

Taira Tadamori was annoyed. Very annoyed. A Chinese ship lay offshore loaded with goods that meant hefty profits. But here too were the pests he had he had tried to dodge: Dazaifu inspectors intent on boarding the ship, interrogating the captain, and inspecting the cargo so they could nab a considerable part of it in the name of taxes and fees.

The ship's captain was fuming. Had Taira Tadamori forgotten his assurance that at this out-of-the-way anchorage there would be no hungry officials? On the strength of that promise he had by-passed the familiar port of Hakata to sail a long, looping course southward around Kyushu's western outreaches through island-clogged passages and bays then back northward more than sixty miles to the farthest shore of the gulf called the Ariake Sea. Here, he had been assured, was the security of the estate that Tadamori managed.

Tadamori tried to cool the irate Chinese. He insisted that he could handle the situation. As manager he represented the owners of the estate, and though it was held by a temple in the capital that temple had been founded by imperial order and the estate was in fact part of the lands belonging to the imperial family. In this year 1133 the head of the imperial family was the retired emperor Toba, the most influential man in the capital. Toba took a keen interest in the family lands. He was zealous in expanding them and he would not look kindly on any attempt to cut into the revenue they yielded.

Tadamori knew this because he was one of Toba's confidants, one of the inner circle in the retired emperor's office. He was in this fortunate position because he was chief of his Taira family, whose Taira warriors served the retired emperor. One of his rewards for faithful service, along with a series of lucrative governorships, was his lucrative assignment to manage this estate: a manager received a share of the estate's income. Toba got his money's worth; a renowned warrior gave an estate security.

A man did not achieve Tadamori's stature without being resourceful. In this instance he had in his entourage a man who had been a scribe in the retired emperor's office, drafting the missives that flowed from that office. He knew the style of such a document and he knew the signatures of the staff who would validate it. Tadamori called on those skills now, and shortly he had in hand an order, impressively signed and sealed, explicitly prohibiting representatives of Dazaifu from entering this estate. Tadamori watched as the discomfited officers rode off. Then he rewarded his scribe for felicitous forgery.

This was not an exploit that Tadamori would boast about to the retired emperor, but he knew that Toba would approve the result, and might even be amused by the method. The possessors of any estate sought to bar local officials from the estate: they were forever trying to refute the estate's tax exempt status so they could collect taxes; they took a cut on taxes collected.

An owner needed convincing documents to assert tax exemption, but he also needed fighting men to ward off predatory intruders. The government was unable to police the provinces and so, although the nobility scorned warriors, they relied on them to protect their scattered lands. Sometimes it was possible to recruit a local force, but when the aristocrats of the capital needed muscle they turned to the warrior clans, either the Minamoto or the Taira.

It is not mere coincidence that the rise of the Taira came during the century when the imperial family shook free of Fujiwara dominance. In 1068, because Fujiwara consorts had failed to produce a male heir, the Fujiwara had to accede to the enthronement of a mature man not born of a Fujiwara mother, not molded by Fujiwara upbringing. He reigned for four years and then retired, having ensured that both his successor and the next crown prince were similarly unfettered. He was the first of four vigorous retired emperors who made the imperial family-for the first time in its history-the most powerful force in the government.

There were other retired emperors during that period but only the senior counted. None of the four tried to act as emperor after retiring, but as head of the family each contrived to build the family's influence and hitherto meagre wealth.

It was the new center of power created by the retired emperors that gave the taira their opportunity. Their rivals the Minamoto had an old alliance with the Fujiwara. Fujiwara power and glory were critically dependent on the Minamoto might that maintained order and kept income flowing from vast estates. The Minamoto were "the teeth and claws" of the Fujiwara and in return they had achieved rank and position at the court. The Taira could now go after that same kind of respect by attaching themselves to the retired emperors.

There were several branches of the Taira, largely independent of each other; most were based in the northeast where they had won territory and influence. A lesser known group was closer to the capital, on territory they took over when a tough tenth-century Taira warrior, after serving as governor of Ise province, decided to settle there. From that base his descendents reached westward. By the time of his great-grandson, Taira Masamori- Tadamori's father-Taira influence had reached both sides of the Inland Sea and the west coast of Honshu. It was

Masamori who started his family's rise to glory by cultivating the second of the four retired emperors, Toba's grandfather Shirakawa.

Masumori's approach was forthright. In 1097, from his family lands, he donated 250 choice acres-with, of course, their income-producing peasants-to support an imperial temple built in memory of Shirakawa's most beloved daughter. A cordial introduction came quickly.

Shirakawa was devoted to building temples and augmenting the family's lands. Masamori contributed to both, and moved into Shirakawa's inner circle.

His status as a favorite was confirmed when he was sent to deal with a prominent Minamoto who had erupted on the west coast of Honshu, killing the governor of Izumo province and seizing tax rice. He had angered the government before: when he was the governor of Tsushima, Dazaifu had accused him of brutality against the island's people; exiled to an offshore island, he had escaped and landed in Izumo.

Masamori returned from Izumo bearing the Minamoto head, which he exposed to public view on the prison gate. Probably what was most important to Masamori, he had ousted a Minamoto from a region that the Taira intended to dominate. As a result of his success, Masamori took a place alongside the established Minamoto captains as an enforcer of the peace in the capital.

They were kept busy, Kyoto was anything but placid, a run-down city, dangerous at night. Taira and Minamoto were called upon to round up the thieves and cutthroats who infested the streets, and to face down the rampaging throngs of priest-thugs who boiled out of the great temples and shrines to battle each other or to confront the court with demands for the redress of some grievance. If they got their way, it usually called forth a howling protest from a rival institution claiming that its rights had now been trampled, and another melee had to be quelled.

Such services were rewarded. Masamori received a string of appointments to be governor of important, prosperous provinces. The governor of a province had ample opportunity to get rich: he was both tax assessor and collector, and squeezing the peasants was a fine art. Masamori's governorships made him rich and they also made him powerful, for they gave him the chance to win the allegiance of local leaders.

He was adroit in getting appointments to provinces along the Inland Sea. In this strategic region he gained the loyalty of hundreds of the minor chieftains who controlled the coastal villages and inlets that were home to seamen who fished and

ferried and doubled as pirates. They gave him a navy of boats manned by tough, skilled seamen. With them he took effective control of the Inland Sea.

He was therefore the logical choice to deal with that old problem, the Inland Sea's pirates, and more than once he was ordered to subdue them. These assignments played into his hands; they gave him the opportunity to exert discipline and crush disloyalty. The pirates he shackled and paraded through the streets of Kyoto were those who had flouted his authority. The lesson was not lost on the others.

In 1119 he was sent to Kyushu to crush insubordination on an estate that belonged to one of the great imperial temples. He took care of it easily, and the trip gave him the opportunity to see for himself Hakata's harbor, busy with Chinese ships, Chinese merchants, Chinese goods. He was already investing in the China trade and it pleased him to see the activity that was bringing him foreign luxuries and more wealth.

Kyushu lords came to pay their respects to the great warrior from the capital, and when he returned to Kyoto with the culprit's head he was flanked by more than a hundred prominent warriors from Kyushu and the Inland Sea. He was demonstrating that he dominated western Japan.

His final triumph came when he was promoted to Fourth Rank, the first Taira warrior to break into the higher ranks. He died around 1121, full of honor. Headship of the Taira passed to his son Tadamori.

