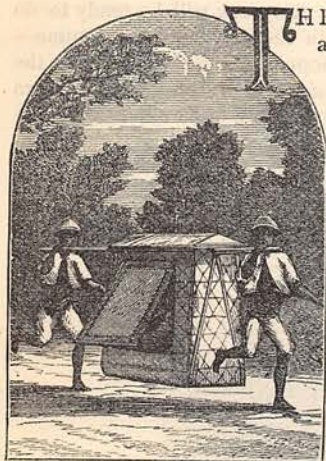


SOCIAL LIFE IN JAVA.

BY A LATE LADY RESIDENT.



THREE years' residence among a foreign people as one of themselves—and such has been my privilege—gives one decided and ample opportunities of learning the many differences that exist between that people's manners and customs and one's own. And as the study of one's neighbours "from life" is at all times instructive, and often entertaining, I hope that the

readers of this paper may glean either profit or pleasure from my notes taken among the Dutch in the best of their colonies.

As every one knows, the towns of Batavia, Soerabaia, and Samarang are the largest and most important in Java, and life in them differs as totally from existence in the smaller towns and capitals of presidencies inland and on the coast as life in London differs from life in the provinces. In each of these three places the number of Europeans and half-caste inhabitants is large enough to form circles of society, and permits even of choice of acquaintance, while in the smaller towns—some like villages—two or three families often comprise the white population. The want of congenial fellowship, and the wearying monotony of the days in these far-away settlements, are in many cases counterbalanced by the benefits arising from a good climate, cheap servants, articles of food at less rates, and, in a word, the various economies to be made by not visiting, neither receiving. Many a Dutch official with but a middling salary, and the ordinary family of five or six olive-branches proverbially said to accompany small means—very likely, too, a couple of them at expensive schools in Holland—is thankful to find himself placed away high on the hills, where he and his offspring can live free and unfettered, relieved from the dear bonds that frequently attend social etiquette. Batavia, the chief town of Dutch India, and the seat of its government, is considered by the colonists to be, although the most expensive, the most pleasant place to live in. The fact of the governor having his palace there, and entertaining a little during his short monthly visit to it, tends to keep things more lively at Batavia than anywhere else in the island.

Suburban Batavia or Weltevreden is possessed of a large square called the Koningsplein, and round this commodious and sought-after houses are built, each in its own compound, but often at no great distance

from its neighbour. These dwellings are sometimes floored entirely with marble, but have more often the three principal rooms laid with that now expensive material. Small houses are generally altogether minus the refreshing substitute for matting, the absence or presence of which makes a slight difference in the rent. Rent varies according to the situation and size of a house. Families living at Koningsplein pay 300 to 400 guildens a month (£350 to £400 a year) for a good-sized house, and have heavy taxes in addition. The further one goes from the clubs, the stations, and the few shops, the cheaper rents become; but even at great distances, and for small houses, the prices demanded make no slight diminution in the pockets of those who pay them. Up-country, in small places, the prices charged for rent and lodging cannot be called moderate. Punkahs are unknown in a Dutch Batavian house, being considered as a rule disagreeable things, inducing headaches and colds in the head; in some instances they have even been charged with giving a propensity to nausea! Gas is in all houses within a certain radius, but is a much dearer method of lighting than by the petroleum lamps used elsewhere. Dutch ladies are world-renowned for being good housewives, and Holland's daughters in Java certainly support the reputation well, notwithstanding that the difficulties of guiding an establishment there are increased by its having to be done in a strange language. For the conquered do not use the conqueror's language, but *vice versa*, and Malay is the medium of intercourse between natives and Europeans. Living cannot be considered cheap either in Batavia, and most likely the effects of the late cattle plague, with the very lately added high rates of taxation, will not conduce to its becoming less expensive. Meat not many months ago was 1 gulden (1s. 8d.) per lb., sometimes dearer, and difficult to procure at any price. Poultry forms a staple article of daily fare, and is very often the staff of deliverance on which a Dutch housewife leans in cases of unexpected guests, &c. There are so many itinerant vendors of fruit, fowls, eggs, fuel—in fact all the minor requirements of a household—that most ladies find the manner of purchasing these articles at their doors, although a troublesome one, most economical and profitable. Every luxury for table use is obtainable in the European and Chinese stores in Batavia. The prices of all these domestic commodities, even after the usual amount of bargaining and beating down, are higher than those paid for the same things in British India.

