

of this kind. Such rational distinctions, however, were alien to the approach of Murasaki and her contemporaries. No more in their thinking than in the structure of their language did the idea of mutually exclusive categories prevail. Seeming incompatibilities of belief could be slurred over by neat syncretic formulae, and the most incongruous practices accepted as if they were an integral part of the faith in question. Not only did the various religious functions overlap, but the religions themselves blended imperceptibly with the vast network of superstitions. Thus it seemed quite natural that the emperors, the high priests of Shintō, should take Buddhist vows, that people should suffer from possessions owing to a bad karma, and that Buddhist priests should believe in nature gods, lucky stars, and goblins. In the West too we can find many cases of incongruity. Renaissance popes practised astrology, and until 1552 the Book of Common Prayer included a service of exorcism preceding the baptism of children.¹ The fact remains that, for better or for worse, the West was rarely prepared to accept the degree of overt syncretism and intellectual permissiveness that was normal in Japan during the Heian period and later.

¹ Services for the exorcism of devils from haunted houses may be (and actually still are) carried out by the Church of England with the previous licence of a bishop (72nd Canon of the Church of England, 1603).

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MURASAKI'S WORLD OF SHINING PRINCE

III A

VI

The 'Good People' and their Lives

If the informed Westerner was asked to enumerate the outstanding features of traditional Japan, his list might well consist of the following: in *culture* Nō and Kabuki drama, Haiku poems, Ukiyoe colour prints, samisen music, and various activities like the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and the preparation of miniature landscapes that are related to Zen influence; in *society* the two-sworded samurai and the geisha; in *ideas* the Zen approach to human experience with its stress on an intuitive understanding of the truth and sudden enlightenment, the samurai ethic sometimes known as *Bushidō*, a great concern with the conflicting demands of duty and human affection, and an extremely permissive attitude to suicide, especially love suicides; in *domestic architecture* fitted straw matting (*tatami*), large communal baths, *tokonoma* alcoves for hanging *kakemono*; in *food* raw fish and soy sauce (*tempura* and *sukiyaki* being judiciously excluded as Western importations). The list would of course be entirely correct. Yet not a single one of these items existed in Murasaki's world, and many of them would have seemed as alien to her as they do to the modern Westerner.

The immense changes that occurred in Japan, especially during the Muromachi and Tokugawa periods, make it hard to reconstruct life in Heian Kyō; and the tidal waves of later Westernization impose a further barrier between us and the world inhabited by Murasaki. We do, however, have a compensating advantage. Vernacular literature, in particular *The Tale of Genji* and the *Pillow Book*, gives us a remarkably detailed picture of daily life in

Japanese patrician society during the tenth and eleventh centuries. When it comes to this sort of information, we are probably better served about Japan than about any other country at the time; and in Japan itself it is not until we reach the seventeenth century that we find a body of realistic writing with a similar amount of detail.

Of course, it is a one-sided picture, concentrated almost exclusively on the social and cultural aspects of life. From reading works like *The Tale of Genji*, *Gossamer Diary*, and the *Pillow Book* we should hardly guess that the men described were often leading figures in the government of the day and that they spent at least as much of their time in political intrigues as in those of an erotic nature. Still less should we imagine that many of them, especially members of the northern branch of the Fujiwara family, were hard-working officials, seriously devoted to their public duties. The old Minister of the Left in *The Tale of Genji* is one of the few characters in the romantic literature of the time who belong to the category described by Sir George Sansom when he writes of 'grave and industrious officials, men who were diligent in performing their ceremonial duties, scribbling their memoranda, issuing their orders and despatches, men steeped in official routine'.¹

One reason is that many of the writers of the vernacular works were women who could have little detailed knowledge of matters like politics from which most of them were excluded.² In his study of Sei Shōnagon Arthur Waley refers to the 'extraordinary vagueness of women concerning purely male activities'.³

Yet this is only part of the explanation. Writers like Murasaki would, it is true, tend to underplay the 'public' lives of their male

¹ George Sansom, *A History of Japan*, i, 144.

² Some Heian women (especially Dowager Empresses like Higashi Sanjō no In and Jōtōmon In) wielded great political power (see p. 203). But they were exceptions. Most women of the time, including all the writers with whose work we are familiar, were uninvolved in politics, though many of them took a keen interest in palace intrigues, state marriages, and promotions.

