

# **TALES OF THE SAMURAI**

Stories illustrating Bushido, the Moral Principles of the  
Japanese Knighthood

BY

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"A warrior burns incense into his helmet when he is determined to die on the field"

## PREFACE

The following tales of the samurai, the knights of old Japan, are based largely on real facts. They have been adapted from among traditional stories related by *kōdanshi*, story-tellers, who nightly delight large audiences with romances and historical stories, especially the noble deeds of the samurai. There are also numerous Japanese books and magazines devoted to stories of this description, which are read with keen interest by all classes of our countrymen, in particular by young people.

It is true the samurai class has gone forever along with feudalism; but fortunately or unfortunately the Japanese at large are samurai in a sense. During the last half century European civilization has revolutionized Japanese society, both for better and for worse. In institutions political and social, in manners and customs, in arts and literature, the Japanese have lost many of their characteristics; yet it may safely be said that the sentiments, motives and moral principles of the samurai in some measure remain in the bedrock of their character in their subconsciousness, so to speak. The Japanese of to-day are intellectually almost cosmopolitans, but emotionally they are still samurai to no small degree.

Honest Kyūsuké, the hero of the story of the same title, was not a samurai, but his principles were those of a samurai. Let that justify the inclusion of the story in this volume.

The author's hearty thanks are due to Mr. Joyen Momokawa, a celebrated *kōdanshi*, who kindly helped him in the choice of these tales, and also to the editor of the *Kōdan Kurabu* for permission to translate *Katsuno's Revenge*, one of his stories.

A. Miyamori.

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## UNGO-ZENJI

IT was snowing fast.

Already as far as eye could see the world was covered with a vast silvery sheet. Hill and dale, tree and field, all alike clothed in virgin white.

Caring nothing for the bitter cold, but loving the beautiful, Daté Masamuné determined to go out to enjoy the scene. Accordingly, accompanied by a few attendants, he wended his way to a pavilion set on a low hill in the castle grounds whence an extensive view, embracing the whole of his little fief of Osaki, could be obtained.

In later life Masamuné distinguished himself by signal service rendered to the state, eventually becoming one of the greatest daimios in Japan, under Iyeyasu, the first Shogun, but at this time Osaki was his sole estate, and his income did not exceed 100,000 *koku* of rice a year.

“What an enchanting picture! What can compare with a snow landscape?” he exclaimed, as he stood enraptured, gazing with delight from the balcony of the pavilion at the pure loveliness of the scene before him. “It is said that snow foretells a fruitful year. When the harvest is abundant great is the rejoicing of the people, and peace and prosperity reign over the land!”

While his lordship thus soliloquized, Heishiro, the sandal-bearer—Makabé Heishiro as he was called from his birthplace,

Makabé in Hitachi, a surname being a luxury unknown to the third estate—waited without. Having adjusted his master's footgear there was nothing more to do till he should come out again. But presently Heishiro observed that the snowflakes fell and lay somewhat thick on his valuable charge. He hastened to brush them off with his sleeve, but more flakes fell, and again the *geta* (clogs) were covered with icy particles.

"This will never do," he said to himself. "His lordship disdains to wear *tabi* (socks) even in the coldest weather, deeming it a mark of effeminacy; should he place his bare feet on these damp *geta* he will assuredly catch cold. I must keep them warm and dry for him."

So the good fellow in the kindness of his simple heart took up the heavy wooden clogs, and putting them in the bosom of his garment next to his skin, continued his patient waiting.

"His lordship comes!"

Heishiro had just time to put the *geta* straight on the large stone step at the entrance before the double doors slid open right and left and Masamuné appeared, young, imperious.

He slipped his feet on to the *geta*. How was this? They felt warm to his touch! How could that be in such freezing weather? There could be but one explanation. That lazy lout of a sandal-bearer had been using them as a seat—sitting on the honourable footgear of his august master! The insufferable insolence, of the fellow!

In a passion at the supposed insult he caught the offender by the nape of his neck, and shook him violently, exclaiming

between his set teeth, "You scoundrel! How dared you defile my *geta* by sitting on them! You have grossly insulted me behind my back! Villain, take that..."

