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"DO WHAT IS RIGHT, LET THE CONSEQUENCE FOLLOW."

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Lectures ON THE MALAYSIAN ISLANDS.

BY CAPT. WALTER M. GIBSON.

LECTURE II.

Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, March 3, 1860.

[REPORTED BY G. D. WATT.]

On a previous occasion, and in another building, I spoke concerning the multitudinous islands which dot the map of Oceanica; and especially concerning that portion, which is the great group of islands lying between Asia and Australia, dividing the Pacific from the Indian Ocean, and called the East Indian Archipelago. It is not my purpose to go over any of that ground, except to make a few general remarks; although, I have no doubt, there are a great many here this evening who did not listen to those previous introductory remarks. I will simply recapitulate this much, that this great group comprises about six thousand islands, the largest being about twice the size of this Territory. There are several hundreds of these islands that would make respectable States, equal in territory to Virginia or Kentucky; and then there are thousands of smaller ones, varying in dimensions from that of a good large district or county, down to that of a respectable farm or plantation.

I spoke then of the delightful climate of these islands; and I will only say this much further, in addition to what I then stated, that during two and a half years which I spent in those regions, I never once experienced a withering cold nor a scorching sun heat; but all the time, it seemed to be a delightful continuation of spring. Hear what the celebrated geographer, Malte Brun, has to say in reference to the climate of these regions:—

"The marshy shores of some islands in the north-west of Oceanica (that is, the Sandwich Islands, and other groups of Polynesia), exposed to an intense heat, generate a pestiferous air, which may be corrected by a more extensive cultivation. Notwithstanding these local inconveniences, Oceanica presents to the industrious, the healthy, and the temperate, a greater diversity of delightful climates than any other part of the world (especially in the south-western, or Malaysian portion). Such islands as are small and elevated resemble so many paradises. By selecting localities with the proper elevations, the Englishman may find his fresh lawns, the Italian his orange groves, and the West Indian planter his fields of sugar-cane. The small extent of these islands procures for them the temperature of the ocean. The heat never becomes insupportable, even for northern Europeans. The air is continually renewed by the light sea and land breezes, dividing the empire of day and night. There, perpetual spring is rarely disturbed by hurricanes or earthquakes."

The soil, being volcanic in its nature and origin, is, consequently, of the richest character, and produces wonderful varieties in the vegetable kingdom, of flowers and fruits of every kind. I will only speak of one, which I failed to mention on the previous evening; although the most remarkable of the vegetable kingdom, that is, an enormous flower, which is now called by botanists, Rafflesia Arnoldi. This immense flower, resembling a gigantic dahlia, measures about three and a half feet across; its color is of a most beautiful light purple shade, spotted with blue and deep purple in a wonderful manner. This enormous blossom may seem almost too marvellous to be credited; but it is not very much larger than a water-lilly found in South America, which is well known, called the Victoria Regia, and which measures about two and a half feet across its flower leaves and petals. This large flower of the islands is a magnificent object in the landscape, when huge clusters of them are observed.

I should have passed by, for the present, any further mention of the animals of the islands, if it had not been that I have, since the previous occasion, heard of some expressions of doubt showing that there are some persons here troubled with a weak stomached scepticism, which will not permit them to swallow my enormous tiger fourteen feet long, and my elephant calf eight feet high, nor even my little Malay deer, weighing not more than two pounds. I am sorry to say I cannot aid their mental indigestion by any alteration in size of the creatures spoken of; but, on the contrary, to be exact, must increase the proportions in the case of the two first mentioned animals, and even diminish the smaller one. I hold a work in my hand, published by a man called John Crawford, who was the English ambassador to Siam, and who published his book a few years ago, since I have returned from the east. In speaking about the elephants of these islands, he makes these remarks:—

"This elephant (of Sumatra) is found to be a species distinct both from the African and the Asiatic, and hence it is called by naturalists, Elephas Sumatrensis. The dorsal vertebræ (or backbone), instead of nineteen joints, as in the Asiatic, amount to twenty; and instead of nineteen pairs of ribs, it has twenty."

