

The Reconciliation

There was a young samurai of Kyoto who had been reduced to poverty by the ruin of his lord, and found himself obliged to leave his home, and to take service with the Governor of a distant province.

Before quitting the capital, this samurai divorced his wife, a good and beautiful woman, under the belief that he could better obtain promotion by another alliance. He then married the daughter of a family of some distinction and took her with him to the district whither he had been called. But it was in the time of the thoughtlessness of youth, and the sharp experience of want, that the samurai could not understand the worth of the affection so lightly cast away.

His second marriage did not prove a happy one; the character of his new wife was hard and selfish; and he soon found every cause to think with regret of Kyoto days. Then he discovered that he still loved his first wife, loved her more than he could ever love the second; and he began to feel how unjust and how thankless he had been. Gradually his repentance deepened into a remorse that left him no peace of mind. Memories of the woman he had wronged (her gentle speech, her smiles, her dainty, pretty ways, her faultless patience) continually haunted him.

Sometimes in dreams he saw her at her loom, weaving as when she toiled night and day to help him during the years of their distress: more often he saw her kneeling alone in the desolate little room where he had left her, veiling her tears with her poor worn sleeve. Even in the hours of official duty, his thoughts would wander back to her: then he would ask himself how she was living, what she was doing...

Something in his heart assured him that she could not accept another husband, and that she never would refuse to pardon him. And he secretly resolved to seek her out as soon as he could return to Kyoto, then to beg her forgiveness, to take her back, to do everything that a man could do to make atonement.

But the years went by.

At last the Governor's official term expired, and the samurai was free. "Now I will go back to my dear one," he vowed to himself. "Ah, what a cruelty, what a folly to have divorced her!" He sent his second wife to her own people (she had given him no children); and hurrying to Kyoto, he went at once to seek his former companion, not allowing himself even the time to change his traveling-garb.

When he reached the street where she used to live, it was late in the night -- the night of the tenth day of the ninth month -- and the city was silent as a cemetery. But a bright moon made everything visible; and he found the house without difficulty. It had a deserted look: tall weeds were growing on the roof. He knocked at the sliding-doors, and no one answered. Then, finding that the doors had not been fastened from within, he pushed them open, and entered. The front room was matless and empty: a chilly wind was blowing through crevices in the planking; and the moon shone through a ragged break in the wall of the alcove. Other rooms presented a like forlorn condition. The house, to all seeming, was unoccupied.

Nevertheless, the samurai determined to visit one other apartment at the farther end of the dwelling; a very small room that had been his wife's favorite resting-place. Approaching the sliding-screen that closed it, he was startled to perceive a glow within. He pushed the screen aside, and uttered a cry of joy; for he saw her there, sewing by the light of a paper-lamp!

Her eyes at the same instant met his own; and with a happy smile she greeted him, asking only: "When did you come back to Kyoto? How did you find your way here to me, through all those black rooms?"

The years had not changed her. Still she seemed as fair and young as in his fondest memory of her... But sweeter than any memory there came to him the music of her voice, with its trembling of pleased wonder. Then joyfully he took his place beside her, and told her all: how deeply he repented his selfishness, how wretched he had been without her, how constantly he had regretted her, how long he had hoped and planned to make amends; caressing her the while, and asking her forgiveness over and over again.

She answered him, with loving gentleness, according to his heart's desire, entreating him to cease all self-reproach. It was wrong, she said, that he should have allowed himself to suffer on her account: she had always felt that she was not worthy to be his wife. She knew that he had separated from her, notwithstanding, only because of poverty; and while he lived with her, he had always been kind; and she had never ceased to pray for his happiness. But even if there had been a reason for speaking of amends, this honorable visit would be ample amends: what greater happiness than thus to see him again, though it were only for a moment?

"Only for a moment?" he replied, with a glad laugh... "say, rather, for the time of seven existences! My loved one, unless you forbid, I am coming back to live with you always, always, always! Nothing shall ever separate us again. Now I have means and friends: we need not fear poverty. To-morrow my goods will be brought here, and my servants will come to wait upon you, and we shall make this house beautiful... Tonight," he added, apologetically, "I came thus late, without even changing my dress, only because of the longing I had to see you, and to tell you this."

She seemed greatly pleased by these words; and in her turn she told him about all that had happened in Kyoto since the time of his departure... excepting her own sorrows, of which she sweetly refused to speak.

They chatted far into the night... Then she conducted him to a warmer room, facing south, a room that had been their bridal chamber in former time. "Have you no one in the house to help you?" he asked, as she began to prepare the couch for him.

