

FIRST MEMORIES TO 1894

I.

It was the morning of the second or third day after we had been arrested for the Red Flags Incident.¹ We had been taken first to Tokyo Jail and then to Chiba Prison. Now for the first time all of those who had been brought in together were led out into a central courtyard for exercise. The yard was between the wings of the building—a rather large dreary open area surfaced with cinders so that not a blade of grass grew.

We lined up and the prison sergeant in charge unrolled a list, slowly checking each of our faces against the names and descriptions. Suddenly he frowned and looked back and forth from my face to the list, checking and rechecking as if puzzled. Then, staring down his nose at me, he

1. In this *Akahata jiken* of June 1908, Ōsugi was arrested and subsequently sentenced to two and one-half years in prison for violating the Peace Preservation Law. Following a meeting to celebrate the release from prison of a prominent Socialist—Yamaguchi Gizō (also known as Kaizō or Koken [1883–1920])—Ōsugi and others began to sing revolutionary songs and wave large red flags emblazoned with slogans such as “Anarchism” and “Communism.” Among the dozen demonstrators arrested were Arahata Kanson (1887–1981), Sakai Toshihiko (1870–1933), and Yamaguchi; three who later helped found the Japanese Communist party. Also arrested was Kanno Sugako (1881–1911), the female activist who would die on the gallows in 1911 for plotting to assassinate the emperor. Ōsugi’s various terms in prison are recounted in chapter 7.

asked in a slightly nasal northeastern accent, “You—you’re related some way to Ōsugi Azuma, aren’t you?”

I was certain that next to my name on the list was the information, “eldest son of Azuma.” To go to the trouble of asking, the guard must be someone who knew of my father. Since he looked to be in his thirties and seemed unusually alert for a prison official, and because of the friendly tone in his voice, I wondered if he hadn’t perhaps once served as a noncommissioned officer in the regiment in Echigo. I thought to myself, Sergeant, you must be surprised to see the old man’s name connected with a prison record like mine! Rather than answer him, I simply grinned. It was a little unsettling in these circumstances to meet someone who had known my father.

“Don’t you know someone named Azuma?” he asked again suspiciously. “Ōsugi Azuma, the army officer?”

When I continued to stand there grinning in silence, Sakai² broke in and answered for me: “How could he not know? That’s Ōsugi’s old man.”

“So—I was right. I served under him when he was a battalion commander. Hmm, so this is the son of the ol’ Idealist,” he said half to himself as if distracted by his own thoughts. Then, returning to me, “Ōsugi was famous in the Second Division for being an idealist. How’s it his son would end up in a place like this?”

The term “idealist” was an army cliché meaning loyal, patriotic, devoted to the military spirit. It was a term of respect but carried overtones of “stiff,” “unbending,” and not overly strong on military strategy.

When I had come home after being expelled from the military cadet school, many people remarked in surprise that my father was “such a gentleman.” At the time someone who seemed to know my family better said in my defense, “Well, you don’t know his mother.” Actually I don’t really know which I am more like, my father or my mother, but I certainly looked more like Mother.

2. Sakai Toshihiko, an influential journalist and pioneer socialist. A co-founder of the *Heimin Shimbun* (Commoners News) and of the Japanese Socialist party (in 1906), Sakai was arrested as a result of the Red Flags Incident and sentenced to two years in prison. At the time Ōsugi was married to the sister of Sakai’s wife, but she divorced Ōsugi before his autobiography was published.

“Does he really look so much like me?” she would ask people. And then, gently pinching my nose, “But I don’t have such a horrible nose!” My mother was pretty; her nose was high and straight whereas mine was flat and lumpy at the tip.

I was told that when my father became a second lieutenant in the Imperial Guards his battalion commander, Colonel Yamada, was selecting a husband for his wife’s younger sister. Though there were two candidates, in the end the prize went to my father.

My mother, who was living with the Yamadas at the time, was quite a tomboy. When Yamada’s horse was saddled and left in front of the house for him, Mother would often climb on and gallop the horse up and down the yard.

