

CHAPTER V - YOSHIDA-TORAJIRO

THE name at the head of this page is probably unknown to the English reader, and yet I think it should become a household word like that of Garibaldi or John Brown. Some day soon, we may expect to hear more fully the details of Yoshida's history, and the degree of his influence in the transformation of Japan; even now there must be Englishmen acquainted with the subject, and perhaps the appearance of this sketch may elicit something more complete and exact. I wish to say that I am not, rightly speaking, the author of the present paper: I tell the story on the authority of an intelligent Japanese gentleman, Mr. Taiso Masaki, who told it me with an emotion that does honour to his heart; and though I have taken some pains, and sent my notes to him to be corrected, this can be no more than an imperfect outline.

Yoshida-Torajiro was son to the hereditary military instructor of the house of Choshu. The name you are to pronounce with an equality of accent on the different syllables, almost as in French, the vowels as in Italian, but the consonants in the English manner - except the J, which has the French sound, or, as it has been cleverly proposed to write it, the sound of ZH. Yoshida was very learned in Chinese letters, or, as we might say, in the classics, and in his father's subject; fortification was among his favourite

studies, and he was a poet from his boyhood. He was born to a lively and intelligent patriotism; the condition of Japan was his great concern; and while he projected a better future, he lost no opportunity of improving his knowledge of her present state. With this end he was continually travelling in his youth, going on foot and sometimes with three days' provision on his back, in the brave, self-helpful manner of all heroes. He kept a full diary while he was thus upon his journeys, but it is feared that these notes have been destroyed. If their value were in any respect such as we have reason to expect from the man's character, this would be a loss not easy to exaggerate. It is still wonderful to the Japanese how far he contrived to push these explorations; a cultured gentleman of that land and period would leave a complimentary poem wherever he had been hospitably entertained; and a friend of Mr. Masaki, who was likewise a great wanderer, has found such traces of Yoshida's passage in very remote regions of Japan.

Politics is perhaps the only profession for which no preparation is thought necessary; but Yoshida considered otherwise, and he studied the miseries of his fellow-countrymen with as much attention and research as though he had been going to write a book instead of merely to propose a remedy. To a man of his intensity and singleness, there is no question but that this survey was melancholy in the extreme. His dissatisfaction is proved by the eagerness with

which he threw himself into the cause of reform; and what would have discouraged another braced Yoshida for his task. As he professed the theory of arms, it was firstly the defences of Japan that occupied his mind. The external feebleness of that country was then illustrated by the manners of overriding barbarians, and the visit of big barbarian war ships: she was a country beleaguered. Thus the patriotism of Yoshida took a form which may be said to have defeated itself: he had it upon him to keep out these all-powerful foreigners, whom it is now one of his chief merits to have helped to introduce; but a man who follows his own virtuous heart will be always found in the end to have been fighting for the best. One thing leads naturally to another in an awakened mind, and that with an upward progress from effect to cause. The power and knowledge of these foreigners were things inseparable; by envying them their military strength, Yoshida came to envy them their culture; from the desire to equal them in the first, sprang his desire to share with them in the second; and thus he is found treating in the same book of a new scheme to strengthen the defences of Kioto and of the establishment, in the same city, of a university of foreign teachers. He hoped, perhaps, to get the good of other lands without their evil; to enable Japan to profit by the knowledge of the barbarians, and still keep her inviolate with her own arts and virtues. But whatever was the precise nature of his hope, the means by which it was to be accomplished were both difficult and obvious. Some one with

eyes and understanding must break through the official cordon, escape into the new world, and study this other civilisation on the spot. And who could be better suited for the business? It was not without danger, but he was without fear. It needed preparation and insight; and what had he done since he was a child but prepare himself with the best culture of Japan, and acquire in his excursions the power and habit of observing?