Catching up one of the clogs which he had kicked off, he struck the poor servitor a heavy blow between the eyes, which caused him to reel stunned and bleeding to the ground. Then hurling the companion *geta* at his prostrate victim, he strode proudly back to the castle, barefooted, for he was in too great a rage to wait until another pair of *geta* could be brought.

No one stayed to look after Heishiro. None cared what became of him. For some time he lay as he had fallen, but presently the cold brought him back to consciousness, and he rose slowly and with difficulty to his feet.

He picked up the *geta* with which he had been struck, and with tears mingling with the blood on his face gazed at it mournfully for a few moments. Then, as the thought of his master's injustice came over him, he gnashed his teeth in impotent rage.

"Haughty brute, that you are, Masamuné," he muttered, "you shall pay for this! The bond between us as lord and vassal has snapped for ever. I have been one of the most devoted of your humble servants, but now I will never rest till I have had my revenge on you for this cruel treatment!"

Then Heishiro again put the *geta* into his bosom, though with how different an intention from before, and descending the hill on the side furthest from the castle, limped painfully away.



From that time forth the man had but one idea—to wreak condign vengeance on the arrogant noble who had so abused his kindness.

But Masamuné was a daimio, though a poor one, while Heishiro was only a serf. Assassination was impossible, Masamuné being always well guarded even while he slept, besides possessing considerable bodily strength himself. He must have recourse to other and subtler means. He thought long and deeply. There were only two persons of higher rank than the daimio who could affect his position at will—the Emperor and the Shogun. But how could a man of Heishiro's standing gain the ear of either of these two illustrious personages so as to slander Masamuné and influence them against him? The very idea was absurd! True, it was a warlike age and promotion speedily followed the achievement of a deed of valor; with a spear in his hand and a good horse under him one might rise to almost any height. But Heishiro was no soldier and his physical strength was small. With a sigh he admitted to himself that the accomplishment of his purpose did not lie that way.

And then a happy thought struck him. He remembered that any one, high or low, great or small, could become a priest and that the prospects held out in that profession were boundless. There was no distinction to which a man of the lowliest parentage and the weakest body might not aspire. A learned priest with a reputation for sanctity might get access to Court—gain the notice of the Emperor himself!

That was it!

Heishiro resolved to turn priest, and with this in view made all haste to Kyoto, where he entered the Temple of Ungoji in Higashiyama as an acolyte.

But the career of an acolyte is none of the easiest. Before he can be received into the priesthood he must go through all forms of asceticism, self-denial, and penance. Furthermore, he has to serve his superiors as a drudge, doing the most menial tasks at their command. Heishiro had a very hard time of it. A man of ordinary perseverance might have succumbed and given up. Not so Heishiro. Not for a moment did he dream of abandoning his self-imposed task. He was determined as long as there was life in him to endure every hardship and humiliation, so that eventually he might attain his end. Still he was but human, and there were times when his weary body almost gave way and his spirit flagged. His racked nerves seemed as if they could bear no more. At such times he would look in a mirror at the reflection of the deep scar on his brow, and draw from its place of concealment the odd garden *geta*, saying to himself, "Courage! Remember Masamuné! Your work is not done yet."

Then strength and calmness would return and he once more felt equal to labour and endure.

Little by little Heishiro rose in the favour of his superiors, and his learning showed marked progress. At length, he thought he might get on faster if he went to another monastery, and the Temple of Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei being the largest and most renowned of all places of sacred teaching in Japan, he applied there for admission and was readily admitted.

Twenty years later, Jōben, for that was the name Heishiro took on entering the priesthood, was known far and near for his erudition and strict application to all observances of a life of the most austere piety. But he was not satisfied. He was still very far from being in a position to attract the notice of the Emperor. Yet higher must he climb. To be world-famous was his aim.

