

LITERATURE.

Adventures among the Dyaks of Borneo. By FREDERICK BOYLE, F.R.S. Hurst and Blackett.

There are few parts of the world of which we know less than of Borneo, and a glimpse of what the author justly calls "that strangest anomaly of the age—a kingdom ruled by a private English gentleman, whose independent sovereignty is recognised by his native land," cannot fail to be interesting.

Mr. Boyle tells us very little of the government and laws of Rajah Brooke's dominions—probably because there is very little to tell. All measures are decided by a council of seven, consisting of the Rajah himself, the "Tuan Mudah," or heir apparent, the Resident of Kuching, and four native members. Judicial causes are tried by the Tuan Mudah or the Resident, assisted by the three Datus, or *Malay* nobles, living at Kuching, who state and explain the native laws or customs applicable to the questions before the court. These Datus, or Pangerans, are related to the Sultan of Bruni; and this kindred, Mr. Boyle tells us, is the only patent of nobility in the country. The outlying districts of Sarawak are administered by English residents deputed from Kuching.

The population of Borneo is composed of several races: the Malays, Dyaks, Kenowits, Milanowes, and Pakataus. The Malays and Dyaks have been generally considered distinct races, but Mr. Boyle thinks the resemblance between their languages "as strong, perhaps, as between the broadest Yorkshire and sharp Cockney. Every *Malay* can converse with a Dyak, and even we ourselves were sometimes comprehended." The *Malay* language has a very soft and pleasing sound, and has been called the "Italian of the East." Like our own tongue, it very readily absorbs foreign words. "Arabic, Hindoo, Persian, even Chinese and English, are all laid under contribution to enlarge the *Malay* vocabulary, and probably one half of its words are derived, with scarcely an alteration, from a foreign source." The dialect of ordinary conversation has no grammatical structure or regularity of any kind.

Mr. Boyle considers that the Malays deserve less than most other Orientals the reputation they generally bear for treachery and cruelty. He has a very high opinion of the Dyak character. The bravery, honesty, and truthfulness of that race seem to him especially worthy of praise. Their custom of "head-hunting," the only idea which their name suggests in Europe, was not, he thinks, in its origin any proof of a savage disposition. The head taken from an enemy slain in fair and open war was as legitimate a trophy of valour as a cross or a medal. The hideous mania for head-collecting which in later times made the whole land one scene of murder was fostered by the *Malay* government and great nobles, who hoped by this means to see the Dyak tribes mutually exterminated, or at any rate weakened past all chance of successful rebellion.

The custom, horrible as it was, had its comic side. The Dyaks, in their anxiety to obtain heads, were not always very particular about the original possessors; and Mr. Boyle once saw, among a number of human skulls, that of an orang-outang suspended from the ceiling of a hut. On questioning his hostess on the subject, and pointing out the difference between this head and its neighbours, he was solemnly informed that it had formerly belonged to a most malignant "antu" or devil, who had been slain, after a desperate fight, by the master of the house. The Rajah's government has succeeded in putting a stop to the lawless state of bloodshed to which head-taking gave rise, by forbidding its subjects to kill anyone except in regular war declared by the monarch himself. Farther than this it would be dangerous to go; the feelings and prejudices of the people would at once revolt against any attempt to deprive them of the right of taking their traditional war trophies.

The weapons of this singular race are the spear and the "sumpitan" or blow-pipe. Like some of the South American tribes, the Dyaks have never arrived at a knowledge of the bow. They substitute for it, as a means of throwing projectiles,

A tube of hard wood, about eight feet long, fitted at the further end with a sight and a broad spear-head, so placed as not to interfere with the flight of the arrow. The thorn of the rago palm supplies a natural arrow, barbed, pointed, and admirably adapted to the purpose. It is from six to eight inches long, quite straight, and equally thick from base to point. The blunt end is encased in a cube of compressed pith, fitting exactly to the hollow of the tube. The mouth-piece is held between the index and second finger of the left hand, while the right supports the sumpitan, of which the weight is so considerable that a strong arm and much practice can alone enable a man to direct it.

The arrows are poisoned, and the effective range of the weapon is about forty yards. The arms peculiar to the Malays are the well known "kris," and the "parang-latok," which consists of a blade "about two feet long and a couple of inches broad at the point, from which it narrows down to the junction of the hilt, where it becomes square and half an inch thick." Both of these weapons are however being gradually supplanted by the use of the sabre.

