



## I

*T*HE loud-speaker of the Totsuka Club emitted Europe-style music—a Carmen pot-pourri punctuated by eructations and borborygms that reminded Mr. Podler of the water ordeal in Zauberflöte, witnessed by him years ago at Munich. Bubbles seemed to issue from the throat, matt-textured and black, or the curved trumpet, and almost to materialise in the ectoplasm provided by cigar smoke.

Observing his new acquaintance, he meditated a remark; one such as might appeal to the owner of a small, artistic-looking chin-tuft, and blonde hair worn a trifle long at the back. Such a remark should be high-brow, or at least slightly flavoured with intellectual snobbery. Furthermore, it would be overheard by little Mr. Takamatsu, engulfed quite near them in a vast Chesterfield; before him the severe standards of the British Intelligentsia must be maintained.

‘This flatulent thing’s our latest concession to the brainlessness of the herd; and what’s more it’s a compulsory concession, like Hankow’.

‘Dear, dear!’ said the man with the tuft placidly. His name was Sheepshanks. But newly elected to the club, he was anxious to avoid having to participate in the factions and antagonisms which, as he rightly conjectured, were rampant in this miscellaneous crowd. He loathed every kind of emotional disturbance, not so much because it was unseemly, as that he believed it favourable to arterio-sclerosis.

Mr. Takamatsu was not impressed, nor, indeed, was he listening; carried away on the tide of bogus Spanish music, he drifted rapturously down familiar channels of thought, his ale-tinted skull gleaming, as though with delight, through its black stubble, a millimetre high. How incredibly rapid was the advance of Japan! It seemed but yesterday that the first railway station was opened, with ceremonies almost religious, at Shimbashi, or that an orchestral piece had been performed, regardless of time, and with every instrument permanently several bars out, before a vociferously enthusiastic audience. And now we had wireless and an aerial mail service; not only would a Japanese audience turn up its nose at third-rate foreign pianists, but the very errand boys would play 'Toreador' on their mouth-organs as they swooped jeopardsly past on bicycles; the same kind of boy in England would be whistling a vulgar music-hall song. Carmen was naturalised; the energetic Japanese had much more right to it, surely, than the moribund Latin nations.

In Mr. Takamatsu's library might be seen the works of Mill, Spencer and Emerson, Count Keyserling's Diary, Dr. Nitobe's *Bushido*, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority*, and M. Muret's *The Twilight of the White Nations*. He had almost persuaded himself to love the Chinese for their increasing anti-European sentiment.

'Well, Takamatsu, what do you think of Mr. Gwatkin's latest attack on your hearth and home?' cried the fat and hearty Mr. Kurrie-Lewer, knocking down a bright yellow copy of *Banzai* on the table, as the din of the radio ceased.

'We hate heem', replied the little merchant simply, continuing to beam.

'Poor man. Why all the animosity? He doesn't exaggerate as much as all that, does he?'

Mr. Kurrie-Lewer was anxious to draw Mr. Takamatsu, whose Anglophobic pronouncements were generally rich and racy.

‘Not so much. But not necessary to show all dark side of Japanese life. Suppose Japanese Gwatkin wrote *Hurrah* exposing dark side of English life. You would not like it, sure ; but not necessarye’.

Not necessary—an admirable creed. Mr. Kurrie-Lewer, who was a diplomat, had always deprecated the tendency to demand truth at all costs, and felt convinced that these denudations and revelations were largely exhibitionism masquerading as moral uplift ; a piece of semi-conscious Western hypocrisy. In the East there was a much healthier attitude toward truth ; indeed, there were certain occasions on which it was exceedingly impolite not to tell a lie.

‘I’m there with you, Takamatsu, I must say. Here’s Japan trying all she knows to get on with modern civilisation, and one of us interloping foreigners comes along and washes your dirty linen in public ; just as though we hadn’t got baskets full of our own at home. Mind you, I’m not saying you haven’t got even more ; but I do think that under the circumstances it’s rather rough to run you down and deluge you with missionaries as though you were a lot of South Sea cannibals’.

