

esting. I marked eighteen of the fifty as meritorious, which did seem unusual, I admit. Perhaps it was simply maternal blindness. This was one of them:

kokoro nomi  
hedatezu tote mo  
tabjgoromo  
yamaji kasanaru  
ochi no shirakumo

Although in spirit  
we are always together,  
the traveler, alas,  
dwells afar under white clouds  
beyond many a mountain road.

I was sure it had been inspired by thoughts of these travel skies of mine. Touched, I added a reply in small characters beside it:

koishinobu  
kokoro ya taguu  
asayū ni  
yukite wa kaeru  
ochi no shirakumo

Ah! My loving heart  
accompanies the white clouds  
of this distant land  
as they journey ceaselessly  
toward the city and back again.

I also added a reply to another poem with "Travel" as its topic. [Tamesuke's poem:]

karisome no  
kusa no makura no  
yonayona o  
omoiyaru ni mo  
sode zo tsuyukeki

Dew dampens my sleeve  
at the very thought of it—  
the makeshift pillow  
on which the traveler's head  
must repose night after night.

[The reply:]

aki fukaki  
kusa no makura ni  
ware zo naku  
furusurete koshi  
suzumushi no ne o

As autumn deepens,  
I weep into a pillow  
fashioned of grass,  
crying like the bell insect  
for the ones I have left behind.

I added something more at the end of the fifty poems—general comments on the art of composition, and a final poem written with Tameit in mind:

kore o miba  
ika bakari ka to  
omoiizuru  
hito ni kawarite  
ne koso nakarure

Were he to see them,  
what happiness he would feel!  
I can but shed tears  
in his place, weeping aloud  
as thoughts of him fill my mind.

Tamemori had also sent some poems, thirty of them, saying, "Please mark these and point out all the faults." He had turned sixteen that year. To me the verses seemed excellent—quite professional—but then I thought in embarrassment that I was probably just being a doting parent again. His travel poems, like Tamesuke's, seemed to have been written with me in mind. I had sent the boys a day-by-day account of the journey to Kamakura, which he had doubtless read before composing them.

[A travel poem by Tamemori:]

tachiwakare  
fuji no keburu o  
mite mo nao  
kokorobososa no  
ika ni soiken

How sorely the sight  
of smoke above Mount Fuji  
must have sharpened  
the misery of the traveler  
separated from her dear ones!

I added a reply to that one too:

karisome ni  
tachiwakarete mo  
ko o omou  
omoi o fuji no  
keburu to zo mishi

Just for a while,  
I have parted from my dear ones,  
but to me Fuji's smoke  
suggested the fire of love  
burning in a mother's heart.

Lady Gonchūnagon sent another detailed letter. "I have had no companion with whom to compose since you left, and now that autumn is here, I miss you more than ever. I look at the moon alone all night long." [Her poem:]

azumaji no  
sora natsukashiki  
katami dani  
shinobu namida ni  
kumoru tsukikage

Tears of longing becloud  
even the moon, the reminder of one  
for whose sake I hold  
the skies of the eastland road  
in nostalgic affection.

In my reply, I wrote of my longing for home and other such things. [My poem:]

kayourashi  
miyako no hoka no  
tsuki mire mo  
sora natsukashiki  
onaji nagame wa

Looking at the moon  
thus distant from the capital,  
I yearn for those skies.  
It seems that the two of us  
have gazed with similar thoughts.

Many poems from the capital have accumulated since then. I shall try to record them elsewhere.

shikishima ya  
yamato no kuni wa  
ametsuchi no  
hirakehajimeshi  
mukashi yori  
iwado o akete  
omoshiroki  
kagura no kotoba  
utaiteshi  
sareba kashikoki  
tameshi tote  
hijiri no miyo no  
michi shiruku  
hito no kokoro o  
tane to shite  
yorozu no waza o  
koto no ha ni  
oni kami made mo  
aware tote  
yashima no hoka no  
yotsu no umi  
nami mo shizuka ni  
osamarite  
sora fuku kaze mo  
edaka ni  
yawaraka ni  
furu ame mo  
toki sadamareba  
kimikimi no  
mikoto no mama ni  
shitagaite  
waka no uraji no  
moshiogusa  
kakiatsumetaru  
ato ōku  
sore ga naka ni mo  
na o tomete

\*\*\*  
Ah, how awesome  
the power first manifest  
here in Yamato,  
the land of Shikishima,  
in days long ago,  
after the separation  
of heaven and earth,  
when the rock-cave door opened  
and entertaining  
words set to divine music  
were intoned aloud,  
thus making clear the Way  
of imperial rule!  
Poetry takes as its seed  
the human heart,  
it expresses a myriad things  
in the leaves of words,  
it touches the emotions  
of spirits and gods.  
With calming touch, it quiets  
the billows rising  
on the four seas that border  
our eight islands;  
likewise, it tempers the winds  
blowing in the sky,  
that the branches may be still;  
and it determines  
the season when rain may fall.  
And thus, many times,  
in faithful obedience  
to august edicts  
from successive sovereigns,  
men have raked together  
collections of salt seaweed  
from Poetry Bay.  
And among that company  
there have been, in truth,

miyo made tsugishi  
hito no ko no  
oya no toriwaki  
yuzuriteshi  
sono makoto sae  
ari nagara  
omoeba iyashi  
shinano naru  
sono hahakigi no  
sono hara ni  
tane o makitaru  
toga tote ya  
yo ni mo tsukae yo  
ikeru yo no  
mi o tasuke yo to  
chigirioku  
suma to akashi no  
tsuzuki naru  
hosokawayama no  
yamagawa no  
wazuka ni inochi  
kakei tote  
tsutaishi mizu no  
minakami mo  
sekitomerarete  
ima wa tada  
kuga ni agareru  
io no goto  
kajio taetaru  
fune no goto  
yoru kata mo naku  
wabihatsuru  
ko o omou tote  
yoru no tsuru  
nakunaku miyako  
ideshikado  
mi wa kazu narazu  
kamakura no  
yo no matsurigoto  
shigekereba  
kikoeageteshi

a father, son, and grandson  
successively famed.  
Now, there is actual proof  
of a property  
granted to that grandson's son  
by special bequest.  
Might it be because the heir  
grew within a womb  
of no account (suggesting  
*hahakigi* trees  
on the Sonohara plain  
in Shinano)?  
Might that be the reason why  
they dam the upper course  
of the mountain stream whence flowed—  
as through a conduit  
barely sustaining life—  
waters descending  
from Hosokawayama,  
the domain beyond  
Suma and Akashi,  
willed in covenant:  
“Be of service to the state;  
let this property  
ensure your livelihood”?  
For love of that son,  
now driven to his wit's end,  
bereft of support,  
as forlorn as a fish  
stranded on dry land,  
or as a boat with its rope  
severed from the oar,  
his mother, weeping aloud  
like a crane in the night,  
has embarked on a journey  
from the capital,  
but she is of small account,  
and affairs of state  
proliferate like grasses  
at Kamakura.  
The pleas she has presented—

koto no ha mo  
 eda ni komorite  
 mume no hana  
 yorose no haru ni  
 narinikeri  
 yukue mo shiranu  
 nakazora no  
 kaze ni makasuru  
 furusato wa  
 nokiba mo arete  
 sasagani no  
 ikasama ni ka wa  
 narinuran  
 yoyo no ato aru  
 tamazusa mo  
 sate kuchihateba  
 ashihara no  
 michi mo sutarete  
 ika naran  
 kore o omoeba  
 watakushi no  
 nageki nomi ka wa  
 yo no tame mo  
 tsuraki tameshi to  
 narinubeshi  
 yukusaki kakete  
 samazama ni  
 kakinokosareshi  
 fude no ato  
 kaesugaesu mo  
 itsuwari to  
 omowamashikaba  
 kotowari o  
 tadasu no mori no  
 yushide ni  
 yayoya isasaka  
 kakete toe  
 midarigawashiki  
 sue no yo ni  
 asa wa ato naku  
 narinu to ka

the leaves of her words—  
 remain as buds on the branches,  
 and now the plum trees  
 have blossomed in the springtime  
 of a fourth year.  
 How piteous must be the stare  
 of her old dwelling,  
 abandoned to the onslaughts  
 of the skyborne winds  
 blowing from every quarter,  
 its eaves in ruins,  
 its chambers festooned with webs  
 woven by spiders!  
 And what will be the outcome  
 if they also rot—  
 those precious writings bequeathed  
 by generations?  
 May not others then forsake  
 the Way of poetry?  
 Upon reflection, our plight  
 is not merely cause  
 for private lamentation:  
 it is sure to prove  
 a most serious matter  
 for society.  
 If there be those who think them  
 nothing but falsehoods  
 pure and simple—those traces  
 from the brush of one  
 who, in various manners,  
 wrote down documents  
 providing for the future—  
 pray make offerings  
 and briefly consult the god  
 of Tadasu Woods,  
 the shrine whose name promises  
 correction of wrongs.  
 With no concern for myself,  
 I trust the government,  
 holding firm to the belief  
 that if there be those

isameokishi o  
 wasurezuba  
 yugameru koto o  
 mata tare ka  
 hikinaosubeki  
 to bakari ni  
 mi o kaerimizu  
 tanomu zo yo  
 sono yo o kikeba  
 sate mo sa wa  
 nokoru yomogi to  
 kakochiteshi  
 hito no nasake mo  
 kakarikeri  
 onaji harima  
 sakai tote  
 hitotsunagare o  
 kumishikaba  
 nonaka no shimizu  
 yodomu tomo  
 moto no kokoro ni  
 makasetsutsu  
 todokōri naki  
 mizuguki no  
 ato sae araba  
 itodoshiku  
 tsuru ga okabe no  
 asahikage  
 yachiyo no hikari

who remember the warning  
 left as legacy  
 in these degenerate  
 late days of the Law—  
 "hemp seems to have disappeared  
 without a trace"—  
 someone will surely straighten  
 that which has been bent.<sup>82</sup>  
 Upon hearing of the past,  
 I feel a kinship  
 with the one who received grace  
 after complaining,  
 "the surviving mugwort plants."<sup>83</sup>  
 Her case, too, was thus.  
 Her land was in Harima,  
 the same province as ours,  
 and she traced her descent  
 from the same lineage.  
 If only the government  
 will reach a verdict  
 without delay—if only  
 it will emulate  
 the meadow spring whose waters,  
 though once they stagnate,  
 flow again as in the past—  
 eternal radiance  
 will render ever brighter  
 the morning sunlight  
 at Tsurugaoka Shrine,

82. According to contemporary opinion, the history of the Buddhist religion had entered its final stage, an era of degeneracy in which the doctrines barely survived. The quotation is from a poem by a Kamakura Regent, Hōjō Yasutoki (scs 1154): yo no naka ni / asa wa ato naku / narikeri / kokoro no mama no / yomogi nomi shite ("In the present world, hemp has vanished without a trace; nothing remains but mugwort bushes growing exactly as they please"). In Yasutoki's poem, hemp, a straight plant, functions as a metaphor for uprightness and justice; mugwort, a sprawling plant, as a metaphor for disorder and unrighteousness.

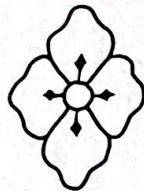
83. The poet known as Shunzei's Daughter (actually his granddaughter) is said to have won a dispute over land rights by sending this composition to Yasutoki: kimi hitori / ato naki asa no / mi o shiraba / nokoru yomogi no / kazu o kotoware ("If you alone, my lord, know me to be someone as upright as vanished hemp, please judge the number of the surviving mugwort plants").

sashisoete  
akirakeki yo no  
nao mo sakaen

nagakare to  
asayū inoru  
kimi ga yo o  
yamarokotoba ni  
kyō zo nobetsuru

and ever greater  
will be the prosperity  
of this enlightened rule.  
[*Envy:*]

Today I express  
in the speech of Yamato  
the prayers I offer  
both morning and evening  
that our lord's rule may endure.



## Medieval Recluse-Memoirists

The first of the three memoirs below, *An Account of My Hermitage* (Hō-jōki), was written in 1212 by Kamo no Chōmei (1155?-1216). The Kamo clan traced its ancestry to a god who had settled at Kamo (now a part of Kyōto) after having marched with Emperor Jinmu, the legendary founder of the Japanese state. In Chōmei's day, its leading members held low court ranks and prospered as priests at the influential Upper and Lower Kamo Shrines and their subsidiaries. Chōmei's father, Nagatsugu (d. ca. 1173), had become head priest of the Lower Kamo Shrine at around the time of his son's birth.

Chōmei seems to have been a pampered child, untouched by the political turbulence of the times, and to have looked forward to a career in the Shinto priesthood. When he was eighteen or twenty, however, the death of his father left him without backing, and he turned increasingly to music and literature. He participated in numerous important poetry contests from around 1191 on, and in 1201 was honored by appointment to the Poetry Office, an organ established by Retired Emperor Go-Toba in preparation for the compilation of *New Collection of Early and Modern Poetry*. Go-Toba also proposed to make him a priest at Tadasu, a Kamo subsidiary at which Nagatsugu had once served, but the Kamo Chief Priest insisted on the selection of his own son instead. The loss of the appointment was apparently a devastating blow to Chōmei. Although the Retired Emperor offered to create an opening for him at a less prestigious shrine, he severed his ties with the Poetry Office, took Buddhist vows, and went to live at Ohara near Mount Hiei, an area favored by recluses. A few years later, probably around 1208, he built a hermitage in the remote mountains at Hino, his final home.

Chōmei's only lengthy absence from Hino was occasioned by a visit to Kamakura in the autumn of 1211. The journey had been arranged by Asukai Masatsune (1170-1221), a former member of the Poetry Office who had once been on close terms with Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-99), the founder of the Kamakura shogunate. Masatsune may have wanted to help his old colleague by introducing him to Yoritomo's son, the shogun Sanetomo (1192-1219), an ardent versifier who was already in correspondence with the famous Teika. But nothing came of the visit, and Chōmei returned to the hermitage.