³ Arthur Waley, *The Pillow-Book of Sei Shōnagon*, p. 128. But Beaujard considers that Waley is overstating the case: 'On pourrait, tout aussi bien, remarquer par ailleurs que Sei connaissait parfaitement les pétitions officielles et en déduire qu'elle n'était pas tellement ignorante pour tout ce qui regardait l'administration.' (A. Beaujard, *Sei Shōnagon: son temps et son œuvre*, p. 356.) The fact remains that, for all her curiosity, Sei shows extremely little interest in what took place in the government offices, and none at all in the manors, from which her society derived its sustenance.

characters. Yet from other sources we know that many of the men who attained positions of importance in the Heian administrative hierarchy were in fact singularly uninterested in their official responsibilities and preferred to pass their time in composing elegant poems in Chinese or supervising the punctilious of elaborate ceremonies rather than in carrying out the prosaic duties of public office. Still less were most of them prepared to administer their scattered manors in the provinces, which would mean spending precious days away from the capital, and worse still, dealing with dreary, boorish yokels. When Murasaki's gentlemen do venture into the countryside it is not to inspect their estates, or even to enjoy a day of hunting (the common male pastime in most aristocratic societies), but to compose poems on the autumn foliage or to keep a tryst at some mountain temple. Professor Oka emphasizes the debilitating effect on the Heian upper class of being almost totally divorced from the productive life of the country; and the separation of Heian Kyō from the rest of Japan undoubtedly helped to discourage the development of a vigorous, self-reliant approach among the metropolitan aristocrats.¹

In most of the government departments themselves, overstaffing, cumbersome formalities, and the tendency to turn all business into ceremonial routine had advanced so far by Murasaki's time that even the most energetic official was sooner or later almost bound to succumb to frustration and boredom and to divert his energies to more trivial pursuits. This applied particularly to those who were not related to the dominant faction of the Fujiwara and were therefore debarred from positions of real power.

Time after time the male characters in *The Tale of Genji* regret the hours that they are obliged to spend in their offices, separated from the activities that really interest them. None is more plangent on the theme than the shining prince himself. At the age of thirty he has reached the lofty post of Great Minister of the Centre. Far from welcoming the promotion, he bitterly begrudges the extra work his new duties involve. Visiting Murasaki's room one day, he discusses the Battle of the Seasons² that has recently been engaging the members of his household:

'I can well understand the feelings of Lady Akikonomu when

¹ Oka, op. cit., p. 22 ff.

² See p. 21.

she tells us that she likes Autumn best. But, when all is said and done, I think that your own choice of the early morning in Spring is the most reasonable. Oh, if only I could spend more of my time with you here, wandering about the garden and comparing the beauties of the trees and plants in the different seasons! I really was not made for this endless round of official business. Sometimes I wonder if I shouldn't get away from it all and retire to a monastery....¹

* * *

The picture of the average Heian aristocrat that appears in literature and painting is likely to strike many Western readers as effeminate. The contemporary ideal of male beauty was a plump white face with a minute mouth, the narrowest slits for eyes and a little tuft of beard on the point of the chin. This—apart from the beard—was the same as the ideal of feminine beauty, and often in Murasaki's novel we are told that a handsome gentleman like Kaoru is as beautiful as a woman. We know that Fujiwara no Korechika, the great Adonis of the day, had a perfectly round white face; here, as in many other respects, he was probably the model for the hero of *The Tale of Genji*.² Having read the scenes in which ladies almost swoon at the thought of Prince Genji's physical charms, most Westerners (and many modern Japanese) are bound to be surprised by his rather epicene appearance in the scrolls, where he is depicted with a pasty complexion, almost imperceptible eyes, and an exiguous tuft of beard. Yet there is every reason to believe that the scrolls are faithful to Murasaki's ideal of male beauty.

We also have a good picture of what a Heian gentleman should *not* look like. The dark, hirsute Prince Higekuro (who is significantly named after his 'black beard') is physically the antithesis of Genji

¹ Ikeda ed., ii, 332. One is reminded of Prince Konoe's frequent statements at the time when he was Prime Minister that he wanted to 'retire from the world of politics and become a priest' (e.g. testimony of General Suzuki Teichi at the war crimes trial). Konoe was a scion of the Heian aristocracy in more ways than one. See also Ikeda ed., ii, 314, for the passage in which Genji realises with dismay that the death of his father-in-law, the Minister of the Left, is going to force him to devote more of his time to public affairs, which in the past he had managed to delegate to the conscientious old minister.

² See p. 286.

and Kaoru, and when Tamakazura, later to become his wife, looks with aversion at his dark, hairy face, we can judge what Murasaki Shikibu thought about the more masculine-appearing type of man.¹

The Heian gentleman powdered his face (the faces of badly-powdered men remind Sei of dark earth over which the snow has melted in patches)² and used a generous amount of scent on his hair and clothes. The technique of mixing perfumes was highly developed. In an age when bathing was perfunctory and clothing elaborate and hard to clean, scent served a very useful purpose. It was, of course, no ready-made commodity, but the product of a complex and sophisticated art.³ Genji himself was much admired for the skill with which he prepared his own incense, whose distinctive aroma always announced his approach and lingered after his departure. In the case of Prince Niou, who on the whole is pictured as one of the more masculine of the male characters, the preparation of scents was something of an obsession. Both he and his friend Kaoru owe their names to this art; and nothing more symbolizes the ideals of this period, and contrasts it with the subsequent age of military heroes, than the fact that two of Murasaki's most respected male characters should be named 'Lord Fragrance' and 'Prince Scent'.

