

1.

Kitabatake Chikafusa, A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns

1339

After the Heiji incident of 1159, the country had been disrupted for twenty-six years by the Taira. Beginning in the Bunji era (1185–1189), Minamoto no Yoritomo and his sons asserted their power for thirty-seven years; and after the Jōkyū incident of 1121, the Hōjō of Yoshitoki ruled supreme for another 113 years. Throughout this period of more than 170 years, unified imperial rule of the country had ceased. Yet in the reign of Emperor Godaigo, the country was again reunited under the throne with greater ease than turning over one's hand. People everywhere exulted in the fact that, when the time has come, the divine purpose of the great goddess Amaterasu will be made known.

[...]

Takauji's transfer of allegiance to the imperial side was certainly a meritorious act. But when the emperor, for whatever reason, favored him above others and bestowed excessive rewards upon him, Takauji appears to have believed he had accomplished something comparable to Lord Yoritomo's pacification of the country. Before long he was given a two-rank promotion to the fourth rank and appointed captain of the military guards, left division; and even before the ceremony of congratulation was held he was advanced to the junior third rank and, almost immediately thereafter, to the junior second rank and the post of counselor. Takauji was also made governor and constable of three provinces and was given many holdings in land. His younger brother, Tadayoshi, was appointed director of the bureau of horses, left division, and was advanced to the junior fourth rank.

In an earlier time Minamoto no Yoritomo achieved incomparable merit as pacifier of the country. Yet it was improper policy for the government to promote him to high rank and office. The exorbitant promotions given to Yoritomo may indeed have caused the early extinction of his family line. During the time of Yoritomo and Sanetomo, Takauji's ancestors, although members of the Minamoto clan, were treated with no special favor. Rather, they were regarded as mere vassals of the shogun. For example, when Lord Sanetomo made his ceremonial visit (*haiga*) to the Hachiman Shrine, the chieftain of the Ashikaga was simply one among some twenty vassals who preceded him on foot. Supposing a descendant of Yoritomo should appear today; there would certainly be no reason to promote him to high office. Even less reason is there to advance the scion of a family that has for so long been simply retainers. I am told there were those who questioned why someone like Takauji, who achieved no great merit,

should be so lavishly rewarded. It was certainly not the work of Takauji or any other mortal that the fate of Takatoki in the Kanto ran out or that Emperor Godaigo's fortune unfolded. The *bushi* as a class had, in fact, been enemies of the court for generations. It was surely reward enough for them that their families were spared by the emperor because they came over to the loyalist side. They should now serve the throne with unswerving loyalty, accumulate merit, and await the just rewards that will in the natural course of things come to them. Yet the *bushi* seem to think that this imperial restoration, which was a wondrous act of heaven, was something they alone accomplished. None seems to have learned from the example of Chieh Tzu-t'ui. Not only the Ashikaga, but *bushi* from other families as well have been given promotions and have even been permitted access to court. As some people have said, "Although it appeared that the country was returned to the *kuge*, it became in fact more than ever a world of the *bushi*."

Although I have already discussed the way of rule several times, let me repeat that it is the decisive administration of the country based on honesty and compassion. This way is in accordance with teachings revealed by the great goddess Amaterasu.

In speaking of decisive administration, it must be made clear that there are various aspects to such administration. First, there is the selection and appointment of people to the offices of central government. Once the ruler has appointed the proper people to these offices, he need interfere no further in their activities. Above all else, this has been the basis for sound rule in both our country and China. A second aspect of the way of decisive administration is the assignment of people to provincial positions, which must be made on grounds of public merit and not as personal rewards. Third, it is essential that distinguished service be rewarded and that wrongdoing be punished. For this is how the ruler advances good and chastises evil. Should any of these aspects of decisive administration be mishandled, the results will be disordered rule.

In the ancient age, regular ranks and offices were not given for meritorious service. Instead, a separate system of merit ranks, extending from one to twelve, was established. People without regular ranks could rise by means of outstanding service to the first level of the merit ranking system and be treated as the equivalent of those who held the regular junior third rank, upper grade, or even the senior third rank, lower grade. It was also possible for persons who held regular ranks to acquire merit ranks as well.

Within the regular system of ranks and offices, there are two types of offices: inner offices, ranging from the three highest ministerships (great ministerships) at court to the lowest functionary positions in the eight boards of the department of state; and outer offices, which extend from provincial governorships to the positions of scribe and district governor. Of the many offices of government, some are patterned on the dictates of heaven and others are in accordance with conditions on earth, and it is wrong to appoint unqualified people to them. It is said that "titles and appurtenances of

rank cannot be given on loan to people” and that “people hold offices on behalf of heaven.” Improper appointment to office by the lord is called *byūkyo* (mifeasance) and improper acceptance of office by the subject is termed *shiroku* (misprision). *Byūkyo* and *shiroku* signal the beginning of destruction of the state, and are the basis for ensuring that kingly rule will not long endure.

[...]

After the Heiji incident, imperial authority declined precipitously. Kiyomori unlawfully seized power in the land and rose to the position of great minister of the council of state, while his sons became great ministers of state and generals. But there is no need to comment further upon this. Because the Taira of Kiyomori became enemies of the court and were destroyed, they could not serve as examples for later ages. Minamoto no Yoritomo, on the other hand, quelled the Taira rebellion with his own might and dispelled more than twenty years of imperial discontent. This was an achievement beyond compare since the age of Jimmu in most ancient times, when Umashimami-no-mikoto pacified the central provinces, and since Nakatomi no Kamatari in the reign of Empress Kōgyoku overthrew the Soga clan.

