

The Taiheiki

A CHRONICLE OF MEDIEVAL JAPAN

Translated, with an

Introduction and Notes

by Helen Craig McCullough

CHARLES E. TUTTLE COMPANY
Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan

1959

The Building of the Great Palace Enclosure; The Matter of the Shrine of Sugawara no Michizane

The nobles reported to the throne on the twelfth day of the first month of the next year, saying:

"His Majesty's affairs have become exceedingly numerous, and the hundred offices are out of order. The bounds of this palace are narrow, nor is it a place where ceremonies can be made ready, since its length is but four hundred and seventy-five yards on the four

But though it were to be made greater on every side by a hundred and twenty yards, and though halls and buildings were to be built, still it would not equal the imperial residence of antiquity. The great palace enclosure ought to be built."

So they spoke, and thereupon the emperor commanded the provinces of Aki and Suō to bear the expense thereof, and set aside the twentieth part of the yearly yield of taxes of all the stewards and housemen of the land of Japan.

Here follows a description of the original palace enclosure, which in turn leads to a lengthy biography of Sugawara no Michizane (845-903), the exiled minister whose angry spirit was believed to have caused the palace's destruction by fire.]

(SNIP)

But it came to pass that a fire broke out in the Daigokuden and burnt up all the offices and ministries. And it is said that, though they were rebuilt swiftly, they burnt again when the malevolent spirit of fire and thunder, a lesser god of the Shrine of Kitanomatsun Tenjin, came down on the southwest pillar of the Miyōden.

He that is called Temman Tenjin is the master of elegant accomplishments and the great preceptor of men of letters. In heaven he shows his brilliance to the sun and moon and illumines the land; earth he became a minister of state and made the people flourish. He speak of his beginnings: Once on a time a little boy of four or five years stood alone in the south garden of Lord Zezen, the Ōgawara consultant, a child most fair to behold, reciting a poem touching on the flowers of the garden.

Seized with amazement, Lord Zezen spoke a word to him, asking, "Whence are you come, and of whose family are you a son?"

"I have no father or mother," he said. "Will you not be my father?"

And rejoicing in his heart, Lord Zezen carried him on his shoulder, held him in his arms, and reared him lovingly inside doors and a brocade. This was he who is known to men as the Kan minister of state.⁴⁸

Now this child understood the way of things without being taught, unequalled in wit and learning. In his tenth year, his

⁴⁸ Sugawara no Michizane. See note 2, Chapter Six. Kan is the Sino-Japanese pronunciation of the Suga- of Sugawara.

father the Kan consultant smoothed his hair, asking, "Can you compose a Chinese poem?" Whereupon tranquilly the boy spoke of the coldness of that night, and in clear words made a poem of five-word lines.

Bright is the moonlight, as on new-fallen snow;
Like shining stars are the blossoms of the plum.
Alas! The golden mirror⁴⁹ runs its course,
But in the courtyard there is a fragrant smell.

Thereafter his Chinese poems were abundantly inspired, their brilliance even as that of the poems of the great days of T'ang. His prose was as skillful as the prose of Han and Wei, and he committed a myriad scrolls of books to memory. Wherefore he succeeded beyond all others in the examinations on the twenty-third day of the third month of the twelfth year of Jōgan.

In the spring of the same year, it came to pass that men gathered together at the house of Miyako no Yoshika to shoot at archery. And the Kan minister of state likewise came to that place. Miyako no Yoshika thought in his heart:

"This lord is a person who is always studying, even by the light of fireflies. Surely he is unable to distinguish one part of a bow from another, since he can have no leisure to practice. Let us amuse ourselves by making him shoot."

So he thought, and put a bow and practice arrows in front of the Kan minister of state, saying, "Since it is the beginning of spring, amuse yourself for awhile."

