

## ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

DIVINATION AMONGST THE KHASIAS,  
AND THE PUNISHMENT OF WITCHCRAFT.

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In the Khasia hills it is the custom of the people, of such of them at least as have not been civilized by their intercourse with the English residents, to consult their augurs or soothsayers in times of sickness and trouble, and to seek for advice and help through omens drawn from the breaking of eggs, and propitiatory sacrifices of fowls, goats, pigs, oxen, &c. Their method of divination by the sacrifice of fowls consists of an inspection of the entrails, and recalls forcibly the practice of the haruspices of ancient Rome. In many other respects their religion reminds one of the mythology of the Greeks and Romans. The *ἑβραεῖται Ζεὺς* is represented by U Blei, the great god, the maker of all things. Then there is a host of lesser deities, some of whom are benevolent in their dispositions, others malignant demons. Every sacred grove and most of the streams and rivers are supposed to be tenanted by demons, Khasia representatives of the Dryad and Naiad nymphs of the early Greeks. The sacred grove on Shillong Peak, the highest point of the Khasia hills, is supposed to be the Olympus or favourite abode of the majority of the gods. Sickness and plagues have their own especial demons, amongst whom U Thakoor, the tutelary demon of small-pox, is perhaps the most important.

In my rambles through the hills I have frequently seen the augurs, by which name I designate the individuals who understand the signs of the eggs, at their work—usually an aged man sitting in some house enclosure, surrounded by a small but anxious crowd, and to the accompaniment of a monotonous chant breaking eggs on a small oblong board, and, when a satisfactory answer has been obtained, sacrificing a fowl or a goat as the case may be. They are not in the slightest degree discomposed by the presence of a stranger. They make no secret of their method of procedure. On one occasion, an ancient member of the fraternity of augurs endeavoured to explain to me the egg part of the system of divination. It is simple enough. Before the breaking of the egg the god is asked a question, and, according to the manner in which the yolk, white, and shell are blended on the board, the answer is either negative or affirmative. By means of eggs they ask questions as to the cause of disease and the means of bringing it to a satisfactory termination. The remedy prescribed always consists in propitiating the offended demons by the sacrifice of an animal or two. The flesh of the victims slain is consumed in the feast which follows. The heart is partaken of only by the members of the house which performs the sacrifice, ; the rest of the flesh is divided indiscriminately amongst the people present. On the death of a Raja whole hecatombs are slain in sacrifices to the demons, and feasts given which last for days. Thus, the custom of sacri-

ficing can hardly be considered a bad one, inasmuch as the people consume the flesh of the victims slain. On the other hand, it has often grieved me to see the wholesale waste of eggs which the mere interrogation of the deity entails: for no use is made of the broken eggs, but they are swept from the board to the ground to be eaten up by the dogs and pigs. Hundreds of eggs are broken in these questionings of the demons. Accordingly, in times of cholera and small-pox, when the superstitious feelings of the people are evoked, the price of eggs is ordinarily doubled in Shillong, and sometimes a good egg cannot be got for love or money.

I have often found the custom of egg-breaking a trouble from the delay which it occasions. When vaccinating in remote parts of the hills I have had occasionally to wait for a day or two in a village while the augur was consulted and dozens of eggs broken to find out whether U Thakoor regarded vaccination with favor or the reverse. I now make it my practice to send for the Lyngdoh or high priest, immediately on my arrival in a village. If I can persuade him of the benevolence and harmlessness and unselfish nature of my mission, I generally find that the answers of the eggs are favourable. On the other hand, if he is opposed to innovation, there is very little use in trying to win over the people.

In the case that has suggested this paper an augur residing in Shillong was consulted by the relations of a middle-aged woman about a severe illness under which she laboured. The usual breaking of eggs and sacrifices were carried out, but the patient so far from improving got suddenly worse. Her friends immediately came to the conclusion that she had been bewitched or looked upon with an evil eye by the augur, so they planned a punishment for him. The parties to the crime were the woman herself, her husband, and her two daughters and their paramours. The unfortunate augur was invited to an orgie or feast which consisted of a feed of rice and pork, a cut from the village pig, and as much arrack as he could drink. He accepted the invitation, went to the party, and was never seen alive again.

About a fortnight afterwards the body of a man horribly battered and mutilated, but nevertheless capable of being identified as that of the missing individual, was found amongst the boulders at the bottom of a deep ravine below one of the waterfalls.

It was sent to me for examination. I found it enormously swollen from decomposition and sodden from immersion. A leather belt around the waist, with a *lungoty* attached, was deeply buried in the midst of the inflated skin. From the manner in which the belt and *lungoty* were fixed, it was evident that they had been applied before decomposition set in, during life in fact, or shortly after death, and that they were imbedded deeply as I found them by the swelling of the gas-inflated tissues. On opening the *lungoty* I found that the genitals had been entirely removed. A clean-cut stump of the penis, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch long, projected from beneath the pubic arch. Nothing was left of scrotum or testicles. Failing other evidence, it was apparent from the manner in which the *lungoty* was attached that the

genitals had been removed before it was fastened on and before the body was exposed. I was particular in satisfying myself on this point, as I thought it possible that the plea might be urged that the genitals had been eaten off by jackals, or perhaps by fishes, or mayhap torn off in the fall over the cliffs.

