

AN ACCOUNT OF MY HUT

[*Hōjōki*] by Kamo no Chōmei

"An Account of My Hut" was written in 1212, the same year as the death of Hōnen, the great leader of Japanese popular Buddhism. There is a deeply Buddhist tinge to the work, a Buddhism quite unlike the intellectual, aesthetic religion which Kūkai had taught. The new Buddhism—and this work—was pessimistic, as was not surprising in view of the disasters which befell Japanese society in the late Heian Period. The author, Kamo no Chōmei (1153-1216), describes in this work some of the calamities which he personally witnessed; he does not allude, however, to the fighting between the Taira and the Minamoto which also ravaged the country. In such terrible times men often turn to religion as he did, and his account of the life he led before and after "abandoning the world" is still very moving.

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The flow of the river is ceaseless and its water is never the same. The bubbles that float in the pools, now vanishing, now forming, are not of long duration: so in the world are man and his dwellings. It might be imagined that the houses, great and small, which vie roof against proud roof in the capital remain unchanged from one generation to the next, but when we examine whether this is true, how few are the houses that were there of old. Some were burnt last year and only since rebuilt; great houses have crumbled into hovels and those who dwell in them have fallen no less. The city is the same, the people are as numerous as ever, but of those I used to know, a bare one or two in twenty remain. They die in the morning, they are born in the evening, like foam on the water.

Whence does he come, where does he go, man that is born and

dies? We know not. For whose benefit does he torment himself in building houses that last but a moment, for what reason is his eye delighted by them? This too we do not know. Which will be first to go, the master or his dwelling? One might just as well ask this of the dew on the morning-glory. The dew may fall and the flower remain—remain, only to be withered by the morning sun. The flower may fade before the dew evaporates, but though it does not evaporate, it waits not the evening.

THE GREAT FIRE

In the forty and more years that have passed since first I became aware of the meaning of things, I have witnessed many terrible sights. It was, I believe, the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month of 1177, on a night when the wind blew fiercely without a moment of calm, that a fire broke out toward nine o'clock in the southeast of the capital and spread northwest. It finally reached the gates and buildings of the palace, and within the space of a single night all was reduced to ashes. The fire originated in a little hut where a sick man lodged.

The fire fanned out as the shifting wind spread it, first in one direction and then another. Houses far away from the conflagration were enveloped in the smoke, while the area nearby was a sea of flames. The ashes were blown up into the sky, which turned into a sheet of crimson from the reflected glare of the fire, and the flames, relentlessly whipped by the wind, seemed to fly over two or three streets at a time. Those who were caught in the midst could not believe it was actually happening: some collapsed, suffocated by the smoke, others surrounded by flames died on the spot. Still others barely managed to escape with their lives, but could not rescue any of their property: all their treasures were turned into ashes. How much had been wasted on them!

Sixteen mansions belonging to the nobility were burnt, not to speak of innumerable other houses. In all, about a third of the capital was destroyed. Several thousand men and women lost their lives, as well as countless horses and oxen. Of all the follies of hu-

man endeavor, none is more pointless than expending treasures and spirit to build houses in so dangerous a place as the capital.

THE WHIRLWIND

Again, on the twenty-ninth day of the fourth moon of 1180, a great whirlwind sprang up in the northeast of the capital and violently raged as far south as the Sixth Ward. Every house, great or small, was destroyed within the area engulfed by the wind. Some were knocked completely flat, others were left with their bare framework standing. The tops of the gates were blown off and dropped four or five hundred yards away, and fences were swept down, making neighboring properties one. Innumerable treasures from within the houses were tossed into the sky; roofs of bark or thatch were driven like winter leaves in the wind. A smoke-like dust rose, blindingly thick, and so deafening was the roar that the sound of voices was lost in it. Even so must be the blasts of Hell, I thought.

