



While the two were bathing, a couple of servants from the city came into the mountains to fetch firewood. Passing the bath shed, they noticed smoke rising from the chimney, and decided that as long as someone was already heating water they might as well go in and have a soak themselves. They put down their loads and went in to find two old monks in the big tub. One of them seemed to have some sort of pain in his butt. The monks wanted to know who the two men were, but the men, for their part, noticed that the bath shed stank to high heaven — so horribly, in fact, that they both instantly got a splitting headache. Terrified, they escaped as fast as they could.

Later on the Japanese tengu possessed someone and told the whole story.

35.

THE INVINCIBLE PAIR

In Sanuki province there still is a large body of water named Mano Pond that Kōbō Daishi made out of kindness toward the people who live nearby. It is so big, and the dikes around it are so high, that it looks more like a lake than a pond. Its deep waters harbor countless fish great and small, and at the bottom there once lived a dragon.

One day this dragon came out of the water to sun himself, and slithered around on an isolated section of the dike in the shape of a little snake. Just then the tengu of Mount Hira, far off in Ōmi province, flew over in the form of a kite. He dove at the little snake, caught him in his talons, and soared up again into the sky.

A dragon is, of course, immensely strong, but this one had been taken so suddenly that all he could do was hang in the tengu's

claws. The tengu for his part meant to crush the snake and eat him, but that turned out to be impossible since, after all, it was a mighty dragon he had seized and no weakling serpent. Not knowing quite what else to do, the tengu took the dragon back to his lair on Mount Hira and stuffed him into a hole in the rocks so small that the dragon could hardly move. The poor dragon was miserable. Not having a drop of water he could not fly away, and for several days he lay there waiting to die.

Meanwhile the tengu was planning a little foray to Mount Hiei to catch himself a nice fat monk. That night he perched in a tall tree and kept his eyes on the dormitory across the valley on the side of the hill. A monk came out on the veranda to relieve himself. When he picked up the water jar to wash his hands, the tengu pounced, seized him, and carried him off to Mount Hira, where he stuffed him into the hole with the dragon. The terrified monk thought he was done for, but the tengu went off again.

From out of the darkness a voice asked, "Who are you? Where did you come from?" The monk explained what had happened — so suddenly that he still had his water jar — and asked who had spoken. The dragon introduced himself and told his own story. "It's very tight in this hole, you know," he groaned, "but I can't fly away because I haven't a drop of water!"

"Maybe there's some left in this jar," suggested the monk.

"Oh, how wonderful! What luck you're here! If there is, I can save us both. I'll take you back home!"

With joyous anticipation the monk turned the jar upside down over the dragon and a drop of water fell out. The dragon was wet.

"All right," said the dragon, "don't be afraid. Just close your eyes and sit on my back. I'll never forget what I owe you."

The dragon turned into a small boy, took the monk on his back, smashed the rock walls of their hole, and burst forth amid thunderclaps and bolts of lightning. Huge clouds gathered in the sky and heavy rain fell. The monk was frightened but trusted the dragon enough to hang on. He was deposited instantly right where he had started, on the veranda of his dormitory on Mount Hiei. The dragon flew off.

With all the crashing and roaring, the other residents of the dormitory were sure that any second a bolt would destroy them. Then suddenly the thunder stopped and blackness fell. When the

sky cleared, they discovered their colleague who had vanished the other night, and he answered their astonished questions by telling them his story.

The dragon pursued the tengu everywhere in search of revenge. At last when the tengu was cruising the streets of the Capital, disguised as a warrior-monk soliciting donations for his temple, the dragon swooped down and killed him with one blow. Suddenly the tengu was a kestrel with a broken wing, and he was trampled underfoot by the passersby.

On Mount Hiei the monk repaid his debt by reading the sutras faithfully on behalf of his friend the dragon. Each had saved the other's life — surely the result of a deep karmic bond between them in lives gone by.

36.

RAIN

In Nara there used to be a temple called Ryūenji, or Temple of the Dragon Garden. The single monk who lived there served the Lotus Sutra, expounding a chapter a day and chanting its text. A dragon, moved by the chanting, would come in human form every day to listen, and when the monk found out who his visitor was the two became fast friends.

