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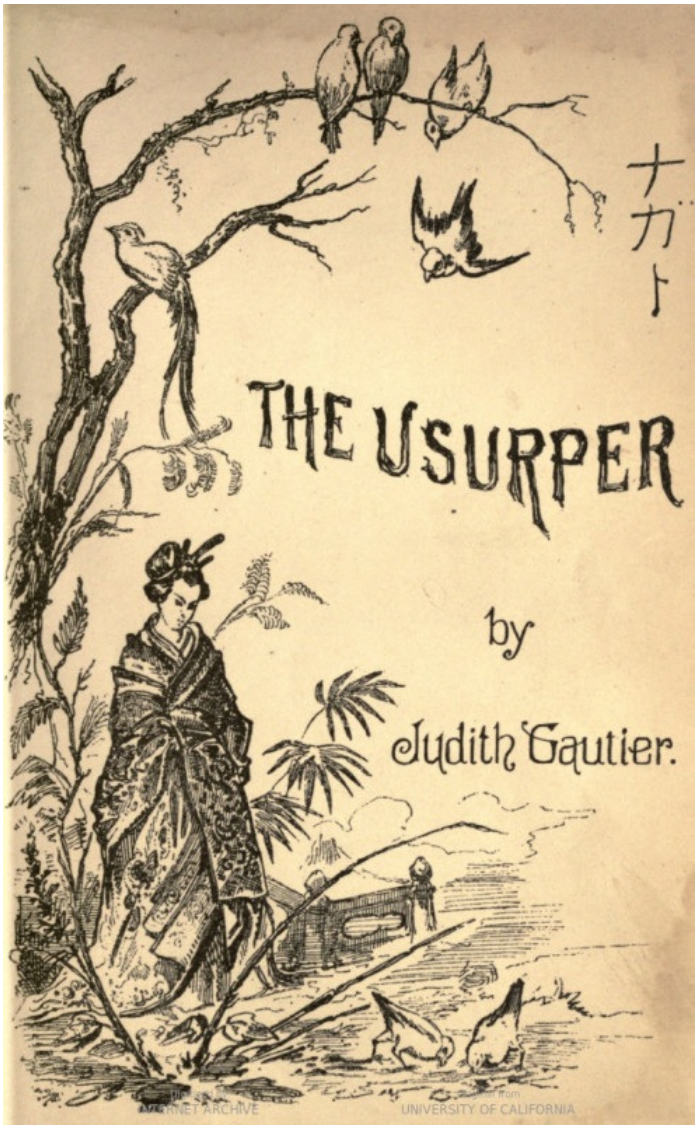

THE USURPER

An Episode in Japanese History

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

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BOSTON

ROBERTS BROTHERS

1884

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THE USURPER.

AN EPISODE IN JAPANESE HISTORY.

(1615.)

CHAPTER I.

THE LEMON GROVE.

Night was nearly gone. All slept in the beautiful bright city of Osaka. The harsh cry of the sentinels, calling one to another on the ramparts, broke the silence, unruffled otherwise save for the distant murmur of the sea as it swept into the bay.

Above the great dark mass formed by the palace and gardens of the Shogun[1] a star was fading slowly. Dawn trembled in the air, and the tree-tops were more plainly outlined against the sky,

which grew bluer every moment. Soon a pale glimmer touched the highest branches, slipped between the boughs and their leaves, and filtered downward to the ground. Then, in the gardens of the Prince, alleys thick with brambles displayed their dim perspective; the grass resumed its emerald hue; a tuft of poppies renewed the splendor of its sumptuous flowers, and a snowy flight of steps was faintly visible through the mist, down a distant avenue.

At last, suddenly, the sky grew purple; arrows of light athwart the bushes made every drop of water on the leaves sparkle. A pheasant alighted heavily; a crane shook her white wings, and with a long cry flew slowly upwards; while the earth smoked like a caldron, and the birds loudly hailed the rising sun.

As soon as the divine luminary rose from the horizon, the sound of a gong was heard. It was struck with a monotonous rhythm of overpowering melancholy,—four heavy strokes, four light strokes; four heavy strokes, and so on. It was the salute to the coming day, and the call to morning prayers.

A hearty youthful peal of laughter, which broke forth suddenly, drowned these pious sounds for an instant; and two men appeared, dark against the clear sky, at the top of the snowy staircase. They paused a moment, on the uppermost step, to admire the lovely mass of brambles, ferns, and flowering shrubs which wreathed the balustrade of the staircase. Then they descended slowly through the fantastic shadows cast across the steps by the branches. Reaching the foot of the stairs, they moved quickly aside, that they might not upset a tortoise creeping leisurely along the last step. This tortoise's shell had been gilded, but the gilding was somewhat tarnished by the dampness of the grass. The two men moved down the avenue.

The younger of the pair was scarcely twenty years old, but would have passed for more, from the proud expression of his face, and the easy confidence of his glance. Still, when he laughed, he seemed a child; but he laughed seldom, and a sort of haughty gloom darkened his noble brow. His costume was very simple. Over a robe of gray crape he wore a mantle of blue satin, without any embroidery. He carried an open fan in his hand.

His comrade's dress was, on the contrary, very elegant. His robe was made of a soft white silk, just tinged with blue, suggestive of reflected moonlight. It fell in fine folds to his feet, and was confined at the waist by a girdle of black velvet. The wearer was twenty-four years old; he was a specimen of perfect beauty. The warm pallor of his face, his mockingly sweet eyes, and, above all, the scornful indifference apparent in his whole person, exercised a strange charm. His hand rested on the richly wrought hilt of one of the two swords whose points lifted up the folds of his black velvet cloak, the loose hanging sleeves of which were thrown back over his shoulders.

The two friends were bare-headed; their hair, twisted like a rope, was knotted around the top of their heads.

"But where are you taking me, gracious master?" suddenly cried the older of the two young men.

"This is the third time you have asked that question since we left the palace, Iwakura."

"But you have not answered once, light of my eyes!"

"Well! I want to surprise you. Shut your eyes and give me your hand."

Iwakura obeyed, and his companion led him a few steps across the grass.

"Now look," he said.

Iwakura opened his eyes, and uttered a low cry of astonishment.

Before him stretched a lemon grove in full bloom. Every tree and every shrub seemed covered with hoar-frost; on the topmost twigs the dawn cast tints of rose and gold. Every branch bent beneath its perfumed load; the clusters of flowers hung to the ground, upon which the overburdened boughs trailed. Amid this white wealth which gave forth a delicious odor, a few tender green leaves were occasionally visible.

"See," said the younger man with a smile, "I wanted to share with you, my favorite friend, the pleasure of this marvellous sight before any other eye rested on it. I was here yesterday: the grove was like a thicket of pearls; to-day all the flowers are open."

"These trees remind me of what the poet says of peach-blossoms," said Iwakura; "only here the snow-flakes of butterflies' wings with which the trees are covered have not turned rose-colored in their descent from heaven."

"Ah!" cried the younger man sighing, "would I might plunge into the midst of those flowers as into a bath, and intoxicate myself even unto death with their strong perfume!"

Iwakura, having admired them, made a slightly disappointed grimace.

"Far more beautiful blossoms were about to open in my dream," said he, stifling a yawn. "Master, why did you make me get up so early?"

"Come, Prince of Nagato," said the young man, laying his hand on his comrade's shoulder, "confess. I did not make you get up, for you did not go to bed last night."

"What?" cried Iwakura; "what makes you think so!"

"Your pallor, friend, and your haggard eyes."

"Am I not always so?"

"The dress you wear would be far too elegant for the hour of the cock.[2] And see! the sun has

scarcely risen; we have only reached the hour of the rabbit."[3]

"To honor such a master as you, no hour is too early."

"Is it also in my honor, faithless subject, that you appear before me armed? Those two swords, forgotten in your sash, condemn you; you had just returned to the palace when I summoned you."

The guilty youth hung his head, not attempting to defend himself.

"But what ails your arm?" suddenly cried the other, noticing a thin white bandage wound about Iwakura's sleeve.

The latter hid his arm behind him, and held out the other hand.

"Nothing," he said.

But his companion grasped the arm which he concealed. The Prince of Nagato uttered an exclamation of pain.

"You are wounded, eh? One of these days I shall hear that Nagato has been killed in some foolish brawl. What have you been doing now, incorrigible and imprudent fellow?"

"When Hieyas, the regent, comes before you, you will know only too much about it," said the Prince; "you will hear fine things, O illustrious friend, in regard to your unworthy favorite. Methinks I already hear the sound of the terrible voice of the man from whom nothing is hid: 'Fide-Yori, ruler of Japan, son of the great Taiko-Sama, whose memory I revere! grave disorders have this night troubled Osaka.'"

The Prince of Nagato mimicked the voice of Hieyas so well that the young Shogun could not repress a smile.

'And what are these disorders?' you will say. 'Doors broken open, blows, tumults, scandals.' 'Are the authors of these misdeeds known?' 'The leader of the riot is the true criminal, and I know him well.' 'Who is he?' 'Who should it be but the man who takes a share in every adventure, every nocturnal brawl; who, but the Prince of Nagato, the terror of honest families, the dread of peaceful men?' And then you will pardon me, O too merciful man! Hieyas will reproach you with your weakness, dwelling upon it, that this weakness may redound to the injury of the Shogun and the profit of the Regent."

"What if I lose patience at last, Nagato," said the Shogun; "what if I exile you to your own province for a year?"

"I should go, master, without a murmur."

"Yes; and who would be left to love me?" said Fide-Yori, sadly. "I am surrounded by devotion, not by affection like yours. But perhaps I am unjust," he added; "you are the only one I love, and doubtless that is why I think no one loves me but you."

Nagato raised his eyes gratefully to the Prince.

"You feel that you are forgiven, don't you?" said Fide-Yori, smiling. "But try to spare me the Regent's reproaches; you know how painful they are to me. Go and salute him; the hour of his levee is at hand; we will meet again in the council."

"Must I smile upon that ugly creature?" grumbled Nagato.

But he had his dismissal; he saluted the Shogun, and moved away with a sulky air.

Fide-Yori continued his walk along the avenue, but soon returned to the lemon grove. He paused to admire it once more, and plucked a slender twig loaded with flowers. But just then the foliage rustled as if blown by a strong breeze; an abrupt movement stirred the branches, and a young girl appeared among the blossoms.

The Shogun started violently, and almost uttered a cry; he fancied himself the prey to some hallucination.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed; "perhaps the guardian spirit of this grove?"

"Oh, no," said the girl in a trembling voice; "but I am a very bold woman."

She issued from the grove amidst a shower of snowy petals, and knelt on the grass, stretching out her hands to the King.

Fide-Yori bent his head toward her, and gazed curiously at her. She was of exquisite beauty,—small, graceful, apparently weighed down by the amplitude of her robes. It seemed as if their silken weight bore her to her knees. Her large innocent eyes, like the eyes of a child, were timid and full of entreaty; her cheeks, velvety as a butterfly's wings, were tinged with a slight blush, and her small mouth, half open in admiration, revealed teeth white as drops of milk.

"Forgive me," she exclaimed, "forgive me for appearing before you without your express command."

"I forgive you, poor trembling bird," said Fide-Yori, "for had I known you and known your desire, my wish would have been to see you. What can I do for you? Is it in my power to make you happy?"

"Oh, master!" eagerly cried the girl, "with one word you can make me more radiant than Ten-Sio-Dai-Tsin, the daughter of the Sun."

"And what is that word?"

"Swear that you will not go to-morrow to the feast of the God of the Sea."

"Why this oath?" said the Shogun, amazed at this strange request.

"Because," said the young girl, shuddering, "a bridge will give way beneath the King's feet; and when night falls, Japan will be without a ruler."

"I suppose you have discovered a conspiracy?" said Fide-Yori, smiling.

At this incredulous smile the girl turned pale, and her eyes filled with tears.

"O pure disk of light!" she cried, "he does not believe me! All that I have hitherto accomplished is in vain! This is a dreadful obstacle, of which I never dreamed. You hearken to the voice of the cricket which prophesies heat; you listen to the frog who croaks a promise of rain; but a young girl who cries, 'Take care! I have seen the trap! death is on your path!' you pay no heed to her, but plunge headlong into the snare. But it must not be; you must believe me. Shall I kill myself at your feet? My death might be a pledge of my sincerity. Besides, if I have been deceived, what matters it? You can easily absent yourself from the feast. Hear me! I come along way, from a distant province. Alone with the dull anguish of my secret, I outwitted the most subtle spies, I conquered my terrors and overcame my weakness. My father thinks me gone on a pilgrimage to Kioto; and, you see, I am in your city, in the grounds of your palace. And yet the sentinels are watchful, the moats are broad, the walls high. See, my hands are bleeding; I burn with fever. Just now I feared I could not speak, my weary heart throbbed so violently at sight of you and with the joy of saving you. But now I am dizzy, my blood has turned to ice: you do not believe me."

"I believe you, and I swear to obey you," said the king, touched by her accent of despair. "I will not go to the feast of the God of the Sea."

The young girl uttered a cry of delight, and gazed with gratitude at the sun as it rose above the trees.

"But tell me how you discovered this plot," continued the Shogun, "and who are its authors?"

"Oh! do not order me to tell you. The whole edifice of infamy that I overthrow would fall upon my own head."

"So be it, my child; keep your secret. But at least tell me whence comes this great devotion, and why is my life so precious to you?"

The girl slowly raised her eyes to the King, then looked down and blushed, but did not reply. A vague emotion troubled the heart of the Prince. He was silent, and yielded to the sweet sensation. He would fain have remained thus, in silence, amidst these bird songs, these perfumes, beside this kneeling maiden.

"Tell me who you are, you who have saved me from death," he asked at last; "and tell me what reward I can give you worthy of your courage."

"My name is Omiti," said the young girl; "I can tell you nothing more. Give me the flower that you hold in your hand; it is all I would have from you."

Fide-Yori offered her the lemon twig; Omiti seized it, and fled through the grove.

The Shogun stood rooted to the spot for some time, lost in thought, gazing at the turf pressed by the light foot of Omiti.

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[1] Lord of the kingdom. This is the same title as Tycoon, but the latter was not created till 1854.

[2] Six hours after noon.

[3] Six o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER II.

NAGATO'S WOUND.

The Prince of Nagato had returned to his palace. He slept stretched out on a pile of fine mats; around him was almost total darkness, for the blinds had been lowered, and large screens spread before the windows. Here and there a black lacquer panel shone in the shadow and reflected dimly, like a dull mirror, the pale face of the Prince as he lay on his cushions.

Nagato had not succeeded in seeing Hieyas: he was told that the Regent was engaged with very important business. Pleased at the chance, the young Prince hurried home to rest for a few hours before the council.

In the chambers adjoining the one in which he slept servants came and went silently, preparing their master's toilette. They walked cautiously, that the floor might not creak, and talked together in low tones.

"Our poor master knows no moderation," said an old woman, scattering drops of perfume over a court cloak. "Continual feasting and nightly revels,—never any rest; he will kill himself."

"Oh, no! pleasure does not kill," said an impudent-looking boy, dressed in gay colors.

"What do you know about it, imp?" replied the woman. "Wouldn't you think the brat spent his life in enjoyment like a lord? Don't talk so boldly about things you know nothing of!"

"Perhaps I know more about them than you do," said the child, making a wry face; "you haven't got married yet, for all your great age and your great beauty."

The woman threw the contents of her flask in the boy's face; but he hid behind the silver disk of a mirror which he was polishing, and the perfume fell to the ground. When the danger was over, out popped his head.

"Will you have me for a husband?" he cried; "you can spare me a few of your years, and between us we'll make but a young couple."

The woman, in her rage, gave a sharp scream.

"Will you be quiet?" said another servant, threatening her with his fist.

"But who could listen to that young scamp without blushing and losing her temper?"

"Blush as much as you like," said the child; "that won't make any noise."

"Come, Loo, be quiet!" said the servant.

Loo shrugged his shoulders and made a face, then went on listlessly rubbing his mirror.

At this instant a man entered the room.

"I must speak to Iwakura, Prince of Nagato," he cried aloud.

All the servants made violent signs to impose silence on the new-comer. Loo rushed towards him and stopped his mouth with the rag with which he was polishing the mirror; but the man pushed him roughly away.

"What does all this mean?" he said. "Are you crazy? I want to speak to the lord whom you serve, the very illustrious daimio who rules over the province of Nagato. Go and tell him, and stop your monkey tricks."

"He is asleep," whispered a servant.

"We cannot wake him," said another.

"He is frightfully tired," said Loo, with his finger on his lip.

"Tired or not, he will rejoice at my coming," said the stranger.

"We were ordered not to wake him until a few moments before the hour for the council," said the old woman.

"I sha'n't take the risk of rousing him," said Loo, drawing his mouth to one side.—

"Nor I," said the old woman.

"I will go myself, if you like," said the messenger; "moreover, the hour of the council is close at hand. I just saw the Prince of Arima on his way to the Hall of a Thousand Mats."

"The Prince of Arima!" cried Loo; "and he is always late!"

"Alas!" said the old woman; "shall we have time to dress our master?"

Loo pushed aside a sliding partition and opened a narrow passage; he then softly entered Nagato's bedroom. It was cool within, and a delicate odor of camphor filled the air.

"Master! master!" said Loo in a loud voice, "the hour has come; and besides there is a messenger here."

"A messenger!" cried Nagato, raising himself on one elbow; "what does he look like?"

"He is dressed like a samurai:[1] he has two-swords in his sash."

"Let him come in at once," said the Prince, in a tone of agitation.

Loo beckoned to the messenger, who prostrated himself on the threshold of the room.

"Approach!" said Nagato.

But the messenger being unable to see in the dark hall, Loo folded back one leaf of a screen which intercepted the light. A broad band of sunshine entered; it lighted up the delicate texture of the matting which covered the wall and glistened on a silver stork with sinuous neck and spread wings, hanging against it.

The messenger approached the Prince and offered him a slender roll of paper wrapped in silk; then he left the room backwards.

Nagato hastily unrolled the paper, and read as follows:

> "You have been here, illustrious one, I know it! But why this madness, and why this mystery? I cannot understand your actions. I have received severe reprimands from my sovereign on your account. As you know, I was passing through the gardens, escorting her to her palace, when all at once I saw you leaning against a tree. I could not repress an exclamation, and at my cry she turned towards me and followed the direction of my eyes. 'Ah!' she said, 'it is the sight of Nagato that draws such cries from you. Could you not stifle them, and at least spare me the sight of your immodest conduct?' Then she turned and looked at you several times.

> The anger in her eyes alarmed me. I dare not appear before her to-morrow, and I send you this message to beg you not to repeat these strange visits, which have such fatal consequences to me. Alas! do you not know that I love you, and need I repeat it? I will be your wife whenever you wish.... But it pleases you to adore me as if I were an idol in the pagoda of the Thirty-three thousand three hundred and thirty-three.[2] If you had not risked your life repeatedly to see me, I should think you were mocking me. I entreat you, expose me to no more such reproofs, and do not forget that I am ready to recognize you as my lord and master, and that to live by your side is my dearest desire."

Nagato smiled and slowly closed the roll; he fixed his eyes upon the streak of light cast on the floor from the window, and seemed lost in deep revery.

Little Loo was greatly disappointed. He had tried to read over his master's shoulder; but the roll was written in Chinese characters, and his knowledge fell short of that. He was quite familiar with the Kata-Kana, and even knew something of Hira-Kana; but unfortunately was entirely ignorant of Chinese writing. To hide his vexation, he went to the window and lifting one corner of the blind, looked out.

"Ah!" he said, "the Prince of Satsuma and the Prince of Aki arrive together, and their followers look askance atone another. Ah! Satsuma takes precedence. Oh! oh! there goes the Regent down the avenue. He glances this way, and laughs when he sees the Prince of Nagato's suite still standing at the door. He would laugh far louder if he knew how little progress my master had made in his toilet."

"Let him laugh, Loo! and come here," said the Prince, who had taken a pencil and roll of paper from his girdle and hastily written a few words. "Run to the palace and give this to the King."

Loo set off as fast as his legs could carry him, pushing and jostling those who came in his way to his utmost.

"And now," said Iwakura, "dress me quickly."

His servants clustered about him, and the Prince was soon arrayed in the broad trailing trousers which make the wearer look as if he were walking on his knees, and the stiff ceremonial mantle, made still more heavy by the crest embroidered on its sleeves. The arms of Nagato consisted of a black bolt surmounting three balls in the form of a pyramid.

The young man, usually so careful of his dress, paid no attention to the work of his servants; he did not even glance at the mirror so well polished by Loo, when the high pointed cap, tied by golden ribbons, was placed on his head.

As soon as his toilette was complete he left the palace; but so great was his abstraction that, instead of getting into the norimono awaiting him in the midst of his escort, he set off on foot, dragging his huge pantaloons in the sand, and exposing himself to the rays of the sun. His suite, terrified at this breach of etiquette, followed in utter disorder, while the spies ordered to watch the actions of the Prince hastened to report this extraordinary occurrence to their various masters.

The ramparts of the royal residence at Osaka, thick, lofty walls flanked at intervals by a semicircular bastion, form a huge square, which encloses several palaces and vast gardens. To the south and west the fortress is sheltered by the city; on the north the river which flows through Osaka widens, and forms an immense moat at the foot of the rampart; on the east, a narrower stream bounds it. On the platform of the walls grows a row of centenarian cedars of a sombre verdure, their level branches projecting horizontally across the battlements. Within, a second wall, preceded by a moat, encloses the parks and palaces reserved for the princes and their families. Between this wall and the ramparts lie the houses of soldiers and officials. A third wall surrounds the private palace of the Shogun, built upon a hill. This building is of simple but noble design. Square towers with roof upon roof rise here and there from the general mass. Marble stair-ways, bordered by slender lacquer railings, and decorated at the foot by bronze monsters or huge pottery vases, lead to the outer galleries. The terrace before the palace is covered with gravel and white sand which reflects back the splendor of the sun.

In the centre of the edifice stands a large, lofty, and magnificently ornate square tower. It supports seven roofs, whose angles are bent upward; on the topmost roof two enormous goldfish[3] writhe and twist, glittering so that they may be seen from every point of the city.

In that part of the palace nearest to this tower is the Hall of a Thousand Mats, the meeting-place for the Council.

The lords arrived from all directions, climbed the hill, and moved towards the central portico of the palace, which opens upon a long gallery loading directly into the Hall of a Thousand Mats.

This lofty, spacious hall is entirely bare of furniture. Movable partitions sliding in grooves intersect it and, when closed, form compartments of various sizes. But the partitions are always opened wide in such a way as to produce agreeable effects of perspective. The panels in one compartment are covered with black lacquer decorated in gold, in another of red lacquer or of Jeseri wood, the veins of which form natural and pleasing designs. Here, the screen, painted by a famous artist, is lined with white satin heavily embroidered with flowers; there, on a dead gold ground, a peach-tree loaded with its pink blossoms spreads its gnarled branches; or perhaps merely an irregular sprinkling of black, red, and white dots oil dark wood dazzles the eye. The mats which cover the floor are snow white, and fringed with silver.

The nobles, with their loose pantaloons falling below their feet, seem to move forward on their knees, and their robes brush the mats with a continuous sound, like the murmur of a waterfall. The spectators, moreover, preserve a religious silence. The *Hattamotos*, members of an order of nobility, recently instituted by the Regent, crouch in the farthest corners, while the *Samurais*, of ancient lineage, owners of fiefs and vassals of princes, pass these newly made nobles by, with scornful glances, and come perceptibly closer to the great drawn curtain veiling the platform reserved for the Shogun. The *Lords of the Earth*, princes supreme in their own provinces, form a wide circle before the throne, leaving a free space for the thirteen members of the Council.

The councillors soon arrive. They salute each other, and exchange a few words in low voices; then take their places.

On the left, presenting their profile to the drawn curtain, are the superior councillors. They are five in number, but only four are present. The nearest to the throne is the Prince of Satsuma, a venerable old man with a long face full of kindness. Next to him is spread the mat of the absentee. Then comes the Prince of Satake, who bites his lip as he carefully arranges the folds of his robe. He is young, dark-skinned, and his jet black eyes twinkle strangely. Next to him is established the Prince of Ouesougi, a fat and listless-looking man. The last is the Prince of Isida, a short, ugly-faced fellow.

The eight inferior councillors crouching opposite the throne are the princes of Arima, Figo, Wakasa, Aki, Tosa, Ise, and Coroda.

A stir is heard in the direction of the entrance, and every head is bent to the ground. The Regent advances into the hall. He moves rapidly, not being embarrassed, like the princes, by the folds of his trailing trousers, and seat's himself, cross-legged, on a pile of mats to the right of the throne.

Hieyas was at this time an old man. His back was slightly bent, but he was broad-shouldered and muscular. His head, entirely shaven, revealed a high forehead, with prominent eyebrows. His thin lips, cruel and obstinate in expression, were deeply marked at the corners with downward wrinkles. His cheek-bones were extremely marked, and his prominent eyes flashed forth abrupt and insincere glances.

As he entered, he cast an evil look, accompanied by a half-smile, towards the vacant place of the Prince of Nagato. But when the curtain rose, the Shogun appeared, leaning with one hand on the shoulder of his youthful councillor.

The Regent frowned.

All the spectators prostrated themselves, pressing their foreheads on the ground. When they rose, the Prince of Nagato had taken his place with the rest.

Fide-Yori seated himself, and motioned to Hieyas that he might speak.

Then the Regent read various unimportant reports,—nominations of magistrates, movements of the troops on the frontier, the change of residence of a governor whose term had expired. Hieyas explained briefly and volubly the reasons which had actuated him. The councillors ran their eyes over the manuscripts, and having no objection to make, acquiesced by a gesture. But soon the Regent folded all these papers and handed them to a secretary stationed near him; then resumed his speech, after first coughing:—

"I called this special meeting to-day," he said, "that its members might share the fears which I have conceived for the tranquillity of the kingdom, on learning that the severe supervision ordered over the European bonzes and such Japanese as have embraced their strange doctrine, are strangely relaxed, and that they have resumed their dangerous intrigues against the public peace. I therefore demand the enforcement of the law decreeing the extermination of all Christians."

A singular uproar arose in the assembly,—a mixture of approval, surprise, cries of horror and of anger.

"Would you witness a renewal of the hideous and bloody scenes whose terror still lingers in our minds?" cried the Prince of Satake with his wonted animation.

"It is odd to affirm that poor people who preach nothing but virtue and concord can disturb the peace of an empire," said Nagato.

"The Daimio speaks well," said the Prince of Satsuma; "it is impossible for the bonzes of Europe to have any effect upon the tranquillity of the kingdom. It is therefore useless to disturb them."

But Hieyas addressed himself directly to Fide-Yori.

"Master," said he, "since no one will share my anxiety, I must inform you that a dreadful rumor is beginning to circulate among the nobles and among the people."

He paused a moment, to add solemnity to his words.

"It is said that he who is still under my guardianship, the future ruler of Japan, our gracious lord, Fide-Yori, has embraced the Christian faith."

An impressive silence followed these words. The spectators exchanged glances which said clearly that they had heard the report, which might have a solid basis.

Fide-Yori took up the word.

"And should a calumny spread by ill-intentioned persons be avenged upon the innocent I I command that the Christians shall not be molested in any way. My father, I regret it, thought it

his duty to pursue with his wrath and to exterminate those unhappy men; but I swear, while I live, not one drop of their blood shall be shed."

Hieyas was stupefied by the resolute accent of the young Shogun; for the first time he spoke as a master, and commanded. He bowed in sign of submission, and made no objection. Fide-Yori had attained his majority, and if he was not yet proclaimed Shogun it was because Hieyas was in no haste to lay down his power. He did not, therefore, wish to enter into open strife with his ward. He set the question aside for the time being, and passed to something else.

"I am told," he said, "that a nobleman was attacked and wounded last night on the Kioto road. I do not yet know the name of this noble; but perhaps the Prince of Nagato, who was at Kioto last night, heard something of this adventure?"

"Ah! you know that I was at Kioto," muttered the Prince; "then I understand why there were assassins on my path."

"How could Nagato be at Osaka and at Kioto at one and the same time?" asked the Prince of Satake. "There is nothing talked of this morning but the water-party which he gave last night, and which ended so merrily with a fight between the lords and the sailors from the shore."

"I even got a scratch in the squabble," said Nagato, smiling.

"The Prince traverses in a few hours distances that others would take a day to go over," said Hieyas; "that's all. Only, he does not spare his horses; every time he comes back to the palace, his animal falls down dead."

The Prince of Nagato turned pale, and felt for the sword missing from his girdle.

"I did not suppose that your anxious care extended even to the beasts of the kingdom," said he, with an insolent irony. "I thank you in the name of my dead horses."

The Shogun, full of alarm, cast supplicating glances at Nagato. But it seemed as if the Regent's patience were proof against all trials to-day. He smiled and made no reply.

However, Fide-Yori saw that anger smouldered in his friend's soul; and dreading some fresh outburst, he put an end to the council by withdrawing.

Almost immediately one of the palace guards informed the Prince of Nagato that the Shogun was asking for him. The Prince said a pleasant word to several nobles, bowed to the rest, and left the hall without turning his head in the direction of Hieyas.

When he reached the apartments of the Shogun, he heard a woman's voice, petulant, and at the same time complaining. He caught his own name.

"I have heard all," said the voice,—"your refusal to accede to the wishes of the Regent, whom you suffered to be insulted before your very eyes by the Prince of Nagato, whose impudence is truly incomparable; and the rare patience of Hieyas, who did not take up the insult from respect for you, from pity for him whom you believe to be your friend, in your ignorance of men."

Nagato recognized the speaker as the Shogun's mother, the beautiful and haughty Yodogimi.

"Mother," said the Shogun, "turn your thoughts to embroidery and dress: that is woman's sphere."

Nagato entered hurriedly, that he might not longer be an unsuspected listener.

"My gracious master asked for me," he said. Yodogimi turned and blushed slightly on seeing the Prince, who bowed low before her.

"I have something to say to you," said the Shogun.

"Then I will retire," said Yodogimi bitterly, "and go back to my embroidery."

She crossed the room slowly, rustling her trailing silken robes, and casting as she went out a singular look at Nagato, compounded of coquetry and hate.

"You heard my mother," said Fide-Yori.

"Yes," said Nagato.

"Every one is anxious to detach me from you, my friend: what can be their motive?"

"Your mother is blinded by some calumny," said the Prince; "the others see in me a clear-sighted foe, who can outwit the plots which they contrive against you."

"It was of a plot I wished to speak to you."

"Against your life?"

"Precisely. It was revealed to me in a strange fashion, and I can scarcely credit it; yet I cannot resist a certain feeling of uneasiness. To-morrow, at the feast of the God of the Sea, a bridge will give way beneath me."

"Horrible!" cried Nagato. "Do not go to the feast."

"If I stay away," said Fide-Yori, "I shall never know the truth, for the plot will not be carried out. But if I go to the feast," he added with a smile, "if the conspiracy really exist, the truth would be somewhat difficult of proof."

"To be sure," said Nagato. "Still, our doubts must be set at rest; some means must be found. Is your route fixed?"

"Hieyas has arranged it."

Fide-Yori took a roll of paper from a low table and read:—

"Yedogava Quay, Fishmarket Square, Sycamore Street, seashore. Return by Bamboo Hill and Swallow bridge.

"The wretches!" cried Iwakura; "that is the bridge swung across the valley!"

"The place would be well chosen indeed," said the Shogun.

"It must be that bridge; those crossing the countless city canals would not expose you to death by crumbling under your feet, but at the utmost to a disagreeable bath."

"True," said Fide-Yori; "and from the Swallow bridge I should be hurled upon the rocks."

"Have you full trust in my friendship for you?" asked the Prince of Nagato, after a moment's thought.

"Can you doubt it, Iwakura?" said the Shogun.

"Very well, then. Fear nothing, feign complete ignorance, let them lead the way, and march straight up to the bridge. I have thought of a way to save you, and yet discover the truth."

"I trust myself to you, friend, in perfect confidence."

"Then let me go; I must have time to carry out my scheme."

"Go, Prince; I place my life in your hands untremblingly," said the Shogun.

Nagato hastened away, first saluting the king, who replied by a friendly gesture.

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[1] Noble officer in the service of a daimio or prince.

[2] Temple at Kioto containing 33,333 idols.

[3] These fish actually exist, and are valued at an immense sum, many placing it as high as a million dollars.

CHAPTER III.

FEAST OF THE SEA-GOD.

Next day, from early dawn, the streets of Osaka were full of movement and mirth. The people prepared for the feast, rejoicing in the thought of coming pleasures. Shops, the homes of artisans and citizens, opening full upon the street, afforded a free view of their modest interiors, furnished only with a few beautifully colored screens.

Voices were heard, mixed with bursts of laughter; and now and then some mischievous child struggled out of his mother's arms, while she was trying to dress him in his holiday attire, and frisked, and danced with glee upon the wooden stairs leading from the house to the road. He was then recalled with cries of pretended anger from within, the father's voice was heard, and the child returned to his mother, trembling with impatience.

Sometimes a little one would cry: "Mother, mother! Here comes the procession!"

"Nonsense!" said the mother; "the priests have not even finished dressing yet."

But still she moved towards the front of the house, and, leaning over the light balustrade, gazed into the street.

Carriers, naked save for a strip of stuff knotted round their waists, hastened rapidly by, across their shoulders a bamboo stick, which bent at the tip from the weight of a package of letters. They went in the direction of the Shogun's residence.

Before the barber's shops the crowd was thicker than elsewhere; the boys could not possibly shave all the chins presented, or dress all the heads offered. Customers awaiting their turn chatted gayly outside the door. Some were already dressed in their holiday garb, of bright colors, covered with embroidery. Others, more prudent, naked to the waist, preferred to finish their toilet after their hair was dressed. Vegetable-sellers and fish-merchants moved about through the throng, loudly praising their wares, which they carried in two buckets hanging from a cross piece of wood laid over one shoulder.

On every side people were trimming their houses with pennants, and streamers, and embroidered stuffs covered with Chinese inscriptions in gold on a black or purple ground; lanterns were hung up, and blossoming boughs.

As the morning advanced, the streets became fuller and fuller of merry tumult. Bearers of norimonos, clad in light tunics drawn tightly round their waist, with large shield-shaped hats, shouted to the people to make room. Samurais went by on horseback, preceded by runners, who, with lowered head and arms extended, forced a passage through the crowd. Groups paused to talk, sheltered from the sun by huge parasols, and formed motionless islands in the midst of the surging, billowy sea of promenaders. A doctor hurried by, fanning himself gravely, and followed by his two assistants carrying the medicine-chest.

"Illustrious master, are you not going to the feast!" cried the passers-by.

"Sick men pay no heed to feasts," he answered with a sigh; "and as there are none for them, there can be none for us."

On the banks of Yedogava the excitement was still greater. The river was literally hidden by thousands of vessels; the masts trimmed, the sails still unset, but ready to unfurl, like wings; the hatchways hung with silks and satins; the prows decked with banners whose golden fringe, dipped into the water, glittered in the sun, and stained the azure stream with many-colored ripples.

Bands of young women in brilliant attire came down the snowy steps of the river-banks cut into broad terraces. They entered elegant boats made of camphor-wood, set off by carvings and ornaments of copper, and filled them with flowers, which spread perfumes through the air.

From the top of Kiobassi—that fine bridge which resembles a bent bow—were hung pieces of gauze; crape, and light silk, of the most delicate colors, and covered with inscriptions. A gentle breeze softly stirred these lovely stuffs, which the boats, moving up and down, pushed aside as they passed. In, the distance glistened the tall tower of the palace and the two monstrous goldfish which adorn its pinnacle. At the entrance to the city, to right and left of the river, the two superb bastions looking out to sea displayed on every tower, at each angle of the wall, the national standard, white with a scarlet disk, —an emblem of the sun rising through the morning mists. Scattered pagodas upreared above the trees against the radiant sky their many roofs, curled upward at the edge in Chinese fashion.

The pagoda of Yebis, the divinity of the sea, attracted especial attention upon this day; not that its towers were higher, or its sacred doors more numerous, than those of neighboring temples, but from its gardens was to start the religious procession so eagerly awaited by the crowd.

At last, in the distance, the drum sounded. Every ear was bent to catch the sacred rhythm familiar to all: a few violent blows at regular intervals, then a hasty roll, gradually fading and dying, then again abrupt blows.

A tremendous roar of delight rose from the crowd, who instantly took their places along the houses on either side of the streets through which the procession was to pass.

The Kashiras, district police, rapidly stretched cords from stake to stake, to prevent the throng from trespassing on the main street. The procession had started; it had passed through the Tory, or sacred gateway which stands outside the pagoda of Yebis; and soon it defiled before the impatient multitude.

First came sixteen archers, one behind the other, in two lines, each man at a convenient distance from the other. They wore armor made of plates of black horn fastened together by stitches of red wool. Two swords were thrust through their sashes, barbed arrows extended above their shoulders, and in their hands they held huge bows of black and gold lacquer. Behind them came a body of servants bearing long staffs tufted with silk. Then appeared Tartar musicians, whose advent was announced by a joyous racket. Metallic vibrations of the gong sounded at intervals, mingled with drums beaten vigorously, shuddering cymbals, conch-shells giving out sonorous notes, shrill flute-tones, and blasts of trumpets rending the air, formed such an intensity of noise, that the nearest spectators winked and blinked, and seemed almost blinded.

After the musicians came, borne on a high platform, a gigantic crawfish, ridden by a bonze. Flags of every hue, long and narrow, bearing the arms of the city, and held by boys, swung to and fro about the enormous crustacean. Following, were fifty lancers, wearing round lacquer hats, and carrying on their shoulders a lance trimmed with a red tassel. Two servants led next a splendidly caparisoned horse, whose mane, drawn up above his neck, was braided and arranged like a rich fancy trimming. Standard-bearers marched behind this horse; their banners were blue, and covered with golden characters. Then advanced two great Corean tigers, with open jaws and bloodshot eyes. Children in the crowd screamed with fright; but the tigers were of pasteboard, and men, hidden in their paws, made them move. A monstrous drum, of cylindrical form, followed, borne by two bonzes; a third walked beside it and struck the drum incessantly with his clenched fist.

Finally came seven splendidly dressed young women, who were received with merry applause. These were the most famous and most beautiful courtesans of the town. They walked one after the other majestically, full of pride, each accompanied by a maid, and followed by a man who held a large silken parasol over her. The people, who knew them well, named them as they passed.

"There's the woman with the silver teal!" Two of those birds were embroidered on the large loose-sleeved cloak which she wore over her many dresses, whose collars were folded one above the other upon her breast. The cloak was of green satin, the embroidery of white silk, mixed with silver. The fair one's headdress was stuck full of enormous tortoise-shell pins, forming a semicircle of rays around her face.

"That one there, that is the seaweed woman!"

The beautiful growth, whose silken roots were lost in the embroideries of the cloak, floated out from the stuff and fluttered in the wind.

Then came the beauty with the golden dolphin; the beauty with the almond-blossoms; the beauties with the swan, the peacocks, and the blue monkey. All walked barefooted upon high clogs made of ebony, which increased their apparent height. Their heads bristled with shell-pins,

and their faces, skilfully painted, seemed young and charming under the soft shadow of the parasol.

Behind these women marched men bearing willow-branches; then a whole army of priests, carrying on litters, or under pretty canopies with gilded tops, the accessories, ornaments, and furniture of the temple, which was purified during the progress of the procession.

After all these came the shrine of Yebis, the God of the Sea, the indefatigable fisher who spends entire days wrapped in a net, a line in his hand, standing on a rock half submerged in the water. The octagonal roof was covered with blue and silver, bordered with a pearl fringe, and surmounted by a great bird with outspread wings. This shrine, containing the God Yebis invisible within, was borne by fifty bonzes naked to the waist.

Behind, upon a litter, was borne the magnificent fish consecrated to Yebis, the *Akama, or scarlet lady*,—the favorite dish of all those who are fond of dainty fare. Thirty horsemen armed with pikes ended the procession.

The long train crossed the city, followed by the crowd which gathered in its rear; it reached the suburbs, and after a long march came out upon the sea-shore.

Simultaneously with its arrival, thousands of vessels reached the mouth of Yedogava, which wafted them gently towards the ocean. The sails were spread, the oars bit the water, banners floated on the breeze, while the sun flashed myriad sparkles across the blue, dancing waves.

Fide-Yori also reached the shore by the road that skirts the river bank; he stopped his horse and sat motionless in the midst of his suite, which was but scanty, the Regent being unwilling to eclipse the religious *cortége* by the royal luxury.

Hieyas himself was carried in a norimono, as were the mother and wife of the Shogun. He declared himself ill.

Fifty soldiers, a few standard-bearers, and two out-runners formed the entire escort.

The arrival of the young Prince divided the attention of the crowd, and the procession of Yebis no longer sufficed to attract every eye. The royal headdress, a sort of oblong golden cap placed upon Fide-Yori's head, made him easily recognizable from a distance.

Soon the religious procession filed slowly before the Shogun. Then the priests with the shrine left the ranks and went close down to the water's edge.

Upon this the fishermen and river boatmen suddenly ran up with cries, bounds, and gambols, and threw themselves upon the bearers of Yebis. They imitated a battle, uttering shouts, which grew more and more shrill. The priests made a feigned resistance; but soon the shrine passed from their shoulders to those of the stout sailors. The latter with howls of joy rushed into the sea and drew their beloved god through the clear waves, while bands of music, stationed on the junks which ploughed the sea, broke into merry melody. At last the sailors returned to land, amidst the cheers of the crowd, who soon scattered, to return in all haste to the town, where many other diversions awaited them,—open-air shows, sales of all sorts, theatrical representations, banquets, and libations of saki. Fide-Yori left the beach in his turn, preceded by the two runners and followed by his train. They entered a cool and charming little valley, and took a road which, by a very gentle slope, led to the summit of the hill. This road was utterly deserted, all access to it having been closed since the evening before.

Fide-Yori thought of the plot, of the bridge which was to give way and hurl him into an abyss. He had dwelt upon it all night with anguish; but beneath this bright sun, amidst this peaceful scene, he could no longer believe in human malice. And yet the path chosen for the return to the palace was strange. "We will take this road to avoid the crowd," said Hieyas; but he had only to close another way to the people, and the King might have gone back to the castle without making this odd circuit.

Fide-Yori looked about for Nagato; he was nowhere to be seen. Since morning the Shogun had twenty times inquired for him. The Prince was not to be found.

Sad forebodings seized upon the young Shogun. He suddenly asked himself why his escort should be so scanty, why he was preceded by two runners only. He looked behind him, and it seemed to him as if the norimono-bearers slackened their pace.

They reached the brow of the hill and soon Swallow bridge appeared at the turn of the road. As his eye fell upon it, Fide-Yori involuntarily reined in his horse; his heart beat violently. The frail bridge, boldly flung from one hill to another, crossed a very deep valley. The river, rapid as a torrent, leaped over the rocks with a dull, continuous noise. But the bridge seemed as usual to rest firmly upon the smooth rocks which jutted out beneath it.

The runners advanced unshrinkingly. If the conspiracy existed, they knew nothing of it. The young King dared not pause; he seemed to hear echoing in his ears Nagato's words: "March fearlessly towards the bridge!"

But the beseeching tones of Omiti also thrilled through his mind he recalled the oath which he had uttered. Nagato's silence alarmed him above all else. How many things might occur to foil the Prince's plan! Surrounded by skilful spies who watched his slightest acts, he might have been carried off and prevented from communicating with the King. All these thoughts rushed tumultuously into Fido-Yori's brain, the last supposition making him turn pale. Then, by one of those mental freaks often noted in situations of extreme peril, he suddenly recalled a song which he had sung as a child, to make himself familiar with the chief sounds of the Japanese language.

He mechanically repeated it:—

"Color and perfume fade away.
What is there in this world that is permanent?
The day which is passed, vanishes in the gulf of oblivion.
It is like the echo of a dream.
Its absence causes not the slightest distress."

"I learned that when a mere child," murmured the King; "and yet I now shrink and hesitate at the possibility of death."

Ashamed of his weakness, he urged his horse forward. Just then a loud noise was heard on the opposite side of the bridge; and, suddenly turning the corner of the road, angry horses, with flying mane and bloodshot eyes, appeared, dragging behind them a chariot laden with the trunks of trees. They hastened towards the bridge, and their furious feet rang doubly loud upon the wooden flooring.

At the sight of these animals coming towards them Fide-Yori's whole escort uttered cries of terror, the porters dropped their norimonos, the women jumped out of them in alarm, and, gathering up their ample robes, fled hastily away. The runners, whose feet already touched the bridge, turned abruptly, and Fide-Yori instinctively sprang to one side.

But all at once, like a cord which, too tightly stretched, breaks, the bridge gave way with a loud crash; it first bent in the centre, then the two fragments rose suddenly in the air, scattering a shower of pieces on every hand. The horses and the car were plunged into the river, the water dashing in foam to the very brow of the hill. For some moments one animal hung by his harness, struggling above the gulf; but his bonds gave way and he fell. The tumultuous stream quickly bore to the sea horses, floating tree trunks, and all the remnants of the bridge.

"Oh, Omiti!" cried the King, motionless with horror, "you did not deceive me! This then was the fate reserved for me! Had it not been for your devotion, sweet girl, my mangled body would even now be flung from rock to rock."

"Well, master, you possess the knowledge that you wished. What do you think of my team?" cried a voice close beside the King.

The latter turned. He was alone, all his servants had abandoned him; but he saw a head rising from the valley. He recognized Nagato, who quickly climbed the stony elope and stood beside the King.

"Ah, my friend! my brother!" said Fide-Yori, who could not restrain his tears. "What have I ever done to inspire such hatred? Who is the unhappy man whom my life oppresses, and who would fain hurry me from the world?"

"Would you know that wretch?—would you learn the name of the guilty man?" said Nagato with a frown.

"Do you know him, friend? Tell me his name."

"Hieyas!" said Nagato.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SISTER OF THE SUN.

It was the warmest hour of the day. All the halls of the palace at Kioto were plunged in cool darkness, thanks to the lowered shades and open screens before the windows.

Kioto is the capital, the sacred city, the residence of a god exiled to earth, the direct descendant of the celestial founders of Japan, the absolute sovereign, the high priest of all the forms of religion practised throughout the kingdom of the rising sun, in fact, the Mikado. The Shogun is only the first among the subjects of the Mikado; but the latter, crushed beneath the weight of his own majesty, blinded by his superhuman splendor, leaves the care of terrestrial affairs to the Shogun, who rules in his stead, while he sits alone, absorbed in the thought of his own sublimity.

In the centre of the palace parks, in one of the pavilions built for the nobles of the court, a woman lay stretched upon the floor which was covered with fine mats. Suddenly she rose upon her elbow and plunged her dainty fingers in the dark masses of her hair. Not far from her, an attendant, crouched on the ground, was playing with a pretty dog of a rare species, which looked like a ball of black and white silk. A koto, or musical instrument with thirteen strings, a writing-case, a roll of paper, a fan, and a box of sweetmeats were scattered over the floor, which no furniture concealed. The walls were made of cedar wood, carved in open work or covered with brilliant paintings enhanced by gold and silver; half-closed panels formed openings through which other halls were visible, and beyond these still other apartments.

"Mistress, you are sad," said the attendant. "Shall I strike the koto-strings, and sing a song to cheer you?"

The mistress shook her head.

"What?" cried the maid, "Fatkoura no longer loves music? Has she then forgotten that she owes

the light of day to it? For when the Sun-goddess, enraged with the gods, withdrew into a cavern, it was by letting her hear divine music for the first time that she was led back to heaven!"

Fatkoura uttered a sigh, and made no answer.

"Shall I grind some ink for you? Your paper has long remained as stainless as the snow on Mount Fusi. If you have a grief, cast it into the mould of verse, and you will be rid of it."

"No, Tika; love is not to be got rid of; it is a burning pain, which devours one by day and by night, and never sleeps."

"Unhappy love, perhaps; but you are beloved, mistress!" said Tika, drawing nearer.

"I know not what serpent hidden in the depths of my heart tells me that I am not."

"What!" said Tika in amaze, "has he not revealed his deep passion by a thousand acts of folly? Did he not come but lately, at the risk of his life,—for the wrath of the Kisaki might well prove fatal,—merely to behold you for one instant?"

"Yes; and he vanished without exchanging a single word with me, Tika!" added Fatkoura, seizing the young girl's wrists in a nervous grasp. "He did not even look at me."

"Impossible!" said Tika; "has he not told you that he loved you?"

"He has; and I believed him, because I was so eager to believe. But now I believe him no longer."

"Why?"

"Because if he loved me he would have married me long since, and taken me to his estates."

"But the affection which he bears his master keeps him at the Court of Osaka!"

"So he says; but is that the language of love I What would I nob sacrifice for him!... Alas! I thirst for his presence! His face, so haughty, and yet so gentle, floats before my eyes! I long to fix it, but it escapes me! Ah! if I might but spend a few happy months with him, I would gladly kill myself afterwards, lulling myself to sleep with my love; and my past happiness would be a soft winding-sheet for me."

Fatkoura burst into sobs and hid her face in her hands. Tika strove to console her. She threw her arms around her, and said a thousand affectionate things, but could not succeed in calming her.

Suddenly a noise was heard at the other end of the room, and the little dog began to yelp.

Tika rose quickly and ran out, to prevent any servant from entering and seeing the emotion of her mistress; she soon returned beaming.

"It is he! it is he!" she exclaimed. "He is here; he wishes to see you."

"Do not jest with me, Tika!" said Fatkoura, rising to her feet.

"Here is his card," said the young girl; and she offered a paper to Fatkoura, who read at a glance:—

> "Iwakura Teroumoto Mori, Prince of Nagato, entreats the honor of admission to your presence."

"My mirror!" she cried frantically. "I am horrible thus,—my eyes swollen, my hair disordered, dressed in a robe without embroidery! Alas! instead of weeping, I should have foreseen his coming, and busied myself with my toilette from early dawn!"

Tika brought the mirror of burnished metal, round as the full moon, and the box of perfumes and cosmetics.

Fatkoura took a pencil and lengthened her eyes. But her hand trembled, she made too heavy a line; then, wishing to repair the mistake, only succeeded in smearing her whole cheek with black. She clenched her fists with rage, and ground her teeth. Tika came to her aid, and removed the traces of her awkwardness. She placed upon the lower lip a little green paint, which became pink on contact with the skin. To replace the eyebrows, which had been carefully plucked out, she made two large black spots very high upon her forehead; to make the oval of her face longer, she sprinkled a little pink powder on her cheek-bones; then rapidly removed all the apparatus of the toilette, and threw over her mistress's shoulders a superb kirimon. Then she left the hall at full speed.

Fatkoura, trembling violently, stood beside the gotto as it lay on the floor, one hand holding up her mantle heavy with ornament, and eagerly fixed her gaze on the entrance.

At last Nagato appeared. He advanced, placing one hand on the golden hilt of one of his two swords, and, bowing with graceful dignity, said: "Pardon me, fair Fatkoura, if I come like a storm which sweeps across the sky unannounced by any foreboding clouds."

"You are to me like the sun when it rises from the sea," said Fatkoura, "and you are always expected. Stay! but a moment since I wept for your sake. See! my eyes are still red."

"Your eyes are like the evening and the morning stars," said the Prince. "But why did they drown their rays in tears? Can I have given you any cause to grieve?"

"You are here, and I have forgotten the cause of my sorrow," said Fatkoura, smiling; "perhaps I wept because you were far away."

"Why can I not be always here?" cried Nagato, with such an accent of truth that the young

woman felt all her fears vanish, and a flash of joy illumined her countenance. Perhaps, however, she mistook the meaning of the Prince's words.

"Come closer," she said, "and rest upon these mats. Tika will serve us with tea and a few delicacies."

"Could I not first send the Kisaki a secret petition of the utmost importance?" asked Nagato. "I seized upon the pretext of this precious missive in order to get away from Osaka," he added, seeing a shadow on Fatkoura's brow.

"The sovereign has been vexed with me since your last appearance; I dare not approach her, or send any of my servants to her."

"And yet this note must be in her hands with the briefest possible delay," said Nagato, with a slight frown.

"What shall we do?" said Fatkoura, whom this trifling mark of distress had not escaped. "Will you come with me to one of my illustrious friends, the noble Iza-Farou No-Kami? She is in favor just now; perhaps she will help us."

"Let us go to her at once," said the Prince.

"Let us go," said Fatkoura with a sigh.

The young woman called Tika, who had remained in the next room, and signed to her to draw a sliding-panel, which opened upon a gallery encircling the pavilion.

"Are you going out, mistress?" said Tika. "Shall I summon your suite?"

"We are going incognito, Tika, to take a walk in the orchard. Really," she added, with her finger on her lips, "we are going to visit the noble Iza-Farou."

The maid bent her head in token of understanding. Fatkoura 'bravely set foot on the balcony, but sprang back hastily with an exclamation.

"It's a furnace," she cried.

Nagato picked up the fail lying upon the floor.

"Courage!" he said; "I will cool the air nearest your face."

Tika took a parasol, which she opened over her mistress's head, and Nagato waved the huge fan. They set out, sheltered at first by the projecting roof. Fatkoura led the way. Now and then she touched her finger-tips to the open-work cedar balustrade, and uttered a baby shriek at its burning contact. The pretty silken-haired dog, who had felt obliged to join the party, followed at a distance, growling, doubtless, remarks upon the madness of a walk at such an hour of the day.

They turned the corner of the house, and found themselves in front of it, at the top of a broad staircase leading to the garden, between two balusters ornamented with copper balls; a third baluster, in the centre of the staircase, divided it into two parts.

In spite of the intolerable heat and the vivid light, whose reflection from the sandy soil fairly blinded them, Fatkoura and the Prince of Nagato pretended to be walking with no other object than to pick a few flowers and admire the charming prospect which lay before them at every step. Although the gardens were deserted, they knew that the eye of the spy was never closed. They made haste to reach a shady alley, and soon arrived at a group of sumptuous pavilions scattered among the trees and connected by covered galleries.

"It is here," said Fatkoura, who, far from looking in the direction of the buildings of which she spoke, was leaning over a little pond filled with water so clear as to be almost invisible.

"Just see that pretty fish!" she said, purposely raising her voice; "I should think he was carved from a block of amber. And that one who looks like a ruby sprinkled with gold! he seems hanging in mid air, the water is so transparent. See, his fins are like black gauze, and his eyes like balls of fire! Decidedly, of all the dwellers in the palace, Iza-Farou has the finest fish."

"What, Fatkoura!" cried a feminine voice from the interior of a pavilion, "are you out at such an hour? Is it because you are a widow that you take so little care of your skin, and let it be destroyed by the sun?"

A blind was half raised, and Iza-Farou thrust out her pretty head, bristling with light tortoise-shell pins.

"Ah!" she said, "the lord of Nagato! You will not pass by my house without honoring me by entering," she added.

"We will come in with pleasure, thanking the fate which led us in this direction," said Fatkoura.

They went up the steps leading to the pavilion, and moved on through the flowers filling the balcony.

Iza-Farou came towards them.

"What had you to tell me?" she said to her friend in a low voice, as she gracefully saluted the Prince.

"I need your help," said Fatkoura; "you know I am in disgrace."

"I know it; shall I sue for your pardon? But can I assure the Queen that you will never again commit the fault which angered her so deeply?" said Iza-Farou, casting a mischievous glance at Nagato.

"I am the only criminal," said the Prince, smiling. "Fatkoura is not responsible for the actions of a madman like me."

"Prince, I think she is proud to be the cause of what you call mad acts; and many are the women who envy her."

"Do not jest with me," said Nagato; "I am sufficiently punished by having drawn down the wrath of her sovereign upon the noble Fatkoura."

"But that is not the question in point," cried Fatkoura. "The Lord of Nagato is bearer of an important message which he wishes to transmit to the Kisaki secretly. He first came to me; but as I cannot approach the Queen just now, I thought of your kind friendship."

"Trust the message to me," said Iza-Farou, turning to the Prince; "in a very few moments it shall be in the hands of our illustrious mistress."

"I am overcome with gratitude," said Nagato, taking from his bosom a white satin wrapper containing the letter.

"Wait here for me; I will return soon."

Iza-Farou took the letter, and ushered her guests into a cool and shady hall, where she left them alone.

"These pavilions communicate with the Kisaki's palace," said Fatkoura; "my noble friend can visit the sovereign without being seen by other eyes. May the gods grant that the messenger bring back a favorable answer, and I may see the cloud which darkens your brow vanish!"

The Prince seemed, in fact, absorbed and anxious; he nibbled the tip of his fan as he paced the room. Fatkoura followed him with her eyes, and her heart involuntarily stood still; she felt a return of the dreadful agony which had so recently wrung tears from her, and which the presence of her beloved had suddenly calmed.

"He does not love me," she murmured in despair; "when his eyes turn towards me, they alarm me by their cold and almost contemptuous expression."

Nagato seemed to have forgotten the presence of the young woman; he leaned against a half-open panel, and seemed lost in a dream, at once sweet and poignant.

The rustle of a dress upon the mats that covered the floor drew him from his revery. Iza-Farou returned; she seemed in haste, and soon appeared at the corner of the gallery. Two young boys, magnificently attired, followed her.

"These are the words of the divine Kisaki," said she, as soon as she was within speaking distance of Nagato: "'Let the suppliant make his request in person.'"

At these words Nagato turned so pale, that Iza-Farou, frightened, thinking that he would faint, rushed towards him, to prevent him from falling.

"Prince," she cried, "be calm! Such a favor is, I know, enough to cause your emotion: but are you not used to all honors?"

"Impossible!" muttered Nagato, in a voice which was scarcely audible; "I cannot appear before her."

"What!" said Iza-Farou, "would you disobey her command?"

"I am not in court-dress," said the Prince.

"She will dispense with ceremony for this time only, the reception being secret. Do not keep her waiting longer."

"So be it; lead the way!" suddenly exclaimed Nagato, who had now apparently conquered his emotion.

"These two pages will conduct you," said Iza-Farou.

Nagato left the room rapidly, preceded by the Kisaki's two servitors; but not so rapidly that he did not hear a stifled cry which broke from the lips of Fatkoura.

After walking for some time, and passing through the various galleries and halls of the palace without paying the slightest heed to them, Nagato came to a great curtain of white satin, embroidered in gold, whose broad folds, silvery in the light, leaden-hued in the shade, lay in ample heaps upon the ground.

The pages drew aside this drapery; the Prince advanced, and the quivering waves of satin fell together again behind him.

The walls of the hall which he entered glittered faintly in the dim light; they gave out flashes of gold, the whiteness of pearls and purple reflections, while an exquisite perfume floated in the air. At the end of the room, beneath curtains fastened back by golden cords, sat the radiant sovereign in the midst of the silken billows of her scarlet robes; the triple plate of gold, insignia of omnipotence, rose above her brow. The Prince grasped the vision with one involuntary look; then, dropping his eyes as if he had gazed upon the sun at noon, he advanced to the centre of the room and fell upon his knees; then slowly his face sank to the ground.

