

## The Literary Movement in New Japan

By William Elliot Griffis

JAPAN has a literary history of over twelve hundred years. Its most ancient liturgies, legends, and poems go still further back into the mists of unwritten antiquity. Its "Kojiki," or Bible, was given to writing in 712 A.D. The Japanese have had block-printing for over a millennium. The use of movable types was known among them nearly a century before Coster or Gutenberg. Their employment of woodcuts and book-illustrations is nearly synchronous with that of Europe. Local, general, and circulating libraries have followed much the same history as in Western lands. This their day in the nineteenth Christian century is a day not of trickling fountain-drops, nor of meadow rivulets, but of a great flood of literature in every form. From the many-editioned daily newspapers in the capital to the standard national dictionary or stately history requiring years of growth, all forms of reading-matter keep producer and distributor busy. Nearly eight hundred periodicals, printing about two hundred millions of copies, are published in the Mikado's Empire. Between 1885 and 1890 there were issued no fewer than 7,476 original works, 10,580 compilations, 223 translations, and 441 new editions; or, in all, 18,720 books, classified under 42 subjects, to be read by the forty millions of the Japanese.

A bird's-eye view of Japanese literary history shows that learning was at first the monopoly of the Court and the priests. In the Middle Ages it spread out along restricted lines. As in Europe, so in Nippon, the clerk was skillful with the pen, while the knight was content with his sword. The Samurai, like the Scotsman, was rather apt to boast that "son of mine, save Gavin, ne'er could pen a line." After the great peace brought by Iyeyasū, early in the seventeenth century, the gentry were, as a rule, well educated, and knowledge spread even among the traders, farmers, and mechanics. Now, in these years of enlightened civilization, the 35,000 schools of all kinds give daily instruction to 3,500,000 pupils.

Since the ninth century Japan has had something like an alphabet. Accurately, it is a syllabary of forty-seven letters, which, with marks and points, represent nearly seventy sounds. With these *kana*, books for the people can be written, but most of the serious literature is in the Chinese characters. This is the era of good literature, for the first time, put into *kana* for the people.

Pedantry and mere letter-learning have always been the curse of Japan. Like a great tree shading balefully the native originality and energy has been this dominance of Chinese ideas and ideals. The women were the first to break away and write romances, poems, sentimental and descriptive literature in unstilted style, which is still the standard of pure Japanese. Strange to say, when a man wanted to write what *was* readable, enjoyable, and, as it proved, after seven hundred years still charming, he imitated this "woman's style." In other words, he threw away his Chinese stilts and wrote his own more beautiful native language.

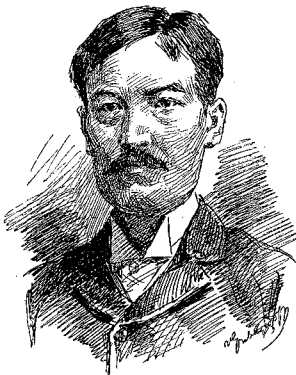
Some of these mediæval poems, comedies, romances, have been put into English by Professor Basil Hall Chamberlain. Mr. K. Suyematsu, who, alas! left letters for politics, translated large portions of the "Genji Monogatari." This romance of Prince Genji is, in style, the acknowledged standard of the language. It is a description of palace life in Kioto, in the eleventh century. Each of

the fifty-two chapters is named after a flower representing one of the loves of Genji. It shows these high-bred æsthetical lovers of moonlight, poetry, painting, music, and the fine arts devoted to an existence as elegant, frivolous, and narrow as that in the royal courts of Western lands. Among other points suggesting modern life, even to last Sunday's newspaper, are the minute and accurate descriptions of the ladies' costumes, their toilet effects, and the fashionable parties given. These *monogatari* were the progenitors of the Japanese novel, though some of them are more like fairy tales. The most famous and oldest of those before the Genji is "The Bamboo-Cutter's Daughter." Put into English by the Rev. E. R. Miller, it tells of a shining moon-maiden, a finger long, found in the joint of a bamboo cane. Nourished by an old couple, the crystal damsel grows up to smite all men's hearts with her beauty, and to compel her numerous lovers, from the Mikado to the ordinary princelings, to be wild with love for her. She sends them on impossible errands, but, in spite of two thousand vigilant guards and archers, she leaps into her glistening chariot and returns to the moon.

