XIII.

FOLK-LORE AND FIRESIDE STORIES.

The hibachi, or fire-brazier, is to the Japanese household what the hearth or fire-place is in an Occidental home. Around it friends meet, the family gathers, parents consult, children play, the cat purrs, and the little folks listen to the fairy legends or household lore from nurse or grandame.

I have often, in many a Japanese home, seen children thus gathered round the hibachi, absorbing through open eyes and ears and mouth the marvelous stories which disguise the mythology, philosophy, and not a little of the wisdom of the world's childhood. Even the same world, with its beard grown, finds it a delight to listen now and then to the old wives' fables, and I propose in this chapter to give a few of the many short stories with which every Japanese child is familiar, and which I have often heard myself from children, or from the lips of older persons, while sitting round the hibachi, or which I have had written for me. The artist Ōzawa, at my request, sketched such a scene as I have often looked upon. The grandmother has drawn the attention of her infantile audience to the highest tension of interest. Iron-bound top, picture-book, mask of Suzumé, jumping-jack, devil in a band-box, and all other toys are forgotten, while eyes open and mouths gape as the story proceeds. Besides the gayly colored little books, containing the most famous stories for children, there are numerous published collections of tales, some of which are centuries old. Among those current in Japan are some of Indian, Chinese, and perhaps of other origin.

The wonderful story of "Raiko and the Oni" is one of the most famous in the collection of Japanese grandmothers. Its power to open the mouths and distend the oblique eyes of the youngsters long after bed-time, is unlimited. I have before me a little stitched book of seven leaves, which I bought among a lot of two dozen or more in one of the colored print and book shops in Tōkiō. It is four inches long and three wide. On the gaudy cover, which is printed in seven col-

ors, is a picture of Raiko, the hero, in helmet and armor, grasping in both hands the faithful sword with which he slays the ghoul whose frightful face glowers above him. The *hiragana* text and wood-cuts within the covers are greatly worn, showing that many thousand copies have been printed from the original and oft-retouched face of the cherry-wood blocks. The story, thus illustrated with fourteen engravings, is as follows:

A long while ago, when the mikado's power had slipped away into the hands of his regents, the guard at Kiōto was neglected. There was a rumor in the city that *oni*, or demons, frequented the streets late at night, and carried off people bodily. The most dreaded place was at the Ra-jō gate, at the south-western entrance to the palace. Hither Watanabé, by order of Raiko, the chief captain of the guard, started one night, well armed. Wearily waiting for some hours, he became drowsy, and finally fell asleep. Seizing his opportunity, the wary demon put out his arm from behind the gate-post, caught Watanabé by the neck, and began to drag him up in the air. Watanabé awoke, and in an instant seized the imp by the wrist, and, drawing his sword, lopped the oni's arms off, who then leaped into the cloud, howling with pain. In the morning Watanabé returned, and laid the trophy at his master's feet. It is said that an oni's limb will not unite again if kept apart from the stump for a week. Watanabé put the hairy arm in a strong stone box, wreathed with twisted rice-straw, and watched it day and night, lest the oni should recover it. One night a feeble knock was heard at his door, and to his challenge his old aunt's voice replied. Of course, he let the old woman in. She praised her nephew's exploit, and begged him to let her see it. Being thus pressed, as he thought, by his old aunty, he slid the lid aside. "This is my arm," cried the hag, as she flew westward into the sky, changing her form into a tusked and hairy demon. Tracing the oni's course, Raiko and four companions, disguised as *komusō* (wandering priests), reached the pathless mountain Oyé, in Tango, which they climbed. They found a beautiful young girl washing a bloody garment. From her they learned the path to the oni's cave, and that the demons eat the men, and saved the pretty damsels alive. Approaching, they saw a demon cook carving a human body, to make soup of. Entering the cave, they saw *Shu ten dōji*, a hideous, tusked monster, with long red hair, sitting on a pile of silken cushions, with about a hundred retainers around him, at a feast. Steaming dishes were brought in, full of human limbs, cooked in every style. The

