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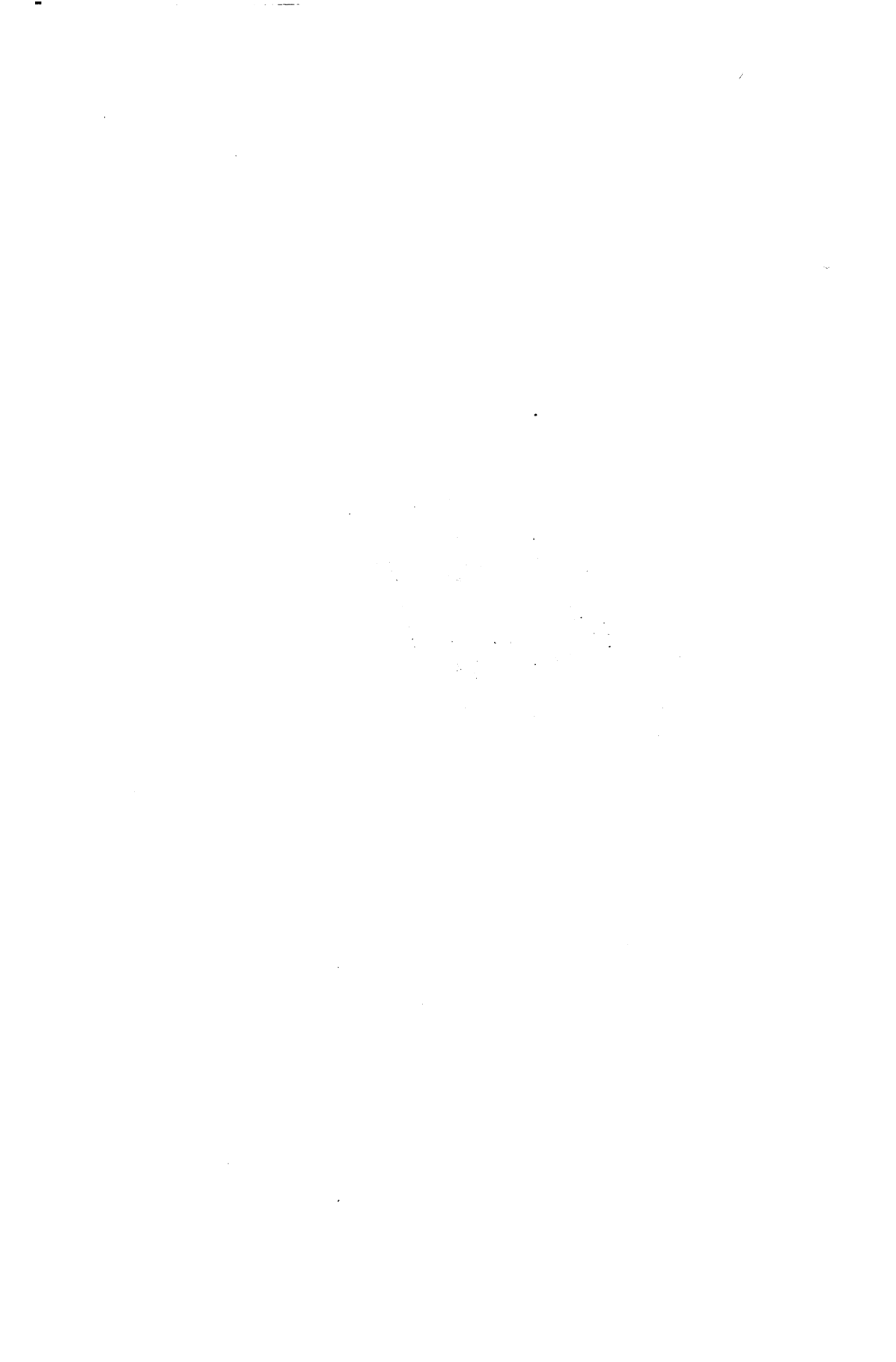
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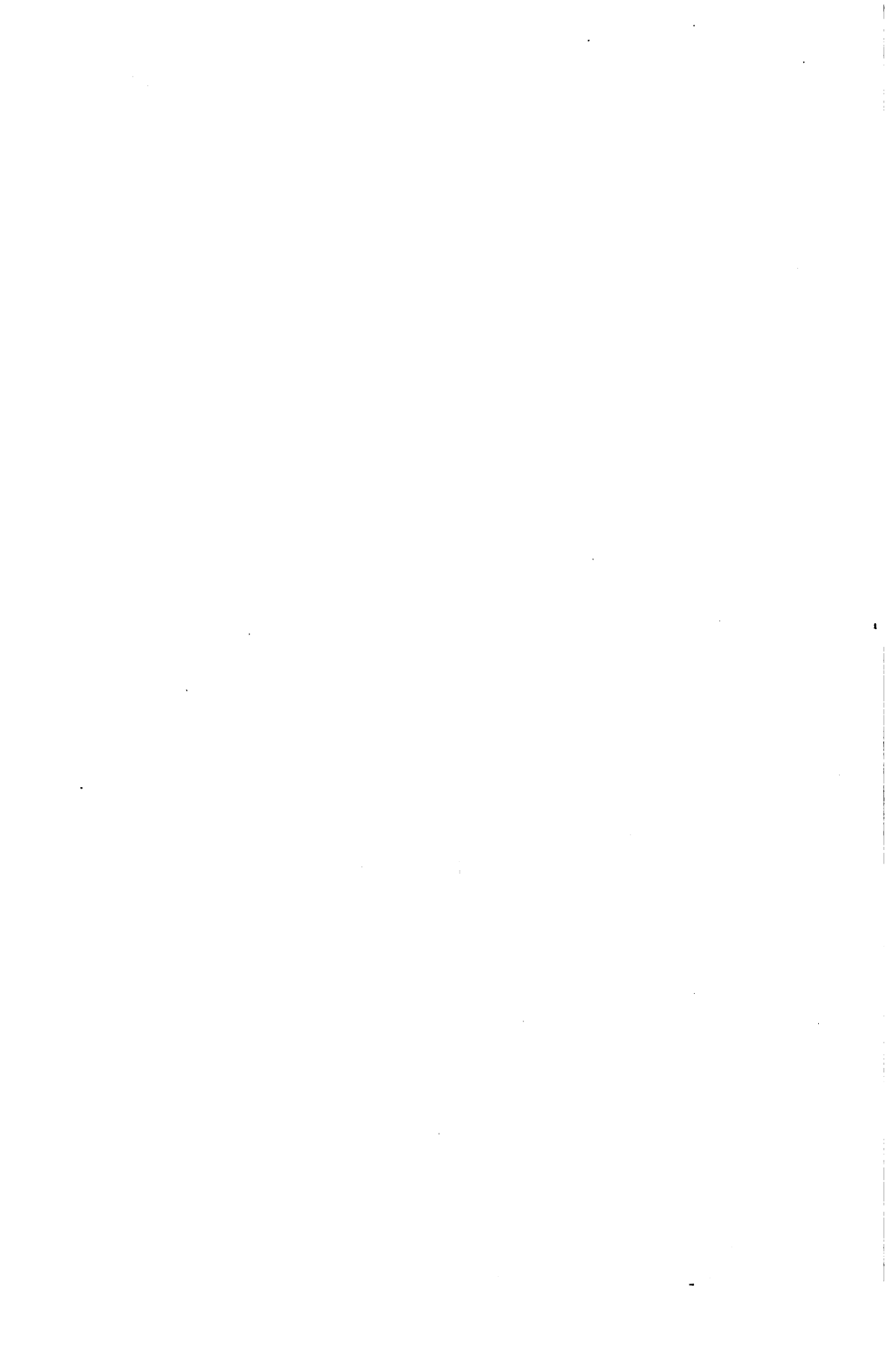
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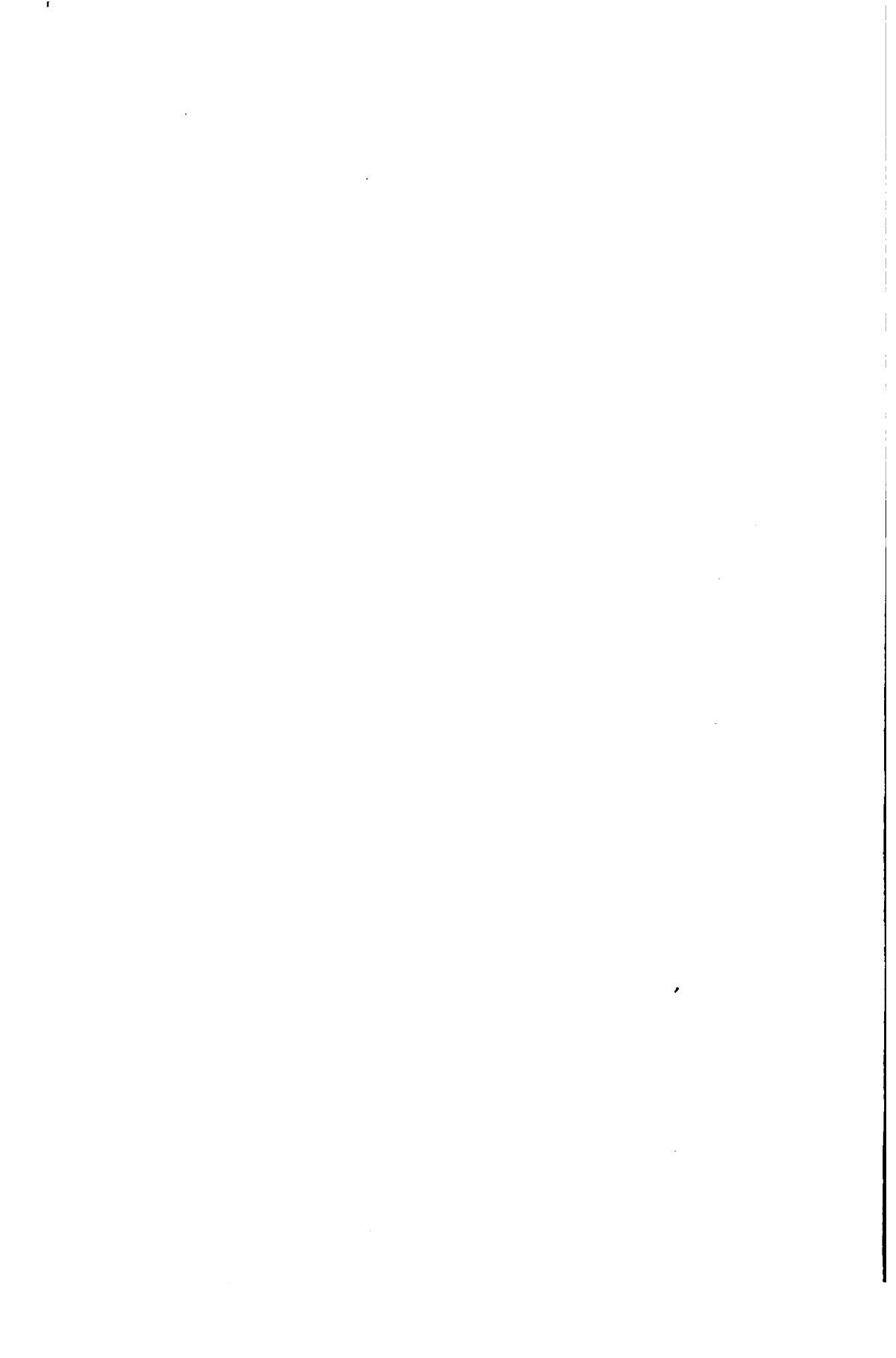
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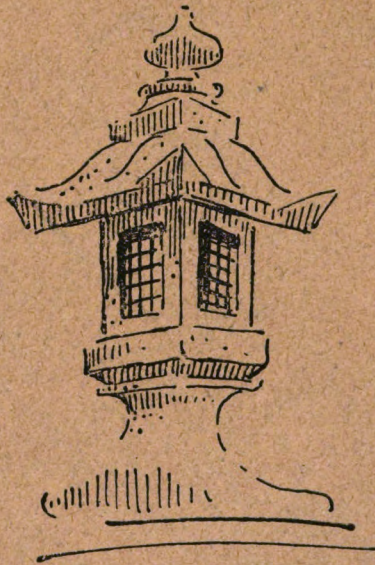
TK63 The Library of Czechoslovakian Authors

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FOUR ^{Z D A R M A I}
JAPANESE TALES

By

Jan Havlasa



Prague

Published by
The Czechoslovakian Foreigners' Office

1919



FOUR JAPANESE TALES



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Klecanda, Jan

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Edvard Leschinger Prague

P R E F A C E

Comparatively very little of Czech and Slovak literature is known to the British and American public, and our English speaking visitors have often complained of their inability to procure works of our fiction in translation. We have no doubt that the publishers of the United States of America and of Great Britain will in the near future see to satisfying the interest and curiosity of their public in this regard, and if we have decided to publish a few selections of the works of our authors in translation, we are led not so much by the wish to call attention to certain typically Czech authors as by the desire to show that unobserved by the world our writers could encompass the world and its highest ideals in their scope. We chose for the first volume of our little series a work by Jan Havlasa if for no other reason, because he is the only Czech fiction-writer expressing himself as readily in English as in his own language; and »Four Japanese Tales« are in fact not a translation but only the author's own English version of his Czech work. A still more decisive reason was our wish to show that sympathies extended to our Siberian army by the Japanese could only strengthen the interest that already existed in our nation for the Japanese before they became aware of our existence. It is well to mention that Mr. Jan Havlasa spent a whole year in Japan not long before the outbreak of the war writing about his experiences both in Czech and English. For the following volumes we prepare a selection from the writings of Otakar Březina, the foremost Czech poet, a selection of old Czech myths from the pen of the most beloved author of Bohemia, Alois Jirásek, a book of verses, translated by the well-known friend of the Czech nation, Mr. P. Selver, an anthology of the work of Viktor Dyk, and others.

K a r e l D o m i n, Ph. Dr.,
President of the Czechoslovakian Foreigners Office.



*To the Japanese Friends
of liberated
Czechoslovakia*





THE PAINTER OF CAMELLIAS.

History records that the first great native painter of Japan was the courtier Kose-no-Kanaoka, whose activity and fame were in flower at the end of the ninth and in the first half of the tenth century, and of whose works very few are extant. But history often makes mistakes, and therefore we must not be surprised that not with a single word does it mention Kose-no-Kanaoka's predecessor, who was without doubt the contemporary of the great Buddhist saint Kobo Daishi, and who, in an age when Chinese and Korean art held complete sway in Nippon, first began to look at the world around him with his own eyes, Japanese eyes, and to paint with his own brush, a Japanese brush. He it was who first had the idea to paint pictures on sliding screens, and thus ingeniously prevented a thing meant to conceal from reminding offensively of its original purpose; for then the screen at the same time disclosed views into the conceptions of refined minds, it opened a magic window into an imaginary world, and allowed him who stood or sat before it to forget that there was something or other behind it which was hidden to his sight and should remain untouched by his imagination as well. At least this much is registered by unreliable history: that at the emperor's court painting on screens was practiced in the ninth century, and that in the eleventh century Motomitsu founded the first native school of painting Yamato-ryu. In reality, however, the precursor if not the actual founder of the "Japanese school" was that forerunner of Motomitsu and Kose-no-Kanaoka, whose fate was sadder than that of the latter; for not only was no piece of his work preserved for posterity, but also his very name and memory fell into the absolute oblivion that so often is the lot of those who have the courage first to swim against the current.

