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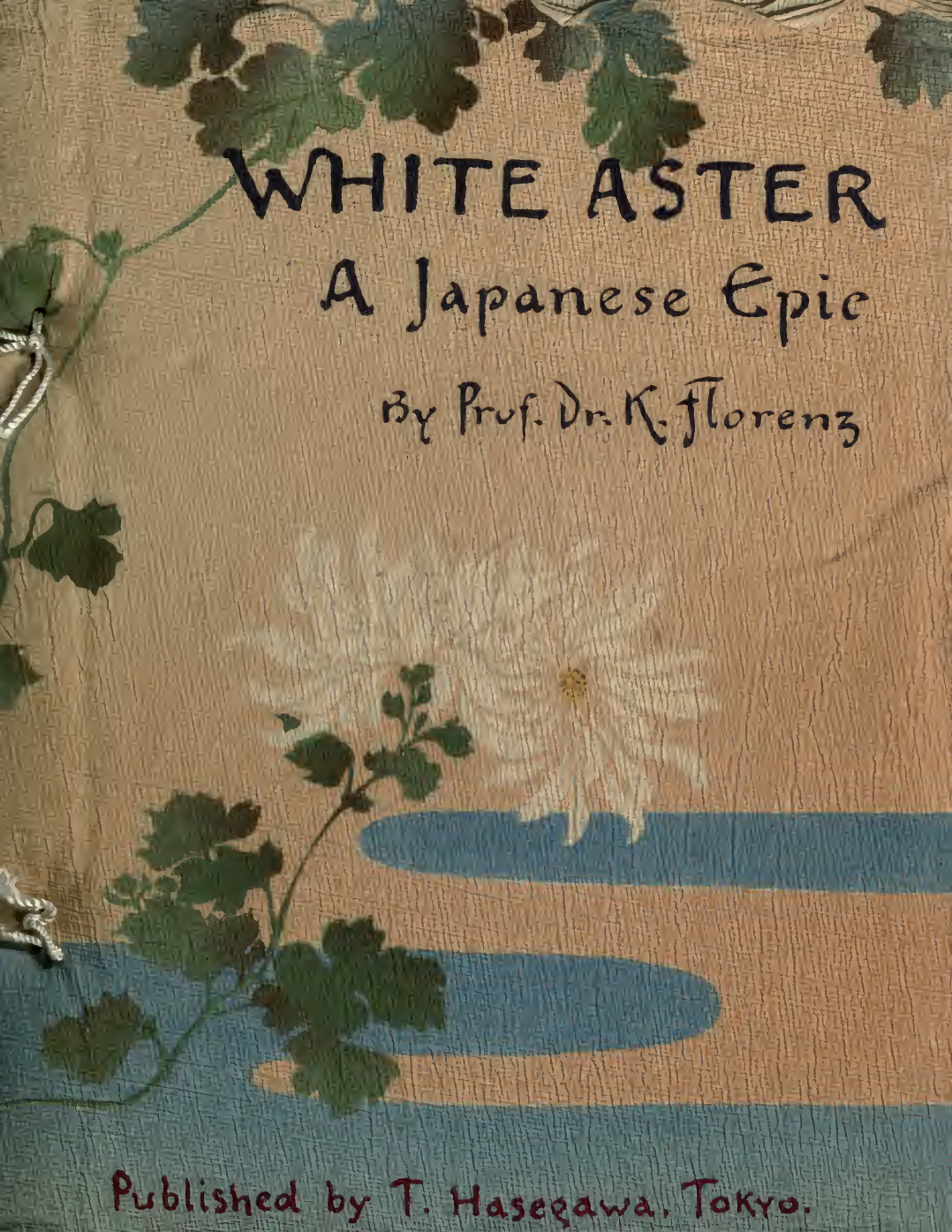
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WHITE ASTER

A Japanese Epic

By Prof. Dr. K. Florenz

Published by T. Hasegawa, Tokyo.



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WHITE ASTER  
A JAPANESE EPIC

TOGETHER WITH  
OTHER POEMS

from the German Adaptation of

Prof. Dr. Karl Florenz

By

A. Lloyd, M.A.

Published by  
T. Hasegawa  
10 Hiyoshicho, Tokyo, Jap



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1963



DEDICATED  
AS A TOKEN OF GRATITUDE  
AND RESPECT  
TO  
GEORGE EBERS









## PREFACE.

---

Long epics are of rare occurrence in Japanese literature as in Chinese, and the few specimens in existence scarcely deserve to be ranked with our western epopees. Little stress is laid on plot or development of action: characters with very marked features seldom present themselves, and there is very little attempt to penetrate into the unfathomable depths of human passions. On the other hand, they are rich in pictures and in descriptions of natural phenomena: no sooner has the poet briefly touched upon the inward conflict of the heart, than he lets his fancy turn back at once to the visible things of the world, which he takes pleasure in describing with great rhetorical skill. In the version which is here offered to the favorable



consideration of the western reader the translator has allowed himself considerable latitude, sometimes trying to render his original accurately, and sometimes very freely; thinking that he could thus do more justice to the poets of the Far East than he could by a rigidly conscientious literal translation which would have killed all the poetical charm of the work.

“White Aster” came before the German translator in two forms. He consulted it in its Chinese original under the title of 孝女白菊の詩, “the Lay of the Pious Maiden Shirakiku” (i. e. White Aster), as composed by the great Sinologue Professor *Tetsujiro Inouye*; but he also had before him a rendering of this poem into classical Japanese by the eminent scholar Naobumi Ochiai (孝女白菊の歌).

Ochiai's rendering is much prized in Japanese literary circles on account of its masterly handling of the language, but to our taste Inouye's original is richer in delicate shades of thought, and the translator has therefore based his own rendering exclusively on this one. We beg therefore to offer to our readers a work in which the situations and the personages, the



action and the sentiment, are all Japanese, though tinged with Chinese art and rhetoric,—always premising that every translation (and how much more does this apply to the English version!) is like silver—one always loses by the exchange.

The illustrations to this book have been designed and executed by two Japanese artists. The greater part come from the pencil of *Mishima Yunosuke*, (三島雄之助;—known in art as 蕉窓 *Shōsō*), who designed the cover, and pp 1-71; *Arai Shūjiro* (新井周次郎, art-name, *Yoshimune* 芳宗) is responsible only for the illustrations to the smaller poems, pp 72-80.

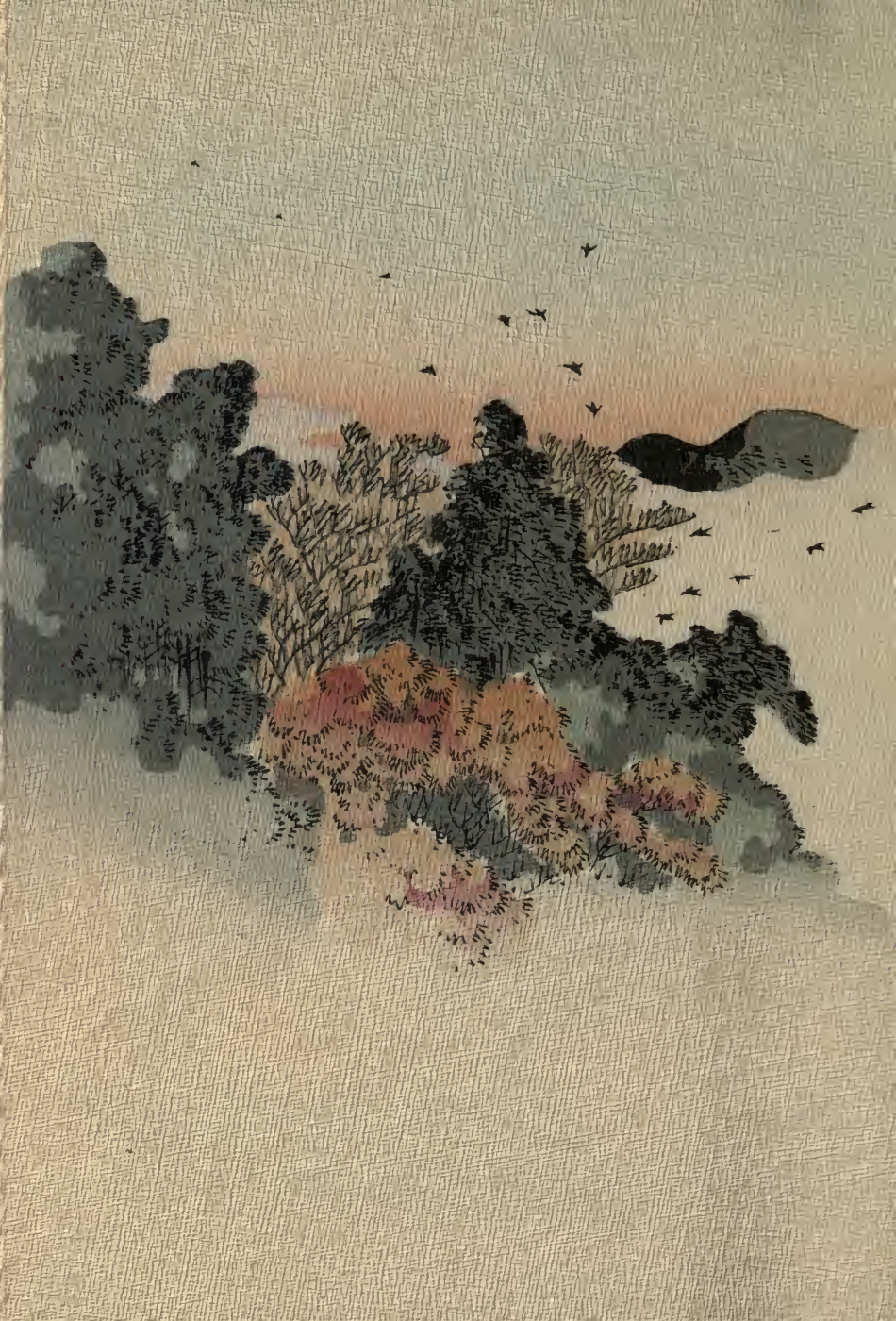
Tokyo, Autumn of 1895.

(German Edition) Prof. Dr. K. Florenz.

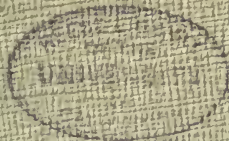
Autumn of 1897.

(English Edition) A. Lloyd. M. A.









## CANTO I.



The sun went down, and its last level rays,  
As with a golden veil of mist, enveloping  
The mount of Aso, lay upon the thorp.  
The wind with gentle murmurs through the trees,  
Scattered the many-tinted Autumn leaves,  
Like pattering raindrops, countless on the earth.

Just then, within the distant temple-grove,  
Boomed forth the deep notes of a smitten bell;  
When from a hut that stood upon the fringe  
And outskirts of the village, crept a maid,  
Straining her eyes to scan the Autumn fields.  
And as she gazed, upon each eager lid  
Sparkled a teardrop, that no loved one came,  
That thus she stood looking abroad in vain,  
The solitary inmate of the hut.



For now three weary days had dragged away  
Since that her sire had climbed the mountain side  
And not returned. At early dawn he went,  
Shouldering his hunting nets and trusty gun,  
Across the slushy fields, and where the wind  
Breathed through the rustling reed-grass, whilst the moon,  
Pale with its latest conflict with the dawn,  
Beamed faintly o'er the temple's hallowed roof.  
Thence, by the path that leads towards the hill,  
He climbed, and quickly disappeared from sight.





