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The Tale of Genji

Murasaki Shikibu

EASTERN TREASURES

The Tale of Genji by

MURASAKI SHIKIBU

(c. 973 - c. 1025)

Contents

Eastern Treasures Series

MURASAKI SHIKIBU

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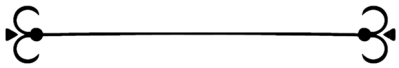
The Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu



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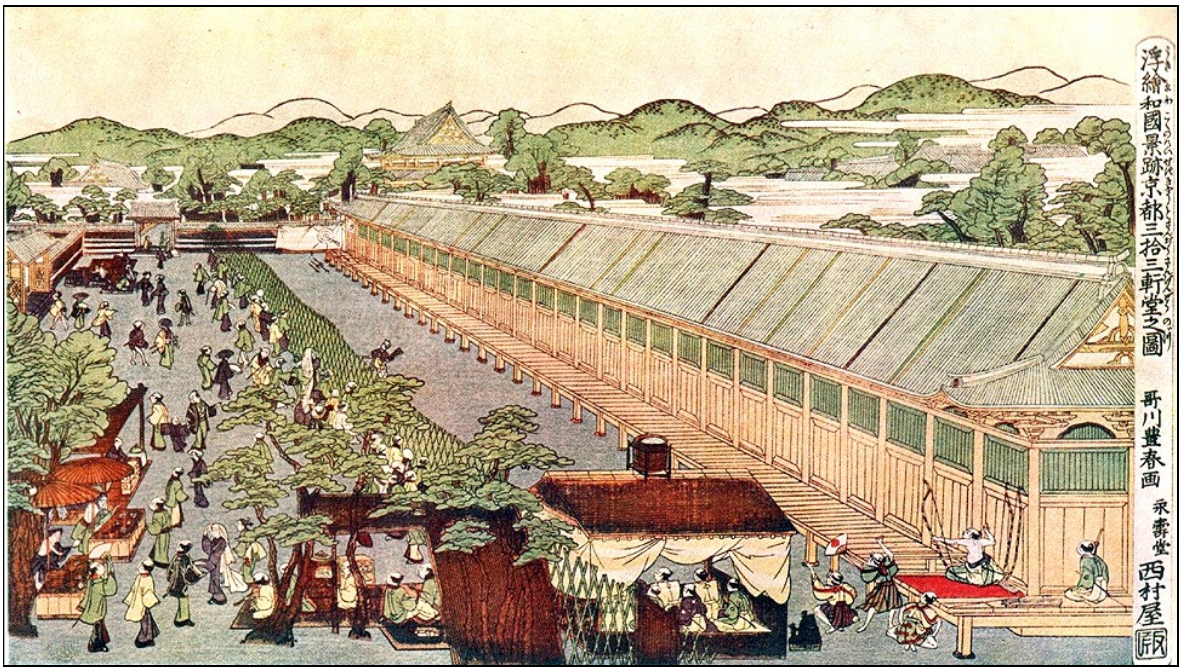
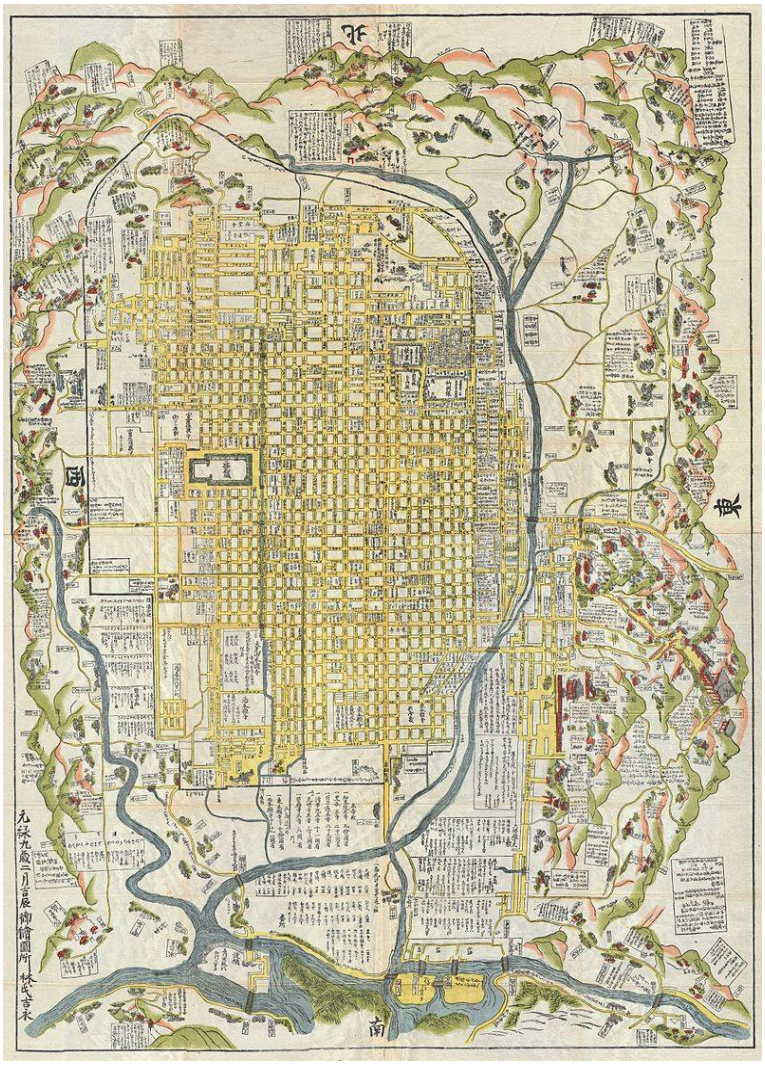
The Translations