‘Zat is so. Why you not deruge Turks with missionaries, or Portuguese ? Japan is a more go-ahead nation than Turks and Portuguese ; you irrogical Anglo-Saxons’.

Unwittingly they had given this turn to the conversation, because of the half-heard click of billiard-balls from the adjacent room, where, as usual, the Revs. Abishag P. Shumacher and Quincy L. Schieberman were monopolising the best table. The former had been dispatched by the Galveston Medium Shell Baptists at a princely

salary to arouse in the Japanese (whom he found, alas ! distressingly sceptical and apathetic) something of that herd-hysteria that was so easily induced in the negroes, to say nothing of the whites, at camp-meetings. The negro, he would say regretfully, was turrerbly carnal, but he reacted to religion fine. He would go on to recount stories of salvation long ago in the Aristocratic South, making it appear that he came of old slave-owning stock, instead of an obscure baker's family from Mannheim.

Quincy Lafayette Schiebermann represented the Methodism of the Middle West ; his style was therefore more scholarly and less sensational than that of his confrère. An ardent anti-Darwinian and supporter of the late Mr. Bryan, he held a theory of the mystical order of creation which conclusively proved the existence of a God. Starting with a Trinity, everything, he demonstrated, was neatly arranged in threes : earth, water and air ; male, female and offspring ; animal, vegetable and mineral. Smiling in pity at ribald suggestions of further evidence like coat, waistcoat and trousers, or spot, plain and red, he developed his thesis not only in the pulpit, but in long letters which, printed in the Japan *Argus* (' Pastor Schiebermann Raps Darwin '), threatened to rival seriously the baseball news and the instalments of ' Bringing up Father ', the three occurring appropriately together on the same page.

Mr. Schiebermann scored a miss in baulk, Mr. Schumacher a massé cut in the cloth ; they were enjoying themselves immensely.

Messrs. Kurrie-Lewer, Takamatsu and Baron Kondo shook for cocktails. Mr. Sheepshanks took a little Sherry for his stomach's sake ; ever since he was turned of thirty-five he feared disease and death. After the small climacteric man's resistance begins to wane ; the

diminution of the peril of consumption is more than counterbalanced by the hundred gambits which now become possible to our grim enemy ; intestinal stasis, hardening of the arteries, nephritis and cancer, that ugly word that he would try to exclude from his mind. Cocktails played into the devil's hands ; but a little Sherry—and after meals Biofirmin, that “ arrests morbid states conducive to or resulting from old age ” ; on such principles he modelled his regimen. His fear of emotional stress conflicted with his morbid inclination to brood over possible diseases, so, as a sort of compromise, he had taken to doctoring himself in an amateurish way. The medicine cupboard in the marital chamber was plentifully stocked ; for Mrs. Sheepshanks, cosmetics, stimulants, sedatives ; for him, depuratives, purgatives, alteratives.

Male social life was centred in the Totsuka Club ; here was the whole gamut, from ‘ Captain ’ Harvey Moss, ‘ R.N. ’, an ex-gunner's mate, and a clever rogue who had managed to deceive successfully poor old Count Saito, from whom he had obtained money for the establishment of a School of Comparative Eschatology (Mr. Moss often wondered what it was), to H.E. the Ambassador of Atlantis, bland, vague and lovably senile.

There were bridge, mahjonn, billiards and the shaking of dice ; but scandal was undoubtedly the favourite recreation, as providing more scope for the intellectual and creative faculties. In other clubs the smutty story might claim precedence over other amusements, but within these walls respectability had relegated it to second place, with novel-reading a bad third. This state of things was said by cynics like Professor McGonigle to be due to the diplomatic rather than to the clerical element. Denigration, then, and the adornment of unpromising fact, was here carried to a pitch of per-

fection that shamed the by no means despicable craft of the 'hen-parties', and far excelled that of countries where the law is less accommodating. To take a mild instance: the wooden conventicle of the Methodists had, a year after the great earthquake, been charitably supplied with cushions and other upholstery; and Mr. Schiebertmann had dedicated them in a prayer which moved hundreds by its austere beauty, and ran pretty nearly as follows: 'O Lord, we have this day been made more comfortable by Thy help and are fixed real fine with these hassocks; grant we may be worthy of them, and keep ourselves as spahtless as they are at present'. But the Club version ran: 'Say, Lord, we've gotten by Thy help a real cute lot o' notions. Our church is just Palm Beach. Grant us grace nodder become a bum lot o' drug-store loafers and spiritual hoboos. O boy! but we're mighty comfortable now'. If that wasn't good American, Professor McGonigle would declare (he was suspected of being the author of the *varia lectio*), it was, like most modern-style things in this country, a jolly fine imitation of it.