Then even fell — but he came not; and night  
Fell, gloom'd, and broke; and once more days and nights  
Passed, — yet he never came. Then she in fear,  
Dreading mishap, enquired everywhere  
From friends and neighbours: — None had seen  
His traces.

And so now her tearful eye  
Wandered in vain over the outspread scene,






Mists, cold and dark, were rising slowly up,  
And with their mantle grey were wrapping o'er  
The silken carpet of red maple leaves.  
Then darkness fell: and gathering the dry leaves,  
Wind-blown, that lay in ridges all around,  
She kindles on the hearth a crackling fire,  
Handles the fan with deftly moving wrist,  
Awakes the slumbering gleed within the coals,  
And boils the kettle for the evening tea.







Meantime the door oft rattles, and each time  
She starts, thinking "Tis Father"—; but the wind  
Was mocking her with idle rappings. Thus  
Hours long she sat, and with her grieving eye  
Gazed now upon the glowing fire, and now  
Upon the rising clouds of steam that danced  
Fantastic right across the darkening room,  
Like those sweet dreams that fill a man with hope,  
And, gaily dancing, sink to nothingness.  
Deep sunk in sleep lay all the villagers,  
And all around was solitary still,  
Save where across the clouded heavens moved,  
With mournful cries, flocks of belated geese.

The sky had changed its dress, and suddenly  
Wrapped round itself a cloak of black rain clouds:  
Noisily shrilled the cold autumnal blast,  
Bowed low the leaves, ducking, as though in fear,  
And loudly storming fell the rain to earth.



White-Aster heard it, shuddering, and with pain  
Thought of her father's suffering (who can tell?):  
Nor longer, thus inactive, can she bear  
To hear the rain splash, and the howling wind  
With patience. Hastily resolved, she throws  
Her blue cloak o'er her shoulder; on her head,  
A hat of red bamboo, and thus goes forth  
Adown the village-street and from the street,  
Through field and bush and grove, towards the hills.  
Here the steep path winds with a swift ascent  
Towards the summit:—the long grass that grew  
In tufts upon the slopes, shrivelled and dry,  
Lay dead upon her path—; hushed was the voice  
Of the blithe chafers:—Only sable night





Yawned threatening from the vale. Nor voice of man,  
Nor cry of beast, gives token of a life  
Existing in the waste. The wind alone  
Howls in the cypresses and rocking pines,  
With roaring voice, as of the storm-thrashed waves.  
Then by degrees the downpour ceased, — and lo!  
The sombre veil of clouds was rent, and through  
The widening rifts peered out the moon and stars,  
To find a mirror in the crystal stream,  
That glided smoothly o'er its bed of rock.

Now to a bridge she came, that, built of stone,  
Stood hoar with mossy age, and crossing it  
Followed the crooked path against the stream,  
That rushed down chattering to his rocky friends.  
Where should she seek the footsteps of her sire?

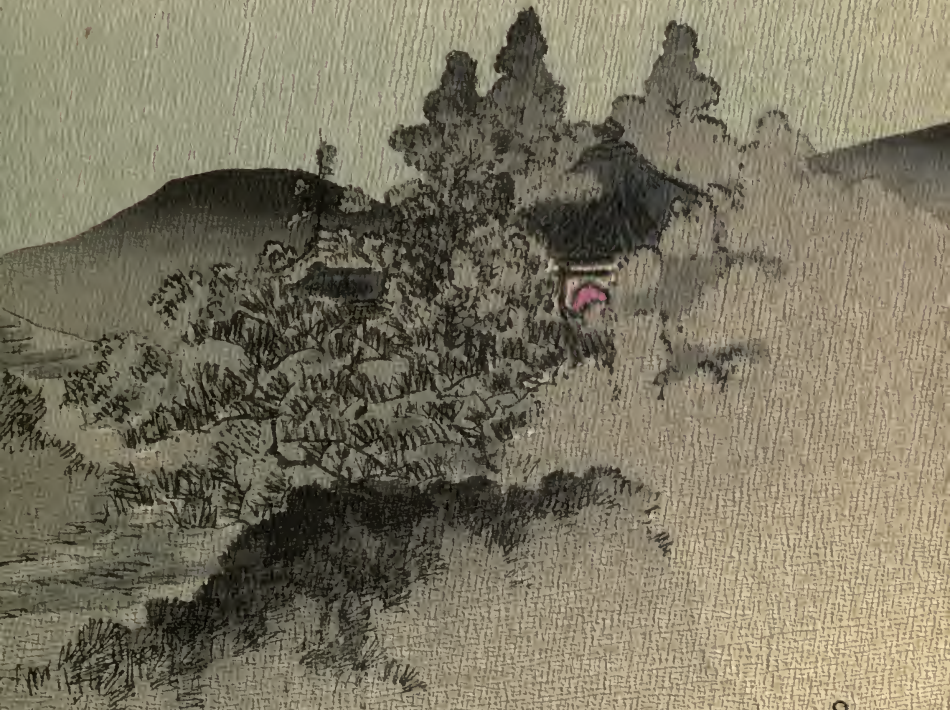


Salt tears of anguish rose, and from her eyes  
Flowed, in a copious stream, adown her cheeks,  
Staining the sleeves that strove to stem their flood.  
So roamed she aimless, up and down the hills,  
Until, at length, within a little grove  
The narrow path was lost. But in the grove,  
O'er-shadowed by the gloomy cypresses  
And branching camphor-trees, she spied from far  
A temple, and a voice come thro' the air,  
As of a priest intoning on his book.





Bleached bones lay on the ground, and rows of graves  
Stood like gray ghosts; with downward stretching arms  
The weeping willows kissed the impure earth  
That breathed corruption; mouldering stood the roof;  
The rotten pillars stood aslant; the wind  
Piped through the broken paper window panes,  
Through which there gleamed a faintly glimmering light.  
Pushing aside the wanton-growing hedge,  
She stumbled up the broken steps of stone





That lead within the silent temple-yard:  
The moonlight shining on her through the trees,  
Tinted her face with its own ghostly hue.

But when the anchorite within perceived  
The sound of steps, he rose up from his desk,  
Candle in hand, half-opening the crank door,  
And saw a shadow moving o'er the ground.  
Then feared he, and his face grew ashy pale:  
"Avaunt! fox-ghost," he cried; "Thou mock'st me not;  
"No tender maid of human birth would thus  
Brave the wild humours of this stormy night."

To whom, with gently pleading voice, the maid:

"I am a poor and solitary maid:  
No spirit I, that with deceitful charms  
Draws near to lure thee to perdition foul.  
Be not alarmed that I thus all alone,  
At such an hour, should break upon thy peace:  
I seek my father on these mountain tracts;  
And therefore wander thus o'er desert paths."







So spake she. As with modest mien she stood  
Thus before him in homely country dress,  
All unadorned, save with pure Nature's grace,  
What man her beauty's charms could have resisted?  
" 'Tis clear she comes of noble family:  
Her eyebrows are as twin half moons: her hair  
Lies on her snowy temples, like a cloud:  
In charm of form she ranks with Sishih's self,  
That pearl of loveliness, the Chinese Helen."

Wondering, the monk fixed his dark eye on her  
And asked, astonished, "Maiden, whence art thou?"  
Much of her story was he fain to ask,  
Yet first he led the maid within the shrine,  
And bade her sit before the sanctuary.

Shrieked through the broken panes the mountain wind,  
Flickered the dull flame in the dingy lamp,  
Black pitchy darkness filled the empty hall,  
Save where the lamplight on the idols fell.  
Without, a brook was rushing down the rocks,  
With noise that pierced the flimsy walls, the bats  
Flew to and fro, and their dark-wandering wings  
With light breath touched her hands and weary cheeks.



At Buddha's feet the maiden sat and dried  
Her moistened eyes, from which the copious tears  
Flowed silent down her cheeks, and, with forced calm,  
Thus to the monk began her mournful tale:

I am the daughter of a Samurai:  
Where the famed towers of Kumamoto raise  
Their proud heads heavenward, in the southern isle,  
There was I cradled—in a stately house,  
Richly set out, with costly palanquins,  
And neighing steeds, pure bred; abundant stores  
Of toothsome dainties for all appetites.  
No sad mischance befalling e'er disturbed  
Our home's perennial peace:—with equal ray,  
Warming and bright, the friendly sun beheld






Our broad verandah, gay with velvet tints  
Of blooming peonies — and hanging blinds  
Of rushes, bound with silk, softened the glare  
That blazed too fiercely in the summer noon.

Here dreamed I my young life, foreboding ill.  
Then suddenly the sounds of warfare filled  
The land, — soldiers were marching — and the dust  
Of combat, rising, darkened all the air.  
But few escaped the all-devouring death  
That drank the life-blood of the country, and  
Incarnadined the fields with streams of blood.  
Strewed with the whitening bones of slaughtered men  
The battle-fields were marked, — on all sides round,  
Ruined and charred, the barns and homesteads stood  
Black monuments of war; — while shrieking crows  
Flying in thousands o'er the desert roads  
Swooped down to forage. Young and old alike  
Fled, leaving home and fields and goods,  
In panic-stricken troops, from where the foe,  
Stood round the moated castle. 'Twas no time  
For dangerous hesitancy: I, too, fled,  
So did my mother, and with her I sought  
A sheltering refuge. The cold Autumn wind  
Blew, and the leaves fell countless, when one eve  
We spied an ancient temple. Overhead,









The sky was clear, and, with a waning light,  
The moon's last sickle-crescent glimmering forth  
Lit up a wasted plain, and in its midst  
A ruined village—whose deserted street  
(Nor man nor beast was there, nor any sound)  
Made waste more woful. Here we sought  
A temporary shelter and a place  
To shield us from the wind: a wretched roof  
We wove of reeds and rushes formed our home,  
And thus in need and misery we staid  
There at the foot of Aso. My own hands  
Supplied our scanty wants—water and wood,  
For warmth and food—, to drag out painful days  
That like the night-mare's horrors, slowly crept.

Yet worse remained in store, the cup of woe  
Was not yet drained,—for suddenly we heard  
That joining with the rebel bands, my sire  
Had fought against the King,—the sad revolt  
Had now been crushed, and all the rebel lords  
Justly condemned to death—: one bloody fight



At the "White Mountains" where the Sun-flag flew  
Victorious over Saigo's corpse, had sealed  
The fated issue — oh! our tears were blood!  
For he was lost, and all was lost. And now  
We waited with interminable woe,  
Hopelessly hoping, when nor day nor night  
Brought rest or solace; and no poppy-draught  
Of sleep brought sweet forgetfulness of pain.  
We could not dare to hope for his return.

But when another Autumn, covering  
The land with dewdrops sparkling in the moon,  
Drove flocks of clamorous geese across the sky,  
Then longing seized my mother for her lord,  
With daily growing pains about her heart,  
And care and anguish laid her on her couch.  
There drew she many a heavy sigh that came  
From sorrow-stricken breast. — Medicinal

gnawed

More at her mind than body. As the  
stream





Flows to the sea and nevermore returns,  
So ebb'd and ebb'd her life. I cannot tell  
What in those days I suffered. Nature's self  
Seemed to be mourning with me, for the breeze  
Of Autumn breathed its last, and as it died  
The Vesper-bell from yonder village pealed  
A requiem o'er my mother. Thus she died,  
But dead yet lives—for, ever, face and form,  
She stands before my eyes; and in my ears  
I ever seem to hear her loving voice,  
Speaking as in the days when, strict and kind,  
She thought me household lore,—in all a mother.  
Ah! could I but with some light act repay  
Her mother-love so rich and manifold!  
Deeply I grieve, and with deep shame confess  
That I have never loved her as I ought.  
I see the story of my woe has touched  
Your heart, yet list, and, listening, feel the joy  
That filled my breast. For last year, suddenly,  
He whom we wept as dead, my father, came  
To seek and save us. Adverse circumstance  
Had driven him here and there, until at last  
He dared once more to show his face at home.





