RIVER MIST AND OTHER STORIES

by

Kunikida Doppo

Translated from the Japanese

by

DAVID G. CHIBBETT

Kodansha International Ltd.,
Tokyo, New York and San Francisco.

11
Musashino

Ask any Japanese to name his favourite Doppo short story and the chances are that he will say *Musashino*, which is probably more of a commentary on the Japanese education system than it is on the quality of the story itself. Doppo wrote *Musashino* either in late 1897 or early 1898 and it was published in *Kokumin no Tomo* vol. 22 no. 365 in February 1898 under the title *Ima no Musashino* (Musashino As It Is Today).

After his tragic affair with Sasaki Nobuko, Doppo fled with his brother Shūji to the village of Shibuya on the plain of Musashino, probably in order to recapture memories of the holiday he and Nobuko spent there in August 1895. He stayed at Shibuya throughout the autumn and winter of 1896 and the spring of 1897, spending his days wandering around the woods and fields of the plain which occupies a very special place in Japanese literary and military history.

The quotations from Doppo's diary, the *Azamuzakaru no ki*, and Futabatei Shimei's translation of Turgenev's story, the *Rendez-vous*, give a rather disjointed effect to a narrative which is very much in the tradition of Japanese *zuihitsu* (random jottings) writing, and contains no fictional element at all. The overall effect of *Musashino* is enhanced by some fine descriptive writing, but it is probable that its uniquely Japanese flavour prevents it from being truly appreciated by the Westerner.

'The only traces of the Musashino region remaining today are to be found in the Iruma district.' I once read this statement on an early nineteenth-century map, which went on to describe Iruma as follows:

> 'On the 11th day of the 5th month of 1333, the Taira and Minamoto fought a day-long battle involving many skirmishes at Kotesashihara near the Kume river. At dusk, the Taira retreated about six miles and took up a defensive position on the banks of the river. Next dawn the Minamoto advanced and succcessfully stormed the Taira defences.'

Thinking that this battle site might be one of the surviving relics of Musashino referred to on the map, I thought of going to see for myself, but at the time I did not go, as I was worried about what I might find. The desire to see what remains of the Musashino we visualise through pictures and poems is not exclusive to me by any means and I think it was about a year ago that I conceived the strong wish to see in detail, for my own satisfaction, how much of that ancient Musashino survives today. As the days passed, the wish grew ever stronger. Is it possible to

satisfy such a desire? I do not say it is impossible, but I do not believe it is easy. I confess at any rate that I found considerable charm in modern Musashino and I suspect that there are many who would feel about it as I do.

To begin with, I should like to fulfil a small part of my desire by recording my feelings during the autumn and winter I spent there. I found the first part of my answer in the fact that Musashino is every bit as beautiful as it must have been in ancient times. Doubtless it is not really possible to visualise its former beauty, but the beauty of modern Musashino moves me to reach an exaggerated conclusion. I have just said that modern Musashino has beauty, but perhaps, all things considered, it would be more appropriate to say that it has charm.

* * *

For lack of any other material I should like to call on the notes I made in my diary covering the period from autumn 1896 to spring 1897, during which I lived in a tiny, ramshackle cottage in the village of Shibuya. It was during the winter that my reasons for making the trip, stated above, were fulfilled, but to present a complete picture, let me begin with the autumn.

7 SEPTEMBER 'Yesterday and today a strong southerly wind blew up clouds, sweeping them away again as quickly as they came. It rained intermittently and when the sun filtered through the clouds, for a time there was a glittering sheen over the trees of the woods and forests.'

This describes a typical autumn day in modern Musashino. The trees are as green as they are in summer, but the skies are completely different, for the driving south wind brings low cloud and frequent rain. In the clear intervals, the sunlight beats down on the forests sending up clouds of vapour and making the trees sparkle. I often thought how beautiful it would look if one could get a bird's eye view of the whole of Musashino on such a day. Two days later, on September 9, I wrote in my diary as follows:

'The wind was strong and the voices of autumn filled the fields. The cloud formations were constantly changing.

The weather at this period continued broken as I have described and the skies and fields were a picture of incessant change. The sun when it was out was like summer, but the colour of the clouds and the sound of the winds belonged to autumn. It was profoundly charming. This describes the beginning of autumn in modern Musashino and until the end of winter I continued to make a record in my diary of the changes in the scene. The following entries, I think, may indicate essentials of all the various transformations.