This somewhat feminine impression of the Heian gentleman is confirmed by what we read of his behaviour. During his visits to the nearby village of Uji, Prince Niou, who is certainly not intended to appear more pusillanimous than average, is terrified of being attacked by highway robbers or by men from Kaoru's manor. Few Western readers will fail to be impressed by the unabashed way in which Murasaki's heroes display their softer emotions. Genji and his companions lived in an age when the virtues of male impassivity had not yet come to be valued. Tears, far from being a sign of weakness, showed that a man was sensitive to the beauty and pathos of life. It is true that lachrymose heroes often figure in the history of the military period too; but it is a different sort of situation that reduces these robust men to tears. The warrior will weep at the death of his lord and thus display the sincerity of his grief; but the Heian gentleman is reduced to tears at the prospect of parting from his mistress, at the sight of a magnificent sunrise, or at the thought

¹ Ikeda ed., iii, 237.

² Kaneko ed., p. 8.

³ See pp. 191-3.

of someone else's loneliness. In her diary Murasaki describes the great Fujiwara no Michinaga weeping with joy when he sees the emperor arriving at the Gosechi festival; and in her novel the spectators are moved to tears by the beauty of Genji's dance.¹ Love affairs are invariably attended by tears and the man is certainly not behindhand in this respect. After Prince Niou has spent his first night with Ukifune, he weeps at the thought of how hard it will be to arrange future meetings.² Here Murasaki is not, as the modern reader might suspect, implying some weakness in the young man's character, but simply reminding us of his exquisite sensibility.

In drawing a picture of the Heian gentleman from a book like *The Tale of Genji* we must of course make full allowance for the fact that it is a work of fiction in which many of the characters, especially the more important ones, are idealized. In her descriptions of Genji, Niou, and Kaoru the author was presenting the ideal man, rather than the flesh and blood creatures whom she met at court, those all too human men who drank to excess, spoke in loud voices, and knocked on her door at night.

For some women the solid, sturdy, impassive male, to whom the grunt or the laconic remark comes easier than the flood of tears, provides a more attractive image; but Murasaki clearly preferred the sensitive and emotional type who might nowadays be described as unmanly. Here, as in her ideas about male physical beauty, she appears to have shared the standards of her time—standards that are reflected not only in women's diaries but in male works of fiction like *The Tale of the Hollow Tree*.

We can be sure that there were many gentlemen in Heian Kyō who worked hard and efficiently in their offices (how else could the Fujiwara Councils have functioned as well as they did?), who were perfunctory in their use of scent and powder, who, like Tachibana no Norimitsu in the *Pillow Book*, did not give a fig for poetry or literary quotations,³ and who conducted their love affairs expeditiously, with a minimum of tears and elegances. And even among the aristocracy nature no doubt created far more men with Higekuro's attributes than with the smooth features of a Kaoru.

Yet, so long as we are aware of its limitations, Murasaki's picture of the Heian male is valid and historically significant. For it was a

¹ See Ikeda ed., vii, 30, and pp. 190-1 below.

² See p. 186.

³ See p. 181.

man like Prince Genji, with his gentle nature, his sensitivity and his wide range of artistic skills, who represented the ideal of the age and who set the tone for the social and cultural life of the good people.

* * *

Not much is said about food in the vernacular literature of the time and virtually nothing in the Chinese-style writings. It was regarded as a vulgar subject and, while we hear a good deal about drinking parties, meals are hardly ever described. Sei Shōnagon disliked men who ate heavily; a gentleman, she tells us, should pick daintily at his dishes. One of the most distressing things about the lower orders is the way in which they wolf down their food.¹

As in China, rice was the staple diet, the polished variety being reserved mainly for the aristocracy. There were several rice dishes, some of which (like *machi* rice cakes) are still current. Among the food that commonly accompanied the rice was seaweed and radishes. Fruits and nuts were eaten a great deal and also made into cakes; sugar, however, was not used. Ice was stored in special chambers, and in the hot months rich people enjoyed a sort of sherbet made of shaved ice and liana syrup. Fish was boiled, baked, or pickled, but, in the capital at least, it was not as a rule eaten raw until a later period; shell-fish like sea-eel (*anadhi*) were especially popular. Meat was normally excluded because of Buddhist influence. Somewhat illogically, pheasant, quail, and other types of game were allowed; but, since there was little hunting, this was not an important part of the menu except in the very richest households. Among the common vegetables were sweet potatoes, egg-plants, carrots, onions, and garlic (the last having been introduced from Korea). In the reign of Emperor Ichijō a type of butter (*so*) was made of cow's milk, but it did not become popular and soon disappeared from the Japanese diet—so completely, indeed, that when the first Westerners arrived in the country their outstanding characteristic, apart from having red hair and bulging blue eyes, was that they were 'butter-stinking' (*bata-kusai*).