"No," she answered, laughing cheerfully: "I could not afford a servant, so I have been living all alone."

"You will have plenty of servants to-morrow," he said, "good servants, and everything else that you need!"

They lay down to rest, not to sleep: they had too much to tell each other...; and they talked of the past and the present and the future, until the dawn was gray. Then, involuntarily, the samurai closed his eyes, and slept.

When he awoke, the daylight was streaming through the chinks of the sliding-shutters; and he found himself, to his utter amazement, lying upon the naked boards of a moldering floor... Had he only dreamed a dream? No: she was there: she slept... He bent above her, and looked, and shrieked! for the sleeper had no face! Before him, wrapped in its grave-sheet only, lay the corpse of a woman, a corpse so wasted that little remained save the bones, and the long black tangled hair...

Slowly, as he stood shuddering and sickening in the sun, the icy horror yielded to despair so intolerable, a pain so atrocious, that he clutched at the mocking shadow of a doubt. Feigning ignorance of the neighborhood, he ventured to ask his way to the house in which his wife had lived.

"There is no one in that house," said the person questioned. "It used to belong to the wife of a samurai who left the city several years ago. He divorced her in order to marry another woman before he went away; and she fretted a great deal, and so became sick. She had no relatives in Kyoto, and nobody to care for her, and she died in the autumn of the same year; on the tenth day of the ninth month..."

YUKI-ONNA

IN a village of Musashi Province, there lived two woodcutters : Mosaku and Minokichi. At the time of which I am speaking, Mosaku was an old man ; and Minokichi, his apprentice, was a lad of eighteen years. Every day they went together to a forest situated about five miles from their village. On the way to that forest there is a wide river to cross ; and there is a ferry-boat. Several times a bridge was built where the ferry is ; but the bridge was each time carried away by a flood. No common bridge can resist the current there when the river rises.

Mosaku and Minokichi were on their

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way home, one very cold evening, when a great snowstorm overtook them. They reached the ferry; and they found that the boatman had gone away, leaving his boat on the other side of the river. It was no day for swimming; and the woodcutters took shelter in the ferryman's hut, — thinking themselves lucky to find any shelter at all. There was no brazier in the hut, nor any place in which to make a fire: it was only a two-mat¹ hut, with a single door, but no window. Mosaku and Minokichi fastened the door, and lay down to rest, with their straw rain-coats over them. At first they did not feel very cold; and they thought that the storm would soon be over.

The old man almost immediately fell asleep; but the boy, Minokichi, lay awake a long time, listening to the awful wind, and the continual slashing of the snow against the door. The river was roaring; and the hut swayed and creaked like a junk at sea. It was a terrible storm; and the air was every moment becoming colder; and Minokichi shivered under his rain-coat. But at last, in spite of the cold, he too fell asleep.

He was awakened by a showering of snow in his face. The door of the hut had been

¹ That is to say, with a floor-surface of about six feet square.

forced open ; and, by the snow-light (*yuki-akari*), he saw a woman in the room, — a woman all in white. She was bending above Mosaku, and blowing her breath upon him ; — and her breath was like a bright white smoke. Almost in the same moment she turned to Minokichi, and stooped over him. He tried to cry out, but found that he could not utter any sound. The white woman bent down over him, lower and lower, until her face almost touched him ; and he saw that she was very beautiful, — though her eyes made him afraid. For a little time she continued to look at him ; — then she smiled, and she whispered : — “ I intended to treat you like the other man. But I cannot help feeling some pity for you, — because you are so young. . . . You are a pretty boy, Minokichi ; and I will not hurt you now. But, if you ever tell anybody — even your own mother — about what you have seen this night, I shall know it ; and then I will kill you. . . . Remember what I say ! ”

With these words, she turned from him, and passed through the doorway. Then he found himself able to move ; and he sprang up, and looked out. But the woman was nowhere to be seen ; and the snow was driving furiously into the hut. Minokichi closed the door, and secured it by fixing several billets of wood

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against it. He wondered if the wind had blown it open ; — he thought that he might have been only dreaming, and might have mistaken the gleam of the snow-light in the doorway for the figure of a white woman : but he could not be sure. He called to Mosaku, and was frightened because the old man did not answer. He put out his hand in the dark, and touched Mosaku's face, and found that it was ice ! Mosaku was stark and dead. . . .

