

THE TO-KEN SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

for the Study and Preservation of Japanese Swords and Fittings



Hon. President: B. W. ROBINSON, M.A., B.LITT.

Secretary: H. M. HUTCHINSON, 141 Nork Way, Banstead, Surrey

PROGRAMME 94

DECEMBER 1976 - JANUARY 1977

Programme Editor

Clive Sinclair
61 Norfolk Crescent
Sidcup, Kent.

The Meetings will in future be held at the Mason's Arms Public House, Maddox Street. This is just off Hanover Square, near St. Georges Church. They will start at the usual time of 7.30 p.m.

February Meeting, Monday February 7th: A talk on the comparison of feudal Scotland and feudal Japan by Mike Mortimer.

March Meeting, Monday March 7th: Dave Parker will give a talk on naginata and yari. Please bring any examples.

EDITORIAL - The December and January meetings had to be cancelled owing to the quite unexpected loss of our usual meeting place at the Princess Louise. Members arrived for the December meeting to find that the room had been converted into a wine bar and was no longer available for a private meeting. By some oversight no notice of this had been sent to us. We have now obtained a room at the Mason's Arms. This is our old meeting place before we moved to the Princess Louise and although rather smaller is very comfortable and pleasant.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Under the present arrangements all subscriptions fall due in March. They are as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Full Member | £4 a year |
| Corresponding Member | £3 a year |
| United States and Canada | \$9 a year |
| or by air mail | \$15 |

A few members in other parts of the world have asked for Programmes to be sent by air mail and appropriate rates have been arranged in each case.

Subscriptions should be sent to:

The Secretary
Token Society of Great Britain
141 Nork Way
Banstead
Surrey England

Cheques should be made payable to "The To-Ken Society of Great Britain".

It is regretted that owing to the high cost of printing and posting the Programme copies cannot be sent to members who are in arrears with the subscription.

Tour in Japan

The Japan Society of the United States have announced that they are arranging a cultural visit to Japan from June 29th to July 22nd 1977. Details may be obtained from:

Miss Sandra Faux,
Japan Society Inc.,
333 East 47th Street,
New York. New York 10017

Spring Arms Fair

Arms Fairs Ltd. are holding their Spring Arms Fair on 15th and 16th April at the Royal Lancaster Hotel. The Society has been given a stand and we would appreciate the loan from members of suitable items for display.

A few weeks ago I came across a hard-backed folder with a collection of old magazines entitled "Artistic Japan". They were dated between 1880 and 1890 and each issue covered various aspects of Japanese art, including wood-cut blocks, ojime, jewellery and swords. They provide a fresh account of these aspects of art as they were very close to the time that Japan opened up to the west. The following three articles are of the long sword, the short sword and an interesting bamboo writing case. Although the first two may not contain any new information for most members, I think the style of writing is refreshingly quaint, and the third article I found absorbing.

Editor

ARTISTIC JAPAN, February 1889

The Sword

1. The Katana or Large Sized Sword

In the "History of the Empire of Japan", contained in the "Letters of Francois Caron, President of the Dutch Colony in this Country" (France) (revised, added to, and published by Melchisedech Thevenot, 1696) Mons. Caron says:-

"Once when two Japanese gentlemen met on a staircase in the Emperor's palace, their swords clashed against each other. He who was descending was displeased because the other had struck his sword, and said some words to him. The one ascending apologised for the mishap, but at the same time added that it was, after all, two swords which had touched each other and one was of equal value to the other.

"'I will make you understand', said the quarrelsome one, 'what is the difference between the two'; and he straightway proceeded to commit hara-kiri - cutting of the stomach.

"The other one, jealous of this advantage that his enemy had taken of him, hastened to serve on the table before the Emperor a dish that he had in his hands, and returned to find him who had made the quarrel, dying of his self-inflicted wound; having inquired of him if he still lived, he killed himself in a like manner, saying to his comrade that he would not have forestalled him had he not been at that moment occupied about the service of his King, but that he might die happy for he had shown that his sword was of equal worth."

The story, retold more recently in the 'Forty-seven Worthies of Assano', confirms the tradition of ferocious susceptibility in heroic times.

In our days - or at least before the recent legislation - the sight of arms invariably excited the Samurai.

