

Kazuma's Revenge

By A. B. Mitford (Lord Redesdale)

It is a law that he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword. In Japan, where there exists a large armed class over whom there is practically little or no control, party and clan broils, and single quarrels ending in bloodshed and death, are matters of daily occurrence; and it has been observed that Edinburgh in the olden time, when the clansmen, roistering through the streets at night, would pass from high words to deadly blows, is perhaps the best European parallel of modern Yedo or Kiôto.

It follows that of all his possessions the Samurai sets most store by his sword, his constant companion, his ally, defensive and offensive. The price of a sword by a famous maker reaches a high sum: a Japanese noble will sometimes be found girding on a sword, the blade of which unmounted is worth from six hundred to a thousand riyos, say from £200 to £300, and the mounting, rich in cunning metal work, will be of proportionate value. These swords are handed down as heirlooms from father to son, and become almost a part of the wearer's own self. Iyéyasu, the founder of the last dynasty of Shoguns, wrote in his Legacy,¹ a code of rules drawn up for the guidance of his successors and their advisers in the government, "The girded sword is the living soul of the Samurai. In the case of a Samurai forgetting his sword, act as is appointed: it may not be overlooked."

The occupation of a swordsmith is an honourable profession, the members of which are men of gentle blood. In a country where trade is looked down upon as degrading, it is strange to find this single exception to the general rule. The traditions of the craft are many and curious. During the most critical moment of the forging of the sword, when the steel edge is being welded into the body of the iron blade, it is a custom which still obtains among old-fashioned armourers to put on the cap and robes worn by the Kugé, or nobles of the Mikado's court, and, closing the doors of the workshop, to labour in secrecy and freedom from interruption, the half gloom adding to the mystery of the operation. Sometimes the occasion is even invested with a certain sanctity, a tasselled cord of straw, such as is hung before the shrines of the Kami, or native gods of Japan, being suspended between two bamboo poles in the forge, which for the nonce is converted into a holy altar.

At Osaka, I lived opposite to one Kusano Yoshiaki, a swordsmith, a most intelligent and amiable gentleman, who was famous throughout his neighbourhood for his good and charitable deeds. His idea was that, having been bred up to a calling which trades in life and death, he was bound, so far as in him lay, to atone for this by seeking to alleviate the suffering which is in the world; and he carried out his principle to the extent of impoverishing himself. No neighbour ever appealed to him in vain for help in tending the sick or burying the dead. No beggar or lazar was ever turned from his door without receiving some mark of his bounty, whether in money or in kind. Nor was his scrupulous honesty less remarkable than his charity.

While other smiths are in the habit of earning large sums of money by counterfeiting the marks of the famous makers of old, he was able to boast that he had never turned out a weapon which bore any other mark than his own. From his father and his forefathers he inherited his trade,

¹ The Legacy of Iyéyasu, translated by F. Lowder. Yokohama, 1868. (Printed for private circulation.)

which, in his turn, he will hand over to his son—a hard-working, honest, and sturdy man, the clank of whose hammer and anvil may be heard from daybreak to sundown.

The trenchant edge of the Japanese sword is notorious. It is said that the best blades will in the hands of an expert swordsman cut through the dead bodies of three men, laid one upon the other, at a blow. The swords of the Shogun used to be tried upon the corpses of executed criminals; the public headsman was entrusted with the duty, and for a “nose medicine,” or bribe of two bus (about three shillings), would substitute the weapon of a private individual for that of his Lord. Dogs and beggars, lying helpless by the roadside, not unfrequently serve to test a ruffian’s sword; but the executioner earns many a fee from those who wish to see how their blades will cut off a head.

The statesman who shall enact a law forbidding the carrying of this deadly weapon will indeed have deserved well of his country; but it will be a difficult task to undertake, and a dangerous one. I would not give much for that man’s life. The hand of every swashbuckler in the empire would be against him. One day as we were talking over this and other kindred subjects, a friend of mine, a man of advanced and liberal views, wrote down his opinion, *more Japonico*, in a verse of poetry which ran as follows:—“I would that all the swords and dirks in the country might be collected in one place and molten down, and that, from the metal so produced, one huge sword might be forged, which, being the only blade left, should be the girded sword of Great Japan.”