Notwithstanding, he whose name is unknown to us bothered his head neither with thoughts as to how his contemporaries judged

his paintings nor with fears that future generations would slight or forget him. He was an artist because he knew how to see; and an artist who sees more or better than it is given to his contemporaries to see is never understood by them. He was an artist who, creating his own world, did not vex himself with those to whom this world remained foreign; but there were many who heard the spring breezes rustle in the bamboo shoots he painted on sliding-doors, who unbarred their souls to the charm of his white plum-blossoms, who comprehended that the mist rising above his lake-shores fringed with irises rose also above the beauty of their own native country, which was overlooked by the disciples of the Koreans and the Chinese. But then envy began to gnaw at the hearts of those who feared that their own narrow horizons would be overshadowed by the brush of the intruder; they raised hue and cry in the name of sacred tradition and effected his falling out of the good graces of the court before he could attain the emperor's favour. To this he was well-nigh insensible; for it was not his ambition to paint for the sake of praise, but to paint well. A cloud hanging on the gnarled and twisted branch of a pine fascinated him more than Chinese sages seated in the clouds; and his brush loved rather to quicken the outlines of beautiful boulders of which no one before him had taken any notice, than to make petrified symbols of the gods according to patterns repeated hundreds of times. He was visited by a suave courtier and refused to take an order for a picture in the Korean style; he did not know that he was in fact opposing the sovereign will of the court and falling into a snare prepared for him; he painted wisps of bamboo bending under the weight of snow, and in return for his efforts was banished to the north country where the snow lies on the mountains long after everything is green and blooming in the south.

He went away into exile contented that he would no longer be exposed to disturbing influences, whether of praise or of incomprehension; he found himself a dwelling in a secluded hamlet beneath the mountain pass called Shimizu, west of sacred Nikko, deep in the interior, in the neighborhood of the wild Ainus, who at that time still inhabited these regions; and roaming over the mountain paths, in wonder he opened his eyes, which day by day saw more and more of the things before hidden from them. There were days when his brush was paralyzed into inactivity, in despair over the manifold beauties that he did not wish to record but imperfectly. The secret of perspective was disclosed to his inner sight and tortured him; the feeling of latent movement embodied in a branch seemingly immobile, in a stone seemingly unfeeling, in the mist ensnared be-

tween clumps of bamboo, began to torment him by impressing on his mind that hitherto in his effort to see too much he had not seen enough. He wished his brush to picture the hidden soul of things, their mysterious life, their longings and dreams; and as the months went by, he understood ever more clearly that one human life was insufficient for the mastery of so much as he had attempted in the beginning, and he blessed the day that had brought him disfavour and expelled him into this country, where he had awoken to his former blindness. And upon his return from his ramble that day, he sat down to his work as if in a fever, without the slightest idea of what he was about to paint. Was it to be the snowdrift over which he had walked today, the snowdrift thawing under the June sun and pierced here and there by bamboo grass with leaflets of a rich blue-green hue, margined with yellow? Was it to be the great white chalices of wild magnolias, which had commanded his admiration beneath the pass? Or those graceful red camellias on the mountain slope which every day lured him into a wood of shining leaves sprinkled as if with drops of blood? His heart bled; and his brush pictured the excruciating desire of that poor heart in one single twig with three charming blossoms that opened beneath his hand in tremulous and sweet agitation. Never before had he been so well contented with his work; he felt that he had created life, or even more, that he had divined the meaning of life. There were people who heard the rustling of the spring breeze in his plume-like bamboos; but nobody had thought of listening in his paintings for the soul of the bamboo, for the soul of a nature. Nevertheless these three camellias seemed to him to be the first step into regions where he had never been before, and into which nobody's footprints could lead him.

He became a painter of camellias, partly out of gratitude, but mainly because he became aware of the strange fascination they had for him. His liking for them gradually deepened into passion. It was not long before all other things lost interest for him, and it seemed to him that before his love for camellias all had been but passing play, the whiling away of time, and impatient waiting for the Great Moment which had come upon the day when in his first painting of their flowers he had regained his lost contentment and self-confidence. He painted camellias as some paint again and again the portrait of a beloved woman; he painted them in the way some dedicate their brush to the gods, and in painting camellias he expressed not only their souls but also his own, he betrayed the most secret depths of his inner self. His camellia-blossoms played a wonderful and unending scale of shades of red, and gradually

it became possible to guess from a picture whether the day had been sunny or misty, whether the sun were already in the west or had not yet reached the zenith, whether the season were spring or late autumn, whether the flower 'mourned or exulted, whether it were foreordained to premature death or to living out its life in full. His camellias seemed to stand out from his pictures in such a life-like manner that many a screen of his gave the impression of being a *tokonoma*, an 'alcove in which was placed a vase with a camellia branch, or of a window opened into a wood of camellias. Sometimes he would play with some bizarre fancy: he would paint a praying mantis or a noisy cicada on a camellia twig whose buds were striped in pink and white, and the earthen vessel in which the camellia twig was placed would be ornamented on its slender body with unbelievably plastic camellia flowers, moulded as if by the hands of a sculptor. This, however, was only play; his leading passion was the scarlet magnificence or the carmine rapture or the pink delicacy of live flowers, the lay of live branches, the sensitive turning of living leaves. His hold on perspective grew ever firmer, his way of putting movement into immobility became ever more daring; and when after a certain length of time his fame began to spread from province to province, the courts of the nobles began to whisper about this miraculous 'painter of the before unnoticed *tsubaki*, whom the emperor's court had driven into exile.

To all of this the painter of camellias paid as little attention as to his former failure, he painted and loved his camellias so much that he could not think of any other object worthy of his brush, nor of any woman worthy of his love. But one day when returning from a stroll he met in the pass of Shimizu a charming young girl, whom he had never seen before, and who was attired in a splendid court gown, the like of which surely had never appeared before in that mountainous region. He was amazed by her beauty and by her mien; but still more was he surprised at the perturbation that had laid hold of him with his first glance at this girl. They stopped, facing each other, and for a time both were silent; nevertheless even in this silence his soul spoke, and she dropped her eyes; in that silence his heart went out to her, and she accepted it in exchange for her own. And then she told him never to ask her about her origin, but to let it suffice that she had come after him and to him, because she had to come, and that her name was Tsubaki, Camellia. His wonder increased. Tsubaki was her name, and *tsubaki* it was that he loved more than all the other flowers of earth and far more than anything he ever saw or could imagine in this imperfect world. At any rate he would not be unfaithful to his camellias

in this new love for a woman, for beautiful Tsubaki-San, who for some mysterious reason had come to him, he did not know whence and how. Her refined speech was that of the court; and he was not slow in discovering that she had been carefully educated in poetry and philosophy, and that she understood not only his art but also his passion for the flowers she resembled so much. Her company only incensed his love for camellias and in loving them he only all the more adored Tsubaki-San, who from that day lived with him first as his servant, then as his companion, and finally as his gentle sweetheart-wife. Her cheeks burned with a wonderful and unending scale of shades of red under his ardent gaze, her body seemed to him like the supple trunk of a camellia tree, her arms like its branches, her fingers like sensitive leaflets. Sometimes the idea struck him to portray her, and smiling happily she would sit for him; but ever and again his brush painted new camellia flowers, and she was not jealous, on the contrary finding these strange portraits of herself the most beautiful of his work. And there was not a single discord in their happy love; for there never was a woman who could better incite love for art and stimulate its expression than Tsubaki-San did almost involuntarily, merely by loving and being loved.

The day came, however, when the unheard-of and never-before-seen beauty of his paintings was voiced even to the august ears of the emperor; and when the envoys of the highest court brought an assortment of his pictures and screens, the emperor was so enthusiastic that immediately he recalled the Painter of Camellias from exile and in advance honored him with a resplendent court title. A special mission was sent out into the remote mountainous country, which according to the intentions of the court intriguers was to have closed over the exile like water over a stone; but these schemes failed, his art triumphed, and in the intoxication of the moment the Painter of Camellias consented to go to the court to thank the emperor for his favor and to paint for him a large and beautiful picture in several panels on the sliding-screens of the new ceremonial hall in the imperial palace. Vainly the charming eyes of Tsubaki-San wept with tearless sadness and mute presentiment; he talked himself into the idea that shortly he would return to her, just as soon as he had tasted of the humiliation meted out to his former opponents and detractors; and she did not dissuade him with a single word. He, who had never cared for the praise or the censure of the world, now boasted of the amazement which he imagined he would arouse with the work he had in mind, with The Hall of Camellias in the Emperor's palace, and she smiled with a wilting

smile in which there were more tears than in the most desperate weeping, more pain than in a breaking heart.

Thus the Painter of Camellias returned in triumph there whence he had departed in disgrace a few years before. The good will of the sovereign was his, learned critics were finding ever new charms and virtues in his work, and his admirers worshipped him. He talked about his principles, and the court listened to him with interest; he began the work entrusted to him, and the critics nodded their heads approvingly when they saw that he was beginning to paint in a style which was to eclipse the Korean and Chinese masters on their own field. The work progressed slowly, but that did not decrease the fame and favor he enjoyed at the court; and in the midst of feasts and festivals grew ever dimmer the memory of Tsubaki-San, whom he had left behind far away in the heart of the mountains. The painting progressed slowly, but all the more rapidly there grew within him a sort of anxiety when he was alone with his work, vainly waiting for the moment which would make him forget the whole world and live and breathe only in his idea, in his art. And as the weeks lengthened into months, the Painter of Camellias who no longer painted camellias became more and more discontented with himself and with everything else; at first he cursed all those years in which he had painted nothing but camellias, and then himself for ever having set out upon these new paths, which really were very old; gladly he would have stopped his work, obliterated it all, and begun anew as he had learned to create in banishment, but his name and honor were engaged, and he felt that he never would have the strength to finish this painting against his convictions, against his past, against his art, against his love, against himself. He still kept up the appearance of pride and self-confidence; but in private and in solitude he grew faint-hearted, he hardly could support his heavy head, and his eyes imagined the delicacy and beauty of her whom alone he loved and to whom he had been unfaithful, not only for the smiles of other women but still more through having estranged himself from his own self and from his camellias. His heart ever more passionately called Tsubaki-San, but his brush was afraid to attempt even a stroke in his former style. He wished to paint his camellias, but felt that without Tsubaki-San he would fail, and that he could not survive his failure. Only one thing saved him from despair: the profound, though unwarranted belief that Tsubaki-San would come to liberate him, he knew not how and when, but he was sure that only she could save him from disgrace, and that she would . . .

At last when he was already contemplating suicide, so as to es-

cape ridicule and dishonor for the work in which he had failed, when danger threatened that the grievous decline of his genius would be exposed and that he would be thrown into an abyss of humiliation, in comparison with which exile had been a happy fate, the Painter of Camellias was actually saved by her for whom he longed as an artist and as a man, and whom he mutely implored for help. The night following the day when, shut up alone in the Hall of Clouds, which originally was to have been the Hall of Camellias, it was brought home to him with full force that he was at the end of his tether and on the verge of ruin, and that he no longer had the strength to go on with the comedy . . . that night, when in his apartments he was despairingly trying to imagine Tsubaki-San, his former happiness at her side, her devoted love, and her ability to inspire him . . . that night, when his dry burning eyes wept without tears for the camellias that had led him on to the right path in art and which he had lightheartedly betrayed . . . that night a terrible fire broke out in the imperial palace, and running out-of-doors so that he could watch it from afar, the Painter of Camellias had the impression that gigantic and unbelievably beautiful camellias were being tossed upwards to the midnight sky. At the first moment the possibility did not strike him that in this fire might also be turned to ashes the work in which he had been a traitor to himself, a liar and a failure, for which he had deserted sweet Tsubaki-San and given up painting camellias: but hardly had the thought taken form when his heart was filled with certainty that this had happened, that he was saved, and that his deliverer was his own sweet Tsubaki-San. His happiness was so great that the first instant his heart failed him and he nearly fainted; but when a little later breathless people rushed to him with the news that it was his paintings which were flaming to the sky and suffusing it with crimson, he was to all intents and purposes extraordinarily calm. He even smiled, and people admired his strength of spirit. Very soon, however, he reentered his house, for he was afraid that he would not be able to suppress either wild joy or overpowering emotion, which alternately were taking possession of him; far from the turmoil and alone, he sat down in the room flooded with reddish reflections and endeavored to imagine his Tsubaki-San and his return to his mountain retreat, where he had been so happy in life and art. For the first time his own folly and meanness were fully impressed upon his mind and he was filled with bitter remorse for his infatuation. Notwithstanding, do what he would he could not call forth in his memory the picture of his companion and adviser; ever and again there appeared to his inner sight a magnificent camellia flower whenever he

thought he had the features of her face within his mental grasp, and finally, towards morning, he fell asleep, worn out by the vain effort but none the less happy.

Next morning, however he learned a terrible piece of news. The Hall of Clouds had been set on fire intentionally, and the incendiary—a woman—had been caught. The Painter of Camellias hurried out to see the wretched creature, who according to law doubtlessly would be condemned to the stake and then burned in public: and his foreboding proved correct. The incendiary was his charming Tsubaki-San, without whom he could imagine neither life nor further artistic activity; his lover and his inspiration . . . She was smiling with fathomless sadness, surrounded by armed guards who were protecting her against the rage of the populace; she sank to the earth at his feet and hiding her flaming cheeks behind the sleeve of her magnificent gown, she awaited his words. The mob, the courtiers, all who had hastened in their wake, waited likewise; and with the exception of Tsubaki-San, all were amazed that he did not allow himself to be carried away by anger, but that his voice was gentle, even loving, when at last he overcame his emotion and spoke. Thereupon a surprised murmur arose from the palace court-yard: The Painter of Camellias thanked the woman for having forgiven him his perfidy and for saving him from shame . . . Tsubaki-San uncovered her face, and her smile was no longer sad but happy. She begged him to forgive her if she had disgraced his name by her crime; but the Painter of Camellias shook his head. »I am the one who brought disgrace on my name,« he replied so that all could hear, »and I am the one who committed a crime. For there is no shame more criminal and no crime more shameful than when an artist is untrue to himself and is led astray by the lure of fame.«

Only out of respect for the high rank of the famous painter and upon his declaration that the incendiary was his wife did the Emperor augustly consent to Tsubaki-San's being spared the shame of the stake and to her being executed by the sword; but the Painter of Camellias was ordered to carry out the sentence himself before the eyes of the court. With smiles upon their faces the lovers met on a raised platform and to the strains of music they sat opposite each other for a long time before the signal was given for the execution; they were not capable of uttering a single word, but their eyes spoke for them, and in hers he read that she did not wish him to follow her, but to live on for her memory. He promised her all she requested; and when she extended her delicate neck and he raised his arm with the sword, there was not a heart in the court-yard that was not touched to its depths. The sword whizzed through the

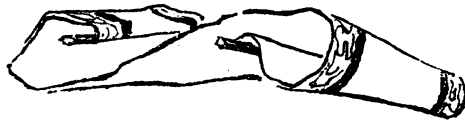
air; but no head dropped on the wooden floor with a dull thud, no awful stream of blood gushed forth. Instead of a head there fell on the mat a marvelously beautiful camellia-blossom, the like of which no one had ever seen before.