While Professor McGonigle's mischief was seldom damaging, that of the maturer gossips was of a far more serious nature. No bachelor conducting an establishment with the most staid and elderly servants, no married man with even five minutes of his day unaccounted for in detail, could escape their calumny. And, what was worse, they corrupted the callow and the single-hearted, who, scarce a month after election, would become affected by the insidious influence that lurked in this uncomely red brick building, with its roan leather arm-chairs and its bleak, white distempered rooms, too high for comfort, too low for grandeur. Beset on the one side by missionaries inveighing against vices which, forbidden to themselves, they imagined others to be

practising, on the other by those who must repeat something smart, and so malicious, at all costs, it would not be long before they attained to some excellence at the game. In short, the Totsuka Club was then and always, in the words of Mr. Podler, 'just lousy with liars'.

He had recognised early in life, after some embarrassing incidents in society, that his sallies of wit fell too often upon stony ground; a few sudden silences at the dinner table had persuaded him that his must be the safer and easier medium of undecorated frankness. His vitality demanded forceful expression, and his ambition would have had it more complex; but, though quite fairly well-read, a mysterious defect in the engine of his brain prevented him from applying to his own speech the embroideries he most appreciated in his favourite authors. Perhaps he was fundamentally too honest for epigram.

He was now feeling a little sick as he reviewed the throng that passed him to their Saturday lunch—lunch, at least, 'was what the 'Embassy crowd' called it, the merchants preferring the more oriental 'tiffin', while all the Americans said 'tuffn'. Diplomats, merchants, Japanese peers, parsons, professors; Totsuka society from alpha to omega. The merchants especially enraged him, because, as he pointed out to Mr. Sheepshanks, while they included some good fellows, there were also 'a mob of little tuppenny-halfpenny Balham clerks who come out here raw from the counter and think themselves Lord God Almighty, and go sucking up to the Embassy'. Mr. Podler was so far tainted with snobbery as to dislike them, not for giving themselves airs and climbing', but for their Balham antecedents.

No! he could not face that lot, shuffling by now in monstrous fresco, with every feature and idiosyncrasy

studied *ad nauseam*. There they went, just as usual, the pale, the ruddy and plethoric, and all those varieties of brown misnomered 'yellow' by Western peoples. An appallingly large number of them wore thick-rimmed American spectacles; several affected beards, a few even the whiskers of a forgotten era. Baron Yamaguchi had cultivated a ferocious pair of Victorian mutton-chops, the Belgian Counsellor, M. Leulinghem, a magnificent red spade beard, while a German secretary's chin was plumed after the manner of Chaucer. Graft and the shop-till, God and the blackboard; that was what they represented and what they talked about. And people called that Life, or Reality! Why, even the suburban Bohemianism of the Tottenham Court Road and its dimmer but more genteel simulacrum in Chelsea was better than this. It was not long since he had recalled with scorn, and even shame, his youthful poses of wickedness, his tripling of beer with Bolsheviks in the City Road, his chaffing of painted youths at a surreptitious café in the Jaegerstrasse, his silly chatter with others of his kidney about Honegger or Morales (the strange postures of adolescence!); but now, futility for futility, they seemed to have been more real, more related to life, than the tissue of mechanical occurrences that depressed him at the moment. There was his adventureless work at the Consulate, with its tang of Civil Service primness, and to set it off, a monotone of legation dinners, with now and then an interminable Japanese wedding banquet, all morning coats and speeches, or a geisha orgy to which he might be treated by some magnate who wished to ingratiate him for business purposes, where the same sort of farded little women fired off the same kind of excessively broad joke. There were tennis and golf, bridge and billiards, afternoon call, motor drives to the mountains on Sunday



