CHAPTER XXIII

THE REAL SHINTO

Yo no naka wo	To what shall I compare
Nani ni tatoyemu?	This world?
Asa-borake	To the white wake behind
Kogi-yuku fune no	A ship that has rowed away
Ato no shira-nami.	At dawn!

WHEN the autumn came and the maple trees turned scarlet, the men returned from their long summer holidays. After that, Asako's lot became heavier than ever.

'What is this talk of tall beds and special cooking?' said Mr Fujinami Gentaro. 'The girl is a Japanese. She must live like a Japanese, and be proud of it.'

So Asako had to sleep on the floor alongside her cousin Sadako in one of the downstair rooms. Her last possession, her privacy, was taken away from her. The soft mattresses which formed the native bed, were not uncomfortable; but Asako discarded at once the wooden pillow, which every Japanese woman fits into the nape of her neck, so as to prevent her elaborate *coiffure* becoming disarranged. As a result, her head was always untidy, a fact upon which her relatives commented.

'She does not look like a great foreign lady now,' said Mrs Shidzuyé, the mistress of the house. 'She looks like *osandon* (a rough kitchen-maid) from a country inn.'

The other women tittered.

One day, the old woman of Akabo arrived. Her hair was quite white like spun glass, and her waxen face was

wrinkled like a relief map. Her body was bent double like a lobster; and her eyes were dim with cataract. Cousin Sadako said with awe that she was over a hundred years old.

Asako had to submit to the indignity of allowing this dessicated hag to pass her fumbling hands all over her body, pinching her and prodding her. The old woman smelt horribly of *daikon* (pickled horse-radish). Furthermore, the terrified girl had to answer a battery of questions as to her personal habits and her former marital relations. In return, she learned a number of curious facts about herself, of which she had hitherto no inkling. The lucky coincidence of having been born in the hour of the Bird on the day of the Bird set her apart from the rest of womankind as an exceptionally fortunate individual. But, unhappily, the malignant influence of the Dog Year was against her nativity. When once this disaffected animal had been conquered and cast out, Asako's future should be a very bright one. The family witch agreed with the Fujinami that the Dog had in all probability departed with the foreign husband. Then the toothless crone breathed three times upon the mouth, breasts, thighs and navel of Asako; and when this operation was concluded, she stated her opinion that there was no reason, obstetrical or esoteric, why the ransomed daughter of the house of Fujinami should not become the mother of many children.

But on the psychical condition of the family in general she was far from reassuring. Everything about the mansion, the growth of the garden, the flight of the birds, the noises of the night-time, foreboded dire disaster in the near future. The Fujinami were in the grip of a most alarming *ingé* (chain of cause and effect). Several 'rough ghosts' were abroad; and were almost certain to do damage before their wrath could be appeased. What was the remedy? It was indeed difficult to prescribe

for such complicated cases. Temple charms, however, were always efficacious. The old woman gave the names of some of the shrines which specialised in exorcism.

Some days later the charms were obtained, strips of rice-paper with sacred writings and symbols upon them, and were pasted up on posts and lintels all over the house. This was done in Mr Fujinami's absence. When he returned, he commented most unfavourably on this act of faith. The prayer-tickets disfigured his house. They looked like luggage-labels. They injured his reputation as an *esprit fort*. He ordered the students to remove them.

After this sacrilegious act, the old woman, who had lingered on in the family mansion for several weeks, returned again to Akabo, shaking her white locks and prophesying dark things to come.

For some reason or other, the witch's visit did not improve Asako's position. She was expected to perform little menial services, to bring in food at meal-times and to serve the gentlemen on bended knee, to clap her hands in summons to the servant-girls, to massage Mrs Fujinami, who suffered from rheumatism in the shoulder, and to scrub her back in the bath.

Her wishes were usually ignored; and she was not encouraged to leave the house and grounds. Sadako no longer took her cousin with her to the theatre or to choose kimono patterns at the Mitsukoshi store. She was irritated at Asako's failure to learn Japanese. It bored her to have to explain everything. She found this girl from Europe silly and undutiful.

