THE JAPANESE DANCE

MARCELLE A. HINCKS

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
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AME-NO-UZUME DANCING TO ATTRACT THE SUN-GODDESS FROM HER RETREAT

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CHOZO KOIKÉ

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INTRODUCTION

In one of the oldest legends of Japan we are told that the Sun-Goddess Amaterasu, being angry, hid herself in a cave, so that the world was plunged in darkness, and life on earth became intolerable. And the eight million deities of the Japanese heaven, seeing the sorrow and destruction wrought by Amaterasu's absence from the world, sought by every means possible to coax her from her retreat; but nothing could prevail on her to leave it, until one god, wiser than the others, devised a plan whereby the angered goddess might be lured from her hiding-place. Amongst the immortals was the beautiful Amé-no-Uzumé; they sent her to dance and sing at the mouth of the cave, and the goddess, attracted by the unusual sound of music and dancing, and unable to withstand her curiosity, emerged from her concealment, to gaze upon the dancer. So that once more she gave the light of her smile to the world. The people never forgot that dancing had been the means of bringing back Amaterasu to Japan—the land on which she still shines with incomparable radiance and softness—and therefore, from time immemorial, the dance has been honoured as a religious ceremony and practised as a fine art throughout the land called of "the rising sun." To find the origin of dancing in Japan we must, then, go back to that remote period when history merges into fable, and when the simplest occurrences of life are attributed to supernatural causes. And inasmuch as the fables and legends

of a country reflect the thoughts and feelings, and the manners and customs of its earliest inhabitants, this fable of Amaterasu shows the extraordinarily important place assigned to the dance at the very beginnings of the race. From this and much evidence of the same nature, one is justified in concluding that even the barbaric ancestors of the Japanese loved to dance, and that they indulged to a considerable extent in the exercise which, above all others, satisfies both the physical and emotional demands of a healthy organism. Several other legends attest the great antiquity of Japanese dancing: the first costume dance is said to have been prompted by pain, for when a certain deity, conquered in fight, was threatened with drowning, he painted his face red and lifted his feet in an agony of supplication, thus giving rise to what has ever since kept the name of "Warrior Dance," *Hayato-mai*, which is still included amongst the classical mimes of the Imperial Court. Dancing in Japan is not associated with pleasure and joyful feelings alone, but every emotion, grave or gay, may become the subject of a dance. Thus, at one time, funeral dances were performed around the corpse, which had been placed in a building specially constructed for the purpose, and though it is said that originally the dancers hoped to recall the dead to life by the power and charm of their dance, later the measures were performed merely as a farewell ceremony.

The Japanese dance is of the greatest importance and interest historically. Like her civilisation and the greater number of her arts, Japan borrowed her dance from China, though the genius of her people very soon developed many new forms of dances, quite distinct from the Chinese importation. From the earliest times dancing has been closely associated with religion; in both the Shinto and the Buddhist faiths we find it occupying a foremost place in worship. The Buddhist priests in the thirteenth century, men of learning and enlightenment,

made use of the dance as a refining influence, along with the cult of the tea-ceremony and landscape-gardening and the arts which helped to refine the uncultured military class by which Japan was more or less ruled at that time. To the dance Japan owes her finest dramatic literature, which, by the help of these same Buddhist priests, was gradually evolved from the combination of several dances in vogue at an early period. The invention of a stage and the construction of the modern theatre were also the outcome of dancing. And modern Japan is indebted to dancing for the preservation of the classical Japanese language in the poems written several hundred years ago to accompany the *Nō* dancers. Thus it is difficult to over-estimate the importance of this powerful æsthetic factor in the history of the culture of Japan.

Before attempting to give either an historical survey or a description of Japanese dancing, it is necessary to explain that in Japan the meaning of the word "dance" is totally different from the Occidental conception of the term. Whereas our dance consists almost entirely of rhythmical gymnastic with no set purpose but that of striking graceful attitudes, the Japanese dance, like the ancient Greek dance, is entirely of a pantomimic nature, and strives to represent in gesture an historical incident, some mythical legend, or a scene from folk-lore; its chief characteristic is always expressiveness, and it invariably possesses a strong emotional tendency. The Japanese have extraordinary mimetic gifts which they have cultivated to such an extent, that it is doubtful whether any other people has ever developed such a wide and expressive art of gesture. Dancing, in the European sense, would be called gymnastic in Japan, and classed with Ju-jutsu, or the ancient acrobatic "*Dengaku*." This essential difference between the Japanese and European dance must always be borne in mind when we look at Japanese dancing and are somewhat

bewildered, and perhaps not very interested, by the apparently meaningless gestures, and sleeve-waving, and fan-waving, and stamping of feet. We must remember that every movement, every turn or twist of the hand, the arm, or the body has some significance as clear to the Japanese as spoken words, and that the subtlety of the Eastern mind detects various shades and degrees of emotions in dance movements, which we neither look for nor understand. In a country where expressive gesticulation has been in use for many thousands of years, where all art tends to become conventionalised and formal, it is not surprising that an extensive vocabulary, as it were, of motions should have been evolved, the meaning of which is clear only to the Japanese themselves. Like the tea-ceremony, the dance is esoteric as well as exoteric, and to apprehend the meaning of every gesture is no easy task to the uninitiated. Thus, to arch the hand over the eyes conveys that the dancer is weeping; to extend the arms, whilst looking eagerly in the direction indicated by the hand, suggests that the dancer is thinking of some one or something in a far-away country; the arms crossed on the chest and a drooping head mean meditation; these, however, are comparatively easy to interpret, but many others are of a nature too complicated to be so easily understood by foreigners. There is, for instance, a set of special gestures for the *Nō* dances, divided first of all into a certain number of fundamental gestures and postures, and then into numerous variations of these, and figures derived from them, much in the same way as the technique of European ballet-dancing consists of "fundamental positions" and endless less important "positions." But the gestures of the Japanese dance seem, to the European mind, to be such remote symbols of the feelings which they seek to express, and so different from the natural and spontaneous gestures wherewith we should express similar emotions, that it is difficult to under-

