

Dialogue

Looking at time with a view
from life in the forest

Best regards!
C. N. Nicol

C.W. Nicol
Born in Wales, England
in 1940. Writer.
After living in Canada and
Africa, he resided at the
foot of Mount Kurohime
in Shinano-machi, Nagano
Prefecture.
He was the author of many
books, including the novel
"Tixil" (Kadokawa Shoten).
C.W. Nicol passed away
on April 3rd, 2020.



Makoto Kano
Born in Tokyo in 1925.
Former president of
Kurohime Wakan-yaku
Research Institute Co.
He settled at the foot of
Kurohime Mountain after
the war in 1946, and
founded the company the
following year. He passed
away in

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Settlement in Kurohime

I put the Takageta he gave me on my backpack and came to Kurohime (Black Princess).

Nicol: How long have you been living in Kurohime Mountain?

Kano: I came here in 1946, so it's been almost 40 years.

Nicol: So you came after the war. You came from Tokyo, didn't you?

Kano: Yes, that's right. At that time, Tokyo was in a state of devastation after the defeat in the war, and the whole area was a burnt-out wasteland. The government's policy was to make people leave Tokyo as much as possible. The names of pioneer settlements all over Japan, from Hokkaido to Kyushu, were posted at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office, and I went there to look for them.

Nicol: So the name of Kurohime was posted there, too?

Kano: That's right. I fell in love with the mysterious and romantic name "Kurohime Mountain."

Looking back on it now, that was enough to make me decide to go. (laughs)
I didn't actually know much about the place.

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Nicol: Was there anyone who could give you advice?

Kano That's what's interesting. One of my co-workers told me, "Kurohime is said to get a lot of snow, so you should bring your Takageta (tall wooden clogs).

" (laughs) He said, "Here, I'll give you these clogs. If you take them, you'll be all right no matter how much it snows." (laughs) So I put the Takageta he gave me on my backpack and came to Kurohime.

Nicol: It's very interesting. You brought Takageta with you. (laughs) Did you actually use them?

Kano: Let me tell you. It was September in 1946 when I arrived in Kurohime. The autumn leaves were changing color in the mountains, and it was beautiful. I settled at the top of the mountain, so Lake Nojiri looked like a miniature landscape garden from there. Also, I could see the Sea of Japan, the area from Kashiwazaki to Naoetsu in Niigata, which cannot be seen now because of smog. I really felt that I had come to a good place.

Nicol: It's really the best season here, isn't it?

Kano: Yes, that's what I thought then, but it started snowing at the end of November. It snowed one meter a night, so Takageta didn't help at all. But I foolishly went down the mountain in two to three meters of snow wearing those Takageta.

Nicol: Oh, everyone must have been surprised.

Kano: Yes. At that time, I had a beard, and my hair was long and tied up around my shoulders because I didn't have money to go for a haircut. I was wearing the Takageta with that look. They sure were surprised and said, "A Tengu (Japanese mythical creature) has come! A Tengu has come!" (laughs).

Nicol: (laughs) Oh, I can imagine.

Kano: How long has it been since you came to Kurohime?

Nicol: I first came here in 1978, and came to live here in 1980. I was encouraged to live here by Gan Tanigawa, a poet who also lives in Kurohime.

Kano: I heard that you've been to many places around the world. Why did you decide to stay here?

Nicol: It's the same as you. I went to many places in search of adventure and animals, such as the Arctic, Canada, Ethiopia, and also Tokyo and Wakayama in Japan. However when I came to Kurohime and saw the mountains, I fell in love with the princess of Kurohime. I thought if I lived with Kurohime my luck would improve.

Kano: There is a saying in the East, "Ichigo-ichie. (Once-in-a-lifetime encounter)" You and I were karate training students together, and I never thought we would meet at the foot of Kurohime Mountain in Oku-Shinano. It must be some kind of mysterious fate.