Once my younger brother Noburu and I were discussing our relatives, when he said, “I’ve heard our grandfather on Mother’s side was quite an interesting fellow. I heard a lot about him from Yone in Osaka, but I was so fascinated listening to him I didn’t try to remember any of it. Maybe you take after grandfather.” And he urged me to ask our cousin Yone about it when I had a chance. Until then, of the relatives on my mother’s side I knew only the sister who was married to Yamada, the next youngest sister who was Yone’s mother, and my grandmother. I had never heard a thing about my grandfather or so much as given him a thought. Since my grandmother was an extremely uncouth individual, I dismissed the whole idea, thinking that my mother’s family was probably not altogether respectable.

Still, since Yone and a comrade of mine in Osaka knew each other and I understood that they often spoke of me, I was inclined to feel somewhat closer to Yone. Thus when I was in Osaka I finally went to see Yone. He had inherited my grandfather’s house and had a shoe shop near Yodoyabashi. I was just twenty when I met him.

“Do you recognize me?” I asked Yone as soon as I entered the shop. I had just given the slip to a man tailing me and I didn’t want Yone’s clerks to know my name.³

3. Although the text is not explicit here, Ōsugi was no doubt under police surveillance. Because of such police harassment, especially during the Russo-Japanese War, the socialist leaders depended greatly on students who could travel the country less conspicuously to disseminate their literature and gather subscriptions to their periodicals. Ōsugi

“Of course I do. No one except my family has eyes like those,” he replied with exaggeration, staring at me with eyes even larger than mine. He then led me into the rear of the shop.

My grandfather’s name was Kusui Rikimatsu. He was from near Minato-nana-maguri in Wakayama, where I understand he had a rather large sake brewery. From his youth he had been very strong and quite a rogue. When this grandfather was twelve, one of the domain’s martial arts instructors, a man named Date, picked him as a pupil and Grandfather became his apprentice. By the time Grandfather was eighteen he had received his certificate of proficiency. He was well versed in judo, swordsmanship, horsemanship, and use of the lance. He made judo his particular specialty and eventually opened a judo academy under the sponsorship of Date. It had five hundred day students and one hundred boarders.

Grandfather was a huge man, six feet four inches and 350 pounds. They say that even when he died at the age of thirty-three he still weighed 300 pounds. Yone had many stories about him.

“Once, probably during some holiday festival, the samurai and the townspeople had an argument over some trivial matter. Grandfather became angry and finally exchanged heated words with a large group of samurai. From that time on he was the sworn enemy of all samurai and always stood up for the townspeople. That was the cause of our family’s ruin.” Yone always tended to glorify our grandfather and the stories made such fascinating listening that, like my brother, I could never remember them afterward.

My father’s home was near the town of Tsushima, ten miles west of Nagoya, in a place called Ōaza-Uji that was part of the administrative village of Koshiji. Now Koshiji has been merged with another village to form Kamimori. It seems that my father’s family usually served as headmen of Uji. There is a story that the name Ōsugi became our family

had been helping at the *Heimin Shimbun* since 1904; he was probably in Osaka that year on some such mission but the police had marked him. By Western reckoning he was nineteen.

name because of a large tree at the place.⁴ A certain lord out hunting with his falcon passed by and, admiring the tree, exclaimed, “What a huge cryptomeria that is!” Though this is not a very reliable story, even now a tall cryptomeria does stand there just off the main road as if it were a guidepost.

This grandfather died while my father was overseas in the Sino-Japanese War.⁵ Because of his death the school in Uji was forced to close for one day. I don’t recall hearing anything else about this grandfather except that his name was something like Tenkurō or Tenshiichirō.