And the Painter of Camellias understood that Tsubaki-San had been no daughter of man, but the embodied soul of the flower he loved above all others, to whom he had consecrated his life and his art, and whom finally he had wished to betray, spellbound as he was with the vanity and emptiness of wordly fame.

Satiated with the world and its illusions, he shaved his head and entered a Budhistic monastery so that secluded from the tumult of life he could end his life in memories of her whom he loved, whom his love had called into being and his treachery had condemned to death.

* * *

Not a single picture by the Painter of Camellias is extant: indeed, not a single one survived the sad fate of his sweetheart, for at the instant when the sword struck the neck of Tsubaki-San, all the camellia blossoms he had ever painted fell off their stems, not petal by petal, as camellias had done up to that time after the manner of roses, but as a whole . . . like a severed head falling to the ground . . . The name and fame of the Painter of Camellias were soon obliterated, and the camellia became a flower almost unknown in art, except in the Korin school. From that time to this day, however, wilted camellias do not drop off petal by petal, but each flower falls intact to the ground. And therefore the Japanese people to this day have a sort of superstitious dread of this flower, even though they admire it; it reminds them of heads condemned to the sword. However, this legend fell into oblivion, and had it not been revealed to me once in a dream, probably nobody ever would have been able to disclose to the world this touching and instructive incident of the Painter of Camellias and his sweetheart, beautiful Tsubaki-San. For not even in Japan does anyone know this legend.





THE GARDEN OF FULFILLED DESIRE.

It is of no importance where and how I came to know Kumamoto, a young business-clerk of Tokyo. In our becoming acquainted there was nothing that is not the every-day experience of any and every white person living and travelling in Japan. From every outing I would return to my rooms in Yokohama in the dreary certainty that in a few days I would begin to receive touching postal cards and pathetic epistles from some half-dozen, or perhaps even a full dozen young Japanese who in the praiseworthy effort to practice their English had very adroitly made my acquaintance at different points of my last trip. Because almost always such an enthusiast had proved himself at least for some time a welcome adviser, an interpreter or a moral support in the face of attempts to overcharge in some country inn, politeness required my answering at least the first letter, usually conceived in problematic English as impressively as if a correspondence were being inaugurated which could be cut short only by the death of one of us. If after half a year I had wished to keep in contact with all those who seemed to be passionately desirous of my so doing, it certainly would have been the death of me within a very short time, and my benefactors would have lost their correspondent just the same.

This argument pleased me so much with its adamant logic that after some time I ceased to answer the letters of my travelling acquaintances altogether. But Kumamoto was a man of enterprise and unusual loyalty. The friendship which he formed for me and the desire to perfect his English led him, after three unanswered letters and postal-cards, to come from Tokyo to Yokohama and hunt me up in my lodgings. He also brought me handsome presents, and offered his services as a guide in Tokyo on days when he could absent himself from his work. They were far apart, and I accepted his friendship the more readily that he wore dark glasses. It is hard

to resist eyes which are hidden behind black glasses; for two reasons it is extremely difficult. You do not see the eyes of the other person, and you see your own. So it happened that my friend Kumamoto went away contented, after we had agreed upon our first meeting in Tokyo.

I have to confess I never had reason to regret that Kumamoto wore dark glasses. I learned many interesting things from him, he took me to places where probably I could not have gone otherwise, and because for every meeting he prepared himself diligently and systematically, he always said what he had to say quickly and intelligibly, and the rest of the time I was free to make inquiries about things that had greater significance to me. Of course on the first and second meeting he showed an inclination to repeat all that he had taken the pains to learn by heart just as soon as he had finished the first recitation; but on both occasions I clenched my fists and avoiding the black glasses, thwarted his attempts with much determination till at length he comprehended and reconciled himself to the inevitable.

Then for the first time did I notice his peculiar laugh, with which, it seemed, he was wont to disguise his embarrassment, and of which he surely was not even conscious. As if by sucking in air through his closed teeth he were whistling on one of them which was hollow, . . . thus could I approximatively describe that sound; only it was not whistling at all, but rather a sort of buzzing, very quiet and very intense, gradually rising, then bubblingly dispersing and finally stopping of a sudden. I was never able to work out a permanently acceptable theory of the physical cause of that sound; for that matter, it was enough that I knew its psychical cause, and whenever Kumamoto began to buzz like a singed moth, I knew that in some way or other I had disconcerted him and strove to avoid a similar blunder in the future.

Once it happened, however, that Kumamoto took to buzzing under circumstances which excluded my having caused him embarrassment, even unconsciously. I had gone with him to a place of his selection, but when we reached it his information proved erroneous and nothing was left to us but to retrace our steps. I was not particularly pleased with our failure, but my disappointment was not tragic. Tokyo is large, and its surprises are many. Merely turning the first corner would have sufficed to give the foreigner hungry for impressions ample reparation, even though it were in a small, mean street, so deserted that a native would not have hoped to find in it anything of interest to his white companion. I explained my ideas on the matter to Kumamoto, and he stopped buzzing; nev-

ertheless he did not yet seem to be entirely at his ease, and wishing to banish his fears and to concentrate his attention on something else, I began jestingly to reproach him for never having narrated to me any uncanny stories and mysterious incidents with which every little street we passed through must be enlivened for the inner sight of a native.

»We are now in the district of Shitaya, and that neighbors on Asakusa, where you were born and have lived your life so far« I laughed, »You certainly must know the history of every stone in this part of town. Oh, you could talk if you would.«

He cast a furtive glance at me, which with him meant that he turned his dark glasses in my direction for the fraction of a second with quaint ostrich-like secretiveness. »What folly.« he exclaimed at length. "Old women's tales. We modern people take no notice of them. It is sad enough that the masses are still submerged in them to such a degree."

I exerted myself to explain to him why exactly such stories interested me. Nor did I neglect to mention Lafcadio Hearn, whom "such folly" made famous in America and England. I wished to follow many paths in order to penetrate to the soul of the people in the end; and such an intelligent young man as he, Kumamoto, surely would comprehend that some of these paths must lead through the phantom realm of the popular imagery.

He thought for a moment, slackening his pace. Then suddenly he came to a decision. "All right, then, I will take you to my house. I don't live far. Up till now I didn't take the liberty of inviting you because my wretched dwelling is not suitable to receive you. But today we have been disappointed and . . . I do not know where else to take you. I shall show you my garden, if you will condescend to pay me a visit." "Your garden." I cried in surprise, for I remembered his having complained several times of the inconveniences of his lodging, which was hemmed in on all sides by the small houses of a poor district and by various odours.

He laughed "Yes, I shall show you my Garden of Fulfilled Desire, and relate to you a trifling story which is connected with it. It is trifling, I repeat . . . nevertheless, but for it I would not be here. So much I can acknowledge regardless of my opinion on the whole matter . . ."

"What a charming name your garden has." I wondered. "Do you know, my dear friend, that already now I am very much contented with what you call our disappointment? I have seen hundreds of temples all over Japan, but nobody ever offered to show me a Garden of Fulfilled Desire. Fulfilled desires usually disappoint; but

I feel that neither your garden nor its story will disappoint me."

We passed a veteran of the China-Japan war limping behind an ambulatory play-kitchen for children and calling the attention of the public to himself by blowing a military bugle. The searching gaze of the poor and the poorest followed us on all sides, and every little while some one would answer my accidental glance with a bow.

"Mama ni naranu wa ukiyo no narai," responded Kumamoto with an old Buddhist proverb. "To be disappointed is usual in this miserable world." It seemed that he was not even aware of his words, uttered in Japanese, and then, lifting his head as he came out of his thoughts, he added in English:

"You are right, fulfilled desires usually disappoint. But my father was not disappointed in his garden and therefore gave it that name."

Pushing aside the sliding screen of translucent paper, so as to light up the room, my friend Kumamoto said:

"If you please, sir, this is my garden."

I half stifled a cry of wonder; for in truth before that time I had never seen a Japanese garden more beautiful than this one, which was the property of a young business-clerk with dark glasses. It was more of a charming landscape than a garden . . . a landscape from out of a fairy-tale, the like of which some one might be able to create in his imagination, but hardly would hope to find in reality, alive and green, as it now appeared before my eyes.

About in the centre there arose a shapely hillock, and on its slope a path wound its way upward among rocks, the natural shape of which a Japanese could appreciate better than a white person, and the arrangement of which gave the impression that they formed some sort of magical emblem. Upon the summit stood a little temple hoary with age, with a thatched roof so overgrown with moss that it looked as if it were covered with patina. Seldom had I seen pillars and beams more beautifully carved; the gable was a magnificent piece of Japanese art, and its dragons, enlivened by subdued colours, all but twisted and writhed in the sunlight. One could see into the shrine. It was disconcertingly empty, containing only a metal mirror, which was fastened upon two strings, probably stretched from the floor clear to the ceiling. What symbol lay in this mirror, now so brilliant? That all our eyes see is but illusion?

My thoughts, however, roved from the temple to the oblong garden which surrounded it. The surface of a little lake glistened

on the right side the hillock, immediately at its base, and it was plain to me at first glance that its shape conformed to the Chinese character for the word "heart", just as in the garden of the temple of Kameido, to which the people of Tokyo go to admire the purple splendour of the wistarias towards the end of April. "Shindji no Ike, the Pond of the Word Heart," I remarked quietly, and it did not escape me that Kumamoto was delighted by my sagacity. In the middle of the pond was a little square island, from whose upper side two little bridges led to the shore in such wise that the extremity of the lake there resembled a shining mark above an angular capital U. Two small basins of water, at either end of the lake, completed the likeness to the Chinese ideograph in question. Well-nigh the whole of the islet was taken up by a grave, by the side of which stood a high stone lantern, chiselled out of a single piece. I had seen similar lanterns, born on the shells of tortoises, — all of one piece; this toro, however, appeared to be born by some strange sort of insect, recalling a cicada or a bee, and so realistically chiselled that, green with moss as it was, it seemed ever ready to fly or to give some kind of sign of life.

Japanese gardens do not resemble ours in any respect; as a rule they contain no flower-beds, which in the majority of cases would disturb, if not destroy altogether, that impression of a landscape seen from afar, which is the fundamental idea of Japanese gardening, whether the garden in question be ever so extensive or ever so tiny. Nor were there flowers in the Garden of Fulfilled Desire; it seemed to have blossomed forth with strangely shaped boulders and carefully formed mounds of yellow sand, among which the path meandered like a brook, strewn with flat stones as if to afford a dry crossing. Only here and there were clumps of bamboo with leaves either pale green or almost blue, but always edged with white or yellow; some clumps were periwinkle-green, others sulphur-yellow and one group was as if bronzed. Moss in places heaped up to form odd imitations of bushes, clusters of bamboo and isolated wisps of grass were the only living green things in the garden besides a mighty, knotty pine, without doubt a century old, which extended its rugged picturesquely gnarled limbs on the left side of the hillock.

All of this was surrounded by a bamboo fence, which accurately followed the oblong form of the garden but still gave the impression, at first glance, of a zigzag line, because the ground on the border was not level, but here gradually rising and there suddenly dropping; and this bamboo fence was a little over two inches high, a mere toy. There was no need for a higher fence for the Garden.

of Fulfilled Desire, for its dimensions were no greater than twelve inches by twenty, the hillock towered some eight inches, the temple was something over four inches high, the stone lantern by the grave about two inches, the clumps of bamboo were all sizes between three and five and a half inches, and the centenarian pine barely overtopped the moss-grown roof of the temple. Everything else was in the same elf-like proportions: the lake and the bridges, the path and the boulders and the tiny statues of various deities which were placed here and there...

It was a family tokoniwa, a miniature garden placed, according to custom, in the recess called tokonoma, which contains, besides various ornamental objects, the only pictures which hang in room, it was an unbelievably wee garden, in which just as in larger gardens out of doors, the charming impression was given that everything was really large- that hillock, temple, lake, tree-, and only seemed to be small because we were looking at it from afar and from on high, or perchance through the wrong end of a pair of opera-glasses. Of course, the Japanese art of gardening contributes substantially to the possibility of this enchanting illusion with its dwarfed trees. One often sees maples, pines and other trees even a hundred years old and still only a foot or so high, though with branches perfectly developed and with a gnarled trunk which at first glance betrays its venerable age. The pine in Kumamoto's tokoniwa was not the first miracle of that art that I had beheld in Japan, but harmonized as it was with its surroundings, with which it had grown up, it seemed to me the most wonderful dwarfed tree of my experience. So majestically did it dominate over the Garden of Fulfilled Desire that it seemed to me as if it had created its space and time and did not belong to this world. In truth I would not have been surprised if suddenly on the path around the lake there had appeared proportionately tiny folk in kimonos, with microscopic smiles on their faces.

"You never showed me anything more exquisite, Mr. Kumamoto", I cried in sincere enthusiasm. "There is not a single thing in your tokoniwa that is not a treasure of art. If your garden were a thousand times as large, it would be a thousand times less charming" I looked out of the window into the narrow and somewhat dirty little street, resounding with a hundred different sounds. "Who would suspect the existence of such a treasure in your little home, so modestly hidden among the most modest. I have half a mind to be angry at you for not having shown me your Garden of Fulfilled Desire long ago. A beautiful name, but its bearer is far more beautiful. That tree! It is certainly a hundred years old!"

My host nodded. "It is a little older," he answered.

"But you said that your father named the garden," I objected "I thought that he made it."

The folding screens opened quietly and Kumamoto's aged servant came in with tea. She knelt down and bowed in the old-fashioned way, touching the floor with her forehead. We sat down on cushions on the floor and accepted cups of tea from her.

"Yes, my father was the maker of the garden, but this tokoniwa and tree were in the possession of our family already before", explained Kumamoto, in the sweat of his brow collecting his English for this conversation on an unexpected subject. "My great-grandfather was a famous cultivator of dwarfed trees; even poems were written in his honour, and on one of Hokusai's wood-cuts you can see my great-grandfather with a great number of his dwarfed creations. This pine was his favorite piece of work. However, my grandfather neglected the family tokoniwa, and it perished; only the tree survived. And because my father suffered the same fate of being overlooked in the family, he took a deep liking to this tree and befriended it. My honourable father, I must explain, was extremely ugly. It is painful to me to speak of this matter. It seems cruel that some one should suffer on account of his looks, but it happens often enough, I think. At any rate it happened to my father. He looked like one of the successful artificially dwarfed creations of his grandfather, my renowned great-grandfather. Between him and the old tree there arose a sort of brotherhood of feeling. When my father grew up and it was brought home to him that he would have to go through life without a companion, because he was so unsightly, he made this garden, which you see here in my room, of the sun-baked, formless earth of the tokoniwa. And he dedicated it to the gods with the humble entreaty that they take pity on his miserable loneliness. . . . You see there in the corner Thousand-handed Kwanon, the Goddess of Mercy, and near the lake Benten, the Goddess of Luck, and other deities. Why, however, my father put only the metal mirror into the shrine, I do not know. He probably had his reasons."

Having filled our cups for the second time, the aged servant hobbled out backwards, bowed profoundly between the sliding doors, muttering apologies, and disappeared. We were alone.

"Superstitious reasons", added Kumamoto and laughed with a buzzing sound. "You understand that of course I look at it all from a different point of view!"

I could not help getting angry and interrupted him rather unceremoniously:

"My dear friend, what does any point of view matter to me when we are concerned with a thing of beauty and a story attached to it? I shall be very grateful to you if you will relate everything to me regardless of the colour of my skin and of the date of this day."

