

Japanese Creation Myth (712 CE)

From Genji Shibukawa: *Tales from the Kojiki*

The following is a modern retelling of the creation story from the Kojiki, Japan's oldest chronicle, compiled in 712 CE by O No Yasumaro. This version is easier for the modern reader to understand than the original, but its essential features are preserved. The quest for Izanami in the underworld is reminiscent of the Greek demigod Orpheus' quest in Hades for his wife, Euridice, and even more of the Sumerian myth of the descent of Innana to the underworld.

How does this story reflect the sense of its creators that Japan is the most important place in the world?

The Beginning of the World

Before the heavens and the earth came into existence, all was a chaos, unimaginably limitless and without definite shape or form. Eon followed eon: then, lo! out of this boundless, shapeless mass something light and transparent rose up and formed the heaven. This was the Plain of High Heaven, in which materialized a deity called Ame-no-Minaka-Nushi-no-Mikoto (the Deity-of-the-August-Center-of-Heaven). Next the heavens gave birth to a deity named Takami-Musubi-no-Mikoto (the High-August-Producing-Wondrous-Deity), followed by a third called Kammi-Musubi-no-Mikoto (the Divine-Producing-Wondrous-Deity). These three divine beings are called the Three Creating Deities.

In the meantime what was heavy and opaque in the void gradually precipitated and became the earth, but it had taken an immeasurably long time before it condensed sufficiently to

form solid ground. In its earliest stages, for millions and millions of years, the earth may be said to have resembled oil floating, medusa-like, upon the face of the waters. Suddenly like the sprouting up of a reed, a pair of immortals were born from its bosom. These were the Deity Umashi-Ashi-Kahibi-Hikoji-no-Mikoto (the Pleasant-Reed-Shoot-Prince-Elder-Deity) and the Deity Ame-no-Tokotachi-no-Mikoto (The Heavenly-Eternally-Standing-Deity). . . .

Many gods were thus born in succession, and so they increased in number, but as long as the world remained in a chaotic state, there was nothing for them to do. Whereupon, all the Heavenly deities summoned the two divine beings, Izanagi and Izanami, and bade them descend to the nebulous place, and by helping each other, to consolidate it into terra firma. "We bestow on you," they said, "this precious treasure, with which to rule the land, the creation of which we command you to perform." So saying they handed them a spear called Ama-no-Nuboko, embellished with costly gems. The divine couple received respectfully and ceremoniously the sacred weapon and then withdrew from the presence of the Deities, ready to perform their august commission. Proceeding forthwith to the Floating Bridge of Heaven, which lay between the heaven and the earth, they stood awhile to gaze on that which lay below. What they beheld was a world not yet condensed, but looking like a sea of filmy fog floating to and fro in the air, exhaling the while an inexpressibly fragrant odor. They were, at first, perplexed just how and where to start, but at length Izanagi suggested to his companion that they should try the effect of stirring up the brine with their spear. So saying he pushed down the jeweled shaft and found that it touched something. Then drawing it up, he examined it and observed that the great drops which fell from it almost immediately coagulated into an island, which is, to this day, the Island of Onokoro. Delighted at the result, the two deities descended forthwith from the Floating Bridge to

reach the miraculously created island. In this island they thenceforth dwelt and made it the basis of their subsequent task of creating a country. Then wishing to become espoused, they erected in the center of the island a pillar, the Heavenly August Pillar, and built around it a great palace called the Hall of Eight Fathoms. Thereupon the male Deity turning to the left and the female Deity to the right, each went round the pillar in opposite directions. When they again met each other on the further side of the pillar, Izanami, the female Deity, speaking first, exclaimed: "How delightful it is to meet so handsome a youth!" To which Izanagi, the male Deity, replied: "How delightful I am to have fallen in with such a lovely maiden!" After having spoken thus, the male Deity said that it was not in order that woman should anticipate man in a greeting. Nevertheless, they fell into connubial relationship, having been instructed by two wagtails which flew to the spot. Presently the Goddess bore her divine consort a son, but the baby was weak and boneless as a leech. Disgusted with it, they abandoned it on the waters, putting it in a boat made of reeds. Their second offspring was as disappointing as the first. The two Deities, now sorely disappointed at their failure and full of misgivings, ascended to Heaven to inquire of the Heavenly Deities the causes of their misfortunes. The latter performed the ceremony of divining and said to them: "It is the woman's fault. In turning round the Pillar, it was not right and proper that the female Deity should in speaking have taken precedence of the male. That is the reason." The two Deities saw the truth of this divine suggestion, and made up their minds to rectify the error. So, returning to the earth again, they went once more around the Heavenly Pillar. This time Izanagi spoke first saying: "How delightful to meet so beautiful a maiden!" "How happy I am," responded Izanami, "that I should meet such a handsome youth!" This process was more appropriate and in accordance with the law of nature. After this, all the children born to them left nothing to be desired. First, the island of Awaji was born,

next, Shikoku, then, the island of Oki, followed by Kyushu; after that, the island Tsushima came into being, and lastly, Honshu, the main island of Japan. The name of Oyashi- ma-kuni (the Country of the Eight Great Islands) was given to these eight islands. After this, the two Deities became the parents of numerous smaller islands destined to surround the larger ones.