Near Kiyosu lived an old man named Niwa something who was my grandfather’s younger brother. He had a small reputation as a scholar of nativist studies.⁶ We still have the inkstone and water jar he used for mixing ink. When I went to Nagoya at fifteen to enter military cadet school, my father had me stop and visit him. My father also had two elder brothers. The older, Inoko, inherited the house in Uji and served as headman. The next one, Kazumasa, lived in Nagoya. While I was at cadet school he was quite kind to me, yet I never understood what he did for a living. He went to the courthouse quite often, it seemed; I wondered if he wasn’t a moneylender. I don’t know how much property my grandfather left them, but it was divided between these two uncles and my father. Uncle Inoko managed my father’s share. But Uncle tried his hand at several enterprises and, when they failed, my father’s share was lost too. “If we had it now,” my mother often complained, “we could easily have paid the school expenses for two or three of you children.” I think it was probably because of this that my father never took much interest in Uncle Inoko’s affairs. Nor did he pay much more attention to Uncle Kazumasa.

It seemed the Yamadas were the only people with whom my parents had a relationship such as true relatives have. The Yamadas had a con-

4. The Chinese characters for Ōsugi mean “large cryptomeria tree.”

5. The Japanese and the Chinese armies fought in Korea and Manchuria between July 1894 and March 1895.

6. *Kokugaku* or “national learning” involved literary, religious, and, eventually, political scholarship that stressed ancient traditions believed to predate Chinese Confucian or Buddhist influences. In this period its teachings formed the core of a very influential strain of emperor-centered nationalism.

siderable influence on me, and my name, Sakae, was taken from a reading of one of the Chinese characters in my aunt's name. Yet you cannot fight against inheritance. Inoko and Kazumasa both stuttered, as did the old man Niwa. My father stuttered some. And, as you might expect, I have always been a stutterer.

II.

My father had no formal schooling. Yet from childhood he liked to read and often borrowed books from Niwa. As was the local custom for third sons, my father entered a Buddhist temple and was for a time a priest. The Satsuma Rebellion broke out, however, and my father began to have higher ambitions.⁷ He soon ran away from the temple and went to the capital, Tokyo. First he joined a training unit and became a non-commissioned officer; then, after more study, he finally entered the officer training school. Shortly after he became a second lieutenant he married my mother and was assigned to the regiment in Marugame.

It was there that I was born. I don't recall the address or the name of the neighborhood. In the official family register my birth date is given as 17 May 1885, but I understand the date was actually 17 January. At that time company-grade officers were practically prohibited from marrying. If they did, they had to post a guaranty fee of three hundred yen. Since my father could not afford to pay, he did not apply to have the marriage registered until it was certain my mother was pregnant. My birth date was thus recorded as later than it was in fact.

Before long my father returned to the Imperial Guards in Tokyo. Then, when I was five and my parents had three children on their hands, he was transferred to Shibata in Echigo province, where he remained in obscurity for fourteen years. Because I was raised there until I was fifteen, Shibata is almost my hometown and my memories really begin there.⁸ But I do remember a little about the period we lived in Tokyo.

7. In 1877 Saigō Takamori (1828–1877), one of the greatest heroes of the Meiji Restoration, led some 40,000 Satsuma and other samurai into battle against his former colleagues in the Tokyo government. What may have inspired Ōsugi's father was the new recognition given the modern-style army when it proved itself victorious against Saigō's samurai. In chapter 3 part 4 Ōsugi mentions his youthful admiration for Saigō.

8. As late as 1910 this former castle town had fewer than 12,000 inhabitants and was more than 27 kilometers from the nearest city, Niigata, the prefectural capital, which itself had a population of only 59,000.

The house was somewhere in Banchō. There was a house on either side of a gate and our house was behind them. In one of the houses next to the gate lived a little girl named Oyone. If I remember correctly, she was a year older than I. We were great friends. I was still too young for school but she was already going to kindergarten and beginning to learn songs. When she came home she would practice them in a loud voice, which made me furious since I didn't know any songs. So whenever I heard her singing in the house across the way, I would shout over and over with all my might some nonsense like "Rain—kon! Kon! Snow—kon! Kon!"

