
GODS
AND HEROES
OF OLD JAPAN.

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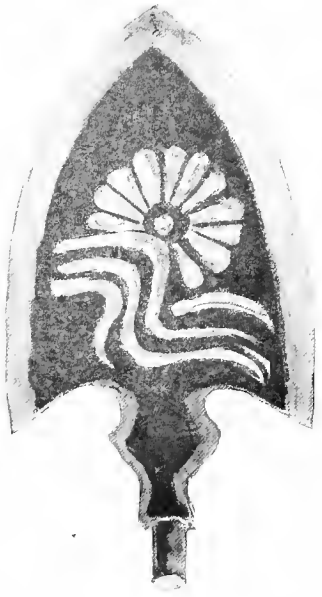

THESE short stories of Heroes are taken from the Sacred Writings and Ancient Histories of Japan. The early legends are miraculous, the later tales are historically true and the incidents are genuine; the last two stories correspond to our own Age of Chivalry —the Age of the Bow—the time of Agincourt and Crecy.

As the Heroes of the ancient Greeks were the expression of their ideals, and figure in all their art, so the Japanese with their beautiful worship of the Spirits of the Dead, rank their Heroes almost among the Gods, picture them a thousand times on their china, woodwork, colour-prints, and lacquer; and thus create a heroic atmosphere of sacrifice, generosity, and contempt of death, in which the Japanese child moves and has his being. He has an added incentive to noble deeds; for will he not himself become an Ancestor one day, his 'ihai' on the family shelf, and little bowls of food and saké and sprays of blossom placed there in his

honour, to be dutifully worshipped with soft clappings of hands?

Our oldest families are tiny mushroom growths beside the great family-trees of Japan, with their roots deep in the dim centuries. The present Mikado claims direct descent, through long lines of shadowy Emperors, from Amaterasu, the great Sun-Goddess herself.

It was She who presented the Regalia—the Mirror, the Sword, and the Jewel—to the first Emperor of Japan, her Sublime Grandchild, and without them no Mikado may lawfully reign. As all know, the mirror has to this day a certain mystical significance; it is the 'Soul of a Woman,' as the sword is the 'Soul of a Warrior.'

I have to acknowledge my obligations to the translations of the 'Hojiki' by B. H. Chamberlain, of the 'Nihongi' by W. G. Aston; also to Mons. E. Bertin's masterly work, 'Les Grandes Guerres Civiles du Japon'; and to Mr. Marcus Huish, Messrs. Seeley

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The quotation from ancient chronicles on page 126 *also appears in Brinkley's 'Japan,' vol.* 2, *and the verse on page* 47 *is from B. H. Chamberlain's 'Classical Poetry of the Japanese.'*

Lastly, my special thanks are due to Mr. B. Nagano from the Japanese Educational Department, for his valuable assistance in consulting Japanese originals, and to Mr. Stephen Paget for much friendly advice.

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PROLOGVE.

THE WAY OF THE GODS.

'What thought so high as Heaven is?
What mind so wide?'

LISTEN, my children, to the true story of the Beginning of the World.

When there was neither Heaven nor Earth, nor Sun nor Moon, nor anything that is, there existed in Infinite Space the Invisible Lord of the Middle of Heaven. With him were two other Gods.

By their miraculous power, a Thing whose shape cannot be described came into existence in the midst of Space, in appearance like a Floating Cloud. Forth from it sprang as it were a Flowering Rushsprout, rising from the water—*pure, translucent and bright*—which grew and grew and widened and widened infinitely, till it spread over all things and became the Canopy of Heaven. Then downward from the Floating Cloud grew the Under-region—the Realm of Night—which is the Root-region of the World and the abode of Departed Spirits.

And the centre of the Floating Cloud became the Earth, which was still liquid and formless and without life.

After this were born in Heaven seven generations of Gods, and the last and most perfect of these were Izanagi and Izanami. Now Izanagi and Izanami were the Parents of the World and all that is in it. And it happened in this

wise: the Gods of the High Plain of Heaven said to Izanagi and Izanami—

'Descend and make of this drifting mud and ocean a firm and beautiful Land, and fill it with living things.' And the Gods placed in their hands a mystic jewelled Spear.

Now in these days the heavens were near to the earth, and the space between was spanned by a Heavenly Floating Bridge. So they set forth bravely on their journey, and looking down into the Space beneath them, they saw in the depths the green plain of the Sea. They held counsel together and said, 'Is there not a country beneath?'

And Izanagi pushed the jewelled Spear down from the Floating Bridge and stirred the green sea round and round, and some say that is why the earth turns round and round to this day. Then the brine went curdle-curdle, and they drew up the Spear, and the brine that fell from the end of the Spear dropped down and became an Island. This island was called Onogoro and is one of the Everlasting Islands of the Land of Sunrise, of the Land of fertile Reed-plains, which is Japan.

Now the Gods stepped down on to the Earth, and it was strange and desolate, and they shivered, and felt lonely and afraid.

Suddenly sounded a whirring of wings; two tiny Sekirei—wagtails—swept by and fluttered to the ground. It was early spring-time, the living air thrilled warm and sweet. With little pecks and cheeps, full of busy pride, the pair sought twigs and grasses and wove them deftly into a downy nest. Quivering with rapture the lover-bird hovered round his mate and sang of love and joy and happy days to come.

While the Great Gods watched, a warmth crept round the heart of Izanagi, and in Izanami's eyes was a mist of tears. She whispered softly, 'Let us, too, make a house to dwell in!' Then Izanagi plunged his Spear into the ground, and round them arose a great and glorious Palace; and the Spear was the Heart-Pillar thereof. And they were hidden from the sight of Heaven and Earth.

Then, moving round this Pillar, they met and gazed on one another with charmed eyes. The Mother of Mankind cried joyfully, 'Behold! I have met with a lovely Youth!' And Izanagi cried back, 'Behold! I have met with a lovely Maiden!'

So the Sekirei first taught the Gods the ways of Love, and are honoured and cherished in Japan to this day.

But Izanagi remembered how Izanami had been the first

to speak, and in his displeasure said wrathfully, 'I am a Man, and should by right have spoken first!'

When the first child born to them was ugly and deformed, they put him in a boat made of Camphor-wood, and he sailed away to sea and became the God of the fisher-folk. His children are the hairy men who live in some of the islands of Japan to this day.

Then the Gods passed round the pillar a second time, and Izanagi spoke first. So his anger was appeased, and they lived greatly content.

Together they made the Eight Islands of Japan, and placed them at the summit of the globe. But the land was hidden, being covered with mists,—so Izanagi sent forth the God of the Winds. He, blowing lustily, rent the clouds, and the earth lay as a bride unveiled, shimmering with silver dew on her green pastures.

Next came the Food-Spirit to comfort mankind, the Sea-Gods, the Mountain-Gods, the Gods of the River-mouths, the Tree-Gods, and the Earth-Goddess. Last of all was born the fierce Fire-God, Kagu-tsuchi. Now this God was of such a hot and fiery temper, that he burnt his Great Mother and she suffered change and departed to the Lower World.

Then Izanagi was wroth and cried aloud, 'O that I should have given my Beloved in return for a single Child!'

And his sorrow was so great that he crawled round her head and her feet, and from the tears that he shed, sprang up the Goddess of Weeping. Then he took his ten-span sword and hewed Kagu-tsuchi in three pieces, and each piece sprang into life as the Spirit of Thunder, the Spirit of Mountains, and the Spirit of Rain.

Now Izanagi loved his wife so greatly that he could find no rest or peace on earth; and after wandering long in search of comfort and finding none, he determined to seek her, even in the Realm of Departed Spirits. His way lay through a long and gloomy passage where few have trod, right through the centre of the earth; till he came at length to the Gate of Everlasting Night, to the kingdom of Yomi, the Ruler of the Under World. He knocked at the Gate and cried aloud:—

'O my beloved Sister! come back to me!' and she answered him:

'O beloved Elder Brother! gladly would I come, but alas! I have eaten of Yomi's cooking and am bewitched. Let me return and speak to him, but do not thou follow me!'

So Izanagi waited anxiously without, till growing impatient at her long delay, he broke a tooth off his comb, lighting it as a torch; and so dared to enter those terrible Shades. Through dark and dreadful ways he wandered, and his heart quailed within him.

But Yomi was wroth with him for his daring, and smote Izanami so that when he found her she lay as one altered in death, with Eight Witches at her head and her feet. Then a great horror fell upon Izanagi, he turned and fled swiftly, and the Eight Ugly Women rose and pursued him. On he ran, through winding ways where icy blasts fly shrieking; and the Witches swept after him and would have caught him, but he seized the wreath from his head and flung it down, and it was changed into bunches of grapes. When the Witches saw these they stopped and greedily devoured them; then gathering up their robes, rose and pursued again.

Izanagi felt the chill of their coming, and drew out a many-toothed comb from the right bunch of his hair, and threw it behind him. Behold! as it touched the ground, there sprang up a hedge of young bamboo-shoots across the path. The Witches swooped down, pulled up the young shoots and eat them to the last one: then again gave chase.

Now Izanami, too, was angered against him, for she had been put to shame; and she sent five hundred warriors from Yomi to pursue him. When the rush and the tramping drew nearer, Izanagi unsheathed his ten-span sword, and in his despair his breath failed as at the approach of Death. Then suddenly appeared before him the Gate of the Pass of Yomi; and hastily plucking some peaches which grew by the Gate, he threw them and scattered his pursuers and himself passed through into the light. And he rolled a mighty stone across the mouth of the opening, so that none hereafter could move it.

The Peaches that had saved him, he named Their Augustness the great Divine Fruit; and they are honoured in some parts of Japan to this day.

Now when he came back into the world again, Izanagi felt very weary, and searched for a clear stream to wash away the foulness of the Lower Regions which clung to him. When he had found one, he bathed therein, and of this washing many evil gods were born; among them were the Gods of Crookedness who love to plague mankind. Seeing this evil, he made the Gods of Straightening to make crooked things straight.

Now when he had rested and accomplished his puri-

fication, he created the greatest of his children in this wise:—

Descending once more into the clear stream, he bathed his left eye,—and forth sprang AMATERASU the great Sun-Goddess.

Sparkling with light She rose from the waters, as the Sun rises in the East, and her brightness was wonderful and shone through Heaven and Earth; never was seen such radiant glory.

Izanagi rejoiced greatly, and said: 'There is none like this Miraculous Child!'

Taking a necklace of Jewels, he put it round her neck, and said: 'Rule Thou over the Plain of High Heaven!'

Thus Amaterasu became the source of all life and light, the glory of her shining has warmed and comforted all mankind, and she is worshipped by them unto this day.

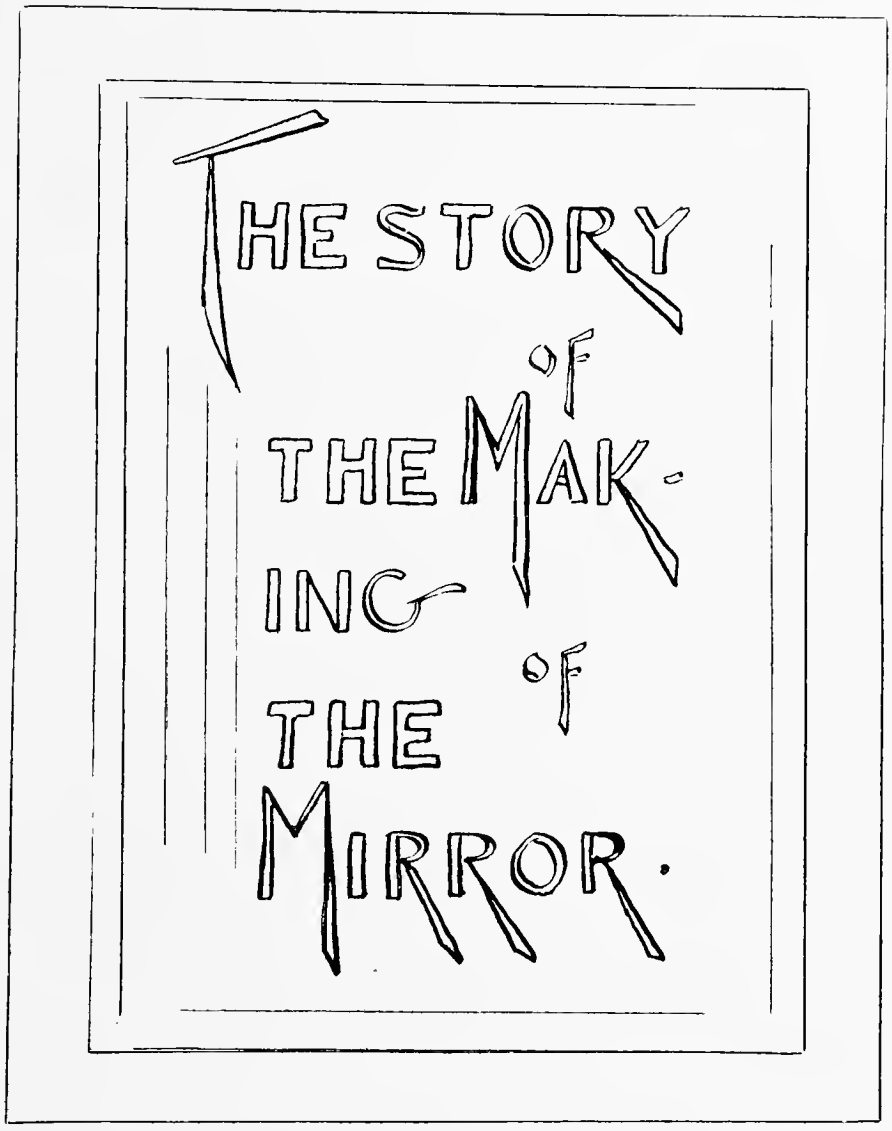
Then he bathed his right eye, and there appeared her brother the Moon-God. Izanagi said, 'Thy beauty and radiance are next to the Sun in splendour, rule thou over the Dominion of Night!'

When the two Beautiful Ones had departed, a third God came forth, whose name was Susa-wo. He was a god with a strange destiny, and could never be at peace, sweeping

ceaselessly over hills and valleys with his long beard floating behind him. Izanagi gave him Dominion over the Sea.

But he was not content, and neglected his kingdom, restlessly roaming over the earth, so that the green mountains withered and the rivers dried up. The murmuring of spirits he woke with his moaning was as the sound of innumerable bees.

So Izanagi in his wrath banished him to the Nether Regions, and having accomplished his work, withdrew into an Island Cave, and abode there till the End.


THE STORY
OF
THE MAK-
ING
OF
THE
MIRROR.

'We are only Shadows, we shall pass:
but the Great Light shall endure.'

NOW, when Amaterasu the Sun-Goddess ascended into her Kingdom, she reigned there peacefully in great glory; and the fair light of her beauty flooded the Earth and the Heavens.

Her brother Susa-wo at the time of his banishment to the Under-World, beheld her shining, and said:

'I will go and bid farewell to my Sister the Sun-Goddess, ere I depart!'

So he mounted to Heaven with such sudden violence, that the rivers and mountains shook and groaned aloud, and every land and country quaked.

Amaterasu was greatly alarmed and said, 'I know my Brother desires to take my Kingdom from me!' So she girt on her ten-span sword and her nine-span sword, and her necklace of five hundred jewels which she twisted round her hair and arms, and she slung on her thousand-arrow quiver, and great high-sounding elbow-shield. Then she brandished her bow and stamped her feet into the hard ground till it fell away from her like rotten snow, and she stood valiantly, uttering a mighty cry of defiance.

Then Susa-wo stood on the further side of the Tranquil River of Heaven, which is the Milky Way, and answered her softly with fair words:

'O my Sister! I am come hither with a pure heart to bid thee farewell. Why dost thou put on a stern countenance? Let me but see thee once and speak with thee, face to face, ere I depart.'

Then the heart of the Sun-Goddess was softened, and she let him enter and cross the River of Heaven. But even here Susa-wo could not rest from his turbulent ways.

Now, in her wisdom, Amaterasu would wonder how best to help and comfort mankind, and on a certain day she sent Susa-wo on a journey to find her sister, the Food-Goddess, as she had many things to enquire of her. When the Food-Goddess looked and saw Susa-wo descending towards her, she quickly prepared a great banquet in his honour, and by her miraculous power she produced from her mouth boiled rice and every kind of fish and game. But Susa-wo, watching her, flew into a rage and cried out: 'Thou art unclean! Dost thou offer me what comes from thy mouth!' And he took out his sword and slew her.

When Amaterasu heard this, she was very wroth with her Brother, and sent a second messenger to see if the Food-Goddess were really dead. And when he found her, behold, a miracle! all things good for Man were growing from her head and body. Millet and grass, mulberry trees

with silkworms on them, rice and wheat and large and small beans. The messenger took them all and presented them to the Sun-Goddess, who rejoiced greatly and gave them to mankind, rice for the wet fields and other grains for the dry.

And she planted the mulberry trees on the Fragrant Hills of Heaven, and chewed the cocoons of the silkworms, and spun thread to weave silk garments for the gods.

Now, one day, while she was weaving with her maidens in the sacred hall, word was brought to her that her Brother had trampled the rice-fields and polluted her store-houses. And when she sought to excuse him, he angered her yet more by his folly and violence. So Amaterasu covered her face, and in her grief and anger she hid herself from the sight of all men in a rocky cave, and closed the door.

When her radiance was hidden, all the world was left in deep darkness and confusion, the whole Plain of Heaven was obscured, and the Land of the Reed Plains darkened. Night and Day were unknown, and neither in Heaven nor Earth was there any light at all. The sound of many voices rose and fell, like the swarming of bees, and everywhere was trouble and dismay.

In the midst of the gloom the eighty myriads of Gods

met together in council, and their meeting-place was on the banks of the Milky Way of Heaven. And the Great Wise God, wiser than his fellows, who held in his mind the thoughts and imaginings of all men, said softly: 'She is a Woman, and surely will be curious! Let us show her something more beautiful than herself!' But as in all High Heaven nothing fairer could be found, they made a mighty Mirror, forged by the Blacksmith God from the metals of Heaven. Yet the Gods were not satisfied, and commanded him to make another. So with his anvil from the Milky Way, and bellows, fashioned from a single deer-skin, he forged a second and yet a third, and this last was perfect and flawless, in shape like the Sun.

And they lit great fires outside the Cave and hung the Mirror there on the branches of the sacred Sakaki tree, above it a necklace of Ever-bright and Glittering Jewels, and below it some strips of fine-woven cloth. Then the Wise God took from his fellows six long bows and bound them together, and placed them upright in the ground, and gently brushed the strings.

And the fair Goddess Amé-no-Uzumé was led forth to dance, her flowing sleeves bound up with the creeping plant Masaki, and her head-dress of trailing Kadzura vine,

gathered from the Mountains of Heavenly Fragrance, and in her hands the branches of young bamboos hung with tiny bells. These she waved rhythmically to and fro to the sound of her stepping, and as the humming of the bow-strings rose and fell, the eighty myriad Gods sat around her and joyfully beat the measure.

She sang of the beauty of an unknown Goddess, and as her body swayed in cadence, the great assembly of Gods laughed aloud till the Vault of Heaven shook.

The Sun-Goddess wondered greatly at all this mirth and music, and said: 'How is it that while the whole Plain of Heaven and the Land of the Reed-Plains is darkened, Uzumé sings and frolics, and the eighty myriad Gods do laugh?' She peeped, inquisitive, out of the cave.

Uzumé still sang of the beauty of the Unknown Goddess, and the words of the First Song were these:

'GODS! from the cavern's gloom
Comes she majestical!
Shall not our hearts rejoice?
Mine is the victory!
Who can resist my charms?
Hail, Ever-Shining One!'

And wondering — longing — yet unwilling to venture forth, Amaterasu looked from the depths of the cave and listened to the strains, and heard the Gods make merry; till opening wider the door, she stood upon the threshold.

Two Gods hastily held forward the Mirror, and she saw, amazed, the vision of her own exceeding loveliness. Then the first flush of Dawn appeared suddenly in the East, there was a stir as of awakening birds, the mountain-tops blushed pink, and all the Gods held their breath.

She stepped forward softly, still gazing entranced, while broad shafts of light shot upwards in the sky, and her glory filled the air with rosy radiance. As she looked on her ineffable beauty, the Wise God, twisting a rice-straw rope, stretched it across the mouth of the cave—for never more could she desire to hide her Face from a sorrowing World.

And thus with the Sunshine came Music and Dancing, for the delight of men.

But Susa-wo was severely punished by the Gods, and banished from their sight for ever.

THE STORY OF THE FINDING OF THE SWORD

'For the Gods ordain that Hell and Heaven are in the hearts of men.'

WHEN the brightness of Amaterasu was restored to earth and sky, Susa-wo, who had been shamefully banished by the Gods, was very loath to leave the great blue Plain of High Heaven. So he bound together green grass, and made himself a broad hat and a rough grass rain-coat, such as the peasants in Japan wear to this day.

In this disguise he wandered, humbly asking for hospitality among the eighty myriad Gods. But they all knew him in spite of his disguise, and they all turned their backs upon him, refusing food and shelter. At last, unable to find a resting-place, he came sorrowfully to earth. And it was during the time of continuous rains.

He landed in the province of Izumo, the holy country of the Gods, where Izanagi, the Father of the world, had ended his days. Round him were the shadowy shapes of the hills, phantoms in a gray mist, and beyond towered great peaks—enormous, ghostly—their great cups lifted to the clouds, crowned with eternal snows.