Kyoto, Japan — Murasaki Shikibu's birthplace

Kyoto's Teramachi Street, believed to be the site of her family home



Eighteenth century depiction of Heian-kyō (Kyoto). It was the official capital of Japan for over one thousand years, from 794 to 1868 with an interruption in 1180.



Map of Heian-kyō, 1696

Brief Introduction: Murasaki Shikibu and 'The Tale of Genji'

A lady-in-waiting at the Imperial court of the Heian period, Murasaki Shikibu is best known as the author of *The Tale of Genji*, widely considered to be one of the world's first novels, written in Japanese between about 1000 and 1012. Murasaki was born in c. 973 in Heian-kyō, Japan, into the northern Fujiwara clan descending from Fujiwara no Yoshifusa. This Fujiwara clan dominated court politics until the end of the eleventh century, through strategically marrying their daughters into the imperial family and the use of regencies. In the late tenth century and early eleventh century, Fujiwara no Michinaga, the so-called Mido Kampaku, arranged his four daughters into marriages with emperors, securing for himself unprecedented power. Murasaki's great-grandfather, Fujiwara no Kanesuke, had been in the top tier of the aristocracy, but her branch of the family had gradually lost power and by the time of Murasaki's birth was at the middle to lower ranks of the Heian aristocracy, comparative to provincial governors. The lower nobles were typically posted away from court to undesirable positions in the provinces, exiled from the centralised power in the metropolis Kyoto.

Despite the loss of status, the family had a reputation among the literati through Murasaki's paternal great-grandfather and grandfather, both of whom were well-known poets. Her great-grandfather, Fujiwara no Kanesuke, had 56 poems included in 13 of the Twenty-one Imperial Anthologies, the *Collections of Thirty-six Poets* and the *Tales of Yamato*. In the Heian era the use of names, insofar as they were recorded, did not follow a modern pattern. A court lady, as well as being known by the title of her own position, took a name referring to the rank or title of a male relative. Thus "Shikibu" is not a modern surname, but refers to Shikibu-shō, the Ministry of Ceremonials where her father was a functionary. "Murasaki", an additional name possibly derived from the colour violet associated with wisteria, may have been bestowed on her at court in reference to the name she had given to the main female character in her novel.

In Heian-era Japan, husbands and wives kept separate households; children were raised with their mothers, although the patrilineal system was still followed. Murasaki was unconventional because she lived in her father's household, most likely on Teramachi Street in Kyoto, with her younger brother Nobunori. Her mother died, perhaps in childbirth, when she was young. Murasaki had at least three half-siblings raised with their mothers; she was very close to one sister who died in her twenties. At that time Japan was becoming more isolated, after missions to China had ended and a stronger national culture was emerging. Japanese had slowly become a written language through the development of *kana*, a syllabary based on abbreviations of Chinese characters. In Murasaki's lifetime, men continued to write formally in Chinese, but *kana* became the written language of intimacy and of noblewomen, setting the foundation for unique forms of Japanese literature.