Not only were many houses damaged or destroyed, but countless people were hurt or crippled while repairing them. The whirlwind moved off in a southwesterly direction, leaving behind many to bewail its passage. People said in wonder, "We have whirlwinds all the time, but never one like this. It is no common case—it must be a presage of terrible things to come."

THE MOVING OF THE CAPITAL

In the sixth month of the same year the capital was suddenly moved, a most unexpected occurrence. It had been hundreds of years since the reign of the Emperor Saga when the capital was fixed in Kyoto.¹ The site of the capital was not a thing lightly to be changed without sufficient reason, and the people were excessively agitated and worried by the news.

However, complaints served no purpose and everyone moved, from the Emperor, his ministers, and the nobility on downward. Of

¹ The capital was actually established at Kyoto by Saga's father, the Emperor Kammu, in 794.

all those who served the court, not a soul was left in the old capital. Those who had ambitions of office or favors to ask of the Emperor vied to be the first to make the move. Only those who, having lost their chances of success, were superfluous in the world and had nothing to hope for, remained behind, although with sorrow. The mansions whose roofs had rivaled one another fell with the passing days to rack and ruin. Houses were dismantled and floated down the Yodo River, and the capital turned into empty fields before one's eyes. People's ways changed completely—now horses were prized and oxcars fell into disuse. Estates by the sea in the south or west were highly desired, and no one showed any liking for manors in the east or the north.²

About this time I happened to have business which took me to the new capital. The site was so cramped that there was not even enough space to divide the city into the proper number of streets.³ To the north the land rose up high along a ridge of hills and to the south sloped down to the sea. The roar of the waves made a constant din, and the salt winds were of a terrible severity. The palace was in the mountains and, suggesting as it did the log construction of the ancient palaces, was not without its charms.

I wondered where they could have erected the houses that were daily dismantled and sent down the river so thick as to clog it. There were still many empty fields, and few houses standing. The old capital was now desolate but the new one had yet to be finished. Men all felt uncertain as drifting clouds. Those people who were natives of the place lamented the loss of their land, and those who now moved there complained over the difficulties of putting up houses. I could see on the roads men on horseback who should have been riding in carriages; instead of wearing court robes they were

² Oxcars were the traditional vehicles of the court nobility, who now were changing to military ways. Estates near the new capital of Fukuhara (by the Inland Sea) were desirable, but those near the center of Minamoto power in the east and north were dangerous.

³ According to the *yin-yang* system of Chinese divination, a capital should have nine streets running east-west and eight streets running north-south, as was observed in the building of Kyoto.

in simple service dress. The manners of the capital had suddenly changed and were now exactly like those of rustic soldiers.

Everywhere people could be heard wondering if future disorders were portended, and indeed, with the passage of the days, the country came to be torn by disturbances and unrest. The sufferings of the people were not, however, entirely in vain—in the winter of the same year the capital was returned to Kyoto. But what had happened to the dismantled houses? They could not all have been re-erected in their former grandeur.

Some faint reports have reached my ears that in the wise reigns of former days the country was ruled with clemency. Then the Imperial palace was thatched with straw, and not even the eaves were aligned.⁴ When the Emperor saw that the smoke rising from the kitchen fires was thin, he went so far as to remit the taxes, although they were not excessive. That was because he loved his people and sought to help them. If we compare present conditions with those of ancient times, we may see how great is the difference.

THE FAMINE

Again, about 1181—it is so long ago that I cannot remember for certain—there was a famine in the country which lasted two years, a most terrible thing. A drought persisted through the spring and summer, while the autumn and winter brought storms and floods. One disaster followed another, and the grains failed to ripen. All in vain was the labor of tilling the soil in spring or planting in summer, for there was none of the joy of the autumn reaping or winter harvest. Some of the people as a result abandoned their lands and crossed into other provinces; some forgot their homes and went to live in the mountains. All manner of prayers were begun and extraordinary devotions performed, but without the slightest effect.