Early rising is as general a habit in Batavia as in most other hot climates, but morning walks or rides are not indulged in by many. On rising you take your cup of nice *café au lait*. Breakfast is served at half-past seven, and as the Dutch are both simple and frugal, the table is not spread with the many needless hot dishes of its English prototype. Slices of bread-and-

butter, otherwise *boterhammen*, with perhaps an egg or some radishes, or a sardine, a piece of cheese, a slice of cake, or raw smoked ham, or jam—two or three from the list will be all that constitute the repast. At mid-day appears the truly Javanese meal, the *rijst tafel*, or rice table, considered by numerous dwellers in Java the meal of the day. From its name one can easily infer that the rice forms one of its component parts, and so it does, its very literal foundation, for you begin by helping yourself liberally with it, and then continue by placing a little from every dish handed round on the top of your supply. That done, you mix the contents of your plate well together, and proceed with your meal. Meat, fish, game, poultry, vegetables, pickles, curry, sauces, *sambals*, ground red chillies, chutneys, all come to the front to serve the rice table,

family is a thoroughly enjoyable time. All its representatives assemble for the cup that cheers, and laughter and fun, with "chaff" and criticism, make the company, from which the children are not excluded, a gay one.

Shortly after six p.m. every one will be ready to do their respective parts in the evening's programme—some drive and go shopping, some walk, while the elders will pay their *devoirs* to society and return visits, for, following the practical system, visiting hours are not in the heat of the day, but from six till half-past seven p.m. for formal calls, and after dinner, from about nine till eleven—sometimes twelve—for the more friendly informal ones. Not unfrequently ladies call on each other during the morning hours in *robe-de-chambre* or *Sarong and Kabya*; but these are visits



MARKET-PLACE IN JAVA.

and are eaten in one conglomerate mass; yet, however rash the assertion may seem, and however unappetising my description may read, I am certain that an English person would not be long resident in a Dutch interior in Java before appreciating the meal. The practical Dutch say that when you are in Rome you must do as the Romans do, or in other words, when in Java you must be to a certain extent Javanese in your habits; for surely, they argue, the natives know best when to rest, what to eat, and how to clothe themselves for their climate, and ought they not to be copied a little? Thus, after *rijst tafel*, where and when practicable, there is a general exodus by the members of the household to their respective apartments, there to remain until the rays of the afternoon sun begin to decline—happy visitors to the land of Nod, or else refreshing themselves quietly with a "read" in a long chair. The always enjoyable bath, an hour's work or study, passes the time until five o'clock, when, however busy the lady of the house may have been during the day, she appears to do the honours of the tea-table. On holidays, tea-hour in a large

of great intimacy—or are supposed to be such—and are more in vogue among Dutch-Indian ladies than the Dutch ladies. First visits with the Dutch abroad—and at home as well, I believe—are matters of more importance and are surrounded with more etiquette than is usual with us. Most of us are aware that in our English colonies it is the new-comers who call on the first settled, or these call on the new-comers, just as the custom of the place exacts; and bachelors can leave cards at any house they please, taking their chance of finding its mistress "at home" or otherwise. In Batavia the last-comers call on the families already settled there whom they may wish to know, but before going to their houses *in propria persona* they must ask permission to be received. A young man, and an old one too, can never visit a house—for the first time only, be it always understood—without either waiting to ask permission to do so from the head of a family or being introduced to the lady of it, and then requesting her to do him the honour to receive him, &c. This is only a form, for permission is invariably granted politely, and though it is a very disagreeable one from

an English point of view, it has its advantages, as one soon learns on hearing its pros and cons from a Dutch person. There can hardly be a nation more observant of society's polite forms than the Dutch, and though chary of having anything to do with strangers unless properly introduced, they are then hospitable to a lavish degree both to them, and among themselves. No house is without its *logeer kamer*—guest-room; no trouble too great to take for the inmates of it. They may not be particular friends, hardly more than acquaintances, or perhaps new arrivals in Java, with a note from a mutual friend, and otherwise unknown to their host and hostess. No matter; while with them they are made so "at home," treated so right royally, that on leaving they come to the conclusion that they are sorry to go.

