CHAPTER I

AN ANGLO-JAPANESE MARRIAGE

Shibukaro ka
Shiranedo kaki no
Hatsu-chigiri.

Whether the fruit be bitter,
Or whether it be sweet,
The first bite tells.

THE marriage of Captain the Honourable Geoffrey Barrington and Miss Asako Fujinami was an outstanding event in the season of 1913. It was bizarre, it was picturesque, it was charming, it was socially and politically important, it was everything that could appeal to the taste of London Society, which, as the season advances, is apt to become jaded by the monotonous process of Hymen in High Life and by the continual demand for costly wedding presents.

Once again Society paid for its seat at St George's and for its glass of champagne and crumb of cake with gifts of gold and silver and precious stones enough to smother the tiny bride; but for once in a way it paid with a good heart, not merely in obedience to convention, but for the sake of participating in a unique and delightful scene, a touching ceremony, the plighting of East and West.

Would the Japanese heiress be married in a kimono with flowers and fans fixed in an elaborate *coiffure*? Thus the ladies were wondering as they craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the bride's procession up the aisle; but, though some even stood on hassocks and pew seats, few were able to distinguish for certain. She was so very tiny. At any rate, her six tall bridesmaids were arrayed in Japanese

dress, lovely white creations embroidered with birds and foliage.

It is hard to distinguish anything in the perennial twilight of St George's; a twilight symbolic of the new lives which emerge from its Corinthian portico into that married world about which so much has been guessed and so little is known.

One thing, however, was visible to all as the pair moved together up to the altar rails, and that was the size of the bridegroom as contrasted with the smallness of his bride. He looked like a great rough bear and she like a silver fairy. There was something intensely pathetic in the curve of his broad shoulders as he bent over the little hand to place in its proud position the diminutive golden circlet which was to unite their two lives.

As they left the church, the organ was playing *Kimi-ga-yo*, the Japanese national hymn. Nobody recognised it, except the few Japanese who were present; but Lady Everington, with that exaggeration of the suitable which is so typical of her, had insisted on its choice as a voluntary. Those who had heard the tune before and half remembered it decided that it must come from the 'Mikado'; and one stern dowager went so far as to protest to the rector for permitting such a tune to desecrate the sacred edifice.

Outside the church stood the bridegroom's brother-officers. Through the gleaming passage of sword-blades, smiling and happy, the strangely assorted couple entered upon the way of wedlock, as Mr and Mrs Geoffrey Barrington—the shoot of the Fujinami grafted on to one of the oldest of our noble families.

'Are her parents here?' One lady was asking her neighbour.

'Oh no, they are both dead, I believe.'

'What kind of people are they, do you know? Do

the Japs have an aristocracy and society and all that kind of thing?'

'I'm sure I don't know. I shouldn't think so: they don't look real enough.'

'She is very rich, anyhow,' a third lady intervened; 'I've heard they are big landowners in Tokyo, and cousins of Admiral Togo's.'

The opportunity for closer inspection of this curiosity was afforded by the reception given at Lady Everington's mansion in Carlton House Terrace. Of course, everybody was there. The great ballroom was draped with hangings of red and white, the national colours of Japan. Favours of the same bright hues were distributed among the guests. Trophies of Union Jacks and Rising Suns were grouped in corners and festooned above windows and doorways.

Lady Everington was bent upon giving an international importance to her protégée's marriage. Her original plan had been to invite the whole Japanese community in London, and so to promote the popularity of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance by making the most of this opportunity for social fraternising. But where was the Japanese community in London? Nobody knew. Perhaps there was not one. There was the Embassy, of course, which arrived smiling, fluent, and almost too well-mannered. But Lady Everington had been unable to push very far her programme for international amenities. There were strange little yellow men from the City, who had charge of ships and banking interests; there were strange little yellow men from beyond the West End, who studied the Fine Arts, and lived, it appeared, on nothing. But the hostess could find no ladies at all, except Countess Saito and the Embassy dames.

Monsieur and Madame Murata from Paris, the bride's guardians, were also present. But the Orient was submerged beneath the flood of our rank and fashion, which, as one lady put it, had to take care how it stepped for fear of crushing the little creatures.