The capital had always depended on the countryside for its needs, and when supplies ceased to come it became quite impossible for

⁴ A description combining the virtues of the legendary Chinese Emperor Yao with the Japanese Emperor Nintoku.

people to maintain their composure. They tried in their desperation to barter for food one after another of their possessions, however cheaply, but no one desired them. The rare person who was willing to trade had contempt for money and set a high value on his grain. Many beggars lined the roads, and their doleful cries filled the air.

Thus the first year of the famine at last drew to a close. It was thought that the new year would see an improvement, but it brought instead the additional affliction of epidemics, and there was no sign of any amelioration. The people were starving, and with the passage of days approached the extremity, like fish gasping in insufficient water. Finally, people of quality, wearing hats and with their legs covered,⁵ were reduced to going from house to house desperately begging. Overwhelmed by misery, they would walk in a stupor, only presently to collapse. The number of those who died of starvation outside the gates or along the roads may not be reckoned. There being no one even to dispose of the bodies, a stench filled the whole world, and there were many sights of decomposing bodies too horrible to behold. Along the banks of the Kamo River there was not even room for horses and cattle to pass.

The lower classes and the wood-cutters were also at the end of their strength, and as even firewood grew scarce those without other resources broke up their own houses and took the wood to sell in the market. The amount obtainable for all that a man could carry, however, was not enough to sustain life a single day. Strange to relate, among the sticks of firewood were some to which bits of vermilion or gold and silver leaf still adhered. This, I discovered, came about because people with no other means of living were robbing the old temples of their holy images or breaking up the furnishings of the sacred halls for firewood. It was because I was born in a world of foulness and evil that I was forced to witness such heartbreaking sights.

There were other exceedingly unhappy occurrences. In the case of husbands and wives who refused to separate, the ones whose affections were the stronger were certain to die first. This was because, whether man or woman, they thought of themselves second and

⁵ Ordinary beggars would have been bareheaded and barelegged.

gave to their beloved whatever food they occasionally managed to get. With parents and children it inevitably happened that the parents died first. Sometimes an infant, not realizing that its mother was dead, would lie beside her, sucking at her breast.

The Abbot Ryūgyō of the Ninnaji, grieving for the countless people who were dying, gathered together a number of priests who went about writing the letter A on the forehead of every corpse they saw, thus establishing communion with Buddha.⁶ In an attempt to determine how many people had died, they made a count during the fourth and fifth months, and found within the boundaries of the capital over 42,300 corpses lying in the streets. What would the total have been had it included all who died before or after that period, both within the city and in the suburbs? And what if all the provinces of Japan had been included?

I have heard that a similar disaster occurred in 1134, during the reign of the Emperor Sutoku, but I did not myself experience what happened then. Of all that has passed before my eyes, this famine was the strangest and saddest of all disasters.

THE EARTHQUAKE

Then there was the great earthquake of 1185, of an intensity not known before. Mountains crumbled and rivers were buried, the sea tilted over and immersed the land. The earth split and water gushed up; boulders were sundered and rolled into the valleys. Boats that rowed along the shores were swept out to sea. Horses walking along the roads lost their footing. It is needless to speak of the damage throughout the capital—not a single mansion, pagoda, or shrine was left whole. As some collapsed and others tumbled over, dust and ashes rose like voluminous smoke. The rumble of the earth shaking and the houses crashing was exactly like that of thunder. Those who were in their houses, fearing that they would presently be crushed to death, ran outside, only to meet with a new cracking of the earth.

⁶ In Shingon Buddhism, of which the Ninnaji was a center, great significance is given to A, the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, the beginning of things, and it is believed that all afflictions can be ended by contemplating this letter.

They could not soar into the sky, not having wings. They could not climb into the clouds, not being dragons. Of all the frightening things of the world, none is so frightful as an earthquake.

