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BASHO

AND

THE JAPANESE POETICAL
EPIGRAM.

BASHŌ AND THE JAPANESE POETICAL EPIGRAM.

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I.

All Japanese poems are short, as measured by European standards. But there exists an ultra-short variety consisting of only seventeen syllables all told. The poets of Japan have produced thousands of these microscopic compositions, which enjoy a great popularity, have been printed, reprinted, commentated, quoted, copied, in fact have had a remarkable literary success. Their native name is *Hokku* (also *Haiku* and *Haikai**), which, in default of a better equivalent, I venture to translate by "Epigram," using that term, not in the modern sense of a pointed saying,—*un bon mot de deux rimes orné*, as Boileau has it,—but in its earlier acceptation, as denoting any little piece of verse that expresses a delicate or ingenious thought. Before entering into historical details, it may be best to give a few examples, so as to make plain at once the sort of thing to which the student's attention is invited. For a composition begun, continued, and ended within the limits of seventeen syllables must

* See pp. 254 and 260-1 for an explanation of these terms. The Chinese characters serving to write them are 發句, 俳句, 俳諧.

evidently differ considerably from our ordinary notions of poetry, there being no room in so narrow a space for most of what we commonly look for in verse. Take the following as representative specimens:—

(1)

17 { 5 *Naga-naga to*
7 *Kawa hito-suji ya*
5 *Yuki no hara**

A single river, stretching far

Across the moorland [swathed] in snow.

No assertion, you see, for the logical intellect, but a natural scene outlined in three strokes of the brush for the imagination or the memory. Just so in the next:—

* For the sake of those unfamiliar with Japanese prosody, it should be stated that I. This language acknowledges no diphthongs:—what appear to be such in a Romanised transliteration are really two independent syllables. II. Final *n* always counts as a whole syllable. The reason is a historical one, namely, that this final *n* generally represents the syllable *mu* in the archaic language, which tolerated no final consonants whatever. Thus the word *aruran*, "probably is," counts as four syllables, and actually sounds so to Japanese ears. The *m* in such words as *amba*, *amma*, comes under the same rubric. III. To a similar cause must be ascribed the fact that syllables containing long vowels count double:—they all result from the crasis of two original short syllables, as *kōri*, "ice," from *ko-ho-ri*. Some Chinese words with long vowels are written with three *Kana* letters, for instance 長 *chō*, "long," as *chi-ya-u* チヤウ. As the classical poets admit no Chinese vocables, such cases do not present themselves in their compositions. The epigrammatists count all long syllables as equivalent to two short ones, irrespective of derivation and spelling, following in this the modern pronunciation. IV. Such combinations as *kwa*, *gwa*, *shu*, *cha*, etc., though written with two *Kana* letters, are also treated by the epigrammatists as monosyllables, because so pronounced.

Applying the above rules, it will be seen that such a verse as No. 3 is perfectly regular in its prosody, because the long syllable *yū* of *yūdachi* counts double. So is the following, where a novice might find it more difficult to make the count:—

(3)
 17 { 5 *Suzushisa yo*
 7 *Yūdachi nagara*
 5 *Iru hi-kage*

How cool the air! and through a shower
 The radiance of the setting sun.

(4)
 17 { 5 *Ihito-ha chiru*
 7 *Totsu hito-ha chiru*
 5 *Kaze no ue*

A leaf whirls down whirls down, alackaday!
 A leaf whirls down upon the breeze.

This last requires a word of explanation. It is not meant to call up any actual scene:—it is metaphorical. The Japanese poets were in the habit of composing some lines when taking leave of life,—a death-song in fact. The tiny composition here quoted—itsself a little leaf fallen two centuries ago—was the death-song of one of the most famous of epigrammatists. The words intimate his regret at parting from life, whirled down like an autumn leaf upon the breeze, to perish utterly and pass out of remembrance.

These specimens may serve to show the general character of the Japanese epigram. It is the tiniest of vignettes, a sketch in barest outline, the suggestion,

(2)
 17 { 5 *Gwanjitsu ya*
 7 *Kinō no oni ga*
 5 *Rei ni kuru*

On New Year's day, yesterday's dun
 Comes to present his compliments.

On the other hand, No. 17 (*inf.* p. 265) has a redundant syllable,—viz., 8 in the second line instead of 7, because the *mō* of *mōshi-aguru* counts as two. Such cases of imperfect prosody are, as will be noticed later on, by no means uncommon.

not the description, of a scene or a circumstance. It is a little dab of colour thrown upon a canvas one inch square, where the spectator is left to guess at the picture as best he may. Often it reminds us less of an actual picture than of the title or legend attached to a picture. Such a verse, for instance, as

(5)
Ura-kaze ya
Tomoe wo kuzusu
Mura-chidori

A troop of sea-gulls, and a gust
 Off shore that breaks their whirling flight.

—might it not, without the alteration of a single word, serve as the title of one or more of the water-colour sketches shown at any of our modern exhibitions? Or take this one by Bashō, the greatest of all Japanese epigrammatists;—

(6)
Magusa ou
Hito wo shiori no
Natsu-no kana

Over the summer moor,—our guide
 One shouldering fodder for his horse.

Here anyone familiar with Japanese scenery sees mirrored the lush-green landscape, the sloping moor with its giant grass man-high, that obliterates all trace of the narrow winter pathway, while the bundle on some peasant's shoulder alone emerges far off on the skyline, and shows the wayfarers in which direction to turn their steps. Across a distance of ten thousand miles and an interval of two centuries, the spirit of the seventeenth century Japanese poet is identical with that which

informs the work of the Western water-colourist of to-day. It is intensely modern, or at least imbued to the full with that love and knowledge of nature which we are accustomed to consider characteristic of modern times. More rarely figures take the chief place, as when Bashō gives us the following

(7)

Chimaki yuu

Kata-de ni hasamu

Hitai-gami

She wraps up rice-cakes, while one hand
Restrains the hair upon her brow.

A picture this of a rustic maiden at some village fair, attending to her business of selling cakes and lollipops to the holiday-makers, and at the same time not inattentive to her personal appearance. Or take an instance from a higher walk in life, from the Samurai caste of feudal days:—

(8)

Gwanjitsu ya

Ie ni yuzuri no

Tachi hakan

'Tis New Year's day:—I'll gird me on
My sword, the heirloom of my house.

This, to be sure, is but a single touch, a mere indication. Nevertheless, as the leading thought, the keynote, so to say, of the subject is struck—for was not the sword called “the living soul of the Samurai?”—it practically suggests the whole picture. Without any verbose addition, there rises up before us the image of the warrior in his stiff-starched robes, ready for elaborate feudal ceremonies, for war, or for *harakiri*.

All the specimens hitherto quoted are on subjects commonly called “poetical.” But the Japanese epigrammatists by no means confine themselves to such. They turn willingly to the homeliest themes. One of them tells us how cold he was in bed last night:—

(9)

Samukereba

Nerarezu neneba

Nao samushi

So cold I cannot sleep; and as
I cannot sleep, I'm colder still.

Another exclaims

(10)

Yobi-kaesu

Funa-uri mienu

Arare kana

The fishmonger,—oh! call him back!
But he has vanished in the hail.

It is as if a window-pane had been thrown open, and instantly shut again. We have barely time to catch a passing glimpse of the circumstance hinted at.

A third grumbles, for that “the rainy season of June has turned his razor rusty in a single night,” while a poetess, complaining of that same source of trouble, so familiar to us residents in Japan, declares that her “embroidered gown is spotted before it has even once been worn.” The washing, the yearly house-cleaning, Christmas (or rather December) bills, even chilblains (!), come under the epigrammatist's ken. In fact, nothing is too trivial or too vulgar for him. Many epigrams have to do with packhorses, inns, and miscellaneous incidents of travel. Some contain historical allusions, or allusions to literature.

Some are "epigrams" in the exact etymological sense of the term, being inscriptions on pictures, fans, etc. Hardly any deal with love, which is surprising, as love takes high rank among the favourite themes in the other subdivisions of Japanese poetry.

II.

So much by way of preface and orientation. The Japanese epigram has had a long and curious history. When at its zenith, it allied itself with a system of ethical teaching; yet its origin can be traced to a paltry game. The thing merits investigation.

We find, then, that at the earliest period of which trustworthy information has survived,—say, the sixth century of the Christian era,*—Japanese verse already consisted of the same extremely simple elements as characterise it at the present day. So simple and scanty, indeed, are these elements that one almost hesitates to employ the term "prosody" in discussing them. Neither rhyme, quantity, nor accentual stress was regarded, but a mere counting of syllables, eked out in some degree by adhesion to a traditional phraseology, more particularly to certain stock-

* The "*Kojiki*," which is the earliest surviving work of Japanese literature, dates only from A. D. 712. But its historical notices begin to be credible when dealing with events of the fifth century, and some of the poems preserved in it may, with a fair degree of probability, be attributed to the sixth century, if not earlier. For a discussion of the whole subject of the credibility of early Japanese history, see the Introduction to the Translation of the "*Kojiki*," in the Supplement to Vol. X. of these "Transactions;" also a paper by Mr. Aston in Vol. XVI.

epithets (the so-called "pillow-words" *). The style was naïve in the extreme, and expressed the naïve sentiments of a primitive people, to whom writing was unknown or at least unfamiliar, and literature not yet thought of as an art. All poems were brief, few extending beyond forty or fifty lines, most to less than half that number. The rule determining their construction was that lines of five syllables and seven syllables must alternate, with an extra line of seven syllables at the end, to mark the completion of the poem. But even this simple rule was often violated, especially in early times, for no apparent reason unless it were want of skill. Frequently the impression left on the ear is that of an almost total absence of metre. Anyhow, the normal form of the Japanese poem became fixed at 5, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 7, the number of lines being thus always odd. From the beginning, there had been an inclination to prefer poems of five lines to those of any larger number. Thus the *Tanka*, or "Short Ode," as it is termed, of 5, 7, 5, 7, 7—or 31 syllables in all—was established as the favourite vehicle of poetry. It never was what we term a "stanza:"—no Japanese poet ever employed it as the material out of which to build up longer poems by adding verse to verse, such composite versification never having approved itself to the simple native taste. When anything longer than thirty-one syllables was wanted, an indefinite series of 5, 7, 5, 7 lines, with one of 7 at the end, was resorted to, as already indicated.

An impulse towards such more ambitious efforts was given in the seventh century, by the sudden advance of civilisation at that period under Chinese and Indian in-

* For details of the pillow-words, see Vol. V., Pt. I. of these "Transactions."

fluence. The quickening of the national intellect through the advent of a new religion, the remodelling of the government, the introduction of innumerable new customs, wants, and industries, the general diffusion of the art of writing, and the study of Chinese literature, ended by invigorating even poetry. The years between, say, A.D. 700 and 760, when the first anthology—the well-known “*Manyōshū*”—was compiled by Imperial order, witnessed a veritable outburst of song. There were ballads, love-poems, elegies, descriptive poems, mythological poems that sometimes rise almost into majesty of expression, occasional poems of various import evidently inspired by genuine sentiment. The foreign influence does not make itself obtrusively felt; it informed, without violently warping, the native taste. What it contributed to the technique of verse was chiefly a knowledge of that system of “parallelism” which was the rule in Chinese, and which the Japanese poets now adopted as an occasional ornament. Some of these compositions of the golden age ran into as many as 50, 70, or 100 lines. Generally, however, a thirty-one syllable verse on the same subject was appended, showing how curiously tenacious the Japanese taste was of that diminutive form. Specimens translated literally, both of the longer poems and of the short ones tagged on to them, will be found in Mr. Aston’s “Grammar of the Japanese Written Language” and in his “History of Japanese Literature.” A contemporary critic might well have thought that the poetical literature of Japan was marching towards a great future.

Unfortunately, such was not the case. The wider inspiration died out within a single life-time. The next time that an Imperial anthology was called for (the “*Kokin-*

shū,” published A.D. 905), only five poems out of a total of over 1,100 attained to any length, and even these few are universally allowed to lack merit of any kind. All the rest were diminutive pieces each of thirty-one syllables only, and this continued ever after to be the classical form of verse. Very dainty some of these little verses are; for here again Chinese influence had been active, and had introduced numerous themes hitherto unthought of, besides suggesting a far more skilful use of language. The snow, the moon, the plum-blossom, even the cherry-blossom which is nowadays considered the national flower *par excellence*, the autumn leaves,—in fact well-nigh all the subjects that have ever since formed the commonplaces of Japanese verse, are Chinese importations of the ninth and tenth centuries. That the native prosody should have survived unchanged under these circumstances, may appear odd. The cause is doubtless to be sought in the profoundly divergent phonetic structure of the two languages, which made the adoption of Chinese metres and rhythms physically impossible. Here is a couple of representative specimens of the thirty-one syllable stanza, as turned out by innumerable poets from the ninth century down to our own day:—

Kiyu nagara

Sora yori hana no

Chiri-kuru wa—

Kumo no anata wa

Haru ni ya aruran

When from the skies that winter shrouds
The blossoms flutter round my head,
Surely the spring its light must shed
On lands that lie beyond the clouds.*

* The “blossoms” are of course the snow-flakes, which, by a graceful Chinese conceit, are likened to the white petals of the cherry-flower.

*Hana no mitsu
Hototogisu wo mo
Kiki-hatetsu—*

*Kono yo nochi no yo
Omou koto nashi*

I've seen the flowers bloom and fade,
I have heard out the cuckoo's note:—
Neither in this world is there ought
Nor in the next to make me sad.

That is, the poet—a true Epicurean—has drunk to the full the cup of life, and has no fears for the life to come.

A somewhat free translation must be excused, as our English rhymed stanza is not easy to manage. Yet I hold to it, as fairly representative of the Japanese original, with which it agrees in length within one syllable (32 instead of 31), and also because, when halved, it will serve better than aught else to render the epigram.* In the case of the epigrams, which are far easier to translate, all the versions given in this paper are literal,—as literal, that is, as the disparity between English and Japanese idiom

* The whole question as to the best equivalents for alien metres is a notoriously difficult one. Some ingenious reader may point out that the Japanese epigram has exactly the same number of syllables (17) as the hexameter, when the latter runs to its full length of five dactyls. Nevertheless, I should not select that form as an equivalent in the present case, partly because the hexameter always sounds exotic in English, whereas the Japanese measure to be represented is nothing if not popular and familiar; but still more because the Greek or Latin hexameter possesses a grand resonance, and is in itself a complete unit perfectly rounded off, whereas the form of the Japanese epigram is essentially fragmentary, as will be explained later on. The somewhat jogging form which I have chosen, with its elementary metre and its suggestion of fragmentariness, appears to me to suit the case better.

will allow. But in the specimen thirty-one syllable odes here quoted it is rather to the form that I would invite attention than to the matter, because in this particular form the epigram had its origin. It will be noticed that a dash has been placed after the third line of the Japanese original. This is because the voice always pauses in that place, after what is termed the “upper hemistich” (Jap. *Kami no ku*, also *Hokku*, lit. “initial hemistich”), consisting of 17 syllables. The “lower hemistich” (*Shimo no ku* or *Ageku*,* lit. “raising” that is “finishing hemistich”) consists of 14 syllables. The slight pause made between them for rhythmical purposes causes each to be recognised as a semi-independent entity, even when the sense flows on without interruption. This fact had an important result in what came after.

And now the Chinese influence, which so far had acted for good, took a baneful turn, introducing conventionality and frivolity. Poets—shall we rather say poetasters?—were no longer to draw their inspiration from their own hearts, and from the incidents of their lives:—they were encouraged to write to order. The social state of Japan at that period fostered the evil. There could be no popular or national literature; for the mass of the nation still lay beyond the pale of the only literary influence then known,—an alien one. The cultivation of letters was accordingly almost confined to Court circles, a Court itself bereft of political power, and where life had sunk into an effeminate round of ceremonies and diversions alike puerile and tiresome. Poetical tournaments (*uta-arvase*) became a favourite pastime. In imitation of Chinese usage, themes

* The Colloquial expression *ageku no hate ni*, “the end of it all,” comes from this, being literally “at the end of the hemistich.”

were set, courtiers' wits were sharpened against each other, and prizes were adjudged. We even hear of gold dust and of landed estates being bestowed on successful competitors; but real poetry had ceased to live.

The next step was the introduction, at these poetry tournaments, of a Chinese game resembling our "capping verses." At first, in the ninth and tenth centuries, the lords and ladies of Kyōto composed Chinese verses as nearly as possible after the mode prevalent at the Court of Nanking, on rhymes officially given out, and according to the intricate rules of Chinese prosody. But when, in the eleventh century, their first pro-Chinese ardour had cooled, and the task of writing in a foreign tongue was felt to be too irksome, they fell back on the traditional native stanza of thirty-one syllables. The game, then, in this stage, consisted in either fitting on a first hemistich to a second, or a second to a first. This was termed *Renga*, lit. "linked verses." Sometimes, supposing a second hemistich to have been given, ingenuity was exercised by the composition of more than one suitable first hemistich, whose merits would be discussed, and the palm awarded to the best by an umpire. The independence of each hemistich thus became accentuated; and if the second and less important half were to fall off, the *Hokku* or first hemistich would remain as an independent entity. This is what did in fact happen, and the form of the epigram was thus determined.