Ah! many were the tears I saw him shed,  
As I related all the mournful tale  
Of mother's death; and yet with words of love  
I tried all arts of filial blandishment  
To soothe his grief, and in some wise replace  
Her whom he lost:—Henceforth at every hour  
My sole endeavour was to clear the clouds  
Of melancholy brooding on his brow.

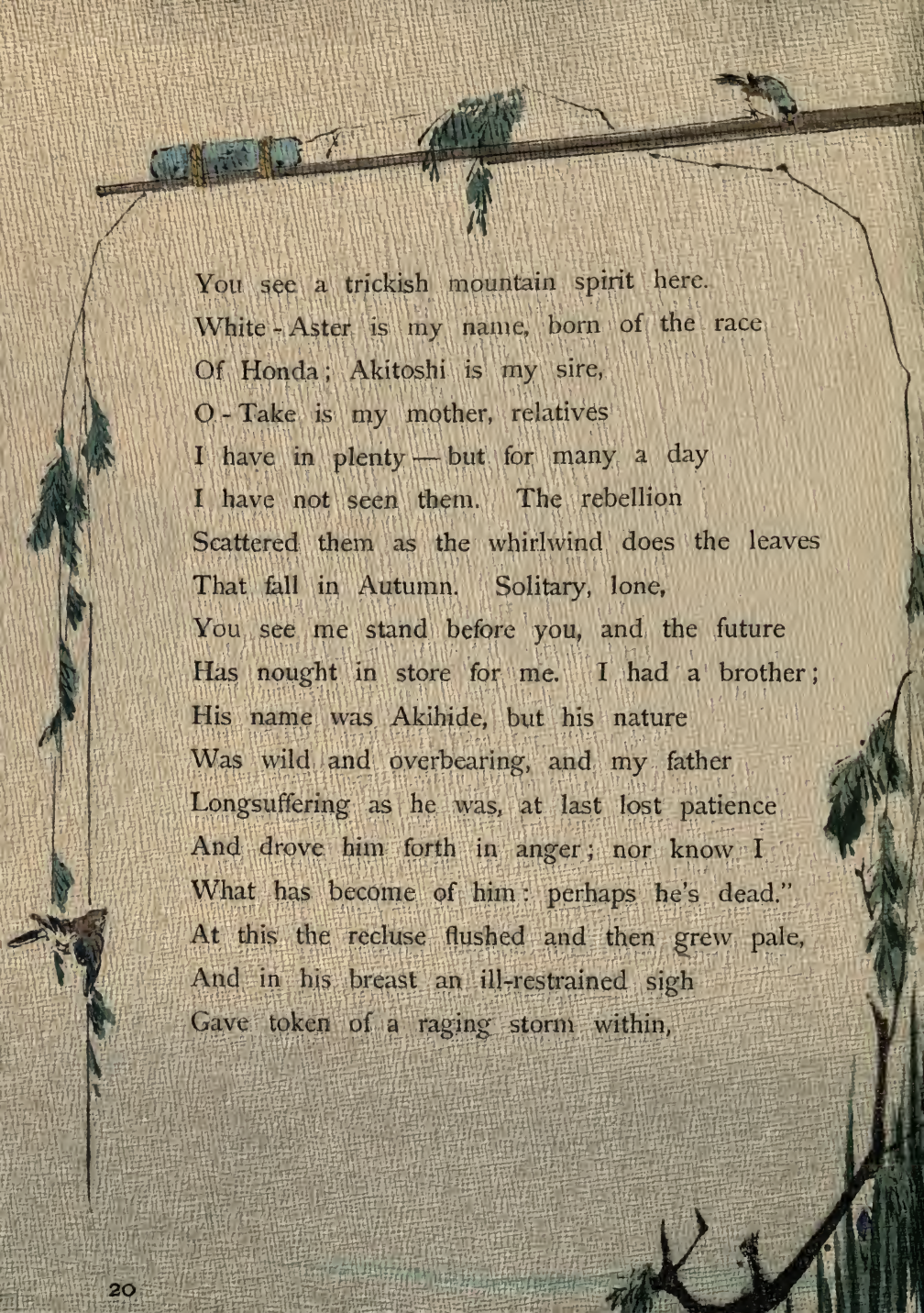
And now a few days since, ere yet the dawn  
Had fully broke, he took his nets and gun  
And went towards the mountains, there to hunt.  
Three days in vain I wait for his return:  
The neighbours have not seen a trace of him:  
We know not—has he lost the narrow path  
Among the wooded rocks? or from a cliff  
Fall'n into a ravine? Ah! thousandfold  
Fear seizes me and anguish, nor have I  
Any to counsel with me and advise!  
Thus have I come alone to seek him here  
Myself, through all this storm. But

you, good sir,

Shrink not from one bowed down by  
need, nor think







You see a trickish mountain spirit here.  
White - Aster is my name, born of the race  
Of Honda ; Akitoshi is my sire,  
O - Take is my mother, relatives  
I have in plenty — but for many a day  
I have not seen them. The rebellion  
Scattered them as the whirlwind does the leaves  
That fall in Autumn. Solitary, lone,  
You see me stand before you, and the future  
Has nought in store for me. I had a brother ;  
His name was Akihide, but his nature  
Was wild and overbearing, and my father  
Longsuffering as he was, at last lost patience  
And drove him forth in anger ; nor know I  
What has become of him : perhaps he's dead.”  
At this the recluse flushed and then grew pale,  
And in his breast an ill-restrained sigh  
Gave token of a raging storm within,



Where feeling strove with feeling : yet he kept  
His self-restraint in silence. Monk and maid  
Facing each other sat, as though quite lost  
In dreams of dark foreboding. In her eyes  
Then glanced a shining teardrop : but the monk  
Veiled with his outspread hands his anguished face.

At last, he broke the silence, and upraised  
His gentle eyes, and spoke with kindly voice :  
“As long as it is night, you must not think  
To trust yourself to these inclement hills ;  
Stay here, I pray, till then : it is not safe  
To wander now. Stay, till the wakeful cock  
Proclaims the dawn, and in the gathering light  
The eastward hills grow red : the rising sun  
Shall bring new joy and lighten all your path.”

Thus spake he, and she felt how kind and wise  
The words were that he spoke, and, silently  
Consenting, laid her down before the shrine





To slumber. But her rest was much disturbed ;  
For, her thin robes ill sheltering her limbs,  
She froze e'en as she slept. Her weary head  
Was filled with dreams ; for, lo ! with tearful eyes,  
And solemn countenance, her father stood  
Close by her pillow. " One false step," he cried,  
Hurled me into a deep ravine, where now  
Thick brushwood holds me that I cannot move  
Forwards, nor backwards. Thus three weary days  
I've suffered : thirst and hunger fill my frame  
With martyr-pains of hell, till in despair  
I pray that I may lose my wretched life.

Whiteaster rose, striving to catch his coat,  
And question further ; but he vanished  
Quick as he came, and left no trace behind.

The night was still : no sound fell on the ear,  
The Temple slept in peace, save here and there  
A gentle breeze up-springing moved the crowns  
Of jewelled bamboo-stems, that answering  
Rustled with gentle whispers. Thus the night  
Passed, and the moonlight faded, and the panes  
Began to gleam, as through them, westward, passed  
The first faint glimmers of the orient day.









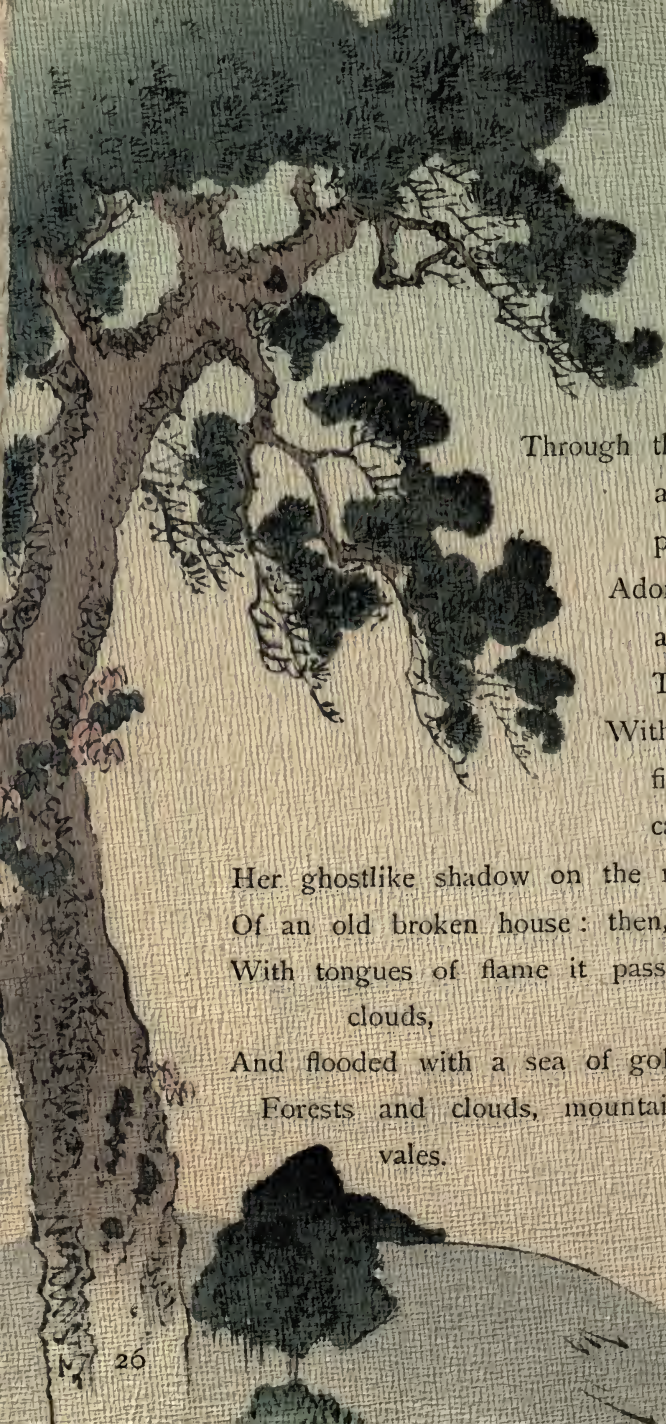


## CANTO II.

Now the red dawn had tipped the mountain  
tops,  
And birds, awaking, peered from out their  
nests,  
To greet the day with strains of matin joy;  
The while the moon's pale sickle, silver  
white,  
Fading away, sunk in the western sky.  
Clear was the air and cloudless, save the  
mists  
That rolled in waves upon  
the mountain  
tops,  
Or crept along the  
gullies. Here  
the maid







Took leave of  
the recluse,  
and sped  
her way

Through the bright morn,  
along the rocky  
path

Adorned with grass  
and flowers.

