A Muramasa Blade



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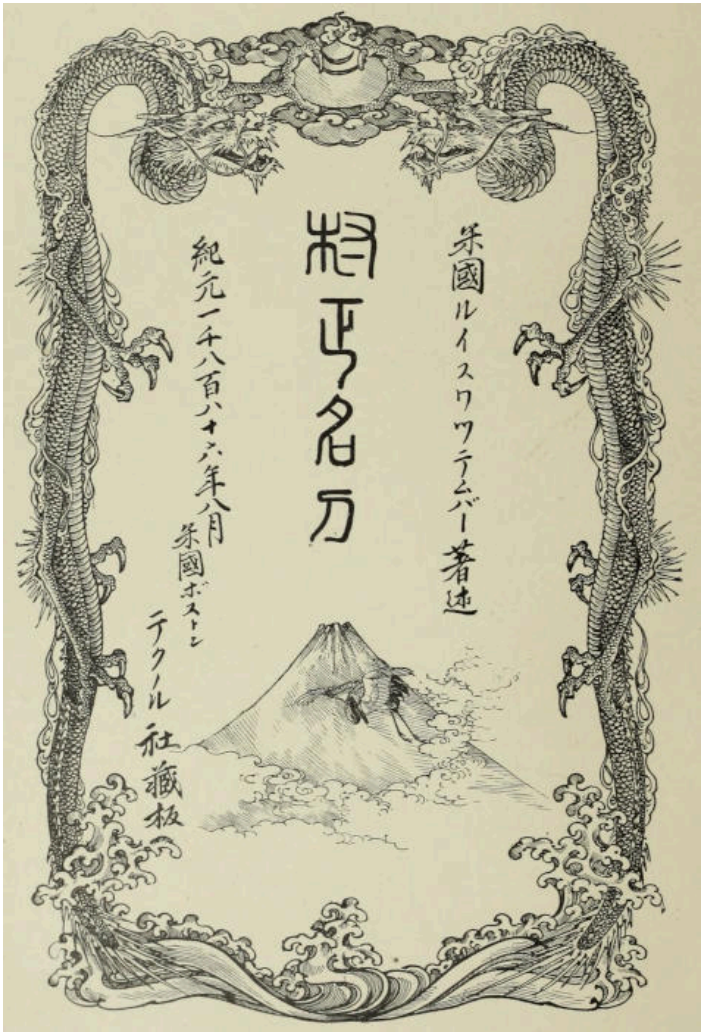
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A MURAMASA BLADE





A

MURAMASA BLADE

A Story of Feudalism in Old Japan

BY
LOUIS WERTHEIMBER

"THE SWORD IS THE SOUL OF THE SAMURAI"



BOSTON
TICKNOR AND COMPANY
1887

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TO

MY DEARLY BELOVED SISTER EMILIE

In Brotherly Affection

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR

PREFACE.

This story is an original tale of Old Japan, written almost from a Japanese point of view. It might be translated into that language; and, rendered in book form or told on a street corner by one of the itinerant story-tellers, the reader or listener would think it to accord fully with the traditions of the period in which it is supposed to have been enacted. Whether such a treatment will meet with approval here, it remains for the public to say. I have adhered to it against the advice of several eminent literary friends, to bring the story more into accord with our canons of style and construction. From the standpoint of a Japanese, none of the incidents or situations are in the slightest degree strained or exaggerated, and none of the characters overdrawn. All the historical allusions are strictly true and authentic,—as far as present knowledge on the subject goes,—and have been carefully and painstakingly culled from native chronicles.

The five engravings on copper have been executed by a young Japanese, Mr. Nakamura Munehiro, of Tokio, one of the best engravers in Japan, who also made the original drawings for the same. The other pictures were drawn by Shirayama Dani, a young porcelain painter in the employ of Fujiyama, of this city. It shows the versatility of Japanese artists, that although the young man had never in his life done anything but porcelain painting, which is done in pure wash, he succeeded without instruction, in a very few days, in making pictures for reproduction.

In spite of their sharp outline they are done not with pen and ink, but with a Japanese brush.

LOUIS WERTHEIMBER.

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日本東京中村宗廣謹調

A MURAMASA BLADE.

INTRODUCTION.

One day in my wanderings in that quarter of the city of Tokio given up to the habitation of the poorer classes of the community, I stopped to rest for a moment at the lowly hut of an old *jinrikisha* man whom I had had frequent occasion to employ theretofore. Finding the old man and his wife at home, I sat down on the porch, and after a while succeeded in drawing the couple into something like conversation.

The hut which they occupied was poor enough. It stood on the edge of a small sweet-potato field, and contained only two rooms, the floor of each one covered by two mats of the usual size, and therefore exactly six feet square. The extreme cleanliness of the place—although this quality in general is common in Japan—struck me at once, in spite, or partly on account, of the extreme poverty, which was equally evident. The sliding paper-covered doors, which also served as windows, had been taken out, and I could look through the house, which contained nothing in the way of furniture, not even a pine cloth-chest such as is seldom lacking in the poorest habitations,—nothing, in fact, except a few patched cotton quilts which served for beds, bedding, and covering, rolled up in a corner. The thick straw mats, although their outside covering was in part worn off by use, showed not a speck of dirt or dust, and the

bare upright timbers were perfectly white from frequent washing and scrubbing.

Noticing on one side of the room an old sword hanging on two wooden pegs, I asked to be allowed to look at it, and it was rather hesitatingly, as I thought, handed to me. In former years only the *samurai*, or men of gentle blood, were allowed to wear two swords, and always did so. They esteemed this as their most prized prerogative, and guarded the privilege with extreme jealousy as long as they enjoyed it, which was until the Government prohibited the practice a few years ago. The mere possession of a sword is now free to everybody, and many tens of thousands of these weapons at present serve for fish and kitchen knives, or for other common purposes.

Drawing this one from its wooden scabbard, I found it bright and shining; and being an amateur collector, I could see that it was no ordinary blade.

“Who is the maker?” I asked, almost mechanically, as I usually did when my Japanese friends favored me with a sight of their old family swords.

The answer came very slowly, and not until an inquiring glance showed that I was surprised at not getting it sooner: “It is a Muramasa blade, your honor.”

“A Muramasa!” I exclaimed, jumping up in genuine surprise; “and how in the name of Buddha did *you* manage to get hold of a Muramasa?”



THE OLD JINRIKISHA MAN AND HIS WIFE.

My astonishment was natural. I had in the course of years succeeded in making a collection of swords of the best makers; but it was only after a long search, and at an expense which was felt to be considerable even by an ardent amateur like myself, that I had been able to acquire an undoubted and genuine piece of handiwork of the artisan who, with the single exception perhaps of Masamune, was certainly the most celebrated sword-smith of Japan.

“It has been in the possession of my family, your honor, for five centuries and a half,—ever since it was given by the maker who forged it, Senjuin Muramasa, to one of my ancestors at Ise, the place where they both resided.”

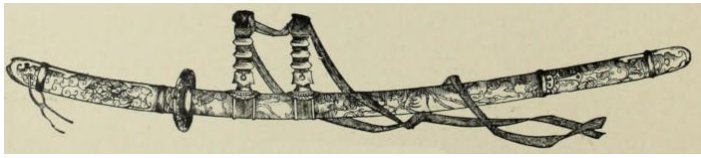
The man’s voice, although, as heretofore, humbly polite in its manner, had now a new ring,—something like a tone of cold formality; such a tone, it seemed to me, as might have characterized the voice of a polished Greek slave replying to some coarse word of his brutal Roman master.

There was a pause of a few moments, which the thought of my abrupt rudeness rendered awkward and even painful to me. I was the first to break the silence, addressing him in the language which is used among equals, instead of, as heretofore, employing such terms as are used to inferiors,—a distinction which in Japanese is strongly and definitely marked. I could see by a quick, startled movement, as well as by the play of his features, that the change was deeply felt, and the motive which prompted it appreciated. “I have for years been a student of sword-lore,” I said, “and I know that every Muramasa blade has a history of its own, fraught with numerous romantic and thrilling incidents. This one here must have had its share, with which, under the circumstances, you are doubtless familiar; and I should esteem it a great favor to be permitted to listen to any narrative you may choose to recall, more especially as regards the time when the smith was yet alive.”

I had touched a sympathetic chord in the old man’s heart by this concession alike to his family pride and his love for the sword. It is not easy for a foreigner to understand how completely the sword

has entered into Japanese life. Poets and minstrels, warriors and statesmen, lord and vassal, have honored it in word and deed for more than a millennium. To a greater extent than any other agent, probably, it has moulded and shaped the history of that country into its setting of gallant chivalry and self-immolating feudal devotedness, and has written its record on thousands of well-contested battle-fields, in the quivering body of a living book. Only within a few years has it begun to outlive its power; but its renown is imperishable.

The story told by this poor *jinrikisha* man, as we sat on the porch of his humble dwelling, constitutes but one simple chapter in this wonderful history. It illustrates the spirit which pervaded Old Japan, the veneration which attached to the sword, and the peculiar personal obligations of honor which rested upon all samurai in those feudal times. As the story was related to me, so I tell it here, regretting only that in the process of translation it must lose much of local color and characterization, but hoping that in spite of this it may be found to possess an interest purely its own, independent of the way in which it is now narrated.



JAPANESE SWORD.

CHAPTER I.

It was in the year of our Lord 1322, according to the Japanese calendar the fourth year of the reign of Go Dai Go Tenno, the ninety-fifth descendant of Jimmu Tenno, and nineteen hundred and eighty-two years from the time when the latter had assumed the title of the “First Emperor of Japan.”



FARM LABORER.

For the first time in its history a general peace, lasting for more than a century, reigned over the land. Guerilla and border warfare, it is true, was still carried on, in a desultory manner, in different parts of the empire; feuds between the daimio of neighboring provinces were no rarities; and the *kataki-uchi*, the Japanese vendetta, still caused many bloody tragedies to be enacted, and year after year claimed its thousands of victims. All such disturbances, however, originating in private jealousy and personal enmity, had during this period been merely local, without expanding sufficiently to assume a national character, as in former centuries, when one half of the fighting population was constantly at war with the other. During a hundred and two years no organized revolt against the authority of the Shôgun, or rather against the Ilōjō family, who were the real rulers, had occurred. The administration of the latter, both civil and military, was, it is true, excellent in most regards,—a fact which not even their enemies could gainsay. The success with which they had repelled the invasion of the Tartar force sent by Kublai Khan, with its countless ships and its tens of thousands of warriors, showed them to be brave and skilled in war, while the general prosperity of the empire gave ample evidence both of their knowledge of the country's needs and of their ability to enforce those measures by which the arts of peace are made to flourish. Farmers tilled their lands free from the harrowing care which beset their forefathers as to whether they would be able to enjoy the fruits of their labor, or whether roving bands would seize the garnered harvest and even force the young and strong to become unwilling recruits among the henchmen and servants attending the feudal chiefs. The advance in

commerce, art, and more especially in learning and the polite accomplishments, had been extraordinary, and their regenerating influence had gradually made itself felt in all parts of the empire. Plenty and apparent security reigned everywhere; and yet it was felt and known by those who cared to think and who took notice of passing events, that the end of this period of tranquillity was inevitable, and moreover even now near at hand. Every coming day might see the smouldering embers of discontent, hitherto concealed, blaze forth into a fierce and destructive civil war.



WOMAN SOWING RICE.

One of the surest signs of the trouble impending was the increased military activity displayed at the court of every daimio. The coming conflict cast its shadow before, not in boisterous speech or loud-mouthed denunciation, but in the training of body and limb to be duly prepared for action requiring physical strength and endurance. Horses were made to learn their paces, swords and lances were sharpened, buckler and shield were burnished, and every armorer's workshop echoed the sounds of toil from early morning until late at night.

Kuwana, the capital of the province of Ise, could at this period boast of one of the gayest and yet most martial courts in the land. The character of the reigning Duke, who had ruled for more than thirty-six years, was such that although courage, daring, and manly accomplishments could well look for their due meed of reward at his hands, deeds of unjustifiable violence and ill-will found no opportunity to interfere with or check the progress and prosperity of the land.

He was now fifty-five years old, and had become stout and fleshy and—for he loved the wine-cup no less than the sword—gouty as well, and he was frequently obliged to be carried to his pavilion on the field to witness sports in which, not so very long before, he used to participate and shine in a way that few could equal. Traces of his former prowess were still evident in his face and bearing, despite his corpulence and bodily helplessness. There was about him a self-possession, or rather a self-assertion, of manner which appertains only to those who have learned to maintain themselves and their rights in positions of importance and difficulty; and to do this in those times required physical strength as well as

qualities of the mind which go to make up leaders of men. His bright, fierce eye followed closely and with evident enjoyment every motion of those among the actors who showed more than ordinary skill; and when any unusually daring feat was performed, his hands and arms worked convulsively, and he swayed himself to and fro as if to assist with his body where only his eyes could take part.

Ono ga Sawa, as the Duke was called, was feared and held in awe by his neighbors, who in the desultory border warfare in which they had sometimes been engaged, had found that his dare-devil courage was equalled by his astuteness, his energy, and his extraordinary tenacity. By the people of his province, and more especially by his retainers, to whom he was a kind and considerate master, he was honored and respected. He loved boldness and valor, and even in speech he encouraged frankness and openness to a degree rare with those in his position. Of a jovial and good-natured disposition withal, he ever approved of mirth and frolic, and often at the dinner-table bandied jokes with his attendants, and would even bear from those he liked a return in kind.



MYTHOLOGICAL GODS OF JAPAN.

There was only one point upon which it would have been injudicious to speak with freedom in his presence. The old lord had a great veneration for family and gentle birth, for blue blood and for the superiority to which the possession of a long line of ancestors could justly lay claim. He was fond of displaying his genealogical tree, showing his descent from Nakatomi no Kamatari, the celebrated minister of Tenchi Tenno in the seventh century, who himself was a descendant of the royal house of Fujiwara. When excited by wine he did not stop there, but would count back to Jimmu Tenno, the first Emperor of Japan, two thousand years ago; and he was even

known at such times to refer to Isanami no Mikoto and Isanagi no Mikoto, the primeval mythological gods of the country, in a way which seemed to show plainly that he considered himself as standing in some sort of relationship with them. Now there was not a scullion in the kitchen, nor a sandal-bearer in the courtyard, who did not indulge in jokes at this propensity; for they all knew that the old gentleman's grandfather was a common peasant, who in the wars which followed the accession of the Minamoto family to the Shôgunate, when he was pressed as a soldier, had by personal bravery and native force of character raised himself to the position of a military general. His son, the father of the present lord, had in his early youth been apprentice to a dyer, and from thence had been called to the camp of his parent when the latter began to acquire military glory. But the bravest of the brave military retainers at the court would sooner have faced unarmed a wild boar than breathe a word of doubt or even show a look of incredulity when, as so often happened, the old genealogical tree was taken down and explained to them. Etiquette at that time was not what it became much later,—an element of such importance in the education of every *samurai* as to curb temporarily the fiercest temper and force the most headstrong passions to subordinate themselves to time and place. The long reign of peace had its softening influence; yet, although threatening talk and angry looks were not as likely as before to lead to immediate violence, they were strangers neither at the festive board nor in the council-hall. An utter disregard, however, for all rules of society as they existed even then, and a reckless fashion of indulging his passions when aroused, made Ono ga Sawa a

man to be carefully humored by his attendants.

An incident which had happened ten years previously was still fresh in the memory of every one. An embassy had arrived from the province of Sendai to arrange a marriage between the son of the lord of that province and a daughter of Ono ga Sawa. All the preliminaries had been concluded, and a grand festival and banquet were being given in honor of the occasion. Toward the end of the carouse, when wine had loosened tongues and conversation had become general, the chief ambassador, perhaps in ignorance or inadvertence, but more probably from a desire to check the feeling of pride with which he had so often been received, essayed a joke about the silk which faced the dress of his host. “You must be a good judge of dyeing, and perhaps have a special receipt handed down to you, to give that ribbon such a rich, deep purple color,” he began; but if he had intended to say more, the general silence which followed this remark caused him to refrain. The sudden cessation of all mirth and conversation struck those present as with a chill, and the laughing faces of a moment before now showed only anxious looks furtively directed toward their lord.

Ono ga Sawa’s face, though flushed with wine, became overspread with a deadly pallor. The silence of his followers not only prevented him from overlooking a remark which in cooler moments he might perhaps have disregarded, but gave it undue prominence. Before the assembled guests had twice drawn breath he had unsheathed his small sword and aimed a desperate blow at the ambassador. The excess of his fury, rather than a natural shrinking away on the part of his intended victim, caused the

weapon to miscarry, only slightly grazing the other's skin and drawing a few drops of blood; but this was sufficient to enable him to regain his self-control. Those composing the ambassador's suite had risen with muttered threats and placed themselves behind their chief; while the Kuwana men, who formed the large majority, also rose and surrounded their lord. The latter, however, now perfectly calm, with one glance caused his retainers to resume their stations. Slowly replacing his sword, to show he meant no further violence, but only half sheathing it, and keeping it firmly grasped, he said: "The only kind of dyeing I understand is dyeing with blood; those spots upon your doublet now show the same color as my ribbon,—the color of blood, the color I love to see whenever honor demands it."



THE DUKE'S ATTACK ON THE AMBASSADOR.

In saying this, his meaning was not to be misunderstood. He showed himself ready to stand by the consequences of his act; yet there was a certain half-conciliatory tone and manner about him of which the other thought best to avail himself. He knew that if the failure of the important mission with which he was intrusted could be attributed to his own lack of discretion—to which in this instance it might be ascribed, although the provocation he had

given was certainly a slight one—it would end in his own disgrace with his lord. So, quickly collecting himself, with a laugh as natural as he could simulate, he replied: “You have certainly given us a good practical illustration of what you call your style of dyeing, and if you intended it as a lesson, I will accept it as such from you; although there are very few lords in this kingdom for whom it would be safe or advisable to attempt a similar course of teaching with me.”



STREET BOARD FOR GOVERNMENT EDICTS.

Physical courage in those days was a common virtue, and that of the envoy was too well known to be doubted; his course in ignoring the rash act prompted by the other's ungovernable temper only raised him in the opinion of every one present, including Ono ga Sawa himself. It was probably the only period in the history of Japan when such an occurrence could have taken place without entailing more serious consequences. During the long civil wars which were soon to follow, peaceful solutions of any difficulty were again out of the question; and after that time the observance of etiquette was made so imperative that such a breach of it as had been here committed by Ono ga Sawa would have demanded redress by law, and would have subjected its perpetrator to severe punishment by the court of the Shôgun. On the other hand, up to a hundred years previous, when fighting was the rule all over the land to the exclusion of everything else, such a course as had been here taken by the ambassador would certainly not have been appreciated; it would have been utterly opposed to the spirit of an age which acknowledged no other honorable means of redress than an appeal to arms, and which did not permit any qualification as to time and place, but demanded instant and unhesitating action, even if self-destruction was the certain result.



EMPEROR OF JAPAN.

But the last hundred years had wrought a considerable change. Nominally the profession of arms was still the only one a gentleman could engage in; but literature, art, and the polite accomplishments had begun to claim a fair share of attention. The

strong government of the Hōjō at Kamakura had improved laws and regulations and caused them to be respected, thus imbuing the rising generation with a sense of order and obedience to which their forefathers had been strangers. It was a salutary discipline, which naturally found its counterpart in a certain self-restraint introduced into the social relations of life, into the intercourse between man and man. Every *samurai* was still ready and eager to serve actively as a soldier; but in the absence of such opportunities he tried to show his aptitude for other pursuits. Many descendants of the royal house of Fujiwara more especially distinguished themselves in civil employment.

The centre of the whole movement—from whence, indeed, it derived its principal support—was the Mikado's court at Kiyoto. Soon after the close of the great struggle which saw the Minamoto family firmly established as Shôguns, the songs of the high priest Tiun, son of the Kuwambaku Tadamichi, first officer in the above court, had taken a powerful hold on the public mind. As early as the year 1232 the issuing and editing of a full and complete edition of all the valuable lyric and heroic poetry then extant had been intrusted to Fujiwara no Sada by the Mikado himself. In the succeeding reign the brother of the governing Emperor, the high priest Yen Man In,—a man equally noted for erudition, for courtly manners, and for the charm of his conversation, who, although ordained for the church, exercised, by his talent for government, supreme influence at the court,—greatly quickened the advancement of learning, of letters, and of the polite accomplishments.

By the middle of the century the intellectual

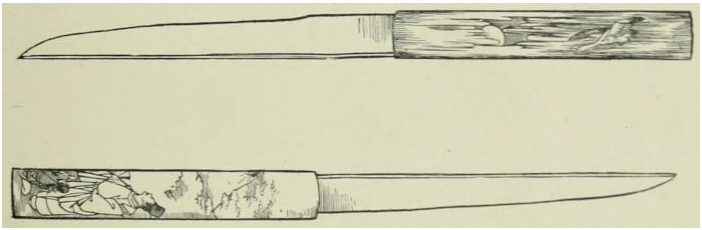
current had filtered into and permeated the purely military court at Kamakura, where the reigning Shôgun had called upon Kiyowara, a celebrated sage, to review and explain to him the well-known Chinese work *Tei Wan* (or "Guide for the Conduct of Rulers and Sovereigns"), and Tokiyori, lord of Sagami, his first minister,—a man of the type of Yen Man In, who by mere force of character and capacity was the virtual ruler of the Shôgun's court, as much as the other was at the imperial court,—himself copied and commented upon the work *Tei Kuwan Sei Yo* ("Study of the Principles of Politics"), publishing it in his own name. In the beginning of the fourteenth century the effects of this regeneration had made themselves felt more or less in every part of Japan, and although military prowess was held in as high esteem as ever, its value was greatly enhanced if added to it was some degree of polite learning, dignity, and courtliness of manner. Ono ga Sawa himself attached great value to these latter qualities, and the action of the lord of Sendai's ambassador in ignoring and adroitly turning into a sort of joke what would certainly not have tended to the other's credit if treated in earnest, caused him a feeling of satisfaction which he was generous enough not to conceal. The mission was a complete success, an early consummation of the marriage was agreed upon, and the ambassador on his return was loaded with presents.



EMPRESS OF JAPAN.

It may well be imagined that those whose duty called them to the court avoided, even in the lightest of humors engendered by the wine-cup, a subject fraught with so much danger. It was not a great hardship to do this where so much to pass the time

pleasantly and agreeably offered itself. Amusements and festivities were not wanting, the province was well governed, the harvests for years had been good, the hand of the tax-collector lay lightly upon peasant and citizen alike; and a plentiful crop having again been garnered in the year of which we write, the usual harvest festival, with its attendant games and military exercises, was about to be celebrated on even a grander scale than usual.



SWORD DAGGERS.

CHAPTER II.

The evening before the appointed day all the inns were filled to overflowing, and fresh visitors arrived far on into the night, only to be followed, with the dawn, by still greater crowds. Most of them were farmers from the surrounding country; but a goodly share of strangers was not wanting, and all found plenty to interest them.

Theatres at that time were not known; but tight-rope performers, jugglers, dancers, story-tellers, and ballad-singers were in abundance, all doing a thriving trade.



SINGING GIRLS.

Among the spectators was a party of three, who had come late in the day and who stood on a little knoll close to one of the entrances, looking at the feats of riding and of *kisha* (archery on horseback), *dakiu* (polo), *inu-o-mono* (dog-hunting), and other sports. The group consisted of a tall, sinewy man of about thirty-five years, although his sad, furrowed face at first sight made him look much older, a boy not more than ten by his side, and behind these two one who was evidently an old retainer. The boy was the son of his companion, as could be seen at a glance, in spite of the difference between the fresh, bright, sunny countenance of the one, and the careworn, anxious look of the other. The contour of the lad's face was the same as that of the man; the mouth, although smiling with the innocence of childhood, had the same resolute cast, and the eyes, now flashing with delight at the gay scene before them, shone with that look of cool, determined daring so conspicuous in the father. In the man's case, indeed, this last feature was developed to an extent rarely seen; yet it nevertheless seemed so utterly at variance with the settled, gloomy dejection which overspread his face that even a passer-by would have been disposed to step and wonder whether such a character could bear to submit to even the most pitiless blows of fortune, rather than battle with them and win victory or find rest in death. In this melancholy aspect, the man offered a marked contrast to the great throng of sight-seers, whose faces reflected only mirth and enjoyment; and they looked at him from time to time with no little awe, giving to him and his companions a wide berth, although the grounds elsewhere were crowded. Perhaps the dresses of the party, which showed them to be *samurai*, contributed to this feeling of respect;

for members of the military class did not generally, on such occasions, mix with the common people, but remained on the platforms and stands erected for them. Although, however, the three travellers wore *samurai* dresses, these were of the poorest description, stained by travel and weather, and the two swords which each carried in his girdle showed no ornament whatever.

