

The Loves of Gompachi and Komurasaki

By A. B. Mitford (Lord Redesdale)

Within two miles or so from Yedo, and yet well away from the toil and dirt of the great city, stands the village of Meguro. Once past the outskirts of the town, the road leading thither is bounded on either side by woodlands rich in an endless variety of foliage, broken at intervals by the long, low line of villages and hamlets. As we draw near to Meguro, the scenery, becoming more and more rustic, increases in beauty. Deep shady lanes, bordered by hedgerows as luxurious as any in England, lead down to a valley of rice fields bright with the emerald green of the young crops. To the right and to the left rise knolls of fantastic shape, crowned with a profusion of Cryptomerias, Scotch firs and other cone-bearing trees, and fringed with thickets of feathery bamboos, bending their stems gracefully to the light summer breeze. Wherever there is a spot shadier and pleasanter to look upon than the rest, there may be seen the red portal of a shrine which the simple piety of the country folk has raised to man Sama, the patron god of farming, or to some other tutelary deity of the place. At the eastern outlet of the valley a strip of blue sea bounds the horizon; westward are the distant mountains. In the foreground, in front of a farmhouse, snug-looking, with its roof of velvety-brown thatch, a troop of sturdy urchins, sun-tanned and stark naked, are frisking in the wildest gambols, all heedless of the scolding voice of the withered old grandam who sits spinning and minding the house, while her son and his wife are away toiling at some outdoor labour. Close at our feet runs a stream of pure water, in which a group of countrymen are washing the vegetables which they will presently shoulder and carry off to sell by auction in the suburbs of Yedo. Not the least beauty of the scene consists in the wondrous clearness of an atmosphere so transparent that the most distant outlines are scarcely dimmed, while the details of the nearer ground stand out in sharp, bold relief, now lit by the rays of a vertical sun, now darkened under the flying shadows thrown by the fleecy clouds which sail across the sky. Under such a heaven, what painter could limn the lights and shades which flit over the woods, the pride of Japan, whether in late autumn, when the russets and yellows of our own trees are mixed with the deep crimson glow of the maples, or in spring-time, when plum and cherry trees and wild camellias—giants, fifty feet high—are in full blossom?

All that we see is enchanting, but there is a strange stillness in the groves; rarely does the song of a bird break the silence; indeed, I know but one warbler whose note has any music in it, the *uguisu*, by some enthusiasts called the Japanese nightingale—at best, a king in the kingdom of the blind. The scarcity of animal life of all descriptions, man and mosquitoes alone excepted, is a standing wonder to the traveller; the sportsman must toil many a weary mile to get a shot at boar, or deer, or pheasant; and the plough of the farmer and the trap of the poacher, who works in and out of season, threaten to exterminate all wild creatures; unless, indeed, the Government should, as they threatened in the spring of 1869, put in force some adaptation of European game-laws. But they are lukewarm in the matter; a little hawking on a duck-pond satisfies the cravings of the modern-Japanese sportsman, who knows that, game-laws or no game-laws, the wild fowl will never fail in winter; and the days are long past when my Lord the Shogun used to ride forth with a mighty company to the wild places about Mount Fuji, there camping out and hunting the boar, the deer, and the wolf, believing that in so doing he was fostering a manly and military spirit in the land.

There is one serious drawback to the enjoyment of the beauties of the Japanese country, and that is the intolerable affront which is continually offered to one's sense of smell; the whole of what should form the sewerage of the city is carried out on the backs of men and horses, to be thrown upon the fields; and, if you would avoid the overpowering nuisance, you must walk handkerchief in hand, ready to shut out the stench which assails you at every moment.

It would seem natural, while writing of the Japanese country, to say a few words about the peasantry, their relation to the lord of the soil, and their government. But these I must reserve for another place. At present our dealings are with the pretty village of Meguro.

At the bottom of a little lane, close to the entrance of the village, stands an old shrine of the Shintô (the form of hero-worship which existed in Japan before the introduction of Confucianism or of Buddhism), surrounded by lofty Cryptomerias. The trees around a Shintô shrine are specially under the protection of the god to whom the altar is dedicated; and, in connection with them, there is a kind of magic still respected by the superstitious, which recalls the waxen dolls, through the medium of which sorcerers of the middle ages in Europe, and indeed those of ancient Greece, as Theocritus tells us, pretended to kill the enemies of their clients. This is called *Ushi no toki mairi*, or "going to worship at the hour of the ox,"¹ and is practised by jealous women who wish to be revenged upon their faithless lovers.

When the world is at rest, at two in the morning, the hour of which the ox is the symbol, the woman rises; she dons a white robe and high sandals or clogs; her coif is a metal tripod, in which are thrust three lighted candles; around her neck she hangs a mirror, which falls upon her bosom; in her left hand she carries a small straw figure, the effigy of the lover who has abandoned her, and in her right she grasps a hammer and nails, with which she fastens the figure to one of the sacred trees that surround the shrine. There she prays for the death of the traitor, vowing that, if her petition be heard, she will herself pull out the nails which now offend the god by wounding the mystic tree. Night after night she comes to the shrine, and each night she strikes in two or more nails, believing that every nail will shorten her lover's life, for the god, to save his tree, will surely strike him dead.

