XX.

THE ASHIKAGA PERIOD.

The internal history of Japan during the period of time covered by the actual or nominal rule of the thirteen shōguns of the Ashikaga family, from 1336 until 1573, except that portion after the year 1542, is not very attractive to a foreign reader. It is a confused picture of intestine war.

Ashikaga Takauji, the founder of the line, was a descendant of the Minamoto Yōshikuni, who had settled at Ashikaga, a village in Shimotsuké, in the eleventh century. He died in 1356. His grandson Yoshimitsu, called the Great Ashikaga, was made shōgun when ten years old, and became a famous warrior in the South and West. After the union of the two dynasties, he built a luxurious palace at Kiōto, and was made Dai Jō Dai Jin. He enjoyed his honors for one year. He then retired from the world to become a shaven monk in a Buddhist monastery.

Under the Hōjō, the office of shōgun was filled by appointment of the imperial court; but under the Ashikaga the office became hereditary in this family. As usual, the man with the title was, in nearly every case, but a mere figure-head, wielding little more personal power than that of the painted and gilded simulacrum of the admiral that formerly adorned the prow of our old seventy-four-gun ships. During this period the term Kubō sama, applied to the shōguns, and used so frequently by the Jesuit fathers, came into use. The actual work of government was done by able men of inferior rank. The most noted of these was Hosokawa Yoriyuki, who was a fine scholar as well as a warrior. It was through his ordering that the young shōgun Yoshimitsu was well trained, and had for his companions noble youths who excelled in literary and military skill. This was vastly different from Hōjō Tokimasa's treatment of the sons of Yoritomo. He attempted the reform of manners and administration. He issued five mottoes for the conduct of the military and civil officers. They were: 1. Thou shalt not be partial in amity or enmity. 2. Thou shalt return neither

ly frequent during this period. The public morals became frightfully corrupted, religion debased. All kinds of strange and uncouth doctrines came into vogue. Prostitution was never more rampant. It was the Golden Age of crime and anarchy.

The condition of the emperors was deplorable. With no revenues, and dwelling in a capital alternately in the possession of one or the other hostile army; in frequent danger from thieves, fire, or starvation; exposed to the weather or the dangers of war, the narrative of their sufferings excites pity in the mind of even a foreign reader, and from the native draws the tribute of tears. One was so poor that he depended upon the bounty of a noble for his food and clothing; another died in such poverty that his body lay unburied for several days, for lack of money to have him interred. The remembrance of the wrongs and sufferings of these poor emperors fired the hearts and nerved the arms of the men who in 1868 fought to sweep away forever the hated system by which such treatment of their sovereign became possible.

So utterly demoralized is the national, political, and social life of this period believed to have been, that the Japanese people make it the limbo of all vanities. Dramatists and romancers use it as the convenient ground whereon to locate every novel or play, the plot of which violates all present probability. The chosen time of the bulk of Japanese dramas and novels written during the last century or two is that of the late Ashikagas. The satirist or writer aiming at contemporary folly, or at blunders and oppression of the Government, yet wishing to avoid punishment and elude the censor, clothes his characters in the garb and manners of this period. It is the potter's field where all the outcasts and Judases of moralists are buried. By common consent, it has become the limbo of playwright and romancer, and the scape-goat of chronology.

The act by which, more than any other, the Ashikagas have earned the curses of posterity was the sending of an embassy to China in 1401, bearing presents acknowledging, in a measure, the authority of China, and accepting in return the title of Nippon Ō, or King of Japan. This, which was done by Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the third of the line, was an insult to the national dignity for which he has never been forgiven. It was a needless humiliation of Japan to her arrogant neighbor, and done only to exalt the vanity and glory of the usurper Ashikaga, who, not content with adopting the style and equipage of the mikado, wished to be made or called a king, and yet dared

not usurp the imperial throne.* The punishment of Ashikaga is the curse of posterity. In 1853, when the treaty with the United States was made, a similar insult to the sovereign and the nation, as well as a contemptible deception of the American envoy and foreigners, was practiced by the shōgun calling himself "Tycoon" (Great King, or Sovereign of Japan). In this latter instance, as we know, came not the distant anathema of future generations, but the swift vengeance of war, the permanent humiliation, the exile to obscurity, of the Tokugawa family, and the abolition of the shōgunate and the dual system forever.

It was during the first of the last three decades of the Ashikaga period that Japan became known to the nations of Europe; while fire-arms, gunpowder, and a new and mighty faith were made known to the Japanese nation.

---

* The Ashikaga line of shōguns comprised the following:

1. Takauji	1335–1357	9. Yoshihisa	1472–1489
2. Yoshinori	1358–1367	10. Yoshitané	1490–1493
3. Yoshimitsu	1368–1393	11. Yoshizumi	1494–1507
4. Yoshimochi	1394–1422	12. Yoshitané (same as the 10th)	1508–1520
5. Yoshikadzu	1423–1425	13. Yoshiharu	1521–1545
6. Yoshinori	1428–1440	14. Yoshiteru	1546–1567
7. Yoshikatsu	1441–1443	15. Yoshiaki	1568–1573
8. Yoshimasa	1449–1471		

The term Kubo sama, so often used by the Jesuit and Dutch writers, was not an official title of the shōgun, but was applied to him by the common people. When at first anciently used, it referred to the mikado, or, rather, the mikado who had abdicated, or preceded the ruling sovereign; but later, when the people saw in the Kamakura court and its master so close an imitation of the imperial style and capital, they began gradually to speak of the shōgun as the Kubo, with, however, only the general meaning of "the governing power," or the nobleman who enjoyed the right of riding to the court in a car, and entering the imperial palace. The term was in use until 1868, but was never inherent in any office, being rather the exponent of certain forms of etiquette, privilege, and display, than of official duties. The Jesuit fathers nearly always speak of the mikado as the Dairi (see page 39), and at first erroneously termed the daimiōs "kings." Later on, they seemed to have gained a clear understanding of the various titles and official relations. In some works the Kuambaku (with *dono*, lord, attached) is spoken of as "emperor." Nobunaga, who became Nai Dai Jin, is also called "emperor." During the supremacy of the military rulers at Kamakura and Yedo, the offices and titles, though purely civil, once exclusively given to nobles at the mikado's court, were held by the officials of the shōgunate.

In later chapters, the writer of this work has fallen into the careless and erroneous practice of calling daimiōs "princes." The term "prince" should be employed only in speaking of the sons of the mikado, or members of the imperial family. "Collectively, the daimiōs were lords or barons, and all ranks of the peerage were represented among them, from the kokushi, or dukes, down to the hatamoto, or knights."