

DOMESTIC LIFE IN BORNEO.—One day I went to a great feast at one of the houses of the Datu Patinghi, the principal Malay dignitary. This chief was very fat and good humoured. He had two wives, Mina, and Inda, each of whom had a separate establishment, and it was not a little amusing to see the manner in which these two ladies (between whom there was little love lost) treated their joint husband. Inda would complain that her house was not so good as Mina's, whereupon the Datu would have to build her a new one equal to that of her contemporary. Mina would then find out some defect in her establishment, which must be rectified or made similar to Inda's. The old gentleman lives a month at each house, and sometimes when passing the house of the neglected wife, I have seen him obliged to go over to the opposite side of the river to escape the abuse of the irate lady who would appear at the wharf and give full vent to her anger in, of course, the most ladylike language possible. Well, to return to the feast. Ascending by a ladder into a capacious audience hall, built of the usual flimsy material, we found some hundreds of Malays seated cross-legged on the floor, and led by a number of Hadjis (those who have made the pilgrimage to Meckah), they chanted verses of the Khoran in loud unmusical tones. Chairs were given us at one end of the long room, and soon after we were seated a row of people approached us with bowls filled with water, containing leaves of sweet flowers with which they sprinkled us. The company now arranged themselves into groups round large brazen platters, on which were plates of rice, curried fowls, and goat's flesh, and sweetmeats of many descriptions, all savouring of cocoa-nut oil. After the meal the gongs struck up, and we witnessed a Malay dance. It is not without grace; a handkerchief was given to the first man that got up, and when he had finished, he threw it to another, who, thus challenged, had to carry on the dance. Swords are often used, and one or two men perform. If two, they advance and retire to the sound of various gongs and drums, sometimes crouching down, sometimes making feints, but never actually striking. Now one will parry and cover himself with his shield, and now he will thrust, keeping all the time to the sound of the music. Weapons are frequently, however, dispensed with, and the dance is distinguished as much by the motion of the arms as by that of the legs. At the conclusion of the feast we went to see a Malay marriage. The bride was a niece of the before-named Mina, and her future husband was a relation of the Datu Bandar. For about a month firing of cannon, display of flags, feasting and making merry had been going on at the houses of these two people. We were shown into the large room where the ceremony was to take place—it was decorated with leaves and flowers, and at one end there were the bridal couches covered with handsome mats. At the head of each (there were two side by side) there was a mountain of pillows of embroidered silk and satin, reaching to the very ceiling of the room. The couches were surrounded by a double set of curtains ready to be let down, and the space inside was decorated in gorgeous style with cloth of gold, artificial flowers of peculiar appearance, and numerous other ornaments. For two hours we waited, we few Europeans being seated on chairs (*quite* an innovation) in a central position. Gradually the room filled with the ladies of Sarawak, with their children, while the men collected outside. In one corner of the room I observed the bride, seated on a mattress, and surrounded by a crowd of women who were dressing and decorating the poor girl, who drooped her head and looked nervous, but said not a word. The large headdress (amply stuck over with gold flowers and ornaments) having been completed to the satisfaction of the old women, the bride was led up to one of the couches where she was seated. Some of the fastidious ladies were now giving a finishing stroke to the headdress, and some fanning her, while others looked interestedly on. Her dress was of cloth shot with gold; one sarong fastened with a gold belt fell from the waist to the feet, another was put on as a sort of cross belt over the right and under the left arm. Her arms were loaded with massive gold bracelets, and her fingers covered with rings. The young bride was not bad looking, at least the upper part of her face was well formed, but her lips and lower jaw were too large and projecting. From the number of women in the room we had an opportunity of judging of the standard of beauty among the Malays, which I am afraid, does not, as a rule, come up to *our* idea of perfection. However, there were some good-looking damsels among the assemblage, and after living among them one is inclined to get over one's English prejudices and to become reconciled to their looks. The women of the lower orders having harder work to do than women in a higher state of civilization very soon get old. The men have open countenances and a pleasing look, which seems to counteract their otherwise ugly features, and although small they are strong in the arms and legs, and are well made. Our bride having been ready for some time, the approach of the bridegroom, whose preparations had been conducted at his relation the Datu Bandar's house, was announced. He came in a large boat, smaller ones being lashed on either side. Preceded by men carrying artificial flowers, Kassan was carried in, striding across a man's shoulders, and when he alighted at the door of the room some Hadjis repeated a prayer, which was three times responded to by the whole assemblage. Kassan then struck the threshold of the room with his foot three times, and walked up to the bridal couch between two men. He stopped close to his future wife, struck her over the head with a wand he carried in his hand, and placed his right foot on her lap, as a sign of superiority of the man over his wife. Retreating a pace or two he sat down on his couch; Kassan was dressed in cloth of gold trousers, with a sarong (worn like a kilt) above them; another sarong over his right shoulder passing under the left arm. A crown of gold flowers on his head completed his dress. We now rose from our chairs, got into one boat and pulled down the river to our house, leaving the wedded pair, who had to spend their seven days' honeymoon in seclusion.—