Meguro is one of the many places round Yedo to which the good citizens flock for purposes convivial or religious, or both; hence it is that, cheek by jowl with the old shrines and temples, you will find many a pretty tea-house, standing at the rival doors of which Mesdemoiselles Sugar, Wave of the Sea, Flower, Seashore, and Chrysanthemum are pressing in their invitations to you to enter and rest. Not beautiful these damsels, if judged by our standard, but the charm of Japanese women lies in their manner and dainty little ways, and the tea-house girl, being a professional decoy-duck, is an adept in the art of flirting,—*en tout bien tout honneur*, be it

¹ The Chinese and the Japanese following them, divide the day of twenty-four hours into twelve periods, each of which has a sign something like the signs of the Zodiac:—

Midnight until two in the morning is represented by the rat.

2 a.m. until 4 a.m. in the morning is represented by the ox.

4 a.m. until 6 a.m. in the morning is represented by the tiger.

6 a.m. until 8 a.m. in the morning is represented by the hare.

8 a.m. until 10 a.m. in the morning is represented by the dragon.

10 a.m. until 12 noon in the morning is represented by the snake.

12 noon until 2 p.m. in the evening is represented by the horse.

2 p.m. until 4 p.m. in the evening is represented by the ram.

4 p.m. until 6 p.m. in the evening is represented by the ape.

6 p.m. until 8 p.m. in the evening is represented by the cock.

8 p.m. until 10 p.m. in the evening is represented by the hog.

10 p.m. until Midnight in the evening is represented by the fox.

remembered; for she is not to be confounded with the frail beauties of the Yoshiwara, nor even with her sisterhood Near the ports open to foreigners, and to their corrupting influence. For, strange as it seems, our contact all over the East has an evil effect upon the natives.

In one of the tea-houses a thriving trade is carried on in the sale of wooden tablets, some six inches square, adorned with the picture of a pink cuttlefish on a bright blue ground. These are ex-votos, destined to be offered up at the Temple of Yakushi Niurai, the Buddhist Æsculapius, which stands opposite, and concerning the foundation of which the following legend is told.

In the days of old there was a priest called Jikaku, who at the age of forty years, it being the autumn of the tenth year of the period called Tenchô (A.D. 833), was suffering from disease of the eyes, which had attacked him three years before. In order to be healed from this disease he carved a figure of Yakushi Niurai, to which he used to offer up his prayers. Five years later he went to China, taking with him the figure as his guardian saint, and at a place called Kairetsu it protected him from robbers and wild beasts and from other calamities. There he passed his time in studying the sacred laws both hidden and revealed, and after nine years set sail to return to Japan. When he was on the high seas a storm arose, and a great fish attacked and tried to swamp the ship, so that the rudder and mast were broken, and the nearest shore being that of a land inhabited by devils, to retreat or to advance was equally dangerous. Then the holy man prayed to the patron saint whose image he carried, and as he prayed, behold the true Yakushi Niurai appeared in the centre of the ship, and said to him:—

“Verily, thou hast travelled far that the sacred laws might be revealed for the salvation of many men; now, therefore, take my image, which thou earnest in thy bosom, and cast it into the sea, that the wind may abate, and that thou mayest be delivered from this land of devils.”

The commands of the saints must be obeyed, so with tears in his eyes, the priest threw into the sea the sacred image which he loved. Then did the wind abate, and the waves were stilled, and the ship went on her course as though she were being drawn by unseen hands until she reached a safe haven. In the tenth month of the same year the priest again set sail, trusting to the power of his patron saint, and reached the harbour of Tsukushi without mishap. For three years he prayed that the image which he had cast away might be restored to him, until at last one night he was warned in a dream that on the sea-shore at Matura Yakushi Niurai would appear to him. In consequence of this dream he went to the province of Hizen, and landed on the sea-shore at Hirato, where, in the midst of a blaze of light, the image which he had carved appeared to him twice, riding on the back of a cuttlefish. Thus was the image restored to the world by a miracle. In commemoration of his recovery from the disease of the eyes and of his preservation from the dangers of the sea, that these things might be known to all posterity, the priest established the worship of Tako Yakushi Niurai (“Yakushi Niurai of the Cuttlefish”), and came to Meguro, where he built the Temple of Fudô Sama,² another Buddhist divinity. At this time there was an epidemic of small-pox in the village, so that men fell down and died in the street, and the holy man prayed to Fudô Sama that the plague might be stayed. Then the god appeared to him, and said:—

“The saint Yakushi Niurai of the Cuttlefish, whose image thou earnest, desires to have his place in this village, and he will heal this plague. Thou shalt, therefore, raise a temple to him here that not only this small-pox, but other diseases for future generations, may be cured by his power.”

Hearing this, the priest shed tears of gratitude, and having chosen a piece of fine wood, carved a large figure of his patron saint of the cuttlefish, and placed the smaller image inside of the

² Fudô, literally “the motionless:” Buddha in the state called Nirvana.

larger, and laid it up in this temple, to which people still flock that they may be healed of their diseases.