young damsels had to serve the demons, who quaffed saké out of human skulls. Raiko and his band pretended to join in the orgies, and amused the demons by a dance, after which they presented them with a bottle of saké which had been mixed with a narcotic. The chief drank a skullful and gave to his retainers. Soon all the demons were asleep, and a thunder-storm of snores succeeded. Then Raiko and his men threw off their disguise, drew sword, and cut off their heads, till the cave flowed blood like a river. The neck of the chief demon was wider than Raiko's sword, but the blade miraculously lengthened, and Raiko cut the monster's head off at one sweep. They then destroyed the treasure, released all the prisoners, and returned to Kiōto in triumph, exposing the huge head along the streets.

The red-haired, red-faced, or red-bearded aliens in Japan, who drink brandy out of tumblers, and then in drunken fury roam in the streets of Yokohama and Nagasaki, are not unfrequently compared to the intoxicated monster beheaded by Raiko. The Japanese child who sees his parents indulge in saké from a tiny cup, and to whom black eyes and hair, and the Japanese form, face, and dress constitute the true standard, is amazed at the great size of the mugs and drinking-glasses from which the men of red beards and faces drink a liquid ten times stronger than saké. Very naturally, to the Japanese imagination and memory the drunken sailor appears a veritable *shu ten dōji*. Nevertheless, the Yokohama coolie does not call him by so classic a name. He frames a compound adjective from the imprecation which most frequently falls from the sailor's lips. In the "Yokohama dialect," the word for sailor is *dammuraisŭ hitō* ("d—n-your-eyes" man).

The story of "The Monkey and the Crab" has as many versions as that of "The Arkansas Traveler." It is continually re-appearing in new dress and with new variations, according to the taste and abilities of the audience. Its flavor, as told by the chaste mother instructing her daughters, or by the vulgar coolie amusing his fellow-loafers while waiting for a job, is vastly different in either case. The most ordinary form of the story is as follows:

Once upon a time there was a crab who lived in a hole on the shady side of a hill. One day he found a bit of rice-cake. A monkey who was just finishing a persimmon met the crab, and offered to exchange its seed for the rice cracknel. The simple-minded crab accepted the proposal, and the exchange was made. The monkey eat up the rice-cake, but the crab backed off home, and planted the seed in his garden.

A fine tree grew up, and the crab was delighted at the prospect of soon enjoying the luscious fruit. He built a nice new house, and used to sit on the balcony, watching the ripening persimmons. One day the monkey came along, and, being hungry, congratulated the crab on his fine tree, and begged for some of the fruit, offering to climb and gather it himself. The crab politely agreed, requesting his guest to throw down some of the fruit that he might enjoy it himself. The ungrateful rascal of a monkey clambered up, and, after filling his pockets, eat the ripest fruit as fast as he could, pelting the crab with the seeds. The crab now determined to outwit the monkey, and, pretending to enjoy the insults as good jokes, he dared the monkey to show his skill, if he could, by descending head foremost. The monkey, to show how versatile were his accomplishments, accepted the friendly challenge, and turning flank—not tail—for Japanese monkeys have no tails—he began to come down head foremost. Of course, all the persimmons rolled out of his pockets. The crab, seizing the ripe fruit, ran off to his hole. The monkey, waiting till he had crawled out, gave him a sound thrashing, and went home.

Just at that time a rice-mortar was traveling by with his several apprentices, a wasp, an egg, and a sea-weed. After hearing the crab's story, they agreed to assist him. Marching to the monkey's house, and finding him out, they arranged their plans and disposed their forces so as to vanquish their foe on his return. The egg hid in the ashes on the hearth, the wasp in the closet, the sea-weed near the door, and the mortar over the lintel. When the monkey came home he lighted a fire to steep his tea, when the egg burst, and so bespattered his face, that he ran howling away to the well for water to cool the pain. Then the wasp flew out and stung him. In trying to drive off this fresh enemy, he slipped on the sea-weed, and the rice-mortar, falling on him, crushed him to death. Wasn't that splendid? The wasp and the mortar and sea-weed lived happily together ever afterward.

