

water a long way and I've a lot farther to go. I don't see why you should have to beg any off *me!*"

"You're right," said Chūsan, "I'll do that." He strode to a rock on the hillside, drew his sword, and struck off a chunk. Clear, cool water gushed out. The local people were amazed at their new spring.

Chūsan also went to the Nachi waterfall, where holy men have practiced since time immemorial. The mountain torrent there tumbles gleaming white, four hundred feet down a cliff to the valley floor. When Chūsan chanted the Heart Sutra amid the roaring and the spray, the waters reversed their flow, and the living Thousand-Armed Kannon appeared on the rocky lip of the falls.

Years later he went to the Minoo waterfall where En no Gyōja, the wizard of the mountains, once met the Indian sage Nāgārjuna. Then Chūsan himself turned into Thousand-Armed Kannon, went straight up through the falls, and vanished forever.

183.

THE DRAGON CAVE

The Dragon Cave at Murō in Yamato province is where the Dragon King Zentatsu lives. His first home was Sarusawa Pond in Nara, but a long time ago an imperial concubine drowned herself in the pond and the dragon had to escape to the pool at Kōzen in the Kasuga Hills. Then someone dumped a corpse in the Kōzen pool and the dragon had to flee again, this time to Murō.

Eventually the Venerable Nittai went into the cave at Murō to worship the dragon. After three or four hundred yards of pitch darkness, he came out into light as bright as day and saw a palace. Dazzlingly brilliant, jeweled blinds swayed gently in the breeze along its south side, and he glimpsed behind them a jade desk with a copy of the Lotus Sutra on it. A voice from behind the blinds asked him who he was and what he wanted. Nittai gave his name and said he had come to worship the Dragon King.

"You mustn't look at me," replied the Dragon King. "Leave the

cave and I'll meet you three hundred yards beyond it."

Nittai obeyed and went to wait. The Dragon King rose from the earth before him, fully adorned and crowned, till Nittai could see his whole body down to the waist. After Nittai had contemplated him for a while, the Dragon King disappeared.

Nittai built a shrine on the spot and made a statue of the dragon. They say it is still there. When the monks of Murōji, the temple nearby, pray for rain, they chant sutras at this shrine. When their prayers work, a black cloud rises over the Dragon Cave and soon covers the whole sky. Then it rains.

184.

GOLD FROM THE DRAGON PALACE

A poor young man of the Capital was so unable to make a decent living that every moon on Kannon's day, the eighteenth, he worshipped Kannon and visited as many temples as he could to pray for help. This had been his custom for years.

One year, in the ninth moon, he was going from temple to temple as usual when he passed through southern Yamashina, which was little inhabited in those days. In a deserted stretch of hills he met an older man carrying a foot-long spotted snake on the end of a pole. As the young man walked by, the little snake moved.

"Where are you going?" the young man asked. The older man replied that he was on his way to the Capital and asked the same question back. The young man explained his pilgrimage and inquired about the snake.

"I've a purpose for it," the older man answered.

"Won't you let me have it? Killing's a sin. Give it to me, for love of Kannon. This is Kannon's day, after all."

"You may talk of Kannon, but Kannon protects people as well as snakes. I need this snake. I don't particularly want to kill it, but I have to live somehow."

"What do you want it for?"

"Well, you see, I make the *nyoi* wands that monks carry when they preside at a rite. The head of a *nyoi* is curled like a fern shoot

and made of ox horn. I need the oil from this little snake to work the horn into the right shape.”

“What do you do with your *nyoi* then?”

“What a question! I sell it to a monk! That’s my trade!”

“I see. You need the snake, and I certainly can’t ask you to give it to me for nothing. Would you take my coat for it?”

The man agreed and the exchange was made.

“Where’d you get the snake?” the young man asked, and learned that it was from a pond nearby. After the older man had gone on, he took the snake to the pond, scraped the sand of the bank down a little to where it was cool, and let the snake go. The snake went right into the water. With his mind now at rest, he continued his pilgrimage.

A few hundred yards further on, a pretty twelve-year-old girl, very nicely dressed, came toward him. He could not imagine what she was doing in so lonely a place.

“You’re so kind!” she said. “I’ve come to thank you.”

“Kind? What do you mean?”

