

Legend of the Four-Faced Towers of Angkor

From Angkor:

By P. JEANNERAT BEERSKI

Brahma once upon a time was deeply plunged in meditation, motionless, mumbling his prayers with lips parted and downcast eyes. * * * all his thoughts were in a land of ideals and virtue, his soul had altogether departed from all care as a fierce belle. * * * his smile was gentle, his eye lashes cast long shadows over his cheeks, his ears were shut to all outward noises, his lids lowered to all outside spectacles. * * * What greatness there was in this figure, silent and cold as stone, yet full of the highest thoughts and of the greatest conceptions. It seemed that nothing could stop for an instant the flight of his soul upon the path of virtue and inner happiness.

It was rare that man, genie or god could find pleasure in the utmost purity; it was rare that man, genie or god discovered that the greatest joy resided in moral meditation. Yet Brahma was no doubt the most enviable of beings as he sat praying, holding between his fingers the beads of an amber rosary. First men stopped to watch him, stood still for a long time, then went away marveling at the strength of the god, who had then only one face, like two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and one mouth had so far been quite sufficient for all his wants. Later on animals, reassured by the immobility of this strange being, sniffed at his clothes, turned around him; a jackal even bit his toes, but with no effect; a tiger roared just behind his back; an eagle landed on his crown; lizards crawled over his arms, and a woodpecker, believing him to be nothing but a log, tapped on his chin to see fell whether or caterpillar would emerge from the nape of his neck; butterflies fluttered near his ears, and a field mouse began to build a nest in his lap. But Brahma did not stir; his skin had not the slightest quiver; his thoughts did not wander for one moment from his prayers; for you must, according to religious laws, stay motionless whilst meditating.

The god's position had remained unchanged for hours, and then for days, and then for months; his hair had grown long, and his nails were crooked like claws; he seemed roared, and, whether under rain or sunshine, his limbs and body did not show uneasiness; during the greatest storms his head did not stoop, when the thickest oaks had to acknowledge the power of the Marus with bows, or else fall, broken at their base.

For how long would he have crouched imbued in prayer no one could tell, as he did not betray the least weariness.

Winter had come, and on the field where Brahma sat, at the foot of the Himalayas, snow fell abundantly and covered the grass, the branches and the god with a mantle of shining white. * * * yet not a shiver ran through his veins, not a shudder told that he felt the biting cold. Gradually as the flakes fell thicker and thicker not a thing in all the region kept its natural color; the snow every time from the brightest blue to the most violent red, from jet black to gaudy orange, lost its peculiar appearance; each one blended like the colors of the spectrum into white, the most dazzling, the purest white. Animals themselves, or at least those that remained, took the virginal hue and the hair of foxes and ermine, the feathers of some birds were blackened, and all was white; even the dark leafage of pines had to batten on its gloomy green; the few flowers that could grow in this temperature were white; the sky, the earth were white; water had turned into ice. * * * and the curious effect of all this whiteness was that nothing seemed to possess shape, nothing could be distinguished from the rest, and indeed soon nothing seemed to exist. Brahma opened his eyes and saw nothing. As the pure ice under his gaze did not disturb to his prayers he did not close them again. He looked, but he could believe that he was in a cloud or a fog, as neither men nor beasts nor objects stood out from the white glow.

It was at this time that Tilottama, stepping over the frozen earth, discerned her god, deeply

thinking under ice and snow. But she was also robed in white, a mantle of white silk on her head, a shawl of white cashmere on her shoulders, and Brahma did not see her more than the whitened trees, or the whitened mountains and streams. She seemed to be an uncoiled, ephemeral spirit walking on an unsoiled ephemeral plane. She, and the hills, and the woods, and the plains around her were invisible to any eyes, and the motionless god remained undisturbed. The girl at last stood still before him, then slowly took off her veils and garments. As she unfastened a buckle of ivory, her robes fell suddenly to the ground and revealed to the eyes of Brahma a dream in flesh, a hope realized, an inexplicable incarnation of the utmost loveliness. At first, dazzled by the eternal white rays, he merely noticed a blur, a spot of darkness rising from the snow; then he saw the most beautiful woman, and, however intent he had been on thoughts of righteousness, he could not take his gaze away from the charming form. All his ideas of meditation flew away from his brain like a troop of unpleasants, crowd; but he had just recommenced a new intention when he wanted to stay motionless, according to law, till he had finished hymns and religious songs.

