

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

BY THE REV. JAMES SIBREE, JUNIOR.

(Continued from page 40.)

## CHAPTER III.

### SONGS.

**N**EXT in order in this collection of folk-lore we find a number of native songs or *Hiran' ny Ntaolo* ("Songs of the Ancients"). The Malagasy people (at least those tribes of them with whom we are best acquainted in the central and eastern provinces) are very fond of singing and of music, and have a very correct ear for harmony. They like singing in parts; and when they hear a new tune will often improvise a tenor, alto, or bass accompaniment. The native tunes are somewhat plaintive, and are often accompanied with the regular clapping of hands and the twanging of a rude guitar or other instrument. On moonlight nights the children and young people will stay out of doors until the small hours of the morning, singing the native songs, in which they take immense delight. It will be seen from the following specimens that although these songs are not rhymed or metrical they have nevertheless a certain rhythmical "swing" or flow, and a parallelism of structure, and are arranged in somewhat regular form as regards couplets and stanzas.

Several of these songs are in praise of the sovereign, and were chiefly composed in honour of the persecuting Queen Rànavàlona I., who reigned from 1828 to 1861. In heathen times, that is, until the present queen's accession in 1868, it was customary to salute the sovereign as the "God seen by the eye," the visible divinity (*Andriamànitra hita m'aso*). Here is one of these laudatory effusions addressed to the former queens:

1. Salutation, Rabòdonàndrianimpòina ! \*  
Suns (there are) not two ;  
Suns but one only (namely),  
Rabòdonàndrianimpòina !
2. Going to Imànga, † she's no stranger ;  
Coming to Iarivo, † sovereign of the land.
3. A shield of beaten gold ;  
Rising up (she is) light of the heaven ;  
Stooping down, lamp of the earth.

Another song is in more regular form, consisting of six stanzas of five lines each:

1. Rabòdonàndrianimpòina :  
South of Ambàtonafàndrana, ‡  
North of Ambòhimitsimbina,  
West of Imàndroséza,  
East of Ambòhijànahàry.
2. May you live, Rabodo,  
And Rambòasalàma-Razàka, §  
And Rakòto (son of) Radàma, ||  
And the whole (royal) family,  
Not to be counted up.
3. A single tree by the river,  
One only who rules,  
For there is our sovereign !  
The new moon coming from the west,  
The full moon coming from the east.
4. The woods of Ambòhimànga, ¶  
Bending down in their growth,  
Behold the child reigning ;  
There Rabòdo reigns,  
Thou indeed art our lady.

\* This was the official and semi-sacred name of the queen, meaning "The beloved of Andrianimpòina," her first husband and predecessor.

† Shortened forms of Ambòhimànga and Antanànarivo, the ancient and present capitals.

‡ This and the three following words are the names of the northern, southern, eastern, and western portions of the capital city, the royal palaces being in the centre, and on the summit of the long rocky ridge on and around which the city is built.

§ The queen's nephew, and heir to the throne until the birth of her son ; see p. 37.

|| Her son, afterwards king as Radàma II. (1861—1863); see p. 38.

¶ The old capital is surrounded by woods, which clothe the hill up to its summit.

5. So the lowly have their own,  
The great also have their own ;  
The kingdom is a staircase,  
Not causing to stumble,  
Not wearying to traverse.
6. Salutation, Rabòdonàndrianimpòina ;  
There are no desolate ones ;  
The orphans are well fed,  
Those whose parents are living  
Are all fat and flourishing.

Some of these songs are wordy and full of repetitions, especially in the choruses, which are very much in what we should call, in English, the "tra-la-la" style; but several are composed in a grave and serious strain, some enforcing the honour due to parents, others expounding the nature of true friendship. In one of these latter the hearers are cautioned not to make "mist friendship," which soon dissolves; nor "stone friendship," which cannot be joined again if broken; but to form "iron friendship," which can be welded again if severed; or "silk friendship," which can be twisted in again; not "tobacco friendship," liked but not swallowed; nor "door friendship," liked indeed, but pushed to and fro; and so on.

As in the proverbs and oratorical pieces, so also in some of these songs, the different places in the central province are referred to, in some cases with a punning on their names, to the effect that although they may be *called* So-and-so, those only who act in accordance with the name have truly such-and-such qualities. Thus:—

A place-name is Tsianòlondròà (lit. "Not-for-two-people");  
Yet it's not the place is (really) Tsianolondroa,  
But 'tis the wife who is "not for two people."

A place-name is Ambòhipòtsy (White-village);  
Yet it's not the place is (really) Ambòhipotsy,  
But those who hate uncleanness *are* white.