Such is the story of the miracle, translated from a small ill-printed pamphlet sold by the priests of the temple, all the decorations of which, even to a bronze lantern in the middle of the yard, are in the form of a cuttlefish, the sacred emblem of the place.

What pleasanter lounge in which to while away a hot day could a man wish for, than the shade of the trees borne by the hill on which stands the Temple of Fudô Sama? Two jets of pure water springing from the rock are voided by spouts carved in the shape of dragons into a stone basin enclosed by rails, within which it is written that "no woman may enter." If you are in luck, you may cool yourself by watching some devotee, naked save his loin-cloth, performing the ceremony called *Suigiyô*; that is to say, praying under the waterfall that his soul may be purified through his body. In winter it requires no small pluck to go through this penance, yet I have seen a penitent submit to it for more than a quarter of an hour on a bitterly cold day in January. In summer, on the other hand, the religious exercise called *Hiyakudo*, or "the hundred times," which may also be seen here to advantage, is no small trial of patience. It consists in walking backwards and forwards a hundred times between two points within the sacred precincts, repeating a prayer each time. The count is kept either upon the fingers or by depositing a length of twisted straw each time that the goal is readied; at this temple the place allotted for the ceremony is between a grotesque bronze figure of Tengu Sama ("the Dog of Heaven"), the terror of children, a most hideous monster with a gigantic nose, which it is beneficial to nub with a finger afterwards to be applied to one's own nose, and a large brown box inscribed with the characters *Hiyaku Do* in high relief, which may generally be seen full of straw tallies. It is no sinecure to be a good Buddhist, for the gods are not lightly to be propitiated. Prayer and fasting, mortification of the flesh, abstinence from wine, from women, and from favourite dishes, are the only passports to rising in office, prosperity in trade, recovery from sickness, or a happy marriage with a beloved maiden. Nor will mere faith without works be efficient. A votive tablet of proportionate value to the favour prayed for, or a sum of money for the repairs of the shrine or temple, is necessary to win the favour of the gods. Poorer persons will cut off the queue of their hair and offer that up; and at Horinouchi, a temple in great renown some eight or nine miles from Yedo, there is a rope about two inches and a half in diameter, and about six fathoms long, entirely made of human hair so given to the gods; it lies coiled up, dirty, moth-eaten, and uncared for, at one end of a long shed full of tablets and pictures, by the side of a rude native fire-engine. The taking of life being displeasing to Buddha, outside many of the temples old women and children earn a livelihood by selling sparrows, small eels, carp, and tortoises, which the worshipper sets free in honour of the deity, within whose territory cocks and hens and doves, tame and unharmed, perch on every jutty, frieze, buttress, and coigne of vantage.

But of all the marvellous customs that I wot of in connection with Japanese religious exercises, none appears to me so strange as that of spitting at the images of the gods, more especially at the statues of the Ni-ô, the two huge red or red and green statues which, like Gog and Magog, emblems of strength, stand as guardians of the chief Buddhist temples. The figures are protected by a network of iron wire, through which the votaries, praying the while, spit pieces of paper, which they had chewed up into a pulp. If the pellet sticks to the statue, the omen is favourable; if it falls, the prayer is not accepted. The inside of the great bell at the Tycoon's burial-ground, and

almost every holy statue throughout the country, are all covered with these outspittings from pious mouths.³

Through all this discourse about temples and tea-houses, I am coming by degrees to the goal of our pilgrimage—two old stones, mouldering away in a rank, overgrown graveyard hard by, an old old burying-ground, forgotten by all save those who love to dig out the tales of the past. The key is kept by a ghoulish old dame, almost as time-worn and mildewed as the tomb over which she watches. Obedient to our call, and looking forward to a fee ten times greater than any native would give her, she hobbles out, and, opening the gate, points out the stone bearing the inscription, the “Tomb of the Hiyoku” (fabulous birds, which, living one within the other—a mysterious duality contained in one body—are the emblem of connubial love and fidelity). By this stone stands another, graven with a longer legend, which runs as follows:—

“In the old days of Genroku, she pined for the beauty of her lover, who was as fair to look upon as the flowers; and now beneath the moss of this old tombstone all has perished of her save her name. Amid the changes of a fitful world, this tomb is decaying under the dew and rain; gradually crumbling beneath its own dust, its outline alone remains. Stranger! bestow an alms to preserve this stone; and we, sparing neither pain nor labour, will second you with all our hearts. Erecting it again, let us preserve it from decay for future generations, and let us write the following verse upon it:—‘These two birds, beautiful as the cherry-blossoms, perished before their time, like flowers broken down by the wind before they have borne seed.’ ”

Under the first stone is the dust of Gompachi, robber and murderer, mixed with that of his true love Komurasaki, who lies buried with him. Her sorrows and constancy have hallowed the place, and pious people still come to burn incense and hay flowers before the grave. How she loved him even in death may be seen from the following old-world story.