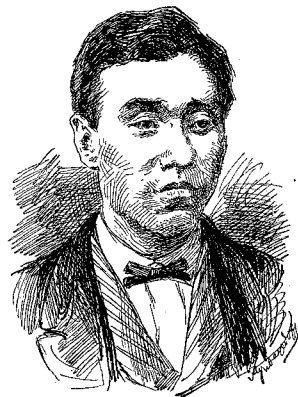
The salt which preserves literature is style. The "Tosa Niki," written in the year 935, by an officer of the Mikado who had served three years as governor in Tosa, is barren of plot, but exuberant in literary graces. He makes a voyage home to Kioto, and tells of his calls made and returned, presents given and accepted on the way, pictures the life of the sailors and the landspeople, describes his own feelings, and says sweet words of home—that is all. Yet the delightful style, the language-music, makes this dainty little Tosa Diary a favorite yet. It has been done into English. The "woman's [*i. e.*, Japanese, not Chinese] style" saved it.

Now, if we take a leap from the tenth to the nineteenth century, it is because we are not writing of the matter interesting only to the philologist, archæologist, or historian. Over the tons of printed stuff, useful enough in its way, we pass, in order to speak of the modern literature of style, of imagination, of power to move and shape the life of the living and of the coming generations. We can but touch upon the Japanese poetry and fiction, simply casting a glance at the history of our own time, and merely naming four influential makers of New Japan: Fukuzawa, the untitled, who might be cabinet officer, but remains private schoolmaster, editor, author, and "the intellectual father of half the young men" in office; Kido, founder of the Japanese periodical press, and "the brain and pen of the Revolution" of 1868; Shimada Samuro, editor, member of the Diet, and author of a history of the Regent I. (who took the responsibility, signed the American treaty in 1859, and was assassinated March 23, 1861), which marks a new era in Japanese historiography; and Taguchi Uchida, editor of "The Economist," and a keen literary critic.

Perennially free from the fetters of Chinese formalism, Japanese poetry interests a foreigner more than Japanese prose. "There is no teacher of it," says a native proverb. No, the good *uta-bito* is born, not made. No Chinese word is allowed in its vocabulary. Indeed, one may put in a whole bolster, or row of "pillow-words," meaning nothing, but sounding well, in order to pad out the full form; but all the vocables must be native. But alas for the pitiful limits of the stanza! It is in lines of 5. 7. 5. 7. 7



Shimada Samuro



Fukuzawa

syllables, thirty-one in all, and rarely is the *naga-uta*, or long poem, over a page long. The voluminous collections of Japanese poetry are but fields of thistle-down.

As for the themes of these tiny poems, they are sighs, tears in trickling syllables, exclamations, word-pictures, verbal tricks, and musical phrases. Or they tell of the moon, autumn's falling leaves, and the brevity of life. They picture the flowers, birds, the swaying bamboo, the cuckoo's

song. They breathe of love. They ignore the stars. Many things beautiful to us are barred because of their associations, and our commonplaces are conspicuously absent.

After possibly sixteen centuries of these tiny lyrical poems, two Japanese students, after study in the United States, began to translate the poems of Christendom into their own tongue. Campbell, Gray, Tennyson, Longfellow, Shakespeare, sang in Japanese. They took a bold step further, and a decade ago sent forth a volume of "New Style



Kido

Poems." Yatabé and Toyama, both, we believe, students in Cornell, were the innovators, each contributing nine poems with fourteen translations. In their prefaces they called their work neither *uta* nor *shi* (Chinese stanzas); but simply poetry. The style allies itself closely to the best models of written Japanese, and the structure is that of the older but only occasional *naga-uta*, or long poems. For ten years something like a literary revolution seemed impending; but though, as late as 1891, Mr. Toyama recited with effect a poem of thirty-six stanzas, descriptive of the great earthquake of 1855, including pathetic experiences and a tribute *in memoriam* to his mother, the movement towards a new avatar of the spirit of Japanese poetry cannot be accurately called a visible success. Volumes, collections rather, of verse in the old trammels are still published, and are popular. And yet we hazard the belief that when the Japanese youth enter more fully into the fairy-lands of Occidental poetry, when the modern ideas instilled by world-knowledge, science, and the Bible possess their souls, they will seek broader channels of expression.

