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SIAM—LAND OF FREE MEN

By
H. G. DEIGNAN

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1. Map of Siam

[Illustration: FIG. 1.—Map of Siam.]

SIAM—LAND OF FREE MEN

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(WITH 8 PLATES)

From the earliest times the great peninsula which lies between India and China has been peculiarly subject to foreign intrusion. Successive waves of Mongolian humanity have broken over it from the north, Dravidians from India have colonised it, Buddhist missions from Ceylon have penetrated it, and buccaneers from the islands in the south have invaded it. Race has fought against race, tribe against tribe, and clan against clan. Predominant powers have arisen and declined. Civilisations have grown up, flourished and faded. And thus out of many and diverse elements a group of nations have been evolved, the individuals of which, Môn, Kambodian, Annamese, Burmese, Shan, Lao, Siamese and

Malay, fundamentally much alike, but differing in many externals, have striven during centuries for mastery over each other, and incidentally over the countless minor tribes and clans maintaining a precarious existence in their midst. Into this mêlée of warring factions a new element intruded in the sixteenth century A. D. in the shape of European enterprise. Portuguese, Dutch, French and English all came and took part in the struggle, pushing and jostling with the best, until the two last, having come face to face, agreed to a cessation of strife and to a division of the disputed interests amongst the survivors. Of these there were but three, the French, the English, and the Siamese, and therefore Further India now finds herself divided, as was once all Gaul, into three parts. To the east lies the territory of French Indo-China, embracing the Annamese and Kambodian nations and a large section of the Lao; in the west the British Empire has absorbed the Môn, the Burmese and the Shans; while, wedged between and occupying the lower middle part of the subcontinent, with the isolated region of British Malaya on its extreme south border, lies the kingdom of Siam, situated between 4° 20' and 20° 15' N. latitude, and between 96° 30' and 106° E. longitude.[1]

So wrote Graham at a period when the Siamese held sway over a territory of more than 200,000 square miles or an area equivalent to the combined areas of the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and almost half of Ohio. It must not be supposed, however, that the Thai[2] had permanently resigned themselves to a continuation of this political division of the peninsula. Rich provinces to which they had more or less cogent claims, based on facts of history or ethnography, lay under foreign rule and, with the rise of world-wide nationalism in the 1920's and 1930's a lively irredentism came into flower. This irredentism and its accompanying nationalistic fervor have colored the policies of the Thai Government during the decade just passed and serve to explain many political actions which are otherwise puzzling to the western world.

[1] Graham, W. A., Siam, vol. 1, pp. 1-2, London, 1924.

[2] Pronunciation near English "tie."

GEOGRAPHY

Whatever more or less final rectifications of frontiers result from the current war, the land of the Thai will still, for general purposes, fall into four geographic divisions of major importance: Northern, Central, Eastern, and Peninsular.

Northern Thailand, lying between the Salwin and the Me Khong, two of the world's most majestic rivers, is, for the most part, a country of roughly parallel ranges and valleys running north and south. At the heads of the flat-floored valleys, which vary in elevations above sea level from 800 feet in the southeast to 1,200 feet in the northwest, arise important streams, the Me Nan, the Me Yom, the Me Wang, and the Me Ping, which, falling through narrow defiles to debouch in the low land of Central Siam, eventually there conflow to form the Me Nam Chao Phraya, the chief artery of that division. On the alluvia of these streams, as might be expected in a country whose civilization was originally based upon riziculture, live the great bulk of the northern Thai or Lao, in a setting of rich fields and orchards. The ranges similarly rise, southeast to northwest, from low, rounded hills to imposing peaks, many of which exceed an altitude of 5,000 feet and two of which achieve more than 8,000 feet. These mountains, rising abruptly from the valley floors and, on the whole, densely forested, are scarcely inhabited by man except for scattered groups of seminomadic hill tribes, which exist there by hunting and a primitive agriculture. The northernmost province, Chiengrai, is separated from the sister provinces by a mountain wall and belongs wholly to the Me Khong drainage; it is largely a region of marshes and grassy savannas.

Central Siam, the heart of Thailand, is the vast alluvial plain of the Chao Phraya and may be described as 55,000 square miles of almost unbrokenly monotonous scenery. The level of the land is but little higher than that of the sea and, during the dry season, tidal influence is plainly evident as much as 50 miles from the river's mouth. Alluvial deposits, brought in the season of floods from the northern hills, are, however, raising this level at an astonishing rate; geological evidence shows that within comparatively recent times a great part of the plain was covered by the sea and even now the northern shores of the Gulf of Siam, at the mouth of the Chao Phraya, are advancing seaward at a rate of almost a foot a year. Its rich soil, its abundance of watercourses, both natural and artificial, and its comparatively dense population combine to make it one of the most eminently suitable areas of the world for the production of fine rice.

As Central Siam is the heart of the Kingdom, the royal city of Bangkok or Krungthep is the very core of that heart. Situated on the banks of the Chao Phraya, some 20 miles from its mouth, this metropolis, whose history goes back not earlier than the mid-eighteenth century A.D., is the center for scholarship and the arts, the filter through which pass all goods and ideas received by the interior from the outside world, and the nucleus of one of the most highly centralized of national governments. Its citizenry of some 800,000 represents no less than 5 percent of the total population of the country.