In Satsuma - a province whose inhabitants are considered quarrelsome and ill-humoured - if a man in public, no matter for what purpose, has drawn his sword against anyone, he is not allowed

to return it to its scabbard without having terminated the combat by death; according to the law he is obliged to fight until he has killed his adversary or fallen mortally wounded himself. It is by virtue of these rigorous injunctions in times of peace that the display of every kind of weapon is prohibited. The lance and the daggers must be in sheaths; the barrels of guns are carefully covered up, only to be removed in the case of an expedition into a hostile country, or when escorting a criminal to the place of execution. So it was that Sir Rutherford Alcock - who made it a custom to be accompanied at Yedo by some lancers of his own nation - was requested by the Japanese Government to hide the lance blades of his escort, in order to avoid engendering a supposition in the minds of the inhabitants of hostile sentiments (R. Lindau, 1864; Un Voyage autour du Japon).

A young Japanese, a page in the house of a prince before the revolution of 1868, told me that a man in shabby and stained clothes appeared at the gates of the castle, and begged for a hearing. He drew from his belt his two swords, placing them in the hands of the pages, and was in a short time allowed entrance. The young people smiled at his strange appearance, and then hastened to examine his swords, which were placed on a rack of lacquer decorated with armorial bearings. When the man retired he received back his swords, which were presented to him with the greatest respect. Their exquisite quality bore witness to the fact that they alone remained as relics of the former exalted position of their master, the solitary witness to his fortune, spent often under a feigned ancestral name.

A visitor of this sort would never have been an imposter. Stories are indeed told of swords belonging to the nobles having been dishonestly acquired, but they invariably had the effect of bringing ill-luck, and, besides, were dangerous to possess, for they had a vindictive spirit in them.

It was in the endless and bloody feudal wars from the 13th Century to the 16th Century between the Taira and Minamoto families, that the worship of arms came to Japan. The metal workers of these times forged armour, and suspended from strings attached to it, pieces of paper as charms against evil spirits, and they caused their fine works to be blessed by the priests of Bishamon. The god Inari, who lives in the fir woods, and whose image for this reason is often accompanied by a fox, on some occasions came to help the forger in the making of his finest swords.

Let us inquire whence and by what mysterious methods arms reached the Islands of Nippon. What were the tribes that first of all landed there? Whence came the rumours, transmitted from mouth to ear, that they were dark skinned, with their teeth stained black? (Married women to this day stain their teeth black).

Later on other strangers came and the first-comers were pushed back up into the mountains on Oho-ye-yama, where they became demons and eaters of women, and were armed with great

wooden clubs. The Stone Age, as it is usually termed, is shown by numerous examples. In the second century before the Christian era, according to the 13th Century Chinese historian Ma-tuan-li, on the authority of an ambassador sent to China from Japan "they have swords, lances and axes as arms".

In this long interval, extending perhaps over a thousand years, who had taught the Japanese to work in iron? For we know from the annals of the Tairas, that they had for a long time imported their iron from foreign countries. At this time the Indian apostles, who spread the gospel of Sakyamuni, were crossing the seas. Coincidentally with the arrival of the Buddhist religion in India, China and Corea, a great advancement occurred in the manufacture of arms. Among temple treasures are shown ancient sword blades, misshapen and oxydised with age - such as are brandished by the four guardians of heaven, who watch by the temples and oversee the evil geni of the cardinal points.

The real Japanese arm though, is the Katana - a sword slightly curved, with one edge only, and sufficiently solid for use with two hands.

It is probable that before the discovery of the iron mines found in the eighth century, Japan got iron already worked from Corea - abundant in minerals and more advanced in civilisation.

We must here remark upon an unusual circumstance in the history of the industrial arts and that is that the names of the masters who invented or carried to perfection the forging and tempering of sword blades are known - for instance, Masa-nobu and Sane-nori in the tenth century. The quality of their work is of the finest, and of an unequalled resistance. The 'Kamis' - or spirits of their ancestors - came to their aid when they hammered the pieces made of old nails, put them in a furnace, annealed and tempered them, and, lastly, they sharpened and polished them, and added the signature.

