The Adventures of Kintaro, the Golden Boy

Yei Theodora Ozaki

Long, long ago there lived in Kyoto a brave soldier named Kintoki. Now he fell in love with a beautiful lady and married her. Not long after this, through the malice of some of his friends, he fell into disgrace at Court and was dismissed. This misfortune so preyed upon his mind that he did not long survive his dismissal—he died, leaving behind him his beautiful young wife to face the world alone. Fearing her husband's enemies, she fled to the Ashigara Mountains as soon as her husband was dead, and there in the lonely forests where no one ever came except woodcutters, a little boy was born to her. She called him Kintaro or the Golden Boy. Now the remarkable thing about this child was his great strength, and as he grew older he grew stronger and stronger, so that by the time he was eight years of age he was able to cut down trees as quickly as the woodcutters. Then his mother gave him a large ax, and he used to go out in the forest and help the woodcutters, who called him "Wonder-child," and his mother the "Old Nurse of the Mountains," for they did not know her high rank. Another favorite pastime of Kintaro's was to smash up rocks and stones. You can imagine how strong he was!

Quite unlike other boys, Kintaro, grew up all alone in the mountain wilds, and as he had no companions he made friends with all the animals and learned to understand them and to speak their strange talk. By degrees they all grew quite tame and looked upon Kintaro as their master, and he used them as his servants and messengers. But his special retainers were the bear, the deer, the monkey and the hare.

The bear often brought her cubs for Kintaro to romp with, and when she came to take them home Kintaro would get on her back and have a ride to her cave. He was very fond of the deer too, and would often put his arms round the creature's neck to show that its long horns did not frighten him. Great was the fun they all had together.

One day, as usual, Kintaro went up into the mountains, followed by the bear, the deer, the monkey, and the hare. After walking for some time up hill and down dale and over rough roads, they suddenly came out upon a wide and grassy plain covered with pretty wild flowers.

Here, indeed, was a nice place where they could all have a good romp together. The deer rubbed his horns against a tree for pleasure, the monkey scratched his back, the hare smoothed his long ears, and the bear gave a grunt of satisfaction.

Kintaro said, "Here is a place for a good game. What do you all say to a wrestling match?"

The bear being the biggest and the oldest, answered for the others:

“That will be great fun,” said she. “I am the strongest animal, so I will make the platform for the wrestlers;” and she set to work with a will to dig up the earth and to pat it into shape.

“All right,” said Kintaro, “I will look on while you all wrestle with each other. I shall give a prize to the one who wins in each round.”

“What fun! we shall all try to get the prize,” said the bear.

The deer, the monkey and the hare set to work to help the bear raise the platform on which they were all to wrestle. When this was finished, Kintaro cried out:

“Now begin! the monkey and the hare shall open the sports and the deer shall be umpire. Now, Mr. Deer, you are to be umpire!”

“He, he!” answered the deer. “I will be umpire. Now, Mr. Monkey and Mr. Hare, if you are both ready, please walk out and take your places on the platform.”

Then the monkey and the hare both hopped out, quickly and nimbly, to the wrestling platform. The deer, as umpire, stood between the two and called out:

“Red-back! Red-back!” (this to the monkey, who has a red back in Japan). “Are you ready?”

Then he turned to the hare:

“Long-ears! Long-ears! are you ready?”

Both the little wrestlers faced each other while the deer raised a leaf on high as signal. When he dropped the leaf the monkey and the hare rushed upon each other, crying “Yoisho, yoisho!”

While the monkey and the hare wrestled, the deer called out encouragingly or shouted warnings to each of them as the hare or the monkey pushed each other near the edge of the platform and were in danger of falling over.

“Red-back! Red-back! stand your ground!” called out the deer.

“Long-ears! Long-ears! be strong, be strong—don’t let the monkey beat you!” grunted the bear.

So the monkey and the hare, encouraged by their friends, tried their very hardest to beat each other. The hare at last gained on the monkey. The monkey seemed to trip up, and the hare giving him a good push sent him flying off the platform with a bound.

The poor monkey sat up rubbing his back, and his face was very long as he screamed angrily. “Oh, oh! how my back hurts—my back hurts me!”

Seeing the monkey in this plight on the ground, the deer holding his leaf on high said:

“This round is finished—the hare has won.”

Kintaro then opened his luncheon box and taking out a rice-dumpling, gave it to the hare saying:

“Here is your prize, and you have earned, it well!”

Now the monkey got up looking very cross, and as they say in Japan “his stomach stood up,” for he felt that he had not been fairly beaten. So he said to Kintaro and the others who were standing by:

“I have not been fairly beaten. My foot slipped and I tumbled. Please give me another chance and let the hare wrestle with me for another round.”