And so Kumamoto told the rest of the story without further apologies, but as disjointedly as if he were tearing each word from the bottom of his heart.

* * *

Although my host did not mention again with a single word the uncomeliness of his father, I could imagine more and more vividly, looking at him and at the tree, the almost grotesque ugliness which seemed to have condemned Kumamoto senior to painful loneliness. Not that Kumamoto junior was ugly; except for the fact that his eyes bulged in a strange way behind his black glasses, he was a rather handsome young man with a clear complexion, lips of almost feminine delicacy, and a forehead, nose, chin, and ears that had all the characteristics of a refined race, as had likewise his sensitive, small, and shapely hands. Nevertheless there was something in his features which one could imagine transposed into the pathetic ugliness that doubtless had been the allotment of his father.

For during twenty years the tokoniwa remained a garden of unfulfilled desire and Kumamoto's father went his way in life alone, oppressed by solitude. He made offerings to the gods before the tiny temple he had built and whose thatched roof was already mossgrown with age; he carefully attended to the garden and to his friend the tree; but so far he had received not even the slightest sign which could strengthen his hope for the fulfillment of his desire. He was almost forty years old, and his ugliness must have grown ever more grotesque, but his hope remained steadfast, amounting almost to certainty. "I must confess," said Kumamoto haltingly, "that his neighbors always looked upon my father as a little . . . queer."

The recluse yearly set out upon pilgrimages to renowned temples of the deities to whom his little garden was dedicated, and to whom he looked for the final fulfillment of his longing for love, for a gentle companion in life, which hitherto had brought him so little warmth and happiness. And on one of those pilgrimages he found in the midst of a sacred grove on the steps leading to a temple a dying cicada.

It was the summer cicada which the Japanese call *min min-zemi* and whose voice, the humble folk say, sounds like the chanting of a bonze in temple services. In Japan from spring till fall nature is full of the penetrating and often unspeakably sweet sounds of various species of cicadas or semi; this cicada however, which lying on its back and twirling around in a circle, buzzed on the hot temple-steps, filled the heart of the melancholy pilgrim with pity and sorrow. Its high note shook despairingly, like the weeping of someone who is dying painfully and unwillingly; and the recluse, touched to the bottom of his heart, picked up the cicada, trying to ascertain its injury and wondering whether he could not save it merely by placing it somewhere in the shade on the bark of a tree. But every time the cicada fell back on the ground, turned over on its back and renewed its lamentations.

And the man of the lonely heart took pity on the tortured insect, brought it home and made for it a soft nest in his garden of desire so far unfulfilled. It was already clear to him that, whether by a bird's beak or through some other unfortunate accident, the poor cicada had been blinded; its big bulging eyes were covered by a sort of milky film; but it seemed to be its *ingwa*, that is the consequence of its acts in some previous incarnation, that it should not die as yet, and therefore the injured cicada had been dropped by the bird or in some other manner placed in the way of the man who befriended it. Day by day its moaning decreased and finally it regained the use of its legs, though it still occasionally fell over as if from weakness. It began to move about the garden, and the little temple on the hillock and the trunk of the dwarfed pine were its favorite haunts.

After a few days the lone man remembered that his ward was also alone, and that perhaps its song would be less mournful if it had near it another being which could understand it better than a person, and could bring it more comfort. His conscience smote him and he hurried to buy a tiny bamboo cage with another captive cicada. He had never kept captive cicadas and locusts in cages, as many people do, so as selfishly to enjoy their song of longing for freedom, for the perfume of nature; and upon his return home he set free the captive cicada in his tiny garden.

And a miracle happened : finding herself at liberty, the cicada did not forsake the garden and her crippled companion. Her body rustled quietly, almost inaudibly, when she came near the blind semi, and he answered her gently; it seemed as if those two had much to say to one another. And then when on a branch of the old pine the newly arrived cicada lifted her rejoicing, charming voice in

song, a still more wonderful thing happened. As if in answer to this voice, the two strings in the shrine, upon which the metal mirror was fastened, reverberated like from out of a dream, delicately and dreamily, but unmistakably. It was as if the gods had spoken; and the solitary man for the first time in his life almost understood how one feels when one is happy.

For several weeks both semi were his companions and the friends of the old pine; and during that time he did not feel lonely or sad, listening for long hours to the song of both cicadas, who always kept together so devotedly that when looking at them he could not help giving way to his old longing, which now asserted itself with redoubled force. And it seemed to him that the strings in the little temple had responded not only to the song of the newly acquired semi, but also to the secret voice of his heart . . . to that voice of whose existence only the gods knew. But when one morning the song of the cicadas did not greet the rising sun, the solitary man felt how gradually his body was growing cold till he thought that his martyred heart would stop its beating. He was in mortal terror of the unchangeable reality and hoped against hope that perhaps after all he was mistaken, and that presently there would resound from the garden those charming tones which had brightened so many an hour for him; not until midday, brought to the verge of despair by the dead silence of the garden and not even conscious of the sounds from the street, did he take courage to go to the tokonoma, the recess, and look at his tokoniwawa, deserted by the cicadas.

But though his horror of the deathly stillness proved to be well-founded, he discovered that after all he was mistaken. The cicadas had not forsaken him. Upon the unruffled surface of the little lake there floated fragments of the wings and one leg of one of his semi, which had fallen victim to some sort of murderous attack, and inside the little temple behind the metal mirror he perceived the other minime lying on its back, stiff and motionless. Carefully he took out the dead cicada, and at once recognized it as the blind one that he had saved and taken home on his pilgrimage to Kwannon the Merciful. His soul was filled with sorrow, and when he had buried the bodily remains of both his friends on the islet in the lake, he chiselled out of stone a beautiful lantern for the grave, putting into it all his art, which was not inconsiderable. For just as his grandfather had been famous for his garden masterpieces, he also was held in great respect among the artisans of Tokyo for his miniature carvings in ivory, wood and stone.

During the night after the day when he placed the lantern on

the grave of the two semi, the solitary man had a strange dream. He dreamt about the garden which he had fostered for twenty years, not, however as a tiny toy but as a landscape through which he himself walked. The pine raised by his grandfather towered to a formidable height the various statues which in the course of the twenty years he had placed here and there overtopped his own stature, and even the bamboo fence surrounding the garden seemed to him extraordinarily massive and high. His creations, before so tiny, now revealed his art to him in a new light, and he began to feel equal to a work of fullgrown art of which he before had thought himself incapable. The temple on the mountain beckoned to him from the distance majestically; not even the magnificent buildings of sacred Nikko had made such an impression on him as now his own work. All at once it seemed to him that the *tokonawa* had been a dream and that this was reality; but in that case he would be a great artist, and great artists are always beautiful because from out of their eyes there shines the creative power of gods. His chest broadened, his stature grew in height. He went up the path to the temple that was his work, feeling sure something had come into his life that would change it completely. But upon reaching the shrine, he stopped in wonder. From out of its twilight, in which the metal mirror glittered like a precious stone, there emerged a blind old man of a noble and venerable appearance. His looks seemed familiar to him, and his voice still more so. "This temple is your heart and my heart", said the aged man, smiling kindly. "Listen to your heart, that it may not speak in vain." At that moment the lone man awoke; but it was still long before morning, and he fell asleep before he could fix his dream in his memory.

The days dragged by slowly. He had become used to working near his garden, and the song of the semi had put him into the mood for work, had made his fingers more joyful, his imagination more supple; even now he would sit for hours by the *tokonawa*, but his fingers were heavy and his brain heavier still. He often caught himself gazing fixedly into empty space, and vaguely it seemed to him that he was trying hard to remember something, something beautiful, which would change his life from its very foundations. He believed that his desire would be fulfilled in the end; perhaps it was to be regretted that he gave himself up to vain illusions, but it was his fate, and could not be changed. In his future incarnations perhaps his desire would be directed towards higher and more perfect planes, but now he longed for love, for a wife.

He would be so absorbed in these thoughts that he did not hear the hum of life in the little street beneath his windows; but one day something happened that at once brought him back to this world. Suddenly the strings resounded in the shrine of the temple which he had carved for his garden; they sighed a response just as they had done when the newly-arrived cicada had lifted its song in the Garden of Desire. . . . For a moment the lone man was struck motionless with wonder, and he felt as if his heart must burst with a great gladness, with unendurable happiness. Of a sudden the dream of not long ago returned to his memory and he comprehended who the old man had been and what his mysterious words had meant. He realized that from this very moment his was the Garden of Fulfilled Desire, and that down there under his window in the little street she was passing whose voice had called forth the response from the strings of the little temple, strings which day and night remained dumb to thousands of voices and sounds continually penetrating from the outside into the quiet room. He knew that he had only to arise to see her whom *ingwa* had predestined for him, for nothing happens in this world that has not its cause in the acts, thoughts and longings of past incarnations, long since fallen to dust and ashes. This voice reverberating in this common street found a sweet echo in his heart. Perhaps they had been promised to each other at some long, long past time, and through no fault of their own did not attain the happiness for which they longed; and through long suffering having bought the right to meet again in some future incarnation, now at last they were to find the fulfillment of their desire.

"*Amma kamishimo go hyaku mon*," sounded for the third time in the little street, the melodic and melancholy signal of the *masseuse*, the signal by which thousands of *masseurs* and *masseuses* all over Japan offer their services for the inconsiderable sum of five hundred mon or five sen. But all those thousands- tens of thousands- are stone-blind. Every one of those who sing or whistle the signal makes his way carefully through the middle of the street, feeling his way with a cane so as not to come upon an unexpected obstacle. Young and old, men and women, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, all of them are plunged in darkness from which there is no return.

He understood that she who was predestined to be his wife would never see his ugliness, that for her his voice would be his face; and getting up he called the young *masseuse* who was passing by his house, called her with a trembling, joyful voice. And she stopped, pressing her hand to her heart, and slowly turned to him her pale, sadly beautiful face.

My friend Kumamoto was silent for a while, and I was not sure whether he were gazing at the Garden of Fulfilled Desire or into space.

"They say my mother was extraordinarily beautiful," he added hurriedly, somewhat shamefacedly but still proudly. "She came from a noble family which was reduced to poverty by the abolishment of the feudal system. Her father, a samurai through and through, went into business, but fared badly; and his youngest child, who became blind at a tender age for lack of medical care, was trained to be a masseuse and helped support her helpless parents."

His words were interrupted by the signal of a passing masseuse. It looked as if without being conscious of it he were listening whether also this voice would not force a sigh from the strings in the little temple of the tokonawa. The next moment he shuddered and continued with a tired voice:

"For ten years my honorable parents lived together in great happiness and perfect contentment. Then I was born, their first and last child. For my mother did not survive my birth" . . .

He took off his glasses and began to clean them vigorously, breathing on them again and again. I saw him without them for the first time and could not help noticing his bulging, filmy, bloodshot eyes, reminding me of the eyes of some sort of large insect. It was to be seen that he had inherited from his mother his weak, abnormal sight.

"My father died only last year," added Kumamoto, putting on his glasses again, but not yet turning towards me. "Throughout his whole life eccentric, towards the last he became childish. It was his mania to buy semi and set them free. And daily he spent long and happy hours here, by his Garden of Fulfilled Desire. He died sitting, with a smile on his face."

The clattering of countless pairs of wooden sandals, the occasional cries of children, voices of adults, the tinkling of the bells of newspaper deliverers running by, the signal of the blind masseuse wandering around the corner, and a hundred other sounds confusedly echoed into the quiet room.

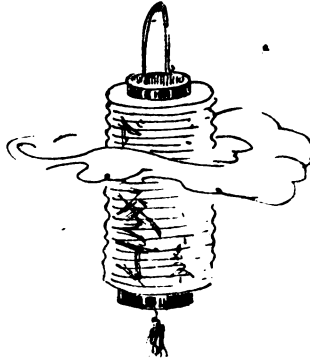
"That is all, sir," my host whispered with a sigh.

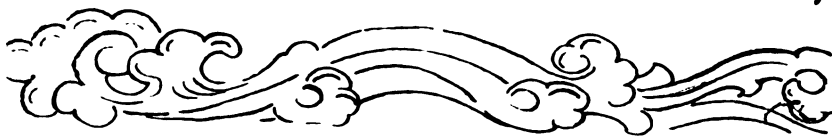
"I thank you with all my heart, Mr. Kumamoto," I said, and then, noticing his gloomy expression, I added playfully: "But is that really all? Own up to it, my dear friend, that even you sometimes wait for the string to resound once more."

But my host answered only with his embarrassed; buzzing laugh;

and then at last I became aware of the familiarity of the sound,
which up to that time I could not succeed in describing to myself:

Thus and not otherwise it was that in the Japanese landscape
sounded the song of the cicadas.





THE DARLING OF THE GODS.

With a sudden swerve the path lept above five terraces of innundated paddy fields, similar to looking-glasses of strange shapes with their green borders like bronze frames covered with patina. My companion let down his kimono, tucked up during the ascent, and smiled, for it did not escape him that I was concentrating my attention on the words of a song upon the lips of peasant-women near by, dressed in dark blue, close-fitting trousers and wading in a field where they were transplanting seedling rice-plants in straight rows at uniform distances.

"If you had European clothes on they would have stopped their singing long ago", he said, "Unfortunately they are not singing anything of special interest, characteristic of this part of the country. You can hear this song all over Japan. It is playful." And word by word, so that I might better catch the meaning, he repeated its words:

»Adana e-gao ni
mayowanu mono wa
Ki-Butsu, kana-Butsu,
Ishi-botoke!«

"Who never was bewitched by the smile of a woman is a wooden Buddha, a metal Buddha, a stone Buddha," he then added in English to make sure; for as an electrical engineer who had studied in Tokyo he of course knew English far better than I his language.

Involuntarily I laughed; although I did not say a single word, he read my thought. »Don't you believe it! Now they are dressed for work and muddy up to the elbows and knees. Distastefully muddy. And the perfume enveloping them does not stimulate you to imagine their possible transformation into delicate and charming specimens of womanhood. But if you saw them washed and dressed for some

m a t s u r i, for some festival! Then you would understand why they say that in all Shinshu our valley is the richest in woman's beauty. Do not forget that O-Take-San, the honorable Miss Bamboo, the famous m i k o or temple dancer, whom you can trace in the art and literature of the sixteenth century, came from our little village.«

It was high time for me to own to this blank in my knowledge of things Japanese; for twice already my kind guide had touched upon this beauty, whose name had survived centuries, and moreover I had gathered that even now our walk was directed towards something intimately connected with the history of her who meant so little to me and so much to the people in that part of the country.

The engineer looked at me reproachfully. »What queer people you are, you white people!" he exclaimed. »Could you not have told me long ago that the name O-Take is but an empty sound to you? You wished me to show you the k e m b u t s u, the sights of our village. I am leading you two hours over break-neck paths to Kaze -no miya, to the Temple of the Winds, and now when we are within five minutes of our destination, it transpires that you never heard of our renowned country-woman! Do you know at least what a m i k o is?