The games had been progressing for some time, and the horses—often mercilessly punished—became excited and restive; when at last one, whose youthful rider had treated him to too many kicks of his heavy stirrups, became uncontrollable, and dashing madly by the grand stand where Lord Ono ga Sawa was sitting, galloped headlong toward the entrance. Two of the nimble-footed *bettoes* (horse-boys) who tried to stop the runaway were thrown off without difficulty, and a few steps more would have brought the horse in contact with the frightened crowd of human beings congregated beyond the barriers, when the older stranger, already mentioned, stepped forward, and catching hold of the bridle, arrested the animal without apparently any very great exertion. The rider, who had managed to keep his seat upon his runaway steed, expressed his warmest thanks; and shortly afterward a special messenger came with Ono ga Sawa's orders to offer places to the stranger and his party, and to invite them to participate in the games, if they desired to do so. A ready assent was given to this invitation, and after seeing his companions seated, the stranger mounted a horse provided for him and entered the lists. From the very outset he showed himself to be more than a match for any one present, excelling in riding, fencing, archery, and in every other manly accomplishment there displayed. Yet his face never relaxed its severe,

taciturn expression; and although he was scrupulously polite and attentive to every detail of knightly courtesy, he went through it all, not like an enthusiastic votary, but rather as a man fulfilling a duty which involved no thought of pleasurable excitement. A very flattering invitation to visit the castle and partake of the feast spread there, and also to present himself formally before the Duke, was at once extended to him.



THE DUKE RECEIVING MUTTO.

When in the evening he repaired thither with his companions, it was easy to see that the report of his exploits had preceded his arrival. Every eye was upon him as he passed to the inner hall, where Ono ga Sawa, surrounded by his principal vassals, received him with more state and ceremony than an unknown and unheralded stranger could well have expected. “I have been a pleased witness of your feats of strength and skill to-day,” the Duke began, after the new-comer had made the usual obeisance, “and I wish to ask you whether, if not bound by other ties, you are willing to engage yourself at my court.”

“I am now seeking where to tender my services, and I shall be thankful to be able to do so here,” was the rather short, but respectfully given, answer. When the Duke spoke again, his tone was a shade less courteous and pleasant. The stranger had taken his grace too much as a matter of course. He expected a little more *empressement*. He was accustomed to see his favors received more demonstratively; and being of a jovial disposition himself, this cold, unbending reserve in place of the warm acknowledgments which he expected somewhat displeased him.

“You know who I am,” he said, and as he continued, the shade of *hauteur* which he had assumed deepened; “I am Ono ga Sawa, the lord of this province, the descendant of Kamatari; and I require that those who surround me shall be men of tried valor and attainments, as well as of distinguished family and honorable name. The first of these qualifications you have shown that you possess in an eminent degree, and it only remains for me to ask who you are and where you come from.”

The stranger bowed his head low; but his humility did not affect his tone of speech, which was firm and decided. “If your highness deigns to accept my services, although there may be many superior to me in abilities, none will excel me in strict performance of my offices and in readiness to fulfil a *samurai’s* duties, even to the shedding of the last drop of my blood in your behalf. I come from a family old and noble, and not very long ago standing high in the country where we lived; and were it not that I had known that your highness was a lord of great merit and high repute, I never would have asked for or even accepted your offer of engagement. I am now a *ronin*, and am called Mutto Nobuyuki; but my real name and where I come from I cannot disclose.”

There was a pause which appeared very long to the assembled courtiers, during which the Duke scrutinized the stranger with a searching glance. What he saw there probably satisfied him that the other had spoken truly. In a tone which, although stern, showed nothing of displeasure, he at last said, —

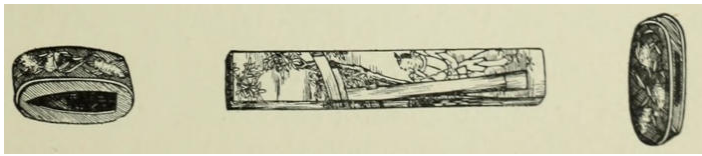
“You have given me abundant proof of your prowess of body and skill of arm; and if the strength and depth of your devotion prove equal to these, as well as to your boldness of speech, I can well congratulate myself upon enlisting you in my service.”

“I have spoken as becomes a free, unfettered *samurai*,” replied the stranger. “Once admitted among your liegemen, my speech will seldom be heard except in due deferential response to your orders.”

“Be it so, then. You shall have your house within the castle, and I will herewith make you an

allowance of fifty *koku* of rice for your maintenance."

This was certainly a liberal allowance for those times, and Mutto acknowledged it in fitting terms. He then asked permission to introduce his son, and the boy's bright, intelligent face and frank yet respectful behavior found great favor. The Duke spoke to him in a kind, almost fatherly, way, and on dismissing him ordered his treasurer to give him a few gold ornaments to put on his sword. He also directed that a seat at the banquet should be assigned to him by the side of his father. This brought the audience to a close. Etiquette required them to remain at the feast until after the Duke had left the hall, and it was far into the night before they retired to the house which in the mean time had been prepared for their reception. Their servant, Yamagawa, had arranged everything in their new domicile; and although their own luggage was meagre enough, nothing necessary for comfort was lacking, the Duke having given special orders that everything that was wanted should be supplied from the ducal storehouses.

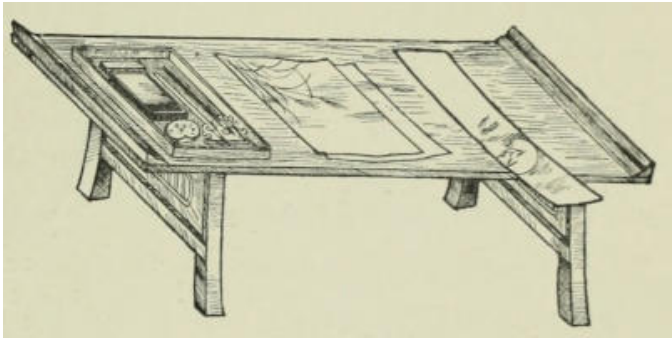


SWORD ORNAMENTS.

CHAPTER III.

In this place for some years to come the three strangers continued to live a quiet, uneventful life. Mutto scrupulously attended to his court duties as one of the chamberlains at the palace; but every moment of the time which he could call his own was devoted to the education of his son. Sennoske, as the boy was called, was already at the age of fifteen a man inferior to none, and almost the equal of his father in all manly accomplishments. Nor had his mind been forgotten. Mutto himself was a fair scholar, and where he thought himself deficient, or was unable through lack of time to devote the necessary attention, he had taken care to secure the best teachers. The latter gladly undertook the charge of instructing the boy, whose aptitude for acquiring knowledge was as marked as his ways and manners were winning. His father strictly supervised and regulated his studies, and showed himself somewhat a hard taskmaster, who never allowed Sennoske leisure for any amusements except such as would either strengthen his body or improve his mind, and the boy grew up having no desire for other recreation. Although passionately fond of books and of indoor studies, the tendency of the times and the examples set before him by his father, as well as by others, roused his ambition and prevented anything like neglect of physical training. This severe bodily and mental work had become easy to him, and to pass from one to the other was all that his system needed, and all the enjoyment he cared for. His

intense love and admiration for his father, and the pleasure which he derived from the gratification the latter showed at his quick and steady progress, was another reason, if one had been needed, to impel him to diligence. To Sennoske his father was everything that was good and great and noble. He knew and felt how much kindness and sympathy were hidden under that austere taciturnity which in all these years had never relaxed into the faintest semblance of a smile. He remembered a sunny childhood in a beautiful home, where his father had laughed and played with him, always showing a gay, cheerful face; and he felt what a terrible shock must have been given to that nature by some fearful calamity, thus to freeze up all apparent sympathy and feeling for the outside world. He had no knowledge of what could have been the catastrophe that wrought this change; and any allusion to their former life, although not forbidden in so many words, was yet discouraged by his father in a way that prevented his ever referring to it.



WRITING TABLE.

Among those who contributed to Sennoske's training was one whose name was then already famous in Japan,—Muramasa, the sword-smith. An

immense gulf divided, at that time, the *samurai* from the merchant, the farmer, the artisan, and, in fact, from all other classes. To this rule the sword-smith formed the only exception. He Who could forge a sword fairly well stood far higher in social rank than the artisan of equal skill in any other profession; and a master of the art, however low his extraction, was considered and treated as an equal by the two-sworded gentry. Muramasa then stood at the head of his profession, without a rival in the country. His superiority was acknowledged by his brother artisans as well as by the nobility; and many of the latter—men of great means too—would willingly have beggared themselves to obtain a sword of his making. To have a man like this living in his dominions was considered a great honor, and was, moreover, a source of real power and influence, of which the Duke was fully aware; and he had made to the smith the most extravagant offers of money, titles, and other honorary considerations to induce him duly to inscribe himself on the roll of his feudal retainers, but without success. Threats or coercion would have been worse than useless with a man whom the Shôgun himself would only too gladly have welcomed to his capital (Kamakura), and would have honored there as highly as the Duke did in his province. Any wilful injury done him would have been resented as a national loss by every *samurai* in the country; so Ono ga Sawa had fain to be satisfied with the sword-smith's independent way of living, taking care, however, to use every opportunity to prove to him, by valuable gifts and otherwise, the honor and esteem in which he was held.

And there was good reason for all this regard and high consideration; for those famous "Muramasas," as the blades were called after their maker, were

things of beauty, of joy, of pride, and of power to their lucky possessors. The smith himself was an expert at using as well as making his weapon, and the proofs he had sometimes semi-publicly given of its excellence were marvellous, and wellnigh bordered on the incredible. He would cut a hair let fall in the air; he would hold his sword still in the water, with its sharp edge facing the current, and there it would of itself out a piece of paper floating toward it; then again, to show its strength, he would cut through a copper bar an inch in thickness without producing the slightest mark or indentation on the blade. Once, on a memorable occasion when discussion as to the relative merits of rival sword-smiths ran high, he asked that any three swords of the best makers be selected. This was done; and placing them side by side, he dealt with his own blade terrific blow square upon their upturned edges. It went entirely through one sword, which was the most strongly curved, passed through the steel edges of the others, and remained imbedded in the softer part which forms the back. Being with difficulty extracted, it was found that its own sharp edge had remained intact; and there was nothing but a slightly increased brightness in three different spots to show where it had been in contact.

Small wonder, then, that a true *samurai* should value such a weapon above every other earthly possession. Money alone could not buy one. It began to be known that only warriors of high standing, whose reputation for valor and fighting qualities was established, could succeed in having an order for a sword executed. If the applicant had a name for loving fighting for its own sake,—one who, when no opportunities for legitimate warfare presented themselves, would hunt up broils, quarrels, and

duels,—it greatly enhanced his chances of a favorable reception from the sword-smith. The prices paid were always high enough; but far more liberal offers had often been refused because made by men —as the report went—whose reputation credited them with inclinations, if not of a pacific, yet of a less decidedly bellicose nature. One of Muramasa's stipulations in former years had been that no sword bought of him should be sold during the lifetime of the purchaser. He dispensed with this condition now, because there was no further need for it; the lucky possessor of such a treasure would have sacrificed his last *hakama*, his mistress, his wife and child probably, sooner than part with it.



STREET SCENE IN KUWANA.

The smith's residence was in the outskirts of the city, in what had formerly been called the village of Senjuin. It was a smoke-blackened, gloomy looking building of two stories close to the street, the lower part—the doors of which were constantly closed—being the forge. On both sides of the house and in

the rear was a yard which was enclosed with a bamboo fence, the stakes being placed side by side and three deep,—thus effectually preventing any possibility of getting even a glimpse through them; while their ends were sharply pointed, threatening certain impalement to any who should attempt to scale them. Here Muramasa lived with his son,—who assisted him at his craft and was initiated into its secrets,—his daughter, and only one old woman-servant.

He was not a pleasant man to look at, this cunning forger, whose handiwork caused the great and the mighty to do him honor. His eyes—very large and very prominent, ready, it seemed, to start from their sockets—had a sinister look; to which the heavy, bushy eyebrows, heaviest and bushiest in the space between the eyes, where they met, doubtless contributed. A massive chin, under a small, rather thin-lipped mouth, showed great energy and determination, while the short stout neck, with veins like cords, the broad shoulders, and the brawny, sinewy arms, gave evidence of great physical strength. When speaking, two rows of large, regular, and beautifully white teeth partly redeemed the unattractiveness of the other features; but when angered or excited, the whole face presented an aspect of extreme hideousness and repulsiveness. At such times the mouth was firmly closed; the eyebrows moved and contracted until each individual hair seemed to stand on end; the eyes, already unnaturally large and protruding, dilated and rolled around in their sockets with a glitter like that of a snake; and a deep red, furrowed line showed itself on his forehead from the crown down to the eyebrows, making his head look as if it consisted of two halves badly pasted together.

A parallel had often been drawn between the smith and Mutto. Both these men, renowned for strength and skill, living for themselves and seemingly desirous of avoiding company, always reserved and even gloomy, and never sharing in wine-parties or other festivities, offered a great contrast to the usual style of conduct of the cavaliers at the court; for the latter, acting with the spirit of the age, although ready at any time for hard work and harder blows, believed in taking pleasure and amusement whenever and wherever it could be found. But when the two men once stood side by side in the court, it was easy to perceive that however much unlike to others, there was very little real resemblance between them.

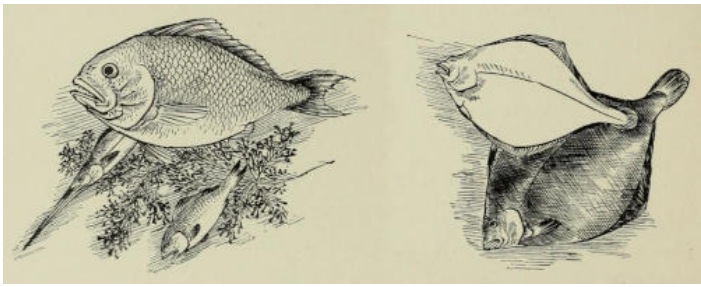
Mutto's athletic but slight and supple figure was cast in quite a different mould from the smith's heavy, awkward-looking frame; and in so far as other than physical attributes could be discerned, the difference became even more marked. The look of gloom on the face of the former seemed like a dark veil, obscuring its naturally pleasant and cheerful expression. The regular features could never have settled into such clearly-cut, bold, determined lines if their possessor had always been given to inactive brooding and sorrowing. They now spoke unmistakably of weary resignation; but it was a new-born resignation foreign to the man's real nature, and implanted there by some unaccountable calamity. In demeanor he was quiet and dignified, and in the performance of his often monotonous duties as chamberlain he had been known to stand sometimes for hours like a statue, scarcely moving either limbs or features.

With the smith, body and face were cast in a

heavy, coarse mould, and both gave evidence of the savage restlessness and discontent of the mind within. Very seldom were they characterized by anything like repose. In general the eyes rolled about in their sockets, glancing here and there with a preoccupied air, while the whole lower part of the face twitched convulsively; and this movement often extended even to the limbs and body. It was evident that no other influence but the thoughts within him induced this unquiet. When he found himself observed, he could by a strong effort resume outward composure; but he would at such times hurl back a look so vicious that few cared to encounter it twice.

The neighborhood where the smith's house stood was very lonely. In former years it had been a small fishing-village called Senjuin, which in time, as the castle-town of Kuwana gradually extended, became one of the outskirts of the latter. This was many hundred years ago. With its loss of independence, in spite of the proximity of the great town, it lost also its well-to-do look, and became the resort of the very worst and the very poorest elements of the population. During the great Minamoto wars, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it suddenly developed into prosperity. The streets became lined with stores, mechanics' workshops, small manufactories of different articles of military equipment; and with these, not a few wine-shops, houses of bad repute, and gambling-dens. There was then continual marching and countermarching; regular and irregular bodies of troops, such as could be induced to take the field by threats or promises, through motives of partisan loyalty, from love of adventure, or through the more mercenary object of gain or booty to be reaped, were being continually formed, and Kuwana had become a noted resort for

such bands to equip themselves, most of the new traffic concentrating itself in that part where Senjuin had formerly stood.



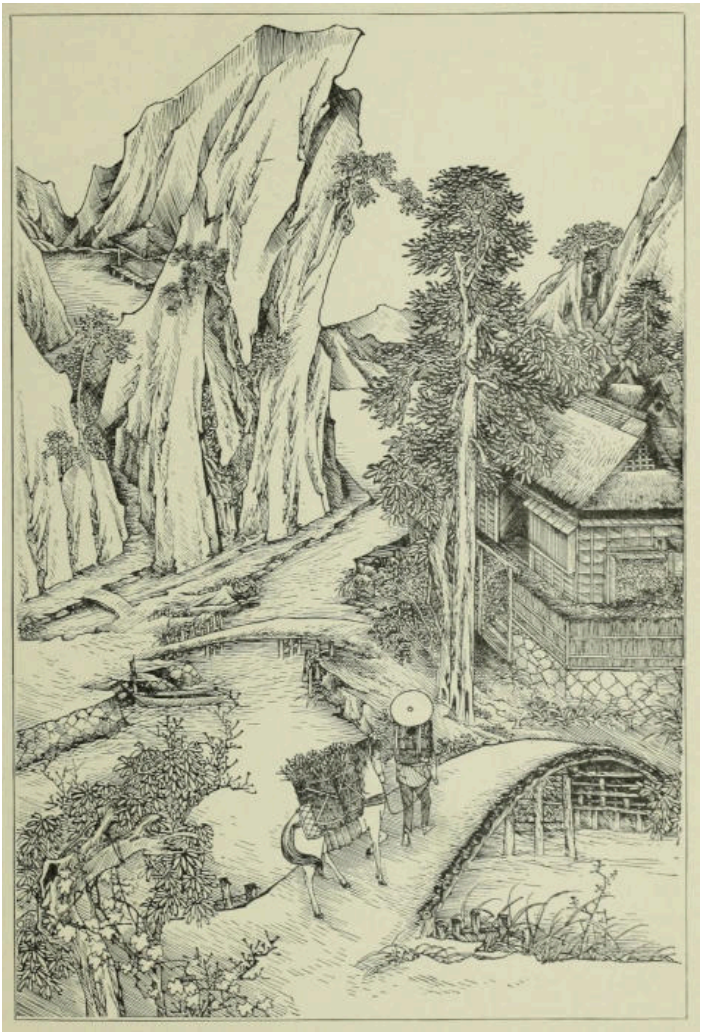
The town possessed abundant natural advantages. Its neighborhood abounded with many kinds of good woods, including a great variety of bamboos,—so necessary in the production of articles of every-day use. Inland products could easily and cheaply be brought down on the river which ran beside the town. Its situation by the sea-shore, and the never-failing supply of fish which was thereby secured, was also of great value at a time when fields were irregularly tilled and the cost of cereals often reached famine prices. The advantage of being able to go and come by sea or land was not slight, and was especially appreciated by those lawless characters who abounded at the time, and a goodly number of whom could always be found there. Whatever the disposition and tendency of these gentry might have been, however, they were kept in check by the proximity of the castle with its garrison, which prevented anything like excess of violence or ill-doing. Burglaries, robberies, and murders even were no rarity; but assistance was always at hand when a brawl assumed too great dimensions. No band of robbers could come and levy contributions or commit other outrages as they did sometimes in

smaller towns and villages.

Thus this quarter of the town grew up and flourished as long as the war lasted. With the return of peace this prosperity waned, and soon departed altogether. The working part of the population moved away nearer the castle-walls and the old, established centre of business; and the disreputable part, finding their occupation gone, left for other regions. In the course of a few decades the place had become almost entirely deserted. Some of the houses at first had been taken down and removed, some had been destroyed by fire, and not a few had fallen down, rotting away in unshapely heaps. All those that yet stood were in a state of extreme decay. Passing beggars and *ronins* often used them as a temporary refuge, and a great deal of real danger to unarmed wayfarers lurked under the shadow of this apparently deserted solitude. It was also a favorite spot for duels and night-brawls, and many a manly form was often found there in the morning lifeless and covered with sword-cuts.

About nine years previous to the time when the first incidents related in this narrative took place, Muramasa the sword-smith, who had already acquired considerable reputation in his craft, arrived in Kuwana, and for a trifle bought a plot of land, where he erected his house in the manner already described. It was the worst-reputed part of the whole neighborhood, near the high road, which skirted one end of the deserted village, and opposite to a large open, level space, where once had stood houses which had been burned down, and in whose place a plentiful supply of weeds had sprung up. These were, however, kept well beaten down; for it was this particular spot which was generally chosen when the

brawlers or duellists fought in greater numbers. Muramasa had been accompanied by a young wife, a son about fourteen years of age, the offspring of a former marriage, and an old married serving-couple. From the very beginning he had led a lonely and solitary life, as he did afterward. He repaired one of the old buildings on the land he had bought, so as to make it temporarily habitable while his new house was being constructed.



JAPANESE LANDSCAPE.

His wife always remained utterly secluded; and even of the mechanics engaged by him to put up the new house, only one or two got a passing glance at her through a half-open door or window,—sufficient, however, it seems, to make them speak in glowing

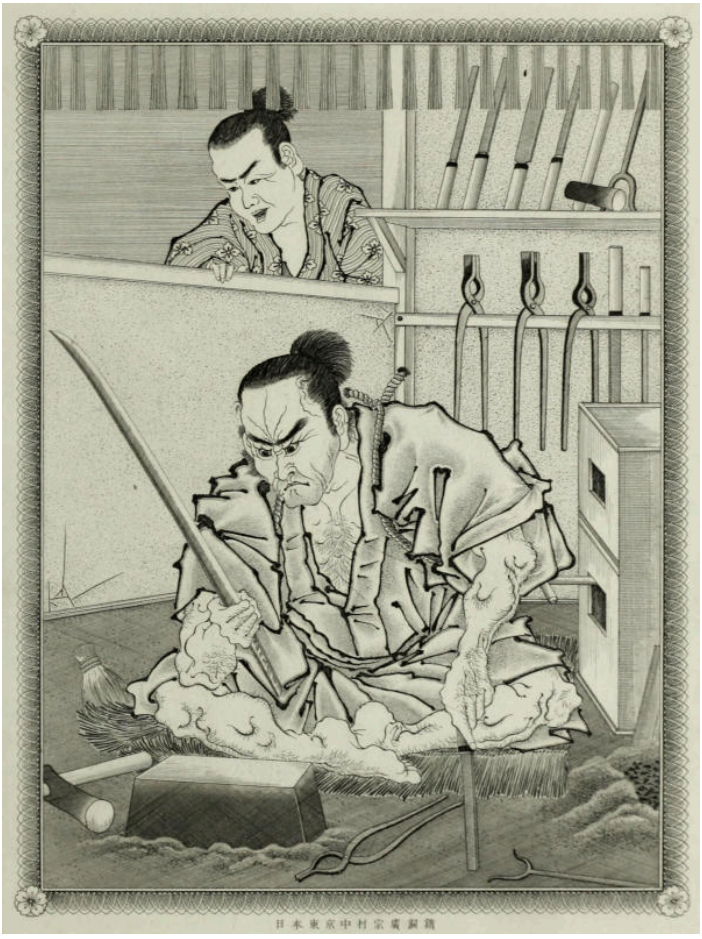
terms of her marvellous beauty. Two years after her arrival she died in giving birth to a daughter, who was named O Tetsu. It then began to be bruited about that she had been an *Eta* (a pariah), the queen of her tribe, famous for her surpassing loveliness. This report, which, it was said, first originated with a travelling showman who had formerly known Muramasa in other places, gradually assumed a more definite shape, and it was whispered that she had been rescued by the smith while being abducted by some nobleman and carried to the latter's castle. Rumor went still further, and stated that it was not a man of low degree, but one of the mighty lords of the land who had attempted this outrage, and that six of his most trusty blades engaged in the execution of the design had been cut down and disabled by the smith who fought single-handed. Careless of the opinion of the world, he afterward made the outcast Eta his lawful wife. He loved her fondly and passionately, and she reciprocated his sentiments.



AN *ETA*.

After her death, all that there was of kindness, of love, and of sympathy in his nature went out toward his daughter. To the outer world he became, if possible, more grim and reserved than he had been before. He shunned all such chance acquaintances as he had made, he went to the court—where even

hitherto, in spite of an open invitation, he had rarely made his appearance—only when the occasion rendered his presence unavoidable; beyond this he paid and received no visits whatever. The only persons who gained admittance to his house were a few old teachers whom he had engaged for his daughter. The aged serving-man who had accompanied him had died three or four years after their arrival, and no one had taken his place, the old serving-woman being the only domestic who remained to do the necessary duties about the house.



The smith’s son, now a man over thirty years of age, resembled his father in outward looks and appearance, and if his face showed rather more good-humor, it was probably merely a negative quality arising from its lack of expression. Physically he was as strong and stout as the smith; but his mind was of a very inferior order. He was, however, an expert in all that pertained to swords; and on this point could discourse pleasantly and with an

intelligence that sometimes bordered on eloquence. As regarded everything else, his mental and reasoning faculties seemed to present a perfect blank, he being unable to understand causes and effects, unless they were of the most simple kind, such as could be learned mechanically. For his father he showed great awe and reverence, and toward his half-sister he evinced an affection which was as deep as it was humble, and might be likened to that of a faithful dog. He displayed it by a desire to be close to her in those short periods when he was not engaged in work. At such times he would often put his hand furtively but tenderly on some part of her dress; and when she perceived it, he would bend forward, as if waiting for a smile or a caressing word, which were the usual acknowledgments, and to which, when given, his only response was a broad, pleased grin. He rarely spoke on anything not connected with his craft, but to express his wants and feelings used certain signs, which those about him had learned to interpret. He might almost have passed for an idiot, were it not for his clear, logical talk on everything connected with his profession, and for a quickness of movement of both hand and limb which such beings do not usually possess, and which in him was developed to a remarkable degree. It is probable that he was naturally endowed with but limited reasoning powers. These, however, would have been sufficient for the narrow range of views and the limited routine duties of a peasant or a laborer in those days; but in the position in which he was placed, the comparatively strong claims made upon him in the exercise of his profession had, so to say, absorbed all that there was of intellect and drawn it into this one channel, leaving everything else a blank.

