

# THE ORATORY, SONGS, LEGENDS, AND FOLK- TALES OF THE MALAGASY.

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The sixth section of *Specimens of Malagasy Folk-lore* consists of a short series of seven Speeches, under the heading of *Haingom-pitenénan' ny Ntaolo ràha nifanànatra izy*, that is, "Ornaments of Speech among the Ancients, when they mutually admonished." Although in Mr. Dahle's selection these follow the native songs, they would seem to be more properly placed next to the first division of the book, *Haintény làvalàva*, or "Oratorical Flourishes," as they partake somewhat of the character of these; and we shall therefore consider them in this place. There is some little difference in the style of these pieces, and in that of the *Hain-teny lavalava*; and as they afford good illustrations of some features in native oratory and its profusion of figures, two or three of them may be translated in full, although some of the allusions are very obscure.

## *A statement of (or, a plea for) Friendship.*

1. As regards ourselves and not other people; for we are people born of one mother and people of one origin; one root, one stock, brethren following the footprints of the cattle,—not broken, even if torn; a hundred measures of rice, mixed in the storehouse, houses built north and south (of each other),\* right and left hand, eyes and nose, rice in two measures, yet born of one person only.

2. Therefore let us love one another, for those far off cannot be called; for the distant fire, as they say, one cannot warm at, and a hundred measures of rice cannot be carried.

\* The old Hova houses were always built with their length running north and south, the front of the house facing the west, the lee-side.

3. There is none overtaken by another ; \* for if we call for other people's relatives, they say, it is night, but if we call our own relatives, then it is broad day, † for look, even the name of Such-an-one is become " Not-overtaken-by-another " !

4. Therefore as for thee, O senior like to a father, thou art an *ambòra* tree for binding, \* and the thick forest for hiding, and the hoof for feasting, \* and the sun and moon, and the sky to cover over, and the earth for treading upon.

5. Thou art the breast joining on to the wings, and palm of the hand joining to the forefinger, and knee joining the muscles.

6. Thou art the sole *vòamàintilàny* (fruit) remaining, and the tree left of the forest, and the bird changing meat, and thou art chief and Such-an-one still living (amongst us).

#### *Thanksgiving Speech.*

Pleasing, friends ; swallowed (*i.e.* acceptable), friends ; sweet, friends ; great and cannot be swallowed are ye. Sweet indeed is honey, but there are dregs ; savoury (*lit.* sweet) indeed is salt, but it is like a stone ; sweet indeed the sugar-cane, but it is like wood ; but the good done by you is incomparable. Nevertheless, friends, be of good cheer, for the good you have done will not be pleasing (only) on the day of doing it, like the feet of the cattle treading the rice ground, ‡ but will be pleasing taken home to sleep on, for it shall be rewarded when awaking ; for that is water bathed in to remove grease, and fat anointing to cause to shine, and cloth to wear to keep off shame. For money is soon spent, and other things come to an end, but friendship, that is enduring.

Another speech is an admonition to companions who shirk their share of government (unpaid) service : —

Short is our word, Sirs, a speech of the old, and if long, yet height without bulk, and if too short, then rolled about ; so let it be like the trench for sweet potatoes made by *Ikarìjovòla*, and the germs (*fig. topic*) extracted.

With regard to yourself, Such-an-one ; the people (*lit.* " the under

\* Here the meaning is not at all clear.

† Referring to the strong and universally admitted claims for help in various circumstances that relationship involves.

‡ Cattle are employed to trample over the softened mud of the rice fields before planting.

the day") go upon the Queen's service, but thou hidest away in secret, and dost not go to do thy share, but only just now puttest in an appearance. So that here now thou actest like the little butterfly by the water: able to close up its wings, able to expand them; thou dost like the water-fowl: black when diving, black when emerging; for if thou dost like the little crab in the hole: grasped by the hand and yet not got, sprinkled with water, and not coming out,—then we detest that, Sir! And now if it appears that what is under the eye is not seen, or under the tongue and is not chewed, or near the nose and not smelt, or looked at and not known,—then we utterly detest that, Sir! So, although your feet even may go, and although your knees even may skulk along, and although your chin may touch the ground, we will not let you off unless you perform the service for the honour of the sovereign.

Here is another piece, the subject of which is

*Do not use Evil speech.*

1. It is not well that men should make a hammer with two heads: both speaking good and speaking evil. For it is an evil thing, friends, to act like the tongue of the ox, licking carefully the hump and licking also the feet; able to enter into the nostrils, able to enter also the mouth.

2. Take heed to the mouth, friends, for the mouth is a compartment (or room), the mouth is just like a piece of cloth—tearing this way, and tearing that way; the mouth is like Alakaosy (the unlucky month), and if one does not butt another, one butts one's self. For the good (speaking) mouth is, they say, as a meal; but the evil mouth is, they say, a thing cleaving to one.