Things, however, did not at first move in that direction. For a long time—three or four centuries—the tendency was the other way; and here comes in the most curious part of the story. Instead of producing an ultra-short variety of verse, the new game seemed more likely to lead to a long and intricate variety. It would certainly

have done so, had not the bent of the Japanese mind been too decidedly towards the small, the sketchy, no less in poetry than in painting and carving. The "linked verses," which, down at least to the year 1124, had consisted of two members only,—one upper and one lower hemistich,—were extended to a larger number, in imitation of Chinese models. This change had taken place by the beginning of the thirteenth century; and as the Far-Eastern mind habitually submitted all matters—even the most trivial—to rigid rule, a code was drawn up for the guidance of verse-cappers. This code appeared in several recensions, of which the first dates from A. D. 1087, the latest from 1501. According to it, the length of a set of "linked verses" was extended to 8, to 50, and ultimately to 100 hemistichs, and a certain order was prescribed for the succession of subjects treated in each set. Thus, if the *Hokku* ("initial hemistich") spoke of the spring with special reference to January, the second hemistich must also refer to January, and end with a full stop. The third hemistich must introduce some idea appropriate, not to January only, but to the whole season of spring, and must end with the particle *te*, which roughly corresponds to our English participles in *ed* or *ing*; but should the second hemistich have included a *te*, then one of the particles *ni* or *ran*, or the phrase *mo nashi*, must be preferred. The fourth hemistich is a "miscellaneous" one, that is, no mention must be made in it of any of the four seasons. It should end with some such easy, graceful verbal termination as *nari* or *keri*. No. 5 is called the "Fixed Seat of the Moon," because here the moon must in any case be made mention of; and this and Nos. 6 and 7 are termed the "Three Autumn Hemistichs,—for the moon, which introduces

these three, is the special property of autumn. All the hemistichs down to No. 6 inclusive are termed the "Initial Obverse" (*Sho-omote*), because always written on one side of the same sheet of paper; and (according to one authority at least) such subjects as religion, love, the shortness of life, and the expression of personal sentiments are forbidden therein. Hemistichs 7 to 12 (in some cases 7 to 14) are the "Initial Reverse" or "Reverse Corner" (*Sho-ura* or *Ura-kado*). No. 7, as already indicated, forms one of the three Autumn Hemistichs; but in No. 8 and those that follow, the choice of subjects is left free. The final hemistich (*Agoku*), however, must return to the subject of No. 1. The rules vary somewhat, according to the total number of hemistichs gathered together into a set. For instance, in one variety of 36, whose name and number are derived from the Six-and-Thirty Poetical Geniuses of mediaeval literature, there is a division into two sets of 18 each; and the first of these is subdivided into an Obverse of 6 and a Reverse of 12 hemistichs, while in the second subdivision, technically termed the "Leave-taking," the order is exactly contrary, the Obverse having 12 and the Reverse 6 hemistichs, while the "Fixed Places" for the mention of the moon and of the flowers are also exactly contrary, being respectively 5 and 11 in the one, and 11 and 5 in the other. I have here given only three or four of the technical terms with which the subject bristles, and will not claim your attention for the elaborate rules regarding the collocation of subjects and the choice of words. Their minuteness almost passes belief, as when, for instance, it is ordained that the word *ikaga*, "how?" may not be repeated except at an interval of three hemistichs, nor the word *bakari*, "about," save at an interval of seven hemistichs; *hototogisu*, "cuckoo," only

once in a set of 100, but *nobe*, "moorland," and *matsu koi*, "love kept waiting," twice. Additional rules provide for the preferential use of homonyms,—for instance, *ka* 香, "fragrance," instead of *ka* 蚊, "mosquito;" for anagrams of proper names, for alphabetical sequence in the order of the *Kana* syllabary,—all this in certain fixed places,—as also for the insertion of words upside down, as *mitsu*, "three," for *tsumi*, "sin," and for the introduction, not of actual words themselves, but of certain others with which they may form grammatical compounds. At this point even the Japanese commentator breaks down, confessing that the intricacies of the subject begin to baffle him. In fact, he ventures so far as mildly to suggest that "these rules, being too mechanical, must have interfered to some extent with the poetical value of the pieces composed."(!) Easier of comprehension is the classification of all the items allowed to be mentioned under the caption of each month. Thus, under January we find New Year's day, the New Year sky, certain rice-cakes, a particular kind of wine, ferns, the straw and other emblems used in New Year decorations, various ceremonies, lotteries, gifts, the seven herbs of spring, the plum-blossom, the willow, etc. We also understand, without difficulty, though perhaps with wonderment, that an elaborate set of rules prescribed the method to be followed in transcribing each set of poems on paper, as some of the pages were to have more written on them, some less. The paper itself, too, had to be folded in a peculiar manner, and the various pages possessed technical names, as already hinted at above.

All this is puerile enough. How far more absurd will it not appear, when closer scrutiny reveals the fact that the total of 36, 44, 50, 88, or 100 hemistichs thus tacked

on to each other by unalterable rule gave no continuous sense! In the Chinese models the sense ran on continuously. But either these models were misunderstood, owing to their being read in anthologies which gave only "elegant extracts" of the chief "beauties," or else the Japanese stanza—or perhaps we should rather say the Japanese mind of that age—obstinately refused to lend itself to any but the shortest flights. To be sure, the work was done, or rather the game was played, under circumstances which would have cramped more soaring intellects. Notwithstanding the dominion of Chinese precedents over Japanese literature, which has already been commented on, a rule handed down from time immemorial forbade the use in poetry of any but purely native words. Thus, more than half the vocabulary was excluded; for half the vocabulary was Chinese, and these Chinese words comprised many of those in most familiar use, besides most of the terms denoting delicate shades of meaning. Their exclusion at once limited the scope of poetical expression, helped to make it artificial, and divorced it ever more and more from real life.

In serious poetry the ban placed on all foreign terms proved too strong to break, and has remained in force down to the present day. The result was that this serious poetry soon became fossilised in mannerism and vain repetitions. But even at Court,—solemn as the Court of Kyōto was,—a revulsion took place. As early as A.D. 905, we find the compilers of the "*Kokin-shū*" admitting to a corner of their anthology a small set of stanzas of more or less comic import, or characterised by conceits which overstepped the limits set by the rules of serious poetry. Such comic stanzas were termed *Haikai*, and the

taste for them gradually spread. The subjects might be taken from common life; and common words—Chinese no less than native—were admitted into their vocabulary,—an innovation of far-reaching effect, for it gave free scope alike to the mind and the tongue, which had hitherto been bound in mediæval fetters. After some time, it became fashionable to compose "linked verses" in the new comic or colloquial style, which accordingly received the name of *Haikai no Renga*, that is, "comic linked verses." The first extensive collection of these was made by one Yamazaki Sōkan, an ex-Samurai who turned Buddhist priest,—a priest, apparently, of the jovial sort, as he forsook the world less to practise devotion than to be rid of the worries of feudal service. He lived from 1465 to 1553, and is commonly regarded as the father of the Japanese epigram, although another poet-priest, Sōgi Hōshi (1421-1502) was his elder by more than forty years. A noticeable feature of this period was the downward spread of the taste for this class of poetry into the inferior ranks of society.

Although the custom long persisted—indeed it is not quite dead even in our own day—of linking verses together according to the elaborate and puerile rules mentioned above, the *Hokku*, or "initial hemistich," had gradually come to be considered more important than all those that were tagged on to it. Its composition was habitually entrusted to the most skilful of the poets present at any poetry meeting, it was repeated from mouth to mouth when the others were forgotten, and many anthologies were devoted to it alone. Thus did it happen that though the word *Hokku* properly means "initial stanza," and *Haikai no Renga* properly means "comic linked verses," the two terms *Hokku* and *Haikai* have practically run together

into one signification. They, as well as *Haiku* (which is a cross between the two), indifferently denote what we have ventured to term the Japanese "epigram." This epigram may be defined as a half-stanza originally of a comic, or at least a colloquial cast, which in time came to be composed in all moods,—grave as well as jocular, esthetic as well as trivial, classical as well as colloquial. Its permanently distinctive characteristics are two in number:—firstly, it is quite free in its choice whether of subject or of diction; secondly, it is essentially fragmentary, the fact that it is part only of a complete stanza, and that it is consequently not expected to do more than adumbrate the thought in the writer's mind, having never been lost sight of. All through its history, inditers of epigrams have devoted no small portion of their time to furbishing up the missing second halves of their staves. A second stave is always there *in posse* if not *in esse*,—a fact important to the would-be translator, because it shows him that in selecting a form for his versions, he should prefer one which is calculated to produce on the English ear the impression of fragmentariness. If he omits to notice this, he will fail in his chief duty,—that of rendering in some sort the movement of the original. The same consideration explains why the grammar of this style of verse is apt to be elliptical to the verge of obscurity,—past that verge indeed,—so that great numbers of verses are unintelligible as they stand. They are not (technically speaking) meant to stand so; it is assumed that something ought to follow. Accordingly, the reader is constantly called upon to supply, not only missing verbs and particles, but whole clauses. The Japanese themselves often grope vainly in the obscurity thus caused, as the attempted explanations of the

commentators amusingly testify. Little wonder, then, that the foreign student will be apt to find fully half, perhaps three-quarters, of the epigrams submitted to his notice enigmatical. Take this, for instance,

(11)

Hatsu-yuki ya
Are mo hito no ko
Taru-hiroi

lit. First snow, aye! that too a child of man, picker-up of barrels.

Such a collocation of words sounds to us like absolute nonsense. But it is not nonsense; it is only sense over-condensed. The meaning is: "That poor boy, walking along the streets picking up cast-off barrels in the first winter snow,—he, too, and others like him, miserable though be their lot, yet count among the sons of men, and as such deserve our pity." The signification is clear to the Japanese without periphrasis or comment, because they are habituated to such elliptical modes of expression. In fact, this verse has passed into a proverb. Or again,

(12)

Yo no naka wa
Mikka minu ma no
Sakura kana

lit. As for the world, oh! cherry unseen during three days.

This, too, is proverbial, being equivalent to some such saying of ours as "The fashion of this world passeth away." Interpreted more closely, the exact sense conveyed is that "The world changes as rapidly as does a cherry-tree which one should not have visited for the space of three days. He saw it in full bloom; meantime the wind has blown, and left not a single blossom on the branches."

Here, too, Japanese readers would require no explanation. There are, however, numerous cases in which the process of condensation has been carried so far as to baffle even them. This happens chiefly when the epigram refers to some particular circumstance or event, which has been forgotten. No ordinary educated Japanese would understand the following without explanation:—

(13)

Hirosawa ya
Hito-shigururu
Numatarō

Hirosawa must probably, says the commentator, be explained as the name of a place,—a large mere in the neighbourhood of Kyōto; the grammar and metre of the second line are both shaky; and the last word *Numatarō* has, it would seem, been coined as an equivalent for *hishi-kui*, a kind of wild-goose, which is here personified as the eldest son (*Tarō*) of the marsh (*numa*). Thus we arrive at some such sense as

“A wild-goose alone in a shower at Hirosawa”

which result, to say the least, sounds unattractive and uncomfortable. The impression which the author meant to convey—an impression of grey solitude and dreariness—could have been conveyed with far greater effect in intelligible language,—has in fact been so conveyed by other epigrammatists over and over again, for instance in these closely parallel lines:—

(14)

Mozu no iru
No-naka no kui yo
Kaminazuki

Lit. “Oh! the post in the midst of the moor, on which a butcher-bird perches,—November!”

that is,

“November, with a butcher-bird
Perched on a post on th’ open moor”

a graphic suggestion, truly, of a dreary autumn scene.

The legitimate use of condensation—legitimate because of the vivid effect produced—is well-exemplified in the following verse by the poetess Chiyo, which ranks among the most famous productions of this Lilliputian literary form:—

(15)

Asagao ni
Tsurube torarete
Morai-mizu

Lit. Having had well-bucket taken away by convulvuli,—gift-water!

The meaning is this:—Chiyo, having gone to her well one morning to draw water, found that some tendrils of the convulvulus had twined themselves around the rope. As a poetess and a woman of taste, she could not bring herself to disturb the dainty blossoms. So, leaving her own well to the convulvuli, she went and begged water of a neighbour,—a pretty little vignette, surely, and expressed in five words.

But to return to the historical sketch of our subject, which was interrupted by the need for explanation and comment. It was mentioned a page or two back that the first collectors of “epigrams,” as distinguished from the “linked verses” of which these same epigrams were originally but fragments, was Yamazaki Sōkan, a Buddhist priest whose long life extended from A. D. 1465 to 1553. Great numbers of priests belonging to the Zen sect of Buddhism devoted themselves at this period, and for a couple of centuries more, to the art of versification and to esthetics generally.

Some few Shintoists did likewise. A Shintō priest of the Sun-Goddess's temple at Ise, named Arakida Moritake (1472-1549), a contemporary of the just-named father of epigrammatic poetry, specially distinguished himself; but his compositions, and indeed all those of this early age, retained a strong comic tinge. The composers themselves, despite their ecclesiastical character, were much given to eccentric frolics, and to all the *sans-gêne* of a semi-Bohemian life. To their honour be it added that, while fun counted in their eyes for a great deal, money counted for nothing at all. Yamazaki Sōkan is said to have lived on ten cash a day, and to have had no other furniture in his cell than a single kettle. The prettiest of his verses that has survived is the following, which is worthy of the later, classic age:—

(16)

*Koe nakuba
Sagi koso yuki no
Hito-tsurane*

But for its voice, the heron were
A line of snow, and nothing more.

How often has not this subject been treated by the Japanese painter, as a delicate symphony in white! But, as already remarked, almost all his compositions verge on the comic, for instance this one, comparing, not inaptly, the posture of the frog to that which a Japanese assumes when squatting respectfully, with his hands stretched out on the mats to address a superior:—

(17)

*Te wo tsuite
Uta mōshi-aguru*
Kawazu kana*

* Note the polite word *mōshi-aguru*, used in addressing a superior.

Oh! the frog, with its hands on the floor, lifting up [its voice in] song!

Puns were much sought after, as in

(18)

*Yo ni furu wa
Sara ni shigure no
Yadori kana*

where *furu* has a double signification:—firstly, construed with *yo*, it means “dwelling in the world,” while secondly construed with *shigure*, it means “a shower falling,” so that the entire sense meant to be conveyed—though the actual words merely adumbrate it—is that “Man’s sojourn in this world is as transitory as a shelter to which one may betake oneself during a shower.” But to cap verses cleverly was still the poet’s chief aim. Some one having proposed as second hemistich the lines

*Kiritaku mo ari
Kiritaku mo nashi*

I want to kill him, and [at the same time] I don’t want to kill him,—

Yamazaki Sōkan immediately added the first hemistich

(19)

*Nusubito wo
Toracte mireba
Waga ko nari*

On looking at the thief whom I have caught, [behold], it is my own child.

This epigram has remained proverbial for a wish, which, when fulfilled, turns out to be anything but pleasant.

On another occasion—it was in the tenth month of a certain year—the Shintō priest above mentioned, on entering the apartment where a poetical tournament was to be

held, and perceiving that the whole assemblage consisted of Buddhists, exclaimed in verse

(20)

*O zashiki wo
Mireba izure mo
Kaminazuki*

to which Sōgi responded with the second hemistich

*Hitori shigure no
Furi-eboshi kite*

The task of making this intelligible to any one entirely ignorant of Japan, its language, and customs, might be abandoned as hopeless. Members of the Asiatic Society will, however, easily perceive that the contrast insisted on by the two ready wits is that between the shaven pates of the Buddhists and the curious gauze cap worn by Shintō priests over their natural hair. But this is not all:—there are two puns to be taken into account, and *Kaminazuki* is here the first important word. It signifies literally “the month without Shintō gods.” The tenth month of the year is so styled in Japanese poetical and religious parlance, because of a tradition to the effect that in that month all the Shintō gods and goddesses forsake their other shrines in order to hold a conclave at the great temple of Izumo. The sight of a party consisting exclusively of Buddhists would naturally remind a Shintoist of the absence of his Shintō gods, and furthermore, as *kami* means “hair” as well as “god,” the syllables *kami na[shi]* suggest “no hair,” in allusion to the Buddhist shaven heads, so that the upper hemistich comes to mean “On looking round the apartment, I see none but Buddhists.” In the second hemistich the word *shigure*, “shower,” which has nothing to do with the matter in hand, forms

a sort of punning “pillow-word” to introduce *furi*, which has the sense of “raining,” and at the same time recalls *furu*, “old,” thus giving the sense of “Yes, but there is one Shintoist among us in his old gauze cap.” Both hemistichs are decidedly clever in the original, though the sparkle is of course lost and the point blunted by the laborious process of elucidation in a foreign tongue.

A few more examples of the compositions of this, the earliest, age of Japanese epigram will be found at the end of the present essay. The authors above mentioned each had numerous pupils, by whom their tradition was continued. But no eminent names are recorded till the close of the sixteenth century, when a Samurai called Matsunaga Teitoku (1571-1653) became the legislator for epigrammatic poetry by the publication of a work entitled “*O-Garagasa*,” in which its rules were detailed apart from those that had so long guided the composers of “linked verses.” Of the latter, too, he was the acknowledged master in his day, and was accordingly nominated by Imperial decree to the post of *Hana-no-moto*, which may be rendered “the Flowery Seat,”—a laureateship which carried with it the control over all minor teachers and pupils in the poetry schools by the granting or withholding of diplomas, etc.; for in the Japan of that age everything was legislated for,—even verse and versifiers. This particular poet, though highly eccentric and finally blind, left a flourishing school, from which shone out with particular lustre five disciples known to fame as the “Five Stars” (五星). Even such a Confucian scholar as Hayashi Razan, even so eminent a Japanologue as Kitamura Kigin, did not disdain to take lessons from him in epigram; and the great Bashō himself was, poetically speaking, his descend-

ant in the second generation. His verses appear to me somewhat formal; but he had the merit of avoiding vulgarity. Teishitsu (1608-1671), one of the "Five Stars," equalled, if he did not surpass, his master, though it is related that he had so poor an opinion of his own productions that he considered only three worth preservation, and committed all the rest to the flames. One of these three has been held by the best judges* to be the finest epigram ever written. It runs as follows:—

(22)

*Kore wa kore wa
To bakari hana no
Yoshino-yama*

The verse resists all attempts at adequate representation in English; but the gist of it is that the mountains of Yoshino, when covered with the cherry-blossom, baffle description by their loveliness, and leave the beholder nothing but inarticulate exclamations of wonder and delight. This poet also had five specially eminent pupils, known in literary history as "The Two Guests and the Three Men" (二客

* By such men, for instance, as Bashō. But Acha Kōson, an ingenious modern critic, has pointed out a flaw in the verse:—it is not characteristic enough. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same words might be applied to other unique scenes, as *Kore wa kore wa—To bakari yuki no—Fuji no yama*, substituting Fuji with its snows for Yoshino with its flowers. Among epigrams on Yoshino, this critic would award the palm to the following (by the poet Ryōta), which could not be transferred to any other scene:—

(21)

*Shira-kumo ya
Chiru toki hana no
Yoshino-yama*

Its purport is to liken the falling petals of the cherry-blossoms of Yoshino to a white cloud. Perhaps one might render it thus: "A white cloud,—nay! the blossoms on Mount Yoshino as they flutter down."