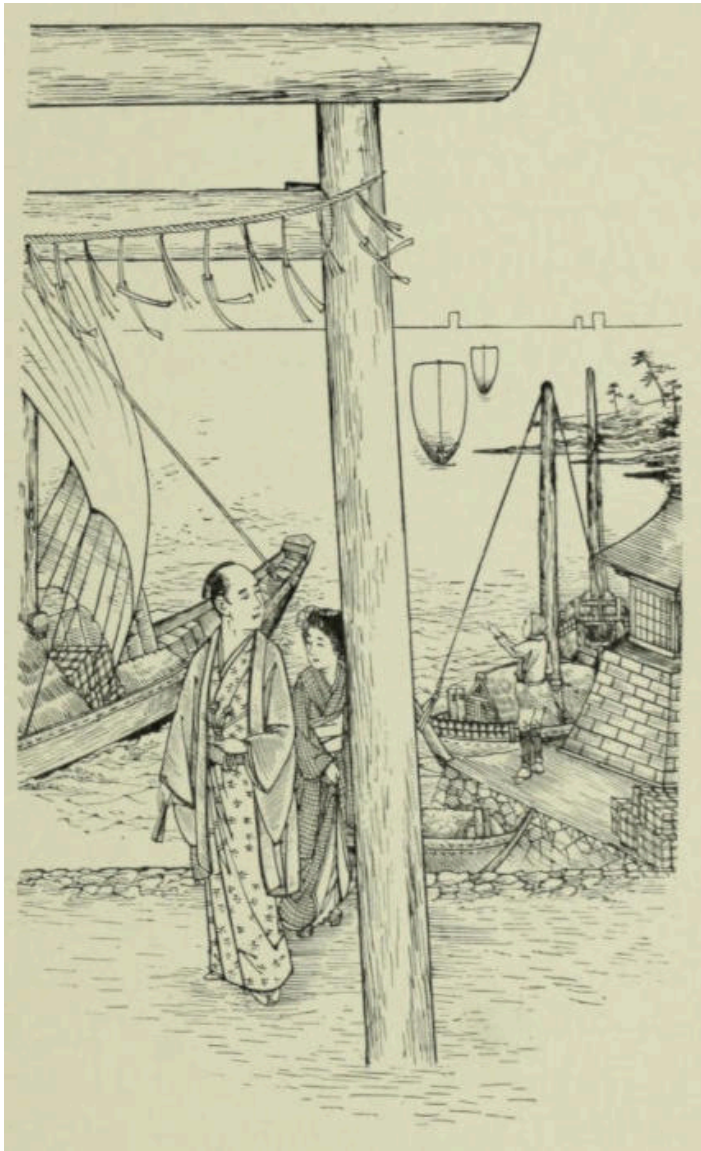


SWORD-GUARD.

CHAPTER IV.

Under such surroundings grew up the fairest maiden to be found in the province of Kuwana. All who had seen her were unanimous in according this tribute to O Tetsu. The people often wondered how such a beautiful, lovely being could spring from such a coarse, knotted stock, even when her mother's fair, delicate nature was grafted upon it. There are many points of beauty for which the daughters of Japan have always been favored beyond those of most other nations. In no country probably will there be found so many possessing those delicate hands and feet, that gloriously beautiful neck, and those bright, shining eyes which seem to be the birth-right of the maidens of the Land of the Rising Sun. All these advantages and many others were found to perfection in O Tetsu; and she added to them a grace of movement and a witchery of manner which caused the poets of the court to lament the poverty of their language, because it failed to supply them with adequate terms to describe all these endearing qualities to their satisfaction. Fair and fresh and beautiful as a summer morn, graceful as a Japanese lily, with wonderful eyes, lustrous and brilliant, and shining with a peculiar humid brightness which suffused or rather covered them as if with a refulgent and yet a transparent veil, and with a voice whose sweet melody, if you were young and impressionable, lingered in your ears for days and weeks after you heard it, O Tetsu might well lay claim to be considered peerless throughout the land.

Her hands and feet might have belonged to a child half her age, and her form was slight and delicate; yet she was no tender, hothouse plant, but in reality strong and robust. When on cold, frosty winter mornings, the ground being covered with snow, she walked out with her bare feet thrust into high-heeled *getas*, her rich, warm blood mantling neck and face, she looked a picture of physical health, and formed a striking contrast to many damsels whose coarser build did not prevent them from shivering, and showing hands and feet and noses that were blue and ugly with the cold. In spite of her generally mild and demure looks, there was something of her father's nature in her after all,—a certain imperious way, which, rarely displayed, might have been taken for a faint, a very faint, counterpart of the old smith's headstrong obstinacy. There was some slight resemblance between them also in outward looks,—a resemblance in general hardly conceivable, but which became apparent in O Tetsu when her eyes were momentarily closed. Then her small mouth and chin showed its resolute cast, and the whole outline of the face was not lacking in a certain determined look, which, as shrewd observers said, would have developed into something of a temper if circumstances had favored it. All these latent traits, however, were not visible, or failed to be noticed, when you saw her eyes—those beautiful eyes, with their unfathomable depth of bright, roguish tenderness. Although her father doted on her, yet the stern, fierce nature of his strong and powerful individuality rendered disobedience or self-willed pertinacity an impossibility, and the girl's feminine graces were thus saved from being marred by tendencies which a different education might have aggravated into faults.



LANDING-PLACE AT KUWANA.

Young as O Tetsu was, offers of marriage,—some of them of a kind to satisfy very exacting demands

on the score of birth, family, position, and personal accomplishments,—had not been wanting. There were those who would have wooed her for her father's reputed wealth; there were others, and probably the greater number, who were attracted mostly by the charms of her person and manners; while not a few of high position and noble birth would have been content to give her their name if she had possessed neither beauty nor wealth, being actuated by the sole hope of getting one of her father's swords as a dowry. The social taint attaching to her escutcheon on account of her reputed Eta mother, the mere suspicion of which in the case of most others would have been an all-powerful objection, not to be outweighed by the possession of wealth, was disregarded in the daughter of this clever artisan. In her it would have been condoned, even if it had stood out as a well-known and established fact. This, however, was not the case, as it was after all but a vague report, which anybody who chose might disbelieve. The lovers of O Tetsu looked for no other reason to ignore its existence but their own desire and inclination; while the smith's fame, his reputed influence, which it was known would carry great weight if he chose to exert it, and above all the secret superstitious awe which he inspired, were so many deterrent influences to prevent people from talking above their breath of what might be distasteful to him if it should reach his ears.



A RONIN.

This fear and awe had its origin in another of those rumors which arise no one knows how or when, and

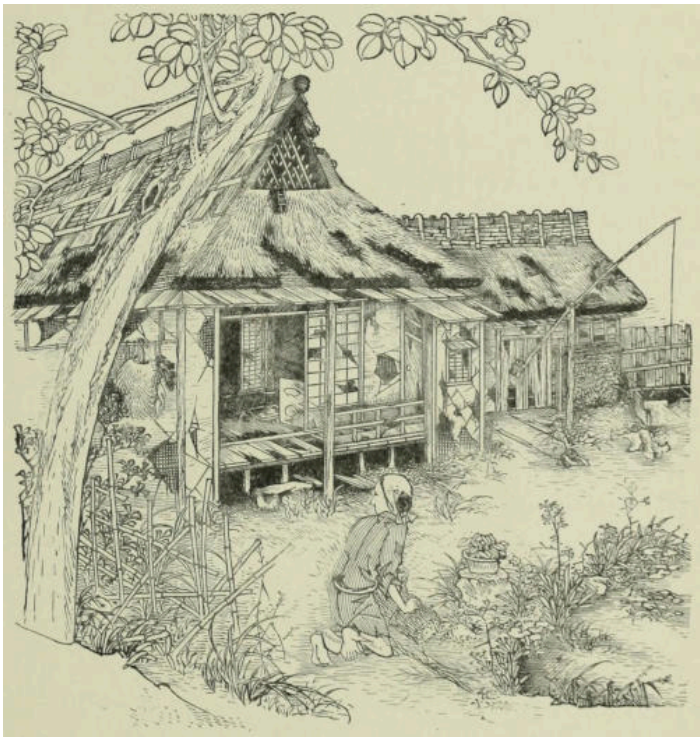
which sometimes, having a substratum of truth, or assuming its semblance from accidental circumstances, come to be accepted as undoubted facts. In this instance it had long since been so accepted. It was said that in the manufacture of his swords the smith needed newly-shed human blood. The age was superstitious enough to believe that such a procedure correctly carried out would entail marvellous results; and the wonderful excellence of Muramasa's productions favored this reasoning. There were sufficient grounds beside to make such a belief plausible. The smith's weird appearance and manner, and the dreary, lonely character of the neighborhood wherein he lived, had undoubtedly contributed to this end. Moreover, the dead bodies which were found so often near his house,—much more frequently, it was said, than ever before,—whether they had belonged to *samurai* slain in brawl or duel, merchants robbed and killed for their money or beggars probably cut down from mere wanton lust, were always cut and slashed in a terrible manner, leaving hardly any blood in the body, while traces of it were often found suspiciously near the smith's dwelling. Nobody thought of accusing the latter of sordid motives, and his solitary life prevented him from having many enemies. It was only the blood he wanted to temper his steel; and when the time came that he needed it, and no accident supplied him, then, as people said, he took care to furnish an accident himself. If such had been the case, known and proven, it would probably have entailed no unpleasant consequences upon the smith, unless some one, specially interested and high in authority, had chosen to take the matter in hand. Human life was held cheap enough, while good swords were rare; and if it required human blood to

make one, a few merchants and vagrants could well be spared. Muramasa himself was doubtless aware of this report, and was even believed by some to encourage it. At least, whether true in any degree or altogether a fabrication, he never by word or sign contradicted it; he probably had enough worldly wisdom to know that the atmosphere of dread mystery in which, by common report, he thus lived, created a spell which could not but enhance the value of the products of his marvellous handicraft.

As far as O Tetsu was concerned, none of these rumors had ever reached her. It was known that in her case the smith objected to and would resent such a piece of tale-bearing; and the mysterious fear of him was sufficient to prevent anything of the kind. Once only had such an attempt been made.

As the girl one forenoon passed out of the house on her way to the town to make a few purchases, accompanied, as she always was, by her old servant, she was stopped not far from her door by two old beldames with whom she had a slight acquaintance. The latter had been loitering under pretence of looking at some tumble-down buildings on the other side of the street, to which both of them pointed now and then in apparently a deeply interested way; in reality, however, they were waiting, hoping perhaps to meet the smith's daughter, who went out only two or three times a month, but generally at this hour. It was not the first time that these women, who were known as confirmed gossips, had been seen in the neighborhood; but they had never before met the young girl, whom, when they saw her now, they accosted with such a show of affection and caressing words that she could not but stop and make some sort of reply. As the conversation continued,

however, she, knowing that her father objected strongly to anything like street gossip, became uneasy and bent a significant look on her servant. The latter, who in general was quick enough in her perceptions, and of her own accord had often stopped such *rencontres*, sometimes in a very abrupt and unceremonious manner, seemed in this instance unable to understand the meaning of her young mistress's uneasiness, and, contrary to all her habits, even took a lively interest in the conversation.



DESERTED BUILDINGS.

"Miss O Tetsu is getting to be very proud now," said one of the women, the wife of a small sugar-baker, in the course of the conversation which

followed numerous minute inquiries after the other's health. "Yet when you were a child you never passed our poor, humble place without calling for your candy, which I took so much pleasure in giving to the dear, pretty little thing."

"Oh, yes!" her companion, the shrewish spouse of an *omochaya* (dealer in toys), chimed in, "and at that time she rarely passed our place without accepting some little toy or plaything; and bless her little heart, how she did enjoy the sight of the picture-books, and the tops which she began to spin as soon as she passed out into the street! But Miss O Tetsu has become a great lady now, with more beauty and wealth than any other girl in the province, and poor people like us can hardly expect to be noticed by her."

"You are both certainly mistaken," replied O Tetsu, vexed with the others as well as herself. She could not understand the meaning of all this talk; she only remembered going to these women's shops, as she went to others, to make occasional purchases, and she was at a loss to account for this fervor and extreme show of friendly sympathy. Still, above everything she would not be thought proud or unkind to inferiors, and so she continued: "I am not a child any more, and do not now care for sweetmeats or toys; but I do not mean to forget any kindness done to me, and if you care for my company, I will call upon you the next time I go out."

"I knew it; I knew what a kind-hearted and good-natured little fairy you are," the former speaker quickly and rather illogically rejoined. "And how is your dear father?" she continued abruptly, noticing the other's impatience to get away.

"I have not seen my father for some days; he is finishing a sword now, and at such times he always shuts himself up with my brother in the smithy, allowing not even me to disturb him."

"So now is the time when your father is finishing one of his wonderful swords? I ought to have known it. They found two corpses fearfully hacked to pieces on the lot opposite to you. Strange,—is it not?—but at such times corpses are always found over there. Strange, is it not, Miss O Tetsu?"

"There is nothing strange about it," the old servant here quickly spoke up. "When Muramasa is engaged on one of his swords, he is utterly absorbed in his work, and robbers and thieves know they need not fear his interference; so they pursue their evil ways without danger of being disturbed by one who would be a match for a dozen of them."

"I suppose that may be it," was the response, slowly given. "We think, however, at such a time the smithy could show many strange and queer, perhaps some fearful, scenes, and I would give anything to be able to get a glance at it to-day."

"I will afford you that pleasure," said a deep, harsh voice; and turning round, the woman who had spoken saw the smith himself at her elbow. The sight of him at that moment would have appalled even a strong, stout-hearted man, much more the shrinking creature whom he had just addressed. His mouth was firmly compressed, his face looked unnaturally broad, and its repulsive features new seemed perfectly hideous, with the coal-dust and soot which covered them as well as his whole body. The furrow on his forehead was filled with this floating dust, and glistening with the great drops of sweat that had gathered there, had become a shining jet black. But

the worst feature of all were those large, restless, glaring eyes, surrounded as they now were with red, inflamed brows, which spoke of long nights of watching and labor.

“You can go on now, O Tetsu,” he said, addressing his daughter, “while I take charge of these ladies. Go on,” he continued in a more peremptory way, as the other loitered; “I must fulfil the wish of these ladies who have such very kind feelings for you and me;” and taking hold of each by an arm, he led them along, while the girl, unaccustomed to hear severe tones from him, hurried away with her servant.

What the two gossips who were now led away into the smithy heard or saw there, they could or would never give a rational account of. They were both in such a state of abject fear and terror that the smith had to change his hold from their arms to their waists to bring them to his place, which was only a few feet away. They remembered the smithy,—large, dark, and gloomy, all the darker and gloomier for the contrast with the bright air and light outside. They remembered seeing a hot, lurid fire at one end, before which the smith’s son was working half naked with an immense hammer on a white-hot bar of iron. All around him were numberless tools and instruments with sharp edges and bright surfaces glistening in the glare of the flame, which came out with a hissing noise. The place also contained a quantity of large and small tubs, some apparently empty, and some containing liquid which looked black as tar, but which, when the firelight fell upon it, shone red as blood. Queer and fantastic shadows, which elongated or contracted as the flame on the hearth shot out or subsided, filled the place. Half-dead with terror, they remembered being led, or

rather carried, by the smith close to the fiery heat, and they had a dim recollection of being told by him how a human being could be burned to cinders here in a few moments, and how those cinders could be put to use again in forging a sword. An idle vagrant unwilling to work, or a good-for-nothing, peeping, spying chatterbox, who neglected her home but minded everybody's business, could hardly be put to any better use than this.



O TETSU AND THE TWO BELDAMES.

The terrible heat, and partly their own feelings, must have overpowered these two beldames, for they remembered nothing further until they found themselves out in the yard by the well, drenched from head to foot with several buckets of water which the smith had thrown over them. With a grim smile he said he thought they were satisfied with their visit; and while he gave it as his opinion that the air of the smithy hardly agreed with them, he added that if he ever heard of their expressing any further curiosity, he would certainly be ready to contrive means of giving them another glimpse of his workshop. Then, without further ceremony, he conducted them to the gate, which he closed in their faces, leaving the poor drenched women, chattering with cold and still shaking and quaking with fright, to find their way home as best they could. It was said that from this day the henpecked *omochaya* found his wife marvellously changed for the better. Queerly enough, although neither of them spoke of their adventure, the affair gradually came to be known and talked about; and the guarded, evasive answers which, although otherwise voluble enough, they gave when interrogated by their acquaintances, only heightened the interest without satisfying it, thereby giving new food for mysterious tales about the smith.

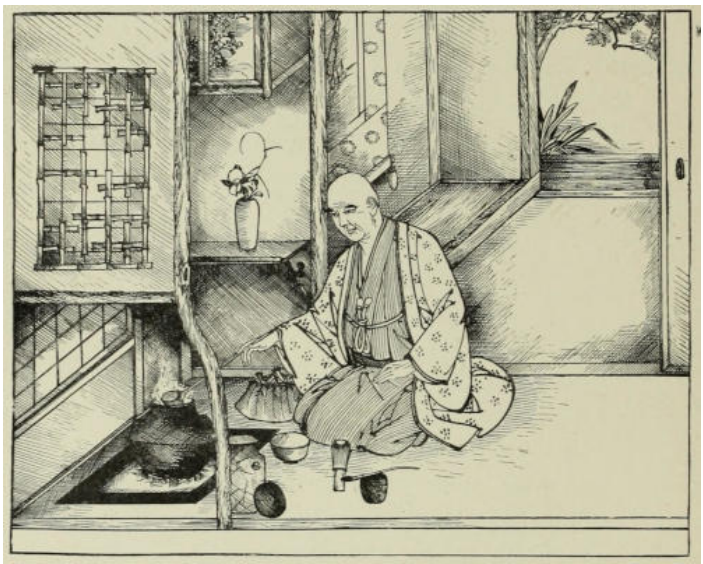


SWORD-GUARD.

CHAPTER V.

Among those who were smitten by O Tetsu's charms was no less a person than the old Duke Ono ga Sawa himself. Being already married, he could only offer her the position of first concubine,—which, however, in Japan implies nothing of dishonor and very little even of inferiority. The position of a first concubine, or second wife, as she is sometimes called (and even that of those who follow her), is a legitimate one, recognized by law and custom. She ranks next to the first wife; and if the latter fail to bear male children, the concubine's son succeeds to his father's titles and honors. With the exception, perhaps, of two or three of the very highest families, there were none in the province but would have been greatly pleased and gratified at such an offer for their daughter. Still, the Duke was hardly sanguine, for a few hints to this effect conveyed to Muramasa had fallen upon what appeared to be very unresponsive soil. Forced to act more directly, he appointed a duly accredited *nakōdō*. For this office he selected—doubtless purposely—a superannuated court noble living in retirement upon a small pension, and who, although aware of the smith's merit, was yet only partially acquainted with his position and pretensions. This, as well as the ill success which had attended all others who had preceded him on similar errands, he only learned when, flushed with pride, he informed—in strict privacy, of course—some of his younger court friends of his appointment. Their responses,

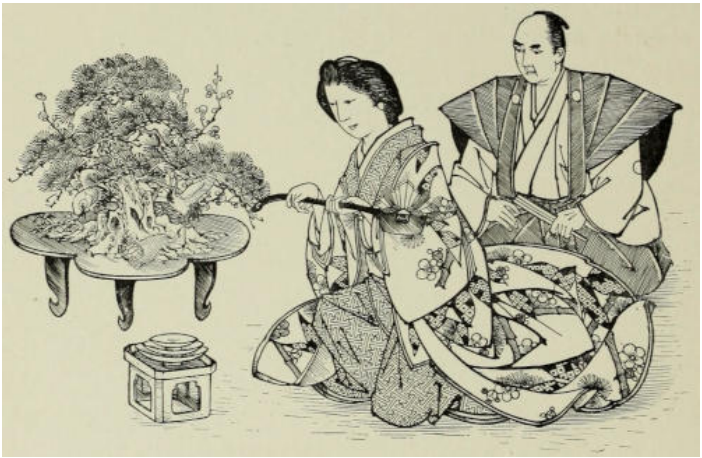
unanimous as they all were, sadly dampened his expectation of a quiet and successful issue to his mission, and clouded his hopes of the benefits and advantages which would result therefrom, not to speak of the Muramasa sword, which in the first flush of sanguine excitement the envoy felt certain of receiving from the man to whom he offered such an eligible position for his daughter. He almost began to regret that he had been chosen by the Duke. Still, having once accepted the duty, he had no choice; and trusting not a little to his own power of persuasion, he started on his errand.



INKIO. (RETIREMENT FROM WORLDLY AFFAIRS.)

Contrary to precedent, and far in excess of anything he anticipated, he was extremely well received. His host, who could not but be aware of his errand, at once invited him into the best room. Tea and wine were brought in; and as in Eastern countries the matter in hand is never immediately

introduced, but only approached gradually, other subjects, and naturally swords, were discussed first—and last. The host, usually so sparing of his words, seemed this day to put no restraint on his tongue. Every attempt on the part of his visitor to approach the matter that had brought him to Senjuin was the signal for Muramasa to recount the story of some glowing feat of arms, of some wonderful exploit of Japan's great heroes, or of some marvellous piece of fencing or swordsmanship. The enthusiasm naturally engendered by such subjects, not unmixed with anxiety and a lingering fear that his object was in no way furthered by what he could not help listening to with pleasure and even with rapture, caused the envoy to resort to the wine-cup more frequently than agreed with the sober habits which a small income necessarily imposed. He did this with such effect that in the course of a few hours he had completely forgotten the object of his mission. He began to entertain the smith with an heroic recital of the exploits of his own youth, which with every succeeding cup trenched more and more on the marvellous; and when at last he took his leave, being escorted to the door by his host, he was still talking and gesticulating, although in a confused way, and the servant who had accompanied him found it difficult to induce him to enter his chair.



MALE AND FEMALE NAKŌDŌ. (MARRIAGE NEGOTIATORS.)

When soberness and consciousness returned, his mortification was so great that he could not bring himself again to face the smith, and he informed the Duke of what had occurred. The latter's passion was not so strong as to make him unable to subordinate it to his policy of retaining Muramasa at the court. He judiciously refrained from taking any further steps to carry out his design, and he was too kind-hearted to show any displeasure towards the sorely distressed old servitor, whom, on the contrary, he dismissed with gentle words and presents. Muramasa's action in this affair was based upon opinions and convictions which with him were the result of individual thought, uninfluenced by surroundings and customs. His love for his daughter, like his love for his art, was a deep, holy feeling, emanating from the man's inner nature. He felt that a life amid the rivalries and petty jealousies of the court could not afford her any real happiness or content; and the sturdy independence of his character prevented him

from becoming imbued with those social prejudices which look to outside glitter, and to which weak natures readily succumb.

That Sennoske should have succeeded in ingratiating himself into the favor of such a man, who until now had kept everybody, high and low, at a distance, was something at which the good people of Kuwana marvelled not a little. It could only be ascribed to the boy's frank and winsome face, to his manliness and skill of arms far in advance of his age, added to great reserve and modesty of demeanor. The court, taking its cue from the character of the Duke, had assumed a tone of levity and of boisterousness which was especially affected by the younger *samurai*, and to which Sennoske, with his modest and retiring ways, was almost the only exception. It was probably more especially this latter quality which had gained him the regard of the grim old smith, who taught him many new points in regard to the use of the sword, and even a few general rules as to the making of one.

Two or three days seldom passed without seeing the lad at the forge, where he was always well received. Was it altogether the *samurai's* love for the sword which caused these frequent visits; and were not O Tetsu's bright eyes even a stronger attraction? It was merely a repetition of the old, old story. When he had first come, she was only a child; and as she gradually budded into womanhood before his eyes, the young man, whose way heretofore, confined to hard work and study, had been serious and monotonous, did not himself know what it was that all at once made him look upon life and its surroundings with such bright, joyful, enthusiastic feelings. The intimacy growing up between the two

young people must have been observed by the smith; and if, even by his silence, he encouraged it, the reason was simply that the boy's character impressed him with a sense of his worth, and he felt that, joined to Sennoske, his daughter's future would be in safe hands. Gradually his favoritism grew beyond the limits of mere passive indulgence; and Sennoske, becoming almost like a member of the family, passed in the company of O Tetsu many hours of supreme happiness such as it is only given to true, open, and honest natures like his to enjoy. Sennoske's father knew nothing of this, and believed that his son frequented the smith's forge merely for the sake of the lessons he received in swordsmanship and forging, or at most to listen to the smith's weird tales of chivalrous daring, which, on returning home, he sometimes repeated. Before the young man was even himself aware of it, his passion for the girl was so great that he felt he could not live without her; and although heretofore he had had no secrets from his father, he experienced in this instance a nameless, undefined dread of disclosing his attachment. He loved, he fairly worshipped, his father; but the love was mixed with a great deal of reverential awe and deep pity, often amounting to anguish, at the sight of that frozen look of sorrow and gloom which never left Mutto's face.