Eastern Thailand is a huge, shallow, elevated basin, tilted toward the east, so that while its western rim stands 1,000 feet above the sea, its eastern rim is formed by low hills. The plateau is watered by the system of the Me Nam Mun, a tributary of the Me Khong. A poverty-ridden country of unproductive soil and adverse climatic conditions, it supports indifferently well a comparatively limited population.

Peninsular Siam is the narrow, northern two-thirds of the Malay Peninsula, sharply divided longitudinally by a mountain chain which passes down its whole length. It is a country rich in forests, cattle, fisheries, mines, and agriculture, and possessed of great natural beauty in the countless islets off its shores, its beaches lined with palms and casuarinas, and the verdure of its mountain-backed landscapes. Most of the developed natural wealth of the Kingdom is found in this portion, which has fine systems of highways and railroads.

The whole of Siam lies between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator and is subject to the typical monsoonal climate of southeastern Asia, by which the prevailing winds, from the latter part of April to the middle of October, consistently blow from the southwest and from mid-October to April, from the northeast. In Northern, Central, and Eastern Thailand there are three distinct seasons—the hot weather, the rains, and the cold weather, the first extending from February or March to May, the second from June to October, and the third covering the remaining months of the year. When the northeast winds blow strongly, the cold weather is very marked, but at such times as the seasonal winds fail, the cold weather is scarcely distinguishable from the hot. In Northern Siam, which lies at greatest distance from the sea and possesses greater radiation, the days may be hot even during the cold weather when the night temperatures afford a strong contrast by dropping to as low as 50° F. and on the mountains even lower, although never reaching freezing temperatures. The basin of Eastern Siam, with its thin vegetation and cut off from cooling breezes by its surrounding rim, is subject to terrific heats during the day and, during the winter, very low temperatures at night. The central plain, outside of Bangkok, is pleasantly cooled during the hottest season by the continuous sea winds, night and day; in Bangkok, however, perhaps owing to houses of masonry in place of thatch and the drainage of surrounding marshes, the climate is not only appallingly hot but actually becoming perceptibly more so year by year. Peninsular Siam has the mildest and most equable climate, the greatest annual rainfall, and only two noticeable seasons—the hot weather from February to August and the rains from September to January, with the peak of the wet season coming in December.

Owing to the fact that the political frontiers have little relationship to biogeographical boundaries, the Kingdom possesses a fauna and flora richer than those of most areas of comparable size. The primeval jungles of the western and northern mountains show untrammelled Nature at her tropical best. The slopes are enlaced with countless streams and waterfalls, from roaring torrents to rills which flow only during and after the rains. In the forests of these hills and valleys, huge epiphyte-laden trees, bound together by vines, shelter such animals as the elephant, the tiger, and the gaur, but so dense is the cover that the presence of large game is more often made known by signs than by actual sight, and only the hunter who is willing to work hard and long is likely to shoot a worth-while trophy. More than 1,000 different birds are recorded from the country, while fishes of almost endless variety abound everywhere, from the Gulf to the smallest roadside ditches. The natural vegetation ranges from the most typically tropical plants, such as the mangosteen, to forms of the Temperate Zone, such as pines and violets, on the northwestern mountains. The central plain, where not devoted to rice cultivation, shows the characteristic flora and fauna of a marsh and the eastern plateau has an impoverished biota, characterized by a certain number of endemic forms; the Peninsula, however, like the west and north, bears great forests rich in species of animals and plants.

PEOPLES

Archeology can still tell us little of the first human occupants of Siam. The earliest evidence of man's existence here is furnished by celts, uncovered in the Peninsula and on the eastern plateau, which are supposed to date from the later Neolithic period; geology, however, gives us no reason to conclude that the makers of these implements were not preceded by other races.

[Illustration: 1. The rivers fall from the northern plateaus to the central plain through narrow defiles.]

[Illustration: 2. Ancient wall at Chiengmai. The city walls are preserved as picturesque ruins.]

[Illustration: 1. An international incident was caused by the European alpinist who first scaled the monolith to plant his nation's flag upon it.]

[Illustration: 2. Boats must be pulled upstream through the rapids by ropes.]

[Illustration: 1. The valuable gum resin, Bengal kino, is yielded by the "mai kwao" (*Butea frondosa*).]

[Illustration: 2. Young rice plants are transplanted from a seedbed to the flooded fields.]

[Illustration: 1. At the end of the rains, fish may be captured from the roadsides.]

[Illustration: 2. Cows and water buffaloes are treated as family pets.]

Among the mountains of the Malay Peninsula exist to this day small groups of dwarf, black-skinned, kinky-haired people, different from all other races of the country but closely related to the natives of the Andaman Islands and the Negritos of the Philippines; it has been surmised that these Ngo (Semang) are the dwindling remnant of a once numerous population, successors to (and possibly descendants of) the Neolithic men.