Tilottama was standing as an idol of burnished gold, for her skin had that delightful dark hue which at first attracted the notice of the god. Indeed it could be understood why Brahma had forgotten his ideals of thought when he saw the ideal of flesh. The features of the girl had been created in the rarest mould; a mouth as bright and fresh as a lotus bud besprikled with dew; cheeks full and round, with a delicate coloring of blood appearing under the surface, which was as smooth as silk; a small chin with a dimple at its base, as if ready to receive a drop of rose water or a kiss; hair, black like the fur of otters and trailing on the ground like the train of a queen—and then—two eyes, blacker than the hair, blacker than night, blacker than doom, in the centre of which two snowy spots shimmered; the sparks of a fire of beauty, stolen from the treasures of the goddess of love. This head made of the gems of womanly charm was merely the crown of a figure made of the jewels of feminine loveliness. Forms exquisite and glorious. How fair was Tilottama! What grace was hers!

All at once she dropped her brow, lifted her knee and started to dance a prashadina with undulating movements and supple torsions. She trod softly over the earth and so lightly that no marks were left on the snow; she took a step forward, then one back; she raised her toes and touched them with her fingers; she flung one arm to the right and pulled it back as invitation; her neck bent back, her lips opened to show pearl teeth and a small tongue impertinently pointed. Her pupils went from one corner of her eyes to the other in languishing agonies; her eyebrows contracted, a wrinkle crossed her forehead, then vanished in a smile; her tresses trailed on her shoulders and breasts, and she would resolutely throw them back in the wind, emphasizing the modelling of her limbs. She turned round the god, slipped behind his back, came later with a pace more lascivious. She ran, seemed to stumble, almost touched the ground with her elbow, but in a natural effort, unnatural in its ease, rose again like a reed when the breeze has stopped. She flew like a wraith, jumped, whirled, laughed. She danced like Salome must have danced, and Brahma, like Herod, was vanquished. Each time when she disappeared behind him he desired to turn his head, but he would not break the rules of religion; he cursed inwardly, but knew that he could not move; he hurried his prayers, but still he had many to say before being able to raise a flap of tantalizing girl in his arms. He followed her with ravenous gaze as long as he could, almost forcing his eyes out of their sockets, but she was soon again invisible behind his back, and he would boil with anger until she appeared again on the

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other side. The circle where she danced was now cleared of snow, and wild hyacinth and iris grew under her feet; she was ever more beautiful, ever more joyful, ever more exhilarating. Greatly amused at the vexation of the god when she went out of his field of vision, she would muse, rough and frolicsome, coming so near that Brahma could feel her breath passing like a burning simoon of temptation.

This, however, could not last, and he soon smiled; all the gloomy expression of annoyance leaving his features. * * * Tilottama came in front of him, and then went to his left, but * * * lo * * * as soon as his two eyes

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could see her no longer another face appeared on that side of his head: as she went behind a third face was there and two more eyes to gaze at her; lastly, a fourth took shape on the right side of the god's head: he assumed his name of Chaturmukha, the four-faced, and could finish his prayers at leisure, without missing a single gesture of the delightful dancer.

Yes, it could be thou, Brahma, whom I now see in this temple of Cambodia; it would be thine eyes that ache for the forms of a woman; it would be thy mouth craving for the kiss of a girl. * * * And who knows that the ghost of Tilottama, dancing with the same voluptuousness, does not come to haunt the dream of all these stone colossi when they feel lonely and forlorn?

flaming mouth at the gate beneath them. And with heroic promptness they dumped the drums. Right there was where they learned that the fluid they had supposed to be water was an article called gasoline, which is very thin stuff and never has been known to satisfy a real thirsty fire dragon.

The guards rushed to the street and spread the alarm and there came presently a red wagon known to the Japanese as a fire engine—presumably a chariot for the transportation of the fire dragon. For a time the guards were afraid that the silly Japanese would offer the dragon a ride. But they didn't. They went through some incantations with a pair of copper jars, and the fire dragon went away leaving nothing but the cinders of a rubbish fire in his wake.

