

## LOVE IN NIPPON.

BY K. T. TAKAHASHI IN SHORT STORIES.

It was a curious gathering. Looking over the deep, serene Sumida, with its palace-boats, whence arose the quaint strains of *samisen* now heaving and now bellowing on the waves of its eventide; looking across to the dreamy banks of Mukojimo, with their ten miles of the cherry groves, now ablaze in the setting sun of an early spring, uncertain shapes of homebound epicureans moving slowly; here on Hashiba side, in a lordly hall of Hosokawa mansion, there were assembled in a strange concourse some ten or twelve Englishmen and Americans and a few Europeans, with a goodly number of Japanese themselves sprinkled among them. It is not for me to tell how this meeting came about; I only happen to know that its object was to listen to the tale of love of many a different land.

The last speaker sat down. The storm of applause raged and subsided. The chairman called on the next, and great was the enthusiasm that followed. In the midst arose Mr. Okada Gamba, a stalwart man of fifty, full of military airs. One would have expected anything but a gentle voice of sweet passion from a man of his type, yet you could easily trace out a forehead of beautiful shape and a mouth of ideal cut, which told of a handsome face of the early days, now buried under the gray hairs and frosted beard. He calls on the audience; let us listen:

"I rise with a nameless feeling. After having listened to the excellent stories of the preceding gentlemen, all so well told, what could you expect from me? Yet I am here to-night to represent our beloved Japan. Japan shall not be outdone! No! not even in the matter of love! *U!* I will proceed.

"Thirty-five years ago I was a young man of twenty, a winsome youth. But how many of you here know the Japan of those days, of three decades and five springs ago? The two centuries of peace and plenty perfected the splendor of Tokugawa dynasty, alas! at the expense of the honest and the hardworking. Outside the very walls of polish and luxury the atmosphere was thick with buzzing noises, as of bees, ready for a new life, new action, and restless and venturesome became the spirit of the day among the quick. Nor was I an exception. At twenty I left the home and went about a *mushashigyo* (wandering about for the championship of the martial arts). Ah! the word itself has become a relic of the past feudalism now! But in those days there was a glory of manhood in its very sound.

"I journeyed through south. In Nagasaki I became acquainted with an American, a survivor of a wreck. From him I acquired a little English and some knowledge of the West. It was like a peep into the grandeur of a forbidden land; and a forbidden land it was for us at the time, that home of modern civilization. My spirit took a new turn then and went a little ahead of the reckoning of the period. My friends, however, warned me in time that I was being suspected of high-sounding crimes, such as desertion, treason, etc. So I hurried to North to harbor the weather, and went wandering through the domains of the different *daimios* of these regions, whiling away the days of an unwilling exile.

Five years elapsed; and one day I walked past the little town of Yaita and came under a bower of a cherry-tree, which outspread its branches over the road, growing itself within a row of a long winding hedge-fence encircling a large villa. The time was spring. The queen blossoms were in their glory. I looked up and saw the sister-trees rivaling their magnificence over the whole extent of the villa, but the one I stood under was the queen of queens. In a momentary dream of happiness I mused out:

U'tsu-kushi-na  
I-ma-o-sa-ka-rini  
Sa-ku ra-ba-na  
No-chi-no Shi-rushi-ni  
Ta-wo ri-to-va u-kan.

(How grand in thy glory! O blossoming cherry! That the like be mine, will I thy branch pluck now!) I reached up my hand and was about to break the nearest one, when I heard a noise of someone else tearing down a branch within. A sweet voice then said, 'Your pardon,' and a hand, beauteous as pearl, held out to me a pink-clustered bough through a crevice in the hedge-growth. And, lo! in the little opening I beheld a face as of a flower! I heard my own blood rustling up the veins! I stretched out my hand, received the gift and said an awkward thanks, half apologetically. I saw a faint streak of crimson mount the face, but only for a moment; it disappeared behind where the growth was the thickest, an uncertain figure gliding away out of my sight. For the first time in my life, then, I leaned eagerly forward against the hedge, trying to catch a glimpse of a woman! I was spellbound, I forgot myself.

"I leaned there all absorbed till a hand suddenly jerked me by the shoulder and a gruff voice said, 'a gentleman or a thief?' Turning around quickly and taking a post of action, I said in my consternation: 'Thy words of impertinence! I am a gentleman; what of that?' and I faced a group of five *samurai*, smiling a smile of derision. As the words scarcely left my lips one of them ejaculated: 'Noble gentleman! we are glad to make your acquaintance!' and a well spread palm of his hand came flashing over my cheek. But it lodged itself only in my firm grasp, which pulled my innocent saluter a little toward myself, and with a twist of my body I returned him a toss of his body in the air—a respectable toss! Ah!

you smile, my good audience! you do not believe me! Yet only thirty years ago a feat like this was a mere commonplace. Ah me! how old have I grown these days!

