



## XIX

THE world, obdurate as a billiard-ball which offers no purchase to the claws and teeth of a kitten, presented an uncompromising convex to the Ditchlings at this time. It was all very well to vow that they would not have attended Mr. Fargo's 'fiançailles', a bibulous rout, for anything on earth; but there were other repulses that could not be so dismissed. For one thing, it was quite probable that the senior pupils at Mr. Ditchling's school would strike next term, and on his account. Mr. Inouye, the most popular teacher of this establishment, was learned on the subject of Marxianism, kept a bust of Trotsky, had had his house twice raided by the police, and belonged to a secret society for the propagation of 'Dangerous Thought'. He was known to have met, last summer, a detachment from the Soviet Embassy, bathing together without a stitch of clothing (Mr. Douglas's 'little white cows' are no fantasy) and singing Russian revolutionary songs most admirably in four parts. But all the boys loved Mr. Inouye, and had already threatened a strike with sabotage when the Principal, under the pressure, it was said, of the ubiquitous Centipedes, who were capable of trouncing anyone soundly and leaving him unconscious amid the wreckage of his home, had made an abortive move for his dismissal. The Principal was an indolent old gentleman with a few green wisps of billy-goat's hair on his chin, but none on his head, and an inordinate love of green tea and Ko-cho cigarettes which taste like the

furnes of imperfectly distilled charcoal. As long as he could be left in peace to squat on his tatami and 'stink the place out', as Ditchling bitterly remarked, with the dried alfalfa that he smoked in such quantities, or pick at a dish of bean jam with a pair of chopsticks, he was perfectly happy. His hobbies were calligraphy, the Chinese classic and Noh-singing, in which last he indulged for the good of his chest, producing apparently from the lower part of his abdomen a series of intestinal quaverings and hollow roars that disturbed the rest of two unappreciative Dutch merchants who lived in the same compound.

Mr. Ditchling did not—though the greater part of his pupils did—share in Mr. Inouye's advanced views. He was an orthodox monarchist and chauvinist; he read some of the simpler tales of Rudyard Kipling to his flock, appending little corollaries of his own on the desirability of discipline, Empire, the efficiency of capitalism, steadiness under fire, and the code of 'sporting' honour among British schoolboys. But these excursions into ethics failed to produce the result he had anticipated. From the first a subdued sniggering had been perceptible in the back rows; but later, on his entry he would observe the classroom blackboard to be scribbled over with words of a revolutionary nature, such as 'Lenin', 'kiss', or 'Thard International'. The disaffection of the class was aggravated by his own disciplinary methods. The Japanese schoolboy, who has never received correction of any kind at home, resents with a cleverly concealed virulence any attempt to humiliate him. The day after that on which Ditchling had publicly torn up the 'themes' of two youths who, in his judgment, had been cheating, a mysterious voice cried 'Baka!' its echoes filling the playground which he happened to be crossing at the moment. Determined not to let the

affront sleep, he delivered a speech to his class which he found in a state of expectancy and ill-subdued glee. Some boy, he told them, had in a peculiarly boorish and Japanese manner shouted a rude word at him. Although he could not detect the culprit, he had no doubt that it was one of the two who had been cheating yesterday. Unless they came forward and apologised in public—but he doubted they were too sneaking to perform so manly an act—they should both fail in the terminal examination.

The class receiving this news with apparent docility, Ditchling thought the matter was closed, and congratulated himself that he knew 'how to handle the young devils'. But a few days later he was deeply chagrined to receive the following letter :

'SIR,—You are not the noble man, but animal. If you do not pass the all of us in Examination, we throw the Vitliol to your face.—(Signed) ALL THE CLASS'

Mr. Ditchling contracted a cold pain in his solar plexus, while his wife rushed off at once to the Embassy to demand protection from an infuriated populace. But Mr. Griffiths, the swarthy second Secretary, expressed grave doubts as to whether the Embassy could interfere in so purely personal a matter, and hinted as delicately as he could that no sensible person would make such a fuss about the silly threats of schoolboys. After she had returned to talk vehemently of jacks-in-office, snobs, cliques and complaints to the Crown, Mr. Ditchling demanded audience of his Principal, who promised reluctantly to take the requisite steps. Which were these: at the end of term Mr. Ditchling found himself preceded to the examination room by a diminutive policeman, who solemnly reassured him thus. 'Do not be Ah-fraid: I will pu-rotect you'. So escorted, he mounted the dais to

a murmur of very audible amusement, which the rattle of the little tin sword failed to quell.

He knew, by this time, his Japanese juvenile psychology well enough to be sure that a riposte would not be long in its delivery ; and indeed, Mr. Wagatsuma, a teacher of the same class, meeting him casually the other day on a station platform, had intimated that a strike would be threatened next term to exact the promise of Mr. Ditchling's dismissal. The Principal feared his pupils more than he did the Centipedes ; the latter might break his head, the former cost him his position, a far more serious matter. How much greater, then, was their power of suasion than Ditchling's, who had no weapon in his armoury but intrigue and, failing that, conscientiousness, and to whom it was forbidden by law to offer violence to a Japanese subject.