SENNOSKE AND HIS FATHER.

When not directly engaged in instructing his son, Mutto's only discourse had been on the obligations of a true *samurai*; and even here he confined himself almost exclusively to what his listener well knew was a *samurai's* first and chief duty,—the *kataki-uchi* (vendetta). Instance after instance did the youth hear of men who had sacrificed brother and sister, wife and concubine,—nay, sometimes even father and mother,—to carry out some just vengeance, and who

had died happy because they survived the satisfactory end of their vendetta long enough to cast one glance of exulting victory upon the dead or dying body of their victim.





SOSANOÔ MIKOTO, THE PATRON GOD OF SWORDS AND INVENTOR OF POETRY.

Gradually it dawned upon Sennoske that his father, from some inexplicable cause, must have been unable to fulfil such a duty which his *samurai* honor had imposed upon him, and that he was educating his son to act in his stead. The thought, as soon as it struck the lad, brought a thrill of wild and fierce delight. With conscious pride he felt that his body, trained to every athletic exercise, his sinews of steel and muscles of iron, his quick eye and swift foot, gave him a better right than any other youth of his age to hope to carry out the dream of every young *samurai*,—to see himself grasping his blood-stained sword and covered with mortal wounds, his foot upon the body of his prostrate and dying foe. No *samurai* worthy of the name had a higher ambition than to die such a death; and when Sennoske lived, the spirit that ruled men of his class was not different from what it had been for centuries before, or from what it continued to be up to within the last few decades.

The thoughts, hopes, and expectations thus engendered in the mind of Sennoske had completely occupied it until he met O Tetsu. Not that this event wrought anything like a complete revulsion of feeling. No new-born passion could wholly supersede the result of traditional and inherited tendencies, and of an education which had caused the tenets of a soldier’s creed to be instilled with the first glimmer of consciousness. Sennoske was still as ready as ever to dare anything and sacrifice everything in the

cause of his father's vendetta. With that object in view he would not have hesitated a moment to lay down his life if necessary. But this "if necessary" had now intruded itself where before no thought had been given to it. He sometimes feared that he was even lacking in loyalty and good faith to the principle in which he had been brought up, because he permitted himself to look forward to any end but one; and this was doubtless the reason why he refrained from speaking to his father of his passion for O Tetsu. Day by day, however, that passion grew; until he felt that it was impossible to cease hoping that he might yet call the girl his own, and that the fulfilment of his mission, whatever duties it entailed, might not be irreconcilable with the consummation of his desires.



CHAPTER VI.

Ten years had elapsed since Mutto and his son had first come to Kuwana, and the great struggle so long impending was now fairly breaking out. That the crisis had not occurred sooner was a matter of sufficient wonder, and was owing altogether to the strong measures of repression, to the undoubted ability for governing possessed in general by those who were still the actual rulers of the land. But although the overthrow of the Hōjō might be delayed, it could not be averted. The insolent pride of these chieftains, not content with setting up and pulling down Shôguns at will, and punishing with death all who incurred their displeasure, had even heaped indignities upon the imperial family; and from this, more than from all other causes combined, their hold upon the people was weakened beyond hope of recovery.

In Japan the divinity which hedges the king owes nothing to the poet's flowery imagery, but has always been accepted as a living fact by high and low, by rich and poor, by the strong and by the weak. The government of the country had *de facto* always been wielded by some chieftain whose genius, naturally in those times mainly of a military character, had enabled him to arrogate position and power. If at the same time he possessed administrative and organizing qualities, then the prestige and influence exerted by his name, added to the support of his clansmen, would often secure this power for several generations to his descendants. In

this way the Sugiwara, Fujiwara, Taira, the Minamoto, and others whose names and exploits are familiar to every child in Japan, had risen to fame and to the control of the State.

All these chiefs, nevertheless, however absolute their power might have been, were extremely careful, so far as outward show and ceremony went, to profess the deepest reverence for, and implicit obedience to, the ruling Emperor. The genius which could rise to pre-eminence in spite of the valor and opposition of numerous rivals, would have been useless if it could not obtain recognition of its arrogated offices from the Throne. Military or civil ascendency could not make a man Kwambaku, Dajodaijin, or Shôgun; it was only investiture by the ruling Mikado, the descendant of the gods, which in the opinion of the public could confer these titles. At this time the Shôgunate and the nominal control of national affairs were in the hands of the Minamoto family. In times gone by, from the tenth to the twelfth century, they and the Taira were the two leading clans of the Empire. They were, however, both too great to exist by the side of each other; and a fierce and desperate warfare was waged between them, which lasted for many decades, and in which the Minamotos were at last utterly vanquished and almost extirpated.

Among the very few survivors was a young boy named Yoritomo, who had been carried to the rugged and barren mountain fastnesses of Idzu, where he was brought up in the charge of a faithful old servant. This boy was destined to take vengeance upon the despoilers of his race. Becoming himself the most illustrious figure that Japanese history up to that time had known, he raised the Minamoto name

and power to a higher pinnacle of fame and prestige than it had ever attained. Appointed Shôgun by the Mikado in the year 1192, he firmly established the Shôgunate with its seat at Kamakura, and made himself virtual dictator of the country. He died in 1199, and the genius for war and statesmanship which had distinguished him seemed to have died with him.



YORITOMO LIBERATING A THOUSAND CRANES IN HONOR OF HIS VICTORIES.

Although he bequeathed his power and the prestige of his name to his descendants, thus securing for the latter the possession of the

Shôgunate, the office became a purely nominal affair. Like the illustrious dead Yoritomo, who had wrested all real authority from the imperial throne, leaving it only the bare show and pomp of power, so now the Hōjō stepped in, and in their hands the Minamoto Shôguns were but puppets moving at the will of their so-called guardians. Daily the Hōjō adherents grew in strength and numbers, and every position of trust and influence was soon occupied by them and their creatures. In the arrogance of their pride, engendered by a long continuance of absolute power, they at last did what even the great Yoritomo himself had never dared to do,—they failed to pay even outward reverence to the Emperor, and openly showed the mailed hand by which he was ruled. Mikado after Mikado was forced to abdicate in favor of some other member of the imperial family whom the Hōjō thought more devoted to their interests, and the ex-Emperors who had provoked their resentment —banished, sent into exile, or forced into cloisters— were treated with rigor, often with humiliating severity.

Such a course could not last. Neither the prestige gained for the Hōjō by their military talents,—which in the year 1279 had repelled the invasion of the great Mongol Chieftain Kublai Khan, with its myriads of ships and its numberless army,—nor the merits of their civil administration, which preserved internal peace, promoted agriculture, industry, and trade, and showed harshness only in what might be thought to trench upon their assumed prerogatives, could reconcile the people to the disrespect shown to their Emperors. The gods from whom the latter descended must sooner or later take vengeance not only upon the desecrators, but also upon the people who stood passively by and permitted this unholy work to

proceed without interfering.



MAN IN ARMOR.

Although hardly probable, it is yet perhaps barely possible, that the Hōjōs harbored the thought of being able some day to usurp the imperial throne; and it may have been this hope which dictated their policy. They could not but know that such a consummation might be looked for only after long years of preparation, and they therefore tried to lessen the imperial prestige by forcing successive Mikados to abdicate, and making light of their sacred rights and prerogatives. But if some such deep-laid scheme really animated their course, events proved that they had miscalculated the force of the feeling which inspired the people, and which made love and reverence for their Emperors the foundation of their patriotism and religion. Repeated outbreaks against the Hōjō domination had occurred within the last decade; but they had been quelled before assuming any serious dimensions, and summary punishment dealt out to those concerned in them. One of these, which had been instigated in secret by the son of the reigning Emperor, had caused the father to lose his throne and be banished to a distant island, while the son was forced to shave his head and enter a convent, and eventually to leave even that retreat and flee to the mountains to save his life.

Ono ga Sawa, although he hated the Hōjō at heart, was too prudent, without seeing a reasonable chance of success, to commit himself to any movement which might endanger his house and his life. The great want of the disaffected was a leader,—one who by birth, position, and personal qualities might command the confidence and esteem of all classes among them. At last, however, news arrived at Kuwana in the fall of the year that Nitta Yoshisada

had raised the standard of revolt and called upon the whole country to assist him. This new champion of the Mikado was lord of the castle of Nitta; and he as well as his brother, the lord of the castle of Ashikaga, who had joined him in the rising, were direct descendants of a celebrated Minamoto chief, their fiefs, which lay in contiguous provinces, within easy distance of the Hōjō stronghold Kamakura, having been in uninterrupted possession of themselves and their forefathers for nearly four hundred years.

Nitta had earned a high military reputation while serving as captain in the Hōjō armies. He had been deputed with a large force to subdue Kusunoki Masashige, who had thrice within three years raised the flag of revolt, and although defeated each time, had still managed to escape to unfurl anew the imperial standard and assemble soldiers in its defence. Although Nitta had always been ready to support the Hōjō chiefs against rivals, or even in schemes of personal aggrandizement, he yet had no wish to fight against the supporters of the Mikado. He dared not refuse the command offered to him, as he would thus lay himself open to suspicion, and suspicion then meant death. His resolution in this dilemma was soon made. Having started with his troops, he carefully sounded the temper of the officers and men; and finding it what he expected, exhibited a commission which he had procured from the exiled Emperor, at the same time describing to them in an eloquent and affecting speech the condition of their rightful rulers. They one and all agreed to fight for the cause which they had been sent to overthrow.

All previous outbreaks had been confined to distant provinces, and the lack of unity and

concerted action, together with the want of military ability among many of the would-be leaders, had resulted in their easy suppression by the disciplined forces sent against them. Nitta was resolved to carry the war into the enemy's country, where he knew the disaffected would muster in great numbers as soon as a favorable opportunity should present itself; but for a time he pitched his camp at his own castle. Before setting out, however, he sent proclamations to the different provinces, stating his intention of restoring the wrongfully exiled Mikado to the possession of the throne and to the enjoyment of that supreme power which belonged to him, and calling upon all loyal subjects to aid in carrying out this sacred mission. Nitta's emissaries were everywhere received with joy and acclamation, and with promises of aid in men, money, and war material,—promises which, as the immediate future showed, were religiously kept.

CHAPTER VII.

When Ono ga Sawa heard of Nitta's rising and the manifesto, he hesitated not a moment, but immediately proclaimed himself one of those who were determined to secure to the Emperors their legal rights. On account of his bodily infirmities, he was unable to take an active part himself; but couriers were immediately despatched assuring Nitta of his support, and promising that two thousand of his best fighting men should leave Kuwana and march to Nitta's aid within four days. He was as good as his word, and within the specified time as fine a body of troops as could be found in any part of the Empire, well equipped and provided with all necessaries, were ready to march in defence of their Emperors against the Hōjō usurpers.

Sennoske naturally formed one of their number; but, contrary to the Duke's apprehensions, Mutto had not asked to join the expedition, and the latter's faithful and efficient services were so well appreciated by this time that Ono ga Sawa felt greatly relieved at being assured of having him by his side in case of any local disturbance which Hōjō partisans might raise.

While making his hurried preparations, it seemed to Sennoske that his father was several times on the point of telling him what he felt must be the secret of his life; but each time Mutto checked himself, changing the conversation to other subjects, and the last day of Sennoske's stay had nearly passed away

without his having learned anything in regard to it. He had not yet found time in the hurry of preparation to take leave of Muramasa and O Tetsu. Going to Senjuin late in the evening, when all his arrangements for departure had been completed, he found the girl at the open door of the forge awaiting his arrival, the smith and his son being within, busily engaged in work. The young man followed his future little wife, as he already sometimes playfully called her, to a room above; and there the two exchanged those vows and professions of love and promises of eternal faithfulness which, in Japan as well as everywhere else, have been repeated millions of times before, and will be repeated millions of times again. Then their talk ran on, and became principally a reiteration of the hope of meeting each other again, with flattering prognostications on the part of O Tetsu as to the distinctions which her lover was sure to gain in battle; and in spite of the latter's deprecating remonstrance, it was evident by his pleased looks that he listened not unwillingly. His was a handsome face, and the flush of enthusiasm and of sanguine youthful ambition which now sat upon it enhanced its natural beauty.

So engrossed were the lovers in each other that they took no note of the opening of the sliding door of the room, and both started upon hearing the voice of O Tetsu's father, whom they now saw standing close beside them, holding in his hand a sword splendidly mounted in gold, and wrapped in rich silk. There was a kindly look on his face such as even his daughter had rarely seen there before; and when he asked her to leave them alone for a few moments, his naturally harsh and firm voice was modulated in a soft and tender tone. His rugged, athletic frame evidently shook with strong emotion; but Sennoske,

who had often seen him when laboring under strong excitement, knew that this time the moving cause was neither anger nor hate.

"Take this sword," he said, Sennoske the while becoming almost delirious with joy; "a better one I never forged in my life." Then, after a moment's pause, he added: "I have learned to feel more affection for you, Sennoske, than I thought I could ever feel for any one outside of my own family, partly probably because I trust that with you my daughter will be happy; but I also love you for your own sake, and because your youthful ambition reminds me of a time when I was like you. I hope and trust that your fate points to a happier lot than mine has been. I am of humble birth; and this, with the peace reigning over the land, has proved an impassable barrier to my achieving distinction in arms and carving out a name for myself that might, as I once dreamed, stand worthily by the side of Japan's great heroes.

"Oh! the misery of feeling that one possesses the strength of arm and the resolute will to achieve great things, and yet to lack every means of action; to be treated as an inferior by every one of those proud *samurai*, the immediate forefathers of many of whom have been of as low birth as myself, and only achieved distinction in the glorious *Gempei* wars! I was born to the humble lot of a peasant, to labor from early morn until late at night, while my food was of the poorest and scantiest description; but I would have worked ten times harder, and been satisfied with even worse fare, if I could have had a chance of bettering my fortunes. To accomplish this and rise above the station in which I was born, I could see only one road open to me,—to become a

renowned sword-smith. It was not easy to do this. I had no father and no brother to initiate me into the secrets of the art handed down from father to son, generation after generation during hundreds of years, as is the rule with the craft. Many a weary mile did I travel, enduring hunger and thirst and, what was worse to me, numberless slights and indignities, before I found one who was without son or male kindred, and with whom I succeeded in obtaining service. He had a daughter; and no lovesick swain ever showed more outward tokens of the depth and strength of his devotion, or spoke more passionate words of burning love to the object of it, than did I to that ugly shrew, whom I loathed from my very soul when I gave her my hand and took her name. For seven long years did I dissemble, performing the most menial services to prove my faithfulness, before my master and father-in-law thought fit to initiate me into the first principles of the art. My teacher could tell me little more, and I soon outstripped him.

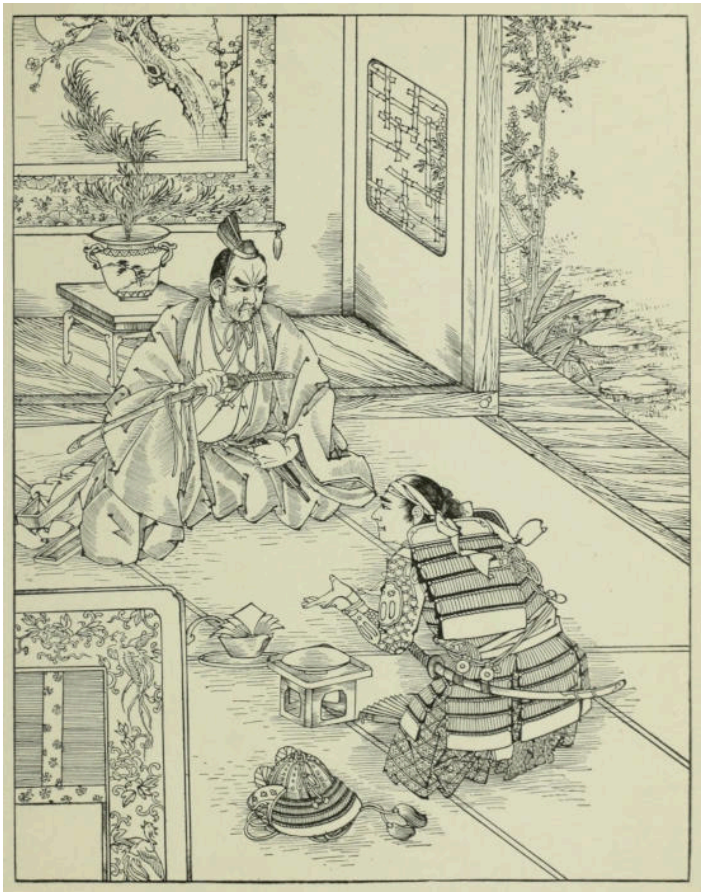


PEASANT.

"The gods have been kind to me, and have rewarded me for my prayers by granting me skill and ability; have answered my fasting and my devotion, my days and nights of restless toil, by allowing me to discover many secrets which are unknown to others. Oh, the fools, the fools! they think that steel is dead because it is cold and motionless and without apparent life! Thrice-told fools and idiots! they kill the life which exists in the iron as it comes from Nature, and they give no other in return; and yet they know from their forefathers, and have learned to prattle, that the sword is the living soul of the *samurai*.

"There is life in this blade which I give you to-day, my boy,—better, finer, and richer life than in most of the boors who try to fashion a sword. But remember that on this account, unless you use it wisely and carefully, this sword is a dangerous gift. Never draw it unless you need its help; never return it to its scabbard without using it; and never let it remain undrawn longer than a cycle of twelve years. Should you ever by any unforeseen fatality have drawn and exposed it to the light of the sun, the moon, or the stars without being able to use it on the enemy who provoked you, then before returning it to its scabbard use it on some inferior animal; but never think of sheathing it without the blade having come in contact with the blood of something still living. If you act thus, you will find it your devoted friend; it will obey and even anticipate your thoughts and desires; with the least guidance it will strike your enemies and those who are opposed to you in their weakest places unto death, in spite of numbers and courage, in spite of armor and helmet. But if you fail in obeying the directions I have given you, the blade will turn upon and mark you for its victim with

equal certainty; and even were you to bury it in the deep ocean, it would not fail to wreak vengeance upon you."



SENNOSKE RECEIVING THE SWORD FROM THE SMITH.

The mainspring which moved the nature of the smith was evident. Sennoske, although he was young and inexperienced in the passions which stir the heart and guide the actions of men, was yet a keen observer, and he could now easily fathom the depths

of the sword-smith's strange nature. He saw that the man's ruling passion was ambition,—ambition so inordinate that it could never be satisfied, and which, burning so fiercely without hope of realization, had retired into itself and assumed the semblance of a morose and misanthropic disposition. The mildness apparent in him when he entered the room had passed away after a few moments; and as he recounted his sufferings and disappointments, the play of his features and the tones of his speech had been a fitting accompaniment to the words he uttered. Yet his voice had never been loud, and while allowing scope to his passions he still evidently held them in check. Nevertheless the eyes which shone like coals of fire, and the half-hissing sound of his utterance showed plainly how deeply he was moved by dwelling upon his real and fancied wrongs. Sennoske had often seen fierce outbreaks of temper; yet as he now listened he gave an involuntary start, due not so much to what was presented to his senses as to the thought of how fierce a volcano must have been burning for years in that herculean frame. Slight as the movement was, it did not escape the smith; it arrested immediately the force of the current into which he had drifted with the recital of these reminiscences, and as he continued he resumed the quiet earnestness which he had shown upon first entering.

"I have long looked forward to the breaking out of this war, and I thought at one time that my son would realize my hopes of a glorious career in arms; but although physically strong and active, he does not possess a nature to achieve great things. You, however, I firmly believe, will make a name. When you return from this campaign the hand of O Tetsu shall be yours; and the name of Muramasa shall

indeed be coupled, not only with the skill of the forge, but also with the memory of heroic deeds. This sword which I give you forms part of the dowry of your future bride, with whom I will now leave you to say your last farewell. Before you start for the seat of war, if your father is as yet unacquainted with what I know is your wish as well as mine, I desire you to inform him of the purport of our conversation."

The parting of the lovers was of necessity brief, as it was time for Sennoske to return; but deep love and passionate devotion spoke on both sides, and O Tetsu was overjoyed at hearing that her father had openly countenanced their mutual affection. As the young man passed through the forge on his way home, he again wished to thank the smith for his princely gift; but Muramasa, who had relapsed into his usual taciturn mood, stopped him short, telling him that his father had a right to whatever time was still at his disposal. With a few words of farewell to the smith and his son, and a last look at O Tetsu's window, he tore himself away.

When he reached home he found his father sitting beside the brazier, with letters and papers spread out before him. At the sight of the magnificent sword, Mutto showed even more emotion than his son had expected under the circumstances. He looked at it on all sides, weighed it in his hands, and partly withdrew the blade, slowly, inch by inch, replacing it only to withdraw it similarly over and over again. While this was going on, Sennoske, not without a sinking heart, acquainted him with what had happened regarding O Tetsu; but, contrary to his fears and expectations, the recital elicited no displeasure and hardly any surprise.



RESENTING AN INSULT.

“Many a man superior to you in worldly position would willingly and gladly marry an Eta if she brought him such a dowry,” was the response; “and even without this princely gift I could have raised no

objection to your marriage with one who is in other respects your equal. But, my boy," Mutto continued, in a tone which showed that he was powerfully affected, "you run a risk beyond that of any of your companions. With your strength, your skill in arms, and your discriminating wisdom, I have no fears for you as to the ordinary chances of battle. If you fall, it will be as a hero. Otherwise, with all these advantages, added to the sword you carry, you will be sure to achieve distinction.

"There is, however, a task which devolves upon you where no public honor is to be gained, and where the danger is infinitely greater,—nay, where it is extremely doubtful whether you will survive success, or even the mere attempt to achieve it. I have refrained from speaking to you about this heretofore, and my intention was to give you all the particulars to-day. But upon mature consideration I have determined again to defer it. Old Yamagawa, who accompanies you, knows the matter, and has my orders to disclose it to you when the occasion demands. I know you will not hesitate a moment to do and dare everything to accomplish the object I have in view; but act with prudence and circumspection, and do not endanger yourself recklessly. My future without you would be dreary; and although I should not hesitate to sacrifice your young, hopeful life in the pursuit of a just vengeance, yet to see that vengeance accomplished and still preserve you would be happiness indeed. You have yet to take leave of the Duke, and you will naturally desire to show your sword at court. Do not be chary of doing so; it will be of great benefit to you. You will start with the first approach of dawn, and we will spare each other the pain of any further leave-taking. So farewell, and may the gods protect and

prosper you!”



Sennoske was deeply touched; yet, with the varied emotions which the day had brought forth, the pain of separation was less acute than under ordinary circumstances it would have been. At the castle the preparations for the departure of so many men of rank caused an unusual stir, with attendant bustle and commotion. When, after having himself announced, Sennoske entered the large audience-

hall, he found it filled with court nobles and with those who, like himself, were bound for the war, and had come to pay their homage to the Duke before departure. Passing through the crowded ranks to the raised platform where the Duke had his seat, he there made the customary low obeisance. Ono ga Sawa, with whom he had always been a favorite, after addressing him in his usual kindly way, at once fixed his attention upon the sword, which in truth looked sufficiently conspicuous.

“What, Sennoske,” he exclaimed, “you, who are such a sober, steady youth, nevertheless indulge in this finery, and begin to be a dandy now, when rough life in field and camp is about to open for you! It must have cost all your pocket-money to have this tinsel put on your sword. In my time we took pride only in the blade itself, and carried it in unvarnished plain wooden scabbards. Is it your old sword, or have you also exchanged it for some modern weapon which glitters and shines to match the outside, but which will break as soon as your hand causes it to fall upon helmet or cuirass?”

“It is a Muramasa, your Highness, which the smith himself gave me less than two hours ago; and if it be only as true as the hand and heart of him who guides it, it will not fail in splitting the helmets and in passing through the bucklers and armor of those against whom your Highness bids me draw it.”

While speaking, Sennoske offered the sword for inspection to the Duke, whose astonishment, shared by every one present, was so great that he could not control it; and the youth remained with the weapon in his outstretched hands for several moments before the other recovered sufficiently to take it from him. Looking at it in the orthodox fashion, by

withdrawing it slowly and carefully, inch by inch, until about half of it was exposed, Ono ga Sawa's astonishment gave way to admiration; and so absorbed did he become in his gaze, that notwithstanding those present in the hall, whose surprise had been as great as that of their chief, pressed around him closer than court etiquette ordinarily permitted, he seemed utterly oblivious of their curiosity. A long time elapsed before he even looked up, and then those around, recollecting themselves, hastily drew back; but his thoughts were as yet too much occupied with the sword to notice any impropriety.

"To a warrior by birth and training like myself there is nothing in my dominions of equal value with your sword, Sennoske," the Duke said at last; "and to tell you to be careful of such a treasure would be like asking the heavens to guard the sun, like telling a child to cherish its parents, like importuning a *samurai* not to fail in the duty of *kataki-uchi*. In the struggle before us, which is the cause of the heaven-descended Emperors, we need not fear defeat in the end; but should it happen that any single action in which you participate go against us, I charge all your companions to see that this sword is not lost, and that even if you fall, it be brought back here and returned to your father. It will be the thought of many that Muramasa has distinguished you in a way which your years hardly justify; but he has only given expression to opinions which I also hold as to your merit. I hope and believe you will return safely and with honor; and if my good wishes count for anything, you have them in the fullest degree."

