



**ALCINA's *Historia de las Islas...* (1668)**

**[Part I, Book III, Chapter 23]**

**Concerning Other Defects on Nature and Diseases  
which are Characteristics to these Bisayans and Filipinos**

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## Capítulo 23

### De otros Defectos de los Naturales y Enfermedades que son Particulares de estos Indios Bisayas y Filipinos

**J**untemos con los efectos del ánimo los defectos naturales del cuerpo, que, como uno y otro dependen tanto de sus compleciones, humores y calidades para sus operaciones ad invicem<sup>1</sup>, casi con una forzosa dependencia se subordinan; y son tantas las lacras a que, con el contagio de la primera culpa nació sujeta nuestra carne, viciada con el primer bocado, que ninguna cosa hay en el mundo ni más común ni menos dependiente de nuestra voluntad que manqueras, fealdades y vicios de la naturaleza, o menos pródiga con los hombres, o más inficionada ya, repartiendo con todos de los forzosos achaques, enfermedades y ayes que en todas partes se ven comunes, y en algunas especiales.

Trataré pues en éste de los particulares de estas Islas e indios bisayas, dejando los comunes a todos; que ellos mismos se manifiestan en todas partes; y, aunque he oído reparar, y a los principios lo hice yo con admiración hasta que supe la causa, que acá, respectivamente de España y otras partes se ven pocos ciegos a nativitate<sup>2</sup>. No he visto yo acá ni uno tan solo, sino por accidentes que con el tiempo se contraen, o por desgracias que suceden; raro baldado o contraecho; ningún niño falto de miembros ni con

## Chapter 23

### Concerning Other Defects on Nature and Diseases which are Characteristic of these Bisayans and Filipinos

**L**et us join the tendencies of the spirit with the natural defects of the body because the one and the other depend so much on their make-up, mood and qualities for their operations *ad invicem*.<sup>1</sup> They are subordinated to one another with an almost inevitable dependence. So numerous are the scars of the first sin, to which our corrupted flesh was born with the first bite, that there is nothing in the world, either more common or less dependent on our will than the defects, moral ugliness and vices of nature. These are either less in profusion among individuals, or more infectious now; widespread with all the inevitable illnesses, diseases and lamentations that are so common everywhere and especially in some places.

Leaving aside the defects common to everyone, I shall deal with the ones peculiar to these Islands and the native Bisayans which manifest themselves in all regions. I have heard it stated, in the beginning I did so with admiration until I learned the reason, that here, in comparison with Spain and other places, few are seen blind a nativitate.<sup>2</sup> I have not seen even one here, except through chance or by misfortunes which happen to them in the course of time. Rarely are they crippled or deformed. Nor is any child deprived of his limbs or deformed in a monstrous way as often

otras monstruosidades que suelen suceder, que los físicos atribuyen o a la falta de materia en la generación, o a la sobra de calidades nocivas que para ella concurren.

Acá, aunque de todo ésto hay y ha habido, no se vieron tantos de los efectos, o monstruosos o desproporcionados; y la causa es, y ha sido hasta ahora, que estos naturales con una piedad inicua y con una conmisericordia – no sé si la llame bestial y más de fieras que de hombres, o diabólica – cuando les sucedía antiguamente, y aun ahora, aunque no es tanto ya, mataban a todas las criaturas que nacían con alguna falta notable o con alguna deformidad extraordinaria. Y, según he sido informado de los que lo saben bien, decían en su lengua: *Din buhian ini cai maraut*, etc., “no dejemos esta criatura viva que sale mala y toda la vida nos será de carga,” con lo cual las mataban y enterraban luego, y echaban voz que habían nacido muertos. ¡Ojalá no durara aún esto!

Y, si era malísimo cuando carecían de verdadero conocimiento de Dios e inmortalidad de las ánimas, ahora es pésimo y detestable, y que debe avivar mucho el cuidado de los ministros para atajar tan inhumana costumbre.

Y dije que ojalá no durara aún ahora, porque la experiencia me ha mostrado que, además de lo dicho de malograr o matar a las criaturas que nacieron ciegas o faltas de miembros, o con gibas u otras enfermedades, dejando los impedimentos que suelen poner las indias bisayas para no concebir, aunque muchas sin efecto, hay entre ellas mucha facilidad en malparir; y no sólo las que se hicieron madres a escondidillas y por hurto – que ésto se usa más entre naciones más políticas – aquí aunque hay algo es poco y raro – sino aun las casadas y que lícitamente conciben y debieran parir, que, o por evitar el cansancio en criar sus hijos, o las necesidades y pobreza que les niega lo necesario para sustentarlos cuando ya mayores, o por ver el mal logro y poco provecho que de ellos tienen, no son pocas, sino muchas, las que

happens. [The latter is something to] which the doctors attribute to a lack of substance at the time of gestation or to an excess of harmful humors that intervene in the process.

