



THE UNMANNERLY TIGER AND OTHER KOREAN TALES

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CONTENTS

About The Digital Library of Korean Classics

ON THE DOOR-STEP

TOKGABI AND HIS PRANKS

EAST LIGHT AND THE BRIDGE OF FISHES

PRINCE SANDALWOOD, THE FATHER OF KOREA

THE RABBIT'S EYES

TOPKNOTS AND CROCKERY HATS

THE SNEEZING COLOSSUS

A BRIDEGROOM FOR MISS MOLE

OLD WHITE WHISKERS AND MR. BUNNY

PEACH-BLOSSOM, PLUM-BLOSSOM, AND CINNAMON ROSE

TOKGABI'S MENAGERIE (Cats and Dogs)

THE GREAT STONE FIRE EATER

PIGLING AND HER PROUD SISTER

SIR ONE LONG BODY AND MADAME THOUSAND FEET

THE SKY BRIDGE OF BIRDS

A FROG FOR A HUSBAND

THE VOICE OF THE BELL

THE KING OF THE SPARROWS

THE WOODMAN AND THE MOUNTAIN FAIRIES

TO
HORACE NEWTON ALLEN
Pioneer of Science and American
Minister Plenipotentiary in Korea

ON THE DOOR-STEP

1871-1911!

IT is forty years since folk-lore and firearms met in the forts on the Han River, in Korea. The brave tiger-hunters, in padded cotton and sheet iron armor, equipped with their jingals and firelocks, faced the eleven-inch shells of the American gunboats, the grape and cannister of the Dahlgren howitzers, and the Bridesburg rifles of our marines and sailors. Waving defiance to the invaders under the stars and stripes—the red, white and blue—were the native flags, rich in symbols of cosmic evolution and of the perpetual succession of day and night. The Chinese philosophy, as embodied in the yellow and blue of Heaven and Earth, and in the Eight Diagrams from the back of the Dragon-Horse, antedating Confucius, supplemented a rich picture gallery of folk-beliefs—the product of the native imagination—on the banners of the patriot defenders.

At that date, as pioneer of science and of the American school system in the far interior of Japan, I was myself busy in depopulating, by means of chemistry and physics, the rather overcrowded Japanese world of gods, oni, imps, dragons, etc., and, by training Japanese teachers to do the same, was helping to transform multitudes of more or less malignant and uncanny creatures of the imagination into harmless fairies.

Studying the Korean flags captured by our men, I was delighted to find in them an album of Korean folk-lore, racy, original, and with a background wholly its own. Here was a revelation of what the natives actually believed, richer by far than anything which aliens could disclose. The mountain spirit riding his piebald pony, the statant, winged tiger holding the lightnings in his grasp, the flying serpent, able after a thousand years of evolution to rise from air into air and smite Korea's foes, showed

what was the oldest of all faiths in the Land of Morning Splendor. To me, these symbols opened a great gate into the Korean's mind, and since then I have enjoyed many a holiday of mental recreation in company with the Korean fairies. What if they are not as lovely as those of Greece?

A few years later, the pioneers of science, of the healing art, of the greatest of all hopes, and of good news for the soul, entered Korea. They opened the language and mines of scholarship and research. To them and their French predecessors, how great is my debt! How can I utter it! To Allen, Hulbert, Gale, Jones, Appenzeller, Underwood—all shining names, as well as to anonymous workers, my thanks are heartily given here and always. When will the Repository, the Review, the Asiatic Society of Korea recommence their good work?

In these days, what with science, dogma, the awful variety of “doxies,” and the crass pragmatism and most harmful prudery of people who have no imagination, the fairies are having a hard time of it. Among those who would rob the children of the divine gifts and the joys that lie outside the domain of science, let the writer be counted last. What a dark world it would be, if the dogma doctors and fact-mongers should reduce the mind's world to a Sahara of sterile reality!

W. E. G.

Ithaca, March 2, 1911.