The Japanese were, originally, careful not to divulge their secrets to other nations. Kaempfer tells (AD 1755) how, in the year 1676, a Daikwan, or administrator of the imperial estate of Nagasaki, named Sie-Tsugu-Feso, was convicted for having collected together some swords which he proposed to send secretly into Corea. This was enough to cause his death and that of his whole family, which was a large one. The Jesuits sent some swords to Louis XIV, which he preserved for a long time in the Petit-Bourbon. Rembrandt had some, which the captain of a Dutch ship had given him in exchange.

The Dutch, in their first reports addressed to the directors of the East India Company, drew attention to the immense prices at which the Japanese valued their arms. "They have" (Memorable Embassades, Amsterdam, 1660) "the same madness for the jars of tsia (tea) and for Kakemonos, as they have for their swords and daggers, which are often priced at four or five thousand florins, when they are the forging of some celebrated workman". With regard to the

fortune of a Mikado, who died in 1631, Melchisedech Thevenot gives us the words that he uttered on his deathbed: "I have always held in great reverence these things as much as my ancestors; and you should make a rule to do so for this reason." Among other precious articles, he gave to his son a sword curved in a semi-circle with the signature "Dzouky Massamé;" another signed "Samoyé"; another smaller, which bears the name "Bungo-Dyssero"; another "Massamé". He left to his second son a sword signed "Czu-Massamé" to his third brother (both princes had provinces of their own) "a sword, some kakemonos and a little vessel for preparing tsia (tea) in, called mara-issibu."

At the close of the seventeenth century, the taste for luxury and adornment had degenerated to such an extent with the Samuri that they ornamented and painted themselves like women. A certain Yodora Fatsyro, son of one of the rich merchants of Osaka, ruined himself by wanton extravagance, was exiled, and the government confiscated his goods. In the list of his effects there are mentioned a hundred and seventy swords of all lengths. It was the height of fashion to match the pair of swords with the dress worn. The excellence of the swords and the art displayed in their mountings were mentioned by the Jesuits in their 'Letters', which were abundantly circulated over Europe. To the reverend Fathers is due the praise of having first admired them. They had sent to Saint-Siege an embassy, which leaving Nagasaki in 1582, arrived at Lisbon in 1584. Phillip II received them where he examined their silk robes, their draperies for ceremonial use and their swords. But really, with very rare exceptions, Japanese arms never, until quite lately, found their way into Europe. Travellers only noted their existence; the Renaissance, so fond of everything which appertained to a man of war, was unaware of their existence.

Colonélie Clerc, who has collected at the Museum of Arms a most interesting series of war costumes of every race and age, has kindly assisted me in my experiments, by sending to the Small Arms Factory at Chatelleraut some of the blades which the Government received at the time of the French Exhibition of 1867, from the Prince of Satsuma. The following are some extracts from his official report:-

"I have submitted the blades to the examination of the master workmen of the Small Arms Factory, who are very experienced in questions of forging, tempering and sharpening.

In order to examine the structure of the metal, a blade has been broken in three places. It has thus been easily ascertained, that the core is formed of a very wiry iron, covered on its two principal faces and edge, by a coating of steel. The thickness of the two metals is most regular, the welding is perfect, without an appearance of cracks or indentations. This operation must present enormous difficulties to be successfully and perfectly surmounted, as they are: often our forgers

could hardly believe their eyes. The raw material, too, must be of the best quality, to judge from its grain and physical properties.

The sharpeners are even cleverer, if it were possible, than the forgers: the shape and size of the blades is kept with the greatest exactitude, all the ridges have a perfect regularity; the edge is wonderful and the polish is very fine.

To sum up, the materials are excellent and those that have worked them real artists. Such is the opinion of our most capable experts. We can learn nothing that is profitable from the blades which you have sent us; but if you could induce the Japanese workmen to come and give us their assistance as forgers and sharpeners, I believe they could instruct our master workmen in many ways."

The great Iyeyasu spoke as follows concerning this noble weapon: "For a Samurai to forget to wear his sword is an unpardonable act; the sword in the girdle is the Soul of the Samurai". This aptly sums up the whole matter.

- 8 Phillippe Burty.

