

*Sent to Geog. Soc of Phila Journal.
Jan'y - 1901.*

Manners and Customs of the People of Southern Borneo.

By H. M. Hiller. Dec. 19th. 1900. Phila. Geo. Soc.

About three years ago I had the pleasure of addressing this society upon the manners and customs of the natives of Sarawak, a country from which we had but lately returned. Since then we have again visited Borneo, but we have extended the field of our investigation, so that from Labuan on the North and West, all the way round to the mouth of the Balungan river on the East, we have touched at most of the important places, entered the mouth of nearly every river, and ascended the larger rivers as far as was possible under the existing conditions.

Our party divided at Singapore in the early part of the year 1897. Dr. Furness returned to Sarawak and Mr. Harrison and I proceeded to Dutch West Borneo.

Six months later we again met. Dr. Furness had by that time explored the head waters of the Baram and Tinjar rivers. Mr. Harrison and I had ascended the Kapuas river, a day's

Sibau

journey beyond Putus Sibau, the last Dutch outpost, a distance of over five hundred miles from the sea coast; we also ascended the Sibau, a tributary of the Kapuas, to its source; crossed the intervening water shed, the "Tohen Batu", and descended the Balleh and its tributaries, eventually reaching the sea at the mouth of the Rejang river. In October 1897 Mr. Harrison and I proceeded to Dutch East Borneo, ascending the Kotei river to the village of Ana, a distance of about three hundred miles. We had expected to ~~further~~ ascend the Kotei river, to cross the Tohen farther to the Eastward, and again reach the sea by way of the Balleh and Rejang rivers. In this latter enterprise we were disappointed because the Dutch governor would not give his consent for us to proceed beyond Ana. It was during these attempts to explore the central highlands, and the delays caused by the Dutch officials, that we were able to collect many of the Ethnographical and Natural History specimens now displayed at the University Museum; and it also

enabled Mr. Harrison to make this unusual collection of photographs, which I shall show you to-night.

In order that these photographs may be the more readily understood, let me refresh your memory as to the political and social conditions that exist in Borneo at the present time. Borneo is the second largest island in the world and has an area of 286000 sq. miles. It is a jungle clad from its marshy coast to its central mountain chain. In the lowland swamps the mangroves plant their stilt-like roots in the mud and the Nipa palms fringe the tidal waters. Between this marshy coast and the hills stretch the level forest lands, where the great buttressed Tapang and Banyan trees tower above the palms and fern, and the creepers knit their boughs into an inextricable tangle. In the hill country the forests are more open and there are game-trails leading across the ridges that separate one water course from another, but in the lowlands^{even} these game-trails ~~even~~ are seldom seen and the streams are the only practicable routes of travel.

Nearly all these streams take their source in the central mountain chain, and where joined by other brooks, they soon become mountain torrents that dash down the rapids and over the rocks with incessant roar. Their waters are clear and cold in the high lands, but are soiled by the muddy banks of the low lands, and the incoming tide lessens the force of their currents. In the uplands, the trees overarch the streams, creepers festoon from bank to bank, and orchids droop over the waters; but in the low lands there is no such beauty of scenery, the sun beats down with pitiless fury upon the broad reaches of the rivers, an unbroken silence reigns throughout the heat of the day, and the crocodiles sunning themselves upon the muddy banks, seem the only evidences of life. But hidden away among the undergrowth, there are myriads of insects, reptiles and four-footed animals; birds and monkeys inhabit the trees, and at early morning and again before sunset, all this silent low land bursts into movement and song.

Each of these streams, and the region drained thereby, becomes a Negri, or country, and beyond the point where the waters divide to fall into this or that river-basin, the native will not travel without first performing peculiar ceremonies; when once he has overstepped this imaginary border line, he feels as though he had left his home and fatherland far behind, he is a stranger in a strange land, he fears for imaginary dangers and becomes homesick just as other people whose skins are not so dark.

