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THE SWORDSMITHS OF JAPAN

used the professional name of Okisato by which he is often known.

His success was further consolidated four years later when Yamano Nagahisa, the official sword-tester of the Shōgun's Government, using only one arm, cut through the bodies of two criminals at a stroke with one of Kotetsu's short swords. After a successful test with three bodies in 1660, Hisahide, grandson of Yamano Nagahisa, set up a record in 1663 with a long sword made by Kotetsu by cutting through four bodies at a stroke. Two years later his grandfather, now aged sixty-eight, successfully repeated this feat with another Kotetsu blade which has since become a "national treasure."

From the time of the first of these tests Kotetsu's name was made, and the remainder of his life is a peaceful record of honourable service in noble households. His first regular patron was Matsudaira Yorimoto, Lord of Moriyama, whose retainer he became in 1660 on the recommendation of Sasaki Kunitsuna, another swordsmith from his native Nagasone. Kunitsuna was well versed in the methods of the great Masamune of Sagami (1264-1343), and he most probably taught Kotetsu some of the Sagami secrets. After five years' service with Yorimoto, Kotetsu attached himself to Inaba Iwami no Kami, living at that nobleman's Yedo residence until 1670, when he moved to Uyeno on the outskirts of the city, and ended his life there in 1678 at the age of eighty (by Japanese reckoning).

The authorities are as a rule too factual to provide much material for an estimate of character. It is clear, however, that Kotetsu, like many swordsmiths, was a devout Buddhist. He entered the priesthood after practising austerities for ten years, and later became a "retired layman" or *niudō*, a title he frequently incorporated in his signatures. He belonged to the sect of Nichiren. He was evidently proud, and set a high value on his work, as is shown by his impulsive killing of a disparaging client related above, and this is confirmed by another story which is told of him. He had made a sword for a certain nobleman, but the latter complained that the price was too high. Kotetsu replied that he had devoted as much time to it as another smith would have spent on twenty or thirty swords, and proceeded to demonstrate its quality by cutting through a pine trunk and a stone lantern. The nobleman then expressed himself willing to pay the price demanded, but Kotetsu declined and took the sword away.

Kotetsu's blades vary considerably in style, as does the wording of his signatures upon them. But he invariably used old metal, which first gave him his nickname of Kotetsu ("old iron"), and the grain of the steel in his blades is so close as to be barely perceptible. He formed the characters of his signature clearly and with elegance, generally using a fine line lightly engraved. Numerous forgeries of his work exist, but he is thought to have made some four hundred blades of a high quality, and ranks among the foremost half-dozen swordsmiths of the *Shintō* ("New Sword") period.

NAMES and the Collector

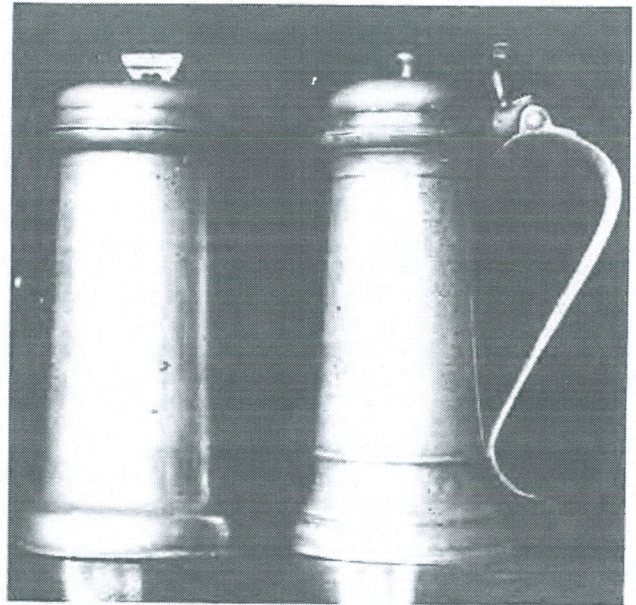
A GOOD many years ago the writer bought a Stuart flagon of the 1625-1640 period with the touch, E.G. over two flagons, all within a beaded circle (Cotterell, No. 5614(a)), from a dealer who said that it had come into his hands from Mr. Kirkby-Mason, who had told him that the flagon was originally in Shelley (All Saints') Church, Suffolk; information naturally evoking special interest in the mind of the latest purchaser as I had never heard of Shelley in Suffolk, although the Kent Shelley was known to me.