ARTISTIC JAPAN - March 1889

2. The Wakizashi or Small Sword

In 1875, having already been bitten by the passion for Japanese art, I had formed the nucleus of a collection. My friends also found great amusement in the curiosities which began to arrive in considerable numbers. A sword in my collection, quite commonplace in exterior appearance, and with a sheath of no striking beauty, was nevertheless the object of general admiration. A young Japanese student in France, had been introduced to me, and took great interest in my efforts to understand my collection and to trace out the historical connection of my objects. He belonged to an ancient and noble family, that since the rise to power of the Tokugawas, had fallen in its fortunes. He was thoroughly in favour of European reforms and evinced not the slightest enthusiasm for my sword. Besides, he assured me that the "attendants of the ministers carried weapons exactly similar". One day in October, he made his appearance holding a long parcel wrapped in white silk, containing two swords wrapped up in antique brocade, the beauty of which I had often heard his friends tell. He said to me - his usual politeness having more gravity than usual, that his father had chosen these arms himself before his departure for Europe; that they would be much safer in my keeping than in a bachelor's chambers. That the Katana was in perfect condition but the Wakizashi had become slightly blunt (he and some friends had cut the wires on some champagne bottles with it on one lively occasion).

The small sword, the pair of the Katana and its inseparable companion in the life of a Japanese, gives rise to detailed consideration.

The mounting is signed, "Goto Mitsu Masa". The Gotos constitute a family of makers of sword mounts, who have come down in regular succession from the middle of the fifteenth century to our day. The Gotos worked in gold and shakudo in the same manner as the earliest masters in iron, brass, embossed work, and translucent enamels. The series of signatures of the members of the head and collateral branches of the family, with the representations of imitations and forgeries, formed two volumes even before the end of the eighteenth century, issued for the use of collectors, who were passionate collectors of their work.

Goto Mitsu Masa has put on the Kashira (pommel) a branch of a cherry tree half hidden by a notice, on which is written a warning to passers-by:- "He who cuts a branch from this tree shall have his own fingers cut off."

Two gold ornaments (menuki) bound by and partly under a black silk cord, which is wound round a shark's-palate skin, covered handle, which in the first instance meant to stop the hand slipping, represent the merciless chase of a crane by a falcon. The guard, which projects but little is oval and of iron with incrustated decorations, pierced with holes for the Kodzuka and Kogai to pass through. These guards, of which the decorative variety is almost endless, gives the strongest proof of the genius of people. The most astonishing, to my mind are those of hammered or cut iron, moreover, they have been brought into our modern commerce by the importations of our great merchants. Samurai, wearing by right two swords, had to have a change of several sets of guards, each more or less valuable, more or less simple. Even the most simple appeal to an artistic taste, covered as they are either with bas-reliefs, or cut through with the greatest ingenuity; they form an infinite repertory of historic legends, or motives from nature, interpreted without exception with taste and spirit.

On the left side of the scabbard there is slipped into a groove a knife (Kodzuka) of which the blade is hidden but the handle projects. On a ground of shakudo (nanako) with a hammered surface, having the appearance as it were, of a coating of caviare, the artist has continued the decorative motive which is seen on the other parts of the sword, even on the least important pieces - a crescent moon emerging from vapours in gold and silver, blossoms of flowers and snow crystals. The blade, often of flexible steel, is sharpened two-thirds of its length; on it we have only the maker's name - Nobu-Yoshi, at Myako. Some also have written on them the name of their early owners, Buddhist prayers, short poems, or even a series of landscapes such as the "Eight Views of Lake Biwa". These marks of the engraver, on a material most difficult to work on, are of a fineness and fidelity which are surprising to a degree.

The Kodzuka, I have heard said, was pushed into the fringed hair, which the warriors - they have for ages worn flowing locks - fastened up before going into action. In addition, the Kodzuka, besides being used to fasten the heads cut off in battle to the saddle bow, were also a missile weapon, whose special practice has been represented by Hosusai in his "Man-gwa", which appears very similar in use to a lance. At all times it serves as a paper knife - Japanese paper being made of vegetable tissue cannot be torn.

The Kogai (head pin) balances the Kodzuka on the opposite side of the scabbard. It is formed of a long blunt blade. The oldest that I have collected are of iron, sharpened on two sides, and was used for repairing leather belts.

At a later date, when horses were imported from Corea the Kogai served for grooming their hooves, horses never being shod in Oriental countries. Also at times it was divided into two longitudinal parts, and these two narrow instruments could be used for eating rice. One also hears it affirmed that one of these 'head-pins' was stuck in the scalp of an enemy by his victor in action, and that the 'proofs' were collected when the engagement was completed victoriously.