The Birth of the Deities

Having, thus, made a country from what had formerly been no more than a mere floating mass, the two Deities, Izanagi and Izanami, about begetting those deities destined to preside over the land, sea, mountains, rivers, trees, and herbs. Their first-born proved to be the sea-god, Owatatsumi-no-Kami. Next they gave birth to the patron gods of harbors, the male deity Kamihaya-akitsu-hiko having control of the land and the goddess Haya-akitsu-hime having control of the sea. These two latter deities subsequently gave birth to eight other gods.

Next Izanagi and Izanami gave birth to the wind-deity, Kami-Shinatsuhiko-no-Mikoto. At the moment of his birth, his breath was so potent that the clouds and mists, which had hung over the earth from the beginning of time, were immediately dispersed. In consequence, every corner of the world was filled with brightness. Kukunochi-no-Kami, the deity of trees, was the next to be born, followed by Oyamatsumi-no-Kami, the deity of mountains, and Kayanuhime-no-Kami, the goddess of the plains. . . .

The process of procreation had, so far, gone on happily, but at the birth of Kagutsuchi-no-Kami, the deity of fire, an unseen misfortune befell the divine mother, Izanami. During the course of her confinement, the goddess was so severely burned

by the flaming child that she swooned away. Her divine consort, deeply alarmed, did all in his power to resuscitate her, but although he succeeded in restoring her to consciousness, her appetite had completely gone. Izanagi, thereupon and with the utmost loving care, prepared for her delectation various tasty dishes, but all to no avail, because whatever she swallowed was almost immediately rejected. It was in this wise that occurred the greatest miracle of all. From her mouth sprang Kanayama-biko and Kanayama-hime, respectively the god and goddess of metals, whilst from other parts of her body issued forth Haniyasu-hiko and Haniyasu-hime, respectively the god and goddess of earth. Before making her "divine retirement," which marks the end of her earthly career, in a manner almost unspeakably miraculous she gave birth to her last-born, the goddess Mizuhame-no-Mikoto. Her demise marks the intrusion of death into the world. Similarly the corruption of her body and the grief occasioned by her death were each the first of their kind.

By the death of his faithful spouse Izanagi was now quite alone in the world. In conjunction with her, and in accordance with the instructions of the Heavenly Gods, he had created and consolidated the Island Empire of Japan. In the fulfillment of their divine mission, he and his heavenly spouse had lived an ideal life of mutual love and cooperation. It is only natural, therefore, that her death should have dealt him a truly mortal blow.

He threw himself upon her prostrate form, crying: "Oh, my dearest wife, why art thou gone, to leave me thus alone? How could I ever exchange thee for even one child? Come back for the sake of the world, in which there still remains so much for both us twain to do." In a fit of uncontrollable grief, he stood sobbing at the head of the bier. His hot tears fell like hailstones, and lo! out of the tear-drops was born a beautiful babe, the

goddess Nakisawame-no-Mikoto. In deep astonishment he stayed his tears, and gazed in wonder at the new-born child, but soon his tears returned only to fall faster than before. It was thus that a sudden change came over his state of mind. With bitter wrath, his eyes fell upon the infant god of fire, whose birth had proved so fatal to his mother. He drew his sword, Totsuka-no-tsurugi, and crying in his wrath, "Thou hateful matricide," decapitated his fiery offspring. Up shot a crimson spout of blood. Out of the sword and blood together arose eight strong and gallant deities. "What! more children?" cried Izanagi, much astounded at their sudden appearance, but the very next moment, what should he see but eight more deities born from the lifeless body of the infant firegod! They came out from the various parts of the body,--head, breast, stomach, hands, feet, and navel, and, to add to his astonishment, all of them were glaring fiercely at him. Altogether stupefied he surveyed the new arrivals one after another.

Meanwhile Izanami, for whom her divine husband pined so bitterly, had quitted this world for good and all and gone to the Land of Hades.

Izanagi's Visit to the Land of Hades

As for the Deity Izanagi, who had now become a widower, the presence of so many offspring might have, to some extent, beguiled and solaced him, and yet when he remembered how faithful his departed spouse had been to him, he would yearn for her again, his heart swollen with sorrow and his eyes filled with tears. In this mood, sitting up alone at midnight, he would call her name aloud again and again, regardless of the fact that he could hope for no response. His own piteous cries merely echoed back from the walls of his chamber.

Unable any longer to bear his grief, he resolved to go down to the Nether Regions in order to seek for Izanami and bring her back, at all costs, to the world. He started on his long and dubious journey. Many millions of miles separated the earth from the Lower Regions and there were countless steep and dangerous places to be negotiated, but Izanagi's indomitable determination to recover his wife enabled him finally to overcome all these difficulties. At length he succeeded in arriving at his destination. Far ahead of him, he espied a large castle. "That, no doubt," he mused in delight, "may be where she resides."