Among those who perished was the only child of a samurai family, a boy of five or six, who had made a little house under the overhanging part of a wall and was playing there innocently when the wall suddenly collapsed, burying him under it. His body was crushed flat, with only his two eyes protruding. His parents took him in their arms and wailed uncontrollably, so great was the sorrow they experienced. I realized that grief over a child can make even the bravest warrior forget shame—a pitiable but understandable fact.

The intense quaking stopped after a time, but the after-tremors continued for some while. Not a day passed without twenty or thirty tremors of a severity which would ordinarily have frightened people. After a week or two their frequency diminished, and there would be four or five, then two or three a day; then a day might be skipped, or there be only one tremor in two or three days. After-tremors continued for three months.

Of the four great elements, water, fire, and wind are continually causing disasters, but the earth does not normally afflict man. Long ago, during the great earthquake of the year 855, the head of the Buddha of the Tōdaiji fell off, a terrible misfortune, indeed, but not the equal of the present disaster. At the time everyone spoke of the vanity and meaninglessness of the world, and it seemed that the impurities in men's hearts had somewhat lessened, but with the passage of the months and the days and the coming of the new year people no longer even spoke in that vein.

HARDSHIPS OF LIFE IN THE WORLD

All is as I have described it—the things in the world which make life difficult to endure, our own helplessness and the undependability of our dwellings. And if to these were added the griefs that come from place or particular circumstances, their sum would be unreckonable.

When a man of no great standing happens to live next door to a

powerful lord, however happy he may be he cannot celebrate too loudly; however grief-stricken, he cannot raise his voice in lamentations. He is uneasy no matter what he does; in his every action he trembles like a swallow approaching a falcon's nest. The poor man who is the neighbor of a wealthy family is always ashamed of his wretched appearance, and makes his entrances and exits in bursts of flattery. And when he sees how envious his wife and children and his servants are, or hears how the rich family despises him, his mind is incessantly torn by an agitation that leaves not a moment's peace. If a man's house stands in a crowded place and a fire breaks out in the neighborhood, he cannot escape the danger. If it stands in a remote situation, he must put up with the nuisance of going back and forth to the city, and there is always a danger of robbers.

Those who are powerful are filled with greed; and those who have no protectors are despised. Possessions bring many worries; in poverty there is sorrow. He who asks another's help becomes his slave; he who nurtures others is fettered by affection. He who complies with the ways of the world may be impoverished thereby; he who does not, appears deranged. Wherever one may live, whatever work one may do, is it possible even for a moment to find a haven for the body or peace for the mind?

RENUNCIATION OF THE WORLD

I inherited the house of my father's grandmother and for a long time lived there. Afterward I lost my position and fell on hard times.⁷ Many things led me to live in seclusion, and finally, unable longer to remain in my ancestral home, in my thirties I built after my own plans a little cottage. It was a bare tenth the size of the house in which I had lived, and being intended just as a place where I might stay it had no pretensions about it. An earthen wall was, it is true, raised around it, but I lacked the means to put up an ornamental gate. I also built a rough shed of bamboo posts for my carriage. I must confess that when the snow fell or gales blew, I could

⁷ Kamo no Chōmei's family enjoyed a hereditary position as Shinto priests at the Kamo Shrine, but in his generation this privilege was rescinded.

not but feel alarmed; and since the house was near the Kamo River, there was considerable danger of flooding as well as the threat of bandits.

For over thirty years I had tormented myself by putting up with all the things of this unhappy world. During this time each stroke of misfortune had naturally made me realize the fragility of my life. In my fiftieth year, then, I became a priest and turned my back on the world. Not having any family, I had no ties that would make abandoning the world difficult. I had no rank or stipend—what was there for me to cling to? How many years had I vainly spent among the cloud-covered hills of Ohara?⁸

THE HUT TEN FEET SQUARE

Now that I have reached the age of sixty, and my life seems about to evaporate like the dew, I have fashioned a lodging for the last leaves of my years. It is a hut where, perhaps, a traveler might spend a single night; it is like the cocoon spun by an aged silkworm. This hut is not even a hundredth the size of the cottage where I spent my middle years.

