



## V

THAT night Mr. Kurrie-Lewer was to give one of his celebrated parties for men only. Conspicuous among the blond mob of Atlantean commercials and diplomats moved not only the smart Podler, but that mercurial millionaire, Mr. Takamatsu, and a Mr. Horie, a golliwog of a young man, with lank, girlish hair down to his shoulders, and vast horn-rimmed spectacles. If a golliwog could have mated with an owl, such might have been the appearance of their offspring. Mr. Podler repressed a grin at this astonishing figure, with its pink jumper and corduroy trousers. Mr. Horie was a designer of post-vorticist scenery for the Hodogaya little theatre, where they acted Noel Coward, Andreef, Pirandello and Firbank's *Zoubaroff*—and occasionally as a concession to the groundlings, 'Barnard Shar', worshipped in this country under that curious name. Miss Vocadlo had once danced there, but this was during her short-lived intimacy with Mr. Horie. It had not been long before she took offence at some of his habits, while he soon discovered her to be insufficiently modern. For one thing, she was too pretty in face and figure; the post-vorticist affects an acute-angled grotesque. But in point of sheer geometric hideousness, Mr. Horie, with his diagonal teeth and complete absence of chin, left nothing whatever to be desired.

Mr. Takamatsu was especially welcome at Mr. Kurrie-Lewer's house; fat, jolly men, both of them, they found other points in common, such as being alumni of

Camford College, Oxbridge, the more evangelical of the two oldest Atlantean Universities, and a taste for objects of virtue, particularly from China and Japan. Takamatsu had a bluff way of talking anti-foreign sentiment and jingoism, especially to Atlanteans, his little pig's eyes twinkling, as he lolled dumpily back in a chair with both hands in his trouser pockets. They would go into fits of laughter, and discover in him the most valuable of tonics.

'You send home your damn missionaries, please. Why you send them here to preach peace of God that passeth all the understanding, and all time you fortify the Singapore and the Pearl Harbour? You think the Japanese is fool; but she is not fool; one day you see, yes, I think so. English, she is fool. She comes and teach us how to handle the big Navy; we say sanko very much, and sen one day our big Navy handle you. Haha! Japanese must have coronee and eKONonmic DEvelop-MENT. She take Manchuria, Indo-China, Malay, India. Very sorry FOR you. We shall be white man's burden. Haha! dam heavy burden. You drop us like the hot plate. We help Chinese to make the many soldier. Russians allies make many Russians soldier; we wipe you on the floor with yarrow peril'.

People then patted him on the back and gave him another cocktail. It might be true that a large section of the Japanese public thought, and half the vernacular press wrote, in precisely the same vein; but that was all right; an East-Asiatic alliance could do nothing in their time; they hadn't got the money. As for Takamatsu, he was genuinely fond of these casual Germanic souls, and sometimes entertained them on a lavishly and even startlingly Oriental scale. He liked to cultivate, if he could, their taste for 'Jahpa-nese pu-retty garl'. Tonight he was eloquent on Western morals, introducing the subject through his pet aversion, the missionaries.

‘ Oh, what the hypocrites they are, your missionaries. They say Japanese man immoral man, she goes to Yoshiwara, she keep concubine. Why she shall not keep concubine? It is better than run after someone wife. Haha! You send the missionary and your Gwatkin make plenty money when he write Japanese is the ricentious man. But your English civirisation, what it bring? I tell you the ABC of English civirisation: Adultery, Bible, Commarce. You bting them to our nateeve land and you corrupt the familee life. You foreigners are the rotten lot; very ricentious. To-day why what I find out? I intend to visit Mr. Cavara and lovely wife. Not at home; Mr. Cavara she has gone to Totsuka on OFFICIAL busiNESS. And lovely wife he goes in motor with Monsieur Faburo. You know Monsieur Faburo; I know heem too, the rotten lot. The sarvant did tell me perhaps motor axe-dent: madame went away the many hours. Motor axe-dent, I dohnt sink. I sink diff-er-ent sort of axe-dent. To-night I go here and I come past hees house. No light, no one at home. Still diff-er-ent axe-dent, Haha!’

Fortunately these allegations were retailed in a corner to Podler and Kurrie-Lewer, who were his particular cronies.