Chinese was taught to Murasaki's brother as preparation for a career in government, and during her childhood, living in her father's household, she learned and became proficient in classical Chinese. In her diary she tells us:

> "When my brother was a young boy learning the Chinese classics, I was in the habit of listening to him and I became unusually proficient at understanding those passages that he found too difficult to understand and memorize. Father, a most learned man, was always regretting the fact: 'Just my luck,' he would say. 'What a pity she was not born a man!'"

With her brother she studied Chinese literature and received instruction in traditional subjects like music, calligraphy and poetry. Certainly, her education was unorthodox, as women at that time were usually deemed incapable of intelligence and were not educated in Chinese. Murasaki was aware that others saw her as pretentious and haughty, due to her forceful personality, which seldom won her friends.

Unlike most noblewomen of her status, she did not marry on reaching puberty and remained in her father's household until her mid-twenties or perhaps even to her early thirties. In 996 her father was posted to a four-year governorship in Echizen Province and Murasaki went with him, although it was uncommon for a noblewoman to travel such a distance that could take as long as five days. She returned to Kyoto in c. 998 to marry her father's friend Fujiwara no Nobutaka, a much older second cousin. Descended from the same branch of the Fujiwara clan, he was a court functionary and bureaucrat at the Ministry of Ceremonials, with a reputation for dressing extravagantly and for being a talented dancer. In his late forties at the time of their marriage, he had multiple households with an unknown number of wives and offspring. Gregarious and well-known at court, he was involved in numerous romantic relationships that may have continued after his marriage to Murasaki. As was customary, she would have remained in her father's household, where her husband would have visited her. Nobutaka had been granted more than one governorship and by the time of his marriage to Murasaki he was likely wealthy. A precise understanding of their marital relationship is, of course, impossible to know. The following year, Murasaki gave birth to a daughter, named Kenshi and two years later her husband died during a cholera epidemic.

As a married woman Murasaki would have had servants to run the household and care for her daughter, giving her ample leisure time. She enjoyed reading and had access to folk romances such as *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* and *The Tales of Ise*. Some scholars believe she commenced work on *The Tale of Genji* before her husband's death; it is known she was writing after she was widowed, perhaps in a state of grief. In her diary she describes her feelings after her husband's death:

> "I felt depressed and confused. For some years I had existed from day to day in listless fashion... doing little more than registering the passage of time... The thought of my continuing loneliness was quite unbearable".

According to legend, Murasaki retreated to Ishiyama-dera at Lake Biwa, where she was inspired to write *The Tale of Genji* on an August night, while looking up at the moon. Although scholars dismiss the factual basis of the story of her retreat, Japanese artists have often depicted her at Ishiyama Temple staring at the moon for inspiration. She may have been commissioned to write the story and may have known an exiled courtier in a similar position to her hero, Prince Genji. Murasaki would have distributed newly written chapters of her novel to friends, who in turn would have re-copied them and passed them on. By this practice the story became widely known and Murasaki gained a reputation as a famous author. In her early to mid-thirties, she became a lady-in-waiting at court, most likely due to her newfound celebrity status.

Heian culture and court life had reached a peak early in the eleventh century. The population of Kyoto grew to around 100,000, though the nobility became increasingly isolated at the Heian Palace in government posts and court service. Courtiers became overly refined with little to do, insulated from reality and preoccupied with the minutiae of court life, turning instead to artistic endeavors. Emotions were commonly expressed through the artistic use of textiles, fragrances, calligraphy, coloured paper, poetry, and layering of clothing in pleasing combinations, reflecting mood and season.

Those who showed an inability to follow conventional aesthetics swiftly lost popularity, particularly at court. Popular pastimes for Heian noblewomen included rigid fashions of floor-length hair, whitened skin and blackened teeth, included having love affairs, writing poetry and keeping diaries. The literature that Heian court women wrote is now recognised as some of the earliest and finest literature in the Japanese canon. Despite their seclusion at court, some women wielded considerable influence, often achieved through competitive salons, dependent on the quality of those attending.

The Empress Shōshi was aged about 18 when Murasaki joined her court, either in 1005 or 1006. Shōshi was a serious-minded young lady, whose living arrangements were divided between her father's household and her court at the Imperial Palace. She gathered around her talented women writers and the rivalry that existed between them is evident in Murasaki's diary, where she writes disparagingly of one fellow author:

> "Izumi Shikibu is an amusing letter-writer; but there is something not very satisfactory about her. She has a gift for dashing off informal compositions in a careless running-hand; but in poetry she needs either an interesting subject or some classic model to imitate. Indeed it does not seem to me that in herself she is really a poet at all."

