

DAI-BOSATSU TÔGE

OR

Great Bodhisattva Pass



BOOK III.

Mibu and Shimabara



Chapter 1.

FOR two days now Ryunosuke stayed in an inn at Ôtsu. He was now only seven miles and a half from Kioto. Did he wish to recuperate himself thoroughly before he entered Kioto ?

Another night came. Ryunosuke was lying on his back resting his head on the alcove, and took up a little book to kill time. Presently he heard some one shown in the next room :—

“This way, please.”

He heard only the voice of the maid, but judged by the

footfall that it was not a single guest who took the next room.

"Bath is open," said the maid.

"Yes! ? You take it first," came in a man's voice.

"After you, dear," answered a woman.

"You both take together," advised the maid.

The guests seemed to be a young man and a young woman judging from their voices, which Ryunosuke thought he had heard before. So he put down the book.

Ryunosuke soon thought, without listening to the voices any further, that they must be the pair he saw at the tea-stall where the keeper made match-ropes. A queer feeling came over him.

"Too soon for having been on Grand Shrine pilgrimage," thought Ryunosuke. The inn was very quiet that night, it was like lodging in a big temple. Keeping himself still, Ryunosuke overheard the whispering of the young couple.

"We shall reach Kioto, to-morrow."

"Yes, but what of that," the man sighed.

"I must see Miss Yuki, your sister, at once," said the voice that resembled the voice of Hanna.

"What's the good of it? There's no help. Ah-a! I'd rather die here than go back."

"Yes, indeed we had better....."

Here their voices ceased to be heard.

'Ah, well, old, old story,' Ryunosuke thought.

"I, too, can't go back to Karneyama, now."

"Nor I to Kioto."

"Let's kill ourselves, let's kill ourselves" came in rather a shrill voice. They possibly did not know that some one was in the next room.

The man said 'let us die,' and the woman did not protest, it showed that the woman was not unwilling. It was now quite clear that love-and-lover suicide was what the consultation of the two would lead to.

"Then, dear!"

"Shin-san, I have made up my mind, now."

"Forgive dear, forgive, I have no right to ask you so much."

"Oh yes, you have."

"Last cups, dear."

No voices were heard now but sobs for some time.

"Haven't you got anything to say? If you have, write it."

"Yes, just a word for parents."

"Then write carefully, a beautiful letter, not an ugly letter; we don't want to be laughed at after."

The sound of an opening pen-case, and the rustling of a roll of letter paper were heard plainly. Ryunosuke heard all, yet no pity for the couple stirred him.

The other day, the woman thanked him profusely as if he had saved her life, for a little service he rendered to rescue her out of a predicament. Now she said she would lay her life for the man. Was her life so cheap!?

Ryunosuke was not jealous to see such a deep love that

one was going to give life for it. He was derisive of their cheap lives. To watch coolly those people whom he could save if only he tried, gave Ryunosuke a sort of pleasantness. He lay in the next room and wore the derisive smile that he wore when he killed a man.

"Die, die, those who want to die," whispered something in his mind. But then some other word seemed to follow that.



Chapter 2.

Nothing happened that night. In the morning the next room was noisy and that awoke Ryunosuke. 'Oh the couple.....' he thought. Their proposed resolution seemed to him like the crashing of two gems between heavy stones. Their disjointed words and their sobs! He went to sleep hearing them. He did not know what had happened later. Now people were heard in and out of the next room rushing the passage, running up and down the staircase, whispering and scolding—something must have happened surely, Ryunosuke thought, piecing these incidents together. But Ryunosuke did not bother to ascertain what had happened. He coolly sat for his breakfast that a maid had brought in.

"I suppose your sleep was disturbed a great deal by the noise night over."

"What noise?"

"Don't you know what happened in the next room?"

"No."

The servant was an open faced young woman who looked to be very good natured. She was surprised to find that Ryunosuke did not know the turmoil and commotion that took place in the house:—

"You know, early last night a young husband and his wife look the next room."

"I knew that."

"The couple committed love-and-lover suicide."

"Suicide!?"

"Yes. They jumped in at the mouth of the Azumagawa at where it empties into the lake. They were in a firm embrace. Their bodies were found early this morning, while it was still dark, by boatmen belonging to the Government Granary, and they gave alarm."

"Um."

"They told us that they were going to visit Miidera Temple, and left us past seven o'clock, and were over-due when the time for returning came. So we all feared something might have happened. Then it came that there was a suicide at the Azuma Bank, so we sent a man to see who it was, and unfortunately what we had suspected came true, it was our guests."

"Um."

"The doctor was sent for at once and everything possible was done, but life was extinct in them."

"Hum."

"We proposed to look after the bodies, and so they will be brought here soon after the coroner's inspections."

"I pity them."

"Yes, poor people. They were so young, yet took such a rash action!"

"Where were they from?"

"In the register they gave Sanjō 'down,' Kioto and so on, and they wrote their last letters, too, beautifully. They must have written them last night before they left us, for two letters were there side by side on the alcove."

"What was there in the letters?"

"The officers opened the letter, the master of this inn present. According to what they have written they were not married."

"Weren't they man and wife?"

"No, they were relations, cousins or something, and awfully complicated an affair were they mixed up in. Her home is Kameyama Town of Ise Province, I hear. Theirs was not a simple love affair."

Ryunosuke had ended his breakfast, but the maid went on talking.

"In their letters we find that his younger sister was sold to Shimabara. Shimabara of Kioto is where the gay-quarters are, as you know."

"Um."

"He was so sorry for what happened to her that there were many words in the letter in connection with that,

apologizing to his sister and blaming himself for that. He wrote he could assign the downfall of his house to fate, but never that of his sister."

"Um."

"A fairly wealthy house, we understand, but the house was broken in, and that was the beginning of its downfall. You know, Mr. Samurai, of late Kioto is full of daring robbers. It is dreadful, you know, you must be on guard."

"Robbers!?"

"Yes, you know we are now in troublous times, so the robbers go openly and unchecked. They carry large mallets and smash in the doors from outside, and threaten the inmates to contribute to the 'war fund.'"

"Um."

"Besides, any amount of 'skill testing' murder go on and girls and women are ravished. This place is not far from Kioto, so we never feel comfortable."

"Um."

"Oh look, I see a number of people coming, two palanquins, too. They must be the young couple. Look, Mr. Samurai, oh poor young folks!" excitedly said the maid, who had been looking out through the balustrade.

Chapter 3.

Kioto of that time was a fearful place.

Ryunosuke knew that well enough, he needed no maid to tell him that, he was going there by choice. Kioto was then full of samurai, teeming with them. But they divided into two big groups, pro-Shogun and pro-Mikado.

Those who wanted to oust Tokugawa Shogunate and to guard the Shogunate against them, were in turmoil at Kioto. Then anti-foreign sentiments further complicated the matter.

There were then rogues who masqueraded themselves as pro-Mikado samurai and committed crimes.

Assassinations were not rare. Each side picked off distinguished persons to decrease the power of the opponent. In the streets of fair Kioto, heads, newly cut and smelling of blood, were common to be met with here and there. The burden upon the shoulder of the Lord of Aizu, new Provost Marshal of Kioto, was tremendous. To restore the power of the tottering Shogunate on the one hand, and put the rough and keen malcontents of the time in check on the other, was what the Lord Aizu undertook in spite of his failing health, putting himself in the foremost of the troubled times, both internally and externally, for foreign countries were then pressing Japan for trade. The Aizu Clan took upon itself the most unpopular and arduous duties.

It was the eighth day of the second moon, 1863 that the Band of Levies started from Yedo for Kioto to attach itself to the Lord of Aizu for duties to keep pro-Mikado samurai, mostly West Japan Clan samurai, in check.

The power of Tokugawa was on the decline. The Shogun's retainers were mostly scare-crows. The once dreaded 'men of the east of Hakone Range' were no more. The only people who retained mettle were the Levy men and North Japan Clan samurai.

Amongst the Levies, Isami Kondo, Toshizo Hijikata and a few others were most dreaded by even the boldest of all pro-Mikado samurai. Strange to say neither Kondo nor Hijikata had any connection with the Tokugawas. They were born and bred on the soil that produced the warriors of the East of Hakone of yore, who were said to more than match the warriors of whole Japan. Besides their inborn warrior instincts, they acquired the thorough mastery of the sword. And they, oblivious to the final success or otherwise of the cause they had espoused, came forward to route the rough and knavish samurai who congregated in and round the Mikado's city ostensibly for lofty political views.

The honour and prestige of East Japan samurai were no longer upheld by the Hatamoto (Bannermen) or Shogun's retainers, nor by its vassal daimioes; they were barely upheld by the yeomen, and they, singlehanded, held the West Japan Clan samurai who rose against Tokugawa like the tide, in check.

Such as Ryunosuke Tsukue was neither a pro-Mikado, nor pro-Shogun, nor did he possess such arduous and noble warrior spirits as Kondo and Hijikata possessed. He was now seen travelling leisurely having left Otsu. The breeze from Hiei Mountain stroked him on the face. He felt elated, and the weariness of the long journey was now gone. The long strong sword forged by Musashitaro looked to be anxious for fray. As he came to the parting of the road, some one called from behind:—

"I say, Sir, hold on a minute."

Ryunosuke turned and saw a sturdy samurai was coming this way steadfastly. There was no one but Ryunosuke, so he concluded that that samurai must have spoken to him.

"I see that you are travelling by yourself," said the samurai.

He was dressed in black kimono and long kilts of *kokoruz* cloth. A pair of pattens were seen on the feet, and a folding iron-framed fan in hand. He was a fighting man through and through. His short-sword was a little too short, but then his sword!—it seemed to be well nigh four feet, it protruded on his side. He approached Ryunosuke—the tall figure looking down upon him from head to foot.

"Yes, solitary as you see," Ryunosuke said in the usual gruff voice and in the looks that well matched that man's stare.

"I am alone, too. I ask your company."

"Where are you bound for?"

"To Kioto."

"I see."

It was a very lonely part of the road Fuda-no-Tsuji or Poster Cross, that these two samurai met, where the poster said 'The Willow is Green; Flowers are red.' Osakayama Hill stood behind. Ryunosuke led the way, the other samurai in high clogs following a few paces behind. They did not open their mouths for a few minutes.

Ryunosuke never sought company even when he was journeying, never accosted anybody. He was rather suspicious of this samurai, who accosted him from behind and sought his company.

One who has gone through the same experience as others are now undergoing, judges them rightly. Ryunosuke soon felt within himself that this man never sought his company out of friendship. He wanted to test his skill in using the sword at him. According to his, or her, frame of mind one diffuses an atmosphere that conveys friendship or enmity.

"Where are you from?" asked the man.

"From East."

"East! ? Which clan?"

"I am a detached man."

"But what clan formerly?"

"Born of no clan."

"Born of no clan!?" a slight derisive smile played round his lips.

"Then you are a swordsman."

"Yes."

"What branch of the art—sword, spear, or.....?"

"Sword."

"What school?"

Ryunosuke thought the man a nuisance to ask him so many questions:—

"I should like to know yours first."

"Very well. I was at first instructed in Jigen Ryu School."

"Jigen Ryu!"

"In East it may not be well known, but it is a distinguished school that Bizen-no-kami Setoguchi completed receiving instruction in the art first from Priest Jigenbō of Iwōgataki in Satsuma Province."

"Yes, I'm informed of your school."

To speak of fencing never tired Ryunosuke; it was his only stimulant.

"And are you a Satsuma Clan's man?"

"Yes, formerly, but at present I owe allegiance to nobody."

"Is that so. Satsuma is a country famed for valour, you must know many high famed deeds of valour."

"If you're anxious to know....."

The next moment the two samurai leaped apart each from the other off the road, and they were now just six yards distant on an open space where grasses were still withered.

Chapter 4.

As they leaped, their hands grasped the hilt and they stared at each other. They did not draw upon their swords yet. Ryunosuke was incensed by the high handed and bold behaviors of this samurai; he was aiming too high to lead me to the same fate as the old gaffer on Great Buddhisattva Pass—thought Ryunosuke.

The pale skin of Ryunosuke shone like the pearl from the emotion. His slender eyes were steady and clear. Whenever he was intent on killing such were the symptoms.

"Show you how well Satsuma smiths forge?" said the man striking the hilt of the sword that seemed to be near four feet in length.

"Yes, please."

They did not draw yet.

"Wait, wait; I'd like to have a bout really worth the name," said he, and he seemed to be delighted to find Ryunosuke showing to be so well up in the art. He must fence himself well to welcome one tough enough to give a good fight.

"How if we meet properly and fight to our hearts' content?"

"Your challenge is accepted," said Ryunosuke with a smile, and he looked askance at the challenger. The fighter was calm and cool, too. He took out a sheet of paper from his bosom and:—

"I think we had better post a notice to obviate interference, haven't you got a pen?"

Ryunosuke handed him his pen-case in silence. The man bit the tip of the brush to wet and soften it, and wrote thus in thick and big letters:—

BOU, ARBITRATION BARRED!

He was an interesting fellow. Their arena was not far from the road as they stood then. So amongst those who would come to see the fray, attracted by the sound of the clashing swords, it was not impossible to find meddlesome people who might want to stop the fight. So the poster was intended to prevent that, and fight on the silly battle to the finish—finish for both if not for one. He knew his business all right.

Ryunosuke coolly watched him finish the writing. When the notice was written he looked about, and pinned it with a scabbard-knife on the trunk of a big pine-tree that stood near. Then he sought sticky resin to paste the corners of the paper labouriously.

"Get ready, please."

"Very well."

The fighter girdled up his sleeve-laps with the sword-cord. Removing his big hat, Ryunosuke did the same. Drawing that tremendously long sword, the man took the guard of 'above head' and yelled 'yei.' A loud voice it was. He seemed to be quite used to bouting. His skill at using the sword could not be gauged yet, but it was plain that he would act in this manner to unnerve his opponent

every time. At any rate a man must be quite used to bout with the real sword to behave as he did.

Ryunosuke, on the other hand, drew upon his sword, but gave out no yells, no demonstrations. He held his sword straight 'to the eye' and ready for 'at the moment of'—once again his favourite guard which he had had no opportunity of assuming for some time. The challenger had caught a tarter! What he had thought to be a pleasure bout turned out to be a serious one. The most trying time of all for a swordsman is in the initial stage of a bout, when he attempts to gauge the skill of the opponent and discover his peculiarities hiding his own behind his favourite guard.

No hurrying, no word; with his sword 'to the eye' stood Ryunosuke. He gave no reaction to the yell or demonstration. The fighter, who called himself a Satsuma samurai 'detached,' began to be struck with the strangeness of Ryunosuke's mode of fencing.

If it were only a match with the practice-stick and with protectors on, one would bump against the opponent to break his guard, or deal out a trial thrust or cut. But with the real sword that loves to suck blood and cut bones, such a ruse is out of question.

The fighter holding his sword above his head yelled many a time trying to frighten Ryunosuke as reconnaissance. But Ryunosuke remained as silent as a forest in snow, and as cool as coolness could be. This made the man cautious; he could not fathom how Ryunosuke would counter if

he dealt out a blow, where such a counter would come, and to what extent.

There was less traffic on the road than formerly, because of the troubled state of the country. Yet the place they were fighting was near the parting of the road for Kyoto and for Osaka, so:—

"What, fighting!?"

"Yes, two samurai."

"They drew, they drew."

"Yes, they have."

"Oh, what a long sword!"

"Look out!"

Those who were not strong in heart could not watch a real bout. Most people passed by in quick pace covering their faces with their sleeves. Those whose curiosity got better of the fear stood around at a distance, holding their breath, and one foot ready to take flight. Those who stood around must be those who were strong enough to run and not faint away when the contestants close in.

Perhaps to see persons fight with cold steel in broad daylight, is most fearsome. Swords that flash in the moonlight, helmets that glitter in the starlight are poetical enough to soften the bloody aspect of the thing. But here in the white daylight all is naked—flesh and blood of one person versus flesh and blood of another, and their murderous swords! All are to see for men and gods. If anybody should know what sort of man Ryunosuke was, and could discern his ever-changing subtle expressions on his face as

he went on fighting, eighty-four thousand hairs of the man would stand on end.

Amongst the crowd that watched the bout, there was one who looked to be a little different from the rest. First he stood behind other people looking indifferent. But now he took a pace forward and then another, while the crowd receded. He looked like a rock that appearing to move forward in a stream.

'Bout, Arbitration Barred!'—he now stood under it and watched the fight. Leggings, socks and sandals; the customary sedge-hat was strapped upon his back. He was not a samurai, but did not look to be a merchant or farmer. In his hand he carried a staff made of oak, four foot six, like the one a mountain pilgrim would carry.

There are many curious persons in this world, amongst them those who approach danger by choice are fools.

On the brow of the fighter, who challenged Ryunosuke, now appeared slight perspiration, and with that he was seen to lose temper by degrees.

Then Ryunosuke was seen to move, imperceptibly though, a little forward, and the fighter just that much to the rear. He altered his guard from 'above head' to 'to the eye.'

'Irrespective of the opponent's guard, rush in at once as you rise to bout, and as you rush thrust at the abdomen, you will invariably win' was what pupils were taught as the secret of success in a real bout at Mr. Chida's school of fencing as well as at several other schools. Yes, indeed!

To forestall and seek decision at once, or resign to a prolonged and patient watchful waiting and win the bout by patience. The Satsuma fighter adapted the first principle to force a decision upon Ryunosuke, but finding no opening for that tactic, he came down to the level of Ryunosuke and the two now stood as if two camps engaged in a prolonged warfare with rows of shields protecting each from the other.

In East Japan as far as he bouted, none could break Ryunosuke's guard of silent waiting. This fighter was beautifully caught in it. The sky of the fifth moon threatens rain but never rains in earnest and keep so for ten days and often for twenty days. It is enough to make any man get vexed and lose temper. Dull, vexatious, but till thunder storms clear the atmosphere there is no help for it. Ryunosuke's mode of fighting was like that weather. The fighter's patience was now exhausted, it burst out like the thunder.