‘ For God’s sake keep your mouth shut about it, Takamatsu, old boy,’ said Kurrie-Lewer anxiously. ‘ There’d be the devil to pay if it got about. Anyhow, I don’t quite see why the escapade of a Dago woman and a Belgian should reflect on British morals. Talking through your hat, old son, that’s what you’re doing’.

‘ You wait. English just so bad. She will make the fool of himself very soon, haha!’

Mr. Podler preserved his outward tranquillity, not only because his projected demarches with Inez had been

beyond all hope forestalled, but because he felt himself to be a suitable butt for Mr. Takamatsu's sarcasm.

'Sar I—I een-tend to vee-seet you!' with these words, enunciated *andante cantabile*, Mr. Horie bowed a shock head before him. It was urgently necessary to pin him down to time and date; for Mr. Horie was just the sort of person who would come and suck his breath on the doormat at the most impossible times—one of the times, perhaps, at which Mr. Podler might be occupied with (he quailed at the thought) amatory pursuits.

'I'd be very pleased indeed to see you next week, say Friday at four. How's the theatre getting on?'

Mr. Horie had not prepared an answer to that question for which he required 'notice', but he had sedulously composed a question of his own. The only thing to do was to get it off his chest, ignoring his interlocutor's remark.

'Sar!' He remained impassive for three seconds, then: 'Do you sink Syngé is greatest dram-mat-ist?'

'Sink sing? Sing? Ah, Syngé, of course. Well no, I should hardly say so. What about Dekker and Massinger and some of those Johnnies? I believe they're supposed to be rather great, aren't they?' He was careful to dissociate himself from the professional student of letters, and to affect only the vaguest or most nodding acquaintance with slightly more recondite authors; at the same time he was careful to name two that would be likely to stump Mr. Horie. He was right; like many of his type, Mr. Horie knew all the moderns and none of the ancients. He became at once solemnly abstracted. During the pause that ensued he travailed at the fabrication of a reply to the previous question.

'I in-tend to call you Friday at four OClock'.

The interview was over.

Towards the end of dinner wine began to inspire Ensign Pullborough, of the Utopian Guards, who had come out to learn the language. He felt that the moment had arrived for a display of his not inconsiderable knowledge of Japanese customs.

'You should have just heard that Geisha-girl that was at Kondo's the other night; Gawd, she was properly witty. I asked her if she liked Englishmen, and she said Englishmen . . . but Japanese men . . . Very neat I call that'.

'Japanese garl like Englishman, she is beeg', interpolated Mr. Takamatsu. 'Japanese little man. Not so good for love, good for war. Beeg Engleeshman the fine target, red face very easy to shoot. Little Japanese, yerrow face—little Japanese Moong-kee, you call heem—very deaf-cult to shoot. Modarn warfare for little man, no more Anglo-Saxon Soup-erioritee.'

Commander Pinkney, who had turned 'Labour', retired from the Navy and taken to importing iron bedsteads, protested.

'Hang it all, Takamatsu, you talk as though the whole world was aching to have imperialist wars. What about the disarmament conferences? What about the growth of pacifist democracies, even in your own country? You must admit that militarism here hasn't the standing that it used to'.

'Do not worry. There will soon be another war to end war, and Japan he comes out a top dog. Our people not really so democratic; you see. Perhaps there shall be some re-vo-ru-tion-aree propaganda; danger of the revolution. Then we have a war. It will be unpopular war? Pacifist democracy he protests? I dohn sink. You foreign devils get mobbed pretty quick, same as in China now. We brow your Singapore to hell, that is what for you teach us the gunnery'.

‘What a bloodthirsty old ruffian you are, Takamatsu’, cried Mr. Kurrie-Lewer. ‘I shall make it my duty to report your inflammatory speeches to headquarters, and next time you go to England you’ll disappear mysteriously’.

‘Yes, I do not sink. I go to England; nice little Japanese gentleman writing book in quaint EEnglish about your hygienic country. They take round and do show me everythings, all your hush-hush boat and everythings. The saphead Anglo-Saxon! We do the things better here, sure. Your Naval Attaché go to our dockyard inspect. We show him old steam roller. Go away and report on that old ferrow! Haha!’

