

# IN THE SHADOW OF NANTEISAN.

## CHAPTER I.

"HOME, home, sweet home; there's no place like home."

The simple ballad, sung by a fresh, girlish voice, rang through the wood in which the vocalist was sitting, and echoed through the rocky gorge lying at her feet. A lithe, fair-haired maiden, with laughing brown eyes, had cast aside her canvas and was cleaning her palette.

"A queer sense of the fitness of things you must have, Edie."

The speaker, who sat on the sloping turf a yard or two below the songstress, was like her as seven-and-twenty with delicate health can be like seventeen, robust and overflowing with youthful energy.

"Fancy," the elder continued, "'Home, sweet home' under the shadow of a Japanese temple, with strange trees half buried in gorgeous climbers around us, and one's eyes resting at the same time on a mountain buried in snow, and on myriads of tropical flowers—rather, 'Tis the clime of the East—'tis the land of the sun,' but 'Home, sweet home'—no!"

"Ah, wild!" the young girl cried, springing to her feet, and striking an attitude as she completed the quotation—"ah, wild as the accents of lovers' farewell, are the hearts which they bear, and the tales which they tell." Oh!" in a tone of annoyance, "Father Sanyo has been listening to me making a fool of myself."

Her face flushed as a tall, dark man, who had been looking at her from a little distance, walked forward with a smile. He wore a tonsure, which, together with his garb, showed him to be a Buddhist priest. His age might be about thirty, his face, though emaciated, was handsome, the eyes were large and deep-set, and there was a grave dignity in his bearing which immediately impressed one.

"My little foreign flower," he said in Japanese in a musical voice, "wherever you are there is light, and beauty, and harmony, so far as they can be had in this dark world of sin and discord. Would you be pleased, dear child, to repeat in my tongue these melodious words you just now—"

Here his eyes fell on the elder lady, and he became slightly embarrassed. He bowed very low, and muttering a benediction with one hand extended, the smile left his face, and he walked slowly on.

"Grace, you frightened the poor bonze," whispered Edie laughingly. "I am the only one with whom he forgets that he has a character to support for unsociability."

"I wish Mr. Sanyo would unbend. I am curious to know a man who, if rumour be true, is a saint and an admirable Crichton rolled into one, who prefers the life of a hermit to that of a butterfly at the Mikado's court, and satisfies his ambition by scaring away evil spirits with a gong."

"Indeed, Grace, he hardly deserves your satire. He is really very clever, and you know he resigned a very high office for a religious life, so that he must be conscientious."

"Never mind my satire, love. I am only jealous that Father Sanyo refuses to smile on me. Meanwhile, the sun has disappeared, and we had better be going."

The majestic, snow-capped figure of Nanteisan looked down upon them, its rugged outlines softened by the gathering twilight. A subdued sound of troubled waters ascended through the mist which veiled the bed of the ravine; the twitter of birds came from the branches of the lofty cryptomerias overhead as the girls walked silently hand-in-hand down the slope towards their house. They reached the roadway, and the younger paused for a moment beside a little cemetery. Only malefactors were buried there, but the graves were all neat, the grass closely shaven, and fresh flowers rested in bamboo troughs filled with water.

Suddenly the deep boom of a gong, slow and measured, came through the quiet evening, its sound repeated by every rock.

"Poor Father Sanyo!" sighed Edie. "If to take care of their graves and to intone prayers for their souls could do the dead any good, he would deserve well of these criminals. Oh, run, Grace; there is papa waiting for us."

The life of the two girls was an uneventful one in this out-of-the-way mountainous district of Japan, day succeeding day without making any change in their round of occupations. Their mother had been dead for some years, and their father, Dr. Bevan, who was a medical missionary, spent a large part of his time out of doors, travelling from village to village, sometimes being away for a week together.

Even when at home he had little repose, for people who never attended his religious services gladly availed themselves of his medical skill, and a little crowd eager for European medicine was always to be found outside the mission surgery awaiting his return.

Since Mrs. Bevan's death Grace had been her father's housekeeper and general assistant, a position which left her little leisure. When her housework was done there were visits to be paid, alms to be distributed, and the manifold duties of a Lady Bountiful to be performed.

Edith was the only comparatively idle member of the family. Left an orphan early, her father and sister would never regard her as other than a child, and though she was now a full head taller than Grace, and becoming day by day more womanly, the delusion was continued. The garden was her charge, and she kept the vases filled with flowers; but when this task was finished Grace would, in motherly fashion, send her out with an admonition to have a good walk and bring back some fresh roses on her cheeks. Edie did not like passing through the village, with its slatternly women and dirty, naked children, its dogs and cesspools, so she usually took a path leading from the back of the house to wooded hills, which afforded delightful views and almost complete solitude.

