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THE KINGDOM OF THE YELLOW ROBE

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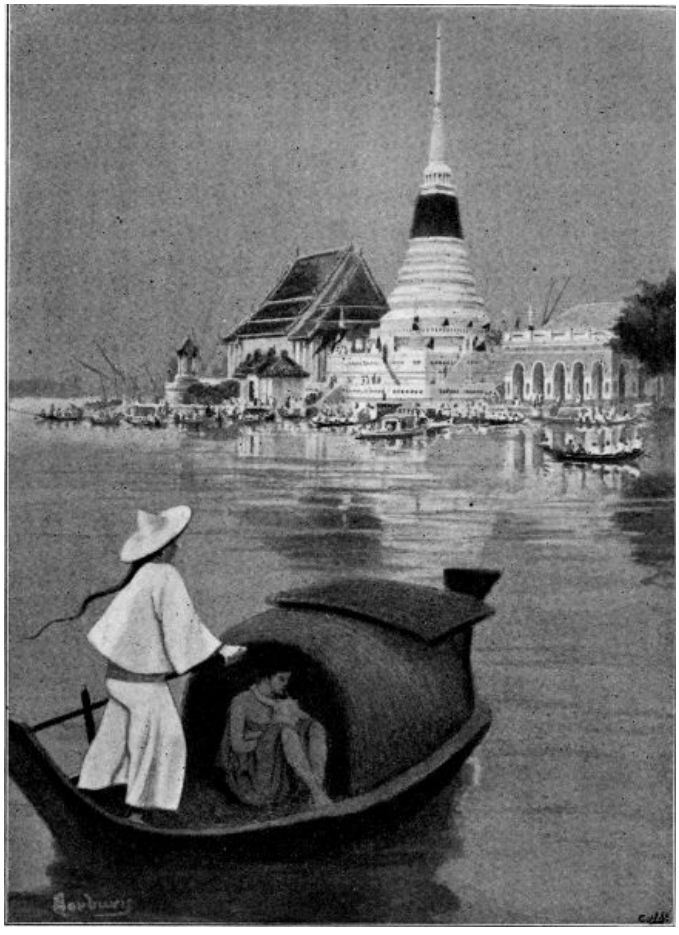
BY ERNEST YOUNG

ILLUSTRATED BY E.A.NORBURY



"THE SHRINE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WATERS."—PAKNAM.

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THE KINGDOM OF THE YELLOW ROBE

BEING SKETCHES OF THE DOMESTIC AND RELIGIOUS RITES AND CEREMONIES OF THE SIAMESE

BY

ERNEST YOUNG

Late of the Education Department, Siam.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. A. NORBURY, R.C.A.

(Late Director of the Royal School of Art, Bangkok, Siam)

And from Photographs by the Author.

WESTMINSTER

ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE & Co

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PREFACE

The following pages are intended to present to the reader an account of the domestic and religious rites and ceremonies of the Siamese. They are the outcome of several years' residence in the Capital of Siam. In order to verify some of my own observations or to amplify some points with regard to which my own knowledge was rather scanty, I have consulted most of the books which in recent years have been published concerning the country of Siam. I am particularly indebted to the works of two writers whose knowledge was both wide and deep; viz., H. Alabaster, whose "Wheel of the Law" deals with Siamese Buddhism; and Captain Gerini, whose various monographs on domestic or religious customs are full of valuable and reliable information concerning their misty origin and meaning. I must also acknowledge my indebtedness to "The Siam Repository" (a weekly paper long since extinct, but whose pages are a treasure-house of information to the enquirer), and to my friend Mr. R. L. Morant for much helpful criticism and advice.

The illustration "Planting out young Rice" is from a sketch in the possession of Mrs. Smith, of Tarrawatta, Beckenham, who has kindly lent it for the purpose of illustrating this book.

The following five illustrations are also from sketches, kindly lent by E. Lloyd Williams, Esq., of James St., Buckingham Gate.

"Offering Rice to the Priests."

"Making Curry."

"Ploughing a Rice-field."

"Collecting ripe Grain."

"Rice Boats coming down the Menam."

E. Y.

Chingford, 1898.

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TO
MY WIFE

THE KINGDOM OF THE YELLOW ROBE.

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CHAPTER I.

STREET SCENES IN THE VENICE OF THE EAST.

Bangkok, the Venice of the East, was not the Capital of Siam during the earlier period of that country's history. Formerly the seat of government was at Ayuthia; but the ancient capital is now a heap of ruined temples and dwellings, an attraction for travellers, but of little importance to the people themselves. At the time when this mouldering city was the home of the Sovereign, a man

of Chinese origin was sent to govern one of the northern provinces of the country. He is known in Siamese history as Phya Tak, and was a man of great administrative ability. When the invading armies of Burmah, in their triumphant march through Siam, reached the neighbourhood of the ancient capital, Phya Tak was sent for by the king, to aid him with his counsel and strength. His reputation as a brave and powerful warrior secured for him his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Siamese army. Mustering all the available forces of the kingdom, he set out to do battle with the enemy. It was hoped that he would utterly rout the invading army, and so free the [Pg 2] land from its powerful enemies. But when the valiant Tak came in sight of the foe, he was not long in realising that any attack that might be made by his small army against the much greater numbers of the Burmese, could only end in his utter defeat. He promptly fled with all his own retainers, and with as many of the soldiers as cared to follow him, to the port of Chantaboon. Here he leagued himself with all the fighting men and chiefs of the neighbouring provinces, and finally collected an army of about ten thousand men. He supported himself and his soldiers by robbing and pillaging all the villages along the coast.

A SCAVENGER.

The Burmese, carrying with them many captives, and much treasure of gold and silver gained at the sack of Ayuthia in 1767, at last returned once more to their own land. Then Phya Tak came north again, and on the spot where the Regent's palace now stands, built himself a home and proceeded to found the walled city of Bangkok. Having accomplished this work, he several times defeated the Burmese, then re-organised some form of administration and caused himself to be acknowledged as king of the land. Associated with him in all his adventures and successes was a close personal friend and confidential adviser. This man was of noble birth and vigorous character, and it was to his counsel and assistance that the new sovereign owed much of his success. Soon after the king had completed his great work of re-organisation he unfortunately became insane. The priests brought against him accusations of sacrilege and impiety, and tried to [Pg 3] stir the people to revolt. He was extremely unpopular on account of the heavy taxes he had levied on the wealthier classes, as also for the extreme cruelty with which he had treated all ranks of his subjects. Stimulated both by the exhortations of the priests, and by the oppressive treatment to which they were daily subjected, the citizens of the new capital at length rose in rebellion. Their sovereign fled from his angry subjects and took refuge in a neighbouring monastery, where he donned the yellow robe and declared himself a priest. This declaration saved his life for a short time, but soon after his flight he was put to death by his favourite friend and general, who then [Pg 4] followed the promptings of his ambition and the suggestions of his fellow-noblemen, in assuming the royal robes and crown. He called himself Somdetch Pra Boroma Rahcha Pra Putta Yaut Fah, and became the first king of the present dynasty. It is with the fall of Ayuthia, the rise of these two usurpers, and the founding of Bangkok that the authentic history of Siam commences. A period of about one hundred and forty years comprises the limits within which the chief facts of Siamese history can be substantiated. Bishop Pallegoix, compiled from native annals an account of Siam and its people, extending back to a very remote period; but His Majesty the late King has somewhat lessened one's confidence in these annals by declaring that they are "all full of fable, and are not in satisfaction for believe."

The city which was thus founded by Phya Tak, has ever since remained the chief home of the sovereign, and the seat of government. It is now one of the most interesting of Oriental towns. From the break of day till scorching noon, from scorching noon till the first cool breeze of evening, from sunset until midnight, and from then on through the small hours of the morning, the busy streets of Siam's capital present a never ending procession of curious and picturesque scenes. With the first faint glimmer of light in the east, the life of the city begins. The approach of day is heralded with the sonorous voices of the huge gongs that are being vigorously beaten by

the official welcomer of the dawn, in a turret within the walls of the Royal Palace. The cocks, who have crowed the whole night through with troublesome persistency, greet the rising of the sun in notes both long and shrill, as if they were trying to impress upon their hearers the belief that they have but just awakened from the profoundest of slumbers. The bull-frog croaks his surly good morning. The pariah dogs howl or bark with an amount of vigour and determination, that shows that they too are anxious to contribute their share to the combination of discordant sounds, that forms a fitting prelude to the noise and bustle of the coming day. [Pg 5]

It is not to be supposed that the wealthier members of Siamese society rise at this early hour. As a matter of fact, they have but recently retired to rest, and will not appear again either for business or pleasure until the sun has crossed the meridian. All the business of the State, and all the pleasures of Society are conducted in the cool hours of evening, night, or early morning, while during the broiling heat that comes and goes with the daylight, officialdom sleeps and rests. It is an excellent arrangement. The lower classes, however, are soon awake and astir. First to arise are the Chinese inhabitants. Here, as everywhere in the East, the subjects of the Celestial Empire have found their way, and, by their untiring energy and their wonderful adaptability to all changes of custom, life, and government, have managed to establish themselves so securely that any attempt to dislodge them would, if successful, be fatal to the best interests of the country. They live and die in the same atmosphere of superstition that surrounded them at their birth. No matter to what country their industry and enterprise may lead [Pg 6] them, they never forget during their daily toil to give frequent evidence of their keen faith in the supernatural. Their first act on rising in the morning is to explode a number of noisy fire-crackers in every doorway, to dispel the crowds of evil spirits, who, during the dark hours of the night may have congregated round their thresholds with intent to do them harm. In the swarms of buzzing flies and stinging mosquitoes there are innumerable emissaries of the powers of ill, and these the noise and smoke effectually disperse for a brief interval. So that the daily practice of one superstitious custom is not without its immediate if temporary effect upon the well-being of its devout observers.

THE CURRY VENDOR.

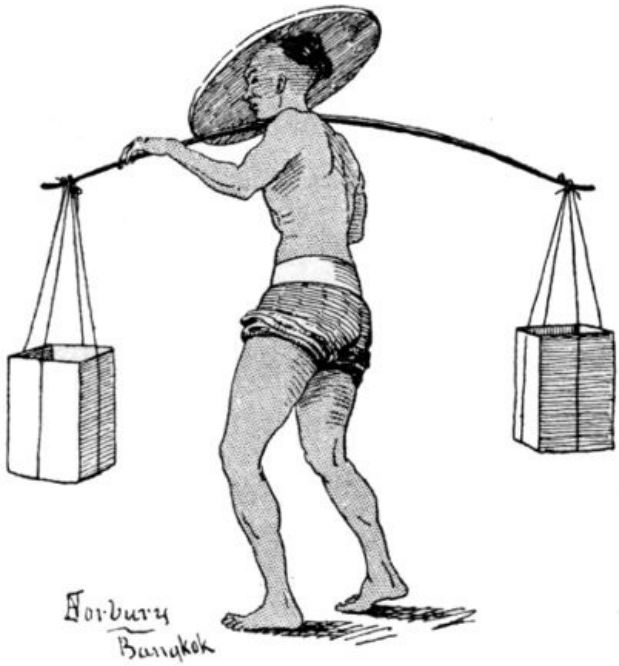
The shops and workshops are open in front to the street on account of the intense tropical heat. [Pg 7] There is no difficulty whatever in seeing and hearing every native dealer or craftsman as he pursues his daily employment. The foot-lathe of the woodturner, rude but efficient, whirls busily round, scattering its chips into the street; the barber sharpens his razors, sets his pans and chairs at the edge of the roadway in view of every passer-by, and prepares to shave a head or trim a pig-tail; and the idol-maker spreads his gold and silver leaf upon representations of Buddha made in wood or plaster after a strictly orthodox and ancient pattern.

Numerous Buddhist priests in robes of yellow, saffron or orange, pace slowly along with alms-bowls of wood or brass, receiving their daily food from the believers in their ancient faith. Their garments borrow new hues from the lately risen sun, and stand out in vivid and picturesque relief against the more sober tints of the roads and dwellings. The itinerant curry-vendor wastes no time in preparing his unsavoury messes, and is soon busy trying to dispose of them to the passers-by. A pole slung over his shoulder, bears at one end a small earthenware stove with a supply of charcoal and water. At this end he cooks, to order, the various delicacies suspended from the other end of the pole. The water in the pot is drawn from the nearest canal or stagnant pool and is almost a meal in itself. For a farthing you may purchase a bowl of rice, which is warmed in the boiling water while you wait. Another farthing will provide you with a number of attendant luxuries in the form of very fiery pepper or very strong and unhealthy smelling vinegar. [Pg 8] The basis of the curry may be frog or chicken, stale meat, fermented fish, decayed prawn, or one of a thousand articles of equally evil taste and pungent odour. Most things are either cooked or

re-warmed for the purchaser by the simple plan of suspending them in a sieve inside the pot of boiling water. The same pot and the same water serve for all customers alike, so that the hundredth hungry individual gets for his farthing, not only all that he bargains for, but various tastes of the other delicacies that his predecessors at the counter have elected to buy. No charge is made for the use of the china basin which has not been washed since the last man used it, or for the loan of the leaden or earthenware spoons, or a couple of chopsticks. Neither the proprietor of this strolling restaurant nor the force of public opinion demand that these articles be used, and for many, fingers take the place of either chopsticks or spoons.

"Isa-kee! Isa-kee!" It is a queer sound when you hear it for the first time. A Chinaman comes staggering along the road, carrying two heavy pails at the ends of the usual bamboo pole. He bawls in long, loud, nasal tones, "Isa-kee! Isa-kee!" The man is wet with the perspiration that streams down his bare yellow body and soaks the cloth round his loins, that forms his only clothing. Presently, crowds of little boys, dressed in even less than the noisy vendor, collect round him and purchase with avidity the strange-looking mess denominated "isa-kee." He collects the coppers, and places them in a small leather purse, tied round his waist with a bit of string, [Pg 9] there to lie in company with a little rank, black tobacco, or opium, until time will permit him to lose them in the maddening excitement of the gambling dens. "Isa-kee" is the vendor's reproduction of the English word "ice-cream", though there is little resemblance between the commodity he disposes of with such extraordinary rapidity, and the fashionable European delicacy whose name it has borrowed. A more truthful name and description of the article sold in the streets of Bangkok, would be "ice-mud." It is apparently a concoction of dirty water, half-frozen slush, and sugar. Being cold and sweet it is a favourite sweetmeat with the native children, and the ice-cream merchant may generally be found doing a roaring trade outside the different schools during playtime. When ice itself was first introduced to the Siamese by the European residents, they promptly coined for it the short and expressive name of "hard-water." It is amusing to hear the little ones exclaim as they swallow the frozen fluid, "Golly! How it *burns*!"

As far as the casual observer can judge, in this capital of Siam there are no Siamese engaged in any hard manual labour at all. There are of course, many Siamese employed in various kinds of domestic or official work, but in the streets nearly every workman is Chinese. There are nearly as many Chinese in the country as there are Siamese. They marry Siamese women, and their children make excellent subjects, as they possess both the natural brightness of the mother and [Pg 10] the industry of the father. Unless they renounce their own nationality they are subject to a poll-tax of about five or six shillings, payable once every four years. At a date made known by proclamation, each Chinaman must present himself at the police-station and pay the tax. The receipt given is a small piece of bee's-wax about the size of a three-penny piece. This bears a seal, and is worn on the wrist for a certain time, fastened by a piece of string. The police are very busy at this time, as there is nothing the Siamese policeman so much enjoys as leading some unfortunate Chinaman to pay the tax. Should the seal be lost, the alien is bound to buy another as soon as he is requested by some officer of the law.



THE KEROSINE DEALER.

Carpenters, blacksmiths, butchers, bakers and scavengers are all Chinese. It is a Chinaman who sits all through the heat of the day, under a tent made of an old sheet supported by a central [Pg 11] bamboo pole, displaying an array of strange-looking liquids, placed in thick glass tumblers in a long row. Great lumps of vermicelli float in the blue, green, red, or yellow liquids, presenting the appearance of curious anatomical specimens preserved in coloured spirits. It is a Chinaman who hawks about great pails of slimy, black jelly having the consistency and colour of blacking, but said to be extremely palatable with coarse brown sugar. The men who are watering the roads with wooden buckets fitted with long bamboo spouts; the men who sweep the roads, and mend

them; the coolies in the wharves; the clerks in the offices; the servants in the hotels and houses: are all subjects of "The Lord of the Vermilion Pencil."

No Siamese pulls a rickshaw, though he frequently rides in one. The Chinese are the beasts of burden as far as the Bangkok rickshaw is concerned. This vehicle, as seen in Siam is a very sorry-looking object, bearing only a distant resemblance to those met with in every Eastern port from Colombo to Yokohama. Nowhere do you ever find such dilapidated rickety structures as those that the coolies pull through the streets of this city. A new one would be a veritable curiosity. When the rickshaws of Singapore and Hong-kong have reached a condition of extreme old age, and are so broken down that the authorities in those ports refuse to grant them licences any longer, they are sent on to Bangkok, where no licences are required. There the poorer classes use them freely, and there too are they as often used for the removal of household furniture, or [Pg 12] the transportation of pigs, as they are for the carriage of passengers. The coolies tear through the streets, regardless of anyone's comfort or safety except their own; though, be it said, that they never resent the cut of a driver's whip when some coachman thus forcibly reminds them which is the right side of the road.

Pigs are not always allowed the luxury of riding in rickshaws. They are more usually transported in a far less comfortable fashion. Their two front feet are tied together, and then their hind feet are similarly fastened. A stout piece of wood is passed under the two loops thus formed, and the pig is carried by two men, each bearing one end of the pole. The animals generally object very strongly to this form of motion, and signify their disgust, and perhaps their pain, by the most heart-rending, ear-piercing shrieks. Thus another set of discordant sounds is added to the medley that roars from morning to night.

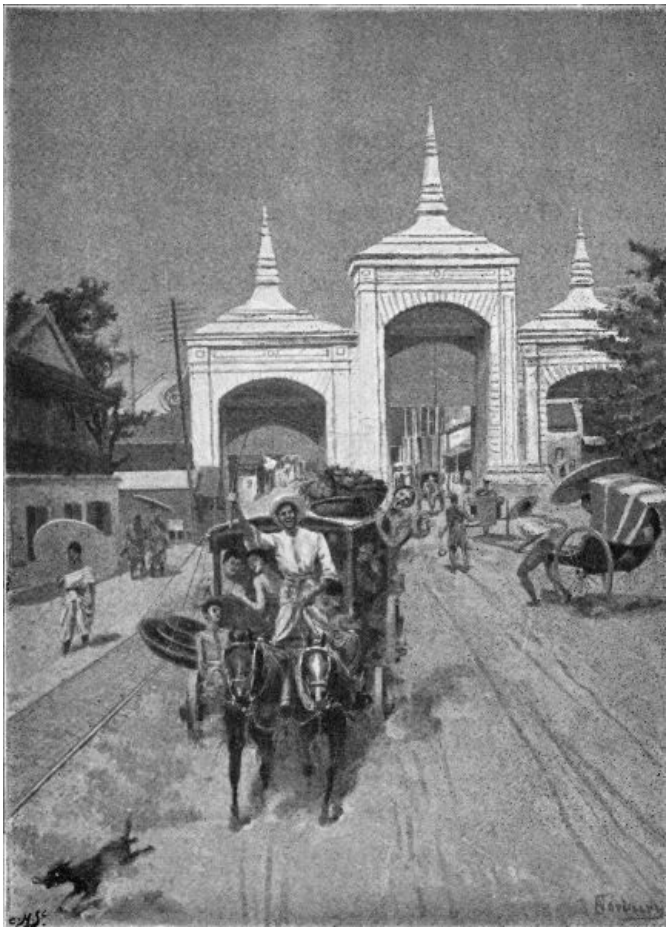
The rickshaw was borrowed from Japan; the "gharry" has been imported from India. It is a square box-like structure, the upper half being fitted with sliding windows similar to those in the door of a London four-wheeler. These windows, when open, admit of a free circulation of air, and they can easily be closed to keep out either rain, dust, or sun, at the will of the passenger. The sliding window-frames are always badly fitted, and they rattle and shake with such a terribly deafening noise, that two people sitting side by side, are compelled to shout when they wish to address [Pg 13] each other. Riding in these coaches gives one the sensation of being a kind of marble inside a gigantic rattle-box that is being vigorously shaken for the driver's amusement. The majority of the gharries are not in a very much better condition than the rickshaws. The harness is generally made of rope or string, instead of leather, and even if a leather strap or trace is visible, it is nearly always in two or three pieces temporarily connected with string. At very short intervals of time and space, the driver is compelled to descend and repair as best he can the broken connections. These drivers are chiefly Siamese or Malays, and so many of them have adopted the red Turkish fez as a head-dress, that it can safely be taken as the badge of coachmen. In fine weather both Malay and Siamese drivers wear their own national costumes, but should it rain, they promptly divest themselves of every stitch of clothing except a cloth round the loins. They place their garments in a box under the seat, and drive about in a state of almost perfect nudity until the sun reappears and dries them with his rays, when they once more clothe themselves in their native apparel.

The "omnibus" is a variation of the English one, with extensive and important modifications. It is of local construction, and without springs. It consists of a long shallow box on four wheels. A rickety roof is supported by equally rickety pillars, and serves to keep out the sun and rain. Omnibuses are very popular amongst the poor, on account of their exceedingly low fares, several miles being travelled for a few cents. Every kind of vehicle is crowded to its fullest capacity. A [Pg 14] rickshaw will ordinarily hold two; you may often see four or five in one. A gharry should carry four, but by crowding inside and piling one person on top of the other, with the addition of a couple hanging on behind, one on each door-step, and one on each hub of the wheels, a whole family manages to get conveyed to its destination by means of a single conveyance. Omnibuses are similarly crowded and packed, to an extent which is only possible on account, first, of the absence of any law to prevent it, and secondly, of the genial good-temper of the natives themselves.

Klings and Tamils from Southern India have introduced the bullock cart as a convenient method of carrying heavy goods. These Indian settlers are the bullock drivers, the dairymen, and the owners of cattle. They export a large number of lean bullocks to Singapore and the Malay Archipelago, where they are subsequently fattened to feed the residents. The value of the animals thus exported, is about two hundred and forty thousand Mexican dollars annually.

An electric tramway, and bicycles of the most modern construction, tell their own tale of the way in which European influences are making themselves felt in this land. The only real Siamese land carriage is a curious buffalo cart. It is rarely seen in the streets of the capital, as its peculiar form and construction fit it more particularly for traffic through the jungle.

[Pg 15]



THE THREE-HEADED GATE.

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The varied colours of the different costumes worn by the members of many nationalities, form a [Pg 17] strikingly bright and cheerful picture. Blue being the colour of every Chinaman's work-a-day clothing, is at once a conspicuous and pleasant tint. It is only during the three days' festivities that usher in the Celestial New Year, that the wearers of the pig-tail disport themselves in any other colour. During those three days, however, they are adorned with the richest of heliotrope, lavender, pale blue, green or yellow silks. In the intervals between successive New Years these gorgeous garments are safely deposited in the pawnshops. The various shades of yellow and brown that predominate in every crowd, are not the result of the dyer's art, but the effect of the hot bright sunlight upon the bare bodies of those who go uncovered. The same bright light intensifies the whiteness of the European linen jackets, now adopted by so many Siamese in lieu of the gaily coloured scarf that formerly was the only clothing worn on the upper part of the body. Even now most of the women wind a long sash of some vivid hue round the breast, thus forming a cheerful band of colour against the whiteness of the jacket. In every crowd may be seen not only Siamese and Chinese, but Sikhs in scarlet turbans, Burmese in yellow and pink, Malays in gaudy sarongs, Laos in dark striped petticoats; as well as Annamese, Klings, Tamils and Japanese, each of whom is ever dressed in the garb that centuries of custom have defined as his own particular method of clothing his nakedness. When to the effect of all these pleasing [Pg 18] colours, is added the happy merriment of thousands of faces that have never yet experienced the fierce struggle for existence that characterises the life of the poor of the West, a scene is realised which is nowhere to be met with except in the sun-kissed lands of the East.

In the licensed gambling-houses there is always a little crowd of excited men and women, who, when they have lost their trifling earnings, speedily proceed to the pawnshops with any article of clothing or furniture that is not absolutely indispensable to their existence. When their own property has all been squandered they take that belonging to other people, thus producing an endless succession of daily thefts. The city is full of pawnshops, some streets containing scarcely any other form of business. It is in these places that the Europeans hunt for their frequently stolen property, or search for the curios that are afterwards presented to friends or sold to museums at home.

The numbers of civil, genial postmen in their yellow kharki uniforms faced with red, and carrying big Japanese umbrellas under their arms, are sufficiently numerous and busy to testify to the efficiency of this branch of the Civil Service. Most of the policemen are Siamese, but their appearance is always a decided contrast to that of the neatly clad postmen. Their uniforms, made of blue cloth, are intended to be reproductions of those worn by their London brethren. But as they are made of a cloth that rapidly shrinks and fades, a caricature rather than an imitation is the result. They are partial to umbrellas, roll their trousers above their knees, wear no shoes, and [Pg 19] seem to revel in the possession of battered helmets. There is nothing whatever in their bearing that is characteristic of authority, neither are they men of great stature or commanding strength. Yet they seldom meet with any resistance in the exercise of their duties, and it is a common sight to see a puny-looking policeman leading three or four natives to the police-station, each prisoner

being merely fastened by the arm to the one behind, with his own scarf or pocket-handkerchief.

So many of the native houses with their quaint gables and double or triple roofs have been pulled down, and brick ones of European pattern erected instead, that scarcely any purely native street remains. The one truly native quarter is a long narrow bazaar known as Sampeng. It is about a mile and a quarter in length, and contains a very mixed population of Indians, Siamese, and Chinese. It resembles somewhat a street in Canton, but lacks the wealth of elaborately carved and gilded sign-boards, that gives such a decidedly local atmosphere to a purely Chinese street. Stretched overhead, from side to side, are pieces of torn cloth and matting, that act quite as effectively in keeping out the sun as in imprisoning that awful combination of foul odours that seems to be the possession of all Oriental thoroughfares. The small gutter which runs in front of each house is full of stagnant water or of the accumulated domestic rubbish of the people who dwell by its side. This long narrow bazaar, however, is not without its own attractions. Here are [Pg 20] gathered together specimens of all the native produce, and here too work a few exponents of each of the native crafts. Blacksmiths and weavers are plying their several trades; workers in gold and silver are fashioning boxes and ornaments for the rich, and the lapidaries are polishing stones for the jewellers to set. Peep-shows and open-air theatres tempt the idle to linger, and numbers of busy toilers jostle each other as they make their way to and fro over the uneven, roughly paved foot-path. At night, the shops are closed, but the gambling-houses, opium dens, and brothels are thronged by the lowest of the low. At one end of the bazaar is the chief idol manufactory of the country. The thousands of temples that are scattered all over Siam, require a large stock of images; and the devout are frequent donors of representations of Buddha, of values proportionate to their means. Most of the idols are made according to one or other of the following methods.

A wooden model of the desired image is first made. It is next covered with very thin silver-leaf, after which the wooden model is removed and the interior filled up with pitch. This is perhaps the most common method of making small cheap idols. The larger ones are first modelled in wax, and then covered with a cement made of fine sand and clay. This is dried in the sun and finally heated in a furnace, when the wax melts and is collected for use another time. Melted brass is then poured over the image and evenly spread until the whole surface is covered with a thin coating of [Pg 21] metal. A great many gilded images are made, the gold-leaf being laid over a covering of black pitch. Until the outer layer of gold, silver, or brass has been deposited on the carved or moulded figure, and until the eyes have been placed therein, it is not considered in any way sacred. The two last operations are frequently attended with great ceremony at the home of the owner, in the presence of many priests.

In every temple there are "printed gods". These are very small idols, about an inch or two in length, made of clay and having a flat surface at the back. They are stuck in rows, on a piece of board painted with some bright colour, and are then gilded and placed in the temple.

In the remotest alley, the most secluded corner, the broadest highway, or the most open of public spaces, roam the most disreputable and degraded members of the canine family—the pariah dogs. Black, brown, white, and spotted dogs with skeleton frames and sunken eyes, many of them in the last stages of disease and decay, snap at the dirtiest bone, or feast upon the filthiest rubbish they can find. They own no master, and no man owns them. They may be counted till one is weary of counting, and yet the eye will still discover many that remain unnumbered. Often it would be a kindness to the poor starved and crippled creatures to put them speedily out of pain, but the Buddhist law, "Thou shalt not kill", is all powerful here, and so the pariahs breed and multiply, giving in return for the permission to live, their effective services as vigilant and industrious scavengers.

In the markets, the natives squat cross-legged upon their stalls, offering for sale vegetables and [Pg 22] fruit, betel nut and cigars, salted fish and queer-looking sweetmeats; or busying themselves, in the absence of customers, by vigorously waving a big palm or banana leaf to drive away the clouds of flies that would otherwise immediately settle upon their perishable wares. The dealers are chiefly Siamese women, and are amongst the most polite and obliging saleswomen in the world.

The original city of Bangkok is surrounded by a high thick wall pierced with many gates that are never closed. The principal entrance is the one known as "The Three-Headed Gate", so called on account of the three tapering spires that surmount the three openings. By far the larger portion of the population lives outside the wall, but as the Royal Palace and nearly all the Government buildings are within its circumference, it encloses everything that is of importance to the native as far as government is concerned. The roads in the city are excellent, and in the neighbourhood of the palace itself there are a number of wide open green spaces that would not discredit any city of Europe. The palace is enclosed by several rows of departmental offices, outside of which is a high white wall.

Day closes with a rapidity equal to that with which it dawns, there being no long spell of twilight either in the morning or the evening. In the principal streets, the electric light has displaced the small old oil lamps that at one time formed the only evening illumination known to the people, [Pg 23] but on the outskirts of the city the lamplighter still wends his evening round, carrying the small ladder, boxes of matches, and bottles of oil, that mark the nature of his occupation. The oil lamps are placed at more or less irregular intervals, and are soon blown out by any wind of moderate strength. Little cholera lamps swung aloft at the ends of long slender poles, sway backwards and forwards, telling where the grim fiend has entered in his work of destruction. The Chinese light

their smoky tallow candles and place them in large quaint lanterns bearing mystic signs and symbols; while round the city wall itself, the cocoa-nut oil lamps burn with a lurid glare, sending forth at the same time dense clouds of yellow pungent smoke.

A GHARRY.

In the absence of drunken men and women and the scarcity of women of ill-fame, the streets of Bangkok might well serve as a model for some of the wealthier and more handsome towns of Europe. There is one thing to be regretted in connection with the improvements that are daily being made in the capital, and that is the gradual effacement of all traces of native design or workmanship. Bridges, houses and railway stations are mostly of a distinctly European type, and that type one of uncompromising ugliness. The new streets of Bangkok, if cleaner and sweeter than the old, have nothing of the curious charm of those they have replaced, and are merely excellent examples of unadulterated brick and mortar unrelieved by the faintest trace of anything that could possibly be described as artistic. [Pg 24]

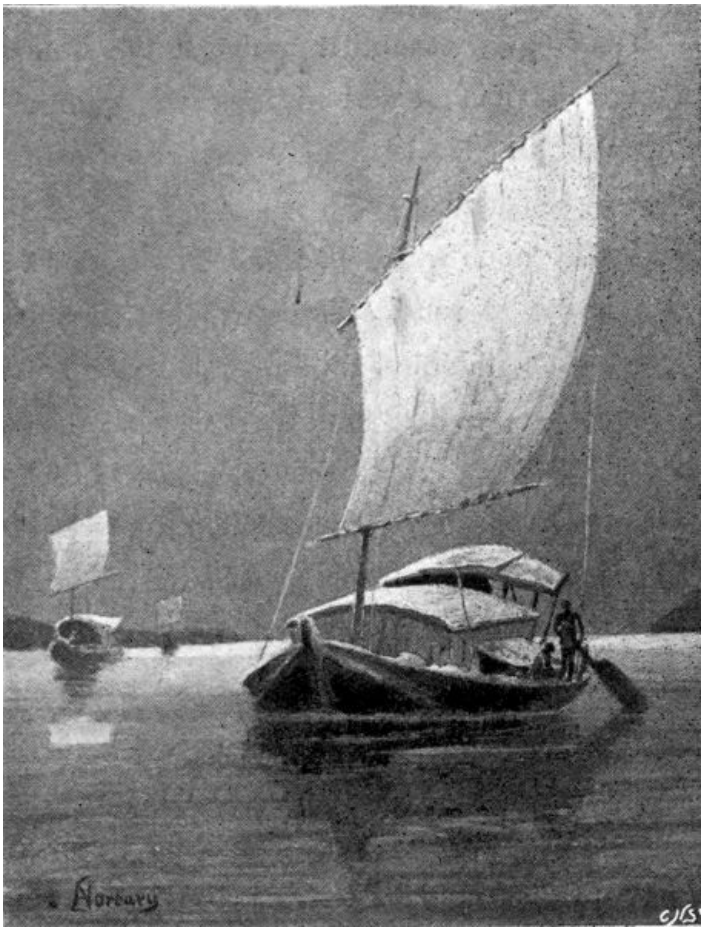
CHAPTER II. [Pg 25]

BY "KHLONG" AND RIVER.

In a walk through any Siamese street the traveller cannot fail to remark the total absence of any carriage or other wheeled vehicle of native design. There are conveyances of many descriptions borrowed from India, China, Japan, and Europe, but none whatever that can be pointed out as being designed by the Siamese themselves. Any enquiry as to the cause of this apparently strange lack of originality in a matter which so directly concerns the daily life of the community, is readily answered. Until a comparatively recent date there were practically no roads in the country, and even at the present time, the roads in any part of the kingdom outside Bangkok scarcely deserve the name. There are scarcely any means of communication between one village and another, and very often only defective communication between two parts of the same village, except by water. The water is the true home of the Siamese, and it is on this, their native element, that their real character and genius are best exhibited. It is true that, in the capital, they now ride ponies and bicycles, for a few roads suitable to such forms of exercise exist, but the boat, not the horse, the paddle, not the whip, are the property of the nation at large. [Pg 26]

In earlier times, when they erected houses upon land, they chose as the most convenient sites for their dwellings, the banks of the rivers or the shores of the sea. When agricultural enterprise led to the formation of inland settlements, no roads were made to connect the new settlement with those already existing, but canals or "khlongs" were cut instead. The connections between rivers were made in a similar fashion; and for purposes of pleasure or business, religious processions or state ceremonies, a thousand different forms of boat were planned and constructed. The numberless canals that thread their way across the plains in every possible direction, have turned the lower portion of Siam into a veritable labyrinth of winding water-ways. The khlongs differ in age, appearance and size, as do the roads of more densely populated countries. The ancient highways of Europe here find their parallel in canals whose age and origin it would be difficult to determine, though none of them possess any history extending to periods that Western historians would call remote. Even as the municipalities and corporations of our land construct year by year new roads for the facilitation of traffic, so, for the same purpose new water-ways are being continually cut in the land of Siam. The broad deep khlongs with their double lines of

house-boats, and their continual traffic of lumbering barges, cumbersome rafts, comfortable house-boats and tiny canoes, are the great streets of the cities, and the highways of the plains. [Pg 27] The foul-smelling, silted-up water alleys, with their rotten disreputable houses, and their heaps of decaying refuse, are the slums and blind alleys; while the green lanes and country by-paths of more temperate lands are here represented by delightful little canals that twine their way through the thick jungle. The palms meet overhead and form a sheltering canopy; birds of many brilliant hues flit lazily from branch to branch, consoling themselves for their loss of song in the [Pg 28] contemplation of their gorgeous plumage. There are lonely canals in comparatively unfrequented places, where only occasional travellers disturb the silence. Here the alligator stretches his long ungainly form in the grey and slimy mud; the monkeys chatter to one another amongst the branches of the trees upon the banks; and the squirrels gambol in the tree-tops up aloft, in conscious enjoyment of perfect freedom and everlasting sunshine.

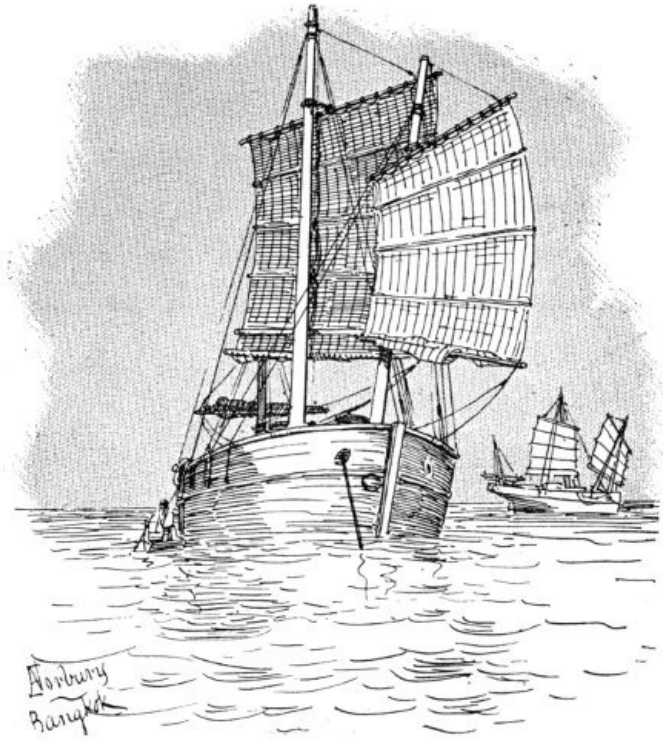


RICE BOATS COMING DOWN THE MENAM.

The great river upon which Bangkok stands, flows almost directly from north to south, through mountain valleys and deep ravines, then tumbles, boils, and roars through a series of dangerous rapids until it reaches the wide and fertile plains, to whose inhabitants it means both life and wealth. In most European maps it is called the river Menam, but as "menam" itself means "river", the name as thus written possesses no meaning. Every river in the country is called "menam," the first syllable of the word meaning "mother", and the second one "water." The real name of the Bangkok river is "Menam Chow Phya", which may be freely rendered as the "River Duke", for "Chow Phya" is the highest title of nobility that can be held by anyone not of royal descent. Every traveller enters Siam by this river, and in passing from its mouth to the capital, he may easily observe many excellent examples of true Siamese life and customs. At the entrance there is a bar of sand and mud, which at low tide is visible in certain places, and which even at high tide is never covered by more than fifteen feet of water. As a consequence, no deeply laden vessels can [Pg 29] enter the river, and they have to load or discharge the greater part of their cargo by means of small sailing vessels called "lighters", at an island in the gulf. There is only one narrow passage through the bar, and the unwary mariner frequently runs aground. It is said that when the Siamese Minister for Foreign Affairs was asked why no attempt was made to remove this bar, that thereby the river might be rendered more navigable, and commerce facilitated, he replied, "For the same reasons that you English don't relish the idea of a Channel Tunnel." Similar banks of mud or sand, or both, render unnavigable every river that flows through the country. They are decisive evidence of the way in which the whole of the gulf is being gradually filled up. The coast is everywhere shallow, and at low tide long stretches of mud may be seen at any point on the northern shores of the inlet. The whole of lower Siam is one vast alluvial deposit. In several places in the interior, borings for wells have passed through thick strata of sea-shells and other marine deposits, thus showing that in earlier days the northern limit of the gulf extended far north of the site of the present capital.

Having crossed the bar, the general character of the river becomes at once apparent. The appearances presented are characteristic of all the rivers in this part of the world. On either bank

the thick jungle comes down to the water's edge, forming a dense green mass of lowly attap or stately palm, interlaced with lianes and gigantic creepers, full of thorny bushes and different [Pg 30] species of the cactus family, with the lordly palm towering high above the living undergrowth, demanding and obtaining instant admiration from every beholder, and majestically waving his verdant crown in condescending acknowledgment of the homage paid to his unquestioned sovereignty by the myriad forms of vegetable life that cluster round his feet. In the centre of the river lies a little island, on which stands Prachadee Glang Nam—"The Shrine in the Middle of the Waters." It is a snow-white spire-crowned edifice, round whose base are a number of small quaint structures, the whole forming a conspicuous and typical example of the ecclesiastical architecture of Siam. A broad band of scarlet cloth wrapped round the spire, about half-way between the summit and the base, by some devout member of the Buddhist faith, serves a double purpose in increasing the pictorial aspect of the scene, and at the same time in indicating that the teachings of the wise and noble Gautama, in whose honour the building was erected, have here retained some of their power over the lives of the inhabitants. The King of Siam is the last of the various independent sovereigns who have professed their belief in the words of the great teacher whose outward symbol of humility was the beggar's yellow robe. The neighbouring countries of Annam, Cochin-China, Cambodia and Burmah, now owe allegiance to a foreign government, and their sovereigns, who once bent the knee before the altars of Buddhism are dead or deposed. The only remaining independent Buddhist monarch is H. M. King [Pg 31] Chulalongkorn, and here in the centre of the great highway of his country, at the very gate of his kingdom, stands this fair white temple to the honour of the ancient sage.



A LIGHTER.

Boats of many shapes and sizes cross and re-cross the path of the steamer as it makes its way along the winding course, but not until the vessel is anchored amid stream is it possible to fully appreciate the unique appearance of the scene. Along each bank are the floating houses made of teak and plaited bamboo, and thatched with the long spear-like leaves of the attap palm. Their gabled ends, best understood from the illustrations, are of a form peculiar to this land alone, and [Pg 32] are repeated monotonously on every dwelling. The houses stand upon pontoons, or else upon rafts which are made of numerous stems of the bamboo tree or the areca-palm, tightly bound together in bundles. Each bundle is more or less free from the others, so that as the floating foundation gradually rots away, the raft can easily be removed and then replaced piece by piece without disturbing the equilibrium of the dwelling itself. The rafts are loosely moored to several stakes driven deep in the bed of the river, and rise and fall with the tide. The house is closed in front by a number of planks of wood, which are removed in the day-time for the admittance of light and air. It bears in front a little platform or verandah, often railed in to prevent the younger members of the family from falling into the swiftly flowing stream beneath. This uncovered platform serves many purposes. It is here in the early morning, and again in the evening, that the family may most often be seen enjoying the luxury of a bath. Men, women, and children come to the edge of the platform, take up water from the river with brass basins or wooden buckets, and then pour it over head and shoulders, thus drenching both themselves and clothes at the same time. Here, too, the dealers display their wares—the giant fruit of the durien plant, which is described by Alfred Russell Wallace as being a combination of strawberries and cream, nectar and ambrosia, ripe pears and ice cream, but which to the uninitiated suggests more truthfully the presence of exceedingly defective sanitation; the mangosteen, a pearl amongst fruits, delightful [Pg 33] to eat and to behold, a snow-ball in a casket of crimson; mangoes; fresh green cocoa-nuts filled with delicious, refreshing milk; bananas of countless varieties; sugar-cane ready skinned and cut

in small pieces for the youngsters, who think it the sweetest of sweetmeats; young bamboo stems, rivalling asparagus when properly cooked; cheap tin and trumpery from Birmingham, Manchester, or Germany; silks from China and Bombay; occasionally buffalo-horns; tiger-skins; black monkeys with white beards; green parrots; lamp-oil, and joss sticks; and a host of small and inexpensive articles (being the produce of many countries of the globe) that are likely to find ready purchasers amongst a people of simple tastes and small means. Very often in the evening when the sun is getting low, the family take their evening meal out of doors on the same verandah. When the meal is over they still squat upon the floor, smoking huge cigarettes of rank tobacco wrapped in the leaf of the banana, and exchanging occasional words or greetings with some friend or acquaintance passing homewards in his boat. These floating structures are [Pg 34] comparatively clean, cool, and comfortable, and possess one great advantage over a fixed dwelling upon land, in the fact that, provided the house is the property of the tenant, he may remove to a new locality without any of the inconvenience of an ordinary removal, by the simple process of shifting at the same time both his habitation and all that it contains. It is an amusing and not uncommon sight to see a father and his family, aided by a few muscular friends or relatives, tugging away at ponderous shovel-shaped oars, fastened fore and aft, as they pilot their house through a crowd of smaller craft on their way to settle in some more desirable or convenient locality.

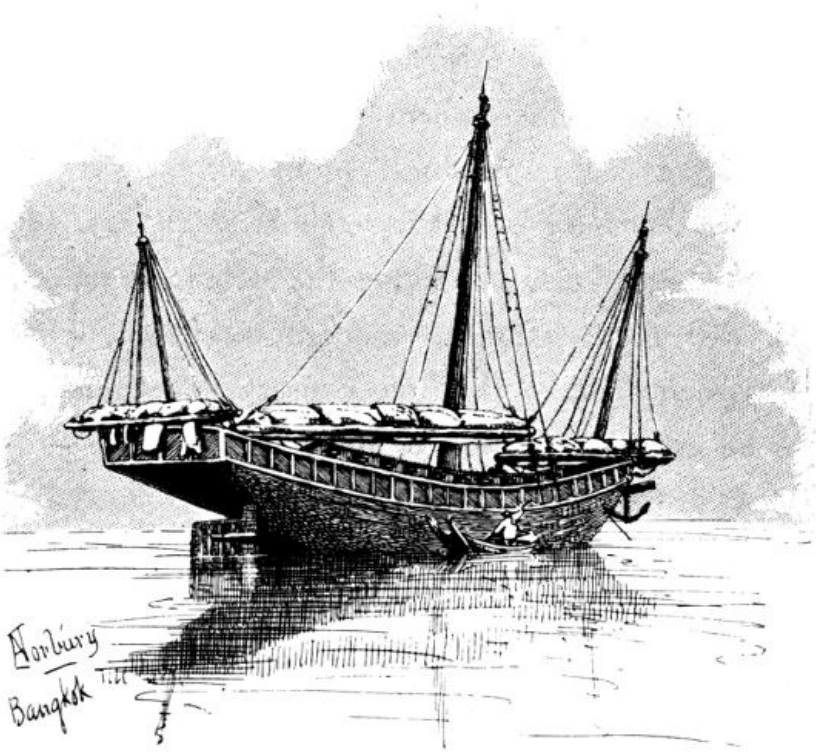
SIAMESE CANOES.

Behind the floating houses, either situated on the banks or overhanging the water, are houses built on piles. They are raised sufficiently high to escape the floods that come with the rainy season. Their general construction is the same as that of the floating dwellings, but as their inhabitants throw most of their rubbish into the space between the ground and floor instead of into the river, they are by no means such healthy habitations as those that float in the river below.

In the river are moored the coasting steamers that carry the rice of Siam to Singapore or Hong-kong, that transport lean cattle to the Malay States and Archipelago, and bring back goods of European or Asiatic manufacture, as well as thousands of Chinese coolies for the labour market. There are great Norwegian sailing vessels taking in teak, and tank steamers discharging kerosine [Pg 35] oil.

Chinese junks and "lighters" pass slowly by with heavy, yellow, mat-like sails, bearing cargo to the island in the gulf, where it will be transferred to the larger steamers. On the prow of every junk is painted a big wide-open eye, whose powerful optical properties are supposed to aid the vessel in steering a safe and speedy course. Says the Chinese maritime philosopher, "No have got eye; how can see?" There are no Siamese junks or steamers, for the trade of the country is in the hand of foreigners, who, for commercial purposes, use either the steamers that owe their design and construction to modern invention, or else the huge unwieldy junks that the conservative Chinese crews would be exceedingly loth to relinquish.

