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JAPANESE LYRICS

TRANSLATED BY

LAFCADIO HEARN

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

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THE RIVERSIDE PRESS CAMBRIDGE

1915

Seki wa yoi took,

Asahi wo ukete;

O-Yama arashiga

Soyo-soyoto!

SONG OF MIONOSEKI.

[Seki is a goodly place, facing the morning sun. There, from the holy mountains, the winds blow softly, softly, -- soyo-soyoto.]

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

SCATTERED through the pages of Lafcadio Hearn's writings are many Japanese lyrics. So graceful are these little poems, so characteristic, in their swift, sure impressionism, of Oriental art, that it has seemed worth while to bring them together within the compass of a single volume.

It is perhaps unnecessary to analyze here the distinctive features of Japanese poetry. The reader will understand that as the poets relied for their effect largely upon the opportunities for subtle and intricate double meanings afforded by the peculiar structure of the Japanese language, it is scarcely possible to do them justice in an alien tongue. But these translations, though faithful to the original, have the innate feeling for beauty, the instinctive sense of the right word, the perfect phrase, common to everything that came from Hearn's pen.

To preserve the volume from the appearance of undue weightiness the interpretive notes with which the poems are accompanied have been reduced to the smallest possible compass. Indeed, in many cases the elaborate plays upon words are too involved to be susceptible of explanation.

In their limitations of a poem to the presentation of a

single impression and in their ability to present that impression with the utmost vividness and with the sternest economy of words, these Japanese poets are strangely akin to the Imagists, the youngest of the modern schools. And for this reason it has seemed peculiarly appropriate that their work should be included in the NEW POETRY SERIES.

JAPANESE LYRICS

INSECT POEMS

[2]

Nugi-kakuru

Haori sugata no

Kocho kana!

Torisashi no

Sao no jama suru,

Kocho kana!

Tsurigane ni

Tomarite nemuru

Kocho kana!

Neru-uchi mo

Asobu-yume wo ya --

Kusa no cho!

Oki, oki yo!

Waga tomo ni sen,

Neru-kocho!

Kago no tori

Cho wo urayamu

Metsuki kana!

Cho tonde -

Kaze naki hi to mo

Miezari ki!

[3]

Like a woman slipping of her haori [\[1\]](#) -- that is the appearance of a butterfly.

Ah, the butterfly keeps getting in the way of the bird-catcher's pole!

Perched upon the temple-bell, the butterfly sleeps:

Even while sleeping, its dream is of play -- ah, the butterfly of the grass!

Wake up! wake up! -- I will make thee my comrade, thou sleeping butterfly.

Ah, the sad expression in the eyes of that caged bird! -- envying the butterfly!

Even though it did not appear to be a windy day, the fluttering of the butterflies --!

[4]

Rakkwa eda ni
Kaeru to mireba --
Kocho kana!

Chiru-hana ni --
Karusa arasou
Kocho kana!

Chocho ya!
Onna no michi no
Ato ya saki!

Chocho ya!
Hana-nusubito wo
Tsukete-yuku!

Aki no cho
Tomo nakereba ya;
Hito ni tsuku.

Owarete mo,
Isoganu furi no
Chocho kana!

Cho wa mina

Jiu-shichi-hachi no

Sugata kana!

[5]

When I saw the fallen flower return to the branch -- lo! It was only a butter fly! [2]

How the butterfly strives to compete in lightness with the falling flowers!

See that butterfly on the woman's path, -- now fluttering behind her, now before!

Ha! The butterfly! -- it is following the person who stole the flowers!

Poor autumn butterfly! -- when left without a comrade, it follows after man!

Ah, the butterfly! Even when chased, it never has the air of being in a hurry.

As for butterflies, they all have the appearance of being about seventeen or eighteen years old. [3]

[6]

Cho tobu ya --

Kono yo no urami

Naki yo ni!

Cho tobu ya,

Kono yo ni nozomi

Nai yo ni!

Nami no hana ni

Tomari kanetaru,

Kocho kana!

Mutsumashi ya! --

Umare-kawaraba

Nobe no cho.

Nadeshiko ni

Chocho shiroshi --

Tare no kon?

Ichi-nichi no

Tsuma to miekeri --

Cho futatsu.

Kite wa mau,

Futari shidzuka no

Kocho kana!

[7]

How the butterfly sports, -- just as if there were no enmity in this world!

Ah, the butterfly! -- it sports about as if it had nothing more to desire in this present state of existence.

Having found it difficult indeed to perch upon the (foam-) blossoms of the waves, -- alas for the butterfly!

If (in our next existence) we be reborn as butterflies upon the moor, then perchance we may be happy together!

On the pink-flower there is a white butterfly: whose spirits, I wonder?

The one-day wife has at last appeared -- a pair of butterflies!

Approaching they dance; but when the two meet at last they were very quiet, the butterflies!

[8]

Cho wo ou

Kokoro-mochitashi

Itsumademo!

Yuku e naki:

Ari no sumai ya!

Go-getsu ame.

Hito koe wa.

Tsuki ga naitaka

Hototogisu!

Hototogisu

Nakitsuru kata wo

Nagamureba, --

Tada ariake no

Tsuki zo nokoreru.

Hototogisu

Chi ni naku koe wa

Ariake no

Tsuki yori hokani

Kiku hito mo nashi.

Would that I might always have the desire of chasing butterflies!

Now the poor creature has nowhere to go! . . . Alas for the dwellings of the ants in this rain of the fifth month!