»You said yourself that it means a temple dancer,« I managed to help myself out of the difficulty. He started to walk again.« Yes, in a Shinto temple. Literally it means the darling of the gods; and the duty of these priestesses is still, as it always was, to dance for the delectation of the gods during festivals and to wait on the priests in ordinary temple services. At different places different requirements were made upon these priestesses, who were always chosen only from certain families. In some places girls could be priestesses only before coming to maturity, in others even to the age of sixteen or seventeen; and today unusually beautiful and graceful dancers are often not dismissed from the temple even after marriage. Everywhere and always she who was chosen to be the darling of the gods was comely enough to become the darling of a man; however, the priestesses were deterred from this eventuality by the requirement of absolute chastity, — and by the advantages accruing to them and their families from their position. Nevertheless their liberty was curtailed only in the evening and at night, when their innocence was most endangered; then they were always shut up in a special dwelling behind the temple. And if it happened that some m i k o made a mistep, she did not share the fate of the fallen Vestal Virgin; she merely ceased to be the darling of the gods, having become the darling of a human being and a woman who had learned to know man's love.« He hesitated and turned to me. »You

know, I suppose, that the *miko* or *gura*, or temple dance of the priestesses does not at all approach your Western idea of dancing?«

"Oh, yes, my ignorance does not go quite so far after all", I assured him. »They dance mainly with their hands. Harmonious movements, full of charming meanings for the initiated Accompanied perhaps by archaic music, ancient chants, the clapping of hands, the bubbling sounds of small drums. Have I retrieved my honor?«

He nodded and waved his hands towards the wood in which above the undergrowth of various shrubs and trees loomed the remnants of a once mighty and venerable *cryptomeria* grove.

»Two hundred steps more, and we are at the Temple of the Winds, or at least at its ruins«, he remarked.« »There was born the fame of O-Take, than whom the gods never had a more charming darling or a more bewitching dancer. She was also something of a soothsayer, if we may believe hearsay. There are no written proofs of it, though these are not lacking as far as her beauty and art went. But it seems that, unlike the Shinto priestesses of today, the *miko* of the olden times were sometimes endowed with clairvoyant and occult powers. It is said the Gods used to enter their bodies and speak through their lips.« He shrugged his shoulders. »On the whole there is no reason for us to disbelieve that O-Take was also a divineress. Her bodily and spiritual gifts must have been many, for she ruined many men. But at that time she was no longer the darling of the gods.«

He stopped and for a while we walked in silence along a narrow and rough path, bordered on either side by fields that resembled glistening fens. Bright-colored dragon-flies darted above the water. Here and there a frog jumped from the path and splashed into one of the fields. From behind us again was wafted the singing of the villagers, now dragging in a melancholy manner.

»A strange coincidence«, my companion remarked. »Just now they began an old song about our O-Take. Like a bamboo twing in spring she was — — those are the opening words of the ballad. Now, however, listen rather to the voices of our *semi*. I have heard that tropical cicadas are miserable fiddlers in comparison with our *semi*. I do not know; I never have been in the tropics, as you have.«

I assured him that the fame of the *semi* was entirely deserved. I did not wonder that the humble folk likened its droning to the voice of a Buddhist priest chanting the sacred sutras. He seemed to be delighted, and to forgive me my obdurate indifference to the name and history of that O-Take, to whom he himself doubtless was attracted. I recollected that his face was infused with color as if in momentary excitement when he began to relate about the beau-

tiful m i k o of the sixteenth century; but then I put aside the thought as romantic and on the whole unfounded. When we entered the wood, the sweet buzzing sound which filled the perfumed air turned my thoughts into other channels. How strange that this woody nook, with vegetation in reality little different from that of Central Europe, is so unmistakably Japanese, I said to myself; almost every tree, every piece of sod, every bush tries to express exactly what the art of this nation does; and everything is stylized . . .

The shadow of the wood was pleasantly cool; hard by a pheasant made itself heard; the mournful song of a bird resounded for a while in a thicket. Then the path flowed into the remains of the cryptomeria grove like a brook into a lake. The mighty pillarlike trunks rose high above the rest of the trees, here sparser, and in places large open spaces were thus formed, looking like air-bubbles filled with a delicate, diffused green. But presently there appeared bubbles tinged with a salmon- orange hue. Like clouds alight with a wonderfully beautiful fire there floated high above us the blossoming crowns of giant azaleas.

My companion turned to me, interrupting our silence, of which I had not even been aware up to that moment. »These tsutsudji were blossoming here already at the time when people on their way to Kaze-no miya told each other how they looked forward with delight to beholding the dances of the most charming pet of the gods who ever graced the festivals of the Temple of the Winds. Today there exist no larger azaleas in the whole of Japan, except in Yamoto.« He cast a slow side-long glance at me, from which I felt that his thoughts were wandering far away from me in time, and still near in space. »And hither used to come Masushige, a young samurai, wounded with love for the comely temple dancer . . .« He laughed somewhat absently, and it seemed as if his lips were still whispering though he had already come to a full stop.

And before I could answer, the thicket opened and before us there appeared the melancholy ruins of the Temple of the Winds, here and there invaded by different plants. Only the torii, the Shinto gate resembling a great Chinese ideograph, was almost new while the rest was time worn, falling to decay.

»Look, yonder is the platform on which O-Take used to dance her m i k o - k a g u r a,« he remarked in a somewhat shaken voice. »And in the background, where now bamboo is growing, you can see the last remains of the so called m i k o - y a s h i k i, where the darlings of the gods used to be shut up for the night. Would you believe that when I stand here I can imagine so vividly and in such detail the original appearance of the temple and all the rest of

the buildings that I sometimes find it difficult to see what you must see?« He stopped almost embarrassed.

»Sit down on these bulging roots,« he added after a moment.

»I will relate to you somewhat more coherently the story of the temple dancer. All that happens, happens well. After all there could be no more appropriate place for this story.« And he sat down as if really tired.

»Like a bamboo shoot in spring . . . such was O-Take-San even at a tender age, and as the old song runs, already the fact that she was named »Bamboo« was a sign of divine favor. And the third verse describes how already as a child, dressed in the white robe of a priestess, she raised aloft the s u z u more graciously than ever any »darling of the gods« before her. The s u z u seemed to grow from out of her white hand, my companion emphasised, repeating the fifth verse of the ballad. »I suppose you know what the s u z u is.«

I had to confess that I did not. "The s u z u is a special bronze instrument hung with little bells, which the m i k o uses in dancing," the engineer explained patiently, fixing his eyes on the bamboo thicket. "To this very day it preserved the shape of a bamboo shoot in remembrance of the mythical episode which this dance represents. As you know, Ama-terasu, the Goddess of the Sun, having been offended by her brother Susa-no-o, in her anger hid herself in a cave, leaving the earth plunged in grievous darkness. The rest of the gods in vain endeavored to persuade her to come out; Ama-terasu, however, remained obdurate. Then the gods and goddesses gathered about the cavern, and began to sing and dance; one of them Ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto, tied little bells to the bamboo shoot she held and by means of it finally enticed the angered goddess to the door. Hardly had she opened it when one of the gods put a mirror before her eyes, and she, bewitched by her own beauty, followed the mirror out in front of the cave. The earth was again immersed in sunlight . . .« He silenced himself, as if half his soul were somewhere else than at the ruins of this temple, and then he added hurriedly: »The suzu, having the form of a bamboo shoot, seemed to grow from out of the white hand of her who was as slender and beautiful even as a bamboo shoot . . . that is the simile understood by every Japanese. Perhaps you have noticed that young bamboo shoots grow from out of a protecting white sheath, surrounding the joints of the culm at that point; keeping this in your mind, you can better appreciate the appropriateness of the com-

parison and the wonderful succinctness of that single line. Unfortunately however, our old ballad is all too succinct.«

It was evident that the subject of his narrative was too dear to him to allow his slighting any stage of it without adornments of his own imagination, gradually heating to the story; and when he was at his best he wished to say so much so beautifully that more than once his supply of English words or some phrase failed him, and then he became impatient, almost angry, cutting up his sentences and losing the main thread. At other times, however, when the stream of his eloquence flowed continuously and every sentence was like a brisk ripple, foaming with some adroit turn of speech, he seemed to live the story to such a degree that he began to forget his real relation to the narrated episodes. From time to time he talked of O-Take as if he had known her, as if now he were relating something he had lived through; I explained this to myself as due to his narrative glow, temperament, and subtly different understanding of English and of our Western logic in sentence-building. For that matter, his inimitable, fragmentary style soon began to affect me, perhaps partly for the reason that he himself was carried away, until even to me the temple dancer became something more than a mere image but recently conceived; I felt that her charm still emanated from the ruins of the temple she formerly graced, that in the atmosphere formerly permeated by the admiration awakened by her there still vibrated the desires she never disappointed by fulfillment, and that these vibrations called forth in my imagination her real image. From time to time I was surprised by the coincidence of my expectation with the words of the engineer; it was almost as if he were relating to me something which, I had just become aware, was already known to me.

I acknowledge that the story excited me somewhat; and still it was so entirely simple. The comely little O-Take was from her earliest childhood the companion of Masushige; they were both of the same age to an hour, and because their families lived close to each other and were on friendly terms, it was not to be wondered at that the simultaneous arrival into the world of the two children was looked upon as a sort of mystic sign, which the mutual sympathy of O-Take and Masushige seemed to confirm. But nobody had the slightest idea that this reciprocation was only seeming, that O-Take, on the surface so sweet and gentle, knew how to torture her companion in every conceivable way, at the same time being unwilling to forego his society altogether. Countless, it would seem, were the subterfuges through which she tortured him; but I must confess that more than one of the examples offered by the en-

gineer seemed rather petty to me. He perceived my doubts, interrupted himself for a moment, impatiently motioned with his hand and remarked: "The suffering of childhood loses nothing in poignancy because it is sometimes imaginary or exaggerated by individual sensitiveness. Rest assured that Masushige's daily tragedies were not less cruel than many an exemplary suffering made so much of in your literatures and to us Orientals either incomprehensible or even comical.« And before I could answer, he plunged into his story again, or better said, into Masushige's story, which he related as if he drew upon his own memories, half intoxicating and half poisonous.

Arriving however at the point when O-Take became a *miko* in the Temple of the Winds, he suddenly dropped Masushige and devoted himself to an eloquent description of O-Take's growing beauty, her success and her strange power over all with whom she came into contact. Already when she was nine years old her fame as a temple dancer spread from Shinshu into the neighboring provinces; and upon festival days Kaze-no-miya was visited by an ever increasing number of strangers. O-Take moved as lightly and noiselessly on the platform as if she were floating, and her arms seemed to chant with every gesture. The mystic *suzu* with its little bells was endowed by her charming hand with so much life that people hearing and seeing it would feel as if they had conceived a new meaning in the old parable, a new meaning which disclosed to them the profoundest mysteries of their beings; and they were happy, they smiled, but when the dance was over, they tried in vain to remember what a short time before had been so clear to them. Her face was always pretty, but from the time she became a priestess it grew beautiful in some superhuman way, at the same time always seeming to be different. Once it was her oblique and lustrous eyes that attracted, once it was her scarlet lips and delicate nose with its quivering nostrils, again it was her forehead, cheeks and chin, at another time something undescrivable and intangible perhaps in the expression of her face, perhaps in that which was hidden behind her face.

For soon it was evident that from time to time O-Take was carried away by her dancing into religious ecstasy. Then even the dullest became aware that they did not exist for her as an audience, that she was not even conscious of this world, but that she really was dancing in the dusky eternity of space in front of the cave in which the refractory Sun-Goddess had hidden herself. Only some, gifted with instinctive insight, felt that in her exaltation there was something disquieting, which after each festival persecuted them

in their subconsciousness, even in the privacy of their thoughts and conceptions. Finally it was rumored that at times the gods enter the body of this darling of theirs and prophesy through her lips; then even noblemen from distant towns and the envoys of powerful daimios began to make pilgrimages to the Temple of the Winds, to make this or that inquiry of the prophetess. Her answers had all the charm of double and enigmatic meaning that since the beginning of the world has characterized all oracles; nobody could complain of the answers of the gods given him in Kaze-no-miya but only perchance of his own interpretation of them.

There were many who forgot what they really came to ask; when O-Take was twelve years old, many a samurai had more questions in his heart when leaving than when he came. But though she had ripened into a woman, O-Take did not even in the following years give the slightest cause for the suspicion that she ever forgot for a moment the requirement of chastity not only of body but also of thought. It looked as if youths and young men for her were not distinguishable from children, women, and old men; she was so kind to everyone that it hurt, she was so modest and courteous that it crushed, and when he with whom she had just been talking stepped back, he felt as if he had been engulfed by a chasm before her eyes and had been instantly forgotten by her, even with his sad fate. She was so chaste that also those who never desired to sin, when looking at her or even at the thought of her felt a wild ebullition of the senses that filled them with horror. And still her dance brought all nearer to the joyous and clean fundamentals of life; some in its beginning, some in its middle and others in its end found the key to happiness which at other times seemed impossible, and unimaginable; but the same people either before this feeling of equilibrium or after it grew restless, became abashed in the presence of their neighbors, and took fright at their own fancies.

Such was this temple dancer when she was sixteen years of age; inviolable and still desired by many, chaste and maddening, gentle and cruel: »In her was personified the primordial principle of the relation of the human to the superhuman,« said the engineer after some deliberation, »she was a dancing problem of sex, intellect, instinct, religion, exaltation, good-evil, the longing for the infinite, art, soul-body . . . Oh, a dancing problem, that is all . . .« He snapped his fingers and tossed his head.« Of course, the mob did not comprehend of what exactly consisted the strange fascination of her singing and dancing. The mob never understands. All such things are reserved for the elect; that is all that the mob under-

stands, and that is why it hates the elect. For to the elect all things have manifold, deepened meanings,« He smiled in apology and hurriedly returned to the story, the outline of which he had broken by this deviation; but the forgotten Masushige made use of this crevice to force his way back into the narrative. For naturally Masushige was of the elect. It might be said simply that Masushige never ceased loving O-Take; on the contrary, his love increased till it became the desire of a man for a woman, and O-Take's inaccessibility excited him to the paroxysms of a morbid imagination and irritated senses; but the young engineer took pains to transpose his Masushige into as extraordinary a key as possible. He made out of the natural desire of a love-smitten youth a mystic affair, the symbol of the eternal, something of the Faust tragedy. But then he gradually slipped into a more natural key, without hunting far-fetched explanations for different points of his story.

In the end even daimios with their trains did not disdain to make pilgrimages to Kaze-no-miya; one poet and then another sang the praises of O-Take and her divine dance; the temple dancer of a formerly unknown nook became the subject of paintings. And Masushige was jealous, tortured himself, and longed with all his soul and all his heart, with all his young body, which withered with vain desire . . . With a few sentences the engineer succeeded in depicting his condition as vividly and as truthfully as if he were describing his own suffering; and it did not escape me that now his face was pale and his eyes shone strangely.