The rising sun,  
With level rays of  
fiery glamour,  
cast

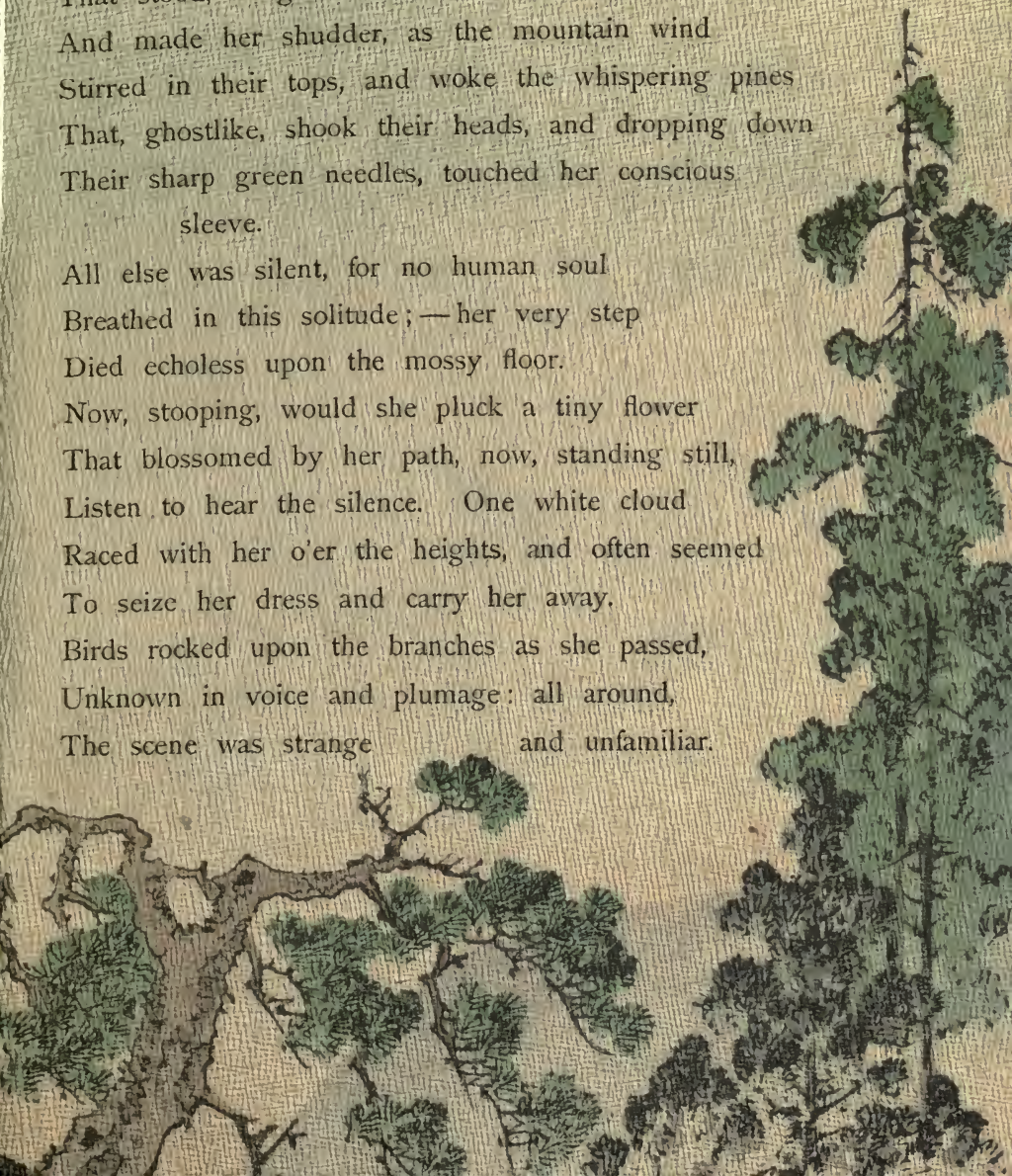
Her ghostlike shadow on the ruined wall  
Of an old broken house : then, as she went,  
With tongues of flame it passed betwixt the  
clouds,

And flooded with a sea of golden light  
Forests and clouds, mountains and happy  
vales.



Once more her path lay under mighty trees  
That stood, as giant watchmen, over her,  
And made her shudder, as the mountain wind  
Stirred in their tops, and woke the whispering pines  
That, ghostlike, shook their heads, and dropping down  
Their sharp green needles, touched her conscious  
sleeve.

All else was silent, for no human soul  
Breathed in this solitude;—her very step  
Died echoless upon the mossy floor.  
Now, stooping, would she pluck a tiny flower  
That blossomed by her path, now, standing still,  
Listen to hear the silence. One white cloud  
Raced with her o'er the heights, and often seemed  
To seize her dress and carry her away.  
Birds rocked upon the branches as she passed,  
Unknown in voice and plumage: all around,  
The scene was strange and unfamiliar.









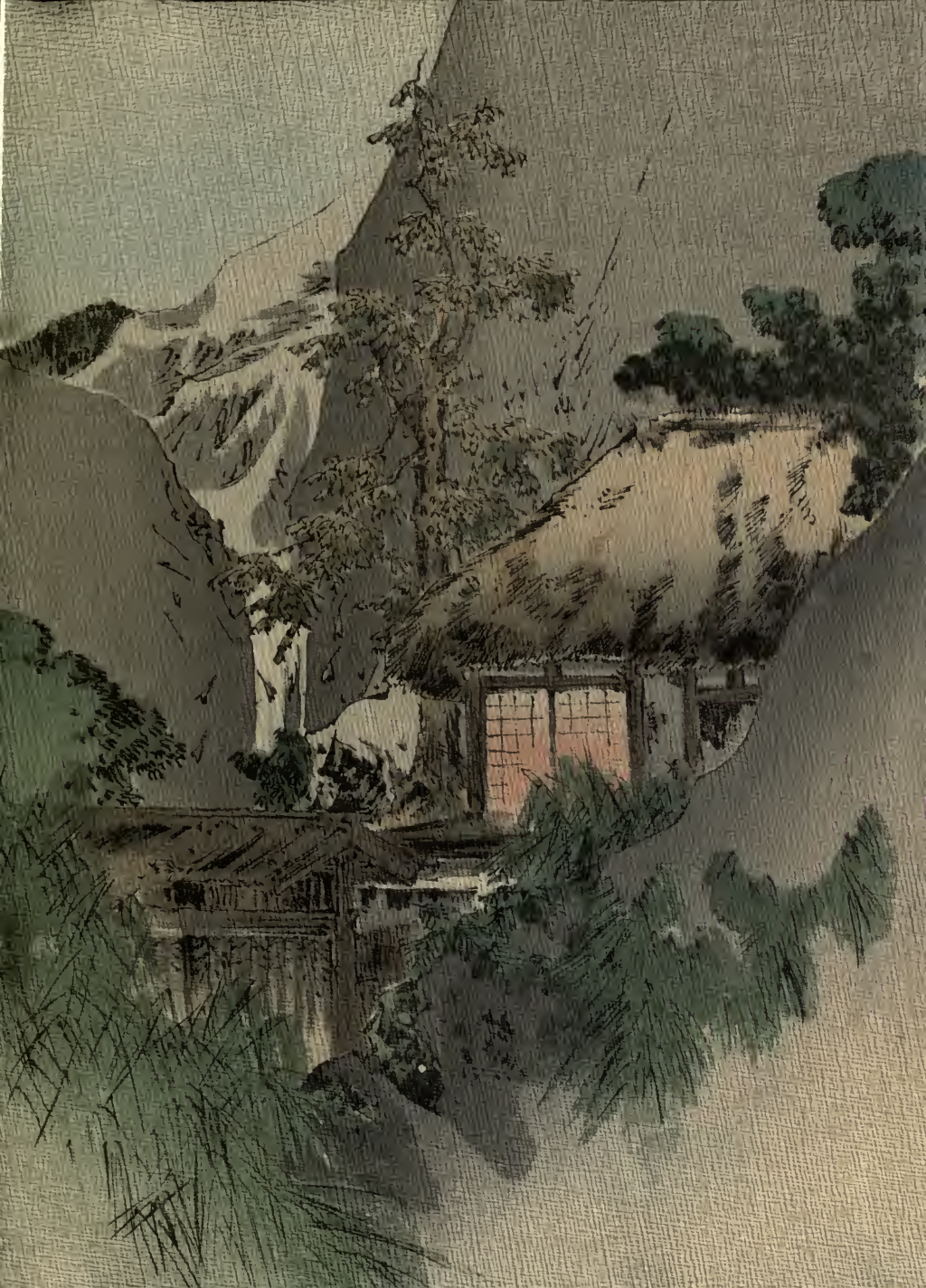
In the clearing stands a herd of deer,  
Seeking refreshment in the icy steam,  
Which, like a truthful mirror, still reflects  
The sheen of yonder maples, which the frosts  
Have not yet robbed of their autumnal charms.  
Far as the eye can reach, mountains and hills,  
Mountains and deep-sunk valleys, and a fringe  
Of dark-green woods; and, winding under them,  
The road to Hoshu passes out of sight.

And where is now her father? Ah! no trace  
Shows where he passed, and all the many charms  
Of much adorned Nature seem to mock  
Her grieving heart, and, as she hurries on,  
The forest-stillness seems to laugh at her.  
But, look, those dark forms creeping after her,  
With cruel speed, and, with discourteous hands,  
Seizing the shrinking maiden—who are they?  
Robbers they are, who seize her as their prey,  
And lead her hastily, with cruel force,  
O'er stocks and stones, to their ungodly den.  
In piteous distress, she now 'gins cry,  
Screaming for help;—no friendly knight is near,  
And only Echo answers to her call.



Quickly they brought her where a thicket dense  
Concealed the entrance to a dark ravine,  
At which the robbers, and their helpless prey,  
Plunged in and disappeared. In this recess,  
Lay a recess more secret. 'Neath a rock,  
Like gable-tree projecting from its base,  
Stood, half in ruins, a low-constructed house.  
The broken reed-thatch scarce could bear th' attacks  
Of wind and rain; but thick-grown ginko trees,  
Which, like to golden clouds, filled the ravine,  
Saved the scant thatch. A ceaseless chattering brook  
Flowed by the house, and the rank ivy-stems  
Grew o'er the broken windows. Here the sun  
Ne'er visits with his parting rays at eve,  
But all is gloom and silence save the cry  
Of some belated bird that wakes the night.  
Here with wild shouts, because their prize was rare,  
The robbers called their comrades, who received  
Them and their captive with much boisterous joy,  
Putting a thousand questions to the maid,  
Who wept and almost fainted in her fear.  
Then with coarse jests they mocked her, as the crows  
That scold at carrion. Then they sat them down,











All in a circle, to the joyful feast,  
The saké-cask was broached; and smoke-dried fish,  
Mountains of pork, with rice and radishes,  
Were piled in bowls and dishes. They, despising  
The chop-sticks' cleanly offices, put forth  
Their hands to grasp the food, and, like wild wolves,  
Ate noisily their fill, with greedy haste,  
And much lip-smacking at the abundant cheer.

Now, when their first keen greed was satisfied,  
One, who seemed captain of the noisy crew,  
Arose, and leering with bold lustful eyes,  
Approached the modest beauty: "See," he cried,  
"I am the king of this free mountain-folk:





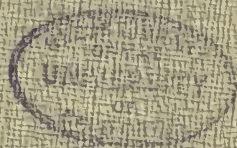
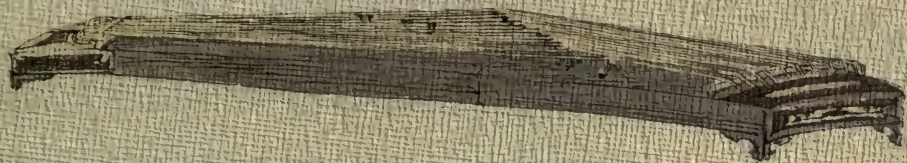
But ne'er before has Fortune smiled on us  
With gift of lovely maiden. Listen now!  
For many years I've had within this house  
A koto, on which no one ever yet  
Has played. Now you shall be the first, to-day,  
To play on it, and, with sweet melodies,  
To give us longed for pleasure. Sit you down,  
And let us hear your skill; for I do swear  
That, if you hesitate, then with this sword  
I'll cut you into bits, and give your flesh  
To yonder noisy crows. Mark well my words."

