

more than that, for they remained fixed in a dull stare. Just then the hat arrived, with almost all the water gone. I poured into her mouth the few remaining drops, and for the first time she seemed to open her eyes of her own volition. She placed her hand on my knee and looked around the hut. I said, "It's water. You must drink it or you'll die." I lay her over my knee and waited for the next hat. Another came and again I poured the drops into her mouth. As I repeated this over and over I seemed to see the others, shouting as they scrambled one after another back up the steep cliff from the spring, their weary bodies caught in the moonlight, and exactly as though I were pouring distilled moonlight I poured the drops of water into the sick woman's mouth.

TRANSLATED BY DONALD KEENE

NOTICE: This material may be protected by  
copyright law (Title 17, U. S. Code).

## EARTH AND SOLDIERS

[*Tsuchi to Heitai*, 1938] by Hino Arhihei (born 1907)

*The most famous literary products of the "China Incidents" of the thirties were the diaries written by Hino Ashihei, an official correspondent attached to the troops. The reading public of the time found such absorbing interest in the descriptions of the fighting, with its scenes of pathos and heroism, that, in the old phrase, "the price of paper rose." Hino has been denounced for his lack of a more critical attitude toward these wars of aggression, but it is undeniable that he accomplished brilliantly the task of making reportage into a work of artistry.*

October 28, 1937

Aboard the (Censored) Maru.

Dear Brother:

Again today, there is the blue sky and the blue water. And here I am writing this while lying on the upper deck of the same boat. I wish this were being written at the front, but not yet. All I can tell you is about the soldiers, lolling about the boat, the pine groves and the winding, peaceful line of the Japanese coast. What will be our fate? Nobody knows. The speculation about our point of disembarkation is still going on. Rumors that we are bound for Manchukuo are gaining strength.

Besides, there is a well-founded report that on the Shanghai front, where there has been a stalemate, our troops attacked and fought a ferocious battle. The story is that two days ago they advanced in force and rolled back the line for several miles, taking two important Chinese cities. They say that big lantern parades are swirling through the streets of Tokyo, in celebration. So the war

is over! And we are to be returned, like victorious troops. That would be funny, in our case, but anyway, we are to be sent home soon!

Of course, this is nonsense, some absolutely ridiculous story. Yet we cannot avoid listening when someone talks in this vein. We cannot believe it and yet we do not wish to convince ourselves that it is not true.

This sort of life, while it is bad for the men because it is *too* easy, is even worse for the war horses, down in the hatch. They have been stabled below decks, in a dark and unhealthy hole. Sometimes, you can see them, clear down in the hold, standing patiently in the darkness. Some have not survived so well. They have lost weight. Their ribs are showing and they look sickly.

They have the best in food and water. Actually, they get better care than the men. Does it surprise you to know that, in war, a horse may be much more valuable than a man? For example, the horses get all the water they need. On the other hand, the supply of water for the men is limited, barely enough for washing, let alone the daily bath to which we are accustomed.

From that standpoint, the horses are much better off than we are. But the poor creatures have no opportunity for exercising, breathing fresh air, and feeling the sunlight. They are growing weaker. With my own eyes, I have seen a number of them collapse.

I never looked at a war horse, without thinking of poor Yoshida Uhei, who lives on the hillside, back of our town. In my memory, they are always together, just as they were before the war ever came. It is impossible to disassociate one from the other.

Perhaps you do not remember Uhei. He was a carter. He had a wagon, with which he did hauling jobs. His horse, Kichizo, drew it.

In all my life, I have never known such affection between man and animal. Kichizo was a big, fine chestnut, with great, wide shoulders and chest, and a coat like velvet. It used to shimmer in the sun and you could see the muscles rippling underneath the skin. Uhei cared for Kichizo like a mother with a baby.

I suppose this can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that Uhei had no children. He was already past forty, but his wife had

never conceived. Undoubtedly, Uhei long ago gave up hope of having a child. So all his affection turned toward Kichizo, the horse. You have heard fathers brag about their sons? In a way, he did the same thing about Kichizo. "What strength!" he would say, "and yet how gentle he can be. He's a dear fellow, that Kichizo, even though he is so big and strong."