And the rain poured steadily down. In the dim twilight of the bamboo groves, it fell drip, drip, from the branches, and from the border of his broad straw hat the bright

drops twinkled and fell. At last, forlorn and full of heaviness, he cried: 'My heart is brimming over with sorrow, like a lotus leaf with water!'

He came to a rushing stream, which bubbled and sparkled through mossy banks, and on the tossing waves were two chopsticks floating. Susa-wo said: 'I will follow this stream and see what manner of folk live here.' So he turned and went up the valley.

Soon cries of distress met his ear, and he hurried his steps, running and slipping on the stones beside the torrent bed, until he came upon an old man and woman with a young girl between them, and he saw they were weeping bitterly.

So he asked them: 'Why do ye lament thus?' And the old man answered:

'Formerly we had eight young daughters, but each year the eight-forked serpent of Koshi has come and devoured one. And now this is our last daughter, Inada, our youngest and dearest, and the time has come for the monster to return.'

Then Susa-wo looked on the Princess Inada, and she was fair as the blossom of the cherry tree, and slender as the willow, and he said:

'If I save her life, and she is your daughter, will ye give her to me as my wife?'

Now Susa-wo was still dressed as a peasant, in his broad hat and straw coat, and they never divined he was a God.

The maiden cried: 'Leave us, fair youth, we are accursed. If the monster sees thee, he will slay thee!'

But the old man, bowing, said: 'With reverence, wilt thou tell me thy august name?'

He answered: 'I am the Brother of the great Sun-Goddess!'

At this they all fell down and worshipped, and her parents said: 'If this be so, O Shining One, with reverence we offer her to thee.'

Then the maiden dried her tears; and with the hope of deliverance her great beauty shone forth like an opening flower, and Susa-wo's heart was stirred, and he loved her; and fearing the return of the serpent, he quickly changed her into a close-toothed comb, which he placed in his hair.

Then he commanded the two old people to make eight vats of Saké, or rice wine, of eight-fold strength, and to place them in a row. And when they had done this he stood near and watched.

Ere long the serpent came, and his length was so great that it spread across hills and valleys: on his back was trailing moss, and great pine trees and cryptomerias grew upon it, and his bellowing made the earth and air to shake. He approached leisurely, sure of his prey, twisting his eight heads, and peeping in and out of valleys and creeks, sometimes lifting a long neck to scent the evening breeze. Suddenly spying the Saké, he roused himself joyfully, and urging his huge body forward, plunged each separate head into a vat, and no sound was heard save the lapping of tongues and the gurgling of many throats.

When he had well drunk, Susa-wo seized his ten-span sword and struck off every head as it lay buried in the wine, and with a writhe and a groan that filled the earth like a mighty thunder-clap, the beast turned over and lay dead. But the River Hi flowed on, changed into a river of blood.

Susa-wo struck once more, and behold! the edge of his blade was turned. Seeking the cause of it, he drew forth from the tail of the dragon a mighty Sword, all wonderfully wrought. The bright blade glimmered and glistened in the twilight, and round the hilt hovered mystic fires and sparks striking upward. Wonderingly he turned it over

in his hands, saying: 'How can I, who am an outcast from Heaven, keep this Divine Sword?'

Then, remembering his Great Sister whom he had so sorely offended, he cried: 'I will humbly offer Her this Sword, and if it be accepted, I shall know myself forgiven by the Gods.' So he sent up the Sword, by a messenger, to Heaven, and Amaterasu took it, and placed it in the palace with the Jewel and the Mirror.

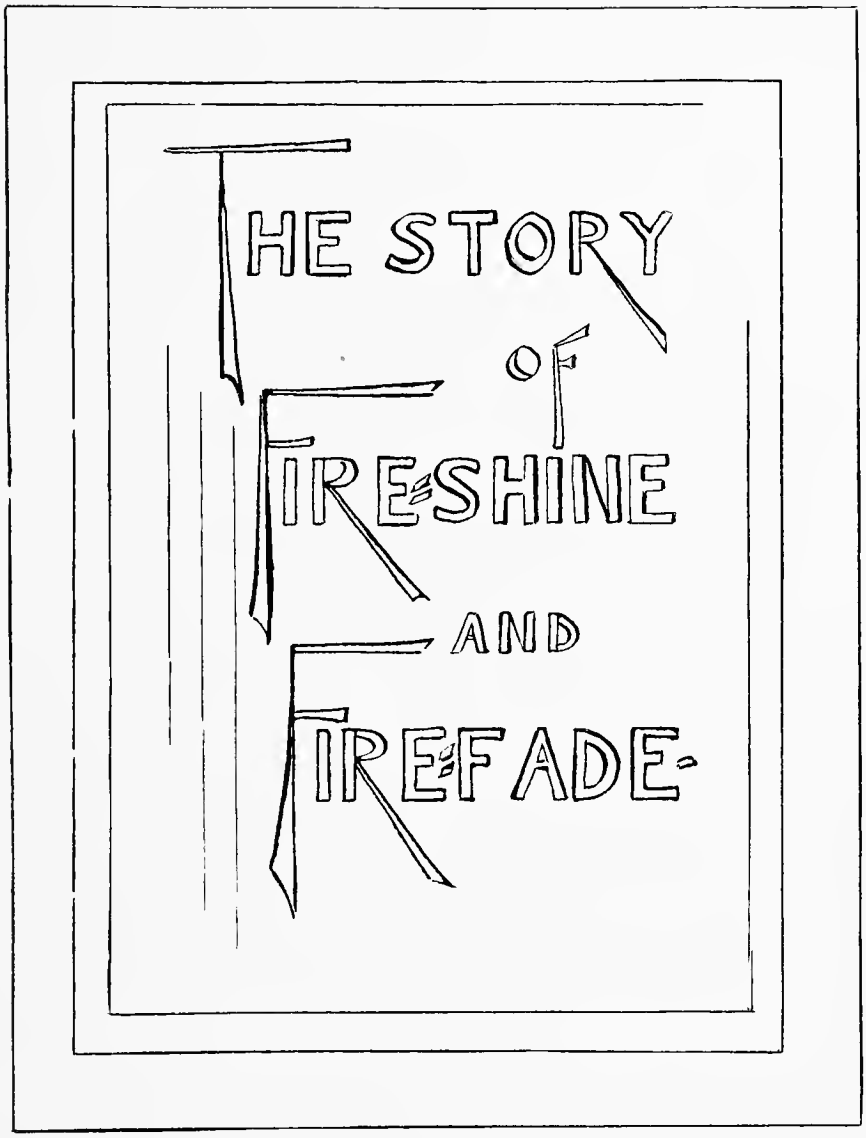
So Susa-wo travelled on, seeking a resting-place in the Land of Izumo. And the Princess Inada was with him, changed into a maiden again. When he came to Suga, a great peace descended on him, and he lifted his arms to Heaven, saying: 'I am refreshed!' There among the groves of cedars and pines he built himself a palace with beams and pillars of cedar-wood, intertwined with mulberry-plant and creeping wisteria.

When Susa-wo and the Princess entered the palace, pillars of cloud arose, soft, mysterious, manifold, screening them from the sight of the world, and Susa-wo sang the First Love-song to his Beloved, for the cloud was lifted from his heart for ever.

The temple of Yaegaki now stands on this spot, and

here all the youths and maidens who wish for wedded love go secretly and hang their little white tokens at the entrance of the shrine, or tie up two branches of the precious Camelia tree. They write no name and only whisper their heart's prayer. Below are all the little paper banners of victory of those whose prayers have been granted, and the Deities, Susa-wo and his wife Inada, must be kind, as the number of these little banners is so great, they look like a sudden fall of snow.

So Susa-wo found salvation on Earth, after his banishment from Heaven, and he and the wondrous Princess Inada still listen to all true lovers' prayers.


THE STORY
OF
FIRE-SHINE
AND
FIRE-FADE-

'The perfume of thy spray
Salt-scented,
Drew me to thy arms,
O Sweet Sea-Mother!'

WHEN the great assembly of Gods met together on the Plains of High Heaven, Amaterasu sat enthroned, clothed in golden majesty, looking across the vast Void to where the green Earth circled for ever beneath her feet. She looked down on the Eight Islands of Japan, the land of a Thousand Autumns, on its forests and rivers, its mountains and valleys, in the ever-shifting mists of morning.

Amaterasu said: 'I see a beautiful and favoured land, whom shall we appoint to rule over it?'

The gods answered: 'Send thy Sublime Grandchild, Ninigi-no-mikoto, he shall reign over it and the Children of the Sun for ever.'

So the Sun-Goddess commanded him to make ready, and said: 'Behold, my Child! the magic SWORD, the glittering JEWEL, and the heavenly MIRROR! They are thine to take with thee on thy journey to the Earth. Guard the Mirror carefully, it is My Spirit, and when thou lookest into its depths with a pure heart, thou shalt see My Face.'

So the Sun-Child, at the command of the Sun-Goddess, left his Heavenly Rock-seat, and pushing aside the eight-fold clouds with a mighty cleaving, he descended in the Crystal Boat to the high mountain-top Tsu-ku-shi. When

he stepped out upon the pine-clad slopes and gazed about him, the day was drowsy and tender and blue, and in the air was a more than earthly fragrance. Like a vast Cavern hung the blue Plains of Heaven above him, and glassy and blue stretched the still sea beneath.

'Here will I dwell' he said, 'and build me an House, where the morning sun shines bright and the evening sky is golden.' And his servants did as he commanded.

Thus the August Grandchild established his peaceful rule, and built a fair palace, basing deep on the nethermost rock the massy pillars, and upraising to High Heaven the timbers of the roof to shelter him from sun and sky.

It happened one day as he wandered by the wave-washed shore, behold! a young maiden came slowly towards him, clothed in pink and purple robes, like the sheen of lotus and wisteria bloom, and her long black hair flowed down round her feet. Looking intently upon her, he was touched by her beauty, and cried:

'Fear me not, Fragrant and Fair one! only tell me thy name, and thy dwelling-place!' and she answered him:

'My father is the great Mountain-God, and my name is Blossoming-Brilliantly-like-the-Flowers-on-the-Trees.'

And they walked and talked together, to the sound of the waves lapping on the rocks and the screaming of the sea-gulls.

So she led him to her father, to whom he told his name, and asked for the Princess Blossom as his bride. The Mountain-God consenting, sent also to his palace an elder sister, Princess Long-as-the-Rocks, strong, hard-featured, and plain. The Prince, disappointed and displeased, would not so much as look upon her, and sent her home again with all haste.

Then the God of the Mountain sent word to him in his anger, saying: 'O foolish youth! Hadst thou wedded the Elder Sister, thy children would have lived as long as the Rocks endure, as long as the Snows fall and the Winds blow. But since thou hast chosen the younger, thy children shall be frail and beautiful as the Flowers of the Trees.'

When he had finished speaking, the Prince turned and looked on his beautiful wife, and could find no sorrow in his heart, and they were blissful and content. But thus it was that the Children of the Sun lost their immortality, and became as the children of men.

To the Sun-Child and Princess Blossom were born two

sons. They were born among flames and smoke, while the house where their mother dwelt was on fire, and were named Hoderi and Howori, or Fire-Shine and Fire-Fade.

As they grew to be tall and handsome youths, Fire-Shine became a skilful fisherman, and would spend his days on the seashore, climbing the cliffs or sailing his boat through the waves. His father gave him the Magic Hook, with the Luck of the Sea.

To the younger brother he gave the Magic Bow, with the Luck of the Mountain.

Howori loved all the life of the forest—the subtle scents of growing things, the first note of the newly awakened birds, the filmy flower-petals fluttering to the ground, and the still, fragrant depths of the pine-woods. He was withal a mighty hunter, and caught things rough of hair and smooth of hair, and brought home his spoils at the close of day.

Now, though Hoderi found his fortune with his Magic Hook, there were days when the rain fell and the fierce winds blew, and he could not put out in his boat to fish; but storm or shine, he saw his brother take his Luck and set off boldly for the woods. Then Hoderi felt his jealousy burn within him and said:

'Though thou art the younger, I see well thou hast the better gift! It is not fit that I the elder should be less fortunate than thou! Let us change our gifts, my hook for thy bow—and thou shalt go down to the sea to fish, and I will go to the mountain.'

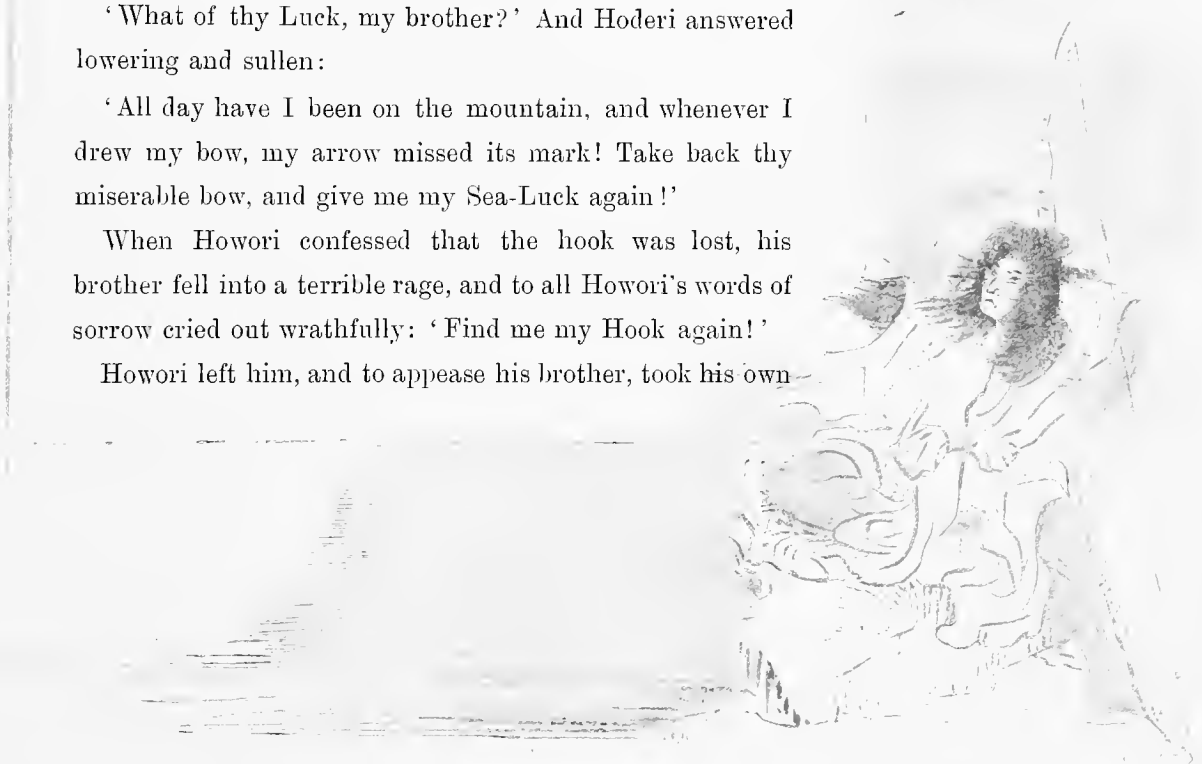
Howori readily agreed to what his brother wished, gave him the bow, and took the hook in return. All day long he sat in the little boat, gazing into the shining depths beneath him, watching his line lie limp and idle in the water,—but no fish came near. Once a bright red jewel flashed as it rose to the sun, and when he pulled the line eagerly, alas! both fish and hook were gone! At sunset he had caught nothing and wandered homeward disconsolate. Meeting his brother, he cried:

'What of thy Luck, my brother?' And Hoderi answered lowering and sullen:

'All day have I been on the mountain, and whenever I drew my bow, my arrow missed its mark! Take back thy miserable bow, and give me my Sea-Luck again!'

When Howori confessed that the hook was lost, his brother fell into a terrible rage, and to all Howori's words of sorrow cried out wrathfully: 'Find me my Hook again!'

Howori left him, and to appease his brother, took his own



precious sword, and breaking it into many pieces, beat them into fish-hooks of all shapes and sizes, and offered them to Hoderi. But this angered him the more, and flinging them furiously from him, he cried out: 'Bring me mine own Gift again, before I slay thee!'

So Howori, despairing, went and sat sadly by the long sea waves, when, behold! he saw a tall and stately old man approaching. He had coal-black shining eyes, and eye-brows which hid his face, and to his long flowing beard and round his girdle hung shells and strands of dark-green seaweed. The Ancient One of the Sea enquired of him, saying: 'Why dost thou grieve here?'

Howori answered straight, 'My brother seeks my life, for I have lost his magic hook in the sea!'

The old man answered, smiling strangely,

'Truly it is a hard thing to find what the sea holds!' and as he spoke his eyes became sparks of fire, and Howori felt them pierce his heart, so that he fell down and worshipped. The Old Man said: 'If thou wilt follow my words thou shalt not die, and I will give thee a new kingdom to rule over.'

He then threw his comb to the ground, and it became a multitudinous clump of bamboos, out of which he wove a

basket with fine meshes and cast it on the waves. Then he said to Howori:

'Leap! and trust in the gods!'

He leapt on the frail raft, and it floated out to sea, and the blue waves crisped and curled about it as the west wind ruffled the water, and all around was the warm sweet-smelling foam and the glory of the summer day.

A strange drowsiness overcame Howori—the blue Ocean seemed like a Mother to him—he longed to lie on her breast, and he cuddled down on his raft, and watched the long roll of the waves rising round him, and the white gulls circling in the blue dome above. He forgot his brother, his home, and all his troubles, and as he lay lapped in a strange content, he felt himself sinking—sinking—through crystal-clear depths, while on every side of him rose azure walls, stretching upward to the ever lessening daylight, till it seemed like a star overhead. Then his raft grounded, and he awoke on the Pleasant Shore, and behold! before him, at the bottom of the sea, stretched the Ocean Road.

Then the Prince sprang to his feet with a laugh of delight, and set out on his new adventure with uplifted heart, ready for all that might befall.

Full of wonder he followed the Road—on all sides were sea-blooms rich and rare, little glens of sand, where silver pearl shells glittered, bright flashings through purple shadows, among gray and branching forests, and at his feet the deep-green seaweed gently swaying. And so he wandered on, over pleasant valleys and hills, until he reached a mighty Palace, standing alone, with battlements and turrets and stately towers—beautiful as a palace in a dream.

Before the gate was a well, and beside the well grew a many-branched cassia tree, with wide-spreading leafy boughs.

Now Howori could not tell what manner of gods dwelt in this place, so he hid himself among the branches of the cassia tree.

Presently came out from the gate of the palace a wonderful maiden in blue and crimson robes, with necklaces of coral and pearls, and a diadem of rare shells crowning the soft hair, which fell round her like a veil. She held in her hand a jewelled pitcher, which she took to the well to fill. As she looked down into the water, another face gazed up at her—not her own—but the smiling face of a man. Startled, she let the pitcher fall, and looking round, she beheld a

stranger among the leaves of the cassia tree. Howori called to her softly, but she fled, and running hastily to her father, said:

'There is a rare stranger at our gates, prithee go out and speak to him.'

Then the God of the Ocean arose, gathering up his robes of gold and jewels, and went to meet him. Bowing low he said:—

'Who art thou, O stranger, and how didst thou descend hither?' Prince Fire-Fade replied:

'I am the Grandchild of the great Sun-Goddess, and I came hither on a raft which sank with me through the waves; wherefore I claim your hospitality, for I am a stranger in this land.'

When the God of the Ocean heard who was his guest, he hastened to pay him great honour, and led him into the palace, and prepared for him a banquet of all kinds of delicate sea-dishes. Then he seated him upon an eight-fold cushion of sea-asses' skins, and his beautiful daughter, Toyotama, or Rich-Jewel, waited on him.

But the Prince could neither eat nor drink for gazing on her charms and exquisite grace, and when the feast was ended, he begged the King to give him the Princess for his

wife. The old God readily consented, for said he: 'It is a great honour and joy, that the Heavenly Grandchild should come to visit me here.'

So Prince Fire-Fade and Princess Toyo-tama lived in the Sea-God's palace in a dream of perfect content. Every hour brought some new wonder for Howori; and day after day slipped by, shrouded in the blue mystery of the Ocean. Sometimes he would seem to hear above him the knock-knock of the waves upon some rocky shore, beating on a sleeping world. Below, the enchanted deep was alight with visions of beauty—green pennons waving on a golden ground, dainty maids laughing and hiding among rocks, where crimson flowers grew. Dimly the daylight filtering through the waves would wax and wane, and like a dim reflection were the memories of past days. He learned to know the strange creatures of the sea, and to dive like an arrow through the sapphire depths, to hunt through forests and to shun the underground caves where the Storms lay bound. And he stayed with them there for three years, in perfect happiness.

One day his wife questioned him about the great world above the sea. Then he told her of the green earth and the

sunlight on the mountains; and his heart leapt when he spoke of fresh breezes silvering the long grass and of woods of rose-red azaleas and dark cryptomerias. A sudden homesick longing seized him, as he thought of his parents and his own dear Land of Sunrise. So he sighed deeply.

The God of the Ocean saw how Howori sat and sighed, and said to him:

'My son, what is thy sorrow? Have we wearied thee here, and dost thou long for thine own Land?'

He answered: 'My father, alas! my heart melts with desire to see my country again! But I shall never return thither.' Then he told him of his brother's deadly quarrel, and of the loss of the magic hook.

The Sea-God, listening, was filled with pity, and summoned all the fishes of the sea, broad of fin and narrow of fin, great and small, and enquired of the hook. But they could tell him nothing, until one said:

'The Red Lady (red mullet) has had a sore mouth for some time past, perhaps she can tell us!' They searched for the Red Lady, and when she was found, behold, in her mouth was the hook hidden!