Although the popularity of the Chinese language diminished in the late Heian era, Chinese ballads continued to be fashionable, including those written by Bai Juyi. Murasaki taught Chinese to the Empress, who was interested in Chinese art and Juyi's ballads. The Empress even installed screens decorated with Chinese script, causing outrage, since written Chinese was considered the language of men, far removed from the women's quarters. The study of Chinese was thought to be unladylike and went against the notion that only men should have access to the literature. Women were supposed to read and write only in Japanese, which separated them through language from government and the power structure. Murasaki, with her unconventional classical Chinese education, was one of the few women available to teach Shōshi classical Chinese.

Murasaki appears to have been unhappy with court life and was withdrawn and sombre. No surviving records show that she entered poetry competitions and she exchanged few poems or letters with other women during her service. She gives the impression in her diary that she disliked the court and the revelry. She did, however, become close friends with a lady-in-waiting named Lady Saishō. She especially disliked the men at court, whom she thought were drunken and unintelligent.

Instead, she enjoyed writing in solitude, feeling she was out of place in the general atmosphere of the court, writing of herself:

> "I am wrapped up in the study of ancient stories... living all the time in a poetical world of my own scarcely realizing the existence of other people.... But when they get to know me, they find to their extreme surprise that I am kind and gentle".

Some historians believe she was too outspoken to make friends at court. Rank was important in Heian court society and Murasaki would have felt she had little in common with the higher ranked and more powerful ladies. In her diary, she writes of her life at court:

> "I realised that my branch of the family was a very humble one; but the thought seldom troubled me, and I was in those days far indeed from the painful consciousness of inferiority which makes life at Court a continual torment to me."

When Emperor Ichijō died in 1011, Shōshi retired from the Imperial Palace to live in a Fujiwara mansion in Biwa, accompanied by Murasaki, who is recorded as being there in 1013. The author may have died in 1014, as her father is recorded having made a hasty return to Kyoto from his post at Echigo Province that year, possibly because of her death. This would mean that she passed away approximately at the age of 41. Some consider the year 1014 to be speculative and believe she may have lived with Shōshi until as late as 1025. Murasaki's brother Nobunori died in c. 1011, which, combined with the death of his daughter, may have prompted her father to resign his post and take vows at Miidera temple, where he died in 1029. Murasaki's daughter entered court service in 1025 as a wet nurse to the future Emperor Go-Reizei (1025-1068). She went on to become a well-known poet under the name of Daini no Sanmi.

Murasaki's writing is considered important for its reflection of the creation and development of Japanese writing, during a period when Japanese shifted from an unwritten vernacular to a written language. *The Tale of Genji* comprises 1,100 pages and 54 chapters, which took about a decade to complete. Murasaki would have needed patronage to produce a work of such length. Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1028), an important statesman and friend of the author at court (some believe he was her lover), provided costly paper and ink, as well as the service of calligraphers. The first handwritten volumes were probably assembled and bound by ladies-in-waiting.

The novel is traditionally divided into three parts, the first two dealing with the life of Genji and the last with the early years of two of his prominent descendants, Niou and Kaoru. There are also several short transitional chapters, usually grouped separately as their authorship has been disputed:

Part 1: Genji's rise and fall

> Youth, chapters 1-33: Love, romance, and exile
> Success and setbacks, chapters 34-41: A taste of power and the death of his beloved wife

Part 2:

> The transition (chapters 42-44): Detailing short episodes following Genji's death

Part 3:

> Uji, chapters 45-54: concerning Genji's official and secret descendants, Niou and Kaoru

For her novel, Murasaki draws on and blends styles from Chinese histories, narrative poetry and contemporary Japanese prose. This pioneering juxtaposition of formal Chinese style with mundane subjects resulted in a sense of parody or satire, securing a distinctive voice. The narrative follows the traditional format of *monogatari* — the literary form of an extended prose narrative tale — particularly evident in its use of a narrator, with no inclusion of supernatural elements, typically found in earlier *monogatari*.