In modern fiction, though there are many names, we pass over the mountainous heap of love-stories and romances (hitherto almost the only literature written wholly in the easily read *kana*) for women, to speak of Bakin. Born in 1767, and dying in the same year with Hokusai the artist, Bakin was as learned as he was fascinating. His immense work, "The Story of Eight Dogs," set the feet of at least one foreign traveler on the paths leading through the land described, and to see the old ruins of castles out of which brave retinues in peace and war once proceeded, but over which the crow now flies unalarmed. Of Bakin's 290 works there are many short stories, such as "The Golden Wind-Bell of Kamakura" and "The Diary of a Goldfish," rich in color, delightfully aromatic with literary allusion, and of absorbing interest as pictures of manners and characters. He is the Walter Scott of Japan in his wonderful power of reproducing the men and scenes of the Middle Ages and the splendors of feudalism. The spirit of his writings is didactic. He is an uncompromising Confucian, and, from the point of view of New Japan, is pedantic and narrow.

While Bakin occupied the place of master in the art of classic fiction, Ikku pictured life more in the manner of Dickens, and was not afraid to transfer the people's language to his pages. With his pen he sketched and colored the common people's world as did Hokusai with his pencil. The first Japanese book read by the writer was the "Tokaido Hiza-kurige," or A Tramp on the Great Eastern Sea Road from Yedo to Kioto. Coarse and vulgar in places as it is (I remember how one or two of my daimio friends professed to be shocked at it or ignorant of the book,

though really knowing it well), it is one of the most original and racy books in the whole native repertoire.

From about 1830 to 1879 Bakin reigned supreme, but in the latter year Bulwer's "Ernest Maltravers" was ably translated into Japanese. It was the setting of a new image in Dagon's temple. A brilliant author, Tsubouchi, attacked Bakin the idol, and wrote a novel exploiting his own new ideas. He also mastered Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar," and rendered it as a lyrical epic in flowing Japanese verse. Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare" was also finely done into Japanese. All this helped mightily to open his countrymen's eyes to other models of beauty and power.

Another writer named Yamada followed Tsubouchi, the pioneer, using new materials and methods, and the two novelists soon had many imitators. Besides brilliant short stories, the inexhaustible theme of the feuds of the rival families of nobles in the Middle Ages (Genji and Heiki) furnished new motives. "The Butterfly" is a historical novel of the twelfth century. In "The Flower-wheel" a poor student feeds his ambition by pulling a jinrikisha at night to earn his rice and buy books. In another, a poor and beautiful girl, pupil in the Normal School, descends through an immoral career until she becomes the wife of a common laborer. Indeed, several of the leaders of the new school of fiction, being graduates of the Imperial University of Tokio, have a rich field for exploitation in the school life of so many thousands of the youth of both sexes from all parts of the Empire confronting the complex life and temptations of the great city amid the dissolution of the old social and political life. The wonderful stories of the Japanese Solomon, Oka, the judge, and the exploits of the Forty-seven Ronins, were also retold.