Then the Sea-God brought forth two gleaming crystal

balls, the Jewels of the Tides, shining like dragons' eyes and seething with an inward white-hot fire, saying to Howori:—

'When thou seest thy brother again in thine own land, give him first his magic hook, and say, '*A hook of Ruin, a hook of Poverty, a hook of Downfall!*' If he should try to do thee hurt, take this Jewel of the Rising Tide, and the waves of the sea will flow in over the land, higher and higher, and will swallow him, wherever he may seek for refuge. Should he cry for mercy, hold up the Jewel of the Ebb-Tide, and the waters will sink through the earth and go back to their own place.'

So Howori took them gratefully, and bade a sorrowful farewell to his wife, promising he would soon return to her. But she wept silently, saying:

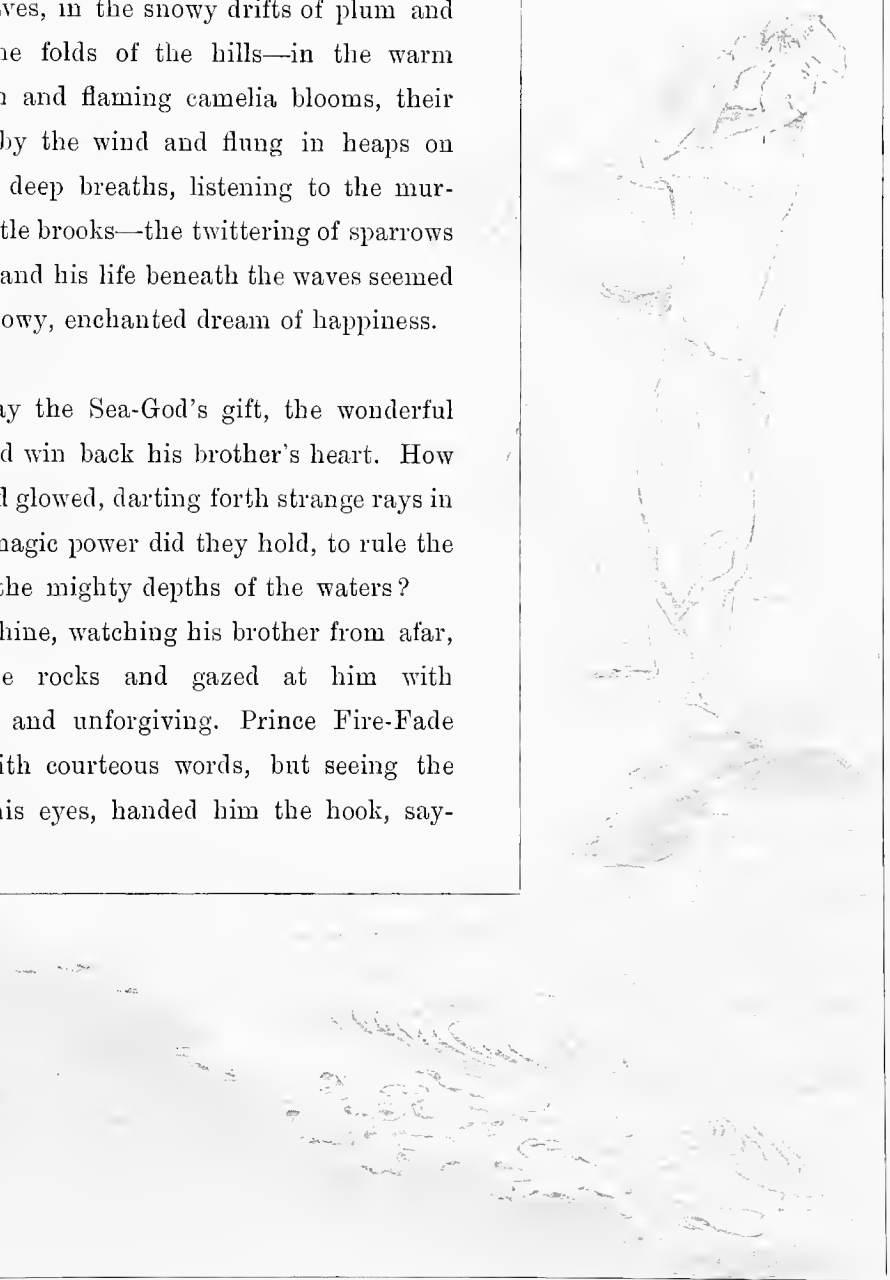
'Nay, I know well thou wilt not return hither, but if thou dost remember me in thine own land, build me a little house, close to the beach, and thatch it with cormorants' feathers, and I shall follow thee—only do not seek me until I call thee, or I shall lose thee for ever!'

And Howori comforted her and promised to do as she desired.

Then a sea-monster bore him in one day to the upper earth, and he saw once more the blue mountains of his own land, the white glow of the sun on the horizon, and the infinite tenderness of the sky. How he rejoiced in the whispering of the leaves, in the snowy drifts of plum and cherry blossom in the folds of the hills—in the warm crimson of the peach and flaming camelia blooms, their petals whirled aloft by the wind and flung in heaps on the grass. He drew deep breaths, listening to the murmurous plashing of little brooks—the twittering of sparrows feeding their young—and his life beneath the waves seemed like a Dream—a shadowy, enchanted dream of happiness.

But in his hand lay the Sea-God's gift, the wonderful talisman which should win back his brother's heart. How the balls trembled and glowed, darting forth strange rays in the sunlight! What magic power did they hold, to rule the restless sea, and stir the mighty depths of the waters?

Now Prince Fire-Shine, watching his brother from afar, stood up among the rocks and gazed at him with wrathful eyes, sullen and unforgiving. Prince Fire-Fade went to meet him with courteous words, but seeing the gleam of hatred in his eyes, handed him the hook, say-



ing: 'A hook of Ruin, a hook of Poverty, a hook of Downfall!'

In his fury Prince Fire-Shine drew his sword; then Howori held up the Jewel of the Rising Tide, placing it on his forehead.

Straightway the waves of the sea, and the floods of the lakes and river-mouths rose and rose, flowing over all the land, while Hoderi, amazed and alarmed, fled before them from height to height. The waters pursued, relentless, seeking to swallow him. He struggled desperately up the steep mountain side, but when he reached the summit the tide had covered the mountain; he then climbed to the top of the loftiest tree—but in vain; the strange waves still rose around him. At last in his extremity, seeing this marvel was from the gods, he called on his brother for mercy.

Howori straightway held out the Jewel of the Ebb-Tide, and the waters began to sink.

Hoderi fell down before him, saying: 'Spare me now, and I and my children will be thy servants for evermore!' So Howori spared him, and his children's children serve the sons of Howori. And they are the Hayoto who guard the palace gates to this day.

Prince Fire-Fade had not forgotten his promise to Toyo-tama, and built her a little house by the seashore, and longed passionately for her return.

The Princess came back secretly, bravely cleaving the waves, and sought refuge in the little house. Now her father was truly a Dragon-King, so she was obliged for the time to take the form of a dragon; wherefore she did not wish her husband to see her, until she was restored to her former shape. But he was unable to restrain his impatience, and peeped in at the window in spite of his wife's warning. There he saw his beautiful wife changed into a dragon, and she—overcome with shame and wrath—fled weeping away.

Howori's heart was rent: he stood upon the seashore and called to her—but none answered; there was nothing to be heard but the rasp of the shingle and the hissing of water drawn through chasms in the rocks. He cried aloud again, and this time a faint wailing cry seemed to echo him. He looked towards the sound, and there, high on the beach, sheltered from winds and waves, lay his tiny son, his puckered face like a crumpled flower peering out from under the rushes which covered him. It was a love-gift left by Princess Toyo-tama for his consolation.

Then the Prince knew that he should never see her more, and holding his little son in his arms, he sang:—

'Whate'er befalls me,
I dream of my love;
The Wild-Duck fly
Far in the offing
To where she dwells,
And bring no word!'

When Toyo-tama knew Howori's grief, her loving heart was touched, and she sent her younger sister, Rare-Jewel, to comfort him and care for his little son, who grew up strong and lusty.

He became a famous warrior, the greatest of the Mikados, Jimmu Tenno, conqueror of Yamato, whose birthday is still a day of rejoicing throughout Japan.

But from that day the Road between Land and Sea has been shut.

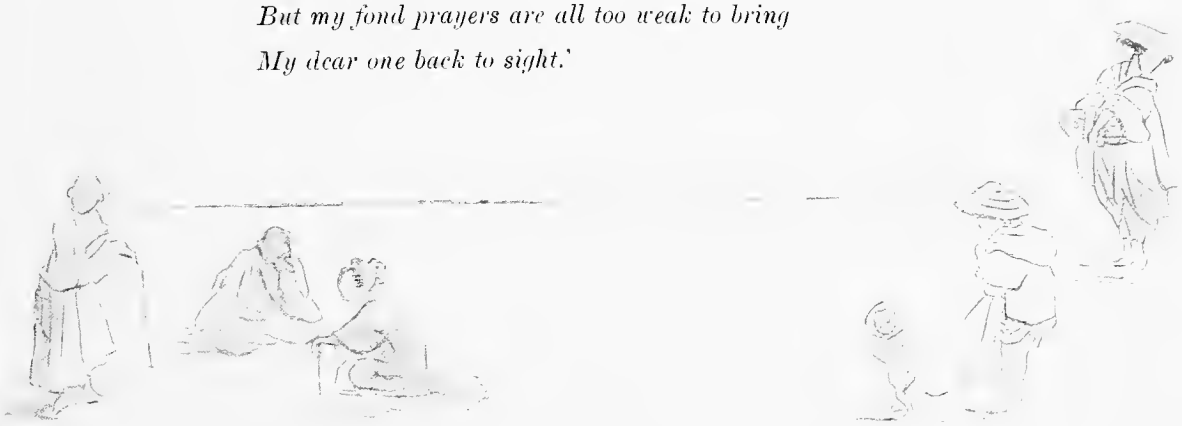
Sometimes on moonlight nights fishermen see the sweet Sea Mother sitting alone on the rocks with her lute on her knees. Her robes are pearly white, and in her hair is a crown of gold, set with gems and rare sea-shells. She sings songs of such passionate sweetness that the evening star is

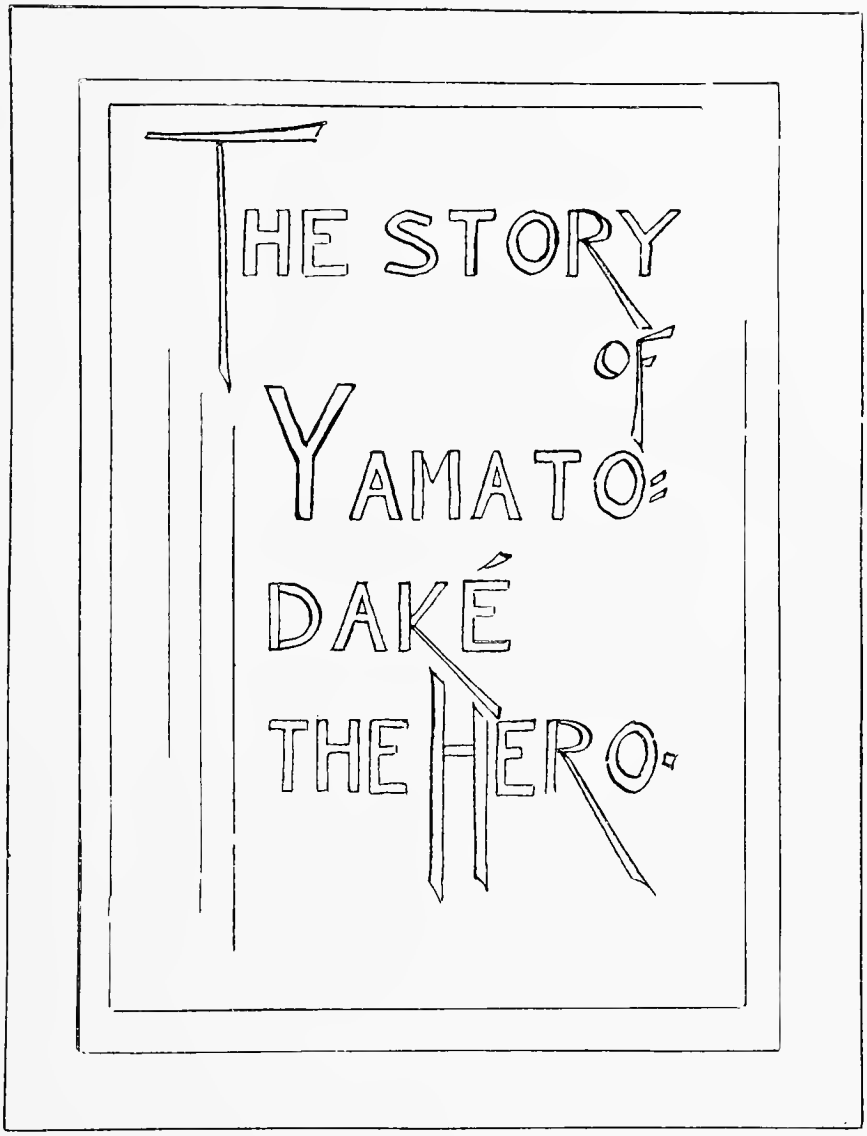
drawn up from the sea to its place in the West, and listens trembling.

Her great love is for little children, whom she protects from the white sea-dragons that rise from the uttermost depths of the ocean to devour them. It is her hand that draws the tides in their ebb and flow; and all men who live on the islands or along the coast worship her and pray to her for wealth and beauty and power.

Howori became Emperor of the land of a Thousand Autumns, and reigned over the islands of Japan many hundred years in peace and prosperity.

'Like to the mists of spring
My heart is rent; for like the song of birds
Still all unanswered ring
The tender accents of my passionate words.
I call her every day
Till daylight fades away,
I call her every night
Till dawn restores the light,—
But my fond prayers are all too weak to bring
My dear one back to sight.'




THE STORY
OF
YAMATO-
DAKÉ
THE HERO.

'The spirit of self-sacrifice, with fealty and filial piety, this is the Spirit of Shinto.'

MANY hundred years ago the Emperor Keiko reigned in Japan. He had many sons, but Prince Wo-usu —afterwards known to all men as Yamato-daké—was the fairest and bravest of them all. His face was as sudden sunshine, and his eyes shone like stars when there is no moon. All men loved to watch his gallant bearing, but what the Prince loved best of all was the glitter of his own sword in the sunlight, and he would sit and dream dreams, and long to be a man.

When he was sixteen years old the Emperor called him, and said: 'My son, look around thee and tell me what thou seest!' The Prince answered:

'I see our own dear Land of Sunrise, its mountains fragrant with blossom, and carpets of lilies and iris flower!'

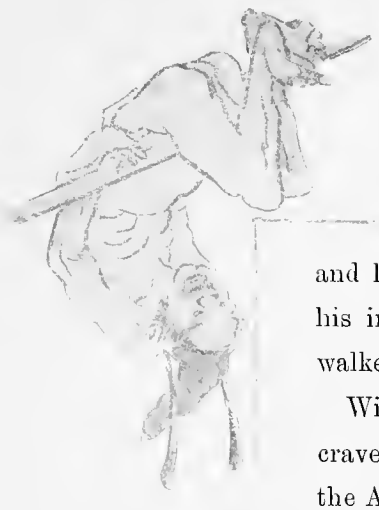
'This is indeed our dear Land,' quoth the Emperor, 'girdled by the silver sea, beloved of the gods! But for the people of this land there is no peace or comfort, for robbers infest the ways, and destroy their homes and well-watered fields. And the most terrible of these is the chief of Kumaso, huge and strong as a giant, so that none dare go out against him.'

The Prince cried: 'Let me go, O my Father, and destroy this man for thee!' And the Emperor gave him leave.

So he started on his great Adventure, with only four chosen men, wonderfully skilled in the use of the bow. He first took counsel of the Wise Princess, Yamato-himé, who was learned in all the secrets of men's hearts—and then they set off boldly for the West. Many women wept secretly to see them go, but the hearts of the Five were lifted high with hope, and they went on, ever westward, crossing fertile plains and rivers, till they came to a deserted land, where the fields lay desolate and the huts were empty. Then Yamato ground his teeth and vowed vengeance, saying: 'Is this indeed my Father's kingdom?'

When they reached the land of Kumaso, they found the great Chief dwelling in a cave, surrounded by a threefold belt of warriors whom no enemy could hope to pass. So the five friends hid themselves and held counsel together, and the Prince, remembering the words of Yamato-himé, the Wise Woman, unfolded his scheme. Now his face was delicate in beauty, his eyes gentle and luminous; and loosening his hair, so that it fell about his youthful face, he wrapped himself in a woman's silken raiment, and so stood before them, a dainty maiden, fair as a blossom in spring-time.

When they saw this, the four friends clapped their hands



and laughed aloud. Then he hid his sword in the folds of his inner garment, and bidding them stay in hiding, he walked boldly towards the robber's camp.

Winsome he looked as he wandered by and shyly craved admittance. He could sing and dance, he said, if the August Chief would but deign to look on him. So he was allowed to pass, but hid himself till the banquet was prepared.

When the feast was ready, the Brave came forth to summon his friends. Huge and strong as a bull, giant-limbed, with shaggy, unkempt locks, he towered above them all; but in his face there was a snake's look, treacherous and cruel.

Then the Prince showed himself, and held him with his shining eyes. The Brave looked on the seeming maiden smiling so sweetly upon him; and, blind to all but her beauty, he led her in with fair words, and seated her beside him at the feast. When the Brave spoke, his voice was as the deep booming of many bells, and all stayed still to listen, for they feared him. The Prince laughed and danced and sang, enchanting all, and showed no fear, though he watched and waited with fast-beating heart for his great moment to come.

On a sudden, in the midst of feasting and laughter, he rose in his place, crying in clear tones:

'Behold! I am the son of the Emperor Keiko, and am come to punish evil-doers!'

So saying, he turned towards his enemies, and drawing his sword, plunged it into the heart of the chief.

The company were stricken motionless and dumb; and the dying Brave, sore amazed at this dauntless courage, cried out:

'Stay thy hand!' And the Prince waited in silence to hear what he would say.

'Before thou camest hither, brave Youth,' said the chief, 'there was none so valiant as I in all this land; but since thou dost excel me in might, I will give thee a new name—thou shalt be called Yamato-daké, the Hero of Japan!' And so he died.

By this name is Yamato-daké known to all ages.

At the sight of his fate, the robbers fled, bewildered and dismayed; but their limbs were heavy with wine, and the avenging sword of the Prince and the shafts of the terrible bowmen slew many at the mouth of the cave, while others fled far out into the night.

The Five returned with songs and laughter to their

homes, where the Emperor heaped honours upon them; and the Prince wedded the beautiful Princess Adzuma, whose deep love and devotion to him are ever a fragrant memory in the land.

Now hear the story of how Yamato-daké went forth on his next Adventure, to the utmost verge of the Empire, to the wild Land of the Yemishi! These are strange hairy men, clad in bearskins, who live in holes in the ground, or in nests in the trees, carrying their arrows in their topknots.

The Emperor gave him a Sacred Holly-wood Spear, saying: 'My son, we know that thy face is like thunder and lightning, and wherever thou dost turn there is none to stand before thee!' So he blessed him, and Yamato-daké departed, turning aside at the Temples of Isé, where the Wise Woman, Yamato-himé, the virgin princess, was Guardian of the Sacred Treasures. There lay the Magic Mirror of Amaterasu, covered in embroidered silken coverings—so that none through all the ages have dared to look upon its Sacred Surface. There also lay the Glittering Jewel and the Sword.

The Princess came to him, bringing the Sacred Sword,

Murokomo the Cloud-gatherer, saying: 'Take it, my son, and the Gods be with thee!' And Yamato-daké hung his old sword in the branches of the pine tree where he was resting, thanked her gratefully, and marched away over the hills.

Joyous and light of heart the little band passed through a winter world of snowy whiteness, and when two chiefs met him and offered obedience, he did not dream of treachery, but followed them to their camp, for they told him of great moors where game abounded, and he was a mighty hunter.

In the morning, scouts came breathless with good news. They had seen a great herd of deer on the near slopes of the mountain of Fuji. 'Their breath is like the morning mist,' they said, 'and their legs appear as the stems of a dense wood.'

Yamato-daké set forth elated, taking with him his bow and Magic Sword, and when he reached the middle of the moor where the underwood was thickest, the hairy men his hosts were hidden from his sight. Suddenly a rustling and crackling broke the silence, and pillars of smoke rose from the ground on every side. While he stood and wondered, the smoke broke into flame and all the moor

was ablaze. With a fierce roar, great fiery tongues leaped up into the air, and by their light he saw the little hairy men, covered with their bearskins, dancing a weird dance of victory. They had entrapped their enemy, and he was delivered into their hands! Even the little black children, soft and furry, clapped their hands and yelled!

Before them, in a ring of living fire, stood the Prince, goodly and great, and hungry flames closed in on him from every side, licking black the ground with myriad tongues. So he fought for breath till his senses grew dim, and as he swayed and would have fallen, a soft mist enfolded him and sealed his eyes.

And when he looked again, a light that was not the fiery glare shone round him, and before him stood One who was fairer and taller than all women. Her garments were golden as the sky at sunset, and her smile was like the breaking of a summer dawn.

She stretched forth her hand, saying: 'Give me thy Sword!' Then took the mighty blade, and, with one sweep, cut down the grass from left to right; then turned again and swept the moorland bare behind them.

Now they stood high on a barren spot, out of reach of the flames, which licked along the naked earth in vain,

darting and whispering on the ground. But at the word of the Goddess, they flamed forth anew, rolling backwards over the treacherous enemy and consumed them suddenly, so that few escaped to return to their own place.