The fire department claimed credit for the victory. And the guards merely smiled with suitable tolerance. They knew, as every body knows, that the dragon had fled when they recited form prayer No. 27. But you can't tell that to a Japanese.

Korea Deplores Japanese Ignorance of Fire Dragons

By ROBERT J. CASEY*

Seoul, Korea, Nov. 7.—Out past the south gate and far beyond the summit of Nan San lives the fire dragon. But it seems silly to mention it. Everybody ought to know about that.

The fire dragon has always lived there. The mountain was his home even in those dim ages before Korea became the center of the world's culture and scientific advancement—which was, of course, many years ago.

Not a bad chap, the dragon * * * lazy, of course, but in this case laziness is a virtue rather than a vice. He has been singularly inactive since mud replaced wood in the construction of dwelling places and offerings placed in the hills to placate him have been more effective than even the soothsayers had hoped.

Not to be Trusted.

However, it is not a good idea to trust dragons even when sleeping. They may be good-hearted and all that, but they are dumb animals, and when a fire dragon comes in to pay a town a visit his good intentions are a minor consideration. His flaming laughter is too much for his moral votaries to withstand.

So, purely as a matter of safety first, the south gate has always been equipped with protective materials and a brace of fire dragon sentries who know just what to do should he take a notion to wander out of his mountain home. Since the day when the gate was built, large drums have been placed in the upper gallery below the overhang of its pagoda roof. And it is the duty of the fire dragon sentries to see that these drums are kept filled with water which may be used to slake the thirst of the dragon and cause him to go home without entering the town and making ashes of it.

Keep Up Defense.

When the Japanese came there was some argument about the usefulness of the dragon guard. You just can't get even a simple notion through the skull of a Japanese official. But in the end there was a compromise. Japanese sentries took over the gate, but the Korean gendarmie continued to supply the tub fillers for the upper gallery.

Things changed in Seoul, of course, after the coming of the Japanese. For example, the old well that used to supply the water for the tubs went dry, and a thing called a garage was built across the path over which the sentinels might in an emergency haul water from another well. However, the Koreans are a determined people. Eventually they arranged with the proprietor of a shop near by to give them what they needed. Once a month they were to pour out what water remained in the drums and obtain a fresh supply. This regular procedure, it was hoped, would insure a constant watchfulness and maintain the equipment at a point of necessary efficiency.

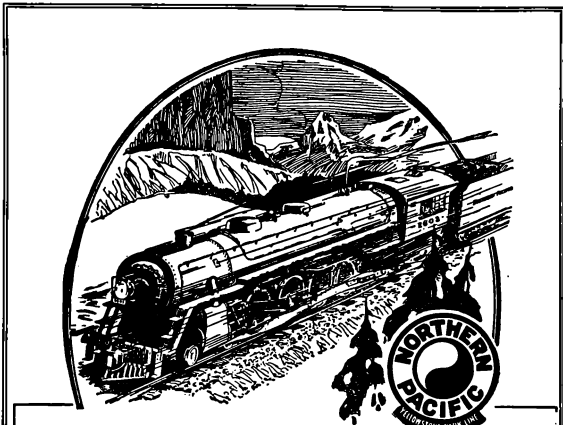
All went well until last night, when the Korean guards were called away to a conference and left their work in the hands of the Japanese. The Japanese promised to empty the drums and get them refilled at the shop. Which goes to show how useless it is to trust a Japanese.

One Hitch in Plans.

The soldiers went through all the motions of emptying the drums and called them empty for refilling. But in their lamentable ignorance they went not to the shop but to the garage.

"Fill these drums," said the sergeant of the guard, "and charge to the Korean Dragon Protective association."

And the garage man did. The guards returned at midnight unaware of the error and, of course, that had to be the time for the rousing of the fire dragon. Scarcely had they taken their places in the balcony when they saw his



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*Captain Robert J. Casey's regular job is a front-page feature story daily in the *Chicago Daily News*, but he is on a tour of the Far East just now, picking up such odd bits as the one reproduced here.—ED.