

CLASSICS TO GO
BOTCHAN
MASTER DARLING



NATSUME SOSEKI

Botchan
Master Darling
Natsume Soseki

A NOTE BY THE TRANSLATOR

No translation can expect to equal, much less to excel, the original. The excellence of a translation can only be judged by noting how far it has succeeded in reproducing the original tone, colors, style, the delicacy of sentiment, the force of inert strength, the peculiar expressions native to the language with which the original is written, or whatever is its marked characteristic. The ablest can do no more, and to want more than this will be demanding something impossible. Strictly speaking, the only way one can derive full benefit or enjoyment from a foreign work is to read the original, for any intelligence at second-hand never gives the kind of satisfaction which is possible only through the direct touch with the original. Even in the best translated work is probably wanted the subtle vitality natural to the original language, for it defies an attempt, however elaborate, to transmit all there is in the original. Correctness of diction may be there, but spontaneity is gone; it cannot be helped.

The task of the translator becomes doubly hazardous in case of translating a European language into Japanese, or vice versa. Between any of the European languages and Japanese there is no visible kinship in word-form, significance, grammatical system, rhetorical arrangements. It may be said that the inspiration of the two languages is totally different. A want of similarity of customs, habits, traditions, national sentiments and traits makes the work of translation all the more difficult. A novel written in Japanese which had attained national popularity might, when

rendered into English, lose its captivating vividness, alluring interest and lasting appeal to the reader.

These remarks are made not in way of excuse for any faulty dictions that may be found in the following pages. Neither are they made out of personal modesty nor of a desire to add undue weight to the present work. They are made in the hope that whoever is good enough to go through the present translation will remember, before he may venture to make criticisms, the kind and extent of difficulties besetting him in his attempts so as not to judge the merit of the original by this translation. Nothing would afford the translator a greater pain than any unfavorable comment on the original based upon this translation. If there be any deserving merits in the following pages the credit is due to the original. Any fault found in its interpretation or in the English version, the whole responsibility is on the translator.

For the benefit of those who may not know the original, it must be stated that "Botchan" by the late Mr. K. Natsume was an epoch-making piece of work. On its first appearance, Mr. Natsume's place and name as the foremost in the new literary school were firmly established. He had written many other novels of more serious intent, of heavier thoughts and of more enduring merits, but it was this "Botchan" that secured him the lasting fame. Its quaint style, dash and vigor in its narration appealed to the public who had become somewhat tired of the stereotyped sort of manner with which all stories had come to be handled.

In its simplest understanding, "Botchan" may be taken as an episode in the life of a son born in Tokyo, hot-blooded, simple-hearted, pure as crystal and sturdy as a towering rock, honest and straight to a fault, intolerant of the least injustice and a volunteer ever ready to champion what he considers right and good. Children may read it as a "story of man who tried to be honest." It is a light, amusing and, at

the name time, instructive story, with no tangle of love affairs, no scheme of blood-curdling scenes or nothing startling or sensational in the plot or characters. The story, however, may be regarded as a biting sarcasm on a hypocritical society in which a gang of instructors of dark character at a middle school in a backwoods town plays a prominent part. The hero of the story is made a victim of their annoying intrigues, but finally comes out triumphant by smashing the petty red tapism, knocking down the sham pretensions and by actual use of the fist on the Head Instructor and his henchman.

The story will be found equally entertaining as a means of studying the peculiar traits of the native of Tokyo which are characterised by their quick temper, dashing spirit, generosity and by their readiness to resist even the lordly personage if convinced of their own justness, or to kneel down even to a child if they acknowledge their own wrong. Incidentally the touching devotion of the old maid servant Kiyō to the hero will prove a standing reproach to the inconstant, unfaithful servants of which the number is ever increasing these days in Tokyo. The story becomes doubly interesting by the fact that Mr. K. Natsume, when quite young, held a position of teacher of English at a middle school somewhere about the same part of the country described in the story, while he himself was born and brought up in Tokyo.