Then suddenly his story took an unexpected turn; and he endeavored not to betray with a single word the surprise in store. Almost sentimentally he described Masushige's strolls about the Temple of the Winds, his sighs, his impotent outbursts of despairing determination which never ripened into acts; nor did he neglect to mention trifling episodes in which O-Take sometimes tortured Masushige, not directly as in her childhood, but indirectly in such a refined way that he did not even have the sweet certainty of really being tortured, of being worth at least so much trouble to her. And one afternoon he met her in the woods, in a fragrant wild nook of a secluded spot, where he often took refuge with his love and pain. She was so beautiful and her eyes burned with such a strange fire that he caught his breath and in the first moment thought he had fallen victim to witchcraft, that his senses were deceiving him. It was, however, the real O-Take, flesh and blood, white but flaming with red flames, palpably a mortal but still like a being from another world . . . She knew of his haunt, she

knew of his love, and she came after him . . . She made a secret of nothing. He had never heard of anything like it; he would never have expected a hundredth part exactly from her. »We are promised to each other, we are predestined for each other,« she said joyously, »and I have always loved you. I always danced for you, for the gods and for you . . . But today I shall dance for you alone, for myself and for you, and I will dance the sun of love out from the cave where it hid to leave our world in darkness.«

She talked as if in a fever, but as he was equally agitated, neither her appearance nor her actions surprised him. At last his tongue loosened; he told her of the tortures of his long love, in ardent and gentle words he told of his longings; in answer she began to dance as he never before had seen anyone dance, singing at the same time about her strange heart, which at once loved and tortured, as if obeying some mysterious command, which at once tortured and pined, perhaps in consequence of some sin committed in a long-past incarnation, which at once grievously tortured and voluptuously benumbed itself with this pleasure of suffering . . . She undulated like a field of ripening rice in the wind, she bent like an iris stem weighed down by the splendor of its bloom, and her arms opened like the wings of a butterfly . . . Burning passionate words flowed from her lips, but her appearance preserved the chastity that so much excited and drove to despair those who had understood that O-Take was created for the love of men and not of gods . . . And before they parted, the goddess of love really allowed herself to be persuaded to come out of her cave, their world was flooded with a magnificent glow, and embracing him, O-Take whispered threats that filled him with wild delight. »You must never love any one but me,« she breathed, sighing with pleasure »only me and always me. And if another were in your embrace, I would feel it even if I were a thousand miles away, my heart would know it and would be embittered with an awful hatred, and without my willing it would send out an Iki-ryó . . . a phantom of revenge, which can murder in broad daylight even if he who hates does not wish to murder.«

Then the engineer interrupted his narrative for an instant. »Perhaps you never heard of Iki-ryó. The common people believe that hate can embody itself, of its own accord hunt him, who did a wrong, and kill him against the will of the person harboring hate. And for this reason, they say, we should never hate, even if we are terribly wronged, because we never know whether against our will our hatred will not commit murder. For in that case the sin would be upon our heads.« He became silent, allowing his eyes to

rove over the quiet idyl of the temple's ruins. He was somewhat out of breath like one who is relating things that lie too close to his heart; and when after a few moments he resumed his story, he did so with an involuntary, profound sigh, seemingly relative to Masushige's short happiness.

For that night O-Take disappeared from the Temple of the Winds. Not until the following day did her lover learn of it, and thinking in his first excitement that O-Take had been driven to suicide by qualms of conscience, he himself contemplated committing seppuku or harakiri, as became a samurai. Already the third day, however, it became known in the neighborhood that O-Take had run away with a young nobleman of a rich family, living in Kyoto; it transpired that she had made careful preparations for this flight, which had been agreed upon for that very night; and there were many conjectures as to the fate of both lovers, who in such an unprecedented manner had broken the customs of the country. Nobody had the least inkling that the renowned temple dancer had broken them for the first time already on the afternoon before her flight; and still less did they suspect that it was in Masushige's embrace that O-Take for the first time scorned the grace of the Gods for the love of a man . . . And because O-Take had been the pride of the country around and had contributed materially to the prosperity of her village, the anger of the people and their bitterest condemnation turned against the seducer of the beautiful *miko*, not against O-Take herself, in whom both the priests and the people were willing to see the poor blinded victim of a wile.

»In this light even the ballad which we heard on our way here treats the matter,« remarked the engineer, lowering his voice, as if putting this digression into parenthesis. »As an innocent victim.«

I looked at him amazed. »And the ballad does not know of Masushige?« escaped me.

»Only of his vain love, of the virtue of O-Take, and of how he mourned because of her fall . . .«

I was on the point of asking how it was then that he had learned of the one love-meeting of O-Take with her Masushige, but at once I changed my mind. I would have been very foolish to shatter the outlines of the story; if there were some mystery here, either it would explain itself or in time I would figure out its solution. Certainly there was nothing to be gained through inquisitiveness or impatience. I did not insist on his explaining the gaps in the ballad, and he went on with his tale.

What followed, the old song did not neglect to record with due

pathos: Masushige shaved his head and as a monk entered a Buddhist monastery, which just at that time had been built on the other side of the valley; he entered a monastery and did penance for his sin and for O-Take, while she in Yeddo, the Tokyo of today, was enjoying her short fame as the first profane dancer of Japan. In a short time she broke with her lover and took a new one, she performed charming and poetic dances before the haughty and the humble, she invented new forms of dancing which no one after her could execute, and for the space of two or three years she was showered with successes and riches, with the good will and admiration of all. She exchanged one lover for another, a circumstance which, however, the ballad discreetly evades, and her dances became more and more daring, until at last she was banished along with her last lover, an impoverished samurai, into exile on an island between Japan and the Loo Choo Archipelago. There she pined away with longing for fame and love, though of course the ballad affirms well-meaningly that O-Take died of grief over her transgression and vain longing for the Temple of the Winds, where once she had been so happy. And before she went away to the Kingdom of Shadows, into Meido, she remembered Masushige and sent him as a keepsake a wonderful, exquisite mirror, made for her by the greatest artist of the time, who had been enthralled by her charms, like so many others, an artist who for a short time had been her lover, like so many others. These were the sceptical additions of the engineer; the ballad limited itself to recording that from her death-bed O-Take sent Masushige her soul in the shape of a mirror.

Once more my companion interrupted his story. "I suppose it is unnecessary to call your attention to the fact that the mirror was of metal. At that time Nippon knew no other kind. And as you probably also know, these metal, always round mirrors were little miracles of beauty and taste. They were usually of bronze, and their face was magnificently polished with a mixture of tin and mercury, the back was decorated with embossed flowers, birds, dragons, or Chinese ideographs; this kind of mirror always had a handle giving the whole the appearance of a metal fan. But perhaps I may call your attention to that occult relation of the mirror to its mistress's soul, in which our humble folk believe and have believed from time immemorial. An old Japanese proverb says that a woman's mirror is her soul. We have many peculiar traditions about mirrors. For example, a mirror is supposed to feel all the joys and sorrows of its mistress, becoming bright and dull. Another legend relates of the mirrors of two women jealous

of each other: in the deep of the night the mirrors engaged in a combat so fierce that both broke, along with the hearts of their sleeping owners. You understand, then, how a woman of occult powers like O-Take could send her first lover her soul in the mirror into which she had once gazed at her image." He arose and stretched himself.

"Well, what happened with Masushige," I prompted him.

For the fraction of a second his eyes seemed to bulge unnaturally but he recovered himself so quickly that in the next moment I was not sure of the fleeting impression.

"Yes, we must not forget our Masushige," he muttered and raised his head, meeting my glance. "The ballad is silent on this point, ending with the death of O-Take and her last recollections of the Temple of the Winds, her village, and the companion of her childhood. But I ascertained facts, that is, I have a theory, I have a sort of foundation or well-founded supposition as to the foundation of theory . . . yes . . ." He became somewhat confused and stuttered. "Masushige was . . . a sort . . . of eccentric person. He never even looked into the mirror. Was he afraid of breaking his holy vows? Was he hurt too deeply? All I know is that secretly he threw the mirror into the forest tarn to which I am now leading you, and which is situated near the nook where O-Take gave herself to him, only to desert him the same night . . . "He laughed somewhat forcedly." From his monastery it was a good distance. Our Masushige must have been a sort of monomaniac, whatever his fixed idea may have been; fear of the sensuous soul of her whom he had once loved so much, or disillusion, the longing to save at least some illusion, or revenge unworthy of a monk . . . He threw the mirror into the tarn, near which he had once lived through the most beautiful moments of his life, he threw it away without ever having looked into it . . ."

I could not help smiling. "And how do you know this, if I may ask?" I said with an involuntary tinge of irony.

He turned towards me and I noticed that he was almost livid. "I found it," he answered, "and when we return I shall show it to you."

And he quickened his pace as if something were driving him away from the melancholy ruins of the temple; and before we had gone a hundred steps he changed his mind, suddenly declared the walk to the tarn to be entirely superfluous, and led me back to his lodging beyond the village, halfway between the paper factory and the new electric plant. The whole way back there

was no talking with him; in the end he was almost irritable and more inclined to be monosyllabic than was to my liking.

No sooner were we in his room than his mien changed altogether. "I was afraid that we should come home too late," he began to explain, "and that there would be no more direct sunlight. I was very anxious that we should get here in time. That was why I hurried so impolitely. I beg your pardon a thousand times."

I waived his apologies. "But why do we need sunlight?" I queried. I had the suspicion that he had been hurrying rather for his own satisfaction than for my sake.

"You will see in a minute." He offered me a cushion, on which I seated myself, and after having clapped his hands three times he continued. "You are not mistaken if you think that I hurried partly for my own sake. Today I was relating the story of the temple dancer, so I wished to come in time to catch a glimpse of her phantom..." His eyes burned with a strange smoldering fire. "Without the sun it would be impossible, — without that sun which she worshipped with her dance as the Darling of the Gods..." An aged woman, his servant, entered, knelt down and touched her forehead to the matted floor. He ordered tea and almost impatiently waved his hand to bid her leave us. "Fortunately, we still caught the sun and with it the best possible ending for my story. But we came just in the nick of time. In five minutes it would have been too late."

Excusing himself, he hurried away and in a short time returned with an ancient mirror, the handle of which was green, as if mossgrown. "A strange shape," I exclaimed, taking it into my hand. "The handle looks like live bamboo in this covering of patina. And look, here are wisps and leaflets of bamboo... A beautiful piece of work, which does not suffer in the least from the patina. One could say that age instilled life into this mirror..." Doubts assailed me as to whether such a green covering could have formed under water; I doubted it and began to suspect that this part of my host's information was untrue or at least inaccurate. But at that instant I turned the mirror over and cried out in wonder. The back was altogether unsightly, devoid of ornaments, unpolished and even rough, as if corroded. "What a pity!" escaped me. "Probably the most beautiful part of it is lost for ever!"

He was so excited that without an apology he almost tore the mirror from out of my hand. "Quickly, before the sun goes down!" he cried anxiously and turned the face of the mirror towards the sun, throwing its reflection on the opposite wall, which was plunged in deep shadow.

And then amazement laid hold of me, and I hesitated to believe my eyes: for on the paper sliding-screen there appeared in the golden circle of light the dancing figure of a woman with arms outstretched, holding in her hand the sacred *suzu*, a golden, burning shadow, looking like the heart of a flame. An unspeakably delicate and mystic figure, the nudity of which was only a suggestion, enveloped in fire . . .

"But this is surely impossible . . ." I finally managed to whisper; but as yet I could not take my eyes off from that charming, mysterious vision. It seemed to me as if in the screen a loophole had been opened into glowing depths of time and space, so to say, and that in a little while I would see before me in life-size that charming O-Take whose soul had been conjured into the magic mirror; that from out of the abyss from which we assume there is no return my companion was calling back her whom doubtlessly he himself loved and whose secret he had learned in some inexplicable manner. A strange excitement came upon me, and extraordinary agitation.

But at that instant the sun went down, the golden circle disappeared from the wall, and the vision seemed to me still more unbelievable. I turned to the engineer with a mute question. He handed me the mirror. There was nothing noteworthy on its face, except that it was slightly convex. I looked into it and saw my own awe-stricken face. I turned it over; the back was ungainly, uneven, and covered with patina, as I had observed before. It was clear to me that I would look in vain to the mirror for an explanation of that mysterious phenomenon, evidently belying the laws of nature.

"May I trust my eyes, may I believe that I really saw what I saw? Or did it only seem to me?" I said at length in an avowedly quivering voice. I was undeniably excited, and it seemed unnecessary to conceal my excitement.

He laughed. "If you had read what Professors Ayrton and Perry wrote about the magic mirrors of Japan in the Transactions of the Royal Society, if I remember rightly in volume twenty-six, or the article by the same authors in the twenty-second volume of the Philosophical Magazine, you would not be so amazed, though even then you would have the right to be somewhat mysti-

fled in the first moment, not with the reflection of the face of this mirror, but much more with its back. By the way, I remember the numbers of those two volumes because naturally I myself sought to explain the mystery, being interested in this matter."

"I beg of you, do not torture me any longer and explain to me what seems to be inexplicable."

We sat down again on the floor and he poured out tea for me, which the old servant had brought in the meantime. "Some of our old metal mirrors display interesting phenomena in the reflection they cast. Sunlight reflected from the face of such a mirror throws on a wall a luminous picture of the design executed in relief on its back. This in itself is surely a strange occurrence, and such mirrors fully deserved to be called magic. Metal, untransparent matter, — but the mirror casts on the wall the picture of its back, inaccessible to the sunlight. But Ayrton and Perry discovered what to our old mirror-makers was of course no secret. The phenomenon originates in the fact that the curvature of the surface of the mirror is greater above the flat part of the back than above the relief. The mirror, of course, was cast with a flat face, and was made slightly convex before polishing by being scratched with a special iron tool and rubbed thoroughly with mercury. The first process caused the convexity of the face, the second increased it; the effect of both these processes was greater on the thinner parts of the mirror than on those above the embossed parts of the back. Thus originated the convexity, scarcely perceptible to the casual glance but sufficient to give a reflection in sunlight with a luminous picture of the design on the back of the mirror. Do you understand?"

I reached for the mirror. "I understand, I understand it all after your explanation," I cried impatiently, "but I do not understand how then your magic mirror can reflect a dancing figure when on its back there is nothing but this rough surface!" I trembled with fear lest his final explanation should be too matter of fact.

Silently he drew a metal rod out of the *hibachi*, the bronze vessel with live coals, and significantly tapped the mirror with it. It sounded hollow. And then I understood:

The back of the mirror was on the inside, and the unsightly covering was but a protection.

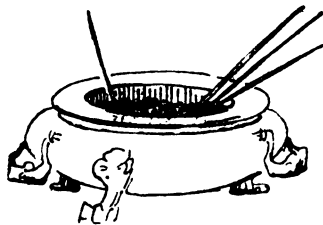
"Even in this there is a sort of deeper meaning, which escapes you," my host added and sighed involuntarily, lifting to his lips a tiny tea-bowl. And I noticed that his hand quivered.

* * *

Towards the close of my sojourn in Japan I read in the newspapers about the mysterious death of my friend the engineer, whom I met several times after our becoming acquainted upon the occasions of his rare visits to Yokohama and Tokyo. The happening caused considerable excitement and so gradually all that it was possible to ascertain in the case was made public.

The young engineer had just married a highly educated young girl of a Tokyo family held in great respect. The very first morning, before his wife was out of bed, he left the room under some pretext or other; he was in entirely good spirits, in a happy frame of mind, it seems. At least to that effect were the affirmations of the servants, who saw him leave the house and hurry across the courtyard to the stone building for the storage of valuable objects, the go-down which adjoins every more pretentious house in Japan. When he did not return for a long time the young wife was finally filled with dire forebodings, dressed hastily and went after him. Two servants were with her when in the "go-down" she found her husband lying upon his face, already growing cold. He rested on an ancient mirror which had pierced his throat with sharp, metal bamboo leaflets forming the handle. His face was drawn in horror but on his lips there dwelt a happy smile.

