

An Account of the Hara-Kiri

(From a Rare Japanese MS.)

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Seppuku (*hara-kiri*) is the mode of suicide adopted amongst Samurai when they have no alternative but to die. Some there are who thus commit suicide of their own free will; others there are who, having committed some crime which does not put them outside the pale of the privileges of the Samurai class, are ordered by their superiors to put an end to their own lives. It is needless to say that it is absolutely necessary that the principal, the witnesses, and the seconds who take part in the affair should be acquainted with all the ceremonies to be observed. A long time ago, a certain Daimio invited a number of persons, versed in the various ceremonies, to call upon him to explain the different forms to be observed by the official witnesses who inspect and verify the head, &c., and then to instruct him in the ceremonies to be observed in the act of suicide; then he showed all these rites to his son and to all his retainers. Another person has said that, as the ceremonies to be gone through by principal, witnesses, and seconds are all very important matters, men should familiarize themselves with a thing which is so terrible, in order that, should the time come for them to take part in it, they may not be taken by surprise.

The witnesses go to see and certify the suicide. For seconds, men are wanted who have distinguished themselves in the military arts. In old days, men used to bear these things in mind; but nowadays the fashion is to be ignorant of such ceremonies, and if upon rare occasions a criminal is handed over to a Daimio's charge, that he may perform *hara-kiri*, it often happens, at the time of execution, that there is no one among all the prince's retainers who is competent to act as second, in which case a man has to be engaged in a hurry from some other quarter to cut off the head of the criminal, and for that day he changes his name and becomes a retainer of the prince, either of the middle or lowest class, and the affair is entrusted to him, and so the difficulty is got over: nor is this considered to be a disgrace. It is a great breach of decorum if the second who is a most important officer, commits any mistake (such as not striking off the head at a blow) in the presence of the witnesses sent by the Government. On this account a skilful person must be employed; and, to hide the unmanliness of his own people, a prince must perform the ceremony in this imperfect manner. Every Samurai should be able to cut off a man's head: therefore, to have to employ a stranger to act as second is to incur the charge of ignorance of the arts of war, and is a bitter mortification. However, young men, trusting to their youthful ardour, are apt to be careless, and are certain to make a mistake. Some people there are who, not lacking in skill on ordinary occasions, lose their presence of mind in public, and cannot do themselves justice. It is all the more important, therefore, as the act occurs but rarely, that men who are liable to be called upon to be either principals or seconds or witnesses in the *hara-kiri* should constantly be examined in their skill as swordsmen, and should be familiar with all the rites, in order that when the time comes they may not lose their presence of mind.

According to one authority, capital punishment may be divided into two kinds—beheading and strangulation. The ceremony of *hara-kiri* was added afterwards in the case of persons belonging to the military class being condemned to death. This was first instituted in the days of the

Ashikaga¹ dynasty. At that time the country was in a state of litter confusion; and there were men who, although fighting, were neither guilty of high treason nor of infidelity to their feudal lords, but who by the chances of war were taken prisoners. To drag out such men as these, bound as criminals, and cut their heads off, was intolerably cruel; accordingly, men hit upon a ceremonious mode of suicide by disembowelling, in order to comfort the departed spirit. Even at present, where it becomes necessary to put to death a man who has been guilty of some act not unworthy of a Samurai, at the time of the execution witnesses are sent to the house; and the criminal, having bathed and put on new clothes, in obedience to the commands of his superiors, puts an end to himself, but does not on that account forfeit his rank as a Samurai. This is a law for which, in all truth, men should be grateful.

ON THE PREPARATION OF THE PLACE OF EXECUTION

In old days the ceremony of *hara-kiri* used to be performed in a temple. In the third year of the period called Kan-yei (A.D. 1626), a certain person, having been guilty of treason, was ordered to disembowel himself, on the fourteenth day of the first month, in the temple of Kichijōji, at Komagomé, in Yedo. Eighteen years later, the retainer of a certain Daimio, having had a dispute with a sailor belonging to an Osaka coasting-ship, killed the sailor; and, an investigation having been made into the matter by the Governor of Osaka, the retainer was ordered to perform *hara-kiri*, on the twentieth day of the sixth month, in the temple called Sokusanji, in Osaka. During the period Shōhō (middle of seventeenth century), a certain man, having been guilty of heinous misconduct, performed *hara-kiri* in the temple called Shimpukuji, in the Kōji-street of Yedo. On the fourth day of the fifth month of the second year of the period Meirēki (A.D. 1656), a certain man, for having avenged the death of his cousin's husband at a place called Shimidzudani, in the Kōji-street, disembowelled himself in the temple called Honseiji. On the twenty-sixth day of the sixth month of the eighth year of the period Yempō (A.D. 1680), at the funeral ceremonies in honour of the anniversary of the death of Genyūin Sama, a former Shogun, Naitō Idzumi no Kami, having a cause of hatred against Nagai Shinano no Kami, killed him at one blow with a short sword, in the main hall of the temple called Zōjōji (the burial-place of the Shoguns in Yedo). Idzumi no Kami was arrested by the officers present, and on the following day performed *hara-kiri* at Kiridōshi, in the temple called Seirūji.

In modern times the ceremony has taken place at night, either in the palace or in the garden of a Daimio, to whom the condemned man has been given in charge. Whether it takes place in the palace or in the garden depends upon the rank of the individual. Daimios and Hatamotos, as a matter of course, and the higher retainers of the Shogun, disembowel themselves in the palace: retainers of lower rank should do so in the garden. In the case of vassals of feudatories, according to the rank of their families, those who, being above the grade of captains, carry the bâton,² should perform *hara-kiri* in the palace; all others in the garden. If, when the time comes, the persons engaged in the ceremony are in any doubt as to the proper rules to be followed, they should inquire of competent persons, and settle the question. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the period Genroku, when Asano Takumi no Kami disembowelled himself in the palace of a Daimio called Tamura, as the whole thing was sudden and unexpected, the garden was covered with matting, and on the top of this thick mats were laid and a carpet, and the affair

¹ Ashikaga, third dynasty of Shoguns, flourished from 1336 to 1568 A.D. The practice of suicide by disembowelling is of great antiquity. This is the time when the ceremonies attending it were invented.

² A bâton with a tassel of paper strips, used for giving directions in wartime.

was concluded so; but there are people who say that it was wrong to treat a Daimio thus, as if he had been an ordinary Samurai. But it is said that in old times it was the custom that the ceremony should take place upon a leather carpet spread in the garden; and further, that the proper place is inside a picket fence tied together in the garden: so it is wrong for persons who are only acquainted with one form of the ceremony to accuse Tamura of having acted improperly. If, however, the object was to save the house from the pollution of blood, then the accusation of ill-will may well be brought; for the preparation of the place is of great importance.