Tadamori's career took off where Masumori's had ended. By 1133, when he produced that forged order to shoo away Dazaifu inspectors, he had performed the customary duties: he had been the governor of major provinces, with a Minamoto chieftain he had repulsed riotous priest-soldiers in the capital-, and he had disciplined the pirates of the Inland Sea. He had become richer than his father, enabling him to build a temple enshrining a thousand and one Buddhist images to fulfill a vow made by retired emperor Toba. Toba was so pleased that he granted this Taira warrior the unprecedented honor of entering the palace as a courtier.

His first appearance was set for one of the harvest festivals as the year drew to a close. To introduce himself he was expected to perform a dance before the assembled court. To dance was not a problem: he had enough of a courtier's training to manage that with aplomb. But some of the nobles were so enraged at his intrusion into their precincts that they planned to assassinate him as he danced, or so rumor had it.

Tadamori took precautions. It was prohibited to go armed into the palace, but under his robe he buckled on a wooden dagger silvered to look real, and he made certain that the assembled gentlemen glimpsed it. Furthermore, he stationed a loyal retainer, sword in hand, in the garden just outside the hall.

The courtiers did all they could to upset him. In chanting his accompaniment they changed the words to insult his family as upstarts (though they were descended from a revered emperor) and to ridicule him because he was somewhat cross-eyed. Tadamori did not lose his composure. As he finished he called a woman attendant and handed over his dagger.

When it was all over, the incensed nobles raised a noisy protest, demanding that he be punished for wearing a blade and posting a guard. Called before the retired emperor, Tadamori professed ignorance about the guard, "It was the act of a loyal retainer who heard that I was in danger," he said. "If you desire it I will punish him." As for the dagger, he asked that it be brought forth; all saw that it was a harmless accessory. Rather than punishing him, Toba congratulated him on his foresight.

He continued as manager of the estate on the Ariake Sea until he died (he sent deputies, rarely going to Kyushu himself), and trade with Chinese merchants there and at Hakata added to his wealth. He was generous with his money: it brought acceptance.

He continued to edge his way into court society, for he wanted his family to be accepted as cultured, not just as useful enforcers. He joined poetry contests, participated in festivals, and was gallant to the ladies of the court, and liberal too, because he knew very well the power they wielded. He ended like his father Masamori in Fourth Rank, high for a warrior.

The career of his son Kiyomori picked up from there. Or was he Tadamori's son?

It was said at the time, though not in public, that his father was the retired emperor Shirakawa. Although this is written only in the fictionalized saga of the Taira clan, it has persisted through the centuries, and respected Japanese scholars accept it today.

The story goes like this. The retired emperor set out one dark night to visit one of his favorite ladies. As his small party approached her residence, he and the courtiers escorting him panicked at what seemed to be a horrible monster. Tadamori was then only a junior officer but Shirakawa had noticed him and he was

called upon to slay the demon. To Tadamori, however, the thing seemed not so awesome, and he thought how embarrassing it would be if he used his warrior's skill against something harmless. He dashed forward and grappled with it; it turned out to be an aged monk bundled up in a straw hat and raincoat. Shirakawa was so impressed by Tadamori's combination of bravery and judgement that he bestowed on him the lady he had come to visit. She was visibly pregnant, and Tadamori was told that if the baby was a girl, Shirakawa would take her into the court as his daughter, but if the child was a boy, Tadamori was to raise him as a warrior. A boy was born, Tadamori named him Kiyomori and raised him as his son and heir. There have always been those who credited imperial parentage for Kiyomori's spectacular rise.

His first important political appointment came when he was promoted to a rank almost as high as his father's and made governor of Aki, a rich province on the Honshu side of the Inland Sea, about halfway between Dazaifu and the capital.

Governors had long since ceased to live in their provinces; they sent underlings and remained in the capital. But on being named governor, Kiyomori toured Aki, taking care to report his appointment to the province's Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. At one shrine, though it was not then the most important, he was awed.

It stands on an offshore island called Itsukushima, or sometimes Miyajima. With a sweeping vista of the Inland Sea as a backdrop, the shrine stretches from the shore toward a great torii that rises from the waves. At high tide its buildings and connecting galleries seem to float upon the water.

It is praised as one of Japan's three most beautiful sights, but when Kiyomori first came upon it, it was sadly decayed. Even so, he was enthralled by its setting, its age-old sanctity, its neglected beauty. He spent time and riches restoring it to magnificence, he made it his family's guardian shrine, the Taira shrine, and it could not fail to prosper. He never faltered in his devotion.

There were practical considerations as well. Itsukushima was strategically located on the shipping route through the Inland Sea. Chinese ships were not then permitted to enter the Inland Sea but, looking ahead, he began major works to widen the channel between the many islands so that large boats could pass.

Aki's jagged coast afforded many small harbors that were home to seamen who were already conscious of Taira power. Kiyomori enlisted them to make Aki a Taira stronghold.

Beyond all that, his pious devotion to Itsukushima's deities had an earthly parallel. He was captivated by one of the loveliest of the shrine maidens who danced to entertain the deities and the devout. A daughter was born. Like other fathers of his station, Kiyomori acknowledged and protected the girl, and when she grew up to be pretty but (it was said) not overly bright, he placed her advantageously in the court. All of his eight daughters married well; he saw to that.

Of his many mistresses, the dancer at Itsukushima held his affection much longer than most. Twenty-five years after his term as governor had ended, a courtier who hoped to curry favor with Kiyomori by making a pilgrimage to Itsukushima pondered what gifts-necessarily expensive-he should take to the Lady. His ploy worked.

Kiyomori never let go of Aki. After his two terms as governor, he installed two of his brothers in succession, and then the head priest of Itsukushima shrine.

Still he knew that the China trade focused on Hakata. That port was the prime gateway. More than 1600 Chinese merchants clustered around Hakozaiki shrine on the shore of Hakata bay. The shrine provided a hospitable environment for its satellite village and the Chinese gave generous support to

the shrine. The shrine was itself deep in trade, financing voyages, supplying Japanese goods for sale in China, sharing profits to its great advantage.

A merchant was a traveling man, and he needed a base in Japan; he gained a partner by marrying a Japanese woman. She eased the language barrier and relations with the local people, and when he was away, which was most of the time, she managed the business, ran the household, and raised their children. (Usually he had another wife and family in China.)

A peaceful businesslike Hakata depended on what was happening in Kyushu, and Kyushu was not peaceful. A new breed of warlords had emerged. Most were descended from officials who, long ago, had chosen to stay in Kyushu after finishing their assignments at Dazaifu or a provincial headquarters. Having come from the capital, they had prestige that they converted to power. They acquired land and attracted followers who became formidable bands of warriors. By Kiyomori's time Kyushu had been carved up by such chiefs. They were often at each others' throats.

The Harada were typical. Their ancestor came to Kyushu in 941 in the campaign against Fujiwara Sumitomo. He settled not far from Dazaifu and by Kiyomori's time his descendants were the strongest power in northern Kyushu.

They controlled thousands of acres of farmland and they could send more than four hundred mounted warriors against their equally pugnacious neighbors. Their territory enveloped Dazaifu, giving them a vested interest.

