AN ACCOUNT OF A TEN-FOOT-SQUARE HUT (*HŌJŌKI*, 1212)

Chōmei wrote *An Account of a Ten-Foot-Square Hut* at the end of the Third Month of 1212 while in retirement at Hino, in the hills southeast of Kyoto. It is written in a mixed Japanese–Chinese style that draws heavily on Chinese and Buddhist words and sources. Probably the most noticeable rhetorical feature of this style is the heavy use of parallel phrases and of metaphors. The work is noted for its vivid descriptions of a series of disasters in the capital during a time of turmoil (the war between the Taira and Minamoto at the end of the twelfth century) and for its description of the law of impermanence of all things, one of the central tenets of Buddhism, which had a profound impact on Japan at this time. As a recluse who retreats from society and turns toward the pursuit of the Pure Land, a western paradise envisioned by the Pure Land Buddhist sect, the author is representative of a larger movement among the cultural elite at this time. In the end, however, Chōmei finds himself in the paradoxical position of advocating detachment and rebirth in the Pure Land while at the same time becoming attached to the beauties of nature and the four seasons and the aesthetic life of his ten-foot-square hut at Hino.

The current of the flowing river does not cease, and yet the water is not the same water as before. The foam that floats on stagnant pools, now vanishing, now forming, never stays the same for long. So, too, it is with the people and dwellings of the world. In the capital, lovely as if paved with jewels, houses of the high and low, their ridges aligned and roof tiles contending, never disappear however many ages pass, and yet if we examine whether this is true, we will rarely find a house remaining as it used to be. Perhaps it burned down last year and has been rebuilt. Perhaps a large house has crumbled and become a small one. The people living inside the houses are no different. The place may be the same capital and the people numerous, but only one or two in twenty or thirty is someone I knew in the past. One will die in the morning and another will be born in the evening: such is the way of the world, and in this we are like the foam on the water. I know neither whence the newborn come nor whither go the dead. For whose sake do we trouble our minds over these temporary dwellings, and why do they delight our eyes? This, too, I do not understand. In competing for impermanence, dweller and dwelling are no different from the morning glory and the dew. Perhaps the dew will fall and the blossom linger. But even though it lingers, it will wither in the morning sun. Perhaps the blossom will wilt and the dew remain. But even though it remains, it will not wait for evening.

In the more than forty springs and autumns that have passed since I began to understand the nature of the world, I have seen many unexpected things. I think it was on the twenty-eighth of the Fourth Month of Angen 3 [1177]. Around eight o'clock on a windy, noisy night, a fire broke out in the southeastern part of the capital and spread to the northwest. Finally it reached Suzaku Gate, the

Great Hall of State, the university, and the Popular Affairs Ministry, and in the space of a night they all turned to dust and ash. The source of the fire is said to have been the intersection of Higuchi and Tominokōji, in makeshift housing occupied by *bugaku* dancers. Carried here and there in the violent wind, the fire spread outward like a fan unfolding. Distant houses choked on smoke; nearby, wind drove the flames against the ground. In the sky, ashes blown up by the wind reflected the light of the fire, while wind-scattered flames spread through the overarching red in leaps of one and two blocks. Those who were caught in the fire must have been frantic. Some choked on the smoke and collapsed; some were overtaken by the flames and died instantly. Some barely escaped with their lives but could not carry out their possessions. The Seven Rarities and ten thousand treasures all were reduced to ashes.[139] How great the losses must have been. At that time, the houses of sixteen high nobles burned, not to mention countless lesser homes. Altogether, it is said that fire engulfed one-third of the capital. Thousands of men and women died, and more horses, oxen, and the like than one can tell. All human endeavors are foolish, but among them, spending one's fortune and troubling one's mind to build a house in such a dangerous capital is particularly vain.