Like a sharp knife, the cruel robber's words  
Pierced to her heart. But what can woman's strength  
Avail against the blinded lusts of men?  
So, though in heart rebellious, her soft hands  
She reached out to the harp, and touched the strings  
Gently at first, and feebly; then with strength  
That gathered in the music. Thus she played  
As ne'er she played before. For, in her heart





Excitement, passion, pain, held tournament,  
And all her thoughts, and every hope and fear,—  
Her inmost self—found voices in the strings,  
Now, as the Fall-wind rustling in the tress,  
It sounded, low and sad; and now, as though  
The ghost of some poor crane from Paradise  
Were hovering o'er this moon-lit world of ours,  
Her grief cried shrill and weird; and then again,  
As when the night rain in the bamboo-groves  
By Siang's streams, patters and drips to earth,  
Then voices, as of spirits, hovered o'er  
The minstrel, and the sound of dropping pearls  
Into a jewelled bowl that fall and break  
With clear sharp crack into a thousand bits.  
No wonder were it if the river-god  
Danced to her strains, and e'en the dragon-fiend,  
That lurks beneath the waves, stood up to hear.









She ceased. The darkened mountain-peaks around  
Lay still and peaceful as a slumbering babe :  
The moon gleamed through the broken window-panes,  
The air was clear and bright. The woods alone  
Re-echoed with the music's dying strains.  
E'en the harsh robbers' hearts could not withstand  
The magic power of song : — but, silently  
Contemplative, they marked its waning notes,  
Mindful of long forgotten piety.

Meanwhile a man, armed with sword and spear,  
Had stolen to the house, and, with loud cries,  
Bursting the door, attacked the festive crew  
With lightning onset. Ere the robber band,  
All unprepared for combat, could begin  
To rouse resistance, it was all too late.  
For, like the hailstones, thick and fast, his blows  
Fell, and his arm mowed opposition down,  
Till but one man escaped by timely flight.  
Streams of warm blood flowed trickling o'er the mats,  
And stained the plates and dishes : here, the heads  
Lay with their eyes still opened wide, and there,  
The headless trunks lay motionless and stiff.

Who was the hero that performed this deed  
Sole and unaided ? His black robe, and cap



Of silk proclaim the priest: with quiet hand,  
He wiped his bloodstained sword, and called the maid  
Into the doorway, where the waxing moon  
Shone on his face, and thus began to speak:

“Be without fear, White Aster: thee to save  
I came: thou sawst me yesternight, and now  
From my own lips shalt gather who I am;  
For longer would it ill be seem to hide.  
Your brother I; you gaze at me in doubt,  
And muse incredulously, how the man,  
Whom you remember full of wicked lusts,  
Ungoverned, unrestrained, and slave to vice,  
Should stand before you in a hermit's garb?  
Yet listen. When my father drove me out,  
Lone and forsaken, many years I spent,  
In wandering, oft repentant, but my pride  
Held me from seeking pardon. So I came  
One spring to Yedo, and engaged myself,  
Half student and half servant, in the house  
Of the famed teacher Keiu, where I read  
The ancient classics and the holy books,  
Which as I studied deeper, and compared  
My own life's conduct with the moral rules  
Of the great Chinese doctor — how despised





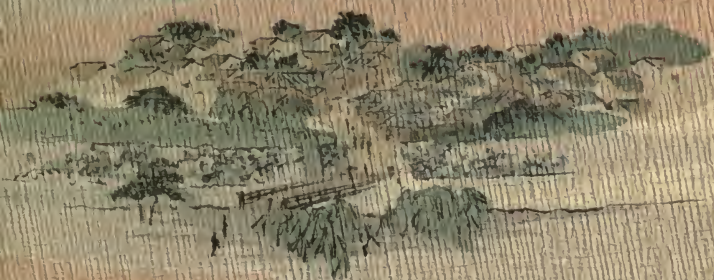







And despicable seemed my life to be!

Thus sat I once at eventide, and read  
My book before the window — fine spring rain  
Was drizzling in the garden, and the wind  
Sighed in the trees. Unbearable became  
The load of bitter memories; the laugh  
And chatter of my comrades turned to pain:  
And all the world was bitter. I resolved,  
Manlike, to change my life and with the change  
Return, a new man, to my father's house.








So when the tumult of the wars had ceased,  
Shouldering my books, and girding sandals on,  
I set out homewards. Now the evening sun  
With his last rays illumined all the trees,  
When with great joy I came. But what a sight  
Welcomed my homecoming! The village street  
Ran silent twixt the rows of broken homes,  
Rank with ill weeds and grasses: bleaching bones  
Lay on all sides—a vivid scene of death.  
There stood I now, with all my vanished dreams,  
And cried in bitterness: “too late! too late!”  
Then crept away, heart-broken, to the hills.  
There, in the Temple, where last night you found  
Me hidden, I renounced all earthly hopes.  
Now to grow daily worthier of the Lord,  
Was my sole aim: by day and night I read  
Upon the holy books and many a tear  
Bedewed their pages. In the midst of this,  
Sudden you came, as by some higher  
power





Conducted, and with deep emotion stirred  
I heard you tell the fortunes of our house.  
Much then my spirit fought against itself,  
Wishing to tell my name and welcome you,  
My long-lost sister; but false shame forbade,  
And kept my mouth tight closed. Fear undefined  
Pressed on my heart this morning, when you took  
Leave of me; for I knew that robber bands,  
Throughout these mountains, make the paths unsafe,  
So tracking you all day, I followed on,  
And found you here amidst this blackguard crew.  
There they lie, dead by the avenging sword,  
In their own dirty blood, and you are free.  
As far as the next village I will lead you,  
And help you find our father: but his eyes  
Shall ne'er behold me more. On this same spot  
Where I saved you, my hand shall end my life,  
And self-sought death shall purge away my guilt.  
So spake he; was it a confusing dream  
That dazed her sense? or was it really true,



That she had found her brother? Wav'ring doubt  
Was all impossible. Bright tears of joy  
Gleamed in her eyes and trickling down her cheeks  
Fell on her new-found brother's brawny hand.  
With words of sweetest love she spoke him fair,  
And breathed new hope: how oft her father had  
Longed for his lost son, and with bitter grief  
Killed all his former harshness. — Gathering night  
Had settled on the land, whilst yet they spoke:  
The frosty mountain air was crisp and clear  
As running streamlets: on the zenith, stood  
The silver moon; across the cloudless sky,  
Some wild geese flying told the hour of night.



### CANTO III.

It yet was night. — Valley and mountain lay  
In deep and solemn silence: from the woods,  
The long-drawn plaintive cry of monkey bands  
Breaking alone the stillness. In the west,  
The moon lay low upon the horizon's edge,  
In act to hide behind a band of clouds.  
White Aster, with her brother, then forsook  
The black ravine, and with swift-moving feet,  
Sped through the forest, where projecting rocks  
And pathless thickets blocking up their path  
Caused many a deviation. When they came  
To a dark spot where the thick roof of leaves  
Made night the blacker, lo!  
a sombre shape





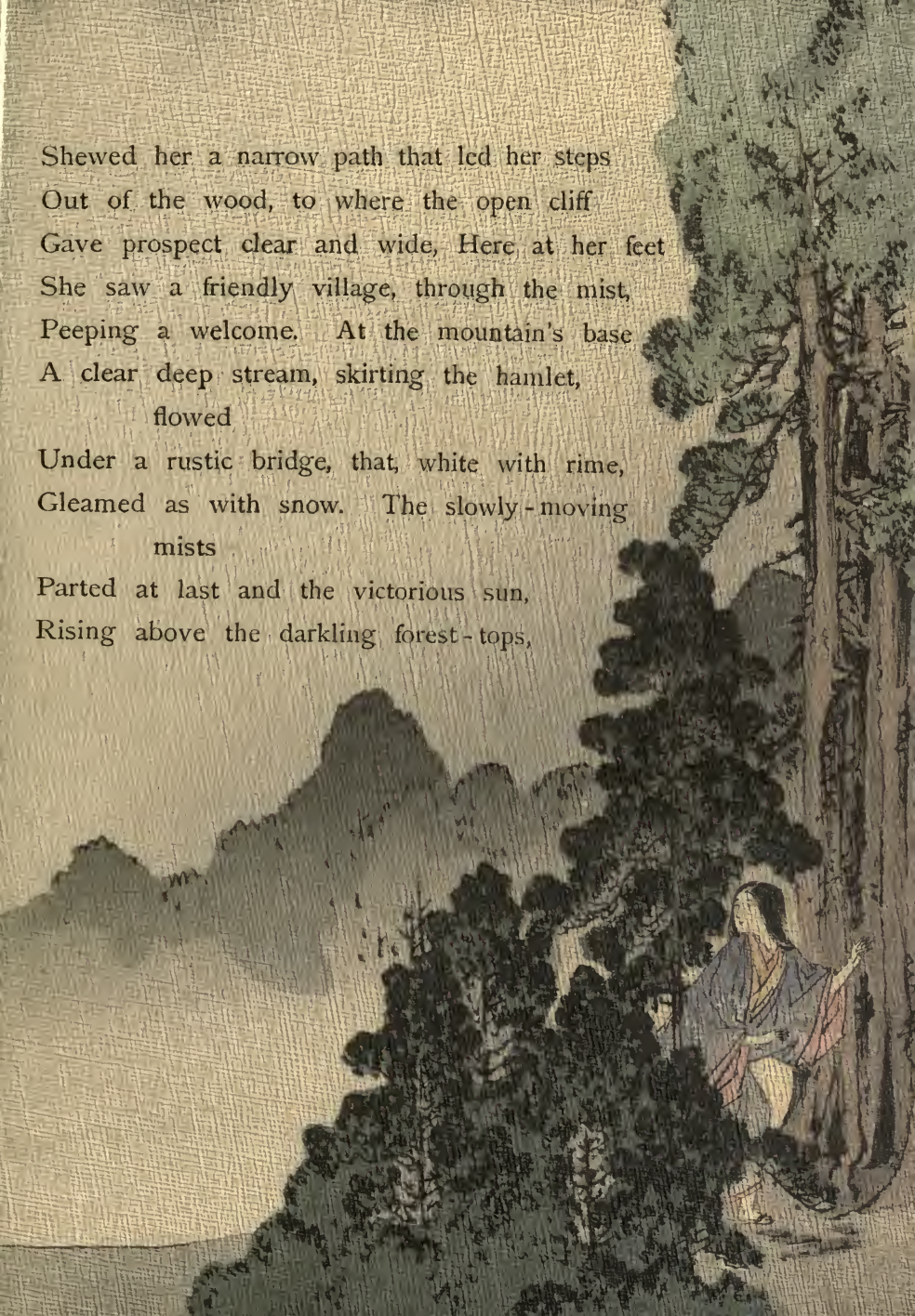
Came creeping after them, and suddenly,  
Loud crying, seized the monk, and sought with force  
To snatch the sword that in his girdle hung.  
Fiercely the monk fought, and the bandit bold  
Fought to avenge his mates;—and thus they strove  
Each to the death, thro' the thick underwood,  
Now this one conquering and now that, until  
Behind the trees they quite were lost to sight.  
The maid, at first, in fear had fled, but then  
Thoughts of her brother's danger, brought her back  
To where she fled from. Here, with loud-raised cries,  
She called her brother, wandering to and fro,  
And searching brake and thicket, but in vain;  
It seemed as though the earth had gulped them down.  
Thus desperate, for hours, she wandering went  
About the forest, till the breaking dawn



Shewed her a narrow path that led her steps  
Out of the wood, to where the open cliff  
Gave prospect clear and wide, Here at her feet  
She saw a friendly village, through the mist,  
Peeping a welcome. At the mountain's base  
A clear deep stream, skirting the hamlet,  
flowed

Under a rustic bridge, that, white with rime,  
Gleamed as with snow. The slowly-moving  
mists

Parted at last and the victorious sun,  
Rising above the darkling forest-tops,









Hooded with golden rays a new-born world,  
Awaking all to pleasure. In the boughs  
Twitted the joyous birds, and blithely hailed  
The happy morning light; but she, how oft,  
Turning her sad face to the sombre wood,  
Did then sigh forth her grief, that guileful fate  
Had taken her brother almost ere it gave,  
Had lied to her of happiness and joy,  
And when her poor heart, listening to the charms  
Of hope's false tale, had yielded to the dream  
Of instant bliss, — then fate, with cruel hand,  
Shaking her heart, had emptied it of joy,  
And left it poorer, sadder, than before.