¹ See p. 86.

Heian cuisine was remarkably little influenced by China's. Then as now great stress was placed on presentation, the food always being served with an eye to visual effect. But the dishes themselves lacked the variety and sophistication that, possibly under the influence of Taoism,¹ had already made Chinese cooking among the finest in the world. The joys of the table did not rank high in Heian Kyō, and on the whole the food was poor in both culinary and nutritive value.²

Non-alcoholic drink was limited almost entirely to water. Milk had been drunk during the Nara period, but had now lapsed from use and was held in almost the same aversion as in China. Tea was introduced in the ninth century by the founder of the Tendai sect, and was planted on Mount Hiei. The first Japanese sovereign to taste it was Emperor Saga, who was offered a cup by a Buddhist priest in 815. This mark of royal approval did not, however, win success for the new beverage. In Murasaki's time laymen used it almost exclusively for medical purposes, and it did not become popular for more than two hundred years.

In the tenth (as in the twentieth) century the great Japanese drink was rice wine. Already seven hundred years earlier Chinese travellers commented that the Japanese 'are much given to strong drink'.³ Heian literature provides ample evidence that the gentlemen of the time enjoyed wine and its effects. Drinking parties were extremely popular. Wine was poured for each guest in turn according to his rank; often people were expected to recite a poem or sing a song before raising the cup to their lips. There were several drinking games, in which the losers were obliged to drink the 'cup of defeat' (*basshi*), and these frequently turned into drunken carousals.

Most of the numerous types of *sake* drunk in Murasaki's time were weaker than the present-day varieties; yet (owing, among other things, to the absence of fats from the traditional Japanese diet) they were all highly intoxicating. In her diary Murasaki complains about Michinaga's drunkenness, from which she suffered on more than one occasion.⁴ His elder brother, Michitaka, shared his

taste for drink, as we can tell from the following passage in the *Pillow Book*:

'The gallery [of the Palace] was full of courtiers. His Excellency [Fujiwara no Michitaka] summoned servants from the Empress' Household and made them bring fruit and other dishes to be eaten with the wine. "Now let everyone get drunk!" he said. And in fact everyone did get drunk. The ladies-in-waiting began to exchange remarks with the gentlemen and they all found each other extremely amusing."¹

A common form of entertainment among the officials was a drinking party at which those who had recently been promoted were made to take as much *sake* as they could hold—and sometimes rather more. So bibulous did these affairs become that the custom was repeatedly prohibited. Like most interdictions of this type, however, it had little effect, and the 'promotion parties' went on unabated. The traditional Japanese tolerance towards drunkenness was already well established in the Heian period. Women were not excluded from the pleasures of the cup. Sei Shōnagon expresses her disapproval of women drinkers, but she herself had the reputation of being a tippler.

* * *

The 'good people' had their two main meals at about ten o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon. In Murasaki's time the custom of taking snacks (a piece of dried octopus, for example, or a rice biscuit) had spread upwards from the working class to the aristocracy; also, the first meal was often served a couple of hours later than had been usual in the past, and the day started with a light breakfast.

There was nothing rigid, however, about Heian meal-times or bed-times. Time-keeping by the clepsydra was a complicated process. Apart from certain palace officials, few people were ever aware of the exact hour of the day, and on the whole people were free from the tyranny of the clock. The irregularity of hours gives a somewhat amorphous quality to their day. There appears to have been no idea of a normal time, or even of a

¹ Rei. Reischauer and Fairbank, op. cit., pp. 138-9.

² For further details about Heian cuisine see Fujiki, op. cit., pp. 156-8.

³ G. B. Sansom, *A Short Cultural History of Japan*, p. 30.

⁴ E.g. pp. 62-63.

¹ Kaneko ed., p. 553.

normal range of hours, at which to go to bed. It is commonplace to read in *The Tale of Genji* that the sun is rising over the horizon while the characters are engaged in conversation; and the sight of the dawning light, far from speeding them to their beds for a few hours of belated sleep, is often the occasion for an impromptu concert in which the beauty of the new day is celebrated on the flute or zither.¹ Kaoru on one of his visits to Uji spends all night in desultory talk with Prince Hachi. Towards dawn, hoping to hear something about his host's talented daughter, he brings the conversation round to the subject of music. The indefatigable old prince then calls for his zither and a concert ensues, which in turn is followed by another long conversation. One can imagine how efficiently Kaoru would have carried out his official responsibilities that day if he had bothered to report for duty at the Headquarters of the Inner Palace Guards where he was stationed.