Only at night, they would chatter as girls will, even if they are enemies; and it was then that Sadako narrated the history of her romance with the young student.

One night, Asako awoke to find that the bed beside

her was empty, and that the paper *shoji* was pushed aside. Nervous and anxious, she rose and stood in the dark veranda outside the room. A cold wind was blowing in from some aperture in the *amado*. This was unusual, for a Japanese house in its night-attire is hermetically sealed.

Suddenly, Sadako appeared from the direction of the wind. Her hair was dishevelled. She wore a dark cloak over her parti-coloured night-kimono. By the dim light of the *andon* (a rushlight in a square paper box), Asako could see that the cloak was spotted with rain.

'I have been to *benjo*,' said Sadako nervously.

'You have been out in the rain,' contradicted her cousin. 'You are wet through. You will catch cold.'

'*Sa! Damaré!* (Be quiet!)' whispered Sadako, as she threw her cloak aside, 'do not talk so loud. See!' She drew from her breast a short sword in a sheath of shagreen. 'If you speak one word, I kill you with this.'

'What have you done?' asked Asako, trembling.

'What I wished to do,' was the sullen answer.

'You have been with Sekiné?' Asako mentioned the student's name.

Sadako nodded in assent. Then she began to cry, hiding her face in her kimono sleeve.

'Do you love him?' Asako could not help asking.

'Of course I love him,' cried Sadako, starting up from her sorrow. 'You see me. I am no more virgin. He is my life to me. Why cannot I love him? Why cannot I be free like men are free to love as they wish? I am new woman. I read Bernard Shaw. I find one law for men in Japan, and another law for women. But I will break that law. I have made Sekiné my lover, because I am free. I have sleep in his arms in the tea-house by the lake. He has made me feel like—like Mount Fuji when the new sun touches the peak!'

Asako could never have imagined her proud, inhuman

cousin reduced to this state of quivering emotion. Never before had she seen a Japanese soul laid bare.

'But you will marry Sekiné, Sada dear; and then you will be happy.'

'Marry Sekiné!' the girl hissed, 'marry a boy with no money and leave you to be the Fujinami heiress, when I am promised to the Governor of Osaka, who will be Home Minister when the next Goverment comes!'

'Oh, don't do that,' urged Asako, her English sentimentalism flooding back across her mind. 'Don't marry a man whom you don't love. You say you are a new woman. Marry Sekiné. Marry the man whom you love. Then you will be happy.'

'Japanese girls are never happy,' groaned her cousin. 'But I keep Sekiné. When I am married he will come to me as chauffeur.'

Asako gasped. This morality confused her.

'But that would be a mortal sin,' she said. 'Then you could never be happy.'

'We cannot be happy. We are Fujinami,' said Sadako gravely. 'We are cursed. The old woman of Akabo said that it is a very bad curse. I do not believe superstition. But I believe there is a curse. You also, you have been unhappy, and your father and mother. We are cursed because of the women. We have made so much money from poor women. They are sold to men, and they suffer in pain and die so that we become rich. It is a very bad *ingé*. So they say in Akabo, that we Fujinami have a fox in our family. It brings us money; but it makes us unhappy. In Akabo, even poor people will not marry with the Fujinami, because we have the fox.'

It is a popular belief, still widely held in Japan, that certain families own spirit foxes, a kind of family banshee who render them service, but mark them with a curse.

'I do not understand,' said Asako, afraid of this wild talk.

'Do you know why the Englishman went away?' said her cousin brutally.

It was Asako's turn to cry.

'Oh, I wish I had gone with him. He was so good to me, always so kind and so gentle!'

'When he married you,' said Sadako, 'he did not know that you had the curse. He ought not to have come to Japan with you. Now he knows you have the curse. So he went away. He was wise.'

'What do you mean by the curse?' asked Asako.

'You do not know how the Fujinami have made so much money?'

'No,' said Asako. 'It used to come for me from Mr Ito. He has shares or something.'

'Yes. But a share, that means a share of a business. Do you not know what is our business?'

