

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

ADVENTURES AMONG THE DYAKS OF BORNEO. By F. BOYLE. *Hurst and Blackett, Marlborough-street.*—This is a volume containing a very pleasant description of a sojourn amongst Rajah Brooke's subjects in Borneo. The author and his brother visited Sarawak in the year 1863, and they seem to have passed a very pleasant time amongst the natives, who are a cheerful, good-natured, hospitable people, a little too much addicted to the use of ardent spirits, and seemingly entertaining a somewhat suspicious fancy for the collecting of human skulls. Several natives, being the fortunate possessors of a large number of these revolting relics of mortality, are held in high estimation by the people. The missionaries have done much to Christianize and civilize the Dyaks; but there is evidently a great deal more to be accomplished before they will abandon several very vicious customs. The following is a curious reason given by an independent chieftain for torturing one of his subjects:—

A CURIOUS JUSTIFICATION OF TORTURE.

The kris (sharp sword knife) is common to all nations of Malay extraction, except the New Zealanders, and throughout the Archipelago takes the place of our gallows. Their mode of execution by its means is curious and characteristic. The criminal is led unbound to the place of execution, and takes his seat quietly in an arm-chair; usually chewing penang to the last moment. The kris used on such occasions is about eighteen inches long, and quite straight. Grasping this instrument, the executioner steps up gently behind the prisoner, and thrusts it in to the hilt between the left shoulder and the neck. The heart is pierced instantaneously, the criminal leaps up from his chair, and falls dead. There is a story told, but I know not with how much truth, of the son of an executioner, very well known in the far East, who not long ago was called upon to perform his father's duties. Not being used to the work, he made his thrust over the right shoulder, and, consequently, missed the heart. Without any confusion at the horrible result, he dragged out his kris, and saying, coolly, "Ah! that was wrong, I know!" struck again in the proper spot, and this time with success. The Malays have a reputation for treachery and cruel practices, which they do not seem to deserve. Torture is never permitted, and they retaliate the charge of treachery on their accusers. Human life is not highly esteemed among them, it is true, but the same may be said of all races inhabiting a tropical climate, and "kris-ing" is considered a merciful death. An independent chieftain, well known in Singapore, is said to have crucified some rebels who fell into his hands while we were in Sarawak. His "pangerans" remonstrated strongly with him, urging that torture was repugnant to human nature and opposed to the customs of their ancestors. "Very true," replied the Tumasong, "but it is the English practice; they persuaded me to read their sacred books, and in them I found an account of it." If the story be not true it is droll, but whether these unfortunates were crucified or not, I can aver positively that the Tumasong is a very handsome, courteous gentleman, who gives his friends a very good dinner, and sits with them while they drink capital wine from his cellars. It is possible that in the sanctity of the domestic circle he does not obey the prophet's commandment quite so strictly as in company.

Mr. Boyle paid a visit to the Court of King Gasing, a somewhat eccentric monarch, who is clearly no teetotaler.

MAJESTY IN ITS CUPS.

In person the worthy old chief was tall, his face was long, eyes small, nose somewhat flat, and mouth very large. His skin was yellow and deeply wrinkled; his hair was worn short over the forehead, and hanging down behind. In the costume of private life, Gasing's appearance was rather striking, but when adorned for the feast he was truly grand. Upon the very apex of his cranium, the brass top of a dragoon helmet was tied by a band of linen passing under the chin, and from this a mass of long black horsehair streamed down his back. Over his manly brow was fixed a brazen plate formerly belonging to one of her Majesty's regiments, emblazoned with numerous victories in which the gallant corps had participated in various unknown portions of the globe. What place or position this article may have occupied when borne by its original possessors I cannot conceive, but judging from the effect produced by it on old Gasing, I should be inclined to think that it was not worn on the forehead. Upon his broad shoulders, and buttoned tightly over his chest, was the gorgeous uniform coat worn by consuls-general at the English Court, and his lean, yellow thighs protruding from between the tails as he sat cross-legged on the floor produced the drollest effect. His stomach was equally adorned and protected by the plated cover of a soup tureen, of a pattern embossed in high relief. This was the brightest jewel in Gasing's crown, and an object of mad jealousy to neighbouring potentates. If ever the lawless times of old