'Why *did* you let him do it?' said Mrs Markham to her sister.

'It was a mistake, my dear,' whispered Lady Everington, 'I meant her for somebody quite different.'

'And you're sorry now?'

'No, I have no time to be sorry—ever,' replied that eternally graceful and youthful Egeria, who is one of London's most powerful social influences. 'It will be interesting to see what becomes of them.'

Lady Everington has been criticised for stony heartedness, for opportunism, and for selfish abuse of her husband's vast wealth. She has been likened to an experimental chemist, who mixes discordant elements together in order to watch the results, chilling them in ice or heating them over the fire, until the lives burst in fragments or the colour slowly fades out of them. She had been called an artist in *mésalliances*, a mismatchmaker of dangerous cunning, a dangler of picturesque beggar-maids before romantic-eyed Cophetuas, a daring promoter of ambitious American girls and a champion of musical comedy peeresses. Her house has been named the Junior Bachelors Club. The charming young men who seem to be bound to its hospitable board by invisible chains are the material for her dashing improvisations and the *dramatis personæ* of the scores of little domestic comedies which she likes to keep floating around her in different stages of development.

Geoffrey Barrington had been the secretary of this club, and a favourite with the divinity who presided over it. We had all supposed that he would remain

a bachelor; and the advent of Asako Fujinami into London society gave us at first no reason to change our opinion. But she was certainly attractive.

She ought to have been married in a kimono. There was no doubt about it now, when there was more liberty to inspect her, as she stood there shaking hands with hundreds of guests and murmuring her 'Thank you very much' to the reiterated congratulations.

The white gown was perfectly cut and of a shade to give its full value to her complexion, a waxen complexion like old ivory or like a magnolia petal, in which the Mongolian yellow was ever so faintly discernible. It was a sweet little face, oval and smooth; but it might have been called expressionless if it had not been for a dimple which peeped and vanished round a corner of the small compressed mouth, and for the great deep brown eyes, like the eyes of deer or like pools of forest water, eyes full of warmth and affection. This was the feature which struck most of us as we took the opportunity to watch her in European dress with the glamour of her kimono stripped from her. They were the eyes of the Oriental girl, a creature closer to the animals than we are, lit by instinct more often than by reason, and hiding a soul in its infancy, a repressed, timorous, uncertain thing, spasmodically violent and habitually secretive and aloof.

Sir Ralph Cairns, the famous diplomat, was talking on this subject to Professor Ironside.

'The Japanese are extraordinarily quick,' he was saying, 'the most adaptable people since the ancient Greeks, whom they resemble in some ways. But they are more superficial. The intellect races on ahead, but the heart lingers in the Dark Ages.'

'Perhaps intermarriage is the solution of the great racial problem,' suggested the Professor.

'Never,' said the old administrator. 'Keep the breed pure, be it white, black, or yellow. Bastard races cannot flourish. They are waste of Nature.'

The Professor glanced towards the bridal pair.

'And these also?' he asked.

'Perhaps,' said Sir Ralph, 'but in her case her education has been so entirely European.'

Hereupon, Lady Everington approaching, Sir Ralph turned to her and said,—

'Dear lady, let me congratulate you: this is your masterpiece.'

'Sir Ralph,' said the hostess, already looking to see which of her guests she should next pounce upon, 'you know the East so well. Give me one little piece of advice to hand over to the children before they start on their honeymoon.'

Sir Ralph smiled benignly.

'Where are they going?' he asked.

'Everywhere,' replied Lady Everington, 'they are going to travel.'

'Then let them travel all over the world,' he answered, 'only not to Japan. That is their Bluebeard's cupboard; and into that they must not look.'

There was more discussion of bridegroom and bride than is usual at Society weddings, which are apt to become mere reunions of fashionable people, only vaguely conscious of the identity of those in whose honour they have been gathered together.

'Geoffrey Barrington is such a healthy barbarian,' said a pale young man with a monocle; 'if it had been a high-browed child of culture like you, Reggie, with a taste for exotic sensations, I should hardly have been surprised.'

