

# The Story of the Demon Shudendôji

By A. B. Mitford (Lord Redesdale)

The dance of Nakamura represents the demon Shudendôji, an ogre who was destroyed by the hero Yorimitsu according to the following legend:—At the beginning of the eleventh century, when Ichijô the Second was Emperor, lived the hero Yorimitsu. Now it came to pass that in those days the people of Kiyôto were sorely troubled by an evil spirit, which took up its abode near the Rashô gate. One night, as Yorimitsu was making merry with his retainers, he said, “Who dares go and defy the demon of the Rashô gate, and set up a token that he has been there?” “That dare I,” answered Tsuna, who, having donned his coat of mail, mounted his horse, and rode out through the dark bleak night to the Rashô gate. Having written his name upon the gate, he was about to turn homewards when his horse began to shiver with fear, and a huge hand coming forth from the gate seized the back of the knight’s helmet. Tsuna, nothing daunted, struggled to get free, but in vain, so drawing his sword he cut off the demon’s arm, and the spirit with a howl fled into the night. But Tsuna carried home the arm in triumph, and locked it up in a box. One night the demon, having taken the shape of Tsuna’s aunt, came to him and said, “I pray thee show me the arm of the fiend.” Tsuna answered, “I have shown it to no man, and yet to thee I will show it.” So he brought forth the box and opened it, when suddenly a black cloud shrouded the figure of the supposed aunt, and the demon, having regained its arm, disappeared. From that time forth the people were more than ever troubled by the demon, who carried off to the hills all the fairest virgins of Kiyôto, whom he ravished and ate, so that there was scarce a beautiful damsel left in the city. Then was the Emperor very sorrowful, and he commanded Yorimitsu to destroy the monster; and the hero, having made ready, went forth with four trusty knights and another great captain to search among the hidden places of the mountains. One day as they were journeying far from the haunts of men, they fell in with an old man, who, having bidden them to enter his dwelling, treated them kindly, and set before them wine to drink and when they went away, and took their leave of him, he gave them a present of more wine to take away with them. Now this old man was a mountain god. As they went on their way they met a beautiful lady, who was washing blood-stained clothes in the waters of the valley, weeping bitterly the while. When they asked her why she shed tears, she answered, “Sirs, I am a woman from Kiyôto, whom the demon has carried off; he makes me wash his clothes, and when he is weary of me, he will kill and eat me. I pray your lordships to save me.” Then the six heroes bade the woman lead them to the ogre’s cave, where a hundred devils were mounting guard and waiting upon him. The woman, having gone in first, told the fiend of their coming; and he, thinking to slay and eat them, called them to him; so they entered the cave, which reeked with the smell of the flesh and blood of men, and they saw Shudendôji, a huge monster with the face of a little child. The six men offered him the wine which they had received from the mountain god, and he, laughing in his heart, drank and made merry, so that little by little the fumes of the wine got into his head, and he fell asleep. The heroes, themselves feigning sleep, watched for a moment when the devils were all off their guard to put on their armour and steal one by one into the demon’s chamber. Then Yorimitsu, seeing that all was still, drew his sword, and cut off Shudendôji’s head, which sprung up and bit at his head; luckily, however, Yorimitsu had put on two helmets, the one over the other, so he was not hurt. When all the devils had been slain, the heroes and the woman returned

to Kiyôto carrying with them the head of Shudendôji, which was laid before the Emperor; and the fame of their action was spread abroad under heaven.

This Shudendôji is the ogre represented in the Nakamura dance. The Ichimura dance represents the seven gods of wealth; and the Morita dance represents a large ape, and is emblematical of drinking wine.

