## CHAPTER VI

### ACROSS JAPAN

*Momo-shiki no*
*Omiya-bito wa*
*Okaredo*
*Kokoro ni norite*
*Omoyuru imo !*

Though the people of the
Great City
With its hundred towers
Be many,
Riding on my heart—
(Only) my beloved Sister !

THE traveller in Japan is restricted to a hard-worn road, dictated to him by Messrs Thos. Cook and Son, and by the Tourists' Information Bureau. This *via sacra* is marked by European-style hotels of varying quality, by insidious curio-shops, and by native guides, serious and profane, who classify foreigners under the two headings of Temples and Tea-houses. The lonely men-travellers are naturally supposed to have a *penchant* for the spurious *geisha*, who haunt the native restaurants; the married couples are taken to the temples, and to those merchants of antiquities who offer the highest commission to the guides. There is always an air of petty conspiracy in the wake of every foreigner who visits the country. If he is a Japan enthusiast, he is amused by the naïve ways, and accepts the conventional smile as the reflection of the heart of 'the happy, little Japs.' If he hates the country, he takes it for granted that extortion and villainy will accompany his steps.

Geoffrey and Asako enjoyed immensely their introduction to Japan. The unpleasant experiences of Nagasaki were soon forgotten after their arrival at Kyoto, the ancient capital of the Mikado, where the charm of old

Japan still lingers. They were happy, innocent people, devoted to each other, easily pleased, and having heaps of money to spend. They were amused with everything, with the people, with the houses, with the shops, with being stared at, with being cheated, with being dragged to the ends of the vast city only to see flowerless gardens and temples in decay.

Asako especially was entranced. The feel of the Japanese silk and the sight of bright colours and pretty patterns awoke in her a kind of ancestral memory, the craving of generations of Japanese women. She bought kimonos by the dozen, and spent hours trying them on amid a chorus of admiring chambermaids and waitresses, a chorus specially trained by the hotel management in the difficult art of admiring foreigners' purchases.

Then to the curio-shops! The antique shops of Kyoto give to the simple foreigner the impression that he is being received in a private home by a Japanese gentleman of leisure whose hobby is collecting. The unsuspecting prey is welcomed with cigarettes and specially honourable tea, the thick green kind like pea-soup. An autograph book is produced in which are written the names of rich and distinguished people who have visited the collection. You are asked to add your own insignificant signature. A few glazed earthenware pots appear, Tibetan temple pottery of the Han Period. They are on their way to the Winckler collection in New York, a trifle of a hundred thousand dollars.

Having pulverised the will-power of his guest, the merchant of antiquities hands him over to his myrmidons, who conduct him round the shop—for it is only a shop after all. Taking accurate measurement of his purse and tastes, they force him to buy what pleases them, just as a conjurer can force a card upon his audience.

The Barringtons' rooms at the Miyako Hotel soon became like an annex to the show-rooms in Messrs

Yamanaka's store. Brocades and kimonos were draped over chairs and bedsteads. Tables were crowded with porcelain, *cloisonné* and statues of gods. Lanterns hung from the roof; and in a corner of the room stood an enormous bowl-shaped bell as big as a bath, resting on a tripod of red lacquer. When struck with a thick leather baton like a drum-stick it uttered a deep sob, a wonderful, round, perfect sound, full of the melancholy of the wind and the pine-forests, of the austere dignity of a vanishing civilisation, and the loneliness of the Buddhist Law.

There was a temple on the hill behind the hotel whence such a note reached the visitors at dawn and again at sunset.. The spirit of everything lovely in the country sang in its tones; and Asako and Geoffrey had agreed, that, whatever else they might buy or not buy, they must take an echo of that imprisoned music home with them to England.

So they bought the cyclopean voice, engraved with cabalistic writing, which might be, as it professed to be, a temple bell of Yamato over five hundred years old, or else the last year's product of an Osaka foundry for antique brass ware. Geoffrey called it 'Big Ben.'

'What are you going to do with all these things?' he asked his wife.

'Oh, for our home in London,' she answered, clapping her hands and gazing with ecstatic pride at all her treasures. 'It will be wonderful. Oh, Geoffrey, Geoffrey, you are so good to give all this to me!'

'But it is your own money, little sweetheart!'

Never did Asako seem further from her parents' race than during the first weeks of her sojourn in her native country. She was so unconscious of her relationship that she liked to play at imitating native life, as

something utterly peculiar and absurd. Meals in Japanese eating-houses amused her immensely. The squatting on bare floors, the exaggerated obeisance of the waiting-girls, the queer food, the clumsy use of chop-sticks, the numbness of her feet after being sat upon for half an hour, all would set her off in peals of unchecked laughter, so as to astonish her compatriots, who naturally enough mistook her for one of themselves.