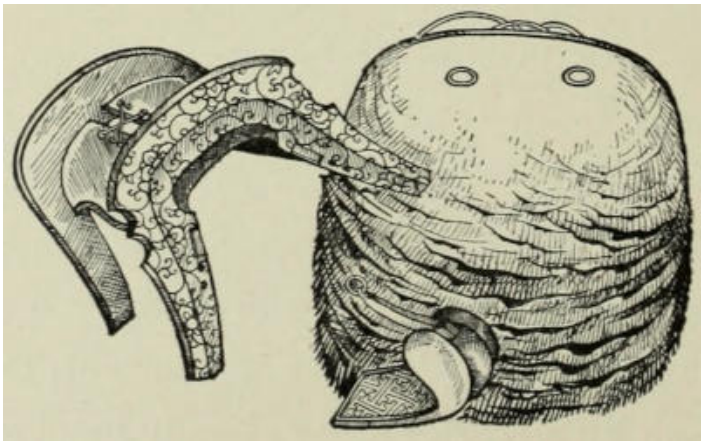
Meanwhile the news had been spread in the courtyard by some of the servants, who had heard it

in the hall; and when Sennoske retired, he found himself surrounded by an eager crowd anxious to examine his gift and to congratulate him upon his good fortune. Most of them doubtless were sincere; for he had always been a great favorite, and there was little to excite envy in the modest manner with which he had invariably borne himself. He was detained for a considerable time, and it was nearly midnight before he reached his home, where Yamagawa waited for him.

Everything was ready for departure; and as he threw himself upon the quilted mats of his bed for a few hours' repose, the events of the day flitted before him, mingled with hopes dictated by ambition, with a vague dread as to his father's objects and purposes, and of course with tender thoughts of O Tetsu. But even these did not prevent him from soon falling into a deep sleep, which the exertion, the excitement, and the varied incidents of such an eventful day naturally induced in a healthy and robust body; still they were powerful enough to retain their influence over his mind after consciousness had left it. They conjured up picture after picture of happiness, and when he awoke a few hours afterward, O Tetsu's image was still in his thoughts and her name on his lips.

Rousing himself, his eye fell upon the sword by his side, and then only did the reality come home to him; with a half sigh, in spite of the exulting glance which he bestowed upon the weapon, he was soon dressed and ready for departure. He could hear his father moving about in the next room, which was separated from his only by a paper-covered partition; but as he did not come out, Sennoske, remembering his instructions the day before, made no attempt to see him again. As he went to join his party, it gave

him a pang to recollect how much more his mind had been occupied with thoughts of the girl he loved, than of the man who until now had been parent, friend, teacher, and everything to him; and he muttered a fervent prayer that it might be granted him to try his strength with his father's unknown enemies, and to bring back a cheerful look to that stern, sad face, so long clouded by sorrow.



SADDLE, STIRRUP, AND SADDLE-CLOTH.

CHAPTER VIII.

The war in which Sennoske now took part forms one of the most glorious epochs in Japanese history. On one side was the imperial family, who in an unbroken line had ruled the land for two thousand years; and yet this period represented but a small part of the time during which their authority had been recognized, for they were directly descended from the gods who had been venerated and adored from time immemorial. Opposed to the imperial cause was a horde of usurpers, whose only claim to recognition was the power which they wielded temporarily, and, as they themselves knew, unjustly. It was a struggle of the inherited and invested majesty of right, religion, patriotism, and justice, against usurpation, cunning, and intrigue; and the result could not be in doubt. Yet it is a subject of just pride to the imperial family and to the people whom they govern that victory was achieved in so short a time, a few months being sufficient for the complete overthrow of the hitherto all-powerful usurpers. The latter and their adherents fought bravely, and their natural courage was doubtless stimulated to its utmost by the knowledge that defeat with them meant utter annihilation, accompanied with eternal shame and disgrace. Yet their desperate valor availed them nothing. They fought like burglars caught in the act; but the cool, steady, and determined loyalty of the imperial partisans mowed them down as the sharp knife of the husbandman cuts down noxious weeds.

Although the Kuwana contingent was one of the first to join the forces of the popular general, Nitta, they found him already greatly strengthened by numerous volunteers and deserters. Several encounters which soon took place with detachments of Hōjō forces sent against them resulted in an easy victory, as large numbers of the vanquished troops deserted their colors and enlisted for the righteous cause. In one of these engagements, Nitta, who always fought in the van of his troops, noticed near him a knight whose alertness and elasticity of movement, in spite of his complete coat of mail, could belong only to a young man, while the blows which he dealt were such as few even among veterans could give,—his sword at every stroke cleaving a Hōjō armor and going deep into the body beneath it. It was no other than Sennoske, whom, immediately after the fray and on the field of battle, Nitta made one of his aids. Others besides the general had noticed the prowess of the new-comer, and admiration changed to wonder when he took off his helmet and showed his fair, boyish face, as yet with scarcely a vestige of beard, and with a complexion that a girl might have envied.



SENNOSKE IN BATTLE.

Within a few weeks the army in and around the castle had, in the opinion of its leader, become strong enough to try issues with the enemy in the latter's stronghold. Marching orders were therefore given, and the troops were told openly that their destination was Kamakura, which was to be taken by storm. Meeting no opposition worthy of the name, they reached the sea-shore at Enoshima, only three miles from their destination. Here an unexpected

difficulty presented itself. Although it was ebb-tide the sea ran extremely high, so that the road along the shore was submerged beneath angry waves, which washed even the steep mountain spurs from whose base they were generally separated by several hundred feet of hard, sandy soil. The only way to reach Kamakura seemed to be for them to retrace their steps by a long *détour* round the other side of the mountain. This course would entail loss of time and labor; but the commander-in-chief was less disturbed on that account than by the fear that this accident might be misconstrued into an evil omen, and consequently dampen the enthusiasm of his followers. For at the last moment the Hōjō had changed their tactics. They all at once showed unbounded honor and veneration for the Emperor whom they had placed upon the throne three years before, and took care to have their new-born loyalty proclaimed far and wide. They knew, as they said, that the gods from whom the Mikados sprang would never allow sacrilegious hands to be laid on their descendants, and in the changes which had been made the Hōjō had merely been instruments ordained to work out the divine will by placing the sceptre in the hands of him who could wield it to the best advantage of the country. Numbers of Hōjō spies had found their way into Nitta's camp, where only the evening before some of them had been discovered and executed; and those undetected would certainly make the most of this unexpected impediment, causing it to be regarded as a sign of the displeasure of the gods and an augury of evil.



SEIZING A DISGUISED HŌJŌ SPY IN NITTA'S CAMP.

Going down to where the waves washed his feet and frequently covered him with their spray, Nitta looked out over the sea long and earnestly. The white-crested billows came and went, but the last-

comer showed no sign of lagging behind those that had preceded it. Sennoske, seeing the anxiety depicted on his chief's face, ventured to step up to him and give his opinion. He had been brought up in a seaport town, with a harbor which was none of the best, where he had been out at all times, and had learned to know the tides and the signs of the weather. Therefore he felt that he could now take it upon himself to assert that in a few hours, or a day at most, the flood must subside. Nitta, although he appeared absorbed in thought, and scarcely to listen to his lieutenant, eagerly drank in every word the latter said; and, placing confidence in it, performed one of those acts which, trifling as they may appear, are yet emanations of genius. Exerting a purely moral force, such actions are often all-powerful in shaping the destinies of men and nations, by giving decision to the vacillating, courage to the timid, a feeling of strength which is equivalent to real force to the weak, and making heroes of those who possess manly qualities in any degree.

Taking his sword, of matchless workmanship and ornamentation, glittering in the sunlight which reflected itself in the burnished gold, Nitta cast it out into the waters as far as a warrior's arm could throw it, asking the gods to accept it as a peace-offering, and calling upon them to give their divine aid to the army which now marched to uphold the vested and inherited rights of their descendants, the Emperors of the country. In the name of the Mikado, driven from the throne into a lonely exile, he prayed them to bid the angry waves subside and give free passage to those who came to avenge his despoilers and punish the sacrilege. It was a powerful invocation, and its effect was thorough and instantaneous, creating general and unbounded enthusiasm. If any man there

had misgivings, it would have been dangerous for him to express them; and when next morning the waters had subsided, leaving the road free and open, all lingering doubts as well as the hopes of the Hōjō sympathizers vanished as the dew of the night that disappeared in the morning sun.

As they approached Kamakura, they found a large portion of the enemy's army posted before the walls; so fierce, however, was the onslaught of Nitta's troops that the ranks of the besieged were at once broken, and they fled for protection into the city. But the assailants were close upon them, and followed in such numbers that the gates could not be shut against them. From ward to ward, from street to street, from house to house, the Hōjō were driven, in spite of their persistent and desperate struggles, and before nightfall the city was taken.

This battle decided the war and the fate of the Hōjō. The honest portion of their adherents consisted merely of those who had been dazzled and won over by the spell of absolute power exercised for a considerable time; and this spell once broken, they fully recognized their folly as well as their guilt, and were ready to sue for and accept pardon on any terms. It was expected that the principal men of the defeated clan, together with such of their partisans and abetters as were too deeply implicated to hope for forgiveness, would form into roving bands and flee to distant inaccessible parts of the empire; but as they were now without physical or moral support, a general engagement was no longer to be feared. In view of this it was decided by Nitta to dismiss at once a part of the army, so that divisions of the retiring troops might be employed in protecting their several provinces from the marauders who should

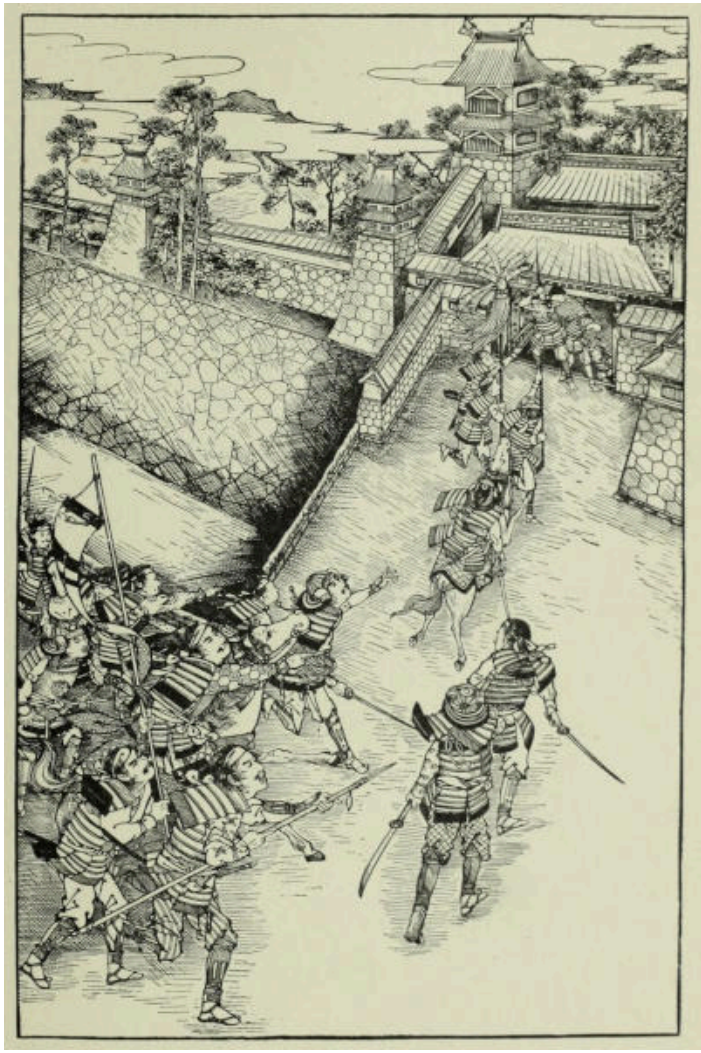
flee thither, and in hunting them down and bringing them to punishment.



NITTA PRAYING TO THE GODS BEFORE THROWING HIS SWORD INTO THE SEA.

One of the provinces to which it was believed that the defeated would be certain to resort in large numbers was Idzu, lying to the west of the Tokaido, beyond the Hakone Mountain-range, on the road to Kuwana. Here the great Yoritomo had in his youth

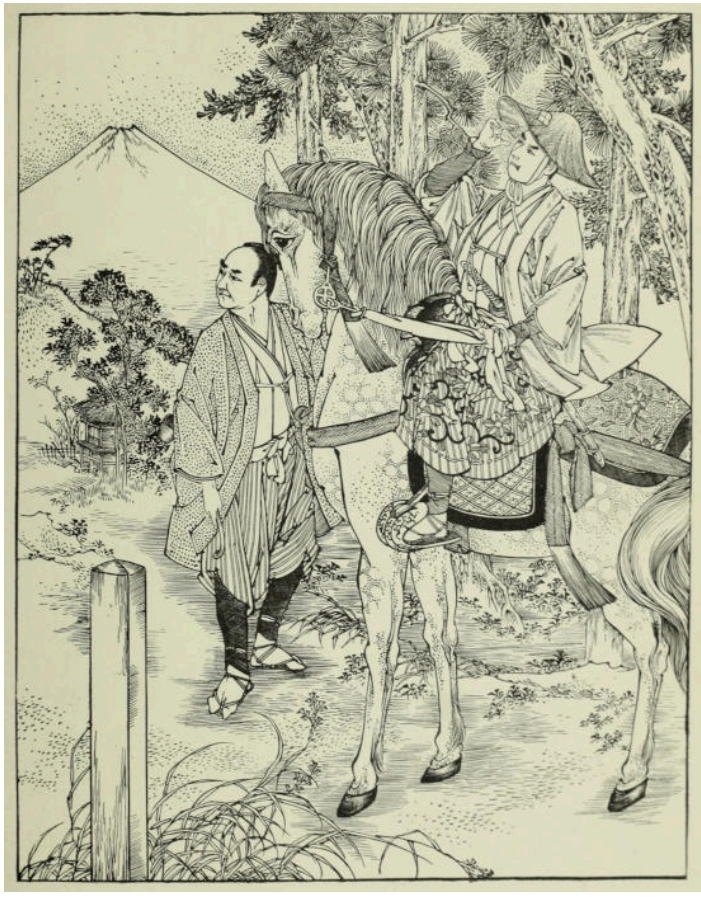
found an asylum from his Taira foes. It required coolness and courage, a steady eye and a firm foot to track foes into these Idzu fastnesses, over these rugged, pathless mountains, where Nature alone offered almost insurmountable obstacles. Nitta gave a proof to the country of his confidence in Sennoske by intrusting to him the military command of that region, as well as of the country along the Tokaido from the Hakone Mountains to the province of Kuwana. The contingent from the latter province, which was to return for the purpose, was to be under his orders, together with such other troops as he might think it advisable to raise in the districts assigned. Nominally, it was necessary to have this appointment acknowledged by the daimios in whose dominions the new commander was to act; but this was merely a matter of form entailing a short delay. No one would have been willing to displease the victorious Nitta, or to incur the suspicion of being a Hōjō sympathizer, by in any way impeding the measures deemed necessary to bring the insurgents to justice.



SCENE AT THE STORMING OF KAMAKURA.

The delay which would ensue before he could take active command, Sennoske determined to take advantage of by returning home; and leaving the Kuwana soldiers to follow to the place which he was

to make the base of his operations, he started early in the morning on the day succeeding his appointment, accompanied by Yamagawa, both mounted on good horses and attended only by two running footmen. He was in good spirits. The honors he had gained; the charm of the important command intrusted to him; the thought of meeting his father and the Duke, with the great expectations that they entertained of him more than fulfilled in so short a time; and last, but not least, however he might try to disguise it to himself, the joy of again seeing O Tetsu, —all these were certainly good and sufficient reasons for his elation.



SENNOSKE ON HIS RETURN.

Pushing on as fast as possible, on the evening of the same day he reached Odawara, a strong castle town at the northern foot of the Hakone Mountain-range. The fame of his exploits had preceded him, and the lord of the castle received him in a way which could not but be flattering to the young man, pressing him to remain at least a day or two longer. No inducement, however, could detain Sennoske; and leaving their horses, which would only have

impeded their way over the mountain-passes, he started on foot the next day at dawn with his faithful henchman.



PILGRIMS TO FUJIYAMA.

The road, as it was at that time laid out, wound between the Hakone and the Ashigara Mountain-

ranges; and here the young man made perhaps less haste than might have been expected. It was late in autumn, the weather was fine, the air bracing; and in spite of his anxiety to reach his home he could not but loiter a little to view the beautiful scenery that presented itself. The mountains and hill-sides were clothed in their rich autumnal garb of gold and red and purple and brown of every shade and depth of coloring; while as if to supply the need of a stronger contrast, clusters of evergreen trees here and there reared their crowns of unchanging hue high into the air.



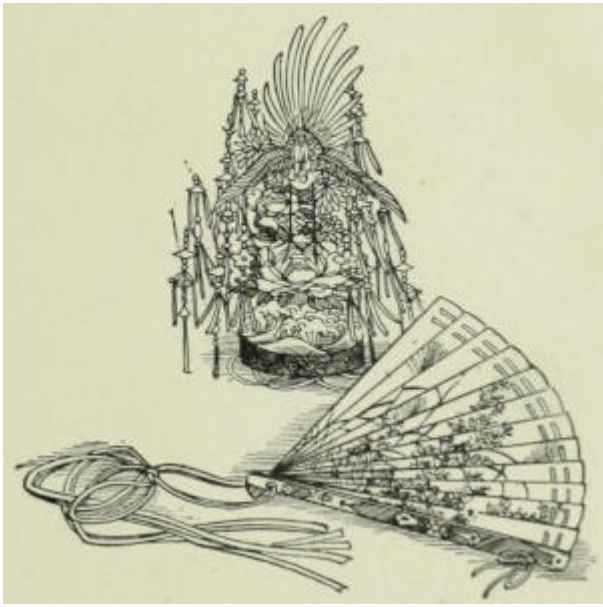
ROADSIDE TEA-HOUSE.



FUJIYAMA, WITH ANGEL HOVERING OVER IT.

The whole effect was greatly heightened by occasional glimpses of Fuji, which presented itself under the most varying forms and expressions. Sometimes just a glimpse of its top was visible over an intervening mountain-range, while again a portion of the huge mass would reveal itself through a narrow gorge; sometimes one of its bleak sides, within range of the eye, but up to this moment obscured by clouds which now suddenly parted,

would astonish the traveller who had just gazed at what he thought empty space, while the shifting curtain, hiding the view the next moment, would make him doubt whether he had seen aright. Two or three times the whole mountain with its perfect outline stood in majesty like a giant sentry watching over the land. With the varying beauty of scenery which each successive step thus unclosed, it was impossible for a lover of Nature like Sennoske not to stop for a moment now and then to admire it. Yet it was only for a moment, as the thought of the welcome awaiting him prevented him from lingering as he otherwise would have done. Many a good-looking young girl at the roadside tea-houses followed with strained eyes the figure of the dashing young cavalier, whose pleasant, gentle ways so well set off his unmistakably martial air. Old Yamagawa also came in for his share of attention; and now that they neared home, honored and successful, the old servitor indulged occasionally in what was probably his only fault,—a love of wine,—to a greater extent than was good for him; but his young master had not the heart to chide or even to restrain him.



COURT LADY'S HEAD-DRESS AND STATE FAN.

CHAPTER IX.

It was late at night on the second day before Sennoske arrived at Mishima, at the foot of the other side of the mountains. The town was full of people; for besides the ordinary contingent of travellers, who always muster here in force, there were a great many *samurai*—some who had started too late to join the army, others, like Sennoske, already returning home—and a considerable number of Hōjō adherents fleeing in various disguises to find an asylum before pursuit was fairly organized against them. The inns and hostelries were over-crowded; but the Kuwana nobility had always enjoyed a good reputation on the road, and the charm of the young man's manner moreover failed not in its usual effect; so at the inn at which he determined to stay, two parties of merchants, already closely packed, were forced to content themselves with even less space in order to clear a room for the new arrival. Sennoske, who was weary, at once repaired to the bath, accompanied by Yamagawa, carrying the Muramasa sword, which was never out of sight or reach of either master or servant.

After his master had retired, the old servitor also indulged in the luxury of the bath, the daily use of which in Japan is considered almost a necessity. Already half overcome by the fumes of the wine-cup, the hot bath and the close air of the room still further increased his stupefaction; and in returning to his apartment he staggered along the corridor in a confused, aimless manner, until, mistaking one of the

passages, he stopped at the end of it before what of course was the wrong room.

The sound of unknown voices from within reached his ears; but thinking they must belong to visitors of his master, he unhesitatingly opened the paper sliding-doors, and falling on his hands and knees with his head bowed down, in the fashion of Japanese servants, he pushed the sword forward as far as he could, uttering the customary phrase, “Have you any further orders for me?” Receiving no answer, and fearing that Sennoske had noticed his drunken condition and was displeased at his showing it before visitors,—something which heretofore had never happened,—he remained a minute or two in his prostrate position, bowing his head still lower, and muttering apologies. At last a voice which he did not recognize spoke out: “We will excuse you because you insist on being excused; but tell us first what it is that you require, and what brings you hither.”

Yamagawa looked up, and the sight that presented itself, unexpected as it was, partly sobered him. There were six or seven *samurai*, all unknown to him, seated on the mats; and the foremost among them, who also was the last speaker, had taken up the sword pushed towards him, and, regarding it with the eye of a connoisseur, was evidently surprised at the rich ornamentation and workmanship.

“Give me back my sword,” Yamagawa cried; “it belongs to my master, and I am responsible for it. Give it back to me, oh! please give it back to me at once,” he repeated, raising his voice and eagerly holding out his hands.

“Gently, my man! Of course I shall give it back to you,” said the other; “but do not be so importunate,

and do not speak so loudly before your superiors, or you will have to be taught better manners. Who is your master?"

"His name is Sennoske Mutto, from Kuwana, and he is just returning home from the war," was the reply. "This is a Muramasa sword, which he values highly, and he will begin to be anxious about it; so please give it back to me at once," pleaded the old man. He was still partly under the influence of wine; and this fact, together with the mortification of his position and the anxiety and irritation under which he labored, had made him forget discretion, common sense, and his dignity as a *samurai*, all other considerations being merged and lost in his impatient eagerness to regain possession of the cherished weapon.

"A Muramasa sword, and your master intrusts it to a drunken fool like you!" said another of the party, who until now had been sitting in the rear of his companions, but who now moved forward to where the light fell fully upon him. "Does he attach so little value to it, in spite of what you say, as to leave it like a toy in the hands of one who in his cups would not mind trading it off for a measure of wine? His opinion differs from mine as to the care which he ought to bestow upon it. Be off! and tell your master that if he wants this sword he must come for it himself."

What was it which, at the sight of the new speaker and at the first word uttered by him, made the old man look as if petrified with horror and stupefaction, clammy perspiration bathing his face, while his hair literally stood on end? Only his eyes spoke; and although fastened with almost stony fixedness upon the man who had just addressed him, they yet had

an expression of such intense, deadly hatred that the other, as he fairly caught sight of it, involuntarily recoiled a step and laid his hand on the sword he carried at his side.



YAMAGAWA DISCOVERING HIS MISTAKE.

Gradually, by a series of sharp, convulsive movements, Yamagawa's form and features relaxed from their rigid cast, and it was evident that a full consciousness of his position and surroundings was

slowly taking hold of him, and that as it did so he was making powerful efforts to regain his self-control. Every trace of drunkenness had disappeared, and it was only extreme mental and nervous excitement which made his voice tremble when he again spoke:—

"Give me back the sword, Taka Suke; and after returning it to my young master, I will try to refrain from telling him or his father that I have again met you. Perhaps I am selfish enough not to wish to stand disgraced before one in the service of whose family I have become old and gray, whose welfare has occupied every thought of my mind, to whom every fibre of my body is devoted, and for whose sake I would willingly shed my blood drop by drop. Perhaps I have become too feeble in mind as well as in body fully to realize the duties of a *samurai*, for I would fain save my young master from facing one who has been the curse of his house, instead of doing my utmost to bring about a meeting, so that he could either kill you or fall as a *samurai* should. As for me, I know I shall not long be able to endure the thought of having met you and not only failed myself to take vengeance, but even shielded you against punishment by those whose right and duty it is to inflict it. For twelve years there has never been a day when you have been absent from my thoughts, and I could never think of you without cursing you. Yet all the sufferings I have so far endured are as nothing compared with the humiliating misery of this hour, when I find myself compelled, through my own fault, to plead to one who has caused blight and ruin to fall upon those I love and hold dear."