A solitary voice! Did Moon cry? 'T was but the hototogisu. [\[4\]](#)

When I gaze towards the place where I heard the hototogisu cry, lo! there is naught save the wan morning moon.

Save only the morning moon, none heard the heart's-blood cry of the hototogisu.

LULLABIES AND CHILDREN'S VERSE

[12]

Nenneko,
O-yama no
Usagi no ko,
Naze mata
O-mimi ga
Nagai e yara?
Okkasan no
O-naka ni
Oru toku ni,
Biwa no ha,
Sasa no ha,
Tabeta sona;
Sore de
O-mimi ga
Nagai e sona.

[13]

Sleep, baby, sleep! Why are the honorable ears of the Child of the Hare of the honorable mountain so long? 'T is because when he dwelt within her honored womb, his mamma ate the leaves of the loquat, the leaves of the bamboo-grass. That is why his honorable ears are so long.

[14]

Nono-San,

or

O-Tsuki-San

Ikutsu?

"Jiu-san, --

Kokonotsu."

Sore wa mada

Wakai yo,

Wakai ye mo

Dori

Akai iro no

Obi to,

Shhiro iro no

Obi to

Koshi ni shanto

Musun de.

Uma ni yaru?

"Iyaiya!"

Ushi ni yaru?

"Iyaiya!"

[15]

Nono-San,

Little Lady Moon,

How old are you?

"Thirteen days, --

Thirteen and nine."

That is still young,

And the reason must be

For that bright red obi,

So nicely tied, [5]

And that nice white girdle

About your hips.

Will you give it to the horse?

"Oh, no, no!"

Will you give it to the cow?

"Oh, no, no!"

[16]

Tobi, tobi, maute mise!

Ashita no ba ni

Karasu ni kakushite

Nezumi yaru.

Ato no karasu saki ine,

Ware ga iye ga yakeru ken,

Hayo inde midzu kake,

Midzu ga nakya yarozo,

Amattara ko ni yare,

Ko ga nakya modose.

Hotaru koe midzu nomasho;

Achi no midzu wa nigaizo;

Kochi no midzu wa amaizo.

Cho-cho, cho-cho, na no ha ni tomare;

Na no ha ga iyenara, te ni tomare.

Daidaimushi, daidaimushi, tsuno chitto dashare!

Ame kaze fuku kara tsuno chitto dashare!

Kite, kite, let me see you dance, and tomorrow evening, when the crows do not know, I will give you a rat.

O tardy crow, hasten forward! Your house is all on fire. Hurry to throw water upon it. If there be no water, I will give you. If you have too much, give to your child. If you have no child, then give it back to me.

Come, firefly, I will give you water to drink. The water of that place is bitter; the water here is sweet.

Butterfly, little butterfly, light upon the na leaf. But if thou dost not like the na leaf, light, I pray thee, upon my hand.

Snail, snail, put out your horns a little;; it rains and the wind is blowing, so put out your horns, just for a little while.

[18]

Wakakereba

Nichi-yuki shiraji:

Mahi wa semu,

Shitabe no tsukahi

Ohite-tohorase.

[19]

As he is so young, he cannot know the way . . . To the messenger of the Underworld I will give a bribe, and entreat him, saying: "Do thou kindly take the little one upon thy back along the road." [6]

LOVE SONGS AND LYRICS

[22]

Ka-mi-yo ko-no-ka-ta
Ka-wa-ra-nu mo-no wa:
Mi-dzu no na-ga-re to
Ko-i no mi-chi.

Eko suru tote
Hotoke no mae ye
Futari mukaite,
Konabe date.

Adana e-gao ni
Mayowanu mono wa
Ki-Butsu, -- kana-Butsu, --
Ishi-botoke!

Asu ari to
Omo kokoro no

Ada-zakura:

Yo wa ni arashi no

Fukanu monokawa?

Kawaru uki-yo ni

Kawaranu mono wa

Kawarumai to no

Koi no michi.

[23]

Things never changed since the Time of the Gods:

The flowing of water, the Way of Love.

Even while praying together in front of the tablets ancestral,

Lovers find chance to murmur prayers never meant for the dead! [7]

He who was never bewitched by the charming smile of a woman,

A wooden Buddha is he -- a Buddha of bronze or stone!

Thinking tomorrow remains, thou heart's frail flower-of-cherry?

How knowest whether this night the tempest will not come?

All things change, we are told, in this world of change and sorrow;

But love's way never changes of promising never to change.

[24]

Oya no iken de
Akirameta no wo
Mata mo rin-ye de
Omoi-dasu.

Kaai, kaai to
Naku mushi yori mo
Nakanu hotaru ga
Mi wo kogasu.
Nanno ingwa de
Jitsu naki hito ni
Shin wo akashite, --
Aa kuyashi!

Wasuraruru
Mi naran to omo
Kokoro koso
Wasure nu yori mo
Omoi nari-kere.

Hi kurureba

Sasoeshi mono wo --

Akanuma no

Makomo no kure no

Hitori-ne zo uki!

[25]

Father and mother forbade, and so I gave up my lover; --

Yet still, with the whirl of the Wheel, [\[8\]](#) the thought of him comes and goes.

Numberless insets there are that call from dawn to evening,

Crying, "I love! I love!"--- but the Firefly's silent passion.

Making its body burn, is deeper than all their longing.

Even such is my love . . . yet I cannot think through what ingwa [\[9\]](#)

I opened my heart -- alas! -- to a being not sincere!