The protagonist is Hikaru Genji, who is portrayed as a superbly handsome man and a genius. 'Hikaru' means 'shining', deriving from his appearance, hence he is known as the Shining Prince. Genji is the second son of a Japanese emperor, but he is relegated to civilian life for political reasons and lives as an imperial officer. The novel opens with the death of Genji's mother when he is three years old. The grieving Emperor Kiritsubo then hears of a Lady Fujitsubo, formerly a princess of the preceding emperor, who resembles his deceased concubine. In time, she becomes one of his wives. Genji loves her first as a stepmother, but later they fall romantically in

love with each other. Genji is frustrated by his forbidden love for the Lady Fujitsubo and is on poor terms with his own wife, the Lady Aoi. He engages in a series of love affairs with many other women. These are, however, unfulfilling, as in most cases his advances are rebuffed, or his lover dies suddenly, or he grows weary of the court. Eventually, Genji visits Kitayama, a rural hilly area north of Kyoto, where he finds a beautiful ten-year-old girl. He is fascinated by this child (Murasaki no Ue) and discovers that she is a niece of the Lady Fujitsubo. Finally, he kidnaps her, brings her to his own palace and educates her to be like the Lady Fujitsubo — his womanly ideal. During this time, Genji also meets Lady Fujitsubo secretly and she bears his son, Reizei. Everyone except the two lovers believes the father of the child is the Emperor Kiritsubo. Later, the boy becomes the Crown Prince and Lady Fujitsubo becomes the Empress, but Genji and Lady Fujitsubo swear to keep the child's true parentage secret…

Some of the recurring themes are the fragility of life, the tyranny of time and the inescapable sorrow of romantic love. A principal theme, "the sorrow of human existence" (mono no aware), is directly referenced over a thousand times in the text. Critics argue that Murasaki wished to forge for herself an idealistic escape from court life, which she found less than savoury. In the character of Genji she depicts a gifted, comely, refined, yet human and sympathetic protagonist. The tale is noted for its universal appeal over the centuries since its first publication, transcending both its genre and age. Its basic subject matter and setting — the passing love affairs at the Heian court — are those of romance and its cultural assumptions are those of the mid-Heian period. And yet, the novel delivers a powerful statement on human relationships, the impossibility of permanent happiness in life and the vital importance of sensitivity to the feelings of others. Throughout the prolonged story, Genji recognises in each of his lovers the inner beauty of the woman and the fragility of life.

By 1021 all the chapters were known to be complete and the work was sought after in the provinces where it was scarce. The story was so popular that Emperor Ichijō had it read to him, even though it was composed in Japanese. Within a century of her death, Murasaki was highly regarded as a classical writer. Her reputation and influence have not diminished. Her writing was required reading for court poets as early as the twelfth century, as her work was studied by scholars, who generated authoritative versions and criticism. In the seventeenth century, Murasaki's work became emblematic of Confucian philosophy and women were encouraged to read her books. In 1673, Kumazawa Banzan, a prominent Confucian, argued that her writing was valuable for its sensitivity and depiction of emotions.

The Tale of Genji is generally considered the greatest work of Japanese literature and thought by many to be the world's oldest novel. Celebrated across the world as an enduring classic, it is both the quintessential representative of a unique society and a writer that speaks to universal human concerns with a timeless voice. It preserves a lost world of ultra-refined and elegant aristocrats, whose indispensable accomplishments were skill in poetry, music, calligraphy and courtship. To this day, the novel continues to captivate its audiences, largely due to how the finely delineated characters and their concerns are universal, regardless of time. When Arthur Waley's translation was published in 1933, reviewers compared Murasaki Shikibu to Austen, Proust and Shakespeare. Although the novel features scenes of powerful action, it is permeated with a sensitivity to human emotions and to the beauties of nature, scarcely paralleled elsewhere. The novel's tone darkens as it progresses, revealing the author's maturity and her developing Buddhist conviction of the world's vanity.

Seventeenth century depiction of Murasaki by Tosa Mitsuoki

Nineteenth century depiction of Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1027), a court politician in the Heian Period. He became extremely powerful during Murasaki's lifetime and served as her patron.

The Empress Shōshi, with her infant son, is depicted in this thirteenth century painting, with her father Fujiwara no Michinaga and lady-in-waiting Murasaki presiding at the 50-day ceremony of the child's birth.

The throne hall at the Imperial Palace, Kyoto — often frequented by Murasaki, while attending the Empress Shōshi

After retiring from court, Empress Shōshi and Murasaki lived in the Lake Biwa region, shown here in a late seventeenth century illustration by Tosa Mitsuoki.

