

## XIX.

## THE WAR OF THE CHRYSANTHEMUMS.

THE dynasty of the imperial rulers of Japan is the oldest in the world. No other family line extends so far back into the remote ages as the nameless family of mikados. Disdaining to have a family name, claiming descent, not from mortals, but from the heavenly gods, the imperial house of the Kingdom of the Rising Sun occupies a throne which no plebeian has ever attempted to usurp. Throughout all the vicissitudes of the imperial line, in plenitude of power or abasement of poverty, its members deposed or set up at the pleasure of the upstart or the political robber, the throne itself has remained unshaken. Unclean hands have not been laid upon the ark itself. As in the procession of life on the globe the individual perishes, the species lives on, so, though individual mikados have been dethroned, insulted, or exiled, the prestige of the line has never suffered. The loyalty or allegiance of the people has never swerved. The soldier who would begin revolution, or who lusted for power, would make the mikado his tool; but, however transcendent his genius and abilities, he never attempted to write himself mikado. No Japanese Cæsar ever had his Brutus, nor Charles his Cromwell, nor George his Washington. Not even, as in China, did one dynasty of alien blood overthrow another, and reign in the stead of a destroyed family. Such events are unknown in Japanese annals. The student of this people and their unique history can never understand them or their national life unless he measures the mightiness of the force, and recognizes the place of the throne and the mikado in the minds and hearts of its people.

There are on record instances in which the true heirship was declared only after bitter intrigue, quarrels, or even bloodshed. In the tenth century, Taira no Masakado, disappointed in not being appointed Dai Jō Dai Jin, left Kiōto, went to Shimōsa in the Kwantō, and set himself up as Shinnō, or cadet of the imperial line, and temporarily

ruled the eight provinces of the East as a pseudo-mikado.\* In 1139, the military families of Taira and Minamoto came to blows in Kiōto over the question of succession between the rival heirs, Shutoku and Go-Shirakawa. The Taira being victors, their candidate became mikado. During the decay of the Taira, they fled from Kiōto, carrying with them, as true emperor, with his suite and the sacred insignia, Antoku, the child, five years old, who was drowned in the sea when the Taira were destroyed. The Minamoto at the same time recognized Gotoba.

It may be more analogical to call the wars of the Gen and Hei, with their white and red flags, the Japanese Wars of the Roses. Theirs was the struggle of rival houses. Now, we are to speak of rival dynasties, each with the imperial crysanthemum.

In the time of the early Ashikagas (1336-1390) there were two mikados ruling, or attempting to rule, in Japan. The Emperor Go-Daigo had chosen his son Kuniyoshi as his heir, but the latter died in 1326. Kogen, son of the mikado Go-Fushimi (1299-1301), was

---

\* Taira no Masakado, or, as we should say, Masakado Taira, was a man of great energy and of unscrupulous character. He was at first governor of Shimōsa, but aspired to rule over all the East. He built a palace on the same model as that of the mikado, at Sajima, in Shimotsuké, and appointed officers similar to those at the imperial court. He killed his uncle, who stood in the way of his ambition. To revenge his father's death, Sadamori, cousin to Masakado, headed two thousand men, attacked the false mikado, and shot him to death with an arrow, carrying his head as trophy and evidence to Kiōto, where it was exposed on the pillory. Shortly after his decease, the people of Musashi, living on the site of modern Tōkiō, being greatly afflicted by the troubled and angry spirit of their late ruler, erected a temple on the site within the second castle encinte near Kanda Bridge, and in that part of the city district of Kanda (God's Field) now occupied by the Imperial Treasury Department. This had the effect of soothing the unquiet ghost, and the land had rest; and later generations, mindful of the power of a spirit that in life ruled all the Kwantō, and in death could afflict or give peace to millions at will, worshiped Masakado under the posthumous name of Kanda Miō Jin (Illustrious Deity of Kanda), his history having been forgotten, or transfigured into the form of a narrative, which to doubt was sin. When Iyēyasū, in the latter end of the sixteenth century, made Yedo his capital, he removed the shrine to a more eligible location on the hill in the rear of the Kanda River and the Suido, where, later, the university stood, and erected an edifice of great splendor, surrounded by groves and grounds of surpassing loveliness. This was perhaps only policy, to gain the popular favor by honoring the local gods; but it stirred up some jealousy among the "mikado-reverencers" and students of history who knew the facts. Some accused him of treasonable designs like those of Masakado. In 1868, when the mikado's troops arrived in Yedo, they rushed to the temple of Kanda Miō Jin, and, pulling out the idol or image of the deified Masakado, hacked it to pieces with their swords, wishing the same fate to all traitors. Thus, after nine centuries, the traitor received a traitor's reward, a clear instance of historic justice in the eyes of native patriots.