About two hundred and thirty years ago there lived in the service of a daimio of the province of Inaba, a young man, called Shirai Gompachi, who, when he was but sixteen years of age, had already won a name for his personal beauty and valour, and for his skill in the use of arms. Now it happened that one day a dog belonging to him fought with another dog belonging to a fellow-clansman, and the two masters, being both passionate youths, disputing as to whose dog had had the best of the fight, quarrelled and came to blows, and Gompachi slew his adversary; and in consequence of this, he was obliged to flee from his country, and make his escape to Yedo.

And so Gompachi set out on his travels.

One night, weary and footsore, he entered what appeared to him to be a roadside inn, ordered some refreshment, and went to bed, little thinking of the danger that menaced him: for as luck would have it, this inn turned out to be the trysting-place of a gang of robbers, into whose clutches he had thus unwittingly fallen. To be sure, Gompachi’s purse was but scantily furnished, but his sword and dirk were worth some three hundred ounces of silver, and upon these the robbers (of whom there were ten) had cast envious eyes, and had determined to kill the owner for their sake; but he, all unsuspecting, slept on in fancied security.

In the middle of the night he was startled from his deep slumbers by some one stealthily opening the sliding door which led into his room, and rousing himself with an effort, he beheld a beautiful young girl, fifteen years of age, who, making signs to him not to stir, came up to his bedside, and said to him in a whisper:—

³ It will be readily understood that the customs and ceremonies to which I have alluded belong only to the gross superstitions with which ignorance has overlaid that pure Buddhism of which Professor Max Muller has pointed out the very real beauties.

“Sir, the master of this house is the chief of a gang of robbers, who have been plotting to murder you this night for the sake of your clothes and your sword. As for me, I am the daughter of a rich merchant in Mikawa: last year the robbers came to our house, and carried off my father’s treasure and myself. I pray you, sir, take me with you, and let us fly from this dreadful place.”

She wept as she spoke, and Gompachi was at first too much startled to answer; but being a youth of high courage and a cunning fencer to boot, he soon recovered his presence of mind, and determined to kill the robbers, and to deliver the girl out of their hands. So he replied:—

“Since you say so, I will kill these thieves, and rescue you this very night; only do you, when I begin the fight, run outside the house, that you may be out of harm’s way and remain in hiding until I join you.”

Upon this understanding the maiden left him, and went her way. But he lay awake, holding his breath and watching; and when the thieves crept noiselessly into the room, where they supposed him to be fast asleep, he cut down the first man that entered, and stretched him dead at his feet. The other nine, seeing this, laid about them with their drawn swords, but Gompachi, fighting with desperation, mastered them at last, and slew them. After thus ridding himself of his enemies, he went outside the house, and called to the girl, who came running to his side, and joyfully travelled on with him to Mikawa, where her father dwelt; and when they reached Mikawa, he took the maiden to the old man’s house, and told him how, when he had fallen among thieves, his daughter had come to him in his hour of peril, and saved him out of her great pity; and how he, in return, rescuing her from her servitude, had brought her back to her home. When the old folks saw their daughter whom they had lost restored to them, they were beside themselves with joy, and shed tears for very happiness; and, in their gratitude, they pressed Gompachi to remain with them, and they prepared feasts for him, and entertained him hospitably: but their daughter, who had fallen in love with him for his beauty and knightly valour, spent her days in thinking of him, and of him alone. The young man, however, in spite of the kindness of the old merchant, who wished to adopt him as his son, and tried hard to persuade him to consent to this, was fretting to go to Yedo and take service as an officer in the household of some noble lord; so he resisted the entreaties of the father and the soft speeches of the daughter, and made ready to start on his journey; and the old merchant, seeing that he would not be turned from his purpose, gave him a parting gift of two hundred ounces of silver, and sorrowfully bade him farewell.

But alas for the grief of the maiden, who sat sobbing her heart out and mourning over her lover’s departure! He, all the while thinking more of ambition than of love, went to her and comforted her, and said: “Dry your eyes, sweetheart, and weep no more, for I shall soon come back to you. Do you, in the meanwhile, be faithful and true to me, and tend your parents with filial piety.”

So she wiped away her tears and smiled again, when she heard him promise that he would soon return to her. And Gompachi went his way, and in due time came near to Yedo.

But his dangers were not yet over; for late one night, arriving at a place called Suzugamori, in the neighbourhood of Yedo, he fell in with six highwaymen, who attacked him, thinking to make short work of killing and robbing him. Nothing daunted, he drew his sword, and despatched two out of the six; but, being weary and worn out with his long journey, he was sorely pressed, and

the struggle was going hard with him, when a wardsman,⁴ who happened to pass that way riding in a chair, seeing the affray, jumped down from his chair and drawing his dirk came to the rescue, and between them they put the robbers to flight.

Now it turned out that this kind tradesman, who had so happily come to the assistance of Gompachi, was no other than Chôbei of Bandzuin, the chief of the *Otokodaté*, or Friendly Society of the wardsmen of Yedo—a man famous in the annals of the city, whose life, exploits, and adventures are recited to this day, and form the subject of another tale.

When the highwaymen had disappeared, Gompachi, turning to his deliverer, said—

“I know not who you may be, sir, but I have to thank you for rescuing me from a great danger.”