By the time that the roulette cloth was laid everybody, except Mr. Podler, was displaying the highest spirits. He felt no inclination to smile when he recollected that to drop in at Madame Cavara’s at about tea-time to-morrow would be futile, even if she had returned from her ‘motor accident’ by then. To prefer that paunchy Belgian to himself was a shocking error of judgment, and, if she had a taste like that, he tried vainly to comfort himself, he was well out of it. But the volcano of lurid emotions seethed the more violently after this reflection and two glasses of liqueur brandy; at a third, there came one flash of alcoholic illumination. Lulu, of course! Then the aching soreness returned even more acutely. He didn’t feel any interest in her now. He was not to be satisfied with just any woman, and make himself cheap; his heart was set on Inez and he’d damn well get her out of the clutches of that swine Fabre even now.

He started aimlessly planking down counters on the cloth, and promptly won, greatly to his surprise. Not, indeed, that one could make very much when the highest unit was fifty sen; but after the same number had turned

up three times some of the other players began to take notice.

‘ Really ’, said Professor McGonigle, ‘ Really, you mustn’t, Podler, or I shall be thinking you had an unsuccessful love-affair, or sold your soul to the devil ’.

‘ Ah, it’s love ’. Ensign Pullborough’s voice must be heard at all costs. ‘ Man’s been gloomy all the evening ’.

Mr. Takamatsu twinkled. ‘ Ha ! you have the motor axe-dent like Monsieur Faburo ! Sat is ah way to do it ’.

The gall of this remark irritated Podler almost beyond endurance, but he managed to smile sourly as he pocketed a frayed collection of Yen notes that afforded him no satisfaction. Let Inez keep her fat Belgian ; better not mix with these foreigners—it was a lesson not to. With Lulu now, he would be on safer ground. She understood the proud, shy heart of the Englishman, if anyone did. It was only those who attacked boldly and conceitedly that got a rap over the knuckles ; but when one was genuinely in pain. . . .

The gains and losses being adjusted, Mr. Kurrie-Lewer proposed that Mr. Takamatsu should take over the bank. In the interval whisky was served as a settler to the previous mixed potations. But it did not have that effect upon Ensign Pullborough, whose smile became more and more pitiful, till he hurried, deadly pale, from the room ; nor upon Professor McGonigle, who insisted on pretending to be more drunk than he was, and attempted to imitate the serpentine movements of Miss Vocadlo, while he chanted in a sepulchral base :

‘ Shircumshantshes over which I’ve go’ no control  
Prevent me from sheeing life shteadily and sheeing it whole.

‘ Motto of the shoshiety for the Pup-Propagation of the

shpecies in Foreign Parts—Pav-love-yer, as Marie Lloyd used to say in the dim and distant’.

‘My heart’, improvised Podler to himself, ‘is like a soiled piece of newspaper flying from a midden on a northerly gale, twisted, tortured. Can it be that I haven’t the enterprize of these other men who get what I want? Luck shuns retiring people, and inwardly I am retiring; inwardly Sheepshanks is a bandit compared to me’.

‘Cheer up, jolly old Podler, cheer up!’ shouted Mr. Kurrie-Lewer, patting him on the back. ‘It’ll all come right in the end. Now, Mr. Horie, have a whisky, won’t you?’

‘Noh . . . thank you. It brings the brush to my cheek’. Mr. Horie, already much heated with a single glass of wine, smiled desperately. A roar of laughter and the restless movement of men getting up to stroll for a while in the garden dazed him still more and, collapsing into a vast armchair, he sat there feeling vaguely vexed that his short legs would not touch the floor.

Mr. Podler lit a cigar and strolled out too, to cool his brain, and ran up against Mr. Takamatsu, gravely inhaling the breeze on the wiry and resilient lawn. Tree-frogs chirped delicately; a handful of shooting stars pencilled the sky with evanescent lemon. From a rhombus of saffron light in the middle distance the notes of a bamboo flute, cool and blue as the thaw-drops on the edge of a glacier, mournful and languishing crotchets, crept toward them on the gently stirring air.

‘Your Japanese night’, remarked Mr. Podler, ‘is truly romantic’.

Mr. Takamatsu made no reply; he was busy peering across the gourd-encumbered fence into the garden beyond, discerning lights and voices. At length he



whispered with glee. 'There I see something much more romantic'.