— Now as her path lay by a little shrine,  
She bowed her knees, and prayed, with burning soul,  
Before the altar of the deity.  
Meanwhile an old man, spade on shoulder, came



Along that way, and wondering saw the maid  
Kneeling and groaning. Kindly drawing nigh,  
He asked the cause of her fast-flowing tears.  
But when the maid had told her mournful tale,  
Deep pity seized him for her sad distress,  
And strove to heal her grief with balm of words.  
He led her to the village, where she dwelt,  
As his own daughter, in his cottage home.  
Girt round with palm-trees, in a sheltered spot,  
Still and remote, the little cottage lay ;  
From the trim garden, through a wooden gate,  
A road led to the open, where the stream  
Rushed valley-wards through rocks and boulders, thence  
To the pine clad mountains. Driven by the wind,  
The yellow leaves, chasing each other, fell  
In little heaps beside the cottage door :  
Half withered asters lay upon the floor,  
And, with attenuated pipe, the choir  
Of insects chirped its everlasting song.  
With kindly heart and true paternal care,  
The old man strove to cheat White Aster's grief,  
That dwelt in silence on her loved ones lost.  
Till soothed by tenderness, at last, she grew  
To lose her sense of strangeness, and became  
A grateful inmate of the peasants' house.

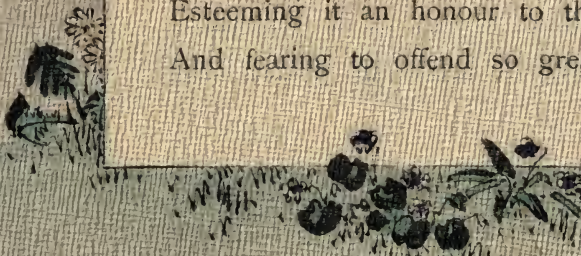




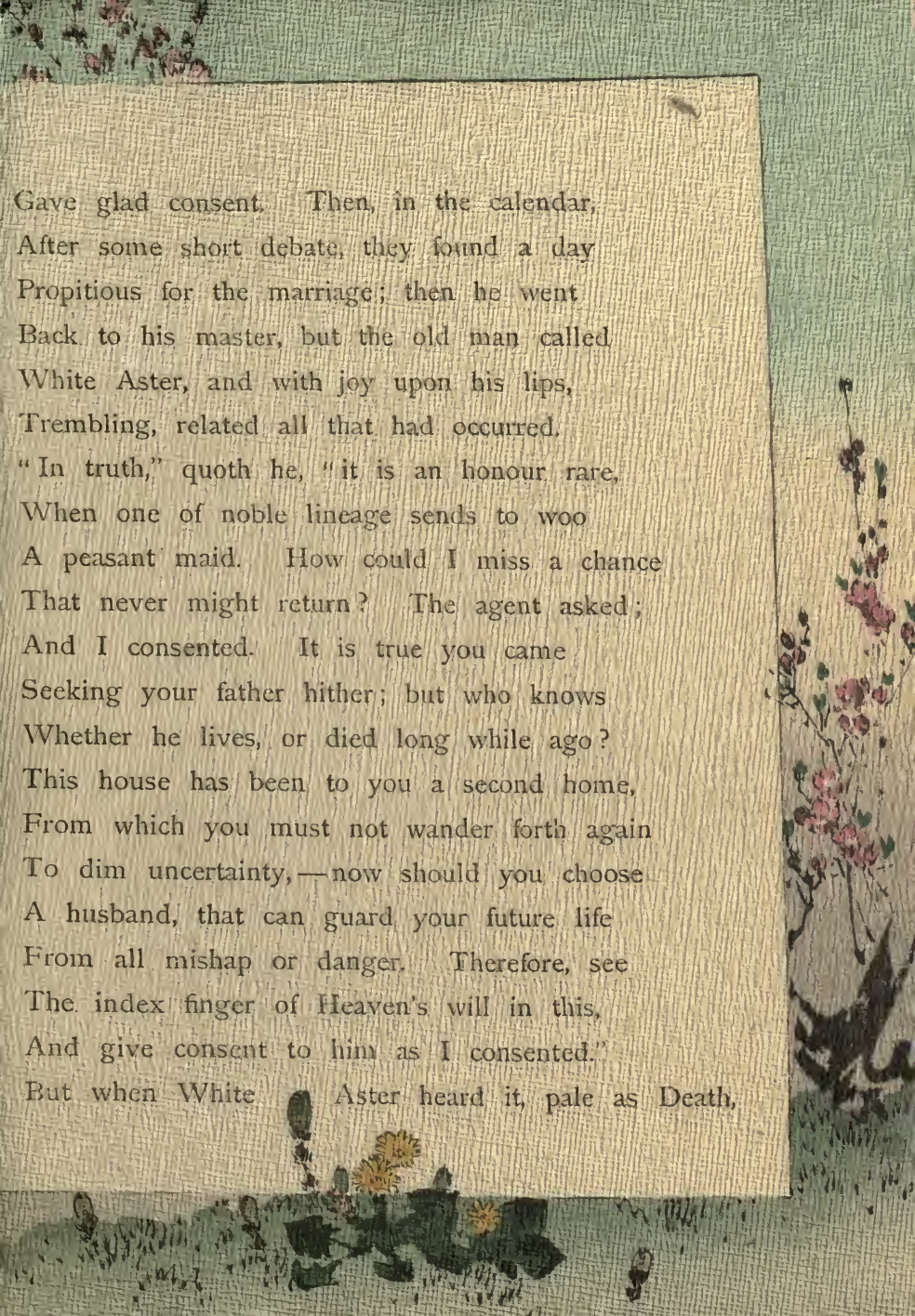




The year went by, and days and months again  
Grew into years and vanished, as the foam  
That crests the ocean's billows; as they passed,  
White Aster bloomed to lovely womanhood,  
And oftimes in her simple village dress,  
Passing through spring-clad fields, her beauty shone  
Like to a branch of snow-white cherry-bloom,  
Against the darkling screen of sombre pines,  
Like pearls betwixt her lips, parted to smile,  
Shone her white teeth, her fingers lithe and slim  
Like pliant grass in springtime. Far and near  
The country side rang with her beauty's praise,  
And many a swain sighed when he heard her name;  
Nay, even the Governor of the land had heard  
White Aster's fame, and, hearing, had resolved  
To seek her hand in marriage. So one day,  
Following the custom of the land, he sent  
An agent to the old man, to enquire  
If he might have the maid. The simple man  
Esteeming it an honour to the girl,  
And fearing to offend so great a lord,







Gave glad consent. Then, in the calendar,  
After some short debate, they found a day  
Propitious for the marriage; then he went  
Back to his master, but the old man called  
White Aster, and with joy upon his lips,  
Trembling, related all that had occurred.  
"In truth," quoth he, "it is an honour rare,  
When one of noble lineage sends to woo  
A peasant maid. How could I miss a chance  
That never might return? The agent asked;  
And I consented. It is true you came  
Seeking your father hither; but who knows  
Whether he lives, or died long while ago?  
This house has been to you a second home,  
From which you must not wander forth again  
To dim uncertainty,—now should you choose  
A husband, that can guard your future life  
From all mishap or danger. Therefore, see  
The index finger of Heaven's will in this,  
And give consent to him as I consented."  
But when White Aster heard it, pale as Death,



And all as speechless sat she—then the tears  
Broke from her eyes, her trembling breast's gan heave  
And sink with grief, and answer gave she none;  
The while the old man, all amazed, yet full  
Of pity looked upon her. Then at last  
She broke her silence, and with weak voice said:  
“Words of my poor dead mother, which she spoke,  
Whilst yet my brother lived with us, remain  
Firm fixed in my remembrance. “Once,” she said,  
“Ere morn had scarce begun to dawn, I went  
To worship at the temple: as I passed  
Through the churchyard twixt rows of gravestones hoar,  
And blooming white chrysanthemums, I heard  
The piteous wailing of a little child.  
Which following, I found, amidst the flowers,  
A fair young child with crimson-mouthing lips,  
And fresh soft cheeks—a veritable gem.  
I took it as a gift that Buddha sent  
As guerdon of my faith, and brought it up  
As my own child, to be my husband's joy,  
And mine: and as I found thee couched  
Amidst white-blooming asters, I named thee  
White Aster, in memorial of the day:  
Thus are you Akihide's sister, and  
His early playmate, and henceforth, you must



Practise all womanly accomplishments  
And every maiden virtue, that you may,  
In years to come be his true-hearted wife,"  
Thus spake my mother then, and, since that time,  
Though years have passed, and many a sad mishap  
Has marred the hoped-for joy, my mother's words  
Sound in my ears as clear, as though she stood  
Bodily here before me. I am bound  
(My destiny all settled) till the dust





Claim back my earthly frame. These many years,  
As thine own daughter thou hast nourished me,  
And heartily I thank thee. My poor life,  
Were that of service, would I offer for thee  
In token of my lively gratitude. But this  
Spare me, that I should be another's wife.  
This, though it cost my life, I must refuse."  
Thus weeping silently, she went and sat  
Down in a corner: but the good old man  
Anxious, and full of pain to break his word,  
Sat doubting,—yet a secret hope remained  
That haply yet her maiden heart might change.