THE UNMANNERLY TIGER

“MOUNTAIN UNCLE” was the name given by the villagers to a splendid striped tiger that lived among the highlands of Kang Wen, the long province that from its cliffs overlooks the Sea of Japan.[1] Hunters rarely saw him, and among his fellow-tigers the Mountain Uncle boasted that, though often fired at, he had never been wounded; while as for traps—he knew all about them and laughed at the devices used by man to catch him and to strip him of his coveted skin. In summer he kept among the high hills and lived on fat deer. In winter, when heavy snow, biting winds, and terrible cold kept human beings within doors, old Mountain Uncle would sally forth to the villages. There he would prowl around the stables, the cattle enclosures, or the pig-pens, in hopes of clawing and dragging out a young donkey, a fat calf, or a suckling pig. Too often he succeeded, so that he was the terror of the country for leagues around.

One day in autumn, Mountain Uncle was rambling among the lower hills. Though far from any village, he kept a sharp lookout for traps and hunters, but none seemed to be near. He was very hungry and hoped for game.

But on coming round a great rock, Mountain Uncle suddenly saw in his path some feet ahead, as he thought, a big tiger like himself.

He stopped, twitched his tail most ferociously as a challenge, showed fight by growling, and got ready to spring. What was his surprise to see the other tiger doing exactly the same things. Mountain Uncle was sure that there would be a terrible struggle, but this was just what he wanted, for he expected of course to win.

But after a tremendous leap in the air, he landed in a pit and all of a heap, bruised and disappointed. There was no tiger to be seen, but instead a heavy lid of logs had closed over his head with a crash and he lay in darkness. Old Mountain Uncle at last

was caught. Yes, the hunter had concealed the pit with sticks and leaves, and on the upright timbers, covered with vines and brushwood, had hung a bit of looking-glass. Mountain Uncle had often beheld his own face and body in the water, when he stooped to drink, but this time, not seeing any water, he was deceived into thinking a real tiger wanted to fight him.

By and by, a Buddhist priest came along, who believed in being kind to all living creatures. Hearing an animal moaning, he opened the trap and lifting the lid saw old Mountain Uncle at the bottom licking his bruised paw.

“Oh, please, Mr. Man, let me get out. I’m hurt badly,” said the tiger.

Thereupon the priest lifted up one of the logs and slid it down, until it rested on the bottom of the pit. Then the tiger climbed up and out. Old Mountain Uncle expressed his thanks volubly, saying to the shaven head:

“I am deeply grateful to you, sir, for helping me out of my trouble. Nevertheless, as I am very hungry, I must eat you up.”

The priest, very much surprised and indignant, protested against such vile ingratitude. To say the least, it was very bad manners and entirely against the law of the mountains, and he appealed to a big tree to decide between them.

The spirit in the tree spoke through the rustling leaves and declared that the man should go free and that the tiger was both ungrateful and unmannerly.

Old Mountain Uncle was not satisfied yet, especially as the priest was unusually fat and would make a very good dinner. However, he allowed the man to appeal once more and this time to a big rock.

“The man is certainly right, Venerable Mountain Uncle, and you are wholly wrong,” said the spirit in the rock. “Your master, the Mountain Spirit, who rides on the green bull and the piebald horse to punish his enemies, will certainly chastise you if you devour this priest. You will be no fit messenger of the Mountain Lord if you are so

ungrateful as to eat the man who saved you from starvation or death in the trap. It is shockingly bad manners even to think of such a thing.”

The tiger felt ashamed, but his eyes still glared with hunger; so, to be sure of saving his own skin, the priest proposed to make the toad a judge. The tiger agreed.

But the toad, with his gold-rimmed eyes, looked very wise, and instead of answering quickly, as the tree and rock did, deliberated a long time. The priest’s heart sank, while the tiger moved his jaws as if anticipating his feast. He felt sure that Old Speckled Back would decide in his favor.