'And if it had been you, Arthur,' replied Reggie

Forsyth of the Foreign Office, who was Barrington's best man, 'I should have known at once that it was the twenty thousand a year which was the supreme attraction.'

There was a certain amount of Anglo-Indian sentiment afloat among the company, which condemned the marriage entirely as an outrage on decency.

'What was Brandan dreaming of,' snorted General Haslam, 'to allow his son to marry a yellow native?'

'Dreaming of the mortgage on the Brandan property, I expect, General,' answered Lady Rushworth.

'It's scandalous,' foamed the General, 'a fine young fellow, a fine young officer, too! His career ruined for an undersized *geisha*!'

'But think of the millions of *yens* or *sens* or whatever they are, with which she is going to re-gild the Brandan coronet!'

'That wouldn't console me for a yellow baby with slit eyes,' continued the General, his voice rising in debate as his custom was at the Senior.

'Hush, General!' said his interlocutor, 'we don't discuss such possibilities.

'But everybody here must be thinking of them, except that unfortunate young man.'

'We never say what we are thinking, General; it would be too upsetting.'

'And we are to have a Japanese Lord Brandan, sitting in the House of Lords?' the General went on.

'Yes, among the Jews, Turks, and Armenians who are there already,' Lady Rushworth answered. 'An extra Oriental will never be noticed. It will only be another instance of the course of Empire taking its way Eastward.'

In the Everington dining-room the wedding presents

were displayed. It looked more like the interior of a Bond Street shop where every kind of *article de luxe*, useful and useless, was heaped in plenty.

Perhaps the only gift which had cost less than twenty pounds was Lady Everington's own offering, a photograph of herself in a plain silver frame, her customary present when one of her protégées was married under her immediate auspices.

'My dear,' she would say, 'I have enriched you by several thousands of pounds. I have introduced you to the right people for present-giving at precisely the right moment previous to your wedding, when they know you neither too little nor too much. By long experience I have learnt to fix it to a day. But I am not going to compete with this undistinguished lavishness. I give you my picture to stand in your drawing-room as an artist puts his signature to a completed masterpiece, so that when you look round upon the furniture, the silver, the cut glass, the clocks, the engagement tablets, and the tantalus stands, the offerings of the rich whose names you have long ago forgotten, then you will confess to yourself in a burst of thankfulness to your fairy godmother that all this would never have been yours if it had not been for her!'

In a corner of the room and apart from the more ostentatious homage, stood on a small table a large market-basket, in which was lying a huge red fish, a roguish, rollicking mullet with a roving eye, all made out of a soft crinkly silk. In the basket beneath it were rolls and rolls of plain silk, red and white. This was an offering from the Japanese community in London, the conventional wedding present of every Japanese home from the richest to the poorest, varying only in size and splendour. On another small table lay a bundle of brown objects like prehistoric axe heads, bound round with red and white string, and vaguely odorous of

bloater-paste. These were dried flesh of the fish called *katsuobushi* by the Japanese, whose absence also would have brought misfortune to the newly married. Behind them, on a little tray, stood a miniature landscape representing an aged pine-tree by the seashore and a little cottage with a couple of old, old people standing at its door, two exquisite little dolls dressed in rough, poor kimonos, brown and white. The old man holds a rake, and the old woman holds a broom. They have very kindly faces and white silken hair. Any Japanese would recognise them at once as the Old People of Takasago, the personification of the Perfect Marriage. They are staring with wonder and alarm at the Brandan sapphires, a monumental *parure* designed for the massive state of some Early-Victorian Lady Brandan.

Asako Fujinami had spent days rejoicing over the arrival of her presents, little interested in the identity of the givers but fascinated by the things themselves. She had taken hours to arrange them in harmonious groups. Then a new gift would arrive which would upset the balance, and she would have to begin all over again.