A seventeenth century ink and gold paper fan portraying Murasaki writing

Suematsu Kencho Translation, 1882

The first translation of *The Tale of Genji* into English was published in 1882. Viscount Suematsu Kenchō (1855-1920) was a Japanese politician, intellectual and author. Apart from his activity in the Japanese government, he wrote several important works on Japan in English. He produced his partial translation of *The Tale of Genji* while still studying at Cambridge University. It only features seventeen of the chapters and is little read today. Nonetheless, it was responsible for reviving interest in Japanese literature in the West, making a seminal Asian classic accessible to many readers for the first time.

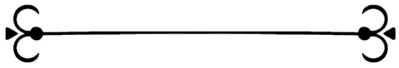
Viscount Suematsu Kenchō, c. 1890

Designated one of the One Hundred Poets, Murasaki is shown here dressed in a violet kimono, the colour associated with her name, in this Edo period illustration, c. 1800

CONTENTS

Late seventeenth century or early eighteenth century silk scroll painting of a scene from Chapter 34 of 'The Tale of Genji', depicting men playing in the garden, watched by a woman sitting behind a screen.

INTRODUCTION BY THE TRANSLATOR



Genji Monogatari,[1] the original of this translation, is one of the standard works of Japanese literature. It has been regarded for centuries as a national treasure. The title of the work is by no means unknown to those Europeans who take an interest in Japanese matters, for it is mentioned or alluded to in almost every European work relating to our country. It was written by a lady, who, from her writings, is considered one of the most talented women that Japan has ever produced.

She was the daughter of Fujiwara Tametoki, a petty Court noble, remotely connected with the great family of Fujiwara, in the tenth century after Christ, and was generally called Murasaki Shikib. About these names a few remarks are necessary. The word "Shikib" means "ceremonies," and is more properly a name adopted, with the addition of certain suffixes, to designate special Court offices. Thus the term "Shikib-Kiô" is synonymous with "master of the ceremonies," and "Shikib-no-Jiô" with "secretary to the master of the ceremonies." Hence it might at first sight appear rather peculiar if such an appellation should happen to be used as the name of a woman. It was, however, a custom of the period for noble ladies and their attendants to be often called after such offices, generally with the suffix "No-Kata," indicating the female sex, and somewhat corresponding to the word "madam." This probably originated in the same way as the practice in America of calling ladies by their husbands' official titles, such as Mrs. Captain, Mrs. Judge, etc. only that in the case of the Japanese custom the official title came in time to be used without any immediate association with the offices themselves, and often even as a maiden name. From this custom our authoress came to be called "Shikib," a name which did not originally apply to a person. To this another name, Murasaki, was added, in order to distinguish her from other ladies who may also have been called Shikib. "Murasaki" means "violet," whether the flower or the color. Concerning the origin of this appellation there exist two different opinions. Those holding one, derive it from her family name, Fujiwara; for "Fujiwara" literally means "the field of Wistaria," and the color of the Wistaria blossom is violet. Those holding the other, trace it to the fact that out of several persons introduced into the story, Violet (Murasaki in the text) is a most modest and gentle woman, whence it is thought that the admirers of the work transferred the name to the authoress herself. In her youth she was maid of honor to a daughter of the then prime minister, who became eventually the wife of the Emperor Ichijiô, better known by her surname, Jiôtô-Monin, and who is especially famous as having been the patroness of our authoress. Murasaki Shikib married a noble, named Nobtaka, to whom she bore a daughter, who, herself, wrote a work of fiction, called "Sagoromo" (narrow sleeves). She survived her husband, Nobtaka, some years, and spent her latter days in quiet retirement, dying in the year 992 after Christ. The diary which she wrote during her retirement is still in existence, and her tomb may yet be seen in a Buddhist temple in Kiôto, the old capital where the principal scenes of her story are laid.

The exact date when her story was written is not given in the work, but her diary proves that it was evidently composed before she arrived at old age.

The traditional account given of the circumstances which preceded the writing of the story is this: when the above-mentioned Empress was asked by the Saigû (the

sacred virgin of the temple of Ise) if her Majesty could not procure an interesting romance for her, because the older fictions had become too familiar, she requested Shikib to write a new one, and the result of this request was this story.