The Kan minister of state did not draw back, but joined himself to a side. He bared his snowy skin to the waist, raised up and pulled down, steadied the bow for awhile, and let go an arrow. The five virtues of the skilled archer were displayed abundantly in the flight of that arrow, and in the twang of the bowstring and the turning over of the bow. Nor was his aim at all mistaken, but in five turns of two arrows each, he struck the mark ten times. And Miyako no Yoshika's heart was moved thereby, so that he came down, drew him by the hand, feasted him for many hours, and gave him presents of divers kinds.

On the twenty-sixth day of the second month of the same year,

⁴⁹The moon.

the emperor of En'gi⁵⁰ (being yet the crown prince), summoned the Kan minister of state and said to him:

"Surely you are as talented as Li Ch'iao of the court of Han, who wrote a hundred poems in one night. Compose ten Chinese verses within two hours, that the emperor may look upon them."

When the Kan minister of state received the ten subjects, in an hour he composed ten poems. Doubtless one of those ten was his poem speaking of the last days of spring:

In sending off the spring
I use no boat or carriage,
But only say goodbye to the last bush warbler,
And to the falling blossoms;
And lodge tonight in a poet's house,⁵¹
So that the spring may know my heart.

There was nothing lacking at all, not in men's praise of his wit and intelligence, nor in his following of the way of benevolence and righteousness. The emperor looked upon him with unbounded approbation, thinking, "Through this man alone will the sovereign's virtue become as that of the sage-rulers of Chinese antiquity, and the land will be ruled as by Confucius and the Duke of Chou." He rose from middle counselor to great counselor in the sixth month of the ninth year of Kampyō, and soon he became a grand marshal. When the emperor of En'gi came to the throne in the tenth month of that year, all affairs of state were in his hands, and all military matters. No man could stand alongside him, not even a regent or a member of a ministerial family. And in the second month of the second year of Shōtai he became a great subject and grand marshal. In those days there was a person called the Great Subject of the Main Cloister,⁵² a descendant of Fujiwara no Kamatari in the ninth generation, and the first son of Lord Shōsen. Because he was the elder brother of the empress and the uncle of Murakami Tanno, he thought, "By no means is any man my equal, whether he be of a regent family or of the highest lineage." It was most hateful to his

⁵⁰ Daigo Tanno (reigned 897-930). En'gi was the era name given to the years 901-923.

⁵¹ Spend the night writing verses.

⁵² Fujiwara no Tokhina (871-909), who became the most powerful figure of his day.

heard that he was overreached by the Kan minister of state in office and rank, and in emoluments and rewards.⁵³ Plotting secretly with Lord Hikaru, Lord Tadakuni, and Sugane no Ason, he summoned the chief of the Bureau of Divination, buried dolls in the eight corners of the imperial dwelling place, and laid a curse on the Kan minister of state by worshipping the invisible powers. But because it is not the way of heaven to be unjust, no harm came to the august person of the minister.

Then the Great Subject of the Main Cloister thought, "If it be thus, I will speak evil words against him, that he may be punished and destroyed." Many times he spoke, saying, "The Kan minister of state governs the realm with a selfish heart, cares nothing for the people's misery, and makes wrong right." And thereupon the emperor thought:

"He is a treacherous minister, causing disorders and harming the people. He is not a loyal minister who censures what is wrong and prohibits what is unjust."

How unfortunate it was! "What man is this, who tells lies as smoothly as a piper plays? If he would prevail upon you to cover your nose, cover it not, lest husband and wife be made as two stars that never meet. If he would prevail upon you to pick up a bee, take it not, lest mother and son be made as wild beasts."⁵⁴ By a slanderer's false words may husband and wife be set apart, and parent and son, who ought to cherish one another as their own souls. How then might it be otherwise with sovereign and minister? On the twentieth day of the first month of the fourth year of Shōtai, the emperor decreed, "The Kan minister of state shall be demoted to be deputy chief of the Dazaifu, and shall be sent forth in exile to Tsukushi."

Unable to bear the sorrow of being sent away, the Kan minister of state sent the former emperor a poem filled with a thousand

⁵³ This is incorrect, as becomes apparent later in the story.