Once, with the aid of the girls of the hotel, she arrayed herself in the garments of a Japanese lady of position with her hair dressed in the shiny black helmet-shape, and her waist encased in the broad, tight *obi* or sash, which after all was no more uncomfortable than a corset. Thus attired she came down to dinner one evening, trotting behind her husband as a well-trained Japanese wife should do. In foreign dress she appeared *petite* and exotic, but one would have hesitated to name the land of her birth. It was a shock to Geoffrey to see her again in her native costume. In Europe, it had been a distinction, but here, in Japan, it was like a sudden fading into the landscape. He had never realised quite how entirely his wife was one of these people. The short stature and the shuffling gait, the tiny delicate hands, the grooved slit of the eyelids, and the oval of the face were pure Japanese. The only incongruous elements were the white ivory skin which, however, is a beauty not unknown among home-reared Japanese women also, and, above all, the expression which looked out of the dancing eyes and the red mouth ripe for kisses, an expression of freedom, happiness, and natural high spirits, which is not to be seen in a land where the women are hardly free, never natural, and seldom happy. The Japanese woman's face develops a compressed look which leaves the features a mere mask, and acquires very often a furtive glance, as of a sharp-fanged animal half-tamed by fear, something weasel-like or vixenish.

Flaunting her native costume, Asako came down to dinner at the Miyako Hotel, laughing, chattering, and imitating the mincing steps of her country-women and their exaggerated politeness. Geoffrey tried to play his part in the little comedy; but his good spirits were forced, and gradually silence fell between them, the silence which falls on masqueraders in fancy dress, who have tried to play up to the spirit of their costume, but whose imagination flags. Had Geoffrey been able to think a little more deeply he would have realised that this play-acting was a very visible sign of the gulf which yawned between his wife and the yellow women of Japan. She was acting as a white woman might have done, certain of the impossibility of confusion. But Geoffrey for the first time felt his wife's exoticism, not from the romantic and charming side, but from the ugly, sinister, and—horrible word—inferior side of it. Had he married a coloured woman? Was he a squaw's man? A sickening vision of *chonkina* at Nagasaki rose before his imagination.

When dinner was over, and after Asako had received the congratulations of the other guests, she retired upstairs to put on her *négligé*. Geoffrey liked a cigar after dinner, but Asako objected to the heavy aroma hanging about her bedroom. They therefore parted generally for this brief half-hour; and afterwards they would read and talk together in their sitting-room. Like other people, they soon got into the habit of going to bed early in a country where there were no theatres playing in a comprehensible tongue, and no supper restaurants to turn night into day.

Geoffrey lit his cigar and made his way to the smoking-room. Two elderly men, merchants from Kobe, were already sitting there over whiskies and sodas, discussing a mutual acquaintance.

'No, I don't see much of him,' one of them, an

American, was saying, 'nobody does nowadays. But take my word, when he came out here as a young man, he was one of the smartest young fellows in the East.'

'Yes, I can quite believe you,' said the other, a stolid Englishman with a briar pipe, 'he struck me as an exceptionally well-educated man.'

'He was more than that, I tell you. He was a financial genius. He was a man with a great future.'

'Poor fellow!' said the other. 'Well, he has only got himself to thank.'

Geoffrey was not an eavesdropper by nature, but he found himself getting interested in the fate of this anonymous failure, and wondered if he was going to hear the cause of the man's downfall.

'When these Japanese women get hold of a man,' the American went on, 'they seem to drain the brightness out of him. Why, you have only got to stroll around to the Kobe Club and look at the faces. You can tell the ones that have Japanese wives or housekeepers right away. Something seems to have gone right out of their expression.'

'It's worry,' said the Englishman. 'A fellow marries a Japanese girl, and he finds he has to keep all her lazy relatives as well; and then a crowd of half-caste brats come along, and he doesn't know whether they are his own or not.'

'It is more than that,' was the emphatic answer. 'Men with white wives have worry enough; and a man can go gay in the tea-houses, and none the worse. But when once they marry them, it is like signing a bond with the devil. That man's damned.'

Geoffrey rose and left the room. He thought on the whole it was better to withdraw than to hit that harsh-voiced Yankee hard in the eye. He felt that his wife had been insulted. But the speaker could not have known by whom he had been overheard, He had merely

expressed an opinion which, as a sudden instinct told Geoffrey, must be generally prevalent among the white people living in this yellow country. Now that he came to think of it, he remembered curious glances cast at him and Asako by foreigners and also, strange to say, by Japanese, glances half contemptuous. Had he acquired it already, that expression which marked the faces of the unfortunates at the Kobe Club? He remembered also tactless remarks on board ship, such as, 'Mrs Barrington has lived all her life in England; of course, that makes all the difference.'

