

## LIFE IN THE FORESTS OF THE FAR EAST.

The following is extracted from a letter to a merchant in this city from a young gentleman, son of a U. P. minister now deceased, who went out two or three years ago to Borneo, in the faint hope of recovering his health. That object has been happily attained, and he having received an appointment in the interior, it is considered that many of his friends here would be glad to learn of his welfare, and that it would be interesting to others to know the positions which young Scotchmen are frequently placed in.

—, Borneo, 8th Nov., 1864.

My dear Sir,

Like all uncivilised people, the natives here have great dread of evil spirits, and believe that all sickness is caused by them. I had often heard of the ceremony which they have for "casting out evil spirits," and expressed a wish to see it. The other day one of the chiefs told me that he was going to "barantu" his wife, and asked me to come and see the fun. About ten o'clock at night I went to his house, at the wharf of which I was met by the Pangeran, and conducted by him to a seat of honour which had been prepared for me. On looking round I was quite astonished at the scene. The walls and ceiling of the large apartment were hung all over with curtains of Chinese silk and velvet, wrought with gold, and something which, in the lamp light, glittered like diamonds. The floor was covered with beautiful mats and rugs, on which sat about a hundred young men and women dressed in the best costumes. In the middle of the room was a swing, on which sat the lady possessed with a devil. She was supported by two old men, who moved the swing gently, and addressed the devil in doleful voices. After a short time the lady was conducted to her room, and one of the old men mounted the swing, and made it go with a vengeance, at the same time violently exhorting the devils, but I could not hear what he said for the deafening native music. Presently he dropped upon the floor, and commenced capering like a madman, one time dancing, another writhing on the mats or grinning like an ape in the face of whoever was near him. After some time he approached my mats, and, after capering about some time, he went down on his knees and commenced speaking like an idiot to me. Every eye was fixed upon me, and I pretended to take it all serious till the old beast began writhing like a mad dog at the foot of my mats, when I seized my cane, and, before any one could say a word, dealt him three tremendous whacks on the back, at the same time telling him, in Malay, that I'd put the devils out of him. You may be sure that he didn't wait long within reach of my rattan, but went off like a shot, rubbing the chastised part. At first the natives were so amazed at my conduct that they could not utter a word; but seeing me laughing, and the old man's discomfiture, the thing was so ludicrous that they actually yelled with laughter, some of them rolling on the floor, the better to give vent to their mirth. The young girls especially seemed to enjoy it, and with their bright black eyes shot comical glances of approval at me. These old sorcerers are both dreaded and detested by the natives, and consequently if any one is "brany" enough to take them by the nose they don't get much sympathy.

I intended to have gone to Sarawak before the monsoon commenced, but it was too late before I could get away. My friend R—, the Resident here, spends lots of time in what he calls hunting and fishing, but his expeditions never seem to be productive of anything; however, a deer-track or a nibble are quite sufficient for good-natured R—. One day, at my house a lot of headmen were standing on the verandah, and one took up a light Minnie rifle of mine and admired it. R—, of course,

immediately began to praise his rifle and shooting, and said Tuan— was never a captain in the Rifles like me, and, of course, can't shoot like me. The natives, however, said they thought Tuan— could lick him, as they had seen him shooting; and when it came to a match I did give him a licking; but R— was nothing daunted. A few days after we were up the river at a Malay village, when my rifle was admired; he made just the same speech as he had done before, telling them that I hadn't had opportunities of learning like him. One of his own men said I had beat him before. But R— wouldn't admit it, and, pointing to a cocoa nut, he said, See if he could cut the stem of that. I had taken no notice of the talk, but when he challenged me to cut the twig of the nut, a chief came up to me laughing, and begged me to try, so I raised my rifle and let fly, and down came the right nut; but R— shouted out that the bullet had only gone through the nut, not the twig; however when we picked it up the nut was uninjured, the stem having been neatly cut by the bullet. R— said he could do it too, but, on trying, didn't even hit the nut. But a discomfiture is not felt by R—; he neither loses temper nor confidence. I wish I were so happily constituted. Although R— puts me into a rage occasionally, I like him greatly, as well as respect him, as a better-meaning, better-hearted fellow I never knew. He comes down here every night at five o'clock, and has a pipe and glass of grog. He soon begins to talk, and lays aside the pipe, while I puff away and listen, throwing in a word occasionally. During the fine season I had plenty to do, and could not join him in any of his sports; however, it was all the better, as none of them succeeded. After I had sent off my last cargo I thought I'd teach him how to go about things, so one night sent up for two of the chiefs to come to my house. When they came my boy put coffee and biscuits before them, which all Malays are very fond of. I then told them I wanted to get up a "tuba fishing," and that I wanted to keep it secret from Tuan R—, till everything was arranged. They entered heart and soul into the scheme, and next morning went to a river about six miles along the coast to make everything ready. About a week after all was prepared, and I asked R— to join me. He, of course, was going to assist me, use his influence, &c.; but when I told him all was ready he said he couldn't get away. However, the prospect of sport was too tempting to R—, and after about half an hour he said he'd come. In the morning we sent on provisions, clothes, spears, &c., in a boat, then started ourselves on foot. After a pleasant walk we arrived at the mouth of the river Judan, where the Pangeran was waiting for us in a boat, to take us to the camponey (village), which is about an hour's pull from the mouth. A place had been prepared for us in the principal house, where we had breakfast; after which R— went to fish, and I went to superintend operations preparatory for the next day's sport. The river selected is about a mile along the beach from the Judan. The people I found all busy splitting bamboos, to fence in the river at high tide, so as to prevent the fish going to the sea again. In the evening we amused ourselves chatting with the natives, who all squatted round us till long after we had gone to sleep. Next morning we got up at cock-crow, had coffee, and started for the other river; and after an hour and a half's pull we came upon the natives preparing the "tuba." There were about twenty or thirty sampans, all filled with men and women busy pounding away at the root, and mixing it with water, in the bottom of their boats. The scene was wild-like and interesting: the woods resounded with the beating of the clubs, the yells and laughter of the natives; the rich tropical verdure adorned the river on each side, while the solemn old jungle trees formed an arch over it, through which the sun's rays but faintly penetrated. After all was ready the "tuba" was hauled into the river, and we allowed our boats to float quietly down with the tide. In each boat so many men pulled and two stood up with long fish spears. After about an hour an occasional fish began to rise to the surface of the water, but gradually they became more numerous, till we speared them as fast as the men could take them off the barbs. R— was wild with excitement, continually shouting out "Isn't this a wopper?" "That's the way to touch 'em up," and really the scene was exciting, the natives yelling like devils, the boats darting from side to side, and occasionally an unfortunate spearman toppled into the water head foremost. The quantity of fish caught was astonishing. The two villages got sufficient to last them half a month.