When we crossed the central water-shed, we saw many of these customs, for among our following were men of various tribes and each had his own peculiar rite to perform.

Before drinking of the waters in the new country, the Kyans~~s~~ took a knife in their teeth, immersed themselves in the stream, and muttered their petitions to the Spirits. The Bukit went down into the first tiny brook, divested himself of all clothing, took an ear-ring from his ear, threw it

into the water and then offered the following prayer to the water nymphs. "Oh spirit of the waters I make you this offering to show you that your children do not forget you; protect me I pray you, keep me from harm in the country I am about to traverse, keep me from sickness, from poison, and death in the land of your waters; bring me back in safety to my own country!" He had wound a chaplet of sweet-scented leaves about his brow, he was naked, and as he stooped there among the fern in the running waters of the stream, lifting the first handful of water to his lips, it was hard to realize that it was only Laioh the Buckit, and not some Faun. The night we reached the summit of this mountain chain and came to the point where the waters of the Kapuas separate from the waters of the Balleh; the whole party joined in the performance of the following ceremony.

They had brought some chicken's eggs from their home, (almost a fortnight had been spent in reaching this point,) these together with some rice were placed in a basket and the

chief then passed it around to each one of us that we might lay our hands upon the eggs and pass our fingers through the rice. The eggs were then placed in forked sticks by the side of the trail, and Tegang, the chief, as spokesman thus addressed the "hantu-tohen-," the spirits of the highland". "We make you presents of rice and eggs that you may in turn protect us in the land we are about to enter, let no evil spirits follow us, let no one poison or kill us, give us good omen-birds, and a safe return to our own people." As the one small lamp burned a hole in the inky blackness of the night, the wreaths of mist drifted across the ridge like disembodied spirits, and it needed but an ounce of credulity to make one believe that the hantu-tohen were prowling around in the darkness.

The different tribes living in a river basin are usually, but not always, at peace with each other; but are nearly always at enmity with the tribes living across the nearest watershed; and this may to some extent explain their fears and the performance of these peculiar rites whenever they leave their

own "waters" to enter the stranger land.

Until within recent years the natives of Borneo were able to carry on their old time customs of slavery, of war, and of head hunting; and today, despite the best endeavors of the different government officials, these evils still prevail to some extent.

At present Borneo is largely governed by white rule. Sarawak is more familiar to the English reader than any other portion, though it comprises but one fifth of the area of the island. The British North Borneo Company has of late years assumed control of the Northern end of the island. The Sultanate of Brunei is still semi-independent and consists of a small area wedged in between North Borneo and Sarawak. While the largest portion of the island, about 200,000. sq. miles, comprising all the lands situate South and East of the watershed has been for several centuries under the control of the Dutch; yet despite the fact that white men have owned and governed Borneo for so long a period, it is far behind the other islands of the Malay Archipelago in density of popula-

tion, and development of resources. There are no coffee nor sugar cane estates, no spice nor tea gardens, and the fertile lands are scarcely broken by a permanent clearing; the trackless jungles are almost unknown, except to the monkeys and the birds inhabiting the branches overhead, or to the four-footed folk who hide among the bracken and the fern; and the "babas", or new jungle reclaims the tentative farmlands, blots out the last years trail and covers every trace of fire, of war, and of death with its all obliterating carpet of green. Here and there a native cuts out a pathway to his field, and in a few years the babas has left no trace of either; consequently he travels by the water-ways, builds his house and clears his field nearby a stream, so that he can obtain easy access to them by means of boats. This has made them efficient boat builders and those who live in the hills, where the rapids and currents are dangerous, are among the most skillful canoeists in the world.

The main task of their life is the tillage of the small plots of ground cleared of jungle with persistent toil, and

set apart for the cultivation of rice, which is their staple food. By way of luxuries, at times they vary their bill of fare with fish, salt, vegetables in the shape of tubers, succulent roots and green fern fronds, and on rare occasions, meat. Owing to their superstitions they are debarred from eating many kinds of meat; even the pigs and fowls which they keep about their houses, are eaten only on great occasions, such as when children are named or when taboos are raised.