It may be added that the original is written in an autobiographical style. It is profusely interlarded with spicy, catchy colloquials patent to the people of Tokyo for the equals of which we may look to the rattling speeches of notorious Chuck Connors of the Bowery of New York. It should be frankly stated that much difficulty was experienced in getting the corresponding terms in English for those catchy expressions. Strictly speaking, some of them have no English equivalents. Care has been exercised

to select what has been thought most appropriate in the judgment or the translator in converting those expressions into English but some of them might provoke disapproval from those of the “cultured” class with “refined” ears. The slangs in English in this translation were taken from an American magazine of world-wide reputation editor of which was not afraid to print of “damn” when necessary, by scorning the timid, conventional way of putting it as “d—n.” If the propriety of printing such short ugly words be questioned, the translator is sorry to say that no means now exists of directly bringing him to account for he met untimely death on board the Lusitania when it was sunk by the German submarine.

Thanks are due to Mr. J. R. Kennedy, General Manager, and Mr. Henry Satoh, Editor-in-Chief, both of the Kokusai Tsushin-sha (the International News Agency) of Tokyo and a host of personal friends of the translator whose untiring assistance and kind suggestions have made the present translation possible. Without their sympathetic interests, this translation may not have seen the daylight.

Tokyo, September, 1918.

CHAPTER I

Because of an hereditary recklessness, I have been playing always a losing game since my childhood. During my grammar school days, I was once laid up for about a week by jumping from the second story of the school building. Some may ask why I committed such a rash act. There was no particular reason for doing such a thing except I happened to be looking out into the yard from the second floor of the newly-built school house, when one of my classmates, joking, shouted at me; "Say, you big bluff, I'll bet you can't jump down from there! O, you chicken-heart, ha, ha!" So I jumped down. The janitor of the school had to carry me home on his back, and when my father saw me, he yelled derisively, "What a fellow you are to go and get your bones dislocated by jumping only from a second story!"

"I'll see I don't get dislocated next time," I answered.

One of my relatives once presented me with a pen-knife. I was showing it to my friends, reflecting its pretty blades against the rays of the sun, when one of them chimed in that the blades gleamed all right, but seemed rather dull for cutting with.

"Rather dull? See if they don't cut!" I retorted.

"Cut your finger, then," he challenged. And with "Finger nothing! Here goes!" I cut my thumb slant-wise. Fortunately the knife was small and the bone of the thumb hard enough, so the thumb is still there, but the scar will be there until my death.

About twenty steps to the east edge of our garden, there was a moderate-sized vegetable yard, rising toward the south, and in the centre of which stood a chestnut tree which was dearer to me than life. In the season when the chestnuts were ripe, I used to slip out of the house from the back door early in the morning to pick up the chestnuts which had fallen during the night, and eat them at the school. On the west side of the vegetable yard was the adjoining garden of a pawn shop called Yamashiro-ya. This shopkeeper's son was a boy about 13 or 14 years old named Kantaro. Kantaro was, it happens, a mollycoddle. Nevertheless he had the temerity to come over the fence to our yard and steal my chestnuts.

One certain evening I hid myself behind a folding-gate of the fence and caught him in the act. Having his retreat cut off he grappled with me in desperation. He was about two years older than I, and, though weak-kneed, was physically the stronger. While I walloped him, he pushed his head against my breast and by chance it slipped inside my sleeve. As this hindered the free action of my arm, I tried to shake him loose, though, his head dangled the further inside, and being no longer able to stand the stifling combat, he bit my bare arm. It was painful. I held him fast against the fence, and by a dexterous foot twist sent him down flat on his back. Kantaro broke the fence and as the ground belonging to Yamashiro-ya was about six feet lower than the vegetable yard, he fell headlong to his own territory with a thud. As he rolled off he tore away the sleeve in which his head had been enwrapped, and my arm recovered a sudden freedom of movement. That night when my mother went to Yamashiro-ya to apologize, she brought back that sleeve.

Besides the above, I did many other mischiefs. With Kaneko of a carpenter shop and Kaku of a fishmarket, I once ruined a carrot patch of one Mosaku. The sprouts were just

shooting out and the patch was covered with straws to ensure their even healthy growth. Upon this straw-covered patch, we three wrestled for fully half a day, and consequently thoroughly smashed all the sprouts. Also I once filled up a well which watered some rice fields owned by one Furukawa, and he followed me with kicks. The well was so devised that from a large bamboo pole, sunk deep into the ground, the water issued and irrigated the rice fields. Ignorant of the mechanical side of this irrigating method at that time, I stuffed the bamboo pole with stones and sticks, and satisfied that no more water came up, I returned home and was eating supper when Furukawa, fiery red with anger, burst into our house with howling protests. I believe the affair was settled on our paying for the damage.