Summoning up all his courage, he approached the main entrance of the castle. Here he saw a number of gigantic demons, some red some black, guarding the gates with watchful eyes. He retraced his steps in alarm, and stole round to a gate at the rear of the castle. He found, to his great joy, that it was apparently left unwatched. He crept warily through the gate and peered into the interior of the castle, when he immediately caught sight of his wife standing at the gate at an inner court. The delighted Deity loudly called her name. "Why! There is someone calling me," sighed Izanami-no-Mikoto, and raising her beautiful head, she looked around her. What was her amazement but to see her beloved husband standing by the gate and gazing at her intently! He had, in fact, been in her thoughts no less constantly than she in his. With a heart leaping with joy, she approached him. He grasped her hands tenderly and murmured in deep and earnest tones: "My darling, I have come to take thee back to the world. Come back, I pray thee, and let us complete our work of creation in accordance with the will of the Heavenly Gods,--our work which was left only half accomplished by thy departure. How can I do this work without thee? Thy loss means to me the loss of all." This appeal came from the depth of his heart. The goddess sympathized with him most deeply, but answered with tender

grief: "Alas! Thou hast come too late. I have already eaten of the furnace of Hades. Having once eaten the things of this land, it is impossible for me to come back to the world." So saying, she lowered her head in deep despair.

"Nay, I must entreat thee to come back. Canst not thou find some means by which this can be accomplished?" exclaimed her husband, drawing nearer to her. After some reflection, she replied: "Thou hast come a very, very long way for my sake. How much I appreciate thy devotion! I wish, with all my heart, to go back with thee, but before I can do so, I must first obtain the permission of the deities of Hades. Wait here till my return, but remember that thou must not on any account look inside the castle in the meantime. " I swear I will do as thou biddest," quoth Izanagi, " but tarry not in thy quest." With implicit confidence in her husband's pledge, the goddess disappeared into the castle.

Izanagi observed strictly her injunction. He remained where he stood, and waited impatiently for his wife's return. Probably to his impatient mind, a single heart-beat may have seemed an age. He waited and waited, but no shadow of his wife appeared. The day gradually wore on and waned away, darkness was about to fall, and a strange unearthly wind began to strike his face. Brave as he was, he was seized with an uncanny feeling of apprehension. Forgetting the vow he had made to the goddess, he broke off one of the teeth of the comb which he was wearing in the left bunch of his hair, and having lighted it, he crept in softly and- glanced around him. To his horror he found Izanagi lying dead in a room: and lo! a ghastly change had come over her. She, who had been so dazzlingly beautiful, was now become naught but a rotting corpse, in an advanced stage of decomposition. Now, an even more horrible sight met his gaze; the Fire Thunder dwelt in her head, the Black Thunder in her belly, the Rending-Thunder in her

abdomen, the Young Thunder in her left hand, the Earth-Thunder in her right hand, the Rumbling-Thunder in her left foot,-and the Couchant Thunder in her right foot:--altogether eight Thunder-Deities had been born and were dwelling there, attached to her remains and belching forth flames from their mouths. Izanagitno-Mikoto was so thoroughly alarmed at the sight, that he dropped the light and took to his heels. The sound he made awakened Izanami from her death-like slumber. For sooth!" she cried: "he must have seen me in this revolting state. He has put me to shame and has broken his solemn vow. Unfaithful wretch! I'll make him suffer, for his perfidy."

Then turning to the Hags of Hades, who attended her, she commanded them to give chase to him. At her word, an army of female demons ran after the Deity.

Translated by Yaichiro Isobe

*Copied from Washington State University's website:
http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/world_civ/worldcivreader/world_civ_reader_1/kojiki.html*

Translation of original text from Sacred-Texts.com
**RECORDS OF ANCIENT
MATTERS
VOL. I. 1**

PREFACE. 2

I 3 Yasumaro 4 say: 5

Now when chaos had begun to condense, but force and [4] form were not yet manifest, and there was nought named, nought done, who could know its shape? 6 Nevertheless Heaven and Earth first parted, and the Three Deities performed the commencement of creation; the Passive and Active Essences then developed, and the Two Spirits became the ancestors of all things. 7 Therefore 8 did he enter obscurity and emerge into light, and the Sun and Moon were revealed by the washing of his eyes; he floated on and plunged into the sea-water, and Heavenly and Earthly Deities appeared through the ablutions of his person? 9 So in the dimness of the great commencement, we, by relying on the original teaching, learn the time of the conception of the earth and of the birth of islands; in the remoteness of the original beginning, we, by trusting the former sages, perceive the era of the genesis of Deities and of the establishment of men. 10 Truly do we know that a mirror was hung up, that [5] jewels were spat out, and that then an Hundred Kings succeeded each other; that a blade was bitten, and a serpent cut in pieces, so that a Myriad Deities did flourish. 11 By deliberations in the Tranquil River the