stand how they ever could have been evolved. These conventional gestures and sleeve-waving and fan-waving movements constitute the greatest difficulty to an intelligent interpretation of the Japanese dance. The technique is also elaborate, though the vocabulary of dancing terms is hardly as complete as that of French dance-technique, but the positions and attitudes of the limbs are radically different from those of the European dance, the feet being little seen, and their action considered subordinate, though the stamping of the feet is important in some dances. But the ease of movement, the smoothness, and the *legato* effect of a Japanese dance in which the music of motion is so subtly produced as to escape any but the finest apprehension, and in which any movement suggestive of effort is banished, can only be obtained by the most rigorous physical training. The Japanese are faithful to their high artistic ideal in this, as in every other art; they strive to master technique so thoroughly that every work of their art is produced with perfect ease and spontaneity; their ideal is "art hidden by its own perfection."

CHAPTER I

THE dances of Japan may be grouped under three broad divisions, each of equal importance: (1) Religious; (2) Classical; (3) Popular.

The oldest records show that religious dancing was brought from China at a very early period, when it was still a national institution there and widely practised; and it is chiefly as an aid to religious services that extraordinary developments of the choreographic art in Japan took place at an early period. In these religious exercises especial attention was given to gesture and to expressive meaning of movement, and here the origin of the conventionalised gestures of Japanese dancing is probably to be found, for everything said or done with religious intent after centuries of practice tends to become either a stereotyped formula or a conventional movement, the significance and meaning of which are known only to the initiated. The last vestiges of a religious dance of ancient China may still be seen at the half-yearly sacrifices to Confucius, when eight pairs of dancers in gorgeous robes, holding a triple pheasant's feather in one hand and a three- or six-holed flute in the other, posture and dance as an accompaniment to the Confucian hymn. It is said that the *Bugaku*, a religious dance of China, was introduced two thousand years ago; but the history of Japan at that time is shrouded in the mists of mythology, and it is only towards the seventh or eighth century A.D. that historical records become to a certain extent trustworthy. In the early part of the fifth

KOCHO OR "BUTTERFLY DANCE."

One of the *Kagura* dances performed at the Nikko temple in honour of the two-hundredth anniversary of the first Shogun, Ieyasu

century the Emperor Mommu established a musical school in which the *Bugaku* was taught, its postures being probably very similar to those of the modern temple dances. *Bugaku* seems, however, to be a more or less generic term, and the other and later religious and military dances are either included in it, or derived from it. It is in the Nara and the Heian epochs, from the eighth century to the middle of the twelfth, that the history of dancing really begins; and the unbroken record of its progress can be traced step by step from that time to the present day. Indeed, the history of all the arts of Japan would seem to date from the Nara period, previous records, artistic or otherwise, being too slight and uncertain to be taken into serious consideration. The intellectual development of Japan at this time was remarkable, and offers a striking resemblance to the rapid military, naval, and commercial evolution of modern Japan; for as the best things of European civilisation have been successfully assimilated and occasionally improved by the Japanese of the nineteenth century, so the arts and refinements of China were enthusiastically adopted and developed by the cultured dilettanti of the eighth century, foremost amongst those arts being the dance. By far the most important and interesting religious dance was the dance of the Shinto shrines, the *Kagura*, of pure Japanese growth, whose strains were supposed to be those sung by the fair dancer who lured the Sun Goddess from her cave. It seems to have been originally a kind of commemorative service with pantomimic representations of this mythical incident, and it was celebrated at night, taking place during the dark hours, in memory of those darkest hours when Amaterasu deprived the world of her luminous beauty; and the Emperor and nobles usually presided at the performance of the *Kagura*, in imitation of the deities who witnessed the original measure trod by Amé-no-Uzume. Towards the close of the tenth century thirty-eight chants that

were used to accompany the *Kagura* were committed to writing. They were divided into two parts, both of a religious nature and included in the *Kagura:* the "Chants of the Worship Dance" (*Tori-mono-uta*) and "Chants of the Fête Dance" (*Mayebari*). They consisted mainly of sleeve-waving, hand-movements, and body-swaying, each with its symbolical meaning, and had little or no motion of the feet. The poems have not much poetic value or significance, and are more in the nature of verbal melodies, the rhythm and cadence of the verse being an accompaniment to the steps and postures of the dance. The two following examples are typical:

MAYEBARI

(Chant of the Fête Dance)

Deeply dipping deep
In the rain-fed river's tide,
Robe and stole we dye.
Rain it raineth, yet,
Rain it raineth, yet,
Rain it raineth, yet,
Dies the colour never more;
Never fades the deep-dyed hue.

TORI-MONO-UTA

(Chant of the Worship Dance)

Sacred offerings pure,
Not for mortal beings spread,
But for her, sky-throned,
Majestic Toyöoka.
Offerings for the Gods divine,
Offerings for the Gods.