"Iwakura," said the Kisaki, after a long pause, "what you ask of me is serious. I desire certain explanations from your own lips before I prefer your request to the sublime master of the world, the son of the gods, my spouse."

The Prince half rose, and strove to speak, but could not; he felt as if his bosom would burst with the frantic throbbing of his heart. The words died on his lips, and he remained with downcast eyes, pale as death.

"Is it because you think me angry with you that you are so much alarmed?" said the Queen, looking at the Prince for an instant with surprise. "I can forgive you, for your crime is but slight. You love one of my maidens, that is all."

"Nay, I do not love her!" cried Nagato, who, as if he had lost his senses, raised his eyes to his sovereign.

"What matters it to me?" said the Kisaki abruptly. For one second their gaze met; but Nagato closed his guilty eyes, and trembling at his own audacity, awaited its punishment.

But after a pause the Kisaki went on in a quiet voice: "Your letter reveals to me a terrible secret; and if what you imagine is true, the peace of the kingdom may be deeply affected."

"That is why, Divine Sister of the Sun, I had the boldness to beg for your all-powerful intercession," said the Prince, unable completely to master the quiver in his voice. "If you grant my prayer, if I obtain what I ask, great misfortunes may be prevented."

"You know, Iwakura, that the Celestial Mikado is favorable to Hieyas; would he believe in the crime of which you accuse his favorite I and would you be willing to maintain in public the accusation hitherto kept secret?"

"I would maintain it to Hieyas' very face," said Nagato firmly; "he is the instigator of the odious plot which came near costing my young master his life."

"That affirmation would endanger your own life. Have you thought of that?"

"My life is a slight thing," said the Prince. "Besides, the mere fact of my devotion to Fide-Yori is enough to attract the Regent's hatred. I barely escaped assassination by his men a few days ago, on leaving Kioto."

"What, Prince! is that indeed possible?" said the Kisaki.

"I only mention the unimportant fact," continued Nagato, "to show you that this man is familiar with crime, and that he is anxious to rid himself of those who stand in the way of his ambition."

"But how did you escape from the murderers?" asked the Kisaki, who seemed to take a lively interest in the adventure.

"The sharp blade of my sword and the strength of my arm saved my life. But why should you waste your sublime thoughts upon so trifling an incident?"

"Were the assassins numerous?" inquired the Queen, curiously.

"Ten or twelve, perhaps. I killed several of them; then I gave my horse the spurs, and he soon put a sufficient distance between them and me."

"What!" said the Kisaki meditatively, "is the man who has the confidence of my divine spouse so fierce and treacherous? I share your fears, Iwakura, and sad forebodings overwhelm me; but can I persuade the Mikado that our presentiments are not vain? At least I will try to do so, for the good of my people and the salvation of the kingdom. Go, Prince; be at the reception this evening. I shall then have seen the Lord of the World."

The Prince, having prostrated himself, rose, and with his head still bent towards the earth, withdrew backwards from the room. As he reached the satin curtain, he once more almost involuntarily raised his eyes to the sovereign, who followed him with her gaze. But the drapery fell and the adorable vision disappeared.

The pages led Iwakura to one of the palaces reserved for sovereign princes passing through Kioto. Happy to find himself alone, he stretched himself upon a pile of cushions, and, still deeply moved, gave himself up to a delicious revery.

"Ah!" he murmured, "what strange joy fills my soul! I am intoxicated; perhaps it comes from breathing the air that surrounds her! Ah! terrible madness, hopeless longing which causes me such sweet suffering, how much you must be increased by this unexpected interview! Already I had often fled from Osaka; exhausted, like a diver perishing for want of air, I came hither, to gaze upon the palaces which hide her from my sight, or to catch an occasional glimpse of her in the distance as she leaned over a balcony, or paced the garden paths surrounded by her women; and I bore hence a store of happiness. But now I have breathed the perfume which exhales from her person, her voice has caressed my ear, I have heard my name tremble on her lips! Can I now be content with what has hitherto filled up my life? I am lost; my existence is ruined by this impossible love; and yet I am happy. Soon I shall see her again, no longer under the constraint of a political audience, but able to dazzle myself at my ease with her beauty. Shall I have strength to conceal my agitation and my criminal love? Yes, divine sovereign, before thee only my haughty spirit falls prostrate, and my every thought turns towards thee as the mists to the sun. Goddess, I adore thee with awe and respect; but alas! I love thee as well, with a mad tenderness, as if thou wert but a mere woman!"

CHAPTER V.

THE KNIGHTS OF HEAVEN.

Night had come; to the heat of the day had succeeded a delicious coolness, and the air was full of perfume from the garden flowers, wet with dew.

The balconies running outside the palace halls in which the evening diversions were to take place, were illuminated, and crowded with guests, who breathed the evening air with delight. The Prince of Nagato ascended the staircase of honor, bordered on either hand by a living balustrade of pretty pages, each holding in his hand a gilded stick, at the end of which hung a round lantern. The Prince passed through the galleries slowly, on account of the crowd; he bowed low when he encountered any high dignitary of the Court, saluted the princes, his equals, in friendly phrase, and approached the throne room.

This hall shone resplendent from the myriad rays of lanterns and of lamps. A joyous uproar filled it as well as the neighboring apartments seen through the widely opened panels.

The maids-of-honor chattered together, and their voices were-blended with the slight rustle of their robes, as they arranged the ample folds. Seated on the right and left of the royal dais, these princesses formed groups, and each group had its hierarchic rank and its especial colors. In one the women were arrayed in pale-blue robes flowered with silver; in another in green, lilac, or pale-yellow gowns.

Upon the dais covered with soft carpets, the Kisaki shone resplendent in the midst of the waves of satin, gauze, and silver brocade formed by her full scarlet and white robes, scintillating with precious stones. The three vertical plates surmounting her diadem looked like three golden sunbeams hovering above her brow.

Certain princesses had mounted the steps to the throne, and, kneeling upon the topmost one, talked merrily with their sovereign; the latter sometimes littered a low laugh, which scandalized some silent old prince, the faithful guardian of the severe rules of etiquette. But the sovereign was so young, not yet twenty years old, that she might readily be pardoned if she sometimes ceased to feel the weight of the crown upon her head; and at her laughter, joy spread on every side, as the songs of the birds break forth with the first rays of the sun.

"The supreme gods be praised!" said one princess in an undertone to her companions, "the sorrow that oppressed our sovereign has passed away at last; she is gayer than ever this evening."

"And in what a clement mood!" said another. "There is Fatkoura restored to favor. She mounts the stops to the throne. The Kisaki has summoned her."

In fact Fatkoura stood upon the last step of the royal dais; but the melancholy expression of her features, her fixed and bewildered gaze, contrasted strangely with the serene and happy look imprinted upon every face. She thanked the Kisaki for granting her pardon; but she did it in a voice so sad and so singularly troubled that the young Queen trembled, and raised her eyes to her former favorite.

"Are you ill?" she asked, surprised at the change in the young woman's features.

"With joy at winning forgiveness, perhaps," stammered Fatkoura.

"You need not remain for the feast if you are not well."

"I thank you," said Fatkoura, bending low, as she moved away and was lost in the crowd.

The notes of a hidden orchestra were soon heard, and the entertainment began.

A curtain was drawn aside in the wall opposite the throne, and revealed a charming landscape.

Mount Fusiyama appeared in the background, rearing its snow-sprinkled peak above a necklace of clouds; the sea, of a deep blue, dotted with a few white sails, lay at the foot of the mountains: a road wound along among trees and thickets of flowering shrubs.

Then a young man entered; he hung his head; he seemed tired and sad. The orchestra was silent. The young man lifted up his voice. He told how misfortune had pursued him. His mother died of grief because the fields cultivated by her husband grew more and more sterile. He followed his mother's coffin with tears, then almost killed himself with work to support his aged father; but the father died in his turn, leaving his son so destitute, that he had not money enough to bury him. He then sold himself as a slave, and with the price of his liberty paid the last marks of respect to his father. Now he was on his way to his master to comply with the terms of the contract. He was going off, when a most beautiful woman appeared in his path. The young man gazed at her in mute admiration.

"I have a favor to beg of you," said the woman. "I am alone and forsaken; accept me for your wife: I will be devoted and faithful to you."

"Alas!" said the young man, "I have not a single possession, and even my body is not my own. I have sold myself to a master, to whom I am now on my way."

"I am skilled in the art of weaving silk," said the unknown; "take me to your master; I will manage to make myself useful."

"I consent with all my heart," said the youth; "but how comes it that a woman so beautiful as you is willing to take a poor man like me for her husband?"

"Beauty is nothing in comparison with the qualities of the heart," said the woman.

"In the second part, the husband and wife are seen working in their master's gardens,—the man cultivating flowers, the wife embroidering a marvellous tissue which she had woven. The master walked about, overlooking his slaves; he approached the young woman and examined her work.

"Oh, what splendid stuff!" he exclaimed; "it is of inestimable value."

"I would gladly exchange it for our liberty."

The master agreed to the bargain, and set them free. Then the husband fell at his wife's feet; he thanked her enthusiastically for having thus delivered him from bondage. But the woman was transformed; she became so brilliant, that the young man, dazzled, could look at her no longer.

"I am the celestial weaver," said she; "your courage and industry and your filial piety touched me, and, seeing your misery, I descended from heaven to help you. All that you may henceforth undertake shall succeed if you never depart from the path of virtue."

So saying, the divine weaver rose to heaven and resumed her place in the house of the silkworms.[1]

The orchestra then played a dance. The curtain fell, and soon rose again. It revealed the garden of a pagoda, with its thickets of bamboos, its light edifices, with their huge roofs supported by a vast number of beams of every hue. Then scene followed upon scene in pantomime, one having no connection with the other. Religious or military legends were represented, fabulous heroes and symbolic characters appeared in antique costume, some wearing the egg-shaped mitre and the tunic with long open sleeves, others having on their head the old-fashioned crestless helmet, with its gold ornaments, which protected the nape of the neck, or wearing a fantastic headdress, broad and high, in the form of a pyramid of gold, decorated with fringes and tiny bells.

Then the stage was cleared; and after a prelude from the orchestra, young and lovely dancing-girls appeared, clad in gorgeous dresses, with the wings of birds or butterflies on their shoulders, and long antennas on their foreheads which quivered gently above their golden crowns, wrought in open-work. They performed a slow graceful dance, full of undulating rocking movements; their figure ended, they formed groups on either side of the stage, while comic dancers, disguised in false noses and extravagant costumes, entered and concluded the spectacle by a wild dance full of blows and tumbles.

From the beginning of the representation the Prince of Nagato had leaned against a wall near the stage, and, half hidden in the folds of a curtain, while every eye was fixed upon the mimic scene, he gazed ecstatically upon the smiling and radiant sovereign.

It seemed as if the Queen felt oppressed by this ardent and tenacious gaze, for she turned her head, and her eyes rested on the Prince.

The latter did not lower his eyes—an all-powerful charm prevented him from doing so; that look, descending towards him like a sunbeam, scorched him. For a moment he felt as if he had lost his senses; it seemed as if the Kisaki smiled upon him very faintly. She instantly cast down her eyes and examined the bracelet encircling her arm; then, lifting her head, she appeared to follow the course of the performance attentively.

When the curtain fell for the last time, in the midst of the hubbub of conversation renewed after a prolonged silence, a woman paused before Nagato.

"I know your secret, Prince!" she said, in a low, but threatening tone.

"What do you mean?" cried Nagato; "I do not understand you, Fatkoura."

"You understand me very well," replied Fatkoura, looking steadily at him; "and you may well turn pale, for your life is in my hands."

"My life!" murmured the Prince; "I would bless any one who would rid me of it."

The young woman had moved away; but a great stir now occurred around the Queen. All the maids-of-honor had risen, and silence again fell upon the assembly.

The Kisaki stepped down from her throne; she advanced slowly through the hall, dragging a weight of satin after her. The princesses in groups, according to their rank, followed at a distance, stopping whenever she stopped. All the guests bowed low as she passed. She spoke a few words to an illustrious Daimio or a lady of high rank, then went on; in this way she reached the Prince of Nagato.

"Iwakura," said she, drawing from her bosom a sealed letter wrapped in a piece of green satin, "give this paper to the Shogun's mother from me." And she added in a lower tone: "It is what you asked for. The Mikado's orders are that you shall only make use of this document when you are sure that Hieyas is about to perjure himself."

"Your orders shall be faithfully executed," said Nagato, tremblingly taking the letter. "This very night I will return to Osaka."

"May your journey be prosperous!" said the Kisaki in a strangely gentle voice. Then she passed on; the Prince still heard the rustle of her dress on the mats for a brief moment.

An hour later Nagato left the Dairi,[2] and was on his way.

In traversing the city he was obliged to keep his horse to a walk, lest he should run over some of the merry throng that blocked the streets.

Huge lanterns of glass, paper, gauze, or silk shone on every hand; their many-colored lights cast odd reflections upon the faces of the passers, who, as they changed position, looked pink, blue, lilac, or green. The horse was somewhat frightened by the deafening uproar that pervaded Kioto. There were shouts of laughter from women standing before a puppet-show; a tambourine ringing an incessant accompaniment to the marvellous feats of a band of conjurors; angry cries from a quarrel degenerating into a brawl; a silver bell struck by the finger of fate in response to some sorcerer who foretold the future to an attentive circle; the shrill songs of the priests of Odji-gongem performing a sacred dance in the garden of a pagoda; then the clamor of a whole army of beggars, some mounted on stilts, others accoutred in historic costume, or wearing in lieu of hat a vase containing a flourishing shrub in full bloom.

Here were mendicant friars, clad in red, with shaven head, puffing up their cheeks and drawing from silver whistles sounds, whose acuteness pierced the tumult and rent the ear; priestesses of the national form of worship passed along, singing and waving a holy-water sprinkler of white paper,—the symbol of purity; a dozen young bonzes playing on all sorts of instruments, listened eagerly, to catch the measure of the melody which they were executing in spite of the general commotion, while farther on a tortoise-charmer beat a tam-tam with rapid strokes, and blind men, sitting at a temple door, thumped with all their might on bells bristling with bronze pimples.

From time to time nobles of the Mikado's Court forced their way through the crowd; they were going incognito to the theatre or to one of the tea-houses which were kept open all night, and in which, set free from the rigors of etiquette, they could drink and enjoy themselves at their ease.

Nagato, too, travelled incognito and alone; he had not even an out-runner to disperse the crowd before him. He managed, however, to leave the city without injuring any one. Then he gave the reins to his impatient steed, who galloped quickly along a magnificent avenue of sycamores, bordered by pagodas, temples, and chapels, which glided swiftly by to right and left, and from which a fragment of prayer or sacred song reached his ear. Once he turned and cast a long look behind. He saw through the branches the tomb of Taiko-Sama, Fide-Yori's father; he thought that the ashes of that great man must quiver with joy as he who bore safety to his son passed by. He left the suburbs behind him and climbed a low hill.

He then cast a last look on that city so dear to his heart. It was wrapped in a luminous fog, red in the midst of the blue light cast by the moon upon the surrounding mountains. On the slopes, among the trees, scattered roofs of pagodas shone like mirrors. The golden chrysanthemum which surmounts the door of the Dairi caught a ray, and looked like a star suspended over the city. But all disappeared behind the brow of the hill; the last sound from Kioto faded and died.

The Prince heaved a sigh; then, urging his horse, he flew like an arrow through the land. He passed through several villages huddled by the roadside, and at the end of an hour reached Yodo. He traversed the town without slackening pace, and rode by a castle, whose lofty towers were brilliantly lighted, while the water in the moats glittered back a reflection.

This castle belonged to Yodogimi, the Shogun's mother; it was then inhabited by General Harounaga, a favorite of that princess.

"I have little confidence in the valor of the handsome warrior who sleeps behind those ramparts," muttered the Prince, glancing at the silent castle. A moment later he was galloping through a rice-field. The moon was mirrored on every side in the pools of water from which the slender blades grew. The rice-plantation looked like a vast pond; delicate white vapors floated here and there in sheets close to the ground, and a few great black buffaloes lying half in the water slept quietly.

Nagato checked his panting horse; soon he dropped the bridle on its neck, and bowing his head, plunged anew into his despotic revery. The animal fell into a walk, and the pre-occupied Prince left him to his own gait.

Nagato saw once more the brilliant palace halls, and the sovereign advancing towards him; he fancied he heard again the rustle of her robes. "Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, "this letter which has lain in her bosom now rests on my heart and burns me."

He drew the letter hastily from his breast.

"Alas! I must part with this priceless relic," he murmured.

All at once he pressed it to his lips. The touch of the soft stuff, the familiar perfume exhaled from it, sent an ardent thrill through the Prince's veins. He shut his eyes, overcome by a delicious ecstasy.

An uneasy neigh from his horse roused him from his dream.

He restored the royal missive to his bosom and looked around him. Fifty paces in front of him, a group of trees cast its shadow across the road. Nagato thought he saw something stir in that shadow. He seized the pike fastened to his saddle, and urged on his horse, which plunged and reared, reluctant to advance.

The Prince's doubts were soon solved: armed men awaited his coming.

"What, again!" he cried. "The Regent must be very anxious to get rid of me."

"This time he will not fail!" replied one of the assassins, riding full upon him.

"You have not got me yet!" said Nagato, turning his horse aside.

His opponent, borne onwards by the impetus of his sally, passed close by him without reaching

him.

"Rash fool that I am," muttered the Prince, "thus to expose this precious paper to the chances of my fate!"

Naked swords gleamed around him. His assailants were so numerous that they could not all approach the object of their attack at once.

Nagato was the most skilful fencer in the entire kingdom; he was both cool and daring. Whirling his pike about him, he broke several sword-blades, the splinters falling in a shower of blood; then, forcing his horse to execute a series of rapid leaps, he escaped for a moment the blows which were aimed at him.

"I can certainly defend myself for a few instants more," he thought, "but I am plainly lost."

A buffalo, aroused, uttered a long and melancholy bellow; then nothing more was heard but the clink of steel and the stamping of horses.

But suddenly a voice rang through the darkness. "Courage, Prince!" it cried; "we come to your aid!"

Nagato was covered with blood, but he struggled bravely still. The voice lent him new strength, while it paralyzed the assassins, who exchanged anxious glances.

The rapid beat of horses' hoofs was heard, and before any recognition was possible, a body of horsemen fell upon the assailants of the Prince.

Nagato, exhausted, withdrew slightly to one side, and with surprise and confusion watched the defenders who had arrived so opportunely.

These men were beautiful to behold in the moonlight, which illumined the rich embroideries of their dress, and drew azure sparkles from their light helmets, decorated in open-work. The Prince recognized the costume of the Knights of Heaven, the Mikado's guard of honor.

Soon nothing was left of the assassins despatched by the Regent, but corpses. The conquerors wiped their weapons, and the leader of the troop approached Nagato. "Are you seriously wounded, Prince?" he asked.

"I do not know," replied Nagato; "in the heat of battle I felt nothing."

"But your face is bathed in blood."

"True," said the Prince, putting his hand to his cheek.

"Will you dismount?"

"No; I am afraid I should not be able to remount. But talk of me no more; let me thank you for your miraculous intervention, which saved my life, and ask you by what chain of circumstances you were on this road at this hour."

"I will tell you all soon," said the knight; "but not before you have dressed the wound which has bled so profusely."

Water was brought from a neighboring pool, and the Prince's face was washed with it; a tolerably deep Cut was found on his forehead, near the temple. Nothing could be done for the time being but to bandage his head tightly.

"You have other wounds, have you not?"

"I think so; but I feel strong enough to reach Osaka."

"Very well, let us be off!" said the knight; "we will talk as we ride."

The little troop took up the line of march.

"You intend to escort me then?" said Nagato.

"We are ordered not to leave you, Prince; but the accomplishment of that duty is a pleasure to us."

"Will you do me the honor to acquaint me with your glorious name?" said Nagato, bowing.

"You know me, Nagato; I am Farou-So-Chan, Lord of Tsusima."

"The husband of the lovely Iza-Farou, whom I had the honor of seeing this very day!" exclaimed Nagato. "Forgive me! I should have recognized you by the terrible blows that you dealt my opponents; but I was blinded by blood."

"I am proud and happy to have been chosen to help you, and to prevent the unfortunate results which your reckless daring might have caused."

"I acted with unpardonable levity indeed," said Nagato; "I had a right to risk my life, but not to expose the precious message which I bear."

"Let me tell you, dear Prince, that the envelope which you carry contains nothing but a blank paper."

"Is it possible?" cried Nagato; "have I been tricked? In that case I cannot survive the affront."

"Calm yourself, friend," said the Prince of Tsusima, "and hear me. After the feast this evening, no sooner had she re-entered her apartments, than the divine Kisaki summoned me: 'Farou,' she said, 'Prince Nagato leaves Kioto to-night. I know that his life is in danger, and that he may fall into an ambuscade. Therefore, instead of the message which he supposes he is bearing, I have

only given him an empty envelope. The true letter is here,' she added, showing me a little casket. 'Take fifty men with you, and follow the Prince at a distance. If he is attacked, go to his rescue; if not, rejoin him at the gate of Osaka, and give him this casket without letting him know that you have borne him escort.' I have it here, Prince; only you have a matchless horse, and we almost came too late to help you."

Nagato was deeply moved by this revelation; he remembered how sweetly the sovereign had wished him a prosperous journey, and could not help seeing a sign of interest in his safety in what had taken place. And then he thought that he might now retain that treasure, that letter which she had worn upon her heart for a whole evening.

The rest of the journey was silent. Fever had seized Nagato; the chill of coming dawn made him shiver, and he began to feel weakened by the loss of blood. When they reached the gates of Osaka, the sun had risen. Tsusima took from his saddle-bow a tiny crystal box, closed by a cunningly knotted silk cord.

"Here, Prince," said he, "the precious letter is contained in this box. Farewell! May your wounds be speedily healed!"

"Farewell!" replied Nagato; "thanks once more for risking your precious life for mine, which is of small worth."

Having saluted each of the little band of horsemen, Nagato made his way through one of the city gates, and pricking his horse, soon reached the palace.

When Loo saw his master enter, pale as a ghost, and covered with blood, he fell on his knees, where he remained mute with amazement.

"Come," said the Prince, "shut your gaping mouth, and get up; I am not dead yet. Call my servants, and run for the doctor."

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[1] Constellation of the Scorpion.

[2] Royal residence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FRATERNITY OF BLIND MEN.

A few hours later, groups of courtiers stood beneath the veranda of the palace of Hieyas; anxious to be the first to greet the real master, they awaited his wakening. Some leaned against the cedar columns that supported the roof, others, standing firm on their legs, one hand on their hip, crumpling the silky folds of their loose tunic, listened to one of their number as he told an anecdote, doubtless very entertaining, for it was followed with the utmost attention, and the auditors let fall an occasional laugh, instantly stifled out of respect for the slumbers of the illustrious sleeper.

The narrator was the Prince of Tosa, and the Prince of Nagato the hero of the adventure that he recounted.

"Yesterday," he said, "the sun was setting when I heard a noise at my palace gate. I went to the window, and saw my servants wrangling with a troop of blind men. The latter were bent on entering, and all talked at once, striking the flagstones with their sticks; the lackeys shouted to drive them off, and no one heard what the other said. I was beginning to lose my temper at the scene, when the Prince of Nagato appeared; my servants at once bowed low before him, and at his order admitted the blind men into the pavilion used as a stable for the horses of my visitors. I went out to meet the Prince, curious to hear an explanation, of this comedy.

"'Make haste!' he said as he entered, throwing a bundle on the floor; 'let us take off our robes, and dress in these costumes.'

"'But why?' I asked, looking at the costumes, which were little to my taste.

"'What!' said he, 'is not this the hour when we may drop the weary pomp of our rank, and become free and happy men?'

"'Yes,' said I; 'but why use our liberty to muffle ourselves in that ugly garb?'

"'You shall see; I have a scheme,' said the Prince, who was already disrobing; then, putting his lips to my ear, he added, 'I marry, to-night. You'll see what a lark it will be.'

"'What! you're going to be married, and in that dress?' I cried, looking at the Prince in his beggarly disguise.

"'Come, hurry,' he said; 'or we sha'n't find the bride.'

The Prince was half way downstairs. I quickly donned a dress like his, and, urged by curiosity, followed him.

"'But,' I exclaimed, 'all those blind men whom you quartered in the stable?'

"'We will join them.'

"'In the stable?' I asked.

"I did not understand a blessed thing; but I had confidence in the whimsical fancy of the Prince, and I patiently waited for him to solve the mystery. The blind men had collected in the great courtyard of the palace, and I saw that we were dressed precisely like them. The poor fellows had the most comical faces imaginable, with their lashless eyelids, their flat noses, their thick lips, and their stupidly happy expression. Nagato put a staff in my hand, and said: 'Let us be off.'

"The gates were thrown open. The blind men, holding one another by the skirt, started out, tapping the ground with their sticks as they went. Nagato, bending his back and shutting his eyes, followed in their rear. I saw that I was expected to do the same, and I tried my best to imitate him. There we were in the streets in the train of that band of blind men. I could restrain myself no longer. I was seized with a frantic fit of laughter, which all my comrades soon shared."

"Nagato has certainly lost his senses!" cried the Prince of Tosa's hearers, writhing with laughter.

"And Tosa was scarcely better!"

"The Prince of Nagato, he never laughed," continued the story-teller; "he was very angry. I tried to find out something of the Prince's plans from the blind man nearest me, but he knew nothing of them. I only learned that the corporation of which I formed a part belonged to that confraternity of blind men whose business it is to go among the middle classes to rub sick people and those who are not strong. The idea that we might perhaps have to rub some one, sent me off again into such a fit of merriment that, in spite of my efforts to keep a straight face to please the Prince, I was obliged to stop and sit down on a stone to hold my sides.

"Nagato was furious. 'You'll put a stop to my marriage,' he said.

"I set off again, winking my eyes and imitating the gait of my strange fellow-travellers as best I could. They struck the ground with their sticks, and, at this noise, people leaned from their windows and called them in. In this way we came to a house of poor appearance. The noise of sticks was redoubled. A voice demanded two shampooers.

"'Come,' said Nagato to me; 'this is the place.'

"Leaving the band, we went up a few steps and found ourselves in the house. I saw two women, whom Nagato awkwardly saluted, turning his back to them as he did so. I hastily shut my eyes and bowed to the wall. But I managed to half open one eye again, prompted by curiosity. There were a young girl and an old woman, probably her mother.

"'Take us first,' said the latter; 'you shall rub my husband later.'

"She then squatted on the floor and bared her back. I foresaw that the old woman would fall to my lot, and that I must certainly play the part of shampooer. Nagato was lost in salutations.

"'Ah! ah! ah!' he mumbled, as inferiors do when saluting a person of high rank.

"I began to rub the old lady violently, and she uttered lamentable groans; I struggled bravely to resist the laugh which again rose in my throat and nearly choked me. The girl had uncovered one shoulder, modestly, as if we had had eyes.

"'It is there,' she said; 'I gave myself a blow, and the doctor said that it would do me good to be rubbed.'

"Nagato began to rub the young girl with amazing gravity; but all at once he seemed to forget his rôle of blind man.

"'What beautiful hair you have!' said he. 'There's one thing certain: if you were to adopt the headdress of noble women, you would not have to resort, as they do, to all sorts of devices for lengthening your hair.'

"The young girl gave a shriek and turned round; she saw Nagato's very wide open eyes fixed upon her.

"'Mother!' she exclaimed, 'these are no blind men!'

"The mother fell flat on the floor; and surprise taking away all her senses, she made no effort to rise, but began to utter yells of rare shrillness.

"The father ran in in a fright.

"As for me, I gave free vent to my mirth, and rolled on the ground, unable to hold in longer. To my great surprise, the Prince of Nagato threw himself at the workman's feet.

"'Forgive us,' said he. 'Your daughter and I want to be married; and as I have no money, I resolved to follow the custom of the country and carry her off, to avoid wedding expenses. According to custom also, you must forgive us, after playing the stem parent for a little while.'

"'I marry that man!' said the girl; 'but I don't know him in the least.'

"'You think my daughter would take a scamp like you fora husband?" cried the father. 'Be off! out of the house in a trice, if you don't want to be acquainted with my fists.'

"The sound of his angry voice began to attract a crowd before the house. Nagato gave a long-drawn whistle.

"'Will you go!' cried the man of the people, scarlet with rage; and, amidst the most vulgar insults and objurgations, he raised his fist upon Nagato.

"'Do not strike one who will soon be your son,' said the Prince, catching him by the arm.

"'You, my son! You will sooner see the snow on Fusiyama blossom with flowers.'

"'I swear that you shall be my father-in-law,' said the Prince, throwing his arms round the fellow's waist.

"The latter struggled in vain; Nagato bore him from the house. I then approached the balustrade, and saw the crowd collected outside, dispersed by the runners preceding a magnificent procession,—music, banners, palanquins, all bearing the Prince's arms. The norimonos stopped at the door, and Nagato stuffed his father-in-law into one of them, which he closed and fastened with a pad-lock. I saw what I was to do; I clutched the old woman and settled her in another palanquin, while Nagato went back to got the girl. Two norimonos received us, and the procession set out, while the music sounded gayly. We soon reached a charming establishment in the midst of the prettiest garden I ever saw. Everything was lighted up; orchestras hidden among the foliage played softly; busy servants ran to and fro.

"'What is this enchanting palace?' said I to Nagato.

"'Oh! a trifle,' he answered scornfully; 'it is a little house which I bought for my new wife.'

"'He is crazy,' thought I, 'and will utterly ruin himself; but that's not my affair.'

"We were led into a room, where we put on splendid dresses; then we went down into the banquet-hall, where we met all Nagato's young friends, Satake, Foungo, Aki, and many others. They received us with enthusiastic shouts. Soon the bride, superbly dressed, entered, followed by her father and mother, stumbling over the folds of their silken robes. The father seemed quite calm, the mother was flurried, and the young girl so astounded that she kept her pretty mouth wide open. Nagato declared that he took her for his wife, and the marriage ceremony was complete. I never saw so merry a one. The feast was most delicate, everybody was soon drunk, and I among the rest; but I had myself carried hack to the palace about three o'clock for a brief rest, for I wanted to be present this morning at the Regent's levee."

"That is the most absurd story I ever heard," said the Prince of Figo. "There is certainly no one like Nagato for knowing how to carry out a joke."

"And he is really married?" asked another lord.

"Very really," said the Prince of Tosa; "the marriage is legal, in spite of the woman's low rank."

"The Prince invents new follies every day, and gives splendid feasts; he must come to an end of his vast fortune ere long."

"If he is ruined, it will please the Regent, who does not love him over much."

"Yes; but it will grieve the Shogun, who is exceedingly fond of him, and who will never let him want for money."

"Hollo!" cried the Prince of Tosa, "there comes Nagato back to the palace."

A procession was indeed passing through the gardens. On the banners and on the norimono, borne by twenty men, were visible the insignia of the Prince,—a black bolt surmounting three balls in pyramidal form. The *cortége* marched quite near the veranda which sheltered the nobles, and through the curtains of the norimono they saw the young Prince dozing on his cushions.

"He surely won't come to the Regent's levee," said one lord; "he would run the risk of falling asleep on the shoulder of Hieyas."

"Nagato never comes to pay his respects to Hieyas; he detests him profoundly; he is his avowed enemy."

"Such an enemy is not much to be feared," said the Prince of Tosa. "On his return from these nightly escapades he is only fit for sleeping."

"I don't know whether that is the Regent's opinion."

"If he thought otherwise, would he endure from him insults serious enough to condemn him to hara-kiri? If the Prince still lives, he owes it to the clemency of Hieyas."

"Or to the loving protection of Fide-Yori."

"Doubtless Hieyas is only generous through regard for the master; but if all his enemies were of Nagato's mind, he might esteem himself happy."

While the courtiers thus chatted away the time of waiting for his waking, Hieyas, who had risen long before, paced his chamber, anxious, uneasy, bearing on his care-worn face the marks of sleeplessness.

A man stood near the Regent, leaning against the wall; he watched him stride up and down; this man was a former groom, named Faxibo. Hostlers had enjoyed considerable favor since the accession to power of Taiko-Sama, who was originally an hostler. Faxibo was deeper than any other person in the confidence of the Regent, who hid nothing from him, and even thought aloud in his presence.

Hieyas constantly raised the blind from the window and looked out.

"Nothing," he said impatiently; "no news. It is incomprehensible."

"Be patient for a few moments more," said Faxibo; "those whom you sent out upon the Kioto road cannot have returned yet."

"But the others! There were forty of them, and not one has returned! If he has escaped me again,

it is maddening."

"Perhaps you exaggerate the man's importance," said Faxibo. "It is a love-affair that attracts him to Kioto; his head is full of follies."

"So you think; and I confess that this man terrifies me," said the Regent vehemently, pausing before Faxibo. "No one ever knows what he is doing; you think him here, he is there. He outwits the most cunning spies: one declares that he followed him to Kioto, another swears that he has not lost sight of him for an instant, and that he has hot left Osaka; all his friends supped with him, while he was fighting on his return from the Miako[1] with men stationed by me. I think him asleep, or busy with his own affairs: one of my schemes is on the eve of success; his hand descends upon me at the last, moment. The empire would long since have been ours if it had not been for him; my partisans are numerous, but his are no less strong, and he has the right on his side. Stay: that plan which I had so skilfully arranged to rid the country, under the guise of accident, of a sovereign without talent and without energy,—that plan which was to throw the power into my hands,—who frustrated it? Who was the accursed coachman who urged that infernal team across the bridge? Nagato! He, always he. However," added Hieyas, "some one else, one of my allies, must have played the traitor, for it is impossible that any other can have guessed the scheme. Ah! if I knew the villain's name, I would at least gratify myself by an awful revenge."

"I told you what I was able to discover," said Faxibo. "Fide-Yori exclaimed at the moment of the crash: 'Omiti, you were right!'"

"Omiti! Who is Omiti? I do not know the name."

The Regent had advanced into the hall adjoining his chamber, which was divided, by a large screen only, from the veranda where the nobles were awaiting his coming. From within, this screen admitted of seeing without being seen. Hieyas heard the name of Nagato uttered; he approached eagerly, and signed to Faxibo to come close to him. Thus they heard the whole story of the Prince of Tosa.

"Yes," muttered Hieyas; "for a long time I took him for a man of dissolute morals and of no political importance; that was why I at first favored his intimacy with Fide-Yori. How deeply I repent it, now that I know what he is worth!"

"You see, master," said Faxibo, "that the Prince, doubtless warned of your project, did not quit Osaka."

"I tell you he was at the Miako, and did not leave there until far on in the night."

"And yet the Prince of Tosa was with him until very late."

"One of my spies followed him to Kioto; he entered the city in broad daylight, and remained there until midnight."

"It is incomprehensible," said Faxibo. "Stay! there he is, going home," he added, seeing Nagato's procession.

"Is it really he who occupies the litter?" asked Hieyas, trying to look out.

"I think I recognized him," replied Faxibo.

"Impossible! it cannot be the Prince of Nagato, unless it be his corpse."

At this moment a man entered the chamber, and prostrated himself with his face on the ground.

"It is my envoy," cried Hieyas. "Speak quickly, come I What have you learned?" he cried to the messenger.

"I went to the part of the road to which you directed me, all-powerful master," said the envoy. "At that spot the ground was strewn with corpses; I counted forty men and fifteen horses. Peasants were hovering around the dead; some felt of them, to see if there were no lingering trace of life. Others pursued the wounded horses, which were running about the rice-fields. I asked what had happened. They told me that no one knew; but at sunrise they saw a band of horsemen pass, belonging to the divine Mikado; they were on their way to Kioto. As for the corpses lying by the roadside, red with their blood, they all wore dark costumes, without any armorial bearings, and their faces were half hidden by their headdress, after the fashion of bandits and assassins."

"Enough!" exclaimed Hieyas, frowning; "go!"

The envoy retired, or rather fled.

"He has escaped me again," said Hieyas. "Well! I must deal the blow with my own hand. The end which I would attain is so noble, that I should not hesitate to use infamous means to overthrow the obstacles which rise in my path. Faxibo," he added, turning to the ex-groom, "usher in those who wait. Their presence may drive away the sad forebodings which oppressed me all night."

Faxibo lifted aside the screen, and the nobles entered one after another to greet the master. Hieyas observed that the courtiers were loss numerous than usual; none were present except those princes who were wholly devoted to his cause, and some few indifferent people who sought a special favor of the Regent.

Hieyas, still talking with the lords, moved out upon the veranda and looked around.

It seemed to him that an unusual bustle pervaded the palace courts. Messengers were starting off every moment, and princes coming up in their norimonos, in spite of the early hour. All were

proceeding towards Fide-Yori's palace.

"What is the matter?" thought he; "whence comes all this stir I what mean these messengers bearing orders of which I know nothing?" And, full of alarm, he dismissed the lords with a gesture.

"You will excuse me, I know," he said "the interests of the country call me."

But before the princes had taken leave, a soldier entered the room.

"The Shogun, Fide-Yori, begs the illustrious Hieyas to be good enough to come before his presence at once," said he; and without waiting for an answer, he departed.

Hieyas stopped the lords who were about to leave.

"Wait for me here," he said; "I do not know what is going on, but I am devoured by anxiety. You are devoted to me; I may possibly need you."

He saluted them with a wave of the hand, and went slowly out, his head bent, followed only by Faxibo.

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[1] That is to say, the capital.

CHAPTER VII.

PERJURY.

When he entered the hall where Fide-Yori was waiting for him, Hieyas saw that something important was about to occur.

All the party devoted to the son of Taiko-Sama were assembled there.

Fide-Yori wore for the first time, that warlike and royal costume which he alone had the right to assume. The cuirass of black horn girt his body, and heavy skirts, made of a series of plates fastened together by stitches of red silk, fell over a pair of loose trousers confined from the ankle to the knee by velvet gaiters. He had a sword on his left side, and another on the right. Three golden stars glittered on his breast; his hand rested upon an iron wand. The young man was seated on a folding stool such as warriors use in their tents.

On his right stood his mother, the beautiful Yodogimi, pale and nervous, but splendidly arrayed; on his left, the Prince of Mayada, who shared the regency with Hieyas; but being very old, and for some time past an invalid, this Prince held himself aloof from business matters. He however kept watch over Hieyas, and maintained the interests of Fide-Yori as far as possible.

On one side were the princes of Satsuma, Satake, Arima, Aki, and Issida; on the other, the warriors,—General Sanada-Sayemon-Yoke-Moura at their head,—in battle array; Aroufza, Moto-Tsoumou, Harounaga, Moritzka, and a very beautiful and serious young man, named Signenari.

All the Shogun's friends, in fact, and all the mortal enemies of the Regent were assembled; yet Nagato was absent.

Hieyas cast a haughty glance around the assembly.

"Here I am," he said, in a firm voice; "I am waiting. What are your wishes?"

A profound silence was the only answer. Fide-Yori turned away his eyes from him in horror.

At last the Prince of Mayada began to speak.

"We wish nothing from you but justice," said he; "we would simply recall to you a fact which you seem to have forgotten,—that your term of regency as well as mine, expired some months since, Hieyas; and in your zeal for governing the empire you have not heeded this. The son of Taiko-Sama is now of a fit age to reign; your rule is therefore over. It only remains for you to lay down your powers at the master's feet, and render him an account of your conduct, as I shall render an account of my actions while he was under our tutelage."

"You do not consider what you say," cried Hieyas, his face growing purple with rage; "you apparently mean to urge the country to its ruin!"

"I have spoken gently," replied Mayada; "do not force me to assume a different tone."

"You desire an inexperienced child," continued Hieyas, heedless of the interruption, "to wield the power before he has had any practice in the difficult profession of the head of a nation. It is as if you put a heavy porcelain vase into the hands of a new-born babe: he would let it fall to the ground, and the vase would break into a thousand bits."

"You insult our Shogun!" exclaimed the Prince of Satake.

"No," said Hieyas; "Fide-Yori himself will agree with me. I must initiate him slowly into my labors, and point out to him the possible solutions of the questions now in debate. Has he ever paid any heed to the affairs of the nation? His young intelligence was not yet ripe, and I spared him the fatigues of government. I alone possess the instructions of the great Taiko, and I alone can carry on the vast work which he undertook. The task is not yet accomplished. Therefore, in obedience

to that venerated chief, I must, in spite of your opinion, retain in my own hands the power intrusted to me by him; but, to show you how highly I esteem your advice, from this day forth the youthful Fide-Yori shall share the grave cares whose burden I have hitherto borne alone. Answer, Fide-Yori," added Hieyas; "say for yourself if I have spoken after your own heart."

Fide-Yori slowly turned his ashen face towards Hieyas and gazed at him fixedly. Then, after a moment's silence, he said in a voice somewhat trembling, although full of scorn: "The noise made by Swallow bridge as it fell beneath my tread has not made me deaf to your voice."

Hieyas turned pale before him whom he had striven to send to his death; he was humbled by his crime. His lofty intelligence suffered from these spots of blood and dirt which bespattered it; he saw them in the future darkening his name, which he longed to render glorious, certain that his duty towards his country was to keep in his own hands the power of which he was worthier than any other. He felt a sort of indignation at being obliged to compel by force that which public interest should have eagerly required of him. However, resolved to struggle to the end, he raised his head, bowed for an instant beneath the weight of tumultuous thoughts, and cast a savage and overbearing glance around the room.

A threatening silence had followed the Shogun's words. It was prolonged until it became painful; the Prince of Satsuma broke it at last.

"Hieyas," he said, "I summon you in my master's name to lay down the powers with which you were invested by Taiko-Sama."

"I refuse!" said Hieyas.

A cry of amazement escaped from the lips of all the nobles. The Prince of Mayada rose; he advanced slowly towards Hieyas, and drew from his breast a paper yellowed by age.

"Do you recognize this?" said he, unfolding the writing, which he held before the eyes of Hieyas. "Was it indeed with your blood that you traced your traitorous name here side by side with my loyal one? Have you forgotten the form of the oath,—'The powers which you intrust to us we will restore to your child upon his majority; we swear it on the remains of our ancestors, before the luminous disk of the sun'? Taiko fell peacefully asleep when he saw those few scarlet lines; to-day he will rise from his tomb, perjurer, to curse you."

The old man, trembling with anger, crumpled in his hands the oath written in blood and flung it in Hieyas' face.

"But do you really think that we shall let you thus despoil our child before our eyes?" he continued. "Do you think, because you do not choose to give up what you have taken, that we will not wrest it from you? The crimes which you plot have clouded your intellect; you have no soul or honor left; you dare to stand erect before your master,—before him whom you strove to kill!"

"He not only tried to take my life," said Fide-Yori; "that man, more savage than the tiger, has this night caused the murder of my most faithful servant, my dearest friend, the Prince of Nagato!"

A shudder of horror passed over the assembly, while a flash of joy illumined the eyes of Hieyas.

"Rid of that formidable foe," he thought, "I shall soon master Fide-Yori."

As if replying to his thought, the voice of Nagato was heard. "Do not rejoice too soon, Hieyas," it said; "I am alive, and still in condition to serve my young master."

Hieyas turned quickly, and saw the Prince, who had just lifted a heavy curtain, and now entered the hall.

Nagato looked like a ghost; his eyes, glittering with the light of fever, seemed larger and blacker than usual. His face was so pale that it could hardly be distinguished from the narrow white bandage spotted with blood which bound his head. A spasm of pain shook his limbs, and caused a crystal box that sparkled in his hand to quiver.

General Yoke-Moura ran to him.

"What madness, Prince!" he cried, "to rise and walk, after losing so much blood, and in spite of the orders of your doctors!"

"Bad friend!" said Fide-Yori, "will you never cease to play with your life?"

"I will become the slave of the doctors in obedience to the undeserved interest that you take in me," said the Prince, "when I have fulfilled the mission with which I am charged."

Hieyas, filled with alarm, had taken refuge in utter silence; he watched and waited, casting frequent glances at the door, as if anxious to escape.

"I should offer you this casket on my knees, and you should receive it on your knees," said the Prince; "for it contains a message from your lord and master and ours, from him who holds his power from Heaven, from the all-powerful Mikado."

Nagato prostrated himself and offered the casket to the Shogun, who bent his knee as he took it.

Hieyas felt sure that this casket contained his final doom; and he thought that now, as always, it was the Prince of Nagato who triumphed over him.

Meanwhile Fide-Yori had unfolded the Mikado's message and ran his eye over it. An expression of joy irradiated his countenance. He raised his eyes, wet with tears, to Nagato, thinking in his turn that it was always through him that he triumphed.

"Prince of Satsuma," said he, extending the letter to the aged lord, "read this divine writing aloud

to us."

The Prince of Satsuma read as follows:—

> "I, the direct descendant of the Gods who founded Japan, I lower my eyes to the earth, and I see that much time has elapsed since the death of that faithful servant of my dynasty, Taiko-Sama, whom my predecessor named General-in-chief of the kingdom. The son of that illustrious leader, who rendered great services to the country, was six years old when his father died; but time has sped for him as for all men, and he is now of an age to succeed his father; wherefore I name him in his turn General-in-chief of the kingdom.
>
> "In a few days the knights of Heaven shall solemnly announce to him my will and pleasure, that none may be ignorant of it.
>
> "Now, trusting to Fide-Yori the cares of government, I replunge myself in the mysterious absorption of my superhuman dream.
>
> "Given at the Dairi, in the nineteenth year of Nengo-Kai-Tio (164).
>
> "GO-MITZOU-NO."

"That is unanswerable," said Hieyas, bowing his head; "the supreme master has ordered,—I obey. I lay down the powers which were confided to me; and after the insults to which I have submitted, I know what remains for me to do. I hope that those who have managed this matter may not repent their success some day, and that the country may not have cause to groan under the weight of misfortune which may befall it."

He went out, after uttering these words, and all the lords rejoicing, gathered around the young Shogun and congratulated him.

"You should congratulate my friend and brother, Nagato," said Fide-Yori; "it was he who accomplished everything."

"All is not ended yet," said Nagato, who seemed thoughtful; "you must instantly sign Hieyas' death-warrant."

"But you heard what he said, friend; he said that he knew what remained for him to do. He is even now about to perform the hara-kiri."

"Certainly," said the Prince of Satsuma.

"He knows the code of nobility," said the Prince of Aki.

"Yes; but he despises its customs, and will not conform to them," said Nagato. "If we do not promptly condemn that man, he will escape us; and once free, he is capable of daring anything."

The Prince of Nagato had unfolded a roll of white paper, and offered a brush dipped in ink to the Shogun.

Fide-Yori seemed to waver. "To condemn him thus without a trial!" he said.

"A trial is of no avail," replied Nagato. "He has perjured himself, and failed in respect to you before the whole Council; moreover he is an assassin."

"He is my wife's grandfather," murmured the Shogun.

"You can repudiate your wife," said Nagato. "While Hieyas lives, there can be no peace for you, no safety for the country."

Fide-Yori seized the brush, wrote the warrant, and signed it.

Nagato handed the order to General Sanada-Sayemon-Yoke-Moura, who instantly left the room.

He soon returned, his countenance disfigured by wrath. "Too late!" he cried; "the Prince of Nagato was right: Hieyas has fled!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CASTLE OF OWARI.

On the shores of the Pacific Ocean, at the top of a rocky cliff, stands the fortress of the Princes of Owari. Its walls, pierced with loopholes, are so constructed as to follow the lay of the land. They are masked here and there by groups of trees and shrubs, whose fresh verdure is in happy contrast with the ragged walls of rust-colored rock.

From the summit of the fortress the view is very fine. A little bay rounds to the foot of the hill, and affords safe shelter for the junks and barks which skim the clear water in all directions; farther away the blue waves of the Pacific trace a darker line against the sky. On the land-ward side rises a chain of mountains, cultivated in patches to their very tops. Between the mountains lie valleys, where we may see villages nestling in a grove, near a brook; then the valleys end in the heart of more hills.

A broad and well-kept road winds along the undulating ground to the foot of the castle of Owari.

This road, known as the Tokaido, was built by Taiko-Sama; it intersects the entire kingdom, traversing the domains of the Daimios, and is under the sole jurisdiction of the Shogun.

The Prince who ruled over the province of Owari was at this time living in his castle.

About the third hour after noon on the day that Hieyas fled from Osaka, the sentinel posted on the loftiest tower of the palace of Owari cried out that he saw a troop of horsemen galloping along the Tokaido. The Prince was at the moment in one of the courts of the castle, crouched upon his heels, his hands resting on his thighs. He was attending a lesson in hara-kiri taken by his young son.

The child, seated on a mat in the centre of the court, held in both hands a short, blunt sword, and raised his pretty artless face, already serious in its cast, towards his instructor, seated opposite him. Women were looking on from a gallery above; and their dresses made bright spots of color against the delicate tints of the carved wood-work. Enormous butterflies, birds, flowers, or variegated balls were embroidered on their robes; every head was bristling with big yellow tortoise-shell pins. They chattered together with a thousand bewitching airs and graces.

In the court, leaning against the upright post of a bronze lantern, a young girl in a closely fitting dress of sky-blue crape, with all the folds drawn to the front, fixed an absent gaze upon the little lord; in her hand she held a screen, upon which was painted a humming-bird.

"Hold the sword firmly," said the teacher; "apply it by the point, below the left ribs; be careful that the edge of the blade is turned to the right. Now grasp the hilt in your hand, and bear on with all your strength; then quickly, without moderating your pressure, move your weapon horizontally towards your right side. In this way you will cleave your body in twain according to strict rule."

The child went through the motions with such violence that he tore his robe.

"Good! good!" exclaimed the Prince of Owari, striking his thighs with his open hands. "The little fellow has plenty of courage!"

At the same time he raised his eyes to the women leaning from the balcony, and imparted his impression to them by a sign of the head.

"He will be brave and intrepid as his father," said one of them.

It was just then that news was brought to the Prince of the appearance of a band of horsemen on the royal road.

"Doubtless a neighboring lord coming to visit me incognito," said the Prince; "or else these horsemen are merely passing travellers. At any rate, there is no reason to interrupt the lesson."

The teacher then made his pupil repeat the list of incidents which oblige a man of noble race to rip himself open; namely, to incur the displeasure of the Shogun, or receive from him a public reprimand; to disgrace himself; to avenge an insult by slaying its originator; voluntarily or involuntarily to permit the escape of prisoners intrusted to one's care; and innumerable other nice cases.

"Add," said the Prince of Owari, "to be wanting in respect to one's father. In my opinion, a son who insults his parents can only expiate that crime by performing hara-kiri."

At the same time he cast another look at the women, which meant: "It is well to inspire children with a dread of paternal authority."

At this moment a loud noise of horses pawing the pavement was heard in an adjoining court-yard, and an imperious voice called out: "Lift the drawbridge! Close the gates!"

The Prince of Owari sprang to his feet.

"Who gives orders in my house?" said he.

"I!" answered the same voice.

And at the same time a group of men entered the second court.

"The Regent!" cried the Prince of Owari, falling prostrate.

"Rise, friend!" said Hieyas, with a bitter smile; "I have no longer any right to the honors that you render me; I am, for the moment, your equal."

"What has happened?" anxiously inquired the Prince.

"Dismiss your women," said Hieyas.

Owari made a sign; the women disappeared.

"Take your brother away, Omiti," said he to the young girl, who had turned terribly pale at the entrance of Hieyas.

"Is your daughter's name Omiti?" exclaimed the latter, his face growing suddenly purple.

"Yes, master. Why do you ask?"

"Call her back, I beg."

Owari obeyed. The young girl returned, trembling, and with downcast eyes.

Hieyas looked at her fixedly with an expression on his face which would have alarmed any one who knew the man. The maiden, however, raised her head, and an undaunted spirit was apparent in her eyes,—a sort of self-renunciation.

"It was you who betrayed us," said Hieyas in a dull, heavy voice.

"Yes," said she.

"What does this mean?" cried the Prince of Owari with a start.

"It means that the plot so carefully contrived within these castle walls, so mysteriously concealed from all, was surprised and revealed by her."

"Wretch!" cried the Prince raising his clenched fist against his daughter.

"A woman,—a child,—to ruin a political conspiracy!" continued Hieyas. "A vile pebble, to make you stumble, and hurl you headlong to the ground! It is a mockery!"

"I will kill you!" yelled Owari.

"Kill me! what will it matter?" said the girl. "I have saved the King. Is not his life worth mine? I have long awaited your vengeance."

"You shall wait no longer!" said the Prince, seizing her by the throat.

"No; do not kill her!" said Hieyas. "I will take her punishment into my own hands."

"So be it!" said Owari; "I abandon her to you."

"It is well!" said Hieyas, signing to Faxibo not to lose sight of the young girl. "But let us leave what is past and gone; let us look towards the future. Are you still devoted to me?"

"Can you doubt it, master? And must I not now struggle to repair the wrong done you by one of my family without my knowledge?"

"Listen, then. A conspiracy has suddenly wrested the power from my hands. I contrived to escape the death that threatened me, and fled in the direction of my principality of Mikawa. Your domains lie between Osaka and my province. Your fortress overlooks the sea, and can bar the passage of soldiers coming from Osaka; that is why I stopped here, to bid you collect your troops as quickly as possible and put your country in a state of defence. Guard your castle well. I will stay here, where I am safe from sudden attack, while my faithful comrade, Ino-Kamo-No-Kami" (Hieyas pointed to a nobleman in his escort, who bowed low to the Prince of Owari, the latter returning his salute), "proceeds to the castle of Mikawa, fortifies the whole province, and gives the alarm to all the princes my allies."

"I am your slave, master; dispose of me."

"Give orders to your soldiers at once."

The Prince of Owari left the courtyard. Servants ushered their master's guests into cool, airy apartments, and served them with tea, sweetmeats, and a light meal.

Soon Ino-Kamo-No-Kami took leave of Hieyas, who gave him his final instructions; and taking with him two of the lords who had accompanied them thither, he remounted his horse and left the castle.

Hieyas then called Faxibo.

The latter was engaged in devouring a honey-cake, never taking his eyes from Omiti, as she sat in a corner of the room.

"Can you disguise yourself so that none shall know you?" he asked him.

"So that you yourself would not know me," said Faxibo.

"Good! To-morrow morning you will return to Osaka and arrange to learn all that goes on in the palace. Moreover, you will travel with a woman."

Hieyas leaned towards the ex-groom and whispered in his ear.

An evil smile hovered upon Faxibo's lips.

"Good, good!" he said; "to-morrow at dawn I will be ready to start."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TEA-HOUSE.

In one of the suburbs of Osaka, not far from the beach whose white sandy slope stretches down to the sea, stood an immense building, whose roofs, of various heights, rose far above the level of the neighboring houses. The front of this edifice opened full upon a busy street, always crowded, and full of noise and confusion.

The first floor had a series of broad windows, closed by gay-colored blinds, which were often opened wide by a push from one of the inquisitive young women whose peals of laughter rang upon the air.

At the corners of the various roofs banners floated and large lozenge-shaped lanterns swung; the ground-floor consisted of a wide gallery open to the street and protected from the sun and wind by a light roof. Three big black characters, inscribed on a gilded panel, formed the sign of the

establishment, and ran as follows,—"The Day-Break Inn. Tea and Saki."

Towards noon the balcony was crowded with customers; they sat with crossed legs upon the mat which covered the floor; they drank saki, or hid their faces in the cloud of steam rising from the cup of tea, upon which they blew lustily, to cool it. Women, coquettishly arrayed and carefully painted, moved gracefully about from group to group, carrying the hot drink. In the background you might see smoking stoves and pretty china cups and dishes arranged upon sets of red lacquer shelves.

Every moment fresh passers-by, cango-bearers, and men carrying burdens would stop, ask for a drink, pay, and hurry off again.

Sometimes a quarrel would arise in front of the inn and degenerate into a brawl, to the great delight of the patrons.

For instance, a pedler ran against a dealer in shells and cuttle-fish; his basket of wares was upset, and all the fish fell to the ground and rolled in the dirt.

High words rained on either side, traffic was hindered, a crowd collected and took sides with one or the other of the contending parties, and soon two hostile armies were ready to try the fate of arms.

But a shout arose: "The cable! the cable! Don't fight; bring a cable!"

Some of the spectators hurried off, bustled into one house after another, and at last, finding what they wanted, came running back with a large rope.

Then the lookers-on took up their stand in front of the houses, leaving a free space for those who were to struggle. The latter seized the rope in both hands, there being fifteen on each side, and began to pull with all their might and main. The rope stretched and shook, then held firm.

"Courage! Hold tight! Don't let go!" was the cry on every side.

However, after struggling long against fatigue, one of the parties suddenly let go the rope. The victors fell all together in a heap, with their legs in the air, amidst the shouts and laughter of the mob, who ran to their rescue. They were helped to their feet, and a reconciliation was signed and sealed by copious draughts of saki.

The inn was thronged, and the maids were beside themselves with such an overflow of custom.

Just then an old man, leading a girl by the hand, contrived to stop a waitress as she passed, and catch her by the sleeve.

"I want to speak to the master of this establishment," he said.

"You choose your time well," said the girl, with a roar of laughter.

By a sudden movement she freed herself, and was gone before the old man could add another word.

"I will wait," said he.

A cask of saki was staved in, and the jolly drinkers talked and laughed noisily.

But all at once silence fell upon them; the shrill sound of a flute and the music of a stringed instrument were heard. The sounds came from the rooms above.

"Listen! listen!" was the general cry.

Some of the passers stopped to hear. The sound of a woman's voice was heard. The words of the song were clearly audible:—

> "When Iza-Na-Gui descended to earth, his companion, Iza-Na-Mi, met him in a garden.
>
> "'How delightful to meet such a handsome young man!' she exclaimed.
>
> "But the God, in displeasure, replied: 'It is not fitting for the woman to speak first; meet me again.'
>
> "They parted, and they met each other once more.
>
> "'How agreeable to meet such a lovely girl!' said Iza-Na-Gui.
>
> "Which of the two spoke first?'"

The voice ceased; the accompaniment went on for a few moments more.

A discussion ensued among the drinkers; they replied to the question asked by the singer.

"Of course the God was saluted first," said some.

"No, no! It was the Goddess!" shouted others. "The will of the God cancelled the first salutation."

"Did he cancel it?"

"To be sure I to be sure! They began again, as if nothing had ever happened."

"Which does not annul what had occurred; and so the woman spoke first."

The argument threatened to wax warm; but all ended by a larger number of cups being emptied. Soon the throng thinned off, and the tavern grew quiet again.

A servant woman then noticed the old man leaning against an upright post, and still holding the

young girl by the hand.

"Do you want a cup of tea or saki?" asked the woman.

"I wish to speak to the keeper of the tea-house," answered the man.

The servant looked at the old man. His head was covered with a large hat of woven reeds, like the cover of a round basket; his costume, much worn, was of brown cotton. He held in his hand a fan, on which was marked the road from Yeddo to Osaka, the distance from one village to another, the number and importance of the inns, etc. The woman then examined the young girl. She was shabbily dressed. Her robe, of faded blue, was torn and dirty; a fragment of white stuff twisted about her head partially concealed her face. She leaned on a black-and-red paper parasol, torn in various places; but she was strangely beautiful and graceful.