Following the Ngo and sometime during the past few millennia, it is believed that there came successive waves of a people of Mongolian origin who, making their way down the rivers, drove the primitive Negritos into the hills and settled in their place. Now conveniently known as the Mon-Annam family, their descendants are the Mon (Peguans), the Cambodians, and the Annamese, as well as numerous semibarbarous lesser tribes which persist among the mountains of the subcontinent.

Probably between two and three thousand years ago and certainly after the arrival of the Mon-Annam immigrants, another great population wave, known as the Tibeto-Burman family, rolled southward over Indo-China but chiefly descended the valley of the Irrawaddy (where they have given rise to the modern Burmese), thus scarcely entering Siam at all. Only in comparatively recent times, driven from their former homes by political disturbances, have tribes of this stock (Yao, Meo, etc.) migrated into Thailand and the territories to the east, where they are constantly being joined by others of their blood brothers from farther north.

While the Mon and the Khmer (Cambodians) were still spreading over the southern parts of Indo-China and before they had begun, under the influence of colonists from India, to emerge from a condition of savagery, the tribes which they had left behind them at different points during their southward movement were already being driven back into the mountains and brought into a state of partial subjugation by the members of a third great family of migrants from the north. These were the people now known as Lao-Tai, who, sending out bands from their ancient seat in the valley of the Yangtze, had already, 2,500 years ago, established a powerful state on the banks of the Me Khong in the neighborhood of the modern Wieng Chan (Vientiane).

The Lao-Tai of the Yangtze Valley were evidently very numerous, for not only did they thus early establish kingdoms far from home but also became a power in their own land and for some time bid strongly for the mastery of all China. For centuries they waged successful wars on all their neighbors, but their strong propensity for wandering weakened their state and finally caused its disintegration. The Chinese attacked them repeatedly, each attack producing a fresh exodus until, during the thirteenth century A.D., the Emperor Kublai Khan dealt them a final blow which crushed their power and scattered them in all directions. Fugitives entered Assam, where earlier emigrants had already settled, and became the dominant power in that country; others invaded Burma, where for two centuries a Lao-Tai (Shan) dynasty occupied the throne; while down the Salwin and Me Khong Valleys came band after band of exiles who mingled with their cousins already established in those valleys and, in time fusing with the Mon and the Khmer, produced the race which, since the founding of the city of Ayuthia, has been dominant in Siam.

The principal divisions of the Lao-Tai family now living within the borders of Siam are the Thai ("free men") or Siamese proper; the Lao, who occupy the former seats of those tribes of their own stock that afterward developed into the Thai; and the Shans, a later intrusion of distant cousins, descended from the Lao-Tai tribes that settled in the more eastern districts of Burma in the twelfth century and earlier.

PREHISTORY

The history of Siam prior to the fourteenth century A.D. is chiefly known from a hodgepodge of disconnected stories and fragments known as the "Pongsawadon Mu'ang Nu'a" ("Annals of the North Country"), compiled at different periods from such of the official records of various cities and kingdoms as had escaped the destruction which at intervals overtook the communities to which they referred. With the omission of the numerous supernatural happenings there recorded and comparative study of the chronicles of neighboring countries, scholars have been able to draw a rough picture of the condition of Siam at the dawn of historical time.

Their researches show a country inhabited by primitive people of Mon-Khmer stock among whom had settled groups of their more civilized cousins from Cambodia, who had brought with them the religion and customs acquired by contact with colonists from India. These communities grew from villages into cities and at the same time sent out offshoots in all directions, which in time became the capitals of small states, the chiefs of which constantly made war on each other and against the Lao-Tai tribes at their borders and now and again rose to sufficient strength to repudiate the vague suzerainty claimed over them all by the empire of Cambodia.

Contemporary records of the period subsequent to the fourteenth century A.D. are easily available. The most important is the "Pongsawadon Krung Kao" ("Annals of the Old Capital" or "Annals of Ayuthia"), which contains a complete and fairly accurate account, compiled in successive reigns, of the history of the country from A.D. 1349 to 1765. The seventeenth and later centuries have also seen the production of numerous works, by European travelers and missionaries, which deal wholly or partly with Siam.

KINGDOM OF SUKHOETHAI-SAWANKHALOK

The most ancient Mon-Khmer settlement of which anything definite is known was Sukhothai (located on the river Me Yom some 200 miles north of the site of modern Bangkok), which by 300 B.C. was already a sizable village. At first putting forth no pretensions to the status of kingdom, the community evidently increased rapidly in importance, for some two centuries later the chief, Phraya Thammarat, declared himself King of the district, founded the new capital of Sawankhalok, and appointed one of his sons viceroy of Sukhothai, which itself soon grew into a fortified city. Thereafter, the two towns served alternately as the capital of a country which, as the Kingdom of Sukhothai-Sawankhalok, gradually grew to great wealth and strength.

Its monarchs occupied themselves with the waging of war against the petty chieftains of neighboring states (founded in the same manner and upon the same principles as their own but at somewhat later dates) and, in course of time reducing all of them to vassalage, came to be recognized as rulers of the whole country. The vague overlordship of Cambodia continued for many centuries but with little or no influence upon the destinies of its nominal dependency, which was left to manage itself and its own subordinates as seemed to it best.