## A story of the Otokodaté of Yedo (cont)

As soon as the sun begins to rise in the heaven, sign-boards all glistening with paintings and gold are displayed, and the play-goers flock in crowds to the theatre. The farmers and country-folk hurry over their breakfast, and the women and children, who have got up in the middle of the night to paint and adorn themselves, come from all the points of the compass to throng the gallery, which is hung with curtains as bright as the rainbow in the departing clouds. The place soon becomes so crowded that the heads of the spectators are like the scales on a dragon's back. When the play begins, if the subject be tragic the spectators are so affected that they weep till they have to wring their sleeves dry. If the piece be comic they laugh till their chins are out of joint. The tricks and stratagems of the drama baffle description, and the actors are as graceful as the flight of the swallow. The triumph of persecuted virtue and the punishment of wickedness invariably crown the story. When a favourite actor makes his appearance, his entry is hailed with cheers. Fun and diversion are the order of the day, and rich and poor alike forget the cares which they have left behind them at home; and yet it is not all idle amusement, for there is a moral taught, and a practical sermon preached in every play.

The subjects of the pieces are chiefly historical, feigned names being substituted for those of the real heroes. Indeed, it is in the popular tragedies that we must seek for an account of many of the events of the last two hundred and fifty years; for only one very bald history<sup>1</sup> of those times has been published, of which but a limited number of copies were struck off from copper plates, and its circulation was strictly forbidden by the Shogun's Government. The stories are rendered with great minuteness and detail, so much so, that it sometimes takes a series of representations to act out one piece in its entirety. The Japanese are far in advance of the Chinese in their scenery and properties and their pieces are sometimes capably got up a revolving stage enables them to shift from one scene to another with great rapidity. First-rate actors receive as much as a thousand riyos (about £300) as their yearly salary. This, however, is a high rate of pay, and many a man has to strut before the public for little more than his daily rice; to a clever young actor it is almost enough reward to be allowed to enter a company in which there is a famous star. The salary of the actor, however, may depend upon the success of the theatre; for dramatic exhibitions are often undertaken as speculations by wealthy persons, who pay their company in proportion to their own profit. Beside his regular pay, a popular Japanese actor has a small mine of wealth in his patrons, who open their purses freely for the privilege of frequenting the green-room. The women's parts are all taken by men, as they used to be with us in ancient days. Touching the popularity of plays, it is related that in the year 1833, when two actors called Bandô Shûka and Segawa Rokô, both famous players of women's parts, died at the same time, the people of Yedo mourned to heaven and to earth; and if a million riyos could have brought back their lives, the money would have been forthcoming. Thousands flocked to their funeral, and the richness of their coffins and of the clothes laid upon them was admired by all.

"When I heard this," says Terakado Seiken, the author of the *Yedo Hanjôki*, "I lifted my eyes to heaven and heaved a great sigh. When my friend Saitô Shimei, a learned and good man, died, there was barely enough money to bury him; his needy pupils and friends subscribed to give him a humble coffin. Alas! Alas! here was a teacher who from his youth up had honoured his parents, and whose heart knew no guile if his friends were in need, he ministered to their wants; he grudged no pains to teach his fellow-men; his goodwill and charity were beyond praise; under

---

<sup>1</sup> I allude to the *Tai Hei Nem-piyô*, or Annals of the Great Peace, a very rare work, only two or three copies of which have found their way into the libraries of foreigners.

the blue sky and bright day he never did a shameful deed. His merits were as those of the sages of old; but because he lacked the cunning of a fox or badger he received no patronage from the wealthy, and, remaining poor to the day of his death, never had an opportunity of making his worth known. Alas! alas!”

The drama is exclusively the amusement of the middle and lower classes. Etiquette, sternest of tyrants, forbids the Japanese of high rank to be seen at any public exhibition, wrestling-matches alone excepted. Actors are, however, occasionally engaged to play in private for the edification of my lord and his ladies; and there is a kind of classical opera, called Nô, which is performed on stages specially built for the purpose in the palaces of the principal nobles. These Nô represent the entertainments by which the Sun Goddess was lured out of the cave in which she had hidden, a fable said to be based upon an eclipse. In the reign of the Emperor Yômei (A.D. 586—593), Hada Kawakatsu, a man born in Japan, but of Chinese extraction, was commanded by the Emperor to arrange an entertainment for the propitiation of the gods and the prosperity of the country. Kawakatsu wrote thirty-three plays, introducing fragments of Japanese poetry with accompaniments of musical instruments. Two performers, named Takéta and Hattori, having especially distinguished themselves in these entertainments, were ordered to prepare other similar plays, and their productions remain to the present day. The pious intention of the Nô being to pray for the prosperity of the country, they are held in the highest esteem by the nobles of the Court, the Daimios, and the military class: in old days they alone performed in these plays, but now ordinary actors take part in them.