The teak that is exported, is sent down to the capital from the northern forests in the Shan uplands around Chiengmai, bound together in cumbersome rafts. After passing through the perilous rapids of the Meping, they are stopped at the Customs station at Raheng, and duties are there levied upon them. They are then allowed to drift with the current and are steered with a number of perforated, rudder-like oars fastened at both ends of the raft. In the centre there is always a little temporary hut rudely fashioned out of a few branches and leaves. Some member of the crew will generally be found taking a comfortable nap therein.



CHINESE TRADING JUNK.

Fiery little steam-launches tear across the river, whistling, shrieking, rushing like so many water fiends, half swamping or upsetting many of the smaller boats in their swell. Tiny mites of children [Pg 36] paddle freely and easily along in tiny cockle-shell canoes, without any signs of fear or hesitation. They easily avoid the big "fire-boat," and guide their craft into the swell in order that they may enjoy the fun of riding upon the miniature waves. The most common form of boat to be seen on the river is the native gondola, or "rua-chang". It is used for purposes of business or pleasure, but it is rapidly losing its popularity as a ferry boat owing to the introduction of the more rapid little steam-launches. Both sexes are employed as gondoliers. They stand to their work with one foot upon the edge of the boat. Their oars are fastened loosely to a small piece of wood near one end, [Pg 37] and the boat is propelled with long graceful sweeps of the oar, by a method that no European has ever yet been able to acquire. They turn about with amazing rapidity, or preserve a straight course from point to point, with but little apparent effort on the part of the boatman, and with no seeming variation in the movement of the oar. As a matter of fact, the whole work of steering or of turning is done by a peculiar twist given to the oar at the end of the stroke, but so deftly is the motion made that in the smaller boats it is practically invisible. The ease and gracefulness with which the Siamese gondolas skim across the waters, is in pleasing contrast to the ugly jerky motion of the boats that serve the same purpose in the rivers and harbours of China, and represents a degree of skill on the part of the oarsmen, probably unattained by any other boatmen in the world. Long "dug-outs", mere hollowed-out trunks of trees, sunk to the water's edge with a heavy freight of rice, fruit or vegetables, are paddled along by two men, one at each end. They squat on their haunches on flat projecting ends whose superficial area is about eighteen square inches. In the early morning, the priests paddle themselves from house to house in long narrow canoes, with their alms-bowls deposited on the floor in front of them, for when they put on the yellow robe, they do not put off their aquatic attainments.

Moored in every available inch of space are the house-boats in which thousands of the inhabitants spend the whole of their lives. They are born in the boat, are reared aboard, and are [Pg 38] only taken permanently ashore when life is ended. Generally speaking, these house-boats are wide in the beam, and possess a deck whose planks are removable in order that cargo, clothes, and provisions may be stored underneath. In the centre is the house, consisting of the deck for a floor, and an elliptical plaited rattan shell for walls and roof. A small sliding framework of light wood or matting projects from one end of the house to the stern end of the boat, and bears a number of removable curtain-like frames around the sides, so that the steersman is well protected from wind and rain. In these boats a whole family may be gathered together, from grandfather to grandchild. There is but little room for exercise, and they sleep close together, side by side, like sardines in a box, yet they always seem happy and contented. Every home contains a small altar to Buddha, with a seated image of the saint himself placed thereon. This they delight to decorate with flowers and bundles of incense sticks placed in blue and white china vases. The poorest always manage to spare a few coppers on festive occasions to re-decorate and adorn their domestic idol. If there are any Chinese on board, their presence is indicated by a number of red prayer-papers bearing mystic symbols in black and gold, stuck here and there upon the roof and walls of the cabin.

Rice is brought from many places inland, in a boat of very similar appearance and construction, but in this case, there is practically no room for anyone but the crew, as the central house-like [Pg 39] portion is filled to the roof with the valuable grain. Round the edge of the boat, through its entire length on both sides, runs a projecting ledge about a foot wide, along which the men walk when

they find it necessary to pole their way through shallow water. The external appearance of the boat is materially improved by varnishing it with a common native compound that gives to the wood a bright reddish-brown hue. All such vessels are made in the country from woods found in the native forests, for the people are as clever in building boats as they are in propelling them. A great part of the amphibious population is not resident in the capital. The people live in the country where they till the fields that lie on the banks of the rivers or canals, in those places where the jungle has been cleared. There they anchor their homes until the time of harvest, when they gather in the fruits of their labour and then proceed leisurely south. On arriving at Bangkok, they dispose of their cargo, take a short holiday, visit their friends, see the sights of the city, and finally return to their fields, gardens, orchards again, taking with them quantities of kerosine oil, cheap prints, matches, and many small articles of domestic use.

The water population is complete in itself, and is perfectly independent of its terrestrial neighbours in every way. It has not only its own houses and shops, its water omnibuses and hansoms, but even its floating restaurants and pedlars. The restaurant is contained in a fairly small canoe, but it is surprising what a quantity of cooking apparatus and what a varied [Pg 40] assortment of food the *chef* manages to carry. He passes from house to house, from boat to boat, boiling and cooking as he goes, and easily disposes of his curries and boiled rice.

"CAN I GIVE YOU A LIFT, REVEREND FATHERS?"

The river has its own police, with duties corresponding to those of their brethren ashore, but they wear, instead of a battered helmet, a neat white or blue cap, on whose black ribbon is printed in gold letters the words that describe their particular functions. Both the water and the land policemen are called "polit", the word being a modification of our own word "police" according to a rule of pronunciation in the native language, according to which all final consonants of the nature of 's' are pronounced as 't'.

There is a water market, but unlike the land market which remains open all day, this one opens [Pg 41] and closes before the sun has risen very high. Scores of boats are massed together in one compact crowd. Each boat is sunk to the gunwale with piles of fruit or fish. The occupants barter and bargain with the same incessant deafening noise of shouting, laughing, and swearing that is characteristic of all markets the world over. The women wear flat-topped hats made of leaves, which slope outwards from the crown, and are stuck on their heads by a circular frame-work of cane placed inside. Boats pass in and out of the crowd without accident or trouble, and though not an inch of water is to be seen from the edge of the throng, the market gardeners, fishermen and florists never lose any of their merchandise as they move in some mysterious fashion from one spot to another.

Even if a boat were upset, nothing more serious than the loss of its freight would be likely to occur. The owner would never be drowned. He would simply turn his vessel over again, climb over the side, and paddle off home. Yet many of these canoes are so light and small, and float in such a condition of unstable equilibrium, that no European could either get into one of them, or, if the boat were held until he were seated, take a couple of strokes in one without falling overboard. There is, however, only the remotest possibility of any native being drowned as the result of being capsized, for the whole nation may be described as a nation of swimmers. Whether in the water or on the water they are in perfect safety. Little children, long before they [Pg 42] can walk, are thrown into the water by their mothers, who fasten under their arms a tin float that always keeps the head above water. The wee brown dots splash and splutter about in the lukewarm current of the river, involuntarily learning the correct action of the limbs in swimming, and gaining an acquaintance with this element that ever afterwards prevents any feeling of fear. In this way many children learn to swim almost as soon as, if not before, they can walk.

The boys early learn to paddle their own canoes, and they have invented a number of water

games that are possible only among children educated in this fashion. Occasionally a party of them will get into a long narrow boat, and crowd together until the water is just on the point of entering. Then with a few gentle strokes with a paddle, they urge it forward, the water flowing in with every stroke. As soon as they feel it sinking beneath them, they roll out into the canal or river, turn the canoe up again, slowly but deftly climb in one by one, and then off once more to repeat the fun.

At certain seasons of the year boat races are held at the little island at the mouth of the river, on which stands the temple previously described. In these races no consideration is paid to "fouls." The object of each crew is to reach the winning-post first, and any crew is allowed to prevent its opponents attaining that desirable end, by any means they care to employ. The consequence is that the first part of the race resolves itself into a series of "ramming" manoeuvres. There is a [Pg 43] fierce struggle between the rival crews who try to upset each other. The intensest excitement prevails amongst the spectators as two boats near each other, and they watch the manoeuvring with breathless interest until one of them is upset, when cheers break out in encouragement of the winners, who strain every nerve to reach the goal before their opponents can once more get aboard their craft and so continue the contest. Women as well as men take part in the sports, both sexes being equally skilful in any sport or amusement of an aquatic nature.

Soon after sunset the river clears considerably, for these water-folk rise and retire with the sun. They shut up the front of their houses, and then lie down to sleep through the long hot night as peacefully and securely in their floating cradles as any of those who live upon land.

CHAPTER III. [Pg 44]

THE CHILDREN.

The lives of the children of the East are surrounded by a number of time-honoured rites and ceremonies of an imposing but superstitious character. The infant is a priceless gift from the beneficent gods, and its life must be ordered in accordance with the curious superstitions invented of old by the legendary deities of its forefathers. The infant is at once a source of pride, for it is a mark of heavenly favour, and of hope, for it shall, if good luck befall it, hand down its father's name unto another and a later generation. Whatever ritual has been devised aforetime as tending to bring long life and prosperity unto the new-born child, must therefore be observed with great pomp and careful attention to minute but important details. And lastly, the Oriental child causes its parent to reveal certain features in his character that otherwise lie hidden and unobserved. The fiercest Hindoo is the most tender-hearted of men when his little loved one lies sick; the fat, stolid, wooden-headed Chinaman becomes a lively youngster himself as he tosses his crowing chuckling babe aloft; and the genial, gentle Siamese is never so winning as when caressing the hope of his house. Siamese children exhibit in their earlier days the best qualities [Pg 45] of their race to a very high degree.

The Hindoos instituted ten "samskâras" or rites, the due performance of which, was supposed to ensure to the child freedom from all evil influences. Now the original Siamese as they travelled south from the slopes of the Tibetan mountains, came into contact with the Hindoo civilisation and religion, and adopted therefrom their religious beliefs and many of their social customs. Owing to the absence of reliable written historic records in Siam itself, the mass of the people have long since forgotten where and how most of their ceremonial practices originated, but the learned amongst them have little difficulty in pointing out both their primary source and their latter-day modifications. The ten auspicious rites that encompassed the life of the Hindoo child, began with its birth, and ended with one imposing pageant more important and far-reaching in its effects than any of the nine that had preceded it, and marking very definitely the end of the period of childhood. One month after birth occurred the ceremony of shaving the first few hairs of the new-born, and about the same time, a rite somewhat similar to that of christening was observed, when the child received its first but temporary name. These two ceremonies still exist in Siam, but six of the original ones have disappeared. Amongst those that have thus been lost are the rite of ear-boring, which occurred about the third year and which still survives amongst the Laos and the Burmese; the rite of training the child to eat rice; the rite of teaching the first [Pg 46] footsteps; the rite of speaking the first words; the rite of first putting on the loin-cloth; the rite of taking the first lessons in swimming, which was reserved for princesses; and lastly, the rites of shaving the top-knot and the subsequent investiture of the sacred thread, which form the final links in the chain of ceremonial practices devoted to the little ones.

It is obviously impossible therefore to pretend to give any adequate account of the people of this land, without first treating of the life and character of her children, on whose behalf the favour of the spirits of good are so frequently and carefully besought by their anxious parents. Considering the number of ritualistic observances that have occurred through successive generations, with the object of obtaining for the young the good-will of the angels, it might reasonably be supposed that if the numerous prayers had been in any way effective, by this time the present generation of children should be enjoying untold benefits, and should be leading lives far superior in their freedom from ordinary mishap or pain, to those of children not similarly descended. It would puzzle any observer, however, to discover in what way they are more tenderly cared for by the

celestial dispensers of desirable things, than are other children. They cannot be described as differing in any very essential particulars from their little brothers and sisters in other lands. It is true that they have not the keen perception of truth, the chivalrous sentiment of honour, or the dogged industry which are common to some extent to most European children; but they have a [Pg 47] respect for the aged, for their parents, and for all those set in authority over them that might well be copied by the democratic children of the West. In their behaviour towards their parents and their priests they stand as excellent exemplars of reverence and obedience.

The respectful manner they adopt in their dealings with all who may be presumed to control them, renders the work of any teacher in Siam a moderately light one. Insubordination or impertinence is unheard of. The oft-debated question of corporal punishment is here solved by the character of the children themselves. Schools can be managed without canes, hard words, or severe punishment of any description. Discipline, the first and chief goal that the European teacher strives to obtain, is here produced by merely wishing for it. The term "kroo" or "teacher" is a title that commands respect from parents and scholars alike, and they invariably use it in addressing him on all occasions and in all places whether public or private. The only teachers for years were the priests, even as the majority are to-day, and it seems as though in transferring the office of pedagogue from priest to layman, they have transferred also a portion of that atmosphere of reverence that is ever associated with the priesthood. The Siamese in this respect may be said to have reached a higher level than their whiter brethren, inasmuch as they recognise in an outward and visible manner, that the teacher of religion and the instructor of the young are both engaged in the same grand work of mental and moral progress.

Siamese children, especially the little girls, are exceedingly pretty, rivalling, if not excelling, all [Pg 48] the other beauties of the East, Japan included. They are very merry, continually contented, easily pleased and most unselfish in their dealings with one another. Their almost absolute lack of selfishness is one of the most pleasing features in their very lovable characters. The boys at school lend their property to their fellow-scholars with the greatest readiness. Watches, knives, pencils, and other schoolboy treasures circulate sometimes to such an extent that one is inclined to fancy they must be common property; and, greatest test of pure good-nature, they even lend their bicycles to each other.

They are, however, early tainted with the national vices, vices that flourish more particularly in hot climates and luxurious soils. It will be wise, however, to make no attempt to describe these more mature characters until some one can lay down a code of moral virtue which shall be absolutely applicable to all people at all times. It will be safer to consider only the younger children at a time of life preceding the period when sensual enjoyments begin to enchain both mind and body.

Upon the birth of the child, a big fire is made by the side of the mother, who at this time forsakes her bed and lies on a long narrow flat board. A fruit supposed to possess protective properties is scattered round or under the house, and a cord is twined round the exterior of the dwelling, which has been blessed by the priests and which also serves the same purpose of keeping off those evil spirits who would otherwise enter and carry away the life of the child. The interior of [Pg 49] the room is like a furnace, and it is to be feared that under these conditions, the evil spirits that haunt the sites of defective ventilation do only too often accomplish their fatal object. For three days, several old women attend the mother and make offerings to the powers whose influence is beneficial. This they do by making three balls of rice and then throwing them in three lucky directions. It is said that every new-born babe bears as its first name the word "Dang", which means "red". If this be so, then the mother or nurse speedily turns her attention to the best means of rendering the term singularly inaccurate, for instead of allowing the child to retain its original and natural colour, she immediately rubs it all over with a yellow paste whose chief constituent is turmeric powder. The baby presently appears as if it were suffering from a very severe and expansive attack of jaundice. This process of 'yellowing' is popularly supposed to keep away mosquitoes. It is not confined to red babies, but cats and dogs may often be seen who have received the same treatment. It is a common sight to see a couple of toddling yellow children engaged in teasing or amusing an equally yellow specimen of the canine or feline family.

For several years no clothes are worn, so that their health is never injured or their comfort marred by unsanitary garments. They are frequently adorned with massive gold or silver bracelets and anklets, and wear a little silver shield fastened in front of the body by a string of beads passed round the loins. The shield is merely an ornament and plays no indispensable part [Pg 50] in their metallic apparel, for when it is once lost, it is seldom replaced, though the string of beads may persist for some months afterwards. The amount of wealth possessed by the poor in the shape of ornaments must be enormous, for almost every child bears somewhere on its body a heavy piece of gold or silver.

Until the child can walk it passes its life under the same system of treatment usually accorded to human beings at this tender age. It is nursed and petted by its mother, talked to, made a fuss of, presented to uninterested visitors, and generally tormented by the same excess of demonstrative affection which mothers of every colour lavish upon their own offspring. At a very early stage in its existence it is transferred with solemn ceremony from the wicker basket in which it has lain since its birth to a cradle peculiar to Siam. The cradle consists of a strong oblong rectangular frame-work at the top and a flat narrow board at the bottom. The two are connected round the four sides by a network made of strong twine. It is suspended from the rafters of the roof by four strong cords. It is swung, not rocked, and the mother or sister of the babe will sit tailor-fashion on the floor for hours at a time contentedly chewing betel-nut, or chanting monotonous Siamese

Gregorians in a low plaintive tone, at the same time swinging the cradle gently to and fro by a long rope. When the baby is taken for an airing it is carried by some female member of the household, who places it on her hip and supports it with one arm. This method of carrying the [Pg 51] child is said to be a healthy one for the baby, but it must be a fairly unhealthy one for the nurse, who has always to walk at an angle with the ground, suggesting the appearance of the Tower of Pisa, while the baby is wedged, cross-legged, between the firm pressure of the supporting arm and the bended body.

Passing over the period which elapses between lying in the cradle and learning to walk, we next find these little Eastern street-arabs following their own sweet wills in the roads and alleys or on the canals of their native town or village. They are perfectly free and independent, and are given up to the educative influence of Nature in a way that would have satisfied Rousseau himself. The boys still remain unclothed; they scamper along the roads, driving young bullocks; sit on the backs of tame buffaloes as they plough the rice fields; steal bananas; climb trees for cocoa-nuts; smoke enormous cigarettes; paddle their own canoes; never bother their heads about getting home in time for meals; lie down in shady places to rest; never read books; do not know the inside of a school, and spend the whole day according to their own ideas of amusement. If they want to play, they play; if they desire to sleep, they have but to lie down in the first convenient spot, when they attain the desired condition with a rapidity that is to be greatly envied. Gloves, ties, collars, neat pockets, untorn coats, unsplit boots and other abominations never cause the Siamese boy a moment's anxiety. If he wears any hat at all, it is a nice light roomy sort of [Pg 52] structure discarded by its original owner several years before, and in such a condition of decay, that an occasional fall into the water or mud does not affect either its value or its usefulness.

At a later date he begins to wear clothes. He dresses like his sister, wearing a cool airy garment consisting of a single long strip of cloth of some bright colour, fastened round the waist and draped about the legs. It hangs loosely about the knees and resembles a pair of knickerbockers. There are no buttons, tapes, pins, or suspenders, and he requires little training in the art of fixing his single garment so that it will remain permanently in the required position. He wears no shoes or stockings, the use of such luxuries being restricted to the upper classes. The upper half of the body is left bare, except when, in accordance with a fashion of very recent date, a white linen jacket is worn. All girls wear either this jacket or else a coloured scarf wrapped tightly round the breast. The smarter ones wear both scarf and jacket, but amongst the lower classes, the majority of the women leave their bodies uncovered above the waist after the birth of the first child. All ranks of society are passionately fond of finery, and adorn themselves as well as they can possibly afford. The native rings are set with native stones, but the workmanship is very rude. When money is not available for the purchase of jewellery, flowers are obtained. As their clothes possess no collars with button-holes in which the floral decorations can be placed, they stick them behind the ear.

A day's life with one of these children is spent after the following fashion. He rises at early dawn [Pg 53] and goes at once to the nearest water to bathe. He has no acquaintance with soap, but pours abundant water over himself with basin or bucket. The refreshing operation finishes with a plunge in the stream, after which he either lies down, or runs about till he is dry. A breakfast of rice, salt fish, and fruit, eaten from brass or earthenware dishes, with his fingers, is the prelude to the day's enjoyment. He next devotes all his energies to getting through the day. He accomplishes the task set before him by alternate intervals of sleep or play. He is a faithful disciple of Isaac Walton. A bit of stick and a fibre of rattan are sufficient tackle with which to capture a few fish out of the thousands that swarm in the waters. At low tide, when many of the canals are mere valleys of mud, a whole tribe of children descend into the slimy deposit, and push coarse sieves into the mud in the attempt to catch prawns. The captured creatures are placed in stone jars. When weary of the sport, or when the jar is filled with prawns, they vary the nature of their amusement by pelting each other with mud. It is simply snow-balling transformed. They stand about in the slippery mess, and make little pellets of soft mud. These they fling at each other with an aim remarkable for its invariable accuracy. When sufficiently tired and dirty they get away to the nearest water, take a turn or two, and then come up to dry.

They delight in witnessing extreme activity in other creatures. A cock fight or a general battle [Pg 54] amongst the pariah dogs is a source of great amusement. At night they search for crickets. When they have collected a large number they place them, two at a time, in small jars made of mud and baked hard in the sun; the two crickets are urged to engage in warfare by the skilful application of small pointed pieces of wood. The battle which ensues evokes their hearty appreciation. They catch fighting fish, feed them with mosquito larvæ, and then train them to fight. After a proper course of training the fish become extremely pugnacious, and will even make fierce attacks upon their own images as seen in a looking-glass placed by the side of the bottle in which they are imprisoned. As a general rule, Siamese youths are keen spectators of anything of a combative character. And yet amongst themselves they are extremely peaceful and unquarrelsome. Supposing them all to be sent to school, it may be safely predicted that there would be fewer fights in a whole generation of scholars than an English school knows in a year.

Uncoloured pictures have no charm for them, for an ordinary drawing in black and white is utterly incomprehensible to them. All native drawings, with their strange disregard of the laws of perspective, are executed in colours. They do not instantly recognise photographs of the streets and buildings with whose appearance they are perfectly familiar, and they will as often as not view them upside down. The power to appreciate black and white is, however, merely dormant, as is shown by the fact that the few children who attend the Anglo-Vernacular schools speedily [Pg 55]

learn to take an intelligent interest in the drawings and reproductions of photographs published in the English illustrated papers.

They are very clever in the art of making bouquets and weaving garlands of flowers. On festive occasions, the houses are festooned from end to end with long rope-like strands of small blossoms fastened together with wonderful skill.

On every head a little tuft of hair is allowed to grow in the centre of a shaven crown. This is removed at a certain period, with an imposing and important ritual.

They make excellent scholars, for they are very bright and intelligent. Only a mere handful of the population attend any school regularly, but all those who hope to obtain any Government employment must at least learn to read and write. Those that do attend the schools learn to draw accurately and neatly after very little practice. They need no teaching with regard to modelling in clay, their representations of elephants in particular being beyond criticism. All ordinary school subjects are rapidly acquired by them, and they are adepts in the acquisition of a foreign language. They learn to read, write, and speak English in the Anglo-Vernacular schools in about three years, with great ease and fluency. Many boys will speak in English concerning the common events of their daily lives after a few months' tuition. They are helped in this matter by their wonderfully retentive memories which enable them to remember a large number of words and idioms.

There is no "esprit de corps" in any school, unless it is cultivated by the master in charge. It can [Pg 56] be easily developed up to a certain point for just the same reason that the adoption can be ensured of certain rules and maxims in the schoolboy's code of honour, not so much on account of the intrinsic value of the maxim or the rule itself, as because it has been put before them as a European custom. It is therefore to be imitated if they wish to appear "up to date." In speaking to their teachers, no matter what their relative ranks in life may be, they invariably use that form of the pronoun "I" which signifies that they consider themselves as occupying a lower position than the person spoken to. They abhor long holidays, but like to take odd days by fits and starts whenever they feel so inclined. Unpunctuality is a common fault unless firmly opposed. Cricket and football have been introduced at one of the schools and have become fairly popular, but the climate is really too hot for such vigorous forms of athletic activity ever to flourish except amongst a few enthusiasts.

Inquisitiveness is politeness, and it is rather bewildering to the English teacher new to his work, especially when he is constantly questioned as to his age, the price of his watch, the amount of his salary, or the date when he last had his hair cut. The school satchel does not seem to have become popular, most scholars carrying their belongings tied up in a Manchester-made handkerchief. Boys of the higher classes are attended by their servants, who carry these articles for them, and at times, even carry the owners also. In the intervals of playtime they smoke. Each [Pg 57] boy carries his own tobacco-pouch, matches, and tobacco, and is an adept at rolling cigarettes. They are thoroughly unselfish as regards the disposal of their smoking material, and a cigarette will be circulated amongst a group of friends, each one taking a whiff or two and then handing it on to his neighbour. If the weed is unfinished when the school bell rings, they calmly extinguish it, stick it behind the ear, penholder fashion, and return to class.

They are affectionate, cheerful, respectful, delightful fellows to play with or work with, and offering to the observant master many interesting examples of the gradual development of mind and character under a rational system of teaching.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

In a land where superstitious practices abound, the children are sure to have more than an ordinary belief in goblins and ghosts. The belief in divers supernatural beings of evil or good intent is powerfully implanted in every adult mind. In the case of the children every natural phenomenon, every event of their lives is to them under the control of some invisible spirit. They have a profound belief in their marvellous fairy tales, and many of them never grow out of this extreme condition of credibility during the whole of their existence. They cling to their mystic interpretations of natural phenomena, with such force, that in the schools that have been recently founded, the attempts to teach the elements of natural science have been made under [Pg 58] rather disheartening circumstances. The children are perfectly certain that thunder is exactly what their name for it denotes, "the sky crying." There is a horrible giant of great strength and furious temper who leads a very quarrelsome life with a cantankerous wife, and when he grumbles and growls at her various iniquities, the echo of his voice comes in cries from the sky. When in fits of violent anger he hurls his ponderous hatchet at his spouse, it strikes the floor of heaven, and a thunderbolt falls. When the broad flashes of lightning play at hide-and-seek amongst the dense black masses of cloud during the wet months of the rainy season, they say a woman is flashing a mirror in the air, or according to another interpretation, the angels are [Pg 59] amusing themselves by striking fire with bricks. The falling stars are produced when frolicsome spirits in their sportive moods pitch torches at each other. When the giant crab comes up out of his hole in the deep parts of the sea, he bears up the waters on his back, and the tide flows; when he retires again, it ebbs. Sometimes the angels in heaven all take it into their heads to have a bath at the same time, and as a consequence they splash the water over the sides of the bath, and the rain falls. Another theory states, however, that the rain is caused by a huge fish a thousand miles long, who with his mighty tail furiously lashes the waters of the deep. The most poetical of all these superstitions is that which ascribes the origin of the winds to the voices of the babies who have departed this life.

Not only children, but thousands of the grown-up men and women hold firmly to these beliefs in spite of all the scientific explanations that are given to them. Quite recently a debate was held at the Bangkok Literary Institute on "What is the shape of the world?" The ecclesiastical portion of the audience, who were mostly natives, fought tooth and nail for the flatness of our planet, and though one or two of their own countrymen argued very forcibly against their notions, when the final vote was taken there was quite a large majority opposed to the theory of "round like an orange." One of the teachers was giving a lesson to his class one day on this very subject. His scholars promptly informed him that the world was flat. He further learned that it would take two [Pg 60] hundred years to travel round it at the rate of two hundred miles a day, and that somewhere within the circumference of this pancake-shaped planet there is a mountain called Mount Meru, which is eight hundred and forty thousand miles high, bearing upon its summit the realms of heaven. He explained that the world was round, and was greeted by the remark, "Why, that can't possibly be, for if the world were round the water would all roll off." As there are no scientific terms in the language, and as all attempts to explain why the water did not roll off would have been utterly beyond the comprehension of the young minds of his scholars, he was rather non-plussed. He did his best, however, and believed that, by his earnestness in pressing home his point, he had at last made them accept, even if they did not understand, the fact. By way of recapitulation at the close of his lesson he asked one who had shown intense incredulity, "What shape is the world?" The boy stolidly replied, "The teacher says it is round."

In their fairy tales they demand episodes of the most marvellous character. An Englishman once

read to some Siamese boys the story of "Jack the Giant Killer," thinking it might interest them. To his great surprise they listened with the greatest indifference to his narrative. On being questioned as to whether they liked the story or not, one boy replied, "It isn't fierce enough;" and further, by way of illustrating what he considered satisfactory in this class of fiction, he related how a Siamese hero met the whole of his enemies banded together against him in a deep ravine. [Pg 61] The hero went towards them single-handed, and just when the assembled foes were calculating upon a triumphant victory, he quietly took up the mountains to the right and left of him, in the hollows of his hands, brought them rapidly together, annihilated the multitude with one stroke, and then unfatigued, replaced the mountains upon their bases once more.

In some cases their superstitions exert a very real influence upon their actions. There are many people who would never dare to utter the words "tiger" or "crocodile" in a spot where these terrible creatures might possibly be in hiding, for fear of directing the attention of the beasts towards themselves. Another illustration may also here be given. One of the students in training at the Normal College for teachers, was absent for some time. On his return, the principal spoke to him, calling him by the name he had previously been known by. He at once requested that his old name should not again be used, and gave a new one. On enquiring the reason, it was found he had been absent through illness. While lying sick at home, an angel had appeared to his mother in a dream and had warned her that if her son's name were not changed, he would die, as the name he then possessed was an unlucky one for him. His name was immediately changed, and he recovered. At the same time, his cousin lay ill in the same house, and the angel gave a similar warning with regard to this boy's name, but the prophetic voice was in this case unheeded, and [Pg 62] the child died. As there is no registry of births or deaths there is practically no trouble in altering a name, and in fact, such alterations are of frequent occurrence.

A few years ago the Siamese Government organised an Education Department, with the intention of establishing an adequate system of Primary Education, which was to be followed in due time by a system of Secondary Education. Up to that time the only schools were those in connection with the monasteries. In these schools reading and writing were taught by the priests. Though their methods were illogical and their curriculum narrow, it must never be forgotten that most Siamese men can read and write their own language, and that the country owes a deep debt of gratitude to these monks who did their best according to their own theories. These schools must in the future be the starting-points for any system of education that would pretend to exercise any influence throughout the country. The work of the Education Department, as far as progress or reform is concerned, has been, so far, in connection with the establishment of a Training College for Teachers, the founding of four Anglo-Vernacular Schools for boys, one of which is a boarding-school, and a boarding-school for girls. These have been organised and controlled by Europeans and are fairly satisfactory. Attached to the Training College is a Practising School, which is the only good Vernacular school in Siam. It owes its present excellent condition to the three Englishmen who have had it successively under their charge. But undoubtedly the most [Pg 63] successful educational institution is the school for girls. It has been more than usually fortunate in possessing a staff of teachers possessing brilliant intellectual attainments, great professional skill, and a deep living interest in everything that tends towards social progress. Unfortunately, the Vernacular schools have not yet come under European influence, and they still preserve their antiquated methods. Only about seven or eight of them are directly under the control of the Education Department. They possess no furniture, and the children sit on the floor. In one school, the head master has provided a number of old soap and biscuit boxes to act as desks. There are no registers or other records. There is a "code" which contains two standards. It takes a boy from three to four years to pass the first, and comparatively few ever attempt to pass the second. The teachers in these Government Vernacular Schools are not priests, though the schools themselves are usually in some part of the temple grounds.

It is to be hoped that in the near future the Government will decide upon a thorough re-organisation of these schools, for, when they are properly taught and controlled, they will be very powerful for good, the bright and intelligent character of the scholars rendering all school work eminently successful.

CHAPTER IV. [Pg 64]

THE SHAVING OF THE TOP-KNOT.

Of all the ceremonies that attend the lives of Siamese children none are so important as those connected with the shaving of the top-knot. From their earliest days the whole of the hair is shaved off the top of the head, with the exception of one small tuft that is never touched until it is finally removed with great pomp and ritual. This single lock is daily combed, twisted, oiled, and tied in a little knot. A jewelled pin stuck through it, or a small wreath of tiny flowers encircling it, are its usual adornments. The head, as being the crown and summit of the human body is held in extreme reverence, and it is considered the height of impertinence for one person to touch another's head except when necessity demands. Under the tuft there lies, according to the Hindoo legend, a microscopic aperture through which the human spirit finds a means of entrance at birth and departure at death, and when Ravana, one of the giant kings of Ceylon, once carelessly or caressingly laid the tip of his finger upon the hair of the beautiful Vedavatti, she

turned to him in direst anger, declaring that after such an unwarrantable insult, life was no longer possible to her, and that she would speedily cut off her abundant and outraged locks and then perish in flames before his eyes. [Pg 65]

The ceremony of tonsure is a very ancient one, and is found existing in many countries separated from each other not only by miles of land and sea, but far more widely divided by different religious and social customs. The priests of Isis, the Hindoo Siva, the Roman Catholic monks, the candidates for admission to the religious brotherhood of Peru—are all examples of the extent to which this ceremony has been practised in many lands, through many years. It figures as a religious observance symbolical of a change of life and purpose; it occurred amongst the Chinese originally as a sign of subjection consequent upon a change of masters; and it exists in Siam as a civil rite terminating the period of childhood. In all cases it typifies a complete change of condition or purpose—it marks a re-birth. In the case of Siamese boys, who must shave the whole of the head before entering the priesthood, the ceremony takes place a year or so before the time when they must each, according to their national custom, don the yellow robe. Girls lose their top-knot when they are about eleven or thirteen years of age. In any case it must be removed before they reach the age of puberty, and as many of them reach this condition before or near the thirteenth year, their parents generally keep on the safe side by performing the operation when they are eleven years old. The twelfth year is inadmissible, as twelve, being an even number, is unlucky. [Pg 66]

When the year has arrived in which it is deemed expedient to cut off the carefully tended lock, the astrologers are consulted as to the appointment of a propitious day. Now this is an extremely difficult task, for the day chosen must be one free from any of the numerous evil influences that affect the lives of men. These evil influences have been duly studied and catalogued, and include the powers of innumerable demons and of death. The day must not be one on which sickness is liable to appear; in the heavens above, no constellation bearing a female name must be visible; it must not be a day marked in the calendar as being likely to be visited by thunderbolts, conflagrations, wrecks or loss of life by drowning. Then also it must be free from dangers from enemies or wild beasts; or yet again, it must not be a day on which a man may expect severe punishment from his earthly rulers, or death by falling off a tree.

Even when the auspicious day has been decided after long and laborious calculations, and earnest consultations of old calendars, there yet remains the necessity of choosing a particularly lucky moment on the particularly lucky day.

When all these preliminary details have been satisfactorily settled, the date is announced and preparations are made for the celebration of the event with an elaborate and mystic ritual. The house of the parents of the child is cleaned and adorned, a process it never undergoes except on those occasions when it is the scene of the performance of religious ceremonies. A table is placed to receive the numerous offerings which will be freely made on the auspicious day, and a gilded image of Buddha is placed reverentially on an altar and surrounded with candelabra bearing waxen tapers, with incense sticks in china vases, with wax flowers and the sacred vessels used during the celebration. Around this decorated altar a hallowed circle is formed with certain utensils deemed especially important and holy. It includes within its circumference, a bench or table on which are placed several vessels of gold and silver, and the bowls of water which will be afterwards consecrated by means of a number of formulæ recited by the priests from the sacred Buddhist or Brahminical texts. The mystic conch-shell, and the shears and razors complete the holy ring. There are three pairs of scissors, the handles of one pair being of gold, of another of silver, and of the third of an alloy of copper and gold. On another stand about as high as the level of the eye of a man of average height, are placed several offerings of dainty food in small saucers made of plaited leaves. These are for the refreshment and propitiation of the tutelary deities of the place, to whom, and to the shades of the dead, the Brahminical astrologers make oblations and prayers at the rate of about two shillings and four pence per day. A curiously-shaped throne is next erected. It is a raised square dais with four slender posts, one at each corner, which lean towards each other at the top, and support a frail canopy. The whole structure is first covered with white cloth, and then draped with curtains of white gauze and cloth of gold. It is on this throne that the candidate sits to be bathed with consecrated water when the top-knot has been removed. During the initial stages of the proceedings it bears a nine-storied pagoda. The pagoda tapers towards the summit and is of very frail material. The corner stays are made of the mid-ribs of the plantain leaves, and each story is formed of strong fibrous leaves. On each stage there are nine square dishes also constructed of leaves. They hold a number of sweetmeats and foods that are supposed to be particularly palatable to the god Ketu. This deity is of a kindly and beneficent disposition, and, if properly worshipped, rewards his devotees by endowing them with long life and prosperity. Hence all these preliminary preparations in order to entreat his presence on this important occasion. Along the corner stays are stuck incense sticks, tapers, and flags of a peculiar pattern. The preparations are completed by surrounding the whole house with a protective cord or thread made of unspun cotton. The thread is attached at one end to the dais erected for the monks, passes over the altar, is twined round the bowls containing the water to be consecrated, is carried round the exterior of the house, and is then brought back to the hall, where it ends in a small ball, ready to be tied to the top-knot of the child. It is supposed to be efficacious in keeping out all evil spirits or other influences that would in the absence of any such consecrated barrier, force an entrance to the hall of ceremonies and render nugatory the performance of the various rites. A similar cord may be seen at times round the palace or city walls, serving a similar purpose. [Pg 67] [Pg 68] [Pg 69]

On the appointed day, the floor of the house is covered with mats or carpets, and a dais is prepared for the monks who are to be present. It is raised above the level on which all ordinary mortals will sit, and is covered with fine white cloth. Pillows with embroidered triangular ends are prepared for the monks to lean against, and spittoons, bowls of water, and trays of tea-cups and betel-nut are placed before each pillow. There are usually seven or nine monks, but even when their number is more or less than this, it is never by any chance an even one. At the side of the platform a gong is hung from a tripod stand. This gong plays an important part in the subsequent proceedings, for it is used to mark the end of each successive stage of the ritual. Every relative and friend is invited, and each of the guests is expected to bring a present either of food or money. The more people are invited, the more profitable does the ceremony become to the candidate and his parents. If the people are poor, they can always borrow the gold and silver utensils that are required from some wealthy friend or relative, for it is the custom on these occasions for help to be freely requested and as freely rendered. About three or four in the afternoon of the first day the monks and friends arrive. As the first monk enters the house, one stroke is given to the gong. The arrival of the second monk is announced by two strokes, the third by three, and so on. It is customary amongst the lower classes to wash the feet of each priest on [Pg 70] his entrance into the house. A basin of water is thrown over his feet, after which they are dried with a towel. When the priests are all seated, tea is poured out for each of them. While they are refreshing themselves the band in attendance strikes up a lively tune, the visitors at the same time seating themselves upon the floor in readiness for the first item on the official programme. In the meantime the child is being robed and otherwise adorned. He wears a full gala dress and is loaded with costly ornaments. The skirt is of rich brocade, and the cape round the shoulders is of gold filigree set with precious stones. Heavy gold and jewelled bangles are placed upon the wrists and ankles, and armlets of similar value encircle the arms. In certain cases a triple gold chain is placed over the left shoulder and under the right arm. Sometimes the child is so heavily weighted with these valuable ornaments that he is unable to walk without support. A coronet or wreath surrounds the top-knot. He bears in his hands a charm on which are written several sentences of protective import. In this way a further precaution is taken against the intrusions of undesirable visitors from the supernatural world.

Two household priests of the Brahmin faith precede the child as he comes forth from the inner apartments to meet the assembled guests. They scatter in front of them flowers and parched rice as an offering to those celestial beings whose favours and influence they desire. Behind these, [Pg 71] comes another couple, one blowing the conch trumpet and the other vigorously agitating the hour-glass-shaped tabor. A musical outburst greets their appearance, while the smiling faces of every one present afford encouragement and sympathy to the nervous subject of the trying ordeal. The child proceeds to the dais, raises his hands, palm to palm, to his forehead and bows his head to the ground in obeisance to the monks. He repeats his salutations three times; at the third time, placing his head on a cushion on the floor of the dais. He remains in this prostrate condition until the end of that portion of the ritual which is celebrated on the first day. The priests now take the protective cord in their hands, and the monk of highest rank ties the loose end of the thread to the top-knot.

Then a member of the family crawls on hands and knees to the raised platform, and with bent head and uplifted hands, beseeches the monks to recite the five daily precepts of abstinence. In a monotonous Gregorian kind of chant, the assembled priests then intone these five precepts, asking Buddha to keep them that day from all destruction of life, from thieving, from impurity, from lying, and from intoxicating liquors. The guests repeat them solemnly after the priests, and by so doing bind themselves to a faithful observance of them for that day at least. A number of texts are next recited by the priests in the same monotonous kind of chant. At the end of each text, three strokes are given to the gong. When the recital is finished, the candidate rises from his prostrate position and leaves the room in the same way that he entered it, the Brahmins [Pg 72] scattering offerings in front of him, the gongs, conch trumpets and band combining in one deafening burst of sound to indicate that that day's portion of the ceremonial is over. The texts that are recited are regarded by the people as so many exorcisms against malignant influences, but their real purpose, which has long been forgotten, is more of an instructive character, as they were intended by Buddha to teach the people what were the evils against which they were to strive.

The day closes with great merriment. Old friends tell their own experiences or those of their children on similar occasions; invitations to forthcoming ceremonies are given and accepted; every one feasts and smokes, and then a theatrical performance takes place that lasts long into the small hours of the morning.

The whole ceremony is now a complex mixture of both Buddhist and Brahminical rites, but there is very little difference between the parts enacted by the priests of Buddha and those of Brahma. The Brahminical priests, however, have a special set of chants of their own, and these they repeat during the first day's ceremonies. The object of their prayers is to entreat a number of their own supernatural beings to grant their approval of all that is being done. They appeal to the Devas, and to Siva sitting on his porpoise. They cry to Vishnu as he rides on the back of the serpent king in an ocean of milk; to the four-armed Brahma on his golden swan; to the god of the winds riding swiftly in his chariot of clouds; and to Indra on his wonderful elephant with the [Pg 73] three and thirty heads. They recall to the minds of these deities the past existences of the tonsorial candidate. They remind them of the good actions he has previously performed, and wind up with a powerful and poetic appeal that they will combine to endow the subject of their prayers with a long and prosperous existence.

On the morning of the third day, when the actual cutting will take place, the monks arrive at a very early hour, before the sun has risen, but no gong tells of their arrival, nor is any noise of any description permitted, as the spirits of ill must not be awakened or allowed to know that this is the day of the great event. The priests take their breakfast in silence, no band accompanying their repast, with its joyful strains. As the hour of dawn approaches, the Brahmins lead in the child. As the particular moment, foretold by the astrologers, draws near, the Buddhist priests sing songs to Buddha, using the Pali, a language which is not understood by the people, relating his many triumphs, and by judicious praise securing his approval. These songs are thought to be extremely efficacious in procuring for the child an abundance of good luck in the future. While the singing is taking place, the top-knot is divided into three locks, each lock being then fastened at the ends. Amulets are placed in them, and every precaution is taken to carry out the final act of this, the most important, stage of this important rite, with the strict observance of the minutest detail. Any deviation from the prescribed mode of procedure would be fatal to its success. The [Pg 74] chanting continues until the actual moment has arrived when the hair must be severed from the head. At the very moment the chants end, the gongs are beaten, and the guest of highest rank takes up the gold-encrusted scissors and quickly snips off one of the three locks. Then the two most aged relatives of the child present, take the other scissors, and cut off the remaining tufts. Each of the three in turn pretends to shave off the short hairs that are left, after which a skilled barber, with a genuine razor, speedily removes the last trace of the long-cherished appendage, leaving the head perfectly bald. The long hairs are placed in one basin, and the short hairs in another. They are afterwards dealt with in a manner to be presently described. More chanting and gong-beating announce that the performance has been successfully accomplished.

There are still other forms to be gone through, the first of which immediately follows the operation of shaving. The offering to Ketu is removed from the throne that it has occupied up to the present time, and the shaven-headed child is seated under the canopy on the exact spot previously occupied by the offering to the god. In his hand he holds a powerful charm, which he presses tightly to his breast. The eldest monk, or else the one of the highest rank, takes a portion of the consecrated water and pours it over the head of the child. All the other priests follow suit, and then comes the turn, first, of the relatives, and lastly, of the most distinguished visitors. As the bathing takes place in early morning, the air is generally rather cold, and the candidate is [Pg 75] doubtless very much relieved when the last drop of holy water has been thrown over him.

When the bathing is over, he retires and changes his costume for the most gorgeous apparel that his friends possess or can borrow. He is dressed in the brightest of colours, adorned with jewels, and then returns to his friends. His first duty is to feed the officiating priests. This he does by first taking to each of them a silver bowl filled with rice, from which he helps each monk to a liberal portion, with a carved wooden ladle inlaid with mother of pearl. Having served out the rice, he takes trays of sweetmeats and fruit, going and returning on his knees, and prostrating himself before each monk in turn. Music again accompanies the feast, and at its conclusion the priests chant a song of thanksgiving, and give their blessing to the child.

In the afternoon another feast is held, followed by a purely Brahminical ceremony of peculiar interest. Each person, so say these priests, possesses a "kwun." It is difficult to translate this word into English, and it has been variously rendered as "soul," "spirit," "good-luck," and "guardian-angel." It is supposed to enter and leave the body at different times, and its absence is always indicated by the troubles that immediately visit the person whose corporeal frame it has vacated. Now at the time of the tonsure ceremony, great anxiety is felt, as at this time there is great probability that the "kwun" may depart, and so leave the unfortunate child a hopeless [Pg 76] wreck in after life. The purpose of the subsequent ceremonies is to recall this mysterious being, should he by any chance have departed, and then to fix him so securely in the body of the child that ever afterwards he may be sure of possessing the subtle, fickle phantom. No time is wasted before making the attempt to induce the "kwun" to take up a permanent abode. A pagoda is erected, and on it are placed several kinds of food known to be favoured by the spirit. This pagoda, several mystic candle-holders, boxes of perfumed unguents, offerings of cocoa-nuts, and an auspicious torch are arranged in a holy circle. In the afternoon, after the "kwun" has had time to enter the charmed ring and satisfy his spiritual appetite with the perfumes of the unguents and the foods, the candidate is led into the centre of the hall and placed near the pagoda. A cloth is thrown over the food in order to confine the spirit and prevent him getting away. All the people present, sit down on the floor, forming a circle, with the child, the captured "kwun" and the priests in the middle. The Brahmins now address the spirit, and in a very earnest fashion ask him to come into the child. They tell tales to him, and so try to amuse him, and they entreat him with flattery, joke, and song. The gongs ring out their loudest notes, the people cheer, and the priests pray, and only a "kwun" of the most unamiable disposition could resist the combined appeal. The last sentences of the formal invocation run thus:—

> "Benignant Kwun![A] Thou fickle being who art wont to wander and dally about! [Pg 77] From the moment that the child wast conceived in the womb, thou hast enjoyed every pleasure, until ten (lunar) months having elapsed and the time of delivery arrived, thou hast suffered and run the risk of perishing by being born alive into the world. Gracious Kwun, thou wast at that time so tender, delicate, and wavering as to cause great anxiety regarding thy fate; thou wast exactly like a child, youthful, innocent, and inexperienced. The least trifle frightened thee and made thee shudder. In thy infantile playfulness thou wast wont to frolic and wander to no purpose. As thou didst commence to learn to sit, and, unassisted, to crawl totteringly on all fours, thou wast ever falling flat on thy face or on thy back. As

thou didst grow up in years and couldest move thy steps firmly, thou didst then begin to run and sport thoughtlessly and rashly all round the rooms, the terrace, and bridging planks of travelling boat or floating house, and at times thou didst fall into the stream, creek, or pond, among the floating water-weeds, to the utter dismay of those to whom thy existence was most dear. O gentle Kwun, come into thy corporeal abode; do not delay this auspicious rite. Thou art now full-grown and dost form everybody's delight and admiration.