Soon after the trip to Kamakura, Chōmei put together *Untitled Jottings* (Mumyōshō, ca. 1211), a miscellaneous assortment of anecdotes and notes about poets, poems, and the art of composition, with many quotations from his teacher, Shū'e (fl. ca. 1160-80). Later, around 1214, he assembled a group of Buddhist anecdotes, *A Collection of Talks on the Awakening of Faith* (Hosshinshū). Both works are fairly well known today, as are several of his approximately 340 extant poems. But it is undoubtedly his short essay on the futility of attachment to worldly things, *An Account of My Hermitage*, that has caused him to rank with Yoshida Kenkō (Kaneyoshi) as one of the two main figures among identifiable male prose writers of the medieval period.

The translation of *An Account of My Hermitage* is complete.

Yoshida Kaneyoshi (1283?-ca. 1352), the author of *Essays in Idleness* (Tsuzuregusa, ca. 1330?), belonged to a branch of the Urabe clan whose members had been hereditary priests at Yoshida Shrine before they entered the secular bureaucracy. In his youth, he became a steward to the Horikawa, one of the main Fujiwara houses, thus establishing a connection to which he probably owed his court career and his ability to participate in the life of the upper aristocracy. He held the respectable posts of Chamberlain and Assistant Commander of the Military Guards of the Left, and was active as a poet in the conservative Nijō school, which compiled most of the medieval imperial anthologies.

Around 1313, for unknown reasons, he took Buddhist vows, changed the reading of the characters in his name from Kaneyoshi to the more religious-sounding Kenkō, and went to live at Ono-no-shō outside the capital. As was often true of lay monks, or novices (*nyūdō*), he retained many of his former interests, receiving visitors, making trips to the capital, participating in poetry contests, and otherwise keeping in touch with the world. In 1322, he sold the land that had been his chief

source of income, and thereafter, if scholarly opinion is correct, supported himself by increased activity as a poet—perhaps teaching, and probably actively seeking patrons. It was probably in the 1320's that he made two trips to eastern Japan and lived in two other places close to the capital.

In 1336, Emperor Go-Daigo, the sovereign whose supporters had crushed the Kamakura shogunate three years earlier, was forced by the rebel warrior Ashikaga Takauji (1305-58) to flee to the Yoshino Mountains, where, during the next fifty-seven years, he and his successors presided over what came to be called the Southern Court, while a rival Northern Court in the capital conferred a species of legitimacy on Takauji's Muromachi shogunate. Casting his lot with the Northern Court, Kenkō took up residence in the capital. He won recognition as a major poet and an expert on ancient usages, became acquainted with powerful figures like Takauji's brother Tadayoshi (1306-52), and secured the patronage of an influential warrior, Kō no Moronao (d. 1351), whom he is said to have coached in the niceties of court etiquette. His last years are obscure.

Despite Kenkō's fleeting prominence as a poet, *Essays in Idleness* is regarded today as his only significant literary legacy. Sixty of the work's 243 sections are translated below.

Nothing is known about the author of *An Account of a Journey to the East* (Tōkan kikō, 1242?) except what can be inferred from the work itself—namely, that he was a well-educated man, presumably nearing fifty, who professed to be reclusive and weary of the world, but who was apparently not unwilling to contemplate the possibility of employment in Kamakura. The translation of his memoir is complete.

## An Account of My Hermitage

### I

The waters of a flowing stream are ever present but never the same; the bubbles in a quiet pool disappear and form but never endure for long. So it is with men and their dwellings in the world.

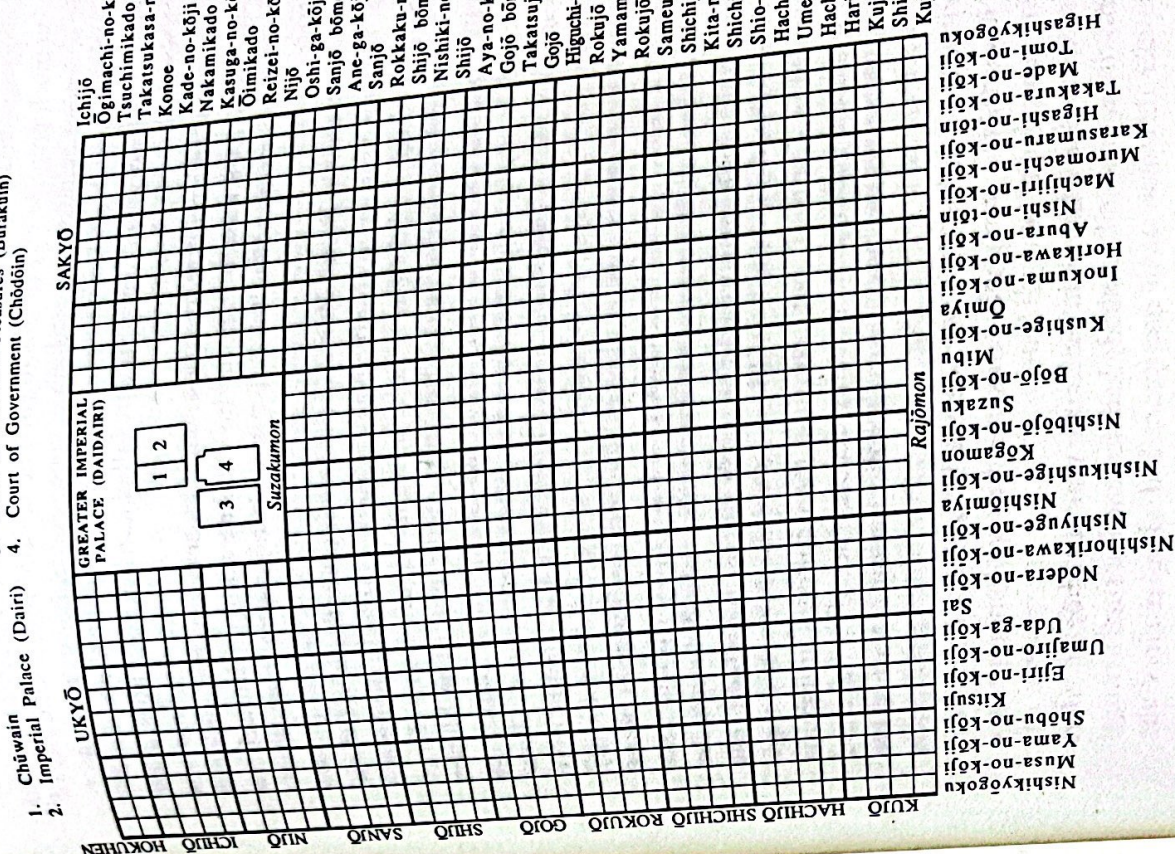
The houses of the high and the low seem to last for generation after

generation, standing with ridgepoles aligned and roof-tiles jostling in the magnificent imperial capital, but investigation reveals that few of them existed in the past. In some cases, a building that burned last year has been replaced this year; in others, a great house has given way to a small one. And it is the same with the occupants. The places are unchanged, the population remains large, but barely one or two survive among every twenty or thirty of the people I used to know. Just as with the bubbles on the water, someone dies at night and someone else is born in the morning. Where do they come from and where do they go, all those who are born and die? And for whose benefit, for what reason, does a man take enormous pains to build a temporary shelter pleasing to the eye? The master in his dwelling is like the dewdrop vying in ephemerality with the morning glory where it forms. The flower may remain after the dew evaporates, but it withers in the morning sun; the flower may droop before the moisture vanishes, but the dew does not survive until nightfall.

2

I have witnessed a number of remarkable occurrences in the more than forty years since I began to understand the nature of things. Around the Hour of the Dog [7:00 P.M. - 9:00 P.M.] on a very windy night—I believe it was the Twenty-eighth of the Fourth Month in the third year of Angen [1177]—a fire broke out in the southeastern part of the capital and burned toward the northwest. In the end, it spread to Suzaku Gate, the Great Hall of State, the Academy, and the Ministry of Popular Affairs, reducing them all to ashes overnight. Its source is said to have been a temporary structure housing some dancers, located near the Higuchi-Tomi-no-kōji intersection. Spread here and there by an erratic wind, it burned in a pattern resembling an open fan, narrow at the base and wide at the outer edge. Suffocating smoke engulfed distant houses; wind-whipped flames descended to earth everywhere near at hand. The sky was red to the horizon with ashes lit by the fiery glare, and winged flames leaped a block or two at a time in the lurid atmosphere, torn free by the irresistible force of the gale. Everything must have seemed as unreal as a dream to the people in the fire's path. Some of them fell victim to the smoke. Others died instantly in the embrace of the flames. Still others managed to escape with their lives but failed to rescue their

- 3. Court of Abundant Pleasures (Burakuin)
- 4. Court of Government (Chōdōin)



The Heian capital (Heian-kyō). Names in capital letters are districts; names in italics are gates.

belongings, and all their cherished treasures turned to ashes. The value of so much property may be imagined! The fire claimed the houses of sixteen senior nobles, to say nothing of countless others of less importance. It was reported that fully one-third of the capital had been destroyed. Dozens of men and women were killed; innumerable horses and oxen perished.

All human enterprises are pointless, but it must be counted an act of supreme folly for a man to consume his treasure and put himself to endless trouble merely to build a house in a place as dangerous as the capital.

Again, around the Fourth Month in the fourth year of Jishō [1180], a great whirlwind sprang up near the Nakamikado—[Higashi]Kyōgoku intersection and swept all the way to Rokujō Avenue. Not a house, large or small, escaped destruction within the area of three or four blocks where the blast wreaked its full fury. In some cases, entire buildings were flattened; in others, only crossbeams and pillars were spared. Gates were caught up and deposited four or five blocks distant; fences were blown away and neighboring properties merged. And I need hardly mention what happened to smaller objects. Everything inside a house mounted to the skies; cypress-bark thatch and shingles whirled like winter leaves in the wind. Dust ascended like smoke to blind the eye; the terrible howl of the storm swallowed the sound of voices. It seemed that even the dread karma-wind of hell could be no worse. Not only were houses damaged or destroyed, but countless men suffered injury or mutilation while the buildings were being reconstructed. The wind moved toward the south-southeast, visiting affliction on innumerable people.

Whirlwinds are common, but not ones such as that. Those who experienced it worried that it might be an extraordinary phenomenon, a warning from a supernatural being.

Again, around the Sixth Month in the fourth year of Jishō, the court moved suddenly to a new capital.<sup>1</sup> Nobody had dreamed of such a thing. When we consider that more than 400 years had elapsed since the establishment of the present imperial seat during Emperor Saga's reign, surely a new one ought not to have been chosen without exceptional

1. The move took place soon after the suppression of a preliminary attempt to overthrow the Taira. The new capital was at Fukuhara (now a part of Kōbe), where Taira no Kiyomori had established his principal residence some years earlier.

justification. It was more than reasonable that people should have felt disquiet and apprehension.

But complaints were useless. The Emperor, the Ministers of State, the senior nobles, and all the others moved. Nobody remained in the old capital who held even a minor court position. Those who aspired to office and rank, or who relied on the favor of patrons, strove to move with all possible dispatch; those who had lost the opportunity to succeed in life, or who had been rejected by society, strayed behind, sunk in gloom. The dwellings that had once stood eave to eave grew more dilapidated with every passing day. Houses were dismantled and sent floating down the Yodo River, and their former locations turned into fields before the onlookers' eyes.

In a complete reversal of values, everyone prized horses and saddles and stopped using oxen and carriages. Properties in the Western and Southern Sea circuits were sought; those in the Eastern Sea and Northern Land circuits were considered undesirable.

It happened that something took me to the new capital in Settsu Province. The cramped site, too small for proper subdivision, rose high on the north where it bordered the hills and sank low on the south beside the sea. The breaking waves never ceased to clamor; the wind from the sea blew with peculiar fury. The imperial palace struck me as unexpectedly novel and interesting, situated in the hills as it was, and I asked myself whether Empress Saimei's log house might not have been rather similar.<sup>2</sup>

I wondered where people were erecting the whole houses that were being sent downstream daily, their numbers great enough to clog the river. There were still many empty parcels of land and few houses. The old capital was already in ruins; the new one had yet to take form. Not a soul but felt as rootless as a drifting cloud. The original inhabitants grieved over the loss of their land; the new arrivals worried about plaster and lumber. On the streets, those who ought to have used carriages rode horseback; those who ought to have worn court dress or hunting robes appeared in *bitatare*. The customs of the capital had been revolutionized overnight, and people behaved like rustic warriors.

I have heard that such changes portend civil disturbance—and that was precisely what happened. With every passing day, the world grew

2. The log house was a temporary residence in Kyūshū used by Empress Saimei (594–661) when the Japanese were preparing to attack the Korean state of Silla in 661.

more unsettled, people lost more of their composure, and the common folk felt more apprehension. In the end, a crisis brought about a return to the old capital during the winter of the same year.<sup>3</sup> But who knows what became of the houses that had been torn down everywhere? They were not rebuilt in their former style.

We are told that the sage Emperors of old ruled with compassion. They roofed their palaces with thatch, neglecting even to trim the eaves; they remitted the already modest taxes when they saw the commoners' cooking-fires emit less smoke than before. The reason was simply that they cherished their subjects and wished to help them. To compare the present to the past is to see what kind of government we have today.

Again, there was a dreadful two-year famine. (I think it was around the Yōwa era [1181-82], but it was too long ago to be sure.) The grain crops were ruined as one calamity followed another: drought in the spring and summer, typhoons and floods in the autumn. It was vain for the farmers to till the fields in the spring or set out plants in the summer; there was no reaping in the fall, no bustle of storage in the winter. Some rural folk abandoned their land and wandered off; others deserted their homes to live in the hills. Prayers were begun and extraordinary rituals were performed, but they accomplished nothing.