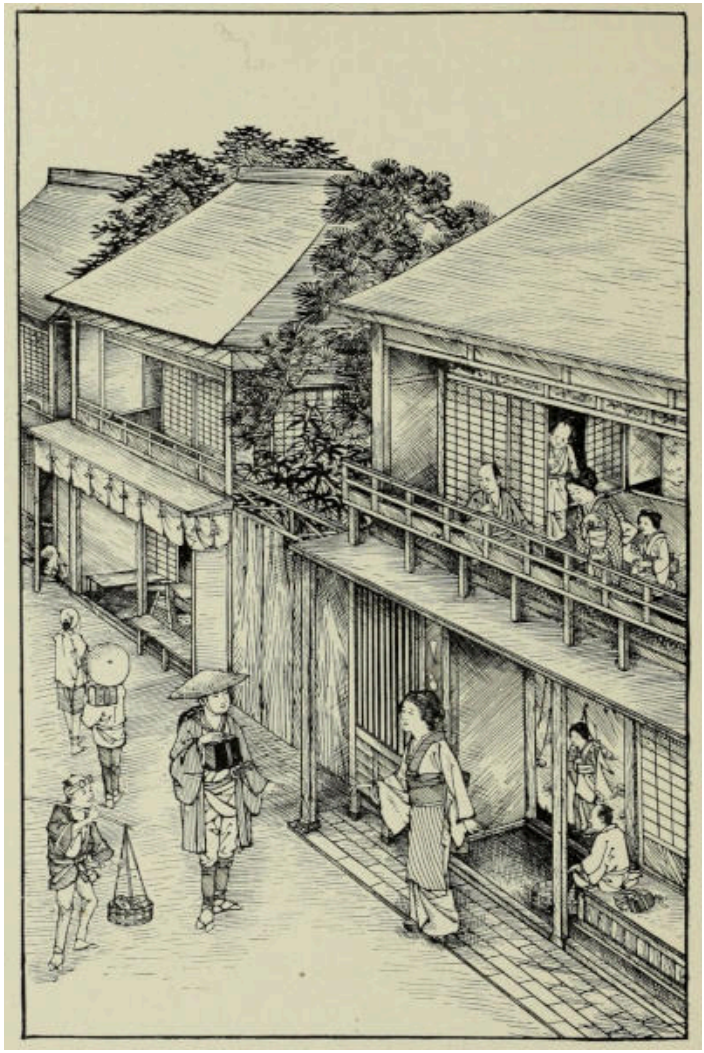
"I will give you still further reason to curse me, then," said the other. "The gods seem kind to me; for

although our cause has failed, I am still able to strike at the only one whom, from some foolish whim, I spared, leaving him life and liberty when I had the power to take both. So Numa is still alive, and you now serve his son. Well, the brat has his father's courage, as he showed in the war; and I have no doubt he has also the same conceit. Curse you all, with your pretended fine feelings and virtues, which you constantly flaunt before our eyes! They will not impose upon me, however. Go, and repeat to your master what has been told to you here; go, and tell him that if he knows a *samurai's* duties, of which his father always prated so much, he must be aware that a drunkard is not fit to be intrusted with a sword, least of all with one like this. Go, and tell him that if he cares for it more than you seem to have done, he must come and humbly beg for it himself."

There was somewhat of truth in this taunt, which the devilish cunning of the other had formulated so as to make it more cutting than the keenest-edged weapon. Seeing from the tenor of it that all further parley would be useless, Yamagawa without another word or look made his way back to his master's room. As he entered, Sennoske started in amazement and affright at the change which half an hour had effected in the appearance of his old servant. The signs of acute physical pain, as well as of mental anguish, were graven in deep lines on his features, and spoke with equal emphasis out of his hollow, sunken eyes; shuffling along as he did on his right side, with his right hand convulsively clasping his left bosom, it is probable that the terrible ordeal through which he had passed, had brought on a partial heart-stroke. Yet overlying all these manifestations of suffering, which became almost tangible and somatic as it were by comparison, there

was a look of utter, hopeless despair,—such a look as is seen in certain types of incurable madness; such a look as hunters see in some animals hunted down to the last stages of exhaustion, with the dogs fastening on them, and no hope of escape.

In a sufficiently coherent way to make himself understood, Yamagawa explained the circumstances attending the loss of the sword, without, however, hinting at the identity of the *samurai* whom he had recognized among his despoilers. Sennoske, although greatly annoyed and angry at the impudence of the demand transmitted to him, showed no outward signs of perturbation, and in reality a sincere pity for the poor old man before him mastered every other emotion. From the version given to him, he could of course scarcely understand why this accident, although implying a serious neglect of duty on the part of Yamagawa according to the code then prevailing, should yet have affected the old servitor in such a terrible way; and in spite of the latter's urgent solicitation to go at once about the recovery of his weapon, he stayed to console and cheer him.



ROADSIDE HOTEL.

“Sorrow is bad for old age,” he said; “it withers up the tree of life quicker and surer than the cold north winds wither the blooming chrysanthemum. Cheer up, and do not let me see you so downcast at this

trumpery business, especially now that we are nearing home. As soon as I have regained my sword, I shall feel like teaching these gentry a lesson at which you may have to assist me; so—"

"Yes, as soon as you have regained possession of your sword," said the other, interrupting him. "Oh, pray, my dear master, go at once! this suspense is horrible."

Sennoske at these words started up, filled with dark forebodings. He felt that there must be something more in this affair than he yet apprehended, and he hesitated no longer. Calling a servant, he had himself conducted to the room which Yamagawa had mistakenly entered; and announcing his name, made a fair apology for what had occurred, and courteously but firmly asked for the return of his sword. Taka Suke, who had sent him the message to come, and who was evidently the leader of the party, replied to him in what was plainly a prepared speech:—

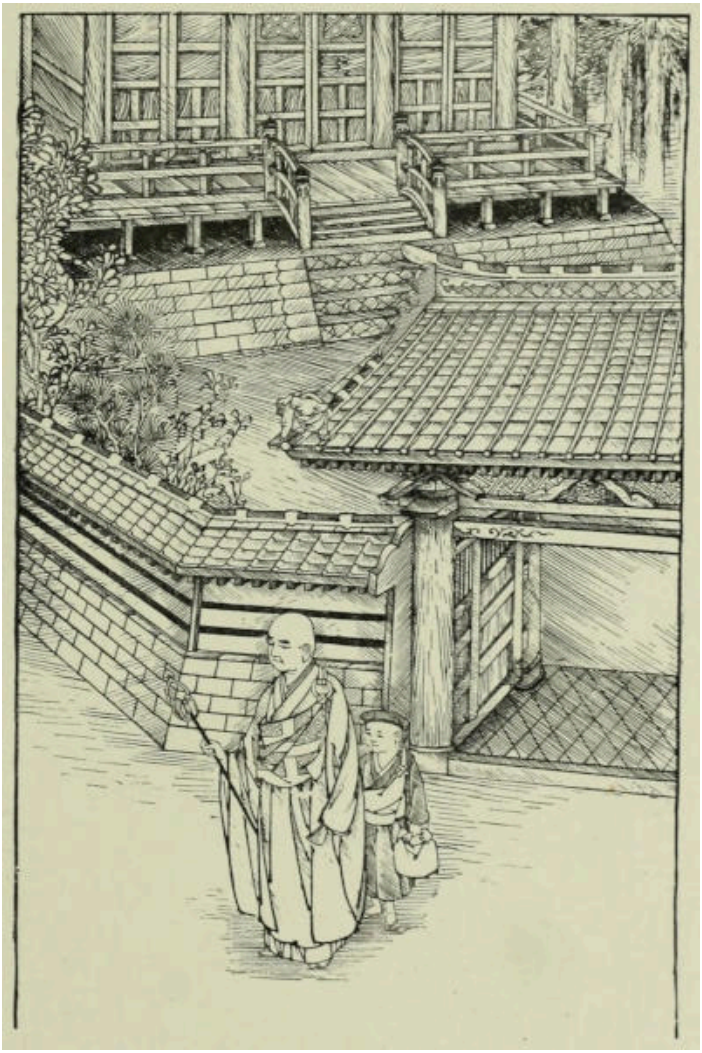
"I have heard of you, Sennoske, and of the renown which you have gained on the field of battle; but it seems to me that, in spite of this, you are greatly deficient in the duties and obligations of a *samurai*. Courage and bravery and prowess in battle are common enough in our country; but a sword like this of yours is rarely found, and its possession probably more than any quality of your own has helped you to achieve success and renown. You know the old saying, 'The sword is the soul of the *samurai*.' It owes its origin to a feeling hallowed by the custom of centuries,—a feeling which has been outraged by the careless, negligent way in which this treasure has been handled. Your youth and inexperience may plead in extenuation of yourself, but the fault of your

retainer, who is a *samurai*, and old enough to know his duty, cannot be condoned; and we will listen to no demand for the restoration of this blade unless it is accompanied by the head of that drunken brute through whose culpable carelessness it might easily have been lost or spoiled."

"But this is preposterous," Sennoske rejoined; "this is horrible! You surely cannot mean what you say—and yet the life of a faithful old retainer is not a fit subject for sport. I recollect him from the day when consciousness first dawned upon me; memory recalls him as watching over my childhood, guiding and instructing my early youth, in the most disinterested, self-sacrificing way. I would willingly risk my life for him at any moment; and sword was never yet forged, nor ever will be, which could weigh equally in the balance with such faithfulness and such devotion as he has always shown. I respect your feelings; but this man has suffered more than enough already for his one fault. I again beg you to return me the sword which belongs to me, and to which no one but myself can lay any claim."

Sennoske, although greatly excited and incensed, had succeeded in repressing any outward signs of excitement or anger; he had spoken with quiet dignity, and when referring to the man whom he had left in such a dejected state his tones became tender and pathetic. It appeared to him that the whole proceeding was a deliberate attempt to deprive him of his matchless blade; yet—to his honor be it said—at the moment, the idea of its possible loss troubled him less than the thought of the probable effect of that loss on his old retainer. His solicitude for Yamagawa caused him to be wary, and to show more moderation in his speech than he otherwise would

have done, in view of the arrogant manner in which he had been treated. The next answer which he received, however, was well calculated, in its cold, sneering, and evidently studied insolence of tone and bearing, to make him lose every vestige of self-control.



BUDDHIST TEMPLE. (MONK AND ACOLYTE.)

“Go to, boy,” said Take Suke, “go to! This sentimental twaddle may do when you meet half-grown girls who admire softness or meekness, or when you are in the company of enervated Shingon or Obaku priests, who would fain palliate their own condition by holding up soft-hearted effeminacy as something to be admired. I would sacrifice by the score and by the hundred as good serving-men as ever drew breath to gain possession of this sword—or of one like it,” he corrected himself. “More than ever I insist: bring me the head of that drunken beast, and I will return you your sword.”

It was the very extremity of the provocation which for a moment paralyzed Sennoske, and that moment was sufficient for his presence of mind partially at least to assert itself. He understood the object of the insult offered to him, and he could see that the least indiscretion, a single false step, would insure his own destruction. Taka Suke while talking had, contrary to all rule and etiquette, drawn the sword out of its scabbard, and while apparently playing with the naked blade, and weighing it in his hand, had never allowed his sinister eye for a second to be removed from the face of the young soldier. All the other inmates of the room had half risen, and their hands were suspiciously near their sword-hilts. It had flashed through Sennoske’s mind to throw himself forward and try to wrench the sword from the other’s hands; but opposed as he was by seven resolute men, and only partially armed himself, with nothing but his short dirk in his girdle, he abandoned the thought as soon as it came, knowing that such an attempt would be the height of madness. Yet he felt that his self-command was fast leaving him, and that

another speech like the last would surely precipitate him to his own destruction; so he withdrew abruptly, to collect himself and to resolve upon some course of action.



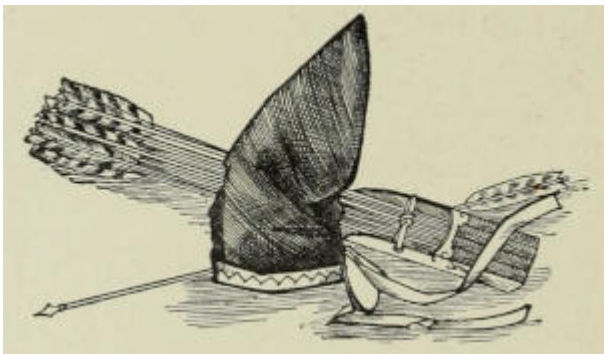
YAMAGAWA COMMITTING SEPPUKU (HARA-KIRI).

The servant who had brought him hither, and who under pretence, probably, of waiting for orders had listened to the whole conversation, conducted him back to his own room. On entering it he found there

a number of superior Ise officers, who, hurrying back like himself, had just arrived, and to whom Yamagawa had told the affair of the sword. One look at his master satisfied the old servitor that the former's mission had been unsuccessful; but he could learn no particulars, for to all inquiries Sennoske, who wished to spare him the shock of the communication, at least for the present, gave only evasive replies. Happening to look at the servant of the house, still standing by the half-open door, with eyes and ears intent upon what was going on, Yamagawa immediately divined that the fellow had listened at the other room; and pulling him in by the sleeve, he ordered him, with short word of command, to tell all he had heard there. To do this was of course a serious breach of etiquette; it was, however, with no thought of taking umbrage at the freedom assumed by his old servitor, but only to spare him the shock of what was coming, that Sennoske interfered. Nevertheless, his assumed displeasure remained unheeded, and even unnoticed. Giving the young fellow a good shaking, Yamagawa again ordered him to repeat what had taken place in the other room; and trembling and stammering, the other, in spite of his fright, gave a sufficiently lucid account of what he had witnessed.

A muttered word, or rather ejaculation, unintelligible to those present, was the old *samurai's* only reply as he returned to his seat,—in which, however, he moved round, so as partly to turn his back to his companions. No one spoke. The men present were mostly veterans, men of action and not of words; and every one was considering the circumstances of the case, revolving within himself what had best be done before he gave tongue to his thoughts. The dead silence, which was in strange

contrast with the sound of laughter and revelry borne to them from other parts of the house, was gloomy, and had begun to be oppressive, when it was broken by the sound of something trickling on the mats. All started, but Sennoske was the first to divine its terrible import. A single bound brought him to the side of Yamagawa; but it was too late. The latter on turning round had arranged his dress in conformity with the rule on such occasions, and had quietly and noiselessly committed *hara-kiri*. He had done it deliberately and carefully, and the wound which he had inflicted upon himself was the regulation cut of six inches in length by one inch deep.



ARROWS AND MILITARY HEAD-DRESS.

CHAPTER X.

The first great grief which his young life had known now came upon Sennoske as he knelt by the side of his old attendant. A thousand recollections of the watchful care, kindness, and unvarying zeal and attachment of Yamagawa overwhelmed him, until he became thoroughly unmanned, and could only sob in a broken voice: “Oh, Yamagawa! why have you done this to me?”

“Listen to me, Sennoske,” replied the old *samurai*, — whose present composure and serenity were in striking contrast with his appearance of half an hour before, his face, which showed no evidence of physical pain in spite of the suffering caused by his wound, being lit up by a happy smile at the evident deep-felt love and sympathy expressed by his young master,—“listen to me carefully, for my time is short.” As he spoke, he compressed tightly with both hands the gaping wound from which his blood and life were slowly oozing out. “The great enemy of your house, who has been the cause of all the misfortunes which have befallen it, is now the possessor of your sword. You know him by reputation. It is the notorious Taka Suke, in comparison with whose shameless, brazen-faced effrontery all other acts of Hōjō arrogance might well be characterized as humility itself. Here in my lap is my *kakioki*, my last will and testament, addressed to you, explaining everything. It was to be given to you in case of my death. Take it now and read it aloud.” Seeing that Sennoske, with his hands before his face,

was still sobbing bitterly, he motioned to another of the party to do what he had asked; and the man addressed, an old soldier, at once complied, taking the document and reading as follows:

“It is now nearly twelve years ago that a quarrel broke out between the Dukes of Ando Taro and Ando Goro, in the province of Mutsu; this quarrel assuming considerable proportions, the Hōjō government at Kamakura sent out Taka Suke with full powers to arbitrate and judge between the contending parties. He was comparatively unknown at that time, and was received by both Dukes with marks of great distinction, as became his mission, and, as is the custom, with lavish gifts. But whatever was presented to him was like a few kernels of rice thrown to a famished dog, it only whetted his appetite for more. In the most barefaced manner he and his satellites asked for more and more, and received it indiscriminately from both sides. His chamberlains, his mistresses, his servants down to the lowest horse-boy and scullion, all had to be fed over and over again.



SENDING A PRESENT.

"Your father, who was Ando Goro's *karo*, or first counsellor, saw his master's substance melt away under this system of extortion which he did not dare oppose, while as yet there was no pretence on the part of Taka Suke of even looking into the merits of the case, much less of rendering a decision. The ducal treasury was exhausted; the many rare and costly articles accumulated by generations of the Duke's ancestors, and the whole of your father's private fortune, had been swallowed up by this fellow's greed. There was absolutely nothing left to give, when Ando Goro in strong terms and angry words, more than hinting at Hōjō misrule, demanded judgment. This just suited the wily arbitrator. Carefully selecting time and place and company so as to be cruelly effective, with coarse taunt and jeer he insulted the Duke and goaded him to madness. Regardless of policy and of the chances against him, regardless of the advice and remonstrance of his trusted *karo*, Ando Goro planned a revolt. His movements, however, had been carefully watched, and his plans were allowed to ripen sufficiently clearly to demonstrate his guilt. When this point was reached he was seized and thrown into prison. In this case judgment was not delayed; within ten days his territory was confiscated, and he himself paid the penalty of his life. His wife shared her husband's fate; his two infant sons were seized, and disappeared, no one knowing how or where; and all his principal retainers were severely punished, some suffering death, some imprisonment and some exile.



A KARO (CHIEF COUNSELLOR).

“Only one man seemed to remain exempt from persecution, and he was the *karo*. He had arranged his affairs, and expected, hour after hour, day by day, to be summoned to prison and death; but no summons came. Your father was a man who had commanded honor and respect second to none where he had lived. Untouched by even a breath of suspicion in his high and responsible position, with rare physical and mental graces, and incomparable in

all manly accomplishments, the inhabitants of the province, high and low, looked up to him with a respect amounting to reverence. But the times were corrupt, and his long years of faithful service failed to make men believe that he had remained true to his trust, when day after day continued that strange immunity from arrest while every one else belonging to his master's house had suffered. Too many were only over-ready to sell themselves to the Hōjō; and although in this instance it seemed utterly incredible, yet men equally high in position and character had before been won by Hōjō purses and Hōjō promises.

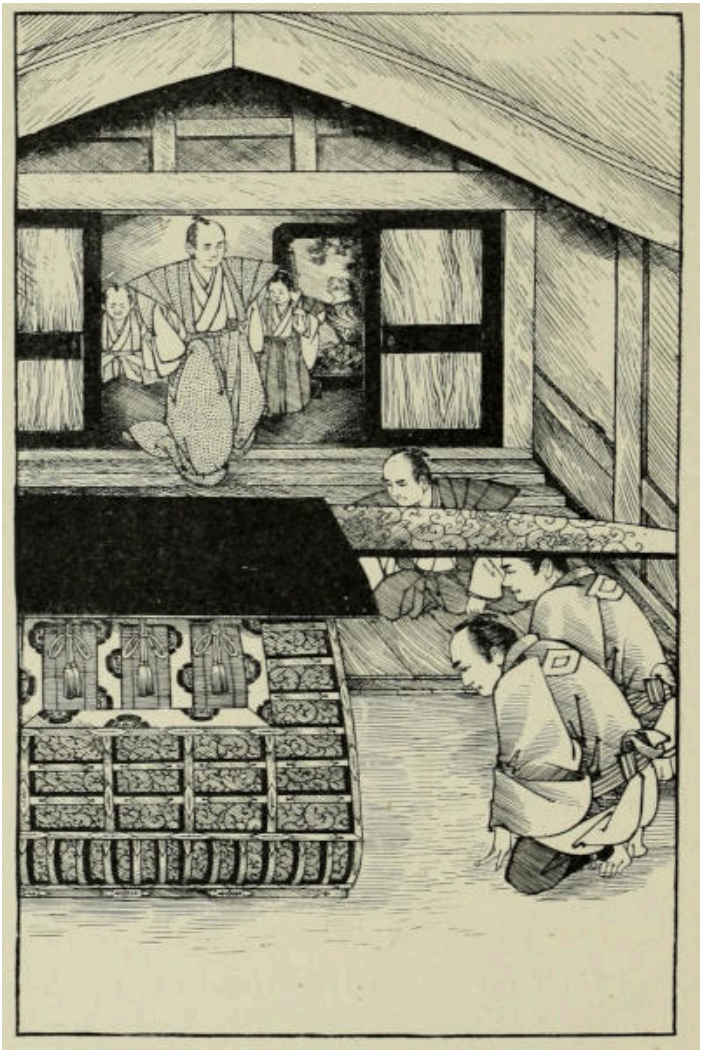


AN EXECUTION.

“Your father’s nature was delicate and sensitive, in spite of his physical prowess and of the outwardly cold equanimity of his character. Loyal as loyalty itself, conscious of the rectitude of his actions and thoughts, he met those who had once bowed down to the ground in his presence, and who now had only a

scornful glance for him, with equal scorn and pride, which only went to confirm their suspicions of what they considered his shameless desertion. Never did a *samurai* look more anxiously for decree of promotion and advancement than did your father for the order which should consign him to the grave. At first, when with every minute he was expecting his doom, he had no thought of *kataki-uchi*; and even later on he saw no possible way of breaking single-handed through the cordon of guards and satellites which protected his and his late lord's enemy. When, however, fifteen days had elapsed, during which he had, as it seemed, been utterly ignored, he publicly registered a vow that whenever chance or his own exertions should bring him into the presence of Taka Suke, he would kill him, or perish in the attempt. He had recorded his vow in the usual manner, taking care, however, to give it the greatest possible publicity, so that he against whom it was directed could not pretend to be ignorant of it.

"Your father succeeded apparently in forcing notice upon himself; for the same day, as evening came on, a posse of soldiers entered his house. His swords and weapons were taken from him, and his arms pinioned; but this was not done in the coarse, brutal way in which prisoners generally are treated, the leader of the soldiers showing all possible consideration, and even apologizing for what he did. A large and convenient *nori mono* (palanquin) had been brought to the door, and in this Mutto was carried more like a chief followed by his retainers than a disgraced rebel prisoner. His captors took him directly to the castle, into the presence of Taka Suke, when all retired, leaving the two men alone.



A LORD ENTERING HIS NORI-MONO.

"'I should have sent for you before this,' said the host to his prisoner-guest, 'but I wished to give you time to do justice to your grief for your late lord, although he but little deserved it. Probably Ando

Goro's only posthumous claim to the regard of mankind consists in the good sense which he displayed in selecting you for his *karo*; and all the good he ever achieved, as is well known, was of your doing. Had he followed your counsel he would still be the lord of his province, honored and respected. He chose instead to give way to the promptings of his own wicked passions; he rose in revolt against the lawful government of the country, and he has met the fate which is the just due of every rebel. All who surrounded him aided and abetted his evil designs with the exception of yourself, who were the only one, as I know full well, to try to dissuade him from his folly and crime. In common with every one else, I have always entertained feelings of high regard and admiration for your mental and physical accomplishments as well as for your moral character, as shown by your faithfulness and devotion. It was not my intention that you should stand before me as you do now; your unfortunate expression of to-day has forced me, however, to adopt these precautions; but these bonds shall fall at the first word which shows that you understand my feelings and accept my offer of friendship and friendly interest. You shall be appointed this very day temporarily to the government of your late lord's territories, which is all that my authority empowers me to do at present; but I doubt not—nay, I am sure—that with the first signs of zeal and faithfulness the Hōjō government will confirm your appointment and make you the actual duke, with the title hereditary in your family.'

"This language astounded your father, although it failed to move him or to shake his resolution in the slightest degree. 'I am utterly unable,' he replied, 'to understand the meaning of your magnificent offers,

and I am too indifferent in regard to them to look into their motive. As far as my honor and faithfulness, which you rate so highly, are concerned, the one would be forever tarnished, and the other prove itself false and valueless, were I to accept your proposal. If I have acquired a good name and reputation, I owe it merely to the possession and practice of those qualities which should be the birth-right of every one of our class, and which have enabled me to serve my late master loyally, but, alas! as events have shown, only too inefficiently. My duty now is plain,—to avenge my lord, if possible, or else to die as becomes a faithful *samurai*.'

"'I expected some such reply from you,' rejoined the other, 'although I hoped that the sincere desire for your welfare which I have so openly shown would cause you to put your refusal in a milder form. You have the consciousness of having done everything for Ando Goro which it was possible to do; but his headstrong nature would not brook control, or even advice, and his destruction lies at his own door. You can do nothing more for him, and your country has certainly some claim to your services. Men of your stamp are needed now, when strife and rebellion are everywhere raising their heads; and in place of a useless sacrifice to one whom you served faithfully as long as faithfulness would benefit him, it were a better, a higher, and a worthier ambition to try to insure internal peace, tranquillity, and prosperity to our glorious empire.'



ŌTŌ NO MIYA, THE MIKADO'S SON, IN HIS MOUNTAIN RETREAT WHEN FLEEING FROM THE HŌJŌ.