“Why, you saved my life! When I told my parents they said I should go straight to thank you and tell you how grateful they are. That’s why I’m here.”

He realized this must be the snake, and though touched he was also afraid. “Where are your parents, then?” he asked.

“Over there. I’ll take you to see them!” She led him toward the pond.

He was so frightened that he would gladly have run away, but when she promised that no one would hurt him he instead followed her reluctantly to the water’s edge. She asked him to wait while she announced he was coming, then vanished. His mind reeled.

“I’ll take you now,” said the girl, suddenly back. “Please close your eyes.”

He did so and was just feeling himself drifting off when she told him to open them again. A magnificent gate, far finer than any palace gate in our land, stood before him. Having let her parents know he was there, she came out again and asked him to follow her.

He obeyed timidly. Inside the gate rose a dazzling palace made of every precious metal and stone. She led him to a central pavilion built all of shining multicolored jade, with the most beautiful floors

and curtains. The place seemed like paradise.

Out came a gentleman in his early sixties, so distinguished that the young man was quite overawed. "Please come in," he said.

For a moment the young man wondered who he was talking to. "You're too kind, sir," he finally replied. "May I?"

"Of *course* you may! I didn't come to greet you for nothing! Come in!"

With great hesitation the young man did so. His host told him what a joy it was to welcome him, in view of the outstanding kindness of what he had done.

"But I've done nothing, sir!" the young man protested.

"The world knows well enough how parents love their children," the gentleman went on. "I've a good many children myself, and the youngest is this girl. Today she wanted to play in the pond. Oh, I tried to stop her, but she wouldn't listen! Then she came back and told me how she'd been caught and was going to be killed when you came along and saved her. I can't tell you how grateful I am!"

Finally the young man grasped that this was the girl's father.

Next, the gentleman had some overpoweringly splendid servants serve a feast. As he ate, he pressed his guest so insistently to do so too that the nervous young man let himself be persuaded. It was a delicious meal.

"I'm a Dragon King," the gentleman began when the dishes were finally cleared away, "and I've lived here since time out of mind. What I'd really like to give you in thanks is a Wishing Jewel, but I'm afraid the people of Japan are too evil at heart and can't be trusted with one. I've something else for you instead, though." He had a servant fetch a box from which he took a rice cake three inches thick, made of pure gold.

He broke the cake in two and gave the young man half. "Don't use this up all at once," he warned. "If you break off a little as you need it, you'll be quite comfortable the rest of your life."

The young man put the cake in the fold of his robe. At the appropriate moment he excused himself, and the girl took him back to the gate. Again she told him to close his eyes. When he opened them, they were both standing by the pond. The girl said she would have to go now and promised him she would never forget his kindness. Then she disappeared.

When he got home, his family clamored about how long he had

been gone. What he had thought an hour or two had actually been several days!

He told no one about his golden cake but quietly broke off bits and exchanged them for what he needed. Since the cake always grew back to its old size, no matter how much he broke off, he became very rich. All his life he served Kannon faithfully, and after he died the golden cake disappeared. It did not pass on to his children.

185.

THE POND GOD TAKES A WIFE

A woman in Shimōsa province often took her stepdaughter, a girl of twelve or so, to the edge of a large pond and announced to the god of the pond that the girl was his to marry. She did this once when a gale was blowing and the pond was very rough. The girl was so frightened that her hair stood on end; and what with the wind and waves, and the ominous darkness of the day, she fled home again as fast as she could go with the awful feeling that something was behind her.

Dashing panic-stricken into the house, she clutched at her father and began telling him what had happened. Next, her stepmother ran in just ahead of a huge snake. The snake stared at the girl, the tongue in its huge head flickering.

The father was no great lord, but he was still quick-witted. “She’s *my* daughter,” he told the snake. “This woman here is just her stepmother and she’s got no right to give her away. I’m the only one who can do that and I refuse. No, a wife’s bound to do as her husband says, and as far as I’m concerned *she’s* the one who’s yours, if you want her. Go ahead, take her!”

While father and daughter made their escape, the snake slithered toward the stepmother instead and coiled around her. They say she went mad and began turning into a snake herself.

The story was going around one summer ten years or so ago, which would be about 1270. Rumor had it that on a certain day that fall, both snakes would rise from the pond during a