Before I was aware, I had become heavy with years, and with each remove my dwelling grew smaller. The present hut is of no ordinary appearance. It is a bare ten feet square and less than seven feet high. I did not choose this particular spot rather than another, and I built my house without consulting any diviners.⁹ I laid a foundation and roughly thatched a roof. I fastened hinges to the joints of the beams, the easier to move elsewhere should anything displease me. What difficulty would there be in changing my dwelling? A bare two carts would suffice to carry off the whole house, and except for the carter's fee there would be no expenses at all.

Since first I hid my traces here in the heart of Mount Hino, I have added a lean-to on the south and a porch of bamboo. On the west I have built a shelf for holy water, and inside the hut, along the

⁸ Chōmei felt that even the simplicity of his cottage was still not a suitable life; he had to become a true hermit.

⁹ Normally the site of a house was selected after consulting *yin-yang* diviners, but for a Buddhist priest one place was as good as another.

west wall, I have installed an image of Amida. The light of the setting sun shines between its eyebrows.¹⁰ On the doors of the reliquary I have hung pictures of Fugen and Fudō.¹¹ Above the sliding door that faces north I have built a little shelf on which I keep three or four black leather baskets that contain books of poetry and music and extracts from the sacred writings. Beside them stand a folding koto and a lute.

Along the east wall I have spread long fern fronds and mats of straw which serve as my bed for the night. I have cut open a window in the eastern wall, and beneath it have made a desk. Near my pillow is a square brazier in which I burn brushwood. To the north of the hut I have staked out a small plot of land which I have enclosed with a rough fence and made into a garden. I grow many species of herbs there.

This is what my temporary hut is like. I shall now attempt to describe its surroundings. To the south there is a bamboo pipe which empties water into the rock pool I have laid. The woods come close to my house, and it is thus a simple matter for me to gather brushwood. The mountain is named Toyama. Creeping vines block the trails and the valleys are overgrown, but to the west is a clearing, and my surroundings thus do not leave me without spiritual comfort.¹² In the spring I see waves of wistaria like purple clouds, bright in the west. In the summer I hear the cuckoo call, promising to guide me on the road of death. In the autumn the voice of the evening insects fills my ears with a sound of lamentation for this cracked husk of a world. In winter I look with deep emotion on the snow, piling up and melting away like sins and hindrances to salvation.

When I do not feel like reciting the *nembutsu*¹³ and cannot put

¹⁰ The Buddha was said to have emitted light between his eyebrows.

¹¹ Fugen (Sanskrit, Samantabhadra) is the highest of the bodhisattvas. Fudō Myōō (Sanskrit, Acalanātha) is the chief of the Guardian Kings.

¹² The west is the direction of Paradise and it was thus auspicious that it should have been clear in that direction. The purple cloud is the one on which Amida Buddha descends to guide the believer to the Western Paradise.

¹³ The invocation to Amida Buddha practiced particularly by believers in Jōdo Buddhism.

my heart into reading the Sutras, no one will keep me from resting or being lazy, and there is no friend who will feel ashamed of me. Even though I make no special attempt to observe the discipline of silence, living alone automatically makes me refrain from the sins of speech; and though I do not necessarily try to obey the Commandments, here where there are no temptations what should induce me to break them?

On mornings when I feel myself short-lived as the white wake behind a boat,¹⁴ I go to the banks of the river and, gazing at the boats plying to and fro, compose verses in the style of the Priest Mansei. Or if of an evening the wind in the maples rustles the leaves, I recall the river at Jinyō, and play the lute in the manner of Minamoto no Tsunenobu.¹⁵ If still my mood does not desert me, I often tune my lute to the echoes in the pines, and play the "Song of the Autumn Wind," or pluck the notes of the "Melody of the Flowing Stream," modulating the pitch to the sound of the water. I am but an indifferent performer, but I do not play to please others. Alone I play, alone I sing, and this brings joy to my heart.