Over here, although all this does exist and has existed, one does not see such occurrences as monstrosities or deformities. The reason is, and has been even up to now, that these natives, prompted by some sort of wicked piety due to compassion, – I do not know whether to call it animal-like and more proper to beasts than humans or diabolical – in ancient times and even now, they killed all the infants who were born with a considerable defect or some unusual deformity. It is not so widespread today. What I have been informed by those who know this well, said in the language: “Diri buhian ini kai maraut, etc.” It means something like this: “Let us not permit this creature to live which is born deformed, for it will be a burden all its life.” Hence, they killed such and buried them at once, and spread the rumor that they had been stillborn. Would that, this would not be!

If this was a very vile practice when they lacked the true knowledge of God and about the immortality of the soul, now it becomes the most terrible and detestable evil. It should make the ministers keenly aware to stop such an inhuman practice.

I stated, would that such a thing would not continue now because experience has taught me that besides the said practice of destruction or killing of humans that were born blind or lacking in limbs or with humpbacks or other diseases (notwithstanding the many obstacles the Bisayan natives place in the way of conception, though many without effect) there is among them great skill in the practice of causing miscarriage. This takes place not only among those who become mothers secretly or on the sly. Such practices are more common among the so-called civilized nations; over here, although it does take place, it is not so widespread and is somewhat rare. To this category belong also the married women, who could and should conceive properly; yet, either to spare themselves the burden of raising children, or due to necessity and poverty which deny them what is needed to support them when grown-up, or when they should experience little success or failure which they expect of them. It is these that turn to abortion; here they are

procuran abortos, sin los que sin procurarse suceden; y tienen muchas hierbas y maleficios con que con facilidad los consiguen; y, aunque a algunas les cuestan la vida, las más con feliz suceso.

Abuso es éste digno de toda animadversión y de duplicado cuidado para que se ataje o evite en los ministros que de ellos cuidan, y de que trataré en la Segunda Parte de esta Historia proponiendo algunos medios que, para lo político, podrán servir de freno que lo reprima, pues cede en tanto daño de la república y falta de gente, y que no es esta la menor de las causas de su disminución y poca medra, como trataremos en su lugar; de modo que esta propensión en las indias bisayas parece defecto de la naturaleza y su piedad en ellas.

Otro defecto hay, muy general y casi común en estas Islas, en todas la mujeres – y entra éste en las dolencias y enfermedades propias; y es que, de veinte de ellas, las diecinueve, si no todas, padecen dolores ordinarios de estómago y barriga y ahogamiento de la madre, que son no poco impedimento para la procreación. Las causas no son difíciles de rastrear, aunque sí de atajar; porque como acá los calores son continuos y lo más del año, y a toda esta gente, por su pobreza en lo común y más general, el agua – en que muchas veces al día se bañan – les sirve de ropa limpia, pues los más no tienen con que mudarla, sin atender a otras causas, en las mujeres tan ordinarias y necesarias que pudiera detenerlas, se meten a todas horas en el agua. Y esta es una de las destemplanzas que pedecen. Es entre nosotros fatal el bañarse después de comer; entre ellos, lo más ordinario es que con el bocado en la boca se echan a nadar.

El cuidado en Europa y otras partes, y prevenciones para el parto y atenciones y remedios después, son muy gran parte del cuidado, ciencia y diligencias de las parteras. Por acá las más paren sin tener parteras, y las que hay, saben comúnmente poco, aunque no faltan algunas muy diestras.

Una pobre mujer bisaya se halla muchas veces sola en estos conflictos, y no pocas veces sin el marido que la pudiera asistir algo en casa, con que a solas, expuesta al viento e influencias

not just a few, but many. Herein, we do not include miscarriages. They have many herbs and evil ways by which to bring about these consequences with ease. Sometimes they pay for it with their lives; most of the time they succeed.

This is an abuse which deserves total abhorrence and a redoubled vigilance on the part of the ministers to whose care these are entrusted. We shall treat this in the Second Part of the Historia, proposing some methods that may serve in a social way to put a stop to all this. This contributes so much harm to the country and to a decrease in population. Nor is this the least of causes for its decrease and small progress, as we shall note in its place. This mode and tendency among the Bisayan women seems to be a defect in nature or a kind a false piety/pity in them.

