

FACING TWO WAYS

The Story of My Life

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Illustrated

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PART ONE
MY PEACEFUL CHILDHOOD IN HALF-
WESTERNIZED TOKYO

I

My Father and Mother

I WAS born into a samurai family of Tokyo, so I began life as a member of a caste. Today there is less significance in such a fact, but when I was born it still meant a good deal as Japan had thrown off feudalism only thirty years before. At the time of my birth, the four classes—the samurai, tillers of the earth, artisans and traders—were still distinct. Thus, for generations my ancestors had been loyal retainers of a daimyo, one of whose descendants is the present Count Abe. Lord Abe's feudal estate was located in the middle west of Japan proper, on the coast of the Inland Sea, a place of beautiful scenery and mild climate. On a neighboring estate lived the daimyo whose retainers' loyalty is immortalized in the popular play, *Chushingura*, or *The Forty-Seven Ronin*.

Daimyos were heads of feudal clans, and in the days of the Tokugawa shogunate Japan was divided into about three hundred of these. The rank of each daimyo was calculated by the amount of rice his land produced. For instance, the measurement of rice crops from the lands which belonged directly to the Tokugawa Central Government called Ten-Ryo (the Land of Heaven), measured eight million koku,¹ and the former lands of Prince Shimazu, Marquis Mori, and Marquis Mayeda, the three wealthiest daimyos of the time, counted about one million koku each. Our family's daimyo, Lord Abe, was of the middle rank, owning about one hundred thousand koku worth of land around his Fukuyama Castle, whose noble outline, with

¹ One koku is five bushels.

its snow-white plaster walls supporting a succession of heavy-gabled, mild-sloping roofs, their gray tiles framed against the blue sky, can still be seen from the train windows, if one knows where to look.

Every samurai family belonged to one of the three hundred daimyos and rendered him civil and military service. The daimyo's income, chiefly in the form of rice, was allotted from his treasury to the families in his service according to their rank in the economic and social hierarchy within the clan, and for generations the income was inherited by the samurai descendants with almost no change in the amount from the beginning to the end of the Tokugawa period. The eldest son became the head of the family after the death or retirement of his father and the samurai rights were all dependent on this heir. In case a father had no son, all the family privileges were lost. An heir was of the utmost importance, therefore, and many concubines were retained to assure the birth of a son. Following the arrival of a boy, babies were coldly received into the family, if at all, for they would only impoverish it by consuming its strictly limited income. These children were plainly distinguished from the heir and were called "Cold Rice." They had to be satisfied with cold, leftover food, while the heir enjoyed the freshly cooked, warm rice.

The stern moral code of this daimyo and samurai class, called "Bushido," which has been made widely known to the Western world by Dr. Inazo Nitobe, bore a good many resemblances to the moral code of Western chivalry. Both stood for honor and the defense of the weak. The starting point of samurai training was the cultivation of this sense of honor and protection. The Bushido code taught the samurai that the worst thing he could possibly do was to bring shame on the lord and on his own family. "Harakiri," an honorable suicide by disemboweling, was encouraged, and when a samurai felt that he had committed a dishonorable act he killed himself to compensate for it.

Another typical attitude of life as revealed in this Bushido moral code was stoicism, coming from Buddhist teachings. The Japanese samurai renounced personal desire of any kind. This was appropriate in a country so poorly endowed with natural resources. Bushido was well practiced in the days of feudalism. Warriors did not have to worry about their livelihood: they had only to consider how to behave according to conventions.

However, after the Meiji political restoration which was completed in 1868, feudalism was replaced by a new social system based on modern industrialism. The samurai suddenly lost their security of living, whether they had heirs or not, and had no training with which to meet the new social order. Their traditional moral principle—"Deprecate the material value of things, and be loyal to thy lord"—was a positive handicap as feudalism was being undermined by Western materialism. The samurai conception that it was shameful to work for direct material remuneration made the starved warrior sit passively at a table heaped with plates of wooden fish, put there just for show, and pretend he had eaten enough by using a toothpick in a satiated manner. The toothpick, which often horrifies the visitor from the West, has a long and honorable history.

My father, Ritaro Hirota, who was born two years before the Meiji restoration, faced difficulties and privations in his boyhood, and was one of those who struggled in the tide of this great social change. But the samurai class soon developed ambition, and my father was urged to study at the Imperial University of Tokyo, which was being organized on the Western basis of education. Only a selected few could secure the privilege of entry. There he studied science to be a mechanical engineer. In my father's boyhood, students had learned their history and literature from Chinese books, and modern science through European languages. As paper manufacturing and printing in those days were still done in the old-fashioned way, father could not afford expensive books. He copied from cover

to cover the whole volume of a Chinese-Japanese dictionary that he needed so much. This is only one instance of the great efforts made by the students of early reconstruction days.