And as he proceeded to express his gratitude, Chôbei replied—

“I am but a poor wardsman, a humble man in my way, sir; and if the robbers ran away, it was more by good luck than owing to any merit of mine. But I am filled with admiration at the way you fought; you displayed a courage and a skill that were beyond your years, sir.”

“Indeed,” said the young man, smiling with pleasure at hearing himself praised; “I am still young and inexperienced, and am quite ashamed of my bungling style of fencing.”

“And now may I ask you, sir, whither you are bound?”

“That is almost more than I know myself; for I am a *rônin*, and have no fixed purpose in view.”

“That is a bad job,” said Chôbei, who felt pity for the lad. “However, if you will excuse my boldness in making such an offer, being but a wardsman, until you shall have taken service I would fain place my poor house at your disposal.”

Gompachi accepted the offer of his new but trusty friend with thanks; so Chôbei led him to his house, where he lodged him and hospitably entertained him for some months. And now Gompachi, being idle and having nothing to care for, fell into bad ways, and began to lead a dissolute life, thinking of nothing but gratifying his whims and passions; he took to frequenting the Yoshiwara, the quarter of the town which is set aside for tea-houses and other haunts of wild young men, where his handsome face and figure attracted attention, and soon made him a great favourite with all the beauties of the neighbourhood.

About this time men began to speak loud in praise of the charms of Komurasaki, or “Little Purple,” a young girl who had recently come to the Yoshiwara, and who in beauty and accomplishments outshone all her rivals. Gompachi, like the rest of the world, heard so much of her fame that he determined to go to the house where she dwelt, at the sign of “The Three Sea-coasts,” and judge for himself whether she deserved all that men said of her. Accordingly he set out one day, and having arrived at “The Three Sea-coasts,” asked to see Komurasaki; and being shown into the room where she was sitting, advanced towards her; but when their eyes met, they both started back with a cry of astonishment, for this Komurasaki, the famous beauty of the Yoshiwara, proved to be the very girl whom several months before Gompachi had rescued from the robbers’ den, and restored to her parents in Mikawa. He had left her in prosperity and affluence, the darling child of a rich father, when they had exchanged vows of love and fidelity; and now they met in a common stew in Yedo. What a change! what a contrast! How had the riches turned to rust, the vows to lies!

⁴ Japanese cities are divided into wards, and every tradesman and artisan is under the authority of the chief of the ward in which he resides. The word *chônin*, or wardsman, is generally used in contradistinction to the word *samurai*, which has already been explained as denoting a man belonging to the military class.

“What is this?” cried Gompachi, when he had recovered from his surprise. “How is it that I find you here pursuing this vile calling, in the Yoshiwara? Pray explain this to me, for there is some mystery beneath all this which I do not understand.”

But Konsurasaki—who, having thus unexpectedly fallen in with her lover that she had yearned for, was divided between joy and shame—answered, weeping:

“Alas! my tale is a sad one, and would be long to tell. After you left us last year, calamity and reverses fell upon our house; and when my parents became poverty-stricken, I was at my wits’ end to know how to support them: so I sold this wretched body of mine to the master of this house, and sent the money to my father and mother; but, in spite of this, troubles and misfortunes multiplied upon them, and now, at last, they have died of misery and grief. And, oh lives there in this wide world so unhappy a wretch as I! But now that I have met you again—you who are so strong—help me who am weak. You saved me once—do not, I implore you, desert me now!” and as she told her piteous tale the tears streamed from her eyes.

“This is, indeed, a sad story,” replied Gompachi, much affected by the recital. “There must have been a wonderful run of bad luck to bring such misfortune upon your house, which but a little while ago I recollect so prosperous. However, mourn no more, for I will not forsake you. It is true that I am too poor to redeem you from your servitude, but at any rate I will contrive so that you shall be tormented no more. Love me, therefore, and put your trust in me.” When she heard him speak so kindly she was comforted, and wept no more, but poured out her whole heart to him, and forgot her past sorrows in the great joy of meeting him again.

When it became time for them to separate, he embraced her tenderly and returned to Chôbei’s house; but he could not banish Komurasaki from his mind, and all day long he thought of her alone; and so it came about that he went daily to the Yoshiwara to see her, and if any accident detained him, she, missing the accustomed visit, would become anxious and write to him to inquire the cause of his absence. At last, pursuing this course of life, his stock of money ran short, and as, being a *rônin* and without any fixed employment, he had no means of renewing his supplies, he was ashamed of showing himself penniless at “The Three Sea-coasts.” Then it was that a wicked spirit arose within him, and he went out and murdered a man, and having robbed him of his money carried it to the Yoshiwara.

From bad to worse is an easy step, and the tiger that has once tasted blood is dangerous. Blinded and infatuated by his excessive love, Gompachi kept on slaying and robbing, so that, while his outer man was fair to look upon, the heart within him was that of a hideous devil. At last his friend Chôbei could no longer endure the sight of him, and turned him out of his house; and as, sooner or later, virtue and vice meet with their reward, it came to pass that Gompachi’s crimes became notorious, and the Government having set spies upon his track, he was caught redhanded and arrested; and his evil deeds having been fully proved against him, he was carried off to the execution ground at Suzugamori, the “Bell Grove,” and beheaded as a common malefactor.