To wish to be forgotten by the beloved is a soul-task harder far than trying not to forget.

At the coming of twilight I invited him to return with me --! Now to sleep alone in the shadow of the rushes of Akanuma -- ah! What misery unspeakable!" [\[10\]](#)

[26]

Koshi o-son gojin wo ou;

Ryokuju namida wo tarete rakin wo hitataru;

Komon hitotabi irite fukaki koto umi no gotoshi;

Kore yori shoro kore rojin.

Tadzunetsuru,

Hana ka tote koso,

Hi wo kurase,

Akenu ni otoru

Akane sasuran?

Izuru hi no

Honomeku iro wo

Waga sode ni

Tsutsumaba asu mo

Kimiya tomaran.

Omae shindara tera ewa yaranu!

Yaete konishite sake de nomu.

Closely, closely the youthful prince now follows offer the gem-bright maid; --

The tears of the fair one, falling, have moistened all her robes.

But the august lord, having once become enamored of her -- the depth of his longing is like the depth of the sea.

Therefore it is only I that am left forlorn, -- only I that am left to wander alone.

Being on my way to pay a visit, I found that which I took to be a flower: therefore here I spend the day . . . Why, in the time before dawn, the dawn-blush tint should glow -- that, indeed, I know not. [\[11\]](#)

If with my sleeve I bide the faint fair color of the dawning sun, -- then, perhaps, in the morning my lord will remain.

Dear shouldst thou die, grave shall hold thee never!

I thy body's ashes, mixed with wine, will drink.

GOBLIN POETRY

[30]

Hi tomoshite
Kitsune no kwaseshi,
Asobime wa --
Izuka no uma no
Hone ni ya aruran!

Kitsune-bi no
Moyuru ni tsukete,
Waga tama no
Kiyuru yo nari
Kokoro-hoso-michi!

Ko-ya, sore to?
Ayame mo wakanu
Rikombyo:
Izure wo tsuma to
Hiku zo wazurau!

Futatsu naki

Inochi nagara mo

Kakegae no

Karada no miyuru --

Kage no wazurai!

[31]

-- Ah the wanton (lighting her lantern)! -- so a fox-fire [12] is kindled in the time of fox-transformation! . . . Perhaps she is really nothing more than an old horse-bone [13] from somewhere or other

Because of that Fox-fire burning there, the very soul of me is like to be extinguished in this narrow path.

Which one is this? -- which one is that? Between the two shapes of the Rikombyo [14] it is not possible to distinguish. To find out which is the real wife -- that will be an affliction of spirit indeed!

Two lives there certainly are not; -- nevertheless an extra body is visible, by reason of the Shadow-Sickness.

[32]

Naga-tabi no

Oto wo shitaite

Mi futatsu ni

Naru wa onna no

Saru rikombyo.

Miru kage mo

Naki wazurai no

Rikombyo, --

Omoi no hoka ni

Futatsu miru kage!

Rikombyo

Hito ni kakushite

Oku-zashiki,

Omote y deasanu

Kage no wazurai.

Mi wa koko ni;

Tama wa otoko ni

Soine suru; --

Kokoro mo shiraga

Haha ga kaiho.

reason of her ghostly sickness.

Though (it was said that), because of her ghostly sickness, there was not even a shadow of her left to be seen, -- yet, contrary to expectation, there are two shadows of her to be seen!

Afflicted with the Rikombyo, she bides away from people in the back room, and never approaches the front of the house, -- because of her Shadow-disease.

Here her body lies but her soul is far away, asleep in the arms of a man; -- and the white-haired mother, little knowing her daughter's heart, is nursing (only the body).

[34]

Tamakushige

Futatsu no sugata

Misenuru wa,

Awase-kagami no

Kage no wazurai.

Me wa kagami,

Kuchi wa tarai no

Hodo ni aku:

Gama mo kesho no

Mono to koso shire.

Hamaguri no
Kuchi aku toki ya,
Shinkiro!
Yo ni shirare ken
Tatsu-no-miya-hime!

Shinkiro --
Tatsu no miyako no
Hinagata wo
Shio-hi no oki ni
Misuru hamaguri!

[35]

If, when seated before her toilet-stand, she sees two faces reflected in her mirror, -- that might be caused by the mirror doubling itself under the influence of the Shadow-Sickness.
[\[15\]](#)

The eye of it, widely open, like a (round) mirror; the mouth of it opening like a wash-basin -- by these things you may know that the Toad is a toilet article. [\[16\]](#)

When the hamaguri [\[17\]](#) opens its mouth -- lo! Shinkiro appears! . . . Then all can clearly see the Maiden-Princess of the Dragon-Palace.

*Lo! In the offing at ebb-tide, the hamaguri makes visible the miniature image of Shinkiro --
- the Dragon-Capital!*

Nemidare no
Nagaki kami woba
Furi-wakete,
Chi hiro ni nobasu
Rokuro-Kubi kana!

"Atama naki
Bakemono nari" -- to
Rokuro-Kubi,
Mite odorokan
Onoga karada wo.

Tsuka-no-ma ni
Hari wo tsutawaru,
Rokuro-Kubi
Keta-keta warau --
Kao no kowasa yo!

Roku shaku no
Byobu ni nobiru
Rokuro-Kubi

Mite wa, go shaku no

Mi wo chijimi-keri!

[37]

Oh! . . . Shaking loose her long hair disheveled by sleep, the Rokuro-Kubi [\[18\]](#) stretches her neck to the length of a thousand fathoms!