Dazaifu had changed. The fighting made it obvious that Dazaifu no longer controlled Kyushu as the court had originally intended it should. The position of Governor General had become a sinecure for an imperial prince whose only function was to collect the generous salary of rice and all the other goods that count as perquisites. Next in line was the Senior Assistant Governor General, but since 1121 no one holding this position had bothered to come to Dazaifu. To fill the void, Kyushu men moved up the ladder of responsibility. They padded the payroll with friends and relations; the number of secretaries, for instance, swelled from four to more than twenty. And terms of office lengthened until they became lifetime and hereditary. But local officials were competent. Taxes were collected, and that satisfied the court.

What did not change was Dazaifu's reputation for avarice. One of the last of the Senior Assistant Governor Generals who came to Dazaifu merited this half-admiring entry in the diary of a court noble: "He robbed the nine provinces and two islands clean, and did the same with Chinese goods." Another, a scholar who espoused Confucian ethics, returned to the capital with "one boat full of goods acquired legitimately and another boat full of ill-gotten goods."

Greed did not abate when Senior Assistant Governor Generals stopped coming to Dazaifu. For instance, there was Dazaifu's 1133 attempt to grab the cargo of the Chinese ship that came through the Ariake Sea to Taira Tadamori's bailiwick. Tadamori frustrated them, but that happened rarely.

The governors of Kyushu's provinces did have recourse when Dazaifu became too abusive. They could appeal to the court, and often with success. A scholar has calculated that in the 126 year span from 991 to 1117 forty percent of Dazaifu's head officials were dismissed for knavery in office.

The Chinese merchants had no such protection. They tried to maintain smooth relations with Dazaifu so as not to jeopardize business, but Dazaifu's head officials repeatedly tried to take personal control of the China trade, and the merchants filed a flood of complaints, claiming that they were cheated or not paid at all. The court ignored them.

The merchants' chief support came from Hakozaki shrine. The shrine was a major institution. Originally a branch of the Hachiman shrine at Usa, it had been moved to Hakata bay in 923 to protect against raiders from Korea. A temperate

Dazaifu would have been conciliatory toward such an eminent religious institution. Instead, there was usually acrimony.

In 1140 Hakozaki priests attacked Dazaifu inspectors and drove them away. Dazaifu's answer was to take direct control of the shrine, but relations only grew worse.

In 1151 Dazaifu sent more than five hundred mounted warriors roaring into Hakozaki. They were led by the chief of the Harada and most of the men were his: Dazaifu's army was Harada's army. They looted the shrine's storehouse, destroyed its buildings and altars, seized the property of the Chinese, and left the community devastated.

When Kiyomori heard about this he was exasperated. The Chinese restored their community, and Dazaifu rebuilt the shrine, but it took time.

The year after the raid, 1152, the clashes between Kyushu rivals was aggravated by the arrival of a thirteen-year-old scion of the Minamoto. He was Minamoto Tametomo and he was no child. (They matured early then; pirate Sumitomo's fourteen-year-old son died fighting like a man alongside his father in their last stand.)

Tametomo was tall, brawny, and wild. At thirteen he drew a bow longer and stronger than most men's and at close range he wielded a devastating long sword. Most of his father's eight sons were reckless daredevils but Tametomo was such a terror that he had to be got rid of. His father consigned him to Bungo province in far-off Kyushu, where a liegeman was nominated as guardian. Tametomo quickly reversed the relationship.

There was a streak of wildness in his family. His grandfather was that Minamoto whose stormy career was ended in Izumo province by Taira Masamori a few decades earlier. There were still some of grandfather's loyal retainers around Kyushu; they rallied to the fiery grandson.

Bungo province, facing the Inland Sea, lay southeast of Dazaifu and Harada territory. Tametomo gave himself the title of constable, magnetized a warrior band of his own, and attacked Harada. He also galloped southwest against another powerful warlord named Kikuchi. He set off a bloody free-for-all. After a couple of years of this, the court ordered Dazaifu to capture him and bring him to the capital, which was what Dazaifu had been vainly trying to do. Tametomo continued to erupt, fighting all comers.

Finally, the court pressed his father to order him home. Tametomo ignored him until he learned that because of his disobedience his father was being demoted and humiliated; to clear his father, he had to return and give himself up. Many of his followers begged to go with him, but he knew that a large force would be alarming so he chose twenty-eight warriors, just enough to satisfy form.

He reached the capital in time to join his father in a brief, bloody melee set off by animosity between two retired emperors, the senior retired emperor Toba and the junior retired emperor Sutoku. Sutoku was presumably Toba's son, but Toba didn't think so.

Sutoku's mother, Shoshi, was his grandfather Shirakawa's adopted daughter, and he made her Toba's consort. Shoshi was a charmer, but there were those who considered her a strange choice for empress: it was rumored that she had had affairs before Shirakawa adopted her, and he was thought to be overly fond of her. After her marriage to Toba she gave birth to a son but Toba believed that the father was not he but his grandfather. That son was the future emperor Sutoku. Toba always disliked him, and forty-three years later, when the long-lived Shirakawa died and Toba became the senior retired emperor, he forced Sutoku to retire and, instead of Sutoku's son, put on the throne another of his own sons by his favorite consort; a three-year-old emperor called Konoe. Sutoku was doubly resentful.

Not only were the two retired emperors on very bad terms, the Fujiwara were split by discord that had the same origin. The Fujiwara regent Tadazane had objected to Shoshi's becoming empress; it was he who wrote in his diary that it was "the strangest event in Japanese history" (one of her affairs had been with his eldest son). Tadazane's rift with Shirakawa forced him into retirement. His eldest son succeeded him as prime minister and head of the family. When Shirakawa's death finally permitted Toba to take over, he called Tadazane out of retirement. This brought about another strange event: a father coming out of retirement to wrest back authority from his son. Neither father nor son behaved gracefully. The rupture within the Fujiwara was as rancorous as that in the imperial family.

In 1155 Toba's son, the Emperor Konoe, always sickly, died without producing an heir. As his life waned there was intense scheming over who would succeed him. Among the plotters close to Toba were his favorite consort, whose relationship made her powerful, and a courtier from a lesser Fujiwara family (not the one that produced regents and chancellors) who had changed clothing to become a wily and unscrupulous priest called Shingei.

The logical choice to succeed Konoe was Sutoku's son, but not surprisingly Shinzei and the lady put forth another candidate, one of Toba's grandsons. 'Men it

was pointed out that this boy's father, Toba's fourth son, was living and there was no precedent for passing over a father to put his son on the throne.

The father had never been seriously considered for emperor. Toba considered him unqualified because he was addicted to poetry and other cultural frivolities, and had shown little interest in anything else. Perhaps, also, Toba saw flaws in his character. But Toba was persuaded that the price for making the grandson emperor was to enthrone the son first. He became the emperor Go-Shirakawa (the prefix Go meaning that he was Shirakawa the Second); Toba probably expected that he would soon retire to the life of a dilettante.

Shinzei profited, of course; having played a significant role in putting Go-Shirakawa on the throne, he quickly became one of the new emperor's favorites. He was delighted to be in the powerful inner circle, and it didn't bother him that he thought Go-Shirakawa was (in historian George Sansom's translation) "a dark [that is to say, unenlightened] ruler, without parallel in the history of China and Japan." This was also the opinion of another contemporary, who said he "did not know black from white."

Fujiwara Tadazane's eldest son profited also; now he was back in power. while Tadazane and his favorite second son were out.

As for Sutoku, any hopes that his descendants would come to the throne was dashed. He and Tadazane's second son were allied in their discontent.