Formerly it was the custom that, for personages of importance, the enclosure within the picket fence should be of thirty-six feet square. An entrance was made to the south, and another to the north: the door to the south was called *Shugiyōmon* (“the door of the practice of virtue”); that to the north was called *Umbanmon*, (“the door of the warm basin”). Two mats, with white binding, were arranged in the shape of a hammer, the one at right angles to the other; six feet of white silk, four feet broad, were stretched on the mat, which was placed lengthwise; at the four corners were erected four posts for curtains. In front of the two mats was erected a portal, eight feet high by six feet broad, in the shape of the portals in front of temples, made of a fine sort of bamboo wrapped in white³ silk. White curtains, four feet broad, were hung at the four corners, and four flags, six feet long, on which should be inscribed four quotations from the sacred books. These flags, it is said, were immediately after the ceremony carried away to the grave. At night two lights were placed, one upon either side of the two mats. The candles were placed in saucers upon stands of bamboo, four feet high, wrapped in white silk. The person who was to disembowel himself, entering the picket fence by the north entrance, took his place upon the white silk upon the mat facing the north. Some there were, however, who said that he should sit facing the west: in that case the whole place must be prepared accordingly. The seconds enter the enclosure by the south entrance, at the same time as the principal enters by the north, and take their places on the mat that is placed crosswise, as shown in the annexed plan.

Nowadays, when the *hara-kiri* is performed inside the palace, a temporary place is made on purpose, either in the garden or in some unoccupied spot; but if the criminal is to die on the day on which he is given in charge, or on the next day, the ceremony, having to take place so quickly, is performed in the reception-room. Still, even if there is a lapse of time between the period of giving the prisoner in charge and the execution, it is better that the ceremony should take place in a decent room in the house than in a place made on purpose. If it is heard that, for fear of dirtying his house, a man has made a place expressly, he will be blamed for it. It surely can be no disgrace to the house of a soldier that he was ordered to perform the last offices towards a Samurai who died by *hara-kiri*. To slay his enemy against whom he has cause of hatred, and then to kill himself, is the part of a noble Samurai; and it is sheer nonsense to look upon the place where he has disembowelled himself as polluted. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, seventeen of the retainers of Asano Takumi no Kami performed *hara-kiri* in the garden of a palace at Shirokané, in Yedo. When it was over, the people of the palace called upon the priests of a sect named Shugenja to come and purify the place; but when the lord of the palace heard this, he ordered the place to be left as it was; for what need was there to purify a place where faithful Samurai had died by their own hand! But in other palaces to which the remainder of the retainers of Takumi no Kami were entrusted, it is said that the places of

³ White, in China and Japan, is the colour of mourning.

execution were purified. But the people of that day praised Kumamoto Ko (the Prince of Higo), to whom the palace at Shirokané belonged. It is a curish thing to look upon death in battle or by *hara-kiri* as a pollution: this is a thing to bear in mind. In modern times the place of *hara-kiri* is eighteen feet square in all cases; in the centre is a place to sit upon, and the condemned man is made to sit facing the witnesses; at other times he is placed with his side to the witnesses: this is according to the nature of the spot. In some cases the seconds turn their backs to the witnesses. It is open to question, however, whether this is not a breach of etiquette. The witnesses should be consulted upon these arrangements. If the witnesses have no objection, the condemned men should be placed directly opposite to them. The place where the witnesses are seated should be removed more than twelve or eighteen feet from the condemned man. The place from which the sentence is read should also be close by. The writer has been furnished with a plan of the *hara-kiri* as it is performed at present. It is annexed here. Although the ceremony is gone through in other ways also, still it is more convenient to follow the manner indicated.

If the execution takes place in a room, a kerchief of five breadths of white cotton cloths or a quilt should be laid down, and it is also said that two mats should be prepared; however, as there are already mats in the room, there is no need for special mats: two red rugs should be spread over all, sewed together, one on the top of the other; for if the white cotton cloth be used alone, the blood will soak through on to the mats; therefore it is right the rugs should be spread. On the twenty-third day of the eighth month of the fourth year of the period Yenkiyô (A.D. 1740), at the *hara-kiri* of a certain person there were laid down a white cloth, eight feet square, and on that a quilt of light green cotton, six feet square, and on that a cloth of white hemp, six feet square, and on that two rugs. On the third day of the ninth month of the ninth year of the period Tempô (A.D. 1838), at the *hara-kiri* of a certain person it is said that there were spread a large double cloth of white cotton, and on that two rugs. But, of these two occasions, the first must be commended for its careful preparation. If the execution be at night, candlesticks of white wood should be placed at each of the four corners, lest the seconds be hindered in their work. In the place where the witnesses are to sit, ordinary candlesticks should be placed, according to etiquette; but an excessive illumination is not decorous. Two screens covered with white paper should be set up, behind the shadow of which are concealed the dirk upon a tray, a bucket to hold the head after it has been cut off, an incense-burner, a pail of water, and a basin. The above rules apply equally to the ceremonies observed when the *hara-kiri* takes place in a garden. In the latter case the place is hung round with a white curtain, which need not be new for the occasion. Two mats, a white cloth, and a rug are spread. If the execution is at night, lanterns of white paper are placed on bamboo poles at the four corners. The sentence having been read inside the house, the persons engaged in the ceremony proceed to the place of execution; but, according to circumstances, the sentence may be read at the place itself. In the case of Asano Takumi no Kami, the sentence was read out in the house, and he afterwards performed *hara-kiri* in the garden. On the third day of the fourth month of the fourth year of the period Tenmei (A.D. 1784), a Hatamoto named Sano, having received his sentence in the supreme court-house, disembowelled himself in the garden in front of the prison. When the ceremony takes place in the garden, matting must be spread all the way to the place, so that sandals need not be worn. The reason for this is that some men in that position suffer from a rush of blood to the head, from nervousness, so their sandals might slip off their feet without their being aware of their loss; and as this would have a very bad appearance, it is better to spread matting. Care must be taken lest, in spreading the matting, a place be left where two mats join, against which the foot might trip. The white screens and other things are prepared as has been directed above. If any curtailment is made, it must be done as well as

circumstances will permit. According to the crime of which a man who is handed over to any Daimio's charge is guilty, it is known whether he will have to perform *hara-kiri*; and the preparations should be made accordingly. Asano Takumi no Kami was taken to the palace of Tamura Sama at the hour of the monkey (between three and five in the afternoon), took off his dress of ceremony, partook of a bowl of soup and five dishes, and drank two cups of warm water, and at the hour of the cock (between five and seven in the evening) disembowelled himself. A case of this kind requires much attention; for great care should be taken that the preparations be carried on without the knowledge of the principal. If a temporary room has been built expressly for the occasion, to avoid pollution to the house, it should be kept a secret. It once happened that a criminal was received in charge at the palace of a certain nobleman, and when his people were about to erect a temporary building for the ceremony, they wrote to consult some of the parties concerned; the letter ran as follows

“The house in which we live is very small and inconvenient in all respects. We have ordered the guard to treat our prisoner with all respect; but our retainers who are placed on guard are much inconvenienced for want of space; besides, in the event of fire breaking out or any extraordinary event taking place, the place is so small that it would be difficult to get out. We are thinking, therefore, of adding an apartment to the original building, so that the guard may be able at all times to go in and out freely, and that if, in case of fire or otherwise, we should have to leave the house, we may do so easily. We beg to consult you upon this point.”