Now, it takes the elephant about sixty years to get its growth, so that an elephant calf, to be equivalent to our two-year-old steer, may be some thirty or forty years old. There are elephants still living who have attained the age of from three hundred to four hundred years. There are some of those sacred white elephants which are worshipped in Siam, that were alive when Columbus discovered this continent, and are living at the present time. I said nothing about its age. I presume this elephant calf, eight feet high, was probably fifteen or twenty years old; and yet had not attained to more than the third part of its growth.

The same author I have just quoted, and others, state that the tiger of the Malay islands, especially of Sumatra, is much larger than the Royal Bengal tiger, which measures from eleven to twelve feet in length.

As regards the dimunitive deer, a perfectly shaped one, and yet a little creature not more than four or five inches high. This same author, Crawford, in speaking of them, says that the moschus kanchil, or musk deer of Sumatra, is of "less weight than an European hare." To be particular with regard to the one I handled, it did not weigh more than one pound and eleven ounces.

There are a great many peculiarities in these islands, in both the animal and the vegetable kingdom, differing from any thing else to be found in the world.

I also omitted to speak of the minerals: I shall not undertake to name them all. I shall simply mention this far, for your general information, that gold is found in abundance in the largest of these islands, especially Borneo and Sumatra. These two islands are exceedingly rich in gold. At this time there is an annual export of gold dust, from Borneo and Sumatra, brought to the British settlement of Singapore, of about seven millions of dollars. The best iron in the world is found in the island of Borneo. It is far superior to the celebrated Swedish Wotz iron. It is remarkable for its strong magnetic power; and the semi-civilized people of Borneo, and the Malays of Sumatra, which are a little more civilized, now make out of this iron the keenest cutting blades, surpassing the celebrated Damascus blades, and those famous Toledo swords of Spain. A large number of the English and French officers, who were engaged in the late Crimean war, possessed sword blades made by the semi-barbarians of Borneo. I have seen one cut in pieces a quarter inch bar of iron, like a corn stalk;—and you can pierce a Spanish dollar with a well-made Malay dirk, without injuring its point.

Antimony is found in Borneo, in great quantities. About nine-tenths of the amount used in the world, is obtained from this island, and exclusively from a portion of its territory, over which a notable Englishman at the present time has dominion, whose name is Sir James Brooke, of England, and called Raja Brooke or King Brooke by the natives. He is the sole owner of those valuable antimony mines.

There are also diamonds found of the finest quality, the most brilliant and lustrous. The largest are found in the island of Borneo, far surpassing those of Brazil or Hindostan. One of the Sultans in Borneo has one weighing three hundred and thirty-four carats. There are several celebrated diamonds possessed by the princes of Europe, varying in value from many thousands to several millions of dollars. According to the usual estimates of the value of the lustrous gems, this one of Borneo must be worth four or five millions of dollars. The finest pearls are now procured on the coasts of the islands of the Archipelago. There are many beautiful ones found on the coasts of Persia and Mexico. But the largest, and those which are most truly globular in form, of most brilliant hue, and consequently most valuable, are found in the vicinity of the islands of New Guinea, and some islands called Kei and Arroo.

The best quality of tin is obtained from the island called Banca. Formerly the world obtained all its tin from the mines in Cornwall. Now, two-thirds of it, and that of the best quality, is obtained from this small island.

Copper is also found, and coal has been recently discovered; although the natives entertain a singular prejudice against the use of it. They have known its use for a long time before Europeans visited these seas. They knew they could make a good fire with it; but they never seemed to entertain any partiality for it. They give it a name which signifies devil's wood. An excellent coal is found in the northern portion of Borneo, at a point called Labuan; and in the southern portion at a point called Banjarmassin. And I wish to say that this coal can be mined there by native labor, at a cost of a dollar and a bit per ton; and it could be furnished to American and European steamships at a cost of about two dollars. And yet, such is the state of corruption at Washington, and such is the assiduity, and skill, and diplomacy of contractors, that they succeed in persuading our generous and wealthy Uncle Sam to pay fifteen dollars per ton freight on Pennsylvania coal. You may have read in the papers which came in the last mail, some reports of the steamship Mississippi, in which it is stated that this vessel consumed several hundred thousand dollars worth of coal which was taken from the United States, when they could have bought it in the East for about one-tenth part of the cost.

