

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES.

No. I Philology in relation to the Tapir.

The tapir is a living representative of the perisodactyle section of ungulate mammals. These animals are an ancient group retaining many characters of the primitive ungulate of the Miocene epoch, which belongs to the Tertiary Era, and carries us back several millions of years. It was during this epoch that the height of mammalian development was reached. This animal has during the passage of this enormous period of time undergone but little change. Fossils varying very little from the present day tapir have been found in Europe and would seem to have lived there during the Miocene and Pliocene periods, but became extinct before the Pleistocene or Glacial period. The end of the Pliocene and beginning of the Pleistocene epochs are calculated by scientists to be about 550,000 B. C. The Pleistocene epoch precedes the Holocene period which is our present day formation and these two epochs fall within the Quaternary Era or Age. In other regions such as China and the Southern territories of the United States of America, fossilized remains of the tapir have been found, which lived there in the Pleistocene epoch. The tapir is found to-day in Central America as well as in Brazil, Paraguay and the Andes and in Asia. The South American species are of different colour to those of Asia. The tapir of the continent of Asia is found in Siam, south of the Isthmus of Kra, and a few would seem to live even north of that line, for I have been told of one being shot in the Western portion of the province of Rajburi near the frontier with Burma. They are also found in the forests of Tavoy and Mergui in Burma and in the Malay States, as well as in Sumatra and Borneo.

The tapir is an animal of great interest to the zoologist for it is one of the most ancient of animals and it has undergone little change during the enormous period of time during which the world has been in process of formation and also because it is related to the rhinoceros and the horse. This may seem to be a strange statement to make but it is supported by the evidence of natural history. Looking at these animals from a certain angle, a resemblance to the horse is apparent but looked at casually the animal would seem to resemble the boar or swine. The head of the animal suggests a pig. The snout is elongated and forms a trunk or proboscis which is flexible and capable of being shortened or lengthened at will. The snout thus resembles the trunk or proboscis of an elephant. The nostrils are on the under portion of the trunk. The ears are thick and somewhat like those of a rat. The tail which is short is like the tail stump of a horse without the hairs. The feet resemble those of the rhinoceros. The fore feet have four toes and the hind feet three toes, which are encased in large horse-like hoofs. The under-surface of the foot rests on a large pad. The genital organ and

testes are hidden in the hind-portion of the abdomen. The fore portion of the animal from the head to behind the shoulders as well as the rump and hind quarters are black, whereas the middle of the body is white. The young, however, are spotted with white or fawn colour on a dark ground, the hair being much longer than when the animal has attained maturity. The hair is short and thick. The tapir has a measurement, at the shoulder when standing, of between 1 m. and 1.25 m., being 10 cm. higher at the rump,

The tapir lives in the recesses of dense forests and delights in lying in water and swampy ground. The male and female would seem to live together in marital harmony for they are always found together. They are nocturnal feeders, living on grass, young shoots of shrubs and trees, and other kinds of vegetation.

The tapir presents many peculiar features for study by zoologists and natural historians and he is also philologically a puzzle in Siam. The Siamese word for the tapir is Som-set (สมเส็จ) which is a shortened form of สมเส็จ meaning completely mixed or a complete mixture. The reason the Siamese give this peculiar name to this animal is because they believe the animal to be composed of the flesh of seven different animals although there is no suggestion of interbreeding among these seven animals. The seven animals are:—the pig, the elephant, the rhinoceros, the horse, the bear, the ox, and the sambar. The tapir has points of resemblance to the pig, the elephant, the rhinoceros, and the horse, so that this curious belief of the Siamese would seem to have some justification. Hunters hold that if a tapir is shot and falls to the ground, the characteristics of the flesh of the seven animals mentioned, become manifest in that portion of the body which touches the ground, that of the rest of the body being like the normal flesh of an ordinary animal. Some hunters even go so far as to say that the flesh of the seven animals which congregate together in that portion of the body which is in contact with the ground is of different colours. The flesh of this animal is not much esteemed as food nor is the animal sought after for commercial purposes. The reason for this animal having survived may be found in these two main factors. The chief enemy of the tapir is the tiger.

F. H. GILES.

No. II A Natural History Note.

It may be of interest to place on record that a dwarf hunch-backed elephant has been seen roaming in the forests north-west of the inland sea between Patalung and Nakon Sridhamaraj in Southern Siam. Apart from this animal being dwarf and hunch-backed all other parts of the body seem to be normal. The people of the district say that this animal is a descendant of some tame elephant