According to the autopsy he was stricken by paralysis of the brain; but strange to say, there were some symptoms of death by strangling, which was of course out of the question. And because the marks on the throat looked as if caused by some monstrous strangling grasp, it was rumored among the superstitious folk and the factory workers that the engineer had died a violent death, and that his murderer was I k i - r y ó, the embodied hate of somebody whom he had wronged, either willingly or unconsciously, or who at least had come to believe that he had been wronged. However, no one thought of stopping to notice that old mirror, and the less did any one think of turning its polished surface to the sun, which would have called forth in the reflection the fairy-like vision of O-Take, the temple dancer.





THE ADVENTURE OF A KNIGHT-ERRANT.

The limping old man looked searchingly at the pilgrim wrapped in a straw raincoat. The stranger's garments were not worth much, but his accent and his behavior were excellent; and when the wind blew apart his coat for an instant, the old man noticed two swords behind his belt, which designated him as a samurai. Doubtlessly he was a ronin, a "wave-man", a povertystricken nobleman without a lord, a wandering adventurer; his face was trustwothy, the gaze of his eyes was clean and frank. Nevertheless they were sad eyes, probably having seen much grief, of their own and of other people.

The old man's eyes lit up. He had an idea, a very good idea, but it seemed to him too soon to come out with it as yet. Oh, it was not for nothing that his hamlet had been contented with him for thirty years as its muraosa, or headman. Perhaps just now a new opportunity was offering itself for him to display his prudence to his people. Too long had his mura suffered from the Honorable Goblin Spider, but already several ronins had perished in the attempt to rid the ancient temple of its haunting specter, and so far this good man, though undoubtedly brave, had not shown enough interest to warrant a hope that such an adventure would lure him. It was necessary to arouse his curiosity, to awaken his attention.

And bowing profoundly, the old man began to talk, sucking in some syllables and breathing out others, and in every other way strictly adhering to the rules of etiquette, so that the errant samurai could not be offended by a single word or look.

Yes, it is still a good way to the village, a full hour; of course, the distance can be shortened considerably by going on the paths through the rice fields. The villagers, however, do not like this shorter route because it is necessary to cross the river on a plank from beneath which one can hear the Phantom Washerwoman count ner pieces of laundry and break into weeping when she finds one

missing. Of a sunny day it seems that it is only the currents bubbling and gurgling and breaking on the boulders: but if the day be cloudy, at twilight, or especially of a night, no one can question the reality of the voice counting the washed clothes and in the end bursting into desperate lamentation. There were many who even saw the Phantom Washer-woman; and several of them paid for their inquisitiveness in one way or another. For the Phantom Washer-woman takes vengeance on those who cross the plank singing gaily. Once a certain honorable samurai of the neighborhood purposely did not heed the advice given him by his carriers, and being somewhat exuberant after having imbibed too freely, he not only sang on his way across the bridge, but actually had his sedan-chair stop in the middle of the plank, and sneered at the Phantom Washer-woman, adding the names of ludicrous objects to the names of the numbers as she recited them and finally mimicking her wails. Nothing happened, and he covered also his carriers and guides with biting ridicule. But when they were nearing home a comely maiden stepped into their way and handed the samurai a bamboo casket, with the alleged message of her mistress "that his good humor return whenever he looked at her present". She made an obeissance and disappeared among the camellia bushes; and opening the casket, the samurai found the bloody and mutilated head of a little child. Dark forebodings came over him, and jumping out of the *ka go* he hurried home to his family only to find there the headless body of his youngest son. The Phantom Washerwoman had revenged herself . . .

"Sitting in a *ka go* (a sedan) does not entitle anyone to irritate *ka ge* (shades, superhuman powers)", gravely observed the *ronin*, and the old man repeated this pun in his mind so that he could flaunt it on occasion. It was clear to him that this "wave-man" was a wise and discrete person; and it pleased him that he was not altogether uninquisitive. For in the next moment he asked why the Phantom Washerwoman counted her pieces of laundry and always burst into lamentations when she reached the number seventeen.

»She used to wash for the household of a rich yeoman,« he explained obligingly,« and most likely once some valuable piece was carried away by the current, or stolen by the treacherous ghost-fox. And because for former smaller losses she had suffered humiliation at the hands of the cruel yeoman, she was overwhelmed with fear, counted her pieces again and again, and not being able to find the missing one, in the end threw herself into the river. Her body was mangled among the boulders just under the bridge. And because her own life had dragged by too gloomily for her to sing at her work,

the Phantom Washerwoman's hatred pursued all who ever enraged her with their singing.«

The r o n i n shook his head, setting upon his way again. »Hatred cannot be uprooted by hatred, but by love, our Master said, and if we do not react against an evil deed with hate, exactly so much evil will disappear forever from this transitory, wretched world.« His voice, however, sounded somewhat uncertain, and the old man, who limped along at his side, looked at him with a hurried, furtive side-long glance. The countenance of the r o n i n, which life had furrowed with many wrinkles, was like a forest tarn: calm, but no one could tell what lay concealed on the bottom of his soul. »It is sinful even to entertain evil and hateful thoughts,« he continued in a moment, gazing vacantly ahead of him, »for we never know how far our hatred may reach and of what it is capable. It is not wise to be careless regarding thoughts. If they are thought persistently and strongly, they become embodied; and it takes a long time for any Thought to die. The world is full of Thoughts, good and bad, foolish and wise, valuable and useless. We live in the midst of innumerable influences and effects. Some thoughts are already mere phantoms. As for the unfortunate washerwoman, she envied people their gaiety, and her envy outlived her. Because of her envy she was chained so firmly to her k a r m a that she could not disengage herself from her form in this incarnation and become embodied anew to continue on her pilgrimage to the Higher Worlds and Heavens. Only on the ship of the Good Law should one approach the Shore of Death and Incarnation.« And he sighed, as if from the depths of some hidden old grief.

The old man was surprised at this eloquence, which would have better become a wandering monk than a man of two swords; and doubts assailed him as to whether this ronin were a person to his liking, capable of fulfilling his hopes. »Not every one carries these exalted precepts in his mind, the less in his heart,« he interposed out of politeness, so as to show interest in the conversation. And sorrowfully his eyes roved to the grove on the hill, around which the road wound its way to the village, as yet invisible. There was the haunted temple; and he was preparing to lead the conversation from the Phantom Washerwoman to the Goblin Spider and to another way over the hill through a wild bamboo thicket around a deserted monastery and down immediately into the middle of the village. He had had everything planned so nicely, but the r o n i n spoiled it all for him with this moralizing. The crippled old man sighed likewise, but from the depths of a fresh disappointment, which was reflected in his physiognomy and voice.

The ronin thoughtfully assented. »That is so: very few of us endeavor with all our might to approach perfection. It is easy to condemn the poor washerwoman for her envy which even after her death remained in this world, taking her form for its own. But who knows whether at the bottom of my heart there does not lie a hundred times greater anger . . . an anger that is driving me forever over the world from place to place?« His eyes flashed and he gnashed his teeth.« Yes, such is my case. But what can you look for in a ronin but blows of fate that peradventure did not yet cease to hurt! Do not be too much disappointed with my dishonorable worthlessness.«

O d j i s a n, however, lifted his head once more; his eyes brightened and quickened. It seemed that after all more could be expected from this ronin than monkish preaching. Oh, we all have our wounds, he remarked; but not all of us have the opportunity to heal them by forgetting, like honorable ronins, who roam all over the country, see many things and live through exciting adventures. And pleading his advanced age in excuse of his curiosity, he asked him what had befallen him that was so terrible.

Perhaps the ronin was just in the mood to open his heart to somebody; or mayhap the great and holy peace that enveloped the countryside, ripening for harvest, loosened his habit of reserve. »What happened to me was awful.« he said in a changed voice, and the old man noticed that beads of perspiration gathered upon his brow. »I revolted against priestly power; the abbot of a Buddhist monastery intrigued against my d a i m y o, and at the same time deluded him with honeyed words; he incensed the powerful and generous daimyo against us, his courtiers and vassals; he attained an ever stronger hold over the populace. Our daimyo finally shaved his head and entered an order, relinquishing his estates in favor of the monastery. We made an attempt to save our lord from the treachery, but it was too late. My family was put to death and I fled as an outlaw . . . But in the end the abbot overreached himself, trying to instigate an elaborate plot against neighboring daimyos. They united against him, routed his forces, and he barely escaped with his life. It is not known with certainty where he took refuge; but do I ever it was, my hatred surely followed him there. And therefore I remained a ronin, though I could have returned into the service of my d a i m y o. What kind of a life could I have led in a country where everything reminded me only of my lost family, my lost happiness? My hatred would have grown, but I wished to subdue and overcome it. That is why I am a ronin. I wish to walk away and think down my hatred. I see a great deal of suf-

fering and many wrongs in the world, and wherever I can, I help sufferers and avenge wrongs like a man. I see also much good and kindness, and with each little bit my hatred grows smaller. I think that it is almost worn out; but there are still moments when suddenly it swells within me and shrieks . . .«

The old man could no longer restrain himself. »Honorable sir . . . would you care to acquire merit by a noble deed?« he interrupted the ronin, so excited that he stuttered.« Yes, a noble deed. A road shorter than this one leads, look, yonder over the hill that we see above us . . . that is, a road to our village. They are grateful folks, my villagers. That is, my unworthiness happens to be the muraosa, the headman. Oh, forgive me for mentioning such an insignificant detail. But it occurred to me . . . Yes, when I was telling you about the Phantom Washerwoman it occurred to me that I might also call your honorable attention to the Goblin Spider. It is an awful specter. But the path, that leads past the temple saves much time. Over yonder it branches off. We do not have to cross the river. We shall come down directly into the village. Nobody uses the path, the people are afraid. But it is not necessary to go close to the temple. That is, your honor can go, if it pleases you . . .«

The ronin smiled almost imperceptibly at the old man's excitement and his transparent devise. »As for your Goblin Spider, I have never heard of it. A Buddhistic temple is haunted . . . you say? Deign to stoop to my ignorance and enlighten it. How long has the Goblin haunted the temple?«

The lame old man stopped questioningly at the parting of the ways, and when the ronin nodded silently, set out upon the path contentedly. »Twenty years ago a new abbot came to the monastery, but with him also misfortune. Bonze after bonze left the temple, many of them ran away on dark nights, and in the end the abbot alone remained. Nobody in all the country around went any more to pray in the church; for whenever anyone prayed for anything in this temple, the opposite was sure to happen. But the abbot was a hard man; he stayed that he might combat the specter that was ruining the reputation of the temple. In the end he was overcome; they found him entangled like a fly in an awful cobweb . . . and without a drop of blood. He was dead and sucked dry by the Goblin Spider. Thus it was and not otherwise. We thought that after the abbot's death the specter would desert the temple; but it stayed on, and its hatred was shifted on to us, to our village . . . Great is the harm it does us, and many the ways in which we have tried to get rid of it . . . All in vain. Our youths have gone against it, and more than one ronin. But nobody who dares to pass the

night in the temple ever comes out alive and sound. Many came to harm even in broad daylight in the temple or on its grounds. It happened that at night pilgrims allowed themselves to be lured by the lights that always burn in the church, and paid with their lives for their mistake. Some of the villagers, near the temple in broad daylight, caught sight of a beautiful *geysha* in a gaily-colored robe and with golden hairpins in her lustrous, high coiffure; she walked mincingly to the temple and on its steps turned and smiled at them; thereupon they noticed with amazement that she did not touch the ground with her feet, but floated like a spirit, in a vapor of the colors of mother-of-pearl. Others, again, saw a weeping maiden with hair loosened, kneeling before the church and praying fervently; but when they had gone around her, they saw to their horror that she had but half a body and half a face, and that her hair was a tangled cobweb, full of small blue and black flies. And they fled.«

The *ronin* appeared to wonder at some of the circumstances. »Twenty years ago,« he muttered in thought. »And this specter can be seen in the daytime! That is most strange, for as is well known, the *Shi-ryo* or ghosts of the dead haunt only at night. Between two and three in the morning is their hour. But this *Goblin Spider* is no ordinary specter. And is it still so fierce?

The villager seemed somewhat embarrassed. »We make sacrifices to it, so as to propitiate it. Perhaps that is why it is milder now. For three years already it has not slain anyone, but the smaller misfortunes which continually are befalling our village are certainly his work. Here we may still talk about it; but when we come to yonder group of bushes and trees, it will be best to keep silent about the *Goblin Spider*. Its rage would pursue us if we were to malign it on its own premises. Of course, it would be something else if . . .« And he broke off eloquently.

The knight errant, however, understod. »If I offered to undertake fighting the specter and overcame it, you wish to say? Well, I shall try to acquire this merit. To night I shall stay in the haunted temple. It is still about two hours before sundown. Therefore we shall come to the deserted monastery in more than plenty of time.«

Thereupon, however, the old *murasu* took pity on the good *ronin*, and began to persuade him to abandon his rash project. »The responsibility for your death would weigh heavily upon me,« he objected, »for you still have an important task before you: to appease your hatred. If you do not care to give up this insane idea for your own sake, do so for mine.«

But the *ronin* was a man of his word and not of words. He

was, silent, peering from under bushy eyebrows straight before him, and O d j i s a n finally held his pace, knowing that his objections were useless and his persuasions vain. They walked one beside the other, and the sweet voice of the chirping s e m i accompanied them. They passed the group of bushes and trees, before long were plunged in the shade of a wood, and finally caught sight of the tile roof of the temple, peeping out above the bamboo thicket.

»In the course of those years the garden ran wild,« whispered the m u r a o s a. »As for me, I am superfluous here. In this jungle I could not find the way.«

The r o n i n stopped before a spot to which no longer penetrated the rays of the sun, hanging low in the western horizon.

»As for the entrance to the temple yard, I shall find it myself,« he said in an even voice. »Let your honor continue on the way home in peace and quiet. Is it possible to hear the temple bell distinctly in the village?«

Still more quietly the old man responded: »Not only the bell but also the big drum of the main temple can be heard in the village. Only we have not heard either for a long time.«

The ronin smiled:

»Be good enough, you and your people, to listen early in the morning, and if you will hear the sound of the drum, be sure I am well and alive and that your village has been delivered from the Goblin-Spider once and forever.«

The old man took fright at these words uttered in a loud voice, hastened to bow himself away and hobbled at a lively pace out from the immediate nearness of the temple. In a few moments he disappeared in the wood. And the r o n i n, left alone on the glade divided into dying light and growing shadow, for a long, long time stood motionless, plunged in thought, and then set about searching for the path, overgrown and hidden somewhere in the bamboo thicket.

It was gloaming, and at the slightest movement of a bamboo twig it looked as if a spider were gliding down to the ground. The dusk blended the outlines of things, over which there seemed to slip an insidious cobweb. Immense shadows lay here and there; a boulder beneath a widespread pine might have been a spider's body, and the bulging roots its phantom legs; in places there were black tarns of darkness.