Podler looked in the direction indicated; at the cobra-shaped branch of a pine there floated on the night, rosy and silken, a rotund lantern, curtsying and winking like a precise bawd out of an eighteenth century drama, and casting just sufficient light on the couple below to make them recognisable. Relaxed upon a *chaise longue*, Lulu Miles fanned herself wearily, and seated close to and bending over her, Tristram Sheepshanks was delivering an evidently impassioned address.

'Oh, se Eenglish hypocrites', chuckled Mr. Takamatsu, 'very eth-cal, hey? Japanese lantern blush; she is not used to the adulterations'.

When he turned round for applause he found himself alone. Believing that Mr. Podler had retired all of a sudden, overcome by his triumphant satire, or like Pericles, for some other purpose, he chortled once or twice and wandered back, very well pleased with himself, to the roulette table, where he would chaff the respectable and gloomy Podler a little more. But his intended victim had already taken his leave.

On the way back to his cottage it was necessary that Podler should pass the front of the Miles's garden, which abutted on that of Mr. Kurrie-Lewer. He was therefore enabled to take one more anxious peep at the wounding prospect, so as to assure himself that there was no mistake. But the lantern was out and the garden deserted by all but windy darkness. How desolate was the sigh of the pine-trees, how abrupt the cessation of human voices, as darkness leaps into the area which the extinguished flame vacates. Not quite so abrupt, though; for suddenly a full, deep-chested contralto swooped owl-like out of the shadows, brilliant yet tearful in quality; from mousing owl to dying phoenix.

' Lyke buggbeares wyth vysardes to make olde sootes  
 dyssardes  
 Wyth sowcynges wyth rowsynges wyth bownsynges  
 wyth trowsynges  
 Wyth roomblynges wyth loomblynges wyth fool  
 blynges wyth toomblynges  
 Wyth ramplynges wyth tramplynges with rapping  
 . wyth tappynge. . . '

There followed ' tramplynges ' of feet, louder, nearer,  
 and then Alba burst into view, striding along the road,  
 homeward bound from the Miles's dinner-party, and  
 dragging her little husband along by the arm. She was  
 not drunk, merely a trifle elevated; no amount of  
 alcohol would deprive her of steady gait or clear  
 articulation.

' Good God ! ' Podler said to himself, ' the woman's  
 canned ! '

But it certainly improved her, freshening her up,  
 imparting to her face a dewy loveliness such as might  
 haunt the dream of some ephebic poet. Not thus,  
 however, did she haunt Mr. Podler's fancy; he reflected  
 bitterly that had she kept an eye on her husband instead  
 of boozing, to-night's contretemps would never have  
 taken place—she and Lulu were to blame between them,  
 since Lulu was quite capable of encouraging her in her  
 favourite diversion so as to be sure of an uninterrupted  
 conversation with the probably less culpable Tristram.  
 In the light of one of the municipal electric globes she  
 recognised the tall, sallow-faced figure. Without a word  
 she seized him by the wrist and dragged him along, a  
 mute, unwilling prisoner, who exchanged pitiful glances  
 with the rather shamed-looking Sheepshanks. Once  
 more, stimulated by this increase to her audience, she  
 let loose deep ululations on the night that seemed, to

Podler's appalled senses, to change, as acid does litmus, all the sober colouring round them. The darkness smeared upon the earth turned crimson, the sky green, the stars funereally black. From every window in Osakai he imagined that heads on elongated tortoise-necks protruded bulbous eyes, eager to devour the scandalous flavour of the scene. 'A drunken drab and two gallants? No, merely Mrs. Sheepshanks being conducted home after a heavy night of it; but after all, it's very much the same thing'. Without mercy, she continued fortissimo :

' Wyth fyrie flames flashynges, wyth squibes lusty  
 crashynges,  
 Wyth hyffa, wyth huffa, wyth ryp rap poff puffa  
 Wyth clattrynges and batttrynges, wyth pattrynges  
 and tattrynges,  
 Wyth janglynges, wyth wranglynges, wyth bang-  
 lynges, wyth tanglynges—  
 Syng hegh hoe jolye hegh hoe, a-sprityng goe we'.