Thinking of this and that, he sought what words  
Of eloquence would win her, when the door  
Opened, and lo! the agent, with a man  
That dragged a heavy trunk, wherein were stored  
The bridal gifts, which, with a sober air,  
He spread to view upon the well-swept mats.  
Silk garments, woven white, or gaily decked  
With rich embroideries of varied hue,  
Thin, that the wind in summer, blowing cool,  
Could penetrate, or thick, with wadded warmth,  
For winter days; sashes of gold brocade,  
Sweet-scented coverlets, and rugs of fur,  
That like new-fallen snow lay soft and white;  
These and much else he took out piece, by piece,  
From the great-bellied chest, till the quick words  
Of admiration on the old man's lips



Died, and his gleaming eyes alone expressed  
His pleasure. — But the neighbour's curious wife  
Who, with a woman's mind, had followed in,





Upon the agent's heels, to see the gifts,  
With unrestrained praise poured forth her words;  
And, handling every gift, extolled the maid  
That called such things her own, Street-children  
    peep'd,  
With wonder, thro' the hedge, their chubby hands  
Pointing outstretched towards the magic gifts,





But poor White Aster, dumb with sorrow, sat  
With drooping head and weeping bitterly,  
Then, when the midnight darkness, covering, lay  
Upon the silent fields, White Aster stole,  
With silent-gliding footsteps, from the door;  
And, though the wind blew chill upon her face,  
And the night-loneliness struck to her heart,  
Yet resolutely strode she to the stream,  
Whose jasper-waves broke o'er the gleaming rocks.  
Not by the trodden path, but through the grass,  
And overhanging bushes, that no eye  
Of man should mark her flight, nor the hard world  
Know where, beneath the pall of darksome night,  
She sought her tomb amidst the cold wet waves.







So came she to the bridge that spanned the  
stream,

Fast flowing 'neath its arch, and there her hands  
Folded in prayer, and with heaven-glancing eye,  
Repeated to herself the Sanskrit words  
Which, as a child, she learned in Buddha's praise.  
Then, stooping forward, stood in act to plunge  
Into the cold deep stream, when, from behind,  
A hand, firm-grasping, seized her by her robes,  
And pulled her back. "Thanks be to Buddha,  
who,

Just at this hour, brought me to this dark spot  
To save thee, silly child, from this rash deed.  
For years, long years, I sought thee—now once  
more

I find thee—thus"! White Aster turned and looked  
Her saviour in the face, incredulous:

Then, with a cry, fell on her brother's neck,  
And sobbed forth her full heart in speechless joy.  
But, when her tears had eased the pent up flood,  
That pressed within her heart, at last her tongue  
Was loosed and spoke. Ah! what a multitude



Of painful recollections had they both  
To tell each other—all their sufferings,  
And all their actions, since that cruel morn  
When, scarce united, they were rent apart.  
Meanwhile the moon's round face, with happy  
light,

Rose o'er the mountains—from the village rose  
The unmelodious tones of rustic pipe;  
Still they talked on; the quickly running hours  
Passed in their course, and in the eastern sky  
The pale dawn showed the face of coming day.  
Then their straw shoes they tied secure and firm,  
And with quick step began their homeward road,  
If haply they could know their father's fate.  
For weeks they wandered, and at last they came  
To the old home. The well-known plum  
trees stood

Within the smiling garden, and the gate  
Of moss-grown bamboo stood to welcome them  
Part of the house remained, surviving storms  
Of wind, and civil war; the reed thatched roof,  
Though broken, still gave shelter from the rain



With trembling heart Whiteaster pushed the gate  
And entered—but what sight! an old man stood  
Deep sunk in thought against an upright beam,  
As counting the slow hours, impatiently,  
Until that hoped-for children should come back.  
Now he looks up! “Oh Father!” Oh what joy  
Breathes in that moment of a child’s return!

The sun retired to rest, the darkness fell,  
And moon and stars kindled their nightly lamps.  
The three sat joyful at the festive board;  
For the old man welcomed with joy the son,  
Whom once he drove to exile, praising much  
His patience in misfortune; but his words  
Came fastest when he praised the modesty  
And virtue of the maid. Then with a smile,  
Uplifting high his brimming glass, he blessed  
The hour that brought his children back to him,  
After long painful absence; and enquired  
Of their adventures, and himself began  
To tell his own:

“When on that morn I left  
My home, and to the mountains bent my steps,  
Making a slip, I lost my firm foothold,  
And fell into a deep ravine. In vain,  
I tried a hundred dangerous roads



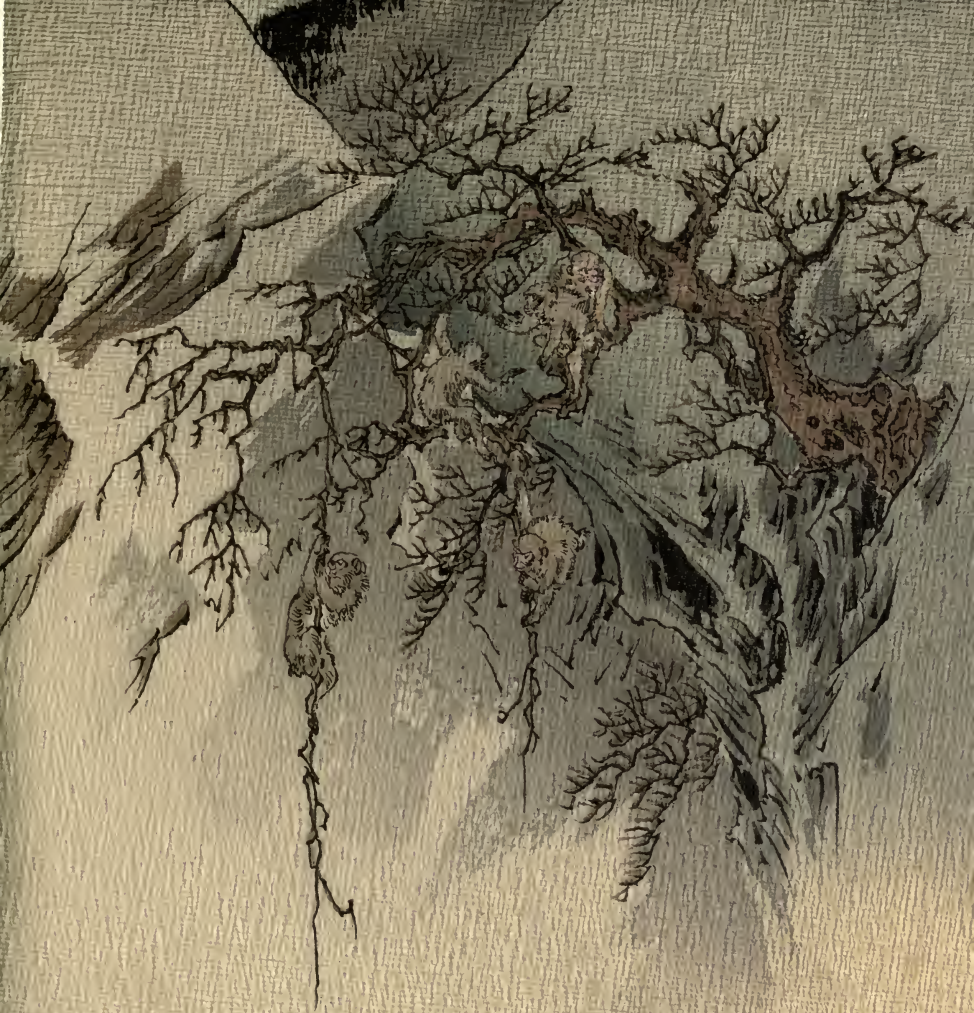




To scale the sheer sides of the hollow gorge,  
That mocked my efforts; but wild berries grew  
Abundantly for food, and in a hole  
That scarcely covered me I slept at night.  
But lo! one morning, as I gazed aloft,  
Towards the o'erhanging cliffs, a monkey troop  
Sat on a withered vine, and chattering  
With cries, and wild grimaces, beckoned me.  
I followed where they called, and seized the vine  
That hung down to me, and, to my surprise,  
It bore my weight, and so I came at last  
To extricate myself; yet when I reached  
The top, the troop had vanished without trace,







Only the crickets, chirping in the grass,  
Filled all the mountain side with cheerful song.  
Then came the thought that no blind chance had brought  
The monkey-troop, and that my strange escape



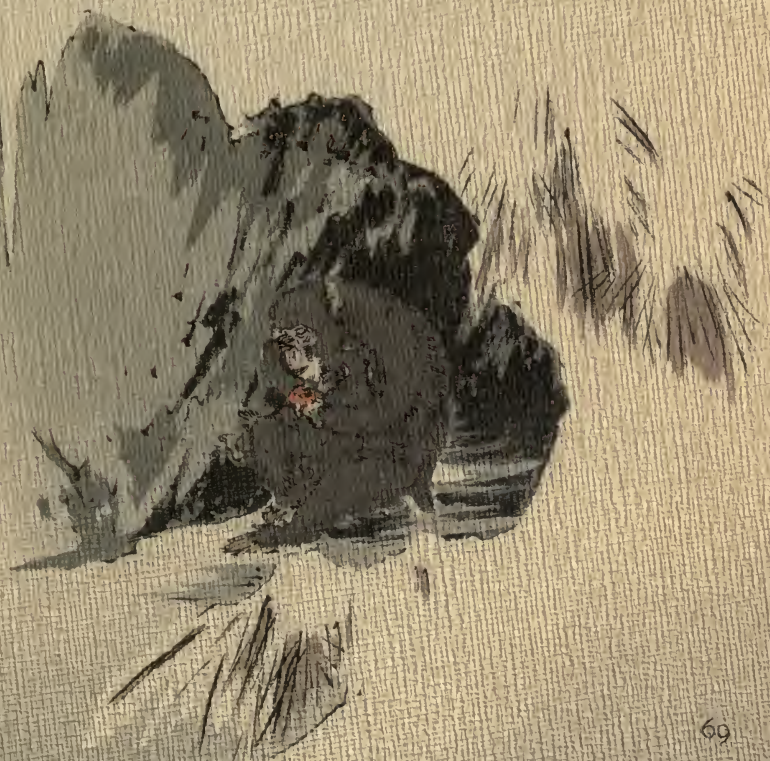


Was caused by gratitude; for once it fell,  
In winter-time, that as I hunted in the hills,  
Amongst the snow, a female monkey sat  
Holding her babe, beneath a tree. I raised  
My gun and aimed to shoot at her, but she  
Began to cry, with such a human voice,  
Praying for mercy, that my lifted gun  
Sank harmless by my side. I spared her life;  
And she, in turn, seeing my sorry plight,  
Cried to me from the rocks, and showed the way  
To flee from certain death. The silly beast  
Knows how to show its gratitude, and shames  
Many a thankless man. For oh! how few,  
In these degenerate days, remain to shew  
True Faith and Honour, and unselfishly  
To cling to duty! I alas! have fought  
A rebel 'gainst my rightful lord and king,  
Unmindful of my troth, and with black hands,  
Wasted my fatherland. Such men as I,  
Unfaithful and ungrateful, stand below  
The lower beasts. Ah! when I recollect  
All my base acts, my grieving heart is pierced  
With pangs of penitence. Your soul alone,  
Whiteaster, still remains untouched and pure.  
Only through you does my race still retain

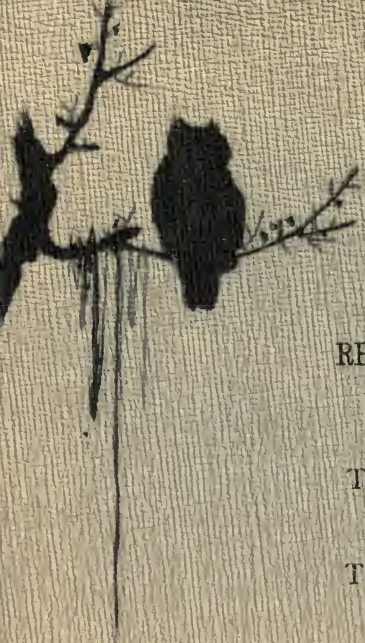


Its costly gem of childlike faithfulness,  
Wither the flowers in the gardens all,  
The flower of thy heart shall wither ne'er."

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## RETURN HOME AT NIGHT.