When a Samurai has to perform *hara-kiri* by the command of his own feudal lord, the ceremony should take place in one of the lesser palaces of the clan. Once upon a time, a certain prince of the Inouyé clan, having a just cause of offence against his steward, who was called Ishikawa Tôzayémon, and wishing to punish him, caused him to be killed in his principal palace at Kandabashi, in Yedo. When this matter was reported to the Shogun, having been convicted of disrespect of the privileges of the city, he was ordered to remove to his lesser palace at Asakusa. Now, although the *hara-kiri* cannot be called properly an execution, still, as it only differs from an ordinary execution in that by it the honour of the Samurai is not affected, it is only a question of degree; it is a matter of ceremonial.

If the principal palace⁴ is a long distance from the Shogun's castle, then the *hara-kiri* may take place there; but there can be no objection whatever to its taking place in a minor palace. Nowadays, when a man is condemned to *hara-kiri* by a Daimio, the ceremony usually takes place in one of the lesser palaces; the place commonly selected is an open space near the horse-exercising ground, and the preparations which I have described above are often shortened according to circumstances.

When a retainer is suddenly ordered to perform *hara-kiri* during a journey, a temple or shrine should be hired for the occasion. On these hurried occasions, coarse mats, faced with finer matting or common mats, may be used. If the criminal is of rank to have an armour-bearer, a carpet of skin should be spread, should one be easily procurable. The straps of the skin (which are at the head) should, according to old custom, be to the front, so that the fur may point backwards. In old days, when the ceremony took place in a garden, a carpet of skin was spread. To hire a temple for the purpose of causing a man to perform *hara-kiri* was of frequent occurrence: it is doubtful whether it may be done at the present time. This sort of question should

⁴ The principal yashikis (palaces) of the nobles are for the most part immediately round the Shoguns castle, in the enclosure known as the official quarter. Their proximity to the palace forbids their being made the scenes of executions.

be referred beforehand to some competent person, that the course to be adopted may be clearly understood.

In the period Kambun (A.D. 1661—1673) a Prince Sakai, travelling through the Bishiu territory, hired a temple or shrine for one of his retainers to disembowel himself in; and so the affair was concluded.

ON THE CEREMONIES OBSERVED AT THE HARA-KIRI OF A PERSON GIVEN IN CHARGE TO A DAIMIO

When a man has been ordered by the Government to disembowel himself, the public censors, who have been appointed to act as witnesses, write to the prince who has the criminal in charge, to inform them that they will go to his palace on public business. This message is written directly to the chief; and is sent by an assistant censor; and a suitable answer is returned to it. Before the ceremony, the witnesses send an assistant censor to see the place, and look at a plan of the house, and to take a list of the names of the persons who are to be present; he also has an interview with the *kaishaku*, or seconds, and examines them upon the way of performing the ceremonies. When all the preparations have been made, he goes to fetch the censors; and they all proceed together to the place of execution, dressed in their hempen-cloth dress of ceremony. The retainers of the palace are collected to do obeisance in the entrance-yard; and the lord, to whom the criminal has been entrusted, goes as far as the front porch to meet the censors, and conducts them to the front reception-room. The chief censor then announces to the lord of the palace that he has come to read out the sentence of such an one who has been condemned to perform *hara-kiri*, and that the second censor has come to witness the execution of the sentence. The lord of the palace then inquires whether he is expected to attend the execution in person, and, if any of the relations or family of the criminal should beg to receive his remains, whether their request should be complied with; after this he announces that he will order everything to be made ready, and leaves the room. Tea, a fire-box for smoking, and sweetmeats are set before the censors; but they decline to accept any hospitality until their business shall have been concluded. The minor officials follow the same rule. If the censors express a wish to see the place of execution, the retainers of the palace show the way, and their lord accompanies them; in this, however, he may be replaced by one of his *karó* or councillors. They then return, and take their seats in the reception-room. After this, when all the preparations have been made, the master of the house leads the censors to the place where the sentence is to be read; and it is etiquette that they should wear both sword and dirk.⁵ The lord of the palace takes his place on one side; the inferior censors sit on either side in a lower place. The councillors and other officers of the palace also take their places. One of the councillors present, addressing the censors without moving from his place, asks whether he shall bring forth the prisoner.

Previously to this, the retainers of the palace, going to the room where the prisoner is confined, inform him that, as the censors have arrived, he should change his dress, and the attendants bring out a change of clothes upon a large tray: it is when he has finished his toilet that the witnesses go forth and take their places in the appointed order, and the principal is then introduced. He is preceded by one man, who should be of the rank of *Mono-gashira* (retainer of the fourth rank), who wears a dirk, but no sword. Six men act as attendants; they should be of the fifth or sixth rank; they walk on either side of the principal. They are followed by one man who should be of the rank of *Yônin* (councillor of the second class). When they reach the place, the leading man

⁵ A Japanese removes his sword on entering a house, retaining only his dirk.

draws on one side and sits down, and the six attendants sit down on either side of the principal. The officer who follows him sits down behind him, and the chief censor reads the sentence.

When the reading of the sentence is finished, the principal leaves the room and again changes his clothes, and the chief censor immediately leaves the palace; but the lord of the palace does not conduct him to the door. The second censor returns to the reception-room until the principal has changed his clothes. When the principal has taken his seat at the place of execution, the councillors of the palace announce to the second censor that all is ready; he then proceeds to the place, wearing his sword and dirk. The lord of the palace, also wearing his sword and dirk, takes his seat on one side. The inferior censors and councillors sit in front of the censor: they wear the dirk only. The assistant second brings a dirk upon a tray, and, having placed it in front of the principal, withdraws on one side: when the principal leans his head forward, his chief second strikes off his head, which is immediately shown to the censor, who identifies it, and tells the master of the palace that he is satisfied, and thanks him for all his trouble. The corpse, as it lies, is hidden by a white screen which is set up around it, and incense is brought out. The witnesses leave the place. The lord of the palace accompanies them as far as the porch, and the retainers prostrate themselves in the yard as before. The retainers who should be present at the place of execution are one or two councillors (*Karô*), two or three second councillors (*Yônin*), two or three *Monogashira*, one chief of the palace (*Rusui*), six attendants, one chief second, two assistant seconds, one man to carry incense, who need not be a person of rank—any Samurai will do. They attend to the setting up of the white screen.

The duty of burying the corpse and of setting the place in order again devolves upon four men; these are selected from Samurai of the middle or lower class; during the performances of their duties, they hitch up their trousers and wear neither sword nor dirk. Their names are previously sent in to the censor, who acts as witness; and to the junior censors, should they desire it. Before the arrival of the chief censor, the requisite utensils for extinguishing a fire are prepared, firemen are engaged,⁶ and officers constantly go the rounds to watch against fire. From the time when the chief censor comes into the house until he leaves it, no one is allowed to enter the premises. The servants on guard at the entrance porch should wear their hempen dresses of ceremony. Everything in the palace should be conducted with decorum, and the strictest attention paid in all things.