19 SEPTEMBER 'Morning; the sky was cloudy and the wind died away. There was a cold mist and a chilly dew.

Everywhere I could hear the chirruping of insects and it was almost as if the very heart of heaven and earth had woken from a dream.'

21 SEPTEMBER 'The autumn sky was cloudless and the leaves on the trees shone like fire.'

19 OCTOBER 'The moon was bright, casting black shadows over the forests.'

25 OCTOBER 'In the morning there was a heavy mist which cleared during the afternoon. At night the moon shone through gaps in the clouds. In the morning before the mist had cleared, I went out for a walk in the fields and I visited a part of the forest.'

26 OCTOBER 'In the afternoon I went again to the woods. I sat in the heart of the trees, looking around me, straining my ears, and silently contemplating.'

4 NOVEMBER 'The sky was high and the air was clear. In the evening I went for a solitary walk in the fields where the wind was blowing. The mountain chain surrounding the province, close to Mt. Fuji, was black against the sky and the stars were little pinpoints of light. At last twilight came and the black shadows of the trees receded into the night.'

18 NOVEMBER 'I went for a moonlit stroll. Palls of blue smoke crept over the earth and the moonlight was shattered against the trees.'

19 NOVEMBER 'The sky was clear, the wind pure and the dew chill. As far as the eye could see, the yellow autumn leaves mingled with the rich greenery of the trees. Birds flew from branch to branch. There was no sign of any other human as I walked along in silent thought, letting my feet take me wherever they would through the countryside.'

22 NOVEMBER 'Late at night the wind moaned through the trees rustling the leaves with a sound like rain, though the rain had actually stopped some time before.'

23 NOVEMBER 'Almost all the leaves have been brought down by last night's storm. The rice harvest is almost completely gathered in. The whole scene begins to take on the look of the withering decay of winter.'

24 NOVEMBER 'Not all the leaves have fallen yet. When I look at the distant mountains, my heart is filled with yearning and longs to vanish into them.'

26 NOVEMBER 'Ten o'clock. Outside the wind and rain moan forlornly, answered by the steady dripping of water. It was misty all day, as if the fields and woods were

wrapped in an eternal dream. In the afternoon I took my dog for a walk. I went into the woods and sat in silence while he slept. There was a stream wending its way through the trees, carrying with it the fallen leaves. Occasionally the autumn rains pattered dismally on the treetops and branches and it was so peaceful when the drops fell through onto the fallen leaves.'

27 NOVEMBER 'It is clear today and there is no sign of last night's storm. The sun rose gloriously in the sky and when I stood on the hill at the back of my cottage, I could see the pure whiteness of Fuji towering above its neighbouring peaks. It was truly a morning appropriate to the dawning of winter. The irrigation ditches had overflowed into the fields and the inverted images of the trees reflected from the water.'

2 DECEMBER 'This morning the frost glittered beautifully under the morning sun, like snow. After a while it clouded over slightly and it was cold despite the sun.'

22 DECEMBER 'The first snows of winter fell today.'

13 JANUARY 1897 'Late at night the wind died away and the woods were silent. There were frequent snow showers and once when I went out with a lamp, the falling snow danced and glittered under its light. Ah! The silence of Musashino. Straining my ears, I could hear the distant sound of the wind in the trees — the voice of the wind perhaps!'

14 JANUARY 'A very heavy snowfall this morning and the grapevine trellis collapsed. Late at night I could hear the wind in the treetops. Ah! The cold wintry blast sweeping from wood to wood in the land of Musashino! I could hear the sound of thawing snow round the eaves.'

20 JANUARY 'A beautiful morning. Not a cloud in the sky. The ice needles formed by the frost glittered like silver on the ground. Little birds wheeled in the treetops and the tips of the branches were needle-sharp to touch.'

8 FEBRUARY 'The plum trees are in bloom and at last we are getting some really beautiful moons.'

13 MARCH 'Midnight. The moon waned and a wind sprang up, stirring the frost and making the woods sing.'

21 MARCH 'Eleven o'clock at night. I listened to the wind now distant and now close. Spring was on the attack and winter was flying before it.'

* * *

According to long tradition, Musashino in ancient times was incomparably beautiful on account of the endless vistas of miscanthus reeds all over the plain, but nowadays it is covered with woods. In fact you might even say that these woods form the distinctive feature of modern Musashino, being composed mostly of varieties of deciduous oak which lose all their leaves in winter. In spring the fresh greenery almost gushes from the trees. This annual transformation from bare trees to fresh greenery can be seen all over the plain which extends about thirty miles to the east of the Chichibu ridge.