The blade of my Wakizashi measures rather more than eleven inches. The metal is of a somewhat bluer hue than that of the Katana, with a solidity which can only compare with natural crystal. It bears the signature "Haru-Mitsu, inhabitant of the province of Bizen, of the village of Osafune". The 'clouds' are the traces of the steeling and they reveal the methods of some special time, province and workshop. This complicated science should be studied by experts.

The Katana was the fighting weapon that watched over the life of its owner. The Wakizashi, on the other hand, was the guardian of his honour, in the past, the present and the future. In the home it occupied a place specially designed for it on a sword stand placed in a niche. It consummated the death of its conquered or insulted master, unable to do justice himself, or condemned by law, but with the privilege of not submitting himself to the supreme horror of the executioner. It was the special weapon used for Hara-kiri or Seppuku.

Count C de Montblanco in 1865 thus concisely described Seppuku: "In Japan the man who deserves death, and dies by his own hand, is preserved from the shame entailed by his crime. In bravely accepting the responsibility of his act, he so to speak, destroys the guilt. He bequeaths to his family the memory of his courage and dignity; it weighs in the balance with the recollection of his crime, and thus the moral position which was his right, and the respect in which he had been held, were preserved."

Such is the moral signification of the Wakizashi, whose use might be an honour to the most advanced civilisation.

Phillipe Burty

Editor's Note: It must be that I am guided by some hidden 'kani' in writing the next piece. Having just spent some three hours editing the above two articles, the clock has turned midnight and it is now December 14, 1976, exactly 275 years after Oishi Kuranosuke led the loyal ronin on their trail of vengeance; that immortal snowswept night.

ARTISTIC JAPAN - October 1888

A Travelling Writing Set (made by one of the Forty Seven Ronin)

One winter afternoon, some years ago, I happened to pay Mr Bing a visit just as he was having a consignment of goods from Japan unpacked. Among other things already gathered together on a lacquer tray, there was a small writing set, called in Japanese 'Yatate' (arrow-holder), containing the badger's-hair brush for writing, and a tiny box in which is enclosed a sort of sponge of rabbit's hair, soaked in Indian ink. These quaint little objects, each made of two pieces of bamboo, had upon them representations of children playing, drawn in black upon the yellowish drab colour of the natural wood. There was nothing in any way unusual about the childish games, but somehow the little set seemed to me to have the appearance of an object of use in bygone times, and a long inscription engraved on the box, and one of those undisguised mends, seen on objects of value in Japan, doubly confirmed by ideas.

I offered a price, which was not accepted and went away disappointed, and on returning the next day, determined to buy it, found it had already been sold to a well-known collector, who in the course of a year or so tired of it, and I at last secured it.

It languished at my home for some time until one day, M. Hayashi discovered the writing set in a drawer. I saw his fingers trembling with excitement as if he were touching some precious relic; at the same time he remarked to me, "Do you know you have here a great curiosity - an object made by one of the forty-seven Ronins?" And tearing a leaf from a notebook, he directly translated the inscription on the box (see page 11) which may be put thus:- "Carved by Otoka Nobukiyo, subject of Prince Akao, in 1683, at the end of spring time". (If the date is correct, the Prince of Akao having been executed in 1690 - seems to indicate that the little writing set was manufactured before Otoka was a Ronin and a merchant of bamboo articles; but according to the custom in Japan, people who had no idea of becoming professional artists carved netsukes to amuse themselves, and so Otoka, as a merchant later on, may have made profit by the amusement of his younger days.)

大高

0
TAKA

FAMILY NAME
OF RONIN

赤穂

AKA
0

NAME OF THE
MASTER OF THE
FORTY-SEVEN RONIN

信清

NOBU
KYO

FORENAME OF
RONIN

臣

(SHIN) SUBJECT

彫

HORO
KORO

"SCULPT"

之

亥季

KI
SUIS

END OF
SPRING
TIME

天

TEN
WA
SAN

NUMBER OF
SERIES OF YEARS

和三

THREE

二月

NI
GATSU

2ND MONTH

癸

The story of the young Lord's attack on Kotsuke within the walls of the royal palace is well known. The punishment could only be death, and after committing Seppuku he left his retainers, masterless, without purpose or direction to their lives - Ronin.