A place-name is Ambòhibelòma (Village-of-farewell);  
Yet it's not the place is (really) Ambohibeloma,  
But it's those who go home who say, Farewell.

Similar allusions are often brought into Malagasy canoe songs. Many of these are both musical and amusing, and few experiences are more pleasant in Madagascar travelling than to glide rapidly down or across one of the large rivers in the early morning, the time when the eastern rivers, at least, are the smoothest, and in a large canoe, with

plenty of paddlers, to listen to the rowers' songs. They will often improvise a song, one of them keeping up a recitative in which circumstances which have occurred on the journey are introduced, while the others chime in with a chorus at regular intervals, a favourite one being "*He! misy va?*" "Oh! is there some?" This question refers to various good things they hope to get at the end of the day's journey, such as plenty of rice, beef, sweet potatoes, &c., these articles of food being mentioned one after another by the leader of the song. A little delicate flattery of their employer, the Englishman they are rowing, is often introduced, and praises of his hoped-for generosity in providing these luxuries for them; something in this style:—

E, misy vâ?	Oh, is there any?
E, misy ré!	O yes, there's some!
E, ny vorontsiloza, zalàhy é?	Oh the turkeys, lads, O?
E, misy re!	O yes, there's some!
E, ny gisy matavy, zalahy e?	Oh the plump-looking geese, lads, O?
E, misy re!	O yes, there's some!
E, ny akoho manatody, zalahy e?	Oh the egg-laying fowls, lads, O?
E, misy re!	O yes, there's some!
E, ny Vazaha be vola, zalahy e?	Oh the very rich foreigner, lads, O?
E, misy re!	O yes, here he is!

and so on, *ad libitum*.

My friend and brother missionary, the Rev. J. A. Houlder, amusingly describes the canoe songs he heard on a journey down to the eastern coast, and gives a free translation of one of them. He says, "the men burst out with

Kàlamàk' o! Kàlamàk' o! (very loud and quick.)  
 Kalamak' aron' é! (softish and quick.)  
 E! e! e! Kalamak' e! (softer and slow.)"

After an unsuccessful attempt to get some rum from their employer, "as if to show their independence of the close-fisted strangers who could not be induced to comfort them thus," they mockingly led off with "Is there any there?" As much as to say, "Were we not fools to ask them?" This is a favourite chorus, sung very rapidly, but having a long pause on the first word. The men never seemed to tire of shouting it out after any strain the leader cared to improvise. Thus his thoughts ran on to the work in hand, and he sang,

"To unitedly dig are there any there?"

And was responded to by the chorus,

"Are there any there?"

Again,

“ Oh then dig away hard, do not shirk your share! ”

Chorus,

“ Are there any there? ”

“ Thus it went on until the leader thought of the night's rest and a good supper at the foreigner's expense before taking it. Liquids having failed, he would try solids, so began to flatter and cajole with a view, something after this style:

“ Then long may our famous foreigners live!  
Is there any there?  
Of beef and pork what a fill they will give!  
Is there any there?  
To speak not of poultry so fat and fair!  
Is there any there?  
And rice very good they will freely share!  
Is there any there?  
But, gracious me, what a terrible shame!  
Is there any there?  
To make such a row in our kind friend's name!  
Is there any there? ”

“ And so on, until solo and chorus burst out into a joyous laugh of pleasant expectation; and one of the persons to whom they were looking for a gratuity found himself bending unconsciously to each dig of the paddle, and almost shouting out,

“ Then work away hard, you jolly boys there,  
Till we all get there;  
To feed you well shall we not take care  
When we all get there? ” \*

In another song heard by the writer on the Mâtitanana river (south-east coast), the chorus was “ *Mandàny vatsy, Toamàsina malàza é!* ” i. e. “ Consumes provisions for the way, famous Tamatave O! ” while the recitative brought in all the different villages on the journey from Tamatave to the capital, ending with Andohàlo (the central space) and Avàra-dròva (the northern and chief entrance to the palace).

Among these Malagasy songs are some called *sàsy*, which are employed as dirges for the dead. An example given by Mr. Dahle consists of five different strains, the first of which is in three stanzas; of these the second may be given as a specimen :—

\* *North-east Madagascar*, pp. 7, 8.



E, malahelo ô! e malahelo ô!	Ah, sorrowful O! ah, sorrowful O!
Tomany alina!	Weeping by night!
E, malahelo ô ny vadiny etoana!	Ah, sorrowful O! is here his wife!
Tomany alina!	Weeping by night!
E, malahelo ô ny zanany etoana!	Ah, sorrowful O! are here his children!
Tomany alina!	Weeping by night!
E, malahelo ô ny havany etoana!	Ah, sorrowful O! are here his relatives!
Tomany alina!	Weeping by night!
E, malahelo ô ny ankiziny etoana!	Ah, sorrowful O! are here his slaves!
Malahelo izy rehetra!	Sorrowful are they all!