Then the war came. It came clear down to our little town, into the nooks and corners of the country, taking men and horses. Kichizo was commandeered by the army.

When he heard the news, Uhei was speechless with surprise for a while. I remember it very well. "The army needs your horse, Uhei," someone told him. "It is for the nation." Uhei looked at the speaker with dumb disbelief in his face. His eyes were frozen, uncomprehending. "Don't worry," they told him, "Kichizo will be all right. He isn't a cavalry horse. He won't be in any danger. They'll use him behind the lines, to pull wagons. It won't be anything different than what he does here. And the army takes good care of its horses. They're very important. Don't you worry about him."

Uhei turned away without speaking and began to run toward his home. He broke into a dead run, like a crazy man, and we saw him disappear behind the bend in the road. "He'll be all right," somebody said, "after all, it's only a horse."

That same afternoon, Uhei came back to town. He looked different then. He was smiling and his eyes were shining, and he swaggered around the streets. "Have you heard the news?" he kept saying, "Kichizo, my horse, is going to the war. They need big strong fellows for the army, so of course Kichizo was the first horse they thought about. They know what they're doing, those fellows. They know a real horse when they see one."

He went to the flagmaker and ordered a long banner, exactly like the ones people have when a soldier is called to the war.

"Congratulations to Kichizo on his entry into the army," **this** banner said, in large, vivid characters. Uhei posted a long pole in front of his house, high on the hillside, and attached this banner. It streamed out in the wind, where everyone could see. Uhei **was**

bursting with pride. As soon as the banner was up, he took Kichizo out from the field and pointed up to where it floated gracefully above the house. "You see that, Kichizo," he said. "That's for **you**. You're a hero. You've brought honor to this village."

Meanwhile, Uhei's wife, O-shin, was carrying this human symbolism even further. She bought a huge piece of cloth and began preparing a "thousand-stitches belt" for the horse.<sup>1</sup>

This cloth that O-shin bought was big enough to cover four or **five** men. When she stood in the street, asking passers-by to sew a **stitch**, they all laughed, but they did it. She had a needle that she borrowed from a **matmaker** to do such a big piece of work. When the stitches were all in, she herself worked all through one night, finishing the belt. It was very **difficult**, with such a big needle, but she finished it.

They put the good-luck belt around Kichizo's middle, just as though he were a soldier. At the same time, Uhei visited a number of different shrines in the neighborhood and bought lucky articles. O-shin sewed them into the belt.

And finally, he gave a farewell party and invited all the neighbors. Uhei was not a rich man and he couldn't afford it. If he had any savings, they were all spent that night. I was among those he invited. I took, as a gift, a bottle of wine.

Most of the guests were already there, in Uhei's neat little house, by the **time** I arrived. They were in good humor, laughing and drinking. Uhei was excited and bustling around, seeing to everything. His eyes were glistening. "Yes, it's rare to find such a wonderful horse," he said. "You seldom find a horse with so much spirit and intelligence and at the same time so strong and vigorous. Oh, he'll show them! I'm so happy, Have a drink! Have many cups of wine for this happy occasion!"

**There** were tears rolling down his cheeks as he spoke and the bitter salt mingled with the wine he was drinking. Everyone was making a noise, laughing and talking and roaring jokes. O-shin kept

<sup>1</sup> The "thousand-stitches belt" is a talisman, with red threads sewn by well-wishers for a Japanese soldier when he leaves for the front. It is supposed to protect him from wounds

hustling in and out of the kitchen, bringing hot food and warming the wine. She was a plain little thing, drab, I used to think. But that night, smiling and exuberant, she seemed transformed **and** almost beautiful.

When the party was at its height, Uhei suddenly jumped up from the table and ran outside. We heard the heavy clomp-clomp of a horse, walking through the front yard. And then, through an open window, Kichizo's long graceful neck came in. His head stretched all the way to the banquet table. He looked at us gravely; I again had the feeling that he knew all about this occasion, and knew it was for him, and what it meant.