At the same time as the various Mon-Khmer states of Siam were struggling to subdue each other, the Lao tribesmen inhabiting the mountainous districts to the north, emboldened by their increasing numbers and constantly raiding the rich villages of the plains, were demanding an ever greater amount of attention and as early as the fifth century A.D., the reduction of the Lao had become almost the main preoccupation of the kings of Sukhothai-Sawankhalok. Expeditions against them were constant, but while they were frequently defeated and large numbers of them carried captive to Sukhothai or Sawankhalok, the intercourse thus brought about served only to strengthen them, since it enabled them to adopt the customs and civilization of the conquerors and then turn the acquired knowledge against their instructors with an ever-growing degree of success.

About A.D. 575, a Lao city, built in imitation of the Khmer capitals, was founded at a spot about 250 miles north of Sawankhalok and given the name of Haribunchai (later corrupted to Lamphunchai and the modern Lamphun). The chief of this town married a princess of the Khmer state of Lopburi and established a dynasty which closely followed the Brahman rites and ceremonies in vogue at Sukhothai. During this time other Lao states arose and the time soon came when the Khmer could no longer hold the Lao in check. During succeeding centuries Lao armies advanced far south into the Mon-Khmer

kingdoms, marital and political alliances between Lao and Khmer royalty became common, and Lao settlements were established in various parts of southern Siam.

Despite wars with rival states to the south and the Lao to the north, the Kingdom of Sukhothai-Sawankhalok prospered greatly and in time attained to a high civilization. The arts were encouraged, the people were well governed, trade was extensive, and friendly relations were maintained with China and other distant countries by frequent exchange of embassies. Envoys from the Emperor of China, who visited Sukhothai in the seventh century A.D., have left records which indicate that the populace were chiefly engaged in the cultivation of rice and the manufacture of sugar and that in manners and customs they closely resembled the modern inhabitants of Siam. The style of architecture, remains of which still survive, followed, in somewhat degenerated form, that seen in the ruins of Angkor and other Cambodian cities.

During the reign of the hero-King Rama Khamheng (Phra Ruang) the country reached the zenith of its greatness and when he died, about A.D. 1090, he left to his heir an empire which embraced much of the Lao states to the north and all of the more southern Khmer kingdoms of Siam. This heritage, however, was fated to endure but a short time. During the eleventh century the Khmer King of Lopburi and the Lao King of Lamphun, both vassals of Phra Ruang, had been intermittently at war with each other without interference from the suzerain; toward the end of the century Lopburi was finally overcome and, declaring itself subordinate to Lamphun, was forced to admit large numbers of Lao to settle within its borders. Soon after Phra Ruang's death, a great Lao army composed of the warriors of several allied states and led by a chief known as Suthammarat, invaded Sukhothai-Sawankhalok itself, defeated its armies, overran its lands to the south, reduced the cities, and founded the capital of Pitsanulok, southwest of Sukhothai and in the heart of the Khmer Kingdom. Thereafter, although the rulers of Sukhothai-Sawankhalok continued for some time to maintain regal state, they were never again to hold a paramount position and were, in fact, to become mere vassals of the ancient enemy until eventually, some four centuries subsequent to the foundation of Pitsanulok, they were to be no more than provincial governors representative of the kings of Ayuthia.

Suthammarat, an admirer of the Khmer, in setting up his throne in the conquered kingdom, imitated as closely as possible the ways of Sukhothai and, by marrying a lady of the country, set an example for his following which gave great impetus to that fusion of Lao and Khmer which, already begun in Lopburi, was soon to result in the evolution of the Thai (Siamese) race.

The early thirteenth century saw the beginning of the last and greatest influx of Lao into the south of Siam. The suppression of the Lao-Tai undertaken in southwestern China, culminating in the decisive victories of the Emperor Kublai Khan, drove many thousands of these people down into the mountainous regions of northern Siam, where the newcomers upset the balance of power among their predecessors and caused the disruption of several of their states. As a result, many impoverished petty chieftains of ancient lineage gathered their people together and set off down the rivers to seek new fortunes in the kingdoms to the south. During the following century, mingling with the Khmer and the Lao-Khmer and acquiring great strength of numbers, the Lao wrested control from the original inhabitants and established capitals of their own, one of which, Supanburi, was in time to become dominant over all the rest. When, at the middle of the fourteenth century, Phra Chao Uthong, King of Supanburi, fleeing from a pestilence, marched westward to found a new capital, Nong Sano, now the seat of the weak successors of the great Suthammarat, fell into his hands almost without a struggle, its King fled to Cambodia, and Uthong erected near the fallen city the new city of Maha Nakhon Si Ayuthaya (Ayuthia), which was destined to become famous throughout the world as the capital of one of the greatest kingdoms in the history of Farther India.

KINGDOM OF AYUTHIA

Phra Chao Uthong (under the name of Phra Ramathibodi) became King at Ayuthia in A.D. 1350 and thereafter was fully occupied in bringing the outlying states and provinces into line, in organizing his government, and in setting up a system of law, parts of which continue in use to the present time. Before his death in 1369, he had brought together the whole of the components of the Sukhothai-Sawankhalok Kingdom and had welded them so closely together that, when Cambodia, annoyed by the independent attitude of what was theoretically its vassal, sent an army to reassert its rights of suzerainty, the united Siamese not only defeated the enemy but pursued him well within the confines of his own country.