Plumtree Dance
Another *Kagura* dance

The movements accompanying the former were suggestive of the "dipping of cloth in lye, the dropping of rain, and immutability," as we are told by a writer on Japanese history, whilst the dance of the "Worship Chant" strove to express reverence, adoration, and humility. The music was solemn and weird, and the instruments used were the *koto*, a flute, and a drum. Stages were erected at all the principal Shinto temples for the performance of the *Kagura*, and each temple had its staff of dancers. The illustrations show two different dances included in the *Kagura*. The *Kocho* or "Butterfly Dance" belongs to a series of *Kagura* dances which was performed at the Nikko temple on May 14, 1815, by royal command, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the first Shogun, Iyeyasu, in whose honour the mausoleum at Nikko was built. "The Plum-Tree Dance," according to the particular figure shown in our illustration, would appeal more to our comic than to our religious sense; but the plum-tree being, in Japan, an emblem of purity, this dance assumes a solemn and religious character in the eyes of the Japanese. The *Kagura* can still be seen in a somewhat modified form at the shrine of Kasuga at Nara, and it also gave rise to the benedictory dance of the "scarlet ladies," whose jangling of bells and fan-waving take place at the Nikko temples to-day. But, above all, Japan is indebted to the *Kagura* for its modern popular theatre, for, towards the end of the sixteenth century, it was owing to a vestal dancer of one of the shrines—a *miko*—that the religious mimetic dance was popularised and first used as a means of gaining a livelihood, and performed elsewhere than in temple or palace.

O—Kuni was a vestal of the shrine of Izumo, and being renowned for her beauty and her skill in posturing in the *Kagura*, was sent to Kyoto to dance before the Shogun, and to beg for funds for the repair of the shrine. But O—Kuni fell in love with a retainer of the Shogun, and together they fled, she from the temple

and he from the Shogun's Court. To earn a living, she danced on the sward in Kyoto, and wore a wide-brimmed lacquer hat, a red rain-coat, and a string of beads about her neck, and probably introduced some modifications in the *Kagura* to suit the popular taste. Her success was great, and she found many imitators, but only amongst the lowest classes. The erection of a stage for these performances soon followed, but the conduct of the mixed companies of dancing men and women was so bad that, in 1643, women were banished from the stage, and in the Japanese theatre female parts have since been taken by men. In such wise did O—Kuni become the foundress of the *kabuki* or popular theatres of Japan ; the dances were later combined with marionette shows, and in the eighteenth century the foundation of the drama proper was firmly established by Japan's two greatest dramatists, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, the Shakespeare of Japan, and Takeda Izumo, whose historical dramas are yet the standard plays of the *kabuki*. It is strange that, although the aristocracy had enjoyed theatrical displays as early as the fourteenth century, the lower classes had no theatre till the sixteenth century, when O—Kuni popularised the *Kagura*. The drama of modern Japan has become entirely separated from dancing, but traces of its choreographic origin are even now visible, for on the Japanese stage the mimetic art is as important as the spoken word.

SAMBASO DANCER

Sambaso is the prelude to other plays in the *Kabuki* theatre

CHAPTER II

The origin of the classical dances of Japan is neither as mythological nor as remote as that of its religious dance. At a very early period there existed two dances in Japan, which, although of a somewhat trivial and uninteresting character, were transformed later by the Buddhist priests into dramatic dances of great artistic beauty. The *Den-gaku*, or bucolic mime, was acrobatic, and the *Saru-gaku*, or monkey mime, comic. The former seems to have been a display of rhythmic acrobatic feats, such as pole-balancing, stilt-walking, and a sword-and-ball exercise by men mounted on high clogs, and stages for its performance were erected at an early period in all parts of the country. The *Saru-gaku* is supposed by some authorities to date as far back as the year 572, but others believe that it was of somewhat later growth, and that it originated through the comic actions of a courtier who danced about the Palace garden one night with the skirts of his robe tucked up, simulating cold. Its object was thus always to excite mirth, and although none of the early poems employed to accompany the *Saru-gaku* are extant, it is supposed that they were of a trivial nature. In the Heian epoch it achieved great popularity, nobles themselves taking part in it. But had it not been for the religous and artistic zeal of the Buddhist priests, both these dances might have remained in their original undeveloped state. The Buddhist priests, finding the love of music and dancing so thoroughly ingrained in Japanese character, instead of attempting to banish art

from the realm of religion and daily life, wisely made use of it as a medium for teaching religious truths. They enlisted in their service the most popular arts of Japan, and developed and altered them so subtly and cleverly that, whilst the people imagined they were dancing merely for pleasure, they were in reality learning religious teachings in the poems that accompanied the dances, and at the same time performing a sacred duty. Like Roman Catholicism during the Renaissance, Buddhism encouraged and promoted the arts, and Japan, like Italy, is indebted to religion for many of her most beautiful artistic productions. But the change from the unintellectual acrobatic *Den-gaku* and *Saru-gaku* was gradual and must have occupied a considerable time. Almost a century elapsed before the perfect form of the *Nō* dance was attained. Both the "monkey mime" and the bucolic mime had been transformed from frivolous to religious exercises, and each in turn became the favourite measure of Court and temple, whereby in witnessing a dance the people were taught the instability of life, the vanity of all things human, and those doctrines which the Buddhist priests strove to inculcate. Exactly how and when the change took place is not known, but it is certain that the *Den-gaku* suggested spectacular effect and provided both stage and costumes for the new dramatic dance, whilst the various sorts of chanted and sung poems in vogue at that time probably supplied the accompaniment to the rhythmic gestures. The Buddhist priests thus found the elements of the new dramatic dance in the popular songs and dances of Japan, but their own genius and skill blended these existing songs and dances into an artistic and intellectual *ensemble* of the highest order. For the *Nō* dance is very similar to the ancient Greek drama, in which the three "musical arts," poetry, music, and dancing, had equal importance. Again, in their appeal to the highest and best side of Japanese character the *Nō* dramas show a striking resemblance to the Greek drama: they have the same