There is another kind of defect, quite widespread and almost common in these Islands among all the women – and this among their own afflictions and illnesses. It is this, that out of twenty of them, nineteen, if not all, suffer from continuous pains of the stomach, the abdomen and menstrual disorders, which are no small impediments to procreation. It is not difficult to trace the causes, but they are hard to remedy. One is the heat here which is continuous and lasts for most of the year; also the widespread poverty. The water in which they bathe many times a day, serves as a clothing for them, since the majority of them do not have enough clothes to change. So, without paying attention to other causes, so common and necessary for the women, which may be preventative, they go into the water at all hours. That is one of the excesses from which they suffer. Among us it is disastrous to bathe after eating; among them it is common even with a bit of food in their mouths.

The care shown in Europe and elsewhere and the preparations for the delivery and ministrations after it, are a very good part of the task, knowledge and care of the midwives. Over here, most of them give birth without a midwife; those who are here know rather little, although some are very skillful.

A poor Bisayan woman finds herself very often in such straits and not a few times her husband, who might assist her in the house, is absent. And so, being alone, exposed to the wind and

del cielo – que todas sus casas lo están comúnmente, como de gente pobre – pare, y aunque algunas con buen suceso, muchas con malo; y quedan inhábiles para repetir los partos.

Ví yo, entre otras muchas, y supe de unas de estas mujeres bisayas que había ya parido dos veces, y ambas a solas, sin ayuda chica ni grande, y, acabado de parir, se llevaba la criatura al río, y, metiéndose ella en él, se lavaba y limpiaba de las vecindades y rastros poco limpios del parto. Lavaba a su hijuelo o hijuela; volvíase a vestir y a su casa; y, cuando volvía el marido, que reparaba en el menguado bulto del vientre, le mostraba la criatura y le tenía la cena prevenida, como si él fuera el que necesitaba, y no ella, de quien se la previniese.

De modo que, sin retretes cerrados, paren y pasan y viven; y, aunque ésto parece, que a lo humano y natural es dicha, no es sino desdicha, pues los achaques de la naturaleza, como son generales en toda ella, deben ser prevenidos o atajados, y acá, aunque nada de eso tienen, y Dios – como dicen – que da el frío según la lana, les acude con particulares providencias, con todo no se puede negar sino que de suyo son poco favorables a lo personal y causa de muchas dolencias en común, aunque tal vez salga bien. Y así a lo que yo he reparado, uno de los mayores males que padecen estos naturales en estos casos, y en los de las muchas enfermedades que padecen, es no tener alivio, remedio ni medicinas comúnmente, sino que, dejados no sé si bestialmente al acaso, u ocasionalmente a la divina Providencia, esperan a lo que saldrá, y comúnmente es poco favorable a la salud y conservación, no solo de los individuos sino de la especie.

No traigo muchos casos que pudiera. En la Segunda Parte se ofrecerá ocasiones en que se cuenten algunos que indican o la poca capacidad, o la mucha insensibilidad de estos indios, o la superabundante providencia con que nuestro gran Dios mira por ellos, porque se cumpla aquello de Cristo Nuestro Redentor: Qui minuta animalia curare non desinit etc., quanto magis etc.<sup>3</sup>

elements – as all their houses are since they are so poor – she gives birth. Sometimes these births are successful; many times they are a failure. She is rendered incapable of giving another birth.

I saw and knew about one of these Bisayan women, among others, that she had given birth twice. Both times alone, without any assistance, either small or great. Upon delivery, she took the newly-born to the river and with it washed herself of all the uncleanness of the afterbirth. Then, she washed the boy or girl, dressed herself and returned to her house. When her husband returned and saw how the size of her tummy diminished, she presented him with the baby and had supper ready for him. All, as if he were the one, and not she, who needed someone to prepare it.

In this manner, without any enclosed rooms, they give birth, carry on and live. Although, on the human and natural level this seems like a blessing, it is in reality a misfortune. Since the maladies of nature, which are everywhere, should be prevented or impeded. Here there is nothing of that sort; God, as the saying goes, gives the cold in proportion to the wool and aids them with his special providence. All in all, one cannot deny that alone these are little assistance in particular instances and result in many common illnesses, even though perhaps they may escape harm. So, as far as I have been able to observe, one of the greatest evils that these natives suffer in such situations, and in the many diseases that they have to bear, is not to have relief, remedy and medicines, as a rule, but left – I do not know whether in the manner of beasts – to chance or occasionally to Divine Providence, or come what may. Ordinarily, this is hardly beneficial to health and preservation, not merely of individuals but of the human species.