[paragraph continues] Empire was pacified; by discussions on the Little Shore the land was purified. [12](#) Wherefore His Augustness Hono-ni-ni-gi [13](#) first descended to the Peak of Takachi, [14](#) and the Heavenly Sovereign Kamu-Yamato [15](#) did traverse the [6] Island of the Dragon-Fly. [16](#) A weird bear put forth its claws, and a heavenly sabre was obtained at Takakura. [17](#) They with tails obstructed the path, and a great crow guided him to Yeshinu. [18](#) Dancing in rows they destroyed the brigands, and listening to a song they vanquished the foemen. [19](#) Being instructed in a dream, he was reverent to the Heavenly and Earthly Deities, and was therefore styled the Wise Monarch, [20](#) having gazed on the smoke, he was benevolent to the black-haired people, and is therefore remembered as the Emperor-Sage. [21](#) Determining the frontiers and civilising the country, he issued laws from the Nearer Afumi; [22](#) reforming the [7] surnames and selecting the gentile names, he held sway at the Further Asuka. [23](#) Though each differed in caution and in ardour, though all were unlike in accomplishments and in intrinsic worth, yet was there none who did not by contemplating antiquity correct manners that had fallen to ruin, and by illumining modern times repair laws that were approaching dissolution. [24](#)

In the august reign of the Heavenly Sovereign who governed the Eight Great Islands from the Great Palace of Kiyomihara at Asuka, [25](#) the Hidden Dragon put on perfection, the Reiterated Thunder came at the appointed moment. Having heard a song in a dream, he felt that he should continue the succession; having reached the water at night, he knew that he should receive the inheritance. Nevertheless Heaven's time was not yet, and he escaped like the cicada to the Southern Mountains;

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both men and matters were favourable, and he marched like the tiger to the Eastern Land. Suddenly riding in the Imperial

Palanquin, he forced his way across mountains and rivers: the Six Divisions rolled like thunder, the Three Hosts sped like lightning. The erect spears lifted up their might, and the bold warriors arose like smoke: the crimson flags glistened among the weapons, and the ill-omened crew were shattered like tiles. Or ere a day had elapsed, the evil influences were purified: forthwith were the cattle let loose and the horses given repose, as with shouts of victory they returned to the Flowery Summer; the flags were rolled up and the javelins put away, as with dances and chants they came to rest in the capital city. The year was that of the Cock, and it was in the Second Moon [26](#) At the Great Palace of Kiyomihara did he ascend to [9] the Heavenly seat: in morality he outstripped Ken-Kō, in virtue he surpassed Shiū-Ō. Having grasped the celestial seals, he was paramount over the Six Cardinal Points; having obtained the heavenly supremacy, he annexed the Eight Wildernesses. He held the mean between the Two Essences, [27](#) and regulated the order of the Five Elements. He established divine reason herewith to advance good customs; he disseminated brilliant usages wherewith to make the land great. Moreover the ocean of his wisdom, in its vastness, profoundly investigated the highest antiquity; the mirror of his heart, in its fervour, clearly observed former ages.

Hereupon the Heavenly Sovereign commanded, saying: "I hear that the chronicles of the emperors and likewise the original words in the possession of the various families deviate from exact truth, and are mostly amplified by

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empty falsehoods. If at the present time these imperfections be not amended, ere many years shall have elapsed, the purport of this, the great basis [28](#) of the country, the grand foundation of the monarchy, will be destroyed. So now I desire to have the chronicles of the emperors selected and recorded, and the old

words examined and ascertained, falsehoods being erased and the truth deter. mined, in order to transmit [the latter] to after ages." [29](#) At that time there was a retainer whose surname was Hiyeda and his personal name Are. He was twenty-eight years old, and of so intelligent a disposition that [10] he could repeat with his mouth whatever met his eyes, and record in his heart whatever struck his ears. [30](#) Forthwith Are was commanded to learn by heart the genealogies of the emperors, and likewise the words of former ages. Nevertheless time elapsed and the age changed, and the thing was not yet carried out. [31](#)

Prostrate I consider how Her Majesty the Empress, having obtained Unity, illumines the empire,—being versed in the Triad, nourishes the people. [32](#) Ruling from the Purple Palace, Her virtue reaches to the utmost limits of the horse's hoof-marks: dwelling amid the Sombre Retinue, Her influence illumines the furthest distance attained to by vessels' prows. The sun rises, and the brightness is increased; the clouds disperse, neither is there smoke. Never cease the historiographers from recording the good omens of connected stalks and double rice-ears; never for a single moon is the treasury without the tribute of continuous beacon-fires and repeated interpretations. In fame She must be pronounced superior to Bum-Mei, in virtue more eminent than Ten-Itsu. [33](#) Hereupon, [34](#) regretting the errors in the old words, and

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wishing to correct the misstatements in; the former chronicles, She, on the eighteenth day of the ninth month of the fourth year of Wa-do [35](#) commanded me Yasumaro to select and record the old words learnt by heart by Hiyeda no Are according to the Imperial Decree, and dutifully to lift them up to Her. [36](#)

