

THE STORY OF LU-WEN.

BY EDWARD GREY.

Many of the most beautiful legends of Japan are of Indian or Chinese origin, and are as old as the hills.

The woodcutter, like most poor people, was blessed with many children, whose necessities compelled him to labor from daylight until dawn.

One day, when he was engaged in felling a tree, a begging priest interrupted him and inquired whether he had ever thought of a future state.

"I have no time to attend to such things. If you had to work for your living, as I do, and had a large family to support, you would not trouble yourself about the future.

The "bozu," who had a golden tongue and was used to hearing such plain talk, bowed and said: "My son, you must not forget that you owe something to yourself.

"When the winter storms howl around the base of Tendai it will be good to have a fox skin to protect one's head."

"Ah!" he murmured to himself, "if one of those glorious creatures would but notice me!"

The pious Lu-wen, utterly forgetful of his good wife and starving children, continued to gaze upon the lovely ladies until the hours melted into days.

From that hour Lu-wen became a changed being, and instead of working with his axe, wasted his time in religious disputation with all who would listen to him, and in meditation and prayer.

When winter came he would sit by the smoky fire and count his beads, and during the rainy season he occupied the sheltered side of the hut and compelled his children to stand in the puddles.

At first his wife, who was an industrious, frugal woman, submitted in silence and turned a deaf ear to the advice of her neighbors, who failed not to plainly express their opinions of her husband's eccentric conduct.

"Listen to me! I can no longer contain my indignation or bear the sight of our little ones' misery. Are you blind and deaf? Cannot you see that their stomachs are adhering to their backbones and their hearts mourning for food?"

"Woman, the gods are before everything. Your words shock me! See, our children are listening, and will be led astray by your thoughtless expressions. You forget that I am known as the most pious man in this province."

"Pious! pious!" ejaculated the heart-broken creature, as she glanced around their miserable home and saw nothing but hungry faces and empty vessels.

He snatched up his axe from the corner where it had so long rested, and without deigning to look behind him strode up the mountain side, entered a mist cloud and disappeared from her sight.

began to reproach herself for having been so disrespectful to her husband, and when a neighbor looked in to inquire how she was getting along, she sighed and replied: "I fear I have driven Lu-wen away for good. Oh, what shall I do!"

Lu-wen slowly ascended the mountain and, as he walked, beheld the sun god drive back the dragon of the mist. Upon reaching his usual retreat he seated himself on a shelf of rock and murmured a prayer to Buddha.

"What fools men are to toil and sweat in order to amass the dross of this world. When will they learn that to acquire happiness it is only necessary to abandon material things and to pray to the gods? Here all is peace and one is not tormented with the chatter of a woman's tongue."

Having thus expressed himself he yielded to the soothing influences around him, and closing his eyes, enjoyed the ecstasy of holy contemplation.

"My children, do not follow the advice of the priests when they tell you to pray continually. Prayer is good and the gods are merciful, but we must consider others as well as ourselves.

Thus speaking, he turned sorrowfully away and moved slowly in the direction of the mountain followed at a respectful distance by the strange old woman, who, as he vanished into the gloaming, uttered a triumphant laugh and melted into air.

Although some unbelieving persons assert that the foregoing is merely an idle legend, invented by story-tellers to frighten lazy persons who pretend to be pious in order to avoid labor, it is most certain if you visit the mountain of Tendai, when the moon is at its full, you will encounter the spirit of Lu-wen, the woodcutter.

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Woman, you surely must be jesting. "No, I speak the truth, she bitterly replied. "The gods to punish you for your little ones have prolonged your life until there is not a Lu-wen to burn incense at your tomb."

The shades of evening were falling, and the people followed the aged pair with awed faces and bated breath. Slowly, for the patriarch walked with great difficulty, the weird ones advanced until they arrived at the moss-covered tablets erected in memory of the woodcutter's ancestors.

"There rest the bodies of your unfortunate children, who perished miserably through your piety."

As he gazed on the neglected graves big tears coursed down his withered cheeks and moistened his snowy beard, and he covered his eyes with his hands as though he could not bear the sight.

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