**KOREAN FOLK-TALES.**

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Before beginning the discussion of Korean folk-lore it will be well to define the term or at least to indicate the limits within which the discussion will be confined ; for folk-lore ie a very ambiguous term, including, at one extreme, not only the folk-tales of a people but the folk-songs, superstitions, charms, proverbs, conundrums, incantations and many other odds and ends of domestic tradition which find no classification under other headings. Folk-lore is the back attic to which are relegated all those interesting old pieces of ethnological furniture which do not bear the hall-mark of history and are withal too ambiguous in their origin and too heterogeneous in their character to take their place down stairs in the prim order of the modern scientific drawing-room. But if we wish to feel as well as to know what the life of a people has been, we must not sit down in the drawing-room under an electric light and read their annals, but we must mount to the attic and rummage among their folk-lore and, as it were, handle the garments of by-gone days and untie the faded ribbon that confines the love-letters of long ago. Written history stalks across the centuries in seven-league boots, leaping from one great crisis to another and giving only a birds-eye view of what lies between; but folk-lore takes you by the hand and leads you down into the valley, shows you the home, ths family, the every-day life, and brings you close to the heart of the people. It has been well said that the test of a man’s knowledge of a foreign language is his ability to understand the jokes in that language. So I would say that the test of a man’s knowledge of any people’s life is his acquaintance with their folk-lore. [page 46]

The back-attic of Korean folk-fore is filled with a very miscellaneous collection, for the same family has occupied the house for forty centuries and there never has been an auction. Of this mass of material I can, in the space allotted me, give only the merest outline, a rapid inventory, and that not of the whole subject but of only a single part一namely the folk-tales of Korea.

For convenience we may group them under six heads. Confucian, Buddhistic, shamanistic, legendary, mythical and general or miscellaneous tales.

Williams defines Confucianism as “The political morality taught by Confucius and his disciples and which forms the basis of Chinese jurisprudence. It can hardly be called a religion as it does not inculcate the worship of any god.” In other words it stops short at ethical boundaries and does not concern itself with spiritual relations. The point at issue between Confucianism and Buddhism is that the latter affirms that the present life is conditioned by a past one and determines the condition in a future one, while Confucianism confines itself to the deciding of questions of conduct beginning with-birth and ending with death. It is to be expected therefore that, like Judaism in the days of its decadence, every probable phase and aspect of human life will be discussed and a rule of conduct laid down. This is done largely by allegory, and we find in Korea, as in China, a mass of stories illustrating the line of conduct to be followed under a great variety of circumstances. These stories omit all mention of the more recondite tenets of Confucianism and deal exclusively with the application of a few self-evident ethical principles of conduct. They all cluster about and are slavish imitations of a printed volume of stories called the O-ryun Hang-sil (五倫行實) which means “The Five Principles of Conduct.” This has been borrowed mainly from China and the tales it contains are as conventional and as insipid as any other form of Chinese inspiration. As this is a written volume which has a definite place in literature it may not perhaps be strictly classified as folk-lore but the great number of tales based on it, giving simple variations of the same thread-bare themes, have become woven into the fabric of Korean folk-lore and have produced a distinct impression, but rather of an academic [page 47] than a genuinely moral character. Following the lead of this book, Korean folk-lore has piled example upon example showing how a child, a youth or an adult should act under certain given circumstances. These “five principles” may be called the five beatitudes of Confucianism and while their author would probably prefer to word them differently the following is the way they work out in actual Korean life.

(1) Blessed is the child who honors his parents for he in turn shall be honored by his children.

(2) Blessed is the man who honors his king for he will stand a chance to be a recipient of the king’s favor.

(3) Blessed are the man and wife who treat each other properly for they shall be secure against domestic scandal.

(4) Blessed is the man who treats his friend well for that is the only way to get treated well oneself.

(5) Blessed is the man who honors his elders, for years are a guarantee of wisdom.

Then there are minor ones which are in some sense corollaries of these five, as for instance:

Blessed is the very, very chaste woman for she shall have a red gate built in her front yard with her virtues described thereon to show that the average of womanhood is a shade less virtuous than she.

Blessed is the country gentleman who persistently declines to become prime-minister even through pressed to do so, for he shall never be cartooned by the opposition—and, incidentally, shall have no taxes to pay!

Blessed is the young married woman who suffers patiently the infliction of a mother-in-law, for she in turn shall have the felicity of pinching her daughter-in-law black and blue without remonstrance.

Blessed is the man who treats his servant well, for instead of beeing squeezed a hundred cash on a string of eggs he will only be squeezed seventy-five.

Korean lore abounds in stories of good little boys and girls who never steal bird’s nests, nor play “for keeps,” nor tear their clothes, nor strike back, nor tie tin pans to dogs’ tans. They form what we may call the “Sunday-school Literature” of the Koreans and they are treated with the same contempt[page 48] by the healthy Korean boy or girl as goody-goody talk is treated by normal children the world over.

While these stories are many in number they are built on a surprisingly small number of models. After one gets a little used to the formulae, the first few lines of a story reveals to him the whole plot including commencement, complications, climax, catastrophe and conclusion. For instance there is the stock story of the boy whose parents treat him in a most brutal manner but who never makes a word of complaint Anticipating that they will end by throwing him into the well he goes down one dark night by the aid of a rope and digs a side passage in the earth just above the surface of the water ; and so when he is pitched in headlong the next day, he emerges from the water and crawls into this retreat unknown to his doting parents who fondly imagine they have made all arrangements for his future. About the middle of the afternoon he crawls out and faces his astonished parents with a sanctimonious look on his face which from one paint of view attests his filial piety, but from another says “You dear old humbugs, you can’t get rid of me so easily as that.” Be it noted, however, that the pathos of this story lies in its exaggarated description of how Korean children are sometimes treated.

We also have the case of the beautiful widow, the Korean Lucrece, who when the king importuned her to enter his harem seized a knife and cut off her own nose, thus ruining her beauty. Who can doubt that she knew that by this bold stroke she could retire on a fat pension and become the envy of all future widows?

Then there was the boy whose father lay dying of hunger. The youth whetted a knife, went into his father’s presence, cut a generous piece of flesh off his own thigh and offered it to his parent. The story takes no account of the fact that the old reprobate actually turned cannibal instead of dying like a decent gentleman. The Koreans seem quite unable to see this moving episode in more than one light and they hold up their hands in wondering admiration ; while all the time the story is exquisitely ironical.

There are numerous stories of the Lear type where the favorite children all deserted their parent, while the one who had been the drudge turned out pure gold. There is quite a [page 49] volume of Cinderella stories in which proud daughters come to grief in the brambles and have their faces scratched beyond repair while the neglected one is helped by the elves and goblins and in the sequel takes her rightful place. But these stories are often marred by the callous way in which the successful one looks upon the suffering or perhaps the death of her humbled rivals.

A common theme is that of the girl who refuses to marry any other man than the one, perhaps a beggar, whom her father had jokingly suggested as a future husband while she was still a child. The prevailing idea in this kind of story is that the image once formed in a maiden’s mind of her future husband is, in truth, already her husband, and she must be faithful to him. Such stories are a gauge of actual domestic life in Korea just inversely to the degree of their exaggeration.

Of course a favorite model is that of the boy who spends his whole patrimony on his father’s obsequies and becomes a beggar, but after a remarkable series of adventures turns up prime minister of the country. And yet in actual Korean life it has never been noted that contempt of money is a leading qualification for official position.

There is also the type of the evil-minded woman who did nothing but weep upon her husband’s grave, but, when asked why she was inconsolable, replied that her only object was to moisten the grave with her tears so that grass would grow the sooner, for only then could she marry again!