Abundant translations from Western literature kept pace with original production for a half-decade, opening the new world of Western fiction to the minds of the Japanese, and emancipating them. Then followed Ozaki, who, basing his style on that popular at the end of the seventeenth century, added new literary devices. It may now be said that this school of writers—for there are now more than a coterie—rule the day in New Japan. There are novelists of learning and imagination who still finely uphold the best traditions of Bakin, but the newer, broader, and deeper views of man and nature, and the more purely Japanese literary style, are increasingly popular. They have elements of enduring permanence, for the sway of Confucius in Japan has been broken amid the ruins of feudalism, and the literary ideals are no longer Chinese. New Japan has her face towards Christendom, if not wholly set towards Christianity. Buddhism has

more of the spirit of humanity, more of consolation and hope, more that touches every-day life on every side, and touches it kindly, than Confucianism. Hence it is not strange that, in the new school of literature, Kotaro Han portrays the spirit of the Light of Asia. Who will yet interpret Japanese life in that of the Light of the World?

How the younger men are reaching out on fresh paths of inquiry is also seen in the literary magazines in which



Taguchi Uchida

moves the breath of the West. One group of writers is devoted to German poetry, and, by translations and adaptations, are making the inspiring thought of the Teutonic seers and singers popular. We are told also of an Englishman who has so far mastered Japanese as to be a pronounced success as a story-teller in Tokio. To the eager crowds in the halls and booths he unfolds the novel plots, and exciting episodes of European romance and history.

Thus the whole vast area of ancient, mediæval, and modern history and literature of the West is opening to the men and women of New Japan. The first rush of translation is over, and the Mikado's subjects at present prefer the adaptations, transfusions, or original story,



poem, or essay from their own authors. While the censor is still potent and ubiquitous, and the Imperial Diet and new political machinery have more of novelty than of history, this new mine will also be well worked. The romancer and satirist, however, finds it safer, as well as more profitable, to make his characters live in Athens or Rome, instead of relegating them to "the Ashikaga era" (A.D. 1333-1574) of execrable memory, and the potter's field of Japanese chronology. One fiction-writer is said to have built a house in Tokio out of the profits of a novel depicting Japanese political life, the plot of which is taken from Thucydides's history of the Peloponnesian war. Besides fiction which embroiders the old annals, there is a prodigious activity among native scholars who now write their country's story on critical principles and in attractive literary form for the people.



## The Poems of Robert Bridges<sup>1</sup>

By Robert Bridges<sup>2</sup>

To most American readers the works of the English poet Robert Bridges are as unknown as were the novels of George Meredith a few years ago. Yet both are well past middle life, and have long had the critical approval of a few choice minds whose praise is hard to win. Mr. Bridges has never sought the applause of the multitude; indeed, he has avoided it as much as possible by publishing most of his poems in limited editions, privately printed by the Rev. H. Daniel, a Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford. These thin volumes of hand-made paper, printed from a font of beautiful type with old English long ff, are already among the rare finds of book-collectors. One of them, of which only twenty copies were issued, sells for more than \$100, and several other volumes fetch \$30 to \$40. The poet never publishes in the magazines, but a few years ago issued a popular selection from his verse, under the title "The Shorter Poems of Robert Bridges," and within a few weeks has made more of his work accessible to the public in "The Humours of the Court, and Other Poems."

As for the career of the man outside of his books, it is known that he leads the life of a scholarly country gentleman near Oxford, and has a circle of close and admiring friends. His full name and titles are Robert Seymour Bridges, M.A., M.B., M.R.C.P. He was born in 1844, was graduated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in 1863, and in medicine in 1874. He has, however, retired from the practice of his profession. His printed works are as follows:

"Poems," Pickering, London, 1873; "Poems," Daniel, Oxford, 1879; "Poems," large paper, 150 copies, 4to, Daniel, Oxford, 1884; "Prometheus, the Fire-giver," Daniel, Oxford, 1884; "Eros and Psyche," 8vo, Bell, London, 1885; "Nero, an Historical Play," 4to, Bumpus, London, 1885; "Sonnets," 20 copies, Daniel, Oxford, 1889; "The Feast of Bacchus," 105 copies, Daniel, Oxford, 1889; "Palicio," a play, Bumpus, London, 1889; "The Return of Ulysses," a play, Bumpus, London,

1890; "Christian Captives," a play, Bumpus, London, 1890; "Shorter Poems," Bell, London, 1890; "Achilles in Scyros," large paper, Bumpus, London, 1890; "The Growth of Love," large paper, 100 copies, Daniel, Oxford, 1890; "Eden," 110 copies, large paper, 8vo, Bell, London, 1891; "Milton's Prosody," 250 copies, large paper, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1893; "Shorter Poems," Book Five, H. Daniel, Oxford, 1893; "The Humours of the Court," Bell, London, 1893.