perfection of style and language, an extraordinary depth of feeling, and a nobleness of sentiment which runs throughout all of them. They are amongst the masterpieces of Japanese literature, but, like all great works of art, they have never been popular, and they are read and loved only by the cultured class of Japan; they are "for all and none," as Zarathustra says of his teaching and as may be said of all great art. The *Nō* dramas are for those who have sought to penetrate beneath the surface of things, and to whom a work of art means more than the mere beauty of outward form. The Buddhist priests, having the monopoly of learning and culture at that time in Japan, were the authors of most of the *Nō utâi*, and under the guise of drama and poetry they taught the doctrines of Buddha. Cloaked in the subtlest and most beautiful metaphors and similes we find the contempt of worldly pleasures, the exhortations to lead a pure life, and all manner of wise advice. But these allusions are clear only to those initiated in the philosophy of Buddhism, whilst the constant mention of historical and mythical incidents of China are neither understood nor appreciated by the uneducated. The tone of pessimism and deep melancholy pervading all the *Nō* dramas is also characteristically Buddhistic; one feels that they are the natural complement of a religion which, having found life full of suffering and pain, both physical and moral, holds out as the supreme good the total extinction of Self. There are about 300 *Nō* dramas, with musical accompaniment, and occasionally the postures of the dance are marked by special signs, consisting of abbreviated Japanese words. The *Nō* dramas are acted on a stage, and they are partly sung, partly recited, and performed by dancers, or what in Europe might be called actors, were it not that their gestures are to a certain extent rhythmical and conventional, and by a chorus which sits on one side and sings and recites, but takes no active part in the

proceedings. The stage is constructed on an altogether different plan from the stages in the *Kabuki* theatre. On three sides the stage is surrounded by seats, laid flat on the floor-matting in Japanese fashion, and little wooden partitions, about six inches high, divide them into "boxes." The subjects of these dramas are taken from the history of Japan and China, and nothing of a commonplace or frivolous nature is ever represented; the adventures of national heroes are usually chosen, and the chorus either chants a poem descriptive of the scenery through which the hero is supposed to journey, or else supplies the key to his thoughts and actions, thus taking the place of the monologue of the European stage, or the leitmotiv of the Wagnerian music-dramas. The hero himself dances or strikes appropriate attitudes, both his paces and postures being slow and solemn, or he joins in a kind of question-and-answer dialogue with other dancers, or with the chorus. In the illustration, we see Benkei, the great Japanese giant hero, whose many and wonderful adventures have been celebrated by poets and artists. The scene is taken from the *Nō* drama *Benkei* and represents the giant about to fight Yoshitsune, the valiant boy, who conquers him: whereupon Benkei becomes the faithful and devoted henchman of Yoshitsune, and helps him in his adventures and tribulations. The most stirring and the most touching scenes are enacted in this manner by one or several men, women never publicly performing in the *Nō* dance. Of scenery there is practically none, for the descriptive beauty and vividness of the poems is deemed more powerful than the scenic painter's art. In *Sumida Gawa*, for instance, a well-known *Nō* drama, the scenery consists of a conventional pine-tree painted at the back of the stage, and three live pine-trees lining the avenue or way leading to the stage. The costumes, however, are of great richness and beauty, and masks are always worn. Those in the "Monstrous Spider" are particularly strange and fantastic,

BENKEI ON THE BRIDGE (A DANCE)

The giant Benkei fighting Yoshitsune, the boy hero

and the fight between the armed Imperial Guards and masked monsters, who entangle and entwine their human opponents in the long gauzy filaments of their spider's web, is curious and impressive. The origin of the tale is supposed to be the story of Kintaro, the servant of Yorimitsu, who exterminated a band of robbers dwelling in caves, and popularly known as "earth-spiders."

A typical *Nō* dance, full of allusion to Buddhist teachings, is that called *Hachi-no-ki*, or "The Plants"; it is amongst the favourite *utâi* of the *Nō* theatre. It tells of a Buddhist monk who sought shelter from a snow-storm in the house of some poor people. He is hospitably received, and his host, being unable to find fuel for a fire, sacrifices three plants—the plum, cherry, and pine tree—which he had collected and loved in the days of his prosperity, and uses them as firewood. This noble and generous man was once a famous warrior, Sano Genzaemon Tsuneyo, but he has been ruined through the intrigues of his relatives, and as the Shogun is away travelling, he cannot appeal to him to redress his wrongs. Tsuneyo is faithful, however, to his lord, and keeps the worn suit of armour, the rusty halberd, and a lean charger, and declares that his loyalty is unshaken and that he is always in readiness to fight for the Shogun. The monk takes leave of his generous host. Some time elapses, and a proclamation being issued by the Shogun, calling all warriors to Kamakura, the ruined but ever faithful soldier sets out on his meagre horse, clad in his thread-bare suit of armour. A messenger is sent to find him among the warriors, for the Shogun would speak to him. And to his astonishment, he finds that the Shogun and the travelling monk are one, that this call to arms was but to test his loyalty, and as a reward for his hospitality and the sacrifice of his favourite trees, he is to rule over three villages, *Umeda* (Plum), *Sakurai* (Cherry), *Matsueda* (Pine), and he is made governor of Sano. In every line

of this *Nō* dance one finds a subtle embodiment of Buddhist teaching. Even the plants which give the drama its title are symbolical of those virtues most loved and encouraged by the monks, for in Japan the plum is the emblem of purity, the cherry represents the Samurai spirit, or spirit of knighthood, and the pine is the symbol of constancy.

