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978-1-108-04629-9 - Through Central Borneo: An Account of Two Years' Travel in the Land of the
Head-Hunters between the Years 1913 and 1917: Volume 2

Carl Lumholtz

Excerpt

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THROUGH CENTRAL BORNEO

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CHAPTER XXIII

A PROFITABLE STAY—MAGNIFICENT FRUITS OF BORNEO—
OMEN BIRDS—THE PENIHINGS IN DAILY LIFE—TOP
PLAYING—RELIGIOUS IDEAS—CURING DISEASE

ON my return to camp a pleasant surprise awaited me in the arrival of mail, the first in six months. The days that followed were laborious: buying, arranging, and cataloguing collections. From early morning Penihings came to my tent, desiring to sell something, and did not quit until late at night. Some were content to stand quietly looking at the stranger for ten or fifteen minutes, and then to go away, their places being taken by others. But after all it was a happy time, much being accomplished every day by adding to my collections and gaining much interesting information.

Over my tent grew a couple of rambutan trees, and close by were two trees bearing a still more delicate fruit called lansat (*lansium domesticum*). It is mildly acid, like the best kind of orange, but with more flavour, and in appearance resembles a small plum without a stone, and when ripe is almost white in colour. Every morning, at my request, the chief climbed one of these trees, on which the fruit hung by the bushel, and sold me a basketful for a trifle. The lansat is so easily digested that one can eat it freely in the evening without inconvenience; in fact it is a decided aid to digestion. According to the natives these trees are plentiful in the utan, but in the kampong they, as well as the famous durian and the

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rambutan, have been raised from seed. Borneo certainly possesses fine wild fruits, but as the jungle is laborious to pass through it would be most difficult to find the trees. I have hitherto directed attention to the superior quality attained by the fruits of the island which are grown from imported stock, as the pineapple, pomelo, etc.

The usual nuisance of crowing cocks is not to be avoided in a Dayak kampong, though here they were few. I saw a hen running with a small chicken in her beak, which she had killed in order to eat it—a common occurrence according to the Penihings. The ludicrous self-sufficiency of the Bornean male fowls, at times very amusing, compensates to some extent for the noise they make, but they are as reckless as the knights-errant of old. Outside my tent at dawn one morning I noticed one of them paying devoted attention to a hen which was hovering her chickens. He stood several seconds with his head bent down toward hers, then walked round her, making demonstrations of interest, and again assumed his former position, she meanwhile clucking protectingly to her brood. Finally, he resolutely attacked her, whereupon she emitted a discordant shriek while seven or eight tiny yellow chicks streamed forth from underneath her; in response to her cry of distress another cock immediately appeared upon the scene and valiantly chased the disturber away.

No less than nine prahus started out one day, bound for Long Iram to buy salt and other goods, taking a small quantity of rattan. The following day, late in the afternoon, the party returned, having passed the night a short

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THE PENIHINGS

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distance away. As they had approached Long Blu an omen bird, evidently a small woodpecker, had flown across their path in front of the first prahu, whereupon the whole flotilla at once retraced their course—a tedious day's trip against the current. It makes no difference whether this bird flies from left to right, or from right to left, or whether it crosses in front or behind the boat. If the bird is heard from the direction on the left of the party the augury is bad, whether he is seen or not. If heard from the right side everything is well. After waiting three days the party proceeded on their way.

There are seven omen birds, according to the Penihings, and they are regarded as messengers sent by a good antoh to warn of danger. For the same purpose he may make a serpent pass in front of the prahu, or a rusa cry in the middle of the day. At night this cry is immaterial. The most inauspicious of all omens is the appearance of a centipede. If a man in a ladang is confronted with such an animal he at once stops work there and takes up a new field.

The tribal name of the Penihings is A-o-haeng. Until recently each kampong had from two to five sūpi, chiefs or rajas, one being superior to the others. The office was hereditary. There are still several rajas in one kampong, for instance, three in Long Tjehan. The Penihings have a practical turn of mind and though they usually tell the truth at times they may steal. They are the best workers among the tribes on the Mahakam River (above the great rapids) and on a journey they travel in their prahus day and night, resting only a couple of hours in

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the early morning. However, the custom of travelling at night may be due to fear of meeting omen birds.

The hair of the Penihings and the Oma-Sulings, though it looks black, in reality is brown with a slight reddish tint plainly visible when sunlight falls through it. I believe the same is the case with other Dayak tribes. In Long Tjehan I observed two natives who, though passing as Penihings, were of decidedly different type, being much darker in colour and of powerful build, one having curly hair while that of the other was straight. Penihing women have unpleasantly shrill voices, a characteristic less pronounced with the men. Members of this tribe are not so fine-looking as those of other tribes on the Mahakam, with the exception of the Saputans.

When leaving the kampong on his daily trips to the ladang, or when he travels, the Penihing carries his shield. Even when pig-hunting, if intending to stay out overnight, he takes this armour, leaving it however at his camping-place. A spear is also carried, especially on trips to the ladang. The sumpitan, called sawput, is no longer made and the tribe is not very apt at its use; therefore, being unable to kill the great hornbill themselves, these natives have to buy its highly valued tail feathers from the Punans. The latter and the Bukats, who are the greater experts in the use of the sumpitan, notwithstanding their limited facilities, are also the better makers, which is by no means a small accomplishment. These nomads, and to some extent the Saputans as well, furnish this weapon to all the Bahau tribes, the Kayans excepted.