The moral against greedy and ungrateful people needs no pointing. In one of the recently published elementary works on natural philosophy, written in the vernacular of Tōkiō, I have seen the incident of the bursting egg utilized to illustrate the dynamic power of heat at the expense of the monkey. Another story, used to feather the shaft aimed at greedy folks, is that of the elves and the envious neighbor. The story is long, but, condensed, is as follows:

A wood-cutter, overtaken by a storm and darkness among the

mountains, seeks shelter in a hollow tree. Soon he saw little creatures, some of a red color, wearing blue clothes, and some of a black color, wearing red clothes. Some had no mouth; others had but one eye. There were about one hundred of them. At midnight the elves, having lighted a fire, began to dance and carouse, and the man, forgetting his fright, joined them and began to dance. Finding him so jolly a companion, and wishing him to return the next night, they took from the left side of his face a large wen that disfigured it, as pawn, and disappeared. The next day, having told his story in high glee, an envious neighbor, who was also troubled with a wen on the right side of his face, resolved to possess his friend's luck, and went out to the same place. At night the elves assembled to drink and enjoy a jig. The man now appeared, and, at the invitation of the chief elf, began to dance. Being an awkward fellow, and not to be compared with the other man, the elves grew angry, and said, "You dance very badly this time. Here, you may have your pledge, the wen, back again." With that an elf threw the wen at the man. It stuck to his cheek, and he went home, crying bitterly, with two wens instead of one.

Stories of cats, rabbits, dogs, monkeys, and foxes, who are born, pass through babyhood, are nursed, watched, and educated by anxious parents with all due moral and religious training, enjoy the sports proper to their age, fall in love, marry, rear a family, and live happy ever afterward to a green old age, form the staple of the tiny picture-books for tiny people. When told by garrulous nurses or old grannies, the story becomes a volume, varied and colored from rich imagination or actual experience.

A great many funny stories are told about blind men, who are often witty wags. They go about feeling their way with a staff, and blowing a double-barreled whistle which makes a peculiarly ugly noise. They shave their heads, and live by shampooing tired travelers at hotels, or people who like to be kneaded like a sponge or dough. They also loan out money at high rates of interest, public sympathy being their sure guard against loss. Even among these men the spirit of caste and rank prevails, and the chief blind man of a city or town usually holds an official diploma. On the occasion of such an award the bald-pates enjoy a feast together. After imbibing freely, they sing songs, recite poetry, and crack jokes, like merry fellows with eyes, and withal, at them because having eyes, some can not see—to read. Here is a sample. An illiterate country gawk, while in the capital, saw a learned man reading with eyeglasses on. Thereupon,

he hastened to an optician's, and bought a pair. He was both annoyed and surprised to find he could not make out a word.

A story is told of two men who were stone-deaf, who met together one morning, when the following dialogue took place:

First Post. "Good-morning. Are you going to buy saké?"

Second Post. "No. I am going to buy saké."

Third Post. "Oh, excuse me, I thought you were going to buy saké."

I heard the following story from one of my students from Fukui. It is a favorite with the professional story-tellers in Tōkiō. It reminds one of the Spaniard who is said to have put on magnifying spectacles while eating grapes, or the Yankee who strapped green eyeglasses on his horse while feeding him on shavings:

A very economical old fellow, named Kisaburo, once took lodgings near a shop to which the *élite* of the epicures of Yedo resorted daily for the delicacy of eels fried in soy. The appetizing odor was wafted into his quarters, and Kisaburo, being a man of strong imagination, daily enjoyed his frugal meal of boiled rice by his palate, and the savory smoke of eels through his olfactories, and thus saved the usual expense of fish and vegetables.

