

## XVIII.

## THE TEMPORARY MIKADOATE.

THE first step taken after the overthrow of the military usurpation at Kamakura was to recall the mikado Go-Daigo from exile. With the sovereign again in full power, it seemed as though the ancient and rightful government was to be permanently restored. The military or dual system had lasted about one hundred and fifty years, and patriots now hoped to see the country rightly governed, without intervention between the throne and the people. The rewarding of the victors who had fought for him was the first duty awaiting the restored exile. The methods and procedure of feudalism were now so fixed in the general policy of the Government, that Go-Daigo, falling into the ways of the Minamoto and Hōjō, apportioned military fiefs as *gurdons* to his vassals. Among them was Ashikaga Takauji, to whom was awarded the greatest prize, consisting of the rich provinces of Hitachi, Musashi, and Shimōsa. To Kusunoki Masashigé were given Settsu and Kawachi; and to Nitta, Kōdzuké and Harima, besides smaller fiefs to many others.

This unfair distribution of spoils astounded the patriots, who expected to see high rank and power conferred upon Nitta and Kusunoki, the chief leaders in the war for the restoration, and both very able men. It would have been well had the emperor seen the importance of disregarding the claims and privileges of caste, and exalted to highest rank the faithful men who were desirous of maintaining the dignity of the throne, and whose chief fear was that the duarchy would again arise. Such a fear was by no means groundless, for Ashikaga, elated at such unexpected favor, became inflamed with a still higher ambition, and already meditated refounding the shōgunate at Kamakura, and placing his own family upon the military throne. Being of Minamoto stock, he knew that he had prestige and popularity in his favor, should he attempt the re-erection of the shōgunate. Most of the common soldiers had fought rather against Hōjō than against duarchy. The emperor was warned against this man by his ministers;

but in this case a woman's smiles and caresses and importunate words were more powerful than the advice of sages. Ashikaga had bribed the mikado's concubine Kadoko, and had so won her favor that she persuaded her imperial lord to bestow excessive and undeserved honor on the traitor.

The distribution of spoils excited discontent among the soldiers, who now began to lose all interest in the cause for which they had fought, and to murmur privately among themselves. "Should such an unjust government continue," said they, "then are we all servants of concubines and dancing-girls and singing-boys. Rather than be the puppets of the mikado's amusers, we would prefer a shōgun again, and become his vassals." Many of the captains and smaller clan-leaders were also in bad humor over their own small shares. Ashikaga Takauji took advantage of this feeling to make himself popular among the disaffected, especially those who clung to arms as a profession and wished to remain soldiers, preferring war to peace. Of such inflammable material the latent traitor was not slow to avail himself when it suited him to light the flames of war.

Had the mikado listened to his wise counselor, and also placed Kusunoki in an office commensurate with his commanding abilities, and rewarded Nitta as he deserved, the century of anarchy and bloodshed which followed might have been spared to Japan.

Go-Daigo, who in the early years of his former reign had been a man of indomitable courage and energy, seems to have lost the best traits of his character in his exile, retaining only his imperious will and susceptibility to flattery. To this degenerate Samson a Delilah was not wanting. He fell an easy victim to the wiles of one man, though the shears by which his strength was shorn were held by a woman. Ashikaga was a consummate master of the arts of adulation and political craft. He was now to further prove his skill, and to verify the warnings of Nitta and the ministers. The emperor made Moriyoshi, his own son, shōgun. Ashikaga, jealous of the appointment, and having too ready access to the infatuated father's ear, told him that his son was plotting to get possession of the throne. Moriyoshi, hating the flatterer, and stung to rage by the base slander, marched against him. Ashikaga now succeeded by means of his ally in the imperial bed in making himself, in the eyes of the mikado, the first victim to the conspiracies of the prince. So great was his power over the emperor that he obtained from the imperial hand a decree to punish his enemy Moriyoshi as a *chōtēki*, or rebel, against the mikado.

Here we have a striking instance of what, in the game of Japanese state-craft, may be called the checkmate move, or, in the native idiom, *Ôte*, "king's hand." It is difficult for a foreigner to fully appreciate the prestige attaching to the mikado's person—a prestige never diminishing. No matter how low his actual measure of power, the meanness of his character, or the insignificance of his personal abilities, he was the Son of Heaven, his word was law, his command omnipotent. He was the fountain of all rank and authority. No military leader, however great his resources or ability, could win the popular heart or hope for ultimate success unless appointed by the emperor. He who held the Son of Heaven in his power was master. Hence it was the constant aim of all the military leaders, even down to 1868, to obtain control of the imperial person. However wicked or villainous the keeper of the mikado, he was master of the situation. His enemies were *chôtéki*, or rebels against the Son of Heaven; his own soldiers were the *kuan-gun*, or loyal army. Even might could not make right. Possession of the divine person was more than nine-tenths—it was the whole—of the law.

Moriyoshi, then, being *chôtéki*, was doomed. Ashikaga, having the imperial order, had the *kuan-gun*, and was destined to win. The sad fate of the emperor's son awakens the saddest feelings, and brings tears to the eyes of the Japanese reader even at the present day. He was seized, deposed, sent to Kamakura, and murdered in a subterranean dungeon in the Seventh month of the year 1335.

