

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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Immunity from Mosquito Bites.

WITH the mosquito as he is, and as he has been for forty-six years, in the territory on both sides of the Mississippi River from Memphis, Tenn., to New Orleans, and along the Gulf of Mexico for five hundred miles, in the cypress swamps, palmetto and cane-brakes, on the lower river lands, winter and summer, following my business of telegraphy, I am intimately acquainted; and from this long and varied experience can say definitely for myself that I have no immunity from their attacks. Every bite yesterday, or forty-six years ago, produced a wound, generally a white, callous swelling from one quarter to three-quarters of an inch in diameter, and as high as a quarter of an inch, which remains forty-five to sixty minutes, with more or less pain in all, and fever in many cases. And this whether it was the bite of the fierce gallinipper of the swamps, which stings through a flannel shirt, or the little zebra-legged thing—the shyest, slyest, meanest and most venomous of them all—which invades the heart of the city, away from the foliage, the common haunts of the other varieties.

While I have to be vigilant in warding them off, my children sitting around are comparatively undisturbed, and other people suffer nothing from them; so it seems the mosquito has the power of selection.

But if I have experienced no immunity from mosquito poison, I have enjoyed it other ways, which it may be interesting to state. When I qualified as an operator in Mississippi, I was given a station to which was attached fifty miles of wire, which I was to keep in order, repair breaks, remove leaks, and replace insulators. The line was mostly on trees, few poles being used, and the foliage, including vines, had to be kept down. The latter were especially dangerous and of rapid growth, and among them was the *Rhus toxicodendron*, but I knew nothing of its qualities; and when I came across it, which I did at the very outset, I cut it at the roots, and taking hold of it with naked hands, pulled it off the trees and poles without ever experiencing the least effects from it. Others are poisoned by its touch, and are laid up for weeks and months, their sufferings being produced by periodical eruptions appearing annually on the hands, face or neck for many years. DAVID FLANERY.

Memphis, Tenn., U.S.A., April 28.

Identical Customs of Dyaks and of Races around Assam.

THE deplorably backward state of anthropology in England and India is effectually exposed by the recent publication of Mr. Ling Roth's "Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo." Beautifully illustrated, exhaustive in treatment, too expensive to be procurable among working students, and exasperatingly unweildy, it is a monument of shame to us, as a race; the more so when we see that only 700 copies are to be issued, "no cheaper edition" guaranteed! and the beautiful plates to be destroyed!

As a record of our apathy and ignorance it could hardly be surpassed. Here is a really wonderful work, lavishly got up, two huge volumes full of the most valuable matter, quoted from the best authorities, unlimited speculation as to where these races came from, and as to how some of their singular customs arose, such as "head-hunting," &c., and, as far as I can see, not the faintest suspicion that these customs came, with the race itself, from Assam.

The late Captain Otto E. Ehlers, with whom I spent ten days here in the early part of 1895, was so impressed with the fact, at last, that these Abor-Noga savages around Assam are the race stock whence the Batta-Dyak developed, that he determined to first examine and collect among our groups, and later on visit Borneo. With this object in view we visited together some of the eastern Nogas. He then went among the little-known "Apa Tanangs," and later on the "Nogas" along the south border, "A-nga-mi" and others, making huge collections. Unfortunately he contracted fever, and was ordered off for a long sea voyage, intending to visit Papua so as to collate the races there, closely allied to our Kol; and had intended taking

Borneo on the return voyage. His untimely death in Papua put an end to it all, and what has become of his notes and collections I do not know. This, however, I can vouch for, *i.e.* that he was thoroughly convinced that in and round Assam we have a huge mine of anthropological lore, of which our men of science have not the faintest suspicion, and to which fact I have now for some years in vain endeavoured to draw attention.

In reading Mr. Ling Roth's work, it becomes at last almost wearisome to note the identity of the Bornean customs with those of our semi-savage races, down even to trivial details, the only marked differences being those due to developments through contact with more advanced races *later on*, such as the early and pre-Musalman, and Brahmanical influences, *vis à Java*. One of the greatest stumbling-blocks in collating our races with those of the Archipelago is the persistence with which languages are looked upon as the main tests of racial affinity. Occasionally language is invaluable, but at other times, as in this case, it stands a bad second, or even third, both custom and physique being more reliable. We often have curious proofs of this even here, on a small area. For instance, I am now endeavouring to get a collection of the peculiar armless fringed jackets worn by the men among E. Nogas, Mishimi, Miri, Apatanang, Mikir, Kasia, Garo, Kuki, &c. I have seen these being woven by Noga women, the loom simply two sticks in the ground, with a cross-piece (Fig. 1, A), to which the narrow web is attached; another stick, B, at about six feet distant from

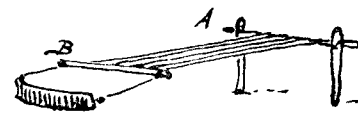


FIG. 1.

A, and over which the threads pass, is held tightly by a strap and strings which pass round the weaver's back, as she sits on the ground.

The small piece of cloth when finished, with patterns often woven in of coloured cotton or goat's hair, is some 4 feet long by 8 inches or 10 inches wide. The ends of threads form a fringe, thus (Fig. 2):—

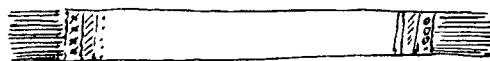


FIG. 2.

Now, two of these pieces are sewn together, so as to leave a hole in the centre (Fig. 3);



FIG. 3.

and then, after turning over, are sewn down the sides, so as to leave arm-holes (Fig. 4).

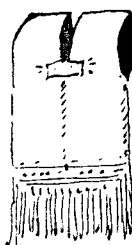


FIG. 4.

The whole thing is too methodical, and identical, to be an accidental resemblance—all are practically alike in details of construction; yet we not only find this jacket among all these tribes, but among the Dyaks, a proof (among many others) that, as a racial relic, it is *older than the languages* of these races around Assam.

But the lists of identical customs, seen between these races here, and those in Borneo, from "head-hunting," and its causes, building on piles, tattooing, &c., down to such trivial details as the value attached to the hornbill's feathers, curious fences, is interminable, quite impossible to put in a letter.

What I desire to point out is the need for systematic research among these races around Assam and in the ultra-Indian peninsula; they are practically unknown to anthropologists, and unless soon taken in hand, a vast amount of most valuable history will