Geoffrey looked at his reflection in the long mirror in the hall. There were no signs as yet of premature damnation on the honest healthy British face. There were signs, perhaps, of ripened thought and experience, of less superficial appreciation. The eyes seemed to have withdrawn deeper into their sockets, like the figurines in toy barometers when they feel wet weather coming.

He was beginning to appreciate the force of the advice which had urged him to beware of Japan. Here, in the hotbed of race prejudice, evil spirits were abroad. It was so different in broad-hearted tolerant London. Asako was charming and rich. She was received everywhere. To marry her was no more strange than to marry a French girl or a Russian. They could have lived peaceably in Europe; and her distant fatherland would have added a pathetic charm to her personality. But here in Japan, where between the handful of whites and the myriads of yellow men stretches a No Man's Land, serrated and desolate, marked with bloody fights, with suspicions and treacheries, Asako's position as the wife of a white man and Geoffrey's position as the husband of a yellow wife were entirely different. The stranger's phrases had summed up the situation. They were no good, these white men who had pawned their lives to

yellow girls. They were the failures, the *ratés*. Geoffrey had heard of promising young officers in India who had married native women and who had had to leave the service. He had done the same. Better go gay in the tea-houses with Wigram. He was the husband of a coloured woman.

And then the crowd of half-caste brats? In England one hardly ever thinks of the progeny of mixed races. That bitter word 'half-caste' is a distant echo of sensational novels. Geoffrey had not as yet noticed the pale handsome children of Eurasia, Nature's latest and most half-hearted experiment, whose seed, they say, is lost in the third generation. But he had heard the tone of scorn which flung out the term; and it suddenly occurred to him that his own children would be half-castes.

He was walking on the garden terrace overlooking the starry city. He was thinking with an intensity unfamiliar to him and terrifying, like a machine which is developing its fullest power, and is shaking a framework unused to such a strain. He wanted a friend's presence, a desultory chat with an old pal about people and things which they shared in common. Thank God, Reggie Forsyth was in Tokyo. He would leave tomorrow. He must see Reggie, laugh at his queer clever talk again, relax himself, and feel sane.

He was nervous of meeting his wife, lest her instinct might guess his thoughts. Yet he must not leave her any longer or his absence would make her anxious. Not that his love for Asako had been damaged; but he felt that they were travelling along a narrow path over a bottomless gulf in an unexplored country.

He returned to the rooms and found her lying disconsolate on a sofa, wrapped in a flimsy champagne-coloured dressing-gown, one of the spoils of Paris. Her hair had been rapidly combed out of its formal native

arrangement. It looked draggled and hard as though she had been bathing. Titine, the French maid, was removing the rejected débris of kimono and sash.

'Sweetheart, you've been crying,' said Geoffrey, kissing her.

'You didn't like me as a Jap, and you've been thinking terrible things about me. Look at me, and tell me what you have been thinking.'

'Little Yum-Yum talks very great nonsense sometimes. As a matter of fact, I was thinking of going on to Tokyo to-morrow. I think we've seen about all there is to be seen here, don't you?'

'Geoffrey, you want to see Reggie Forsyth. You're getting bored and homesick already.'

'No, I'm not. I think it is a ripping country; in fact I want to see more of it. What I am wondering is whether we should take Tanaka.'

This made Asako laugh. Any mention of Tanaka's name acted as a talisman of mirth. Tanaka was the Japanese guide who had fixed himself on to their company remora-like, with a fine flair for docile and profitable travellers.

He was a very small man, small even for a Japanese, but plump withal. His back view looked like that of a little boy, an illusion accentuated by the shortness of his coat and his small straw boater with its coloured ribbon. Even when he turned the illusion was not quite dispelled; for his was a round, ruddy, chubby face with dimples, a face with big cheeks ripe for smacking, and little sunken pig-like eyes.

He had stalked the Barringtons during their first excursion on foot through the ancient city, knowing that sooner or later they would lose their way. When the opportunity offered itself and he saw them gazing

vaguely round at cross-roads, he bore down upon them, raising his hat and saying,—

'Can I assist you, sir?'

'Yes, would you kindly tell me the way to the Miyako Hotel?' asked Geoffrey.

'I am myself *en route*,' answered Tanaka. 'Indeed, we meet very *à propos*.'