In the days of Edward I (1272-1307), the Lord of the Manor of Shelley in Kent was Thomas Shelley, the progenitor of the two branches of the Shelley family now living, and it is also recorded that in the first year of that same monarch's reign, Robert de Tattershall died, seized of the Manor of Shelley in Suffolk, thus providing evidence of the existence of the two Manors of Shelley in those days. The Suffolk Shelley is a hamlet with a sprinkling of houses and about 100 inhabitants. The church from whence came my Stuart flagon was my attraction; and I wrote to a fellow member of the Society of Pewter Collectors living at Ipswich asking him if he could visit Shelley and let me have all the information he could gather about the church and its history. My correspondent (then over seventy) told me that the hamlet was not only fifteen miles distant but completely inaccessible to him, and sent me his local paper which by one of those striking coincidences that same week had published a supplement dealing with the history of the Parish of Shelley.

The Church of All Saints is a very modest little medieval

building, with scant historical interest. It consists of a chancel and nave, a south aisle and a squat tower placed midway on the north side of the nave—a rather unusual position. For so small a population it has doubtless served its purpose. There are only a few monuments within the church, the principal being that of Dame Margaret Tylney, dated 1598. The Tylneys or Tilneys were Lords of the Manor of Shelley in the XVIth century; and according to the supplement mentioned above one of them acted as host to Queen Elizabeth when that forthright lady visited Shelley Hall on one of her journeys. Another of the family, Edmund Tilney, was in 1579 Master of the Revels in the Royal Household, which office, we are told, he filled successfully for some thirty years.

In 1934 a large number of the flagons with the same "touch" as my piece were displayed at St. Peter Hungate Church Museum, Norwich, in an Exhibition of Pewter Plate drawn from many churches within the diocese. The unknown maker of E.G. pieces was probably a London pewterer. Capt. A. V. Sutherland-Graeme, F.S.A., a past-president of the Society of Pewter Collectors, has suggested Edward Gilbert (Cotterell No. 1862); but it is a remote possibility that his provenance was Norwich, where there is a record



(Left) Stuart pewter flagon, 1625-1640; touch, E.G. over two flacons, all within a beaded circle.
(Right) Slightly later piece

of a dozen or more known pewterers working in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Strange it is that the identity of a man of whose work so many pieces have survived the lapse of three centuries should remain unknown.

Assuming, of course, that Mr. Kirkby-Mason's statement as to the provenance of the flagon was correct, it is odd that neither the Tilneys nor the Kerridges, their successors in the first half of the XVIIth century, seem to have presented the church with a *silver* rather than a pewter flagon; a precious metal usually being used in the celebration of Holy Communion except in a parish where there was no one of sufficient means to make such an offering.

ROLAND J. A. SHELLEY.

BOOKS RECEIVED

- THE ALPHABET, A KEY TO THE HISTORY OF MANKIND. DAVID DIRINGER, D.LITT. Foreword by SIR ELLIS MINNS, LITT.D. Hutchinson's Scientific and Technical Publications. 50s.
EARLY MAN, A SURVEY OF HUMAN ORIGINS. ALAN HOUGHTON BRODRICK. Hutchinson's Scientific and Technical Publications. 18s.
FRENCH FAIENCE. ARTHUR LANE. Fabers. 21s.
FAKES. OTTO KURZ. Fabers. 30s.
SEA PAINTERS. F. GORDON ROE. Lewis. £5 5s. net.
TREASURE ISLAND. R. L. STEVENSON. Camden Classics. Paul Elek. 10s. 6d.
OLD ENGLISH PORCELAIN. W. B. HONEY. Fabers. 25s.