In respect to the people who inhabit these islands, the general impression is, that there is but one race called the Malays, and that they are few in number. On the contrary there are about thirty millions of people on these islands, about as many as there are in all the United States and Territories. The Malays, of pure race, do not constitute more than one-tenth part of this population; and they chiefly inhabit the island of Sumatra. They are the dominant, conquering race; they are the Normans of the east. They have subdued hundreds of other nations; they have given them language, laws, literature, and government.

There is another race, much superior in number, and superior in refinement and civilization, called the Javanese. They number about one-third part of this population. And then there is another race somewhat noted and singular, who inhabit the island of Celebes, and are called Bughinese. They are the most enterprising merchants of the Archipelago; and build very substantial vessels to carry cargoes to the British settlement at Singapore; also to Siam, and China, cargoes worth ten to fifty thousand dollars.

Then, again, there is a remarkable people called the Dyaks, numbering about three millions. They are lower in the scale of civilization than those that I have previously mentioned. They are a tall, well-formed race, though I cannot say they are taller than the Malays; but they are, in body, a better proportioned people, and of a lighter complexion. They may be regarded, in some respects, as the most terrible savages of all the inhabitants of these islands, in consequence of their bloody and singular fancy to cut off the heads of other people, thinking that for every one they possess, it insures them the possession of an enslaved soul to wait upon them in the next world. But excepting this terrible superstition, they seem to promise to make greater advance in civilization than any other nation in the Indian seas. They very much resemble the New Zealanders; and how remarkable has been the advance in human improvement of these people.

There are now many native New Zealanders who have built elegant European houses, and who import for the entertainment of their children, pianos and other European luxuries, whose fathers were confirmed cannibals.

Then there is a peculiar race called the Alfuras, exceedingly rude and barbarous in their condition, yet timid and gentle in their dispositions. The next in the descending scale of humanity, in these islands, are the Papuans, who are the negroes of the east, as black as the African, with heads equally as curly; but instead of woolly, the head covering of the Papuan is course, kinky hair. They are small of stature, and some of them manifest rather a ferocious disposition; and again, on the contrary, many tribes of them are exceedingly mild in their character.

Descending lower still in the scale of civilization—we come down to the very foot of the human ladder—to a race of people called the Kubus and the Gugus, who differ very little in physical appearance, and I might also say in mental qualification, from the great baboon or the orang-outang of these islands. Their bodies are entirely covered with long flowing hair. They have not the slightest idea of, nor the slightest use either for the tailor, or for the cook, inasmuch as they use no covering except that provided by nature; and they prefer their game raw and without seasoning. They will eat raw snails, snakes and fish. They lodge generally in the tops of trees, making a rude sort of platform by placing bamboo sticks, across horizontally extended limbs; which they cover with large palm leaves.

Although it was my object at this time, merely to make a general enumeration of races, yet I cannot let these hapless mortals pass by without relating circumstances concerning them; for they are human beings, inasmuch as they have some kind of articulation, or powers of speech, which gift would class them in the human family, but their articulations are very few, and consist of a few monosyllabic grunts. They cannot repeat a word of two syllables. They dwell in a country which is an inaccessible marsh, situated in the southern portion of Sumatra. This marshy territory has never yet been penetrated to any appreciable extent by Europeans. It would require too great a cost for canaling, draining, and bridging, to warrant any such effort, at this time. In those swamps a peculiar gum tree is found called benzoin, which produces the frankincense spoken of in the Bible, and made use of in the worship of all Asiatic nations, and in the ceremonial of Catholic churches. The gum, which produces this sweet smelling incense, is obtained exclusively in this swampy district, and it is gathered solely by these extraordinary savages, and obtained from them in this peculiar manner. The Malay, Chinese, and other traders who are anxious to get this gum, proceed to certain points on the outskirts of these inaccessible swamps, and they make a tremendous outcry, striking hollow logs and numerous gongs. They continue this for sometime; and then depart out of sight, after leaving little strips of cloth, brilliant glass beads, and some other trifles. After a while, the poor timid wild Kubus may be observed creeping forth from the edge of the forest, bringing along portions of this gum which oozes from the trees; this they deposit, and take away the trinkets. And in every instance, it has been observed, they deposit a full equivalent for what has been left for them.