Thus, not only were the gates to the ' sapphire throne ' of English Literature at Taisho irrevocably barred, but his hold upon his present job was becoming lamentably precarious. The outlook was gloomy, especially because it was on the cards that in another seven months a smaller edition of Clarence Eugene might be interrupting his nocturnal repose. It is no joke for a foreigner with a family to be unemployed in Japan.

Mrs. Ditchling, too, as the summer waned, began to perceive that sinister forces were in league against her. At the yacht race last Thursday Mrs. Miles had cut her dead on the quay ; neither the Eavarian Ambassador nor the Cavaras had invited them to their farewell dinner-parties ; while the giant picnic engineered by Mr. Kurrie-Lewer and Mr. Fargo had recently left for Enoshima without them—four cars full of hilarious people, among whom McGonigle was unusually conspicuous, having changed hats with Malvina Bugbird. They stormed hooting past the very door to which Mrs.

Ditchling and Clarence had hastened to see what the noise was about. The whoops which greeted her—had they but something remotely ironic in their intonation? The tentatives of some unknown faction to freeze her out of Totsuka society were all too evident.

But troubles lay even nearer home than this; O-Natsu-san, the treasure, had depreciated sadly as an asset since the Harada fiasco. It soon became clear that her commissions from tradesmen, and consequently the weekly bills, were increasing rapidly, and that this increase was in strict proportion to the number of cousins that visited her. When for the first time a grinning orang-outang of a youth in a spotted 'yukata' was introduced to the mistress as 'cousin-san', he had been welcomed and requested to make himself at home. He did; never had Mr. Ditchling's consumption of 'Air-ship' cigarettes accelerated so portentously as during this particular fortnight. The next cousin was a sour-faced personage who was evidently connected with fish. He was, in fact, a fish-porter from the harbour with a boring wife and family. The climax was reached at 12.30 one night, when a frightful uproar from the 'back regions' woke Mr. Ditchling. Was it fire or a burglar? Burglars always had knives. Descending in bodily fear at the command of his wife, he ascertained that the disturbance came from the cook's apartment. As soon as his footsteps were audible in the kitchen, the paper doors of the cook's room shot furiously back, and two cousins of brawny construction precipitated themselves headlong into the outer darkness.

O-Natsu-san, over the priority of whose favours they had been quarrelling almost to the point of bloodshed, proved that she had a far better head on her shoulders than either when she explained without hesitation and in a rapid succession of lies, that they had stayed rather later

than they had intended, discussing what could be done to assist a favourite uncle who was caught by one of the periodic bank smashes, which are certainly a prominent feature in Japanese financial life. The noise which had broken Mr. Ditchling's rest was merely an expression of alarm on discovering that the night train for Shimonoseki, where the uncle lived, was due to leave in five minutes ; hence the abruptness of their flight.

As for Mrs. Ditchling's face powder, she found herself buying enough in a week to adorn, as she pathetically complained, the whole of the Yoshiwara ; and if Clarence Eugene had stolen chocolates at a quarter the rate at which they disappeared, he would have been permanently sick, instead of once a week, which was his average.

As if the cup of adversity was not already full, they were visited at this time with a sanitary disaster of a kind seldom experienced in the West. Soon after the eruption of the brawny cousins, who were local folk, one of them being related to a priest, it was noticed that a ghost had taken up temporary quarters in the domestic well, from which he could only be ejected by the rite of exorcism, and the servants were threatening to leave in a body unless a priest were immediately summoned for the purpose. He was sent for, and arrived one afternoon, a pleasant-looking, portly old body ; ' a man who sees straight into your soul ; really there's a great deal in common between Buddhism and Roman Catholicism '. But Toni Ditchling's enthusiasm ebbed when the good old man, smiling and bowing, managed to convey to her that the cost of exorcism, like that of rice and vegetables, had gone up since the great earthquake, largely as a result of the increase in the number of unquiet spirits who had not received the dues which would have been paid them at ordinary seasons. He named a figure which pained them ; but it was better to pay than to be

suddenly deserted by the whole staff, so, after a loud and undignified argument, Ditchling had to consent to be 'stung'. Next week, O-Natsu-san had a very pretty new tortoiseshell comb in her hair. But, on the other hand, she crowned the misfortunes of the Ditchlings by being unable to produce the concrete evidence of McGonigle's trespass which, they had hoped, would clinch the matter. She was grossly culpable, utterly unreliable: it was, they felt, sheer negligence.