His child in exile, the heart of the emperor relented. The scales fell from his eyes. He saw that he had wrongly suspected his son, and that the real traitor was Ashikaga. The latter, noticing the change that had come over his master, left Kiôto secretly, followed by thousands of the disaffected soldiery, and fled to Kamakura, which he had rebuilt, and began to consolidate his forces with a view of again erecting the Eastern capital, and seizing the power formerly held by the Hôjô. Nitta had also been accused by Ashikaga, but, having cleared himself in a petition to the mikado, he received the imperial commission to chastise his rival. In the campaign which followed, the imperial forces were so hopelessly defeated that the quondam imperial exile now became a fugitive. With his loyal followers he left Kiôto, carrying with him the sacred emblems of authority.

Ashikaga, though a triumphant victor, occupied a critical position. He was a *chôtéki*. As such he could never win final success. He had power and resources, but, unlike others equally usurpers, was not

clothed with authority. He was, in popular estimation, a rebel of the deepest dye. In such a predicament he could not safely remain a day. The people would take the side of the emperor. What should he do? His vigor, acuteness, and villainy were equal. The Hōjō had deposed and set up emperors. It was Ashikaga who divided the allegiance of the people, gave Japan a War of the Roses (or Chrysanthemums), tilled the soil for feudalism, and lighted the flames of war that made Kiōto a cock-pit, abandoned the land for nearly two centuries and a half to slaughter, ignorance, and paralysis of national progress. To clothe his acts with right, he made a new Son of Heaven. He declared Kogen, who was of the royal family, emperor. In 1336, this new Son of Heaven gave Ashikaga the title of Sei-i Tai Shōgun. Kamakura again became the military capital. The duarchy was restored, and the War of the Northern and the Southern Dynasties began, which lasted fifty-six years.



Ashikaga Takauji, Sei-i Tai Shōgun. (From a photograph taken from a wooden statue in a temple in Kiōto.)

The period 1333-1336, though including little more than two years of time, is of great significance as marking the existence of a temporary mikadoate. The fact that it lasted so short a time, and that the duarchy was again set up on its ruins, has furnished both natives and foreigners with the absurd and specious, but strongly urged, argument that the Government of Japan, by a single ruler from a single centre, is an impossibility, and that the creation of a dual system with a "spiritual" or nominal sovereign in one part of the empire, and a military or "secular" ruler in another, is a necessity.

During the agitation of the question concerning the abolition of the dual system, and the restoration of the mikado in 1860-1868, one of the chief arguments of the adherents of the shōgunate against the scheme of the agitators, was the assertion that the events of the period 1333-1336 proved that the mikado could not alone govern the country, and that it must have duarchy. Even after the overthrow of the "Tycoon" in 1868, foreigners, as well as natives, who had studied Japanese history, fully believed and expected that in a year or two the present mikado's Government would be overthrown, and the "Tycoon" return to power, basing their belief on the fact that the mikadoate of 1333-1336 did not last. Whatever force such an argument might have had when Japan had no foreign relations, and no aliens on her soil to disturb the balance between Kiōto and Kamakura, it is certain that it counts for naught when, under altered conditions, more than the united front of the whole empire\* is now required to cope with the political pressure from without.

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\* Certain writers, and one as late as 1873, dispute the right of Japan to be called an "empire," and the mikados to be styled "emperor," "inasmuch as they [the mikados] sent tribute to the Emperor of China." As matter of fact, none of the mikados ever did this, though one shōgun (Ashikaga Yoshimitsū, page 195) did. Chinese books, and even the official gazettes of Peking, speak of all nations—even England, France, and the United States—as "paying tribute" to China, and their envoys as "tribute-bearers." Japan has always remained in total political independence of the Middle Kingdom and her Hwang Ti. That Japan is an "empire," the absolutism of the mikado, the diversity of her forms of governmental administration, differing in Liu Kiu (having its lord, or feudal vassal), Yezo (territory governed by a special department), and in the main body of the empire, besides its varied nationalities—Japanese, Liu Kiuans, and Ainōs. This expression of sovereignty is graphically conveyed in the two Chinese characters, pronounced, in Japanese, *Ko tai* (page 39, note), and *Hwang Ti* in Chinese. The Japanese rulers, borrowing their notions of government and imperialism from China, as those of modern Europe have from Rome, adopted the title for the mikado, who has ever ruled, not only over his own subjects of like blood, but over *ebisū*, or barbarians, and tributary people. When the character *Ko* is joined to *Koku* (country), we get *Ko Koku* (which is stamped on the outside of this volume), or "The Mikado's Empire," the idea emphasized being personal, or that of the mikado as government personified. When *Tei* is joined to *Koku* (*Tei Koku Nihon*, the blazon, or distinctive tablet, inscribed with four Chinese characters over the Japanese section at the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia), we have the idea of an empire ruled by deity, or divine government—theocracy. The fact that Japan, though so much smaller than China, has always claimed equal dignity, power, and glory with her mighty neighbor, and the fact that there can not be two suns in the same heaven, helps to explain the deep-seated rivalry, mutual jealousy, and even contempt, which "the decayed old gentleman" and "the conceited young upstart" feel toward each other.