Salt is obtained from the trader in the bazaar, fruits grow wild in the jungle and fish are usually to be had for the casting of a net; ordinarily their harvests are good, yielding a sufficient supply of rice and now days, even though the harvest should fail there is less danger of a famine, because they can purchase food from the trader and pay for it in jungle produce, such as damar-gum, gutta-percha and rattans.

It is the search for these latter products that takes them to the hills, or even over the borderland into the stranger

country, and accounts for the feuds that have existed for centuries. For some doughty but untried warrior, in order to win his spurs, either by bravery or treachery, would take these opportunities to secure the coveted token of his prowess; and many a long standing quarrel has begun and ended on the watershed.

Head hunting was at one time a very popular pastime; the head of an enemy entered so largely into their customs, their superstitions and their religion, that in order to prevent a great number of calamities, and, in many instances to secure happiness, a head was essential; hence in former years, at the conclusion of a successful harvest, when the granaries were filled and the birds had been consulted and found propitious, they organized the "pantang-naich", or regular head-hunting expedition. But the various governments have strenuously opposed head hunting and today a head is seldom taken, save when some tribe ^{cross} ~~across~~ the border on a marauding foray; then a retaliatory expedition is sanctioned by the powers and a goodly

crop of the ghastly plunder results. Although this head taking desire burns as fiercely as of old, yet the penalties are too often imposed to make it popular, and when a gutta-percha hunter meets a rival hunter on the tohen he usually passes the time of day and departs in peace.

While in the Upper Kapuas valley I learned how the natives now play Hamlet without the ghost, and find a substitute for the "pantang Naich". In this instance, as in many another case they hood-wink the spirits by the following ruse. We were ascending the Mendalam river, in company with Tegang- a young Kyan chief- and some of his slaves; when we met some Malay traders who informed us that they had heard the sound of gongs being beaten, which is the signal to inform the members of a tribe that some calamity, such as a fire, or a death has occurred. Consequently the slaves were urged to redoubled exertions and we sped through the waters. Fortunately for our friend Tegang, we soon met some natives who informed us that the cause of the gongs being beaten was due to the death of a

child, the daughter of Lodang, a chieftain who lived farther up the river. The family of the child went into mourning; and according to custom, ^{no} beads ^{nor} or other ornaments were worn; the father wore a bark loin cloth, the other relatives put on their oldest garments, and the house was "pantang" or tabooed. In the meantime the child's spirit had gone to Bukit Tepelong to wait there outside Julang Telang, or paradise, until Lodang should bring a fresh head into the house.

A few days later Lodang came down to our camp, his face showed unmistakable signs of sorrow, he wore a single garment, ~~the~~ loin-cloth of bark, his sword was wrapped in palm-leaves, and he announced that he was on his way to the upper Mandai river to get a head in order to raise the "pantang". I could not understand how he dared incur the government displeasure, but upon his return he proudly showed me an old and well dried head which he had purchased of the Mandais; and a lower jaw obtained from my old friend, Kumbang, the Kantu chieftain. There was feasting and dancing at Lodang's a few days later, and his child fittingly and appropriately entered Julang Telang, while the

Hantus never dreamed that they had been imposed upon.

From the foregoing remarks you may be led to believe that the men do nothing but cultivate the fields or go on the war path, but such is not the case; they are skillful at working iron, they make boats, mats, and baskets, they build houses and fashion their weapons. The ~~Amik~~ women also have many duties to perform, they card, spin and dye cotton from which they weave artistic blankets and other useful garments. Furthermore there is a lighter side to their life than one would suppose; there are the feasts and the dances, especially after the harvests; they have flutes, and a reed instrument, called the kaludi, on which the youths play the music for the war-dances or the softer strains of the serenade. They have rum with which they are able to obtain a mild carouse; and last but of prime importance- there is tobacco, used by all from the toddling babe to the tottering old crone. Tobacco is the next important item after their food, and it was always useful, as a trading medium, even when salt would be refused. Children begin its use long before they shed their milk teeth,

and I never heard them complain of the injurious effects of the "cigarette habit".