On the way he had discoursed about all there was to be seen in Kyoto. Only, visitors must know their way about, or must have the service of an experienced guide who was *au fait* and who knew the 'open sesames.' He pronounced this phrase 'open sessums,' and it was not until late that night that its meaning dawned upon Geoffrey.

Tanaka had a rich collection of foreign and idiomatic phrases, which he must have learned by heart from a book and with which he adorned his conversation.

On his own initiative he had appeared next morning to conduct the two visitors to the Emperor's palace, which he gave them to understand was open for that day only, and as a special privilege due to Tanaka's influence. While expatiating on the wonders to be seen, he brushed Geoffrey's clothes and arranged them with the care of a trained valet. In the evening, when they returned to the hotel and Asako complained of pains in her shoulder, Tanaka showed himself to be an adept at massage.

Next morning he was again at his post; and Geoffrey realised that another member had been added to his household. He acted as their *cicerone* or 'siseroan,' as he pronounced it, to temple treasuries and old palace gardens, to curio-shops and to little native eating-houses. The Barringtons submitted, not because they liked Tanaka, but because they were good-natured, and rather lost in this new country. Besides, Tanaka clung like a leech and was useful in many ways.

Only on Sunday morning it was the hotel boy who brought their early morning tea. Tanaka was absent. When he made his appearance he wore a grave expression which hardly suited his round face; and he carried a large black prayer-book. He explained that he had been to church. He was a Christian, Greek Orthodox. At least so he said, but afterwards Geoffrey was inclined to think that this was only one of his mystifications to gain the sympathy of his victims and to create a bond between him and them.

His method was one of observation, imitation and concealed interrogation. The long visits to the Barringtons' rooms, the time spent in clothes-brushing and in massage, were so much opportunity gained for inspecting the room and its inhabitants, for gauging their habits and their income, and for scheming out how to derive the greatest possible advantage for himself.

The first results of this process were almost unconscious. The wide collar, in which his face had wobbled Micawber-like, disappeared; and a small double collar, like the kind Geoffrey wore, took its place. The garish neck-tie and hatband were replaced by discreet black. He acquired the attitudes and gestures of his employer in a few days.

As for the cross-examination, it took place in the evening, when Geoffrey was tired, and Tanaka was taking off his boots.

'Previous to the *fiancée*,' Tanaka began, 'did Lady Barrington live long time in Japan?'

He was lavish with titles, considering that money and nobility in such people must be inseparable; besides, experience had taught him that the use of such honorifics never came amiss.

'No, she left when she was quite a little baby.'

'Ladyship has Japanese name?'

'Asako Fujinami. Do you know the name, Tanaka?'

The Japanese set his head on one side to indicate an attitude of reflection.

'Tokyo?' he suggested.

'Yes, from Tokyo.'

'Does Lordship pay his *devoir* to relatives of Ladyship?'

'Yes, I suppose so, when we go to Tokyo.'

'Ladyship's relatives have noble residence?' asked Tanaka; it was his way of inquiring if they were rich.

'I really don't know at all,' answered Geoffrey.

'Then, I will detect for Lordship. It will be better. A man can do great foolishness, if he does not detect.'

After this, Geoffrey discouraged Tanaka. But Asako thought him a huge joke. He made himself very useful and agreeable, fetching and carrying for her, and amusing her with his wonderful English. He almost succeeded in dislodging Titine from her cares for her mistress's person. Geoffrey had once objected, on being expelled from his wife's bedroom during a change of raiment,—

'But Tanaka was there. You don't mind him seeing you apparently.'

Asako had burst out laughing.

'Oh, he isn't a man. He isn't real at all. He says that I am like a flower, and that I am very beautiful in "*deshabeel.*"'

'That sounds real enough,' grunted Geoffrey, 'and very like a man.'

Perhaps, innocent as she was, Asako enjoyed playing off Tanaka against her husband, just as it certainly amused her to watch the jealousy between Titine and the Japanese. It gave her a pleasant sense of power to see her big husband look so indignant.

'How old do you think Tanaka is?' he asked her one day.

'Oh, about eighteen or nineteen,' she answered.

She was not yet used to the deceptiveness of Japanese appearances.

'He does not look more sometimes,' said her husband, 'but he has the ways and the experience of a very old hand. I wouldn't mind betting you that he is thirty.'

'All right,' said Asako, 'give me the jade Buddha, if you are wrong.'

'And what will you give me if I am right?' said Geoffrey.

'Kisses,' replied his wife.

Geoffrey went out to look for Tanaka. In a quarter of an hour he came back, triumphant.

'My kisses, sweetheart,' he demanded.

'Wait,' said Asako; 'how old is he?'

