

THE BOSTON OF FEUDAL JAPAN.

BY ERNEST W. CLEMENT.

“THE Boston of Japan” is the title applied by Arthur May Knapp¹ to Mito, one of the most famous places of Feudal Japan. This appellation is especially appropriate because Mito was a prominent center of intellectual activity in the days of the Tokugawa feudalism, and was, in a large degree, the literary “hub” of Japan. It may be comparable again with Boston in reference to political affairs; for it was the seat of the great movement which finally culminated in the revolution of 1868 and the overthrow of the military despotism of the Tokugawa dynasty of the Shoguns. And, although the American Revolution, in which Boston was the cradle of liberty, led to the overthrow of royal tyranny and the establishment of a great republic: yet Mito may still be called the Boston of Old Japan, although it was the cradle of Imperialism rather than Republicanism; for the Japanese Revolution has led to constitutional imperialism, representative institutions, local self-government, freedom of assembly and of the press, religious liberty and many other privileges unknown in the time of the absolute despotism and military domination of Old Japan.

Mito is situated about seventy-five miles northeast of Tokyo, on the Naka River and only a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. It was the principal town of the province², or geographical division, known as Hitachi; and it is now the capital of the prefecture,³ or political division, known as Ibaraki. But Mito must not be considered merely a geographical term. As a local habitation, it was the castled home of a *daimyo* (feudal lord) and the chief town of a very powerful clan. But under the feudal system, perfected by Iyeyasu, the first of the Tokugawa Shoguns, each of his retainers must have at least one *yashiki* (mansion) in Yedo and reside there

¹ In *Feudal and Modern Japan*.

² *Kuni*.

³ *Ken*.

six months in the year. And this had the effect of transferring to the broader arena of Yedo the literary and political activity of the clan and thus of widening the influence of Mito. It should, therefore, be borne in mind that what is reported as said and done in Mito may not have taken place within the narrow limits of the castled town, but may have occurred in the great city of Yedo or even in the imperial capital, Kyoto. Mito was the name of a town, a family, a clan and the lord of the clan; and it was also the name of a school of philosophy and political science, to whose profound influence may be traced the downfall of the last dynasty of the Shoguns. And, by one of the strange ironies of fate, it was a Mito man, son of a great Mito prince, but adopted into another clan, who was the last of his dynasty. And yet to his credit it should be reckoned, and to his honor it should be acknowledged, that he had the vision to see, and the wisdom to recognize, that he was "the last of the Shoguns," and by his resignation he united the empire in one administration under the lawful hereditary emperor.

The feudal lords of Mito belonged to the Tokugawa family; the first of them was a son of Iyeyasu. Mito was one of the *go-sanke*, or "honorable three houses," including Kii, Owari and Mito, from which alone the Shogun might be chosen in case of the failure of the direct line. The first Tokugawa Prince of Mito, now well known by his posthumous name, or title, of Iko, was the one who began to lay out the famous garden, Koraku-yen, in the Koishikawa District of Tokyo. The mansion thereon has been superseded by the Imperial Arsenal, which daily turns out its supply of arms and ammunition for New Japan; while the garden still remains and is a delight to all visitors, because it is a type of the artistic and refined tastes of Old Japan.

The second Prince of Mito was its greatest and best, and contributed the most to the literary culture, scholarly habits and political philosophy which make its warrant to be called "the Boston of [Old] Japan." He lived from 1628 to 1700; assumed the government of his clan in 1661 and in 1690 retired from active public life. His given name was Mitsukuni; a common title of his was Mito Komon; and his posthumous name is Giko, which means "righteous prince." And this appellation was appropriately conferred, as we might ascertain if we should look into the details of his career.

But we are especially concerned at this time with only one phase of his character; for he is best known as a scholar and a patron of scholars and has been well called "that Japanese Mæcenas." The schools of Mito were among the best in the Empire.