The children were always a source of great interest to us; they have good manners, they are very efficient and useful, even from their infancy, and I have seldom seen one who was impet^rinent, or dishonest. They run errands and assist their elders and early learn to take a man's part in life. In the boat, in the field, or in the duties performed about the house they always do their share without complaint. On our various expeditions one or more boys usually accompanied us and we invariably made them our intimate and trusted friends. They taught us their language, their songs and dances, how to set traps, and cast the fish nets; to wrestle, to spin tops, and to make their intricate figures of cats cradle. Their parents were always kind and affectionate towards them, and I have seen a mother put her babe to sleep with a lulaby, the words of which I could not understand but the meaning of which was unmistakable; and the cradle would swing but a few moments before this time honored spporific would have its effect.

Within the limits of this paper I can only speak in a general way of their many interesting customs. They live for the most part in long house^S₂ or community houses where the roof of thatch or clapboards, perhaps a quarter of a mile in length, shelters an entire tribe, amounting in some instances to one or two thousand people. A partition of rough hewn boards runs lengthwise down the center, separating the floor space into a front verandah, or street and a compartment at the back, which is further subdivided by cross partitions to form the separate rooms for each family. The floors are also of beards, or of bamboos and the houses are raised on posts or piles to afford protection from the dampness, from beasts of prey and to render it a fortress in time of war. In some instances pal^lisades surround the house and outlying granaries, and an entrance is only to be gained through strongly guarded gates. These are the so-called "long houses" of the more powerful tribes; on the other hand such jungle nomads as the Punans build a tiny, miserable hut of leaves. I have said that the chief object of their life was to secure a sufficient

store of rice; almost as important to most of the tribes, is the consulting of omens. They watch and listen for the birds, to see or hear them on this side or that, in order to learn the warnings of the Spirits, and thus they avert evil or secure happiness. Every act of life, every natural or unnatural phenomenon is under the control of the unknown Spirits, and they send warnings to the natives by various messengers; chief among these are birds of various kinds; also spiders, snakes, lizards, the barking deer, the falling tree are all signals; and every expedition, be it if peace or war is prefaced by ceremonies in which the omens are consulted. Each field that is cleared, each house that is built requires that the omens be consulted for fear of offending the spirits that preside over the field and the home. The new born child is ushered into life with mysterious ceremonies, the old man leaves it with appropriate rites, and this constant fear and vigilance adds a bitter drop to every cup they drink.

Yet the natives are not without their ideas of a "Here-after". They too have a river Styx, a Purgatory or place of

waiting, and a final "haven of rest", where those who have gone before await the coming of their kindred and friends.

In every region there is one hill or mountain, conspicuous by reason of its isolation, its height or its peculiar conformity, whereon the departing spirit rests before taking its final flight to the sky or the true and final resting place of all Bornean souls. This detention may be for various reasons, but in the old days, a disembodied spirit often waited on the mountain peak until its family or its friends could take a head from the enemy in order that it might have a slave to fittingly accompany it when it met its "Fathers".

The following note is quoted from my journal to give you an idea of their popular belief in regard to the departing Spirits. "In the valley of the Barito river half way up the *Teweh* tributary, stands the "Mountain of Moss", Gunong Lumut. Here, after the body has ceased to be the home of the soul, reside the souls of the Tunjungs and many other tribes living in the Mahakkam and Barito river regions. When the messenger of death, Taman Rikung, comes to claim the soul, ^{or} ~~K~~ Kalalungan,