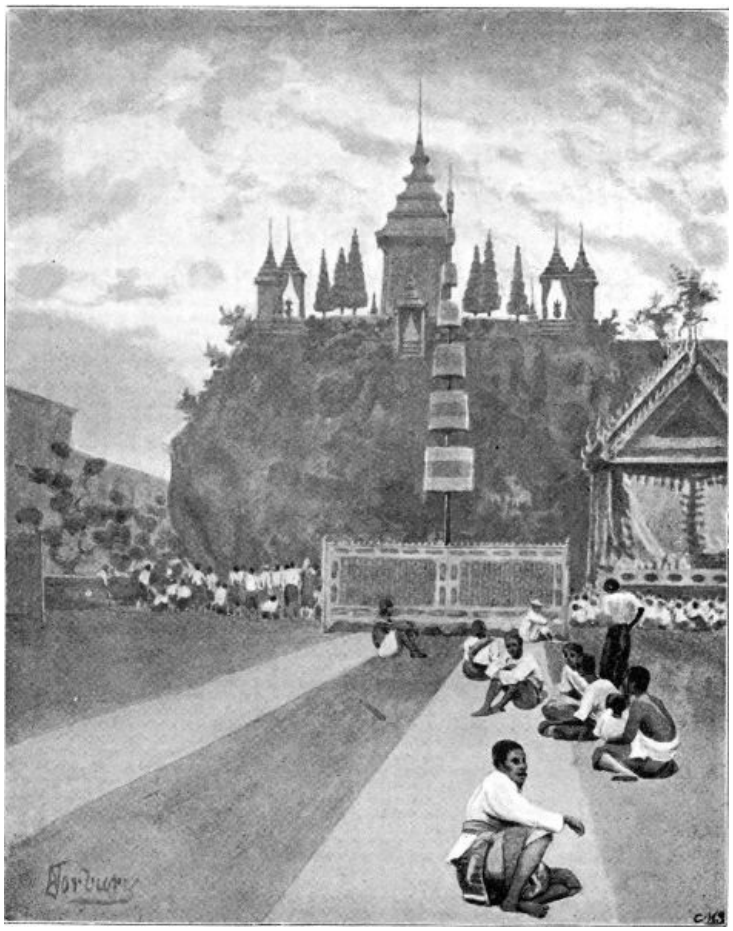
"Let all the tiny particles of Kwun that have fallen on land or water, assemble and take permanent abode in this darling little child. Let them all hurry to the site of this auspicious ceremony and admire the magnificent preparations made for them in this hall." [Pg 78]

The brocaded cloth from the central pagoda is now removed, rolled up tightly and handed to the child, who is told to clasp it firmly to his breast and not to let the "kwun" escape. Everyone stands up, still forming a ring round the candidate. The mystical torch in the centre is lit; the Brahmin takes three candlesticks, each containing three tapers, and lights them at the central fire. With his palms together he raises the nine lights above his head, describes with them a circle in the air, and then with the back of his right hand, wafts the smoke into the child's face. Each person in the surrounding group repeats the same actions in turn, and when the last person has finished, the officiating priest takes one betel leaf from the pagoda. A second and a third time is the waving of fire performed, and each time a betel leaf is removed from the stand. After the third time of waving, the priest replaces the candlesticks, and daubs the three leaves with a paste made of the sweet smelling oils and other substances on the different stories of the pagoda. He extinguishes the nine candles by pinching the wicks between the smeared leaves, after which he takes them all in his hands, relights them, once more puts out the flame and blows the smoke in the child's face. He repeats the same mystical operations twice, and at last replaces all the candlesticks. He now dips one finger into the dirty leaves, and with the paste draws a scroll between the child's eyebrows. Milk is taken from the cocoa-nuts in a small spoon, and the spoon [Pg 79] is presented to each successive layer of the pagoda, as though it were taking a portion of each of the articles placed thereon. The child drinks the milk, and having thus imbibed the food of the "kwun," ensures ultimately the "kwun's" permanent residence in his body. Around his wrist is fastened a charmed and magic cord to protect him from those infernal spirits whose vocation it is to tempt the "kwun" to forsake its home. For three nights he sleeps with the embroidered cloth that was taken from the pagoda, fast clasped in his arms. If after three days nothing unfortunate occurs to trouble him, his future welfare is definitely established.

It now only remains to dispose of the hairs that were taken from the head on the removal of the top-knot. The short hairs are put into a little vessel made of plantain leaves, and sent adrift on the ebb tide in the nearest canal or river. As they float away, there goes with them also, all that was harmful or wrong in the previous disposition of the owner. The long hairs are kept until such time as the child shall make a pilgrimage to the holy Footprint of Buddha on the sacred hill at Prabat. They will then be presented to the priests, who are supposed to use them for the manufacture of brushes for the sweeping of the Footprint; but in reality, so much hair is presented to the priests each year, that they are unable to use it all, so they wait till the pilgrims have departed, when they consume with fire all that they do not require.

So important to the individual is this ceremony of shaving the top-knot, that were it omitted in [Pg 80] the case of any single person, the unlucky one would believe himself ruled by evil influences for the rest of his life, and would unfailingly attribute every disaster in after-life to the fatal omission of the ceremony. Yet there are many people who have neither money themselves, nor friends or relatives from whom they can borrow it. Were it not for the kindness of the Government, their unfortunate offspring would never be able to enjoy the advantages conveyed to them by the celebration of the tonsorial ritual. The Government, however, holds a public ceremony which is less impressive and expensive than the private one, at which all who are too poor to afford the cost of the ceremony at home, may have their heads shaved by Brahmin priests gratuitously. Each child receives also a present of a small silver coin worth about two-pence. This public function is held immediately after the close of the "Swinging Festival,"[B] and three or four hundred people annually avail themselves of the opportunity thus afforded them to get their children's top-knots removed.

[Pg 81]



MOUNT KAILASA, AS ERECTED FOR THE HAIR-CUTTING CEREMONIES OF H. R. H. THE CROWN PRINCE OF SIAM.

In the case of children of royal birth, the celebrations are of a still more imposing character. The essential details are similar, but various modifications are introduced in order to emphasise the extra importance of the rite to those belonging to the royal family. On these occasions the shaven candidate is not bathed upon a mere canopied dais. In the courtyard in front of the Royal Palace, a hillock is erected in imitation of Mount Kailasa, the abode of Siva. It is a hollow structure, built [Pg 83] up of plaited bamboo, supported on poles, and covered with tinsel. Upon the summit of this artificial hill is a central pavilion beautifully gilt, elaborately decorated, and adorned with tapestry and cloth of gold. A fence of prescribed pattern encloses the pavilion. It is an open framework with small rhomboidal openings, in each of which is hung a small gilded heart-shaped lozenge. Conical umbrellas with seven tiers occur at every two or three yards. There are four pavilions, also lavishly decorated, one at each corner of the hill. At one side, an artificial grotto is constructed in which the bathing takes place. In the walls of the grotto are representations of the heads of the horse, the elephant, the lion and the bull. Over the entrance appears the head of the hooded snake. These heads are connected with the water-main, and are so placed that the five streams of water from the five mouths all converge to the central spot which the candidate occupies when he takes the bath. The floor of the grotto is a miniature lake in which are placed golden models of water-beetles, fishes and other aquatic creatures. Rare flowering plants and ferns complete the internal decorations of the place. A little passage leads thence to the pavilion where the young prince or princess will change his or her attire on the completion of the ceremony. On the ground, four lath and plaster elephants covered with tinsel of different colours, face the four points of the compass. Here and there about the hill is a multitude of mechanical [Pg 84] toys, plaster casts, waxen flowers, real plants and models of animals. The candidate is carried round the Palace each day, with an imposing procession of priests, members of the amazon guard, soldiers and attendants.

No other event in the life of any Siamese is celebrated with anything like the expense that attends the top-knot cutting, except perhaps a funeral.

CHAPTER V. [Pg 85]

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE.

Although marriage does not follow immediately after the shaving of the top-knot, yet after the important event has taken place, both boys and girls are legally entitled to marry. In the case of the girls, marriage takes place about fourteen, but the men defer their entrance into the

matrimonial condition until they are about twenty. Every girl gets married sooner or later, so that old maids do not exist.

There are about as many ways of attaining the state of matrimony in Siam as there are in England. Two people may fall in love with each other with the consent of their parents; they may elope without the consent of their parents; or a wife may be bought out and out without any real affection existing on either side. In the methods adopted to secure this most desirable consummation of human happiness, there are several dissimilarities of procedure between the East and the West. If a Siamese wishes to go through the ceremony of a strictly regular marriage, he must be prepared to observe a great deal of formality and to experience a great deal of trouble. Should he attempt to pay his addresses to the object of his affections in any but the [Pg 86] recognised way, he will, if discovered, be suspected of improper motives, and will be liable to suffer personal chastisement at the hands of the young lady's male relatives.

A young Siamese who is anxious to join the ranks of the Benedicts, first chooses amongst the maidens of his acquaintance the particular one to whom he wishes to be allied. If he allowed himself to be guided in this matter by the counsels given in one of the native books, he would consider the reputed character of the lady he desires for his wife, and try to discover to which of seven distinct classes of wives his beloved belonged. There is nothing very remarkable in the remarks of the philosopher who has thus catalogued the several classes of women who are mated with men, but as his classification throws considerable light upon the power, position, and character of Siamese women, it is here given in full.

1.—Some wives are to their husbands as a younger sister. They look to their husbands for approving smiles as the reward of their kind and affectionate forethought. They confide in him and feel tenderly towards him. And when they have once discovered the wish, the taste, and the ideas of him whose approval they respect, they devote themselves thoughtfully and assiduously to the realisation of his desires. Their own impulsive passions and temper are kept under strict control lest some hasty word should mar the harmony of their union.

2.—Some wives are to their husbands as an elder sister. They watch sedulously [Pg 87] their husband's outgoings and incomings so as to prevent all occasion for scandal. They are careful as to the condition of his wardrobe and keep it always in order for every occasion. They are diligent in preserving from the public gaze anything that might impair the dignity of their family. When their lord and master is found wanting in any particular they neither fret nor scold, but wait patiently for the time when they can best effect a reformation in his morals and lead him towards the goal of upright manly conduct.

3.—Some wives are to their husbands like a mother. They are ever seeking for some good thing that may bring gladness to the heart of the man for whom they live. They desire him to be excellent in every particular, and will themselves make any sacrifice to secure their object. When sorrow or trouble overtakes them, they hide it away from the eyes of him they love. All their thoughts centre round him, and they so order their conversation and actions that in themselves he may find a worthy model for imitation. Should he fall sick, they tend him with unfailing care and patience.

4.—Some wives are to their husbands as a common friend. They desire to stand on an exactly equal footing with him. If ill-nature is a feature in the character of their husbands, they cultivate the same fault in themselves. They will quarrel with him on the slightest provocation. They meet all his suggestions with an excess of carping criticism. They are always on the look-out for any infringement of what [Pg 88] they deem their rights, and should the husband desire them to perform any little service for him, he must approach the subject with becoming deference or their refusal is instant and absolute.

5.—Some wives wish to rule their husbands. Their language and manners are of a domineering nature. They treat the man as if he were a slave, scolding, commanding, and forbidding with unbecoming asperity. The husbands of such women are a miserable cringing set of men.

6.—Some wives are of the robber kind. Their only idea in getting married is the possession of a slave and the command of a purse. If there is money in the purse they are never satisfied until they have it in their own grasp. Such wives generally take to gambling and staking money in the lottery, or purchasing useless articles. They have no care as to where the money comes from or by whose labours it is earned, so long as they can gratify their own extravagant and ruinous fancies.

7.—Some wives are of the murderess kind and possess revengeful tempers. Being malicious and fault-finding, they never appreciate their own homes and families, and are always seeking for sympathisers from outside. They share their secrets with other men, using their pretended domestic discomfort as a cloak for their own vice and an excuse for their greatest misdeeds.

No young man ever imagines that his beloved will fall into any of the undesirable classes, but, deeming her worthy in every respect, he seeks her hand. What the young lady may think [Pg 89]

concerning his intentions towards herself counts for little or nothing, as the would-be bridegroom never consults her; though if he were desirous that she should return his affections he could attain his desire by purchasing from a fortune-teller or quack, a love-potion, which when taken by the maiden would arouse in her the most passionate longing to become his wife. He does not dare to outrage his national etiquette by asking for her hand direct from her parents, but, with all avoidance of secrecy concerning the state of his affections, he communicates the matter to his friends and to the elders of his own household. They select a rather elderly woman, who must be acquainted with and respected by the girl's parents. She pays a visit to their home, and while engaged in sipping her tea, gently insinuates the purpose of her call. She does this with an art only perfected by long practice, gained in many similar missions. The mother rolls up her reply in a great many vague expressions, the general tone of which can, however, be easily judged by the ambassadress to be favourable or otherwise. Nothing very decisive is uttered on either side, but the old lady on her return presents a report upon which after developments arise. If the indications are considered favourable, the parents of the young man choose from amongst their friends a few elderly persons of both sexes, who are respectable and who are also intimate friends of both families. They issue invitations to the selected friends to pay them a visit on a given day. Then in a protracted conversation they discuss the match, and decide amongst [Pg 90] themselves as to whether it is desirable to enter into definite negotiations with the other parties or not. Having pronounced for the match, they choose a lucky day, and then the committee of counsellors repairs to the home of the young lady's parents.

These at once understand the object of the visit, and receive the visitors with great politeness, setting before them trays of tea, betel-nut and tobacco. When a sufficient amount of drinking and chewing has been accomplished, the elderly people open up the subject of their mission. They speak with due respect to the parents, and never fail to use exactly the right pronoun that describes their relative positions. The slightest hitch in the extremely delicate negotiations would be fatal to success. The conversation that ensues is of a formal and deliberate character. Says one of the visitors, "The parents of —— having ascertained that this is a propitious day, have commissioned us to come and confer with you concerning their son who at present has no wife. His parents have asked him if he had any one in his mind that he would like to take for his wife, and to whom he could trust his life in sickness and his obsequies after death. The young man replied that the only person he had in his mind was your daughter of the name of ——. Therefore at the request of the parents of this young man, we are here to visit you, the highly respected parents of this young lady, that we may confer with you in reference to this matter. What do the parents say?"

Then the parents reply after this wise. "Our daughter stands high in our affections, and the young [Pg 91] man is also much beloved by his parents. We have an ancient proverb which says, 'Move slowly, and you will gain your object; a prolonged effort is usually attended with favourable results.' We will consult our relatives on the right hand and on the left hand and take their counsel and opinion upon the matter. Please call again."

It often happens that some youthful beauty is sought in marriage by more than one of her love-sick acquaintances, and a choice has to be made. But Phyllis is voiceless in this most important matter which so deeply concerns her future welfare. Her parents, with due regard to the interests of all concerned, settle the point for her after long and careful consideration.

The "go-betweens" wait for what they consider a reasonable time, and then on a lucky day they once more visit the lady. The parents of the maiden have by this time made up their minds, and if they are favourably inclined to the match, they say to their visitors, "We have consulted our relatives, and they are unanimously of the opinion that if the young man sincerely loves our daughter, and if he can place implicit confidence in her as a proper person to tend him in sickness, and direct his funeral ceremonies after death, then we will no longer place any barrier to the attainment of his wishes. But how is it with regard to the ages and the birthdays of the parties? Are they such as are suitable to each other?"

It takes a little while to answer this question. The Siamese have a cycle of twelve years, bearing [Pg 92] respectively the names of the Rat, Cow, Tiger, Rabbit, Major Dragon, Minor Dragon, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Cock, Dog and Hog. One of their prevalent superstitions asserts that persons born in certain years should not marry each other, as any union between them would only be fruitful of endless discord. Thus a person born in the "year of the Dog" might lead a life of never ending discord with one born in the "year of the Rat." When a marriage between two persons is contemplated, this important question of the year of birth must be referred to a fortune-teller, who, being of an obliging disposition, and having a keen eye to business, will, for a small fee, generally pronounce that, so far as the conditions of birth are concerned, there is "no just cause or impediment why the two persons should not be joined in holy matrimony."

This difficulty having been satisfactorily settled, another visit follows, when the elders announce the result of their visit to the astrologer. "Since birthdays need cause no further delay, what shall be said about the money to be provided for the young couple to commence business on, and the money for building a house for their habitation?"

It must here be explained that every intending bridegroom must either possess a house or signify his willingness to erect one. In most cases the new houses are erected if possible upon the premises of the bride's parents, so that, provided a man has many daughters and plenty of land, [Pg 93] he may ultimately gather round him quite a small village of descendants.

The girl's parents reply, "We are not in any way rich, so that we shall be quite unable to afford

much money for the purpose you mention. But we should like to enquire how much the young man is likely to receive from his parents."

"That," answer the ambassadors, "depends almost entirely upon the parents of the young lady." They next suggest sums of money which of course vary in amount according to the wealth of the contracting parties. So much is put down as being for use in trade, and so much for building a house. The number of dishes is also specified, that the young man's friends will be expected to contribute towards the wedding festivities. As a rule, they discuss at the same time, the plan of the proposed house, the number of rooms it should contain and the quantity of furniture that should be provided. When all these details have been finally settled, the committee return and report the results of their negotiations.

The last preliminary detail is settled by the acceptation of the terms of the contract by the young man's parents. The fortunate lady is now informed that she is about to be married, and the young man is similarly told that he may soon call the desired one his own. He is not allowed to go near her, or to indulge in any form of courtship, but the obliging parents, with every desire to save the pair any unnecessary trouble or excitement, themselves convey all gifts and messages. During the whole time that elapses between the first mention of the marriage until the ceremony itself is [Pg 94] actually accomplished, the betrothed pair are supposed never to meet. They have no opportunity of indulging in any of those little marks of affection which are supposed to be the especial weaknesses of young lovers. They are not allowed to be demonstrative after this fashion. Kissing is never at any time common, and even when it occurs it seems a very strange operation, for it consists of a vigorous sniff made when the nose is pressed against the cheek of the one so saluted. The mothers at this time guard their daughters with great vigilance, and any approach of the lover to his lass would put an end to all his schemes for future bliss.

The erection of the new house is rapidly proceeded with, and owing to the frail character of the structure, the work occupies but a very short time. All arrangements for the wedding are made, and many invitations issued to friends and relatives. The money mentioned in the agreement is paid over to the parents of the bride. It is called "Ka nom," or "the price of the mother's milk" with which the bride was nourished in her infancy. A number of gifts are exchanged between the parents, and then the astrologers fix the day for the wedding ceremony.

The wedding partakes of the nature of a feast. On the happy day, fruits and sweetmeats are prepared and laid out for the guests. Musicians and priests are summoned to the festival. The groom heads a procession to the bride's home, taking with him presents for his bride and for her father and mother. His most intimate friends and a band of musicians accompany him. Everyone [Pg 95] is in his gayest attire, and the crowd is a medley of orange, yellow, saffron, blue, pink, scarlet and green. When the bridegroom reaches the house he goes to his own new quarters, where he is met by a boy, who brings him a tray of betel-nut sent by his future wife. At the commencement of the wedding ceremony a screen separates him from the lady, and he is not yet allowed to look upon her face. After a certain time spent in feeding, the money provided by both parties is laid upon the ground. The amount is examined in order to test the accuracy and genuineness of the sums deposited. If all is in order, they are sprinkled with rice, scented oil and flowers. The priests offer up a prayer, the screen is removed, and then the couple kneel down to be bathed with holy water. The chief elder pours it first over the head of the bridegroom, and then over the head of the bride, at the same time pronouncing a blessing upon them both. Very often the bowing and bathing are dispensed with, and the couple are considered as married as soon as the money is paid over. No registers are signed, and no official record of the event is made. The bride retires to remove her wet clothes, but the bridegroom waits till he receives her gift of a new suit, in which he speedily attires himself. The priests again engage in chanting, and the guests return to their feasting until evening, when they all return to their homes, with the exception of the bridegroom, who hires a band with which to serenade his lady-love until the small hours of the [Pg 96] next morning. As yet he has had no conversation with her whatever.

On the morning of the next day, the priests and visitors arrive once more, when all busy themselves in waiting upon the monks as they make a hearty and luxurious meal. Should this day be a propitious one according to the wisdom of the astrologers, the ceremonies close in the evening. A respectable old couple who are intimate friends of the bride, and are themselves the parents of numerous offspring, go to the new house to make all ready for the homecoming of the newly married ones. The young man goes next, attended by his friends bearing torches. About nine o'clock, a crowd of elderly people escort the bride to her husband's dwelling, where they soon begin to drink tea and chew betel-nut, not forgetting at frequent intervals to give to the young people many wise yet unnecessary counsels. If anything should happen of doubtful omen, the bride is once more taken home again, for she may not take up her residence with her husband except under the most propitious circumstances. The end is reached at last, and the kind and benevolent friends retire to their homes, and leave the newly married couple to make each other's acquaintance. Then for the first time do they enjoy the pleasure of each other's company, and there can be no doubt, that no friends were ever so willingly parted with as those whose footsteps are heard last descending the bamboo ladder as they take themselves away into the darkness.

After a few days the groom takes his wife to visit his parents. She carries with her several [Pg 97] presents, and on reaching the house, prostrates herself to the ground before her new relatives. In a few minutes she is raised by her mother-in-law, who embraces her and treats her with becoming respect and attention. The bride also takes her husband to visit her parents, where the same forms of etiquette are again observed.

A CHINESE MERCHANT.

At every wedding feast there are always three metallic plates or dishes containing respectively, Chinese cakes, a very highly seasoned kind of mincemeat, and a tray of betel-nut. These three dishes were formerly known collectively, under the name of "the betel-nut tray," and so universal [Pg 98] is the custom of providing them, that the wedding ceremony itself is now frequently spoken of by the same name.

After the birth of the first child the joint stock is produced and the young couple are set up in business. Up to this time their household expenses have been defrayed by the bride's parents.

Siamese law gives the husband the right to administer a little wholesome chastisement to his wife, should he think she requires it; but such occasions must be of rare occurrence where the women are so good-tempered, and so gentle in their manners.

The whole ceremony above described is only observed in the case of the first or chief wife, who always remains the legal head of her husband's household. Other wives are merely bought as so much merchandise, all formality being omitted except such as attends the payment of the purchase money. Polygamy is extensively practised amongst the higher classes, but it is controlled in the case of the poor by the fact that a man must not have more wives than he can keep. Chastity is highly commended by the Buddhist religion, but although Buddha censured polygamy he did not absolutely forbid it. He did not see his way clear to a thorough prohibition of the practice, and even admits that if a man's wives are properly acquired, he is unable to pronounce it wrong. The practice of only having one wife he strongly commends, and looks upon it as a form of celibacy. No disgrace of any kind is attached to the condition of a subordinate wife, but she does not hold a high social position. Very often she inhabits a house separated from that [Pg 99] in which the head wife resides. Upon the death of the husband, her children are legally entitled to a share of the property, but they do not share on equal terms with the children of the first wife. Then too, a bought wife can be sold or given away, while the head wife can only be divorced. It sometimes happens that a man sells one of his concubines, and she takes her children with her if she has any, so that her sons and daughters possess a father and a step-father both living at the same time.

There is a very elastic divorce law, and marriages can practically be annulled by mutual consent. In such cases the wife takes away with her all the property she brought to the husband on her marriage, and all she may have since acquired either by trade or purchase. She also retains possession of the first, third, and fifth children. Great respect is shown to the condition of motherhood, a wife of low rank with children being of far more importance in the family than even the chief wife should she be childless.

The king, the princes, and most—of the noblemen have fairly large harems. The late king had eighty-four children who were the offspring of thirty-five mothers. The possession of a large harem appears to be regarded as an honour to the owner, who glories in his property much after the same fashion as Western noblemen take great pride in their private art galleries or libraries. The king has generally one wife who is called the Queen. At the present time there are two queens—the First Queen and the Second Queen, both of them being half-sisters of the reigning [Pg 100] sovereign. The women of the royal harem, unlike all other Siamese women, are under great restrictions as regards their personal liberty. They are known under the name of "forbidden women", that is, women forbidden to leave the palace. They are not permitted to pass beyond their prison walls except with special permission, which is rarely, and only on occasions of

extraordinary importance, granted to them. Their quarters are called "The Inside," and it is not considered polite in Siamese society to hold conversation concerning the place or its inmates. Into this region no man but the king ever enters. It is a city of women, complete in itself, with its own shops, markets, gaol and policemen. Those noblemen or princes who possess handsome daughters are only too glad to present them to their sovereign, for should their children become favourites with their royal husband, honours and promotion will most likely fall to them as a natural consequence. The late king once remarked that he was not particularly anxious to acquire all the youth and beauty of Siam himself, but, as so many of her fairest daughters had already been presented to him, he could not possibly refuse similar gifts in future, as he did not wish to offend any of his subjects.

The Siamese have several amusing reasons for permitting a man to have as many wives as he pleases, while they refuse to grant a like privilege to women folk. Woman, they say, is man's inferior, is under his control, and may not be allowed the luxury of possessing two masters. Besides, if a woman had several husbands, she would never know who was the father of her [Pg 101] children, and the children, not knowing their own father, might possibly at some time or other injure him, or even commit parricide without knowing it. And moreover, there is a remarkable difference in the several dispositions of men and women; men, however many wives they have, and whatever their feelings towards them, would never desire to kill them, but if women had more husbands than one, they would wish to put to death all except the one they liked best, for such is their nature.

> "There was once on a time a priest, who daily blessed a great king, saying, 'May Your Majesty have the firmness of a crow, the audacity of a woman, the endurance of a vulture, and the strength of an ant.' And the king, doubting his meaning, said, 'What do you mean by the endurance of a vulture?' And he replied, 'If a vulture and all other kinds of animals be caged up without food, the vulture will outlive them all.' And the king tried, and it was so. Then the priest said, 'I spoke of the strength of an ant, for the ant is stronger than a man or anything that lives. No other animal can lift a lump of iron or copper as large as itself, but an ant will carry off its own bulk of either metal if only it be smeared with sugar. Also I spoke of the firmness of a crow, for none can subdue the boldness and energy of the crow, however long it may be caged. It can never be tamed. And if the king would see the audacity of a woman, I beg him to send for a couple who have been married but one or two months, and who are as yet, deeply in love with each other. [Pg 102] First call the husband and tell him to take this knife and cut off his wife's head and bring it to you, when, as a reward, you will give him half your kingdom and make him viceroy. And if he will not do it, then send for the woman and tell her that if she will cut off her husband's head and bring it to you, you will make her your chief queen and ruler of all the ladies in the palace.' And the king did so. He found a newly married couple who had never quarrelled and were deeply enamoured of one another, and sending for the husband, he spoke to him as the priest suggested. The man took the knife, hid it in his dress, and that same night he rose when his wife slept, thinking to kill her, but he could not, because he was kind-hearted and reflected that she had done no wrong. And the next day he returned the knife to the king, saying that he could not use it against his wife. Then the king sent messengers to the wife secretly, and they brought her to him, and he flattered her and enticed her with promises, as the priest had told him. She took the knife, and as soon as her husband slept, stabbed him, cut off his head, and took it to the king. This story shows not only that women are more audacious than men, but also that, if anyone entices or pleases them, they will plot the death of their husbands, which is good reason for not letting them have more than one husband."[C]

CHAPTER VI. [Pg 103]

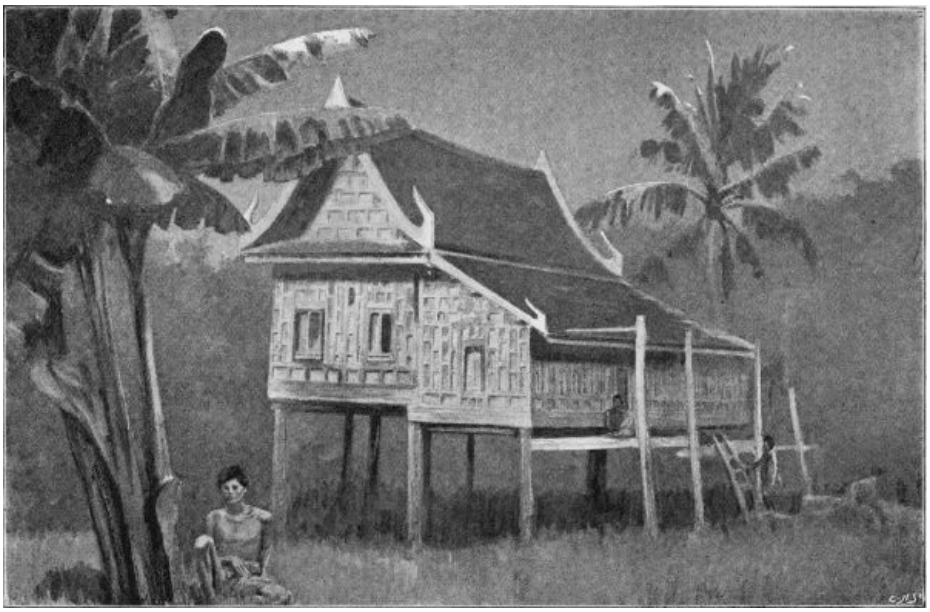
DOMESTIC LIFE AND CUSTOMS.

It is an easy matter to obtain some idea of the daily life and surroundings of the poorer inhabitants of Siam, for their houses are such open structures that every enquiring eye may gaze therein without any interruption. They spend so much of their time, and pursue so many of their employments in the open air, that even the most casual observer could not fail to rapidly acquire much information concerning their domestic life and customs. In the case of the wealthier classes there is much more privacy. They may be described as living also a kind of double life. Their houses are divided into two parts; in one quarter they live their own native life after their own native fashion; in the other portion an attempt is made to reproduce the European style of living. This latter part is the only one shown to the European visitor. He is received in a drawing-room with tables and chairs, piano and pictures; he dines in a room where the dishes are of European pattern, the servants have the habits of European waiters, and the menu contains only such dishes as are known to be palatable to the white man. All the surroundings are of such an [Pg 104] unmistakably foreign origin, that the visitor looks in vain for any trace of the life and manners of the native in the house of his wealthy host. Were he permitted to pass beyond the bounds set by

modern fashion, he would possibly find much to interest and amuse in the real house of the native prince or nobleman. As this is more or less unusual or impossible, he is forced to seek for his information in those poorer dwellings, which the forward march of so-called civilisation has, as yet, left completely untouched.

The house-boats which represent the original dwellings of the people have been already described. The land houses are of a very frail and rude character, though not without their own charm and picturesqueness when seen embedded in bowers of tropical foliage. Each house represents very strikingly the social grade of its owner, whether it be the low hut of the labourer in which a man of average height may scarcely stand upright, or the brick and stone palace with carpets and electric lights of the prince or nobleman. Most of the houses are of wood, and are made of either bamboo or teak. They stand upon wooden platforms about six feet from the ground, being supported in that position by strong teak pillars. Teak is used for this purpose not only on account of its strength, but because it is also one of the few woods which are so hard that the destructive little "white ant" leaves it alone. The walls are of teak boards, or else of plaited bamboo. In the latter case the dwelling is light and airy, for the numerous interstices between the strands of wood are left unclosed, thus admitting a plentiful supply of air and light. The roof is [Pg 105] always covered with some form of thatch, never with slates or tiles. Along the river banks and near water generally, the attap palm grows in abundance, and its long fibrous leaves make an excellent thatch. The leaves are stitched together, forming rectangular layers about two feet long and one foot wide. When these leafy mats are placed on the roof in an inclined position they form a water-tight covering. In places remote from water, where the leaves cannot be easily obtained, an equally serviceable thatch is made from the long broad leaves of certain kinds of jungle grass. These leafy roofs last about three years. In the summer they get so completely dried by the sun that they become brittle, and every strong gust of wind carries away tiny bits of the thatch. In this condition they are extremely inflammable, and fires are of frequent occurrence. As the houses are usually very close together, a fire is a very serious calamity; for not only are numerous dwellings consumed in the rapidly spreading conflagration itself, but it is always necessary to destroy every house in the neighbourhood on which sparks would be likely to fall, in order to prevent a wholesale bonfire. There is no fire-brigade either amateur or professional, and the soldiers are always employed to put out the flames. One of these houses could be easily smashed to bits by a hatchet, especially in the dry season, when they are about as substantial as a match-box.

The houses are built on poles for two reasons; first, to avoid the floods during the rainy season, [Pg 106] and secondly, to prevent the intrusion of the wild beasts who roam about at nights in the more remote parts of the country. There is no second storey, but a platform or verandah runs along the front or even round the whole of the house. The ascent to this verandah, or to the front door in the absence of one, is made by means of a rickety ladder constructed of the indispensable bamboo.



A SIAMESE TEAK-WOOD HOUSE.

The house is divided into at least three rooms, a kitchen, a drawing-room and a bedroom. So powerful is the superstition that even numbers are unlucky, that the number of rooms is always an odd one. The same fancy regulates also the number of windows and doors, and even the rungs of the ladder. Of these rooms the least dirty is the one we have designated the drawing-room. The kitchen is always remarkable for its accumulation of dirt and rubbish. A properly constructed fireplace is of course impossible in a wooden house. A substitute for grate and oven is obtained in one of two ways. A wooden box is filled with earth, and a couple of bricks are placed thereon. The fire, which is of wood or charcoal, is laid between the bricks, and the pot, pan, or kettle is supported by them. A more civilised form of stove is an earthenware furnace. It resembles in shape a short narrow pail, containing a shelf midway, pierced by a number of round holes. Below the shelf an oblong aperture is cut in the side of the pail. The pot stands on the rim of the bucket, the charcoal is placed on the sieve-like shelf, and a current of air is caused to pass upwards by [Pg 109]

rapidly waving a fan to and fro in front of the lateral opening. No chimney or other method of exit is provided in the kitchen by which the smoke of the fire can escape. It finds its way to the exterior or into the other rooms of the house, through the holes in the walls or through the light frame-work screens and partitions that represent walls. Grime and soot accumulate year after year, and form a very complete if inartistic covering to the sides and roof of this Oriental kitchen. The place is never cleaned out or disinfected. Spiders spin their webs in undisturbed possession of every nook; tiny lizards crawl over the walls, open-mouthed, looking for flies and mosquitoes; multitudes of insects of the "crawly creepy" kind find comfortable breeding-places amidst the shreds of smoke-stained attap.

Every member of the household knows how to cook. If the mother is not at home, the father can easily take her place, for he knows quite well how long rice should be boiled or bananas stewed. The little children can fry the fish or make the curry, and so are independent of their parents in this respect. Whenever the voice of hunger makes itself heard, its appeal is promptly responded to, and consequently great irregularity prevails in the times of meals. But as a general rule there are two fixed meals each day, one at about seven o'clock in the morning and the other about half-past five in the afternoon. The chief article of food is rice. In the cooking of this grain the people have no rivals. They wash it four or five times, and then soak it for a little while. They put it next [Pg 110] into boiling water for three or four minutes, and then pour off the water. The pot is left over the fire for some time longer so that it is well steamed, care being taken, however, to remove the pot before the rice is burned. When it is turned out into the basin, the grains are all considerably swollen, and are separate from each other. They are as white as snow and not at all sticky. Rice is cooked in many other ways; made into cakes, fermented to make an intoxicating drink, taken internally as medicine, and used externally as a poultice. Fruits and sweetmeats are eaten between meals. The rice is often served up cold.

When making a meal, the natives either follow the custom of the Chinese and poke their food into their mouths with chopsticks, or they attempt to imitate the European, and use spoons made of tin, lead, or china; or finally, they use their own fingers. A large bowl of rice is placed in the centre of the floor and the hungry ones sit round it in a circle, either squatting upon their haunches or sitting tailor-fashion with their legs crossed under them. Various curries and other foods are eaten with the rice, and these are placed in small china basins arranged round the central one. Each person has in front of him a small basin, and helps himself, so that the quickest eater naturally gets the biggest share.

Rice is sold in the markets and at many little shops, ready cooked, and wrapped up in small quantities in a banana leaf. Workmen and others engaged in outdoor occupations find it just as [Pg 111] easy to get a meal outside as at home, for they never suffer from lack of plates, tables, or chairs. They just sit down by the side of the road and wait for the first itinerant dealer in eatable wares to appear, when they dip into his pots or baskets, and for a few cents get a fairly substantial meal.

As a relish with the rice, fish is generally eaten. This may be fresh or stale, fried or fermented. The stale fish eaten by the natives may be recognised from afar owing to its powerful perfume. Such forms of food, especially when they have the additional attraction of a particularly pungent flavour, are held in high esteem. Decaying prawn well covered with fiery pepper is a delicacy keenly appreciated. Eggs that have been salted and preserved are also considered palatable. Amongst the other dainties that figure on the menu may be mentioned the seeds and stalks of the sacred lotus, the stem of the young bamboo, peas, beans, sugar-cane, several kinds of weeds and blossoms, every kind of fruit obtainable, chilies, mango-chutney, cocoa-nut milk, and fat pork. The favourite sauce is called "Nam-prik" or "pepper-water." Red pepper is bruised in a mortar and then made into a paste with shrimps or prawns in a condition politely described as "high." To this is added black pepper, garlic and onions. Brine and citron juice give to the compound the necessary liquidity. A little ginger is also considered a desirable ingredient. This sauce is said to be decidedly efficacious in stimulating a jaded appetite. Being accustomed to this highly seasoned kind of diet, the Siamese fail as a rule to appreciate the more delicate flavours of the [Pg 112] European table, which they describe as being perfectly insipid.

They excel in the art of preparing fruit, and they can remove the hard kernels from all stone fruit, with such skill that when placed upon the table, the eye fails to discover from its external appearance, that the natural condition of the fruit has been in any way altered. The meal is washed down with a draught of canal water. There are no water-works, and as the poor cannot afford to buy receptacles in which to store up rain water, they are forced during the dry season to drink the filthy sewage-water of the canals. Needless to state, cholera epidemics are by no means infrequent.

The floor of the kitchen is of plaited bamboo, like most of the walls. Through the cracks are thrown all the scraps that remain when breakfast or dinner is finished. The cooking water, the old bits of meat, bone, and fish, the skins of fruits, and most other domestic refuse are similarly disposed of. There is always a crowd of bony, hungry pariahs lying in wait beneath the kitchen floor, ready to snap up the bits as they fall. It is well for the inhabitants that these canine waifs and strays do thus frequent their habitations, for in the absence of any salaried scavengers, they would otherwise become veritable pest-houses. The little furniture that the kitchen boasts, is not of any great value. There is the fireplace,—a wooden box, or earthen stove; a few earthenware pots; a few china and brass basins; some old kerosine tins, which are used for carrying water; a [Pg 113] few baskets; a kettle and a small table; an old stool or up-turned box.

Just as there are no cleaning days, so there are no washing days. When the people go to bathe, they go into the water in the garment they happen to be wearing at the time. When they come out again; they very dexterously wrap a clean dry one round the body, at the same time slipping off the wet one, which is then wrung out, and left to dry in the sun. The professional washermen or "dhobies" are all Chinese and are chiefly employed by the Europeans. Their methods of washing immediately destroy flannels, and ultimately ruin every article of whatever texture that is handed over to their tender mercies. They wash clothes on the banks of the canal in the dirty water. They first soak them till thoroughly wet, then rub them well over with soap, and then bang them against the stones till they have succeeded in knocking some of the dirt out, and many holes in. A rinse in water follows, and then the articles are dried in the sun. They understand the mysteries of "ironing and starching", but the "ironing" process is productive of numerous patches of "mould", and the "starching" results in an uncanny limpidity. Any man in want of a dress-shirt, or a clean pair of white drill trousers, can always borrow those belonging to someone else on application at the "laundry", and the payment of a small fee.

The drawing-room, sitting-room, parlour, or whatever other name it may be known by, is not [Pg 114] luxuriously furnished. The visitor sits upon the floor, with only a skin or mat between himself and the boards. In many instances even this form of couch is absent. A few low stools may occasionally be found. The walls are commonly adorned with photographs, cheap lithographs, and prints. Every caller is offered a tray of betel-nut and its accompanying condiments; a cup of tea, and cigarettes. The betel-nut is not eaten alone, but with a mixture of tobacco, seri-leaf, turmeric and lime, and no host ever forgets to offer these things to his guest. In time, as a result of continual chewing, the gums and lips become a vivid red, and the teeth an intense shiny black, and in extreme old age the teeth also protrude in a repulsive fashion. The first effect of the nut upon a beginner is rather of an intoxicating or stupefying nature. But after having once contracted a strong liking for its bitter flavour, many people find themselves absolutely unable to do without it. Every man carries in his pocket a small box containing the nut, the tobacco etc., or is followed wherever he goes by his servant who bears it after him. When the master sits down, the servant deposits it by his side so that it is easily within reach of the owner. These boxes are often of valuable material and beautiful workmanship. The commonest material used in their construction is silver, but the wealthier classes have their betel-boxes made of rich, ruddy gold and set with jewels. The black teeth that are obtained by the constant use of the nut are considered beautiful. The natives express their contempt for white teeth in the remark, "Any dog [Pg 115] can have white teeth." The local dentists keep in stock complete sets of black false teeth, so that when a naturally black tooth is removed, an artificially coloured one can at once take its place and so prevent any break in the uniform coal-like aspect of the mouth. Saliva is produced in copious quantities during mastication, and is of a blood red colour. As it is never swallowed, spittoons must always accompany the betel-box. If the saliva is allowed to fall upon wood or stone it produces brick-red stains which are not easily removable. Such stains are exceedingly common in the streets and houses. The black deposit formed upon the teeth is said to exercise a preserving influence upon them.

Smoking is to some extent gradually replacing betel-nut chewing, especially with the children, who now take to the weed when they are about five or six years old. The native tobacco is very strong, and when smoked as a cigarette wrapped in dried banana-leaf, it is decidedly unpalatable to the European. Light cigarette tobaccos of foreign manufacture are now much in vogue. Those who can afford it, roll up the tobacco in lotus leaf. For this purpose the petals of the lotus flowers are taken, dried in the sun, flattened with a hot iron, and then cut into rectangular pieces of the same size as ordinary cigarette paper. Pipes are rarely seen.

The natives are not addicted either to strong drink or to opium. Those who drink beer and spirits have learnt the habit from their Western friends. The opium monopoly is farmed, and is at [Pg 116] present in the hands of a Chinaman who is the king's head cook. The late king feared that his subjects might take to the drug, and he issued a decree forbidding all of them under heavy penalties to buy or smoke it, but the law has become inoperative.

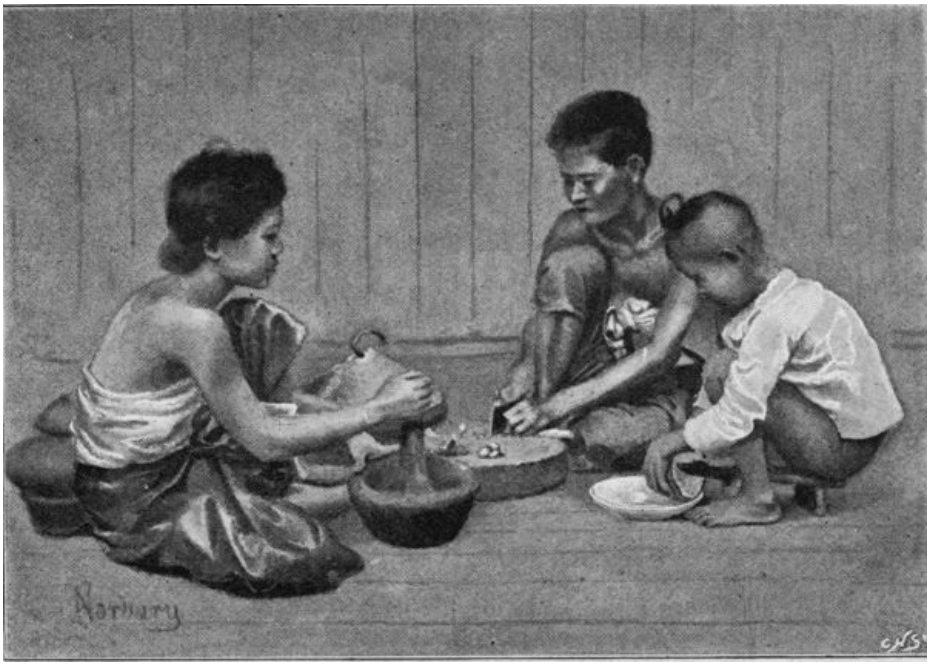
The bedroom, the third necessary room of every Siamese dwelling, cannot be held up as a model of cleanliness. Frequently it is the lumber-room where everything old and unnecessary is stowed away. The altar and the idols are placed therein, especially if the sick or dying are lying there. On retiring for the night, the doors and windows are closed, and the atmosphere soon becomes hot and unhealthy. Owing to the presence of innumerable mosquitoes whose buzzing and stinging are effective preventatives of somnolescence, every one must sleep inside a mosquito net. In the majority of cases the net is so dirty, and its meshes are so clogged with deposits of dust accumulated through many days, that neither air nor mosquitoes can penetrate its folds. People sleep on the bare boards, on mats or skins, and on mattresses stuffed with tree cotton. Pillows are not in common use, except amongst those who have borrowed the Chinese form of this luxury —namely, a hard, hollow, semi-cylindrical frame of bamboo.

When sleeping, the head must not be pointing to the West, as that point of the compass where the sun finishes his daily round, is synonymous with death. The favourable position is with the head to the North and the feet to the South. Other superstitions with regard to the points of the [Pg 117] compass prevail, certain directions being considered auspicious according to the days of the week. Thus on Sunday, the East is the lucky situation; on Monday, the West; on Tuesday, the South; on Wednesday, the South West; on Thursday, the North; on Friday, the South East; and on Saturday, the North West. It is very important that on any given day a person should not set out to travel in any other direction, or place his face towards any other point of the compass should

he be taking part in any ceremony of importance.

If the tenant of the house owns any cattle, they are stabled underneath, so that any thieves who may visit his premises during the night may readily be detected. Pigs and cows directly under one's bedroom are not usually considered as being conducive to healthy, restful sleep, but the Siamese do not seem to mind their presence in the least.

Frequent mention has been made of the bright colours of the clothes worn by the people. Most of the cotton or silk goods are manufactured in England, Germany, or Switzerland, but the brighter and more artistic colours are produced by the natives themselves, by means of a number of dyes made from various roots, fruits, and seeds. Some of the colours thus obtained are never to be found in any of the cloths imported from abroad, especially the many beautiful shades of yellow and orange, so conspicuous in the ecclesiastical vestments. To be thoroughly fashionable one must put on a differently coloured garment every day, and wear rings and other jewelled [Pg 118] ornaments with stones of corresponding hue. This custom is not simply a fashionable one. It owes its origin to an old superstition. Sunday is under the rule of the sun, therefore on that day bright red silks and rubies should be worn; Monday, the day of the moon, can only be properly respected by wearing silver or white coloured garments and moonstones; Tuesday, the day of ruddy Mars, requires light red clothes with coral ornaments; Wednesday, devoted to the greenish tinted Mercury, is the day when green garments and emeralds are correct; the variegated appearance of Jupiter dominates the fashion for Thursday and prescribes the cat's-eye as the proper jewel; Venus rules on Friday, and requires from her worshippers silver-blue apparel and diamonds; while Saturday is under the influence of Saturn, who demands sapphires and dark-blue costumes.



MAKING CURRY.

The Siamese wear their hair cut short and brushed straight up from the forehead. This method of dressing the hair is of comparatively late origin. The king's crown, the actor's head-dress, and the hats worn in many processions are all of a conical shape. They owe their design to that period when the hair was knotted and piled up on the head in such a way as to require a conical hat or crown. Before the first century, the hair is said to have been worn in a long flowing plait, resembling the pig-tail of the Chinese. From the second to the eighth centuries, when Siam was tributary to Cambodia, a Hindoo style of dressing the hair was adopted from the sovereign state. At this time a central lock of hair adorned the head. At a later date when the country gained its [Pg 119] independence, the hair was allowed to grow uniformly all over the head, but cut short. The change was made in order that some visible sign could be shown that freedom had been gained. This fashion remained in vogue till about the thirteenth century when the top-knot was introduced as a relic of Sivaitic worship, together with other Hindoo manners, by immigrants from India. Other forms were at different times adopted. For instance, from 1002 A.D. to 1768 A.D. the hair of the men was frequently cut in a cup-shaped fashion. The king who reigned at that time is popularly supposed to be responsible for this style, which could be most satisfactorily [Pg 120] produced by placing half a cocoa-nut upon the head, and shaving or cutting away all the hair then visible. Women, however, allowed their locks to grow until they flowed over the shoulders. Again, from 1698 A.D. to 1798 A.D. many people adopted the "Great Freemen" pattern, in which the hair appeared in the form of a reversed brush in the centre of the head.