'I went out of the front door, and there was Master Tanaka, telling the rickshaw-men the latest gossip about us. I said to him, "Tanaka, are you married?" "Yes, Lordship," he answered, "I am widower." "Any children?" I asked again. "I have two progenies," he said; "they are soldiers of His Majesty the Emperor." "Why, how old are you?" I asked. "Forty-three years," he answered. "You are very well preserved for a man of your age," I said,—and I have come back for my kisses.'

After this monstrous deception, Geoffrey had declared that he would dismiss Tanaka.

'A man who goes about like that,' he said, 'is a living lie.'

Two days later, early in the morning, they left Kyoto by the great metal high road of Japan, which has replaced the famous way known as the *Tokaido*, sacred in history, legend and art. Every stone has its message for Japanese eyes, every tree its association with poetry or romance. Even among Western connoisseurs of Japanese

wood-engraving, its fifty-two resting places are as familiar as the Stations of the Cross. Such is the *Tokaido*, the road between the two capitals of Kyoto and Tokyo, still haunted by the ghosts of the Emperor's ox-drawn wagons, the *Shoguns'* lacquered palanquins, by feudal warriors in their death-like armour, and by the swinging stride of the *samurai*.

'Look, look, Fujiyama!'

There was a movement in the observation-car, where Geoffrey and his wife were watching the unfolding of their new country. The sea was away to the right beyond the tea-fields and the pine-woods. To the left was the base of a mountain. Its summit was wrapped in cloud. From the fragment visible, it was possible to appreciate the architecture of the whole—*ex pede Herculem*. It took the train quite one hour to travel over that arc of the circuit of Fuji, which it must pass on its way to Tokyo. During this time, the curtained presence of the great mountain dominated the landscape. Everything seemed to lead up to that mantle of cloud. The terraced rice-fields rose towards it, the trees slanted towards it, the moorland seemed to be pulled upwards, and the skin of the earth was stretched taut over some giant limb which had pushed itself up from below, the calm sea was waiting for its reflection, and even the microscopic train seemed to swing in its orbit round the mountain like an unwilling satellite.

'It's a pity we can't see it,' said Geoffrey.

'Yes, it's the only big thing in the whole darned country,' said a saturnine American, sitting opposite; 'and then, when you get on to it, it's just a heap of cinders.'

Asako was not worrying about the landscape. Her thoughts were directed to a family of well-to-do Japanese, first-class passengers, who had settled in the observation-car for half an hour or so, and had then withdrawn,

There was a father, his wife and two daughters, wax-like figures who did not utter a word but glided shadow-like in and out of the compartment. Were they relations of hers?

Then, when she and her husband passed down the corridor train to lunch, and through the swarming second-class carriages, she wondered once more, as she saw male Japan sprawling its length over the seats in the ugliest attitudes of repose, and female Japan squatting monkey-like and cleaning ears and nostrils with scraps of paper or wiping stolid babies. The carriages swarmed with children, with luggage and litter. The floors were a mess of spilled tea, broken earthenware cups, and splintered wooden boxes. Cheap baggage was piled up everywhere, with wicker baskets, paper parcels, bundles of drab-coloured wraps, and cases of imitation leather. Among this débris children were playing unchecked, smearing their faces with rice cakes, and squashing the flies on the window-pane.

There is an old Japanese proverb which says,—

'Bad manners on a journey, no need for apology.'

It is unfortunate for Japan's reputation that this maxim should be followed so literally, and that this railway train inspection should be for so many foreign travellers their one opportunity for studying at close quarters the native in his private life.

Were any of these her relatives? Asako shuddered. How much did she actually know about these far-away cousins? She could just remember her father. She could recall great brown shining eyes, and a thin face wasted by the consumption which killed him, and a tenderness of voice and manner quite apart from anything which she had ever experienced since. This soon came to an end. After that she had known only the conscientiously chilly care of the Muratas. They had told her that her mother had died when she was born,

and that her father was so unhappy that he had left Japan for ever. Her father was a very clever man. He had read all the English and French and German books. He had left special words when he was dying that Asako was not to go back to Japan, that Japanese men were bad to women, that she was to be brought up among French girls and was to marry a European or an American. But the Muratas could not tell her any intimate details about her father, whom they had not known very well. Again, although they were aware that she had rich cousins living in Tokyo, they did not know them personally and could tell her nothing.

Her father had left no papers, only his photograph, the picture of a delicate good-looking sad-faced man in black cloak and kimono, and a little French book called *Pensées de Pascal*, at the end of which was written the address of Mr Ito, the lawyer in Tokyo through whom the dividends were paid, and that of 'my cousin Fujinami Gentaro.'