Father did not like me in the least, and mother always sided with my big brother. This brother's face was palish white, and he had a fondness for taking the part of an actress at the theatre.

"This fellow will never amount to much," father used to remark when he saw me.

"He's so reckless that I worry about his future," I often heard mother say of me. Exactly; I have never amounted to much. I am just as you see me; no wonder my future used to cause anxiety to my mother. I am living without becoming but a jailbird.

Two or three days previous to my mother's death, I took it into my head to turn a somersault in the kitchen, and painfully hit my ribs against the corner of the stove. Mother was very angry at this and told me not to show my face again, so I went to a relative to stay with. While there, I received the news that my mother's illness had become very serious, and that after all efforts for her recovery, she was dead. I came home thinking that I should have behaved better if I had known the conditions were so serious as that. Then that big brother of mine denounced me as wanting in

filial piety, and that I had caused her untimely death. Mortified at this, I slapped his face, and thereupon received a sound scolding from father.

After the death of mother, I lived with father and brother. Father did nothing, and always said “You’re no good” to my face. What he meant by “no good” I am yet to understand. A funny dad he was. My brother was to be seen studying English hard, saying that he was going to be a businessman. He was like a girl by nature, and so “sassy” that we two were never on good terms, and had to fight it out about once every ten days. When we played a chess game one day, he placed a chessman as a “waiter,”—a cowardly tactic this,—and had hearty laugh on me by seeing me in a fix. His manner was so trying that time that I banged a chessman on his forehead which was injured a little bit and bled. He told all about this to father, who said he would disinherit me.

Then I gave up myself for lost, and expected to be really disinherited. But our maid Kiyō, who had been with us for ten years or so, interceded on my behalf, and tearfully apologized for me, and by her appeal my father’s wrath was softened. I did not regard him, however, as one to be afraid of in any way, but rather felt sorry for our Kiyō. I had heard that Kiyō was of a decent, well-to-do family, but being driven to poverty at the time of the Restoration, had to work as a servant. So she was an old woman by this time. This old woman,—by what affinity, as the Buddhists say, I don’t know,—loved me a great deal. Strange, indeed! She was almost blindly fond of me,—me, whom mother, became thoroughly disgusted with three days before her death; whom father considered a most aggravating proposition all the year round, and whom the neighbors cordially hated as the local bully among the youngsters. I had long reconciled myself to the fact that my nature was far from being attractive to others, and so didn’t mind if I were treated as a

piece of wood; so I thought it uncommon that Kiyō should pet me like that. Sometimes in the kitchen, when there was nobody around, she would praise me saying that I was straightforward and of a good disposition. What she meant by that exactly, was not clear to me, however. If I were of so good a nature as she said, I imagined those other than Kiyō should accord me a better treatment. So whenever Kiyō said to me anything of the kind, I used to answer that I did not like passing compliments. Then she would remark; "That's the very reason I say you are of a good disposition," and would gaze at me with absorbing tenderness. She seemed to recreate me by her own imagination, and was proud of the fact. I felt even chilled through my marrow at her constant attention to me.

After my mother was dead, Kiyō loved me still more. In my simple reasoning, I wondered why she had taken such a fancy to me. Sometimes I thought it quite futile on her part, that she had better quit that sort of thing, which was bad for her. But she loved me just the same. Once in a while she would buy, out of her own pocket, some cakes or sweetmeats for me. When the night was cold, she would secretly buy some noodle powder, and bring all unawares hot noodle gruel to my bed; or sometimes she would even buy a bowl of steaming noodles from the peddler. Not only with edibles, but she was generous alike with socks, pencils, note books, etc. And she even furnished me,—this happened some time later,—with about three yen, I did not ask her for the money; she offered it from her own good will by bringing it to my room, saying that I might be in need of some cash. This, of course, embarrassed me, but as she was so insistent I consented to borrow it. I confess I was really glad of the money. I put it in a bag, and carried it in my pocket. While about the house, I happened to drop the bag into a cesspool. Helpless, I told Kiyō how I had lost the money, and at once she fetched a bamboo stick, and said

she will get it for me. After a while I heard a splashing sound of water about our family well, and going there, saw Kiyo washing the bag strung on the end of the stick. I opened the bag and found the color of the three one-yen bills turned to faint yellow and designs fading. Kiyo dried them at an open fire and handed them over to me, asking if they were all right. I smelled them and said; "They stink yet."