“I must go and see the trap before I can make up my mind,” said the toad, who looked as solemn as a magistrate. So all three leaped, hopped, or walked to the trap. The tiger, moving fast, was there first, which was just what the toad, who was a friend of the priest, wanted. Besides, Old Speckled Back was diligently looking for a crack in the rocks near by.

So, while the toad and the tiger were studying the matter, the priest ran off and saved himself within the monastery gates. When at last Old Speckled Back decided against Mountain Uncle and in favor of the man, he had no sooner finished his judgment than he hopped into the rock crevice, and, crawling far inside, defied the tiger, calling him an unmannerly brute and an ungrateful beast, and daring him to do his worst.

Old Mountain Uncle was so mad with rage and hunger that his craftiness seemed turned into stupidity. He clawed at the rock to pull it open to get at the toad to tear him to pieces. But Speckled Back, safe within, only laughed. Unable to do any harm, the tiger flew into a passion of rage. The hotter his temper grew, the more he lost his wit. Poking his nose inside the crack, he rubbed it so hard on the rough rock that he soon bled to death.

When the hunter came along, he marveled at what he saw, but he was glad to get

rich by selling the tiger's fur, bones, and claws; for in Korea nothing sells so well as a tiger. As for the toad, he told to several generations of his descendants the story of how he outwitted the old Mountain Uncle.

TOKGABI AND HIS PRANKS

TOKGABI is the most mischievous sprite in all Korean fairy-land. He does not like the sunshine, or outdoors, and no one ever saw him on the streets.

He lives in the sooty flues that run under the floors along the whole length of the house, from the kitchen at one end of it to the chimney hole in the ground at the other end. He de-lights in the smoke and smut, and does not mind fire or flame, for he likes to be where it is warm. He has no lungs, and his skin and eyes are both fire-proof. He is as black as night and loves nothing that has white in it. He is always afraid of a bit of silver, even if it be only a hairpin.

Tokgabi likes most to play at night in the little loft over the fireplace. To run along the rafters and knock down the dust and cobwebs is his delight. His favorite game is to make the iron rice-pot lid dance up and down, so that it tumbles inside the rice kettle and cannot easily be got out again. Oh, how many times the cook burns, scalds, or steams her fingers in attempting to fish out that pot lid when Tokgabi has pushed it in! How she does bless the sooty imp!

But Tokgabi is not always mischievous, and most of his capers hurt nobody. He is such a merry fellow that he keeps continually busy, whether people cry or laugh. He does not mean to give any one trouble, but he must have fun every minute, especially at night.

When the fire is out, how he does chase the mice up and down the flues under the floor, and up in the garret over the rafters! When the mousies lie dead on their backs, with their toes turned upward, the street boys take them outdoors and throw them up in the air. Before the mice fall to the ground, the hawks swoop down and eat them up. Many a bird of prey gets his breakfast in this way.

Although Tokgabi plays so many pranks, he is kind to the kitchen maids. When, after a hard day's work, one is so tired out that she falls asleep, he helps her to do her hard tasks.

Tokgabi washes their dishes and cleans their tables for good servants. So when they wake up, the girls find their work done for them. Many a fairy tale is told about this jolly sprite's doings—how he gives good things to the really nice people and makes the bad ones mad by spitefully using them. They do say that the king of all the Tokgabis has a museum of curiosities and a storehouse full of gold and gems and fine clothes, and everything sweet to eat for good boys and girls and for old people that are kind to the birds and dumb animals. For bad folks, he has all sorts of things that are ugly and troublesome. He punishes stingy people by making them poor and miserable.

The Tokgabi king has also a menagerie of animals. These he sends to do his errands rewarding the good and punishing naughty folks. Every year the little almanac with red and green covers tells in what quarter of the skies the Tokgabi king lives for that year, so that the farmers and country people will keep out of his way and not provoke him. In his menagerie the kind creatures that help human beings are the dragon, bear, tortoise, frog, dog and rabbit. These are all man's friends. The cruel and treacherous creatures in Tokgabi's menagerie are the tiger, wild boar, leopard, serpent, toad and cat. These are the messengers of the Tokgabi king to do his bidding, when he punishes naughty folks.

