

Naruko-Yaruko (*Bird Rattle Quarrel*)

Two local people go out for a walk in the fields, and find in the rice-field a device that scares wild birds and animals from harming crops. One of them calls it “Naruko,” and the other disagrees and says its name is “Yaruko.” The disagreement ends up with their making a bet on which of them is right. They agree that the proprietor of a nearby teahouse should be the judge as to which of them is right. The proprietor, hearing that their stakes are their swords, and receiving from each a promise of some gift (firewood and charcoal will be given him), offers an answer in the form of *waka*-poem composed by the priest Saigyō (1118-1190), explaining that it is best not to make bets, and that while two parties are distracted by their quarrel, the third party may profit. So saying, he immediately picks up their swords and takes to his heels, chased by the two men.

Kurozuka (*The Black Mound*)

A senior priest named Yukei and his followers in Nachi in Wakayama Prefecture are travelling through many provinces as part of their Buddhist training. One evening they arrive at Adachigahara in Fukushima Prefecture. Looking for lodging for the night, they visit a humble hut—the only hut that can be found in the area—but their request is refused by the old woman who lives in the hut. However, when they ask to stay a second time, she accepts them out of pity and leads them into a room. The priest, finding a spinning wheel in the middle of the room, asks her to show them how it is used. As she turns the wheel and starts to spin, he is deeply impressed with the idea of an old woman quietly turning the wheel to earn her living. It reminds him of the life of all human beings in this transient world.

In the dead of night she leaves the hut to collect firewood under the strict condition that, while she is out, they do not look into bedroom. Yukei keeps his words as he has promised, but his followers are swayed by curiosity and peep into her bedroom. To their horror, they discover a large number of human corpses piled high in the room. They immediately flee from the place for safety. On her return, discovering that they have disobeyed her, the old woman becomes furious and, transforming herself into an ogre, chases after them. Vigorously rubbing the rosary beads between their hands, they pray to the “Five Mantra Kings” to quell the evil spirit, and soon her power is dissipated and she disappears into the wild night wind.

by Takao Saijo