A dirge with more variety and thought in it is a memorial song for a native officer named Ratsida, who died in the war with the Ikongo, one of the Tanàla or forest tribes in the south-east of Madagascar, about thirty or forty years ago. The following is an almost literal translation:—

1. Where, do you say, is Ratsida?  
The memorial stone of Ratsida  
Is north of Isòanieràna,  
South of Itsimbazàza;  
Vain substitute for a tomb.\*
2. Where was it he was lost?  
The corpse of Ratsida  
There at the foot of Ikongo  
Is food for the ants,  
Lost and dead in the war!
3. How about his relations?  
The relations of Ratsida  
Are alone in the dark.  
Given up their beloved one,  
Lost and dead in the war!
4. Who then, say, are the desolate?  
The friends of Ratsida  
Look about them in vain,  
For dead is their loved friend,  
His remains not come from the war!

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\* It is considered by the Hova that to die away from home, so that the corpse cannot be buried in the family tomb, is one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall one. Of course this sometimes occurs in the wars, but usually the body, or at least the bones, are carefully brought even for hundreds of miles up to Imérina to be buried in the sepulchre of their fathers. The memorial stone of Ratsida is a massive slab of dressed granite set up on the roadside on the south-west of Antanànarivo.

5. How as to his lands ?  
The ancestral lands of Ratsida  
Are grown over with weeds ;  
No longer a meeting-place,  
For he is dead in the war !
6. How as to his tomb ?  
The tomb of Ratsida  
Its hope disappointed,\*  
Unentered by the weary,  
For he is cut off in the war !
7. How as to his slaves ?  
The slaves of Ratsida  
Expect to be scattered,  
Gone to a child who inherits;  
Mouldering on the field he who gathered them !
8. How as to his superior ?  
The lord of Ratsida  
Laments in his heart,  
Dead his servant beloved,  
Killed by a gun in the war !
9. Who then is to blame ?  
No blame to his superiors,  
For his short time of service,  
The sport of gun and spear,  
His corpse lost in the war !
10. 'Twas the lot of Ratsida :  
To be killed on his way,  
To be food for the birds,  
To be a meal for the ants ;  
Alas ! he was prey to ill-fortune !

The following description of the burial customs and chants of the Sihànaka tribe is translated from the account given by an intelligent young Hova evangelist who lived among them for three years (1867—1870):—

“ Their customs when watching a corpse are as follows : A number of women, both young and old, sit in the house containing the corpse, and the chief mourners weep, but the rest sing and beat drums. There is no cessation in the funeral customs and singing day or night until the burial, although that sometimes does not take place for a

\* Here the tomb seems to be personified, and is represented as lamenting the absence of its proper occupant.

week, in the case of wealthy people. The dirges sung on these occasions are distressing and strange to hear, and show plainly their ignorance of the future state and of what is beyond the grave; for the dead are termed 'lost' (*véry*), lost as people are who are left by their companions, and do not see the way to go home again; and death they look upon as the messenger of some hard-hearted power, who drives hard bargains which cannot be altered, and puts one in extreme peril (lit. 'in the grip of a crocodile'), where no entreaties prevail. The dead they call 'the gentle (or pleasant) person'; and they will not allow his wife and children and all his relatives to think of anything but their bereavement, and the evil they have to expect from the want of the protection they had from the dead; for now 'the pillar of the house on which they leaned is broken, and the house which sheltered them is pulled down, and the town they lived in is destroyed, and the strong one they followed is overcome.' And after that they declare that the living are in trouble, and seem to agree that it had been better not to have been born.

"While they are yet singing in the manner just described, a man goes round the house and sings a dirge in a melancholy tone; upon hearing which those in the house stop suddenly and are perfectly still. Then the one outside the house proceeds rapidly with his chant as follows:—

'O gone away! O gone away, oh!  
Is the gentle one, O the gentle one, oh!  
Ah, farewell, ah, farewell, oh!  
Farewell, oh! farewell to his house!  
Farewell, oh! farewell to his friends!  
Farewell, oh! farewell to his wife!  
Farewell, oh! farewell to his children!'

Then those within doors answer 'Haié!' as if to say, Amen.

