

SOME ADDITIONAL FOLK-LORE FROM MADAGASCAR.



I HAD hoped to have supplemented my paper on "Malagasy Folk-Lore and Popular Superstitions" (*Folk-Lore Record*, vol. ii. pp. 19-46), by a longer article, giving specimens of Malagasy Folk-Tales, Songs, and Oratory. A considerable portion of this article was written, but, through my being wrecked in the Red Sea in July 1880, the MS. was lost, together with many other papers and books, some of which cannot be replaced. I regret that a press of other work has hitherto prevented me from re-writing the paper. I hope still to do this, but meanwhile I venture to put together a few more particulars on the folk-lore of Madagascar as an appendix to the article which has already appeared in this *Record*. It will be convenient to follow the same arrangement of subject as that observed in the first paper.

Animals.—Many curious customs and superstitions, it may be remembered, are connected with the largest animal found in Madagascar, the humped and long-horned ox. The Sàkalàva of Ménabé, on the west coast, not only seldom kill red oxen for food, but at their circumcision festivals, and then only, they kill a *bull*, instead of an ox; and the child to be operated on is seated on the animal's back during the customary invocation. The royal tribes of Mâroseràna and Andrévola, in the Fiherénana province (south-west coast), used sometimes to employ human sacrifices instead of those of oxen.

The tribe or clan of the south-east provinces, called Zâfy Raminà, will not eat flesh unless the animal has been killed by the hand of one of their own tribe.

The Rev. C. F. Moss relates that "a place called Anàlavòry [between the capital and the north-west coast] was described to us as

the burial-place of an extinct race of kings; and it is said that every year, at the feast of the *fandràdana* [the new-year's festival, a very great occasion with the Malagasy], a herd of cattle gather of their own accord at the spot, whereupon the fat ones die of themselves without waiting for the butcher; while the lean ones, led by an ancient cow, run away, to return to the same spot and go through the same course of procedure the following year. We were also assured that if we stood there and shouted, no matter how dry the day, rain would surely come."

Omby or *ombé*, the native word for ox, is an old equivalent for "chief," "head," and the bull is held as sacred among the *Sàkalàvas*. In digging out the foundations for a new gateway to the royal courtyard at *Antanànarivo*, a few years ago, the remains of one of the former queen's fighting-bulls were discovered, carefully wrapped in a red *làmba*, the ample cloth forming the outer article of native dress.*

Among the *Sihànaka* tribe any one who sees a large black moth called *kàkabémàso* (i.e., "the enemy with many eyes," alluding to the eye-like spots on its wings) is believed to be liable to an attack of a disease called *sòratra* or *tròmba*. The same consequence also follows seeing the bird called *vòrondréo*.

A native evangelist living among the same people had a hare-lipped cow and two rabbits. These animals caused much anxiety to the superstitious folks, a number of whom waited upon him, and requested him either to remove or kill them, as such creatures were tabooed amongst them, and would bring sickness and other calamities if allowed to remain.

* The close connection of the native name for the ox with many Malagasy words may be seen from the following examples:—

Ombalàhinify, eyetooth; lit. "bull-tooth."

Ombalàhintòngotra, heel; lit. "bull of foot."

Ombalàhi-fanòto, lit. "bull-pounder," a name given to the rice-pounder when used in the circumcision ceremonies.

Ombalàhi-vòla, "silver bulls," are small ornaments of silver about an inch long, in the rude shape of an ox, worn about the wrist or chest as charms.

Ombalàhin' Andriamànitra, "God's bull," is the name of a bead.

Ombivòlavrita, "oxen finished (?) money," are speckled cattle, frequently used for sacrifices and as presents to the sovereign or chief.

Among the Hovas a bit of folk-lore was connected with the whale. When an earthquake shock occurred they used to say, "*Mivàdika ny tròzona*" ("The whales are turning over") and "*Mampandro ny zànanany ny tròzona*" ("The whales are bathing their children").