* * *

The leisured class had a rich variety of games and contests, which allowed people to display their skill, taste, and erudition, and which, particularly for the women, helped to pass the long inactive hours. *Go* (undoubtedly one of the finest games of any country or time) had been introduced from China in the Nara period, and was extremely popular in aristocratic circles. The Genji scrolls picture Kaoru having a game with the Emperor, in which the prize, an unwelcome one as it turns out, is the hand of the Emperor's daughter in marriage; we also see Tamakazura's two daughters enjoying a game of *go* beyond the rich white blossoms of the cherry tree that they have chosen as their stake. Although *go* was often played for bets, the real gambling game of the time was *sugoroku*, a type of backgammon which was periodically (and ineffectively) forbidden. *Sugoroku* was not considered as elegant as *go*, and it is significant that the keenest player in *The Tale of Genji* should be Tō no Chūjō's uncouth illegitimate daughter from the province of Ōmi. There was also a simple dice game called *chābani*; among the Things that

¹ See p. 189.

Give One a Pleasant Feeling, Sei Shōnagon includes 'winning a lucky throw of the dice'. Popular among the ladies was the game of *ranse*, which involved balancing as many *go* stones as possible on a single finger; they also enjoyed a form of riddly-winks known as *tagi*.

Several parlour games called for verbal ingenuity and a knowledge of the classics. *Naza* consisted of a series of conundrums posed by two opposing teams. In *myūagi* one of the players would cover a character in a Chinese poem, and the aim was to guess the hidden word from the context, the rhythm, and one's own poetic erudition. There was a similar game in which one part of the character was covered while the contestants tried to guess the remainder.

A large category of games was known as 'comparisons' (*awase*). At first they had been mainly 'comparisons of things' (*mono-awase*), such as flowers, roots, seashells, birds, and insects. The root-comparing contest (*ne-awase*), for example, was an ancient and rather formalized game played during the Iris Festival in the Fifth Month. The guests were divided into two teams, left and right. Iris roots were submitted in pairs by members of each team, together with appropriate poems, and carefully compared for beauty, length, and rarity. Specially appointed judges decided which team had produced the finest roots, and prizes were awarded to the winning side. Like most Heian social occasions, this was accompanied by a good deal of music, wine, and amorous dalliance.

The other 'comparisons of things' followed the same general pattern. Thus in the small-birds contest (*hotori-awase*) members of each team produced little song-birds that they had raised at home; they were compared, two by two, in terms of plumage, colour, and voice, and the side that had entered the greatest number of rare and beautiful birds received a prize. The court ladies in particular devoted a great deal of time to preparing their exhibits, and on the eve of one of the great contests the rival teams were in a frenzy of activity. For, as Sei writes in her chapter on Things that Make One Happy, 'if one wins in a contest (*mono-awase*)—no matter what kind it may be—how can one fail to be overjoyed?'¹

In Murasaki's time 'comparisons' were increasingly devoted to the products of craft and art, like fans, incense, paintings, and

¹ Kaneko ed., p. 944.

poems. Poetry contests (*uta-awase*), which had started in court circles in the ninth century, became particularly popular during the tenth. These contests were no casual parlour-games but keenly-fought battles in which a person's reputation as a poet, and accordingly as a man of culture, could be made or broken. The topics were posted several weeks in advance, and even before the announcement the contestants had usually prepared verses on likely subjects—all of which must have removed some of the spontaneity from the proceedings. During the contest itself the entries from each of the two sides were recited in pairs by official readers and recorded for posterity; the judge's decisions, and sometimes the reasons for them, were also recorded. Contests of this type were unlikely to produce any very fresh or original verse. They did, however, help to keep poetry in the main stream of social life and had a considerable influence (not, on the whole, a favourable one) on the development of conventional modes of writing.

A somewhat less formal type of poetry contest was the *enshō-awase*, in which the contestants were divided into two teams, with men on one side and women on the other. Each player would recite a love poem to a member of the opposing team, who was then expected to produce a prompt reply using the same mood and imagery. As a rule, the sentiments were conventional and not intended to be taken seriously. The winners received the usual prizes of silk or other valuables, as well as the prestige afforded by poetic fluency.

* * *

The most popular outdoor pastime for Heian gentlemen was a form of football known as *kemari*. The players arranged themselves in a circle and kicked a leather ball among each other, the aim being to prevent it from touching the ground. The Scrolls of Yearly Observances show a group of noblemen playing *kemari* under a roof of cherry blossoms. They are dressed in elaborate court robes of blue and red silk, and their black lacquered bonnets perch precariously on the back of their heads; two of the gentlemen carry

fans. There is a look of great concentration on their white, round faces, but their movements appear to be slow and graceful. *Kemari* tended to become an art rather than a casual game, and some practitioners attained a high degree of skill. The chronicles record that in 905 when a group of young noblemen played *kemari* in the presence of the emperor they passed the ball two hundred and sixty times without letting it touch the ground, which we can safely take to be an all-time record.