The evil mouth is just like the loin-cloth, binding only its owner. For there is no one guilty in body, they say, but they who are guilty in mouth are guilty. For the unguarded mouth, they say, is cause of calamity, and those who are free of speech, they say, reveal secrets; so that what is done by the mouth, they say, endangers the neck.

3. Take heed, friends, to the mouth, and do what is right, for that only brings lasting good. For if one does good when young, they say, they have something to take to old age, yea, even to take with them in death. For that has given rise to the popular saying, "Do good that you be not forgotten, even when you have mouldered away."

For the good done, they say, is a memorial (lit. "a set-up stone"), and the good done is good packed up for a journey.

It will be noticed in this speech what a frequent repetition there is of the word *hòno*, "they say," or "it is said"; apparently guarding a speaker from personal responsibility for much of his counsel, and sheltering him under the authority of others. This is quite characteristic of the native mind, which shrinks from very direct assertion or accusation, and always prefers an indirect mode of statement.

The symbols and figures which it will have been seen in the preceding pages to be a marked characteristic of Malagasy speech are not, however, confined to words, but are sometimes extended to actions. Every reader of the Old Testament scriptures is aware of the frequent use made of such methods of teaching by the Hebrew prophets, as seen in the Book of Ezekiel (iii. 1-3; iv.; vii. 23; xxiv. 1-4; xxxvii. 15-17), and in 1 Kings xxii. 11.

In Malagasy history there are some interesting examples of a similar employment of symbolic acts, especially before the general use of writing had made written letters common. Towards the close of the last century, Andrianimpòina, king of Imérina, had reduced under his authority a great part of the interior of the island, and, confident in his own power, sent a messenger to the principal chief of the southern central province, Bétsiléó, telling him that he was "his son" (a common Malagasy expression implying that one person is subordinate to another), and requiring him to come and acknowledge his father. The Bétsiléó chief, however, replied that he was no son of the Hova king, but that they were brothers, each possessing his own territory. The Hova returned for answer, "I have a large cloth (to cover me), but thou hast a small one; so that if you are far from me you are cold; for I am the island to which all the little ones resort, therefore come to me, thy father, for thou art my son." When the Bétsiléó chief received this message he measured a piece of wood between his extended arms (the *réfy* or standard measure of the Malagasy, between the tips of the fingers when the arms are stretched apart to the utmost), and sent it to the king, with the words, "This wood is my measure; bid Andrianimpòina equal it; if he can span it, then I am his son, and not his brother." Upon Andrianimpòina trying it he was unable to reach it, for the Bétsiléó chief was long in the arms. But the Hova king would not give up his point, and



replied, "My measurement of the wood is of no consequence, for kingship does not consist in length of arms; thou art little, therefore my son; I am great, therefore thy father." (Cf. 2 Kings xvi. 7.)

Still the southern chief was unwilling to submit, and sent a particular kind of native cloth ornamented with beads, with a request that an ox should be cut up upon it, as another sign whether he was to acknowledge the Hova king as his superior or not. This test also turned out to his own advantage; but at length Andrianimpòina would have no further trifling. He sent back the cloth with a piece cut off one end of it, and a spear-hole through the middle, as a significant warning of his intentions unless immediate submission was made. The lesson was not lost upon the weaker chief; he returned a humble answer, begging that he might not be killed, saying, "While it is to-day, all day let me eat of the tender (food) of the earth, for Andrianimpòina is lord of the kingdom."

Something of a similar kind of symbolic act is related of Queen Ranavalona I. "When she came to the throne in 1828 there was a little boy not many months old at that time, of the true seed royal, and descended from the line of the ancient kings. The Queen then announced that she had made this boy her adopted son, and that he should be her successor; even if she should have children of her own, his right to the throne should remain good. Afterwards she had a son of her own, whom she named Rakòton-dRadàma; many thought that her own son would succeed her, but the declaration in favour of the other was never rescinded, and hence arose much animosity between the two princes. When the queen became old and feeble, the subject of the succession came up, and she settled it in a singular way, substantially as follows:—She held a meeting of her officers, judges, and heads of the people, with great solemnity within the palace, when she announced her intention of making a valuable present to each of the two princes. Two fine vases or covered vessels were placed on the table, and the two young men were called in; the elder was first directed to choose which he would have. He did so, and on opening the vase it was found to contain some beautiful gems and valuable ornaments. The younger, her own son, then opened his vase, and found it contained only a handful of earth. The Queen then addressed the assembly, saying that the elder prince was to be advanced to high honour and riches in the land; but, as the land could not be divided, the younger prince, who had received from God

the handful of earth, should be her successor."\* (He eventually became king under the name of Radàma II., but only reigned about eighteen months.)

## CHAPTER II.

### RIDDLES AND CONUNDRUMS.

The second division of Mr. Dahle's book consists of about three hundred Malagasy proverbs, here called "Shorter clever Speeches resembling Proverbs;" but, as this branch of native wisdom and observation really requires a separate paper in order to do it justice, we shall not here give extracts from this part of the book. Perhaps in some future issue of the *Folk-Lore Journal* space may be found for a fuller discussion of and examples from the proverbs of the Malagasy than can be conveniently given here as a part of their folk-lore. Besides which, it will be necessary to take illustrations from larger collections than this supplementary one from the work we are chiefly using as a text-book.

