

# A Story of the Otokodaté of Yedo;

*Being the Supplement of  
The Story of Gompachi and Komurasaki  
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The word Otokodaté occurs several times in these Tales; and as I cannot convey its full meaning by a simple translation, I must preserve it in the text, explaining it by the following note, taken from the Japanese of a native scholar.

The Otokodaté were friendly associations of brave men bound together by an obligation to stand by one another in weal or in woe, regardless of their own lives, and without inquiring into one another's antecedents. A bad man, however, having joined the Otokodaté must forsake his evil ways; for their principle was to treat the oppressor as an enemy, and to help the feeble as a father does his child. If they had money, they gave it to those that had none, and their charitable deeds won for them the respect of all men. The head of the society was called its "Father;" if any of the others, who were his apprentices, were homeless, they lived with the Father and served him, paying him at the same time a small fee, in consideration of which, if they fell sick or into misfortune, he took charge of them and assisted them.

The Father of the Otokodaté pursued the calling of farming out coolies to the Daimios and great personages for their journeys to and from Yedo, and in return for this received from them rations in rice. He had more influence with the lower classes even than the officials; and if the coolies had struck work or refused to accompany a Daimio on his journey, a word from the Father would produce as many men as might be required. When Prince Tokugawa Iyémochi, the last but one of the Shoguns, left Yedo for Kiyôto, one Shimmon Tatsugorô, chief of the Otokodaté, undertook the management of his journey, and some three or four years ago was raised to the dignity of Hatamoto for many faithful services. After the battle of Fushimi, and the abolition of the Shogunate, he accompanied the last of the Shoguns in his retirement.

In old days there were also Otokodaté among the Hatamotos; this was after the civil wars of the time of Iyéyasu, when, though the country was at peace, the minds of men were still in a state of high excitement, and could not be reconciled to the dulness of a state of rest; it followed that broils and faction fights were continually taking place among the young men of the Samurai class, and that those who distinguished themselves by their personal strength and valour were looked up to as captains. Leagues after the manner of those existing among the German students were formed in different quarters of the city, under various names, and used to fight for the honour of victory. When the country became more thoroughly tranquil, the custom of forming these leagues amongst gentlemen fell into disuse.

The past tense is used in speaking even of the Otokodaté of the lower classes; for although they nominally exist, they have no longer the power and importance which they enjoyed at the time to which these stories belong. They then, like the 'prentices of Old London, played a considerable part in the society of the great cities, and that man was lucky, were he gentle Samurai or simple wardsman, who could claim the Father of the Otokodaté for his friend.

The word, taken by itself, means a manly or plucky fellow.

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Chôbei of Bandzuin was the chief of the Otokodaté of Yedo. He was originally called Itarô, and was the son of a certain Rônin who lived in the country. One day, when he was only ten years of age, he went out with a playfellow to bathe in the river; and as the two were playing they quarrelled over their game, and Itarô, seizing the other boy, threw him into the river and drowned him.

Then he went home, and said to his father—

“I went to play by the river to-day, with a friend; and as he was rude to sue, I threw him into the water and killed him.”

When his father heard him speak thus, quite calmly, as if nothing had happened, he was thunderstruck, and said—

“This is indeed a fearful thing. Child as you are, you will have to pay the penalty of your deed; so to-night you must fly to Yedo in secret, and take service with some noble Samurai, and perhaps in time you may become a soldier yourself.”

With these words he gave him twenty ounces of silver and a fine sword, made by the famous swordsmith Rai Kunitoshi, and sent him out of the province with all despatch. The following morning the parents of the murdered child came to claim that Itarô should be given up to their vengeance but it was too late, and all they could do was to bury their child and mourn for his loss.

Itarô made his way to Yedo in hot haste, and there found employment as a shop-boy; but soon tiring of that sort of life, and burning to become a soldier, he found means at last to enter the service of a certain Hatamoto called Sakurai Shôzayémon, and changed his name to Tsunéhei. Now this Sakurai Shôzayémon had a son, called Shônosuké, a young man in his seventeenth year, who grew so fond of Tsunéhei that he took him with him wherever he went, and treated him in all ways as an equal.

When Shônosuké went to the fencing-school Tsunéhei would accompany him, and thus, as he was by nature strong and active, soon became a good swordsman.

One day, when Shôzayémon had gone out, his son Shônosuké said to Tsunéhei—

“You know how fond my father is of playing at football: it must be great sport. As he has gone out to-day, suppose you and I have a game?”

“That will be rare sport,” answered Tsunéhei. “Let us make haste and play, before my lord comes borne.”

So the two boys went out into the garden, and began trying to kick the football; but, lacking skill, do what they would, they could not lift it from the ground. At last Shônosuké, with a vigorous kick, raised the football; but, having missed his aim, it went tumbling over the wall into the next garden, which belonged to one Hikosaka Zempachi, a teacher of lance exercise, who was known to be a surly, ill-tempered fellow.

“Oh, dear what shall we do?” said Shônosuké. “We have lost my father’s football in his absence; and if we go and ask for it back from that churlish neighbour of ours, we shall only be scolded and sworn at for our pains.”

“Oh, never mind,” answered Tsunéhei; “I will go and apologize for our carelessness, and get the football back.”

“Well, but then you will be chidden, and I don’t want that.”

“Never mind me. Little care I for his cross words.” So Tsunéhei went to the next-door house to reclaim the ball.

Now it so happened that Zempachi, the surly neighbour, had been walking in his garden whilst the two youths were playing; and as he was admiring the beauty of his favourite

chrysanthemums, the football came flying over the wail and struck him full in the face. Zempachi, not used to anything but flattery and coaxing, flew into a violent rage at this; and while he was thinking how he would revenge himself upon any one who might be sent to ask for the lost ball, Tsunéhei came in, and said to one of Zempachi's servants—

"I am sorry to say that in my lord's absence I took his football, and, in trying to play with it, clumsily kicked it over your wall. I beg you to excuse my carelessness, and to be so good as to give me back the ball."

The servant went in and repeated this to Zempachi, who worked himself up into a great rage, and ordered Tsunéhei to be brought before him, and said—

"Here, fellow, is your name Tsunéhei'?"

"Yes, sir, at your service. I am almost afraid to ask pardon for my carelessness; but please forgive me, and let me have the ball."

"I thought your master, Shôzayémon, was to blame for this; but it seems that it was you who kicked the football."

"Yes, sir. I am sure I am very sorry for what I have done. Please, may I ask for the ball?" said Tsunéhei, bowing humbly.

For a while Zempachi made no answer, but at length he said—

"Do you know, villain, that your dirty football struck me in the face? I ought, by rights, to kill you on the spot for this; but I will spare your life this time, so take your football and be off." And with that he went up to Tsunéhei and beat him, and kicked him in the head, and spat in his face.

Then Tsunéhei, who up to that time had demeaned himself very humbly, in his eagerness to get back the football, jumped up in a fury, and said—

"I made ample apologies to you for my carelessness, and now you have insulted and struck me. Ill-mannered ruffian take back the ball,—I'll none of it;" and he drew his dirk, and cutting the football in two, threw it at Zempachi, and returned home.

But Zempachi, growing more and more angry, called one of his servants, and said to him—

"That fellow, Tsunéhei, has been most insolent: go next door and find out Shôzayémon, and tell him that I have ordered you to bring back Tsunéhei, that I may kill him."

So the servant went to deliver the message.

In the meantime Tsunéhei went back to his master's house; and when Shônosuké saw him, he said—

"Well, of course you have been ill treated; but did you get back the football?"

"When I went in, I made many apologies; but I was beaten, and kicked in the head, and treated with the greatest indignity. I would have killed that wretch, Zempachi, at once, but that I knew that, if I did so while I was yet a member of your household, I should bring trouble upon your family. For your sake I bore this ill-treatment patiently; but now I pray you let me take leave of you and become a Rônin, that I may be revenged upon this man."

"Think well what you are doing," answered Shônosuké. "After all, we have only lost a football; and my father will not care, nor upbraid us."

But Tsunéhei would not listen to him, and was bent upon wiping out the affront that he had received. As they were talking, the messenger arrived from Zempachi, demanding the surrender of Tsunéhei, on the ground that he had insulted him: to this Shônosuké replied that his father was away from home, and that in his absence he could do nothing.