"Yah!" he shouted and delivered his first cut. The secret of Ryunosuke's 'silent waiting' was to counter at the outset of his opponent's move.

Which side received the cut? The swords clashed just for a second and sparks flew, the two fighters leapt and were now some ten yards distant. Neither side was hurt. The fighter, to give no respite, took the guard of 'above head' and closed in inch by inch. Ryunosuke resumed his usual guard. It was to begin all over again.

When the swords clashed, the curious but timid crowd

dispersed shrinking. Some ran as much as a quarter of a mile away. Seeing that neither of the contestants were hurt, the crowd reformed gradually. The man who carried a staff and was in the habit of a commoner alone did not however run at all; he stood as if he were the referee, cool and collected, though the contestants were now drifting to come closer to where he was standing.

The Satsuma man was not a man of mere boldness; he was highly skilled at using the sword. To draw a parallel, the bout now was like two wrestlers in dead grips each trying to bring the other to the mat. If no 'water and rest' were given, both would drop by sheer exhaustion. But lo and behold! The bout now took a slight change in the nature of its process—the point of the sword of Ryunosuke was seen to be advancing though the rate was so small that it would have escaped the eye of a casual observer.

As Ryunosuke advanced, his challenger receded, perspiration born of desperation now running down his cheeks. He changed his guard again to that of 'to the eye.' As he receded an inch Ryunosuke advanced an inch; half an inch had he moved, then half an inch Ryunosuke pressed forward.

Silently Ryunosuke delivered a cut closing in but that glanced off near the temple, the swords clashing and the man leaping back. Ryunosuke pressed, but his follow-up was foiled the man leaping back again. But unfortunately he tripped over a stone and fell thud on his side. He had

been still in clogs till this very time. To deliver a cut on the head before the man could get up seemed to be to any observer what Ryunosuke would do. The one who fell would be cut down by the man who did not fall, though such had not always been the case. But then, before it came to that, an interrupter appeared. It was that queer man with a staff.

"Stay!" flew the staff and it stopped Ryunosuke's hand.



Chapter 5.

Ryunosuke, the desperado from Satsuma and the queer man with a staff were later seen in a room of a restaurant called *Yakko* at Yamashina. They sat round hob-nobbing. The Satsuma man said:—

"A queer style, I can't name it. I have bouted at many an Ito Ryu School fencing hall."

The man with a staff speaking for Ryunosuke:—
 "You know, he follows his own style. Nearly every one loses patience when bouting with him. In East his style is called amongst the fencers the guard of 'silent waiting.'"

"I see, 'silent waiting,' well named, East has her own peculiar product. Ha-ha-ha" the Satsuma man laughed.

"West has also many of her peculiar products, your sword is one," retorted Ryunosuke.

"Um, this!" he took up his sword with much show of importance:—

"Masakiyo Mondonsho is the smith."

"I ask that it be shown," said the man with a staff, and with due observance of the ceremony attached to inspecting a sword, he drew it to see. It was a splendid specimen of Satsuma smithery that faithfully perpetuated the *Kamakura* forge. Ryunosuke looked at it, too, and:—

"Hum, a fine one!"

"The ways of a Satsuma samurai is, once drawn never to sheath the sword unless it has tasted blood. This is the first time that I have broken this rule with regard to my sword. But never mind, for I love your way of meditation. Won't you show me your sword?"

He inspected, with due formalities, Ryunosuke's sword by *Musashi-taro*:—

"Sharp, eh! Seemed to have licked much blood."

"Yes, and was about to taste some more a while ago."

"What 'about to,' well mine was 'about to,' too" and they looked at each other and laughed. The fighter's laugh was an honest and open laugh; that of Ryunosuke bitter.

"But what stopped the two swordsmen was the merit of my staff, wasn't it?" said the queer man giving a side-wise glance to a corner of the room. The fighter looking at the staff:—

"What's that, a queer thing?"

"Lately the wrestlers at Osaka are carrying this calling it 'red-hair' trip-upper. I got one from them."

"Well, let me see," the fighter said rising and bringing the staff from the corner. It was what wrestler Onogawa devised to arm his men to form the van in case it were necessary to fight the foreigners. Onogawa did so receiving instructions from Mito Tokugawa, who headed, though a Tokugawa, the royalists and was keen to prevent the Occident from touching Japan.

The three samurai hob-nobbed very cordially, and what they should have done at first, that was to introduce one another, they did as they were going to part. The desperado said :—

"I am Shimbei Tanaka of Satsuma."

Shimbei Tanaka departed for somewhere after due leave-taking. Ryunosuke and the queer man were left to themselves. He was not queer nor a fool, he was no other than Yuzuru Yamazaki of Mito, a member of the Band of Chosens, a man skilled at Katori Ryu School quarter-staff. Ryunosuke knew him while both were in Yedo. By chance he passed by the two contestants, and he mediated.

After Tanaka was gone Ryunosuke and Yamazaki were like two members of a family.

"I say, Yoshida, things are moving rather quickly since."

"Are they?"

"Have you heard that many of the levy-men returned to Yedo from Kioto owing to a ruse of Kiyokawa."

"Yes, I have, in order to attack the foreigners at Yokohama, or for some such purpose."

"Kiyokawa is a schemer all right. Perhaps after all he is the most clever fellow of all the New Levy leaders. I think friend and foe alike say the same of him."

"Perhaps he is."

"He said he would attack the foreigners, but his scheme was to plan for an uprising at Yedo, and use the very men as cats' paw in order to oust the Shogunate."

"I see. He'll come to do something big if he were allowed to have his own way."

"Serizawa, Kondo, Hijikata and others all planned to kill him, but he was always fortunate."

"Um."

"But at long last fate willed it so and Kiyokawa was killed."

"What, Kiyokawa killed!?"

"Yes, at Akabanebashi Bridge, Shiba. He was nicely caught by Matashiro Hayami, Tadasaburo Sasaki and a few others."

"Kiyokawa was one of the senior pupils of Mr. Chiba, so he ought to have been a strong fencer."

"Both Sasaki and Hayami are well known swordsmen, what could Kiyokawa do to be waylaid by such people with their followers?"

"Quite. Then the New Levy disbanded?"

"Oh no, divided into two. There were two hundred and fifty men who left Yedo for Kioto. But most of them have returned to Yedo through the ruse of Kiyokawa as I have told you. But fourteen men under Serizawa and Kondo remain."

"Only fourteen!"

"Yes, but they as a nucleus organized a force and named it Band of Chosens. The band comprises ex-levy men newly sworn in, and also strong fenceers from various provinces. The headquarters are at Mibu, in the compound of the Lord of Nambu's mansion. Kamo Serizawa and Isami Kondo are captains. Toshizo Hijikata, Kinzan Niimi and Keisuke Minami are lieutenants."

"I see."

"I am knocking about in such a habit in order to spy upon roving samurai as well as to find recruits for the band. I'm fortunate to have found you here, let's go to Mibu where the headquarters of the new band are."

"Not so fast."

Ryunosuke had reason to weigh the matter carefully before he decided upon going to Mibu. So he asked:—

"But how are Serizawa and Kondo getting along? Do you think they can pull together?"

Yamazaki frowned and his eyes glared to hear Ryunosuke thus remarked about the two:—

"Well, that's where the hitch is."

"No, they can't pull together."

"A storm is brewing to come sooner or later. Already there are factions in the band, one for Serizawa and the other for Kondo among the men of the Chosen; and they are like cats and dogs, painful to say."

"To go by where one was born, I must side with Kondo,

because he and I alike come from Musashi, but I owe many a good turn to Serizawa," said Ryunosuke and he remained pensive.

"I see. I am from Mito, same as Serizawa, but I think Kondo goes a few pegs above Serizawa."

Yamazaki then compared the two captains of the Band of Chosens and remarked:—

"Kondo commands more popularity. Serizawa is too rough. Kondo is a man of insight. Serizawa incurs hatred, while Kondo fear. In time the band will come to be under Kondo. I'll leave things as they shape themselves and see."

Kamo Serizawa was a member of the Tengu Party of Mito. Kamo Serizawa was an assumed name. Tsugujii Kimura was his real name. Yamazaki, who came from the same province as Serizawa, said that Kondo was a better man. Well, we may well judge which of the two was a superior man.

"Well, I think I'll not go at once to Mibu. I'll take lodging at some suitable locality and seek an interview with Serizawa and decide upon my course," said Ryunosuke.

"That's not bad. See the sight of Kioto at leisure. If you join the Band, then there will be no more free and easy feeling."

"Won't you tell Serizawa that I have arrived. I don't want Kondo know it."

"All right. Where will you stay?"

"Well, somewhere secluded. Don't you know of any likely inn? Find one for me, will you?"

"Yes, Abunmiya at Rokkakudo is one I know, I'll take you there."

"Please," said Rynnosuke, and they left the place slightly merry. As they went along, the evening crows were seen flying from Daigo towards Uji.

"By the way Mr. Yoshida, don't draw upon your sword lightly, the street is full of blood-thirsty fellows, one like we parted just now."

"That desperado surprised me."

"Men like him are rare. He sets no value upon his life. Well, what name did he give?"

"He said Shimbei Tanaka of Satsuma."

"Shimbei Tanaka, eh? Keep it in your memory. Men of his type love to carry out assassination. Last year at Kujō Riverbed Mr. Sakon Shimada of Prince of Kujō household was assassinated, but no one is apprehended for that crime yet."

"Is it? I was told that assassinations are rather common now."

Chapter 6.

A figure that seemed to be seeking lonesome places for a stroll was seen walking east from Mibu Village to Niijo Castle across the township. The figure was that of one of the persons with whom the reader is already acquainted.

The one was only a lad who had not shaven his crown yet, but on his side he wore a grim and stern sword. From time to time he put the peg of the folding fan upon the end of the hilt and gazed about to take in stock the lay of the locality, and then looked up into the sky to imbibe the moon-clouded night. The person was no other than Hyoma Utsuki. When did he arrive at Kioto?

Troublous were the times then, yet Kioto did not lack something of refinement to be discerned, befitting the Mikado's abode over a thousand years. In the streets the atmosphere was not at all peaceful; swords clashed. But to listen to the running water of the Kamogawa River with the moon dimmed by the clouds; to see in a distance the flower-clad Kwachōzan Hill with the Grand Sanjō Bridge to one's immediate front; the peak of Nyoigatake shrouded in the mist; the pagoda of Yasaka with Gion taken in; Kiyomizu and Ōtani all in slumber in smoky, misty night vapour that hovered in streaks, reminded one of the fairy maidens of heaven who fell in sweet slumber, and a spectator imbibing all that would find oneself melting and becoming part of the scenery.

It was a moon-clouded night. But it was already past the middle of the fourth moon, and in no part of the sky the moon could be spotted; it was generally light. Clouded the sky was, but not oppressive, the agreeably humid air filled the perfect spring night of Kioto.

Hyoma, coming upon the bridge trod it in such a manner that he thought it too sacred an object for hurried steps. It was past midnight. Traffic had been scarce even when the night was not advanced, now there was no soul to be seen except himself. He was in monopoly of the capital's spring night which was said worth a thousand *ryo* in gold by the poet.

Even in Kioto Hyoma never took to killing peaceful citizens, nor went about to pick quarrels. His spare time was employed either in meditation in the main hall of the Mibudō Temple, or in taking strolls in the dead of night at lonely and dangerous places. So far he encountered no adventure.

Ryunosuke expended more time in travelling from Yedo to Kioto challenging many a fencing school on the way. Hyoma, on the contrary, came to Kioto straight with the levy-men, and now he had over a month experience of the city which Ryunosuke knew yet very little.

Hyoma had learned that Ryunosuke was now in Kioto. He thought he would surely come upon him before long, and that was one of the reasons of Hyoma's night wanderings. But coming to Kioto and becoming acquainted with the political and diplomatic situations of Japan, and finding

the spirited samurai of different clan who gave him an impression that *they* managed Japan, Hyoma felt that he too was now called up to a higher and bigger stage than mere vendetta.

That night Hyoma saw a party of rover samurai go guarding a palanquin on Sanjō Street. Watching their backs Hyoma came back to his quarters at Mibu wondering very much about them in mind. "I'm sure they were some of our men, I have recognition of their backs," said he to himself.

The next morning Hyoma was sent for by Isami Kondo, the captain. He repaired to Isami. He sat erect upon a skin with his arms folded. On the sword rack was his favourite weapon named Kobetsu or 'Tigerkiller.' The eyes that sought Hyoma were more determined than usual.

"Utsuki, no more night wanderings, please."

"No!?"

Isami stared down upon Hyoma whose expression betrayed his astonishment at receiving such a command.

"Sir, is that....."

"Don't ask. You mustn't go out at night."

Kondo spoke curly and determinedly. Point blank! He gave no reason, and he seemed to be vexed with something. It was no use to explain things to Kondo once he was determined upon something, so Hyoma held his peace.

Isami was a man of muscle and strength. His cheek bones were like rocks, his forehead was like a steel plate.

The eyes that shone beneath it had at times were very charming, but should he be a little out of humour, they shone with such glare that no one could return his gaze which bordered on ferocity. If anybody should receive that ferocious gaze on meeting him, the man was sure to be found, by the next morning, put to sword in some street corner.

Hyoma saw that Kondo was angry. He knew how dreadful the consequence of Kondo's anger was, but Hyoma had nothing that needed a searching of heart on his part. He thought however that there was no use to explain now. In time everything would be clear. Then Isami would not think any more of it. Hyoma knew his man well so;—

“Very well, captain, I will stop my night wanderings.”

“All right.”

Upon this Hyoma returned to his quarters.

Passing by the well he saw two of the Chosens drawing water to wash their faces talking aloud:—

“Imura, you came home late, last night.”

“Um. I slept in this morning.”

“Where did you go?”

“A bad place!”

Hyoma heard them as he passed. He looked at Imura attracted by the dialogue only to find him resembling very much one of the men who went guarding a palanquin over-night.

There was then an incident that needs telling. It was

that Kamo Serizawa, captain of the New Levies robbed a wealthy man of his wife, carried her to his quarters and made her his woman. Serizawa and his men had long been in the habit of rough and high handed practices. But this piece of conduct was felonious. Hyoma heard it the same day. He could not help connecting the rover samurai he saw last night guarding a palanquin, and Serizawa's robbing a rich citizen's wife. And especially one of the samurai looked very much like Imura, one of Serizawa's men. So Hyoma's suspicion grew. The next day, as Hyoma entered the gate of the headquarters he came upon Imura pat as he came from the direction of the store-room.

“Mr. Imura,” Hyoma addressed.

“Oh,” Imura said and he seemed to be taken aback,

but smiling:—

“Oh, is it Mr. Utsuki.”

“I want to ask you something, Mr. Imura?”

“What is it?”

“Haven't your group handled any woman for examination of late?”

“No,” said Imura, but his ‘no’ sounded as if he were trying to hide the truth.

Amongst the levy-men there were two factions, the Kondo and the Serizawa. There was no love lost between them. Utsuki was rather attached to Kondo, he did not like Serizawa's personality. Besides, he had heard that Seri-

zawa was shielding Ryunosuke, so now Serizawa was his enemy.

Since that Hyoma made up his mind to keep an eye on Serizawa. To-day Hyoma shadowed that Imura and a new comer who went out to visit Serizawa at his quarters. They passed into the precinct of the Honkokuji Temple. So Hyoma did not enter it at the gate, but reined a little and kept watch. Pretty soon the two came out beaming with smile and talking with laughter. Passing the gate they did not return to Mibu where their quarters were, but went towards Shimabara taking the road behind the Honganji Temple, talking aloud in utter disregard of passers-by. About a third of a mile from there, the road ran through rice-fields, and at the end of the road stood the gay-quarters of Shimabara where the fire of pleasure burnt red.

"Look, the lights! They quicken our heart-beats, don't they? But our ways of seeking pleasure are rather naive if we bring them alongside those of our captain. His ways are different and deep," Imura said, his voice ringing over the fields.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" they both laughed together. Then their conversation was too low to be heard clearly. Presently the new comer looked back abruptly and whispered in the ear of Imura:—

"Someone's coming!"

Imura stopped:—

"Yes, I hear steps."

From Ikkancho to Shimabara there were no houses, it was open to see to find anyone who would come.

"A Shimabara visitor, I suppose. How about scaring him a bit?"

It was a likely place to play pranks on people. It was right in the middle of Sujaku Fields, that once was a busy town along Sujaku Thoroughfare when Kioto was the hub of the Land of Mikado (tenth and eleventh centuries A.D.) and before the civil wars of fifteenth to sixteenth century reduced Kioto to a half of what it had been. Now, at the time of this story, footpads were commonly met with there and 'skill testing' murder frequent. So any visitor to the quarters who took this road did so after taking due precaution against the risk.

Hyoma came up to the two who were now halted.

"Excuse me, sir, but could you direct me to *Jizo* of Mibu?"

"Where? To *Jizo* of Mibu?!"

"Yes, the way to the *Jizo* Temple of Mibu and Lord Nambu's Mansion."

"You ask of the Nambu Mansion, I think I have heard your voice before."

It came in Imura's voice and the man took a few paces towards Hyoma.

"Oh, isn't it Mr. Utsuki?"

"Oh, isn't it Mr. Imura's voice that is saying that?"

To Imura it was a complete surprise to find Hyoma here, and a feeling of uneasiness seemed to rise within him.

"Why are you here? At this hour of night! You don't, as a rule, come this way, do you?"

"I went to Shichijō, and lost on my way home."

"I see. This is the way you may well lose yourself upon. Going straight you come to that bright town. Listen, drums and banjos! There we find paradise. The Mibu Temple you seek is that dark high roof over there," Imura said pointing to the gigantic roof that loomed up in the dark far across the fields.

"Oh, is that the Jizoji Temple? I see; and that is Shimabara. I quite see now."