The third and fourth sections of the book comprise a small collection of Malagasy riddles and conundrums, *Fampànononana* and *Safidy*, the latter word meaning "choosings," two somewhat similar things being offered for choice in enigmatical language. Such playing upon words is a favourite amusement of the people; and, as some of them show considerable shrewdness a few examples may be given, all of them beginning with the question, *Inona àry izàny?* "What then is this?"

1. At night they come without being fetched, and by day they are lost without being stolen?

*The stars;* for, according to the common belief, they go completely away from their places by day.

2. Cut down, and yet not withering?

*Hair,* when cut off.

3. Six legs and two feet (lit. "soles")?

*Money scales,* which have always three strings (legs) for each pan, which is called in native idiom its "tongue," but in the riddle is compared to a foot.

\* Quoted from *Recollections of Missionary Life in Madagascar*, by James Cameron, Esq.

4. Lying on the same pillow, but not on the same bed ?

*The rafters of a roof*, which lean on the same ridge-piece (or pillow), but rest (that is, the opposite sides) on different wall-plates (or beds).

5. Coarse *ròfia* cloth outside and white robe inside ?

*The manioc root*, which has a brown skin, but very white floury substance, here contrasted with the ordinary native habit of wearing coarse and often dirty clothing below, and a fine white cloth or *làmba* over all.

6. If boiled, never cooked; but if roasted, ready directly ?

*Hair*.

7. Cannot be carried, but can easily be removed ?

*The public road*; for, until quite recently, there have been no rights of way in Madagascar, and any one can divert a path as he may please.

8. Fetch the dead on which to place the living ?

*Ashes and fire*, alluding to the common native practice of fetching a live coal or two in a handful of ashes.

9. Standing erect he gazes on heaven (lit. "the Creator"); stooping down he gazes on the oxen's footprints?

*Rice*, which while growing stands erect, but when ripe bends downwards.

10. Its mother says, Let us spread out our hands, but its children say, Let us double up our fists ?

*The full-grown fern and the young fern-shoots*, alluding to the rounded knobs at the heads of the latter, compared with the outspread fronds of the plant when full grown.

11. The foot above the leg ?

*The leaves of the horirika*, an edible arum, whose broad leaf is compared to a foot and its stalk to a leg.

12. Cut, and yet no wound seen?

*A shadow and water*.

13. The mother says, Let us stand up, but the children say, Let us lie across ?

*A ladder and its rungs*, the latter are called "children of the ladder" (*zàna-tòhatra*).

14. Has a mouth to eat with, but has no stomach to retain food?

*A pair of scissors*. A cutting edge is called in native idiom its "tongue" (*léla*).

15. God's little bag, whose stitching is invisible ?

*An egg*.

16. Living on dainties, yet never fat ?

*A lampstand*, which is continually fed with fat.

17. Earth under the person, the person under dry grass, dry grass under water, and water again surrounded by earth?

*A water-carrier and the waterpot he (or she) carries, together with a ring of dry grass used as a pad for the water-pot, the water carried, and the earthen siny or pot enclosing the water.*

18. When the little one comes the great one takes off its hat?

*The great store waterpot in a house, from which the straw cover or hat is removed when water is drawn with a horn or tin ladle.*

19. Dead before it begins to bluster?

*A drum, referring to the bullock's skin of which it is made.*

20. Many shields, many spears, yet cannot protect wife and children?

*The lemon tree, alluding to the spines on the branches and the round fruits.*

In the appendix to the book three specimens of conundrum games are given, the custom being for the proposer to mention first a number of things from a dozen to thirty, calling upon the rest of the party to guess what they are when he has done. In the first of these a number of insects, birds, and household objects, are mentioned by some more or less vague description of them, such as, "Adornment of the sovereign? The people," "Horns (*i. e.* protection) of the people? Guns." "Top-knot of the town? A big house." "Two-thirds of his sense gone before he gets arms and legs? A tadpole, when it changes to a frog," &c.

In the second game all the different parts of an ox are described in an enigmatical way, thus: "God's pavement? Its teeth." "Two lakes at the foot of a tree? Its eyes." "Continually fighting, but never separating? Its lips." "Blanket worn day and night and can't be torn? Its skin," &c.

In the third game occur the following: "Fragrance of the forest? Ginger." "Fat of the trees? Honey." "The lofty place good refuge from the flood? Antanànarivo." "The lofty place good for sheltering? Ambòhimànga."\* "Rising up and not questioned? The roof-posts of the house;" for a native, when rising up from the mat, would invariably be asked, "Ho aiza moa hianao?" "Where are you going?"

\* Because of the woods which clothe the slopes of the hill.