He was but twenty-two, and already all this was clear in his mind, when news reached Choshu that Commodore Perry was lying near to Yeddo. Here, then, was the patriot's opportunity. Among the Samurai of Choshu, and in particular among the councillors of the Daimio, his general culture, his views, which the enlightened were eager to accept, and, above all, the prophetic charm, the radiant persuasion of the man, had gained him many and sincere disciples. He had thus a strong influence at the provincial Court; and so he obtained leave to quit the district, and, by way of a pretext, a privilege to follow his profession in Yeddo. Thither he hurried, and arrived in time to be too late: Perry had weighed anchor, and his sails had vanished from the waters of Japan. But Yoshida, having put his hand to the plough, was not the man to go back; he had entered upon this business, and, please God, he would carry it through; and so he gave up his professional career and remained in Yeddo to be at hand against the next opportunity. By this behaviour he put

himself into an attitude towards his superior, the Daimio of Choshu, which I cannot thoroughly explain. Certainly, he became a RONYIN, a broken man, a feudal outlaw; certainly he was liable to be arrested if he set foot upon his native province; yet I am cautioned that "he did not really break his allegiance," but only so far separated himself as that the prince could no longer be held accountable for his late vassal's conduct. There is some nicety of feudal custom here that escapes my comprehension.

In Yeddo, with this nondescript political status, and cut off from any means of livelihood, he was joyfully supported by those who sympathised with his design. One was Sakuma-Shozan, hereditary retainer of one of the Shogun's councillors, and from him he got more than money or than money's worth. A steady, respectable man, with an eye to the world's opinion, Sakuma was one of those who, if they cannot do great deeds in their own person, have yet an ardour of admiration for those who can, that recommends them to the gratitude of history. They aid and abet greatness more, perhaps, than we imagine. One thinks of them in connection with Nicodemus, who visited our Lord by night. And Sakuma was in a position to help Yoshida more practically than by simple countenance; for he could read Dutch, and was eager to communicate what he knew.

While the young Ronyin thus lay studying in Yeddo, news came

of a Russian ship at Nangasaki. No time was to be lost. Sakuma contributed "a long copy of encouraging verses and off set Yoshida on foot for Nangasaki. His way lay through his own province of Choshu; but, as the highroad to the south lay apart from the capital, he was able to avoid arrest. He supported himself, like a TROUVERE, by his proficiency in verse. He carried his works along with him, to serve as an introduction. When he reached a town he would inquire for the house of any one celebrated for swordsmanship, or poetry, or some of the other acknowledged forms of culture; and there, on giving a taste of his skill, he would be received and entertained, and leave behind him, when he went away, a compliment in verse. Thus he travelled through the Middle Ages on his voyage of discovery into the nineteenth century. When he reached Nangasaki he was once more too late. The Russians were gone. But he made a profit on his journey in spite of fate, and stayed awhile to pick up scraps of knowledge from the Dutch interpreters - a low class of men, but one that had opportunities; and then, still full of purpose, returned to Yeddo on foot, as he had come.

It was not only his youth and courage that supported him under these successive disappointments, but the continual affluence of new disciples. The man had the tenacity of a Bruce or a Columbus, with a pliability that was all his own. He did not fight for what the world would call success; but for "the wages of going on." Check him off in a dozen

directions, he would find another outlet and break forth. He missed one vessel after another, and the main work still halted; but so long as he had a single Japanese to enlighten and prepare for the better future, he could still feel that he was working for Japan. Now, he had scarce returned from Nangasaki, when he was sought out by a new inquirer, the most promising of all. This was a common soldier, of the Hemming class, a dyer by birth, who had heard vaguely (1) of Yoshida's movements, and had become filled with wonder as to their design. This was a far different inquirer from Sakuma-Shozan, or the councillors of the Daimio of Choshu. This was no two-sworded gentleman, but the common stuff of the country, born in low traditions and unimproved by books; and yet that influence, that radiant persuasion that never failed Yoshida in any circumstance of his short life, enchanted, enthralled, and converted the common soldier, as it had done already with the elegant and learned. The man instantly burned up into a true enthusiasm; his mind had been only waiting for a teacher; he grasped in a moment the profit of these new ideas; he, too, would go to foreign, outlandish parts, and bring back the knowledge that was to strengthen and renew Japan; and in the meantime, that he might be the better prepared, Yoshida set himself to teach, and he to learn, the Chinese literature. It is an episode most honourable to Yoshida, and yet more honourable still to the soldier, and to the capacity and virtue of the common people of Japan.