Then Kintaro consenting, the hare and the monkey began to wrestle again. Now, as every one knows, the monkey is a cunning animal by nature, and he made up his mind to get the best of the hare this time if it were possible. To do this, he thought that the best and surest way would be to get hold of the hare’s long ear. This he soon managed to do. The hare was quite thrown off his guard by the pain of having his long ear pulled so hard, and the monkey seizing his opportunity at last, caught hold of one of the hare’s legs and sent him sprawling in the middle of the dais. The monkey was now the victor and received, a rice-dumpling from Kintaro, which pleased him so much that he quite forgot his sore back.

The deer now came up and asked the hare if he felt ready for another round, and if so whether he would try a round with him, and the hare consenting, they both stood up to wrestle. The bear came forward as umpire.

The deer with long horns and the hare with long ears, it must have been an amusing sight to those who watched this queer match. Suddenly the deer went down on one of his knees, and the bear with the leaf on high declared him beaten. In this way, sometimes the one, sometimes the other, conquering, the little party amused themselves till they were tired.

At last Kintaro got up and said:

“This is enough for to-day. What a nice place we have found for wrestling; let us come again to-morrow. Now, we will all go home. Come along!” So saying, Kintaro led the way while the animals followed.

After walking some little distance they came out on the banks of a river flowing through a valley. Kintaro and his four furry friends stood and looked about for some means of crossing. Bridge

there was none. The river rushed “don, don” on its way. All the animals looked serious, wondering how they could cross the stream and get home that evening.

Kintaro, however, said:

“Wait a moment. I will make a good bridge for you all in a few minutes.”

The bear, the deer, the monkey and the hare looked at him to see what he would do now.

Kintaro went from one tree to another that grew along the river bank. At last he stopped in front of a very large tree that was growing at the water’s edge. He took hold of the trunk and pulled it with all his might, once, twice, thrice! At the third pull, so great was Kintaro’s strength that the roots gave way, and “meri, meri” (crash, crash), over fell the tree, forming an excellent bridge across the stream.

“There,” said Kintaro, “what do you think of my bridge? It is quite safe, so follow me,” and he stepped across first. The four animals followed. Never had they seen any one so strong before, and they all exclaimed:

“How strong he is! how strong he is!”

While all this was going on by the river a woodcutter, who happened to be standing on a rock overlooking the stream, had seen all that passed beneath him. He watched with great surprise Kintaro and his animal companions. He rubbed his eyes to be sure that he was not dreaming when he saw this boy pull over a tree by the roots and throw it across the stream to form a bridge.

The woodcutter, for such he seemed to be by his dress, marveled at all he saw, and said to himself:

“This is no ordinary child. Whose son can he be? I will find out before this day is done.”

He hastened after the strange party and crossed the bridge behind them. Kintaro knew nothing of all this, and little guessed that he was being followed. On reaching the other side of the river he and the animals separated, they to their lairs in the woods and he to his mother, who was waiting for him.

As soon as he entered the cottage, which stood like a matchbox in the heart of the pine-woods, he went to greet his mother, saying:

“Okkasan (mother), here I am!”

“O, Kimbo!” said his mother with a bright smile, glad to see her boy home safe after the long day. “How late you are to-day. I feared that something had happened to you. Where have you been all the time?”

“I took my four friends, the bear, the deer, the monkey, and the hare, up into the hills, and there I made them try a wrestling match, to see which was the strongest. We all enjoyed the sport, and are going to the same place to-morrow to have another match.”

“Now tell me who is the strongest of all?” asked his mother, pretending not to know.

“Oh, mother,” said Kintaro, “don’t you know that I am the strongest? There was no need for me to wrestle with any of them.”

“But next to you then, who is the strongest?”

“The bear comes next to me in strength,” answered Kintaro.

“And after the bear?” asked his mother again.

“Next to the bear it is not easy to say which is the strongest, for the deer, the monkey, and the hare all seem to be as strong as each other,” said Kintaro.

Suddenly Kintaro and his mother were startled by a voice from outside.

“Listen to me, little boy! Next time you go, take this old man with you to the wrestling match. He would like to join the sport too!”

It was the old woodcutter who had followed Kintaro from the river. He slipped off his clogs and entered the cottage. Yama-uba and her son were both taken by surprise. They looked at the intruder wonderingly and saw that he was some one they had never seen before.

“Who are you?” they both exclaimed.

Then the woodcutter laughed and said:

“It does not matter who I am yet, but let us see who has the strongest arm—this boy or myself?”