Throughout the year, in mist, in rain, in moonlight, in wind, in fog, in the early winter snows, in the shade of the trees and in the colours of autumn, Musashino offers an ever-changing variety of scenes. Its wonder is such that it is not understandable to the people of western and north-eastern Japan, for it seems that in the beginning the Japanese did not comprehend the beauty of the deciduous oak. When a Japanese writer wrote of woods, he was thinking principally of pines so that the very idea of listening to the early autumn rains in an oak forest does not figure at all in our literature, not even in poetry. I myself come from western Japan and ten years have passed since I first went up to Tokyo as a student. It is only recently that I have come to understand the beauty of deciduous woods, something I first learned in reading this following passage from a short story:

> 'One day about the middle of September, I went into a birch wood. There had been a steady drizzle since morning, but in the clear intervals a warm sun shone. The sky was truly capricious. One moment fleecy white clouds were trailing across the sky, covering it, and the next, without any warning, there would be a rift in the clouds revealing patches of blue sky which shone forth like the eyes of a man shining with wisdom.
>
> 'I just sat there, looking and listening. The leaves of the trees above my head were engaged in faint combat, and just by listening to the sound they made, I could tell the season. It was not the cheerful, laughing sound of early spring; it was not the gentle wafting sound of summer; nor was it the long conversational sound or the nervous chatter of late autumn. No, it was a melancholy whispering which sometimes you could catch and sometimes not. It was almost as if the gentle breeze was stealing its way into the treetops. The appearance of the sodden wood under alternating sun and cloud was constantly changing.
>
> 'Sometimes it was as if everything in the wood smiled for a moment, with red tinges everywhere and the scarcely living birches would suddenly seem like white silk, taking on a gentle lustre. The tiny leaves scattered on the ground would shine like gold, taking fire under the rays of the sun. The graceful

> stems of the fern and bracken would take on the colour of overripe grapes, tangling and entwining with each other infinitely, so that there was suddenly a clear space before my eyes.
>
> 'Sometimes it would become gloomy equally suddenly and in a single instant everything would lose its colour. The drizzle would come pattering down weirdly as in a whisper, leaving the clusters of birch trees in a white mist such as one sometimes sees when the sun shines on snow as it falls from the skies. Although the lustre of the leaves of the birch trees would fade, they would still be greener than those of the young oaks which were all coloured red and gold. And sometimes the sun managed to seep through the rain onto the dense branches now soaking wet, making them glitter.

This passage is taken from Futabatei Shimei's translation of the short story *The Rendez-vous* by Ivan Turgenev. It was the power of his description which first led me to an appreciation of the beauty of deciduous woods. Of course he is describing a Russian scene and talks of birch trees rather than the oaks of Musashino, but plains covered with deciduous trees are all alike. It occurred to me that if the trees of the Musashino plain were pines instead of oaks, it would be very uniform and singularly lacking in such brilliant transformations. It would not be something to prize in the same way. Being oaks, the leaves take on the colours of autumn and in due course fall from the trees. The early autumn rains whisper and the winter winds scream and howl so that when gusts strike the hilltops, thousands of leaves flutter into the sky like distant flocks of tiny birds. When all the leaves have fallen, you are left with mile upon mile of bare trees, and with the blue winter sky hanging high over all, there is an air of tranquillity pervading the plain. The air is perfectly still so that even distant sounds can clearly be heard. My diary entry for December 26 reads:

> 'I sat in the wood and looked and listened and contemplated.'

Just like the man in Turgenev's story.

How did the sounds of autumn through winter match up to my expectations of modern Musashino? In the autumn there were sounds from within the woods, and in winter from beyond them. The sound of birds' wings and their twittering voices. The soughing of the wind. There were singing, howling, screaming voices. The chirrupings of insects in chorus beneath clumps of grass in the woods. The echoes of carts as they wound their way between the trees, down the slopes and along the paths through the fields. Horses' hooves scuffing through the fallen leaves — perhaps a cavalry patrol out on manoeuvres or a foreigner and his wife out for a long ride. The harsh voices of the villagers as they make their way along — gone almost before you realise they are there. The footsteps of a woman hurrying along a lonely path. A gun fired in the distance or a sudden shot from a nearby wood. Once I

visited a wood with my dog and I was sitting on a tree stump reading a book when suddenly I heard the sound of something falling. The dog who had been lying at my feet pricked up his ears and gazed in the direction of the noise. That's all there is to tell about that incident. Perhaps a chestnut had fallen, for there are many chestnut trees in Musashino.

