

Two Eastern Fables

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HERE are two fables, the one in Japan and the other in the Philippine Islands, which have many traits in common, and the intercomparison of which may perhaps be of some interest to ethnologists.

I.

THE Philippine children, in their earliest years, learn the *Tale of the Tortoise and the Monkey*, or, as it is called in the Tagal language, *Ang buhay ni pagong at ni matsing*. There is scarcely in Tagal literature another tale more popular and better known than this, although there are many prettier and more interesting. To it are traceable many sayings, phrases, maxims, and comparisons, which have received currency in reference to various conditions of common day life. This tale runs as follows:

The tortoise and the monkey found a banana tree floating amidst the waves of a river. It was a very fine tree, with large green leaves, and with roots, just as if it had been pulled off by a storm. They took it ashore. "Let us divide it" said the tortoise, "and plant each its portion." They cut it in the middle, and the monkey, as the stronger, took for himself the upper part of the tree, thinking that it would grow quicker, for it had leaves. The tortoise, as the weaker, had the lower part, that looked ugly, although it had roots. After some days, they met.

"Hallo, Mr. Monkey," said the tortoise, "how are you getting on with your banana tree?"

"Alas," answered the monkey, "it has been dead a long time! And yours. Miss Tortoise?"

"Very nice, indeed; with leaves and fruits. Only I cannot climb up, to gather them."

"Never mind," said the malicious monkey, "I will climb and pick them for you."

"Do, Mr. Monkey," replied the tortoise gratefully.

And so they walked towards the house.

As soon as the monkey saw the bright yellow fruits hanging between the large green leaves, he climbed up and began plundering, munching and gobbling, as quick as he could.

"But give me some, too," said the tortoise, seeing that the monkey did not take the slightest notice of her.

"Not even a bit of the skin, if it is eatable," rejoined the monkey, both his cheeks crammed with bananas.

The tortoise meditated revenge. She went to the river, picked up some pointed snails' planted them around the banana tree, and hid herself under a cocoa-nut shell. When the monkey came down he hurt himself and began to bleed.

After a long search, he found the tortoise.

"You, wretched creature, here you are!" said he. "You must pay now for your wickedness; you must die. But as I am very generous, I will leave to you the choice of your death. Shall I pound you in a mortar, or shall I throw you into the water? Which do you prefer?"

"The mortar, the mortar," answered the tortoise. "I am so afraid of getting drowned."

"O ho!" laughed the monkey; "indeed! You are afraid of getting

1. Known to only a few Rizalists is this article which originally appeared in "Trubner's Record" (Vol. 1, No. 3, July, 1889), a journal devoted to the literature of the East. This article, written nearly a year after the hero's sojourn in Japan, was obviously prepared in English, clearly showing Rizal's versatile genius as an accomplished linguist and Oriental scholar. The article appeared in the London magazine edited by the elderly Dr. Rheinhold Rost, librarian of the India Office and an authority on Malayan customs and languages.

2. A kind of spiral periwinkle, called *susu* in Tagal.

drowned! Now I will drown you."

And, going to the shore, he slung the tortoise and threw it in the water. But soon the tortoise reappeared swimming and laughing at the deceived, artful monkey.

II.

THIS is the Philippine tale of the monkey and the tortoise. The Japanese fable, *Saru Kani Kassen*, or, *Battle of the Monkey and the Crab*, as published by Kobusha at Tokyo, is as follows:

A monkey and a crab once met when going round a mountain.

The monkey had picked up a persimmon-seed, and the crab had a piece of toasted rice-cake. The monkey seeing this, and wishing to get something that could be turned to good account at once said: "Pray, exchange that rice-cake for this persimmon-seed." The crab, without a word, gave up his cake, and took the persimmon-seed and planted it. At once it sprung up, and soon became a tree so high, one had to look up at it. The tree was full of persimmons, but the crab had no means of climbing the tree. So he asked the monkey to climb up and get the persimmons for him. The monkey got up on a limb of the tree and began to eat the persimmons. The unripe persimmons he threw at the crab, but all the ripe and good ones he put in his pouch. The crab under the tree thus got his shell badly bruised, and only by good luck escaped into his hole, where he lay distressed with pain and not able to get up. Now, when the relatives and household of the crab heard how matters stood, they were surprised and angry, and declared war and attacked the monkey, who, leading forth a numerous following, bid defiance to the other party. The crabs, finding themselves unable to meet and cope with this force, became still more exasperated and enraged, and retreated into their hole, and held a council of war. Then came a rice mortar, a pounder, a bee,

and an egg, and together they devised a deep-laid plot for revenge.

First, they requested that peace be made with the crabs; and thus they induced the king of the monkeys to enter their hole unattended, and seated him on the earth. The monkey, not suspecting any plot, took the *hibasi*, or poker, to stir up the slumbering fire, when bang! went the egg, which was lying hidden in the ashes, and burned the monkey's arm. Surprised and alarmed, he plunged his arm into the pickle-tub in the kitchen to relieve the pain of the burn. Then the bee, which was hidden near the tub, stung him sharply in the face, already wet with tears. Without waiting to brush off the bee, and howling bitterly, he rushed for the back door; but just then some seaweed entangled his legs and made him slip. Then down came the pounder tumbling on him from a shelf, and the mortar, too, came rolling down on him from the roof of the porch, and broke his back and so weakened him that he was unable to rise up. Then out came the crabs in a crowd and brandishing on high their pincers pinched the monkey to pieces.

III.