Now when Gompachi was dead, Chôbei’s old affection for the young man returned, and, being a kind and pious man, he went and claimed his body and head, and buried him at Meguro, in the grounds of the Temple called Boronji.

When Komurasaki heard the people at Yoshiwara gossiping about her lover’s end, her grief knew no bounds, so she fled secretly from “The Three Sea-coasts,” and came to Meguro and threw herself upon the newly-made grave. Long she prayed and bitterly she wept over the tomb of him whom, with all his faults, she had loved so well, and then, drawing a dagger from her girdle, she plunged it in her breast and died. The priests of the temple, when they saw what had

happened, wondered greatly and were astonished at the loving faithfulness of this beautiful girl, and taking compassion on her, they laid her side by side with Gompachi in one grave, and over the grave they placed a stone which remains to this day, bearing the inscription "The Tomb of the Shiyoku." And still the people of Yedo visit the place, and still they praise the beauty of Gompachi and the filial piety and fidelity of Komurasaki.

Let us linger for a moment longer in the old graveyard. The word which I have translated a few lines above as "loving faithfulness" means literally "chastity." When Komurasaki sold herself to supply the wants of her ruined parents, she was not, according to her lights, forfeiting her claim to virtue. On the contrary, she could perform no greater act of filial piety, and, so far from incurring reproach among her people, her self-sacrifice would be worthy of all praise in their eyes. This idea has led to grave misunderstanding abroad, and indeed no phase of Japanese life has been so misrepresented as this. I have heard it stated, and seen it printed, that it is no disgrace for a respectable Japanese to sell his daughter, that men of position and family often choose their wives from such places as "The Three Sea-coasts," and that up to the time of her marriage the conduct of a young girl is a matter of no importance whatever. Nothing could be more unjust or more untrue. It is only the neediest people that sell their children to be waitresses, singers, or prostitutes. It does occasionally happen that the daughter of a *Samurai*, or gentleman, is found in a house of ill-fame, but such a case could only occur at the death or utter ruin of the parents, and an official investigation of the matter has proved it to be so exceptional, that the presence of a young lady in such a place is an enormous attraction, her superior education and accomplishments shedding a lustre over the house. As for gentlemen marrying women of bad character, are not such things known in Europe? Do ladies of the *demi-monde* never make good marriages? *Mésalliances* are far rarer in Japan than with us. Certainly among the lowest class of the population such marriages may occasionally occur, for it often happens that a woman can lay by a tempting dowry out of her wretched earnings; but amongst the gentry of the country they are unknown.

And yet a girl is not disgraced if for her parents' sake she sells herself to a life of misery so great, that, when a Japanese enters a house of ill-fame, he is forced to leave his sword and dirk at the door for two reasons—first, to prevent brawling; secondly, because it is known that some of the women inside so loathe their existence that they would put an end to it, could they get hold of a weapon.

It is a curious fact that in all the Daimio's castle-towns, with the exception of some which are also seaports, open prostitution is strictly forbidden, although, if report speaks truly, public morality rather suffers than gains by the prohibition.

The misapprehension which exists upon the subject of prostitution in Japan may be accounted for by the fact that foreign writers, basing their judgment upon the vice of the open ports, have not hesitated to pronounce the Japanese women unchaste. As fairly might a Japanese, writing about England, argue from the street-walkers of Portsmouth or Plymouth to the wives, sisters, and daughters of these very authors. In some respects the gulf fixed between virtue and vice in Japan is even greater than in England. The Eastern courtesan is confined to a certain quarter of the town, and distinguished by a peculiarly gaudy costume, and by a headdress which consists of a forest of light tortoiseshell hair-pins, stuck round her head like a saint's glory—a glory of shame which a modest woman would sooner die than wear. Vice jostling virtue in the public places; virtue imitating the fashions set by vice, and buying trinkets or furniture at the sale of vice's effects—these are social phenomena which the East knows not.

The custom prevalent among the lower orders of bathing in public bath-houses without distinction of the sexes, is another circumstance which has tended to spread abroad very false notions upon the subject of the chastity of the Japanese women. Every traveller is shocked by it, and every writer finds in it matter for a page of pungent description. Yet it is only those who are so poor (and they must be poor indeed) that they cannot afford a bath at home, who, at the end of their day's work, go to the public bath-house to refresh themselves before sitting down to their evening meal: having been used to the scene from their childhood, they see no indelicacy in it; it is a matter of course, and *honi soit qui mal y pense*: certainly there is far less indecency and immorality resulting from this public bathing, than from the promiscuous herding together of all sexes and ages which disgraces our own lodging-houses in the great cities, and the hideous hovels in which some of our labourers have to pass their lives; nor can it be said that there is more confusion of sexes amongst the lowest orders in Japan than in Europe. Speaking upon the subject once with a Japanese gentleman, I observed that we considered it an act of indecency for men and women to wash together. He shrugged his shoulders as he answered, "But then Westerns have such prurient minds." Some time ago, at the open port of Yokohama, the Government, out of deference to the prejudices of foreigners, forbade the men and women to bathe together, and no doubt this was the first step towards putting down the practice altogether: as for women tubbing in the open streets of Yedo, I have read of such things in books written by foreigners; but during a residence of three years and a half; in which time I crossed and recrossed every part of the great city at all hours of the day, I never once saw such a sight. I believe myself that it can only be seen at certain hot mineral springs in remote country districts.