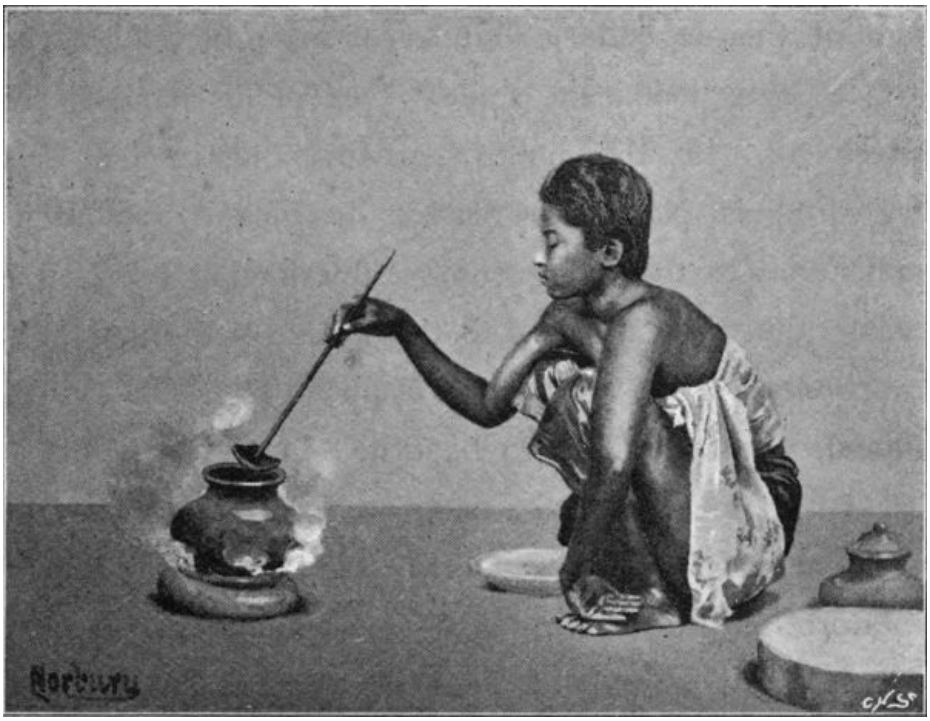
There are certain days of the week when it is unwise to visit the barber, others on which it is highly desirable that any alteration in the condition of the hair should be made. If it is cut on Sunday, lasting happiness and long life are ensured to him who then loses his locks; the unfortunate individual who undergoes the same operation on a Monday may expect fatal diseases, sorrows, and many unpleasant surprises; Tuesday hair-cuttings bring peacefulness and prosperity, and victory in war, while those of a Wednesday are attended with manifold evils,

great anxieties, and troubles from enemies. If a man desires the powerful protection of those angels who inhabit the heavenly spheres, he must get his hair cut on a Thursday; if he would have the satisfaction of finding all kinds of food savoury and palatable, he must visit the barber on Friday; and lastly, if he would be certain of the successful accomplishment of every rite and deed performed on the Saturday, he should submit his locks to the shears on that day.

In a country where so many insanitary conditions surround the life of the people, sickness is common. Hence doctors and quacks abound. A few Siamese have been educated for the medical [Pg 121] profession in foreign countries, and are skilful practitioners. A few others have learnt the principles of European medicine and surgery in the Medical School at Bangkok, but the vast majority of the native professors of the healing art have no other knowledge than that handed down to them by tradition. There are royal "doctors" attached to the court, quacks who profess to cure anything and everything under the sun, and magicians who both cure and kill for a moderate consideration. If a person has an enemy whose death he wishes to encompass, there are certain wizards who will give effect to his wishes by bewitching a buffalo. The animal then dwindles to the size of a pea. This highly condensed pill is given to the enemy, and when swallowed begins to expand to its original size, with a result that is best left undescribed. Other magicians make clay images to represent sick persons. Over these images they perform curious incantations, and then bury them in the jungle, where they absorb and so remove the sickness of the person whom they represent. There is, however, a distinct school and science of medicine which is not simply a matter of magic. In the treatment of fevers and other local ailments, the native doctors are as good as the European. They are clever practisers of the operation of massage; they understand the nature and use of many of the herbs and roots that grow in their jungles; and they are great believers in shower-baths, and in the healing properties of earth when applied to wounds and boils. Their physiological and scientific knowledge is summed up briefly in [Pg 122] the following paragraphs.

All nature is composed of four elements, earth, fire, wind and water. The bodies of men and animals are made up of the same constituents, the earth and water being visible in the bones, flesh and blood, while the fire and wind, though invisible, are clearly present in the breath and heat. The earth of which all solid bodies are composed is of twenty-six varieties; the different forms of water are divided into twelve classes, those of wind into six classes, and those of fire into four. Now in the body of man all the six kinds of wind are known to exist. The first flows from his head to his feet, the second from his feet to his head. The third wind circulates in the region of the diaphragm; the fourth forms the pulse; the fifth enters the lungs; and the sixth is present in the abdominal viscera. Of the four kinds of fire that exercise any influence upon the health of humanity, two varieties of this subtle element are beneficial, and produce respectively the natural temperature of the body, and an easy digestion. The other two kinds are of an undesirable character, as one is the cause of fevers, and the other consumes the body in old age.

The body is divided into thirty-two parts subject to ninety-six diseases, all of which are the inevitable result of any excess in the amount of any one of the primary elements. An excess in the quantity of fire produces all kinds of fevers; any superabundance of water creates dropsy and kindred ailments. All sicknesses that cannot be easily accounted for, are attributed to an [Pg 123] accumulation of wind, and the natives commonly reply when asked what is the matter with them, "ben lom", that is, "it is wind."



STEAMING RICE.

Ill health and good health are dispensed by numerous spirits, and it behoves all men so to order their lives and actions that they may not incur the displeasure of those spirits who have sickness

at their disposal, but that they may win the favour of those who dispense the blessing of perfect health.

In the days when Buddha walked and talked amongst men, there lived a man of remarkable wisdom who is the father of medicine. To him the plants and flowers of the forest spoke, revealing their many virtues. The knowledge thus revealed to him he wrote down in books, and [Pg 124] also taught by word of mouth to his fellow-men. The remedies he prescribed are sacred and infallible. If they apparently fail to cure, the failure is not to be attributed to the method of treatment he laid down, but to the want of sufficient goodness of life and character in the doctor or his patient. Every native physician has in his house an image of this legendary founder of his profession. Upon his face is a beneficent smile. One of his hands is held outstretched. In the hollow of this outstretched hand, every drug is placed to receive his blessing before it is administered to the ailing one. After having received the blessing, the drug is taken to the house of the patient and there boiled in an earthenware pot. The solution thus obtained, very often has to be drunk in quarts before any effect is produced. If the sick man dies the doctor gets no remuneration for his services. The following recipe for a mixture that will cure snake-bites should be noticed by all those who intend to hunt or work in jungles where poisonous reptiles abound.

A piece of the jaw of a wild hog.

A piece of the jaw of a tame hog.

A piece of the bone of a goose.

A piece of the bone of a peacock.

The tail of a fish.

The head of a venomous snake.

CHAPTER VII. [Pg 125]

DOMESTIC LIFE AND CUSTOMS (*continued*).

Slavery or serfdom is one of the most interesting features in the social life of the Siamese. It is another of those customs which they have borrowed from a neighbouring nation. The Shan ancestors of the Siamese were "free" men, and the name "Thai", which was the name they called themselves, signified that fact. It is, moreover, the name of the nation to-day, though the condition of slavery is a very wide-spread one. For many years the inhabitants of the plains were tributary to Cambodia, whose princes and nobles treated all servants and aliens as slaves. When the foreign yoke was thrown off, this domestic custom was instituted amongst the "free" men, and all the subjects of the king became theoretically his slaves. But as he was unable to find employment for this large body of serfs, he delegated a portion of his ownership to persons of lower rank. These in turn handed on their powers to other people, and so arose a condition of universal serfdom, which, however, was only strictly enforced in the case of the poorer classes. The system thus organised divided the whole nation into a series of social strata, but the limits between the different grades of society have never been so rigid and impassable as the [Pg 126] adamantine boundaries that separate the castes of India. In fact, the serf in Siam to-day may be a nobleman of high rank in the future, should he possess ability of sufficient distinction to warrant so great a promotion. Until the present reign there were theoretically no "free" men in the kingdom at all, for everybody owed homage to some one of higher degree; but one of the first acts of H. M. King Chulalongkorn after he came to the throne, was to issue a decree by which all children born of slaves were thereafter declared free. As freedom could be purchased there were also many people in the land who had obtained their independence. Though the king's decree struck a very decisive blow at the condition of domestic slavery, a system of state slavery still prevails inasmuch as the laws relating to *corvée* and conscription are still enforced. Chinese, priests, and foreigners are all exempt from enforced labour of any kind, but the first-named of these classes has to pay a triennial tax as the price of its exemption. The people who are now in bondage are in that condition chiefly as the result of financial indebtedness.

When a native borrows money he either promises to pay a certain amount of interest for the loan, or he promises and actually allows the lender to have his services for a specified time in lieu of interest. Should the borrower under the first agreement here mentioned, fail to pay the interest he has promised, he then offers his personal services in payment of both interest and capital. If the total sum is large, a lifetime may not be long enough to work off the debt at the native rate of [Pg 127] wages, and he so becomes a slave for life. Many people, too, when heavily in debt, sell themselves bodily to someone who will discharge their numerous debts for them. The man who has lost his freedom as the result of financial misfortunes can always re-obtain it if he can in any way obtain sufficient money to pay off his debts. There is nothing cruel or revolting in the treatment of the serfs, and many of them are sincerely attached to their masters, and have been known voluntarily to afford them any assistance they could when misfortunes have overtaken them. They are fed, clothed, and housed at the expense of their owners, and rarely experience in their dependent condition any real hardship. Away in the country the majority of the people prefer to live as the bondservants of some powerful person, who in return for their labour

provides both them and their families with protection and support.

The *corvée* laws are also responsible for a certain number of those who are in bondage. When the central authorities claim the services of someone resident in a remote quarter of the country, the order is made through the governor of the province in which the person whose time and labour are required, resides. If this person desires to avoid the requisition, he is often allowed by the local officials to pay a certain sum of money sufficient for the hire or purchase of a substitute. A mark is then tattooed on the wrist of the substitute, and he becomes definitely the property of the [Pg 128] government. Now if the "marked" man should die at an early date, an illegal claim is often made for the provision of another proxy, on his wife and children. This claim is in opposition to the law, but has often been made by officials of cruel, arbitrary dispositions. In most cases he who so breaks the law is also the administrator of the law for that district, and if the woman and her children are unable to satisfy the demand for money thus unjustly made, they must become themselves the slaves of the official till they work off the amount required from them. When the boys have grown to such a height that they too may be called upon by the government for *corvée* or conscription, their master also marks them upon the wrist, and in this way the condition of serfdom is perpetuated from generation to generation. When at a later date the government does actually requisition their services, their owner professes that they are really his own personal property, and he pays to the central authorities a tax of ninety cents per annum for each male, and so retains them as his dependants. In these cases also, the bond-man becomes free when he is prepared to pay a certain fixed sum, but it is rarely possible for a serf to obtain the necessary funds, as he is daily employed in the service of his master and so prevented from earning wages elsewhere. No slaves can be sold to another person without their own consent. If a slave is sold, and if he afterwards absconds, the seller is bound to repay to the buyer the sum originally paid, less a reasonable amount reckoned for loss of service during the time he has been absent from [Pg 129] his old master, unless it is directly specified to the contrary in the agreement made at the time of purchase. Before the king's decree freed the children of all slaves, they too became the property of the owners of their parents, but they could be set at liberty by paying a sum of money which was fixed by law. They could not be sold to anyone else without the consent both of themselves and their parents.

Each slave has a paper on which is stated the amount to be paid for his or her redemption. The paper is kept by the owner, but it must be given up whenever the amount specified therein is forthcoming. The slave who attempts to gain freedom by running away, and so avoiding what is often a perfectly just and legal debt, is punished by being put in chains, but the fetters are of no great weight and are simply put on the ankles to prevent any further attempt at escape. In any case they are preferable to an indefinite period of imprisonment in the native goal.

If a man buys a new servant, and afterwards sees reason to regret his bargain, he may demand the return of the purchase money, and the cancelling of the agreement, provided he makes his claim before the expiration of three months from the date of purchase. If any bond-servant neglects the due performance of any of the duties prescribed by the master, the losses that are thereby incurred are added to the amount of the redemption money, and must be paid before freedom can be claimed. If any female slave is married against her will to any favourite of her owner, or maybe to the owner himself, the price of her freedom must forthwith be reduced by [Pg 130] one half. When wars took place, the man who fought in lieu of his master, thereby regained his freedom. Should any serf sustain injury in any way while carrying out work demanded from him by his owner, he is entitled to receive compensation according to the nature and extent of his injuries. When a slave is killed in defending either his master or his master's property, no claim can be made against the person who was security for the slave. But if any slave absconds, then any money spent in his apprehension is added to the price of his redemption. It will be seen that the laws of the kingdom which govern the system of domestic bondage, are on the whole of a just and equitable nature. And it must not be forgotten that these laws were made long before Western influence had in any way exercised any effect in the land. They are sufficient in themselves to demonstrate the essentially broad-minded and humanitarian character of the present and previous sovereigns. It is true that they are often broken by powerful officials in remote districts, but under the new system of administration now being rapidly organised, there will perhaps arise a more rigorous and judicial application of the principles of the legislative code.

The national etiquette is the logical result of the national condition of society. Briefly put, it consists of a certain number of laws relating to the amount of deference to be paid by persons of one social grade to those of a higher one. Most of the old forms of etiquette are strictly observed [Pg 131] by all ranks, though of late years a few have disappeared under the pressure of progressive social reforms stimulated and often initiated by the king himself. As the head is the most sacred part of the body, the chief rules that concern the behaviour of an inferior person in the presence of his superior, relate to the position of the body. Formerly no person dared raise his head to the level of that of one of higher rank. He might not cross a bridge while his superior passed beneath, nor could he walk in a room situated above that in which his superior might be lying or sitting. At the present time, bridges and floors are trodden indiscriminately. Until the year 1874 A.D., all persons approached the sovereign on hands and knees, crawling with the head upon a level with the monarch's feet. The crawling in public has been abolished, but nearly every person crouches in the streets when he speaks to, or passes, one whom he knows to be of higher rank than himself. The abolition of public crawling was made by the present king in the presence of his assembled courtiers a few years after he ascended the throne. The occasion will ever remain a memorable one in the annals of the country. All the chief members of the different government

services were in their accustomed positions on hands and knees, with heads bent to the ground, when a decree was read to them of which the following paragraphs formed a portion.

> "Since His Majesty ascended the throne, it has been the Royal purpose to cherish the State and augment the happiness of the greater and lesser princes, ministers and nobles, the clergy, the Brahmins, and the masses of the people all over the kingdom. Whatever is oppressive and burdensome, it has been the Royal purpose to remove from the people, and abolish from the State. His Majesty has noticed that the great countries and powers in Eastern and Western Asia, that is to say to the East of our country, China, Cochin China and Japan, and to the West, India and the regions where oppression existed, compelling the inferiors to prostrate and worship their masters and persons of rank, similar to the custom prevailing in Siam, have at present ceased these customs and instituted new ones. [Pg 132]
>
> "They have universally changed and ceased the custom of prostration and worship, to make manifest the good purpose that there shall be no more oppression in their countries. The countries that have abolished these rigorous exactions, have manifestly greatly increased in their prosperity.
>
> "In this kingdom of Siam there are some national customs that are rigorous, hostile to good usage, and ought to be modified; but the changing and modifying of customs cannot be effected at once; such changes must be the subject of much thought and gradual modification, adapted to times and circumstances. It is in this way that states will augment their susceptible prosperity.
>
> "The custom of prostration and human worship in Siam, is manifestly an oppressive exaction which an inferior must perform to a superior, causing him embarrassing fatigue in order to honour a superior. These acts of showing honour by such prostration and worship, His Majesty perceives are of no benefit whatever to the country. Inferiors who are obliged to perform them, to honour their superiors, must endure and suffer much till the time when they leave the presence of their superior and thus escape the requisition. This custom His Majesty perceives is a primary cause of many existing oppressive exactions, therefore, this ancient national custom, which made prostration the prescribed method of demonstrating respect in Siam, must be abolished; for His Majesty is graciously disposed to confer happiness upon all, and to this end, will relieve them from the burden of prostration as practised heretofore. His Majesty proposes to substitute in the place of crouching and crawling, standing and walking; and instead of prostration on all-fours and bowing with palm-joined hands to the ground, a graceful bow of the head. [Pg 133]
>
> "Standing, walking, bowing the head, are equal demonstrations of respect with crouching and crawling.
>
> "Perhaps some persons of rank who may favour the custom of crouching and crawling as heretofore, thinking it good, may have their doubts as to the wisdom or advisability of the new regulations, and may wish to know why the change from prostration to standing will be advantageous to the State. These may rest assured that the proposed change is ordered to impress upon the people the intention to remove from them all oppressive exactions. States that do not oppress the inferior ranks will assuredly have great prosperity. [Pg 134]
>
> "Henceforth, the princes and nobles according to their rank, when in solemn audience before the throne, or wherever His Majesty may be present, will please observe this Royal Edict, which is hereby promulgated to regulate henceforth the conduct of noblemen in every particular in in this matter."[D]

The decree proceeded to detail and explain the new social rules, after which the whole crowd rose from the ground, and for the first time in the history of the country, the subject stood upright in the presence of the sovereign. The people to whom this wise edict was addressed are of a conservative nature, and believe in precedent as an infallible guide in all matters. They have no love for innovations, and have been slow to follow their king in his forward march towards a pure and enlightened form of government. There are many noblemen who still insist upon their servants approaching them in the ancient way, in spite of the proclamation and the king's own wishes. But on court days no such demonstrations are now ever seen within the precincts of the Audience Chamber.

The place of honour is on the right hand of the chief guest. Places near the wall on the right hand are of greater honour than those on the left, while the position of greatest distinction in any room is opposite the door.

Civil and religious holidays follow each other in rapid succession the whole year round. The King's birthday is celebrated for three days by the entire nation. Ships are wreathed in flowers and bunting, banquets are given, receptions are held, and salutes are fired. At night, the palaces in the city, the vessels in the river, every house by the side of a road or on the bank of a stream, are ablaze with light. Night is turned to day, and earth becomes a fairy land. [Pg 135]

A RICKSHAW.

The New Year holidays also last three days. They commence on the First of April, a day which is scarcely auspicious from the European point of view. For the usual feasting that accompanies this and all other holidays, a special kind of cake is made, which is as much in demand as our own Shrove-Tuesday pancakes or our Good-Friday hot cross-buns. The temples are thronged with women and children making offerings to Buddha and his priests.

The people inaugurate their New Year with numerous charitable and religious deeds. The rich entertain the monks, who recite appropriate prayers and chants. Every departed soul returns to the bosom of his family during these three days, freed from any fetters that may have bound him in regions of indefinable locality. On the third day the religious observances terminate, and the remaining hours are devoted to "the world, the flesh, and the devil." Gambling is not confined to the licensed houses, but may be indulged in anywhere. Games of chance hold powerful sway in every house as long as the license to participate in them lasts. [Pg 136]

Priests in small companies occupy posts at regular intervals round the city wall, and spend their time in chanting away the evil spirits. On the evening of the second day, the ghostly visitors from the lower realms lose the luxury of being exorcised with psalms. Every person who has a gun may fire it as often as he pleases, and the noise thus made is undoubtedly fearful enough in its intensity to cause any wandering traveller from the far-off fiery land to retrace his steps with speed. The bang and rattle of pistols, muskets, shot-guns, and rifles cease not till the break of day, by which time the city is effectually cleared of all its infernal visitors.

Twice each year another important holiday occurs, in connection with the taking of the oath of allegiance. Every person who is a prince, a nobleman, or a paid servant of the Government, is required to present himself at the temple in the grounds of the Royal Palace, or at other places appointed in other parts of the country, to swear his allegiance to the king. Each person signifies his acceptance of the oath read to him, by drinking, and sprinkling upon his forehead, a few drops of specially prepared water. Some ordinary rain-water is first placed in a bowl, and then stirred with swords, pistols, spears and other weapons such as are likely to be used in the punishment of those who are guilty of treasonable practices. Priests are excused, as it is considered that their professions of holiness are sufficient guarantees of their loyalty. [Pg 137]

Portions of the symbolical water are afterwards sent to the distant provinces. The local governors then assemble those people who are in any way connected with the local administration, and require them also to take the oath and drink the water of allegiance. The formula of the oath is somewhat lengthy, but the following translation of a portion of it will serve to show its general character.

"We beseech the powers of the deities to plague with poisonous boils that will rapidly prove fatal, and with all manner of terrible diseases, the dishonourable, perverse, and treacherous. May we be visited with untimely wretched and appalling deaths that our disloyalty may be made manifest in the eyes of the whole world. When we shall have departed from this life upon earth, cause us to be sent to, and all to be born again in, that great hell where we shall burn with unquenchable fire through limitless transmigrations. And when we have expiated our penalties there, and are born again into any other world, we pray that we may fail to find the least happiness in any pleasurable enjoyments that may there abound. Let us not meet the god Buddha; let us not hear the sacred teachings; let us not come into contact with the sacred priests whose mission it is to be gracious to men and animals, and to help them to escape from misery, to attain a progressive succession of births and deaths, and finally to reach heaven itself. Should we by any chance meet with holy men or priests, let us receive therefrom no gracious helpful assistance."[E] [Pg 138]

Although the oath is rather a terrible one to take, very very little solemnity prevails on these occasions, and every one performs his part of the ceremony in a most casual manner.

Those natives who have had little or no communication with Europeans are the best exemplars of the true character of the nation. They are very gentle in their manners; timid, especially in the dark or with strangers; gay and cheerful, and fond of cheerful persons. They rarely quarrel amongst themselves, as they dislike worry and trouble of every description. They are lazy when ordinary work has to be done, but busy enough when preparations have to be made for amusements or holiday processions. Their idea of the millenium is that the tide will flow up one side of the river and down the other, so that everyone may go whithersoever he pleases without the trouble of rowing. There will be no work of any description, and men will lie in the sunshine, as happy as birds. The country people never beg, and even in the capital it is only the leprous and [Pg 139] the blind who ask for alms. There is no clamouring for backsheesh as in other Oriental countries. The people are sharp and witty, and delight in jokes and sharp sayings. They are not nearly so imitative as the Chinese, but they absorb new ideas, and adapt themselves to changes of custom with great rapidity, when they have once overcome their initial prejudice against the innovation. When the electric tramway was first opened in Bangkok, the absence of any visible locomotive machinery caused them the greatest bewilderment, and for several days they half worshipped the cars as they passed them in the streets, murmuring to themselves the while, "It is the Devil's carriage." In less than a week, the cars were packed on every journey with a crowd who distinctly appreciated the speed and ease with which they were being carried along.

They are not greater liars than other men, except when they have come into close contact with civilisation. There are old residents living in Bangkok who remember the day when the word of a native was as good as his bond. Today the dwellers in the city are never to be trusted. Some of them carefully avoid speaking the truth on all occasions, even when it would be quite as serviceable as an untruth.

The money formerly used consisted of sea-shells of small value, eight hundred to a thousand being equal to about two pence. It was easy in those days for a man however poor to get something to eat, for there was always something on sale that could be bought for the thousandth part of two-pence. In imitation of foreign ways, a flat coin was introduced made of lead, and the [Pg 140] old sea-shell was abolished as legal currency. The Government made a huge profit out of the transaction, for they refused to buy up any of the worthless little cowries, and they sold the leaden coins for more than they were worth. Counterfeiting naturally followed, and the coins were re-called, but as soon as the treasury-boxes were filled with a mixture of good and false money the Government refused to receive any more. All those who still had any of the leaden money in their possession experienced a serious loss. An alloy of lead and copper was issued at a reduced value; but the profit to be made by coining was still so great that counterfeit coins speedily found their way into circulation. Small bullets of gold and silver next came into use, and one of them still remains in circulation. None of these coins were stamped with the image of the king, for at that time there was a strong prejudice against the making of portraits in any medium. Europeans who travel into the jungle, have even at the present time, only to point a camera at a crowd in order to procure its instant dispersion. When a copy of the face of a person is made and taken away from him, a portion of his life goes with the picture. Unless the sovereign had been blessed with the years of a Methuselah he could scarcely have permitted his life to be distributed in small pieces together with the coins of the realm. But not many years ago the present king ordered a new issue of the coinage. Flat, round copper and silver pieces were made at the mint in [Pg 141] the palace, and on every disc appeared the shapely profile of the reigning monarch. Postage stamps followed, with the same profile printed on them; then the king was painted and photographed; and so the old superstition has lost its power; while modern fashion requires that all who can afford it shall be photographed. It is perhaps scarcely necessary to add here, that with the exception of two or three Europeans, all the professional photographers are Chinamen.

The flat, gold coins were hoarded by the people, turned into ornaments or used in the making of jewelry. They are no longer used as money, but are bought as curios for four times their original value.

Weights and scales have not as yet displaced the old methods of measurement. The table of Siamese Dry Measure is a good illustration of the devices adopted by uncivilised people to facilitate their buying and selling in the absence of any fixed legal standard.

880 Tamarind seeds make one cocoa-nut shell (kanahn)
25 Cocoa-nut shells make one bamboo basket (sat)
80 Bamboo baskets make one cart (kwien)

or

830 Tamarind seeds make one cocoa-nut shell
20 Cocoa-nut shells make one bucket (tung)
100 buckets make one cart.

In calculating time two calendars are used. One is a religious one and is only used for ecclesiastical purposes. It commences with the death of Buddha, about 543 B.C. The civil calendar is the one in general use. It dates from the founding of Bangkok in 1784 A.D. The idea of [Pg 142] eternity is expressed in concrete form in the following manner. Eternity is divided into long periods of time, called "kops". Each "kop" is represented by a stone measuring ten miles each way. Once in every hundred years, an angel descends to one of these stones and wipes its surface with a gossamer web. When by these successive century wipings, one stone shall have been thoroughly worn away, one "kop" will have been completed, and a second period of eternity will begin.

The human race is gradually dwindling away. In the misty ages of the past all men were giants. The present race of Siamese is well proportioned, but small. Their descendants will be smaller. Some of them will diminish till they are as small as dogs; a few centuries later, all will be no bigger than rats; the stature of a butterfly and then of a flea will measure the height of men, and ultimately they will disappear altogether from the face of the earth.

The Siamese speak a language of their own. It possesses its own nouns, verbs and other parts of speech, a sprinkling of slang, and practically no "swear" words. These are only used by those whose knowledge of English is colloquial. There is a special language devoted to the sacred person and attributes of the king, which must be used by all who speak to or of him. The special vocabulary required is a difficult one to learn even to the natives themselves. The hairs of the monarch's head, the soles of his feet, the breath of his body—in fact every single detail of his [Pg 143] person both internal and external, has a particular name. When he eats or drinks, sleeps or walks, a special word indicates that these acts are being performed by the sovereign himself, and such words cannot possibly be applied to any other person whatever. There is no word in the language by which any creature of higher rank or greater dignity than a monarch can be described; and the missionaries in speaking of "God" are forced to use the native word for "king". Each person in speaking to another uses a pronoun which at once expresses whether the speaker is of superior, equal, or inferior rank to the person spoken to. In this way superiority of social position is asserted, or corresponding inferiority confessed, in every conversation between two persons.

The language spoken by the pure Siamese is monosyllabic and toned. The apparently longer words are really a collection of monosyllables. For instance:

"mi-keet-fi" "a match" is made up of three words,
"mi" ... "wood"
"keet" ... "a line"
"fi" ... "a fire"

The word for "ice" is a combination of two words meaning "hard water", and that for "cheese" a combination of two words meaning "hard butter".

The toned words are a great trouble to foreigners who are not accustomed to a "sing-song" form of speech. Some syllables have three different sounds, others as many as five, and each different [Pg 144] tone expresses a different meaning. In many cases the mistakes that are made by the foreigner cause little difficulty, as his meaning is clear, though his speech is mysterious. The word for "horse" is a differently sounded form of the word for "dog," but any such mistake in speech, as "Chain that horse to his kennel," or "Order me a two-dog carriage," would be readily understood by a servant, who would merely receive the order with a smile and then proceed to execute it according to the wish of his master. There are many words between which the difference in sound is important, as the smallest mistake would make all the difference between an ordinary and an obscene word. There are others too where it behoves the white man to be careful of his inflections, or he may, when intending to say to some village farmer, "I am going to dance upon your *field*," unfortunately remark, "I am going to dance upon your *aunt*," or even "I am going to dance upon your *face*," either of which errors might be productive of results not foreseen by the imperfect linguist.

Names in Siam often indicate precise relationships. On pointing out one person to another and asking "Who is that?"—the person spoken to may reply, if any such relationship exist, "That is my elder brother," or "That is my younger brother" as the case may be, never simply "That is my brother." Nearly all such words as "grandfather," "grandmother," "uncle," and "aunt" when spoken by anyone indicate whether the relationship is on the paternal or maternal side. Names of [Pg 145] children often relate to their appearance, or circumstances connected with their birth. One is "little," another "large," while even a particular deformity may be perpetually called attention to by such a name as "hunch-back." There are no names specially set aside as belonging to male and female, so that both a boy or girl may be called "lotus," or "black," or any other name fancied by the parents. There are also no surnames.

"Nai" is a general term comparable to "Mr." and applied to males of all ages who possess no higher title. "Maa" is similarly used in the case of females. The absence of surnames, and also of numbered houses in most of the streets, causes some difficulty when it becomes necessary to send letters through the post. An envelope has often to be addressed something like the following:

To Mr. Lek,
Student of the Normal College,
Son of Mr. Yai, Soldier,
Near the foot of the Black Bridge
at the back of the Lotus Temple,
New Road, Bangkok.

The alphabet is derived from Pali. There is no distinction between the written and printed characters, nor are there any capital letters. Letters and books are written from left to right as in the European languages, but no spaces are left between the words. Printing has only been in use in the country for about forty years, and all the old religious texts are written with a style, on [Pg 146] long thin strips of palm leaf about eighteen inches long and two inches broad. The edges of the leaves are covered with gold leaf, and the "pages" of any book are fastened together with silk

cords. Every monastery possesses a good collection of these leafy documents. They are kept in the temples in cases which are often elaborately gilded or inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 147]

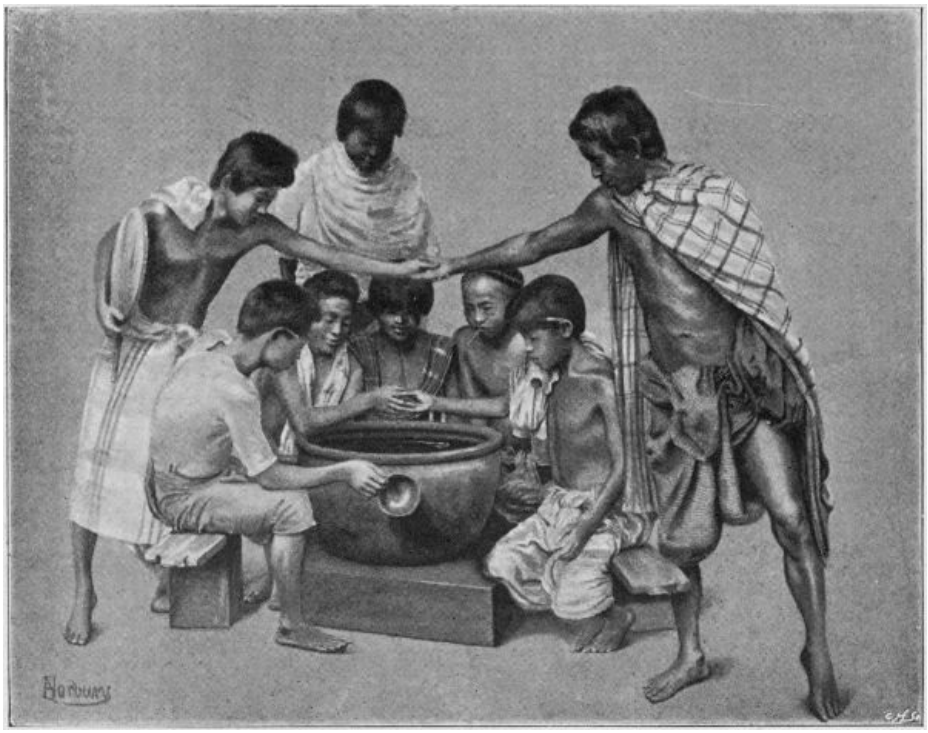
POPULAR AMUSEMENTS.

The Siamese are fond of being amused and of amusing themselves, but they do not usually indulge in active sports with the exception of rowing and a species of football. Games that involve any great physical exertion are played chiefly by persons who make a business of the performance. The professional acrobats that are met with on festive occasions are fearless and skilful. Amongst the many feats they perform for the amusement of their fellow-countrymen, there are few that do not require both strength of nerve as well as agility of limb. The "acrobat poles" are stout bamboo rods fastened firmly to the ground. Each pole terminates, about twenty feet from the ground, in a lotus-shaped capital. The acrobats climb to the top and perform various feats on the small space afforded them by the flattened surface of this small platform. No nets or mattresses are provided to break their fall in case of accident. There are other men who fix pikes and sword-blades in a row and then lie with their bare backs upon the sharpened points. Juggling with keen-edged daggers is certainly a less dangerous amusement. "Throwing the hammer" here [Pg 148] takes a new form as "swinging the hammer". A heavy sledge-hammer is lifted by a rope held between the teeth, and then swung deftly over the shoulder so as to fall well to the rear of the athlete. These dangerous acrobatic exhibitions are not at all frequent, probably owing to the fact that there are only a few men in the whole country who are able to take part in them.

On national holidays an open air play known as "Kra, ooa," or "spearing the buffalo," is enacted. It is a mixture of dumb show and grotesque dancing, and is based on an old Burmese story. The legend relates that once upon a time there was an old woman who had a husband named Ta So. One night she dreamt that she was enjoying a dish of buffalo's liver. Her enjoyment of the luxury was so great that she presently awoke. She was unable to sleep, so she awakened her husband and told him of her dream, and of the wonderful flavour of the meat. The more she dwelt upon the delicious character of her phantom repast, the stronger grew her desire to taste the real article. She urged Ta So to go out into the jungle and spear a buffalo. He for some time declined to rise from his couch, alleging that he was a bad hunter and dared not track so formidable a creature. He attempted to seek repose once more, but the hungry lady grew more and more importunate, and he was forced at last to set out on a hunting excursion. His wife accompanied him to see that he did not shirk the task she had set him. After a long time they managed to track a wild buffalo. They skirmished and scouted, and finally succeeded in killing it. They opened the [Pg 149] animal, extracted the desired delicacy, and then returned home to enjoy it.—The representation of this story has been repeated times without number, but it never fails to meet with popular approval. An actor first appears dressed as a Burmese woman. She next proceeds in very colloquial vernacular to bully her husband in accordance with the tradition. The buffalo used is a sham one. Four or five people throw a dark-coloured cloth over themselves, and the foremost of these holds in his hands a huge mask, supposed to be a buffalo's head. It would serve equally well for the head of any other creature known to natural history, for it is unlike anything but the fabulous creation of some man's mad imaginings. As the husband and wife chase the ungainly brute, it gambols to the music of a native band, in a circle about twenty feet in diameter. The dodging and running, the pretended attack, the sham wounds, and the awful groans are always received with the same loud bursts of hearty appreciative laughter.

The game of "takraw" is popular with boys and youths, and is similar to the game of football as exhibited by the Burmese in recent years in London. The players, who may be of any number, stand in a ring. One of them tosses into the ring a light wicker ball. As it falls another player catches it on his foot, head, or shoulder. He at once passes it to someone else, without touching it with his hands. The ball passes swiftly from one spot to another, and it is often kept up for quite a [Pg 150] long time. If it falls to the earth, it is picked up and again tossed to the skilful players. And so the game proceeds until every one is tired. There is no scoring of points or winning of games. New-comers join in the fun and weary ones leave without in any way interfering with the amusement of the rest. The "fancy kicking" that is exhibited by expert players excites great admiration in natives and foreigners.

[Pg 151]



LAYING WAGERS ON FIGHTING FISH.

Games in which the element of chance enters are the greatest favourites. The people are born gamblers, and to make a bet is the delight of everyone, from prince to peasant. They bet on the results of a cock-fight, a boxing match, a fight between crickets, or a combat between their pugilistic fishes. Even kite-flying is accompanied by unlimited "book-making." The Siamese are not to be compared with the Japanese in the art of constructing curious or beautiful kites, but they are certainly their equals in flying them. The most common form of kite is a five-pointed one —a pentagonal star. On none of the kites, whatever may be their shape or size, is "tailing" ever used, and rarely does a native run in order to get the kite to rise. By a peculiar rapid jerking of the string, the kite is made to create its own wind when a natural one is not blowing. Men may often be seen on calm still days flying their kites from boats as they pass up and down the river. Kite contests are of frequent occurrence during the windy months. One kite is called the male and the other the female. The object of the contest is the capturing of the female by the male. [Pg 153] When they are both at a considerable height from the ground, one flyer so jerks the string of the male kite as to cause it to swoop downwards with great velocity. If the apex of the falling star strikes the body of the soaring female, it effectually wounds her and brings her to earth. But it is perhaps oftener luck than skill that ends the contest so suddenly. As a rule the string of the descending kite passes over the string of the steady one. Then the owner of the male toy checks its downward motion, and with a rapid pull of the string towards him, causes it to pass under the string that is attached to the female, and then to rise again. In this way one string is wound round the other. The operation is repeated a second and even a third time, after which the players each pull their kites towards them, let them go again, pull in again and so on, so that each string is sawing the other one. Excitement takes possession of the spectators and they begin to speculate as to which string will first break. They frequently stake large sums of money on the result of the aerial combat. In many instances the owner of the entangled female, manages by a skilful manipulation of the string to free her from the toils of her antagonist, who then once more pursues her, and manoeuvres to compass her destruction.

A WRITER OF LOTTERY TICKETS.

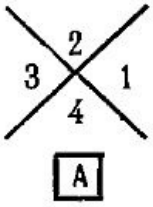
In every street there will always be found a Chinaman, wearing big goggles, sitting at a table in the front of an open house or shop, wearing upon his wooden countenance a quiet and meditative smile. By his side is a small pile of thin sheets of yellow paper, and a quantity of writing material. [Pg 154] He is an agent of the gambling farmer and deals in lottery tickets. The Government farms out the monopoly and derives a considerable revenue from it, as in some years as much as thirty thousand pounds sterling has been paid for the privilege of being allowed to gently ease other people of their superfluous cash. The lottery farmer chooses, every day, one out of thirty-four characters of the alphabet as the lucky one for that day. He keeps the secret of his choice to himself, and leaves those people who are of a speculative turn of mind to guess the particular letter he has chosen. Everyone is at liberty to try his luck. The gambler goes to one of the numerous writers of lottery tickets and names a letter. The writer slowly inscribes the letter upon one of the sheets of paper. He then folds it up, and on the back states his own name and address, the name and address of the purchaser of the ticket, and the amount paid for the same. He keeps possession of the paper till the close of the day. The city is divided into districts, over each of which the lottery farmer places a trustworthy overseer. Towards evening the overseer visits every ticket writer in his locality, collects all the papers, and the money paid for them. These he afterwards takes to the office of his chief. At a given hour the farmer declares the winning letter and the papers are opened. All those papers that do not bear the chosen character are thrown away and the money appropriated. Those who have been fortunate enough to guess correctly the letter for the day, receive back twenty-nine times their stake, so that the man who staked one [Pg 155] pound receives twenty-nine as his reward. The chances in favour of the proprietor of the lottery are so great, and so many thousands of people patronise him every day that he can easily afford to award a prize of high value to the few winners. Some people endeavour to calculate their chances beforehand. In every writer's house is placed a board divided into squares. Every day from the beginning to the end of the month, the letter chosen is written in one of these squares. The board is consulted by those about to try their luck, and they try to work out a system which shall guide them in their choice. Many gamblers, especially if they are Chinese, consult their gods about the matter. They go to the temples and stand in front of the altar. There they find a bamboo box containing thirty-four strips of bamboo, on each of which is printed one of the letters used by the lottery farmers. They address the presiding deity of the place and promise him abundance of fat pork and chickens if only he will be so kind as to help them in their venture. After having made this tempting offer, one stick is chosen from the bundle. The gambler looks at [Pg 156] it, and then wonders if the gods are going to make sport of him. He proceeds to test the sincerity of the deity. He takes two pieces of bamboo root, which have been flattened on the one side and rounded on the other. He throws them into the air, exclaiming as he does so, "If I have chosen the right letter, let these two roots fall with the flat sides up." Suppose they fall as he desires, he repeats the experiment, saying, "If I have chosen the right letter, let these two roots fall with the round side up." Even if success again crowns his experiment, he still feels inclined to doubt the playful deity to whom he is appealing for counsel. So he throws the roots yet once again—"If I have chosen the right letter let these two roots fall, one with the flat side up, and one with the round side up." If they should fall in this way, he is practically certain the gods are with him. He pawns everything he possesses and stakes every farthing he can obtain on the letter of his choice. Thirty-three chances to one that he loses, and he may spend the rest of his life in extreme poverty, bewailing the fickleness of the god he supplicated.

Anyone who can write can set up a stand, for it is the policy of the farmer to have his agents scattered all over the city. The overseers are not directly paid for their services, but on the contrary, actually pay to be allowed to hold the office. The writers of the tickets receive a commission of one shilling for every forty-four shillings they hand to the overseers. The overseer receives from the farmer the same proportion of the total amount he collects each day. Thirty [Pg 157]

times the sum actually staked is handed to the writer of a correct letter. He then hands over to the winner twenty-nine times the sum, so that he gets a further profit of one-thirtieth of all the winning money that passes through his hands.

A few years ago, the gambling farmer lost a considerable sum of money through his own indiscretion. He had obtained a new wife of great beauty, of whom he was passionately fond. One day she asked him what letter he had chosen for the winning one. "Why do you wish to know?" said he. Woman-like, she replied, "Oh, I merely asked you out of curiosity." "Well," said the infatuated adorer, "promise me that you will on no account reveal it to any single person you may meet. Remember, if people were to know what letter I had chosen, I should lose a tremendous sum of money." The new favourite answered, "I promise not to tell." He gave her the letter, and faithful to her promise, she kept the secret. But she went to one of the writers and staked all the money she had on what she knew was to be the lucky character. The writer knew who she was, and jokingly asked her why she had chosen that particular letter. She answered that she had simply selected it as any one else might have done in order try her luck. Several people standing by heard the conversation, and learning that the chief had been to see her the day before in her own quarters, they thought it extremely probable that she was in possession of that days winning number. They promptly followed her example, with the result that her confiding spouse lost [Pg 158] several thousand dollars on the day's transactions. He at once accused her of betraying his trust, and although she pleaded her innocence, he sold her within a few days to gratify his want of revenge, or perhaps, to recoup himself in part for the losses he had sustained as the result of his own folly.

In the small gambling houses that abound, various games of chance are played all day. They are open to the road, and are always fairly well filled. Idlers strolling by with an odd cent in their waistband, step in and lose it, and then pass on their way to give place to others who seek easily-made fortunes. The games played require no skill on the part of those who play. It is all pure chance, as the following descriptions will show.



The Mat Game. On the floor is spread a mat with two lines drawn across it at right angles to each other, as shown in the diagram. The banker sits in the position marked A, and the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 are placed as here indicated. In front of the banker is a big pile of cowrie shells. He takes up as many as he can hold in his two hands and places them in front of him. The crowd then place any amount they like on any one of the four numbers. Suppose, for example, that there are four playing and that each places a shilling on a different number. When all those who wish to play have put down their money, the proprietor begins to count out the shells he has taken from a large heap, and to place them in small piles of four each, and notes the remainder when all the [Pg 159] shells have been disposed of. If there is a remainder of two, then the man whose money is on two gets his stake doubled. Number four loses, and numbers one and three neither lose nor gain. If there is a remainder of three, the money on three is doubled, number one loses, and numbers two and four remain unaltered. If there are twenty or thirty people playing, the principle is the same. All those who have guessed the right remainder get their money doubled, the opposite numbers lose, and the others neither win nor lose. If there is no remainder then the winning number is four. One variation in the method of staking is allowed. The money may be placed on any one of the four diagonal lines. Suppose the stake is laid on the line between three and two, then if either three or two be the remainder the money is doubled, but if one or four wins, then the money is lost. Porcelain counters of very small value are used at these places, and so common is the gambling habit, that these counters are used in the markets for the purchase of goods, for both buyers and sellers know that the gambler's coins can easily be disposed of again. If a banker fails, he is unable to redeem his porcelain coinage and the holders are then liable to lose the value of the counters in their possession.

Brass Cup Game. The necessary apparatus for this form of speculation is a small brass cup and a wooden cube. The upper face of the cube is divided by a line into two halves, one of which is [Pg 160] painted red and the other white. The banker puts the cube on the table in any position he chooses, without letting the people see how it is placed. He covers it with the brass cup. The players put down their stakes in various positions round the cup. The banker raises the cup. All money opposite the white edge is returned at the rate of three to one, while all opposite the other three sides passes into the banker's pocket.

The Animal Game. This is a very favourite amusement at fairs. A board is provided which measures about eighteen inches by twenty. It is divided by lines into a number of equal oblongs. In each space is painted some animal. The owner has three large wooden dice with figures painted on the sides corresponding to those in the squares on the board. Those who wish to try their luck choose a picture and place their money thereon. The three dice are placed in a cocoa-nut shell, and rattled about, and then thrown on a table. The winning pictures are those that appear on the topmost faces of the three cubes.

Gambling with cards is very common. The cards are all of Chinese pattern, and measure three inches by one. On them are printed kings, governors, soldiers, officials, and other important personages. There are one hundred and sixteen cards in a pack, but what are the rules that govern their complicated manipulation the writer has failed to fathom, even as he has also failed to find any other European who could furnish the requisite explanation.

Chess is one of the few pastimes that is not used for betting purposes. The game is substantially [Pg 161] the same as that played in England, but a boat replaces the castle, the bishop is represented by a nobleman, and the knight's moves are made by a horse. There are many skilful players, and the present Minister for Foreign Affairs, Prince Devawongse, can checkmate most of the foreigners who have had the opportunity of playing with him. The real Siamese chessmen are difficult to obtain as they are made only for private use and not for sale. The poorer classes readily make up a full set when they want a game, by using buttons or cowries for the pawns and modelling the rest of the pieces out of bits of soft clay.