Then, in the Fourth Month of Jishō 4 [1180], a great whirlwind arose near the intersection of Nakanomikado and Kyōgoku and raged as far as the Rokujō District. Because it blew savagely for three or four blocks, not a single house within them, large or small, escaped destruction. Some were flattened; some were reduced to nothing more than posts and beams. Blowing gates away, the wind carried them four or five blocks and set them down; blowing fences away, it joined neighboring properties into one. Naturally, all the possessions inside these houses were lifted into the sky, while cypress bark, boards, and other roofing materials mingled in the wind like winter leaves. The whirlwind blew up dust as thick as smoke so that nothing could be seen, and in its dreadful roar no voices could be heard. One felt that even the winds of retribution in hell could be no worse than this. Not only were houses damaged or lost, but countless men were injured or crippled in rebuilding them. As it moved toward the south-southwest, the wind was a cause of grief to many people. Whirlwinds often blow, but are they ever like this? It was something extraordinary. One feared that it might be a portent.

Then, in the Sixth Month of the same year, the capital was abruptly moved.[140] The relocation was completely unexpected. According to what I have

139. "Seven Rarities and ten thousand treasures" here means "things of value." The Seven Rarities of Buddhist texts are gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, coral, agate, and clamshell.

140. Kiyomori, the leader of the Taira clan, had the capital moved from Kyoto to Fukuhara (now Kobe) in 1180.

heard, Kyoto was established as the capital more than four hundred years ago, during the reign of the Saga emperor.[141] The relocation of the capital is not something that can be undertaken easily, for no special reason, and so it is only natural that the people were uneasy with this move and lamented together about it. Objections having no effect, however, the emperor, the ministers, and all the other high nobles moved. Of those who served at court, who would stay behind in the old capital? Those who vested their hopes in government appointments or in rank, or depended on the favor of their masters, wasted not a day in moving, while those who had missed their chance, who had been left behind by the world, and who had nothing to look forward to, stayed sorrowfully where they were. Dwellings, their eaves contending, went to ruin with the passing days. Houses were disassembled and floated down the Yodo River as the land turned into fields before one's eyes. Men's hearts changed; now they valued only horses and saddles. No one used oxen and carriages any more. People coveted property in the southwest and scorned manors in the northeast. At that time I had occasion to go to the new capital, in the province of Tsu. I saw that there was insufficient room to lay out a grid of streets and avenues, the area being small. To the north, the city pressed against the mountains and, to the south, dropped off toward the sea. The roar of waves never slackened; a violent wind blew in off the saltwater. The palace stood in the mountains. Did that hall of logs look like this?[142] It was novel and, in its way, elegant. Where did they erect the houses they had torn down day by day and brought downstream, constricting the river's flow? Open land was still plentiful, houses few. Even though the old capital had become a wasteland, the new capital was yet unfinished. Everyone felt like the drifting clouds. Those who had lived here before complained about losing their land. Those who had newly moved here bemoaned the pains of construction. In the streets, I saw that those who should have used carriages rode on horses, and most of those who should have dressed in court robes and headgear wore simple robes instead. The ways of the capital had changed abruptly; now they were no different from the ways of rustic samurai. I heard that these developments were portents of disorder in the land, and it turned out to be so: day by day the world grew more unsettled and the people more uneasy, and their fears proved to be well founded, so that in the winter of the same year the court returned to this capital.[143] But what became of all the houses that had been torn down? Not all of them were rebuilt as they had stood before.

141. It was Emperor Kanmu (r. 781–806) who actually relocated the capital from Nagaoka to Heian-kyō (Kyoto), in 794. Perhaps Chōmei saw the failed attempt to return the capital to the former capital, Nara—in 810, during the reign of Emperor Saga (r. 809–823)—as serving to establish the capital at Kyoto once and for all.