Under Ramathibodi's successors the Kingdom continued to prosper. During the next two centuries, Buddhism definitely succeeded Brahmanism as the popular religion throughout the country and great treasure was expended in beautifying the cities by the erection of graceful temples and reliquaries in the adapted Cambodian style which persists in Siam to this day.

About A.D. 1527, the King of Pegu, enraged by the exploits of Siamese marauders in his frontier province of Tavoy, collected an army at Moulmein and sent it into Siam under the leadership of the heir apparent, Bureng Naung. Defeating the Siamese near Supanburi, the Peguan prince advanced to the walls of Ayuthia itself; so stout was the resistance, however, and so prolonged the siege that his supply system broke down and he was forced to return to his own country, fighting rear-guard actions and losing heavily all the way. After 3 years, Bureng Naung, now King, taking the assumption by the King of Siam of the title "Lord of the White Elephants" as a *casus belli*, again attacked Siam with a great army and once more besieged the capital. This time, to save the city, the "Lord of the White Elephants" was compelled to negotiate and to turn over several of the animals in question to the invader, who then retired. Only a few years later, however, the Siamese King repudiated Peguan suzerainty; Bureng Naung returned, by treachery gained admission to the city, sacked and partially destroyed it, and sent the King, with many of his followers, in chains to Pegu. Leaving the Siamese governor of Pitsanulok as his viceroy in Ayuthia, Bureng Naung pressed on to subdue other cities but was scarcely out of sight when a Cambodian army, burning to avenge recent defeats and to reestablish ancient rights, appeared to begin a new siege of Ayuthia; this enemy was repulsed but not before the unprotected districts around the capital had been thoroughly looted.

Just now, when, attacked from east and west, her provinces despoiled and her people fugitive or captive, Ayuthia seemed doomed to early extinction, a hero arose to redeem her. This was Phra Naret, a son of Bureng Naung's viceroy, who, appointed by his father governor of Pitsanulok, in his youth saw military service defending his province against robber bands and in the wars of Nanda Bureng, son and successor to Bureng Naung, against the rebellious province of Ava. By his ability bringing upon himself the dislike of the Peguan King, to such a degree that his life was endangered, he revolted (ca. A.D. 1565) and led a Siamese army to sack and pillage Tenasserim and Martaban. Two punitive expeditions sent against him were signally defeated by Naret, who was then crowned King of Siam and at once began to restore Ayuthia and to repopulate it by captives brought from outlying districts which had attempted to cast off their allegiance.

Having established his supremacy at home, Naret inflicted a crushing defeat upon yet another Burmese army sent to subdue him and then, to avenge the humiliations imposed upon his country during her time of weakness, led a strong force against Cambodia; this campaign ended with the destruction of the Cambodian capital and the carrying of the King and many of his people captive to Ayuthia, where the former was executed. Finally, some time about the year 1600, Naret, at the head of a great army, invaded Burma with the object of conquering the whole of that country, but this was not to be: the King met death in one of the early battles and his son and heir, abandoning the enterprise, returned to his own dominions. But within the space of not more than 35 years, Naret had raised Siam from a condition of almost complete ruin to a position of ascendancy over all the neighboring kingdoms and he left to his successors a great empire which was to endure for a period of 175 years.

During this period, Siam was becoming well known to the European merchant adventurers trading in the Orient under the flags of Portugal, Holland, and England. Early in the sixteenth century, the Malay Kingdom of Malacca had been conquered by the Portuguese; individuals of this nation had penetrated to Ayuthia and Pegu and had served in the ranks of the contending armies during the Siam-Burmese wars; Portuguese factories had been established at the various Siamese ports. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Portuguese missionaries arrived at Ayuthia, where they were well received and given land for their churches. About this time also, English and Dutch ships first appeared in Siamese waters and a bitter rivalry soon sprang up among the foreigners, who competed for commercial supremacy and the favor of the King, without which trade could scarcely be carried on at all. This antagonism resulted in endless quarreling and even in desperate battles between the representatives of the rival powers and by 1634 the Dutch had so far prospered that they had built a fortified factory at Amsterdam on the river Chao Phraya, carried on extensive commerce throughout Siam, and monopolized the carrying trade to China and Japan. With the taking of Malacca by the Dutch in 1641, the influence of the Portuguese soon declined, although many individuals continued to live in Siam, where such surnames as da Silva and da Jesus persist to this day in families which no longer show any other trace of European ancestry. The Dutch rapidly succeeded to all the commercial outposts of Portugal in Siam, devoting themselves chiefly to trade and taking little or no interest in internal politics, except insofar as their commercial prospects were affected. The first formal treaty contracted by Siam with any western power was that entered into, in the year 1664, with the representatives of the Dutch East India Company, authorized by the Dutch Republic. Dutch trade with Siam continued until A.D. 1706, when the royal favor was finally lost for good and the Company's agents expelled from

the Kingdom.