When any one is condemned to *hara-kiri*, it would be well that people should go to the palace of the Prince of Higo and learn what transpired at the execution of the Rônins of Asano Takumi no Kami. It is my intention to annex a plan of the event. A curtain was hung round the garden in front of the reception-room; three mats were laid down, and upon these was placed a white cloth. The condemned men were kept in the reception-room, and summoned, one by one; two men, one on each side, accompanied them; the second followed behind; and they proceeded together to the place of execution. When the execution was concluded in each case, the corpse was hidden from the sight of the chief witness by a white screen, folded up in white cloth, placed on a mat, and carried off to the rear by two foot-soldiers; it was then placed in a coffin. The blood-stained ground was sprinkled with sand, and swept clean; fresh mats were laid down, and the place prepared anew; after which the next man was summoned to come forth.

⁶ In Japan, where fires are of daily occurrence, the fire-buckets and other utensils form part of the gala dress of the house of a person of rank.

ON CERTAIN THINGS TO BE BORNE IN MIND BY THE WITNESSES

When a clansman is ordered by his feudal lord to perform *hara-kiri*, the sentence must be read out by the censor of the clan, who also acts as witness. He should take his place in front of the criminal, at a distance of twelve feet; according to some books, the distance should be eighteen feet, and he should sit obliquely, not facing the criminal; he should lay his sword down by his side, but, if he pleases, he may wear it in his girdle; he must read out the sentence distinctly. If the sentence be a long document, to begin reading in a very loud voice and afterwards drop into a whisper has an appearance of faint-heartedness; but to read it throughout in a low voice is worse still: it should be delivered clearly from beginning to end. It is the duty of the chief witness to set an example of fortitude to the other persons who are to take part in the execution. When the second has finished his work, he carries the head to the chief witness, who, after inspecting it, must declare that he has identified it; he then should take his sword, and leave his place. It is sufficient, however, that the head should be struck off without being carried to the chief witness; in that case, the second receives his instructions beforehand. On rising, the chief witness should step out with his left foot and turn to the left. If the ceremony takes place out of doors, the chief witness, wearing his sword and dirk, should sit upon a box; he must wear his hempen dress of ceremony; he may hitch his trousers up slightly; according to his rank, he may wear his full dress—that is, wings over his full dress. It is the part of the chief witness to instruct the seconds and others in the duties which they have to perform, and also to preconcert measures in the event of any mishap occurring.

If whilst the various persons to be engaged in the ceremony are rubbing up their military lore, and preparing themselves for the event, any other person should come in, they should immediately turn the conversation. Persons of the rank of Samurai should be familiar with all the details of the *hara-kiri*; and to be seen discussing what should be done in case anything went wrong, and so forth, would have an appearance of ignorance. If, however, an intimate friend should go to the place, rather than have any painful concealment, he may be consulted upon the whole affair.

When the sentence has been read, it is probable that the condemned man will have some last words to say to the chief witness. It must depend on the nature of what he has to say whether it will be received or not. If he speaks in a confused or bewildered manner, no attention is paid to it: his second should lead him away, of his own accord or at a sign from the chief witness.

If the condemned man be a person who has been given in charge to a prince by the Government, the prince after the reading of the sentence, should send his retainers to the prisoner with a message to say that the decrees of the Government are not to be eluded, but that if he has any last wishes to express, they are ordered by their lord to receive them. If the prisoner is a man of high rank, the lord of the palace should go in person to hear his last wishes.

The condemned man should answer in the following way:—

“Sir, I thank you for your careful consideration, but I have nothing that I wish to say. I am greatly indebted to you for the great kindness which I have received since I have been under your charge. I beg you to take my respects to your lord and to the gentlemen of your clan who have treated me so well.” Or he may say, “Sirs, I have nothing to say; yet, since you are so kind as to think of me, I should be obliged if you would deliver such and such a message to such an one.” This is the proper and becoming sort of speech for the occasion. If the prisoner entrusts them with any message, the retainers should receive it in such a manner as to set his mind at rest. Should he ask for writing materials in order to write a letter, as this is forbidden by the law, they

should tell him so, and not grant his request. Still they must feel that it is painful to refuse the request of a dying man, and must do their best to assist him. They must exhaust every available kindness and civility, as was done in the period Genroku, in the case of the Rônins of Asano Takumi no Kami. The Prince of Higo, after the sentence had been read, caused paper and writing-materials to be taken to their room. If the prisoner is light-headed from excitement, it is no use furnishing him with writing-materials. It must depend upon circumstances; but when a man has murdered another, having made up his mind to abide by the consequences, then that man's execution should be carried through with all honour. When a man kills another on the spot, in a fit of ungovernable passion, and then is bewildered and dazed by his own act, the same pains need not be taken to conduct matters punctiliously. If the prisoner be a careful man, he will take an early opportunity after he has been given in charge to express his wishes. To carry kindness so far as to supply writing-materials and the like is not obligatory. If any doubt exists upon the point, the chief witness may be consulted.

After the Rônins of Asano Takumi no Kami had heard their sentence in the palace of Matsudaira Oki no Kami, that Daimio in person went and took leave of them, and calling Oishi Chikara, the son of their chief, to him, said, "I have heard that your mother is at home in your own country; how she will grieve when she hears of your death and that of your father, I can well imagine. If you have any message that you wish to leave for her, tell me, without standing upon ceremony, and I will transmit it without delay." For a while Chikara kept his head bent down towards the ground; at last he drew back a little, and, lifting his head, said, "I humbly thank your lordship for what you have been pleased to say. My father warned me from the first that our crime was so great that, even were we to be pardoned by a gracious judgment upon one count, I must not forget that there would be a hundred million counts against us for which we must commit suicide; and that if I disregarded his words his hatred would pursue me after death. My father impressed this upon me at the temple called Sengakuji, and again when I was separated from him to be taken to the palace of Prince Sengoku. Now my father and myself have been condemned to perform *hara-kiri*, according to the wish of our hearts. Still I cannot forget to think of my mother. When we parted at Kiyôto, she told me that our separation would be for long, and she bade me not to play the coward when I thought of her. As I took a long leave of her then, I have no message to send to her now." When he spoke thus, Oki no Kami and all his retainers, who were drawn up around him, were moved to tears in admiration of his heroism.

Although it is right that the condemned man should bathe and partake of wine and food, these details should be curtailed. Even should he desire these favours, it must depend upon his conduct whether they be granted or refused. He should be caused to die as quickly as possible. Should he wish for some water to drink, it should be given to him. If in his talk he should express himself like a noble Samurai, all pains should be exhausted in carrying out his execution. Yet however careful a man he may be, as he nears his death his usual demeanour will undergo a change. If the execution is delayed, in all probability it will cause the prisoner's courage to fail him; therefore, as soon as the sentence shall have been passed, the execution should be brought to a conclusion. This, again, is a point for the chief witness to remember.