Out from the university my father pulled his boat up the stream of awakening industry, where this young inexperienced engineer was well received. The hectic years in establishing factories, with new machines of high efficiency, changed our land of the Lotus Dream into a country of whistles and smoking chimneys. How many huge chimneys have I seen rising around high temple towers and against the picturesque green hills of the seashore! My father would proudly tell me that these were his great contribution to industrial Japan, at which I would smile, saying to myself, "That couldn't be helped in those days!"

The marriage of my father to my mother was, of course, not a love match. According to the Japanese custom, it was arranged by the parents as a family affair, or indeed, an affair of two families. Both belonged to the samurai caste and the honorable marriage was effected by a go-between who satisfied the families concerned that the standards of culture and family tradition were well balanced. Although my father, as an engineer with Western training, had an outward appearance of modernity, psychologically he was controlled by the feudal code of the old regime. He stayed in a mental world with my grandfather, who dared not step out from this conservatism, feeling great pride in his family traditions.

This samurai pride may be said to have been the motive power of the mid-Meiji reaction against the swift and superficial westernization of Japan: the basis of national consciousness, crying for the abolition of extraterritorial rights and other ill-considered treaties with the Western countries. **

Thus my father, wearing a Western suit and hat, understanding English well, designing factories in modern style, was in his private life thoroughly imbued with the feudalistic ideology. He was during my childhood, and he still is, a samurai, not

with the sword girded at his side, but with the engineer's ruler in his pocket.

My father has had very regular habits all through his life. He does not like to use the word "about," while Japanese usually speak and act with the "about." He acts with the precision his ruler and scales indicate, the only exception being when he gives his order to the maids at dinner table. He may say that he likes to measure his sake (rice wine) a little more generously than precisely, with a sly glance at mother's face. He is gifted in music and likes to play the bamboo flute and sing folk songs. But, according to his stoic samurai principle, he believes that the encouragement of pleasure will ruin the nation and refrains from singing too much or playing too long on his favorite bamboo flute.

During the Tokugawa period, literature, art, music and drama—the things that perpetuate the humane side of life—were regarded as evils by the ruling class except as it directed them. The plays which grew out of the old marionette shows persisted as popular entertainment, and the acting, costuming, subtlety of dramatic expression and power of emotional appeal in the Kabuki theater are highly esteemed to this day by the people at large. But only the classical No drama with its extremely reserved action and ultrarefined taste was permitted for the enjoyment of the samurai class in former times.

The No are religious dramas, inculcating Buddhist morals. They were developed by the great masters of the art in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and were inherited generation after generation by the families who founded the No schools, such as "Kanze" or "Hosho," under the patronage of the daimyo or samurai class. The leading performers play in skillfully carved masks appropriate to the characters portrayed, and their words are chanted or intoned to a particular kind of musical accompaniment—flutes, large drums and tsuzumi (hand drums), descriptive and explanatory passages being sung by

the chorus. The dancers, masked and gorgeously robed in sweeping garments, move, from the beginning to the end of the play, through a series of stately posturings, each of which is prescribed by tradition. The No drama had its own comedy, though of a formal nature—the Kyogen, or short farces, performed by way of relief. They now appear on No programs, ridiculing everything in heaven and earth, displaying the humorous aspects of the servant problem, of marital relations, the iniquities of priests. But to repress one's feelings to the limit of endurance became second nature to the Japanese. It is highly appreciated as a samurai virtue, but often misunderstood by people who do not know the background of Japanese culture and interpret restraint as a denial of emotions. My father's ancestry spoke through his relation to the arts. He and mother usually responded to the solemn effect of the No, although father occasionally hummed a little passage from Kyogen, cheerful and a little red in the face from his rice wine after supper.

When my mother came into my father's house as a young bride, she entered the family of his parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, student servants,¹ and housemaids of various ages, more than twenty in number. Soon after my father, in his twenty-third year, was graduated from the university, my grandfather retired as active head of the household and father became the legal chief. His first salary of sixty yen a month (\$30) was just about enough to support this big family, including the expense of sending his younger brothers and cousins to the Imperial University from which he himself had been graduated. The cost of living was about one-tenth of what it is at present, but it was hard for my mother to manage the family finances even though each member of the group was brought up with the samurai habits of extreme thrift.

¹The student servant is an old Japanese institution. During the Tokugawa period, students usually lived with masters, waiting on them with the utmost humility. In present-day Japan, many poor boys become servants and thus work their way through colleges or universities.