In 1659 there arrived at Ayuthia one of the most extraordinary figures in the history of Siam. This was Constantine Phaulcon, the son of a Cephalonian innkeeper, who ran away to sea in an English ship and, eventually making his way to Siam, stayed there to become Chief Minister of the Crown and the trusted adviser of the King, Phra Narai. Under Phaulcon's able guidance the country for a time prospered greatly. Not only were the Portuguese and Dutch merchants, already established, encouraged to extend the scope of their enterprise but the English and French East India Companies were invited to set up factories at the capital. The King himself, in partnership with his First Minister, operated a profitable fleet of merchantmen and became the principal trader of his own country.

About this time it came to be believed in Europe that the whole of the Far East was ripe for conversion to Christianity and a Roman Catholic Mission was organized in France to put this ambitious design into effect. Ayuthia, possessing a cosmopolitan population and strong commercial ties with Japan, China, the Sunda Isles, and India, was considered the best central location for the project and, in A.D. 1662, three French bishops with a staff of priests arrived there to inaugurate the work. These ecclesiastics were favorably received by the King and within a short period the mission had acquired a considerable number of adherents. In order further to strengthen their position, however, they sought and obtained the official support of Louis XIV of France, who exchanged complimentary letters and embassies with the Siamese monarch. Phaulcon, in the confidence of the bishops, was thus brought into correspondence with Colbert, Louis's minister, and before long the French King's interest was centered on more material aspects of Siam than its spiritual welfare. A scheme was set afoot for securing the supremacy of France in the Asiatic kingdom through the agency of the priests, who, apparently believing that, with material support from Louis, they could convert the King himself to Christianity, were not unwilling to do their part. Six French men-of-war and a body of 1,400 soldiers were therefore dispatched to Siam, ostensibly to assist in intimidating the Dutch, who were at the time causing trouble from their fortress of Malacca. The two principal ports of Bangkok and Mergui were garrisoned by a part of these French troops and the King was induced to attach another part of them to his own person. The missionaries then began to exhort the King with all the eloquence at their command but found that his conversion was a more difficult matter than had been expected. Their obstinate insistence with him and Phaulcon's ascendancy over him ended by alarming the Siamese, and when remonstrances against the ever-increasing number of foreigners in the service of the State went disregarded, a conspiracy was formed among high officers of the Court. Phra Narai was driven from the throne, Phaulcon was killed, the European troops were driven from the country, and Siam was saved from becoming the keystone of a great French empire in the Far East.

[Illustration: 1. A primitive type of cart still is used in remote districts. The teak logs shown in the background must be carted or dragged by elephants from the forest to the nearest large stream.]

[Illustration: 2. Elephants are employed to break up a jam of logs at the estacades of a bridge.]

[Illustration: 1. An extensive commerce is carried on between the riverine towns by small boats. The water wheel of bamboo (left) irrigates a garden on the shore.]

[Illustration: 2. The graceful temples of Thailand are adorned with lacquer, gold leaf, and colored glass.]

[Illustration: 1. Ransacked reliquaries dot the jungles of Thailand.]

[Illustration: 2. The high altar of a Buddhist shrine.]

[Illustration: 1. Royalty visits Chiangmai.]

[Illustration: 2. A princely funeral at Chiangmai. White is the color of mourning.]

The Kingdom of Ayuthia continued to prosper during several subsequent reigns marked by friendly relations with European nations, including the French, and a preoccupation with foreign commerce. But, about the year 1759, the Burmese, reunited, after a long period of internal strife, under the martial Alaung Phra, initiated hostilities against the Siamese by an invasion which brought them to the walls of the capital; the Burmese King, however, sickened at the beginning of the siege and died before he could regain his own country. In 1766, under his son, Sin Byu Shin, war was resumed by simultaneous marches on Ayuthia from north and south and the city was again invested. Phra Sucharit, the Siamese ruler, was unfamiliar with warfare but encouraged his people to a spirited resistance, hoping that relief would be afforded by the annual floods, coming in the wake of the rains; the enemy merely patrolled the waters in hundreds of boats and, as they subsided, threw up new earthworks even nearer the walls. In the spring of 1767, Sucharit, disheartened, attempted to treat with them but was rebuffed and when, with the arrival of reinforcements, the Burmese made an assault in force, the weakened city fell to

them and was given over to looting, flames, and slaughter. The King, unattended, escaped in the confusion but was to die of exposure only a few days later.

KINGDOM OF TONBURI

Sin Byu Shin, leaving a viceroy with a small garrison to rule the country, withdrew his army to meet a threatened Chinese invasion of Burma and once again Siam fell into an interregnum of anarchy, with outlying districts setting themselves up as independent while robber bands preyed upon the people. An ex-official named Phraya Taksin, who had deserted his King when Ayuthia seemed likely to fall, gathered about himself a large number of deserters and broken men like himself and, by guile and treachery, soon acquired complete authority in the southeastern provinces, whence, in due time, he appeared before the walls of Ayuthia as a national avenger. Overcoming the garrison and killing the Burmese viceroy, Taksin declared himself King and selected, as the site of his new capital, the village of Tonburi, on the shore of the Chao Phraya opposite the settlement of Bangkok, where a populous city soon came into being. To strengthen his position, however, it was essential that Taksin destroy a legitimate pretender to the throne whose claims had many adherents; this prince had established himself at Khorat and thither the King sent an army with orders to take the city. But in advance of his soldiers he sent secret emissaries who so demoralized the prince's supporters that when the usurper's army appeared at last, the city fell into his hands almost without a struggle and the prince was captured and soon afterward murdered. With this last threat to his power removed, Taksin was able to send out expeditions in all directions and soon made himself undisputed master of the whole country.