Both were faced with total frustration unless they struck back. In the next year, 1156, Toba died; they saw their best chance during the ensuing days of transition. They rebelled, proclaiming that Sutoku was again emperor.

There had been rumors that this would happen, and on his deathbed Toba had called in Minamoto Yoshitomo and commanded him to guard the palace and the highways leading to the capital. Kiyomari brought his Taira warriors to join Yoshitomo's force at the imperial palace. Yoshitomo and Kiyomari were given joint command.

Most of the Minamoto were with Yoshitomo, but his fattier, Tameyoshi, and five of his sons, including Tametomo, sided with Sutoku. Most of the Taira were with Kiyomori, but his uncle, Tadamasa, and his four sons were with Sutoku. And so the two military families, like the imperial family and the Fujiwari, were divided against each other. It is this bizarre exhibition of unfilial conduct that makes this struggle repugnant to the Japanese: "There was a child who cut off his father's head, there was a nephew who cut off his uncle's head, there was a

younger brother who exiled his older brother, there was a woman who drowned herself in grief. These things are unnatural events in the annals of Japan.”

This quotation is from a stirring narrative of the uprising, one of a special genre that the Japanese call “war tales.” Historian Paul Varley calls the war tales “literary history, mixtures of truth and fancy.” They are based on actual events but it is sometimes a problem to separate the truth from the fancy.

In this tale, Tametomo is the hero, a warrior of superb skill, strength and valor. Minamoto Yoshitomo is pictured as a spirited leader, but Kiyomari is so timid that his son Shigemori takes command of the Taira warriors.

Briefly then: The opposing forces gathered, Go-Shirakawa’s at the imperial palace, Sutoku’s at a detached palace. Sutoku’s leaders vetoed Tametomo’s advice that they make a night attack, and instead, as Tametomo had predicted, suffered a night attack. On a midsummer’s night in 1156 flaming arrows set fire to the buildings behind them, and the fighting was soon over.

Tametomo had volunteered to defend a strategic gate with only his twenty-eight men from Kyushu. One of his arrows ripped through the armor of two men; another felled both a man and his horse. When his brother Yoshitomo dashed up at the head of his men, Tametomo spared him but shot the ornament off the top of his helmet as a demonstration. Finally, an unremitting mass attack overwhelmed Tametomo and his men. Of the twenty-eight Kyushu warriors, twenty-three died and the rest were wounded.

The fighting had lasted only four hours and involved only a few hundred men, but the consequences were great. For one thing, warriors had been called in to settle a dispute at the court, and no longer would they be content to serve merely as “hired swords.” They would move to center stage and finally take over rule of Japan.

Minamoto Yoshitomo had contributed most to the emperor’s victory, but Taira Kiyomori and priest Shinzei were close to Go-Shirakawa and they were the true victors. They were richly rewarded while Yoshitomo was slighted, and they took harrowing vengeance on the lowers. They sent a few into exile, but for most it was torture and execution such as the capital had not seen in centuries.

They exiled former emperor Sutoku to the province of Sanuki. At a place not far from the provincial capital where Sugawara Michizane had presided as governor, he became a tourist attraction, anguishing under heavy guard until they did away with him.

Kiyomori had no problem in doing away with his uncle Tadamasa. Thinking, “If I kill Tadamasa, it will surely force Yoshitomo to kill his father,” he publicly beheaded Tadamasa and his four sons in the riverbed.

Yoshitomo, handed an imperial order to behead his father, petitioned the emperor for clemency in every way he could, but he only angered Go-Shirakawa, who said that if he delayed any more, Kiyomori would be told to do it. Yoshitomo still could not bring himself to patricide, so one of his captains acquiesced, saying it would be a great disgrace for a Minamoto to be executed by a Taira, but when the time came he was blinded by tears and another man had to do it.

Soon Yoshitomo received another imperial command: “You will search for and kill all your younger brothers, especially him who is called something like Tametomo.” Knowing that he had no recourse, Yoshitomo sent out a party to find them. Tametomo escaped but the others were beheaded. He was then told: “You still have many younger brothers. However young they may be, search out all of them, except for girl children, and do away with them.” There were four by his father’s latest wife, aged seven, nine, eleven, and thirteen. A retainer went to get them at their home. Their mother was away, praying at a shrine, and the four boys came eagerly, thinking they were going to see their father. Near a mountain peak they were told the truth, and they bravely met their end; the eldest, like a warrior, cut his belly and died. When their mother learned what had happened, she threw herself in a river and drowned.

And so Yoshitomo was rewarded for leading the emperor’s forces to victory by the virtual extinction of his family.

It took them two months to find Tametomo. He had become a monk, living by begging for his food. He was brought to the capital and paraded before the emperor, nobles, and sightseers in the market place. Some of the fury had passed by then, and there was admiration for his bravery and prowess, so, after taking the precaution of dislocating the shoulder of his bow-drawing arm, they sent him into exile on an island off the Izu peninsula far to the northeast. He was not yet vanquished, however. He took control of the area, and almost fifteen years later they had to send an army to finish him off.

Kiyomori had done little fighting but his rewards were great. He was promoted to Third Rank; Yoshitomo only to Fourth. He was made governor of the rich province of Harima, strategically located on the Inland Sea; Yoshitomo got no province, only a position in the imperial guards slightly better than the one he had held previously.

Kiyomori asked for and received one other position: Senior Assistant Governor General of Dazaifu. His Third Rank overqualified him for the post, but he knew what he was doing. Foreign trade, the China trade, was never far from his thoughts. He wanted no impediments to that trade. Hakata had to be orderly and businesslike, and that meant that Kyushu had to be controlled.

He did not go to Dazaifu himself. He sent a trusted liegeman as his deputy and he put kinsmen in key provinces as governors. He was confident, and rightly so, that his renown as a warrior would be enough to restrain the rambunctious lords of Kyushu.

Go-Shirakawa retired after reigning only two years, and his sixteen-year-old son became the emperor Nijo. This was as Toba had hoped, but instead of retiring to the life of pleasure that Toba had counted on, Go-Shirakawa was assertive in retirement; he overshadowed events for decades.

His most trusted adviser was Kiyomori's ally, Priest Shinei. Since Shinei came from a lesser family of the Fujiwara, his influence and arrogance made him detested by most of the court.

One man who came to hate him was Fujiwara Nobuyori. He was of the major Fujiwara family and was headed for high position until Shinei blocked his rise.

And there was Minamoto Yoshitomo, who had been so badly treated. Despite his grievances, Yoshitomo had reached for conciliation with Shinei by offering his daughter in marriage to Shinei's son. The proposal was haughtily rebuffed as coming from a coarse warrior. When a short time later Shinei married his son to one of Kiyomori's daughters, Yoshitomo was doubly humiliated and infuriated.

Allied in bitterness, Yoshitomo and Nobuyori struck, choosing a time when Kiyomori was off on a New Year Pilgrimage. They easily seized the imperial palace, taking custody of both the emperor and ex-emperor. Shinei had been warned and managed to escape but they tracked him down and killed him. Eliminating him had been their first objective.

With both of the imperial personages in their hands, they possessed the power to rule. They appointed their own men to all key positions. Nobuyori made himself chancellor and Yoshitomo became governor of Hurima, taking that prized province away from Kiyomori.

When Kiyomori got word of the uprising, his first inclination was to retreat to Kyushu to rally an army there. But his son Shigemori, always more of a warrior than his father, insisted that they must return to the capital and fight or be branded as rebels. They returned and took up positions at Kiyomori's mansion.