Led by Oishi Kuranosuke, forty seven of the Ronin planned revenge, but Kotsuke was on his guard. Great precautions were taken in order to allay his fears. The loyal band scattered and Oishi Kuranosuke left his wife and appeared to lead the life of a drunkard and debauch, until at last Kotsuke began to relax. Then on the 14th December 1701, the Ronin attacked Kotsuke's mansion and eventually caught him and put him to the sword. They then followed their master's example and died by their own hands, and became immortalised as true examples of the Samurai spirit.

It is easy to understand, on hearing the translation of the inscription by M. Hayashi, how much interest I felt in an object which might even have played a part in the expedition against the house of Kotsuke. It is natural that I should be anxious to make the acquaintance of my artist hero either by a portrait sketch or any representation. I set to work to ransack my albums, finding the compilation entitled "Sei tu Guishi Den (Knights of duty and devotion) where the artist Kuniyoshi shows us the Ronin in the act of attacking Kotsuke.

Having shown the album to M. Hayashi, I asked him to pick out Otoka, and whether he knew any further details of the man. While searching through the book, he said to me - "Here is Otoka or rather Quengo Tadao - for it is not the custom to mention the real names of the Ronins - they are always represented by the feigned names by which they are known in the theatre. While saying this, M. Hayashi had turned to a page in the album where one finds a coloured print of a warrior in a blue helmet, with a black and white robe lined with black, his head lowered, his hands on the handle of a lance, one foot in the air, the other flat on the ground and making a great blow from side to side. Then M. Hayashi exclaimed, "His biography, here it is!" and I give it as he translated it:-

"Tadao belonged by descent to a family of vassals of Akao. In spite of his youthfulness he was a well known character; his knowledge of tactics and manoeuvring brought him great renown. After the disaster befell the house of his master, he came to Yedo, determined in his heart to have vengeance. But to the world he appeared as an artist, and he was called among poets Shiyo, and a great poet of this period, Kikaku, was his friend. He was admitted to the tea society of Tcha-noyu and was the pupil of Yamada Sohen, the celebrated master of tea ceremonies, who was intimate with Kira (Kotsuke). He so continued to put himself into possession of the knowledge of the habits of his enemy. In order to become perfectly acquainted, he disguised himself as a merchant of articles made in bamboo and of brooms, of which he

sold the finest sort; so he constantly visited the palace of Kira. So it was that he learnt that the fourteenth day of the twelfth month was the day of general cleaning, and that on this day, all the people were either drunk or asleep from fatigue. So it was also, that he showed Oishi which was the night that an attack should be made. In the combat he was wounded during the night, and it is believed that Kobayoshi Heihate was his adversary".

One remarks the words, "disguised himself as a merchant of articles of bamboo"; he must have made them himself, as is proved by the little portable writing-set in my collection.

Edmond De Goncourt

(I must apologise for the quality of the caligraphy on page 11, it is not one of my strong points)

Editor

Ichi-no-tani

I have in my possession two interesting little books, both written by a certain Mr Harold Williams. They are entitled "Shades of the Past" and "Tales of the Foreign Settlements in Japan", and are charming both in content and the manner in which they are written. I thought it might be of interest to tell about one story in the latter book, entitled "Echoes of the Battle of Ichinotani".

It will be remembered that about 750 years ago, the Taira clan secured the possession of the Imperial Personage in a kind of protective kidnapping and found it necessary to defend the western approaches of their headquarters by constructing a fort and barrier at Ichi-no-tani, located between present day Shioya and Suma. There a watch was kept for spies and enemies of the Taira, attempting to infiltrate the territory. In recent years at an almost identical spot a police check-point has been set up in order to intercept smugglers of rice. These police are also constantly on the alert for the harassed and distracted; as this is also a notable suicide spot. Foreigners travelling deaily by motor car from Tarumi and Shioya will be familiar with the police box.

Probably very few of the commuters who pass daily between Shioya and Suma remember or give a thought to the bloody battle that was fought there over 750 years ago. Still fewer probably look at the steep mountains and see the horsemen of Yoshitsune, of the opposing Minamoto clan, making their perilous descent down the mountain side with the object of attacking the Taira fort from the rear. Many horses stumbled and crashed with their

riders, but sufficient survived to stage a desperate assault on the stronghold. After a bloody battle, in which Taira Atsumori, literally lost his head, the Taira men were defeated and as many as possible tried to make their escape in boats from the beach, the same beach to which tens of thousands of Kobe residents flock every summer.