During the reign of the Ashikaga Shogun Yoshimitsu, 1368–1394, the *Nō* was developed to an extraordinary degree, and the subjects of its repertory were considerably increased. To this epoch belongs the famous school of dancers upon whom the Shogun conferred the name of *Kwan-ami*, and several historical incidents of both China and Japan were composed into dramatic dances by the gifted founders of the school. The descendants of the *Kwan-ami* are still the privileged *Nō* dancers of Japan, and share the honour with three other families who date from the sixteenth century. The *Nō* was considered the accomplishment of every nobly born individual—*Nō*, in fact, signifying accomplishment. Sumptuous wardrobes were provided for the dancers in all aristocratic mansions, where stages were erected for the performance of the *Nō*; every noble in the land, with the exception of the Emperor, took part in them. During the military epoch the Shogun Yoshimasa, a prince of dilettanti, to whose immoderate love of culture Japan of the fourteenth century owes the development of the tea-ceremony and landscape-gardening, patronised *Nō* dancing in the same lavish fashion. He declared it to be the ceremonious accomplishment of every military man, and having organised the most renowned dancers into four schools, he arranged that once in his life each dancer should repair to Kyoto to perform the "once-in-a-life" *Nō*, which naturally became an all-important event conducted on a scale of splendour hitherto unsurpassed.

Another famous and popular *utâi* or *Nō* drama still to be seen in the *Nō* theatres of Japan is the poetical tale of *Kogō*,

THE MONSTROUS SPIDER (V. DANCE)
The Imperial Guards attacking the Earth Spider

the dramatised version of an historical incident. Kogō is a beautiful Japanese lady, and the favourite of the Emperor Takakura-no-in. But owing to the jealousy and power of the Empress, who happens to be the daughter of the powerful Prime Minister, Kogō is forced to leave the Court and to hide where she hopes that neither man's love nor woman's hate will find her. The scene opens when Takakura, disconsolate at the loss of his love, sends a courtier to Nakakuni, a loyal confidant, to beg him to find Kogō and deliver an Imperial message. It is said that the lady has retired to Sagano, a suburb of Kyoto, where she leads a lonely life in a very humble dwelling. Nakakuni remembers that this is the fifteenth of August, and that Kogō will surely play her harp (*koto*) to the full moon, and as the remembrance of her soft and exquisite playing still lingers in his memory, he will have no difficulty in recognising it. Wherefore he sends the messenger to the Emperor with hopeful tidings. Nakakuni sets out on his journey, mounted on a steed from the Imperial stables. He journeys far, with the clear sky above, lighted with the bright moon's white light, whilst around him the murmur of living things mingles with the soft sighing of the autumn wind. Here and there he sees the wild deer, startled by his approach, swiftly disappear into the dark forest, followed by their loving mates. On and on he rides, through pathless field and forest, ever listening for the sound of the soft *koto*, but hearing naught save the wind in the trees and the countless weird noises of the great sleeping forest around him. At last a faint sound catches his ear; it seems more melancholy than the rustle of the leaves of the pine, it is clearer and sweeter than the song of falling water or rippling brook. Then, to his delight, the melody grows more distinct as he approaches, and Kogō is heard playing sadly and softly an ancient Chinese love-song, the *So-fu-ren*, or "Thinking of my love." She remembers her love! Nakakuni knocks at the door,

but Kogō, startled and frightened, denies that she is the person whom Nakakuni seeks. "Indeed, I am too humble a creature to receive an Imperial message!" "'Tis in vain to deny that you are Kogō. You may hide your face, but the sound of your playing I would always know." Kogō at last sees that Nakakuni has really recognised her, and she breaks the seal of her lord's love-letter. Alas! as she reads the tender words of the message, she remembers the days of her happiness; she sees herself at Court, as of yore, loved and favoured, amidst flowers, music, singing, dancing, and all the hours made bright by the sunshine of love; then the dark days, when she was deprived of her love, and the sad present come back to her, and the words of the Emperor's letter grow dim through the tears that fall from her eyes. . . .

And Nakakuni sets out, in the moonlit night, bearing a message to the Emperor from his love.

The *Nō* dances are amongst the few relics of ancient Japan, and the *Nō* theatres, quite distinct from the *Kabuki*, are yet patronised by the Imperial family and frequented by the aristocracy. Language, costumes, and postures are the same as those of eight hundred years ago, and in the *Nō* we see, perhaps better than in any other art, Japan's characteristic artistic traits; the love of rich but sober colouring, the rigid rules which have remained unaltered for centuries, the expressiveness, the high emotional qualities prevailing in spite of and through the medium of conventional forms.