The following history is in more senses than one a “Tale of a Sword.”

About two hundred and fifty years ago Ikéda Kunaishôyu was Lord of the Province of Inaba. Among his retainers were two gentlemen, named Watanabé Yukiyé and Kawai Matazayémon, who were bound together by strong ties of friendship, and were in the habit of frequently visiting at one another’s houses. One day Yukiyé was sitting conversing with Matazayémon in the house of the latter, when, on a sudden, a sword that was lying in the raised part of the room caught his eye. As he saw it, he started and said— “Pray tell me, how came you by that sword?”

“Well, as you know, when my Lord Ikéda followed my Lord Tokugawa Iyéyasu to fight at Nagakudé, my father went in his train; and it was at the battle of Nagakudé that he picked up this sword.”

“My father went too, and was killed in the fight, and this sword, which was an heirloom in our family for many generations, was lost at that time. As it is of great value in my eyes, I do wish that, if you set no special store by it, you would have the great kindness to return it to me.”

“That is a very easy matter, and no more than what one friend should do by another. Pray take it.”

Upon this Yukiyé gratefully took the sword, and having carried it home put it carefully away.

At the beginning of the ensuing year Matazayémon fell sick and died, and Yukiyé, mourning bitterly for the loss of his good friend, and anxious to requite the favour which he had received in the matter of his father’s sword, did many acts of kindness to the dead man’s son—a young man twenty-two years of age, named Matagorô.

Now this Matagorô was a base-hearted cur, who had begrudged the sword that his father had given to Yukiyé, and complained publicly and often that Yukiyé had never made any present in return; and in this way Yukiyé got a bad name in my Lord’s palace as a stingy and illiberal man.

But Yukiyé had a son, called Kazuma, a youth sixteen years of age, who served as one of the Prince’s pages of honour. One evening, as he and one of his brother pages were talking together,

the latter said— “Matagorô is telling everybody that your father accepted a handsome sword from him and never made him any present in return, and people are beginning to gossip about it.”

“Indeed,” replied the other, “my father received that sword from Matagoro’s father as a mark of friendship and goodwill, and, considering that it would be an insult to send a present of money in return, thought to return the favour by acts of kindness towards Matagorô. I suppose it is money he wants.”

When Kazuma’s service was over, he returned home, and went to his father’s room to tell him the report that was being spread in the palace, and begged him to send an ample present of money to Matagorô. Yukiyé reflected for a while, and said— “You are too young to understand the right line of conduct in such matters. Matagorô’s father and myself were very close friends; so, seeing that he had ungrudgingly given me back the sword of my ancestors, I, thinking to requite his kindness at his death, rendered important services to Matagorô. It would be easy to finish the matter by sending a present of money; but I had rather take the sword and return it than be under an obligation to this mean churl, who knows not the laws which regulate the intercourse and dealings of men of gentle blood.”

So Yukiyé, in his anger, took the sword to Matagorô’s house, and said to him— “I have come to your house this night for no other purpose than to restore to you the sword which your father gave me; and with this he placed the sword before Matagorô.

“Indeed,” replied the other, “ I trust that you will not pain me by returning a present which my father made you.”

“Amongst men of gentle birth,” said Yukiyé, laughing scornfully, “it is the custom to requite presents, in the first place by kindness, and afterwards by a suitable gift offered with a free heart. But it is no use talking to such as you, who are ignorant of the first principles of good breeding; so I have the honour to give you back the sword.”

As Yukiyé went on bitterly to reprove Matagorô, the latter waxed very wroth, and, being a ruffian, would have killed Yukiyé on the spot; but he, old man as he was, was a skilful swordsman, so Matagorô, craven-like, determined to wait until he could attack him unawares. Little suspecting any treachery, Yukiyé started to return home, and Matagorô, under the pretence of attending him to the door, came behind him with his sword drawn and cut him in the shoulder. The older man, turning round, drew and defended himself; but having received a severe wound in the first instance, he fainted away from loss of blood, and Matagorô slew him.