But the most popular of all amusements is the theatre. It is the delight of old and young alike, and is intensely interesting to the foreigner, as probably representing to a very large degree, the primitive way in which the dramas that were presented to his forefathers, were staged and enacted. It possesses an additional attraction inasmuch as it is yet a purely native institution, unaffected by those Western influences that are so rapidly destroying in the East the many Oriental manners and customs that were once the delight of the traveller. Yokohama is a European seaport. There are English policemen in Shanghai, and cafés in Saigon. In Bangkok itself electric lights and tram-cars have appeared, and one of the latest orders of the Court requires that at all future state ceremonies the native shall discard his own picturesque costume for frock-coat, European trousers, and top-hat. So far, however, the Siamese theatre has [Pg 162] remained unaffected by these modern fashions.

The theatre of the capital may differ from that of the province, but the differences are those demanded by native taste alone. It is in all cases admirably suited to a people of fertile imagination and simple habits. Spectacular displays and gorgeous transformation scenes are neither expected nor given. Realism is not demanded in any form. Except in the matter of dress, simplicity characterises the whole performance. Great attention is paid to the pattern and the material of the costumes. They are of a regulation type—heroes, angels, soldiers, and monarchs being arrayed according to fashions that have descended from generation to generation. Cloth of gold, richly embroidered cloaks, and expensive jewels, make up the wardrobe of the richer companies.

There is only one theatre in the capital to which any admission fee is charged and where regular performances are held. On dark nights when the moon is hidden the theatre is closed, for there would be no light to go home by, but as soon as the new moon appears again, the doors are opened and the people flock to the only place of amusement that can successfully compete with the rival attractions of the gambling hells and opium dens. All other theatrical performances take place as a rule at private houses on the occasion of a wedding, a cremation, or any other public or private ceremony at which large crowds of people congregate.

The various troupes of performers are the private property of certain noblemen, who greatly [Pg 163] pride themselves on the skill and beauty of their "prima-donnas". There are also bands of players who stroll from place to place and depend for their living on the voluntary offerings of the spectators. Occasionally they find their services required for some domestic celebration. At other times they perform in the open air, or in any odd empty shed they may happen to discover in the course of their wanderings.

There are two kinds of theatre—the "lakhon" and the "yeegai". The former, which stands highest in public estimation is probably derived from the Nautch dances of India. At one time there was a large Brahmin settlement in the town of Ligore, which is situated to the north-east of the Malay Peninsula. These emigrants from India brought with them a number of nautch girls whose dances were highly appreciated by the people of the land in which they had newly settled. The native name for Ligore is Lakhon, and when the dancers went from place to place, they were known as "The actors from Lakhon," and later on simply as the "lakhons". The word passed into the common speech and is now used as the name for "theatre". The members of the "lakhon" companies are all women with the exception of a few clowns. They seldom produce any new or original plays. Those that they act over and over again are chiefly translations of Hindoo myths, and are intolerably long. Several hours a night for a fortnight would be required for the complete performance of some of these lengthy dramas. This is no barrier to the enjoyment of the [Pg 164] audience, for the stories of the plays are the only literature that they constantly read. They are therefore thoroughly familiar with the plot, the characters, and all the incidents of the dramas performed before them. It follows that they never need to attend the theatre from night to night in order to follow the development of the story. In fact, the better they know the play, and the oftener they see it performed, the more they enjoy it.

[Pg 165]

FACES FROM A SIAMESE THEATRE.

There is no acting in our sense of the word. The words of the play are dolefully chanted by a chorus of women, whose screeching voices produce sounds that are painfully unmusical when judged from the European standpoint. The only words uttered by the actresses themselves are similarly chanted at times when they feel that the situation has reached a climax, and consequently needs an extra amount of noise to make it thoroughly effective. The orchestra employed is called the "Mahoree", and contains twenty-one instruments when complete. The instruments used are chiefly of the percussion type and are powerful sound producers. Amongst them are drums, cymbals, tom-toms, gongs and bamboo dulcimers. Stringed instruments are represented by a few squeaky one-stringed fiddles and an instrument that resembles a zither. A terrible wind instrument is sometimes employed when it is desirable to produce a sound that can be calculated to rival that of the bagpipes when played by a zealous but unmusical amateur. The use of the band is chiefly to mark the rhythm of the chorus and to produce effective noisy bursts [Pg 167] of sound in important scenes. Any embrace between a pair of lovers is emphasised by a forcible hammering of drums and clashing of cymbals. They know nothing of harmony, but musical experts with well-trained ears, say that they play in unison.

There is nothing natural in the actions of the performers except as regards those of the clowns. The funny men are the only ones who ever say anything in their natural voices or who ever move their limbs in a common everyday manner. The ladies go through a series of posturing evolutions euphemistically called dances. They are nothing more than extraordinary contortions of the body accompanied by equally strange motions of the limbs. The fingers are bent backwards from the joints, and the arms backwards from the elbows in a way no untrained person could ever possibly imitate. From early childhood the fingers and arms are daily bent out of place until finally they become, as it were, double jointed. The actresses whiten their faces with powder and do not relieve their ghostly appearance with any touch of colour. They fasten on the finger-tips artificial gold finger-nails of abnormal length. The audience either stands or sits on the floor, and smokes incessantly. The stage is simply a portion of the floor marked out by mats, round the sides of which sit those members of the audience who are nearest the performers. There is a raised seat or small platform at the back of the stage for the use of those who represent kings and queens in the different scenes. At the back of the seat is the common dressing-room of the whole company. [Pg 168] It is partially or completely open to the public gaze, and a small crowd always gathers there to see the fair ones powder and adorn themselves. The strolling troupes dispense with even this imitation of a dressing-room, and prepare themselves for their parts in full view of the audience. They carry their belongings in old kerosine tins, which they arrange along one side of the shed in which they are performing.

If a horse is required, an actress comes on the stage, wearing a piece of head-gear shaped like a horse's head. It is not worn as a mask to cover the face, but as a hat on the top of the head. The rider does not mount her steed, but places her hand on its shoulder and walks by its side. Monkeys and elephants play important parts in the old legends, and they are represented in the same simple fashion; though one private company in Bangkok boasts a real elephant that has been trained for theatrical performances.

A voyage at sea is undertaken without ships. One of the players crosses the stage, having a pole in imitation of a mast fastened to his chest. From the top floats the national flag, while pieces of thin cord are fastened from the same point to the neck and shoulders of the player to represent rigging. The passengers then embark by arranging themselves in two long lines behind the man with the pole. When they are all safely aboard, the stern of the vessel arrives and forms the tail end of the procession. He also bears a pole, a flag, and a quantity of string rigging, and attached [Pg 169] to his back is a wooden rudder, the cords of which are held by the passenger immediately in front of him. They then sail away, rolling their supple bodies in time to the music, in imitation of the rolling motion of a vessel at sea. They cross the stage, pass out at one side, and re-enter at the other, time after time, as though they were trying to impress the audience with the tedious and protracted nature of their journey.

The possession of a tin sword is a sufficient indication of a warrior; while a tall tapering crown is the symbol of monarchial authority.

Occasionally there is a villain in the piece, who after some wicked deed, finds it necessary to conceal his whereabouts. This appears at first sight to be a very difficult matter, for the stage is absolutely bare of everything that could possibly afford the slightest concealment. The difficulty is soon surmounted. If he needs a wall behind which to hide himself, a bamboo screen with a hole in the middle is at once pushed on the stage in full view of the audience. He retires behind it, and the spectators then enjoy the comical sight of a hero seeking and finding not, while the villain amuses himself by watching through the hole in the screen the fruitless efforts made to discover his hiding-place. If he is supposed to be concealed in a wood, a banana leaf or a branch of a tree is handed to him, and he holds it with his hands in front of his face. Again the hero is disappointed in his search, and when tired out with his long and unrewarded exertions, he plucks [Pg 170] fruit from off the branch behind which the villain is in safe retirement, the audience roars with delight.

The eagerness and keen enthusiasm with which the spectators receive all these primitive methods of dramatic representation, are conclusive proof that they are endowed with strong imaginations.

The "yeegai" is of a different character entirely. It is Malay in origin. The performers are all men or boys, and belong generally to the lower classes. Chorus and orchestra are not considered indispensable, the former being always absent, and the latter generally consisting of seven large drums. There is no posturing and fantastic dancing, but genuine acting. The old legends give way to more modern and original works of a strictly farcical character. The buffoonery is excellent, but the language is nearly always coarse. Current events are burlesqued, and foreign residents with pronounced mannerisms get caricatured.

Whatever be the play or wherever it be performed, luxuriously upholstered boxes and special incidental music are not required, for the story itself is of sufficient interest to the people to capture their hearts and minds without the assistance of any expensive and elaborate furniture.

CHAPTER IX. [Pg 171]

OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL.

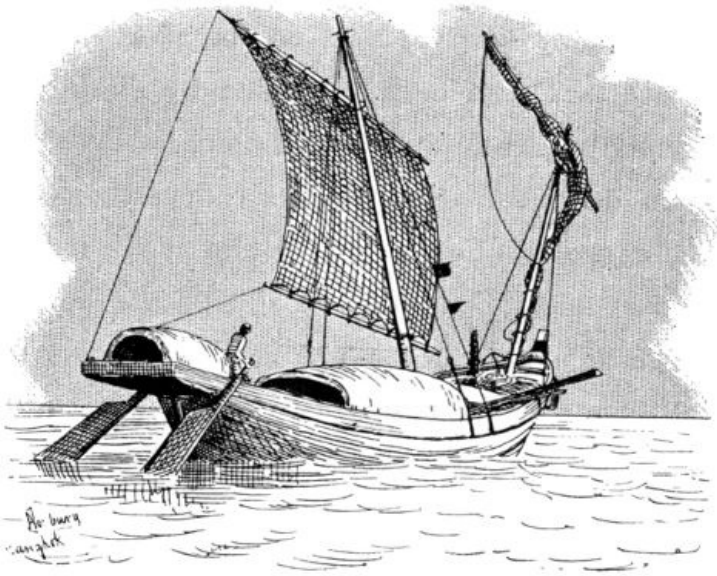
Within the limits of the crowded capital one can easily study closely the superstitions, the customs, and the ceremonies of the people. But if any idea is to be gained of the industries of the country, it is necessary to pass from the busy canals and the crowded highways into the wide plains beyond. In the busy city the Siamese are shopkeepers, policemen, postmen, soldiers and government officials. The mechanics and artisans are Chinese. There is no sign of any native industry, no weaving of cloth, tanning of leather or manufacture of anything beautiful or useful. The city is the mart; the goods that are sold therein are made or grown in other localities. Travel into the jungle or the field, and then you may find the native at work, earning his living, and spending his life in the most primitive manner. It may here be stated that it is not an easy matter to travel even a short distance in Siam, and very few of the foreign residents ever make a trip except for business purposes.

The journey to every place must be commenced by water, either in a house-boat or in a steamer. The house-boat is about eighteen feet long and four feet beam, and is rowed by a number of [Pg 172] strong skilful boatmen. The number of men varies from two to eight according to the size of the boat. The man at the stern manages the rudder with his foot while he rows with his hands. All the men stand to their work, and row after the native fashion. In the centre of the boat is a small hut or cabin, which is about three feet high, so that its occupant can only lie therein. Standing or sitting is impossible, and the operations of dressing, washing and eating are performed under trying conditions. The deck planks are all removable, and under these must be stowed away sufficient clothing and provisions to last the traveller during the whole of his trip, for no matter where he travels, he can never replenish his larder or his wardrobe. The Chinese cook, who is an indispensable part of every expedition, sleeps and cooks at the back of the boat, in a space about three feet square. He shelters himself during the heat of the day with a big paper umbrella, and sleeps at night on the floor of his kitchen. He prepares his master's meals just as though he were

surrounded with all the ordinary utensils supposed necessary in the practice of culinary art, and when they are ready, he acts as waiter and hands them into the cabin through a small window in the back. The traveller's limbs get very sore with constantly lying on a hard mattress; but he has little opportunity of taking exercise, for the jungle comes down to the water's edge in most places that are uninhabited. These house-boats are only used for inland journeys as they would soon be capsized in a rough sea. [Pg 173]

PREPARING RATTAN FOR CHAIR-MAKING.

One thing that soon strikes the wanderer is the presence of the Chinese. In the most secluded hamlet, and in the deepest jungle, wherever men are gathered together, there are the Celestials in the midst of them, doing the chief share of the work, and taking the largest share of the profits. The wealth of the country consists in its agricultural produce. Rice is the chief food article cultivated, and will be dealt with in the succeeding chapter. But at Chantaboon, now in the hands of the French, excellent pepper is grown. Coffee has only recently been introduced, and it too flourishes in the neighbourhood of the same port. Sugar-cane is very plentiful, but is little used for the making of sugar. Where the refineries do exist they belong to the Chinese. The tobacco plant that is grown is very rank, and too powerful in its effects to become popular with Europeans. If it were properly cured and prepared, it might be more palatable. Amongst the other agricultural products may be mentioned hemp, cotton, cocoa-nut, areca-nut, maize, teak, bamboo, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, indigo, a little tea in the far north, and fruit of many varieties. [Pg 174]

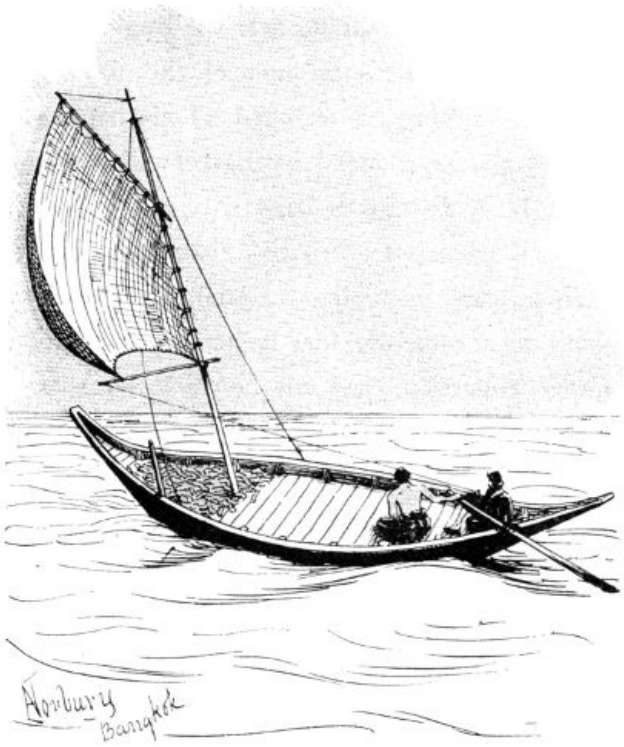


FISHING LUGGER.

Petchabooree is a typical Siamese agricultural village. It is easily reached by house-boat from Bangkok in two or three days. Through the village runs a clear silvery stream with a white sandy bed. On each side of the stream extends a double row of wooden houses, under which lie innumerable pariahs. Between the double line is a narrow passage forming the street, market, and pleasure-ground of the inhabitants. Buffaloes come down to the river for water at regular hours twice each day. On the broad plains in the neighbourhood rice is grown. A few miles away is a Laos settlement, occupied by the descendants of prisoners of war who were once placed here to till the soil for those who captured them. They still preserve their dark striped petticoats, and [Pg 175] are never seen without their long knives at their waists. They spend most of their time at this particular place in manufacturing sugar from the sugar palm. When the fruit appears upon the tree, a man climbs to the top, and cuts it off. To the cut stalk he fastens the hollow stem of a bamboo, about eighteen inches long. As the juice oozes from the cut surface it drops into the wooden cylinder. When this is filled it is removed, and replaced by another. The juice is collected and boiled in iron pans under an attap-thatched shed. The furnace is of very simple construction. A trough is dug in the earth, and the hole thus made filled with wood. A light is applied, and then the pan is placed on the ground, with its centre over the hollow dug-out fireplace. Fresh wood is pushed into the hole when required. As the wood costs nothing and the iron pan is cheap, the [Pg 176] manufacture of sugar in this primitive fashion is not at all costly. The thick syrupy liquid is put into big wooden barrels, and sent to Bangkok to be further boiled and converted into sugar. The fresh juice of the sugar palm is sweet and refreshing, but when it begins to ferment it is a powerful intoxicant.

There are many pretty places on the shores of the Gulf of Siam, but these can only be visited by steamer. They are charmingly picturesque, the bathing is excellent, and the fish are delicious. No steamers call at these desirable spots, there are no hotels, and except for fish they have no food for sale. Only one of them—Anghin, has any house in which a foreigner would care to reside. The village of Anghin ("stone basins") is so called because there are several large hollows in the granite rocks, where rain water collects in the wet season. Public attention was first drawn to the place in 1868, when a notice appeared in the local papers in these words:—

> "H. E. Ahon Phya Bhibakrwongs Maha Kosa Dhipude, the Pra Klang, Minister for Foreign Affairs, has built a sanitarium at Anghin for the benefit of the public. It is for the benefit of Siamese, Europeans, or Americans, who may go and occupy it when unwell, to restore their health. All are cordially invited to go there for a suitable length of time and be happy, but are requested not to remain month after month, and year after year, and regard it as a place without an owner. To regard it in this way cannot be allowed, for it is public property, and others should go and [Pg 177] stop there also."



FISHING BOATS AT THE BAR.

For a time a few people went, but the sanitarium is now in ruins, and is only habitable in dry weather when holes in roofs and walls are no inconvenience to the visitor. It is necessary when visiting this lovely little spot to take with one all the provisions required during the stay, a plentiful supply of pure water, and every article of furniture, such as beds, tables, chairs, and wardrobes. Having collected all these things, a small steamer is next required to convey them [Pg 178] and their owner to his destination. An English resident in Bangkok who wished to take a holiday there, bargained with a native merchant for the loan of a vessel. The native promised faithfully that the steamer should be at a certain landing near the Englishman's house by one o'clock in the afternoon of the day mentioned. Early in the morning he removed all his baggage to the riverside. He was surrounded by baskets of ducks, baskets of chickens, hams in canvas bags, jars of rain water, boxes of soda water, pans, pots, furnaces, chairs, tables, mattresses books, camera, and sketching material. A few friends who were going to accompany him helped to keep guard over this motley collection. At one o'clock no steamer was visible, but there was nothing very surprising in that fact, as the Oriental does not know the meaning of punctuality. But when two o'clock passed, then three o'clock, and then four, he felt that something had gone wrong. One of the party went to make enquiries. He returned after dark to say that the propeller of the steamer was broken, and that the steamer was in dock, but that she would be at the landing by seven the next morning. All the boxes and furniture were sadly and slowly conveyed back to the house again. One of the boxes was opened, and a dinner made of soda water and corned beef. The host and his guests slept as best they could, on the floors of the dining-room and the drawing-room.

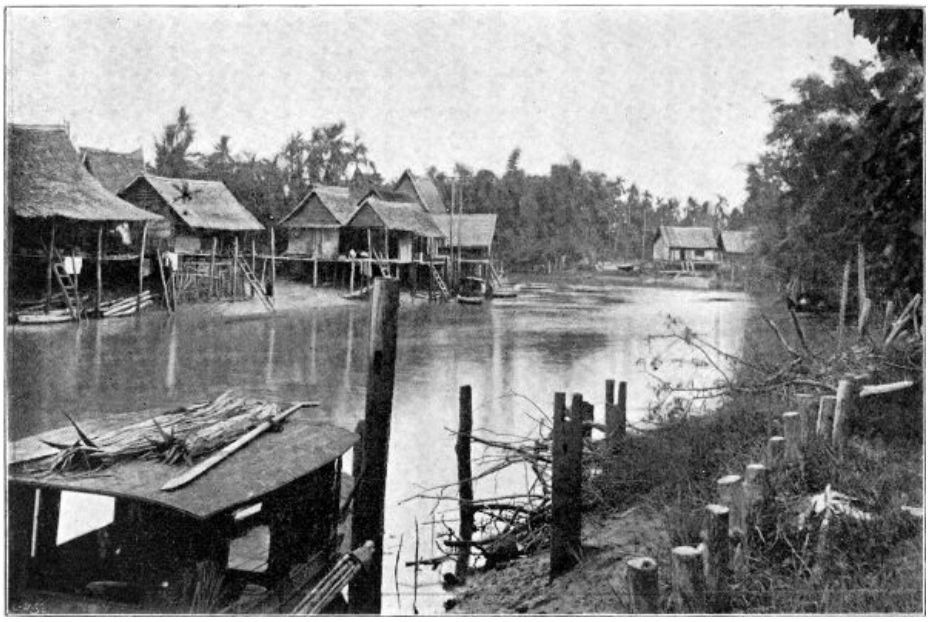
At seven the next morning all the holiday traps were carried out and placed on the landing, [Pg 179] where they were speedily surrounded by a crowd of jeering natives who scoffingly enquired when the party proposed to start. They endured this until four o'clock in the afternoon, when the vessel did at last put in an appearance. They embarked as rapidly as possible, and began their journey at night. There was only one cabin, which was dirty beyond description, and swarming with spiders and cockroaches. In the middle of the night it began to rain, so they wrapped themselves up in cloaks and waterproofs and slept on deck under the tables. One of them asked the Malay skipper why the vessel was going so slowly. Said he, with an amused smile, "This boat go half-speed. This boiler got many holes. Go full-speed—burst!" Then he chuckled. When about two miles from Anghin the recently mended propeller broke and sank. Everything was landed by means of one small boat. The sanitarium had been untenanted for many months by human beings, but thousands of ants, spiders, cockroaches, and lizards had made themselves at home there. The men opened some tins of kerosine and flooded the place with it. All the creatures that were not destroyed by it were driven away by its obnoxious smell, and in a short time the place was rendered habitable. Perhaps the reader will now understand why it is that European residents in Siam seldom go to the sea-side.

There is not much difference between a fishing and an agricultural village. There is the same double row of houses with the street between, and the back doors of each of the houses nearest the sea or river, facing the water.

Along the beach small heaps of sea-shells are found at intervals of a few yards. They have been [Pg 180] collected by the villagers, who send them in small sailing boats to Bangkok where they are used for making lime. The lime-kilns are made of bricks in the shape of a shallow box. The floor has a number of apertures, and some fire is placed beneath. In the box a layer of shells lies upon a layer of straw and charcoal. Then comes another layer of fuel and another layer of shells, and so

on until the box is full. A blast of air is driven into it by a fan connected to treadles. There is no covering to the kiln, and the fumes that rise have several times been fatal to the workmen.

[Pg 181]



KHLONG NEAR PETCHABOOREE.

Page 174.

From the beach can be seen, at low tide, long lines of poles radiating in all directions. These form the fishing traps that are used chiefly for catching a fish called "plah-tu." It is about the size of a herring, tastes like trout when fresh, and like kippers when smoked. During the north-east monsoon these fish are driven in great shoals to the northern end of the gulf, and while this wind continues to blow the fishermen are kept busily employed. The fishing stakes are long slender poles. They are fixed in the bed of the sea about forty inches apart from each other, in double rows, forming a funnel-shaped passage with a very wide entrance or mouth. Several funnels converge upon a central circular or rectangular structure also made of thin poles, which we may for convenience call the trap. Nets are fixed in it by cords so as to be ready for use when the fishermen pay it a visit. The radiating lines are often half a mile long, and as they move to and fro [Pg 183] in the restless sea they form an impassable barrier to the timid fish, who are driven by the currents into the trap, from which they seem unable to find their way out. The boats usually go out at sunset, and they form a very pretty picture as they skim lightly over the buoyant waves, their yellow porous mat-sails catching rosy or orange hues from the setting sun, which are again mirrored in deeper shades in the purple waters below. On reaching the trap the men let down their nets, only to haul them up again a few minutes later, laden with silvery fish. The boats return about daybreak. Their coming is eagerly awaited by the whole population, who turn out to receive them. Buffalo carts are also ready to carry the fish from the boats to the village. In the village the night's booty is sorted and examined. The fish are cleaned and the gills removed, all the refuse being thrown into strong brine. The briny solution of fishy odds and ends is afterwards sold as "fish sauce". The best fish are very lightly steamed and then packed in flat circular baskets, put on board the swiftest sailing boats, and sent off to Bangkok. A certain amount is sold to people near at hand, or used for food by the villagers themselves. The remainder are either smoked, or packed with brine in deep pits in the ground. When well salted the fish is dried and exported. The value of the fish exported is about one and a half million dollars. It finds great favour with the Chinese. The Javanese too buy large quantities of the salted fish, chiefly on account of the salt that they purchase at the same time, for pure salt is a very dear luxury in that [Pg 184] island. The decaying rotten refuse is used as manure in the kitchen gardens of the Chinese. If its properties as a manure are half as powerful as its odour, it should be extremely valuable.

But "plah-tu" are not the only fish caught in this out of the way corner of the earth. Prawns are plentiful, and they are caught in nets of very small mesh. Two boats go out together from the shore for a little distance and then separate. From boat to boat is suspended a net heavily weighted to make it sink. When the net is fully extended the boats move towards the shore, dragging it with them. In this way thousands of prawns and small fish are easily caught. Prawns are pounded into a paste with salt. The mixture is not unlike anchovy sauce.

Mussels and many other shell-fish are obtained in an easy manner. Long poles are driven into the sand in water where these creatures are known to abound, and left there for some time. After a while they are covered with the shell-fish, which have fastened on the poles. To pull up the pole and scrape off the deposit is but the work of a few hours.

[Pg 185]

A BUFFALO CART.

The buffalo carts used in the villages in this part of Siam, are peculiar-looking conveyances. But they are admirably fitted for the rough work for which they are built. They are used between villages on the coast at times when boats cannot pass from place to place, and also between places inland where no canals exist. Their construction will be better understood from the [Pg 187] accompanying illustration than from any written description, but a few points may be noticed. The hood over the top is not for protection from sun or rain. There are no roads in the jungle, though here and there, there are a few tracks. The buffaloes literally force their way through the dense undergrowth, the eye of the experienced driver always telling him where the most passable spots are to be found. The hood protects the head of the driver or his passengers from the branches of the trees that obstruct the way. Without it they would be unable to travel at all in any place where the vegetative growth was at all thick. The projecting side pieces in a similar way keep the wheels from getting entangled in the undergrowth. The bottom of the cart is at a good distance from the ground, for very often the way lies through swamps or flooded marshes so deep that only the heads of the buffaloes can be seen above the mud and water. In such places the animals frequently lie down to cool themselves. This in no way endangers the cart, as the beasts are not harnessed to it in any way. The yoke is simply laid across their necks, and prevented from slipping by straight pieces of wood on each side. When passengers travel, a plank is placed at about the level of the driver's elbow in the picture. The reins are of rope, and the bell round the neck is a hollowed piece of wood with two or three wooden tongues inside it. Owing to the uneven character of the ground the cart sways from side to side, and produces in most people who experience the motion for the first time, a feeling akin to sea-sickness. As the plank, on [Pg 188] which the traveller sits cross-legged, is near the top of the vehicle, his head is dangerously near the roof. Every time the cart gives a sudden lurch to one side, he receives a smart rap on the side or top of his head. As a rule he recoils from the blow only to receive another on the other side as the vehicle recovers its equilibrium. The huge wheels, unsupplied with metal bearings, creak and groan with awful ceaseless regularity.

[Pg 189]

A SIAMESE BULLOCK CART.

In many places valuable minerals are said to exist. Gold, rubies, sapphires, and diamonds have been found, but so far have not been obtained in very large quantities. In the Siamese provinces in the Malay Peninsula, tin is exceedingly abundant and is mined by the Chinese.

In the northern provinces there are numerous valuable teak forests, from which the Government derives a very large revenue. Nearly the whole of the teak that is used in building the ships of the different nations of the world, comes from the extensive forests of Upper Burmah and Northern Siam. Much of the teak that is exported from Moulmein and sold as Burmese or Indian, is really obtained from Siamese forests lying between the River Meping and the River Salween. The forests of Burmah have been worked for a much longer period than those of Siam, and the logs obtained therefrom are of inferior quality and smaller girth. The teak forests of Siam are worked with British capital alone, no French or Germans being engaged in the trade. The agents of the [Pg 191] British firms live at the scene of the lumbering operations, and are personally responsible for the hiring of the forests, the cutting of the wood, and its subsequent exportation to Bangkok. The different firms have saw-mills of their own in the city, and they trim and cut the logs before they are finally sent abroad. The leases for the forests are obtained from the Lao chiefs in whose districts they stand, but the terms of the leases are often subject to revision by the Siamese Commissioners. The trees are killed before they are felled, by having a ring cut in the bark, about two or three feet from the ground. The "girdled" stem is left for nearly three years before it is cut down, as it is not properly dead before that time. The only method of transport possible in places where there is no water, is by elephants, and this form of transportation is so very expensive that the workings are mostly confined to the banks or the immediate vicinity of the streams. Teak trees unfortunately do not grow in clusters or groves, but only in isolated spots, often separated from each other by considerable distances, so that the question of carriage is financially a very important one.

Felling takes place during the rainy season when the ground is soft and wet, so that the trees as they fall are not likely to sustain any serious damage. Three labourers working together are able to fell three trees in one day. The rough logs are piled side by side until they are removed by the elephants. One of these strong sagacious creatures is harnessed to the log by ropes. He drags it [Pg 192] over the ground to the nearest water, his work being considerably lightened by the aid of rude rollers placed along the track. The elephants on reaching the water, pile up the logs on the bank, until the buyer or the agent has examined them. The owner places his own mark on them for purposes of identification, and then the elephants roll them into the water, and place them in positions that render their being bound into rafts a comparatively easy matter. Thieves make themselves busy at such times, breaking up rafts, stealing logs from which they obliterate the owner's mark, and disposing of them as rapidly as possible at nominal values to the first customer they can find. They keep on the look-out for stray elephants too, and occasionally manage to get safely away with their valuable spoil. No replanting goes on, and great waste of timber is caused by the servants of the lessees. The forests will ultimately be destroyed unless some regulations are made with regard to the girth of the trees cut down, and the replanting of fresh ones in the places of those that have been felled. The loss that the world will experience from the loss of the wood, will be infinitesimal compared with the injury that is likely to fall upon the country itself in the changed climatic conditions that invariably attend such wholesale deforestation.

Very fine trees are allowed to stand because the natives are afraid to cut them down. Within any giant of the forest they suppose powerful spirits to be embodied, and they are afraid to call down [Pg 193] upon themselves unforeseen and terrible visitations of anger from the spirits who inhabit them.

The villagers in all parts of the country are very hospitable and kindly disposed towards travellers. They show their politeness in their extreme inquisitiveness. They poke their noses into

everything, and beg old bottles and sardine tins from the cook, at the same time making little presents of eggs and fish. In very remote places the white skin of the European is a great curiosity, but they never molest any traveller whatever his colour, nor do they interfere with his personal liberty. On the other hand, every one, from the governor of the district down to the lowest slave, will do all they can to help the wanderer, provided he treats them with that courtesy and respect which they are prepared to show to him. Sometimes a native with a little mischief in his nature will attempt a practical joke, but it is usually of such a harmless character that only a very disagreeable person would be likely to experience any great annoyance. A fisherman one day visited a small party of Europeans who were encamped in his neighbourhood, and offered to sell them an animal for food. The creature had neither head, feet, nor tail, but their absence was explained by the vendor, who said he had removed them in order to save the white men trouble. He further stated that the animal was a hare that he had trapped in the jungle. None of the party knew very much about anatomy, but they felt rather dubious as to the truth of the man's [Pg 194] statements. One of them, quite thoughtlessly and casually, observed, "Perhaps it is a dog." A broad grin spread over the wily fisherman's face, for the stray shot had hit the mark. He retired roaring with laughter, and exclaimed in the vernacular, "Master very clever, very clever!"

They are generally frightened by a camera, but it is a strange thing that no where do the priests object to having their photographs taken and printed. In fact, as soon as they learn the nature of the apparatus they become a perfect nuisance by the eagerness they express to be photographed. They will come every morning to the tent or hut where the photographer is encamped, dressed in their best Sunday robes, and wait about all day, in the hope of being "taken." They express considerable astonishment at the coloured and inverted picture seen on the ground-glass screen at the back of the camera, and they are unable to understand why prints cannot be instantaneously produced. A very picturesque old Peguan was once entreated to sit for his portrait by a man who was travelling. The ancient one hesitated, and thought, and consulted his family. He was allowed to look through the ground glass and see the faces of a few of his friends thereon. That decided the point. He threw his fears and scruples to the winds, and posed himself in a graceful attitude astride a water-jar. The photographer focussed and adjusted his machine, snapped the shutter, shut up the slide, and exclaimed, "It is finished." Then the old man came up to have a look. When he found that his picture was not ready at once, he felt that he had been [Pg 195] grossly deceived, and his remarks were such that the photographer deemed it wise to seek for the company of his friends.

The sight of the coloured picture on the ground-glass screen of the camera, led a few villagers to commit an amusing error. After looking at it for some time, they went to another spot to watch an artist who was at work there at the same time. They decided amongst themselves that his work was a superior form of photography, and that as he drew his brushes across the canvas they made the coloured picture come up through the back. Their theory worked excellently for a while, but when the artist began to put in boats in places in the picture which did not correspond to those in the landscape, they felt that the machine had gone wrong, and departed, murmuring that it wasn't a very good "picture-box" after all.

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 196]

THE CULTIVATION OF RICE.

The natives of Siam depend absolutely on rice for their very existence. It is the only necessary article of food. Should the supply fail, there is nothing to take its place. All other forms of food are, comparatively speaking, luxuries. Abundance of rice means life; scarcity of rice brings famine and death. The failure of the crops in Siam would produce a famine as far-reaching and as disastrous in its results as those of India, which have at different times evoked to such a large degree, the practical sympathies of the English people. And yet, despite the terrible nature of the disaster which would attend any sensible diminution in the supply of this all-necessary and all-sufficient article of food, the methods of cultivation are primitive to the last degree, and are carried on with agricultural implements of the rudest possible character.

[Pg 197]

THE SWINGING FESTIVAL.

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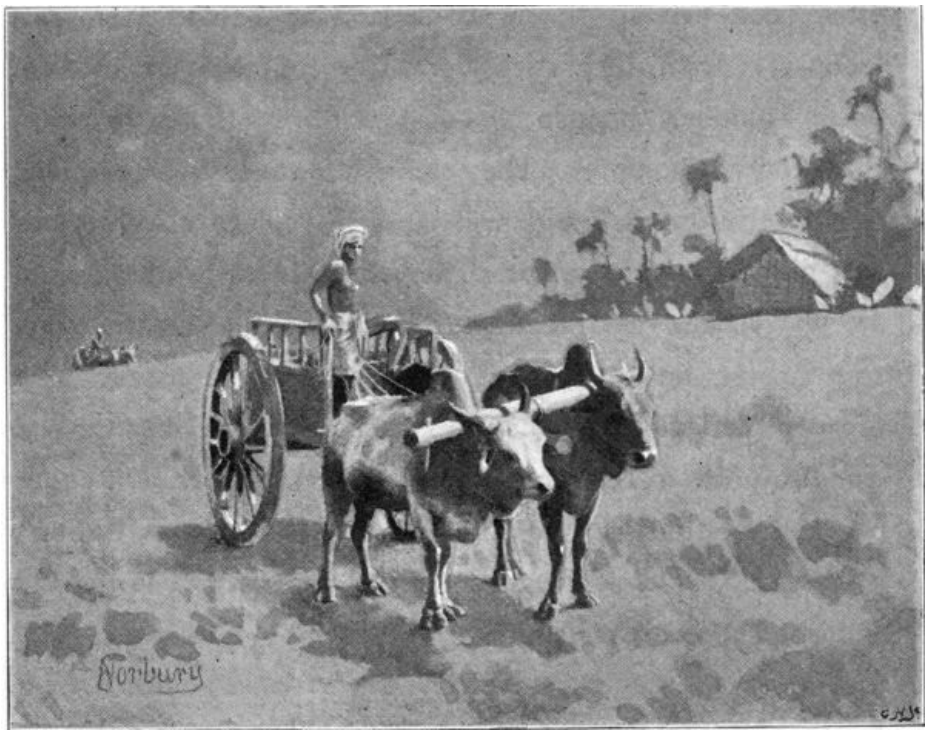
When a farmer increases the area of the land under cultivation, by buying or stealing a new piece of wooded ground or jungle for the purpose of cultivating rice, he commences his farming operations by burning down the whole of the timber in order to save himself the trouble of cutting it. In this way, with the maximum of waste and the minimum of labour, the ground is cleared. [Pg 199]



COLLECTING RIPE GRAIN.

It is next ploughed with an instrument the total cost of which is about three shillings. Roughly speaking, the plough is merely a crooked stick with one handle. If a piece of wood or cane be bent into two portions, one longer than the other, and if the shorter portion of the cane be fastened into a heavy block of wood pointed at one end, while the longer arm is held in the hand, a rough model of a Siamese plough will be obtained. Occasionally, but by no means always, a triangular piece of iron is fitted on to the wooden foot. This, however, is never permanently fastened to the block. The plough cuts a shallow furrow about two inches deep and five or six [Pg 200]

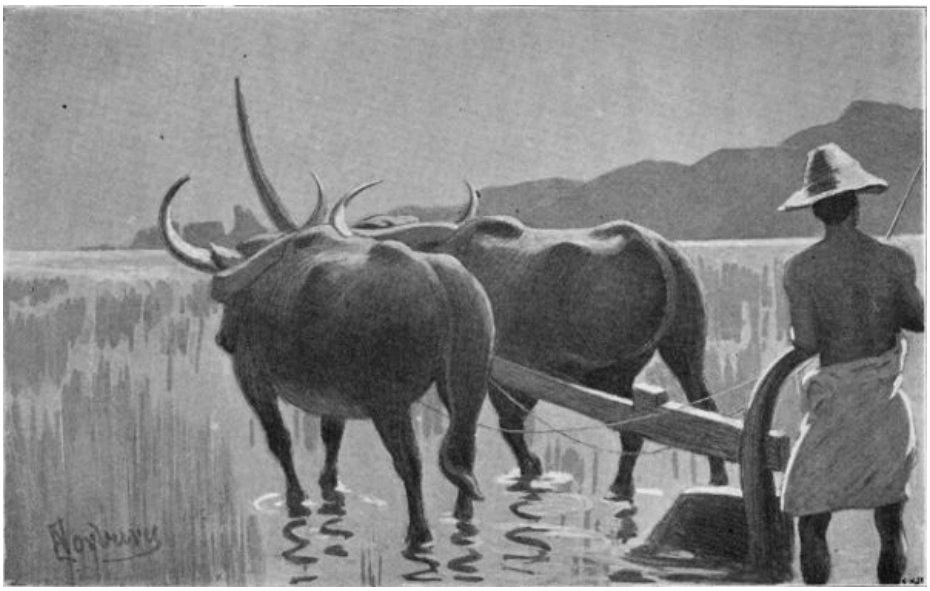
inches wide. It is usually drawn by buffaloes, which are the chief beasts of burden in this country. The "táme" buffalo, as it is called, seems very docile with its native owners, and little children are often seen driving them about, running behind them, belabouring them with sticks, or sitting on their broad hard backs, guiding them in the desired direction by whacking them over the nose. They have, however, a strong dislike to Europeans, and will attack a white man without any provocation whatever. The natives give as the reason for his dislike, that the "smell" of the white man is offensive to the beasts. They are yoked to the plough in a manner as simple as it is inexpensive. A slightly curved wooden yoke is laid across their powerful necks. On either side of the neck a straight piece of wood passes through a hole in the yoke, hangs downwards, and so keeps the heads of the animals in the right position. From the yoke to the shorter portion of the plough, there passes a long heavy wooden beam. This is fastened into a socket in the plough, just below the handle. It is tied to the yoke with a thong of hide, or a long strip of rattan cane, and ends in a graceful curve a foot or two above the heads of the animals. The free end of the beam is often decorated with flowers, feathers, or brightly coloured ribbons. Pieces of rope passed through holes in the nostrils are the native substitute for the European bridle, harness, and reins. [Pg 201] Thus the whole weight of the plough, the beam, and the yoke rests upon the necks of the animals. With one hand on the plough, and the other loosely grasping the reins, the field labourer toils through the broiling heat of the day, guiding the great clumsy-looking animals by an occasional tug at the reins, or urging them to greater speed with long low groan-like exclamations.

The harrow is square in shape, is made of bamboo, and bears a number of straight wooden teeth. It is drawn by buffaloes, yoked and harnessed as in the case of the plough.

As rice only grows where there is an excess of moisture, an abundant supply of water must be produced either by natural or artificial means. There is scarcely any artificial irrigation in Siam, for the peasants depend upon the chance rise of the rivers to flood the fields after the heavy rains are over. These floods not only inundate the low-lying plains, and so save the peasant the trouble of watering his fields himself, but when they subside they leave behind a deposit of mud so rich and fertile that manuring is rendered unnecessary. And as these floods are of annual occurrence, any system of rotation of crops has never been considered. Occasionally some farmer deems it advisable to adopt some artificial method of inundating his fields, and various methods of doing this are in use. In none of them, however, are pumps ever used, though considering the number of canals that thread the country from end to end, one would think that the easiest and most natural way of getting the water from the canal into the fields would be by means of pumps [Pg 202] connected to a series of troughs that would carry the water to any point where it was required. Instead of a pump, various arrangements of baskets and buckets are employed. The baskets, which are made of cane and pitched inside and out to prevent leakage, will hold about seven or eight gallons. They are so suspended by a system of ropes, that a couple of children can easily scoop up water from the canal and pour it on to the adjacent rice-patch. When the fields in the immediate neighbourhood of the water-supply have been deluged, the water is passed over into the fields further away by means of a large wooden scoop, which takes up a few gallons at a time. This process is repeated for each successive field, and eventually the whole of the farm receives the requisite amount of water.

When buckets are used, the system of irrigation is called "watering with the foot." The buckets are small, and are linked together about twelve inches apart. They revolve on a rude wooden windlass, which is worked by two men, who place their feet on treadles fastened to the shaft round which the buckets revolve, at the same time grasping a horizontal bar for support. They run from the canal or pool, up an inclined trough, fall over the shaft, and tilt their contents into the field, pass back again under the shaft, and so return to the canal again.

[Pg 203]



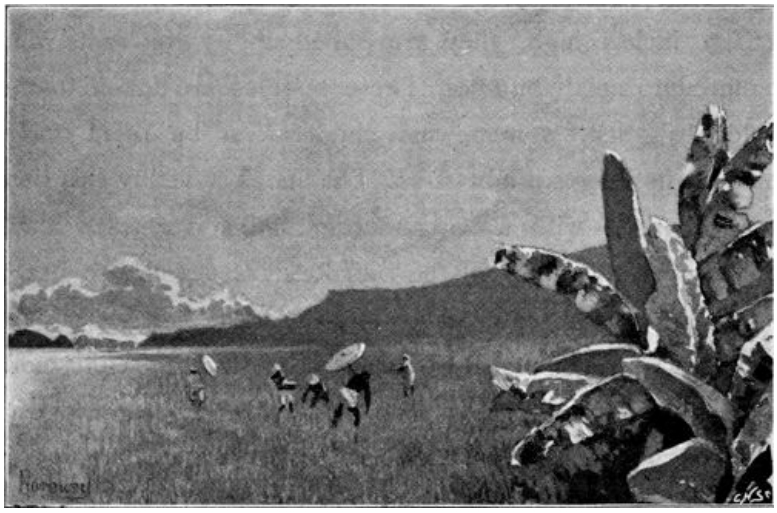
A SIAMESE RICE-PLOUGH.

Page 199.

Of the forty different kinds of rice known to agriculturists, about six varieties are grown in Siam. The natives divide these roughly into two classes, which they name respectively "Garden rice," [Pg 205]

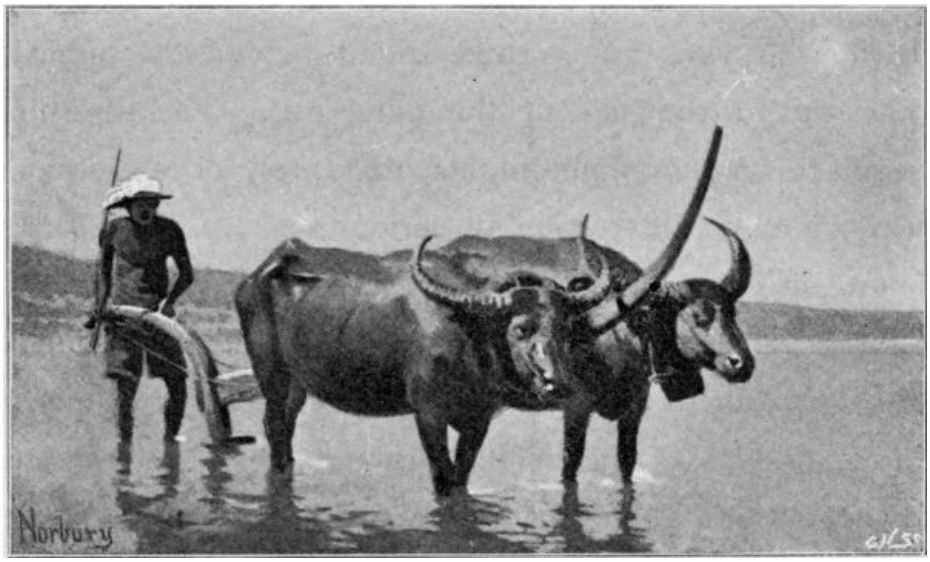
and "Field rice." The latter kind is inferior in quality, and is scattered broadcast in the fields, where it is left to grow without any further care or attention being bestowed upon its cultivation. "Garden rice," on the other hand, is carefully sown and tended. The seeds are first sown as thickly as they can grow, in well-watered patches. They soon sprout, and the beautiful green blades grow rapidly in the hot sunshine. When they are a few inches high, they are pulled up by the roots, and bound into small bundles. These bundles are taken to the fields by men, women, and children, to be there transplanted in long straight rows. The fields have by this time been covered with water, and trampled into a thick black mud under the hoofs of the buffaloes. Everyone, to use a native expression, now "dives into the field." They push the roots of the young shoots deep down into the soft mud, with their nimble hands and feet, with amazing rapidity. A good worker will not take more than three days to plant an acre. Planting lasts from about June to October, and during that time the farm hands receive in wages from eight to twelve shillings a month.

The way in which the rice is reaped when the time for harvest has arrived, depends largely on the state of the fields. If the waters have subsided, it is reaped with the sickle, and bound into sheaves, which are first allowed to dry in the sun, and are then removed by buffalo carts or bullock waggons. But if the fields are still under water, this method is obviously impossible, and besides, there is always a sufficiently large number of leeches, land-crabs and water-snakes [Pg 206] moving about in the slimy mud to make the labourer cautious as to where he treads. In this case the people go to the fields in their long narrow canoes. They cut off the ripe heads with a sickle, and drop them into small baskets placed in the bottom of the boat. Great carelessness is often shown by the laughing, gossiping reapers, who drop handful after handful of ripe grain into the water.



PLANTING OUT YOUNG RICE—FOOT OF KORAT HILLS.