Will not the Rokuro-Kubi, viewing with astonishment [\[19\]](#) her own body (left behind) cry out, "Oh, what a headless goblin have you become!"

*Swiftly gliding along the roof-beam, the Rokuro-Kubi laughs with the sound of "keta-keta" -
- oh! The fearfulness of her face!*

Beholding the Rokuro-Kubi rise up above the six-foot screen, any five-foot person would have become shortened by fear.

[38]

Yuki-Onna --

Yoso kushi mo

Atsu kori;

Sasu-kogai ya

Kori naruran.

Honrai wa

Ku naru mono ka,
Yuki-Onna?
Yoku-yoku mireba
Ichi-butsumo nashi!

Yo-akereba
Kiete yuku e wa
Shirayuki no
Onna to mishi mo
Yanagi nari-keri!

Yuki-Onna
Mite wa yasathiku,
Matsu wo ori
Nama-dake hishigu
Chikara ari-keri!

[39]

As for the Snow-Woman, [\[20\]](#) -- even her best comb, if I mistake not, is made of thick ice; and her hair-pin, too, is probably made of ice.

Was she, then, delusion from the very first, that Snow-Woman, -- a thing that vanishes into empty space? When I look carefully all about me, not one trace of her is to be seen!

*Having vanished at daybreak (that Snow-Woman), none could say whither she had gone.
But what had seemed to be a snow-white woman became indeed a willow-tree!*

Though the Snow-Woman appears to sight slender and gentle, yet, to snap the pine-trees
asunder and to crush the live bamboos, she must have had strength.

[40]

Samukesa ni
Zotto wa suredo
Yuki-Onna, --
Yuki ore no naki
Yanagi-goshi ka mo!

Erimoto ye
Mizu kakeraruru
Kokochi seri,
"Hishaku kase" cho
Fune no kowane ni.

Yurei ni
Kasu-hishaku yori
Ichi-hayaku
Onore ga koshi mo
Nukeru sencho.

Yurei wa
Ki naru Izumi no
Hito nagara,
Ao-umibara ni
Nadote itsuran?

[41]

Though the Snow-Woman makes one shiver by her coldness, -- ah, the willowy grace of her form charms us in spite of the cold. [\[21\]](#)

As if the nape of our necks had been sprinkled with cold water, -- so we felt while listening to the voice of the ship-ghost, saying: -- "Lend me a dipper!" [\[22\]](#)

The loins of the captain himself were knocked out very much more quickly than the bottom of the dipper that was to be given to the ghost.

Since any ghost must be an inhabitant of the Yellow Springs, [\[23\]](#) how should a ghost appear on the Blue sea-Plain?

[42]

Sono sugata,
Ikari wo ote,
Tsuki-matou

Fune no hesaki ya

Tomomori no rei!

Tsumi fukaki

Umi ni shidzumishi,

Yurei no

"Ukaman" tote ya!

Fune ni sugareru.

Ukaman to

Fune wo shitaeru

Yurei wa,

Shidzumishi hito no

Omoi naruran.

Urameshiki

Sugata wa sugoki

Yurei no,

Kaji wo jama suru

Fune no Tomomori.

[43]

That Shape, carrying the anchor on its back, and following after the ship -- now at the bow

and now at the stern -- ah, the ghost of Tomomori. [24]

Crying, "Now perchance I shall be saved!" the ghost that sank into the deep Sea of Sin clings to the passing ship! [25]

The ghosts following after our ship in their efforts to rise again (or, "to be saved") might perhaps be the (last vengeful) thoughts [26] of drowned men.

With vengeful aspect, the grisly ghost of Tomomori (rises) at the stern of the ship to binder the play of her rudder.

[44]

Ochi-irite,
Uwo no ejiki to
Nari ni ken; --
Funa-yurei mo
Nama-kusaki kaze.

Shiwo-hi ni wa
Seizoroe shite,
Heikegani
Ukiyo no sama wo
Yoko ni niramitsu.

Saikai ni

Shizumi-nuredome,

Heikegani

Kora no iro mo

Yahari aka-hata.

Make-ikusa

Munen to mune ni

Hasami ken; ---

Kao mo makka ni

Naru Heikegani.

[45]

Having perished in the sea, (those Heike) would probably have become food for fishes.
(Anyhow, whenever) the ship-following ghosts (appear), the wind has a smell of raw fish!

Marshaled (on the beach) at the ebb of the tide, the Heike-crabs [\[27\]](#) obliquely glare at the apparition of this miserable world.

Though (the Heike) long ago sank and perished in the Western Sea, the Heike-crabs still display upon their upper shells the color of the Red Standard.

Because of the pain of defeat, claws have grown on their breasts, I think; -- even the faces of the Heike-crabs have become crimson (with anger and shame).

Mikata mina
Oshi-tsubusareshi
Heikegani
Ikon wo mune ni
Hasami mochikeri.

Tokonoma ni
Ikeshi tachiki mo
Taore-keri;
Yanari ni yama no
Ugoku kakemono!

Saka-bashira
Tateshi wa tazo ya?
Kokoro ni mo
Fushi aru hito no
Shiwaza naruran.

Hidayama wo
Kiri-kite tateshi
Saka-bashira --
Nanno takumi no

[47]

All the (Heike) party having been utterly crushed, claws have grown upon the breasts of the Heike-crabs because of the resentment in their hearts.