By dawn the storm was over ; and when the ferryman returned to his station, a little after sunrise, he found Minokichi lying senseless beside the frozen body of Mosaku. Minokichi was promptly cared for, and soon came to himself ; but he remained a long time ill from the effects of the cold of that terrible night. He had been greatly frightened also by the old man's death ; but he said nothing about the vision of the woman in white. As soon as he got well again, he returned to his calling, — going alone every morning to the forest, and coming back at nightfall with his bundles of wood, which his mother helped him to sell.

One evening, in the winter of the following year, as he was on his way home, he overtook a girl who happened to be traveling

by the same road. She was a tall, slim girl, very good-looking; and she answered Minokichi's greeting in a voice as pleasant to the ear as the voice of a song-bird. Then he walked beside her; and they began to talk. The girl said that her name was O-Yuki;¹ that she had lately lost both of her parents; and that she was going to Yedo, where she happened to have some poor relations, who might help her to find a situation as servant. Minokichi soon felt charmed by this strange girl; and the more that he looked at her, the handsomer she appeared to be. He asked her whether she was yet betrothed; and she answered, laughingly, that she was free. Then, in her turn, she asked Minokichi whether he was married, or pledged to marry; and he told her that, although he had only a widowed mother to support, the question of an "honorable daughter-in-law" had not yet been considered, as he was very young. . . . After these confidences, they walked on for a long while without speaking; but, as the proverb declares, *Ki ga aréba, mé mo kuchi hodo ni mono wo iu*: "When the wish is there, the eyes can say as much as the mouth." By the time they reached the village, they had become very much pleased

¹ This name, signifying "Snow," is not uncommon. On the subject of Japanese female names, see my paper in the volume entitled *Shadowings*.

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with each other ; and then Minokichi asked O-Yuki to rest awhile at his house. After some shy hesitation, she went there with him ; and his mother made her welcome, and prepared a warm meal for her. O-Yuki behaved so nicely that Minokichi's mother took a sudden fancy to her, and persuaded her to delay her journey to Yedo. And the natural end of the matter was that Yuki never went to Yedo at all. She remained in the house, as an "honorable daughter-in-law."

O-Yuki proved a very good daughter-in-law. When Minokichi's mother came to die, — some five years later, — her last words were words of affection and praise for the wife of her son. And O-Yuki bore Minokichi ten children, boys and girls, — handsome children all of them, and very fair of skin.

The country-folk thought O-Yuki a wonderful person, by nature different from themselves. Most of the peasant-women age early ; but O-Yuki, even after having become the mother of ten children, looked as young and fresh as on the day when she had first come to the village.

One night, after the children had gone to sleep, O-Yuki was sewing by the light

of a paper lamp ; and Minokichi, watching her, said :—

“To see you sewing there, with the light on your face, makes me think of a strange thing that happened when I was a lad of eighteen. I then saw somebody as beautiful and white as you are now—indeed, she was very like you.” . . .

Without lifting her eyes from her work, O-Yuki responded :—

“Tell me about her. . . . Where did you see her ?”

Then Minokichi told her about the terrible night in the ferryman’s hut, — and about the White Woman that had stooped above him, smiling and whispering, — and about the silent death of old Mosaku. And he said :—

“Asleep or awake, that was the only time that I saw a being as beautiful as you. Of course, she was not a human being ; and I was afraid of her, — very much afraid, — but she was so white ! . . . Indeed, I have never been sure whether it was a dream that I saw, or the Woman of the Snow.” . . .

O-Yuki flung down her sewing, and arose, and bowed above Minokichi where he sat, and shrieked into his face :—

“It was I — I — I ! Yuki it was ! And I told you then that I would kill you if you ever

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said one word about it! . . . But for those children asleep there, I would kill you this moment! And now you had better take very, very good care of them; for if ever they have reason to complain of you, I will treat you as you deserve!" . . .

Even as she screamed, her voice became thin, like a crying of wind;— then she melted into a bright white mist that spired to the roof-beams, and shuddered away through the smoke-hole. . . . Never again was she seen.

THE
STORY OF
MIMI-
NASHI-
HŌICHI

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MORE than seven hundred years ago, at Dan-no-ura, in the Straits of Shimonoséki, was fought the last battle of the long contest between the Heiké, or Taira clan, and the Genji, or Minamoto clan. There the Heiké perished utterly, with their women and children, and their infant emperor likewise—now remembered as Antoku Tennō. And that sea and shore have been haunted for seven hundred years. . . . Elsewhere I told you about the strange crabs found there, called Heiké crabs,

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which have human faces on their backs, and are said to be the spirits of Heiké warriors.¹ But there are many strange things to be seen and heard along that coast. On dark nights thousands of ghostly fires hover about the beach, or flit above the waves, — pale lights which the fishermen call *Oni-bi*, or demon-fires; and, whenever the winds are up, a sound of great shouting comes from that sea, like a clamor of battle.