return to the Sea Dyaks, this tureen-cover will be an object of contention such as the world has not beheld since the days of Troy. And surely if men are determined to fight, a piece of brilliant tin, highly ornamented and adapted for the richest personal adornment, is a prize worthy of some sacrifice. Thus arrayed, Gasing sat and perspired, an object of admiration to all his guests. The thick padding of his coat nearly stifled him; the tureen-cover barged uncomfortably against his stomach; to the meanest taste, naked legs popping from behind gold lace must have appeared incongruous; but Gasing was half drunk, and quite happy. We shook hands with him and numerous other chiefs, who staggered to their feet for the ceremony, and then dropped helplessly into their places. They were all in that state which renders movement vague and inadvisable, so, as they occupied the shade, we were compelled to sit in the sun.

FESTIVITIES AT A BORNEAN COURT.

Every one who could keep his feet began to dance, and those who were already helpless endeavoured to yell. The Terpsichorean performances were of all kinds, generally accompanied by astonishing noises and much confusion. Gasing was either too grand or too drunk to engage in such activities; but he interested himself in the efforts of his friends, and organized several sets with great success. One of these was very extraordinary and unintelligible. A tall chief produced a sort of cat-o'-nine-tails, another a human head, and the two joined in a frantic race round the verandah. Then the head-holder faced about, and pirouetted with one leg in the air, while he alternately advanced and withdrew the trophy in his hand; meanwhile the chief armed with the cat-o'-nine-tails lashed vigorously at the surrounding multitude, and both performers laughed derisively at each other. When the demands of exhausted nature compelled these two to bury their heads in a bathing-jar, four or five others took their place, provided with blocks of wood having a feather at each end; we took these to represent canoes, but Gasing assured us that they were intended to portray the "rhinoceros hornbill," and were considered by all competent judges to be rather fine works of art. Then a number of gongs were suddenly beaten, and swords, and cat-o'-nine-tails and heads, and rhinoceros hornbills began to sway about over the heads of a mass of human beings who were executing some extraordinary ballet adapted to their state of mind and body. But, meanwhile the girls and women, having doffed their apparel of festivity, began again to mingle with the crowd in ordinary costume. No Delilah of Europe better knows her power to make a fool of a strong man than one of these Dyak sirens, nor is more inclined to exercise her fascination. The presence of the female element was soon felt in the noise and confusion, which absolutely seemed to increase. Several of the girls were so charming as to excuse the infatuation of their victims, and I need scarcely say that the prettiest were the most culpable. But, ugly or beautiful, old or young, all instantly employed their most cunning arts in enticing the bravest and most famous warriors to drink and drink again. We saw a little beauty seat herself lovingly beside a tall fellow with a simple face and honest eyes, whom she coaxed to toast her from a large jar which she offered to his lips, until he fairly fell backwards upon the floor. This satisfactory conclusion attained, his tormentor, who, we heard, was affianced to him, ran screaming with laughter to bring seven other wretches as mischievous as herself to jeer at the vanquished lover. Raising her hopes to sport of a higher order, she shortly after brought her jar to the spot where we sat, in the hope, no doubt, of beguiling the white men into the same condition as her other adorners; but in Europe we are accustomed to run the gauntlet of more dangerous fascinations, and she relinquished the attempt in despair. But I ought to set the reader right upon a point nearly touching the breeding and propriety of our Dyak friends. In England such a scene of drunkenness and uncouth merriment as I have described would necessarily be coarse and disgusting to the last degree, but among these savages it was not so. We did not see a single act of impropriety, even among the most reckless of the revellers, and the brutality inseparable from a heavy "wine" at Oxford or Cambridge was utterly absent.