Even the live tree set in the alcove has fallen down; and the mountains in the hanging picture tremble to the quaking made by the Yanari! [\[28\]](#)

Who set the house-pillar upside-down? Surely that must have been the work of a man with a knot in his heat. [\[29\]](#)

That house-pillar hewn in the mountains of Hida, and thence brought here and erected upsided-down -- what carpenter's work can it be? [\[30\]](#)

[48]

Ue shita wo

Chigaete tateshi

Hashira ni wa

Sakasama-goto no

Urei aranan.

Kabe ni mimi

Arite, kite to ka?

Sakashima ni

Tateshi hashira ni

Yanari suru oto!

Uri-iye no

Aruji wo toeba,

Oto arite:

Ware me ga kuchi wo

Aku saka-bashira.

Omoikiya!

Sakasa-bashira no

Hashira-kake

Kakinishit uta mo

Yamai ari to wa!

[49]

As for that house-pillar mistakenly planted upside-down, it will certainly cause adversity and sorrow. [\[31\]](#)

O Ears that be in the wall! [\[32\]](#) listen, will ye? To the groaning and the creaking of the house-post that was planted upside-down!

When I inquired for the master of the house that was for sale, there came to me only a

strange sound by way of reply, -- the sound of the upside-down house-post opening its eyes and mouth! (i.e. its knots and cracks.)

Who could have thought it! -- even the poem inscribed upon the pillar-tablet, attached to the pillar which was planted upside-down, has taken the same (ghostly) sickness. [\[33\]](#)

[50]

Nanige naki
Ishi no Jizo no
Sugata sae,
Yo wa osoroshiki
Mikage to zo naki.

Ita hitoe
Shita wa Jigoku ni,
Sumizome no
Bozu no umi ni
Deru mo ayashina!

Hegasan to
Rokuji-no-fuda wo,
Yurei mo
Nam'mai da to
Kazoete zo miru.

Tada ichi no
Kami no o-fuda wa
Sasuga ni mo
Norike naku to mo
Hegashi kanekeri.

[51]

Though the stone Jizo looks as if nothing were the matter with it, they say that at night it assumes an awful aspect. [\[34\]](#)

Since there is but the thickness of a single plank (between the voyager and the sea), and underneath is Hell, 't is indeed a weird thing that a black-robed priest should rise from the sea! [\[35\]](#)

Even the ghost that would remove the charms [\[36\]](#) written with six characters actually tries to count them, repeating: "How many sheets are there?" [\[37\]](#)

Of the august written-charms of the god (which were pasted upon the walls of the house), not even one could by any effort be pulled off, though the rice-past with which they had been fastened was all gone.

[52]

Yo-arashi ni

Chishiho itadaku
Furu tsubaki,
Hota-hota ochiru
Hana no nama-kubi.

Kusa mo ki mo
Nemureru koro no
Sayo kaze ni,
Mehana no ugoku
Furu-tsubaki kana!

Tomoshihi no
Kage ayashige ni
Miyenuru wa
Abura shiborishi
Furu-tsubaki ka-mo?

[53]

When by the night-storm is shaken the blood-crowned and ancient tsubaki-tree, [\[38\]](#) then one by one fall the gory heads of the flowers, (with the sound of) hota-hoba!

When even the grass and the trees are sleeping under the faint wind of the night, -- then do the eyes and the noses (or "the buds and the flowers") of the old tsubaki-tree move!

As for (the reason why) the light of that lamp appears to be a Weirdness, -- perhaps the oil was expressed from (the nuts of) the ancient tsubaki? [\[39\]](#)

THE RIVER OF HEAVEN

[56]

The following group of poems are all from the *Manyoshu*, or "Gathering of a Myriad Leaves," a vast collection of poems composed before the middle of the eighth century. They represent the old classic poetry at its purest, free from alien influence; and they offer us many suggestions as to the condition of Japanese life and thought twelve hundred years ago. The legend to which they refer is as follows: --

The great god of the firmament had a lovely daughter, Tanabata-tsume, who passed her days in weaving garments for her august parent. She rejoiced in her work, and thought that there was no greater pleasure than the pleasure of weaving. But one day, as she sat before her loom at the door of her heavenly dwelling, she saw a handsome peasant lad pass by, leading an ox, and she fell in love with him. Her august father, divining her secret wish, gave her the youth for a husband. But the wedded lovers became too fond of each other, and neglected their duty to the god of the firmament; the sound of the shuttle was no longer heard, and the ox wandered, unheeded, over the plains of heaven. Therefore the great god was displeased, and he separated the pair. They were sentenced to live thereafter apart, with the Celestial River [\[40\]](#) between them; but it was permitted them to see each other once a year, on the seventh night of the seventh moon. On that night -- providing the skies be clear -- the birds of heaven make, with their bodies and wings, a bridge over the stream; and by means of that bridge the lovers can meet. But if there be rain, the River of Heaven rises, and becomes so wide that the bridge cannot be formed. So the husband and wife cannot always meet, even on the seventh night of

[57]

the seventh month; it may happen, by reason of bad weather, that they cannot meet for three or four years at a time. But their love remains immortally young and eternally patient; and they continue to fulfil their respective duties each day without fault, -- happy in their hope of being able to meet on the seventh night of the next seventh month.

[58]

Amanogawa
Ai-muki tachite,
Waga koishi
Kimi kimasu nari
Himo-toki makena!

Hisakata no
Ama no kawase ni,
Fune ukete,
Koyoi ka kimi ga
Agari kimasan?