"Give them to me; I'll get them changed." She took those three bills, and,—I do not know how she went about it,—brought three yen in silver. I forget now upon what I spent the three yen. "I'll pay you back soon," I said at the time, but didn't. I could not now pay it back even if I wished to do so with ten times the amount.

When Kiyo gave me anything she did so always when both father and brother were out. Many things I do not like, but what I most detest is the monopolizing of favors behind some one else's back. Bad as my relations were with my brother, still I did not feel justified in accepting candies or color-pencils from Kiyo without my brother's knowledge. "Why do you give those things only to me and not to my brother also?" I asked her once, and she answered quite unconcernedly that my brother may be left to himself as his father bought him everything. That was partiality; father was obstinate, but I am sure he was not a man who would indulge in favoritism. To Kiyo, however, he might have looked that way. There is no doubt that Kiyo was blind to the extent of her undue indulgence with me. She was said to have come from a well-to-do family, but the poor soul was uneducated, and it could not be helped. All the same, you cannot tell how prejudice will drive one to the extremes. Kiyo seemed quite sure that some day I would achieve high position in society and become famous. Equally she was sure that my brother, who was spending his hours studiously, was only good for his white skin, and would stand no show in the future. Nothing can beat an old woman

for this sort of thing, I tell you. She firmly believed that whoever she liked would become famous, while whoever she hated would not. I did not have at that time any particular object in my life. But the persistency with which Kiyō declared that I would be a great man some day, made me speculate myself that after all I might become one. How absurd it seems to me now when I recall those days. I asked her once what kind of a man I should be, but she seemed to have formed no concrete idea as to that; only she said that I was sure to live in a house with grand entrance hall, and ride in a private rikisha.

And Kiyō seemed to have decided for herself to live with me when I became independent and occupy my own house. "Please let me live with you,"—she repeatedly asked of me. Feeling somewhat that I should eventually be able to own a house, I answered her "Yes," as far as such an answer went. This woman, by the way, was strongly imaginative. She questioned me what place I liked,—Kojimachi-ku or Azabu-ku?—and suggested that I should have a swing in our garden, that one room be enough for European style, etc., planning everything to suit her own fancy. I did not then care a straw for anything like a house; so neither Japanese nor European style was much of use to me, and I told her to that effect. Then she would praise me as uncovetous and clean of heart. Whatever I said, she had praise for me.

I lived, after the death of mother, in this fashion for five or six years. I had kicks from father, had rows with brother, and had candies and praise from Kiyō. I cared for nothing more; I thought this was enough. I imagined all other boys were leading about the same kind of life. As Kiyō frequently told me, however, that I was to be pitied, and was unfortunate, I imagined that that might be so. There was nothing that particularly worried me except that father was too tight with my pocket money, and this was rather hard on me.

In January of the 6th year after mother's death, father died of apoplexy. In April of the same year, I graduated from a middle school, and two months later, my brother graduated from a business college. Soon he obtained a job in the Kyushu branch of a certain firm and had to go there, while I had to remain in Tokyo and continue my study. He proposed the sale of our house and the realization of our property, to which I answered "Just as you like it." I had no intention of depending upon him anyway. Even were he to look after me, I was sure of his starting something which would eventually end in a smash-up as we were prone to quarrel on the least pretext. It was because in order to receive his protection that I should have to bow before such a fellow, that I resolved that I would live by myself even if I had to do milk delivery. Shortly afterwards he sent for a second-hand dealer and sold for a song all the bric-a-bric which had been handed down from ages ago in our family. Our house and lot were sold, through the efforts of a middleman to a wealthy person. This transaction seemed to have netted a goodly sum to him, but I know nothing as to the detail.

For one month previous to this, I had been rooming in a boarding house in Kanda-ku, pending a decision as to my future course. Kiyo was greatly grieved to see the house in which she had lived so many years change ownership, but she was helpless in the matter.

"If you were a little older, you might have inherited this house," she once remarked in earnest.

If I could have inherited the house through being a little older, I ought to have been able to inherit the house right then. She knew nothing, and believed the lack of age only prevented my coming into the possession of the house.

Thus I parted from my brother, but the disposal of Kiyo was a difficult proposition. My brother was, of course, unable to take her along, nor was there any danger of her following