In former years the Heiké were much more restless than they now are. They would rise about ships passing in the night, and try to sink them; and at all times they would watch for swimmers, to pull them down. It was in order to appease those dead that the Buddhist temple, Amidaji, was built at Akamagasaki.² A cemetery also was made close by, near the beach; and within it were set up monuments inscribed with the names of the drowned emperor and of his great vassals; and Buddhist services were regularly performed there, on behalf of the spirits of them. After the temple had been built, and the tombs erected, the Heiké gave less trouble than before; but they continued to do queer things at intervals, —

¹ See my *Koutô*, for a description of these curious crabs.

² Or, Shimonoséki. The town is also known by the name of Bakkan.

proving that they had not found the perfect peace.

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Some centuries ago there lived at Akamagaséki a blind man named Hōichi, who was famed for his skill in recitation and in playing upon the *biwa*.¹ From childhood he had been trained to recite and to play; and while yet a lad he had surpassed his teachers. As a professional *biwa-hōshi* he became famous chiefly by his recitations of the history of the Heiké and the Genji; and it is said that when he sang the song of the battle of Dan-no-ura “even the goblins [*kijin*] could not refrain from tears.”

At the outset of his career, Hōichi was very poor; but he found a good friend to help him. The priest of the Amidaji was fond of poetry and music; and he often invited Hōichi to the temple, to play and recite. Afterwards, being much impressed by the wonderful skill of the lad, the priest proposed that Hōichi

¹ The *biwa*, a kind of four-stringed lute, is chiefly used in musical recitative. Formerly the professional minstrels who recited the *Heiké-Monogatari*, and other tragical histories, were called *biwa-hōshi*, or “lute-priests.” The origin of this appellation is not clear; but it is possible that it may have been suggested by the fact that “lute-priests,” as well as blind shampooers, had their heads shaven, like Buddhist priests. The *biwa* is played with a kind of plectrum, called *bachi*, usually made of horn.

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should make the temple his home ; and this offer was gratefully accepted. Hōichi was given a room in the temple-building ; and, in return for food and lodging, he was required only to gratify the priest with a musical performance on certain evenings, when otherwise disengaged.

One summer night the priest was called away, to perform a Buddhist service at the house of a dead parishioner ; and he went there with his acolyte, leaving Hōichi alone in the temple. It was a hot night ; and the blind man sought to cool himself on the verandah before his sleeping-room. The verandah overlooked a small garden in the rear of the Amidaji. There Hōichi waited for the priest's return, and tried to relieve his solitude by practicing upon his biwa. Midnight passed ; and the priest did not appear. But the atmosphere was still too warm for comfort within doors ; and Hōichi remained outside. At last he heard steps approaching from the back gate. Somebody crossed the garden, advanced to the verandah, and halted directly in front of him — but it was not the priest. A deep voice called the blind man's name — abruptly and unceremoniously, in the manner of a samurai summoning an inferior : —

“ Hōichi ! ”

Hōichi was too much startled, for the moment, to respond ; and the voice called again, in a tone of harsh command, —

“Hōichi !”

“*Hai!*” answered the blind man, frightened by the menace in the voice, — “I am blind ! — I cannot know who calls !”

“There is nothing to fear,” the stranger exclaimed, speaking more gently. “I am stopping near this temple, and have been sent to you with a message. My present lord, a person of exceedingly high rank, is now staying in Akamagaséki, with many noble attendants. He wished to view the scene of the battle of Dan-no-ura ; and to-day he visited that place. Having heard of your skill in reciting the story of the battle, he now desires to hear your performance : so you will take your biwa and come with me at once to the house where the august assembly is waiting.”