"Hold on, Utsuki!"

"What is it?"

"You going back to Mibu, straight?"

"Yes."

"That won't do, coming so far. You can't go back now;" Imura said taking hold of Hyoma by the sleeve-lap, and then talking in a very unpleasant tone:—

"Be a sport, come, come with us."

"Where to go?"

"Don't feign ignorance, come where we come."

"No, I have no time for that."

"Be a sport. Our captains Mr. Kondo and Mr. Serizawa to head the list, we are all the habitués of Shimabara. You're fair and young, so you must come."

"I am not equal to such elegant men of the world."

"Yes, you are. The fair ladies of Shimabara like your kind of man. It won't do to live in Kioto and not to

be acquainted with Shimabara ladies. Isn't that so? Mizobe."

"Yes, quite."

"There you are. Unless you see the inside of Shimabara, you can't talk life."

Mibu and Shimabara are very near, almost all at a stone's throw each from the other. It couldn't have been that Hyoma did not know there was Shimabara. Imura held Hyoma's sleeve fast and pulled to induce him to visit the quarters.

Hyoma thought it may not be unwise to let them have their own way and Hyoma followed them. He might make some useful discoveries.

So Hyoma did not force Imura to let go his sleeve, and they were now only about a hundred yards from the gate. All right, Hyoma thought, and he made up his mind to see it through. They had now come to the gate.

"See, Utsuki, this is the Grand Gate. See, here's a weeping willow. This is the famous Willow of Deguchi or Way Out Willow. Now, see, everywhere it is brighter than day, this is the first of Seven Wonders of Shimabara. Take a step in, you see fairy ladies dance, and heavenly beauties come to entertain you."

Now Hyoma saw before him Shimabara unfold its gay and tempting night life.

Chapter 7.

The pride of Shimabara is that it is the head of the whole gay-quarters in Japan, as a real fact in the past and a memory in the present.

The present day Shimabara is the mere shadow of what it was. You may visit the famous Shimabara by the dear sweet Sujaku; disappointed you will turn doubting if you had really come to Shimabara. The houses are now old and dilapidated, the streets are narrow and dirty. Peasants' carts pass in front of it, the smoky locomotives of the Tamba Railway trains puff behind. Between, the place ekes out its paralytic existence fighting desperately against the changes that time brings.

Hanzan Nishotei, an epigrammatist of Yedo who lived a little over a hundred years ago wrote in his 'Kioto as I Saw Her':—

'Shimabara is surrounded by a plaster wall all around, and inside, the place is lonesome. I saw a cheap eating-house hung out in the Mid Street.'

A little later-day writer, Bakin:—

'The quarters of Shimabara are now depopulated and the surrounding wall no longer stands erect. Except Ageyama-machi Street the houses as well as the streets are dirty. The inmates lack in elegance compared with those of Gion.' It is now nearly a century since Bakin wrote the above. The plaster wall in question leaves no trace. Lesser houses

are now not occupied, larger establishments are going from bad to worse. Once proud house-signs dyed on narrow curtains, now soiled and desolate, hang limp along the extensive frontage that shows signs of part desertion of the establishment. Urtentanted rooms and not frequented portions of such big houses are dusty and bare of the once brilliant lacquer. The whole aspect of the place squashes the image of beauty and elegance that one may acquire from the famous passage out of the Saga and Omuro, 'I am Kisaragi, whom people call 'beguiler,' of Shimabara.' Those who will take the trouble of seeing through Nakanocho, Chūdoji, Tayūmachi, Ageyamachi and Shimonochō for the sake of the old days of Shimabara, Japan's head of all gay-quarters, and shed a tear for her ruin are kindhearted folks. Mostly the visitors depart with their 'hum, what's this?' derisive in mind of Shimabara for her empty name. You may halt before the most senior house Sunmya, it is as dirty as the rest. Mockingly you call at the door, then a matron, the type we imagine of the alma a generation ago used to be seen in Tokio when Ryūhoku Narushima chiefly penned the geisha world, will answer the call, and decline your admittance politely because you carry no introduction to the house with you.

This is not because she has taken you for a novice, it is invariably applied to anybody. Dashing know-alls may drive up to the portico in the latest fashion motorcar, 'sorry if no introduction' will be meted out for them just the same. It makes no difference at Shimabara whether you

are dressed fine or shabby, fashionably or otherwise. This custom make some think more of Shimabara and increase their respect for her; some think it is ridiculous and that it is no wonder that Shimabara is headed for ruin.

Even if you obtain the honour of being admitted, a ridiculous feeling will fill your mind.

Entering, under a rough hewn sooty pillar you will find a big cooking oven common in the cook-house of a big temple. Hand pumps that are three centuries old will meet your eye. Things that look like pickle-tubs are there in big numbers. You will find the place very much like the kitchen of a big squire's household twenty generations old.

Besides, above the lintel spears, quarter-staff, halberd and the like old 'warriors' keep watch; and immediately on entering, a sword-rack is there like an old retainer sitting in the stiff Shogun's court dress looking down upon you.

Awestricken you pass to the parlour where the ceiling is low, as it is usual with all the Kioto-style houses, and dark. But everywhere you find marks of refinement. Low and dark do not necessarily mean shallow and cheapish you will next think, and if you ask for the meaning of the decorations of the slide and ceiling of each room, the matron, the type of which there was mention (possibly the elder maid-servant) will take the trouble of explaining them to you without any show of importance or pride.

The first room is called *Misu-no-ma*, or Chamber of

Sacred Curtains; the second *Oku Misu-no-ma*, or Inner Chamber of Sacred Curtains. The third is *Ogi-no-ma*, or Chamber of Folding Fans that cover twenty-one mats, or fully ten square-feet. On the ceiling are painted twenty-one folding fans, and upon four of the six thick-paper slides bear the picture of Holly-hock Festival of Kamo Shrine (God of Thunder) in Tosa School painting.

The fourth room is the *Uma-no-ma*, or Chamber of Ponies and Horses, painting by *Ōkyō* (18th Century painter) on the slides. The fifth is *Kujaku-no-ma*, or Chambers of Peacock and Peahens painted by *Hampō* (early 19th Century); the sixth, *Hakkei-no-ma* or Chamber of Eight Views—eight views of Shimabara. The seventh room is the *Sakura-no-ma*, or Chamber of Cherry-blossoms by *Tsunenobu Kanō* (later 17th Century painter); the eighth room *Kakoi-no-ma*, Chamber of Secrecy, has an ode by *Kitō* (18th Century epigrammatist). The ninth room is the *Aogai-no-ma*, or Chamber of Blue Shells. It covers seventeen mats. The tenth room *Higaki-no-ma*, or Chamber of Cypress, has all Cypress-bark fence sliding doors. The eleventh room is *Donsu-no-ma*, or Chamber of Damask, where the doors are damask-paneled. The twelfth, *Matsu-no-ma*, or Chamber of Pine-trees, are composed of two sections, one sixteen mats and the other twenty-four, and the Chamber has a huge *Hotei* or Potbelly, one of the seven gods of fortune, painted in such a manner that he smiles at you from whichever direction you approach. The chamber has no pillar, the ceiling is supported by means

of suspension. The chamber hangs a big work by Ganki (early 19th Century painter).

If you seek further merit of various rooms, each has its own history and tradition. In the Chamber of Blue Shells it is all mothers-of-pearl that decorate the walls; the Chamber of Cypress has such-and-such incidents attached to it—you will be told. Then it will be explained that the great Saigō (the foremost leader of the Royalists and a good compromiser, who was instrumental in bringing in the new Japan peacefully) used to take this Chamber of Pine-trees, for the chamber suited to guard against an eaves-dropper. His favourite partner was Kodayū, and his bosom friend Priest Gesshō used to have Hanagiri-dayū as his mate. Priest Gesshō must have then been a gallant, too!

Regarding the Japanese gay-quarters in the light of sociology, unless some Japan-as-She-Used-to enthusiasts come forward and take steps to preserve the above mentioned Suniya, another house called Wachigai and a few others, a material for the sociological history of Japan will disappear. Because the present delapidated Shimabara, that keeps still something of the old days of Shimabara,—the head of the whole gay-quarters of Japan, has no hope of recovery. The said Suniya, for instance, moved to the present site from Rokujō some two hundred and ninety years ago when Shimabara was open, and the building is as old as that, and there are several other buildings which date similarly. So in the light of the history of architecture, the place deserves preservation you may say. Those who have come just to

see are often converted into sociologists and as well as archaeologists because of the antiquity of the place.

Shimabara of Kioto anti-date Yoshiwara of Yedo by thirty years. The former was open by permit of Hideyoshi, the Viceroy who preceded the Tokugawa Shogunate and conquered the warring lords and put a stop to feudal civil wars that had lasted over a century. Yoshiwara of Yedo was by sanction of Iyeyasu, the first Shogun of the Tokugawas. Shimachi of Osaka then followed. At first when Hideyoshi gave permission to establish gay-quarters at Kioto, they were open at Yanaginachi, then they moved into Shiyashiki, which was later called Misujimachi, then the present Sujaku Fields were made the site of and named Shimabara in the year 1641. According to the Ukiyomongatari, or Folks' History:—

'Lately they have been all put into one and placed at Sujaku west of Shichijō, north of Tamba Road. The site of the quarters are closed on three sides and only open at the remaining one side like the castle of Shimabara (where Christians rebelled in the year 1637 against the Shogunate, incensed by its ban of christianity and the repeated persecutions), so people call it *Shimabara*.'

Miyako-Meisho-Zue, or Guide to Kioto's Sight:—

'Then again they were moved to the present Sujaku Fields in the year 1641. The reason that it is called Shimabara is because a little before the time of removal a man named Shiro Amakusa led an insurrection at Shimabara of Hizen Province, and Shimabara was upon the tongue of

everybody. The quarters moved into the new site with much ado, and the excitement of the place induced the people to nickname the site Shimabara.'

One is struck with the strangeness of fate that the memory of the Christian Persecution is born by the name of a licensed quarters!

By the way, according to an old and informed man, the history of that class of women in Japan dates as old as the country herself, for mention is made of them in the Manyô, or Collection of Old Odes and Poems. Later at Shirakawa at Higo, Kanzaki-Eguchi near Kioto, Ikeda, Kisegawa and Oiso on the East Coast Road such women were found. Then at Murotsu something like their quarters made appearance. When the Heike Clan, at the end of the twelfth century, came to the cruel end of the annihilation by drowning in the sea near Shimonoseki, a few surviving court ladies drifted to this occupation and formed their quarters at Akamagasaki, (or Shimonoseki) of Nagato Province, and at Murotsu, all along the shores of the sea where spider-crabs bear the expression of bitter mortification of Heike warriors. The quarters at Murotsu prospered decidedly more than the other places, it being near the capital.

But the first of all *licensed* quarters is Shimabara, and it has had its ups and downs. Shichininshu of Misujimachi period, that is Courtesan Yoshino the second who was ransomed by Merchant Saburobei Haiya, was perhaps the most prosperous. Then, through the rise of Gion Quarters, Shimabara began to decline.

Then at the period of this novel, that is at the time of the Restoration (of Mikado to power, that is from about seventy to eighty years from now), Shimabara bloomed forth again by reason of the samurai of over seventy clans congregating in Kioto. Shimabara then regained its former prestige and prosperity. Any samurai who displeased his lord by overstaying, or otherwise misbehaving at other quarters was never forgiven, but if it were at Shimabara, he was leniently treated. Such was the influence and prestige of Shimabara.



Chapter 8.

At Shimabara at a house where a curtain bearing the name Kitsuya appeared, a peasant in the dress of a traveler was seen one day:—

"I say, if you please!"

It was Shichibei of Ôme who spoke.

A woman about thirty, who had her eye-brows shaven and wearing her damask narrow-sash tied in front, answered the call by separating the curtains.

"I am from a little distant place. Does Madame Miyuki reside here?" said Shichibei to her.

"Yes, she does. But who are you?"

"Does she? I am from East; I desire to have an interview with the lady."

"Do you say that you want to see Madame Miyuki? Does she know of your coming?"

"No. But I have something I must tell her. I am an ignorant stranger to this place. So I simply came straight here as soon as I arrived at the inn."

"That won't do," the woman said contemptuously:—

"Do you think a 'Madame' will see a stranger so easily? Go back, please," and the woman was about to turn from Shichibei.

"Please, mum, if I cannot see the 'Madame,' I understand that there is a girl called Matsu kindly taken charge of by this establishment."

"Matsu.....!?"

"Yes, a girl lately arrived from Yedo."

"Well.....," she said but the woman did not complete the sentence. She looked at Shichibei once more penetratingly and altering her tone all of a sudden said:—

"I have no knowledge of such a girl."

"Well, I don't know what to do," said Shichibei, and he seemed indeed at a loss. The woman must have felt sorry for the stranger:—

"If you want to see the 'madame,' you must go through the proper channel. She is out just now gone to a house of interview, but I will tell her your wish when she is back."

"Very well, I'll come later. By the way, you said 'come through the proper channel if I wanted to see madame,' what shall I have to do for that?"

"For that you must ask at that yonder large interview house, or at other 'tea houses,' but not here."

"I have just arrived from East and am an ignoramus, you must overlook my preposterousness. I will go over there and be informed of the proper ways, and come again," Shichibei said, and bowing politely he was about to leave Kitsuya intending to come again later. Then a 'madame' with her followers was seen coming this way in 'procession' from an interview house.

Shimabara originated the 'procession' as well as to call the courtesan 'madame.' By the word 'procession' is meant the 'madame's' journey between her residence and the interview house.

Formerly, on the twenty-first of every month, later twice a year, then only on the twenty-first of the fourth moon, either the full, second rate or third rate procession of all the inmates was carried out. The full procession took place when a new courtesan makes her appearance. Now what Shichibei saw was merely a courtesan returning to her residence from an interview house.

A brilliantly beautiful 'madame' wearing twelve hair-pins to form a halo, a sash with pine and snow in embroidery tied in front in a big bow and the laps hanging down, a gown with cherry blossoms falling in a breeze in print, a pair of high clogs lacquered coal black with vermilion straps, came along in 'procession' with a 'tender' maid and a page girl, and a servant who had his six foot sash dyed in stripes made into a bow on the back holding a

long handled umbrella unfurled from behind the 'madame' to shade her from above. The 'procession' came in the orthodox slow pace. Shichibei stood under the eaves of a house and gazed upon the party dumfounded. The party presently entered the Kitsuya, separating the curtains. After the party, two servants carried a large black lacquered box which resembled the common clothes-box. On one side of the box, Shichibei saw, a wooden tag in the shape of a chess-piece, and on which Miyuki, the name of the 'madame' was written.

"I say, sir!" a little page-girl in a flowing-sleeve dress of plum-blossoms in print came out of the Kitsuya and addressed Shichibei. He turned and said, "Do you mean me?"

"Yes, you, sir. The 'madame' wants to see you, so please step in."

"That is very kind of her, thank you."

The room into which Shichibei was shown had age-old silver-leafed thick-paper sliding doors pasted with poem pads. Possibly they bore synopsia of noted 'madames' since this house was established. Shichibei tried to read some of the poems, but the calligraphy was too elegant in style at places for Shichibei to read. Shichibei had no education, but by dint of application he had made himself above the folks in reading letters and in explaining official notices. But facing such superior literature, he could not help wiping the perspiration on the forehead, feeling ashamed of himself finding him inferior to women, and he felt compelled to respect them.

Chapter 9.

Shichibei laid himself down in a room of the Kitsuya to take it easy while waiting for the return of Matsu who had gone to Arashiyama Park with some of her fellow servants of the establishment.

He recollected the mien of Madame Miyukidayū when she was shorn of her decorations and listened to Shichibei. She looked quite different from the person in the 'procession.' She wore a broad scarlet lapelled gown, gorgeous underwears, black vest sewn to skirts of different material, and a silk-crepe, or some such material, double-sash below an apron-like red girdle. She appeared with her thick paint still on, the lips rouged, and her elegant Kyoto dialect came from the lips showing the teeth dyed coal-black. She appeared to be about two years older than Matsu. Shichibei remembered that she said she regarded Matsu as if she were her sister and Matsu reciprocated the feeling. He thought she made a fine sister for Matsu and was glad for her. He carefully considered what steps were best for Matsu to take. He had come to ransom Matsu, but was it not rather better to leave Matsu in the hand of such a fine woman? He could no longer be persistent of his original plan.

Yet he thought of how to raise the money to ransom Matsu, what should he do with her when she was taken back to East. And while he went on thus thinking, he

became drowsy and was about to fall asleep. Then :—

“Excuse me—oh, Uncle!”—Matsu had come in.

Shichibei woke in his half-sleep and set his eyes upon the beautiful maiden who had walked in.

“Are you not my Uncle from Ōme?” the maiden said kneeling. “Is it Matsu, really Matsu?” said Shichibei rising.

“Yes, it is Matsu,” she assured.

Matsu had changed thrice in form. The first Matsu was a little girl with the pilgrim's pack on the back fighting the monkeys on the summit of Great Buddhissetva Pass. The second Matsu was at Kamio's mansion in the attire and style of a maid of honour. The third is the present Matsu, not so gorgeous as a 'madame' but better attired than a dancer. Shichibei had seen many Kioto and Osaka merchants who take delight in dressing their daughters in the style that resembled what Matsu was now in. Shichibei did not see when Matsu was at Kamio's mansion, so he was surprised to find her changed so much.

“It was a long time since,” Matsu said tears, running down her cheeks.

“You are now quite a woman, and a very attractive woman, too,” Shichibei said, his eyes also dim with the tears.

“I thought I should never be able to see you in this life.”

“Don't be silly, it's only a short distance from Yedo.”

Shichibei became sad, and Matsu wanted to cry. It was really nothing for Shichibei to cover several hundred miles,

but to Matsu the road was not smooth till she found her home in the western capital travelling well nigh three hundred miles from Yedo.