The r o n i n, however, did not mind these weird shadows, being engaged in seeking the path by which he could penetrate to the yard

of the temple. Only now it occurred to him that he should have asked the old man to bring him a lantern; but when at length he found the way he saw that it would have been superfluous. For through the bushes and the bamboo there beckoned a flickering, uncanny light, hung in the temple court-yard. He took down the lantern, and looking neither to the left nor to the right, made directly for the main altar. His steps had been muffled by grass when he was crossing the yard; but although he had on straw sandals, just as soon as he reached the wooden stairs he heard his hollow foot-falls reverberating in all the nooks and crannies of the court and temple. The staircase was old and warped, and crackled with a hundred strange voices and whispers; it seemed as if from everywhere malicious imps were snickering at him. Even the pillars moaned as if warningly, and it would not have taken an unusually experienced ronin to discern at once that this was in truth a haunted temple. But the knight knew no fear and did no stop; for that matter, his thoughts were only partly aware of his surroundings, being mostly somewhere in the past, twenty years distant. »And the new abbot came here twenty years ago,« he whispered absently. »How strange, how very strange!«

He entered the temple and sat down directly beneath the altar, on which a bedusted Shaka Muni, with his hand raised in blessing, reposed on a lotos flower. A thousand cobwebs were hung all around, even on the smile of the dreaming Buddha; they were extended in many layers, one above the other, and from below it looked as if clouds had congealed above the ronin's head in the dusk of the eaves. But whereas the cobwebs entwining the saint differed in no respect from the product of ordinary spiders, the silky tissue of the net everywhere else in the temple was iridescent with magnificently glittering hues.

»Only a good spider dares to approach Shaka Muni, who is supreme good,« the ronin said to himself. »It is easy to see that the rest of the cobwebs are the vain work of the Goblin Spider.«

And because he knew that in the beauty of evil only evil again is hidden, he turned aside his gaze from the pearly shimmer of those phantom cobwebs and cast his eyes on the floor, thinking good and clean thoughts. And the resplendent, vividly colored cobwebs vanished.

He was satisfied with himself when he noted this but further he saw nothing out of the ordinary, nor did he hear any suspicious sound; not until midnight. Then suddenly there appeared before him a specter having only half a face, one eye, one hand, one foot, and flowing hair that was naught but a tangled cobweb. And when

it was very near the phantom kneeled down and seated itself half-heartedly on its single foot, saying in a squeaky voice, with its half of a mouth:

»Hitokusai!« Which means something like: »I smell a man.« And the ronin realized that thus exactly had squeaked the old stairway by which he had mounted into this temple, chosen as a lair by this foul spirit.

He was brave, and the hand he held on the grip of his sword did not tremble. But he did not budge or utter a word. And the ghost vanished as soundlessly as it had made its appearance.

Then came a bonsan with a polished head and a pleasant smile on his well-fed face. He bowed, seated himself opposite the ronin and began to play on a samisen. Never before had the samurai heard such enchanting and wonderful music. The strings of the samisen sighed beneath the ivory plectrum so silkily and so sweetly that the ronin's eyes began to close. It seemed to him that he could fall into a most delicious slumber with his head resting in his hand. Visions of his former happiness evolved before his mind's eye, and after long years he again beheld dear faces with great distinctness, he beheld his wife and children, who had died a cruel death at the hand of the tyrannical monk. His wife's voice seemed to sound from the strings of the samisen, . . . the voice that once had whispered words of tenderness and devotion to him. Dampness gathered under the lashes of the haggard ronin, and in time with that seductive melody his head began to nod to and fro; the gratifying visions became still more gratifying, and it began to seem to him that more than twenty years was but a dreary dream, and that this was reality, that he was young again and enveloped in the love of his family. Then suddenly he tore himself out of his intoxication and with a greath leap jumped up from the floor, at the same instant drawing his sword. For he comprehended that a cruel pitfall had been prepared for him, that he had fallen victim to hallucinations, and that such dulcet music could not issue from beneath human fingers.

But the priest burst into boisterous, goodnatureed merriment. »Oh hoho, oh, ho . . . you thought I am a ghost!« he laughed. »Not in the least, you are mistaken, honorable sir! I am only the wretched, hard-ried bonsan of this temple and I play to drive away evil spirits. Does my music sound at all uncanny to you?« This voice sounded strangely familiar to the ronin, and his heart was heavy in his bosom. »Does not this samisen sound extremely well?« continued the priest persuasively. »Could a soecter venture into the magic circle of sweet sounds?«

The ronin sat down anew, half-shamefacedly peering from beneath his shaggy eyebrows at the mysterious bonsan. He wished to weigh his situation and all the circumstances of this incident, but his thoughts were confused, and as soon as the dreamy sounds began to float quietly from the samisen, again the visions became alive in his imagination, and his heart ached. These visions were reality before the evil, terrible abbot destroyed his happiness forever . . . His bosom heaved with a sigh, his face became livid. Oh, how he used to hate the priest who in the name of the gods had heaped crime upon crime . . . However, now his hatred bowed its head and became contrite; it changed to pity . . . There still would come moments when his soul would be embittered, when his thoughts would suddenly jumble in his head, when a red mist would be whirled by a burning wind before his dry, parchingly dry eyes . . . But so it is with all people: from pity to hate is a mere step . . . The ronin, however, resolved never again in this wasted, wretched, expiating existence to take this step. At that moment the bonsan leaned towards him, and his voice sounded ingratiating. »Deign, honorable sir, to condescend to try the excellent tone of my samisen yourself!« he said, handing him his musical instrument.

Involuntarily the ronin extended his left hand; but at that instant his smile congealed on his face. For in the bonze's countenance there came to pass a terrifying change, rapidly and still dilatorily, violently and still of its own accord. Whose were those sticky features? Whose that suave and penetrating look? Whose that smile? And recognizing his greatest enemy, who had put his wife and children to death, the knight errant summoned all the strength of his soul to suppress the desire to jump up and kill this wretch. He smiled painfully, and with that smile his bosom was relieved, his eyes cleared, his heart thawed. He bowed, thanked formally and with his extended left hand accepted the proffered samisen.

No sooner had he touched it than the samisen was transformed into a phantom cobweb and the bonsan into the Goblin Spider, into a hideous monster, here hairy and there slimily bare, but sparkling all over with the colors of mother-of pearl like a rotting puddle. Its long legs were terminated by frightful claws, each one resembling a different instrument of torture. All this the ronin took in at a single glance, but he was alarmed by nothing, notwithstanding that his left hand was entangled in the web to such a degree that he could not use it. »A fly caught in a spiderweb struggles and dies,« he said to himself, and assumed a defensive position, avoiding violent movements, jerks, and sweeps. His opponent was a skilful fighter, and his attacks were adroit and clever;

but it seemed to the r o n i n that he could figure them out in advance and that he felt instinctively the direction from which each came. He combated the furious fiend heroically and inflicted upon it many a grievous wound with his sword; for his right hand was entirely free and his left helped at least in guarding. Nevertheless he himself suffered more than one wound, and in the heat of combat becoming careless, finally was so bound up in the cobweb that upon being thrown to the ground he could not rise again.

He fell, however, under the blessing hand of Buddha, and the Goblin Spider did not seem to have enough strength to continue the fight. With wideopen eyes the r o n i n observed it as wading in its own blood it crawled out of the temple. With every movement it left on the floor a bloody imprint of its body and feet; and its blood was purple. The lights went out and the r o n i n, feeling extraordinarily at ease though physically bound, fell into a deep sleep, in which he dreamt that he had attained his end and worn out the anger in his heart.

The sun arose and the birds started to sing in the temple garden, where for long years no bird's song had resounded. The knight recovered from his stupor and looked around the interior of the temple in wonder, recalling the happenings of the foregoing afternoon and night one after the other. He did not command a complete view of the space in the middle of which he was lying, being so much entangled in that ghostly net that he could hardly raise his head to look at the big drum by the side of the altar. It was out of the question for him to beat upon it; but without the signal agreed upon the villagers would never venture even to the spot to which the loquacious m u r a o s a had escorted him, much less through the thickets to the yard, unseen by human eyes for three years. Without that signal he would be condemned to a slow and horrible death of hunger, thirst, and loss of blood; and only at this thought did the r o n i n notice that the blood long since had ceased to flow from his wounds, which under the cobwebs had not only closed, but even healed. Only small scars remained after them, and they looked like a text of the sacred sutras. The r o n i n allowed his weary head to sink again to the floor, and raised his eyes to the blessing Shaka Muni. It seemed to him that the statue was smiling graciously at him, and feeling a great calm and extraordinary content in his heart, he resigned himself to his i n g w a. Happen what would, one thing was sure: his soul was entirely free of the hatred that formerly had blinded him, which for years he had endeavored to drive out of his heart. His features were composed, his glance clean and bright.

Thereupon immense beautiful butterflies appeared in the temple,

gilded by the morning sun, and whenever one of them in his flight hit the drum, it resounded deeply. And their swarming seemed to form the noble strokes of ideographs in which the reclining knight read the renowned k y ó or sutra about love and forgiveness, about the nothingness of all things and the vanity of illusions

Thus the villagers found him: smiling and gazing somewhere beyond visible things into other and more perfect worlds. They found him entangled in awful cobwebs; but when, putting aside their useless weapons, they set about liberating him, they discovered that the phantom tissue vanished like mist before the sun, hardly was it separated from the r o n i n's body.

»But who beat the drum?« they asked in amazement, after hearing the r o n i n's account of the night's happenings.

»Somebody's beautiful thoughts turned into butterflies,« said the knight errant, slowly gathering himself up from the ground, »and these butterflies, fluttering about the statue of Shaka Muni and hitting the drum, summoned you, honorable sirs,«

He arose and looked around the temple; and then a great wonder filled his soul. For the imprints left by the bleeding Goblin Spider looked at first glance exactly like his family emblem. »But here on the floor you see the traces of an evil thought that took on the form of the Goblin Spider,« he added thoughtfully. »Somebody's hatred embodied itself in an I k i - r y ó; but the hatred weakened, as the years went by, and the I k i - r y ó lost its invincibility. Small indeed is my merit!«

And he bade the m u r a o s a with his villagers to follow him in the purple tracks of the wounded goblin. They went out of the temple into the yard, from the yard they penetrated into the forlorn garden, where azalea clumps long ago had forgotten their trimmed shapes and gone wild, and there, away in the corner, between two fallen lanterns they found the Goblin Spider, moaning and groaning horribly.

A long-dried-out little fishpond was filled with the purple blood of the monster, which had not had the strength to crawl to the hole yawning beneath one of the prostrate t o r o s. The immense spotted feet twitched in the throes of death, and the bulging yellow eyes turned upwards; the horrible claws, however, had disappeared from the extremities, and the villagers wondered how the Spider could have fought so murderously when he was almost unarmed.

For a while the r o n i n gazed motionlessly at the Goblin Spider; then he smiled, raised his sword, and merely touching the monster's body with it, at one stroke severed the head from the hideous body.

It rolled into the hole under the fallen lantern; and the body became but the shadow of the branch of a tree on the yellow sand.

The villagers were so terrified and awe-stricken by all this that not a single one of them noticed another sudden change in their immediate vicinity. But nothing escaped the ronin's eye. He saw that there where before a hole had gaped under the wrecked lantern now suddenly an orderly grave had appeared with a moss-grown monument. And in the boughs of the tree above the h a k o a bird sang sweetly and then vanished at once, as if it had changed to vapor.

Having shaved his head, the knight errant became a monk and undertook to reestablish this temple, where he had conquered his own hatred. The faithful from far and wide made pilgrimages to the temple, but especially those who either were persecuted by an I k i - r y 6 or were being consumed by their own secret hatred. It was said that nobody ever returned from this pilgrimage without consolation, and many were enlightened on the dark ways of life. For by the grace of the gods it was given them to understand that, like all things, intentions, and feelings, also hatred is but an illusion, a hideous illusion, however, murderous and selfdestroying.

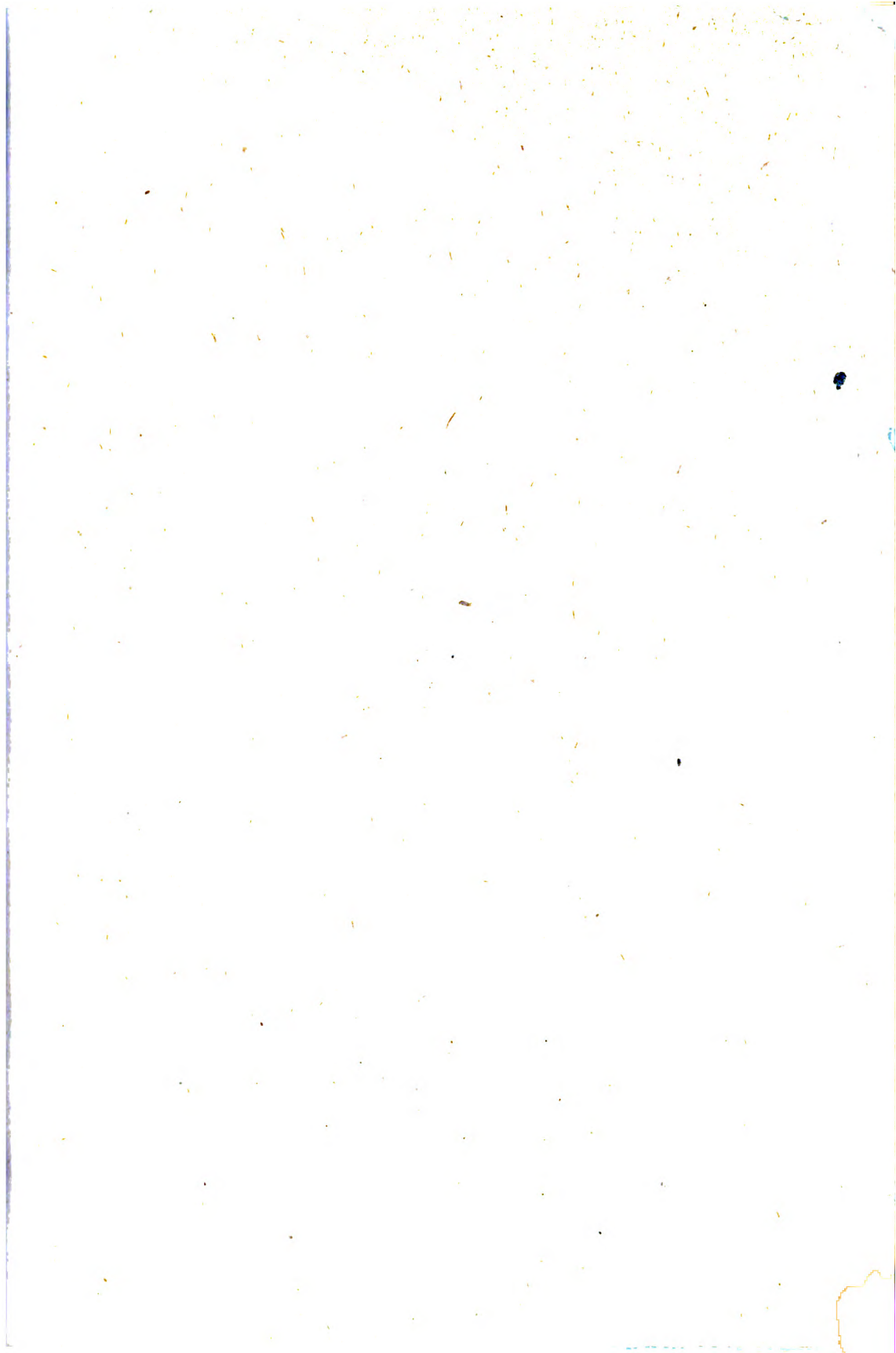




My English version of the »Four Japanese Tales« coincides almost word for word with the Czech original, some parts of which I wrote in fact first in English

The faulty division of words and other errors were unavoidable for technical reasons.

The drawings are by
LADISLAV ŠALOUN,
the creator of
the Hus monument in
Prague.









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