Kaze kumo wa
Futatsu no kishi ni
Kayoedomo,
Waga toho-suma no
Koto zo kayowanu!

Tsubute ni mo
Nage koshitsu-beki,
Amanogawa
Hedatereba ka mo,
Amata sube-naki!

[59]

He is coming, my long-desired lord, whom I have been waiting to meet here, on the banks of the River of Heaven The moment of loosening my girdle is nigh! [\[41\]](#)

Over the Rapids of the Everlasting Heaven, floating in his boat, my lord will doubtless deign to come to me this very night.

Though winds and clouds to either bank may freely come or go, between myself and my far-away spouse no message whatever may pass.

To the opposite bank one might easily fling a pebble; yet, being separated from him by the River of Heaven, alas! To hope for a meeting (except in autumn) is utterly useless.

[60]

Aki-kaze no

Fukinishi hi yori

"Itsushika" to --;

Waga machi koishi

Kimi zo kimaseru.

Amanogawa

Ito kawa-nami wa

Tatanedomo,

Samorai gatashi --
Chikaki kono se wo.

Sode furaba
Mi mo kawashitsu-beku
Chika-keredo,
Wataru sube nashi,
Aki nishi araneba.

Kageroi no
Honoka ni miete
Wakarenaba; --
Motonaya koin
Au-toki made wa!

[61]

From the day that the autumn wind began to blow (I kept saying to myself), "Ah! when shall we meet?" -- but now my beloved, for whom I waited and longed, has come indeed!

Though the waters of the River of Heaven have not greatly risen, (yet to cross) this near stream and to wait upon (my lord and lover) remains impossible.

Though she is so near that the waving of her (long) sleeves can be distinctly seen, yet there is no way to cross the stream before the season of autumn.

When we were separated, I had seen her for a moment only, -- and dimly as one sees a flying midge; now I must vainly long for her as before, until time of our next meeting!

[62]

Hikoboshi no
Tsuma mukae-bune
Kogizurashi, --
Ama-no-Kawara ni
Kiri no tateru wa.

Kasumi tatsu
Ama-no-Kawara ni,
Kimi matsu to, --
Ikayo hodo ni
Mono-suso nurenu.

Amanogawa,
Mi-tsu no nami oto
Sawagu-nari:
Waga matsu-kimi no
Funade-surashi mo.

Tanabata no
Sode maku yoi no
Akatoki wa,
Kawase no tazu wa
Nakazu to mo yoshi.

[63]

Methinks that Hikoboshi must be rowing his boat to meet his wife, -- for a mist (as of oar-spray) is rising over the course of the Heavenly Stream.

While awaiting my lord on the misty shore of the River of Heaven the skirts of my robe have somehow become wet.

On the River of Heaven, at the place of the august ferry, the sound of the water has become loud: perhaps my long-awaited lord will soon be coming in his boat.

As Tanabata (slumbers) with her long sleeves rolled up, until the reddening of the dawn, do not, O storks of the river-shallows, awaken her by your cries.

[64]

Amanogawa
Kiri-tachi-wataru:
Kyo, kyo, to --
Waga matsu-koishi

Funade-surashi!

Amanogawa

Yasu no watari ni,

Fune ukete; --

Waga tachi-matsu to

Imo ni tsuge koso.

O-sora yo

Kayo ware sura,

Na ga yue ni,

Amanokawa-ji no

Nazumite zo koshi.

Yachihoko no

Kami no mi-yo yori

Tomoshi-zuma; --

Hito-shiri ni keri

Tsugiteshi omoeba.

[65]

(She sees that) a mist is spreading across the River of Heaven . . . "To-day, to-day," she thinks, "my long-awaited lord will probably come over in his boat."

By the ferry of Yasu, on the River of Heaven, the boat is floating: I pray you tell my beloved that I stand here and wait.

Though I (being a Star-god) can pass freely to and fro, through the great sky, -- yet to cross over the River of Heaven, for your sake, was weary work indeed!

From the august Age of the God-of-Eight-Thousand-Spears, she had been my spouse in secret only; yet now, because of my constant longing for her, our relation has become known to men.

[66]

Ame tsuchi to

Wakareshi toki yo

Onoga tsuma;

Shika zo te ni aru

Aki matsu are wa.

Waga koru

Niho no omo wa

Koyoi mo ka

Ama-no-kawara ni

Ishi-makura makan.

Amanogawa.

Mikomori-gusa no

Aki-kaze ni

Nabikafu mireba,

Toki kitarurashi.

Waga seko ni

Ura-koi oreba,

Amanogawa

Yo-fune kogi-toyomu

Kaji no 'to kikoyu.

[67]

From the time when heaven and earth were parted, she has been my own wife; -- yet, to be with her, I must always wait till autumn.

With my beloved, of the ruddy-tinted cheeks, this night indeed will I descend into the bed of the River of Heaven, to sleep on a pillow of stone.

When I see the water-grasses of the River of Heaven bend in the autumn wind (I think to myself): "The time (for our meeting) seems to have come."

When I feel in my heart a sudden longing for my husband, then on the River of Heaven the sound of the rowing of the night-boat is heard, and the splash of the oar resounds.

To-zuma to
Tamakura kawashi
Netaru yo wa,
Tori-gane na naki
Akeba aku to mo!

Yorozu-yo ni
Tazusawari ite
Ai mi-domo,
Omoi-sugu-beki
Koi naranaku ni.