She was sobbing for a while, pressing one of the flowing sleeves to her face.

“When did you arrive, Uncle?”

“To-day.”

“How did you know that I was to be found here?”

“Well, I just happened to hear that you were here, so have come in great haste. On arriving, however, I find you are far more happily situated than I imagined, and there was no difficulty in seeing you either. My intention was to take you back to Yedo. But I have just been turning the matter over in my mind if that was wise, for you have after all nobody to go to in Yedo, and I cannot be looking after you as much as I wish to. Fate has placed you here, you may as well stay here. What is your idea? Open your heart to me, dear.”

“Thank you, Uncle. I am resigned to fate, you know. Everywhere I have met misfortune.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don't wish either to return to Yedo nor stay here. Nobody can rise above fate, so I will not struggle against fate anymore.”

Shichibei folded his arms and remained thinking.

Then :—

“You allow yourself to become a courtesan?”

“Yes, I have my mind made up, for during the month

I shall have to begin business as Madame Miyuki's younger sister."

Shichibei was again pensive:—

"Well, if you have so made up your mind, you may have your own way. But on my part I must say that I fail then in my duty to you. I don't want to see you become a courtesan."

"Thank you, Uncle, but....."

"Well, I've come to ransom you, I must once fish you out of this. After that you can please yourself. You may go back to Yedo, or stay here. I don't think I'll interfere."

"Dear Uncle, you mention ransoming, but....."

"Money, you mean; it cannot frighten me no matter how big the sum may be."

"Thank you, Uncle."

Matsu dried her eyes again. Of course she preferred freedom to bondage. If only there were parents, brother or sister to take her to, or any other relations, or a man who loves and whom she loves, Shichibei would be more prompt in putting his resolution into execution. But to take her to her Aunt Taki, or back to the 'widow' at Tsumagoizaka were equally more dangerous for her than to leave her here, because of the character of those two women. Then should Shichibei himself look after her? Oh no, he was a man who must expect the long arm of the law to reach him at any moment, so it would be the worst thing for Matsu to live with Shichibei.

"Uncle, if you will kindly ransom me, I will go to a little place among the mountains called Sawai."

"What? Sawai? What part of Sawai?"

"You know, that bridge called Mannenbashi, below that bridge is a mill, I'm told. There I will toil husking and milling rice, and winnowing, for a living."

"At the mill by Mannenbashi, eh? You know of anybody there?"

"Yes, I have a man whom I promised. 'To have promised' may sound a little unusual, but there must live a man who was really kind to me, as if he were my brother."

Who was he who was waiting for the coming of this woman? Who was he whom she had promised something? It was very fortunate for her if she really had such a man waiting for her.

Chapter 10.

What Kioto abounds in are temples, women, and cobblers, what she is scarce of are samurai, wine-shops, press-makers and mendicants—went a saying. Now there were swanking samurai everywhere, and women, who held the second place in the list of the things in which Kioto abounds, were now seldom seen in the street.

After leaving Ikancho, Shimabara Quarters, Shichibei began to calculate.

To ransom Matsu more than four hundred *ryo* gold would be needed. He had paid already a hundred *ryo* earnest money. He said the balance would be paid within three days. Now he must obtain three hundred and fifty *ryo*.

The sunset bell tolled as he came upon Sembondōri Street.

Studying in mind the lay of the locality and the houses, Shichibei came as far as the Jizo Temple of Mibu before he was aware. He made some trifle offering in money for the *Jizo* and came out of the temple. Before him stood the mansion of the Lord of Nambu.

"Whose mansion is this? If this is of a daimio, he must be one possessing above half a million bushels of rice fief," thought Shichibei.

The village of Mibu was already dark. The sound of the looms echoed peace in the warlike atmosphere in which Kioto, nay Japan, was then steeped. Striking out at Aya-kōji in his wandering, Shichibei saw again the lights of Shimabara burn red. He thought of what Matsu would be thinking of there, and felt sad.

Shichibei sat at a cheap eating house not far from the Nambu Mansion of Mibu.

"Boss, your wine is good."

"Yes."

"Where do you get this eel from?"

"That's from Wakasa, sir."

"This is good, too."

"Like it, sir? You see, people round here are pretty particular, so I shall have to be very careful of what I supply."

"I see. Many spacious mansions are found round here. I suppose them folks are pretty particular, so you have to be careful."

"Yes, that's it, sir."

The wine was good, the spitch-cock was excellent, so Shichibei got very pleasant, and settled down to talk with the keeper.

"Have you come to worship at the *Jizo*, sir?"

"Yes, I'm now returning from the temple."

"Well, I suppose by the look of things, the 'play' wouldn't be staged this year."

"What play, is it?"

"You see, there is what we call Mibu Play. Shortly there will be muster. But the times are so troublous, that I don't know if it will be held this year."

"Mibu Play! I know it at least by name, for folks talk of it even in my native country."

"It is distinctly a thing of its own. If you are going to stay here for any length of time, you had better make a point of seeing it."

"I think I'd like to see it to enrich my store of knowledge."

"Then there'll be the grand 'procession' of the 'madames' at Shimabara, the gay quarters, which is only held once a year. That is a sight worth seeing, too."

"The 'procession'! I saw it once at Yoshiwara. Is the one carried out here much different from the one we see at Yedo?"

"No, not very much different. I saw that of Yedo in the wood-cut. The Yedo affair seems to be even bigger than that carried out in Shimabara, but I hear that it originated in Shimabara, and more come to see it than the one at Yedo."

"I see."

Shichibei wanted to kill time here, so he further went on talking with the keeper.

"Pardon," entered then a man attired as a merchant with a pack of fancy goods on his back.

"Good evening, old man," he said and putting down his pack at a handy spot, took out his tobacco pouch and cast a glance at Shichibei.

Shichibei looked at him. Their eyes met; each thought the other had a peculiar glance.

"Oh, Mr. Fukuzo, you're late this evening," said the keeper in a very familiar tone.

"Well, I had to show all the contents of my pack at the Nambu Mansion, and so am thus late."

"Where? At the Nambu Mansion, and fancy goods! Well, how?"

"Well, at a very unlikely place I made a much bigger sale than expected. It is well said that business is a speculation."

"Yes, you're right. Nobody could have thought that

fancy goods be bought by 'rover' samurai. It is like hair-pins for round-heads."

"Ah well, you see, from outside it may look as if stern and strict, but at the back-door lady's palanquins from Gion and Shimabara quarters are not infrequent."

"Is that so?!" said the keeper coming along with a heated bottle of wine, looking much struck with the news.

"I think I'll have eel again."

The fancy goods man began to tinkle. He addressed Shichibei as there was a break in the conversation with the keeper.

"It's getting cloudy, sir."

"Is it? It was fine."

Shichibei and the pedlar entered into conversation.

"It may not rain, but the weather of Kioto seems to be more changeable than that of Yedo."

"Is it? I am a stranger here."

"Excuse me, but what part of East are you from?"

Abruptly the word 'east' fell from the lips of the man, so Shichibei looked up, and said:—

"Musashi."

"I thought so, judging from your language and style. And possibly you are near Yedo, perhaps along the road from Yedo to Kôfu."

Shichibei looked at the face of the pedlar again. To Shichibei, the expression of the man's eyes seemed to be a little too military for a pedlar. Anybody could tell a man whether he was from East or from Kioto-Osaka district,

but to be pointed out 'near Yedo, and possibly along the Road to Kōfu' was a little uncanny, Shichibei thought, and so he said :—

"You guessed it rightly, sir. Hachijōji ! But then where are you from, the man who can guess rightly my native town ?"

"I ? Well, I am also from East. Mi-i-i, no Tsuchinura. I have knocked about a good deal here and there, and am now peddling fancy goods plying my trade amongst the womenfolk of flowery Kioto. Excuse me, have a cup from me, please."

The hand that held out a cup for Shichibei bore the corns made by the fencing stick. Shichibei took up the cup unconcernedly thanking for it.

The fancy-goods dealer left the place after exchanging cups with Shichibei several times, as such is usual when people hob-nob. Shichibei now began to eat rice after tipping for a long time.

"I say, boss, what's Nambu Mansion ?" he asked.

"The Nambu Mansion is that big compound in front of the Jizo Temple. At present many 'rover' samurai are quartered."

"Before the temple ! ?"

"Yes, that compound with a black gate."

"I see."

It was what Shichibei had marked down.

"What are those 'rover' samurai ?"

"They are 'rover' samurai belong to a band named

New Chosen. They were sent from Yodo to counter the 'rover' samurai from various clans who congregated in Kioto."

"Rovers set to fight rovers, eh ?"

"That's it. They are those who carry themselves erect with big and strong arms bared below the tucked up sleeves, and walk in proud strides. They are all strong men. Shops round here are all prosperous owing to them."

"Who's the head man ?"

"The leaders are Mr. Serizawa and Mr. Kondo."

"Mr. Serizawa and Mr. Kondo ! Are they daimio ?"

"No, not even Shogun's retainers. They are themselves 'rovers.'"

"What is their first name ?"

"Mr. Serizawa's is Kamo."

"Kamo ! ? (wild duck) A curious name !"

"Yes, a very curious name !"

"Then I suppose Mr. Kondo is called Ahiru (house duck)."

"Don't make fun of them, Mister ; if any of their samurai hear that, you'll be a dead man. Mr. Kondo has a better name for a soldier, Isami—Isami (courageous) is his first name."

"Isami, is it ? 'Isami Kondo,' I think I have heard his name. And under Messrs. Serizawa and Kondo, how many are there about ?"

"Well, how many do you ask ! ? I don't know exactly, about seventy or eighty they seem to be. But, there are several detachments quartered at several places in the city, so the total number must be far bigger than that."

"Who pays them?"

"The Lord of Aizu pays them. In addition to that they have some other source of income. What they spend amount to a big sum, we understand. They are living in grand style, you know."

"Hum, is that so."

The dialogue ceased.

"What's that?" Shichibei asked.

"The stroke of four (ten o'clock)," answered the keeper.

Not only Shichibei was a swift traveller, he could run on a fence, or wall, with his body nearly perpendicular to the wall and nearly parallel to the ground. And again he could walk upside down with his feet on the ceiling and the head downmost. Perhaps the speed that enabled him to run on the face of the wall made it possible for him of that feat. Shichibei loved to run on the roof-ridge of his house when he was a boy. He would jump from the roof of his house to the neighbour's, and then to that of the next house and so on, and go the whole of his village not treading at all on the ground. If anybody would chase him with long pole, he would dodge it and leap into a tree; run the top of a fence; and none could hit him even several pole might join in the chase.

Moonlight nights, star-lit nights as well as dark night Shichibei would amuse himself, when it occurs to him to do so, by running upon the roof-ridges. A gust of wind that came sweeping down from the Chichibus would rustle upon

the dry thatch, and all would be quiet again. Then pot-pot would come from the roof to the innate of the house at Shichibei's village—a sound like some one was chopping shepherd's-purse on the board. Old folks would frown and say, "Shichi is at it, again." Besides, as much as Shichibei was skilled at taking things on the earth, he could catch things in the water, too.

Shichibei would stand upon a rock on the bank of the Tamagawa River, and gazing upon the water would be heard telling himself there went trout, here salmon-trout; over there were some singer-frogs; this way came dace, there went goby, here gold-fish. Nobody standing with him would see any such objects, even a skilful fisherman! He would then come down from the rock and put his hand in the water, and grab the kind of fish he had named out of the part of the river he had just mentioned.

Even when the fishermen old in the game, with all the paraphernalia of their trade, found the catches too meagre for a living, Shichibei would fill his basket easily every time. It was not Shichibei caught the fish, the fish went to Shichibei—folks used to say, surprised at his skill. Shichibei would answer, smiling to a questioner, that the secret was, while people chased the fish, he caught them by the nose as they came, so he could not miss them.

Over a hundred miles overnight Shichibei made nothing of to cover, and his pace was such that a sun-hat made of cypressbark put on his chest would not fall, people used to say.

Until quite recently there stood 'Shichibei' Jizo at Sakashita of Ome Town. It was the spot where Shichibei buried night after night the hoard of money he stole.

After Shichibei was executed that money was discovered, and a stone image of Jizo was erected there, and it was named 'Shichibei' Jizo. At first the Jizo was said that it answered the prayers of those who were suffering from bad legs. Then gamblers began to worship it.

Some said then that if you buried some sum of money and would find it intact after three days, you were sure to gain a great profit. But nobody found his money intact after three days. Later it was discovered that some of the local r'ed-wells created such a false belief to obtain money by digging what folks buried there to obtain luck. Ome Town recently underwent a renovation, and 'Shichibei' Jizo was removed.

The spot where Shichibei lived is still remembered by folks in a mulberry field near Ome Town. It is called Shichibei's House, and is said haunted. The first man who bought the house said that he felt giddy while repairing the house, and he died that night. The second man who bought the house for a very cheap price, became ill soon after he lived in it and died within three months. Then there was no one who would take the house for some time. But there was a strong-willed man who said that those two cases were a mere coincidence, there could not be such a thing as a haunted house in the east of Hakone Mountain, and bought it next for nothing. He pulled down the house and planted

mulberry-trees. Nothing happened to him; people were relieved in mind; and the man was very proud of himself about it. One winter afternoon, however, he worked there to straighten it up. There were many bundles of mulberry sticks. The straw-rope that bound one of the bundles snapped, and the sticks sprang and hit his eyes; he became totally blind before he reached home. After that little was heard of Shichibei's House.

The village of Mibu slept in peace. It was a particularly quiet night. Even at the Nambu Mansion the desperadoes went to bed one after another. Only the pay officer Jusuke Hiranma stayed up playing checker with Genzaburo Inoue. Inoue was a little better hand at the game than Hiranma and gained two points. Whenever they played the game of checker, they used to play all night through till morning.

As the two sat watching the board indulging in playful bragging, the light of the rapeseed oil lamp in paper shades went out.

"Oh, no more oil, eh? Or was it a moth?" they remarked. It took some time before they succeeded in relighting the lamp using the flint, tinder and spill. They found everything in the room intact including the pieces on the board. The lamp had enough oil and there was no trace of any moth interfered with the light. The two samurai, too eager to continue their game, never troubled to investigate why the light went out, and they resumed their game when the lamp was relighted. At dawn they

stopped playing. Inoue left the room and Hiramama went to bed.

The night that Shichibei had the Nambu Mansion in mind, passed there with no other incident than that the light in the pay officer's room went out. But the next morning Jusuke Hiramama, the pay officer, sat looking dreadful in the room where he had played the game of checker overnight.

"Mr. Hiramama," came from a man who entered the room by opening the slide. He was no other than the man who stopped the duel between Ryunosuke and the desperado from Satsuma at Oiwake, where the road for Osaka separates from the Tokaido, or Yedo-Kioto Highway. He was also the man who made Shichibei wonder at the cheap eating-house the previous night—Yuzuru Yamazaki of Mito he was.

"Oh, Mr. Yamazaki."

Yamazaki wore no sword as he did not in the previous night. He was in very sombre coloured clothes befitting a pedlar, and sat before Hiramama without any ceremony:—

"You don't look well."

"Don't I?"

"All night playing, eh?"

"Um."

Hiramama was extremely heavy-hearted. The more pleasantly Yamazaki spoke, the more down-heartedly Hiramama answered.

"What's the matter, Hiramama? You are not at all usual."

"Yamazaki, a serious thing had happened."

"What? A serious thing!" Yamazaki echoed.

Hiramama looked up, and fixing his eyes upon Yamazaki:—

"Mr. Yamazaki, are you my friend?"

"What's up, to talk so seriously?"

"I have a request that I shall never ask again."

"What, a request? I don't like to hear you talk in that strain. What's up, Hiramama?"

Hiramama sighed, and breathing with difficulty:—

"I must commit harakiri. I ask you to second it by beheading me."

"What, kill yourself!?"

"Yes, I'm going to."

"All right, if you have reason, for then I'll be your second, but you must explain first."

"Very well, I'll explain."

"Go on."

"I played checker last night with Inoue."

"Yes."

"We played until it was near dawn, and then I went to bed and slept till a little while ago."

"Well."

"On awaking I found some money gone."

"Money! Stolen?"

"Three hundred *ryo* gold is short out of the sum I counted and put in the cabinet before I began to play checker last night."

"That's strange. Did you investigate?"

"It's difficult to investigate. The only persons who were in this room were Inoue and I. If I make mention of the matter, Inoue will be indignant."

"Naturally. And Inoue is not the sort of person who will stoop to stealing."

"To announce that the quarters of the New Chosen were broken in by a thief and money taken, would be a disgrace upon the honour of our men."

"Yes, quite."

"Therefore I'll take it upon myself alone, and commit harakiri, and announce that I misappropriated the sum becoming short of money for the squandering at Shimabara."

"I see," said Yamazaki and remained deep in thought for a while. Then:—

"Don't cut your belly yet, for I've got something in mind," said he, for in the mind of Yamazaki the mysterious traveller from East, whom he hob-nobbed in the cheap eating house the previous night, flashed. The man seemed to regard Yamazaki with suspicion, Yamazaki parted with him in the similar frame of mind.

Yamazaki and Hiramra were close friends. Yamazaki was very skilled at spying, going about in disguise, upon 'rover' and 'detached' samurai of different clans.

Chapter 11.

The next morning Shichibei put on a little more respectable *haori* coat than the everyday use, and wearing light straw slippers, came to Shimabara with a little parcel under his arm.

Passing the Grand Gate, he was about to turn to the left. Then a man came from the opposite direction; the two met face to face. Shichibei saw that the man was that fancy goods dealer whom he hob-nobbed at the eating-house the previous night.

"Unpleasant fellow again!" Shichibei thought and he could not, somehow, remove the impression of the man from his mind. Looking aside he passed the man and came before the Kitsuya. Shichibei then noticed that the man was watching him secretly standing at the end of a lane a little way off.