These volumes represent the work of twenty years, and reveal a wide range of scholarship. They show him to be a close student of the Greek and Latin classics, as to form and spirit. One of his plays, "The Feast of Bacchus," is an adaptation of a play of Menander, through the Latin version of Terence, preserving the beauties of the latter. Mr. Bridges uses in this play a curious form of English hexameter, which is built on quantity rather than accent. The author's explanation is that "a natural emphasizing of the sense gives the rhythm;" but to most readers the meter will seem merely melodious prose.

A play which is more nearly in accord with English traditions is "Achilles in Scyros," written in blank verse of unusual beauty and correctness, and interspersed with choruses after the Greek manner. The pastoral setting of the play and the simple story, with its pretty comedy and love-making, give it a charm which must appeal to minds sensitive to beauty; and it is beauty rather than strength which is always the characteristic of this poet. The quality of his blank verse is well shown in this:

We may enjoy in quiet the sweet air,  
And thro' the quivering golden green look up  
To the deep sky, and have high thoughts as idle  
And bright as are the small white clouds becalmed  
In disappointed voyage to the noon.

That he has made a careful study of blank verse is shown by his monograph on "Milton's Prosody," and he has consequently learned how to give his own verse variety with dignity. "The Humours of the Court" reveals him as a student of the Spanish drama. Indeed, his plays are generally the experiments of a scholar rather than the dramatic outbursts of a poet. To scholars will they, therefore, always make their appeal for appreciation.

But when you read the lyrics of Robert Bridges, you lose sight of the scholar and find the poet. His scholarship simply aids him in preserving the best traditions of the Elizabethan lyrics; but the poet in him bursts into spontaneous song. No mere scholar can ever reach the pure lyric strain—it is the love of life, the joy of the heart, the ecstasy of beauty. Any admirer of Mr. Bridges might rest his claim for lyric eminence on one poem and be sure of the verdict:

Awake, my heart, to be loved, awake, awake!  
The darkness silvers away, the morn doth break,  
It leaps in the sky; unrisen lusters slake  
The o'ertaken moon. Awake, O heart, awake!

She too that loveth awaketh and hopes for thee;  
Her eyes already have sped the shades that flee,  
Already they watch the path thy feet shall take:  
Awake, O heart, to be loved, awake, awake!

Awake, the land is scattered with light, and see,  
Uncanopied sleep is flying from field and tree;  
And blossoming boughs of April in laughter shake:  
Awake, O heart, to be loved, awake, awake!

He has written many other lyrics with the true lift in them—the songs of a mind and spirit in thorough accord with Nature. When you have read them, you discover that it is not sensuous beauty which starts him singing; you see through the songs into the clear intelligence of the singer. He loves the visible forms of nature because they help him to an understanding of the invisible recesses of his own heart:

Then comes the happy moment; not a stir  
In any tree, no portent in the sky. . . .  
But life and joy are one—we know not why—  
As though our very blood long breathless lain  
Had tasted of the breath of God again. . . .  
But, O most blessed truth, for truth thou art,  
Abide thou with me till my life shall end.  
Divinity hath surely touched my heart;  
I have possessed more joy than earth can lend.



*you get Mr. Bridges*

<sup>1</sup> *The Humours of the Court, and Other Poems.* By Robert Bridges. G. Bell & Sons, London; Macmillan & Co., New York.

<sup>2</sup> It would seem hardly necessary to say that Mr. Robert Bridges, of "Scribner's Magazine," the writer of this article, and Mr. Robert Bridges, the English poet, are two persons. Some reviewers, however, have failed to recognize the fact.—THE EDITORS.