The mother of Matagorô, startled by the noise, came out; and when she saw what had been done, she was afraid, and said— “Passionate man! what have you done? You are a murderer; and now your life will be forfeit. What terrible deed is this!”

“I have killed him now, and there’s nothing to be done. Come, mother, before the matter becomes known, let us fly together from this house.”

“I will follow you; do you go and seek out my Lord Abé Shirogorô, a chief among the Hatamotos,² who was my foster-child. You had better fly to him for protection, and remain in hiding”

So the old woman persuaded her son to make his escape, and sent him to the palace of Shirogorô.

² *Hatamotos*. The Hatamotos were the feudatory nobles of the Shogun or Tycoon. The office of Taikun having been abolished, the Hatamotos no longer exist. For further information respecting them, see the note at the end of this story.

Now it happened that at this time the Hatamotos had formed themselves into a league against the powerful Daimios; and Abe Shirogorô, with two other noblemen, named Kondô Noborinosuké and Midzuno Jiurozayémon, was at the head of the league. It followed, as a matter of course, that his forces were frequently recruited by vicious men, who had no means of gaining their living, and whom he received and entreated kindly without asking any questions as to their antecedents; how much the more then, on being applied to for an asylum by the son of his own foster-mother, did he willingly extend his patronage to him, and guarantee him against all danger. So he called a meeting of the principal Hatamotos, and introduced Matagorô to them, saying— “This man is a retainer of Ikeda Kunaishôyu, who, having cause of hatred against a man named Watanabé Yukiyé, has slain him, and has fled to me for protection; this man’s mother suckled me when I was an infant, and, right or wrong, I will befriend him. If, therefore, Ikeda Kunaishôyu should send to require me to deliver him up, I trust that you will one and all put forth your strength and help me to defend him.”

“Ay! that will we, with pleasure!” replied Kondô Noborinosuké. “We have for some time had cause to complain of the scorn with which the Daimios have treated us. Let Ikeda Kunaishôyu send to claim this man, and we will show him the power of the Hatamotos.”

All the other Hatamotos, with one accord, applauded this determination, and made ready their force for an armed resistance, should my Lord Kunaishôyu send to demand the surrender of Matagorô. But the latter remained as a welcome guest in the house of Abe Shirogorô.

Now when Watanabe Kazuma saw that, as the night advanced, his father Yukiyé did not return home, he became anxious, and went to the house of Matagorô to seek for hint, and finding to his horror that he was murdered, fell upon the corpse and embraced it, weeping. On a sudden, it flashed across him that this must assuredly be the handiwork of Matagorô; so he rushed furiously into the house, determined to kill his father’s murderer upon the spot. But Matagorô had already fled, and he found only the mother, who was making her preparations for following her son to the house of Abe Shirogorô: so he bound the old woman, and searched all over the house for her son; but, seeing that his search was fruitless, he carried off the mother, and handed her over to one of the elders of the clan, at the same time laying information against Matagorô as his father’s murderer. When the affair was reported to the Prince, he was very angry, and ordered that the old woman should remain bound and be cast into prison until the whereabouts of her son should be discovered. Then Kazuma buried his father’s corpse with great pomp, and the widow and the orphan mourned over their loss.

It soon became known amongst the people of Abe Shirogorô that the mother of Matagorô had been imprisoned for her son’s crime, and they immediately set about planning her rescue; so they sent to the palace of my Lord Kunaishôyu a messenger, who, when he was introduced to the councillor of the Prince, said—

“We have heard that, in consequence of the murder of Yukiyé, my lord has been pleased to imprison the mother of Matagorô. Our master Shirogorô has arrested the criminal, and will deliver him up to you. But the mother has committed no crime, so we pray that she may be released from a cruel imprisonment: she was the foster-mother of our master, and he would fain intercede to save her life. Should you consent to this, we, on our side, will give up the murderer, and hand him over to you in front of our master’s gate to-morrow.”