When Yoritomo went up to the imperial capital, he resolutely refused appointment as major counselor and general; but, after having the titles pressed upon him again and again, he accepted. This was indeed disastrous, both publicly for the court and privately for Yoritomo. Yoritomo’s sons succeeded him and became great Ministers and generals, but in the end the family came to ruin, for there was none to succeed the sons in their turn. Clearly this Minamoto family of Yoritomo had gone against the will of heaven. And because the emperor set such an unfortunate example in bestowing high courtier ranks and offices on military chieftains, even warriors who had achieved nothing whatever of merit came to think that they should be given comparable status and position.

Although Yoritomo himself accepted these honors, he sternly prohibited his brothers or other members of his family from also doing so. Yoshitsune rose only as high as the fifth rank in the office of the imperial police, and Noriyori became no more than the governor of Mikawa Province. And when Yoritomo visited the palace of the *in* to offer his felicitations, Noriyori was obliged to join other vassals in forming the vanguard of his retinue. Perhaps Yoritomo discerned the seeds of overbearing pride in these brothers and for this reason eventually had them killed. In addition to Yoshitsune and Noriyori, many other Minamoto were destroyed by Yoritomo, who was evidently determined to prevent the spread of prideful ways, to perpetuate the Bakufu’s rule, and to bring peace to his own house.

The progenitor of the Seiwa Genji, Tsunemoto, was the grandson of an emperor, yet he participated in the campaign against Taira no Masakado as second in command under the shogun for pacification of the east, Fujiwara no Tadafun. Thereafter the

Seiwa Genji became a military clan, and for many years, from the time of Tsunemoto's son Manjū up through the generations of Yorinobu, Yoriyoshi, and Yoshiie, members of this clan successively served as defenders of the court. Above, the court asserted its authority; below, the Minamoto – never reaching beyond their station in life – consolidated their house. But Tameyoshi in his generation joined the losing side in the Hōgen incident and was executed; and his son Yoshitomo, yearning to achieve merit, perished in the aftermath of the Heiji incident. There can be no doubt that these men went against the will of their ancestors.

[...]

For a more recent example of an unselfish minister, let me return to the Bunji era (1185–1189) in Yoritomo's time. When the Minamoto chieftain himself led a campaign of subjugation against Fujiwara no Yasuhira in Mutsu, Taira no Shigetada performed with distinction in the van of Yoritomo's army. As a result, Shigetada was offered his choice of reward from among any of the fifty-four districts of Mutsu. Yet Shigetada selected and was granted an exceedingly small district called Nagaoka. It appears that he did this to allow as wide a distribution as possible of rewards to other deserving people. Shigetada was indeed a wise man.

In a decree granting a holding to a man named Kumagai Naozane, Yoritomo wrote: "You are the leading warrior of Japan." Later, this decree was brought to the attention of an emperor and was praised by the people telling him about it as a splendid example of how, in adding extravagant words of praise to the granting of a small holding, Yoritomo had truly demonstrated his esteem for honor and his disregard for profit. It would be interesting to know precisely why Yoritomo praised Naozane in this manner.

Today there are none who think anything at all like Shigetada and Yoritomo. Instead, there are only people who, in all matters, disdain their lords and trumpet their own merits. Not only have the ways of the Kantō *bushi* of Yoritomo's time changed; the *kuge* also no longer behave as they once did. There are those who for this reason grieve over what the world is coming to. Nevertheless, for a while during Emperor Godaigo's restoration, there truly appeared to be unity once again under the court. Everyone flocked to the capital, and Kyoto flourished.

[...]

Godaigo was given the designation of retired sovereign and, perhaps to assuage his feelings, Prince Nariyoshi was made heir apparent to the throne. But in the twelfth month of the same year Godaigo secretly departed from Kyoto. Summoning forth the family of Masashige from Kawachi Province, he made his way to Yoshino and there established a temporary palace. Resuming his imperial rank, he had both the sacred mirror and the jewels placed in his personal keeping. Was this not indeed a wondrous thing? Even before the emperor moved to Yoshino, men had come forth to raise loyal

troops in his support, and after he arrived there still more stalwarts are said to have rallied to him. [...]

In the winter of 1338, in the old capital of Kyoto, the era name was changed to Ryakuō. But since at the court of Yoshino the era designation of Engen was retained, the provinces came to use whichever they wished. Although this sort of thing was common in China, it had never occurred before in Japan. This is the fourth year since removal of the court to Yoshino in the province of Yamato with its ancient imperial associations. Inasmuch as the sacred mirror and jewels are at Yoshino, how can it be regarded as other than the imperial capital?

Sometime about the sixteenth day of the eighth month, I learned, Emperor Godaigo became ill and died. [...]

Realizing that the end was drawing near, the emperor had the night before moved Prince Noriyoshi to the residence of the minister of the left and had transferred the three imperial regalia to him. In accordance with his wishes, the emperor was given the posthumous name of Godaigo.

Emperor Godaigo ruled the country for twenty-one years and died at the age of fifty-two.

In ancient times, Emperor Chūai died in a temporary palace erected for his campaign against the Kumaso. Whereupon Empress Jingū soon pacified Korea, quelled the rebellions of various princes, and installed her son Ōjin as emperor. In our present age, Emperor Godaigo has been blessed with a truly royal destiny. Having asserted unified imperial rule over the land after a disruption of 170 years, he has himself effected transfer of the throne to his successor. Ashikaga Takauji, a thief without merit or virtue, rose in the world and for some four years distressed the imperial mind and now has caused the emperor's death. Should the great resentment that Emperor Godaigo held against Takauji go unavenged? Inasmuch as the new emperor is also a direct descendant in the imperial line from the great goddess Amaterasu, how can anyone dare go against his imperial authority? Although the country is now disordered, his succession is surely in itself a sign that unity will once again be restored.