

Origin of Chaulmoogra Oil—Another Version

We recently reviewed the account of the "Leper King" of Angkor Wat¹ and the relation of this account to the origin of the use of chaulmoogra oil in the treatment of leprosy.

There is another legend given by Wong and Wu² and attributed to Burma by their source, Joseph F. Rock.

¹ Editorial. What Happened to the King? Internat. J. Leprosy **38** (1970) 435-438.

² Wong, K. C. and Wu, Lien-teh. *History of Chinese Medicine*. Shanghai: National Quarantine Service, 1936, pages 115-116.

"It relates that in the days of yore, before the time of Buddha, there reigned a King in Northern India by the name of *Ok-sa-ga-rit*. This King had five sons and five daughters. These five princes exiled themselves, and their sisters volunteered to do the same, owing to the naming of a younger (sixth) prince, a son by a second queen, as heir apparent. The story tells that *Piya*, the eldest sister of these five princes, who was much honoured and revered, became a 'leper.' The brothers and sisters,

for fear of hurting her feelings, took her into a jungle, as if on a pleasure trip, and when they arrived at a certain place where there was a cave they left her there with all kinds of provisions. The cave, which had a very narrow entrance, was well protected.

"At the same time *Rama*, once the king of Benares, was living in the jungle under the following circumstances: While king of Benares, he became afflicted with leprosy, and although his court physicians did their best they failed to relieve him of his sufferings or to improve his condition. He decided to abdicate the throne in favour of his son. So, leaving the palace, he went into the jungle and subsisted entirely on herbs and roots, but especially on the fruit and leaves of the *Kalaw* tree. After a time, he was completely cured and felt better and stronger than when he had lived in the palace surrounded with luxury. He lived in the hollow of a large tree, which he converted into a home.

"One day a tiger, prowling near *Piya's* cave, was attracted by the scent of a human being, and made frantic efforts to gain entrance to the cave. *Piya* was so horrified that she gave a piercing scream. *Rama*, hearing the cry from his hollow tree, noted the direction whence it came and next day went in search of the person who gave the

agonizing cry. He discovered the cave and shouted, 'Who lives in the cave?' *Piya*, hearing a human voice replied, and after the usual greetings, explained her circumstances. He asked her to come out, but she refused, being shy and modest. So *Rama* forced his way into the cave and carried her off to his hollow tree. He then made her eat fruit, roots and leaves of the *Kalaw* tree which had wrought such a wonderful cure for him. She was soon cured, and *Rama* took *Piya* unto himself as his wife. *Piya* gave birth to twins sixteen times, bearing thirty-two sons. A hunter from Benares one day came to this part of the jungle and recognized *Rama* as the former king of Benares. Seeing so many young princes, the hunter asked who they were. *Rama* explained the circumstances, and the hunter, on his return to Benares, related the whole story to the king who was none other than *Rama's* son.

"This wonderful tree is identified today as belonging to the genus *Hydnocarpus*. Of this genus there are a number of trees, the seeds from which are used for the extraction of an oil effective in the modern treatment of leprosy. The early records of India and China both show that the doctors of ancient times were well acquainted with its use."—O. K. Skinsnes