Side by side with the *Nō*, and serving as a relief from their solemnity, are farces called *Kiogen*, often played between each *Nō* dance. A survival of the *Saru-Gaku*, the monkey mime so well loved by the mirthful Japanese, is found in these plays. Their action is that of a broad farce, and although the jests are trivial, they are well calculated to raise laughter.

The dances of the "Maple Club" at Tokio in the present

day are a modern development of the *Nō*. But the classical language has been popularised, the actions and gestures more or less modernised, and the dancers are women instead of men. It is not surprising that these changes should be deplored by the cultured classes of Japan, who disapprove of any innovation which tends to vulgarise their classical dance. As all foreign visitors to Japan see the "Maple Club" dances, it is necessary to explain that they do not number among the dances of ancient Japan, but are entirely of modern growth and development.

CHAPTER III

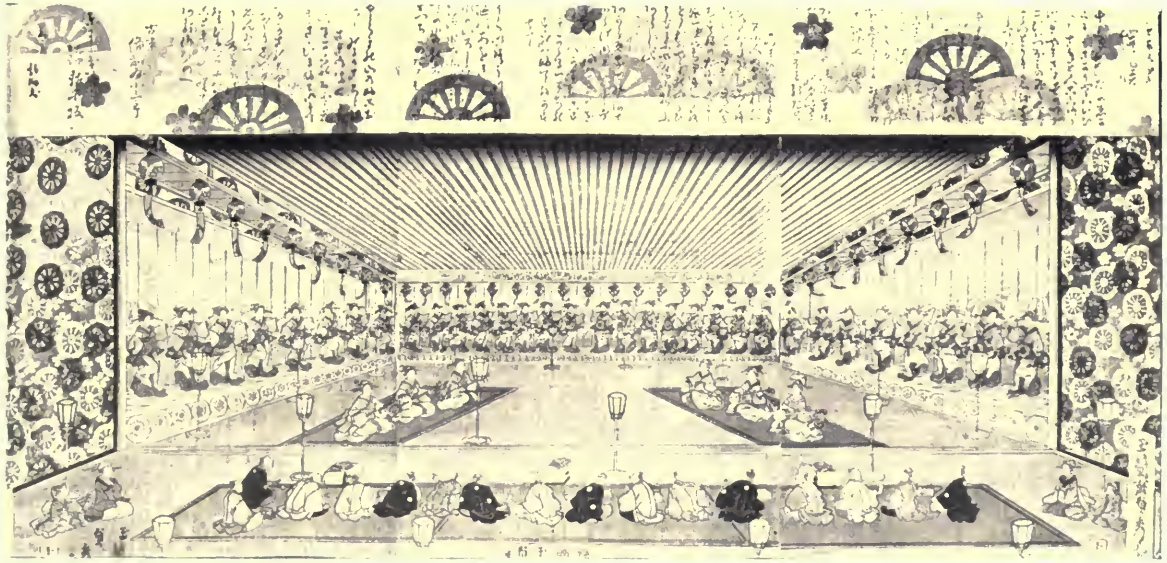
Of perhaps even greater antiquity than either the religious and classical dances of Japan are the popular dances, the *odori*, the wild flowers in the field of Japanese dancing. The primitive Japanese must have danced long before any organised religion had invented the *Kagura* and many centuries before there existed an aristocracy to dance the *Nō*. It was one of their instincts to dance their emotions and feelings, as all primitive peoples have done, and to find the origin of popular dancing in Japan one must go back to that period when Japan had neither arts nor civilisation; it is probably as old as the race, as deep down in their nature as love and hate. But as with the religious dance, so the trustworthy historical accounts of the popular dances take us no further back than the Nara epoch, when the artistic development of the country was so great. Indeed, the history of the Nara and Heian period consists rather of the records of religion and the arts than of warlike annals; the people seem to have then devoted most of their time to the cultivation of their æsthetic sense, either in the invention of new songs and dances or in the long hours devoted to the worshipful admiration of some beautiful aspect of nature, such as the visit to the cherry-blossoms in spring, or the excursions to view the beauty of the autumn moon in the fall of the year. From this close and loving observation of nature, from the careful study of the forms and colours of trees, flowers, birds, came not only Japan's wonderful pictorial art, but also

the capacity for combining and grouping large masses of people so as to carry out some scheme of colour, a harmony of the most subtle lights and shades, such as was seen in the grand spectacular dances of this epoch.

At Nara the people delighted in the *Uta-gaki*, a gorgeous and elaborate display; youths and maidens clad in blue silk robes and scarlet girdles assembled at the palace gate to dance in the presence of the Emperor, and from thence proceeded through the city singing and dancing in organised masses.

In 794, when, by order of the Emperor Kwammu, the Imperial capital was transferred from Nara to Kyoto, the inhabitants of the favoured city exhibited their joy by another dance of the same character, and on every festive occasion they performed in large masses the *Honen-odori*, in which each district of the city was represented by a special colour and costume. The east of the city was supposed to be guarded by a dragon, and therefore the east was typified by a soft light green colour; over the south soared the scarlet bird, and crimson crepe was worn in his honour: the dark power of the military north was attired in black velvet, whilst white crape was donned by the representatives of the west, where crouched the grey tiger. And on every costume the most delicate and exquisite patterns and fantasies were woven and embroidered. The artist's deft fingers had here pictured the nightingale perched on the blossoming plum-tree, there shown a silver stream with golden fish gleaming in its clear water; on a crimson background stalked long and graceful herons basking in the sunshine; cherry petals shaken from the tree by the soft wind were falling on the light green folds of a gown; wisteria gracefully entwined a youth's lithesome figure; the whole fairy-like world of Japanese nature in its tender and radiant beauty was depicted on the gowns of the dancers, whose movements were regulated by the colour which they wore. There were, too, the *Saibara*, or sonnets set to Chinese music, and accom-