At the foot of this mountain is a rough-hewn cottage where the guardian of the mountain lives. He has a son who sometimes comes to visit me. When I am bored with whatever I am doing, I often go for a walk with him as my companion. He is sixteen and I sixty: though our ages greatly differ we take pleasure in each other's company.

Sometimes I pick flowering reeds or the wild pear, or fill my basket with berries and cress. Sometimes I go to the rice fields at the foot of the mountain and weave wreaths of the fallen ears. Or, when the weather is fine, I climb the peak and look out toward Kyoto, my old home, far, far away. The view has no owner and nothing can interfere with my enjoyment.

When I feel energetic and ready for an ambitious journey, I follow along the peaks to worship at the Iwama or Ishiyama Temple. Or I push through the fields of Awazu to pay my respects to the

¹⁴ From a poem by the Priest Mansei. See page 93.

¹⁵ Reference to the famous "Lute Song" (*P'i-p'a Chi*) by Po Chū-i. Minamoto no Tsunenobu (1016-1097) was a famous musician and poet.

remains of Semimaru's hut, and cross the Tanagami River to visit the tomb of Sarumaru.¹⁶ On the way back, according to the season, I admire the cherry blossoms or the autumn leaves, pick fern-shoots or fruit, both to offer to the Buddha and to use in my house.

If the evening is still, in the moonlight that fills the window I long for old friends or wet my sleeve with tears at the cries of the monkeys.¹⁷ Fireflies in the grass thickets might be mistaken for fishing-lights off the island of Maki; the dawn rains sound like autumn storms blowing through the leaves. And when I hear the pheasants' cries, I wonder if they call their father or their mother; when the wild deer of the mountain approach me unafraid, I realize how far I am from the world. And when sometimes, as is the wont of old age, I waken in the middle of the night, I stir up the buried embers and make them companions in solitude.

It is not an awesome mountain, but its scenery gives me endless pleasure regardless of the season, even when I listen in wonder to the hooting of the owls.¹⁸ How much more even would the sights mean to someone of deeper thought and knowledge!

When I first began to live here I thought it would be for just a little while, but five years have already passed. My temporary retreat has become rather old as such houses go: withered leaves lie deep by the eaves and moss has spread over the floor. When, as chance has had it, news has come to me from the capital, I have learned how many of the great and mighty have died since I withdrew to this mountain. And how to reckon the numbers of lesser folk? How many houses have been destroyed by the numerous conflagrations? Only in a hut built for the moment can one live without fears. It is very small, but it holds a bed where I may lie at night and a seat for me in the day; it lacks nothing as a place for me to dwell. The hermit crab chooses to live in little shells because

¹⁶ Semimaru was a poet of the Heian Period who lived in a hut near the Barrier of Ausakayama. See page 92. Sarumaru-dayū was an early Heian poet, but nothing is known about him. For a later description of roughly the same area, see Bashō's "Unreal Dwelling," page 374.

¹⁷ This paragraph is full of allusions to old poems which it would be tedious to explain.

¹⁸ From a poem by Saigyō: "The mountain is remote; I do not hear the voices of the birds I love, but only the eerie cries of the owl."

it well knows the size of its body. The osprey stays on deserted shores because it fears human beings. I am like them. Knowing myself and the world, I have no ambitions and do not mix in the world. I seek only tranquillity; I rejoice in the absence of grief.

Most people do not build houses for their own sake. Some build for their families or their relatives; some for their friends and acquaintances. Some build for their masters or teachers, and some even to hold their possessions or beasts. I have built for myself and not for others. This is because in times like these, being in the position I am, I have no companion and no servant to help me. Supposing that I had built a spacious house, whom should I have lodged? Whom should I have had live there?