At last Shôzayémon came home; and when he heard what had happened he was much grieved, and at a loss what to do, when a second messenger arrived from Zempachi, demanding that

Tsunéhei should be given up without delay. Then Shôzayémon, seeing that the matter was serious, called the youth to him, and said—

“This Zempachi is heartless and cruel, and if you go to his house will assuredly kill you; take, therefore, these fifty riyos, and fly to Osaka or Kiyôto, where you may safely set up in business.”

“Sir,” answered Tsunéhei, with tears of gratitude for his lord’s kindness, “from my heart I thank you for your great goodness; but I have been insulted and trampled upon, and, if I lay down my life in the attempt, I will repay Zempachi for what he has this day done.”

“Well, then, since you needs must be revenged, go and fight, and may success attend you I Still, as much depends upon the blade you carry, and I fear yours is likely to be but a sorry weapon, I will give you a sword;” and with this he offered Tsunéhei his own.

“Nay, my lord,” replied Tsunéhei; “I have a famous sword, by Rai Kunitoshi, which my father gave me. I have never shown it to your lordship, but I have it safely stowed away in my room.

When Shôzayémon saw and examined the sword, he admired it greatly, and said, “This is indeed a beautiful blade, and one on which you may rely. Take it, then, and bear yourself nobly in the fight; only remember that Zempachi is a cunning spearsman, and be sure to be very cautious.”

So Tsunéhei, after thanking his lord for his manifold kindnesses, took an affectionate leave, and went to Zempachi’s house, and said to the servant—

“It seems that your master wants to speak to me. Be so good as to take me to see him.”

So the servant led him into the garden, where Zempachi, spear in hand, was waiting to kill him. When Zempachi saw him, he cried out—

“Ha I so you have come back; and now for your insolence, this day I mean to kill you with my own hand.”

“Insolent yourself!” replied Tsunéhei. “Beast, and no Samurai! Come, let us see which of us is the better man.”

Furiously incensed, Zempachi thrust with his spear at Tsunéhei; but he, trusting to his good sword, attacked Zempachi, who, cunning warrior as he was, could gain no advantage. At last Zempachi, losing his temper, began fighting less carefully, so that Tsunéhei found an opportunity of cutting the shaft of his spear. Zempachi then drew his sword, and two of his retainers came up to assist him but Tsunéhei killed one of them, and wounded Zempachi in the forehead. The second retainer fled affrighted at the youth’s valour, and Zempachi was blinded by the blood which flowed from the wound on his forehead. Then Tsunéhei said—

“To kill one who is as a blind man were unworthy a soldier. Wipe the blood from your eyes, Sir Zempachi, and let us fight it out fairly.”

So Zempachi, wiping away his blood, bound a kerchief round his head, and fought again desperately. But at last the pain of his wound and the loss of blood overcame him, and Tsunéhei cut him down with a wound in the shoulder and easily despatched him.

Then Tsunéhei went and reported the whole matter to the Governor of Yedo, and was put in prison until an inquiry could be made. But the Chief Priest of Bandzuin, who had heard of the affair, went and told the governor all the bad deeds of Zempachi, and having procured Tsunéhei’s pardon, took him home and employed him as porter in the temple.

So Tsunéhei changed his name to Chôbei, and earned much respect in the neighbourhood, both for his talents and for his many good works. If any man were in distress, he would help him, heedless of his own advantage or danger, until men came to look up to him as to a father, and many youths joined him and became his apprentices. So he built a house at Hanakawado, in Asakusa, and lived there with his apprentices, whom he farmed out as spearsmen and footmen

to the Daimios and Hatamotos, taking for himself the title of their earnings. But if any of them were sick or in trouble, Chôbei would nurse and support them, and provide physicians and medicine. And the fame of his goodness went abroad until his apprentices were more than two thousand men, and were employed in every part of the city. But as for Chôbei, the more he prospered, the more he gave in charity, and all men praised his good and generous heart.

This was the time when the Hatamotos had formed themselves into bands of Otokodaté, of which Midzuno Jiurozayémon, Kondô Noborinosuké, and Abé Shirogorô were the chiefs. And the leagues of the nobles despised the leagues of the wardsmen, and treated them within scorn, and tried to put to shame Chôbei and his brave men; but the nobles' weapons recoiled upon themselves, and, whenever they tried to bring contempt upon Chôbei, they themselves were brought to ridicule. So there was great hatred on both sides.

One day, that Chôbei went to divert himself in a tea-house in the Yoshiwara, he saw a felt carpet spread in an upper room, which had been adorned as for some special occasion and he asked the master of the house what guest of distinction was expected. The landlord replied that my Lord Jiurozayémon, the chief of the Otokodaté of the Hatamotos, was due there that afternoon. On hearing this, Chôbei replied that as he much wished to meet my Lord Jiurozayémon, he would lie down and await his coming. The landlord was put out at this, and knew not what to say; but yet he dare not thwart Chôbei, the powerful chief of the Otokodaté. So Chôbei took off his clothes and laid himself down upon the carpet. After a while my Lord Jiurozayémon arrived, and going upstairs found a man of large stature lying naked upon the carpet which had been spread for him.

“What low ruffian is this?” shouted he angrily to the landlord.

“My lord, it is Chôbei, the chief of the Otokodaté,” answered the man, trembling.

Jiurozayémon at once suspected that Chôbei was doing this to insult him; so he sat down by the side of the sleeping man, and lighting his pipe began to smoke. When he had finished his pipe, he emptied the burning ashes into Chôbei's navel; but Chôbei, patiently bearing the pain, still feigned sleep. Ten times did Jiurozayémon fill his pipe,<sup>1</sup> and ten times he shook out the burning ashes on to Chôbei's navel; but he neither stirred nor spoke. Then Jiurozayémon, astonished at his fortitude, shook him, and roused him, saying—

“Chôbei! Chôbei! wake up, man.”

“What is the matter?” said Chôbei, rubbing his eyes as though he were awaking from a deep sleep; then seeing Jiurozayémon, he pretended to be startled, and said, “Oh, my lord, I know not who you are; but I have been very rude to your lordship. I was overcome with wine, and fell asleep: I pray your lordship to forgive me.”

“Is your name Chôbei?”

“Yes, my lord, at your service. A poor wardsmen, and ignorant of good manners, I have been very rude; but I pray your lordship to excuse my ill-breeding.”

“Nay, nay; we have all heard the fame of Chôbei, of Bandzuin, and I hold myself lucky to have met you this day. Let us be friends.”

“It is a great honour for a humble wardsmen to meet a nobleman face to face.”

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<sup>1</sup> The tiny Japanese pipe contains but two or three whiffs; and as the tobacco is rolled up tightly in the fingers before it is inserted, the ash, when shaken out, is a little fireball from which a second pipe is lighted.

As they were speaking, the waitresses brought in fish and wine, and Jiurozayémon pressed Chôbei to feast with him; and thinking to annoy Chôbei, offered him a large wine-cup,<sup>2</sup> which, however, he drank without shrinking, and then returned to his entertainer, who was by no means so well able to bear the fumes of the wine. Then Jiurozayémon hit upon another device for annoying Chôbei, and, hoping to frighten him, said—

“Here, Chôbei, let me offer you some fish;” and with those words he drew his sword, and, picking up a cake of baked fish upon the point of it, thrust it towards the wardsman’s mouth. Any ordinary man would have been afraid to accept the morsel so roughly offered; but Chôbei simply opened his mouth, and taking the cake off the sword’s point ate it without wincing. Whilst Jiurozayémon was wondering in his heart what manner of man this was, that nothing could daunt, Chôbei said to him—

“This meeting with your lordship has been an auspicious occasion to me, and I would fain ask leave to offer some humble gift to your lordship in memory of it.<sup>3</sup> Is there anything which your lordship would specially fancy?”

“I am very fond of cold macaroni.”

“Then I shall have the honour of ordering some for your lordship;” and with this Chôbei went downstairs, and calling one of his apprentices, named Tôken Gombei,<sup>4</sup> who was waiting for him, gave him a hundred riyos (about £28), and bade him collect all the cold macaroni to be found in the neighbouring cook-shops and pile it up in front of the tea-house. So Gombei went home, and, collecting Chôbei’s apprentices, sent them out in all directions to buy the macaroni. Jiurozayémon all this while was thinking of the pleasure he would have in laughing at Chôbei for offering him a mean and paltry present; but when, by degrees, the macaroni began to be piled mountain-high around the teahouse, he saw that he could not make a fool of Chôbei, and went home discomfited.