'No, said Asako again.

'You have seen the Yoshiwara, where girls are sold to men. That is our business. Do you understand now?'

'No.'

'Then I will tell you the whole story of the Fujinami. About one hundred and twenty years ago our great-great-grandfather came to Yedo, as Tokyo was then called. He was a poor boy from the country. He had no friends. He became clerk in a dry-goods store. One day a woman rather old asked him, "How much pay you get?" He said, "No pay, only food and clothes." The woman said, "Come with me; I will give you food and clothes and pay also." He went with her to the Yoshiwara, where she had a small house with five or six girls. Every night he must stand in front of the house, calling "*Irrasshai! Irrasshai!* (Come! Come!) Pretty girls, very cheap! New girls, young girls! Come and try them. They are very sweet and loving!" Then the drunken workmen, and the gamblers, and the bad

samurai would come and pay their money and make the girls give them pleasure of their bodies. And they pay their money to him, our great-great-grandfather. When the girls were sick, or would not receive guests, he would beat them and starve them and burn *o kyu* (a medical plant called moxa, used for cauterisation) on their backs. One day he said to the woman who was mistress of the house, "Your girls are too old and dry. The rich friends do not come any more. Let us sell these girls. I will go into the country, and get new girls; and then you will marry me, and make me your partner." The woman said, "If we have good luck with the girls, and make money, then I marry you." So our great-great-grandfather went back to his own country, to Akabo; and his old friends in the country were astonished, seeing how much money he had to spend. He said, "Yes, I have many rich friends in Yedo. They want pretty country girls to be their wives. See, I pay you in advance five pieces of gold. After the marriage, more money will be given. Let me take your prettiest girls to Yedo with me. And they will all get rich husbands." They were simple country people, and they believed him because he was a man of their village, of Akabo. He went back to Yedo with about twenty girls, fifteen or sixteen years old. He and the other clerks of the Yoshiwara first made them *jorō*. From those twenty girls, he made very much money. So he married the woman who kept the house. Then he hired a big house called Tomonji. He furnished it very richly; and he would only receive guests of the high-class people. Five of his girls became very famous *oiran*. Even their pictures, drawn by Utamaro, are worth now hundreds of *yen*. When our great-great-grandfather died, he was a very rich man. His son was the second Fujinami. He bought more houses in the Yoshiwara and more girls. He was our great-grandfather. He had two sons. One was your father's father, who bought this land and

first built a house here. The other was my grandfather, Fujinami Gennosuké, who still lives in the *inkyo*. They have all made much money from girls; but the curse was hurting them all, especially their wives and daughters.'

'And my father?' asked Asako.

'Your father wrote a book to say how bad a thing it is that money is made from men's lust and the pain of women. He told in the book how girls are tricked to come to Tokyo, how their parents sell them because they are poor or because there is famine, how the girls are brought to Tokyo ten and twenty at a time, and are put to auction-sale in the Yoshiwara, how they are shut up like prisoners, how very rough men are sent to them to break their spirit and to compel them to be *jorō*, so they never refuse a man though he may be very ugly and very bad and very drunken. Even if they are sick and unhappy, even if they have babies in them, they must never refuse. There is a trial to see how strong they are. Twenty or thirty men are sent to one girl in one night one after another. Then, when the spirit is broken, they are shown in the window as 'new girls' with beautiful kimono and with wreath of flowers on their head. If they are lucky, they escape disease for a few years, but it comes soon or late—*rinbyo*, *baidoku* and *raibyo*. They are sent to the hospital for treatment; or else they are told to hide the disease and to get more men. So the men take the disease and bring it to their wives and children, who have done no wrong. But the girls of the Yoshiwara have to work all the time, when they are only half cured. So they become old and ugly and rotten very quickly. Then, if they take consumption or some such thing, they die and the master says, "It is well. She was already too old. She was wasting our money." And they are buried quickly in the burial-place of the *jorō* outside the city boundary, the burial-place of the dead who are forgotten. Or some, who are very strong,

live until their contract is finished. Then they go back to the country, and marry there and spread disease. But they all die cursing the Fujinami, who have made money out of their sorrow and pain. I think this garden is full of their ghosts, and their curses beat upon the house, like the wind when it makes the shutters rattle!'