The best answer to the general charge of immorality which has been brought against the Japanese women during their period of unmarried life, lies in the fact that every man who can afford to do so keeps the maidens of his family closely guarded in the strictest seclusion. The daughter of poverty, indeed, must work and go abroad, but not a man is allowed to approach the daughter of a gentleman; and she is taught that if by accident any insult should be offered to her, the knife which she carries at her girdle is meant for use, and not merely as a badge of her rank. Not long ago a tragedy took place in the house of one of the chief nobles in Yedo. One of My Lady's tire-women, herself a damsel of gentle blood, and gifted with rare beauty, had attracted the attention of a retainer in the palace, who fell desperately in love with her. For a long time the strict rules of decorum by which she was hedged in prevented him from declaring his passion; but at last he contrived to gain access to her presence, and so far forgot himself, that she, drawing her poniard, stabbed him in the eye, so that he was carried off fainting, and presently died. The girl's declaration, that the dead man had attempted to insult her, was held to be sufficient justification of her deed, and, instead of being blamed, she was praised and extolled for her valour and chastity. As the affair had taken place within the four walls of a powerful noble, there was no official investigation into the matter, with which the authorities of the palace were competent to deal. The truth of this story was vouched for by two or three persons whose word I have no reason to doubt, and who had themselves been mixed up in it; I can bear witness that it is in complete harmony with Japanese ideas; and certainly it seems more just that Lucretia should kill Tarquin than herself.

The better the Japanese people come to be known and understood, the more, I am certain, will it be felt that a great injustice has been done them in the sweeping attacks which have been made upon their women. Writers are agreed, I believe, that their matrons are, as a rule, without reproach. If their maidens are chaste, as I contend that from very force of circumstances they cannot help being, what becomes of all these charges of vice and immodesty? Do they not rather

recoil upon the accusers, who would appear to have studied the Japanese woman only in the harlot of Yokohama?

Having said so much, I will now try to give some account of the famous Yoshiwara⁵ of Yedo, to which frequent allusion will have to be made in the course of these tales.

At the end of the sixteenth century the courtesans of Yedo lived in three special places: these were the street called Kôjimachi, in which dwelt the women who came from Kiôto; the Kamakura Street, and a spot opposite the great bridge, in which last two places lived women brought from Suruga. Besides these there afterwards came women from Fushimi and from Nara, who lodged scattered here and there throughout the town. This appears to have scandalised a certain reformer, named Shôji Jinyémon, who, in the year 1612, addressed a memorial to the Government, petitioning that the women who lived in different parts of the town should be collected in one "Flower Quarter." His petition was granted in the year 1617, and he fixed upon a place called Fukiyacho, which, on account of the quantities of rushes which grew there, was named *Yoshi-Wara*, or the rush-moor, a name which now-a-days, by a play upon the word *yoshi*, is written with two Chinese characters, signifying the "good" or "lucky moor." The place was divided into four streets, called the Yedo Street, the Second Yedo Street, the Kiôto Street, and the Second Kiôto Street.

In the eighth month of the year 1655, when Yedo was beginning to increase in size and importance, the Yoshiwara, preserving its name, was transplanted bodily to the spot which it now occupies at the northern end of the town. And the streets in it were named after the places from which the greater number of their inhabitants originally came, as the "Sakai Street," the "Fushimi Street," &c.

The official Guide to the Yoshiwara for 1869 gives a return of 153 brothels, containing 3,289 courtesans of all classes, from the *Oiran*, or proud beauty, who, dressed up in gorgeous brocade of gold and silver, with painted face and gilded lips, and with her teeth fashionably blacked, has all the young bloods of Yedo at her feet, down to the humble *Shinzo*, or white-toothed woman, who rots away her life in the common stews. These figures do not, however, represent the whole of the prostitution of Yedo; the Yoshiwara is the chief, but not the only, abiding-place of the public women. At Fukagawa there is another Flower District, built upon the same principle as the Yoshiwara; while at Shinagawa, Shinjiku, Itabashi, Senji, and Kadzukkappara, the hotels contain women who, nominally only waitresses, are in reality prostitutes. There are also women called *Jigoku-Onna*, or hell-women, who, without being borne on the books of any brothel, live in their own houses, and ply their trade in secret. On the whole, I believe the amount of prostitution in Yedo to be wonderfully small, considering the vast size of the city.