The Nô are played in sets. The first of the set is specially dedicated to the propitiation of the gods; the second is performed in full armour, and is designed to terrify evil spirits, and to insure the punishment of malefactors; the third is of a gentler intention, and its special object is the representation of all that is beautiful and fragrant and delightful. The performers wear hideous wigs and masks, not unlike those of ancient Greece, and gorgeous brocade dresses. The masks, which belong to what was the private company of the Shogun, are many centuries old, and have been carefully preserved as heirlooms from generation to generation; being made of very thin wood lacquered over, and kept each in a silken bag, they have been uninjured by the lapse of time.

During the Duke of Edinburgh's stay in Yedo, this company was engaged to give a performance in the Yashiki of the Prince of Kishiu, which has the reputation of being the handsomest palace in all Yedo. So far as I know, such an exhibition had never before been witnessed by foreigners, and it may be interesting to give an account of it. Opposite the principal reception-room, where his Royal highness sat, and separated from it by a narrow courtyard, was a covered stage, approached from the green-room by a long gallery at an angle of forty-five degrees. Half a dozen musicians, clothed in dresses of ceremony, marched slowly down the gallery, and, having squatted down on the stage, bowed gravely. The performances then began. There was no scenery, nor stage appliances; the descriptions of the chorus or of the actors took their place. The dialogue and choruses are given in a nasal recitative, accompanied by the mouth-organ, flute, drum, and other classical instruments, and are utterly unintelligible. The ancient poetry is full of puns and plays upon words, and it was with no little difficulty that, with the assistance of a man of letters, I prepared beforehand the arguments of the different pieces.

The first play was entitled *Hachiman of the Bow*. Hachiman is the name under which the Emperor Ojin (270—312 A.D.) was deified as the God of War. He is specially worshipped on account of his miraculous birth; his mother, the Empress Jingo, having, by the virtue of a magic stone which she wore at her girdle, borne him in her womb for three years, during which she

made war upon and conquered the Coreans. The time of the plot is laid in the reign of the Emperor Uda the Second (1275—1289 A.D.). In the second month of the year pilgrims are flocking to the temple of Hachiman at Mount Otoko, between Osaka and Kiyoto. All this is explained by the chorus. A worshipper steps forth, sent by the Emperor, and delivers a congratulatory oration upon the peace and prosperity of the land. The chorus follows in the same strain: they sing the praises of Hachiman and of the reigning Emperor. An old man enters, bearing something which appears to be a bow in a brocade bag. On being asked who he is, the old man answers that he is an aged servant of the shrine, and that he wishes to present his mulberry-wood bow to the Emperor; being too humble to draw near to his Majesty he has waited for this festival, hoping that an opportunity might present itself, he explains that with this bow, and with certain arrows made of the Artemisia, the heavenly gods pacified the world. On being asked to show his bow, he refuses; it is a mystic protector of the country, which in old days was overshadowed by the mulberry-tree. The peace which prevails in the land is likened to a calm at sea. The Emperor is the ship, and his subjects the water. The old man dwells upon the ancient worship of Hachiman, and relates how his mother, the Empress Jingo, sacrificed to the gods before invading Corea, and how the present prosperity of the country is to be attributed to the acceptance of those sacrifices. After having revealed himself as the god Hachiman in disguise, the old man disappears. The worshipper, awe-struck, declares that he must return to Kiyoto and tell the Emperor what he has seen. The chorus announces that sweet music and fragrant perfumes issue from the mountain, and the piece ends with felicitations upon the visible favour of the gods, and especially of Hachiman.