"'Your code of *samurai* morality is different from what I have been taught, Taka Suke,' said the ex-*karo*, slightly raising his voice, though its tones remained quiet and firm. '*Chiugi* [faithfulness to one's lord and master] would be little worth the

name if it were obligatory only while in the receipt of bounties and favors from one's lord, and could be disregarded when not synonymous with self-interest. It is not the doings of men who act like this that are told to us in songs and romances, that form the heritage of our heroes, and that fire and inflame the minds of our youth. Is not *kataki-uchi* the first of all duties? And where does it find its highest justification but in faithfulness in avenging the death and appeasing the manes of our lord and master? The ruin of my late lord and of his house lies at your door. Why have you spared me when mercy was not shown to woman or child, to the helpless or to the innocent? I owe you no thanks for it. Were these arms free, I should strike you down now; and nothing can reconcile me to life but the hope, slight as it may be, of some day being able to accomplish my vengeance. This is my duty; and in devoting my life to it, my country can claim nothing more. When you speak of "rebellion and strife raising their heads," you can mean only rebellion against the Hōjō usurpers; but were I not bound to the fulfilment of a higher obligation, such rebellion would find in me one of its most ardent partisans.'

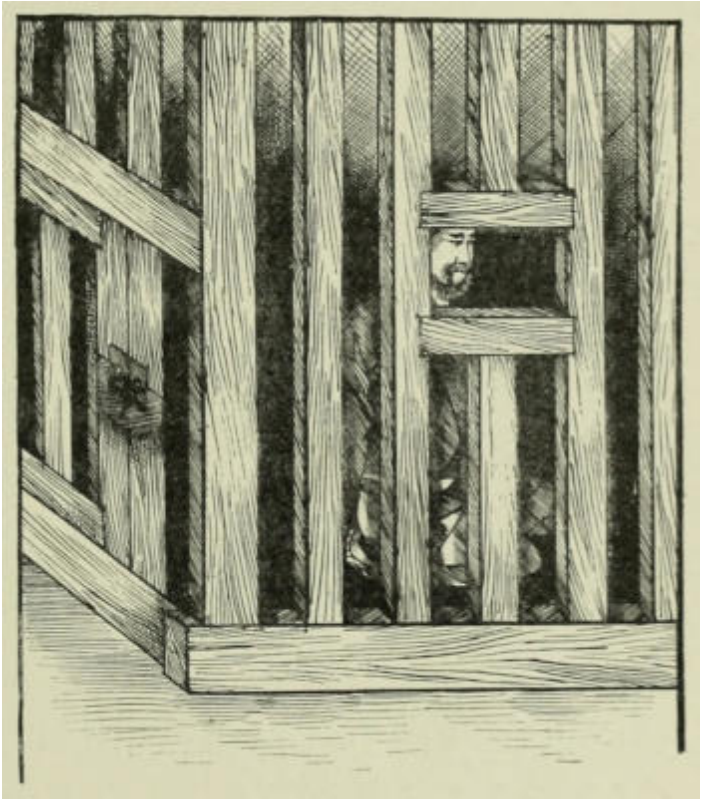
"'And do you not think of your wife?' Taka Suke still persisted. 'Have you no feeling of pity for her, who, if you insist upon your refusal, must suffer a cruel death; none for your son, who, if he grows up in the likeness of his father, with the advantages which your new position would confer upon him, might become one of Japan's most famous men, perpetuating your name and renown to the latest generations?'

"'My wife is a *samurai's* wife, and knows she must take her share of the pains and penalties, as well as

enjoy the privileges and advantages, of her position; my son had better die a lingering death than succeed through the shame and disgrace of his father.'

"'Yes,' Taka Suke, now dropping his mask, replied angrily, 'I know you are one of those who believe in *chiugi* and *kataki-uchi* and all those devices which are implicitly followed by fools and weak-minded persons, but which men of sense make use of only to suit the occasion. I can understand the beauty of *kataki-uchi* when used against those who have injured me, and of *chiugi* when it governs the behavior of my dependants. It is true our cause is threatened, and it is necessary for the continuance of Hōjō power that men of influence, wherever they may be found, should be enlisted in its support. Such men as you, respected by *samurai* and by the rabble, equally ready with sword, tongue, and pen, are rare enough, and their action influences thousands of others. I do not yet despair of bringing you over to our side. Men of your stamp are inclined to sacrifice themselves, satisfied with the delusion that their virtues will be lauded and appreciated after their death. But I will leave you no such consolation. I will have it spread about that through you your master was betrayed. I will have you brought to the castle of Kamakura; and while it will be said that you have left your family in order to enjoy a licentious life with the wages of your treason, you shall pine away a close prisoner. What do you say to this prospect; and how, under these circumstances, will your name be spoken of by posterity?'





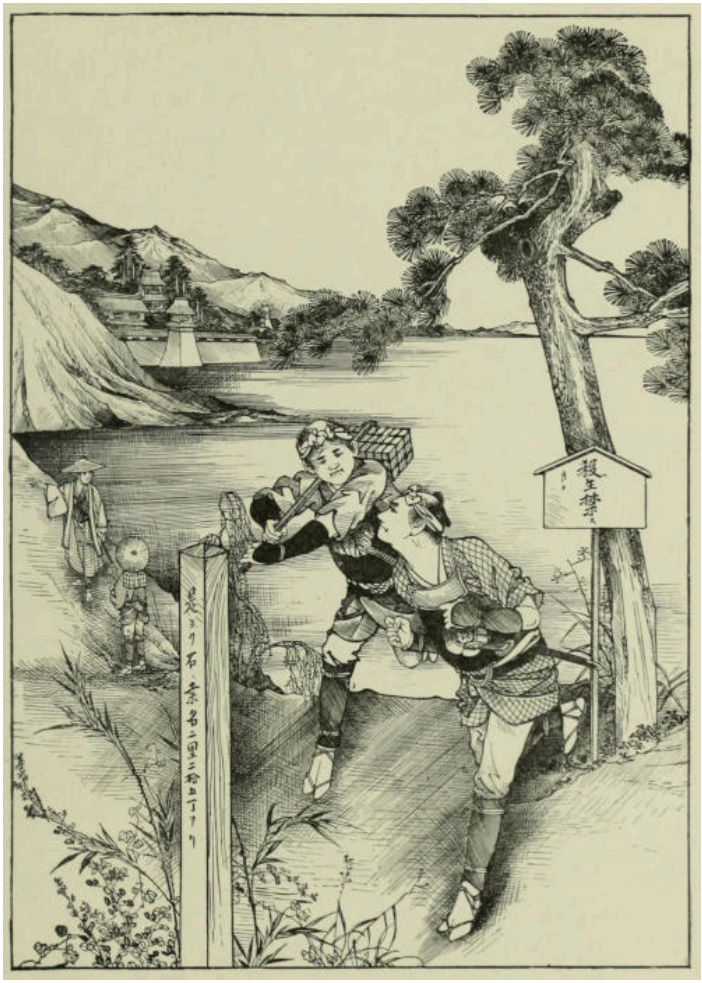
A PRISON.

“Outwardly calm and composed, although this speech did not fail to stir him to the deepest anger and indignation, Mutto replied: ‘Whatever you may do, the truth will sooner or later be certain to prevail. Knowing that it is impossible to appease the manes of my murdered lord with your blood, I can only show my devotion by committing *seppuku*, which I will not now defer any longer. No honest man’s finger shall point at me in scorn, no disloyal *samurai* shall cite me and claim me as a living companion in shame. I will have the satisfaction of having lived and died as a feudal retainer should live

and die,—loyal to my lord and master.'

"'No, no! you shall have no such satisfaction. I will not leave you to delude yourself with this thought,' Taka Suke vehemently broke in. 'You do not yet know all. Ando Goro, it is true, paid the penalty for his treason with his life; but his two young sons yet live. Yes, they yet live,' he repeated with cold emphasis, as Mutto turned pale and started, half in joy, half in affright, with a nameless dread of what might be coming; 'but you will never learn their abode, for they have been taken to a distant isle, where they are carefully watched by men devoted to me. I have changed my intention as to the measures to be adopted in regard to you, and you shall go from this place free and untrammelled. But you shall pledge your knightly word that you will make no attempt against my life or against your own; and the safety of these two boys shall answer for your fidelity. In case of your death they shall be made to follow you at once into the shadowy land to which you are so anxious to go; and I shall also make immediate and careful disposition that any attempt at my life, whether successful or not, shall give them no longer time on earth than relays of fleet-running messengers require to carry them their doom. What say you to this, Numa? Had you not better at once enter my service and watch over a life which now must be very precious to you?' Taka Suke asked this question with a sneer; it was thrown away, however, for the last revelation had done its work, and the man before him was utterly prostrate and broken-hearted. 'But I will not press you for an answer now', the Hōjō chief continued. 'You shall give me the promise I asked for, sealing it with your blood; and then you can take your own time. And remember that whenever you choose to come to me, all the

honors and emoluments promised shall be yours at once, without further reference or allusion to what has passed between us.'



POSTAL COURIERS.

"When your father left the castle after this interview he was a man broken in body, in heart,

and in spirit. In addition thereto came the illness of his beloved wife, your mother, which in a few days assumed a fatal character. After her death he found it impossible to continue living in the same place, where all those whose esteem he cared for now shunned him. He was on the verge of madness, and only his flight, I believe, saved him from such a fate. We separated, to avoid attracting attention and to elude pursuit. He confided you to my care; and you must remember the night of our departure, when we went one way and he another. In the middle of the night, like a thief and a malefactor, he left the place where until now he had been foremost in rank and position, as well as in the esteem of the people. We met by appointment in a mountain retreat of Idzu, at the house of an old friend and companion-in-arms who had turned priest and was leading a quiet, secluded life. There we remained a year, which enabled your father to regain his tranquillity; and then we travelled on to Kuwana, where, as you know, he took service with Ono ga Sawa. When making arrangements for his flight he had taken care, in his fear for the safety of his master's sons, that Taka Suke should be informed after his departure that he had fled to a life of seclusion, and would sacredly keep the vow he had taken. He has since often regretted his twofold promise; for tidings which reached him from one or two friends who remained true to him left very little doubt that the young dukes had really been killed, and that Taka Suke's version of their exile was a fabrication to work upon the feelings of a noble mind which had proved itself superior to all sordid influences."

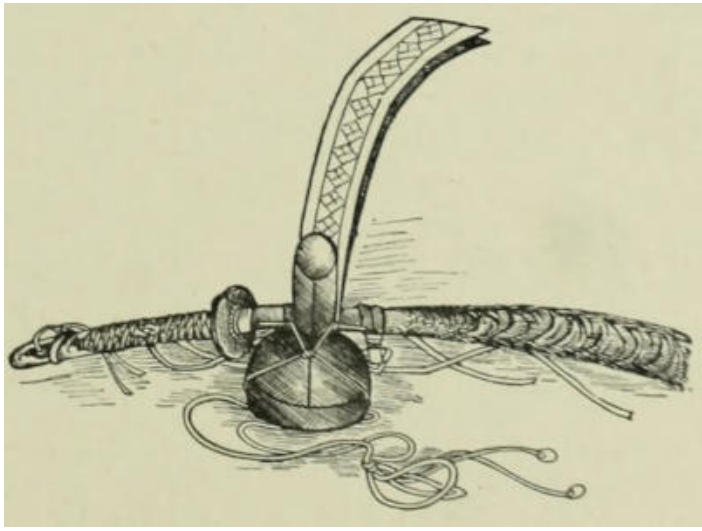
The *kakioki* here came to an end, concluding with the usual formulas, stamp, and seal pertaining to such a document. During the reading, Yamagawa

had retained his death-grip on his wound. Superior will-power made him oblivious to physical pain, and enabled him to retain consciousness until the testament had been read to the end. Motioning now to Sennoske to come nearer, and summoning all his energies, he succeeded, although in a scarcely audible whisper, in saying his final words:—

"From what I have learned in the course of this campaign from men of our old province who no longer feared the Hōjō, the doubt as to the fate of Ando Goro's sons has resolved itself into a certainty. I ought to have acquainted you with all this at once, causing you to search out that venomous beast, Taka Suke; but I hesitated, knowing him to be as cunning as he is wicked, and brave and strong withal. I also wished to let you first enjoy the pleasure and triumph that await you at home; and I half hoped and half wished that before long he would meet his just doom at other hands. I have erred grievously in believing that the Fates which govern the world would allow such a just vengeance to remain unfulfilled by him who evidently was designed to execute it. The signal way in which the divine will has been declared in this instance proves to me also that I need have no fear for the result. I die happy in this consciousness; and now, Sennoske, although I am of inferior rank, I know you will show me the last and greatest mark of friendship which one *samurai* can show to another."

As he spoke he released the grip of his hands, the ghastly wound opened wide, and he fell partly forward, with life evidently very nearly extinct. Sennoske did not hesitate, for to withhold his hand now would have been cruel as well as contrary to all law and usage. Taking Yamagawa's sword and

grasping it firmly in both hands, with a muttered blessing which the other seemed to understand and acknowledge by a last flicker illuminating his face, his young master made one sweeping downward stroke. The head rolled on the ground, and a life of patient, unselfish, and sacrificing devotion came to a sad but an honorable end.



STATE SWORD AND HEAD-DRESS.

CHAPTER XI.

"Now for Taka Suke!" cried a younger member of the party, excitedly. But he said no more, and hung his head abashed; for a stern glance from his older companions showed him plainly that many words and loud talk were not only not needed, but even out of place at this moment. In glancing round the room, Sennoske saw the servant who had attended him, and who, fascinated by what he had seen and heard, had remained unnoticed in a corner. He was summoned, and told to put Yamagawa's head on one of the platters lying on the floor, and to precede the young soldier to his enemy's room. The poor fellow hardly appreciated the active part assigned to him in this drama. "I am not used to carrying cut-off heads," he stammered; "I shall be certain to commit some breach of etiquette: so please excuse me." As he spoke, with his head on the floor, raising it at every few words to look around in a half-frightened, half-foolish sort of way, and bringing it down again with a hard thump in the unconscious excess of his apologetic speech, his appearance under other circumstances would certainly have been sufficiently ludicrous. A reiterated command caused him to slide upon his knees to where the ghastly head lay on the floor; but as he brought his hands near it, his courage failed him, and he made a precipitate rush for the door. He was not allowed to leave, however, and a sharp blow with a scabbard across his shoulders by one of the party, an old soldier who had little sympathy for such scruples or squeamishness, caused

the physical pain partly to overcome his nervous sensitiveness. Sennoske, with his usual consideration for the feelings of others, seeing the state of mind the man was in, himself gently placed the head on one of the platters; and the servant, with averted face, then took heart to raise it up and to proceed to the room of Taka Suke.

The others present followed, but remained slightly in the rear, having received strict orders from the young soldier not to interfere or take any active part unless he called upon them. Sennoske felt a wild, fierce delight at the thought of the struggle before him. Physical action is always a relief for any great nervous strain, and there are none but the veriest cravens who will not gladly accept it as a welcome change, even when accompanied by personal risk and danger. It is natural for health and strength to look for such an outlet, and in the time in which Sennoske lived, education and conventional usage did not repress the play of natural energies. With his physical powers developed almost to perfection, the young soldier actually hungered for an opportunity where his harassed feelings might find vent in valorous deeds. The very thought of a desperate hand-to-hand struggle did much to restore his coolness and self-possession, which had been considerably disturbed by the tragic scene through which he had passed, and by the revelations which his old attendant had made to him.

As they came to the room where he now knew his mortal enemy to be, Sennoske opened the sliding door to allow the servant to enter; then following him, and taking the platter with its ghastly burden out of his hand, he deposited it gently on the floor, while in a clear, firm, and perhaps slightly

authoritative tone he said: “Here is the head of my retainer, as you demanded it; I now ask you to return to me my sword.”

As soon as he entered he saw that he had come not a moment too soon; for the packed portmanteaus lying about, as well as other signs, showed that the party was on the eve of departure. Such, in fact, had been their intention; it was only the knowledge that a number of Ise *samurai* had arrived, and a fear that they were watched and would not in a body be able to decamp with the sword in their possession without being desperately opposed, that had caused the delay and a parley, in the midst of which Sennoske came upon them. All of them, and their leader not the least, were evidently considerably surprised at the prompt and literal manner in which Taka Suke’s command had been carried out. The Hōjō chief’s alternative had been presented, it is true, very largely out of spite against the man whom he hated, because that man had scorned his offers and eluded his power; for in striking at Yamagawa he felt he struck at Mutto and at Mutto’s son. Yet he hardly expected that his extravagant claim would be acceded to, and under any circumstances he calculated upon a delay that would enable him to escape with the sword, which to a man in his position was an invaluable prize. In the event of his being unable to escape,—a contingency which the arrival of the Ise men rendered probable,—he still believed it would be possible to represent Sennoske’s loss of the sword in such a way as to appeal effectually to the prejudices of the extremists on the subject of sword-etiquette among the *samurai* travellers who had come to the inn. He thereby hoped to create a diversion and to make the whole affair a subject of negotiation, during which time he

would have possession of the sword; and in the end he would not be scrupulous in framing excuses and contriving means for keeping it permanently.

Both his designs, however, were frustrated. The readiness with which the man had been sacrificed seemed to argue that, after all, in spite of what his young master had said, no very high value was attached to his life; at any rate, the head there exposed took away all excuse for keeping the sword any longer. This poor head now troubled Taka Suke more than its possessor had ever done in life; being a man who had seldom been thwarted, he would have given much to draw the sword and cut the now inoffensive cause of his disappointment in pieces. Sennoske, who was watching him narrowly, partly divined what was passing through his mind, and regained his self-possession more fully as the other showed outward signs of anger and mortification. He again repeated his demand, but with a stronger emphasis of authority, which seemed to intimate that he had means to enforce it; and so Taka Suke, seeing that he could not possibly frame a valid excuse for retaining the weapon, with a muttered curse, half handed, half threw it over to his enemy.

Sennoske caught it; and as he found, with his accustomed grasp, that it was indeed his trusty blade, he felt a shock which caused his heart to beat almost audibly as it seemed to him, while his brain seethed and throbbed against his temples with the tumultuous flood of emotions which agitated it. But this excitement was only momentary. He had slightly bent his head on receiving the weapon; but quickly raising it again, he spoke calmly and clearly, with quiet self-possession: “You have given me back my sword, my beloved *samurai* sword; but the mere

return of it is not sufficient. A faithful and dearly cherished life had to be sacrificed to your ‘feelings of honor,’ as you called them: all your heads must accompany the return of this sword to satisfy *my* feelings of honor!” He had drawn the sword as he concluded, and waited with chivalrous courage for a second or two, until at least one other blade should be bared.



A FENCING MATCH.

The combat was not as unequal as it looked at first sight. A heavy Japanese sword, held as it is with both hands, and not admitting of any great celerity of movement when wielded by an ordinary man, enables a master of the art, with quickness and agility to match, as was here the case, easily to keep

at bay two, or even three opponents. Sennoske had placed himself against a corner of the room; his foes were all in front of him, and the necessity of requiring considerable room to wield their weapons prevented them from overpowering him by too many rushing upon him at once. Moreover, they were at a disadvantage. They had in a vague sort of way expected a struggle of some kind, but they were not prepared for this sudden demonstration. The sound of muffled voices and footsteps in the hall spoke of a reserve force of unknown strength ready to assist, or if need were to avenge, the young champion.

But by far the most powerful influence was exerted by the flashing sword before them. It was not like other swords. In the uncertain light of the flickering candles it gleamed and glistened with a wicked, reddish sort of color, such as is seen in newly shed blood. It cut through space with a hissing, seething sound, as if it were going through waves, not of air, but of water or blood, which parted in affright before its sharp edge. As it was raised and lowered, it looked like a phantom snake elongating and contracting itself at will. All the dark tales about Muramasa, all the sinister import which popular belief attached to the product of his handicraft, and which was household lore in Japan, almost found justification in the way that this blade had caused the death of Yamagawa and had bred the present struggle.

Great, however, as was the influence of such thoughts and feelings, they could not altogether paralyze *samurai* instincts, and in response to Sennoske's challenge three blades were drawn almost immediately. With a motion so light that it implied no effort, the young soldier's weapon whizzed

through the air, causing the head of one of his antagonists to roll on the floor, and in its downward sweep striking a second one under the shoulder, cutting the arm clean off. It was the work of a few seconds merely; but by this time two more of the party, among whom was Taka Suke, had unsheathed their swords.

The Hōjō chief, the only one of the party who was entirely free from the influence of the superstitious spell which worked upon the others, leaped forward with a yell of rage as he saw his two companions fall. As he did so, he stumbled against the platter containing Yamagawa's head, and in falling, the point of his sword pierced his knee through and through, inflicting an extremely painful wound, and bringing him to the ground with a wail of anguish while the cry of his onslaught was yet ringing through the room. He lay there helpless, his fall utterly demoralizing the surviving men-at-arms. Two of them took no active part whatsoever, one having drawn his sword without attempting to use it; while the other had not even done as much, but had remained in his seat gazing upon every movement of Sennoske's weapon with a stupid, helpless stare, evidently the outgrowth of superstitious fears. The remaining two who still stood opposed to the young champion, dismayed by the scene before them, wielded their swords mechanically and aimlessly, and seemed almost to rush upon their own destruction as they were cut down by Sennoske's blade. The young man proceeded in his self-imposed task almost like an executioner carrying out a sentence, and sparing none. Last of all he turned upon Taka Suke, who, having drawn the weapon from his leg, lay writhing on the floor in transports of pain and rage, making wild, ineffectual attempts

to strike his opponent. By this time numbers of the visitors in the house had hurried to the doors of the room where the tragedy was being enacted; these had been opened, but the Ise men prevented any one from entering, and a crowd of faces looked in upon the tragic spectacle. *Kataki-uchi! kataki-uchi!* resounded from every side, causing all within ear-shot to rush to the spot; but the reason being known, no one would have interfered, even if the Ise men had not guarded the entrance.

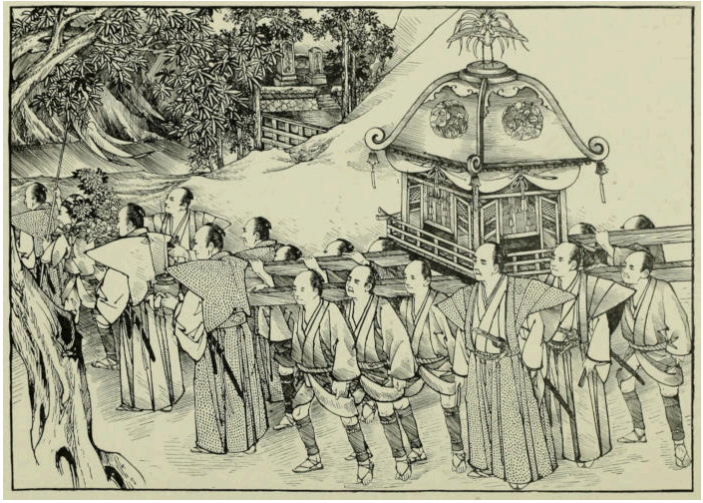


SENNOSKE FACING HIS ENEMIES.

As Sennoske looked at the man writhing at his feet, he thought of his dead mother, of his father's manhood blighted and seared by foul machinations, and of his faithful attendant's untimely death; and a savage feeling of revengeful joy, utterly foreign to his brave but gentle nature, took possession of him. He lowered his blade, which he had raised already, and addressing the other, spoke to him in words which fell upon his ears like molten lead injected into living veins. As he called him by name,—by the hated name of Taka Suke, than which none was more execrated in the country,—the spectators gave unmistakable signs of satisfaction. "It is small honor, and little cause for deserving men's esteem, to fulfil the obligations of *kataki-uchi* against you, Taka Suke," he said, "and it merely becomes a duty like that of the executioner putting a criminal to death. You have tyrannized over and trampled upon all in your power, you have, without compunction, bereft them of possessions, of good name, and of life, as long as the Hōjō influence gave you authority and means, and left your victims without redress. Now, when this power no longer shields you, you have been unable, in spite of the assistance of six stalwart men-at-arms, to defend yourself against a 'boy,' as you call him. But this 'boy' is strengthened and inspired by something which you lack, and which you think of no value. He fights in the holy cause of right and of a just retribution. In killing you I restore to my father his honor and prestige, which you tried to take from him; and in his name, and in the name of all others whom you have unjustly accused and condemned, I hereby fulfil—"

"Hold, hold!" interrupted the doomed man. "Let

me commit *seppuku*. It is a privilege which is granted to the lowest of our class, and one which by virtue of my rank I claim; I appeal to all within hearing to see that it is granted to me." As he spoke, his voice became almost pleading, and for the first time an unmistakable sign of fear showed itself together with the sneering malice and the evil hate of which the face still spoke so strongly. Added to this were the traces of physical pain; and the whole effect was so repulsive that those at the doors, many of whom were no strangers to scenes of death, turned aside, half in disgust, half in dread. As they did so, the wretched man reiterated his request frantically, without giving time for a response, shrieking it out at last in an agony of wild terror. This man, who during his life had been bound by no knightly law, who while in the fulness of health had remained untouched alike by feelings of veneration for what others held sacred, and by feelings of dread for what others feared, now, with death before him, clung desperately to the thought of dying like a *samurai*. He had known scores of men in the flower of their years die in such a way serene and contented, and probably the thought of this prompted his demand. He could not feel resigned to death; he clung to life with fierce desire, with some wild hope of escape, or at least delay, from the doom which he yet knew to be inevitable.



A FUNERAL.