The eel-frier, on discovering this, made up his mind to charge his stingy neighbor for the smell of his eels, and paid him a visit with his bill made out. Kisaburo, taking it in good humor, called his wife, who brought out the cash-box. After jingling the bag of money, he touched it on the bill, and replacing it in the box under lock, ordered his wife to return it to its place. The eel-man, amazed at such financiering, cried out, "Well, are you not going to pay me?" "Oh no!" said Kisaburo, "you have charged me for the smell of your eels; I have paid you back with the sound of my money."

A story very similar to this, which I have transcribed as I heard it, is given by Rabelais, Third Book, thirty-seventh chapter.

Stories illustrating the freaks of absent-minded men are very numerous. Here is one, told me by a village lad from near Takéfu, in Echizen. A farmer's wife about to enjoy the blessing of addition to her family besought her husband to visit a famous shrine of Kuan-on, the Goddess of Mercy, and make an offering and pray for easy deliverance of her offspring. The good wife packed up a lunch for her husband in a box of lacquered wood, and took out one hundred cash (about one and a half cents) from their hoard, which was kept in an old bag made of rushes, in a jar under the floor, as a gift to be

thrown into the temple coffer to propitiate the deity. At early morn the man prepared to start, but in a fit of absent-mindedness, instead of his lunch-box, he took the pillow (a Japanese pillow is often a box of drawers holding the requisites of a woman's coiffure, with a tiny bolster on the top), and, carefully wrapping it up, set off, and in due time arrived at the shrine. Now, the husband was less devout than his spouse, and, being ten miles away from her tongue and eye, he decided to throw but ten cash into the sacred coffers, and spend the remaining ninety on a bottle of saké, to be served by a pretty waiter-girl at the adjoining tea-house. So he divided his money into two packages, but in his absent-mindedness he unintentionally flung the larger amount into the temple box. Annoyed on discovering his bad luck, he offered his prayers in no very holy frame of mind, and then sat down to enjoy his lunch. Not being able to eat the hair-pins, pomatum, etc., in the pillow-box, he made his way to an eating-shop to buy a bit of *mochi* (rice-dough) to satisfy his hunger. Again his greed and absent-mindedness led him to grief, for, seeing a large round piece of what he thought was good dough for short-cake for only five cash, he bought it and hurried of, thinking the shop-girl had made a mistake, which she would soon discover at her cost. When he went to eat it, however, he found it was only a plaster show-piece for the dough. Chewing the cud of bitter reflections, the hungry man at dark reached, as he supposed, his home; and seeing, as he thought, his wife lighting a lantern, greeted her with a box on the ear. The woman, startled at such conduct, screamed, bringing her husband to her relief, and the absent-minded man, now recovering his senses again, ran for his life; but when beyond danger he relapsed into his old habits, and reaching his own dwelling, found himself begging pardon of his own amazed wife for having boxed her ears.

One of the many tales of filial revenge (see page 222) told to children is that of "the Soga boys." In the time of Yoritomo, while on a hunt in the mountains, one Kudo shot and killed Kawadzu. Of the slain man's two sons, one was sent to a monastery in the Hakoné mountains, to be educated for the Buddhist priesthood. There, as he grew up, he learned all about the death of his father, and who his murderer was. From that time, he thought of nothing but how to compass his death. Meanwhile, the other son was adopted by one Soga, and became a skillful fencer. At Ōiso, on the Tōkaidō, the two orphans finally meet, lay their plans, feast together, and prepare to join the great hunt of Yoritomo on the slopes of Mount Fuji. On

the night after, they attack the quarters where the tired Kudo lies asleep. They beat down the servants who try to defend him, and sate their revenge by cutting off his head.

Of foxes and badgers I have written elsewhere. I have in this chapter of folk-lore, given only a few specimens from a great storehouse. This last is called "The Boy of Urashima."

In the reign of the Empress Suiko (A.D. 593–628) there lived, on a small island off the coast of Tango, a poor fisherman and his wife. Though too poor to provide more than the barest necessaries of life, they managed, being pious folks, to keep the lamp always burning in the shrine of Riu Jin, the sea-god, their patron. Night and morning they offered up their prayers, and, though their meals might be scanty, they never failed to burn a stick of incense at the shrine.