Nothing is so quieting as the sound of the early autumn rains. Even in Japan, the theme of the autumn rains on the mountain hut has found its way into poetry, but how quiet it is when, instead of a hut, you hear the rain falling all over the wide expanse of wood and field. It gives a feeling of generosity, of gentleness and sweetness which is the special feature of the rains in Musashino. I had encountered the same type of rain previously in the dense forests of Hokkaido where the effect is that much greater because of total absence of humanity. By contrast, the Musashino rains are somehow more human and have a kind of whispering charm.

During the period of my stay on Musashino, I visited several woods in the Nakano area at Shibuya, Setagaya and Koganei. Every so often I would grow tired and sit down just to listen to the noises of the woods. These sounds came and then vanished as quickly as they had come, now approaching, now receding. There was the sound of leaves falling on a windless day. When this finished, I always felt the tranquillity of nature and was somehow aware that the breath of eternity was pressing upon me. Late in the Musashino winter nights when the stars were out, I frequently wrote in my diary of the sound you get when the winter winds blow chill across the woods as if they were striving even to sweep the stars from the sky. The noise of the wind summons a man's thoughts into the beyond and as I listened to that forlorn sound, now near, now far, I sometimes thought of life in ancient Musashino and of Kumagai Naoyoshi's poem:*

> 'In the night I listen to the sound of the leaves of the trees, and hear the wind come softly creeping.'

I knew what it was like to live in a mountain hut, but you need to have lived in a village through a Musashino winter to really appreciate this poem.

It is from the end of spring to early summer that one most feels the warming beauty of the sun's rays when sitting in the woods, but I shall not write about that here, for I want to treat of the season when the leaves are tinged with autumn colours. When you walk in the woods just as the leaves are turning colour, the clear sky peeps through gaps between the branches and the rays of the sun splinter on the leaves as they sway in the breeze. It is indescribably beautiful when a broad plain

* Kumagai Naoyoshi (1782-1862): Edo period *waka* poet.

such as Musashino has its trees bathed in tongues of flame as the sun sinks in the West. If you climb high enough you can command an overall view of the plain, but even if you cannot get that high, there is no need to worry for as the scenery of a plain is the same everywhere you only need to see a small part to be able to imagine the whole. How splendid it is when, moved by this vision, you walk as far as you can amidst the autumn leaves under the setting sun until at last there are no more trees and you come out into the fields.

* * *

On 25 December I wrote in my diary:

'I walked over the fields and visited the woods.'

And on 4 November I wrote:

'I stood alone in the fields at dusk with the winds blowing about me.'

Let me quote from Turgenev again:

'I stood still and picked a posy. Then I left the woods and went out into the fields where the sun was low in the blue sky. Its light was pale and cold, and everything was a uniform pale green in colour. There was still half an hour to sunset, but already the heavens were stained a faint red by the evening glow. Tiny leaves were being swept by the strong wind across the yellow stubble in the fields, along the path through the woods and past me in flurries. The whole wood, standing like a wall against the fields, was rustling feverishly and the leaves were not shining, but flickering like a scattering of tiny jewels. I did not mind the withered grass, the tares and the straw; somehow they were not disagreeable. The spiders' webs were waving and billowing in the wind.

'I stopped, suddenly depressed. All the images that assailed my eyes were there all right, but they roused no interest or curiosity in me any more and it seemed that I was aware only of the coldness of impending winter. A timid crow flapped its wings heavily and cut through the wind with its head held high. Suddenly it turned its head and glared at me before flying quickly up into the sky, and crowing as if it would tear its voice, it flew for the shelter of the woods. A flock of doves flew vigorously from a granary, but suddenly danced upwards, almost as if forming themselves into a pillar, and scattered rapidly over the fields. Ah, autumn! Someone seems to pass over by the bare mountain and the sound of an empty cart echoes across the sky.'