The councillor repeated this message to the Prince, who, in his pleasure at being able to give Kazuma his revenge on the morrow, immediately agreed to the proposal, and the messenger returned triumphant at the success of the scheme. On the following day, the Prince ordered the mother of Matagorô to be placed in a litter and carried to the Hatamoto’s dwelling, in charge of a

retainer named Sasawo Danyémon, who, when he arrived at the door of Abé Shirogorô's house, said—

“I am charged to hand over to you the mother of Matagorô, and, in exchange, I am authorized to receive her son at your hands.”

“We will immediately give him up to you; but, as the mother and son are now about to bid an eternal farewell to one another, we beg you to be so kind as to tarry a little.”

With this the retainers of Shirogorô led the old woman inside their master's house, and Sasawo Danyémon remained waiting outside, until at last he grew impatient, and ventured to hurry on the people within.

“We return you many thanks,” replied they, “for your kindness in bringing us the mother; but, as the son cannot go with you at present, you had better return home as quickly as possible. We are afraid we have put you to much trouble.” And so they mocked him.

When Danyémon saw that he had not only been cheated into giving up the old woman, but was being made a laughing-stock of into the bargain, he flew into a great rage, and thought to break into the house and seize Matagorô and his mother by force; but, peeping into the courtyard, he saw that it was filled with Hatamotos, carrying guns and naked swords. Not caring then to die fighting a hopeless battle, and at the same time feeling that, after having been so cheated, he would be put to shame before his lord, Sasawo Danyémon went to the burial-place of his ancestors, and disembowelled himself in front of their graves.

When the Prince heard how his messenger had been treated, he was indignant, and summoning his councillors resolved, although he was suffering from sickness, to collect his retainers and attack Abe Shirogorô; and the other chief Daimios, when the matter became publicly known, took up the cause, and determined that the Hatamotos must be chastised for their insolence. On their side, the Hatamotos put forth all their efforts to resist the Daimios. So Yedo became disturbed, and the riotous state of the city caused great anxiety to the Government, who took counsel together how they might restore peace. As the Hatamotos were directly under the orders of the Shogun, it was no difficult matter to put them down: the hard question to solve was how to put a restraint upon the great Daimios. However, one of the Gorôjiu,³ named Matsudaira Idzu no Kami, a man of great intelligence, hit upon a plan by which he might secure this end. There was at this time in the service of the Shogun a physician, named Nakarai Tsusen, who was in the habit of frequenting the palace of my Lord Kunaishôyu, and who for some time past had been treating him for the disease from which he was suffering. Idzu no Kami sent secretly for this physician, and, summoning him to his private room, engaged him in conversation, in the midst of which he suddenly dropped his voice and said to him in a whisper—

“Listen, Tsusen. You have received great favours at the hands of the Shogun. The Government is now sorely straitened: are you willing to carry your loyalty so far as to lay down your life on its behalf?”

“Ay, my lord; for generations my forefathers have held their property by the grace of the Shogun. I am willing this night to lay down my life for my Prince, as a faithful vassal should.”

“Well, then, I will tell you. The great Daimios and the Hatamotos have fallen out about this affair of Matagorô, and lately it has seemed as if they meant to come to blows. The country will be agitated, and the farmers and townsfolk suffer great misery, if we cannot quell the tumult. The Hatamotos will be easily kept under, but it will be no light task to pacify the great Daimios. If you are willing to lay down your life in carrying out a stratagem of mine, peace will be restored to the country; but your loyalty will be your death.”

³ The first Council of the Shogun's ministers; literally, “assembly of imperial elders.”

“I am ready to sacrifice my life in this service.”

“This is my plan. You have been attending my Lord Kunaishôyu in his sickness; to-morrow you must go to see him, and put poison in his physic. If we can kill him, the agitation will cease. This is the service which I ask of you.”