The capital had always depended on the countryside for every need. Now, with nothing coming in, people were beside themselves with anxiety. In desperation, they offered all their treasures at bargain rates, but nobody took any notice. The rare person who was willing to trade thought little of gold and much of grain. The streets were overrun with mendicants; lamentations filled the air.

The first of the two years dragged to a close. But just as everyone was anticipating a return to normal in the new year, a pestilence came along to make matters even worse. Like fish gasping in a puddle, the starving populace drew closer to the final extremity with every passing day, until begged frantically from house to house. These wretched, dazed beings fell prostrate even as one marveled at their ability to walk. Countless people perished of starvation by the wayside or died next to tile-capped walls. Since there was no way to dispose of the bodies, noisome stench filled the air, and innumerable decomposing corpses

3. The rebellions of provincial Minamoto leaders had produced serious military disturbances.

shocked the eye. Needless to say, the dead lay so thick in the Kamo riverbed that there was not even room for horses and ox-carriages to pass.

With the woodsmen and other commoners too debilitated to perform their usual functions, a shortage of firewood developed, and people who possessed no other means of support broke up their own houses to sell in the market. The amount a man could carry brought less than enough to sustain him for a day. It was shocking to see pieces of wood covered with red lacquer or gold and silver leaf jumbled together with the rest. On inquiry, one learned that desperate people were going to old temples, stealing the sacred images, tearing away the fixtures from the halls, and breaking up everything for firewood. It is because I was born in a degenerate age that I have been forced to witness such disgraceful sights.

Some deeply moving things also happened. Whenever a couple were too devoted to part, the one whose love was greater was the first to die. This was because he or she put the spouse's welfare first and gave up whatever food came to hand. Similarly, a parent always predeceased a child. One sometimes saw a recumbent child sucking at his mother's breast, unaware that her life had ended. Grieved that countless people should be perishing in that manner, Dharmas Seal Ryūgyō of Ninnaji Temple sought to help the dead toward enlightenment by writing the Sanskrit letter "A" on the forehead of every corpse he saw.<sup>4</sup>

The authorities kept track of the deaths in the Fourth and Fifth Months. During that period, there were more than 42,300 bodies on the streets in the area south of Ichijō, north of Kujō, west of Kyōgoku, and east of Suzaku. Of course, many others died before and afterward. And there would be no limit to the numbers if we were to count the Kamo riverbed, Shirakawa, the western sector, and the outlying districts, to say nothing of the provinces in the seven circuits.

People say there was something similar during the reign of Emperor Sutoku, around the Chōshō era [1132-35], but I know nothing about that. I witnessed this phenomenal famine with my own eyes.

If I remember correctly, it was at more or less the same time that a terrible seismic convulsion occurred. It was no ordinary earthquake. Mountains crumbled and buried streams; the sea tilted and immersed the land. Water gushed from fissures in the earth; huge rocks cracked

4. In esoteric Buddhism, of which Ninnaji was a center, "A," the first syllable in the Sanskrit syllabary, was regarded as symbolic of the unity of all things.

and rolled into valleys. Boats being rowed near the shoreline tossed on the waves; horses journeying on the roads lost their footing. Not a Buddhist hall or stupa remained intact anywhere in the vicinity of the capital. Some crumbled, others fell flat. Dust billowed like smoke; the shaking earth and collapsing houses rumbled like thunder. If people stayed indoors, they were crushed at once; if they ran outside, the ground split apart. If men had been dragons, they might have ridden the clouds, but they lacked the wings to soar into the heavens. It was then that I came to recognize an earthquake as the most terrible of all terrible things.

The violent shaking subsided fairly soon, but aftershocks followed for some time. No day passed without twenty or thirty earthquakes of an intensity that would ordinarily have caused consternation. The intervals lengthened after ten or twenty days, and then there were tremors four or five times a day, or two or three times a day, or once every other day, or once every two or three days. It must have been about three months before they ceased.

Of the four constituents of the universe, water, fire, and wind create constant havoc, but the earth does not usually give rise to any particular calamities. To be sure, there were some dreadful earthquakes in the past (for instance, the great shock that toppled the head of the Todaiji Buddha during the Saikō era [854-57]), but none of them could compare with this. Immediately after the event, people all talked about the meaninglessness of life and seemed somewhat more free from spiritual impurity than usual. But nobody even mentioned the subject after the days and months had accumulated and the years had slipped by.

Such, then, is the difficulty of life in this world, such the ephemerality of man and his dwellings. Needless to say, it would be utterly impossible to list every affliction that stems from individual circumstance or social position. If a man of negligible status lives beside a powerful family, he cannot make a great display of happiness when he has cause for heartfelt rejoicing, nor can he lift his voice in lamentation and trembling. If a poor man lives next door to a wealthy house, he abases himself before the neighbors and agonizes over his wretched appearance whenever he goes out in the morning or returns in the

evening. Forced to witness the envy of his wife, children, and servants, and to hear the rich household dismiss him with contempt, he is forever agitated, constantly distraught.

He who lives in a crowded area cannot escape calamity when a fire breaks out nearby; he who settles in a remote spot suffers many hardships in his travels to and fro and puts himself at grave risk from robbers. The powerful man is consumed by greed; the man who refuses to seek a patron becomes an object of derision. The man who owns many possessions knows many worries; the impoverished man seethes with envy.

He who depends on another belongs to another; he who takes care of another is chained by human affection. When a man observes the conventions, he falls into economic difficulties; when he flouts them, people wonder if he is mad. Where can we live, what can we do, to find even the briefest of shelters, the most fleeting peace of mind?

## 3

For a long time, I lived in a house inherited from my paternal grandmother. Later, my fortunes declined through lack of connections, and I found myself unable to remain in society, despite many nostalgic associations. Shortly after I entered my thirties, I moved voluntarily into a simple new dwelling one-tenth the size of the old place. I built only a personal residence, with no fashionable auxiliary structures, and although I managed an encircling earthen wall, my means did not extend to a gate. The carriage-shelter was supported by bamboo pillars, and the house was unsafe in a snowfall or windstorm. The site was near the riverbed, which left it vulnerable to floods, and there was also danger from robbers.

For more than thirty miserable years, I endured an existence in which I could not maintain my position. Every setback during that time drove home the realization that I was not blessed by fortune. And thus, at fifty, I became a monk and turned my back on the world. Having never had a wife or children, I was not bound to others by ties difficult to break; lacking office and stipend, I possessed no attachments to which to cling.

During the next five springs and autumns, I sojourned among the clouds of the Ōhara hills, leading a life devoid of spiritual progress.

Now at sixty, with the dew nearing its vanishing point, I have built a new shelter for the tree's last leaves, just as a traveler might fashion a single night's resting place or an old silkworm spin a cocoon. It is not a hundredth the size of my second house. Indeed, while I have sat around uttering idle complaints, my age has increased with every year, and my house has shrunk with every move.

This house is unusual in appearance. It is barely ten feet square, and its height is less than seven feet. The location was a matter of indifference to me; I did not divine to select a site. I built a foundation and a simple roof, and attached hinges to all the joints so that I could move easily if cause for dissatisfaction arose. There would be no trouble about rebuilding. The house would barely fill two carts, and the carters' fees would be the only expense.

After settling on my present place of retirement in the Hino hills, I extended the eastern eaves about three feet to provide myself with a convenient spot in which to break up and burn firewood. On the south side of the building, I have an open bamboo veranda with a holy water shelf at the west end. Toward the north end of the west wall, beyond a freestanding screen, there is a picture of Amida Buddha, with an image of Fugen alongside and a copy of the *Lotus Sutra* in front. At the east end of the room, some dried bracken serves as a bed. South of the screen on the west side, a bamboo shelf suspended from the ceiling holds three leather-covered bamboo baskets, in which I keep excerpts from poetry collections and critical treatises, works on music, and religious tracts like *Collection of Essentials on Rebirth in the Pure Land*. A zither and a lute stand next to the shelf. The zither is of the folding variety; the handle of the lute is detachable. Such is the appearance of my rude temporary shelter.

To turn to the surroundings: I have made a rock basin in which to collect water from an elevated conduit south of the hermitage, and I gather ample supplies of firewood in a neighboring stand of trees. The locality is called Toyama, "the foothills." Vines cover the paths. The valley is thickly forested, but there is open land to the west. Aids to contemplation abound. In the spring, lustrous cascades of wisteria burgeon in the west like purple clouds. In the summer, every song of the cuckoo conveys a promise of companionship in the Shide Mountains. In the autumn, the incessant cries of the cicadas seem to lament the transitoriness of worldly things. And in the winter, the

accumulating and melting snows suggest poignant comparisons with sins and hindrances.<sup>5</sup>

When I tire of reciting the sacred name or find myself intoning a sutra in a perfunctory manner, I rest as I please, I fall idle as I see fit. There is nobody to interfere, nobody to shame me. Although I do not make a point of performing silent austerities, I can control speech-induced karma because I live alone; although I do not make a fuss about inducing the commandments, I have no occasion to break them because obeying the environment conducive to transgression.

On mornings when I compare my existence to a white wake in the water, I borrow Mansei's style while watching boats come and go at Okanoya; on evenings when the wind rustles the maple leaves, I imitate Tsunenobu's practice while recalling the Xinyang River.<sup>6</sup> If my interest does not flag, I often perform "Song of the Autumn Wind" as an accompaniment to the murmur of the pines, or play "Melody of the Flowing Spring" to harmonize with the sound of the water. I am not an accomplished musician, but my playing is not designed for the pleasure of others. I merely pluck the strings alone and chant alone to comfort my own spirit.

At the foot of the hill, there is a brush-thatched cottage, the abode of the mountain warden. The small boy who lives there pays me an occasional visit, and if I chance to feel at loose ends, I set out for a ramble with him as my companion. He is ten, I am sixty. Our ages differ greatly, but we take pleasure in the same things. Sometimes we pull out reed-flower sprouts, pick *iwanashi* berries, heap up yam sprouts, or pluck herbs. Or we may go to the rice fields at the foot of the mountains, glean ears left by the reapers, and fashion sheafs. When the weather is balmy, we scramble up to a peak from which I can look toward the

5. Amida and his attendants were thought to descend, riding on a purple cloud, to escort the believer to the Western Paradise at the moment of death. Possibly because the cuckoo's cry included notes that sounded like *shide*, the bird was considered a messenger from the land of the dead, which lay beyond the Shide Mountains. Sins and hindrances to enlightenment piled up in the course of daily life and were discharged periodically by repentance rites and confessions before a Buddha.

6. Mansei (8th c.) was the author of a frequently quoted poem on ephemerality (sis 1377): yo no naka o / nani ni tatoen / asaborake / kogiyuku fune no / aro no shiranami ("To what shall I compare life in this world—the white wake of a boat rowing off at break of day"). Tsunenobu (1016–97) was a major poet known also as an expert lute player. Chōmei alludes to the first two lines of Bo Juyi's "Lute Song": "As I see off a guest at night near the Xinyang River, / The autumn wind rustles through maple leaves and reed plumes."

distant skies over my old home and see Kohatayama, Fushimi-no-sano, Toba, and Harsukashi. Nobody owns the view; there is nothing to keep me from enjoying it.

When the going is easy and I feel like taking a long walk, I follow the peaks past Sumiyama and Kasatori to worship at Iwama or Ishiyama. Or I may traverse Awazu Plain, visit the site of Semimaru's dwelling, cross the Tanakami River, and seek out Sarumaru's grave.<sup>7</sup> On the way home, I search for cherry blossoms, pick autumn leaves, gather bracken, or collect fruit and nuts, depending on the season. Some of my trophies I present to the Buddha; others I treat as useful souvenirs.

On peaceful nights, I long for old friends while gazing at the moon through the window, or weep into my sleeve at the cry of a monkey. Sometimes I mistake fireflies in the bushes for fish lures burning far away at Maki-no-shima Island, or think that a gale must be scattering the leaves when I hear rain just before dawn. The *boroboro* call of a pheasant makes me wonder if the bird might be a parent; the frequent visits of deer from the peaks attest to the remoteness of my abode.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes I stir up the banked fire and make it a companion for the wakefulness of old age. The mountains are so little intimidating that even the owl's hoot sounds moving rather than eerie. Indeed, there is no end to the delights of the changing seasons in these surroundings. A truly reflective man, blessed with superior powers of judgment, would undoubtedly find many more pleasures than the ones I have described.

## 4

When I first began to live here, I thought it would not be for long, but five years have already elapsed. My temporary hermitage has gradually become a home, its eaves covered with rotted leaves and its foundation mossy. Whenever I happen to hear news of the capital, I learn that many illustrious personages have breathed their last since my retreat to these mountains. And it would be quite impossible to keep track of all the unimportant people who have died. A great many houses have also

7. Semimaru and Sarumaru were semilegendary poets.  
8. Gyōki (Gyōgi): yamadori no / boroboro to naku / koe kikeba / chichi ka to zo omou / haha ka to zo omou ("When I hear the voice of the pheasant, mountain bird, crying *boroboro*, I think, 'Might it be a father? Or might it be a mother?'"). Saigyō: yama fukami / naruru kasegi no / kejikasa ni / yo ni tōzakarū / hodo zo shiraruru ("To see at close hand deer grown accustomed to me deep in the mountains is to know my remoteness from the affairs of the world").

suffered destruction in recurrent conflagrations. Only in my temporary hermitage is life peaceful and safe. The quarters are cramped, but I have a place where I can lie at night and another where I can sit in the daytime. There is ample room for one person. The hermit crab likes a small shell because it knows its own size; the osprey lives on the rocky coast because it fears man. It is the same with me. Knowing myself and knowing the world, I harbor no ambitions and pursue no material objectives. Quietude is what I desire; the absence of worries is what makes me happy.