But the manner of removal was made plain by several notches which were found in the rami of the pubis and ischium surrounding the obturator foramen on the left side. These had evidently been made by a coarse cutting instrument of some kind, probably a *dhao*. That the parts had been hacked off rather roughly was apparent from the number of notches, also from an extensive cut into the upper part of left thigh, just below the groin, which divided some of the adductor muscles, the internal saphena vein and some branches of the femoral artery.

Together with this both fore-arms were broken and the bones comminuted; the head of the left femur was found to be completely dislocated out of its socket; both sides of the chest were extensively bruised, and several ribs were broken and comminuted on both sides; the skull was completely stove in, and a number of fragments of the bones were found lying in the diffuent brain tissue.

The scalp presented a very puzzling appearance. It was slightly abraded at the vertex, and was perfectly bare, not a single hair upon it, and it was of a deep green color all over. Whether this was due to bruising and violence during life, or to *post mortem* congestion, I could not satisfactorily determine. The real solution of the mystery did not occur to me at the time.

From the condition of many of the injuries it was plain that they were of *post mortem* occurrence, *e. g.*, these of the fore-arms, skull and thigh. In these instances the bones were found lying broken in tissues noway discolored by ecchymosis, and there was no bruising of the skin over them. It was impossible that the bones of the skull could have been fractured during life, in the manner in which I found them, without a break of the skin, or at any rate extensive ecchymosis: but no such signs were visible, nothing but the general deep-green discoloration and the absence of hair.

I gave it as my opinion that death was caused by injuries inflicted on the man; that the extensive wounds caused by the removal of the genitals would, of themselves, in all probability have proved fatal: but that several of the ribs were also broken during life; that many of the injuries were *post mortem*, and caused by the descent of the body over the waterfall.

The correctness of this opinion was borne out by the facts elicited at the trial. One of the accomplices turned Queen's evidence. Five persons were implicated in the affair, *viz.* the sick woman, her younger daughter aged 17, two lads aged 18 and 20, and her husband; the latter in a minor degree. It appeared that they all got somewhat intoxicated, and so exceeded the limits of the punishment which they had contemplated. This was to have been simple castration, or rather ablation of the external genitals. While the victim was drunk the lads set upon him and beat him with sticks, and then held him down while one of the women hacked off

the parts with a *dhao*. They afterwards held his head over the fire to singe him. (This accounted for the extraordinary appearance which the scalp presented.) He expired soon after. When the husband of the woman, who was a hard-working mallee, a servant of mine, returned from his day's work, he found the corpse lying on the floor. They persuaded him to take it out and bury it in the garden. A few days later, alarmed at the search that was instituted by the police, he dug it up at night, and carried it to the top of a very deep waterfall, and threw it over. The fall was a broken one of about 200 feet. Many bones were, of course, broken by the fall.

Whether mutilation of the organs of generation is the recognized punishment of a wizard in the Khasia Hills, or whether the punishment in the present case was accidentally suggested, prompted perhaps by the fact that women were concerned in it, I am unable to say: but I find it stated in Chevers' work on Jurisprudence "that this (mutilation of the membranum virile) would appear to be the orthodox mode of treating wizards in India." To break an enchantment it appears to the vulgar mind to be essential to remove this particular portion of the enchanter's person.

#### IMPETIGO FOLLICULORUM.

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I have given this name to a skin affection occasionally met with in this part of Bengal, but which I do not find described in any European treatise on skin diseases. I have seen altogether about ten cases, some of them in Dacca, and some in Calcutta; but I did not meet with any during my two years' stay in Burma.

It consists in a suppurative inflammation of the hair follicles of the skin, and is generally limited to the skin from below the knee to just above the ankle, the back of the leg being less affected than the front and sides. Both legs are affected at the same time, but not always equally. In one case the hair follicles of the thigh were also affected, but to a less degree than those of the leg; and in another the hair follicles of other parts of the body, particularly on the exterior aspect of both elbows, were the seat of that fibrinous exudation which results in what is known as Lichen agminata, the products of the inflammation undergoing organisation instead of suppurating as in the legs.

In this disease, the skin of the part affected presents a preternatural and glistening smoothness, and is dotted over with numerous points of suppuration, in the centre of each of which is a hair generally broken off short a few lines above the level of the skin. The pus, which is of thin consistency and pale in colour, occupies a minute cup-shaped cavity, and is covered with a thin flat operculum of cuticle level with the skin, and through the centre of which the hair passes. On pulling out the hair this flat operculum often comes away with it; the drop of pus can then be pressed out of the cavity containing it, and the shape and smooth walls of this are made visible.