

Prologue

Up to half a century ago dedicated *samurai* of our clan followed their lords to the graves in burning faithfulness. To our vexation, however, it was prohibited by the previous lord. Those martyrs were pillars of the clan. If the lord no longer has such faithful retainers, on whom does he depend for his government? Wasn't it those loyal attendants who supported the lords and the clan in past turbulent times?

But the new regulation prohibits us from martyrdom, and we have not seen any cases since then. If you choose to obey the law, you cannot follow your lord only to live out your life in remorse and frustration. On the other hand, if you dare to kill yourself in conscience, you will violate the law.

Either way means only torment, but I have encountered a *samurai* living splendidly in such a situation. A respected hermit, he is known by the name of Jocho. With his hair completely shorn and dressed in a monk's robe, he lives alone in a hut in the northern mountains away from the busy town of Saga. His way of living must be so hard during the winter for sweeping wind and driving snow.

One day in early March, 1710, I climbed up to see him pushing my way through the growth of grass and trees along the rocky path. This is a short poem I read then.

*"White clouds in the sky
Finally have I come across
The flower I have been seeking."*

He said that he has few visitors, living in such a remote hut away from the weary world. He never complained of the inconvenience but rather praised it for the cherry blossoms in bloom nearby, saying that he feels as if he lived in Yoshino noted for its cherry blossoms. He also said he could recognize the change of the seasons only by the nature surrounding him. Then he composed this poem.

*"Down in the town as well
Flowers must be in bloom,
A heavy sound was heard of the bamboo water pipe."*

Immersed in such a quiet forest, I felt free and relaxed and thought of a poem by a Chinese poet. "A pine tree lives a thousand years but finally crumbles to dust. An althea flower comes to bloom in the morning and drops to the ground in the evening, but it glows with such beauty." Then I read another poem of my own.

*"Drying my laundry outside
A camellia petal
Sounded as it dropped."*

- * This preamble was written by Tashiro Tsuramoto, compiler of the HAGAKURE. It is not found in other HAGAKURE books, but seems suitable as a prologue.
- * Jocho is the name of the hermit who continued to tell Tashiro Tsuramoto what is written in the HAGAKURE. At the death of Nabeshima Mitsushige, the second lord of the Saga clan, he renounced the world and lived a life of a hermit.
- * A monk is supposed to have his hair cut completely and be dressed in a robe.