CONCERNING SECONDS (KAISHAKU)

When the condemned man is one who has been given in charge for execution, six attendants are employed; when the execution is within the clan, then two or three attendants will suffice; the number, however, must depend upon the rank of the principal. Men of great nerve and strength

must be selected for the office; they must wear their hempen dress of ceremony, and tuck up their trousers; they must on no account wear either sword or dirk, but have a small poniard hidden in their bosom: these are the officers who attend upon the condemned man when he changes his dress, and who sit by him on the right hand and on the left hand to guard him whilst the sentence is being read. In the event of any mistake occurring (such as the prisoner attempting to escape), they knock him down; and should he be unable to stand or to walk, they help to support him. The attendants accompanying the principal to the place of execution, if they are six in number, four of them take their seats some way off and mount guard, while the other two should sit close behind the principal. They must understand that should there be any mistake they must throw the condemned man, and, holding him down, cut off his head with their poniard, or stab him to death. If the second bungles in cutting off the head and the principal attempts to rise, it is the duty of the attendants to kill him. They must help him to take off his upper garments and bare his body. In recent times, however, there have been cases where the upper garments have not been removed: this depends upon circumstances. The setting up of the white screen, and the laying the corpse in the coffin, are duties which, although they may be performed by other officers, originally devolved upon the six attendants. When a common man is executed, he is bound with cords, and so made to take his place; but a Samurai wears his dress of ceremony, is presented with a dagger, and dies thus. There ought to be no anxiety lest such a man should attempt to escape; still, as there is no knowing what these six attendants may be called upon to do, men should be selected who thoroughly understand their business.

The seconds are three in number—the chief second, the assistant second, and the inferior second. When the execution is carried out with proper solemnity, three men are employed; still a second and assistant second are sufficient. If three men serve as seconds, their several duties are as follows:—The chief second strikes off the head; that is his duty: he is the most important officer in the execution by *hara-kiri*. The assistant second brings forward the tray, on which is placed the dirk; that is his duty: he must perform his part in such a manner that the principal second is not hindered in his work. The assistant second is the officer of second importance in the execution. The third or inferior second carries the head to the chief witness for identification; and in the event of something suddenly occurring to hinder either of the other two seconds, he should bear in mind that he must be ready to act as his substitute: his is an office of great importance, and a proper person must be selected to fill it.

Although there can be no such thing as a *kaishaku* (second) in any case except in one of *hara-kiri*, still in old times guardians and persons who assisted others were also called *kaishaku*: the reason for this is because the *kaishaku*, or second, comes to the assistance of the principal. If the Principal were to make any mistake at the fatal moment, it would be a disgrace to his dead body: it is in order to prevent such mistakes that the *kaishaku*, or second, is employed. It is the duty of the *kaishaku* to consider this as his first ditty.

When a man is appointed to act as second to another, what shall be said of him if he accepts the office with a smiling face? Yet must he not put on a face of distress. It is as well to attempt to excuse oneself from performing the duty. There is no heroism in cutting a man's head off well, and it is a disgrace to do it in a bungling manner; yet must not a man allege lack of skill as a pretext for evading the office, for it is an unworthy thing that a Samurai should want the skill required to behead a man. If there are any that advocate employing young men as seconds, it should rather be said that their hands are inexpert. To play the coward and yield up the office to another man is out of the question. When a man is called upon to perform the office, he should express his readiness to use his sword (the dirk may be employed, but the sword is the proper

weapon). As regards the sword, the second should borrow that of the principal: if there is any objection to this, he should receive a sword from his lord; he should not use his own sword. When the assistant seconds have been appointed, the three should take counsel together about the details of the place of execution, when they have been carefully instructed by their superiors in all the ceremonies; and having made careful inquiry, should there be anything wrong, they should appeal to their superiors for instruction. The seconds wear their dresses of ceremony when the criminal is a man given in charge by the Government: when he is one of their own clan, they need only wear the trousers of the Samurai. In old days it is said that they were dressed in the same way as the principal; and some authorities assert that at the *hara-kiri* of a nobleman of high rank the seconds should wear white clothes, and that the handle of the sword should be wrapped in white silk. If the execution takes place in the house, they should partially tuck up their trousers; if in the garden, they should tuck them up entirely.

The seconds should address the principal, and say, "Sir, we have been appointed to act as your seconds; we pray you to set your mind at rest," and so forth; but this must depend upon the rank of the criminal. At this time, too, if the principal has any last wish to express, the second should receive it, and should treat him with every consideration in order to relieve his anxiety. If the second has been selected by the principal on account of old friendship between them, or if the latter, during the time that he has been in charge, has begged some special retainer of the palace to act as his second in the event of his being condemned to death, the person so selected should thank the principal for choosing so unworthy a person, and promise to beg his lord to allow him to act as second: so he should answer, and comfort him, and having reported the matter to his lord, should act as second. He should take that opportunity to borrow his principal's sword in some such terms as the following: "As I am to have the honour of being your second, I would fain borrow your sword for the occasion. It may be a consolation to you to perish by your own sword, with which you are familiar." If, however, the principal declines, and prefers to be executed with the second's sword, his wish must be complied with. If the second should make an awkward cut with his own sword, it is a disgrace to him; therefore he should borrow some one else's sword, so that the blame may rest with the sword, and not with the swordsman. Although this is the rule, and although every Samurai should wear a sword fit to cut off a man's head, still if the principal has begged to be executed with the second's own sword, it must be done as he desires.

It is probable that the condemned man will inquire of his second about the arrangements which have been made: he must attend therefore to rendering himself capable of answering all such questions. Once upon a time, when the condemned man inquired of his second whether his head would be cut off at the moment when he received the tray with the dirk upon it, "No," replied the second; "at the moment when you stab yourself with the dirk your head will be cut off." At the execution of one Sanô, he told his second that, when he had stabbed himself in the belly, he would utter a cry; and begged him to be cool when he cut off his head. The second replied that he would do as he wished, but begged him in the meantime to take the tray with the dirk, according to proper form. When Sanô reached out his hand to take the tray, the second cut off his head immediately. Now, although this was not exactly right, still as the second acted so in order to save a Samurai from the disgrace of performing the *hara-kiri* improperly (by crying out), it can never be wrong for a second to act kindly. If the principal urgently requests to be allowed really to disembowel himself, his wish may, according to circumstances, be granted; but in this case care must be taken that no time be lost in striking off the head. The custom of striking off

the head, the prisoner only going through the semblance of disembowelling himself, dates from the period Yempô (about 190 years ago).