Nicol: Yes, I think so, too. It might sound like something divine, but that's the only way I can explain it. Since living in Kurohime, I've come to accept most, but not all, of my life. I knew I was meant to live this way. I have no intention of leaving Japan. I will go abroad for work and travel, but I will always come back here....



Kenji Miyazawa and the Momotaro School I set Kenji's "Dekunobou" as one of my goals.



Kano: By the way, I heard that you are currently working on a translation of Kenji Miyazawa. I'm also interested in this. What do you find most attractive about Kenji?

Nicol: I'm attracted to his way of looking at nature. I can't explain it well in my poor Japanese, but when I read it thinking "It's a mysterious fairy tale somehow," I found that he really understood nature deeply.

Kano: Kenji Miyazawa was able to communicate with nature by touching the soil, even kissing it, to feel the words of the soil, by looking at the wind to write children's stories like "Kaze no Matasaburo", and by looking at acorns and grass to write "Acorns and Wildcat".

Nicol: His body was small and not strong. That's why he died early. But his heart was able to fly from that little chest. That's what I like about him. And he didn't say "I'm a god" or "I know things better than you people". I think he is a considerable person.

Kano: Let me tell you about my encounter with Kenji Miyazawa. When I first came here, the roads were not as good as they are now, so when it snowed, children of the pioneers could not go to school, so they happened to gather at my house. I wondered whether the children of Kurohime could miss school when it snowed, but of course they were absent for a long time. In the end, 20 or so of them gathered at my house, and before I knew it, it had become a branch school. While teaching there, I had opportunities to have the children read and listen to Kenji Miyazawa's children's stories. So, I came to know Kenji Miyazawa more deeply through the dialogue with the children.

Nicol: Through the dialogue with the children. That's great. By the way, can you tell me more about that branch school?

Kano: The children from elementary school to junior high school and even preschool children came to the branch school. Because it was a poor pioneer village, the mountain was the classroom, the mountain was the auditorium, and the mountain was the playground. There was no heater, so we made a fire pit in the middle of a hut and lined up desks around it to study. The method of learning was called "brother-sister learning," in which the older children taught the younger children, and I was having a hard time burning the wood in the fire pit with a fire-breathing bamboo in my hand. (laugh).

Nicol: (laughs) That must have been a very unique classroom scene.

Kano: Yes, that's right. The children were poor and always hungry, but they didn't like it to be called "buncho" (branch school), so we talked about it and named it "Momotaro (peach boy) School." At this humble school, I began to teach martial arts to the children so that they would not debase themselves and so that they would gain confidence. I taught them karate. Unlike other martial arts, karate doesn't require any equipment and can be done literally with a karate (holding nothing). (Laughs)

Nicol: I understand it very well. (laughs) So that's still going on today?

Kano: That's right. We call it the Kobudo Momotaro School now, and we teach manners, yoga, karate, jodo (a form of martial art using a cane staff), and Tai Chi all day on Sundays. Of course, it is not the same school as it used to be, but there are some things that we have always kept since then.

1. to work hard, 2. to be polite, 3. Not to give up, 4. to be energetic, 5. to have the courage to reflect. These are the five things.

Nowadays, children with their own problems come to us, but if we have them promise to follow these five things and work on them seriously, they will grow marvelously.

Nicol: That's a wonderful promise.

Kano: I would like to talk about Kenji again. In the famous poem "Ame nimo makezu, Kaze nimo makezu," (Unbeaten by rain, Unbeaten by wind), he says, "I want to be called a Dekunobo (fool)," or "I want to become such a person." I was very moved by this word "Dekunobo" in other words, it is "A-Ho(fool)". My pseudonym is "Ho-An" after "A-Ho", and I used Kenji's "Dekunobo" as my daily motto. I believe that the way of thinking infused in that poem are applicable to the world.



Enmeido

Every day at three o'clock in the morning,
I wake and seclude myself in Enmeido



Kano: Our society nowadays is called a civilized society, and I think it is too clever and lopsided. In fact, I don't think it's a "civilized" society at all, but a "convenient" society. Kenji Miyazawa was a devotee of Hokekyo (the Lotus Sutra), but what is your view of religion?