A great awe fell on Yamato-daké; he bowed down before the Goddess, adoring, with his face to the ground. She said:—

'*I am AMATERASU. Fire and Hate are quenched in My name. Take back thy Sword, thou shalt use it for Me hereafter.*'

Henceforth the great Sword was called Kusu-nagi, or Grass-mower, and it is worshipped in the Shrine at Atsuta to this day.

When Yamato-daké raised his head the Goddess had departed, and only a golden mist floated upwards to the sky.

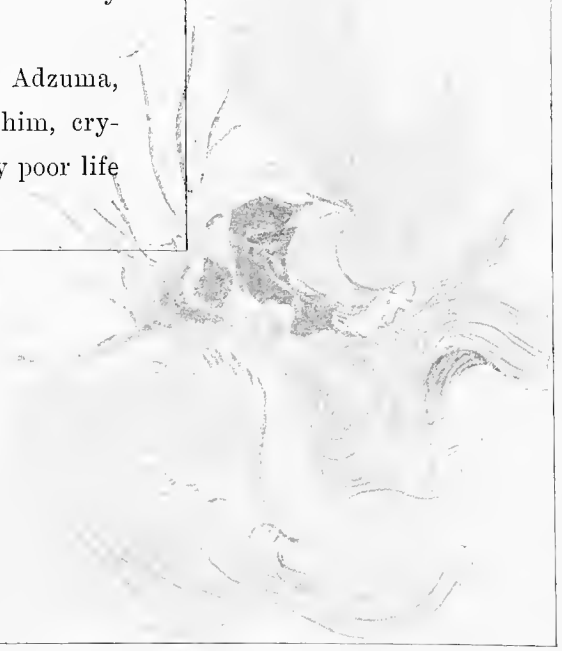
It was Spring-time when they came to the Hakoné mountains, leaving the wild country behind them, and toiled up evergreen slopes, through solemn aisles of mossy mountain-pines. They passed through deep clefts, where pink and purple rocks shut out the sky, and drank at foaming torrents falling into blue lakes, cradled in the laps of the hills. To the East lay the sea, fringed with

silver surf, and in and out of little bays sailed countless tiny fishing boats. And they saw before them a fairy land, wrapped in an azure mantle, shimmering with rice-fields and shining threads of many streams, all silver-blue beneath a deep-blue heaven.

Soon they reached the fair Bay of Yedo, and the air was clear and still, and rocks and hills upon the further side seemed scarcely out of reach. Yamato-daké laughed a great laugh, and cried: 'Who will leap with me across this little sea?'

And the Sea-God heard and was offended, and nursed his wrath until the Prince and all his company had taken ship and were at his mercy on the waves. Then a great hurricane arose and lashed the waves to fury. Green walls, crowned with angry foam, rose mast-high above the little ship, and hurled themselves downward with a rush and roar, threatening to swallow them; while great Hands seemed to buffet them hither and thither. The sea was cloven to its centre, so low did they sink, so high were they lifted up.

In their blackest despair, the little Princess Adzuma, whom Yamato-daké loved, flung herself before him, crying: 'The Sea-God calls for a Sacrifice! Let my poor life



be given for thine!' And ere he could answer, she turned from him and plunged into the billows.

A great cry went up from the heart of the Prince for his Beloved, while a charmed hush fell over the sea. The wild gusts died away to a breath, black clouds and rain and hail passed like an unhappy dream, while the waves heaved and sobbed themselves into silence. The sacrifice was accepted.

A pine tree overshadows her little shrine, looking over the Bay towards Fuji-yama the blest; and there the sailors and fisherfolk love to pray and bring their offerings, before they sail away into the Sea-God's kingdom.

Yamato-daké had many strange and wonderful adventures, the songs say, which would take too long to tell. He sailed on ever northward with his men, past steep-walled cliffs fringed with wild duck, or broken by a crimson gush of poppies pouring down some narrow cleft into the sea. A great Mirror was hung on the prow of the ship in honour of the Sun-Goddess, and as the hot rays of the sun fell upon it, ship and heroes sailed on, wreathed in a golden mist.

So they reached the uttermost verge of the Empire, the

End of the World, where wild men dwelt. And as they saw the ship approaching—a golden boat on a sapphire sea—they fell down and worshipped, thinking the heroes were indeed messengers from the gods. Into the waves the hairy men rushed, holding up their robes, and dragged the boat on to the yellow sand. Then, kneeling before him like simple children, they offered themselves and their kingdom to Yamato-daké.

So, having accomplished his work, he turned homewards, ridding the country on his way of many scourges, and of evil spirits of the ferries and mountain passes. He came to an Unknown Land, where deep chasms yawned beside crumbling pathways, where the mountains seemed piled tenfold one on another, and wicked gods sent forth their breath to wither every living thing. Once an evil spirit, who came to him in the form of a deer, tried to bewilder and torment the Prince, until he struck it in the eye with a piece of garlic, and the deer vanished.

Another time, when alone and unarmed, meeting a huge Serpent in the way, he stepped lightly and scornfully across it. Now this was in truth a god whom he had set forth to meet, and the spirit, furious at the insult, called down Icy Rain on Yamato-daké, enveloping him in mists and shroud-

ing the valleys in gloom, so that the Prince stumbled over torrent-beds, and among crags and precipices, till he swooned with pain and weariness.

Through the darkness he heard a tinkling sound of running water: it was a mountain spring, cold and pure, and drinking of it his spirit was refreshed. He called the stream Wi-samé, which means 'Sit still till you're Sober.'

At length they reached the high pass of Usui-Togé, and the Land of the Reed Plains was unrolled before them as a vast picture. At the feet of Yamato-daké were sweet-scented day-lilies, blue campanulas and rosy azaleas, softened with tender tints of brake-fern; around him, on the slopes of the hills, were forests of young chestnut and oak, and dark shadowy cryptomerias encompassing all. Below glittered the great lake, and far beyond, the blue waters of the Bay where he had lost his Heart's Desire.

As he stood there and thought of his dainty little wife whose love for him had brought her to her death, there came a sharp pang and sudden rush of sadness.

'O Adzuma, Adzuma!'—'Alas! my wife, my wife!'—he breathed his grief aloud. And in her honour has the land of Eastern Japan been called Adzuma to this day.

But alas! for the Prince! The poison from the breath of the Serpent-God had entered his veins, and he fell sick. With his faithful little band he wandered slowly homeward, leaning on his staff.

'On the wings of my heart I was borne through the air;' he said sadly, 'but now I am weighed down, and my limbs are too heavy to carry me!'

Resting under a pine tree, he found the sword he had hung in its branches, long years before, and he made this song in honour of the faithful pine.

'O sentinel pine tree!
That lookest to Ohari,
What gift may I bring thee?
Alas! lovely pine,
As man I would clothe thee
In garments of beauty,
A sword girt around thee!'

Standing on the moor, he looked towards the land of his birth, full of homesick longing.

'O Akitsusu, Dear land of the Dragon-fly!' he murmured, 'sweetly the clouds arise thence and blow softly towards me! Thou art hidden in the folds of the moun-

tains, fold within fold, O Yamato! Let us twine in our hair thy pale evergreen oak in fondest memory!'

Thus he sang, for he knew he should never see his dear hills and valleys more. 'Alone I lay me down on the waste moor to die, and none to say a word to me!'

His mighty spirit passed away, given for his beloved Yamato as a true Child of the Sun; his memory, crowned with courage and splendid deeds, still rests like a sunbeam over the land.

When the Emperor was told of his son's death he could not rest, and all food was bitter in his mouth. Night and day he lamented and wept and beat his breast. He ordered a great tomb to be made in his son's honour, on the moor of Nobo, and, with the Empress and her children, made a pilgrimage thither.

When they came near, a beautiful White Bird rose from the tomb of the Prince and soared upwards. Within the tomb were found only his chaplet and robes. The White Bird flew onward to the shore, and they followed through the short bamboo-grass, not doubting the Bird was the soul of Yamato-daké, singing the while:

'Sorrowfully stumbling we follow thy white soul soaring above us!' Then the bird flew over the sea, and they followed through the waves, singing:

'Swaying we pass through the floods, like reeds that are shaken in water!'

The White Bird flew on and stopped at Shiki, so they made a great Monument there in his honour. It is named 'The Mausoleum of the White Bird.'

But the Bird flew up to heaven, and was lost to sight.

THE STORY OF THE GOOD EMPEROR

'*In days of old, to govern meant to make right.*'—CONFUCIUS.

THIS is no tale of love and adventure, but of life and death; of patriotism strong as death, and generous as life. It is the subtle fragrance of Moto-ori's 'Scent of wild cherry blossoms at dawn,' the true Spirit of Japan.

Now in the Ancient Writings the story of the Emperor Nintoku is this:—

Fifteen centuries ago the old Emperor Ojin lay dying, and he called to him two of his elder sons, and asked them earnestly: 'Do ye love your children?' They answered: 'We do, exceedingly.'

'Which do ye love best,' said he, 'the elder or the younger?'

One brother answered quickly: 'There is none like the elder!'

But the second brother, Prince Sazaki, afterwards called Nintoku, wise in reading hearts, saw the pain in his father's face, and said: 'The elder have passed through their colds and heats, and have come to manhood—but it is to the younger our hearts are drawn, for they are helpless and very pitiful!'

Then the old man was pleased and answered: 'Thou hast spoken my thought, my son!'

This he said because he dearly loved a yet younger son,

the darling of his old age. This was a bright and gallant lad, and at the last his father's heart turned towards him, and he named him Prince Imperial and heir to the throne.

Thus the boy was left with the weight of government upon his shoulders. He was so young and knew so little how to act, and all the while the people desired Prince Sazaki to be their ruler, for they knew of old his goodness and sympathy for the dead and his charity for the living.

So the young Prince Imperial wrote to his brother, imploring him to be Emperor in his stead. 'He that shall rule over the Empire,' he said, 'should overspread them like Heaven and comprehend them like the earth. . . . Seeing the wise man should rule and the foolish one serve, so shall I be thy servant and thou, O Great Prince, gracious and discerning, art worthy to become Lord of the Empire.'

Now Prince Sazaki remembered his father, and the trouble in his eyes, and answered: 'My father made choice of thy Illustrious Virtue. Let his wishes be honoured throughout the land.' And he would not listen to his brother's pleading.

However, the boy also refused to be crowned Emperor, and built himself a palace at Uji, while Prince Sazaki dwelt at Naniwa.

And for three years the people had no Emperor, and lived without laws or justice, and there was none to settle their grievances or defend them against their enemies.

A certain poor fisherman brought a mat-basket of fresh fish as a gift to Uji Palace. But the Prince Imperial sent him word 'I am not the Emperor,' and sent him to Naniwa. Here he was given the same answer, and on the road his fish grew tainted. So he procured fresh fish from the coast; but with his journeyings to and fro the second basketful was also wasted. The fisherman flung them away in despair and burst into tears. This story was told at Uji; the young Prince heard it, and it revealed to him how the land was distraught for want of a ruler.

So before all his gallant warriors and men-at-arms, the gentle Prince raised his hands to heaven, and cried aloud: 'Why should I, all unworthy, prolong my life and cause trouble throughout the Empire? If my brother cannot reign lest he trouble my father's spirit, let me die and give comfort and happiness to my people!' And he died there by his own hand.

When Sazaki heard this he was terribly shocked. Hastening from Naniwa he arrived on the third day at the palace of Uji. There he beat his breast and wept aloud, and in his

despair knew not what to do. He loosed his long hair so that it fell around him, and bestrode the body, crying three times 'O my beloved Brother!' At this the young Prince suddenly sat up and life returned to him.

'Woe! Woe is me!' mourned Sazaki, 'Why hast thou brought this sorrow on our house? How shall I answer to my father for thee?'

'If I meet my father in the land whither I go,' said the young Prince, 'I will speak to him of thee and tell him of all thy excellent wisdom and charity!' And he spoke many more comforting words. He presented his mother's daughter, Princess Yata, to him and begged him to take her as his wife. Then he lay down again and the light of his life left him.

So Prince Sazaki put on plain unbleached garments and mourned for him with great ceremony on the top of the hill of Uji.

Prince Sazaki was crowned as Emperor Nintoku, and his wife was called the Grand Empress.

All the people gathered together on the hillside, according to custom, to build the new Mikado a palace. He stood watching their black heads moving up and down, he saw

them dragging timber, carrying baskets of stones and wood, their loose blue garments snapping in the wind, and his heart grew big with love of them all. He pitied their patient labour, for they had left their fields just at the season of early spring, when farmers make ready their soil and sow the Five Grains—hemp, millet, rice, wheat, and pulse—for the summer harvest. So he ordered that the rafters and ridge-poles, posts and pillars, should be left without ornament or carving, and the thatch left untrimmed, lest for the sake of his own fanciful desires the harvest be spoiled and the people suffer.

They all blessed and praised him, only the Grand Empress was not content; full of angry pride, she was forced to hide her vexation in her heart.

Many years came and went, and one day the Emperor ascended the tower of his great palace, and gazed with loving pride over the pleasant land of Japan. Blue was the sky overhead, bewildering, bewitching blue, strewn with faint purple streaks, memories of dawn. Blue the hot haze veiling the distance, with bright sapphire flashes from the waters of Biwa the beautiful, gleaming through shifting mists. On the hillsides glowed passionate crimson camelias

and pale Daphnes, offering their sweet souls in fragrance to the morning air. Immediately below, a multitude of brown wooden huts clustered under the shadow of his palace; there dwelt his children, for whom his life was spent.

There was a soft hush over the city. No indistinguishable murmur of voice and song, or tinkling of tiny feet, or quivering of the blue above the long ridge-poles, or curls of gray smoke told of 'gohan' cooking for the morning meal. The strange silence oppressed him. It spoke of hot rainless summers, of famine and drought and little children fainting for food.

While the Emperor was pondering sadly these things, he was greeted by his servants with an array of tiny dishes full of dainty trifles. Fresh fish from the lake, cooked herbs and rice with sweetmeats and saké. But he turned aside sick at heart, and descending the tower, called his counsellors together and asked them the meaning of what he had seen.

They told him of failing crops, of heavy taxes, and forced labour: and the Emperor rose up before them all, full of wrath and trouble. 'In days of old, when the wise gods ruled, there rose from every hut songs of praise and rejoic-

ing! Now there is silence and mourning and the people starve. Behold, I make a decree. Until three years are passed, no man shall labour for me or for my house, no taxes shall be paid, and my people shall have rest from toil.'

So for three years, no man worked for the Emperor or for his house, but tilled their own fields and raised their own crops; and by a miracle the silken robes of state did not wear out, nor the shoes on their feet, nor did the food fail or spoil, though it was never renewed. But the Palace fell to ruin, the thatch decayed, the futons (coverlets) were soaked by the rain, and through the chinks and cracks, the wind howled at night, and the starlight filtered in.

But the Gods of High Heaven were content, and there came wind and rain in abundance, and for three autumns the harvests were good and the people lived in plenty, and the smoke of the cooking rose thickly through the land, and everywhere were dances and songs praising the Emperor's virtue.

The Emperor went up again to his tower; far and wide he saw prosperous hamlets and fields ripe for harvest, so he turned to the Empress, saying: 'Behold our prosperity! what else can we desire?' But the Empress was ill-pleased, and answered: 'What dost thou mean by prosperity?'

'Surely when smoke fills the land and the people are wealthy!'

But the Empress was still angry, and answered: 'Behold the Palace walls, they are crumbling to decay—at night is my coverlet exposed to wind and rain. Dost thou call this prosperity?'

The Emperor answered: 'When heaven makes a Prince, it is for the sake of the people. So the wise old Gods, when one of their subjects was cold and starving, it was as though they suffered in their own bodies. Now the people's poverty is no other than Our poverty; the people's happiness is no other than Our happiness. How then can the people rejoice and the Prince be sorrowful?'

It happened at the end of three years the people from all over the country, to the uttermost provinces, sent him a petition, saying: 'The black-headed people have now abundance, nor do the little ones gather up the remnants. There are no men without wives or women without husbands. Let us therefore repair the palace lest we incur guilt in the sight of heaven.'

But the Emperor was still patient and would not take them from their fields.

And the ancient books say, that in the tenth year of his reign, he at length consented that they should labour for him. So the people, full of thankfulness and joy, came in great multitudes, of their own free will, and none would be left behind. Aged men and women, supported by their sons and daughters, little children, whose tender limbs could scarcely bear the weight of wood and stones, all worked with one accord, with songs and laughter, at the rebuilding of the palace.

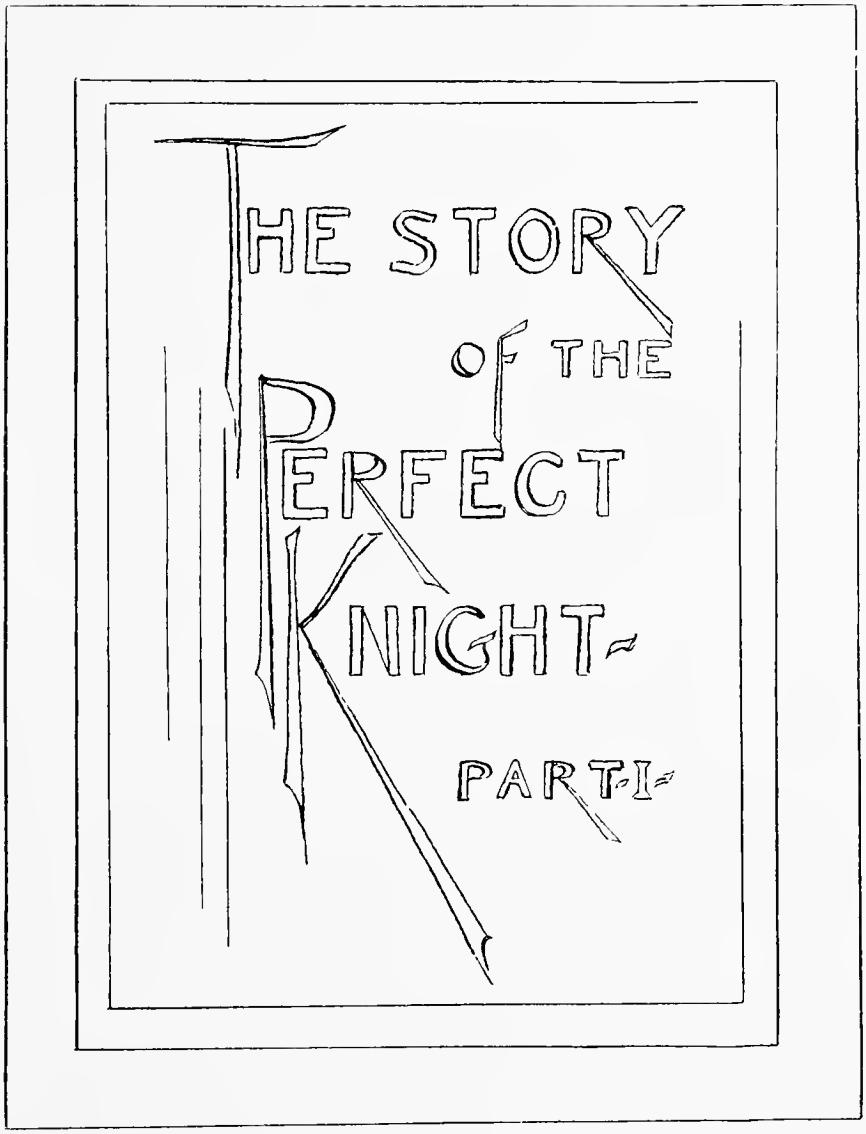
Night and day they worked, and each man vied with his neighbour whose share should be the greatest; and behold! there arose a fair and lofty palace, with beams of cedar-wood and pine, carved and decorated with great splendour, silver door-plates, and golden door-posts and pillars, the long ridge-poles pointing heavenwards with soft brown thatch finely cut and trimmed.

Nintoku did many good deeds, building embankments and bridges and irrigating the land, and he rose early in the morning and went late to rest, working at the lightening of taxes and labour. He showed true sympathy with the dead, comforted the sick, the widow, and the orphan, and for twenty years the land was prosperous and at peace.

As through a parted curtain we look down the long centuries at this shadowy Emperor, with his worshipping black headed people, and his jealous wife, quietly realizing ideals that the West still dimly gropes after: our wonder grows at this blue-robed fairy folk with their clear vision and wonderful constancy of thought.

For Nintoku is still the pattern for all future Mikados.

In what other land, save the one Amaterasu loved, could we find one Emperor who willingly lays down his life that a better man may reign, or another who lives under crumbling rafters that his people may have food!


THE STORY
OF THE
PERFECT
KNIGHT
PART I

'*Man's life cometh, goeth, scattereth,*
like a summer flower.'—HOKUSAI.

IT was nearly a thousand years ago, long after the wise old gods had left the earth,—when the Emperors were children, reigning a few brief years, secluded and worshipped as gods,—that Yoshitsuné, the Perfect Knight, and best beloved of Heroes, lived and fought and suffered in Japan. They say the white blossom of the cherry is the symbol of a true-souled warrior, so was he spotless in honour, the Flower of Chivalry, with a heart of gold.

'Woe to the land whose King is a Child!' said the prophet; and when little Yoshitsuné was born, his country was laid waste by the quarrels and feuds of two great houses, the Taira and Minamoto. The story of their fierce warfare, their constant and deadly rivalry, and the battles which they fought, is told in the Wonderful Song of the Clans—sung to the strains of the biwa on winter nights, while the moon casts blue shadows on paper windows—or, on warm summer evenings, to the chirping of crickets and the noiseless quivering of dragon-flies.