⁵⁴ From a poem by Po Chū-i. A Chinese queen told a beautiful rival that the king disliked her nose, advising her to cover it. Then the queen told the king that the lady covered her nose because his smell was displeasing to her, whereupon the king cut off the offending member. Another woman put a bee into her clothing after first removing its sting. When her son tried to capture the insect, she screamed to her husband that he was assaulting her. The husband became suspicious of the son, who finally killed himself.

chiefs: "Will not His Majesty become a weir to stop me where I float away?" The former emperor wept into his sleeve and took his way to the palace to prevail upon the sovereign to take back the punishment of exile, yet in the end he returned vainly, swallowing his anger, for the emperor would not come out to meet him.

Thereafter a sentence of banishment was handed down quickly, commanding the Kan minister of state to go forth to the Dazaifu. Among his twenty-three children, the four that were sons were set apart utterly, banished to provinces in every direction. His eldest daughter alone was suffered to remain in the capital, but eighteen daughters departed from the city weeping, to go to wearisome Tsukushi. How pitiful it was!

Then from the Red Plum Hall, his study for many years, the Kan minister of state went forth into the pale moonlight of dawn. Smelling the lingering fragrance of plum blossoms in his sleeve, he thought, "This alone is my memento of spring at home!" Tearfully he recited, "If an east wind blow, send me your fragrance, O blossoms of the plum; forget not the spring because your master is gone!"

He got up into his carriage, sped on his way by officials named to stop him from lingering on the journey, who said, "You must go as far as Yodo Crossing by nightfall."

May it not be that the minister's trees and plants grieved to part from him, albeit no hearts beat within them? For his plum tree flew away on a wind from the east and let down its roots in the garden of his exile dwelling. This is the very flying plum tree of the Dazaifu which spoke to a man in his dream, lamenting, "How cruel are you who break my branches!"

In the time of Nima, when the Kan minister of state went down to be an official in the land of Sanuki, even as Kan Ning⁵⁵ he rode in a boat furnished with ropes of brocade, while poles of yew and oars of cassia wood struck against the sides beneath the moon of the southern seas. But when he went forth to exile in Shōtai, between waves and rush roofing he spread out the sleeve of a robe given him by the emperor in a bygone day, and thought on the

⁵⁵ An ostentatious rich man who lived during the Three Kingdoms period in China (220-280).

clouds of the Dazaiфу with his heart in sorrow. Mourning for his wife and daughter left behind in the capital, he thought, "Yesterday's parting was the end"; grieving sorely to remember his eighteen sons⁵⁶ sent away to unknown lands, he thought tearfully, "Indeed, they must suffer in body and spirit as they go forth on these unexpected journeys."

In a Chinese poem he spoke of his feelings on that trip:

Driven forth by the imperial commissioners,
 Father and sons are set apart in five places.
 My mouth cannot speak; there is blood in my eye.
 I bow myself down before the gods of heaven and earth.

When the messenger sent with him by his wife turned back on the way, he wrote, "Until they disappeared I looked back as I journeyed—the treetops beside your dwelling place."

Quickly the days and nights passed, until he came to the place of his exile at the Dazaiфу. And the officials from the capital set him inside a wretched hut and went away home.

As the Kan minister of state gazed sadly upon the colored roof tiles of the Dazaiфу tower and listened to the bell of the Temple of Kannon, the autumn became the autumn of his life. Morning and evening he thought of home, his tears growing thicker with every word that was spoken, so that the sleeves of his garments were never dry. Nor might it have been otherwise, even had he not yearned after his home, since he had been thus grievously and unjustly accused!

Now beyond endurance his bitterness entered into the marrow of his bones, that by false slanders he was condemned to be exiled. After purifying his body for seven days, he wrote a prayer to the gods, climbed up onto a high mountain, put up the prayer on the front of a pole, and for seven days stood on the tips of his toes. May it be that Brahma and Indra pitied him because of those slanders? For a black cloud came down from the sky, and took up the petition, and raised it to the distant heavens.

