

Hojio-ki<sup>1)</sup>

Incessant is the change of water where the stream glides on calmly: the spray appears over a cataract, yet vanishes without a moment's delay. Such is the fate of men in the world and of the houses in which they live. Walls standing side by side, tilings vying with one another in loftiness, these are from generations past the abodes of high and low in a mighty town. But none of them has resisted the destructive work of time. Some stand in ruins; others are replaced by new structures. Their possessors too share the same fate with them. Let the place be the same, the people as numerous as before, yet we can scarcely meet one out of every ten, with whom we had long ago a chance of coming across. We see our first light in the morning and return to our long home next evening. Our destiny is like bubbles of water. Whence do we come? Whither do we tend? What ails us, what delights us in this unreal world? It is impossible to say. A house with its master, which passes away in a state of perpetual change, may well be compared to a morning-glory with a dew drop upon it. Sometimes the dew falls and the flower remains but only to die in the first sunshine: sometimes the dew survives the drooping flower, yet can not live till the evening.

More than forty years of existence have rewarded me with the sight of several wonderful spectacles in this world. On the 28th of April in the 3rd year of Angen(1177) when the wind was raging and the night was boisterous, a fire broke out at eight o'clock in the south-eastern part of the city and spread towards

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1) This title may be rendered into English as 'a description of a little house.' 'Ki' is the Chinese term which represents one of the primary divisions of prose composition. 'Hojio' literally means 'ten feet by ten,' which Chōmei gave to his house as its name to denote its smallness.

the north-east. The Sujakuden,<sup>1)</sup> the Daikyokuden, the Daigakurio, and the Mimbushō were all reduced to ashes in one night. A temporary structure at Tominokōji in Hinokuchi where the sick were lodged, was said to be the starting-point of the winged conflagration. Caught by the wind hovering around, the fire soon proceeded thence in the form of an open fan. It enveloped<sup>2)</sup> distant houses in smoke, and licked with fiery tongues the neighbouring ground. Sparks scattered on high, blazing with dazzling light, presented a brilliant glow of immense dimension. Amidst this red chaos, the flames driven by the wind, flew over the distance of one or two *chō* and found their new home in another quarter. The inhabitants were of course out of their wits. Some fell choked with smoke, others died in the conflagration. Those who fortunately escaped with their lives, lost all their property. No estimate could be formed of the treasures and riches that perished. One third of the city was left a wilderness. Thousands of people together with an immense number of cattle, fell victims to this merciless conflagration. Of all human contrivances which prove fruitless, the feeblest is that effort of theirs to reside in cities which are so dangerous.

On the 29th of February in the fourth year of Jishō (1180), a whirlwind arose in Kiogoku and rushed toward Rokujō with terrible vehemence. Travelling three or four *chō* in one gust, it wrecked all the houses standing in its way. Some were thrown down flat upon the ground; others stood only with their pillars. The roofs of gates were blown off, fences were broken and neighbours found their mansions without any boundaries. Articles of furniture were whirled up into the sky; the bark and thatch which had covered the roofs looked like leaves before a

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1) Sujakuden and Daikiokuden are the names of two imperial palaces. Daigakurio was an educational institution like modern university. Mimbushō was an official institution corresponding to the present Department for Home Affairs.

2) Both the fire and houses are spoken of as if they were animate.

wintry wind. The dust which, like thick smoke, blinded our eyes, the raging of the gale which drowned all human voices, reminded one of the Gō wind of Hell.<sup>1)</sup> The wind destroyed not only houses, but maimed many people who were engaged in checking its work. It travelled toward the south-west much to the grief of people living there. Though a whirlwind usually springs up, such a violent one is indeed an exception. I could not help thinking then that it was meant for a warning from the Unseen.

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(Several paragraphs which follow are devoted to an account of the removal of the capital to Settsu in 1180, of the famine during Yōkwa (1181), of the pestilence in the same year, the earthquake in the second year of Genreki. All these however are not essential to the true purport of the piece, so that we can dispense with them with little hesitation.)