Men do not usually build houses for their own benefit. Some build for wives, children, relatives, and servants, some for friends and acquaintances, some for masters, for teachers, or even for household goods, treasures, oxen, and horses. But I have built for myself this time, not for anybody else. Because of present conditions and my own situation, I possess neither a family to share my dwelling nor servants to work for me. If I had built a great house, whom would I have lodged in it, whom would I have established there?

Friends esteem wealth and look for favors; they do not necessarily value sincere friendship or probity. I prefer to make friends of music and nature. Servants prize lavish rewards and unstinting generosity; they do not care about protection, affection, or a safe, tranquil existence. I prefer to make my own body my servant. How do I do it? If there is work to perform, I use my body. True, I may grow weary, but it is easier than employing and looking after someone else. If there is walking to do, I walk. It is burdensome, but less so than worrying over horses, saddles, oxen, and carriages. I divide my body and put it to two uses: it suits me very well to employ hands as servants and feet as conveyances. My mind understands my body's distress: I allow the body to rest when it is distressed and use it when it feels energetic. I use it but do not make a habit of pushing it to extremes. If it finds a task irksome, I am not perturbed. It is surely a healthful practice to walk constantly and work constantly. What would be the point of idling away the time? To make others work creates bad karma. Why should I borrow their strength?

It is the same with food and clothing. I hide my nakedness under a rough fiber robe, a hemp quilt, or whatever comes to hand; I survive by eating starwort from the fields and nuts from the peaks. Because I do not mingle with others, I need not chide myself for having felt ashamed of my appearance. Because I possess little food, I find coarse fare tasty.

I do not describe such pleasures as a means of criticizing the wealthy;

I merely compare my own former life with my present existence. "The triple world is but one mind."<sup>9</sup> If the mind is not at peace, elephants, horses, and the seven treasures are trash; palatial residences and stately mansions are worthless. I feel warm affection for my present lonely dwelling, my tiny cottage. My beggarly appearance is a source of embarrassment on the infrequent occasions when something takes me to the capital, but after my return I feel pity for those who pursue worldly things. If anyone doubts my sincerity, let him consider the fish and the birds. A fish never tires of water, but only another fish can understand why. A bird seeks trees, but only another bird can understand why. It is the same with the pleasures of retirement. Only a recluse can understand them.

## 5

The moon of my life is setting; my remaining years approach the rim of the hills. Very soon, I shall face the darkness of the Three Evil Paths. Which of my old disappointments is worth fretting over now? The Buddha teaches us to reject worldly things. Even my affection for this thatched hut is a sin; even my love of tranquility must be accounted an impediment to rebirth. Why do I waste time in descriptions of inessential pleasures?

As I reflect on these things in the quiet moments before dawn, I put a question to myself:

You retired to the seclusion of remote hills so that you might discipline your mind and practice the Way, but your impure spirit belies your monkish garb. Your dwelling presumes to imitate the abode of the honorable Yuiima, but you are worse than Śuddhipanthaka when it comes to obeying the commandments. Is this because you let yourself be troubled by karma-ordained poverty, or has your deluded mind finally lost its sanity?

The question remains unanswered. I can do no other than use my impure tongue for three or four repetitions of Amida's sacred name. Then I fall silent.

*Late in the Third Month of the second year of Kenryaku (1212)*  
*Set down by the monk Ren'in in the hermitage at Toyama*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Kegon Sutra*: "The triple world is but one mind. Outside mind there is nothing; mind, Buddha, and all the living, these three are no different."

<sup>10</sup> Ren'in was Chōmei's Buddhist name.

## Essays in Idleness

How foolish I feel when I realize that I have spent another day in front of my inkstone, jotting down aimless thoughts as they occurred to me, all because I was bored and had nothing better to do.

## I

One may conclude that any man born into this world will find a multitude of things to desire.

The position of the Emperor is too awe-inspiring for words, and so too the Princes, down to the last branch and leaf of the Imperial Tree—all of these being of august status as men not born of human seed. Likewise, it goes without saying that the Regent, first of all nobles, is to be envied; indeed, all nobles of sufficient rank to be granted the privilege of acting as Escorts at court are truly impressive—so much so that their children and grandchildren retain some of their importance even if they have come down in the world. And on down through the lesser ranks there are also those who may meet with success according to their various stations and look very self-satisfied, even though in reality they may be of little consequence.

The least enviable of men is the monk. Sei Shōnagon spoke the truth when she said that people think of him as no more than wood or stone. Even when he is at the height of his influence, ordering people about and making a great display of his power, one cannot consider him that impressive. It is as Monk Sōga said: "Fame is a burden; and the monk who attains it may be transgressing the Teachings." The determined recluse is probably a better ideal.

One of course wants a man to be excellent in appearance and to bear himself well, but the man who is easy to listen to, speaks with charm, and never talks too much—that is the sort of person of whose company I never tire. For how lamentable it is when a man one had thought of as quite outstanding reveals himself to be inferior in character! A man's social status and looks are of course determined at birth; but if he resolves to progress in wisdom, what is there to stop him? To see a man of good looks and disposition but no education mixing with men of inferior status and disagreeable appearance, who quite outstrip him in

## 7

Life would lose much of its attraction if it went on forever—if man did not melt away like the dew on Adashi Moor or drift off like the smoke over Toribe Mountain. Its very uncertainty is the thing that gives it savour.

Look at other creatures and you will see that none lives as long as man. There are even those like the mayfly, which dies waiting for evening, and the summer cicada, which lives to know neither spring nor autumn. Just being able to live one year to the fullest should be a source of peace. The man who laments every passing day could go on for 1,000 years and still feel it was all the dream of a single night. Besides, since we cannot live forever, what is to be gained by stretching our years until we have become old and ugly? Long life means an abundance of shame. The best thing a man can do is to die before he reaches forty. Once he goes beyond that age, the desire to mingle in society blinds him to proper embarrassment about the figure he cuts; and the affection inspired by his grandchildren in his sunset years makes him want to be spared to see them achieve success. His attachment to worldly things grows stronger and stronger, until he finally loses all ability to appreciate the charm of ephemerality—a most shameful end.

## 8

Nothing exceeds lust in the power to deceive the human heart. And what a foolish thing that heart is!

Scents, for instance, are ephemeral, and we know that perfume burned into robes lasts only a moment; yet still our hearts thrill at a wonderful fragrance.

The wizard called Kume reportedly lost his power to work wonders after seeing the white legs of a girl washing clothes—something one can believe, since nothing is more beautiful than hands, legs, and skin that are fair, full-fleshed, and lustrous.<sup>12</sup>

## 10

One knows that it is only a temporary dwelling, but still it is a source of pleasure to have a house that suits one's needs, that is just what

12. The wizard called Kume reportedly lost his power to work wonders

talent and treat him as of no account—that is indeed a regrettable sight.

It is most desirable for a man to be trained in orthodox learning, the composition of poetry in Chinese and Japanese, and music. Furthermore, it is splendid to observe a man whose knowledge of court custom and ceremony is a mirror for the conduct of others. Finally, the man of breeding is one who is able to write smoothly and in an acceptable hand, has a voice good enough to lead songs, and who, though reluctant to partake when drink is pressed upon him, does not abstain from drinking entirely.

## 3

Superior though he may be in every other way, a man who has no capacity for love seems to lack something, like a fine *sake* cup without a bottom.

For a man in love is a true delight: his sleeves heavy with dew or frost, he drifts along toward no certain goal, taking great pains not to earn the complaints of his parents or the censure of the world; but, for all his trouble, his advances lead only to heartache, and most of the time he sleeps alone—on nights when he sleeps at all.

And yet it is good for a man not to give himself entirely to such pleasures, or to be regarded by women as too easy a mark.

## 4

One is inspired by the sight of a man who never forgets the life to come and is never lax in his attentions to the Way of the Buddha.

## 5

It is best for a man who has suffered some setback not to be quick to shave his head and become a monk; rather, he should close his gate so quietly, with no particular expectations for the future, and then pass the days Middle Counselor Akimoto once said that he wanted to "see the moon of exile—but without committing any crime."<sup>11</sup> One can understand how he must have felt.

11. The purpose would presumably have been to gain an understanding of an exile's feelings.

one would want. At the house where a man of breeding lives in quietude, even the moonlight seems to shine down with greater effect. Though neither modern nor ornate in style, such a place will be surrounded by venerable trees, and in the garden the grass will appear to grow as it pleases, most naturally; the verandas and open-work fences will be joined with exquisite workmanship, and the furnishings, all placed artlessly around the room, will give off an aura of the past, making the place seem comfortable and refined.

On the other hand, a house that carpenters have labored over and polished, full of rare and imposing furnishings, both Chinese and Japanese; a house where everything down to the trees and grasses has been so trained that not a trace of natural beauty remains—now that is truly an ugly and cheerless sight. How could anyone hope to live long in such a place? Just one look is enough to picture it going up in a puff of smoke. One can indeed tell the personality of a person from the sort of place he lives in.

Once the poet Saigyō saw that the Go-Tokudaiji Minister had stretched a rope across the rooftop of his house to keep the kites from roosting there. "What would it hurt if kites *were* to perch there? So this is what the Minister is really like!" Saigyō said. It is reported that he never visited the house again.

I remembered this incident when I saw a rope pulled along the ridge of the roof of the Kosaka Palace of the Aya-no-kōji Prince. Upon hearing my story, a man of the Prince's household said, "The truth is that crows used to gather on the roof and catch frogs from the pond—something His Highness could not bear to watch." Why, of course, I thought, much impressed. I wonder if the Go-Tokudaiji Minister might also have had a good reason.

## II

Once, during the Godless Month, I was passing through a place called Kurusu Moor on my way to visit a friend in the hills nearby. Making my way down a long, narrow path covered with moss, I came upon a hut where someone was living a forlorn existence. Save for water dripping from a bamboo pipe buried in fallen leaves, there was not a hint of sound; and chrysanthemum blossoms and autumn leaves scattered about on the altar inside were the only indication that someone was indeed living there.

"Ah, so a man can live even in such a lonely state," I reflected, much moved at the thought. But then, in the garden beyond, I saw a large rangerine tree firmly fenced about on all sides—a sight that quite destroyed the effect of the place and left me thinking, "If only that tree hadn't been there!"

## 13

To sit alone with a book spread out before you in the lamplight is one of life's greatest pleasures. Among my own favorite books are the more engaging chapters of *Wen xuan*, the collected poems of Bo Juyi, the sayings of Laozi, and Zhuangzi's writings. As for things written by scholars of our own country, I find many works of the past very captivating.

## 22

In all respects, I am drawn to things of ages past. Nowadays, standards of taste are growing more vulgar all the time. Even in the fine furnishings crafted by our woodworkers, I am most pleased by those done in old styles.

Even when it comes to letters, I prefer the language I find on old scraps left from long ago. And the same is true of spoken language, which is also getting worse all the time. In the past, people would say, "Bring the coach!" or "Light the lamps!"; now they say, "Bring it round!" and "Light 'em up!" When they ought to say, "Men of the Grounds Bureau—to your posts!" they say, "Torchers, let's have some light!"; and instead of referring to the place where the Emperor listens to lectures on the *Sutra of Golden Light* as the "Imperial Attendance Chamber," they call it the "Lecture Hall"—a sad state of affairs, an old gentleman once lamented to me.

## 23

One hears it said that ours is a degenerate time, the age of the End of the Law. Yet how far from that world, how rare a delight is the venerable air that dominates the ninefold imperial palace.

The Open Stage, the Dining Court, the This Chamber, the That Gate—such places sound splendid as a matter of course. But at the

palace even the names of things that may likewise be found in the commonest dwellings—half shutters, small plank floors, high sliding doors, and the like—have a most delightful ring.

And how splendid it is to hear the command, "Prepare for night!" from the Guards Hall, or the call, "Bring the lamps—and be quick about it!" from the Imperial Bedchamber. At such times, the looks of self-satisfaction on the faces of senior nobles as they go about their duties in the Guards Hall are to be expected; but to find the same expressions among the minor men of the palace staff is amusing indeed. And what comical sights those same men make when you see them napping here and there on a chilly night!

Once the Tokudaiji Chancellor Kintaka declared of the chimes in the Repository of the Sacred Mirror that they made "a most delightful and elegant sound."

## 25

Our world is a place as changeable as the pools and shallows of the Asuka River: time moves along, things pass away, happiness is overtaken by sorrow; a splendid dwelling becomes a field without inhabitants, while another house stays the same on the outside but has new occupants—leaving us with no one who can share in our reminiscences, since the peach and plum blossoms are unable to speak.<sup>13</sup> And the ephemerality of things is all the more intense at the site where once stood the mansion of a great man of the remote past whose glory we never saw.

The grand designs of His Lordship Michinaga are still visible in the Kyōgoku Mansion and the Hōjōji Temple. But how heartstruck one is to see how they have been altered by time! When he labored over those buildings, and provided for their maintenance by grants from private estates, he was doubtless convinced that his house would flourish into the distant future as the abode of the Emperor's guardians, of the chief pillars of the state—never envisioning a time in which the place would fall so completely into ruin. The main gates and the Golden Hall lasted until quite recently; but during the Shōwa era [1312–17] the south gate burned, and since then the Golden Hall has fallen over and remains in a state of collapse, with no sign that it will be put right again. Only the

<sup>13</sup>. An allusion to a line of Chinese poetry by Sugawara no Fumitoki (WKRES 538): "O blossoms of the peach and plum, you will not say how many springs have passed."

Muryōjū-in survives as a reminder of the past, with its row of nine Muryōjū-in Buddhas still inspiring awe. And still impressive are the sixteen-foot calligraphy by Kōzei and the door inscribed by Kaneyuki, whose strokes remain vivid to this day. And the Lotus Hall is still standing as well. But how long will even these last? Here and there in the temple precincts are places that show no such hint of their past, the temple foundation stone; today no one knows anything about except for an odd foundation stone; today no one knows anything about those places at all.