There they received a cry for help from Kiyomori's deputy at Dazaifu. Dazaifu had been attacked by a certain Hyuga Michitoshi, and Dazaifu's—that is, Harada's—warriors were unable to put him down. Little is known about Michitoshi: was he just out to grab some territory, or was he mounting a diversion to help the Minamoto? To deal with him, Kiyomori sent one of his ablest captains, Taira Iesada, the same man who, more than twenty-five years earlier, had stood guard outside the hall where Tadamori had danced his debut at the court before a hostile audience.

In the capital, as the opponents squared off, Yoshitomo had the stronger force. He wanted to attack but Nobuyori persuaded him to wait for reinforcements. Reinforcements came instead to Kiyomori and, because power went to Nobuyori's head, his supporters began to defect. Some of them disguised the emperor as a court lady, not difficult since he was still young and beautiful, and smuggled him out of the palace into Kiyomori's mansion. Others helped Go-Shirakawa escape to an imperial temple. With them gone, Yoshitomo and Nobuyori lost legitimacy: they were rebels.

In the earlier conflict Minamoto and Taira had fought on both sides, kinsmen against kinsmen. Now it was Minamoto against Taira, the two great warrior clans battling each other for supremacy.

With Shigemori in command, the Taira attacked. Kiyomori stayed behind, ostensibly to guard the emperor.

The war tale that chronicles this clash does not treat Nobuyori kindly. Frightened by the first battle cry he “grew pale and green as grass.” He tried to mount his horse “but, fat and bloated as he was . . . he had difficulty mounting.” Footmen restrained his spirited steed and two of his retainers pushed him up. “Perhaps because they shoved too much, he went over on the left side and fell flat on his face with a thud. They quickly raised him up and looked. He was a frightful sight, his face covered with sand and blood streaming from his nose. . . . He did not look as if he would be good for much.”

Led by Yoshitomo, the Minamoto twice repulsed the Taira, but when Shigemori ordered the Taira to feign a headlong retreat, they pursued, and other

Taira warriors slipped behind them and occupied the palace. The Minamoto had no choice but to attack the Taira mansion and, outnumbered, they failed.

Nobuyori, who had run away in the confusion of battle, was soon captured and beheaded.

Yoshitomo told his men to scatter and save themselves to fight another day. Then he and three sons who had fought at his side set out to push their way through the snowy mountains to the northeast where he could raise more troops.

One son, fifteen years old, wounded and unable to keep up, begged his father to kill him so he would not hinder the others and would not fall into the hands of the Taira. Yoshitomo finally had to comply, and not much later was himself killed by a treacherous retainer. Learning of his, one son returned to Kyoto to retaliate by killing a Taira leader; he too was betrayed, and Kiyomori had him beheaded at the public execution ground like a common criminal.

The third son, Yoritomo, a fourteen-year-old who had fought like a veteran, was captured and brought to the capital, where Kiyomori ordered his captor to hold him for public execution. But Yoritomo so impressed his keeper that he hurried to the one person who might save him, the only mother Kiyomori had known, the tonsured widow of his presumed father, Tadamori. She had never ceased to grieve over the early death of a son of her own who had shown great promise, and when she was told that Yoritomo was the very image of that beloved son, she begged Kiyomori to spare this heir to Minamoto leadership. Reluctantly he acceded. Against his instincts and the advice of those around him, Kiyomori changed Yoritomo's sentence to exile in the custody of another Taira family on the distant Izu peninsula, not far from the island where his uncle Tametomo was stirring things up.

There remained Yoshitomo's three youngest sons. Their mother was his mistress Tokiwa, known as one of the most beautiful women in the capital. We are told about her flight to safety through a snowstorm, her youngest held at her breast inside her kimono, another strapped on her back, the eldest holding tight to her hand.

To force her to return with her children, Kiyomori seized and threatened to kill her mother. When Tokiwa appeared before him he was captivated, but she yielded to him only on condition that he would spare her children. The womanizer in Kiyomori overrode prudence; the three boys were consigned to temples to be raised as Buddhist monks.

The affair with Tokiwa was a disappointment: the lady's coldness did not make for pleasure. She went on to marry a Fujiwara, and for Kiyomori there was always another woman.

In due course Taira lesada marched back from Kyushu with the head of Hyuga Michitoshi. Go-Shirakawa made a little excursion to view it, and as a reward for lesada's work, Kiyomori was raised to Third Rank and the court's inner circle.

With the Minamoto disposed of, and both the emperor Nijo and ex-emperor Go-Shirakawa deep in his debt, Kiyomori was triumphant. He turned his attention to something never far from his thought, the China trade.

So that large Chinese ships could navigate the Inland Sea, he had ordered dredging to widen and deepen the channel through the crowded islands near Itukushima and the shrine he revered. (Chinese ships were not then permitted to enter the Inland Sea, but this was a detail to be dealt with later.)

Far up the coast, at a place called Fukuhara which today is part of the city of Kobe, he had undertaken construction daunting in scale and difficulty. He was building a new port: Chinese ships would come to him. Behind the port, on the slope between sea and mountains, mansions were rising for him, his kinsmen, and his close retainers. Securely within Taira territory, less than fifty miles from Kyoto but apart from its ferment and bother, Fukuhara would be his base, his headquarters, his own capital.

Back in Kyoto, he placed Taira relatives in high positions all through the government, and made them governors of major provinces, garnering income and strengthening the Taira grip on the Inland Sea and Kyushu.

He dealt adroitly with the Fujiwara, neutralizing them with the same matrimonial tactics that had been their stock in trade. They still disdained warriors but they were realists and rarely balked. Kiyomori had eleven sons and eight daughters (not all by the same wife), as well as four brothers and a stew of other relatives, including a collateral family who provided more useful kin, among them his principal wife. His daughters were a great asset: he married them to young men who would soon be important.

His position was enhanced when he was able to put his wife's young sister Shigeke in the retired emperor's household. She soon caught Go-Shirakawa's eye and in the autumn of 1161 a son was born. Since Go-Shirakawa's older son, the young emperor Nijo, had not yet produced a male heir, it was possible that this

child of Taira blood might someday be emperor- a prospect that pleased Kiyomori, the Taira, and Go-Shirakawa but not Nijo, who desperately wanted a son of his own to succeed him. Nijo was already on very bad terms with his father, and this new child soured their relationship further.

Nijo endured three anxious years before one of the palace women gave birth to a son, and then his joy was cut short by illness that he realized was fatal. Hastily he abdicated in order to make sure that his son succeeded him. Early in 1165, at the age of seven months (“extraordinarily young even by Japanese standards,” writes historian G. Cameron Hurst III) the infant became the emperor Rokujo.

That did not deter Go-Shirakawa and Kiyomori. Six months later, with great ceremony, Shigeo's son was installed as crown prince and the young prince's Taira relations, especially Shigeo and Kiyomori, were appropriately honored with high rank.

Kiyomori was no longer Senior Assistant Governor General of Dazaifu. A few months after crushing the Minamoto he had handed that post to one of his Fujiwara sons-in-law, the son of Priest Shinzei. That young man had followed recent precedent by staying home and collecting his salary in the capital.