Such are the evils of the world, the instability of life and of human habitations. Still greater is the distress which we experience through the shackles of social bonds. Those who enjoy the favour of the great may for a moment be steeped in pleasure, but can not enjoy permanent happiness. Even forcing back their tears, they sometimes counterfeit a careless smile, though always restless in demeanour. Like a sparrow close by the nest of an eagle, they live in a state of perpetual fear. Poor folks, on the other hand, are vexed with their wretched condition, are forced to look on the impotent envy of their wives and children, and to put up with the insolence of their rich neighbours. They too are unable to enjoy even a moment's peace of mind. Again those who live near thoroughfares can never escape the fury of conflagration when it rages. Let them reside in the country; they are then subject to no small disadvantage of bad roads, not to

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1) Certain Buddhistic books tell us that when the world comes to an end, a strong wind called Gō, shall arise.

speak of an occasional attack from burglars. The strong knows no content, the single is the object of contempt; wealth brings with it an equal amount of care; poverty always goes hand in hand with distress; reliance makes one another's slave; charity fetters the mind with affection: to act exactly like others is intolerable; not to act as they do seems to be madness. In what place shall we settle and with what occupation shall we amuse ourselves?

Inheriting my paternal grandmother's estate, I lived long there. Bereft of my family, however, and having lost vigour through a series of misfortunes, I was at last compelled to forsake the paternal estate, when I was thirty years of age and to inhabit a hut with no other companion than my own mind. When compared to my former residence in extent, it was scarcely more than one-tenth. A room there was indeed, but a house it was not in the proper sense of the term. No gate adorned the poor hedge. Bamboo pillars supported the roof: the floor rested upon a wagon.<sup>1)</sup> When the wind blew hard or a snow-storm set in, the hut was in constant danger of being swept off or of falling down. Moreover, being situated near the river bank, a flood could easily wash it away. Thus overtaxed with earthly cares, my mind fell an easy prey to despondency. In the meantime, however, changes in physical surroundings and the vicissitudes of fortunes, reminded me of the ephemeral character of human destiny. The time came at last when I left the house and left the world altogether. Bound by no family ties, I left no yearning toward what I had left; being no pensioner, why should I long for my former position? Many springs and summers were spent among the clouds of Mount Ōhara.

Now when the dew of sixty years was on the point of vanish-

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1) It is somewhat difficult to imagine a house whose floor rested upon a wagon. Even in the author's time, such a house was not inhabited by any except him who built it after that style so that the house itself could be carried anywhere.

ing, once again did it condense upon a tiny leaf.<sup>1)</sup> You might compare it to a night's shelter for a belated traveller or a cocoon inhabited by an old silk-worm. In extent, this new hut of mine could not claim even one-hundredth of the former. You see, my life was declining, and the house was reduced along with it. In structure it resembled no ordinary house. The room was ten feet by ten; its height was less than seven. It occupied no permanent site, because I had no mind to settle in a definite place. A clay-built floor, a thatched roof, and planks linked together with hooks, so that they might be removed easily if necessary, constituted my abode. What expense was I liable to in changing my home? Two carts were enough to carry the house itself. Only the little hire for them, nothing more!

Here during my seclusion in the innermost recesses of Hino, I added a temporary blind on the southern side of the hut with a bamboo mat under it: an *akadana* (water-shelf) along the western wall, has become the sacred place for putting the image of Buddha so that his brow may be lit up by the mellow beams of the setting sun. On each of the door leaves, I have hung a picture of Hugen and Hudō. On a little shelf above the northern door sash, are placed a few trunks of black leather, containing some poetical extracts in Japanese, songs, *Ōjio-yōshū* and the like. Close by, against the wall, you will find a *koto* and a *biwa* to which I gave the name of 'Ori-goto' and 'Tsugi-biwa' respectively. On the east side, a bed consisting of old fern leaves scattered about and a mat of straw, a writing desk below the window a brazier beside a pillow, completed its furnishing. A little patch of ground to the north of the hut, was laid out as my garden where I planted several medicinal herbs, enclosed by a broken hedge. This is the condition of my temporary abode.