His first dim memory was of a long winter flight in his mother's arms under fast-falling snowflakes, of whirling storms on open moors, and the brushing of frost-laden branches in a deep forest. They were fleeing from some terrible danger, for his mother's heart would beat and stop

and beat again as she caught her sobbing breath, and dared not stay and rest.

For Kiyomori, the cruel chief of the Taira, had treacherously slain her dear lord, the chief of the Minamoto; had scattered the clan like sheep, killing all he could find without mercy.

Two tiny boys clung to her skirts, one bearing his father's sword, while Yoshitsuné lay warm in her bosom; and the flakes fell softly, softly—'soyo, soyoto'—silent and noiseless, and the snowdrifts deepened; they seemed like hurrying ghosts in a world of white.

Little Tokiwa struggled on with her three babes, till they came upon a Taira soldier swaggering by. His heart was touched by her wonderful beauty, and he gave them all help and shelter and his own rations for food. But his news nearly broke Tokiwa's gentle heart. The tyrant Kiyomori had seized her aged mother and made her a slave within the palace.

Hearing this she wept bitterly, her flight and sorrows had been all in vain; true to her filial duty she must return and succour her mother, though her babes should die in the hands of the tyrant.

Sadly she turned again, and at length stood before

Kiyomori in his gorgeous palace, the ceilings and walls a dream of dragons, all heads and tails, and his chair of state lacquered in scarlet and gold. Alone in her soft beauty, bowing with indrawn breath and smiling the sweet smile of courtesy, Tokiwa prayed for the lives of her mother and babes, while the tyrant cunningly watched her. Slowly, as a lamp fades in daylight, his look of hatred changed; his black heart was stirred by her charm and grace, and he cried at last:

'Thy children shall live, little Tokiwa!—but thou shalt come to my palace and dwell in my courts!'

So to her own eternal sorrow she came and dwelt there as his wife, to save her loved ones from ruin, though her heart was hot with loathing. And he commanded the boys should be trained as priests and so made harmless for ever.

Little Yoshitsuné stayed with his mother, but Tokiwa noticed that the gleaming eyes of the child made Kiyomori strangely restless; he muttered of 'dragons newly hatched' that 'cleave the sky!' So she sent him to the monastery, in charge of an old white-bearded priest.

Yoshitsuné had a half-brother, Yoritomo, in the hands of the Taira and condemned to death. There is a sad little

tale of how his sister, seeing him led away, rushed out of the house and begged to die with him. Being roughly repulsed, the child turned sorrowfully back, took out her small dagger and pierced her own heart.

The Taira chief, shaken by this sight, turned to Yoritomo and asked him if he wished to live.

'If I die,' the boy answered sadly, 'who will pray for the spirit of my father?'

Touched by this filial thought, the chief took him to the old Empress, who saw in him the image of her own dead son, and helped him to escape to the Province of Idzu, where he lived for many years, till his own day came for vengeance.

So in the depths of the fragrant pine-woods, on the Kurama mountain, little Yoshitsuné passed quiet years among reverend bonzes with embroidered capes and shaven heads. The droning of long drawn texts was his lullaby, and his small steps danced beside stately teachers, telling him to honour the Way.

He was a lonely child, though they told him of Jizo, the gentle God, beautiful and tender, who loves little children and comforts their baby souls; and of Kwannon-of-the-

Thousand-Arms, Mother of Pity and Mercy, *She who looketh down above the sound of Prayer, by whose name one may stand firm in the sky, like a sun.* Still he hungered for one human breast to cling to when the nights were dark.

But as he grew older, he became brave and wise in all the wisdom of the priests, who loved him for his scholarship, though they feared his pranks, for he was full of mischief unquenchable, lithe and slippery as a squirrel. When his brothers had their fine black hair cut off, and quietly donned the robes of Buddhist priestlings, Yoshitsuné would not, but danced and mocked at them with their own proverb 'Better shave the heart than shave the head!' and tonsure would he none.

Yet no mouse so still as he, when some belated traveller sought refuge among them. Swiftly he kindled the 'hibachi,' and crouching intent, like some wild woodland creature, would hearken to tales of battles and conflicts, of high deeds and noble death. The old priests gravely nodded shaven crowns and muttered to themselves: but to little Yoshitsuné waves from the great world without seemed surging up and beating on those quiet walls.

As years went by, his wild spirit longed for freedom. At

night, while others slept, he would creep out into the woods and leap and race with arms outspread, a small white ghost among black giant trunks. Sometimes green moons peered at him from the thickets, with rustlings, rather felt than heard, and strange shapes gleamed among the forest shadows. Wrapped in the warm caress of night, he loved to lie and gaze through dainty tracery of boughs, blue-black against the shining depths; and here, under the stars, he would bring out his hidden treasure, his father's sword, given him by Tokiwa when she bade farewell.

The sword, handed down from sire to son, had been forged by the famous swordsmith, Bizen Tomonari, who worked one hundred days with prayer and fasting, all rites of purification, strict discipline, and cleansing of the body. When the work was accomplished, the weapon was a marvel, exquisitely chased with gold, the swordguard finely pierced, while from the bright curved blade gleamed silver lightnings as it glowed and sparkled in the moonlight.

It spoke to him of all their bitter wrongs. *A man may not live under the same heaven as the slayer of his father!* —the words were burnt upon his heart, and his small frame shook with passionate desire to save the Minamoto and to avenge his father's murder.

One day a wandering priest accosted him—a loyal Minamoto in disguise—who unfolded a great scheme for the rising of the clan. When he had ended, he asked abruptly: 'How is thy heart, my Prince, wilt be a priest or warrior?' Yoshitsuné answered gravely:

'Nay, my father, one desire have I, to follow Buddha the Compassionate, and lead a life of piety!'

'Alas! that I who served my lord should see this day!' said the priest sorrowfully. 'Is thy heart stone, O Yoshitsuné? knowest thou thy brother Yoritomo lives, and Minamoto are arming in the hills?' Seeing the lad still silent, the priest drew forth his sword from under his robe, and tried to pierce his body.

'Life is a flame before the wind!' cried Yoshitsuné, and stayed his hand. 'Wait and die with me a warrior's death. Tell me quickly thy tale!'

Ardently he listened, his eyes like glow-worms in the dark: and his destiny seemed calling—calling—across moon-flecked fields and swelling hill-sides.

Weary with waiting, Yoshitsuné once prayed the gods for a sign that they remembered his cause. One night, on his wanderings, a huge rock barred the way; he raised high his

sword, and with one strong sweep cut the boulder through, as a child might slice a melon, and the two sides gaped and fell apart! When he felt the blade his wonder deepened, for the edge was keen as ever!

As he leapt joyfully between, a sudden mocking laugh rang through the forest, and turning wrathfully he spied a wonderful and quaint procession. It was a King-Tengu—a bird-like elf—with nose three hands-breadth long, strutting proudly towards him; while on either side attendant elves guarded the royal nose from knocks.

'I laughed,' cried the Tengu, 'to see thy play; a mighty warrior art thou to war with rocks and stones! Wilt thou see *me* fight? I can show thee greater things.'

At this the boy humbly implored the Tengu to help him, and with broken words he told his sorrows.

'Take comfort,' said the wise Tengu, 'the Six Magic Powers are mine, and I will teach thee, for thy Destiny is sure!'

And so for one hundred nights, under the monster pine that still stands on Kurama mountain, the Minamoto princeling learnt from the Tengus all their secret lore: the art of war, the secret of success, the speech of birds and beasts, the herbs of death and healing, and the soul of silent

things. Then the Tengu taught him how to leap and swing and sway with movements swift and easy as a swallow, and to this day they sing the marvels of his strength and grace.

Nightly he slipped out unseen into the many-voiced silence of the woods, while flashing fire-flies, threads of crimson gossamer, lit the darkness with a thousand fires. Tall trees stood sentinel with shadowy swaying branches: in and out strutted little elves on their high clogs, sometimes with baskets suspended on their noses, full of rare fruit for their refreshment. And here Yoshitsuné learnt to fence as no man ever fenced before.

Baby Tengus, winged like birds—the older Tengus moult and have no feathers—peered and chattered in the tree-tops where their nests were hidden.

Now the boy, wise and discerning, soon mastered all the elves could teach him, and felt the time had come to seek his fortune. He was sixteen, supple and slender, full of ready wit and cheerful laughter, though headstrong and fiery in his anger. Yet they said his gleaming eyes would soften into sudden tenderness, and a crying child would run to him for comfort. True it is that he was modest and fearless and wore a look of majesty and noble birth. The haunting fear of Kiyomori's heart had taken noble shape!

For the last time he rose secretly, in the dead hours of the night, dropped for ever his black robe, and with a thrill of joy slipped on a soft white tunic, finely worked, and over this a noble's dress of silk, embroidered red and gold, then in his waist-sash placed his dirk and girt his sword upon his thigh.

The old priest, whose wise and gentle teachings—*higher than the mountains and deeper than the sea*—were in his heart, slept quietly within. Taking his flute from his breast, his 'Bird of Heaven,' Yoshitsuné blew into it one parting melody, then turned and sped down the mountain.

So he fled away to the northward, with only one faithful guide, and the tale of his adventures and escapes would take a long summer's day in the telling.

Once, when attacked by forty robbers, Yoshitsuné, with his maiden sword, slew five and put the rest to flight. But in dread lest news of this exploit should reach the Court, his friend would not let him rest till they were safe in the castle of Hidehira, an old noble, faithful to the cause of the Minamoto, who received Yoshitsuné as a son.

Here, the songs say, the Prince was also trained in knightly exercises, to ride, to hunt, to shoot with the bow, and

all the use of sword and spear, in the knowledge of battles and sieges and of war on land and sea. And here, because of his gentleness and courage, he was called the Perfect Knight: all men felt his charm and loved him for his grace and daring. For his courtesy and charity the people held him dear—for his skill in arms the soldiers worshipped him, his aim was fine and true and his sword-play swift as flashes of silver lightning.

But as he grew to manhood, fiery thoughts would scorch and burn him, every note of warfare knocked insistent at heart and brain, and at last, telling no man of his purpose, he fled secretly through scented summer nights to Kioto, where Kiyomori held his court, and all his chiefs and generals were assembled. Here he was resolved to penetrate their inmost counsels and find out the secrets of their crafty warfare.

Because of the long quiet years spent in the monastery and with Hidehira at Oshiu, he was quite unknown at court, so he hid his strong purpose under a life of pleasure, while his gallant figure and skill in music soon won him friends. There was one Great Officer, who planned the strategy and tactics of the Taira, and to him did Yoshitsuné

most frequently resort. The old man held in his possession certain precious Chinese rolls concerning war and tactics, but he was prudent and wise, and the youth with all his charms could not win to see even their smallest corner.

This officer had a daughter, of a bright and wonderful beauty, and Yoshitsuné, with his handsome face and smiling eyes, soon found some favour in her sight. He would sit and draw forth yearning melodies from his beloved flute, till at last he drew the heart from her breast; and the poor maiden was blinded and bewitched for love of him. One day he whispered to her to bring her father's papers—just for one short hour—and the little maid obeyed, under the spell of his voice and charm.

With fast-beating heart he unrolled the priceless treasure, glanced through each page and grasped its inner meaning, studied the plans of battle and campaign; and with a stifled cry of exultation gave back the roll to the maiden, and bade her quickly return it to its place. Now if he could find his followers that hated Crimson Flag should fall!

He dared not stay in Kioto, but ere he left he met a strange and fateful figure, strange to all men, big with fate for him.

Benkei, the warrior, robber, priest: Benkei, whose face is still a household joy, pictured on a thousand toys throughout Japan: standing eight feet high, *black as lacquer and powerful as a hundred men!* He was brought up within the temple, but his unruly spirit made his robe a mockery, and in and around the city the fierce black priest was a mysterious terror. Men feared to meet him as they feared the grave. Never had heaven imparted so great a measure of strength to man.

Many wonderful stories are told of him: how he stole and carried away on his own back the great bronze bell of Midera, and was thereby rightly discomfited—but this tale we have no time to tell.

One of his wild adventures was to become possessed of a thousand swords. 'Hidehira,' he reasoned, 'has a thousand horses and a thousand suits of mail, another holds a thousand quivers and a thousand bows, I will rob men of their swords, until I, too, can boast of a thousand!'

The news of this mysterious robbing filled the city. None could walk abroad in safety; the better armed, the worse their fate. At last he had stolen nine hundred and ninety-nine; only one more sword was needed.

That night Benkei went to the temple of Gojo to pray to the gods for success, and squatted near the gate like a bull-frog in hiding. Many worshippers thronged past, but though his rolling eye scanned them eagerly, no single weapon seemed fine enough to crown his work.

Night was far advanced and one by one the pilgrims disappeared. Benkei was yawning, when the sweet notes of a flute broke the silence. In a few moments a handsome youth appeared, walking leisurely towards him and playing charmingly the while. He wore a noble's silken dress, cunningly embroidered; and at his side there hung a sword, a wondrous sword, gleaming with a thousand lights.

Tears of longing came to Benkei's eyes. Surely the gods were kind! He followed the youth closely till his music ceased, then stood suddenly before him on the bridge with arms and legs outstretched.

'Little one,' cried he cheerfully, 'whither goest thou? knowest thou not the Black Priest walks at night? Yield to thy destiny and deliver me thy sword!'

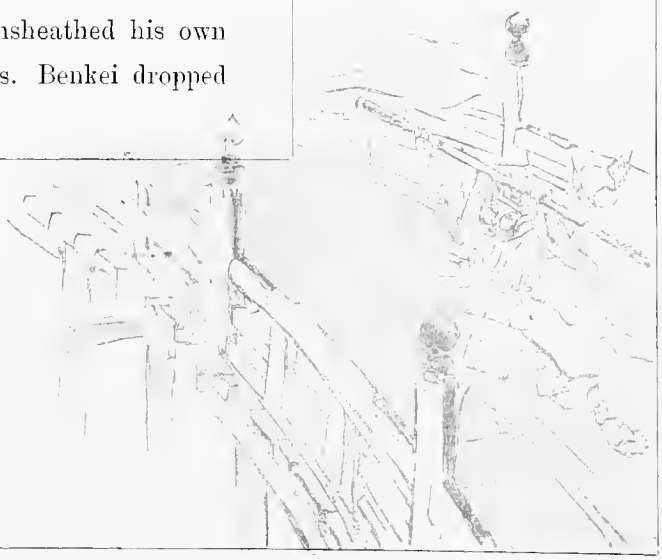
Yoshitsuné, for it was he, smiled, and looked awhile on Benkei, answering lightly:—

'My friend, a tale was told me of a strange priest robbing swords, and I have searched for him these many days!

And art thou really he?' He gazed on the giant curiously, and then—'But, for my sword, it is my sorrow to refuse thee! It is my greatest treasure, the guardian of our honour, the fortune of our house, forged in a hundred days by Bizen Tomonari, it has rested without stain till now—wilt thou take it from me?'

His mocking smile raised Benkei's fury. 'Wait for my finger-marks, my pigmy!' he muttered, and sprang forward to seize him, but the youth jumped lightly back the bridge's length and stood, fan in hand, awaiting him. A stifled roar as of a wild beast foiled, and the robber swung his sword about his head and struck downwards with terrific force where young Yoshitsuné stood—but lo! the lad had quickly sprung aside, and, poised upon the railing, watched him cleave the planks in twain. Still slowly fanning, at the second furious onslaught he leapt high into the air, the sword of Benkei struck the woodwork, and Yoshitsuné alighted on the buried blade, laughing merrily the while.

Benkei was bewildered; what strange powers were these? As every blow failed of its mark, the giant seemed to lose his strength and courage, till the youth unsheathed his own sword and struck him across both arms. Benkei dropped



his weapon and fell face downwards on the ground, expecting instant death. Yoshitsuné bestrode him and told his name:—

'I am the son of Yoshitomo the Minamoto! Wilt thou yield?'

'Ay! I see well thou art one of that eagle's brood,' panted the fallen man.

'If thou wilt serve me faithfully, thou shalt live,' said the lad. 'Rise and take thy oath of service!'

So Benkei, humbled, overwhelmed, arose and swore on his sword to be faithful unto death.

From that time his evil nature seemed to slip from him as a man might drop a mantle; and as a shadow follows the shape, so did this gigantic shadow follow his master's fortunes for good or ill, till they passed the Gate of Life which is also the Gate of Death.

The Prince bade the maiden farewell, and she sang him a sad little song:

'I have heard of the magical incense that summons the souls of the absent:
Would I had some to burn in the nights when I wait alone!'

But the Prince had no song to sing to her, for his thoughts were on other matters.

So he returned with his faithful Benkei to Hidehira's country, and dwelt near his old friend in a secluded valley, training a goodly band of followers.

Now Yoritomo, his half-brother, a statesman and a great warrior, had gathered round him many of the noble clans who would not bend the neck to the Taira yoke. He raised once more the Fair White Banner of the Minamoto, and sent word thereof to Yoshitsuné in the north.

When the great summons came, the young Prince and his gallant band rode forth, gay and brave, with the sunlight on their faces, and on their way they were joined by many 'ronins,' leaderless men, who had lost their chiefs. For the country-side swarmed with Samurai, like bees in honey-time. In the Kuanto many joined for love of the old wise rule of the Minamoto, many from hatred of the Taira tyranny, and many for the glamour which began to cling round Yoshitsuné's name and fame.

It was in gorgeous Kamakura that the two brothers met, after twenty years of dangers and miraculous escapes. Yoritomo was short of stature, muscular and powerful, his forehead high and overhanging, his face strongly marked

and lined, telling of cruel jealousy and restless ambition: beside him, the noble Yoshitsuné, quick and eager, his clear untroubled eyes alight with sacred fire, which men call love of country and leadership of men.

Yet the young Prince was all too ready to worship and admire his brother, and swore allegiance to him; a vow faithfully kept, through good and evil, through disappointment, cruelty, and most base ingratitude.

Now the issues were joined, the great death-struggle began.

When Kiyomori the Taira heard of the rise of his ancient enemy, he fell into a very tumult of passion. He marched forth his warriors to overwhelm them, and the two armies met on opposite banks of the Fuji-kawa river, where the gleaming splendour of snowy Fuji casts its shadow in the dawning. But the floods had changed the rapid stream into a roaring, crashing torrent. Utterly dismayed, the fiery foes watched the wild waves between them, where no creature shorn of wings could hope to pass. If looks of deadly hate, defiant cries, and curses fierce and deep could kill, the banks had been a long array of stricken corpses. So the enemies camped, impotent and wrathful, in sight of one another.

During the dark hours of the night, one Minamoto slipped down to the river bank, and roused out of the reeds a covey of nesting water-birds that flew with loud cries and whirring of wings straight upon the enemy. The Taira in sudden panic, not doubting they were surprised, falling on each other in the darkness, incontinently fled, and in one wild shameful flight, never rested till they reached Kioto!

So all that country-side was gained without one spilt drop of Minamoto blood!

Old Kiyomori, helpless, raging, seized his own son, one of the luckless army, and banished him from the land. Worn out by his own great transports of fury, he fell sick. His end reads like some ancient tale of the vengeance of the older gods.

Ruler of all Japan, impotent, spectre-ridden, he wandered on the shore of the beautiful Inland Sea, haunted by terrible visions. The fair blue waters brought no grateful coolness, but to his prophetic gaze were peopled with pale ghosts of Taira rising and falling in the waves.

He stood on the terrace of Fukuhara by the sea: in his ears was the din of battle; whitened bones of warriors who

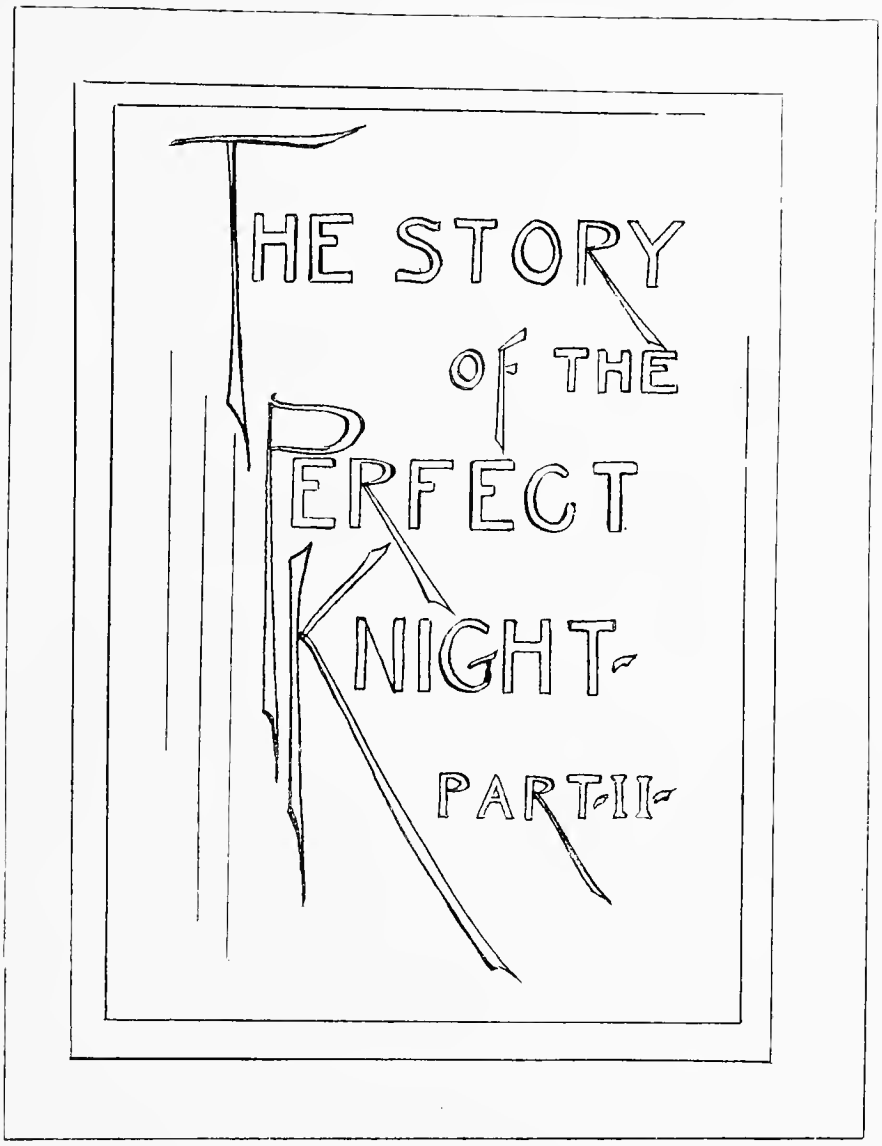
died to satisfy his insolent ambition, lay in heaps on the shore. Beside him the wrathful ghost of Yoshitomo, the Minamoto chief, treacherously slain, kept constant watch. Icy baths of holy water were brought by the priests to cool his fever, but the fire within him changed it all to vapour as it touched him.