A man's friends esteem him for his wealth and show the greatest affection for those who do them favors. They do not necessarily have love for persons who bear them warm friendship or who are of an honest disposition. It is better to have as friends music and the sights of nature. A man's servants crave liberal presents and are deferential to those who treat them generously. But however great the care and affection bestowed on them, they do not care the slightest for their master's peace and happiness. It is best to be one's own servant.

If there is something which must be done, I naturally do it myself. I do sometimes weary of work, but I find it simpler to work than to employ a servant and look after him. If some errand requires walking, I do the walking myself. It is disagreeable at times, but it is preferable to worrying about horse-trappings or an oxcart. I divide my body and make two uses of it: my hands are my servants, my feet my vehicle, and they suit me well. When my mind or body is tired, I know it at once and I rest. I employ my servants when they are strong. I say "employ," but I do not often overwork them. If I do not feel like working, it does not upset me. And is it not true that to be thus always walking and working is good for the body? What would be the point in idly doing nothing? It is a sin to cause physical or mental pain: how can we borrow the labor of others?

My clothing and food are as simple as my lodgings. I cover my

nakedness with whatever clothes woven of wistaria fiber and quilts of hempen cloth come to hand, and I eke out my life with berries of the fields and nuts from the trees on the peaks. I need not feel ashamed of my appearance, for I do not mix in society and the very scantiness of the food gives it additional savor, simple though it is.

I do not prescribe my way of life to men enjoying happiness and wealth, but have related my experiences merely to show the differences between my former and present life. Ever since I fled the world and became a priest, I have known neither hatred nor fear. I leave my span of days for Heaven to determine, neither clinging to life nor begrudging its end. My body is like a drifting cloud—I ask for nothing, I want nothing. My greatest joy is a quiet nap; my only desire for this life is to see the beauties of the seasons.

The Three Worlds are joined by one mind.¹⁹ If the mind is not at peace, neither beasts of burden nor possessions are of service, neither palaces nor pavilions bring any cheer. This lonely house is but a tiny hut, but I somehow love it. I naturally feel ashamed when I go to the capital and must beg, but when I return and sit here I feel pity for those still attached to the world of dust. Should anyone doubt the truth of my words, let him look to the fishes and the birds. Fish do not weary of the water, but unless one is a fish one does not know why. Birds long for the woods, but unless one is a bird one does not know why. The joys of solitude are similar. Who could understand them without having lived here?

Now the moon of my life sinks in the sky and is close to the edge of the mountain. Soon I must head into the darkness of the Three Ways:²⁰ why should I thus drone on about myself? The essence of the Buddha's teaching to man is that we must not have attachment for any object. It is a sin for me now to love my little hut, and my attachment to its solitude may also be a hindrance to salvation. Why should I waste more precious time in relating such trifling pleasures?

¹⁹ From the Avatamska Sutra. The Three Worlds may be interpreted as the past, the present, and the future.

²⁰ The three paths in the afterworld leading to different types of hells.

One calm dawning, as I thought over the reasons for this weakness of mine, I told myself that I had fled the world to live in a mountain forest in order to discipline my mind and practice the Way. "And yet, in spite of your monk's appearance, your heart is stained with impurity. Your hut may take after Jōmyō's,²¹ but you preserve the Law even worse than Handoku. If your low estate is a retribution for the sins of a previous existence, is it right that you afflict yourself over it? Or should you permit delusion to come and disturb you?" To these questions my mind could offer no reply. All I could do was to use my tongue to recite two or three times the *nembutsu*, however unacceptable from a defiled heart.

It is now the end of the third moon of 1212, and I am writing this at the hut on Toyama.

TRANSLATED BY DONALD KEENE

²¹ Jōmyō (Vimalakīrti) was a priest of Sakyamuni's time who built himself a stone hut much like Chōmei's. Handoku (Panthaka) was the most foolish of Sakyamuni's disciples.

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