Tsusen agreed to undertake the deed; and on the following day, when he went to see Kunaishôyu, he carried with him poisoned drugs. Half the draught he drank himself,⁴ and thus put the Prince off his guard, so that he swallowed the remainder fearlessly. Tsusen, seeing this, hurried away, and as he was carried home in his litter the death-agony seized him, and he died, vomiting blood.

My Lord Kunaishôyu died in the same way in great torture, and in the confusion attending upon his death and funeral ceremonies the struggle which was impending with the Hatamotos was delayed.

In the meanwhile the Gorôjiu Idzu no Kami summoned the three leaders of the Hatamotos and addressed them as follows:—

“The secret plottings and treasonable, turbulent conduct of you three men, so unbecoming your position as Hatamotos, have enraged my lord the Shogun to such a degree, that he has been pleased to order that you be imprisoned in a temple, and that your patrimony be given over to your next heirs.”

Accordingly the three Hatamotos, after having been severely admonished, were confined in a temple called Kanyeiji; and the remaining Hatamotos, scared by this example, dispersed in peace. As for the great Daimios, inasmuch as after the death of my Lord Kunaishôyu the Hatamotos were all dispersed, there was no enemy left for them to fight with; so the tumult was quelled, and peace was restored.

Thus it happened that Matagorô lost his patron; so, taking his mother with him, he went and placed himself under the protection of an old man named Sakurai Jiuzayémon. This old man was a famous teacher of lance exercise, and enjoyed both wealth and honour; so he took in Matagorô, and having engaged as a guard thirty Rônins, all resolute fellows and well skilled in the arts of war, they all fled together to a distant place called Sagara.

All this time Watanabé Kazuma had been brooding over his father's death, and thinking how he should be revenged upon the murderer; so when my Lord Kunaishôyu suddenly died, he went to the young Prince who succeeded him and obtained leave of absence to go and seek out his father's enemy. Now Kazuma's elder sister was married to a man named Araki Matayémon, who at that time was famous as the first swordsman in Japan. As Kazuma was but sixteen years of age, this Matayémon, taking into consideration his near relationship as son-in-law to the murdered man, determined to go forth with the lad, as his guardian, and help him to seek out Matagorô; and two of Matayémon's retainers, named Ishidomé Busuké and Ikezoyé Magohachi, made up their minds, at all hazards, to follow their master. The latter, when he heard their intention, thanked them, but refused the offer, saying that as he was now about to engage in a vendetta in which his life would be continually in jeopardy, and as it would be a lasting grief to him should either of them receive a wound in such a service, he must beg them to renounce their intention; but they answered—

“Master, this is a cruel speech of yours. All these years have we received nought but kindness and favours at your hands; and now that you are engaged in the pursuit of this murderer, we desire to follow you, and, if needs must, to lay down our lives in your service. Furthermore, we

⁴ A physician attending a personage of exalted rank has always to drink half the potion he prescribes as a test of his good faith.

have heard that the friends of this Matagorô are no fewer than thirty-six men; so, however bravely you may fight, you will be in peril from the superior numbers of your enemy. However, if you are pleased to persist in your refusal to take us, we have made up our minds that there is no resource for us but to disembowel ourselves on the spot.”

When Matayémon and Kazuma heard these words, they wondered at these faithful and brave men, and were moved to tears. Then Matayémon said—

“The kindness of you two brave fellows is without precedent. Well, then, I will accept your services gratefully.”

Then the two men, having obtained their wish, cheerfully followed their master; and the four set out together upon their journey to seek out Matagorô, of whose whereabouts they were completely ignorant.

Matagorô in the meanwhile had made his way, with the old man Sakurai Jiuzayémon and his thirty Rônins, to Osaka. But, strong as they were in numbers, they travelled in great secrecy. The reason for this was, that the old man’s younger brother, Sakurai Jinsuké, a fencing-master by profession, had once had a fencing-match with Matayémon, Kazuma’s brother-in-law, and had been shamefully beaten; so that the party were greatly afraid of Matayémon, and felt that, since he was taking up Kazuma’s cause and acting as his guardian, they might be worsted in spite of their numbers: so they went on their way with great caution, and, having reached Osaka, put up at an inn in a quarter called Ikutama, and hid from Kazuma and Matayémon.