The province of Mito was especially noted for the number, ability and activity of its scholars. Mitsukuni began collecting books and started a library, which, augmented from time to time, grew to more than 200,000 volumes, most of which are Japanese and Chinese works, although a few Dutch works on natural history and zoology are included. He also collected men, scholarly men, Japanese and even Chinese, to assist in the great literary labors which he undertook. His works were varied⁴ and included, for example, 20 volumes of essays, 5 volumes of poems, 510 chapters on various Japanese rites and ceremonies, and, last but not least, the *Dai-Nihon-Shi* (History of Great Japan) in 100 volumes.

It is this work, still considered a standard history of Japan, that has made Mito most famous and combines in one the intellectual, literary and political claims to the title "Hub." It was written in classical Japanese, the scholarly language of the day; and it probably received the correction, and assistance in composition, of one or more of the Chinese savants who had fled for refuge to Japan when their own native dynasty was overthrown in the seventeenth century by the present Manchu dynasty. This history, from the literary point of view, is one of the classics of Japanese literature.

History repeats itself again in this connection. Just as the Turks in the fifteenth century, by the capture of Constantinople, scattered the learned men of the East and their learning over the West; so Tartar hordes again, two hundred years later, drove Chinese scholars out of their native land into the neighboring country of Japan. And, as the Greek scholars stirred up throughout Western Europe a Renaissance, so the Chinese savants aroused in Japan a revival of learning.⁵

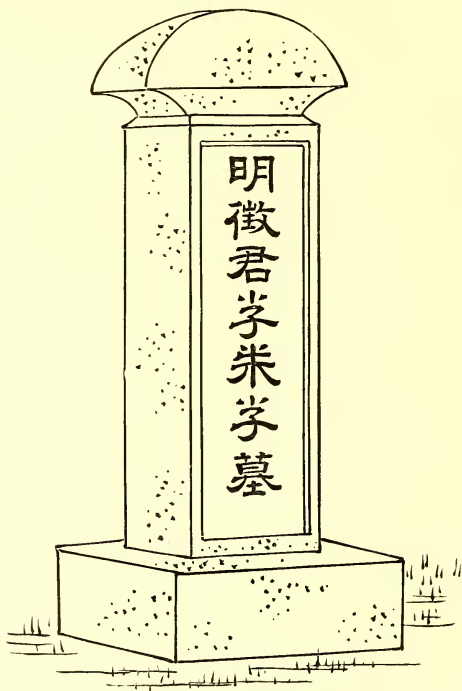
The best known of these Chinese refugees is named Shu Shunsui, who was invited in 1665 to make his home with Prince Mitsukuni, and lived in the Mito clan till his death in 1682. He was buried in the family cemetery of the Mito princes; and his tombstone, here reproduced, bears the following inscription: "The tomb of Shu, an invited gentleman of the Ming [dynasty]." Another Chinese, named Shinyetsu, lived in Mito as priest of the Gion temple and is buried in its sacred precincts. His tombstone, also reproduced here, is inscribed as follows: "The tomb of the great priest, Shin [posthumously called] Jusho, opener of the mountain [temple]."

Besides the direct and indirect literary work of the Chinese refugees in Japan, there was also the deeper interest which, by their

⁴ See also *Transactions Asiatic Society of Japan*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 115-153.

⁵ See also *Transactions Asiatic Society of Japan*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 12-40.

very presence, was naturally aroused in the study of Chinese literature and philosophy. Dr. Griffis says:⁶ "These men from the West brought not only ethics but philosophy. . . . Confucian schools were established in most of the chief provincial cities. For over two hundred years this discipline in the Chinese ethics, literature and