His stormy soul knew no repentance. On his death-bed, calling his sons and grandsons, generals and counsellors to him, he cried aloud:—

'Pray no prayers for me, make no offerings, ceremonies or reading of holy texts! Only fetch me the head of Yoritomo of the Minamoto, and hang it on my tomb; so shall my soul find rest!'

His hearers were stunned into silence, till the still hand of Death brought peace to his tortured soul.

When, sixteen years later, Yoritomo the Minamoto, Governor of all the land, was killed by a fall from his horse, his head was still safely on his shoulders.


THE STORY
OF THE
PERFECT
KNIGHT-
PART-II-

'As the cherry is the fairest of flowers,
So is the Warrior the Flower of Men.'

So the old Taira died, and his son, Munémori, became chief in his stead. Among deep-toned echoes of that distant time we hear of the General, Yoshinaka the ill-fated, called 'Morning Sun,' from the sudden glory of his fame; of his brilliant victories over the Taira; his capture of Kioto, Queen of cities, enthroned among evergreen hills with her crystal girdle of flowing streams; of Yoritomo's jealousy and of his own swift fall. There is a song, too, of his beautiful wife, who rode with him dressed as a warrior to battle, and fought by his side till his sad death.

We hear tales of conflicts and sieges, of knightly chivalry and the happy death of heroes; of the noble Yoshitsuné's feats of arms, his courage and fine strategy, leading men from victory to victory. The love of his dear land and of his race, greater than all earthly loves, so possessed him that he seemed as one invincible, favoured by the gods; his high exploits and the magic of his name drew all men like a charm.

So the Taira were driven back from refuge to refuge.

But the shadow of the End was approaching. The White Flag bore slowly onwards; Kioto the beautiful was fallen, Kiyomori dead, his son Munémori a coward at heart, and the Taira, with their women and children, the Child-

Emperor Antoku with the three sacred Emblems of Japan—the Jewel, the Mirror, and the Sword—fled away, with all their treasure, to the sea coast.

In the castle of Fukuhara on the shore, standing between lowering cliffs and purple sea, the doomed Taira stayed.

Yoshitsuné rode round to the top of a stupendous precipice of rock overlooking the Eastern Gate. Far below, in the courtyard of the castle, they saw the glittering spear-heads of the enemy shifting to and fro, a changing glint of steel and gold. The men gazed down quietly; none could descend into that abyss and hope to live.

The Prince, mounted on his charger, with golden-branched helmet antlered like a stag, and gleaming coat of silver-bronze, called an old hunter to him.

'Is there a path down yonder cliff?' The old man, bowing low, shook his head.

'Hast thou seen some animal descend?'

'A hunted stag I once saw leaping from rock to rock with wide affrighted eyes!'

Young Yoshitsuné gazed down more earnestly, and marked where here and there bright grass and tufts of poppy grew.

'Loose me two horses,' he cried, 'one weighted with full armour, and drive them down the rock!'

Shivering, stumbling, the poor beasts were driven down, and scrambled from ledge to ledge, while the Prince eagerly scanned their foot-marks. Suddenly one horse rolled over and fell, but the second, loaded with a suit of mail, still found its way trembling and with a rush reached the bottom in safety.

An exulting cry broke from Yoshitsuné, and putting spurs to his horse he dashed down the precipice, choosing the narrow way of safety, and bidding all who loved him, follow. With an answering shout, three thousand warriors thundered down the terrible descent, and burst on the astounded Taira below!

At this sudden onset, the mighty mass of men seemed to heave and bubble as in some vast melting pot. A wild storm of sound arose, rending the air; the great Gates gave way, friend struck friend, and none knew which was friend or foe. Men, women and children, the Boy-Emperor with the Sacred Treasures, all in wild confusion, took to their ships and fled fearfully across the bay.

As the Taira looked back towards the castle, they saw first a dull gray cloud, then a leaping tower of yellow flame.

They had lost their last refuge on earth. Was there any pity for them on the wide sea?

While the Minamoto made ready to pursue, a wild hurricane swept over the country, tearing up great trees by their roots and flinging them to earth like straws. Now Yoshitsuné's men came from inland parts, and they looked doubtfully on the hurl and the crash of the breakers—on the ships one moment black against the sky, then hidden from sight in the trough of the waves.

Kajiwara, friend to Yoritomo, stood by giving counsel.

'Let the rowers be seated facing one another,' he said, 'at the bow and at the stern, and in time of danger retreat will be easy!'

Yoshitsuné, raging into sudden flame, cried out: 'The men of the Minamoto know only one way, the way to victory or death!'

Kajiwara laughed scornfully, 'Like a wild boar running on to the hunter's spear!'

'Wild boar or deer,' said the Prince, fearing for the spirit of his men, 'it is I who command and you who obey.'

A burst of triumphant laughter from the men turned Kajiwara's heart to rage and bitterness. He hated Yoshit-

sunè from that hour, and was later cruelly revenged on him.

Now the Prince, battling through the spray with Benkei and a few brave comrades, joyfully leapt into the nearest galley, and breasting the waves, was caught by the hurricane and in one wild rush they were swept across the sea. The hungry waves dashed up, but could not follow. In their ears was the song of the rigging, the wail of the pursuing wind, the deep roar of the breakers.

Swiftly on the wings of the storm they were borne to the further coast, with only fifty gallant hearts out of all his company. Landing at Awa, a messenger, mistaking the little band of Samurai for friends of the Taira, told them where to find the enemy's host with all their ships. They were at Yashima, all unprepared for attack.

At this news Yoshitsunè hurried forward, and with his fifty men fell on them with such a sudden onslaught that the great host were scattered like sheep, and took ship once more, believing the whole army was upon them.

So the great Taira fleet spread across the bay of Yashima, while the rest of Yoshitsunè's army crossed the strait and drew up on the shore in array of battle. Facing them lay the Taira ships, five hundred sail, gorgeous and quivering

in a mist of crimson banners. The decks were thronged with fighting men, while below were crowded together old men and women, court ladies in their gay embroidered robes, and little black-eyed children; for none could be left behind.

Now Yoritomo's order came to his brother, 'Destroy utterly, and let our country be at peace!'

Yet how let loose the battle? Should horse and warrior charge a fleet?

As the two armies faced each other tense and silent, a small boat shot out from under the galleys and glided between; in it a beautiful woman, all crimson and gold, sat alone. At the prow, on a slender pole, was fixed a fan bearing the image of the sun. Beckoning to the Minamoto she pointed to the fan in smiling defiance.

The archers read the challenge, but it was skilfully devised, for either they must miss and shame themselves, or strike the emblem and offend the Goddess of the Sun.

One mighty archer was chosen to be champion, and rode his big black war-horse boldly through the surf. Swaying with the waves he bent his bow—the shaft flew, piercing the handle of the fan—while both armies shouted aloud. The falling fan was the signal of battle, and before

it touched the water, a flight of arrows sped from ship to shore. The Minamoto rode madly into the sea, charging the war-junks as they crept near to pour in their deadly hail. Yoshitsuné the golden-horned, in the forefront of this amazing battle, let fall his bow, and stooping for it in the waves, was seized by the Taira, his armour caught with lances and grappling hooks, as they tried in vain to draw him to them or force him beneath the water. Using one arm, he quietly defended himself, searching for his bow the while, till, holding it aloft, he freed himself with lightning passes and sprang back to safety. Again a shout rent the heavens; it was most mad fighting!

There, too, was Benkei with his seven weapons on his back, in the thickest of the fray, sweeping a clear path before him with his great two-handed sword!

Hundreds of archers were marshalled on the shore, shooting volleys of arrows that fell as thick as rain, and the sand was strewn with shivered armour and horses overthrown.

At length the Taira fleet drew off, the fighting was over, Yoshitsuné victorious; but the end was yet to come.

The Taira sailed along the coast, calling on their

followers on shore to join them, but so closely the Minamoto pursued that none could reach the fleet.

At Dan-no-ura, near Shimonoseki, the Taira turned, like a wounded stag at bay, for their last death-struggle. They had reached the uttermost limit of the land, and would sail no further.

Here Yoshitsuné assembled a fleet of seven hundred sail, and like a flight of stately birds they descended on the foe. On the shimmering blue, dark hulls rose and fell, their decks ablaze with the flash of golden armour and gaudy trappings of countless men-at-arms, bristling with lance and spear, while at every masthead flew the White Flag barred with black.

It was glorious May weather, the salt scent of stinging foam was in the air. On the Taira ships—packed with all they held dear—dainty little ladies in gleaming silks, wrapped to the feet in their long black hair, lay listening to the song of the moving ripples; so few would hear any other song to the tuning of the koto again!

'The world ere long a world of tears must weep!' But now all hearts were high with hope, awaiting the 'koka-bura'—singing arrow—the signal for attack.

The arrow sped,—the war-junks leapt forward, and the sea was churned to milky froth with the fury of the onset. Each warrior stood forth, his gold-horned helmet glistening in the sun, proclaiming his name and challenging an enemy to combat. So closely were they pressed, that men jumped from boat to boat, and every deck was the scene of fierce encounters.

In the first desperate attack the Taira overbore the Minamoto, till Yoshitsuné, seeing them waver, stooped and rinsed his mouth with the salt tide, and called upon the gods of War and Water. Hereupon two white doves, sacred emblems of the clan, alighted on the Minamoto flag, while shadowy white banners were seen floating in the heavens. At this sight the Minamoto fell to prayer, while *the hair of the Taira stood up, and their hearts grew small within them!*

The noble Yoshitsuné sprang forth like a young war-god, and called on his men to conquer by their love of him, by their hope of glorious death, and the memory of past wrongs: then did the Minamoto, shouting aloud in their ardour, rise, and joyfully hurl themselves upon the enemy.

The conflict deepened; shouts of victors and groans of vanquished rose heavenward with the clamour and clash of

arms—and the echoes are still to be heard, fishermen say, on stormy nights when the wind is high.

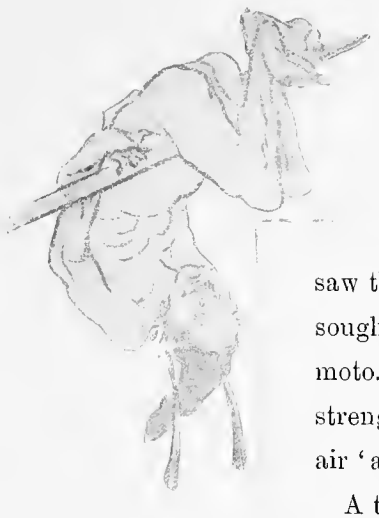
It was revealed to Yoshitsuné, by a Taira traitor, on which junk the young Emperor lay hidden, and on that doomed ship the hail of arrows and death descended. The little ladies under hatches crowded, affrighted, round Tomomori the Taira as he came below. 'How goes the fight?' they asked. For answer, Tomomori with a strident laugh seized all he could lay hands upon, and flung it overboard in silence.

The parable was clear. The old Empress, now a holy nun, girt at her side the Sacred Sword, put on her head a dark-hued garment, and drew together her garments of straw-coloured silk; then taking the Child-Emperor in her arms she soothed him with gentle words.

'There is a fair city below the waters,' she whispered, 'the Place of Perfect Peace!' And jumping overboard disappeared under the blood-flecked foam.

A great cry of anguish was echoed from ship to ship as the heroic women, with tears and cries and clasping of little ones, followed her example, saving their honour in the cold caress of the ocean.

The greatest of the Taira lords, all gold and glorious,



saw the end had come. Sublime in his fury and despair he sought to slay, in his last moment, the greatest of the Minamoto. He fell on Yoshitsuné, who, with supernatural strength, bent his body and jumped, rising sheer into the air 'across eight ships'—landing on his own.

A triumphant cry burst from the Minamoto, and at this sure sign from the gods, the Taira bound round his body an iron chain and anchor, and so, clanking heavily, dropped into the sea!

So died the Taira, paying in this dread moment for years of cruelty, luxury, and oppression: but their heroic end became them well.

One blot, shameful even to their enemies, was Munémori, who feared to die as his followers had done, and stood shivering on deck. Some Minamoto soldiers, not wishing to soil their swords, pushed him over the edge into the sea. He swam to and fro, crying out to Yoshitsuné to save him, and clinging desperately to a lowered hook. When he was pulled on board he begged for mercy, and swore to become a priest and forsake his clan.

None who witnessed this shameful cowardice could wonder at the wrath of heaven or the downfall of the race.

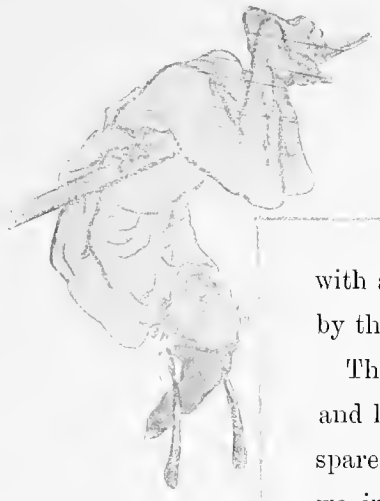
And so the Taira perished utterly, with their women and children, and there were none left to mourn.

Except a few forlorn souls who would sit on the green hill-side and weep and weep, till they could weep no more, for the gallant heroes and the little black-haired women, full of brave resolve and childlike piety, lying under the waves.

Many hundred years later, hunters in search of their quarry found an unknown tribe living in one of the hidden valleys. On examining their ancient records they were found to be a remnant of the Taira, who had lived thus for centuries alone with their memories, unknown and unsuspected of the world.

The seashore, once strewn with their bodies, is still haunted, and many hundreds of pale spirit fires hover and glimmer round the shore. Sometimes a belated fisherman sees ghostly forms rise round his boat and beg for a dipper to cleanse the sea from its crimson stains, but he is careful to give them one without a bottom, or they will bale, and fill the boat with sea water until it sink.

Even the creatures of the sea were stamped with the impress of that awful day. Little crabs along the coast bear on their backs the weird image of a Samurai in armour,



with a face strangely contorted, and are said to be possessed by the spirits of the Taira.

The great Mirror of Amaterasu and the Jewel were saved and brought by a Taira soldier to Yoshitsuné, who in return spared his life, but the Sword (not the one found by Susa-wo in the tail of the dragon, which lies in the shrine at Atsuta) was lost for ever.

Yoshitsuné was at the height of his glory, many times conqueror, worshipped by the men he had led to victory, beloved of the people, stainless in honour, fearless in fight; would we could so keep his memory ever happy and young!

But this is a true tale, and in truth the Prince, who bore no malice, had forgotten his secret enemy, Kajiwara, still less did his open soul dream of Yoritomo's cruel jealousy. But Kajiwara had poisoned the heart of Yoritomo with dark hints, how his brother would seek to wrest his power away. So when Yoshitsuné, flushed with success, marched towards Kamakura with his triumphant army, Yoritomo refused to see him, and commanded him to remain alone at the monastery of Koshigoé.

Here, hidden away by the monks, is a rare treasure, an

old faded roll, the famous letter written by Yoshitsuné to his brother, so touching in its generous candour, that in reading it the heart is stirred, even across the gulf of centuries!

He appeals to him by their brotherly love and early life and sorrows, by his devoted service—'for I have ever slept with my head upon my armour'—and by his glorious victories, by the grieving spirit of his father, and the honour of the House, to believe him innocent.

'Our country is a country of the gods, and I have sworn before the gods of earth and of the sixty provinces of Japan, great and small, that I have no rebellious spirit against my brother. Can it be,' he asks sadly, 'that the crimes of my ancestors are falling on me?'

Still Yoritomo's anger was too bitter for forgiveness.

'He shall be hoed up without mercy! Will no one rid me of this fellow?' he cried before his knights and nobles. No warrior stirred, but a priest stepped forward and started on his treacherous errand.

A beautiful dancing-girl had warning of his coming, and flew to the Prince, whom she found quietly sleeping. Hurriedly bringing him his helmet and armour, she girt on his sword and gave him his bow, ere he could be surprised.

Then Yoshitsuné strode forth to meet the traitors at the gate, and blazing with wrath fought and slew them.

But since it was his brother who sought his life, he had no heart for vengeance, but fled with the faithful Benkei, and together they took ship to cross the famous straits of Dan-no-ura.

They saw huge clouds hanging, black and ominous before them.

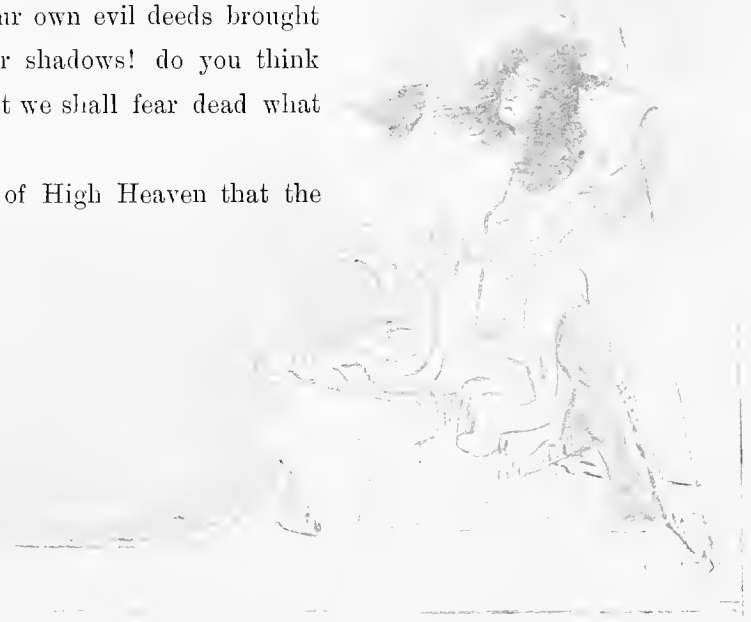
'Look, my lord, look!' cried Benkei, suddenly, 'these are no storm-clouds, nor do they bear rain-drops in their bosom! Canst thou see the blood-red flags floating across them: the air is full of armed men!'

Gradually the sun sank in the west, slashing the sea with crimson; overhead the thunder rolled in the black vault of heaven, and vivid lightning flashes revealed multitudes of ghostly Taira, fierce, resentful, menacing.

Benkei the bold seized his bow, and twanging the strings, cried aloud:—

'My lords of Taira, it was your own evil deeds brought you under the waves! O ye poor shadows! do you think that you can make us afraid, that we shall fear dead what we never feared living?'

He then prayed to the Gods of High Heaven that the



resentful dead might find peace: and while he prayed the clouds melted into a ghostly mist, with faint shadows of horsemen galloping, and the glint of swords and spears.

A temple to Amida, the Boundlessly Compassionate, was built upon the shore: and from that time the poor souls found rest.

Then the two wandered, dressed as travelling priests, and as they reached the last barrier on the mountain pass, an officer of Yoritomo stood before them.

Benkei, ever ready, drew a blank parchment from his bosom, and recited aloud an appeal for offerings from the high priest in Kioto for the casting of a great bronze bell. The officer fell on his face at the sound of this holy name, and Benkei, turning on the young Prince, struck him boldly on the shoulder, crying:

'Thou fellow, lacking manners! dost thou stand while thy betters kneel?' Then, muttering wrathfully, 'In these evil days, young men know neither reverence nor piety!' he pushed with sublime audacity through the gate, and they breathed once more in safety.

How gladly Yoshitsuné sought out his friend Hidehira! and with what joy the fine old noble welcomed him! He

gave the Prince part of his dominion to rule over, where he passed peaceful years; and one may see in the province of Oshiu to-day the quiet spot in the valley where he lived.

But as Hidehira felt death approaching, he begged the Prince to fly from his brother's wrath, which was in no way appeased, to the isle of Yezo. With his last breath the old man commended Yoshitsuné to his son, who, black-souled and basely treacherous, straightway sold him to his enemy.

Some say that Benkei held the bridge when later Yoritomo's troops surrounded their castle, and as flight upon flight of arrows struck him, his huge form remained motionless, imperishable, barring the narrow way. Pierced with wounds, the arrows standing out like "quills upon a porcupine," the terror of his name kept all men from approaching him. When at last the boldest ventured near they found his form without life: he had died a "standing death."