This passage describes the scene in the fields of Russia, but what Turgenev says is equally applicable to Japanese fields from autumn through winter. There are of course no bare mountains in Musashino,

but the countryside undulates like the surge of the ocean. At first glance, Musashino looks like a level plain, but it is set high and here and there are shallow depressions and valleys. At the bottom of these valleys you usually find paddy fields whereas the higher spots which are normally divided between field and wood are given over to dry fields. The plain is so constructed that you might get mile upon mile of woods or fields or perhaps just a little of each so that a wood is surrounded by fields and sometimes the fields are surrounded on three sides by woods. The farmers have their dwellings scattered about over the plain and divide the fields among them. Fields and woods are so confusedly scattered that sometimes you enter a wood and come straight out into fields again. This is a special feature of Musashino. Here there is nature and life with a flavour all its own, completely different from the great plains and forests of Hokkaido.

When the rice ripens, the paddy fields in the valleys turn yellow. After the rice has been harvested and the shadows of the trees reflect in the fields, it is the turn of the radishes. When the last radish has been plucked from the ground, they are washed in streams or small pools of water. Then at last the fields turn green with the new shoots of wheat. Sometimes the fields where wheat is growing are left untouched at one end and you can see miscanthus and wild camomile waving in the breeze. The miscanthus plain stretches up and away to the horizon. If you climb a hill, you can see the black peaks of Chichibu, which form the boundaries of the province, stretching away through gaps in the trees and it seems as if these mountains run along the horizon and then dip below it. Shall I go down to the fields again? Or shall I lie down on the miscanthus, make a wind barrier for myself from dead grass, expose my face to the warm rays of the sun in the southern sky, and watch the woods as the leaves rustle and glitter in the wind? Or should I go my way among the trees again? This is a problem which has often confronted me. But it is no real problem to me now, for I know all the paths which criss-cross Musashino and whichever I choose I know I shall not be disappointed.

* * *

A friend of mine once wrote me the following letter:

> 'The other day I was walking over a miscanthus plain deep in thought. It occurred to me that so many people must have walked over paths through fields in the dim and distant past, thinking to themselves, according to the season, how beautiful was the morning dew or marvelling at the colours of the evening snow. Perhaps even enemies may have become the best of friends in such beauty and walked their way home hand in hand.'

If you walk through ordinary fields, you may have such beautiful

notions, but the paths of Musashino inspire a very different feeling. If you go to meet someone by the paths of Musashino, you may miss him and meet instead someone you wished to avoid. This is because all the paths twist and turn through the woods, across the fields and there are so many forks that it is easy to go round in circles. The paths vanish constantly into woods, emerge into fields and vanish again, so that you can never keep track of anyone as he walks along. But for all that, the paths of Musashino are much more rewarding than any others, and people should not distress themselves at getting lost, for wherever you go, there is something worthwhile to see, hear and feel.

The beauty of Musashino can first be appreciated simply by walking the length and breadth of the plain. It does not matter when you go — whether spring, summer, autumn, winter, morning or evening, in the night under the moon, in snow, wind, frost, fog or rain. Just by walking you come across a multitude of things to delight you everywhere you go, and this, to me, is Musashino's most special feature. Where else in Japan is there such a place, leaving aside the obvious choice of Hokkaido? Is there anywhere else where you meet such a satisfactory mingling of wood and field, and where life and nature maintain so close a harmony?

If you are walking along a path and come to a fork, there is no need to trouble yourself. Just go wherever your stick points the way. The path you choose may lead you into a small wood and if there it divides further, choose the smaller track for it may lead you to some delightful spot, such as the site of an old grave. You may find four or five such graves in a line, covered with moss, and with a small open space before them and flowers blooming at the side. And to complete your happiness, perhaps some small birds singing in the treetops. Now go back and take the other fork. Immediately the trees thin out and a broad field stretches before you. You walk down a gentle slope and everywhere there is miscanthus, its tips glittering under the sun.

Beyond the miscanthus, the fields, and beyond them a clump of low trees. In the distance you will see, perhaps, a small grove of cedars. Fleecy clouds gathered on the horizon and perhaps a chain of mountains, deceptively taking on the colour of clouds themselves. On a warm October day, the sun shines balmily and a pleasant breeze sighs through the trees. When you go down towards the miscanthus plain, you come out to the bottom of a small valley and the great vista which stretched before your eyes just a moment before is completely hidden. Suddenly amidst the miscanthus and woods, you discover a long, narrow pond where you would least expect it. The water is pure and clear, vividly reflecting the white clouds in the heavens.