So Shichibei passed before the Kitsuya and was going to take the turn for Ageyamachi, or Interview House Street, he saw now that the man was coming this way to shadow him.

Shichibei, describing a circle, came again on the main street; the man was still seen following him. Much annoyed, Shichibei came out to Shimonochi Street, and went on reading every gate-lanterns to throw the man off his trail. Turning back, Shichibei saw that there was now no trace of that annoying man. Much pleased he came back to the main street for the third time, and there he found a

tobaccoist. He thrust his face into the shop to buy some tobacco; there he found the man again calmly smoking his pipe. Shichibei now began to feel very uneasy, but he bought some tobacco nonchallantly, and re-filling his pouch, he left the shop. The man was seen to rise to follow Shichibei once more.

"This won't do. I'll go back and come again later," he thought, and came to the Grand Gate and passed it to leave the quarters, and he took the Tambo Road. The dealer still followed him.

Shichibei girded now his loins and began to *walk*. He now went on an entirely different pace from the one with which he was strolling in the quarters. The man chased him. He could keep up with Shichibei as far as Shichijō Thoroughfare, but not further; the man gnashed his teeth.

The man (the fancy goods dealer) was seen pretty soon again in Shimabara quarters. He was sorry that he let fly his bird, but was glad that he had obtained some clue.

Nodding to himself for something in mind, Yamazaki came before the Kitsuya. He knew well how Isami Kondo, the dare-devil captain of the New Chosen, carried on with Miyuki, a 'madame' of this house. And reasoning something within him he called at the door:—

"Good-day, good-day, ladies."

"Ay," came Matsui beaming with smile. But seeing that it was only a fancy goods dealer, she was seen visibly disappointed. However she asked gently:—

"What is your business?"

"Fancy goods dealer, Miss."

"Fancy goods dealer! ? All right, wait a minute," Matsui said and withdrew. Yamazaki gazed upon her back.

Matsui waited and waited for Shichibei all day long. Many a time she went to the Gate Willow to see if he were coming. At every footfall she ran out to see if it were not Shichibei, but he did not come.

The night over, the third day, the day of promise for Matsui's ransom, would come; Matsui could not sleep for anxiety and excitement.

It was past midnight. Still she could not sleep speculating on her future. Then she remembered the conjuring of the trailing sash she had heard from her friends—conjuring that would tell whether the man whom one waited for would come or not. It was to mount upon the look-out balcony above the roof at midnight, the eighth watch, and facing in the direction of the man's house, one should throw a sash of plain seam holding one end of it in hand. Then one should come down the balcony not turning the head. If the sash would not be caught by anything, and so one would be able to come back to one's own room, the man would come without fail. Matsui made up her mind to try that. She took out a sash, and stealthily went upstairs and got out upon the balcony.

It was a starlit night. The Milky Way was seen across the sky towards the County of Kadosogōri. An interview house or two still had the shutters open showing that all

night revelling was going on there. Except, the Sujaku Fields were in dead silence of the night.

Standing on the balcony Matsu looked around which way to throw the sash. She had not asked where Shichibei was staying. He came in and went out by the Grand Gate.

Matsu threw the sash, the 'sash of reunion,' therefore, in the direction of the Grand Gate and she recited inaudibly, as she had been told by her friends:—

Oh, homeward retrace! as

The East Road at Hitachi turns;

May it be for a short while,

I want my man come to me again.

and stood there. She heard then something which sounded like a gust of wind striking the house, and the trees of the courtyard rustling over the tiles of the roof, and saw, shot into her sight, the figure of a man like a monkey.

Matsu covered. The black figure stood before her and demanded silence.

"Mercy," she entreated.

"Oh, aren't you Matsu? Matsu! My dear Matsu, my dear Matsu!"

"Oh, you are my uncle; but why?"

The man whom she had been waiting for was now with her. But the manner of his coming was so strange. At the hour of eighth watch and along the roofs! It was like a dream to Matsu, nay more than a dream.

"It's lucky that I meet you here. I've come in secret to meet you."

"But, Uncle, why have you come in this manner at this hour of night?"

"To explain would take more time than I can spare.

I'm in a desperate hurry."

"Why, Uncle?"

"I am chased by people. An ugly man is after me. That was why I couldn't come to you. I can't take you back with me either. Be patient for a little longer."

"Then, Uncle, are you going to leave me here and go away?"

"Yes, I have to. If I take you with me, you may get into trouble, so stay here as you are for a while."

"What is the meaning of this, Uncle? Have you committed any crime?"

"Don't ask, you shall know in time. Even this meeting is not quite safe; well then, Matsu, good luck! take good care of yourself."

"Oh, what shall I do?"

"Don't worry; give my compliments to the master of this house and the 'madame.' Never tell anybody of this meeting; even to such persons who look like officers and come to you to inquire of me. I've got the money to ransom you, but I mustn't produce it now."

From the street came the sound of a night watchman going on his rounds.

"All right, Matsu? I'll surely come back within a short while," Shichibei said and he disappeared leaping from roof to roof like a locust.

Chapter 12.

To the eye of Hyoma who crossed the Grand Gate for the first time in life, every thing was a source of wonder. In dire contrast to Imura and Mizobe, who strutted in high spirits, Hyoma felt as if he were choked and he wished to turn and run. However, he walked after the two. Presently they entered the Sumiya.

"Mibu, we are from Mibu."

"Welcome, my lords!" greeted the servants but they did not look pleased.

Imura and Mizobe walked into a room haughtily, carrying their swords. At an interview house, the sword was to be left at the hall, but those from Mibu were exceptions. Imura sat rudely cross-legged and ordered wine, dancers and 'madames.' The maid went out after receiving the order but did not come in again for some time. Mibu samurai were, to tell the truth, abhorred and dreaded, and people took care not to come near them more than they could help.

Imura and Mizobe went on drinking by themselves. Hyoma sat a little away and watched them. From some other rooms, banjos and sing-songs were heard; and every now and then the yodel-like singing of Chinese style poems which were rather poorly rendered.

Imura frowned affectedly, and:—

"Noisy country samurai! Can't they sing any better songs than those barbarous poems? You know Shimabara's

Chuck Songs, don't you? Shinmachi's (Osaka gay-quarters) Hedge Songs and Yoshiwara's (Yedo gay-quarters) Take-up Songs and Shimabara's Chuck Songs are the 'trio songs of the trio cities.' Nowadays there's no dancer who can sing to you the real good Chuck Song any more, nor any ear is there that can appreciate it. Listen to their low class ditties and out-of-tune Chinese style poems. The elegant atmosphere that filled this place once can no longer be sought. The world is going from bad to worse." So saying Imura laughed, putting on the airs of a patriot. And continuing:—

"Well, I'll sing to you now Chuck Song With Swing—I say Utsuki, don't sit so ill at ease, make yourself at home, and have a drink."

He thrust a cup to Hyoma. Hyoma received it and reseating himself to face Imura:—

"I have something I must ask you."

"What is it, looking so very serious?"

"I see a scar on your hand. How did you receive it?"

"This scar!?" Imura said much astonished, but it was now late to hide it, for Imura's right hand came to the full view for Hyoma to see, as it held out the cup.

"Oh, this is nothing, I received it as I failed to parry a thrust while practising spear."

"You are a liar," Hyoma said moving forth his seat a little.

"What, do you call me a liar?" said Imura angrily and he replaced the sword closer to him.

"I think it was not inflicted by a practice-spear, it is a wound received in a real fight."

"What, a wound received in a real fight!?"

"Yes, Imura, I suppose you know a merchant named Hishiya who hangs out at Shijo-dori Thoroufave."

"Hishiya! What has he got to do with me?"

Imura took hold of his sword much excited. Mizobe took up his sword angrily too, to second Imura.

Hyoma, on his part, took up his sword and receded a little toward the alcove pillar, and said:—

"That Hishiya was broken in the other day by three robbers. About that incident I want informations from you. Don't be so excited! Let's talk the matter over quietly."

"I don't know anything about it. I'm no clerk of Messrs. Hishiya, nor the police officer set to watch thieves."

"Nobody said that you were the police officer set to watch thieves, nor a clerk of Messrs. Hishiya & Co. What I want to ask you about is those thieves."

"You thought I knew anything about them?"

"Yes, precisely. If you say that you don't know anything about them, I'll ask your scar. Let the scar explain whether it was inflicted by a practice-spear, or received in a real fight."

"You're now slandering me. It's a serious allegation, I cannot pass that," Imura said red with rage and grasping the hilt of his sword.

"Imura, you want to draw upon your sword, do you? Better not! If you draw, I draw, Mizobe then must draw, too; and some of us must get hurt, hurt very much. It will trouble this house and frighten the visitors. It is very foolish. Put down your sword, let's talk the matter over quietly."

"Hold on! You've called me a thief, I may forgive you, but my sword will not," Imura said, and motioned to Mizobe to be ready. Hyoma, however, was a first class fencer trained by Toranosuke Shimada. Friendly bouts amongst the samurai of the band had proved that Imura or Mizobe was no match against him. They grasped the hilt of their swords rather for show of indignation than really to fight Hyoma. Staring at the two persons who now had closed up with him, Hyoma said:—

"Not so fast, not so fast! If you were not guilty, you needed not be so excited no matter what I said. I came into this useless place out of respect for your wish. It's now up to you to answer to my queries."

"No sophistry, boy; if you call me again a thief, there'll be no hesitation on my part to draw upon the sword. Well, what else you want to know?"

"Well, that Hishiya's—oh no, no more about the thieves. I wonder if you happened to know the whereabouts of Ume, wife of Mr. Tabei Hishiya?"

"What, Mrs. Hishiya? What happened to her?"

"She is missing."

"What has it got to do with me?"

"I only wondered if you happened to know her whereabouts."

"No, I don't," Imura shook his head emphatically.

"Tabei Hishiya, her husband, however says that she was summoned to the Nambu Mansion twice for examination in connection with some matter. And she has not come home yet from the second summon. Isn't that queer?"

"What do you mean? Do you think that I've got anything to do with the affair?"

Imura wanted to shake off the questioner by show of indignation, but the troubled state of his conscience betrayed itself in his manner and speech.

"Then you know nothing about her?"

"Of course not."

"If you are so obstinate I know what to do."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'll let that scar on your hand speak."

"What?"

"If the cause of that scar is discovered, everything will be made clear. If you don't want that, just say a word where Ume, the woman is. No more is asked."

"I don't know, haven't I told you so?"

"You still talk like that, eh?"

"Yes, even if I had to fight you."

"Don't you value your life?" said Hyoma and he took up his sword. Imura and Mizobe loosened the catch of their swords to draw.

Hyoma turning to Imura:—

"You are a new man in our band, so you've got nothing to do with this affair. You had better stand aside. But if you interfere, I'll kill you first. Have you heard me?"

Hyoma declared war emphatically to Mizobe. Mizobe joined the band by Imura's recommendation after there was the Hishiya Affair, so he had nothing to do with it. He well knew Hyoma's skill as a fencer, and so, although owing to the force of circumstances he was compelled to help Imura, he did not at all like to die for such an ignoble cause.

So:—

"Um," he said in a very lukewarm tone and seemed unnerved.

"All right, stay there then and see I and Imura fight," said Hyoma.

Mizobe seemed now at a loss how to act. He did not say whether he would take sides or remain neutral. He did not know what to do with the hand that he put on the hilt of his word. But then:—

"Wait a moment, comrades; not so fast, if you please," said he and he now turned to be an arbiter.

"Whatever the reason, we must not fight amongst ourselves. Leave it to me. Mr. Imura, if you know of anything about the matter, tell it to Mr. Utsuki."

"I said I don't know," said Imura and grabbing the cup-rinser he flung it at Hyoma. It hit the alcove pillar and clack it broke; the water showered in the room. Imura was expected to leap in after the missile drawing upon his sword, but instead, he ran.

Hyoma failed to make good his man. Throwing down Mizobe, who had clung to him to stop him from chasing Imura, Hyoma left the Sumiya. On the way he thought:—

“Well, I think I’ll leave the Band of New Chosen. My intention was not to render help to the band. I have joined the band, because I sought help from such senior fencers as Kondo and Hijikata in order to have my brother avenged. But the band seems to be a thing I had better let alone.”



Chapter 13.

“Isn’t it Yohachi?”

“Oh, Father.”

“I was thinking of you, because you don’t come to temple for some time.”

“I have been very busy, Father, so naturally I couldn’t come.”

“Come oftener. I’m working with my hammer and chisel on the slab of stone that you carried up for me the other day.”

“Oh, you mean the stone that you said you would chisel a Jizo.”

“Yes, on that one.”

“Father, you can draw, you write a beautiful hand and besides you carve. You can do everything.”

“Ah well, I think I can. I can hoe the patch as well as husk and polish rice, as the good honest folks of the parish do.”

“Well, I admire you, sir.”

“Thank you, Yohachi. By the way, come to the temple, won’t you? I’ve got jam dumplings and buns, presents from honest folks of the parish; and so much of them, too, that Buddha and myself can’t eat them all. So if you come, I’ll treat you to them as much as you like.”

“Can that be true?!”

“I won’t cheat you. I’ll treat you to white rice, too, if you want that.”

“Thank you, I’ll come.”

“Tell me something about Yedo as your present.”

“All right, Father; but then won’t you teach me more of that song of Jizo?”

“The chant, eh? All right, I’ll teach you that. Where did we leave off? I hope you have not forgotten.”

“You taught me up to ‘Babes and children all under ten’.....”

“I see, you are slow to learn, but it is good job that you don’t forget if you learnt it once.”

Abbot Tomyo of the Kaizoji Temple was a very sociable yet very active and hard working priest, and he was a great friend of Yohachi.

"Yohachi, the second anniversary of the late Danjo Esq. comes shortly, doesn't time fly quickly?"

"Yes, it's coming. I can hardly think it's two years since the grand old master is dead."

"I have lost a good checker player to match me; I'm now less a friend, and feel so much lonelier, but there's no help for it. Pity is that his son is so unworthy of his father."

"The young master, you mean?"

"Yes. I wonder where is Ryunosuke now?"

They arrived at the temple as they thus went on.

Abbot Tomyo began to wield his hammer and chisel on a huge piece of stone placed on a straw-mat under a drooping cherry-tree that stood in the middle of the garden in full sunlight. Yohachi sat by him with Ikutaro strapped on his back.

"Oh, it's coming to shape. What a merciful face it has!"

"I've now to curve the upper part of the staff and the ring of Six Great Attributes; then the eyes!"

"Where are you going to set it up?"

"I'm going to set it up at a place beyond your guessing."

"Where can it be? Somewhere about the temple? Under this cherry-tree is good."

"Oh no, nowhere near the temple. I long thought where. It will be on the summit of Great Buddhissattva Pass."

"On the summit of Great Buddhissattva Pass!?"

"The name of the pass, first of all, is suitable for the

site of an image of Jizo, the Great Jizo Buddhissattva! Isn't it a splendid idea?"

"Ay, Father, it is!"

"Do you think so? Well, when the image is made, the ritual for consecration and opening its eyes will be performed in this temple. Then it will be carried and placed on the summit of Great Buddhissattva Pass."

"I see," Yohachi said much touched in heart.

"When you take the image to the mountain, I will carry it on my back to the top of the pass."

"That's excellent. You carried up this stone to the temple, so when it is turned into a holy image, you carry it again. Good!"

"I like that. The service will bring me blessing."

"Yes, you're right. Glory be to the Jizo Buddhissattva, let happiness and longevity be on earth! Om Ha-Ha-Havi Samaya Svaha!"

"Father."

"What is it?"

"I want you to teach me more of the Song of Jizo."

"Oh, the chant, you mean."

"Yes. It begins" Chant for the Jizo on the Stony River-Bed, by Saint Kūya Shōnin, and—

'Tis not that this life sees,

A child's life beyond

On Stony River-bed meets.

All who hear

This tale, shed a tear!

*Babes and children**All under ten,*

"I learnt it so far, so next verses, please."

"All light, I chant, so you chant after me," Abbot Tomyo said, applying the chisel to improve the folds of the garment of the image:—

'All come to Stony Bed.

Mah and dah, they all cry,

Mah and dah, they all call.'

Yohachi repeating:—

'All come to Stony Bed.

Mah and dah, they all cry,

Mah and dah, they all call.'

The abbot now leading:—

'Oh, their calls! Oh their cries!

Back my soul, wring my heart.'

"Father, I'm sad," Yohachi said, his eyes full of tears.

"That's good, that shows you are in grace. No wonder you shed genuine tears. Yohachi, do you know, however, that we don't shed enough tears? Our tears can hardly fill a small, small clam-shell. Jizo's mercy, however, is greater than all the seas put together. We unworthies shed our cheap tears for small sorrows and trifling joys. But the tears that the Great Buddhisattva sheds for the sake of the sins and iniquities of this wicked world that has denied Buddha, are copious and holy. Gloy be to the Jizo Buddhisattva, let happiness and longevity be on earth! Om Ha-Ha-Havi Samaya Syana!

"I think you are right. Tears come even to me, when I think into the future of only one child, and I don't know what to do. It must be indeed hard and trying for Jizo to see our wicked world," said Yohachi.

"You are right, my child. Well, I'll sing you the rest of the song:—

'The children gather

Pebbles of the bed, and

Prayer pagodas they make.

The first stone for father,

The second for mother;

The third for brethren

Living at home, they sing.

Amused are they in daytime thus;

But when draws the sunset night,

Demons from Hades come to them.

And say they to them in language harsh,

"Stupid you are to pile them so;

Your mah, your dah who still pine

Say no prayer, but just weep.

Their tears bring us to you

Evil to do.

No ill you should regard of us." And

They destroy the pagodas

With their cruel club.'

How is it, Yohachi, isn't it dreadful? The pagodas the tiny hands built, piling pebble on pebble, are ruthlessly destroyed by the demons. Don't regard it merely as an event

in the next world. In the present life, to those who fail to say prayers for their departed souls, demons in the form of hindrance and misfortune come, and such people never get along well in this life. Fix this firmly in your mind, Yohachi."

