

## A DESCRIPTION OF MY HUT.<sup>1</sup>

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The water incessantly changes as the stream glides calmly on; the spray that hangs over a cataract appears for a moment only to vanish away. Such is the fate of mankind on this earth and of the houses in which they dwell. If we gaze at a mighty town we behold a succession of walls, surmounted by tiled roofs which vie with one another in loftiness. These have been from generation to generation the abodes of the rich and of the poor, and

<sup>1</sup> The Japanese title is Hojo-ki. The term *Hojo* literally signifies ten-feet-square and occurs first in a Buddhist work, the *Uima-Hyo*, where Uima is said to have collected a vast audience in a room which was only a *hojo*. The term came to be used for a priest's hut, then, as is so common in Japanese phraseology, for the priest himself. The term is frequently met with in the literature of the Tokugawa times as applying to the old rector or keeper of a Buddhist temple.

yet none resist the destructive influence of time. Some are allowed to fall into decay ; others are replaced by new structures. Their fate is shared by their inmates. If, after the lapse of a long period, we return to a familiar locality, we scarcely recognize one in ten of the faces we were accustomed to meet long ago. In the morning we behold the light, and next evening we depart for our long home. Our destiny resembles the foam on the water. Whence came we and whither are we tending? What things vex us, what things delight us, in this world of unreality? It is impossible, truly, to say. A house and its occupant, changing perpetually, may well be compared to a morning-glory flecked with dew. Sometimes it happens that the dew evaporates and leaves the flower to die in the first glare of day ; sometimes the dew survives the flower, but only for a few hours ; before sunset the dew also has disappeared.

During my two-score years of existence I have been fortunate enough to witness several notable spectacles. On the 28th day of April in the third year of Angen (1177), during a night of wind and storm, a fire broke out at eight o'clock in the evening in the south-eastern part of the capital,<sup>1</sup> and spread rapidly in a north-western direction. One portion of the palace buildings, with the Official College and the Home office, were before morning reduced to ashes. The conflagration was supposed to have had its rise in a temporary structure used as a hospital, and to have spread from this quarter northwards in the form of an open fan. Cloaking the distant houses in smoke, it licked the intervening ground with greedy tongues of flame. The sparks, dispersed aloft, and of dazzling brightness, illumined the sky for miles around. Amidst this ruddy chaos, the flames might be seen, urged on by the wind, leaping over whole blocks at a time, and finding a lodgment in a new quarter. The inhabitants ran hither and thither in a state of dis-

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<sup>1</sup> Kyōto.

traction. Some fell down insensible, choked by the smoke; others perished in the flames. Such as had the good fortune to escape with their lives lost all their property. An incalculable amount of treasure and of wealth was destroyed. Thousands of people and an immense number of cattle fell victims to this merciless conflagration. Surely it is futile for a human being to expect immunity from harm in so dangerous a spot as a city!

My next experience was also remarkable. On the 29th of February in the 4th year of Jisho (1180), a whirlwind arose in Kyogoku,<sup>1</sup> and drove on with terrible fury towards Rokujo.<sup>1</sup> Travelling three or four hundred yards in every gust, it wrecked all the houses that lay in its path. Some were thrown flat on the ground; others were unroofed and left standing with only the bare posts remaining. The roofs of gates were blown off, fences were broken down, and landmarks swept away. Articles of furniture were whirled up into the sky, and the straw and bark which formed the roofing of houses were scattered through the air like the leaves of autumn. A blinding dust, thick as smoke, filled the air, and the noise of the elements drowned all human utterance, reminding one of the wind called *go*,<sup>2</sup> which, at the end of the world, will sweep every thing before it. Surely, thought I, this visitation comes to us as a warning from the Unseen. (Here follows an account of the removal of the capital to Settsu in 1180, of the famine year, 1181, followed by pestilence, and of the earthquake in the second year of Genreki 1185).