In 1166 Kiyomori had his half brother Yorimori (different mother) appointed to the position. Yorimori surprised both his fellow courtiers and the Kyushu men entrenched at Dazaifu by making the journey in the late autumn of 1166. Six months later, traveling home through spring's fresh landscapes, he could take satisfaction in what he had accomplished.

All through northern Kyushu he had strengthened the bonds with the local leaders. He had formally and ceremonially found the dominant Okura as liegemen, making them proud and grateful. The powers just south of Dazaifu, Ogata in the east and Kikuchi in the west, were, he knew, less reliable, but they had professed unswerving fealty. Farther south he had not much concerned himself-it was the north where trade was centered-but there were Taira estates all through that area, and in southernmost Satsuma province the redoubtable Taira Iesada was governor and the tough Ata clan were of Taira descent.

Yorimori had taken firm control of the port of Hakata and every shrine and temple along the coast, putting a stop to the disputes that had so disrupted trade. He had cemented relations with the other big shrines and temples, all of them busy traders. Michizane's memorial temple Anrakuji was already in the Taira fold: its manager, designated by the Sugawara family in the capital, was a sycophant named Anno, who, to curry favor, had built a mansion for himself at Fukuhara near

Kiyomori's. It had not been so easy to deal with the powerful Hachiman shrine at Usa. There was old animosity between Usa and Dazaifu, and more than once the shrine had appealed to the court, charging Dazaifu with illegal taxation and extortion. Yorimori smoothed things over and had the chief priest appointed to a position at Dazaifu as high as any Kyushu man had ever attained.

In short, Yorimori did more than anyone else to tighten the Taira grip on Dazaifu, Hakata, and northern Kyushu.

Yorimori was still on his way home when Kiyomori capped a series of rapid promotions by leapfrogging the two highest positions in the regular government—Minister of the Right and Minister of the Left—to become chancellor of the realm with Junior First Rank. No military man had ever before achieved that office or that rank, the highest that any subject could reach in his lifetime. He took advantage of his exalted position to lift the ban on Chinese ships entering the Inland Sea; now his channel-dredging and port-building would pay off.

Having demonstrated that no place in the government could be denied him, he resigned after a few months. He was not well and he worried about the next life: he took the tonsure, entered the Buddhist priesthood, and retired to Fukuhara. For his brief service as chancellor he received large tax-free estates in three provinces.

Priestly robes did not inhibit his politicking. By now it was obvious that he and Go-Shirakawa intended that Nijo's son Rokujo have a very brief reign. Early in 1167 the three-year-old Rokujo "abdicated" and Go-Shirakawa's eight-year-old Taira son became the emperor Takakura. The court was used to intrigue but this raw maneuver caused nervous misgiving.

In the spring of the next year, Go-Shirakawa made one of his many pilgrimages to Kukai's great monastery on Mount Koya, a journey of three or four days from the capital. He took with him the prime minister and most of the high officials, each with his attendant courtiers, grooms, and drudges. There were, presumably, no ladies, since women were not permitted on the sacred mountain (they could be parked at its base, where the steep climb begins).

It was cherry blossom time, and the long procession of sedan chairs, horses, and footmen was a pretty sight as it wound through the fields and foothills.

On his way home, the ex-emperor chose to drop in on Kujomori at Fukuhara, perhaps with some gaiety in mind after the asceticism of the monastery. Fukuhara was noted for partying, and the two happy conspirators had much to be merry about.

Go-Shirakawa was back at Fukuhara the next year. A Chinese ship was in port, and Kiyomori introduced the merchant-captain to the ex-emperor. When they heard of this in the capital, courtiers were appalled that an imperial personage had come face to face with a merchant, and, worse, a foreigner, but Go-Shirakawa probably enjoyed slumming and without doubt he was showered with gifts.

He made other such friendly visits and even joined Kiyomori on a trip to Itsukushima and the Taira shrine.

In 1171 Go-Shirakawa and Kiyomori drew even closer: the ex-emperor adopted Kiyomori's daughter Tokuko, then sixteen years old, and made her the consort of the ten-year-old emperor Takakura. If, when these teen-agers got around to it, they were to produce a son, Kiyomori would be grandfather of the next emperor. This was the relationship that enabled the Fujiwara to dominate the government for almost two centuries, yet Go-Shirakawa still believed that he was manipulating Kiyomori. Dark and devious though Go-Shirakawa was, at this point one must question his perspicacity. Realization that Kiyomori was using him came slowly and, as it did, the relationship soured.

The aristocrats of the court had never accepted Kiyomori or his tribe, deploring that they had gained preeminence "simply for killing people." Taira arrogance grew more offensive. For instance, there was the occasion when Kiyomori's young grandson, on his way home from a music lesson, met the carriage of the Fujiwara regent. The youngster not only refused to give way but let his followers smash the regent's carriage and humiliate him. The boy's father, Shigemori, instead of disciplining his son, ordered that the regent be attacked again: when he was on his way to the court, his attendants were dragged from their horses and his procession scattered.

Such behavior bred plots against the Taira. Most were inept and came to nothing. Kiyomori's fiendishly efficient intelligence system uncovered others and terminated them with murder. The most serious came to light in 1177. Close associates of Go-Shirakawa had been conspiring at a villa in the hills outside Kyoto, certainly with the ex-emperor's encouragement. Vengeance was swift and brutal. One of the group, a priest, was tortured and executed, the others were exiled. Kiyomori took no overt action against Go-Shirakawa, but he had been warned.

Toward the end of the next year, 1178, a son was born to the young couple in the imperial palace. A month later Kiyomori had the infant made crown prince. Go-Shirakawa had been outwitted and overpowered.

In the summer of the next year, Kiyomori's first son and heir, Shigemori, fell seriously ill. One story says that, sickened by the violence all about him, he prayed for death.

A famous Chinese physician was in Hakata at the time, and Kiyomori begged his son to let that man treat him. Shigemori refused, saying that, if his death was ordained, no doctor could help him, and if the Chinese did cure him it would cast shame on Japanese physicians. The Chinese doctor remained in Hakata and in the early autumn Shigemori died. The Taira had lost their ablest commander.

Shigemori has been praised as a more stable and temperate man than Kiyomori, and a restraining influence. But it is doubtful that he could have reined in his father at this point. Kiyomori knew that he was getting old and he was driven to perpetuate Taira supremacy by any means.

Toward the end of the year he forced a mass dismissal of officials he believed loyal to Go-Shirakawa; some were exiled, two were executed, one committed suicide. The ex-emperor was taken to a palace where he was kept in seclusion under tight guard.

Early in 1180 emperor Takakura was forced to abdicate and Kiyomori's grandson, a little more than one year old, became the emperor Antoku. The child emperor was heavily guarded by Taira warriors; warriors were everywhere in the uneasy capital. Kiyomori's arrival from Fukuhara with more soldiers increased the tension.

In the sweltering rainy season another conspiracy was uncovered. Distant exile was ordered for an imperial prince, one of Go-Shirakawa's sons. His co-conspirator, the instigator of the plot, was an elderly Minamoto courtier whom the Taira had tolerated, but also ridiculed, as a harmless token Minamoto. The two men tried to escape but were caught and killed.

Kiyomori had had enough of the capital. He ordered the court to move to his refuge at Fukuhara. He led the procession: the infant emperor Antoku, his father the ex-emperor Takakura, Takakura's father the ex-emperor Go-Shirakawa, and the high officials of the government. Go-Shirakawa was escorted by Kyushu warriors led by Harada; Kiyomori was calling for support from that far away.