There are 394 tea-houses in the Yoshiwara, which are largely used as places of assignation, and which on those occasions are paid, not by the visitors frequenting them, but by the keepers of the brothels. It is also the fashion to give dinners and drinking-parties at these houses, for which the services of *Taikomochi*, or jesters, among whom there are thirty-nine chief celebrities, and of singing and dancing girls, are retained. The Guide to the Yoshiwara gives a list of fifty-five famous singing-girls, besides a host of minor stars. These women are not to be confounded with the courtesans. Their conduct is very closely watched by their masters, and they always go out to parties in couples or in bands, so that they may be a check upon one another. Doubtless,

⁵ The name Yoshiwara, which is becoming generic for "Flower Districts,"—*Anglicè*, quarters occupied by brothels,—is sometimes derived from the town Yoshiwara, in Sunshine, because it was said that the women of that place furnished a large proportion of the beauties of the Yedo Yoshiwara. The correct derivation is probably that given below.

however, in spite of all precautions, the shower of gold does from time to time find its way to Danaë's lap; and to be the favoured lover of a fashionable singer or dancer is rather a feather in the cap of a fast young Japanese gentleman. The fee paid to singing-girls for performing during a space of two hours is one shilling and fourpence each; for six hours the fee is quadrupled, and it is customary to give the girls a *hana*, or present, for themselves, besides their regular pay, which goes to the master of the troupe to which they belong.

Courtesans, singing women, and dancers are bought by contractors, either as children, when they are educated for their calling, or at a more advanced age, when their accomplishments and charms render them desirable investments. The engagement is never made life long, for once past the flower of their youth the poor creatures would be mere burthens upon their masters; a courtesan is usually bought until she shall have reached the age of twenty-seven, after which she becomes her own property. Singers remain longer in harness, but even they rarely work after the age of thirty, for Japanese women, like Italians, age quickly, and have none of that intermediate stage between youth and old age, which seems to be confined to countries where there is a twilight.

Children destined to be trained as singers are usually bought when they are five or six years old, a likely child fetching from about thirty-five to fifty shillings; the purchaser undertakes the education of his charge, and brings the little thing up as his own child. The parents sign a paper absolving him from all responsibility in case of sickness or accident; but they know that their child will be well treated and cared for, the interests of the buyer being their material guarantee. Girls of fifteen or upwards who are sufficiently accomplished to join a company of singers fetch ten times the price paid for children; for in their case there is no risk and no expense of education.

Little children who are bought for purposes of prostitution at the age of five or six years fetch about the same price as those that are bought to be singers. During their novitiate they are employed to wait upon the *Oiran*, or fashionable courtesans, in the capacity of little female pages (*Kamuro*). They are mostly the children of distressed persons, or orphans, whom their relatives cruelly sell rather than be at the expense and trouble of bringing them up. Of the girls who enter the profession later in life, some are orphans, who have no other means of earning a livelihood; others sell their bodies out of filial piety, that they may succour their sick or needy parents; others are married women, who enter the Yoshiwara to supply the wants of their husbands; and a very small proportion is recruited from girls who have been seduced and abandoned, perhaps sold, by faithless lovers.

The time to see the Yoshiwara to the best advantage is just after nightfall, when the lamps are lighted. Then it is that the women—who for the last two hours have been engaged in gilding their lips and painting their eyebrows black, and their throats and bosoms a snowy white, carefully leaving three brown Vandyke-collar points where the back of the head joins the neck, in accordance with one of the strictest rules of Japanese cosmetic science—leave the back rooms, and take their places, side by side, in a kind of long narrow cage, the wooden bars of which open on to the public thoroughfare. Here they sit for hours, gorgeous in dresses of silk and gold and silver embroidery, speechless and motionless as wax figures, until they shall have attracted the attention of some of the passers-by, who begin to throng the place. At Yokohama indeed, and at the other open ports, the women of the Yoshiwara are loud in their invitations to visitors, frequently relieving the monotony of their own language by some blasphemous term of endearment picked up from British and American seamen; but in the Flower District at Yedo, and wherever Japanese customs are untainted, the utmost decorum prevails. Although the shape

which vice takes is ugly enough, still it has this merit, that it is unobtrusive. Never need the pure be contaminated by contact with the impure; he who goes to the Yoshiwara, goes there knowing full well what he will find, but the virtuous man may live through his life without having this kind of vice forced upon his sight. Here again do the open ports contrast unfavourably with other places: Yokohama at night is as leprous a place as the London Haymarket.⁶

A public woman or singer on entering her profession assumes a *nom de guerre*, by which she is known until her engagement is at an end. Some of these names are so pretty and quaint that I will take a few specimens from the *Yoshiwara Saiken*, the guide-book upon which this notice is based. 'Little Pine,' 'Little Butterfly,' 'Brightness of the Flowers,' 'The Jewel River,' 'Gold Mountain,' 'Pearl Harp,' 'The Stork that lives a Thousand Years,' 'Village of Flowers,' 'Sea Beach,' 'The Little Dragon,' 'Little Purple,' 'Silver,' 'Chrysanthemum,' 'Waterfall,' 'White Brightness,' 'Forest of Cherries,'—these and a host of other quaint conceits are the one prettiness of a very foul place.

⁶ Those who are interested in this branch of social science, will find much curious information upon the subject of prostitution in Japan in a pamphlet published at Yokohama, by Dr. Newton, R. N., a philanthropist who has been engaged for the last two years in establishing a Lock Hospital at that place. In spite of much opposition, from prejudice and ignorance, his labours have been crowned by great success.