then made heir. Go-Daigo's third son Moriyoshi, however, as he grew up, showed great talent, and his father regretted that he had consented to the choice of Kogen, and wished his own son to succeed him. He referred the matter to Hōjō at Kamakura, who disapproved of the plan. Those who hated Hōjō called Kogen the "false emperor," refusing to acknowledge him. When Nitta destroyed Kamakura, and Go-Daigo was restored, Kogen retired to obscurity. No one for a moment thought of or acknowledged any one but Go-Daigo as true and only mikado. When, however, Ashikaga by his treachery had alienated the emperor from him, and was without imperial favor, and liable to punishment as a rebel, he found out and set up Kogen as mikado, and proclaimed him sovereign. Civil war then broke out.

Into the details of the war between the adherents of the Northern emperor, Ashikaga, with his followers, on the one side, and Go-Daigo, who held the insignia of authority, backed by a brilliant array of names famous among the Japanese, on the other, I do not propose to enter. It is a confused and sickening story of loyalty and treachery, battle, murder, pillage, fire, famine, poverty, and misery, such as make up the picture of civil wars in every country. Occasionally in this period a noble deed or typical character shines forth for the admiration or example of succeeding generations. Among these none have exhibited more nobly man's possible greatness in the hour of death than Nitta Yoshisada and Kusunoki Masashigé.

On one occasion the army of Nitta, who was fighting under the flag of Go-Daigo, the true emperor, was encamped before that of Ashikaga. To save further slaughter, Nitta sallied out alone, and, approaching his enemy's camp, cried out: "The war in the country continues long. Although this has arisen from the rivalry of two emperors, yet its issue depends solely upon you and me. Rather than millions of the people should be involved in distress, let us determine the question by single combat." The retainers of Ashikaga prevailed on their commander not to accept the challenge. In 1338, on the second day of the Seventh month, while marching with about fifty followers to assist in investing a fortress in Echizen, he was suddenly attacked in a narrow path in a rice-field near Fukui by about three thousand of the enemy, and exposed without shields to a shower of arrows. Some one begged Nitta, as he was mounted, to escape. "It is not my desire to survive my companions slain," was his response. Whipping up his horse, he rode forward to engage with his sword, making himself the target for a hundred archers. His horse, struck when at full

speed by an arrow, fell. Nitta, on clearing himself and rising, was hit between the eyes with a white-feathered shaft, and mortally wounded. Drawing his sword, he cut off his own head—a feat which the warriors of that time were trained to perform—so that his enemies might not recognize him. He was thirty-eight years old. His brave little band were slain by arrows, or killed themselves with their own hand, that they might die with their master. The enemy could not recognize Nitta, until they found, beneath a pile of corpses of men who had committed *hara-kiri*, a body on which, inclosed in a damask bag, was a letter containing the imperial commission in Go-Daigo's handwriting, "I invest you with all power to subjugate the rebels." Then they knew the corpse to be that of Nitta. His head was carried to Kiōto, then in possession of Ashikaga, and exposed in public on a pillory. The tomb of this brave man stands, carefully watched and tended, near Fukui, in Echizen, hard by the very spot where he fell. I often passed it in my walks, when living in Fukui in 1871, and noticed that fresh blooming flowers were almost daily laid upon it—the tribute of an admiring people. A shrine and monument *in memoriam* were erected in his native place during the year 1875.

The brave Kusunoki, after a lost battle at Minatogawa, near Hiōgo, having suffered continual defeat, his counsels having been set at naught, and his advice rejected, felt that life was no longer honorable, and solemnly resolved to die in unsullied reputation and with a soldier's honor. Sorrowfully bidding his wife and infant children good-bye, he calmly committed *hara-kiri*, an example which his comrades, numbering one hundred and fifty, bravely followed.

Kusunoki Masashigé was one of an honorable family who dwelt in Kawachi, and traced their descent to the great-grandson of the thirty-second mikado, Bidatsu (A.D. 572–585). The family name, Kusunoki ("Camphor"), was given his people from the fact that a grove of camphor-trees adorned the ancestral gardens of the mansion. The twelfth in descent was the Vice-governor of Iyo. The father of Masashigé held land assessed at two thousand *roku*. His mother, desiring a child, prayed to the god Bishamon for one hundred days, and Masashigé was born after a pregnancy of fourteen months. The mother, in devout gratitude, named the boy Tamon (the Sanskrit name of Bishamon), after the god who had heard her prayers. The man-child was very strong, and at seven could throw boys of fifteen at wrestling. He received his education in the Chinese classics from the priests in the temple, and exercised himself in all manly and warlike arts. In