The common, every-day Tokgabi plays fewer tricks on the men and boys and enjoys himself more in bothering the girls and women. This, I suppose, is because they spend more time in the house than their fathers or brothers. In the Land of Rat-tat-tat, where the sound of beating the washed clothes never ceases, Tokgabi loves to get hold of the women's laundry sticks which are used for pounding and polishing the starched clothes. He hides them so that they cannot be found. Then Daddy makes a fuss, because

his long white coat has to go without its usual gloss, but it is all Tokgabi's fault.

Tokgabi does not like starch, because it is white. He loves to dance on Daddy's big black hat case that hangs on the wall. Sometimes he wiggles the fetich, or household idol, that is suspended from the rafters. But, most of all, he enjoys dancing a jig among the dishes in the closet over the fireplace, making them rattle and often tumble down with a crash.

Tokgabi likes to bother men sometimes too. If Daddy should get his topknot caught in a rat hole, or his head should slip off his wooden pillow at night and he bump his nose, it is all Tokgabi's fault. When anything happens to a boy's long braid of hair, that hangs down his back and makes him look so much like a girl, Tokgabi is blamed for it. It is even said that naughty men make compacts with Tokgabi to do bad things, but the imp only helps the man for the fun of it. Tokgabi cares nothing about what mortal men call right or wrong. He is only after fun and is up to mischief all the time, so one must watch out for him.

The kitchen maids and the men think they know how to circumvent Tokgabi and spoil his tricks. Knowing that the imp does not like red, a young man when betrothed wears clothes of this bright color. Tokgabi is afraid of shining silver, too, so the men fasten their topknots together, and the girls keep their chignons in shape, with silver hairpins. The magistrates and government officers have little storks made of solid silver in their hats, or else these birds are embroidered with silver thread on their dresses. Every one who can uses white metal dishes and dresses in snowy garments. Tokgabi likes nothing white and that is the reason why every Korean who can puts on clothes that are as dazzling as hoar frost. Tons and mountains of starch are consumed in blanching and stiffening coats and skirts, sleeves and stockings. On festival days the people look as if they were dipped in starch and their garments encrusted in rock candy.

Before we tell of Tokgabi's Museum and Curiosity Shop and of his Aviary of birds liked and disliked, and his menagerie of popular and despised animals, we must let you know how and why Tokgabi used to be most busy between the hours of nine o'clock at night and midnight.

In old days, the Great Bell, in the centre of the city of Seoul, was struck at nine o'clock at night. Then, every man and boy must be in the house and off the streets, while every woman and grown girl, carrying a little paper lantern, was free to walk out in the darkness or moon-light. Woe be to any one of the masculine gender caught outdoors! If grabbed by the magistrate, he was severely spanked. Great wooden paddles were kept in the police office to be used on boys and men seen abroad. The women folk, dressed in white, in their turned-up shoes, and with their funny little green jackets over their heads, wended their way to call on their female friends for chat and gossip. Yet they must every one of them be home by midnight, and then—if Tokgabi had not hidden their beaters away—they began again on the pile of starched clothes. Laying each garment over a little round log, they kept up a steady "rat-tat-tat," until near morning, making the real Korean chorus, which Tokgabi loves to hear.

EAST LIGHT AND THE BRIDGE OF FISHES

LONG, long ago, in the region beyond the Everlasting White Mountains of Northern Korea, there lived a king who was waited on by a handsome young woman servant. Every day she gladdened her eyes by looking southward, where the lofty mountain peak, which holds the Dragon's Pool in its bosom, lifts its white head to the sky. When tired out with daily toil, she thought of the river that flows from the Dragon's Pool, down out of the mountain. She hoped that some time she would have a son that would rule over the country which the river watered so richly.