"Have you come to make a sale?" asked the maid of the inn.

The old man made a sign that he had.

"I will tell the master."

She went off, and soon returned. The master followed her.

He was a man of repulsive plainness. His little squinting black eyes were scarcely visible between the narrow fissure of his absurdly wrinkled eyelids; his mouth, widely removed from his long, thin nose, destitute of teeth and adorned with a few stiff sparse hairs, gave a sly and mean expression to his pock-marked countenance.

"You want to get rid of that young woman?" said he, rolling one eyeball, while the other one disappeared round the corner of his nose.

"To get rid of my child!" screamed the old man. "I only consent to part from her to protect her from misery and want."

"Unfortunately I have more women now than I need; and they are every one of them quite as pretty as she is. My house is entirely full."

"I will look elsewhere," said the old man, making a pretence of going.

"Don't be in such a hurry," said the landlord; "if your demands are not too extravagant, perhaps we can come to terms."

He made the man a sign to follow him into the entrance hall from which he had just come; this hall looked out on a garden, and was quite empty.

"What can your girl do, I say?" asked the frightful squint-eyed fellow.

"She can embroider, she can sing, and play on several instruments; she can even compose a quatrain at a pinch."

"Ah-ha! is that so? And how much do you want for her?"

"Four kobangs."

The innkeeper was about to exclaim, "No more!" but he restrained himself.

"That's exactly what I was going to offer you," said he.

"Well, it's a bargain," said the old man; "I hire her to you to do whatever you bid her, for a term of twenty years."

The buyer hurriedly brought brushes and a roll of paper, and drew up a bill of sale, which the old man readily signed.

The young girl meantime stood like a statue; she did not waste a look on the old man, who pretended to wipe away a tear as he pocketed the kobangs.

Before leaving, he bent towards the innkeeper's ear and whispered: "Keep your eye on her; watch her well; she will try to escape."

Then he quitted the Day-Break Tea-house; and whoever saw him, as he turned the corner of the street, change his pace, rubbing his hands and outstepping the nimblest, might well have suspected the reality of his old age and his white beard.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRYST.

The Prince of Nagato lay stretched upon a black satin mattress, one elbow buried in a cushion and the other arm held out to a doctor crouching beside him. The doctor was feeling his pulse.

At the Prince's bedside, Fide-Yori, seated on a pile of mats, fixed an anxious look upon the wrinkled but impenetrable face of the physician. An enormous pair of spectacles, with round black-rimmed glasses, lent a comical expression to the grave face of the worthy man of science.

Near the entrance of the room knelt Loo, his forehead touching the floor, in honor of the King's presence. He amused himself by counting the silver threads in the fringe of the carpet.

"The danger is over," said the doctor at last; "the wounds have closed; and still the fever continues, for some reason which I cannot understand."

"I will explain it to you," said the Prince, eagerly drawing back his arm; "it is my impatience at being nailed to this bed, and forbidden to enjoy the open air."

"What, friend!" said the Shogun, "when I myself come hither to share your captivity, are you so impatient to be free?"

"You know very well, dear lord, that it is for your affairs that I am so anxious to be up and doing; the departure of the embassy which you are sending to Kioto cannot be indefinitely delayed."

"Why did you ask me as a special favor to make you chief of that embassy?"

"Is it not my delight to serve you?"

"That is not your only motive," said Fide-Yori with a smile.

"You allude to my supposed love for Fatkoura," thought Nagato, smiling in his turn.

"If the Prince is reasonable, if he gives up this over-excitement which exhausts him, he may start in three days," said the doctor.

"Thanks!" cried Nagato; "that news is better than all your drugs."

"My drugs are not to be despised," said the doctor; "and you must take the one which I will send you presently."

Then he bowed low to the King and his noble patient, and retired.

"Ah!" exclaimed Fide-Yori when he was alone with his friend, "your impatience to be off proves to me that I am not mistaken. You are in love, Iwakura; you are beloved; you are happy!" And he heaved a deep sigh.

The Prince looked at him, surprised at this sigh, and expecting a confidence; but the young man blushed slightly, and changed the conversation.

"You see," said he, opening a volume which he held on his knee, "I am studying the book of the laws; I am looking to see if it does not need softening and altering."

"It contains one article which I would advise you to suppress," said Nagato.

"Which?"

"That which treats of mutual suicide for love."

"How does it run?" said Fide-Yori, turning over the leaves. "Ah! here it is:—

> "'If two lovers swear to die together, and commit hara-kiri, their bodies shall be handed over to the officers of justice. If one of them be not mortally wounded, he or she is to be treated as the murderer of the other. If both survive the attempt, they shall be ranked as reprobates.'"

"That is shameful," said Nagato; "hasn't one a right to escape by death from a grief too heavy to be endured?"

"There is a religion which says not," murmured Fide-Yori.

"That of the European bonzes! That whose doctrines public rumor says you have accepted," said Nagato, striving to read his friend's face.

"I have studied that creed, Iwakura," said the Shogun. "It is pure and impressive, and the priests who teach it seem full of abnegation. While our bonzes think of nothing but making money, they scorn wealth. And then, you see, I cannot forget the terrible scene which I once witnessed, nor the sublime courage of the Christians as they submitted to the horrible tortures which my father ordered to be inflicted on them. I was a child then. I was taken to see them executed, to teach me, so my guardians said, how such creatures should be treated. It was near Nangasáki, on the hill. That nightmare will never cease to trouble my dreams. Crosses were planted on the slope so thickly that the hill seemed covered with a forest of dead trees. Among the victims, whose noses and ears had all been cut off, walked three little children,—I seem to see them still,—disfigured and bleeding, but revealing a strange courage in the face of death. All the poor wretches were fastened to the crosses, and their bodies were pierced with lances; the blood ran in streams. The victims made no outcry; as they died, they prayed that Heaven would pardon their executioners. The spectators uttered frightful shrieks, and I, overcome by terror, screamed with them, and hid my face on the breast of the Prince of Mayada, who held me in his arms. Soon, in spite of the soldiers, who beat them back and struck at them with their lances, those who witnessed that dreadful scene rushed up the hill to wrangle for some relic of those martyrs, whom they left naked on their crosses." As he spoke, the Shogun continued to turn over the pages of his book.

"Exactly," he said, with a movement of horror; "here is the very edict pronounced by my father when he commanded the massacre:—

"'I, Taiko-Sama, devote these men to death, because they come to Japan, calling themselves ambassadors, although they are not so; because they remain in my domains without my leave, and preach the law of the Christians, contrary to my commands. I decree that they shall be crucified at Nangasáki.'"

Fide-Yori tore out this and several ensuing pages, containing laws against the Christians.

"I have found what I wanted to expunge," he said.

"You do well, master, to spread your protecting arm over those mild and inoffensive men," said Nagato; "but beware lest the report which spreads from mouth to mouth, and accuses you of being a Christian, take shape, and your enemies use it against you."

"You are right, friend; I will wait till my power is firmly established, to declare my sentiments, and atone, as far as may be, for the blood spilled before my very eyes. But I must leave you, dear invalid; you are growing tired, and the doctor ordered you to rest. Be patient; you are nearly cured."

The Shogun left the room with an affectionate glance at his friend. No sooner had he gone, than Loo sprang up; he yawned, stretched himself, and made a thousand grimaces.

"Come, Loo!" said the Prince, "run out into the gardens for a little while; but don't throw stones at the gazelles, or frighten my Muscovy ducks."

Loo hastened away.

When he was alone, the Prince drew quickly from under his mattress a letter wrapped in green satin; he placed it on his pillow, leaned his cheek against it, and closed his eyes to sleep.

This letter was the one given him by the Kisaki; he preserved it as a precious treasure, and his only joy was to inhale its faint perfume. But, to his great distress, it had seemed to him, for some days past, as if the perfume were evaporating; perhaps, accustomed to inhale it, he did not notice it so strongly.

Suddenly the Prince rose up; he remembered that inside the envelope this subtle and delicious perfume would doubtless be better preserved. He broke the seal, which he had not hitherto touched, thinking that the envelope was empty; but to his great surprise he drew out a paper covered with written characters.

He uttered a cry and tried to read, but in vain. A red veil shimmered before his eyes; there was a buzzing in his ears; he feared lest he should faint, and rested his head on the pillow. He, however, succeeded in calming himself, and again looked at the writing. It was an elegantly worded quatrain. The Prince read it with indescribable emotion:—

> "Two flowers bloomed on the banks of a stream. But, alas! the stream divided them.
>
> "In each corolla lay a drop of dew, the shining spirit of the flower.
>
> "Upon one of them the sun fell; he made it sparkle. But she thought: Why am I not on the other bank?
>
> "One day these flowers hung their heads to die. They let fall their luminous soul like a diamond. Then the two drops of dew met at last, and were mingled in the stream."

"She gives me a tryst," cried the Prince, "farther away, later on, in another life. Then she has guessed my love! She loves me, then! O Death! can you not hasten? Can you not bring nearer the celestial hour of our reunion?"

The Prince may have thought his wishes granted; for, falling back on his cushions, he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WARRIOR-QUAILS.

In a delightful landscape in the midst of a thick wood stands the summer residence of the Kisaki, with its pretty roofs of gilded bark. The thick foliage of the lofty trees seemed loath to make way for those glittering house-tops, which projected on every side of the palace, shading a broad veranda, whose floor was covered with carpets, and strewn with silk and satin cushions worked in gold.

The prospect is not extensive, and the dwelling seems shut in by cool green vegetation. Emerald reeds flaunt their slender leaves like banners on the breeze, uprearing silvery, flaky plumes. Orange-bushes bloom beside tall bamboos, and mingle their sweet-scented flowers with the red blossoms of the wild cherry. Farther away, large camelias climb the trees; at their feet big red leaves, covered with light down, unfold beside tall heaths, so delicate, so airy, that they look like tufts of green feathers. Above this first plane of verdure, palms, bananas, oaks, and cedars interlace their branches and form an inextricable network, through which the light filters, tinged with a thousand varying hues.

A brook glides slowly over a bed of thick moss, and its crystal stream is slightly troubled by a water-hen of lovely plumage, who just ruffles it with her wings as she chases a dragon-fly, whose slim body flashes forth metallic reflections.

But more brilliant and more splendid than the flowers, the velvety moss, or the silvery shadows

on the stream, are the dresses of the women who sit on the veranda.

The Kisaki, surrounded by her favorite ladies and a few young lords, the noblest of the Court, is witnessing a quail-fight.

On account of the heat, the sovereign wears a light robe of pigeon-colored silk gauze,—a shade of green which she alone has the right to use. In place of the three plates of gold which form her crown, she has arranged in her hair three daisies with silver leaves. Over her left ear, from the head of a long pin buried in her hair, hangs, at the end of a slender gold chain, a huge pearl of rare beauty and perfect shape.

Two young boys, in costumes differing only in color, crouch upon their heels, face to face, watching the contest between the pretty birds, ready to pick up the dead and bring forward fresh combatants.

"How little chance of winning I have," said a lord with an intellectual cast of countenance, "I, who dared to bet against my Queen!"

"You are the only one who was so bold, Simabara," said the Kisaki; "but if you win, I am sure that every one will bet against me in the next fight."

"He is likely to triumph," said the Prince of Tsusima, husband of the beautiful Iza-Farou-No-Kami.

"What!" cried the Kisaki, "have I so nearly lost?"

"See, your champion weakens!"

"Courage! one more effort! courage, little warrior!" said the Queen.

The quails, with bristling feathers and neck outstretched, paused for a moment, gazing motionless, each at the other, then sprang to the attack again; one of them fell.

"Ah! all is over," cried the Queen, rising to her feet; "the bird is dead! Simabara has won."

Young girls now handed about sweetmeats and delicacies of various kinds, with tea gathered on the neighboring mountains; and the sports ceased for a time.

Then a page approached the Kisaki, and told her that a messenger had been waiting for some moments with news from the palace.

"Let him enter," said the sovereign.

The messenger advanced, and prostrated himself.

"Speak," said the Kisaki.

"Light of the World!" said the man, "the embassy from the Shogun has arrived."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Kisaki. "And who are the princes that compose it?"

"The Princes of Nagato, Satsuma, Ouesougi, and Satake."

"It is well!" said the Kisaki, dismissing the messenger by a sign. "These gentlemen will weary of waiting for an audience," she continued, addressing the princes grouped about her. "The Mikado, my divine master, is at the summer-palace with all his wives and his Court; the Dairi is almost deserted. Tsusima, go, seek out these princes, and conduct them hither; they shall share our sports. Let pavilions be prepared for them within the limits of the residence," she added, turning to her women.

Her orders were transmitted to the interior of the house, and the Prince of Tsusima, bowing profoundly, withdrew.

The Dairi was not more than half-an-hour's journey away from the summer-palace, so that an hour was all-sufficient time to go and come.

"Prepare a fresh combat," said Kisaki. The fowlers cried aloud the names of the combatants:

"Gold Spur!"

"Rival of Lightning!"

"Gold Spur is a stranger," said the sovereign. "I will bet on Rival of Lightning; I consider him matchless: he killed Coral Beak, who had slaughtered untold adversaries."

All the spectators followed the Queen's example.

"If that is so," she cried, laughing, "I will bet alone against you all; I will join myself to the fortunes of Gold Spur."

The struggle began. Rival of Lightning rushed forward with the speed which had won him his name. Usually, he disabled his foe at the first onslaught; but now he fell back, leaving a few feathers in his antagonist's beak, the latter being untouched.

"Well done! well done!" was the shout on every side. "Gold Spur begins wonderfully well!"

Some of the noblemen squatted on their heels, to follow the fight more closely.

The birds closed for the second time. But nothing was to be seen except a confused heap of quivering plumes; then Rival of Lightning fell with bleeding head, and Gold Spur proudly placed one foot upon the body of his conquered enemy.

"Victory!" cried the Kisaki, clapping her small milk-white hands. "Gold Spur is the monarch of the day; to him belongs the prize collar."

One of the princesses fetched a black lacquer box containing a gold ring set with rubies and coral, from which hung a tiny crystal bell.

The victor was brought to the Queen, who, taking the ring in two fingers, put it round the bird's neck.

Other fights followed; but the Kisaki, strangely absent-minded, paid little heed to them. She listened to the myriad noises of the forest, and seemed annoyed by the babbling of the brook, which prevented her hearing distinctly a very faint and far-off sound. It might have been the slight clash of swords thrust into a noble's girdle, the crunching of the sand on one of the paths beneath the tread of approaching guests, or the sudden snap of a fan rapidly opened and shut.

An insect, a passing bird, drowned this almost imperceptible sound. However it soon grew louder; everybody heard it. Cheerful voices were mingled with it.

"Here come the ambassadors!" said Simabara.

Soon after, they heard the clang of arms, as the Princes laid off their weapons before appearing in the sovereign's presence.

Tsusima came forward from the interior of the house and announced the noble envoys, who appeared in their turn, and prostrated themselves before the Kisaki.

"Rise!" said the young woman hastily, "and learn the laws which govern our little Court of Flowers. Ceremonious etiquette is banished from it; I am regarded as an elder sister. Every one is free and at ease, and has no duty, but to devise fresh diversions. The watchword here is mirth."

The lords rose; they were soon surrounded, and questioned in regard to recent events at Osaka. The Kisaki cast a rapid glance at the Prince of Nagato. She was struck by the look of weakness imprinted upon the young man's whole frame; but she surprised in his eyes a strange gleam of pride and joy.

"He has read the verses that I gave him," she thought. "How foolish I was to write what I did!"

Still, she signed to him to approach.

"Rash man!" she cried, "why did you undertake a journey when you are still so weak and ill?"

"You deigned to protect my life, divine Queen," said the Prince; "could I longer delay coming to testify my humble gratitude?"

"It is true that my foresight saved you from death, but it did not succeed in preserving you from frightful wounds," said the Queen. "It seems as if all your blood had flowed from your veins; you are as pale as these jasmine-flowers."

She showed him a blossoming spray which she held in her hand.

"You must have suffered greatly," she added.

"Ah! dare I confess to you," cried Nagato, "that to me physical suffering is a comfort? There is another and far more painful wound,—that which is killing me, which leaves me no rest or peace."

"What!" said the Kisaki, disguising her profound emotion with a smile, "is this the way that you obey my wishes? Did you not hear me say that gayety reigns here? Speak no more of death or sorrow; let your soul unbend beneath the balmy breath of this beautiful and invigorating scene. You shall pass some days here; you shall see what a rural and delightful life we lead in this retreat. We rival in simplicity our ancestors, the shepherds, who first pitched their tents on this soil. Iza-Farou," she continued, addressing the Princess, who passed before the house just then, "I should like to hear a story; call our companions, and put an end to their political debates."

Soon all the privileged people admitted to the intimacy of the Queen were assembled. They went into the outer hall of the house. The Kisaki ascended a low platform, covered with carpets and cushions, and half reclined upon them. The women took their places on her left, the men on her right; and servants at once placed upon the ground, before each, a small gold plate containing dainties and warm drinks.

Through all the open panels the scented air of the woods entered the spacious room, which was filled with a greenish light, reflected from the neighboring trees. The walls were wonderfully decorated; fabulous animals, the bird Foo, the unicorn, and the sacred tortoise stood out in bold relief from a background of azure, gold, or purple, and a screen of *cloisonné* enamel, in tints of turquoise and brown, described its zigzags behind the dais. There was no furniture, nothing but thick mats, cushions, and satin hangings ornamented with birds, embroidered in circles of gold.

"I declare to you at the outset," said the Kisaki, "that I shall not utter a word. I am seized with an overwhelming laziness and indifference. Besides, I want to hear stories, and not to tell them."

Loud protests were made against this announcement.

"I am not to be moved," said the Queen, laughing; "you shall not even persuade me to pronounce a few words of flattery when your stories are done."

"Never mind!" cried Simabara; "I will tell the story of the wolf changed into a young girl."

"Do! do!" exclaimed the women; "we like the title."

"An old wolf—"

"Oh! he was old, was he?" said a young princess, with a look of contempt.

"You know very well that to give shelter to a human soul, an animal must be old."

"True! true!" cried the listeners; "go on!"

"An old wolf," said Simabara, "lived in a cave near a much travelled road. This wolf had an insatiable appetite. He therefore frequently left his cavern, went to the side of the road, and gobbled up a passer-by. But this mode of procedure was not at all to the taste of the travellers, and they ceased to frequent that road; so that little by little it became quite deserted. The wolf meditated long and deeply, seeking a way to put an end to this state of things. Suddenly he disappeared, and every one supposed he was dead. Some bold people ventured along the road, and there they saw a lovely young girl, who smiled bewitchingly upon them.

"'Will you follow me, and rest in a cool, delightful spot,' she said.

"None thought of refusing; but no sooner had they left the road, than the young girl returned to her former shape of an old wolf, and devoured the travellers; then she resumed her fair form and returned to the roadside. From that day forth not a traveller has escaped the jaws of the wolf."

The princes loudly applauded this story; but the women protested.

"That is to say that we are dangerous traps hidden beneath flowers," said they.

"The flowers are so beautiful that we shall never see the trap," said the Prince of Tsusima, with a laugh.

"Come!" said the Queen; "Simabara shall drink two cups of saki, for hurting the feelings of the women."

Simabara merrily drained the cups.

"Formerly," said Princess Iza-Farou, flashing a mischievous glance at Simabara, "heroes were plenty. There were Asahina, who could seize in each hand a warrior in full armor and hurl him to a great distance; Tametomo, with his terrible bow; Yatsitsone, whose only shield was his open fan; and how many more! Their lofty deeds were the constant theme of conversation. It was said, among other things, that on one occasion Sousige, the unrivalled cavalier, returning from a journey, saw several of his friends crouching round a chess-board; he spurred his horse over, their heads, and the animal stood motionless on his hind feet in the centre of the board. The players, struck dumb, thought that the knight had dropped from heaven. Nowadays I hear nothing to compare with that."

"Good! good!" exclaimed Simabara; "you would infer that none of us are capable of such a remarkable feat of horsemanship, and that the age of heroes is passed."

"That is exactly the idea that I wished to convey," said Iza-Farou, bursting into laughter; "was I not bound to reply to your impudent wolf?"

"She had a right to avenge us," said the Kisaki; "she shall not be punished."

"Flower-of-the-Reed knows a story, but she won't tell it!" cried a princess, who had been whispering with her neighbor.

Flower-of-the-Reed hid her face behind the loose sleeve of her robe. She was a very young girl, and somewhat shy.

"Come, speak!" said the Kisaki, "and don't be alarmed; we have nothing in common with Simabara's wolf."

"Very well! This is my story," said Flower-of-the-Reed, suddenly reassured. "In the Island of Yezo lived a young man and a maiden who loved each other tenderly. They had been betrothed from their cradles, and had never been parted. The girl was fifteen years old, and the young man eighteen. The date of their marriage was soon to be fixed. Unhappily the son of a rich man fell in love with the girl, and asked her father for her hand; and he, heedless of his former promises, gave it to him. The young couple pleaded in vain; the father was firm. Then the girl went to her lover in despair.

"'Listen!' said she; 'as we must be parted in this world, death shall unite us. Let us go to the tomb of your ancestors, and there kill ourselves.'

"They did as she proposed; they lay down upon the tomb and stabbed themselves. But the rejected lover had followed them. When he no longer heard their voices, he approached and saw them stretched out side by side, motionless, hand in hand.

"While he bent over them, two white butterflies rose from the tomb and flew gayly upwards, fluttering their wings.

"'Ah!' angrily cried the jealous survivor, 'it is they! They have escaped me; they escape into glory; they are happy! But I will follow them, even into heaven!'

"So saying, he seized the dagger which lay upon the tomb, and in his turn struck himself to the heart.

"Then a third butterfly rose into the air. But the others were far away; he could never reach them.

"Even now, to this very day, if you look among the flowers, when spring comes back to us, you will see the two winged lovers pass, side by side. Look again; you will soon see the jealous one, who follows, but can never overtake them."

"Indeed," said Iza-Farou, "butterflies are always grouped in that way: two flutter about together,

and a third follows them at a distance."

"I have noticed that peculiarity too, without knowing the reason for it," said the Kisaki. "The story is pretty; I never heard it before."

"The Prince of Satsuma must tell us something," said Flower-of-the-Reed.

"I!" exclaimed the old man in some alarm; "but I don't know any stories."

"Yes! yes! you know plenty," exclaimed the women; "you must tell us one."

"Then I will relate an adventure which happened not long since to the Prince of Figo's cook."

This announcement provoked a general outburst of merriment.

"You will see," said Satsuma, "you will see that this cook had a good deal of wit. In the first place, he is very skilful at his trade, which is not a thing to be despised; and moreover he pays extreme attention to the minutest details of his work. A few days ago, however, at a feast to which I went, the servants brought in a bowl full of rice and uncovered it before the Lord of Figo. What was the latter's surprise to see in the middle of the snowy rice a black insect, quite motionless, because it was cooked! The Prince turned white with rage. He summoned the cook; and seizing the ignoble insect with the tips of his ivory chopsticks, he presented it to the fellow with a terrible look. There was nothing left for the unfortunate servant but to rip himself up as speedily as possible. But it seemed that that operation was not at all to his liking; for, approaching his master with every sign of the most lively joy, he took the insect and ate it, pretending to think that the Prince did him the honor to offer him a taste of the repast. The guests began to laugh at this display of quick wits. The Prince of Figo himself could not help smiling, and the cook was rescued from death."

"Good! good!" cried all the listeners; "there's a story which cannot offend any one."

"It is Nagato's turn," said Tsusima, "he must know delightful stories."

Nagato started as if aroused from a dream; he had heard nothing, noticed nothing, absorbed as he was in the ecstatic contemplation of the goddess whom he adored.

"You want a story?" he asked, looking at the company as if he saw them for the first time.

He reflected for a few seconds.

"Very well; you shall have one," he said.

"There was once a tiny pond, born upon a day of storm and tempest. It was formed upon a mossy bed, and violets and pretty flowering-shrubs surrounded it and bent over it. The clouds, its kindred, had not yet quite dispersed, when the birds came, dipping the tips of their wings in its waters, and delighting it with their songs. It was happy, and rejoiced in life, finding it good. But soon the clouds vanished, and something marvellously dazzling appeared high overhead. The water sparkled; diamond-like ripples traversed its surface; it was changed to a magnificent casket of jewels. But the clouds came back, the vision disappeared. What sorrow then, and what regrets! The pond found no more pleasure in the songs of the birds; he despised the reflections cast upon his bosom by the flowers on his shores; everything looked dark and ugly to him. At last the sky cleared again, and this time for a long period. The bright wonder reappeared; the pond was again penetrated with warmth, splendor, and joy; but he felt that he was dying beneath those golden darts, which grew more and more fiery. Yet if a light branch threw its shadow over him, if a fine mist sprang up and served him as a shield, how he cursed them for delaying his delicious annihilation for one moment! The third day he had not one drop of water left: the pond had been swallowed by the sun."

This tale plunged the princesses in sweet reveries. The men declared that Nagato had invented a new form of story-telling, and that his improvisation ought to be put into poetry.

The Queen, who understood that the Prince spoke for her ear alone, almost involuntarily threw him a look full of melancholy pleasure.

The day neared its close. Two princesses now knelt before the Kisaki, to take her orders for the next day's diversions.

"To-morrow," said she, after a few moments' consideration, "we will have a rustic breakfast and a poetic contest in the western orchard."

The party soon broke up, and the embassy was conducted to the pavilions, embowered in shrubs and flowers, which had been assigned to it.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WESTERN ORCHARD.

When the Prince of Nagato woke next day he experienced a feeling of well-being and of joy to which he had long been a stranger. Yielding to the brief and idle revery which is like the dawn of wakening consciousness, his eye wandered over the dancing shadows of the leaves without, cast upon the closed blinds by the sun. Myriads of birds warbled and chattered, and one might almost think that the light itself sang in that medley of clear voices.

The Prince thought of the happy day which lay before him; it was an oasis in the dry and burning desert of his love. He repulsed the thought of speedy departure, with its train of attendant griefs, to give himself wholly up to the delights of the present; he was calm and happy.

The night before, his mind full of memories, his heart filled with emotion, he knew that sleep would hold persistently aloof. He therefore ordered a drink to be prepared which would prevent insomnia. A secret feeling of coquetry led him to avoid a feverish night. He was aware of his own beauty, having been told of it frequently; and the glance of every woman he met repeated the story daily. Had not his grace of person and of face, the charm which emanated from him, had their share in attracting the favorable notice of the Queen? They therefore deserved to be guarded from the inroads of fever and fatigue.

Calling his servants, the Prince demanded a mirror, and examined himself with eager haste.

But the first glance allayed his fears. His pallor had recovered the warm tints of which illness had robbed it; the blood returned to his lips; and yet his eyes still retained something of their feverish lustre. He paid an almost childish attention to the details of his dress, choosing the sweetest perfumes, the softest garments, of the faint but clear blue tint which he preferred.

When he left his pavilion at last, the guests were already assembled before the Kisaki's palace. His arrival caused a sensation. The men went into raptures over his toilette; the women dared not speak. But their silence was most flattering; it might be translated thus: He is worthy to be loved, even by a queen; for that perfectly beautiful body is the temple of the most refined spirit and the noblest heart in the kingdom.

The Princess Iza-Farou-No-Kami approached Nagato. "You have not asked me for news of Fatkoura, Prince," said she.

The Prince had never thought of Fatkoura, nor had he even noted her absence.

"She was ill yesterday," continued the Princess; "but the announcement of your arrival restored her to health. Depressed as she has been for some time, your return may perhaps console her. You will see her directly; she is with the Kisaki. She is on duty this week. Well! have you nothing to say?"

The Prince knew not what to say; in fact, Fatkoura's name roused both remorse and weariness in him. He reproached himself for inspiring this woman with love for him, or rather for appearing to respond to the love which he guessed she felt. He had used this false passion as a screen between the curious gaze and the sun of his real love. But he no longer had the strength to keep up his *rôle* of fond lover; and instead of the pity and friendship which he strove to feel for his unfortunate victim, Fatkoura only inspired him with deep indifference.

The arrival of the Kisaki enabled him to dispense with any answer to Iza-Farou. The Queen advanced from the veranda, greeting her guests with a gracious smile as they bent one knee to the ground.

As they were to climb a mountain and pass over narrow paths, the Kisaki had donned a less ample robe than she usually wore. Her sea-green gown was of crape, wrinkled slightly, like the surface of a lake ruffled by the wind; a broad cloth of gold girdle bound her waist and formed a huge knot at the back. A branch of chrysanthemum in full bloom was embroidered upon one end of this sash. The Queen had in her hair large pins of light tortoise-shell elaborately wrought, and on her brow was a small round mirror surrounded by a row of pearls.

Soon a magnificent chariot, drawn by two black buffaloes, approached the palace. This chariot, surmounted by a roof and covered with gilding, looked like a summer-house. It was closed by blinds, which the Kisaki ordered to be raised.

The princesses and lords took their places in norimonos drawn by a large number of men in rich array, and they set joyously forth. The day was superb, a light breeze cooled the air, and they would not be troubled by the heat.

At first they passed through the gardens of the royal residence. The chariot thrust aside the straggling branches which grew across the paths, it frightened away the butterflies, and broke the flowers from their stems. Then they reached the wall that surrounds the summer-palace, and went through the lofty gateway crowned by the Mikado's bird, the Foo-Houan,—a mythological creature which took part in the creation of the world. They then followed the wall along its exterior; next they took a road bordered by tall trees and leading to the mountains. There the whole Court got down to continue the journey on foot. They formed into groups, servants opened parasols, and the ascent of the mountain was merrily begun. The Kisaki walked first. Alert and active as a young girl, she ran a few steps, gathered wild flowers from the bushes; then, when she had too large a collection, she threw them away. The merry company chatted and laughed; each one walked at his own pace. Here and there a lord took off the lacquered hat which looked like a circular shield and hung it at his belt; then he fixed his open fan in his hair twisted like a rope, so that it projected like a penthouse over his forehead.

At times an opening in the bushes revealed the city, which seemed to spread out as they rose higher and higher; but they did not stay to gaze, for their first stop was to be on the terrace before the temple of Kiomidz,—that is, the temple of pure water,—whence the view is very fine. This temple rests on one side upon immensely tall pillars of wood, reaching down to the very foot of the mountain; on the other it is supported by a rough hewn rock. It shelters beneath its broad roof, covered with blue porcelain tiles, a divinity with a thousand arms.

Upon the terrace, covered with large pebbles, which extends in front of the temple, camp-stools

had been arranged, that the noble party might rest, and enjoy the beauty of the view at their ease.

They soon arrived and took their places.

Kioto lay before them, with its countless low but elegant houses, encircling the vast park of the Dairi,—a lake of verdure from which rose here and there, like an islet, a broad and magnificent roof. The eye could readily follow the clear line traced around the park by the walls.

To the south of the city a river, the Yedogava, glistened in the sun. The plain, rich and well cultivated, stretched beyond. Another watercourse, the Wild Goose River, flows through the heart of the town, near the fortress of Nisio-Nosiro, which rears its lofty ramparts and its square tower, crowned by a roof with upturned edges.

Behind the city lay a semicircle of high hills covered with vegetation and with temples of every sort, rising one above the other on the slopes, scaling them, and half hidden in foliage and flowers. The nobles pointed out to one another the temple of Iasacca, or the Eight Escarpments; the tower of To-Tse, with its five series of airy roofs; the chapel of Guihon, containing nothing but a round metal mirror, and surrounded by a vast number of pretty houses, to which people repair for tea and saki; then, lower down, nearer the plain, on the road that loads to Fusimi, the colossal pagoda of Daibouds, very lofty, very splendid, and containing within its gardens the temple of the Thirty-three thousand three hundred and thirty-three Idols,—a very long and narrow building.

The party went into ecstasies over the beauty of the situation. They delighted to lose their way in fancy in the complicated network formed by the city streets, filled with a brilliant throng, the enclosures and the courtyards, which from that height seemed like open boxes. With a single glance they traversed all Kioto; beside the river they saw a large open space, surrounded by a palisade, that was the parade-ground of the Knights of Heaven, some of whom were now galloping about the enclosure, their embroidered robes, their lances, and helmets flashing in the sun.

The dark, green mountains stood out in bold relief against the clear blue sky; some more distant peaks were violet hued; the atmosphere was so pure that the little city of Yodo was plainly visible, joined to Kioto by the long ribbon-like road crossing the golden fields.

The Kisaki rose.

"Let us be off!" she cried. "We must not linger here too long; we must drink, higher up, the water of the cascade of Otooua, which gives prudence and wisdom,—so the bonzes claim."

"Is there no fountain whose water has the power to make men light-hearted and careless?" said Simabara; "I would rather wet my lips in that."

"I don't see what you would gain," said a princess, laughing; "if there be such a fountain, you have most certainly tasted its waters."

"If there were one which made us forget life, and believe in a dream without awaking," said the Prince of Nagato, "I would drink to intoxication of it."

"I would content myself with that which gives prudence, were I in your place," said Fatkoura, who had not yet exchanged a word with Nagato.

Her bitter and satirical voice made the Prince shudder. He did not reply, but hastened to rejoin the Queen, who was climbing a stone staircase hewn in the steep side of the mountain.

This staircase, bordered by shrubs whose interlaced branches formed a verdant canopy above it, led to the cascade of Otooua. The sound of the water was already audible as it gushed from three fissures in the rock, and fell from a height into a small pond.

The Kisaki arrived first; she knelt on the grass and dipped her hands in the clear water.

A young bonze ran forward with a golden cup; but the sovereign dismissed him with a sign, and advancing her lips, swallowed the water held in the hollow of her hand, then rose and shook her fingers. A few drops fell upon her dress.

"Now," said she, laughing, "Buddha himself has no more wisdom than I."

"You laugh," said Simabara; "for my part, I believe in the virtues of the water: that is why I do not taste it."

They took a very rough path. Its very look made the women utter cries of alarm. Some declared that they would never risk their lives on such a road; but the lords went first, and extended their shut fans to the most timid, and thus the top of the mountain was reached. But then the cries of distress were redoubled. Before them lay a tiny torrent, which ran babbling over the stones; it must be crossed by jumping from rock to rock, at the risk, if one were awkward, of wetting the feet.

The Kisaki asked Nagato to let her lean on his shoulder, and passed safely over. Some of the women followed her; then turned to laugh, quite at their ease, at those who dared not venture.

One young princess paused in mid-stream, standing on a rock; she held close about her the ample folds of her robe; and, half laughing, half dismayed, would neither go forward nor backward. She only resolved upon crossing the dangerous ford when her friends threatened to leave her alone in the middle of the torrent.

There were but a few steps more to be taken ore they reached the western orchard, which is surrounded by a hedge of tea-plants. The Queen pushed open a lattice-gate, and entered the

enclosure.

It was the most enchanting spot imaginable. The spring, at this height, is somewhat tardy; and while in the valley the fruit-trees had already shed all their flowers, here they were in full bloom. Upon the undulating surface carpeted with thick turf, plum-trees covered with tiny white stars, apricots, apple-trees, peach-trees with their pink flowers, cherries decked with dark-red bloom, bent and twisted and stretched in every direction their dusky branches, whose roughness formed a marked contrast to the frailty of the petals.

In the middle of the orchard a large carpet was spread on the grass, and a red satin curtain, held up by gilded poles, flapped above it. A collation was served on this rug in costly china dishes.

The guests gladly squatted around the trays loaded with dainty provisions; the walk had given all an appetite. The women arranged themselves in two groups to the right and left of the Kisaki; the men took their seats opposite her at a respectful distance.

The most outspoken gayety soon reigned throughout the noble assembly; laughter bubbled from every lip. They chattered loudly, and no one heeded the melodies discoursed by an orchestra hidden behind a screen made from fibres of the reed.

Fatkoura alone wore a gloomy look and remained silent. The Princess Iza-Farou studied her by stealth with increasing surprise; she also looked from time to time at the Prince of Nagato, who seemed lost in a delightful dream, but never turned his eyes in the direction of Fatkoura.

"What has happened?" murmured the Princess. "He has certainly ceased to love her; and I thought the wedding was so near at hand!"

The feast ended, the Kisaki rose.

"Now," said she, "to work! Let each one of us draw inspiration from Nature to compose a quatrain in Chinese characters."

They scattered in various directions beneath the trees; each one went apart and reflected. Some paused before a blossoming branch; others walked slowly along, their gaze fixed on the ground, or with head uplifted towards what could be seen of the sky through the constellations of snowy or rose-tinted flowers. Some lazy spirits stretched themselves at full length on the turf and closed their eyes.

The bright and lively hues of their dresses shone forth gayly against the green, and added one more charm to the landscape.

Soon all the poets were recalled. The time fixed for the framing of the quatrain had elapsed. They assembled and sat down on the grass. Servants brought in a huge bronze bowl, upon the sides of which writhed sculptured dragons in the midst of imaginary shrubbery. This bowl was full of white fans, decorated only by a slight sketch in one corner. On one was a tuft of iris; on another a few slender reeds, a cottage by a lake, over which bent a willow, or a bird grasping a branch of almond-flowers in his claws.

Each competitor took one of these fans, upon which he was to write his verse. Brushes and India ink ready mixed were also brought. Soon the black characters stood in four perpendicular rows upon the white surface of the fans; the poems were finished. Each poet read his own quatrain aloud.

The Princess Iza-Farou began:—

"THE FIRST FLOWERS.

"How fleeting, in life, is the time
When we have only joys, hopes, and no regrets?
Which is the most delicious moment of spring?
That when not a single flower has yet faded."

Lively approval hailed this poem.

When silence was restored, Simabara took up the word:—

"THE LOVE OF NATURE.

"I lift my head, and I see a flock of wild geese.
Among those travellers one, who erst was in the van, now lags
behind her mates.
See how she flies behind the rest. Why does she linger thus?
Because from the heights of heaven she wonders at the beauty
of the scene."

"Good! good!" cried the listeners.

Some of the princes repeated the last line, shaking their heads with satisfaction.

Several other quatrains were read; then the Kisaki repeated hers:—

"THE SNOW.

"The sky is clear; the bees hum o'er the garden beds;
A balmy breeze blows through the trees;
It makes the plum-blossoms fall in showers.
How delightful is the spring snow!"

"You are the master of us all!" was the enthusiastic shout. "What are our verses beside yours!"

"Our great poet, Tsourai-Iouki,[1] never wrote a more perfect poem than that," said the Prince of Nagato.

"It was from that poet I drew my inspiration," said the Kisaki, smiling with pleasure. "But it is your turn to read, Iwakura," she continued, glancing at the Prince.

Nagato opened his fan and read:—

"THE WILLOW.

"The thing which we love more than all else, we prefer that no one else should love.
It belongs to another.
So the willow, which takes root in our garden,
Bends, blown by the wind, and adorns our neighbor's wall with its branches."

"The illustrious Tikangue[2] might be your brother," said the Kisaki; "there is no quatrain in his works superior to that. I wish to preserve the fan that your hand has illustrated; give it to me, I beg."

Nagato approached the Queen, and, kneeling, offered her the fan.

Fatkoura abruptly recited the following lines, which she improvised on the spur of the moment:—

"The pheasant runs through the fields; he attracts all eyes by his gilded plumage;
He cries aloud as he seeks his food.
Then he turns towards his mate,
And through love for her he involuntarily betrays the place of his retreat to men."

The Queen frowned, and paled slightly. A transport of rage made her heart palpitate; for she saw that Fatkoura, by this improvisation, hurled an outrageous insult at Nagato and herself. She slandered her sovereign with the daring of a soul which has lost all, and offers one buckler to revenge,—despair.

The Kisaki, feeling her inability to punish, was seized by a vague terror, and repressed her wrath. If she acknowledged that she understood the injurious intention of Fatkoura's words, must she not confess to a guilty prepossession,—an interest unworthy of her majesty,—in the love to which her beauty had given birth in the heart of one of her subjects?

She complimented Fatkoura in a very quiet voice upon the elegance of her poem; then she sent her by a page the prize offered for competition. It was a charming collection of poems, no longer than a man's finger; the fashion being for the smallest books possible.

Some hours later, while the Prince of Nagato, leaning over the edge of the terrace, was gazing down from the mountain top at the setting sun, which shed its purple glory across the sky, the Kisaki drew near him.

He lifted his eyes to her face, thinking that she wished to speak to him; but she was silent, her eyes fixed on the horizon, and full of sadness; she preserved a solemn attitude.

The reflection from the western sky disguised her pallor. She repressed some painful emotion, and strove to restrain a tear that trembled on her lashes and dimmed her sight.

Nagato felt a sort of terror; he was sure that she was going to say something dreadful to him. He would fain have prevented her from speaking.

"Queen," said he, softly, as if to dismiss the danger, "the sky looks like a great rose-leaf."

"It is the last falling leaf of day," said the Kisaki,—"of the day which is sinking into the past, but whose memory our spirits will preserve as a day of joy and peace,—perhaps the last."

She turned away to hide her tears, which, despite her efforts, flowed fast.

The Prince's heart was oppressed with inexpressible agony; he was like the victim who sees the knife at his throat. He dared not speak, lest he should hasten the sacrifice.

Suddenly the Kisaki turned to him.

"Prince," said she, "I have something to say to you: you must marry Fatkoura."

Nagato stared at the Queen in dismay; he saw her eyes were wet with tears, but full of a calm and irrevocable resolve.

He slowly bowed his head. "I will obey," he murmured.

And while she moved quickly away, he hid his face in his hands, and gave vent to the sobs which were stifling him.

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[1] The two latter quatrains are translated from Tsourai-Iouki, one of the most famous poets of Japan.

[2] An illustrious Japanese poet, author of the verses entitled "The Willow."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIKADO'S THIRTY-THREE DINNERS.

The sublime Son of the Gods was bored. He sat cross-legged on a raised dais covered with mats, between curtains of gold brocade which hung from the ceiling and were drawn back in heavy folds on either side. A succession of rooms opened, one from another, before the monarch's gaze.

He thought that he was very majestic; then he yawned.

The one hundred and ninth Mikado, Go-Mitzou-No, although young, was excessively fat,—made so, no doubt, by the almost constant inaction of his life. His face was pale, no ray of sun ever resting on it; several chins reposed upon his breast; his purple robes fell about him in ample folds; the lofty plate of gold adorned his brow. At his right were arranged all the insignia of his omnipotence,—the sword, the mirror, and the iron tablet.

The Mikado found his existence monotonous. Every action of his life was arranged in advance, and must be accomplished in accordance with the most minute etiquette. If he left the precincts of the palace, he was shut up in a superb vehicle drawn by buffaloes; but he felt suffocated in that close box, and preferred to remain on his throne. If he wished to admire the flowers in his garden beds, he must go out in company with a vast suite, and the annals of the kingdom made careful note of the event. The greater part of his time was supposed to be passed in meditation: but to tell the truth, he meditated very little; his intellect had become blunted. When he tried to think, the strangeness of the ideas that buzzed confusedly through his brain astonished him. Some of his fancies were criminal, some ludicrous. The latter amused him; but he dared not laugh, knowing that he was watched. He would then strive to bring his mind back to celestial things; but it wearied him, and he returned to his whimsical dreams. Sometimes he was seized by an irresistible desire to move about, to run and jump and leap; but that would ill comport with the silent immobility appropriate to the descendant of the Gods. One day, however,—or rather one night, the mysteriously achieved his desire. He slipped out of bed, and while all around him slept, he performed a wild dance; no one ever knew it,—at least so he thought. As he never saw anything but the bent back of his subjects, he may really have supposed that he belonged to a superior race, and that the common herd of men walked on all fours. And yet he thought that they sometimes treated him like a child. His bow and arrows were taken away, because on one occasion, while a body of delegates from the Shogun lay prostrate before his throne, he let fly an arrow at the highest dignitary among them. In spite of the rage which sometimes boiled within him, he dared not rebel; his inaction, the perpetual association with women, who alone could serve him, had weakened his courage. He felt that he was at the mercy of his ministers; he feared lest he should be assassinated.

And yet, at times, an immense pride took possession of him; he felt divine blood course through his veins; he knew that the earth was not worthy to be trodden beneath his feet, that the race of men had no right to behold his face; and he dreamed of making thicker still the veils which separated him from the world. Then, the very next moment, he would fancy that perfect happiness lay in solitary rambles over the mountains, in working in the open air, in being the lowliest of men; then he would be seized by a vague despair, he would groan and bewail his fate. But he was soon persuaded that his grief was nothing but a homesick longing for heaven, his native land.

Just now the Mikado was ready to receive the envoys from Fide-Yori. They had come to testify the latter's gratitude towards the supreme ruler, who had conferred the title of Shogun upon him.

The curtains were drawn before the throne; then the princes were ushered in, falling at once upon their faces, with arms extended in front of them. After a long delay the curtain was drawn aside.

Profound silence reigned: the princes remained with their faces on the floor, motionless.

The Mikado considered them from the height of his throne, and made silent reflections upon the arrangement of the folds of their garments, on a sash end which had turned over and showed him the wrong side. He thought that the crest of Satsuma, a cross within a circle, looked like a dormer window barred by two bamboo slats.

Then he wondered what they would all think if he were suddenly to utter frantic yells! How he would like to see them jump up, with stupefied faces!

In a few moments the curtain was again let down; the princes withdrew backwards. Not one word had been uttered.

After the audience the Mikado left the platform and was stripped of his very burdensome state dress. Robed once more in simpler garments, he bent his steps towards the apartments in which he took his meals.

Go-Mitzou-No regarded the dinner-hour as the most agreeable moment in the day; he prolonged it as much as he possibly could. The Mikado liked good living; he had a decided preference for certain dishes. On account of these preferences a terrible difficulty had formerly arisen. The Son of the Gods could not reasonably be expected to bend his lofty mind to the details of the kitchen and decide upon the dishes he would eat; and yet no more could he submit to the caprices of his cooks or his ministers. After prolonged reflection the Mikado found a way to reconcile all parties. He ordered that thirty-three entirely different dinners should be prepared for him every day, to

be served in thirty-three saloons. It then only remained for him to walk through those rooms, and choose the meal that pleased him best.

Sometimes it happened that after eating one dinner he would go into another hall and eat a second.

When he crossed the threshold of the first of the thirty-three rooms, twelve very noble and most beautiful damsels received him. They alone were entitled to wait upon him. Their hair, in the presence of their lord, must be undone, and hang dishevelled in the folds of their trailing garments.

The Mikado had seated himself on a mat before the dinner of his choice, and had begun to eat, when the Kisaki entered, unannounced. She, too, when appearing before the supreme master, was obliged to wear her hair flowing loosely. Her superb black tresses were therefore unconfined, and fell in waves to the very ground.

The Mikado raised his eyes to her in amazement, and hurriedly swallowed the morsel that he had in his mouth.

"My beloved companion," said he, "I did not expect to see you!"

"My divine lord," she replied, "I have come to inform you that I shall very soon lose one of my women; the fair Fatkoura is about to marry."

"Very good! very good!" said the Mikado; "and whom?"

"The Prince of Nagato."

"Ah-ha! I consent to the marriage."

"And what princess do you name to take the place of the one who is to leave me?"

"I will name any one whom you may select."

"I thank you, master," said the Kisaki; "and I depart from your divine presence, imploring your pardon for having dared to interrupt your repast."

"Oh, it's no matter!" said Go-Mitzou-No, who hastened, as soon as his wife had gone, to make up for lost time.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HAWKING-PARTY.

Some days after the reception of the embassy, towards the tenth hour of the morning, the hour of the serpent, a young cavalier rode at full speed along the road which leads from Osaka to Kioto.

At that hour the road is very crowded; beasts of burden, pedlers, men and women of the people pass and repass along its entire length. Peasants carry the produce of their fields to the suburban towns; they are on their way to Fusimi, Yodo, and Firacca. Merchandise of every kind is taken from Osaka to Kioto,—rice, salt-fish, metals, and precious woods; while Kioto sends to the city of the Shogun tea, silk, bronze vases, and various sorts of lacquered ware.

The young horseman paid not the faintest heed to the crowd; he gave his steed the reins, and urged him on with his voice. Moreover, the road was always free before him; people sprang quickly aside at the sound of the furious galloping feet, and the passers-by retreated to the roadside, which was bordered here and there with houses made of beech-wood.

The rider moved so rapidly that, in spite of all their efforts, the curious could not distinguish his features.

"It's a warrior," said one; "I saw the gleam of his weapons."

"That was no great thing to see," said another; "every time he moved he glittered like lightning."

"It's a warrior of high rank; I saw the gold thongs of his whip of office."

"Is he a general?"

"Ask the swallow, as she flies, to see whether the copper horns shine upon his helmet; she alone is capable of overtaking that knight."

When he reached Kioto, the young soldier did not slacken his pace; he rode through the city at a gallop, and entering the palace, inquired for the envoys of the Shogun.

"They are at the summer-palace," was the answer; "or rather they are not there. They have joined our divine Kisaki in the chase; they started at sunrise."

"In which direction did they go?"

"Towards the shores of Lake Biva, at the foot of the mountains," replied the lackey; "but, my lord, do you wish to join the illustrious hunters?"

"Bring me a horse," said the young man coldly, without answering the question.

At the same time he alighted, and the servant led away his weary steed; soon two grooms

brought forward another, equipped, and full of spirit.

The soldier again mounted, and rode away.

Lake Biva lies behind the chain of hills that surrounds Kioto. To reach it, several valleys must be traversed, and many roundabout paths pursued. The young man could not keep his horse at a steady gallop, on account of the many hills up and down which lay his course. Sometimes, instead of following the windings of the road, he galloped over the thick grass in the valleys, to cut short his journey. At the end of an hour he came out upon the lake-shore; but then he did not know which way to turn.

The lake, blue as a sapphire, stretched before him far as the eye could roach. To right and left rose small copses and thickets and brown rocks; whilst beyond them lay broad pastures covered with moss and heath. Of the hunt, no trace, no sign by which he might guess in which direction he was to follow.

The young soldier seemed in no wise disconcerted by this circumstance; he spurred his horse up a slight eminence and gazed around him. He then perceived, in the midst of a bamboo grove, the roof of a tiny temple half buried in the trees. Thither he hurried, and, without dismounting, rudely struck the alarm-bell.

The noise waked the keeper of the temple, a bald-headed old bonze, with long, thin face.

He ran out, rubbing his eyes.

"Do you know which way the royal hunt went?" said the young man.

"This morning I heard the barking of dogs, the neighing of horses, and loud laughter," said the bonze; "but I saw nothing. The hunters did not pass this way."

"Then they must have gone to the right," said the warrior, dropping a piece of silver into the alms-chest covered with a lattice work of bamboo.

He started off at a gallop. He rode for a long time, pausing occasionally to listen. At last he heard a distant barking, although the shore lay desolate before him. He stopped, and looked in all directions.

The barking came from the mountains; the sound of horses' hoofs was also indistinctly heard.

Suddenly, without a break, the sounds became loud and clear. Black dogs sprang from a narrow gorge between the hills, speedily followed by men on horseback.

The entire hunt passed before the young man. He recognized the Kisaki by the red gauze veil which floated around her. Some of the princesses held a hooded falcon upon their left fist. The lords bent forward, ready to let fly their arrows; each grasped a huge black lacquer bow.

As all the hunters had their heads thrown back, and were watching a falcon chasing a buzzard, high in the heavens, they passed without observing the young warrior. The latter at once rode alongside of them.

The dogs started a pheasant, which rose screaming from a bush. A fresh falcon was unleashed.

As he rode, the soldier sought out, among the nobles, the Prince of Nagato, and approached him.

"Stay, Iwakura!" he cried; "Fide-Yori sends me to you."

The Prince turned his head with a start; he drew in his horse. They lingered behind.

"Signenari!" exclaimed Nagato, as he recognized the young leader. "What has happened?"

"I bring important news," said Signenari. "Civil war threatens us. Hieyas has levied armies; he holds half Japan. With an amazing promptitude, he has collected large forces,—far superior to ours. The danger is imminent; therefore the master desires to rally all his followers around him."

"Alas! alas!" cried Nagato, "the future alarms me! must the land, then, be bathed in the blood of its own children? What does General Yoke-Moura say?"

"Yoke-Moura is full of energy and confidence; he has assembled a council of war. But still another misfortune has befallen us: we have lost the Prince of Mayada."

"Is he dead, that dear old man?" said Nagato, bowing his head,—"the only one who never yielded to the invading power of Hieyas! He could not have loved Fide-Yori more dearly, had he been his father. It was he who, on the death of the Tycoon, brought the little boy into the Hall of a Thousand Mats and presented him to the princes, who swore allegiance to him. How many have betrayed him since that day. How many more will yet betray him! Poor Mayada, you alone could win some semblance of respect from Hieyas; now he fears nothing mortal."

"He shall fear us, I swear it to you!" cried Signenari, with an heroic flash in his eye.

"You are right! Forgive me for this temporary weakness," said the Prince, lifting his head. "I am so crushed with grief that this sad news overwhelmed me for an instant."

The hunters had noticed the Prince of Nagato's absence. Supposing some accident had occurred, an alarm was raised, and the whole Court came flying back.

They soon perceived the Prince, talking with Signenari. They joined and surrounded them, asking a thousand questions. The dogs barked, some of the horses reared and plunged; the falconers recalled their birds, who refused to obey, and continued to pursue their prey.

"What has happened?" said one.

"It's a messenger."

"Does he bring tidings from Osaka?"

"Bad news!"

Nagato led Signenari to the Kisaki's side.

The Queen was mounted on a white horse covered with a network of pearls, and decked with silken head-tassels.

"Here is the bravest of your soldiers," said Nagato, turning to Signenari. "He comes from Osaka."

Signenari bowed low; then resumed his grave and reserved attitude.

"Speak!" said the Kisaki.

"Divine Sovereign, it is with pain that I disturb your pleasures," said Signenari; "but I must inform you that the peace of your kingdom is threatened. Hieyas has raised a part of Japan in revolt; he is preparing to attack Osaka, that he may usurp the power intrusted to your servant Fide-Yori by the celestial Mikado."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed the Kisaki. "Would Hieyas dare commit such a crime? Has the man no soul, that, to satisfy his insatiate ambition, he does not hesitate to arm brothers against brothers, and to shed on Japanese soil the blood of Japan's sons? Are you sure of what you state?"

"The news was brought to Osaka last night by messengers sent in hot haste by the princes; the latter were hurriedly striving to fortify their provinces. The Daimio of Arima arrived this morning at dawn and confirmed the news of the messengers. Scouts were instantly sent to various points, and the Shogun ordered me to recall his ambassadors as swiftly as possible, to hold a council."

"Let us return to the palace," said the Kisaki.

The party set out silently; only the princesses whispered together as they stared at the young warrior.

"What a beauty he is?"

"You might take him for a woman!"

"Yes; but what daring in his eye!"

"What coldness too! His tranquil gravity disquiets and alarms."

"He must be terrible in battle."

"Terrible, too, to her who loves him; his heart seems to be of steel, like his sword. Do not look at him so steadily."

Nagato rode up to the Queen.

"These events will delay your marriage, Iwakura!" said she, with a strange feeling of delight.

"Yes, Queen," said the Prince; "and the chances of war are many: perhaps it may never take place. However, as Fatkoura is publicly known as my betrothed, I wish her to go, until the wedding, to my castle of Hagui, where she will live with my father. If I die, she will bear my name, and be ruler over the province of Nagato."

"You are right," said the Kisaki; "but death will spare you. I will make vows for your preservation."

Nagato looked at her reproachfully. He dared not speak, but his eyes expressed his thought; they said plainly: "You know that death would be sweeter to me than the union which you force me to make."

The Kisaki, deeply moved, turned away her head and spurred on her horse. They returned to the Dairi.

When the Mikado learned the tidings of probable war, he seemed afflicted; but in secret he rejoiced. He did not love the Regent, nor did he care much more for the Shogun. Although he was their sovereign lord, he had a confused feeling that they ruled him. He knew that they both kept a watchful eye on him, and he feared them. He was therefore delighted to think that they would mutually inflict on each other all the evil that he wished them both.

That same day the envoys of Fide-Yori left Kioto and returned to Osaka.

CHAPTER XV.

THE USURPER.

In less than two months, as Signenari had stated, Hieyas had made himself dreaded; he had at his beck and call an army which public report numbered at five hundred thousand. The provinces of Sagama, Mikawa, and Sourouga, which belonged to him, had furnished large bodies of soldiers. The lord of Owari, the most devoted of Hieyas' allies, had commanded every able-bodied man in his principality to take up arms; so that there was not a laborer left upon his lands. The Prince of Tosa was powerfully entrenched in the large Island of Shikoku, lying to the south of the

kingdom, opposite Osaka Bay. From that point he threatened the Shogun's capital.

The majority of the sovereign lords of Japan, confident of the success of Hieyas, lent him their aid, and held their forces at his disposal.

Hieyas had established himself at Yeddo,—then a mere suburb, whose fine strategic position tempted him. Situated about mid-distance of the length of the great Island of Nipon, at the extreme end of a bay which cut deeply into the land, and surrounded by high mountains, it was easily fortified, and once fortified, impregnable. Moreover, its position in the centre of Japan, in view of the small width of the island, allowed communication by land to be readily cut off between the large Island of Yezo, the northern part of Nipon, and its southern portion, in which lay Kioto, Osaka, and the principalities of Fide-Yori's partisans. In this way, one half of Japan was insulated, and thus forced to remain neutral, or take sides with Hieyas.

The aged Regent displayed an unparalleled activity. In spite of his advanced years and precarious health, he proceeded to every spot where he thought his influence necessary. With those princes who were hostile to him, he feigned that he still held the power no longer his, and claimed from them the number of troops which they were bound to furnish the Government in time of war. Then he hastily despatched those men to distant points. In case his enemies learned the truth, they were thus disabled from harming him.

But after realizing these daring schemes, and preparing for the violent struggle necessary in order to usurp the supreme power, Hieyas felt so weak, so enfeebled by fever and pain, that he imagined he was about to die. He speedily summoned his son, who was then residing at the castle of Mikawa.

Fide-Tadda, son of Hieyas, was at this time forty-five years old. He was a man of no great personal valor, but patient, persevering, and submissive to minds superior to his own. He professed a boundless admiration for his father. He instantly hastened to the side of Hieyas, taking with him his youngest daughter, a lovely girl of fifteen.

Hieyas lived in a stronghold which he had built years—before at Yeddo, and which was not yet wholly finished. From the room in which he lay, stretched on thick cushions, he saw through the large window the beautiful Fusiyama, from whose snow-covered summit issued a column of delicate white smoke.

"Is that your daughter?" said Hieyas, as Fide-Tadda approached him with the girl.

"Yes, illustrious father; this is the younger sister of the Shogun's wife."

"The Shogun's wife!" repeated Hieyas, shaking his head and sneering. "The little thing is very pretty," he added, after inspecting the young girl minutely, making her blush and drop her long black lashes on her cheeks. "Take good care of her; I shall need her."