There are other singular races called the Semangs, the Jakuns and Bajans, and others to be mentioned, which would only be a repetition of hard names. I have not now the time to give you particulars concerning the social habits, manners, and religious customs of all these races. It is my object this evening, to dwell more especially on particulars, which concern the Malay, the foremost one of these races. The Malays consider war their chief profession or pursuit; and, of course, they are proud and lazy like all warrior races. By their superior skill and spirit of mastery they succeed in compelling other races to do the work for them, while they are quite willing to do all the fighting. The Malays have such an idea of their dignity as warriors, that when they go forth in their great prahus, or war boats; which will carry one hundred and fifty fighting men, and still have room for forty or fifty rowers,—should they happen to encounter an overpowering force and are about to be overcome, but could be materially aided by these rowers, who are of the inferior and working races, yet the true Malay will choose to die rather than to owe his life to one of these slaves. They do not differ in these ridiculous notions of the dignity of the warrior and aristocratic character, from the old Danes, Normans, Britons, and Saxons, and other fighting and plundering barbarians among our ancestry in Europe.

I believe that the Malay race springs from a Scythian stock. I judge so from my study of Eastern and Indo-European languages; also from many peculiarities in their social habits, and their system of government. They are the only people of the eastern hemisphere, that accord to woman an equal social and political position with man. A large portion of the rulers or petty chieftains are women; they are also the teachers, the only doctors, and all the little itinerant traffic of these islands is carried on by women.

In regard to their female government, I think it would be interesting to mention one or two anecdotes. Many years ago, the king of England sent ambassadors to Achin, a Malay nation in the northern portion of Sumatra, which was then governed by a queen. The English envoys were exceedingly anxious to obtain the privilege for their government to erect a post, or a small trading station, the same as they had done at many points on the continent of Asia; which enabled them to subdue the natives in different countries, in the same manner as the Portuguese and Spaniards had done. They offered many presents and large sums of money to obtain permission to erect a small house, merely, as they said, for the accommodation of the agent who would direct the trade that might take place between Sumatra and England. The nobles of Achin, who had received many costly presents, and had been bribed—were willing to grant the request of the foreigners; but the queen firmly refused to give her consent. She said if the English would fill her largest dwelling with solid masses of gold, she would not permit them to erect the smallest possible bamboo dwelling or hut on her territory. The result was a civil war, but the queen's forces ultimately conquered; she punished her nobles and compelled the English ambassadors to leave the territory; and now, at this day, this native state of Achin is among the few remaining independent nations of Malaysia. Of hundreds that then existed, there are not more than three or four notable independent Malay States; and Achin stands foremost in the list.

