

FEATURE:

NATSUME SŌSEKI AND BUDDHISM

An Outline of Natsume Sōseki's *Meian*  
(Light and Darkness)

*L*IGHT and *Darkness* was Sōseki's last and unfinished novel and was serialized in the *Asahi Shinbun*, a prominent Japanese newspaper, from May 26 until December 9, 1916, at which time the author suddenly passed away.

The protagonist appears to be Tsuda Yoshio, a young businessman, whose characterization is rare among Sōseki's writings. Tsuda married Onobu about six months before the novel begins through a matchmaker, Mrs. Yoshikawa, the wife of Tsuda's boss. It seems that Tsuda takes care of Onobu very well, but there is a secret that he is keeping from her. Before his marriage, he was engaged to a woman called Kiyoko, whom he had also met through the same Mrs. Yoshikawa. However, Kiyoko suddenly broke off the engagement and married another man named Seki. Tsuda is from then on unable to forget her, even though he pretends nothing unusual has happened in the presence of Onobu. However, by chance, he undergoes an operation for hemorrhoids at a hospital, and the novel begins with a doctor diagnosing him before his surgery.

During his stay in the hospital, Tsuda has to deal with two problems, money and women, both of which come to the surface when he is visited by Kobayashi, an old friend of his, and Ohide, Tsuda's sister, whose personality is quite different from that of Onobu's and who, because of this, cannot get along with her. Not only will Tsuda's medical treatment cost him a great deal, but also Kobayashi, in need of money himself, thinks up various ways of obtaining it from him. Kobayashi, for instance, knows that Okamoto,

Onobu's uncle, is rich and is a friend of the Yoshikawas. On the other hand, Ohide, sensing that Tsuda has a secret concerning a woman, presses him to divulge his true love. However, this confession is overheard by Onobu.

At the same time, Mrs. Yoshikawa, noticing some kind of emotional distance between Tsuda and Onobu, recommends his going and seeing Kiyoko, who so happens to be recuperating in a neighboring hot spring town. Therefore, after being discharged from the hospital, Tsuda goes there and meets her. The story is then left in mid-air due to Sōseki's death as I have mentioned above.

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