142. Empress Saimei (r. 655–661) built a temporary palace of logs in Kyushu in 661.

143. The people's fears were realized when Minamoto no Yoritomo raised an army in the Eighth Month of 1180.

I have heard that in venerable reigns of ancient times, emperors governed the nation with compassion: roofing his palace with thatch, Yao[144] of China refrained from even trimming the eaves; seeing how thin the smoke that rose from the people's hearths, Nintoku[145] of Japan forgave even the lowest taxes. They did so because they took pity on the people and tried to help them. By measuring it against the past, we can know the state of the present.

Then, was it in the Yōwa era [1181–1182]?—long ago, and so I do not remember well, the world suffered a two-year famine, and dreadful things occurred. Droughts in spring and summer, typhoons and floods in fall—adversities followed one after another, and none of the five grains ripened. In vain the soil was turned in the spring and crops planted in the summer, but lost was the excitement of autumn harvests and of the winter laying-in. Consequently, people in the provinces abandoned their lands and wandered to other regions, or forgot their houses and went to live in the mountains. Various royal prayers were initiated and extraordinary Esoteric Buddhist rites were performed, to no effect whatever. It was the habit of the capital to depend on the countryside for everything, but nothing was making its way to the capital now. How long could the residents maintain their equanimity? As their endurance wore down, they tried to dispose of their valuables as if throwing them away, but no one showed any interest. The few who did engage in barter despised gold and cherished millet. Beggars lined the streets, their pleas and lamentations filling one's ears. In this way, the first year struggled to a close. Surely the new year would bring improvement, one thought, but on top of the famine came an epidemic, and conditions only got worse. The metaphor of fish in a shrinking pool fit the situation well, as people running out of food grew more desperate by the day.[146] In the end, well-dressed men wearing lacquered sedge hats, their skirts wrapped around their legs, went intently begging house to house. One would see them walking, exhausted and confused, then collapse, their faces to the ground. The corpses of people who had starved to death lay along the earthen walls, and in the streets, their numbers were beyond reckoning. A stench filled the world, as no one knew how to dispose of so many corpses, and often one could not bear to look at the decomposing faces and bodies. There was not even room for horses and carriages to pass on the Kamo riverbed. As lowly peasants and woodcutters exhausted their strength, firewood, too, came to be in short supply, and so people with no other resources tore apart their own houses and carried off the lumber to sell at market. I heard that the value of what one man could

144. Yao was one of the legendary sage kings of antiquity in the Confucian tradition on which emperors were meant to model their rule.

145. According to the *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihon shoki* (720), Emperor Nintoku was the legendary sixteenth emperor of Japan who also had a reputation for sage rulership for his remittance of taxes every third year.

146. Chōmei probably borrowed the metaphor from *The Essentials of Salvation* (*Ojōyōshū*, 985), by Genshin (942–1017).

carry was not enough to sustain him for a single day. Strangely, mixed in among the firewood were sticks bearing traces here and there of red lacquer, or of gold and silver leaf, because people with nowhere else to turn had stolen Buddhist images from old temples and ripped out temple furnishings, which they broke into pieces. I saw such cruel sights because I was born into this impure, evil age.[147] There were many pathetic sights as well. Of those who had wives or husbands from whom they could not part, the ones whose love was stronger always died first. The reason is that putting themselves second and pitying the others, they gave their mates what little food they found. So it was that when parents and children lived together, the parents invariably died first. I also saw a small child who, not knowing that his mother was dead, lay beside her, sucking at her breast.

The eminent priest Ryūgyō of Ninna Temple,[148] grieving over these countless deaths, wrote the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet on the foreheads of all the dead he saw, thereby linking them to the Buddha. Wanting to know how many had died, he counted the bodies he found during the Fourth and Fifth Months.[149] Within the capital, between Ichijō on the north and Kujō on the south, between Kyōgoku on the east and Suzaku on the west, more than 42,300 corpses lay in the streets. Of course, many others died before and after this period, and if we include those on the Kamo riverbed, in Shirakawa, in the western half of the capital, and in the countryside beyond, their numbers would be limitless. How vast the numbers must have been, then, in all the provinces along the Seven Highways. I have heard that something of the sort occurred in the Chōjō era [1134], during the reign of Emperor Sutoku, but I do not know how things were then. What I saw before my own eyes was extraordinary.

