JAPANESE HOKKU

(Continued from page 8)

ma ni kuru ka to Matsu to mo tataku

panese poets courted limitations art, as if they felt, with the true of genius, that the more re-

path of development.

Matsu to two tataku

Naturu tsumo ri ka

Aki no kase.

One of the most remarkable of the many is similar to the English ballad measure, and in the hands of masters may be fash-their poetry is that it must not treat of ioned into an effective, beautiful and war and bloodshed, or, indeed, of any noble medium of poetic thought.

But the hokku and, in less degree, the not have been listened to had he tried to tanka are still the favorite forms of Japanese poets counted limitations.

This similar to the English ballad measure, and in the hands of masters may be fash-their poetry is that it must not treat of ioned into an effective, beautiful and noble medium of poetic thought.

But the hokku and, in less degree, the sing "Achilles" wrath" in Nippon and answeyers. Their curt lines and their sing "Achilles' wrath" in Nippon, and anese verse. Their curt lines and their Dante could not have been born in the few but well-treasured words are adof genius, that the more rehe field the greater must be
itsu, are restricted to a single theme, and
the power of selection. What
we been sacrificed in order that
the tanka and hokku should be
evel-work! We of the West, led to the development of longer poems.

Dante could not have been born in the few but well-treasured words are admirably representative of the genius of
the Japanese speech. No other language
is more compendious, and not even the
ment or thought. But the new martial
suggestion. This is due largely to the
spirit of Japan, and the desire and necesunder-depths of significance in all Japanevel-work! We of the West, led to the development of longer poems.

Indeed, the hokku is the exaltation of long and majestically flowing The naga-uta, or "long song," has ay think they have sacrificed been in vogue for centuries; but it is but neither their genius, nor merely a string of tanka, and is inelastic of the language, is fitted for and unfitted as a vehicle of modern

from a recent issue of a Tokio sustained flights. They could have prothought. Another form, the ima-yo, conwill serve to illustrate both the duced long poems, strewn with exquisite sisting of verses of four lines of 7-5-7-5 thoughts; but not an Iliad nor a "Divina" syllables, but too restricted in theme, is Commedia." They found their own best being developed under the name of being developed under the name shin-tai-shi, or "new form poem." This is similar to the English ballad measure,

Indeed, the hokku is the exaltation of the phrase. It is of course much more; but it has developed the phrase to a height and beauty not attained in any other language. It is the perfection of other language. It is the perfection of phrase that makes poetry quotable. We do not remember poems or verses, but felicitous phrases. The enchanting harmony and linked beauty of Keats' "Nightingale" linger in most minds as a delicious though blurred memory; but a delicious though blurred memory; but the "alien corn," and the "foam of the "alien corn," and the "foam of perilous seas," these we bear in our bos-oms forever. A great hokku embalms a single sentiment or impression in an immortal phrase, and it finds lodgment for all time in all the hearts of

A comparison of the hokku with some of the briefer forms in Western poetry is inevitable. To contrast such a measure as the sonnet with the tanka makes the Japanese poem show to great advantage, its thirty-one syllables seeming a mere guard of honor in presence of the heavy cohorts of its rival. But when the sonnet is set side by side with the *hokku*, the English measure seems elaborate and

Wordsworth felt it necessary to de-fend his occasional self-limitation to "the sonnet's scanty plot of ground," "the sonnet's scanty plot of ground, and did so in an immortal sonnet—
"nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room." His plea is that many souls, like his own, "have felt the weight of too much Jiberty." But the one hundred and forty syllables of the sonnet afford almost unrestricted freedom, compared with the seventeen syllables of the hobby

With the quatrain the contrast is not so great, and it is still less striking with the heroic couplet; but the latter is not a poem, and even when used as the vehicle of an epigram, does not impress one as a distinct poetic measure, as the hokku invariably does. The quatrain is, indeed, the only frequently employed form in Western poetry that may endure a comparison, in respect to brevity, with the hokku. But even the quatrain corre-sponds more nearly with the tanka, both sponds more nearly with the lanka, both as regards length and the treatment of theme. Fitzgerald's golden quatrains, in which he melted down the "dross-allayed" "Rubaiyat" of Omar, and Landor's famous one on himself—"I strove with none, for none was worth my strife"—are more like tauka, and are too. strife"—are more like tanka, and are too full and varied for the hokku, which demands far greater compression and

It is not the purpose here to consider the comparative excellence of the Jap-anese hokku and the quatrains or sonnets of the West. As one star different from another star in glory, it is sufficient to know that in the marvelous hokku the world has another form of beauty. Into this tiny cup a nation has poured its heart; and countless artists have labored patiently and lovingly, until the cup has been wrought into a rare and resplendent jewel. The outside world, in all its centuries of song, has not yet found the secret or the art of putting so much beauty into such small compass.



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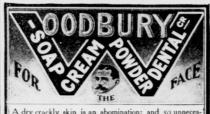
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