In those times, the order of a samurai was not to be lightly disobeyed. Hōichi donned his sandals, took his biwa, and went away with the stranger, who guided him deftly, but obliged him to walk very fast. The hand that guided was iron ; and the clank of the warrior’s stride proved him fully armed, — probably some palace-guard on duty. Hōichi’s first alarm was over : he began to imagine him-

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self in good luck;—for, remembering the retainer's assurance about a "person of exceedingly high rank," he thought that the lord who wished to hear the recitation could not be less than a daimyō of the first class. Presently the samurai halted; and Hōichi became aware that they had arrived at a large gateway;—and he wondered, for he could not remember any large gate in that part of the town, except the main gate of the Amidaji. "*Kaimon!*"¹ the samurai called,—and there was a sound of unbar-ring; and the twain passed on. They traversed a space of garden, and halted again before some entrance; and the retainer cried in a loud voice, "Within there! I have brought Hōichi." Then came sounds of feet hurrying, and screens sliding, and rain-doors opening, and voices of women in converse. By the language of the women Hōichi knew them to be domestics in some noble household; but he could not imagine to what place he had been conducted. Little time was allowed him for conjecture. After he had been helped to mount several stone steps, upon the last of which he was told to leave his sandals, a woman's hand guided him along interminable reaches of pol-

¹ A respectful term, signifying the opening of a gate. It was used by samurai when calling to the guards on duty at a lord's gate for admission.

ished planking, and round pillared angles too many to remember, and over widths amazing of matted floor,—into the middle of some vast apartment. There he thought that many great people were assembled : the sound of the rustling of silk was like the sound of leaves in a forest. He heard also a great humming of voices,—talking in undertones ; and the speech was the speech of courts.

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Hōichi was told to put himself at ease, and he found a kneeling-cushion ready for him. After having taken his place upon it, and tuned his instrument, the voice of a woman — whom he divined to be the *Rōjō*, or matron in charge of the female service — addressed him, saying, —

“It is now required that the history of the Heiké be recited, to the accompaniment of the biwa.”

Now the entire recital would have required a time of many nights : therefore Hōichi ventured a question :—

“As the whole of the story is not soon told, what portion is it augustly desired that I now recite ? ”

The woman’s voice made answer :—

“Recite the story of the battle at Dan-no-ura, — for the pity of it is the most deep.”¹

¹ Or the phrase might be rendered, “for the pity of that

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Then Hōrchi lifted up his voice, and chanted the chant of the fight on the bitter sea, — wonderfully making his biwa to sound like the straining of oars and the rushing of ships, the whirr and the hissing of arrows, the shouting and trampling of men, the crashing of steel upon helmets, the plunging of slain in the flood. And to left and right of him, in the pauses of his playing, he could hear voices murmuring praise : “ How marvelous an artist ! ” — “ Never in our own province was playing heard like this ! ” — “ Not in all the empire is there another singer like Hōrchi ! ” Then fresh courage came to him, and he played and sang yet better than before ; and a hush of wonder deepened about him. But when at last he came to tell the fate of the fair and helpless, — the piteous perishing of the women and children, — and the death-leap of Nii-no-Ama, with the imperial infant in her arms, — then all the listeners uttered together one long, long shuddering cry of anguish ; and thereafter they wept and wailed so loudly and so wildly that the blind man was frightened by the violence of the grief that he had made. For much time the sobbing and the wailing continued. But gradually the sounds of lamentation died away ; and again, in the great stillness that part is the deepest.” The Japanese word for pity in the original text is *awaré*.

followed, Hōichi heard the voice of the woman whom he supposed to be the Rōjo.

She said :—

“ Although we had been assured that you were a very skillful player upon the biwa, and without an equal in recitative, we did not know that any one could be so skillful as you have proved yourself to-night. Our lord has been pleased to say that he intends to bestow upon you a fitting reward. But he desires that you shall perform before him once every night for the next six nights—after which time he will probably make his august return-journey. To-morrow night, therefore, you are to come here at the same hour. The retainer who to-night conducted you will be sent for you. . . There is another matter about which I have been ordered to inform you. It is required that you shall speak to no one of your visits here, during the time of our lord’s august sojourn at Akamagaséki. As he is traveling incognito,* he commands that no mention of these things be made. . . . You are now free to go back to your temple.”

After Hōichi had duly expressed his

* “Traveling incognito” is at least the meaning of the original phrase,—“making a disguised august-journey” (*shinobi no go-ryokō*).

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thanks, a woman's hand conducted him to the entrance of the house, where the same retainer, who had before guided him, was waiting to take him home. The retainer led him to the verandah at the rear of the temple, and there bade him farewell.

It was almost dawn when Hōichi returned; but his absence from the temple had not been observed, — as the priest, coming back at a very late hour, had supposed him asleep. During the day Hōichi was able to take some rest; and he said nothing about his strange adventure. In the middle of the following night the samurai again came for him, and led him to the august assembly, where he gave another recitation with the same success that had attended his previous performance. But during this second visit his absence from the temple was accidentally discovered; and after his return in the morning he was summoned to the presence of the priest, who said to him, in a tone of kindly reproach:—

“We have been very anxious about you, friend Hōichi. To go out, blind and alone, at so late an hour, is dangerous. Why did you go without telling us? I could have ordered a servant to accompany you. And where have you been?”