At last the Kan minister of state perished from the sorrow of his banishment, on the twenty-fifth day of the second month of the third year of Engi, and men made his grave in the place that is now

⁵⁶ The author is confusing Michizane's sons with his daughters.

the Anrakuji Temple. How sad it was that this spring flower of the imperial palace floated away, following the never-returning waters! How sad it was that this moon of the night of the western government⁵⁷ was obscured, entering the clouds of a false name! The noble and the base shed tears, longing for a world where honesty and sincerity might flourish, the far and the near were silent, sorrowing to live in an era of degeneracy.

Late in the summer of that same year, a certain Hoshobō was sojourning on top of the Hill of the Four Brightnesses, purifying the waters of his mind in the moonlight shining before the floor of the Ten Ways to Buddhahood: Hoshobō the thirteenth abbot of the Enryakuji, who was also called Son'i, and received the title of monk reformer after his death. Suddenly there came a noise of someone knocking at the Personal Buddha Hall.⁵⁸ And when Hoshobō opened the door he beheld the Kan minister of state, even he of whom men said, "Assuredly he died last spring in Tsukushi."

Seized with amazement Hoshobō invited the minister to enter, saying, "Please come in." Again he said:

"Truly did I hear that you died in Tsukushi on the twenty-fifth day of the second month, wherefore I wept into my sleeve bitterly, and constantly performed pious works to pray for your enlightenment in the afterlife. Do I wake or dream, that now you come here looking exactly as before?"

So he spoke, and the Kan minister of state wiped away the tears falling one after another onto his face. He spoke a word to Hoshobō, saying:

"For a time I descended among men to bring tranquility to the realm by acting as a minister of the court. Yet because His Majesty believed in the slanders of Lord Tokihira, at last I sank beneath an unjust punishment. More fierce than the flames of a kalpa-fire⁵⁹ is the heat of my wrath! Though my body is destroyed, that was made up of the five skandhas, assuredly my spirit lives on in heaven. Having obtained leave to wreak my vengeance from the

⁵⁷ The government of Kyushu.

⁵⁸ See note 31, Chapter Two.

⁵⁹ See note 3, Chapter Eight.

great and small divinities, and from Brahma, Indra, and the Four Kings, I am resolved to draw near to the ninefold imperial palace to kick to death the crafty courtiers and slanderers who used me ill, the one after the other. The court will certainly call upon the Mountain Gate to perform the mystic rites of absolute control,⁸⁸ but do you refrain utterly from going forth to the palace, though the emperor himself send a command."

"My debt is not small to you who were my teacher," said the monk reformer, "yet neither is my duty to the emperor an inconsequential thing. Though I turn away once, must I not go to the palace if His Majesty summons me a second or third time?"

Then suddenly the face of the Kan minister of state grew wrath. He took up a pomegranate from before him, crunched it with his teeth, and spit it out against the door of the hall. And the seeds became a violent fire, burning the door. Yet the monk reformer was in no wise affrighted, but turned his face toward the burning fire, made the water-sprinkling sign with his hands, and extinguished the fierce flames in an instant, so that the door was but half burnt. Men say that this very door stands today at the Mountain Gate.

Thereafter, the Kan minister of state stood up and ascended into the heavens. Soon thunder rolled high and low above the imperial palace, as though high heaven itself were like to fall down to earth, and the great earth itself were to be rent in twain, and the emperor and the hundred officials made their bodies small, their spirits fainting within them. For seven days and seven nights the rain came down mightily, while a tempest blew and darkness covered the earth. Even as the suffering in the Hell of Crying and Wailing, or in the Hell of Great Crying,⁸¹ even so were the crying voices of the high and low of the capital and Shirakawa, and of the men and women, for the people's houses were swept away in the flooding waters.

At last a thunderbolt fell down onto the Seiryōden in the great palace enclosure, lighting a fire in the outer robes of the Great Counselor Lord Kiyotsura such as would not be put out, though

⁸⁰ Over all influences, whether good or evil.