三人). With them the first or introductory period of the Japanese epigram, as cultivated at Kyōto, may be said to close. Its latest members were contemporary with the rise of two other schools,—the *Daurin Ha* at Yedo, which plunged into intricacy, mannerism, and exaggeration, and Bashō's school which finally led Japanese poetry back into the paths of good taste and good morals.

The origin of the *Daurin* School was on this wise. A Samurai from the province of Higo, named Nishiyama Sōin (1605-1682), whose lord had been cashiered, wandered off to Ōsaka and Kyōto, where he shaved his head as a Buddhist priest and prayed for poetical inspiration to the god Temmangū, at whose shrine each of his compositions was successively offered up. Such pious preparation would lead the European student to expect some grave and serious result; but in Japan they manage these matters differently. The result in this case was that the poet went in for every kind of verbal jugglery and ingenious conceit! Meantime, at the then recently founded and luxurious city of Yedo, a similar meretricious taste had found a home in a little coterie of versifiers who were weary of the simplicity of the earlier Kyōto school. Their club, which was known by the title of *Daurin* (談林), or "The Forest of Consultation," warmly welcomed Nishiyama to Yedo in 1664. He became its leader, and, by roving all over the country from Nagasaki to the extreme North, where one of the local Daimyōs enrolled himself among his pupils, he spread the new mode far and wide, assisted therein by his contemporary Saikaku, the favourite novelist of the day, who may be best described as a Japanese Zola, as his stories are alike admirable in style and abominable in matter. His epigrams, fortunately—at

least those that I have seen quoted—do not appear to have shared in this coarseness. Tradition credits him with having composed twenty thousand of them in a single day. Here are a few examples of the verses of the Danrin School:—

(23)

Naga-mochi ni
Haru kakure-yuku
Koromo-gae

A change of garments, and the spring
Goes into hiding in the chest

that is to say, "When we stow away our heavier garments on the approach of summer, spring hides itself in our trunks or closets till next year,"—a conceit which it doubtless cost the composer some trouble to excogitate.

(24)

Kumo no mine ya
Yama minu kuni no
Hiroi-mono

A lucky find,—the peaks of cloud,—
For countries that no mountains see

that is, "In flat countries, how glad the natives must be to see mountainous masses of cloud!"—another conceit of like calibre to the first.

(25)

Moshi nakaba
Chōchō kago no
Ku zo uken.

Did it but sing, the butterfly
Might have to suffer in a cage

in other words, "'Tis fortunate for the butterfly that its voice is not as beautiful as its wings; for in that

case it would run the risk of being shut up in a cage by those who would fain hear it sing."

(26)

Tsuki-yo yoshi
Tachitsu itsu netsu
Mitsu-no-hama

The actual sense here conveyed is, "Beauteous is the moonlight night at Mitsu-no-hama, whether one stand up, or sit, or lie down." But the real point must be sought in the sound of the words,—the three *tsu's* of *Tachitsu itsu netsu*, resumed in the word *mitsu*, which itself signifies "three."

(27)

Sareba aki
To mōsu iware no
Nobe sōrō

Here again the matter signifies little; it is the manner that amuses. The meaning, so far as there is any, is merely that the aspect of the moor proclaims the autumn season. But, apart from a pun on the word *nobe*, which may mean either "to proclaim" or "a moor-side," an irresistibly droll effect is produced by the employment of the stiff epistolary style, than which nothing can be further from the spirit of poetry. One poetess even composed her death-song in this mock epistolary style:—

(28)

Tsuki mo mite
Ware wa kono yo wo
Kashiku kana

which may be rendered into fairly equivalent English thus:

And having seen the moon, I now
To this world have the honour to be

that is to say, "Having enjoyed the world, its beauties and its glories, I now have the honour to remain your humble servant, etc., etc., and to depart this life." It seems a poor joke to die with.

Literary conceits are, of all things, the hardest to transfer from one language to another. Still, even the slight indications here given may suffice to show how naturally and inevitably the fireworks of the Danrin School would eclipse the productions of the earlier epigrammatists, with their quiet prettinesses and their innocent little puns. For a whole generation this sort of thing hit the public taste, just as "smart" writing has done in our own day among Anglo-Saxons. The only question was as to who should express the most far-fetched ideas in the most unexpected words. Sometimes it was a clever literary allusion,—a Confucian maxim, perhaps, masquerading in modern Japanese guise;—sometimes an astounding exaggeration; at others something new in the mere phrasing,—a horribly vulgar word, or else a solemnly classical one,—anything in short, provided that the effect was warranted to startle. As for the matter, that was a *quantité négligeable*.

III.

Such was the state of Japanese poetry—for the epigram was the only species of poetry that retained any life—when a man appeared, named Bashō, who was destined to infuse into it a totally new spirit. This remarkable person was born in the year 1644 at Ueno, in the province of Iga.

He came of ancient Samurai lineage, and from boyhood had been the favourite companion of his Daimyō's son. This accomplished youth, himself no mean scholar and poet, was at once Bashō's feudal lord, his teacher, and his friend. When death prematurely removed him, Bashō, then a boy of sixteen, was so distraught with grief that home and the ordinary avocations of a Samurai could no longer restrain him. Despite the Daimyō's injunctions, he fled privately, carrying with him a lock of his dead young lord's hair to the great Buddhist monastery of Kōya-san, and leaving behind him a very pretty verse of adieu to the comrades of his youth:—

(29)

Kunno to hedatsu

Tomo ka ya kari no

Iki-wakare

The words are not susceptible of exact translation into English; but their drift is that the writer is now severed for life from his former friends, as the soaring wild-geese are from each other by the clouds of heaven. In the autumn of the same year he abandoned the world, in order to throw himself into the arms of poverty and mysticism. Many contradictory versions are given of the exact reasons for his retirement. One, for which there is no shadow of proof, but which has been made the theme of a popular drama, implicates his moral character, telling of an intrigue with his lord's wife. But the simplest explanation is to be found in that pessimistic and ascetic tinge, which, though dead in the Japan of the twentieth century, had been impressed on the national mind during the mediæval period of civil war and misery, and which, long before Bashō's time, had driven warriors and nobles innumerable

to lay aside worldly dignities. After the final pacification of the country about the year 1600, under the sway of the Tokugawa Shōguns, the same causes no longer operated. But in their place, for all members of the Samurai caste or military gentry, there came a grinding, omnipresent routine, a ceaseless round of minute ceremonial observances, which made life a burden to any but the most prosaic spirits. Little wonder that heads of families became *inkyo*, as it was called,—that is, retired from active life, as early as possible, as the only escape from official tyranny, the only means of following their own tastes,—while others, more impatient still, threw over the traces even in youth by sheltering themselves under the shadow of the Buddhist profession, whose power in the land was still a mighty one. Many became Buddhist priests in form only, renouncing their hereditary names and titles, shaving their heads, and donning priestly robes, but devoting themselves to pleasure, nowise to religion. Such were the esthetes who, as playmates of Shōguns and other exalted personages, developed the tea ceremonies, planned most of the beautiful gardens at Kyōto, and helped to advance all the fine arts. Others were genuine converts; many seem to have stood half-way between mystic fervour and artistic or literary culture. Bashō's position was peculiar. Genuinely converted, a mystic of the Zen sect to the tip of his fingers, his aim was yet strictly practical; he wished to turn men's lives and thoughts in a better and higher direction, and he employed one branch of art, namely poetry, as the vehicle for the ethical influence to whose exercise he had devoted his life. The very word "poetry" (at least *haikai*, which we must here perforce translate by "poetry" rather than by

"epigram") came in his mouth to stand for morality. Did any of his followers transgress the code of poverty, simplicity, humility, long-suffering, he would rebuke the offender with a "This is not poetry" (literally, "not epigram"), meaning "this is not right." But more often he contented himself with preaching by example.

But to return to his biography. Having freed himself in early youth from all official duties, and having determined to lead a life devoted to virtue and to intellectual achievement, he went to Ōsaka and Kyōto, and wandered with special delight amid the mountain fastnesses of Yoshino, which had been the favourite retreat of his favourite poet, Saigyō Hōshi. There he bathed in the brooks and rested in the shady valleys, and meditated on the impermanence of human fate. This life and the composition of poetry helped to calm his spirit. A verse from those days preserves the memory of his early struggles:—

(30)

Tsuyu toku-toku

Kokoromi ni uki-yo

Sosogaba ya

Where the dew drops, there would I fain
Essay to wash this frivolous world

that is, "I would wash away from me all taint of the world by a plunge into pure nature."—The deep gulf separating utterances like this from the futilities of previous epigrammatists need scarcely be pointed out. Bashō's position as poet and as moralist is here taken up, never to be relinquished. Soon afterwards we find him at Yedo, where he studied all the literature then accessible under the best masters,—masters whose names

have remained famous to this very day,—Chinese philosophy and *belles-lettres* under Itō Tan-an, Japanese classical poetry and prose under Kitamura Kigin, modern poetry under Yamaguchi Sodō, Buddhism under Butchō Oshō. He constantly carried about with him one or other of the chief works of the standard authors, and several of these he knew by heart; so that when he came to employ epigram as his vehicle of expression, he did so with a mind full of ideas differing widely from the idle conceits which had formed the stock-in-trade of his predecessors in that art. But though so great a reader, his favourite book of all was nature, which he studied in extensive wanderings almost all over Japan. From the year 1672 onwards, his residence—so far as he can be said to have had any permanent residence—was at Yedo in a little villa, or rather cottage, in the garden of a friend, a well-to-do citizen, where grew some banana-trees (Jap. *bashō*), which suggested the literary pseudonym by which he is known to fame; for here be it parenthetically remarked that almost all Japanese artists and poets take some such pseudonym, often several. The whole literary world of the new metropolis seems to have at once kindly welcomed him. Soon he became the acknowledged leader of those who wrote verse; and the almost yearly publication of some new work led even such as had hitherto practised other styles to renounce them, and to proclaim themselves his pupils. Every rank of society contributed its quota. The majority perhaps were priests,—at least priests in name; but we find also doctors, tradesmen, Samurai, even Daimyōs, and not grown men only, but boy students, and ladies too of various degrees enrolled in this truly democratic literary

circle, which so strangely maintained its private liberty in the midst of the rigidly fettered social organism that enveloped it on every side.

About the year 1682, Bashō seems to have experienced a second conversion; at any rate his study of the doctrines of the Zen sect of Buddhism then became more earnest, owing to continued intercourse with the Buddhist teacher above mentioned, aided by conversations with the latter's personal attendant, who, though an illiterate man, had attained to spiritual enlightenment. The learned abbot endeavoured at first to wean him from the composition of epigrams, on the ground of their frivolity. The story goes that, as the two were strolling one day in a country lane, the abbot said, "You, who turn everything into idle verse, what useful thing could you find to say about this mallow by the roadside?" Bashō at once responded with the stanza

(31)

Michi-no-be no

Mokuge wa uma ni

Kuware-keri

The mallow-flower by the road
Was eaten by a [passing] horse

and the abbot owned himself vanquished in the dispute; for the moral lesson conveyed in those few words was too obvious:—"Had not the mallow pressed forward into public view, the horse would never have devoured it. Learn, then, ambitious man, to be humble and retiring. The vulgar yearning for fame and distinction can lead nowhither but to misery, for it contradicts the essential principle of ethics."

The following epigram, which every Japanese has by heart, also probably dates from this period:

(32)

Furu-ike ya

Kawazu tobi-komu

Mizu no oto

The old pond, aye! and the sound of a frog leaping into the water. From a European point of view, the mention of the frog spoils these lines completely; for we tacitly include frogs in the same category as monkeys and donkeys,—absurd creatures scarcely to be named without turning verse into caricature. The Japanese think differently:—the frog, in their language, has even a poetical name—*kawazu*—besides its ordinary name, *kairu*, and his very croak appeals to them as a sort of song. The picture here outlined of some mouldering temple enclosure with its ancient piece of water, stagnant, silent but for the occasional splash of a frog, suggests to them the meditative and pathetic side of life. To them it appears natural that the “attainment of enlightenment,” as the Buddhists call it, or conversion, as we say in Christian parlance, should express itself in some such guise.

The foreign student may at first feel somewhat sceptical concerning the moral signification attributed to many of Bashō's epigrams. The justice of such a method of interpretation is of course difficult to prove convincingly. Nevertheless, the testimony of tradition must be allowed some weight, and I have been brought to believe that a thorough study of the influence of the mysticism of the Zen sect in Japan would bear out native tradition in its attribution of “inner meanings,” not to Bashō's writings merely, but to the writings and even the actions of many

other men of that and previous periods. In any case, whether this current method of interpretation be true or false, it has been so widely received that no study of the Japanese epigram would be complete without some reference to it.

According to the accepted account, Bashō's change of views, his conviction of the transitoriness of all things earthly, and his consequent determination to have no longer any fixed home, were accelerated by the impression left on his mind by the burning of his house in the fire of January, 1683, which destroyed the greater part of Yedo. It is said that he had to throw himself into the pond in his little garden to avoid being burnt alive, a literal illustration of the text familiar to him as a good Buddhist, which teaches that “[man's life] is like unto a house on fire,” that is, equally sure of swift destruction. Though his pupils clubbed together to rebuild his modest abode, though they even undertook to feed him, he is to be found from that time forward almost constantly on the road. The Tōkaidō, the Nakasendō, the provinces around Kyōto including his own native province of Iga, and above all the shores of beautiful Lake Biwa, of which some of his favourite pupils were natives and which have thus become classic ground in the annals of Japanese poetry,—all these districts were visited and re-visited, and commemorated in a series of diaries interspersed with stanzas, such as the “*No-sarashi Kikō*,” the “*Sarashina Kikō*,” the “*Oi no Shōbun*,” and various others, not to mention the “*Saru-mino Shū*” and other anthologies, besides didactic works on the composition of epigram. His most distant journey was one to the North, when, beginning with Nikkō and the moor of

Nasu, he continued on to Matsushima, thence up the river Kitakami, afterwards across country to the opposite or Western coast, and back through the provinces of Uzen, Echigo, etc., into Mino. We know the exact day when he and his companion started,—the 16th May, 1689,—we know the weather they encountered, the people they met, the thoughts they thought,—for all this is chronicled in a diary entitled "*Oku no Hosomichi*," which may perhaps be freely rendered as "Our Trail Northward." The whole thing may sound not so very unlike the tour of a modern globe-trotter. Mr. Aston, in his charming "*History of Japanese Literature*," has accordingly spoken of Bashō as "a great traveller." But I venture to think that this term, with its prosaic connotation, may mislead. He always spoke of himself as a pilgrim (*angya*). If he wandered up and down the country, it was in order to commune with mountains, and rivers, and forests, and waterfalls, in order to ponder on scenes of antiquity, and in order to realize in himself the Buddhistic ideal and to communicate it to his followers in all parts of the empire, as much by the contact of his personality as by the example of his verse. If he visited every place famous in song and legend and history,—battle-fields as well as graves and temples and places famed for beauty, he did so seeking not so much information, as does the intelligent but cold-blooded "traveller" of our own day and race, as edification. In other words, his aim was "enlightenment" in the Buddhistic sense,—a thing superficially akin to, yet fundamentally differing from, what we term "information," because the end in view is not scientific, intellectual, but ethical. Sometimes he might take a lift on a horse, or even in

a palanquin; but the plan generally followed by him and the two or three pupils whom he permitted to share his wanderings, was to go on foot, dressed in the poor garb of a pilgrim, and carrying no luggage save a wallet which contained his writing-box and a few books. Sometimes they would sleep at a wayside inn, sometimes at a peasant's hut, sometimes in the open air. Not infrequently, owing to Bashō's wide-spread reputation, the hospitality of some great house was pressed on him; nor was it refused, though he knew on an occasion how to rebuke the ostentation even of a host. For instance, when spending a few days at the rich city of Kanazawa on the northern pilgrimage just mentioned, a grand feast was organised in his honour by the local leaders of literary society. When it was over, he thanked them for their kind intentions on his behalf, but added bluntly that such feasting on rare and expensive viands was no wise to his taste, nor at all compatible with the poetic life, that his own custom was to take his siesta on a moor or to sit under a tree to avoid a shower, that if he required food he would ask for it, and in fine that only on condition of perfect sobriety and simplicity, would he consent to keep up intercourse with his present hosts. The rebuke, tempered doubtless by the courtly, old-fashioned manners for which he was noted, was taken in good part. At the next meeting, nothing was provided but tea, and there was all the more leisure for fruitful discourse on poetry, and for the composition of verses by all present, and for their correction, according to established Japanese custom, by the master himself. At length he suggested that the company might be feeling hungry, and would be grateful for a little cold rice.

Thereupon no servant, but the master of the house himself, brought in the family rice-tub, and helped each guest to a bowl or two of rice, with pickles as the sole condiment. The whole company gathered round in a circle to share the frugal repast, and Bashō's thanks were warmly expressed for the readiness shown in complying with his recommendation of plain living and high thinking.

The severe simplicity observed in his cottage at Yedo is described by a writer who visited him there in the year 1684. The same writer affords us a quaint peep at the life led in those days by two of his pupils; who afterwards rose to great celebrity,—Kikaku and Ransetsu. These youths, with one other, inhabited a room of eight mats, bare of all conveniences save one pan and one kettle, and having for sole ornament an image of the infant Buddha stuck in a hole in the wall. The three owned but a single quilt between them, from which, as it was rather short, their toes stuck out at night; and when they felt cold, they got up and composed verses. Yet they came of parents well-born and not specially poor, and they had been trained in the best schools. Some of the houses inhabited by the members of this semi-religious, semi-Bohemian circle had rules written up prescribing the conduct which all guests were expected to observe. One excellent code, which was followed in a rich house near Kyōto where Bashō was always a welcome guest, forbade, among other things, "arguing and loud snoring."

Never to yield to anger was one of Bashō's fixed principles. Another was universal charity, not towards men only, but towards animals. His vivid realisation of the Buddhist doctrine of the essential identity of all sentient ex-

istence, whether brute or human, seems to have become an ingrained feeling, to which many of his best-known stanzas bear witness, for instance:—

(33)

Hana ni asobu

Abu na kui so

Tomo-suzume

Sparrow, my friend, * oh! do not eat
The bees † that hover o'er the flowers!

