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PERAK MUSEUM NOTES, NO. III.

THE TIN MINES
AND THE
MINING INDUSTRIES OF PERAK
AND OTHER PAPERS.

BY
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ALSO A PAPER ON THE PADI INDUSTRY OF KRIAN
BY H. W. C. LEECH, LL.D., AND AN ITINERARY OF A TRIP TO GUNONG
BINTANG BY G. A. LEFROY, CHIEF SURVEYOR, PERAK.

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SOME NOTES ON THE MALAYAN FOLK-LORE
OF NATURAL HISTORY.

BY L. WRAY, JUN.

A strange superstition is attached to a small snail which frequents the neighbourhood of the limestone hills in Perak. It belongs to the *Cyclophorida*, and is probably an *Alycaeus*. Among the grass in the shadow of a grazing animal these creatures are to be discovered, and if one of them is crushed it will be found to be full of blood, which has been drawn in a mysterious way from the veins of the animal through its shadow. Where these noxious snails abound the cattle become emaciated and sometimes even die from the constant loss of blood. In the folk-lore of other countries many parallels to this occur, but they differ in either the birds, bats or vampires, who are supposed to prey on the life-blood of their fellows, going direct to the animals to suck the blood instead of doing so through the medium of their shadows.

A horned toad, known as *katak bertandok*, but not the common one of that name (*Megalophrys nasuta*, Gunther), has a very bad reputation with the Malays. It is said to live in the jungle on the hills, and whenever it takes up its abode all the trees and plants around wither and die. So poisonous is it, that it is dangerous even to approach it, and to touch or be bitten by it is certain death.

The bite of the common toad (*Bufo melanostictus*, Cantor) is also said to prove fatal. That toads have no teeth is an anatomical detail that does not seem to be thought worthy of being taken into account.

The supposed venomous properties of this useful and harmless tribe have a world-wide range. In Shakspeare many allusions to it are made; one of them, which mentions the habit of hibernation possessed by those species which inhabit the colder parts of the earth, says—

“ In the poison'd entrails throw,
Toad, that under coldest stone
Days and nights hast thirty-one,
Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.”
Macbeth, Act. iv.

In another, reference is made to the toad-stone, which seems to be represented in Malayan tradition by the pearl carried in the bodies of the hamadryad, the cobra and the bungarus, the three most deadly snakes of the Peninsula.*

“ Sweet are the uses of adversity
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in its head.”

* These stones are called *batu gilar*, and are highly valued. They are calcareous, and look like the rounded and waterworn operculum of some marine mollusc, but their true origin is uncertain.

Boccaccio makes one of his stories turn on the poisonous properties of a toad, the two principal characters, Pasquino and Simona, being killed by putting into their mouths the leaves of a sage plant which grew over the hole of a large toad. "King John of England is supposed to have been poisoned by a drink in which matter from a living toad had been infused."—*Medical Jurisprudence*, by Beck.

There is some foundation of fact for the popular belief, as toads secrete an acrid fluid from the skin, which appears to defend them from the attacks of carnivorous animals.*

A species of fish-like tadpole, found at certain seasons of the year in the streams and pools, is supposed to divide when it reaches maturity, the front portion forming a frog and the after part or tail becoming the fish known as *ikan kli*, one of the cat-fishes or siluridæ. In consequence of this strange idea many Malays will not eat the fish, deeming it but little better than the animal from which it is supposed to have been cast.

The *ikan kli* is armed with two sharp barbed spines attached to the fore part of the pectoral fins, and can and does inflict very nasty wounds with them, when incautiously handled. The spines are reputed to be poisonous, but it is believed that if the brain of the offending fish is applied to the wound it will act as a complete antidote to the poisonous principle, and the wound will heal without trouble. The English cure for hydrophobia—that is, "the hair of the dog that bit you," will occur to all as a modification of the same idea.

When the eggs of a crocodile are hatching out, the mother watches; the little ones that take to their native element she does not molest, but she eats up all those which run away from the water, but should any escape her and get away on to the land they will change into tigers. Some of these reptiles are said to have tongues, and when possessed of that organ they are very much more vicious and dangerous than the ordinarily formed ones. When a crocodile enters a river, it swallows a pebble, so that on opening the stomach of one it is only necessary to count the stones contained in it to tell how many rivers it has been into during its life. The Malays call these stones *kira-kira dia*, on its account. The Indians on the banks of the Oronoko, on the other hand, assert that the alligator swallows stones to add weight to its body to aid it in diving and dragging its prey under water. Crocodiles inhabiting a river are said to resent the intrusion of strangers from other

