

COUNT OGURI'S QUEST

By Onoto Watanna

DESPITE his course at an American college, Count Oguri was a temperamental pariah. While he desired keenly to live upon terms of social intimacy with many persons, and while, not infrequently, he himself had made advances, there was that in his manner tending to the ultimate overthrow of all such ambitions. There was a diffidence in his mental attitude that led, not only to an embarrassed manner, but gave, as well, the appearance and qualities of a marplot. Oguri had lain awake long to plan, in detail, some interview or meeting that was to bring him the friendship of Cullen, the full-back, or Wright, "the star debater," and, having settled the minutiae of proper familiarity with his associates, had gone down to breakfast, only to ask for the salt in a tone of voice that instantly attracted to himself the full gaze of the tableful.

He could not analyze the situation lucidly enough to determine just why they stared; they themselves could not have told, but he and they both realized that there was a strained something in his voice to confound him and to startle them. Then, for days, he would refrain from asking for anything, the experience of the one occasion vitiating the resolution of a fortnight.

When Count Oguri had again fought himself up to the proper pitch of pitiful daring, he would attempt the interviews. But, at the slightest evidence in the individual of that collective stare over the salt incident, his courage would evaporate

into mere nervous giddiness. The incident would be reported duly by the sought-for one, and would take its place in the archives of accusation against the good-fellowship of Count Oguri.

Such was the temperamental impediment of Oguri, and, when it is added that he was a Japanese, the second element in the dissatisfaction that Oguri aroused is stated. Friends were kept away by his dispositional failing, as well as because of his nationality.

Then, too, the understanding of Count Oguri, while easily outstripping that of his contemporaries in the taking to itself of the principles and facts of sciences and languages, could not admit unto itself any comprehension of characteristic student customs.

When a group of sophomores entered the rooms of the "Jap Slimer," for the purpose of imparting to his "benighted Oriental understanding some slight compendium and illustrated appendix of the college custom of hazing," Oguri could not recognize his urgent need of it.

"My pagan friend," said a sophomore, "you must prove your ability as a 'Slimer,' by drinking this bottle of milk and singing that classical ditty, 'I'm a Pea-green Freshman.'"

The Japanese leaped to a pair of iron dumb-bells lying in a corner. "What you call this?" he shouted. "You call this civilization? I call it barbarism."

Then, without further words, Count Oguri attacked his enemies, swinging the iron objects with long reach, and

with the earnest purpose of clearing the room, or of killing an enemy. He cleared the room.

After that, the sophomores let him alone, giving him up as one without a sense of humor. His classmates, however, discerning in this act a germ of class spirit, decided suddenly that they had misjudged the grim-featured Japanese. They called upon him in bodies. Again Oguri was afforded an opportunity of getting on with his fellows, but again did the shyness and diffidence of his disposition declare themselves his enemies. His classmates concluded that his act of bravado was animal instinct brought to bay, and not calculated class spirit. His own eagerly desirous personality had remained embarrassedly in the background. No one discerned that he wished to be a good-fellow before everything, but could not show it.

College life has no toleration for the man who, as a freshman, cannot conform to its traditions, and to the unpopularity Oguri's temperament brought was added a measure of college displeasure. He was doubly cut off from his fellows' inner life; nevertheless, he did not think of leaving the college. He was bent upon becoming as American as possible, and this early failure did not deter him from going on with his course.

It was observed, during his next year, that Count Oguri, unlike many who had objected vigorously to hazing as freshmen, took no title to his privilege of hazing in turn those whom time had placed beneath his academic feet. In his last two years, when upper-classman rank gave him authority over under-classmen, he used the higher rank and its perquisites only to protect some unhappy freshman.

When Count Oguri, in accord with his Americanizing intention, left the collegiate hill where four highly fruitful, if unhappy, years had added their touch of development, and took his bachelor apartment on Fifth avenue, he thought with joy that his outcast

state was at an end. Here he could make a new beginning. He would put aside all his American past with his enemies and acquaintances—for there was none he called friend—he would even drop the almost repellent attitude, assumed during his last college term, and again approach the world in a spirit of fellowship. If no other way presented itself, his title and wealth would open a way into a society which, though perhaps *bourgeois* and sordid, must contain, almost against its will, the one man or woman who should be that thing he had dreamed of always, but never possessed, a friend.