It has already been told how Shirai Gompachi was befriended and helped by Chôbei. His name will occur again in this story.

At this time there lived in the province of Yamato a certain Daimio, called Honda Dainaiki, who one day, when surrounded by several of his retainers, produced a sword, and bade them look at it and say from what smith’s workshop the blade had come.

“I think this must be a Masamuné blade,” said one Fuwa Banzayémon.

“No,” said Nagoya Sanza, after examining the weapon attentively, “this certainly is a Muramasa.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is an act of rudeness to offer a large wine-cup. As, however, the same cup is returned to the person who has offered it, the ill carries with it its own remedy. At a Japanese feast the same cup is passed from hand to hand, each person rinsing it in a bowl of water after using it, and before offering it to another.

<sup>3</sup> The giving of presents from inferiors to superiors is a common custom.

<sup>4</sup> *Tôken*, a nickname given to Gombei, after a savage dog that he killed. As a Chônin, or wardsman, he had no surname.

<sup>5</sup> The swords of Muramasa, although so finely tempered that they are said to cut hard, iron as though it were a melon, have the reputation of being unlucky: they are supposed by the superstitious to hunger after taking men’s lives, and to be unable to repose in their scabbard. The principal duty of a sword is to preserve tranquillity in the world, by punishing the wicked and protecting the good. But the bloodthirsty swords of Muramasa rather have the effect of maddening their owners, so that they either kill others indiscriminately or commit suicide. At the end of the sixteenth century Prince Tokugawa Iyêyasu was in the habit of carrying a spear made by Muramasa with which he often scratched or cut himself by mistake. Hence the Tokugawa family avoid girding on Muramasa blades, which are supposed to be specially unlucky to their race. The murders of Gompachi, who wore a sword by this maker, also contributed to give his weapons a bad name.

A third Samurai, named Takagi Umanojô, pronounced it to be the work of Shidzu Kanenji; and as they could not agree, but each maintained his opinion, their lord sent for a famous connoisseur to decide the point; and the sword proved, as Sanza had said, to be a genuine Muramasa. Sanza was delighted at the verdict; but the other two invent home rather crestfallen. Umanojô, although he had been worsted in the argument, bore no malice nor ill-will in his heart; but Banzayémon, who was a vain-glorious personage, puffed up with the idea of his own importance, conceived a spite against Sanza, and watched for an opportunity to put him to shame. At last, one day Banzayémon, eager to be revenged upon Sanza, went to the Prince, and said, "Your lordship ought to see Sanza fence; his swordsmanship is beyond all praise. I know that I am no match for him; still, if it will please your lordship, I will try a bout with him;" and the Prince, who was a mere stripling, and thought it would be rare sport, immediately sent for Sanza and desired he would fence with Banzayémon. So the two went out into the garden, and stood up facing each other, armed with wooden swords.

Now Banzayémon was proud of his skill, and thought he had no equal in fencing; so he expected to gain an easy victory over Sanza, and promised himself the luxury of giving his adversary a beating that should fully make up for the mortification which he had felt in the matter of the dispute about the sword. It happened, however, that he had undervalued the skill of Sanza, who, when he saw that his adversary was attacking him savagely and in good earnest, by a rapid blow struck Banzayémon so sharply on the wrist that he dropped the sword, and, before he could pick it up again, delivered a second cut on the shoulder, which sent him rolling over in the dust. All the officers present, seeing this, praised Sanza's skill, and Banzayémon, utterly stricken with shame, ran away home and hid himself.

After this affair Sanza rose high in the favour of his lord; and Banzayémon, who was more than ever jealous of him, feigned sickness, and stayed at home devising schemes for Sanza's ruin.

Now it happened that the Prince, wishing to have the Muramasa blade mounted, sent for Sanza and entrusted it to his care, ordering him to employ the most cunning workmen in the manufacture of the scabbard-hilt and ornaments; and Sanza, having received the blade, took it home, and put it carefully away. When Banzayémon heard of this, he was overjoyed; for he saw that his opportunity for revenge had come. He determined, if possible, to kill Sanza, but at any rate to steal the sword which had been committed to his care by the Prince, knowing full well that if Sanza lost the sword he and his family would be ruined. Being a single man, without wife or child, he sold his furniture, and, turning all his available property into money, made ready to fly the country. When his preparations were concluded, he went in the middle of the night to Sanza's house and tried to get in by stealth; but the doors and shutters were all carefully bolted from the inside, and there was no hole by which he could effect an entrance. All was still,

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The swords of one Tōshirō Yoshimitsu, on the other hand, are specially suspicious to the Tokugawa family, for the following reason. After Iyéyasu had been defeated by Takéta Katsuyori, at the battle of the river Tenrin, he took refuge in the house of a village doctor, intending to put an end to his existence by *hara-kiri*, and drawing his dirk, which was made by Yoshimitsu, tried to plunge it into his belly, when, to his surprise, the blade turned. Thinking that the dirk must be a bad one, he took up an iron mortar for grinding medicines and tried it upon that, and the point entered and transfixed the mortar. He was about to stab himself a second time, when his followers, who had missed him, and had been searching for him everywhere, came up, and seeing their master about to kill himself, stayed his hand, and took away the dirk by force. Then they set him upon his horse, and compelled him to fly to his own province of Mikawa, whilst they kept his pursuers at bay. After this, when, by the favour of Heaven, Iyéyasu became Shogun, it was considered that of a surety there must have been a good spirit in the blade that refused to drink his blood and ever since that time the blades of Yoshimitsu have been considered lucky in his family.

however, and the people of the house were evidently fast asleep; so he climbed up to the second story, and, having contrived to unfasten a window, made his way in. 'With soft, cat-like footsteps he crept downstairs, and, looking into one of the rooms, saw Sanza and his wife sleeping on the mats, with their little son Kosanza, a boy of thirteen, curled up in his quilt between them. The light in the night-lamp was at its last flicker, but, peering through the gloom, he could just see the Prince's famous Muramasa sword lying on a sword-rack in the raised part of the room; so he crawled stealthily along until he could reach it, and stuck it in his girdle. Then, drawing near to Sanza, he bestrode his sleeping body, and, brandishing the sword, made a thrust at his throat; but in his excitement his hand shook, so that he missed his aim, and only scratched Sanza, who, waking with a start and trying to jump up, felt himself held down by a man standing over him. Stretching out his hands, he would have wrestled with his enemy; when Banzayémon, leaping back, kicked over the night-lamp, and throwing open the shutters, dashed into the garden. Snatching up his sword, Sanza rushed out after him, and his wife, having lit a lantern and armed herself with a halberd,<sup>6</sup> went out, with her son Kosanza, who carried a drawn dirk, to help her husband. Then Banzayémon, who was hiding in the shadow of a large pine-tree, seeing the lantern and dreading detection, seized a stone and hurled it at the light, and, chancing to strike it, put it out, and then scrambling over the fence unseen, fled into the darkness. When Sanza had searched all over the garden in vain, he returned to his room and examined his wound, which proving very slight, he began to look about to see whether the thief had carried off anything; but when his eye fell upon the place where the Muramasa sword had lain, he saw that it was gone. He hunted everywhere, but it was not to be found. The precious blade with which his Prince had entrusted him had been stolen, and the blame would fall heavily upon him. Filled with grief and shame at the loss, Sanza and his wife and child remained in great anxiety until the morning broke, when he reported the matter to one of the Prince's councillors, and waited in seclusion until he should receive his lord's commands.

It soon became known that Banzayémon, who had fled the province, was the thief; and the councillors made their report accordingly to the Prince, who, although he expressed his detestation of the mean action of Banzayémon, could not absolve Sanza from blame, in that he had not taken better precautions to insure the safety of the sword that had been committed to his trust. It was decided, therefore, that Sanza should be dismissed from his service, and that his goods should be confiscated; with the proviso that should he be able to find Banzayémon, and recover the lost Muramasa blade, he should be restored to his former position. Sanza, who from the first had made up his mind that his punishment would be severe, accepted the decree without a murmur; and, having committed his wife and son to the care of his relations, prepared to leave the country as a Rônin and search for Banzayémon.

