

The Belfast News-Letter
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A COMPANION PICTURE—A MALAY
FESTIVAL.

It was evening, and I was conducted into a large room, with a small space railed off for spectators. Candles were stuck in silver sconces, fastened to the walls in profusion, amid garlands of flowers innumerable. Round the room were several old Malays, squatting on mats, and dressed in gala costume. In the centre of the room a quantity of perfume was burning. Three or four younger Malays kept marching round the room, and they and the old gentleman aforesaid kept up a sort of grunting, whining chorus, which at first I took to be indications of severe pain in the abdominal regions, but was afterwards informed that they were chanting sentences from the Koran. Suddenly the young gentlemen began to throw themselves about in the most gladiatorial attitudes, singing faster than ever. Thereupon the old gentlemen shouted much louder, as though the internal agonies had vastly increased. Then the young men stripped off their shirts, and I thought they were going to have a regular "set-to." My friend Jones irreverently cried "Go it!" and offered to back the little one with the flat nose against the lot. But they were not going to box at all; they only danced, and jumped, and shouted, till they left little pools of sudorific exhalations on the floor. Then a boy came shouting awfully. Jones cried "Turn him out!" and at the same time two of the young men seized the boy, and plunging a sharp instrument like a meat skewer through his tongue—at least, so it appeared—and they led him round to the admiring spectators with the skewer projecting through his tongue. Jones pronounced it 'too bad,' hinted that he should like to punch the head of the fellow that did it; but the boy looked quite happy and content with his tongue on a skewer; so that, no doubt, there was some deception, which, however, defied our detection. As soon as this interesting youth had departed, one of the young men took a dagger and plunged it into the fleshy part of his side, just above the hip, and then walked round and showed himself. There were a few drops of blood, apparently flowing from the wound, in which the dagger was left sticking. Jones informed him, gravely, that he would have a terrible pain in his side, and offered to prescribe for him a valuable recipe of his grandmamma's. Another man thrust a skewer through his cheek and came and showed himself also. Then some red-hot chains were brought in, and thrown over an iron beam, when another of the Malays seized them with his bare hands, and kept drawing them fast over the beams. All the while that these exhibitions were taking place, the Malays kept up their hideous shrieking of the Koran sentences, all of them shouting together, and louder and louder the more horrible the experiment was being tried. The noise, the sight, the weapons, the red-hot chains, together, formed a scene bordering on the diabolical; except that there was such evident jugglery in the whole affair, and the plate was so constantly handed round for money, while the comments of my cockney friend were so absurd, that the the ludicrous predominated greatly over the horrible.

—*Ibid.*