In all things it is vain to make plans for a future we will never see.

## 27

How terribly forlorn it is when, after the Abdication Banquet, the three regalia—the Sword, the Necklace, and the Mirror—are formally transferred to the new Emperor.

I understand that our recently retired sovereign wrote this poem in the spring of the year in which he stepped down from the throne:<sup>14</sup>

tonomori no	Even the groundsmen
tononomiyatsuko	who served me at the palace
yoso ni shite	now neglect to come,
harawanu niwa ni	leaving my unswept courtyard
hana zo chirishiku	strewn with wind-blown flowers.

Preoccupied with all the official functions of the new reign, people don't visit the old sovereign, who seems a lonely figure. It is in such situations that people's true feelings become known.

## 28

There is no time more moving than a period of national mourning.<sup>15</sup> The very appearance of the temporary palace is a poignant sight, with its plank floors low to the ground, its blinds of rough reed stalks and valences of coarse cloth, its rustic furnishings. Even the attire of the attendants—down to their swords and decorative sword-belts—is different than usual and most affecting.

<sup>14</sup>. The reference is to Emperor Hanazono (1297–1348; r. 1308–18).  
<sup>15</sup>. "National mourning" (*ryōan*) was a one-year period during which a reigning sovereign mourned the death of a parent.

In times of quiet thought, I realize that of all feelings the most difficult to suppress is longing for things past.

After all is quiet, with everyone in bed, I often while away the long night hours by putting the things around me in order; and as I throw out notes I would not want left behind, I come across a scrap of calligraphy or an idle drawing by one who is no longer with us and feel exactly as I did back then. Or then again I find a letter written by a friend still living but sent long ago, and am moved deeply as I wonder what the occasion might have been, or in what year it was written. It is somehow sad to think that the things that have become one's own over time will go on, oblivious and unchanging, long after one is gone.

## 31

On a morning made beautiful by snowfall from the night before, I sent off a letter to a person with whom I needed to correspond. In reply to my note, which had said nothing of the snow, she wrote back, "Am I expected to consent to the requests of a man so ill-natured that he fails even to ask me how I am liking the snow?" What an amusing thing to say!

Since the lady is no longer with us, I find even so minor an incident impossible to forget.

## 32

Once, around the Twentieth of the Ninth Month, I made good on an invitation to visit a certain gentleman and spent the night with him, walking about to enjoy the moon. Remembering an acquaintance along the way, the man showed me the woman's house and then went inside. Waiting in the run-down, dew-drenched garden, I caught a scent of a most discreet perfume that could not have been prepared for our visit. The snatches of conversation I overheard left me deeply moved.

In good time my friend emerged from the house. But I was still so taken with the elegance of the scene that I hid myself and watched to see the woman push open the double doors and gaze up at the moon. How disappointing it would have been had she just locked the door and

withdrawn into her rooms immediately! Since she could not have known that anyone would be staying around to watch what she did, her behavior can only have been the result of a practiced sensibility. I heard later that not long thereafter the lady died.

## 38

What utter foolishness it is to use oneself up in the search for fame and profit, with never a moment's peace, making life a constricting toil. Much wealth has a way of consuming life: it is an agent that invites danger, beckons trouble. And after your death, even if you have left a pile of riches high enough to make a pillar for the North Star, it will bring only grief to your heirs. The pleasures that delight the eye of a foolish man are simply not worth the trouble. For a man of sensibility will think of big carriages, fat horses, and ornaments of jewels and gold as entirely useless things. Better to abandon your gold to the mountains and throw your jewels into a deep pool. Only a complete fool troubles himself over a desire for profit.

Of course anyone would like to leave behind a name that will last far into the future. But do we only call superior those of high rank and exalted status? No: for we know of many foolish and quite stupid men born into fine houses who, blessed with opportunity, advanced to high rank and lived most glamorous lives; and there are also many sages and holy men who, not meeting with good fortune, resigned themselves to low status and ended in obscurity. Next to desire for profit, desire for a lasting name is most foolish.

Again, one wants to leave a reputation for excellence in learning and character. But consider the matter carefully and you will realize that to love praise really means only that you find joy in the commendation of others. And neither those who praise nor those who condemn last long in this world. Those who have heard what such men say also are quick to disappear. So whose low opinion should we fear? Whose recognition should we desire? Indeed, it is a high reputation that lays the foundation for slander. No good comes from leaving a high name after one is gone. After desire for fame and profit, this is next most foolish.

Speaking to those who seek knowledge out of a desire to become wise, I would say that with wisdom comes falsehood, and with great

ability comes an increase in harmful passions. True wisdom is not something heard from another or learned through study. And what is true wisdom anyway? What one should do and what not are part of a continuum. And what are we to call "good"? A man of true excellence has no knowledge, no virtue, no accomplishments, no fame. Who can know of him? Who can make him known? And this is not because he hides his virtue or keeps his stupidity to himself, but because he is beyond the realm of wise or foolish, virtue or vice.

If a man is deluded enough to seek fame and profit, he will end as I have described. All desire must be denied. There is nothing worth talking about; there is nothing worth wanting.

## 43

Once, toward the end of spring, beneath mild, fair skies, I happened by a noble-looking mansion set well back in spacious grounds, with venerable trees all around and a garden strewn with fallen blossoms that I could not pass without venturing in for a better look. The southern exposure of the main building was entirely open, with the shutters all down, and there seemed to be no one about. But, going around to the eastern side, I caught sight, through a door left conveniently ajar and a tear in the reed blinds within, of a man of fine features who looked to be perhaps twenty years old. Although at his leisure, he was most dignified and elegant in manner, looking down at a book spread out before him on a desk.

Even now I would like to find out who he was.

## 52

At Ninnaji Temple there was a certain monk who, although already advanced in years, had never visited Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine. Regretting that fact, he resolved to go, setting off on foot to make his pilgrimage. He did his obeisances at Gokurakuji and at Kora; then, thinking that was all there was to the place, he went back home.

Upon returning, he met one of his comrades. "Well," the monk said, "I've finally done what I've been thinking about all these years, and the shrine was more grand than I had heard it to be. But, tell me: why was it that all the other pilgrims there climbed on up the mountain? I

wanted to see for myself, but my intent was only to worship the god, so I didn't go up."

It appears that even in the smallest things it is best to have a guide.

## 53

Here's another story about a monk at Ninnaji.

This happened at a farewell party for an acolyte who was about to go off and become a full-fledged monk. Caught up in the revelry and thoroughly drunk, one of the other monks got up to take his turn at entertaining the group and made to put a three-legged cauldron over his head. Since it would not go on smoothly, he flattened his nose and pushed the cauldron down over his face, and then began to dance around, much to the amusement of all assembled.

After dancing awhile, the monk tried to pull the cauldron off, but to no avail. At this everyone sobered up and began wondering what to do. First one way, then another, they tried pulling the pot off, scraping the monk's neck until the blood flowed; but his neck only swelled up, making it difficult for him to breathe. Then they tried to break the pot, but it would not be broken, and the reverberations were too much for him to bear. Now quite at a loss for what to do, they put a cloak over the three legs of the pot, gave the monk a stick for support, and took him by the hand off to a doctor in Kyōto. Along the way, everyone stared at the monk in wonderment.

What a strange sight the monk must have presented sitting there in front of the doctor! He spoke, but his voice was so muffled that his words could not be made out. "There's nothing in my books about a situation like this," the doctor said. "Nor is there anything about it in the oral teachings." So the monk went back to Ninnaji, where his aged mother and other close friends gathered around his pillow, crying and lamenting his fate—although one doubts that he could even hear them. With the situation getting no better, one man said, "Even if we take off his ears and nose doing it, we have to save his life. Let's just grab on and pull with all our might." So they took dry rice-stalks and pushed them up between his head and the metal and pulled as if to yank his head off, leaving only holes in place of his ears and nose but at last succeeding in freeing him. The story has it that the monk survived in the end, but was ill for a very long time.

A house should be designed for summer. In winter, you can stay anywhere; but it's hard living in a house that's no good in the heat. Deep water doesn't seem to cool; it's shallow water flowing fast that is refreshing. When you're reading tiny writing, a room with sliding door panels provides more light than one with hinged shutters. A room with a high ceiling is cold in winter and dark when lit by lamplight.

I once heard a discussion in which it was concluded that a house containing some unused space is nice to look at and can be put to all sorts of uses.

Some people say, "If you are dedicated to the Way, where you live makes no difference. What difficulty can it present to your hopes for the next life if after taking vows you stay at home, still mixing with family and friends?" But those who say such things know nothing about how to prepare for the life to come. One who aspires to overcome the cycle of life and death can surely have no interest in serving his lord morn and eve, or in the day-to-day business of running a household. The mind is moved by its surroundings, after all: without quietude, the Way is hard to pursue.

People today cannot match the capacities of those of old. Even if they go off into the mountain groves, they must have some means of staving off hunger and protecting themselves from storms. How then can they not give the appearance of having worldly desires on occasion? Yet it is going too far to say that there is no use in leaving the world, that one may as well not abandon lay life. For even if a man who has entered the Way and turned his back on the world still has some desires, they will not resemble in number or intensity the desires of a man still embroiled in mundane affairs. With his paper bedclothes, his rough hempen robes, his one rice bowl, and his herb broth, will such a man be a drain on others? His demands are easily answered; his heart is quickly satisfied. And even if he does harbor some desires, he is somewhat shy because of his status, so he will usually retreat from evil and move toward good.

Certainly a man should try somehow to sever his worldly bonds while in this life, in token of his being born a man. The man who puts all

his effort into worldly gain and makes no attempt to pursue higher understanding is really no different from the beasts.

Things that seem common: too many furnishings where one is sitting; too many brushes around an inkstone; too many sacred statues in a home chapel; too many stones and trees and bushes in a garden court; too many children and grandchildren in a house; too many words used when talking to people; too much praise for oneself in a written petition. Things that don't offend good taste even if numerous: books on a bookcart; trash on a trash pile.

Like ants they crowd together, hurrying off to east and west, running along to north and south. Some are noble, others common; some are old, others young. All of them have places to go and homes to return to. At night, they go to bed; in the morning, they get up. But what do they hope to accomplish in their coming and going? Greed for long life, desire for greater wealth—these are things that never come to an end. And what do they think to gain by preserving their lives? All that awaits them is old age and death, which are quick to come and never rest for a minute, leaving them little to truly enjoy. Yet still there are those who wander in error, fearing nothing. Some stay infatuated with fame and profit because they have never given a thought to their final destination. And then there are the fools who lament their fate, pleading to live on forever because they are ignorant of the universal principle of change.

I simply cannot abide people who get hold of the latest fad and then spread its praises all about. More admirable by far is the kind of man who learns of such things only after they are old news.

When a new person arrives at a gathering, some man lacking in both understanding and breeding can be counted upon to bring up topics already familiar to him and his companions, exchanging cryptic phrases and clever glances, with much laughter—all in a way that makes the new person feel completely uninformed.

When the painting or calligraphy adorning a screen or sliding door is clumsily done, one is less critical of the work itself than of the master of the house.

For it is all too often the case that a man's accoutrements serve to show the inferiority of his sensibility. By this I don't mean that one must allow oneself only the finest of possessions. Rather, I speak of those who make things tasteless and ugly in an attempt to make them last well, or who out of a desire to be original end up filling their homes with useless things that reveal only the fussiness of the owner. The best furnishings are those that seem a little old, are not terribly pretentious, and stand up over time.

Once when someone remarked that silk was unsatisfactory as a backing for picture or book scrolls because it showed wear too readily, Ton'a replied, "To the contrary, I find that it's only after the silk has frayed at top and bottom and some of the mother-of-pearl has fallen from the roller that a scroll becomes truly attractive." This is an excellent sentiment. In the same way, while most people say that if a set of books is not uniform it is not pleasing to the eye, I am persuaded by Bishop Kōyū's comment on the subject: "To insist on complete sets of things is a mark of insensitivity. Incompleteness is far superior."

Another person has said this: "To want everything uniform and complete shows bad taste. Leaving things imperfect is more pleasing and gives one a future to look forward to. When a palace is built, something is always left unfinished." Indeed, even among the Confucian and Buddhist classics written by the ancient sages, there are many missing chapters.

How many are the things that work within other things to waste and spoil! The body has lice; a house has mice; a country has brigands; the common man has wealth; the man of high station has benevolence; and the monk has his Law.<sup>16</sup>

16. In his fourth and fifth examples, Kenkō echoes the Taoist work *Zhuàn* which argues that the petty man who seeks wealth and the Gentleman who seeks

Once a man went to call on a woman who was living rather despondently in a run-down out-of-the-way house to which she had withdrawn during a time of personal trial. It was still early in the month, and as the man searched quietly for the house in the dim moonlight, the dogs of the place came toward him, barking so ferociously that they brought out a kitchen maid. She asked him who he was, and he persuaded her to let him into the house.

For a few minutes he stood on the crude wood floor in the hallway, wondering how the woman could bear to stay in so wretched a place, until a woman's voice, composed but youthful, said, "Come this way, Sir." A sliding door then opened—not too smoothly—and he went inside.

The interior was not in such a sorry state; indeed, it looked very dignified in the glow from a lamp at the other end of the room, whose light, albeit faint, made it possible to see the comeliness of the furnishings. And the scent of incense, which had obviously been burning since well before his appearance, made the place seem a more comfortable one in which to live.

"Shut the gate," someone said, adding, "and it may rain, so pull the carriage in under the gate roof. Then find a place for his men to sleep." This was followed by someone whispering, "Ah, maybe tonight at least we'll get some rest." Despite the speaker's attempts to be discreet, the quarters were so close that the visitor could not help overhearing.