Before starting, however, he thought that he would go to his brother-officer, Takagi Umanojô, and consult with him as to what course he should pursue to gain his end. But this Umanojô, who was by nature a churlish fellow, answered him unkindly, and said—

"It is true that Banzayémon is a mean thief; but still it was through your carelessness that the sword was lost. It is of no avail your coming to me for help: you must get it back as best you may."

"Ah!" replied Sanza, "I see that you too bear me a grudge because I defeated you in the matter of the judgment of the sword. You are no better than Banzayémon yourself."

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<sup>6</sup> The halberd is the special arm of the Japanese woman of gentle blood. That which was used by Kasa Cozen, one of the ladies of Yoshitsuné, the hero of the twelfth century, is still preserved at Asakusa. In old-fashioned families young ladies are regularly instructed in fencing with the halberds.

And his heart was bitter against his fellow-men, and he left the house determined to kill Umanojô first and afterward to track out Banzayémon; so, pretending to start on his journey, he hid in an inn, and waited for an opportunity to attack Umanojô.

One day Umanojô, who was very fond of fishing, had taken his son Umanosuké, a lad of sixteen, down to the sea-shore with him; and as the two were enjoying themselves, all of a sudden they perceived a Samurai running towards them, and when he drew near they saw that it was Sanza. Umanojô, thinking that Sanza had come back in order to talk over some important matter, heft his angling and went to meet him. Then Sanza cried out—

“Now, Sir Umanojô, draw and defend yourself. What! were you in league with Banzayémon to vent your spite upon me? Draw, sir, draw! You have spirited away your accomplice; but, at any rate, you are here yourself, and shall answer for your deed. It is no use playing the innocent; your astonished face shall not save you. Defend yourself, coward and traitor!” and with these words Sanza flourished his naked sword.

“Nay, Sir Sanza,” replied the other, anxious by a soft answer to turn away his wrath; “I am innocent of this deed. Waste not your valour on so poor a cause.

“Lying knave!” said Sanza; “think not that you can impose upon me. I know your treacherous heart;” and, rushing upon Umanojô, he cut him on the forehead so that he fell in agony upon the sand.

Umanosuké in the meanwhile, who had been fishing at some distance from his father, rushed up when he saw him in this perilous situation and threw a stone at Sanza, hoping to distract his attention; but, before he could reach the spot, Sanza had delivered the death-blow, and Umanojô lay a corpse upon the beach.

“Stop, Sir Sanza—murderer of my father!” cried Umanosuké, drawing his sword, “stop and do battle with me, that I may avenge his death.”

“That you should wish to slay your father’s enemy,” replied Sanza, “is but right and proper; and although I had just cause of quarrel with your father, and killed him, as a Samurai should, yet would I gladly forfeit my life to you here; but my life is precious to me for one purpose—that I may punish Banzayémon and get back the stolen sword. When I shall have restored that sword to my lord, then will I give you your revenge, and you may kill me. A soldier’s word is truth; but, as a pledge that I will fulfil my promise, I will give to you, as hostages, my wife and boy. Stay your avenging hand, I pray you, until my desire shall have been attained.”

Umanosuké, who was a brave and honest youth, as famous in the clan for the goodness of his heart as for his skill in the use of arms, when he heard Sanza’s humble petition, relented, and said—

“I agree to wait, and will take your wife and boy as hostages for your return.”

“I humbly thank you,” said Sanza. “When I shall have chastised Banzayémon, I will return, and you shall claim your revenge.”

So Sanza went his way to Yedo to seek for Banzayémon, and Umanosuké mourned over his father’s grave.

Now Banzayémon, when he arrived in Yedo, found himself friendless and without the means of earning his living, when by accident he heard of the fame of Chôbei of Bandzuin, the chief of the Otokodaté, to whom he applied for assistance; and having entered the fraternity, supported himself by giving fencing-lessons. He had been plying this trade for some time, and had earned some little reputation, when Sanza reached the city and began his search for him. But the days and months passed away, and, after a year’s fruitless seeking, Sanza, who had spent all his money without obtaining a clue to the whereabouts of his enemy, was sorely perplexed, and was

driven to live by his wits as a fortune-teller. Work as he would, it was a hard matter for him to gain the price of his daily food, and, in spite of all his pains, his revenge seemed as far off as ever, when he bethought him that the Yoshiwara was one of the most bustling places in the city, and that if he kept watch there, sooner or later he would be sure to fall in with Banzayémon. So he bought a hat of plaited bamboo, that completely covered his face, and lay in wait at the Yoshiwara.

One day Banzayémon and two of Chôbei's apprentices Token Gombei and Shirobei, who, from his wild and indocile nature, was surnamed "the Colt," were amusing themselves and drinking in an upper story of a tea-house in the Yoshiwara, when Tôken Gombei, happening to look down upon the street below, saw a Samurai pass by, poorly clad in worn-out old clothes, but whose poverty-stricken appearance contrasted with his proud and haughty bearing.

"Look there!" said Gombei, calling the attention of the others; "look at that Samurai. Dirty and ragged as his coat is, how easy it is to see that he is of noble birth! Let us wardsmen dress ourselves up in never so fine clothes, we could not look as he does."

"Ay," said Shirobei, "I wish we could make friends with him, and ask him up here to drink a cup of wine with us. However, it would not be seemly for us wardsmen to go and invite a person of his condition."

"We can easily get over that difficulty," said Banzayémon. "As I am a Samurai myself, there will be no impropriety in my going and saying a few civil words to him, and bringing him in."

The other two having joyfully accepted the offer, Banzayémon ran downstairs, and went up to the strange Samurai and saluted him, saying—

"I pray you to wait a moment, Sir Samurai. My name is Fuwa Banzayémon at your service. I am a Rônin, as I judge from your appearance that you are yourself I hope you will not think me rude if I venture to ask you to honour me with your friendship, and to come into this tea-house to drink a cup of wine with me and two of my friends."

The strange Samurai, who was no other than Sanza, looking at the speaker through the interstices of his deep bamboo hat, and recognizing his enemy Banzayémon, gave a start of surprise, and, uncovering his head, said sternly—

"Have you forgotten my face, Banzayémon?"

For a moment Banzayémon was taken aback, but quickly recovering himself, he replied, "Ah! Sir Sanza, you may well be angry with me; but since I stole the Muramasa sword and fled to Yedo I have known no peace: I have been haunted by remorse for my crime. I shall not resist your vengeance: do with me as it shall seem best to you; or rather take my life, and let there be an end of this quarrel."

"Nay," answered Sanza, "to kill a man who repents him of his sins is a base and ignoble action. When you stole from me the Muramasa blade which had been confided to my care by my lord, I became a disgraced and ruined man. Give me back that sword, that I may lay it before my lord, and I will spare your life. I seek to slay no man needlessly."

"Sir Sanza, I thank you for your mercy. At this moment I have not the sword by me, but if you will go into yonder tea-house and wait awhile, I will fetch it and deliver it into your hands."

Sanza having consented to this, the two men entered the tea-house, where Banzayémon's two companions were waiting for them. But Banzayémon, ashamed of his own evil deed, still pretended that Sanza was a stranger, and introduced him as such, saying—

"Come, Sir Samurai, since we have the honour of your company, let me offer you a wine-cup."

Banzayémon and the two men pressed the wine-cup upon Sanza so often that the fumes gradually got into his head and he fell asleep; the two wardsmen, seeing this, went out for a

walk, and Banzayémon, left alone with the sleeping man, began to revolve fresh plots against him in his mind. On a sudden, a thought struck him. Noiselessly seizing Sanza's sword, which he had laid aside on entering the room, he stole softly downstairs with it, and, carrying it into the back yard, pounded and blunted its edge with a stone, and having made it useless as a weapon, he replaced it in its scabbard, and running upstairs again laid it in its place without disturbing Sanza, who, little suspecting treachery, lay sleeping off the effects of the wine. At last, however, he awoke, and, ashamed at having been overcome by drink, he said to Banzayémon—

“Come, Banzayémon, we have dallied too long; give me the Muramasa sword, and let me go.”