In reverent obedience to the contents of the Decree, I have made a careful choice. But in high antiquity both speech and

thought were so simple, that it would be difficult to arrange phrases and compose periods in the characters. [37](#) To relate everything in an ideographic transcription would entail an inadequate expression of the meaning; to write altogether according to the phonetic method would make the story of events unduly lengthy. [38](#) For this reason have I sometimes in the same sentence used the phonetic [12] and ideographic systems conjointly, and have sometimes in one matter used the ideographic record exclusively. Moreover where the drift of the words was obscure, I have by comments elucidated their signification; but need it be said that I have nowhere commented on what was easy? [39](#) Again, in such cases as calling the surname 日下 *Kusaka*, and the personal name written with the character 帯 *Tarashi*, I have followed usage without alteration. [40](#) Altogether the things recorded commence with the separation of Heaven and Earth, and conclude with the august reign at Woharida. [41](#) So from the [13] Deity Master-of-the-August-Centre-of-Heaven down to His Augustness Prince-Wave-Limit-Brave-Cormorant-Thatch-Meeting-Incompletely makes the First Volume; from the Heavenly Sovereign Kamu-Yamato-Ihare-Biko down to the august reign of Homuda makes the Second Volume; from the Emperor Oho-Sazaki down to the

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great palace of Woharida makes the Third Volume. [42](#) Altogether I have written Three Volumes, which I reverently and respectfully present. [43](#) I Yasumaro, with true trembling and true fear, bow my head, bow my head.

Reverently presented by the Court Noble Futo no Yasumaro, an Officer of the Upper Division of the Fifth Rank and of the Fifth Order of Merit, on the 28th day of the first moon of the fifth year of Wa-dō. [44](#)

Footnotes

[1:1](#) p. 6 Literally "Upper Volumes," there being three in all, and it being the common Japanese practice (borrowed from the Chinese) to use the words Upper, Middle, and Lower to denote the First, Second and Third Volumes of a work respectively.

[1:2](#) The peculiar nature of this Preface, which is but a *tour de force* meant to show that, the writer could compose in the Chinese style if he chose to do so, has been already hinted at in the Introduction. It is indeed a laboured little composition, and, but for the facts stated in its latter portion, has no value except perhaps as a specimen of the manner in which the legends of one country may be made to change aspect by being presented through the medium of the philosophical terminology and set phrases of another. It may be divided into five parts. In the first the writer, in a succession of brief allusions antithetically balanced, summarizes the most striking of the legends that are detailed in the pages of his "Records," and in a few words paints the exploits of some of the early emperors. In the second the troubles that ushered in the reign of the Emperor Tem-mu and his triumph over Prince Ohotomo are related at greater length in high-flown allusive phrases borrowed from the Chinese-historians. The third division gives us the Emperor Temmu's decree ordering the compilation of the "Records," and the fourth tells how the execution of that decree was delayed till the reign of the Empress Gemmiyō (A.D. 703-715), on whom likewise a panegyric is pronounced. In the fifth and last the compiler enters into some details concerning the style and method he has adopted.

[1:3](#) The First Personal Pronoun is here represented by the humble character 臣, "vassal," used in China by a subject when addressing his sovereign in writing.

[1:4](#) p. 7 This is the compiler's personal name. His full name and titles, as given at the end of this preface, were 正五位上勳五等太朝臣安萬侶 *i.e.*, the Court Noble Futo no Yasumaro, an Officer of the Upper Division of the First Class of the Fifth Rank and of the Fifth Order of Merit. The family of Futo claimed to descend from His Augustness Kamu-yawi-mimi, second son of the Emperor Jim-mu. Yasumaro's death is recorded in the "Chronicles of Japan Continued," under date of 30th August, A.D. 723.

[1:5](#) *I.e.*, I report as follows to Her Majesty the Empress.

[1:6](#) *I.e.*, in the primeval void which preceded all phenomena there was neither form nor movement, and it was therefore unnamed and unknowable.

[1:7](#) This sentence summarizes the first eight Sections of the text of the "Records." The "three Deities" are the Deity Master-of-the-August-Centre-of-Heaven, the High-August-Producing-Wondrous-Deity (see Sect. I, Notes 4, 5, and 6.) The two Spirits representing the "Passive and Active Elements" are the creatrix and creator Izanami and Izanagi (the "Female-Who-Invites" and the "Male-Who-Invites,"—see Sect. II, Note 8), the procreation by whom of the islands of the Japanese archipelago and of a large number of gods and goddesses forms the subject of Sections III-VII.

[1:8](#) The word "therefore" is not appropriate in this place, and Motowori accordingly warns the reader to lay no stress upon it.

[1:9](#) This sentence alludes to Izanagi's visit to Hades, and to the purification of his person on his return to the Upper World (see Sects. IX and X). It also refers to the birth of the Sun-Goddess and of the Moon-God from his left and from his right eye respectively, and to that of a large number of lesser gods and goddesses, who were produced from every article of his wearing apparel and from every part of his person on the occasion of his performing those ablutions (see Sect. X.)

[1:10](#) The "original teaching" here mentioned means the original traditions of Japanese antiquity, The "former sages,"—a term which in China fitly designates such philosophers as Confucius, and Mencius, but which it is difficult to invest with any particular sense here in Japan where no sages, have ever arisen,—may be best taken to mean those unknown persons who transmitted the legends of the gods and early emperors. The "establishment of men" probably alludes to the investiture of the [p. 8](#) sovereignty of Japan in the human descendants of the Sun-Goddess. The expression is however obscure, and Motowori himself has nothing satisfactory to tell us about it.