"Then they enquire and reply as follows, those outside asking, and the others in the house answering:—

'What is that sound of rushing feet?'  
'The cattle.'  
'What is that rattling chinking sound?'  
'The money.'  
'What is making such a noise?'  
'The people.'

referring to the property of the deceased. Then the one outside the house chants again:—



- ‘ O ! distressed and sad are the many ! ’  
 ‘ O ! the plantation is overgrown with weeds ! ’  
 ‘ O ! scattered are the calves ! ’  
 ‘ O ! silent are the fields ! ’  
 ‘ O ! weeping are the children ! ’

Then those in the house answer again ‘ Haié ! ’

“ Then the one outside the house again sings :—

- ‘ O gone away, gone away, is the gentle one !  
 Farewell, oh ! farewell, ’ ” &c. &c.\*

The longest piece in Mr. Dahle’s collection of songs is a kind of ballad in forty-four stanzas of three lines each. It relates the fortunes of an only son called Bénandro, who would go off to the wars, notwithstanding the entreaties of his father and mother. Of course he at last overcomes their opposition, and goes away with a confidential slave, but soon comes to grief, for he is taken ill, dies on the road, and the slave has, according to native custom, to bring back his bones to his disconsolate parents, who are ready to die with sorrow at their loss. Although full of repetitions it has a swinging, almost rhythmical, flow, very like some of the old English ballads, as will be seen by a few specimen verses :—

1. Benandro a darling son,  
 Benandro a darling son,  
 Benandro a dearly loved one.
2. Then rose, say I, Benandro O !  
 Besought his mother O !  
 Besought his father O !
3. O pray do let me go,  
 O pray do let me go ;  
 For gone are all the young men, O !
12. Then answered back his father, O !  
 Then spake to him his mother,  
 “ Stay here, O piece of my life.
13. The road you go is difficult,  
 Diseases dire will cut you off,  
 Stay here, do thou stay here.
14. The insects too are numerous,  
 The fever too is dangerous,  
 Stay here, O piece of my life.”

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\* *Antanànarivo Annual*, vol. i. p. 64.

However, he goes away under the charge of Tsàramainty (The Good Black), who is charged to nurse him if ill, to feed him when hungry, to be, in fact, in the place of his father and mother. But falling ill he remembers with sorrow his self-willedness, gives directions to Tsàramainty to take his "eight bones," that is, the principal bones of the four limbs, to his parents. Their grief at hearing of his death is pathetically described:—

Gone indeed is Benandro O !  
Gone, and will return no more ?  
Take me to thee, Benandro O !

I grieve for thee, Benandro O !  
I long for thee, Benandro O !  
Take me with thee, Benandro O !

The last-mentioned sentiment is a frequent one in the funeral laments of the heathen Malagasy. The whole concludes with a "moral" in approved ballad style, warning young men to believe in and obey the words of their parents.

The concluding song of the collection is in a rather imaginative and poetical strain, on the Earth, as the "house appointed for all living":—

1. I will humble myself to thee, O earth,  
I will plead with thee, O earth ;  
For to thee we give up our loved ones.  
Yes, go home to thee the loved ones ;  
For thou takest the cherished ones,  
And the cherished wife dost thou fetch,  
Our fathers and mothers dost thou take,  
Relatives we cannot part with thou sweetest off;  
Yes, all alike go home to thee, O earth !  
Yes, say I, O earth, earth, earth !
2. Then answered also, they say, the earth,  
And thus, 'tis said, was the word of the earth :  
Do not give blame to this earth,  
Do not give censure to this earth ;  
For the ground you tread on is earth,  
And the water you drink is earth,  
And the rice you eat is earth,  
And the cloth you wear is earth,  
And the night you take rest in is earth,  
And the morn you rise up in is earth.

3. Dia nitsara ny mpahalala,  
 Sy nanelanelana ny mahalala :  
 Aoka re, ry zareo, fa ady sahala ;  
 Mijanòna izao izay mankahala.  
 Aoka ny tany tsy ho mpankahala,  
 Ny olo-mijanòna tsy hankahala.  
 Fa avelao mba ho ady sahala,  
 Dia mandefera izay mahalala ;  
 'Zay hendry dia ho finari-tsahala,  
 Fa tsy mety ho sahala ny olon-adala.
3. Then the wise ones gave decision,  
 And the discerning ones interposed :  
 Let it suffice, ye twain, lest a quarrel arise :  
 Let that rest which would stir up hatred.  
 Let the earth not become an enemy,  
 Let mankind stay and not bear enmity.  
 For let it be, lest a quarrel arise,  
 And let those who know be forbearing ;  
 For those who are wise are the happy,  
 And should not make themselves equal with fools.