The literature of the period frequently describes archery contests. They were especially popular among members of the Guards, who as a rule used a four-foot bow and aimed at a target about one hundred feet away. Like many Heian games, archery came to be a form of gambling. Horse-racing and a type of polo known as *dabōji* were also enjoyed by Guards officers. Standards of horsemanship, however, declined drastically during the age of court nobles, and at the end of the period we read of an important Fujiwara official trying unsuccessfully to mount his horse while a group of military men stand by jeering.¹ Hunting, as we have seen, was interdicted by the Buddhist church. The ban on taking life extended to falconry, but in this case it was often disregarded, perhaps because some of the emperors themselves enjoyed the sport.

Among spectator games was *sumō* wrestling, performed for the enjoyment of the aristocracy by mountainous fighters from the provinces. The nobility also enjoyed watching horse races and archery contests. The only cruel sport of the time was cock-fighting (*tori-awase*), a popular form of gambling among both nobility and commoners. In the Scrolls of Yearly Observances we see a cock fight in the garden of a patrician mansion. Two cocks are about to pounce on each other. Behind each of them squats a black-bonneted gentleman in elaborate court costume, who looks hardly bigger—and certainly far less fierce—than the bird he has entered in the competition. As usual in the *awase*, there are two teams, one of the left and one of the right; the members are gathered outside gaily coloured pavilions, eagerly waiting for the fight to start. A couple of ladies are seated on the veranda under a spray of cherry blossoms and some others are peeping from behind the blinds of the house.

¹ The incident occurred in 1159 and the unfortunate official was Fujiwara no Nobuyori, who among other posts held that of Captain of the Outer Palace Guards.

Attached by red strings to two dwarf trees, the next pair of cocks are impatiently waiting to tear each other to pieces.

Since women rarely ventured into the open, there were few outdoor pastimes for their benefit. We know, however, that they enjoyed watching the stately form of boat-racing known as *juna-kunabe*, and also that in the winter they took great delight in rolling snowballs (*yukikorogashi*) and piling snow in tubs or silver bowls. The *Pillow Book* has a long passage about the huge snow mountain that Empress Sadako's ladies built in the garden of her palace.

* * *

The Heian year was rich with ceremonies and festivals of every kind. Indeed, if we were to enumerate all the regular and occasional observances in Murasaki's time, we should have a list no less impressive than that of the *fortes* in ancient Rome. As in Rome, many of these occasions were of religious or folk origin but had become accepted as part of secular, metropolitan life. The greatest differences from Rome were in the scale of the pageantry (even the most gilded Japanese ceremony never approached the grandeur of the affairs described by Suetonius) and in the fact that the celebrations in Heian Kyō concerned chiefly the aristocracy, whereas the Roman authorities arranged *pantom et circenses* above all for the plebeians.

The role of these festivals in the lives of Genji and his circle can hardly be exaggerated. Without them daily life, especially for the women, would have been intolerably monotonous. Indeed, when we read a book like *Gossamer Diary*, we sometimes feel that, but for the Festival of the Weaver Star, the Shintō Moon Festival, and similar events with all preparations they involved, things would have come to an almost complete standstill for the writer and her companions. These observances also satisfied the contemporary taste for colour, grandeur, and display. Many of them involved stately court dances of the *bugaku* type and came close to being artistic performances in their own right. The Yearly Observances were particularly important in the imperial government. For the emperor himself and for many of the High Court Nobles they were so absorbing that there would have been little time for any

real political activity even if the ruling Fujiwaras had permitted it.

Among the many occasional ceremonies were those for the installation of a new imperial concubine, childbirth ceremonies, the observances carried out fifty days after the birth, the coming-of-age ceremonies for boys (*Gempukku*) and girls (*Moge*), and funeral services. In Book 49 of *The Tale of Genji* the emperor's second daughter (the one whom Kaoru rather reluctantly won as his wife in the game of *go* with the emperor) proceeds to Kaoru's mansion in the Third Ward:

It was an outstanding ceremony. The Princess was escorted by all the ladies-in-waiting of the Emperor's household, each of whom had eight pages in attendance. She herself rode in a carriage with projecting eaves, behind which came three silken carriages, six gilded carriages, twenty palm-leaf carriages and two of split bamboo. Prince Kaoru sent an escort to meet the Princess. It consisted of several equipages carrying ladies of his own household, whose magnificently coloured sleeves hung elegantly outside the carriages. In addition the Princess was accompanied by a throng of High Court Nobles, Senior Courtiers and officials from the Palace. All in all, it could hardly have been more impressive.¹

The regular Yearly Observances originated in many different ways. Some had been taken over directly from the Chinese Court, though by Murasaki's time they had mostly undergone considerable adaptation. Others, as we have seen, had their source in folk festivals or local celebrations, but had been absorbed into the court calendar; conversely, many observances that were originally carried out in the Imperial Palace spread to private households, and even came to be practised by commoners and provincials. Still others were religious festivals—Buddhist, Shintō, and Confucianist.

Since they cumulatively played such an important part in Heian life, it may be well to give some examples from the rich array of observances that were carried out in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Rather than divide them into categories (religious and secular, foreign and indigenous, folk and aristocratic), I shall list them in chronological order, which would have seemed more natural in Murasaki's time.

