

‘鶴の恩返し’

Tsuru no Ongaeshi

訳・川久保 精 祐

“A liberal idea in children’s literatures in prewar Japan”

We can imagine that before World War Two the thought of the right wing had been growing widely in Japan and many ultranationalists had been making desperate effort for the purpose of banishing liberal ideas in those days.

What is more, such a general drift of affairs in Japan in those days that exiled liberalists and Marxists was growing more serious. Nevertheless, I should say, the liberal idea in the children’s literatures had been allowed to teach children so that they were able to learn Japanese traditional human feelings as the Japanese.

That is to say, most of us Japanese are delighted to be touched by others’ concern and want to put others’ mind at ease.

I believe this is the big reason why teaching such traditional human feeling was not done away with in prewar Japan. We Japanese always expect that the young will learn philosophical development—mind and soul—through reading Japanese children’s literatures.

With all my wish, here is a poor translation of a Kamishibai: Tsuru no Ongaeshi.

The original is published by Epoch Sha and the translation is composed so that you can cut it out the back of the original. In this way, you can use it both in English and Japanese. I sometimes use it for students so

that they may be able to be touched not only by the beauty of this story but also by the Japanese traditional human feelings. I'd like to have youngsters find out such human feelings, but the English is too difficult as it is. When I have some time I will go over it and simplify it more. I hope some of you criticize my poor translations and suggest to me that I should revised them right away.

- (1) A long time ago, in Japan, there lived an old farmer and his wife.

One day, the old farmer was carrying some firewood home, when he heard a cry come from the swamp by the side of the road. He went to see what was the matter, and what should he see but a stork that had been caught in a hunter's trap?

- (2) Wasting no time, the old farmer opened the trap and set the stork free. It cried for joy, and flew off into the snow that fell gently from the cold winter sky. When he got home that night, he told his wife about what had happened that day:

FARMER You should have seen how happy it was as it opened its wings to take flight off into the falling snow!

When the farmer's wife heard her gentle husband's tale, she couldn't help putting herself to imagine how beautiful the stork must have been, and she smiled to think that her husband had set it free.

- (3) That night, the old couple heard some one knocking on their door.

FARMER "Who could it be at this time of night?" the old farmer wondered. When he slid open the front door, there in the snow stood a young girl. She was slim and very beautiful.

GIRL “I have lost my way in the snow. Please let me stay the night.”

FARMER “You must be cold. Come in right away and warm yourself.” The old farmer said, and he led the girl into the house.

(4) The old farmer put more wood on the fire in the hearth, and his wife gave her some hot rice porridge to eat.

They began to talk and found out that the young girl had no home and no place to go. When he heard this, the old farmer said:

FARMER “Well then, why don’t you live with us?”

GIRL “Oh, thank you very much. I would be lucky to be able to live in such a wonderful home.”

And so, all three decided to live together.

(5) The next morning, before dawn, the young girl woke up and tiptoed into the kitchen to prepare breakfast for the old couple before they awoke. But to her dismay, there was no rice or miso left.

GIRL “What shall I do? There’s not even enough food for a simple breakfast.”

The young girl spoke to herself as she looked around the kitchen for something to make breakfast with. As she searched, she came upon a basket of thread. Her worried look changed to a warm smile; now she knew exactly what to do to help the old couple, and she went straight into the room where the loom was.

(6) Clickety click, clickety click. The sound of the loom filled the house.

When the farmer and his wife woke up, they found a beautiful cloth that had been woven by the young girl. She said:

GIRL "Please, take this cloth and sell it. Then with the money you will be able to buy some rice.

The old farmer was overcome with joy. He took the cloth to the town, sold it, and bought rice, miso, and a wooden comb. When he returned home, he gave her the comb as a present.

(7) That night, the old farmer said as he got ready for bed:

FARMER "What a wonderful day this has been. I hope my dreams tonight are as good." and he let out a big yawn.

GIRL "Good night, and sleep well. There is nothing that makes me happier than to see your smiling faces. I still have a bit more work to do, so I won't go to bed just yet."

And then, she told them that there was one thing that she wanted them to promise.

(8) GIRL "Please promise me that you will never watch me as I am weaving."

Her face was so grave, that it startled the old farmer.

FARMER "All right, I promise." The old farmer said. But as soon as he made the promise, he became curious, and stared at the girl. Why didn't she want to be seen while she was weaving?

(9) From then on, every night she wove a roll of beautiful cloth twelve yards long, and the next day the old farmer would take the cloth to the town where it sold for the highest prices any one had ever paid.

Three, four, five days passed, and she became more and more pale. One day, as she sat staring out the window at the sunset, she said to herself:

GIRL “Just one more roll, tonight. I must finish it for them.”

Her voice was weak, and she didn’t even notice that the comb that the old farmer had given her had fallen to the floor.

(10) When the old man came home that day, he saw the comb and picked it up. He was very worried about the young girl, she seemed not to be well. His wife tried to make her eat more.

WIFE “You must have more; here, I’ll get you another bowl of rice.” But the young girl just left her chopsticks in front of the hearth, and said:

GIRL “No thank you, I still have one more job to do.”

So saying, she rose to go to her loom, and stumbled out of weakness, but turned quickly and said:

GIRL “You must not see me, remember!” and she entered the weaving room.

(11) Neither of the old couple was able to stop her; they just watched her as she slid the door shut, and worried about her as they heard the sound of her weaving deep into the night.

WIFE “Don’t you think she sounds weaker than before? Do you think she’s all right?” The old woman said as they lay trying to sleep.

FARMER “I had better take a look.” The old man got up to check on the young girl, but suddenly stopped when he remembered the promise.

(12) But as soon as he stopped, the sound of the loom stopped too. When this happened, the old farmer rushed to the room and opened the door just enough to look inside.

FARMER “Wha... What are you doing here?!” He couldn’t believe his eyes. Who should be at the loom, but a beautiful white stork!

(13) The stork was pulling feathers out from her own wings and weaving them one by one into the cloth. Her strength was almost gone, but she continued to pull the feathers out, one by one.

Slumped over the loom, she was so tired she could hardly move. But when she realized that the old farmer was looking at her, in a flutter she changed back into the young girl.

The stork had changed herself into a young girl in order to repay the farmer for saving her life in the swamp!

(14) The old farmer was struck with surprise;

FARMER "Why, you... you are the stork... the stork that was caught in the trap in the swamp!"

GIRL "Yes... I am, the one you set free.

We are allowed to change into human form only once in order to repay the person who saves us from death. But since you discovered me, I am not allowed to remain by your side any longer." The girl wept as she spoke.

(15) FARMER "I broke the promise, I know. But please forgive me and stay with us. Please don't go!

GIRL "No. There is nothing I can do, I must leave you. Please take good care of yourselves."

FARMER "Good-bye."

WIFE "Good-bye."

The girl stepped out of the house and changed back into the stork. She was slowly beginning to take flight when the old farmer took out the comb and called out to her:

FARMER "Wait, grant this one last request! Take the comb in re-

membrance of us!”

(16) Kaw Kukoo, Kaw Kukoo... The stork cried out in a sad voice. The old farmer threw the comb into the air and she caught it in her beak, then flew off high into the sky of the winter night.

The old farmer and his wife stood looking after the stork with tears in their eyes. They had been touched not only by the beauty of the cloth that she had woven, but also by the beauty of her soul.