Then he made a sign to dismiss the child.

"I may die, my son," he said when he was alone with Fide-Tadda; "that is why I sent for you. I wish to give you my last instructions,—to trace out the line of conduct which you are to follow when I am no more."

On hearing his father speak in this way, Fide-Tadda could not repress his tears.

"Stop, stop!" cried Hieyas, smiling; "do not weep for me yet, I am not dead; and you shall see that my mind, is not impaired, as that old Mayada would have people think. Listen to me, and treasure my words in your memory."

"Every word that falls from your mouth is to me what a fine pearl would be to a miser."

"I will be brief," said Hieyas; "talking tires me. Know first, my son, that the predecessor of Go-Mitzou-No, the present Mikado, once honored me with the title of Shogun. It was after the death of Taiko. I made no parade of the title, not wishing to offend the friends of Fide-Yori. I allowed the princes and the people to fall into the habit of calling me the Regent. What mattered the name by which the power was known, so long as the power rested in my hands? But now the title of Shogun is of the utmost importance to me, for it is hereditary, and I can abdicate in your favor. You spoke just now of the Shogun. I am the Shogun. Fide-Yori did indeed receive the same title, and I never reminded his insolent councillors that it was really mine. I acted prudently. I was in their hands; they might have slain me. But now I undertake this war,—be well assured of it,—as sole representative of the legal power. I have had embroidered off my banners the three chrysanthemum leaves, the insignia given me by the former Mikado; and it is in the name of his heir that I lead my armies on to battle. I act without his authority, true; but as soon as I gain the victory he will approve my acts."

Hieyas paused for an instant, and drank a little tea.

"Only," he soon resumed, "death may surprise me,—it threatens me even now; and my work must be finished after I am gone. That is why I now abdicate in your favor. You will remain at the castle of Mikawa, sheltered from the hazards of war, watching over your daughter, who may serve for one of my plans, until the day when victory shall proclaim you master of Japan; then you will establish your residence at Yeddo, the best-situated city in the kingdom. Now I will try to put clearly before you the object for which you are to strive in your government of the nation. Taiko-Sama, who was a man of genius, although he was the son of a peasant, conceived the plan, as soon as he gained power, of uniting the sixty-one petty kingdoms composing Japan into a single kingdom, to be ruled by the Shogun. The life of one man was not long enough to see this project realized. Taiko, nevertheless, undertook it with great vigor, always carefully concealing his

intentions. I alone was the confidant of his hopes, and hitherto I have revealed them to no one. When Taiko plunged the princes into the war with China, which seemed to so many an act of madness, it was done to weaken the nobles by a costly war, and to keep them away from their provinces for a time. While he led them to the field, I carried out his orders at home. I superintended the construction of the Tokaido,—that broad road which impudently passes directly through regions formerly subject to their own princes only; I summoned to Osaka the wives and children of the absent lords, under pretext of protecting them from all danger, if by any accident the Chinese army should invade the land. When the princes returned, we refused to let the women go home. They were to live permanently at Osaka; they are still there, precious hostages, who answer for the fidelity of their husbands and fathers. As Taiko was also a great warrior, victory crowned his dangerous enterprise and strengthened his power.

"The Mikado had long paid little heed to the affairs of the empire. Taiko thought it well that he should pay even less attention to them; he made his power imaginary.... Listen!" continued Hieyas, lowering his voice: "this power must be diminished still more; the Mikado must retain merely the title of sovereign. Load him with honors, deify him more and more, so that he may lift his eyes to heaven, and turn them away from earth forever.

"Taiko was interrupted by death in the execution of his task, which was but just begun; the princes are still powerful and rich. Continue this work after me; parcel out the kingdoms, sow discord between the nobles. If two friends hold neighboring principalities, forbid them to reside within their domains at one and the same time; if they are foes, on the contrary, let them dwell together. War will break out between them, and one at least will be enfeebled. Always keep their wives at Yeddo. Bring into fashion a ruinous luxury; the women will help you in this. Empty the coffers of their husbands, that they may be forced to sell their estates. But if one of them be rich enough to provide for all these outlays, pay him a visit, and oblige him to spend his last bit of gold to receive such an honor fitly. Be careful to close Japan strictly against all strangers: the princes might make formidable alliances with them. Therefore let no ship coming from distant countries enter our ports. Seek out the Christians and massacre them remorselessly: they are capable of fomenting revolt and insubordination. You understand me fully, my son? You must strive to make of Japan a single empire, subject to but one master. But this end will be long and difficult of attainment, and man's life is brief; wherefore, when time has blanched your hair, you must summon your son, as I summoned you to-day, and transmit my words to him. I have finished."

"Father," said Fide-Tadda, kneeling before Hieyas, "I swear to fulfil your wishes to the letter."

"Good, my child; but send for the doctor," said Hieyas, who breathed laboriously, exhausted by his long discourse.

The doctor was brought.

"Illustrious scholar," said Hieyas, looking fixedly at him, "am I very ill?"

"No, master," said the doctor, with some hesitation.

"I command you to speak nothing but the truth. Am I very ill?

"Yes," said the physician.

"In danger of death?"

"Not yet; but the life of fatigue which you lead may hasten your end."

"Could I live to see the end of the war which I am undertaking, supposing that it should last six moons?"

"Oh, yes!" said the doctor; "you might oven prolong the war considerably beyond that time."

"Well! then I am rich," cried Hieyas, laughing. "I need not be in haste; I will take a few days of rest."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FISHERMEN OF OSAKA BAY.

A strange commotion reigned in the castle of Fide-Yori. Military leaders, clad in ponderous cuirasses, constantly passed through the gate in the outer wall; the tread of their horses' hoofs re-echoed from the lofty vaulted roof. They hurriedly entered the third enclosure, and reached the Shogun's palace.

Fide-Yori, in a room opening from the Hall of a Thousand Mats, was holding council, surrounded by the chiefs of his army and those princes who were most loyal to him.

The young Shogun's brow was clouded; he did not hide his anxiety, shared by most of the warriors. Some, however, full of trust and ardor, strove to raise their master's courage.

"Our situation is not desperate," said General Sanada-Sayemon-Yoke-Moura, the most skilful soldier in the empire; "we must face it coolly. Hieyas has but one advantage over us: while we had no thought of war, he was collecting his armies; he is ready to begin the strife; we are not prepared. But in a few days this inferiority will cease to exist; our troops will be in marching order, and, the contest will become equal. For the present, therefore, we must occupy the enemy

with trifling skirmishes,—keep him at a distance,—while we assemble our forces around Osaka."

"My advice is, that you should attack Hieyas at once, and not allow him to assume the offensive," said General Harounaga, a soldier of little merit, who had been rapidly promoted by the active protection of Yodogimi, the Shogun's mother.

"How can you think of such a thing?" exclaimed young Signenari. "Our army would be slaughtered in a few hours by forces three times its size. We must occupy the forts, and protect ourselves from any surprise until all our forces are assembled. If Hieyas has not then attacked us, it will be time enough to take the offensive."

"I maintain my proposition," said Harounaga. "I have an idea that Hieyas's army is not nearly so numerous as you suppose. How, in the space of a single moon, could he make himself so formidable?"

"We cannot act on suppositions," said Yoke-Moura; "and we are in no condition to make an attack. The first thing to be done is to increase the army."

"How many soldiers have we at the present time?" asked Fide-Yori.

"Let me see," said Yoke-Moura: "Signenari, who, in spite of his youth, has just been honored with the rank of general, has twenty thousand men under him; Harounaga has as many; Moto-Tsoumou and Massa-Nori each command ten thousand soldiers; Moritzka has fifteen thousand, and Yama-Kava five thousand. I am at the head of thirty thousand troops. That makes a total of one hundred and ten thousand soldiers."

"By what means shall we swell the list?" said the Shogun.

"You do not consider, master," said Yoke-Moura, "that the Princes have not yet sent in the troops which they are bound to furnish you in time of war, and that these troops will at least treble the number of your army."

"Nor must we forget," cried the Prince of Aki, "that certain provinces are directly threatened by Hieyas or his allies, and that those provinces will be obliged to withhold their soldiers, under penalty of instant invasion."

"The most exposed provinces," said Signenari, glancing at a map, "are those of Satsuma, Nagato, and Aki, on account of their vicinity to the principalities of Figo and Tosa."

"What!" exclaimed Fide-Yori, "have the Prince of Figo and the Prince of Tosa deserted me?"

"Alas! friend," said Nagato, "you did not know it; and yet I long since told you of their treachery. But your pure soul cannot believe in crime."

"If it be so," said the Shogun, "the Princes must keep their soldiers, and return at once to take command of them. You must leave me, Iwakura."

"I will send a substitute," said the Prince of Nagato. "I have decided to remain here. But let us not think of that; let us hasten to act, and to send our troops to their various posts; let no time be lost in idle words."

"I agree with Yoke-Moura," said the Shogun; "the enemy must be kept off from Osaka while we assemble our forces."

"Let General Moritzka start immediately with his fifteen thousand men," said Yoke-Moura; "let him proceed to the province of Isye, and inform the prince who governs that country of our plan for defence. He can leave him five thousand men, with orders to watch the movements of the lord of Owari, his neighbor, and to blockade his fortress, if possible. Then let Moritzka traverse the breadth of Japan; and, leaving on the frontiers of the rebellious provinces as many men as he may deem requisite, enter the principality of Wakasa, and there establish himself. With the armies levied by the princes of that region we shall soon have nearly forty thousand men on the frontier. Yama-Kava and his five thousand soldiers will encamp on the shores of Lake Biva, behind Kioto; the Knights of Heaven can then join them, and take up their quarters on the heights. Harounaga will lead his army to Yamashiro, and cover Osaka on the north; Signenari will occupy the Island of Awadsi, to the south of Osaka, and hold in check the traitor lords of Tosa and Figo, whose attack at this time would be much to be dreaded. The rest of the army will remain in the suburbs of the city, ready to move to those points most in danger."

"There is no change to be made in the plan which you propose," said the Shogun; "let all be done as you direct, and without delay."

The Generals knelt in turn before the Shogun; then left the room.

"Princes," said the Shogun to the nobles who remained with him, "return to your estates. Let those whose domains are threatened retain their soldiers; let the others immediately send me all the men at their disposal."

The princes bowed before their master, in order of their rank,—Satsuma, Ouesougui, Arima, Aki, Wakasa; then they withdrew. Fide-Yori was left alone with Nagato.

"Iwakura," he said, looking him in the eye, "what do you think of this war?"

"I think that it will be bloody; but justice is on our side. Even if conquered, we shall be noble and glorious; and Hieyas, were he victor, would be covered with reproach. We have youth, strength, and energy. Hope marches before our armies."

"I thank you, friend, for your attempt to encourage me by your own confidence. My heart is full of anxiety."

"I must leave you, master," said the Prince of Nagato; "I must call together my troops."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think that I would rest inactive, useless, here? Do you think that I would look on and see others slaying and being slain, and not join the fray? I have no soldiers, but I will find some."

"At least, I entreat you not to summon those who guard your lands; do not leave your domains open to invasion."

"I have no idea of doing so," said the Prince; "I will not send for those soldiers. Not that I care to preserve my principality, but my father resides at the castle of Hagui, and my betrothed has lately joined him. I must shield their precious lives behind the living rampart of my loyal army. Not one man shall leave the province of Nagato."

"Well, where will you get the troops of which you speak?" asked the Shogun.

"That is a secret," said the Prince. "When my forces have accomplished some valiant deed, I will bring the men before you."

"I cannot guess your schemes," said Fide-Yori; "but I am sure that you will do nothing that is not noble and heroic. Go, my friend."

Prince Nagato returned to his palace, where he found assembled some twenty samurai, his vassals, who came to ask his orders.

"Hold yourself in readiness to travel," said the Prince; "collect your servants and prepare your baggage. Before sunset you shall know my purpose."

Nagato went up to his own apartments; but as he approached them a strange noise fell upon his ear.

"What is going on?" he muttered. He hurriedly entered the room opening from his bedchamber. He then discovered that it was little Loo who was making all this uproar by his own unaided efforts. He was armed with a notched sword, and revolved around a screen decorated with life-sized figures of warriors. Loo stamped his foot, uttered singular howls, insulted these motionless warriors, and transfixed them mercilessly with his weapon.

"What are you about there?" cried the Prince, half angry, half amused.

Loo, at sight of his master, threw down his sword and fell on his knees.

"What does all this mean?" repeated Nagato. "Why are you hacking my furniture to pieces?"

"I am practising for the war," said Loo, in a voice which he vainly strove to render piteous. "That," he added, pointing to the screen, "is the castle of Owari, with its garrison; I was the army of the Shogun."

The Prince bit his lips, to hide his mirth.

"Would you be brave, Loo?" said he.

"Oh, yes," said the child; "and if my sword only cut, I should fear no one."

"I fancy that if these warriors, instead of silk and satin, were made of flesh and blood, you would take to your heels in a trice."

"Not at all!" cried Loo, squatting on his heels. "I am often very bad, and I often get into a fight. Once I pulled a gatekeeper's ear because he would not let me pass, pretending it was too late. While he called for help and held on to his ear, I jumped over the gate. Another time I was chasing a stork, which I had wounded with a stone, when a big dog came at me with his mouth open. I caught him by the neck, and gave him such a squeeze that he ran off yelping; but I was very angry with that dog, all the same, because I lost the stork meantime."

The Prince meditated as he listened to Loo's stories. He remembered that he had often heard of his exploits; they had been reported to him, with the advice to dismiss his youthful follower.

"Would you like to go to the war with me!" said he, suddenly.

"O master," cried Loo, clasping his hands, "I entreat you to take me! I am more supple than a serpent, more agile than a cat; I can slip in anywhere. You shall see that I can make myself useful. Besides, the very first time that I am frightened, you can cut off my head."

"It is a bargain," said the Prince, smiling. "Go, put on a very simple dress of some dark color, and hold yourself ready to accompany me. I shall want you to-night."

Nagato went into his chamber, while Loo, wild with delight, ran off with a bound.

The Prince was about to strike upon a bell to summon his servants, when he thought he heard a faint scratching under the floor. He stopped and listened; the noise was repeated more distinctly. Nagato closed the open panels around the room; then, coming back to that point in the floor where the noise was heard, he lifted the mat, and searched for a knot in the wood, upon which he pressed his finger. A portion of the floor then slid aside, and discovered a staircase, leading down into darkness. A man mounted the last steps, and entered the room. At the first glance the fellow looked like Nagato; he seemed like a rough sketch for the perfect statue realized in the Prince.

"Where have you been, my poor Sado?" said the Prince. "I had forgotten you."

"I have married; I am happy," said Sado.

"Ah! I remember, now,—the story of the princes disguised as blind men, and carrying off a whole

family! You have a pretty wit. That adventure occupied many idle minds for weeks. But what do you want? Do you lack money?"

"Master, I came to tell you that I am ashamed of the life which I lead."

"What! Have you forgotten our agreement?"

"No, your Highness; I forget nothing. I was a criminal; I was about to be beheaded when you pardoned me, because your illustrious father exclaimed, as he saw me: 'That man looks like you, Iwakura!'"

"I pardoned you also," said the Prince, "because, in my eyes, your crime was slight; you killed your enemy to avenge an insult, nothing more. But what were the conditions of my pardon?"

"Blind obedience, devotion unto death. I came to remind you of that to-day."

"What?"

"Unto death...." repeated Sado, emphasizing each syllable.

"Well, you still live; you are not released from your oath."

"Master," said Sado, in a serious tone, "I am of noble origin; my ancestors were vassals of your ancestors, and until the day when indignation led me to commit a crime, no stain over dimmed the lustre of our name. You saved me from death; and instead of making me expiate my error by a laborious life, you made my existence an unending feast. In your name I have enacted a thousand mad freaks; I have displayed a reckless luxury; I have enjoyed life, fortune, honors, as if I were an all-powerful prince."

"Well, you did me a favor by executing my orders; no more. Your resemblance to me served to deceive my enemies and cheat their spies."

"You have driven your enemies away for the present," continued Sado; "and my *rôle* of young madcap is ended. But consider, your Highness, what services I might render you in the war now beginning. Thanks to skilfully prepared cosmetics, I can make my face present a perfect image of your own; I am accustomed to imitate your voice and gait. Many of your friends know me only, and to them I am the true Prince of Nagato. What an advantage to possess a double on the field of battle! I could attract the enemy in one direction, while you acted on the opposite side. You would be thought here, while you were elsewhere. I have accomplished my mission well when it was only necessary to play the fool, and spend money by the handful. I will do even better when I must be brave, and shed my blood for you."

"Your noble origin is revealed by your words," said the Prince, "and I esteem you highly enough to accept your offer. I know your ability in matters of war; it will be valuable to us. But you must know that the risks will be very great in this conflict."

"My life is yours,—do not forget that, master; and if chance destines me to die for you some day, the stain upon my name will be effaced."

"Very well," said the Prince, hurriedly. "You will set off for my dominions; the neighboring lords threaten them seriously. You will put yourself at the head of my troops; you will defend the territory. But my supposed presence in my kingdom may attract around it many enemies. Remember, whatever happens, to uphold the honor of my name; remember that to all you are the Prince of Nagato."

"By dint of imitating you I have acquired something of your spirit," said Sado. "I swear to be worthy of you!"

"I trust you," said the Prince. "I know how intelligently you have carried out the strange character which I confided to you; all the adventures performed by you in my name ended to my honor. That is why I give you full powers now. You will leave here, taking with you a numerous suite, and I will take the subterranean road. Tell me where it comes out."

"There are two exits, master," said Sado,—"one which opens into a hut occupied by a fisherman, on the shores of the Yedogava; the other, into my wife's house. For, as I told you, I have married a charming young girl, whom I loved."

"What will become of her if you die?"

"I leave her in your care, my lord."

"Make all your arrangements in regard to her at once," said the Prince. "I too may be killed, and not return; my treasury is at your discretion."

"Thanks, generous Prince," said Sado, kneeling at Nagato's feet. "Have you any further commands?"

"You will give the Shogun the letter which I am about to write."

The Prince took a sheet of paper made from the fibre of the bamboo, and decorated with blossoming bind-weed, and wrote rapidly:—

> "MASTER,—If they tell you that I have changed my mind, and have gone to my estates, do not believe it, but let them say so still.
>
> "IWAKURA."

He handed the note to Sado. "Now," said he, "hide yourself an instant behind that screen, that no one may see us together. When I have gone, you will proceed according to my orders."

"May happiness go with you!" said Sado, concealing himself.

"Thanks for the wish," said the Prince, sighing. He drew aside a panel, and called Loo. The little servant hastened in. He was dressed like an artisan's child, but had put his sword in his girdle. He helped his master to don a costume without any ornament; then the Prince, opening a box, wrapped in his sash a considerable sum of money.

"Now let us be off," said he, approaching the staircase.

Loo looked at the open trap-door, without showing the least surprise. A lighted lantern stood on the upper step. He took the lantern, and began to descend; the Prince followed him, and closed the trap-door. They then went down fifty steps, and found themselves in a small square chamber, very damp and cold, which had two outlets.

"In which direction shall we go, master?" asked Loo, looking at the diverging paths.

The Prince paused to take his bearings; then said: "To the right."

They entered the narrow corridor, supported here and there by large upright posts of black wood, and walked for about half an hour; they then reached the foot of a staircase, up which they climbed. This flight of steps led to the one room of a fisher's hut.

"Here we are," said Nagato, gazing about him.

The room was deserted, and almost empty; some few blackened nets formed a sort of drapery upon the walls; in one corner a light boat was laid on its side.

"It's not beautiful here," said Loo, with a scornful air.

The door was fastened on the inside with an iron bar. Nagato raised it, and slid the panel aside in its groove.

The sun had set, night drew rapidly near; but the sky was still empurpled, the river blood-red. A few large boats were visible, moored near the bank; other vessels were coming back from sea. The sailors took in the sails of woven reeds; the sound of the ring as it slipped down the mast was heard distinctly. A few fishermen climbing the steep steps from the water, and dragging their dripping nets, returned slowly to their homes.

Already the big rectangular lanterns were lighted before the tea-shops; a joyous clamor began to rise from their gardens and open halls.

The Prince, followed by Loo, turned towards the largest of these establishments; but to his great surprise, when he entered the balcony, already crowded with people, he was greeted with enthusiastic shouts.

"It is my worthy Sado who wins me this popularity," he thought.

"His highness! his highness!" was the cry.

"Bring saki! open fresh casks! The Daimio wants every man to get drunk!"

"We will! we will! So drunk that we can't tell the moon from the sun."

"But we want plenty of saki,—plenty, plenty! Then we can sing the ancient song of 'Dainogon-Ootomo'."

They shouted this song in chorus:—

> "Is there aught on earth more precious than saki?
> If I were not a man, I would fain be a tun."

Upon this a sailor, naked to the waist, with a broad, unprepossessing face, approached the Prince.

"We will drink by and by," said he. "The last time we met, you cut my cheek open with your fist. I'd like to break a rib or two for you; after that we shall be friends."

"Do you know whom you're talking to?" cried Loo indignantly, rushing upon the man of the people.

The latter pushed him off; but the child seized his arm, and bit it till the blood came. The sailor yelled with pain.

"The fellow's a regular wolf!" he shrieked.

And he fell upon Loo with clenched fists; but the Prince grasped him by the wrists.

"Let that child alone," said he; "I will fight you if you like. What is your name?"

"Don't you know?"

"I've forgotten."

"A prince may easily forget a common sailor's name," was the shout from all sides. "His name is Raiden, like the God of Storms."

"Very well, Raiden," said Nagato; "let us fight since you bear me a grudge."

"First set me free," said Raiden, who struggled in vain to release himself.

The Prince loosed his hold. The sailor, clenching his fists, glared at his opponent for one moment, then sprang upon him; but Nagato, by a single sudden and violent motion, sent him rolling on the floor, amidst a great crash of broken china, among the cups and bottles ranged upon the ground.

All the spectators burst out laughing.

"Now you're satisfied," they said. "You have done more than a kobang's worth of damage; if the Prince doesn't pay, you'll have to sell a good many fish to settle the bill."

"I will pay," said the Prince. "But speak, Raiden, do you wish to continue the fight?"

"No, I thank you," said Raiden; "I fell into some boiling tea, and I shall have to smart for it. Besides, you are stronger than ever to-night; I should get whipped."

"The saki! the saki! if the quarrel is over," said the spectators. "Speak, Prince! In what fashion will you amuse us to-night?"

"First let us drink," said the Prince. "This is scarcely a time for rejoicing. Sad news are spread through the castle; all hearts are uneasy, for civil war is at hand. The pranks which we have played are out of season now,—like the flowers and leaves when the first gales of winter blow."

Saki was brought. Utter silence ensued; all eyes were fixed on the Prince.

"I have come to talk to you, who have been my companions in pleasure," he continued. "You love fighting, you are brave, you are strong; will you be my comrades still, and fight under my command, against the enemies of Fide-Yori?"

"To be sure we will!" cried several sailors.

"But our wives and children; what will become of them?"

"Who will feed them in our absence?"

"You know very well that gold flows from my fingers like water from a fountain. I will not let you leave your trade and risk your lives without paying you handsomely. How much does a fisherman earn in a day?"

"That depends; on bad days, when the sea is very rough, we don't make so much as an itzibou. Good hauls of the net sometimes bring in half a kobang."

"Well! I will pay you half a kobang a day while the war lasts."

"It's too much! it's too much!" was the general shout; "our blood is not worth so much."

"I will not take back my words," said the Prince.

"But consider," cried Raiden: "there are a great many of us; if you engage us all at that price, the sum total will be considerable."

"I can count," said the Prince, smiling. "I want two hundred men: that makes one hundred kobangs a day, three thousand kobangs a month, thirty-six thousand a year."

Raiden opened his eyes wide.

"Where will you get so much money?"

"You have no idea of the wealth of princes," said Nagato, astonished at this strange discussion. "I shall scarcely notice the outlay; so have no scruples."

"Good! good! If that is so, we accept," exclaimed the sailors.

"For that price you can have us cut into fifty pieces," said Raiden, who had not yet recovered from his surprise.

"You will run great dangers," said the Prince; "you must be bold and loyal."

"He who fights the sea has no fear of men," said a sailor; "we are accustomed to danger."

"Listen!" said Nagato: "you will choose among your boats fifty of the best and strongest; you will make no change in their peaceful aspect; you need not remove your fishing-tackle; but hold them ready to put to sea at the first signal."

"Agreed!" said Raiden.

"I will provide you with arms," continued the Prince, "but you will carefully conceal them; you must look like fishermen, and not like soldiers."

"Very good; we understand!" cried Raiden, as, standing with his arms folded, he listened attentively to the Prince.

"I have no further orders to give you for the present," said Nagato; "only keep our bargain secret."

"We will not tell it even to the gulls that fly over the sea."

The Prince opened his belt, and threw a piece of gold on the ground.

"Our engagement begins from to-day for those who are here present," said he, "and I will count out a hundred kobangs to each one. You will choose among your mates the number of men needed to make up my little army. Engage the bravest and most discreet."

"Sailors are not chatterboxes," said Raiden, "particularly fishermen; noise frightens the fish. Come, Loo," said he; "the Prince is ready to count out the money."

Loo approached, and began to arrange the little plates of gold in piles. Each man came forward in his turn and gave his name, which Nagato wrote upon a long strip of paper. The Prince looked with pleasure on the frank and daring faces of these men, who had sold him their lives. He thought that seldom at court had he met the loyal look which shone here in every eye. The

majority of these men were bare-chested, revealing their vigorous muscles. They laughed with pleasure as they took their money.

Soon the Prince left the tea-house, and ascended the banks of the river. For a long distance he could hear the laughter and the voices of the sailors, who, as they drank their saki, sang loudly the song of Dainogon-Ootomo. Loo, who heard it for the first time, tried to recall it, and hummed it as he marched behind the Prince:

"If I were not a man, I would fain be a tun."

CHAPTER XVII.

DRAGON-FLY ISLAND.

The beautiful Yodogimi wept. She stood leaning against a black lacquer panel, one arm raised with a gesture of grief, her fingers pressed lightly against the smooth, shining wall, her head thrown back, and somewhat inclined towards her shoulder. She wept, without forgetting to be beautiful.

Yodogimi was nearly forty years old. Who would have thought it from her charming face and form? Her large eyes were still brilliant, her lips fresh, her complexion clear; and the single rope-like twist of her hair, when released from its pins, rolled to the floor like a dark serpent. The Princess, as was her habit, was magnificently arrayed; a costly girdle clasped her slender waist, and the embroideries of her robe were of marvellous workmanship. A few steps away from her stood General Harounaga, her lover, in full armor, his gold-thonged whip in his hand. He stared at the floor and struggled to force a tear, but could not. From time to time he heaved a deep sigh.

"Alas, alas!" exclaimed Yodogimi, "you will go, you will forget me; perhaps die!"

"I may die," said the General, "but I can never forget you."

"Die! Have you no heart, that you can talk to me of death I Men are cruel; they swear devotion, and then, for a mere nothing, they forsake us."

"It is not my fault. War has broken out; I must start for Yamashiro with my men."

"And if I command you to stay?"

"I must disobey, Princess."

"You confess it unblushingly! Well, I forbid you to leave me!"

"So be it," said the General. "I cannot resist your wishes; but this very evening I shall commit suicide."

"Because you are tired of my society?"

"No; because I should be dishonored; and no one should ever outlive dishonor."

"Oh, I am mad!" said Taiko-Sama's widow, wiping her eyes. "I speak like a child; I counsel you to play a coward's part. Go; do not spare your blood. If you die, I too will die. How handsome you are in fighting dress!" she added, looking admiringly at him. "Is it for the enemy's eyes that you adorn yourself thus?"

"It is the custom," said Harounaga; "besides, the arrows rebound from these overlapping plates of horn, and no blow of the sword can pierce them."

"Do not talk so; I seem to see you in the thick of the fight," cried Yodogimi. "I see the arrows fly, I hear the clash of steel. What will become of me during these long days of agony and alarm?"

"Yamashiro is not far from Osaka," said the General; "I will send you frequent news from the camp."

"Yes, promise me you will. Send a messenger every day."

"You shall hear from me every day. Farewell, most beautiful of princesses!"

"Farewell, bold warrior! Hay Heaven grant us a speedy meeting!"

Harounaga withdrew; and as he passed across the palace courtyard, Yodogimi leaned from the window for a final glimpse of him.

The page who held the warrior's horse informed the General, as he helped him to the saddle, that most alarming reports were current in the castle. The advance-guard of the enemy had been seen at Soumiossi; that is, but a few leagues from Osaka. The Shogun's troops had, therefore, failed to blockade the entire breadth of the Island of Nipon, as was their purpose. Harounaga hurriedly rejoined his division, which was waiting for his coming, to march forth from the castle ramparts. Several knights galloped to meet him. The Shogun had just reached the encampment, and was inquiring for Harounaga.

"Do not go to Yamashiro," he shouted, as soon as he saw him; "proceed to Soumiossi, and try to crush the rebels, if it be true that they are already established there."

"I fly, master," answered Harounaga; "and I swear to conquer."

A few moments later, he left Osaka with his army. At the same hour a number of fishing-boats, taking advantage of the tide, left the harbor, and, driven by a strong breeze, reached the open sea. It was Nagato's fleet.

The Prince was one of the first to learn of the appearance of Hieyas' soldiers at Soumiossi. He at once decided to put to sea and cruise about the regions threatened.

Each boat was manned by four sailors; that in which Nagato sat contained one more person,—Loo; the latter had caught a few fish, and with frank cruelty watched their dying struggles. Raiden was at the helm.

The Prince, lying in the bottom of the boat, gazed vaguely up at the huge brown sail, which cracked and swelled, and at the entangling ropes and cordage; he was lost in revery. The same dream always filled his soul; it was like the sea, which reflects the sky forever. Every incident, every action disturbed the Prince painfully, made him melancholy; they were so many clouds veiling his love, preventing him from utter absorption in it. And yet his noble disposition impelled him to devote himself to the service of his sovereign, to shed his blood for him,—save him,—if it were possible; but despite himself, he often forgot the war, Hieyas, intrigue, and crime,—as, when silence is restored, one forgets the noise that broke it for a time.—He then invoked in fancy, a look bent upon him, a sweet voice, a corner of a veil raised by the wind and brushing his lips; he recalled the sudden thrill which that light touch sent throbbing through his veins. Sometimes he thought that perhaps she too was dreaming of him, and he followed the errant fancy into space.

The waves rocked him gently, and encouraged him in these idle dreams; the wind blew, the swelling sail looked like an immense crescent; the water, driven rapidly back, splashed up at the bow.

"It is that I may not be parted from her," he murmured, "that I engage in this strange adventure. I reckon on chance to furnish me with occasions to serve my Prince; for if I were asked to explain my plan for the campaign, I should be vastly puzzled. My only purpose is to bear down upon the most perilous points, fight with fury, and then sail away without making myself known. But in General Yoke-Moura's opinion a small body of independent troops, coming up in the midst of a battle, sometimes tip the scales of victory, and do great service.... I remember this very opportunely, to justify my conduct," added the Prince, smiling.

The fifty boats composing the flotilla were scattered broadcast over the sea. Loo said that they looked like a swarm of butterflies on the point of drowning.

Towards noonday they drew near the shore. Soumiossi was close at hand, and Nagato desired to land, that he might, if possible, collect fresh information in regard to the hostile army.

A small cove sheltered the vessels, which neared shore; the greater part remained in the offing, only twenty men accompanying the Prince, who took a road a hundred paces from the beach and apparently leading to a village. They walked on for some time; but all at once the foremost men, who had turned the corner, came running back.

"A Daimio! a Daimio!" they shouted.

"Well, what is that to us?" said Nagato.

"If we block up the road, they will walk directly over us, or else chop off our heads," said Raiden.

"Go, Loo," said the Prince, "and see what name is written on the post at the roadside. If the lord whose coming it announces be less noble than I, we will throw the post to the ground; and although I have no train of followers, the Prince shall make room for me."

Loo, having looked about for an instant, ran up to one of the posts which noblemen erect on roads by which they mean to travel, announcing the day on which they shall pass by.

The child soon returned with a look of utter amazement.

"It is you, master, who are to pass this way!" said he.

"What?" said the Prince.

"It's written on the board," said Loo: "'The all-powerful Iwakura-Teroumoto-Mori, Prince of Nagato, will traverse this region on the tenth day of the fifth moon.'"

"Silence, Loo!" said the Prince; "let nothing surprise you, and be discreet ... Sado must be on his way to my dominions," he added aside to himself.

Already, in a light cloud of dust, the out-runners of the procession turned the corner of the road. Then came lackeys, scribes, and cooks, bearing all sorts of utensils.

The sailors knelt by the roadside; the Prince hid behind a hedge of wild roses.

The first group passed, followed by some twenty horses loaded with chests, boxes, and bundles wrapped in red leather; then by a large number of men carrying pikes, banners, swords, bows, quivers, and umbrellas.

A crowd of servants came next; each man bore on his shoulder a highly varnished box, which held the clothes and other personal property of the Prince.

Then appeared in succession, officers wearing magnificent weapons and princely lances, adorned with cock's plumes and leathern thongs,—grooms led along richly caparisoned horses; a Samurai, followed by two lackeys, holding at arm's length the hat with which, when he sets foot on the ground, the Prince protects himself from the sun; another lord carrying a parasol in a black

velvet case; behind them the servants and baggage of these nobles marched in silence.

Then came twenty-eight pages wearing round hats, preceding the litter of the Prince. Those pages moved in a peculiar way; at each step they kicked back with one foot, lifting it as high as possible, and at the same time thrust one hand forward, as if to swim.

Finally, the norimono of the lord approached, borne by eight men, who advanced slowly, taking short steps, carrying on the palm of one hand the single shaft, passing over the palanquin like a bent bow, the other outstretched hand seeming to impose silence and express respectful awe.

Upon the black lacquer, dotted with gilded nails, which covered the sides of the norimono, were the armorial bearings of the ruler of Nagato,—three balls surmounted by a bolt. The inside of this great box was hung with gay-colored silk stuffs, and upon a mattress covered with a velvet carpet the Prince reclined and thumbed a book.

The norimono passed, and the procession ended with a throng of grooms, pages, and banner-bearers, who marched in perfect order and the most profound silence.

"Really," said Raiden, rising, and brushing the dust from his knees, "all that is very fine; but I'd rather be a sailor, and walk freely about, without all that cumbersome train."

"Be quiet," said another man; "you'll vex the Prince."

"I've no doubt he agrees with me," said Raiden; "since, being a prince, he turned sailor."

They now reached the nearest village; and before they had time to ask a question, were fully informed in regard to all they wished to know. Several neighboring towns had emigrated to this one. The streets were choked with people, carts, and animals. A tremendous hubbub arose from the mob of men and beasts. The buffaloes bellowed in affright, and crushed one another; the pigs, who were trodden upon, uttered shrill squeals; the women groaned, the children cried; and the story of recent events passed from mouth to mouth.

"They've taken Dragon-fly Island."

"Opposite Soumiossi, you can see them from the shore. The inhabitants of the island had no time to escape."

"They came in three war-junks,—three fine junks gilded in spots, with very tall masts, and flags streaming in every direction."

"Are they the Mongols?" asked certain old men, who had a confused remembrance of ancient wars and foreign invasions.

"No; it is the Regent, who wants to have the Shogun killed."

"How many soldiers landed on the island?" asked Raiden, who had slipped in among the crowd.

"Nobody knows; but there were a great many; the junks were full of them."

"About fifteen hundred men," thought Raiden.

"It's the advance-guard of Hieyas' army," said the Prince of Nagato in a low voice. "If Fide-Yori's troops do not arrive promptly, Osaka is in the utmost danger. Let us put to sea again," he continued; "I have a plan, which, although desperate, may succeed."

Before leaving the village, Nagato ordered Raiden to buy a quantity of carpenter's tools. Then they went back to the shore and re-embarked.

Towards evening the little fleet hove in sight of Soumiossi, and found shelter behind a promontory which completely hid it. The place was most beautiful; enormous trees, whose naked roots clung like the claws of some bird of prey to rocks and earth, overhung the sea; bushes and shrubs swung above them tufts of gorgeous bloom; the waves were strewn with fallen petals, which floated about, collected in small islets or long wreaths. The waves, dashing against sharp rocks, cast up white foam; gulls fluttered about, like the froth of the sea turned into birds. The water was of a uniform tint of satiny blue, shot with silver, and the sky still shimmered in liquid gold, reflected from the setting sun. In the distance lay Dragon-fly Island, green and fresh, with its strange insect-like outlines; the coast of Soumiossi, one ruddy glow, displayed its jagged cliffs; and at the extreme point of the promontory a tiny pagoda reared its peaked roof, tiled with porcelain, all the angles apparently raised by the four chains which bound them to a golden arrow.

The Prince thought of another sunset,—that which he had witnessed from the mountain top near Kioto, with the Queen at his side. He closed his eyes, and saw her before him, so beautiful, so noble in the mute avowal of her grief, her lashes glittering with tears, turning upon him her pure gaze, and commanding him to marry her rival. The least details of her speech, her gesture, the little mirror upon her brow flashing like a star, were graven upon his memory with amazing distinctness.

"That was a sad moment," he thought; "and yet, as I recall it, it seems to have been full of fascination. At least she was there,—I saw her, I heard her; the sound of her voice was like balm, to heal the cruelty of her words. But now, what agony to live! Time seems like a boundless sea, where no rock or mast permits the exhausted bird an instant's rest!"

Three very light canoes were now launched, scarcely visible above the water. As soon as night fell, Nagato chose eight men from the most adventurous of his crew, together with Raiden and another sailor named Nata. They got into the canoes, three men in each.

"If you hear shots, come to our rescue," said the Prince of Nagato to those who were left behind.

And the three boats moved noiselessly off.

Those who manned them were armed with swords and daggers; moreover, they took with them the tools bought in the village, and several matchlock guns. These weapons—a foreign invention, often damaged or imperfect—generally refused to go off, or else exploded in the hands of their owners. They were accordingly equally dreaded by those who used them and those against whom they were directed. The Prince had contrived to get fifty new and well-made guns, which was a large supply for his little army; still, the sailors regarded the strange machines with a certain distrust.

The boats glided along in the shadow, steering straight for Dragon-fly Island. The noise of the oars, handled cautiously, mingled with the myriad dull sounds of the sea. A light breeze rose, and whistled in their ears.

As they approached the island they tried to move more and more silently. Already they could see fires among the trees. They were not far from shore, for they could distinctly hear the measured tread of a patrol upon the bank.

The Prince ordered his men to row round the island in search of the war-junks. They lay at anchor close to the shore, having Dragon-fly Island between them and the Soumiossi coast. They were soon visible to the men in the canoes, their vast hulls and lofty masts outlined in black upon the less intense darkness of the sky; lying almost on a level with the water as they were, the junks seemed enormous to them. Upon each one, a lantern burned at the foot of the mast, hidden from time to time by the sentinel as he paced up and down the deck.

"Those sentinels will see us," said Raiden, in a low voice.

"No," replied the Prince; "the lantern lights up the spot where they are, and prevents them from distinguishing anything in the darkness where we are. Let us now approach; and may our mad enterprise tend to our glory!"

The three boats moved off one after the other, and each one came alongside one of the ships without making more noise than a gull as it dips into the wave. The canoe which contained the Prince had approached the largest of the junks. It lay between the other two. The shadow was thicker than ever beneath the bulging sides of the vessel. The black water splashed, and dashed the little boat against the giant hull; but the noise was lost in the incessant shock of the water and the continual fall of one wave after another upon the shores of the island.

"Let us stay here," said the Prince, in a scarcely audible voice. "Even if they looked from the deck, they would never see us here."

"True," said Raiden, "but we could not work here; the boat is not steady enough. If we could reach the prow of the vessel, we should be better off."

"So be it," said the Prince.

All three, kneeling in the bottom of the boat, pressed with their hands against the junk, and thus advanced rapidly. Sometimes an involuntary collision, which seemed to them to make a terrible noise, made them pause; then they went on again. They reached the ship's prow. At that moment the sentinel cried:

"Oho!"

He was answered from the other junks:

"Oho!"

"Oho!"

Then all was silent once more.

"To work," said Nagato.

Their plan was merely to sink these great ships by making a hole in them below the water-line, large enough to let in the sea.

"What rocks and reefs can do with the greatest ease, we may perhaps achieve by taking a little trouble," was the Prince's thought. The tools which had been used in the construction of the ship's hull might now be useful in destroying a fragment of it. It would be quite enough to make an opening as big as a man's hand, or to remove a plank. The water, which only asks to be let in and glide everywhere, would be quite content with that.

Raiden, leaning from the canoe, felt the slimy sides of the ship, and searched under the sticky moss, under paint and tar, for the heads of the nails which held the planks together. The Prince and the sailor Nata tried to hold the boat as nearly stationary as might be. Raiden took a tool from his belt, and with great exertion dug out a few nails.

"This ship is well built," said he; "the nails are as long as sword-blades; besides, they are rusty, and as firm in the wood as big teeth in a young jaw."

"Do you think we can carry out our plan?"

"I certainly hope so," said Raiden. "It is impossible that a nobleman like you could take such trouble for nothing; only I am very awkwardly situated, with my head down, and obliged to pull out the nails obliquely. I must get into the water."

"Are you crazy?" said Nata. "The sea is very deep here."

"There must be a rope in the boat."

"Yes," said Nata.

"Very well; fasten the two ends to the seat."

Nata quickly obeyed, and Raiden passed the rope under his arms.

"In this way I shall be suspended in the water," said he; and he slid silently over the side of the boat. For more than an hour he worked in the darkness, without uttering a single word; and as his hands moved beneath the water, he made no noise. Nothing was audible save the monotonous tread of the sentinel and the dash of the waves against the ship.

"Pass me the saki," said Raiden at last; "I am cold."

"It is my turn to work," said Nata. "Get into the boat again."

"It is done," said Raiden. "I have taken out the nails all round a plank as long as our boat, and as broad as Nata is from shoulder to shoulder."

"Then you have fully succeeded," said the Prince.

"Not yet; the most difficult part remains. The plank is dovetailed, into its two neighbors, and affords no hold by which I can pull it out."

"Try to slip your tool into the crack."

"I have been trying, but in vain," said Raiden; "the plank must be pushed from the inside."

"That cannot be done," said Nagato.

Raiden raised his head; he looked at the ship's hull.

"Is there not a port-hole up there over our heads?" he asked.

"I see nothing," said the Prince.

"You are not accustomed, as we are, to see through the darkness on stormy nights," said Nata; "but I see the port-hole very plainly."

"Some one must get in there, and push out the plank," said Raiden.

"You are crazy; none of us could squeeze through that narrow opening."

"If little Loo were here," muttered Raiden, "he would get in there soon enough, he would!"

At this moment the Prince felt something move between his legs, and a small figure rose from the bottom of the boat.

"Loo knew that he would be wanted!" it cried.

"What! Are you there?" said the Prince.

"Then we are saved," said Raiden.

"Quick!" said Loo; "lift me up to the window."

"Listen!" said Raiden, in a low voice. "As soon as you get in, you are to feel along the wall, and count five planks down, straight under the opening. The sixth you will push; but as soon as you feel it yield to your hand, you must stop, and hurry back. If you push it entirely out, the water, pouring into the hold, will drown you."

"All right!" said the boy.

Nata stood leaning his back against the junk.

"You are not afraid, Loo?" said the Prince.

Loo, without a word, shook his head. He was already upon Nata's shoulders, and clinging to the edge of the port-hole with both hands. Soon he thrust in his head and shoulders; then his legs followed, and he was lost to sight.

"It must be even darker in there than out here," said Nata, who had his ear close to the ship's side.

They waited. The time seemed to them long; their anxiety made them motionless. At last a cracking noise was heard. Raiden felt the plank move. A second push made it start from its place.

"Enough! enough! or you are lost!" said Raiden, not daring to raise his voice.

But the child heard nothing; he continued to use his clenched fists with all his strength. Soon the plank fell, and floated off upon the waves. At the same time, with a roar, the water streamed into the ship.

"And the child! the child!" cried the agonized Prince.

Raiden thrust his arms despairingly into the yawning hole, black and tumultuous as it was.

"Nothing! nothing!" said he, grinding his teeth. "He has been carried off by the force of the water."

At this moment cries were heard from one of the neighboring junks. Lights flashed hither and thither on the deck; they seemed in the darkness to move through the air of their own will.

"Our friends may need us," said Nata.

"We cannot desert that poor boy," said the Prince, "while there is a hope of saving him; we will not stir from the spot."

All at once Raiden uttered a shout of joy; he felt a small cold hand upon the edge of the hole in the ship's side. He soon drew the child out, and dropped him into the boat.

Loo did not stir; he had fainted. Raiden climbed hastily into the boat, dripping wet as he was.

"That poor fellow is about done for," said Nata, pushing off from the junk.

"Let us join the others," said Nagato; "perhaps they have not finished their work."

The shouts increased; the alarm was given on every hand. Lights were seen moving about on the shores of the island, and the sound of arms snatched up in haste was heard.

"We sink! we sink!" cried the crew of the junks.

Several men sprang into the sea, and swam, puffing and blowing, towards land. Terror had reached its height among the troops. The junks sank rapidly; the water bubbled and boiled as it poured into their holds. The enemy was at hand, and yet invisible. The more lights were brought, the blacker seemed the sea.

The Prince of Nagato leaned from the canoe, and vainly strove to pierce the gloom with his eye. Suddenly a violent shock made his boat start and quiver, dancing about in strange fashion for some moments.

"We can see no more than you," said a voice; "excuse us, Prince, for giving you such a knock."

"Oh, it's you!" said Nagato; "did you succeed?"

"We should be at work still, if our task were not accomplished. We have gnawed through the wood like an army of rats, and made a big hole in the junk."

"Good, good!" said the Prince; "you are indeed valuable assistants."

"Let us sheer off," said Raiden; "they have long-boats still; they may pursue us."

"And our comrades?"

"They'll take care of themselves; be sure of that. Perhaps they have escaped already."

The soldiers fired a few arrows at hap-hazard, which fell like rain in the water around the canoes.

"They are so awkward that they might hit us without meaning to do so!" said Nata, laughingly.

"Sheer off!" shouted Raiden, rowing vigorously.

The darkness now began to grow less profound; a pale gleam spread across the sky like a drop of milk in a glass of water. On the edge of the horizon the light grew stronger, though still vague and faint. It was the dawn of the rising full moon. Soon, like the point of a sword-blade upon the horizon, the planet shed a steel-like lustre. At once a trail alternately dark and light ran along the sea to the shore; bluish sparks crackled and glittered on the crest of the waves; then the moon appeared like the arch of a bridge, and at last rose wholly into sight, like a metal mirror.

They were now out of reach of the soldiers. Nata took the oars; Raiden rubbed Loo's temples with saki as he lay across the Prince's knees.

"At least he is not dead, poor child!" said Nagato, putting his hand on Loo's heart.

"No. See, his little chest heaves slowly; he breathes; but he is frozen. We must strip off his wet clothes." They undressed him; Nata took off his outer garment and wrapped the boy in it.

"That brat don't know what fear is," said Raiden. "Don't you remember, Prince, how he bit me when I wanted to fight you? I have but one wish now; that is, that he might bite me again."

The sailor tried to separate Loo's locked teeth, and poured a quantity of saki down his throat. The boy swallowed it the wrong way, sneezed, coughed; then opened his eyes.

"What! then I am not dead?" he asked, gazing about him.

"Well, it seems not," cried the delighted Raiden. "Will you drink?"

"Oh, no!" said Loo, "I've had quite enough to drink. Salt water is very nasty; I never tasted it before. I shall have to eat a great many banana preserves before I can get rid of the taste."

"Are you in pain?" said the Prince.

"No," said Loo; "but tell me if the junk has sunk."

"Nothing but the tip of her mast can be seen by this time," said Nata. "The success of our enterprise is largely due to you."

"You see, master, that I am of some use," said Loo, with great pride.

"To be sure; and you are as brave as the bravest man," said the Prince. "But how did you get here?"

"Ah! that's just it! I saw that you were determined to leave me behind, so I hid under the bench."

"But tell me," cried Raiden, "why you pushed the plank so hard, in spite of all my warnings?"

"I wanted to make sure that the junk did not escape; and then I heard a noise in the ship. I had to make haste. Besides, I don't think I could have climbed back again at any rate. There were all sorts of beams and ropes, and chains that tripped me up; for I couldn't see any more than if I'd had my head in a black velvet bag."

"And when that mass of water fell upon you, what did you think?"

"I thought that I was killed, but that the junk would surely sink. I heard the thunder roar, and I swallowed gallons. The water ran in at my nose, my mouth, and my ears; and then I knew no more, felt no more!"

"You were very near death, my poor Loo," said the Prince; "but for your fine conduct I will give you a handsome sword, well sharpened, and you can wear it in your sash like a lord."

Loo cast a look full of pride at his companions, whose faces were lighted up by the moon, and smiled broadly, showing two deep dimples. A misty blue light shone across the sea, so that they could see off for some distance.

"Two junks have disappeared," said Nagato, gazing in the direction of the island; "the third is still afloat."

"I think I see boats hovering about her; do you think our friends can have been taken by surprise?".

All at once the junk keeled over on one side; and instantly a small boat was shoved off, and moved rapidly away. The ship's boats, full of soldiers, chased her, sending a thick flight of arrows after her. Several shots were fired from the junk.

"Let us hasten to their aid!" exclaimed the Prince.

Raiden had already changed the course of the canoe; the other boat, which accompanied them, followed alongside.

"They will never let themselves be taken," said Raiden, who kept turning his head to look, as he rowed.

In fact, the light canoe flew over the waves, while the heavier long-boats, loaded down with men, moved very slowly.

"The junk is sinking! the junk is sinking!" shouted Loo, clapping his hands.

In truth the last vessel remaining above the surface sank slowly; then with one impulse disappeared.

"Victory! Victory!" cried the sailors and the Prince.

"Victory!" was the answering cry from the hotly pursued canoe, which came nearer and nearer.

The three boats were soon side by side.

"Let them chase us," said the Prince; "and do not move too quickly to deprive them of all hope of catching us."

A few shots were fired; several soldiers fell, and were immediately thrown overboard, to lighten the boats. An arrow struck Raiden in the shoulder; but its force was spent; it merely pricked him, and fell into the canoe.

"That was well aimed," said Raiden.

The moon was in mid-heaven; but the polished mirror was dimmed as if by a breath. It soon assumed a rosy tint; then became cottony; then was nothing more than a white cloud. The blue and silver color of the sky was shadowed by a tinge of pale amethyst, which spread rapidly from the horizon; violet lights shimmered over the sea. It was day.

Behind the promontory, the Prince's fleet had heard the shots which were to be their signal; they at once left the shore and spread their sails, which assumed the lovely hue of peach-blossoms in the first sunbeams. As soon as they were within reach of his voice, the Prince of Nagato, standing up in the canoe, shouted with all his might:—

"Surround those long-boats! Cut off their retreat! Capture them!"

Loo danced with delight. "After sinking the big craft, we confiscate the little ones," said he.

The soldiers saw their danger; they put about, and tried to escape. But how could they contend in a trial of speed with oars against those great sails swelling in the morning breeze? The boats were quickly overtaken, then passed. The soldiers gave up all for lost. By steering straight upon them, and with a single blow, one of those large vessels could sink them in a second. They hastily threw their weapons into the water, in sign of submission. The men were hauled on board; then the long-boats were swamped and sunk.

"Go seek your monstrous mother at the bottom of the sea!" cried Loo, as he watched them go down.

The three canoes then joined the flotilla. The Prince and his sailors boarded the large vessels.

Loo related to those who had been left behind how they had swamped the enemy's junks, how he got drowned in a hole, then was brought back to life again, to wear a sword like a lord. The prisoners were counted as they stood with heads bent, resigned, and waiting for their fate. There were fifty of them.

"Our bold plan succeeded better than we could have hoped," said the Prince; "I am still lost in amaze at its realization; but since Marisiten, the god of battles, the divinity with six arms and three faces, has been so far favorable to us, do not let us rest from our labors yet. We must now surround Dragon-fly Island, and cut it off from the rest of the world, until the Shogun's army comes to our relief."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the sailors, made enthusiastic by their recent victory.

"How many soldiers are there on the island?" the Prince asked one of the prisoners.

The soldier hesitated; he looked up and down, then right and left, as if asking advice. All at once he decided to speak.

"Why should I hide the truth?" said he. "There are two thousand."

"Very well!" exclaimed the Prince; "let us make for the island, and allow no one to quit it; then we shall have, not fifty prisoners, but two thousand."

Loud cheers greeted Nagato's words; they set off. Soon the saki went round; the sailors chanted a war-song, which they sang, each in his own fashion, producing a lively but deafening melody.

The deepest consternation reigned in the island. No one could believe his own eyes. The junks, so strong and so beautiful, sank suddenly in the sea; the boats, full of soldiers, did not come back. Who could this enemy be, who struck in the dark? The sentinels had only seen a frail canoe, manned by three men, who, impudently clinging to the ship, hammered away at the hull with all their might and main, and ripped it up; then fled, setting them at defiance.

So there were no more ships; even boats were lacking. They had no means of leaving the island. There they were established, as if in a fortress surrounded by an immense moat. Protected by their war-junks, it was an excellent position indeed. But now the fortress proved their prison; if speedy succor did not come, they were lost. The chief in command of these two thousand men—his name was Sandai—ordered the two best boats to be chosen from the wretched craft belonging to the inhabitants of the island. This order being executed, he appointed five men to each.

"You will set off in all haste," said he, "and rejoin the main body of the army. You will then inform the General of our distressing situation."

The boats started; but when they had gone a little way, they saw a vast circle of motionless sails, which barred their passage. The boats retraced their course. They were blockaded. Sandai collected all the provisions, taking the animals and crops of the inhabitants. There was a week's supply; besides, they could catch fish.

"We must build big rafts, and try to reach the mainland unseen, by night," said the leader.

The men set to work, felled trees, stripped off the branches; thus the day passed. They worked all night as well; but next morning they saw a glitter and commotion on the Soumiossi shore. General Harounaga's army had arrived.

That gay warrior, on his side, was greatly embarrassed. He did not know what to do in face of the foe divided from him by the sea. The fleet was taking in stores at Osaka; it was not yet ready to sail. If he had to wait for its coming before making an attack, the enemy might escape him.

Harounaga encamped his troops on the beach, pitched his tent, and retired into it to consider the situation. Meantime his soldiers fired a few arrows in the direction of the island, by way of salute; they fell in the water, the island being out of range. Nevertheless, towards noon, a well-aimed arrow fell just outside Harounaga's tent, and stuck quivering in the sand. A paper was fastened to the feathered end of the arrow, which was plucked up and taken to the General.

Harounaga unfolded the paper, and read as follows:—

> "Prepare for attack. The enemy are in your power. I have deprived them of all means of escape. I will provide you with means of reaching them."

The note was not signed. The General left his tent, and gazed across the water. A fishing-boat was crossing leisurely from Dragon-fly Island to the Soumiossi shore.

"Whom can this letter be from?" thought Harounaga. "Is any one jesting with me? Am I to transport my whole army in that vulgar boat?"

But, as he looked, other boats appeared upon the ocean; they came nearer; their number grew. Harounaga counted them.

"Well! well!" he said, "the project seems feasible. Come, my men!" he cried, "take up your arms; here is a fleet to carry us across!"

As soon as the movement of the troops was apparent, the boats advanced to the shore. The Prince of Nagato was first to land. The Prince recognized the General.

"Ah! it's that stupid Harounaga," he muttered.

Loo leaped ashore. He wore a superb sword at his waist.

"Twenty men to a boat," he shouted. "There are forty of them, which will make eight hundred men to each voyage."

The General came forward.

"What! Prince Nagato!" he exclaimed.

"I am Naiboum,"[1] said the Prince; "all the glory of the affair shall fall to you."

"A sovereign expose himself thus to the risk of battle!" said Harounaga, in surprise.

"I wage war at my caprice, subject to no one; and I find a certain pleasure in these novel sensations."

"You!—you used to care for nothing but feasting!"

"I prefer warfare now," said the Prince, smiling; "I am fickle."

Shots and confused clamor were heard in the distance.

"What is that?" asked the General.

"A false attack upon the other side of the island, to favor the landing of your soldiers."

"Why, you are as good a General as I am," said Harounaga.

The Prince hid a contemptuous smile behind his fan.

The boats, loaded with men, put off from shore, the General accompanying the Prince. Loo had picked up a sort of trumpet; and, leaning forward, blew into it with all his might and main.

Hieyas' soldiers awaited them in a body, on the opposite coast, ready to oppose the landing to their utmost; arrows began to fly thick and fast from both parties. The Prince of Nagato sent forward to right and left a boat full of men armed with guns. They overwhelmed the foe, who had no firearms, with an incessant volley of shot.

Upon shore a furious hand-to-hand fight soon followed. Men fought up to their knees in the water; sword-strokes made the foam splash high. Sometimes two adversaries would pull each other down, roll over, and disappear. Dead bodies and quantities of arrows floated on the waves. Sailors caught hold of the boats, and pushed them violently out to sea. One strong stroke of the oar brought them back. Then some would hang their whole weight on one side, hoping to capsize them. The hands clutching the edge were hewed at with sabres; the blood spurted out, then trailed upon the water like torn rags.

When a boat was empty, it returned in haste to fetch more soldiers; soon the partisans of the Usurper were crushed. They surrendered.

The dead and wounded were numerous. The latter were laid upon the sand, their wounds were dressed, and they were encouraged with kind, fraternal words. Were they not brothers? They wore the same uniform, they spoke the same language. Some wept as they recognized friends in the enemy's ranks. The vanquished men sat upon the ground in an attitude of utter despair; they crossed their hands upon their knees, and bowed their heads. Their swords and bows were gathered up and made into heaps, which were given to the victors.

The Prince of Nagato and the General advanced into the interior of the island. Harounaga swung from his wrist the golden-thonged whip; the scales of his cuirass clattered and clashed as he strode along with one hand on his hip.

"Bring forward the leader of the rebels," said the Prince.

Sandai came forward. He still wore the varnished black leather mask, fitted to the helmet, and worn in battle; he removed it, and revealed his melancholy visage.

The presence of Nagato strangely troubled this chieftain, who had formerly asked and obtained his interest with Fide-Yori. He had afterwards joined the Regent from ambitious motives, and now he betrayed his first sovereign. Nagato's calm and scornful gaze made him feel all the infamy of his conduct; he saw that he could never again hold up his head under the double humiliation of defeat and dishonor. Moreover, the Prince seemed to him clad in peculiar majesty. Amidst his warriors in full armor, their heads protected by strong helmets, Iwakura stood bareheaded, dressed in a black silk robe with a slight tracery in gold; on his hands were white satin gloves, reaching to the elbow, and above each arm a stiff plastron forming an epaulette, and making his shoulders seem very broad. In this guise he looked more formidable than all the rest.