Besides this treasury in the dining-room, there were all her clothes, packed now for the honeymoon, a whole wardrobe of fairy-like disguises, wonderful gowns of all colours and shapes and materials. These, it is true, she had bought herself. She had always been surrounded by money; but it was only since she had lived with Lady Everington that she had begun to learn something about the thousand different ways of spending it, and all the lovely things for which it can be exchanged. So all her new things, whatever their source, seemed to her like presents, like unexpected enrichments. She had basked among her new acquisitions, silent as was her wont when she was happy, sunning herself in the warmth of her prosperity. Best of all, she never need wear kimonos

again in public. Her fiancé had acceded to this, her most immediate wish. She could dress now like the girls around her. She would no longer be stared at like a curio in a shop window. Inquisitive fingers would no longer clutch at the long sleeves of crinkled silk, or try to probe the secret of the huge butterfly bow on her back. She could step out fearlessly now like English women. She could give up the mincing walk and the timid manner which she felt was somehow inseparable from her native dress.

When she told her protectress that Geoffrey had consented to its abandonment, Lady Everington had heaved a sigh.

'Poor Kimono!' she said, 'it has served you well. But I suppose a soldier is glad to put his uniform away when the fighting is over. Only, never forget the mysterious power of the uniform over the other sex.'

Another day when her Ladyship had been in a bad mood, she had snapped,—

'Put those things away, child, and keep to your kimono. It is your natural plumage. In those borrowed plumes you look undistinguished and underfed.'

The Japanese Ambassador to the Court of St James proposed the health of the bride and bridegroom. Count Saito was a small, wise man, whom long sojourn in European countries had to some extent de-orientalised. His hair was grizzled, his face was seamed, and he had a peering way of gazing through his gold-rimmed spectacles with head thrust forward like a man half blind, which he certainly was not.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'it is a great pleasure for me to be present on this occasion, for I think this wedding is a personal compliment to myself and to my work in this splendid country. Mr and Mrs Geoffrey

Barrington are the living symbols of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance; and I hope they will always remember the responsibility resting on their shoulders. The bride and bridegroom of to-day must feel that the relations of Great Britain and Japan depend upon the perfect harmony of their married life. Ladies and gentlemen, let us drink long life and happiness to Mr and Mrs Geoffrey Barrington, to the Union Jack and to the Rising Sun!'

The toast was drunk and three cheers were given, with an extra cheer for Mrs Geoffrey. The husband, who was no hand at speechmaking, replied—and his good-natured voice was quite thick with emotion—that it was awfully good of them all to give his wife and himself such a ripping send-off, and awfully good of Sir George and Lady Everington especially, and awfully good of Count Saito; and that he was the happiest man in the world and the luckiest, and that his wife had told him to tell them all that she was the happiest woman, though he really did not see why she should be. Anyhow, he would do his best to give her a jolly good time. He thanked his friends for their good wishes and for their beautiful presents. They had had jolly good times together, and, in return for all their kindness, he and his wife wanted to wish them all a jolly good time.

So spoke Geoffrey Barrington; and at that moment many people present must have felt a pang of regret that this fine specimen of England's young manhood should marry an Oriental. He was over six feet high. His broad shoulders seemed to stoop a little with the lazy strength of a good-tempered carnivore, of Una's lion, and his face, which was almost round, was set off by a mane of the real lion colour. He wore his moustache rather longer than was the fashion. It was a face which seemed ready to laugh at any moment—or else to yawn. For there was about the man's character and appearance

something indolent and half-awakened and much of the schoolboy. Yet he was over thirty. But there is always a tendency for Army life to be merely a continuation of public-school existence. Eton merges into Sandhurst, and Sandhurst merges into the regiment. One's companions are all the time men of the same class and of the same ideas. The discipline is the same, the conventionality and the presiding fetish of Good and Bad Form. So many generals are perennial schoolboys. They lose their freshness, that is all.

But Geoffrey Barrington had not lost his freshness. This was his great charm, for he certainly was not quick or witty. Lady Everington said that she kept him as a disinfectant to purify the atmosphere.

'This house,' she declared, 'sometimes gets overscented with tuber-roses. Then I open the window and let Geoffrey Barrington in!'

