

No. 17 A Beggar Celebrates the Birth of a Child (September, in the third year of Bunka)

In the village of Fukawa in Shimōsa, by some rice fields near Raikenji Temple, I saw four or five pieces of matting spread out on a mound, and an elderly man pressing drinks on a company of people. Beside him a child was mashing miso. How curious, I thought, and watched on from behind some trees. Amid laughter and talk of a first grandchild a young woman appeared, very graceful and kindly-looking, her hair bound with a length of linen. She had a languid air about her, like a flowering pink washed by rain, which showed clearly that she had been through childbirth. She hardly seemed to belong in such wretched bush-ridden fields. Was this in fact the work of conjuring goblins or a trick played on us by some fox or raccoon dog, I asked a villager, who informed me that the man was a beggar, a familiar figure in the neighbourhood, who made a living standing at people's gates and receiving meagre alms. The way this beggar enjoyed life could only be described as princely. He has no store of riches so he is untroubled by thieves, he has no house of his own so he is unafraid of fires. If anything, he enjoys greater happiness and comforts of the heart than a man who receives stipends. Resplendent garments in figured or embroidered silk, of gauze or of brocade, must appear to these folk as sparrows, mosquitoes or wasps passing before their eyes. Even Rirō, who was famed for his far-sightedness, should fail to set this household apart by its circumstances. Very likely the old man had gathered his people this evening to celebrate the seventh day after the birth of the heir, and to pray that the family line should be everlasting.

Learning from the cradle to be at home with night dew.

No. 76 Scraggy Cherry Trees (Spring, in the third year of Bunsei)

Everywhere the fields and the trees have greened overnight with the blessing of the rain and the dew, and flecks of blossoms appearing on the cherry trees, people are hesitantly taking their first steps out, upon which,

Today, again, word goes round of cherries, cherries in bloom.

We grieve over flowing water that will never find its way back and fallen blossoms that will never rejoin their boughs. Their predicament is ours, then how laughable is it that we should have a fancy to compose poems on cherry blossoms in spring and on the moon in autumn.

A man hies by with a tucked-up hem, no doubt to see the cherries bloom.

Tea stalls mushroom overnight for lo, the cherries are in bloom.

Reposing side by side, we deliberate on distant cherry trees in bloom.

A drop from above brushed my crown, a drip from the cherry blossoms.

So far I have lived unchastised, while rain falls on the cherry blossoms.

I am sobered by the thought that because Kashiwabara, where I live, is situated in a remote corner of Shinano, it differs from wealthy regions in that our cherry trees are scraggy, very much like my own silhouette, they attract no visitors, their blossoms lack lustre and look something miserable, and set against cherry trees in bloom elsewhere, they would seem as hermits in mountain retreats.

Flowers, indeed, though I should blush to call them cherry blossoms.

No. 89 An Elderly Tiller of Rice Fields (March, in the fifth year of Bunsei)

The master of the house also spoke about how he rose early in the morning and, on looking out, saw a flock of waterfowl, a great multitude of them, taking flight from some distant paddies. 'Wild geese and duck visit these parts every year, their habit being to stay the night and depart, and from that day the water celery grows greener and lusher day by day, and as it turns warmer we remove our garments one by one. Yet all the while I do nothing but tend and plough the rice fields, without writing a single poem or making a single drawing, and thus I grow old. Is this not a pitiable lot?', he lamented, to which I replied, 'You are mistaken. I have reached the ripe old age of sixty without growing a single grain of rice, I have been reviled as a good-for-nothing, but still I remain unpunished and somehow live on, very much to my shame', and for the first time the man laughed out loud.