The Prince played carelessly with his fan, and did not appear to recollect that he had ever known Sandai.

"Rebel," he said, without raising his voice, "I do not ask you if you will renounce your crime, and return to the service of your true lord. Pride, I know, survives honor in the heart of man, and you would refuse."

"Prince," said Sandai, "before the battle your voice might have recalled me to my duty, and brought me to your feet; but after defeat no leader can disown his acts and serve his conqueror. Therefore I cannot consent to yield."

"So be it; I will send you back to the master of your choice," said Nagato. "You will set off alone, unaccompanied by page or squire; you will rejoin Hieyas, and say to him this: 'General Harounaga conquered us; but it was the Prince of Nagato who sank the junks which might have rescued us.'"

"Illustrious Daimio," said Sandai, without any sign of anger, "I am a general, and not a messenger. I may be guilty, but I am not a coward; I can endure merited insult without revolt, but I cannot survive it. Send some other messenger to Hieyas; and let him add to the tidings he bears the news of my death."

Profound silence followed this speech. All understood the General's intention, and no one desired to oppose him. Sandai seated himself upon the ground. He drew one of his swords,—the shorter of the two; then; having saluted the Prince, he ripped himself up with a single blow.

"That deed raises you in my eyes," said Nagato, who was perhaps still heard by the dying man.

"Let this warrior be buried upon the island, with the pomp appropriate to his rank," said Harounaga.

Sandai's body was borne away.

"Now," said the Prince, "I will take a little rest. I begin to recall the fact that I spent the whole night upon the sea, and that I never closed my eyes for a second. The victory is as complete as possible. It only remains for you, Harounaga, to establish communications between Soumiossi and the island which you have conquered. You can do so by the aid of rafts, forming a kind of bridge. Despatch messengers to Fide-Yori, occupy the island and the neighboring coasts, keep a watch over the sea, and await fresh orders from Osaka."

"Thanks for your precious advice," said the General. "You are the true victor. Will you permit me to say so to our much-loved lord?"

"No," said the Prince; "announce it to Hieyas only. I desire my name to ring in his ear like a threat."

With these words the Prince of Nagato withdrew. Night fell, quiet and cool; then it passed away, and day reappeared.

General Harounaga came from his tent, and inquired if the Prince had waked. He had grown accustomed to taking his orders and advice. It spared him the trouble of thinking. He had a thousand questions to ask. A messenger ran to the tent which had been pitched for Nagato. It was half open; but on looking in, the Prince was found to be absent.

"He may have gone back to his boat," said Harounaga.

They hastened to the shore. There was not a sail on the sea; the Prince of Nagato's fleet had vanished.

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[1] That is, incognito.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRINCIPALITY OF NAGATO.

At the beginning of hostilities, Fatkoura, according to the arrangement made by the Prince, had been despatched to Hagui, the castle of her betrothed, under an escort provided by the Queen, to protect her from the dangers of the road. She also took all her household. In the midst of her despair and disappointed love, she felt a cruel pleasure. "There are three of us miserable now," she thought. She had agreed to marry the Prince, with an idea of being avenged. Besides, how could she refuse? The Kisaki had ordered the marriage, nobly sacrificing her own unacknowledged love; moreover, everybody in the palace knew Fatkoura's feeling for the Prince of Nagato. She had revealed it unhesitatingly, in the pride of her joy, when she thought herself beloved. She left the Court hastily, tired of wearing a smiling mask before her friends, whose congratulations overwhelmed her.

During the journey, she saw nothing of the lovely country through which she passed. She kept her eyes fixed on the matting of her norimono, her grief growing ever more profound. Sometimes she sent for Tika; and the girl would crouch down opposite her, and gaze at her with anxious pity, trying to rouse her from her melancholy revery.

"Just see, mistress!" she would say; "see what a pretty river, the color of absinthe, runs between those velvety hills. Every shade of green is to be found there,—the green of the pale willow, of the dark cypress, of the silvery birch, of the turf, bright as an emerald; each adds its varying hue. And look, the moss, to make that green too, has crept all over the water-mill, whose image is reflected in the water. And yonder those reeds# which look like swords, and those ducks, flapping their wings and flying away with necks outstretched,—they are as green as is the rest of the landscape."

Fatkoura did not heed her.

"He will come back to you," said Tika, giving up all hope of turning the thoughts of her mistress from her persistent grief; "when you are his wife he will love you again, you are so beautiful."

"He never loved me, and I don't want him to love me," said Fatkoura; "for I hate him."

Tika sighed.

"I have but one pleasure, and that is to know that he suffers; that she too—she who crushes me by her power and her matchless beauty—is devoured by sorrow. They love, and they may not confess it. I am one obstacle the more between them. The Mikado might have died; then she could have married him."

"A Kisaki! marry a prince!" exclaimed Tika.

"You forget," said Fatkoura, "that Nagato's ancestor was next in rank to the Mikado. Iwakura's crest still proclaims the fact, for it consists of two Chinese characters, meaning: 'The highest rank.' In the days when I loved the Prince of Nagato, the Son of the Gods himself could not have driven him from my heart."

"You love him more than ever," murmured Tika.

Sometimes Fatkoura was moved with pity for her own fate. She recalled the time when the delight of being loved filled her soul; and she wept bitterly. But tears failed to comfort her.

"I am a fool!" she said; "I long to weep upon his shoulder; I fain would pour out my anguish to his cold and cruel heart!"

Then her anger grew strong within her once more.

At last she reached the town of Hagui, situated on the shores of the Japanese Sea. She entered the superb gateway of the ancient fortress of the Princes of Nagato. In the first courtyard Iwakura's father came forward to meet her, and greeted her kindly, saying: "Welcome to your home, Princess of Nagato." Though sixty years old, he was straight and strong. In the nobility of his features the young woman traced some likeness to Iwakura. The Prince had abdicated in favor of his eldest son some years before; he now devoted himself to the education of his youngest boy, a lad of thirteen, who stood beside him, and upon whose head his hand rested.

Fatkoura was forced to smile and seem cheerful. She hid her mouth behind her sleeve, with that modest and affectionate gesture familiar to Japanese women; then she knelt for a moment at the Prince's feet. He treated her in a fatherly manner,—made her splendid presents, installed her in the state apartments, showed her his domains, gave entertainments for her, and got up hunting parties in her honor.

Fatkoura experienced a strange emotion amid these surroundings, which so vividly recalled her betrothed. She saw the room in which he was born; the playthings broken by his childish hands; his first clothes, which still retained the impress of a figure graceful even then. She was told a thousand pretty anecdotes of his adored infancy; then the heroic deeds of the boy and man, his literary triumphs, the nobility of his soul, his goodness and devotion. The old Prince never wearied of the tale; and the father's love tortured and increased the woman's unhappy passion. Then a sort of resignation came to her. By dint of hiding her grief she buried it in the depths of her soul, and diminished it. She tried to forget that she was not beloved; she found comfort in the strength of her own affection.

"I love," she would say to herself; "that is enough. I will be content to see him, to hear his voice, to bear his name. I will be patient. Time, perhaps, may cure his passion. Then he will take pity on my long suffering; he will remember all that I have endured for his sake; his heart will be softened; he will love me. I shall end my days in happiness with him; I shall be the mother of his children."

When the rumors of war were confirmed, anxiety took possession of all hearts; the life of the absent one was in danger.

"Where is he at this moment?" asked Fatkoura.

"He is at the most perilous post, I am sure," replied the old nobleman. He said this with pride, holding his head erect; but his voice trembled, and tears stood in his eyes.

Then more details reached the castle. The Princes of Figo and Tosa threatened Osaka, and also the province of Nagato. Iwakura's father raised an army, and despatched troops to the frontier. "We have one ally, the Prince of Aki," said he; "besides, we shall not be attacked. No one has a grudge against us.".

He was mistaken. The soldiers sent forward by him had not yet reached the limits of the kingdom, when the Prince of Tosa landed on the shores of the inland sea. Full of alarm, the Prince sent a deputation to his neighbor, the lord of Aki, who declared that he intended to remain neutral in the war.

"He is a traitor, an infamous wretch!" cried old Nagato, when his envoys brought him back this answer. "Well, we will defend ourselves unaided,—with no hope of victory, to be sure, but with the certainty that we shall not dim the lustre of our former glory."

When he was alone with Fatkoura, the Prince let all his despondency appear.

"I pray," said he, "that my son may remain with the Shogun, and not return here. Attacked by these powers, we cannot possibly conquer. If he were here, he would rush to his death; and who would avenge us then?"

A party of horsemen now entered the castle. The Prince turned pale as he saw them. They wore Nagato's crest upon their shields.

"Do you bring news of my son?" he asked, in an unsteady voice.

"Illustrious lord, the Prince of Nagato is in good health," said a Samurai. "He is at this moment on the borders of the kingdom, busy rallying the army around him. He intends to march against the Prince of Figo."

"Aki has betrayed us; does my son know that?" said the Prince.

"He knows it, master. The Prince passed through the province subject to that wretch; he supposed him friendly, but was treacherously attacked. Thanks to his unequalled bravery, he scattered his assailants; but half his baggage was lost."

"What orders did he send us through you?"

"These, sire: the Prince of Nagato begs you to levy an extra number of troops and despatch them to meet the Prince of Tosa, who is advancing towards Chozan; then to double the defenders of the fortress, take in large supplies of provisions, and shut yourself up in it; he also requests that you will put me in command of the troops sent against Tosa."

These orders were at once executed.

One event followed another in rapid succession. Other messengers arrived. The Prince of Nagato gave battle in the northern part of the kingdom, in the territory of Suwo; the lord of Suwo, a vassal of the Prince of Aki, favored the landing of Figo's men. But Iwakura defeated these troops on the inland sea; many were drowned, others took refuge on board the ships lying at anchor. Meantime the lord of Suwo's little army attacked the Prince in the rear, trying to cut him off from the province of Nagato; but the army was completely routed, and the Prince was able to regain his kingdom.

Then Figo, supported by fresh forces, reappeared on the outskirts of Nagato; and Iwakura prepared to repulse a second attack.

But while the Prince of Nagato triumphed in the northern part of his domains, the Prince of Tosa invaded them on the south.

The province of Nagato, the extreme point of the Island of Nipon, is bounded on three sides by the sea,—on the south-east by the inland sea divided from the Pacific Ocean by the islands of Shikoku and Kiu-Shiu; on the west by the Straits of Corea; on the north by the Japan Sea; and on the east a mountain chain separates it from the principalities of Suwo and Aki.

The Prince of Tosa came from the Island of Shikoku by way of the Bungo Channel, crossing the inland sea directly to Chozan. His plan was to march through the province straight upon Hagui, the capital, situated on the other side, upon the shores of the Japan Sea.

Tosa encountered the troops hastily levied and sent to the front by the old lord of Nagato; but those raw recruits gave way before the well-trained army of the invader, and beating a retreat, fell back upon Hagui. Preparations were then made to maintain a siege.

The stronghold stood some distance from the town, upon an eminence surrounded by a moat; from the top of its towers could be seen the fields and the sea.

Tosa's army soon covered the plain. The old lord watched it from the fortress.

"My daughter," said he to Fatkoura, "I wish you had stayed in Kioto!"

"Father," replied the young woman, "it is my duty and my pleasure to be here in my husband's castle, when it is in danger."

Moreover her peril distressed her but little. Her anger was dead; she felt nothing now but love; she trembled for her dear one's life; frightful anguish rent her soul. The arrival of a messenger did not allay her fears.

"Since that man left him," she thought, "he might have died twenty times over."

But the castle was blockaded; messengers could no longer reach them.

The town made a brave resistance, but was captured on the fifth day; then began the siege of the stronghold. The Prince of Tosa himself directed the siege.

The enemy first constructed a long roof of wood, covered with plates of iron; then they raised it upon very tall posts, to which they fastened it. This formed a species of penthouse, which they placed in the moat. They then brought earth, stones, and brushwood, which they flung into the water. The arrows aimed at them rebounded from the roof of the penthouse. Huge blocks of stone were hurled from the castle on the hill, to crush this dangerous refuge; but their force was deadened as they rolled, and most of them fell into the moat,—only serving to help the besieging party in their labor, as they quietly went on filling up a portion of the moat, under the sheltering roof which they had built. No more projectiles were therefore thrown from the ramparts.

The soldiers made a sally; and marching down the road which winds around the hill like a ribbon, approached the moat. To reach the point where the foe was at work, they were forced to quit the road, protected by a double row of cypress-trees, and march across the slippery grass which carpeted the steep slope of the hill. The soldiers did their best; but they found it almost impossible to fire under these circumstances, while they themselves afforded a fine target to their adversaries. The wounded rolled down hill and fell into the moat.

Nagato's men gave up the attempt perforce, and returned to the castle. The enemy finished their work without any trouble; making a broad dyke to the foot of the hill, over which the army might pass.

They then stormed the fortress, which resisted bravely, and refused to surrender. The besieged party fought to the last upon, the crumbling walls. The victors rushed in, threw open the doors, let down the bridge; and the Prince of Tosa entered the castle of Nagato to the sound of triumphal music.

The sight which met his eyes in the first courtyard which he entered, affected him most disagreeably. There had been no time to bury the dead, who had been collected in this court, in a sitting posture, their backs against the wall. There were nearly a hundred bodies, with greenish faces, gaping mouths, and staring eyes, their arms hanging limp; they were terrible to behold.

The Prince of Tosa fancied that they glared at him, and forbade him to enter. As he was superstitious, he was on the point of turning back. But he soon mastered his weakness, went on into an inner hall of the palace, and ordered the old lord, his women, children, and entire household, to be brought before him. They soon appeared.

There were aged women, some accompanying a decrepit father, young girls, and children. The lord of the castle came forward, leading his son, and followed by Fatkoura.

"If you wish to destroy these women," said old Nagato, looking at Tosa with scorn, "say so at once, that I may curse you, and call down every possible affliction upon your head."

"What do I care, whether they live or die?" cried Tosa. "You yourself, having abdicated, count for nothing, and I spare your gray hairs. I seek among you a hostage of sufficient value to guarantee the submission of the Prince of Nagato; for, having won the victory, I cannot remain upon his lands. The war summons me in another direction. Which shall I take," he continued,—"the son, or the father? The child is very young yet, and of no importance; for want of a better, I will carry off the father."

"Take me with him then!" exclaimed the boy.

Suddenly Fatkoura stepped forward.

"Since you think his father too old, and his brother too young," she cried, "take captive the sovereign's wife, if you consider her worthy regret."

"Certainly I will take you; for you must be passionately loved," said Tosa, struck by Fatkoura's beauty.

"Why have you betrayed yourself, my daughter?" muttered old Nagato. "Why not let me go?"

"Is she really Iwakura's wife?" asked the conqueror, stirred by a doubt. "I command you to give me a truthful answer, Nagato."

"Every word which my mouth utters is the word of truth," said Nagato. "This woman is my son's wife, for they have pledged their troth; nothing but the war delayed the wedding."

"Very well; let Iwakura seek his bride in the castle of the Princes of Tosa; and the ransom which he must pay for her shall be proportioned to the value of the treasure which I bear off."

"What have you done? what have you done?" sighed the old Prince. "How shall I ever dare to tell my son that his wife is a prisoner?"

"You should be thankful," said the Prince of Tosa; "for see how generous I am. I give you your life,—your own life, that of your son, and the lives of all your household; I permit you to rebuild the shattered walls of your castle, and am content with this one captive."

"I am ready to go," said Fatkoura, glad to be sacrificed for the safety of the rest; "may I take a maid with me?"

"One or several, and as much baggage as you choose," said the Prince of Tosa. "You will be treated by me as a sovereign should be."

That very night Fatkoura left the castle of Nagato. She vainly strove to restrain her tears as she passed over the threshold in her norimono, borne by the retainers of the victor.

"I shall never come back!" she cried.

Tika too wept. When they had gone a short distance, Fatkoura made the palanquin-bearers halt; and leaning from the window, gazed for the last time at the fortress of Hagui, on the brow of the hill, already outlined in black against the crimson sky.

"Farewell! farewell!" she cried, "last refuge of my undying hope. Behind your walls, home of my beloved, I still could dream of a remote and lingering bliss. But it is ended; I am vowed to despair. The last ray which shone upon my path fades with the dying day."

The men resumed their journey, and the castle was lost to sight. The Prince of Tosa left half his army in Nagato's domains. Messengers brought him word that Figo had been unable to break through the enemy's lines, but that on hearing the news of the siege of Hagui, Iwakura had suddenly departed, to march to the rescue of the fortress. He started by night, and silently; in the morning the field was found deserted. Figo intended to follow him up; but victory would be assured if they could bar the enemy's march and crush him between two armies.

Tosa gave his orders to the leaders of the troops whom he left behind; then hastened on to Chozan, where his ships awaited him. He was reluctant to leave his dominion longer without protection, fearing the vicinity of the Prince of Awa, whom he supposed to be loyal to Fide-Yori.

When the junks had left the coast, and were sailing the inland sea, towards the Bungo Channel, the Prince visited his prisoner. He had established her in a superb tent, in the stem of the finest ship, the one in which he himself embarked. Fatkoura sat upon a bench covered with rich rugs; her eyes were fixed upon the shores of Nagato, now disappearing in the distance, bathed in light.

"Have you any wish which I can gratify, fair Princess?" asked Tosa. "Shall I order sweetmeats to be brought? would you like to hear the sound of the flute or biva?"[1]

"All my wishes rest behind in the land which I have left," she replied; "I have but one wish now,—to die."

"I respect your grief," said the Prince, and withdrew.

But he did not go far. He paced the deck, and, as if involuntarily, he frequently approached the tent which sheltered Fatkoura. Tika watched him out of the corner of her eye. He had changed his military costume, and was dressed with much care. The Prince of Tosa was thirty years old. He was rather fat and short; his brown skin set off his white teeth to advantage; and his eyes, veiled by heavy lids, had a look of amiability.

Tika thought the Prince quite charming; and she smiled faintly every time that he heaved a sigh or cast a furtive glance at Fatkoura, who watched the wake of the vessel.

"She is beautiful, is she not?" she said to herself. "You think that the Prince of Nagato is very lucky to have such a bride; you would like to take her from him. I guessed your purpose instantly. From the moment that you saw her in the castle of Hagui, you had eyes for no one else, and you carried her off with all speed; you feared lest her lover should come in time to wrest her from you. But you'll have your labor for your pains; she will never love you.... Not that I would not pray for your success," continued Tika, carrying on her monologue; "if she could be cured and become Princess of Tosa, I should rejoice sincerely. The Prince of Nagato, too, would consent to the match with pleasure; but that, you cannot suspect."

The Prince of Tosa also scanned the young waiting-maid from time to time.

"Yes, yes! I understand," muttered Tika; "you examine the stepping-stone which may possibly help you to reach her."

Soon the girl got up; and, as if to breathe more freely, moved about the deck. She leaned over the bulwarks, and looked across the sea; but all the time she slyly watched the Prince's movements.

"Oh! you will come to me," said she, "I am very sure of that. Let us see how you will begin the conversation."

The Prince did indeed approach her, though slowly, and with some hesitation. Tika looked away.

"The air is fresher here, is it not, young woman?" said the Prince at last, pausing in front of her.

"Well, that is commonplace enough," thought Tika, who replied by bowing her head.

"Why doesn't your mistress take a little walk? Why not let this light breeze cool her heated brow?"

"The wind which blows from the land of exile is more burning than flames of fire," said Tika, in a solemn tone.

"Is it so dreadful, then, to dwell in one castle rather than in another?" said the Prince. "Fatkoura shall be treated like a queen. I swear that I desire her captivity to be more sweet than liberty is to most people. Tell me what does she like?"

"Did she not tell you that she cared for nothing now? Once she was fond of dress, and music, and festivity; more than all else she loved to hear the footsteps of her lover on the outer gallery."

"She was very fond of this Nagato, then?"

"She loved him as he deserved to be loved; he is the most perfect knight imaginable."

"There are others as good," said Tosa.

"You think so!" cried Tika, with an incredulous air; "I never heard of them."

"He loves her madly, I suppose?"

"How could any one help loving her?"

"True, she is beautiful," said the Prince, casting a look at Fatkoura.

"You think her beautiful now, when her eyes are drowned in tears, and when she scorns the aid of paint and dress. If you had seen her when she was happy!"

"I will do my utmost to bring back a smile to her lips," said Tosa.

"There is but one way to do that."

"What is it? Tell me."

"To restore her to her husband."

"You mock me," cried the Prince, with a frown.

"I, sir!" said Tika, clasping her hands; "do you think I would deceive you, and that it would not be the best way to make my mistress happy? I know that you will not try it; so you will never see her smile."

"Very well! then she must be sad," said Tosa; "I shall not set her free."

"Alas!" sighed Tika.

"Silence!" cried the Prince, stamping his foot. "Why do you say alas? what difference does it make to you whether you wait upon her here or there. Don't you see that she has fascinated me, and that I am miserable?"

The Prince moved away as he said these words, while Tika pretended to be lost in profound surprise.

"I did not think that you would confide in me quite so soon," she muttered when he was gone. "I divined your secret long ago; but you little guess how ready I am to favor your love."

Tika then went back to sit at the feet of her mistress.

"You desert me, to talk with our jailer," said Fatkoura.

"It was he who came to talk to me, mistress," said Tika; "and in the space of a few moments he told me very strange things."

"What did he tell you?"

"Must I repeat his words? you will not be angry?"

"I don't know; but speak."

"Well, he said that you were the jailer, and he was your prisoner."

"What do you mean?"

"That the Prince of Tosa loves Fatkoura, and that if she is skilful, she can make him obey her every whim."

"I despise him too much to heed whether he loves or hates me?" said Fatkoura, turning away her head.

"He is not so contemptible," said Tika; "he is a very powerful and very illustrious prince."

"Can you speak in such terms of our mortal enemy, Tika?" said Fatkoura, looking at her severely.

"Do not scold me," said Tika, with a caressing air. "I must hate him less, since I know that your grace has conquered him, and that in a few hours you have subjugated his heart."

"Yes, you cannot forget that another turns his eyes from me, and you are grateful to this man for repairing the outrage inflicted upon me!" said Fatkoura, hiding her face in her hands.

As the sea was smooth and the voyage pleasant, instead of travelling by land, they skirted the coasts of the Island of Shikoku, weathered Cape Tosa, and after sailing north-ward for some hours in the Pacific Ocean, the junks entered the harbor of Kotsi. The city was gay with flags, banners, and lanterns; the streets were strewn with blossoming boughs. The sovereign made a triumphal entry at the head of his victorious troops.

When they had passed through the town and entered the precincts of the castle, the Prince himself led Fatkoura to the pavilion chosen for her. It was the palace of the Queen of Tosa, who had been dead for several years.

"I am deeply pained that the joyous clamor which greeted me should grate upon your ear," said the Prince to his prisoner; "I could not forbid my people to give way to their delight, but I suffered for your sake."

"I heard nothing; my mind was elsewhere," replied Fatkoura.

Several days passed before the Prince visited the young woman. His budding love made him timid, and he was amazed at this novel feeling. One morning he went for a solitary walk in that part of the park inhabited by Fatkoura. Tika was lying in wait for him, and without a word to her mistress, appeared upon the balcony. The Prince beckoned to her, and she obeyed.

"Is she as sad as ever?" he asked,

"Yes."

"She hates me, I suppose?"

"I don't know," said Tika.

"I made you a confession the other day which I should have withheld," said the Prince; "did you repeat it to your mistress?"

"I never hide anything from her, sir."

"Ah!" eagerly exclaimed the Prince, "what did she say when she learned of my love for her?"

"She said nothing, but hid her face in her hands."

The Prince sighed.

"I must see her at any cost!" he cried. "For three days I have deprived myself of that pleasure, and I am worn out; I forget that I am her master."

"I will announce your visit to her," said Tika, going hastily back into the house.

A moment later, Tosa stood before Fatkoura. He thought her even more lovely than the last time that he saw her. Sorrow had ennobled her beauty; her complexion, free from cosmetics, revealed its feverish pallor, and her eyes wore an expression of proud resignation which was most touching.

The Prince was agitated, and could not utter a sound. She saluted him by raising her sleeve to her mouth. She was first to speak.

"If there be one spark of pity in your soul," she said, in a voice trembling with tears, "do not leave me in this terrible state of uncertainty; give me some tidings of my husband!"

"I am afraid to sadden you still more, by telling you tidings delightful to me, though wretched for you, since you are my enemy."

"Go on, I conjure you!" cried the terrified Fatkoura.

"Well, then, the Prince of Figo's army, ably seconded by my men, has triumphed over the Prince of Nagato, who fought bravely, I must acknowledge. At this moment he is probably a prisoner. The latest bulletin informs me that, with barely a hundred men, Nagato intrenched himself in a small grove; my troops have surrounded him, and escape is impossible."

Fatkoura bent her head in utter despair. He conquered! She could not believe it; she could not imagine him unhappy. In her eyes he was always triumphant, he was foremost,—the noblest, the handsomest of all; besides, how could he be a prisoner, when he might escape captivity by death? She raised her eyes to the lord of Tosa, doubting his words.

"You are hiding the truth from me," she said, with a look of painful intensity; "you hope to prepare me for the fatal blow,—he is dead!"

"I have spoken frankly," said Tosa; "he will be taken alive. But I would give you one piece of advice,—forget that fellow," he added, irritated by Fatkoura's distress.

"Forget him! I!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands.

"You must; all is over for him. Do you think that I would let him go free,—the man whom Hieyas detests so much that he will raise any one who shall rid him of that foe, to the foremost rank in the empire; the man who humbled us all by his luxury, his wit, his beauty; the man whom you love, and who is my rival?—for I love you."

"You love me!" cried Fatkoura, in horror.

"Yes," sighed the Prince; "and I came hither to tell my love; but you led me on to speak of things regarding which I would fain have been silent. I am well aware that my love must be odious to you at first. But you must accustom yourself to it; there is nothing offensive to you in it. I am free, and I offer to make you my wife. Think that the Prince of Nagato has ceased to exist."

Tosa then withdrew, that he might not hear Fatkoura's reply. He was angry with her, and dissatisfied with himself.

"I was brutal," thought he, "I did not speak as I should have done; but jealousy suddenly devoured my soul. It is a fierce pain, which I never knew before."

He wandered all the rest of the day in the gardens, treating harshly all who approached him.

"She will never love me," he said to himself, "I have no means of winning her heart; but if the Prince of Nagato falls into my hands I will take vengeance on him."

Fatkoura was equally restless; she went from one room to another, wringing her hands and weeping silently. She dared not ask any further questions; but each hour as it passed added to her anxiety.

One night she heard an unwonted noise in the castle; the drawbridges were lowered, the clash of arms rang out. She rose, and ran to the window; she saw lights shining through the trees.

"Get up, Tika!" she cried, rousing the young girl. "Try to slip in unseen and overhear what is said; try to find out what is going on in the castle."

Tika dressed rapidly, and left the palace silently. Her mistress followed her with her eyes, but she was soon lost in the darkness.

When she returned she was ashy pale, and pressed her hand to her heart.

"The Prince of Nagato has just entered the palace," she gasped; "I saw him pass by with a guard of soldiers. He was loaded with chains; his weapons had been taken from him."

At these words Fatkoura uttered a loud shriek, and fell to the floor.

"Can she be dead?" exclaimed Tika, in alarm, kneeling beside her mistress.

She put her ear to Fatkoura's breast. Her heart beat rapidly, but her eyes were shut; she was cold and motionless.

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" said Tika, not daring to call, her mistress having forbidden her to admit any of the servants apportioned to her by the Prince of Tosa.

The fainting-fit lasted a long time. When Fatkoura re-opened her eyes, it was day. She looked at Tika for a moment in surprise; but her memory soon returned. She rose abruptly.

"We must save him, Tika," she exclaimed, with feverish excitement; "we must get him out of this castle."

"Has she lost her mind?" thought Tika.

"Come," continued Fatkoura; "let us see if we can find out in what part of the palace he is confined."

"Are you in earnest, mistress? At this time of day? The sun has not yet drunk up the morning dews. We should be suspected if we were seen walking so early, especially as you have never once left your room since you came here."

"No matter; you can say that fever drove me from my bed. Come!"

Fatkoura stepped down into the garden, and walked straight forward. The grass was still dripping wet; the trees and bushes were bathed in rosy light; the topmost peaks of the great castle-tower, touched by the first rays of the sun, glittered, moist with dew. Tika followed her mistress. They came to the palisade enclosing their particular domain. The door was only on the latch; the prisoners were free to roam at will within the well-guarded fortress. The soldiers who brought Prince Nagato were encamped in the avenues of the park. The greater number slept, lying flat on their stomachs, with their heads on their arms; others, crouching round a dying fire, ate rice from large straw-covered bowls.

"Tika," said Fatkoura, looking at these men and the weapons which gleamed beside them, "a sword is a faithful comrade, that opens the door to the other life, and allows one to escape dishonor. The conqueror robbed me of my dagger. Try to steal the sword of one of those soldiers."

"Mistress!" said Tika, casting a frightened glance at the young woman.

"Obey me!" said Fatkoura.

"Then we must move away from those who are awake, and keep in the background; the rustle of our robes might betray us."

Tika glided between the beds of flowers; then stretched herself on the grass, and reached out as far as she could towards a soldier lying on the edge of the path. He slept upon his back, his nose in the air. His sword lay by his side. The girl touched the weapon with the tips of her fingers. Her nails made a slight sound against the scabbard. Her heart beat violently. The soldier did not stir. She advanced yet a little, and seized the sword by the middle; then she slid slowly back across the grass.

"I have it, mistress!" she whispered, returning to Fatkoura.

"Give it to me! Give it to me! I shall feel easier with that defender near me."

Fatkoura hid the sword in her bosom; then walked quickly away, heedless where she went. Suddenly she found herself within a few paces of the palace inhabited by the Prince of Tosa. People were coming and going. She heard the sound of voices; she drew still nearer, and knelt behind a bush to listen. She overheard a few words, and found that some one was congratulating the Prince upon his recent capture.

"I thank you," said Tosa, "for sharing the joy I feel at this occurrence. Nagato is the most bitter enemy of our great Hieyas; so that it is a great glory for me to have delivered him from this detested foe. Nagato will be executed to-morrow, at noon, in the precincts of the fortress; and I shall send his head to Hieyas."

Fatkoura had strength not to cry out. She went back to Tika. She had learned enough. Her pallor was alarming, but she was calm. She pressed the sword against her flesh. It hurt her, but it calmed her.

"Return, I entreat you, mistress," said Tika. "If we should be discovered, our purpose would be suspected, and we should be thrown into prison."

"You are right," said Fatkoura; "but it is absolutely necessary for me to know in what part of the palace Nagato lies. His captor means to kill him; he is condemned to a disgraceful death. If I cannot save him, I can at least give him the means to die nobly."

"I can pass unobserved," said Tika; "I can talk with the servants without arousing suspicion. I will contrive to find out what you want to know."

Fatkoura returned to the palace, and fell upon her cushions, depressed and almost unconscious. Tika was absent a long time. When she came back, her mistress was still in the same place, motionless.

"Well, Tika?" she cried, as soon as she saw the girl.

"I know where he is, mistress; I have seen the pavilion where he lies. I can guide you thither."

"Come!" said Fatkoura, rising to her feet.

"Are you mad?" cried Tika. "It is broad daylight still. We must wait for night."

"True," said Fatkoura; "let us wait."

She sank back. Until evening she remained without moving or speaking, her eyes fixed upon the same spot on the floor. When it was quite dark, she rose and said, "Come!" Tika made no objection, and they set off. They traversed the gardens once more, skirted other houses and courtyards. The girl found her way by looking from time to time at the great tower, upon which a lantern burned.

"You see that small house with two roofs, outlined clear against the sky? It is there."

"The window is lighted," said Fatkoura. "Is he there? Is it indeed possible? Conquered, captive, about to die!"

They went on.

"Are there soldiers there?" asked Fatkoura, in a low voice.

"I do not know," said Tika; "I see no one."

"If I cannot speak to him, I will throw the sword through that open window."

They walked on, and down a slight slope. All at once Fatkoura felt herself clasped by a strong arm, which held her back.

"Another step, and you would have fallen into a deep ditch, which lies just beneath your feet," said a voice. Fatkoura recognized the Prince of Tosa.

"All is over," she muttered.

He still held her; she made desperate efforts to release herself from his grasp, but could not succeed.

"Is it thus you thank me for saving your life?" said he. "Luckily, I was forewarned of the walk you meant to take to-night, and I followed you, to preserve you from danger. Do you suppose that your every word and movement are not faithfully reported to me? Do you suppose that I did not know your mad plan to deliver your lover, or provide him with the means to escape my vengeance?"

"Release me, wretch!" groaned Fatkoura, struggling.

"No," said the Prince; "you shall remain in my embrace. Your touch enchants me. I am determined to love you, whether you will or no. Still, I will make one last attempt to win your affection. Give me your love, and I will let you carry Nagato the sword which you stole from one of my soldiers."

"That offer is quite worthy of you!" said Fatkoura, with disdain.

"You refuse?"

"The Princess of Nagato will never dishonor her name."

"Then you must give up that weapon," said the Prince, himself drawing it from Fatkoura's bosom. "You might escape me by death, which would distress me sorely. Consider my offer; you have until to-morrow to decide. Up to the hour of the execution, at which you will be present, it will be in your power to procure your husband a more easy death."

The Prince then led her back to the palace, where he left her. She was so overwhelmed by terror and despair that it seemed to her she no longer existed. She fell into a troubled sleep; but all the hideous creations of her feverish dreams were less horrible than the reality. When she waked, her first thought stopped the beating of her heart, and bathed her brow in cold perspiration.

The Prince of Tosa sent to know her decision, and for what form of death the Prince of Nagato was to prepare.

"Say to Tosa," haughtily replied the Princess, "that he may cease to insult me by feigning to believe that I could tarnish Nagato's name by committing an act of infamy."

She was then informed that the execution would take place before her windows, just as the sun began to sink towards the west.

"That odious lord thinks, perhaps," said Fatkoura, when she was once more alone with Tika, "that I shall survive the death of him who is dearer to me than my own life. He thinks that the blow which strikes him before my very eyes will not kill me too. He little knows a woman's heart."

Tika, confounded, said nothing. Sitting at the feet of her mistress, her tears flowed silently. People came and went outside the house, the gravel crackling under the many feet. Fatkoura approached the window, and peered through the blind.

Upright posts had been planted around the bare space extending before the palace front. Men, mounted on ladders, beat the ends of these posts with hammers, to drive them into the ground. Then they brought chests of black lacquer with silver corners, and took from them white silk hangings, which were fastened to the posts in such a way as to enclose the square in a wall of silk. Mats were spread on the ground; a pure white one with a red fringe in the centre; upon this mat the condemned man was to sit. A folding-chair was placed beneath Fatkoura's window for the Prince of Tosa, who desired to witness the execution.

The miserable young woman paced her chamber in a fever; she moved away from the window, then returned to it against her will. Her teeth chattered; a sort of terrible impatience took possession of her; she was afraid to wait.

Soldiers entered the square; then came Samurais, the vassals of the Prince of Tosa. The latter gathered in groups, and with one hand on their swords, talked in under-tones, blaming the conduct of their lord.

"To refuse the hara-kiri to one of the noblest among the sovereign princes of Japan! I cannot understand the sentence," said one.

"It is unheard of," said another, "even when it is a question of simple Samurais like us."

"He wants to send the Prince of Nagato's head to Hieyas."

"If the Prince had administered justice to himself, the corpse's head might have been cut off secretly, without dishonor to the memory of the noble victim."

"The lord of Tosa undoubtedly has some reason to hate Nagato."

"Never mind! Hatred does not excuse injustice."

When the hour for the execution arrived, the blinds were rolled up in Fatkoura's apartment.

The distracted young woman fled to the farthest corner of the palace; she hid her head in the folds of a satin curtain, that she might be blind and deaf, and might stifle the sound of her sobs. But all at once she rose, and wiped her eyes.

"Come, Tika!" she exclaimed, "it is not thus that Iwakura's wife should act; I must restrain my grief. Help me to that window!"

When she appeared, leaning upon Tika, deep silence reigned among the spectators,—a silence full of respect and compassion. The Prince of Tosa arrived at the same moment. He raised his eyes to her; but she let fall upon him a look so charged with hate and scorn that his head sank; and seating himself upon the folding-chair, he gave a sign for the prisoner to be brought in. The latter came forward nonchalantly, with a disdainful smile upon his lips. His chains had been removed, and he toyed with his fan. Two executioners walked behind him, bare-legged, dressed in black tunics confined at the waist by a belt, in which was a long sword. He stepped upon the white mat which was to be reddened with his blood a few moments later; then he raised his head. Fatkoura felt a strange thrill. The man who stood before her was not the Prince of Nagato. The

gaze of the enamoured girl, which had lingered so often and so long upon the features of the beloved, could not be deceived even by a resemblance which cheated the whole world. She did not hesitate an instant. She did not see the brilliant eye, or the melancholy smile, or the haughty brow of him who filled her heart.

"I knew that he could not be conquered and humiliated," she said to herself, seized by a wild joy, which she with difficulty disguised.

The prisoner's doom was read aloud. He was condemned to have his hands, and then his head, hewn off.

"The infamy with which you would brand me does but dishonor you," exclaimed the prisoner. "My hands have never committed any but noble deeds, and do not deserve to be severed from the arms which guided them. But invent whatever torments you please, torture me as you will, I shall remain a prince, and you sink to the rank of on executioner. I fought with all my strength against the enemies of our legitimate lord; you betrayed him for another, who betrayed him too, and you craftily attacked my kingdom when there was no ground for war between us. You wanted my head to sell it to Hieyas for a good price; the dishonor is yours. What do I care for your ridiculous sentence!"

"Who is this man who speaks so boldly?" thought Fatkoura.

The Samurais approved the prisoner's words; they declared their dissatisfaction to the Prince of Tosa.

"Do not refuse him the death of a noble," they said; "he has done nothing to merit such severity."

Tosa's soul was filled with rage.

"My vengeance is not sufficient," said he, gnashing his teeth; "I wish I could think of something still more dreadful."

"But you can think of nothing," said the prisoner, laughing; "you always lacked imagination. Do you recollect, when you followed me in the merry pranks which I invented? You never could originate anything; but your brain next day would rehearse our inventions of the day before."

"Enough!" shouted Tosa; "I will tear off your flesh with pincers, and pour boiling pitch into your wounds."

"That is only an improvement on the moxas invented by physicians. Try again; that's a trifle."

"I cannot explain that man's heroic conduct," thought Fatkoura; "he knows that he is taken for another, and he carries on an imposture which leads him to a sure and frightful death."

She longed to proclaim the truth,—to say that this man was not the Prince of Nagato; but she thought that no one would believe her. Besides, as he was silent himself, he must have grave reasons for acting as he did.

"I swear to avenge you in the most startling fashion," she cried aloud. "It is the Prince of Nagato's bride who takes the oath; and she will keep it."

"Thanks, divine Princess!" said the prisoner; "you are the only cause I have to regret my life. Tell my master that I died cheerfully for him, seeing a proof of our superiority and our future glory in the scarce-glutted wrath of my jailer."

"You shall speak no more," exclaimed the Prince of Tosa, with a sign to the executioner.

Sado's head was severed at a single blow. A torrent of blood deluged the white mat, and the body fell. Fatkoura could not repress a shriek of horror.

The Samurais turned away their heads with a frown, and silently retired, bowing to the Prince of Tosa. The latter, filled with shame and anger, shut himself up in his palace.

That very night a messenger, bearing a bloody head, wrapped in red silk and contained in a straw sack, left the castle of Tosa.

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[1] A sort of guitar.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TOMB.

The news of the victory gained at Soumiossi by General Harounaga was swiftly conveyed to Osaka. Yodogimi herself announced it to Fide-Yori with rapturous joy; nor did she disguise the pride which her lover's triumph caused her. But some peasants, coming from Soumiossi, related the details of the battle; and the Prince of Nagato's name was universally substituted for that of Harounaga. Yodogimi forbade the circulation of such a slander under penalty of severe punishment; she lost her temper, and wearied her son with fierce recriminations. Fide-Yori let her rave, loudly praising Harounaga, and quietly thanking his faithful friend for his untiring devotion.

Unluckily other and sad tidings soon effaced the joy caused by this first victory. Hieyas did not

execute any of the movements anticipated; he did not attack Osaka on the south. General Signenari was therefore inactive in the Island of Awadsi, and yet no one dared recall him thence; nor did he make any attempt to break through the lines which barred the Island of Nipon. His army, divided into small detachments, came by sea, landed at different points on the coast near Osaka; then, by night, surprised and carried a position.

Attiska, Hieyas' general, soon took possession of a village near the capital. This news spread through Osaka, and terror ran riot. The Shogun's soldiers were massacred. At the moment of attack, their leader, Oussouda, was absent; he was revelling in a suburban tea-house.

General Sanada-Sayemon-Yoke-Moura was anxious to attack the victors at once, and if possible dislodge them from the position they had won. Fide-Yori begged him to do nothing of the sort.

"Your army is not large enough to lay siege to a village," said he; "and if by any mishap you were defeated, the city would be left defenceless. Recall the troops which you sent to Yamashiro, and until their arrival let us be content to defend Osaka."

Yoke-Moura reluctantly obeyed; but he employed skilful spies to watch the enemy's movements. Soon the troops came back from Yamashiro. A conflict was imminent. But now Yoke-Moura refused to quit the city or to give battle.

He no longer left the fortress; he paced to and fro day and night, restless and uneasy, apparently seeking for something. At night especially, accompanied only by his son Daiske, a lad of sixteen, he wandered incessantly along the outer wall.

The sentinels, who saw him pass and repass with his son, carrying a lantern, could not fathom his conduct, and thought that the General had gone mad. Every now and then Yoke-Moura would fall on his knees and press his ear to the ground. Daiske held his breath. Once, the General sprang up Hastily, greatly agitated.

"Is it the blood buzzing in my ears?" he cried; "I thought I heard something. Listen, my son, and see if I was mistaken."

The boy knelt in his turn, and laid his ear to the ground.

"Father," said he, "I distinctly hear distant blows,—muffled, but regular."

The General listened again.

"Yes, yes!" said he; "I hear them very plainly too; they are the strokes of a pick against the earth. It is there! We have them now; we are saved from a terrible danger!"

"What is it, father?" asked Daiske.

"What is it? Hieyas' soldiers are digging an underground passage, which leads from their camp, passes below the city, and the moat, and will open here."

"Is it possible?" cried Daiske.

"Fortunately a spy warned me betimes of the work which they had in hand; but no one knew where the mouth of the tunnel was to be. If I had left the castle, as Fide-Yori wished, we should have been lost."

"It was high time to discover the point they had chosen for invading the fortress," said Daiske, who was still listening; "they are not far off."

"They have one day's labor more," said Yoke-Moura. "Now I know where they are, I will watch them. But follow me, my son; I would confide to you alone the delicate mission which must now be executed."

The General returned to the pavilion which he occupied in the castle grounds. He wrote a long letter to the commander of the troops returned from Yamashiro, whose name was Aroufza, and who was a brother of Harounaga. He gave this officer all the necessary instructions for the next day's battle. When he had done, he called a peasant, who was waiting in the next room.

"This fellow knows the place where the tunnel begins," said Yoke-Moura to his son. "When the moment has come, he will lead the army thither. You will go with him. Try not to be seen by any one. Carry this letter to Aroufza, and tell him that he must carry out my orders exactly, and allow himself to be guided by this man. Be prudent, be adroit, my boy! It is easy to reach Aroufza's camp; but remember that you must get there unseen, that you may not rouse the suspicions of the spies whom Hieyas doubtless has in our midst. As soon as you arrive, send me a messenger."

"I will start at once, under cover of darkness," said Daiske. "In a few hours, father, you shall hear from me."

The young man then set off with the spy.

At daybreak Yoke-Moura proceeded to pay his respects to the Shogun. Fide-Yori received him coldly. He was displeased with the General, not understanding his inaction.

"Yoke-Moura," said he, "my confidence in your great valor and your devotion to my person alone prevent me from ordering you to make an immediate attack. Here are three whole days lost. What are you about? Why delay so long?"

"I could not begin until I had found something which I was seeking," said Yoke-Moura.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the Shogun, seized by a dreadful fear; and in his turn he wondered if the General's mind was affected. He examined him; but the warrior's face expressed a cheerful tranquillity.

"I have indeed heard," continued Fide-Yori, "that for some time you have been roaming about, day and night, like a lunatic."

"I am resting now," said the General; "I have found what I was looking for."

The Shogun bowed his head. "Decidedly," he thought, "he is mad."

But Yoke-Moura answered his thought. "Wait till to-morrow before you judge me," said he; "and do not be uneasy, master, if you hear a noise to-night." With these words, he withdrew to issue orders to his soldiers. He sent two thousand men out of the city, to, encamp upon a slight eminence in sight of the enemy.

"He is preparing for the attack," said the people of Osaka; and they swarmed over the hills, to the towers of pagodas, and all high places. Fide-Yori himself, with a few courtiers, climbed to the topmost story of the great Goldfish tower, in the centre of the fortress. From there he could see Aroufza's troops in the plain, about eight thousand strong; and farther away, betrayed by the flashing of their weapons and of their armor, the enemy, encamped near a small wood. In the direction of the sea, in the bay, the war squadron was taking in stores; nearer at hand, the city streets, intersected by innumerable canals, like azure ribbons, were filled with an anxious crowd. All labor was suspended; every one was waiting for what was to come. The troops never budged. Fide-Yori grew tired of looking; a secret irritation began to rise within him. He asked for Yoke-Moura.

"The General is nowhere to be found," was the answer. "His men are under arms, ready to start at the first signal; but up to the present moment only two thousand troops have left the fortress."

Finally, towards evening, the enemy made a movement, and advanced towards the city. Instantly the soldiers posted on the hill by Yoke-Moura rushed furiously down. A few shots were fired. The fight began. The enemy were superior in numbers. At the first shock the Shogun's men were driven back.

"Why does not Aroufza move?" said the Shogun. "Is there a traitor in the camp? I really cannot understand the matter."

Hurried footsteps were now heard in the tower, and in a moment Yoke-Moura appeared upon the platform. He held in his arms a great truss of rice-straw. The men who followed him carried brushwood. The General hurriedly thrust aside the courtiers, and even the Shogun, built an enormous pile, and set fire to it. The flame soon rose, clear and bright. Its light illumined the tower, and hid the plain, now dimmed by twilight.

Yoke-Moura, leaning over the balustrade, shielded his eyes with his hands, and strove to pierce the darkness with his gaze. He saw that Aroufza's army moved. "Good!" said he; and he went rapidly down the stairs without answering the many questions with which he was plied. He took up his post at some distance from the point where the tunnel was to open. It was finished; for the strokes of the pick had ceased at noon. Only a thin layer of earth was left, which might be pierced at the last moment.

At nightfall the General had listened, and had heard the tread of feet. The enemy had entered the subterranean passage. It was then that he kindled the flame upon the tower. At that signal Aroufza was to attack the enemy at the other end of the tunnel. It was now entirely dark. Yoke-Moura and his men waited in the most profound silence. At last slight blows were heard. They were cautiously dealt, to make as little noise as possible. The General and his men, motionless in the shadow, listened eagerly. They heard clods of earth drop, and then the heavy breathing of the laborers. Soon a man put his head and shoulders through the opening, standing out in relief in shadow more intense than the darkness itself. He stepped forth, and another followed. No one stirred. They advanced carefully, looking in every direction, until about fifty had appeared; then all at once, with ferocious cries, the watchers rushed upon them. They tried to fall back upon the tunnel.

"We are betrayed!" they shouted to their comrades. "Do not come out! Fly!"

"Yes, traitors, your plots are discovered," said Yoke-Moura; "and you have dug your own tomb."

All those who had issued from the tunnel were slaughtered. The shrieks of the dying filled the palace. People ran up with lights. Fide-Yori came himself, between two lines of servants bearing torches.

"This is what I was looking for, master," said the General, showing him the yawning hole. "Do you think now that I was right not to leave the fortress?"

The Shogun was dumb with surprise at the sight of the danger he had run.

"Not another man shall leave that tunnel alive!" cried the General.

"But they will escape at the other end," said Fide-Yori.

"You were surprised just now at Aroufza's inaction on the plain. He was waiting for the best part of the hostile army to enter this passage, that he might close the door on them."

"Then they are lost!" said the Shogun. "Forgive me, bravest of my warriors, for having doubted you one moment. But why did you not tell me what was going on?"

"Master," said the General, "there are spies everywhere: they are in the fortress, in your palace, in my chamber. One word overheard, and they were warned. At the least alarm, the bird I hoped to catch would have flown."

The enemy had now ceased coming from the tunnel.

"They fancy they can escape," said Yoke-Moura; "they will return when they find that their retreat is cut off."

Soon, in fact, cries of distress were heard. They were so heartrending that Fide-Yori shuddered.

"Unhappy wretches!" he muttered.

Their situation was horrible indeed; in that narrow passage, where two men could barely move abreast, where it was hard to breathe, those desperate soldiers, mad with fear, pushed and crushed each other in the darkness, frantic fur light at any cost, even were it the light of night, which would have seemed brilliant to them in comparison with that ill-omened gloom.

A terrible shove forced several men out of the tunnel, only to fall upon the swords of the enemy.

Amid their shrieks were heard confused cries:—

"Mercy! we surrender."

"Open! let us out."

"No," said Yoke-Moura; "no pity for such traitors as you. I repeat, you have dug your own tomb."

The General ordered stones and earth to be brought, to fill up the opening.

"Desist, I entreat you!" said Fide-Yori, pale with emotion; "those cries tear my heart. They only ask to surrender. Take them prisoners; that will suffice."

"You need not entreat me, master," said Yoke-Moura; "your wishes are my commands. Hollo there!" he added, "stop your noise; you are pardoned; you may come out."

The howls were redoubled. It was impossible to get out. The frightful crowding had suffocated many of the men, whose corpses blocked the mouth of the passage; they formed a solid rampart, increased with every instant, and impassable. All must perish; their struggles shook the ground; they trod one another down, bit one another; their swords pierced each the other's side; their armor was broken with their bones; they died amidst the blackest darkness, stifled in a sepulchre too narrow for their bodies. All attempts to clear away the mouth of the tunnel were vain.

"What an awful thing war is!" exclaimed Fide-Yori, hastening away, entirely overcome.

Soon the cries became less frequent; then utter silence was restored.

"All is over, they are all dead," said Yoke-Moura; "nothing remains but to close up the tomb!"

Five thousand men had perished in that subterranean passage, but a few leagues in length!

CHAPTER XX.

THE MESSENGERS.

Hieyas had himself advanced with fifty thousand men to within a few leagues of Soumiossi. He proceeded thither by water, keeping off the coast, lest he should be seen by the soldiers of Massa-Nori, encamped upon the borders of the province of Isse.

All the defensive plans set on foot by Fide-Yori's generals were promptly made known to Hieyas, and he set his wits to work to foil the schemes of his opponents. He let them blockade the Island of Nipon; and, putting out to sea, advanced towards their lines, landing between Osaka and Kioto. He desired to lay siege to Osaka as soon as possible; for the capture of that town would end the war.

Although really ill, he had gone thus far that he might be at the very centre of the conflict, his feeble nerves not being able to bear a state of suspense.

It was he who had planned the tunnel under the city and the moat, to steal an entrance into the fortress; he knew it to be impregnable by open force, and thought that this bold enterprise might succeed. The loss of the two thousand soldiers captured on Dragon-fly Island annoyed him; but General Attiska's conquest of a village very near Osaka consoled him. He impatiently awaited the result of the adventure, sitting in his tent gazing out before him at the ocean with its tossing junks. The sea was very rough; a gale of wind blew in the offing, and raised high waves, which broke in foam upon the shore. It was bad for small boats and for fishing-smacks.

The Prince of Nagato's fleet was even then at sea. He started from Soumiossi, intending to come nearer to the point occupied by the enemy, to sec whether they mustered strong, and if Hieyas had really advanced thus far. Nagato could not believe it to be so. But the wind rose, and suddenly became furious.

"We must make for shore, and quickly too," cried Raiden, examining the horizon, where mountains of slate-colored clouds were suddenly upreared.

"You think we cannot remain at sea?" asked the Prince.

"If we are here an hour hence, we shall never see land again."

"Luckily the squall blows from the sea," said Nata, "and we shall be driven straight on shore."

"All right," said Nagato; "all the better, that I don't like the way the boat dances. Will this last

long?"

"Of course," said Raiden, "our sails may help us a little; but we shall bob about."

"The wind will carry us along," said Loo, loading himself down with bundles of rope and chain, to make himself heavier.

The sail was hoisted, and the boat began to speed over tire waves; leaping high in the air, then plunging down into the depths, it leaned first to one side, then to the other, the sail touching the water. The horizon was no longer visible on either hand, but only a succession of bills and valleys, which rose and fell; sometimes a wave broke into the boat with a sharp sound, as if a handful of stones had been thrown in.

Loo was stunned by the force of the wind, which never paused, and which dashed a shower of foam into his face; he again felt on his lips the salty taste which he so disliked when he came near drowning.

"Hand me the scoop," said Nata; "the boat is full of water."

Loo hunted about for a moment, and then said: "I can't find it; I see nothing. The wind blows my eye-lashes into my eyes."

The Prince himself picked up the scoop, and handed it to the sailor. "Are we very far from land still?" he asked.

Raiden stood upon a bench, holding to the mast, and looked across the waves. "No, master," he replied; "we're forging ahead. We shall be there in a few moments."

"And the other boats?" said Loo; "they're not in sight."

"Oh, I can see them," said Raiden. "Some of them are close in shore; others are farther off than we are."

"Where shall we land?" asked the Prince. "Upon a hostile shore, perhaps; for nowadays Japan is like a chess-board: the white squares belong to Fide-Yori, and the red ones to Hieyas."

"So long as we are not cast on the rocks, we're all right," said Nata; "the Usurper will pay no attention to poor sailors like us."

"I am no sailor,—not I," said Loo, displaying his sword. "I am a lord."

The sky was darkened; a dull, rumbling sound rolled around the horizon.

"My patron saint is beginning to talk to us," said Raiden. "Bear to the left, Nata," he added; "we're steering right upon a reef. More, more! Look out, Prince! Take care, Loo! We've caught it now; we're in for it!"

And in fact the storm was let loose, and the waves broke madly against the shore. They dashed up furiously; the frothing crests were blown forward; then they poured down like cataracts. Others ran back, leaving a broad sheet of white foam behind them on the sand. The sail was quickly lowered; the mast was unshipped. They were forced to yield their boat to the mercy of the waves. But it seemed impossible that the boat should fail to be shattered by the frightful billows which struck blow after blow upon the frail bark, breaking against it, and now and again dashing directly over it.

Fortunately, they approached land very rapidly. Raiden suddenly sprang into the midst of the tumultuous waves. He found firm footing, and pushed the boat at the stem with all his might. Nata jumped overboard too, and pulled at the chain. Soon the keel was buried deep in the sand, and the crew landed hastily.

"How terrible the sea is!" said the Prince of Nagato, when he was safe on shore. "How it howls, how it roars! What despair, what frenzy urges it on! Does it not seem to fly the pursuit of some powerful enemy? It is indeed a miracle that we have escaped."

"People don't always escape, unfortunately," said Raiden; "it devours many a poor sailor. How many of my comrades lie beneath its waves! I sometimes think I hear them in the storm; and I believe that it is with the voice of shipwrecked men that the sea laments and groans."

All the boats had now landed without serious mishap, although some were partly shattered by the violence with which they were hurled against the shore.

"Where are we?" said the Prince. "Let us try to find out."

The boats were drawn as far as possible out of reach of the sea and the party left the smooth, white beach, which stretched as far as eye could see.

Above the low dune formed by the drifted sand was a broad and partially cultivated plain, which seemed to be deserted. A few huts were in sight, towards which they went. They called aloud, but no one answered.

"The noise of the wind has deafened us," said Loo; and he began to thump on the doors with fists and feet. The huts were empty.

"It seems we are in the table of Hieyas on the chess-board which you just mentioned," said Raiden; "the peasants would not fly from the Shogun's troops."

"If we are near the enemy, so much the better," said the Prince, "since we are in search of them."

"How black it is!" cried Loo. "It seems like night."

"The storm is at hand," said Nata. "Those huts are just what we want, to shelter us."

The rain began to fall in torrents; the few trees scattered over the plain bent to the ground, with all their branches blown one way; and the thunder rattled. The sailors hurried into the deserted huts; they were exhausted, and lying down, fell fast asleep.

Meantime the Prince, leaning against a door, stared out at the furious rain, as it gullied the earth, or was broken by the wind and blown away in fine spray. But Iwakura saw nothing. His thoughts were in the palace at Kioto, on the veranda, amid flowers. He saw the Queen come slowly down the stairs, seeking him with her eyes, half smiling at him. He began to feel an intolerable pang at this long separation. He thought that he might die without seeing her again.

Two men now appeared on the plain. Lashed by the tempest, they hurried along the path. Nagato instinctively hid behind the door, and watched them. They were dressed like peasants; but the wind, which lifted their clothes in a lawless fashion, showed that they were armed with swords. They walked straight towards the huts. The Prince roused Raiden and Nata, and showed them these armed peasants, who still advanced, blinded by the rain.

"You see," said he, "in time of war, fishermen are not what they appear to be; neither are peasants."

"Those fellows have exchanged their spades for swords," said Raiden. "Where are they going? Are they friends or foes?"

"We shall soon know," said Nagato; "for we will take them prisoners."

The two men came forward with heads down, to keep the rain from their faces; they supposed the huts to be empty, and ran to them for shelter.

"Come, come in! Come and dry yourselves!" cried Raiden, when they were close at hand. "The rain rebounds from your skulls like the water of a cataract from a rock."

On hearing his voice, the new arrivals started back, and took to their heels. They were soon overtaken.

"What does this mean?" said Raiden. "Why do you run away so quickly? Have you anything to conceal?"

"You must let us see what it is," said Nata, with his good-natured laugh.

All the sailors had waked; they collected in one hut. The two men were brought before the Prince. Each wore on his head a mushroom-shaped hat, which hid half his face; on the shoulders of each was a rude cloak of unbraided straw, which made him look like a thatched roof. They dripped with rain.

"Who are you?" asked Nagato.

They looked at the Prince with a bewildered, simple air; one of them stammered out something unintelligible.

"Speak more distinctly," said Nagato. "Who are you?"

Then the two cried together: "Peasants."

Loo, who was sitting on the ground, chin in hand, watching them, burst out laughing.

"Peasants!" said he; "monkeys you'd better say. Your assumed simplicity ill conceals your malice."

"Why did you try to run away?" said the Prince.

"I was afraid," said one, kicking the ground and scratching his head.

"I was afraid," repeated the other.

"You are not peasants," said the Prince; "why have you two swords hidden in your belt?"

"Because—there is war about; it is well to be armed."

"There is war about," repeated the other.