By the pond there are just a few withered reeds, perhaps. As you walk along the path, presently it forks with a wood to your right, and to your left a slope, which, of course, you climb, because wherever you walk on

Musashino you are searching for a spot high enough to provide a panoramic view. This is not easily attained, for there are hardly any places where you can look down and see over the whole plain. You must resign yourself to that disappointment from the very beginning.

If you need to find some particular path for a special reason, ask the way of a labourer working in the fields. If he be a man of forty or more, you must raise your voice to attract his attention whereupon he will give you your directions in equally loud tones. If it should be a young girl, however, you must go right up to her and speak softly. Then again, if it be a youth, you should doff your hat and ask politely for he will then tell you freely what you need to know.

On no account, should you speak angrily for that is the bad habit adopted by youths who come from Tokyo. When you go on your way, you will almost certainly find that the path forks again, but always follow the way you have been directed, no matter how insignificant or odd it looks, and you will soon reach the garden of some farmer. It will always come when you least expect it, but you should try not to be surprised. Just ask at the house and go on your way. Shortly you will smile to yourself in recognition of the familiar path you first wanted to find and you will be grateful to the man who told you the way.

Sometimes, as you walk along a straight path, you will come to places where woods in beautiful autumn colours extend unbroken on both sides for half a mile or more. What a pleasure it is to walk along such a path in calm solitude with the tops of the trees gleaming brightly in the evening sun. All will be quiet save for the sound of the occasional falling leaf, quiet and delightfully melancholy. No one for miles around. If you go when all the trees are finally bare, the path will be buried with leaves and with every step you take, there will be a pleasant rustling sound. You will be able to see right into the hearts of the woods where the treetops point like slender needles into the blue sky. Still there will be no one around and it will be ever more melancholy. There will be just the occasional surprise of a dove flying from a tree with a flurry of wings.

It would be nothing short of folly to trace your way home by the same path along which you came for it is impossible to get lost on modern Musashino and there is much to be gained from heading in your homeward direction by a totally new path. The sun on its downward track over the shoulder of Mt. Fuji has not yet completely disappeared and the clouds gathered round the mountain's slopes are dyed gold, changing their shapes even as you watch. The surrounding peaks, covered in snow like a silver chain, run far away into the distant North, finally disappearing into banks of dark clouds.

When the sun has set, a strong wind blows up and the trees moan. Then Musashino seems to come to life and you should hurry on your way as quickly as possible because the cold pierces through you. Look-

ing back over your shoulder, you will see the new moon sending forth its cold light over the bare treetops. It seems that, any minute, the wind will sweep the moon down from the sky until at last you suddenly come out into the fields once more.

* * *

One summer about three years ago, I and a friend of mine left our temporary dwelling in the city and boarded a train which took us as far as Sakai. There we alighted from the train and walked about half a mile to the North until we came to a small bridge known as Sakura-bashi. Just across the bridge, we stopped at a teahouse. The old woman asked us why we had come that way whereupon my friend and I looked at each other and laughed.

'We've come for a stroll. Just for pleasure,' we said. Then it was her turn to laugh, for she seemed to regard us as fools.

'Don't you know that the cherry blooms in the spring?' she said. Of course it was quite useless for us to attempt to explain to her the pleasures of just strolling in the outlying districts of Tokyo in the summer as well as in the spring. Tokyo people just do not understand such a mentality. So we just wiped the sweat from our brows and ate the melon the old woman prepared for us. Then we washed our faces in the waters of a small stream which flowed past the teahouse and left. This stream probably was part of the Koganei system and its waters were very clear as it threaded its delightful way amidst the green vegetation on its banks. From time to time tiny, chirruping birds flew up, flapping their wings as if waiting for an opportunity to quench their thirsts in the stream. To this, however, the old woman gave no heed, seeming to regard the stream as there morning and night for her convenience to wash her pots and pans in.