Yoshimitsu, one of Yoshitsune's men who had come down the mountain side, was grievously wounded during the battle and blood was streaming from his head. He saw the red banners of the Taira hauled down from the walls of the stronghold and heard the shouts of victory. Then his horse, tortured with the pain of many wounds, bolted westward along the coastroad and finally collapsed at a point near what is today the railway crossing west of Shioya Station.

With difficulty, Yoshimitsu made his way up the nearby valley in search of water. His face was smeared with dry blood and with the sweat and grime of battle. He came to a small spring but fainted before he was able to drink. It was dark when he recovered consciousness and, racked with the torment of pain and fever, he plunged his face into the spring water, reopening his wound in his forehead. The blood came streaming into his eyes, and in his delirium, looking towards the light of the moon, he saw fluttering about him what he imagined to be the red banners of Taira's men. Drawing his sword he struck two mighty blows which severed the tops off two sturdy firs nearby. Then he fell dead beside the spring.

The body of Yoshimitsu was found and removed the next day, and no one seems to know whether any tombstone was erected in his memory, but still today the spring continues to sparkle.

Over thirty years ago, when the late Mr E.W. James decided to change those barren hills into a place of beauty, he cut away the mountain tops and filled in the valleys, but preserved the spring. He sensed the atmosphere that seems to linger about places where unusual events have occurred, seemingly the effect of mysterious forces that will not permit the past to die. Without knowing the story of Yoshimitsu, Mr James placed by the spring two stone lanterns and an image of Fudo, the Buddhist deity who in his divine wrath, it is said, can foil and capture the powers of evil.

By a curious coincidence the tops of these lanterns are, in shape, not unlike the Samurai helmets of 750 years ago. Within a year the tops of the lanterns had become broken off, and although replaced, were again broken by the time another year had passed. The story of Yoshimitsu, I am told, is known only to a very few, and it is only they, who say it was he who severed the tops of those lanterns with his sword - just as he had cut down the two fir trees over seven centuries before.

It is a fact that right now the sword marks can be seen plainly where the heads of the lanterns were severed from the columns, they now generally rest loosely on the columns, except on those occasions they are found lying on the ground. It is however, equally evident that any sword which cut that stone must have been made of far tougher steel than any forged nowadays, and must have been wielded by a force greater than that possessed by mortal man.

Sceptics assure me that a carelessly driven motor car must have been responsible for breaking off the lantern heads, and others lay the blame on mischievous boys. I do not know who is responsible and I have given the story, as I heard it from a rather credulous old person.

Is it possible that Yoshimitsu is still crazed with the torment of his wounds, that the blood from his forehead still flows into his eyes, and that he still wields his sword each anniversary night as he did over 750 years ago?

Editor's Note: This is fairly typical of the kind of story in these two books. Events from the past linked quaintly with locations of the present and all given a stir from Mr Williams imagination. Both books are published by Charles E. Tuttle Company, and available either from your local Japanese bookshop or from:-

Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc.
Suido 1-chome
2-6 Bunkyo-ku
Tokyo Japan

LETTER

Your Secretary has received this letter from our member Gene Mathers. It was not intended for publication but it is so full of information that we felt it would interest the Society:

63 Little Moorside
Aston on Trent
Derbyshire

22 December 1976

Dear Malcolm:

Thanks for your letter. I would agree with you about the production of a steel (say 0.6 - 0.9% Carbon) from cast iron - the Chinese were practising such folding and forging techniques as early as 200 - 300 AD, with oxidation being used to control the carbon content. This was known as the "100 refinings" and folding and forging of the cast iron resulted in a loss of weight which the Chinese measured. The steel so produced was said to be "clear and

bright and intensely blue-black". They also used techniques of packing cast iron (2-3.5%C) with wrought iron (0.05%C) in sealed containers and heating these to around 950-1000°C for some 48 hours - called "overnight steel" - su thieh tao. This process is somewhat analagous to the blister process applied to wrought iron. I am fairly certain that such techniques were familiar to Japanese swordsmiths and may have been practised by them, although Masahide (Sword and Same) appears to frown on the use of cast iron to produce sword steels. I am however, convinced that many of the koto swords were produced from folded and forged cast iron, unlike shinto swords which, according to Masa hide, were all made from steel selected from a bloom produced during a direct reduction process, the cast iron being discarded .