To this good couple a dear son was born, who grew up to be pious and dutiful, and to be the staff of his aged parents. When they were too old to go out to fish, Tarō, the son, caught enough fish to support himself and them. Now, it happened that one day in autumn Tarō was out, as usual, in his boat, though the sea was rough and the waves high. The increasing storm finally compelled him to seek shelter in his hut. He uttered a prayer to the sea-god, and turned his prow homeward. Suddenly there appeared, on the crest of the waves, a divine being, robed in white, riding upon a large tortoise. Approaching the wearied fisherman, he greeted him kindly, and said, "Follow me, and I will make you a happy man."

Tarō, leaving his boat, and mounting the tortoise with his august companion, the tortoise sped away with marvelous celerity; and on they journeyed for three days, passing some of the most wonderful sights human being ever beheld. There were ponds of perfectly transparent water filled with the fish he daily caught, and others with strange species. The roads were lined with rare and fragrant trees laden with golden fruit, and flowers more beautiful than he had ever seen or imagined. Finally, they came to a great gate of white marble, of rare design and imposing proportion. Richly dressed ladies and pages were waiting to welcome him. He entered a golden palanquin, and amidst trains of courtiers was borne to the palace of the king, and treated with honor and courtesy. The splendors of this palace it is not possible to describe in the language of earth. Tarō was assigned to one of the fairest apartments, and beautiful girls waited upon him, and a host of servants were ready to do his bidding. Feasts, music, songs, dancing, gay parties, were given in his hon-

or. Many of the people around him seemed very remarkable beings. Some had heads made of shells, some of coral. All the lovely colors of nacre, the rarest tints which man can see beneath the deep-blue sea when the ocean's floor is visible, appeared on their dresses and ornaments. Their jewels of pearls and precious stones and gold and silver were profuse, but wrought in exquisite art. Tarō could scarcely tell whether the fascinating creatures were human or not; but he was very happy, and his hosts so kind that he did not stop to notice their peculiarities. That he was in fairy-land he knew, for such wealth was never seen, even in king's palaces, on earth.

After Tarō had spent, as he supposed, seven days at the king's palace, he wished to go and see his parents. He felt it was wrong to be so happy when he was uncertain of their fate in the upper world. The king allowed his request, and, on parting with him, gave him a box. "This," said he, "I give you on condition that you never open it, nor show it to any one, under any circumstances whatever." Tarō, wondering, received it, and bid adieu to the king. He was escorted to the white marble gate, and, mounting the same tortoise, reached the spot where he had left his boat. The tortoise then left him.

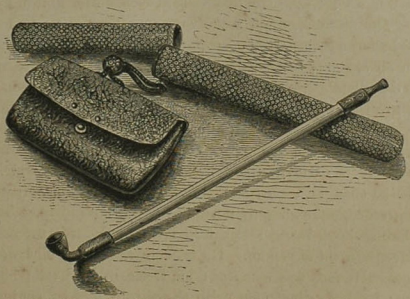
Tarō was all alone. He looked round, and saw nothing on the strand. The mountains and rocks were familiar, but no trace of his parents' hut was seen. He began to make inquiries, and finally learned from an old gray-headed fisherman that, centuries before, the persons he described as his parents had lived there, but had been buried so long ago that their names could be read only by scraping the moss and lichens off the very oldest stones of the grave-yard in the valley yonder. Thither Tarō hied, and after long search found the tomb of his dear parents. He now, for the first time since he had left his boat—as he thought, a few days ago—felt the pangs of sorrow. He felt an irresistible longing to open the box. He did so. A purple vapor, like a cloud, issued and suffused his head for a moment. A cold shiver ran through him. He tried to rise; his limbs were stiff and bent. His face was wrinkled; his teeth dropped out; his limbs trembled; he was an old man, with the weight of four centuries on him. His infirmities were too great for flesh to bear; he died a few days afterward.