T. INOUE.

The clouds o'erveil  
The moon's pale face,  
That shines above  
A king in space.

A sudden wail  
Fills all the air,  
And whispering tones  
The wind-blasts bear.

The mighty pines  
Of sombre hue  
Shudder, and lay  
Their heads askew.

Amidst the reeds  
The shadows glide  
Like beckoning men  
Close by my side.



Where shades of night  
Fall on the plain,  
I pass in fear  
A broken fane.

I cross the bridge  
By wooded hill,  
And, homewards, seek  
The hamlet still

Long, long, hath passed  
The midnight hour:  
No eye keeps watch  
In street or bower.

All sleep: no sound  
Comes on the breeze  
Save where the owl  
Hoots in the trees.



## MY BELOVED'S GRAVE.

M. UYEDA.

Vain was it  
All that I desired;  
My beloved  
Was but a dream,  
A fleeting, transient  
Ray of light.  
And now my life  
Lies drear!

The solemn vow  
Betwixt us made  
With faith unswerving  
Thou didst keep,  
Though parents and kin  
Strove to make thee faithless.

Then slowly,  
Like a flower  
That has no water,  
Thou didst droop. And death  
Came to thee as a welcome guest;  
For ev'n in death  
Thou still art mine.





But when I heard  
That lone, all alone,  
Thou hadst gone home,  
Leaving me, — then I knew  
That in this life  
Objects of hope and love  
Are not granted to man.

For thy sake,  
Seeking for distant lands,  
I travelled far and near.  
For thy sake,  
With toilsome labour sought I to obtain  
Wisdom's rich store.

See, see, now have I  
Come home again.  
See, see, now am I  
Near to the wished-for goal;  
But in vain  
Was all my fond endeavour.  
Knowledge without love  
Is but a curse.



Crooked and cracked  
Stands thy poor tomb:  
Evil weeds  
Grow round thy grave:  
And the priest himself hath forgot  
The dead one's name!

Over the dry drear fields  
Autumn winds  
Blow melancholy.  
Wait for me, love,  
Under thy mossy stone;  
Soon shall I follow thee.

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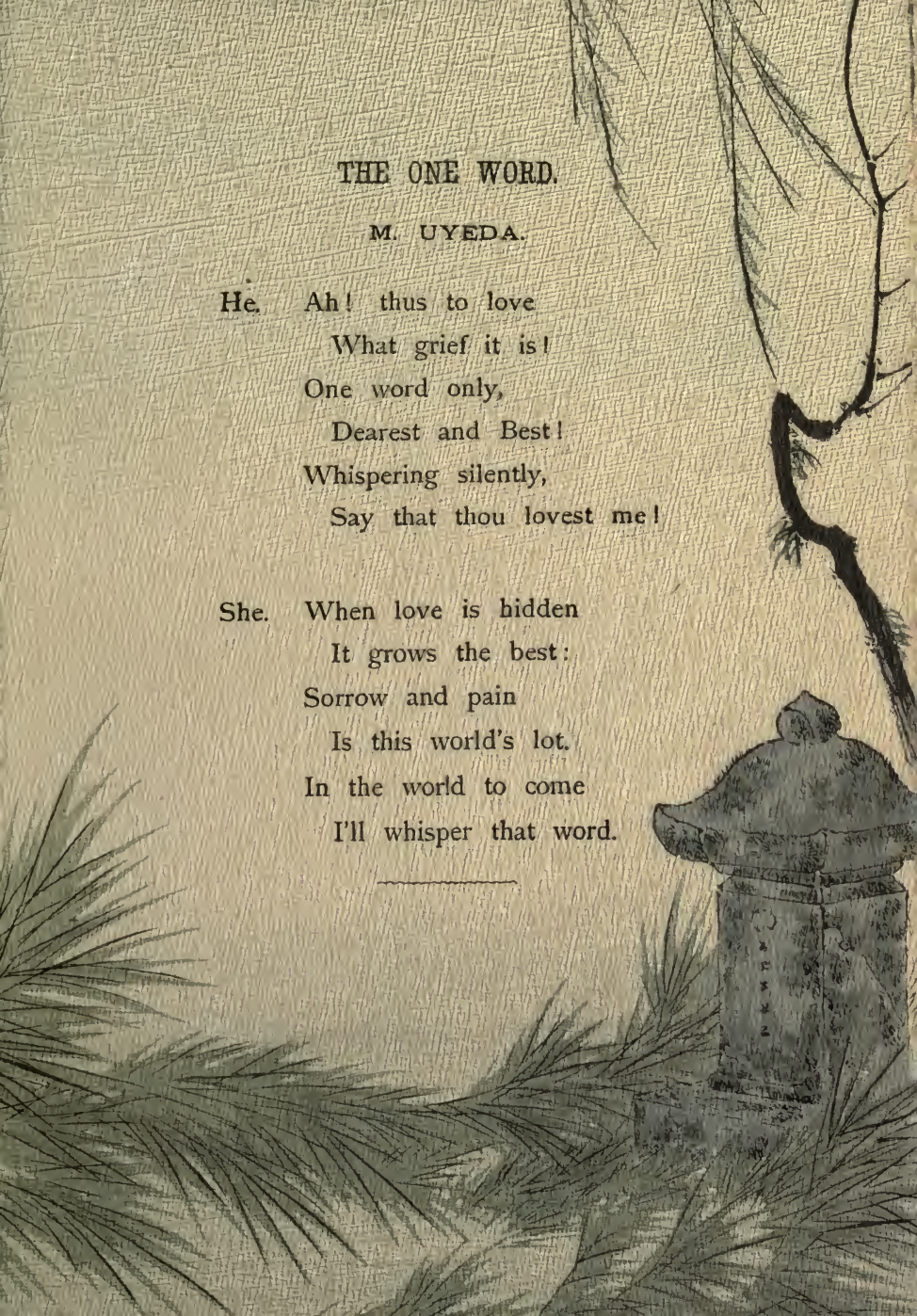
## THE ONE WORD.

M. UYEDA.

He. Ah! thus to love  
What grief it is!  
One word only,  
Dearest and Best!  
Whispering silently,  
Say that thou lovest me!

She. When love is hidden  
It grows the best:  
Sorrow and pain  
Is this world's lot.  
In the world to come  
I'll whisper that word.

---





TO A DEPARTING LOVER.

---

When rain drops fall  
And wet your head;  
Think that they are  
The tears I shed.

---





## A DISAPPOINTMENT.

I dreamed that thou didst come to me,  
And laughing roused myself from sleep;  
But when thy form I could not see,  
Joy fled, and I began to weep.

---

## SMALLNESS OF THE WORLD.

How small the world has grown!  
Methinks that now  
It cannot measure more than four foot six.  
For I, a humble man, scarce five foot tall,  
Find it impossible to fit myself  
Into its small dimensions.

---

## A CONDITIONAL GIFT.

Have thou no care for all the wealth  
That lies stored up in this fair earth;  
For, if thou wilt, I can give thee  
All that the world contains of worth:  
But only if thou promise me  
By day and night incessantly  
To toil for it laboriously.

---



THE ROADSIDE INN. I.

Taira no Tadanori.

When night comes on me meawares, I choose  
A kindly cherry for my hostelry;  
Where, whilst I sleep, the tree with flowing boughs  
Shelters me like a hospitable host.

---

II.

(Anonymous Reply to the Above.)

The flowering bough, beneath whose shade I lodged,  
Was in good sooth, a tender-hearted host:  
For when, at morn, I took my leave of him,  
I saw the dewy tears upon his cheek.

---





# NOTES.

## CANTO I.

- p. 1. 1. 3. **Aso-yama** an active volcano in the southern islands of Kyūshū.
- p. 6. 1. 6. **Mino**, rain-cloak made of straw.
- p. 8. 1. 3. When Japanese women cry they use the sleeves of their dresses as we do our pocket-handkerchiefs. The sleeves are generally lined with red silk.
- p. 8. 1. 10. The **Sutras** form one division of the Buddhist Scriptures.
- p. 9. 1. 1. Cemeteries are attached to most Buddhist Temples.
- p. 9. 1. 6. The windows (*Shoji*) of a Japanese house are sliding frames covered with white transparent paper.
- p. 10. 1. 9. The fox (*Kitsune*) plays a large part in Japanese popular superstition. It is supposed to be capable of assuming all kinds of shapes, and to play various tricks on people. It is therefore much feared.
- p. 12. 1. 8. **Si-shih** a celebrated Chinese beauty in the fifth century B. C. cf. Mayers, Chinese Reader's Manual. No. 571.
- p. 13. 1. 5. **Samurai**, the former warrior class in Japan.
- p. 13. 1. 6. The **Castle of Kumamoto** in Higo, Kyūshū, was formerly one of the strongest places in Japan, but is now in ruins. During the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, which forms the historical background of this poem, and especially of White Aster's narrative, it was besieged in vain.



by the rebel general **Saigō Takamori**. The last battle between Saigo and the victorious government troops took place on the 24th September 1877 on Shirayama ("White Mountain") near Kagoshima. Here Saigo met his death. For further notices of the rebellion see Rein's Japan, Eng. Ed. p. 372-375.

- p. 14. l. 2. **Sudare**. Light curtains made of thin bamboo.  
p. 14. l. 20. Kumamoto, threatened by the approaching rebels.

## CANTO II.

- p. 29. l. 9. The Province of **Hōshū** or **Bungo** lies S. W. of Higo.  
p. 34. l. 4. The **Koto** is a kind of zither, generally with 13 strings.  
p. 35. l. 10. The **Siang** is a tributary of the Yang-tsze-kiang in China, and is famous for the bamboos growing in its district.  
p. 35. l. 15. This and the following lines are reminiscences from Chinese Mythology.  
p. 38. l. 18. **Yedo**,—now Tokyo (since 1868), capital of Japan.  
p. 38. l. 20. **Kei-u**, the literary name of the celebrated sinologue **Nakamura**, who died a few years ago.  
p. 38. l. 21. Here are meant the old Chinese Classics, i. e. the moralists; and The Scriptures of Buddhism.  
p. 44. l. 13. It is a popular belief that wild geese commence their flights at a regular hour, so that their appearance may serve as a note of time.



### CANTO III.

- p. 52. l. 18. All marriages in Japan are treated as family rather than as individual affairs, and are arranged by a go-between (**Nakōdo**).
- p. 53. l. 3. In Japan, as in China, "auspicious days" are chosen for the commencement of any important undertaking. They are marked in the calendars.
- p. 55. l. 3. Marriages between adopted brothers and sisters are allowed, and, under certain circumstances, common. In a family where there is only one son or one daughter, a child of opposite sex is often adopted with a view to an eventual marriage. The adopted son takes the family name, and in this way the name (so important in Japanese eyes) is saved from extinction.
- p. 57. l. 5. The betrothal is considered to be ratified by the interchange of bridal gifts (the kind and number of which is fixed by custom for all classes). After such ratification, the betrothal cannot be broken off, except by mutual consent of both families.
- p. 60. l. 14. White Aster meditates suicide in accordance with a well-established Japanese code of honour.
- p. 62. l. 4. There are to be found in Japanese Buddhism several corrupted Sanskrit or Prakrit formulae, such as **Namu Amida Butsu**. (Glory to the Infinite Buddha) and **Giate, giate, hara giate, hara so giate, so wa ka**. (Corruption of the Sanskrit words *Gate gate pūragate pārasam-gate bodhi svāhā* "O wisdom, gone, gone, gone to the other shore, landed on the other shore, Svāhā!" which







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