In the spring of my fifth year I began kindergarten and set off every day to Fujimi Elementary School holding Oyone's hand. Actually I can't say for certain it was the kindergarten affiliated with Fujimi School, but once later when I passed by I recalled having seen it before. I went inside to look; it was just as I had always remembered my kindergarten. Therefore I decided on my own that it must have been this school. I recall hardly anything that happened in kindergarten except that once I think I was scolded by a woman teacher and I spat in her face. Possibly all I really remember is my mother telling the story afterward. Another time later, I do recall making an elementary schoolteacher cry by spitting at her.

The regiment in which my father was serving was stationed at the Aoyama parade grounds. When it was his turn to stay on the post he would be away from home for a week or so. One day—probably the third or fourth day he had been gone—I grew very lonely for him. I and this same Oyone ran away to go to Aoyama. Just as we reached the entrance to the parade grounds Oyone burst into tears, saying she couldn't walk another step. At the same moment a dog began to bark at us. I also started to cry. We were calmed by a passing soldier and finally taken to my father.

I understand that usually an officer is posted to the regiment in Shibata as an exile for having committed some blunder. Indeed, it is probably true that anyone sent to one of those remote posts in the countryside is sent for that reason. Once, long after we had arrived in Shibata, a group of officers gathered at our home and my father treated them to some cigars my Aunt Yamada had sent from Tokyo. None of them

knew how to smoke a cigar—they all put the wrong end in their mouth; Shibata was that far out in the country. I don't know what my father had done to be sent to Shibata but I heard that once, on some occasion when he was on duty at the emperor's palace, Father's horse threw him and he landed in the moat. As he was climbing out covered with mud the emperor saw him and laughed in delight: "Look, a monkey! a monkey!" But doubtless that would have been an honor for my father, not a cause for loss of face. Actually, my father did look a little like a monkey.

In any case, my father was banished to Shibata. We left Tokyo with another junior officer who was also being sent there. The only thing I remember of that trip was crossing Usui Pass. The cog railway had not yet been built at the pass and we rode in two rickety horse carriages, miles above sea level. The other officer had three in his family and they rode in one carriage. We rode in the other, my father and mother each holding one of my sisters on a lap. I sat by myself, holding on tightly. The carriage frequently lurched as if it would turn over. When we looked down, a thick fog hid the bottom of the gorge hundreds of feet below. Time after time I felt frightened almost to death.

Recently, preparing to write this autobiography, I went to visit Shibata for the first time in twenty years. Ten or fifteen years ago the railroad was completed and a station built. I went expecting things to be so changed that it would be almost completely different. I was surprised: nearly everything looked just as it had twenty years before. As soon as I got off the train, I left the station and when I saw the towering silk mill—looking like a high-class jail—I had the feeling that the flood tide of the industrial revolution had swept over Shibata too. I was wrong. I walked all around the town and, except for the silk mill, not a single thing resembled a factory. Shibata was still as much an army town as ever—a town barely managing to make a living off the troops.

The silk mill belonged to Ōkura Kihachirō and had a large sign reading Ōkura Silk Mills. The mill had been built more for the sake of satisfying Ōkura's vanity than for bringing him profits. Ōkura was born in Shibata. The story is that he failed in business and, owing everybody in

the neighborhood money, left town in the middle of the night carrying his only possessions in a bundle on the end of a stick. That same Ōkura later became a millionaire and a baron.⁹ He returned to Shibata to build a silk mill in his hometown and to erect a bronze statue of himself in the compound of the Suwa Shrine, next door to the mill. In terms of morality, the tide of capitalism had reached Shibata. The bronze statue of himself was Ōkura's own doing, but the townspeople themselves went so far as to display Ōkura's portrait conspicuously in the auditorium of the elementary school.

Our family moved often and we lived in a dozen or so different houses in Shibata. Although three or four of them suffered fires, the rest were almost exactly as they had been years ago. I went to visit each of them, following the same order we had lived in them.