⁸¹ The Hell of Crying and Wailing and the Hell of Great Crying are the fourth and fifth of the eight hot hells of Buddhism.

he laid his body down and rolled over and over. Mareyo no Ason arranged an arrow along his bowstring and turned his face toward the thunder (a brave man, a Controller of the Right). And he spoke a word to it, saying, "Whatever kind of thunder you may be, do you not tremble before the imperial authority?" But a palsy seized Mareyo's five members, and he fell down on his face. Next the side hair of Koneo no Tadakane caught fire, so that he burned to death, and Ki no Kagetsura perished choking in the smoke.

Now the Great Subject of the Main Cloister thought in his heart, "Alas! A divine punishment is visited upon me!" Standing near the emperor's side, he drew forth his sword, saying:

"When you served at the court, you were not lacking in propriety toward me.⁸² Though you are become a god, do you no longer owe a duty to the emperor? If you reverse the Son of Heaven and have not refused to be a protecting divinity, then be quiet awhile, and tranquilly make your virtue felt."

So he spoke to him with reasonable words. Perhaps the thunder god became quiet because of his logic, for he climbed up to heaven, not striking down the Great Subject Tokihira or harming the emperor.

The rain and wind continued upon the earth until the world was like to wash away, with all the lands thereof. And therefore the emperor called upon Hoshōbō, saying, "Let Us appease the wrath of the god through the power of the Buddhist Law." Hoshōbō excused himself once and twice, yet the emperor summoned him a third time. Whereupon indeed he went down to the capital, for he could do no other.

The Kamo River was swollen so greatly that none might cross over it save in a boat. But the monk reformer commanded, "Let my carriage enter the water." And when the ox driver hastened to take the carriage into the overflowing river according to his command, the flood waters parted to the left and right, so that the carriage passed over the ground.

From the time that this monk reformer went to the palace,

⁸² Tokihira outranked Michizane in the official hierarchy, and therefore was entitled to respectful treatment from him. (Tokihira had actually been dead for twenty-two years when lightning struck the Seiryōden.)

the rain stopped and the wind was stilled, as though the wrath of the god had been appeased instantly. The emperor looked graciously upon him, and he climbed back up to the mountain. Men say that it is because of this that all the realm praises the miraculous powers of the Mountain Gate.

Thereafter it came to pass that the Great Subject of the Main Cloister was taken of a sickness whereby his body and spirit were tormented everlastingly. And he begged the reverend father Jōzō to pray for him. But then a small blue snake thrust out its head from the left ear of the Great Subject, and likewise from the right ear, and spoke to the reverend father Jōzō, saying:

"It is in my heart to kill this minister to be avenged of his false slanders. Your prayers and healing will be of no avail. If you wish to know who it is that speaks in this way, I am the god Temman Daijizai Tenjin, even he who was once the Kan minister of state."

The reverend father Jōzō left off praying and went away, affrighted by the strangeness of the revelation, and at once the Great Subject of the Main Cloister died. Likewise, his daughter died very soon, she who was an imperial handmaiden, and his grandson the crown prince.

In the same way the second son of the Great Subject of the Main Cloister was smitten of a grievous disease, the grand marshal Yasutada of the Eighth Ward. And a monk attended on him, reciting the *Sutra of the Healing Buddha*. When this monk read loudly, "the general Kumbhira,"⁴³ it came to Yasutada's ears as the voice of one saying, "*Kubi kiran*," which is to say, "I will cut off your head," and he died. Also Tokihira's third son, Atsutada the Middle Counselor, died in the early years of his life. Awe-inspiring indeed was the divine punishment that instantly destroyed this man, his children and his grandchildren!

Around that time there was a cousin of the emperor of Engi who died suddenly for no reason, a person called Kintada the Great Controller of the Right. Three days later this Kintada came alive with a great sigh, saying:

"I have a thing to tell to the throne. Help me up, for I would go to the palace."

⁴³ One of the twelve divine generals of Yakushi, the Healing Buddha.

And he went forth to the palace with his sons Nobuaki and Nobutaka supporting him on the left and right.