The next one whose history presents a notable instance of female heroism and patriotism is a state in the southern portion of the island of Celebes. A large body of Portuguese troops, commanded by Galvan, a brave and humane man, set sail on board a well appointed fleet to effect the conquest of this island. Shortly after landing on Celebes, his march was checked by the approach of a native army of between twenty and thirty thousand warriors. He had two thousand well-armed, steel-clad, disciplined European soldiers; and he felt convinced that the conflict which appeared inevitable would be nothing more than a massacre of the half naked, undisciplined multitude before him. The generous heart of Galvan was touched with compunction, and he did not wish to be a party to the massacre of men, who offered their defenceless bodies in the defence of their homes. He proposed that he and the chieftain of the island should decide the matter in single combat. If he was slain, his troops should retire, proceed to their ships, and return home; but if, on the contrary, the native prince should fall, the natives of the island should pay a certain tribute that had been demanded, and should acknowledge themselves to be subjects and dependents of the king of Portugal. This was agreed upon. On the following day, the two armies being drawn up in view of each other, about half a mile apart, the Portuguese general galloped forth to the appointed spot. After remaining a few moments, he saw the Indian prince approaching with his retinue. When the chieftain had approached within twenty or thirty feet of the European, it would seem that he was daunted by his keen penetrating glance, or fearless look, because he immediately wheeled around and retreated within the lines of his army. The Portuguese hero supposed that probably this was a little party of reconnoissance, and that the true combatant had not come forth. In the native camp there was great confusion. This prince had brought his family with him to battle, which is customary with Eastern princes, because it is desirous they should share a common fate. There was a sister of this prince, a maiden of seventeen years of age, who felt a keen sense of shame and of disgrace brought upon her country by the cowardly conduct of her brother. Without making known her intentions, she seized a lance, leaped upon a horse, and galloped forth into the plain. Galvan was surprised to see a woman approaching with lance in rest, and charging down upon him. With the skill of an experienced horseman and warrior, he evaded the lance thrust of the heroine, again and again. Meanwhile an interpreter approached; and he became acquainted with the nature of the singular attack, upon learning which his gallantry and feelings of justice and generosity were so moved, that he at once withdrew his army, and made restitution for the damage his troops had committed in the island. The cowardly prince was dethroned by the people of Celebes; and the heroic princess elevated to the sovereignty in his stead; and it is to this day a law among this people that none but a maiden between the ages of 17 and 25 is eligible to mount the throne.

There are many interesting circumstances that could be told, illustrating the character of the women of these islands, as being superior to that of the men. I have observed this in the semi-civilized races of Mexico, in South America, and in Southern Africa, among all these races that are a shade darker than ourselves, that the female is superior to the male in good moral qualities, and even in intellect.

The women are also exceedingly industrious and skillful in the manufacture of various things. They raise the silkworm, and weave a very strong silk cloth, the best, I believe, that is made in the world. It has not such fine and beautiful colors as some of the Chinese and Japanese silks, but it is much heavier and more durable. It is indeed too heavy and highly priced by the natives to be profitable for exportation. The Malay women also make very good muslins; and they are quite skillful in dyeing the cloth, although they adopt a rather slow and tedious process for the purpose. They draw their designs or patterns upon a piece of white cloth, representing birds, beasts, and sometimes a landscape, and then cover the portions of the cloth that are to be left white with melted wax, which they do rapidly; then they immerse the cloth in the dye and afterwards boil out the wax. They cover again other portions of the remaining white surface with designs in wax, and in this way can produce three or four colors. These dyes are exceedingly durable. When the cloth is in rags it still preserves the same brilliant colors, especially the scarlet, which is equal to the celebrated purple of ancient Tyre.

I will now take up the subject of the relations between the sexes, in the marriage connection and its ceremonial. In regard to respect for women, the Malays differ entirely from all other Asiatics. The Chinese, Hindoos, Siamese, or even the Arabs, have no idea or comprehension of the observation of any kind of courteous attention to a woman previous to marriage; they never think of composing a piece of verse, or of doing anything of that kind to interest a young lady. With the Asiatics she is an object of purchase, to work and to breed; and can be as readily disposed of as any of the rest of their live stock. With the Malay it is very different. With the warlike spirit of the Scandinavians or Scythians, they possess also their spirit of chivalry and gallantry towards women. They are capable of strong, affectionate emotion; and the women in their character are eminently worthy of the feeling of love they inspire. But there are some races of the Archipelago who differ very much from the Malays in this matter; especially that wild hairy race called Kubus, who, in matrimonial matters, resemble the Australian savage. When he thinks that he ought to begin to keep house, and to have a companion, and to establish himself as a man of family, he proceeds into the neighborhood of some village. He prowls about and watches to observe the girls going to the springs for water, or to gather fuel. When a good opportunity is presented, he rushes from his concealment in the forest, and gives his intended a good rap upon the head with a cudgel, and knocks her down. But that is not so serious an affair as you might suppose; because nature has provided her with an immense covering for the head, a very strong hair, which is tremendously kinky; and I am speaking within bounds, when I say that this bush of hair sticks out half a foot thick, like an immense cushion around the head, so that a heavy blow of a club is no more than sufficient to stretch the lady insensible upon the ground for a while. The gallant who has proven his affection in this striking manner, carries her away on his back to his hut, and that is all the ceremony that is considered requisite to enter into house-keeping.