With his general cleansing of old linen and putting off of old garments, he had decided to include his late associates. His entrance into the new world that streamed past his windows in carriages and automobiles, that surged by on the sidewalks, and that stretched out in fashionable brownstone as far as his roving eye could discern—his entrance into this world, which, perchance, contained for him its simple and single point of sympathy, should be due to none of those who had misunderstood him. A way would open itself, of that he was assured.

A way did open itself, but in a fashion quite foreign to the imaginings of Count Oguri. One morning, his valet laid before him a sealed envelope, with his name inscribed in feminine strokes. Oguri held it in doubting fingers.

"I feel," he told himself, "that there is something within that packet which will have its influence upon my future."

Still he toyed with it, taking delight in painting its possibilities. Then, with a sudden movement, he tore it open. Count Oguri was invited to send his cheque in payment for the inclosed tickets admitting the bearer into the inner temples of a famous hotel. The occasion was a gathering of fashionables, whose ultimate idea was exclusiveness, though there was a side suggestion of charity. Decidedly, wealth and fashion had sought out Oguri.

The count sent his cheque. There followed closely upon this event a season when his temperamental difficulties were overlooked by those who paid him attention. If he nervously chattered in his idiomatic English, he was made to feel that they thought him charming, witty. If the silence of embarrassment came to the relief of his fluttering tongue, he was graced with a high-caste reserve of manner. Oguri, before whose eyes the newly-kindled fires of sycophancy shone too brilliantly for clear sight, was momentarily dazzled and deceived.

"I am losing, at last, that pitiful uncertainty, that honorable palsy which afflicted me," he thought. "Now I am myself; I am liked for myself."

He sighed with something he took to be satisfaction.

"But have I found complete sympathy?" he inquired of himself.

He knew he had not. Yet these people seemed to like him for his personal qualities; they seemed to desire his company.

After a dance in a two-streeted, two-named establishment, Oguri and a young fellow, whom some recent ingenuous "street" operation had embittered, found themselves in the Hyphen café for a parting stimulant.

"It's a miserable, hollow show, this seeming to enjoy yourself," sighed Oguri's vis-à-vis.

The Japanese was puzzled. "What is?" he asked.

"Oh, this social game. It's heartless and all for a profit."

The young man spoke bitterly.

In his partially awakened joy of life, the Japanese felt that he could aid the other. He said:

"No, my friend, it is not that. Take my case. Once, I was bitter against men; I wanted to be upon good terms, but they wouldn't understand me; now, I have lots of friends who want nothing."

"Don't they, though?" The other was gulping down his carbonic and whiskey. "You wait!"

"Wait?"

"Just wait a week. I've been ob-

serving your case. I see signs of its coming due in less time than that—three days."

"I do not understand you. That, perhaps—" Oguri indicated the bottle at the other's hand.

The man became nettled.

"Why, don't you know," he exclaimed, "that there are men up there"—his finger was jerked vaguely toward the ceiling in the ball-room's direction—"who want to become well acquainted, only in order to rob you through some fake companies; want to swindle you out of your money? And don't you know that there are women—?"

"No, no, no!"

"Why, there are plenty of women there that for your title and money would marry—even you!"

"Am I so repulsive then that you say, 'even me'?"

The other looked him squarely in the eye, with the brutality of the American who has passed through several castes within a short time.

"Well, you're hardly our most esteemed type of beauty," he drawled.

The frankness of this man's bad manners destroyed for Count Oguri any value his note of warning might have had. He was only annoyed, not angry, and still less convinced of his friends' ulterior motives.

Yet, the time came when Oguri was again forced to consider himself an outcast. It was after several men had approached him for loans or investments, and a number of women had caused the idea to penetrate his consciousness that wealth is universally appreciated by women, and that a dark husband does not lessen the value of a title, be the land of that title as far away in distance and imagination as Japan from America.

Then the old bitterness of disposition fell darkly about Oguri. For a time, his emotions were numbed through its operations. As the warmth of his own inner flame thawed him out, a light flashed across his purposes. He reasoned thus:

"All my life long I have sought

sympathy. I was ready to give it to others, but selfishly, merely that I might in turn obtain it. I have been selfish. I will devote myself to the study of my fellow-man. Then shall I find sympathy and happiness." He paused. "Ah, there it is again," he exclaimed. "I seek happiness selfishly, through unselfishness! No; I shall seek an interest in affairs that others may be happy, and, if by the way I myself find happiness, it shall be not my motive, but my incidental reward."