So he made up his mind to go over to China, justly regarded as the fountain-head of all knowledge and wisdom. All she could impart of the Buddhistic faith he would acquire. As soon as an opportunity offered Jōben sailed from his native shores and found himself among a strange people. Here he remained ten years. During that time he visited many famous temples and gathered wisdom from many sources. At last the fame of the traveller reached the ear of the Chinese Emperor, who was pleased to grant him an audience, and graciously bestowed on him a new sacerdotal name, that of Issan-Kasho-Daizenji. Thus it came about that Jōben left his country acknowledged, indeed to be a wise and holy man, but he came back to be regarded as the foremost divine in Japan.

After his return Issan-Kasho-Daizenji stayed at Ungo-ji, the temple in Kyoto where he had entered on his noviciate. He had heard nothing of Masamuné for some years and was anxious to learn what had become of him. He was unpleasantly surprised to hear that the object of his hatred had also risen in the world, and that now as lord of the Castle of Sendai he was considered one of the most important men of the day. Not only did he hold a high office at Court, but as the head of the North-Eastern daimios, even the Shogun had to treat him with respect. All this

was annoying if nothing worse. The Zenji saw that he would have to bide his time, and act warily. A false move now might render futile all his long years of travail.

But after all he did not have to wait very long.

The Emperor was taken ill and his malady was of so serious a nature that the skill of the wisest physicians proved of no avail. The highest officials of the Imperial Household met in solemn conclave to discuss the matter and it was decided that earthly means being vain the only hope lay in an appeal to Heaven.

Who was the priest of character so stainless, of wisdom so profound that he might be entrusted with this high mission?

One name rose to all lips—"Issan-Kasho-Daizenji!"

With all speed, therefore, the holy man was summoned to the Palace and ordered to pray his hardest to the Heavenly Powers for the restoration to health of the Imperial patient.

For seven days and seven nights the Zenji isolated himself from all mankind in the Hall of the Blue Dragon. For seven days and seven nights he fasted, and prayed that the precious life might be spared. And his prayers were heard. At the end of that time the Emperor took a turn for the better, and so rapid was his recovery that in a very short time all cause of anxiety about him was over.

His Majesty's gratitude knew no bounds. The Zenji was honoured with many marks of the Imperial regard, and as a consequence, all the ministers and courtiers vied with each other in obsequiousness to the favourite of the Emperor. He

was appointed Head of the Ungoji Temple, and received yet another name, Ungo-Daizenji.

“The attainment of my desire is now within reach!” thought the priest exultantly. “It only remains to find a plausible pretext for accusing Masamuné of high treason.”

But more than thirty years had elapsed since Makabé Heishiro, the lowly sandal-bearer, had vowed vengeance on the daimio Daté Masamuné, and not without effect had been his delving into holy scriptures, his long vigils, his life of asceticism and meditation. Heishiro had become Ungo-Daizenji, a great priest. His character had undergone a radical change, though he had not suspected it. His mind had been purified and was now incapable of harbouring so mean and paltry a feeling as a desire for revenge. Now that the power was in his grasp he no longer cared to exercise it.

“To hate, or to try to injure a fellow-creature is below one who has entered the priesthood,” he said to himself. “The winds of passion disturb only those who move about the maze of the secular world. When a man’s spiritual eyes are opened, neither east nor west, neither north nor south exists—such things are but illusions. I have nursed a grudge against Lord Daté for over thirty years, and with the sole object of revenge before my eyes have raised myself to my present position. But if Lord Daté had not ill-treated me on a certain occasion, what would my life have been? I should, probably, have remained Heishiro, the sandal-bearer, all my days. But my lord had the unkindness to strike me with a garden *geta* without troubling himself to find out whether I deserved such chastisement. I was roused to anger and vowed to be revenged. Because of my resolve to