When the threshing commences, the services of the ever useful buffalo are once more demanded. A threshing floor is first prepared. A piece of ground is cleared, and then covered with a plaster made of soil, cow-dung, and water. After a few days this pasty mixture sets into a hard, firm [Pg 207] coating. A tall, straight bamboo is erected in the centre of the floor, and a few good heads of rice are fastened at the top for the birds to eat. A roughly carved figure of a man, jokingly christened "the grandfather," is added by way of decoration. Two buffaloes are used, which are yoked side by side. The inner one is loosely fastened on the inside to the central pole, and on the outside to his fellow-worker, while both are guided by a half-naked man or boy, who runs round and round behind the animals, holding on to the tail of the outer one. The threshing takes place on moonlight nights, and rarely does the moon shine on a more interesting or curious scene. The buffaloes pace on in their monotonous round, regardless of their screaming driver or of his vigorous jerking of their hindmost appendages. In the heaps of straw tumble all the merry, laughing urchins of the neighbourhood. The air resounds with the sounds of music, fiddles and tom-toms, dulcimers and drums. Joke and song pass from mouth to mouth. Here glows the red end of a cigarette; there a shiny brown back glistens in the moonlight. The large meek eyes of the animals stare through the gloom. Cocoa-nut oil lanterns vie with the ruddy flames of the fitful bonfires in lending more light to the scene, but rarely do more than tinge their own dark smoke a tawny hue. Fire-flies light up the deep shadows under the long drooping leaves of the palms, or mirror their own pale light in the bits of shiny straw that flutter in the evening breeze. Through all these varied shades of semi-darkness come laughter and song, the cry of the driver, the [Pg 208] creaking of the pole, the firm, steady footfall of the patient beasts, the chirping of crickets, the croaking of frogs, and a million other sounds that tell of life and motion in the late hours of a tropical night.



PLOUGHING A RICE-FIELD.

The rice is winnowed by the wind as it is poured from one wide shallow basket to another, and as the chaff flies about in the sunlight its gilded hues mingle with the vivid green of the surrounding landscape, to form behind the well-proportioned forms of the girls and women, a background which is unique in its brilliant combinations of light and colour. The grain is stored in large baskets made of cane and plastered outside with mud. These stand on a raised platform, and are covered by a roof made of leaves. The eye of the farmer grows bright as he regards his well-filled rice-bins, for by their number and contents does he measure his wealth. The farmers live [Pg 209] together in small villages for mutual protection; but in spite of all their precautions, those who inhabit the more remote portions of the country suffer severely from the depredations of bands of dacoits. During the night, too, the herds of cattle often break out and wander over the fields, doing irreparable damage as they wander from one plantation to another, the absence of all hedges or fences rendering their wanderings merely a matter of choice to themselves.

The rice-mills of Bangkok are constructed after European models, and contain modern machinery; but outside the capital, the primitive mill of earlier days still survives. This is simply a short, broad stump of a tree with a conical hollow inside, the apex of the cone being near the ground. A long lever carries at one end a heavy wooden hammer-head, which falls into the hollow of the stem. It is raised by placing the foot on the other end of the lever, and then jumping up so as to press upon the lever with the whole weight of the body. The women are generally employed in this work, and in any small village you can hear the steady thump, thump of the hammers from morning to night, and see the girls and young women jumping on and off the short end of the lever, with an almost painful regularity and precision.

A great deal of the rice grown in some of the northern provinces is sent to Luang Prabang, the local supply there being insufficient for the wants of the inhabitants. It is sent down the River Mekong on huge rice-rafts made of bamboo. It takes a fairly large crew to manage one of these [Pg 210] rafts, and as several members of the party are sure to have a wife or child with them, the whole structure somewhat resembles a floating village. The most usual measurements of these rafts are one hundred and twenty feet long and about thirty feet beam. They are very difficult to manage, but so skilful are the native boatmen, that by means of a number of oars rigged fore and aft, they generally succeed in taking their cumbersome craft through the numerous rapids and eddies, with only occasional or trifling loss of their valuable cargo.

Two curious ceremonies take place each year in connection with the agricultural operations. One is held in connection with the opening of the field season, while the other is an Oriental form of "harvest-thanksgiving." The first ceremony is known as "Raakna" and is generally held about the middle of May. Until the "Ploughing Festival" is over, no one is supposed to plough or sow. On a certain day foretold by the Brahmin astrologers of the court, the Minister for Agriculture, who is always a prince, or a nobleman of high rank, goes in procession to a piece of ground some distance from the city walls. He is for the time being the King's proxy, and on that day many shopkeepers, and holders of stalls in the markets, pay their taxes to him as the representative of their sovereign. Formerly his followers were in the habit of seizing the goods of any shopkeeper which were exposed for sale along the route of the procession, but this arbitrary manner of [Pg 211] collecting dues has, like many other harmful customs, completely disappeared during the reign of the present enlightened monarch.

On reaching the scene of the festival ceremonies, the Minister finds there a new plough with a pair of exceptionally fine buffaloes yoked to it. Both plough and buffaloes are gaily decorated with flowers and leaves. The Minister takes the plough, and for about an hour he guides it over the field, closely watched by the assembled spectators. They do not, however, concentrate their attention upon his skill as a ploughman, but on the length of the piece of silk which forms his lower garment. If, in the course of his amateur agricultural operations, the Minister should pull this garment above his knee, it is believed that excessive and therefore disastrous rains will occur during the wet season. On the other hand, should he allow it to fall to the ankle a great scarcity of rain is anticipated. A prosperous season is foretold when the folds of the garment

reach midway between knee and ankle.

When a certain portion of the field has been ploughed, several old women in the King's service, strew grain of different kinds over the recently ploughed land. The animals are unyoked and led up to the scattered grain and allowed to feed upon it. Once more the crowd are on the alert, as they seek for yet other omens. That kind of grain of which the buffaloes most freely partake, will, it is expected, be scarce at the next harvest; the kind they disdain will be reaped in abundance. The ceremony over, the minister returns in procession, accompanied by soldiers and military [Pg 212] bands; while the brightly dressed, chattering crowds return to their homes to prepare for the ploughing and the sowing, hoping for abundant rain and sunshine, and looking for a fruitful harvest, that thereby they may escape the terrible and remorseless hand of famine.

The harvest-festival ceremonies are of Brahminical origin and are known to the people under the name of "Lo Ching Cha". The first word "Lo" means "to pull"—"ching cha" is "a swing". The place where the "Swinging Festival" is held is inside the city walls. It is a small green lawn situated opposite to a very large temple, and on the edge of a very busy thoroughfare. For three hundred and sixty three days in each year, there is nothing, except the huge pillars of the swing, to draw one's attention to the spot. A few boys playing football or flying kites, a few old women squatting down for a little gossip, or a few Malay grooms with their masters' ponies are the usual everyday occupants of the spot. On the other two days of the year, when the harvest festival is held, every inch of available space is occupied. The native children, unable to see over the heads of the men and women when they are upon the ground, quickly mount the neighbouring walls, and perch themselves in the branches of the trees, or cling, like monkeys, to every lamp-post and telegraph pole within sight of the proceedings. The thoroughfares leading to the place are blocked with innumerable carriages and rickshaws. The crowd is an exceedingly good-tempered one, and brawling of any kind is very unusual. The distant sound of a military band heralds the approach of [Pg 213] another of those processions so dear to the heart of the Siamese. The procession passes through the dense crowd without any trouble, for the people willingly fall back so as not to impede its progress. Strangely coloured banners bearing quaint devices, flutter above the heads of the crowd. A modern military band plays "Marching through Georgia," while an ancient band in tattered vermilion garments with yellow trimmings, bangs curious drums, and pierces the air with the penetrating shrieks of long brass trumpets. The tom-tom and the gong join in the general uproar. The crowd sways to and fro, striving to catch a glimpse of the barefooted soldiers in their brilliant uniforms, or of the numerous articles borne in the procession to indicate the nature and meaning of the festivities. Decorated buffaloes dragging decorated carts, bundles of rice, offerings of fruit and flowers, are all evidences of the thankfulness of the people for the safe ingathering of their harvests.

BUFFALOES RETURNING FROM THE RICE-FIELDS.

In the centre of the procession, carried in a chair of state on the shoulders of a number of strong well-built men, and shielded from the sun by a huge state umbrella, sits the Master of the Ceremonies resplendent in cloth of gold and jewelled ornaments. At one time the Minister for Agriculture officiated on these occasions, but now a different nobleman is selected each year, whose business it is to organise and superintend all the arrangements for the festival. All eyes turn towards the seated figure in his tall conical hat and jewelled robes. He is carried to a small [Pg 214] brick platform, which is draped with the national flag and covered with flowers. He takes his seat, with two Brahmin priests on his right hand and two on his left. He places his right foot on his left knee, the left foot resting upon the ground. After having once seated himself in this position he is not allowed to remove his foot off his knee until the whole ceremony is finished. As this lasts about two hours, the presiding nobleman must be fairly uncomfortable by the time it is over. The penalty for moving the foot was, formerly, the confiscation of the culprit's property and the loss of his rank, in addition to any immediate ill-usage the attendant priests might think fit to bestow upon him; but this is now all done away with, and the only deterrent influence brought to bear upon the temporary sufferer is the opinion of the people, who would feel deeply hurt and

disappointed should any detail of their well-beloved ceremony be omitted.

The attention of the crowd is next directed to the performance of the swinging games. The swing itself is like any ordinary child's swing except for its enormous size. The side pillars are about ninety feet high, and the seat of the swing is about half-way between the ornamented cross-bar and the ground. A few feet in front of the seat, on the side towards the Palace, a long bamboo-stem is fixed in the ground, and from the top is suspended a small bag of silver coins. The men who take part in the games are usually Brahmins. They are dressed in white, and wear conical hats. They swing towards the bag of money and endeavour to catch it with their teeth. There are [Pg 217] generally three competitors; the prizes for the first being worth about fifteen shillings, while for the second and third they are worth about ten and five shillings respectively. When the winners have received their rewards they pass amongst the crowd, sprinkling the spectators with consecrated water contained in bullocks' horns. Soon afterwards the Minister returns to his home, the crowd disperses, and thus this very ancient ceremony is brought to a close.

CHAPTER XI.

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LAWS AND LEGISLATION.

Recent years have witnessed great changes in the methods of governing and judging the people. In nothing is the distinction between Old and Young Siam so definitely marked. But it is the old order of things that will chiefly concern us in this chapter, for the new order, though indicative of great progress, has been carried out by Western minds in imitation of Western methods, and it therefore presents little which is of intrinsic interest to the student of foreign customs. But as any account of the country's laws and legislation would be incomplete without some mention of modern reforms, a brief account of some of the most important of them is here given.

The King is theoretically an absolute monarch with power to control the life and property of every one of his subjects. But he appointed a Cabinet to assist him in carrying on the government of his country, and it is very doubtful whether he would now care to exercise his despotic authority to the full, should he by so doing incur the combined opposition of the Cabinet he has created. There are twelve ministers in this Cabinet, who hold portfolios and seats. They are

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1. The Minister for Foreign Affairs.
2. The Minister for Finance, who is also Minister of Customs and controls the various monopolies, gambling and opium farms.
3. The Minister for War, who controls both Army and Navy.
4. The Minister of Justice.
5. The Minister of the North, who has under his control the administration of nearly all the provinces north of Bangkok.
6. The Minister of the South and West, who also directs the civil and military *corvée*.
7. The Minister of the Royal Household.
8. The Minister of Public Works, including the railways, posts and telegraphs, and all public buildings.
9. The Minister of Local Government, with control of prisons, police, and police-courts in Bangkok. He combines the functions of a Lord Mayor and a Home Secretary.
10. The Minister for Agriculture, who grants mining concessions, superintends surveys, and looks after the land revenues.
11. The Minister of Public Instruction. Under him are placed the hospitals, the museums, and a number of ecclesiastical establishments.
12. Privy Seal.

The Cabinet holds its business meetings at night. They begin about eight o'clock and sit on through the cool dark hours of the night and early morning. The king may or may not be present.

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Last year an additional legislative body was established, under the name of "The Legislative Council". The members of the Cabinet are all members of the Legislative Council, but many others have been added. They do not hold their meetings in secret, like the older body, and they also call in outsiders, both foreign and native, when they want professional advice on any matter. They have appointed a number of sub-committees, of each of which some European servant of the Government is a member. They are concerned with the reform of old laws and the devising of new ones. One article in the decree that appointed this Assembly is sufficient to show how the king has gradually but voluntarily resigned the position of a pure despot. Until the formation of this Council no law could pass into action, and no reform or new law could even be initiated without the express written sanction of the king. During recent years he has been at times seriously ill for many weeks together. Naturally everything came to a stand-still.

Now the new body of councillors has been specially requested to introduce and discuss new laws and regulations, and it has been further empowered to put into operation any law that it may pass, without the authority of the king, provided he is not at the time sufficiently well in health to attend to business. He, however, reserves to himself the right to amend the law should he afterwards think fit. Those who know anything of the present king will recognise the wisdom of

this arrangement, for he can always be depended upon not to destroy but to stimulate everything which makes for the happiness of his people. [Pg 221]

Each province has at its head a Royal Commissioner who has extensive powers, but who holds office at the pleasure of the king, though in the first instance his appointment is generally for some definite period. The Commissioners are not simply responsible for the good government, or for the collection of the taxes in the district under their charge, but they are intended to form connecting links between the central and the outlying portions of the kingdom. For in faraway provinces, powerful and enterprising chiefs occasionally find it convenient to forget the fact that they are not independent monarchs. The appointment of Royal Commissioners was very much resented by some of the chiefs, especially by those who had previously reigned with the title and dignity of sovereigns. Amongst these was the "King of Luang Prabang," who had for many years governed the province of Luang Prabang under the above title. It has been stated that this man is the only man in the country, except the king, who can boast a purely Siamese descent. Everyone else has some foreign blood in his veins. At any rate, this so-called king belonged to one of the oldest families in the land. When the new Commissioners were appointed, a very young man was sent to take over the government of this province. On nearing the scene of his new labours, he sent word to the old chief to tell him of his arrival, and to demand a formal and elaborate reception to be made for him, as a mark of respect to the sovereign whose orders he had come to [Pg 222] execute. The old man went himself to meet the new arrival, indulging in a good deal of grumbling by the way, and wondering why there was any necessity to make such a fuss. When he found to what extent he was to be superseded in the government of his ancient domain, his grief and anger knew no bounds, but as he was powerless to resent he had to content himself with grumbling and moaning. He rather pertinently asked why the young king had sent a young man to control an old chief who had so long done his duty faithfully and well. One day the Commissioner heard the deposed governor addressed by the people, with the title of "king." He at once forbade the repetition of the word, saying, "There is but one king in Siam." The old man smarted not a little under what he considered was a new insult, but he restrained any outward expression of his feelings. Not long after this occurrence the Commissioner found that the chief had in his possession a state umbrella with the number of tiers used by royalty. He ordered two of these to be at once removed, and his order was obeyed. The insulted chief got his revenge at last, when the French took the province of Luang Prabang. M. Pavie, the French Commissioner, and formerly French Minister in Bangkok, sent the Siamese representative about his business, and invited the old chief to an interview. When the chief arrived, M. Pavie asked him if there was anything he wanted either for himself or his people. The old man related his loss of dignity and title, and begged that he might be allowed to repair his umbrella, and call himself "king" once [Pg 223] more. "Certainly," said M. Pavie, with diplomatic condescension, "call yourself 'king' if you like, and as to the umbrella, add two tiers or twenty, just as you please." The remade king was delighted, and returned home exceedingly glad at heart at the complete restoration of his royal name and furniture. The majority of the Commissioners, as well as the chief members of the Cabinet and of the Legislative Council are relatives of the king.

Siam possesses an excellent code of laws. They are, in the main, just and well suited to the people for whom they were intended. There are faulty laws amongst them, and there are a few that are barbarous or cruel, but these, be it said to the credit of the present government, are never enforced. The faults of Siam's legislative system do not lie in the laws themselves, but in the administration of them. Bribery has been the curse of every court throughout the country. Bribed judges and perjured witnesses have hindered the operations of laws that would have been powerful for good, and have converted what should have been halls of justice into houses of oppression. The venial judge could be publicly flogged, but when the other judges and the witnesses were all also venial, no righteous accuser could be found. The system has existed for so many years that the people have got accustomed to it, and look upon bribery as a necessary and natural part of any legal proceedings. The prolongation of the different lawsuits meant more and more profit to the judge, and so adjournments were indulged in *ad infinitum*. In this way [Pg 224] thousands of cases have accumulated; and up to a few months ago the condition of affairs was so bad that the most just of judges might have been forgiven for preferring to leave alone the legal dust and uncleanliness accumulated by his predecessors. One of the most beneficial results that has followed the appointment of the Legislative Council, has been an enquiry into the character and causes of the defective administration of justice. A party of Belgian lawyers, assisted by a few Siamese lawyers trained for their profession in foreign countries, set to work to overhaul the courts and cases. They cleared off the legal arrears at the rate of scores each week. They found men who had been lying in gaol for years, without trial, for some trivial offence. In many instances the plaintiff who had originally entered the case was dead, or could not be found. These unfortunate sufferers they released at once. They discovered numerous examples of cruel or excessive sentences, which they reduced or annulled. To prevent further accumulations they assisted the native judges in trying all new cases as they came up day by day, giving them in this way, many a valuable object lesson in the administration of justice, though not without occasional hindrances from the judges, and even from the litigants themselves. One day an old woman went to one of the new foreign judges, crouched at his feet, and sobbed out a bitter tale of cruel wrong. She was engaged in some trivial lawsuit with a relative, and she alleged that she could [Pg 225] not get her rights because the judge was receiving bribes. "My cousin," said she, "sends the judge presents of flowers and fruit, and I know what is hidden in the basket." She dwelt on the enormity of the offence and the suffering she endured thereby, and the foreigner listened with great interest. At last he remarked, "Well, what do you want me to do for you?" The woman, her eyes bright with hope, answered him, "Next week the case is coming before you, and if you will

only pronounce a verdict in my favour, I too will make you a present of fruit and flowers."

The laws of the country do not admit of being catalogued or described in any brief manner, as they occupy seventy volumes of closely printed Siamese, a mass of legal literature which it is obviously impossible to condense for the purposes of this chapter.

There are two courts for the trial of criminal cases, and a number of minor courts for the trial of civil cases in Bangkok. There is also an International Court where the subjects of different nations attempt to settle their differences with the natives. As far as Englishmen are concerned, this court is practically useless; for owing to the lackadaisical manner in which the affairs of Englishmen are dealt with by the members of the British consulate, the native judges know full well that they can always give their own countrymen every possible benefit of the slightest doubt. A remark once made by a Siamese to an English resident is only too true—"What good are your Consuls and Ministers to you? If I bring a case against you in your court, I shall win it, and if you [Pg 226] bring a case against me in my court, I am equally certain you will lose it."

There are provincial courts for dealing with minor offences in the outlying districts, but the judges in these courts have no power to sentence a man to death unless such power is directly given them by the king himself.

The course of procedure in any court is simple but slow. The plaintiff presents his case in writing. This is neatly copied by the clerks, and then read to the complainant in order to see that no inaccuracy occurs. If he signifies that the document so read, is a faithful reproduction of the original, it is folded up and fastened with a bit of wax or soft mud, on which he impresses his private seal, that is, the mark of his thumb-nail. A synopsis of the plaint is sent to the defendant, who makes his answer in writing, which is similarly copied and sealed. A day for hearing the case is appointed, but the litigants are called together before the day of trial, with a view to settling the matter privately. If these efforts at conciliation prove unfruitful, the depositions are read before subordinate judges, who, after considering the case, make their award in writing. Their written judgment is forwarded to the chief judge and he pronounces the sentence. The chief judge has full powers, but an appeal to the king is allowable. This privilege is more or less a dead letter, as it would be practically impossible for a poor man to get his appeal brought before the notice of his sovereign.

Very few of the courts have a legal aspect. The judge reclines at one end of the room, on a mat [Pg 227] placed on the floor. Under his arm is a three-cornered pillow. He smokes, drinks tea, chews betel-nut, and spits during the whole course of the trial, and his example is followed by the policemen, witnesses, lawyers and spectators.

A long and terrible oath is administered to each witness. It runs as follows: "I, ——, who have been brought here as an evidence in this matter, do now in presence of the divine Buddha declare that I am wholly unprejudiced against either party, and uninfluenced in any way by the opinions or advice of others, and that no prospects of pecuniary advantages or of advancement to office have been held out to me. I also declare that I have not received any bribes on this occasion. If what I have now spoken be false, or if in my further averments I should colour or pervert the truth so as to lead the judgment of others astray, may the three holy existences before whom I now stand, together with the glorious Devattas of the twenty-two firmaments, punish me.

"If I have not seen, yet shall say that I have seen—if I shall say that I know that which I do not know, then may I be thus punished. Should innumerable descents of the Deity happen for the salvation and regeneration of mankind, may my erring and migrating soul be found beyond the pale of their mercy. Wherever I go, may I be encompassed by dangers and not escape from them, whether arising from murderers, spirits of the ground, robbers, spirits of the forest, of the water, [Pg 228] of the air, or from all the angels, or from the gods of the four elements and all other spirits. May blood flow out of every pore of my body, that my crime may be made manifest to the world. May all or any of these evils overtake me three days hence. Or may I never stir from the place on which I now stand; or may the 'lash of the sky'[F] cut me in twain, so that I may be exposed to the derision of the people; or if I should be walking abroad, may I be torn in pieces by either of the four preternaturally endowed lions, or destroyed by poisonous herbs or venomous snakes. When in the waters of the river or ocean may alligators and large fishes devour me; or may the winds or waves overwhelm me; or may the dread of such evils keep me during my life a prisoner at home, estranged from every pleasure; or may I be afflicted by the intolerable oppressions of my superiors; or may cholera cause my death, after which may I be precipitated into hell, there to go through innumerable stages of torture; amongst which, may I be condemned to carry water over the flaming regions, in open wicker baskets, to assuage the heat felt by the judge of hell when he enters the infernal courts of justice, and thereafter may I fall into the lowest pit of hell. Or if these miseries should not ensue, may I after death migrate into the body of a slave, and suffer all the hardships and pain attending the worst state of such a being, during a period of years measured by the sands of the four seas; or may I animate the body of an animal or beast during [Pg 229] five hundred generations; or endure in the body of a deaf, blind, dumb, homeless beggar, every species of loathsome disease during the same number of generations, and then may I be hurried to the bottomless pit, there to be crucified by the king of hell."[G]

The old code contains a list of persons who are not to be allowed to give evidence. So many people must have been excluded from the witness-box by the old regulations, that one wonders how they ever could have obtained any evidence at all had they obeyed the regulations

completely. For instance, none of the following persons could be called to give evidence:—Drunkards, opium-smokers, gamblers, notorious vagabonds, goldsmiths, braziers, blacksmiths, shoe-makers, executioners, beggars, potters, dancing women, women who had been married three times, adulterers, clerks, orphans, players, jugglers, acrobats, undutiful children, atheists, slaves, friends of either party, enemies of either party, quacks, liars, and sorcerers. Physical defects excluded unmarried or pregnant women, the blind, halt, deaf, people above seventy years old and children under seven, dying people, and persons suffering from any loathsome disease. Intellectual defects prohibited the giving of evidence by those who could not read, could not count up to ten, and who did not know the names of the eight cardinal sins. On the other hand, this curious old code directed that special attention should be given to the testimony of men of good learning and of known good character.

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It was sometimes considered necessary to make a supposed criminal confess. To that end, provided he could not be persuaded by gentler means, the prisoner received ninety lashes on his bare back, with a rattan rod. Time was given for the cuts to heal, and then the experiment was repeated. A time for healing again intervened and then a third flogging settled the matter, for if the man did not confess under the third application of the rod, he was considered innocent. The fear of the punishment that awaited those who did not confess, must often have caused many innocent persons to declare themselves guilty. Flogging was not the only aid to confession. A modification of the thumb-screw in the form of a split bamboo, was held to possess a strong persuasive influence.

One or two very ancient customs still linger. Thus both plaintiff and defendant are expected to provide bail when bail is demanded. And in serious cases where bail is not given, the plaintiff has to go to prison with the defendant until the case is tried. This regulation doubtless often prevents false accusations being made, but it has its severe side, as shown by the fact that a woman who had been plaintiff in a case, was recently released from prison by the new judges, after lying in confinement for over three years. The defendant, moreover, had been allowed to go scot-free many months before.

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Again, the relatives of a man are held security for his good behaviour, and the inhabitants of any neighbourhood are liable to fines and taxes if murders or suicides take place amongst them. These laws if strictly enforced in a country where people rarely leave their own neighbourhood, would render the detection of criminals a fairly easy matter. They are sometimes enforced when it suits the authorities to carry them out.

An incident that came under the personal knowledge of the writer will perhaps illustrate in a general way some of the merits and demerits of the native method of apprehending offenders. During the Franco-Siamese trouble, the natives naturally felt rather unfriendly towards their enemies, and not being able to distinguish between the subjects of one foreign nation and another, they exhibited their displeasure towards all white men alike. An Englishman who was in the Siamese Government Service, was one afternoon taking a walk in the outskirts of the city, accompanied by two ladies. Suddenly he felt a hard blow on the ear, and at the same instant a brick went whizzing past with great velocity. He turned round to see from where the missile came, only to find a barefooted, half-naked native going down the road as fast as he could run. He mentioned the matter the next day to the Minister in charge of the department in which he was employed. His chief very kindly reported the matter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who promised that some attempt should be made to arrest the offender. A policeman was sent to the place where the offence occurred, to make enquiries. He promptly arrested the first loafer he saw, and accused him of the offence. The man denied the charge, but said he could give information as to the name and residence of the man who was wanted. He then took the policeman to the house where the culprit lived. The official went into the place and asked for the man. His relatives professed complete ignorance as to his whereabouts. The policeman then gave them a week in which to find him, and reminded them that if the man were not found by that time he should be compelled to arrest the whole family. Within a week they handed over the culprit. He was taken before the judge and charged with assault. He confessed, and was sentenced to imprisonment for a definite time. All this time the complainant was not summoned to appear; he was not asked to identify the man, or to prosecute in any way. In fact, he knew nothing at all about it until he received a letter from the officials telling him that his assailant was in jail, and that if he wanted to interview the prisoner he would be permitted to do so.

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Many minor offences are punished with flogging. The man's hands and feet are loosely fastened to a bamboo framework, and he is then thrashed on the bare back, with a rattan rod. Deserters from the army are thus punished. But in all cases a timely bribe will lighten the weight of the descending rod, the guilty man meanwhile not forgetting to howl and groan his loudest, so that the official who superintends the execution of the punishment may not discover the fraud. The late king is reported to have been very fond of this method of punishment, and to have ordered frequent chastisement of his chief officials in his own presence whenever he had cause, or thought he had cause, to be seriously offended with them.

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The punishment for murder is death by decapitation. Those who are reprieved through the mercy of the king, lose their titles, rank and property, and are branded on the arm. They are then condemned to the degrading office of cutting grass for the king's elephants. They are not allowed to hire anyone to perform their duties for them, but are obliged to do the work set them until death puts an end to their tasks.

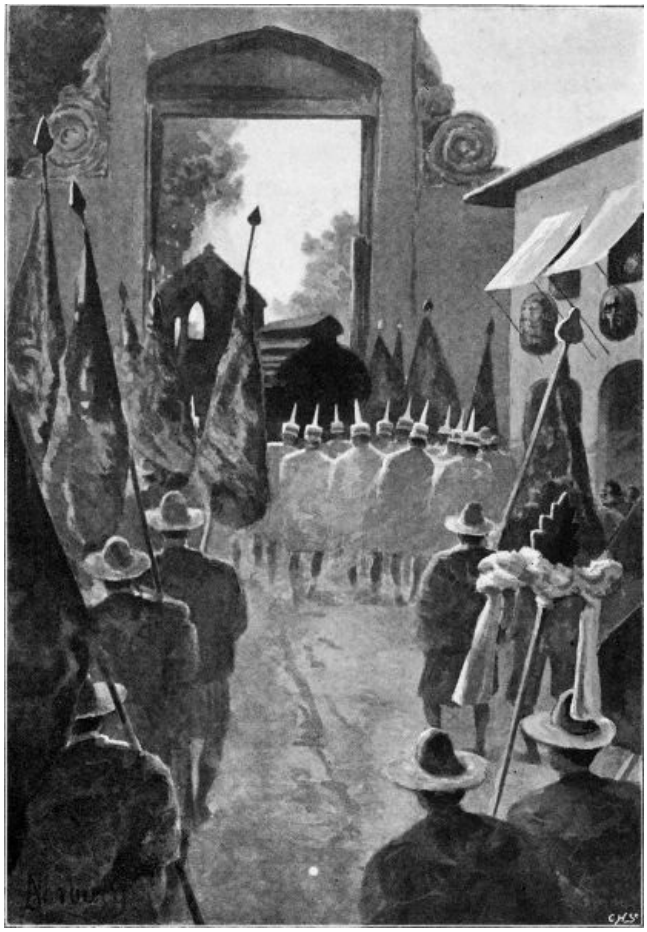
The execution of the death penalty is an impressive if barbarous ceremony. Such occasions are

very rare, and constitute about the only events that are not attended with merry-making. The laughing, joking, merry-hearted native forgets for once to chatter and be glad. The interior of a court, a palace, a gaol, or a temple exercises no restraining influence upon the voluble tongues of the people. But in the presence of the executioners a deathly silence falls upon the whole of the spectators, which is all the more intense and real by reason of its rare occurrence. At the break of day, near a lonely temple on the banks of a lonely canal, some distance from the city walls, the prisoner is led to the spot where he must pay for life with life. His feet and wrists are firmly manacled, and the clink-clank, clink-clank of the chains in the still morning air is the only sound heard as the vermilion-robed executioners bring their victim forth. Presently the sound of chanting arises, and the brethren of the yellow robe intone the prayers for the dead. The man's [Pg 234] neck is fastened to a bundle of bamboos, but he realises very little of what is taking place, for the executioners, with a merciful consideration worthy of much imitation in other walks of life, have thrown their victim into a state of stupor by means of a powerful drug. Into his ears they have rammed plugs of soft clay or mud, so that in case the drug should fail, the wretched creature shall not hear their steps when they come behind him to deliver the fatal blow. The executioners next plead to Buddha for forgiveness, for they are about to break the well-observed law, "Thou shalt not kill." They plead the command of the king and the requirements of justice, and prostrate themselves on the ground. Their prayers over, a silent signal is given, the red-robed figure comes silently and slowly along with a quaint dancing gait; he raises his keen-edged blade on high, and with one sweep of the weapon severs the head from the trunk. The head is set up on a pole as a warning to those present; the feet and hands of the victim are hacked off; the fetters collected, and the crowd disperses silently, with the ominous croaking of many birds of prey impressing the meaning of the lesson upon their mournful hearts.

CHAPTER XII. [Pg 235]

CEREMONIES FOR THE DYING AND THE DEAD.

Death is essentially awe-inspiring and mysterious, and in the case of a people whose lives, from the cradle upwards, are lived in an atmosphere of superstition, it is only to be expected that the ceremonies for the dead should be duly and respectfully performed.



A ROYAL FUNERAL PROCESSION.

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When a person is at the point of death, those by the bedside endeavour to fix the thoughts of the dying one upon the "Great Teacher," whose words are their hope and guide at such a time. Loudly and rapidly, at least eight or ten times a minute, the watchers exclaim, "Pra Arahang, Pra Arahang," this being one of the many names of the last Buddha. With the mind dwelling upon the

precepts of the ancient sage, the sick one passes from this world of men, and the body lies stiff in death. Still the cry goes forth, louder and more rapidly than before, "Pra Arahang, Pra Arahang," so that the departed soul may not forget the teacher as it takes its flight into another world. The cry ceases not until the spirit has passed so far away that all hope of it hearing the voices of earthly relatives must be abandoned. Then loud wailing, the natural world-wide expression of [Pg 236] uncontrollable grief, is heard all over the house. Even the visitors, the domestics, the slaves and others who might not be supposed to be so deeply affected by the loss of the one who has passed away, join in the mournful chorus, as a fitting way of showing their respect for the dead. If the person is of high rank the body is bathed with great ceremony. The king himself comes to the bedside to pour water over the corpse. Other princes follow his example, after whom come the nobles present, according to their rank. The corpse is dressed in pantaloons and a tight-fitting jacket, wrapped in a winding-sheet and placed in a sitting posture in a copper urn. A tube is placed in the mouth, and a mixture of quicksilver and honey poured into the body. The copper urn, which has a grating at the bottom, is next placed inside a golden urn richly studded with precious stones. At the bottom of this urn there is a stop-cock through which the products of decomposition are drained away day by day, in the interval that elapses between the death and the cremation of the body. As the urn is placed on a high pedestal a loud blast is blown upon the trumpets, the ancient conch shell is sounded, the wailing of relatives and friends bursts out afresh, and the band plays sorrowfully a weird funeral dirge. This noisy demonstration is known as "the invitation to the corpse to sit upon the platform." All the insignia of office belonging to the deceased are arranged at the foot of the urn, together with those articles he has continually used [Pg 239] in his daily life, such as his cigar case, his golden betel-nut box, his spittoon, his jewellery, and his writing materials. At dawn, at noon, and again at early evening, the women relatives and domestics gather round the base of the pedestal to indulge in loud and tearful moans. In the intervals between these demonstrations of sorrow, the priests occupy the room, chanting the prayers for the dead and other stanzas from their religious texts appropriate to the occasion. The remains are kept for a long time, sometimes for several years before they are burned.

All people are not cremated. If a man has committed suicide, or died a sudden death, as by lightning, cholera, or small-pox, he is held to be deficient in "merit" and not worth burning. Such people are buried. It may here be noticed how little wood is really required to burn a body. About two armfuls of fuel will reduce a corpse to ashes.

Upon the death of a king, it is the duty of his successor to make preparations for the cremation. The royal burnings take place on an open piece of ground in front of the Royal Palace in Bangkok, called the "Pramane Ground." The word "Pramane" is the name of the structure erected for the ceremony. A square is marked out on the ground, with its sides about forty feet long. At the angles of the square are placed four huge pillars of teak about two hundred feet long. These pillars must be straight, of the finest timber to be found in the kingdom, and must never have been used in any previous ceremony. They lean towards each other at the top, forming a [Pg 240] truncated pyramid, and support a pyramidal structure which ends in a tall tapering spire and is profusely decorated with gold-leaf and tinsel. A large fence of newly cut bamboo is erected to enclose the central erection—the pramane. In three sides of the fence, gates are placed midway. Inside the fence there are a number of temporary buildings, one for the priests, one for the king and royal family, and another for specially invited visitors. The king's pavilion is easily distinguishable from the rest by its wealth of crimson drapery and cloth of gold. The floor of the enclosure is covered with a carpet of split bamboos, which has been specially made for the occasion and may never again be used for a similar purpose. At many points in the fence, royal seven-tiered umbrellas of cloth of gold reflect the powerful sunlight with dazzling brilliancy. Outside the enclosure another set of buildings is provided for the use of the officials, while over the rest of the ground are scattered theatres, puppet-shows, shadow plays and other forms of amusement. Under the central pagoda is a royal throne richly draped, and an eight-sided pyramid which rests upon a firm platform. From the centre of the roof hangs a circular awning, from which long strips of crape, white silk, and cloth of gold are carried to the four corners of the pramane. The eight-sided pyramid is the resting-place of the urn, and has a special canopy of cloth of gold. Floral wreaths and other decorations, made with marvellous skill and taste, are displayed in every available spot, while bits of glass and porcelain adorn the pillars and reflect [Pg 241] the light of the sun by day, and of the torches and lamps by night. After sunset a general illumination of the whole place occurs. It is produced by thousands of torches, oil lamps and Chinese lanterns.

At dawn, on the first day of the celebration of the funeral rites, the corpse is taken in a car to the scene of the ceremonies. The first carriage in the sad procession is occupied by the high priest. As it moves slowly along, he reads from the Buddhist scriptures the passages on death, and fixes his thoughts upon the fleeting nature of this earthly life. The second carriage contains the favourite children of the deceased monarch, while the third is the funeral car. The high priest holds in his hands, pressed closely against the sacred book, one end of a long strip of silver ribbon. The ribbon is carried backwards, passes through the hands of the children, and is fastened at the other end to the golden urn which contains the remains. As the priest reads, holy influences pass from the sacred words through the ribbon to the living bodies of the children and the dead body of their royal father. Other carriages follow the funeral car, one of which contains sticks of fragrant wood, with gilded ends—the fuel for the burning. Another is filled with representations of fabulous animals made in bamboo and covered with tinsel. The head and tail of the funeral procession are formed by the white-robed Brahmins in their usual conical hats. The throbbing of the death-drums falls upon the ear with a dull regular boom, boom, boom.

On arriving at the Pramane, the urn is placed upon the pagoda, there to remain for seven days. [Pg 242] The silver ribbon is fastened in the middle to the urn, and at the ends to the east and west sides of the room, thus indicating the path traversed by the sun in his daily round, and symbolising the life of man in its passage from the cradle to the grave. The priests assemble in great numbers to recite stanzas bearing upon life and death, and upon the mysteries of Nirvana and the hereafter. When their recitations are finished, they sit for a little while, with bent heads, in silent meditation upon the things they have spoken. They retire for a time, but return a few hours later to repeat their solemn chants.

The mourning colour is white, and every subject must wear it when the sovereign dies. Unfortunately black is being gradually substituted for white. It is a very hot and ugly colour to wear in a tropical land. Every subject must also shave completely the hair of his head, and keep his head in this condition of baldness as long as the Court may command.

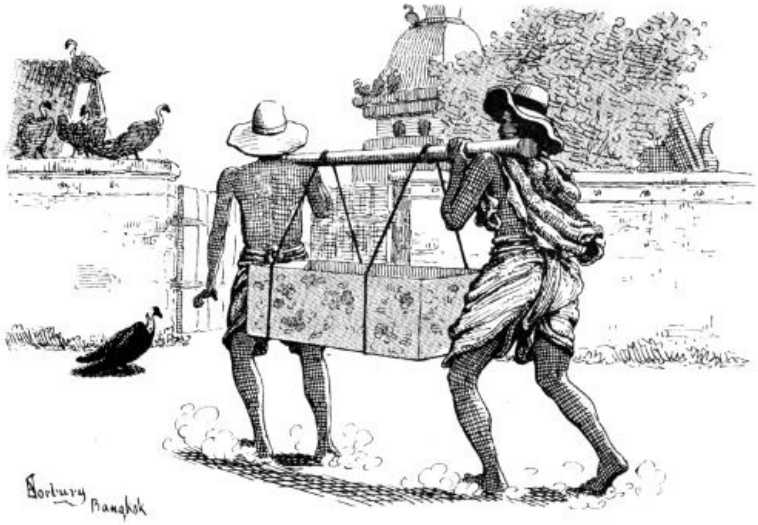
Thousands of priests are on such occasions fed, and presented with new robes, and books, and a crowd of miscellaneous articles, such as clocks, boxes of cigars, trays of betel-nut, and umbrellas.

Here and there on the Pramane Ground are placed the "trees that gratify the desires of men." They have no likeness to any tree at all, but are hollow wicker baskets on the ends of long poles. Tied to the "branches" are a number of fresh limes, each of which contains either a small silver [Pg 243] coin or a lottery ticket. They are supposed to represent the four trees that will blossom at the four corners of the city in which the next Buddha will be born. They will then produce all kinds of delicious fruit in fabulous quantities. In the evening men go up the wicker 'tree,' pluck off the limes and throw them to the crowd. The greatest excitement prevails, and the people shriek and shout, and tumble over each other in their endeavours to obtain one of the coveted souvenirs.

A display of fireworks follows the distribution of limes. Birds, water-spouts, "bellowing elephants," and many other fantastic forms blaze, fizz, and explode. When the last spark has disappeared the first sound of orchestral music is heard, and free open-air theatres, puppet-shows, and shadow plays offer their several attractions for the amusement of the people.

On the seventh day the urn of gold is taken from under the canopy, and the copper one removed from it. All the inflammable drapery, and all articles of any value are carried away to be beyond reach of flame. A pile of fragrant wood and spices is neatly arranged, and then the urn is placed thereon. A quick-burning fuse or train of gunpowder is laid from the funeral pyre to the king's pavilion. At the proper time, about sunset usually, he ignites the fuse with sacred fire from the royal temple. Everyone who is permitted, goes at once to the pramane, lights a candle, and lays it in the fire, thereby increasing the brilliancy and intensity of the fire. Great care has to be taken [Pg 244] to prevent the whole structure and the surrounding buildings being consumed in a general conflagration. Many people are engaged in extinguishing the fire at places where it threatens to exceed its proper limits. In about an hour the cremation of the body is complete, and the fire is everywhere carefully extinguished. The charred bones are placed in the golden urn once more, the original pyramid rebuilt, and the draperies replaced as before. The ashes of the fire are collected, wrapped up in muslin, placed on a golden dish, taken in a procession of state barges some distance down the river, and there thrown into the waters. For three days after the burning the festivities are kept up, and general rejoicing prevails amongst the crowd. The charred remains are kept in a room in the palace, specially set aside for the reception of the royal remains. The timber used in the construction of the pramane or of any of the attendant buildings, can never be used again for funeral purposes. It is distributed to the priests to be used by them in the erection or repairing of their dwellings.

Such then is the ceremony that attends the death of a king. Other members of the royal family and all princes and nobles of high rank are also cremated with great pomp and with a lavish expenditure of money. As the king's household is a very large one, and as a few deaths occur every year, it would involve a fearful waste of time and money if a separate funeral service were held for each of them in turn. One by one as deaths occur, the dead bodies are placed in the [Pg 245] copper urn, and this again in the golden one, until a fairly large number await their cremation. In 1895 a royal funeral ceremony was held that lasted for a week, several bodies being burnt every day. The illustration, "A Royal Funeral Procession", was made in connection with this particular ceremony. The boxes seen passing through one of the city gates were the coffins of the least honoured or distinguished of the dead. Such a cremation, though performed with great state, is not nearly so imposing as that connected with the death of a king.



THE POOR MAN'S FUNERAL.

The poorer classes cannot afford the money to pay for fireworks, theatres, and processions, but they do all that they possibly can to show their respect for the dead, with becoming ritual. When [Pg 246] a man is thought to be nearing his end, the priests are called to his bedside. They read to the dying man of his future births, of the blessed Nirvana, and endeavour to drive all fear from his mind. When life is extinct they sprinkle the body with water, and join the relatives in the chorus "Pra Arahang, Pra Arahang". The body is washed, and wrapped in a clean cloth, and money is placed in the mouth. It is then put into an urn, if the friends can afford to buy one; but if not, it rests simply in the coffin. The coffin is an oblong wooden box, covered outside with wall-paper and tinsel, and has no lid. Food is placed inside, and very often the body lies face downwards so that the spirit shall not find its way back again. The coffin is removed from the house through a hole in the wall, and not through the door, for if the spirit of the deceased should be lingering near, it might refuse to pass through the doorway into the outer world, and would then remain to haunt the house and disturb its inhabitants. The coffin is carried round and round the house three or four times, so as to baffle the spirit that it may not be able to return to its former home. For it must be remembered that these people believe that it takes the soul seven days to reach its final destination, and there is always the possibility of its being re-called from its onward flight by earthly attractions, or by non-observance of the ceremonies that should be performed.

The bearers next proceed to one of the temples which possesses a public "Pramane" or [Pg 247] crematorium. After the burning has taken place the bones, or charred objects that look like bones, are collected from the ashes, to be reverentially preserved by the relatives. As they have no gold urns in which to store these relics, they keep them in common thick glass tumblers of foreign manufacture, over which they place a pagoda-like covering made of red lacquer and gilded by some native artisan. On very particular occasions these remains are brought out and distributed about the rooms, perhaps as a reminder to the pleasure-seekers that death is ever with them.

Those who have died of cholera or by lightning, and who have consequently been buried, are dug up a few months later, and what is left of them committed to the flames.

Paupers and criminals are disposed of in a barbarous and revolting manner. At one of the city temples a flock of vultures, numbering over a hundred, is kept. The vultures are repulsive, dirty-looking birds who sit stolidly hour by hour upon the roof or walls of the temple, apparently without life or motion except when a body is brought for their repast. Then they become keenly excited at the prospect of the coming feast, for which, however, they must first do battle with the crowd of pariahs that also haunt the vicinity of the same temple. They flock down with noisy croaking and great flapping of wings, but are beaten off by the attendants, who first prepare the body for the feast by cutting it open in different places with large sharp knives. They cast a few pieces of flesh to the dogs and then retire. In a second the body is hidden by the birds, who settle [Pg 248] upon it from head to foot. Nothing is to be seen but a compact mass of quivering feathers. The vultures gorge themselves with the flesh, never ceasing as long as anything remains to be consumed, unless it be to make a vicious grab at the head of some venturesome pariah who dares to interfere with their enjoyment of the feast. It is a sickening spectacle, and its only merit is that it is safer from a sanitary point of view to allow the flesh to be eaten in this way than to bury it beneath the damp soil near some human dwelling.

The meal over, the feathered cannibals return to their perches upon roof and wall. The relatives gather up the clean white bones, put them loosely in a wooden coffin, light wax tapers, and bearing the coffin with them, march three times round the funeral pyre. They then light the fire, place the coffin on the burning fuel, and scatter sweetly smelling incense in the leaping flames.

There are two spirits who watch over and take charge of all burning-places. They are familiarly spoken of as the "Grandfather cocoa-nut shell," and the "Grandmother cocoa-nut shell."

To neglect the cremation ceremony would be as fatal to the happiness of the departed soul in its future existence, as to neglect the shaving of the top-knot would be to the success of a child in

this. The soul of the man whose body has not been consumed with fire passes into everlasting and fearful servitude. It becomes the bond-slave of a horrid master whose distinguishing personal [Pg 249] characteristics are a dog's head on a human body and a ferocious temper. He sits for all time with his feet in the fires of hell, enjoying the infernal heat, but as his enjoyment would cease were his extremities to be consumed, he requires a body of servants to cool them. The souls of the uncremated are his slaves, and it is their duty to carry through the long years of eternity, water in open wicker baskets. Their way to the wells lies across a long and perilous bridge, but over it they must pass day by day without end as they perform their thankless task. When the body is burned the soul is liberated from this terrible bondage. There have been times when some frightful epidemic has ravaged the city, and when the attendants in fear and trembling have left the sick to die alone. Then the soldiers have been sent to gather up the dead and cast them into the public graves. When the scourge has spent itself and the minds of the living have become calm again, the relatives of those who have not been burned begin to reflect upon the awful fate that has overtaken the departed souls. Were they to go to the public grave and dig up a body and burn it, it might not be that of him they seek, and their efforts would be of no avail. But they free the fettered soul in another manner. They believe that the horrid monster of the nether regions knows all the names both of the living and the dead, so that if they endeavour to perform any act of propitiation he will know by whom and for whom the deed is done. They obtain the release of [Pg 250] the soul by promising to call themselves in this life the relatives of the demon. It is merely a nominal relationship, but it pleases the fiend with the burning feet, and in return for the homage thus paid to his power he allows the captured soul to go its way.

The worldly relations of the infernal spirit acknowledge their relationship by getting from the priests several red and yellow strings and binding them upon their necks, wrists and ankles. They also make a little cart, and model two clay oxen which they harness to the tiny shafts. In this they put clay images, one for each member of the family. Round the chief joints of these toy images, red and yellow strings are fastened by their owners. Offerings of flowers and fruit are put in the cart and then it is taken to the rice-fields and deposited in some convenient spot. The cart and its contents are soon destroyed by the birds, the wind, and the little field-mice, but they are never restored.

CHAPTER XIII. [Pg 251]

THE ORDER OF THE YELLOW ROBE.

"Lord Buddha sat the scorching summer through,
The driving rains, the chilly dawns and eves;
Wearing for all men's sakes the yellow robe,
Eating in beggar's guise the scanty meal
Chance gathered from the charitable."

"*Light of Asia*," Book V.—Arnold.