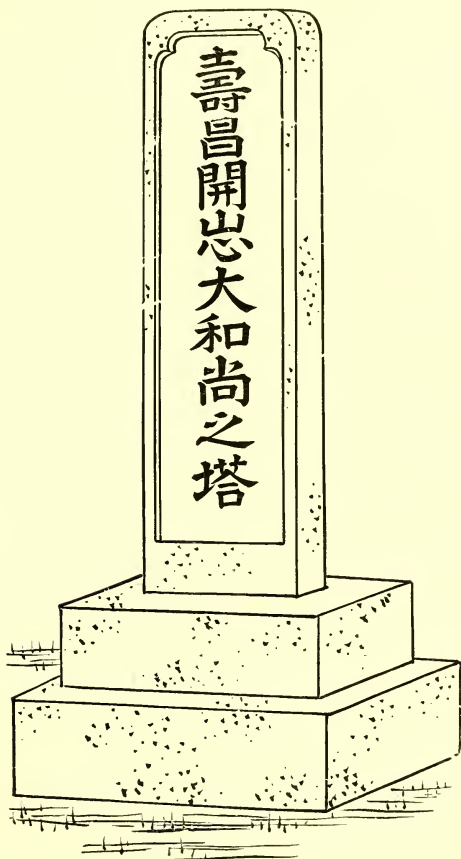
THE TOMBSTONE OF SHU SHUNSUI.

history constituted the education of boys and men of Japan. Almost every member of the Samurai class was thoroughly drilled in this curriculum. All Japanese social, official, intellectual and literary life was permeated with the new spirit."

But this renaissance had a still wider influence, which extended even to political affairs. There were, in fact, three lines along which

⁶ *The Religions of Japan*, pp. 134, 135.

the Japanese were led back to imperialism. One line was Confucianism, which taught loyalty; another was historical research, which exhibited the Shogun as a usurper; and a third was pure Shinto.



THE TOMBSTONE OF SHINYETSU.

which accompanied or followed the second. "The Shinto and Chinese teachings became amalgamated in a common cause, and thus the philosophy of Chu Hi, mingling with the nationalism and pa-

triotism inculcated by Shinto, brought about a remarkable result."
 "The union of Chinese philosophy with Shinto teaching was still



NARIAKI, PRINCE OF MITO.

more successfully carried out by the scholars of the Mito clan."⁷
 To change slightly the figure used above, the Japanese were led

⁷The first of these quotations is from Dr. Griffis; the second is from Mr. Haga, a Japanese authority.

over three roads from feudalism back to imperialism. There was the broad and straight highway of historical research: on the right side, generally parallel with the main road, and often running into it, was the path of Shinto; on the opposite side, making frequently a wide detour to the left, was the road of Confucianism; but all these roads led eventually to the Emperor. This view is corroborated by one more native scholar, Dr. Nitobe, who writes as follows:⁸ "The revival of Chinese classics, consequent upon the migration of the Chinese savants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reminded anew the scholars of Japan that they owed allegiance solely and simply to the Emperor. The simultaneous revival of pure Shintoism, which inculcated the divine right and descent of the Emperor, also conveyed *the same political* evangel." It would seem, therefore, as if Mito, with the aid of Chinese scholars, set on foot a renaissance in literature, learning and politics and has most appropriately been called by Sir Ernest Satow "the real author of the movement which culminated in the revolution of 1868."

In one point, however, Mito apparently exhibited a narrow-mindedness unworthy of the Japanese Boston. In the days when the question was agitated whether Japan should retain its policy of seclusion or enter into relations with Western nations, it was the Mito Prince Nariaki, known after death as Reikko, who was the leader of the anti-foreign party. But there is good reason to doubt whether he was really so unprogressive and ultra-conservative; it looks as if he merely used that policy in the conflict against the usurpation of the Tokugawa Shogunate.⁹

Mito, weakened and decimated by a civil war which rent the clan in the years preceding the revolution, took no active part in that movement, and since then has occupied a comparatively unimportant position in New Japan. It is the capital city of a prefecture, and is growing in importance, but it can scarcely hope to regain its old prestige, when its scholarly atmosphere, literary tastes, intellectual pursuits and political activity against despotism and tyranny entitled it to the honorable appellation of the Boston of Feudal Japan.

⁸ *Intercourse Between the United States and Japan*, p. 30.

⁹ See *Transactions Asiatic Society of Japan*, Vol. XIX, pp. 393-418.