The Kubus are also very peculiar in after-marriage relations. I mentioned to you that their only house is a sort of readily formed platform in the tops of trees. Now, it oftentimes happens that the Kubu does not wish to take the trouble of courtship on his own account, and prefers to steal a neighbor's wife, which is exceedingly common among these savages. He calls at a lodge during the absence of its Kubu proprietor, and forcibly bears away his spouse into the forest, at the same time taking pains to leave evidences of his track by bruising the bushes, or dropping a peculiar shaped leaf in the path. The ravisher proceeds to the vicinity of some small watercourse or lake. He is in duty bound to remain there a whole day, from sunrise till its setting; and if, at the close of day, no one appears to dispute his possession of the woman, he is entitled to his stolen wife. But it is generally the case, that when the husband returns to his lodge, and discovers the abduction of his partner, and also observes the traces left by the ravisher, that he sets out at once to reclaim his right, and vindicate his injured honor. When the despoiled husband appears, his antagonist approaches warily to meet the attack: they make various feints and dodges; and finally they grapple. The wife in the mean time sits demurely looking on, entirely indifferent to the result, being perfectly satisfied to go with the best man. They wrestle and struggle, and, after their best efforts, finally one of the two succeeds in pushing his antagonist into the water. The moment he gets his foot into the water, it is an immediate end of the strife: they never slay each other, nor shed blood; but only strive to prove a superiority in wrestling skill and strength. And so the one that succeeds in first wetting or muddying his antagonist, goes home with the woman; and if the husband be the defeated party, he goes his way without further quarrel; but in consequence of having had his foot put into the pond, it is difficult for him to get another Kubu wife; and hence we might suppose, arose the saying, that such a one has put his foot into it, whenever in a tight place, through his own incapacity or mistake.

Now, there is another remarkable peculiarity in matrimonial matters, as observed in a part of Borneo, which is in very direct opposition to what is entertained and practised here; and it is this, that there are women who are polyanders, the opposite of polygamists; that is, they have two or three husbands. Now, this is a privilege that is only granted to those of highly distinguished families. The first husband is generally a sort of priest, who has a character among his people something like the Brahmins among the Hindoos. He is the clerical husband, who takes charge of her future welfare: the second is a warrior, or fighting husband, and the third one is a working man that provides for the whole family. Now, these are savage people, that is to say, they occupy, as compared with ourselves, a low degree in the scale of civilization; and yet I do not think that this state of marital plurality differs very much from what may be observed in societies, regarded as occupying the topmost round of the ladder of civilization. I think it is commonly observed in the best society of the Atlantic cities of this Union, as well as among the great cities of Europe, that there is many a distinguished lady who enjoys the most intimate friendship of a family pastor, then she flirts amorously with some duelling mustachoed count; and then there is the husband proper, a good honest man who works down town for the whole establishment.