(34)

Hai-ide yo

Kai-ya no shita no

Hiki no koe

'Tis a toad's croak. Come! hop away
From underneath the fancier's house. ‡

He would not allow of unkindness to animals so much as in thought. An anecdote will serve to illustrate this point. As he and his pupil Kikaku were riding along a country lane one day, the latter, espying a red dragon-fly, cried out in verse

(35)

Aka-tombo

Hane wo tottara

Tō-garashi

* One might also translate *tomo-suzume* by "companion sparrows," i.e., sparrows flying in flocks. In the present connection, however, this is less likely to have been the poet's meaning.

† *Abu* generally means the "horsefly." But another smaller insect if also so called,—apparently a species of bee, which hums and is fond of hovering over flowers.

‡ Bird-fanciers catch toads, in order to fatten them up and use their skins to make pouches of, or they sell the flesh of the creatures themselves as medicine. The kindly poet wishes this toad to escape such a fate.

i.e., "Pluck off the wings of a red dragon-fly, and you have a Cayenne pepper-pod." But Bashō reproved him for so cruel a fancy, and corrected the verse thus:—

35-B *Tō-garashi*

Hane wo tsuketara

Aka-tombo

i.e., "Add wings to a Cayenne pepper-pod, and you have a red dragon-fly."

His ardent love of all sentient beings and even of inanimate nature, especially of flowers, showed itself further in a minute observation of natural objects and their ways, and this became a characteristic of the whole later epigrammatic school, moulded as it was by his influence. Doubtless an element of weakness as well as of strength was contained herein; for the perpetual observation of small natural details encouraged a mode of thought prone to dwell on the surface of the visible world, while neglecting the depths and heights of human nature. This has always been a weak point in the intellectual armour of the Far-Eastern nations:—they have never fully realised that "the proper study of mankind is man," and accordingly their art and philosophy alike have remained on a comparatively lower plane.

The purity of Bashō's life—a thing far from common in the Japan of those days—was patent to the world. But he was no prude. On one occasion, at a country inn in the North, he found himself in the room next to that where slept, or rather chattered, two unhappy girls;—courtesans. They were bound on a pilgrimage to Ise, in atonement for their ill-spent lives, and the man-servant who had accompanied them so far was to return from that post-station, leaving them to pursue their long

journey alone. Next morning, noticing the priestly garb of their neighbour and of his companion, they begged to be allowed to journey part of the way in the company of the holy men, or, if that were asking too much, at least in sight of them. This Bashō excused himself from; but he spoke kindly, assuring the girls of the divine care for wayfarers, even such as they. The epigram which he then composed has remained famous:—

36 *Hitotsu-ya ni*

Yūjo mo netari

Hagi to tsuki

The literal interpretation of these words is "Courtesans [and I] slept in the same house,—the lespedeza and the moon." The meaning is that "Occasion will make the greatest strangers companions,—as the moon in heaven and the lespedeza blossom on earth, as priests vowed to a life of sanctity and girls fated to a life of shame. The happier should not altogether condemn or disown the less fortunate, no, not even the guilty, who may often be more sinned against than sinning."

Another of Bashō's marked characteristics was a contempt for shams and for triviality of every kind. True, he could not altogether free himself from the literary conventions of his time and nation; yet he did so to a considerable degree. It was noticed that, of his many thousands of epigrams, not one dealt with Mount Fuji, or with the cherry-blossoms of Yoshino, or with the pine-clad islets of Matsushima,—subjects which custom had, in a manner, imposed on all Japanese writers of verse. Moreover, Yoshino had been one of his favourite haunts, and Fuji of course a familiar friend on tramps innumerable. He even made a long journey (which was more

than the majority of rhymesters did) to see Matsushima with his own eyes; but when he had seen it, he confessed that all that could be said on the subject had been said already, and therefore would not write, having nothing new to tell.

To the so-called rules of composition he paid little heed,—so little in fact that his followers, themselves anxious for rules to guide their own practice, had to allow that their teacher stood outside the rules. He appears to have instinctively felt the absurdity of all the grave legislation which there had been for such little cockle-shells of verse; but actual revolt was as foreign to the Zen spirit in artistic matters as in social or political. Bashō's theory and practice were resumed in the four words 不易流行 *fu-eki ryū-kō*, which may be freely rendered as "unchanging truth in fleeting form," that is, the matter must be such as has permanent interest, the manner must be that of the writer's age,—as good a definition as could perhaps be given of a classic. Truth, he said, has ever been considered "the marrow of style," and he defined truth of style as consisting in repose and in simplicity. Again, "In composing, compose not overmuch:—you will lose genuineness. Let your epigrams spring from the heart rather than from art." And to a correspondent he wrote, "Your zeal for epigram is good news. But epigrams from the heart are more important than erudition. Many men there are who can turn a phrase; there are few who observe the heart's rules." Or take such utterances as the following:—"Style should be natural, with a graceful turn. Ingenuity and the search after what is strange are less to be recommended..... Follow nature, and constantly turn to

See Keene
World Within
p. 136
& Hammit
(Simplicity)

nature..... Let your epigrams resemble a willow-branch struck by a light shower, and sometimes waving in the breeze." Furthermore, he never wearied of impressing on his pupils that they should lead the poetic life, for that then the words of their poems would flow spontaneously; and it was observed that he rarely, if ever, discoursed on art alone, but constantly brought in the ethical element, for which above all he really cared, poetry being to him a means rather than an end. Accordingly, as already noticed, he paid little heed to traditional rules. Even prosody counted for little in his practice. Though no author had Japanese prosody—such as it is—in more perfect command, none offers so many examples of rhythm broken by redundant syllables, doubtless because his instinct told him that the poetic form current in his day and nation was unreasonably short, and because he therefore preferred breaking through the form to sacrificing the sense. The following may serve as one instance among many:—

(37)

Kare-eda ni

Karasu no tomari-keri

Aki no kure

The end of autumn, and some rooks
Are perched upon a withered branch

The second line has nine syllables instead of the regular seven; but it would be impossible to convey more forcibly in one brief phrase the idea of autumnal desolation, and that was all that Bashō cared for. This was an "epigram" in the literal sense of the word, having been inscribed on a sketch of three crows huddling on a leafless branch. Other examples of lines with super-

fluous syllables will be found in the little anthology at the end of this paper. The Japanese have never been sticklers for prosodial accuracy; but Bashō allowed himself an unusual latitude.

Bashō's health, always delicate, seems to have been worn out by his constant wanderings, which exposed him to many hardships. He died at the age of fifty, while on the road as usual, busy spreading his ideas, ethical and poetical. He had been entertained at Ōsaka at the house of the poetess Sono-Jo, where some mushrooms poisoned him. A minute account has been preserved of his last days. He lingered for a fortnight, his chief pupils gathering round him and nursing him with filial care. When it became evident that no hope remained, they requested him to compose a death-bed stanza, according to the universal custom of Japanese poets. But he refused, being unwilling to sanction by his example a practice which he thought led to vanity and deceit, for that insincere persons were wont to get their so-called death-bed poems ready long beforehand, wherewith to cheat the world at their last hour. Nevertheless, next morning, he called two of the watchers to his bedside, and said, "Last night, while I lay sleepless, the following stanza came into my mind:—

(38)

Tabi ni yamite

Yume wa kare-no mo

Kake-mawaru

Ta'en ill while journeying, I dreamt
I wandered o'er a withered moor.

"Neither is this a death-bed stanza, nor is it not one.
I blame myself for being still attached to my lifelong

pursuit of poetry at this moment, when face to face with the great change from life to death."

His state grew more and more critical. On the 27th November, his favourite disciple Kikaku arrived. The interview affected both to tears. Nevertheless, on the next day, Bashō was still able to be moved to laughter by some trivial occurrence which suggested comic verses to one of the party; so they took to composing turn and turn about, in order to amuse him. On the 28th, out of his great love of cleanliness, he insisted on taking a bath, after which he sat up in bed with his chief pupils facing him, and the others ranged in a row on either side, when one of them took down his last will and testament in writing. He himself penned a letter to his old home, sent verbal messages to various pupils, charged those present to forgive one whom, for a grave offence, they had ostracised from their company, then folding his hands in prayer, recited the Buddhist sutra of the Goddess of Mercy ("*Kwannon Kyō*"), and sank back dead as if asleep. He was buried in the temple graveyard of Gichūji, by the shores of Lake Biwa, on—as it is specially recorded—a beautiful day in the Indian summer, the 30th November, 1694, over three hundred mourners attending. The catalogue of the possessions which he left behind is recorded too,—one image of Shaka Muni, one copper bowl, one cape, one wooden ink-box, and so on, ending with a few books and scrolls.

Such, sketched in barest outline, was the career of this amiable and accomplished man, whom some students of his life and works might perhaps feel inclined to term the Japanese Wordsworth. Of course it would not do to press the comparison closely. Bashō was not born under

the same lucky star as Wordsworth. He inherited a language incomparably inferior as a vehicle for poetry, and was restricted to a single form of verse, and that the poorest. From this cause, if from no other, his poetical performance may no more be ranked with Wordsworth's than Skiddaw may be ranked with Fuji. Nevertheless, he succeeded in regenerating the poetic taste of his day. His knowledge of nature and his sympathy with nature were at least as intimate as Wordsworth's, and his sympathy with all sorts and conditions of men was far more intimate; for he never isolated himself from his kind, but lived cheerfully in the world, though not of the world. Accordingly, his contemporaries received from him a moral no less than a literary influence; he embodied for them the Zen form of Buddhism. This subject—the Zen doctrine and its influence in China and Japan—is one that has never yet been treated as it deserves, and it is impossible here to treat it parenthetically. At least so much will perhaps have been gathered from the foregoing,—that the Zen philosophy, or religion, or whatever it may best be termed, is a system in which the pessimism of original Buddhism is softened by wise concessions to common sense and to the needs and limitations of common life, in which asceticism of the body is exchanged for a sort of mental detachment not inconsistent with the calls of social intercourse, in which, while the essential vanity of all earthly pursuits is still recognised, some of those which appeal most strongly to the cultivated human mind, namely the various branches of art, are welcomed to an honoured place in the plan of life, because they may be availed of as a means for passing to yet higher spheres

of thought and conduct. The word *Zen* is a contraction of the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, "contemplation." The early votaries of the sect used to pass their time in contemplation or abstraction. Of some it is related that they sat for years gazing at a wall, scarcely even thinking any more, but in a state betwixt rapture and unconsciousness. Experience, however, showed that mankind was not served by such unnatural excesses, and that the cultivation of harmless pursuits was a preferable mental anodyne. Of course they were never meant to be more than an anodyne. They were to be what the Japanese Buddhists term a *hōben*, a word not susceptible of literal translation into English, and which has most erroneously been translated as "pious fraud." The *hōben* is rather a way, a means, an instrument. The parables of the New Testament, for instance, are *hōben*,—stories not literally true, but useful though fictitious, because pointing the way to truth. In its modern form, the Zen creed had become essentially tolerant and cheery. Under its influence such virtues as moderation, contentment, simplicity, kindliness naturally flourished, together with that sobriety and good taste which we have all learnt to admire in the exquisite art of "Old Japan." Its danger was a tendency to degenerate into, hedonism. We have already seen that some of its earlier professors studied simplicity less as a virtue than as the easiest road to pleasure, and especially to individual freedom in society as then constituted.

There is a point often incidentally touched on in the preceding pages, which may seem particularly strange to anyone unacquainted with the manner in which the arts are cultivated in Japan, namely, the great number of disciples who gathered around Bashō, followed him about,

tended him. Bashō, in fact, is commonly said to have had three thousand disciples. Another account says one thousand, of whom two hundred principal ones. The names of about one hundred are still familiar to educated persons. Yet he had laboured for little over ten years. Similar phenomena meet us in the careers of other poets before and since, and of professors of various arts. The explanation of this circumstance is rooted in one of the fundamental doctrines of Chinese philosophy, as taught by Confucius and developed more particularly by Mencius,—the doctrine of the essential goodness of human nature. The prominence given to this doctrine leads to an extravagantly high opinion of the value of education; for a mind essentially good will of course require but right training to attain to something very like perfection. Hence also, by analogy, the power attributed to education of working, not moral marvels only, but intellectual. Our Western saying that *Poeta nascitur, non fit* springs from an entirely different mental soil. Here it is held that every one can become a painter, every one can become a poet, just as every one can learn to read and write and to behave himself. To a certain extent this is true. What renders it doubly true in the Far-East is the absence of real genius,—as we Westerns understand genius,—so that the interval between different degrees of merit is less than with us. In this manner, racial disposition, strengthened by a congenial doctrine and its attendant practice, accounts for the enormous number of persons in China and Japan who can paint, poetise, and so on, after a quite respectable fashion. Mediocrity does not displease here, which is fortunate, seeing that the highest excellence is wanting. At the same time, it must be

granted that the immense spread of the cultivation of various arts has tended still further to debase the average standard. Hundreds of so-called epigrams, in particular, call to mind nothing so much as the performance of a poor amateur with a poor kodak.

Fortunately, the very worst performers rarely walk quite alone, the usual plan being for the teacher to touch up his pupils' productions before they are allowed to circulate. For centuries past, in every branch of art, a whole class of professional or semi-professional persons, furnished with diplomas and ranged in a hierarchy of gradually ascending excellence, has made a livelihood by polishing the unskilful efforts of amateurs. As such teachers of the poetic art place particular marks against the words needing emendation or calling for special praise, they are termed "markers" (*tensha*), and many have a bad reputation for avarice and corruption. Bashō was no friend to the "markers." His expression of opinion on the amateurs of his day, given in a letter to a friend, is characteristic. He divides epigrammatists into three classes, namely: I. Those who spend their lives wrangling with professional "markers" over the correctness of their diction. Even these, he remarks with his usual kindness and perhaps a little touch of irony, do better than if they were to give themselves up to evil courses; for their innocent folly helps in any case to support the "marker," his wife, his children, and his landlord. II. Rich men who take up epigram-writing as an amusement, caring little whether the "marker" gives them good marks or bad. These resemble children playing at cards. Their time is at least better thus spent than in gossip. Their money and

patronage, likewise, not only support the "marker" class, but do really to some extent help forward the cause of true estheticism. III. Those who study poetry genuinely, devote to it all their strength, and employ it as a means to enter on the true "way," that is, on a philosophical and ethical life. Of these last, he concluded, there could scarcely be ten in the whole empire. Evidently, Bashō shared in no delusions as to the innate goodness or cleverness of men in general. But he did his best towards helping as many as possible to be better and to strive after a better esthetic taste, and he wisely abstained from discouraging well-meant effort, however feeble. His philosophy was truly practical,—humanitarian without fuss. He was the mildest, the least revolutionary of reformers.

IV.

In the preliminary studies for this paper, notes were taken for the biography and characterisation of each of the leading epigrammatists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Independence and eccentricity having always been prominent traits of the class, many of these epigrammatists are the subjects of interesting anecdotes. At least one of them, Onitsura, was a truly remarkable man, almost the peer of Bashō himself, whose friend and contemporary he was, though he survived to the year 1738. But the foregoing account of Bashō has run to such lengths that his successors must be dealt with summarily, before passing on to some concluding remarks of a miscellaneous nature.

Bashō's two most eminent disciples—Kikaku and Ransetsu—have already been mentioned. These, with eight more, named respectively Kyorai, Jōsō, Kyoroku, Shikō, Yaha, Kokushi, Etsujin, and Sampū, are known collectively as the *Jit-tetsu* (十哲),—a title signifying not exactly the "Ten Sages" nor yet exactly the "Ten Wits," but something between the two. Most of these died early in the eighteenth century. Though none came up to Bashō's standard of moral philosophy, their lives testified in many ways to the effect of his teaching, and many of their epigrams deserve to be placed on a par with his. In fact, these ten men—and notably the first four on the list—seem often to realise absolute perfection in this particular style, conveying through a mere pin-point of expression a whole picture to the mind. Examples of their compositions will be found at the end of this essay. Kikaku, though too independent and hasty to copy even Bashō, was himself copied by numberless pupils and admirers, forming the *Edo-Za* or "Yedo School," which subsists to the present day. Ransetsu also left a school, named after him the *Setsu-Mon*. Other schools, all traceable to Bashō, but tinged with local peculiarities, arose on the shores of that beautiful Lake Biwa where the master had spent so many happy days, at Kyōtō, in the provinces of Mino and Owari, at Ise, and in the North, in fact almost all over the Main Island of Japan; and literary history has preserved careful genealogical records of the succession in each, and of their occasional complicated interminglings.

It would seem that at first, that is, during the generation that lived from about 1720 to 1750, a marked decline in the standard of epigrammatic excellence took place.

A vulgar variety was evolved, wherein one person composed the first five syllables, another the last twelve. This, which was known as *Kammuri-zuke*, formed the very furthest point to which the disintegration of Japanese verse was carried. Sometimes people turned the making of epigrams into a kind of lottery, in which the winner gained a dollar, or they employed it as a vehicle for riddles and for caricatures of proverbs.

A second bloom of the true epigram occurred in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when names meet us not unworthy of comparison with any of those that had adorned an earlier age. Yokoi Yayū, for example, was a born versifier. He went so far as to hold that all children's speech falls naturally into sets of five, seven, and five syllables. Because he himself had "lisp'd in numbers," he assumed that others did the like. In later life, he became still better known as a writer of what is called *Haibun*, that is, epigrammatic prose, and in society he was idolised as a universal genius, an "admirable Crichton,"—the best bowman, horseman, swordsman of his day. When rebuked by his feudal superior for wasting time on the composition of epigrams, he proved to the latter, by pouring them out extempore, that he wasted no time on them, for the simple reason that they cost him neither thought nor trouble; and he was known throughout his clan as the most loyal of retainers, the most faithful of friends, and—unusual combination—the most economical of householders.