When the principal has taken his place, the second strips his right shoulder of the dress of ceremony, which he allows to fall behind his sleeve, and, drawing his sword, lays down the scabbard, taking care that his weapon is not seen by the principal; then he takes his place on the left of the principal and close behind him. The principal should sit facing the west, and the second facing the north, and in that position should he strike the blow. When the second perceives the assistant second bring out the tray on which is laid the dirk, he must brace up his nerves and settle his heart beneath his navel: when the tray is laid down, Inc must put himself in position to strike the blow, He should step out first with the left foot, and then change so as to bring his right foot forward: this is the position which he should assume to strike; he may, however, reverse the position of his feet. When the principal removes his upper garments, the second must poise his sword: when the principal reaches out his hand to draw the tray towards him, as he leans his head forward a little, is the exact moment for the second to strike. There are all sorts of traditions about this. Some say that the principal should take the tray and raise it respectfully to his head, and set it down; and that this is the moment to strike. There are three rules for the time of cutting off the head: the first is when the dirk is laid on the tray; the second is when the principal looks at the left side of his belly before inserting the dirk; the third is when he inserts the dirk. If these three moments are allowed to pass, it becomes a difficult matter to cut off the head: so says tradition. However, four moments for cutting are also recorded: first, when the assistant second retires after having laid down the stand on which is the dirk; second, when the principal draws the stand towards him; third, when he takes the dirk in his hand; fourth, when he makes the incision into the belly. Although all four ways are approved, still the first is too soon; the last three are right and proper. In short, the blow should be struck without delay. If he has struck off the head at a blow without failure, the second, taking care not to raise his sword, but holding it point downwards, should retire backward a little and wipe his weapon kneeling; he should have plenty of white paper ready in his girdle or in his bosom to wipe away the blood and rub up his sword; having replaced his sword in its scabbard, he should readjust his upper garments and take his seat to the rear. When the head has fallen, the junior second should enter, and, taking up the head, present it to the witness for inspection. When he has identified it, the ceremony is concluded. If there is no assistant or junior second, the second, as soon as he has cut off the head, carrying his sword reversed in his left hand, should take the head in his right hand, holding it by the topknot of hair, should advance towards the witness, passing on the right side of the corpse, and show the right profile of the head to the witness, resting the chin of the head upon the hilt of his sword, and kneeling on his left knee; then returning again round by the left of the corpse, kneeling on his left knee, and carrying the head in his left hand and resting it on the edge of his sword, he should again show the left profile to the witness. It is also laid down as another rule, that the second, laying down his sword, should take out paper from the bosom of his dress, and placing the head in the palm of his left hand, and taking the top-knot of hair in his right hand, should lay the head upon the paper, and so submit it for inspection. Either way may be said to be right.

NOTE.—To lay down thick paper, and place the head on it, shows a disposition to pay respect to the head; to place it on the edge of the sword is insulting: the course pursued must depend upon the rank of the person. If the ceremony is to be curtailed, it may end with the cutting off of the head: that must be settled beforehand, in consultation with the witness. In the event of the second

making a false cut, so as not to strike off the head at a blow, the second must take the head by the top-knot, and, pressing it down, cut it off. Should he take bad aim and cut the shoulder by mistake, and should the principal rise and cry out, before he has time to writhe, he should hold him down and stab him to death, and then cut off his head, or the assistant seconds, who are sitting behind, should come forward and hold him down, while the chief second cuts off his head. It may be necessary for the second, after he has cut off the head, to push down the body, and then take up the head for inspections. If the body does not fall at once, which is said to be sometimes the case, the second should pull the feet to make it fall.

There are some who say that the perfect way for the second to cut off the head is not to cut right through the neck at a blow, but to leave a little uncut, and, as the head hangs by the skin, to seize the top-knot and slice it off, and then submit it for inspection. The reason of this is, lest, the head being struck off at a blow, the ceremony should be confounded with an ordinary execution. According to the old authorities, this is the proper and respectful manner. After the head is cut off, the eyes are apt to blink, and the mouth to move, and to bite the pebbles and sand. This being hateful to see, at what amongst Samurai is so important an occasion, and being a shameful thing, it is held to be best not to let the head fall, but to hold back a little in delivering the blow. Perhaps this may be right; yet it is a very difficult matter to cut so as to leave the head hanging by a little flesh, and there is the danger of missing the cut; and as any mistake in the cut is most horrible to see, it is better to strike a fair blow at once. Others say that, even when the head is struck off at a blow, the semblance of slicing it off should be gone through afterwards; yet be it borne in mind that this is unnecessary.

Three methods of carrying the sword are recognized amongst those skilled in swordmanship. If the rank of the principal be high, the sword is raised aloft; if the principal and second are of equal rank, the sword is carried at the centre of the body; if the principal be of inferior rank, the sword is allowed to hang downwards. The proper position for the second to strike from is kneeling on one knee, but there is no harm in his standing up: others say that, if the execution takes place inside the house, the second should kneel; if in the garden, he should stand. These are not points upon which to insist obstinately: a man should strike in whatever position is most convenient to him.

The chief duty for the assistant second to bear in mind is the bringing in of the tray with the dirk, which should be produced very quietly when the principal takes his place: it should be placed so that the condemned man may have to stretch his hand well out in order to reach it.⁷ The assistant second then returns to his own place; but if the condemned man shows any signs of agitation, the assistant second must lend his assistance, so that the head may be properly cut off. It once happened that the condemned man, having received the tray from the assistant second, held it up for a long time without putting it down, until those near him had over and over again urged him to set it down. It also happens that after the tray has been set down, and the assistant second has retired, the condemned man does not put out his hand to take it; then must the assistant second press him to take it. Also the principal may ask that the tray be placed a little nearer to him, in which case his wish must be granted. The tray may also be placed in such a way that the assistant second, holding it in his left hand, may reach the dirk to the condemned man, who leans forward to take it. Which is the best of all these ways is uncertain. The object to aim at is, that the condemned man should lean forward to receive the blow. Whether the assistant second retires, or not, must depend upon the attitude assumed by the condemned man.

⁷ It should be placed about three feet away from him.

If the prisoner be an unruly, violent man, a fan, instead of a dirk, should be placed upon the tray; and should he object to this, he should be told, in answer, that the substitution of the fan is an ancient custom. This may occur sometimes. It is said that once upon a time, in one of the palaces of the Daimios, a certain brave matron murdered a man, and having been allowed to die with all the honours of the *hara-kiri*, a fan was placed upon the tray, and her head was cut off. This may be considered right and proper. If the condemned man appears inclined to be turbulent, the seconds, without showing any sign of alarm, should hurry to his side, and, urging him to get ready, quickly cause him to make all his preparations with speed, and to sit down in his place; the chief second, then drawing his sword, should get ready to strike, and, ordering him to proceed as fast as possible with the ceremony of receiving the tray, should perform his duty without appearing to be afraid.

A certain Prince Katô, having condemned one of his councillors to death, assisted at the ceremony behind a curtain of slips of bamboo. The councillor, whose name was Katayama, was bound, and during that time glared fiercely at the curtain, and showed no signs of fear. The chief second was a man named Jihei, who had always been used to treat Katayama with great respect. So Jihei, sword in hand, said to Katayama, "Sir, your last moment has arrived: be so good as to turn your cheek so that your head may be straight." When Katayama heard this, he replied, "Fellow, you are insolent;" and as he was looking round, Jihei struck the fatal blow. The lord Katô afterwards inquired of Jihei what was the reason of this; and he replied that, as he saw that the prisoner was meditating treason, he determined to kill him at once, and put a stop to this rebellious spirit. This is a pattern for other seconds to bear in mind.

When the head has been struck off it becomes the duty of the junior second to take it up by the top-knot, and, placing it upon some thick paper laid over the palm of his hand, to carry it for inspection by the witness. This ceremony has been explained above. If the head be bald, he should pierce the left ear with the stiletto carried in the scabbard of his dirk, and so carry it to be identified. He must carry thick paper in the bosom of his dress. Inside the paper he shall place a bag with rice bran and ashes, in order that he may carry the head without being sullied by the blood. When the identification of the head is concluded, the junior second's duty is to place it in a bucket.

If anything should occur to hinder the chief second, the assistant second must take his place. It happened on one occasion that before the execution took place the chief second lost his nerve, yet he cut off the head without airy difficulty; but when it came to taking up the head for inspection, his nervousness so far got the better of him as to be extremely inconvenient. This is a thing against which persons acting as seconds have to guard.