Waga tame to,
Tanabata-tsume no,
Sono yado ni,
Oreru shirotai
Nuit ken kamo?

Shirakumo no
I-ho e kakurite
To-kedomo,
Yoi-sarazu min

Imo ga atari wa.

[69]

In the night when I am reposing with my (now) far-away spouse, having exchanged jewel-pillows [\[42\]](#) with her, let not the cock crow, even though the day should dawn.

Though for a myriad ages we should remain hand-in-hand and face to face, our exceeding love could never come to an end. (Why then should Heaven deem it necessary to part us?)

The white cloth which Tanabata has woven for my sake, in that dwelling of hers, is now, I think, being made into a robe for me.

Though she be far-away, and hidden from me by five hundred layers of white cloud, still shall I turn my gaze each night toward the dwelling-place of my younger sister (wife).

[70]

Aki sareba

Kawagiri tateru

Amanogawa,

Kawa ni muki-ite

Kru yo zo oki!

Hito-tose ni

Nanuka no yo nomi
Au-hito no --
Koi mo tsuki-neba
Sayo zo ake ni keru!

Toshi no koi
Koyoi tsukushite,
Asu yori wa,
Tsune no gotoku ya
Waga hoi oran.

Hikoboshi to
Tanabata-tsume to
Koyoi au; --
Ama-no-Kawa to ni
Nami tatsu-na yume!

[71]

When autumn comes, and the river-mists spread over the Heavenly Stream, I turn toward the river (and long); and the nights of my longing are many!

But once in the whole year, and only upon the seventh night (of the seventh month), to meet the beloved person -- and lo! The day has dawned before our mutual love could express (or "satisfy") itself!

The love-longing of one whole year having ended to-night, every day from to-morrow I must again pine for him as before!

Hikoboshi and Tanabata-tsume are to meet each other to-night; -- ye waves of the River of Heaven, take heed that ye do not rise!

[72]

Aki-kaze no
Fuki tadayowasu
Shirakumo wa,
Tanabata-tsume no
Amatsu hire kamo?

Shiba-shiba mo
Ai minu kimi wo,
Amanogawa
Funa-de haya seyo
Yo no fukenu ma ni.

Amanogawa
Kiri tachi-watari
Hikoboshi no
Kaji no 'to kikoyu

Yo no fuke-yukeba.

Amanogawa

Kawa 'to sayakeshi:

Hikoboshi no

Haya kogu fune no

Nami no sawagi ka?

[73]

Oh! That white cloud driven by the autumn-wind -- can it be the heavenly hire [\[43\]](#) of Tanabata-tsume?

Because he is my not-often-to-be-met beloved, hasten to row the boat across the River of Heaven ere the night be advanced.

Late in the night, a mist spreads over the River of Heaven; and the sound of the oar of Hikoboshi is heard.

On the River of Heaven a sound of splashing can be distinctly heard: is it the sound of the rippling made by Hikoboshi quickly rowing his boat?

[74]

Kono yube,

Furikuru ame wa,

Hikoboshi no
Haya kogu fune no
Kai no chiri ka mo.

Waga tama-doko wo
Asu yori wa
Uchi harai,
Kimi to inezute
Hitori ka mo nen!

Kaze fukite,
Kawa-nami tachinu; --
Hiki-fune ni
Watari mo kimase
Yo no fukenu ma ni.

Amanogawa
Nami wa tatsutomo
Waga fune wa
Iza kogi iden
Yo no fukenu ma ni.

Perhaps this evening shower is but the spray (flung down) from the oar of Hikoboshi, rowing his boat in haste.

From to-morrow, alas! After having put my jewel-bed in order, no longer reposing with my lord, I must sleep alone!

The wind having risen, the waves of the river have become high; -- this night cross over in a tow-boat, I pray thee, before the hour be late!

Even though the waves of the River of Heaven run high, I must row over quickly, before it becomes late in the night.

[76]

Inishie ni

Oriteshi hata wo;

Kono yube

Koromo ni nuite --

Kimi matsu are wo!

Amanogawa

Se wo hayami ka mo?

Nubatama no

Yo wa fuke ni tsutsu,

Awanu Hikoboshi!

Watashi-mori,
Fune haya watase; --
Hito-tose ni
Futatabi kayo
Kimi naranaku ni!

Aki kaze no
Fukinishi hi yori,
Amanogawa
Kawase ni dedachi; --
Matsu to tsuge koso!

[77]

Long ago I finished weaving the material; and, this evening, having finished sewing the garment for him -- (why must) I still wait for my lord?

Is it that the current of the River of Heaven (has become too) rapid? The jet-black night advances -- and Hikoboshi has not come!

Oh, ferryman, make speed across the stream! -- my lord is not one who can come and go twice in a year!

On the very day that the autumn-wind began to blow, I set out for the shallows of the River of Heaven; -- I pray you, tell my lord that I am waiting here still!

[78]

Tanabata no
Funanori surashi, --
Maso-kagami,
Kiyoki tsuki-yo ni
Kumo tachi-wataru.

[79]

Methinks Tanabata must be coming in her boat; for a cloud is even now passing across the clear face of the moon.