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Hōichi answered, evasively, —

“Pardon me, kind friend! I had to attend to some private business; and I could not arrange the matter at any other hour.”

The priest was surprised, rather than pained, by Hōichi's reticence: he felt it to be unnatural, and suspected something wrong. He feared that the blind lad had been bewitched or deluded by some evil spirits. He did not ask any more questions; but he privately instructed the men-servants of the temple to keep watch upon Hōichi's movements, and to follow him in case that he should again leave the temple after dark.

On the very next night, Hōichi was seen to leave the temple; and the servants immediately lighted their lanterns, and followed after him. But it was a rainy night, and very dark; and before the temple-folks could get to the roadway, Hōichi had disappeared. Evidently he had walked very fast, — a strange thing, considering his blindness; for the road was in a bad condition. The men hurried through the streets, making inquiries at every house which Hōichi was accustomed to visit; but nobody could give them any news of him. At last, as they were returning to the temple by way of the shore, they were startled by the sound of a

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biwa, furiously played, in the cemetery of the Amidaji. Except for some ghostly fires — such as usually flitted there on dark nights — all was blackness in that direction. But the men at once hastened to the cemetery ; and there, by the help of their lanterns, they discovered Hōichi, — sitting alone in the rain before the memorial tomb of Antoku Tennō, making his biwa resound, and loudly chanting the chant of the battle of Dan-no-ura. And behind him, and about him, and everywhere above the tombs, the fires of the dead were burning, like candles. Never before had so great a host of *Oni-bi* appeared in the sight of mortal man. . . .

“Hōichi San ! — Hōichi San !” the servants cried, — “you are bewitched ! . . . Hōichi San !”

But the blind man did not seem to hear. Strenuously he made his biwa to rattle and ring and clang ; — more and more wildly he chanted the chant of the battle of Dan-no-ura. They caught hold of him ; — they shouted into his ear, —

“Hōichi San ! — Hōichi San ! — come home with us at once !”

Reprovingly he spoke to them : —

“To interrupt me in such a manner, before this august assembly, will not be tolerated.”

Whereat, in spite of the weirdness of the thing, the servants could not help laughing. Sure that he had been bewitched, they now seized him, and pulled him up on his feet, and by main force hurried him back to the temple, — where he was immediately relieved of his wet clothes, by order of the priest, and reclad, and made to eat and drink. Then the priest insisted upon a full explanation of his friend's astonishing behavior.

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Hōichi long hesitated to speak. But at last, finding that his conduct had really alarmed and angered the good priest, he decided to abandon his reserve ; and he related everything that had happened from the time of the first visit of the samurai.

The priest said :—

“Hōichi, my poor friend, you are now in great danger ! How unfortunate that you did not tell me all this before ! Your wonderful skill in music has indeed brought you into strange trouble. By this time you must be aware that you have not been visiting any house whatever, but have been passing your nights in the cemetery, among the tombs of the Heiké ; —and it was before the memorial-tomb of Antoku Tennō that our people to-night found you, sitting in the rain. All that you have been imagining was illusion — except the calling of

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the dead. By once obeying them, you have put yourself in their power. If you obey them again, after what has already occurred, they will tear you in pieces. But they would have destroyed you, sooner or later, in any event. . . . Now I shall not be able to remain with you to-night: I am called away to perform another service. But, before I go, it will be necessary to protect your body by writing holy texts upon it."

Before sundown the priest and his acolyte stripped Hōichi: then, with their writing-brushes, they traced upon his breast and back, head and face and neck, limbs and hands and feet, — even upon the soles of his feet, and upon all parts of his body, — the text of the holy sūtra called *Hannya-Shin-Kyō*.¹ When