As to its surroundings: in the south, there is a pipe conducting

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1) I wonder whether this metaphor is intelligible at all in English: but I could not help rendering it without any change of expression inasmuch as it is very fine in the original Japanese.

water to a reservoir made of piled stones. Woods being near in the vine-clad Toyama, there is plenty of fruit and of logs. Though the valley is dark with thickets, it opens towards the west and thus offers much help to meditation.<sup>1)</sup> In spring, my sight is attracted by the wavy clusters of the Fuji (*Wistaria chinensis*) which sends its fragrant odour out of its purple clouds. In summer, the cuckoo with its doleful note<sup>2)</sup> puts me in mind of 'the mountain path of Death.' Autumn fills my ears with the shrill chirps of cicadas which I interpret as the dirge for life as empty as their cast-off shells. In winter I sympathize with snow because of its semblance to human sins, accumulating in depth and then melting away. If indisposed, I freely neglect to say prayers or to read sacred books (*Kyō*), without being admonished by any one for the omission. Nor have I any friend before whom I might feel ashamed for this negligence of duty. Though not specially inclined to observe the 'discipline of silence,'<sup>3)</sup> I am always observant of it, for I have no companion to enter into conversation, and thereby to break the discipline. Being out of the reach of any temptation, I have no chance of breaking the canons of Buddhism. When in the morning, I chance to come to the river's side, and behold boats sailing in it, I feel that I am just in the same mood and position as Man-shami.<sup>4)</sup> When the cinnamon wind rustles among the leaves, I imagine the scene in Junyō-Bay<sup>5)</sup> and begin to play

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1) In Buddhism, the west is associated with Gokuraku (the land of beatitude) which is the abode of all good men after death and lies in the extreme west.

2) Cuckoo is considered as a mournful bird which crosses the mountain of Shide (the starting-point for death).

3) A discipline in which a priest sits during a given time without uttering a word.

4) An official who lived in the reign of Nara.

5) The allusion is to the famous poem of Hakurakuten, called "Junyōkō" i. e. the ballad of the Bay of Junyō, in which the poet describes an unfortunate young girl who played upon the *biwa* for him during his banishment from court in that out-of-the-way part of the country.

upon the *biwa* in imitation of Cinnamon Dainagon.<sup>1)</sup> A performance of the 'autumnal wind' may vie with the echoes from the pines: the song of the 'flowing fountain' is tuned like the murmurs of water.<sup>2)</sup> I do not profess any skill in the art, but then do not play for others' enjoyment. I croon for myself, thrum for myself, only to refresh my mind.

At the foot of the mountain, there is a little cot in which the keeper of the mountain lives. His boy visits me now and then and is my companion in leisurely strolls. He is sixteen years of age and I am sixty. This difference of age, however, does not cause any difference of pleasure which we equally share.

To collect cranberries, to gather kaya-flowers, to fill our basket with the fruits of the yama-imo, to pick parsley, to weave a mat of the fallen ears of corn — such are our diversions. In fine weather I climb up mountain peaks, to behold my native province in the distance: and enjoy the surrounding scenery to my heart's content. I can do that, because nature is not the private property of particular individuals. Long excursions are also undertaken. Then I go over Sumiyama, pass Kasadori, bow before the shrine of Iwama, make a pilgrimage to Isiyama: or I visit the ruins of the cottage of the old Semimaru,<sup>3)</sup> far in the moor of Awazu, linger about the grave of Sarumarudau, on the further side of the Tagami river. On my way home, I am often rewarded for my walk with a bough of cherry, a branch of maple, a bunch of ferns or a basket of fruit, which I offer to Buddha or keep for my own use. The bright moon in the calm night recalls to me the men of old; the cries of monkeys moisten my sleeves with tears; fire-flies in the sward gleam as if they were torchlights of Magijima; a morning shower is an exact

1) A famous musician who founded a school of his own, called the Cinnamon after his name.

2) This playing on words may be almost meaningless in English, but I could not render it better.

3) Semimaru and Sarumarudau are two poets of note.

counterpart of the wind rustling through the leaves; the notes of a wild bird make me curious to know whether it is male or female<sup>1)</sup>; the bold appearance of a hart reminds me of the wide gap existing between the world and me; the ash-covered charcoal newly stirred up, is an old man's delightful companion, in his midnight awaking from sleep; the moping voice of owls fills my mind with pity. Scenes like these are indeed inexhaustible here. Those who are profounder in reflection, and quicker in perception than I, cannot fail to find many other things which may likewise attract their attention.