"I will not fail to do so. Your teaching goes straight to my heart. I'm so happy to hear you teach me."

"Well then—"

'Then appears Jizo of Ministering to Children,
Saying "Oh, children, come to me!

Your lives on earth

Were short and you're now here.

'Tis a long way to seek

Your beloved ones on earth.

Think that I'm your mother,

Think, too, that I'm your father,

Come to me by day,

Come to me by night."

Merciful is he teaching thus,

Shields the children with the skirts of his robe.

Infants who can not yet walk

He pets and carries

Close to the bosom that heaves with love;

He suffers the little hands

To fondle his staff.

Merciful is he!

Let us sing his praise in chant.'

Glory be to the Jizo Buddhisatva, let happiness and
longevity be on earth! Om ha-ha-havi Samaya Savaha!

"Ikutaro, dear, give your ear to. The chant is as much for you as for anybody else," Yohachi said, big tears running down his cheeks and giving the child on his back a gentle push.

Chapter 14.

A great reconciliation banquet was held at the Sumiya of Shimabara.

It was reconciliation of Osaka wrestlers and the Band of New Chosen after a very serious quarrel.

Hidegoro Onogawa, a noted wrestler, was the mediator handling the case very ably. The speedy reconciliation was greatly due to his tact. Not only the fracas was brought to an end, the Band agreed to become a patron of Osaka wrestlers. And so an announcement was made to the effect that grand wrestling matches would be held shortly in the court of the Jizo Temple of Mibu.

Isami Kondo and Kamo Serizawa occupied the seat of honour. Wrestler Onogawa went up to them to receive their cups of friendship. Onogawa was in the mood to talk. Onogawa was at that time already an old man, but still very courageous and interesting to talk with, and he was a heavy drinker.

"Onogawa, you seem to be quite a heavy drinker, but you have aged now, haven't you?" said Isami Kondo.

"No, sir; wrestlers never get old, you know."

"Oh, talk sense! You cannot hide the wrinkles on your brow, nor the white streaks above your temples. What do you say to a round or two of wrist-wrestling with me?"

"Oh no. Nobody is your match in fencing, but in wrestling you are only a babe if you chose me as your opponent," Onogawa said, and putting a small dried flatfish that was on the table into his mouth, and crushing it:—

"See, what my teeth can still do."

"Bravo, friend, well done! Have another drink."

While Isami Kondo went into further conversation with Onogawa, much pleased with his child-like boasting, Kamo Serizawa had been eyeing Matsu, who was waiting upon the guests among many other womenfolk of the establishment, with curiosity.

"Who is that lovely girl who got up just now with a bottle?" Serizawa asked.

"Who! An 'adopted daughter' of the Kitsuya, do you say? Possibly a 'madame' in near future, eh? I shall be her patron. Tell her to come here," he said.

Matsu had been requisitioned to assist other waitresses at the banquet.

"Miss Matsu, that fierce looking gentleman at the seat of honour says that he wants to see you," a maid whispered to Matsu.

"Very well," she answered.

By this time the banquet was turning merry and boisterous. Some danced; some sang; leg-wrestling and

wrist-wrestling went on, samurai and wrestlers matching. Some hugged the dancers who raised shrieks.

Sōji Okita of the New Chosen had been boasting of his strength for some time, and he now went to that extent that he wanted a wrestler to get down to the garden for a bout.

"Hey, let's see who is the better man," he said and he stamped his feet bringing his seat well down as the wrestlers do before a bout.

Samurai and wrestlers all came forward to verandah to see the bout.

Serizawa paid no heed to that, and gazing at Matsu with much satisfaction:—

"You're a beauty, sit by me."

"Thank you," Matsu put down the cup that Serizawa had filled for her.

"My name is Serizawa. I often come here, but I haven't seen you till to-day. What's your name?"

"Matsu, my lord."

"How old are you?"

"Guess, my lord."

"Somewhere between the budding fifteen and sweet seventeen. Wrong?"

"About that, sir."

"Where do you hail from?"

"West."

"What part of West?"

"The part where most of the pilgrims come from."

"Where?"

Matsu had become now quite used to people, and was not afraid of them any longer. Then there came Onogawa:—

"Mr. Serizawa, your cup, please."

"Oh, Onogawa, are you? There!" said Serizawa and he threw his cup to Onogawa instead of handing it properly.

"Mr. Serizawa," Onogawa began, advancing his seat:—

"I hear that you are from Mito. That name makes my blood warm."

"Are you also from Mito?" queried Serizawa.

"No, I'm not from Mito. But if I am not presumptuous to state so, the Lord of Mito is my patron. So when I hear Mito mentioned, I feel drawn towards it by something like the ties that bind a vassal to his liege lord."

"I see. People say that you often present yourself at the Court of Lord of Mito. I suppose it's a good game."

"What do you mean, sir?" Onogawa resented Serizawa to talk to him in that strain, as he was a proud man.

"Um. Well, you see, Mito is rather a lean place. You may make the round of visits, but not much 'compliments money' after all, I suppose."

"Mr. Serizawa, you're harping on the wrong string."

"What do you mean?"

"There may be some wrestlers who make a business of visiting aiming at 'compliments money,' but I never do such a thing."

"Don't you? You never like that sort of thing, eh?"

"The cup I received from the Lord of Mito bears the letter 'mi' in the beautiful cursive hand of his lordship."

"Yes? But, what has that got to do with you?"

"Well, that is all what I have received from his lordship, and I'm proud of it."

"Ah, well, you're not the common sort; I admire you." Serizawa meant to be cynical towards Onogawa, in order

to give vent to his resentment; for Serizawa lost his prestige and popularity through his men's quarrel with the wrestlers. Kondo, on the contrary, rose in estimation by both the samurai and wrestlers.

Onogawa thus chaffed was indignant and sat silent.

"Onogawa, won't you come to this side for a change?" came from Toshizo Hijikata, who was sitting two or three seats away.

Matsu, feeling a slight headache caused by the stuffy air of the banquet hall, had been resting alone in a room. She overheard some one whispering in the next room:—

"All right?"

"All right."

One wanted to make sure of somebody for something, and the other said all right.

"Who is Kondo's regular 'madame'?" an unknown voice said.

"Miyuki, Miyuki of the Kitsuya."

"Who, Miyuki of the Kitsuya?"

Matsu did not mean to give ear to the dialogue in the

next room. But the name of her sister 'madame' could not help but attract her attention. She strained her ears. One of the voices resembled that of Kamo Serizawa, who called her to him in the banquet hall a while ago.

"Mr. Yoshida, after Kondo is done away with, there is something I'd like to make a present of to you." It was surely Serizawa speaking. Matsu could not help playing the role of an eavesdropper, though she loathed that sort of thing. Holding her breath, she now listened further to their dialogue that was carried on in whisper.

"What sort of present?"

"The head of Hyoma. I will kill Hyoma Utsuki for you, and make his head a present to you."

"Hyoma! ? Why?" the other voice than Serizawa said very disinterestedly.

"You make very light of Hyoma's fencing, but there are not many amongst my men who can equal Hyoma."

There was a pause in the voice, and the other voice did not answer.

"He is always trying to track you down. As long as he lives, you are not safe."

"Where is he now?"

"Not far from here."

An applause in the banquet hall drowned the whisper, and Matsu could not hear it for a while. Then:—

"All right. I signal to you presently, so don't fail; he is no common sort of man, you know," Serizawa said and seemed that he was rising.

"Don't worry," the other voice said, and the sound of taking up the sword and rustling of the skirts were heard.

Serizawa, who was now standing, said:—

"That Miyuki is a very pretty woman. When Kondo is done away with, I will act as go-between for you to get her. You must be lonesome since your wife is dead."

Wicked people! It seemed that they were planning to kill both Kondo and Hyoma, and seize Kondo's love, Madame Miyuki.....Matsu overheard a dreadful consultation.

Serizawa, luckily, or unluckily, opened the partition-slides of the room on the side where Matsu was.

"Who are you?" demanded he sharply.

"Sir, it is I," Matsu said. She was too late to hide.

"What are you doing here?" Serizawa asked.

"I did not feel well, so was resting," answered Matsu.

Serizawa came nearer:—

"Aren't you Matsu?!"

"Yes, sir."

"Um," Serizawa said, and after a short deliberation, he took the hand of Matsu, and said:—

"Come along with me."

"I must be back at the banquet hall yet," protested Matsu.

"Never mind that, come along," said Serizawa.

Matsu was now helpless. Serizawa lifted her in his right arm lightly and carrying his sword in the left:—

"You must have heard our conversation."

"No, never."

"I don't mind that, because it was you."

"Sir, let me go."

"You needn't fear me."

Whoever was the man in the next room, he kept silence.

Serizawa passed that room to the next still carrying

Matsu :--

"Matsu, I'll be your patron."

"Thank you, indeed."

"You said you were an 'adopted daughter' of the Kitsuaya, didn't you?"

"Yes, I am, my lord."

"Call on me sometimes. How old did you say?"

"Oh, please sir, let me go. I shall get into trouble if I do not get back to the hall."

"Never mind, I'll stand the racket for you. Well, my cheeks are hot; the hot drinks must have given me this,"

said Serizawa and he thrust his wine-heated cheek near

Matsu's face :--

"When will be your debut? I think I'll help you to make it a brilliant one."

"Thank you, but I must be back at the banquet."

"Never mind."

"Yes, I must be; please let me go."

"Oh, you are stiff-necked. I say 'all right,' that ought to be enough."

"Sir, you are expecting too much from me."

"Don't talk like that."

"Let go, please!"

Matsu was now desperate, but no amount of struggling

on her part would produce any effect. In the arm of Serizawa, Matsu was like a rabbit in the grip of a serpent.

"Help, help," she shrieked. Serizawa loosened his hold.

"Don't be so noisy. What are you afraid of? You crying? Why? You are shortly to come into the dignity of a 'madame,' aren't you?"

"Mr. Serizawa, are you not captain of the New Chosen? What do you mean by tormenting such a poor creature as I," Matsu said, trying to get away from Serizawa.

"Oh no, I'm not tormenting you, I am going to be your patron. See, captain of the New Chosen is going to be your protector."

"Mr. Serizawa, what are you doing there?" said that unknown person who was in the next room.

"Um, you see I'm examining her."

The person in the next room saw and heard Serizawa tormenting the girl, but he held his peace so far. Then all of a sudden 'What are you doing there' said he very curtly. He spoke in a very deep and cheerless voice! Serizawa was a little embarrassed, and answered, to gloss over his silly act, that he was examining her. But he did not let Matsu go yet.

"If you have done with the examination, dispose her of at once. Some slight negligence often mars an undertaking, you know."

"Yes, you're right," Serizawa said rising reluctantly, and ;--

"This woman may be more than what she looks," he added.

"Kill her, kill!"

The voice that came from the next room was chilly and piercing.

"Well, she is not such, however, as deserve death," Serizawa said.

"Then, I'll take charge of her. You go at once and let our side be ready. Be careful, and be bold at the same time! You must not forget what kind of man we are going to deal with," came in the voice of the stranger.

"All right, I leave this girl to you for the time being."

"All right, I will take charge of her."

"Don't be rough with her. She is 'sister' to Madame Miyuki, no rough and ready business, I tell you."

"All right."

"Don't be rough, will you?" Serizawa added and, thrusting Matsu into the next room he left the place looking very reluctant to leave.

"Say, maid," came from the man who had now taken charge of Matsu. The voice was as cheerless as ever.

"Ay, sir."

"Did anybody tell you to be in the next room?"

"No, nobody did. I came in only to rest myself, for the noise and congestion of the banquet hall made me a little ill."

"It was very unfortunate that you were discovered in

the next room when we had some private consultation. You can't leave this room till I let you."

"Very well, my lord. But I have never heard your consultation, even one word, so please let me go."

"No. If you call for help or run, I'll kill you though I don't like to do so. If you keep quiet here till I leave this room, you shall be safe."

"Ay."

The man who took charge of Matsu was no other than Ryunosuke Tsukue. Ryunosuke was both to Matsu and Hyoma an enemy. Each wanted to kill him to revenge one her grand-father, and the other his brother. That very man had been there in that room to carry out the plot of Kamo Serizawa and his clique to assassinate Kondo and some under him.

Ryunosuke Tsukue had been there tripping with a few dishes of delicacies before him. The dim light of a rapeseed oil lamp in paper shades, played upon his ghostly face.

He made Matsu sit before him. He did not bind her, nor threaten; nor was he inclined to tease her. He simply tripped by himself. Every now and then he shut his eyes and remained deep in thought.

"U-u-m," he sighed as he went on thinking; the hand that held the cup shook so much that the wine in it spilt. Waking up from the reverie, he drank some of the contents of his cup, and emptied the rest in the cup-rinser and gazed absent-mindedly upon the water after the drops.

'If you move, I'll kill you' still rang in the ear of Matsu

as if it were the spell cast by a wizard. Matsu was perfectly bound by it. The samurai never sought Matsu, even as much as to fill the cup. He filled it again himself, and raised it slowly. Before it reached the lips, however, he changed his mind and suddenly put it down, and heaved a deep sigh.

He then put his right hand on the head to press it, and looked down. A little while later he looked up sharply, and took the cup. Then eyeing Matsu dully:—

“You are a ‘daughter’ of the Kitsuya, are you?”

“Yes.”

Ryunosuke took a sip at the cup. But he spat it coughing. Putting down the cup hurriedly, he took out pocket-paper to wipe the floor.

“Mr. Samurai,” Matsu addressed summoning up her courage.

“What is it?”

“I haven’t heard anything, so please let me go.”

“No.”

“My master must be much worried over my absence. I haven’t heard anything, so please let me go.”

Ryunosuke shook his head lightly.

The banquet, which had turned rather noisy, was now over. It ended sooner than was expected. Most of the guests seemed to have left. From the hall, however, came the noise that a fair number of the guests must have still remained. By contrast, the loneliness of smaller rooms, that were not occupied, increased.

Matsu, all of a sudden, was assailed by an uncanny feeling.

The fear that Matsu felt when Serizawa seized her, and the fear she was now experiencing, because of the presence of this strange samurai, were different in nature.

“Isn’t this man a ghost?” she even thought. As the place grew quiet, the dimmer grew the lamp. The man sitting in the dim light would heave deep sighs, he would take a sip from the cup, or put it back again not letting it touch the lips. He would look down now, and then in the next moment he would look up sharply and stare into a corner of the room. Then again he would dully look in the face of Matsu. Matsu was terror stricken, she shuddered.

“Who are you?” Ryunosuke said abruptly directing his eyes behind Matsu.

“No. No, sir; nobody came,” Matsu said twisting her body to look behind.

“Hoh, didn’t it?” said Ryunosuke, and he hung his head.

“U-u-u-m,” he groaned.

“Oh, ghost,” Matsu called out startled by something.

“What, ghost!?” Ryunosuke looked up.

“It gave me a fright. It appeared there.”

“What did appear?”

“A woman!”

“A woman!?”

The left hand of Ryunosuke reached out to the sword. He looked about. His slit eyes shone in white glare.

Matsu was almost clinging to Ryunosuke’s knees before she knew what she was doing.

"Ha ha ha ha," rang out Ryunosuke's laugh to dispel the weird atmosphere. But the empty laugh, as it died out, rather increased the ghostliness of the room.

"Don't be silly, girl," Ryunosuke said.

Matsu, however, could not leave the knees of Ryunosuke. She had seen something far dreadlier than the ghostly Ryunosuke.

"Sir, this room is haunted from long, long ago, people say," remarked Matsu.

Ryunosuke looked about in the room once more. He found that he was in the Chamber of Sacred Curtains.

"You know, long ago a 'madame' called Kokonoe, the belle of the time, killed herself in this Chamber."

"Hum."

"That 'madame' was a love-child of a very, very high personage. And what the reason it was I don't know, she attired herself far more elaborately than usual that day; she burnt incense herself; composed her dying verses and with a dagger she stabbed her....."

Matsu pointed at her throat, and shuddered.

"Hu-um. This chamber has such a story, eh?"

"So I'm scared."

"No, you needn't be."

Ryunosuke began to tipple again looking down. The sweet smell of the toilette of Matsu, who now sat near Ryunosuke from fear of the ghost, mingled with the flavour of the wine. Attracted by that, Ryunosuke looked up and saw Matsu who sat turned slightly away from him. The

white comely neck! The plump rosy cheek! And a few streaks of her beautiful hair that heaved with her breath! On his knee found Ryunosuke Matsu's hand!

Seeing that, Ryunosuke began to feel the joy of existence once more, as if a fountain long dry sprang forth water again. He called to mind that many a time Hama, his 'love-wife,' showed her affection to him in the same manner.

"I was so scared," said Matsu finding how closely she had sat to Ryunosuke, and that her hand was on his knee. She was confused; she sat up, and blushed profusely finding that Ryunosuke was gazing at her with eyes that bespoke the tender emotions.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Peg your pardon?" she said by way of an answer.

"It's very quiet now, isn't it?" Ryunosuke remarked.

"Ho, something again!" said Matsu and looked in the direction of the alcove.

"What is it?"

Ryunosuke let drop the cup.

Was it the ghost of Kokonoe? If not, then was it that the evil spirit came out, got loose, from within Ryunosuke?

This Chamber of Sacred Curtains would at times have a gust of wind, apparently coming from nowhere. When the wind ceased, sad and weird sobbing would be heard.

Though nobody actually heard the sobbing, many talked of it; and it was said that anybody who heard the sobbing

would meet death before long. Matsu heard that sobbing now—at least she thought so.

Ryunosuke let drop the cup owing to his hand shaking. As he picked up the cup, what reason was it for, he threw it 'bat' at the south-east pillar of the room with much force.

The cup broke in such a manner that reminded one the spray of waterfalls that thundered in a mid-night storm.

Ryunosuke was now seen with his eyes delirious!