The tradition goes on to say that when this request was made Shikib retired to the Buddhist temple in Ishiyama, situated on hilly ground at the head of the picturesque river Wooji, looking down on Lake Biwa. There she betook herself to undergo the "Tooya" (confinement in a temple throughout the night), a solemn religious observance for the purpose of obtaining divine help and good success in her undertaking. It was the evening of the fifteenth of August. Before her eyes the view extended for miles. In the silver lake below, the pale face of the full moon was reflected in the calm, mirror-like waters, displaying itself in indescribable beauty. Her mind became more and more serene as she gazed on the prospect before her, while her imagination became more and more lively as she grew calmer and calmer. The ideas and incidents of the story, which she was about to write, stole into her mind as if by divine influence. The first topic which struck her most strongly was that given in the chapters on exile. These she wrote down immediately, in order not to allow the inspiration of the moment to be lost, on the back of a roll of Daihannia (the Chinese translation of Mahâprajñâpâramitâ, one of the Buddhist Sûtras), and formed subsequently two chapters in the text, the Suma and Akashi, all the remaining parts of the work having been added one by one. It is said that this idea of exile came naturally to her mind, because a prince who had been known to her from her childhood had been an exile at Kiûsiû, a little before this period.

It is also said that the authoress afterwards copied the roll of Daihannia with her own hand, in expiation of her having profanely used it as a notebook, and that she dedicated it to the Temple, in which there is still a room where she is alleged to have written down the story. A roll of Daihannia is there also, which is asserted to be the very same one copied by her.

How far these traditions are in accordance with fact may be a matter of question, but thus they have come down to us, and are popularly believed.

Many Europeans, I daresay, have noticed on our lacquer work and other art objects, the representation of a lady seated at a writing-desk, with a pen held in her tiny fingers, gazing at the moon reflected in a lake. This lady is no other than our authoress.

The number of chapters in the modern text of the story is fifty-four, one of these having the title only and nothing else. There is some reason to believe that there might have existed a few additional chapters.

Of these fifty-four chapters, the first forty-one relate to the life and adventures of Prince Genji; and those which come after refer principally to one of his sons. The last ten are supposed to have been added by another hand, generally presumed to have been that of her daughter. This is conjectured because the style of these final chapters is somewhat dissimilar to that of those which precede. The period of time covered by the entire story is some sixty years, and this volume of translation comprises the first seventeen chapters.

The aims which the authoress seems always to have kept in view are revealed to us at some length by the mouth of her hero: "ordinary histories," he is made to say, "are the mere records of events, and are generally treated in a one-sided manner. They give no insight into the true state of society. This, however, is the very sphere on which romances principally dwell. Romances," he continues, "are indeed fictions, but they are by no means always pure inventions; their only peculiarities being these, that in

them the writers often trace out, among numerous real characters, the best, when they wish to represent the good, and the oddest, when they wish to amuse."

From these remarks we can plainly see that our authoress fully understood the true vocation of a romance writer, and has successfully realized the conception in her writings.

The period to which her story relates is supposed to be the earlier part of the tenth century after Christ, a time contemporary with her own life. For some centuries before this period, our country had made a signal progress in civilization by its own internal development, and by the external influence of the enlightenment of China, with whom we had had for some time considerable intercourse. No country could have been happier than was ours at this epoch. It enjoyed perfect tranquillity, being alike free from all fears of foreign invasion and domestic commotions. Such a state of things, however, could not continue long without producing some evils; and we can hardly be surprised to find that the Imperial capital became a sort of centre of comparative luxury and idleness. Society lost sight, to a great extent, of true morality, and the effeminacy of the people constituted the chief feature of the age. Men were ever ready to carry on sentimental adventures whenever they found opportunities, and the ladies of the time were not disposed to disencourage them altogether. The Court was the focus of society, and the utmost ambition of ladies of some birth was to be introduced there. As to the state of politics, the Emperor, it is true, reigned; but all the real power was monopolized by members of the Fujiwara families. These, again, vied among themselves for the possession of this power, and their daughters were generally used as political instruments, since almost all the Royal consorts were taken from some of these families. The abdication of an emperor was a common event, and arose chiefly from the intrigues of these same families, although partly from the prevailing influence of Buddhism over the public mind.