"The tossed man picked himself deftly up, and with his comrades drew. I did not, but stood glaring defiance at them with my hand on the hilt of the great sword. Passers-by and curious on-lookers from the vicinity gathered around us in a goodly crowd. A breathless silence sealed their mouths, and they kept a safe distance watching our next move. The odds were against me, most plainly, but my calm, collected manner seemed to have awakened an awe in my assailants, so that each was anxious to have the other start the first blow. Irritated at their cowardice, I relaxed a point of guard. On came a sword descending over me—to hit the air! For mine left its scabbard that same moment, and felled on its back the enemy to the ground. At this the other four jumped upon me. I was now in the thicket of icy flashes! when there came rushing two men towards us from opposite directions. One of them exclaimed: 'Towards I away with your arms!' My foes dodged sulkily a few steps backward, which I let them do without pressing on them, as the fight was after all an unwilling one on my part. Then the other of the new-comers called out to me: 'Honored stranger, pray calm your anger—even for the sake of the flowers you stand under.' A sweet fancy, my heart softened, and I, too, put away my weapon, at which the first man stepped forward and with an unexpected politeness addressed me: 'Ha, all health to you, Mr. Okada. If I am not mistaken, you are the son of my honored master.' I recognized in the man Nejiro Yokone, who at the time I left my father was one of his principal pupils in the time-honored art of fencing. I forbade ill that he should salute me with open hands.

"Some time before this, I had it through the tidings of hearsays, that the same Nejiro had been expelled from my father's for a certain offence not to be mentioned here, and there was no reason whatever that he should bear me goodwill. But there he was, with bows, smiles, and exclamations, the very picture of friendliness. I accepted them all with good grace. He even apologized to me on behalf of the bullies who so unwarrantably attacked me; he said he was keeping a fencing school of his own in Yaita, and that they were his green pupils. He also introduced me to the man who bade me peace. The gentleman's name was Mr. Hori, and he it was who owned the cherry-bowered villa. Mr. Hori proposed that we all adjourn to a feast, explaining to me at the same time that that day he had invited Nejiro and his pupils with some of the town people to a party in honor of his villa's spring, and that I should be welcome above others as an old friend of Professor Yokone's. The Professor Yokone, too, added a word of persuasion; so I followed suit and walked to Mr. Hori's.

"From the *Genka* (entrance) through the hallway to the guests' room, glitter and lustre there was none, to force upon the vulgar the idolatry of wealth; but in the midst of the subdued quietness of colors and ornaments there issued gentle fragrance of unstained woodwork, and it was delightful to tread on the pale green matting of fresh *tatami*. The silken *kakemonos* or painting that hung gracefully in a fantastic niche of *tokonoma*, the dwarf pines and cut twigs, which so picturesquely stood in pots and vases of exquisite makes, the spacious garden that opened in the front like a painted scenery with its pond, hills, rocks and moss-covered step-stones and bowering trees—all bespoke superior taste and culture in the host. Upon these, however, I shall not dwell, but the beautiful panorama hangs before me. I see the little sunken-eyed Yokone, bulging himself out superbly at the head of a motly row of the rustic guests. I see the *karakami* door behind the host slide gently open. I see a lady, the graceful wife of our host, enter the room, followed mildly by her daughter. My heart quickens its throbs. Lo, she is the same—the fair daughter of mine host—she is the one who played coquette to me behind the fence. Ah, I imagine the undying fragrance of that love-inspiring branch still lingering about me. How like the flower of flowers she sits there, haunting vision. There were there plump lassies of bonnie faces, but how each eye turned on Miyo, for such was her name. There are warring within me the passions of jealousy and even anger, the twin servants of awakened love, as Nejiro Yokone greets her with words of familiarity—though they were merest comments on the weather. Yet, ah, I felt dizzy when Miyo bowed me a mumbling bow of acquaintance at the parental words of introduction.

"We all sat there ready for the feast, but it did not come. Mr. Hori had a batch of *tanzaku* cards distributed among us and demanded of us an *ikku*, a verse, a line of poetical sentiment on his cherries, now in their resplendent bloom. A delightful conceit. But what a cast of smiling despair over the honest country faces. Our host led in scribbling down the thirty-one syllables, followed by his wife, Miyo was the next to take up the pen-brush, and then Taro, her younger brother. Taro was the exact counterpart of his sister in looks, a handsome youth of sixteen. After him I came up in the race, and the worthy Professor closed the suit. The rest, one and all, laughed a faint laughter of innocent shame, bowed and scratched their heads, and prayed us to read forth our productions. The all-important man, as he sat there, my friend, Nejiro Yokone, was asked to read his first. He did, and no one ever heard a worse hackwork of plagiarism; I pitied the poor fellow; but when it was my turn, ha, I had to muster all my courage. Strange power—Love! Only an hour ago I defied death in the midst of flashing swords. But now a glance, a smile, a word, and I set on a rack of judgment—almost trembling. But in those days, thirty

## SEVERE ABSCESS CURED.

DEAR SIR,—I had an abscess just behind my right ear in August, 1891. After suffering for three months, I began to take B. B. B., and after one month's use of it I was very much better, and the abscess entirely disappeared in four months. I am certain that Burdock Blood Bitters is an excellent remedy.

FLORENCE M. SHAW, Solgirth, Man.

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