

## Fire in the Rice Fields

Lafcadio Hearn, writing in *Christian Living* magazine, related the story of a Japanese seashore village more than 100 years ago, where an earthquake startled the villagers one autumn evening.

Being accustomed to earthquakes, however, they soon went back to their daily routines.

Above the village, on a high plain, an old farmer was watching from his house. He looked at the sea, and the water appeared dark and acted strangely, moving against the wind, running away from the land. The old man knew what it meant. His one thought was to warn the people in the village.

He called to his grandson: "Bring me a torch! Make haste!"

In the fields behind him lay his great crop of rice. Piled in stacks ready for the market, it was worth a fortune. The old man hurried out with his torch. In a moment, the dry stalks were blazing. Then the big bell pealed from the temple below, signaling fire.

Back from the beach, away from the strange sea, up the steep side of the cliff came the people from the village. They were coming to try to save the crops of their rich neighbor. "He's mad!" they said.

As they reached the plain, the old man shouted back at the top of his voice, "Look!"

At the edge of the horizon they saw a long, lean, dim line – a line that thickened as they gazed. That line was the sea, rising like a high wall and coming more swiftly than a kite flies.

Then came a shock, heavier than thunder. The great swell struck the shore with a weight that sent a shudder through the hills and tore their homes to matchsticks. It drew back, roaring. Then it struck again, and again, and yet again. Once more it struck and ebbed; then it returned to its place.

On the plain, no word was spoken.

Then the voice of the old man was heard, saying gently, "That is why I set the fire to the rice." He stood among them almost as poor as the poorest, for his wealth was gone. But he saved 400 lives by his sacrifice.

We read that account of the old man's unselfishness, and we marvel. Yet, every day, in the centers of Life Care and Century Park and in the work of Life Care at Home, we see various instances of sacrifice among our associates. They sacrifice their time – often above and beyond their scheduled work day – their professional talents and sometimes their own resources to the care of our residents. They give their smiles, their hugs and their tears.

And all of it is done to make the lives of those they serve better and richer.

– Beecher Hunter