I do not relate the many incidents that I could. In the Second Part, there will be opportunities offered where some can be related. They will indicate the little capacity or the great insensibility of these natives or the superabundant providence that our great God shows towards them. So that what Christ, our Redeemer had said may be fulfilled: “*Qui minuta animalia curare no desinit, etc... quanto magis, etc.*”<sup>3</sup>

Vengamos ya a otras enfermedades comunes de estos indios, y algunas propias al parecer suyas o menos comunes en otras partes, saltem en Europa, a lo que yo he reparado.

Y, dejando aparte las viruelas, sarampión, sarna y otras que son comunes y generales, a lo que yo creo, a todos los niños, hay acá otra que es más asquerosa aún, y tan común que nadie se escapa, o chico o grande, como dicen en España, de las viruelas.

Esta que llaman buti<sup>4</sup> es de unas como gomas que nacen en todo el cuerpo, pero más en el rostro y manos y juntaras. Unas son como una nuez de grandes; otras, como avellanas, aunque todas hacen llaga y afean no poco; y, si las madres no son cuidadosas de las criaturas, quedan feas manchas en el rostro y con cicatrices grandes, pero con poco cuidado que haya no quedan rastros como quedan de las viruelas.

Este contagio es general en todos, y, cuando niños, hacen menos dañosos efectos; cuando grandes, son más dañosas y peligrosas, pues quedan incapaces por muchos meses, y aun años, a salir de casa ni trabajar.

Llámanlas por acá los españoles “bubas de niños;” pero téngolas por diferentes. Yo he visto algunos hombres que no las tuvieron cuando niños, tenerlas cuando grandes, y, pasados cuarenta y cinquenta años de su edad, y aun algunas mujeres de más de sesenta, de que se suelen correr y aun padecer muchos dolores, no las curan porque es peor, antes es dicha cuando salen muchas de golpe, porque duran menos y son menos molestas.

A otra enfermedad (no sé si es a lo que llaman en España de San Lázaro), que es de llagas grandes y hediondas, llaman estos pamatas<sup>5</sup>. Esta, aunque no es general en todos, es con todo muy ordinaria, y no son pocos ni pocas los que padecen de estas llagas, que cierto son hediondas y asquerosas, y no es de poco merecimiento para los Padres ministros, que a lo menos una vez al año, y los cuidadosos tres y cuatro veces, mandan traer a todos

Let us now come to other common diseases of these natives and some seemingly proper to them or less common in other regions, at least in Europe, as far as I have been able to observe.

Thus, putting aside the small pox, measles, scabies and others which are widespread and common, according to my belief, to all children, there is another which is even more loathsome. It is so common that nobody remains free from it, whether young or adult as they say in Spain, about the small pox.

This they call *buti*.<sup>4</sup> It is rubber-like which breaks out all over the body, but especially on the face, hands and joints. Some are as large as a nut; others resemble the hazelnut which breaks open and scars. If the mothers do not take good care of the children, there remain large wounds and ugly traces on the face. But with a little care, the face will not become like it does with small pox.

This disease is common everywhere. In the case of children it is less harmful; among the grownups it is more injurious and dangerous which make them incapable to leave the house or go to work for many months and even years.

The Spaniards call it *bubas de niños*, but I consider it something different. I have seen some men who, not having had them when they were children, had them when they were grown up; even passed the age of forty and fifty. And I have even seen some women past sixty who were afflicted with it and suffered great pain. They do not medicate them because it becomes worse; rather it is better when many postules come out together; this way the disease lasts for a short time and causes less hardship.

There is another type of disease – I do not know if it is what they call in Spain San Lazaro – which erupts in large and ill-smelling wounds and which they call *pamatas*.<sup>5</sup> Although this is not very widespread, it is all in all, quite common. Not a few men and women suffer from these wounds which are truly repulsive and awful smelling. This is no little merit for the Father ministers, who at least once a year – the more dedicated, three to four times a year, – request that those ill with this disease and others that are incapacitated, be brought to church like the rest on feastdays.

los enfermos de este mal, y otros que por ello están impedidos de poder acudir a la iglesia como los demás los días festivos. Tenémoslos tres y cuatro días en el pueblo, y todas las mañanas los traen para oír misa y para imponerlos a confesarse y comulgarlos capaces, y con la medicina del alma procuramos dársela para el cuerpo.

El remedio que por acá es eficacísimo para este género de llagas es el que llaman “palo de China,” y acá bolong<sup>6</sup>, que, aunque esta palabra es general y significa medicina, se aplica por antonomasia a esta raíz por su eficacia y conocida virtud. Y es cierto que son raros los que la toman como se debe, que no sanen con ella, quedando totalmente sanos, cuando la bebieron con cantidad competente; que, cuando no se sacó de raíz el mal, suele retoñecer y volver a salir al cabo de tiempo.