"Come!" cried Raiden, "speak the truth. We are friends of Hieyas; if you belong to us, you have nothing to fear."

One of the men cast a rapid glance at Raiden.

"Strip them of their arms and search them," said the Prince to the sailor.

"By all the Kamis, but you have fine swords!" exclaimed Raiden; "they must have cost you dear. You must be very rich peasants."

"We took them from some dead soldiers."

"Then you are thieves!" exclaimed Loo.

"What's that?" said the sailor, snatching a paper carefully hidden under the robe of one of the strangers.

"As we can't escape, we may as well own the truth; we are messengers," said one man, dropping his stupid look. "That is a letter written to Hieyas by General Attiska."

"Very good," said Raiden, handing the letter to Nagato.

"If you really serve the same master as we," said the other messenger, "do not keep us any longer; let us finish our errand."

"When it stops raining," said Loo.

The Prince opened the little paper bag closed at one end with rice paste, and took out the letter. It read as follows:—

> "General Attiska falls prostrate before the illustrious and all-powerful Minamoto Hieyas. Happy days are followed by wretched days; and I have the shame and sorrow to announce a disaster. The tunnel scheme, so carefully elaborated by your lofty intellect, was carried out. With vast pains, thousands of soldiers, working night and day, finally finished the work; we were sure of success. But Marisiten, the God of Battles, was cruel to us. By I know not what treachery, Yoke-Moura was forewarned; and I scarcely dare confess to you that five thousand heroes met their death in the narrow passage which we dug, while the enemy lost not a single man. We have regained the position in the village lost for a time. Nothing therefore is yet compromised, and I hope soon to be able to send you the news of a brilliant victory.
>
> "Written beneath the walls of Osaka, this fifth day of the seventh moon, in the first year of the Shogun Fide-Tadda."

"A fine piece of news indeed, my friends!" said the Prince, who read the letter aloud; "and I will take it to Hieyas myself. I am anxious to enter his camp—to insinuate myself into his very tent."

"Then you are not friends of Hieyas, as you said?" asked one of the messengers.

"No, we are no friends of his!" said Nagato; "but what difference does that make to you, so long as I agree to carry the message in your place?"

"That's true! After all, it's all one to me; the more so as the bearer of ill tidings is apt to be ill received."

"Where is Hieyas' camp?"

"Half-an-hour's journey from here."

"In which direction?"

"To the left, on the borders of the plain; he is quartered in a wood."

"Hieyas is there in person?"

"He is."

"Is there a password to enter the camp?"

"There is!" said the messenger, reluctantly.

"You know it?"

"Of course; but I ought not to reveal it."

"Then Hieyas won't get the message."

"That's so! You have fully made up your mind to keep us?"

"Entirely!" said Nagato; "and to do you no harm if you speak the truth; to kill you if you deceive us."

"Well, then, the password is: Mikawa."

"The name of the province over which Hieyas is ruler," said Nagato.

"Exactly! Moreover you must show the sentinels three chrysanthemum leaves engraved on an iron plate."

The speaker drew a tiny iron plate from his girdle, and gave it to the Prince.

"Is that all?" asked Nagato; "have you told the truth?"

"I swear I have. Besides, our lives are in your hands, and answer for our sincerity."

"Best yourselves, then; but give us your hats and straw cloaks."

The messengers obeyed; then lay down to sleep in one corner of the hut.

"You will go with me, Raiden," said the Prince.

The sailor, proud to be chosen, held his head erect.

"And I?" said Loo, with a wry face.

"You will stay with Nata," said the Prince. "Later on, perhaps this very night, I shall need you all."

Loo moved away, disappointed.

They waited until evening; then the Prince and Raiden, disguised as peasants in their turn, proceeded towards Hieyas' camp. The sailors watched their leader's departure with some uneasiness.

"May your enterprise succeed!" they cried.

"May Marisiten guard you!"

The rain had stopped, but the wind still blew; it passed with a silky hiss over the grass, laid by the storm; heavy clouds drifted rapidly across the clear sky, covering and then revealing the slender crescent moon. The forest stood out on the horizon at the end of the plain.

"Have you no directions to give me, master?" asked Raiden, when they had nearly reached the wood.

"Be observant, and remember all you see," said the Prince. "I want to find out whether the enemy's camp is open to attack at any point; if so, I will summon Harounaga, who is still at Soumiossi, and we will try to beat Hieyas. At any rate, we will see if we can't discover some of his schemes."

The sentinels had already noted the arrivals, and shouted, "Who goes there?"

"Messengers!" answered Raiden.

"Where do you come from?"

"From Osaka; sent by General Attiska."

"Do you know the password?"

"Mikawa!" cried the sailor.

A soldier approached with a lantern. Then the Prince drew from his girdle the iron plate upon which were graven the chrysanthemum-leaves.

"Come along!" said the soldier; "the master is most impatient to see you."

They went farther into the wood.

A few lanterns swung from the trees, sheltered from the wind by a couple of shields. Iwakura and Raiden walked over straw brought from the tents by people going to and fro.

At intervals stood a soldier bearing a long lance, a quiver on his back, erect and motionless; behind the trees, in the half-open tents, sat other soldiers drinking or sleeping. Beyond, all was thick darkness.

Hieyas' tent was pitched in the centre of an open glade, which had been cleared into a square space, hung round with scarlet draperies suspended from pikes. Over the tent floated a large banner, streaming and fluttering in the wind; two archers leaned against either side of the opening. The messengers were ushered in.

Hieyas sat upon a folding-chair. He seemed bowed by age, bent nearly double, his head resting on his breast, his lower lip hanging, his eyes pale and moist. From his attitude and dull look no one would have guessed at the powerful genius and tenacious will within that weak and hideous form. Yet the spirit watched, clear and bright, wearing out the body, and enduring fatigue with heroic indifference.

"News from Osaka?" he said. "Speak! be quick!"

The letter was handed to him, and he opened it hurriedly.

The wind blew into the tent, making the flame flicker in the lanterns as they hung from the central tent-pole. The forest rustled angrily, and the sound of the sea breaking on the beach was plainly heard.

Hieyas showed nothing of the emotion which he felt on reading General Attiska's letter. He beckoned to several officers standing in the tent, and handed them the despatch. Then he turned to the messengers, saying: "Did Attiska give you a verbal message besides this letter?"

Before Raiden could answer, several men entered the tent.

"Master!" cried a soldier, "here are more messengers, all coming at the same moment from different points."

"Well! well!" said Hieyas, "let them come forward." One of the new-comers advanced and knelt. He carried something under his cloak.

"Illustrious lord," he said, in a firm, triumphant tone, "I come from the castle of Tosa. I bring you, in my master's name, the head of the Prince of Nagato."

This time Hieyas could not hide his emotion. His lips trembled; he extended his quivering hands with senile eagerness.

Raiden gave a start when he heard the messenger's words; but the Prince, with a sign, ordered him to be silent.

"I'm curious to see that head," muttered the sailor.

The man uncovered a bag of braided straw, closed at one end by a rope, and untied it.

Hieyas directed a lantern to be brought, saying: "Is it really true? is it really true? I cannot believe it."

The envoy drew the head from the bag. It was rolled in a piece of red silk, which seemed dyed with blood. The wrapper was removed; then Hieyas took the head in his hands and rested it on his knees. A man standing beside him threw the full light of the lantern upon it.

The head was so pale that it seemed made of marble; the jet-black hair, knotted on top of the skull, shone with bluish lustre; there was a slight frown upon the brow; the eyes were closed; a mocking smile contracted the discolored lips.

"If the Prince were not by my side, I should swear that that head was cut from his shoulders," said the astonished Raiden.

Nagato, painfully moved, seized the sailor's hand in a nervous grasp.

"My poor Sado!" he muttered; "loyal unto death, as you promised!"

Hieyas, his head bent, gazed greedily at the head upon his knees.

"It is he! it is he!" said the Usurper; "he is vanquished at last, he is dead, the man who lavished so many insults upon me, and who always escaped my vengeance! Yes, there you lie, motionless and frightful to look upon, you whom every woman's eye followed with a sigh, whom every man secretly envied and strove to imitate. You are even paler than your wont; and despite the scornful expression which your features still retain, you can no longer scorn any one; your glance will no longer cross mine, like the meeting of hostile swords; you can no longer stand in my path. You were a noble soul, a great mind,—I acknowledge that; unfortunately you did not see how disinterested my projects were, and how useful to the country. You devoted yourself to a lost cause, and I was forced to crush you."

"Indeed!" muttered Raiden.

The messenger then described the Prince's capture and execution.

"His arms were taken from him!" exclaimed Hieyas; "he was not allowed to kill himself?"

"No, your lordship, he was beheaded alive; and up to the moment that his head fell, he never ceased to insult his victor."

"Tosa is a zealous servant," said Hieyas, with a shade of irony.

"He is an infamous wretch," murmured the Prince of Nagato, "and he shall bitterly expiate his crime. I will avenge you, brave Sado!"

"How cold death is!" said Hieyas, his hands growing chill at the touch of that pale flesh; he turned, and gave Sado's head to one of the officers standing near him. "Tosa may ask me what he will," he added, addressing the envoy; "I can refuse him nothing. But there was another messenger; what tidings does he bring?"

The second messenger advanced, and prostrated himself in his turn.

"Yet another piece of good news, master," said he; "your soldiers have taken Fusimi, and are about to begin the attack on Kioto."

At these words Nagato, who still held Raiden's hand, pressed it so violently that the poor fellow almost screamed.

"Attack Kioto! What does that mean?" whispered the Prince, with horror.

"If that is so," said Hieyas, rubbing his hands, "the war will soon be over. The Mikado once in our power, Osaka must fall of its own accord."

"We must be off," said the Prince, in Raiden's ear.

"Hieyas is just dismissing the messengers," said Raiden.

As they raised the drapery which enclosed the tent, a red glow lighted up the woods.

"What is that?" asked Hieyas.

Several officers left the tent to inquire. A vast flame arose in the direction of the sea; the wind fanned it, and brought the sound of crackling, snapping wood.

"What can be burning on that shore?" was the cry. "There are no villages that way."

"It is some boats," said a man, who came running in.

"Our boats!" sighed Raiden; "well, that's nice!"

"No one knows where they came from; all at once they were seen stranded on the beach."

"Are there many of them?"

"Some fifty. We went up to them; they were empty. Those large boats, well equipped, struck us as suspicious."

"We thought of Soumiossi."

"So we set fire to them; now they're blazing brightly."

"What a pity! what a pity!" said Raiden; "our fine boats! What shall we do?"

"Silence!" said the Prince; "let us try to get away."

"I'm afraid it won't be so easy as to enter."

They saw that they were free to roam about the camp, no one heeding them; and they moved off in search of an outlet.

"Kioto attacked, and I am here!" said the Prince, a prey to strange agitation. "Our fleet is destroyed. I need two hundred horses; where am I to get them?"

"There are plenty of them here," said Raiden; "but how are we to get hold of them?"

"We will come back with our comrades," said the Prince; "see how the horses are fastened."

"Merely by the bridle to the trunk of a tree."

"They are tied behind the tents in groups of five or six, as well as I can see in the darkness."

"Yes, master."

"We must capture them."

"We will do whatever you command," said Raiden, without objecting that it was impossible.

They had reached the edge of the woods, at the point where they had entered the camp. The sentinels were being changed, and the man who had let them in recognized them.

"Going already!" he said.

"Yes," said Raiden; "we carry orders."

"Good luck to you!" said the soldier; and he signed to his substitute to let them pass.

"Well! they almost drive us out," said Raiden, when they were in the plain.

The Prince walked quickly; they soon reached the huts. All the sailors were awake, and in great dismay. They ran to meet the Prince.

"Master, master!" they shouted, "our boats are burned. What is to become of us?"

"It was that wretch of a Hieyas who did this," cried Loo; "but I will be revenged on him."

"Have you your weapons?" asked Nagato.

"Certainly; we have our swords and our guns."

"Well, you must now show me that your courage is worthy of my confidence. We must perform an act of heroism which may cost us our lives. We must enter the camp of Hieyas, jump upon his horses, and ride towards Kioto. If we are not dead, we shall be in the sacred city before sunrise."

"Very good!" said Loo; "let us enter Hieyas' camp. I have an idea of my own."

"We will follow you," said the sailors; "our lives are yours."

"The camp is but ill guarded," said the Prince; "the undertaking may succeed. Darkness will conceal us from the eyes of our enemies; the noise of the wind in the trees will prevent them from hearing the sound of our footsteps. One thing only distresses me; that is, that we have not time to steal away the head of the brave man who died for me, that we may bury it with the respect it deserves."

"What head?" whispered Loo, to Raiden.

"I'll tell you all I know about it," whispered back the sailor.

"Let us divide," said the Prince; "we have more chance of passing unnoticed, singly. If we can meet again, it will be on the other side of the wood. May the Kamis protect us."

The sailors dispersed. The darkness was profound, and they disappeared abruptly.

Loo lingered behind with Raiden, to question him in regard to what he had seen in the camp. When he had heard enough, the lad escaped, and ran before. He had a plan,—indeed he had two, since he had learned the story of the severed head: he meant to carry off that head, and then to be avenged for the firing of the boats. It was child's play for him to slip into the camp unseen. He had the soft tread of a cat; he could leap, glide, and creep on all fours, without stirring a blade of grass; he would not have waked a watch-dog. The lights in the camp guided him; he ran straight towards the edge of the wood; he wanted to be the first to enter. He was almost upon the sentinel before he saw him; but he fell flat on his face. The man did not see him; as soon as the guard had gone, the boy passed on.

"Here I am," said he, squeezing through a thicket; "the worst is over now."

The wind still blew; vivid flashes of lightning now and then filled the night.

"Ah, God of Storms!" said Loo, as he ran along on all fours under the trees, "you're behaving very badly. Strike your gongs as much as you like, but put out your lantern. As for you, Futen, Spirit of the Wind, blow, blow! harder still!"

With the exception of the sentinels, the whole camp slept; when the wind died away, at internals the regular breathing and occasional snores of the men could be heard. Loo took his way, by Raiden's directions, to Hieyas' tent. He reached it, and recognized the red draperies which formed a wall around the tent. Two archers stood before the entrance. Above them, on posts, hung lanterns.

"Yes, yes! stare out to sea at the dying flames of our burning boats," said Loo; "that will keep you from seeing me."

He slipped under the hangings, flattening himself against the earth; but to reach the tent, he had still a large, light, open space to cross. He hesitated a moment, and cast a glance at the archers.

"Their backs are towards me," said he; "besides, I believe they are asleep at their posts."

He rose, and swiftly gained the edge of the canvas; then he glided in. A blue lantern lit up the interior of the tent. Hieyas, stretched on a silken mattress, the upper part of his body raised by a number of cushions, slept a troubled sleep; sweat stood in beads upon his brow; he breathed heavily.

Loo raised his eyes to the aged Regent, and made a grimace at him; then he looked about the tent. On a mat, not far from his master, slept a servant. A writing-case and a few cups of rare porcelain were placed on a low stool of black wood; in one corner, a complete suit of mail, sinking under its own weight, produced the effect of a man chopped up into pieces. A large red

lacquer chest, upon which were raised in relief the three chrysanthemum-leaves, Hieyas' crest, caught the light and glittered. Against this box rested the straw sack containing Sado's head. Hieyas desired to keep it till the next day, to display it to all his soldiers.

Loo guessed that the head must be in this bag; he crawled to it and opened it; but at that instant Hieyas awoke. He uttered several groans of distress, wiped his forehead, and took a little of a drink prepared for him. The boy hid behind the chest, and held his breath. Soon the old man fell back upon his cushions and dozed again. Then Loo drew the head from the bag, and made off with it. He was hardly out of the tent when shouts of alarm sounded on every hand. The neighing of horses and the shock of arms were heard above the continual rustling of the trees in the wind.

Hieyas waked a second time; and rising all breathless from the sudden start, drew aside the hangings which shut in the tent. A flash of lightning dazzled him; then he saw nothing but intense darkness. But soon, by the light of a fresh flash, longer and more brilliant than the first, he saw, with awful horror, the man whom he supposed dead, whose lifeless head he had held in his hands but a short time since, the Prince of Nagato, sword in hand, pass by on a horse which seemed to Hieyas to make no sound.

His enfeebled nerves, his mind overwrought by fever, prevented him from reacting against this superstitious terror; his strength of mind forsook him; he uttered a frightful cry. "A ghost! a ghost!" he yelled, spreading fear throughout the entire camp. Then he fell heavily to the ground, unconscious. He was thought to be dead.

Some of his officers also recognized the Prince of Nagato, and no less alarmed than Hieyas, put the climax to the confusion in the ranks.

The cry, "A ghost!" ran from mouth to mouth. The soldiers, who had come out at the shout of alarm, fled precipitately back to their tents.

Some one, of more heroic mould, proposed examining the bag, to see if the head was still there. When he found that it had vanished, this unbeliever set up a frightful howl. Confusion was at its height; all the men fell on their faces, loudly invoking the Kamis, or Buddha, according to their special form of faith.

The Prince of Nagato and his men were much surprised at the greeting they received; but they took advantage of it, and traversed the wood undisturbed. When they were on the other side of the grove, they waited for one another; then counted their numbers. Not one was missing; all were on horseback.

"Truly, the Kamis protect us," said the sailors; "who would have thought the expedition would turn out so well!"

"And that we should be taken for ghosts!"

They were about to resume their journey, when Raiden suddenly exclaimed: "But where is Loo?"

"That's true," said the Prince; "he's the only one who has not returned."

"And yet he started first," said Raiden.

They waited a few moments.

"Unfortunately," said the Prince, "the duty which calls me suffers no delay. We must go; but it is with pain that I abandon that faithful boy."

Abandon Loo, the delight of all,—he who reminded the fathers of their children,—the scornful little hero, somewhat cruel, but fearless, and always gay! They set out with aching hearts; all sighed.

"What can have happened to him? Perhaps he has lost his way in the darkness," said Raiden, looking constantly back.

They had gone on for perhaps ten minutes, when those who were behind thought they heard a hurried gallop. They stopped and listened. A horse was indeed coming; shouts of laughter were soon mingled with the hoof-beats. It was Loo.

"Raiden!" he shouted, "come and catch me; I shall fall. I can't stand it any longer; I've laughed too hard?"

Raiden hastened back to meet the boy.

"Well," said he, "so here you are! Why did you lag behind so long? You gave us a great fright."

"Because I had a great deal to do," said Loo; "you got through your work before I did."

"What have you been about?"

"Take that first," said Loo, offering Raiden the severed head; "it 'a as heavy as lead."

"What! so you contrived to get hold of that?"

"Yes," said Loo, who kept looking behind him; "and they think down yonder that it started off on its travels alone; and so they're all half crazed with fear."

They now put their horses to the gallop, to catch up with the Prince and his companions.

"Has the boy come back?" asked Nagato.

"Yes, master; and he brings you the head of the man who looked so much like you," cried Raiden, with a sort of paternal pride.

"That's not all I did," said Loo, still looking back; "see the pink light yonder? Shouldn't you think the sun was rising?"

"The sky is really illumined," said the Prince; "I should say it was the reflection from some fire."

"That's just what it is," said Loo, clapping his hands; "the woods are burning."

"You set them on fire!" cried Raiden.

"Did I not swear to avenge our fine boats, which lie in ashes on the beach?" said Loo, with much dignity.

"How did you manage it? Tell us all about it," said the sailor.

"Ah!" cried Loo, "I never laughed so much in my life! I had no sooner stolen the martyr's head than I heard shouts and cries in all directions. Then I looked for a horse to be ready for flight. Still, I had no idea of running away yet. When I had mounted the beast of my choice, I broke off a pitchy bough, and lit it at a lantern, which I unhooked and threw into the straw of the horse's litter. That straw kindled at once, and the wind fanned my torch to a flame. I started off, setting fire to everything as I went. To my great surprise the soldiers, instead of springing upon me and wringing my neck, fell on their knees when they saw me, stretched out their hands to me, and entreated me to spare them; some taking me for Tatsi-Maki, the dragon of the Typhoons, others for Marisiten, fancying that my horse was the wild boar upon which the God of Battles rides. I nearly split my sides with laughter; and the more I laughed the more frightened they were. So I came through the forest at my ease, firing here a banner, there a dead tree or a bundle of fodder."

"I never could have believed that an army could be so alarmed by a child!" cried Raiden, laughing heartily in his turn.

"If you had seen them," said Loo, "how they stuttered and shook! And well they might; for every one of them thought that a ghost had stretched out his arm and waved a sword at Hieyas, who instantly fell dead."

"Yes," said Nata; "they took us for a legion of ghosts."

The light of the burning forest spread across the sky to the zenith. The Prince turned his head and gazed.

"Loo," said he, "I am daily thankful that I brought you with me; you have the daring of a hero, and a lion's heart in your frail body. These exploits deserve a splendid reward. I give you the title of Samurai."

On hearing this, Loo was speechless with emotion. He looked at Raiden, as he ambled along by his side; then suddenly threw himself into his arms.

At the Prince's order, several men dismounted and dug a grave with their swords by the roadside, to bury the head of the brave Sado.

"We will come and fetch it later on, and pay it fitting honors," said the Prince.

Stones were piled on the grave when it had been filled up, to mark it.

"Now," said the Prince, "let us hasten; we must be at Kioto before day dawns."

They set off at a gallop, a few men going before as scouts.

The Prince also outrode the rest of his party. He wanted to be alone, to hide his emotion and his anxiety. He had not dreamed; the messenger had indeed told Hieyas that the attack on Kioto was about to begin. Attack the sacred capital of the Mikados! Lay hands on the divine person of the Son of the Gods! Nagato could not credit such sacrilege. Moreover, the idea that the Kisaki was in danger overwhelmed him. She, insulted in her sovereign power by one of her subjects, alarmed by battle-cries, by the sound of war, perhaps constrained to fly! The thought put him into a frantic rage. He was surprised that he had not sprung at Hieyas' throat, to strangle him with his own hands when he spoke of Kioto.

"I pitied and respected his age," thought he; "does such a man merit pity?"

And yet, amidst these feelings of anger and dismay, he could not repress a sense of deep joy. To be near her, to see her again, once more to hear that voice, of whose accents his ears were ever greedy! Was it possible? His bosom swelled; a smile hovered on his lips; he saw only her.

"It is Destiny that directs me," he said. "Fate prevented me from going far from Kioto; a presentiment warned me that she would need me."

How did he hope to defend the sacred city against forces which were undoubtedly large? He could not have told himself. Yet he did not doubt that he should triumph over his adversaries, however many they might be. There are sovereign wills which rule events, which carry away the combatants in battle, exalt their courage, render them terrible. The Prince of Nagato felt such an irresistible determination within his breast. To save her, he felt as if he could scatter an army single-handed.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE KISAKI.

Kioto was only five leagues distant from the camp of Hieyas; but as the victorious party occupied the side towards Fusimi, the Prince of Nagato was obliged to take a roundabout route, by the shores of Lake Biva.

Day was beginning to dawn; darkness still covered the earth. But sky and water began to brighten; a fine mist hung here and there.

The lake is shaped like the musical instrument called a biva; it stretches behind the mountains surrounding Kioto, and divides them from the town. The long and narrow part, forming the handle of the guitar, branches out into a river, and, describing a semicircle, enters Kioto from the south.

By the orders of General Sanada-Sayemon-Yoke-Moura, General Yama-Kava was to encamp with his five thousand men on the shore of the lake at the foot of the mountains; but as he advanced, the Prince of Nagato became sure that Yama-Kava had abandoned the position. He found traces of the camp, ashes of dead fires, and holes dug for the tent-poles.

"What does this mean?" he thought. "If the General has left his post, danger must have called him elsewhere. Perhaps the conflict has not yet begun; perhaps all is over, and I have come too late."

At this idea the Prince, a prey to a terrible pang, urged his horse towards the mountain, and hurried up a steep and almost inaccessible path. If he succeeded in climbing the slope, he could reach Kioto in a few moments, instead of wasting several hours in winding along the shores of the lake and river.

Loo was first to follow in his master's tracks. All the sailors soon imitated his example, after recalling the advance-guard. With great difficulty they gained the crest of the hill; it was connected by a slight descent with another and loftier peak, the mountain of Oudji, upon which the most delicate tea is grown.

The western orchard, the scene of the poetical tourney presided over by the Kisaki, lay in the path of the Prince. He leaped the fence and crossed the orchard, this being the shortest way. The trees were loaded with fruit, the over-burdened boughs bending to the ground.

The Prince paused at the brink of the terrace, where the city lay in full view, just at the spot where the Queen had approached him a few months before, and spoken to him with tears in her eyes. He cast a rapid glance at Kioto. From various points rose a column of black smoke, which was also visible within the precincts of the Dairi. The palace and city must, therefore, have been set on fire. The fortress of Nisio-Nosiro, on Wild Goose River, was besieged; the Knights of Heaven were doubtless defending it. The Mikado must have taken refuge behind its ramparts. Farther off, on the other side of the town, a fight was going on between Yama-Kava's men and the soldiers of Hieyas. The latter were almost masters of Kioto. Yama-Kava still held the eastern portion of the city; but Hieyas' banner floated from every other point.

The Prince of Nagato, with frowning brow, devoured the scene spread out at his feet. He bit his lips till they bled; full of wrath, he preserved his clearness of judgment, and coolly examined the situation.

When a conflict occurs in a city, the combatants are perforce scattered. The plan of the streets, their lack of breadth, necessitates a division of numbers. The battle is parcelled out; there is no unity of movement; each street and square has its individual contest, ignoring the phases of those close by.

The Prince of Nagato instantly saw the advantage to be gained from this disposition of the battle. His little troop, nothing on the plain, where its weakness would be apparent, might produce a happy effect by an impetuous dash, taking the enemy unawares in the rear, and possibly causing confusion in the ranks.

The Prince decided quickly, uttered a shout to rally his men, who had managed to join him by dint of much pains; then he spurred his horse down the opposite slope of the high hill, and cried: "Follow me!"

The descent was most dangerous; but the energy of the men seemed to be communicated to their steeds. They reached the bottom without accident; then plunged with frightful speed into the street most crowded with soldiers.

The sound made by the sudden tramp of horses' hoofs upon the paved road was tremendous. The soldiers turned, saw the street filled with cavalry, and with the instinctive dread which men on foot feel for men on horseback, they strove to keep out of the way; pushing and stumbling over each other, in an attempt to reach a cross street. The riders fired a few shots, which only hastened the flight of the pedestrians. In the twinkling of an eye the street was emptied; and the fugitives spread terror as they ran, supposing that they were trapped between two armies.

The street entered by Nagato was very long, traversing almost the entire town, and ending in a small square. At the other extremity, the streets opening into it were occupied by Yama-Kava's soldiers. Upon the square itself the enemy had centred their forces.

The conflict had but just begun. Although inferior in numbers, the partisans of Fide-Yori did not flinch. At the mouth of the square the Prince halted; he was master of the street; it was important to keep it.

"Let twenty men defend the other end of this street," he cried, "and two men station themselves at every alley opening into it. Now we must let Yama-Kava's soldiers know that they are to make

an effort to join us."

Raiden sprang forward. A hailstorm of arrows wrapped, him round; his horse fell; the sailor rose; he was wounded; but he managed to reach the other side of the square. A discharge of musketry rattled, and picked off a number of men. An empty space was formed in front of the street occupied by the Prince; the hostile troops gathered about their leaders, to devise measures; and they decided to abandon the square and fall back upon the neighboring streets. They executed this movement, which was almost a retreat.

Nothing was easier now for Yama-Kava's men than to effect a junction with those of Nagato. The former crossed the square in double-quick time, and gained the conquered street. Soon their General himself appeared, on horseback, masked, clad in his armor of black shell, lance in hand.

"It is the lord of Nagato!" he exclaimed, as he recognized the Prince. "I am no longer amazed to see the enemy so roughly repulsed. Victory seems to be your slave."

"If it be true that I have her in my chains, may she never recover her liberty!" said the Prince. "What is going on here?" he added. "What sacrilege, what unprecedented crime, do we behold?"

"Incredible indeed," said the General. "Hieyas proposes to carry off the Mikado, and burn the town."

"For what purpose?"

"I do not know."

"I think I can guess," said the Prince; "the Mikado, once in his power, would be forced to proclaim Hieyas Shogun; the entire nation would declare itself for Hieyas, and Fide-Yori would be obliged to lay down his arms."

"There is no limit to that man's audacity!"

"Where is the Mikado now?" asked the Prince.

"In the fortress of Nisio-Nosiro."

"So I supposed; and I fancy that you and I have hit upon the same plan of battle."

"You honor me," said the General.

"You mean to spread your army, I fancy, from this street, like a lake becoming a river, and surround the foe. In this way the enemy will be cut off from the shores of the Kamon-Gawa, and the attack on the fortress, of scanty numbers, as it seems to me, will be isolated. You will then fall back upon the fortress and seek shelter within its walls."

"That was indeed my intention," said the General; "but without your help I fear I should have failed to force my way through the hostile ranks."

"Well, now lead your men towards the fortress, while I hold our adversaries here as long as possible."

The General set off. The soldiers of Hieyas returned. The nascent panic was allayed. From every lane on the left they attacked the street which separated them from the river; they were received with volleys of shot and arrows. They retreated; then returned to the charge.

"We must barricade those alleys," said the Prince.

"With what?"

The hermetically closed houses seemed dead. Their mute, blind aspect showed that it would be useless to knock; for it would awake no echo in the soul of the terrified inhabitants. The blinds were wrenched from their hinges, the windows broken open, the houses entered. A sort of pillage began; everything was thrown into the street,—screens, bronze vases, lacquer chests, mattresses, and lanterns. With astonishing rapidity all this was heaped up pell-mell at the mouth of the different lanes. A tea-merchant was entirely stripped; all the exquisite varieties of the aromatic herb, wrapped in silk paper, in leaden boxes, or in valuable caskets, went to swell the pile, and were offered to the ravages of arrows and shot. The air was filled with perfume.

The enemy fought furiously, but could not cross the street. In the direction of the river was heard the sound of another conflict raging there. The Prince sent one of his men that way, saying: "Come and tell us as soon as Yama-Kava wins."

The struggle now became desperate; several barricades were forced; men fought hand to hand in the street filled with dust and smoke.

"Courage, courage!" shouted Nagato to his troops; "a moment more!"

At last the messenger returned.

"Victory!" he cried; "Yama-Kava has crossed the river."

Then Nagato's men began to fall back. Yama-Kava, protected by the Knights of Heaven, who overwhelmed his assailants with arrows from the top of the towers, entered the fortress with his five thousand soldiers. The Mikado was thenceforth out of danger; seven thousand men behind the ramparts being fully equal to the ten thousand exposed troops of the hostile General. The latter, filled with wrath, his orders unheeded, seeing the mistake he had made by involving his men in the labyrinth of streets, sprang to the head of his troops, to inspire them with fresh courage, force the passage so bravely defended, and reach the banks of the Kamon-Gawa.

He found himself face to face with the Prince of Nagato; both were on horseback. They gazed at

each other for an instant.

"It is you, then," cried the Prince, "who serve as the instrument of a crime so odious that it seems incredible! It is you who have the impudence to raise your hand against the divine Mikado!"

For his only answer, the General flung a dart at Nagato, which grazed his sleeve. The Prince responded by a shot, fired at close range. The warrior fell upon his horse's neck without a sound,—to rise no more.

The news of his death spread quickly; the soldiers, left without a leader, wavered.

"His sacrilegious daring brought him ill luck," said they; "it may well be fatal to us too."

The Prince, who noted this hesitation and the vague remorse springing up in the souls of the soldiers, hit upon a scheme adapted to render the victory decisive if it produced the effect which he expected. He ran to the brink of the Wild Goose River, and shouted to the soldiers who guarded the fortress: "Lead the Mikado to the top of the tower."

His idea was caught. Go-Mitzou-No was sought in all haste, and conducted by force, more dead than alive, to the highest tower of the castle.

The Sun Goddess seemed to cast all her rays upon that divine man, who was fully her peer. The Mikado's red robes shone resplendent; the lofty sheet of gold which formed, his crown gleamed upon his brow.

"The Son of the Gods! the Son of the Gods!" was the universal shout.

The soldiers raised their heads; they saw that dazzling mass of purple and gold at the top of the tower,—the man whom they were forbidden to behold, the man surrounded by an awful spell, and whom they had just outraged. They thought that the Mikado was about to take his flight and leave earth behind forever, in punishment of the wickedness of men. They threw down their arms and fell upon their knees.

"Mercy!" they cried; "do not desert us! What will become of us without you?"

"Sublime lord! all-powerful master! we are base wretches; but thy goodness is infinite!"

"We will abase ourselves in the dust; we will moisten it with the tears of our repentance."

Then they burst into invectives against their leaders.

"They drove us to it, they led us astray!" "They intoxicated us with saki, to take away our senses!" "The General paid for his crime with his life!" "Let him be accursed!" "May he be devoured by foxes!" "May the great judge of hell be pitiless towards him!"

The Mikado's eyes wandered over the city; he saw smoke rising on every hand. He extended his arm, and pointed with his finger to the burning buildings.

The soldiers below imagined this gesture to be an order; they rose and flew to extinguish the flames which they themselves had kindled.

The victory was complete. The Prince of Nagato smiled as he saw how exactly the Mikado's appearance had answered his anticipations.

But all at once, just as he was about to step upon the drawbridge and enter the fortress in his turn, frantic servants came running along the banks of the Kamon-Gawa.

"The Queen!" they cried; "they are carrying off the Queen!"

"What say you?" exclaimed the Prince, turning pale. "Then the Queen is not in the fortress?"

"She had no time to seek refuge there, she is at the summer-palace."

Without staying to hear more, 'Nagato sprang like an arrow in the direction of the palace, followed by such of his soldiers as were left,—scarcely fifty able-bodied men.

But they soon lost sight of the Prince; and, not knowing their way, went astray.

Nagato quickly reached the door of the summer-palace. Pages stood at the threshold.

"That way! that way!" they cried to the Prince, pointing to the road which led to the base of the mountains.

Nagato turned and put the spurs to his horse. Unfortunately the road was bordered by trees, and was very winding, so that he could see but a short distance before him. Nothing was visible. His horse reared, and sprang forward. To lighten its load, he throw away his gun.

After ten minutes of this mad race he saw the hind-quarters of a horse in a cloud of dust. The Prince was gaining ground; he soon saw a floating veil, and a man, who turned his head in alarm.

"What man is that who dares clasp her in his arms?" thought Nagato, gnashing his teeth.

The despoiler plunged into a valley; the Prince was dose upon him. The man, seeing that all was lost, slipped down from his horse and escaped on foot, leaving the Queen behind.

The Prince thought he recognized in the fugitive Faxibo, the groom promoted to be the confidant of Hieyas.

It was indeed he. This rogue, who respected nothing, seeing that the day was lost and the Mikado out of reach, thought of the Kisaki, alone and defenceless in the summer-palace; he at once realized the value of such a prize, and resolved to carry off his sovereign. He entered the palace, on the plea of being an envoy from Yama-Kava. He was on horseback; the Queen stepped forward

on the balcony. He instantly seized her, and fled before the servants had recovered from their surprise.

The Prince had no time to pursue Faxibo, as the horse which bore the Queen continued to run.

Nagato rushed after her and caught her in his arms; she had fainted.

He carried her into the shade of a tea-shrub, and laid her on the grass; then he dropped upon one knee, trembling with emotion, desperate, and distracted. The furious course which he had just run, the fatigue of the fight, and his sleepless night, clouded his mind. He thought that he was dreaming; he gazed at the being who had never ceased to occupy his every thought, and blessed the illusion which led him to fancy her beside him.

Lying in a careless, graceful position, very pale, her head thrown back, her body swathed in a lilac crape robe whose folds were stirred by the rapid palpitations of her heart, she seemed asleep. Her sleeve was slightly disarranged, revealing her arm; her little hand, stretched out upon the grass, palm uppermost, looked like a water-lily.

"What supreme beauty!" thought the enraptured Prince; "assuredly the Goddess of the Sun could be no more resplendent! Light seems to radiate from her white skin; her mouth is crimsoned with the life-blood of a flower; her large eyes, beneath their long black lashes, are like two swallows drowned in milk. Do not fade, celestial vision! Remain ever thus: my eyes are riveted upon thee!"

Gradually a sense of reality returned to him; he remembered that she was suffering, while he forgot to aid her. But what could he do? He looked around him for a brook or waterfall; he saw nothing. Then he opened his fan and waved it gently above the Queen's face. She remained motionless. The Prince took her hand, thinking that she might be cold; but he sprang quickly to his feet and started back, alarmed by the deep agitation which the touch of those soft warm fingers aroused in his bosom. He called; no one replied. Those who had followed him in pursuit of the Queen's abductor, instead of turning into the valley, had kept straight on.

Nagato returned to the Kisaki; it seemed to him that she stirred. He knelt beside her once more, and gazed into her face. She opened her eyes; then shut them again, as if dazzled by the light. The Prince bent over her. "Beloved Queen," he sighed, "revive! revive!" She opened her eyes a second time, and saw the Prince. Then an enchanting smile hovered upon her lips. A bird sang above them.

"Is it you, Iwakura?" she said, in a faint voice; "have you come back to me at last? You see that death is merciful, and has reunited us!"

"Alas!" said the Prince, "we still live."

The Kisaki sat up, and leaning on one hand, looked all about her, striving to recollect what had happened; then her eyes returned to Nagato.

"Did not some man tear me from my palace, and carry me brutally away?" she asked.

"A miserable wretch did indeed commit that crime, worthy of a thousand deaths."

"What did he mean to do with me?"

"He meant to imprison you, so that he might impose his own terms on the Mikado."

"Villain!" cried the Queen. "I can guess the rest," she added: "you pursued my ravisher, and rescued me. I am not surprised. I called upon you in the midst of my danger! Just now, when I lost consciousness, I thought of you; I invoked your aid."

With these words the Kisaki cast down her eyes and turned away her head, as if ashamed of such an avowal.

"Oh! I conjure you," cried the Prince, "do not take back those words; do not repent that you pronounced them!"

The Kisaki raised her large eyes to the Prince with a prolonged gaze. "I do not repent," she said. "I love you; I acknowledge it proudly. My love is as pure as a star; I have no cause to conceal it. I have reflected much in your absence. I was terrified by the feeling which took deeper possession of me daily; I considered myself criminal; I strove to conquer my heart, to silence my thoughts; but to no avail. Can the flower refuse to bud and bloom,—the star refuse to shine? Can the night rebel when day triumphs over it, as you have triumphed over my soul?"

"Do I hear aright? Do lips like yours address such words to me?" exclaimed the Prince. "You love me! you, the Daughter of the Gods! Then let me bear you hence; let us fly from the kingdom to some distant land which will be a paradise. You are mine if you love me. I have been so miserable! Now my happiness weighs me to the ground. Come, let us hasten; life is too short to hold such bliss."

"Prince," said the Queen, "the confession which I have made to you, being what I am, should show you how far my love is removed from earthly thoughts. I do not belong to myself in this world; I am a wife; I am a sovereign; no guilty deed can ever be committed by me. My soul surrenders itself to you, against my will; could I hide it from you? But if I spoke to-day, it was merely because we shall never meet again on earth."

"Never meet again!" cried the Prince, in horror. "Why do you say so cruel a thing? Why, after opening heaven to my gaze for a brief instant, do you hurl me suddenly down to the torments of hell? To be deprived of your presence will as surely kill me as to be deprived of light and air."

Nagato covered his face, to hide the tears which he could not restrain. But the Queen gently

drew his hands aside, saying: "Do not weep. What is life? A trifle by the side of eternity. We shall meet again, I am very sure."

"But if death deceive us," said the Prince; "if life ends in annihilation; if all is over with the last sigh?"

"That is impossible," she answered with a smile, "because my love is infinite."

"It is well," said the Prince; "I will kill myself."

"Swear that you will do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed the Kisaki. "What do we know of the will of Heaven? We may not have the right to escape our destiny; and if we do not yield to it, we may be forced to return to earth.".

"But it is impossible; I cannot endure to live!" said the Prince. "Do you not see how I suffer? You say you love me, and you torture me thus!"

"Do you think I do not suffer too? I swear to you that I will die of my love without taking refuge in suicide."

The Prince had thrown himself upon the sod, his face in the grass; convulsive sobs shook his frame.

"You drive me to despair, Iwakura!" cried the Queen; "all my strength will vanish before your grief. I am but a woman in your presence; my will is no longer supreme. What must I do to dry your tears?"

"Allow me to see you from time to time as heretofore," said the Prince; "then only can I consent to wait for death."

"Meet again after what I have told you!"

"I will forget it, if need be, divine friend; I will remain your humble and submissive servant. No word or look shall ever betray the just pride which fills my soul."

The Queen smiled as she saw happiness once more illumine the still moist eyes of the Prince. "You have vanquished me," said she; "and yet I thought my resolution fixed. May I never be punished for my weakness!"

"Punished! For what?" said the Prince. "What evil do we commit? Are not all the nobles of the Court admitted to your presence? Should I alone be exiled because I am blind to everything but your beauty? Would not that be unjust?"

"It would be wise and prudent," said the Queen, sighing, "But I have yielded; let us say no more about it, but return to the palace," she added; "my people must be seeking for me still. We must let them know that I am safe."

"Oh, stay one moment more!" murmured the Prince; "we shall never again meet as now, in the midst of Nature, alone, far from every eye. Civil war, crime, and sacrilege were required to bring about this condition of things. To-morrow all the ceremony of your rank will surround you once more; I can only address you from afar."

"Who knows what may happen yet?" said the Queen.

"The Mikado sought refuge in the fortress, which was at once surrounded by soldiers; I was forced to remain in the summer-palace. All this has happened since morning. The rebels had the upper hand—"

"But since then they have been completely conquered," said the Prince; "the hostile General is killed, and his army has surrendered; the Mikado is free. But let us not talk of that. What matters the war? Tell me: how long have you loved me?"

"Ever since I knew you," said the Kisaki, casting down her eyes. "I never suspected it, until jealousy revealed my love to me."

"You jealous!"

"Yes, and madly. I felt a strange and constant pain; I could not sleep; all pleasures annoyed me. I gave way to my anger continually, and I abused my women. The one whom I thought you loved, I loathed. One evening I drove her from my presence because she betrayed her love by an exclamation on seeing you leaning against a tree. I returned to my palace. I can see you still in the moonlight, pale, with burning eyes."

"Did you not see that I looked at you alone?"

"No; and all night long I wept in silence."

"Oh, do not drive me mad!" cried the Prince.

"You see," said she, "I conceal nothing from you; I lay my heart bare before you, confident of your loyalty."

"I am worthy of your confidence," said the Prince; "my love is as pure as your own."

"A few days later," continued the Queen, "you knelt before me in the audience-chamber. Surprised at your emotion, I permitted myself to speak of my maid-of-honor. You cried out that you did not love her, casting upon me a look in which all your soul was visible. Do you remember what a scornful, angry air I assumed? If you knew what ineffable joy overwhelmed me: the gazelle seized in the tiger's claws, then let suddenly loose, must feel something of my sensations. I knew then that it was I whom you loved; your look and your emotion told me so. When I left you,

I hurried into the gardens and wrote the verses which I gave you so indifferently.

"They lie here upon my heart," said the Prince; "they never leave me."

"Do you recognize this?" said the Kisaki, showing the Prince a fan thrust into the girdle of silver brocade which encircled her waist.

"No," said Nagato; "what may that be?"

She took out the fan, and opened it. It was of white paper, sprinkled with gold. In one corner was a tuft of reeds and two storks flying over; at the other end were four lines of poetry, written in Chinese characters.

"The thing which we love more than all else, we prefer that no one
else should love.
It belongs to another.
So the willow, which takes root in our garden,
Bends, blown by the wind, and adorns our neighbor's wall with
its branches."

"Those are the verses which I wrote in the western orchard!" cried the Prince. "Have you preserved that fan?"

"I never use any other," said the Kisaki.

They broke into pleased laughter, forgetful of their past sufferings, dwelling with delight on this moment of happiness. The Queen no longer spoke of returning to the palace.

"If you were my brother!" she suddenly exclaimed; "if I might pass my life in your society without giving rise to slander, how swiftly the days would pass."

"And you wanted to drive me from you, cruel one!"

"The queen issued that order; before your tears the woman could not obey! But tell me now, how did you happen to fall in love with me?"

"I have long loved you," said the Prince. "My love was born before you ever saw me. When my father abdicated in my favor, I came to take the oath of allegiance to the Mikado. As I left the audience-chamber, you passed by me on the balcony. I thought it was Ten-Sio-Dai-Tsin herself; I was mute with surprise and admiration. Your eyes were lowered; your long lashes cast a shadow on your cheeks. I can see you now, if I close my eyes. A white peacock was embroidered on your robe; lotos-blossoms decked your hair; your hand, hanging by your side, negligently-waved a fan of pheasant-plumes. It was only a flash: you disappeared; but thenceforth I lived but for you.—I did not return to the palace until a year later."

"It was then I first saw you," said the Queen. "Every one was talking of you; my women never wearied of the theme; your praises were on every lip. I was curious to see the hero to whom every virtue was attributed, who was adorned with every grace. Hidden behind a blind, I watched you as you crossed the great courtyard of the Dairi. I thought that rumor did not do you justice; and I moved away, strangely agitated."

"As for me, I left the palace without seeing you again; I was a prey to gloomy sorrow. For a year I had patiently awaited the moment when I hoped I might catch another glimpse of you; and the year's delay ended in disappointment. I could not help coming back a few days later; on this occasion I was admitted to a festival at which you were present. It was then that I perceived the interest felt for me by Fatkoura, and formed the wicked scheme of concealing the overwhelming passion which possessed me behind a feigned love."

"How she must suffer, unfortunate girl, to love, and not be loved in return!" said the Kisaki. "I pity her with all my heart. Where is she now?"

"At my castle of Hagui, with my father. I have sent a messenger thither to bring me the latest tidings in regard to events there. My father must think me dead; for you probably do not know that my kingdom has been pillaged, my fortress taken, and my head cut off. But what do I care? I would give my kingdom and the whole world just to see the pretty dimple at the corner of your mouth when you smile."

"Ah!" said the Queen, "I, too, would cheerfully give up my crown, and all the splendors that surround me, to be your wife and live with you. But do not let us think of what is impossible," she added; "let us remember that our hope lies beyond the limits of this world." Saying this, she raised her eyes to heaven.

"Look, friend!" she exclaimed; "see those clouds lit up by rosy reflections; the sun is setting already. Is it possible!"

"Alas!" said the Prince; "then we must return to the haunts of men."

"Do not be too sad," she whispered; "for we shall meet again."

The Prince rose, and went in search of the horses. The one which he had ridden lay dead from exhaustion; the other, being very weary, had halted a few paces away. He led it back to the Queen, and helped her into the saddle; then he cast a last regretful glance at the valley which he was about to leave. With a deep sigh he took the horse by the bridle and led it over the turf.

Just as the Kisaki and the Prince left, the bush which had shaded them rustled, and a man who had been hidden behind it ran off.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MIKADO.

Thus it was that Kioto escaped the danger which it had incurred; the battle was over, the fires quenched. The Queen, carried off by guilty hands while the city was given over to terror and dismay, was brought back by the Prince of Nagato to a people drunk with joy. The houses, so tightly closed a few hours before, were thrown wide open; everybody flocked into the streets; the inhabitants chatted with the soldiers; barrels of saki were rolled out and tapped. Men danced and sang; they thought themselves dead, and were alive. There was good cause for rejoicing; shouts went up from every street and square; they spread from mouth to mouth, and soon the whole city repeated: "Glory to the Mikado!" "Death to Hieyas!" "Curses on his race!" "Blessings on General Yama-Kava!" "Praises to the Knights of Heaven!"

"And glory to the Prince of Nagato, to whom we owe the victory!" cried one fellow.

"And who restores our divine Kisaki to us," said another.

The Prince at this moment appeared, leading the horse that bore the Kisaki. The crowd parted, and fell prostrate before her in sudden silence, which ceased abruptly as soon as she had passed.

The Queen had drawn her veil over her face; with one hand she held its light folds upon her breast. The horse, flecked with foam, puffed and panted as he moved. Nagato held the animal by the bridle, and occasionally turned to the Queen, who smiled at him behind her gauzy veil, while every forehead touched the ground.

Thus they reached the fortress of Nisio-Nosiro, and crossed its ramparts. The Knights of Heaven came out to receive the Kisaki. Her women remained at the summer-palace; she was asked whether they should be summoned.

"Why should they?" said she; "shall we not return to the palace?"

No one dared to tell her that the Mikado, his fears still unallayed, refused to quit the fortress, and intended to leave it no more.

The Son of the Gods was indignant; victory had not appeased either his terror or his wrath. He, attacked in his own palace,—not by Mongols, nor by Chinese! His own people—that is, his slaves, those who were not worthy to utter his name—had had the unheard-of audacity to take up arms against him! His sacred person was constrained not only to walk, but to run! The Mikado, whose mere glance should reduce a man to ashes, had fled, pale with fear; the stiff folds of his satin robes were disturbed; he stumbled over the abundance of his drapery as he ran through the streets! What had become of the sacred majesty, the divine prestige, of the descendant of the Gods amidst this fatal adventure?

Go-Mitzou-No, furious, trembling, and astounded, was not assuaged by victory. He ordered a general massacre of all the soldiers who had surrendered.

"They will rise against me again!" he said. "Kill them, to the last man!"

"We will kill them by and by," ventured to reply the Minister of the Right Hand, one of the highest dignitaries of the Dairi; "just now those ten thousand additional troops are most necessary to us."

Then the Mikado cried out: "Let Hieyas be brought before me! Let his eyes be put out, his entrails torn from him; let him be cut into small pieces!"

"By and by," said the Minister of the Left Hand "just now Hieyas is out of our reach."

"Assemble all your warriors, all the princes and ministers," then screamed the Mikado; "I desire to inform them of my will."

No one had any objection to make; but the general surprise was great. The Mikado having a will of his own; manifesting the desire to make a speech! Such a thing had never occurred since Yorimoto, in the reign of Tsoutsi-Mikado, repulsed the Mongol invasion, and received the title of Shogun for that brave deed. Since that time the Shoguns had reigned in the name of the Mikados, who had never dreamed of taking back the sceptre intrusted by them to other hands. Had the true master waked at last from his long torpor? did he intend to grasp the power once more, and govern his kingdom for himself? The ministers looked at each other in vague alarm. Some of them secretly favored Hieyas; others were faithful to the dynasty of the Mikados; but they lacked energy, and dreaded any revolt against those who were masters of the army.

But since the fancy took the Son of the Gods to issue his commands, his ministers could not refuse to obey. The nobles and warriors were speedily assembled in the most spacious hall in the fortress. The Mikado sat cross-legged upon a dais surrounded by a low balustrade; the folds of his robes were arranged about him. Then the lords took their seats on the floor, each holding a long, narrow screen before his face, to oppose some obstacle between his gaze and his sovereign's face.

The Prince of Nagato, with Farou-So-Chan, leader of the Knights of Heaven, Simabara, General Yama-Kava, all the ministers, and all the nobles, were present.

Go-Mitzou-No's angry eye wandered over their heads; he swelled up his cheeks, which were even more pasty than usual; then breathed noisily, as if he wanted to scatter a few grains of dust. At

last he found speech,—abrupt, and somewhat plaintive.

"So," he said, "I am no longer master; I am no longer the representative of the Gods! I am besieged, I am outraged; an attempt is made to seize upon my person! I am amazed that you still live. What does all this mean? Is this the way you treat a god? I am the Mikado; that is, the supreme lord. Do you forget that fact? I am here on earth for the good of mankind, when I might be with my family in heaven. If things go on in this way, I will desert you. What! you do not tremble? What are you thinking of? Have you not noticed the signs of anger given by my celestial progenitors? Reflect and remember! But a short time since, a mountain suddenly rose out of the sea opposite the Island of Fatsisio. Is not that terrible? Is not that a mark of the displeasure with which mankind has inspired the Gods? The earth shall shake yet again, and all shall be overthrown. Did there not fall a rain of hairy locks in the suburbs of Osaka only a few days after that mountain rose up out of the water? Was not that a sign of misfortune? Are you blind and deaf? Have you ceased to understand the threats of Heaven? Are you hardened in crime? Do you fear nothing, that you do not shake before the breath of my wrath?"

"We are your faithful servants!" said the Minister of the Right Hand.

"I, Go-Mitzou-No, the one hundred and nineteenth of my race," said the Mikado, "have been insulted; and if the earth is not cleft in twain, it is solely because my feet yet rest upon its surface; it is spared for my sake. Yes, my subjects—mere men—came to the Dairi; they forced the doors; they strove to seize upon me,—to imprison the Son of the Gods! And to escape them I was forced to fly! A Mikado fly from men! I am choked with rage. I will plunge you all into darkness; I will put out the sun; I will turn the sea topsy-turvy; I will dash the earth into a thousand pieces."

"We are your submissive slaves!" said the Minister of the Left Hand.

"If you are my slaves, obey!" screamed the Son of the Gods. "I command that all shall come to an end; the war shall cease, and everything return to its accustomed order."

"Divine Lord! master of our destinies!" said the Prince of Nagato, "will you allow me to speak in your presence?"

"Speak!" said the Mikado.

"The monster whose name is Hieyas," said the Prince, "fears nothing, and insults the gods. But if the command which you have just issued were made known to him in the face of all Japan, he would be obliged to obey, and consent to peace."

"Explain yourself," said Go-Mitzou-No.

"It is with pain that I confess," continued the Prince, "that, in spite of the many defeats he has undergone, Hieyas is still the stronger; his allies increase daily. But they would rapidly diminish, and all would soon abandon him, if he should openly resist an order universally known to emanate from the Mikado."

"No doubt of that," exclaimed the ministers and nobles.

"What shall I do?" asked the Mikado, turning to the Prince of Nagato.

"Sublime master," said the Prince, "my opinion is that you should despatch a herald to proclaim your will in every city and village; at the same time addressing to Fide-Yori and Hieyas a large deputation, charged to inform them that the war is to cease, since such is your pleasure."

"Your advice shall be followed," said the Mikado; "it is good. To reward you for it, I give you the title of Nai-dai-Tsin."

"Sire," cried the Prince, "I am not worthy of such an honor."

"Let the envoys he sent off promptly," said the Mikado. "No more war; let us have peace and repose as of old. I feel exhausted by all these emotions," he added in a lower tone, turning to the prime minister; "it might easily kill me."

They soon separated. On leaving the castle, the Prince of Nagato met a messenger in search of him.

"Whence come you?" asked Iwakura.

"From Nagato."

Then the messenger related all the events that had occurred in that province,—the various battles, the taking of Hagui, and the capture of Fatkoura by the lord of Tosa.

"What!" cried Nagato, "Fatkoura is in the hands of that scoundrel, who beheads princes! I must not delay my vengeance another moment. I will set off at once to deliver her, and make that infamous wretch pay dearly for his crimes and his impertinence."

He then inquired for his little troop, anxious to learn how many the skirmish of the morning had left him. Of the two hundred sailors, eighty had been killed, and fifty wounded; about sixty being in fit condition to resume their march.

Raiden's arm had been pierced by an arrow; but the bone was uninjured. The sailor had had his wound dressed, and declared that it did not pain him at all. He begged the Prince to let him go with him.

"The journey will do me good," said he; "besides, there are not more than sixty of us. That's very few to capture a kingdom; and in so small a number, one man more or less counts for something."

"I need twenty thousand men to march against Tosa," said the Prince; "I shall ask the Shogun to

let me have them. So you see that you may well afford yourself a little rest."

"Is it because I have not behaved well, that you want to drive me from you?" asked Raiden.

"No, brave servant," said the Prince, smiling; "come if you will. You can stay at Osaka if your wound troubles you."

"Shall we start at once?" asked the sailor.

"Are you crazy?" cried the Prince. "We have spent a hard night, and a still harder day; you are wounded: and it never occurs to you to take a little rest! I confess that, if you are indefatigable, I, who am by nature very inert, feel quite exhausted."

"If sleep is permitted, I shall sleep with a good will," said Raiden, laughing; "but if you thought best to start off again, I could have held out a little longer."

"Where is Loo?" asked the Prince; "I lost sight of him in the thick of the fight."

"He's asleep in a house on the shore, and so sound asleep that I could pick him up and carry him off without his ever knowing it. That young Samurai earned his sleep well; he snatched a gun from one of our dead comrades, and I hear that he fought like a little devil."

"Is he wounded?"

"Fortunately, he escaped without a scratch."

"Well, go join him, and take a little repose; to-morrow, at noon, we will start."

Next day Nagato went to take leave of the Kisaki. She had returned to the summer-palace, where he found her surrounded by her women.

"You leave the city which owes its triumph to you so soon, and without taking time for rest?" she exclaimed.

"I leave with an aching heart," said the Prince; "but an imperative duty calls me. Before the peace is signed, I must avenge the insult to my name; I must save Fatkoura, my betrothed."

"Is Fatkoura in danger?"

"She is the prisoner of the Prince of Tosa; a messenger brought me the news yesterday."

"Such reasons admit of no reply," said the Queen. "Make haste to punish that villain; and may the God of Battles be with you."

Her voice trembled slightly as she spoke: he was about to run new dangers; to expose his life,—perhaps to die.

"I believe that I am invincible," said Nagato; "an all-powerful goddess protects me."

The Kisaki forced herself to smile. "May you triumph, and return speedily," said she.

The Prince retired. As he left the hall he fixed a last lingering look upon her; a singular feeling of disquiet chilled his blood.

"Every time that I part from her I feel as if I should never see her again," he muttered.

She too gazed at him, a prey to the same anguish; she pressed to her lips the tip of the fan which the Prince had given her.

He tore himself from her presence. That very night he reached Osaka, and went at once to the Shogun.

"Is it you!" joyfully exclaimed Fide-Yori. "I did not hope to see you so soon; your presence is a consolation to me amid the cares that overwhelm me."

"What!" said Iwakura, "when we are victorious! Why are you sad?"

"How can you ask me, friend? True, Yoke-Moura drove the enemy from the village that they held near Osaka; but Harounaga has just been completely routed in his retreat on Yamashiro. Two thirds of the kingdom are in the power of our foe."

"No matter! We won the day at Soumiossi; we cast confusion into the camp of Hieyas; we triumphed at Kioto. And the Son of the Gods, starting for a moment from his torpor, is about to order the two parties to be reconciled."

"Hieyas will refuse."

"He cannot refuse; he cannot revolt openly against the Mikado."

"He who attacked him with such sacrilegious daring!"

"He attacked him to gain possession of his person, and dictate his own terms to him. The Mikado a captive would be a mere nobody; the Mikado free, and grasping the reins of power once more, is omnipotent."

"Hieyas will impose conditions which I cannot accept. It is his interest to continue the war."

"Nevertheless, he will be obliged to obey for the moment; and our most pressing need is a few months of respite."

"To be sure; we could then assemble all our forces. Communication is cut off; the armies of the various princes have not arrived."