The night went by, and as the man was relating what had gone on in his life since their last meeting, the first cock crowed. He went on, speaking with great earnestness of both the past and the future, until the cock crows became more ardent, and more frequent, making him wonder if perhaps the day had already dawned outside. But since the lady's house was hardly the sort of place one needed to leave under cover of night, he took his time. Only when he could see the white of daylight through the crack in the door did he rise to go, choosing final words of parting the lady would not be likely to forget. It was early in the Fourth Month, and the faint dawn light made the treetops and garden plants glow in lovely green hues that impressed the man with their beauty and charm. Even today, he often remembers the scene,

and takes care when he passes the house always to gaze at it until the great cinnamon tree above it disappears from sight.

105

It was a time when the unmelted snow in the shade of the north side of my house had turned to ice, and even the shafts of a carriage pulled up there were glistening with frost. The dawn moon shone brightly, although partially obscured. At a chapel in an unfrequented section of the city, a quite proper-looking man was sitting with a woman near the veranda, on the threshold of an inner room. The two were talking, and whatever it was they were talking about, they gave no sign of tiring of it. The woman's face and features were very fine; and her perfume, when a hint of it came to me on the wind, was most charming. What snatches of their conversation I caught left me wanting to hear more.

107

During the reign of Emperor Kameyama, there were some ladies in his service who, convinced that it was the rare man who could give a quick and estimable response to a woman's query, made it a point to test every young man coming to the palace. "Have you ever heard a cuckoo?" they would ask. One man, who I understand went on to become a Major Counselor, answered, "No. Men of my low station cannot hear such things." The Horikawa Minister, on the other hand, declared, "Yes. I seem to recall hearing one at Iwakura." When they discussed the matter, the ladies deemed the Minister's response satisfactory. Of the other man, however, they concluded, "But to say one is of too low status to hear such things—now that was a bit much."

A man should be taught from his youth how to avoid being laughed at by women. I believe I heard somewhere that it was thanks to the care Lady Ankimon took in preparing him as a boy that the former Jodoji Regent was so adept in conversation. The Yamashina Minister of the Left once declared, "I'm so ill at ease around women that I have to be on my guard even with serving girls." If there were no women in the world, we could don our robes or wear our caps any way we wanted, and no man would take any care with his appearance at all.

From this one might conclude that women must be splendid beings indeed, to make men feel so at a loss. But the fact is that women are by

nature perverse—self-centered in the extreme, intensely greedy, and with no concept of reason. Their fickle hearts are quick to follow delusion; and their words flow too easily one moment, only to cease the next, when one asks for a response to even the most innocent question. And don't think this silence shows reserve, either, for they may also come forth with the most astonishing things without even being asked. So well devised and highly polished are their statements that you may even think them superior to men in intellect. But when their deceptions come out later, will they ever admit them? No: dishonest and stupid, come out later, will they ever admit them? No: dishonest and stupid, that is what a woman is. How disgusting it is to see any man following a woman around, trying to gain her favor! Why would anyone let himself be chagrined so? Even if there was such a thing as an intelligent woman, one can be sure that she would be aloof and without charm. Only when you let her wiles become your master does a woman seem attractive and worthy of attention.

117

There are seven kinds of people who make bad friends. First is the man of high and noble station; second is the man still young in years; third is the strong man who never falls ill; fourth is the man who likes rice wine; fifth is the strong-willed man of arms; sixth is the man who tells lies; seventh is the man who is exceedingly worldly.

There are three kinds of people who are good to have as friends. First is the friend who gives you things; second is the man of medicine; third is the friend who has wisdom.

122

The most essential accomplishments for a man are: first of all, to be well versed in the classics and knowledgeable in the writings of the sages. Next, a man should have a good hand: even if he does not make calligraphy his chief study, he should learn it for the great help it will be in all other forms of scholarship. Next, a man should study the medicinal arts: for without medicine one cannot provide for one's own health, be of help to others, or fulfill one's duties and filial obligations. Then come archery and horseback riding, two of the Six Arts, and both well worth looking into. Thus training in letters, arms, and medicine is indispensable. Those who gain these skills will never be called useless.

Next, since food is what sustains life, the man who can prepare tasty meals has a great advantage. And then comes skill with one's hands, which is useful in all sorts of ways.

When it comes to other matters, however, one must remember that to be skilled in many things is unseemly in a gentleman. Talent in poetry and excellence in music have always been considered elegant avocations that a gentleman should pursue with devotion. In our time, though, we seem no longer to rely on such means to govern the world—just as we recognize gold as the most excellent of metals, but deem it less versatile than iron.

127

When changing something would result in no benefit, it is best not to change it.

137

Should we look at the blossoms only in full bloom, or the moon only when it is unobscured by clouds? No: for to yearn for a moon hidden behind rain clouds or to ignore the progress of spring from inside drawn blinds is equally moving, and a source of great charm. Indeed, boughts on which flowers are about to bloom, a garden strewn with fallen blossoms—these are things that are truly worth seeing. After all, is a poem prefaced with "Going to see the blossoms and finding them already fallen" or "Unable to see the blossoms" inferior to one introduced with "Seeing the blossoms"? To sigh after fallen blossoms or the setting moon is only natural; but only a truly insensitive person would say, "These boughts are bare now—there's nothing left to see."

In everything, it is beginnings and ends that are of greatest interest. Does love between a man and a woman refer only to when they are together? To suffer misery when one must give up before ever meeting the object of one's affections; to lament a pledge that has come to far away as the clouds; to sit in a reed-choked house thinking of the past—this is what love really means. More so than gazing out on a moon shining unimpeded over a thousand leagues, then, it is moving to wait for the waning moon near dawn, when it takes on a greenish hue. And certainly nothing could be more moving than to see moonlight shining through cryptomeria branches deep in a

it hides behind masses of clouds that have just brought rain showers. The way the moonlight on scrub oaks makes the leaves glisten as if wet is indeed, making one wish for a friend of fine sensibility to share striking indeed, and for a quick return to the capital.

And do we really see the moon and blossoms only with our eyes? One is more certain to be captivated when staying inside the house in spring-time, or imagining the autumn moon from one's bedchamber. For the man of breeding never flaunts his tastes and is reserved even when deeply impressed. Only a rustic shows his admiration with no restraint. When he goes to see the cherry blossoms, he works his way forward through the throng, his eyes so fixed on the blossoms that he has not a glance for those he pushes aside; then he drinks his rice wine, composes some linked verse, and leaves, thoughtlessly breaking off a big branch to take home with him. At a spring, he has to soak his hands and feet; when there's snow, he gets down on it and leaves his footsteps behind. Never is he able to enjoy anything from a proper distance.

Such people have a curious way of watching the Kamo Festival. "The processions slow in coming," they say. "There's no use sitting here on the stand waiting." So off they go to a shack at the rear to amuse themselves by drinking, eating, and playing *go* and backgammon. But they leave someone to keep a lookout for the procession, and when he calls out, "It's coming!" they all rush back, nearly knocking each other down in their resolve to get to their places and miss nothing. "Would you look at that! Look what's coming!" they say, remarking on everything that goes by. Then, after one group has passed in parade, they say, "Tell us when the next group's coming!" and get down from the stands again. Such people seem to come only to see the processions themselves. The high-born of the capital, in contrast, occasionally nap, showing no desire to see everything. Their servants are up and down, serving their masters, but even those in attendance on the high ones, seated behind their masters, never lean forward in an unseemly manner or make an effort to see everything that goes by.

140

A wise man will not leave any treasures behind after his death. If he has saved things of no worth he will seem ridiculous, and if he has stored things of value he will appear to have been vain and silly. And it is particularly regrettable if he has left a vast array of things behind, for

there are sure to be those who will cry, "I'll have this!" and start bickering over his goods—a most undignified scene. Certainly it would be better to turn over whatever things he has decided should go to particular people while he is still alive.

There are of course some few things that one cannot do without in one's daily life; but otherwise one is better off owning nothing.

## 145

When the Escort Hada no Shigemori said of the North Guard Shingan of Shimotsuke, "His is the face of a man who will fall from his horse; he should take care," no one believed he could be right. But Shingan did indeed fall from his horse and die. Then people thought that the words of Shigemori, a man expert in reading faces, must be as sure as the words of the gods.

When someone asked him just what in a man's face boded such a fate, however, Shigemori replied, "I could see that the man's seat wasn't too firm in the saddle, and he liked unruly horses; that's why I made the pronouncement. Have I ever been wrong before?"

## 146

When Abbot Meiun asked a face-reader whether his countenance boded danger from weapons of war, the face-reader replied most respectfully, "Yes, I fear it does." The Abbot went on, "What sign is it that you see, then?" To this the man replied, "Why, a man of My Lord's status should have no fear of being killed in such a way; thus that you even asked me the question is itself a sign that there may be danger to come."

As it turned out, the man was right: it was an arrow that did the Abbot in.<sup>17</sup>

## 147

Recently some people have been saying that a man who has too many burns from moxa treatments is ritually unclean and should forbear participation in Shinto rites, but in the regulations I find no evidence of such a rule.

17. The Abbot was killed by a stray arrow in 1183, during a battle in which he had imprudently become involved.

## 149

One mustn't put the new antlers of a deer up to one's nose and smell them. There are little bugs inside them that crawl in through your nose and eat your brain.

## 150

People who aim to master an art seem to say to themselves, "While I'm still not too good at this, I'll keep it to myself and not let anyone know what I'm doing. People will be more impressed if I practice in private and show myself only after I've developed true skill." But anyone who says such things will never learn a single art well. For it is the man who mingles with the masters even as a beginner, uninhibited by ridicule or laughter, always pushing ahead coolly—it is that man, even if he has no special gift from birth, who will not stumble along the way or become too casual in his attitude. As the years pass, such a man will surpass one with natural gifts but no dedication, in the end arriving at a higher level of performance, expanding his talent contentedly, and gaining the high opinion of the public as an artist of matchless reputation.

## 155

The man who would follow the ways of the world should first learn to sense the mood of the moment. A word spoken out of turn will grate on the ear of the listener, offend his sensibilities, and lead to no good end. Thus one would do well to recognize such exigencies. But falling ill, bearing children, and dying—these things alone follow no schedule; untimely or not, they cannot be put off. The truly crucial events—being born, taking on years, going through changes, and final dissolution—flow on like the waters of a raging river, stopping never for a moment, continuing always on course. And in the same way, when it comes to the truly important things—whether in lay life or after one has taken holy orders—one should not stop to consider the prevailing moods, but instead stride on without hesitation.

Summer doesn't begin only after spring has ended, nor does autumn come only with summer's demise. Rather, in time the spring itself begins to feel like summer; and in summer already autumn appears. Then autumn suddenly turns cold, and it is the Tenth Month, the first

month of winter—but with weather again springlike as the grass turns green and buds swell on the flowering plum. And even with falling leaves, it isn't the case that the new growth comes out after the leaves have fallen, but rather that the leaves fall because of pressure from below. So great is the anticipation of life within that the opportunity comes and is raken with the greatest speed.

Even more rapid, however, are the changes of human life—birth, aging, illness, and death, compared to which the seasons follow a determined order. For death does not wait for a convenient time; it may not even attack from the front, but steal up from behind. We all know death must come; the problem is that it comes when we feel no urgency to prepare for it, when we are not expecting it, just as when a high tide surges in over a tideland that had seemed to keep the sea far away.

## 157

Pick up a brush, and you end up writing something; pick up an instrument, and you want to make music. Pick up a cup, and you think of *saké*; pick up dice, and you think of gambling. The mind always follows what the hand touches. It is for this reason that we should not engage in sinful pleasures for even a moment.

If by chance we glance at a line of holy writ, we somehow end up reading on, perhaps even correcting an erroneous notion of many years. And if we had not opened the book, would we have ever realized our mistake? This is the value of chance stimulation. For if you sit before the altar, beads in hand, sutra open, you may accumulate merit despite a general lack of devotion; and if you sit in meditation—even with distracted thoughts—you may find yourself moving toward a sense of concentration without knowing it.

Phenomenon and essence are not two things, but one. If we are true to the outward form, the inner reality cannot fail to mature. Thus it is wrong to declare such things empty formalities; they deserve praise and respect.

## 164

People meet, and there's never a moment of silence. Always there is. And if you listen to what is being said, it's all useless jabber: the words that are circulating, gossip about people, good and bad—all of

which is harmful to both the people talking and those being discussed, and does no one any good. When people talk like this, they don't realize that what they say profits no one.

## 166

Watching people strive to attain success reminds me of people making a snow-buddha on a spring day; they take pains to decorate it with precious metals and pearls, and then build a pavilion to display it. But will there be enough time to place their buddha on the altar? Too many men wait for success in the same way, supposing they have plenty of time, while beneath them life is melting away like snow.

## 172

When a man is young his body overflows with energy, his heart is easily moved by things, he is full of passion. He throws himself into danger as he might toss a jeweled ball to the ground, almost wanting it to shatter. So much does he love the beauty of women that he seems ready to waste his fortune in pursuit of it, only to relent and cast all that aside, debasing himself in the mossy robes of the priesthood. In an excess of bravado, he gets into a fight, then feels ashamed, and ends up envying the very man he has attacked. Thus his affections change from day to day, always unsettled. He loses himself in lust, is moved by the kindness of another, commits himself to good works; then he risks his future chasing after the example of those who have thrown their lives away—not thinking for even a moment that he might want to live safe and long. Pulled along by his whims, he makes a scandal of his life that may well be talked about for years to come. Yes, leave it to the young man to ruin his life.

When a man grows old, his spirit too loses vitality. He is impassive, easygoing, and never excited by things. Because his heart has arrived at a natural state of serenity, he engages in nothing unneeded; he cares for his body and thus does not suffer from ill health; and he is mindful not to cause anyone trouble. The old man excels the young man in wisdom, just as the young man excels the old in beauty of appearance.

subdued apparel; but at night, showy, bright clothing is best. And personal appearance is also shown to greatest effect in lamplight, just as voices speaking in the dark, taking care not to be heard, are most elegant. Scents and sounds too are especially delightful at night.