Yoshitsuné, within, knew the cruel hour had come. Better a thousand times was death, quick and merciful, than slow punishment and dishonour at his brother's hands. In the black anguish of his last despair, he drew his sword, pierced the heart of his wife and child, and then died by his own hand. At thirty years the brilliant light of his

young life was quenched! His head was sent to Yoritomo who, they say, was too much occupied to look upon it.

So the story ran at Kamakura, but there is another true tale which is worth the telling.

In the wild island of Yezo, where dwell the hairy island folk, there are strange things to be found: arms inlaid with pearl and gold, and beautiful lacquer from Japan. There the dim tribes worship as their only god one 'Yoshitsuné,' who came to them a great and mighty warrior, kindly, wise, ever ready to laugh patiently at their childlike ways, who taught them many things.

And they say that Benkei, whose ready wit never yet had failed his master, had made a mighty figure of straw in his own image, and laughing in his heart at the arrows of the Taira, clothed it in a suit of mail, and placed it in darkness on the bridge. While this Man of Straw defended the castle, he escaped with the Prince through the ravine behind, and so came to dwell among the folk of these wild islands.

They are but large-eyed happy children, with no writing or records, whose minds move slowly. Their eyes read nothing of the past nor dream what is to come: but in their

hearts a strong memory dwells—told from sire to son in simple faith—of one who came to dwell amongst them, greater than all, brave and tender, who gave them equal laws and equal justice, and made them know themselves as men.

THE STORY OF THE LOYAL SAMVRAI

'Devotion to the memory of Ancestors is the mainspring of all virtues.'—HIRATA.

NOW I have told you of many heroes, but the tale of Kusunoki Masashigé is one the people of Japan love best, for his name means patriotism and stainless loyalty, and his memory is as fresh and green to-day as it was five hundred years ago.

Japan had need of valiant hearts; her state was desperate. For Yoritomo the first great Shogun or Governor had, in his foolish jealousy, slain all the chiefs of the Minamoto, so after his death there were none left to rule. The people suffered, and the patient gods waited,—till Takatoki the Hojo, last and worst of the race, brought down ruin on his house.

For he filled his father's palaces with jugglers, jesters, and dancing-girls; two thousand actors were in his courts, and he kept five thousand fighting dogs for shows and combats. The champion dog was as great as an ox, and was led in triumph through the streets, when all must doff their hats, as to a prince. Men no longer lived simply, seeking to honour their Emperor, but wasted days and nights with monkey-fanciers, musicians, and poets.

Kioto the well-beloved had become a city of confusion and wickedness; the old-time hills of blossom and groves of peach were unvisited. An old chronicle tells mournfully

of 'night attacks, robberies and forged Imperial decrees: of empty tumults, shabby hats, and disordered garments: of soldiers saturated with love of finery, wearing hats like cooking-boards, and leaden dirks made like big swords: of gaunt steeds and second-hand armour hired by the day, of fans with only five ribs, and warriors riding in palanquins: while Kioto and Kamakura, the two fair cities, are seated side by side, fashioning verses!'

So it was that many great nobles paid large bribes to Takatoki and lived in the country on their own estates, each a king unto himself, with his army of Samurai and retainers; and they fought and quarrelled with one another, till the land seethed with divisions and deadly feuds.

And the Emperor—Ruler of the Happy Land of Sunrise, Keeper of the Sacred Treasures—was only a ghostly figure in a shadowy court, surrounded by nobles, gorgeous in cherry and purple, with long hair and shuffling gait telling of drowsy days; their highest exploit a book of verse, presented to the Emperor with much ceremony and deep obeisance.

Till at last there came a Man among these dreamers, Godaigo the new Emperor; and the Spirit of his Ancestors dwelt in him. He had courage and wisdom, was deeply

learned in ancient history, and passionately loved the tales of old Mikados, how they led their armies to battle, how they fought, hungered and thirsted, rejoiced and wept with their people.

While the Emperor meditated in the Palace, the gods were raising up a Hero, who should do great deeds and help to overthrow his enemies the Hojo.

There rose under the shadow of Mount Kongozan, hidden among pines, the clear gray lines of a feudal manor, a delicate confusion of pointed roofs and flanking watch-towers. Here dwelt at this time a valiant Samurai, called by men 'Kusunoki' (a camphor tree), who was poor but of royal race. His *mon* or emblem bore the Imperial chrysanthemum, half risen from the waters.

Here too his wife prayed diligently to the god Bishamon for a son; one hundred days she prayed, coaxing the careless god with offerings of tea, saké and dainty trifles, till at length the god bestirred himself, and her prayer was answered.

Marvellous visions came to her nightly, of a mighty warrior in armour, springing from their race, who should renew their ancient glories. So she dreamed; and when

fourteen months were passed (for all this while the child lay under her heart), a new sound was heard in the forest, the voice of a woman singing a quaint monotonous refrain:

'Nenneko sé, nenneko sé!
When was my warrior born?
When cherry-trees flush at dawn!
Fair as a blossom his face shall be.'

It was a man child, strong and lusty, and in her devout gratitude she named him Tamon Maro after the god.

He grew up under the summer sky, steeped in white hot sunshine, and throve through silvery winters till his limbs were bronzed and hardened and he was straight and strong as a young fir-tree.

He was sent to a monastery in Yamato to study learning and sword-play. For in these days of strife, when the Emperor was but a shadow and the Hojo rule weighed heavily, even priests were sometimes famous warriors and taught youthful Samurai their skill with bow and sword, as well as wisdom, obedience, and filial piety.

So the boy laughed and wrestled, fought and played with his fellows, and made snow Darumas in winter-time. Now Daruma was a great saint, and for nine years remained

undisturbed in holy meditation, during which time his legs dropped off. Wherefore the boys in Japan make images of snow in his honour with no legs, lumps of charcoal for eyes, and a little hollow in the body where they set a candle to burn.

When eleven summers had passed over him, one of his father's enemies who had a blood-feud with the Kusunoki, sent a strong man by stealth to the temple; and he stood behind the boy as he read, with his two-handed sword aloft, ready to slay. Tamon Maro, feeling deadly peril near, slipped suddenly from his seat; and the wicked blade fell harmless.

Then the child seized an iron weight upon the table, and hurled it at his adversary, and his little frame glowed with such a passionate wrath that the warrior dared not smite, but sought to seize him in his hands. They swayed and wrestled long together, and the man's knees were loosened; and he felt that the power in Tamon Maro was a wonder from the gods.

So when the boy held him and asked him whence he came and why he sought his life,—he confessed all, and later became his trusted servant and follower.

Tamon Maro grew daily in valour and cunning, and was

taller by a head than any man in the province of Yamato. And he was true and faithful to his word, punctual in all courtesies, and learned in the ancient books.

When he was fifteen years old and his training was accomplished, he journeyed to the house of a friend in Kagado, where a rare work concerning military art and tactics lay hidden. So precious were its secrets that it had only been won at a great cost of thirty thousand taels of powdered gold from an ancient Emperor of China, many hundred years before. He studied earnestly the careful strategy and inner mysteries of warfare, and it was well for him that he did so, for his strength and mother-wit would soon be needed to save him from his powerful enemies.

There was a great monastery adjoining his father's estate, and with its warlike monks the Kusunoki were ever at feud. The monks had heard the fame of young Tamon Maro and decided that it were best to rid themselves of this young lion ere his claws were grown.

The night was beautiful, warm, and dark, and the moon's silver sickle hung over Mount Kongozan, as the young Kusunoki, travelling cheerfully homewards, plunged into an evergreen forest near his father's house. He was in no

way troubled by mysterious shadows sliding between tall stems;—only the strong scent of pines was in his nostrils, and his blood leapt to feel nestling mosses and pale ghost-flowers crushing underfoot, and the brush of billowy branches against his young shoulders.

Without a sound, men sprang at him out of the darkness, every tree-trunk unmasked an enemy: he was suddenly cut off, surrounded, and beset.

Young Kusunoki, adroit and ready, full of tricks and feints, drew them in his struggles to where the growth was thickest; like a snake he twisted, slipping through their heavy hands while they cried in the dark to one another. He gripped one villain by the throat, seized his cloak, which he flung round his own shoulders, and thus disguised dealt mighty strokes, leaping from tree to tree in the darkness.

Baffled and furious, fearing to lose him as well as the big reward promised by the monks, they struck blindly, the boy misleading them with mocking cries, and moving quickly, light and silent, through the pitchy night, till he escaped, and so reached his home in safety.

Here he was joyfully welcomed: the day of his manhood had dawned.

Proudly he shaved his head, blackened his teeth, donned his first suit of armour, the horned helmet, the breast-plate and corselet, all blazoned with the emblem of the Kusunoki. Then, besides the dagger on his hip, his sheaf of arrows and eight-foot lacquered bow, he took the great two-handed sword, whose downward sweep would cleave a man in twain, and the bright curved blade *katana* finely tempered and exquisitely chased in gold and silver.

The child Tamon Maro was no more; before them all stood the warrior Kusunoki Masashigé.

His mother, remembering her visions, knew him as a gift from the gods, one who would be the saviour of his country and his Emperor; but his time was not yet come.

Now the Emperor Godaigo had a wife, one of the war-like Minamoto, who had borne him a son with a warrior's heart, Prince Morinaga, and his father named him Prince Imperial. The wicked Takatoki already feared and hated the new Emperor, so when he heard this news he instantly raised up another Prince of the Royal House as heir to the throne, and banished Morinaga to the monastery of Eizan.

Now was Godaigo filled with deep anger, but he was without a friend to take his part.

His heart was still the heart of a child in worldly matters; he distrusted the Samurai, who were scorned at court for their blunt speech and simple ways, and spent his strength in ardent prayers to his ancestors for the downfall of the Hojo clan and the death of the wicked Takatoki.

Certainly strange messengers of divine anger came to this miserable prince in the night-time. Huge Tengus beat their wings around his bed, tormenting him with beak and claw; the white splendour of Fuji-yama was riven by a terrible earthquake, and the mountain rocked and swayed till a ridge rose up, altering its shape in token of the wrath of the gods. Only Takatoki heeded not, but prepared his vengeance on Godaigo.

It happened one day as the Emperor stood on the mountain looking East and West—from where the temples rose bathed in blossom to the distant gleam of the waters of Biwa among the hills—a horseman came speeding towards him, riding fast like a man in deadly fear. He flung himself down before the Emperor, dusty and disordered; it was his own son Morinaga.

'Fly! Fly!' he whispered, 'the Hojo with three thousand swords are behind the hills!'

Rapidly he drew the Emperor within the palace; all

was hurry and confusion, the court nobles huddled together could give no worthy counsel. Godaigo alone remained calm and patient. One of the noble women knelt before him, imploring him to leave his royal robes and wrap himself in her own perfumed gown, and with his long hair loosened to enter her palanquin ; in this disguise he could pass out behind the palace.

So it was done.

The Emperor, dressed as a lady of the court, bearing with him the Sacred Treasures—the Jewel, the Mirror, and the Sword—with his wise old counsellor Fujifusa and a few faithful servants, hurriedly escaped. Passing unnoticed through the streets the little band walked boldly through the gates and wended their way to Mount Kasagni.

Then Morinaga with quiet resolve dressed himself in the discarded robes all blazoned with the Imperial emblem, left the palace openly, and turned in the direction of his own monastery at Eizan.

The Hojo clattered through the streets and arrived to find the palace empty, the Treasures gone, the Emperor fled! Still many had seen him leave the palace, children's fingers pointed eagerly along the road to Eizan. Thither the Hojo pursued, and besieged the monastery.

And there Morinaga, having arrived in safety, flung away his robes, and in shining coat of mail led forth his warrior monks to the attack, and drove the Hojo army headlong down the hill-side.

In the valley of Akasaka, while these things were happening, Masashigé was being prepared by the gods for his great hour. Spending his young manhood in warlike adventures, he had gathered round him a small band of heroes, who knew him to be cunning in fight and generous to the vanquished. His Samurai were all picked men, skilled in the use of bow and sword, and ready to die a hundred deaths for the master they loved.

The Emperor rested on Mount Kasagni, where many warriors and nobles joined him, but there was no one among them worthy to be leader in the great cause.

One night Godaigo dreamed a dream. He saw a great camphor tree spreading out its branches towards the south, and under this tree were two gods seated. And the gods calling to him said:

'Come and take shelter under these branches!' And the dream passed.

Next morning at dawn the Emperor related his vision to

his followers, and the old counsellor Fujifusa exclaimed joyfully:

'The great camphor tree growing to the south must mean the wise warrior Kusunoki Masashigé, and the two gods seated beside him will surely bring us good fortune.'

Since Kusunoki clearly meant camphor tree, all the assembly rejoiced, for Masashigé was known as a great chief, and they were eager to serve under his banner. So Fujifusa was sent, telling him of the Emperor's dream, and Masashigé hastened to return with him to the Emperor.

They met on the mountain, under giant cryptomerias, and the fair land of Japan stretched away to the sunrise: the Emperor, slightly stooping, serene and stately, with eyes gazing on things unseen, homeless, throneless, with no covering but heaven's sky; Masashigé, a very tower of refuge, strong, rich, powerful, sure of himself, sure of his followers, careless of death. Yet he thought of none of these things; in his innermost soul was only loyalty, pure, unsullied.

He spoke and took the oath of fealty, devoting himself soul and body to the Emperor's cause. Was He not the son of the gods? What earthly power could prevail against Him? He implored his Master not to despair so long as he, Masashigé, had the breath of life.

The Emperor looked and knew that his destiny lay in this man's hands.

When the clear glance of Masashigé rested on the motley host surrounding Godaigo, he saw them undisciplined and useless in case of attack, so hurried to his castle at Akasaka to summon his own well-trained soldiers. One night while he was absent, a quick alarm ran through the camp, a singing-arrow pierced the trees, and with fierce shouts and clash of arms the Hojo were upon them! The retreat had been discovered.

Sleepy Samurai felt their defenceless sides and groped for sword and bow; many fought bravely, but leaderless and bewildered they could make no stand, and the camp and all that in it lay was scattered to the four winds of heaven.

In the midst of the turmoil, Godaigo and Fujifusa, like ghosts in the shadows, slipped away into the woods and so escaped. The poor old counsellor lamented and wept: it was a cruel awakening after the glory and triumph of Masashigé's noble words.

'He bade us not despair!' said Godaigo, 'let us seek him at Akasaka.'

So they turned their steps towards the valley where he

lived, and wandered many days, suffering from hunger and cold and weariness, living on fruits and herbs or a handful of rice given in charity.

In the daytime they rested in hiding, seeking shadowy places where pine-needles lay thickest, or they would make a couch of dead leaves and sleep in the brakes till the stars came out.

So wandered and wept the Child of the Sun, Ruler of the Land of the Gods!

At night they journeyed, pacing long avenues of forest trees with only dancing fire-flies and little crickets, 'Hotoké-nu-Uma'—Horses-of-the-dead—for company. Tufts of blue campanula, white in the moonlight, brushed their long robes, and from pools of burnished silver came the heavy scent of the lotus. Sometimes they listened to the cry of the Buddha-bird: 'Jihi-shin! Jihi-shin!'—'O thou Compassionate Mind! O thou Compassionate Mind!' They talked of future plans.

'The Sacred Treasures are well hidden,' observed Fujifusa, slightly smiling, 'Takatoki cannot make a new Emperor!' For the Hojo had long made and unmade their Emperors, choosing them from the Royal House to suit their own pleasure.

'I am the Emperor,' said Godaigo gravely, 'Takatoki is my faithless servant. I pray Heaven for his destruction!'

One day as the rains broke, the two learned souls were comforting one another by composing verses in the Court manner.

'Shelterless here in the rain, far from my mountain of refuge!' quoth Godaigo.

'How can one shelter from tears? See how the pine trees are weeping!' answered Fujifusa.

As they spoke a glimmer of colour showed through the bushes, and the rustle and stir of the branches warned them of danger. Then, with a rush and a shout, a troop of Hojo sprang out, gold and silver gleaming, and called on them to surrender. The two forlorn souls could offer no resistance; and soon the procession marched mournfully back through the twilight of the woods. Godaigo was handed over and imprisoned in a neighbouring temple.

When this deed was known, a thrill of horror ran through all the land. The people had indeed neglected their Emperor, yet they worshipped him as the sun in heaven: to lay hands on his Sacred Person was sacrilege unspeakable! Wherefore Takatoki hurriedly announced that

Godaigo was deposed; in his stead another Prince of the House was named Emperor, and should be worshipped henceforward.

But for the success of Takatoki's plan one thing was lacking. The Sacred Treasures, without which no Emperor may lawfully reign, were in Godaigo's keeping.

Takatoki the wicked insolently ordered their return, threatened, implored! At length the Emperor, with grim humour, sent false treasures to the Hojo—toys for the new Mikado to play with.

Meanwhile Masashigé was rapidly arming to come to the rescue of his beloved Emperor, and the Hojo in alarm banished Godaigo to the desolate island of Oki.

It was on his lonely pilgrimage to the sea-coast that he beheld a beautiful cherry tree, with bark newly stripped. A verse in scholar's type was drawn upon its shining face:—

'Heaven does not desire his exile,
A faithful friend will be raised to deliver him!'

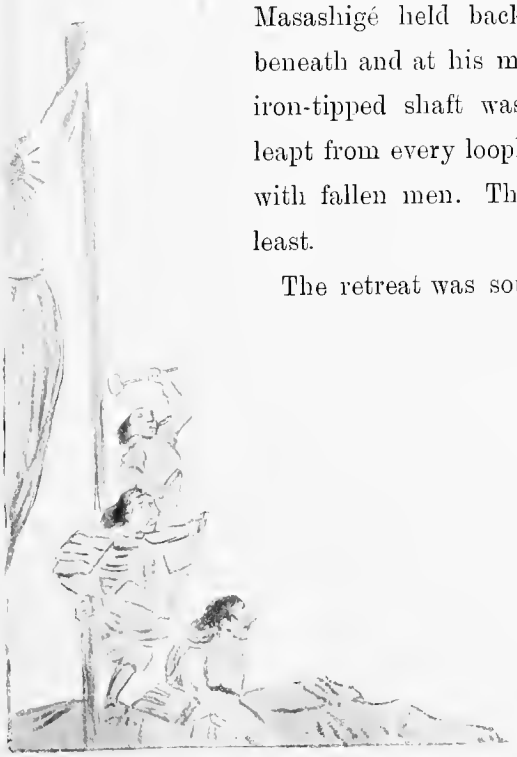
And so the Emperor found comfort, while the soldiers of the Hojo gazed unwitting. It was a friend indeed, who had ridden three days and nights without resting, to give his master one last message of hope and consolation.

Of all men Takatoki feared Masashigé, feared his craft and cunning, feared his loyalty and his power over men's hearts. Therefore he sent his thousands of Hojo against him to the valley of Akasaka.

Here Masashigé, working night and day, had raised a fortress behind his abandoned mansion. Thirty-three square wooden towers pierced with loopholes rose on pillars sunk in the ground, and round the strange building there hung from ropes a fringe of logs and beams, swinging freely in mid air. Behind the loopholes two hundred picked and seasoned archers stood, tense and alert.

The enemy marched up, a grand array, with coloured flags and streamers flying; and when they saw the frail defences, they rushed on with mocking shouts, falling over one another, each eager to be first over the castle walls. Masashigé held back his men till his foes were close beneath and at his mercy. Then, with a sudden cry, every iron-tipped shaft was loosed, quick messengers of death leapt from every loophole, and soon the ground was strewn with fallen men. The castle walls were safe that day at least.

The retreat was sounded, and the host encamped further



down the valley, laying aside their armour and weapons for the night. Sitting round their camp-fires and vowing vengeance on the morrow, the Hojo took their ease—when a quick alarm brought each man to his feet. A part of Masashigé's gallant band lay concealed in the woods and had fallen suddenly upon them. Then down swept Masashigé and his swordsmen as a whirlwind from above, and drove the huge unwieldy host through the valley.

So the warriors returned to their fort, chanting songs of triumph: but Masashigé the wise cried to them:

'Be vigilant and wary, for the Hojo will turn upon us as a wounded boar, furious at defeat!'

It was as he had foreseen. On the morrow the Hojo swarmed up the valley in their thousands, their hearts full of shame and anger. Twenty times they rushed to the attack, to fall before the rain of arrows till many a brave and noble Samurai lay pierced upon the greensward. At length some reached the walls and clambered on the swinging beams, when a quick sword-cut from above severed the straining ropes, flung all to earth, while those above loosed trees and stones upon the fallen foe.

And so the Hojo chiefs would fight no more in the

open, but besieged the fort, till famine should conquer the stubborn hearts within.

Some weeks later Masashigé called his men together, already gaunt and fierce as hungry hounds, to sit in council. There was only three days' food. They might win honourable death, each by his own hand; but this would not shorten the exile of their beloved Emperor nor restore his throne. He had a plan.

'Let each man seek his own safety, creeping stealthily between the watching Hojo, and knowing every stone and shrub within the valley the task is easy! We will meet again in some appointed spot.'

Then spoke Sakon, the mimic, one who could draw men's hearts after him in tears and laughter.

'O my lord! let me remain here alone, I shall know what to do to prevent pursuit! Only give me help to build a mighty stack of fagots!'

Masashigé laughed his great laugh. 'I know thee, Sakon, thou and thy golden tongue! Thou shalt deceive and confound the Hojo to their undoing, if thou wilt. Only follow after—we shall await thee.'