Korea is rich in tales of how a man’s honor or a woman’s virtue was called in question, and just as the fatal moment came the blow was averted by some miraculous vindication ; as when a hair-pin, tossed in the air, fell and pierced the solid rock, or when an artery was severed and the blood ran white as milk, or when the cart which was to carry the loyal but traduced official to his execution could not be moved by seven yoke of oxen until the superscription ‘‘Traitor’’ was changed to “Patriot.”

These are only a few of the standard models on which the Confucian stories are built, but from these we can judge with fair accuracy the whole. In examining them we find in the first place that they are all highly exaggerated cases, the inference apparently being that the greater includes the less and [page 50] that if boys and girls, youths and maidens, men and women acted with virtue and discretion under these extreme circum-stances how much more should the reader do so under less trying conditions. But the result is that, as Confucianism proposes no adequate motive for such altruistic conduct and provides no adequate penalty for delinquency, the stories are held in a kind of contemptuous tolerance without the least attempt to profit by them or apply them to actual conduct. This tendency is well illustrated in another phase of Korean life. When asked why his people do not attempt to emulate the example of the West in industrial achievements the Korean points to the distant past and cites the case of Yi Sun-sin, who made the first iron-clad man-of-war mentioned in history, and says “See, we beat you at your own game,” and he actually believes it, though the Korea of to-day does not possess even a fourth-class gunboat! Even so they point to these fantastic tales to illustrate the moral tone of Korean society when, in truth, these principles are practically as obsolete as the once famous Tortoise Boat. As proof of this I have merely to adduce what we all know of the readiness with which the Korean takes unfair advantage of his neighbor, the general lack of truthfulness, the absence of genuine patriotism, the chaotic state of public and private morals, the impudence of the average Korean child and the exquisite cruelty with which maimed animals are treated.

In the second place it should be noted that while the models given in the O-ryun Hang-sil are mostly from the Chinese, yet a great many of the tales which are based on these and which pass from mouth to mouth are purely Korean in their setting. The Confucian imprint is there, but translated into terms of Korean life and feeling.

A third point of importance is one that we have already hinted at in stating that the more recondite and esoteric ideas of Confucianism are entirely waived aside and only the practical application is brought to the fore. It is to this fact that we must attribute the virility of Confucian ethics, as a code or standard, even though there be no effort to live up to it. The ideas of filial affection, obedience to authority, marital love, respect for age and confidence in friends are not merely Confucian, they are universal, and belong to every religion and to [page 51] every civilization, and it is just because they are fundamental principles of all human society that they survive, at least as a recognized standard. They are axiomatic, and to deny them would be to disregard the plainest dictates of human reason. But let us return to our theme.

These stories, as we have said, form the “Sunday-school” literature of the Koreans. They are taken much as Bible stories are in the west, namely by a select few on select occasions. Everybody knows about them and has a general knowledge of their contents just as every western child knows more or less about David and Goliath, Jonah and the whale, Daniel and the lions ; but just as in the western nursery the Mother Goose Melodies, Cinderella, Jack the Giant-killer, Alice in Wonderland and the Brownies are more in evidence than religious stories, so in Korea the Dragon, Fox or Tiger story, the imp and elf and goblin story are told and listened to far oftener than stories illustrative of Confucian ethics.

The second division of our theme deals with Buddhist tales in Korean folk-lore. Here we find a larger volume and a wider range. The reason for this is that as Buddhism is a mystical religion it gives a much wider play to the imagination ; as it is a spectacular religion it gives opportunity for greater dramatic effect ; as it carries the soul beyond the grave and postulates a definite system of rewards and punishments it affords a much broader stage for its characters to play their parts upon. The Confucian tales are shorter, for they are intended each to point a particular moral, and conciseness is desirable, but with the Buddhistic tales it is different. The plots are often long and intricate. The interrelation of human events in more carefully worked out and the interplay of human passions is given greater prominence, and so the story approaches much nearer to what we call genuine fiction than do the purely Confucian tales. In fact the latter are mere anecdotes, as a rule, and afford no stimulus to the imagination as the Buddhistic stories do.

Another reason why Buddhist stories are so common is that Buddhism was predominant in Korea for a period of over a thousand years and antedated the general spread of Confu- cianism by many centuries. Coming in long before literature, as such, had made any headway in the peninsula, Buddhism [page 52] took a firm hold on all ranks of society, determined the models upon which the stories were built and gained an ascendency in the Korean imagination which has never been disputed. It is probable that to-day ten stories hinge upon Buddhism where one borrows its motive from Confucian principles. Buddhism entered Korea three or four centuries after Christ and it is not till near the middle of the Koryu dynasty, say 1100 A. D., that we hear of any rivalry between it and Coufucianism. By that time Buddhism had moulded the Korean fancy to its own shape. It went deep enough to touch some spiritual chords in the Korean nature. Confucianism never penetrated a hair’s breadth deeper than his reason ; and so Buddhism, by the priority of its occupancy and by its deeper touch made an impression that Confucianism has not even begun to efface.

Another cause of the survival of Buddhist ideas, especially in Korean folk-lore, even after Confucianism became nom-inally the state religion, was that the latter gave such an in-ferior place to women. Buddhism made no great distinction between the sexes. The very nature of the cult forbids the making of such distinction, and Korean history is full of in-cidents showing that women were equal sharers in what were supposed to be the benefits of the religion. Confucianism, on the other hand, gave woman a subordinate place, afforded no outlet to her religious aspirations, in fact made child-bearing her only service. Confucianism is a literary cult, a scholastic religion, and women were debarred from its most sacred arcana. They retorted by clinging the more closely to Buddhism where alone they found food for their devotional instincts, albeit the superstition was as dark as Egyptian night. In this they were not opposed. Confucianism, the man’s religion, seemed to fancy that by letting despised woman grovel in the darkness of Buddhism its own prestige would be enhanced. The fact remains that one of the most striking peculiarities of Korean society to-day is that while the men are all nominally Confucianists the women are nearly all Buddhists, or at least devotees of one or other of those forms of superstition into which Buddhism has merged itself in Korea. For instance, what would have become of the Buddhist monasteries had it not been for the Queens of the present dynasty? Even the[page 53] last ten years give abundant evidence of the potent power of Buddhism in the female breast.

But it is the mothers who mould the children’s minds, and every boy and girl in Korea is saturated with Buddhistic or semi-Buddhistic ideas long before the Thousand Character Classic is taken in hand. The imagination and fancy have become enthralled and, while it is true that in time the boy is ridiculed into professing a contempt for Buddhism, the girl clings to it with a tenacity born of sixteen hundred years of inherited tendency. It is of course a modified Buddhism. The underlying fetichism which the Korean inherits from unt told antiquity has been so thoroughly mixed with his Buddhism that it is quite impossible to tell where the one leaves off and the other begins.

It must be borne in mind that we are speaking now of the common folk-tales and not the ordinary written literature of modem Korea. The formal writings of the past five centuries have been Confucian and the models have all been those of the Chinese sage but they are studied only by the select few who have mastered the ideograph. They are not for the mass of the people and mean even less to the common crowd than Shakespeare and Milton mean to the common people of England and America.

There is one more important reason for the survival of the Buddhist element in Korean folk-tales, and that is its strong localizing tendency. The story plays about some special spot. It clings to its own hallowed locus—just as as the story of William Tell, of King Arthur or of Evangeline would lose half their valne if made general as to locality. It is because the Korean can lead you to a mountain side and say “Here is where Mu-hak stood when he pronounced the fatal words that foretold the Great Invasiou,” or show you the very tree, now centuries old, that To-san planted—it is because of these definite local elements that these tales are anchored firmly in the Korean consciousness. Any Confucian story might have occurred anywhere, in any age. Not so the Buddhist tale ; it names the spot and tells the day that saw the event take place and thus the interest is enhanced four-fold. Old Diamond Mountain carries the burden of as many tales of famous monks as it bears pines and the shoulders of old Hal-[page 54] la Mountain are shrouded in as heavy a cloak of Buddhist lore as of driving mist from off the southern seas.