Such are the woes that meet us on earth, so fleeting is life, so unstable are the habitations of men. Still greater is the discomfort we undergo through the constraints of social bonds. Those who enjoy the favour of the great may for a short season be steeped in pleasure, but they cannot attain permanent happiness. Forcing back their tears, they fre-

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<sup>1</sup> Districts in Kyoto. <sup>2</sup> A Buddhist tradition.

quently counterfeit a careless smile though always restless in demeanour. Like a sparrow close to an eagle's nest, they live in a state of continual fear. The poor, on the contrary, are the slaves of their wretched condition; they are forced to look upon the impotent envy of their wives and children; they must pocket the insults of their rich neighbours; they are denied even a moment's peace of mind. Such, again, as dwell near crowded thoroughfares are unable to escape the fury of conflagrations; but let them remove to the country and they will suffer the inconveniences of bad roads, not to speak of occasional visits from burglars. A strong man knows no contentment, a weak man is the object of scorn; to heap up wealth is merely to add so much to our cares; poverty and distress go hand in hand; dependence on others makes us their slaves; charity imposes fetters of affection on the mind. To act exactly as others do is intolerable; to pursue a wholly independent course seems to be madness. In what spot shall we find a resting-place, and what occupation will furnish distraction to our mind? For long I lived on a property which I had inherited from my paternal grandmother. Having, however, lost my family, and passed through a series of misfortunes which left me weakened in body, I was at length compelled to leave my ancestral home, and at the age of thirty to take up my abode in the solitude of a hut, scarcely more than one-tenth the size of my former residence. It consisted of but one room, and was not a house in the ordinary acceptation of the term. A wall surrounded the enclosure in which it stood, but I could not afford a gate. The posts of the carriage shed were of simple bamboo. In a heavy gale or in a snow storm the hut ran great danger of being swept bodily away, or of being crushed under the superincumbent weight of snow. Moreover, as it stood close to the banks of a river, a flood might easily engulf it. Living in this uninviting abode for thirty years, I at length fell a prey to dejection. I had leisure to muse on the vicissitudes of human life and on the fickleness of

fortune. At length I formed the resolution of quitting the hut and the world together. I was bound by no family ties and could feel no yearning towards what I had left; being no pensioner why should I long for my former position? And so I migrated to the hills, and spent many springs and summers on the cloudy heights of Mt. Ohara. The dew of sixty years that was on the point of vanishing, crystallized afresh on a tiny leaf. My new habitation is small even when compared with its tiny predecessor, and might be likened to a night's shelter for a belated traveller; or to the cocoon which encloses an old silkworm. My life is slowly declining and my fortunes ebb with it. In structure the dwelling resembles no ordinary house. The single room measures ten feet by ten, and seven feet high. It occupies no permanent site, as I have felt little inclination to settle in any one place. The floor is of clay; the roof is of thatch, the boards are fastened together with hooks for ease of transportation. Were I to change my home, what expense should I incur? Two carts are sufficient to carry the whole structure. Only the slight price of the hire of these, nothing more!

Secluded in the innermost recesses of Hino, I have added a few conveniences to my hut. On the southern side I have hung a temporary curtain, with a bamboo mat under it; on the western wall a shelf has become the sacred receptacle for the image of Buddha, where his brow may catch the brightness of the western sun. On each of the two door leaves I have hung a picture—one of Hugen, the other of Hudō. Above the lintel of the northern door I have fastened a shelf, on which are placed several black leather boxes containing literary papers, Japanese songs, *ōjio-yoshū*<sup>1</sup> and the like. Close by, leaning against the wall, are a *koto* and a *biwa*, to which I have given the names of *Origoto* and

<sup>1</sup> A Buddhistic manual, in two volumes, written in Japanese (not Sinico-Japanese).

*Tsugi-biwa*, respectively. On the eastern side is my bed, consisting of a mass of ferns on a straw mat. Beside it, and close by the window, stands my writing-desk and a brazier, and these, with a pillow, complete the furnishing. To the north of the hut lies my garden, a small patch enclosed by a broken hedge and containing a selection of medicinal plants. South of the house a pipe conducts water to a reservoir which I have constructed of stones. The near vicinity of the well-wooded Toyama, with its vine-clad slopes, provides me with sufficiency of fruit and of fuel. The valley, though dark with thick underwood, opens to the west, the home of the blessed, thereby offering much help to my meditations.<sup>1</sup> In spring I gaze on the purple clusters of the wistaria, which hang in wavy profusion all around. The mournful note of the cuckoo ushers in the summer, and puts me in mind of my latter end. With autumn comes the shrill chirrup of the cicadas, which I interpret as a dirge for life, empty as their cast-off shells. Snow has an attraction for me, because it seems to symbolize human sin, which increases in depth and then melts away. When indisposed I frequently fail to perform my devotions or to read the sacred books, and no one can call me to account for the omission. Nor have I any friend in whose presence I can feel ashamed when neglectful of my duties. The discipline of silence,<sup>2</sup> towards which I have no special inclination, I perforce observe, having no friend to tempt me to chatter. Being out of the reach of temptation, I run no risk of breaking the canons of Buddhism. When in the morning I happen to come to the river's margin, and watch the vessels plying up and down, I feel that my frame of mind and my position exactly resemble Manshami's.<sup>3</sup> Again, when the wind