[80]

Perhaps the legend of Tanabata, as it was understood by those old poets, can make but a faint appeal to Western minds. Nevertheless, in the silence of transparent nights, before the rising of the moon, the charm of the ancient tales sometimes descends upon me, out of the scintillant sky, -- to make me forget the monstrous facts of science, and the stupendous horror of Space. Then I no longer behold the Milk Way as that awful Ring of the Cosmos, whose hundred million suns are powerless to lighten the Abyss, but as the very Amanogawa itself, -- the River Celestial. I see the thrill of its shining stream, and the mists that hover along its verge, and the watergrasses that bend in the winds of autumn. White Orihime I see at her starry loom, and the Ox that grazes on the farther shore; -- and I know that the falling dew is the spray from the Herdsman's oar. And the heaven seems very near, and warm and human; and the silence about me is filled with the dream of a love unchanging, immortal, -- forever yearning and forever young, and forever left unsatisfied by the paternal wisdom of the gods.

THE END

NOTES

1. A cloak, lined usually with brightly colored silk.
2. Alluding to the Buddhist proverb: "The fallen flower returns not to the branch; the broken mirror never again reflects."
3. That is to say, the grace of their motion makes one think of the grace of young girls.
4. A creature of which weird things are told; for it is said to be a night wanderer from the Land of Darkness. It cries as though in pain the syllables "*ho-to-to-gi-su*."
5. Because an obi or girdle of very bright color can be worn only by children.
6. Written more than eleven hundred years ago on the death of the poet's little son.
7. Literally: "Repeat prayers saying, dead-of-presence-in twain facing, -- small-pan cooking! "*Konabe-date* is an idiomatic expression signifying a lovers' *tete-a-tete*, the idea suggested being that of the pleasure experienced by an amorous couple in eating out of the same dish.
8. The Wheel of Karma, the passage from birth to birth.
9. Deeds in a former existence.
10. A double meaning in the third line of the original may be rendered by reading for *of Akanuma* -- *after the time of that happy relation*.
11. The meaning intended may be expressed thus: "Being on my way to pay a visit, I met with a being lovely as a flower; and

[84]

for the sake of that lovely person, I am passing the day here . . . Fair one, wherefore that dawn-like blush before the hour of dawn? -- can it mean that you love me?"

12. The Will-o'-the-Wisp is called fox-fire because the goblin-fox was supposed to create it.
13. The goblin-fox deceived men by transforming an old horse-bone into the form of a courtesan.

14. One afflicted with ghost-sickness. It was formerly supposed that the intense grief or longing of a lover caused the suffering spirit to create a double, one body going to join the beloved while the other remained at home.

15. This suggests the ghostly sympathy said to exist between a mirror and the soul of its possessor.

16. A typical play upon words. The toad was credited with supernatural powers and the phrase *kesho-no-mono* may signify goblin-thing as well as toilet article.

17. A mollusk credited with the power of creating a mirage by exhaling a vapor that to deluded mortals takes the form of *Shin-kiro*, the Elf-land of Far Eastern fable.

18. A person whose neck lengthens prodigiously during sleep, so that the head can wander around seeking what it may devour. Often the head is completely detachable.

19. A woman may become a *Rokuro-Kubi* without knowing it.

20. A beautiful phantom whose embrace is death.

21. The original is capable of another reading suggesting that the grace of her form is like that of willow branches weighed down by snow.

22. The spirits of the drowned are said to follow after ships calling for a dipper. This should be given, but first, without the

[85]

knowledge of the spirits, the bottom must be knocked out, otherwise they will use it to fill and sink the ship.

23. The Underworld of the Dead.

24. A famous chieftain of the Heike clan lost in a great sea-fight. His ghost was addicted to making off with the anchors of ships moored in his domain.

25. Spirits of the drowned must remain in the water until they can lure the living to destruction. So his exclamation really means, "now perchance I shall be able to achieve salvation by drowning somebody."

26. Or "the avenging ghost."

27. A species bearing on their upper shells wrinklings resembling the outlines of an angry face. They are said to be the transformed spirits of the defeated Heike warriors.

28. A goblin who makes a practice of shaking houses. It may also mean the sound of the shaking of a house during an earthquake.

29. A house-post must be set with the same end up as when it was growing. An "upside-down post" would groan in the night, open its cracks like mouths and its knots like eyes, and make itself generally a nuisance until the mistake was corrected.

30. Or, "for what evil design can this deed, have been done?" *Takumi* may signify either a carpenter or an intrigue.

31. Literally, "upside-down-matter-sorrow," contrariety.

32. Alluding to the proverb, "There are ears in the wall," suggesting the necessity for care even in private conversation.

33. That is, is upside-down -- all wrong.

34. Some statues of Jizo, the Buddhist savior of children's ghosts, are said to walk at night in various disguises.

[86]

35. The bald body and staring eyes of the cuttlefish, bearing a distorted resemblance to the shaven head of a priest, suggested to the Japanese the name Priest of the sea.

36. Japanese houses are protected against the entrance of evil spirits by charms written on rice paper and pasted on the door.

37. Or, repeating, "Hail to thee, O Buddha Amitabha!" The idea of counting is also suggested in this alternate reading by the fact that the invocation to Amitabha is usually accompanied by the numbering of beads on a rosary.

38. This tree, which in its old age is supposed to be a favorite haunt of goblins, bears a heavy crimson flower that drops with an audible thud often compared with the sound of a human head falling under the sword.

39. The oil used in Japanese lamps was obtained from the nuts of the *tsubaki*.

40. The Milky Way.

41. Lovers, ere parting, were wont to tie each other's inner girdle (*himo*) and pledge themselves to leave the knot untouched until the time of their next meeting.

42. A poetical phrase signifying the use of each other's arms as pillows.

43. Scarf.