It was all very well for Miss Walker to groan and talk an astonishing lot of scriptural rubbish about the ravens and Elisha—or was it Elijah?—or to give a stupid imitation of Dr. Harada making a speech which was not even remotely like the actual thing; such trifling added nothing to their slender bank account. They began to wish they had invested their spare cash in sound debentures instead of in unfruitful hospitality. At present they were seeing too much of Miss Walker altogether; she had long ceased to be funny, and had proved herself useless; the residue of her was merely disgusting. However, it was still necessary, for lack of more profitable society, to adhere to her and her alarming set, whom Ensign Pullborough termed elegantly 'the Bloodies', a group that had elected her as their intellectual leader, and consisted of several inefficient Colonial and American Middle School teachers who called themselves Professors. Professors Miss Gopher, a desiccated Canadian Presbyterian spinster; Miss Gulick, a stout New Jersey virgin whose hair 'every day and in every way' became redder and redder as she approached the grand climacteric, and who, because she had read and been shocked by one of Mr. Van Vechten's or Mr. Morley's novels, and had seen an account, either in the *Saturday Evening Post* or the *Atlantic Monthly* of a New York performance of one of Pirandello's plays, considered

herself to be McGonigle's intellectual superior; Professor Umberto Iggs of Orstrylia who despised phonetics; the pupils, he averred, would ave now difficulty in follerin the hinstructions of their perfesser withart these hunnecessary hartificial haid; and Prof. and Rev. Studebaker, who could talk of nothing but Lahngfeller, having read no other poet.

This society might have proved more congenial, had it been less opposed to alcoholic drink, even in moderation. But to sit uncomfortably on the floor for two hours—Miss Walker's Bohemianism demanded this unconventional posture, which had nothing to do with native customs—listening to her and Miss Gulick pretending that they had read Carlucci, Marcel Proust and Gammer Gurton's Needle, while dreary cups of cocoa and synthetic 'soft' cyder were circulated by Mr. Walker, who snuffed as he poured, was a lowering, a psychically asphyxiating experience, after the uproarious 'beer-dances' concluding with Kummel-punch at the Bavarian Ambassador's, or the more awful but equally spirituous hospitality of Sir Birinus.

Two problems required urgent solution: (a) the discovery of a new job for Ditchling, this time in a school of Conservative tendencies, and (b) their re-instatement, if necessary through self-abasement, in the Totsuka social world.

As regards problem (a) it must be recognised that the good old days of the Meiji era, in which any naval deserter with a quid in his cheek and a rum-flask in his pocket, or any fugitive from Columbian justice, could assume academic dignity, were gone. The Japanese were beginning to feel that foreigners were not always what they professed to be, and to examine the claims of those who offered to educate their youth. Then again, the missionaries, with inferior educational equipment,



were trying to effect a corner in teaching employment ; young persons from a Middle West ' Cow College ' or Nonconformist institute, flourishing their puerile degrees and their standards of knowledge which would disgrace the fifth form of an English country grammar school, agreed to work at a sweated wage, in view of the emolument they already received from missionary headquarters, and were thus able to under-sell better qualified and *bona fide* teachers who received no financial support from religious bodies. A great deal of canvassing, plotting and ' nursing ' would be required before anything like remunerative employment could be secured.

There was but a single spark in the gloom. Mr. Kobayashi called on the next afternoon to express his appreciation of Mr. Ditchling's lecture on the Objective French Novel, and to proffer an envelope fastened, according to the etiquette of present-giving, with red and white paper threads and decorated with a red paper arrow-head. Mr. Ditchling was pleased to find within it twenty ten-yen notes, and Mrs. Ditchling to learn that Mr. Kobayashi was secretary to the management of the Totsuka Normal School, and that he had been strongly impressed by the erudition recently displayed by Mr. Ditchling upon the rostrum ; of the *Criticaster* he knew nothing—the only copy of that weighty periodical available in Japan being safely locked up in a box. It wouldn't do to take any risks.

' And how do you enjoy your present scholastic appointment ? ' asked Mr. Kobayashi, who was at the Johnsonese stage of his English studies. ' I trust you find it congenial ? '

' Well, not quite so much as I could wish. To be quite frank with you, Mr. Kobayashi, there's not enough scope ; before I leave Japan I hope to do something more than just teaching grammar and composition.

People can do that perfectly well who aren't quite so widely read as I am'.

'Precisely; you find yourself no doubt somewhat constricted in your present avocation. It appears to me unfortunate that your undoubted talents should be deprived of a suitable opportunity of being displayed to the fullest advantage'.

'Yes, that's just it'.

'Let me see', Mrs. Ditchling took up the conversation after a pause, as though she was hunting for a fresh topic, 'do we know the English teacher at the Normal School, or don't we? I'm so inclined to mix them up!'

'Professor the Reverend Schieberman; an estimable divine'.

'Ah yes, and American, of course. Tell me, Mr. Kobayashi, do you think the American accent is as *pure* as the English?'

'I cannot say I do. The only disadvantages of Professor the Reverend Schieberman are his curious pronunciation and his tendency to employ undignified phrases'.

'Ah, yes', said Ditchling, 'they have a coarser psychology and less culture than our people have. I should be sorry to see a really artistic nation like Japan Americanised'.

A few minutes later Mr. Kobayashi bowed himself from the door, backward, like the courtier who must not show the prince his posteriors.

'Any chance there, d'you think?' inquired Ditchling with a backward jerk of the head.

'Yes, I *do* think. He seems to be a pretty fair ass'. Her husband frowned. 'I mean—oh, you know what I mean. Anyhow, you've started well with him, and all you've got to do's to go on, carefully, sticking to him tight'.