'How do you know all these terrible things?' asked Asako.

'It is written in your father's book. I will read it to you. If you do not believe, ask Ito San. He will tell you it is true.'

So for several evenings Sadako read to this stranger Fujinami her own father's words, the words of a forerunner.

Japan is still a savage country, wrote Fujinami Katsundo, the Japanese are still barbarians. To compare the conventional codes, which they have mistaken for civilisation, with the depth and the height of Occidental idealism, as Christ perceived it and Dante and St Francis of Assisi and Tolstoy, is 'to compare the tortoise with the moon.' Japan is imitating from the West its worst propensities,—hard materialism, vulgarity and money-worship. The Japanese must be humble, and must admit that the most difficult part of their lesson has yet to be learned. Cut and dried systems are useless. Prussian constitution, technical education, military efficiency and bravado—such things are not progress. Japan must denounce the slavery of ancestor-worship, and escape from the rule of the dead. She must chase away the bogeys of superstition, and enjoy life as a lovely thing, and love as the vision of a life still more beautiful. She must cleanse her land of all its filth, and make it what it still might be—the Country of the Rising Sun.

Such was the message of Asako's father in his book, *The Real Shinto.*

'We are not allowed to read this book,' Sadako explained; 'the police have forbidden it. But I found a secret copy. It was undutiful of your father to write such things. He went away from Japan; and every one said, "It is a good thing he has gone; he was a bad man; he shamed his country and his family."'

There was much in the book which Asako could not follow. Her cousin tried to explain it to her; and many nights passed thus, the two girls sitting up and reading by the pale light of the *andon*. It was like a renewal of the old friendship. Sometimes a low whistle sounded from outside the house. Sadako would lay aside the book, would slip on her cloak and go out into the garden, where Sekiné was waiting for her.

When she was left to herself, Asako began to think for the first time in her life. Hitherto, her thoughts had been concerned merely with her own pleasures and pains, with the smiles and frowns of those around her, with petty events and trifling projects. Perhaps, because some of her father's blood was alive in her veins, she could understand certain aspects of his book more clearly than her interpreter, Sadako. She knew now why Geoffrey would not touch her money. It was filthy, it was diseased, like the poor women who had earned it. Of course, her Geoffrey preferred poverty to wealth like that. Could she face poverty with him? Why, she was poor already, here in her cousins' house. Where was the luxury which her money used to buy? She was living the life of a servant and a prisoner.

What would be the end of it? Surely Geoffrey would come back to her, and take her away! But he had no money now, and it would cost much money to travel to Japan. And then, this terrible war! Geoffrey was a soldier. He would be sure to be there, leading his men. Supposing he were killed?

One night in a dream she saw his body carried past

her, limp and bleeding. She screamed in her sleep. Sadako awoke, terrified.

'What is the matter?'

'I dreamed of Geoffrey, my husband. Perhaps he is killed in the war.'

'Do not say that,' said Sadako. 'It is unlucky to speak of death. It troubles the ghosts. I have told you this house is haunted.'

Certainly for Asako the Fujinami mansion had lost its charm. Even the beautiful landscape was besieged by horrible thoughts. Every day two or three of the Yoshiwara women died of disease and neglect, so Sadako said; and, therefore, every day the invisible population of the Fujinami garden must be increasing, and the volume of their curses must be gathering in intensity. The ghosts hissed like snakes in the bamboo grove. They sighed in the pine-branches. They nourished the dwarf shrubs with their pollution. Beneath the waters of the lake the corpses,—women's corpses,—were laid out in rows. Their thin hands shook the reeds. Their pale faces rose at night to the surface, and stared at the moon. The autumn maples smeared the scene with infected blood; and the stone foxes in front of the shrine of Inari sneered and grinned at the devil-world which their foul influence had called into being through the black witchcraft of lechery, avarice and disease.