

Prince Sandalwood, the Father of Korea

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Korean

*Advanced
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Four little folks lived in the home of Mr. Kim, two girls and two boys. Their names were Peach Blossom and Pearl, Eight-fold Strength and Dragon. Dragon was the oldest, a boy. Grandma Kim was very fond of telling them stories about the heroes and fairies of their beautiful country.

One evening when Papa Kim came home from his office in the Government buildings, he carried two little books in his hand, which he handed over to Grandma. One was a little almanac, looking in its bright cover of red, green and blue, as gay as the piles of cakes and confectionery made when people get married; for every one knows how rich in colors are pastry and sweets for the bride's friends at a Korean wedding party. The second little book contained the direction sent out by the Royal Minister of Ceremonies for the celebration of the festival in honor of the Ancestor-Prince, Old Sandalwood, the Father of Korea. Twice a year in Ping Yang City they made offerings of meat and other food in his honor, but always uncooked.

'Who was old Sandalwood?' asked Peach Blossom, the older of the little girls.

“What did he do?” asked Yongi (Dragon), the older boy.

“Let me tell you,” said Grandma, as they cuddled together round her on the oiled-paper carpet, over the main flue, at the end of the room, where it was warmest ; for it was early in December, and the wind was roaring outside.

“Now I shall tell you, also, why the bear is good and the tiger bad,” said Grandma. “Well, to begin —”

“Long, long ago, before there were any refined people in the Land of the Dawn, and no men but rude savages, a bear and a tiger met together. It was on the southern slope of Old Whitehead Mountain in the forests. These wild animals were not satisfied with the kind of human beings already on the earth, and they wanted better ones. They thought that if they could become human, they would be able to improve upon the quality. So these patriotic beasts, the bear and the tiger, agreed to go before Hananim, the Great One of Heaven and Karth, and ask him to change at once their form and nature ; or, at least, tell them how it could be done.”

“But where to find Him — that was the question. So they put their heads down in token of politeness, stretched out their paws and waited a long while, hoping to get light on the subject.”

“Then a Voice spoke out saying, ‘Eat a bunch of garlic and stay in a cave for twenty-one days. If you do, you will become human.’

“So into the dark cave they crawled, chewed their garlic and went to sleep. It was cold and gloomy in the cave and with nothing to hunt or eat, the tiger got tired. Day after day he moped, snarled, growled and behaved rudely to his companion. But the bear bore the tiger’s insults.”

Finally on the eleventh day, the tiger, seeing no signs of losing his stripes, or of shedding his hair, claws or tail, with no prospect of fingers or toes in view, concluded to give up trying to become a man. He bounded out of the cave and at once went hunting in the woods, going back to his old life.”

“But the bear, patiently sucking his paw, waited till the twenty-one days had passed. Then his hairy hide and claws dropped off, like an overcoat. His nose and ears suddenly shortened and he stood upright — a perfect woman. Walking out of the cave, the new creature sat beside a brook, and in the pure water beheld how lovely she was. There she waited to see what would take place next.”

‘About this time while these things were going on down in the world, matters of interest were happening in the skies. Whanung, the Son of the Great One in the Heavens, asked his father to give him an earthly kingdom to rule over. Pleased with his request, the Lord of Heaven decided to present his son with the Land of the Dragon’s Back, which men called Korea.’”

“Now as everybody knows, this country of ours, the Everlasting Great Land of the Day- spring, rose up on the first morning of creation out of the sea, in the form of a dragon. His spine, loins and tail form the great range of mountains, with its little hills, that makes the backbone of our beautiful country, while his head rises skyward in the eternal White Mountain to the North. On its summit, amid the snow and ice, lies the blue lake of pure water, from which flow out our boundary rivers.

“What is the name of this lake?” asked Yongi the boy.

“The Dragon’s Pool,” said Grandma Kim, “and during one whole night, ever so long ago, the dragon breathed hard and long, until its breath filled the heavens with clouds. This was the way that the Great One in the Skies prepared the way for his son’s coming to earth. ” People thought there was an earthquake, but when they woke up in the morning and looked up to the grand mountain, so gloriously white, they saw the cloud rising far up in the sky. As the bright sun shone upon it, the cloud turned into pink, red, yellow and the whole eastern sky looked so lovely that our country then received its name — the Land of Morning Radiance.”

“Down out of his cloud of many colors, and borne on the wind, Wbanung, the Heavenly Prince, descended first to the mountain top, and then to the lower earth. When he entered the great forest, he found a beautiful woman sitting by the brookside. It was the bear that had been transformed into lovely human shape and nature.”

“The Heavenly Prince was delighted. He breathed on her and, by and by, a little baby boy was born. The mother made for her son a cradle of soft moss and reared her child in the forest.

“Now the people who dwelt at the foot of the mountain were in those days very rude and simple. They wore no hats, had no white clothes, lived in huts, and did not know how to warm their houses with flues running under the floors, nor had they any books or writings. Their sacred place was under a sandalwood tree, on a small mountain named Tabak, in Ping Tang province.”

They had seen the cloud rising from the Dragon’s Pool so rich in colors, and as they looked they saw it move southward and nearer to them, until it stood over the sacred sandalwood tree; when out stepped a white-robed being, and descending through the air alighted in the forest and on the tree.”

“Oh, how beautiful this spirit looked against the blue sky! Yet the tree was far away and long was the journey to it.”

” ‘Let us all go to the sacred tree,’ said the leader of the people. So together they hied over hill and valley until they reached the holy ground and ranged themselves in circles about it.”

“A lovely sight greeted their eyes. There sat under the tree a youth of grand appearance, arrayed in princely dress. Though young looking and rosy in face, his countenance was august and majestic. Despite his youth, he was wise and venerable.

” ‘I have come from my ancestors in Heaven to rule over you, my children,’ he said, looking at them most kindly. ”

At once the people fell on their knees and all bent reverently, shouting: ” ‘Thou art our king, we acknowledge thee, and will loyally obey only thee.’ “Seeing that they wanted to know what he could tell them, he began to instruct them, even before he gave them laws and rules and taught them how to improve their houses. He told them stories. The first one explained to them why it was that the bear is good and the tiger bad. ”

The people wondered at his wisdom and henceforth the tiger was hated, while people began to like the bear more and more.

” ‘What name shall we give to our King, so that we may properly address him?’ asked the people of their elders. ‘It is right that we should call him after the place in which we saw him, under our holy tree. Let his title, therefore, be the August and Venerable Sandalwood.’ So they saluted him thus and he accepted the honor. ”

Seeing that the people were rough and unkempt, Prince Sandalwood showed them how to tie up and dress their hair. He ordained that men should wear their long locks in the form of a topknot. Boys must braid their hair and let it hang down over their backs. No boy could be called a man, until he married a wife. Then he could twist his hair into a knot, put on a hat, have a head-dress like an adult and wear a long white coat. ” As for the women, they must plait their tresses and wear them plainly at their neck, except at marriage, or on great occasions of ceremony. Then they might pile up their hair like a pagoda and use long hairpins, jewels, silk and flowers. ”

Thus our Korean civilization was begun, and to this day the law of the hat and hair distinguishes us above all people,” said Grandma. ”We still honor the August and Venerable Prince Sandalwood. Tomorrow, you shall see the offerings. Now, good-night, my darlings.”

Just then great bell, In Jung (Men decide to go to sleep), boomed, and almost before its last long lingering moan of Ah-Meh-la (Mother’s fault) had died into quietness the little folks were on their bed-quilts and the lights were out.

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