One day she was entering the temple grounds when, as she crossed the stile, a group of urchins on the road pelted her with earth and besprinkled her plentifully with abusive epithets. She turned towards them with blazing cheeks, but was able to do nothing, and she would certainly have had the worst of the encounter had not aid come. A tall, dark priest suddenly stood beside her, springing from she knew not where, and as soon as the boys saw him their faces indicated the most abject terror, and, taking to their heels, they did not look back once before they dived into their respective hovels. It was thus that Edie made Sanyo's acquaintance. Mysterious rumours of his terrible powers filled the neighborhood. No one beyond his single male attendant knew anything of his mode of life, and no one dared to enquire. Edie was flattered by his notice and by the fact that he, distant and almost repellent in his manner to others, was cordial with her. He talked sometimes on botany, occasionally he suggested an improvement in a sketch, and gradually she won from him and carried home in triumph the story of his early life, and of his giving up earthly renown for what he believed to be spiritual glory.

The girl's sense of the romantic was strongly appealed to. She the daughter of an English clergyman, was the confidante of a Japanese Buddhist priest of noble birth, of wondrous sanctity, and whose name was a word of fear for miles around! She suspected no danger. Though not old he was much older than herself, and his profession as well as his habitual gravity seemed to put all idea of love out of the question. But though she believed their acquaintance to be of an ordinary kind she never told her sister how pleasant she found it, and when Grace and Dr. Bevan received from her an account of this interview or that, the only idea that arose in their minds was of a misanthropical man, tired of the world, yet longing for society, welcoming the babble of a charming child.

One afternoon Edith took her sketching materials to a favourite seat near the temple. At that hour the place was usually deserted; those who came to worship, or to receive charms or medicines from the hermit through a grated door, doing so at an earlier hour. But to-day there was a little crowd squatted smoking on the balcony, patiently waiting, and occasionally speaking in awe-struck whispers. Soon after the girl had established herself on the turf seat, one of the men, after some debate, pulled the bamboo rattle which served as knocker. After a little delay an old weazened man came out.

"Go away," he said angrily. "The holy man is at his devotions, and I am not going to disturb him for cattle like you. Should your persistency annoy him, woe upon you and your belongings. Go away!"

Before he could wave his hand a second time the crowd had melted away.

Edith wondered what had caused this change in Sanyo's usually methodical habits. It could hardly be that he was ill, for Grace had remarked to her that his bell sounded with even more than ordinary frequency that morning. Still, she had not seen him for two or three days. She laid down her work and sat looking absently at the little temple. In a palisaded space behind fowls and pigeons roamed, and were regarded sleepily by a pair of white storks. In the building itself there was no sign of life. The front was closed up, and through a side door, generally used only by the priest or his attendant, was pushed back a little in its groove, no sound came through.

Suddenly a drop of rain fell on her hand, and looking round she saw a huge dark cloud enveloping Nanteisan and advancing rapidly towards her. The poultry had already divined the approach of a storm, and had run into shelter, the storks following at a more stately pace. Thinking that the rain would soon pass, Edith took refuge on the picturesque little balcony, which was quite protected by the deep eaves of the temple. She had hardly arrived there when a deep groan reached her. Another, and more sepulchral, drove the blood from her cheeks, and fearing lest Sanyo should be seriously ill, she softly opened the door and peered inside.

A small hall covered with mats lay before her, entirely destitute of furniture, except at the farther end, where the altars were. The decorations of the place were splendid. Gold shone on the ceiling, which was covered with geometrical designs, on the dragons and mythological figures which adorned the dull paper of the partitions, and on the statues which stood in niches around the hall. Through a cloud of incense Edith saw the two altars, lit by silver lamps, covered with vases of flowers, and surmounted by a bronze statue of Buddha.

Within the chancel rails, at the foot of the altars, there was a prostrate figure. As Edith looked it moved, and two outstretched hands beat the ground violently, and an agonised voice cried:

"Have mercy, oh, Lord Buddha! Man is weak. Like the flowers he passes away and dies; he is as fleeting as the lightning's flash, as evanescent as the morning's dew, and his will bows before temptation as the grass bends beneath the breeze. Buddha! Buddha! pardon your miserable servant, who is enslaved by an earthly love for one of another country and a false faith. Oh, tear the weakness from his heart, and bring him back whole to your feet."

The solemnity of the scene and the anguished tones caused Edie to utter an involuntary sob; hearing which the devotee sprang to his feet and looked round.

It was Sanyo, his ghastly face stained with tears, forming a strange contrast to his silken vestments of blue and crimson, all gorgeous with gold embroidery.

Upon seeing the girl he staggered against the rails, then turning his face towards the presiding idol, his lips moved for some seconds.

Edith felt herself suffocating. There was not a breath of wind from outside to lighten the incense-laden atmosphere, and the view of Sanyo's heart which his words gave her made her brain throb painfully.

A mist rose before her eyes, and feeling that she should faint without