



181. THE WATER SPIRIT

Retired Emperor Yōzei's palace compound was very large, and after he died the street we now know as Reizei'in Lane was put through it. The northern part was rapidly built over with houses. Only the southern section kept a few reminders of the garden that had once been there, and one of these was a pond.

One summer night a man stretched out on the veranda of the former palace's west wing, the building itself having survived only to pass into the hands of commoners. As he lay there, an old man three feet tall came and felt over his face. Too frightened to move, he pretended he was asleep until the old man softly got up and walked away. By the bright light of the moon and stars he watched the old man go to the edge of the pond and vanish. Not having been dredged or cleaned within living memory, the pond was choked with waterweeds and looked thoroughly evil. Once more the man shivered with fear.

Night after night now the old man came back and felt over the faces of those who were sleeping nearby. Everyone who even heard the story was terrified. Finally another man spoke up. "All right," said he, "I'll catch that fellow!" He lay down alone on the veranda with a length of stout rope beside him.

It was a long wait. Past midnight, when he had actually begun to

doze off, he felt something cold touch his face. He leapt up, bound whatever it was with the rope, and tied it to the railing round the veranda.

Next, he called for light. There the creature was, a little old man three feet tall and dressed in pale yellow, blinking in the glare. He seemed about to expire. No questioning got any answer out of him, but after a while he smiled, glanced around, and said in a thin, sad little voice, "Would you please bring me a tub of water?"

When they put a big tub before him, he stretched out his neck to see his reflection. "I'm a water spirit, you see," he said, and collapsed with a splash into the tub. There was nothing left of him, though the tub was suddenly full to overflowing. The rope floated, still knotted, in the water.

The astonished people carried off the tub, taking care not to spill a drop, and emptied it into the pond. The old man was never seen or felt again.



182.

THE MASTER OF STREAMS AND FALLS

The remarkable Chūsan, a monk of Kōfukuji in Nara, was said by some to be supernatural. People believed he had actually been born from a stream.

Once Chūsan and several companions set off in a time of terrible drought on a pilgrimage to the East. Even the springs which never failed had all gone dry, and many people were dying of thirst and starvation. People came from far off to get water from one spring in Ōmi province which still ran clear and sweet. When a woman on her way back from this spring, with a jar of water on her head, passed Chūsan on the trail, he asked her for a drink.

"You're a proper holy man," she answered. "Why don't you make a spring right here and get your drink yourself? I've carried this