The court moved unwillingly. They were prepared to hate Fukuhara, and they did. There weren't enough mansions ready for them. (The prime minister fared well enough: he occupied the mansion that Anrakuji's manager, Anno, had built for himself.) They were pained at being in the provinces, distressed at being

cramped between sea and mountains, depressed by the it mournful” sound of the waves. They were loud in their complaints.

Far worse for Kiyomori was word that the imperial prince, before he was hunted down and killed, had managed to issue a princely edict calling on the Minamoto to rise up and smite the Taira. And that Minamoto Yoritomo, whose life he had reluctantly spared twenty years earlier, was gathering troops to answer the call.

It was decided to dispatch an army against Yoritomo at once, before he could rally support. Bereft of his ablest general, Shigemori, Kiyomori turned to Shigemori’s twenty-three- year-old son, hoping that he had inherited his father’s ability. The son was a polished courtier; he had been praised for his dancing at Go-Shirakawa’s fiftieth birthday party. Under his command, thirty thousand men marched out from Fukuhara. They continued through Kyoto without pause, and the chronicles say that by the time they approached the Minamoto reinforcements had swelled their numbers to seventy thousand. (The chronicles often exaggerated troop strengths, but certainly the Taira had a mighty army.)

Yoritomo, had been having problems. In the twenty years since Minamoto and Taira fought each other old hatreds had faded and new alliances had been formed. Neither family members nor traditional vassals rushed to join him, and many were openly hostile.

Nor was Yoritomo himself initially enthusiastic about going to war. He was comfortably situated in the territory of the Taira leader to whom he had been consigned when he was exiled in 1160. He had married that man’s daughter; they had eloped the night before she was to marry another man, but his father-in-law had warmly approved the marriage and even offered to become Yoritomo’s vassal.

But when the call to arms became public, Yoritomo had to act because he had become a target. The foes he faced were not Kiyomori’s force but Taira partisans all around him. In his first engagement he pitted three hundred men against an enemy’s three thousand; he was soundly defeated and barely escaped with his life. But he managed to reach the territory of a loyal Minamoto vassal and gradually other leaders joined him. Many of them were Taira. What was important to a man was to protect his territory; allegiance to the dominant power in the region could do that, loyalty to some distant relative could not. Three months after the opening of hostilities Yoritomo led a force (the chronicles say) of 200,000 men.

The Uji River flows from the slopes of the great mountain. On the twentieth day of the Tenth Month of 1180, Taira and Minamoto faced each other across the

river, poised for the first battle of the war. During the night, a Minamoto scout, moving through the marsh at river's edge, startled the flocks of wild birds nesting there. They took to flight, honking and flapping their broad wings. The Taira thought the Minamoto were staging a night attack; they fled in panic. In the morning the Minamoto found only some abandoned armor.

Yoritomo considered pursuit but his chief vassals advised him to return to his headquarters at Kamakura. There he set about to unify the eastern region and consolidate his power.

For their part, the Taira had had enough of campaigns in the east; they confined themselves to the capital area. They had earlier burned the great temple called Miidera on Lake Biwa because it had sheltered the prince who had issued the call to arms. Now Kiyomori took revenge against the Nara temples that had offered sanctuary to the fugitives, though they were killed on the way and never got there. The Todaiji and the Kofukuji were attacked and burned. The Kofukuji was the hereditary temple of the Fujiwara, splendid in buildings and art. The Todaiji, founded by the emperor Shomu, housed the Great Buddha. Its face dissolved in the flames, the head toppled to the ground and the body melted into a formless mass. Hundreds of monks, men, women, and children had crowded into both temples for protection against Taira warriors. They all perished. The year 1180 closed on this senseless vengeance. The Taira had earned a multitude of new enemies.

About two weeks later, the ex-emperor Takakura died. Son of Go-Shirakawa, father of the child emperor Antoku, he had fallen ill a year earlier, shortly after he was forced to abdicate, and his condition had deteriorated during the difficult months of Fukuhara. Kiyomori had provided a Chinese ship to take him to Itsukushima. There Kiyomori's mistress cared for him while the whole establishment concentrated on powerful prayer, but prayer had not helped. He was only twenty.

A report came in from Dazaifu: Kikuchi had rebelled. Harada was able to put him down, but only after hard fighting all across Kyushu; luckily for the Taira, Kikuchi's neighbor to the east, Ogata, had not joined him. Other couriers brought word of more uprisings in the provinces.

In the month following Takakura's death, Kiyomori fell ill. Gossip said that he was stricken with a raging fever as punishment for destroying the temples, that his body was so hot his bath water boiled. He died less than two months after Takakura. Leadership fell to his third son, Munemori, who reported that the only memorial his father wanted was Yoritomo's head laid on his grave.

There was little fighting during the rest of 1181. Munemori led a small force in a minor victory over Yoritomo's uncle Jukiie when he ventured near the capital, but the Taira did not pursue their advantage.

In the autumn, Yoritomo proposed an end to the fighting if the court would recognize the Minamoto as protectors of the east and the Taira as protectors of the west. Go-Shirakawa would have accepted the proposal but Munemori rejected it; he said his father on his deathbed had demanded that the Minamoto be destroyed.

Things were quiet through most of 1182 as well. Yoritomo was occupied with solidifying his position and creating a system of government for his territory and his vassals, some of whom hated each other and had to be reconciled under his banner.

And he developed Kamakura into a capital; not a fortress-he never contemplated building a castle or fortifications, but a city of handsome residences and offices, centered on its ancient shrine to Hachiman. Yoritomo revered this shrine as Kiyomori had revered Itsukushima.

In Kyoto the Taira were concerned with defense and with keeping order in a city racked by pestilence, fires, and a succession of natural disasters attributed to evil deeds and vengeful spirits. For most of its population, the capital was a miserable place to live, and it was difficult to govern.

The long quiet interlude was ended in mid- 1183 by a man who worried both Yoritomo and the Taira: Yoritomo's cousin Yoshinaka. Although Yoshinaka had been one of the first to declare fealty to Yoritomo, both men knew he was more rival than ally. But Yoshinaka was a Minamoto, and when he loomed as a threat to Kyoto, the Taira were roused to attack. The army they sent against him was utterly defeated. The Taira fled to the west with their child emperor; to their dismay, Go-Shirakawa eluded them. As their red flags drained out of the capital, the white flags of the Minamoto swept in.

The Taira had not gone far when Kiyomori's half brother, Yorinori-he who had done so much to make Kyushu a Taira bastion-turned and went back. It was his mother who had successfully pleaded with Kiyomori to save Yoritomo's life, and he believed, rightly as it turned out, that Yoritomo would treat him well. He had faithfully served Kiyomori as long as he lived; now he cast his lot with the Minamoto.

The Taira had only seven thousand horsemen, all that were left after

their defeat. They spent one night at Fukuhara. In the morning they burned the mansions that had been Kiyomori's pride and, sadly taking leave of that symbol of Taira might, they boarded boats for Kyushu. In the early autumn of 1183, a month after abandoning Kyoto, they reached Dazaifu.

Harada Tanenao's family made way, and the emperor, his mother, his grandmother, and their attendants took over. They had little reason to complain, but the billets of the others, spread all around Dazaifu town and countryside, were less than luxurious.