If we are asked as to the style and make-up of the Buddhist story we can only say it is almost infinite in variety. What we may call the inner circle of Buddhistic philosophy seldom appears in these tales, but through them is constantly heard the cry for release from the bane of existence, and the scorn of merely earthly honors in seen on every page . Well indeed might the women of Korea be willing, nay long, to sink into some nirvana and forget their wrongs. Buddhism is consistent in this, at least, that from its own standpoint it acknowledges the futility of mere existence and says to every man, “Now what are you here for?” There can be no manner of doubt that the pessimism of the Buddhistic cult appeals strongly to the great mass of the Korean people.

The plots of the Buddhistic tales are too long to give in extenso but a few points can be indicated. In many of the stories the Buddhist monastery is the retreat to which the baffled hero retires and receives both his literary and military education and from which he sallies forth to overthrow the enemies of his country and claim his lawful place before the king.

Then again a monastery in the mountains may be the scene of an awful crime which the hero discloses and thus brings triumph to the right. There is no witch nor wizard nor fairy god-mother in Korea. It is always the silent monk who appears at the crucial instant and stays the hand of death with a potent but mysterious drug or warns the hero of dang-er or tells him how to circumvent his foes. Now and again, like Elijah of old, a monk dares to face the king and charge him with his faults or give enigmatic advice which delivers the land from some terrible fate. Often a wandering monk is shown a kindness by some boy and in after years by mysterious power raises him to affluence and power.

In these days one never connects the idea of scholarship with a Buddhist monastery but the folk-lore of the country abounds in stories in which the hero retires to a monastery and learns not only letters but the sciences of astrology and geomancy. And not only so but even military science seems to have been commonly taught in these retreats. In fact there[page 55] are few of these tales in which the hero is not taught the science of war as well as the arts of peace. No other source of information tells us so much about the status of the Buddhist monastery in the middle ages as these same stories. While in Europe the monasteries were repositories of learning and culture, in Korea they went still further and taught the science of war as well.

This, then, is the first and most important thing that Korean folk-lore has to tell us about Buddhism, namely its agency as a general educator. But in the second place these stories show the part that Buddhism has played in determining many of the phases of Korean life as seen to-day. Take for instance the peual code. The punishments inflicted on criminals are evidently copied from the representations of the Buddhist hell. Of course these, too, originated in the imagination and one may argue that the Buddhist hell was copied from the system of punishments in actual force in the country. Now we would expect to find, in any land, a gradual change in the forms of punishment during the centuries, but those in vogue to-day are such exact copies of the ancient Buddhist representations that we cannot but conclude that, even if the Buddhist hell was copied from actual custom, yet the crystalization of it into religious form has perpetuated the ancient and gruesome horrors and prevented the advent of humaner forms of punishment, commensurate with the general advance in civilization and enlightenment.

Another mark that Buddhism and Buddhistic stories have left upon the Korean is his repugnance to taking the life of an animal. To make blood flow is beneath the dignity of any decent man and though Buddhism has been politically under the ban for five centuries the butcher has, until very recently, counted with the Chil-ban or “seven kinds,” which include mountebanks, harlots, slaves and sorcerers. Yet this repugnance to taking animal life does not prevent the most revolting cruelty to animals of all kinds. Were it possible within the limits of this paper, many other points might be cited showing how Buddhistic lore has tended to perpetuate ideas which are not only outside the Confucian system but virtually antagonistic thereto.

And this brings us to our next point, the antagonism [page 56] between Buddhism and Confucianism. All during the Koryu dynasty, 918—1392 A. D., there was kept up a bitter fight between the adherents of the two cults. In those days no one was both a Confucianist and a Buddhist, as is the fashion today. There was a clear line of demarcation, and sanguinary struggles took place, in which Buddhism was uniformly successful. Yet there was always left the nucleus of an opposition, and in the end, when Buddhism had dragged the nation in the mire and made her contemptible, the Confucian idea came to the top and at one bold stroke effected, at least on the surface of things, one of the most sweeping changes that any people has ever seen, comparable with the French Revolution. Now this long and desultory struggle between the systems could not but leave indelible marks on the folk-lore of the people and a volume could be filled with tales illustrating in detail the success now of one side and now of the other. Once when the Confucian element prevailed and the Buddhist Pontifex was condemned to death he foretold that when his head fell his blood would run white like milk to vindicate his cause. It was even so, and his executors bowed to the logic of the miracle and reinstated the despised cult. Again a raven was the bearer of a missive to the King bidding him hasten to the queen’s quarters and shoot an arrow through the zither case! He obeyed and found that his weapon had taken effect in the breast of the Buddhist High Priest, hidden behind it, who had taken advantage of the king’s temporary absence to attack his honor. Then again there were wordy battles between celebrated exponents of the two systems in which the honors rested now with one side now the other. In one instance a test was made to see whether Confucian or Buddhistic principles were better able to control the passions. A celebrated Confucian scholar and a noted Monk were subjected to the seductions of a courtezan, with the result that Confucianism scored a notable victory.

So far as our limited investigation goes it would seem that in these contests between Confucianism and Buddhism Korean folk-lore gives a large majority of victories to the latter. This would indicate that Buddhism made far greater use of folk-tales to impress itself upon the people than did Confucianism. The latter is the more conservative and reasonable [page 57] of the two cults but Buddhism chose the better or at least the surer part by capturing the imagination and monopolizing the mystical element which is so prominent in oriental character.

But the time came when Confucianism usurped the place of power and Buddhism went to the wall ; by which we do not mean that the latter was destroyed nor even that its hold upon the masses was really loosened ; but Confucianism became the state religion, and the Buddhist priest became officially an outcast. From that time, five centuries ago, there has never been a blood feud between the two. Confucianism, having secured control of all temporal power, cared little what Buddhism did in the moral sphere. So we find that the two svstems became blended in the Korean consciousness, in so far as the antipodes can blend. This also has left its mark upon Korean folk-lore. The longest and most thoroughly elaborated stories in Korea show Buddhism and Confucianism hand in hand. For instance a boy in the filial desire to save the life of his dying parent has a dream in which a venerable monk appears and tells him that in a certain monastery in India there is a medicine that will cure the patient. The Buddhist spirits waft him on his way, shield him from the dangers of the “Ether Sea” and bring him back to the bedside of his expiring parent just in time to save his life. We here see that the motive is Confucian, the action Buddhistic. The ethical element is supplied by Confucianism the dramatic element by Buddhism. Sometimes a story begins with Confucianism, drifts into Buddhism and thence into shamanism or even pure animism and then by devious courses comes back to its original Confucian type.

Such tales as these are extremely popular and the reason is not far to seek. The blending of the two ideas gives greater opportunity for the working out of a plot, the story is longer and more complete, while at the same time the dual religious sense of the Korean is better satisfied. If we leave this part of our theme at this point it is not because it is exhausted, but because a paper like this can hope to give at best only a hasty glance at a subject that requires a volume for its proper discussion.

We will pass on, therefore, to the shamanistic stories in Korean folk-lore. Under this head I include all tales which [page 58] hinge upon shamanism, fetichism, animism and the like. In other words, the stories which appeal to the basic religious element in the Korean. Before he was a Confucianist, before he was a Buddhists he was a nature worshipper. True enough the Buddhist monk could scare him with his pictures of a physical hell but it was nothing to the fear he had of the spirit that dwells in yonder ancient tree on the hill-side. The Confucianist could make the chills run up and down his back by a recital of the evil passions of the heart but it was nothing to the horror which seized him when in the middle of the night a weasel overturned a jar in the kitchen and he felt sure that a tok-gabi was at his wierd work among the lares and penates. The merchant would not be moved by a Confucian homily on the duty of fair-dealing with one’s fellow-men but he would spend all day spelling out a luck day from the calendar on which to carry out a plan for “doing” an unwary customer. Countless are the stories based upon these themes. The spirits of the mountain, stream, tree, rock or cave play through Korean fiction like the fairy, goblin or genius through the page s of the Arabian Nights.