panying pantomimic dances of differents kinds, in which the principal participants were men and women of the highest class, led by nobles and ministers, who carried ivory batons to mark the measure, and an orchestra consisting of two kinds of flutes. Here again the costumes were of many colours, and great attention was bestowed upon the arrangement of a harmonious *ensemble*. In one of the *Saibara* the dancing youths and maidens carried toy nets and baskets, and strove by their gestures to recall the undulating movements of the sea; as they sung a short poem in the characteristic Japanese metre they waved their arms and glided about, retreating and advancing as with the sweep of the outgoing and incoming tide, moving with the grace and flowing motion of the waves, and invoking the sea deity to send them his treasures. Like all folk-songs and folk-dances, the *odori* are thoroughly characteristic of the soil from whence they spring. Inspiration for these dances is sought in the incidents of daily life, in folk-lore, and in mythology. Many are of a rustic character, country lads and lasses being the principal executants, and although they may lack technical skill, their natural grace makes one forget the mere mechanical deficiency. Other *odori* are organised dances and form the *répertoire* of the modern geisha, who undergoes a training as arduous and lengthy as that of the very best Occidental ballerina. The dance of Ise-Ondo, for instance, shown in the illustration, is a group dance very similar to a European ballet in its well-organised grouping and *ensemble*. The range of the *odori* is wide; they comprise measures for old and young, for winter and summer, for earth, sea, and sky, and for the whole gamut of the emotions, whilst the Shinto cult, which consists mainly of ancestor worship, has also given rise to many popular songs and dances. At a certain time of the year the spirits of the departed are supposed to visit the world, and Shintoism orders that they should be welcomed cheerfully, with singing and dancing, and the *Bon-*



TSEONDO

Geisha dance in the district of Tse, near the famous Shinto shrine

odori are danced for this purpose, in August, throughout country districts. Every province has its special form of *Bon* dance, the details of the songs, steps, and postures differing considerably in different parts of Japan, the main feature, however, usually remaining the same. The peasants form a great circle, a living wheel, which revolves now slowly, now swiftly, whilst they posture and express their feelings by means of sleeve-wavings and conventional gestures. It is easy to describe the actual steps and attitudes, but how express the subtle charm, the weirdness of the whole performance and the spell which it casts upon the spectator? To a European the sight seems unreal, and so new and strange that at first he cannot grasp its meaning, and he can scarcely realise that the dancers are actually creatures of flesh and blood like himself. Little fairy-like figures glide about in the white ghostly moonlight, their long soft sleeves waving like wings; their rhythmical and precise paces are silent and muffled, their gestures are mysterious and expressive of worship, and their song mingles with occasional soft hand-clapping. All is done with unreal and uncanny smoothness and facility; and in watching the strange scene one wonders whether these are not the ghostly shadows of the peasants who danced the *Bon-odori* two thousand years ago. As the great wheel revolves and the sense of strangeness and weirdness grows greater, one again wonders what matter, after all, whether they be of yesterday or to-day: they are, as their lord Buddha has taught, the same, but with new faces. Another beautiful *odori*, less weird and suggestive than this *Bon*, is danced by little maidens of seven or eight years of age. On the seventh day of the seventh month the *Tanabata-odori* is danced to celebrate the union of the two stars, the Herd Boy Prince and the Weaver Princess, a tale of Chinese origin; the children are decked in sumptuous costumes, with crimson undergarments, a sash of gold and purple, a

fantastic head-dress of silver pins and tortoise-shell, a kerchief bound round their heads, and they carry highly ornamented miniature drums, on which they beat the rhythm of their song with little lacquered drum-sticks. The nurses who accompany this gay company are no less gorgeously equipped, but instead of drums they carry brightly painted umbrellas. The measures trod by the little maids are simple, for the long, heavy satin robes do not allow much freedom of movement. A contrast to this is the *Gebon-odori*, the local dance of Wakayama, in which seventy or eighty merchants take part. Their costumes are very fanciful: black surcoats are worn over white garments, and the hats are adorned with many-hued artificial flowers. They carry gourds, umbrellas, gongs, drums, and in dancing they chant a religious formula. These are types of the innumerable dances of the kind in vogue throughout Japan, which vary according to the locality, each province, town, or village having its special measures. But bright costumes, usually having a symbolical meaning, various accessories—flowers, nets, caskets, jewels—and expressive gesticulation, are the chief characteristics of the *odori* in every part of the country.