Uhei ran into the room again and threw his arms around the horse's neck, and gave him boiled lobster and some octopus, and poured the ceremonial wine into his mouth. "To Kichizo," he cried. "Dear, brave Kichizo!" We all stood and drank and roared "Banzai!" three times. It must have seemed a little silly and sentimental. Yet, Uhei had inoculated us all with something of the love he had for that horse and it seemed natural enough to us.

In the later afternoon of the next day, I saw Uhei at Hospital Hill, returning from the army station. He had delivered Kichizo to them. I spoke to him, but he seemed not to recognize me, nor to have heard my voice, for he walked on a few paces. Then he turned and acknowledged the greeting in a distant, absent-minded sort of way. He looked haggard and sickly, as though he had lost his strength, and he left me hurriedly. All he said was "Kichizo **has gone**."

Later, someone told me how he brought the horse to the station. It was a terribly warm day. So Uhei took his own grass hat, cut two holes in the side for Kichizo's ears, and put it on the horse's **head**. Poor Kichizo, that heavy "thousand-stitches belt" must have been very warm and uncomfortable in such weather. Besides, Uhei **had** decorated him with national flags, so that he looked like some sacred animal on the way to dedication at a shrine. I suppose he felt just that way about him.

O-shin accompanied them, holding the reins, as they **walked to** the station. It was a curious and sad little trio, the man and woman

with that great sleek horse in its strange attire, walking slowly down the hillside, through the village and up the other side. Everyone watched silently. No one laughed.

At the army station, a good many other horses were already gathered together in the yard. They had been examined by the army veterinarians before being accepted. Now they were merely waiting to be taken away on the train. No one knew just when it would come.

O-shin left immediately, but Uhei stayed and stayed beside Kichizo, patting its hip and running his fingers through its mane. At first, the soldiers laughed, just as the people in the village had done. But they soon saw how Uhei felt about his horse and then they told him, kindly. "Don't cry, Uncle. It's a great promotion for your horse, isn't it? He's going to serve the nation now, instead of pulling a cart around the village. That's something, isn't it? Well, then, cheer up. Besides, he'll get better care in the army than you could ever give him. Don't you worry. He's going to be all right." So they tried to console Uhei. Nevertheless, he stayed until dark.

Early the next day, he was back at the army station, fussing over Kichizo. Of course, there was nothing to be done. The army grooms had already cared for and fed and watered the horses, but the poor man wanted to see for himself. He clucked around Kichizo like a hen with its chicks. Not that day, nor for several days afterward, did the train come to take the horses away.

It was quite a distance from Uhei's house to the army station, but he came every day, faithfully. He came early and stayed until dusk.

At last the fatal day came. All the horses were loaded on the train and taken to the harbor, where they went aboard the transports. Uhei went along. He went as far as they would let him and then the grooms again told him not to worry, and promised they would take good care of Kichizo. He bowed, eyes brimming with tears. He bowed and bowed, and could only mumble, "Thanks, thanks, very much."

As the boat moved out of the harbor, he ran up to a bridge over-

looking the water. It was high above the water and he stayed there until the very smoke from the steamer had vanished beneath the horizon. He waved his flag and shouted, "Kichizo," until he was hardly able to speak. And he kept his eyes riveted on the spot where the ship had disappeared.

This is all I know about the story. When I was called to the front, he was the first to come and wish me luck and help me with my preparations. On the day I left, he came again to the harbor and begged me to look out for Kichizo. "You know him," he said, eagerly. "You couldn't miss him among a thousand horses. Anyway, he has a small white spot on his left side and, on the opposite hip, the character 'Kichi' is branded. You couldn't miss him."

"If I see him, I'll be sure and write to you," I said.

"Remember, he's a beautiful reddish chestnut," Uhei continued. "Yes, tell me if you see him. And please say something to him about me. That would seem strange to you, wouldn't it, talking to a horse? All right, but just pat him on the nose, once or twice."