Nicol: I was born and raised in a strict Christian family. I have been to many different places in the world and I lived with the Eskimos (now called Inuit), for a while when I was 17 years old. At that time, I began to feel the truth in the idea that nature is God, and that God is everywhere, even in the pebbles. I still feel that way today.

Kano: I see. My favorite idea similar to it described in "Gorin no sho" by Musashi Miyamoto. He said, "Even a blade of grass or a leaf on the roadside has the way." And he chose the way of the sword saying that a blade of grass and a leaf on the road is his teacher.

Nicol: I am busy with my work now, which is good, but I get desperate sometimes. What I mean by that is this area is nice, but just walking around outside is not enough. I know that if I don't stay deep in the heart of Kurohime and talk to the gods, which might sound snobbish, I would lose myself because I am too busy. So I'm thinking of pitching an Indian-style tent in a secret place in the mountains and taking a retreat whenever I have time. I'll carry a gun, pull a sled with my dogs, and carry some food.

Kano: That's very important, Nicol-san. Actually, there is a hall called "Enmeido" right in front of my company. For the past thirty years, I have been waking up at three o'clock every morning, purifying myself, and staying in Enmeido to recite prayers. It doesn't matter if it's snowing or not, I always wake up at three o'clock in the morning. I stay in Enmeido just like you stay in the mountains.

Nicol: Three o'clock every day? That's amazing.

Kano: In Enmeido, there is no light bulb or anything, just a round window in the wall, and a tree behind the window. I worship to that tree. Also, I enshrine all kinds of things related to our customers, such as letters, New Year's cards, business cards, and contact information. There are about 300,000 names of all our customers there.

Nicol: Why three o'clock in the morning?

Kano: I am often asked about this. It is the darkest and closest to dawn. In winter, it is the coldest and closest to sunrise. It's the time when the world changes from the darkness to the light.

Nicol: Are you going to be awake all day after that?

Kano: That's right. I don't take a break.

Nicol: Phew..... I can't believe it.

Kano: It means I'm asleep 24 hours a day. Trying to stay awake would make me sleepy. If I think I'm already asleep, my eyes are wide open. (laughs) Anyway, as you said, talking with the mountains and listening to the voice of nature is what we need now more than anything.

Birth of "Enmei-cha"(Enmei-tea) My master of herbs is a goat.

Nicol: Kano-san, I'd like to ask you about how "Enmei-cha" came to be.

Kano Yes. I have an unforgettable memory about that. First of all...

Nicol: What kind?

Kano: It's a bitter memory of shopping. There is a cart-wheel at the entrance of my company, and this wheel contains two of my thoughts. One is to remember my original intentions at the time of settlement. The other is my memory I will never forget, which served as an inspiration for the birth of Enmei-cha.

Nicol: It's like a monument to your heart.



Kano: Yes. It was just after I came to Kurohime. One day, hungry children and I and went out pulling a large cart to buy pumpkins. At that time, we saw a mountain of pumpkins drying in the yard of a house with a storehouse. I wanted to buy one and asked, "Excuse me. Can you share this pumpkin with us? I want to feed it to the children in the mountains." And he said, "These pumpkins are not to feed you strangers. They are for the pigs." Then I looked to the side and saw a big dog eating a pile of white rice with miso soup. The children were looking at it looking dazed. I still remember what I said then. "We're not pigs. Let's go home." Everyone was so disheartened. I had always wanted to live like Kenji Miyazawa, but I had never felt such sadness in my life.

Nicol: Did you feel anger then?

Kano: I was deeply feeling how deplorable it was to lose the war to cause such situation rather than feeling angry. So I decided to never go shopping again, and started researching medicinal herbs. This motivated me to start researching edible and medicinal herbs, which had been on my mind for a long time. However, I didn't know anything about them, so one time I picked aconite buds and ate them, and I was in a coma for three days.....