¹ The Smaller Prañā-Pāramitā-Hridaya-Sūtra is thus called in Japanese. Both the smaller and larger sūtras called Prañā-Pāramitā ("Transcendent Wisdom") have been translated by the late Professor Max Müller, and can be found in volume xlix. of the *Sacred Books of the East* ("Buddhist Mahāyāna Sūtras"). — Apropos of the magical use of the text, as described in this story, it is worth remarking that the subject of the sūtra is the Doctrine of the Emptiness of Forms, — that is to say, of the unreal character of all phenomena or noumena. . . . "Form is emptiness; and emptiness is form. Emptiness is not different from form; form is not different from emptiness. What is form — that is emptiness. What is emptiness — that is form. . . . Perception, name, concept, and knowledge, are also emptiness. . . . There is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

this had been done, the priest instructed Hōichi, saying :—

“To-night, as soon as I go away, you must seat yourself on the verandah, and wait. You will be called. But, whatever may happen, do not answer, and do not move. Say nothing, and sit still—as if meditating. If you stir, or make any noise, you will be torn asunder. Do not get frightened; and do not think of calling for help—because no help could save you. If you do exactly as I tell you, the danger will pass, and you will have nothing more to fear.”

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After dark the priest and the acolyte went away; and Hōichi seated himself on the verandah, according to the instructions given him. He laid his biwa on the planking beside him, and, assuming the attitude of meditation, remained quite still,—taking care not to cough, or to breathe audibly. For hours he stayed thus.

Then, from the roadway, he heard the steps coming. They passed the gate, crossed the garden, approached the verandah, stopped—directly in front of him.

“Hōichi!” the deep voice called. But

. . . But when the envelopment of consciousness has been annihilated, then he [*the seeker*] becomes free from all fear, and beyond the reach of change, enjoying final Nirvāna.”

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the blind man held his breath, and sat motionless.

“Hōichi!” grimly called the voice a second time. Then a third time — savagely:—
“Hōichi!”

Hōichi remained as still as a stone, — and the voice grumbled:—

“No answer! — that won’t do! . . . Must see where the fellow is.” . . .

There was a noise of heavy feet mounting upon the verandah. The feet approached deliberately, — halted beside him. Then, for long minutes, — during which Hōichi felt his whole body shake to the beating of his heart, — there was dead silence.

At last the gruff voice muttered close to him:—

“Here is the biwa; but of the biwa-player I see — only two ears! . . . So that explains why he did not answer: he had no mouth to answer with — there is nothing left of him but his ears. . . . Now to my lord those ears I will take — in proof that the august commands have been obeyed, so far as was possible” . . .

At that instant Hōichi felt his ears gripped by fingers of iron, and torn off! Great as the pain was, he gave no cry. The heavy footfalls receded along the verandah, — de-

scended into the garden,—passed out to the roadway,—ceased. From either side of his head, the blind man felt a thick warm trickling; but he dared not lift his hands. . . .

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Before sunrise the priest came back. He hastened at once to the verandah in the rear, stepped and slipped upon something clammy, and uttered a cry of horror;—for he saw, by the light of his lantern, that the clamminess was blood. But he perceived Hōichi sitting there, in the attitude of meditation— with the blood still oozing from his wounds.

“My poor Hōichi!” cried the startled priest,—“what is this? . . . You have been hurt?” . . .

At the sound of his friend’s voice, the blind man felt safe. He burst out sobbing, and tearfully told his adventure of the night.

“Poor, poor Hōichi!” the priest exclaimed,—“all my fault!—my very grievous fault! . . . Everywhere upon your body the holy texts had been written—except upon your ears! I trusted my acolyte to do that part of the work; and it was very, very wrong of me not to have made sure that he had done it! . . . Well, the matter cannot now be helped;—we can only try to heal your hurts as soon as possible. . . . Cheer up, friend!—the danger is

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now well over. You will never again be troubled by those visitors.”

With the aid of a good doctor, Hōichi soon recovered from his injuries. The story of his strange adventure spread far and wide, and soon made him famous. Many noble persons went to Akamagasaki to hear him recite; and large presents of money were given to him, —so that he became a wealthy man. . . . But from the time of his adventure, he was known only by the appellation of *Mimi-nashi-Hōichi*: “Hōichi-the-Earless.”



In a Cup of Tea

Have you ever attempted to mount some old tower stairway, spiring up through darkness, and in the heart of that darkness found yourself at the cobwebbed edge of nothing? Or have you followed some coast path, cut along the face of a cliff, only to discover yourself, at a turn, on the jagged verge of a break? The emotional worth of such experience—from a literary point of view—is proved by the force of the sensations aroused, and by the vividness with which they are remembered.

Now there have been curiously preserved, in old Japanese storybooks, certain fragments of fiction that produce an almost similar emotional experience.... Perhaps the writer was lazy; perhaps he had a quarrel with the publisher; perhaps he was suddenly called away from his little table, and never came back; perhaps death stopped the writing-brush in the very middle of a sentence. But no mortal man can ever tell us exactly why these things were left unfinished.... I select a typical example.

