

# The Story of Sesshiu and the Mouse

(Concluded from August Number)

Retold by Elisabeth Latsch



THE temple had grown dark. Sesshiu had heard the priests leave in the cart. He had heard its rumbling over the cobblestones. He had longed to go along. But here he was, tied to a column in the great dark temple. It all came from being so very, very fond of painting. "I wish I were *anywhere* rather than here. I wish I were Sogaro, the herd boy. He is always hungry and always in rags; but he is out in the fields all day, and he has a little whistle. And the great white oxen eats from his hand, and no one ever ties him up. I wish I were the old blind beggar who stands by the temple gate. I wish I were anyone but me."

How dark the temple had grown, as dark as the fluid in his inkpot. The temple seemed endlessly large and fearfully still. His arms and shoulders began to ache where the ropes were fastened. He was quite fatigued. His legs grew weak and his head grew dizzy. Why the moon must have come out! There was a beam of moonlight dancing on the floor and it came directly over the head of the Goddess of Mercy,

Kwannon. It was beautiful. Sesshiu, the little artist seemed all alive again. And he whispered, so softly and pleadingly, "O thou Goddess Kwannon, help me." He grew very sad when he noticed that the goddess did not seem to hear him. He thought, perhaps, he was much too small to be listened to. The tears began to flow freely and fell upon the floor of the temple. When Sesshiu discovered the little pool of tears at his feet his bare toe began to move around in it. He began to draw. There, it was finished. Something with pointed ears and a very, very long tail. Why, he had drawn his little midnight visitor, the little grey mouse, Nezumi!

But what was that? The tail was moving about. The little swift feet were carrying the long little grey body over the floor. There was a gnawing noise, something was ripping. The rope seemed to be loosening, there was no longer that pain. And then a sudden jerk and the rope fell to the floor. He called to his friend but Nezumi had disappeared. It was so like a dream. Sesshiu was much too overcome to walk away. He fell to the floor in a little heap.

When the priests returned to the temple the next morning Sesshiu was still sound asleep. A peaceful little smile hovered around his lips. "Look, Brothers of mine, a miracle has happened. The boy could have never unfastened this rope. I had tied his hands securely behind his back. He is indeed a being under the protection of the Goddess of Mercy, Kwannon. Since such is the case, that the Goddess lends a helping hand, then, be it so that Sesshiu become an artist."

Thus it is written in the old, old legend that Sesshiu became a wonderful artist. He understood the plants, the insects, the birds, the animals, the mountains and valleys, the brooks and the rivers and into his pictures he put them as true and as real as they were in his out-of-door wonderland.