In this context, it is worth noting that Masahide (p.71) mentions that "pieces of iron, as big as the back of an ox" were found at Hinogori. Joly believes that these were left because they were too large to handle and also that cast iron was not produced. I find it difficult to believe that an iron worker would work "continuously for 1500 days" only to discard the final product, the iron bloom left in the furnace. This leads me to suppose that the bloom "as big as the back of an ox" was a by-product and the iron founder was in fact after cast iron. It is also worth noting that water power was used to power bellows (Sword & Same, p.80) "since remote antiquity". This implies that the furnace temperature could have been high enough to produce cast iron, since in the West, it was only when water power was used that cast iron was produced (14th century).

On the subject of forging to reduce the carbon content to that required in the steel iron oxide can be used. Powdered iron oxide was sometimes added to molten cast iron and stirred in - the carbon was oxidised out, the melting temperature increased and the melt became pasty, at which point an iron rod could be placed in the melt and the steel would "adhere" to this. This technique was used both in the Far East and the West. However, iron oxide introduced as scale during the forging process would be, in my opinion, undesirable, although it would reduce the carbon content to a certain degree. Unfortunately, the carbon + iron oxide → iron + carbon monoxide/dioxide reaction, is a diffusion controlled process and is therefore somewhat slow. Total conversion of the iron oxide to iron is unlikely to occur to any great extent at the sort of times and temperatures involved during forging, so that streaks of scale would be left in the steel, with a consequent loss of strength. Furthermore, since the process the production of gases, blistering of the surface is almost certain to occur - as, indeed, happens with blister steel. The main decarburisation process occurs by a loss of carbon from the surface of the steel during heating to forging temperature. If the steel is folded and forged out, fresh material will be brought

to the surface and decarburised during the next heating cycle so that, after several cycles of folding and forging, the overall carbon content is reduced. This is accompanied by a loss of weight since some of the steel is lost as scale during each cycle of heating and forging. Incidentally, in a smith's forge or furnace there are areas which will be oxidising (reducing carbon) neutral or reducing (increasing carbon) so that, depending upon the region in the fire in which the smith heats the steel carbon can be increased or decreased at will. Close to the air inlet of the tuyeres the atmosphere contains oxygen and carbon dioxide and will therefore oxidise the steel, giving a heavy scale and lowering the carbon. In "colder" areas, remote from the air inlet, the situation is reversed and there will be a high proportion of carbon monoxide and free carbon, resulting in a diffusion of carbon into the steel - this is also mentioned in "Sword and Same" p.76.

Your comment on the tempering of blades by removing the quenched blade from the water bath and allowing the heat retained in the body of the blade to temper the edge is interesting. I have a sword signed Kanezawa no ju Fujiwara Nobutomo (17th century) which I examined some time ago. The blade is made in kobushi style with choji-midare ha. The cutting edge steel appears to be around 0.7-0.8%C but the hardness of the quenched area is only 600-650 Vickers (a quenched 0.7%C steel should have a hardness of around 800 Vickers). There is no sign of tempering of the unquenched region of the ji and I suspected that the smith had therefore withdrawn the blade from the water bath as described above. Before much change in hardness is recorded the cutting edge must reach a temperature of around 300°C, below this temperature all that happens is a slight relief of the residual stresses caused by quenching. The film you describe tends to confirm this. The picture illustrated in Yumoto's book suggests that the temperature attained by the cutting edge during this operation would not be sufficient to affect its hardness.

The whole subject of steel type, construction of the blade and quenching treatments is extremely complex and I do not think there is one simple, all embracing process. As I mentioned earlier the division of blades into koto and shinto could be because of a change from steel forged from cast iron to a steel produced from a furnace bloom, as has been suggested or implied by Masahide. This is something which it would be difficult to prove, even by metallography - which brings to mind something which I have asked various To-Ken members for in the past - if you know of anyone who has any scrap or broken blades kicking about, particularly identifiable ones, I would be grateful to receive them for metallurgical examination, the results to be published in the newsletter. Scrap blades or parts of blades are required since they would be hacksawed into pieces!

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

E. Mathers