The authority of this ruthless man was not to endure long. His appointment of humble relatives to high office offended the nobility, while the popular mind was turned against him by his excesses and by insidious references to his alien ancestry. In 1781, giving out that he was mad, a cabal of his courtiers dethroned him and offered the crown to one of themselves, the son of a secretary to the last kings of Ayuthia. This nobleman, Phraya Chakkri, already popular through his achievements as a royal minister and as a leader of the armies, was readily accepted as King by the people and ascended the throne in A.D. 1782, to found the dynasty which still reigns in Siam.

KINGDOM OF SIAM

Phraya Chakkri (hereafter to be styled as King Rama I) had scarcely assumed his new dignity when Bodaw Phra, King of Burma, attempted a new conquest of Siam. King Rama's military ability was such that the Burmese were finally everywhere defeated and, with the abandonment of Mergui and Tavoy by the Siamese in 1792, the recurrent wars between the two powers may be said to have ended for good. With the foreign danger averted, the King was able to organize his government, the seat of which was transferred from Tonburi to Bangkok, on the left bank of the river, where he constructed a fortified city.

Rama II became involved in war at the beginning of his reign. In 1786, the regent of the now effete Kingdom of Cambodia had formally recognized Siamese suzerainty and had sent the infant King to reside at Bangkok, while he continued to rule the state under Siam's aegis. Annam, to the east, however, made identical claims to supremacy and when, in 1809, the Annamese King attempted to enforce his demands, an army was sent from Bangkok to repel him. The brief campaign ended with Rama's annexation of the Cambodian province of Phratabong, while the rest of the country became a dependency of Annam.

Upon this King's death in 1825, the throne was usurped by one of his sons by a lesser wife, while the legitimate heir, Chao Fa Mongkut, a young man of twenty-one, retired to the safety of the Buddhist monkhood. The reign of Rama III is chiefly notable for Siam's resumption of political relations with the nations of the West. In 1833, a treaty drawn up between Siam and the United States of America represented the first formal tie between this country and any Asiatic power.

Toward the end of the reign, Cambodian politics again caused bad blood between Siam and Annam. A youth named Norodom, a son of the Cambodian King, had some time since been brought to Bangkok

and reared at the Siamese Court. Upon his father's death, he was declared by Siam to be the rightful heir and, supported by a Siamese army, returned to Cambodia to gain the throne and, despite former agreements, to place the country again under Siamese protection.

During his years of retirement, Chao Fa Mongkut, the King's half brother, had assiduously devoted himself to the study of the English language, the sciences, and the manners, customs, and systems of government of foreign lands; at the same time, he missed no opportunity to meet and converse with European travelers. Coming to the throne as Rama IV in 1851, at the age of 47, he brought to his task a remarkable degree of enlightenment, which resulted in throwing the country open to foreign trade and intercourse, in the introduction of such arts as printing and shipbuilding, in the construction of roads and canals, in laying the foundations for systems of education and public health, and in numerous other reforms directed toward increasing the public welfare. His love of learning was indirectly responsible for his death for, visiting a mountain peak to observe an eclipse in 1868, he contracted the illness from which he died in that year.

The program of modernization initiated by King Rama IV was continued and expanded by his son, the great Chulalongkon (Rama V). Among the important reforms instituted during this reign were the abolition of debt slavery, the establishment of law courts, the construction of railways, the spread of education, regulation of the conditions of military service, and radical changes in methods of revenue and rural administration. The appointment of trained officials under organized control in place of ignorant provincial governors and hereditary chieftains welded the loose agglomeration of feudatory dependencies into the modern, homogeneous state.

In the year 1863, Norodom, whom Siam had placed upon the Cambodian throne, made a treaty with France, now master of Annam, by which he accepted French protection; at almost the same time he made an exactly similar compact with Siam. Thus each country found itself responsible for the protection of Cambodia against any possible aggressor, while each was given the sole right of dictating the foreign policy of that state. So absurd a situation could not last and, after 4 years of negotiation, Siam was compelled to yield to the French thesis of their superior rights as successors to the Annamese kings, to abrogate her treaty of 1863, and to abandon all claim to suzerainty over Cambodia.