* * *

As a corollary to the above elaborate statement of the ceremonies proper to be observed at the *hara-kiri*, I may here describe an instance of such an execution which I was sent officially to witness. The condemned man was Taki Zenzaburô, an officer of the Prince of Bizen, who gave the order to fire upon the foreign settlement at Hiogo in the month of February 1868,—an attack to which I have alluded in the preamble to the story of the Eta Maiden and the Hatamoto. Up to that time no foreigner had witnessed such an execution, which was rather looked upon as a traveller's fable.

The ceremony, which was ordered by the Mikado himself, took place at 10.30 at night in the temple of Seifukuji, the head-quarters of the Satsuma troops at Hiogo. A witness was sent from each of the foreign legations. We were seven foreigners in all.

We were conducted to the temple by officers of the Princes of Satsuma and Choshu. Although the ceremony was to be conducted in the most private manner, the casual remarks which we overheard in the streets, and a crowd lining the principal entrance to the temple, showed that it was a matter of no little interest to the public. The courtyard of the temple presented a most picturesque sight; it was crowded with soldiers standing about in knots round large fires, which threw a dim flickering light over the heavy eaves and quaint gable-ends of the sacred buildings. We were shown into an inner room, where we were to wait until the preparation for the ceremony was completed: in the next room to us were the high Japanese officers. After a long interval, which seemed doubly long from the silence which prevailed, Ito Shunské, the provisional Governor of Hiogo, came and took down our names, and informed us that seven *kenshi*, sheriffs or witnesses, would attend on the part of the Japanese. He and another officer represented the Mikado; two captains of Satsuma's infantry, and two of Choshu's, with a representative of the Prince of Bizen, the clan of the condemned man, completed the number, which was probably arranged in order to tally with that of the foreigners. Itô Shunské further inquired whether we wished to put any questions to the prisoner. We replied in the negative.

A further delay then ensued, after which we were invited to follow the Japanese witnesses into the *hondo* or main hall of the temple, where the ceremony was to be performed. It was an imposing scene. A large hall with a high roof supported by dark pillars of wood. From the ceiling hung a profusion of those huge gilt lamps and ornaments peculiar to Buddhist temples. In front of the high altar, where the floor, covered with beautiful white mats, is raised some three or four inches from the ground, was laid a rug of scarlet felt. Tall candles placed at regular intervals gave out a dim, mysterious light, just sufficient to let all the proceedings be seen. The seven Japanese took their places on the left of the raised floor, the seven foreigners on the right. No other person was present.

After an interval of a few minutes of anxious suspense, Taki Zenzaburô, a stalwart man, thirty-two years of age, with a noble air, walked into the hall attired in his dress of ceremony, with the peculiar hempen-cloth wings which are worn on great occasions. He was accompanied by a *kaishaku* and three officers, who wore the *jimbaori* or war surcoat with gold-tissue facings. The word *kaishaku*, it should be observed, is one to which our word *executioner* is no equivalent term. The office is that of a gentleman: in many cases it is performed by a kinsman or friend of the condemned, and the relation between them is rather that of principal and second than that of victim and executioner. In this instance the *kaishaku* was a pupil of Taki Zenzaburô, and was selected by the friends of the latter from among their own number for his skill in swordsmanship.

With the *kaishaku* on his left hand, Taki Zenzaburô advanced slowly towards the Japanese witnesses, and the two bowed before them, then drawing near to the foreigners they saluted us in the same way, perhaps even with more deference: in each case the salutation was ceremoniously returned. Slowly, and with great dignity, the condemned man mounted on to the raised floor, prostrated himself before the high altar twice, and seated⁸ himself on the felt carpet with his back to the high altar, the *kaishaku* crouching on his left-hand side. One of the three attendant officers then came forward, bearing a stand of the kind used in temples for offerings, on which, wrapped in paper, lay the *wakizashi*, the short sword or dirk of the Japanese, nine inches and a half in

⁸ Seated himself—that is, in the Japanese fashion, his knees and toes touching the ground, and his body resting on his heels. In this position, which is one of respect, he remained until his death.

length, with a point and an edge as sharp as a razor's. This he handed, prostrating himself, to the condemned man, who received it reverently, raising it to his head with both hands, and placed it in front of himself.

After another profound obeisance, Taki Zenzaburô, in a voice which betrayed just so much emotion and hesitation as might be expected from a man who is making a painful confession, but with no sign of either in his face or manner, spoke as follows:—

“I, and I alone, unwarrantably gave the order to fire on the foreigners at Kôbé, and again as they tried to escape. For this crime I disembowel myself, and I beg you who are present to do me the honour of witnessing the act.”

Bowing once more, the speaker allowed his upper garments to slip down to his girdle, and remained naked to the waist. Carefully, according to custom, he tucked his sleeves under his knees to prevent himself from falling backwards; for a noble Japanese gentleman should die falling forwards. Deliberately, with a steady hand, he took the dirk that lay before him; he looked at it wistfully, almost affectionately; for a moment he seemed to collect his thoughts for the last time, and then stabbing himself deeply below the waist on the left-hand side, he drew the dirk slowly across to the right side, and, turning it in the wound, gave a slight cut upwards. During this sickeningly painful operation he never moved a muscle of his face. When he drew out the dirk, he leaned forward and stretched out his neck; an expression of pain for the first time crossed his face, but he uttered no sound. At that moment the *kaishaku*, who, still crouching by his side, had been keenly watching his every movement, sprang to his feet, poised his sword for a second in the air; there was a flash, a heavy, ugly thud, a crashing fall; with one blow the head had been severed from the body.

A dead silence followed, broken only by the hideous noise of the blood throbbing out of the inert heap before us, which but a moment before had been a brave and chivalrous man. It was horrible.

The *kaishaku* made a low bow, wiped his sword with a piece of paper which he had ready for the purpose, and retired from the raised floor; and the stained dirk was solemnly borne away, a bloody proof of the execution.

The two representatives of the Mikado then left their places, and, crossing over to where the foreign witnesses sat, called us to witness that the sentence of death upon Taki Zenzaburô had been faithfully carried out. The ceremony being at an end, we left the temple.

The ceremony, to which, the place and the hour gave an additional solemnity, was characterized throughout by that extreme dignity and punctiliousness which are the distinctive marks of the proceedings of Japanese gentlemen of rank; and it is important to note this fact, because it carries with it the conviction that the dead man was indeed the officer who had committed the crime, and no substitute. While profoundly impressed by the terrible scene, it was impossible at the same time not to be filled with admiration of the firm and manly bearing of the sufferer, and of the nerve with which the *kaishaku* performed his last duty to his master. Nothing could more strongly show the force of education. The Samurai, or gentleman of the military class, from his earliest years learns to look upon the *hara-kiri* as a ceremony in which some day he may be called upon to play a part as principal or second. In old-fashioned families, which hold to the traditions of ancient chivalry, the child is instructed in the rite and familiarized with the idea as an honourable expiation of crime or blotting out of disgrace. If the hour comes, he is prepared for it, and bravely faces an ordeal which early training has robbed of half its horrors. In what other country in the world does a man learn that the last tribute of affection which he may have to pay to his best friend may be to act as his executioner?

