

THE FAIRY FOX.

I think we have all of us, whether we are so old as to have forgotten it, or so young as to remember it very well, passed through a time when we believed in fairies. But as we get older, fairy stories lose their interest for us, and when we learn that our bread and butter and all the other pleasant things of life come only by working for them, and not by the kindness of fairies—or such delightful little creatures as Palmer Cox's brownies—then we lose faith in them altogether and become quite too sober or matter-of-fact. And this is where you and I are very different from a Chinaman; because, no matter how hard a Chinaman has to rake and hoe and grub for his daily bread, his faith in the fairies never leaves him. If you see an old Chinese gentleman with large spectacles, and a face so grave that it makes you quite chilly even to look at him, you would never think that he would kneel down and pray to a fairy, that any small boy at home could tell him was all moonshine. And yet he will, and do more than this too, if he is one of the common people.

I really wish that the Chinese fairies were more like these same brownies that you all know so well—always wearing a smile or a grin, and brimming over with good-humor and helpfulness. But if you were to guess from now till night-time what sort of fairies they are that nearly all the common people of Tientsin believe in and worship, I am sure you would not guess rightly; they are the "Fairy Family," the fox, snake, hedgehog, weasel, and rat. Not the kind with gossamer wings, you see, or in the shape of little men and women, but very ugly creatures that most of us do not even care to look at. And the people's belief in them is not at all a make-believe kind of faith, but a worship in downright earnest. You will find shrines for them in many houses.

When I was in Mongolia last summer, I was looking at one of the large towers of the Great Wall, and trying to find out how we could climb up to the top. On one side of it, in the stonework around its base, there is a small hole just large enough for a man to crawl into on his hands and knees; this ran right into the tower, into pitch darkness. We crawled in. There was a little tunnel inside, with a square hole at one end of it leading up to the top of the tower; but the tunnel itself was very dark and dirty and just the place for a beast's den, for it was far from any houses, and there are foxes and wolves in Mongolia which would be glad of such a hiding place. As we crawled out we noticed pieces of paper pasted on the stone with characters written on them. What do you think they said? That wretched little hole had been dedicated as a home of the fairy fox, and these pieces of paper, with sentences of prayer or praise on them, had been brought by worshippers and pasted about the door of this curious

temple. Some one had probably seen a fox take refuge there, and jumped to the conclusion that it was the real fairy fox and that he must be worshipped.

Ancient philosophers say that the fox at the age of fifty can take the form of a woman; at one hundred can become a young girl or a wizard, if he chooses; that at one thousand he is admitted to the heavens and becomes the "celestial fox." The common people though, say that he only has to practice certain occult arts for six hundred fairy years, which are only eighty of our years, and then he is immortal and can change his shape as he pleases.

A year or two ago, in the city of Tung-cho, a man saw, or pretended to see, a fairy fox take refuge in a hole in the city wall. The news spread quickly, and people began to come from all quarters to offer worship at the hole in the brickwork and pray for what they wanted most. As offerings flowed in, a little temple was built against the side of the wall and here hundreds burned their incense and besought the fairy fox to be merciful to them and help them. Some thought that the powerful fairy heard their prayers and sent an answer. These brought strips of cloth with short sentences of praise or of thanksgiving written on them, and hung them on the wall above the shrine. One of these, which you often see on idol shrines, has the words "Ask and it shall be given;" another calls the fox "Preserver of all life"; and some refer to him as enlightening or saving all men. Indeed, he is constantly working miracles of healing or help, so the people believe, and the worship of many a gorgeous idol in the temple is neglected for that of the god-fox.

If you were to go into his temple, here in Tientsin you would not see any image of the fox himself, but only one of a solemn Chinese mandarin, with his wife, Mrs. Fox, sitting by his side, and a number of small boys and girls about them—the little foxes. It is not considered respectful to make a picture or an image of him as an animal, so he appears always as a grave old gentleman, very unlike the sly skulking creature that you and I have always thought a fox to be. You could never tell, if you were to go into a Chinese temple, what the idols were meant to represent, whether animals or men or fire or thunder or money or long life, or what else. For example, the thunder-spirit is a very unamiable-looking old patriarch, with mallet and chisel in his hand and a chubby attendant on either side.

There is only room here to say two things more. First, do you live in New England? If you do, then I think the fairy fox used to be worshipped, much as the Chinese worship him, by the very people who once lived there before you,—that is, the Indians. The Pilgrim fathers could have told you about it very well, and John Eliot, who was the great missionary to our own Massachusetts Indians, saw so much of this curious