It seems cold and unkind of me, but only once have I asked about Kichizo since I came aboard this boat. The groom said he had not seen any such horse. Nor have I, although I have not tried to examine all the horses. But when I see one of them fall sick and die, and then go over the side to the small boat, I cannot help but recall Uhei. For his sake, I hope nothing like this has happened to Kichizo.

Speaking of the "thousand-stitches belt" reminds me of a recent episode that may give you a clear insight into our minds and hearts, these days.

As you know, there is not a man aboard ship without one of these belts. They encircle every waist and each stitch carries a prayer for safety. Mine is of white silk and has a number of charms sewn into it. I do not understand the symbolism connected with each. Some are Buddhist and others Shinto. It makes no difference, of course. All are supposed to afford protection from wounds.

Mother gave me an embroidered charm bag, which contains a talisman of the "Eight Myriads of Deities," and a "Buddha from Three Thousand Worlds." In addition to those, I have an image of

the Buddha, three inches in height, of exquisite workmanship. This was a present from Watabe, who lives on the hillside. When he gave it to me, he said it had been through three wars. "No bullet ever touched the man who wore it," he said. "It is a wonderful charm." Three different soldiers had carried it in the Boxer Rebellion, the first Sino-Japanese War, and the Russo-Japanese War. According to his story, they came through without a scratch.

All the men on this ship are loaded with tokens and amulets and belts and mementoes from their family and friends. On warm days, when we take off our shirts, these articles are seen everywhere. I do not mean to scorn them, but it would be interesting to study them all, with the superstitions they embody. However, one cannot disregard the heartfelt sentiment connected with them.

There was one man who did scoff at them, and in no uncertain terms, either. He no longer does so. This man, Corporal Tachibana, is quite a character. He says he is an atheist. He likes to talk about his ideas and he deliberately provokes arguments, in which he stoutly defends the materialistic point of view. In these, he employs big, pedantic words that so puzzle the men that they cannot reply. Personally, I doubt that he himself understands the meaning of all the words he uses.

Particularly when he has had a little wine, Corporal Tachibana used to like to ridicule the men about their charms and talismans. "Absurd," he would say. "Absolutely ridiculous! If we could really protect ourselves with such things, there never would be anyone killed in war. The Chinese would use them, too, and so would every other kind of soldier. Then what kind of a war could you have, if nobody was killed? It is nonsense, and it is not befitting a member of the imperial army to do such things."

Of course, this was perfectly true and the men knew it. But still they believed in their pitiful little articles, the luck charms. To me, it seemed cruel and heartless of him. If he himself preferred not to place any stock in these ideas, very well. But why should he shake the faith of simple men who did? Strangely enough, however, he himself had a "thousand-stitches belt" around his middle.

One day recently, when it was very hot, we were all on the upper

deck, lying in the shade. Suddenly, without a word, Corporal Tachibana jumped over the side and landed with a magnificent splash. He is not a good swimmer, and when the foam and spray disappeared, we saw him sink. Then he reappeared, churning the water with his arms and legs. Immediately, two of the men stripped and dived in after him. At the cry, "Man overboard," a boat **was** lowered.

They pulled him into the boat and finally brought him up on deck again. His dripping hair was hanging over his face and his stomach heaved. In his right hand was his "thousand-stitches belt"!

As soon as he caught his breath, he explained that when he pulled off his shirt, his belt came with it and the wind blew it into the sea. When he saw it fluttering into the water, he jumped after it.

"Not because I was afraid of being shot, if I lost it," he said, grinning. "I don't believe it can protect me in war. But my folks were so sincere about it that I couldn't just lose it in the ocean, this way. So I had to get it."

He must have thought we did not believe him, for he added, "The prayers of my people, reflecting on my brain, made me do it." Men who had been listening to him, with sly smiles on their faces, suddenly grew serious. The joking stopped. Inadvertently, it seemed to me, he had denied his own arguments and revealed a belief little different from that of the other men. Unconsciously, I put my hand on my own belt.

So much for today, I will write again soon.

TRANSLATED BY BARONESS SHIDZUÉ ISHIMOTO