Then—was it at about the same time?—a dreadful earthquake shook the land.[150] The effects were remarkable. Mountains crumbled and dammed the rivers; the sea tilted and inundated the land. The earth split open and water gushed forth; boulders broke off and tumbled into valleys. Boats rowing near the shore were carried off on the waves; horses on the road knew not where to place their hooves. Around the capital, not a single shrine or temple survived

147. The last of the three Buddhist periods: the first is the age of the true law, during which enlightenment was possible and correct practice could be performed; the second is the age of the simulated law, during which correct practice could be performed and the Buddha's teaching existed; and the last is the age of the degenerated law or latter age of the Buddhist law (*mappō*), during which only the Buddha's teaching remained. In Japan, it was believed that *mappō* began in 1051.

148. Ninna Temple is a large Buddhist institution in northwestern Kyoto that was commissioned by Emperor Kōkō (830–887, r. 884–887) and built by Emperor Uda (867–931, r. 887–897) in 888. The temple maintained particularly close ties to the imperial family in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

149. The subject might be Ryūgyō; the text is ambiguous.

150. The earthquake hit on the ninth day of the Seventh Month, 1185.

intact. Some fell apart; others toppled over. Dust and ash rose like billows of smoke. The sound of the earth's movement and of houses collapsing was no different from thunder. People who were inside their houses might be crushed in a moment. Those who ran outside found the earth splitting asunder. Lacking wings, one could not fly into the sky. If one were a dragon, one would ride the clouds. I knew then that earthquakes were the most terrible of all the many terrifying things. The dreadful shaking stopped after a time, but the aftershocks continued. Not a day passed without twenty or thirty quakes strong enough to startle one under ordinary circumstances. As ten and twenty days elapsed, gradually the intervals grew longer—four or five a day, then two or three, one every other day, one in two or three days—but the aftershocks went on for perhaps three months. Of the four great elements, water, fire, and wind constantly bring disaster, but for its part, earth normally brings no calamity. In ancient times—was it during the Saikō era [855]?—there was a great earthquake and many terrible things occurred, such as the head falling from the Buddha at Tōdai Temple,[151] but, they say, even that was not as bad at this. Everyone spoke of futility, and the delusion in their hearts seemed to diminish a little at the time; but after days and months piled up and years went by, no one gave voice to such thoughts any longer.

All in all, life in this world is difficult; the fragility and transience of our bodies and dwellings are indeed as I have said. We cannot reckon the many ways in which we trouble our hearts according to where we live and in obedience to our status. He who is of trifling rank but lives near the gates of power cannot rejoice with abandon, however deep his happiness may be, and when his sorrow is keen, he does not wail aloud. Anxious about his every move, trembling with fear no matter what he does, he is like a sparrow near a hawk's nest. One who is poor yet lives beside a wealthy house will grovel in and out, morning and evening, ashamed of his wretched figure. When he sees the envy that his wife, children, and servants feel for the neighbors, when he hears the rich family's disdain for him, his mind will be unsettled and never find peace. He who lives in a crowded place cannot escape damage from a fire nearby. He who lives outside the city contends with many difficulties as he goes back and forth and often suffers at the hands of robbers. The powerful man is consumed by greed; he who stands alone is mocked. Wealth brings many fears; poverty brings cruel hardship. Look to another for help and you will belong to him. Take someone under your wing, and your heart will be shackled by affection. Bend to the ways of the world and you will suffer. Bend not and you will look demented. Where can one live, and how can one behave to shelter this body briefly and to ease the heart for a moment?