The first house was still standing, but I recalled nothing about it. The second had not burned either. I remember setting out for elementary school from this house, so I must have been seven or eight at the time. Next door was a carpenter named Okawa Hatsu. He had a son a year or two older than I and a daughter a year or two younger. The three of us were friends. My memories about this place were not about these two, however. They were about another friend—a girl who lived five or six hundred yards away. I will probably mention her again more than once but for the time being I'll just call her Mitsuko.

Mitsuko and I were in the same grade in school and for some reason or another I was infatuated with her. Since our families had no contact with each other and we lived in different neighborhoods, there was no way of getting to know each other. Every time I happened to pass near her in school she was always unkind in one way or another. One day I was sitting at home when suddenly I very badly wanted to see her face. I went outside and came across the Okawa girl. Without warning I slapped her and grabbed the lacquered comb she wore in her hair.

9. Ōkura (1835–1928), mentioned again in chapters 3 and 6, was a former samurai who became one of the most prominent businessmen of the Meiji era. Ōkura first made his fortune through selling guns to the early Meiji government and then provisioned the military in the wars with China and with Russia; he was also later involved with the South Manchurian Railway Company and Japanese economic expansion on the continent. Evidently Ōsugi considered him the archetype of Japanese capitalist.

Clutching the comb in my hand, I ran all the way to Mitsuko's house. There she was in the front playing. I threw the comb at her feet and ran home as fast as my legs would carry me.

The third house was at the end of a block called San-no-maru, right next to the elementary school. The school had been remodeled and completely changed. The house, although listing considerably to one side, had been preserved just as it was thirty years ago. I lingered awhile in front of the gate, staring in the window of a room just to the left of the front door. It once was my room. Since the shutters had been left open, I could see through into the sitting room. There were usually sliding shoji screens between the two rooms and my memory was fixed on those paper screens. I have forgotten what it was I had done—probably I had been playing with matches—but my mother scolded me soundly. In a fit of anger I then set the paper shoji on fire and they burst immediately into flame. My mother shouted for the maid and the two of them tore down the shoji and, after considerable confusion, managed to extinguish the fire.

I walked across the street to the schoolroom where I had spent the fourth grade. As I gazed about, I was almost trembling with excitement. The teacher in charge was named Mr. Shima. He was not much more than twenty years old, and resembled a dwarf. He used to shut his mouth tightly, eyes glittering with malice, and bring his bamboo pointer down with a crack on the top of the desk. If any students talked in class, he hit them with it. Nearly every day I cowered beneath that pointer. Though I don't recall the circumstances, it was thanks to that teacher that I hated arithmetic. Five or six years afterward, when I was in Tokyo on summer vacation from military cadet school, I ran into him unexpectedly. His mouth was tightly closed and he looked as ill-tempered as ever. Much shorter than I and rather shabbily dressed, he looked more like a student houseboy than a teacher.

I recall another instructor at the school: an older man named Saitō who was my second- or third-grade teacher. He was always making eyes at the girls in class and guffawing with his big mouth wide open. He did nothing but play around with the girls, continually putting his arm around Mitsuko and others while laughing his cackling laugh. If you

pulled some prank, he took you into one of the girls' classrooms as punishment and made you stand at the front, facing the whole class while holding a teapot full of water in your hands. Your back would be to the teacher; I used to take advantage of this to tease the class, rolling my eyes and sticking out my tongue. There was a teachers' room next to the classrooms and, on the other side of that, a storeroom. I can't count the number of times I was made to stay after school in the teachers' room. Sometimes I was even locked in the pitch-dark storeroom. Inside were piled old desks and chairs. After your eyes gradually became used to the dark, you could see the rats scampering about the floor. When I was kept there too long I would get bored and sometimes just emptied my bowels in the middle of the floor.

It was the janitors, not the teachers, who took care of us when we had problems. There were two of them: one short and always smiling, the other tall with a rough, frightening face. When they had time to themselves, they would sit in front of the iron kettle on the large hearth in the custodians' room and work on fishing nets. I went there often to be pampered after being scolded by one of the teachers. I always listened closely to whatever they had to say.