*

On the fourth day of the first month of the third Tenwa—that is to say, about two hundred and twenty years ago—the lord Nakagawa Sado, while on his way to make a New Year's visit, halted with his train at a tea-house in Hakusan, in the Hongō district of Yedo.

While the party were resting there, one of the lord's attendants—a *wakatō*^[1] named Sekinai—feeling very thirsty, filled for himself a large water-cup with tea. He was raising the cup to his lips when he suddenly perceived, in the transparent yellow infusion, the image or reflection of a face that was not his own. Startled, he looked around, but could see no one near him. The face in the tea appeared, from the coiffure, to be the face of a young samurai: it was strangely distinct, and very handsome—delicate as the face of a girl. And it seemed the reflection of a living face; for the eyes and the lips were moving.

Bewildered by this mysterious apparition, Sekinai threw away the tea, and carefully examined the cup. It proved to be a very cheap water-cup, with no artistic devices of any sort. He found and filled another cup; and again the face appeared in the tea. He then ordered fresh tea and refilled the cup; and once more the strange face appeared—this time with a mocking smile. But Sekinai did not allow himself to be frightened. "Whoever you are," he muttered, "you shall delude me no further!"—then he swallowed the tea, face and all, and went his way, wondering whether he had swallowed a ghost.

*

Late in the evening of the same day, while on watch in the palace of the lord Nakagawa, Sekinai was surprised by the soundless coming of a stranger into the apartment. This stranger, a richly dressed young samurai, seated himself directly in front of Sekinai, and, saluting the *wakatō* with a slight bow, observed: "I am Shikibu Heinai—met you to-day for the first time.... You do not seem to recognize me."

He spoke in a very low, but penetrating voice. And Sekinai was astonished to find before him the same sinister, handsome face of which he had seen, and swallowed, the apparition in a cup of tea. It was smiling now, as the phantom had smiled; but the steady gaze of the eyes, above the smiling lips, was at once a challenge and an insult.

"No, I do not recognize you," returned Sekinai, angry but cool, "and perhaps you will now be good enough to inform me how you obtained admission to this house?"

[In feudal times the residence of a lord was strictly guarded at all hours; and no one could enter unannounced, except through some unpardonable negligence on the part of the armed watch.]

"Ah, you do not recognize me!" exclaimed the visitor, in a tone of irony, drawing a little nearer as he spoke. "No, you do not recognize me! Yet you took upon yourself this morning to do me a deadly injury!"

Sekinai instantly seized the *tantō*[2] at his girdle, and made a fierce thrust at the throat of the man. But the blade seemed to touch no substance.

Simultaneously and soundlessly the intruder leaped sideward to the chamber-wall, *and through it!* The wall showed no trace of his exit. He had traversed it only as the light of a candle passes through lantern-paper.

*

When Sekinai made report of the incident, his recital astonished and puzzled the retainers. No stranger had been seen either to enter or to leave the palace at the hour of the occurrence; and no one in the service of the lord Nakagawa had ever heard of the name "Shikibu Heinai."

*

On the following night Sekinai was off duty and remained at home with his parents. At a rather late hour he was informed that some strangers had called at the house, and desired to speak with him for a moment. Taking his sword, he went to the entrance, and there found three armed men—apparently retainers—waiting in front of the doorstep. The three bowed respectfully to Sekinai; and one of them said:

"Our names are Matsuoka Bungō, Tsuchibashi Bungō, and Okamura Heiroku. We are retainers of the noble Shikibu Heinai. When our master last night deigned to pay you a visit, you struck him with a sword. He was much will hurt and has been obliged to go to the hot springs, where his wound is now being treated. But on the sixteenth day of the coming month he will return; and he will then fitly repay you for the injury done him...."

Without waiting to hear more, Sekinai leaped out, sword in hand, and slashed right and left, at the strangers. But the three men sprang to the wall of the adjoining building, and flitted up the wall like shadows, and....

Here the old narrative breaks off; the rest of the story existed only in some brain that has been dust for a century. I am able to imagine several possible endings; but none of them would satisfy an Occidental imagination. I prefer to let the reader attempt to decide for himself the probable consequence of swallowing a Soul.

[1] The armed attendant of a *samurai* was thus called. The relation of the *wakatō* to the *samurai* was that of squire to knight.

[2]The shorter of the two swords carried by samurai. The longer sword was called *katana*.