“Of course,” replied the other, sneeringly, “I am longing to give it back to you; but unfortunately, in my poverty, I have been obliged to pawn it for fifty ounces of silver. If you have so much money about you, give it to me and I will return the sword to you..”

“Wretch!” cried Sanza, seeing that Banzayémon was trying to foul him, “have I not had enough of your vile tricks? At any rate, if I cannot get back the sword, your head shall be laid before my lord in its place. Come,” added he, stamping his foot impatiently, “defend yourself.”

“With all my heart. But not here in this tea-house. Let us go to the Mound, and fight it out.”

“Agreed! There is no need for us to bring trouble on the landlord. Come to the Mound of the Yoshiwara.”

So they went to the Mound, and drawing their swords, began to fight furiously. As the news soon spread abroad through the Yoshiwara that a duel was being fought upon the Mound, the people flocked out to see the sight; and among them came Tôken Gombei and Shirobei, Banzayémon's companions, who, when they saw that the combatants were their own friend and the strange Samurai, tried to interfere and stop the fight, but, being hindered by the thickness of the crowd, remained as spectators. The two men fought desperately, each driven by fierce rage against the other; but Sanza, who was by far the better fencer of the two, once, twice, and again dealt blows which should have cut Banzayémon down, and yet no blood came forth. Sanza, astonished at this, put forth all his strength, and fought so skilfully, that all the bystanders applauded him, and Banzayémon, though he knew his adversary's sword to be blunted, was so terrified that he stumbled and fell. Sanza, brave soldier that he was, scorned to strike a fallen foe, and bade him rise and fight again. So they engaged again, and Sanza, who from the beginning had had the advantage, slipped and fell in his turn; Banzayémon, forgetting the mercy which had been shown to him, rushed up, with bloodthirsty joy glaring in his eyes, and stabbed Sanza in the side as he lay on the ground. Faint as he was, he could not lift his hand to save himself; and his craven foe was about to strike him again, when the bystanders all cried shame upon his baseness. Then Gombei and Shirobei lifted up their voices and said—

“Hold, coward! have you forgotten how your own life was spared but a moment since? ~~Be~~ast of a Samurai, we have been your friends hitherto, but now behold in us the avengers of this brave man.”

With these words the two men drew their dirks, and the spectators fell back as they rushed in upon Banzayémon, who, terror-stricken by their fierce looks and words, fled without having dealt the deathblow to Sanza. They tried to pursue him, but he made good his escape, so the two men returned to help the wounded man. When he came to himself by dint of their kind treatment, they spoke to him and comforted him, and asked him what province he came from, that they might write to his friends and tell them what had befallen him. Sanza, in a voice faint from pain and loss of blood, told them his name and the story of the stolen sword, and of his enmity against Banzayémon. “But,” said he, “just now, when I was fighting, I struck Banzayémon more than once, and without effect. How could that have been?” Then they looked at his sword, which had

fallen by his side, and saw that the edge was all broken away. More than ever they felt indignant at the baseness of Banzayémon's heart, and redoubled their kindness to Sanza.; but, in spite of all their efforts, he grew weaker and weaker, until at last his breathing ceased altogether. So they buried the corpse honourably in an adjoining temple, and wrote to Sanza's wife and son, describing to them the manner of his death.

Now when Sanza's wife, who had long been anxiously expecting her husband's return, opened the letter and learned the cruel circumstances of his death, she and her son Kosanza mourned bitterly over his loss. Then Kosanza, who was now fourteen years old, said to his mother—"Take comfort, mother; for I will go to Yedo and seek out this Banzayémon, my father's murderer, and I will surely avenge his death. Now, therefore, make ready all that I need for this journey."

And as they were consulting over the manner of their revenge, Umanosuké, the son of Umanojô, whom Sanza had slain, having heard of the death of his father's enemy, came to the house. But he came with no hostile intent. True, Sanza had killed his father, but the widow and the orphan were guiltless, and he bore them no ill-will; on the contrary, he felt that Banzayémon was their common enemy. It was he who by his evil deeds had been the cause of all the mischief that had arisen, and now again, by murdering Sanza, he had robbed Umanosuké of his revenge. In this spirit he said to Kosanza—

"Sir Kosanza, I hear that your father has been cruelly murdered by Banzayémon at Yedo. I know that you will avenge the death of your father, as the son of a soldier should: if, therefore, you will accept my poor services, I will be your second, and will help you to the best of my ability. Banzayémon shall be my enemy, as he is yours."

"Nay, Sir Umanosuké, although I thank you from my heart, I cannot accept this favour at your hands. My father Sanza slew your noble father: that you should requite this misfortune thus is more than kind, but I cannot think of suffering you to risk your life on my behalf."

"Listen to me," replied Umanosuké, smiling, "and you will think it less strange that I should offer to help you. Last year, when my father lay a bleeding corpse on the sea-shore, your father made a covenant with me that he would return to give me my revenge, so soon as he should have regained the stolen sword. Banzayémon, by murdering him on the Mound of the Yoshiwara, has thwarted me in this; and now upon whom can I avenge my father's death but upon him whose baseness was indeed its cause? Now, therefore, I am determined to go with you to Yedo, and not before the murders of our two fathers shall have been fully atoned for will we return to our own country."

When Kosanza heard this generous speech, he could not conceal his admiration; and the widow, prostrating herself at Umanosuké's feet, shed tears of gratitude.

The two youths, having agreed to stand by one another, made all ready for their journey, and obtained leave from their prince to go in search of the traitor Banzayémon. They reached Yedo without meeting with any adventures, and, taking up their abode at a cheap mum, began to make their inquiries; but, although they sought far and wide, they could learn no tidings of their enemy. When three months had passed thus, Kosanza began to grow faint-hearted at their repeated failures; but Umanosuké supported and comforted him, urging him to fresh efforts. But soon a great misfortune befell them: Kosanza fell sick with ophthalmia, and neither the tender nursing of his friend, nor the drugs and doctors upon whom Umanosuké spent all their money, had any effect on the suffering boy, who soon became stone blind. Friendless and penniless, the one deprived of his eyesight and only a clog upon the other, the two youths were thrown upon their own resources. Then Umanosuké, reduced to the last extremity of distress, was forced to

lead out Kosanza to Asakusa to beg sitting by the roadside, whilst he himself, wandering hither and thither, picked up what he could from the charity of those who saw his wretched plight. But all this while he never lost sight of his revenge, and almost thanked the chance which had made him a beggar, for the opportunity which it gave him of hunting out strange and hidden haunts of vagabond life into which in his more prosperous condition he could not have penetrated. So he walked to and fro through the city, leaning on a stout staff, in which he had hidden his sword, waiting patiently for fortune to bring him face to face with Banzayémon.

Now Banzayémon, after he had killed Sanza on the Mound of the Yoshiwara, did not dare to show his face again in the house of Chôbei, the Father of the Otokodaté; for he knew that the two men, Tôken Gombei and Shirobei "the loose Colt," would not only bear an evil report of him, but would even kill him if he fell into their hands, so great had been their indignation at his cowardly conduct; so he entered a company of mountebanks, and earned his living by showing tricks of swordsmanship, and selling tooth-powder at the Okuyama, at Asakusa. One day, as he was going towards Asakusa to ply his trade, he caught sight of a blind beggar, in whom, in spite of his poverty-stricken and altered appearance, he recognized the son of his enemy. Rightly he judged that, in spite of the boy's apparently helpless condition, the discovery boded no weal for him; so mounting to the upper story of a teahouse hard by, he watched to see who should come to Kosanza's assistance. Nor had he to wait long, for presently he saw a second beggar come up and speak words of encouragement and kindness to the blind youth; and looking attentively, he saw that the new-comer was Umanosuké. Having thus discovered who was on his track, he went home and sought means of killing the two beggars; so he lay in wait and traced them to the poor hut where they dwelt, and one night, when he knew Umanosuké to be absent, he crept in. Kosanza, being blind, thought that the footsteps were those of Umanosuké, and jumped up to welcome him; but he, in his heartless cruelty, which not even the boy's piteous state could move, slew Kosanza as he helplessly stretched out his hands to feel for his friend. The deed was yet unfinished when Umanosuké returned, and, hearing a scuffle inside the hut, drew the sword which was hidden in his staff and rushed in; but Banzayémon, profiting by the darkness, eluded him and fled from the hut. Umanosuké followed swiftly after him; but just as he was on the point of catching him, Banzayémon, making a sweep backwards with his drawn sword, wounded Umanosuké in the thigh, so that he stumbled and fell, and the murderer, swift of foot, made good his escape. The wounded youth tried to pursue him again, but being compelled by the pain of his wound to desist, returned home and found his blind companion lying dead, weltering in his own blood. Cursing his unhappy fate, he called in the beggars of the fraternity to which he belonged, and between them they buried Kosanza, and he himself being too poor to procure a surgeon's aid, or to buy healing medicaments for his wound, became a cripple.