One day, while watching the mountain top, she saw coming from the east a tiny bit of shining vapor. Floating like a white cloud in the blue sky, it seemed no bigger than an egg. It came nearer and nearer, until it seemed to go into the bosom of her dress. Very soon she became the mother of a boy. It was indeed a most beautiful child.

But the jealous king was angry. He did not like the little stranger. So he took the baby and threw it down among the pigs in the pen, thinking that this would be the last of the boy. But no! the sows breathed into the baby's nostrils and their warm breath made it live.

When the king's servants heard the little fellow crowing, they went out to see what made the noise, and there they beheld a happy baby not seeming to mind its odd cradle at all. They wanted to give him food at once but the angry king again ordered the child to be thrown away, and this time into the stable. So the servants took the boy by the legs and laid him among the horses, expecting that the animals would tread on him and he would be thus put out of the way.

But no, the mares were gentle, and, with their warm breath, they not only kept the little fellow from getting cold, but they nourished him with their milk so that he grew

fat and hearty.

When the king heard of this wonderful behavior of pigs and horses, he bowed his head toward Heaven. It seemed the will of the Great One in the Sky that the boy baby should live and grow up to be a man. So he listened to its mother's prayers and allowed her to bring her child into the palace. There he grew up and was trained like one of the king's sons. As a sturdy youth, he practiced shooting with bow and arrows and became skilful in riding horses. He was always kind to animals. In the king's dominions any man who was cruel to a horse was punished. Whoever struck a mare, so that the animal died, was himself put to death. The young man was always merciful to his beasts.

So the king named the youthful archer and horseman East Light, or Radiance of the Morning and made him Master of the Royal Stables. East Light, as the people liked to say his name, became very popular. They also called him Child of the Sun and Grandson of the Yellow River.

One day while out on the mountains hunting deer, bears, and tigers, the king called upon the young archer to show his prowess in shooting arrows. East Light drew his bow and showed skill such as no one else could equal. He sent shaft after shaft whistling into the target and brought down both running deer and flying birds. Then all applauded the handsome youth.

But instead of the king's commending East Light, the king became very jealous of him, fearing that he might want to be on the throne. Nothing that the young man could do seemed now to please his royal master.

So, fearing he might lose his life if he remained near the king, East Light with three trusty followers fled southward until he came to a great, deep river, wide and impassable.

How to get across he knew not, for no boat was at hand and the time was too short

to make a raft, for behind him were his enemies swiftly pursuing him.

In a great strait, he cried out:

“Alas, shall I, the child of the Sun and the Grandson of the Yellow River, be stopped here powerless by this stream?”

Then, as if his father, the Sun, had whispered to him what to do, he drew his bow and shot many arrows here and there into the water, nearly emptying his quiver.

For a few moments nothing happened. To his companions it seemed a waste of good weapons. What would their leader have to fight his pursuers when they appeared, if his quiver were empty?

But in a moment more, the waters appeared to be strangely agitated. Soon they were flecked and foaming. From up and down the stream, and in front of them, the fish were swimming toward East Light, poking their noses out of the water as if they would say:

“Get on our backs and we’ll save you.” They crowded together in so dense a mass that on their spines a bridge was soon formed, on which men could stand.

“Quick!” shouted East Light to his companions, “let us fly. Behold the king’s horsemen coming down the hill after us.”

So over the bridge of fish backs, scaly and full of spiny fins, the four young men fled over the waters. As soon as they gained the opposite shore, the bridge of fishes dissolved. Yet scarcely had they swum away, when those who were in pursuit had gained the water’s

edge, on the furthest side. In vain the king’s soldiers shot their war arrows to kill East Light and his three companions. The shafts fell short and the river was too deep and wide to swim their horses over. So the four young men escaped safely.

Marching on further a few miles, East Light met three strange persons, who seemed to be awaiting his coming. They welcomed him warmly and invited him to be their king and rule over their city. The first was dressed in seaweed, the second in hempen

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