It will be seen by the Malagasy original of the third verse, as given together with the English translation, that the concluding stanza of the poem is entirely in rhyme; and although several words are repeated, they are of one sound all through, and the lines are almost metrical in structure. (The second stanza also has one ending to every line, the word *tàny*, earth.) I am inclined to think that this poem is not a very ancient one, but is somewhat influenced, at least by foreign ideas of comparatively modern introduction.\*

In the very valuable *History of Madagascar*, edited by the late Rev. W. Ellis, a translation is given of another Malagasy poem, which, if it be tolerably close to the language of the original, seems of a rather superior style of thought. Unfortunately, however, the original is not given, and as the English version is metrical and in rhyme, it is probably improved upon somewhat by the translator, Mr. E. Baker, although it is said to be in the same number of lines and syllables as

\* In the discussion which followed the reading of selections from this paper at the Folk-Lore Society's meeting, on Jan. 27th, it was suggested by the Chairman (Mr. Alfred Nutt), and also by Mr. Gomme, that in this song we have traces of nature-worship or an earth-cult. I do not, however, remember any tradition or custom among the Malagasy which would confirm this supposition, although it is possible that as our knowledge of tribes other than the Hova increases such relics of an early stage of religious belief may yet be discovered.

in the original. Mr. Baker was printer to the L.M.S. mission in Antanànarivo, 1828—1836, and was one of the two last missionaries who left the country before the outbreak of persecution. As the *History* is now a rather scarce book, I make no apology for extracting from it this

*Song concerning the Dead.\**

1. Vain man! observ'st thou not the dead?  
 The morning warmth from them has fled.  
 Their mid-day joy and toil are o'er,  
 Though near, they meet fond friends no more.  
 A gate of entrance to the tomb we see,  
 But a departure thence there ne'er will be.  
 The living waves his signal high,  
 But where's his dearest friend's reply?  
 Ah! where are those thus doomed to die?

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\* Native Christian hymns hardly come within the scope of the subjects treated of in this paper, since the ideas embodied in them are almost entirely of foreign introduction. But it may be just noted that while most of the earlier sacred songs of the Malagasy are most earnest and fervent in their tone, and many of them were consecrated by the most touching associations with the sufferings and death of those who died for their faith, one or two were very curious specimens of hymnology. One consists almost entirely of Malagasy proverbs strung together, most of which treat of the uncertainty of life from a heathen point of view, but with a Christian sentiment at the conclusion as a kind of "moral" to the whole. Here is a literal rendering of this strange composition:—

1. Life is a broken potsherd,  
 No one knows who broke it;  
 Life is but steam of food,  
 No one sees where it goes.
2. The appointed time of death is unknown,  
 A tree on the brink of a precipice,  
 No one knows when it will fall,  
 Whether by day or by night.
3. But once only are we young,  
 One throw (of the spear) only;  
 Death is a swift runner,  
 God is the lord of life.
4. To die once may be borne,  
 But second death is unbearable;  
 Blest are the believers in Christ,  
 For they shall obtain life.

See papers by the writer in the *Quiver*, January and February, 1882.

2. Vain man! observ'st thou not the dead?  
 Sweet words forsake their dreary bed,  
 There's none the mould'ring silk \* around his fellow folds,  
 Or north or south again their visits gay behold,  
 Then shall re-echoing vales no longer cheer,  
 For them the hills no lofty signals rear.  
 Their shrouded heads unmoving lie,  
 Unknown the friends that o'er them sigh,  
 Ah! where are those thus doomed to die?
3. Vain man! observ'st thou not the dead?  
 No more their homeward path they tread.  
 The freeman lost † may ransom'd be,  
 By silver's magic power set free;  
 But who these lost from death can buy?  
 Ah! where are those thus doomed to die?  
 Let me prefer true goodness to attain,  
 Or fool or wise I'm deemed by transient fame.  
 New rice, my friends, your cheerful blessing, give,  
 So from Razàfilàhy ‡ grateful thanks receive.

*(To be continued.)*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FOLK-LORE PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH.

BY G. LAURENCE GOMME, F.S.A.

(PART II.)



MY shortcomings in the previous list are sufficiently manifest from the many additions I have been able to gather together. But the true value of such lists as we are compiling here can only be fully tested when they have been printed and so brought under the notice of all interested in the subject. I must be permitted to thank Mr. Swan Sonnenschein and M. Rolland for some very acceptable additions to my list.

One new feature I have thought it wise to introduce, and that is the insertion, under short titles, of the magazine and journal articles

\* Referring to the silk lambas in which the dead are wrapped.

† The word here translated "lost," *véry*, is that which is commonly used of one who is reduced to slavery.

‡ The name of the native bard from whose lips Mr. Baker took down the original song.