The *odori* of the professional dancing-girls are, however, somewhat more complex. The geisha for many centuries has been both a joy and a sorrow to Japan. At a very early epoch professional dancing-girls existed, and it is even said that in 888 the Emperor Uda loved a dancer. Then came the *Shirabiyoshi*, the "white-clad dancers" of the twelfth century, who wore snow-white garments, carried a sword, and wore a man's headdress, and who became the *fureur* of the cultured Heian epoch. They were beautiful creatures, trained in all the arts of pleasure, having accomplishments of mind as well as of body; like some Greek courtisans, they were singers and poets, and often interpreted in gestures, songs and poems of their own invention, the songs in which they specially delighted being the semi-religious, semi-profane *Imayō*, love-songs sung to very solemn music with a pantomimic accompaniment, and particularly suited to their character of mixed refinement and coarseness. For the fame of these white-robed dancers was not as spotless as their garments. All through the history of Japan the professional dancer appears more or less vividly, whether clad in snow-white robes or in the gorgeous hues which she usually adopts. But her influence has often been of such a nature that the Government was compelled to issue edicts against her, declaring the profession of geisha illegal, and her conduct caused her to be banished from the theatre. However, the geisha's *rôle* in Japanese society has not always been nefarious, and she has often exercised a strong influence for good as well

as for evil. But though it must be confessed that the geisha has not always a moralising influence, her beauty and charm are such that, in spite of the peril, one cannot wish to have her disappear from Japanese life. As to the modern geisha, she is not, as Europeans think, merely a pretty waitress in a tea-house, who makes dancing an excuse for displaying her beauty; she is, above all, an artist in the best sense of the word. For the technical skill required for the geisha dances is only acquired by long years of patient practice and study, and at an early age, when she is but seven or eight years old, the child who later will become a dancer is sent to a house where she learns various accomplishments. She is taught singing and poetry, besides dancing, and after years of hard work she becomes a full-fledged geisha, ready to charm all with her artistic accomplishments, her winning smile, and her gracious manner. And as she performs her pantomimic dances, one sees that the geisha, like her ancestor the *Shirabyoshi*, has as much intelligence as she has grace of body and skill of hand and foot. Every movement is suggestive, every gesture expressive. The turn of the head, the glances, the hands—the slender mobile hands—are exquisite poems in themselves; poems which in a few movements will express more than all the jerky, dislocated acrobatics of our Occidental stage. Amongst the favourite and typical geisha dances is that descriptive of the tale of Urashima, the fisher-lad who was beloved of the Sea King's daughter. The fable is popular throughout Japan. And all know how one day Urashima went fishing, and as he lay dreaming in his boat, drifting on the stretch of quiet blue sea, the daughter of the Sea King, with crimson robe and long, dark, flowing hair, glided over the water and invited him to visit her father's palace, for Urashima had been kind to the Sea King's favourite creature, the tortoise, and therefore the King wished to reward him. Naturally, Urashima marries the beautiful Princess, but being human, he wearies of

Bon Dance

A *bon* dance of women alone: they are wearing geisha costume

the beauty of both the sea kingdom and his Princess, and implores her to let him see once more the green hills and the trees of his beautiful land. He longs to feel the touch of a human hand, to breathe the pure air of his native shore. And he leaves his sorrowing Princess, promising to return soon, and as a pledge taking away with him a box bound with a silken cord, the gift of his beloved, who makes him promise that he will never unfasten the knot or open the box. But when he returns to the land of reality he finds that four hundred years have elapsed, that all is changed; his parents and friends have long been dead, and he sees his own tombstone in the cemetery. Sadly he wends his way back to the sea-shore, intent on leaving the strange sights and new faces; but, alas! he is bewildered by the experiences of his sojourn on earth, and overcome by curiosity, opens the box. Out of it comes only a cloud, a soft white vapour, which silently and swiftly rolls away towards the Sea King's kingdom, running to tell the Princess that her beloved will never return. And Urashima suddenly feels the weight of his four hundred years coming down upon him; the enchantment is over; he sees himself withering, the cold of death chills his body, the bloom of eternal youth fades with magical swiftness, the horror and decay of four centuries crush him down, and soon Urashima crumbles away into dust, his remains mingling with the dust of the earth. . . .

The geisha *odori* are as numerous as the tales and poems which inspire them, and as varied in nature as the literature of Japan; refined and coarse, religious and profane, they show all the phases of Japanese life. In them are reflected the people's inmost feelings; they are the living embodiments of their superstitions and folk-lore. A curious fact is that, unlike the people of Australasia, the Japanese have very few dances imitative of the movements of animals, the lion-dance, of a somewhat comic nature, being one of the few exceptions.

THE JAPANESE DANCE

In the study of the religious, classical, and popular dancing of Japan one sees that at all times, from the very beginnings of the race and in its earliest civilisation, the dance has been cultivated as an art equal to either poetry or painting. It is difficult for a European to realise what image arises in the Japanese mind when the word dance is uttered. To the Japanese, it is a thing which from time immemorial has been interwoven in the very texture of their religious, artistic, and daily life ; it is a page in the record of Japan's artistic development. The Dance ! The very gods danced in Japan, before ever mortal feet had learnt to tread a measure ! The whole historical panorama unfolds itself to the Japanese vision when dancing is mentioned ; thousands of years back, the primitive ancestors are seen dancing their joy and their sorrow, and celebrating any event of importance by means of the dance ; the wheel of the *Bon* dancers seems to revolve to a hoary antiquity ; in Court and temple the *miko* posture in the stately *Kagura*, without change or novelty, through the ever-changing centuries ; the aristocratic *Nō* dancers, singing and teaching Buddha's religion, form an unbroken chain which links modern Japan to mediæval times ; whilst the image of the fair and sweet geisha flits about here and there, singing and dancing tales as old as Japan herself. And the Japanese love their dance because they owe it so much ; their drama, their theatre, their beautiful masks, all came as the consequence and the result of dancing. The dance has always been a refining influence of great power, and when the spirit of militarism threatened to arrest Japan's artistic evolution, dancing was one of the arts which more perhaps than all the others helped to save the country from such a calamity.

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