The colour of the eyes of Ryunosuke was something like a pearl sunk in the water. When the water was clear the eyes shone sharp. When the water was not clear, the eyes were dull. They were alike coldly and gloomily lustrous whether they shone sharp or looked dim. Now his eyes lost that peculiar lustre.

The eyes that looked around aimlessly the room, in which the cup broke and flew in pieces, had no longer that weight in the gaze which annoyed his opponent in fencing. His eyes now betrayed the loss of self-confidence and the want of concentration of mind.

"U-u-u-m," he put his hand on the forehead and sank.

"What's the matter, sir?"

"A bad headache!"

"What shall I do, sir?"

"My head swims."

"I will get you some medicine."

Matsu rose.

"No, no need."

"Then some cold water."

"No, I don't want anything."

Ryunosuke, holding his forehead in his hand, refused both medicine and water. But evidently he was very much suffering, because his head was seen going lower every second.

Matsu then thought that now was the chance to run if ever there was one.

"Halt!" the drooping head sprung up and the man was ready with his sword.

"You run!?"

"No."

"Sit down there."

The eyes that stared Matsu were ghastly. Matsu thought this samurai had some uncanny power of attraction that some evil spirit possessed. As one chased in a dream experience, if she tried to run, she was paralysed and could not move.

"U-u-u-m."

Ryunosuke put his hand again on the brow and groaned.

The groan made Matsu think that it came from the bottom of Hades to drag her in.

"Ah-h-h," Ryunosuke looked up slowly.

"I say, maiden," he said quite calmly:—

"I have now a very strange feeling coming over me. I have something I'd like to ask you to hear from me."

"It's a long time since I left home, and I leave a son. What a great change in the topic! There was pathos in the ring of his speech!"

"You have a child!?"

"Yes, a son named Ikutaro."

"That's fine."

"If by chance you come across that child, tell him not to take the sword. Tell him, please, that it is his father's dying saying."

"Your last wish to that son, do you say?"

"Yes, my last wish while I'm yet alive. Generation after generation my house excelled in fencing, but tell him to give it up."

"Why, my lord?"

"No particular reason."

This strange man was in word as well as in manner like a phantom—nothing consistent!

"Very well, my lord. Is your young son then at home with his mother?"

"No, he is not. The one you call mother, who is wife to me, is no longer."

"Is his mother dead?"

"Yes, I killed her?"

"You, *you* killed her yourself!?"

"Yes, I killed her."

"How cruel!"

"I pierced his breast with this sword after having tied the woman to a tree in the pine-grove of the Zōjōji Temple, Yedo," Ryunosuke said and took up his sword forged by Musashi-taro. Here another change came over him. He rose, his eyes were strained and ferocious.

"Sir, look out!" Matsu said, for steadying his stagger, Ryunosuke rose to his feet. Then suddenly he drew upon his sword.

"Help, I say, help!" Matsu screamed now finding her voice to call for help.

"You must be quiet," Ryunosuke said. The Musashi-taro glittered like a silvery fish sporting in the clear water of autumn!

"Help, help!"

"Keep quiet!"

Ryunosuke now cut horizontally, now obliquely. As the sharp end of the sword touched the partition-slides, the sacred curtains were cut and they hung in tatters.

"Mr. Samurrai has gone mad, help!"

If Ryunosuke had drawn to kill anybody, Matsu would have been dispatched with the first sweep of his sword. But he never wielded the blade close to Matsu who ran about the room in fright. He cut the air avoiding her. Staggering, he cut the slides, the floor matting and the pillars. He must have surely gone mad!

"Yei!" he yelled and the inoffending lamp, that was shedding a dim light, received a cut from right above. The flame licked the paper shades.

Ryunosuke was now seen halted. Seeing the lamp broke and the shades caught fire, he smiled gleefully.

Matsu ran out of the room meanwhile. Her cries brought people to this room.

Ryunosuke still stood and watched, in smile, the fire that was now spreading to the partition slides.

Chapter 15.

That night Kamo Serizawa left the banquet hall early and returned to his quarters at Mibu, and called to him his favourite mistress Ume, whom he had obtained by robbing a merchant of his wife.

Those who returned with Serizawa were his trusted men, Jusuke Hirama and Goro Hirayama.

It was rather unusual of Serizawa to leave a place of drinking so soon. Besides, he was singularly in a pleasant mood. He began to tinkle again with Ume. Hirama brought in his favourite 'madame' called Itozato of the Wachigai; and Hirayama, Ko-ei of the Kikyōya. The three pairs went on very merrily being free from the presence of any other persons. Serizawa, much elated, said:—

"Well, things are coming my way now, to-morrow you shall see."

And Serizawa emptied many a bottle with the beautiful Ume as his waitress.

He went to bed with her, feeling very happy. The other two pairs similarly went to sleep in the same room using folding screens to partition off one bed from another. The reason that Serizawa was so elated was that he thought he succeeded in entrapping Kondo. He thought Kondo would call his favourite 'madame' Miyuki of the Kisyūya to him, or he would go to her. Or else he would return to the quarters very late at night. Then he would be sur-

prised, or waylaid by many of the strong fencers. Especially among them was included the best fencer, Ryunosuke Tsukue. To-morrow, the body of Isami Kondo, less his head, would be found somewhere at Shimabara.

Then Serizawa would take the sole command of the New Chosen, and he would gain such distinction that he would be made a daimio in time.

But Isami Kondo, taking Toshizo Hijikata, Seiji Okita and Heisuke Tōdō with him, had returned to the same quarters at Mibu travelling on foot. Through the back gate they entered as quietly as possible, and the party kept still in Kondo's room. Serizawa never knew that. When, however, he was thought fast asleep, Hijikata, Okita and Tōdō dressed in black, and drew their long swords and proceeded the passage that led to Serizawa's room. Kondo followed them in plain clothes and trailing his sword in the left hand—his eyes shining as usual.

They opened the partition slides. The sleepers did not wake yet. They went to bed intoxicated; and they had kicked off the counterpanes. Their nighties, now becoming untidy, made their bodies bare partly.

Hijikata advanced to inspect who in bed were.

"Hirayama, eh? This is Koei, I suppose," Hijikata said inspecting the first pair.

Then coming to the second:—

"Hirama and Itozato, I take. Poor begger! He must accompany his boss, too. Then the man, where is he?"

He said this a little too loudly, but nobody woke yet.

Looking from above the screen, Serizawa was seen deep in sleep snoring, and the beautiful Urne by his side disheveled.

Hijikata smiled, and he signalled to Kondo who was standing by the door that led to the next room. Just then Goro Hirayama, who had been sleeping with 'Madame' Ko-ei, opened his eyes. He was surprised by the presence of strangers in black. He raised his head, but Heisuke Todô cut it off with a sweep of his sword. The head flew, and the blood covered Ko-ei on her face. She screamed.

The screen that stood around the head of Serizawa's bed was now precipitate pushed down over the bed, and the three swordsmen in black pounced upon it and stabbed through it repeatedly, with all the might and main of trained fighters.

"Woh, who's this, presumptuous," Serizawa yelled hoarsely taking hold of the sword by the bed, and tried to spring up.

"Help," screamed Urne in agony pinned under the screen. The bed that was the dream-land of bliss a while ago was now turned into bloody hell. Serizawa received very serious wounds on his thigh, arm, and abdomen, when stabbed through the screen; but still he did not give up fight. He finally succeeded in leaping up throwing back the screen, and stood with his sword drawn.

Serizawa, with all his faults, was a fighter through and through. He was not made captain of dare-devil desperadoes for nothing; and that man was now driven to desperation like a panther cornered.

Serizawa could not see who his assailants were, but found that they were small in number. He counter-attacked the three furiously. The three leaped forwards and backwards parrying, thrusting, and delivering cuts. Especially Hijikata was agile, being short in stature.

Ko-ei leaped out of the bed and sought refuge in the lavatory. Hirama and Itozato were stabbed through the counterpane in the beginning, but fortunately they were not hurt, and they ran. Kondo saw them, but he did not bother.

"Oh, you're Hijikata, aren't you?" Serizawa recognized him, though so badly wounded was he—possibly by his agile swordsmanship.

"Yes, you're right, I'm Hijikata."

"Foul fiends, why not in open and fair fight?"

"Shut up, this is what it fits you nicely," Hijikata yelled and delivered a cut resolutely. It took effect and wounded Serizawa at the right shoulder.

"U-u-m," he groaned and he could no longer wield his sword.

Then came 'yei' from Okita that cut the forehead of Serizawa.

"Wo-o-h," he fell with a groan. Hijikata leaped upon him at once.

"Curse you!" Serizawa said as the point of Hijikata's sword was about to touch his throat.

"Wait, Hijika," Kondo said.

"Serizawa, can you recognize me? I am Kondo. If you want to curse, curse me."

"Oh, you Isami Kondo!" Serizawa cursed, and in the next moment Hijikata's coup de grace ended his life.

Heisuke Tôdô raised Ume, who was trembling from fear, by the collar, and turning the woman towards Serizawa:—

"Have a steady gaze, woman. This is the last look of your darling whom you preferred to your lawful husband. See his punishment."

"Sir, mercy!" the woman beseeched pitifully.

"A charming woman," he said.

"Yes, no wonder that Serizawa erred," Okita responded. They looked at each other, and then at Hijikata and Kondo, by way of seeking instructions as to the disposal of the woman.

Kondo did not nod.

Okita kicked the woman on the loin.

She fell with a faint cry. Raising his sword well above his head, Okita delivered a heavy blow. It cut the woman at the shoulder, the point of the blade reaching well beneath her breast; and she expired as she fell on her back grasping at the air.

Over the body of bloody Serizawa was the beautiful body of Ume; both now cold. Kondo and his three men left the place at that.

The next day, comically it may sound, burial service was held for Serizawa at the Mibu Temple and Kondo was

the Chief Mourner. He led in the rite of incense burning and received the messages of condolence that came from various persons.

To the Lord of Aizu, in whose service the band was, Kondo reported that the Mibu Quarters were broken in by thieves and Serizawa was killed by them. This was also a piece of sham and comic, to say that there were robbers brave enough to break into the quarters of the New Chosen; but nothing was said officially.

The internal discord of the Band of New Chosen was now no more by the death of Serizawa. Two or three of his faction absconded, Jusuke Hiramata, the pay-officer, too. But in the main there was not much change in the organization, and Kondo was now in sole command ably assisted by Hijikata. It was after this that Kondo became a terror at Kioto to the politicians of the time.



Chapter 16.

By the cawing of some crows as well as by the chill morning air, Ryunosuke Tsukue came round to himself. He found that he had been lying in a bamboo-bush by a brook. He did not lose his sword, he carried it sheathed in his left hand. His clothes were torn, his hands and feet were bleeding with minor cuts and scratches.

"A-a-a!" he tried to get up, but his limbs were stiff and he had a pain in every joint. Keeping still for a while

he wanted to nurse himself to sleep again. But then he crawled to the edge of the water and drank a mouthful. He felt himself once more.

"How did I come here? Oh, yes, yes. Till that time I was all right. Then I drew. What did become of that girl, I wonder? I went from room to room in frenzy. Then I got down to the yard. They surrounded me, I must have then used my sword, I see blood on it. Then I heard someone call for a musket. Upon that I ran up a big pine-tree in the yard and I leaped; which way? I can't tell now. Then I ran; ran and ran in the darkness," Ryunosuke recollected. Then came to him the promise that he made with Serizawa to kill Kondo. But he knew that it was now near morning, and was too late to carry it out.

"Ah well, there's now no help for it," he muttered.

"I must see to myself somehow before it is day. This is fortunately a lonely place, but I can't go about as I am. I hear some body coming," he said to himself.

Behind the bush there was an embankment, and footfalls in straw slippers were heard on it.

Ryunosuke waited for them to draw near. It was a man. He carried a lantern in his hand, but it was not lighted, because the day was now dawning.

"I say," Ryunosuke said thrusting his lean body out rustling the bamboo.

"Ay," answered the man shaking from fear.

"Excuse me, but—"

"Yes, yes."

The knees of the man were seen knocking.

"I have lost my way, and....." Ryunosuke began.

But seeing his appearance, the man sat flop on the ground throwing down the lantern, and shivering:—

"Please, sir, don't kill me."

"No, I'm not a footpad."

"Please sir, mercy, I am going to the doctor, for my son is seriously ill."

"Don't make a mistake."

"This is all I have, I give it to you, so please do not kill me," said the man, taking out a purse made of striped cloth from his bosom and placing it before Ryunosuke. Then the man moved backwards as he sat, and fell to the paddy from the bank. Getting up in a flurry he ran helter skelter across the fields.

"Made a mistake it seems, hasty fellow!" said Ryunosuke and smiled. He saw before him a purse that the man threw down. After some hesitation he picked it up. It was pretty heavy.

Ryunosuke was not a good man, but this was the first time he ever touched a property other than his own.

Ryunosuke Tsukue who had come through the Province of Kawachi, was about to enter the township of Yagi of Yamato Province, and stayed his steps to take rest.

Yamato is a province of historical sites and scenic beauties. Raising his eyes Ryunosuke saw, at a distance, the peaks of Tafu and Hatsuse, and many other mountains that

make one bring to mind poetry as well as history. Ryunosuke, who halted on the road, his hands resting on a bamboo stick with which he had been travelling, wore quite a different appearance from the Ryunosuke of other days.

He saw, from the incident on the bank near the Kawakatsu Temple, that how easily folks could be frightened into submission. So, though he did not like it, he waited for another passenger upon the embankment and robbed him of his clothes. The lined kimono of striped pattern, which he now clothed himself in, was that one. He only wore one sword. He travelled the Yamato Road in that appearance hiding his face in a big drooping hat. Nobody could take him above a roving ne'er-do-well.

His purse was now very light.

Which is graver an offence, robbery or murder? What was the reason, Ryunosuke who made nothing of killing, was greatly troubled in mind over the money he took, or rather picked up, on the embankment. His mind was hard to understand, he was greatly troubled in mind over that incident.

The township of Yagi of Yamato Province stands where the roads eastward to Sakurazai and Hatsuse; southward to Okadera, Takatori and Yoshino; westward to Takata, Take-no-uchi and Taema, and northward to Taharamoto, Nara and Kōriyama converge. It was an important town and had Bulletin Square in the centre where all the roads meet.

Entering the town from the west, Ryunosuke now stood

in the Square. On one side Ryunosuke saw a tremendously large well. On all sides he saw inns, large in number; but no touts solicited Ryunosuke. It was, perhaps, not solely because the sun was still high.

Ryunosuke read one of the notices. It read:—

MANIFESTO

Let it be known far and wide that in order to dispel the barbarians, His August Majesty will personally take command of the Armies of Japan. To personally conduct the Council of War at Nara, He will shortly proceed there. All those who are brave and true.....'

so on and so forth—a manifesto of a considerable length calling forth volunteers for the Royalist cause. It was signed Tenchu Gunni, or The Punisher.

Ryunosuke read it through, but he was hungry. The burning questions of the day—restoration of the political power to Mikado, preservation of Japan from the Western barbarians, and such likes never appealed to Ryunosuke, though many young men of his times laid their lives for them. So the manifesto only made Ryunosuke think that some politics were at their usual little game again.

But the hunger within him was a very serious question.

He wanted to eat, but his purse was now too light to afford him a meal at a proper eating-house. He went a little way in the town, and came upon a bun-shop, a famous steamed bun-shop that was opened there by a man who came originally from a place called Kurosaki, or Black

Headland. The speciality of the shop was man-and-wife bun, two buns stuck together and sold as one. On the sign-board were comic verses:—

From Darthead we are from;

But two fair hodies skin to skin!

Nice, eh? nice, eh?

A couple of buns!

Ryunosuke entered the shop. The keeper had just taken the lid of a steamer; the steaming white buns tempted hungry Ryunosuke so much that he wanted to grab the whole thing and shove them into his mouth. But in the next moment he thought how disgusting was the inner man. Yet when a heap of buns was set before him on a black lacquered tray, he forgot himself entirely and cleared what was on the tray in no time. He asked for some more, and finishing another heap, he put down the cup of red tea, and:—

“How much is it, man?” he asked.

“Thank you, sir, a hundred and fifty *mon* copper.”

A hundred and fifty *mon* copper! It came like a blow to Ryunosuke, because fumbling in his pocket, he knew that he had only a hundred and twenty *mon* left.

“Sorry, man, but.....” Ryunosuke shook his purse upside down.

“I have no more than a hundred and twenty *mon*, so.....”

“What? What do you say?” the keeper said angrily.

Had Ryunosuke asked the man a little more politely, he might have let him go at that—or the keeper a little more kind-hearted. But the usual gruff speech of Ryunosuke was liable to be taken rather for looking for trouble than asking for a favour. The calculating shopkeeper misunderstood him completely.

“How can I pay when I haven't got any more?” Ryunosuke said drily. No softer expression mounted his lips even when he was so much in need of it. He never could ask a man a favour of.

“Very well, let's take the matter to where it should be taken to,” said the keeper and taking off his sleeve-girdle he was about to go somewhere.

“Hold on, man, where are you going?” asked Ryunosuke.

“Of late, the town is infested with roving samurai and ne'er-do-wells to the detriment of us shopkeepers. As a warning to the rest of your class, I'm going to the *pro-vost*.”

“Wait a moment,” said Ryunosuke undoing his sword from his side and placing it before the master of the house:—

“Take this, then, for the money.”

“Your sword!?”

“Yes, I don't want the shame of police fetters for only thirty *mon* copper, so take my sword in lieu of the money.”

“I see,” said the keeper.

A sword in lieu of thirty *mon*! Were it of even very inferior make, it was a bargain. So looking a little pleased, the keeper said:—

"It is rather a cumbrous thing for a shopkeeper, but I'll keep it for you till your convenience."

Ryunosuke left the bun-shop leaving his money, the money-bag, as well as the sword, taking only his hat.