¹ Ikeda ed., vi, 223.

The Ninth Month

Seventh Day: The Submission of Reports on Unfit Land.

The Great Ministers and their assistants assemble in the Palace and humbly present His Majesty with reports from the Provincial Governors about crop failures and land that has fallen out of cultivation because of natural disasters or other causes.¹

Ninth Day: Chrysanthemum Festival.

The Emperor and his Court inspect the chrysanthemums in the Palace gardens. Afterwards there is a banquet. Poems are composed and the guests drink wine in which chrysanthemums have been steeped.² After a performance of dances, Palace Girls present small white trouts to His Majesty, and later the guests are also served dishes of white trout.

The Tenth Month

First Day of the Boar: The Boar.

The day is observed as a holiday and is marked by eating seven special kinds of cakes to ward off illness and other misfortunes. The Senior Courtiers and Ladies each receive a chip-box of glutinous rice as His Majesty's bounty.

The Eleventh Month

Second Day of the Hare: Festival of the First Fruits.

His Majesty offers newly harvested rice to the [Shintō] Gods of Heaven and Earth and then partakes of new rice himself. Thanksgiving rituals and dances are performed and ancient prayers recited.

¹ The aim of these reports was to secure a remission of tax. Normally a two-thirds remission was allowed on land that had gone out of cultivation, but in suspicious cases inspectors were sent to examine the situation. The report to the Emperor, though purely ceremonial, was carried out meticulously during the entire period. As Sanson points out, "... the participants in the ceremony were but little interested in the substance of the reports, in such points as the area, position and nature of the rice lands in question. What mattered was the form in which the reports were drawn up, the exact language used in presenting them, the correct placing of signatures and seals, and even the deportment of the officials." Sanson, *A History of Japan*, I, 167.

² Chrysanthemums were supposed to promote longevity (see p. 129). It was believed that, if people rubbed their faces with the pieces of silk floss that covered the chrysanthemums on the eve of the festival, they would be spared the ravages of age.

Second Day of the Dragon: The Gosechi Dances.

In the morning His Majesty attends a [Shintō] service celebrating the newly harvested rice. This is followed by a banquet in honour of the harvest. In the evening the Emperor and his Court attend the annual Gosechi Dances, which are performed by four young girls, three being the daughters of High Court Nobles and one the daughter of a Provincial Governor. Dances are also performed by young gentlemen who have undergone special instruction.

The Twelfth Month

Nineteenth to Twenty-First Days: The General Confession.

A statue of the Goddess of Mercy is moved into the Imperial Dais of His Majesty's Residential Palace, and painted screens depicting the Horrors of Hell are set up under the eaves as a reminder of the need for penitence. In the Palaces and private residences services are held by different priests during each of the three successive nights to expunge the sins committed during the course of the year.

Last Day: The Devil Chase.

On the last night of the year officials from the Ministry of Central Affairs join the Masters of Yin-Yang in a Service of Expulsion, during which special spells are recited. A Devil Chaser, who is selected from among the Imperial Attendants, dons a golden mask and a red skirt. Accompanied by twenty assistants, he makes his way through the Palace buildings and courtyards, twanging his bow-strings, shooting arrows into the air, and striking his shield with a spear in order to expel all devils and evil spirits before the beginning of the New Year's celebrations. Similar precautions are taken in private households.¹

* * *

The prevailing tone of family life was extremely formal. This was not only in the Imperial Palace, where one would expect ceremonial and punctilio to prevail, but in private households as de-

¹ By typical transmutation the devil chaser (*hōōdan*) himself came to represent the devil. In the 11th century it was customary for gentlemen of the court to shoot arrows at him and his assistants. The *Gōke Shūdan*, which mentions this development, does not tell us whether the unfortunate devil-substitutes were ever actually hit.

scribed by writers of the time. Important as the family unit was in Heian society, it appears to have provided few of the convivial pleasures. There was nothing corresponding to the cheerful board at which different generations of the family, sometimes joined by friends and acquaintances, can come together to share the joys of food, drink, and conversation.¹ The members of Prince Genji's household in the Sixth Ward, for example, live in almost total isolation from each other. Except on special occasions when they meet for a festival or to take part in some formal activity like an incense competition, they can normally communicate only by exchanges of notes and poems or by messages that Genji himself relays on his tours through the apartments.

Yūgiri has never once met his young stepmother, Lady Murasaki, though they have been living in different wings of the same house for at least ten years. When he finally does catch a glimpse of her it is only because of the confusion prevailing in the house during the great autumn storm. Struck by his stepmother's unexpected beauty, he promptly falls in love—a complication that would doubtless have been avoided if he had been seeing her regularly over the years.

Later in the novel we find that Kōbai has never had a single opportunity to meet his stepdaughter though they too have lived in the same house since she was a small girl:

"Kōbai was consumed with curiosity. 'If only I could see what she looks like!' he thought. 'It is really too sad that she should always be hidden.'"