(1) Yoshida, when on his way to Nangasaki, met the soldier and talked with him by the roadside; they then parted, but the soldier was so much struck by the words he heard, that on Yoshida's return he sought him out and declared his intention of devoting his life to the good cause. I venture, in the absence of the writer, to insert this correction, having been present when the story was told by Mr. Masaki. - F. J. And I, there being none to settle the difference, must reproduce both versions. - R. L. S.

And now, at length, Commodore Perry returned to Simoda. Friends crowded round Yoshida with help, counsels, and encouragement. One presented him with a great sword, three feet long and very heavy, which, in the exultation of the hour, he swore to carry throughout all his wanderings, and to bring back - a far-travelled weapon - to Japan. A long letter was prepared in Chinese for the American officers; it was revised and corrected by Sakuma, and signed by Yoshida, under the name of Urinaki-Manji, and by the soldier under that of Ichigi-Koda. Yoshida had supplied himself with a profusion of materials for writing; his dress was literally stuffed with paper which was to come back again enriched with his observations, and make a great and happy kingdom of Japan. Thus equipped, this pair of emigrants set forward on foot from Yeddo, and reached Simoda about nightfall. At no period within history can travel have presented to any

European creature the same face of awe and terror as to these courageous Japanese. The descent of Ulysses into hell is a parallel more near the case than the boldest expedition in the Polar circles. For their act was unprecedented; it was criminal; and it was to take them beyond the pale of humanity into a land of devils. It is not to be wondered at if they were thrilled by the thought of their unusual situation; and perhaps the soldier gave utterance to the sentiment of both when he sang, "in Chinese singing" (so that we see he had already profited by his lessons), these two appropriate verses:

"We do not know where we are to sleep to-night,
In a thousand miles of desert where we can see no human
smoke."

In a little temple, hard by the sea-shore, they lay down to repose; sleep overtook them as they lay; and when they awoke, "the east was already white" for their last morning in Japan. They seized a fisherman's boat and rowed out - Perry lying far to sea because of the two tides. Their very manner of boarding was significant of determination; for they had no sooner caught hold upon the ship than they kicked away their boat to make return impossible. And now you would have thought that all was over. But the Commodore was already in

treaty with the Shogun's Government; it was one of the stipulations that no Japanese was to be aided in escaping from Japan; and Yoshida and his followers were handed over as prisoners to the authorities at Simoda. That night he who had been to explore the secrets of the barbarian slept, if he might sleep at all, in a cell too short for lying down at full length, and too low for standing upright. There are some disappointments too great for commentary.

Sakuma, implicated by his handwriting, was sent into his own province in confinement, from which he was soon released. Yoshida and the soldier suffered a long and miserable period of captivity, and the latter, indeed, died, while yet in prison, of a skin disease. But such a spirit as that of Yoshida-Torajiro is not easily made or kept a captive; and that which cannot be broken by misfortune you shall seek in vain to confine in a bastille. He was indefatigably active, writing reports to Government and treatises for dissemination. These latter were contraband; and yet he found no difficulty in their distribution, for he always had the jailor on his side. It was in vain that they kept changing him from one prison to another; Government by that plan only hastened the spread of new ideas; for Yoshida had only to arrive to make a convert. Thus, though he himself has laid by the heels, he confirmed and extended his party in the State.

At last, after many lesser transferences, he was given over from the prisons of the Shogun to those of his own superior, the Daimio of Choshu. I conceive it possible that he may then have served out his time for the attempt to leave Japan, and was now resigned to the provincial Government on a lesser count, as a Ronyin or feudal rebel. But, however that may be, the change was of great importance to Yoshida; for by the influence of his admirers in the Daimio's council, he was allowed the privilege, underhand, of dwelling in his own house. And there, as well to keep up communication with his fellow-reformers as to pursue his work of education, he received boys to teach. It must not be supposed that he was free; he was too marked a man for that; he was probably assigned to some small circle, and lived, as we should say, under police surveillance; but to him, who had done so much from under lock and key, this would seem a large and profitable liberty.