Side by side with the Dyak head-hunting stands the *Malay* mania for running "amok," or, as it is anglicized, "a muck." This madness is generally roused by loss at the gaming table, or by some love affair.

The madman does not necessarily avenge himself upon his injurer. He seizes up the first weapon that meets his eye, and dashes off to the nearest frequented spot, where he cuts and thrusts at every living thing until shot down like a mad animal.

This is the only safe or practical way of dealing with such madmen, and it is pretty generally adopted. Mr. Boyle relates one very curious instance of this madness. A *Malay* was attached to a young slave girl at Bintulu. The girl, fancying that some plot to separate them was on foot, stabbed herself to death. The lover,

Instead of following the usual custom, and avenging his misfortunes upon all sorts of people who had nothing whatever to do with them, preferred to cut himself deliberately to pieces, and, considering that Bintulu is a very peaceable district, where opportunities for practice were necessarily few, his decision was by no means despicable. Without entering into the catalogue of horrid wounds described to us, of which he bore evident traces months afterwards, it will be sufficient to say that sixteen wounds were found on his limbs and body, most of them dangerous.

And yet this man did not die!

Commercial affairs in Borneo must be somewhat impeded by the nature of the circulating medium, which consists of brass cannon, from five to ten feet long. "There is one great advantage about this currency," says Mr. Boyle, "it is not easily stolen." The metal is valued at so much the picul, which contains 33½ pounds. The picul is divided into one hundred catties. Tea is sold by retail in small packets of one catty each, and this, Mr. Boyle suggests as the origin of our "tea-caddy."

Our author praises warmly the magnificent scenery of Borneo; but the enjoyment of it, as well as of the sport for which the country is famous, is very much diminished to Europeans by the nature of the roads over which they have to travel. The "jungle-paths," as they are called, are formed by cutting down trees, lopping off the branches, and placing the trunks, or "batangs," end to end along the whole route to be traversed, over hills, morasses, and rivers, as the crow flies.

It will readily be believed (Mr. Boyle says) that to walk over the rocky bed of a dry river upon a round log forty feet long, and unprovided with any possible balance or support, is not exactly the kind of exercise to be preferred by any one not a professional dancer on the tight-rope.

Nor do these paths improve upon a short acquaintance. Mr. Boyle and his brother felt more dizzy and nervous the second time than the first. The dangerous transits without the least embarrassment. The journey is not rendered more agreeable by the insects met at every yard of the way—the mosquitoes, the poisonous flies, and the fire-ants, whose bite, though not poisonous, is exquisitely painful. The worst plagues of all, perhaps, are the leeches, which cling in herds to the traveller's legs at every step he takes out of the beaten path. "Forty is not an uncommon number" to find attached to oneself at the end of a walk in the forests, "and a stout gentleman of Kuching once discovered seventy sucking at his limbs—or so it is said." Scorpions and centipedes of course abound. Mr. Boyle tells us, by the way, one curious fact of which we do not remember to have heard before. "It has been frequently proved," says he, "in the far east, that the most venomous reptiles lose all power of injury after a few days at sea."

The religion of the Malays is Islam; and the veneration in which they hold the Hadjis or Mecca

pilgrims, and the Shercefs or descendants of the Prophet, both of which classes abound in Sarawak, and are conspicuous for their fanaticism, is a constant source of anxiety to the government. Until the arrival of the English mission at Sarawak the Malays were very lax Mussulmans, but that event seems to have put them on their mettle, and they now observe the precepts of the Koran with great strictness. As to the Dyaks, they have no religion at all. Some persons profess, indeed, to recognize a Deity of some sort in the word "Tufa," or "Tupa," which seems to correspond in some degree to the "Allah" of the Moslem, but it is a name and nothing more. The Dyaks appear to use "Tufa" with as much care or knowledge of its meaning as a more sacred name is used in our mining districts, or in the back courts of St. Giles's. The only supernatural beings of whom they have any idea are the "antus," or devils. But a Dyak's belief in "antus" is like an English child's belief in ghosts—he dreads them very much when alone at night, and laughs at them during the day, or in company; often, indeed, professing a total scepticism concerning them. Mr. Boyle found, however, in one village two mud figures of alligators, the size of life, which were supposed to roam about at night and eat the "antus." "With the exception of a very doubtful figure in a cavern at Bidi, these alligators were the only evidence we could gain of any religious feeling among the Dyaks." They believe, if that word be not too strong, that certain warriors of their own or other tribes become "antus" after death. Their dead are generally buried with their arms and ornaments, though burning is not unusual. "In either case," says Mr. Boyle, "the ceremonies are trivial, and the wake (or feast) elaborate." Their nuptials are extremely simple. Sometimes the happy couple eat rice and honey together, or exchange bracelets, "but the most common ceremony is the shaking of a fowl seven times over their heads." The only indispensable rite seems to be "the simultaneous drunkenness of every male in the house."