Parece enfermedad hereditaria y que pasa de padres a hijos, aunque en algunos no sino después de muchos años; y, aunque suele dar aun a los que no nacieron de padres y abuelos que la tuvieron, la experiencia muestra que raro es el que se escapa, siendo descendiente de quien la tuvo, aunque tal vez queda alguno intermedio sin haber sentido este contagio.

El modo de beber este “palo de China”, que aca llaman banat<sup>7</sup> (que también se dan en estas Islas, y en abundancia en algunas de ellas; después diremos su mata y raíz como es) es o con agua o con vino, cociendo cantidad de él. Dicen los peritos que diez o doce taes, que estos indios llaman basing<sup>8</sup>, son bastantes. (Pesa cada basing diez reales de plata). Este se hace menudas tajaditas o casi polvo, y se cuece hasta que mengua más de la mitad del agua o vino. Pueden beber cuantas veces quieran de lo dicho, o caliente o frío, aunque caliente es mejor. Han de estar en parte donde no les dé el viento, porque están comúnmente sudando.

Si es mujer, no ha de llegarse aun cerca de ella hombre alguno; y, si es hombre, no ha de acercarse a mujer alguna, aunque sea la suya. Y es en tanto grado ésto que cualquiera descuido en esta parte es de mucho impedimento, y aun cuando ha poco que salieron del Borlongan, que llaman ellos, que es del aposentillo en que se curaron.

We keep them for three or four days in the town; each morning they bring them to hear Mass and to prepare them for confessions and communion. Along with the medicine for the soul, we provide them with [remedies] for the body.

A remedy over here which is most effective for these kinds of wounds is what they call “palo de China” and here *bulung*.<sup>6</sup> Although this latter word is a general term and means “medicine”; yet it is applied above all to this root for its efficacy and well-known power. Rare is an individual, who takes this properly, and does not become well; health is restored completely if they drink it in a sufficient amount. When one does not get at the very root of the disease; with time, it reappears.

This appears to be a hereditary disease, which passes from parents to children; in some cases, however, only after many years. Although it may be transmitted even to those not born of parents and grandparents who had it, experience shows that rarely does a person escape it who descended from one who has it even though there may be some intermediately who had no symptom of the contagion.

The manner of drinking this “palo de China,” which they call *banat*<sup>7</sup> over here and which grows in these Islands and in some abundantly, – later we shall describe its foliage and trunk – is either with water or with wine by boiling a quantity of it. The more knowledgeable say about ten or twelve taes, which the natives call, *basing*,<sup>8</sup> are sufficient. Each basing is sold at ten reales of silver. This is shredded into tiny pieces or even into powder and is boiled until the water or the wine is half-evaporated. They may drink it as often as they wish, either hot or cold, although hot is preferable. Those ill must be in a place where they are not exposed to the winds because they are perspiring.

If it is a woman [with the disease], no man whatever may come even near her; if it be a man, no woman at all may approach him even though she is his wife. This is so important that any negligence in this regard, results into a great difficulty. That is so, even if they leave the *burlungan*, as they call it, which is a little room in which they are treated, for a short time.

Aunque el tratar o comunicar común es dañoso, éslo mucho el uso del matrimonio mientras no esté asegurado el humor, y suele rebelde ser y volver de nuevo por cualquiera desmán en esta materia.

Tenían ellos muchos paglihis y observancias para estas ocasiones, que no son tan necesarias como lo dicho; que ésto es lo que califica el uso y experiencia. Lo demás son abusos sin fundamento.

Es lo que llaman banat, éstos bolong, y nosotros “palo de China” una raíz como de batata, dura como un corcho, aunque es menos porosa, y la más pesada y solida es mejor. El tamaño ordinario es largo y rollizo, como la muñeca del brazo. Háyllos mayores y menores. Es toda la raíz resquebrajada y hendida. Nacen todas ellas debajo de tierra, como las que llaman turmas de tierra, batatas o bacotes<sup>9</sup>. La mata es espinosa como zarza, aunque las espinas son menores y menos agudas, pero mucho más espesas. Las hojas como lengua de perro largas, aunque son puntiagudas y de verde algo obscuro. Cuando son tiernas, son medio moradas las de cerca el cogollo.

Nace esta meta, o en partes muy secas, como entre peñas y montecillos; y ésta hace las raíces menores y no tan eficaces. La mejor nace en tierras algo cenagosas y húmedas; y ésta debe ser más a propósito, porque tiene más virtud para sacar de los huesos la viscosidad pegajosa que causa tales llagas.