Such, then, was the condition of society at the time when the authoress, Murasaki Shikib, lived; and such was the sphere of her labors, a description of which she was destined to hand down to posterity by her writings. In fact, there is no better history than her story, which so vividly illustrates the society of her time. True it is that she openly declares in one passage of her story that politics are not matters which women are supposed to understand; yet, when we carefully study her writings, we can scarcely fail to recognize her work as a partly political one. This fact becomes more vividly interesting when we consider that the unsatisfactory conditions of both the state and society soon brought about a grievous weakening of the Imperial authority, and opened wide the gate for the ascendency of the military class. This was followed by the systematic formation of feudalism, which, for some seven centuries, totally changed the face of Japan. For from the first ascendency of this military system down to our own days everything in society — ambitions, honors, the very temperament and daily pursuits of men, and political institutes themselves — became thoroughly unlike those of which our authoress was an eye-witness. I may almost say that for several centuries Japan never recovered the ancient civilization which she had once attained and lost.

Another merit of the work consists in its having been written in pure classical Japanese; and here it may be mentioned that we had once made a remarkable progress in our own language quite independently of any foreign influence, and that when the native literature was at first founded, its language was identical with that spoken. Though the predominance of Chinese studies had arrested the progress of the native literature, it was still extant at the time, and even for some time after the date of our authoress. But with the ascendency of the military class, the neglect of all literature

became for centuries universal. The little that has been preserved is an almost unreadable chaos of mixed Chinese and Japanese. Thus a gulf gradually opened between the spoken and the written language. It has been only during the last two hundred and fifty years that our country has once more enjoyed a long continuance of peace, and has once more renewed its interest in literature. Still Chinese has occupied the front rank, and almost monopolized attention. It is true that within the last sixty or seventy years numerous works of fiction of different schools have been produced, mostly in the native language, and that these, when judged as stories, generally excel in their plots those of the classical period. The status, however, of these writers has never been recognized by the public, nor have they enjoyed the same degree of honor as scholars of a different description. Their style of composition, moreover, has never reached the same degree of refinement which distinguished the ancient works. This last is a strong reason for our appreciation of true classical works such as that of our authoress.

Again, the concise description of scenery, the elegance of which it is almost impossible to render with due force in another language, and the true and delicate touches of human nature which everywhere abound in the work, especially in the long dialogue in Chapter II, are almost marvellous when we consider the sex of the writer, and the early period when she wrote.

Yet this work affords fair ground for criticism. The thread of her story is often diffuse and somewhat disjointed, a fault probably due to the fact that she had more flights of imagination than power of equal and systematic condensation: she having been often carried away by that imagination from points where she ought to have rested. But, on the other hand, in most parts the dialogue is scanty, which might have been prolonged to considerable advantage, if it had been framed on models of modern composition. The work, also, is too voluminous.

In translating I have cut out several passages which appeared superfluous, though nothing has been added to the original.

The authoress has been by no means exact in following the order of dates, though this appears to have proceeded from her endeavor to complete each distinctive group of ideas in each particular chapter. In fact she had even left the chapters unnumbered, simply contenting herself with a brief heading, after which each is now called, such as “Chapter Kiri-Tsubo,” etc. so that the numbering has been undertaken by the translator for the convenience of the reader. It has no extraordinarily intricate plot like those which excite the readers of the sensational romances of the modern western style. It has many heroines, but only one hero, and this comes no doubt from the peculiar purpose of the writer to portray different varieties and shades of female characters at once, as is shadowed in Chapter II, and also to display the intense fickleness and selfishness of man.

I notice these points beforehand in order to prepare the reader for the more salient faults of the work. On the whole my principal object is not so much to amuse my readers as to present them with a study of human nature, and to give them information on the history of the social and political condition of my native country nearly a thousand years ago. They will be able to compare it with the condition of mediæval and modern Europe.

Another peculiarity of the work to which I would draw attention is that, with few exceptions, it does not give proper names to the personages introduced; for the male characters official titles are generally employed, and to the principal female ones some appellation taken from an incident belonging to the history of each; for instance, a girl is named Violet because the hero once compared her to that flower, while

another is called Yûgao because she was found in a humble dwelling where the flowers of the Yûgao covered the hedges with a mantle of blossom.

I have now only to add that the translation is, perhaps, not always idiomatic, though in this matter I have availed myself of some valuable assistance, for which I feel most thankful.

Suyematz Kenchio.

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ENDNOTES.

[1] Which means, “The Romance of Genji.”

End of Sample