It was at this time that Shirai Gompachi, who was living under the protection of Chôbei, the Father of the Otokodaté, was in love with Komurasaki, the beautiful courtesan who lived at the sign of the Three Sea-shores, in the Yoshiwara. He had long exhausted the scanty supplies which he possessed, and was now in the habit of feeding his purse by murder and robbery, that he might have means to pursue his wild and extravagant life. One night, when he was out on his cut-throat business, his fellows, who had long suspected that he was after no good, sent nine of their number, named Seibei, to watch him. Gompachi, little dreaming that any one was following him, swaggered along the street until he fell in with a wardman, whom he cut down and robbed; but the booty proving small, he waited for a second chance, and, seeing a light moving in the distance, hid himself in the shadow of a large tub for catching rain-water till the bearer of the lantern should come up. When the man drew near, Gompachi saw that he was dressed as a

traveller, and wore a bug dirk; so he sprung out from his lurking-place and made to kill him; but the traveller nimbly jumped on one side, and proved no mean adversary, for he drew his dirk and fought stoutly for his life. However, he was no match for so skilful a swordsman as Gompachi, who, after a sharp struggle, despatched him, and carried off his purse, which contained two hundred riyos. Overjoyed at having found so rich a prize, Gompachi was making off for the Yoshiwara, when Seibei, who, horrorstricken, had seen both murders, came up and began to upbraid him for his wickedness. But Gompachi was so smooth-spoken and so well liked by his comrades, that he easily persuaded Seibei to hush the matter up, and accompany him to the Yoshiwara for a little diversion. As they were talking by the way, Seibei said to Gompachi—

“I bought a new dirk the other day, but I have not had an opportunity to try it yet. You have had so much experience in swords that you ought to be a good judge. Pray look at this dirk, and tell me whether you think it good for anything.”

“We’ll soon see what sort of metal it is made of,” answered Gompachi. “We’ll just try it on the first beggar we come across.”

At first Seibei was horrified by this cruel proposal, but by degrees he yielded to his companion’s persuasions; and so they went on their way until Seibei spied out a crippled beggar lying asleep on the bank outside the Yoshiwara. The sound of their footsteps aroused the beggar, who seeing a Samurai and a wardsmen pointing at him, and evidently speaking about him, thought that their consultation could bode him no good. So he pretended to be still asleep, watching them carefully all the while; and when Seibei went up to him, brandishing his dirk, the beggar, avoiding the blow, seized Seibei’s arm, and twisting it round, flung him into the ditch below. Gompachi, seeing his companion’s discomfiture, attacked the beggar, who, drawing a sword from his staff, made such lightning-swift passes that, crippled though he was, and unable to move his legs freely, Gompachi could not overpower him; and although Seibei crawled out of the ditch and came to his assistance, the beggar, nothing daunted, dealt his blows about him to such good purpose that he wounded Seibei in the temple and arm. Then Gompachi, reflecting that after all he had no quarrel with the beggar, and that he had better attend to Seibei’s wounds than go on fighting to no purpose, drew Seibei away, leaving the beggar, who was too lame to follow them, in peace. When he examined Seibei’s wounds, he found that they were so severe that they must give up their night’s frolic and go home. So they went back to the house of Chôbei, the Father of the Otokodaté, and Seibei, afraid to show himself with his sword-cuts, feigned sickness, and went to bed. On the following morning Chôbei, happening to need his apprentice Seibei’s services, sent for him, and was told that he was sick; so he went to the room, where he lay abed, and, to his astonishment, saw the cut upon his temple. At first the wounded man refused to answer any questions as to how he had been hurt; but at last, on being pressed by Chôbei, he told the whole story of what had taken place the night before. When Chôbei heard the tale, he guessed that the valiant beggar must be some noble Samurai in disguise, who, having a wrong to avenge, was biding his time to meet with his enemy; and wishing to help so brave a man, he went in the evening, with his two faithful apprentices, Tôken Gombéi and Shirobei “the loose Colt,” to the bank outside the Yoshiwara to seek out the beggar. The latter, not one whit frightened by the adventure of the previous night, had taken his place as usual, and was lying on the bank, when Chôbei came up to him, and said—

“Sir, I am Chôbei, the chief of the Otokodaté, at your service. I have learnt with deep regret that two of my men insulted and attacked you last night. However, happily, even Gompachi, famous swordsman though he be, was no match for you, and had to beat a retreat before you. I know, therefore, that you must be a noble Samurai, who by some ill chance have become a

cripple and a beggar. Now, therefore, I pray you tell me all your story; for, humble wardsman as I am, I may be able to assist you, if you will condescend to allow me."

The cripple at first tried to shun Chôbei's questions; but at last, touched by the honesty and kindness of his speech, he replied—

"Sir, my name is Takagi Umanosuké, and I am a native of Yamato;" and then he went on to narrate all the misfortunes which the wickedness of Banzayémon had brought about.

"This is indeed a strange story," said Chôbei, who had listened with indignation. "This Banzayémon, before I knew the blackness of his heart, was once under my protection. But after he murdered Sanza, hard by here, he was pursued by these two apprentices of mine, and since that day he has been no more to my house."

When he had introduced the two apprentices to Umanosuké, Chôbei pulled forth a suit of silk clothes befitting a gentleman, and having made the crippled youth lay aside his beggar's raiment, led him to a bath, and had his hair dressed. Then he bade Tôken Gombei lodge him and take charge of him, and, having sent for a famous physician, caused Umanosuké to undergo careful treatment for the wound in his thigh. In the course of two months the pain had almost disappeared, so that he could stand easily; and when, after another month, he could walk about a little, Chôbei removed him to his own house, pretending to his wife and apprentices that he was one of his own relations who had come on a visit to him.

After a while, when Umanosuké had become quite cured, he went one day to worship at a famous temple, and on his way home after dark he was overtaken by a shower of rain, and took shelter under the eaves of a house, in a part of the city called Yanagiwara, waiting for the sky to clear. Now it happened that this same night Gompachi had gone out on one of his bloody expeditions, to which his poverty and his love for Komurasaki drove him in spite of himself—and, seeing a Samurai standing in the gloom, he sprang upon him before he had recognized Umanosuké, whom he knew as a friend of his patron Chôbei. Umanosuké drew and defended himself, and soon contrived to slash Gompachi on the forehead; so that the latter, seeing himself overmatched, fled under the cover of the night. Umanosuké, fearing to hurt his recently healed wound, did not give chase, and went quietly back to Chôbei's house. When Gompachi returned home, he hatched a story to deceive Chôbei as to the cause of the wound on his forehead. Chôbei, however, having overheard Umanosuké reproving Gompachi for his wickedness, soon became aware of the truth; and not caring to keep a robber and murderer near him, gave Gompachi a present of money, and bade him return to his house no more.

And now Chôbei, seeing that Umanosuké had recovered his strength, divided his apprentices into bands, to hunt out Banzayémon, in order that the vendetta might be accomplished. It soon was reported to him that Banzayémon was earning his living among the mountebanks of Asakusa; so Chôbei communicated this intelligence to Umanosuké, who made his preparations accordingly; and on the following morning the two went to Asakusa, where Banzayémon was astonishing a crowd of country boors by exhibiting tricks with his sword.

Then Umanosuké, striding through the gaping rabble, shouted out—

"False, murderous coward, your day has come! I, Umanosuké, the son of Umanojô, have come to demand vengeance for the death of thrice innocent men who have perished by your treachery. If you are a man, defend yourself. This day shall your soul see hell!"