III.

At school I was punished or scolded almost every day by the teachers. I was also constantly disciplined at home. It was as if my mother's chief duty each day was to spank me or shout at me. Mother had a loud voice and it was seldom silent. It was so loud that people who came to visit always knew whether she was at home or not before they even entered the front gate. When she was scolding me, her voice became even louder. The way she scolded was ridiculous. Though I always stuttered, she would grab me and shout, "You're stuttering again!" Being an impatient woman, she could not bear to watch me batting my eyes and working my mouth without saying something about it. Nor could she stand my stammering "da-da-da . . ." when I was trying to talk. I don't know how many times she boxed my ears, shouting "You're stuttering again!"

Whenever I heard her call my name in that loud voice I was sure she had found out about some mischief I had done and would come to her reluctantly. "Bring the broom! Bring the broom!" she would shout. And having no choice I would go to the kitchen to get the long-handled bamboo broom. "This child is really stupid," she used to say to her bosom friend, Mrs. Tani, while patting me on the head.

"When I call for the broom he always brings it, knowing full well he's going to get a beating with it. Then he hands it to me and stands there with a blank look on his face, despite the fact he'd be better off trying to run away. That just makes it worse and all the more the reason to spank him, doesn't it?"

"Even so, a broom is cruel, don't you think?" Mrs. Tani would reply. She too was the wife of an army man, had as many children as Mother, and struck them just as often. It took strength of character to contradict my mother but Mrs. Tani had it.

"I think it's cruel too, but since he's got so big if I spank him with my hand the only thing that hurts is my own hand!"

Mrs. Tani looked at me as if to say "Even so, it's cruel," and then went right ahead and sympathized with Mother. After that the conversation would pass to the general subject of the naughtiness of all children.

I felt rather proud when my mother said, "He's stupid." I thought to myself, That broom doesn't hurt so much. Am I the sort of guy who'd run away from a beating with that?

My father never scolded. My mother often reproached him for it, saying impatiently, "That's why the child never listens to me." On Sunday, the day that my father was usually home, she would insist that he give me a talking to.

"But today's Sunday. I'll give him a good scolding tomorrow. Hmm, s'that so? . . . Started a fight again? . . . What, he did win, did he? Hmm, that's fine. Good work, good work . . ." The more Mother nagged him about it the less concerned he seemed.

My mother was very hard to please about food; she was particularly fussy about the rice. Every time she found fault with the rice I would echo her complaints: "Yeah, it's undercooked!" But my father would say, "People with bad temperaments always find their rice is wrong.

Now, your father's rice is delicious." Wondering if it was true, I once ate some of the rice from his bowl. Of course, it was undercooked too. That's how my father avoided criticizing even the cook. He left both house and children entirely in my mother's hands. Not only did he refuse to scold, he completely refused to intervene in any household matters. He went to his unit early every morning. After he came home in the evening he usually went to his own room to read or write. So we were rarely together with him except at breakfast and dinner.

Nevertheless he did not neglect my military training. It was before he went overseas in the Sino-Japanese War, I remember, so I was still only nine or ten. Every morning he and some other officers practiced with pistols at the target range across the street from our house, and he always took me with him. He also showed me how the pistol worked and even let me shoot it. The memories I have of him riding on his horse also date from about this time. After he came home from the war he took me to another place about three miles away, called Taihōji. Live ammunition was used and there was a trench in front of the targets. He took me along with him to sit in the trench as bullets whizzed about our ears.

When I was about fourteen I took lessons in the art of fencing. Whenever the man from the swordsmith's shop brought swords to our house I butted into the conversation. Finally I was given a cheap sword of my own and was allowed to try it out; with great glee I slashed away at the straw and bamboo dummy. After I entered military cadet school, my father said that he would take me along on a cartography field trip to Sado Island during my summer vacation. But he was busy and nothing ever came of it. Once or twice I was taken along to nearby villages for a night or two to watch maneuvers. With the exception of those occasions and his teaching me some German before I went away to school, I can hardly remember any intimate conversation with my father when I was a child.