afternoons, all of which things were, for him at least, as much duties of prestige as they were pleasures. One could find racier currents, it was true, beneath the surface of Japanese life, but he might never entirely plumb them as long as he desired to preserve his good name and his job. Others had tried them with disastrous results. There was the elderly Fritz Eberle who was stabbed one evening in the diaphragm, firmly, but not fatally, by a certain Fumiko Nagaoka, one of those young women who, chiefly perhaps because their legs are not so short as those of the average Japanese, have learnt to wear foreign clothes with passable grace, and show themselves with an air of great modernity at the few places where European dancing is still sanctioned by the police. Miss Nagaoka was plainly more of a criminal than that old fool Eberle who, through her, had become entangled in some opium-running affair and similar dubious traffic connected with a happy-go-lucky little hotel tucked away in a side alley in Ushigome; but the vernacular press jumped at this opportunity of booming the immorality of foreigners, then a popular cry, and maintained that Miss Nagaoka should be considered as an heroine like the Japanese women of old time who defended their honour at the point of the sword. Then there had been queer doings at Nagoya; the circumstances were not yet and never would be fully revealed in which the Abyssinian Consul was suddenly arrested at the suit of Mrs. Miura, and as suddenly released. The little notebooks which it is the duty of every good Japanese policeman to cram with particulars, especially about aliens, contained, no doubt, the fullest account; but even then—and Mr. Podler knew something of police methods—it was by no means necessarily the truest. One was safe in the beaten track; but as for the surrounding campaign, the longer one lived in Japan

the more one realised how thickly a fair-seeming prospect was set with springes to catch woodcocks.

He was all the more distressed by his malaise because he conceived it to be of a romantic nature, his ambition being at that time to acquire what he thought was a classic serenity, devoid of all yearnings to be in any place other than that which one normally occupied. Yet, quelling him with protean strength and cunning, it would crop up in innumerable unexpected forms—just now in that of jibbing at the habitual club lunch. But was it not incumbent on him to ‘chaperone’ Mr. Sheepshanks at this rite, where he might otherwise feel lost and lonely?

The raucous bellow of Prof. (and Rev.) Zwingli P. Studebaker of the Aoibashi Adventist University penetrated the barrier of his absorption. ‘I ain’t one of your la-di-da highbrows’, he was roaring, ‘but Gahsh, I think Lahngfeller’s a real fine poc-ut’. Who the devil cared what a conceited great camel like that thought about anything? People simply talked like that to conceal their ignorance; and Studebaker was making it pretty clear that he had read no poetry but Longfellow. These ‘Professors’ from America! But, after all, the word was becoming almost equally degraded in Japan as well. His disgust impelled him to action.

‘By the way, Sheepshanks, are you lunching here? Personally, I can’t recommend the chow they give you. What about coming along with me to the Toyo-Ken?’

‘O thanks very much, but, as a matter of fact, I’ve promised to lunch at home. I only looked in here on my way. Why not come and take pot-luck with us? We’re quite used to that sort of thing, and my wife’ll be glad to see you’.

Mumbling heart-felt gratitude, Mr. Podler wandered pensively toward the lavatory, whence the two shortly

emerged, bracing themselves to the shock of a July noon. On smug sago-palms and shock-headed talinots, on long luscious plumes of banana-trees and riotous cannas, whose extravagance in scarlet and yellow was all but audible, the sun launched his ruthless bombardment. One was deafened by the chorus of cicadas, comparable to a textile factory whose racket was just dominated by the sizzling of a hundred safety-valves ; a furious noise that seemed to augment the already intolerable heat.

Mr. Sheepshanks, moving through the upward ripple of air-waves cast back by the scorched pavement, so that his legs and the whole street appeared to warp and tremble, waved languidly at a row of taxicabs. The factotum in charge slammed the door with a shrill 'Orright-o', and they rattled through sweltering streets, tormented with trams and Fordson tractors, toward the parched field of Yoyogi.