and conduct it to ^aTaman Kuring, who dwells on Gunong Lumut, the friends of the deceased put his body in a coffin hollowed from a tree trunk, close it with a lid, seal it with damar gum and place it in the living room of the house, where it may remain for two or three years until a good harvest is secured. Then a great festival is held, the friends are called together, and feasting and drinking ensue for three days and nights. The body is then consigned to the ground and thus peacefully the soul is freed from Taman Kuring and goes to the abode of perfect peace, Teluan Tankeh Langit, which is in the sky. When Taman Rikung leads the soul towards Gunong Lumut he comes at length to the Rayah river (the ~~river~~ river Styx of all the Bornean tribes) over which is placed the usual log - Batang Katu- but the log has this peculiarity, it is not quite long enough to span the stream from bank to bank, and as the soul and its conductor reach the bank the log glides up to them and the soul (of the deserving one) steps on this log and is ferried across in safety to the opposite shore. If, however,

the soul of a wicked person approaches, the discerning log suddenly slips away as he steps upon it, thus precipitating him into the waters where dwell the fiends, typified by huge fish, called "Unkong Sulung Kowang", which devour him and he dies a second, and final death from which there is no resurrection. I asked one man what constituted a crime so ^{heinous} ~~heinous~~ as to cause a soul to be cast to the devouring fish, and his prompt reply was, "any man who refused to get married"; nor could I get him to cite another cause ~~as~~ wicked.

Whence came the people of Borneo has never been definitely determined. The various immigrations have left no enduring data by which the student of anthropology can ascertain to which of the many kindred people of the Malay Archipelago the several tribes belong. They have no written language, they carve no hieroglyphics on stone, and their speech changes with each locality, or each successive tribal movement; so that philology also can aid us but very little in our study of the origin of these people. No one of these tribes can be taken as

a type; nor on the other hand can you find sufficient differences to justify the belief that there is one separate race among all this great number of tribes, although each bears a tribal name and boasts a tribal individuality.

I cannot here mention all the tribes, even by name; let me speak of a few of them with whom we are more or less familiar:....The Bukits and Punans are jungle nomads, the least civilized and most timid of all the tribes, living in small leaf huts in the central hills, subsisting on jungle produce and ^{rarely} ~~never~~ if ever tilling the soil. The Kyans and Kenyahs live in the upper waters of the principal rivers; they build good houses, they travel far in search of jungle produce, they are strong in numbers and are formidable in war. The Bahaus, the Pengs, the Long Wais, and a host of others belong to this same group, as do the Trings who are said to be cannibals; and the Tamans who are the metal workers for many of the other tribes. They all cultivate the hill varieties of rice, and when their crops fail they can usually find sago and other

foods in the jungle. The Tunjungs, the Bentians and kindred tribes living near the sea coast, have been subject to the Sultan of Kotei so many years that they lack the wealth, the spirit and the independence of the hill tribes. Their houses, their boats, their weapons, their customs and their language all testify to their subjugation. We found the Tunjungs a tribe that had especially suffered from the suzerainty -- and the taxation[^] of the Sultan, who, in return, had not been able to protect them from their enemies; and the contrast between all the tribes living under his jurisdiction and the more independent and warlike tribes of the hill country was very easily noted. As a general rule each tribe, or even a sub-tribe may have its chief or rajah, who calls the older men of the tribe to counsel with him, and his rulings are generally decisive. This office is more or less hereditary, consequently they have class distinctions, and there ~~is~~ the ruling class, the freedman and the slave. The slaves, taken captive in the

various raids and war expeditions, or the descendants of those previously so taken, do not suffer all the hardships that the word "slave" conveys to our mind. Among a savage people where the struggle for existence is hard, each man's labor is of great importance, and in Borneo, a slave does not fall so far below the estate of his master as he would in a more civilized country. On account of the constant strife, the epidemics and an occasional famine some of the tribes are gradually disappearing. We visited one house where but a few weeks before our visit, an epidemic of small pox had taken 75 out of a house of 155 people, and on more than one occasion we have met the last man of his tribe. Such tribes as the Kyans seem to hold their own and the Kantus and the Ibans are slowly increasing, but it would be idle to prophecy for the future.