"Are Signenari and his twenty thousand men still on the Island of Awadsi?" asked the Prince.

"Still," said the Shogun; "and the young General is desperate at being reduced to inaction."

"I was just going to ask you to issue orders for him to open the campaign."

"What do you mean?"

"I have a personal injury to avenge. I entreat you to lend me that army."

"On whom do you wish to be revenged, friend?" said the Shogun.

"On one of those who betrayed you,—on the Prince of Tosa. He has attacked my kingdom, plundered my fortress, carried off my bride; and deceived by a resemblance into thinking he had captured me, he refused the man the death of a nobleman, and cut off the head of one of my servants."

"Such things can indeed only be washed out in blood," said Fide-Yori. "I will give you an order for Signenari, and I put a war-junk at your disposal. Do not spare that infamous Tosa,—that envious, cowardly traitor, unworthy of the rank he holds."

"I will raze his towers, burn his harvests, and kill him as one would butcher a hog," said the Prince; "only regretting that he has but one life to pay for all his crimes."

"May you succeed!" said the Shogun. "Alas!" he added, "I was so glad to see you; and you come only to go again! What solitude! what an empty void about me! What sorrow! My heart is gnawed by a secret grief which I must not reveal. Some day I will confide it to you; that will solace me."

The Prince raised his eyes to the Shogun's face; he remembered that several times before, a confession had risen to the King's lips, and had been arrested there by a sort of timid modesty. Now, as then, Fide-Yori was embarrassed, and turned away his head.

"What can it be?" thought Nagato.

Then he added aloud: "My vengeance once appeased, I promise to leave you no more."

As he left the Shogun's apartments, the Prince of Nagato met Yodogimi.

"Ah! you are here, illustrious victor!" she said, bitterly; "you come to receive the praises due your noble deeds."

"It is only when falling from your lovely lips that praise is pleasant to my ear," said the Prince, bowing with somewhat exaggerated politeness; "but you favor me with none but rude and scornful words."

"If we are enemies, it is your own fault," said Yodogimi.

"I never wished to offend you; it was my slight merit which wrought my ruin. You declared war against me; but I never accepted the challenge, and I remained your slave."

"A very humble slave! who attracts all the light to himself, allowing no one else to shine in his presence!"

"Am I really so resplendent?" said the Prince. "Against your will, you see, you let fall the praises which you refused me."

"Cease your raillery!" cried Yodogimi. "I seize this opportunity to tell you that while all the world admire and love you, I detest you."

"She cannot forgive me for Harounaga's defeat," muttered the Prince.

Yodogimi withdrew, hurling an angry glance at Nagato. The beautiful Princess once loved Iwakura in secret. The Prince would not see her love; hence the hatred with which she pursued him.

Nagato left the palace; and, a few hours after, set sail for the Island of Awadsi.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FATKOURA.

The captive of the lord of Tosa found her days long and monotonous. She waited for her avenger, sure of his coming, but impatient at the delay. She was tormented by the love, steadily gaining strength, with which Tosa pursued her. After the execution of the man whom he supposed to be Nagato, he had abstained from visiting her; then, seeing that Fatkoura's grief was not violent, and that she seemed resigned, he took courage and renewed his importunities. Sometimes he was humble, submissive, suppliant; sometimes he raged and stormed; and again, he would try to melt her by his tears. But she was still implacable.

"Your tears," said she, "are like the tiger's, when he fears his victim will escape him."

"You shall never escape me," shouted Tosa.

Fatkoura was severe with Tika; she saw that the maid favored the Prince's love. Tika schemed to make her mistress Princess of Tosa. "The Prince of Nagato is dead!" thought she. "Besides, Fatkoura was quickly consoled for his loss."

"You are free now," she said to her mistress one day; "you can love the Prince of Tosa."

"I shall never love any one but Iwakura," was the young woman's answer.

"Love a dead man! That won't last," thought Tika.

But from that day forth Fatkoura ceased to talk to her; she did not even permit the girl to remain in her presence. Tika wept outside the door; her mistress pretended not to hear her. Yet she missed her maid more than she was willing to confess. This companion of her misfortunes, this confidant of her griefs and her sorrows, was a necessity of her life. Captivity seemed harder to her since she had exiled her from her side; she especially missed the girl's conversation. Finally, she resolved to forgive her, and to confess to her that the Prince still lived. She accordingly summoned her.

The repentant Tika knelt in the centre of the room, hid her face behind her flowing sleeves, and her tears fell fast.

"You will never mention the Prince of Tosa to me again," said Fatkoura.

"Never, mistress," sobbed Tika; "except to curse him."

"Well, I forgive you. Talk to me of my beloved as you used to do."

"Alack! he is dead," said Tika; "I can only mourn with you."

"Don't you think I was speedily consoled?"

Tika, in surprise, looked up at her mistress, who smiled.

"Why, I thought—" she stammered, "I thought he was wrong to submit to defeat in your presence."

"What if I were to tell you that he was never defeated, that he is alive—."

"He triumphs over your heart; he lives in your imagination: that is what you mean."

"No; he still breathes the breath of life."

"Alas, that is impossible! Before our eyes—I shudder to think of it still—his ghastly head fell to the ground."

"That man, whose death we witnessed, was not Iwakura."

"Has grief affected her reason?" thought Tika, scrutinizing her mistress in some alarm.

"You think me mad?" said Fatkoura, "You shall see, when he comes to open the doors of our prison, whether I speak the truth.".

Tika dared not contradict her mistress; she pretended to believe that Nagato lived. "Better this strange hallucination than her former blank despair!" she thought.

They then began to talk of the absent one as had been their wont in the Dairi. They recalled the words that he had spoken, the anecdotes he had told. They tried to imitate the tones of his voice. They reconstructed his every dress, rehearsed, his features, his smile, his attitude. Often they would hold a long discussion over some detail or date, or a simple phrase which he had uttered. In this fashion the hours glided rapidly by.

Every day the Prince of Tosa sent presents to Fatkoura,—flowers, rare birds, marvellous fabrics. Every day Fatkoura let the birds fly, threw the silks and flowers from the window. The Prince never wearied. At noon he would pay a visit to the prisoner, and discourse of his love.

One day, however, he entered Fatkoura's room with a strange expression on his face.

He dismissed Tika with a gesture that suffered no reply; then he stepped towards Fatkoura, and gazed at her fixedly.

"You are firmly resolved to resist me still?" said he, after a pause.

"Now and always; and to hate as much as I despise you."

"That is your final answer? Think again."

"I do not need to think. I hated you from the first moment I saw you; I shall hate you to my death."

"Very well!" cried the Prince, in a terrible voice; "I can force you to become my wife."

"I defy you to do so," said Fatkoura, who never quailed before the Prince's gaze.

"I will conquer you, I swear, as I conquered your lover."

Fatkoura smiled scornfully.

"Yes," resumed the Prince, "you have exhausted my patience. My love made me merciful, timid,—even shy. I implored, I wept, I waited! I left your grief time to heal. Your repeated refusals inflamed my passion; I was enraged; then I humbled myself. But I am tired of this prolonged torture; my prayers are over. No more gentleness, no more tears; you must henceforth be the one to weep and entreat. For the last time, will you love me?"

"Truly you have a singular nature," said Fatkoura. "The vulture does not seek gratitude from the bird he strangles in his clutch; and you insist on love from a woman whose husband you have killed!"

"I know that you can never love me," said Tosa. "Still, you shall say that you do; you shall strive to make me think you do."

"I am curious to learn what means you will employ to make me say such things."

"You will know them soon enough," said the Prince, withdrawing.

From that day a series of sufferings for the prisoner began. At first they separated her from Tika, and locked her into her room; then they stopped up the windows, only letting a few rays of light enter from above. In this way Fatkoura was deprived of seeing the gardens, and of the cool evening air. She was served with food she did not like. Gradually, all utensils for her personal use disappeared. Each day made her situation worse. At last none of the servants would wait on her. She was put into a prison cell, and finally removed to a dungeon, where she had to wait all day for a bowl of cold rice.

"These are the means he takes to win my love!" said Fatkoura, sustained by a hope of rescue.

But one day, abruptly, these stern measures ceased. The young woman was brought back to the rooms which she had at first occupied. Tika was restored to her, and seemed very happy.

"The province of Tosa is invaded," she exclaimed. "An army is at hand; we shall be set free."

"I told you he would come, my lord, my beloved spouse!" said Fatkoura. "He comes to deliver us from our troubles, and to avenge the man who died so bravely in his place."

"I heard no mention of any one but General Signenari, sent by the Shogun."

"Be assured that Iwakura is with him."

"It may be so," said the girl.

"It is so! I shall see him again at last! After so many trials, happiness will return! Is anything known of the fight?"

"The Prince of Tosa set off hurriedly. His soldiers, who did not expect this attack, and were resting on their laurels, were completely beaten. The Shogun's army is but a few leagues away."

"It will soon be beneath these walls," said Fatkoura, "and we shall have to undergo a second siege. But while at Hagui we longed for victory, we now tremble with desire to be vanquished."

Several days passed in feverish expectation. Suddenly, the Prince of Tosa's army, put to rout, returned to the fortress in confusion. The gates were closed, and the siege began. The assailants, leaving the besieged no time for reflection, stormed the place.

A terrible uproar filled the castle. Within, were dismay, continual coming and going, shouts and cries; without, uninterrupted blows. Tika ran in search of news; returned; then started out again. On the third day, the soldiers suddenly rushed to one point: a breach was effected. Cries of discouragement rose on all sides.

"Better surrender."

"We can't hold out long."

"We are lost."

Towards noon the Prince of Tosa entered Fatkoura's room abruptly. She was standing by the window, looking out; her face was radiant with joy. She turned, and saw her enemy gazing at her with folded arms. A sort of instinctive terror took possession of her as she beheld him. He was pale, with a sinister expression. In his right hand he grasped a bloody sword, which dripped upon the floor. He quietly returned it to his belt.

"The battle is lost," he said, with a scowl; "I am conquered."

"The man whom you thought to dishonor is at your gates, and comes to chastise your crimes," said Fatkoura.

"Ah! You know that Nagato is not dead," cried the Prince. "But what does it matter? He is there, it is true; he comes to deliver you: but before he takes you back," he added, in tones of thunder, "before he crosses the crumbling walls of my castle,—mark me well!—you shall be mine."

Fatkoura sprang back, and darted to the farthest corner of the room.

"You may fancy," continued Tosa, "that I did not abandon the field for nothing. The victors are at my heels; there is no time to be lost in idle entreaties." As he said this he sprang towards her.

"Help!" she shrieked in an agonized voice; "Tika, help! Nagato, come to my rescue!"

Tosa laid his hand upon her mouth. "What's the use of shrieking?" said he; "nobody will come. Submit! for you are mine at last; you shall not escape me now."

He encircled her with his arms; but all at once he saw something gleam above him. Fatkoura had snatched a dagger from the Prince's belt.

"You are wrong; I shall escape you yet once again," said she. "My last thought is for you, Iwakura!"

Tosa uttered a loud cry. He saw the dagger buried to the hilt in the young woman's breast; then she drew it out and threw it to the ground.

At that instant the panel which closed the entrance flew in splinters. The Prince of Nagato, sword in hand, rushed into the room and leaped upon the Prince of Tosa.

"Ah, wretch!" he shouted; "you insult your captive and my betrothed! You add this unparalleled crime to all your former misdeeds! But the hour of vengeance is at hand; the earth shall be rid of you!"

Tosa had drawn his sword; he struck it against Nagato's blade. But he shuddered; a superstitious fear froze his blood; he felt that he was about to die.

Iwakura, with irresistible force, drove him back to the other side of the room, and brought him to a stand against the wall. Tosa, with bloodshot eyes, glared wildly at his foe; he could but ill defend himself. Nagato dashed the sword from his hand.

"Now you shall die!" he cried; "I will kill you,—not as a man frees himself of a loyal enemy, but as he would crush a scorpion." And with one fearful blow, he nailed him to the wall by the throat.

Fatkoura had not fallen. She stood leaning against the wall, her hand pressed to her wound. The blood gushed between her fingers. The Prince of Nagato left his enemy writhing in awful agony, and ran to her; he saw the blood flowing in rivers.

"What is it?" he cried.

"I am dying," said Fatkoura.

She sank to the ground. The Prince knelt beside her, and supported her on his knees.

"Is there no one here?" he cried. "Let some one bring a doctor."

"I implore you," said Fatkoura, "do not call; nothing can heal my wound. It was to prevent a stain upon your name that I struck home; I cannot be saved. Let no one enter; let me die by your side, as I could not live there."

"Unfortunate girl! and I have brought you to this!" cried the Prince. "You die for me after a life of suffering,—you, so fair, so young, and so formed for happiness? Ah! why was I placed upon your path?"

"I was happy for a time," said Fatkoura, "very happy; for you seemed to love me. But I have dearly paid for those days of joy. What did I do to you, cruel one, that you should desert me as you did?"

"You guessed the reason, sweet Princess. An all-powerful, invincible love turned me from you; my will refused to obey my reason any longer."

"Yes! how can we struggle against love? I know the power it gains, I, who vainly strove to hate you. Yes! you have felt those sharp pangs, that aimless expectation, those fevered dreams, those hopes that would not die; you have known those sobs which would not be stifled, those tears that burned like drops of fire. A prey to hopeless love, you suffered as I did. Is it not frightful, and can you not pity me?"

"I would give my life to repair the harm I have done you."

"There is no rest by night or day, is there? It seems as if you were at the foot of a precipice lined with steep rocks, which you fain would climb, yet fall back again and again. But I am mad," added Fatkoura; "your suffering was nothing as compared to mine, for you were loved."

The Prince started.

"Yes, she loved you; I know it," resumed Fatkoura, with a faint sigh. "Do you think that the jealous eye of the woman you scorned could fail to read her face I—how its pride died away when she looked at you; how her voice, against her will, would soften when she spoke to you; what happy tremors when you came, what sadness when you went! I watched and noted all; each discovery was like a sword thrust into my heart; rage, hate, and love devoured my soul. No, you never suffered as I did."

"Do not overwhelm me, Fatkoura!" said the Prince. "I did not deserve such love; see how I have rewarded it! You are dying for my sake, and I cannot save you. The horrible grief that rends me at this moment avenges you for much of the suffering that I have caused you."

"I am happy now," said Fatkoura. "I might have died before you came; and I am with you."

"But you shall not die!" cried the Prince. "Am I mad, that I stand here, stunned by horror, instead of bringing you help, or having your wound dressed? You are young; you will recover."

"Why should?" said Fatkoura. "Would you love me then?"

"I would love you then as now, with an infinite affection."

"With a brother's love," Fatkoura whispered, with a bitter smile. "Let me die."

"Alas! that blood which flows so fast, and bears your life with it!" exclaimed the Prince, frantic with grief.

He began to utter frenzied shouts. They were heard. Soldiers and servants rushed in. General Signenari also appeared, still stained with blood from the battle. All stood aside, to let him pass.

"What is the matter, Prince?" he cried.

"A doctor, for Heaven's sake, and at once!" said Nagato. "My betrothed has stabbed herself, to escape the outrages of the infamous Tosa; she is dying."

Fatkoura had fainted.

The palace doctor soon came. He bared the wound, and when he saw it, he looked anything but encouraging. "She did not spare herself," he said.

"Can she be saved?" asked the Prince of Nagato.

The doctor shook his head. "I think not," said he; "the steel went in too deep. If I were to dress

the wound, I might stanch the blood; but it would still flow from within, and suffocate her."

"And if you do not stanch the wound?"

"She will die in a very few moments."

The doctor brought the edges of the wound together. As he touched the sensitive spot, Fatkoura never stirred. He shook his head again. "A bad sign," he muttered.

When the dressing was done, he forced between the young woman's lips the neck of a small bottle holding a strengthening cordial, and made her drink it. Fatkoura soon re-opened her eyes; she still lay across Nagato's knees. Tika sobbed at her feet. She cast an uneasy look at those who filled the room; with a slow and painful gesture signed to them to go. Signenari dismissed them, and withdrew; only the doctor and Tika remained.

"You disobeyed me, Iwakura," said the dying girl in a voice which grew ever weaker; "why did you call in help?"

"To save you."

"I am lost. Saved, rather," she added; "what should I do in this world?"

Spasms seized her; she stretched out her arms; the blood choked her. "Air!" she gasped.

Tika flew to open all the windows, and her mistress saw her.

"Good-by, Tika," she said; "you see that he was not defeated, that he was not dead! We shall never talk of him again."

The girl wept, with her face buried in her hands. Fatkoura raised her eyes to the Prince.

"Let me look at you," she said; "it is so long since my eyes have mirrored your image. How handsome you are, my beloved!—You know," she went on, turning to the doctor, "he is my husband. He came to set me free; but Tosa would have outraged me, and I killed myself."

She spoke in a dull, broken voice, growing weaker and weaker. Her eyes opened wide; a waxen pallor over-spread her face.

"You will speak of me to your father, Iwakura," she resumed; "he loved me well! I told him that I should never see the castle again. I was almost happy there. I saw the room where you were born, your baby dresses—Ah! I have loved you fondly!"

She gasped; drops of sweat stood on her brow. She tore the bandage from her wound.

"Iwakura!" she said, "I cannot see you; lean over me—nearer—Ah!" she shrieked, "to go when he is here!"

"She is dying!" cried the agonized Prince.

"She is dead," said the doctor.

Tika uttered a howl of grief. The Prince hid his face in his hands.

"All her sufferings are over now," said the doctor; "she is at rest, and forgets her troubles in the serene tranquillity of the last sleep."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TREATY OF PEACE.

Hieyas consented to close the war; but, as Fide-Yori predicted, his terms were hard.

"I demand," he said, "the execution of one of the three following alternatives: let Fide-Yori give up the fortress, and spend seven years at Yamato; let me receive Yodogimi as hostage; or let the walls of Osaka be razed, and the moats filled up."

The last proposition only was received with favor by the assembled generals in council of war. But Yoke-Moura regarded the destruction of the ramparts as almost sacrilegious.

"This peace will not last long," said he; "and If the war is renewed, what will become of us with our dismantled castle?"

There was a question of letting Yodogimi go.

"My mother! How can you think of such a thing?" cried the Shogun. "Such a hostage once in his hands, we should cease to be aught but the slaves of Hieyas."

"True," exclaimed General Harounaga; "it is impossible."

"Our walls once destroyed, we are left defenceless. War is preferable to such a peace," broke in Yoke-Moura. He would willingly have surrendered Yodogimi; he cared but little for a woman.

"Hieyas specifies," said some one, "that the moats are to be filled up in such a way that children of three can run up and down into them at play."

"Ten thousand laborers are to be set to work on the walls in all haste," said another.

Yoke-Moura sighed.

"We must accept that condition," said the Shogun; "we are forced to do so. At the least suspicion of war, we can build up the walls and dig out the moats again."

"As you insist," said Yoke-Moura, "I will follow your advice; let us demolish the fortress."

"Let General Signenari proceed to Hieyas' camp to exchange treaties of peace; he will represent me worthily; and, I am sure, will acquit himself nobly in this delicate affair."

"I will strive to deserve the trust with which you honor me," said Signenari. "I await your orders to depart."

"You have scarcely sheathed the sword with which you punished the province of Tosa," said the Shogun; "if you require a day's rest, take it."

"I will start this evening," said Signenari. That same day, in fact, the young General, accompanied by a large and splendid escort, set off for the camp of Hieyas.

Hieyas, after the burning of the forest, in which a part of his men perished, had taken up his quarters on the neighboring plain. He was unwilling to abandon a position so near Osaka. When reinforcements reached him, he marched against Harounaga, who still occupied Soumiossi. The General was beaten, and his army routed. Hieyas, however, left only an advance-guard in the conquered territory, and returned to his camp, where he received the decree of peace emanating from the Mikado. He then summoned several of the lords of his council,—Owari, Dathe, Todo, Coroda. All agreed that it was impossible to resist the command of the Son of the Gods; that they must feign to yield, but create some obstacle to the signing of the treaty.

"Let us manage to make Fide-Yori refuse to sign the treaty of peace," said Hieyas. "In that way the wrath of Heaven will fall on his head."

To his great surprise, he was informed of the arrival of an envoy from Osaka; then Fide-Yori accepted the terms he offered.

"Whom has he sent?" asked Hieyas.

"General Signenari."

The young warrior, whose heroism was well known, inspired even his enemies with profound esteem. When he rode through the camp in his military dress, the sovereign princes saluted him; but Signenari paid no heed to their greetings.

"What is the meaning of this haughty bearing?" asked a nobleman.

"He represents the Shogun, Fide-Yori; he cannot return a salute."

He was conducted to the master's tent. Hieyas was seated at the back on a folding-stool; to right and left of him, mats were spread upon the ground. The princes and generals were present. Signenari was invited to take his place with the princes; but he did not seem to understand, and sat down opposite Hieyas.

"That is right," said one of the lords, in a low voice; "that warrior, young as he is, has already acquired the dignity and prudence of a veteran."

Signenari unrolled a paper.

"These are the words of my master, the Shogun Fide-Yori, son of the Shogun Taiko-Sama," said he. And he read the roll, which he held in both hands:—

> "I, Fide-Yori, general-in-chief of the armies of the Mikado, in order to put an end to the unjust war declared against me by Hieyas, which lays the kingdom waste, consent to accept one of the alternatives proposed by my opponent for the conclusion of peace: I will destroy the outer wall of the fortress of Osaka, and I will fill up the moats; therefore all hostilities are to cease, and arms to be laid down.
>
> "I write this in all sincerity, on the fifteenth day of the second moon of the autumn, in the nineteenth year of the Nengo-Kai-Tio, and I sign with my blood.
>
> "FIDE-YORI."

"If this be so," said Hieyas, in his weak and trembling voice, "I agree to the peace."

He ordered writing materials to be brought, and dictated to a secretary:—

> "I, Minamoto Hieyas, proclaimed Shogun by the predecessor of Go-Mitzou-No, in the name of the Shogun Fide-Tadda, in whose favor I have abdicated, consent to put an end to the war, on condition that Fide-Yori has the walls of the castle of Osaka pulled down and the moats filled up in such fashion that children of three may run up and down into them at play."

A new brush and a long needle were then handed to Hieyas, with which he was to prick the tip of his finger and sign in his own blood. He pricked himself slightly, and only obtained a small, pale drop; still, he signed, and the treaty was handed to Signenari.

"That will not do," said the General, glancing at the document; "the writing is too pale. Your name is illegible; try again."

"But," said Hieyas, "I am old; I am weak and ill; to me a drop of blood is very precious."

Signenari pretended not to hear. Hieyas, with a sigh, pricked himself afresh, and retraced his

signature; then only did the young General give him the treaty signed by Fide-Yori.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONFIDENCES.

Frantic mirth pervaded Osaka. That city of pleasure, of luxury, and of perpetual feasts detested war, political quarrels, mourning,—everything that prevented amusement; diversion being the chief aim of the inhabitants. And now the war was over! The faces lengthened by sorrow and alarm could be exchanged for the laughing, radiant visages of joy. At the first news of peace, the whole town began to dance: sailors on the quays of the Yedogawa, merchants on their doorsteps, and servants in the palace courtyards. Nor were rich citizens, officials, and nobles less delighted, if they were somewhat more reserved in the expression of their joy. The princesses particularly were enchanted; confined in their palaces, separated from their husbands, they seemed to grow old during the war. They waked as from a nightmare. At last they were permitted to be beautiful once more, to smile, and to adorn themselves.

They flew to their great lacquer-chests, scattering odors of musk and sandal-wood as they pulled out the magnificent robes which they had packed away, in order to array themselves in gowns of more sombre hues. The floors were strewn with a picturesque medley of satin, silk and crape of the most delicate tints. But on inspection, regarding these garments as faded and tumbled, they sent for dealers, tailors, and embroidering women.

On the very evening of the promulgation of the peace, the Court announced a water-party, to which all the wealthy inhabitants of Osaka were invited. Excitement ran riot. There was very little time for preparation, or for trimming the boats.

Evening came; the river was lighted up. Thousands of boats, decked with wreaths of lanterns, left the river banks and glided slowly off, some up, some down the stream.

The royal barks soon appeared. Larger and handsomer than the others, they were carpeted with silken fabrics, which hung over and dragged in the water, and lighted-by huge round lanterns of gauze or painted glass, surrounded by the variegated flutter of countless banners. Under the shelter of superb awnings, in the soft light of the lamps, lay graceful women, carelessly stretched upon cushions, amidst the ample folds of their flowing robes. The embroidery of their kirimons glittered, and the great shining pins in their hair gleamed. Nobles sat beside them, uttering a thousand nothings, at which they laughed and threw back their heads. Luminous ripples danced upon the waves.

At the broadest part of the river, where the hills are cut into terraces for a long distance, fire-works were arranged on frames: they were to be sent off on the arrival of the Court. A vast crowd of noisy, merry people were stationed on the terraces to see the festivities. The spectators, some standing, others seated or lying down, carried every one a lantern, and took part in the illumination. Barrels of saki were plentiful; they rolled down the hills; they pitched and tumbled about amid shouts and laughter. Some fell into the water: it was quite a farce to pull them out; some sank; but still everybody was soon intoxicated.

Fide-Yori was present in disguise. With the Prince of Nagato, he occupied a light skiff carrying one faint light. Two men standing in the prow steered. Half lying on their cushions, the friends silently watched the boats as they came and went.

The clear voice of the singers of national legends was heard, accompanied by the biva or the samsin. Bands of music passed, and drowned with their noisy bray the sweet feminine tones. But suddenly the fire-works blazed out, rockets shot through the air, Bengal lights exploded, and let fall a shower of stars. Once begun, the fire-works knew no interruption; the show-pieces were renewed as fast as they vanished in smoke. There was a constant hiss, and crack, and sparkle.

The boat which bore Fide-Yori crossed that in which sat his mother, Yodogimi. The Princess, in a flood of light, appeared in a dazzling toilette. Her boat was entirely draped in gold brocade; the purple satin awning had pearl tassels at each corner. General Harounaga, completely drunk, laughed noisily, lolling on a pile of cushions. The Shogun turned away his head, and the boat passed. Fide-Yori still heard the soldier's shouts of laughter ringing in his ears.

The Prince of Nagato was lost in revery; he saw nothing but the reflection of the lights in the water. He seemed to behold the glow of burning coals, of jewels, of flames and of molten metal. But he tore himself from his dream, thinking that the silence had lasted too long, and raised his eyes to the Shogun. Fide-Yori's face expressed a deep melancholy; however, the young man examined every boat that passed, with an eager look.

Nagato watched him for some moments. "Whom does he seek?" he wondered.

Fide-Yori was evidently looking for some one; he heaved a heavy sigh every time that he was disappointed in his hope.

"Master," said Iwakura at last, "the whole nation rejoices to-day. I thought that sorrow found shelter in my heart alone; but I see that you have kept your share of it."

"I ought indeed to look happy," said Fide-Yori, "but, to you, I show myself as I am. I have an

aching heart, my friend, and nothing can allay my pain. The kingdom is at peace, but I am not?"

"What is it, my beloved prince?" said Nagato; "do you not remember that, a few days ago, you promised to confide your grief to me!"

"I have long desired to do so. I know not what strange restraint has prevented me. I felt as if the emotion, at once so bitter and so sweet, which I now experience for the first time, should be told to no one until she who inspires it had heard my tale."

"You are in love, friend; I suspected it. But why should you suffer from your love?"

"The woman I love saved my life. I never saw her but once. Her name is Omiti; that is all I know of her," said the Shogun.

"Poor dear Prince!" cried Nagato; "and you were never able to trace her?"

"Alas, no!"

"Do you know to what class she belongs?"

"She is the daughter of a noble," said Fide-Yori; "her language and her dress told me that. But were she the lowest reprobate, if ever Heaven permit me to find her, she shall be my wife."

"We will seek her together," said Nagato.

"I seek her even now in the midst of this crowd. Every boat that passes, laden with women, quickens the beating of my heart."

"Then you think that she lives in Osaka?" said the Prince of Nagato.

"I hope and think so," said Fide-Yori.

"Then she is certainly at this festival. What young girl would stay at home to-day?"

"So I thought, friend," replied the Shogun; "that is why I am here."

"Come, give me a hasty sketch of her whom you love," said Nagato, "so that I may help you in your search."

"She is full of exquisite grace; small; her eyes are very large; she has a childish air; her smile is a flower wet with dew."

"The portrait is somewhat lacking in detail," said Iwakura, smiling. "Never mind; let us look for her; you are here to correct the errors that I make."

They ordered their men to row rapidly, and to traverse every part of the river furrowed by illuminated boats. Their light skiff flew over the water like a swallow. It went, came, glided from one side of the stream to the opposite shore, never coming in contact with any other. Not one craft escaped the eager scrutiny of the two friends; but their search was in vain.

"Her name is Omiti; you know nothing more?" asked Nagato.

"Nothing; but I fancy that the family to which she belongs is hostile to me. When she told me of the existence of a conspiracy, she refused to give me the names of its authors."

"Ah!" suddenly exclaimed Nagato, "just see that girl over there. Isn't she the very one you are looking for? I never saw such lovely eyes.".

Fide-Yori turned quickly. "Bah!" said he, "you're mocking me; her lips are thick, and her nose is flat."

"So they are," said Nagato. "Forgive me; she looked pretty from a distance."

Their boat reached the point where the river widened, and where fire-works continued to shoot heavenward.

Fide-Yori, in his turn, uttered a loud exclamation. Through a score of blazing rockets he thought he spied Omiti's face; and he was not mistaken. "There, there!" he cried; "follow that boat; hurry!"

The rowers hastily tacked; but they had to make a *détour*; the great rafts from which the fire-works were sent off blocked the way. When they had passed them, no one knew which boat they were to follow. Fide-Yori had observed nothing but the maiden's face; he saw it no longer. He had noticed neither the number of lanterns nor the colors of the banners. Besides, just at this point there was such a bewildering array of boats of every shape and size, that it was impossible to move.

Fide-Yori trembled with agitation and alarm.

"She will escape me," said he. "Must I find her only to lose her, after waiting so long?"

"Did you see which way the boat went?" asked Iwakura.

"I thought it went up stream."

"Well, let us row that way, then; they can't have gone far. One is fairly held captive here. We shall find her again."

Fide-Yori took courage. "Row up the river," he cried to his men. The young Shogun leaned over the edge and gazed eagerly about. Several people recognized him. Numbers of princesses of the royal household, lords, and generals passed close by him. He saw his mother and General Harounaga again; but the face he sought had vanished.

"Perhaps we were too hasty," said he.

They retraced their course; then went up stream once more.

"The festivities are almost over!" Fide-Yori cried, suddenly. "Let us go to the outskirts of the throng and wait for that boat; when it makes for home, it must pass us."

"Which way shall we go?" said Nagato.

"Towards the upper town; there are no houses of nobles in the direction of the sea."

They waited in vain; the boat did not appear. It had gone down the river, and proceeded towards the suburbs. Fide-Yori went back to the palace discouraged. The Prince of Nagato tried to console him.

"Are you very sure that the woman you saw was the one you are looking for?" said he.

"Sure!" cried Fide-Yori. "I never saw her face but once; but my eyes can never forget it."

"Then," said the Prince, "instead of being sad, rejoice. You only imagined that she lived in this city; now you are certain she does. So we are sure of finding her. You must give another entertainment, and she will be there."

"You are right, friend," said Fide-Yori; "you shall help me; we will search the city. We will find her yet; she shall be my wife. Then my life, which has been but a series of sorrows and disillusions, will begin to brighten. Let us start to-morrow, eh? We'll open the campaign before a new festival can be arranged; we will study the city, district by district; we'll wrest her secret from her. Oh! you have given me fresh courage; you have almost made me happy!"

Hope illumined the young Shogun's eyes, a smile trembled on his lips. All at once a cloud darkened his brow. "How cruel and selfish I am!" he exclaimed. "You, my best friend, my devoted brother, have just lost the woman whom you love; she died a frightful death. And I insult your grief by talking of my love and my hopes. How dare I be gay when you are wretched!"

"Master," said Nagato, "I feel a deep regret for the woman who died for my sake; I cherished a brotherly affection for her. But my betrothed was not my beloved."

"What do I hear?" cried Fide-Yori; "you lift a great weight from my heart. I supposed you were crushed forever. Then you may be happy yet, as well as I."

Iwakura shook his head. "My love is made up of light and shade," said he. "I can never be entirely happy; it is composed half of celestial bliss, and half of utter misery. Such as it is, however, it is my whole life."

"Whom do you love, then?" asked Fide-Yori.

"Oh, Master!" said the Prince, covering his eyes with his hand, "do not ask me."

"It is so sweet to talk of the loved one! See! since I made you my confidant, my trouble has diminished by half."

"I am condemned to silence."

"Even to me? Is it thus you love me? I regret that I opened my heart to you."

"If I should confess the object of my love, you would shun the subject forever."

"Is it my mother?"

"No," said Nagato, smiling.

"Who is it? Tell me, I beseech you!"

"The Kisaki."

"Unhappy man!" cried Fide-Yori; and, as the Prince had predicted, he added not another word.

Next day the work of demolishing the ramparts began. Ten thousand men attacked them; they stood firm. No one knew what to do next. The stones rested on sloping ground, and seemed as if riveted in their places. Above, on the terre-plein, which formed a spacious terrace, cedar-trees grew, and cast a heavy shade. The first breach was made in the towers projecting at intervals from the walls. They were thrown down into the moat; then huge blocks were dragged from the walls, and the work was ended. Only the shattered walls seemed to be still standing; the stones were not there, the mountain of earth remained; but the moat was filled up.

While this work of destruction was going on, the city continued to make merry. Fide-Yori ordered a huge bell to be cast, and dedicated it solemnly to the temple of Buddha; upon this bell were engraved the words: *Henceforth my house shall be at peace*.

On the occasion of the consecration public rejoicings were held, and a splendid performance was announced to be given at the chief theatre in Osaka. A new play was to be brought out, entitled, "The Taiko-Ki," that is to say, the story of Taiko. This semi-historical work was written in honor of Fide-Yori's father. The moment was well chosen for its performance, and the preparations were therefore hastened on. But as the stage-setting was to be very elaborate, no positive date could be fixed.

Nothing else was talked of throughout the city. Places were reserved in advance; from five to six kobangs[1] were paid for a seat. The women eagerly arranged their drosses for the occasion; tailors and embroiderers were beside themselves with commissions. The praises of the leading actor, who was to take the part of Taiko, were loudly sung. Everybody knew him; he was famous.

He had been nicknamed Nariko-Ma, the "Humming-Top."

Fide-Yori, too, waited impatiently for the day of the performance. He hoped that Omiti would be present; and there at least she could not escape him. His search throughout the city with Prince Nagato had been fruitless. It was not so easy as they had fancied, to enter every house and ask for the young girl. They began with the homes of the nobility. That was comparatively easy. The Shogun honored the wives of the absent lords with a visit incognito; it was his whim to see the family of the princesses. He thus passed in review all the noble maidens of Osaka. To enter the houses of wealthy citizens, the two friends were forced to don a disguise, and were not always well received. Their devices to get a glimpse of the daughters of the house varied. They sometimes pretended to have seen an article of priceless value drop from a young girl's sleeve, and were unwilling to return it to any but herself. Or they would say they were sent by an old man in utter despair, who had lost his only daughter, and was looking for a girl of the same age, and bearing some likeness to her, that he might leave his immense fortune to her. This latter invention, of the Prince of Nagato, was quite successful. But the task was a long one; they had already spent a week in the search, and had only visited the palaces and one street in Osaka.

"We shall never contrive to see every house in this great city," said Fide-Yori; "we are crazy to think of doing it."

"We may grow old before we find her whom we seek," replied Nagato. "No matter, let us go on looking; perhaps we shall come across her in the very next house we enter."

Fide-Yori sighed.

"Let us wait till the doors of the theatre are thrown open," said he.

At last huge posters, printed on silk or colored paper, announced the date of the performance.

"We shall see her at the theatre; she will be there, I feel sure," said the Shogun, clinging to that hope.

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[1] Twelve to fifteen dollars.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GREAT THEATRE OF OSAKA.

On one of the largest of the canals which intersect Osaka in every direction stands the theatre, with its broad façade, capped by two roofs. You can go to the play in a boat; you can also go on foot, or in a norimono; for a quay paved with blue flag-stones runs in front of the building, and divides it from the canal.

Two huge blue-silk banners, covered with Chinese characters, hang from flag-staffs at either corner of the house, rising high above the roof. Upon large tablets, on a gold ground, are painted the principal scenes in the plays to be performed. They are painted with marvellous wealth of color, and depict warriors, princesses, gods, and demons in the most exaggerated attitudes. Sometimes, instead of a picture, we find a combination of stuffs arranged in broad relief, velvet, crape, or satin, representing the dresses of the various characters, and producing the most brilliant effects. From the red cross-beams beneath the roof hang enormous lanterns, round in shape on the lower floor, square upstairs. On the ridge-pole, a fabulous animal, something like a dog or lion, juts forward, opening wide his jaws, with bristling mane and tail.

By eight o'clock in the morning—the dragon's hour—the crowd collected before the doors of the Grand Theatre. Those who had no hope of admittance meant at least to enjoy the dazzling spectacle of the arrival of wealthy citizens and elegantly dressed ladies.

On each side of the principal entrance, reached by a broad staircase, were reared lofty platforms, upon which various delegates from the company of actors stood forth, in street dress, fan in hand. In pompous style, with merry gestures and grimaces, they loudly commended the pieces which they were to give to the public, praising the splendor of the costumes and stage setting, and the incomparable merit of the players; and when that subject was exhausted, they amused the mob by all sorts of jokes, puns, and anecdotes, delivered with comic gravity, and accompanied by the perpetual motion of the fan, handled in skilful, graceful style.

Soon the favored portion of the public, who were able to engage their seats in advance, arrived from all sides. Across the two bridges arching the canal to right and left of the theatre came norimonos and cangos, their bearers advancing with measured pace, and following one after the other in infinite succession; from every street appeared countless palanquins. The black lacquer glittered in the sun, the dresses of the women, in haste to enter, had the fresh tints of newly opened flowers. Some young men arrived on horseback; they threw the bridle to the groom, who ran before them, and mounted the stairs to the theatre hurriedly. Under the shade of broad parasols came various families on foot. Upon the canal a throng of boats besieged the landing-stage; the rowers exchanged hard words; the women stepped on shore with little shrieks of alarm. They were followed by maid-servants carrying magnificent boxes of carved ivory, mother-of-pearl, or sandal-wood. The hall was soon filled, and the doors were closed.

The interior of the theatre was rectangular in shape, the parquet divided into square spaces separated by partitions about ten inches high. Two aisles led from the back of the house to the stage, which latter was not divided by any practical boundary from the body of the house, both being upon the same level. These aisles seemed intended rather for occasional exits and entrances of the actors, than for the accommodation of visitors, the partitions between the boxes being sufficiently broad to allow the spectators to reach the places reserved for them. The journey, however, was not without peril, and was accomplished amid screams and bursts of laughter. The women, hampered by their handsome dresses, advanced cautiously, stumbling occasionally. The men offered their arms, to help them into the boxes; but some preferred to sit upon the edge and slide gracefully down. Each compartment held eight persons, who squatted upon the matted floor; and as soon as they were seated, a servant, attached to the theatre, brought them tea and saki on a lacquer tray, with pipes and a brazier.

Raised above the parquet on three sides of the hall was a double row of boxes, the fourth side being occupied by the stage. These boxes, very richly decorated on a background of red or black lacquer, were the most select part of the play-house, especially those in the upper stage. There the most elegant coquettes displayed their magnificent toilets. The aspect of the theatre was delightful; most of the women were beautiful, with their dead-white skins, their glossy hair and dusky eyes. The rustle of silk, the shimmer of satin, the bright colors and the embroideries, formed a splendid spectacle. The married women were easily recognized by their teeth blackened with a mixture of iron filings and saki, by their plucked eyebrows, and by their sash tied in an enormous knot directly in front. The young girls made the knot at the back, and left their teeth to their natural whiteness. They also dressed their hair differently. Instead of letting it hang in a long twist, or gathered in a heavy mass on the top of the head, they combed it over the forehead, arranged it in wings on either side of the face, and fashioned it into an elaborate and voluminous chignon. Some might substitute, for the tortoise-shell pins generally used, others of similar length, but made of filagree gold; their neighbors might prefer to adorn their hair with nothing but flowers and silk cords.

The men were no less fond of dress; crape, brocade, and velvet not being forbidden for their wear. Some had an embroidered scarf on one shoulder, one end hanging forward; the longer the scarf was, the higher the social rank of the wearer. When he saluted a superior he must bend until the scarf touched the ground. Therefore the longer it was, the less he had to bend. A party of nobles appearing incognito, their faces hidden by black crape hoods, showing nothing but their eyes, filled the lower row of boxes. But one of these, very near the stage, remained empty; it was suddenly thrown open, and a woman appeared.

The spectators could not repress a cry of amazement upon recognizing Yodogimi. Was it possible?—the Shogun's mother entering a theatre openly! Had she lost all respect for custom and decorum, and for herself! The veil of light gauze, fastened to the big pins in her headdress, and covering her face, although it might show her desire to preserve her incognito, in no way masked the Princess; she was recognized at the first glance. Still, surprise soon gave way to admiration. Every one was glad she had not hidden her charming face, which the transparent veil did but embellish. Besides, the extraordinary dress worn by Yodogimi took the audience by storm. Her robe was woven of pale gold, covered with fine pearls and grains of crystal; she seemed to radiate light, as if the stars were imprisoned in the folds of the stuff. The Princess smiled as she saw how promptly the first sensation of displeasure was overcome by admiration. She took her seat slowly; and when she was settled in her place, a masked warrior was seen standing behind her.

Then the faint clamor of a gong, the trill of a couple of flutes, and a few muffled blows on a tambourine were heard. The musicians took up their instruments; the play was about to begin.

The audience turned to the stage; it was closed by a curtain covered with huge lozenges, and in the centre of which appeared, upon a scarlet disk, an immense Chinese character, standing for the name of "Humming-Top," the famous and unrivalled actor. A rich silk merchant had presented this curtain in his honor; it was not to be changed until Humming-Top should be surpassed or equalled by one of his colleagues.

The curtain moved; and a man, drawing it slightly aside, came forward. The instant he appeared, the hubbub which filled the hall ceased abruptly. The man saluted the audience with all sorts of grimaces. He was dressed like a wealthy lord, and held in his hands a paper cylinder, which he began to unroll.

The people hung upon his words in profound silence; and yet they all knew that no one could unravel the sense of them. For such is the mission of this individual: he is to speak without being understood. If any one discover the true meaning of what he reads from his roll, he has missed his object. Still, he is to read the text literally, without skipping a word, or adding a syllable. The paper contains an outline of the piece to be played, the names of the characters, the actors, and the scene of action. The herald, by clipping his words and phrases, by uniting things that should be divided; by pausing where there is no pause, managed to mar his test completely, to make absurd mistakes and ridiculous jokes, at which the public laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks. Still they listened; they tried to guess the true meaning. But the speaker was clever: he withdrew, leaving no one a whit the wiser.

When he had disappeared, noisy strains of music sounded behind the scenes, and the curtain rose.

The scene represented an elegant apartment with a large window opening upon a country landscape; rich screens, a bed,—that is, a velvet mattress,—and a number of cushions, furnished

the chamber.

The audience at once recognized the scenery of one of the most popular plays in the repertory of the theatre.

"It's the third act of the Vampire!" was whispered on every hand.

Only this one act of the Vampire, which is the best and most dramatic, was given. The public expressed their satisfaction by a prolonged murmur, and the curtain fell.

During the intermission most of the audience left the hall, and stormed the adjoining tea-house. There the morning meal was served, or merely warm drinks and a few dainties, amidst an indescribable tumult and confusion. Every one expressed his opinion of the merits of the play just witnessed, and of the actors' skill. Their gestures, their cries and contortions, were imitated. Some attempted to repeat their capers, to the great amusement of the spectators; others played chess, morra, or dice.

The wait was a long one. The lads who took the part of women in the first piece were to appear in the second as well; they must have time to rest, take a bath, and change their dresses. But the time passed pleasantly; people ate, smoked, and laughed, and then flocked merrily back to the theatre.

The appearance of the hall was entirely different; all the ladies in the boxes had changed their dresses, the new ones being still more gorgeous than the first.

All eyes were bent on Yodogimi, eager to see how she could contrive a second toilet worthy of that which had so recently dazzled all beholders. Again they were mute with surprise. She seemed clothed in jewels and woven flames; her robe was one mass of humming-bird feathers, which flashed like sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and burning coals. Those living gems had been slaughtered whole-sale to form an ample garment, which cost the price of a castle.

The herald reappeared, delivered a speech no less mysterious than the first, and the curtain rose.

A scene from the Onono-Komat-Ki was now given.

Onono-Komat was a lovely maiden attached to the Court of Kioto. Having a passion for poetry, she devoted herself to study, and composed verses; but in her love of perfection, the poem once written, she washed it out and began again. Young men fell in love with her beauty, and persecuted her with their attentions. She repulsed them, and continued her favorite studies. But the persistent suitors could not pardon her disdain; by base calumny they brought her into disgrace. The inspired maiden left the palace, and wandered at random. By degrees she became poorer and poorer; but her love of poetry never failed. She contemplated the beauties of nature, and sang of them with rare perfection of style. Age came; her hair turned white; she was completely destitute, roaming from village to village, leaning on a staff, a basket on her arm, and living on alms. Children gathered round her when she sat at the gates of a temple; she smiled sweetly on them, and taught them pretty verses. Sometimes a bonze would respectfully ask leave to copy one of the poems stowed away in her basket. The inspired singer died; then only was hatred silenced, and her glory shone forth. She was deified, and her memory is reverenced by all men.

After representing various portions of the play descriptive of the life of Onono-Komat, a burlesque interlude was played, and then the Taiko-Ki at last began.

The curtain went up on a vast scene representing an encampment of soldiers. The General's tent, rising high above the rest, was pitched in the centre. Envoys came running in dismay, gesticulating wildly with arms and legs.

"The General! the General! we must see the General at once!" they cry.

Then the curtains of the tent are parted, and Taiko appears. The Humming-Top had succeeded in reproducing exactly the attitude and dress of the hero he represented. The audience showed their satisfaction. Those who, in their youth, had seen the illustrious Shogun, fancied they beheld him once more.

"What do you want?" says Taiko.

The emissaries dare not open their lips.

"Well!" says Taiko, frowning, and clapping his hand to his sword.

"Sire, while you fight your country's foes, Mitsou-Fide, to whom you intrusted the care of the kingdom, has seized the power."

At this news, Taiko's face passes successively from surprise to anxiety and fury.

Meanwhile a man carrying a light on the end of a long bamboo pole, held it close to the actor's face, that the public might not lose any of his facial expression.

"Let us be off!" cries Taiko;' "my presence alone can restore order in the palace."

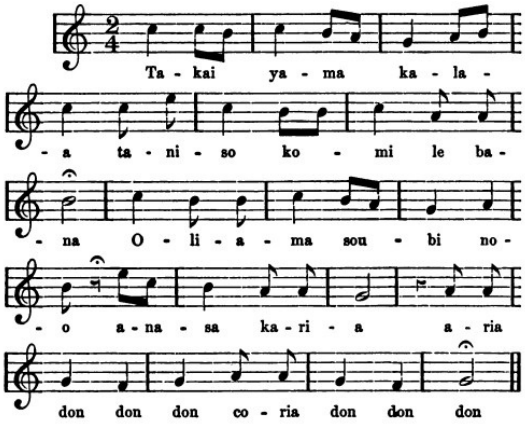
He gives the command of his troops to one of his officers, and leaves the stage by a raised passage through the parquet, and disappears through a heavy curtain.

The stage revolved, and revealed the interior of a pagoda.

Taiko enters. He asks for a night's rest in the pagoda, and is told that Mitsou-Fide has just arrived with his wife and mother. They are travelling, and have stopped here. Taiko starts violently.

"My enemy so near!" he exclaims. "Shall I fly? No; I must disguise myself."

He calls for a razor, shaves his head, and slips on the dress of a bonze. He has scarcely fastened it, when Mitsou-Fide enters, and casts a suspicious glance at Taiko; the latter, to appear at his ease and quite calm, begins to sing a simple air, popular throughout the kingdom:—



"From the mountain top I gaze down into the valley.
The cucumbers and the hawthorn, hope of the harvest, are in bloom."

"Come here, bonze," says Mitsou-Fide. "My mother is tired after her journey; you may prepare a bath for her."

"Who would have thought that I came here to play the part of servant?" cries Taiko, turning towards the audience with most wonderful facial expression. "I obey," he adds aloud.

The bath-room was only divided from the apartment which occupied the stage by a screen covered with oiled paper. Taiko prepares the bath; amusing the audience meantime by a thousand comical remarks, accompanied by appropriate grimaces.

Mitsou-Fide's mother, enters, and asks if the bath is ready. On the affirmative reply of the false bonze, she disappears behind the screen. But Mitsou-Fide learns that Taiko is in the pagoda, and now rushes up in a rage, shouting loudly for his enemy.

"He is in the bath," says a priest.

"He shall not escape me."

Taiko, during this scene, creeps off.

Mitsou-Fide cuts a long stock of bamboo in the garden, sharpens one end of it, and hardens it over the coals in a bronze chafing-dish. Then marching up to the dividing-screen, he pierces the paper with this impromptu spear, and thinking to slay his enemy, kills his mother.

"What have I done?" he exclaims in alarm, on hearing a woman's shriek.

"You have killed your mother!" says his young wife, entering, pale with horror, and trembling like a leaf.

"Repent! repent while she expires!" she cries, in a monotonous chant. "This cruel murder, committed by your hand, is the vengeance of Heaven! Did I not bid you beware of betraying your master? You usurped the power. See to what ambition leads you; you have killed your mother! At least repent while she expires."

"Alas! alas!" howls the murderer; "let us leave this accursed spot, let us fly! Remorse rends my heart! For three days I possessed the power: my punishment is terrible. My mother slain by my own hand! I cannot believe it!"

He bursts into the bath-room; then comes out, with all the signs of despair bordering on madness.

The stage again revolves, and represents a field. Taiko in battle array, surrounded by soldiers, waits to intercept his enemy, who is about to escape. Mitsou-Fide crosses the stage with a scanty train of attendants; he is hemmed in by Taiko's men. The latter, after a long speech, in which he overwhelms his unworthy servant with reproaches, takes him prisoner and loads him with chains.

The curtain falls; the play is over.

It interested the audience deeply; in certain situations they discovered analogies to the events which had so recently troubled the country. Hieyas was often mentally substituted for Mitsou-Fide.

Everybody went home highly delighted.

Everybody? No. Fide-Yori had death in his soul. Omiti was not at the performance. Nagato tried in vain to comfort his friend.

"I shall never see her again!" he cried. "I hoped that I might yet be happy in this life; but misfortune clings to me persistently. Look you, friend," he continued, "I long to die; I am overwhelmed with sorrow. My mother's conduct, her mad and ruinous extravagance, displayed in public, fill my heart with bitterness. Several times, when I heard the rough voice of that soldier whom she is weak enough to love, I was on the point of leaping into their box, slapping him in the

face, and driving her out, with the righteous wrath evoked by such a disregard of all propriety and decency. And then my anger died at a gentle thought which took possession of me. I hoped that she would come,—that maiden in whom my every hope is centred; I searched the hall with an eager glance. She did not come! All is ended; all is desolate within me; and the life which she preserved I would fain lay down forever!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

OMITI.

Winter had come; days of burning heat had given place to days of frost and ice. The leaden sky seemed to have changed places with the earth, now dazzlingly bright in its white robes of snow.

In the outskirts of Osaka the deserted shore had preserved intact the thick coat of wadding dropped from the clouds. The waves, reflecting the dull gray heavens, looked like ink. Scattered rocks jutted from the ground at intervals; the snow clung to their sharp angles. Gulls, disturbed in their flight by the wind, flapped their wings; they seemed dark and dirty against this whiteness.

The last house of the suburb extended its high garden fence along the beach; it was covered with snow, and the swinging sign, which hung from two posts flanking the door, was quite illegible. The big lanterns swelling forward at either side of the entrance had been drawn in and fastened by hooks; a small penthouse sheltered them. The triple roof of the house seemed thatched with silver.

This was the Day-Break Inn. It was here that Omiti had for many long days endured the cruel fate imposed upon her. She suffered in silence, with a proud resignation which accepts neither pity nor consolation. She sacrificed herself to save the lord of the kingdom. She yielded without a murmur to the consequences of her sacrifice; but she sometimes thought that it would have been more merciful to kill her. She had no wish to see the King again, although she had not ceased to love him. Her love was born of a maiden's dream. Before she over saw Fide-Yori, that young prince, said to be handsome and amiable, filled her thoughts; and as she embroidered, she mused and wove a web of fancy about his image. When she discovered the horrid plot which threatened the life of him who filled her soul, she felt as if she should die of terror; but her longing to save him gave her the strength and courage of a hero. In her single interview with the King, in the lemon grove, she saw that her heart had not erred, and that she should never love any other man. But the idea that he might love her never even occurred to her; her modesty forbade it; and since, sold for the general pleasure, she had sunk to the lowest grade in the social scale, the mere thought of again standing in Fide-Yori's presence made her blush with shame.

Often rich merchants from the town would bring their wives to the tea-house, to spend a few hours in the company of the gaizha girls, who instructed them in the art of acquiring elegant manners, taught them to play the samsin, and to compose verses. Sometimes the fine lady, crouching opposite Omiti, listening, with half-open lips, to the girl's plaintive tones, was surprised to see sudden tears flood the singer's eyes. But she supposed it was a seductive wile; and going home, would strive to weep as she struck the strings of her instrument.

Beneath its snowy mantle, behind its closed windows, and although it appeared quite silent from without, the tea-house was full of people and of noise.

For several weeks it had been thronged daily by a crowd of people of all classes, who seemed to assemble there for some secret purpose. The master of the establishment was undoubtedly in league with these men; he always mingled in their conversation,—indeed he often seemed to direct and inflame it. They talked of the affairs of the nation. The general misery was frightful. This civil war, coming just at the time when the fields most needed the master's eye, had injured the harvests; several crops were utterly destroyed by the armies, others were poor; famine threatened all that part of the kingdom which still belonged to Fide-Yori. In the north, on the contrary, everything throve and flourished. While rice was scarce in the neighborhood of Osaka, it was sold at half price in the northern provinces; but Hieyas absolutely forbade it to be exported to the south, and the Shogun took no pains to have a supply brought from elsewhere. While the people died of starvation, the Court displayed an unexampled luxury: every day were given receptions, feasts, and banquets. Yodogimi excited the popular wrath; she exhausted the treasury. The taxes were raised, and salaries lowered. The Government had plainly gone mad. The Court danced on the verge of an abyss, dragging their trains of gold and satin after them, to the sound of bewildering music. All were blind; no one thought of the possible resumption of the war. Men got drunk, they laughed and sang within the fallen walls of the fortress; they took no steps to restore the army to its former footing, or to increase it if possible. Yoke-Moura had vainly striven to act; money was wanting: the caprices and ruinous extravagance of the Princess Yodogimi absorbed it all. And the Shogun, what was he about? Plunged in a mysterious melancholy, he wandered in his gardens solitary and alone, doing nothing, apparently laying down the power. It was evident that Hieyas only waited for an opportunity to give the last blow to that crumbling structure. But why should he wait? The old man's wisdom was in strange contrast with the young man's improvidence and the folly of his Court. Hieyas must be summoned; his accession would save the nation from misery and want. Why should they be reduced to the last

extremity? An effort must be made to bring about the inevitable issue as soon as might be.

Omiti, with growing fear, daily heard similar discourses. The guests of the inn changed; the same men did not always return. They went elsewhere, to stir up rebellion and wrath. It was plain that emissaries from Hieyas were mixed with these artisans. The Usurper felt the value of a movement in his favor at Osaka; he was anxious to provoke it. Moreover the careless indifference of the Court was of wonderful help to him. Omiti saw all this; she wrung her hands, and wept with despair. "Then there is no one who dares to warn him of his danger!" she cried, in her sleepless nights.

One day, as she sat in her room embroidering, she noticed that the people talking in the room below had dropped their voices. Usually they cared very little who heard them. Her heart leaped in her bosom.

"I must hear what they say," she murmured.

She ran to the top of the staircase; and holding fast to the railing, glided to the lowest step as lightly as air, and succeeded in catching a few disjointed sentences.

"Yes, that beach is unfrequented."

"We will enter the inn by the door which opens from the sea."

"And we will leave on the street side in small groups."

"The soldiers must be disguised as mechanics."

"Of course; but they will keep their weapons under their cloaks."

"The city is already greatly agitated; we will proceed to the fortress in a body, and summon the Shogun to abdicate."

"If he refuses, we will enter the palace and take possession of him."

Omiti shivered with horror. "I must get away from here," she muttered; "I must give the alarm."

The conspirators continued: "We must hasten; to-morrow, at nightfall, the soldiers may land."

"Directly after, a cargo of wheat and rice will arrive."

Omiti went back to her room. She had heard enough; her resolve was taken. A sort of mystical ardor filled her soul. "My mission in this world is to save him, to hold him back on the edge of the precipice," she thought with exaltation. "This is the second time that I have discovered a guilty secret,—a plot against the man whom I loved before I ever knew him. The will of Heaven is displayed in this. Once more I will point out his peril to him; my feeble hand shall stay the execution of the crime."

She considered the means she might employ to escape from the house. Two other young women shared her chamber at night. She could not trust them; they did not like her, and were devoted to their master.

Upon the ground-floor all the doors were closed on the inside by heavy bars; besides, the men servants, who had charge of the cellar department, slept down stairs. Therefore it was useless to think of escape in that direction. There remained the window; it was somewhat high above the ground, but that was not what troubled Omiti. How could she open the window without rousing the other women If she succeeded in doing it without a noise, the cold air blowing into the room would wake them. Omiti thought of the window that opened on the staircase landing. But the one in her room looked upon the street, while the other opened into the garden; and once in the garden, she still had the fence to climb.

"No matter," thought Omiti; "I'll get out of the window on the stairs."

But how? She had no ladder at her disposal. With a rope? Where should she get a rope without arousing suspicion? She decided to manufacture one. Her comrades had gone for a walk, and she had plenty of time. Opening the boxes containing her clothes, she took out various strong silk dresses and cut them into strips. She then braided these strips together, and fastened the strands by hard knots. Then she rolled up the rope, and hid it under her mattress.

"Now," said she, "I am sure I can save him."

The day seemed long to her; the fever of expectation made her tremble nervously; her teeth chattered at intervals.

The other girls came back, their cheeks rosy with the cold; they wearied Omiti with the recital of all they had seen and done. They had gone to the banks of the Yedogawa to see if the ice was drifting. They fancied they saw a few floating blocks, but perhaps it was only snow; for there was snow everywhere, even on the golden fishes that crowned the high tower of the fortress, which were turned to silver. The wind was icy; but, to ward off the cold, the men had put on embroidered velvet ear-caps....