punish him I turned priest, studied hard, endured privations, and so, at length, have become one of the most influential priests in the Empire, before whom even princes and nobles bow with reverence. If I look at the matter in its true light it is to Lord Daté that I owe everything. In olden times Sakya Muni, turning his back upon earthly glory, climbed Mt. Dantoku and there served his noviciate with St. Arara. Prince though he was, he performed all menial offices for his master, who if ever the disciple seemed negligent, would beat him with a cane. 'How mortifying it is,' thought the Royal neophyte, 'that I, born to a throne, should be treated thus by one so far beneath me in rank,' But Sakya Muni was a man of indomitable spirit. The more humiliations he had to suffer the more earnestly did he apply himself to his religious studies, so that, at the early age of thirty he had learnt all his teacher could impart, and himself began to teach, introducing to the world one of the greatest religions it has ever known. It may truthfully be said that Sakya's success was largely, if not wholly, due to that stern and relentless master who allowed no shirking of his work. Far be it from me to institute any comparison between my humble self and the holy Founder of Buddhism, but, nevertheless, I cannot deny the fact that the pavilion in the grounds of Osaki Castle was my Mt. Dantoku, and this old garden *geta* my St. Arara's cane. Therefore it should be gratitude, not revenge, that I have in my heart for Masamuné, for it was his unconsidered act that laid the foundation of my prosperity."

Thus the good priest relinquished his long cherished idea of vengeance, and a better feeling took its place. He now looked upon the blood-stained *geta* with reverence, offering flowers and burning incense before it, while day and night he prayed

fervently for the long life and happiness of his old master, Lord Daté Masamuné.

And Masamuné himself?

As stated above he attained great honours and became a leading man in the councils of his country. But at the age of sixty-three he tired of public life and retired to pass the evening of his days at his Castle of Sendai. Here, to employ his leisure, he set about the restoration of the well-known temple of Zuiganji, at Matsushima, in the vicinity of the castle, which during a long period of civil strife had fallen into decay, being in fact a complete ruin. Masamuné took it upon himself to restore the building to its former rich splendor, and then when all was done looked about for a priest of deep learning and acknowledged virtue who should be worthy to be placed in charge of it.

At a gathering of his chief retainers he addressed them as follows:—

“As you know I have rebuilt and decorated the Zuiganji Temple in this vicinity, but it still remains without a Superior. I desire to entrust it to a holy and learned man who will carry on its ancient traditions as a seat of piety. Tell me, who is the greatest priest of the day?”

“Ungo-Zenji, High Priest of the Ungoji Temple in Kyoto is undoubtedly the greatest priest of the day,” came the unanimous reply.

So Masamuné decided to offer the vacant post to the holy Ungo-Daizenji, but as the priest in question was a favourite at

Court, and enjoyed the confidence of the Emperor, it was necessary that His Majesty should first be approached before anything was said to the Zenji. Masamuné tendered his petition in due form and as a personal favour to himself. The Emperor who retained a warm affection for the retired statesman, readily assented, and thus it came about that Ungo-Zenji was appointed Head of the Zuiganji Temple in the beautiful district of Matsushima.

On the seventh day after his installation, Masamuné paid a formal call at the Zuiganji to welcome the new arrival. He was ushered into the private guest-room of the Zenji which was at the moment unoccupied. On turning to the alcove his attention was at once arrested by the sight of an old garden *geta* placed on a valuable stand of elaborate and costly workmanship.

“What celebrated personage has used that *geta*?” said the astonished Masamuné to himself. “But surely it is a breach of etiquette to decorate a room with such a lowly article when about to receive a daimio of my standing! However, the priest has doubtless some purpose in allowing so strange an infringement of good manners.”

At that moment the sliding doors opened noiselessly, and a venerable man in full canonicals and bearing a holy brush of long white hair in his hand, came in. His immobile face was that of an ascetic but marred by a disfiguring scar on his forehead between the eyes.

Ungo-Zenji, for he it was, seated himself opposite his guest and putting both hands, palm downwards, on the mats bowed



several times in respectful greeting, Masamuné returning the courtesy with due ceremony.

When the salutations were over, Masamuné could no longer restrain his curiosity.

“Your Reverence,” he began, “in compliance with my earnest request you have condescended to come down to this insignificant place to take charge of our temple. I am profoundly impressed by your goodness and know not how to thank you. I am a plain man and unskilled in words. But, your Reverence, there are two things which puzzle me, and though at this our first interview you may deem it a want of good breeding to be so inquisitive, may I ask you to explain the place of honour given to a garden *geta*, and the scar on your brow that accords so ill with your reputation for saintliness?”

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