Just before the Sino-Japanese War we had a house in Katata-machi adjacent to the parade grounds. This was our fourth house in Shibata. It has since burned down. While we lived there the drill field was my playground. Between the target range and the barrack moats was an obstacle course where the troops ran races. In an area of about two or

three hundred meters they had placed wooden barricades, trenches, log bridges, stone walls, and clumps of shrubbery. Everyday I went out and jumped the shrubbery, hurdled the trenches, and scrambled like a monkey over the bridges. When the troops ran the course I ran alongside, usually in the lead. Then, after the troops returned to the barricades or I tired of the game, I would go to the target range to dig for bullets.

The bullets used at the Taihōji were cylindrical but the big ones used here were round balls and quite large since they were from old-style single-shot guns. I would collect forty or fifty and, after melting them down, play at making all sorts of shapes from them. There was some risk in digging for them since the sentinel sometimes came around and often soldiers passed by. Usually I went at night when it was dark. A gang of boys saw me once and followed my example. Probably because they thought that if they were caught it would not go so badly for them if I were along, they always invited me to go with them. After joining this gang, which was made up of boys from the slum district on the outskirts of town, I made a surprising discovery. They pooled all the bullets they found and then drew lots. The loser took the bullets and sold them. They used the money to buy candy. Once I too put in the bullets I had found but managed to get out of drawing lots. After a while I fell out with the gang over something or another.

In back of the Katata-machi house was a large grove of bamboo and a number of fruit and nut trees, including plums, pears, persimmons, and chestnuts. Besides the *mōsō* variety of bamboo,¹⁰ there was a slender bamboo that had sprouts from which we could make toy whistles. On at least one occasion, when I had an urge to see Mitsuko, I took her some of these sprouts as a gift. Such tender affairs, however, were not the only ones in which bamboo played a role.

Shibata was actually divided into two sections: Shibata-machi and Shibata-honmura. Shibata-machi had been the merchants' town while the samurai had their mansions in Shibata-honmura. It was generally so

10. *Mōsōchiku* (*Phyllostachys pubescens*) is a tall thick variety of bamboo often used for poles.

at that time and remains so even now. The two sections had separate schools and great differences in character and custom existed. When the children from town came to play at the parade grounds we teased them, making fun of them because they couldn't run the obstacle course or do other things as well as we could. This continued until a quarrel developed, one that took a long time to settle. On our side we had about twenty boys, most about twelve years old. I was the youngest, at only ten years old at the time, and the only officer's son. The rest were all local children. On the town side were between twenty and thirty boys. Most were around twelve but there were also three or four who were fourteen years old or older. Our battles took place on Take Street, which ran through the Naka-machi district between the town and Katata-machi. It had been tacitly agreed on as the battlefield because it was a comparatively wide street with few houses along it. The attack always came from their side and we would defend the entrance to the street.

Before the first battle I cut poles of a suitable size from the bamboo grove and handed them out to everyone on my side. The enemy came empty-handed that first time and we beat them with those poles. The next time they also carried poles. But most of theirs had been used to dry clothes on or were snatched from old fences. As soon as we came to close quarters and exchanged a few ringing blows, their weapons shattered.

I was at the very front of our side during both battles. On the other side, too, the same fellow led both times. He was a shop boy in a bean-curd store in Shimo-machi, the next district over from Naka-machi. He had a large bald spot on his head and tied his hair in a topknot to try to hide it. Though already fifteen or sixteen years old, he was still crazy about fights—the kind of person who would pay money to get into one. In fact, I heard that he had paid some coins to be allowed to join their side in this one. Looking at him always made me sick. I hated him and was determined to fix him somehow or other.

The third battle was a rock fight. Each of us had filled the front of his shirt with stones and as we advanced from a distance each side hurled them at the other. The enemy began to run out of ammunition before