Soon after Siam's withdrawal from Cambodia, the unofficial advocates of colonialism in France began to advance the idea that certain Siamese provinces east of the river Me Khong, having at one time formed a part of Annam, should be restored to that Kingdom, now a French protectorate. There is no historical basis for this claim, which was at first unsupported even in Paris, but when the colonial party added the argument that the unnavigable Me Khong, as one of the future trade routes of Southwest China, must at all costs be acquired by France, the French Government formally demanded of Bangkok the provinces in question. The Siamese replied by suggesting that the disputed territory be regarded as neutral until such time as the frontier could be properly demarcated and this was agreed upon but merely led to further trouble, each side accusing the other of violating the compact. Siam asked for arbitration, which was declined by the French. When, in 1893, bloody collisions occurred along the border, French gunboats, dispatched from Saigon, ascended the Chao Phraya, despite efforts of the Siamese naval forces to bar the way. In consequence of Siamese resistance, the French greatly increased their demands, now insisting that Siam give up all territory east of the Me Khong (including about half of the rich province of Luang Phrabang, to which no French claim had ever previously been laid). After 10 days of blockade, the Siamese had no choice but to accept a humiliating treaty which, among other concessions, required immediate evacuation of her eastern outposts and the payment of an indemnity; as a guarantee, France established a military occupation of the southeastern province, of Chanthabun, which was to continue long after all the terms had been fulfilled.

Relations between the two countries were far from improved by this episode and, during the following years, abuses in the exercise of French extraterritorial rights were a fertile source of provocation. In fact, despite every effort to avoid unfortunate incidents, the Government of Siam found itself spending all its energies in replying to diplomatic representations and to demands for inquiries, explanations, and reparations.

As the French demands increased in numbers and severity, there was no longer any question that Siam's national survival was at stake. But, in 1896, Great Britain, at last alarmed by France's growing strength in southern Asia and unwilling to have her approach too near the eastern confines of India, intervened. High feelings were aroused in both countries but, after lengthy negotiations, an agreement was concluded in the same year, by which Siam's autonomy was guaranteed that she might serve as a buffer between the rival empires.

Thereafter, relations between France and Siam tended to improve. It was not, however, until 1907, that, in return for yet another "rectification of the boundary," the French agreed to revise their extraterritorial rights and to remove the garrison from Chanthabun. A second convention of the same

year resulted in Siam's restoring to Cambodia the province of Phratabong, which she had held since 1809, and receiving in exchange a part of the territory yielded in 1904 and obtaining a recognition of Siamese jurisdiction over Asiatic French subjects. Altogether, in warding off the European neighbor, Siam had been compelled to sacrifice no less than 90,000 square miles of her eastern lands.

THAILAND

Whether the modern traveler enters Siam by steamer from Hongkong or Singapore or by comfortable Diesel-engined train from the Malay States, his destination is certain to be Bangkok. Here, in bewildering juxtaposition, the old Siam and the new Thailand confront him together on every side. The former is represented in the complicated network of canals, upon which thousands of boat-dwellers pass their lives; in the narrow streets hung with the vertical signboards of the inevitable multitude of Chinese traders; in the throngs of yellow-robed monks that appear at daybreak from hundreds of gaily colored shrines whose spires arise in every direction. The new is seen in the modern boulevards lined with spacious wooden houses set among gardens and orchards; in the motorcars competing for space with bicycle-drawn jinrikishas; in the air-conditioned cinema theaters, where, before World War II, were shown the new pictures shipped by air from California; in the cement and match factories; in the great airport of Don Muang, north of the city, where transports arrived daily from Britain and Australia, from Java and The Netherlands.

Until recently, the inhabitants of towns and villages outside the capital lived a life not greatly different from that of their ancestors: one which revolved around the annual cycle of planting, growing, and the harvest, with religious festivals to break the monotony of living. Poverty, as understood in the industrial Occident, was unknown for, while little actual money was seen by the average family during the course of a year, yet a house could be built of bamboo in a day or two; fruit trees bore around the year; clothing was woven at home and shoes were little worn; virtually everyone owned productive land or was at liberty to clear a tract from the forest which covers much of the thinly populated country; taxes were light and could be paid by a few days' labor on some project of public works.

During the decade just passed the Government has initiated a positive program aimed at raising the standards of living of the common people and especially of the peasants who constitute the great majority. Among the means adopted have been the development of such new sources of gain as the raising of tobacco and cotton on a large scale; the construction of great irrigation projects and the development of sources of electric power; the education of the farmer in livestock breeding and scientific agriculture; the establishment of agencies to enable him to obtain a fair market for his produce; the spread of public-health and medical services in far corners of the provinces. The results of this experiment had not yet become clear when the war interfered to hinder its fulfillment.

The political aspect of the program leaned heavily toward economic nationalism, in an endeavor to counteract the excessive proportion of foreign capital in the country and to encourage more active participation by the Thai in the building-up of their own land. If the means to these laudable ends were perverted, by the paid agents of Japanese propaganda and a handful of powerful men within the Thai Government, to serve the cause of "co-prosperity," it must not therefore be assumed that the misfortunes which have recently befallen them are traceable to any activities and desires on the part of the Thai people themselves.

A lively resistance to the usurpers continues, inside Thailand and through her spokesmen abroad; we may confidently expect that the Thai, with the aid and sympathy of their friends of the United Nations, will at the earliest opportunity rid themselves both of their quislings and their Japanese overlords, again proudly to style themselves "the free men."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIAM: LAND OF FREE MEN ***

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