

MISSION FIELD.

RANGOON.

The Bishop of Rangoon has contributed to the *Church News* of the Diocese an interesting paper on the Mission to the Andamans. In speaking of the inhabitants he says:—

"The Nicobarese have some dim, ill-defined notion of a Superior Being, though they have no word in their language to represent God. The word they use signifies 'up there,' 'above,' and conveys no idea of life or personality. In their island homes Nature lavishes upon them abundance of food, requiring but little labor, and this they regard as the gift of some beneficent being. They notice the effects of the moon upon the tides and the weather, and they think that the Good Spirit dwells in the moon, and fancy they can even trace his features as he gazes upon the earth. In their votive plates they sometimes represent the 'Giver of All' in human form, dressed in a skirt made of grasses. They consider this being is kind and good, and has no wish to hurt them. They offer no worship to him, nor have they any idols to remind them of him. But though they are thus indifferent to the service of the one whom they believe to befriend them, a large portion of the time and thoughts of man, woman and child are devoted to conciliating the evil one and disembodied spirits. The lives of the Nicobarese are rendered utterly miserable by their constant abject terror of the unseen world. They impoverish themselves to offer bribes to the spirits, which they suppose to be ready to pounce down and eat the life out of them. To these spirits they ascribe sickness, death and misfortunes of all kinds. They dread even the spirits of their parents and relatives, imagining the soul in its disembodied state to be utterly miserable, and ever trying to return to life in the body, and to enjoy again its canoes, coconuts and pigs. As marriage feasts impoverish the Hindus, so the Nicobarese spend their goods on death feasts, which are held on the day of death, three months afterwards, and three years after death. In large families these mourning festivals are almost continuous through life. Invitations are sent out by strips of rattan, knotted, each knot representing a day. The name of the deceased is never mentioned; he is called son, or elder brother, or by some other title. This custom affects the language; for if the dead man's name is 'fowl,' the word cannot be repeated, and some new word must be invented for the bird thus designated. The friends come, bringing presents of betel, spears, cloth, &c. The body is washed five times, and then wrapped in the new cloth thus collected. It is placed on the death plank, over which there is a sheet of wild betel bark. On the bark are several layers of cloth, the more the better, for the spirit is to hide himself in them; and so be re-

moved with the body from the house. Some of the women, sitting around, and placing their elbows on the body, cry aloud, whilst others are busy making a feast, consisting of pandanus paste, rice, coconuts, plantains, pineapples, &c., which, with rum and toddy, are placed near the head, and remain there till the body is removed, when the viands are thrown out for the dogs and pigs.

The body is then removed to a grave behind the house, upon which they place the property of the deceased, his paddles, spears, cloth, boxes, &c. The mourners return to the house and preserve silence for some time. Three days after burial a cooked fowl, pork, rice and pandanus paste are placed on the grave. At the second death feast, which takes place three months later, the branches of a certain tree are hung up in the house, which are supposed to attract the spirits of the dead. At all feasts the man-loose, witch-doctor and priest is very busy. He is plied with strong drink, under the influence of which he is very clever in discovering spirits. At sunset the grave is visited, and the women decorate it with wreaths; and all night the priests sing, and the women cry. Three years after burial comes the third feast, of koroak or ponge. For months before the women are busy sewing narrow strips of Turkey red cloth worn by men, and the short blue skirts worn by women. These are hung up in the house till the whole roof, sides and floor are covered. As the day approaches the knotted rattan invitations are sent out; a portico made of young coconuts is at the entrance, and on ascending the ladder and entering the room you see hundreds of yards of calico, as well as handkerchiefs torn in strips; in front of the door two rudely carved human figures, between these a triangle of wood about four feet from the apex to the base, with horizontal lathes of wood upon which are suspended a large number of silver and electro-plated spoons. The two luxuries which the opulent Nicobarese indulge in are tall hats and spoons. In our headman's house he showed me ten or twelve tall hats, so antique in shape that it must be nearly time for them to come into fashion again. As for the spoons, they were of all sizes, teaspoons, desert spoons, table spoons, and of great variety in shape. Some had crests on them; many of them probably were obtained from vessels wrecked on these islands. The spoons are used to frighten away evil spirits, or worn as ornaments. One young woman wore a number of spoons and a soup ladle suspended from a cane round her waist. As the feast begins the spoons are rattled, the gongs struck, the coconuts used for holding water are smashed, glass and earthenware are dashed to the ground, the people cry aloud, and the spirits sink away. The pigs are killed, there is a feast in the morning; all sleep during the day, and at night there is more feasting with dancing. The host distributes the skirts and strips all smear-

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themselves with red ochre and lard, and they drink freely of rum or toddy. On the following day, there is canoe racing, and in the evening the chief ceremony, the exhuming of the skull is performed. The men smear themselves with red ochre, and the women with saffron. The poorest and skinniest of pigs is selected for a sacrifice to the spirit. They feel for the heart and run a sharp pointed stick into it, and then roast it. When the skull is dug up the nearest female relative washes it in coconut milk, and then rubs saffron on it. The lower jaw is kept in its place by strips of new cloth wound round the head and then it is carried in procession to the house. Some let their tears fall on the skull, others clasp it to their bosom. Pigs intended for slaughter on the morrow are decorated with silver ornaments. On the next day they bury the skulls again, a large quantity of torn calico being placed on the headstick at the top of the grave.

WORK OF THE PHYSICIAN.—The question which is forcing itself more and more on the minds of scientific men is not how many diseases are, but how few are not, the consequences of men's ignorance, barbarism, folly, self-indulgence. The medical man is felt more and more to be necessary in health as he is in sickness, to be the fellow-workman not merely of the clergyman, but of the social reformer, the political economist and the statesman; and the first object of his science to be prevention, and not cure.—Kingsley.

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