

KENDO FORUM

by Musashi of the Shinto Ryu.



April has been yet another busy month. We spent an informal afternoon entertaining Sir Frank Bowden and his two sons on the 8th; then on the 14th we showed Kendo to a large party from the London Appreciation Society. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation recorded a fifteen-minute programme in the dojo on the Wednesday following. To round off we had the Kendo display in the "Festival of Judo", a special item in this was a reconstructed fencing match of the 16th century which took place before a very severe feudal baron—John Gibb—and his two retainers. The last item of the

show was the Kendo keiko which we wound up with a sharp melee. Those who saw this display may be interested to know that the two long spears used in the "fencing match" both date from the first half of the 16th century.

The last week in May we have organised a training week for seven of our members down in Dorset (Charmouth). Daily training will start with a 6 a.m. keiko on the sands, followed by a gruelling programme for the rest of each day.

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At the end of a decade of wandering, Miyamoto Musashi had at last tracked down Sasaki Ganryu, his father's murderer. He went to his dojo and there challenged him to a fight, but, in accordance with the custom of the times, both men had to seek permission from the baron in whose territory they were. Kuroda Nagamasa gave the required consent and the day of their meeting was fixed for the 18th day of the 8th month of the 4th year of Keicho (A.D. 1599) on the small island known as Nadajima. The two men were closely guarded, not being allowed to leave their houses.

The news of what was about to take place spread far and wide. People all felt that the meeting of two such noted fencers in mortal combat was an event that would not happen twice in a lifetime, and so at daylight on the appointed day they flocked to Nadajima in such numbers that the sea was black with boats. A large number of constables (samurai) had been previously despatched to the island: and not without reason, for not long after their arrival there they were informed that some twenty or thirty of Ganryu's disciples had determined to assist their master, and with this intention had resolved to surround the fencing ring. The

In his later life, Musashi devoted much of his time to the study of Zen Buddhism and is famed for his beautiful ink paintings signed with the name "Niten" ("Two-Sword"). He also left a self-portrait, on which I have based my pen and ink drawing. He was probably about sixty years old at the time.

constables peremptorily forbade anyone but Government-officers landing on the island. They galloped their horses hither and thither shouting: "He who lands, lands at his peril! We have orders to cut down any man who sets foot on the island." Thus Ganryu's disciples were defeated in their designs.

At the sound of the drum the two combatants entered the ring: Ganryu from the western side, and Musashi from the eastern. After the two had saluted each other, an officer produced a white tray, on which were two unglazed earthenware plates. The plates contained a little soft-boiled rice. By the side of them stood a small kettle, which in former days contained sake, but which on the present occasion was filled with water. The same tray placed between the combatants, they each took a little salt, deliberately placed it on the rice; after eating which they drank a little water. Then after simultaneously dashing the earthenware plates to the ground and smashing them to bits, they placed themselves in a fencing attitude.

Before the fight began, Musashi thus addressed his foe: "Ganryu, the murderer of my father! I am here to call you to account for your crime. The same world may no longer contain us both. We are here today to see which of us is the better man."

To which Ganryu replied: "Grand words, indeed! But, however, you are no doubt actuated by a proper motive. In order to gratify you I might allow you to kill me—but this is rather more than you can expect."

"You need not multiply words; I have heard enough. Come, let's to it," replied Musashi, drawing his swords; the fight commenced.