Only Harada Tanenao stayed with them. Kikuchi had been obliged to send warriors to bolster the Taira in the capital, and he accompanied them in their flight, but now he retired to his own territory and ignored repeated commands to rejoin them. Nor did other Kyushu lords appear.

The night of their arrival, the Taira leaders gathered to pray at Anrakuji. On their way, they sent up incense and prayers at Dazaifu's Kanzeonji, but they felt uneasy there because Kanzeonji had become a branch of Nara's Todaiji and they had burnt the Todaiji to the ground. They felt no constraint at Anrakuji. Like Michizane, they were courtiers in exile, and they felt close to his spirit. At other temples and shrines maidens danced for the gods, but at Anrakuji poems were offered for the divine pleasure. All night long they composed verses linked in sadness.

*Recalling the past,
the gods well understand
our nostalgia
for the ancient capital
where we had dwelled so long.*

They traveled to Usa to pray at its shrine dedicated, like the Minamoto shrine at Kamakura, to the deity Hachiman. The emperor was lodged in the residence of head priest Kinmichi, those of high rank stayed in the sanctuary; the other halls and courtyards were crowded with warriors and their red banners. Toward dawn on the last night of their seven-day retreat, their leader Minemori received a divine message in a dream: They could expect no help from the god of Usa.

As autumn deepened, so did their gloom. Then came word that Ogata, the powerful lord of Bungo province, was about to attack them. They sent three thousand mounted warriors against him but he easily turned them back, and they fled Dazaifu, the place they thought they would always be safe. After a fruitless

attempt to find another haven on Kyushu, they crossed the Inland Sea to Sanuki and a point of land called Yashima. They put up some buildings on the shore but nothing fit for their emperor, who stayed gently rocking on his boat.

In the capital, Go-Shirakawa had stripped the Taira of their positions and their rank, but he was unable to get Yoshinaka to pursue them; Yoshinaka feared that if he left the capital, Yoritomo would move in behind him. He did send small forces on a couple of forays; they were routed by bands of Taira. Encouraged by these small successes, the Taira crossed to Honshu and a familiar site not far from Fukuohara. There they encamped on a narrow stretch of beach called Ichinotani. At either end it could be defended by a few men, and it was backed by a cliff hundreds of feet high and so steep it looked impregnable. At Ichinotani they were within striking distance of the capital and they dreamed of returning to it.

Yoshinaka was floundering. He sent agents to the Taira proposing that they unite with him against Yoritomo; Munemori flatly refused. Yoshinaka then extracted from Go-Shirakawa a mandate to attack Yoritomo.

Yoritomo was aware of all this. He had been secretly in touch with Go-Shirakawa; now he was ready to move. Two of his younger half brothers, Tokiwa's sons Noriyori and Yoshitsune, had joined him early in the struggle. He gave each of them an army, a total of sixty thousand men, and in the first month of 1184 sent them into action. They advanced swiftly and when Yoshitsune made a daring crossing of the Uji River not far from Kyoto, Yoshinaka was taken by surprise. His army was caught between the two forces; it was defeated and he was killed. Yoritomo was undisputed head of the Minamoto. Go-Shirakawa promptly empowered him to subdue the Taira.

A week after entering the capital, the Minamoto armies were on the move again. Ten days later they were at Ichinotani, fighting fiercely in the narrow confines at both ends of the beach but making no headway. Yoshitsune took just seventy men and circled around to the height above the beach. Startled, some deer plunged down the precipice. Where deer can go, so can our horses, Yoshitsune shouted, and he led his men slipping and sliding through brambles and scrub more than eight hundred feet down that almost vertical cliff. Shouting battle cries they burst into the middle of the Taira camp. They torched some buildings and the wind carried the flames roaring down the beach. In billows of black smoke, Taira warriors ran to their boats. Overloaded, three big boats sank. On others, those aboard swung swords to slash off the arms of men trying to scramble in. Corpses littered the beach and bobbed in the waves. The sea turned red. A thousand Taira died, but most of the Taira army and most of its leaders escaped back to Yashima. The Minamoto could not follow them: they had no boats.

Again the fighting stopped. All of the west was Taira territory; it had to be softened up before it was invaded. Yoritomo sent an agent into Sanuki to win over the local lords behind the backs of the Taira. He sent men into other provinces of Shikoku and into Kyushu. Enlisting local leaders was vital: they could provide not only men but boats and seamen to carry Minamoto warriors who had no knowledge of the sea.

Six months after Ichinotani, Yoritomo dispatched an army from Kamakura with Noriyori in command. Yoshitsune was not considered available: he was Yoritomo's deputy in the capital, it was necessary to have a blood relative of high standing there to show respect for the court and Go-Shirakawa.

Noriyori's mission was to march down Honshu, enlisting allies wherever he could, and then cross into Kyushu to win over or defeat its pro-Taira lords. He reached the western end of Honshu in about two months, and there he stalled. He had not won the support of leaders who could supply boats. His army sat there for three months. The men grumbled, some deserted. Yoritomo had to send thirty-two boats of provisions, and he grew impatient. The Taira was still lodged at Yashima and Noriyori was deadlocked.

Yet Yoritomo was reluctant to give Yoshitsune an army. Relations were strained between the two brothers. Yoritomo had laid down a strict order that no Minamoto was to receive any reward unless he recommended it. This was affirming a basic tenet of vassalage: a man can serve only one master, he cannot be obligated to another.

Yet Go-Shirakawa had conferred and Yoshitsune had accepted court appointments. It caused a furor in Kamakura. Go-Shirakawa, as always a devious manipulator, was aiming to drive a wedge between the brothers. Yoshitsune believed that Yoritomo had not properly rewarded him for his successes, and he accepted Go-Shirakawa's appointments as an act of defiance. It was one stubborn man jousting with another just as stubborn.

But finally, to get the campaign moving, Yoritomo overcame his misgivings. On the first day of the new year, 1185, Yoshitsune was commissioned to lead a new Minamoto force. He moved quickly. He assembled boats, and in the middle of the Second Month, in a storm that immobilized the rest of his army and its leaders, he left with a hundred and fifty men and their horses in five boats.

The storm carried them many miles past Yashima. They rode through the mountains to appear behind Yashima. Yoshitsune maneuvered to make it appear

that he had a large force, and the Taira took to their boats. Two days later the rest of the Minamoto appeared and the Taira fled toward Kyushu.

Over the next month, Shikoku leaders came to Yoshitsune with men and boats. When he sailed against the Taira he had more than eight hundred boats manned by sailors who knew how to fight at sea.

When they learned what had happened at Yashima, other lords brought boats to Noriyori. He landed his army in Bungo, where Ogata welcomed him, and then wheeled his force north to block the Taira from landing on Kyushu. Only Harada faced him, but could not stop him.

The Taira, with their naval strength, were in their element. They chose to fight in the narrow straits between Kyushu and Honshu, where the tide rushes through with great force. They attacked in the early morning; with the tide carrying them, they bore down on the Minamoto. Their attack failed, and in midmorning the tide reversed, carrying them back, helpless to ward off the Minamoto warriors who boarded their boats. A few escaped, some were captured, but their young emperor and most of the Taira drowned.

The greatest of the war tales tells their story. It begins with these lines:

The sound of the bell of Gion Temple echoes the impermanence of all things. The hue of the flowers of the teak tree declares that they who flourish must be brought down. Yea, the proud ones are but for a moment, like an evening dream in springtime. The mighty are destroyed at the last, they are but as the dust before the wind.