Visiting and receiving over, dinner-time comes. This meal is served in Continental style, and cooked in as French a manner as a good Malay cook, under the leadership of a lady knowing all about it, can do it. Cocoa-nut oil is liberally used in the preparation of numerous dishes, as butter is too expensive for all cooking purposes. Some things I noticed that can be mentioned here. Never do the host and hostess take the top and bottom of the table. The latter assumes the place sacred to the father of an English family, the former sitting at the side. I, however, saw this arrangement exactly reversed in one or two households. Never have I seen salt-spoons or fish-knives on a Dutch Batavian table. One helps oneself to salt with the point of one's knife. Finger-glasses are not brought on at dessert, but are before you all dinner-time. A dinner party is neither a stiff nor a solemn affair (though I have been at one that was rather silent), and I only found it differ from the every-day meal in there being a finer display of flowers on the table, a greater number of dishes (far too many), and in our having escorts to and from the dining-room. The ladies were not in "dinner-dress," but wore comfortable visiting or driving toilette; gentlemen, their cool white suits. The host did not ask particular male guests to lead in certain ladies. He himself walked away with the oldest friend, perhaps, or chief lady guest, and the gentleman who thought himself entitled to do so took the hostess. The rest followed as they thought proper. At table our places were indicated by cards on our plates, and care was shown by the hostess in placing sympathising partners together. The married guests occupied seats near the host and hostess at one end of the table, and the other was devoted to bachelors and maidens.

Concerts are of frequent occurrence, and some are good, and others not worth the trouble of attending. Music, on the whole, receives its due amount of homage from society in Batavia. A musical club, called the "Aurora Toonkunst," is in existence, under able leadership, and nearly all the amateur musicians of the place, besides the professionals, are members of it. One remarks that mostly all the vocal music is in German, maybe for the reason that the Dutch in general do not consider their own a musical language. Whenever the *Staf-Musiek*, comprising an excellent band of musicians, plays, a concourse of people and carriages is sure to be seen. Chairs are placed in the club gardens, and many persons—ladies, too—go there to pass a social hour, listening to the music and conversing with their friends. Theatrical performances, either public or amateur, are rare. Travelling companies of actors sometimes visit the principal towns of the island, but they are never very talented. The desire for change causes them, however, to receive a certain amount of patronage from the going-out Batavians. Out-door games—lawn tennis, croquet, archery, cricket—are not countenanced or patronised in Batavia. Why not, I never could understand.

Birthdays are noticed by one's friends (and acquaintances who know the date) sending cards of congratulation, and the intimates presenting bouquets to the owner of the anniversary, and sometimes presents as well. For these days—and little and big are never allowed to pass unobserved in a family circle—loving hands prepare gifts in secret, and the parents meditate on some little treat to make the days red-letter ones. One of the favourite amusements, or rather occupations, in Java is reading. Every family belongs to one or more reading societies, supplied with the latest publications of Holland, England, France, and Germany. The illustrated papers and magazines of each of these countries form part of the library, and are eagerly discussed.

Even after the many words I have written I find I have left out many things on which I could have further enlarged. But enough now. Life among the Dutch in Java was happy, pleasant; and grateful, kindly memories of individuals as well as of the nation prompt these lines. Many a "globe trotter" can join me in paying a tribute of praise to Dutch hospitality—in admiration for the whole character of the people, from whom well-bred politeness, ay, even friendly kindness to English strangers, is no uncommon thing.



A JAVANESE RESTAURANT.