I have given the story as it was current in Echizen. I have also heard it told with the location on the shores of the Bay of Yedo. Another version makes the strand of a river in Shinano the place of Tarō's departure and return. In another form of the story, Tarō re-

turns to find his parents dwelling in a glorious mansion. After greetings are over, the old folks are curious to know what the box contains. Tarō, persuaded, opens it, to find himself, alone and old, on a desolate shore. The story is undoubtedly very old. It is found in several books, and has been often made the subject of art. The fishermen in various parts of Japan worship the good boy of Urashima, who, even in the palaces of the sea-gods, forgot not his old parents.

The four following stories are a few of many told of a famous judge, named Ōka, who, for wisdom, shrewdness, and judicial acumen, may be called the Solomon of Japan. I first heard of his wondrous decisions when in Tōkiō, but there is a book of anecdotes of him, and a record of his decisions, called the *Ōka Jinseidan*. I suppose they are true narrations.

A certain man possessed a very costly pipe, made of silver inlaid with gold, of which he was very proud. One day a thief stole it. After some vain search, Ōka heard that a man in a certain street had such a pipe, but it was not certain whether it was his own or the stolen article. He found out the truth concerning the pipe in the following ingenious manner.



Japanese Pipe of Bamboo and Brass, Pipe-case, and Tobacco-pouch.

A Japanese pipe is usually made of a tiny bowl, or bowl-piece, fitted to a mouth-piece with a bamboo tube. Sometimes all the parts are in one, the material being metal or porcelain. The mild tobacco, cut into finest shreds, like gossamer, is rolled up in pellets, and lighted at a live coal in the brazier. After one or two whiffs, a fresh ball is

introduced. A native will thus sit by the hour, mechanically rolling up these tobacco pills, utterly oblivious of the details of the act. Like certain absent-minded people, who look at their watches a dozen times, yet can not tell, when asked, what time it may be, so a Japanese, while talking at ease, will often be unable to remember whether he has smoked or not. After long mechanical practice, his nimble fingers with automatic precision roll the pellet to a size that exactly fills the bowl of the pipe.

The shrewd judge found an opportunity to see the suspected man a short time after the theft. He noticed him draw out the golden pipe, and abstractedly roll up a globule of tobacco from his pouch. It was too small. On turning to the brazier, and turning the mouth of the bowl sideward or downward, the pellet rolled out. Here was positive proof to Ōka that the golden pipe was not his own. The thief, on being charged with the theft, confessed his guilt, and was punished.

On another occasion a seller of pickled vegetables of various sorts, a miserly old fellow, being rich, and fearing thieves, kept his gold in a deep dish full of *dai-kon* (radishes), preserved in a liquid mixture composed of their own fermented juice, salt, and the skin of rice-grains. When long kept, the mass has a most intolerable odor, and to remove the smell from the hands after working in it stout scrubbing with ashes is necessary. Now, it so happened that one of the neighbors found out the whereabouts of the pickler's savings, and, when his back was turned, stole. The old pickler kept his heart at the bottom of his radishes, and on his return, on examination, found his treasure gone. Forthwith informing the judge, Ōka called in all the neighbors, and, after locking the doors, began, to the amazement of all and the horror of one, to smell the hands of those present. The unmistakable odor of dai-kon clung to one man, who thereupon confessed, disgorged, and received punishment.

Cases which other judges failed to decide were referred to Ōka. Often the very threat of bringing a suspected man before this Solomon secured confession after other means had failed.

A young mother, being poor, was obliged to go out to service, and to leave her little daughter at the house of another woman to bring up for her. When the child grew up to womanhood, the mother was able to leave service, expecting to live with her daughter, and enjoy her love. To her surprise, on going to the house of the woman who had charge of her daughter, the woman claimed the girl as her own child, and refused to give her up.

When brought before Ōka, there being no evidence but the conflicting testimony of the women, who both claimed maternity, the judge ordered them each to take hold of an arm of the young girl and pull. Whoever was the strongest should have her.