"Ah well, it was a little too hard on him for only thirty *mon*, but nowadays we've got so many of his ilk knocking about that I couldn't do but otherwise. I certainly deal in sweet stuff, but can't be sweet every time," muttered the keeper.

Ryunosuke took the Taharamoto Road to north. To follow the route by which he entered the town, he ought to have proceeded east.



Chapter 17.

Then from the direction of Taharamoto came a quick-footed traveller. It was Shichibei of Ōme Town, north of Yedo. Ryunosuke did not recognize him as you may well suppose, but Shichibei also failed to recognize him. The reason for the failure was possibly two—one was that Shichibei had his eye chiefly on those who were wearing a sword, while Ryunosuke then wore no sword; and the other

reason was that a pack-horse moving in the same direction as Ryunosuke, obstructed the clear view of the man.

Entering the township of Yagi, Shichibei accidentally dropped in the same bun-shop.

"Good day!" he said as he entered.

"Welcome, sir," the keeper responded.

Shichibei had sat near where Ryunosuke's sword was.

"I am scared," Shichibei said pushing aside the sword a little, as he helped himself to the buns.

"Sir, won't you kindly buy that sword?"

"Buy a sword, do you say?"

"Yes. You see, I had to take it just a while ago from a hiker in lieu of the money for some buns."

"I see."

Shichibei took the sword, he was not entirely an amateur as a sword connoisseur.

"May I have a look at it?"

"Certainly!"

"Hu-um."

Shichibei drew the sword and inspected the blade.

Cocking his head to one side:—

"I think this is....." to himself and then:—

"May I undo the hilt to find the maker?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," answered the keeper.

Shichibei drew out the pin, removed the hilt, and read the inscription 'Yasukuni Musashi-taro.'

"Strange!" Shichibei muttered. He thought if it were of Bizen or Sagami forge, nothing would be said. But

to find a man wearing a sword forged by Musashi-taro in this locality, was a thing quite unexpected. So :—

"Master, how did the man who wore this sword look like ?"

"He looked a gamester, or ne'er-do-well; but his speech was that of a samurai. Possibly a samurai declassé."

Shichibei now began to form a theory in mind piecing together the data. So looking at the sword, he inquired the keeper further about the last owner of it.

"How old was he ?"

"Well, about thirty-three or four."

"Face ?"

"He long needed a shave, sir. His complexion was pale, and he had a pair of rather sharp and slender eyes."

"It must be him !" Shichibei said. He had been looking for the very man; that brought him this way.

"Which way did the man take ?"

"Well, a little while ago he left here in the direction of Taharamoto."

"For Taharamoto !?" Shichibei said, and thrusting his hand hurriedly in his bosom, he asked :—

"How much ?"

"Sir, will you buy that sword ?"

"All right, I'll buy."

"Eighty *mon* copper for the buns. As for the sword I must ask you *some* price."

"How much do you ask ?"

"Five *ryo* gold, sir. You may think it a little too much, but the quality of the blade is not an inferior one, you know."

Shichibei gave no reply. Throwing down there one *bu* silver and five *ryo* gold, and grabbing the sword, he left the bun-shop in a great hurry.

At the outer portal of the Hase-dera Temple, stood Ryunosuke.

"I say, bon pilgrims," he accosted a party of worshippers.

"Ay, do you want us, sir ?" replied they.

"Yes. I want to know a little about the temple. I understand that there is a prayer-hall of Bosatsu of Mercy in this temple. Is it open for everybody ?"

"Of course it is, for Bosatsu of Mercy saves those who are shunned and forsaken by man."

"Is it ? Thank you, indeed."

To take it wrongly, the word of the pilgrim could be taken as an insult. Ryunosuke was free and proud, he was going his own way reaping what he had sown. He did not seek Buddha or gods yet, to prepare himself for the life beyond. He still possessed pride, the root of all evils ! But he could not think of any likely place where he might find a roof for the night except at a god's shrine, or in a temple for Buddha. So he inquired the pilgrims about the prayer-hall of the Bosatsu of Mercy.

The evening hue shrouded the inmost chapel of the holy fane. Hearth smoke hovered in the even air like the mist over the villages of Kurosaki and Izumo. The hats of pilgrims for Hatsuse, moving in the mist, still undecided for night shelter, looked like jelly-fish in the sea. The well-known sunset bell of Hatsuse Temple, tolled. It boomed full of pathos, and travelling the corridor of ninety-nine double-yards, moved even Ryunosuke, to remind him of the ode :—

Wish I ne'er heard

The sunset bell

That Hatsuse Temple toll.

My soul dartsles

As I see

Another day passes away.

Ryunosuke turned his steps towards the prayer-hall. Presently he stood by the south column of the hall, where the famous Monk Saigyō, who kicked his weeping child down from the verandah, as it clung to his knees to stop him from leaving the ease and comfort of the hearth in order to seek the true light, met his beloved wife of the other day, who was now seeking the light, too.

—[Book III. End]—



Synopsis of Later Books

Synopsis of Later Books

By the Author

Book 4. 'Miwa' Sedar Shrine

Ryunosuke, who has passed a night, friendless and penniless, in the Prayer Hall of the Bosatsu of Mercy at Hase, seeks the hospitality of Uyeda, Lord of Tango (Honoury Title) being informed of his generosity. Lord Uyeda was hereditary head-priest of the Great Myōjin Shrine at Miwa not far from Hase. He was of a very old and renowned family—a person well-read, and skilled at arms as well. Besides, he was versed in new learnings from the West. While enjoying the hospitality of this personage, Ryunosuke meets Toyo accidentally before the Shrine. Toyo is the woman whom Ryunosuke did not take the trouble to save as she tried to kill herself, with her lover, at Otsu. Toyo resembles so much his wife Hama, whom Ryunosuke killed, that Ryunosuke becomes attached to her, and Toyo to him.

However, there appears Kinzō, a gilded fool, son of the rich Aidamaya of the same town, who loves Toyo. On finding that Toyo is in love with Ryunosuke, Kinzō plots

to kill Ryunosuke, but the plot ends abortive, being discovered by Lord Uyeda. Some days afterwards, Ryunosuke starts for Yedo accompanied by Toyo with Lord Uyeda's approval. Kinzō waylays them with the help of a rogue, and succeeds in carrying away Toyo, while Ryunosuke is occupied dealing with Shichibei. Mortified and vexed, Ryunosuke continues the journey alone and arrives at Uyeno Town in Iga Province, adjacent to Yamato Province. There he meets Keido Matsumoto, leader of the Tenchu Gumi (The Punisher), and joins that party persuaded by Matsumoto; and partakes in the Insurrection of Totsugawa.

Kinzō, by threat, succeeds in gaining Toyo, and they take themselves to Ryūjin Hot Springs in an adjacent province and the man opens an inn there.



Book 5. At Ryūjin Spa

Defeated in the battle and made blind by an explosion of gun-powder on the way in a hunter's hut, Ryunosuke takes refuge in Ryūjin Spa, where a fakir protects him. Ryunosuke meets Toyo again, and he leaves the place by boat for East aided and accompanied by Toyo. Learning this, Kinzō acts like a lunatic and is put to sword by Ryunosuke.

Hyōma Utsuki comes to the spa village seeking Ryuno-

suke, but just fails to meet the man, and retraces his steps after inspecting the dead body of Kinzō.

From this part of the novel, the mysterious swordsman Ryunosuke begins to suffer from defective eye sight.



Book 6. Ai-no-Yama

Ai-no-yama, or Hills Between, is the name of a flourishing stage-town near the Grand Shrine in the Province of Ise—the shrine where the ancestress of the Japanese race is worshiped. At Ai-no-yama, among many artists are Sugi and Tama, two beauties with the banjo. Generation after generation the two best singers take the names Sugi and Tama respectively; and the Tama of the time of this story is particularly pretty. She is highly skilled in rendering Ai-no-yama Songs, songs of Buddhist faith and teaching. Her bosom friend is Yonetomo, a dwarf but a daring and accomplished spearsman—they are friends since childhood. They have a fierce but clever and faithful dog, Muku. The three are all born highly gifted, but they are all of *low birth*. They however, come to leave their native town, the girl and the man becoming suspects in connection with a theft committed at a house in the gay-quarters of Uji-Yamada.

Ryunosuke meanwhile hides at a shipwright Yohei's, and tends to his eyes.

Toyo sells herself to a house in the gay-quarters in order to obtain money for Ryunosuke. Later she kills herself becoming diseased and despondent.

Doctor Dōan comes on pilgrimage plodding all the way from Yedo. He accidentally comes to the rescue of Yonotomo, who is undergoing a severe punishment, as well as to attend to the ailing eyes of Ryunosuke.

Then the lewd 'widow' Kinu, with Bannerman Kamio, retainer to the Shogun, come on pilgrimage to the Grand Shrine, too. Under the very seat of the Shrine to the Ancestress of Japan, series of romance are enacted. Yonotomo, a highly uncommon character of Uji-Yamada as Ryunosuke is uncommon, begins to play his part from this section of the story.

Book 7. Tōkai-Dō or Along the East Coast Road.

Ryunosuke, who lost Toyo by death, but regained his sight to some extent, due to the skill of Dr. Dōan, travels east the Coast Road, in the habit of a Piping Friar, playing on the flute. At Kuwana, Muku, the dog, joins him. At Hamamatsu he falls foul with some of the local samurai over some matter in connection with the art and lore of fencing. But before it takes a serious turn, Kinu, the 'widow' who has stopped in that town to visit a grave, mediates. Ryunosuke resumes his journey looked after by

her—but becomes completely blind again. On the way, they are troubled by Shichibei and Hyakuzo, the Sharp-eye (a young conceited thief and a beau) who compete between themselves in the art of stealing.

Yonotomo, fugitive from his native soil, sleeps under the verandah of the Tenryūji Temple, and again becomes a suspect for thieving, but is rescued by St. Yūgyō of the Jishū Sect.

Hyōma Utsuki, aided by Shichibei, plans to waylay Ryunosuke at Miho, but fails to realize that owing to Yonotomo, who comes in the way accidentally.

Tama of Ai-no-Yama, under her real name Kimi, takes a boat at first to travel east, but lands on the way to travel overland; and comes to such a pass that she makes an attempt on her own life, but is rescued by Muku, her dog; and resumes her journey protected by the dog. At Miho Pine Grove she meets Yonotomo, her bosom friend.

Ryunosuke travels safely accompanied by Hyakuzo in addition to Kinu, the 'widow'; and at an old deserted temple at Ihara, where the party stays for a night, Ryunosuke hears from Kinu, how Toranosuke Shimada, the greatest swordsman of the time, met his death, though tricked and poisoned overnight at a banquet. It strikes Ryunosuke with envy and reverence.

Book 8. Shirane Yama

The following day, Ryunosuke enters into the Province of Kai accompanied by Kinu and Hyakuzo, taking an unfrequented pass. But he, despite being totally blind, draws upon his sword and lops Hyakuzo his arm off, becoming enraged at finding that he has been tricked by the man in league with the woman; Kinu and Hyakuzo thereupon ran, leaving Ryunosuke who faints away. Then Tokun, middle-aged leader of the Women of Mountain (a party of pedlars who travel all over Japan with hill products), rescues him. She takes him to the heart of mountains to her home, to give him rest. Later she takes him to Narada hot spring. There Ryunosuke spears a party of knaves, who masquerading district revenue officers, tries to blackmail a wealthy family of the village, for an alleged evasion of taxes.

Hyoma and Shiehbei, finding the arm of Hyakuzo that comes carried down in a mountain torrent, find him raving in bed deserted by Kinu, who instigates a precocious lad Chūsaku, gold digger, to come to Yedo with her. Hyoma comes climbing up as high as Narada, but it is after Ryunosuke has left there for Kofu, in one of the palanquins employed by the blackmailers.

**Book 9. Women and Petty Persons**

At Ryogoku, Yedo, in a troupe of variety show performers, there appears a negrito spearsman who draws all the popularity of show-goers of the capital upon him. The head of the troupe is Kaku, a man-like but very kind-hearted woman. She is responsible in adding the spearsman to her troupe. He is no other than Yonetomo of Ujyamada, made up as a negrito. The popularity of the 'negrito' is due to his exquisite skill in the use of a spear. But one day his identity comes to be disclosed by the comical doctor Dōan, and the 'negrito' loses heart to appear on the stage any longer, and he absconds with Kimi, the singer.

Kinu, the 'widow,' and the precocious Chusaku, having come to Yedo, he practises usury. Yonetomo serves in his household. He happens to drop a parcel, containing a large sum of money, while going an errand for Chusaku; and has it restored by an honest woman who is on the streets. Yonetomo marvels at the very strange morality of the woman who does not touch even a penny of the large sum she finds on the street, and takes the trouble to restore it to the rightful owner, but makes nothing of placing her virtue on hire.

The troupe of show-woman Kaku goes to Kofu for a run, and there it is wrecked in a brawl with the local ne'er-do-wells.

Book 10. Turbulent Yedo

Times then come to such that the hold of the Tokugawa Shogunate even over the citizens of its capital becomes greatly weak, and there come into being Bands of Paupers, boisterous and rollicking rabble, that go round the city and threaten the rich to treat them to a meal of rice gruel, and then they laugh and shout hurrah and hooray over the whole affair. Dr. Dōan takes delight in joining one of them. Behind the comical Bands of Paupers, lurke 'rover' samurai of anti-Shogunate clans.

Yonetomo leaves the usurer, and becomes a watchman attached to a wealthy house, and drives away armed burglars—'rover' samurai who are unscrupulous 'war fund' collectors. They retreat to the Satsuma Mansion at Mita of Shiba Ward, headquarters of all 'rover' samurai congregated in the City of Yedo, and the base of operation of all anti-Shogunate plots. Dr. Dōan carries on his antics for his own amusement while the capital is in a mood far from laughs.

Kinn, the 'widow,' and Kaku, the show-woman, cross the path each other, and they vie in a certain transaction.

Book 11. Komai, the Lord of Noto

From this section of the novel Komai, the Lord of Noto, a young noble on the side of the Shogunate, who was well versed in the new learning, especially proficient, second to none, in gunnery and science, plays a part. He comes to Kofu as governor of the locality.

Book 12. The Sword forged by Yasutsuna of

Hoki Province

Book 13. The Reign of Darkness.**Book 14. Miss Ogin-sama****Book 15. Abbot Manshin**

At Kofu, events take place in connection with a rare specimen of Japanese swords. Ryunosuke, despite blindness, indulge in skill and sword testing murders. And he comes across Yonetomo, the spearsman, in the darkness of a night. Miss Ogin-sama (a fright), daughter of Fujiwara, the most wealthy family in the Province of Kai, enters the stage—a character dreadful and hideous, scourged with human curses.

Kimi, the singer, becomes an object of affection for Komai, the Lord of Noto.

Abbot Manshin, rough but profound in wisdom, a priest of the Zen Sect, a sect of meditation and austerity, appears on the scene; and Hyoma Utsuki, the young fencer, comes under his influence for his great edification.



**Book 16. Dr. Doan and Borahachi, the
Newly Rich**

Dr. Dean who does not take more than eighteen copper coins from a patient for his fee, tries, out of spite, to vie with Borahachi, the Newly Rich, in things. The narrative is comical as it is cynical.



Book 17. Good Deeds and Evil Actions

Bannerman Kamio, retainer to Shogun, serving in the capacity of a district official at Kofu, tries to obtain the rare sword of the realm by means of threatening Miss Ogin-sama, the owner's daughter. She takes refuge in a secluded room in the precinct of the Kamio Mansion, and there meets Ryunosuke, and she makes him her paramour. Later, she hides at one Koizumi of Yahata Village. There a landslide and flood occur, but is saved from the

catastrophe by the show-woman Kaku and the dog Muku; and she comes to Yedo to live in a haunted house at Somei n. w. of the city.

Komai, the Lord of Noto, leaves Kofu owing to machinations of the wicked Kamio.

Kamio's Mansion, however, comes to be burnt down by the pariah of the locality, and he takes refuge, with Ryunosuke, in the haunted house at Somei. Miss Ogin-sama and the show-woman Kaku also make this place their headquarters.



Book 18. In the Province of Awa

From this part of the story, a rough roving priest called Benshin, blind but extremely developed of the faculty of perception, comes in. He is extremely loquacious. Benshin is an important character in the story, because he is a fakir who looks as if he embodies all the evil of blood-thirstiness, cruelty, revengefulness, curses, wilful misunderstanding and the rest. His every act and word corresponds with that of the cold and cruel Ryunosuke—son of evil karma. Without the full knowledge of Benshin, the truth about the character of Ryunosuke cannot be understood.



Book 19. At Konaji

Book 20. Umon Sankyu

Book 21. Darkness

Book 22. Hakkotsu (or Bleached Bones)

Book 23. Other World

Book 24. Wanderers

Book 25. Michiria

Book 26. Meiro

Book 27. Reibu

Book 28. The Ocean

Of the foregoing books, new characters are a boy named Shigetaro of Kiyosumi, a walking wit; a pure maiden called Yuki or Snow; Haku-un Tayama, a painter of the old Oriental school, who is a man of heroic and soldier-like turn of mind; and a Chinese boy named Kintsui, who causes Komaï, the Lord of Noto, a man of science, to turn his mind towards Christianity. Komaï, later, after a debacle in his political career, becomes interested in sea and ship, and establishes a shipyard.

Ryunosuke hides at a hot spring place called Shirahone (Hakkotsu or Bleached Bones) accompanied by Yuki, the pure maiden.

Dr. Dean travels the Nakasendo Highway for Kioto for pleasure, taking Yonetomo with him, giving rein to his inclinations of spite, sarcasm and wit; faring at times rather badly as a consequence.

Haku-un Tayama, struck with the sublime aspect of the manly Kashima Nada Sea, attempts to draw the likeness of the God of Creation of Japan.

The author pauses here to resume his pen later. In all he has written well over half a million words.





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