After leaving the teahouse, we began to walk leisurely upstream. Ah, the pleasure of that day! Of course Koganei *is* famous for its cherry blossoms and, to the casual observer, it seems foolish to walk nonchalantly along the banks of its streams in the height of summer, but to take that view implies a total lack of knowledge of the rays of the summer sun on Musasino. The atmosphere was sultry that day and there were layer upon layer of clouds in the sky with here and there a patch of blue. Where the clouds met the blue sky there were bands of translucent, pure white light like the colour of silver or snow. There is nothing very summery about that in itself, but there was also a kind of muddy mist intermingled with the clouds, making the sky seem somehow uneven and hazy. There was a criss-crossing of shadows released by rays of light piercing through the clouds and the whole sky seemed to be atremble with a spirit of unrestrained motion. The trees in the woods seemed to melt in the light and heat and became drowsy and limp, almost as if drunk. The trees were set out in straight lines so that it was

possible to see the wide fields through them, but a shimmering heat haze hung over them, making it impossible to look for very long. As we walked along, we panted and wiped the sweat from our faces, pausing at times to look up at the sky, or into the woods or to stare at the point where trees met sky. Suffering? Not on your life! We were brimming with health and vitality.

We walked about six miles without seeing anyone apart from the occasional dog which came unexpectedly rushing from some farmer's garden or wayside thicket. These dogs would look at us in wonder, yawn, and then disappear again. There was also the noise of the occasional rooster, proclaiming the time of day with a great flapping of wings. These were kept by their owners on the walls of rice granaries, in cedar woods or thickets and their calls could be heard loud and clear. We also came across groups of chickens scratching around in the shade of cherry trees. When we gazed far into the distance where the stream ran ahead of us, we could see its waters flowing in a straight line until disappearing into a shadow like a scattering of silver powder. Nearer at hand it glittered under the sun like a silver arrow. My friend and I stood on a bridge judging and making observations on these two different appearances of the waters of the stream as it shimmered and unceasingly transformed itself under the rays of the sun.

Sometimes we could see a shadow on the water in the distance — the shadow of a cloud which reached where we were standing in an instant, stopped for a second and, as quickly as it had come passed beyond us. A moment later the stream glitered brilliantly again and the trees in the woods and the cherry trees on the banks rejoiced in bright greenery again, just the colour of spring grass after rainfall. Under the bridge there was the gentle murmur of the water — not the sound made by water as it dashes against the river banks, nor yet that of shallow water. It was a full, rich sound, a warm human sound! We thought how fortunate the farmers were to walk by the banks of such a stream every day, to say nothing of ourselves as we strolled along with straw hats on our heads and sticks in our hands.

* * *

The friend with whom I made that trip has now become a magistrate and has moved to the provinces, but I showed him what you have just read and he made the following remarks about Musashino:

> 'The plain of Musashino does not belong to what we popularly call the eight provinces of Kanto and I have worked out my own definition of it, using natural boundaries such as mountains and rivers. To begin with, I consider that Tokyo lies at the heart of Musashino, but that we must leave out, because it is impossible to imagine what it must have been like in the days of old when, now, it is filled with busy streets and soaring

government offices. A German woman of my acquaintance once described Tokyo as a "new metropolis" and you can see what she means, nothwithstanding what it was like in the days of the Tokugawa Shoguns.

'However, though we exclude Tokyo itself from the definition of Musashino, we must be careful not to exclude the city's suburbs and outlying districts which, in my view, are part of the poetic beauty of the plain. Take for example Shibuya where you lived, Meguro, Waseda where you and I have enjoyed so many walks, Shinjuku, Shirokane — the list is endless. In other words, if you want to savour the real flavour of Musashino, you must not think only of Mt. Fuji and the Chichibu range, but also the central, city area they surround.

'In your piece you speak of the close harmony existing between life and nature and depict several scenes which have delighted you. With all that you say, I wholeheartedly agree. Once I took my brother on a long excursion in the area surrounding the Tama river. During a five ør six mile walk, we became aware of the different delights of so many different types of life we encountered. For the first half mile there were houses all the way; then they gave out only to be replaced by more houses a little further along. In one short walk there were trees, grass, men and animals for us to see — such a variety. Of course, we must include the Tama river itself in our definition. There are six rivers in Japan to which our ancestors gave the name "Tama", but where else is there such a one as this? It connects flat fields and low-lying woodlands with just the same charm as that with which the outlying districts of Tokyo are connected with the city itself. Let us consider the fields on the east of the plain. There are many paddy fields and despite the low horizon, this is unmistakably Musashino, and from Kinshibori to the area round the Kinu river, the paddy fields, trees and thatched cottages provide all the charm one associates with the plain. It is only in this region that Mt. Fuji stands high against the sky almost as if it is gazing down over our town of Zushi. Consider also Mt. Tsukuba. When we see the shadow of this mountain low in the distant horizon, we understand what is meant when it is said that Musashino somehow lives and breathes in its corner of the eight provinces of Kanto.