He was the only son of Lord Brandan and heir to that ancient but impoverished title. He had been brought up to the idea that he must marry a rich wife. He neither jibbed foolishly at the proposal, nor did he surrender lightly to any of the willing heiresses who threw themselves at his head. He accepted his destiny with the fatalism which every soldier must carry in his knapsack, and took up his post as Mars in attendance in Lady Everington's drawing-room, recognising that there lay the strategic point for achieving his purpose. He was not without hope, too, that besides obtaining the money-bags he might be so fortunate as to fall in love with the possessor of them.

Asako Fujinami, whom he had first met at dinner at Lady Everington's, had crossed his mind just like an exquisite bar of melody. He made no comments at the time, but he could not forget her. The haunting tune came back to him again and again. By the time that she had floated in his arms through three or four dances,

the spell had worked. *La belle dame sans merci*, the enchantress who lurks in every woman, had him in thrall. Her simplest observations seemed to him to be pearls of wisdom, her every movement a triumph of grace.

'Reggie,' he said to his friend Forsyth, 'what do you think of that little Japanese girl?'

Reggie, who was a diplomat by profession and a musician by the grace of God, and whose intuition was almost feminine, especially where Geoffrey was concerned, answered,—

'Why, Geoffrey, are you thinking of marrying her?'

'By Jove!' exclaimed his friend, starting at the thought as at a discovery; 'but I don't think she'd have me. I'm not her sort.'

'You never can tell,' suggested Reggie mischievously; 'She is quite unspoilt, and she has twenty thousand a year. She is unique. You could not possibly get her confused with somebody else's wife, as so many people seem to do when they get married. Why not try?'

Reggie thought that such a mating was impossible, but it amused him to play with the idea. As for Lady Everington, who knew every one so well, and who thought that she knew them perfectly, she never guessed.

'I think, Geoffrey, that you like to be seen with Asako,' she said, 'just to point the contrast.'

Her confession to her sister, Mrs Markham, was the truth. She had made a mistake; she had destined Asako for somebody quite different. It was the girl herself who had been the first to enlighten her. She came to her hostess's boudoir one evening before the labours of the night began.

'Lady Georgie,' she had said—Lady Everington is Lady Georgie to all who know her even a little. '*Il faut que je vous dise quelque chose.*' The girl's face glanced

downward and sideways, as her habit was when embarrassed.

When Asako spoke in French it meant that something grave was afoot. She was afraid that her unsteady English might muddle what she intended to say. Lady Everington knew that it must be another proposal; she had already dealt with three.

'*Eh bien, cette fois qui est-il?*' she asked.

'*Le capitaine Geoffroi*,' answered Asako. Then her friend knew that it was serious.

'What did you say to him?' she demanded.

'I tell him he must ask you.'

'But why drag me into it? It's your own affair.'

'In France and in Japan,' said Asako, 'a girl do not say Yes and No herself. It is her father and her mother who decide. I have no father or mother; so I think he must ask you.'

'And what do you want me to say?'

For answer Asako gently squeezed the elder woman's hand, but Lady Georgie was in no mood to return the pressure. The girl at once felt the absence of the response, and said,—

'What, you do not like the *capitaine Geoffroi*?'

But her fairy godmother answered bitterly,—

'On the contrary, I have a considerable affection for Geoffrey.'

'Then,' cried Asako, starting up, 'you think I am not good enough for him. It's because I'm—not English.'

She began to cry. In spite of her superficial hardness, Lady Everington has a very tender heart. She took the girl in her arms.

'Dearest child,' she said, raising the little, moist face to hers, 'don't cry. In England we answer this great question ourselves. Our fathers and mothers and fairy godmothers have to concur. If Geoffrey Barrington has asked you to marry him, it is because he loves you.

He does not scatter proposals like calling-cards, as some young men do. In fact, I have never heard of him proposing to any one before. He does not want you to say "No," of course. But are you quite ready to say "Yes"? Very well, wait a fortnight, and don't see more of him than you can help in the meantime. Now, let them send for my *masseuse*. There is nothing so exhausting to the aged as the emotions of young people.'

That evening, when Lady Everington met Geoffrey at the theatre, she took him severely to task for treachery, secrecy and decadence. He was very humble and admitted all his faults except the last, pleading as his excuse that he could not get Asako out of his head.