The greatest epigrammatist of the silver age (circa 1770–80) was Buson, the bold painter whose lifelike delineations of tigers and other striking objects adorn some of the Kyōto temples. It may be said of him, as

of Bashō's two greatest pupils, that he carried the art *as* art up to perfection point. His technique is unsurpassed:—he literally paints with words, and how few words! See, for example, Nos. 175, 179, *et seq.*,—each versicle a perfect little cameo, sometimes of beauty, sometimes of humour. The tradition was carried on by Issa (1763–1827), a farmer of Shinshū, noted for eccentricity and childlike simplicity, and for kindness which went so far that he refused even to kill a flea. One of his verses expresses, or rather indicates, the spirit of the Zen teaching more perfectly perhaps than any by other authors:—

(39)

Tsuyu no yo no

Tsuyu no yo nagara

Sari nagara

Granted this dewdrop world is but

A dewdrop world,—this granted, yet.....

that is, "Granted that all phenomena are transitory and valueless, like the dew that forthwith dries up and vanishes, still, when all is said and done, we cannot quite afford to throw life and its joys away. There is some element of permanence in it yet, though it were hard to define this element precisely."—The words in the original are as pretty as the thought itself is graceful and true.

Some of the foremost epigrammatists were women:—The names of Mitsu-Jo (17th century), her pupil Sono-Jo (died 1726), Chigetsu-ni (died 1706), Shūshiki (died 1725), and above all Kaga-no-Chiyo (died 1775), are known to all students of Japanese poetry. One of Chiyo's most celebrated epigrams has already been given,—

that describing the convolvuli which twined about the well. But her preëminent superiority, alike in diction, in nimble-wittedness, and in depth of thought and feeling, claims attention, even where so many famous names have to be passed over in silence. In no other Japanese verse, perhaps, is the sound a more perfect echo to the sense than in the following from her pen. The occasion of it is thus related. A celebrated professor of the art, Rogenbō, who happened to pass through the remote northern town where she lived as a girl, and who was applied to by her for instruction, gave her the cuckoo as a theme, but was rude enough to pay no heed to her efforts and to fall asleep till dawn. She sat there patiently all night, and when the master at length opened his eyes, greeted him with the following:—

(40)

Hototogisu
Hototogisu tote
Ake ni keri

which made him clap his hands and aver that she needed no teacher, being already passed mistress of the art. Rendered into English, the lines merely mean "Day has dawned to [the sound of] 'cuckoo!' 'cuckoo!'" But the Japanese scholar will realise the mastery necessary to put together those six seemingly simple words.

This poetess's married life was summarised in three epigrams. The first

(41)

*Shibukaro * ka*
Shiranedo kaki no
Hatsu-chigiri

* Short *o* for long *ō* on account of the metre.

which was presented by her to her husband on their wedding-day, defies translation into English owing to its terseness. The meaning, however, is clear. The poetess compares her marriage vows to a persimmon. No one can tell whether a persimmon be astringent or not until he bites into it, nor can happiness in wedlock be assured till trial of it has been made. Chiyo had no illusions; but she bore her griefs with fortitude. Her elegy for her husband, who died early, was

(42)

Okite mitsu
Nete mitsu kaya no
Hirosa kana

Whether I lay me down or wake,
How large seems the mosquito-net!

that is, "The very sight of my widowed couch, when I retire to rest and when I wake again in the morning, reminds me of my loss and of my solitude." But she was to be still further bereft. Perhaps the reader, with his mind now better attuned to the Japanese style, will grasp the sad purport of the last epigram of the three:—

(43)

*Tombo-tori **
Kyō wa dokora ye
Itta yara

Where may he have gone off to-day,—
The hunter after dragon-flies?

Her little boy, too, had died, the bright lad who used to run after dragon-flies in the sunshine. To what un-

* Another reading gives *Tombo-tsuri*. If we accept it, the second line of the English must run thus, "The fisherman for dragon-flies." Japanese children do, as a matter of fact, often catch these insects with toy lines and hooks.

known land has he wandered off?—Surely this tiny composition were almost worthy a place in the Greek Anthology, so true is it to nature, so perfectly simple, and yet saying, or at least indicating all that can be said so fully that any word added would be superfluous. But to finish this thumb-nail sketch of Chiyo's mind, the humorous side, which in her, as in so many others, jostled the pathetic, claims a moment's notice. When left alone in the world as a woman of a certain age, she made a living by teaching of the poetic art, and it is related that her figure became unwieldy. One day, as she was quitting the mansion of a noble personage who had entertained her at dinner, the servant-girls, astonished to find that the pretty name of Chiyo belonged to a fat, plain, middle-aged woman, began tittering in the passage behind her. Instantly the poetess wheeled round, and admonished her pert critics in the following impromptu verse:—

(44)

*Hito-kakae
Aredo yanagi wa
Yanagi kana*

A willow may an armful be,
But 'tis a willow all the same.

That is, "I may be fat, but I am a lady, and expect to be treated as one,"—the willow-tree, with its slender gracefulness, being of course symbolical of womanhood.

V

With the generation which passed away about 1780, the art of composing epigrams was gradually lost. The

schools which endeavoured to preserve the old manner became fossilised, while out-of-doors the form of the epigram fell into vulgar hands which busied themselves inditing what are termed, from the name of their inventor, *Senryū* (died 1790),—verses which have this in common with the epigram, that they consist of seventeen syllables, but which are vulgar, often even gross, in matter, and equally low in diction. No need to treat here either of them or of a revival—the so-called *Shinpa*—which is in progress in our own day. This last phase cannot well be judged till more of its course shall have been run. Nevertheless, from the specimens to be found in almost every newspaper, the critic will hesitate to attribute to it much importance. It seems rather that all that can be said within the narrow limits set by such Lilliputian versicles, or semi-versicles, has been said long ago, and that we already stand at a sufficient distance of time from the best and most representative epigrammatists to be able to view their productions as a whole.

Notice, in passing, the curious order in which the phases of the Japanese epigram succeeded each other:—first, a frivolous stage; then the appearance of a reformer who put thought and feeling into the empty shell; then a stage of, so to say, art for art's sake; lastly, fossilisation. European precedents would have led us to expect a certain sturdy and simple genuineness at the beginning, extravagance at the end. But the epigram is not the only Japanese art which shows the exactly reversed sequence. The tea ceremonies offer another marked instance; for there, too, luxury and bad taste ran riot at the beginning, followed by Sen-no-Rikyū's reform in the direction of simplicity, and ending in the fossilisation of

that simplicity. This peculiarity of the Japanese esthetic development must be left to others to explain. More appropriate to the subject of the present essay is it to enquire:—what is the value of the Japanese epigram as literature? Doubtless a foreigner unaided might well distrust his ability to answer this question. But the native commentators—such men as Aeba Kōson, one of the leading *littérateurs* of the present day, and Shiki, and Kōyō Sanjin—help us over this difficulty. Not only have they compiled useful anthologies, and written books explaining the actual text of considerable numbers of famous epigrams; some of their editions indicate the classic sources, both Japanese and Chinese, from which Bashō drew, and thus enable us to appreciate his erudition. One on Buson's epigrams gives the opinions of a whole circle of his modern admirers on most points, while others supply us with biographies, anecdotes, etc., all helping not only to elucidate an enigmatical style, but to fill in the picture of a vanished age.

But while the native commentators are indispensable helps to a comprehension of the subject, it may be doubted whether any European student could bring himself to adopt their estimates. Modern Japanese critics do not intend that their national literature shall yield the palm to that of any other land. Accordingly, they have set themselves to discover Japanese Shakespeares, Japanese Scotts, Japanese Victor Hugos, etc., etc., etc.* In fact, they

* These lines had scarcely been penned, when a newspaper appeared announcing, among other interesting items, the death of "the Japanese Rousseau," Mr. Nakae Tokusuke. As this gentleman was a violent atheist and materialist (his latest work bore the title "Neither God nor Soul"), the nature of his intellectual kinship to the author of "Le Vicaire Savoyard" seems somewhat problematical. *Ex uno disce omnes.*

are busy turning all their geese into swans, with the help of the technicalities of European art criticism,—the "subjective," the "objective," and all the rest of the jargon. They inform us that Bashō's verse was a mirror reflecting the universe within a frame of seventeen syllables. They discover a criticism of life—the whole Zen philosophy in fact—in that single stanza of his on the old pond and the frog jumping into the water, which has been quoted on page 279; and in the next specimen (by one of the "Ten Wits") they admire "that absolute transparency and truth to nature which are of the essence of the epigram:—"

(45)

*Suzushisa ya
En yori ashi wo
Bura-sageru*

Oh! how cool, dangling one's legs over the verandah!

Similarly do they judge in countless other cases.

At the same time, and though nothing would be easier than to make fun of the extravagantly laudatory critics, and even of the epigrammatists themselves, to do so would surely prove little but that the foreign investigator's own critical sense was deficient, but in another direction. For is he not called on to treat his subject sympathetically, or, as Pope puts it, to

"read each work of wit
With the same spirit that its author writ?"

And is this not more than ever necessary in the case of any Oriental literary product, because the conditions under which it came into existence differ *toto caelo* from those of our own literature?

The leg-dangling epigram must of course, be given up,

and with it scores and hundreds of "the baser sort,"—trivialities traceable to the unhappy assumption that every one is capable of writing verse. But when the European critic has made all reasonable deductions, when he has eliminated the prosings and the quibbles and the vulgarities of those poetasters whom Japanese tolerance admits to a niche in the national temple of fame, he is yet left with a remnant wherein many tiny prettinesses sparkle. If he cannot here discover intact that mirror reflecting the universe of which the Japanese commentators speak, he does find thousands of fragments of shattered glass, among which some of shattered crystal, each reflecting at a different angle some minute corner of a scene, a brief note of some fact in nature, or maybe an indication of some sentiment or fancy. The Japanese epigram at its best is a loop-hole opened for an instant on some little natural fact, some incident of daily life. It is a momentary flash, a smile half-formed, a sigh suppressed almost before it becomes audible. Take, for instance, Bashō's lines composed on one of Japan's most famous battle-fields, now a desolate moor:—

(46)

Natsu-gusa ya

Tsuwa-mono-domo no

Yume no ato

Haply the summer-grasses are

A relic of the warriors' dream.

That is, "Of the warriors' dream of power and glory, nought remains but the high grasses waving o'er the moor that is their tomb." Or this other, already quoted at the beginning of the present paper, and which is typical of the art at its highest point of perfection:—

A single river, stretching far

Across the moorland swathed in snow.

Such shorthand verses, if so they may be called, spring from the same mental soil as that on which stand many Japanese artists, who have—not painted, or even sketched,—but hinted at, a flight of birds, a sea-coast, a pine-tree, with but two or three strokes of the brush. The result is not great, perhaps; but we wonder at the production, with such scanty means, of any result at all; and we cannot refrain from wishing that the man who performed these feats in little had tried his skill on a larger canvas. Practically, the classical or semi-classical poets of Japan, for over a thousand years past, have confined themselves to pieces of 31 syllables or of 17, whereas even our sonnet, which we look on as a trifle, has 140, and our system of stanzas strung together enables us to continue indefinitely till the whole of a complex train of thought has been brought before the mind. But it may well be that, even had Europe been available as a model, no such sustained style would have had much chance of permanently establishing itself in Japan. When an artist—when whole generations of artists have produced one sort of thing, it must always remain extremely doubtful whether, after all, they could have produced another. The tendency to ultra-brevity is too persistent a characteristic of Japanese esthetics to be accidental in any given case. Remember that there was no want of longer models. Such models were at hand in Chinese poetry; there were a few, as we have seen, even in the ancient poetry of Japan itself. But somehow these models failed to attract.

Granting, therefore, as a sober judgment forces us to

do, that Japanese poems are but slight efforts,—not pearls, but only tiny beads,—a critical estimate of Bashō, and of the Japanese epigrammatists generally, reduces itself to two points:—I. What is each individual tiny bead worth? and II. Are there enough of these beads, and are they varied enough, to make up a valuable sum total? The foregoing essay will, it is hoped, have put the reader in the way of forming his own opinion on both these issues. Possibly he may deem that the nearest English analogues of the molecules of description, fancy, or morality left us by the best Japanese epigrammatists are such Tennysonian half-stanzas as

“A single church below the hill
Is pealing, folded in the mist.”

“The last red leaf is whirl’d away,
The rooks are blown about the skies.”

“But in my spirit will I dwell,
And dream my dream, and hold it true.”

The difference between the two cases—and doubtless it is a vital difference—lies in this, that the Japanese production is isolated, fragmentary, whereas the European forms part of a grand organic whole. On the one side, “In Memoriam” and whole “Palaces of Art;” on the other, a litter of single bricks, half-bricks in fact. The investigator of Japanese literature, for all that his task is so arduous, has not the satisfaction to be rewarded by the unearthing of any sublime or epoch-making monuments. He must take sundry small finds, and be thankful. He is in the position of a botanist whose specialty should be mosses or lichens, and who therefore could not hope to delight either himself or the public with any

grand discoveries in the way of new flowers or fruits. Still, a careful monograph on a new moss would possess a certain interest and value. The interest of such an enquiry as that here undertaken lies in the fact that, of all the divisions of Japanese poetry, the epigram is the most thoroughly popular, national, therefore characteristic. By the investigator of the Japanese mind it can be studied almost as the subject-matter of a natural science can be studied, and it yields as its result a picture of the national character. We see this character at work while it is, so to say, at play:—we see it ingenious, witty, good-natured, much addicted to punning and to tomfoolery; we see it fanciful but not imaginative, clever but not profound; we see it joking on the gravest subjects; we see it taking life easily and trifles seriously; we see its minute observation of detail, its endless patience in accumulating materials, together with its incapacity for building with them; we see its knack for hinting rather than describing,—a knack which, when it becomes self-conscious, degenerates into a trick and is often carried past the limit of obscurity, not to say absurdity, as when a so-called drawing is so sketchy that the beholder cannot, with the best will in the world, tell whether what he is invited to look at be a rock or a bit of pine-bark. We see likewise the essentially democratic spirit of the nation, no less in the pell-mell choice or no choice of subjects, than in the manner in which all classes joined in the fun. We see that comparative weakness of the feeling for colour which characterises Japanese art reappearing here as a want of feeling for rhyme and rhythm and stanzaic arrangement, for all, in fact, that goes to

make up the colour of verse. Lastly,—and some may deem this the most curious feature of all,—we find a way of looking at nature which recalls the method of our own modern water-colour artists, and which thus constitutes a point of likeness and sympathy between ourselves and a vanished Japanese world of long ago. What, for instance, could be more absolutely modern than this vignette of Bashō's?—

(47)

Tombō ya

Tori-tsuki-kaneshi

Kusa no ue

A stem of grass, whereon in vain
A dragon-fly essayed to light!

Anyone strolling along a country lane at the proper season may verify for himself this minute fact in natural history, as some grass-stalks are too slender to afford foothold even to a dragon-fly. May not the Japanese epigram itself remind us of these frail objects? It appears, now as a tiny herb or flower on our path, now as some brilliant insect which hovers for a moment, and, ere we have well noticed it, flits away out of sight and memory.

ADDITIONAL SELECT EPIGRAMS.

In order to put the reader in touch with native taste, the choice of all the epigrams quoted in the present essay has been guided by native standards, such being preferred as have gained the admiration of the Japanese themselves. The translation aims, not only at being literal, but at preserving the spirit of each original,—poetical where it is poetical, prosaic (e.g. No. 61) where it is prosaic. The different poets are placed, as far as possible, in chronological order. The numerous specimens of Bashō's work are likewise so arranged.

EARLY EPIGRAMMATISTS.

(48)

*Yo ni furu wa
Sara ni shigure no
Yadori kana*

(Sōgi, 1421-1502)

Ah! yes, my passage through the world
Is a mere shelter from a shower.

The poet's death song. He compares brief human life to a momentary shelter. *Furu* contains a pun on "passing through" (the world) and "raining."

(49)

*Tsuki ni e wo
Sashitaraba yoki
Uchiwa kana*

(Sōkan)

Add but a handle to the moon,
And what a pretty fan it makes!

(50)

*Cha no mizu no
Ware to futa suru
Kōri kana*

(Sōkan, 1465-1554)

Behold the water for the tea
Make for itself a lid of ice!

312

Bashō and the Japanese Epigram.

(51)

*Rakkwa eda ni
Kaeru to mireba
Kochō kana*

(Arakida Moritake, 1472-1549)

Fall'n flow'r returning to the branch,—
Behold! it is a butterfly.

i.e. For a moment I fancied it to be a fallen petal flying back, by some miracle, to its native branch. But lo! it was a butterfly.

(52)

*Samidare ni
Hi no ame majiru
Hotaru kana*

(Arakida Moritake)

Oh! fireflies, what a fiery rain
Commingle with the summer shower!

(53)

*Asagao ni
Kyō wa miyuran
Waga yo kana*

(Arakida Moritake)

Ah! yes, as a convolvulus
To-day my lifetime will appear.

The poet's death song. Life is fleeting as the convolvulus, which blooms in the morning (*asa*) only to wither at eve. What the translation renders by "my lifetime" is literally "my world."

(54)

*Kaze kezuru
Yanagi ya kishi no
Hitai-gami*

(Arakida Moritake)

The willows which the breezes comb,
Are they the forelock of the bank?

Early Epigrammatists.

313

The poet likens the catkins of the willow to a lady's tresses, and the wind to a comb. The "bank" is the bank of the river on which the willow-trees are growing. The modern critic Aeba Kōson considers this artificial verse highly characteristic of its composer.

(55)
Chi-nomi-ko ni
Yo wo watashitaru
Shiroasu' kana

(Shōhaku, 1444-1527)

Oh! the December in which the heritage is handed on
to a suckling!

This is a lament on the death of a man poor and in difficulties, who has left an infant heir. The end of the year is the season when debts and bills must be paid, and when poverty consequently presses hardest.

(56)
Nakazareba
Koroshite shimae
Hototogisu

Nobunaga.

The cuckoo,—kill it, if it sing not.

(57)
Nakazareba
Nakashite mishō
Hototogisu

Hideyoshi.

The cuckoo,—I will show it how to sing, if it sing not.

(58)
Nakazareba
Naku made matō
Hototogisu

Ieyasu.

The cuckoo,—I will wait till it sings, if it sing not.

314

Bashō and the Japanese Epigram.