The latter also in good time reached Osaka, and spared no pains to seek out Matagorô. One evening towards dusk, as Matayémon was walking in the quarter where the enemy were staying, he saw a man, dressed as a gentleman’s servant, enter a cook-shop and order some buckwheat porridge for thirty-six men, and, looking attentively at the man, he recognized him as the servant of Sakurai Jiuzayémon; so he hid himself in a dark place and watched, and heard the fellow say—

“My master, Sakurai Jiuzayémon, is about to start for Sagara to-morrow morning, to return thanks to the gods for his recovery from a sickness from which he has been suffering; so I am in a great hurry.”

With these words the servant hastened away; and Matayémon, entering the shop, called for some porridge, and as he ate it, made some inquiries as to the man who had just given so large an order for buckwheat porridge. The master of the shop answered that he was the attendant of a party of thirty-six gentlemen who were staying at such and such an inn. Then Matayémon, having found out all that he wanted to know, went home and told Kazuma, who was delighted at the prospect of carrying his revenge into execution on the morrow. That same evening Matayémon sent one of his two faithful retainers as a spy to the inn, to find out at what hour Matagorô was to set out on the following morning; and he ascertained from the servants of the inn, that the party was to start at daybreak for Sagara, stopping at Isé to worship at the shrine of Tershô Daijin.⁵

Matayémon made his preparations accordingly, and, with Kazuma and his two retainers, started before dawn. Beyond Uyéno, in the province of Iga, the castle town of the Daimio Tôdô Idzumi no Kami, there is a wide and lonely moor; and this was the place upon which they fixed for the attack upon the enemy. When they had arrived at the spot, Matayémon went into a tea-

⁵ Goddess of the sun, and ancestress of the Mikados.

house by the roadside, and wrote a petition to the governor of the Daimio's castle town for permission to carry out the vendetta within its precincts;⁶ then he addressed Kazuma and said—

“When we fall in with Matagorô and begin the fight, do you engage and slay your father's murderer; attack him and him only, and I will keep off his guard of Rônins;” then turning to his two retainers, “As for you, keep close to Kazuma; and should the Rônins attempt to rescue Matagorô, it will be your duty to prevent them, and succour Kazuma.” And having further laid down each man's duties with great minuteness, they lay in wait for the arrival of the enemy. Whilst they were resting in the tea-house, the governor of the castle town arrived, and, asking for Matayémon, said—

“I have the honour to be the governor of the castle town of Tôdô Idzumi no Kami. My lord, having learnt your intention of slaying your enemy within the precincts of his citadel, gives his consent; and as proof of his admiration of your fidelity and valour, he has further sent you a detachment of infantry, one hundred strong, to guard the place; so that should any of the thirty-six men attempt to escape, you may set your mind at ease, for flight will be impossible.”

When Matayémon and Kazuma had expressed their thanks for his lordship's gracious kindness, the governor took his leave and returned home. At last the enemy's tram was seen in the distance. First came Sakurai Jiuzayémon and his younger brother Jinsuké; and next to them followed Kawai Matagorô and Takénouchi Gentan. These four men, who were the bravest and the foremost of the band of Rônins, were riding on pack-horses, and the remainder were marching on foot, keeping close together.

As they drew near, Kazuma, who was impatient to avenge his father, stepped boldly forward and shouted in a loud voice—

“Here stand I, Kazuma, the son of Yukiyé, whom you, Matagorô, treacherously slew, determined to avenge my father's death. Come forth, then, and do battle with me, and let us see which of us twain is the better man.”

And before the iRônins had recovered from their astonishment, Matayémon said—

“I, Araké Matayémon, the son-in-law of Yukiyé, have come to second Kazuma in his deed of vengeance. Win or lose, you must give us battle.”