I find it particularly pleasing when on a night of no special significance a man comes to a mansion well into the evening dressed in the finest attire. And since those among the young who pay close attention to such things are always observant, young people—especially at times when they might be tempted to let their guard down—should take great care with their appearance, making no distinction between normal and special occasions. How charming it is when a gentleman stops to groom his hair after dark, or when a woman, late into the evening, slips out of sight, takes out a mirror, and touches up her face.

## 202

One hears it said that Shinto rites should not be performed during the Tenth Month—the Godless Month—but I can find no such stipulation anywhere. There's not a word about it in the classics. It may be that the name was given only because there are no Shinto festivals during that month.

There are those who say that during the Tenth Month all of the gods gather at Ise Shrine, but no source for that idea exists. If there were any foundation to it, certainly that month would be a festival time at the Grand Shrine; but there is no such tradition. Historically, there have been many imperial processions to shrines during the Tenth Month, although most of those turned out not to bode well for the future.

## 204

When a criminal is to be beaten with rods, he is tied to a "torture device." No one now knows what the device should look like, or how to tie the man to it.

## 207

When the ground was being prepared for the building of the Kameyama Palace, workers hit upon a grave mound that contained great numbers of serpents all coiled up together. "They must be the gods of

Today you had planned to do one thing, but something else comes up and takes the whole day. The person you are waiting for is detained, but someone you hadn't expected shows up instead. Something you had confidence in goes awry, but something you had no hope for works out. The task you worried over comes off without trouble, but the task you thought would be easy proves to be difficult. As the days go by, what happens bears no resemblance to what you had anticipated. It's that way for any year; it's the same for a lifetime.

But just as you start to think that things *never* turn out as planned, something does and you feel more at a loss than ever. The only way we can be sure of things is to realize the truth: that all is uncertainty.

## 190

If there's one thing a man is better off without, it's a wife. I am impressed to hear of a man who has always lived alone, and if I learn later that he has gone to So-and-so's as a son-in-law or taken some woman in to live with him, he comes down in my estimation. People are bound to deride him, saying, "He's decided for himself that his woman is something fine, but she's really not so special!" or, if the woman is fine indeed, "Look at him carry on; why it's as if he's got his own little guardian Buddha, that's what!" And it's worse if the woman really runs the house. Soon they have children, whom she spoils and frets over disagreeably. Even after the man dies, she goes on, becoming a nun and mocking her man's memory with her wizened form.

No matter who the woman is, if a man spends dawn to dusk with her every day, he will grow tired of her and hate her in the end—in which case the woman too is left dangling in thin air. So to live separately, visiting the woman occasionally, makes for a more secure relationship, and one that will stand the test of time. To come unannounced and stay the night is sure to make one's visits seem something special.

## 191

Only a person of no feeling would say that things lose their beauty at night. On the contrary, it is at night that all rich fabrics, decorations, and colors are most delightful. In the daytime, one can appear in simple,

the place," someone said. The whole matter was reported to the Emperor, who sent out an official query asking what should be done. Everyone said, "It would be a hard thing to dig them out if they've occupied the place for a long time." Only Minister Sanemoto disagreed: "The serpents live in the Emperor's realm; why would they want to be cursed on a place where an imperial palace is to be built? The Gods and spirits do not engage in evil deeds. Stop your worrying. The Gods and snakes out and let them go." So the workers destroyed the tomb and let the snakes go into the Ōi River.

No curse ever ensued.

## 209

Once a man lost a suit over a rice field and, out of spite, dispatched men with the command to harvest all of the rice from the field in question. When the men stopped at the first field along the way and began reaping, someone said, "This isn't the right field. What do you think you're doing?" The men replied, "Well, we've really got no business taking the rice from the other field either. Since we've come to do something unreasonable anyway, why shouldn't we do our reaping anywhere we please!"

Their logic was most amusing.

## 211

We can rely on nothing. It is because the foolish man trusts in things that he so often ends up full of hatred or anger. If you have power—don't depend on it: the man of strength is first to fall. If you have great wealth—don't depend on it: riches can vanish in an instant. If you have learning—don't depend on it: even Confucius was rejected by his age. If you have virtue—don't depend on it: even Yen Hui met misfortune.<sup>18</sup> Nor can you rely on the affection of your lord, whose retribution may strike swiftly. And don't put faith in servants: they can betray and abandon you. Don't trust in anyone's goodwill: sometime it must change. Don't trust agreements either, for sincerity is rare.

If you depend neither on others nor on your own state of being, you can rejoice at good fortune and not be bitter at bad. With open space left and right, you will suffer no impediment; with distance behind and in

18. Yen Hui, Confucius's peerless disciple, died young.

front, your way will not be blocked. In a narrow passage things get crunched and broken. When a man has too little leeway for thought, he runs into other people, gets into fights, and loses; but when he has room and is at ease, not a hair of his head suffers.

Man is the most marvelous of all creatures in heaven and on earth. And if heaven and earth know no bounds, why should man's nature be any different? When we are open and unconstrained, joy and sorrow will not forestall us, and no one will cause us trouble.

## 212

The autumn moon is a thing splendid beyond compare. Any man who fails to recognize this, thinking the moon is the same in all seasons, must be lacking in sensitivity indeed.

## 218

Foxes bite people. Once an attendant at the Horikawa Mansion was bitten as he slept. And a low-ranking monk at Ninnaji, passing by the main hall at night, was attacked so ferociously by three foxes that he drew his sword and ran two of them through while trying to defend himself. One of them died on the spot; the other two got away. The monk had bites all over him, but he escaped serious injury.

## 240

Any man who persists in visiting a woman against all odds, despite the obstacles presented by "those observant fisherwomen of Shinobu Bay" and "the watchmen of Kurabu Mountain," must indeed have the most profound feelings for the woman, with whom he will share unforgettable memories.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it can only be embarrassing to a woman if she is sent off by her parents and siblings without the least complication.

And what a waste it seems when a woman suffering financial hardship announces that she will go "if a stream beckons," provided only that the man—be he an unseemly old monk or a vulgar easterner—has money, and then goes off to be greeted in a new house, unknowing and

19. Shinobu (translatable as "hide") and Kurabu (partially homophonous with *kurashi*, "dark") both suggest covert trysts. It is unclear whether Kenkō is alluding to specific poems.

those who can reminisce about the pains of a long courtship, when they "met despite mountains between," will never run out of things to talk about.<sup>21</sup>

When people are brought together by an outsider, there is bound to be a great deal of unpleasantness. Even in the case of a woman of high birth, if she goes to a man of lower status who is ugly and advanced in years, the man may think to himself, "What reason could they have for throwing away such a fine woman on the likes of me?" and then conclude that she must be of inferior character. Then again, he may feel embarrassed by his own mean figure in his wife's presence—a most miserable situation.

The man who has never paused beneath a hazy moon on a night heavy with the scent of plum blossoms, or who has no fond memories of the sky near dawn when he went out into the dew near his lady's hedge—that man had best not fall in love at all.

## 242

Men find themselves caught up in cycles of prosperity and adversity for the sole reason that they are too concerned with pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. Pleasure is liking something so much that we become infatuated with it. And we seek such things endlessly. Our foremost pleasure comes from fame, of which there are two kinds: praise for our deeds and praise for our artistic accomplishments. Our next chief pleasure comes from lust, and our third from appetite. No other desires exceed these three. They all result from a backward view of things and are the source of much trouble. To not pursue them at all is the best course.

## 243

When I turned eight years old, I confronted my father with this question: "What sort of being is a Buddha?" My father said, "Why, a

20. Ono no Komachi (KKS 938): wabinureba / mi o ukikusa no / ne o taete / saseou mizu araba / inamu to zo omou ("In this forlorn state, I find life dreary indeed: if a stream beckoned, I would gladly cut my roots and float away like duckweed").

21. The quotation is probably an allusion to a poem by Minamoto no Shigeyuki (SKKS 1013): tsukubayama / hayama shigeyama / shigekeredo / omoiuru ni wa / sawazarikeri

Buddha is what a man has become." So I went on: "How does a man become a Buddha?" My father replied, "Through the teachings of a Buddha." Then I asked, "And the Buddha that taught the man—what became a Buddha?" He replied, "Well, he became a sort of being was it that taught him?" He replied, "Well, he became a Buddha through the teachings of the First Buddha." I asked, "And what sort of Buddha was that First Buddha, the one that first taught how to become a Buddha?" At this point my father said, "I suppose he must have fallen down from the sky, or popped up out of the earth," and began to laugh.

Much amused, he said to the people around, "When the kid pressed me for an answer, I didn't have one!"

## An Account of a Journey to the East

My age had reached nearly half a century, the frost on my temples growing ever more chill; yet I had lived a profitless life, accomplishing so little that I lacked even a permanent home. I was miserably conscious of my resemblance to the friend of whom Bo Juyi wrote, "He is like a vagrant cloud; his head is as white as frost." It was not that I aspired to seven generations of prosperity such as Jin and Zhang enjoyed; I merely wanted a dwelling like Tao Qian's house by the five willows. But I stayed on in the vicinity of the capital and lived like everyone else, still hesitant about retiring to a brush-thatched hermitage deep in the mountains. As the poet said, my body remained in the profane world while my spirit dwelt in retirement.<sup>22</sup>

Then, quite unexpectedly, I set out from the capital toward the eastern provinces. The season was autumn, toward the middle of the Eighth Month in the third year of Ninji [1242]. My journey was a long one, taking me past countless mountains and rivers, all unfamiliar, but I braved the clouds and cleaved the mists of the endless road. And as a

("All those watchful eyes, many as foothills, as wooded hills at Tsukuba Mountain, will not deter one whose heart burns with passionate longing").

22. Probably an allusion to a couplet from a poem in *Wen xuan* by Wang Tangju: "The lesser recluse retires in hills and fields; the greater recluse retires in the profane world." Jin Rishan and Zhang Anshi were powerful nobles during the reign of Emperor Xuandi (c. 73 B.C.—48 B.C.). Tao Qian (365—427) was a reclusive poet.

keepsake for anyone who may remember me with affection, I have let down an account of all that caught my eye or engaged my attention during the dozen or so days before I reached Kamakura—all the sights and points of interest at lodging places and hostelrys in mountains and fields, and at lonely seashores and streams.

It was around the time of the full moon, the season for leading horses toward the capital, that I crossed Ōsaka Barrier after setting out from my house near the eastern hills. In the late night, the moon shone dim through a pervasive autumn mist, and the faint crow of a sacred cock brought to mind the Han Valley, where "the traveler pressed on under the lingering moon."<sup>23</sup> Near that barrier in ancient times, the recluse Semimaru had built a straw-thatched hut and lived a melancholy life amid harsh gales, turning constantly to his lute to calm his spirit and to poetry to express his thoughts. There are those who say the spirit and to the barrier is called Shi-no-miya Plain, "Plain of the Fourth Prince," because Semimaru was Emperor Daigo's fourth son.

inishie no                    All claims our interest  
wazaya no toko no        at Ōsaka Barrier,  
atari made                even the place  
kokoro o tomuru        where the straw-thatched cottage stood,  
ōsaka no seki            his dwelling in bygone days.

It is pitiful to imagine the feelings with which the Imperial Lady Higashisanjōin recited these lines, composed when she was about to pass the spring at the barrier, during her return from a pilgrimage to Ishiyama:

amatabi                    How sad that today  
yuki ōsaka no            I behold for the last time  
sekimizu ni                my face reflected  
kyō o kagiri no        in these oft-visited waters  
kage zo kanashiki        at Ōsaka Barrier!

After I had passed the barrier mountain, it was still too dark for a good view of Uchide Beach, Awazu Plain, and other well-known places. I was moved by the thought that I must be near the old imperial seat—

23. Anonymous (WKRES 416): "The traveler presses on under the lingering moon, / and made his way at night as far as a government checkpoint at Han Valley. When his party learned that the gate would not open until the first cock crowed, one of the men successfully imitated the bird's cry."

the Ōtsu Palace built in the time of Emperor Tenchi, when the capital was moved from Okamoto at Asuka in Yamato Province to Shiga District in Ōmi.

sazanami ya                Now that the palace  
at Ōtsu of rippling waves  
has moldered away,  
ōtsu no miya no        only the name remains  
arashi yori                at the Shiga capital.  
na nomi nokoreru  
shiga no furusato

Dawn approached, revealing Lake Biwa in the distance, as I rode across the Long Bridge at Seta. I recalled the poem Mansei had composed while gazing at the waters of the lake from Mount Hiei.<sup>24</sup> The vanishing white wake of a rowed boat is truly a lonesome sight.

yo no naka o                I gaze in my turn  
kogyūku fune ni        at the self-same waters  
yosoetsutsu            where his eyes rested  
nagameshi ato o        when he compared this world  
mata zo nagamuru     to a boat rowed on its way.

I continued to Noji, where the heavy dew in the grassy fields soon combined with tears to drench the sleeves of my travel robe.

azumaji no                Today seems to mark  
noji no asatsuyu        a beginning for sleeves thus drenched:  
kyō ya sa wa            morning dewdrops  
tamoto ni kakaru        in the fields of Noji  
hajime naruran        on the road leading eastward.