Since I wrote the above, we have heard that, before his entry into the fatal hall, Taki Zenzaburô called round him all those of his own clan who were present, many of whom had carried out his order to fire, and, addressing them in a short speech, acknowledged the heinousness of his crime and the justice of his sentence and warned them solemnly to avoid any repetition of attacks upon foreigners. They were also addressed by the officers of the Mikado, who urged them to bear no ill-will against us on account of the fate of their fellow-clansman. They declared that they entertained no such feeling.

The opinion has been expressed that it would have been politic for the foreign representatives at the last moment to have interceded for the life of Taki Zenzaburô. The question is believed to have been debated among the representatives themselves. My own belief is that mercy, although it might have produced the desired effect among the more civilized clans, would have been mistaken for weakness and fear by those wilder people who have not yet a personal knowledge of foreigners. The offence—an attack upon the flags and subjects of all the Treaty Powers, which lack of skill, not of will, alone prevented from ending in a universal massacre—was the gravest that has been committed upon foreigners since their residence in Japan. Death was undoubtedly deserved, and the form chosen was in Japanese eyes merciful and yet judicial. The crime might have involved a war and cost hundreds of lives; it was wiped out by one death. I believe that, in the interest of Japan as well as in our own, the course pursued was wise, and it was very satisfactory to me to find that one of the ablest Japanese ministers, with whom I had a discussion upon the subject, was quite of my opinion.

The ceremonies observed at the *hara-kiri* appear to vary slightly in detail in different parts of Japan; but the following memorandum upon the subject of the rite, as it used to be practised at Yedo during the rule of the Tycoon, clearly establishes its judicial character. I translated it from a paper drawn up for me by a Japanese who was able to speak of what he had seen himself. Three different ceremonies are described

1st. *Ceremonies observed at the "hara-kiri" of a Hatamoto (petty noble of the Tycoon's court) in prison.*—This is conducted with great secrecy. Six mats are spread in a large courtyard of the prison; an *ometsuké* (officer whose duties appear to consist in the surveillance of other officers), assisted by two other *ometsukés* of the second and third class, acts as *kenshi* (sheriff or witness), and sits in front of the mats. The condemned man, attired in his dress of ceremony, and wearing his wings of hempen cloth, sits in the centre of the mats. At each of the four corners of the mats sits a prison official. Two officers of the Governor of the city act as *kaishaku*, (executioners or seconds), and take their place, one on the right hand and the other on the left hand of the condemned. The *kaishaku* on the left side, announcing his name and surname, says, bowing, "I have the honour to act as *kaishaku* to you; have you any last wishes to confide to me?" The condemned man thanks him and accepts the offer or not, as the case may be. He then bows to the sheriff and a wooden dirk nine and a half inches long is placed before him at a distance of three feet, wrapped in paper, and lying on a stand such as is used for offerings in temples. As he reaches forward to take the wooden sword, and stretches out his neck, the *kaishaku* on his left-hand side draws his sword and strikes off his head. The *kaishaku* on the right-hand side takes up the head and shows it to the sheriff. The body is given to the relations of the deceased for burial. His property is confiscated.

2nd. *The ceremonies observed at the "hara-kiri" of a Daimio's retainer.*—When the retainer of a Daimio is condemned to perform the *hara-kiri*, four mats are placed in the yard of the *yashiki* or palace. The condemned man, dressed in his robes of ceremony, and wearing his wings of hempen cloth, sits in the centre. An officer acts as chief witness, with a second witness under

him. Two officers, who act as *kaishaku*, are on the right and left of the condemned man; four officers are placed at the corners of the mats. The *kaishaku*, as in the former case, offers to execute the last wishes of the condemned. A dirk nine and a half inches long is placed before him on a stand. In this case the dirk is a real dirk, which the man takes and stabs himself with on the left side, below the navel, drawing it across to the right side. At this moment, when he leans forward in pain, the *kaishaku* on the left-hand side cuts off the head. The *kaishaku* on the right-hand side takes up the head, and shows it to the sheriff. The body is given to the relations for burial. In most cases the property of the deceased is confiscated.

3rd. *Self-immolation of a Daimio on account of disgrace*— When a Daimio had been guilty of treason or offended against the Tycoon, inasmuch as the family was disgraced, and an apology could neither be offered nor accepted, the offending Daimio was condemned to *hara-kiri*. Calling his councillors around him, he confided to them his last will and testament for transmission to the Tycoon. Then, clothing himself in his court dress, he disembowelled himself, and cut his own throat. His councillors then reported the matter to the Government, and a coroner was sent to investigate it. To him the retainers handed the last will and testament of their lord, and he took it to the Gorôjiu (first council), who transmitted it to the Tycoon. If the offence was heinous, such as would involve the ruin of the whole family, by the clemency of the Tycoon, half the property might be confiscated, and half returned to the heir; if the offence was trivial, the property was inherited intact by the heir, and the family did not suffer.

In all cases where the criminal disembowels himself of his own accord without condemnation and without investigation, inasmuch as he is no longer able to defend himself, the offence is considered as non-proven, and the property is not confiscated. In the year 1869, a motion was brought forward in the Japanese parliament by one Ono Seigorô, clerk of the house, advocating the abolition of the practice of *hara-kiri*. Two hundred members out of a house of 209 voted against the motion, which was supported by only three speakers, six members not voting on either side. In this debate the *seppuku*, or *hara-kiri*, was called “the very shrine of the Japanese national spirit, and the embodiment in practice of devotion to principle,” “a great ornament to the empire,” “a pillar of the constitution,” “a valuable institution, tending to the honour of the nobles, and based on a compassionate feeling towards the official caste,” “a pillar of religion and a spur to virtue.” The whole debate (which is well worth reading, and an able translation of which by Mr. Aston has appeared in a recent Blue Book) shows the affection with which the Japanese cling to the traditions of a chivalrous past. It is worthy of notice that the proposer, Ono Seigorô, who on more than one occasion rendered himself conspicuous by introducing motions based upon an admiration of our Western civilization, was murdered not long after this debate took place.

There are many stories on record of extraordinary heroism being displayed in the *hara-kiri*. The case of a young fellow, only twenty years old, of the Choshiu clan, which was told me the other day by an eye-witness, deserves mention as a marvellous instance of determination. Not content with giving himself the one necessary cut, he slashed himself thrice horizontally and twice vertically. Then he stabbed himself in the throat until the dirk protruded on the other side, with its sharp edge to the front; setting his teeth in one supreme effort, he drove the knife forward with both hands through his throat, and fell dead.

One more story and I have done. During the revolution, when the Tycoon, beaten on every side, fled ignominiously to Yedo, he is said to have determined to fight no ore, but to yield everything. A member of his second council went to him and said, “Sir, the only way for you now to retrieve the honour of the family of Tokugawa is to disembowel yourself; and to prove to

you that I am sincere and disinterested in what I say, I am here ready to disembowel myself with you.” The Tycoon flew into a great rage, saying that he would listen to no such nonsense, and left the room. His faithful retainer, to prove his honesty, retired to another part of the castle, and solemnly performed the *hara-kiri*.