# CHAPTER XXXV

## FAREWELL ADDRESS

Now that the term comes to a close, I think that it would be well to talk about the possible values of the studies which we have made together, in relation to Japanese literature. For, as I have often said, the only value of foreign literary studies to you (using the word literary in the artistic sense) must be that of their effect upon your own capacity to make literature in your own tongue. Just as a Frenchman does not write English books or a German French books, except in the way of scientific treatise, so the Japanese scholar who makes literature will not waste time by attempting to make it in another language than his own. And as his own is so very differently constructed in all respects from the European language, he can scarcely hope to obtain much in the way of new form from the study of French or English or German. So I think that we may say the chief benefit of these studies to you must be in thought, imagination and feeling. From western thought and imagination and feeling very much indeed can be obtained which will prove helpful in enriching and strengthening the Japanese literature of the future. It is by such studies that all western languages obtain—and obtain continually—new life and strength. English literature owes something to almost every other literature, not only in Europe, but even in the whole civilized world. The same can be said of French and German literature—perhaps also, though in less degree, of modern Italian. But notice that the original plant is not altered by the new sap; it is only made stronger and able to bear finer flowers. As English literature remains essentially English in spite of the riches gained from all other literatures, so should future Japanese literature remain

purely Japanese, no matter how much benefit it may obtain from the ideas and the arts of the West.

If you were to ask me, however, whether I knew of any great changes so far, I fear that I should be obliged to say, "No." Up to the present I think that there has been a great deal of translation and imitation and adoption into Japanese, from western literatures, but I do not think that there has been what we call true assimilation. Literature must be creative; and borrowing, or imitating, or adapting material in the raw state—none of this is creative. Yet it is natural that things should be so. This is the period of assimilation; later on the fine result will show, when all this foreign material has been transmuted, within the crucible of literature, into purely Japanese materials. But this cannot be done quickly.

Now I want to say something about the manner in which I imagine that these changes, and a new literature, must come about. I believe that there will have to be a romantic movement in Japan, of a much more deep-reaching kind than may now appear credible. I think that — to say the strangest thing first — the language of scholarship will have to be thrown away for purposes of creative art. I think that a time must come when the scholar will not be ashamed to write in the language of the common people, to make it a vehicle of his best and strongest thought, to enter into competition with artists who would now be classed as uneducated, perhaps even vulgar, men. Perhaps it will seem a strange thing to say, yet I think that there is no doubt about it. Very probably almost any university scholar consciously or unconsciously despises the colloquial art of the professional story-teller and the writer of popular plays in popular speech; nevertheless, if we can judge at all by the history of literary evolutions in other countries, it is the despised drama and the despised popular story and the vulgar song of the people which will prove the sources of future Japanese literature—a finer literature than any which has hitherto been produced.

I have not the slightest doubt that Shakespeare was considered very vulgar in the time when he wrote his plays —at least by common opinion. There were a few men intelligent enough to feel that his work was more alive than any other drama of the time. But these were exceptional men. And you know that in the eighteenth century the classical spirit was just as strong in England as it is now, or has been, in Japan. The reproach of the "vulgar," I mean the reproach of vulgarity, would have been brought in Pope's time against anybody who should have tried to write in the form which we now know to be much superior. I have told you also how the great literatures of France and Germany were obliged to pass through a revolution against classical forms, which revolution brought into existence the most glorious work, both in poetry and prose, that either country ever produced.

But remember how the revolution began to work in all these countries of the West. It began with a careful and loving study of the despised oral literature of the common people. It meant the descent of great scholars from their thrones of learning to mix with peasants and ignorant people, to speak their dialects, to sympathize with their simple but deep and true emotions. I do not say that the scholar went to live in a farmhouse, or to share the poverty and misery of the wretched in great cities; I mean only that he descended to them in spirit — sympathized with them — conquered his prejudices — learned to love them for the simple goodness and the simple truth in their uneducated natures. I think I told you before that even at one period of old Greek literature the Greek had to do something of very nearly the same kind. So I say that, in my humble opinion, a future literature in this country must be more or less founded upon a sympathy with and a love for the common, ignorant people, the great mass of the national humanity.