Then a drought struck. Without rain the crops withered and died, till nobles and commoners alike faced terrible suffering. The emperor got a petition reminding him about the monk and the dragon (for their friendship had become widely known) and suggesting that the monk be commanded to have the dragon make rain.

The emperor called in the monk and made him a little speech at the end of which he gave his order. "When the dragon comes for your daily sermon," he said, "you're going to direct him to make rain. I'll banish you from Japan forever if you don't."

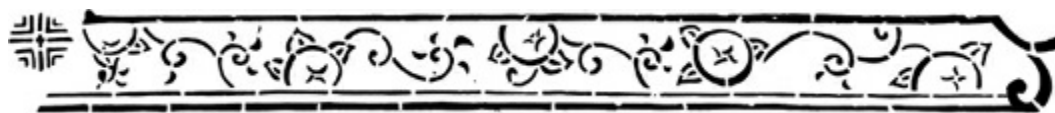
The monk was very upset. When he got home he explained the situation to the dragon, who said he would gladly give his life for his friend in thanks for all the Sutra had done for him over the

years. “But *I* don’t govern the rain,” he went on. “King Bonden decides these things. If I open the gate of the rains my head will fly. I’ll do it, though. Rain will fall three days from now, and I’ll be killed. Please, pick up my body, bury it, and build a temple over it. You’ll find it in the pond which is up in the hills in the western part of Heguri county. And there are three other places I’ll visit on my way there. Build a temple in each one.”

Despite his sorrow, the monk could not ignore the imperial order. He agreed to the dragon’s last request, and the two parted in tears.

On learning what the dragon had said, His Majesty looked forward with relief to rain. Sure enough, on the promised day the sky clouded over, there was thunder and lightning, and heavy rain fell for three days and nights. Now that there was plenty of water again the crops ripened and all was well. The emperor and his people were very happy.

The monk found the pond in the hills where he had been told to look. The fragments of the dragon’s dismembered body floated in its reddened waters. Weeping, the monk buried them and built over them a temple called Ryūkaiji, or Temple of the Dragon Lake; and he expounded the Lotus Sutra there daily for his friend. With the emperor’s help he built three other temples too, as he had promised to do. These were Ryūshinji, Temple of the Dragon Mind; Ryūtenji, Temple of the Dragon Heaven; and Ryūōji, Temple of the Dragon King. And all his life the monk chanted the Sutra for the dragon’s final enlightenment.



37.

NO DRAGON

Ein, a monk in Nara, had a big, red nose. At first people called him “Ein the Red-Nosed Cleric,” but shortened it later to “Ein Red-

Nose” and finally to just “The Nose.”

Legend has it that a dragon lives in Sarusawa Pond, by Kōfukuji’s Great South Gate right on the edge of Nara. In his youth The Nose posted a notice beside the pond, announcing that on such-and-such a date the dragon would rise from the pond in broad daylight. The passersby who read it were intrigued, and the word began to get around. The resulting rumor greatly tickled The Nose, who after all had started it himself, and he was amused at people’s foolishness. Resolving to see the joke through, he went on pretending he knew nothing about the notice.

As the day drew near, the rumor about the dragon attracted crowds not only from nearby but even from the neighboring provinces. The Nose was impressed. “What *are* they all here for?” he wondered. “How very strange! Perhaps something really will happen!” But he went on looking as innocent as ever.

On the day, the streets were so jammed that even The Nose began to take the story seriously. Since apparently the dragon *was* going to rise, he wanted to go and watch. Of course it was impossible to get anywhere near the pond, so instead he climbed up on the foundations of the Great South Gate, which stands on a high embankment. Gazing out over the pond and the whole enormous throng, he waited eagerly for the dragon to appear.

The very idea! By sunset there was still no dragon. When night fell, The Nose had to give up. He was crossing a little bridge on the way home when he nearly bumped into a blind man. “Goodness,” he exclaimed, “you shouldn’t be out in the dark like this! Why, you can’t see the hand in front of your face!”

“The nose,” the blind man corrected him, “You mean you can’t see the *nose*.”

It had not been The Nose’s day.