When the thirty-six men heard the name of Matayémon, they were greatly afraid; but Sakurai Jiuzayémon urged them to be upon their guard, and leaped from his horse; and Matayémon, springing forward with his drawn sword, cleft him from the shoulder to the nipple of his breast, so that he fell dead. Sakurai Jinsuké, seeing his brother killed before his eyes, grew furious, and shot an arrow at Matayémon, who deftly cut the shaft in two with his dirk as it flew; and Jinsuké, amazed at this feat, threw away his bow and attacked Matayémon, who, with his sword in his right hand and his dirk in his left, fought with desperation. The other Rônins attempted to rescue Jinsuké, and, in the struggle, Kazuma, who had engaged Matagorô, became separated from Matayémon, whose two retainers, Busuké and Magohachi, bearing in mind their master's orders, killed five Rônins who had attacked Kazuma, but were themselves badly wounded. In the meantime, Matayémon, who had killed seven of the Rônins, and who the harder he was pressed the more bravely he fought, soon cut down three more, and the remainder dared not approach

⁶ In respect to revenging injury done to master or father, it is granted by the wise and virtuous (Confucius) that you and the injurer cannot live together under the canopy of heaven.

“A person harboring such vengeance shall notify the same in writing to the Criminal Court and although no check or hindrance may be offered to his carrying out his desire within the period allowed for that purpose, it is forbidden that the chastisement of an enemy be attended with riot.

“Fellows who neglect to give notice of their intended revenge are like wolves of pretext, and their punishment or pardon should depend upon the circumstances of the case.”—*Legacy of Iliéyasu*, ut suprâ.

him. At this moment there came up one Kanô Tozayémon, a retainer of the lord of the castle town, and an old friend of Matayémon, who, when he heard that Matayémon was this day about to avenge his father-in-law, had seized his spear and set out, for the sake of the old goodwill between them, to help him, and act as his second, and said—

“Sir Matayémon, hearing of the perilous adventure in which you have engaged, I have come out to offer myself as your second.”

Matayémon, hearing this, was rejoiced, and fought with renewed vigour. Then one of the Rônins, named Takénouchi Gentan, a very brave man, leaving his companions to do battle with Matayémon, came to the rescue of Matagorô, who was being hotly pressed by Kazuma, and, in attempting to prevent this, Busuké fell covered with wounds. His companion Magohachi, seeing him fall, was in great anxiety; for should any harm happen to Kazuma, what excuse could he make to Matayémon? So, wounded as he was, he too engaged Takénouchi Gentan, and, being crippled by the gashes he had received, was in deadly peril. Then the man who had come up from the castle town to act as Matayémon’s second cried out—

“See there, Sir Matayémon, your follower who is fighting with Gentan is in great danger. Do you go to his rescue, and second Sir Kazuma: I will give an account of the others!”

“Great thanks to you, sir. I will go and second Kazuma.”

So Matayémon went to help Kazuma, whilst his second and the infantry soldiers kept back the surviving Rônins, who, already wearied by their fight with Matayémon, were unfit for any further exertion. Kazuma meanwhile was still fighting with Matagorô, and the issue of the conflict was doubtful; and Takénouchi Gentan, in his attempt to rescue Matagorô, was being kept at bay by Magohachi, who, weakened by his wounds, and blinded by the blood which was streaming into his eyes from a cut in the forehead, had given himself up for lost when Matayémon came and cried—

“Be of good cheer, Magohachi; it is I, Matayémon, who have come to the rescue. You are badly hurt get out of harm’s way, and rest yourself.”

Then Magohachi, who until then had been kept up by his anxiety for Kazuma’s safety, gave in, and fell fainting from loss of blood; and Matayémon worsted and slew Gentan; and even then, although he had received two wounds, he was not exhausted, but drew near to Kazuma and said—

“Courage, Kazuma! The Rônins are all killed, and there now remains only Matagorô, your father’s murderer. Fight and win!”

