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THE KACHINS

THEIR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

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wild cat crosses one's path, some of your friends will die, or your undertaking will not prosper. If a deer, hedgehog or rhinoceros crosses the path, it is a good omen, luck is on your side. The only exception is the barking deer; if one of those run across, bad reports will follow. If you see weasels playing or fighting, it is a bad sign; they will entice the human spirit to stray and wander. If two barking deer call at the same time outside a village, illness or fire will follow. If young cattle stray into a house, or go up the roof, the *nats* are after them and they are destined soon to be sacrificed, which means that illness will visit the house. A ring around the sun signifies the death of a chief. Crows calling in a peculiar way outside a house bring messages from friends just deceased. Hence there is a proverb, "He does not even utter the sound of the crow," which means that an old friend has so completely forgotten his former associates that he never sends them any message or token of regard. If the steps of a jungle animal are seen around a newly dug grave, some relatives will soon follow. Thus the immediate surroundings of a grave are carefully inspected the morning after burial. If the boiling rice "breaks" in the pot and does not adhere in one lump, some accident will happen to someone in the house. If soot falls from the roof into food that is being prepared, it is a bad sign. If rats build nests in a grave, the relatives of the interred will be poor. These are a few of the bad omens; the good, which are few, are hardly ever mentioned.

Dreams. Primitive man has always paid a great deal of attention to dreams. The Kachins are no exception. The meaning is sought of almost every dream, and most of the older men know the rules regulating their interpretation. The following is some of the wisdom along this line. To dream about a broken tree, the setting sun or moon, is unfortunate; it presages a speedy death. To dream that young fowls on the back porch are scattered is bad, to dream that they are gathered is good, A dream about

particularly wish to know if they are of respected lineage, and if there have ever been any witches among them. If all is satisfactory, the liquor is accepted and the reply is given, "Well, it is as you wish." In most cases, however, so important an affair demands several visits from the delegate, a great deal of consultation is necessary, and the girl's family, with an eye to business, try to drive as close a bargain as possible. But there is no law forbidding the matter being settled the first time; it is all "as it happens."

If the elder has been successful, he returns to his house where the emissaries have been waiting. These have now in readiness the "evening presents," (*nsin ja*), so called because these affairs are always discussed around the evening fire. The presents as a rule consist of a dried squirrel or a mole wrapped up in two blankets, some silk or woolen cloth. Of course such presents vary, and there are in most localities different standards for chiefs and commoners. Our concern throughout is with the regulations observed by the chiefs. The line of procedure is the same in each case, but presents and the price paid are on a larger scale (more than double), when a chief is married. When the evening presents have been accepted, the date of the marriage and other particulars can be discussed.

The emissaries from the man's family are notified that so far all has progressed satisfactorily, and they now enter the house of the prospective bride, and the real bargaining begins. The elder first called by the emissaries represents the "asking family" (*dama ni*), and a second elder attends to the interests of the "giving family" (*sudyu ni*). The question, how much to pay for the girl is the all absorbing subject. The first elder, in the interest of his clients, and incidentally of his own, tries to procure the damsel as cheaply as possible, while the second elder, with similar motives, argues for a liberal allowance. This part of the programme is probably never settled in one evening and it may take weeks and even

months before there is a final agreement. The price for the daughter of a chief in the good old times use to be: one bullock, called the "liquor carrying bullock;" rupees one hundred "viss of silver;" one slave (*shingma lai-māyam*), to carry on the work formerly done by the girl; one roll of Chinese embroidery; some felt cloth; a rhinoceros horn and an elephant tusk; a long, richly embroidered Chinese coat; an old gong; a large far-sounding gong ten spans in circumference; ten cows; one buffalo to be sacrificed and eaten by the subjects of the chief on the wedding day; a string of valuable beads, especially intended to open the "hand and heart" of the mother, that she may be willing to part with her daughter. This represents quite a good deal of property even for a chief, and few can nowadays pay the price. Slaves, elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns are no longer in the market, and cattle or money must be substituted. The poverty of the present times makes it impossible to attain to the ancestral glory. The full price is seldom, if ever, paid before the marriage, and it may take years and years before the last cow or rupee has found its way to the giving family, who never forget to remind their sons-in-law of the amount still lacking.

For a commoner the price is more moderate, but still heavy enough. It includes cattle, (slaves in well-to-do families), felt-cloth, a gong or two, a blanket, a silk-jacket, rupees ten, and anything else that can be extorted. It will readily be seen how neither commoner nor chief could afford to keep a large harem with such prices for women. If the wife ever complains that she has to work too hard, the husband always reminds her of the heavy price he had to pay, and he regards it as his right to get his money back.

Leaving the parental home. When the day for the wedding (*kumba shālai*), has arrived, the maiden leaves the parental home. Father, mother or near relatives never attend the wedding, which is always held at the bridegroom's house. The girl is at this occasion seen without the baskets always

that few Kachins gained a foot-hold on its eastern bank. The great rivers are fed by hundreds of smaller streams, many of which, especially during the rains, become wild mountain torrents most dangerous to ford. Beautiful scenery is found everywhere. A few of the waterfalls can stand comparison with some of wider reputation. Of these we can mention only the Nampha fall near Sinlum, east of Bhamo; the Gumlau fall north-east of Sima, and the Npa fall half way between Bhamo and Shwego.

Fauna. The animal life of the mountains in the whole of northern Burma is with only a few variations the same as that of the plains. Elephants and rhinoceros are not now found above the foot-hills, but tradition claims that both these pachyderms were once common at higher elevations, and some affirm that they are still to be seen in some of the dense jungles along the Salween. Herds of elephants are still found in the Hukong and many of the chiefs in the valley are in possession of valuable rhinoceros' horn testifying to the existence of the animal in that vicinity. The tiger and the leopard, with many smaller species of the *Felidae*, are distressingly abundant, and in many localities on the increase, as the inhabitants have been practically disarmed. Wild dogs hunt in packs, but seldom trouble the villages. Smaller kinds of carnivora make the keeping of fowls and pigs an anxious problem. Bison is now and then seen in the hills, but is generally confined to the low-lands. Wild hogs, deer and monkeys give the cultivators a lively time, being with difficulty kept out of the fields. Squirrels, badgers, porcupines, weasels, rabbits and numerous species of rats present a variety for the curry pot. The pangolin or ant-eater is not unknown. Otter is found in almost any stream. Bears are in some localities as much feared as tigers and seem to be more often in evidence. Bats are numerous, especially in some of the caves which abound in the hillsides.

Of small birds the hills present a greater variety than the plains, and all furnish meat for the table. During the