his twelfth year he cut off the head of an enemy, and at fifteen studied the Chinese military art, and made it the solemn purpose of his life to overthrow the Kamakura usurpation, and restore the mikado to power. In 1330, he took up arms for Go-Daigo. He was several times besieged by the Hōjō armies, but was finally victorious with Nitta and Ashikaga. When the latter became a rebel, defeated Nitta, and entered Kiōto in force, Kusunoki joined Nitta, and thrice drove out the troops of Ashikaga from the capital. The latter then fled to the West, and Kusunoki advised the imperialist generals to follow them up and annihilate the rebellion. His superiors, with criminal levity, neglecting to do this, the rebels collected together, and again advanced, with increased strength by land and water, against Kiōto, having, it is said, two hundred thousand men. Kusunoki's plan of operations was rejected, and his advice ignored. With Nitta he was compelled to bear the brunt of battle against overwhelming forces at Minato gawa, near Hiōgo, and was there hopelessly defeated. Kusunoki, now feeling that he had done all that was possible to a subordinate, and that life was no longer honorable, retired to a farmer's house at the village of Sakurai, and there, giving him the sword bestowed on himself by the mikado, admonished his son Masatsura to follow the soldier's calling, cherish his father's memory, and avenge his father's death. Sixteen of his relatives, with unquailing courage, likewise followed their master in death.

Of all the characters in Japanese history, that of Kusunoki Masashigé stands pre-eminent for pureness of patriotism, unselfishness of devotion to duty, and calmness of courage. The people speak of him in tones of reverential tenderness, and, with an admiration that lacks fitting words, behold in him the mirror of stainless loyalty. I have more than once asked my Japanese students and friends whom they considered the noblest character in their history. Their unanimous answer was "Kusunoki Masashigé." Every relic of this brave man is treasured up with religious care; and fans inscribed with poems written by him, in fac-simile of his handwriting, are sold in the shops and used by those who burn to imitate his exalted patriotism.\* His son Masatsura lived to become a gallant soldier.

---

\* I make no attempt to conceal my own admiration of a man who acted according to his light, and faced his soldierly ideal of honor, when conscience and all his previous education told him that his hour had come, and that to flinch from the suicidal thrust was dishonor and sin. No enlightened Japanese of to-day would show himself brave by committing *hara-kiri*, as the most earnest writers,

The war, which at first was waged with the clearly defined object of settling the question of the supremacy of the rival mikados, gradually lost its true character, and finally degenerated into a *mêlée* and free fight on a national scale. Before peace was finally declared, all the original leaders had died, and the prime object had been, in a great measure, forgotten in the lust for land and war. Even the rival emperors lost much of their interest, as they had no concern in brawls by which petty chieftains sought to exalt their own name, and increase their territory by robbing their neighbors. In 1392, an envoy from Ashikaga persuaded Go-Kaméyama to come to Kiōto and hand over the regalia to Go-Komatsu, the Northern emperor. The basis of peace was that Go-Kaméyama should receive the title of Dai Jō Tennō (ex-emperor), Go-Komatsu be declared emperor, and the throne be occupied alternately by the rival branches of the imperial family. The ceremony of abdication and surrender of regalia, on the one hand, and of investiture, on the other, were celebrated with due pomp and solemnity in one of the great temples in the capital, and the war of fifty-six years' duration ceased. All this redounded to the glory and power of the Ashikaga.

The period 1336-1392 is of great interest in the eyes of all native students of Japanese history. In the *Dai Nihon Shi*, the Southern dynasty are defended as the legitimate sovereigns, and the true descendants of Ten Shō Dai Jin, the sun-goddess; and the Northern dynasty are condemned as mere usurpers. The same view was taken by Kitabataké Chikafusa, who was the author of the Japanese Red-book, who warned the emperor Go-Daigo against Ashikaga, and in 1339 wrote a book to prove that Go-Daigo was mikado, and the Ashikaga's nominee a usurper. This is the view now held in modern Japan, and only those historians of the period who award legitimacy to the Southern dynasty are considered authoritative. The Northern branch of the imperial family after a few generations became extinct.\*

---

thinkers, and even soldiers admit. Fukuzawa, the learned reformer and pedagogue, and a chaste and eloquent writer, in one of his works condemns the act of Kusunoki, not mentioning him by name, however, as lacking the element of true courage, according to the enlightened view. He explains and defends the Christian ideas on the subject of suicide. His book created great excitement and intense indignation in the minds of the samurai at first; but now he carries with him the approbation of the leading minds in Japan, especially of the students.

\* The names of the "Northern," or "False," emperors are Kōgen, Kōmiō, Shinko, Go-Kōgon, Go-Enyū, and Go-Komatsu.