This portion of our theme is of greater interest than almost any other, for while the Buddhistic and Confucian systems are importations and bring with them many ideas originally alien to the Korean mind we have here the product of the indigenous and basic elements of their character. And yet even here we find an admixture of Chinese and Korean, as we do in every branch of Korean life. After the lapse of so many centuries it is difficult to segregate the original Korean and the imported Chinese ingredients in these tales, but we may be sure that here, if anywhere, we shall come near to the genuine Korean. The number and variety of these stories are so great that we can give only the most meager description of them.

First, then, come the stories which are based upon the idea that animals can acquire the power to transform them- selves into men. These are among the tales that children like the best. There was the wild boar that drank of the water that had lain for twenty years in a human skull and thus acquired the magic power to assume the human shape, but with this fatal limitation, that if a dog looked into his face [page 59] he would be compelled to assume, on the instant, his original form. There is the story, common to China and Korea, of the fox that assumed the shape of a woman, an oriental Circe, and worked destruction to an empire. Now and again a centennarian toad assumes human shape and acts as valet to the tiger who is masquerading as a gentleman. A serpent turns into a beautiful maiden and lures a man to the brink of destruction but being thwarted, changes its tactics and infests his body with a myriad of little snakes from which he is delivered by the sparrows who pluck holes in his skin and let the reptiles out. In the list of animals there is a clear line of demarcation between the good and the evil. The fox, tiger, the wild-boar, the serpent and the toad are always bid while the dragon, the rabbit, the frog and the deer are always good. The tortoise, the bear and the badger are sometimes good and sometimes bad. As the tiger is the mast destructive animal in Korea we are not surprised to find a great number of stories telling how be turned into a girl and came crying to the door of a house in order to lure out one of its inmates, for his supper. This is the favorite story with which to frighten unruly or disobedient children.

Many are the wonders worked by the tok-gabi, a sort of imp that delights to make trouble in the household. There is no Korean who will profess to have seen one or to have been personally cognizant of their pranks but at the same time there are equally few who do not know of somebody else who saw one or was the victim of its malice.

The Koreans believe that these tok-gabi are the spirits of wicked men which have been refused entrance to the place of the blessed and have no option but to haunt their former places of abode, or they may be spirits of innocent people who died by violence or under other painful circumstances and cannot goto paradise because they burn with a desire to avenge themselves. Sometimes they take the shape of a man, sometimes that of a man with the lower part of his body gone, sometimes that of a flying man or a mad-man or a child. At other times it may be in the shape of fire or lightning or a crash like that of thunder or of breaking pottery. The reason why people believe them to be the spirits of men is because no one ever saw out: in the shape of an animal. [page 60]

Many stories are told of how these tormented spirits have leagued themselves with men, promising them that the unholy compact will bring riches and power. This corresponds closely with the withcraft of the Wist. By the aid of these “familiar spirits” many a deed of darkness is said to have been committed. But the promises always fail and the man who sells himself to a tok-gabi gradually wastes away, his face becomes pinched and yellow and unless he breaks the compact and frees himself from the toils of his familiar, disaster is sure. Tales of this Kind frequently tell the means that are employed to annul the compact and prevent the return of the evil spirit. The things he dreads the most are silver, the color red, and wood that has been struck by lightning. Many a man is believed to have broken the spell by hanging about his house long strips of cloth dipped in a red dye. This the spirit cannot pass, and after four days of waiting he departs, never to return. His dread of silver reminds us of the superstition prevalent in the west that in order to shoot a ghost one must load his gun with a piece of silver money in addition to the regular charge. When a tok-gabi attacks a man it always seizes him by the top-knot, so a little silver pin is often stuck in the top of the top-knot as a preventative. If a tree is struck by lightning the boys hasten to secure splinters of the wood to carry in their pouches as charms against the fiends. Then again, these imps figure as guardians or hidden treasure. Once a scholar became impoverished through a too assiduous application to his books and the consequent neglect of the more practical business of life, and wandered away as a beggar. Coming to a village where there was a haunted house from which family after family had been driven by the tok gabis he declared his intention of taking possession. The first night he was rudely awakened by a load of filth being thrown upon him. The situation was anything but pleasing, yet he restrained his anger and quietly remarked that he understood how matters lay but was not to be frightened. Soon a ball of sulphurous fire entered the room and passed before his fact, but he contemptuously waved it off and showed no sign of fear. Thereupon an aged man entered and said. “You are the man I have been waiting for. I was the trusted servant of the man who built this house and even after he died I guarded the[page 61] chest of silver which he had hidden under that house-post yonder. I died with the secret on my mind and could not leave the place till the money was delivered into the hands of a good man. So in the form of a tok-gabi I have been compelled to guard it till you came. Now I can go in peace, for my work is done.” So he vanished. The wondering scholar dug beneath the post and was rewarded with fabulous wealth.

This meddlesome sprite is a sort of Korean Puck and any casualty whose explanation is not patent is attributed to his malevolent influence. One of his favorite pastimes is to bewitch the rice-kettle and make the cover fall into the kettle. Now a Korean kettle cover is always a little larger than the mouth of the kettle and so this super-human feat is attributed to the tok-gabi. It is easy to see how this tale originated. At some time or other a kettle cover was made only a very little larger than the mouth of the kettle so that when the kettle expanded under the heat, the mouth became wide enough to admit the cover which was as yet cold. Then the cover became warm and refused to come out. So it is chat the lack of a little knowledge of physical law has invested the tok-gabi with wide powers. In Korean stories the tok-gabi seldom plays the leading part, but he flits in and out and adds the spice of mystery to the plot.

Fetiches exercise a powerful influence over the common people. The bunch of straw over the door, the rag tied on a sacred tree, a stone thrown on the heap in the mountain pass, the cabalistic sentence which wards off disease, the dead rat with the name of one’s enemy written on its belly and placed beneath the enemy’s bed in order to destroy him,—these and scores of other fetiches play their part in Korean folk-lore, spurring on the imagination and giving piquancy to otherwise tiresome tales.

Prominent among the animal stories are those of the Uncle Remus type, where it is very commonly the rabbit who outwits his stronger enemies; as for instance where the wicked tortoise, who was seeking a rabbit’s liver to cure the Sea King with, induced a rabbit to mount his back, promising to take him to an island where no hawk ever was seen ; but when the rabbit was midway in the channel the tortoise told him his fate, whereupon the rabbit laughed and said that all rabbits had [page 62] removable livers and that he had taken his out and washed it and laid it on a rock to dry, but that the tortoise was welcome to it if he would go back for it. So the rabbit got safely back to shore and had a good laugh at the expense of the amphibian. The fact that the plot is a little far-fetched does not harm it in the least in the Koreans’ eyes.

Spirits are everywhere and are likely to turn up at any corner. Even door-hinges and chop-sticks may be the abode of spirits who have power to change a man’s whole destiny. As a rule these spirits seem to be on the lookout for some one to insult them or trample on their rights, and then their revenge is sweet. And yet we have numerous stories in which good boys or girls have been aided by them. These tales deal with the lowly and common things of life and it is here that Korean humor shows itself to best advantage. Such stories as this probably outnumber all others combined, but as they are generally only anecdotal in character their actual bulk might be less. But this can never be determined, for such stories as this are seldom put in print. Their influence is enormous, and it may be said with considerable confidence that they define the actual religion of far more Koreans than do the more sounding titles of Buddhism and Confucianism. One would think that the spirit worship of the Koreans must be something like that of the ancient Hellenes before the elaboration of their mythology into a definite pantheon. It the Koreans had been left to themselves, we must believe that they too would have developed some such pantheon, but the rival cults from the other side of the Yellow Sea came in and preoccupied the ground. And yet in spite of the long centuries that have passed since then, we find the Koreans to-day worshiping these same spirits of the grove, the rock, the mountain, with a fervor that neither Buddhism nor Confucianism can arouse.