* "The toad secretes a venom of a tolerably powerful character; and instead of this secretion taking place, as in the case of snakes, entirely through the salivary glands, it is actually secreted by the skin, so that the word "sweated" is most accurately descriptive. Dr. Leonard Guthrie mentions that the secretion also occurs in the toad through the parotid glands, and the venom is a thick milky fluid like the juice of dandelion stalks in taste and appearance. When inoculated subcutaneously it kills small birds in six minutes, and dogs and guinea-pigs in half an hour to an hour and a half; the symptoms in birds being loss of co-ordination, followed by death, in guinea-pigs, convulsions, and in the dog, depression, vomiting, and intoxication. Dr. Guthrie describes two very interesting observations of his own on the effect of toad's venom. He kept a small toad in a cage with some common lizards, and one day a lizard, having bitten the toad, immediately afterwards rushed wildly round the cage, burrowing its head in the sand, became convulsed, and died in less than two minutes. His dog having seized a toad, was attacked by instantaneous and profuse salivation, violent vomiting, and collapse. He also noticed that the venom has a most powerful local action on the skin, so that after carrying a toad in his hand he got numbness and tingling in it, with slight swelling and dryness of the skin, lasting for several hours."

waters, and fights often take place in consequence. According to the Malays they are gifted with two pairs of eyes. The upper ones they use when above water and the under pair when beneath the surface. This latter pair is situated half way between the muzzle and the angle of the mouth, on the under surface of the lower jaw. These are in reality not eyes but inward folds of skin connected by a duct with a scent gland, which secretes an unctuous substance of a dark grey colour, with a strong musky odour. Medicinal properties are attributed to the flesh of the males, which are believed to be of very rare occurrence, and to be quite unable to leave the water by reason of their peculiar conformation. The fact is that the sexes are almost undistinguishable, except on dissection, and therefore the natives class all that are caught as females. While on this subject it may be worth mentioning that at Port Weld there used to be a tame crocodile which would come when called. The Malays fed it regularly, and said it was not vicious and would not do any harm. It was repeatedly seen by the early visitants to Port Weld, or Sapetang as the place was then called, and was a fine big animal, with a bunch of seaweed growing on its head. Some one had it called, and then fired at the poor thing; whether it was wounded, or only frightened, is uncertain, but it never came again.

The gall-bladder of the python, *uler sawah*, is in great request among native medical practitioners.* This serpent is supposed to have two of these organs, one of which is called *lampedu idup*, or the live gall-bladder. It is believed that if a python is killed and this organ is cut out and kept it will develop into a serpent of just twice the size of that from which it was taken. The natives positively assert that the python attains a length of 60 to 70 feet, and that it has been known to have killed and eaten a rhinoceros.

One of the pit vipers is exceedingly sluggish in its movements, and will remain in the same place for days together. One individual that was watched, lay coiled up on the branch of a tree for five days, and probably would have remained much longer, but at the end of that time it was caught and preserved. The Malays call it *uler kapak daun*, and they say that it is fed three times a day by birds, who bring it insects to eat. One man went so far as to say that he had actually once seen some birds engaged in feeding one of these beautiful bright green snakes.

The weaver-bird, which makes the long hanging bottle-shaped nests occasionally seen hanging from the branches of a low tree, is said to use a golden needle in the work; and it is affirmed that if the nest is carefully

* "Those who take them proceed to extract the gall from the inside, and this sells at a great price; for you must know it furnishes the material for a most precious medicine. Thus if a person is bitten by a mad dog, and they give him but a small pennyweight of this medicine to drink, he is cured in a moment.

* * * * *

"Yet, again, if one has any disease like the itch, or it may be worse, and applies a small quantity of this gall he shall speedily be cured. So you see why it sells at such a high price.

"They also sell the flesh of this serpent, for it is excellent eating, and the people are very fond of it. And when these serpents are very hungry, sometimes they will seek out the lairs of lions or bears or other large wild beasts, and devour their cubs, without the sire and dam being able to prevent it. Indeed, if they catch the big ones themselves they devour them too; they can make no resistance."—*The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian*, (A.D. 1273.)

picked to pieces without breaking any of it, the needle will be found, but if it is pulled ruthlessly apart, or if even a single piece of the grass of which it is made is broken in unravelling it, the golden needle will disappear. The makers of these curious and beautiful nests are said to always choose trees that are infested with red ants or wasps, or which grow in impassable swamps.

The king crow is called by the Malays the slave of the monkeys, *burong hamba kra*. It is a pretty, active, noisy little bird, incessantly flying about with its two long racket-shaped tail feathers fluttering after it. They say that when it has both of these feathers it has paid off its debt and is free, but when it is either destitute of these appendages or has only one of them it is still in bondage. The grey sea eagle is called *burong hamba siput*, and its office is to give warning by screaming to the shell-fish of the changes of the tide, so that they may regulate their movements, and those species which crawl about on the mud at low water may know when to take refuge in the trees and escape the rising tide, or when the tide is falling, that they may know when to descend to look for food.