Now let me try to explain how and why these things have come to pass in almost every civilized country. The

natural tendency of society is to produce class distinctions, and everywhere the necessary tendency in the highest classes must be to conservatism — elegant conservatism. Conservatism and exclusiveness have their values; and I do not mean to suggest the least disrespect toward them. But conservatism invariably tends to fixity, to mannerism, to a hard crystallization. At length refined society obliges everybody to do and say according to rule — to express or to repress thought and feeling in the same way. Of course men's hearts cannot be entirely changed by rule; but such a tyranny of custom can be made that everybody is afraid to express thought or to utter feeling in a really natural way. When life becomes intensely artificial, severely conventional, literature begins to die. Then, western experience shows that there is one cure; nothing can bring back the failing life except a frank return to the unconventional, a frank return to the life and thought of the common people, who represent after all the soil from which everything human springs. When a language becomes hopelessly petrified by rules, it can be softened and strengthened and vivified by taking it back to its real source, the people, and soaking it there as in a bath. Everywhere this necessity has shown itself; everywhere it has been resisted with all the strength of pride and prejudice; but everywhere its outcome has been the same. French or German or English alike, after having exhausted all the resources of scholarship to perfect literature, have found literature beginning to dry and wither on their hands; and have been obliged to remove it from the atmosphere of the schools and to resurrect it by means of the literature of the ignorant. As this has happened everywhere else, I cannot help believing that it must happen here.

Yet do not think that I mean to speak at all slightingly about the value of exact learning. Quite the contrary. I hold that it is the man of exact learning who best—providing that he has a sympathetic nature—can master to good result the common speech and the unlettered poetry. A Cambridge

education, for example, did not prevent Tennyson from writing astonishing ballads or dramatic poems in ballad measure in the difficult dialect of the northern English peasant. Indeed, in English literature the great Romantic reformers were all, or nearly all, well schooled men, but they were men who had artistic spirit enough to conquer the prejudices with which they were born, and without heeding the mockery of their own class, bravely worked to extract from simple peasant lore those fresh beauties which give such desirable qualities to Victorian poetry. Indeed, some went further—Sir Walter Scott, for example, who rode about the country, going into the houses of the poorest people, eating with them and drinking with them, and everywhere coaxing them to sing him a song or tell him a story of the past. I suppose there were many people who would then have laughed at Scott. But those little peasant songs which he picked out started the new English poetry. The whole literary tone of the eighteenth century was changed by them. Therefore I should certainly venture to hope that there yet may be a Japanese Walter Scott, whose learning will not prevent him from sympathizing with the unlearned.

Now I have said quite enough on that subject; and I have ventured it only through a sense of duty. The rest of what I have to say refers only to literary work.

I suppose that most of you, on leaving the University, will step into some profession likely to absorb a great deal of your time. Under these circumstances many a young man who loves literature resigns himself foolishly to give up his pleasures in this direction; such young scholars imagine that they have no time now for poetry or romance or drama — not even for much private study. I think that this is a very great mistake, and that it is the busy man who can best give us new literature — with the solitary exception perhaps of poetry. Great poetry requires leisure, and much time for solitary thinking. But in other departments of literature I can assure you that the men-of-letters throughout the West have been, and still are, to a great extent,

very busy men. Some are in the government service, some in post offices, some in the army and navy (and you know how busy military and naval officers have to be), some are bankers, judges, consuls, governors of provinces, even merchants — though these are few. The fact is that it is almost impossible for anybody to live merely by producing fine literature, and that the literary man must have, in most cases, an occupation. Every year the necessity for this becomes greater. But the principle of literary work is really not to do much at one time, but to do a little at regular intervals. I doubt whether any of you can ever be so busy that you will not be able to spare twenty minutes or half an hour in the course of one day to literature. Even if you should give only ten minutes a day, that will mean a great deal at the end of the year. Put it in another way. Can you not write five lines of literary work daily? If you can, the question of being busy is settled at once. Multiply three hundred and sixty-five by five. That means a very respectable amount of work in twelve months. How much better if you could determine to write twenty or thirty lines every day. I hope that if any of you really love literature, you will remember these few words, and never think yourselves too busy to study a little, even though it be only for ten or fifteen minutes every day. And now good-bye.