[1:11](#) The mirror here mentioned is that by means of which the Sun-Goddess was allured out of the cave (see Sect. XVI); the jewels are those which Susa-no-Wo (the "Impetuous Male Deity") begged of his sister the Sun-Goddess, and crunched into fragments (see Sect. XIII); the blade that was bitten to pieces by the Sun-Goddess figures in the same legend; the serpent is that slain by Susa-no-Wo after his banishment from Heaven (see Sect. XVIII); the "Myriad Deities" are supposed by Motowori to be this same god's numerous descendants (see Sect. XX). who ruled in Idzumo. There remains the phrase "an Hundred Kings," which is lacking in clearness. The only rational interpretation of it is as designating the Japanese imperial line, and yet the reference seems to have no special appropriateness in this context.

[2:12](#) For the Tranquil River of Heaven, in whose stony bed the gods were wont to meet in council, see Sect. XIII, Note 12. The divine deliberations here referred to are those which resulted in the investiture of the sovereignty of Japan in the grandson of the Sun-Goddess (see Sects. XXX-XXXIII). The "discussions on the Little Shore" allude to the parleys on the beach of Inasa in Idzumo which preceded the abdication of the Deity who had held sway over that part of the country prior to the descent of the Sun-Goddess's grandson (see Sect. XXXII).

[2:13](#) The abbreviated form of the name of the Sun-Goddess's grandson (see Sect. XXXIII, Notes 5 and 10).

[2:14](#) *I.e.*, Mount Takachiho (see Sect. XXXIV, Note 5). The final syllable is here apocopated, in order to preserve the rhythmical balance of the sentence by using only three Chinese characters to write this name, the "Island of the Dragon-Fly" being likewise written with three characters.

[2:15](#) *I.e.*, the first "human Emperor" Jim-mu, whose full native Japanese name is Kamu-Yamato-Ihare-Biko. For the account of his reign see Sects. XLIV-LII.

[2:16](#) *I.e.*, Japan. For the traditional origin of this poetical synonym of Japan see Sect. V. Note 26 and also the legend in Sect. CLVI. The word "traverse" in this sentence alludes to the Emperor Jim-mu's victorious progress from Western Japan to Yamato in the centre of the country, which he is said to have subdued, and where it is related that he established his capital (see Sect. XLIV-L).

[2:17](#) [p. 9](#) For the mention of the bear, whose appearance caused the Emperor Jim-mu and his army to faint away, see commencement of Sect. XLV. Motowori thinks that the character 爪, "claws," is a copyist's error for 山, "mountain" or

穴, "hole," (*Conf.* Sect. XLV, Note 2). For the curious legend of the sabre see the same Section, and for the name of Takakura see more especially Note 3 to that Section.

[2:18](#) For the Gods with tails who met and conversed with the Emperor Jim-mu in Yamato, see the latter part of Sect. XLVI, a perusal of which will however show that the phrase "obstructed the path," which is here used of them, is not exactly applicable. The miraculous crow which was sent down from Heaven to assist Jim-mu in his conquests, is mentioned at the commencement of the same Section and again at the commencement of Sect. XLVII. For Yeshinu (modern Yoshino) see Sect. XLVI, Note 3.

[2:19](#) The word "dancing" in this sentence must not be too closely pressed, as it is used simply to balance the word "song" in the parallel clause,—which clause itself does but echo the sense of that which precedes it. The reference is to the song which Jim-mu sang as a signal to his followers to destroy the "earth-spiders" (see Sect. XLVIII), and perhaps also to the songs in Sect. XLIX.

[2:20](#) "The Emperor Su-jin" must be mentally supplied as the logical subject of this clause. For the story of his dream see Sect. LXIV, and for the origin of the laudatory designation here mentioned see the end of Sect. LXVII, which is however obscure.

[2:21](#) "The Emperor Nin-toku" must be supplied as the logical subject of this clause. The allusion to the smoke and the laudatory designation here mentioned will be understood by reference to Sect. CXXI. The "black-haired people" is a common Chinese phrase for the peasantry or the people in general.

[2:22](#) "The Emperor Sei-mu" must be supplied as the logical subject of this clause. His labours are briefly recapitulated in Sect. XCIV. For the province called Nearer Afumi (*Chika-tsu-Afumi*), see Sect. XXIX, Note 20. Its name is here rhythmically balanced against "Further Asuka" in the following clause.

[2:23](#) "The Emperor In-giyō" must be supplied as the logical subject of this sentence. This Sovereign's rectification of the names forms the subject of Sect. CXXXIX For Further Asuka (*Toho-tsu-Asuka*) see Sect. CXXXIII, Notes 13 and 11.