A marked difference between Korean and western wonder-stories is that in Korea the genuine fairy does not exist. It is a grievous lack. A people without a Titania or an Ariel are surely to be pitied. The Korean imagination has never evolved those gossamer beings whose every act is benevolent and who are personifications of charity. At the same time a similar feature is found in Korean folk-lore under a different [page 63] form, as is illustrated in the case of the two brothers one of whom was good but poor while the other was rich but bad. The good brother found a bird with a broken leg. He took it home and cared for it till it was well and then let it go. Soon the bird returned with a seed and laid it in its benefactor’s hand. He planted it and it grew an enormous gourd which turned out to be full of gold. The bad brother thought to do the same, so he caught a bird and broke its leg and then kept it till the leg was well. Sure enough, the bird came back with the seed and a gourd grew from it, larger even than his brother’s, but when it was opened it poured out a flood of filth which destroyed the wicked brother’s house and all he had.

But we must hasten on to our third heading—the legends of Korea. Under this term we include all supernatural or extra-natural incidents believed by the credulous to form a part of the history of the country. These stories are always short and pithy and are more truly indigenous than any others. This is only what we would expect, since they deal exclusively with Korean history. But apart from this fact there is something about them that separates them from the legends either of China or Japan. They are mostly of great antiquity, in many cases antedating any considerable Chinese influence, which may account in part for their distinct individuality.

And first, of course, we must speak of the legends which tell of the origin of kingdoms and of their founders. We find upon examination that the egg plays the most important part in the origin of ancient heroes. To be sure Tan-gun, the most ancient of all, had an origin quite unique. A bear by patient waiting in a cave was transformed into a woman. She became the bride of Whan-ung the spirit son of Whan-in, the Creator, and their son was Tan gun, contemporary of Noah. But the founder of the great southern kingdom of Silla, 57 B.C. came forth from a gigantic egg found in the forest. The founder of Ko-gu-ryu the northern kingdom came from an egg of semi-supernatural origin. Suk T’al-ha one of the early heroes of Silla came from an egg which floated in from northern Japan in a fast-closed chest. The legend of the three sages of Quelpart is different. They arose from a crevice in the rocks. The founder of the Koryu kingdom had for mother a daughter of the Sea-King, the Korean Neptune. The father[page 64] of the founder of Koguryu was found beneath a stone and he was golden in color and shaped like a frog, so they named him Keum-wa or “Golden Frog.” The wife of the first King of Silla came forth from the side of a hen, beside the “Dragon Spring.” Cases are thus multiplied in which heroes have been credited with superhuman origin.

Closely connected with these stories are those which deal with the omens and signs that heralded the coming of momentous events. Propitious ones were seldom foreshadowed excepting in dreams. There is hardly a great man in Korean history since the tenth century with whose birth tradition does not connect a dream, foretelling the happy event. Heroes themselves before attaining fame had dreams, announcing the approach of greatness. The founder of the present dynasty is said to have dreamed in his youth that he saw a running sheep whose horns and tail suddenly fell off. This afterwards was interpreted to mean that he would become a king for the character for sheep is 羊 and if the horns rand tail are dropped it becomes 王 or King ! Yi Sun-sin, the great admiral who, with his “Tortoise Boat,” drove back the Japanese reinforcements in 1592, was assured of future greatness by one of his friends who dreamed that he saw some men trying to cut down a great tree but Yi Sun-sin came along and with one hand held the tree up while with the other he drove off the vandals. The father of Wang-gon, founder of the Koryu dynasty, dreamed that he saw a young pine tree growing and under it a child with a scale like a fish-scale growing on the back of his neck. When he awoke he saw a monk, the great To-sun, who congratulated him saying that he would be the father of an illustrious son, for the boy in the dream was none other than the offspring of a dragon that lived in the sea off the island of Kang-wha. Before the Japanese invasion King Sun-jo dreamed that a woman came into the palace bearing on her head a sheaf of rice. The great scholar Yul-gok, on hearing of it, exclaimed “You must prepare for war ; for the character 倭 means Japanese and is composed of 人=‘man,’ 禾=‘rice in sheaf’ and 女= ‘woman’ and as the ‘sheaf of rice’ is over the ‘woman’ it means that the ‘small men’ are coming, namely the Japanese.” A maiden dreamed that she saw a dragon enter her father’s ink-water-bottle and when she[page 65] woke up she concealed the bottle and kept it until she was married and her son had attained the age when he must try the government examinations. She gave him the bottle and said “Use this when you write your essay and you will gain great honors.” He did so and through the aid of the dragon passed successive examinations, until at last he became prime minister.

As a rule the signs which fort old future events were ominous. It is a mark of all semi-civilized peoples that fear is the main element in their religion, and this fear has made them quick to detect the signs of coming evil. Before the kingdom of Pak-che fell, imps flew through the palace corridors screaming “Pak-che is fallen, fallen,” and then dived into the earth. Digging at the point where they disappeared, the king found a tortoise on whose back was carved the words “Silla’s sun has just risen, Pak-che’s is at the zenith,” which meant that the latter was about to wane. Before Ko gu-ryu fell, tigers came down from the mountains and wandered in the streets of the city. The fall of Silla, the Japanese Invasion and many other calamities have all had their forerunners. Among these baleful signs must be mentioned the waters of the streams or of the sea turning red like blood, meteors and cornets, eclipses of the sun, abnormal births either human or animal, a white fox crossing the road in front of one, a shower of insects, thunder in the winter, fruit trees blossoming late in the autumn, a white bow piercing the sun, red snow, wailing sounds coming from royal tombs, the blowing down of city or temple gates, clouds fighting with each other, frogs destroying each other, frog’s eyes turning red and fiery ; all these and many more are repeatedly met with in Korean legends. It is of interest to note how closely many of these signs resemble those which were dreaded by the Ancient Romans’ for instance as given in Shakespeare’s tragedy of Julius Caesar. Of course such things as earthquakes or other cataclysmic phenomena might easily be interpreted as omens by widely separated people but others are not so easily explained, such as the roaming of wild animals through the street. Among signs which predict good fortune the most prominent are the meeting with a white deer or a white pheasant, or the finding of a two-stemmed stalk of barley. [page 66]

Prophecy plays an important part in Korean legendary lore. Of course it is all “ex post facto” prophecy, and yet the Korean people still cling to it. Most of the leading events in Korean history since the tenth century are found to have been foretold at some time or other. There does not seem to have been any prophetic office, but now and again a monk or a scholar has been moved to tell his vision of the future. One of the most celebrated of these was the monk Mu-hak who at the time the present dynasty was founded opposed the building of the palace at the site of the Kyong-pok-kung, affirming that if it were done a great calamity would overtake the land in just two hundred years. This is supposed to have been uttered in 1392, and the year 1592 beheld the Japanese invasion. The occurrence of the invasion precisely two centuries after the founding of the new dynasty evidently seemed too tempting an opportunity to let slip for making a startling prophecy.

When anyone doubts the genuineness of these prophecies the Korean points to that one which still stands waiting fulfillment, that this dynasty will be followed by another, whose capital shall be at Kye-ryong San. This prophecy has existed, they say, since far back in the days of the Ko-ryu dynasty. Curiously enough there is another prophecy which says that if this dynasty passes its 500th anniversary it will be perpetual! A few years ago when that crisis was on, considerable uneasiness is said to have existed among leading Koreans on account of that prophecy. The latest one to come to light affirms that “when white pines grow in Korea the south will go to the shrimp and the north to the Tartar.” The “white pines” are interpreted as telegraph poles while the shrimp means Japan and the Tartar means Russia. When the monk Mu-hak pointed out the town of Han Yang as the site of the capital of this dynasty, he ascended Sam-gak Mountain and looking from its top toward the south exclaimed, “I see South Mountain (Nam-san) ten li away which is a sign that if the capital is founded here no official will be able to hold power more than ten years. I see rapids in the river at intervals of three li, which is a sign that no family will be able to retain its wealth more than three generations.”