151. Tōdai Temple is one of the seven great Nara temples and served as the head of the national temple system instituted in Nara times. It is famous for its large statue of Vairocana Buddha, known popularly as the Great Buddha.

I inherited my paternal grandmother's house and occupied it for some time. Then I lost my backing,[152] came down in the world, and even though the house was full of fond memories, I finally could live there no longer,[153] and so I, past the age of thirty, resolved to build a hut. It was only one-tenth the size of my previous residence. Unable to construct a proper estate, I erected a house only for myself.[154] I managed to build an earthen wall but lacked the means to raise a gate. Using bamboo posts, I sheltered my carriage. The place was not without its dangers whenever snow fell or the wind blew. Because the house was located near the riverbed, the threat of water damage was deep and the fear of robbers never ebbed. Altogether, I troubled my mind and endured life in this difficult world for more than thirty years. The disappointments I suffered during that time awakened me to my unfortunate lot.[155] Accordingly, when I greeted my fiftieth spring, I left my house and turned away from the world. I had no wife or children, and so there were no relatives whom it would have been difficult to leave behind. As I had neither office nor stipend, what was there for me to cling to? Vainly, I spent five springs and autumns living in seclusion among the clouds on Mount Ōhara.[156]

Reaching the age of sixty, when I seemed about to fade away like the dew, I constructed a new shelter for the remaining leaves of my life. I was like a traveler who builds a lodging for one night only or like an aged silkworm spinning its cocoon. The result was less than a hundredth the size of the residence of my middle age. In the course of things, years have piled up and my residences have steadily shrunk. This one is like no ordinary house. In area it is only ten feet square; in height, less than seven feet. Because I do not choose a particular place to live, I do not acquire land on which to build. I lay a foundation, put up a simple, makeshift roof, and secure each joint with a latch. This is so that I can easily move the building if anything dissatisfies me. How much bother can it be to reconstruct it? It fills only two carts, and there is no expense beyond payment for the porters.

Now, having hidden my tracks and gone into seclusion in the depths of Mount Hino,[157] I extended the eaves more than three feet to the east, making a convenient place to break and burn brushwood. On the south I made a

152. Chōmei is probably referring to the death of his father, in 1172 or 1173.

153. Suō Naishi, *Kin'yōshū*, no. 581: "I cannot live here any longer, and I leave: like the grass of remembrance growing thickly at the eaves, this dwelling is lush with fond memories."

154. A proper estate would have included guest quarters, storehouses, and other outbuildings.

155. Chōmei's family were hereditary priests of the Tadasu Shrine, part of the Shimogamo complex of Shinto shrines, just north of the capital. His greatest disappointment seems to have been his failure to succeed to this position.

156. Chōmei implies that these five years were vain because even though he had taken Buddhist vows, he had not made any progress toward enlightenment. Ōhara lies to the north of the capital.

157. Southeast of the capital, in what is now Fushimi Ward, Kyoto.

bamboo veranda, on the west of which I built a water-shelf for offerings to the Buddha, and to the north, behind a screen, I installed a painting of Amida Buddha,[158] next to it hung Fugen,[159] and before it placed the Lotus Sutra. Along the east side I spread soft ferns, making a bed for the night. In the southwest, I constructed hanging shelves of bamboo and placed there three black leather trunks. In them I keep selected writings on Japanese poetry and music, and the *Essentials of Salvation*. A koto and a biwa stand to one side. They are what are called a folding koto and a joined lute.[160] Such is the state of my temporary hut. As for the location: to the south is a raised bamboo pipe. Piling up stones, I let water collect there. Because the woods are near, kindling is easy to gather. The name of the place is Toyama. Vines cover all tracks.[161] Although the ravines are overgrown, the view is open to the west. The conditions are not unfavorable for contemplating the Pure Land of the West. In spring I see waves of wisteria. They glow in the west like lavender clouds. In summer I hear the cuckoo. Whenever I converse with him, he promises to guide me across the mountain path of death.[162] In autumn the voices of twilight cicadas fill my ears. They sound as though they are mourning this ephemeral, locust-shell world. In winter I look with deep emotion upon the snow. Accumulating and melting, it can be compared to the effects of bad karma. When I tire of reciting the Buddha's name or lose interest in reading the sutras aloud, I rest as I please, I dawdle as I like. There is no one to stop me, no one before whom to feel ashamed. Although I have taken no vow of silence, I live alone and so surely can avoid committing transgressions of speech.[163] Although I do not go out of my way to observe the rules that an ascetic must obey, what could lead me to break them, there being no distractions here? In the morning, I might gaze at the ships sailing to and from Okanoya, comparing myself to the whitecaps behind them,