When meeting, no salutations are made. The mother

AN UNUSUAL GAME

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uses for her babe the same cradle in which she herself was carried on her mother's back. It is of the usual Dayak pattern, and when it becomes worn or broken a new one is provided, but the old one remains hanging in the house. A cradle is never parted with, because of the belief that the child's life would thereby be imperilled. Should the little one die, the cradle is thrown into the river. An unmarried man must not eat rusa nor fowls, and a married man is prohibited from doing so until his wife has had three children. Men should not touch with their hands the loom, nor the ribbon which is passed round the back of the woman when she weaves, nor should a woman's skirt be touched by a man. These precautions are taken to avoid bad luck in fishing and hunting, because the eyesight is believed to be adversely affected by such contact. Their sacred number is four.

An unusual game played with large tops is much practised for the purpose of taking omens in the season when the jungle is cleared in order to make new ladangs. The top (bae-ang) is very heavy and is thrown by a thin rope. One man sets his spinning by drawing the rope backward in the usual way; to do this is called niong. Another wishing to try his luck, by the aid of the heavy cord hurls his top at the one that is spinning, as we would throw a stone. To do this is called maw-pak, and hence the game gets its name, maw-pak bae-ang. If the second player hits the spinning top it is a good omen for cutting down the trees. If he fails, another tries his luck, and so on. The long-continued spinning of a top is also a favourable sign for the man who spins it. With the

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Katingans a hit means that it is advisable to cut the trees at once, while a miss necessitates a delay of three days. Every day, weather permitting, as soon as the men return from the ladangs in the evening, about an hour before sunset, this game is played on the space before the houses of the kampong. Sometimes only two men consult fate, spinning alternately. The same kind of top is found among the Kayans, Kenyahs, and other Dayak tribes.

According to the information I obtained from the Dayaks they believe that the soul has eternal existence, and although many tribes have the idea that during life several souls reside in one individual, after death only one is recognised, which is generally called liao. One or more souls may temporarily leave the body, thereby causing illness.

Neither in this life nor the next are there virtuous or sinful souls, the only distinction being in regard to social standing and earthly possessions, and those who were well-to-do here are equally so there. With the Katingans whatever is essential to life in this world is also found in the next, as houses, men, women, children, dogs, pigs, fowls, water-buffaloes, and birds. People are stronger there than here and cannot die. The principal clothing of the liao is the tatu marks, which it will always keep. The garments worn besides are new and of good quality. When my informant, a native official of Kasungan, who sports semi-civilised dress, expressed his disapproval of the poor wearing quality of his trousers to an old Katingan, the latter exclaimed: "That matters not. Above,

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all new ones!" In the belief of the Duhoi (Ot-Danums) the liao remains with the body until the funeral-house falls into decay, perhaps for twenty years, when it enters the soil and "is then poor." The idea of the Penihings about life after death is vague, and they do not pretend to know where the soul goes.

The Penihings acknowledge five souls, or batu, in each individual: one above each eye, one at either side of the chest below the arm, and one at the solar plexus. The souls above the eyes are able to leave their abiding-place, but the others can go only short distances. If the first-named depart the person becomes ill next day, the immediate cause being that a malevolent antoh, desiring to eat the victim, has entered the head through the top. On perceiving this the two souls located above the eyes escape and the blian is called upon to bring them back, for unless they return the afflicted one will die.

A fowl or a pig, or both, may then be killed and the blood collected. Some of it is smeared on the patient's forehead, head, and chest, the remainder being offered to antoh, both in plain form and mixed with uncooked rice, as has been described on page 202. When a fowl is sacrificed the empty skin, suspended from a bamboo stalk, is likewise reserved for antoh, the meat having been consumed, as usual, by those concerned.

As another effective means of inducing the return of the soul the blian sings for several hours during one night or more. In the Penihing tribe he accompanies himself by beating an especially made stringed shield. It is be-

lieved that the singer is able to see how the antoh caused the sickness: whether he did it by throwing a spear, by striking with a stick, or by using a sumpitan. In his efforts to restore the patient the blian is told what to sing by a good antoh that enters his head. Without such help no person can sing properly, and the object of the song is to prevail upon a beneficent spirit to eject or kill the evil one so that the souls may return.

The blian usually resorts also to feats of juggling, proceeding in the following way: Clasp his open hands forcibly together over the painful part, at the same time turning himself round and stamping on the floor, he wrings his hands for a few seconds and then, in sight of all, produces an object which in the Penihing conception represents a bad antoh—in fact, by them is called antoh. In this manner he may produce several bits of substance which are thrown away to disappear. According to belief, when the blian performs his trick it is in reality a good antoh that does it for him.

While we were in camp at Long Tjehan there was considerable singing at night for the cure of sick people, and four voices could be heard in different parts of the house at the same time. One night I was prevented from sleeping by a remedial performance just above my tent, which was only a few metres from the house. The clear, strong voice of the blian had resounded for an hour or more, when five loud thumps upon the floor were heard, as if something heavy had fallen. The fact was that the man had stamped hard with his right foot as by sleight-of-hand he caught various objects from the patient, produc-