Among the crowd of brightly dressed people who throng the streets and alleys, the canals and rivers of Eastern Venice, there are none who so soon command the attention of the new arrival, or who appeal more strongly to the eye of the oldest inhabitant of the city, than the yellow-robed priests of the Buddhist faith. In the capital of Siam there are over ten thousand of them, while in the whole kingdom there are more than one hundred thousand. No ancient order of Grey or White Friars ever exhibited their individuality either with such frequency, persistency, or picturesqueness as these representatives of a far more ancient if less noble worship. It is scarcely necessary in these days when Oriental creeds and faiths have been so fully and widely discussed, to point out that the primal elements of that philosophy which announced the necessity of the [Pg 252] Buddhist priesthood are entirely different to those which caused the creation of similar institutions in the West. The monk of the Western orders claims to be an intercessor between God and man. The Buddhists have no God, and therefore they do not make intercession for their brethren. The Western monk is a teacher and a preacher, the Buddhist priest may be, but is by no means necessarily so. The order rests upon a basis something like this:—The evil in the world is the result of past evil and will be productive of future evil. The only way to eradicate the general wickedness of the world is by casting it separately out of each individual in the world. This can only be accomplished by the individual himself, and as long as he remains in contact with the world he is under constant temptation to indulge in its pleasures, to gratify his passions, and to add in a thousand ways to the sum of human misery. By retirement he no longer craves for fine food and raiment, but has every opportunity for long and careful meditation upon his own evil doings and desires, and upon the way to get rid of them. The monastic institution finds its parallel in the life of a layman, when such a one, with a large amount of work to be performed, shuts himself up in his own room and denies himself friends and rest that his labours may be properly accomplished.

There is no real division between priest and layman; either may become the other at will. In Siam the monastic vow is not binding for life, but is cancelled by the superior of the monastery

whenever a request to that effect is made. Every man in Siam enters the priesthood for at least three months of his life, during which time he is supported by the voluntary offerings of the people. The original purity and simplicity of the mendicant order has long been lost. The Society has often been endowed by kings and chiefs with gold and silver; idleness and worthlessness are too often the characteristics of the temporary priests. Still, there are a few who desire to live the noble life of their Founder and to follow faithfully in his paths of wisdom and virtue. For years they have been the schoolmasters and the doctors, and the copiers and makers of books. They are known in Siamese as "Pra," a word which means both "sacred" and "great." [Pg 253]

Each monk has eight requisite and lawful possessions; namely, three robes of yellow cloth which are all worn at the same time; a bowl for the collection of the daily food; a razor with which to shave the head and eyebrows; a case of needles for the repairing of clothes; a girdle; and a filtering cloth. But the Siamese monks often have many possessions besides these. There is a rule that all other property except the above shall be given up to the common use of the monastery, but the rule is not obeyed. The three patched yellow robes are often represented by seven or more; and in the wealthier monasteries they are not of common cloth, but of rich and beautiful silk. The term "yellow" as applied to the priest's vestments is apt to convey a wrong impression to the minds of those not acquainted with Buddhist countries. In these degenerate times the monks [Pg 254] desire that ornament in dress which their religion forbids, and they render themselves very artistic in appearance by a combination of colours not strictly yellow, but ranging from a rich chocolate through shades of saffron, gold and orange to the palest tints of the orthodox colour. The following note from Alabaster's "Wheel of the Law" is an interesting comment upon the priestly robes:

> "I cannot state with any certainty the reason yellow robes were adopted by the Buddhists. There is a story that thieves wore yellow dresses, and that the poor ascetics, in the depth of their humility, imitated the thieves. It is far more probable that the people of the lowest caste, or outcasts, were compelled to wear yellow, and that the Buddhists, voluntarily making themselves outcasts, proudly adopted the colour which marked their act. We find them boasting of the yellow robe as the flag of victory of the saints. In the early days of Buddhism the monks wore whatever they could get. Some picked up and patched together the rags strewn about the cemeteries, whilst others are mentioned as magnificently attired in glittering royal vestments, and in the precious dresses procured by kings for the ladies of the harems, which the ladies piously gave away."

Each priest also possesses a large fan. It is intended to assist him in keeping his eyes from the things of the world, and so to keep his thoughts from straying as he walks along the streets. A priest is forbidden to look more than a plough's length in front of him, and must keep his eyes [Pg 255] fixed upon the ground; but the Siamese monk who obeys this rule must be diligently sought for in out of the way corners. The fan is generally carried by a boy attendant, who holds it so as to screen the priest's head from the sun, while his eyes roam at will, seeking for novelty and amusement.

PRIEST AND ATTENDANT.

All those who wear the yellow robe are not men. Many children can daily be seen with shaven heads and eyebrows, dressed in the priestly garments. These are novices or "nanes," not fully ordained monks. They are not admitted before they are eight years old, and, unless their parents [Pg 256]

intend them to remain in the monasteries for life, they wait until the top-knot has been shaved off before entering into the service of the temple, so that their average age is about thirteen. After a time they leave the temple, return to the world, and get married. But about the age of twenty or twenty-one they must re-enter the priesthood, for in early manhood every male, including the king himself, must seek full ordination. The "nane" during his noviciate has only about ten rules to observe, whereas the fully ordained priest has to obey over two hundred.

The ceremony of ordination if respectfully and devoutly performed would be a very impressive one, but as at present carried out, the only persons in the temple who are at all reverent are the priests themselves. The behaviour of the congregation is marked by indifference and often by extreme levity. When an applicant desires admission to the priesthood he signifies his request sometime beforehand to the president of the chapter, who then appoints a day for him to be formally received. The applicant arrives at the temple with a host of relatives and friends dressed as for a holiday. He is clothed in white, and over his ordinary garments he wears a mantle of gauze decorated with gold and silver spangles. A procession is formed, and to the sound of a band that plays in the open air, he and his male friends march three times round the outside of the temple. He next enters the building and sits down on the floor in a place reserved for him. The women of the party sit on one side of the temple and the men on the other. They all chew [Pg 257] betel-nut, and the men smoke, while all refresh their thirst from the numerous tea-pots that circulate round and round the congregation. At the far end of the building the priests are arranged in two or more rows, facing each other, with the president at their head.

One of the friends of the candidate who has already been ordained, leads him to the superior, saying, "I present this person who wishes to become a priest." The applicant prostrates himself before the president three times, with his hands pressed against his forehead, palm to palm, and says, "Venerable president, I own you as my ordainer." The president fastens the bundle of robes round his neck, and he goes to the entrance of the temple, where two friends who are members of the chapter, fasten the begging bowl round his neck. The three men then return to the altar and bow. The candidate retires a little way, and kneels in reverential attitude while he answers several questions. A private examination has previously taken place. The president now reminds him that he is expected to give truthful replies to the questions put to him, and then puts him publicly through the following catechism.

"Are you free from consumption, fits, leprosy, or any contagious disease?"

"I am free."

"Have you ever been bewitched or in the power of the magicians?"

"Never."

"Are you in the full possession of all your mental faculties?" [Pg 258]

"I am."

"Are you of the male sex?"

"I am."

"Are you in debt?"

"I am not." (Many people endeavour to enter the priesthood in order to avoid payment of their debts.)

"Are you a slave or a fugitive?"

"I am not." (Those drawn for conscription often seek admission, as the forced military service is very unpopular.)

"Do your parents give their consent to the step you are now about to take?"

"They consent."

"Are you over twenty years of age?"

"I am."

"Have you the requisite utensils and garments?"

"I have."

"Then come forward."

The candidate goes forward on hands and knees, and with palm-joined hands salutes the president three times, saying, "O father benefactor, I pray to be admitted to the sacred dignity of the priesthood. Take pity on me and raise me from the lowly condition of the laity to the perfect condition of the priesthood."

The presiding priest next asks the monks of the chapter whether any of them know any just or lawful reason why the candidate should not have his request granted. If none of them state any objection, the president signifies his willingness to admit the candidate to full ordination. The [Pg 259] name, age, and address of the applicant are now written down in the records of the monastery, after which he goes to one side of the temple to be robed. He takes off the clothes he has been

wearing and puts on his new garments in full view of the whole congregation. This is not at all an easy matter, and he is always assisted by some friend who has previously gone through the same ordeal. If the friend gets the robes entangled, as he frequently does, the congregation laughs immoderately at the uncomfortable dilemma in which the candidate is placed. The difficulty is solved by some kindly-disposed priest, who leaves his place and comes to assist in the robing. With fan in hand and the alms-bowl slung over the shoulder, the wearer of the yellow robe kneels once more before the superior, saying:—

"I go for refuge to the Buddha."

"I go for refuge to the Law."

"I go for refuge to the Order."

He follows this by taking ten vows:—

1 "I take the vow not to destroy life."

2 "I take the vow not to steal."

3 "I take the vow to abstain from impurity."

4 "I take the vow not to lie."

5 "I take the vow to abstain from intoxicating drinks, which hinder progress and virtue."

6 "I take the vow not to eat at forbidden times."

7 "I take the vow to abstain from dancing, singing, music, and stage-plays."

8 "I take the vow not to use garlands, scents, unguents, or ornaments." [Pg 260]

9 "I take the vow not to use a broad or high bed."

10 "I take the vow not to receive gold or silver."

Then the president says to him, "You are now received into the brotherhood. I will therefore instruct you what duties you are to perform and what sins you are to avoid. You will daily collect alms and will never put off your yellow robes. You must dwell continually in a monastery and never with the laity, and you must forsake all carnal pleasures," and so on.

The ceremony concludes with the paying of homage to the newly made priest. He sits on the floor, and then all present who are acquainted with him come, one by one, and prostrate themselves to the ground before him, at the same time giving him some present. If he has many friends, the floor of the temple round him is soon covered with about as motley an assortment of articles as it is possible to gather. There are robes, incense sticks, books, pens and ink, pencils, cigars, tobacco, betel-nut, clocks, vases of wax flowers, umbrellas, fans, flowers, fruit and cakes. When all the presents have been given and the congregation have paid their respects to the new monk, they go to their homes, and he at once takes up his residence in the cell allotted him. As long as he remains at the monastery he must obey orders and regard the superior as a second father.

The monks are not allowed to take food after noon. They may drink tea, chew betel-nut, or smoke tobacco, but they must not partake of solid food of any description. This rule is certainly far more rigidly observed than most of those that are laid down to regulate the conduct of the order. One of the commonest sights in any part of Siam is the procession of priests, soon after sunrise, seeking their daily bread. They carry a bowl, basin or bag, and go straight on from house to house, each in the district appointed him. They stand outside the houses, but make no request for alms. If anything is given to them they bless the giver; if they receive nothing they pass silently on their way. Having collected their food, they return to the monastery to eat, and to meditate meanwhile upon the perishableness of the body. On such occasions as weddings, hair-cuttings, and funerals, wealthy laymen entertain the priests at their own houses, and send them away afterwards with further gifts of food. [Pg 261]

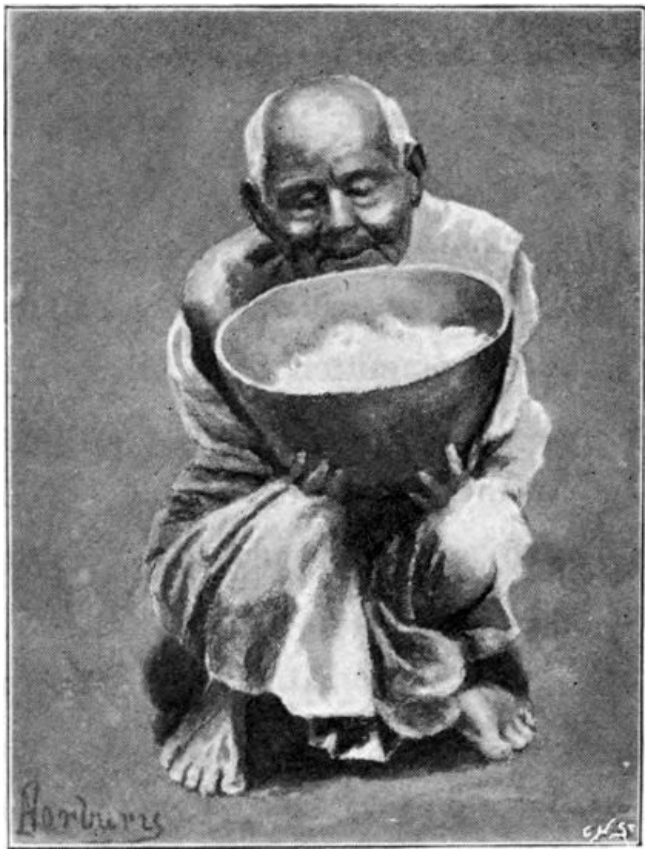
Buddha's early life as a mendicant was passed in the forest, and he held that the solitude and quiet of such a place was conducive to that long process of self-examination and renunciation which constitutes the distinguishing feature of the order. But as he afterwards found that he could be more useful to men by living amongst them, he permitted his disciples to live in companies in different places. The charity of the pious soon provided them with temples and monasteries, some of which were built even in his own time.

During the whole of the dry weather the monks travel from place to place, but in the rainy season, which is the Buddhist Lent, they settle down in some particular monastery. They are not allowed to sleep outside the temple they have chosen for their habitation during this period of retirement, except for some very important reason, and then only with the direct sanction of the superior. As at this time the jungle is flooded, and malaria common, there is much wisdom in the rule that forbids travelling about until the dry weather comes again. The priests, during Lent, preach to the people, who come in large numbers to listen, and to bring offerings. It is a very busy religious season as far as outward appearances are concerned, but the apparent indifference of the majority of the worshippers raises a doubt as to whether these observances possess any moral influence upon their lives. [Pg 262]

The catalogue of the sins which the priests may not commit is a lengthy one and is religiously neglected. For instance, it is a sin to inhale flowers, to sit or sleep more than twelve inches above the ground, to break up the soil, to listen to music, to sing, to dance, to use perfumes, to sit or sleep in a higher position than the superior, to use gold or silver, to hold conversation on any but religious topics, to take gifts from or give gifts to a woman, to borrow, to ask for alms, to possess warlike weapons, to eat too much, to sleep too long, to take part in any sports or games, to judge one's neighbours, to swing the arms when walking, to bake bricks, to burn wood, to wink, to stretch out the legs when sitting, to look contemptuously at any one or anything, to buy, to sell, [Pg 263] to slobber or make a noise when eating, to have any hair anywhere about the head or face, to keep the leavings of meals, to have many robes, to meddle with royal affairs except in so far as they concern religion, to cook rice, to ride on an elephant, to put flowers in the ears, to wear shoes, to love one man more than another, to eat seeds, to sleep after meals, to make remarks about the alms given to them, to wear any colour but yellow, to pander to popular taste when preaching sermons, to wash in the dark, to destroy either animal or vegetable life, and to whistle.

There are five sins that will certainly lead to everlasting punishment, whether committed by a priest or layman, viz., to murder one's father, to murder one's mother, to murder a priest, to treat the words or temples of Buddha with contempt, expressed as "to wound Buddha's foot so as to make it bleed," and to persuade priests to act falsely.

Members are expelled from the order on commission of the following sins:—Sexual intercourse, theft, and murder. After such expulsions they can never be re-admitted. Confessions of sin are made twice a month, at full and new moon, when the chapter meets to listen to the reading of the rules of the order. There is no inquisition; confession is purely voluntary. Slight punishments, such as sweeping the courtyard, or sprinkling dust round the holy Bo-tree follow the acknowledgment of slight breaches of duty. Serious offences are tried in the ecclesiastical courts, for the priestly body is not amenable to the ordinary laws of the land. In these courts, presided [Pg 264] over by the chief priest, no oath is taken. An ordinary affirmation or negative answer to any question is given in silence by the raising and lowering of a fan. If the defendant is found guilty he is unfrocked, publicly flogged, and then expelled from the order.



OFFERING RICE TO THE PRIESTS.

The priest must rise before daylight, wash himself, sweep the room in which he lives, sweep round the Bo-tree, fetch the drinking water for the day, filter it to prevent killing any creatures it may contain when drinking it. These practical offices concluded, he is supposed to retire to a solitary place and there fix his mind in pious meditation upon the rules that regulate his daily life. [Pg 265] He rises to place offerings of flowers before the sacred image, the sacred dome-shaped shrine or the Bo-tree, thinking the whole time of the great contrast between his own weaknesses and Buddha's virtues. The next portion of the daily routine is strictly and regularly followed. He takes the begging-bowl, follows his superior, collects his food, returns, eats his meal, asks a blessing for the donor, performs little duties for his superior, and washes the alms-bowls. For the next hour he should again meditate upon the kindness of Buddha, and then study the sacred books. At sunset he sweeps the holy place, lights the lamps, and listens to the teaching of the superior. As the novices do all the manual work, the superior is expected to devote himself more fully to study and meditation. Many of the chief priests of the different temples are profound Sanscrit and Pali

scholars. The minute routine set forth in the ecclesiastical books is rarely followed in Siam. Priests walk about after sunset, and return late to the temples, their attendants lighting the way with torches. The time they give to meditation and worship is far short of that prescribed in the rules, and they are always ready to turn out for a chat with any visitor to their temple.

Meditation is the Buddhist substitute for prayer. There are five distinct classes of meditation.[H]

1.—Meditation on love. The priest must think of the future happiness which awaits him when he has rid himself of all evil desires. This leads him to desire the same [Pg 266] happiness for all his friends; and finally for his foes. He meditates upon the good actions of his enemies, forgets their evil deeds, and endeavours to arouse in himself a wide-spreading, all-embracing, overshadowing love for all the world, which shall enable him to look with tenderness and affection upon all with whom he comes into contact.

2.—Meditation on Pity. He concentrates his thoughts upon the miseries and sorrows of the world, and awakens the sentiment of pity in his own breast for all the distressed ones among his fellow-men.

3.—Meditation on Joy. He is to change the attitude of his mind to one of contemplation of the joys of all men, and therein to find cause for rejoicing himself.

4.—Meditation on Impurity. He must try to realise the evils of sickness, death, and corruption, to become horrified at the endless misery entailed by the continual recurrence of birth and death, and to desire its final extinction.

5.—Meditation on Serenity. The priest contemplates the worldly opinions of men as to the badness and goodness of things; the desire for wealth and power; the hatred of injustice and oppression; he contrasts youth and disease, love and treachery, honour and disgrace, and endeavours so to rise above them all, that without haughtiness or pride he may be indifferent to all the evils and joys which accompany them, and free from all desires to partake of the same.

This is not the place to discuss the philosophy of Buddha, as we are here concerned only with the mendicant order in Siam. But in order to gain a more complete idea of the duties and character [Pg 267] of the monastic body as contemplated by their founder, the following facts taken from Professor Rhys Davids's work on "Buddhism" are here given.

Buddha before his death told his disciples that they were to propagate his Laws, viz., (1) The four earnest meditations. (2) The four great Efforts. (3) The four roads to Iddhi. (4) The five moral Powers. (5) The seven kinds of Wisdom; and (6) The Noble Eightfold Path.

The four earnest Meditations are: (1) On the impurity of the body; (2) on the evils which arise from sensation; (3) on the impermanence of ideas; (4) on the conditions of existence.

The four great Efforts are—the exertion (1) to prevent bad qualities from arising; (2) to put away bad qualities which have arisen; (3) to produce goodness not previously existing; (4) to increase goodness where it does exist.

The four roads to Iddhi are the four bases of Saintship by which it is obtained. They are: (1) the will to acquire it; (2) the necessary exertion; (3) the necessary preparation of the heart; (4) investigation.

The five moral Powers are—Faith, Energy, Recollection, Contemplation, Intuition.

The seven kinds of Wisdom are—Energy, Recollection, Contemplation, Investigation of Scripture, Joy, Repose and Serenity.

The noble Eightfold Path which leads to Nirvana comprises: (1) Right belief; (2) Right aims; (3) Right words; (4) Right behaviour; (5) Right mode of livelihood; (6) [Pg 268] Right exertion; (7) Right mindfulness; (8) Right meditation and tranquillity.

All these different Powers, Laws, etc., are again subdivided and re-subdivided; but the above lines will be sufficient to outline the moral philosophy of that system which not only the priests should bear out in their lives, but to which every true believer in Buddhism is expected to conform. Practically, however, these counsels are so many obsolete laws, long since dead and forgotten. Outside the permanent priests and a few students, the vast majority of the people know nothing whatever about the system, and if some of the learned writers upon Buddhism in Europe were to preach their Buddhist sermons to the subjects of the only independent Buddhist king remaining, the people would stare in wonder at their new teachers and ask one another what strange doctrines were these that were being preached unto them.

Buddha's own sermons as to the duties of the priesthood are worth a moment's notice, though the priests as a rule have never heard them, or heard them with indifferent ears. The following passages are quoted from the book mentioned above, and are translations of passages in those sermons whose authenticity is established.

"He who, himself not stainless,
Would wrap the yellow-stained robe around him,
He, devoid of self-control and honesty
Is unworthy of the yellow robe."

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"But he who, cleansed from stains,
Is well grounded in the Precepts,
And full of honesty and self-restraint
'Tis he who's worthy of the yellow robe."

"The restrained in hand, restrained in foot,
Restrained in speech, the best of self-controlled;
He whose delight is inward, who is tranquil
And happy when alone—him they call *mendicant*."

"The mendicant who controls his tongue, speaking
Wisely, and is not puffed up,
Who throws light on worldly and on Heavenly things,
His word is sweet."

"Let his livelihood be kindliness,
His conduct righteousness,
Then, in the fulness of gladness,
He will make an end of grief."

"As the Vassika plant casts down its withered blossoms
So cast out utterly, O mendicants, ill-will and lust."

"Do no violence to a Brahman,
But neither let *him* fly at his aggressor.
Woe to him who strikes a Brahman;
More woe to him who strikes the striker."

"What is the use of plaited hair, O fool!
What of a garment of skins?
Your low yearnings are within you,
And the outside thou makest clean."

> "A mendicant, who is fond of disputes, is walled in by ignorance, and understands neither religion nor the law of Gautama."
>
> "A mendicant having received in right time, his meal, returning alone, should sit in private, reflecting within himself; he should not spread out his mind; his mind should be well controlled. Should he speak with a follower of the Buddha or another mendicant, he should speak of the excellent Law, and not backbite or speak ill of another. Some fortify themselves for controversy. We praise not those small-minded persons. Temptations from this source and that are made to cling to them, and they certainly send their minds very far away when they engage in controversy."

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The mendicant that Gautama had in his mind when he uttered the above passages, may be as easily discovered amongst the thousands that wear the yellow robe to-day, as a needle in a mountain of hay.

After a short interval the priests put off their robes and return to the world. If they are wanted for *corvée* or conscription they stay an indefinite period in their safe retreat. The yellow robes are never taken away, but are given by him who is leaving them, to one of the inmates of the same monastery. If a priest is thought to be dying the robes are taken from him, for they must not be contaminated with death. They are afterwards hung on the sacred Bo-tree, but never burned. Anyone who has once been a priest, but has returned to a secular life, may re-enter the priesthood whenever he chooses, but he must be again formally presented and ordained.

In the vicinity of several temples women with shaven heads and white dresses are sometimes seen. They are not always mourners for the dead, but belong to an order of nuns. The first nun was Buddha's foster-mother, who after the death of his father, wished to be ordained. Buddha at first refused to comply with her wishes, but on the intercession of his favourite disciple, Ananda, he granted the request. Ananda's wife, a half-sister of Buddha, was also subsequently ordained as a nun. The order of nuns does not appear to have been at any time half as flourishing as that of the monks. Nuns in Siam are very old widows. They do no teaching, sewing, or work of any description. To them the temple is a form of alms-house where they will be lodged and fed as long as they live.

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CHAPTER XIV.

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AMONG THE TEMPLES.

Every single town and village of Siam is crowded with temples, or "wats," as they are locally called. Compared with similar religious institutions in England, their number seems to be out of all proportion to the number of the population. Their variety of size and method of decoration, as well as their number, is sufficiently conspicuous to make even the most casual observer enquire why they abound to such an extent. And the reason for this superabundance of religious edifices is not to be found in the immense number of people who are popularly supposed to believe in the teachings of Buddha, but rather in a very prevalent, but degraded form of one of the tenets of an originally pure doctrine. For though it is usually stated that five hundred millions of people are believers in, and followers of "The Light of Asia," no one who has lived in a Buddhist country will venture to assert that half that number are regular attendants at the temple on the Buddhist Sunday, or that the vast majority of the people do anything more than passively accept the superstitions of their forefathers without ever enquiring or even caring whether they are the true [Pg 273] teachings of Buddha or not. Ask any person you meet a few questions about the sage who propounded the faith that they are supposed to hold, and it will be speedily discovered that even those who are most assiduous in their attendance at the temple, and who are most charitable in the offerings they give to their priests, know little of the life and less of the teachings of him whom they apparently worship. It will be at once evident to the readers of the foregoing chapters of this book, that the people whose customs are here treated of, though nominally Buddhists, and classed *en masse* as such in Western calculations of the number of those who worship the great Indian teacher of old, are guided in their daily lives, not by the principles of an old world faith, but rather by a number of powerful superstitions gathered at different times from the different nations by whom they are surrounded, or with whom they have come into close contact, which superstitions have little if anything to do with Buddhism. It is not possible to call them Buddhists at all, if the term is to be used as comparable to the term Christian as applied to the believers in Christ in Western lands. The great moral precepts of their religion are not taught to them, are unknown to them, and it is very questionable if the Sanskrit words for benevolence, gratitude, charity, and kindred virtues have any parallel in the ordinary everyday vocabulary of the people. Even if such words do exist, they are only understood by the learned few, and would be as utterly [Pg 274] incomprehensible to the great mass of the people as Greek and Latin.

A VILLAGE TEMPLE.

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Temples then, not being required as houses of continual or devout worship, why do they abound, not only in the capital, but in every village, and on the banks of every river and canal throughout the length and breadth of the whole kingdom? The explanation is found in the fact that the people believe that in order to make merit during this life to save themselves from misery in some future existence, they must among other things follow "the religion which teaches alms-giving." "Make merit." That is the sum and substance of their religious faith and worship. As every reader of Buddhism knows, the soul is said to pass through many stages of existence before it reaches the mysterious region of Nirvana, and that it is possible for any soul to pass even beyond the shadowy confines of this debatable territory and finally attain the perfect condition of Buddhahood. At death, the merit and demerit of the soul are balanced, and the next condition of the wandering soul determined according to a system of debit and credit. The wicked king may be re-born as a slave or even pass into the body of a toad. The soul of a slave may be re-born in one of royal degree or may even ascend to an habitation in the celestial spheres. Hence it behoves every living being during this life upon earth to make as much merit as it possibly can, and as the custom of alms-giving is held to be a very profitable method of investment for the future, it is widely practised by king and peasant alike, each giving to the priests or to those of [Pg 277]

his fellow-men who may be in distress, according to the abundance of his possession of this world's goods. That portion of Buddha's teaching which deals with the law of cause and effect in its relation to the progression or retrogression of migrating souls, has been lost to all except the few, and a mere superstition reigns in its stead.

An English resident in Siam had a servant who frequently absented himself from his duties. On each occasion, when questioned by his master as to the cause of his absence, he replied, "Please, sir, I went to make merit." Said the Englishman, perhaps a little too irreverently, "At the rate you are making merit, I should think you would be an archangel when you die."—"Ah no," replied the servant, "I don't want to be an angel. I don't want to get to Nirvana. I shouldn't like to make enough merit to get to Nirvana; I only want to make just enough merit to be born back again into this world as a royal prince, with lots of money, plenty of wives and heaps of fun."

"Merit" is made in many other ways besides alms-giving and feeding the priests. A woman who was robbed devoted the lost money to merit-making, and gave it charitably away. Even the scattering of limes containing lottery tickets at important cremations and public ceremonies is considered merit-making. Tradition relates that when Buddha was being sorely tempted by the evil Mara, he appealed to the fiend to answer whether or not, he, the tempted one, had not in his lifetime on earth been conspicuous for generous alms-giving, and the world made affirmative [Pg 278] answer for him by a gigantic earthquake. And so the modern Buddhist believes that his merit-making and his alms-giving will cry out on his behalf when he passes from this earthly life into some other condition at present unrevealed to him.

Even their reluctance to kill any living thing is merely another form of the same belief. That it is wrong to destroy the life of anything, be it that of a seed or that of a snake, for the reasons taught by Buddha, they do not seem to know. But they have it firmly established amongst their current superstitions that to take life would be an act of demerit that would be reckoned against them in the future, and so they abstain from killing, though they will readily eat what others have destroyed. They justify their fishing operations by saying that they do not kill the fish, but that they only pull them out of the water, after which they die a natural death.

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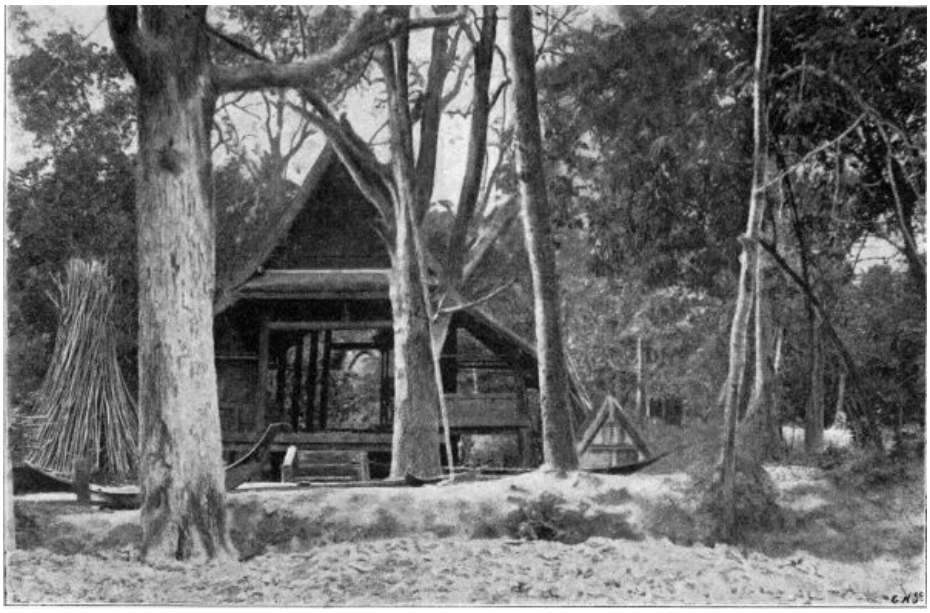

"SALA" IN A JUNGLE CLEARING.

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Now one of the most ostentatious ways of purchasing future happiness is the building of a "wat." There the priests will find a home; there the people may adorn the images, make frequent offerings to Buddha, and engage in other meritorious works; there the children may be taught to read and write; and there all men may see a lasting evidence of the wealth and devotion of the builders. And so temples were built year by year without ceasing, until there are hundreds more than would be wanted even if every man, woman, and child in the land were regular worshippers. Time lays its heavy hand upon these perishable structures and works their ruin. Seeds sprout in [Pg 281] nooks and crevices and their growing roots burst open the walls and roofs. The torrent rains lend their powerful aid in the work of destruction, and in the course of the builder's lifetime the sacred building may become a ruin. But until quite lately, these "wats" were never repaired; they were built and left to crumble. The continued erection of temples has been suspended during late years, partly owing to the influence of the king, who has wisely urged that the repairing of an old and falling "wat" is a more useful and equally effective way of making merit than the building of a new one.

The word "wat," or temple, includes many structures. They frequently stand in extensive grounds, shaded by giant banyans, and surrounded by strong, well-built walls or fences. They are refuges for destitute animals as well as for men seeking retirement. The litter of pariah puppies that must not be destroyed, although not wanted, is deposited inside the temple grounds, there to be fed on the scraps that remain when the monks have finished their midday meal. The central building or church where the idols are kept, the prayers recited, and the priests ordained, is called the

"bote." Round about it are the houses or cells inhabited by the monks. These may be of wood or stone, of an orthodox cell-like pattern, or they may be ordinary native houses specially erected in the precincts of the "bote" for the accommodation of the priests. They should possess no furniture, and rarely do so.

All temples may be divided into two classes, called respectively Wat Luang and Wat Ratsadon. [Pg 282] The first are endowed and dedicated by royalty, while the second class comprises all others. The land on which these buildings are erected becomes for ever the property of the chapter, and cannot be taken away by law, or sold, or in any way disposed of for secular purposes. The central buildings are chiefly of a uniform oblong shape, and are built of wood, brick, or stone, the outer walls being washed or painted white. A colonnade runs round the outside, supported by strong, square pillars of teak-wood, that lean inwards from the base to the roof. The roof may be built in one, two or three tiers, but is always covered with differently coloured tiles arranged in symmetrical patterns. Gold-leaf is lavishly used in the ornamentation of the gabled ends of the roof, and a new temple, with the mid-day sun shining full upon it, presents a very brilliant appearance, especially when seen through the bright green foliage around it. The walls are pierced by a number of windows which are closed by strong teak shutters. The doors of the poorer temples are of plain, unvarnished, undecorated teak, and though solid, are not handsome. In the wealthier "wats" the decoration of doors and windows is often very beautiful. The doors are either ornamented with very intricate designs worked in gold upon a black background, or with scenes in the life of Buddha worked in mother-of-pearl upon a foundation of shining black lacquer. The interiors of the numerous "botes" are variously adorned. There may be only dirty walls, or brilliant mosaics, elaborate designs or painted pictures. Some of the pictures are [Pg 283] extremely funny. In one of the temples in the capital, the artist who has been entrusted with the internal decorations has mixed together in ludicrous confusion, scenes from the life of Buddha, events in Hindoo mythology, and rough reproductions of old European drawings. He has placed a number of European ladies and gentlemen of the time of Louis XIV, on the side of a hill, where they are enjoying themselves with dance and song. It is a rural picnic. Under the hill is a railway tunnel with a train about to enter, and on the summit is Buddha in a contemplative attitude brooding over the whole, but owing to the faulty perspective of the drawing, it is impossible to state whether Buddha is contemplating the scene of merriment, or brooding over the curious handiwork of the designer.

One image of Buddha in a sitting posture occupies the place of honour at the far end of the temple, facing the door. The number of smaller images varies considerably from half a dozen to several hundreds. In one of the temples in the old capital of Ayuthia there are over twenty thousand. They are covered all over with gold-leaf, and the eyes of the larger ones are made of mother-of-pearl. Some of the most barbarous laws in the Siamese civil code relate to the profanation of idols. They are never enforced now, and any need for them must at any time have been very small.

Section 48 of the above code is: "If a thief steal an image of Buddha, and use various devices for removing its ornaments, such as washing or smelting, let him be put into a furnace and be [Pg 284] treated in exactly the same way as he treated the image, and thus pay for his wickedness."

Section 49 says, "If any thief strip a Buddha image of its gold or gilding, let him be taken to a public square and a red-hot iron rubbed over him till he is stripped of his skin, as he stripped the image of its gold, and thus pay for his crime. If a thief scratch the gold from a Buddha image, pagoda, or temple, or sacred tree, let his fingers be cut off."

Heaped round the altar are the offerings of the merit-makers,—old bottles, Birmingham-made vases, clocks, china, saucers, joss-sticks, looking-glasses, bits of coloured glass, and many other articles of equally trivial value. In addition to these things for the adornment of the altar or the use of the temple, the priests also receive food, clothes, money, mosquito netting, boats and small pieces of native furniture. After a big alms-giving day the interior of the sacred pile looks something like an auction room awaiting the commencement of a sale.

The "Prachadee" is a conspicuous feature of all ecclesiastical architecture. It is a brick or stone monument, round at the base, but tapering to a long thin spire at the top, as shown in several of the illustrations in this book. It represents the primitive tope or relic mound, and covers either a relic or an image of Buddha. When a genuine relic cannot be obtained, an imitation of one answers the same purpose. Around the "bote", the most holy of all the buildings, are placed eight stones, one at each of the eight chief points of the compass. They are called "bai sema," and are [Pg 285] cut in the shape of the leaf of the *ficus religiosa* or Bo-tree. They mark out the boundaries of the consecrated part of the "wat." They are erected when the temple is first consecrated. Eight round smooth stones are first buried a little way below the ground, together with the relic or image. Holy water is sprinkled over them, and across the boundary thus formed the spirits of evil intent have not the courage to intrude. Small, solid, cubical platforms of brick are built over the stones, and on the platforms are placed the gilded or painted stone representations of the sacred leaf. These again are covered with a canopy of stone cut in a similar shape, and often elaborately carved or inlaid with mosaics.

Every monastery has its bell-tower, whose chimes call the priests to prayers, tell when the sun has crossed its mid-day path, and "toll the knell of parting day". The towers are of wood and have three stories, in each of which is placed one bell. The bells are painted pale blue, and ornamented with broad plain bands of gold-leaf, which run round the rim, and also divide the surface into four equal segments. They are remarkable for their purity of tone, and are not to be equalled by the

bells usually found in Western churches. The tone is soft and sweet, and at the same time so penetrating that it can be heard for long distances. The bells are not rung, but are beaten. The first few strokes are given slowly and gently, then they gradually increase in rapidity and force, till the bell resounds under a torrent of blows, the tone becoming louder and louder, but never [Pg 286] jarring or discordant.

Not only at every temple, but in many secluded spots at the entrances to lonely canals, and on the edges of the distant jungle, rest-houses are built for the use of wanderers. They are called "salas", and to build a "sala" is a work of merit. As the erection of one of these rest-houses involves less expense than the building of a temple, they are therefore even more abundant than the temples. They consist simply of a wooden platform raised a few feet above the ground by strong posts. Several pillars round the sides of the platform support a thatched or tiled roof. There are no walls and no rooms. Here the traveller, be he native or foreigner, may hold a picnic, may eat, rest, and sleep without expense or interruption. Madmen and lunatics choose the rest-houses near the temples as places where they can live quietly without fear of molestation.

The description given above would apply to the majority of Siamese temples. But it is worth our while to look in detail at a few of the more noted temples in the capital.

The royal temple, Wat Prakow, stands within the circumference of the outer wall that surrounds the palace and the government offices, and on account of the part it plays in important State ceremonies, and because it is the king's own place of worship, it is far more elaborate than any of the other temples of the country. At this temple the water of allegiance is taken and the oath of allegiance is sworn, and in the same building was held the requiem service for the late Crown [Pg 287] Prince. A central "prachadee" stands in the courtyard of the temple, surrounded by many similar structures of lesser height and beauty. The large one in the centre towers high above all the surrounding buildings, and is said to be covered with plates of gold. It certainly looks like a solid mass of that precious metal, and at sunrise and sunset when it catches the roseate hues of the rising or the setting sun, its golden surface can be seen from afar, shining and glittering like a second sun itself, above the coloured roofs of the temples and the white or many-tinted spires that are associated with it. The smaller relic mounds are covered with mosaics of glass and enamel roughly set in plaster. The bits of glass and enamel are not laid in the plaster so as to form a level surface, but here and there they stand out in tiny rosettes, branches and flowers, and fruit and animals. At a distance the rude character of the workmanship is totally hidden, the tawdry appearance of the material is completely lost, and as the uneven surfaces reflect the brilliant light of the sun, the spire-capped shrines form a series of glittering satellites around the central spire of gold.

From the temple courtyard the roof of the large and imposing modern palace can be seen. In the centre, and at either end of the triple-coloured roof, is one of those crown-shaped spires so common in all state and ecclesiastical buildings in Siam. It has been stated that "upon a nearer approach to the magnificent spectacle of Wat Prakow, so dazzling is the effect that it is hard to convince yourself that you are not actually standing before buildings set with precious stones." [Pg 288] Now this is not by any means true. The temples of Buddha in Siam are like Buddhism itself, seen to the greatest advantage when distance has lent its proverbial enchantment. Even as the moral teaching of the great philosopher when viewed through the spectacles of Western professors, is a very different creed to that followed by the people, so the temples when seen through the golden mist of early morning from a distant point of view, are brilliant and beautiful beyond description, though on a nearer view, the perishable and paltry character of the material of which they are constructed destroys the appearance of magnificence, leaving, however, in the place of earlier impressions, a feeling of wonder at the marvellous skill of the people who can produce such striking effects from such tawdry material. Near to the gilded "prachadee" is the actual "bote" used by the king, surmounted by a similar spire, which is overlaid with sapphire-coloured plates of glass and porcelain; while a little distance away stands the larger temple, set in parts with mosaics of emerald green upon a gilt background. There are several smaller spires of ruby red, bright yellow, or snowy white, standing amongst this mass, whose tapering summits are exceedingly slender and graceful in form, though the raised flowers and decorations that surround their bases are made of nothing but common porcelain and glass. One really valuable "prachadee" is constructed of pure white marble, and stands upon a heavy base supported by seven elephants cast in bronze. In various places near the doors of the temple, or the gates in the [Pg 289] walls surrounding the courtyard, there are a number of enormous, grotesque figures, some in helmets, and some in old-fashioned chimney-pot hats. They are evidently of foreign origin, and the sculptor has produced an extremely comical effect by so cutting the eyes as to give them an unmistakable leer or wink. They represent demons, and are supposed to guard the entrance to the sacred edifice. Each figure leans upon a gigantic staff, and gazes into the faces of all those who enter the courtyard or buildings. There are also griffins in stone, the representations of powerful kings who keep the world from being entirely captured by the spirits of evil. The stone lions are the emblems of Shakyamuni in his character as king of men and beasts. A large, bronze figure of the sitting Buddha rests opposite a row of these quaintly carved images of men and animals. It is seated upon a pedestal of marble under a canopy fashioned in imitation of a lotus leaf. The lotus leaf is the Buddhist lily, even as the Bo-tree is the Buddhist cross, and the forms of both these plant structures appear again and again in temple decorations. The lotus is especially noticeable in the lotus-shaped capitals of the huge teak pillars that support the roofs and colonnades of the holy "bote."

The courtyard which contains all these vari-coloured and fantastic shrines and images, is paved

with slabs of white stone and marble, which reflect the heat and light of the sun with oppressive intensity. Other creations in marble, bronze, stone, and wood, set with the same mosaics of cheap [Pg 290] china and common glass, and representing Europeans, fishes, dolphins, and fabulous monsters are scattered profusely but irregularly amongst the larger and more conspicuous monuments. The roofs are covered with coloured tiles. There is a central rectangle in orange, yellow or red, with its edges set parallel to the roof, while round it run several borders in red, blue, and green. Owing to the height of the buildings these coloured roofs are always so far removed from the eye of the spectator that they never lose their artistic appearance. The gables are of wood or metal, and curve upwards at the ends into a peculiar ornament, which is so common in civil as well as religious architecture as to cause much speculation as to its meaning. It has been described as being symbolical of many things, but it most probably represents the head of the Naga or king of snakes. Round the edges of the roofs of several of the constituent buildings of this royal "wat," are hung many small sweetly toned bells, whose silvery voices may be heard in the farthest corners of the enclosure as they swing to and fro with every gentle breeze. The windows and doors are deeply sunk in the extremely thick walls. They are covered with black lacquer and look as though they were made of ebony. Designs in mother-of-pearl have been worked into the lacquer, while the hinges and fastenings of the separate shutters have been richly gilt.

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TEMPLE BELL-TOWER.

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The floor of the chief building is covered with matting made entirely of woven silver wire. The [Pg 293] roof is lofty, and is made of teak. The room is of the usual oblong shape, but at the further end a magnificent altar-like shrine stretches from side to side. The sides of this valuable altar are covered with gold-leaf and gilded glass, which lose a little of their dazzling brilliancy, though they gain in depth of colour, in the subdued light of the interior. Small prachadees in clusters stand at the same end of the temple, all heavily gilt. This Buddhist temple is unique amongst Siamese temples in containing objects of real value. Inside there is nothing tawdry and cheap. Everything is genuine as becomes the gift of a king. On a square table at the back, supported on the tall conical hats of twelve large figures, are seated seven figures of Buddha, in pure solid gold. One hand of each of the figures is raised and pointing upwards. On every finger and thumb of the uplifted hand glitters a king's ransom in rings of emeralds, sapphires, and rubies, while in the centre of each palm shines and flashes a rosette of diamonds. Away up in a dim recess towards which the seven hands are pointing, there is an image of Buddha, often said to be cut out of one enormous emerald. In reality, it is made of jade. This stone is reported to be of priceless value. It cannot easily be examined by visitors as it is partly hidden in shadow, but with a pair of opera-glasses the features are easily distinguishable. The idol is said to have fallen from heaven into one of the Laos states. It was captured from these Northern people by its present owners. It possesses three diamond eyes of great value, the third of which is set in the centre of the [Pg 294] forehead. It has several times been lost or stolen, but has always been recovered.

There are many rare and precious vessels for the temple services, such as cups, incense burners, and candlesticks made of gold and studded with jewels, but unfortunately the workmanship is in

some cases very defective, and the stones have lost a great deal of their value by being badly set and cut. One or two museum cases are to be seen, containing offerings made by royalty or wealthy noblemen. Round the base of the altar are a number of ebony tables holding the usual vases, wax flowers, and clocks, but in this temple they are all of real value.

The walls and ceiling are painted in native style and colour, with scenes from the life of Buddha, and from the Hindoo myth of Ramayana. They are executed with that curious absence of perspective common to Oriental pictures, but nevertheless many of the figures are full of life and action. In particular, the elephants are usually accurately drawn, though strangely coloured.

We may fitly close this chapter with an account of one of the country temples given by H. Warington Smyth in his "Notes of a Journey on the Upper Mekong."

"At Wieng Chan, on the north bank (of the Mekong), the remains of the great Wat Prakaon are very fine; the latter rises from a series of terraces, up which broad flights of steps lead, and is of large proportions. The effect of height is increased by the perpendicular lines of the tall columns [Pg 295] which support the great east and west porticos, and which line the walls along the north and south; the windows between the latter being small, and narrower at the top than at the bottom, also lead the eye up. A second row of columns once existed, and the effect must have been very fine. Now the roof is gone, and the whole structure crowned by a dense mass of foliage, as is the case with all the remains of smaller buildings not yet destroyed. One very beautiful little pagoda at the west end is now encased in a magnificent peepul tree which has grown in and around it, and has preserved it in its embrace. There are remains of several deep water-tanks; and the grounds, which were surrounded by a brick wall, must once have been beautiful. But the best thing at Wieng Chan, or the old city, as they call it, is the gem of a monastery known as Wat Susaket. It is a small building, the Wat itself, of the usual style, with a small lantern rising from the central roof. The walls are very massive, and, with the height inside, the place was delightfully cool; all round the interior, from floor to roof, the walls are honeycombed with small niches in rows, in which stand the little gilt images, looking out imperturbably, generally about eight inches in height.

"Round this building, outside, runs a rectangular cloister which faces inwards, and here, at one time, the monks were living amongst the statues which stand round the walls, many of these three and more feet high, while the walls too are ornamented with niches similar to those inside the main building. In the centre of each side there is a gateway surmounted by a gable, there [Pg 296] being also similar ornaments at each corner. The beauty and retired air of the court inside could not be surpassed, and the effect of the green grass, the white walls, the low-reaching, red-tiled roofs, and the deep shadows is charming; there is nothing flat, nothing vulgarly gaudy, and very little that is out of repair. And here, as is most noticeable in the remains of the other buildings about, the proportions are perfect. In this the ruined remains of Wieng Chan surpass all other buildings I have seen in Siam, and bear witness to a true artistic sense in the builders."

CHAPTER XV. [Pg 297]

AMONG THE TEMPLES (*continued*).