Omiti paid no attention to the interminable chatter of the women. She was delighted to see the lanterns lighted. Darkness had come, but the long evening still lay before her. She could not eat any supper; and feigned illness, to avoid singing or playing the biva.

She returned to her room, where her companions soon joined her; their walk had tired them, and they quickly fell asleep.

The noise, the laughter, and songs of the men who were getting tipsy below lasted yet a long time. But at last she heard the familiar sound of the bars dropping into their places; every one

was gone.

She waited another half-hour, to give the servants time to sleep soundly; then, without the slightest noise, she rose, took the rope from under her mattress, and slid slightly aside the panel opening on the staircase, shutting it when she had passed. She listened, and heard nothing but a few snores, which were very reassuring. She opened the window; the night air made her shudder. She leaned out, and looked down; the white snow afforded a dim light.

"It is high," thought the young girl; "will my rope be long enough?"

She fastened it to the window-frame, and unrolled it. It reached the ground, and even trailed a little on the snow.

Omiti wound her gown about her, and knelt on the edge of the window. But as she was about to intrust herself to that frail cord, a sort of instinctive fear took possession of her; she hesitated.

"What!" said she, "I tremble for my life when his is in danger!"

She let herself go abruptly, holding to the rope with both hands. A sharp pain almost forced a scream from her; she felt as if her arms would be pulled from their sockets; her hands were torn as she slid rapidly down. But all at once one of the knots in the silk gave way under her weight, and the rope broke.

She fell upon the snow, which swallowed her up. But her fall was deadened; and she rose to her feet, feeling no pain, but a sudden lassitude. After shaking off the snow, with which she was covered, she crossed the garden and gained the fence. Luckily the door was only fastened by a big round bolt; after several attempts, she succeeded in drawing it back.

She was on the shore, out of that ill-omened house, free at last! The strong wind blew sharp from the sea, whose monotonous roar she heard. She began to run, sinking ankle deep in the snow, which rose behind her in clouds of glittering particles.

She was in such haste to be gone from the tavern, that instead of going round the corner of the house into the street upon which the front door opened, she followed the garden fence, which soon came to an end, and was replaced by a wall running round another enclosure.

"I will enter the city by the next lane that opens on the beach," thought Omiti.

She reached a sort of open square on the sea-shore, bordered on the other side by a semicircle of wretched huts, half hidden in their mantles of snow. In the middle, a lighted lantern, hanging from a post, made a shimmering, blood-red spot. The light was very dim. The young girl took a few steps into the square, but suddenly recoiled with a cry of horror: she saw an awful face gazing down at her from above the lantern.

At the scream uttered by the young girl, a myriad other shrieks rang out from the bills of countless crows; who, roused abruptly, flew up and circled in the air in aimless fashion. Omiti was soon surrounded by the ill-omened birds. Motionless with fright, she thought herself the victim of some hallucination, and rubbed her eyes, trying to take in and understand what she saw. That face still glared at her; she had snow in her eyebrows, her hair, her open mouth, and her haggard eyes. At first Omiti thought she saw a man leaning against the post; but on looking closer, she found that the head, without a body, was suspended to a nail by the hair, and she recognized that she was in the square where all the public executions took place.

The ground was covered with mounds,—graves hastily dug for the victims. The body of the last criminal had been left at the foot of the post; a dog, busily scratching the snowy shroud that veiled the corpse, uttered a long howl, and fled with a bloody fragment in his jaws. A large bronze statue of Buddha, seated on a lotos, was visible, spotted with white flakes.

Omiti conquered her terror and crossed the square, stretching out her arms to drive away the crowd of ravenous crows which flocked about her. They pursued her with their melancholy shrieks, which were mingled with the roar of the sea.

The young girl went rapidly down a narrow street, illumined by no ray of light. The snow had been trampled, and she walked through icy mud. The darkness was profound; it was not even mitigated by the whiteness of the earth. Omiti kept close to the walls, to feel her way. But the houses did not follow in regular order; there were vacant spaces; she sometimes lost her guide. Her feet sank in pits of soft snow, which began to melt in places. She fell, then rose again; the edge of her dress was soaked. She felt benumbed with cold.

"Shall I ever reach my journey's end?" she thought.

Another street appeared, crossing the first; a few lights glittered down its length. Into this Omiti turned.

Without knowing it, the girl was passing through the very worst quarter of the city. Thieves, disreputable women, and vagabonds of every sort congregate there. There, too, may be found a peculiar class of men, the Ronins. These are young men, sometimes noble, dragged down by dissipation to the lowest stage of ignominy. Driven from their homes or stripped of their office, but preserving the right to wear two swords, they take refuge among the criminal classes, give themselves over to all sorts of shameful industries, assassinate at other people's orders, are the leaders of bands, and exercise great influence over the villains among whom they live. A few hours earlier it would have been impossible for the young girl to enter this region without being attacked, insulted, or carried by main force into some of the evil dens of which it is composed. Fortunately the night was far advanced; the streets were empty.

But another obstacle awaited Omiti: this quarter of the city is shut in by a gate guarded by a watchman. How could she make him open the door at this hour? What excuse could she give to the suspicious and probably surly keeper? Omiti considered this as she walked. She soon saw the wooden gate at the end of a street, lighted by several lanterns; she noticed the hut, made of planks, for the gatekeeper's shelter.

"I must be bold," she thought; "if I manifest the slightest uneasiness he will distrust me."

She marched straight up to the door. The man was probably asleep, for the sound of her footsteps did not bring him out. Omiti measured the gate with her eye. It was impossible to climb over; it was surmounted by barbed iron wires.

The young girl, her heart beating hard, knocked at the hut. The keeper came out with a lantern. He was well wrapped in a wadded robe, and his head was lost in the folds of a brown woollen scarf; he looked sickly, and besotted with drink.

"What's the matter?" said he, in a hoarse voice, lifting his lantern to a level with Omiti's face.

"Open the door," said the girl.

The fellow burst out laughing.

"Open the door at this time of night?" he cried; "you're crazy." And he turned on his heel.

"Stop!" said she, holding him fast; "my father is sick, and sent me to fetch the doctor."

"Very well, there are plenty of doctors here. There's one not ten steps away; there's another in Grasshopper Street; and still a third at the corner of Thieves' Lane."

"But my father has no faith in any but his own physician, who lives in another district."

"Go home and to sleep!" said the man. "That's all a lie; but you can't fool me. Good night!"

He was about to close the door of his hut.

"Let me pass," cried Omiti, in despair, "and I swear you shall be paid beyond your utmost hopes."

"You have money, then?" said, the keeper, turning quickly back.

Omiti recollected that she had a few kobangs in her sash, and said, "Yes."

"Why didn't you say so in the beginning?"

He took the monstrous key that hung from his belt and went to the gate. Omiti gave him a kobang. It was a large amount to the ill-paid man, who drank up his wages as fast as he earned them.

"With such a reason in your hands, there was no need to put your father to death!" said he, throwing open the gate.

"Which is the shortest way to reach the banks of the Yedogawa?" she asked.

"Walk straight ahead. You'll come to another gate; it opens on the shore."

"Thank you!" said she.

And she moved rapidly away. The road was better; the snow had been shovelled away and piled in heaps.

"How I am safe," thought the happy girl, heedless of the fatigue that weighed her down.

She gained the second gate. But now she knew what she was to do to have it opened. The keeper was pacing up and down, stamping his feet, to keep warm.

"I'll give you a kobang if you'll open the gate," she exclaimed.

The man stretched out his hand and put the key in the lock. Omiti passed through; she was on the bank of the river. She had only to climb up to the castle now. The road was long, but unimpeded. She walked bravely forward, drawing her gown close about her, to ward off the cold.

The guardians of the night passed on the other shore, striking their tambourines, to announce the last watch of the night. When the young girl reached the castle, a wan and pallid light was struggling to break through the clouds. The snow resumed its dazzling bluish whiteness; it seemed to radiate light rather than to absorb it from that gloomy sky, apparently covered with reddish smoke.

The castle reared its imposing mass before the young girl's gaze. The lofty towers stood out against the heavens, the broad roofs of the princely pavilions were ranged in order; the cedars along the first terrace had collected on their evergreen branches heavy lumps of snow, fragments of which fell from time to time and slid from bough to bough.

Omiti felt the tears come into her eyes when she saw the ruined walls and the filled-up moats. "My poor dear Prince!" she said. "You have given yourself up to your enemy; if the war were to begin again, you would be lost. At least you shall escape once more from the odious conspiracy contrived against you."

All were asleep in the castle, except the sentinels pacing to and fro; the fallen ramparts were replaced by living walls.

At the moment Omiti touched her goal, she feared she had not the strength to take the few steps necessary to reach the fortress-gate. Soaked with snow, spent with fatigue and excitement, the cold morning air made her shiver from head to foot. Everything swam before her; her pulses

throbbed; there was a singing in her ears. She hurried to the gates; the sentinels crossed their lances, to bar her way.

"No passing here!" they said.

"Yes! I must pass at once,—I must see the King, or you shall be severely punished!" cried Omiti, in broken accents.

The soldiers shrugged their shoulders. "Stand back, woman; you are drunk, or mad. Begone!"

"I beseech you, let me in. Call some one; I feel as if I were dying. But first I must speak with the King! I must! You hear? Do not let me die before I have said my say."

Her voice was so sad and so full of entreaty that the men were moved.

"What ails her?" said one. "She is pale as the snow; she might die, as she says."

"And if she has something to tell!"

"Let us take her to the Prince of Nagato; he can decide whether it's worth hearing."

"Well, come in!" said one of the soldiers; "we pity you."

Omiti took a few tottering steps; but her strength deserted her. She hurriedly snatched from her bosom a withered flower and held it to the soldiers; then, with a stifled cry, she fell backwards.

The embarrassed and uneasy soldiers looked at each other, consulting one another with a glance.

"If she is dead," said one, "we shall be accused of killing her."

"We'd better throw her into the river."

"Yes; but how are we to touch a corpse without making ourselves impure!"

"We will purify ourselves according to prescribed laws; that will be better than being sentenced to have our heads cut off."

"That's so; let's be quick. Poor thing! it's a pity," added the fellow, leaning over Omiti. "But then it's her own fault: why did she die like that?"

Just as they were about to raise her and carry her to the river, a clear young voice was heard singing:—

> "Is there aught on earth more precious than saki?
> If I were not a man, I would fain be a tun!"

The soldiers sprang back. A lad came forward well wrapped in a fur-trimmed robe, his head buried in a hood tied under his chin. He proudly rested his velvet-gloved hand upon the hilts of his two swords.

It was Loo returning from a nocturnal revel alone and on foot, that he might not be denounced to the Prince of Nagato by his suite; for Loo had a suite of his own, now that he was a Samurai.

"What's going on here? Who is this woman stretched motionless on the ground?" he cried, casting a terrible, glance from one soldier to the other.

The soldiers dropped on their knees, exclaiming:

"Your lordship, we are innocent. She wanted to enter the castle, to speak to the Shogun; touched by her prayers, we were about to let her pass and to conduct her to the illustrious Prince of Nagato, when all at once she fell dead."

Loo bent over the young girl. "Donkeys! Dolts! Drinkers of milk! Trodden-down shoes!" he shouted, in a rage, "don't you see that she still breathes, that she has only fainted? You leave her there in the snow instead of going to her aid? To cure you of your stupidity, I'll have you beaten till you drop dead on the spot."

The soldiers shook in every limb.

"Come," continued Loo, "lift her carefully, and follow me."

The men obeyed. As they entered the gate of the fortress, the young Samurai knocked at the guard-house close by. "Renew the sentinels!" he shouted; "I need these fellows."

And he went on. The Prince of Nagato was asleep. Loo did not hesitate to rouse him. He knew that the Shogun was trying to find traces of a young girl whom he adored. He had followed the King, in his search through the city, with his master. The fainting woman, whom he had just found at the castle gate, was very like the portrait sketched by Fide-Yori.

"Master," he said to the Prince, who, still but half awake, fixed a surprised and sleepy gaze upon him, "I think I have found the object of the Shogun's search."

"Omiti!" exclaimed Nagato; "where did you find her?"

"In the snow! But come quickly. She is cold and motionless; do not leave her to die."

The Prince slipped on a fur-lined garment, and ran to the room where Omiti lay.

"This may well be the one we have sought," said he, as he saw her; "let some one call the Shogun. But first send servant-women here, and let them take off this young girl's wet and muddy clothes. Summon also the palace doctor."

Omiti was wrapped in the softest furs; the women stirred up the fire burning in a huge bronze bowl. The King came quickly. From the threshold, through the open panels, he saw the girl in the

midst of a vast heap of splendid furs and stuffs. He uttered a cry of joy, and rushed towards her.

"Omiti," he cried, "is this a dream? Is it you? After so long a separation you are restored to me at last!"

At the King's outburst the young girl trembled; she opened her eyes. The doctor arrived, breathless; he knelt beside her, and took her hand.

"It is nothing," said he, after he had felt her pulse carefully; "a slight fainting fit, undoubtedly, brought on by cold and fatigue."

Omiti, with her large eyes full of surprise, shaded by long quivering lashes, gazed at the people grouped about her. She saw the King at her feet; standing close beside her, the Prince of Nagato, smiling kindly at her; then the grave face of the doctor, made grotesque by an enormous pair of spectacles. She thought she must be the toy of some dream.

"Do you suffer, my sweet love?" said Fide-Yori, clasping Omiti's little hand in both his own. "What has happened to you? Why are you so pale?"

She looked at the King, and heard his words without comprehending them. Suddenly her memory cleared; she rose abruptly. "I must speak to the Shogun!" she cried; "to him alone, and at once."

With a gesture, Fide-Yori dismissed the spectators, but detained the Prince of Nagato. "You can speak before him; he is my dearest friend," said he. "But calm yourself. Why do you look so frightened?"

Omiti tried to collect her ideas, troubled by fever. "Because," she said, "Hieyas, by means of wily emissaries, is inciting the citizens of Osaka to rebel, and to hate there lawful lord. An insurrection is to take place this very night, and soldiers disguised as mechanics will land upon the shore in the outskirts of the town. They will enter the city and march upon your dismantled castle, to demand that you shall abdicate your title, or to kill you if you refuse. You do not doubt my words, I hope? Once already you have had proof, alas! that the misfortunes I predict are real."

"What!" cried Fide-Yori, his eyes filling with tears, "was it to save me yet again that you came? You are the good genius of my life!"

"Make haste and give your orders; take measures to prevent the crimes which are impending," said Omiti; "time presses. It is to be to-night, do you understand? Hieyas' soldiers are to invade your city by treachery." Fide-Yori turned to the Prince of Nagato. "Iwakura," said he, "what do you advise me to do?"

"Let us warn General Yoke-Moura. Let him call his men to arms, and watch the shore and the city. Is there not some place where the leaders of the conspiracy are to meet!" he added, addressing Omiti.

"There is," said the young girl; "at the Day-break Inn."

"Very good; then we must surround the inn and seize the rebels. Do you desire, master, that I should see your orders executed!"

"You will make me happy, friend, by doing so."

"I leave you, sire," said Nagato. "Let nothing disturb you, and give yourself freely up to the joy of reunion with the woman whom you love."

The Prince withdrew.

"What does he mean?" thought the astonished Omiti. "The woman whom you love: of whom was he talking?"

She was alone with the King, and dared not lift her eyes; her heart throbbed violently. Fide-Yori, too, was troubled; he did not speak, but gazed at the lovely girl who trembled before him. She, lost in blushes, twisted in her fingers a tiny withered twig.

"What have you in your hand?" gently asked the Shogun; "is it a talisman?"

"Don't you recognize the spray of lemon-blossoms which you gave me when I saw you?" said she. "Just now, when I fainted, I offered it to the sentinels. I thought that they would take it to you, and that the sight of it would recall me to you. But I find it is still in my hand."

"What! You kept those flowers?"

Omiti raised her clear eyes to the King, revealing her soul in her face; then dropped them quickly. "Because you gave them to me," said she.

"You love me, then?" cried Fide-Yori.

"O master!" said the startled girl, "I should never have dared to confess the weakness of my heart."

"You will not confess your love? Well! I love you with all my soul, and I dare to tell you so."

"You love me?—you, the Shogun?" she exclaimed, with touching amazement.

"Yes, and I have long waited your coming, wicked one. I have sought you; I was plunged in despair; you have made me suffer cruelly! But since you are here, all is forgotten. Why did you delay so long? Had you no thought of me?"

"You were my only thought; it blossomed like a celestial flower in the midst of my sad life; without it I should have died."

"You thought of me, while I groaned at your absence; and you did not come?"

"I did not know that you had deigned to remember me. Besides, had I known it, I should not have come."

"What!" cried the Shogun, "is it thus you love me? Would you refuse to live with me—to be my wife?"

"Your wife!" murmured Omiti, with a bitter smile.

"Certainly," said Fide-Yori; "why do you look so sad?"

"Because I am not worthy even to be numbered with your servants; and when you learn what I have become, you will drive me from you with loathing."

"What do you mean?" cried the Shogun, turning pale.

"Listen," said the girl, in a hollow voice. "Hieyas came to my father's castle; he found out that I had discovered the frightful plot against your life, and had betrayed it; he had me carried away and sold as servant in a tavern of the lowest class. There I have lived as women live who are slaves. I never left that inn until last night. Once more I overheard a conspiracy against you. I escaped from the window by means of a rope, which broke. Now you are saved, let me go; it is not fit that you should stay any longer in the company of a woman like me."

"Hush!" cried Fide-Yori; "what you tell me breaks my heart. But do you think that I could cease to love you? What! It was for my sake you were reduced to servitude; for my sake you have suffered. You have saved my life twice, and you think I would forsake you I would scorn you? You are crazy. I love you more than ever. You shall be queen; do you hear me? How many women in your condition have been bought and married by nobles. You are here; you shall not leave me."

"O master!" exclaimed Omiti, "I conjure you, remember your rank; think of the duty you owe to yourself; do not yield to a passing desire!"

"Hush, cruel girl!" said the King. "I swear that if you continue to drive me to despair I will slay myself at your feet!"

Fide-Yori put his hand to his sword.

"Oh! no, no!" shrieked the girl, turning ashy pale "I am your slave; do with me as you will."

"My beloved queen!" cried Fide-Yori, clasping her in his arms, "you are my equal, my companion, and not my slave. It is not merely from a spirit of obedience that you yield, is it?"

"I love you!" whispered Omiti, raising her beautiful eyes, wet with tears, to the King.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HENCEFORTH MY HOUSE SHALL BE AT PEACE.

The leaders of the conspiracy were all arrested at the Day-break Inn; but the soldiers of Hieyas, warned betimes, did not disembark; so that although the Shogun was certain that Hieyas was the secret head of the plot, no positive proof could be brought against him. Still it was evident that civil war was about to break out again. General Yoke-Moura thought that it would be best to take the initiative, and carry the war into the enemy's country. The other generals, on the contrary, desired to collect all their forces in and around Osaka, and wait.

Discord ensued among the leaders. "You are too rash," they said to Yoke-Moura.

"You are fools," replied the General.

No decision was reached. Fide-Yori, absorbed in his happiness, would not hear any mention of the war. "Let my generals do their work," said he.

At the entreaty of the Prince of Nagato, however, he sent to Hieyas an aged officer named Kiomassa, whose prudence and devotion were well known.

"Let him go to Mikawa under the guise of peace," said the Prince, "and endeavor to find out whether Hieyas really means to resume the war. The Mikado ordered him to preserve the peace; the first who infringes upon his decree will incur his wrath. If war is inevitable, let our enemy be the first to offend. Kiomassa owns a castle in the outskirts of Mikawa; he can pay a visit to Hieyas on his way to his estates without rousing suspicion."

General Kiomassa set off, escorted by three thousand troops. "I have come to make you a neighborly call," said he to Hieyas, as he entered the castle of Mikawa.

Hieyas received him with a mocking smile. "I have always held you in high esteem," he said, "and I am delighted that chance has brought you hither. I said this morning to the nobles of my household, on hearing of your arrival in my dominions, that, save for three things, I saw nothing to reprove in you."

"And what are those three things?" said Kiomassa.

"First, you travel with an army, which is strange in time of peace; second, you possess a fortress, which seems to threaten my provinces; third and last, you let your beard grow under your chin,

contrary to the prevailing style."

Kiomassa answered without seeming disturbed: "I travel with an army to preserve myself from all danger, for I think the roads insecure; I have a fortress, of course, for the lodgment of that army. As for my beard, it is very useful to me; when I tie my helmet on, it makes a little cushion under my chin, and keeps it from being chafed."

"Very good; keep your beard, but shave away your castle," said Hieyas, smiling; "your soldiers will help you with the work."'

"If you insist upon it, I will ask Fide-Yori whether he will authorize me to yield the castle up to you. I shall soon return to my master. Have you no message to send him!"

"You may tell him that I am angry with him," said Hieyas.

"For what cause?"

"Because he has graven the characters composing my name on the bronze bell which he consecrated to the temple of Buddha, and they are beaten morning and night."

"What do you mean?" cried Kiomassa. "Fide-Yori had these words inscribed upon the bell: 'Henceforth my house shall be at peace.'"

"I tell you that all the characters in my name are used to make up that sentence; and it is upon my name the priest strikes with his bronze mallet, accompanying the blow with curses on my head."

"I will inform the Shogun that this coincidence offends you," said Kiomassa, without losing one whit of his composure.

He returned to Osaka, and told how he was received by Hieyas. The mocking insolence and the idle quarrel picked by the aged Regent were a sufficient indication of his hostile purpose, which he did not even try to disguise.

"His conduct is equivalent to a declaration of war," said Fide-Yori; "we should consider it as such. However, we will make no attack. Let Hieyas stand forth; he will not do so immediately; we shall, undoubtedly, have time to re-dig the moats around the castle. Let the work be begun at once."

Some time after this, Fide-Yori repudiated his wife, the granddaughter of Hieyas, and sent her back to her grandfather. He at the same time announced his speedy marriage with Omiti, to whom he had given the title of Princess of Yamato.

The two lovers forgot the rest of the world; their happiness blinded them; they had no room for thought of the dangers which threatened them. Besides, to them the only misfortune possible was to be parted; and they were sure, if any disaster occurred, that they could at least die together.

They had revisited the lemon grove. Delicate buds began to stud the branches, for spring comes quickly in that climate. The last snow has scarcely melted when the trees grow green. They wandered down the misty garden-paths, hand in hand, enjoying the bliss of being together, of seeing one another otherwise than in imagination or in a dream; for they adored each other, but did not know each other. They had met for an instant only, and the mental image which each had preserved of the other was incomplete and rather different from reality. Every moment brought them some fresh surprise.

"I thought you were shorter," said Fide-Yori.

"Your eyes seemed to me proud and scornful," said Omiti; "but they are full of infinite tenderness."

"How sweet your voice is, my beloved!" resumed the King; "my memory perverted its divine music."

Sometimes they embarked in a little boat, and with one stroke of the oar reached the middle of the pond. Upon the bank a tall willow dipped its long green branches in the water; the stiff leaves of the iris pierced the liquid mirror; and water-lilies bloomed on its surface. The betrothed pair cast their lines, and the hook sank, making a series of circles on the water. But the fish nibbled in vain; in vain the light float hovering on the surface of the pond danced a reckless measure; they heeded it not. From one end of the boat to the other, they gazed fondly at each other. But sometimes they noticed that the fish set them at nought; then their clear laughter rang out, mingling with the song of the birds.

He was twenty-three, she eighteen. Yet it was Omiti who occasionally concerned herself about the war. "Do not forget your duties as a king in your love for me," said she; "do not forget that we are threatened with war."

"Your heart is at peace with mine," said Fide-Yori; "why do you talk of war?"

However, the Shogun might safely devote himself to his love. The Prince of Nagato took his place, arranged the defence, and strove to bring about harmony among the generals, who were all at odds, and only thought of thwarting one another. Harounaga in particular gave him abundant cause for anxiety. He forbade his men to dig the moat around the castle. "That is work for slaves," said he; "and you are warriors."

The soldiers of the other companies, unwilling to be less sensitive than their comrades, in their turn refused to work. So that after the lapse of a month and a half children could still run up and down into the moat at play. Nagato was obliged to inflict severe punishments, and order was restored by degrees.

Signenari pitched his camp on the plain to the north of the city; Yoke-Moura took up his quarters on the hill called Yoka-Yama, and Harounaga on Tchaousi-Yama. All the rest of the troops guarded the shore, or were collected in the fortress. Moreover, Nagato had charged Raiden and his mates to enlist all who would fight; and the brave sailors had gathered ten thousand volunteers.

Thus defended, it was difficult to take the city by surprise. Nagato's eagle eye was everywhere; he had fortified the two bastions which stand at the entrance to Osaka, on either side of the river. By the help of the canals intersecting the entire town, by destroying a certain number of bridges, he had contrived to make a moat, and to insulate the district containing the fortress. The Prince seemed unwearied. With such a leader, who thought of everything, and kindled the ardor of the troops by his words and his example, the city might be defended, and still hope. But all at once Nagato left Osaka.

One evening a horseman paused at the door of his palace. Nagato recognized Farou-So-Chan, one of the nobles especially attached to the service of the Kisaki. Iwakura never saw any one who came from the Dairi without a palpitation of the heart. On this occasion his emotion was yet more marked. Farou-So-Chan was charged with a particular and secret mission.

"Here is a letter which the Kisaki directed me to place in your hands," said he, with a melancholy gravity which struck Nagato.

He unfolded the letter with trembling fingers; it exhaled the delicate perfume which he loved so much.

It read as follows:—

> "On the tenth day of the fifth moon go to the province of Ise, to the temple of Ten-Sio-Dai-Tsin, at nightfall; kneel on the threshold of the temple and remain in prayer until a young priest approaches you and touches you on the shoulder; then rise and follow him; he will conduct you to me."

Nagato lost himself in conjectures. What could be the meaning of this singular tryst at the doors of the temple of the Sun-Goddess in the province of Ise? Was it a trap? No; for Farou-So-Chan was the messenger. But then he should see her again; all anxiety faded before that delightful prospect.

The tenth day of the fifth moon was the very next day but one. The Prince had barely time to reach the spot at the hour appointed, and he started in haste.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HIGH-PRIESTESS OF THE SUN.

The earliest temple to Ten-Sio-Dai-Tsin is situated in the province of Ise, and is bathed by the waves of the Pacific Ocean. According to sacred legend, the Goddess Sun was born upon the very site of the temple.

Here antique tradition and vague legends of a bygone age are religiously preserved by the priests, who meditate upon the deep meaning of their symbolism.

In the mysterious time before the world existed, the confused assemblage of elements floated in space. That which afterwards became earth, that which became the heavens, was then mingled together as the yolk and the white are blended in the embryo egg.

But three immaterial gods arose,—the Supreme God, the Creator of Souls, and the Creator of Matter; and chaos ceased. The heavy and opaque bodies were gathered together, and formed the earth; the light and subtile portions rose, and became the heavens.

Soon from the soft and slimy mass constituting the earth arose, among the floating fogs, a half-open, velvety flower, bearing in its cup the nascent Reed God. He brooded for countless years over the infant world. The Spirit of the Waters came after him, and reigned for a thousand million years.

During these immeasurable periods of time one god succeeded to another in heaven, until the seventh of the divine dynasties ruled in the invisible ether.

One day, from the height of a bridge that spanned the clouds, the God Iza-Na-Gi and his companion, Iza-Na-Mi, looked down upon the earth.

"I see nothing but an immense expanse of waters," said the God.

He stirred the surface of the sea with his jewel-tipped spear; the mud and ooze bubbled, rose, and spread over the waters. Thus the primitive island of Japan was formed. Soon it was covered with vegetation; it was peopled with birds and beasts, and became so attractive that Iza-Na-Gi and his companion descended and came to dwell there. The birds taught them love, and the Sun-Goddess was born; then the divine couple gave birth to the Spirits of the Wind, the Rain, and the Volcano; to the Moon God, "who gazes through the darkness of night;" and finally to the first men, whose posterity peopled the island. Then the creators of Japan re-ascended to heaven,

confiding the government of the world to their beloved daughter, the Sun-Goddess.

All the subjects of the bright divinity are bound, at least once in their lifetime, to make a pilgrimage to her temple at Naikou, to purify their souls. Therefore that city is always thronged with pilgrims coming and going,—some in norimonos or on horseback; others,—and these are more meritorious,—on foot, carrying a straw mat which serves as bed, and a long wooden spoon, to dip water from the roadside stream.

The temple is of the utmost simplicity of construction. It is a small structure, open on one side, surmounted by a broad thatched roof, surrounded by hundred-year-old cedars, and preceded at the distance of twenty paces by a tory, or sacred gateway, composed of two tall posts leaning slightly together, and united at the top by two crossbeams, the uppermost being arched upwards at the ends. The temple contains nothing but a large round mirror of polished metal,—symbol of purity and perspicacity.

Opposite this mirror, upon the few wooden steps leading to the temple, the Prince of Nagato knelt at the moment appointed by the Kisaki. It was already night; the moon had risen, and its light, broken by the thick screen of leaves and branches, fell upon the ground. Solitude reigned around the temple; the priests had returned to the sumptuous pagodas adjacent to this rustic monument of the earliest ages; the pilgrims had departed; nothing was to be heard but the low rustle of the cedars in the wind.

The Prince listened. Involuntarily impressed by the sanctity of the spot, the night seemed strangely solemn to him. The silence was somewhat menacing; the shade of the cedars was hostile; the azure eye of the moon seemed to weep upon his upturned face. Why did such unspeakable agony oppress his soul? What was he about to hear? Why was the Queen at Naikou, instead of at her palace? A hundred times he asked himself these questions, which he could not answer.

At last he felt a light touch on his shoulder; he rose; a young bonze stood beside him; he walked away without a word. Nagato followed.

They traversed bamboo groves, avenues of cedars, and reached a broad stone staircase, rising between two slopes, upon which the moon cast a snowy light; they climbed these stairs, leading to the terrace of a high pagoda, whose pointed roof, narrow as an inverted lily, was terminated by a slender spire.

The young bonze paused, signed to Nagato to remain where he was, and retired. The Prince then saw a white form issuing from the pagoda and advancing towards him from the shadow of the roof. The light of the moon struck full upon it, and he recognized the Kisaki. She was clad in a long sleeveless tunic of white silk, over a garment of cloth of gold. It was the dross of the high-priestess of the Sun.

"Queen!" cried the Prince, springing toward her, "am I the victim of a dream? That dress—"

"Is henceforth mine, Iwakura," said she. "I have laid aside my crown; I have drawn nearer to Heaven. Still, from a last feeling of weakness, I wanted to see you once more, to bid you farewell for ever."

"Ah! perjured one!" exclaimed the Prince; "so this is the way you keep your promises!"

"Come," said the Queen, "the night is mild; let us leave this exposed place."

They entered a long path bordered with bushes and filled with silvery mists.

"Listen," said she; "and do not condemn me unheard. Many things have happened since you left Kioto. Know, friend, that on the day,—the recollection of which still charms me against my will,—the day on which you saved me, and we talked together so long, sitting beneath a bush, a man was listening to all we said."

"Impossible!" cried the Prince, in alarm.

"It is true; he who carried me off, instead of escaping, returned and overheard us. He was a spy of Hieyas. That perfidious wretch knew how to profit by the secret which his servant discovered; he revealed it to the Mikado. At first the Son of the Gods was incredulous; he was filled with indignation against the infamous villain who stained the land with blood. But by skilful wiles Hieyas contrived to change the sentiments of the Mikado, and to win his confidence. He cited, as a proof of our guilty understanding, your devotion and heroic conduct at the time of the attack on Kioto. Then the Son of the Gods called me to him, and when I stood before him he handed me a paper upon which our conversation was reported, but perverted and made infamous. Falsehood never stained my lips. I proudly owned that my heart was yours, though never while I lived should I have cause to blush for my deeds. But after this confession I could no longer remain at the Dairi. The high-priestess of Ten-Sio-Dai-Tsin had died some time previous. She was my husband's sister. I asked permission to fill her sacred office, desiring to end my life in retreat. The Mikado at once sent me the title that I craved, and a few days later married the granddaughter of Hieyas,—a child of fifteen."

"Oh, grief!" exclaimed the Prince, falling at the Queen's feet. "For my sake, you have descended from your throne; you have left the palace of your ancestors, to kneel, sad and alone, in the shade of a temple,—you, the smiling divinity whom a whole nation adored."

"I shall love this solitude, Iwakura," said she. "Here at least I am free; I am delivered from the affection of a husband whom I did not love, although he was a god. My thoughts shall be wholly yours."

"Why will you not fly with me? Have we not suffered enough? You love me, and I only breathe because you are on this earth. Why should we torture ourselves thus? Come! Let us exile ourselves! You are my country; my world is the spot where your feet rest! What do we care for what the gossips say? The celestial music of our love will drown their despicable voices. What does the bird who soars aloft, intoxicated with light, care for the hiss of the reptiles writhing in the swampy mire?"

"Hush, friend!" said she; "do not make me repent my wish to see you once more."

"Why will you not hear me? why are you so merciless, so cruel? If your husband has taken another wife, you are free."

"No, Prince, I have not fallen so low; the Mikado has added one more to the number of his wives, but he has not raised her to the rank which I held. I am his equal, and he is still my lord and master. If I were really free, despite the blame I might incur, I would drain the nuptial cup with you, and I would live wherever you liked."

"Ah! I will kill the man who parts us!" cried the Prince, whose mind began to wander.

"Silence, Iwakura!" said the Queen, in a grave voice. "Behold the dress I wear; think what I am. Henceforth I belong to this world no more; its fevers, its follies can touch me no longer. Purified by the divine flame of the Sun, I must meditate upon her mysterious and creative essence, become absorbed in her splendor, let her rays penetrate my being, identify myself with her light, and become as pure as she, until the day when my soul shall fly hence and receive its merited reward."

"Forgive me!" said the Prince. "What matters one man's despair? I was mad to entreat you. See, I am calm now,—calm as the dead in their tombs. Forgive me for offending your ears by my too human words."

"I have power to pardon you now," said she; "and I absolve you with all my soul. Rise, friend! we must part."

They retraced their steps. At the end of this path, bathed in diffused light, all would be over for them; they must part to meet no more. Involuntarily the high-priestess slackened her pace. The Prince's sudden calm terrified her; she felt assured that it was the result of an irrevocable resolve. He was silent, and gazed at her with a peaceful expression.

"He means to die," thought she. But she felt that nothing she might say would shake him in his determination.

They had reached the end of the garden-walk, and advanced along the terrace.

"Farewell!" said she.

As she uttered the word, her heart seemed to break within her; she was on the point of falling into the Prince's arms, exclaiming: "Take me; let us go where you will!"

"Farewell!" he whispered; "do not forget that you have given me your tryst on the threshold of another life."

She fled with a sob. As she reached the pagoda, she turned back for the last time. She seemed some super-natural being, standing in the moonlight, in her robe of gold, which glittered beneath her silk tunic, white as her face. Iwakura stretched out his arms to her; but the high-priestess of the Sun vanished in the darkness, which wrapped her round and hid her forever.

CHAPTER XXX.

BATTLES.

Heiyas was at the gates of Osaka with an army of three hundred thousand men. Coming from the northern provinces, he had traversed the great Island of Nipon, crushing, as he passed, the detachments stationed to guard the country. The soldiers of Fide-Yori died like heroes; not one flinched. The troops of the princes, on the contrary, made but a feeble resistance. However, it was impossible to stay the course of Hieyas' army, mighty as a river swollen by rain. It reached Osaka, and surrounded the city. Without pausing for rest, it attacked the town simultaneously on every side.

Fide-Yori had divided his army into three bodies of fifty thousand each: Signenari and Moritzka commanded the first; Harounaga, Moto-Tsoumou, and Aroufza, the second; Yoke-Moura, the third. The soldiers were valiant; their leaders determined to die if they could not conquer.

The first shock of arms was terrible. The men fought with unparalleled fury and desperation. Had their numbers been equal, Fide-Yori's troops must have carried the day; they were so resolved to be slaughtered rather than retreat, that they were not to be shaken. General Yoke-Moura was attacked by twenty thousand men armed with muskets, having himself but ten thousand stationed on the hill called Yoka-Yama; his men also had guns. One discharge of musketry followed another in rapid succession, until the ammunition was exhausted. Yoke-Moura was only waiting for that moment, having noticed that his adversaries were merely armed with guns and swords, and carried no lances. He then rushed headlong down the hill. His troops, lance in hand,

fell upon their opponents, who, almost defenceless, fled in disorder.

Signenari, too, after a bloody battle succeeded in driving back the enemy; but at all other points the generals, overwhelmed by numbers, were defeated, and forced to retreat into the interior of the town with what soldiers remained to them.

Evening came, and brought a pause in the fighting. The weary soldiers lay down in the city streets, on the bridges, on the banks of the various canals. Signenari and Yoke-Moura alone were still outside Osaka, one on the plain, the other on the hill.

When night had fairly come, a man advanced to the foot of Yoka hill and asked to speak with General Sanada-Sayemon-Yoke-Moura, having a message from Hieyas. He was conducted to the warrior's tent, and Yoke-Moura recognized one of his former companions-in-arms.

"You come from Hieyas? You!" exclaimed the General, in a tone of reproach.

"Yes, friend, I believe in the powerful genius of that man; I know how much his triumph will benefit the nation. And yet, now that I stand before you, I scarcely dare mention the offer which I am directed to make you."

"Then it is a disgraceful one."

"Judge for yourself. Hieyas feels the highest respect for your valor, and he thinks that to vanquish you would be a defeat for him; because your death would rob the country of its noblest soldier. He proposes that you should join his standard; your terms shall be his."

"If Hieyas really feels a particle of respect for me," replied Yoke-Moura, "why does he feign to think me capable of selling myself? You can tell him that were he to give me half Japan, I would not even consider his offer; and that it is my glory to remain loyal to the master whom I have always served, and for whom I would gladly die."

"I was prepared for your answer; and if I accepted the mission offered to me, it was only from a desire to see my old comrade once more."

"You did not fear the just reproaches I might lavish upon you?"

"No; for I did not feel myself guilty. Now a strange remorse torments me at the sight of your calm, brave loyalty. I see that my deeds, dictated by wisdom, are not worth the folly of your blind fidelity."

"Well! it is not too late to repent; stay with us."

"I will do so, friend. If I fail to return, Hieyas will understand that the man who came to buy you with bribes has given you his soul."

The same proposal was made to General Signenari.

"Hieyas offers to gratify my every desire!" exclaimed the youthful General. "Very well; then let him send me his head!"

Next day considerable forces were gathered before Signenari's camp. The young warrior knew that the battle in which he was about to engage must be his last. He went the rounds of the camp, exhorting his men before the fight. Grave, gentle, and handsome as any woman, he passed along the ranks, telling his attentive men how slight a value should be attached to life; not hiding the fact that the result of the day must be either death or dishonor. He added that a glorious death was enviable, and the life of a coward not worth that of a dog.

He then returned to his tent, and despatched a message to his mother, informing her that he was about to die, and sending her a costly dagger in remembrance of himself. Next he stepped to the mirror; and pouring perfume upon his head, placed on it his helmet of black horn, crowned in front with a copper plate of crescent shape; he tied it under his chin, and cut the loose ends of silk cord. This signified that he would never untie them again; that he vowed himself to death. If his head were taken to the victor, the latter would understand that he had allowed himself to be killed voluntarily.

The battle began, Signenari opening the attack; he rushed eagerly forward at the head of his men. The first of the fight was favorable to them; they broke the enemy's ranks, and slaughtered great numbers of them. Signenari's army, decimated the night before, and reduced to scanty numbers, pierced the enemy's ranks as a ship ploughs through the waves; but they closed behind the little band, who were surrounded and captured, but still undaunted. The soldiers of Hieyas thought they had imprisoned the whirlwind. Desperate men are terrible. The carnage was awful; the wounded went on fighting; the earth, bathed in blood, grew slippery; men stumbled in the mud; it seemed almost as if it had rained. But ten thousand men could not hold out long against one hundred thousand. Still the heroes who encircled the youthful leader were not conquered; they did not flinch; they met death on the ground that had been wrested from them. But their numbers lessened rapidly; soon there was nothing left in the centre of the army but a vast heap of corpses. Signenari, covered with wounds, fought on like a lion; he was alone. The enemy wavered before him, they admired his courage; but some one shot an arrow at him, and he fell.

Hieyas was on the battle-field in a litter. His men brought him the fair young head of Signenari. He saw that the helmet-strings were cut, and inhaled the perfume with which the hair was soaked.

"He preferred death to joining my cause," he said, with a sigh. "This victory saddens me as if it were a defeat."

The same day Fide-Yori, sending for Yoke-Moura, asked him what now remained to be done.

"We must attempt a general sortie to-morrow," he replied. "All the remnants of the various armies assembled in the city make a sum total of about sixty thousand men; to which we must add the garrison of the fortress, the ten thousand men still left of my command, and the ten thousand volunteers that you have collected. We may venture to undertake the struggle."

"Shall you return to the city?" asked the Shogun.

"It will be better, I think, for me to keep my advanced position on the hill. When the army is set in motion I will attack the enemy from another point, so that he may be obliged to divide his forces."

All the officers were called together for consultation. The gravity of the situation silenced the quarrels which usually separated them; all yielded to Yoke-Moura.

"The enemy's forces extend entirely round the city," said the General; "so that at whatever point you make your attack, you will be met by numbers fully equal to your own. The sortie must be effected on the south, so that, if possible, you may drive the enemy into the sea. Lot the leaders cheer their men by word and deed, and we may triumph yet.".

"I will take my place at the head of the army," cried Fide-Yori. "Let the royal insignia, borne before my father in battle, be drawn from their velvet cases, and the gilded gourds mounted on scarlet handles, which have always been the signal for victory whenever they appeared, be brought forward. That reminder of Taiko-Sama will inspire the men; it will recall the former triumphs, the glorious battles won in its shadow. This talisman will protect us, and will fill the perfidious Hieyas with alarm, calling up before him the image of the man whose trust he has betrayed."

The generals returned to their troops, to prepare them for the decisive battle of the morrow. Fide-Yori hastened to his betrothed. "This may be the last day that we shall spend together," he said; "I must not lose a second of it."

"What say you, sire?" asked Omiti. "If you die, I die too; and we shall be reunited—to part no more."

"Never mind," said the King, with a sad smile; "I could wish that our happiness had lasted a little longer upon this earth,—it has been so brief, and my misery so long. And you! so gentle, so devoted, you have suffered ills of every sort for my sake; and for your reward, when I longed to load you with riches, honors, and joy, I can only offer you the spectacle of the horrors of war and the prospect of speedy death."

"You gave me your love," replied Omiti.

"Oh, yes!" cried the King; "and that love, which was my first, would have been my last; it would have filled my whole life. Why can I not carry you far from here,—escape this struggle and this slaughter? What care I for power? It never gave me any pleasure. To live with you in some deep retreat, forgetting men and their guilty ambitions,—that would be true felicity."

"Let us not think of that," said Omiti; "it is an idle dream. To die together is an additional delight, which will not be denied us."

"Alas!" cried the Shogun, "my youth revolts at the thought of death. Since I have found you again, dear heart, I have forgotten the contempt which I was taught for this transitory life; I love it, and I would not quit it."

Under cover of night, Harounaga contrived to regain the heights of Tchaousi, which he had lost. General Yoke-Moura had advised him to make the attempt, whose success would allow him to protect the Shogun's sally.

All was ready for the final effort: the soldiers were full of ardor; their leaders were hopeful. Fide-Yori was encouraged; he believed that they would be victorious. One thing, however, grieved him, and that was the absence at this supreme moment of his most faithful friend, his wisest counsellor, the Prince of Nagato. What had become of him? What had happened to him? No news had been heard of him since he left Osaka so abruptly, three weeks before.

"He is dead, since he is not by my side in the hour of danger," thought the Shogun, sighing heavily.

From the earliest dawn the inhabitants of Osaka thronged the approaches to the fortress; they wanted to see the Shogun come forth from the castle in battle array, in the midst of his richly dressed warriors. While they waited they chatted with the soldiers encamped in the streets, pouring them out bumpers of saki. The aspect of the city was joyful; in spite of all that had occurred, the gay disposition of the citizens gained the upper hand. They were going to see a fine sight; they were happy.

Towards the eighth hour the gates of the second wall of the stronghold were opened wide, and revealed a confused mass of banners floating among the bright rays of the tall spears.

The first division of the Shogun's lancers advanced, wearing cuirasses; on their heads the helmet with visor, hollowed at the neck, and ornamented over the forehead with a sort of copper crescent; lance in hand, a little flag fastened behind the left shoulder. Then came the archers, their brows bound with a strip of white stuff, the ends streaming behind them, their backs bristling with long arrows, holding in their hands the tall lacquer bow. After them marched strange creatures, who looked more like huge insects or fantastic shellfish than like men. Some wore above their grinning black masks a large helmet decked with copper antennæ; others had their heads adorned with monstrous horns curving inward, and their masks bristled with red or white mustaches and eyebrows; or else they had a hood of mail brought over the face and head,

leaving nothing visible but their eyes. The plates of their armor, made of black horn, were square, heavy, and oddly arranged; still, beneath the parti-colored silken stitches fastening the sheets of horn together, they produced a fine effect. These warriors, dressed as were their ancestors, were armed with halberds, monstrous bows, and two-handed swords. They filed by in long lines, to the great admiration of the people. At last Fide-Yori appeared upon a horse with braided mane. Before him were borne the gilded gourds, which had never been taken from the castle since the last victories of Taiko-Sama. They were hailed with enthusiastic shouts.

"I intrust them to you," cried Fide-Yori, showing his army the glorious insignia. He said no more; and drawing his sword, rode off at a gallop.

The whole army, moving with heroic impetus, left the city. The people followed them beyond the suburbs.

From the summit of the hill, Yoke-Moura watched Fide-Yori and his troops march out from Osaka and deploy in the plain. He awaited the Shogun's first offensive movement to attack Hieyas' men.

"Certainly," thought the General, "victory is possible. Signenari, who met death so nobly yesterday, did the enemy much injury; I myself repulsed with considerable loss the detachment which attacked my position. We may cut to pieces that division of the army upon which the Shogun pounces. Then the two hostile forces will be almost equal; and with equal numbers we shall surely triumph."

Fide-Yori's army halted on the plain, occupying the ground where Signenari's camp had been pitched the day before.

"What can they be waiting for?" wondered Yoke-Moura; "why do they pause in their forward movement?"

The leaders ran to the flanks of the various battalions. Strange agitation prevailed in the ranks; evidently something new had occurred. They hesitated; they were making plans. All at once the whole army wavered, faced about, and retracing their steps, re-entered the city.

"What does that mean?" cried Yoke-Moura, amazed, and pale with rage. "What sudden madness has seized upon them? It is a mockery! Are they cowards?"

The soldiers of Hieyas then advanced across the plain abandoned by Fide-Yori. At the same moment Yoke-Moura's men gave the alarm. They were attacked on two sides at once.

"It is well," said Yoke-Moura; "all is now lost."

He summoned his young son, Daiske.

"My son," said he, "return to the city; rejoin the Shogun, and say to him that nothing is left for me now but to die a glorious death for him, as I intend to do before evening. Remain with the master while he lives, and die with him."

"Father," said Daiske, casting an imploring look at the General, "I would rather die with you."

"Do as I bid you, my son," said Yoke-Moura, his voice trembling slightly.

A tear rolled down the boy's cheek; but he made no answer, and went. The General watched him for an instant as he descended the hill, sighed, and then plunged abruptly into the thick of the fight.

Without resistance, without exchanging one shaft with the enemy, the Shogun's army had returned to the city in disorder! The people could not believe their own eyes. What had happened? Why should rout precede the battle? This is what really occurred: Harounaga, suddenly abandoning the position which he held on the hill, hastened towards Fide-Yori, accompanied by a man coming from the camp of Hieyas. This man, who was a relative of Hieyas, declared that the majority of the army had gone over to Hieyas, and that when the fight began Fide-Yori would be hemmed in and taken prisoner by his own men. He said that he had surprised this secret, and hastened to warn the Shogun, to prevent his falling into an odious trap.

"Return to the fortress," said he to Fide-Yori. "In the shelter of its ramparts you may defend yourself still, and die nobly; while here you are at the victor's mercy."

After some hesitation the troops returned to the city. This tale of treachery was completely false: it was an act of perfidy planned by Hieyas, who, although he was strong, did not disdain to employ a ruse. But the people refused to accept the plea; the retreat of the soldiers produced a fatal effect.

"They don't know how to behave!" was the cry.

"They are lost; all is ended!"—

"After all, it's no concern of ours."

Half the citizens began to desire the accession of Hieyas.

The Shogun had no sooner returned to his castle, than the hostile army attacked the outskirts of the city. The inhabitants shut themselves up in their houses. A terrible conflict ensued; the ground was defended inch by inch, and yet the enemy advanced. They fought in the narrow streets, on the brink of the canals, upon whose waves, red with blood, dead bodies rocked to and fro; every bridge was carried after a desperate struggle. Little by little, Fide-Yori's troops were driven back towards the fortress.

Inside the castle the confusion was great. No one thought of defending the outer wall; the

bastions no longer existed; the moat had not been re-dug to a depth of more than two feet. All withdrew into the second enclosure; but there they were too remote to offer any aid to those who fought. The latter, after three hours of struggle, were repulsed to the walls of the castle; they invaded the first courtyard, and shouted to those within to open the second, otherwise they must be crushed against the walls.

Yodogimi cried to the men to open the gates. All the doors were thrown wide at once, and the soldiers rushed in. But the enemy were at their heels; when they had passed, the doors could not be closed, and the followers of Hieyas came in behind them.

Fide-Yori, with a thousand men, had taken refuge in the third courtyard of the castle, which contained the great goldfish tower, the residence of the Shogun, and a few palaces of the most noble princes. He did not hope to to defend himself, but merely that he and his family might not be captured alive. In a hall of his palace, drawn sword in hand, between his mother and his betrothed, he gazed through the open window, and with bowed head listened to the awful clash of arms behind the second wall. Many of his troops surrendered. The man whose duty it was to guard the gilded gourds of Taiko-Sama, whose name was Tsou-Gawa, burned them outside the palace, before the eyes of Fide-Yori.

"All is over!" murmured the Shogun. "O you who are dearest in all the world to me, you must die for me and with me! I must take your life to save you from falling into the hands of the victors alive."

He looked at his naked blade; then raised his eyes to his mother and sweet Omiti with a bewildered air. "Is there no way to save them?" he cried; "to let them live? What does it matter to the victor, so I but die!"

"Live without you!" said Omiti, in a tone of reproach. Both women were pale, but calm.

"No, it is impossible!" suddenly exclaimed the Shogun. "I cannot see their blood flow; I cannot see them die; let me be the first to expire!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FUNERAL PILE.

"No one shall die!" suddenly shouted a voice, as Fide-Yori turned his blade against himself.

The Prince of Nagato appeared on the threshold; Loo stood beside him.

"Oh, my brother!" cried the Shogun, rushing towards him, "I did not hope to see you again."

"I knew that victory was impossible," said Nagato, "and I was busy preparing means for your escape when your final effort should fail. You are the sole offshoot of your race; you are vanquished now; but later your dynasty may flourish."

"Is it really in your power to save us?" said the Shogun.

"Yes, master," said Iwakura. "A boat awaits you on the shores of the Yedogawa; it is manned by Raiden, a brave sailor, whose loyalty I know. He will take you out to sea. There a large junk, belonging to the Prince of Satsuma, lies at anchor ready to receive you. As soon as you embark in her she will set sail for the Island of Kiu-Shiu. The lord of Satsuma, the most powerful prince of your kingdom, the most faithful of your subjects, will open his province and his castle to you; there you may live happily with the wife of your choice until the day of vengeance dawns."

"I recognize your untiring devotion," said the Shogun, his eyes dim with tears. "But how can I leave the castle,—how pass through the frenzied hordes which surround it,—without being massacred?"

"You will leave as I entered," said the Prince, "undisturbed by any one. If you will follow me to my palace," he added, bowing low to the two princesses, "I will show you the road that you must take to quit the fortress."

"Prince," said Yodogimi, "your generosity fills me with confusion; I, who have so often striven to injure you, now see how unjust and blind I was. Tell me that you pardon my past errors, or I cannot submit to be saved by you."

"I have nothing to forgive, Princess," said Nagato; "it is I who am guilty of the boundless misfortune to have displeased you."

"Come, let us begone," said the Shogun, "you can explain yourselves later."

They left the hall; Loo walked before.

In the outer court of the palace the insignia of Taiko-Sama still burned, forming a mass of smouldering coals. As he passed them, Fide-Yori turned away his head. They reached the Prince of Nagato's dwelling, and entered his chamber. The trap-door leading to the subterranean path by which the brave Sado was wont to gain admittance to the palace was open.

"This is the way," said he; "it leads to a fisherman's hut on the banks of the Yedogawa. There Raiden awaits you with the boat. Go; Loo will guide you through this underground road."

"What!" cried Fide-Yori, "will you not go with us?"

"No, master, I remain here; I have work yet to do."

"Are you mad? To linger in this palace, which will soon be entirely overrun! What have you yet to do? You will be unable to escape."

"Do not be anxious about me," said Iwakura, with a strange smile; "I shall escape, I promise you."

"Iwakura!" cried the Shogun, gazing at his friend in alarm, "you mean to die! I understand you; but I will not accept safety at such a price. I am master still, am I not? Very well; I command you to follow me."

"My beloved lord," said Nagato, in a firm voice, "if it be true that I have served you loyally, do not refuse me the first favor that I ask,—do not order me to leave this palace."

"I do not order, friend, I conjure you not to rob me of a companion such as you; I entreat you to fly with us."

"I join my supplications to those of my son," said Yodogimi; "do not send us forth with sorrow in our hearts."

"Illustrious Prince," said Omiti, in her sweet, shy tones, "it is the first time I have ever spoken to you; but I too would venture to entreat you not to persist in your cruel resolution."

Loo fell upon his knees. "Master!" he cried; but he could say no more, and burst into tears.

"I recommend this boy to you," said Nagato.

"Then you are deaf to our prayers?" said the Shogun. "Can nothing that we say move you?"

"If she were lost to you," said the Prince, turning to Omiti, "could you consent to live? Oh, cannot you, to whom I have confided the dread secret of my life, understand how painful my existence is? Do you not see the joy that sparkles in my eyes, now that I approach the end of my sufferings? Had I been unable to serve you, I should long since have ended the torment of life. You are not victorious, as I would wish to see you; but I behold you in some safe retreat, full of flowers, joy, and love. You will be happy, if not powerful; you need me no longer. I am free; I can die."

"Ah, cruel friend!" said Fide-Yori, "I see that your resolve is irrevocable."

"Make haste!" said the Prince; "you have delayed too long. Reach the shore; Raiden will conceal you under the sail in the bottom of the boat; then he will take the oars. Loo will hold the helm."

"No, no!" shrieked the boy, clinging fast to his master's dress, "I cannot go; I will die with you."

"Obedience is a good servant's first duty, Loo," said the Prince, gently. "I command you henceforth to obey the master of us both, and to serve him unto death."

Loo flung himself, sobbing, down the dark stairs of the underground passage. The two women followed him; then the Shogun descended in his turn.

"Farewell! farewell! my friend, my brother! noblest, best, most faithful of my subjects!" he exclaimed, his tears flowing fast.

"Farewell, illustrious friend!" said the Prince; "may your happiness last as long as your life!"

He then closed the trap-door. At last he was alone. Then he returned to the courtyard of the palace; and taking a burning brand from the still smouldering brazier, set fire to all the princely pavilions and to Fide-Yori's palace, going through every room. Then he reached the goldfish tower, and kindled a conflagration on every floor. At the top he flung away his brand, and leaned upon the red lacquer railing of the platform, which was surmounted by a broad roof turned up at the corners and supported by four substantial pillars.

The Prince gazed towards the sea. The little boat was already at the mouth of the Yedogawa. Alone upon the water, it seemed to attract the attention of the victorious soldiers encamped upon the beach; but Raiden the fisher cast his net, and the reassured soldiers allowed the boat to pass. In the offing the Prince of Satsuma's junk formed a tiny dark spot against the purple of the setting sun. The atmosphere was incomparably clear; the sea seemed like a huge turquoise.

The shouts of the soldiers were heard around the castle.

"Fide-Yori has set fire to the palace; he will perish in the flames," they yelled.

Those who were still within the shelter of the third courtyard opened the doors and rushed out; they surrendered. Besides, the battle had ceased; the Usurper was at the gate of the fortress. The spectators knelt as he passed; he was greeted with cheers, and proclaimed the sole and legitimate Shogun. This was on the second day of the sixth moon of the first year of Nengo-Gen-Va.[1]

From the summit of the tower the Prince of Nagato saw the litter in which Hieyas lay; he heard the triumphant clamor which hailed him.

"Glory and royal power are nothing in comparison with happy love," he murmured, turning back to look at the boat which held his friends.

It was out at sea now, out of reach of the soldiers; the sail was set, and the boat skimmed swiftly over the waves.

"They are safe," said the Prince.

Then he turned his eyes in another direction, towards Kioto and Naikou. He saw the beginning of

the road that leads to the sacred city, which he had travelled so often; he saw the coast outlined against the azure sea, and stretching away till it was lost in the distance, towards the province where the ancient temple of Ten-Sio-Dai-Tsin stands. He seemed longing to distinguish, across the distance, the form of her whom he was never to see again.

The sun disappeared; the glare of the conflagration began to overpower the light of day. The palace of the Shogun, at the foot of the tower, was a vast furnace, which, seen from above, appeared like a lake of fire tossed by a tempest. The flames surged and seethed, and reared lofty crests, like waves in a storm. Now and then a cloud of red smoke passed before the Prince's eyes, obscuring the horizon. The entire tower was burning; a fearful roar, mingled with a continual crackling sound, filled its walls. The topmost platform, however, was not yet kindled, but already the floor cracked and shook. A jet of flame leaped up and touched the edge of the roof.

"Come, liberating fire!" cried the Prince; "come and allay the devouring fires of my soul! Extinguish, if you can, the inextinguishable flame of my love."

He took from his bosom a crumpled paper, and unfolding it, raised it to his lips; then read it for the last time by the lurid light of the conflagration.

"One day these flowers hung their heads to die. They let fall their luminous soul like a diamond. Then the two drops of dew met at last, and were mingled in the stream."

The heat was intolerable. The paper suddenly blazed up in the Prince's fingers. He gasped for breath; he felt that he was dying.

"My beloved," he cried, "I go before! Do not make me wait too long at the tryst!"

Like the huge petals of a fiery flower, the flames shut in the last floor; they spread to the roof. The two monstrous goldfish writhed on the ridge-pole as if suddenly endowed with life; then they melted, and flowed down in two incandescent streams. Soon the entire edifice fell in with a terrible crash, and an immense sheaf of sparks and flame streamed up to heaven.

[1] June 2, 1615.

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