These three epigrams, which have passed into household words, are not specially well-written, neither are they the composition of the three celebrated rulers whose names they bear. They are sometimes attributed to Shōha, an epigrammatist who died in the year 1600, and who meant to paint, each with a single graphic touch, the characters of the three heroes of his day,—Nobunaga, impetuous and cruel; Hideyoshi, clever; Ieyasu, patient, because well-knowing that, as we say, "All comes to him who waits." The empire came to him, and remained in the hands of his descendants for over two and a half centuries.

(59)
Haru tatsu ya
Ni-hon medetaki
Kado no matsu

When spring comes, the two pine-trees [stand] by the
gate for luck.

(Saitō Tokugen, circa A.D. 1640.)

Or—for *ni-hon* contains a pun (二本 and 日本)—"When spring comes, the pine-trees by the gate bring luck to Japan,"—an allusion to the customary New Year decorations.

(60)
Manzai ya
Mau mo utau mo
Yoku no koto

(Baisei, 1611-1699)

Even the morris-dancers' steps
And songs spring from cupidity.

The desire for money rules all things, even what superficially looks like innocent mirth.

(61)
Masa-masa to
Imasu ga gotoshi
Tama-matsuri

(Kitamura Kigin, 1624-1711)

Serving the spirits of the dead
Exactly as if they were living.

These words are transcribed almost literally from a maxim in the "Confucian Analects."

(62)

*Naku ni sae**Warawaba ikani**Hototogisu*

(Mitsu-Jo, 1572-1647)

[So lovely] even in its cry,—

What were the cuckoo if it laughed?

Japanese, like English, employs the same word (*naku*, "to cry") for weeping and for the sounds uttered by birds and some other animals. Crying disfigures the countenance. If, then, the cuckoo enchants us even when it cries, what would not be the beauty of its smile or its laughter? A good example this of the conceits in which the epigrammatists before Bashō's reform took such delight.

(63)

*Chō karoshi**Koro wa kiru mono**Hitotsu kana*

(Koshun, 1650-1697)

Light goes the butterfly, what time

A single robe is all we don.

(64)

*Yo no akete**Hana ni hiraku ya**Jōdo-mon*

(Seibu, 1606-1678)

The daylight dawns, and, like a flower,

Open the gates of Paradise.

The poet's death song. *Jōdo*, literally, "the Pure Land," is one of the Buddhist heavens, fabled to exist in the West.

(65)

*Tsuki hana no**San-ku-me two ima**Shiru yo kana*

(Rippo, 1600-1669)

The moon, the flow'rs, ah! now's the time

To learn the third name of the sect.

The poet's death song. He alludes to the esthetic triad *tsuki hana yuki*, "the moon, the blossoms, and the snow," which are esteemed the loveliest things in nature. *Yuki*, "snow," however, is homonymous with *yuki*, "going," here taken in the sense of "dying"—it is not the snow, but death, which now comes to complete his experiences.

(66)

*Oranda no**Moji ga yokotau**Ama tsu kari*

(Nishiyama Sōin, 1605-1682)

The wild-geese in the firmament,—

These are Dutch letters sideways stretching.

The flight of the wild-geese athwart the sky suggests to the epigrammatist that outlandish method of communication practised by Europeans, who write across the page instead of up and down it, as the Chinese and Japanese consider natural. In those days any scrap of European writing would be the greatest rarity at the Japanese capital, and the mention of it in verse a daring novelty.

(67)

*Yo no naka ya**Chōchō tomare**Kaku mo are*

(Nishiyama Sōin)

Impossible to translate, owing to the punning insertion of two words which have no direct relation to the sense of the rest of the verse. The gist is: "The world is just what it is. It is an uncertain quantity. Don't take it—that is, don't take life—too seriously." Written across this

principal assertion, as it were, are the words *Chōchō tomare*, "Butterfly, alight!" Besides adding the ornament of a pun, this graceful image helps to reinforce the assertion of the flimsy, flighty character of human life.

(68)

Shira-tsuyu ya
Mu-fumbetsu naru
Oki-dokoro.

(Nishiyama Sōin)

Lacking in all discernment as
To where they light are the white dews.

This is considered one of the best compositions of the leader of the Dairin school. His admiration of nature is conveyed in the form of sportive blame:—instead of seeking out beautiful places, the dew shows so little discretion as to fall everywhere alike.

(69)

Natsu-yase to
Kotacte shinobu
Namida kana

(Nishiyama Sōin?)

Alas! the tears which she restrains,
Saying the heat has made her thin.

Hiding grief under a pretence of illness. This epigram has passed into a proverb.

(70)

Kaya-bara-ni
Oshi ya sutu-oku
Tsuyu no tama

(Sute-Jo, 1635-1698)

Pity the dewy pearl be thrown
Away upon the grassy moor!

The poetess Sute-Jo was born at Kayabara (the name means "grassy moor") in Tanba, where the Daimyō of the province visited her and composed this complimentary epigram, which includes puns on her name and the name of her birthplace. Over thirty of Sute-Jo's friends—all nuns—used to follow her about in her wanderings.

(71)

Yuki no asa
Ni no ji ni ni no ji no
Geta no ato

(Sute-Jo)

A snowy morning,—everywhere
The figure "2" left by the clogs.

This epigram—a perfect specimen in its way—was composed by the poetess at the early age of six. Every resident in Japan has seen snow or mud or sand thus marked with the Chinese numeral 二 "two," by the two underpieces of wood that support the clogs which are the commonest foot-gear among the townsfolk of this country.

(72)

Kado-matsu ya
Akido no tabi no
Ichiri-zuka

(Raizan, 1654-1716)

Literally, "The pine-trees by the gate [which are set up as New Year decorations] are mile-stones on the journey to the nether world."—Some one added the following second hemistich:

Medetaku mo ari
Medetaku mo nashi

i.e. "they are both lucky and unlucky,"—a lucky omen on account of their connection with the New Year rejoicings, an unlucky one because of their marking a stage on the way to death. The lines are popularly thus quoted as a thirty-one syllable verse, and are erroneously ascribed to the priest Ikkyū Oshō.

(73)

Ike nurumi
Koro to ya uwo no
Atama-domo

The season when the pond grows warm,
To judge from all the fishes' heads.

A panting summer's day, with the fishes' heads at the surface of the water, gasping for breath.

BAHSŌ AND HIS SCHOOL.

(74)

*Toshi kurenu
Kasa kite waraji
Haki-nagara*

(Bashō, 1644-1694)

The year has closed while still I wear
My sandals and my pilgrim's hat.

Written on one of his many pilgrimages.

(75)

*Yama-ji kite
Nani yori yukashi
Sunire-gusa*

(Bashō)

Coming this mountain way, no herb
Is lovelier than the violet.

The Japanese violet, which possesses no fragrance, is "the meanest flower that blows." Bashō evinces his love of lowly natural objects by singling it out for mention. According to one commentator, however, the lines are metaphorical:—Bashō having, to his joy, met a Buddhist anchorite in the depths of the forest, compares him to the violet which shuns the sunlight.

(76)

*Yoku mireba
Nazuna hana saku
Kakine kana*

(Bashō)

On looking carefully, behold
The caseweed flowering near the fence!

Another example of his appreciation of humble natural objects.

320

Bashō and the Japanese Epigram.

(77)

*Iza saraba
Yuki-mi ni korobu
Tokoro made*

(Bashō)

Well then, we'll off to see the snow,
Far as we can without a tumble.

— Elyth, how "ill we
tumble down."

(78)

*Hebi kuu to
Kikeba osoroshi
Kiji no koe*

(Bashō)

When told that it will snakes devour,
How frightful is the pheasant's voice!

This epigram has become proverbial for beauty marred by misconduct.

(79)

*Oki-yo oki-yo
Waga tomo ni sen
Nuru kochō*

(Bashō)

Awake! awake! I'll make of thee
My comrade, sleeping butterfly.

(80)

*Yagate shinu
Keshiki wa mizu
Semi no koe*

(Bashō)

Nothing in the cicada's voice
Gives token of a speedy death.

This was Bashō's parting word to one who visited him in his hut by Lake Biwa. The implied meaning seems to be that human life is short and uncertain, despite present joy in scenes of beauty.

Bashō.

321

(81)

*Tako-tsubo ya
Hakanaki yume wo
Natsu no tsuki*

(Bashō)

As literally as a play upon words will permit (*natsu*, "summer," from which *nasu*, "to do," is mentally supplied), this may be rendered, "Octopus pot, aye! and a brief dream while the summer moon [is shining]." The octopus pot is an earthenware vessel with a large opening, which is sunk in the sea. The octopus, deeming it a quiet retreat, crawls inside it, and is thus easily drawn up and caught. The creature's dream of happiness is short. How dreamy, too, is its whole scarcely conscious existence! Equally brief were the dream of one who should fall asleep on a moonlit night in summer, when the nights are at their shortest. There is an implied comparison with the evanescence of human life:—man himself is like a moonbeam, like a fleeting dream, like a creature only half-conscious.

(82)

*Omoshirōte
Yagate kanashiki
U-bune kana*

(Bashō)

Oh! cormorant fishing-boat so gay,
And then again so melancholy!

The cormorants start off gaily; but their mirth is changed to melancholy when the fish they have caught are forced from them by the fishermen who hold them in leash. This was composed in 1688, on passing through Gifu, which is still the locality where the curious method of fishing with the aid of tame cormorants may best be witnessed. See "Things Japanese," s.v. "Cormorant Fishing."

(83)

*Uki ware wo
Sabishigarase yo
Kanko-dori*

(Bashō)

Cuckoo! for melancholy me
Oh! make still deeper loneliness.

322

Bashō and the Japanese Epigram.

Composed on a rainy day in early summer, while Bashō was staying at Saga near Kyōto, in the house of one of his favourite disciples. What he means to express is his love of a gentle melancholy, and of leisure for communing with nature not intruded on by even his best-loved friends.

(84)

*Ara-umi ya
Sado ni yokotau
Ama-no-gawa*

(Bashō)

A rough sea, and the Milky Way
Stretching across to Sado's isle.

Composed on the coast opposite Sado one starry night, when the waves were running high and the loneliness of his pilgrimage oppressed his spirit.

(85)

*Hiya-kiya to
Kabe wo fumacte
Hiru-ne kana*

(Bashō)

Oh! those siestas, with my feet
Pressed fearsomely against the wall!

This verse and the next illustrate the poverty and simplicity of Bashō's mode of life. So fragile is the mud wall of his hut that he fears to break through it when pressing against it with his feet.

(86)

*Ik-ka mina
Tsue ni shiraga no
Haka-mairi*

(Bashō)

The household at the graves assembled,
White-haired, and leaning on their staves.

To visit the graves of ancestors at stated intervals is an act of piety prescribed by immemorial custom. We here see a whole family of aged persons assembled to do honour to those whom they themselves will soon follow to the other world. The picture is more solemn than any other that Bashō has left us.

(87)

*Kumo ori-ori
Hito wo yasumeru
Tsuki-mi kana*

(Bashō)

Oh! the moon-gazing where some clouds
From time to time repose the eye!

Even beauty is best appreciated when occasionally veiled.

(88)

*Meigetsu ni
Hana ka to miete
Wata-batake*

(Bashō)

In the bright moonlight what appeared
Like flowers is a cotton field.

What he took for a grove of lovely cherry-blossom is but a common cotton plantation after all. Unpoetical as the fact is, he states it because it is a fact.

(89)

*Yasu-yasu to
Idete isayon
Tsuki no kumo*

(Bashō)

Oh! clouds about the moon, from whence
She falters forth so debonnaire!

(90)

*Nagaki hi wo
Sazuri-taranu
Hibari kana*

(Bashō)

Oh! skylark for whose carolling
The livelong day sufficeth not!

(91)

*Hototogisu
Koe yokotau ya
Mizu no ue*

(Bashō)

Athwart the surface of the stream
There lieth stretched the cuckoo's voice.

The first redaction of this epigram was *Hito-koe no—E (江) ni yokotau ya—Hototogisu*. The translation is founded on both.

(92)

*Hi no michi ya
Aoi katamuku
Satsuki-ame*

(Bashō)

A rainy day in June, and yet
The sunflow'r bends to the sun's course.

(93)

*Tsuku kane no
Hibiku yō nari
Semi no koe*

(Bashō)

Like to the booming of a bell
When struck, is the cicada's voice.

Bashō.

325

(94)

Mizu-abura

Nakute neru yo ya

Mado no tsuki

(Bashō)

As, lacking oil, I lie abed
At night, the moon my window lights.

(95)

Kokono-tabi

Okite mo tsuki no

Nanatsu kana

(Bashō)

Despite that I have nine times risen,
'Tis but the fourth hour by the moon.

In Japanese, the "seventh" hour, their seven o'clock (old style) corresponding approximately to our 4 A.M. (see "Things Japanese," s. v. "Time"). The poet has risen repeatedly to gaze at the beautiful moon, but still the dawn comes not.

(96)

Mugi-meshi ni

Yatsururu koi ka

Neko no tsuna

(Bashō)

Is it hard fare, or is it love
That makes the cat's goodwife so lean?

The term *mugi-meshi*, here translated "hard fare," in order the better to indicate the sense of the verse, is literally "rice mixed with barley." This dish is considered poor eating as compared with rice pure and simple, and is therefore often resorted to by the lower classes for economy's sake.

326

Bashō and the Japanese Epigram.

(97)

Momiji ni wa

Taga oshie-keru

Sake no kan

(Kikaku, 1661-1707)

Who was it taught the maple-leaves
To heat the liquor in the bottle?

The allusion is to an old Chinese story—acted in another form on the Japanese stage—in which a fire is made of maple-leaves or twigs, to heat the *sake* for a carousal. It is related of this poet that at poetry meetings he was often drowsy from drink, but would wake suddenly and compose better verses than any of his competitors.

(98)

Ume ga ka ya

Tonari wa Ogyū

Sōemon

(Kikaku)

This more resembles an epigram, in the colloquial sense of that term, than any other of the Japanese "epigrams" quoted in the present collection. Kikaku, though afterwards famous as one of the "Ten Wits," was a mere lad when he composed it. He happened to live next door to no less a personage than the Confucianist Ogyū Sorai (Sōemon), the Dr. Johnson of his age and country. Most dwellers in a land where the proprieties, and above all erudition, were so highly honoured, would have trembled in his presence. Kikaku merely indited the above impertinent verse, which says that "The perfume of the plum-blossom (i.e. estheticism, as represented by himself) has for its neighbour one Ogyū Sōemon." The poetical diction of the first line, and the flat prose of the rest form a witty, but untranslatable, contrast.

(99)

Yari-kurete

Mata ya samushiro

Toshi no kure

(Kikaku)

For all my contriving, here I am again at the end of
the year with [nothing but] my strip of matting.

This poet's wild Bohemian life often caused him to be out-at-
elbows.

(100)

Kiraretaru

*Yume wa makoto ka
Nomi no ato*

(Kikaku)

Is my dream true? Am I cut down?
Or was I bitten by a flea?

(101)

Nikumarete

*Nagarōru hito
Fuyu no hai*

(Kikaku)

A man who is disliked, and who
Lives to old age,—a winter fly.

Disagreeable folks live longest.

(102)

Yū-suzumi

*Yoku zo otoko ni
Umare-keru*

(Kikaku)

Taking the cool at eve, I do
Rejoice that I was born a man.

Because men are—and more especially were in Old Japan—allowed
much greater freedom in the matter of *négligé* garments than is permitted
to the other sex.

(103)

Gwanjitsu ya

Harete suzume no

Mono-gatari

(Ransetsu, 1654–1707)

Aye! New Year's day, with a clear sky,
And conversation among the sparrows!

Bashō declared that, as an epigram for New Year's day, this could
not be improved upon, and modern critics endorse his judgment. Re-
member that the Japanese New Year, till the reform of the calendar in
1873, generally fell about the middle of February, when spring is really
in view. We in England place the birds' wedding on St. Valentine's
Day, 14th February.

(104)

Ume ichi-rin

Ich-rin hodo no

Atatakasa

(Ransetsu)

[Slowly] it mildens, as the plum
[Ventureth forth,] blossom by blossom.

The plum-blossom is the earliest of all the flowers of spring, coming
out, in fact, while the snow is still on the ground.—For *hodo*, some read
sutsu.

(105)

Hana ni kaze

Karoku kite fuke

Sake no awa

(Ransetsu)

Come, breeze, and lightly blow upon
The flowers,—bubbles in the wine!

Apparently the poet's request to the zephyr is that it shall at the
same time gently move the blossoms so as to spread their fragrance, and
waft to the other side of the cup the bubbles of the wine which he is
drinking.

(106)

Hyaku-giku soroe-keru ni:

On a chrysanthemum show (literally, on a hundred
chrysanthemums assembled).

*Ki-giku shira-giku**Sono hoka no na wa**Naku mogana*

(Ransetsu)

Yellow chrysanthemums, white chrysanthemums;—
Would there were no more names than these!

This verse, though irregular in metre, is considered a perfect specimen
of the epigrammatic style. Japanese gardeners, like our own, bestow some
fanciful name on every artificial variety of flower produced by their art.
The poet, impatient of these, wishes that there should be no other
names—perhaps no other flowers—than the natural white and yellow.

(107)

*Kiku sakuri**Chō kite asobe**Enogu-zara*

(Ransetsu)

The asters bloom. Come butterflies,
And dally o'er the colour dish!

The exigencies of metre must be our excuse for writing "asters" in-
stead of "chrysanthemums." These flowers are here likened to a painter's
palette.

(108)

*Junrei ni**Uchi-majiri-yuku**Ki-gan kana*

(Ransetsu)

Behold the wild-geese wending homeward,
Mingled with the pilgrim bands!

A picture of two simultaneous processions,—the homeward-bound
pilgrims on solid earth, and the wild-geese in the sky above them. The
flights of wild-geese—northward in spring, southward in autumn—are among
the most characteristic sights of the Japanese landscape.

(109)

*Omoshirō**Fuji ni sujikau**Hana-no kana*

(Ransetsu)

Oh! flowery moor, stretching athwart
Mount Fuji's slope so pleasantly!

The luxuriance of the wild-flowers on Fuji's lower slope—especially on
the western and southern sides—in the month of August, is astonishing.

(110)

*Shiri-bito ni**Awaaji awaji to**Hana-mi kana*

(Kyorai, 1651-1704)

No friends, oh! let me meet no friends
When I am gazing at the flowers!