The youth, thus encouraged, redoubled his efforts; but Matagorô, losing heart, quailed and fell. So Kazuma’s vengeance was fulfilled, and the desire of his heart was accomplished.

The two faithful retainers, who had died in their loyalty, were buried with great ceremony, and Kazuma carried the head of Matagorô and piously laid it upon his father’s tomb.

So ends the tale of Kazuma’s revenge.

* * *

I fear that stories of which killing and bloodshed form the principal features can hardly enlist much sympathy in these peaceful days. Still, when such tales are based upon history, they are interesting to students of social phenomena. The story of Kazuma’s revenge is mixed up with events which at the present time are peculiarly significant: I mean the feud between the great Daimios and the Hatamotos. Those who have followed the modern history of Japan will see that the recent struggle, which has ended in the ruin of the Tycoon’s power and the abolition of his

office, was the outburst of a hidden fire which had been smouldering for centuries. But the repressive might had been gradually weakened, and contact with Western powers had rendered still more odious a feudality which men felt to be out of date. The revolution which has ended in the triumph of the Daimios over the Tycoon, is also the triumph of the vassal over his feudal lord, and is the harbinger of political life to the people at large. In the time of Iyéyasu the burden might be hateful, but it had to be borne; and so it would have been to this day, had not circumstances from without broken the spell. The Japanese Daimio, in advocating the isolation of his country, was hugging the very yoke which he hated. Strange to say, however, there are still men who, while they embrace the new political creed, yet praise the past, and look back with regret upon the day when Japan stood alone, without part or share in the great family of nations.

Note—*Hatamoto*. This word means “*under the flag*.” The Hatamotos were men who, as their name implied, rallied round the standard of the Shogun, or Tycoon, in war-time. They were eighty thousand in number. When Iyéyasu left the Province of Mikawa and became Shogun, the retainers whom he ennobled, and who received from him grants of hand yielding revenue to the amount of ten thousand kokus of rice a year, and from that down to one hundred kokus, were called *Hatamoto*. In return for these grants of land, the Hatamotos had in war-time to furnish a contingent of soldiers in proportion to their revenue. For every thousand kokus of rice five men were required. Those Hatamotos whose revenue fell short of a thousand kokus substituted a quota of money. In time of peace most of the minor offices of the Tycoon’s government were filled by Hatamotos, the more important places being held by the Fudai, or vassal Daimios of the Shogun. Seven years ago, in imitation of the customs of foreign nations, a standing army was founded; and then the Hatamotos had to contribute their quota of men or of money, whether the country were at peace or at war. When the Shogun was reduced in 1868 to the rank of a simple Daimio, his revenue of eight million kokus reverted to the Government, with the exception of seven hundred thousand kokus. The title of Hatamoto exists no more, and those who until a few months ago held the rank are for the most part ruined or dispersed. From having been perhaps the proudest and most overbearing class in Japan, they are driven to the utmost straits of poverty. Some have gone into trade, with the heirlooms of their families as their stock; others are wandering through the country as Rônins; while a small minority have been allowed to follow the fallen fortunes of their master’s family, the present chief of which is known as the Prince of Tokugawa. Thus are the eighty thousand dispersed.

The koku of rice, in which all revenue is calculated, is of varying value. At the cheapest it is worth rather more than a pound sterling, and sometimes almost three times as much. The salaries of officials being paid in rice, it follows that there is a large and influential class throughout the country who are interested in keeping up the price of the staple article of food. Hence the opposition with which a free trade in rice has met, even in famine times. Hence also the frequent so-called “Rice Riots.”

The amounts at which the lands formerly held by the chief Daimios, but now patriotically given up by them to the Mikado, were assessed, sound fabulous. The Prince of Kaga alone had an income of more than one million two hundred thousand kokus. Yet these great proprietors were, latterly at least, embarrassed men. They had many thousand mouths to feed, and were mulcted of their dues right and left; while their mania for buying foreign ships and munitions of war, often at exorbitant prices, had plunged them heavily in debt.