When the monk To-san in 918 A. D. ascended Song-ak [page 67] Mountain and chose the site of Song-do for the capital of the Koryu dynasty he made a mistake, for the next day he ascended it again and saw to his dismay that the distant peaks of Sam-gak Mountain back of Han Yang had shot up in a single night so that they became kyu-bong or “Spy-peaks” upon Song-do; and from this he prophesied that within five centuries trouble would arise from that source. So twelve brazen dogs were set up outside the gate of Song-do which, for four hundred and seventy-five years, barked at the “Spy-peaks,” but to no avail. But space does not permit us to multiply examples. Those given here indicate with sufficient accuracy the style of Korean prophecy.

During the entire history of Korea twenty-one capitals have been founded, and the legends connected with these events are very fascinating. The most of them, as we have seen, center about Song-do and Seoul but ancient Kyong-ju, P’yung-yang, Pu-yu, Ch’un-ch’un, Kwang-ju and others are also embalmed in Korean-folk-lore. In the founding of Seoul we find the clashing of Buddhistic ideas in the dispute between Mu-hak and the courtiers of King T’a-jo. In the end the Buddhistic element seems to have won, perhaps because, before that time, all such things had been left to monks and the new order was not sufficiently well established to depart from precedent. These stories could have little in common with the utilitarianism of the Confucianist, and so all that is occult, mysterious, supernatural or infra-natural finds its genesis in Buddhism, fetichism or Shamanism.

Another style of legend deals with important crises when supernatural aid was rendered. When Chu-mong the founder of Ko-gu-ryu fled from Pu yu in the far north to escape from the scourge of his brothers’ hatred he came to a river where there was neither bridge, boat nor ford. He shot an arrow into the water and a great school of fish rose to the surface and placed back to back to form a bridge for turn to cross. Thus he escaped. When the capital of Silla was attacked by wild natives of the north and was about to fall, strange warriors appeared who had ears like bamboo leaves, and the savages were speedily put to flight. The next day the King found his father’s grave strewn with bamboo leaves and so he knew that spirits had come forth to help him in his dire need. [page 68]

When the Japanese, during the great invasion, attempted to dig open the grave of Ki-ja they heard the sound of music corning from the ground and fear compelled them to desist. This theme of warnings proceeding from royal tombs is a favorite one in Korean lore. When the same invaders attempted to desecrate the grave of the founder of this dynasty the reeds which grow thick about it turned into armed warriors and drove the Japanese away. The Kings of Angnang had a drum which sent forth of its own accord an ominous wail whenever an enemy was about to attack the border.

As in every other land, the battle-fields of Korea form the background for many a thrilling tale. When a Ko-gu-ryu army went north to attack Pu-yu they heard the sound of clashing arms in Yi-mul forest. The leaders pushed forward and found swords and spears wielded by invisible hands. The omen seemed a favorable one. They seized the weapons and with them overthrew the enemy. When rebels attacked Kyong-ju a star fell in the city, which was an omen of destruction, but the stubborn general, defying even the fates, sent up a kite with a lantern attached to its tail. The rebels thought it was the star returning to the sky, and so decamped.

At one time or another almost every foot of Korean soil has been the scene of battle and the stories of wonderful marksmanship, heroic daring, gigantic strength, subtle strate- gem, inventive genius, intrepid horsemanship, hairbreadth escape by field and flood are among the commonest household words of Korea. Such is the story of the battle in which the leader of a piratical baud was killed by Yi T’a-jo who ordered his lieutenant Yi Chi-ran to shoot off the helmet of the robber. Yi T’a-jo’s arrow followed the other and smote the enemy in the eye as the helmet was displaced. Memorable too is the strategem of Yi Sun-sin who, when surrounded by the Japanese, hung men’s clothes on bamboo sticks and placed them along the hill-tops, thus making the enemy suppose that he had a powerful force and so raise the siege. Who shall worthily sing the praises of Yi Yu-song whose virtue was so great that Japanese bullets flattened against his body and fell harmless to the ground ; or of Kwak Cha-u, called “The General of the Red Robe,” who today would be falling upon a body of the enemy in Chul la Province and tomorrow [page 69] would take breakfast in Kyong-ju a thousand li away, because lie had power to “wrinkle the ground.” He would make the ground contract before him, and after he had taken a few steps, expand again, to find that he had gone a hundred li. Others had power to leap over a house or to become invisible. Many are the dei ex machina, like these, whereby men have been saved from seemingly desperate situations. Time would fail us to tell of the exploits of famous captains, monks, bandits and corsairs whose names are enshrined in Korean lore.

Women too come in for their full share of attention, from the time of Yu-wha the mermaid princess and mother of Chu-mong down to the time of Non-ga, the dancing-girl patriot, who seized the Japanese general, her enforced paramour, and threw herself and him from the battlements of Chin-ju in the days of the great invasion. Most noble among the women of Korea was the queen of the last king of Pak-je who, upon the approach of the ruthless enemy, led her maids to the top of a beetling precipice and threw herself into the water far below rather than to suffer indignity at the hand of the Silla soldiery. That precipice is today called Nak-wha-am, or “Precipice of the Falling Flowers,” a name which, alone, would prove the existence of a poetic faculty in the Korean.

Tongman the first woman ruler in Korea divined from the fire in the frogs’ eyes that Pak-je invaders had already crossed the western border of Silla. Se-o the faithful wife followed her husband to Japan on the flying boulder and became a queen, and she wove the magic silk, on which the King of Silla sacrificed and brought back the light of the sun to his dominions which, upon the departure of Se-o, had been stricken with Egyptian darkness. There was, also, the dancing girl in P’yung-yang, the Korean Judith, who during the occupation of that place by Hideyoshi’s army brought her brother over the wall at night to smite off the head of her captor who always slept bolt upright at the table with a sword in each hand and with only one eye closed at a time! Even after his head bad rolled upon the floor he arose in his place and hurled one of his swords with such tremendous force that its blade went clean through a massive wooden pillar.

There are stories of women notorious for their wickedness, as for instance the princess of Ang-nang who married a[page 70] prince of Ye-mak. Her husband came to live at the Ang- nang court, where, in a closely guarded building, there hung a drum which would give out muffled sounds, without being touched by mortal hands, whenever an enemy was about to attack the frontier. The prince knew that his father, the King of Ye-mak, was going to attack Ang-naug; so he induced his wife, the princess, to gain access to the bell-house and slit the head of the drum with a knife. Soon after, messengers hurried in saying that Ye-mak forces had crossed the frontier, but the King laughed at them saying that he had not heard the drum, and so it could not be true. Too late it was found that the drum had been cut. The prince had already fled to the enemy but the princess was forced to confess her sin and was killed just before Ang-nang fell beneath the Ye-mak sword.

A fruitful source of Korean legends is the wisdom shown by prefects and governors in the solving of knotty problems of jurisprudence. These stories, too, bear witness to the rich fund of humor which lies back of the Korean temperament and which keeps the Korean cheerful and patient through centuries of―what shall we say?—anything but ideal government.

A boy accidentally shot his parent and came weeping to the prefect, who could not make up his mind to execute the rigors of the laws upon him until the prefect’s child, coming in, asked the cause of his father’s perplexity and, being told, exclaimed, “The boy must be killed. If his heart had been right he would not have waited for you to punish him ; he would have killed himself. His tears are only to excite your pity.” So the boy was executed.

