

*Japon Illustré* by Aimé Humbert

In 1863, as the Edo period was drawing to a close, Aime Humbert (1819–1900) traveled to Japan as the head of the first Swiss trade mission to Japan. A trade agreement between the two countries was signed the following year. In 1870, after returning to Europe, Humbert published *Le Japon illustré*, which was published in an English edition in 1894 as *Japan and the Japanese, Illustrated*.

In his book, Humbert commented that the Great Buddha at Kotokuin was both a religious and an aesthetic masterpiece. He noted that the statue was hidden away from the bustle of everyday life. The path to the Great Buddha led through trees and flowering plants, and it was only after turning a corner that the immense bronze Buddha became visible, seated in meditation. Its imposing posture, regular features, and complete aesthetic balance had immense appeal, and its surroundings perfectly matched the serenity of the image: a dimly lit, quiet forest enclosed the sacred place.