

JIU-ROKU-ZAKURA

In Wakegori, a district of the province of Iyo (1), there is a very ancient and famous cherry-tree, called Jiu-roku-zakura, or "the Cherry-tree of the Sixteenth Day," because it blooms every year upon the sixteenth day of the first month (by the old lunar calendar),-- and only upon that day. Thus the time of its flowering is the Period of Great Cold,-- though the natural habit of a cherry-tree is to wait for the spring season before venturing to blossom. But the Jiu-roku-zakura blossoms with a life that is not -- or, at least, that was not originally -- its own. There is the ghost of a man in that tree.

He was a samurai of Iyo; and the tree grew in his garden; and it used to flower at the usual time,-- that is to say, about the end of March or the beginning of April. He had played under that tree when he was a child; and his parents and grandparents and ancestors had hung to its blossoming branches, season after season for more than a hundred years, bright strips of colored paper inscribed with poems of praise. He himself became very old,-- outliving all his children; and there was nothing in the world left for him to live except that tree. And lo! in the summer of a certain year, the tree withered and died!

Exceedingly the old man sorrowed for his tree. Then kind neighbors found for him a young and beautiful cherry-tree, and planted it in his garden,-- hoping thus to comfort him. And he thanked them, and pretended to be glad. But really his heart was full of pain; for he had loved the old tree so well that nothing could have consoled him for the loss of it.

At last there came to him a happy thought: he remembered a way by which the perishing tree might be saved. (It was the sixteenth day of the first month.) Along he went into his garden, and bowed down before the withered tree, and spoke to it, saying: "Now deign, I beseech you, once more to bloom,-- because I am going to die in your stead." (For it is believed that one can really give away one's life to another person, or to a creature or even to a tree, by the favor of the gods;-- and thus to transfer one's life is expressed by the term *migawari ni tatsu*, "to act as a substitute.") Then under that tree he spread a white cloth, and divers coverings, and sat down upon the coverings, and performed *hara-kiri* after the fashion of a samurai. And the ghost of him went into the tree, and made it blossom in that same hour.

And every year it still blooms on the sixteenth day of the first month, in the season of snow.