During the days of his social appearances, Oguri had come in contact with a number of persons who were unselfish, so far as the limitations of their natures permitted. They had asked him for contributions for this or that East Side work, or for a fund for the benefit of this or that dependent class. They had accepted his cheques with a real sense of gratitude, but still without any measure of understanding or sympathy for him. They were moral examples, but their very goodness made them too narrow to entertain other than the merest surface feeling for one of alien race.

His new plan of life led Count Oguri to continue his subscriptions to their worthy activities. A young student of sociology, in need of funds to extend his course, managed to find him out. In this way Oguri became a benefactor. Yet he ever remained a pariah. The influences of his past life were too recent upon him, and had made him too analytical to enjoy his occupation. Still, with his old-time persistence, he swung along his course, fairly kicking himself along the path of altruism. In time, this brought him a share of newspaper attention. "The Japanese philanthropist" was a picturesque object for the imaginations of reporters.

One day, as a member of the visitors' committee, he was urged to visit the island where the waifs of a metropolis were housed. Oguri was not eager to go, but his firm conscience, molded out of the morbid materials thrown up by constant introspection,

would not permit him to decline. He went.

When Count Oguri, with the large party of his associates, entered the foundling asylum, and saw on the lower floor rows of tiny tables but a few inches from the ground, with chairs about large enough for a doll, he felt a new interest. The diminutive, the natural expression of affection, appealed to him, emotional outcast as he was, in a way to defy his most searching analysis. Yes, he was glad he had sometimes made a contribution that had helped a child.

On the floor above, the entire party was admitted to a ward in which were the youngest foundlings, though none in the place was more than two years old. Nurses were few. On the floor a number of the larger infants were at feeble play. There were a few faded playthings, the common property of this poor childhood.

The entrance of the visiting party set the ward into instant commotion. From healthy, young and weak throats, at once went up a wail. There was a pause of irresolution upon the part of the invaders. A little girl, standing still in the centre of the room, dropped her faded rag doll, and stared about her with perfect self-possession. Then, while the visitors stood motionless, she walked directly, if unsteadily, to Count Oguri. At his knees, she paused; her hand reached up to him; her lips made a sound of kissing.

"I lub you," she said.

Oguri, dumb and amazed, stared at her. The nurse hurried forward.

"She's quite a noticing child," the woman said; "she picked you out because you're so dark and foreign-looking."

"Oh," said Oguri, as he turned coldly away.

The visiting party's stay was brief, but, during its continuance, the little girl kept her eyes riveted on Oguri. Only the nurse's attention kept her away from the Japanese.

The party left the ward through the winding corridor, Oguri in the rear.

Just before a turn hid him from the child's view, Oguri looked back.

The little girl had followed him to the door, beyond whose limits the discipline of the place had taught her not to go.

A childish foot struck the floor with childish insistence.

"Tum back," a childish voice called, passionately, as the little girl pointed insistently to her faded rag doll.

It was an appeal straight to the heart of Oguri. It reached him. With quick strides, he went back. The child was in his arms. Within him, all the bitterness of the past melted in the tears that streamed down his face.

"I lub you," whispered a little voice.

Here, at last, was the sympathy, the love he had sought. It had come to him; it was his forever.

With the child in his arms, the Japanese turned to the laughing group that had come back to see the issue.

"What are you going to do with the child, count?" asked a woman.

"Adopt her. She is mine for this world and the next," he said, solemnly.

Three days later, the Japanese consul was called upon to arrange that Count Oguri might return to his native Nippon with his little heiress, and the matter was finally settled.

"What, before all the gods, Count Oguri, are you to do with an American child over there?" asked the mystified consul at the railroad station.

Oguri eased the little girl's position in his arms, before he answered. Then:

"To teach her two things—without which all are destitute in body, and outcasts in soul—sympathy and love."



LOVE'S SACRAMENT

THE sweet intoxicant of dew and dawn
On the young, luring mouth of Day, has gone;
Gone is the scarlet of noon's lustful fire,
Exultant in the vintage of desire.

See, now the chalice of the sun low dips,
And lingers at the twilight's parted lips,
Until the dripping lees of amber wine
Stain richly on her breast's dim-shadowed line.

I am the twilight, love, and thou, the sun;
Give me thy golden heart till day is done;
Into my spirit, hollowed to thy will,
Fling thou the elements thy fires distil.

EMERY POTTLE.



"WE must be approaching Boston," said the guest to the automobilist.
"Although I am by this time totally blind, I recognize the taste of the Boston dust."