THERE is no doubt that these two tales, although their ends are very different, have both only one origin, or perhaps one is a modification of the other. There the monkey plays the same part, greedy, malicious, wicked and revengeful; the Japanese persimmon-tree is the Philippine banana, which grows and brings forth fruit quicker than any other tree. There are many points of resemblance between the crab and the tortoise, and there is a mortar mentioned too. Which of both tales is the more ancient? Which is the more original, and where do they come from?

A careful analysis and intercomparison of both tales will show us that the leading idea of both came either from the South, from Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Mindanao, or had its origin

from the Philippine Islands, and afterwards migrated northwards with the people or the race which came from the South to inhabit the Japanese and the Riu-Kiu Islands, being modified in its course in conformity with the climates and the customs of the different countries. There is a Japanese tradition of a hero called, I think *Timnotenho*, who is supposed to have come from those Southern Islands. The Malay origin of the Japanese people is worth being treated separately.

The Tagal tale exists in the Bisaya Islands too, with few modifications. We do not know if there is another analogue in the Malay Archipelago, in Sumatra or Java. If there is comparison with the Tagal version would throw perhaps more light on its origin. For the moment we shall satisfy our curiosity by making an analysis and drawing some deductions suggested by a strict intercomparison of both tales.

The beginning of both is the same, except that the Japanese has a crab instead of a tortoise. This change is very important. I was told, when I was in Japan, that the tortoise was with the Japanese people a symbol of eternity or of something sacred, holy etc., which may be suggested by the Chinese civilization. This is not the case with the Tagal, which sees in the tortoise a poor little innocent thing but artful in its way, rather to be pitied than admired or respected. But there is in the Philippines a superstition also, that if somebody puts his foot on a tortoise, the sole of the foot will hurt into many lines. Perhaps it is a pious superstition to prevent naughty children from stepping on poor, slow walking tortoises.

The Philippine banana tree is more natural than the persimmon-seed and the rice-cake in the Japanese tale. Perhaps because there is no banana tree in Japan, the people have been obliged to adopt these modifications. It seems too foolish or too wise to exchange a

piece of toasted rice-cake for a persimmon-seed. Besides, the toasted rice-cake shows more of a refined civilization than a mere banana tree. Further, the phrases "At once it (persimmon-seed) *prung up, and soon became a tree so high...* The tree was full of persimmons," may more fitly be applied to a banana tree than to a persimmon-seed. Further, people often pull up banana trees, as the heroes of our story do, plant them and get fruits (or the heart which brings the fruits) in three or four days. The case is unnatural for a persimmon-seed. So we think that the Tagal version is more natural.

"But the crab had no means of climbing the tree." This phrase would be correct in the case of a tortoise; we think the crab with its pincers and feet could climb as well as a monkey; at least, the crab climbs very well on any stone wall, etc. This impossibility of climbing, more natural in a tortoise, suggest the supposition that the crab was not in the original tale.

In what follows, the two fables nearly agree till we come to where the crab escapes into his hole.

In the Philippine tale, the revenge of the tortoise, although a little childish, shows a very primitive and peculiar way, "with pointed periwinkles," while in the Japanese there are traces of a more advanced state of society, like the war between crabs and monkeys. The council of war, held in the hole of the crabs, is very remarkable. The *ice-mortar*, the *pounder*, the *bre* and the *egg*, helping the exasperated crabs, give us an idea of the free imagination of the Japanese people. Not only the animated beings, but the inanimate things too, speak and give advice, feel and move like the others.

First they requested that peace be made with the crabs; and thus they induced the King of the monkeys to enter their hole unattended. . . .

It seems to us that all this part is interpolated by some not very clever

story-teller, perhaps in order to gratify the natural wish for revenge. Then if the monkeys were the stronger and the crabs the weaker, which desired that peace be made, these could not have induced the king to come unattended, as he is not constrained by a more powerful foe; but the crabs would go to the monkeys to ask for peace and to offer conditions. The same may be said of the egg which burst under the ashes only to burn the monkey's arm. This part may have been added, long after the wandering people came to Japan; moreover, the *hibasi* only exists in cold climates. The way the tale ends is rather complicated than natural, while in the Philippine version it is plainer and shows a more delicate observation of character and feeling. The mischievous monkey lays a very wicked dilemma before the tortoise, pretending to be generous: *either to die by being pounded in a mortar or to be drowned*. The artful but not wicked tortoise, knowing the real intention and malignity of the monkey, beats him with the same weapons and chooses the mortar. The monkey, continuing his wickedness till the last, refuses what he promised and throws the tortoise into the water. The interest is maintained till the very conclusion.

In both versions there is a great deal of morality: it is the eternal fight between the weak and the pow-

erful. In the Philippine version we find more philosophy, more plainness of form, while in the Japanese there is more *civilization*, and so to speak, more diplomatic usage.

After the short analysis we may give it as our opinion that this Japanese tale had its origin from some South country from where would come also the Philippine version. This last is evidently nearer to the primitive form (if not the primitive form itself) than the Japanese. The Japanese version is much changed and added to, perhaps by other peoples and other civilizations it has met with. This tale may perhaps be considered as one of the oldest tales in the Far East. The differences between both versions show that one is not a copy of the other, and that they must have existed in both countries long before the Europeans came to that part of the world. The fact that this tale is known everywhere in the Philippines, in every island, province, village and dialect, proves that it must be the inheritance of an extinct civilization, common to all the races which ever lived in that region.

In conclusion we would give expression to a wish that Oriental scholars who make a study of the Malay Archipelago may tell us if there are tales of this kind known there in connection with the versions we have been placing before our readers.