The Malays attach great solemnity to the marriage relation; they regard it as sacred and indissoluble. Many days are occupied in all the peculiar and notable ceremonies connected with the event. There are many days of feasting and offering of gifts to their deities. The individuals chiefly concerned, the bride and groom, have rather a hard time. The bride, being loaded with all the ornaments of her family that can be gathered, is seated on a mat with the bridegroom; but they are placed back to back, though not touching each other, being placed about a foot apart, and thus they must remain eight hours each day, and for three days in succession, and they are subject to a severe penalty if they should look round or indulge in any glances at each other. There is generally one or two elderly ladies that keep vigilant watch; and Malay women, like their sex in all parts of the world, are great sticklers for exact observance of ceremonials. There is one ceremonial or preparative for marriage, which I must mention in this place; and that is to file the front teeth of Malay maidens, when they have attained the age of fourteen or fifteen years. Sometimes it is a very slight operation, and its effect on the teeth disappears in a few years; but in many instances it quite disfigures the beautiful white teeth of the girls; and they clamorously object to the barbarous operation, which is painful when executed with badly made Malay files, and is by no means a pleasant affair when performed by the most skillful of our dentists with the best of tools: but when the Malay girls are told by their mothers that they cannot get a husband until this filing is performed, then there is a ready submission to the shortening of their fore-teeth. After the sitting ceremonial mentioned, on the part of bride and groom, the parties stand up before a priest, who joins their hands, and repeats to the groom, these words, which are translated from an old Malay manuscript, and which I have listened to on such occasions:—

"I join you," calling the man by name, "in marriage to Sahyeepa; you take her to be your wife for this world." Let me mention to you that this people marry also for the world to come, or land of spirits. "You must pay the pledge of your marriage, that is, two ounces in gold, or remain forever debtor for the same. If the young man cannot pay this pledge, his family, or village must do so. "You are responsible for your wife, in all and everything. If you should be absent from her seven months on shore, or one year at sea, without leaving her an abundance of rice and other subsistence, your marriage is annulled," that is, if the wife is so inclined.

There are a people inhabiting the Moluccas Islands, who add the following to the formula I have repeated: "You must never raise your knife, your lance, or your fist to your wife; but if she disobeys, or should go astray in any manner, take her into a private place, and wallop her gently with your pocket handkerchief." This, let me tell you, is not such an innocent chastisement as you may suppose; because the Malay gentlemen are in the habit of fastening little bits of silver and gold around the borders of their handkerchiefs; so that they make a sort of mild cat-o'-nine-tails; and if applied to the necks of the ladies will sting a little, and leave some rather noticeable marks.

There are many different languages spoken in these islands. There are more than a hundred different tongues and dialects. But the principal one is the Malay, which is understood upon every island of the Archipelago; so that a man who is familiar with the Malay, is enabled to communicate with every people inhabiting the islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, from Madagascar, on the coast of Africa, to Easter Island, within a few hundred miles of the South American coast; that is, throughout an extent of fifteen thousand miles. In the language of the people of New Zealand, and the Sandwich Islands, I can discover a large portion of genuine Malay words; so that it would take me but a short while to converse with any native of the islands of the Pacific or Indian Oceans, in consequence of my knowledge of the Malay language. There has been invented among the people of the Indian Archipelago, nine different written alphabets. Besides the Malay, there is the Battah, the Rejang, the Lampong, the Javanese, the Bughinese, the Tagala, the Korinchi, and Sundese written languages.

The script used by the Malay people, or was formerly (for they are now abandoning their old system of writing and adopting the Arabic), are angular shaped characters, there not being a curve line in the whole alphabet. On the contrary, the Battahs, a neighboring people, use curved lines altogether in the formation of their alphabetic characters for writing.

The Malays, before they had much intercourse with the Europeans, would write their ordinary communications upon a peculiar leaf called lontar. This leaf has a fine glossy surface, and is surrounded by deep indentations, or a sort of fringed border. With the point of a dirk, a Malay can readily trace these angular letters, and then he can skillfully interlace the fringed border of these leaves in such a manner that no one, except those familiar with it, can pick it apart without tearing it and showing that the letter had been opened.