[2:24](#) *I.e.*, though unlike in character, some of the ancient emperors excelling in caution and others in ardour, some being remarkable for their p. 10 attainments others for their native worth, yet was there not one without a claim to greatness, not one who did not regard antiquity as the standard by which modern times should be judged, and repair the deviations from antique perfection that successively arose during the lapse of ages.—How marvellously inapplicable is this rodomontade to the early monarchs of Japan the student of Japanese history need scarcely be told, and Motowori himself allows that "it is not completely appropriate." Here the first part of the Preface terminates.

[2:25](#) *Viz.*, the Emperor Tem-mu, whose struggle for the crown in the latter part of the seventh century of our era against the contending claims of Prince Ohotomo is related at great length in the pages of the "Chronicles," though naturally beyond the scope of these "Records," which close in A.D. 628. The "Eight Great Islands" is one of the synonyms of Japan (see Sect. V. Note 27). The reason for the specially laudatory mention in this place of the Emperor Tem-mu is the fact that it was with him that the idea of compiling these Records originated, as is indeed stated a little further on. He is here alluded to by the expressions Hidden Dragon and Reiterated Thunder,

metaphorical names borrowed from the "Yi Ching" and denoting the heir apparent Temmu not having ascended the throne till some time after his predecessor's, death, as Prince Ohotomo disputed by force of arms his right to the succession. The phrases "put on perfection" and "came at the appointed moment" are attempts at representing the original 體元 and 應期. The meaning is that the Emperor Tem-mu was the man for the age, and that he took his proper and exalted place in it. In the following sentences we have a flowery *résumé* of the story of the successful war by which he obtained the crown. The reference to the "song in a dream" is indeed obscure; but the "water at night" is the River Yoko, which we read of in the "Chronicles" as having been crossed by him. The characters somewhat freely rendered by the English words "succession" and "inheritance" are 業 and 基, which approximate to that sense in this context. The "Southern Mountains" are the Mountains of Yoshino. whither he escaped for a season as a cicada escapes from its cast-off shell; the "Eastern Land" denotes the eastern provinces of Japan where he organized his army. The "Six Divisions" and the "Three Hosts" are Chinese designations of the Imperial troops, while the "ill-omened crew" of course refers to Tem-mu's enemies.—Prince Ohotomo, and his followers. In the ensuing sentence we see peace restored: Tem-mu has returned to the capital (for which the words "Flowery Summer" are a Chinese periphrasis), he has taken in his hands the insignia of office, and reigns p. 11 supreme over the Six Cardinal Points (North, South, East, West, Above, and Below) and over the "Eight Wildernesses" (*i.e.*, the barbarous regions on all sides). The writer concludes this division of his Preface by a glowing panegyric of the Monarch, who was, he says, superior to Hsüan Hou (軒后 Jap. Ken-Kō), and Chou Wang (周王 Jap. Shiū-O), famous Chinese sovereigns of the legendary period. So intelligent were his efforts, so perfect was his conformity with the ways of

Heaven as displayed in the workings of the Active and Passive Essences, that the Five Elements (Water Fire, Wood, Metal and Earth) all interacted with due regularity, and laudable usages alone prevailed throughout the land. Up to this point the preface may be said to be purely ornamental.

[3:26](#) *I.e.*, March (20th as the "Chronicles" tell us), A. D. 673. The original, to denote the year and the month mentioned, uses the periphrases 歲次大梁 and 月踵夾鍾 but doubtless without any reference to the original proper meaning of those terms.

[3:27](#) The text literally reads thus: "He rode in the exactness of the Two Essences." But the author's intention is to tell us that Tem-mu acted according to the golden mean, keeping the balance even, and not inclining unduly either to the Active or the Passive side.

[4:28](#) Literally "warp and woof," *i.e.*, cannon, standard, mainspring, first necessity.

[4:29](#) This is the imperial decree ordering the compilation of the "Records of Ancient matters." The expressions "original words" (本辭) and "old words" (舊辭) are curious, and Motowori is probably right in arguing from the emphatic manner in which they are repeated that the Emperor Tem-mu attached special importance to the actual archaic phraseology in which some at least of the early documents or traditions had been handed down.

[4:30](#) *I.e.*, he could repeat the contents of any document that he had once seen and remember all that he had ever heard.

[4:31](#) *I.e.*, the Emperor Tem-mu died before the plan of the compilation of these "Records" had been carried into execution. *Viz.* it may be presumed, before a selection from

the various original documents committed to memory by Are had been reduced to writing.

[4:32](#) 得一光宅通三亭育 . For the phrase "obtaining Unity," which is borrowed from Lao Tzū, the student should consult Stanislas Judien's "Livre de la Voie et de le Vertu," pp. 144-149. The "Triad" is the threefold intelligence of Heaven, Earth, and Man. The general meaning of the sentence is that the Empress's perfect virtue, which is in complete [p. 12](#) accord with the heavenly ordinances, is spread abroad throughout the empire, and that with her all-penetrating insight she nourishes and sustains her people.