158. It was believed that Amida Buddha presided over the Pure Land paradise to the west, where anyone who sought refuge in him by reciting his name would be reborn. Amida was thought to ride on lavender clouds when he came from his Pure Land to receive the dying.

159. The Fugen bodhisattva (Sk. Samantabhadra) is often shown seated on an elephant with six tusks, symbolizing the slow, steady progress with which one moves toward enlightenment.

160. The koto could be folded up, and the biwa (lute) disassembled, making them portable.

161. Although Chōmei uses "Toyama" as a proper noun here, the word also denotes "outer mountains," or slopes near town, as opposed to "deep mountains" (*miyama*). The association of *toyama* with vines (*masaki no kazura*) derives from Anonymous, *Kokinshū*, no. 1077: "Deep in the mountains hail must be falling. Vines on the outer mountains have turned red."

162. Chōmei alludes to an exchange between the Horikawa lady and the monk Saigyō (1118–1190). From the lady, *Sankashū*, no. 750; *Gyokuyōshū*, no. 2809: "Let us speak together now, in this world, and make a vow oh cuckoo—be my guide on the mountain path of death." Saigyō's reply, *Sankashū*, no. 751: "The weeping cuckoo will sing to keep his vow with you if you set out upon the mountain path of death."

163. Underlying this and the next two sentences is the Buddhist tradition of ascetic practice aimed at achieving correct action in speech, body, and mind. Chōmei suggests that because of his way of life, he cannot help but act correctly.

and compose verses in the elegant style of the novice-priest Manzei;[164] in the evening, when the wind rustles the leaves of the *katsura* trees, I might turn my thoughts to the Xunyang River and play my biwa in the way of Gen Totoku.[165] If my enthusiasm continues unabated, I might accompany the sound of the pines with "Autumn Winds" or play "Flowing Spring" to the sound of the water.[166] Although I have no skill in these arts, I do not seek to please the ears of others. Playing to myself, singing to myself, I simply nourish my own mind.

At the foot of the mountain is another brushwood hut, the home of the caretaker of this mountain. A small child lives there. Now and then he comes to visit. When I have nothing else to do, I take a walk with him as my companion. He is ten years old; I am sixty. Despite the great difference in our ages, our pleasure is the same. Sometimes we pluck edible reed-flowers, pick pearberries, break off yam bulbils, or gather parsley. Sometimes we go to the paddies at the foot of the mountain, collect fallen ears of rice, and tie them into sheaves. If the weather is fair, we climb to the peak and gaze at the distant sky above my former home, or look at Mount Kohata, the villages of Fushimi, Toba, and Hatsukashi. Because a fine view has no master,[167] nothing interferes with our pleasure. When walking is no problem and we feel like going somewhere far, we follow the ridges from here, crossing Mount Sumi, passing Kasatori, and visit the temple at Iwama or worship at the Ishiyama temple. Then again, we might make our way across Awazu Plain and go to see the site where Semimaru lived, or cross the Tanakami River and visit the grave of Sarumaru Dayū.[168] On our return, depending on the season, we break off branches of blossoming cherry, seek out autumn foliage, pick ferns, or gather fruit. Some we offer to the Buddha, and some we bring home to remind us of our outing. When the night is quiet, I look at the moon at the window and think fondly of my old friends;[169] I hear the cries of the monkey and wet my sleeve with tears.[170] Fireflies

164. Okanoya was on the east bank of the Uji River, in what is now the city of Uji. Manzei (or Mansei), a poet who took Buddhist vows in 721, is best remembered for the waka to which Chōmei alludes: *Shūishū*, no. 1327: "To what shall I compare the world? Whitecaps behind a ship that rows out at dawn."