When the emperor asked Kintada, "What is your business?" Kintada trembled exceedingly, saying:

"To a most terrible place have I been, called the court of the judges of hell. There I beheld a man more than ten feet tall, correctly attired in robes and a high-crowned cap. He offered up a memorial rolled on a golden roller, that said:

"There is a ruler of a small country who has sinned most grievously, one known to men as the emperor of Engi. For he believed in the slander of the Great Subject Tokihira, and sent a blameless minister into exile. Let the court quickly decree that he be dropped into the Hell of Constant Scorching."

"So he spoke, and the thirty judges of hell were greatly angered, agreeing, 'He shall be condemned at once.' Then the second of those judges said, 'What if he shall apologize for his fault by changing the name of the era?' And all were as though troubled in their hearts. Thereafter, I came alive again."

So he spoke, and the emperor, sorely affrighted, changed the name of the era from Engi to Enchō. He burned the imperial decree commanding the Kan minister of state to go forth into exile, made him a Great Subject again, and promoted him a grade to senior second rank.

Thereafter in the ninth year of Tenjō, a commission was given to Mibu no Yoshitane, a priest of Hirano Shrine in the land of Ōmi, to build a shrine at Kitano hard by the great palace enclosure, even on the spot where the thousand pine trees grew up miraculously in one night.⁴⁴ And men worshiped the Kan minister of state therein, calling him Temman Daijizai Tenjin.

Although it was so, perhaps the one hundred and sixty-eight thousand gods were not yet tranquil, those who owed allegiance to that divinity. For three times the divers offices and eight ministries burnt down in the twenty-five years between the second year of Tentoku and the fifth year of Tengen.

After one of these burnings, there was a certain pillar, newly erected by the cunning builders wielding their axes to build the

⁴⁴ See note 2, Chapter Six.

buildings of the great palace enclosure, whereon a verse appeared saying, "Though it be built, again will it burn, till Sugawara's heart be set at ease."

Fearfully the Emperor Ichijō thought, "From this verse may I know that the god's heart is not yet satisfied." He gave the Kan minister of state the title of Great Subject of the Grand Proceptorate, honored him with the senior grade of the first rank, and sent an imperial messenger to the Anrakuji to read the decree aloud.

Then indeed a voice was heard in the sky, reciting a Chinese poem:

Yesterday I was made wretched by the court,
 Today in the City of the West
 Honor is restored to my dead body.
 What are these things to me—
 This sorrow in life and joy in death?
 Now I shall be content
 To guard the imperial throne.

Thereafter, the god's wrath was appeased, and the land was at peace. How awesome it was!

If you would know the true being of this god, he is the greatly benevolent and greatly compassionate Kanzeon, through whose vows vast as the sea all living things reach the opposite shore of salvation. If we speak of his manifestation as a god, he is Tennen Daijizai Tenjin, who every day anew helps all living things, and fulfills the desires of all who come to him. There is none but bows his head in deep reverence before him, from the emperor on high to the myriad folk below. Truly his is a praiseworthy and unequalled shrine!

[End of biography]

In the past there was a rebuilding of the palace that began on the fourteenth day of the eighth month of the fourth year of Jiryaku, and the emperor removed thereto on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the fourth year of Enryū, in the august reign of Go-Sanjō-in. It was a most auspicious occasion, with Chinese verses presented by men of letters, and music offered up by

musicians. Yet very soon all of the buildings in the great palace enclosure burned down again, in the second year of Angen, because of a curse of the Hiyoshi King of the Mountain. Thereafter, the strength of the nation waned, and until this time of Go-Daigo Tenno none among the generations of sage rulers set his hand to the work of rebuilding.

But now it was said, "The great palace enclosure must be rebuilt," though truly the world was disordered from war, the nation was wearied, and the people suffered. (For not yet were the horses sent back south of Flower Mountain, nor the oxen released in the fields of Peace Grove.) * Paper money was made, such as was not used in our country from ancient times until the present; and taxes and requisitions of labor were laid on the lands of the stewards and housemen of all the provinces. Wherefore, many men of understanding knit their eyebrows, saying, "It is contrary to the will of the gods, and extremely arrogant."