They write also upon pieces of bamboo, a few inches in length, which have a fine enamelled surface, and are of a rich cream color. They can trace so finely on these pieces of bamboo, as not to be observable to the naked eye, unless you look very closely. I had evidence of this on one occasion, whilst I was in prison, in the island of Java. I had been exceedingly desirous to communicate with a notable Malay chieftain, that had been taken prisoner by the Dutch, like myself, and had been transported to another part in the island of Java, some hundreds of miles distant from where I was confined. He became acquainted with my whereabouts and was exceedingly desirous to communicate with me. There came one day into the prison yard, as often times happened, a pedler woman with her basket, containing little odd notions, which she had permission to sell to the prisoners; and with the permission of the guard, she would go round to all the cells. She came to my prison ward, and showed me, among other things, a pretty cigar case, made out of bamboo. I had no use for cigars, and never had for tobacco in any shape. She still insisted on selling it me, and offered it to me for such a trifling value, that my curiosity was at last aroused by her importunity, and I bought the bamboo cigar case. As soon as I had retreated within my cell, I observed, on examining the case closely, some exceedingly small characters, which communicated to me some interesting news, that had an important bearing on my position and affairs afterwards.

It might not be uninteresting were I to repeat a few words of their language, which might give you an idea of its softness. In the first place I will repeat the numerals, that is, from one to ten:—1 satu, 2 dua, 3 tegu, 4 empat, 5 leema, 6 annam, 7 toojoo, 8 delapan, 9 sambilan, 10 sapullo. Another instance I will give, is a verse from one of their popular songs:

"Apa guna pasang palita,
Jika tiyada dangan sumbunya,
Apa guna bermayin mata,
Kalu tiyada dangan sungunya."

Translation.

What is the use of lighting a lamp,
If it be without a wick?
What is the use of playing with the eyes,
If you be not in earnest?

The Malay language is most redundant in words, which makes it difficult to acquire. There is a distinct word, not only for finger, but for each joint. Rice in the husk is called padee; when it is cleaned it is called beraasa; and when boiled and prepared for eating, then it is called nasaee. Then the language is singularly figurative. The sun is called the eye of day. A key is called the child of the lock. An eloquent man is called sweet mouthed, a talkative scolding personage is called long mouthed. The language seems to be well fitted for poetry, or rather for metrical compositions; and yet the Malays do not indulge so much in verse, as all the rest of the Asiatics, that possess a language and a literature. They have some interesting poems. The most noted of which is the tragic story of Kini Tambahan.

But their chief interest is in romantic or heroic narrative. They are the most inveterate story-tellers in the world. Nothing delights a Malay so much, as to meet with an individual that can relate to him personal adventures. I never met with a people that are so inquisitive, and that seem to have such an eager desire for the acquisition of knowledge. There exists a sort of professional wandering story-tellers, who are peculiar to Sumatra. Whenever a chieftain entertains a stranger, or his friends, these professional story-tellers are always on hand. They not only relate interesting romances, but they also sing and perform in a dramatic style that amounts to a sort of Malay opera or theatric play. I have a large budget of interesting stories, romances, and poems translated from Malay manuscripts.

I must now make some mention of the religious views of the Malays and other people of these islands. Before any Europeans ever visited them—before the Portuguese and Spaniards, and Arabs visited this people, they believed in a curious, and I may say harmless, mythology. They had a multitude of divinities, who they supposed peopled every rock and tree, like the nymphs called dryads of ancient Greek superstition. These divinities were called widadiri, or sky nymphs; and by the way, all the divinities of the Malays, both good and bad, are feminine; their devil is also a female. They offered to these good or bad spirits simple offerings of fruits and flowers, and incense; and sometimes, like the Chinese, would burn rich cloths and paper that had certain prayers inscribed on the surface; they supposing that the words of the prayer, being consumed, ascended up to the deities. This is similar to the idea entertained by the King of Dahomey, a chieftain of Africa, who, when he wants to send a message to one of his dead relatives, will call one of his slaves, and say, "Go to my uncle and tell him so and so;" and then orders the head of the slave to be cut off. If he has forgotten anything, he calls another man, communicates to him an additional postscript, and has his head cut off. The Malays had a similar idea, but did not adopt such bloody means.

Speaking of blood brings to my mind, what I wish to say about the Malay idea of sacrifice, or expiation by the shedding of blood; and this idea pervades all the islands. When a man's child is very sick, and the ordinary remedies have failed, he will kill, according to his means, either a