Not daring to disobey, the true mother reluctantly took gentle hold, while the other claimant seized a hand, and, bracing herself for the struggle, pulled with all her might. No sooner did the girl utter a cry of pain than the true mother dropped her hand, refusing to try again. Her friends urged her to continue the trial, and her antagonist dared her to go on, but the mother was firm. The judge, silent and attentive the while, then angrily addressed the cruel woman as a deceiver, void of all maternal feeling, who regarded not the pain of her pretended offspring. He then ordered the girl to be restored to her true mother. The false claimant was dismissed in disgrace. Mother and child were overjoyed, and the witnesses astonished at such judicial wisdom.

In another case, a rich merchant of Yedo went to Kiōto on business, and was absent thirteen months. On his return he found that his wife had been unfaithful to him. After fruitless efforts to extort her secret and find her paramour, he went to Ōka. On a certain day, all the male relations, friends, and neighbors assembled, and, one by one, were called into the judgment-hall, and questioned. Ōka told the husband to bring with him his cat, which had for years been a pet in the house. With the cat quietly nestled at his side, he leisurely questioned each person. No clue could be obtained, until one young man appeared and took his seat, as usual, on his heels and knees, on the matting. The cat, now interested, ran briskly up, rubbed itself against his knees, and, being stroked by the man, finally climbed up in his lap, and cuddled itself up as if perfectly familiar with that comfortable place. All this time the young man was looking in the judge's face, and answering his questions, forgetful of the cat. The questioning being finished, the judge ordered the officers to bind the man and conduct him to prison. The man, who was inwardly congratulating himself on his clever answers, and his freedom even from suspicion, thought Ōka was helped by the gods, and confessed his crime.

I have an ivory and a wood carving, both nitsuki, representing the Japanese form of the story of Rip Van Winkle, which is, perhaps, a universal myth. The ivory figure is that of an old man leaning on the handle of an axe. His hair is long and white, and his snowy beard sweeps his breast and falls below his girdle. He is intently watching

two female figures playing a game of checkers. The story (of Chinese origin) is, as told by Japanese story-tellers, as follows:

Lu-wen was a pious wood-cutter, who dwelt at the base of the majestic and holy mountain Tendai, the most glorious peak of the Nan-lin range, in China. Though he thought himself familiar with the paths, he for some reason one day lost his way, and wandered about, having his axe with him. He did not care, however, because the beauty of the landscapes, the flowers, and the sky seemed to possess his senses, and he gave himself up to the ecstasy of the hour, enjoying all the pleasant emotions of holy contemplation. All at once he heard a crackling sound, and immediately a fox ran out before him and into the thickets again. The wood-cutter started to pursue it. He ran some distance, when suddenly he emerged into a space where two lovely ladies, seated on the ground, were engaged in playing a game of checkers. The bumpkin stood still and gazed with all his sight at the wonderful vision of beauty before him. The players appeared to be unaware of the presence of an intruder. The wood-cutter still stood looking on, and soon became interested in the game as well as in the fair players. After some minutes, as he supposed, he bethought himself to return. On attempting to move away, his limbs felt very stiff, and his axe-handle fell to pieces. Stooping down to pick up the worm-eaten fragments, he was amazed to find, instead of his shaven face of the morning, a long white beard covering his bosom, while, on feeling his head, he discovered on it a mass of silken white hair.

The wrinkled old man, now dazed with wonder, hobbled down the mountain to his native village. He found the streets the same, but the houses were filled with new faces; crowds of children gathered round him, teasing and laughing at him; the dogs barked at the stranger; and the parents of the children shook their heads and wondered among themselves as to whence the apparition had come. The old man, in agony of despair, asked for his wife and children and relatives. The incredulous people set him down as a fool, knowing nothing of whom he asked, and treating his talk as the drivel of lunatic senility. Finally, an old grandam hobbled up, and said she was a descendant of the seventh generation of a man named Lu-wen. The old man groaned aloud, and, turning his back on all, retraced his weary steps to the mountain again. He was never heard of more, and it is believed he entered into the company of the immortal hermits and spirits of the mountain.