A father dying left only a hat, a pair of shoes and a roll of paper to his infant son and gave everything else to his daughter, who was fourteen. When the boy came to maturity he asked his sister to share the money but she refused, and drove him away with nothing except the hat, shoes and paper. A friend advised him to appeal to the magistate. He wrote out his plea on the paper and, putting on the hat and shoes, without which no petitioner could enter the magisterial presence, he went to the governor’s yamen. When he had told his story the governor laughed and said, “Certainly you shall have just-[page 71] ice. It is evident that your father knew the avaricious nature of his daughter and foresaw that she would spend the money before letting it pass to her brother, so he gave it to her to hoard under the supposition that it was her’s, but he gave you the hat and the shoes to wear and the paper where on to write out your accusation against her. I decree that she shall turn over the entire fortune to you, as was evidently your father’s intention.”

A valuable brass bowl had been stolen. The thief was doubtless one of twenty or thirty men, but which one it was impossible to tell. The prefect called them all in, on some pretext or other, and after talking about indifferent subjects dismissed them. As they were passing out the door with their backs turned to him he shouted “Where is that bowl?” The thief, taken by surprise, lost his presence of mind and turned like a flash toward the prefect and thus betrayed himself.

A cow’s tongue was cut off by someone in the night and the prefect, after keeping the cow all day without food, called all the town people together and forced each one to offer the cow some beans in a trough. The cow greedily ate from each one until at last a boy came up, whereupon the cow plunged as if in fright. So the prefect knew who the culprit was. The boy confessed that he had done it because his sick mother had asked for cow’s tongue to eat and he had no money to buy one with. The prefect paid for the cow and gave it to the boy for food.

Two men got into a dispute over the ownership of a long pipe. The prefect said, “Before taking up this case let’s sit down and have a smoke.” He offered each of the men a pipe of medium length. As they smoked the prefect saw that one of the men held his head erect and sat back straight while the other would bend his head or lean forward and smoke. So the prefect said, “There is no use in troubling about this case. I know which of you is the owner. A man who is accustomed to use a long pipe gets accustomed to sitting up straight, otherwise he could not smoke with comfort. So the real owner was discovered.

A countryman was standing at Chong-no looking about him, with a fine yellow dog-skin under his arm. A sharper[page 72] came along, backed up to the countryman and got one end of the skin under his arm. When the countryman started on the sharper exclaimed, “What are you doing with my dogskin?” The countryman insisted that it was his. The matter came before the magistrate, who took the skin in his hand and folded it so that the head did not show. When each man had told his story the prefect looked thoughtfully at the skin and, without addressing either man in particular, said “That’s a rather nice skin but why did you slit one of the ears?” The sharper hastened to answer, “O, that was done about two months ago in a fight.” The real owner said, “Why, no, the dog’s ear is not slit―at least not to my knowledge.” The prefect handed the skin to its proper owner and then said to the sharper, “How comes it that if your dog’s ear was this one is not? I think you need a few weeks in the chain-gang.” A hunter was chasing a fax and had wounded it severely. In a few moments more it would be his ; but a dog came out of a yard and caught the fox, whereupon the owner of the dog claimed the animal. The prefect said, “It is evident that the hunter was after the animal’s skin, whereas the dog was after its flesh. Let each have what he sought.”

Such are a few of the anecdotes told of the Solans of Korea and from these the whole of this class of stories may be judged. They often evince a keen knowledge of human nature and they abound in a dry kind of humor which render them not the least interesting part of the repertoire of the Korean story-teller.

Fascinating though the realm of legend may be, we must hasten an to speak of Korean myths ; and here we take the word in its strict meaning, namely some extra-natural origin of a natural phenomenon. At the very start we must say that the Korean imagination has never proved large enough or buoyant enough for those grand flights of fancy which produced the enchanting myths of Greece. Nor has it been virile enough or elemental enough to evolve the hardy heroes of the Norse mythology. The Greek, Roman and Scandinavian pantheons were filled with figures that loo tired gigantic and awful while in Korea almost all superhuman or extra-human agencies seem, somehow, less than man ; sometimes craftier, often stronger, but seldom nobler or worthier. So, instead[page 73] of giving us a Phoebus Apollo to lead out the chariot of the sun to run his daily course across the sky, the Korean gives us the reason why bed-bugs are so flat. Instead of fancying that the cirrus clouds are flocks of sheep feeding in the ethereal pastures the Korean tells us why sparrows bop on both feet while magpies put one foot before the other. Greek mythology is telescopic ; the Korean is microscopic. If you want to know the origin of fire, of the procession of the equinoxes, of echo or of lightning you must seek it in the Greek mythology but if you want to know how it comes about that the ant has such a small waist or why the louse has a black speck on his breas-you must consult the Korean. To the West, form is everything and detail is but secondary while to the East detail is all important and form is but the background for its display.

A very few samples of mythological stories will suffice. Let us ask why it is that the crab walks backwards and the angleworm has no eyes. The Korean will tell us that in dim antiquity this was not true, but that the crab was blind and had a black band around his body while the angleworm had eyes, But, as it happened, a crab took to wife an angleworm and, not long after, suggested that as he was the provider for the family, his wife should lend him her eyes in exchange for his black band. She did so, with the result that the treacherous crab soon after sued for a divorce and obtained it. The angleworm asked to have her eyes back but the crab refused. She then attacked him so furiously that he backed away. She pursued and kept him backing so long that he formed the habit and has never gotten over it.

The flies and sparrows had a quarrel and agreed to arbitrate. The governor of Py’ang An Province was the arbiter. The flies charged the sparrows with stealing rice and building their nests under the eaves and quarrelling all the time. Without waiting to hear the other side the governor ordered the sparrows to be beaten on the legs. As the blows began to fall, the sparrows hopped up and down and begged the governor to wait till he had heard the other side. He complied, and the sparrows charged the flies with entering the house and defiling the food, and with laying eggs in the rice and destroying it. The governor thereupon ordered the flies beaten ; but they begged so piteously, rubbing their hands to-[page 74] gether the while, that the governor let them off. He decreed however that in memory of the trial the sparrows should forever hop on both feet instead of walking properly and that Wherever flies alight they must rub their hands together!

In like manner Korean lore tells why flounders have the two eyes on the same side of the head, why the shad fish has so many bones, why the moon has on it the picture of a tree with a rabbit beneath it, why sorghum seeds are enveloped in a red case, why clams are simply birds that have fallen into the sen, why hawks are like policemen, how the octopus and the serpent had a lawsuit in which the serpent lost, and had to give up his four legs to the octopus who before that time had enjoyed only four. how the angleworm had his legs all taken away and given to the centipede―these and many another quaint and curious freak of nature are explained to the satisfaction of the Korean, at least.

So far we are able to classify roughly the different types of Korean folk-tales, but outside of these limits there is a Whole realm of miscellaneous fiction so varied in its character almost to defy classification, and are able to enumerate only individual types. If I were allowed to classify arbitrarily I should include under one head all those stories which draw their inspiration from the Workings of human passions. Of the love story, pure and simple, as we know it in the west, Korean folk-lore is entirely innocent Social conditions which prevent all communication between men and women of a marriageable age sufficiently account for this ; and it many well be that this limitation along the line of legitimate affection is to blame for a very wide range of popular literature Which could not be discussed with propriety. Love between man and woman is a thing seldom spoken of among respectable Koreans.

Prominent among the stories of human nature I should place those which have for their motive the passion for revenue. Without doubt the prevalence of this type springs from a state of society in which even-1anded and blind-fold justice finds no place ; in which the principle that “to the victor belongs the spoil”. applies equally to political, industrial and social life. It is a state of society in which influence in vulvar language, “pull” is the chief asset of the politi-[page 75] cian, the merchant or even the coolie. In such a condition of things the passion for revenge finds daily and hourly fool to feed upon, and we see a clear reflection of it in the folk-tales of the Korean.