Burong demam, or the fever bird, is so called from its loud tremulous note, and the Malays say that the female bird calls in its fever-stricken voice to its mate to go and find food because it has fever so bad that it cannot go itself. This bird is probably one of the large green barbets. The note is often heard, and doubtless the bird has been collected, but it is one thing shooting a bird and another identifying it as the producer of a certain note.

Another bird, the white-breasted water-hen, a frequenter of the edges of reedy pools and the marshy banks of streams, is reputed to build a nest on the ground which has the property of rendering any one invisible who puts it on his head. The prevailing idea among the Malays is that the proper and legitimate use to put it to is to steal money and other species of property.

Elephants are said to be very frightened if they see a tree-stump that has been felled at a great height from the ground, as some trees which have high spreading buttresses are cut, because they think that giants must have felled it, and as ordinary-sized men are more than a match for them they are in great dread of being caught by creatures many times more powerful than their masters. Some of the larger insects of the grasshopper kind are supposed to be objects of terror to elephants, while the particularly harmless little pangolin (*manis pentadactyla*) is thought to be able to kill one of these huge beasts by biting its foot. The pangolin, by the bye, is quite toothless. Another method in which the pangolin attacks and kills elephants is by coiling itself tightly around the end of the elephant's trunk and so suffocating it. This idea is also believed in by the Singhalese, according to Mr. W. T. Hornaday's *Two Years in the Jungle*. Passing from fiction to fact, a thing that does not seem to be generally known, or at least that has not found its way into natural history books, may be mentioned here. It is that elephants are very fond of eating earth. They methodically dig it out with their fore feet, put it into their mouths with their trunks and munch

it up with evidently great relish. Probably it is a means of keeping their teeth sharp, but they undoubtedly swallow it.

A Malacca cane with a joint as long as the height of the owner will protect him from harm by snakes and animals and will give him luck in all things. What is called a *samambu bangku*, or *baku*, possesses the power of killing any one, even when the person is only slightly hurt by a blow dealt with it. These are canes that have died down and have begun to shoot again from near the root. They are very rare, one of 18 inches in length is valued at six or seven dollars, and one long enough to make a walking-stick of, at 30 to 50 dollars. At night the *rotan samambu* plant is said to make a loud noise, and, according to the Malays, it says—"Bulam sampei, bulam sampei," meaning that it has not yet reached its full growth. They are often to be heard in the jungle at night, but the most diligent search will not reveal their whereabouts. The *rotan manoh* is also said to give out sounds at night. The sounds are loud and musical, but the alleged will-of-the-wisp character of the rattans which are supposed to produce them seems to point to some night-bird, tree-frog, or lizard as being the real cause of the weird notes, though it is just possible that the wind might make the rattan leaves vibrate in such a way as to cause the sounds.

One of the largest and stately of the forest trees in Perak is that known as Toallong or Toh Allong. It has a very poisonous sap, which produces great irritation when it comes in contact with the skin. Two Chinamen who had felled one of these trees in ignorance, had their faces so swelled and inflamed that they could not see out of their eyes and had to be led about for some days before they recovered from the effects of the poison. Their arms, breasts and faces were affected, and they presented the appearance of having a very bad attack of erysipelas. These trees are supposed to be the abiding places of *hantu*, or spirits, when they have large hollow projections from the trunk, called *rumah hantu* or spirit houses. These projections are formed when a branch gets broken off near the trunk, and are quite characteristic of the tree. There are sometimes three or four of them on a large tree, and the Malays have a great objection to cutting down any that are so disfigured, the belief being that if a man fell one he will die within the year. As a rule these trees are left standing when clearings are made, and they are a source of trouble and expense to planters and others, who object to their being left uncut.

The following series of events actually happened. A Malay named Panda Tambong undertook, against the advice of his friends, to fell one of these Toh Allong trees, and he almost immediately afterwards was taken ill with fever, and died in a few weeks' time. Shortly after this some men were sitting plaiting ataps under the shade of another of these ill-omened trees, when, without any warning, a large branch fell down, breaking the arm of one man and more or less injuring two others. There was not a breath of wind at the time, or anything else likely to determine the fall of the branch. After this it was decided to have the tree felled, as there were coolie houses nearly under it. There was great difficulty in getting any one to fell it. Eventually a Penang Malay undertook the job, but stipulated that a *pawang*, or sorcerer, should be

employed to drive away the demons first. The pawang hung pieces of white and red cloth on sticks round the tree, burned incense in the little contrivances made of the split leaf-stalks of the bertam palm used by the Malays for that purpose, cut off the heads of two white fowls, sprinkled the blood over the trunk, and in the midst of many incantations the tree was felled without any mishap; but, strange to say, the pawang, who was a haji and a slave-debtor of the Toh Puan Halimah, died about nine months afterwards.