It was at this period that Mr. Masaki was brought into personal contact with Yoshida; and hence, through the eyes of a boy of thirteen, we get one good look at the character and habits of the hero. He was ugly and laughably disfigured with the smallpox; and while nature had been so niggardly with him from the first, his personal habits were even sluttish. His clothes were wretched; when he ate or washed he wiped his hands upon his sleeves; and as his hair was not tied more than once in the two months, it was often

disgusting to behold. With such a picture, it is easy to believe that he never married. A good teacher, gentle in act, although violent and abusive in speech, his lessons were apt to go over the heads of his scholars and to leave them gaping, or more often laughing. Such was his passion for study that he even grudged himself natural repose; and when he grew drowsy over his books he would, if it was summer, put mosquitoes up his sleeve; and, if it was winter, take off his shoes and run barefoot on the snow. His handwriting was exceptionally villainous; poet though he was, he had no taste for what was elegant; and in a country where to write beautifully was not the mark of a scrivener but an admired accomplishment for gentlemen, he suffered his letters to be jolted out of him by the press of matter and the heat of his convictions. He would not tolerate even the appearance of a bribe; for bribery lay at the root of much that was evil in Japan, as well as in countries nearer home; and once when a merchant brought him his son to educate, and added, as was customary, (1) a little private sweetener, Yoshida dashed the money in the giver's face, and launched into such an outbreak of indignation as made the matter public in the school. He was still, when Masaki knew him, much weakened by his hardships in prison; and the presentation sword, three feet long, was too heavy for him to wear without distress; yet he would always gird it on when he went to dig in his garden. That is a touch which qualifies the man. A weaker nature would have shrunk from the sight of what only commemorated a

failure. But he was of Thoreau's mind, that if you can "make your failure tragical by courage, it will not differ from success." He could look back without confusion to his enthusiastic promise. If events had been contrary, and he found himself unable to carry out that purpose - well, there was but the more reason to be brave and constant in another; if he could not carry the sword into barbarian lands, it should at least be witness to a life spent entirely for Japan.

(1) I understood that the merchant was endeavouring surreptitiously to obtain for his son instruction to which he was not entitled. - F. J.

This is the sight we have of him as he appeared to schoolboys, but not related in the schoolboy spirit. A man so careless of the graces must be out of court with boys and women. And, indeed, as we have all been more or less to school, it will astonish no one that Yoshida was regarded by his scholars as a laughing-stock. The schoolboy has a keen sense of humour. Heroes he learns to understand and to admire in books; but he is not forward to recognise the heroic under the traits of any contemporary man, and least of all in a brawling, dirty, and eccentric teacher. But as the years went by, and the scholars of Yoshida continued in vain to look around them for the abstractly perfect, and began more and more to understand the drift of his instructions,

they learned to look back upon their comic school-master as upon the noblest of mankind.

The last act of this brief and full existence was already near at hand. Some of his work was done; for already there had been Dutch teachers admitted into Nangasaki, and the country at large was keen for the new learning. But though the renaissance had begun, it was impeded and dangerously threatened by the power of the Shogun. His minister - the same who was afterwards assassinated in the snow in the very midst of his bodyguard - not only held back pupils from going to the Dutchmen, but by spies and detectives, by imprisonment and death, kept thinning out of Japan the most intelligent and active spirits. It is the old story of a power upon its last legs - learning to the bastille, and courage to the block; when there are none left but sheep and donkeys, the State will have been saved. But a man must not think to cope with a Revolution; nor a minister, however fortified with guards, to hold in check a country that had given birth to such men as Yoshida and his soldier-follower. The violence of the ministerial Tarquin only served to direct attention to the illegality of his master's rule; and people began to turn their allegiance from Yeddo and the Shogun to the long-forgotten Mikado in his seclusion at Kioto. At this juncture, whether in consequence or not, the relations between these two rulers became strained; and the Shogun's minister set forth for Kioto to put another affront upon the