It was a great extravagance, for instance, to purchase a bicycle for my father's younger brothers to ride in turn instead of their having to walk all the way to the school which was located far from home. Only after long discussions did they get permission to buy one. Later my father entered the Takata Trading Company, at that time one of the largest foreign trading firms in Japan, all of which were busy importing machines for the industrialization of Japan. He was highly valued for his knowledge of mechanics. He was successful in the business field; especially so when he showed his acumen by promptly purchasing munitions to meet the urgent demands of the Japanese army and navy during the Russo-Japanese War. He was in London during the war to prosecute this great undertaking. Later his service was recognized by the government when he was decorated by the Emperor—a rare treat for one who was not a direct official of the imperial government. The honorable degree of Doctor of Engineering was conferred on my father by the Imperial University of Tokyo, and although he has now retired from business, he enjoys his chair at the university, giving lectures there. He is still head of the Hirota family, which numbers nearly a hundred members.

My mother is rather tall for a Japanese. Her skin is smooth as ivory, and her hair is long and thick. She is intelligent, modest, unselfish, and always thoughtful of the other members of the family. She is particular about her manners, and impresses everybody she meets with her graceful dignity. Strict with herself, and formal, she plays the part of a samurai's wife, majestically, as if in a dramatic performance. She rises earlier and retires later than anybody else in the family. She has never allowed herself to enjoy a lazy Sunday morning in bed, and the sickbed is the only place for her to rest. Nobody ever saw her sit in a relaxed manner: she is always erect, wearing her kimono tightly with her heavy sash folded on her back. Even on hot summer days her thick black hair is dressed in the old-

fashioned married lady's style. I remember how I loved, when a little girl, to stay in mother's boudoir watching her hair being dressed.

Lafcadio Hearn, in his delicate style, described Japanese hair-dressing: "volutes, jets, whirls, eddyings, foliations, each passing into the other blandly like the linking of brush-strokes in the writing of a Chinese master! Far beyond the skill of the Parisian *coiffeuse* is the art of the *kamiyui* [professional hairdresser]. From the mythical era of the race, Japanese ingenuity has exhausted itself in the invention and the improvement of pretty devices for the dressing of women's hair; and probably there have never been so many beautiful fashions of wearing it in any other country as there have been in Japan."¹

This formality will remain with us forever just as Kabuki plays will be appreciated even when talkies and revues seem to have taken the whole ground in the world of amusement. Japanese girls now spend their schooldays in the so-called "foreign style" uniform with their hair cut short. They frequently wear the American garb, but as soon as they are engaged and begin to prepare for the wedding, they let their hair grow, to conform to the beautiful *shimada*—the bride's style. No girl could look ungraceful when she leaves the hairdresser's hands.

To come back to my mother's dressing room where she sits patiently in front of her mirror for an hour or more once in every three days when the *kamiyui* comes to her house to arrange her hair. The *kamiyui* sends the maiden apprentice first, who cleans, steams, perfumes the hair, and finally combs it with instruments of various kinds, changing gradually from rough to fine ones. When this has been done, the *kamiyui* arrives. With a comb which has a sharp hairpin at the end, she separates mother's hair into five sections, and twists it in the *marumage*—the dignified married woman's fashion. Then the hair is tied with new white strings especially made for the purpose, and a

¹ *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, p. 419.

big round knot is fixed on the top with four parts around it, puffed out, stiffened with oil and sometimes lined with black paper. On her black hair mother usually wears stringed red coral beads, or green jade ones inherited from her mother, a bit of dark blue tied-and-dyed crepe beneath the center knot, and a gilded and lacquered ornamental comb besides a hairpin or two of the same sort in front and on the sides.

My mother uses polite words only, never liking to pick up the vulgar words spoken in the street. She never betrays unpleasant feelings. "Endurance" and "repression" are her greatest ideals. She says to me, "Endurance a woman should cultivate more than anything else. If you endure well in any circumstances, you will achieve happiness." She never loses her temper with the servants, but is always dignified and gentle, however stupid or slow they may be. She hates ordinary theatergoing. Her stoic principle makes her regard a place of amusement as inappropriate for a samurai's wife; consequently, I was never allowed to go to a theater until I was married and had left her jurisdiction. However, she makes one exception, attending the drama *Chushin-gura*, a true samurai play. She is absorbed in the moral spirit of this story of loyalty rather than in the artistic qualities of the play, and for days and days after she has seen a performance she will say, "Kichi-emon [the name of the well-known actor particularly good as Yurano-suke, the hero] must have been sorry to undergo such horrible disgrace"; she cannot distinguish the actor from the living character.