'Yes, that is a symptom,' said her Ladyship; 'you are clearly stricken. So I fear I am too late to effect a rescue. All I can do is to congratulate you both. But, remember, a wife is not nearly so fugitive as a melody, unless she is the wrong kind of wife.'

It was a wrench for the little lady to part with the oldest of her friendships, and to give up her Geoffrey to the care of this decorative stranger whose qualities were unknown and undeveloped. But she knew what the answer would be at the end of the fortnight. So she steeled her nerves to laugh at her friends' commiserations and to make the marriage of her godchildren one of the season's successes. It would certainly be an interesting addition to her museum of domestic dramas.

There was one person whom Lady Everington was determined to pump for information on that wedding-day, and had drawn into the net of her invitations for this very purpose. It was Count Saito, the Japanese Ambassador.

She cornered him as he was admiring the presents,

and whisked him away to the silence and twilight of her husband's study.

'I am so glad you were able to come, Count Saito,' she began. 'I suppose you know the Fujinamis, Asako's relatives in Tokyo?'

'No, I do not know them,' His Excellency answered, but his tone conveyed to the lady's instinct that he personally would not wish to know them.

'But you know the name, do you not?'

'Yes, I have heard the name; there are many families called Fujinami in Japan.'

'Are they very rich?'

'Yes, I believe there are some who are very rich,' said the little diplomat, who clearly was ill at ease.

'Where does their money come from?' his inquisitor went on remorselessly. 'You are keeping something from me, Count Saito. Please be frank, if there is any mystery.'

'Oh no, Lady Everington, there is no mystery, I am sure. There is one family of Fujinami who have many houses and lands in Tokyo and other towns. I will be quite open with you. They are rather what you in England call *nouveaux riches*.'

'Really!' Her Ladyship was taken aback for a moment. 'But you would never notice it with Asako, would you? I mean, she does not drop her Japanese aitches, and that sort of thing, does she?'

'Oh no,' Count Saito reassured her, 'I do not think Mademoiselle Asako talks Japanese language, so she cannot drop her aitches.'

'I never thought of that,' his hostess continued, 'I thought that if a Japanese had money, he must be a *daimyo*, or something.'

The Ambassador smiled.

'English people,' he said, 'do not know very well the true condition of Japan. Of course, we have our rich

new families and our poor old families just as you have in England. In some aspects our society is just the same as yours. In others, it is so different, that you would lose your way at once in a maze of ideas which would seem to you quite upside down.'

Lady Everington interrupted his reflections in a desperate attempt to get something out of him by a surprise attack.

'How interesting,' she said, 'it will be for Geoffrey Barrington and his wife to visit Japan and find out all about it.'

The Ambassador's manner changed.

'No, I do not think,' he said, 'I do not think that is a good thing at all. They must not do that. You must not let them.'

'But why not?'

'I say to all Japanese men and women who live a long time in foreign countries or who marry foreign people, "Do not go back to Japan." Japan is like a little pot and the foreign world is like a great big garden. If you plant a tree from the pot into the garden and let it grow, you cannot put it back into the pot again.'

'But, in this case, that is not the only reason,' objected Lady Everington.

'No, there are many other reasons too,' the Ambassador admitted; and he rose from his sofa, indicating that the interview was at an end.

The bridal pair left in a motor-car for Folkestone under a hailstorm of rice, and with the propitious white slipper dangling from the number-plate behind.

When all her guests were gone, Lady Everington fled to her boudoir and collapsed in a little heap of sobbing finery on the broad divan. She was overtired, no doubt; but the sense of her mistake lay heavy upon her, and

the feeling that she had sacrificed to it her best friend, the most humanly valuable of all the people who resorted to her house. An evil cloud of mystery hung over the young marriage, one of those sinister unfamiliar forces which travellers bring home from the East, the curse of a god or a secret poison or a hideous disease.

It would be so natural for those two to want to visit Japan and to know their second home. Yet both Sir Ralph Cairns and Count Saito, the only two men that day who knew anything about the real conditions, had insisted that such a visit would be fatal. And who were these Fujinamis whom Count Saito knew, but did not know? Why had she, who was so socially careful, taken so much for granted just because Asako was a Japanese?