He visto yo algunas personas, con llagas de este mal mayores que un plato ordinario, cuando les da en partes donde puede cundir; algunas tan hondas que he visto no pocas veces los huesos y nervios, de olor malísimo, que es inexcusable, y más cuando se les administran los santos sacramentos, y a algunos que vimos como unos Lázaros – que allá decimos –, aunque estas llagas las tengo yo de peor calidad, pues nunca llegan los perros a lamerlas como a las del otro Lázaro.

Después de bebida esta raíz, o palo, los vemos después sanos y buenos; y, aunque les quedan a algunos cicatrices algo feas, con todo la experiencia muestra que su virtud y eficacia es grandísima, y que es una de las mayores y mejores limosnas que

Although dealing with and communicating with each other is dangerous; it is even more so with the act of marriage, unless it is already under control. It may break out again and return anew if careless in this matter.

They had many *paglihi* and practices during these occasions which are not important to what we have said. It is all proven true by use and experience. The rest are unfounded abuses.

What they call *banat*, and these *bulung*, and among us “*palo de China*” is a root like the sweet potato; it is as hard as cork but less porous. However, the heavier and more solid ones are better. The ordinary size is long and round like the wrist of an arm. There are some that are bigger and others smaller. The entire root is split and cloven. All of them grow underground, like those called truffles, sweet-potato *bakut*.<sup>9</sup> The plant is thorny like the bramble, although the thorns are smaller and less sharp but much thicker. The leaves are as long as the tongue of a dog but pointed and somewhat dark green. When they are young, those near the sprout are half violated.

This plant grows in very dry places or among rocks and on small hillsides. This one develops small roots and is not so effective. The better ones grow in a somewhat swampy and humid soil. This type is more suitable since it has more strength in drawing out of the bones the contagious matter which causes such wounds.

I have seen some individuals having wounds of this disease larger than an ordinary plate. Whenever it attacks them in parts of the body where it spreads, some of these are so deep that sometimes I have seen the bones and nerves exuding an incredible bad odor. This is hard to bear especially when administering the holy sacraments. Some of them we see today are like Lazaruses, as we would say over there. These sores I regard as the worst possible; even the dogs never come to lick them as was in the case of those of that other Lazarus.

So, after drinking the extraction of the root or the “*palo*” we see them become healthy and well; however, some horrible scars remain. All in all, experience shows its power and its effects are

se puede hacer a estos pobres, darles de ella lo necesario para curarse.

Solemos dársela los Padres cada año una vez, por lo menos en común; en particular muchas, sin perdonar a lo mucho que a las veces cuesta comprar la que traen de China, que años hay que vale a veinte y treinta pesos; y este año, en que escribo ésto, ha valido a cincuenta pesos un pico, y algunos a más; y, aunque es fama pública por acá que los mismos sangleyes cogen no poca cantidad en estas Islas que mezclan con lo que de su tierra traen, es tal la imaginación o ilusión de estos indios que, si saben que es de acá, no lo quieren porque dicen que no es bueno; y así algunos de los ministros que saben donde la hay con abundancia lo mandan coger de sazón y con luna, en que va mucho, lo enjugan y guardan, sin que lo sepan ellos, y mezclan con lo de China con muy buen efecto; y aun yo he hecho la experiencia, y mandádola dar a algunos, sin que ellos supiesen si era de acá o de allá, y lo que experimenté es que es menester temprarle algo cuando la raíz es nueva porque es demasiadamente eficaz; y si así mezclan las raíces nuevas de acá con las más viejas de China, y que se suelen apolillar, es cierto que hacen el mismo efecto, y ya algunos de los mismos bisayas de más juicio usan de las de acá, templándolas, como digo, y, sacándoles parte del agua, o vino, del cocimiento primero y mezclado algo de la ordinaria cocida.

Y no sólo los indios, sino aun los europeos usan por acá, para sus bubas y otros enfermedades que nacen del mismo principio, el beber de esta agua de “palo”, y algunos tocados de este mal suelen echar en una banga, como una olla grande, en que cabrán cuatro o cinco azumbres, dos reales de peso de dicho “palo de China,” con que atajan y templan semejantes humores; de modo que es de virtud y eficacia conocida esta raíz o palo, que llamamos “de China” para todo humor bubático, que en estas tierras es muy ordinario, donde los que no lo contraen por su demasiada lujuria, que es lo común, lo suelen adquirir con un aguacero que les cogió sudados o con otros vientos nocivos de que acá hay harta abundancia.

very great. It is one of the most beneficial and best alms we can give these unfortunate ones – to offer them what is needed to heal themselves.