Then they built a stack of fagots, and placed the bodies of the enemy thereupon, and slipped away warily by twos

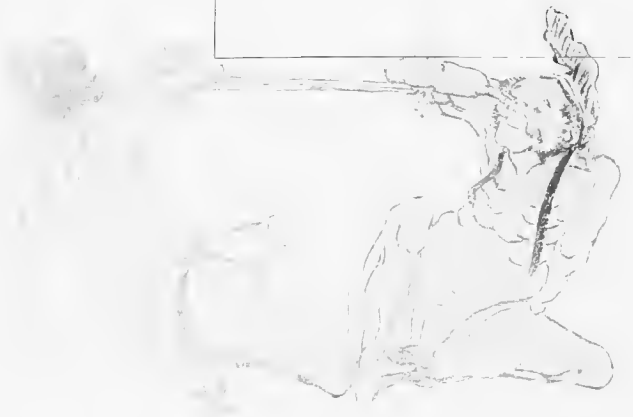
and threes, so silently during the time of shadows, that none were heard nor seen. Only Sakon remained alone with his funeral pyre.

He kindled the wood and the flames rushed up, and the Hojo came swiftly to see what had befallen. All was still and silent round the fort, which seemed a place of the dead. They climbed the walls, wondering, and found poor Sakon, seated near the pile, weeping bitterly.

'Alas! Alas! for my lord Masashigé! Alas! for his brave warriors! Their bodies burn and I am left to mourn!'

He told the wondering Hojo that many Samurai had escaped through the woods—which was the truth—and also that Masashigé and his chiefs were dead. So pitiful were his lamentations, that even their callous hearts were stirred: they bade him go in peace and took the good news back to the camp.

So Sakon fled in haste and found the gallant five hundred all re-united in the midst of a deep forest, where the leaves hang limp and still. But when the heroes heard his tale, wild gusts of laughter shook the silence, till the dead leaves danced and the little gray apes gazed curiously. In memory of this deed and in token of his love, Masashigé gave to Sakon a rare sword of honour.



Now all men accounted Masashigé dead, and his enemies breathed free and deep. Secure in his hiding-place, safe from pursuit, he could strike surely when and where he would. So he reasoned with Sakon, his friend, as they walked in the forest.

'What is it my lord doth most desire?' said Sakon eagerly.

'I would first win back Akasaka, the home of my fathers. Canst help me to devise a way?—Stay, Sakon!—what do these Hojo love, these wrestlers, showmen, jugglers, that we may fool them once again?'

Sakon had bounded to his feet: the game was one he loved.

'My lord, let me go forth!' he cried, 'I know a thing to tell these city-dwellers; none shall know me, and I will enter the fort, hear their plans, and bring back word.'

Masashigé smiled content. He played upon his follower as upon some fine instrument of music.

'Thou hast won once and dost deserve this honour. Go!' he said.

Soon a monkey-fancier, leading a string of little gray apes by a cord, appeared at the gates of Akasaka, where the pleasure-loving Hojo received him warmly; they were weary of the mountains.

With a thousand tricks and jests he passed the time and

won all hearts, till the men themselves laughed and jested freely before him. Sakon learnt but little news, only that a large convoy was expected on the morrow from the plains. Then, without a sign, he vanished from among them and sped through the woods to the trysting-place.

Next day, a troop of rice carriers wound slowly up the valley, bending their heads beneath the heavy loads. They reached the fort and passed within the gates, through the hall of arms, between the watch-towers. At a word from their leader, all gates were shut, every load dropped and from every sack flashed forth a naked sword.

The Hojo stood dumbfounded, while one might draw a breath, when Masashigé stood forth and spoke, and they hearkened to him as to a spirit. He called on them to quit the shameless service of their lord Takatoki, of whom the gods were weary, and to win back their Emperor from banishment. In noble words he claimed their allegiance to their country and to Godaigo, their heaven-sent ruler.

The men gazed with reverent awe on one whom they believed was raised from the dead, and, caught between wonder and fear, each swore henceforth to serve Masashigé and the sacred cause.

The great tidings of his return from the world of spirits

brought hundreds to his banner. And here Prince Morinaga, the hero of many adventures, also joined him. Together they descended into the plains, fought many a gallant fight, and at last subdued their enemies.

Takatoki, in despair, sent his messengers east and west, over all the sixty provinces, and to every city and hamlet, calling on all men to come and join him at Kioto. And since the poor folk had ever obeyed the Hojo, they came unquestioning, in hundreds and thousands, over hills and through waters, till all the country hummed like a vast hive, and on every highway were groups of gaudy Samurai, bright corselets and helmets glistening. Never had the country been so moved.

So the wise Masashigé retired to his mountain fastnesses once more; and there he was besieged. And the tale of that siege is a mighty epic, full of wonderful deeds, to be told on winter nights when lights are low. The chiefs would stride up and down outside the walls, crying out their name and race, and the glorious deeds of their fathers. Then some warrior from within would take up his challenge and come out and give battle, mocking his enemy the while. Many won undying fame; nevertheless none could drive the Kusunoki from their stronghold.

At length Nitta Yoshisada, the greatest of the captains who fought for the Hojo, was won over by Masashigé to the Emperor's cause.

There was a last terrible fight when those within the fort sallied out and set the grass alight, and it flamed down the valley, devouring the Hojo camp. So the enemy were driven away with great loss.

Meanwhile Godaigo, the passionate dreamer, stood forlorn on the shores of Oki, looking across the bay over the stretch of waters. Black and naked the rocks rose out of a blue-black sea, and silver-gray the waves leapt and met in angry embrace, melting and striving together. The wandering airs lifted his long locks as he gazed with weary eyes towards the gleam on the horizon, towards his lost kingdom, the pleasant land of promise. When would the camphor tree spread its branches so that he might find safety under its shadow?

A little skiff sped across the sea, and as the boat grounded on the shingle, one leapt out, making deep obeisance. It was a messenger bringing news of Masashigé's victories, and imploring the Emperor's return, when all the country side, the message ran, would rise and greet him as their true

Mikado and Ruler. With fierce joy Godaigo bade the messenger haste back to those who sent him and prepare his coming.

But the news had reached his keepers also, and they watched him so vigilantly that no escape seemed possible. One of the Minamoto, a true and loyal vassal who had followed his master into exile, now besought him to hasten his flight. So after taking counsel together, the poor hunted Mikado crept past his guards, wrapped in a woman's fine brocaded robe, and was borne in the arms of his faithful servant to the shore, and through the waves, where a fishing-boat rocked with silver splashings on the water. The gentle fisherman, only guessing at some tale of love and jealousy, put them near his pile of gleaming fish and hurriedly set sail.

But in mid ocean the woman's crouching figure seemed to grow in dignity and stature; her eyes to glow like ruddy coals; her robes to fall apart, showing the royal purple; and the fisherman bowed down in sudden deadly fear. Quiet words fell on his ear, claiming his obedience and faithful service, and the man, with his head between his knees, vowed all,—all, while his body held the breath of life.

As the dawn broke, a second sail swept over the seas,

in swift pursuit, like some snowy heron after its prey; and the Minamoto made ready to spend his life in defence of his Emperor. But the poor fisherman begged them, in all humility, to allow him to conceal their honourable persons, and so saying, quick as thought, he flung his pile of fresh-caught fish about their kneeling figures, till they were buried under a mountain of silver scales. Then, climbing on the heap, he sat cheerfully astride.

Soon hoarse and eager voices hailed him across the water. Crying out in answer that he had lately passed a boat with two nobles of the Court sailing to the westward, he prayed the honourable lords to search his own poor craft, empty, as all might see. The Hojo gazed curiously and cunningly round, but there was nought but an open boat and a solitary fisherman seated on his pile of fish. So, crying their thanks, they turned their prow to the west.

The fugitives landed in safety on the mainland, where four valiant youths of the house of Nawa met the Emperor and led him, with all honour, to the summit of a neighbouring mountain. Here they gathered together a couch of dried leaves, and the Emperor rested there under the open sky.

And the four valiant sons sent east and west and

gathered in princes and nobles, with their followers; and all the country side, wild with joy, rose as one man to follow their true Mikado. And there was shouting and song and dancing by the way as the great procession moved forward, and all the great chiefs of southern Japan, with multitudes of Samurai, came in under the Imperial Banner. Here also Prince Morinaga joined his father the Emperor with many hundreds whom he had won over to the cause.

Great battles were fought as the Imperial Chrysanthemum surged slowly onwards and stood at last before the gates of Kioto.

'Every breath of air wafts the perfume of flowers,' sang the poets of the city in her glory, 'and her pagodas stand like a row of stars.'

Here Takauji, the traitor, defender of Kioto—who ever loved to betray the friend that trusted him—deserted the Hojo in their extremity and delivered the city into the hands of the Emperor. The false Mikado fled, wounded, and took refuge in a temple. All the land declared itself loyal, joined the true cause, and marched to Kamakura, the last stronghold of the Hojo, where she lay among the hills, the fair blue waters bathing her feet.

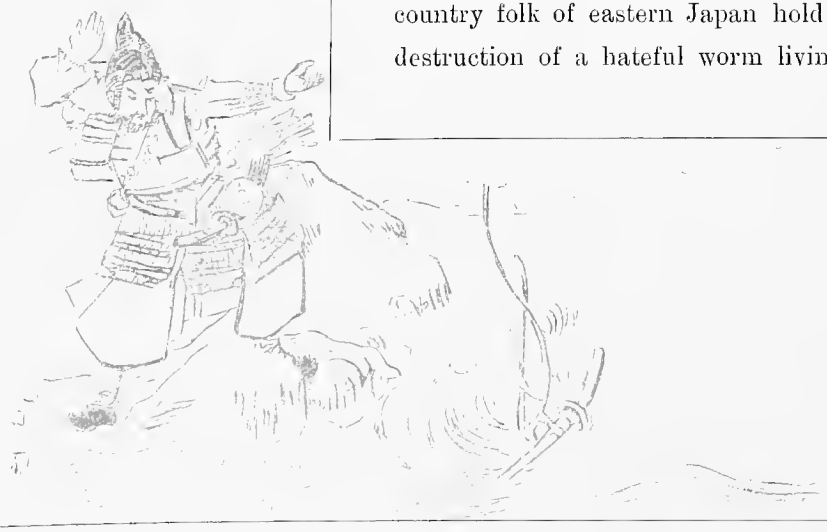
Across the narrow straits at the mouth of the bay was a great array of Hojo war-junks, filled with skilful archers, a bristling barrier between the city and her enemies.

Now the Imperial army sought to cross the silver streak, but vain were their bravery and strength, in vain did brave and doughty warriors shout defiance at their enemies. None could win into the city.

At length Yoshisada, gallant and rash, stood forth and cried aloud to the God who dwelt in the depths of the Ocean, in his palace of pearl and gold, calling on him to defend the true cause and imploring his help.

Then, as a sacrifice to Heaven, taking from his side his glorious sword, he flung it flashing through the sunlight: the great blade turned and fell into the waters. Though no voice nor sign answered him, yet that night a mighty tide swept through the narrow waters: boatloads of Hojo archers were carried out to sea, and across the shallow straits the army passed and entered the golden city. Takatoki, the wicked, with many hundred followers, fled afar and ended his miserable days by his own hand.

So the Hojo rule was destroyed; but to this day the country folk of eastern Japan hold a yearly feast for the destruction of a hateful worm living in the earth, which



they have named the 'Hojo worm,' in token of their abhorrence of the evil wrought upon their Emperor.

The great day dawned when the wandering Emperor should come into his own again, and Masashige, wise and brave, rode out to meet his master with his seven thousand seasoned warriors behind him. Godaigo, remembering his great services, received him with high honour.

'It is through thy strength and 'perfect loyalty,' said he, 'that we have prevailed against our enemies.' The strong heart of Masashigé overflowed.

'Victory has followed our arms,' he answered humbly, 'for the Spirit of the Emperor was with us.'

So the great procession swept solemnly towards Kioto, in countless columns, winding in and out among the hills, in ever-shifting light and shadow. At its head, by the Emperor's command, rode the valiant Masashige, and the worshipping crowds, wild with joy, believed that the golden age of the gods was come again: that the Emperor's mantle should cover them and bring to all safety and happiness.

The pious and scholarly Godaigo was in very truth convinced that his power was from heaven, that peace and

prosperity would follow in his footsteps; that over desolate fields where wolves had roamed unchecked, and rice crops failed, peace would come with healing and brood over the troubled land.

All the great warriors who had fought and bled for him gathered round his throne, hoping that in the glory of his power he would make them his trusted friends and counsellors.

And, for a space, the people were content and went once more to visit their groves of plum and cherry blossom in the spring time, and iris fields, purple and white.

Meanwhile the Emperor, forgetful of his people, was sending far and wide for all the wonders of the earth to fill his palace; birds and beasts, strange and rare; stones and jewels from the centre of the earth; works of art from distant lands: like a child, rejoicing in strange toys. He, who had been brave and full of majesty throughout all his wanderings, forgot those whose blood had raised him to the throne, left them in the outer courts of the palace and rewarded nobles of the Court, sprung like himself from godlike ancestors, by whom a well-turned verse was reckoned a greater deed than the taking of a city.

To the wise Masashigé were given three provinces, already won by his own sword, and to Yoshisada two; but the greatest reward of all, Kuanto, rich in rice fields, well watered by streams, was bestowed upon the traitor Takauji. Godaigo, though learned in ancient writings, knew little of the world of men, and trusted Takauji to his own undoing.

So the traitor grew in riches and power, and forgot the generous Emperor, forgot the hand that raised him, forgot his oath and duty. He named himself Shogun, or Governor of Japan, as the Hojo had done before him, and would take no orders from the Court. He sent the Emperor, in answer to his summons, a sackful of wonders for his museum.

Then Godaigo's eyes were opened; he heard of Takauji's insolence with horror, declared him a rebel, and bestowed the Sword of Justice upon Yoshisada to punish evil-doers.

Meanwhile, amid turmoils and battles, Takauji advanced upon Kioto, and conquered it, while the Emperor with his train of nobles escaped to Eizan.

Then Masashigé and his faithful Sakon determined to win back the city by cunning, and spare its pavilions and groves, its temples and gardens, from fire and sword. So

while Sakon the mimic, sitting weeping in the market-place of Kioto, told to Takauji sad and wonderful tales of his master's downfall and death, Masashigé and Yoshisada walked unnoticed through the streets, and placed their soldiers at the openings to the great roads. The rebels found themselves suddenly surrounded and their chiefs forced to fly.

Now the gallant Yoshisada, who should have followed and destroyed the rebels, had seen during his wanderings a wonderful face at a window, of such strange and exquisite beauty that he could not rest for dreams and longing. It was the fair Koto-no-naisi, a pearl of wisdom and loveliness. And all his fiery zeal against his enemies abated for love of her, and he begged the Emperor for leave to seek her out.

Godaigo, deaf to Masashigé's warning, bade his follower seek her and make her his wife. For the Emperor wearied at times of Masashigé's serious counsels, and would rather lean on the gay Yoshisada, whose bright and reckless spirit charmed his sombre mood.

The great wise chief, who, single-hearted, sought no favours, stood aside unheeded, while the brilliant Yoshisada wasted precious days in Kioto, and their treacherous

enemy daily gathered strength among the discontented Samurai.

Again Masashigé prayed Godaigo for leave to go forth and punish the rebels; but the Emperor, so soon as danger threatened, clung to him as a frightened child, and would not let him go. Eager and far-seeing, Masashigé besought, implored! To stay was certain ruin and disaster. But Godaigo would not let him go.

Soon the day came when, for the second time, a great rebel army menaced Kioto, both by sea and land. Yoshisada sallied forth with his company to meet them, and in the palace hurried counsels were held. Masashigé, wise and cunning, implored the Emperor to take refuge at Eizan while he and his chosen band would harry and distress the enemy, till later they should be strong enough to meet Takauji in open fight.

When he had spoken, one of the court nobles arose, confident and foolish in his ignorance, scorning all prudence, calling on the Emperor to remain and meet the traitor face to face. Heaven would protect the sacred cause!

This advice pleased Godaigo greatly, for, in his pious and learned soul, he truly believed that his divine power would confound his enemies.

Thus it was decreed.

Then Masashigé left the council-chamber, despairing, with death in his heart. His eyes had seen the failure of his life's endeavour, the shattering of his dreams.

Calling those dearest to him, he charged his good friend Sakon to comfort and protect his wife and children and to teach his sons their duty. Once more turning to salute the dwelling of the Emperor, he started for Yoshisada's camp at Hiogo by the sea with his own company of devoted souls.

When they came to a parting of the ways, he called his little son Masatsura to him, gave him a precious roll of precepts, and spoke grave words:—

'Thou art ten years old, my son, and wilt soon be a man. If thou dost not see my face again, this thing shalt thou remember. Never let the thought of thine own gain win thee from thy duty, nor let a shadow of reproach rest upon our name. Whilst one Kusunoki lives, summon him to thy banner and be ready to fight for our lord the Emperor. Behold! this charge I lay upon thee!'

The little lad wept and begged his father for leave to follow and die with him, but Masashigé, chiding him gently, set him on the road to Konzagon.

The stories tell how the boy, on reaching home, sought in solitude to take his life with his own small sword. His mother, coming in to him, divined his purpose and set herself to comfort him. She implored him, in his father's name, to keep his life and strength for vengeance on their enemies.

So the child hearkened; and hereafter, while other boys played with kite and ball, little Masatsura would build huge clay images of Takauji the traitor, and sweep his curved katana till he had severed the hated head from its body, to his abounding joy and satisfaction.

But the heroic Masatsura belongs to another story, and may not be told of here.

Meanwhile Masashigé with his gallant seven hundred had reached the camp of Yoshisada at Hiogo by the sea. This little band, with their look of high resolve, struck Yoshisada with a sudden chill of fear. So look the eyes of men to whom death is a sweeter thing than life. He cried to his friend:

'O Masashigé! What is it you seek? Shall we not take counsel together for the honour of our land and of thy house?'

The warrior smiled and answered him no word, but

stooping, entered the tent, and when saké had been set before them, they solemnly pledged one another, and stayed talking of the next day's battle till late into the night.

The May morning dawned clear and still; the heart of the heavens was bare. Only over the sea hung a delicate white mist, and as the curtain lifted, behold, a countless multitude of sailing boats, the fleet of Takauji the traitor. Behind them through the mountains crept a thin golden stream, a glint of colour winding among pines, with a sound of distant drums. The heart of Masashigé warmed with a fierce and bitter joy. One last great fight; then death, all-consoling death, happy, glorious death!

To Yoshisada he confided one solemn trust: to defend the rear of his little army from the attack by sea. Then, refusing all other aid, he called to him his faithful Kusunoki, and together they rode gaily towards the huge array spreading over the hill-side.

From the midst of the enemy came forth the clan of the Akamats, then the gorgeous Satsuma with their lacquered sword-guards glistening scarlet and gold, and leapt to the attack. Masashigé hurled his men upon them,

and with the shock the great clans faltered and fell, as wheat falls in harvest-time. Each Kusunoki stood behind a silver sheen of steel, so rapidly did they whirl their bright blades aloft! Charging furiously up the mountain, they drove the remnant of the clans before them and down the further side; capturing on the summit the mighty war-drum of camphor wood, which was slung there between two poles and beaten by stalwart Samurai to terrify their enemies. So the great rebel army was dispersed, and their leader sent in shameful flight over hill and dale. Masashigé, victorious, sounded the roll-call; only fifty of his men had fallen.

For a moment hope dawned in the hearts of the heroes, till they turned their eyes again to the southward. There Yoshisada the rash, duped by his cunning foe, had drawn aside and left Takauji free to land, with all his host.

At this sight the vanquished clans took heart, rallied on the further side of the mountain, and once again fell on the Kusunoki. Thus caught between two fires, they fought like giants, with such a power of love and loyalty that all who saw them marvelled. So the rebel clans were once more driven back. Then Masashigé, as a lion at bay, turned upon the swarming thousands rising from the plain

and drove three companies before him like sheep into the sea.

He hung out the glorious banner of the Kusunoki, waving it triumphantly towards his foes, and called the roll of the faithful. Only four hundred now answered the call.

The chief led them by the rocky bed of Minota-gawa where an empty manor stood, and encircled it with his men, facing the foe on every side. The enemy crept forward, fearful even now of some sudden ambush, but only the familiar steadfast few were there. Twenty times the band of heroes flung back the attacking host into the woods, twenty times fresh foes leapt upon them over piles of dead. So they fought on through the sweet summer day, till the men were spent and weary and faint with wounds.

When only seventy of the seven hundred were left standing, Masashigé knew the hour was come. He summoned his warriors and led them within the deserted hall of the manor. More than mortal he seemed, as he stood before them glorious with wounds. His glowing eyes now gazed mildly on his heroes, while he quietly removed his

armour, unbuckled corselet and helmet, and laid them aside. In solemn silence every warrior followed his example; their work was done, the reward remained.

At the supreme moment Takauji's messenger appeared. Even his traitor's heart was moved by this heroic combat. He prayed Masashige not to sacrifice his life; the clans were content, and would leave a road open for the Kusunoki to return in all honour to their own country.

The chief made answer: 'Where Masashigé desires to pass, he will himself cut a road.' He only asked for safe conduct for the youngest of his band, to bear to his home the news of the last great fight.

Then the stories tell how the chief seated himself in the midst of his brave companions, and all lifting their hands to heaven, they swore a mighty oath. Seven times their souls, bound upon the Wheel of Life, would return to earth to fight and die for their Emperor and for their country. Ten times was the oath repeated: then each swung his good sword aloft and plunged it into his own body.

So he perished; whose wise counsels should have saved his master; and rested in the arms of our Dark Mother Death.

But she held him not; his spirit, bound to earth, lived

again in the deeds of his son Masatsura and of his son's sons after him: his true and lofty patriotism is abroad among his people to this hour.

Godaigo lived on through stormy years. He died grasping his sword half-drawn from the scabbard in eternal defiance of his enemies: and so was buried.

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