Nicol: I'm glad you were okay. That must have made you stronger. (laughs)

Kano: The children came to pick me up in the morning, but I was still under the blanket, and they noticed my feet were cold when they touched them. "Tengu Sensei, you're dead," they said, and they pulled my hands and slapped my face. They saved me by taking care of me without any sleep.

Nicol: You have a connection with children.

Kano: At that time, there were no books about medicinal herbs. So I started to take a goat with me to look for them. Goats never eat poisonous plants. They are the opposite of rabbits who eat everything. That's why my master of herbs is a goat. (laughs)

Nicol: I see. So that's where "Enmei-cha" was about to be born.

Kano: Yes, that's right. Sometimes I made some tea for the children, and they said, "Sensei, this tea is ume (delicious.)" So we decided to call it "Ume-cha," and that's what we called it at first. However, there is a Jizo (stone statue) called "Enmei-Jizo" on the roadside of the mountain. So I said to the children, "Since you are studying and helping in such a cold and snowy frontier, perhaps the Jizo gave you this tea. Let's call it Enmei-cha after Jizo." That's how "Enmei-cha" was born through the dialogue with the children.

A company started by a martial artist I believe that "Enmei-cha" is more than just a product.

Nicol: When we think about it like that, "Enmei-cha" has a lot of significance.

Kano: Yes, that's right. I also taught martial arts to the children in the mountains. I taught them karate, jodo, and kendo, which I had been doing since I was a student. That is why I can say this. I made use of the martial arts and built a school and dojo in Kurohime. I also built a farm for medicinal herbs and a factory for farmers. So I believe that Enmei-cha is more than just a product. I believe that for the sake of the Great Nature Health Promotion Movement, the princess of Kurohime had the blessings of the grasses made into tea, not sake, as in the legend of Yoro Falls.



Nicol: By the way, I heard that when Enmei-cha was selling well, the factory caught fire. What was the cause?

Kano: I'll never forget it, it was March 12, 1971. It happened while I was on a business trip. It was caused by overheating of the chimney of the roasting machine. When I arrived in Kurohime by taxi from Nagano, I saw the factory on fire in a snowstorm. The employees were throwing snowballs desperately at the flames like a snowball fight. The fire hydrant was frozen by the snow and could not be used. The factory burned down in the end.

Nicol: How did you manage to get back on your feet and make it this far?

Kano: Thanks to everyone's support. I had started from zero before, so it didn't bother me at all. I felt the strength and gratitude of starting from zero again, so I decided to start over from scratch.

Nicol: Oh, yes. You are the one who came to Kurohime with Takageta.

Kano: (laughs) It was like a warrior training of a bear looking man. I believe that the fire was a lesson that I learned from being burned by fire and exposed to snow by a blacksmith called nature, just as iron is burned by fire and exposed to water to forge a Japanese sword.

Nicol: I practice a little karate myself, so I think I understand what you are saying.

Kano: What I have learned through my martial arts practice is that no matter what kind of adversity you are facing, if you face it seriously, the right path will reveal itself. I believe that cultivating the wilderness, making Enmei-cha, and practicing kobudo (classical martial arts) are all about cultivating my soul.

Nicol: I see. The harsh nature of the mountains taught you that.

Kano: By the way, Nicol-san. How do you feel about Enmei-cha after drinking it?

Nicol: I drink it all the time. I don't even have to look for it, it's right there where I can get it. When I first came to Japan, I liked hoji-cha (roasted tea) and mugi-cha (barley tea), but I've been a big fan of Enmei-cha since I came to Kurohime. When I travel abroad for interviews, I bring tea bags with me. It's good for my health of course, but I'm attracted to the taste, the palatability. It's really "ume-cha (tasty tea)" like you said.

Kano: (laughs) Thank you very much. Well then, thank you very much for your time today. Good luck to both of us.

Nicol: Good luck!