With these words he rushed furiously upon Banzayémon, who, seeing escape to be impossible, stood upon his guard. But his coward's heart quailed before the avenger, and he soon lay bleeding at his enemy's feet.

But who shall say how Umanosuké thanked Chôbei for his assistance; or how, when he had returned to his own country, he treasured up his gratitude in his heart, looking upon Chôbei as more than a second father?

Thus did Chôbei use his power to punish the wicked, and to reward the good—giving of his abundance to the poor, and succouring the unfortunate, so that his name was honoured far and near. It remains only to record the tragical manner of his death.

We have already told how my lord Midzuno Jiurozayémon, the chief of the associated nobles, had been foiled in his attempts to bring shame upon Chôbei, the Father of the Otokodaté; and how, on the contrary, the latter, by his ready wit, never failed to make the proud noble's weapons recoil upon him. The failure of these attempts rankled in the breast of Jiurozayémon, who hated Chôbei with an intense hatred, and sought to be revenged upon him. One day he sent a retainer to Chôbei's house with a message to the effect that on the following day my lord Jiurozayémon would be glad to see Chôbei at his house, and to offer him a cup of wine, in return for the cold macaroni with which his lordship had been feasted some time since. Chôbei immediately suspected that in sending this friendly summons the cunning noble was hiding a dagger in a smile; however, he knew that if he stayed away out of fear he would be branded as a coward, and made a laughing-stock for fools to jeer at. Not caring that Jiurozayémon should succeed in his desire to put him to shame, he sent for his favourite apprentice, Tôken Gombei, and said to him—

“I have been invited to a drinking-bout by Midzuno Jiurozayémon. I know full well that this is but a stratagem to requite me for having fooled him, and maybe his hatred will go the length of killing me. However, I shall go and take my chance; and if I detect any sign of foul play, I'll try to serve the world by ridding it of a tyrant, who passes his life in oppressing the helpless farmers and wardsmen. Now as, even if I succeed in killing him in his own house, my life must pay forfeit for the deed, do you come to-morrow night with a burying-tub,<sup>7</sup> and fetch my corpse from this Jiurozayémon's house.”

Tôken Gombei, when he heard the “Father” speak thus, was horrified, and tried to dissuade him from obeying the invitation. But Chôbei's mind was fixed, and, without heeding Gombei's remonstrances, he proceeded to give instructions as to the disposal of his property after his death, and to settle all his earthly affairs.

On the following day, towards noon, he made ready to go to Jiurozayémon's house, bidding one of his apprentices precede him with a complimentary present.<sup>8</sup> Jiurozayémon, who was waiting with impatience for Chôbei to come, so soon as he heard of his arrival ordered his retainers to usher him into his presence; and Chôbei, having bade his apprentices without fail to come and fetch him that night, went into the house.

No sooner had he reached the room next to that in which Jiurozayémon was sitting than he saw that his suspicions of treachery were well founded; for two men with drawn swords rushed upon him, and tried to cut him down. Deftly avoiding their blows, however, he tripped up the one, and

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<sup>7</sup> The lowest classes in Japan are buried in a squatting position, in a sort of barrel. One would have expected a person of Chôbei's condition and means to have ordered a square box. It is a mistake to suppose the burning of the dead to be universal in Japan: only about thirty per cent, of the lower classes, chiefly belonging to the Montô sect of Buddhism, are burnt. The rich and noble are buried in several square coffins, one inside the other, in a sitting position and their bodies are partially preserved from decay by filling the nose, ears, and mouth with vermilion. In the case of the very wealthy, the coffin is completely filled in with vermilion. The family of the Princes of Mito, and some other nobles, bury their dead in a recumbent position.

<sup>8</sup> It is customary, on the occasion of a first visit to a house to carry a present to the owner, who gives something of equal value on returning the visit.

kicking the other in the ribs, sent him reeling and breathless against the wall; then, as calmly as if nothing had happened, he presented himself before Jiurozayémon, who, peeping through a chink in the sliding-doors, had watched his retainers' failure.

"Welcome, welcome, Master Chôbei," said he. "I always had heard that you were a man of mettle, and I wanted to see what stuff you were made of; so I bade my retainers put your courage to the test. That was a masterly throw of yours. Well, you must excuse this churlish reception: come and sit down by me.

"Pray do not mention it, my lord," said Chôbei, smiling rather scornfully. "I know that my poor skill is not to be measured with that of a noble Samurai; and if these two good gentlemen had the worst of it just now, it was mere luck—that's all."

So, after the usual compliments had been exchanged, Chôbei sat down by Jiurozayémon, and the attendants brought in wine and condiments. Before they began to drink, however, Jiurozayémon said—

"You must be tired and exhausted with your walk this hot day, Master Chôbei. I thought that perhaps a bath might refresh you, so I ordered my men to get it ready for you. Would you not like to bathe and make yourself comfortable?"

Chôbei suspected that this was a trick to strip him, and take him unawares when he should have laid aside his dirk. However, he answered cheerfully—

"Your lordship is very good. I shall be glad to avail myself of your kind offer. Pray excuse me for a few moments."

So he went to the bath-room, and, leaving his clothes outside, he got into the bath, with the full conviction that it would be the place of his death. Yet he never trembled nor quailed, determined that, if he needs must die, no man should say he had been a coward. Then Jiurozayémon, calling to his attendants, said—

"Quick! lock the door of the bathroom! We hold him fast now. If he gets out, more than one life will pay the price of his. He's a match for any six of you in fair fight. Lock the door, I say, and light up the fire under the bath;<sup>9</sup> and we'll boil him to death, and be rid of him. Quick, men, quick!"

So they locked the door, and fed the fire until the water hissed and bubbled within; and Chôbei, in his agony, tried to burst open the door, but Jiurozayémon ordered his men to thrust their spears through the partition wall and despatch him. Two of the spears Chôbei clutched and broke short off; but at last he was struck by a mortal blow under the ribs, and died a brave man by the hands of cowards.

That evening Tôken Gombei, who, to the astonishment of Chôbei's wife, had bought a burying-tub, came, with seven other apprentices, to fetch the Father of the Otokodaté from Jiurozayémon's house; and when the retainers saw them, they mocked at them, and said—

"What, have you come to fetch your drunken master home in a litter?"

"Nay," answered Gombei, "but we have brought a coffin for his dead body, as he bade us."

When the retainers heard this, they marvelled at the courage of Chôbei, who had thus wittingly come to meet his fate. So Chôbei's corpse was placed in the burying-tub, and handed over to his apprentices, who swore to avenge his death. Far and wide, the poor and friendless mourned for this good man. His son Chômatsu inherited his property; and his wife remained a faithful widow

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<sup>9</sup> This sort of bath, in which, the water is heated by the fire of a furnace, which is lighted from outside, is called Goyémon-buro, or *Goyémon's bath*, after a notorious robber named Goyémon, who attempted the life of Taiko Sama, the famous general and ruler of the sixteenth century, and suffered for his crimes by being boiled to death in oil—a form of execution which is now obsolete.

until her dying day, praying that she might sit with him in paradise upon the cup of the same lotus-flower.

Many a time did the apprentices of Chôbei meet together to avenge him; but Jiurozayémon eluded all their efforts, until, having been imprisoned by the Government in the temple called Kanyeiji, at Uyéno, as is related in the story of “Kazuma’s Revenge,” he was placed beyond the reach of their hatred.

So lived and so died Chôbei of Bandzuin, the Father of the Otokodaté of Yedo.