165. The Xunyang River is in Jiangxi Province, China, where the poet Bo Juyi (772–846) wrote his famous *Biwa Song*. Gen Totoku (Minamoto no Tsunenobu, 1016–1097), poet and musician and founder of the Katsura school of biwa playing, lived in the village of Katsura, southwest of the capital.

166. "Autumn Winds" is a well-known piece of court music. "Flowing Spring" is a biwa composition reserved for specially initiated musicians.

167. Bo Juyi, *Wakan rōeishū*, no. 492: "A fine view has no particular master. Mountains belong to those who love mountains."

168. Semimaru, said to have been a blind lutenist, and Sarumaru Dayū were early Heian poets to whom many legends have attached. "Tanakami" refers to the upper reaches of the Uji River.

169. Bo Juyi, *Wakan rōeishū*, no. 242: "On the fifteenth night, the glow of a new moon. Two thousand miles away, the heart of my friend."

170. It was a convention of Chinese poetry that monkey cries are sad.

in the grass might be taken for fishing flares at distant Maki Island; the rain at dawn sounds like a gale blowing the leaves of the trees. When I hear the pheasant's song I wonder whether it might not be the voice of my father or mother;[171] when the deer from the ridge draws tamely near I know how far I have withdrawn from the world.[172] Sometimes I dig up embers to keep me company when, as old men do, I waken in the night. This is not a fearful mountain, and so I listen closely to the owl's call.[173] Thus from season to season the charms of mountain scenery are never exhausted. Of course one who thinks and understands more deeply than I would not be limited to these.

When I came to live in this place, I thought that I would stay for only a short time, but already five years have passed. Gradually my temporary hut has come to feel like home as dead leaves lie deep on the eaves and moss grows on the foundation. When news of the capital happens to reach me, I learn that many of high rank have passed away since I secluded myself on this mountain. There is no way to know how many of lower rank have died. How many houses have been lost in the frequent fires? Only a temporary hut is peaceful and free of worry. It may be small, but it has a bed on which to lie at night and a place in which to sit by day. Nothing is lacking to shelter one person. The hermit crab prefers a small shell. This is because he knows himself. The osprey lives on rugged shores. The reason is that he fears people. I am like them. Knowing myself and knowing the world, I have no ambitions, I do not strive. I simply seek tranquillity and enjoy the absence of care. It is common practice in the world that people do not always build dwellings for themselves. Some might build for their wives and children, their relations and followers, some for their intimates and friends. Some might build for their masters or teachers, even for valuables, oxen, and horses. I now have built a hut for myself. I do not build for others. The reason is that given the state of the world now and my own circumstances, there is neither anyone I should live with and look after, nor any dependable servant. Even if I had built a large place, whom would I shelter, whom would I have live in it?

When it comes to friends, people respect the wealthy and prefer the suave. They do not always love the warmhearted or the upright. Surely it is best simply to make friends with strings and woodwinds, blossoms and the moon. When it comes to servants, they value a large bonus and generous favors. They do not seek to be nurtured and loved, to work quietly and at ease. It is best simply to make my body my servant. How? If there is something to be done, I use my own body. This can be a nuisance, but it is easier than employing and looking

171. The priest Gyōki (Gyōgi), *Gyokuyōshū*, no. 2627: "When I hear the voice of the pheasant singing I think—is it my father? is it my mother?"