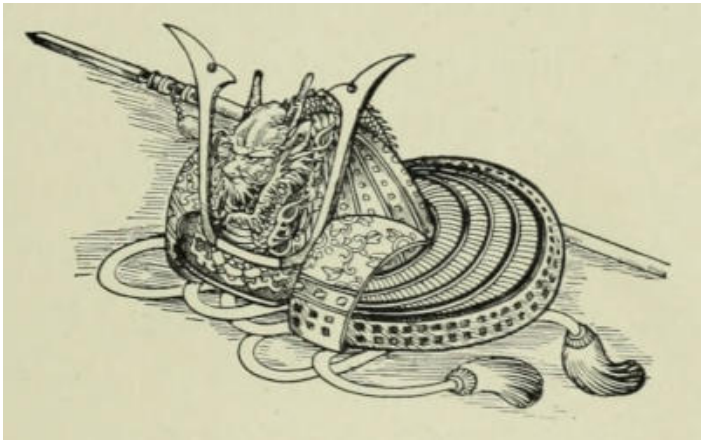
“Your appeal is in vain,” said Sennoske, not altogether unmoved at the sight. “*Seppuku* was designed as a knightly punishment for *samurai* whose errors are errors of judgment, but whose deeds are the deeds of *samurai*. This does not apply to you, who have ever had recourse to intrigue, to circumvention and low cunning, rather than to arbitration by the sword. Men who were opposed to you you have stabbed in the dark, giving them no opportunity to defend or to justify themselves; you have even, as in the case of my father, prevented them from finding relief in an honorable death. The memory of his wrongs and sufferings stands between us, and steels my heart against any feelings of pity it might otherwise entertain for one who has fallen as low as you have.”

As Sennoske spoke, he himself experienced a thrill of unutterable horror. Without volition of his own he felt the sword in his hand raise and extend itself so

as to oblige him to hold the hilt as firmly as he could, to prevent it from slipping out of his grasp. Was it merely a trick of his heated fancy? It seemed to him he was becoming unconscious. All the incidents of his young life passed before him in review. One picture however stood out in bold relief: it was that of his father leaving the presence of Taka Suke utterly prostrate in body and in mind, with only spirit enough left to pray that, impossible as it then seemed, he or his descendants might yet be able to carry out his just vengeance. Sennoske distinctly heard the prayer, and by a powerful effort roused himself to consciousness. As he did so, and looked before him, he saw the head of Taka Suke, severed from the body, lying at his feet, and at the same instant heard a low murmur of approbation from those who stood around. “I hardly saw your sword move, so quickly you did it,” said the leader of the Ise men. “These Muramasas will almost of themselves, I believe, cut off a man’s head.”

For the first time in his life the young soldier felt faint and weak, and it required all his strength of mind and will to complete the short ceremony he had to go through. Taking the head of Yamagawa and placing it by itself on the raised daïs at one end of the room, he put the heads of the six retainers of Taka Suke below and in front of it. As to the head of the Hōjō chief, he placed it by itself, adding a small piece of paper, on which he wrote in a few words the cause and purport of this *kataki-uchi*. Every one who saw it would thereby know the reason of this vendetta; and the gallant courage with which the deed had been performed was of itself sufficient to convince the many spectators of the justness of the cause.

It was long past midnight when Sennoske at last returned to his room; and after the excitement of the last few hours he found that sleep was impossible. He and his companions felt it a relief to remain awake and confer upon the events that had occurred, uniting them in a general way with that inexhaustible topic of conversation, *kataki-uchi*. Toward morning one of the party, wishing that their brave young leader should have a little rest, proposed that a day's halt should be made; and the others, divining his reason, agreed to it. Sennoske strenuously objected, stating his determination to start with the dawn. To this the other wilily replied that such a course would look like flight, and might be called such by any of Taka Suke's supporters either still present or liable to arrive in the course of the day. Every one, including Sennoske, felt that this was a weak reason; yet it was effectual, as such appeals often are when good arguments prove unavailing. It was determined, however, at once to send a courier to the court of Kuwana to carry the documents and despatches which they had brought with them from Kamakura, and a younger member of the party immediately volunteered for the service.



HELMET.

CHAPTER XII.

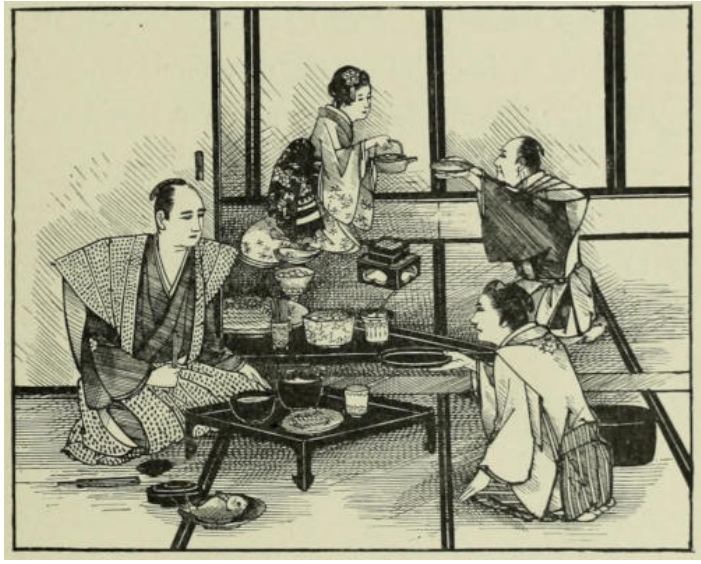
Mutto, after the departure of Sennoske, continued the same quiet, uneventful life that he had led for ten years. He was perhaps even a little more reserved than before, if that were possible, and in spite of the glorious news arriving day after day frequently making mention of his son's gallantry and bold deeds, the gloom on his countenance seemed to be as firmly fixed as ever. Two or three times he called at the smith's, and these were the only occasions when, listening to O Tetsu's merry talk, he showed something like interest in passing events and a partial forgetfulness of the grief which weighed on him. His duties at the court—now that the number of retainers was limited—had become more onerous, and he was almost constantly in attendance. One morning he was there as usual, making a report of what had occurred, when a courier arrived and was ushered in. This man, who was almost breathless, with every sign of exhaustion, was he who had been despatched by Sennoske; and it happened that he was also the first to bring authentic news of the fall of Kamakura and of the complete overthrow and annihilation of the Hōjō power.



NEWS OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE COURIER AT THE

COURT.

He delivered his letters, and the joyful tidings at once spread through the castle and into the town. The Duke, learning that the courier had himself participated in the fight, ordered refreshments brought in, of which he caused him to partake while the despatches were being read. When the reading had been concluded, the rich wine and generous fare, and still more perhaps the absorbing attention which was paid to the recital, invigorated the new-comer, who forthwith gave a graphic account of the battle. From general outlines he soon passed on to particulars, which he knew would be welcome, speaking of the way the Ise men had distinguished themselves, and giving the names of those who had won special renown. None, however, stood as high as Sennoske, who had saved the life of Nitta, the commander-in-chief, during the hottest part of the fray, who seemed invulnerable, and whose exploits had made him and his sword an object of superstitious terror to the enemy. The courier went on to speak of the command which had been intrusted to the young hero, and of the fact that he was now on his way home, having been detained only temporarily by a difficulty with Nagasaki no Taka Suke, the noted Hōjō partisan, whom, together with six of his retainers, he had attacked and killed single-handed.

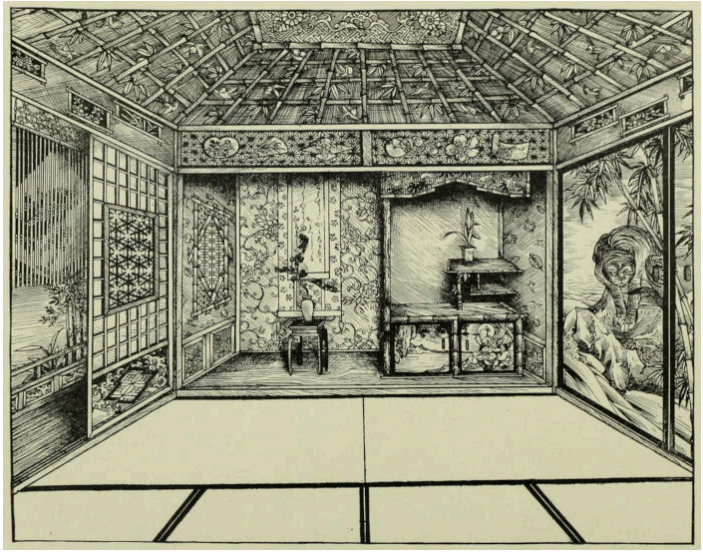


SERVING REFRESHMENTS.

When the courier reached this part of the narrative a heavy fall was heard; and on looking round it was found that Mutto had fainted, and in falling had struck his head against one of the wooden pillars. Assistance was immediately rendered him; but although the contusion was very slight, it was hours before he recovered. Then his face showed a remarkable change. There was no trace left on it of bitterness, of gloom, or of dejection, and it bore a look of complete though subdued content. He now told the secret of his life to the Duke, who did not stint himself in expressions of sincere and heartfelt congratulation. To show how very much in earnest he was, he on the same day made Mutto his hereditary *karo*,—which was the highest acknowledgment of his esteem and trust that he could show him. It was an honor which the recipient for his own sake alone would have waived, but

which for the sake of his son he felt himself bound to accept.

Two days later Sennoske arrived at Kuwana with his party. His reception would have turned the head of any one with less modesty than had fallen to the young warrior's share. His passion for O Tetsu also acted as an efficient counter-influence in repressing his vanity. He could not but feel gratified at the honors shown to him,—honors such as were seldom accorded to one so young; yet his principal care being always of her and of what she thought of him, every other opinion as to his deeds, however flattering it might be, became by comparison less important and less valuable. The only time when this feeling was in abeyance was during his interview with his father. Sennoske had reached the castle a little past noon, and had immediately been ushered into the presence of the Duke, where he had been detained for several hours, giving a minute account of the events of the campaign. With his father, whose altered appearance filled him with delight, he had been able to exchange only a few words while being conducted to the reception-hall. When he left there he was besieged by persons attached to the court, inquiring after relatives and friends. He was too kind-hearted not to stop, in spite of his impatience, when with a few words he was able either to give assurance of an absent dear one's safety, or to speak of the bravery and martial spirit of a departed one in such a way that no *samurai* wife or mother could look upon the loss otherwise than with feelings of pride and satisfaction.



JAPANESE ROOM.

It was nearly evening when he found himself alone with his father in the old house. As the two men stood facing each other, excess of emotion for a while prevented both from giving vent to their feelings in words. Mutto finally put his hand on the other's shoulder, saying in tones of deep affection: "I owe it to you, my son, that I can again enjoy this beautiful world, the glorious sun, the fruitful earth, and all the bright scenes it shows to us. I owe it to you that I am at peace with myself, and that I can lie down at night thinking of the next day, not with morose gloom as of a dreary task, but with glad content. I owe it to you that death has now no terrors for me, and that I can leave the world without the maddening thought that he who brought destruction upon my lord and benefactor remains in it, glorying in the ruin he wrought, and mocking at the *samurai* who is unable to bring him to justice. He

has perished,—perished by your hands, knowing that it was a son of mine who slew him; and the name of Numa will stand in the *samurai* annals without a blot on its escutcheon, for I know of no wrong I have committed save this forced omission of my duty. You have given me back my peace of mind, and with it life, health, and happy content such as I never again thought to enjoy."

The tears sprang to Sennoske's eyes as his father thus addressed him. The stern, sad man, who had never before unbent himself, and whom in spite of a deep feeling of awe he had always loved with intense affection, now for the first time spoke to him with words of tender emotion. Even the voice was changed; and its sound fell upon him with a soft, tender cadence, as unlike his father's former tones as the expressions which moved him so deeply differed from the methodical, impressive speeches that he had previously been accustomed to hear. It was like a change from the northern April wind, with its sad, moaning sound, to the pleasant May breeze, stirring grasses and leaves into gentle melody.

"I am indeed blessed and favored by fortune," the young soldier replied, "that I have been able to do my simple duty in such a manner as to cause you to think me worthy thus to be addressed by you. If this arm could fulfil its task, it was because it acquired skill from your teaching and was exerted in a righteous cause. From the way in which I have gained the victory, it must have been ordained by the Fates which rule this world that I should punish your enemy."



Sennoske then gave an account of the whole scene as it occurred; and in return his father imparted to him all the particulars preceding his own departure from the province of Mutsu. An hour or two was thus spent before either of them was aware of the lapse of time, and then the young man, in reply to the repeated congratulations of his parent, added: “I was armed, moreover, with a matchless sword, that of itself would almost be sufficient to give confidence

even to a weakling, and enable him to achieve success. Muramasa's gift has indeed been inestimable, and, next to you, my best thanks are due to him."

As Sennoske spoke, his mind reverted less to the smith than to the pretty O Tetsu, and an involuntary tinge of color flushed his cheek.

Mutto divined the drift of his son's thoughts, and not unwilling to be left alone for a while with his own emotion, he replied as if in answer to an unspoken question: "You certainly owe a great debt of gratitude to Muramasa, and you ought not to delay thanking him. It would be an inexcusable negligence and a breach of etiquette, as well as a sign of ingratitude, not to visit him on the first day of your arrival. You will of course also see O Tetsu," he added, with something of a smile on his face as Sennoske expressed his readiness at once to act upon the suggestion. "Muramasa and myself have made arrangements lately; and if you are still of the same mind as regards the girl, your marriage may take place at once, before you start on your new mission to Idzu."

There is no need to picture the meeting of the lovers. This narrative has been told to little purpose if the reader's imagination cannot readily divine the scene. Sennoske was in the first flush of a healthy, vigorous young manhood, and his intellect, which was of a very high order both by nature and education, found in his love for O Tetsu an outlet for its natural craving after something higher and nobler than the mere physical duties of a soldier. The girl, who had also inherited health and strength and an ardent, excitable temperament, had consoled herself for her lonely, companionless life with thoughts of

him who was ever in her mind. With both it was a great passion pervading every part of their nature, ennobled and sanctified by the purity and innocence of their lives, and receiving strength and depth beyond the ken of ordinary beings by their pure, ardent singleness of purpose.



MARRIAGE SCENE.

Sennoske's meeting with Muramasa at first hardly satisfied him. In spite of the comparatively short time which had elapsed since his departure, he found the smith considerably wasted, with black rings round the eyes, even more restless and nervous than formerly, and evidently under the influence of acute mental troubles and anxiety. The young soldier's fervent thanks for the sword, with which he opened the conversation, were listened to without any show of interest, and even with an expression of strong impatience which seemed to have taken possession of the man's nature. This, however, was considerably modified when Sennoske came to speak of the exploits with which his name had been connected,

modestly describing them as being due principally to the marvellous powers of his blade; and perceiving the effect of his words, he dilated at length upon all its points of proven excellence.

When at last he paused, the smith, after a few short words of congratulation, asked him abruptly: “Do you know of any Masamune swords being used in this campaign?”

“There were only two, or at most three, such blades in the possession of our troops,” was the reply; “but among the Hōjō adherents there were ten or twelve. I myself have taken one, richly ornamented, which was formerly in the possession of Taka Suke; if you attach any value to it, I should be happy if you would allow me to offer it to you.”

“Beware of what you say!” hissed rather than spoke Muramasa, evidently under great excitement. “Would you discard the superior weapon, and keep the inferior? You must surely know that it is reported that now in his old age Masamune, one of my former masters, forges swords which far exceed mine in excellence.”

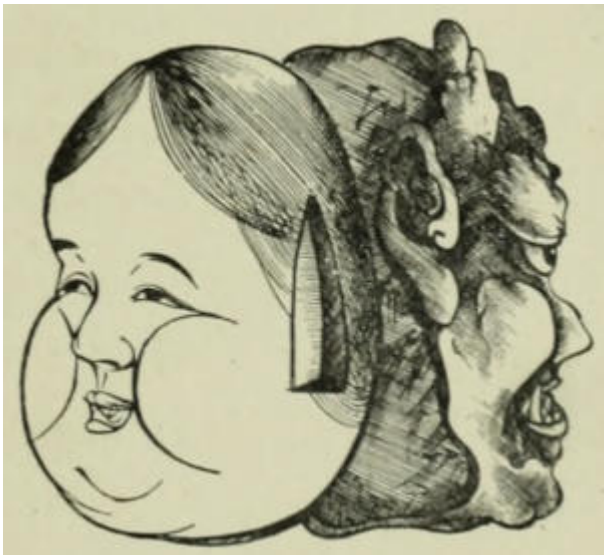
“That is impossible,” Sennoske replied, his tone and manner attesting his truthfulness and showing that he was scarcely less in earnest than the other. “Besides, if proof to the contrary were necessary, have I not given it? Could a mere youth like myself come out unscathed and victorious in a struggle against seven veterans, whose chief wielded a Masamune blade, if mine had not been superior to his, and, I may say, to all the others as well?”



FEMALE MUSICIANS.

"So it was this Masamune blade which Taka Suke had in his hands when you killed him and his pack of retainers?" the smith said, while a fierce joy lit up his sunken eyes. "The sword is the soul of the *samurai*, and it imparts its nature to him who wears it. I knew that that gentle old man could never give to a blade those qualities which men need who are bent on strife or revenge. My forging is of a different nature. You are kind and gentle too, Sennoske; yet your sword would never let you exercise feelings of pity or compassion. I am vindicated,—vindicated through you; and I know that the name of Muramasa will endure, honored and prized, as long as the

samurai spirit shall exist, as long as there are men ready to fight for right and for revenge. You have given me back, Sennoske, my confidence in myself, in my capabilities, and in the work of my hands; and I will accept the present you offer me as a *yuino* when your nuptials with my daughter are celebrated. Four days from now has been selected as a 'lucky day' which shall see you wedded."



EPILOGUE.



Sennoske and his fair wife enjoyed a lifetime of good fortune. Nothing untoward befell them but such small ills as humanity can never be entirely free from; and these were scarcely felt in their happy lot and in the love which they bore to each other and to the children that time brought them. The young soldier gained additional fame in his command at Idzu; and fulfilling within a year the task that had been intrusted to him, he returned to Ise and succeeded his father in the responsible office of *karo*. Numa, who had again assumed his old name, retired into *inkio*,—a private life of quiet and of literary pursuits, which he continued up to his death, which took place fourteen or fifteen years later. Muramasa, with whom he had continued on terms of close friendship and intimacy, died in the same year. The smith's son continued in his profession; but the blades he forged, although of higher quality than those of other smiths, were not prized as those of his father. They were like them in appearance, in form,

and in sharpness, and merely looking at the one by the side of the other, it was often impossible to tell them apart. Even in a few public trials that had been made they proved of equal excellence in all feats that required mere strength; but in fine fancy-work (such as cutting a piece of floating paper, which is one of the crowning tests of the original Muramasa blade) they were a shade inferior,—lacking in a nameless something, which could not be described in words, but which an expert could tell at once when handling them. In short, they were not true Muramasas. A few only of these competitive trials were made, however, and in Kuwana at least they were soon prohibited; for they always ended in heated discussions and bloodshed between the contending parties. As a singular testimony to the value of the older weapon, it was noticed that its possessor nearly always came off victorious.



GATHERING TEA-LEAVES.

The victory of Nitta, although re-establishing the Mikado's divine rights and prerogatives, unfortunately did not secure peace to the Empire. The claims—only too well founded—of those who had taken upon themselves the risk and labor of overthrowing the Hōjō usurpers were disregarded, and the great offices of state given to favorites who had held aloof while there was danger in acting, but who stepped in at the last moment to claim and almost monopolize the rewards. Rival jealousies and hatreds, dissensions, public and private feuds, again reigned supreme, and precipitated civil wars, which deluged the country. Only the divine rights of the

emperors were respected and held sacred, while layman and priest, noble and peasant, suffered alike; and this state of things continued up to the reign of Iyeyas, two hundred and fifty years ago, which inaugurated the long peace that has since ruled in the Empire.



YAMATO-DAKE NO MIHOTA, SEMI-DIVINITY OF WAR.

During all this time the position of *karo* remained in possession of Sennoske's descendants, and the family flourished and succeeded, knowing hardly any reverses of fortune. But, strange as it may appear, with the beginning of this peace the fortunes of the house of Numa declined. Some inexplicable bond seemed to connect their welfare with the fate of Muramasa's swords. These swords, as long as strife and bloodshed were rife, were more esteemed than those of any other maker, in spite, or perhaps partly on account, of the constantly growing feelings of superstition with which they were regarded. Their possessors somehow or other never seemed content unless they had an opportunity for using them; and so generally did they succeed in gaining the victory over their opponents that at last even the bravest shrank with dread from fighting a duel with a man armed with a Muramasa.

Moreover, they were a fruitful cause of accidents. Often, when an interval of peace which had lasted for fifteen or twenty years had caused such a sword to remain unused for that time, upon first being drawn it brought about some dire calamity. It was a common thing, in spite of every care being taken, for the blade to fall out in some unaccountable way and strike the wearer, inflicting a fatal wound. Among those who suffered in this way were some of Numa's descendants. These, however, were almost the only misfortunes which overtook them. With the return of peace these casualties increased to such an alarming extent that at last the Shôgun's government issued a peremptory order, forbidding the use of these swords throughout the entire country. Nevertheless, they were still prized in private; but the power of the Tokugawa's rule was too strong and the edict too imperative to allow of its being in any way openly

disregarded. Muramasa blades after this were found mostly with a few of the most noted *ronins* and robbers, whom tradition speaks of as having been wonderfully successful.

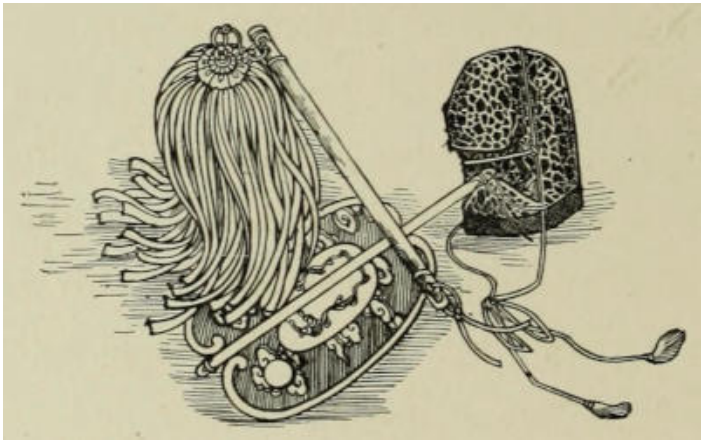
An unfortunate affair of honor which happened just thirteen years after the beginning of the long peace, and in which the then *karo* of the Duke of Kuwana, a descendant of Sennoske, slew his master's son by mistake, forced him to commit *seppuku*. In consideration of their illustrious and faithful services, the reigning Duke caused the family of the unfortunate man to suffer no further punishment than banishment from his province. They found an asylum with the neighboring Duke of Todo, who also gave to the oldest son, who was approaching man's estate, a position at his court which, although far inferior to that which his father had held at Kuwana, was yet a high and an honorable one. This office was made hereditary with his descendants, who, in spite of faithful services, failed to improve it. The genius of the family evidently lay in a military direction; and although now and then some one of its members would perform a great deed of arms, opportunities for such deeds were rare, and the family barely succeeded in retaining their new position: this, however, they did as long as old Japan existed.

But the end of the power of the sword was rapidly approaching. In the first year of the period of Ansei (1855) came the establishment of treaties with foreign nations, and this sounded the death-knell of feudalism in Japan. For a time the descendants of Sennoske still subsisted upon a scanty allowance as dependants of the Duke of Todo. The complete abolition of feudalism by imperial decree in the third year of Meiji (1870) completed their ruin.

On the first day of the tenth month of that year there was breathless excitement in the town. All the *samurai* of any standing were convened by the Duke in the large hall of the palace; and there an imperial envoy, who had arrived the day before, read the decree, that from that day feudalism ceased to exist. "Everything is at an end," some of the *samurai*, stupefied by the news, said as they passed out of the hall; and so to a great extent it was. At an end all their inherited and fancied superiority. The traditions of the past, the records of twenty-five hundred years of ancestors' struggles and heroic deeds, the qualities which all *samurai* revered and held noble and strove to imitate, the bodily and mental gifts with which birth and education had endowed them,—all this in one day had become like a threadbare garment, fit only to be thrown away; while scarcely one of the losers had the means or possessed the faculty of procuring another that would suit the times.

Without education or qualifications adapting him to the new order of things, the last of the line of Sennoske found himself in a sad condition. The miserable pension allowed him by government was inadequate to his barest needs; but even this was soon lost to him, and the accomplishments of peace having never been his, he was unable to care for himself. Fortune befriended him no more; those in places of official power and affluence no longer reverenced the rank of *samurai*, but turned him from their doors, and he sank lower and lower in the social scale, until only the most degrading position of all, that of the poor, despised *jinrikisha* man, was left to him. So to-day he lives, a connecting link between old and new Japan, between the feudalism of the past and the encroachments of the foreign civilization of the present,—a monument to the ruin

of chivalry, knightly pursuits, and glorious deeds of arms; a poor, ragged, despised *jinrikisha* man, but with a glorious heritage in the superb Muramasa blade which hangs on the walls of his hut.



MARSHAL'S BATON, WAR-FAN, AND HEAD-DRESS.





*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MURAMASA BLADE ***

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