(111)

*Nani-goto zo**Hana miru hito no**Naga-gatana*

(Kyorai)

A sabre! what has such to do
On one who comes to view the flowers?

Because esthetics and war agree ill together.

Bashō's School.

331

(112)

*Kokoro naki
Daikwanjo ya
Hototogisu*

(Kyorai)

The heartless Government Office,—ay! and the cuckoo.
A humorous juxtaposition of incongruities.

(113)

*Isogashi ya
Oki no shigure no
Ma-ho kata-ho*

(Kyorai)

What haste! a shower in the offing,
And sails set straight, and sails set slant.

A vignette of a fleet of junks caught in a sudden squall. The sailors are shown running hither and thither, and trimming the sails, now to set their craft running before the wind, and anon to put her on the port or starboard tack.

(114)

*Tsuki-mi sen
Fushimi no shiro no
Sute-gurazawa*

(Kyorai)

I will contéplate from Fushimi's
Abandoned castle-grounds the moon.

Fushimi near Kyōto was the site of Hideyoshi's great castle palace of Momoyama, the most splendid edifice ever reared on Japanese soil. It was given over to the flames soon after its builder's death.

(115)

*Yū-gure ya
Hage-narabitaru
Kumo no mine*

(Kyorai)

'Tis evening, and in serried file
Stand the bare pinnacles of cloud.

332

Bashō and the Japanese Epigram.

(116)

*Uki tomo ni
Kamarete neko no
Sora nagame*

(Kyorai)

Bit by a sorry mate, the cat
Intently gazes at the sky.

Crossed in love, the tom-cat gazes sentimentally at the firmament.

(117)

*Iku-tari ka
Shigure kake-nuku
Seta no hashi*

(Jōsō, 1663-1704)

How many may be hurrying through
The drizzle on the Bridge of Seta?

The immensely long Bridge of Seta, near Lake Biwa, is a favourite theme with the poets and artists of Japan. Here its length is suggested by the mention of a countless multitude.

(118)

*No mo yama mo
Yuki ni torarete
Nani mo nashi*

(Jōsō)

Nothing remaineth; for the snow
Hath blotted out both moor and hill.

(119)

*Kitsutsuki no
Kare-ki sagasu ya
Hana no naka*

(Jōsō)

What! mid the flowers the woodpecker
Is seeking out a withered tree.

Highly unesthetic of the bird to neglect the blossoms and prefer a withered trunk.

(120)

*Nuke-gara ni
Narabite shinuru
Aki no semi*

(Jōsō)

In autumn a cicada dead
Beside the shell that it cast off.

Autumn, a cicada's cast-off shell, even the cicada itself dead,—a set of dreary images typical of the nothingness of human fate.

(121)

*Mina-soko no
Iwa ni ochi-tsuku
Ko no ha kana*

(Jōsō)

Behold the leaf that sinks and clings
Below the water to a rock!

The observation of a tiny fact in nature. So is the next; for any careful eye will have noted the amusingly knowing look on the face of a duck when raising its head after a dive.

(122)

*Mina-soko wo
Mite kita kao no
Ko-gamo kana*

(Jōsō)

The teal, with face fresh from the sight
Of what below the water lies.

(123)

*Kyū no ten
Hinu ma mo samushi
Haru no kaze*

(Kyoroku, died 1715)

Literally, "Cold, too, is the interval before the moxa dots dry,—spring breeze."

This verse is here quoted because it refers to a curious custom, for which see "Things Japanese," s.v. "Moxa," adding to the account there given the following particulars:—The usual plan is for the patients to disrobe to the waist, before the chief practitioner—often a Buddhist priest, as the scene, too, is often a Buddhist temple—marks in sepia on their persons the spots that are to be treated. They then remove to another apartment, round which they squat in a line, while the priest's disciple or acolyte goes from one to another applying the cauterium to each in turn, one dot at a time, so that if a patient has several spots to be burnt, there is at least an interval between the steps of his torture. It is of course a chilly process from beginning to end, as the patient has to sit half-naked.

(124)

*Kata-eda ni
Myaku ya kayoite
Ume no hana*

(Shikō, 1665–1731)

Plum-blossoms! is it that the sap
Still courses through that single branch?

The subject of this epigram was doubtless a plum-tree, all whose branches save one were dead.

(125)

*Shira-kumo ya
Kakine wo wataru
Yuri no hana*

(Shikō)

Oh! the white clouds! nay, rather blossoms,—
Lilies that bend across the fence.

The poet likens his neighbour's lilies to white clouds.

(126)

*Uki koi ni
Taete ya neko no
Nusuna-gui*

(Shikō)

Weary perhaps of dolorous love,
The cat has stol'n a bit to eat.

(127)

*Neko no koi
Shote kara naite
Aware nari*

(Yaha, 1663-1740)

A cat's amours:—from the beginning
He caterwauls; he's to be pitied.

(128)

*Chōmatsu ga
Oya no na de kuru
Gyokei kana*

(Yaha)

Lo! Johnny, in his father's name,
Come to present congratulations!

Namely, on New Year's Day. Acha Kōson singles out this verse for praise.
It pictures to us the self-importance of the little fellow, dressed in
his best and charged with so ceremonious a mission.

(129)

*Haki-sōji
Shite kara tsubaki
Chiri ni keri*

(Yaha)

After I've swept and tidied up,
Adown fall some camellias.

He has been getting his villa ready for a poetry meeting; but when
all seemed finished, some camellias suddenly tumble from their stalks on to
the garden path, and make the place look untidy. This peculiarity of the
camellia is referred to by several poets;—, for instance in No. 169.

(130)

*Uguisu ya
Kado wa tama-tama
Tōfu-uri*

(Yaha)

The nightingale and, at the gate,
The unexpected bean-curd vendor.

The advent of the petty tradesman just as the nightingale is singing
makes a humorous contrast.

(131)

*Yuku kumo wo
Nete ite miru ya
Natsu-zashiki*

(Yaha)

A summer room where, lying down,
I see the clouds as they go past.

The poet, taking his siesta on a July afternoon, watches the clouds
float lazily across the sky.

(132)

*Yake ni keri
Saredomo hana wa
Chiri-sumashi*

(Hokushi, died 1718.)

I am burnt out. Nevertheless,
The flow'rs have duly bloom'd and faded.

The first line of the English rendering is absolutely literal, including
the prosaic work "nevertheless." The words corresponding to the second
line say literally no more than that "The flowers have fallen unconcerned-
ly;" but the sense is as here given. The story goes that Hokushi's house
having been burnt down one day, his friends flocked to present their
condolences. But he, like a true Bohemian, only laughed, and sent them
away with this epigram. Its gist is that so trifling a matter, which did
not interfere with the course of nature, was not worth a second thought.

Bashō's School.

337

(133)

*Meigetsu ya
Yo akuru kiwa mo
Nakari-keri*

(Etsujin, dates uncertain.)

A brilliant moon! there was no marge
Betwixt it and the dawn of day.

On such nights, the brightness of moonlight passes into the brightness
of sunlight without our being able to tell where night ends and day
begins.

(134)

*Ame no tsuki
Doko to mo nashi ni
Usu-akari*

(Etsujin)

A rainy moon, and everywhere
Alike a faint irradiation.

The poet's theme is that universal pale light, coming none can tell
whence, which suffuses the sky on a night which ought to be moonlit,
but is rainy.

(135)

*Yama-dera ni
Kome tsuku oto no
Tsuki-yo kana*

(Etsujin)

Oh! moonlight, with the sound of rice
A-pounding in the mountain temple!

Moonlight nights are often availed of by thrifty householders for
pounding rice.

(136)

*Eri-maki ni
Kubi hiki-irete
Fuyu no tsuki*

(Sugiyama Sampū, 1648-1733)

338

Bashō and the Japanese Epigram.

Moonlight in winter, and I draw
My neck within my comforter.

The substitution of this homely detail for the conventional raptures
on the moon produces a humorous effect.

(137)

*Ko ya matan
Amari lubari no
Taka-agari*

(Sugiyama Sampū)

Oh! how its young ones must be waiting,—
For all too high ascends the lark!

(138)

*Shigure-keri
Hashiri-iri-keri
Hare ni keri*

(Izembō, died 1710.)

A shower came, and so I came
Running indoors; then blue sky came.

Born rich, this poet despised wealth, and spent his time strolling
about in tattered peasant's garb, reciting verses. His diction was eccentric
too, specially affecting the repetition of some single word.

(139)

*Omotasa no
Yuki haraedomo
Haraedomo*

(Izembō)

Oh! what a heavy weight of snow,
Sweep as you may, sweep as you may!

These words are not to be taken literally. The poet sent them to
his daughter as an epigram on worldly vanities.

(140)

*Kami-sori ya
Ichi-ya ni sabite
Satsuki-ame*

(Hanchō, dates uncertain.)

My razor, in a single night,
Is rusted by the rains of June.

(141)

*Yo no naka wa
Sekirei no o no
Hima mo nashi*

(Hanchō)

The movement of the world of men
Is ceaseless as the wagtail's tail.

The bad assonance of "wagtail's tail" does not disfigure the original Japanese.

(142)

*Iza sakura
Omoi-tatsu hi wa
Kumoru to mo*

(Ryōto, 1660-1717)

Off to the cherry-flow'rs! the day
Was fix'd;—and what, though it be cloudy?

(143)

*Waga nari mo
Aware ni miyuru
Kare-no kana*

(Chigetsu-ni, 1634-1706)

Alas! the withered moor, whereon
My figure, too, looks pitiful.

This poetess had become a nun after her husband's death:—hence the comparison between the desolate autumn moor and her own poor garb. Both she and her son Osshū were pupils of Bashō. They belonged to the Lake Biwa school properly so-called, being born at Ōtsu on its shores.

(144)

*Mugi-wara no
Ie shite yaran
Ama-gaeu*

(Chigetsu-ni)

I'll take some barley straw and make
A house for you, little green frog!

"Green frog" is in Japanese literally, "nun frog," so that the bond between the poetess and her protégé was one of name as well as of kindness.

(145)

*Kore de koso
Inochi oshikere
Sakura-bana*

(Chigetsu-ni)

The cherry-flow'rs! for them alone
Is it that life is dear to me.

(146)

*Umi yama no
Tori naki-tatsuru
Fubuki kana*

(Chigetsu-ni)

Oh! snowstorm, at whose blast the birds
Begin to cry o'er sea and hill!

(147)

*Nen itte
Fuyu kara tsubonnu
Tsubaki kana*

(Kyokusui, died 1720.)

How carefully begin to bud
In winter the camellia-trees!

The buds of the camellia are singularly long in forming.

(148)

*Yūdachi ya
Chie samu-zama no
Kaburi-mono*

(Otsuyū, died 1739.)

A show'r, and skill of every sort
In things to put upon the head.

A vignette of people caught in the rain:—one bethinks him, perhaps of his fan, another shelters his head with his long pendent sleeve, etc., etc. This verse, familiar to all Japanese, excellently illustrates the light but graphic touch proper to the epigram.

(149)

*Hate wa mina
Ōgi no hone ya
Aki no kaze*

(Otsuyū)

All come at last to be a fan's
Old sticks when blows the autumn breeze.

We all grow old, as a fan does, which is in constant request during the summer heat, but gets torn and is reduced to little but its sticks by the time the autumn breeze begins to blow. The Japanese talk, not of the "sticks," but of the "bones" of a fan, which makes the comparison of a lean old man to a dilapidated fan still more natural.

(150)

*Nani tori no
Kono ato naku zo
Hototogisu*

(Otsuyū)

He was the cuckoo. Say what other
Bird may sing now he is gone.

Such is the sense, though, literally translated, the words are only. "What bird will sing indeed after this?—cuckoo!" This was an elegy

on the poet Ryōto, head of the Ise school. It was considered so beautiful that the headship of the school was forthwith bestowed upon its composer.

(151)

*Mikazuki ni
Fuka no atama wo
Kakushi-keri*

(Shidō, dates uncertain.)

There, by the crescent moon, the shark
Has hid his head [beneath the wave].

LATER EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

(152)

Haaka-bara ya

Aki no hotaru no

Futatsu mitsu

(Edo-za School)

A cemetery.....

And autumn fireflies two or three.

This was a true "epigram," being an inscription on the picture of a skeleton. Fireflies chiefly haunt dark and lonely places:—hence their mention in the present context.

(153)

Asa-shimo ya

Tsue de e-gakishi

Fuji no yama

(Edo-za School)

The morning hoar-frost, and Mount Fuji

Drawn on it with my walking-stick.

(154)

Hana ga in

Shibai mite kuru

Hito nikushi

(Josen, died 1715.)

The blossoms say, "We hate the folks

Who come here from the theatre."

344

Bashō and the Japanese Epigram.

A contrast between nature and the Philistinism of artificial amusements. Remember that in Old Japan so strong a taint of vulgarity attached to the drama that no *Samurai* ever entered a playhouse,—at any rate openly.

(155)

Mishi yume no

Samete mo iro no

Kakitsubata

(Shūshiki, 1683–1728)

The dream I dreamt has faded, but

The iris keeps its colours yet.

That is, though I die, the world remains.—The poetess's death song.

(156)

Aru hodo no

Date shi-tsukushite

Kami-ko kana

(Sono-Jo, 1665–1726)

Who carried foppery to extremes

Alas! now wears a paper coat.

The miserable end of empty-headedness and extravagance.

(157)

Ōta ko ni

Kami naburaruru

Atsusa kana

(Sono-Jo)

Such heat that, when the child I bear

Upon my back plays with my hair,.....

A picture of intense summer heat, which the slightest touch of another makes unendurable.

(158)

Nui-mono ya

Ki mo sede yogosu

Satsuki-ane

(Anonymous)

Embroideries not e'en yet worn
Are tarnished by the rains of June.

(159)

*Mono-sugo ya
Ara omoshiro no
Kacri-bana*

(Onitsura, 1661-1738)

Uncanny and yet pleasing are
These flow'rs that blossom out of time.

This poet has a great reputation, some going so far as to assert that he unites the excellencies of all the schools. Bashō and he knew and respected each other, and Onitsura arrived independently at very much the same conclusions as Bashō did. As early as 1685, he wrote: "Apart from truth, no poetry. All the rules hitherto obeyed lack reality. Truth must ever be the aim, though if one were to follow truth slavishly, something alien to truth would result.....Though the words may be shallow, the sense must be deep.....Consider not whether a style he antique or modern:—the modern will become old; the old is ever new."—Onitsura was evidently a vigorous thinker and a sane critic. Pity that fate had not given him a wider field to work in. That he really penetrated below the surface of things to the *lacrimae rerum*, is shown by such epigrams as Nos. 162-164, while No. 160 displays his delicate sense of humour.

(160)

*Natsu wa mata
Fuyu ga mashi ja to
Iware-keri*

(Onitsura)

And in the summer, folks opined
That winter was to be preferred,

(161)

*Nyoppori to
Aki no sora naru
Fuji no yama*

(Onitsura)

Without a word of warning, there,
In th' autumn sky, Mount Fuji stands.

(162)

*Gaikotsu no
Ue wa yosōte
Hana-mi kana*

(Onitsura)

Oh! flower-gazers, who have decked
The surface of their skeletons!

This was composed on seeing some magnificently dressed ladies and gentlemen gazing at the blossoms.

(163)

*Mata hitotsu
Hana ni tsure-yuku
Inochi kana*

(Onitsura)

Together with one blossom more,
Oh! life, thou goest on thy way.

This was composed on seeing some falling blossoms.

(164)

*Saku kara ni
Miru kara ni hana no
Chiru kara ni*

(Onitsura)

They blossom forth, and so I gaze,
And so these flowers fade, and so.....

Composed on seeing some luxuriantly blossoming flowers. The world is a round of perpetual change, and all phenomena are evanescent.

(165)

*Oi no aki
Ake mutsu wo kiku
Omoshiro*

(Ritō, died 1755.)

The old man's autumn, who with joy
Hears the six strokes that tell the dawn.

Old people who, sleeping little, weary for the daylight, rejoice when the stroke of six on the temple bell announces that morning has at length come after the long autumn night. There is an implied comparison of old age to the autumn season.

(166)

Hana no yume
Kikitaki chō ni
Koe mo nashi

(Reikan, dates uncertain.)

It has no voice,—the butterfly,
Whose dream of flow'rs I fain would learn.

Suggested by a butterfly asleep upon a blossom. But the "butterfly's dream of flowers" was already mentioned in ancient times by the mystical Chinese philosopher Chwang Tzu.

(167)

Sendō no
Kenkwa wa sunde
Kawazu kana

(Yūya, dates uncertain.)

And when the boatmen have made up
Their quarrel, oh! then 'tis the frogs.

Noise succeeding to noise.

(168)

Tomarite mo
Tsubasa wa ugoku
Kochō kana

(Ryūbai, dates uncertain.)

Oh! little butterfly, with wings
Still moving even when it lights!

(169)

Chiru made mo
Chiranu keshiki wo
Tsubaki kana

(Shosei, dates uncertain.)

Oh! the camellia, which ne'er
Appears like dropping till it drops.

An instance of minute observation:—the blossom of the camellia, without withering, is apt to startle one by suddenly falling to the ground. The Japanese sometimes, therefore, compare it to a decapitated head.

(170)

Hyaku-nari ya
Tsuru hito-suji no
Kokoro yori

(Chiyo, 1703-1775)

This is a poetical rendering of the Buddhist text 萬法唯一心 lti. "myriad devices simply one heart," which means that one intention will manifest itself in innumerable forms, one misconception will lead to innumerable errors, etc., etc. A text of kindred import, which the poetess perhaps had in mind, is 發心一念三千 to be freely paraphrased as "Religion is one, forms are many." This difficult epigram is here given on account of its celebrity, and also because it is typical of a class. In the impossibility of translating it literally, the following must suffice as an approximation:—

A hundred tendrils, yea! and all

From the same vine that is their heart.

Another reading for *hyaku-nari* is *sen-nari*, the name of a species of climbing gourd or calabash, which is commonly grown on a trellis to support the quantities of pendent fruit.

(171)

Hiru-gao ya
Dochira no tsuyu mo
Ma ni awazu

(Yokoi Yayū, 1702-1783)

Alas! the noon convolvulus,
That neither dew may aught avail!