We Fathers are accustomed to give it to them once a year, at least, to all as a group; much of it to individuals, never considering the high cost of these brought from China. There are years where it costs from twenty to thirty pesos. This year, in which I am writing this, the cost is fifty pesos a pico and even more. It is well-known here that the Sangleys themselves gather a large quantity from these Islands and mix it with what they bring in from their own country. The strange thinking of these natives is such that if they know that it is from here, they do not accept it, for they say that it is not good. Notwithstanding, some of the ministers who know where there is an abundance of it, have it gathered in season and at the full moon – this is very important – dry it out and store it. Without the knowledge of the natives, they mix it with that of China with very good results. As an experiment, I caused it to be given to some without their knowing whether it was from here or from there; my findings were that it is necessary to temper it somewhat when the root is fresh, because it is extremely strong. Thus, the new roots from here are mixed with the old ones from China. Just as certain as moths consume the cloth, so this mixture has the same power. Nowadays, some of the Bisayan natives of better judgment utilize those that are here; preparing the mixture as I have said. They draw off a portion of the water or wine from the first and cook it with and mix in some of the ordinary root.

Thus, not only the natives but also the Europeans use it here for their postules and other diseases which are derived from the same source and drink this water of the “palo.” Some who are afflicted with this disease throw into the banga, a large kettle which holds about four or five azumbres, two reales worth of this “palo de China.” With this they stop and moderate similar lesions. Therefore, this root or “palo” which we call “de China” is a powerful and an effective remedy for every postule lesion. This is very common in these lands where those who do not contract it through their licentiousness, which is also common, they acquire it from downpours that came upon while they were perspiring. It may also be the result of the harmful winds which are very frequent here.

Concluyo este capítulo con una prueba que yo he hecho, no una sino muchas veces y en varios pueblos de estos indios bisayas (pues los he andado casi todos), que indica lo poco que gustan de vivir en los pueblos, aun para su bien y salud. Esta es que cuando juntaba o compraba cantidad de este “palo de China,” les decía públicamente en la iglesia que a cualquiera persona, de cualquiera calidad que fuese, tocada de este mal en poco o mucho, que viniese al pueblo o se mandase cargar a él, que yo le daría todo el palo necesario – aunque fuesen treinta taes – para curarse, arroz para comer (que solo este comen en estas ocasiones, aunque no ha de ser nuevo, ni otra raíz alguna de las dichas que dijimos suplen su falta), vino o agua para beberlo, y, si fuese hombre, un muchacho que le acudiese, si mujer una muchacha, lugar a propósito y todo lo necesario. Y, con todo, jamás pude alcanzar que de las tres partes (porque los tenía yo en lista) viniese la una al pueblo, y de esta la mitad se volvía antes de acabar; con lo cual, aunque muchas veces intenté lo dicho, lo conseguí muy pocas.

Tanto como éste es el horror que tienen a estar en los pueblos; y así se los daba después sin esta pensión, aunque mi fin era alguna atención a lo que bebiese para asegurar su salud: y en un año que en el pueblo mayor de estos bisayas, repartí cerca de tres mil o más taes de dicho “palo de China” a muchas personas por lista, a cada cual según su necesidad; hallé, recorriendo después las listas, porque di en este arbitrio, ya que el otro no me salía, que aquel año habían sanado (de modo que el siguiente pagarían tributo, que algunos había no lo pagaban) más de cuarenta personas de ambos sexos; que, si la tuvieran todos los años los encomenderos, dándoles limosna para el dicho efecto del “palo de China” necesario, los fuere de mucho útil para sus almas, pues lo es tanto la limosna, y para sus bolsas, pues cede en aumento suyo cuanto tributo se les paga por los que cobran salud, que no pagarán estando enfermos e impedidos; pero pocos se cuidan de ésto y quieren más meter cuatro que sacar medio, no conociendo que lo era este para añadir muchos.

I bring this chapter to conclusion with an experiment that I made, not only once but many times and in various towns of these Bisayan natives, since I have moved around most of them. It shows how little they desire to live in the towns even though it is for their own good and well-being. When I gathered or purchased a quantity of this “palo de China”, I announced publicly in church that any person, not considering their status, afflicted with this disease – to a large or small extent – who would come to the town or would volunteer to be brought in, I would give as much of the “palo” necessary. [That is], even as much as thirty taes, that such a one may be healed; also, rice for consumption. On such occasions this is about all they eat and it need not be recent. No other root, aside from that already mentioned, can make up for the lack of rice, wine or water to drink. If it was a man, I would provide a boy who would care for him; if it were a woman, a girl. Also a place to stay and all that is necessary. Notwithstanding all this, I could never prevail upon more than one out of three to come to the town (I had listed all this); out of these, half returned before the cure was completed. Although I tried this many times, I succeeded only a very few times.