Fabulous animals.—Some account was given in the previous paper of a curious belief of the Bètsiléó (central southern Madagascar) in a kind of transmigration of souls; the spirits of those of noble blood being supposed to enter a creature called *fanàny*, variously described as a lizard, a worm, and a serpent, which is regarded with idolatrous reverence by the people. My friend Mr. G. A. Shaw, who has resided for many years in the Bètsiléó province, has kindly given me some additional particulars as to this curious superstition. He says the *fanàny* is supposed to be the result of the *life* of the princes, and to come from below the left armpit; for the body, when dead, is bound tightly to one of the posts of the house, and the creature that appears in the liquid exuding from the body by the pressure applied is, they say, the life. This creature is carried to the nearest water, river or otherwise, which from that time becomes *fàdy* or tabooed. No more is seen of it (of course), but they think it is not killed, but changes into a snake or lizard, or some animal forming a connecting link between these two reptiles. Here native authorities differ, some asserting that it has legs, while some are uncertain whether the *dòna* (a species of serpent) is not it. When one of these is found the chief people from the district assemble round it, and alternately ask it if it be not the *fanàny* of such-an-one, until it moves its head, when they consider that it has answered in the affirmative. It is coaxed on to a clean cloth; an ox is killed, and the blood set before the *fanàny*, which is then carried to the chief village of the prince to whose name it is supposed to have answered. A great feast is made; oxen are killed; rum is drunk to excess, and at last the creature is carried to the same tabooed water into which the worm said to come from the body was originally placed. The *fanàny*, they say, can never die; if decapitated another head grows; if cut in halves the missing part is renewed; but any one injuring it will die. The belief is dying out, especially since such confusion of ideas exists as to what animal is really the *fanàny*.

While speaking of fabulous *animals* it may be here noted that there is, in Imérina at least, some trace of that wide-spread belief in the footprints of supernatural beings, giants, saints, mighty men, and gods.* Rapéto, traditionally known as a chief of the Vazimba, the aboriginal inhabitants of the interior provinces, has by the popular imagination been magnified into a giant, and some curious holes in rocks by the roadside, four or five miles north of Antanànarivo, are supposed to be his footprints. A good deal of imaginative power is requisite, for they are shapeless cavities, probably produced by the action of rain water. A village two or three miles west of the capital bears the name of this chief, Ambòhidrapéto, *i.e.*, the town of Rapéto.

Trees and plants.—In the times when bull fighting was common the owners of the bulls held a plant called *tsivàlondriana* in their hands to ensure victory. Concerning a hard-wooded tree called *hàzotòkana*, the Malagasy used to believe that if any part of it were brought into the house the rice pans would be broken. And formerly, the root of a plant called *vàrikitia* was brought by the father of a newly-born child (if the first-born), who held it over his head outside the house, then dashed it on the ground westwards, with the idea that the child was in some way or other benefitted thereby.

In addition to what was said about Malagasy *Ordeals* it may be noted that in the *tangéna* ordeal the poison was occasionally given to dogs or fowls, instead of to the culprit personally, its effect upon these being the test of guilt or innocence. It was believed that certain charms could make the animals die; in the case of a dog these were called *tòlakambòandràno*.

Although the use of the *tangéna* ordeal was abolished in Madagascar by an article in the Anglo-Malagasy treaty of 1865, there can be no doubt that it is still believed in by numbers of the people. This was shown unmistakably so recently as in April 1878; for the prevalence of a very fatal epidemic fever led many of the people in a village only a few miles distant from the capital to resort to the *tangéna*, several dying from the effects. The Government, however, promptly interfered and punished severely all the inhabitants of the place.

* See Tylor's *Early Civilization*, pp. 114-116.

Folk-lore of home and family life.—Among the Bâra there are no midwives, or rather, the midwives are men, the husbands and elder sons doing all that is required at a birth. After giving birth to a child the mother remains in the house four days.

At the commencement of the new year red earth used to be taken from some specified spot and put at the foot of the middle post supporting the roof of the house; this was called *sântatàona*, *i. e.* "first fruits of the year."