At Shinohara, a long dike extended far to the east and west, with the houses of the local folk occupying the area to the north, and the surface of a vast lake stretching away to the south. Deep-green pines lined the opposite shore. The waves, identical in color with the trees, were "green, broad, and deep," even though they did not reflect the Nanshan Mountains.<sup>25</sup> As though in a reed-writing scene, mandarin ducks and mallards flew here and there, or congregated in reeds and water oats where occasional small peninsulas jutted out. According to what I was

24. See footnote 6, p. 389.

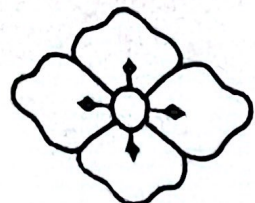
25. An allusion to a poem by Bo Juyi about Lake Kunming in springtime: "The green waters reflect the Nanshan Mountains, they are broad and deep." Reed-writing, mentioned in the next sentence, was an eccentric calligraphic style sometimes used for the transcription of poetry. The characters, distorted to resemble natural objects, were incorporated into water-margin scenes depicting birds, reeds, rocks, etc.



This selection is excerpted from the last of the six historical tales, *The Clear Mirror* (Masukagami), which was probably written between 1338 and 1376. Like *The Great Mirror*, it purports to be a record of the oral reminiscences of an aged narrator—in this case, a nun more than 100 years old whom the author encounters at a temple near the capital. The nun's tale begins in 1180, with the birth of the future Emperor Go-Toba (1180–1239; r. 1183–97), and ends in 1333, with the return to the capital of Emperor Go-Daigo (1288–1339; r. 1318–39), whom the shogunate had exiled to Oki Island in 1332. In a sense, therefore, it is a chronological history of the period during which the Kamakura government was the seat of political power. But its chief concern is with the court, which it attempts to portray as maintaining its vitality and relevance in an era of political eclipse. Extensive attention is devoted to Go-Toba and Go-Daigo, the two sovereigns who asserted the legitimacy of imperial rule by challenging the shogunate, and to descriptions of official functions, poetic composition, and other symbolic affirmations of the court's role as the center of civilization. The author stresses the continuity of court culture by alluding to *The Tale of Genji* at least twenty times, and by endowing Go-Toba, his most fully realized character, with all the taste, elegance, sensitivity, and accomplishments of the Shining Prince. The selections below, from the first three of the works seventeen books, trace Go-Toba's life from his birth to his death.

Translation by George Perkins.

## A Historian-Biographer of the Fourteenth Century



- Chūkyō (1218-34; r. 1221). 85th Emperor. Son of Juntoku, grandson of Yoshitsune
- Go-Toba (1180-1239; r. 1183-97). 82nd Emperor. Controlled court as Retired Emperor, 1198-1221; in exile at Ōki, 1221-39
- Juntoku (1197-1242; r. 1210-21). 84th Emperor. Son of Go-Toba and Shumeimon'in; exiled to Sado in 1221
- Shichijōin (1157-1228). Fujiwara Shokushi; mother of Juntoku
- Shōmeimon'in (1171-1257). Consort of Go-Toba; mother of mikado
- Shumeimon'in (1182-1264). Consort of Go-Toba; mother of Tsuchimikado (1195-1231; r. 1198-1209). 83rd Emperor. First son of Go-Toba
- Yoshitoki, Hōjō (1163-1224). Kamakura Regent
- Yōshitsune, Fujiwara (1169-1206). Imperial Regent (1202), Chancellor (1204). Known as a poet

## The Clear Mirror

[1]

The eighty-second sovereign after the founding of the imperial line was Emperor Go-Toba, whose personal name was Takahira. He was Retired Emperor Takakura's fourth son. His mother was Shichijōin, a daughter of Master of the Palace Repairs Office Noburaka. Shichijōin seems to have been something of a secret imperial favorite during Emperor Takakura's reign (a time when she served the Empress as Lady Hyō-no-kami), for the future Emperor was born to her on the Fifteenth Day of the Seventh Month in the fourth year of Jishō [1180]. Emperor Takakura had abdicated in favor of Empress Kenreimon'in's three-year-old son around the spring of that same year, and the consequent ascendancy of the Heike prevented the younger Prince from receiving any special attention.<sup>1</sup> Retired Emperor Takakura died on the Fourteenth of

1. Kenreimon'in was the daughter of the Heike chieftain, Kiyomori.

the first Month of the following year, which made it seem even less likely that the boy might succeed to the throne.

After the Heike carried off the new Emperor Antoku to wander the distant western seas, Priestly Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa summoned his remaining grandsons. It was in his mind to elevate the oldest, the Third Prince, to the imperial dignity, but the Third Prince took a dislike to him and burst into tears. He dismissed the child in a huff and called for the Fourth Prince, who went straight to his arms and settled happily onto his knee. "This is my true grandson," he said. "He looks just like his father when he was a little boy. He is delightful!" He placed the four-year-old Prince on the throne on the Twentieth of the Eighth Month in the fourth year of Juei [1183].

The Sacred Mirror, the Necklace, and the Sword are always transmitted to a new Emperor when his predecessor steps down, but now, for the first time, the Three Treasures were missing, carried off to Tsukushi by Emperor Antoku. It was an extraordinary accession. (The Mirror and the Necklace were returned later. Most regrettably, the Sword sank with Emperor Antoku when he entered the sea.)

Emperor Go-Toba's Accession Audience took place on the Twenty-eighth Day of the Seventh Month in the first year of Genryaku [1184]. The ceremonies seem to have been performed in the customary manner. It is awesome to imagine the feelings of his older brother, the former Emperor, and of all the others, high and low, when the news reached the Heike, who were still wandering in Tsukushi.

The Purification ceremony was held on the Twenty-fifth of the Tenth Month in that same year, and the Great Thanksgiving Festival followed on the Eighteenth of the Eleventh Month. This poem by Middle Counselor Kanemitsu was inscribed on a folding screen in the Hall of the West. (I think the subject was a place in Tanba Province called Nagata Village.)

kamiyo yori	Have they been waiting
kyō no tame to ya	since the age of the gods
yatsukahō ni	for today's events—
nagata no ine no	Nagata's long, rich rice heads,
shinai someken	bent low with ripening grain?

The young sovereign was very grown up and bright, and the Retired Emperor was well pleased with him.

The First Reading took place on the First of the Twelfth Month, the second year of Bunji [1187], when His Majesty was seven. A Junior Consort entered the palace in the sixth year of the same era. A daughter of the Tsukinowa Chancellor, she progressed to the status of Empress and later came to be called Gishūmon'in. Her only child was Shunkamon'in.

The Emperor performed the coming-of-age ceremony on the Third of the First Month in the first year of Kenkyū [1190], when he was eleven. He began to rule alone after the death of Priestly Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa, which occurred on the Thirteenth of the First Month in the third year of the same era. No billows rose on the sea in the four directions; no winds disturbed the branches. The Third was peaceful; the populace was tranquil. The waves of the sea in the encompassing mercy overflowed the confines of our islands all. Because his benevolence was deeper than the shadows on Mount Tsukuba. Because he was skilled in every pursuit, many men of talent appeared in the provinces, and the age was in no way inferior to earlier times.

His Majesty exhibited particular talent as a poet. People quoted in number of his verses, including this noble composition, which was a clear indication of his concern for proper government:

okuyama no  
odoro no shita o  
fumiwakete  
michi aru yo zo to  
hito ni shirasen

Through tangled thickets  
deep, deep in the mountain's heart  
I would push my way,  
that I might show to others,  
"Even there lies the right path!"

In the First Month of the ninth year of Kenkyū [1198], the Emperor ceded the throne to his oldest son, who had just turned four. He had reigned for fifteen years. He was barely twenty, not yet of an age to retire, but he may have preferred the freedom of movement and the peace and quiet of a former sovereign's life to the ever-present constraints imposed on a reigning Emperor. Happily, he continued to govern as before.

The newly retired sovereign's customary residences were the Toba

2. The First Reading (*Jumibajime*) was performed when the son of a high-ranking family reached the age of seven or eight. Ostensibly designed to show the child how to read, it was a purely symbolic event, during which the elaborately dressed young principal in silence while others repeated a few words from the *Classic of Filial Piety* or another suitable text.

and Shirakawa mansions, both of which he had refurbished. He also built an indescribably elegant villa at Minase, where, during his frequent visits, he celebrated the beauties of spring blossoms and autumn leaves. The Retired Emperor composed these lines for a Chinese-society striking. The Retired Emperor held around the Genkyū era [1204-5]:

The Minase River,  
flowing where haze dims the base  
of the distant hills!  
Why did I think of autumn  
as the time for evening scenes?\*

miwaraseba  
miwaraseba  
yamamoto kasumu  
yamamotogawa  
minasegawa  
yūbe wa aki to  
nani omoikemu

There were beautiful long thatched galleries at the villa, designed with the utmost taste. The arrangement of the rocks where the artificial waterfall cascaded from the hill in front, and the small garden pines, waterfall cascaded from mossy forest patriarchs, made the dwelling seem a veritable immortal's grotto, its occupant destined to flourish for a thousand years.

The Retired Emperor summoned a large party of gentlemen for a musical entertainment when the garden was first laid out, and Middle Counselor Teika, who was still a minor official at the time, presented two poems after the end of the festivities:

arihokemu  
moto no chitose ni  
furi mo sede  
wa ga kimi chigiru  
chiyo no wakamatsu

Still young despite  
the thousand years they have seen,  
the pines on the peak  
pledge to live a thousand more,  
together with His Majesty.

kimi ga yo ni  
sekiiruru niwa o  
yuku mizu no  
iwa kosu kazu wa  
chiyo mo miekeri

In our sovereign's reign,  
a thousand years seem presaged  
by countless droplets  
spraying where the garden stream  
follows its rocky course.

The personal name of the new ruler, Emperor Tsuchimikado, was Tamehito. His mother, the daughter of Dharma Seal Nōen, gave birth to

3. Minase was an area in Settsu Province just south of the Yamashiro border, across the Yodo River from Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine. The Minase River was a short tributary of the Yodo.

4. The moon...

him while she was a court attendant known as Lady Saishō. She was later adopted by Palace Minister Michichika, and in the end came to be called Shōmeimon'in. Michichika was actually her stepfather, but he treated her like his own child after she was blessed with an imperial Prince. He reared the Prince in his Tsuchimikado Mansion.

Emperor Tsuchimikado's Accession Audience took place on the Third of the Third Month in the ninth year of Kenkyū [1198]. Purification on the Twenty-seventh of the Tenth Month, and the customary Great Thanksgiving Festival on the Eleventh Month, his coming-of-age ceremony was celebrated on the Third of the First Month, the second year of Genkyū [1205]. He was a handsome, appealing young man. His character was not quite as firm as his father's, but he was sympathetic to the feelings of others.

The new Regent, Motomichi, had served Emperor Go-Toba in the same capacity. He was succeeded later by the Go-Kyōgoku Lord Yoshitsune, who held the post for a long time. Yoshitsune was a veritable sage of poetry, and Retired Emperor Go-Toba shared his interest in the art and encouraged its practice. An anthology of verse, *Collection for a Thousand Years*, had been compiled during the Bunji era [1185-89], but none of His Majesty's compositions had been included, probably because he was still a child at the time. Now, during this new reign, the Retired Emperor commissioned a new anthology. He instructed Commander of the Gate Guards of the Left Michitomo (Palace Minister Michichika's second son), Ariie of Third Rank, Middle Captain Itaka, Ietaka, Masatsune, and others to collect a wide variety of verses, composed from the earliest times to the present, and then he personally joined them in sifting and choosing among their individual preliminary selections, a most unusual and interesting procedure. His Lordship the Regent, whom I have just mentioned, assisted with the project.

Here is a history of the imperial anthologies, beginning with *Collection for a Myriad Ages*, which was commissioned in antiquity from the Tachibana Minister of the Right during a Nara Emperor's reign:

*Collection of Early and Modern Poetry* was compiled by Tomonori, Tsurayuki, Mitsune, and Tadamine during the reign of the saintly Enji Emperor.

I think I have heard that the Five Pear-Court Poets were instructed to compile *Later Collection* after the Ichijō Regent, Lord Kentoku, was appointed head of the Poetry Office while he was still a Chamberlain-

during the reign of the wise Tenryaku sovereign. Or am I mistaken about that? *Collection of Gleanings* in ten books, compiled by Retired Emperor Kazan himself. *Later Collection of Gleanings* was commissioned from Civil Priest Michitoshi during the reign of Emperor Shirakawa. Then Minister for *Collection of Verbal Flowers*, compiled by order of Affairs Minister Sutoke, were made by Akisuke.

The selection of Sutoke, he ordered Toshiyori to commission Emperor Shirakawa abdicated, he rejected the work of Retired Emperor, *Collection of Golden Leaves*. He rejected the work of another anthology, displeased because Prince Sukehito was when it was first submitted, and he also found something amiss when it was resubmitted. Only on the third trial did it meet with his approval. That was an unusual case, because the judgment of the compilers had usually been accepted without question.

It was splendid indeed that Retired Emperor Go-Toba should have shared personally in the process of selection.

Before the compilation of the new anthology, the Retired Emperor held a poetry contest in 1,500 rounds. The best authors were chosen as participants; the foremost practitioners of the art were named as judges. His Majesty included himself among the judges, but refrained from committing his criticisms to writing, remarking modestly that he could not hope to function at the same high level as the others, and merely indicating which poems he considered superior, and which inferior. It was an impressively elegant way of handling things.

It may be true that when a man of stature masters an accomplishment, his inferiors wish to follow in his footsteps. Perhaps that is why there were so many excellent poets of both sexes in Retired Emperor Go-Toba's day. One of them was a certain Lady Kunaikyō. A descendant of Emperor Murakami through Minister of the Left Toshifusa, she sprang from a house that had once enjoyed great prestige, but her father had died as a mere gentleman of Fourth Rank, after holding a succession of minor offices. Although she was very young, she wrote poetry of almost unfathomable depth—an extraordinary thing. Before the Fifteen-Hundred-Round Poetry Contest, the Retired Emperor said to her, "The other participants in this contest are all famous, experienced poets. You may not quite fit into the same category yet, but I thought it would do no harm to include you. Try your best to compose verses that will be