172. Saigyō, *Sankashū*, no. 1207; *Gyokuyōshū*, no. 2240: "Deep in the mountains the deer draws tamely near and I know how far I have withdrawn from the world."

173. Saigyō, *Sankashū*, no. 1203: "Deep in the mountains there are no friendly birdsongs—the fearful call of the owl."

after someone else. If I have to go out, I walk. This can be painful, but it is not as bad as troubling my mind over the horse, the saddle, the ox, the carriage. Now I divide my single body and use it in two ways. My hands are my servants, my legs my conveyance, and they do just as I wish. Because my mind understands my body's distress, I rest my body when it feels distressed, use it when it feels strong. [And] though I use it, I do not overwork it. When my body does not want to work, my mind is not annoyed. Needless to say, walking regularly and working regularly must promote good health. How can I idle the time away doing nothing? To trouble others is bad karma. Why should I borrow the strength of another? It is the same for clothing and food. Using what comes to hand, I cover my skin with clothing woven from the bark of wisteria vines and with a hempen quilt, and sustain my life with asters of the field and fruits of the trees on the peak. Because I do not mingle with others, I am not embarrassed by my appearance. Because food is scarce, my crude rewards taste good. My description of these pleasures is not directed at the wealthy. I am comparing my own past only with my present.

The Three Worlds exist only in the one mind.[174] If the mind is not at peace, elephants, horses, and the Seven Rarities will be worthless; palaces and pavilions will have no appeal. My present dwelling is a lonely, one-room hut, but I love it. When I happen to venture into the capital, I feel ashamed of my beggarly appearance, but when I come back and stay here, I pity those others who rush about in the worldly dust. Should anyone doubt what I am saying, I would ask them to look at the fishes and birds. A fish never tires of water. One who is not a fish cannot know a fish's mind.[175] Birds prefer the forest. One who is not a bird cannot know a bird's mind. The savor of life in seclusion is the same. Who can understand it without living it?

Well, now, the moon of my life span is sinking in the sky; the time remaining to me nears the mountaintops. Soon I shall set out for the darkness of the Three Paths.[176] About what should I complain at this late date? The essence of the Buddha's teachings is that we should cling to nothing. Loving my grass hut is wrong. Attachment to my quiet, solitary way of life, too, must interfere with my enlightenment. Why then do I go on spending precious time relating useless pleasures?

174. Chōmei here echoes a basic tenet of Mahayana Buddhism, that the phenomena around us, lacking any independent, objective existence, exist only as concepts or distinctions constructed by our minds. His wording derives from a line in the Kegon (Sk. Avatamsaka) Sutra: "All things in the Three Worlds exist only in the one mind." "The Three Worlds" are the world of desire, the world of form, and the world of formlessness, a division of the universe according to the level of enlightenment reached by the beings who exist in each realm. Human beings exist in the world of desire.

175. *Zhuangzi*, "Autumn Floods": "Not being a fish, how can you know that the fish are happy?"

176. The Three Paths are Hells, the Animal Path, and the Path of Hungry Ghosts, into which human beings who had committed bad actions were thought to be reborn.

Pondering this truth on a tranquil morning, just before dawn, I ask my mind: one leaves the world and enters the forest to cultivate the mind and practice the Way of the Buddha. In your case, however, although your appearance is that of a monk, your mind is clouded with desire. You have presumed to model your dwelling after none other than that of Vimalakirti,[177] but your adherence to the discipline fails even to approach the efforts of Suddhipanthaka.[178] Is this because poverty, a karmic retribution, torments your mind,[179] or is it that a deluded mind has deranged you? At that time, my mind had no reply. I simply set my tongue to work halfheartedly reciting the name of the compassionate Amida Buddha two or three times, and that is all.

The monk Ren'in wrote this late in the Third Month of Kenryaku 2 [1212], at his hut on Toyama.[180]

[Translated by Anthony H. Chambers]