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<sup>1</sup> The west is, to Buddhists, associated with *Gokuraku*, the land of beatitude, whither good men go after death. <sup>2</sup> Imposed upon Buddhist priests, as on the Trappist monks of Europe. <sup>3</sup> Manshami is a character in the *Manyōshū*.

rustles among the cinnamon leaves, I call to mind the scene in Junyo Bay, in the Junyoko off Hakurakuten, and begin playing on the *biwa* in imitation of Cinnamon Dainagon.<sup>1</sup> I have no special musical skill, but then there is no one to criticize my efforts; I sing to myself, and thrum for myself, merely as a mental relaxation.

At the mountain foot stands a small cottage, in which dwells the keeper of the mountain. His boy now and then pays me a visit and accompanies me on leisurely strolls. Though he is but sixteen and I am sixty, the difference in our ages makes no difference in the pleasures which we mutually share. We collect cranberries, gather *kaya* flowers, fill our baskets with mountain-potatoes, pick parsley, or weave mats from the fallen corn-stalks. When the weather is fine I ascend the mountain peaks to gaze from afar on my native district, and to revel in the beauty of the surrounding scenery. Of this delight I cannot be deprived, as nature is not the private property of any individual. And I often go on long excursions, over Sumiyama, and past Kasadori, visiting the shrine of Iwama, or making a pilgrimage to Ishiyama. Sometimes I go as far as the moor of Awazu, where are the ruins of old Seminaru's cottage, or linger by the grave of Sarumarudaū, beyond the Tagami river. On my way home I am frequently rewarded by finding a choice bough of cherry or maple, or a bunch of ferns, or a cluster of fruit, which I offer to Buddha or reserve for my own use. A "bright moon on a calm night recalls to me the men of old; the cries of monkeys affect me to tears;"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A famous *biwa* player who flourished at the close of the XIth. century. <sup>2</sup> The poems of Tōhō, in the period of Fūkyō, first refer to the chattering of monkeys as pitiful. The following is from O'Shōrei, a contemporary of Tōhō's, who flourished in the eighth century:—Among the fragrant orange plants we part at a river-side inn; the wind from the river blows hard and sends the rain athwart the ship. Far hence, before the moon of Mt. Sho, alas, will the shrill cry of apes prolong your grief even in your dreams.

the fire-flies in the herbage gleam like the torches of Magji-ma. A morning shower sounds exactly like wind rustling through the trees. When I listen to the notes of a wild bird, I speculate whether it is the male or female bird calling for its young.<sup>1</sup> The bold appearance of a solitary hart reminds me of the wide gap that exists between the world and me; the plaintive voice of the owl fills my mind with pity. Scenes like these are found everywhere around in inexhaustible abundance, possessing for those who are profounder in reflection and quicker in apprehension than myself still more varied attractions. Five years have elapsed since I first took up my abode in this place. The flimsy shed has now fallen into an almost dilapidated condition. Under the eaves there has accumulated a thick mass of mouldering leaves. A coating of moss covers parts of the floor. From time to time tidings have come to me from the city of the death of many noble persons there. And it is an easy matter for me to calculate the number of humbler folks who have also been overtaken by the same fate. Many houses, too, must have been consumed in the numerous conflagrations. Only this unpretending cot of mine remains safe and undisturbed. Narrow though it be, it provides a couch by night and a seat by day, and suffices to shelter me. The shell-fish is content with its contracted abode; the fish-hawk lives on a craggy and inhospitable shore that it may avoid mankind. Like them, I am fond of a single life, with no object of affection to cherish, no friendships to cultivate. My sole desire is to find tranquillity, to be free from care. Others, when they build a house, build it not for themselves;

