

THE
LUSHEI KUKI CLANS

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The following translation of a Lushai's reason for considering the sight of an atlas moth "thianglo" shows the origin of such superstitions. Atlas moths are rare in the Lushai hills. The "keptuam" (atlas moth) was the letter bearer between Pathian and the Vai (foreigner); and once when he was carrying Pathian's letter to the Vai chief the keptuam made the letter into wings, and flew away and disappeared, and Pathian was much disturbed at the loss of his letter and at the disappearance of his messenger, and he made mankind hunt for the missing keptuam. Now the keptuam did not wish to be caught, so he said, "Whoever sees me will die"; but as mankind did not know this they hunted and hunted till at last one saw the fugitive and died, and so they learnt that to see a keptuam is "thianglo," and ever since if anyone sees a male keptuam he will probably die.

Should the fowls at midnight become terrified and make an unusual sound like "i-ak, i-ak" someone will die. Should gibbons be heard hooting during the night, they have seen the corpse of someone who will fall from a tree or be drowned. As the gibbon retires to rest even before the sun sets, it must be very seldom that their shouts are heard at night. It is "thianglo" to shoot a gibbon, because at the Thimzing a man and a wife were changed into those animals. The woman at the time was dyeing blue thread, and therefore the palms of the hands of the female gibbon are black, though the rest of the body is light coloured.

The rhinoceros is also safe from attack on account of a similar belief, the folds of his skin being supposed to be derived from the folds of the cloths of persons who were transmogrified. The natural result of killing one of these animals is that all members of the slayer's family sicken and die, but this can be avoided if the successful huntsman on his return to the village goes straight to the zawlruk or forge and remains there a whole day and night, after which it is safe for him to enter his house, provided that he leaves his gun and haversack behind and has changed all his clothes.

It is, however, worth noticing that, though monkeys, elephants, tigers, bears, &c., are also said to have been men before the Thimzing, there is no reluctance shown to kill them, and in