On certain occasions a cord is directed by the diviners to be fastened from the south-west corner of the house to the north-east (the sacred) corner of it; this is done as a *sòrona* or means of obtaining blessing, and is called *tàdivita*, *i. e.* "finished" or "perfected cord."

The Tanàla (forest) people, as regards their way of eating, may be divided into two classes: from the boundaries of the river Rianàny, going southwards, they eat with wooden spoons; but going northwards they eat with leaves. The Zâfimanélo tribe lock their doors when at their meals, and hardly any one ever sees them eating.

Lucky and unlucky actions, &c.—Of the river Fanàndrona, in Bétsiléo, Mr. Shaw says that, although it is a splendid river, "on account of the superstition of the people deterring them from putting a canoe on it, it is one of the greatest obstacles to travelling to and from the capital in the wet season. In one itinerating journey the only way of getting the writer's goods across was by balancing them upon the native water pitchers, and a man swimming on each side propelling the cranky vessel forward; and although scarcely a year passes without some being drowned, yet no inducement is sufficiently strong to overcome their superstitious dread of allowing a canoe to be used."

Sickness and death.—Among the Hovas the rough bier on which a corpse is carried is called *trànovòrona*, *i. e.* "bird's house," possibly from the idea of the spirit of the departed having flown away, like a bird from its cage. A whirlwind (*tadiò*) is supposed to consist of the ghosts of the dead.

The sacredness attached to royal names among the Hovas is extended after the death of the sovereign to everything connected with their tombs and funeral ceremonies. Thus, they do not say of a king that he has died, but has "retired," *niambòho*, lit. "turned his back" upon

his subjects, or has "gone home to lie down," *nòdimàndry*. His corpse is not called *fàty*, the usual word for that of a subject, but *ny mäsina*, "the sacred" (thing); and it is not buried (*alévina*), but "hidden" (*afénina*); and his tomb is not a *fäsana*, but *tràno mäsina*, "the sacred house," in which is hidden the silver coffin, which is termed *lakambòla*, "the silver canoe." Everything, in short, is specialised by a name different from that applied to the same thing in connection with the people generally, whether nobles or otherwise.

The Rev. W. D. Cowan, in speaking of the epidemic of malarial fever in the Bétasiléo province in 1878-79, says: "One curious coincidence may be mentioned. The town and its suburbs were visited by an epidemic of catarrh. The natives at once said that locusts were near at hand. At this time we had heard of no locusts being in the neighbourhood, but, strange to say, they appeared in great numbers within the week."

Witchcraft and charms.—By mixing charms with the dust a person had trodden upon it was supposed that a disease called *raòdia* (*rao* = *raoka*, gathered, collected, *dia*, footprint) would be caused to that person.

Of the Bétasiléo charms, Mr. Shaw says they consist "for the most part of pieces of wood about a span in length, cut from various trees, some growing only, it is said, in distant places, and hence costing considerable sums of money;" and that he had in his possession between twenty and thirty *òdy*, of each of which he had ascertained the use. Some are believed in simply as medicine, the sticks being rubbed on a stone, and the dust thus grated off eaten by the sick. One is used as an antidote to any poison an enemy may have placed in the food; while others are efficacious for curing cuts and open wounds, delirium, sudden illness, and as protection from thieves, lightning, crocodiles, &c.

Of the *Sihànaka*, the Rev. J. Pearse says: "In 1877 large numbers of the people wore a single grain of Indian corn around their neck as a talisman against a disease which, it was affirmed, a *tenrec* (one of the *Centetidae*, hedgehog-like animals) had announced would appear. During this year a similar story agitated the people. In the month of February a report was circulated that a dog had spoken, and announced that a hurricane causing grievous famine would devastate

the district, that immense hailstones would descend, and that even the heavens would fall. To prevent this calamity the people were told to get six black and six white beads, and to wear them round the neck, as that would prevent any harm overtaking the wearer. The result was that men, women, and children were seen with these twelve beads hung round the neck as a charm." They also wear two white and two black beads to cause rain to fall, but if the string be broken the charm is useless.

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