Then Kintaro, who had lived all his life in the forest, answered the old man without any ceremony, saying:

“We will have a try if you wish it, but you must not be angry whoever is beaten.”

Then Kintaro and the woodcutter both put out their right arms and grasped each other’s hands. For a long time Kintaro and the old man wrestled together in this way, each trying to bend the

other's arm, but the old man was very strong, and the strange pair were evenly matched. At last the old man desisted, declaring it a drawn game.

"You are, indeed, a very strong child. There are few men who can boast of the strength of my right arm!" said the woodcutter. "I saw you first on the banks of the river a few hours ago, when you pulled up that large tree to make a bridge across the torrent. Hardly able to believe what I saw I followed you home. Your strength of arm, which I have just tried, proves what I saw this afternoon. When you are full-grown you will surely be the strongest man in all Japan. It is a pity that you are hidden away in these wild mountains."

Then he turned to Kintaro's mother:

"And you, mother, have you no thought of taking your child to the Capital, and of teaching him to carry a sword as befits a samurai (a Japanese knight)?"

"You are very kind to take so much interest in my son." replied the mother; "but he is as you see, wild and uneducated, and I fear it would be very difficult to do as you say. Because of his great strength as an infant I hid him away in this unknown part of the country, for he hurt every one that came near him. I have often wished that I could, one day, see my boy a knight wearing two swords, but as we have no influential friend to introduce us at the Capital, I fear my hope will never come true."

"You need not trouble yourself about that. To tell you the truth I am no woodcutter! I am one of the great generals of Japan. My name is Sadamitsu, and I am a vassal of the powerful Lord Minamoto-no-Raiko. He ordered me to go round the country and look for boys who give promise of remarkable strength, so that they may be trained as soldiers for his army. I thought that I could best do this by assuming the disguise of a woodcutter. By good fortune, I have thus unexpectedly come across your son. Now if you really wish him to be a SAMURAI (a knight), I will take him and present him to the Lord Raiko as a candidate for his service. What do you say to this?"

As the kind general gradually unfolded his plan the mother's heart was filled with a great joy. She saw that here was a wonderful chance of the one wish of her life being fulfilled—that of seeing Kintaro a SAMURAI before she died.

Bowing her head to the ground, she replied:

"I will then intrust my son to you if you really mean what you say."

Kintaro had all this time been sitting by his mother's side listening to what they said. When his mother finished speaking, he exclaimed:

“Oh, joy! joy! I am to go with the general and one day I shall be a SAMURAI!”

Thus Kintaro’s fate was settled, and the general decided to start for the Capital at once, taking Kintaro with him. It need hardly be said that Yama-uba was sad at parting with her boy, for he was all that was left to her. But she hid her grief with a strong face, as they say in Japan. She knew that it was for her boy’s good that he should leave her now, and she must not discourage him just as he was setting out. Kintaro promised never to forget her, and said that as soon as he was a knight wearing two swords he would build her a home and take care of her in her old age.

All the animals, those he had tamed to serve him, the bear, the deer, the monkey, and the hare, as soon as they found out that he was going away, came to ask if they might attend him as usual. When they learned that he was going away for good they followed him to the foot of the mountain to see him off.

“Kimbo,” said his mother, “mind and be a good boy.”

“Mr. Kintaro,” said the faithful animals, “we wish you good health on your travels.”

Then they all climbed a tree to see the last of him, and from that height they watched him and his shadow gradually grow smaller and smaller, till he was lost to sight.

The general Sadamitsu went on his way rejoicing at having so unexpectedly found such a prodigy as Kintaro.

Having arrived at their destination the general took Kintaro at once to his Lord, Minamoto-no-Raiko, and told him all about Kintaro and how he had found the child. Lord Raiko was delighted with the story, and having commanded Kintaro to be brought to him, made him one of his vassals at once.

Lord Raiko’s army was famous for its band called “The Four Braves.” These warriors were chosen by himself from amongst the bravest and strongest of his soldiers, and the small and well-picked band was distinguished throughout the whole of Japan for the dauntless courage of its men.

When Kintaro grew up to be a man his master made him the Chief of the Four Braves. He was by far the strongest of them all. Soon after this event, news was brought to the city that a cannibal monster had taken up his abode not far away and that people were stricken with fear. Lord Raiko ordered Kintaro to the rescue. He immediately started off, delighted at the prospect of trying his sword.

Surprising the monster in its den, he made short work of cutting off its great head, which he carried back in triumph to his master.

Kintaro now rose to be the greatest hero of his country, and great was the power and honor and wealth that came to him. He now kept his promise and built a comfortable home for his old mother, who lived happily with him in the Capital to the end of her days.

Is not this the story of a great hero?

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