On one occasion, when no one was about, he made his way stealthily to the girl's room, hoping to catch a glimpse of her; but, when he peeped through her screen of state, he could not see even the dimmest outline of her figure.

"I thought that in your mother's absence I ought to come and keep you company," he told her. "It really makes me very unhappy that you should be so distant with me."

Since they were separated by thick hangings, Kōbai could barely make out her answer, but from the elegance and

¹ Among the advice that Fujiwara no Morosuke (d. 960) left to his descendants we find this rather chilling precept: "Unless it is on public business, or for some unavoidable private affair, do not frequent the houses of others. Social intercourse unless on a strictly formal footing is to be regarded as dangerous, leading to jealousy, quarrels, and slander. You must keep yourself to yourself and so preserve your dignity." Quoted by Sanson, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

charm of her voice he imagined how attractive she must be and he was deeply moved."¹

This might seem a somewhat exaggerated case of formality; but nothing is said to suggest that there was anything exceptional about the girl. Similar situations occur throughout the novel. Prince Niou, for instance, has never been allowed to converse with his own sister, the Princess of the First Order, except through curtains or from behind a screen; he desperately wishes that he could have a proper look at the girl—and indeed the forced separation makes him regard her with something more than brotherly interest. Eavesdropping and peeping, which were so prevalent during the Heian period, resulted partly from this rigid convention.

Any unfamiliar society presents us with seeming contradictions. The modern reader is bound to find many incongruities in the world of the shining prince, but perhaps none is more striking than the contrast between this formality, which can prevent a brother from ever seeing his sister or a father his stepdaughter, and the remarkable informality that makes it normal for Prince Niou to go to bed with Naka no Kimi on their very first meeting and for Kashiwagi to do the same with Princess Nyosan before they have spoken a word to each other.

Another aspect of upper-class Heian life that must impress any modern reader is its circumscribed, almost claustrophobic, nature. It is to a large extent an indoor life. This applies especially to women, who rarely venture outside the penumbra of their screens and curtains. But the men too, as we have seen, tend to spend as much of their time as possible inside the palaces and houses of the city. Except in those appalling extremities when they are dispatched to the provinces on official business, they eschew travel by land or sea, and their outdoor activities are largely confined to garden entertainments and visits to nearby temples.

Their range of interests is correspondingly limited. Genji and his friends care nothing for the real world outside Japan. Despite their respect for Chinese culture, actual conditions on the continent do not concern them in the slightest, and the lands beyond China may as well have sunk into the ocean for all they would care. This indifference extends to their own country, which, apart from

¹ Ikeda *ed.*, v. 154.

the small area occupied by the Home Provinces, is equally part of the 'outside' world. Their social insularity is even more unpromising: they are almost totally uninterested in people of other classes, whom they regard without question as being beyond the pale of humanity. In addition they are largely unconcerned with abstract problems or serious intellectual exchanges, and their adherence to Buddhism rarely involves them in metaphysical speculation about questions like the nature of human existence or the origin of evil. The past they regarded as fussy (*formalist*), 'oldish', antique, is invariably a pejorative), and the future concerns them hardly at all except when it directly affects their own interests. Almost entirely, their energy is devoted to the enjoyment of the present—to the enjoyment, that is, of the day-to-day social and cultural pleasures—and, in the case of men, to securing the rank and office that make these pleasures available.

* * *

In a small, closed society, concentrated almost exclusively on its own activities, conversation is bound to become parochial and many of the interests trivial. The *Pillow Book* pictures a world in which everyone is concerned with everyone else's business—especially if it is of amatory nature. When Sei receives a gentleman visitor who is carrying an umbrella, all the ladies know about it, and on the following morning the empress sends her a note with a large drawing of an umbrella. The conversation and letters of the aristocracy are larded with teasing innuendoes, artful references to past incidents, and cunningly devised nicknames, which would be meaningless to anyone outside their circle, but which evoke an immediate response among the 'courtly herd'. As a rule it is an innocent sort of fun; but sometimes the humour is edged with malice, and a woman will be nicknamed because of some embarrassing solecism she has committed or a man obliquely ridiculed in a song because of his mother's humble birth.¹

Absence of real privacy and immense leisure encouraged gossip, especially among the ladies. A good deal of it was unkind. *The Tale of Genji* opens with an account of how the emperor's favourite

¹ See p. 46.

concubine is hounded to death by the malicious gossip of her rivals; and her successor, Lady Fujitsubo, suffers equally from rumours and backbiting. Since women of high birth had few occasions to meet each other except on public and ceremonial occasions, much of the tittle-tattle was purveyed by the old ladies-in-waiting who always hover in the background, taking an obsessive interest in the doings of their betters.¹ Princess Nyosan is driven to distraction by the endless gossiping of her nurses and finally escapes to a nunnery.

¹ See p. 35.