One might have supposed that a race like this, brave, honest, and by no means unintelligent (as Mr. Boyle's account of their eager interest in politics shows), yet without previous convictions of any kind, and therefore free from prejudices, would be peculiarly ready to receive the lessons of Christianity. Up to this time, however, the efforts of the missionaries have made little or no impression upon them. Throughout the East, native converts are looked upon with great suspicion by all parties. It seems clear that for one man who embraces Christianity from conviction, ten adopt it for the sake of the loaves and fishes. Nor is this at all strange. A missionary goes among savages of whose mental condition he is totally ignorant, relates to them histories which he himself has never really digested, and proclaims to them doctrines which he himself does not understand. He plunges at once into the most inscrutable mysteries; and if the conventional paraphrases which commonly pass for explanations of those mysteries are unsatisfactory to his hearers, or if one of the latter, a little shrewder than the rest, ventures to question his premises, he is nonplussed. We do not mean to say that all missionaries are of this class, but the more thoughtful and cultivated among themselves fully recognise these difficulties, and confess their embarrassment in dealing with them. Mr. Boyle has no hopes except in a return to the practice of the first ages of Christianity.

If a whole tribe were assembled together, baptised first and taught afterwards, if no covert bribery (Mr. Boyle here explains in a note that he conveys no accusation against the missionaries) were offered to encourage conversion, if the heathen were not shocked by premature and spasmodic attacks upon their ancestral prejudices; in short, if the missionaries would but come back to that system of propagation employed by the Apostles themselves, most laymen of experience are assured that their success would be as real and solid as it is now slight and unsubstantial.

Whether Mr. Boyle is right or not in this we venture no opinion; but we must reluctantly admit that there is a great deal of truth in his remarks on the effects of European encroachment in the far East:

The Javanese have been civilised, and are discontented Helots; the Dyaks and Malays of Banjarmasin, Sambas, and Pontianak have been driven wild with civilisation; in the South Seas the natives are dying in heaps from the introduction of our beneficent institutions; the Malays of Singapore are gradually driven out by swarms of Chinamen, attracted by the genius of dollars and civilisation; we introduce it to Japan in gunboats, and disseminate it by bombardment; in the Manillas the Spaniards urge on the cause by slow extermination. We know the world was encircled by water, that Liverpool might send its rascals to every coast and distribute Manchester cotton to all the nations; but mingled with his cheap prints and his Sheffield cutlery, the British trader carries materials of very different nature. War, and drunkenness, and depopulation, and all uncleanness, accompany him, and spread far and wide over the land.

We cannot help thinking that this book has been written somewhat hastily. We have noticed two or three curious variations in the spelling of particular words. For instance, the Resident of Kuching is called indifferently "Crookshank" and "Cruikshank" throughout the volume, and we were at first considerably puzzled by it. We often find, too, the same reflection repeated, and in almost the same words, with an interval of a few pages. Nevertheless we believe that every reader will enjoy the book thoroughly. The style is easy and natural, with no straining after effect. The author has a ready and genial appreciation of all he sees and does; and, without falling into that drearily comic mannerism so much in vogue with some travellers at present, he has a genuine perception of fun, and humour enough to transmit that fun undiminished to his readers. It is very long since we have seen anything so good as his description of the feast given by the great chief Gasing. Here is a portrait of that potentate himself in state costume:

Upon the very apex of his cranium the brass top of a dragon 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 of 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 banged 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.

In conclusion, we must express our regret that Mr. Boyle has not given us some more illustrations than the two at the beginning of this volume. He mentions his sketch book several times, and a few more leaves from it would have bestowed additional value on an interesting work.