Such is the terror that they have in coming to the towns. However, later I gave that “palo” anyway without insisting upon my demand; my intention was to attract them so that by drinking this, they would regain their health. One year, in the largest town of these Bisayans, I distributed close to three thousand or more, taes of the said “palo de China” to numerous individuals. Later, I realized this, after going through my list, that in that year more than forty persons of both sexes had been restored to health. I switched to this procedure, after I learned the other did not work. As a result, now some were able to pay their tribute who did not do so previously. If the encomenderos, through the years, would have been providing them with the need of this “palo de China” as alms, it would benefit them too spiritually. Since almsgiving is meritorious and it would also add to their purse because those who regain their health would then pay tribute. If these are ill and unable to pay the tribute, they [encomenderos] lose. Hardly any of them take this into account; they prefer to take in four reales rather than give a half [a real], not realizing how much good they would accomplish.

## ANNOTATIONS

[1] *Ad invicem*. A Latin phrase: “in reciprocation.” Also “mutually.”

[2] *A nativitate*. A Latin phrase: “from birth.”

[3] If God did not abandon the smallest animals, etc., how much more [people]. See Mathew, 7, 25-34 as reference of Alcina. {*Qui minuta animalia curare no desinit, etc... quanto magis, etc.*}

[4] *Buti*. Or *Panduk*: smallpox. *Butihun*, *Pinanurkan*, the most dangerous; in some parts it means like the *tabukaw*. Sánchez, 1711, op. cit.

“*Panduk*: Virus, acute sickness, feverish, with pustules and growth in the skin. v. To have or experience smallpox.” De la Rosa-Alcázar, 1914, op. cit., p. 236.

[5] *Pamatas*. Perhaps, “*Karanga*: a type of leprosy which is very contagious: it causes great itchiness.” De la Rosa-Alcázar, 1914, op. cit., p. 86.

Also spelled as “*karangahun*, *karanghun*: sickness of leprosy, most contagious. One who has this leporous infirmity is called: *karanghun*, *quinaranga*, *pangaranghun*, *pinangaranga*.” Also *guud*. Sánchez, 1711, op. cit.

“*Guud*: A kind of contagious leprosy. To suffer the said sickness.” De la Rosa-Alcázar, 1914, op. cit., p. 125.

[6] *Bolong*. *Bulung*. Or *bulungun*, *bulgun*. Medicine; to cure, to medicate. *Nagbubulung*, (transitive), to cure another; to cure or to medicate is the same. Above all they call bulung to the palo de China, the very one they need most for their sickness of bubas, kapatas, thus nagbulung means to take sores and thus they may be healed.

*Burulongan* or *bulnganan* is a small hut or house “where they perspire.” Hence the hospital may be called, *pamulnganan* or *pamumurulngan*. *Bubulngun*, the one who is under medical care. *Binlung* or *binulung*, the one already medicated. Sánchez, 1711, op. cit.

[7] *Banat*. Nowhere can we locate *banat*; it is, as Alcina describes, a mixture with the root-crop or taro [*batata* or *kamoti*] which we are unable to pinpoint. However, there is a tree, which has medicinal properties, known as “*banati*”: A tree of this name; the wood is good for carpentry and the root is medicinal. Sánchez, 1711, op. cit.

Tramp identifies it better. “*Banati*: Boxwood or kamuning. *Murraya paniculata*. A small tree whose roots are chewed to relieve toothache. The wood is called ‘satinwood’ and is used for ornamentation and being hard is used to make canes.” 1995, op. cit., p. 36.

[8] *Basing*. A bunch of cotton. – Gold Tael. This is of various sorts. *Labing siyam*; it has twelve reales of weight. *Labing walu*; ten reales of weight, eleven in some parts. v. To value something in a gold tael. – *Binasing inin linganay*. This bell has been priced in a gold tael. – According to what some say, there is a jar which is decorated with snakes in relief which is valued at a *tael de oro*.” – *Basingbasing*: A wax peso, appreciated in a gold tael.” De la Rosa-Alcázar, 1914, op. cit., p. 41.

[9] *Bakut*. This *bakut* cannot be found in any of our lexicons. Quite clearly it is a taro or a truffle. Some of the few root-crops mentioned under (Roots) *Raiz* are: *gamut* – Main root. *Lintungany, unayan*. – Wide root. *Dalid*. – Straight root pointing downwards. *Ugduk*. – Root just under the soil. *Lagasaw*. – Root pointing to the center. *Tidlaruk nga gamut*. – Wide spread root. *Kalianap, kayapyap nga gamut*. – Root growing in the trunks that falls to the earth. *Gaka*. – fig. *Ginikaman tungayud*. De la Rosa-Alcázar, 1914, op. cit. ■



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