rightful sovereign. The circumstance was well fitted to precipitate events. It was a piece of religion to defend the Mikado; it was a plain piece of political righteousness to oppose a tyrannical and bloody usurpation. To Yoshida the moment for action seemed to have arrived. He was himself still confined in Choshu. Nothing was free but his intelligence; but with that he sharpened a sword for the Shogun's minister. A party of his followers were to waylay the tyrant at a village on the Yeddo and Kioto road, present him with a petition, and put him to the sword. But Yoshida and his friends were closely observed; and the too great expedition of two of the conspirators, a boy of eighteen and his brother, wakened the suspicion of the authorities, and led to a full discovery of the plot and the arrest of all who were concerned.

In Yeddo, to which he was taken, Yoshida was thrown again into a strict confinement. But he was not left destitute of sympathy in this last hour of trial. In the next cell lay one Kusakabe, a reformer from the southern highlands of Satsuma. They were in prison for different plots indeed, but for the same intention; they shared the same beliefs and the same aspirations for Japan; many and long were the conversations they held through the prison wall, and dear was the sympathy that soon united them. It fell first to the lot of Kusakabe to pass before the judges; and when sentence had been pronounced he was led towards the place of death below

Yoshida's window. To turn the head would have been to implicate his fellow-prisoner; but he threw him a look from his eye, and bade him farewell in a loud voice, with these two Chinese verses:-

"It is better to be a crystal and be broken,
Than to remain perfect like a tile upon the housetop."

So Kusakabe, from the highlands of Satzuma, passed out of the theatre of this world. His death was like an antique worthy's.

A little after, and Yoshida too must appear before the Court. His last scene was of a piece with his career, and fitly crowned it. He seized on the opportunity of a public audience, confessed and gloried in his design, and, reading his auditors a lesson in the history of their country, told at length the illegality of the Shogun's power and the crimes by which its exercise was sullied. So, having said his say for once, he was led forth and executed, thirty-one years old.

A military engineer, a bold traveller (at least in wish), a poet, a patriot, a schoolmaster, a friend to learning, a martyr to reform, - there are not many men, dying at seventy,

who have served their country in such various characters. He was not only wise and provident in thought, but surely one of the fieriest of heroes in execution. It is hard to say which is most remarkable - his capacity for command, which subdued his very jailors; his hot, unflagging zeal; or his stubborn superiority to defeat. He failed in each particular enterprise that he attempted; and yet we have only to look at his country to see how complete has been his general success. His friends and pupils made the majority of leaders in that final Revolution, now some twelve years old; and many of them are, or were until the other day, high placed among the rulers of Japan. And when we see all round us these brisk intelligent students, with their strange foreign air, we should never forget how Yoshida marched afoot from Choshu to Yeddo, and from Yeddo to Nangasaki, and from Nangasaki back again to Yeddo; how he boarded the American ship, his dress stuffed with writing material; nor how he languished in prison, and finally gave his death, as he had formerly given all his life and strength and leisure, to gain for his native land that very benefit which she now enjoys so largely. It is better to be Yoshida and perish, than to be only Sakuma and yet save the hide. Kusakabe, of Satzuma, has said the word: it is better to be a crystal and be broken.

I must add a word; for I hope the reader will not fail to perceive that this is as much the story of a heroic people as that of a heroic man. It is not enough to remember Yoshida;

we must not forget the common soldier, nor Kusakabe, nor the boy of eighteen, Nomura, of Choshu, whose eagerness betrayed the plot. It is exhilarating to have lived in the same days with these great-hearted gentlemen. Only a few miles from us, to speak by the proportion of the universe, while I was droning over my lessons, Yoshida was goading himself to be wakeful with the stings of the mosquito; and while you were grudging a penny income tax, Kusakabe was stepping to death with a noble sentence on his lips.