'However, the boundaries of Musashino extending to the North and South of Tokyo are extremely narrow, almost non-existent one might say. This is because the railways run straight across it, somehow carrying Tokyo itself across Musashino to the regions beyond.'

* * *

I am in complete agreement with my friend's opinions, particularly with regard to the Tokyo suburbs. It may sound odd to include a city's suburbs in Musashino proper, but this is not really so, because it is no more than mentioning the beach when you describe the sea. I shall postpone further discussion of this, however, as I should like to treat of the waterways which cross Musashino.

Of course there are the Tama and Sumida rivers, but I shall concentrate on the less important streams, of which the Koganei is one. The Koganei system flows into the Tokyó suburbs at Shinjuku, by way of such villages as Yoyogi and Tsunohazu, to form part of the Shiya network and others. There are many other nameless streams which run into it, and to the casual observer it offers very little to marvel at, but its charm as it twists and twines its way through woods and fields, appearing and disappearing, offers something for everyone at all seasons of the year. I was brought up in a mountainous district and the rivers I was used to were clear whatever their size. Therefore when I first saw the streams of Musashino, excluding the Tama river, I was disagreeably impressed by their muddiness, but as time went by and I got used to them I felt that this muddiness was somehow appropriate to the plain as a whole.

I remember one summer evening four or five years ago when that same friend and I went for a stroll in the Tokyo suburbs. At about eight o'clock we crossed a bridge over the upper reaches of the Kanda stream. It was one of those almost indescribable nights when the moon was bright, the wind pure and woods and fields enveloped in white gossamer. On the bridge was a group of four or five villagers, leaning against the railings, talking, laughing and singing. But there was one old man with them who kept interrupting their talk and songs. The moon shone clear, describing the scene in a hazy oval of light which floated before our eyes like a stanza from an idyll. We joined them against the railings to gaze at the moon and watch its reflection in the gently flowing waters of the stream. Every time an insect struck the surface of the water, it set up ripples and for a moment there were wrinkles on the face of the moon. The stream wound its way in among the trees disappearing in a semi-circle. The light of the moon as it shattered on the treetops fell, glittering, onto the dark surface of the water. Vapour enshrouded the stream to a height of four feet or more. During the radish season you can see farm labourers everywhere on the banks of these little streams washing the soil from the radishes.

* * *

Why do such places delight us so? I can answer in a few words. It is because these suburban scenes somehow manage to let people see society in miniature. The reason for this is that one feels behind the facades of the houses are concealed stories to arouse the interest of all men,

whether from town or country — small stories, sad stories, funny stories. City and country life mingle there as in a gently whirling vortex. Look there at that one-eyed dog crouching down! As far as his name is known is the extent of that suburb's territory. Look at that restaurant. There are the silhouettes of women, their voices raised, whether in tears or laughter I cannot tell. Outside is the night and an assortment of odours of smoke, earth and other things impossible to distinguish. Then there are two or three large wagons passing by, making a great noise as their wheels pass in and out of the ruts. Look at the two draught horses standing in front of the blacksmith's, their black shadows concealing two or three men having some secret discussion. The red-hot horseshoes are placed on the anvil, and as they are hammered sparks fly into the night sky, assaulting the darkness. Now the men involved in the discussion are laughing, and as the moon rises to the tops of the oak trees behind the houses, the roofs on the opposite side of the street begin to turn white.

Black soot is being emitted from the metal lamps and ten or so people, both villagers and townsmen, rush heedlessly through it. Here and there are piles of vegetables for this is a market place and auction house for such produce. You may think that the people go to bed when it gets dark, but until two in the morning, lights can be seen gleaming through the shop windows. To the back of the barber's shop are the peasants' dwellings where the lowing of cattle can be heard. Next door to the wine shop lives an old man who sells soya beans for soup and early each morning he sets off for the city, proclaiming his wares in a hoarse voice. In the summer when the nights are short and the dawn comes early, by sunrise the wagons are already beginning to pass by. All day long the rumbling wheels never cease. By nine or ten in the morning the cicadas have begun their chirruping from the high trees and it gradually grows hotter and hotter. The horses' hooves send up clouds of dust which are fanned into the empty skies by the wheels of the wagons, and flies flit from house to house, from horse to horse. Then one hears the distant boom of the noon gun and somewhere from the skies over the city one hears the midday siren. This is Musashino.