[4:33](#) In the above four sentences the compiler expresses his respectful admiration of the Empress Gem-miyo, who was on the throne at the time when he wrote, and tells us how wide was her rule and how prosperous her reign. The "Purple Palace" is one of the ornamental names borrowed from the Chinese to denote the imperial residence. The "Sombre Retinue" (if such indeed is the correct rendering of the original expression 支扈) is a phrase on which no authority consulted by the translator throws any light. The "utmost limits of the horses' hoof-marks" and the "furthest distance attained to by vessels' prows" are favourite phrases in the old literature of Japan to express extreme distance (see, for instance, Mr. Satow's translations of the "Ritual of the Praying for Harvest," Vol. VII, Pt. II, p. 111 of these "Transactions" and the present writer's "Classical Poetry of the Japanese," p. 111. Such unusual phenomena as connected stalks, *i.e.*, trunks springing from the same root and uniting again higher up and "joint rice-ears," *i.e.*, two rice-ears growing on a single stem, are considered lucky omens by the Chinese, and their appearance is duly chronicled in those Japanese histories that are composed after the Chinese model. The "continuous beacon-fires" and the "repeated interpretations" are phrases alluding to

the foreign lands (*i.e.*, the various small Korean states) speaking strange languages, whence tribute was sent to Japan. The text, as it stands, gives the impression that the arrival of the tribute-ships was announced by beacon-fires being lighted. Motowori however wishes us to understand the author's meaning to be that foreign states which, in the natural course of events, would be inimical, and the approach of whose ships would be signalized by the lighting of beacon-fires, now peacefully sent gifts to the Japanese monarch. It may be added that the whole sentence is borrowed scarcely without alteration from the "Wên Hsüan" (文選). Bum-mei is the Japanese pronunciation of the characters 文命, the original name of Yü (禹) a celebrated legendary emperor of China. Ten-Itsu is the Japanese pronunciation of the characters 天乙, the original name of the ancient emperor T'ang (湯), who is said to have founded the Shang dynasty in the eighteenth century B.C.

[4:34](#) This word is here used as an initial particle without special significance.

[5:35](#) *I.e.*, 3rd November A. D. 711. Wa-dō (和銅) is the name of a Japanese "year-period" which lasted from A.D. 708 to 714.

[5:36](#) [p. 13](#) *I.e.*, present them to her. With this sentence ends the fourth division of the preface.

[5:37](#) *I.e.*, the simplicity of speech and thought in Early Japan renders it too hard a task to rearrange the old documents committed to memory by Are in such a manner as to make them conform to the rules of Chinese style.

[5:38](#) *I.e.*, if I adopted in its entirety the Chinese ideographic method of writing, I should often fail of giving a true impression of the nature of the original documents (*conf.* the

preceding Note). If, on the other hand, I consistently used the Chinese characters, syllable by syllable, as phonetic symbols for Japanese sounds, this work would attain to inordinate proportions, on account of the great length of the polysyllabic Japanese as compared with the monosyllabic Chinese. The author's meaning may be illustrated by referring to the first clause of the "Records," 天地初發之時 ("when Heaven and Earth began"), which is thus written ideographically with six Chinese characters, whereas it would require no less than eleven to write it phonetically so as to represent the sound of the Japanese words *ame tsuchi no hazhime no toki*, viz., 阿米都知能波士實能登伎. It should be noticed that in this passage the author employs the technical expressions *on* and *kun* (音 and 訓) in a manner which is the precise reverse of that sanctioned by modern usage, *on* being with him the phonetic, and *kun* the ideographic, acceptance of the Chinese characters.

[5:39](#) It will be seen by perusing the following translation that the author can scarcely be said to have vouchsafed as much exegetical matter as this statement would lead us to expect. Indeed his "comments" are mostly confined to information concerning the pronunciation of certain characters. See however Motowori's remarks on this sentence in Vol. II. pp. 19-20 of this Commentary.

[5:40](#) The author here refers to a certain class of Japanese words which offer peculiar difficulties because written neither ideographically nor phonetically. but in a completely arbitrary manner, the result of a freak of usage. His manner of expressing himself is, however, ambiguous. What he meant to say is, as Motowori points out: "Again in such cases as writing the surname *Kusaka*, with the characters 日下, and the personal name *Tarashi* with the character 帶, I have followed

usage without alteration." It is his imperfect mastery over the Chinese construction that makes him fall into such errors,— errors easily rectifiable, however, by the more widely read modern Japanese *literati*.

[5:41](#) *I.e.*, commence with the creation, and end with the death of the Empress Sui-ko (A. D. 628), who resided at Woharida.

[6:42](#) p. 14 For the Deity Master-of-the-August-Centre-of-Heaven see Sect. I, Note 4, and for Prince-Wave-Limit, etc., see Sect. XLII, Note 15. Kamu-Yamato-Ihare-Biko is the proper native Japanese name of the emperor commonly known by the Chinese "canonical name" of Jim-mu. Homuda is part of the native Japanese name of the Emperor Ojin (see Sects. XCIV to CXVIII). Oho-Sazaki is the native Japanese name of the Emperor Nin-toku (see Sects. CXIX to CXXX.)

[6:43](#) *Q.d.*, to the Empress.

[6:44](#) *I.e.*, 10th March, A. D. 712.