

The Rockwood Review.

nap after supper, expecting to wake up in time for the spectacle. But by ten o'clock, when I went to the beach again, all was over, and everybody had gone home. Over the water I saw something like a long swarm of fireflies—the lanterns drifting out to sea in procession; but they were already too far to be distinguished except as points of colored light. I was much disappointed; I felt that I had lazily missed an opportunity which might never again return—for these old "Bon" customs are dying rapidly. But in another moment it occurred to me that I could very well venture to swim out to the lights. They were moving slowly. I dropped my robe on the beach, and plunged in. The sea was calm, and beautifully phosphorescent. Every stroke kindled a stream of yellow fire. I swam fast, and overtook the last of the lantern fleet much sooner than I had hoped. I felt that it would be unkind to interfere with the little embarcations, or to divert them from their silent course, so I contented myself with keeping close to one of them and studying its details.

The structure was very simple. The bottom was a piece of thick plank, perfectly square, and measured about ten inches across. Each one of its corners supported a slender stick about sixteen inches high and these four uprights, united above by crosspieces, sustained the paper sides. Upon the point of a long nail, driven up through the centre of the bottom, was fixed a lighted candle. The top was left open. The four sides presented five different colors—blue, yellow, red, white and black; these five colors respectively symbolizing ether, wind, fire, water and earth—the five Buddhist elements which are metaphysically identified with the five Buddhas. One of the paper-panes was red, one blue, one yellow; and the right half of the fourth pane was black, while the left half, uncolored, represented white. No "kai-

myo" was written upon any of the transparencies. Inside the lantern there was only the flickering candle.

I watched those frail glowing shapes drifting through the night, and even as they drifted scattering under impulse of wind and wave, more and more widely apart. Each, with its quiver of color, seemed a life afraid—trembling on the blind current that was bearing it into the outer blackness. * * * Are we not ourselves as lanterns launched upon a deeper and a dimmer sea, and ever separating further and further one from another as we drift to the inevitable dissolution? Soon the thought light in each burns itself out, then the poor frames, and all that is left of their once fair colors, must melt forever into the colorless Void. * * *

Even in the moment of this musing I began to doubt whether I was really alone—to ask myself whether there might not be something more than a mere shuddering of light in the thing that rocked beside me—some presence that haunted the dying flame, and was watching the watcher. A faint, cold thrill passed over me—perhaps some chill uprising from the depths—perhaps the creeping only of a ghostly fancy. Old superstitions of the coast recurred to me, old vague warnings of peril in the time of the passage of souls. I reflected that were any evil to befall me out there in the night—meddling, or seeming to meddle, with the lights of the dead—I should myself furnish the subject of some weird legend. * * * I whispered the Buddhist formula of farewell—to the lights—and made speed for the shore.

As I touched the stones again I was startled by seeing two white shadows before me, but a kindly voice, asking if the water was cold set me at ease. It was the voice of my old landlord Otokichi, the fishseller, who had come to look