Five years have elapsed since I first settled here. The temporary shed has now been reduced to an all but dilapidated condition. Deep under the eaves, the fallen leaves have accumulated, being left to moulder there. Moss too has grown upon the floor. Occasional tidings from town have announced to me the death of many noble persons there. And I can easily calculate the number of the humble people who have also been similarly overtaken. Many houses too, must have been burnt in the frequent fires. Only this humble cot of mine is safe and quiet. However narrow, it has been a bed by night and a seat by day, and is enough to shelter me. The *gōna*<sup>2)</sup> likes its little shell because he knows content: the fish-hawk inhabits a rough beach because he is afraid of men. Like them I think of myself alone in this world. I cherish no objects, seek no friendship. Tranquillity is my sole desire, to have no trouble is my happiness. Others do not build their houses for themselves; their houses are either for their families or for their friends or for their tutors and lords, or even for their oxen, horses and treasure. But I have built mine for my

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1) The allusion is to a poem of Ūkimoto: —

Is that a father or a mother

Who sings *horo, horo* on the heather.

The notes of a bird evoked the sympathy of the poet who assumes that the parental affection which exists between parent and child, likewise exists among little birds. Such an idea is very common in Japanese poetry.

2) A little parasite which inhabits a small shell.



own sake, because I have no companion, no friend to live with me.

What is friendship but respect for the rich and open-handed and contempt for the just and kind? Better to make associates of music and nature! Our servants only care for rewards and punishments and estimate our favour by the amount of largesses given them. We throw away kindness upon them who never require it. Let us rather be our own servants. To use our own hands and legs, if somewhat irksome, is much easier than employing others. Let us employ our bodies in a double way. Our arms are our servants, our legs are our vehicles. The mind which knows how it goes with the body, may use the latter if fresh, allow it to rest if tired. Let the mind take care not to overtax the body with labour, not to grant the latter's disposition to be idle. To take exercise is healthy: why then should we sit and do nothing? To trouble others is a sin, why should we ask others for help?

As to diet and clothes, I observe the same principle. A garment of 'fuji' and a bed-quilt of hemp are sufficient to cover my body. The kaya-flower, which flourishes in the wilderness, some fruit scattered about the mountain side may very well sustain my life. The poor figure so thinly clad, is no object of ridicule here in solitude. Meals so scanty have still a relish for me. I do not intend those remarks as a sermon for those in easy circumstances, but I want only to compare my former days with the present. Envy and fear have been expelled from my mind since I renounced the world's pleasure. Without regret and without reluctance, I follow my fortune as Providence leads me. Regarding self as a floating cloud, I do not rely on it, nor, on the other hand, am dissatisfied with it in the least. Temporary pleasure has dwindled into nothing over the pillow of the dreamer: his life-long wish still finds its satisfaction in the beautiful in nature.

The three worlds consist of only one mind.<sup>1)</sup> Treasures,

horses, oxen, palaces, towers, what are they, if the mind is uneasy? I enjoy the peace of mind in this lonely place, in this small cottage. In town I might be ashamed to become a beggar; settled here, however, I pity those who toil and moil in the dusty highway of the world. He who doubts what I say, need only look at fishes and birds. Fishes never get weary of water: none but fishes knows their motive. Birds are fond of woods: none but birds may tell you why. The same may be said of seclusion. Its pleasure can not be understood by one who has not led such a life.

The lunar course of my life is fast declining and is getting every moment nearer to the peak of death. If the time comes when I make a sudden start for the darkness of 'the three ways',<sup>2)</sup> of what use would it be to trouble my mind with earthly cares? Buddha teaches us to love no earthly things. To love this mossy hut is still a sin: tried tranquillity is certainly an obstruction to salvation. Woe to them! who indulge in useless pleasures to while away time.

One still morning after those reflections, I began to ask myself: "The object of escaping from the world and of living among woods and mountains is nothing but to tranquillize your mind and to practise your principles. But your mind is soaked in impurity, though your appearance resembles a sage. Your conduct even falls short of Shūri-bandoku's<sup>3)</sup> though your hut is like that of Jiomio-Koji.<sup>4)</sup> Is it the effect of poverty or is it the influence of some impure thought?" No answer did I give to this question but twice or thrice repeated involuntary prayers.

The last day of March, the 2nd year of Kenreki (1211).

Monk Renin at the hut of Toyama.

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- 1) The so-called three worlds are the material, the immaterial and the world of lust.
  - 2) 'The three ways' is the name of a river corresponding to the Styx.
  - 3) A disciple of Shaka, notorious for his folly, and weak memory.
  - 4) 'Jiomio' is another name for Yuima, the hero of the Yuima-gio (one of the sacred books of Buddhism).

“Alas! the mountain peak conceals the moon;  
Her constant light’s denied to me a boon.”\*