

The Telegraph

IN the early years of this century, the samurai tradition was still firmly entrenched in the minds of the older generation in the provinces of Japan. When Father Hayato, wealthy and respected member of his small community, sends his *yoshi*, or adopted son, to America, it is in the expectation that Nagayuki will return a conquering hero, having won the subservience and admiration of the west by the dignity of his bearing and the beauty of his ceremonial kimonos.

But things aren't like that any more, and the tragedy that Hisako Matsubara unfolds in "Samurai" is of the terrible stranglehold of the ancient order on the new. Nagayuki is forbidden by Hayato to accept any of the excellent posts in California offered him by Mitsui, by Toyo Textiles* and by the Yokohama Bank. Nor is he allowed to take his young wife, Tomiko, with him. "No samurai goes into battle with his wife clinging to his belt," says Father Hayato sternly.

Soon after Nagayuki's departure, Father Hayato loses all his money and the family is forced to dismiss their servants and move into one tiny room, where over the years Tomiko brings up her child and tends her old parents. But no hint of their hardship must be sent to America. Father Hayato, a foolish, proud old man, would rather die than let his *yoshi* know of his downfall.

This is an exquisite novel, subtle, gentle and sad, yet with a shrewd and beguiling sense of humour which underlines both the pathos and the bitterness of its theme.