The *asa-gao* (lit. "morning face," called in America the "morning glory," in England "convolvulus") is washed by the morning dew; similarly the *yū-gao* (lit. "evening face") by the dews of eve. But what of the *hiru-gao* ("midday face")? What can it rely on for its refreshment?

(172)

Yama-dera no

Yo-ake ya kane ni

Chiru karasu

(Yokoi Yayū)

A temple on a hill, whose bell
At break of day startles the rooks.

(173)

Bake-mono no

Shōtai mitari

Kare-obana

(Yokoi Yayū)

I've seen the bogie's veritable
Shape:—it's merely withered grass.

I had taken it for a goblin, and lo! it was nothing but a clump of that eulalia grass which grows man-high on the Japanese hill-sides, with fronds that look like beckoning hands.—This epigram, originally aimed at a teacher whose great reputation did not maintain itself on closer acquaintance, has become proverbial for disenchantment.

(174)

Mijika-ya ya

Ware ni wa nagaki

Yume samenu

(Yokoi Yayū)

Is life then short? This dream of mine
Seems long enough that now has faded.

The poet's death song.

(175)

Uguisu ya

Kanai sorōte

Meshi-jibun

(Buson, 1716-1783)

The nightingale and—dinner-time,
With the whole family assembled.

A humorous contrast of the esthetic and the commonplace.

(176)

Kwaikyū

(Memories of the Past.)

Osoki hi no

Tsumorite tōki

Mukashi kana

(Buson)

Oh! distant past, made up of slow
But ever accumulating days!

(177)

Soko-soko ni

Kyō ni-sugoshinu

Tanishi-uri

(Buson)

The snail-man, hurrying along,
Saw not the city which he traversed.

Others come to gaze at the metropolis. The poor vendor of edible snails hurries along without seeing its wonders, and then trudges home again,—a picture of the hard life of the poor.

(178)

Ika-nobori

Kinō no sora no

Ari-dokoro

(Buson)

The kite flies in the self-same spot
Of sky where yesterday it flew.

Though these lines mean nothing more than that the kite is being
flown to-day where it was flown yesterday, they have obtained great praise
on the score of combined ingenuity and simplicity.

(179)

Haru-same ya
Mono-gatari-yuku
Mino to kasa

(Buson)

A show'r in spring, where an umbrella
And rain-coat walk along conversing.

A humorous sketch this of two pedestrians, of whom the spectator,
viewing them probably from behind, sees nothing but their outer pro-
tections against the weather.

(180)

Uzumi-bi ya
Tsui ni wa nieru
Nabe no mono

(Buson)

Ash-smothered coals and, at long last,
The gruel simmering in the pot.

We here see portrayed some recluse sitting up on a winter's night
over a brazier, at which with difficulty he cooks his simple meal. The
critics admire the prominence given to the word *uzumi-bi*, "ash-smothered
coals."

(181)

Uguisu no
Koe tōki hi mo
Kure ni keri

(Buson)

Done is the long spring day, wherein
The nightingale did sing afar.

(182)

Machi-bito no
Aski-oto tōki
Ochi-ba kana

(Buson)

How distant on the fallen leaves
His footstep sounds for whom I wait!

(183)

* *Mizu-tori ya*
Kare-ki no naka ni
Kago ni-chō

(Buson)

Some water-fowl, and in the midst
Of withered trees two palanquins.

Fourteen pages of discussion are devoted in the commentary to this
thumb-nail sketch of a desolate scene:—Was there any one in the palan-
quins? Were they run-away lovers? Were the bearers there, or had
they run away? Is the scene laid on the border of a marsh? &c., &c.

(184)

Fugu-jiru no
Ware ikite iru
Ne-zame kana

(Buson)

Poison-fish soup last night, yet lo!
I wake to find myself alive.

The *fugu* is a delicious, yet often highly poisonous, fish of the genus
Tetrodon, whence a proverbial saying to which this epigram makes allu-
sion: *Fugu wa kuitashi, inochi wa oshishi*, "I want to eat poison-fish, yet
I grudge my life."

(185)

Hana ni yōte
Kacrusa nikushi
Shira-byōshi

(Buson)

The flow'rs have made me drunk:—I loathe
The singing-girls on my way home.

The idea is closely similar to that of No. 154:—natural beauty disgusts one with meretricious charms (and in this case the word “meretricious” may be taken in its literal sense).

(186)

Hana ni kite
Hana ni inenaru
Itoma kana

(Buson)

Coming to see the flow'rs, I sleep
Beneath the flowers, being free.

The commentators praise the delicate esthetic feeling here displayed by the poet, who, instead of vulgarly profiting by every moment of time to gaze at the blossoms, contrariwise rested and wasted some of it, as he had the leisure; for thus may beauty penetrate more deeply into the soul.

(187)

Ara musukashi no kana-zukai ya na! Jigi ni gai
arazumba, aa mama yo!

Ume sakinu
Dore ga mume yara
Ume ja yara

(Buson)

“Oh! what a hard thing is orthography! If there be no injury to the sense, let us spell as we like!”—After these introductory words in prose, the poem goes on to say literally: “The plum-tree is in blossom. Which [blossoms] are *mume*, and which *ume*?” (Different ways of spelling the Japanese word signifying “plum-blossom.”) We are reminded of the saying, “The rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Japanese spelling, after centuries of neglect, was beginning to be discussed and correctness insisted on in Buson's time, which, curiously enough, synchronised with the period when Dr. Johnson fixed our own English orthography.

(188)

Samidare ya
Aru yo hisoka ni
Matsu no tsuki

(Ryōta, 1719-1787)

In the June rains, as if by stealth,
One night the moon shines through the pines.

Ryōta, the third head of the Setsumon School and author of no less than sixty works, was one of the most famous of the eighteenth century revivalists. The epigram here quoted has the honour of being the only one that ever attracted Chinese notice, and was paraphrased into that language. The paraphrase is as follows:—

長夏草堂寂 連宵聽雨眠 何時縣明月 松影落庭前
i.e. literally, “’Tis midsummer, and my grass hut is dreary; every evening I fall asleep to the sound of rain. Suddenly the moon hangs [in the sky]; and the shadow of the pine-tree falls on my garden.”

(189)

Meigetsu ya
Umare-kawaraba
Mine no matsu

(Ryōta)

Oh! moon, if born again, I'd be
A pine-tree on a mountain peak.

In order to be the first to behold the moon rise. Remember that, to the Japanese, the moon is the loveliest of all natural objects, solitary and incomparable. No sunset, no rainbow, no stars of heaven share her praise here, as they do in Western lands.

(190)

Roku-gwatsu ya
Itaru tokoro mina
Yu no nagare

(Rankō, 1728-1799)

'Tis July, and on every side
Nothing but rivers of hot water.

This was composed at the sulphur baths of Kusatsu, the strongest and among the hottest in the world. See Murray's "Japan Handbook" for a description of the curious method of bathing under a quasi-military discipline which is there pursued.

(191)

*Aka-aka to
Shimo kōri-keri
Soba no kuki*

(Rankō)

To ice all crimson red has frozen
The rime upon the buckwheat stems.

This is one of the numerous class of epigrams testifying to observation of minute facts in nature:—the thin crimson stems of the buckwheat may be seen cased in ice on some day or other almost every winter, at least in the uplands.

(192)

*Kare-ashi no
Hi ni hi ni orete
Nagare-keri*

(Rankō)

The withered reeds, that day by day
Break off, are floated down the stream.

(193)

*Mutsu Dono no
Suzumi-dai nari
Chi-Matsushima*

(Gyōtai, 1731–1791)

On Matsushima's thousand isles
The Lord of Mutsu takes the cool.

Mutsu is the name of the province off whose coast lies the little pine-clad archipelago of Matsushima, famous for its beauty.

(194)

*Ama tsutan
Hoshi no hikari ya
Naku chidori*

(Gyōtai)

Where shine the stars that wend along
The heav'ns, there doth the sea-gull cry.

This is to be interpreted allegorically. The poet—a mere wandering *Samurai*—had been summoned to the Court of Kyōto. Accordingly he likens himself to a sea-gull,—a common, worthless bird,—and his new surroundings to the glorious starry vault.

(195)

*Uguisu wa
Modosu-na ume ni
Kakine shite*

(Shirō, 1736–1812)

Around the plum-flow'rs make a fence,
To stay the nightingale's return.

A nightingale had actually come and perched upon a plum-tree in the poet's garden. He would fain resort to violence to prevent its flying home.

(196)

*Iuazuma ya
Etsujin to ni-ji
Kaku na naki*

(Etsujin, 1760–1836.)

A flash of lightning, and no time
To write the one word "Etsujin."

The point of this epigram lies in the extreme simplicity of the characters with which the name "Etsujin" is written, namely 倅人 which any one could dash off in an instant of time.—This poet is to be distinguished from his namesake (one of the "Ten Wits," see pp. 296 and 337), whose name is written 越人.

(297)

Ware to kite

Asobe ya oya no

Nai suzume

(Issa, 1763-1827)

You little sparrows left without
A mother, come and play with me.

This is said to have been composed by Issa at the age of five, when he had just lost his own mother.

(198)

Nan no sono

Hyaku-man-goku mo

Sasa no tsuyu

(Issa)

What then? what are his million bales?
Mere dewdrops on the bamboo grass.

The circumstances under which this verse was composed may serve to illustrate the oddity and independence of spirit which characterised, not this poet only, but many of his brother epigrammatists. The Lord of Kaga, richest of all the Daimyōs, whose revenue was assessed at a million bales of rice, summoned Issa to his presence one day; but the latter refused to go. Thereupon, the Daimyō despatched his henchman with a gold-lacquered box containing His Highness's album, to request the favour of Issa's autograph. This, likewise, Issa at first refused; but being at length over-persuaded, he took his own cheap broken ink-slab, moistened the Indian ink stick with his saliva, and penned a line of poetry as required. "If you don't like it, you can tear it up," said he, on being remonstrated with for his rudeness. The Daimyō, by no means displeased, sent him ten gold coins in acknowledgment; but Issa could only with difficulty be persuaded to keep three shillings, the amount of his rent. Later on, the Daimyō presented him with a beautiful sandal-wood ink-box; but Issa was so much wearied by the visitors who flocked to gaze at it that he handed it over gratis to a curio-dealer, who took it to Yedo and sold it for several hundred dollars. Issa, himself absolutely indifferent to money, composed the above epigram as a vent to his feelings on the

occasion. While his philosophy was strictly practical, his compassion for all living creatures was so profound that he demurred even to killing a flea. His style, though it could rise into the classical on an occasion, was for the most part colloquial, as in No. 200.

(199)

Yase-kawazu

Makeru-na Issa

Kore ni ari

(Issa)

Emaciated frog! be not
Worsted in fight:—Issa is here.

(200)

Yare! naku-na

Sore hodo buji de

Kacru kari

(Issa)

Hallo! you shouldn't cry, you storks,
Returning home so safe and sound!

(201)

Karusa no

Yū-ki-sakura ya

Mune ni tsue

(Sō-a, dates uncertain.)

A typical example of the class of Japanese epigrams most difficult to translate. The words are literally, "Home-going's evening sun cherry-trees, and staff to chest." The picture is that of some aged man, who, having spent the day among the cherry-blossoms, is now returning home, but, rapt by the beauty of the sunset glow upon the flowers, remains gazing at it, his body bent and leaning on his staff. Something like the following may serve as an approximate rendering:—

Cherry-flow'rs sunset-lit:—I turn
And gaze, my breast upon my staff.

(202)

Sei daseba

Kōru ma mo nashi

Mizu-guruma

(Keirin, dates uncertain.)

If but the wheel be diligent,
The water has no time to freeze.

This verse has become proverbial for industry.

(203)

Uguisu ya

Hana naki ki ni wa

Oranu hazu

(Gomei, dates uncertain.)

Of course the nightingale stays not
Upon a tree bereft of flowers.

The elderly poet composed this epigram on calling to see his mistress and finding her abroad. A pretty young woman could not be expected, he suggests, to care for a withered gallant like himself.

(204)

Koi-shinaba

Waga tsuka de nake

Hototogisu

Cuckoo! if I should die of love,
Oh! [come and] sing upon my tomb!

Composed by a courtesan in the Yoshiwara at Yedo, who, having been slandered to her lover, was abandoned by him and reduced to despair.

(205)

Kuchi akeba

Go-zō no miyuru

Karvazu kana

(Anon.)

Behold the frog, who, when he opes
His mouth, displays his whole inside!

Proverbial in the sense of "Do not blurt out all your secret thoughts."—The term *go-zō*, here rendered the "whole inside," is literally the "five viscera."

The literature of the Japanese epigram is voluminous and constantly growing. The following works have been consulted in the preparation of the foregoing essay:—

連俳小史 "*Rempai Shōshi*," by M. Sasa, one thin vol., 1887, deals with the history of *Haikai* and *Renga*.

俳諧史傳 "*Haikai Shiden*," by S. Okonogi and M. Nunokawa, 1 vol., 1884, gives short biographies of all the principal epigrammatists, with specimens of their work, following chronological order according to schools.

俳句評釋 "*Haiku Hyōshaku*," by Katō Heki-godō, one small vol., 1889, with a sequel entitled 續俳句評釋 "*Zoku Haiku Hyōshaku*," reproduces the epigrams of the 猿蓑集 "*Saru-mino Shū*" anthology, and accompanies each with a short commentary.

俳諧論 "*Haikai-ron*," by Aeba Kōson, an article of 46 pages published in a magazine entitled 早稲田文學 "*Waseda Bungaku*." This distinguished man of letters here gives perhaps the best general view of the subject in a concise form.

俳家奇人談 "*Haika Kijin Dan*," by Gengen-ichi, 3 vols., 1816, with sequel entitled 續俳家奇人談 "*Zoku Haika Kijin Dan*," 3 vols., 1832, illustrated. Biographies of epigrammatists.

古今俳家逸話 "*Kokon Haika Itsuwae*," by Shigure-an, one thin vol., 1901. Anecdotes of epigrammatists. Many similar collections exist.

俳句入門 "*Haiku Nyūmon*," by Takahama Kyoshi, a light of the *Shimpa* or contemporary school, 1 Vol., 1898. This little guide to the composition of epigrams is interesting for its general remarks on style.

俳諧獨學 "*Haikai Dokugaku*," issued by the Hakubun-kwan publishing firm. This guide to the analysis and composition of epigrams enters into grammatical and other details, but is not to be recommended. The European student desirous of embarking on the study of the Japanese epigrammatic style should find a careful comparison of the originals quoted in the present essay with their translations far more useful. The favourite ellipses and other grammatical peculiarities of the style will be more easily mastered in this way than by the presentation of any set of rules.

俳諧古選 "*Haikai Kosen*," an anthology by Miyake Shōzan (died 1801), in the edition entitled 評釋俳諧古選 "*Hiyōshaku Haikai Kosen*," published by Kimura Kakū in 1900, which adds a short commentary on each epigram. Only the first half of the original work has yet appeared in this form. Still this volume, published at 25 *sen*, is likely to be more useful to the foreign student than any other, except the 俳句評釋 "*Haiku Hiyōshaku*," which it closely resembles in form.

蕪村句集講義 "*Buson Kūshū Kōgi*," only 2 vols. yet published in book form, 1900. The rest is appearing gradually in a magazine entitled "*Hototogisu*." Buson's epigrams are here discussed seriatim by a select circle of admirers, whose criticisms are given exactly as delivered in Colloquial. The obscurity of many epigrams is here well exhibited.

俳諧文庫 "*Haikai Bunko*," 24 large vols., 1887-1901, issued by the Hakubun-kwan publishing firm. This encyclopædic compilation includes matter new and old,—general treatises, biographies, the complete works of many epigrammatists, anthologies arranged according to subjects, anecdotal matter, prose works by the epigrammatists, their essays, notes of travel, etc., etc., etc. The present writer does not profess to have done more than touch the fringe of this gigantic compilation, but he has at least profited by Uchida Fuchi-an's biography and critique of Bashō, entitled 芭蕉庵桃青傳 "*Bashō-an Tōsei Den*," and 芭蕉後傳 "*Bashō Kōden*," by Aeba Kōson's biography of Yokoi Yayū entitled 横井也有翁ノ傳 "*Yokoi Yayū Ō no Den*," by the biographical sketch appended to the collection of Issa's epigrams entitled 一茶全集 "*Issa Zenshū*," and by Ono Seichiku's historical sketch of the subject entitled 俳諧畧史 "*Haikai Ryakushi*."

Besides the above, there are the well-known general literary histories. Haga's 國文學史十講 "*Kokubun-gaku Shi Jikkō*," or "Ten Lectures on the History of our National Literature," has been found suggestive. It has, moreover, the advantage of being written in Colloquial.

So far as known to the present writer, the only European authors who have treated, however briefly, of the subject hitherto are:—

I. *W. G. Aston*, who, in his "Grammar of the Japanese Written Language," 2nd edit., p. 203 (1877), inserted 3 specimens of epigrams with literal translations, and later, in his "History of Japanese Literature," pp. 289-297 (1899), gave a summary of the subject (but without touching on *origines*), together with literal translations of 19 specimens.

II. *B. H. Chamberlain*, "Handbook of Colloquial Japanese," 2nd. edit., pp. 453-4 (1889), 4 specimens—text and literal translation.

III. *Lafcadio Hearn*, "In Ghostly Japan," pp. 156-164 (1899), text of 8 epigrams, with literal translation and explanation.—Since the present essay was completed, the writer's attention has been drawn to Mr. Hearn's two latest works, "Shadowings," pp. 69-100 (1901), and "A Japanese Miscellany," pp. 92-118 (1901), containing respectively collections of epigrams on the curious subjects of cicade and dragon-flies,—no less than 107 in all, or more, if those are counted of which not the original text, but only the translation is given. Some of the renderings are in the metre of the elegiac distich, which, owing to the far larger number of syllables of that form of verse, necessitates more or less expansion of the originals. Others, rendered literally, though less attractive as English—or Anglicised—poems, possess superior value for the scientific enquirer. All well exhibit the endless dexterity with which the Japanese epigrammatist can modulate the trilling of his tiny pipe.