



Traditional Japanese warrior

But virtuous emotion as exemplified in the famous Kabuki story "Komatsu, or War Horse" was highly approved. It showed the spirit to be encouraged in warrior-women as well as men.

If we tell you the story, we know you will understand.

Rescuing damsels fair and plighting troths used to be a full-time job for our romantic knights of old. In far Nippon the gallant samurai also had his sentimental moods, although his attitude towards his lady-love was far more practical. The story unrolls:—

Ikuzo, a samurai of the Tsushima clan, was invited to a battle that was being held some distance away, but his horse was old and weary, and he could not afford to buy another one befitting his rank. Besides the reluctant horse, his only possession was a beautiful common-law wife, a Niigata maid with lovely black tresses that reached to the ground, and about which he loved boasting to his friends.

His anger was terrible, therefore, when he returned home one day and found that Komatsu, his love and pride, had cut off her hair. Her only reply was to point sadly outside at a magnificent champing steed that was being led

through the courtyard by a groom from the famous Yuri stables. Komatsu had sold her beautiful hair so that her master might have his horse and not be late for the battle.

(Let us sip a little green tea while the huge Kabuki stage revolves to the second act. We need the refreshment, for it is now that the inspiring part of the drama begins.)

Alas, Ikuzo's satisfaction was short-lived. His new charger was so stately and handsome that it was out of the question to use the old shabby saddle and bridle. Once again he became fitful and morose, and, to escape the sneers of his friends, he seriously contemplated taking the logical way out and killing his horse, Komatsu, and himself.

Returning from another fruitless visit to the money-lenders, he found, this time, no Komatsu at all, but instead an exquisitely inlaid saddle, expertly armoured, and all the accoutrements that went with a dashing war horse. A letter nearby explained all. To make Ikuzo completely happy, Komatsu had sold herself to the local licensed quarters, naturally at some discount owing to the loss of her hair, but for enough to provide the equipment desired by Ikuzo.

The curtain falls on Ikuzo riding away in full martial splendour, soliloquising on the superior qualities of the women of Yamato (Old Japan): "If all women were as noble and virtuous as my Komatsu, what a happy world this would be."

The last time we saw this moving drama in Tokyo we were able to meet Utaemon who took the part of Komatsu and who specializes in depicting famous women of history. He was actually a very sweet boy, and he told us that the secret of his success was the many opportunities he had of rehearsing his stage parts in real life. And it is indeed only a short while ago that police regulations were enacted forbidding Kabuki female impersonators from dressing up as geisha and playing obvious practical jokes on short-sighted old gentlemen who really wanted to be entertained in an orthodox manner.