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Our Warm Greetings to the Japanese Fellowship

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2000 is an important year for the George Eliot Fellowship. Not only is it the year of the Millennium, it is also the Fellowship's 70th. birthday. We were founded in November 1930 by the editor of the local newspaper, Mr A. F. Cross. He had tried for 25 years to get the people in Nuneaton to do something to honour the town's famous daughter but with little success. However, on 22 November 1930 he organised the first George Eliot Birthday Dinner—and the Fellowship had begun! He chose the word 'Fellowship' rather than 'Society' as he felt that this was most suited to admirers of a woman who still had a message for present and future generations.

In seventy years the tiny local organisation that Francis Cross initiated has grown to a membership of over 600 in sixteen countries around the world. Our largest number of members in any one country, apart from the United Kingdom, is in Japan and we were delighted to suddenly have an increase all at once when the Japanese Fellowship began. We have had the great pleasure of meeting some of you in the George Eliot Country.

This special year will be marked by many events. Among our guests will be the Canon's Verger from Westminster Abbey who will speak to us about Poets' Corner where, 20 years ago, we unveiled the memorial stone to George Eliot. In June, on the 20th. anniversary of the unveiling, our President will lay a laurel wreath on the stone. Gabriel Woolf, one of our most respected Vice Presidents, will, with Rosalind Shanks, present a programme of readings about George Eliot's life and works and in May we shall have a one-day conference in Nuneaton with the emphasis on George Eliot's greatest novel, *Middlemarch*. Three concerts will take place—one in London and two in Warwickshire.

On 9 July we shall officially hand over the garden which will surround the statue of George Eliot outside the hospital which bears her name. Our Japanese members generously sent us £2000 towards the cost of the garden and we have made sure that a Japanese acer tree has been included in the garden. We have also decided to donate a bench as an acknowledgement of the generous Japanese donation to our fund and this will have a small plaque on it to tell everyone it is dedicated to all our Japanese members.

The George Eliot Memorial Lecture in October will be given by a distinguished American George Eliot scholar, Dr. Jerome Beaty. Our final event of the year will be the Birthday Luncheon on 19 November when, as well as celebrating George Eliot's birthday, we shall be celebrating the Fellowship's 70th. birthday. What a long, long way we have come in 70 years!

I send our warm greetings to you all in Japan.