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the lines of Uki Moto:—"Whenever I hear a pheasant sing, *horo, horo*, I wonder whether it is my father or my mother." The title of the poem in which the lines occur is "All beings are our parents." Boshio (16th century) also expresses the same idea:—"I long to see my father. I long to see my mother, whenever I hear a pheasant sing." The pheasant was typical of parental affection.

their houses are for their families, or their instructors, or their lords, or even for their oxen, their horses and their treasure. But I have built mine for my own sole use, because I have no companion, and no friend to live with me. What is friendship but regard for the rich and open-handed; and contempt for the upright and kindly? Better to make friends with music and with nature! Our servants, caring only for rewards and punishments, estimate our regard for them by the amount of largesses we bestow on them. We throw away kindness on those who neither need nor appreciate it. Let us rather be our own servants, using our own limbs—a manner of life, which, if somewhat irksome for the moment, is much easier than to employ others. Let us make use of our bodies for two ends—our arms as our servants, our legs as our vehicles. The mind which acts in sympathy with the body, may use the latter when fresh, allow it to rest when tired. Let the mind be careful neither to overtax the body, nor, on the other hand, to encourage it in its disposition to be lazy. Exercise is health-giving; why then sit in idleness? To trouble others is a sin; why should we ask for assistance? With regard to my diet and clothing, I observe the same principles. A garment of *fuji* and a bed-quilt of hemp suffice to cover my body. My life may very well sustain itself on the *kaya* flowers which flourish in the wilds, and on the fruits that grow on the mountain side. My poor thinly-clad figure is no object of ridicule in these solitudes, Meals so scanty as I have described have still a relish for me. These remarks are not intended as a sermon addressed to the well-to-do; for I am merely comparing my previous life with the present. Since I renounced the world's pleasures, envy and fear have vanished from my mind. Free from regret and reluctance, I pursue my course as Providence directs me. Looking upon self as a floating cloud, I place no dependence on it, nor, on the contrary, am I in the least dissatisfied therewith. Fleeting pleasures

have dwindled into insignificance over the dreamer's pillow ; his life-long desire finds its satisfaction in the contemplation of the beautiful in nature.

The three worlds<sup>1</sup> consist of only one mind. Treasures, horses, oxen, palaces, castles,—what boot they, so long as the mind is uneasy? In this lone place, in this small cottage, I enjoy full peace of mind. Were I in the city, I might feel shame in becoming a beggar ; but settled here, I pity those who toil and moil in the dusty highway of the world. Let him who doubts the truth of my words merely look at the denizens of the sea and of the air. A fish never grows weary of water ; but its motive none but a fish can tell. So birds are fond of the woods ; ask them the reason why. The same may be said of seclusion ; its pleasures cannot be understood by one who has not led the life.

The lunar course of my life is fast drawing to a close, and every moment I draw nearer to the peak of death. When the time shall come for me to make a sudden start for the darkness of the "three ways,"<sup>2</sup> of what use will it be to me to have troubled myself with earthly cares? Buddha enjoins us to love nothing earthly. To love my moss-clad hut, this of itself is a sin ; even this cherished tranquillity is an obstruction to salvation. Woe to those who, to while away the time, indulge in idle pleasures.

One quiet morning after making these reflections I propounded to myself the following question : Granted that your object in forsaking the world and retiring to these woods and mountains is to tranquillize your mind and carry your principles into practice. But, though in appearance you are a sage, yet your mind is soaked with impurity. Though your hut resembles the dwelling of Jyomo,<sup>3</sup> yet your conduct

<sup>1</sup> The three worlds of matter, spirit and passion. <sup>2</sup> The name of a river, which, like the Styx, has to be crossed by the dead.

<sup>3</sup> The hero of Yuimagyō, a Buddhistic book.

falls short even of Shuri-Bandoku's.<sup>1</sup> Is this the result of poverty, or of inward impurity? This question I left unanswered, but twice or thrice repeated involuntary prayers.

Written in the hut at Toyama, on the last day of March in the second year of Kenreki (1212 A. D.) by Renin, the monk.

Alas ; the moon, now hid behind yon peak,  
Denies the constant light I seek !

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<sup>1</sup> A disciple of Shaka-Munyi, noted for his weak memory.