My mother has accomplished all that is required of a wise parent and a good wife according to the standards of her generation. She has managed the household admirably, and has brought up her six children well. She herself attended a Canadian mission school in Tokyo, which was considered a place of progressive education for Japanese girls. There she studied English and domestic science in Western style. This helped her a good deal in understanding father as befitted the wife of a

progressive businessman. But her missionary education did not make her thoroughly Christian; nor did it greatly affect her way of thinking, for she was reluctant to be converted into the alien religion and stuck to the old moral code which maintains that submission is the utmost womanly virtue. She was faithful to the old family system, humbly serving her parents-in-law and sisters- and brother-in-law.

And yet when I grew old enough to learn music as a part of the training of girlhood she insisted on my learning the piano instead of the koto (thirteen-stringed harp), because she remembered how hard it had been for her to play the koto every day to please her mother-in-law whether she was in a musical mood or not. Nevertheless, she did not wish her daughters to be exempt from the matter of pleasing mothers-in-law, as she believed that the performance of this obligation makes a woman's virtues brighter. Having inculcated this in her children she dared to have her eldest daughter marry into a family with a mother-in-law who was said to be especially difficult to please.

My mother was especially assiduous in educating her children. She made every effort to further their development but her feudal concept of "man first, woman to follow" was clearly seen in her treatment of her sons and daughters. Of course the daughters took sex discrimination for granted, as they did not know anything else. Mother has never understood the moral beauty of romantic love between man and woman. She regards it as indicative of wild feelings which can be allowed to exist only among vulgar people. "Unselfishness, sacrifice and endurance for woman. That is all-sufficient," my honorable mother maintains.

II

Family Manners and Customs

SINCE prefeudal times in Japan the third day of the third month has been the day for the Peach Blossom Festival. On this occasion a pair of candles burn in the delicately framed paper lanterns, on the top of a five-shelved stand covered with scarlet cloth, throwing soft light and shadow on the snow-white faces of the Doll Prince and Princess, crowned and dressed in gorgeous brocades and set on their lacquer-framed throne. An ancient court is resurrected. Artificial plants of pink cherry and yellow orange blossoms are placed on both sides of the throne on the top shelf. Three graceful dolls dressed in white brocade silk robes with red hakama-skirts are the court ladies, and as such are placed below the royal dolls. Beside them are arranged the austere ministers of the Left and the Right together with the household servants. Five musicians with flutes and drums are placed on the middle shelf. The display includes great numbers of miniature household utensils, furniture, dressing mirrors, bureaus, a whole cooking and dinner set, tea set, flower carriages and even ox-drawn carts, all gilded and lacquered. A white and black toy Pekingese is there with a handsomely uniformed maid-in-waiting. Every detail reveals exquisite workmanship in a style derived from ancient times. This festival is celebrated for the girls of the family. They invite their friends to the party and the mother entertains these small guests, who try their best to behave gracefully before the Doll Prince and Princess. I was born on the eve of this festival—my parents' first daughter.

My father was away at the moment and not, as ordinarily, for business reasons. He was paying one of his rare visits to a performance at the No theater, of which he was so fond. Greatly impressed by the austere play of *Shidzuka*, his mind was occupied, on the way home, with the story of this ancient woman of beauty and courage. When he arrived, to his surprise and joy he was told that a daughter had been added to the household. On the seventh day afterward the family welcomed their latest child with a red-rice-and-tai-fish feast¹ and the name of "Shidzué," for the heroine of the No play, was given her by her father, who blessed the infant and expressed the wish that she might have a bright future and be brought up to be as brave as her ancient namesake.

As the legend goes Lady Shidzuka was the beloved fiancée of the young general Yoshitsune whose brother Yoritomo was the first shogun founder of the feudal government in this island empire eight hundred years ago. Very jealous, the shogun accused his younger brother, General Yoshitsune, of treason. To escape persecution, Yoshitsune fled to a remote mountain. Then the shogun tried to take advantage of Shidzuka. She was ordered to come to the Shrine of Kamakura Hachiman and in the presence of hundreds of warriors demonstrate by her homage the power of their lord. Shidzuka was offended. She defied the shogun's command to betray her lover's hiding place. In her great loyalty to him she performed on the spur of the moment a classic dance and composed impromptu a poem praising the glory of her fiancé, Yoshitsune. This historic event was dramatized in various ways later. My father hoped that I would exemplify this loyalty, naming me Shidzué.

At this time we were living near the Imperial University in Hongo located in the residential quarter reserved for the former retainers of Count Abe's family. The Tokugawa feudal gov-

¹ A feast, in which rice boiled with red azuki beans and tai-fish broiled whole are served, is always given on a happy occasion.