#### NOTE ON ASAKUSA

*Translated from a native book called the “Yedo Hanjôki,” or Guide to the prosperous City of Yedo, and other sources.*

Asakusa is the most bustling place in all Yedo. It is famous for the Temple Sensôji, on the hill of Kinriu, or the Golden Dragon, which from morning till night is thronged with visitors, rich and poor, old and young, flocking in sleeve to sleeve. The origin of the temple was as follows: —In the days of the Emperor Suiko, who reigned in the thirteenth century AD., a certain noble, named Hashi no Nakatomo, fell into disgrace and left the Court; and having become a Rônin, or masterless man, he took up his abode on the Golden Dragon Hill, with two retainers, being brothers, named Hinokuma Hamanari and Hinokuma Takénari. These three men being reduced to great straits, and without means of earning their living, became fishermen. Now it happened that on the 6th day of the 3rd month of the 36th year of the reign of the Emperor Suiko (AD. 1241), they went down in the morning to the Asakusa River to ply their trade; and having cast their nets took no fish, but at every throw they pulled up a figure of the Buddhist god Kwannon, which they threw into the river again. They sculled their boat away to another spot, but the same luck followed them, and nothing came to their nets save the figure of Kwannon. Struck by the miracle, they carried home the image, and, after fervent prayer, built a temple on the Golden Dragon Hill, in which they enshrined it. The temple thus founded was enriched by the benefactions of wealthy and pious persons, whose care raised its buildings to the dignity of the first temple in Yedo. Tradition says that the figure of Kwannon which was fished up in the net was one inch and eight-tenths in height.

The main hall of the temple is sixty feet square, and is adorned with much curious workmanship of gilding and of silvering, so that no place can be more excellently beautiful. There are two gates in front of it. The first is called the Gate of the Spirits of the Wind and of the Thunder, and is adorned with figures of those two gods. The Wind-god, whose likeness is that of a devil, carries the wind-bag; and the Thunder-god, who is also shaped like a devil, carries a drum and a drumstick.<sup>10</sup> The second gate is called the Gate of the gods Kid, or the Two Princes, whose colossal statues, painted red, and hideous to look upon, stand on either side of it. Between the gates is an approach four hundred yards in length, which is occupied by the stalls of hucksters, who sell toys and trifles for women and children, and by foul and loathsome beggars. Passing through the gate of the gods Niô, the main hall of the temple strikes the eye. Countless niches and shrines of the gods stand outside it, and an old woman earns her livelihood at a tank filled with water, to which the votaries of the gods come and wash themselves that they may pray with clean hands. Inside are the images of the gods, lanterns, incense-burners, candlesticks, a

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<sup>10</sup> This gate was destroyed by fire a few years since.

huge money-box, into which, the offerings of the pious are thrown, and votive tablets<sup>11</sup> representing the famous gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, of old. Behind the chief building is a broad space called the *okuyama*, where young and pretty waitresses, well dressed and painted, invite the weary pilgrims and holiday-makers to refresh themselves with tea and sweetmeats. Here, too, are all sorts of sights to be seen, such as wild beasts, performing monkeys, automata, conjurers, wooden and paper figures, which take the place of the waxworks of the West, acrobats, and jesters for the amusement of women and children. Altogether it is a lively and a joyous scene; there is not its equal in the city.

At Asakusa, as indeed all over Yedo, are to be found fortune-tellers, who prey upon the folly of the superstitious. With a treatise on physiognomy laid on a desk before them, they call out to this man that he has an ill-omened forehead, and to that man that the space between his nose and his lips is unlucky. Their tongues wag like flowing water until the passers-by are attracted to their stalls. If the seer finds a customer, he closes his eyes, and, lifting the divining-sticks reverently to his forehead, mutters incantations between his teeth. Then, suddenly parting the sticks in two bundles, he prophesies good or evil, according to the number in each. With a magnifying-glass he examines his dupe's face and the palms of his hands. By the fashion of his clothes and his general manner the prophet sees whether he is a countryman or from the city. "I am afraid, sir," says he, "you have not been altogether fortunate in life, but I foresee that great luck awaits you he two or three months;" or, like a clumsy doctor who makes his diagnosis according to his patient's fancies, if he sees his customer frowning and anxious, he adds, "Alas! in seven or eight months you must beware of great misfortune. But I cannot tell you all about it for a slight fee:" with a long sigh he lays down the divining-sticks on the desk, and the frightened boor pays a further fee to hear the sum of the misfortune which threatens him, until, with three feet of bamboo slips and three inches of tongue, the clever rascal lies made the poor fool turn his purse inside out.

The class of diviners called *Ichiko* profess to give tidings of the dead, or of those who have gone to distant countries. The *Ichiko* exactly corresponds to the spirit medium of the West. The trade is followed by women, of from fifteen or sixteen to some fifty years of age, who walk about the streets, carrying on their backs a divining-box about a foot square; they have no shop or stall, but wander about, and are invited into their customers' houses. The ceremony of divination is very simple. A porcelain bowl filled with water is placed upon a tray, and the customer, having written the name of the person with whom he wishes to hold communion on a long slip of paper, rolls it into a spill, which he dips into the water, and thrice sprinkles the *Ichiko*, or medium. She, resting her elbow upon her divining-box, and leaning her head upon her hand, mutters prayers and incantations until she has summoned the soul of the dead or absent person, which takes possession of her, and answers questions through her mouth. The prophecies which the *Ichiko* utters during her trance are held in high esteem by the superstitious and vulgar.

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<sup>11</sup> Sir Rutherford Alcock, in his book upon Japan, states that the portraits of the most famous courtesans of Yedo are yearly hung up in the temple at Asakusa. No such pictures are to be seen now, and no Japanese of whom I have made inquiries have heard of such a custom. The priests of the temple deny that their fane was ever so polluted, and it is probable that the statement is but one of the many strange mistakes into which an imperfect knowledge of the language led the earlier travellers in Japan. In spite of all that has been said by persons who have had no opportunity of associating and exchanging ideas with the educated men of Japan, I maintain that in no country is the public harlot more abhorred and looked down upon.

Hard by Asakusa is the theatre street. The theatres are called *Shiba-i*,<sup>12</sup> “turf places,” from the fact that the first theatrical performances were held on a turf plot. The origin of the drama in Japan, as elsewhere, was religious. In the reign of the Emperor Heijō (AD. 805), there was a sudden volcanic depression of the earth close by a pond called Sarusawa, or the Monkey’s Marsh, at Nara, in the province of Yamato, and a poisonous smoke issuing from the cavity struck down with sickness all those who came within its baneful influence; so the people brought quantities of firewood, which they burnt in order that the poisonous vapour might be dispelled. The fire, being the male influence, would assimilate with and act as an antidote upon the mephitic smoke, which was a female influence.<sup>13</sup> Besides this, as a further charm to exorcise the portent, the dance called Sambahō, which is still performed as a prelude to theatrical exhibitions by an actor dressed up as a venerable old man, emblematic of long life and felicity, was danced on a plot of turf in front of the Temple Kofukuji. By these means the smoke was dispelled, and the drama was originated. The story is to be found in the *Zoku Nihon Ki*, or supplementary history of Japan.

Three centuries later, during the reign of the Emperor Toba (A.D. 1108), there lived a woman called Iso no Zenji, who is looked upon as the mother of the Japanese drama. Her performances, however, seem only to have consisted in dancing or posturing dressed up in the costume of the nobles of the Court, from which fact her dance was called Otoko-mai, or the man’s dance. Her name is only worth mentioning on account of the respect in which her memory is held by actors.

It was not until the year 1624 A.D. that a man named Saruwaka Kanzaburō, at the command of the Shogun, opened the first theatre in Yedo in the Nakabashi, or Middle Bridge Street, where it remained until eight years later, when it was removed to the Ningiyō, or Doll Street. The company of this theatre was formed by two families named Miako and Ichimura, who did not long enjoy their monopoly, for in the year 1644 we find a third family, that of Yamamura, setting up a rival theatre in the Kobiki, or Sawyer Street.

In the year 1651, the Asiatic prejudice in favour of keeping persons of one calling in one place exhibited itself by the removal of the play-houses to their present site, and the street was called the Saruwaka Street, after Saruwaka Kanzaburo, the founder of the drama in Yedo.

Theatrical performances go on from six in the morning until six in the evening. Just as the day is about to dawn in the east, the sound of the drum is heard, and the dance Sambahō is danced as a prelude, and after this follow the dances of the famous actors of old; these are called the extra performances (*waki kiyōgen*).

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<sup>12</sup> In Dr. Hepburn’s Dictionary of the Japanese language, the Chinese characters given for the word *Shiba-i* are *chi chang* (*keih chang*, Morrison’s Dictionary), “theatrical arena.” The characters which are usually written, and which are etymologically correct, are *chih chū* (*che keu*, Morrison), “the place of plants or turf-plot.”

<sup>13</sup> This refers to the Chinese doctrine of the Yang and Yin, the male and female influences pervading all creation.