A woman has been robbed of her ancestral burying- ground by the prefect, and she is told by a fortune-teller that she will be able to secure revenge when she shall succeed in making one egg stand upon another without falling off. She spends years in the attempt, while all the time her wrath burns hot within her. One night the King of Korea, masquerading like Haroun al Raschid of old, peeped through a window and saw an aged woman attempting, time and again, the impossible feat. As he looked, the woman suddenly saw her desire fulfilled. One egg rested on the other and did not fall off. The King demanded admittance and after hearing the whole story gave her her revenge.

A young girl whose father and brother have been wrongfully done to death by the prime-minister, retires to a mountain retreat and practices the sword-dance for years with the settled purpose of thus securing the opportunity to kill the prime minister’s only son, and so cutting off his line. Meanwhile that son has been disowned by his father and wanders away among the mountains where he finds the girl. Neither knows the other, but in time they wed, the girl reserving the right to carry out some dread fate of which she does not tell him. When the time comes for her to go, it transpires that her husband is the very man she has vowed to kill. The husband casts off his father’s name and takes her father’s name, and all conies out right.

A young man mistakenly thinks that he has been grievously injured by a high official. In disguise he secures a position in the household of his intended victim and becomes a confidential servant. As he sees the wished-for day approach, when he can secure his revenge, his master reads his secret in his face and at night puts a manikin in his own bed while he himself hides behind a screen. He sees his would-be murderer enter knife in hand and drive the steel into the supposed body of the official and then escape. The next day, in a most skillful manner he gets the boy back, shows him his error and reinstates him in his old place as if nothing had hap-[page 76] pened. and all without any of the other members of the household suspecting that anything has happened.

Korea also has its stories of detectives and their wiles. The Korean custom of sending government detectives to the country to spy upon governors and prefects and to right the wrongs of the people, forms an easy hook upon which to hang many an interesting tale. These are crude compared with the complicated plots of the West, and yet now and again situations occur which would do credit to Sherlock Holmes himself. In the human heart there is a passionate love of justice. In the end the right must prevail. The Koreans evidently think so, for though there are tragedies enough in actual life there are none in Korean fiction. Tilings come out right in the end. The Korean may be much of a fatalist but he is not a pessimist. His fatalisim is of that cheerful type which takes things as they come. We may rightly say that the comic muse fills the whole stage of Korean drama. It is the villain only who gets killed off.

This craving for justice amounts to a passion, perhaps on the principle that things that are least accessible are the most desired. This feeling has expressed itself in a multitude of stories in which justice, long delayed, has at last been done; justice between King and subject, father and son, friend and friend, master and servant. The Korean story-teller has the same penchant for getting his hero into hot water in order to show his (the teller’s) cleverness in getting him out that prevails in western lands. Fortunately in Korea he always gets out, while in the so-called realism of the West the poor fellow is often left suspended over the coals.

Stories based upon the passion for fame generally take a literary turn. They cluster about the great national examinations. The enormous influence that these examinations have exercised on the life of the Korean is shadowed forth in countless stories relating to the open strife of the competitors, their attempts to cheat or bribe the examiners, to substitute spurious manuscripts, to forge names, if by any means whatever they may arrive at the Mecca of official position. And right here comes out the relative status of literary and military life. The literary man is distinctly above the military. No fame is sufficient that rests only on military success. There are a few [page 77] exceptions but they are very rare. All Korean fiction goes to prove that military glory is thrust upon a man, while it is only literary fame that he eagerly seeks.

Avarice, too, is one of the chords which is struck in Korean tales, but it is usually only as a secondary theme. Rarely is a story devoted exclusively or even mainly to the illustration of this passion. The Koreans are too happy-go-lucky and they have too great a contempt for niggardliness to make the sordidly acquisitive faculty a pleasing theme in fiction. On the other hand the tales of generosity and self-sacrifice, of prodigal and reprehensible extravagance are common enough, for they fit the spirit of the people and go hand in hand with their optimism.

For instance a lad goes forth to seek his fortune. He comes to a village and there finds another boy weeping because he has no money to bury his parent with. Our hero gives the unknown lad every cent he has in the world and then fares on, a beggar. Of how he tramped up and down the country and finally came to the capital of Silla and became a general, of how the Ye-mak enemy had in their ranks a veritabe Goliath, of how our hero went and challenged him, only to find that he was the man whom, as a boy, he had helped with his last cent, and how a happy peace was consummated ―all this forms the kind of story the boys and girls of Korea can listen to by the hour, and ask for more.

Of course we would expect that the peculiar customs of the country would be enshrined in the folk-lore. Nor are we disappointed. The unique stone-fight, the tug-of-war, the detestable custom of widow-stealing and the still more horrible custom called po-sam which was veritable murder, com-mitted for the purpose of forestalling the prediction of the fortune-teller that the bride would soon become a widow, the wiles of the ajun or hereditary hangers on at country prefectures who are looked upon much as Judean publicans, or tax-gatherers were in the days of the Christ; all these themes and many more, based on peculiar Korean customs, swell the volume of Korean folk-lore.

Another class of stories depend for their success upon some startling surprise, some drop from the sublime to the ridiculous. One of the first of these is the story of the man [page 78] who found a monstrous stone Buddha in the woods. From a fissure in its head a pear tree grew and on the tree hung a pear as large as a mail’s head. Such a prize was worth risking life and limb for. Clinging to the bushes that grew from crevices in the ancient image he succeeded in reaching its neck. A wild grape vine afforded him the means to get over he projecting chin but still the nose hung out over him and seemed to bar the way effectively. The only thing to do was to climb up one of the nostrils hoping to find a passage through to the top. All went well until he reached the point where the nostril narrowed, when suddenly a terrific blast of wind came down the orifice and a veritable earthquake shook the mage to its foundations. His last thought as he was hurled though the air to certain death on the rocks below was this— “The god has sneezed.” He landed in a clump of bushes and did not regain consciousness till late in the afternoon when he found to his joy that the same convulsion had shaken off the pear and that it lay at his feet. So he went on his way rejoicing.

It is natural that a land as old as this should be filled with relics of other days and that they should be surrounded with a halo of popular veneration. Even though many of these relics are now lost like the “Holy Grail” yet the stories remain. There was the “Golden Measure” of Silla and the pair of jade flutes that could be sounded only in Kyong-ju, their home There was the magic stone in which one could look and dis-cover the nature of any disease. There was the magic robe that would render its wearer invisible and the “King Stone” from which the ashes of cremated Kings of Silla were cast into the Japan sea. Then there are stories connected with the dolmens which are found all over Korea, but whose origin no one seems to know.

Among the miscellaneous tales are those which tell of the introduction of various things into Korea, or their invention. St. Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland but Yun-san-gun introduced them into Korea. He wanted a few to keep under his bed; but as there were none in Korea he sent to India and secured a boatload. As they were being unloaded some of them escaped, and ever since there have been snakes here. We also have stories about the introduction of tobacco, [page 79] ginseng, bomb-shells, muskets, and musical instruments, some of which came from Japan and some from China, while others were of native invention. One curious tale tells how the Korean alphabet was formed from the lattice work of a Korean door, another one how the Koreans come to wear the remarkable, broad-brimmed hats, as a preventative of conspiracy!

In closing it is necessary to mention the matter of com-parative folk-lore and its relation to Korean folk-lore. The present paper is simply an attempt to give a brief outline of the general style and contents of Korean lore, but beyond that, and more important still, is the relation between the tales of Korea and those of other lands. Here, of course, lies the scientific value of such a study. We want to know the affinities of Korean folk-lore, what elements it borrowed and what elements it lent. It would be quite impossible to attempt such a discussion in this paper, but that it will prove a most interesting field of investigation can be shown in few words. We find in Korea native stories that are almost the exact counterpart of that of Cinderella, which is such a common theme in almost all European countries, of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, of the Uncle Remus stories in which the rabbit outwitted other animals, of Haroun Al Raschid and his nightly peregrinations, of Jonah and the whale, of Red Riding Hood, of Alladin’s Lamp, Sinbad the sailor, and many another type familiar to the scientific folk-lorist of the West.