Several of the larger "wats" in the capital are deserving of further notice. The largest temple in the country is Wat Poh. It has often been said that "he who has seen Wat Poh has seen every Buddhist temple in Siam." It covers an immense extent of ground in the very heart of the great city, and inside its high brick walls are gathered together examples in wood and stone, in bronze and porcelain, of everything connected with ecclesiastical architecture in the country. Its chief attraction is an immense idol. In one of the lofty buildings lies a sleeping Buddha of gigantic proportions. It is probably the largest image of its kind in the world. The room containing it is over two hundred feet long. The idol itself is one hundred and seventy-five feet long, so that it practically occupies the whole of the building, with the exception of a narrow passage all round the base of the rectangular brick platform on which it reclines. The heavy shutters and ponderous doors are always locked, except when some inquisitive foreigner desires to view. His wish can be gratified by the payment to the man in charge of a fee varying from eighteen-pence to two [Pg 298] shillings. After payment has been made, the gigantic doors are flung open and the visitor enters, only to find himself in almost total darkness. One by one a few of the heavy shutters are slowly opened and a little daylight gradually admitted. The light falls upon the dull red walls or elaborate frescoes, and upon the sides of the sleeping figure, but loses itself at last in the dim recesses of the lofty roof. When the eye has become accustomed to the gloom, the peculiar wonder of the spectacle begins to be appreciated. The whole of the building or the image cannot be seen from any one point of view. The gigantic idol is made of brick, which has been covered over with cement. Upon the cement a smooth layer of lacquer has been deposited, and then the whole coated with gold-leaf. The figure measures eighteen feet across the chest; the feet are fifteen feet in length; and the toes are each three feet long. The soles of the feet are inlaid with symbols in mother-of-pearl, according to the legend which states that Buddha had upon his feet at birth a number of signs that proclaimed his true character. The head is covered with a conical cluster of spiral curls, the apex of the cone being far away from human eye in the shadows of the rafted roof.

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WAT CHANG, BANGKOK.
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The sketch of the figure given in this book is the only drawing of the idol in existence, and no photo has ever been taken by any of the local photographers owing to the darkness of the interior. It was only on payment of a heavy bribe that the caretaker allowed the artist to put up his easel. After further debate, followed by a fee, he condescended to open a few more windows [Pg 301] so as to admit sufficient light to render any sketching possible. While the sketch was being made, a small piece of the gilded lacquer fell from the chest of the recumbent idol. In less time almost than it takes to write of the occurrence, the windows were closed, the place veiled in utter darkness, and the artist unceremoniously requested to leave the building. The man evidently expected the whole structure to fall upon his unlucky head as a punishment for allowing the sacred place to be so desecrated by the white man. Doubtless by this time the caretaker has worked off the demerit he earned that day, by devoting some of the money he then received to purchasing merit in one of the many ways known to him.

In the grounds of Wat Poh there are several ponds, shaded by magnificent trees, and surrounded by grotesque figures in stone. These ponds are the homes of a few alligators, which are kept and fed by the priests and servants of the temple.

Almost opposite to Wat Poh, on the other bank of the river, is Wat Chang, a marvel to every one who has ever seen it. The actual "bote," the priests' houses, and the relic mounds are in no respect extraordinary, but on the bank of the river is a huge monument consisting of a series of pagodas resting on a square base. It is this collection of pinnacles that attracts and charms the eye. Their form is not that of the slender-spired "prachadee," but that of a bluntly pointed pyramid, and they are known as "praprang." Viewed from a little distance, they look, as any photo [Pg 302] shows, like a collection of beautifully carved stone pinnacles, but a closer view reveals the fact that they are only made of brick and plaster and covered with divers figures made of broken plates and saucers. Thousands upon thousands of pieces of cheap china must have been smashed to bits in order to furnish sufficient material to decorate this curious structure. It must be admitted that though the material is tawdry, the effect is indescribably wonderful. It is not until one stands close to the work itself that it is possible to realise that the elaborate designs and the quaint figures are merely so many pieces of common china. The tallest of the pagodas, the one in the centre, can be seen from many points in the city, and by ascending the steps that lead half way up to the summit, a magnificent view of the capital itself is gained. The winding river and the broad canals shine like ribbons of burnished silver; the houses are hidden beneath masses of foliage, from amongst whose leafy crowns the prettily coloured roofs and the graceful white spires of many temples stand out in bold and picturesque relief. At sunset the details of the structure of the pagodas of Wat Chang are lost, but the mass of spires and pinnacles takes on a purple tint which changes to one of dusky hue as the light fades slowly from the sky. The whole edifice is in its way a triumph of decorative skill of which the people are reasonably proud.

The Golden Hill is the name given to an artificial mound about two hundred feet high, which [Pg 303] faces the public crematorium where the vultures congregate. At first it is difficult to believe that it is not a genuine hillock, for though later investigation shows it to be constructed of bricks and mortar, trees have been planted on it and creepers trained over it, till it looks as though Nature in some sportive mood had raised an isolated hill amidst the broad extent of low-lying plain by which it is surrounded. On the summit of this leaf-clad brick and plaster mound is a snow-white prachadee with a very large base. The interior of the round basal portion is an open room, in the middle of which, guarded by iron railings, stands a gilded shrine containing an imitation in glass of the famous tooth of Buddha which is preserved in Ceylon. From the size of the original it is evidently spurious, for it is impossible to conceive that the ancient philosopher and teacher possessed the benign and dignified aspect that is attributed to him, if the tooth shown is really

genuine. The scoffing sceptic has even hinted that it is of equine origin. The Bangkok relic is not shown to the worshippers. It is hidden in its gilt case, and many of the natives who bow before the shrine really believe that the object it contains is not an imitation, but an actual tooth of Buddha. Steep stone staircases lead from the smooth lawn at the base to the shrine upon the summit. In clear weather the view extends far away to the jungle-clad interior in one direction, and in the other, to the distant blue hills upon the eastern shores of the gulf. At one time foreigners frequently ascended The Golden Hill for the sake of the view, but since the time of the [Pg 304] Franco-Siamese trouble it has been guarded by soldiers, and no one is allowed to pass the sentries on duty without a special permit signed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

On three days of the year, however, when a special holiday occurs in connection with the worship of the relic, the hill is open to every one. Around the base are set up numerous stalls, booths, and side-shows, and a native fair with all its varied attractions draws thousands of people to the spot. Side by side are the booths where the missionaries sell their school books and their translations of certain portions of the Bible, and the stalls where the wonderful wicker-work made by the prisoners in the jails is offered for sale. Gambling tents, shadow pantomimes, and Chinese theatres are in full swing. There is but very little direct purchasing. Nearly every booth has a lottery. You may pay sixpence for the privilege of rolling three wooden balls along a bagatelle table. You will then be allowed to choose an article whose value varies according to the numbers in the holes into which the little spheres have rolled. At another place a man stands behind a board in which a square hole has been cut on a level with his face. He moves his head quickly backwards and forwards in front of the hole, poking out his tongue and rolling his eyes with marvellous rapidity. At the quickly appearing and disappearing countenance you are permitted to throw three tennis balls, and if you are successful in hitting the distorted features, you receive a [Pg 305] prize of little value. It is an Oriental form of Aunt Sally, with a living Aunt of male extraction, willing to be a target at the rate of three shots for sixpence. On another stall every article has a thread fastened to it. The loose ends of the cotton strands are collected and passed through a bit of hollow bamboo about six inches long. You pay your money and you choose your thread. Then the proprietor traces it out, and you get what is fastened to the other end of it. The prizes range from a common piece of slate pencil, to a penny exercise book, and a German concertina.

All the merit-makers before indulging in the fun of the fair, first buy a bit of gold-leaf, a few wax flowers, or a tiny candle, then mount the steep and broken steps, kneel in front of the shrine, stick their gold-leaf on the iron railings, light their candles and fix them on iron spikes, and throw their waxen blossoms into a blazing bonfire. The visitor to the summit looks down upon a ring of twinkling lights, beyond which lies the deep darkness. The air is full of many sounds. A native band discourses native airs with customary vigour in front of the shrine itself; a military band plays operatic selections in a band-stand half way up the hill; and the devotees bang the big deep-toned bells with more force than is demanded by purely religious feeling. Up from the crowd below comes the roar of hundreds of human voices, the cries of the cheap jacks and lottery owners, and the shouts of the men with the shows, all telling of the animation and excitement that exists amongst the dark-looking figures that ever move, but never leave a vacant spot in the [Pg 306] brilliant torch-lit avenues and passages. The priests sit in long pavilions, their yellow robes and shaven heads set off by the red and white draperies of their temporary resting-places. They drink tea and chew betel-nut incessantly, chatter and laugh with animation, and evidently enjoy the fun quite as much as any of their lay brethren who have come to the place for the double purpose of making merry and making merit.

Another temple, Wat Samplum, boasts a copy of Buddha's famous footprint, which is also worshipped amidst much jollity for three days each year. This footprint is sunk in the centre of the floor of a small spire-crowned room on the top of a low artificial hillock. It has no toes and also no heel. It is shaped like an infant's bath, and is about three feet long, two feet wide, and eighteen inches deep, and has been cut or moulded with strict mathematical regularity. It passes the wit of any European to imagine by what process of logical or illogical reasoning any person could bring himself to look upon this curious object as having the slightest resemblance to a human footprint. The usual fair accompanies the worship, and the believers have no sooner plastered their bit of gold-leaf on the sides or sole of the footprint than they descend the little elevation to take their part in the fun that rages fast and furiously at the bottom.

There are in several of the northern mountain ranges or isolated hills large limestone or granite caves which have been utilised at various times for religious purposes. Near to the walled city of [Pg 307] Karnbooree on the River Meklong, there is one large cave which was used as a store-house for idols and offerings during the last war between the Siamese and Burmese. Here the discoloured images and the withered offerings remain to this day, rarely visited by any one; the entrances to the cavern being nearly blocked up by the jungle growth which has flourished undisturbed for many years.

In the town of Petchabooree there are several caves occupying the whole interior of a hill which is open at the summit and bears all the appearances of an extinct volcano. These caves are still distinctly used as temples. Steps have been cut in the solid rock to form an easy means of descent to their open mouths. One of them receives its light through a crater-like opening in the hill-side; some of them are too dark to be visited without the aid of torches or lanterns. The floors have in all cases been nicely levelled and sanded, while one has been neatly tiled. Idols are arranged in rows round the sides, and Buddhas in standing, sleeping, or sitting postures occupy every jutting crag and hollow corner. Tiny holes, often hidden behind a gigantic image, lead into little, dark, dirty, damp recesses with plank beds and torch smoked altars, where hermits live, or

years ago have lived, in retirement. There is something almost grotesque in these cavern interiors. Huge stalactites and stalagmites shine in the light of the entering sun, or look gloomy and solemn in the fitful spluttering of the smoky torches There is a grandeur of natural power and strength in the great pillars and deep recesses, all tending to make the gilded figures of the benevolent Gautama and his chief disciples look more tawdry and worthless than when seen in their more suitable surroundings in the brick and wooden temples of his living followers. [Pg 308]

One very noticeable feature in the interiors of many temple buildings is the management of the light to increase their solemnity and their impressiveness. For instance, in the case of the sleeping Buddha in Wat Poh, even when many of the windows round it have been opened, the head is still partly hidden in darkness, so that the effect of the height is increased and the wonder of the spectator intensified. And again, Mr. Smyth mentions in the book quoted above, a small "wat" called Wat Boria, where "there is a very fine Buddha, on whose head and shoulders the light is thrown from a small window in the roof. The effect is quite impressive, and does great credit to the architect who designed it. This is by no means the only place in Siam where the light is dexterously managed." He also mentions that at Wat Chinareth, "one enters a monk's doorway at the south-eastern corner from a cloister, and is at first lost in the gloom. At last the great black columns with their elaborate gilt ornamentation (the one decoration they understand in Siam) grow out in the feeble light from the little narrow windows in the low side walls. The lofty peaked roof rises far into blackness."

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THE SLEEPING BUDDHA.

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Mention has frequently been made of the extensive use of gold-leaf in the decoration of shrines and images. The import of this commodity is of the annual value of about one hundred and sixty to two hundred thousand Mexican dollars. And in addition to what is imported, a large quantity is manufactured in Bangkok by Chinese goldsmiths. Near to one of the temples inside the city walls there is a small settlement whose chief employment is the beating of gold-leaf. They get thin pieces of gold about a quarter of an inch square, and put them between thick pieces of white oily paper. Sheets of gold-leaf and sheets of paper are arranged alternately in a pile about two inches thick. This packet of paper and gold is put inside a stout leathern covering which is left open at two sides, and is then placed on a hard stone slab some three or four inches thick. The gold-beater takes a large, heavy hammer with an iron head, and pounds the little parcel in front of him with all his strength. He continues his hammering until the bits of gold have been considerably flattened out. He next takes the thin gold sheets and puts them between finer pieces of white Chinese paper, and then continues his pounding until the sheets have become sufficiently attenuated to be used for the gilding of images and ornaments. Gold-leaf is sold in sheets about three inches square at the rate of fifteen to eighteen shillings per thousand sheets. [Pg 311]

Not only is gold-leaf used for covering idols and shrines, but it is also used by native artists in the decorations of the walls. Earth colours are used for painting figures and scenery; but whenever a figure requires a golden crown or ornament, or the representation of a shrine or temple requires a golden decoration, then gold-leaf is always used, and the contrast between the bright reflecting surface of the metal and the dull appearance of the washes of the earth colours is very striking. [Pg 312]

A favourite subject for religious pictures is the representation of the different hells, of which there are eight. Though the account of the infernal regions as given below may seem very gruesome, there is nothing repulsive in their pictorial presentation by the native artist, owing to utter lack of any effect of realism. In fact, most Europeans require an interpreter in order to understand their meaning. The eight major hells are all places of fearful torment. In the first of the series the condemned creature is cut into infinitesimal pieces, every cut producing its own agonies, as the sense of feeling is never destroyed. When the body has thus been mutilated, a wind possessing life-restoring properties, blows over the torn remains and renovates them once more into a perfect human being, which is again mutilated by the attendants. The torment is repeated indefinitely; but a time arrives at last when the restored body is cast into another portion of the same hell to be the sport of cruel monsters. In this first hell one day is equal in length to nine hundred thousand years.

In the second hell the floor is of molten iron, and as the lost ones tread the liquid metal they sink into it and die in frightful pain. A new life follows the recent death, and again and again is the terrible punishment inflicted through long periods of time, where one day is measured by thirty-six million years upon earth. [Pg 313]

The inhabitants of the third hell have lost a portion of their human form. Either they have human heads, and animals' bodies, or their human bodies possess animals' heads. They are the playthings of innumerable fiends who drive them with thongs from one mountain to another, and ever as they run, great masses of rock fall upon them, wounding and killing them. But as in all the other regions inhabited by the guilty, a new life springs from the dead bodies, that the cruel torment may be re-inflicted.

The fourth hell is beautiful to look upon. Its floor is covered with the sacred lotus, but hidden amongst its rosy petals are sharp-pointed iron spikes. And as the damned come to the edges of hell, they are seized by the powerful arms of diabolical monsters, who fling them with Titanic force upon the treacherous flowers below. They are flung times without number, their wailing and moaning echoing and re-echoing through the corridors of hell for a space of four thousand years whose every day is equal to seventy-six million years upon earth.

The fifth of the series resembles the fourth inasmuch as its floor is covered with iron-spiked blossoms. But the erring souls continually attempt to escape. With much anxiety of mind and weariness of body, they raise themselves from their spiny bed only to be met by fiends armed with gigantic sledge-hammers. Fierce blows of their ponderous weapons send them reeling back to their torment, amidst the horrible laughter of their fierce captors. [Pg 314]

The sixth hell is that of everlasting fire, but of even a more revolting character than that preached by so many Christian teachers. For amidst the roaring flames of the blazing pit scamper the giant dogs of hell, whose teeth are of sharpened iron. They seize their prey, and devour it with insatiable appetite. After being eaten the wicked are re-born, again roasted in the infernal fire, again devoured by iron fangs and so on and on for sixteen thousand weary years.

In the seventh hell the sides are steep hills, but they apparently present a means of escape. Up the precipitous incline the lost ones toil and clamber, but terrific gusts of wind ever hurl them headlong to the bottom on to a floor of iron spikes.

The last of the series is another of unquenchable fire. Here the lost are so crowded together that they have no room to move. This is the deepest and widest hell of all, and here the throng of sufferers must endure their torments until that day when a great cloud shall appear in the heavens, announcing the end of the world.

As if these eight diabolical creations of some fiendish mortal's brain did not contain sufficient terrors to frighten the wicked, all the eight major hells have each been subdivided into sixteen minor ones equally revolting. They are all of cubical shape, and measure thirty leagues each way; but not wishing to weary the reader by detailing their several characters, only one is here mentioned in illustration of their general nature. In one of these minor hells every one suffers from intolerable thirst. Through its gloomy confines flows a river whose waters are saturated with salt. The wretches, maddened by the thirst which none may relieve, fling themselves into the briny flood. Along the banks stand devils with long iron poles with burning hooks, who fish them out again, mutilate their bodies with the red-hot iron, and when they cry aloud in their madness for water, pour molten iron down their scorching throats. [Pg 315]

CHAPTER XVI. [Pg 316]

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES.

Religious ceremonies follow one another with incredible rapidity in the "Kingdom of the Yellow Robe." They are observed by every one, not on account of their religious value, but because they afford excellent reasons for indulging in general holidays. A few of the more important ones will be dealt with in this and the two succeeding chapters.

THET MAHA CHAT. The first one to be noticed here is the "Thet maha chat" or "The Preaching of the Story of the Great Birth." It does not, like the other ceremonies we shall describe, occur on definitely stated days, and in many instances, does not give rise to a general national holiday. It often occurs as a semi-private or domestic religious observance, performed by those and for those whom it immediately concerns. Before describing the manner in which the public and private celebrations of this ceremony are held, it will be advisable to relate the story of the Great Birth according to the account given in the Siamese text, for it is said that this account of the Great Birth does not exist in the Buddhist literature of the surrounding countries.

Buddhist legends, now rejected by many Oriental scholars themselves, relate that the Hindoo philosopher once taught and enlightened his friends and disciples by relating to them at considerable length, five hundred and fifty stories, called "jatakas", about himself. These narratives give a complete account of the various transmigrations of his soul, which he, having attained to Buddhahood, was enabled to vividly recall. Of these five hundred and fifty Birth [Pg 317]

Stories, the Vessantara Jataka relates how he lived upon earth as a noble and virtuous prince called Vessantara. As this was his last existence previous to his re-birth upon earth as Buddha, it is held in high estimation by those who believe in its authenticity. In previous existences he had traversed the whole social scale from king to slave. He had been monarch, courtier, Brahmin ascetic, teacher, prince, nobleman, merchant, slave, potter, and outcast. He had inhabited the bodies of the elephant, tiger, monkey, snake, fish, and frog. In the supernatural worlds he had been a tree-god and a fairy.

The last ten of the Birth Stories are of the greatest interest, as they relate how he successfully attained absolute perfection in all things essential to Buddhahood; and the first nine of them may be fitly summarised as a preface to the story of the tenth or Great Birth.

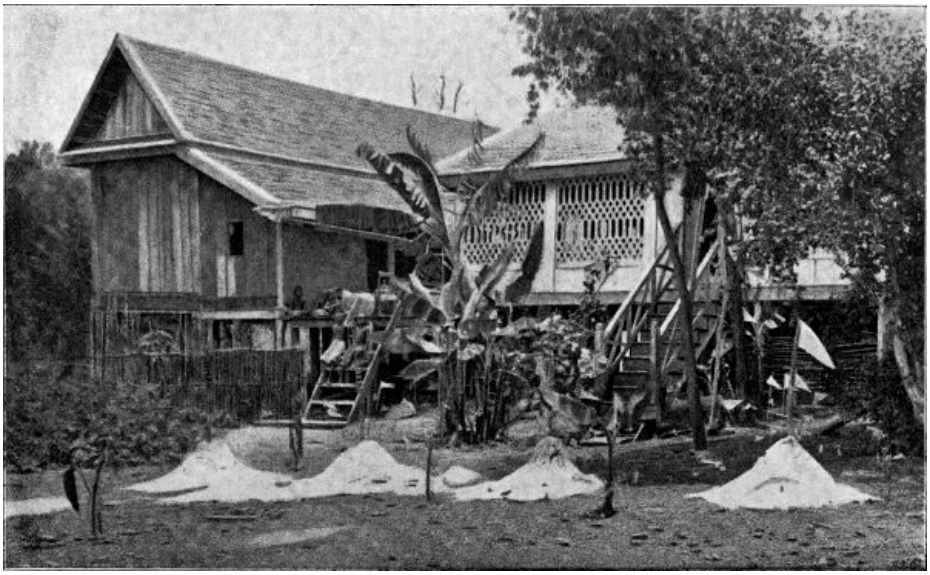
The first story tells how he was born as a prince, the heir to a throne and a crown. Now, whenever, in previous existences, he had reigned as a king, he had invariably suffered and fallen in the succeeding life. He was therefore very anxious to escape the cares and perils of [Pg 318] sovereignty, and so he feigned dumbness. His relatives doubted the reality of his affliction and tried in many ways to make him speak, but all in vain. At last they proposed to bury him alive, and the prospect of this cruel death caused him at last to speak, that he might save his life.

In the second story he is again represented as being the son of a great monarch. His father's younger brother turned traitor, usurped the throne, and put to death him whose crown he had taken. The prince was born in exile, but when he arrived at man's estate he was informed of his real rank and title, and he determined to attempt to regain them. He set sail for his native land, but during the voyage a great storm arose, the vessel was wrecked, and he only managed to save his life by swimming to the distant shore.

The next Birth Story relates that he was the son of blind, ascetic parents, to whom he acted as a faithful servant. He trained a pet deer to carry his bowl for him, and wherever he went the timid creature accompanied him. He was killed in the forest by a stray arrow that a king had shot while hunting.

He was re-born as a king of wonderful power. His dominions included both heaven and hell, and during the period of his sovereignty he managed to visit both these distant portions of his wide domain. History, however, does not relate what he saw or what he did in either of these regions.

[Pg 319]



THE FESTIVAL OF KAW PRASAI.

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He next became the servant of a warrior king, for whom he acted in the capacity of counsellor [Pg 321] and judge, winning for himself great renown for his wisdom and strength of character. On one occasion he is credited with engineering a tunnel through a mighty mountain, that his royal master might fall unawares upon a powerful enemy. The tunnel was constructed, and the attack made with complete success.

The sixth of this set of Birth Stories narrates his career as the Naga king, the monarch of the snake world. His two chief relatives were a human brother, and a sister who inhabited the body of a frog. He himself was a cobra, and one day a skilful snake-charmer captured him, and took him about from place to place on exhibition. He was freed from this humiliating condition by his brother and sister, who ingeniously tricked the wandering showman.

Then again he becomes the son of a king, and holds the position of a judge. Owing to his severity in putting down bribery and corruption, he incurred the displeasure of the Lord Chief Justice, who resented the loss of his valuable perquisites. One night the king dreamt that he had paid a visit to the heavenly regions. When he awoke he sent for the chief judge, and asked him if he could suggest any way of realising the journey, as he would very much like to visit those realms at his leisure. The judge suggested that the trip might be accomplished if the favour of the deities was first obtained by making them an offering commensurate with his desires. He suggested the sacrifice of the prince and all the members of his household. The king accepted the idea, and the [Pg 322]

sacrifice was planned. But several courtiers who had reasons for disliking the chief judge of the kingdom, revealed to their sovereign the enmity that existed between judge and prince. The king, furious at the trick that had been played upon him, instantly ordered the death of the wicked official, but the son, acting with his usual gentleness and mercy, pleaded for his enemy and obtained the remission of his sentence.

In the eighth story he is again a king; but this time devotes his life entirely to the noble practice of alms-giving. So great was his generosity that he soon beggared himself, and was forced to become a hermit. Having nothing left to distribute to those who sought to profit by his benevolence, he conceived the idea of finally giving his own body away in pieces. But the Devas, wishing to save him from the results of such a noble deed, brought him presents of nuggets of gold with which to satisfy the demands of those who daily asked him for alms.

The ninth story presents him to us as a wise man teaching and counselling a king. His fame was noised abroad even unto the uttermost ends of the earth. Amongst those who heard of his wisdom and purity was the Queen of the Nagas. She was so deeply impressed by the stories that reached her, that she fell madly in love with the famous counsellor, and wished, not figuratively, but literally, to possess his heart. From amongst her numerous attendants she chose one who was noted for his cunning, and sent him as her ambassador to the far-off land, with orders to bring [Pg 323] back that which she so much desired. He met with a certain amount of success, for he won the body of the sage by gambling with the king, but all his efforts to put to death the wise old man were ineffectual. And when he was meditating as to the reason of the failure of his murderous attempts, the old man came to him, and spoke to him with words of such tenderness and truth that the emissary returned to the Naga Queen without his prize, but a better and a wiser man.

The tenth Birth Story is the last and the greatest, and bears the distinctive title of "The Great Birth." It is the story of his last existence upon earth as an ordinary human being, and marks the summit of his upward career, the final stage of his successive earthly transmigrations. This story, which we shall presently relate at length, was told by him, after he had become a Buddha, to a great gathering of his friends and relatives, in the famous banyan grove of his native city. Showers of rain fell from heaven, miraculously bathing his holy body, but leaving untouched the throng of people around him. Seven times he appealed to heaven and earth to bear him witness as to the truth of his narrative, and seven times was an answer given in the voice of the thunder and the quaking of the earth.

Siamese tradition goes on to say that after Buddha's death, a holy ascetic ascended to one of the heavens, where he met the Buddha who is next to descend and bless this earth with his teachings. The future Buddha held a long conversation with the earthly visitor in which he told [Pg 324] him, that if the people wished for happiness and prosperity, they must unceasingly perform all the prescribed ceremonies according to the orthodox ritual, and, above all, they must not forget to annually recite the story of "The Great Birth."

At one time, in Siam, Pegu, and Cambodia, it was the universal custom at the end of the rainy season, to gather in private dwellings or temple halls to listen to the reading or recital of the thousand stanzas of the poem which tells the story. The annual celebration is now chiefly a state ceremony performed in special places. In the olden days, offerings were made for the decoration of the halls in which the recital was to be held, and this custom still continues in a smaller degree. The general celebration that formerly took place degenerated at last into a kind of theatrical performance, and was accompanied by pantomime and song. New versions were given; the rhythm of the original poem was altered; and temple vied with temple, and house with house, in the introduction of novelties that would attract large audiences. The late king was a profound scholar and a devout believer in the pure truths and ritual of his religion, and not a nominal Buddhist like the majority of his subjects, and he looked upon these theatrical recitals with their accompanying buffoonery and merriment as being nothing less than a desecration of the famous story, and a burlesque of the life of him whose career they were intended to honour. When he left the cloister for the throne he sternly denounced the exhibition in a decree that is remarkable for [Pg 325] its reasonableness and its forceful expressions. He even went so far as to tell a story, evidently of his own composition, the moral of which was that, as far as any religious merit was concerned, the money spent in preparing for the recitals would be better spent in burning dead dogs' carcasses. His strong expressions of disfavour and disgust have had the desired effect, and the story is now recited in a decent and becoming manner.

The poem, as now recited, contains thirteen cantos and one thousand stanzas, and was written by one of the Siamese kings. It had been prophesied that the holy Buddhist scriptures would ultimately all be lost, and that the Vessantara Jataka, being the most valuable, would be the first to disappear. When the scriptures have all been lost, and man has forgotten the meaning of righteousness, a new Buddha will be born upon earth to teach once more the principles of morality and truth. The "Pious" king who reigned in Siam from 1602 to 1628, is known as a priest celebrated alike for his piety and his learning, and as a king famous for his justice and mercy. He left the temple for the throne, but resigned in favour of his nephew and again returned to the seclusion of the hermit's cell. The prophecy as to the loss of the Jataka deeply affected him, and in order to prevent so great a calamity befalling his people he decided to write it in the form of a poem that it might be handed down from generation to generation. This poem is the gem of Siamese classics, a model of literary style and treatment. King "Pious" was the first of the royal [Pg 326] poets of Siam, but since his day it has been the fashion for the sovereign to write poetical compositions. Both the present king and his father are well known in the country as poets and scholars. The late king was probably the greatest scholar Siam ever had, so that he enjoyed a

double distinction never possessed by any of the monarchs of more civilised lands.

And now for the old king's rendering of the Vessantara Jataka.

In ages long since past, the god Indra called into his presence the beautiful daughter of one of the Devas. He asked her to consent to be re-born into the world of wicked, warring men that she might enjoy the supreme honour and happiness of becoming the mother of the future Buddha. The beautiful spirit maiden was not altogether unwilling to become the recipient of the honour offered her, but before finally consenting, she knelt before the throne of Indra to beg of him ten boons, of such a character that they should preserve her from unhappiness or trouble when she left the regions of heavenly bliss to descend to the realms of earthly woe. She requested that she should be born as one of the highest caste, and that when she was old enough she should be wedded to the powerful monarch Sivi. Not forgetting the personal attractions so desirable in an Oriental queen who wishes for long to retain her husband's affections, she asked for eyes that should be soft and mild like those of the gazelle, and for lashes whose graceful velvety fringe [Pg 327] should be the envy of her rivals and the delight of her husband. Her name was not to be changed from that she had borne, in the gardens of heaven where her graceful figure and handsome face had earned for her the name of "blossom." She also stipulated that she should not experience any of the pains of child-birth, nor at any time suffer any deformation of her slender form. Her youthful appearance was to be preserved for ever from the ruthless hand of time, her complexion and skin to be soft and delicate beyond comparison with those of any earthly rival, and while her beauty enchained the minds of men, she was to win the hearts of all by being allowed to liberate all the prisoners in the land. Her final request included all she had already asked for, and many more besides; for, in a spirit that is delightfully feminine, she asked that when on earth, all her wishes should ever be promptly and completely satisfied. Indra with god-like benevolence granted all her boons, even the last.

In due time she was born on earth, and afterwards wedded to King Sivi. She gave birth to an infant son, the future Buddha in earthly form, who was named by his parents Vessantara. The child gave evidences of his wonderful character by speaking immediately after he was born, and later by his indifference to all earthly pleasures. Neither toys nor jewels were valued by him, and he lived the life of a retired ascetic until he was twenty years old. His father then desired him to marry, and persuaded him to seek for his wife, a princess called Maddi, who was famed for her [Pg 328] great beauty. An embassy was sent to the maiden's father to ask for her hand, and as he willingly assented to the alliance, the princess returned with the ambassadors to be married without any delay to the hermit-like prince, Vessantara.

His married life was one of great happiness. He was sincerely attached to his wife and to his son and daughter, but he never forsook his ascetic manner of living. His benevolence was a household word, and gained for him troops of friends, until he made a gift of more than ordinary value to a neighbouring state, and caused thereby a great popular uproar. His father possessed an elephant whose chief value lay in its miraculous power of calling down rain from the skies in times of drought. Now, the people of a province near to his father's country, were suffering from want of water, and they sent to Vessantara to ask if he would lend them the rain-producing elephant, knowing quite well that he never refused to give to anyone what was asked of him. He granted their request without any hesitation, and told them that they might keep the animal as a present from himself. The ambassadors returned, taking home the beast in triumph; but when the inhabitants of Vijaya knew what had happened they burst into angry accusations against their benevolent prince. They complained also that the animal was not his to give, but was the property of the nation. The king was not less angry than his subjects, and ordered his son to leave the capital at once, and live for the rest of his life in exile. The prince, in defending his [Pg 329] action, said that the elephant was his and had been given to him by its mother at the time of his birth, as a birthday present. To the father, who was unacquainted with his son's destiny and character, this seemed the most intolerable rubbish, and made him exceedingly angry.

Maddi, like a faithful wife, sought to mollify the anger of her father-in-law, and implored forgiveness for her husband, but the king's wrath was too great to be appeased by her tearful entreaties. Then Vessantara gave away the greater part of his property, preparatory to his departing into banishment. He distributed one hundred elephants, one hundred ponies, one hundred vehicles of different kinds, one hundred male slaves, one hundred female slaves, one hundred catties[I] of gold and one hundred catties of silver. He entreated his wife to remain behind and take care of his two children, but she resolutely refused to leave him in his trouble, and taking the children with them, they departed in his chariot. As they drove out of the city they scattered all the money they had, amongst the crowds of people who had collected to see the banished prince leaving his native city.

On their journey they met two Brahmins, who recognised the prince and asked for his horses. He at once granted their request, and prepared to proceed on foot; but two Devas descended from heaven in the form of golden stags and harnessed themselves to the chariot. A little later they were met by another Brahmin, who asked for both chariot and steeds. Vessantara and Maddi [Pg 330] dismounted and left the carriage to the stranger. The stags immediately disappeared, to the great astonishment of him who had begged for them. The wedded pair, carrying their children with them, pursued their way on foot, going in the direction of a distant and lonely mountain, where they proposed living the life of the hermits.

The road to the mountain passed through the country where Maddi's father reigned. He heard of their arrival in his territory and at once set out to meet them. He besought them to stay in his

kingdom, offered them a residence near his own palace, and did all he could to persuade them to change their purpose. But they refused all his offers, saying that they were fully determined to live as hermits in the lonely jungle. At his earnest request they stayed with him seven days, but left him at the end of that time to continue their journey to the far-off mountain.

They had to pass through perilous places, and were exposed to many dangers from men and beasts. A hunter was sent to guard them during this part of the journey. Indra, ever watchful, saw all that was happening, and commissioned one of his celestial architects to go at once to the mountain and prepare two bowers for the reception of the wandering exiles.

At this time there was living in another part of the country, an aged Brahmin who was wedded to a young but ambitious wife. She had heard of Vessantara's gifts, the story of the elephants and the chariot, and of his numerous acts of benevolence, and felt that it would be an easy matter to [Pg 331] trade upon his good nature and obtain some valuable gift for herself. So she asked her aged husband to go and ask Vessantara for his two children. He refused for a long time, but finally yielded to her entreaties, and set off to find the whereabouts of the generous prince that he might make known his wife's request. The guardian hunter saw him approaching, and levelled his bow at him, but the Brahmin said that he was a favourite of the prince, and had often received wise counsel from him, and that he only sought the exile in order to befriend him, and carry to him the messages of old friends. The hunter was deceived, and allowed the Brahmin to pass on his way.

Then the Brahmin arrived at a hut where lived a holy ascetic, to whom he addressed himself, enquiring for the way to Vessantara's residence. The hermit believing the man to be some greedy creature about to prefer a vexatious request, expressed his disgust and anger in very strong language. But the Brahmin, unaffected by the scornful denunciations he had listened to, again professed a desire to befriend the exiled prince. So sincere did his protestations appear, that the hermit gave him the required directions.

Following the path pointed out to him, he at length reached Vessantara's bower, and presenting himself in the disguise of a mendicant, asked the prince to give him his two children. Their mother was absent at the time, as she had not returned from gathering fruit and herbs in the [Pg 332] jungle. The prince was grieved when he heard the request, but he was fully aware that it was only by acts of great self-sacrifice that he could perfect his nature and attain the goal for which he was striving, so without much hesitation, he handed over his little son and daughter to the care of the beggar. His temper was sorely tried when he saw the mendicant tie their tiny hands fast behind their backs as though they were common slaves, and drag them roughly over the rough and thorny pathway. The tender-hearted parent suffered agonies of pain as he witnessed this cruel treatment of his loved ones, but by keeping his mind fixed on his future he managed to control any outward expressions of grief and anger. At some little distance from the bower, the Brahmin stumbled and fell to the ground. The children seeing an opportunity to escape from their brutal master, promptly fled and hid themselves in a lotus pond. The Brahmin returned to Vessantara, and angrily complained of the behaviour of the runaways, and upbraided the father with having deceived and tricked him. The prince, making no answer to the false rebukes, silently went out to look for his little ones. He saw their footprints in the ground, followed the direction they indicated, and soon discovered his son. In answer to his voice, the daughter also came out of her hiding-place, and there, by the side of the pond, the two children knelt down and embraced the feet of their father. Tears that sparkled like gems in the sunlight, fell from the eyes of the sorrowful three. The father spoke tenderly to his weeping children and told them of his great [Pg 333] grief for their suffering, but that it was necessary for his and their future happiness. He tried to show them that if their love for him was sincere, they would go away with the mendicant cheerfully and willingly, for by so doing they would ultimately help in his attainment of perfect bliss. The boy acquiesced, but the little girl's heart was full of anger, and the burning tears ran heavily down her sorrow-stricken face. Once more they were delivered to the beggar, and again was their father's temper sorely tried, for their new master at once gave them both a sound thrashing before his eyes, as a punishment for what he termed their bad behaviour.

While all this was happening, an event had occurred in the forest to prevent the return of Maddi before the children had gone away. For Indra foresaw that she might possibly by her tears and entreaties, hinder her husband's progress towards that goal of perfect benevolence which was to crown and complete his earthly career. So he arranged that on her homeward way, she should meet three animals, a lion, a tiger, and a leopard. They did her no harm, but simply prevented her from going forward. After many attempts to escape, she fell upon her knees and implored them to allow her to pass. Her husband's great act of renunciation having by this time been fully accomplished, the three beasts, who were three Devas in disguise, no longer hindered her progress, but departed into the jungle. It was long after midnight when she returned to her home, and the first thing her motherly eyes detected was the absence of her little ones. She [Pg 334] turned to her husband, in whose face shone a heavenly glow of happiness not unmixed with sadness, and enquired of him what had become of the children. But to all her questions he answered nothing. Then, knowing the generous nature of his heart, and seeing the sadly kind expression on his face, she guessed what had happened, and, overcome with the weight of her great misfortune, she burst into tears and fell in a swoon upon the ground. Her husband tended her gently, and when she had recovered consciousness, he told her all that had happened, and besought her with pleading and argument to agree to the act in which she had as yet had no part. Deeply impressed with his earnestness and dimly conscious that there was more in the matter than she could realise, she acquiesced in what he had done.

Now Indra saw that there was but one thing left to Vessantara which he could give away, and that was his wife Maddi. And the god remembered that if the prince should give away his wife, there would be no one left to tend and care for him in that solitary place. To prevent Vessantara being left absolutely alone, Indra himself descended to earth in the form of an old Brahmin and stood before the bower. The prince saw him there, and at once realised that he had now an opportunity of completing his many acts of self-sacrifice by bestowing his wife upon the stranger. He asked the Brahmin again and again if there was anything he desired, and the Brahmin at length asked for the princess Maddi. With mingled joy and grief he parted with his long-loved and [Pg 335] faithful help-meet, who had suffered much for his sake. The sorrow he felt at parting with the last earthly possession he dearly loved, was almost drowned in the thought that this was the last act in the long drama he had played through many generations. Great was his surprise and delight when the disguised Indra returned his wife to him, telling him to keep her in trust. The apparent Brahmin promised to return for her at some future time, and departed, leaving the loving pair to wonder as to his identity.

The old mendicant who had obtained possession of the children, intended to take them home to become the slaves of his greedy wife. But he lost his way in the trackless forests, and by mistake wandered into the city of Vessantara's father. The king was seated in a pavilion on the palace wall, and as the mendicant slowly wended his way past the royal residence, the observant monarch saw and recognised his two grandchildren. He sent for them, and from the boy's lips learned their story. The boy also told him the amounts that had been fixed by their father as the price of their redemption, and these amounts the king at once paid over to the Brahmin, and so liberated his grandchildren. The money that the Brahmin received was of little use to him, for he died shortly afterwards, leaving no heirs to inherit his wealth. When the children had told their grandfather the story of their father's life and his lonely wanderings in the dangerous jungle, some feeling of pity and remorse took possession of the king, and he determined to have his son [Pg 336] back again. He went to the distant forest, accompanied by the queen, his two newly found grandchildren and many soldiers.

Great rejoicing attended the meeting of the father and son who had been so long separated. Vessantara in answer to the queen's entreaties promised to return home. On his return to his native city a great festival was held, the people thronged to see their long-lost prince once more, alms were distributed in great quantities, and the period of self denial and renunciation was brought to a close. All those to whom Vessantara had previously given his valuable property returned it to him, asking for his blessing and forgiveness.

Those who are interested in the after histories of these people may care to know that Vessantara appeared upon earth as Gautama Buddha, that Maddi was re-born as his wife Yashodra, and that his son was given to him again as Rahula. His daughter, however, did not become a member of his family in the next life upon earth, for when she was forced to follow the cruel old Brahmin, she swore in her heart that she would never again be re-born as the daughter of such an unjust and unloving father.

Thus ends the story of "The Great Birth" according to the version of the "pious" king of Siam. With the exception of the public state recital of the poem, it is now only recited in connection with the novitiate of the eldest sons of rich parents. The poor no longer ask their friends to visit their houses to listen to the thousand stanzas. The rich endeavour to reproduce as far as possible [Pg 337] the circumstances of the original recital. The novice who has retired to the temple and resigned for the time being all his earthly possessions, represents Vessantara. And as Buddha told the tale to a multitude of friends and relations in his native city, so the novice returns from the temple to his own home to chant the numerous stanzas in the midst of his acquaintances. The honour of thus repeating the old story belongs now to the eldest son, except in the case of children of royal birth, for each of whom a public recital is held. As the novice has not had time to learn the whole poem, he only delivers the first few lines, the rest being repeated by monks of longer standing, who have it all by heart. At the conclusion of the ceremony, offerings of food and robes are ostentatiously distributed to those priests who have given their services.

The preaching of the story of the Great Birth during the novitiate of the late Crown Prince of Siam, was the occasion of great public rejoicing. The offerings were more numerous and varied than usual, and were arranged in a novel manner in front of the palace. A huge junk was erected on the grass, and its sides were totally covered with boxes of cigars, boxes of sardines, and tinned provisions. The cabins and hold were filled with eatables, and when the "preaching" festivities were ended, the whole vessel was broken up, and its contents distributed amongst the poor and the hospitals.

CHAPTER XVII. [Pg 338]

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES (*continued*).

The Thot Katin. The Thot Katin ceremonies are not nearly so old as those described in the preceding chapter. They are said to have been first established as purely state ceremonies by one of the Siamese kings, called Somdet Pra Luang, who reigned over Northern Siam about seven

hundred years ago. He was a very popular monarch, and as powerful as he was popular. Whatever he ordered to be done in his own provinces in the north of the country, was always carried out to the letter, and the ceremonies he instituted have extended and developed till they are now universally celebrated all over the kingdom.

In the days when the Buddhist priesthood lived a purely ascetic life, according to the ideal of their great teacher, long before the days even of Pra Luang himself, there was one branch of the monastic order which was far more given to practising self-denial and mortification than any of the rest of the brotherhood. And this sect of holy monks vowed a solemn vow that they would never wear any clothes that were directly or indirectly presented to them. They vowed that their robes should only be made of cloth that had no owners, such as the winding-sheets that had [Pg 339] enshrouded the bodies of the dead, the clothes that had been cast away because they had been worn by persons suffering from infectious diseases, or the garments that had been discarded by their owners as being too ragged or filthy to be used any longer. Garments of this description were the only ones they would wear, and all presents were steadily refused. At the end of the rainy season, when the period of the forced retirement in the monasteries was finished, they went in little parties of three and four to the cemeteries, to the places where the bodies of the dead were burned, and to all the spots where dust, dirt, refuse, and rubbish had been deposited. There they gathered up every scrap and remnant of cloth, to patch them carefully together to make their garments for the coming year. Many people saw them frequently groping about in these unhealthy, unfrequented localities, and asked them wonderingly, "What are you doing there? What are you looking for?" And to all enquiries the priests made none other answer save "We seek for ownerless clothes." Then the people, partly out of a feeling of pity and partly out of a desire to make merit, went to their homes and brought all the pieces of cotton, linen, or woollen cloth they could spare, and generously offered them as gifts to the ragged priests. But the gifts were always firmly refused, and the people returned to their homes, wondering why this one particular order of mendicant brethren would not accept their voluntary offerings.

Some of the more inquisitive of those whose gifts had been refused, stealthily followed the priests [Pg 340] from place to place, and, unseen themselves, observed all they did. And they saw the worthy monks groping in heaps of refuse and gathering fragments of cloth, taking soiled torn rags from the branches of trees, and collecting the scraps of linen that were blown hither and thither by the wind in the grave-yards, where were buried the uncremated, those who had died of small-pox, cholera, and other dangerous and infectious diseases. When they had seen all this, they returned home and told their brethren, and all wondered greatly, but no one understood. Then those people who reverenced the priests, but whose minds held many superstitious notions, invented a theory which seemed to explain all the facts that had been observed, and which afterwards found wide acceptation amongst the people. They said that these wandering, self-denying, rag-hunting monks were of the holiest of the holy, that they had power to see into the realms of heaven and of hell, and that their chief aim and purpose in this life was to promote the future happiness of men and animals. When these priests clad themselves in the garments of one who had died, the deceased ascended into heaven. Therefore, the monks, ever living according to the faith they held, and in pursuance of their great desire to give future bliss to those who had departed, wore not the valuable gifts of the living, but the cast-off garments of the dead.

When this theory had been heard and accepted by devout or superstitious people, the custom arose of wrapping many extra cloths round the body of a dead person, and requesting the priests [Pg 341] to remove them from the corpse and carry them away to the temples. This custom still prevails in many parts of the country amongst people who hope in this way to secure the safe and speedy entrance of their deceased friends and relatives into the realms of indescribable felicity. The late king, in his sincere desire to purify the religious beliefs of his credulous subjects, endeavoured to point out to them that there was nothing whatever in the original scriptural texts to warrant this wide-spread faith, and that it was purely a superstition invented and taught by the laity. He also pointed out the true interpretation of the priests' actions—namely, their desire to live a thoroughly ascetic life that they might purify their minds and be worthy of their master. But the people have refused to accept this simple explanation either from their ruler or from their more enlightened ecclesiastical teachers, and even accuse those priests who exhibit any reluctance to comply with their requests, of being wanting in pity and gentleness. So they continue to wrap unnecessary cloths round the bodies of the dead, that the priests may remove them and wear them, and so ensure the happiness of the dead. There have been also many priests of worldly disposition who have secretly encouraged the custom, as it is a source of considerable worldly profit to themselves.

A more reasonable but still unorthodox creed has found many followers. According to some, the priests sought for the clothes that had shrouded people who had died of infectious diseases, not [Pg 342] out of pity for the dead, but out of consideration for the living. For by removing these cloths they effectually prevented them from being blown amongst the homes of men, and so spreading the disease. They thus removed a possible disaster. This idea degenerated into the belief that by presenting the priests with robes, impending dangers would be rendered ineffectual to the giver, and led to the custom of throwing garments for the use of the priests in front of the temples. This was usually done at the end of the rainy season, which, according to the old custom of counting time, was the end of the year. The donors thought they would in this way certainly secure prosperity for themselves and families during the ensuing months.

As a result of this latter belief it became the custom to present robes to the priests in October and November, when the wet months were drawing to a close. King Pra Luang in his palace at

Ayuthia, considered the custom, pronounced it good, and established it as part of the ordinary worship of the devout. When the proper season arrived, he set out himself to distribute robes to the inmates of the royal temple. Each temple provided a quantity of fireworks, and appointed responsible officers to superintend their pyrotechnical displays. In front of the landing of the king's palace, were gathered together numerous boats laden with baskets of food and yellow cloth. In the centre of each basket a stout branch was fixed, and from the branches lighted lanterns were suspended. At the bottom of every lantern trailed a strip of yellow silk, symbolical [Pg 343] of the scraps that the old monks sought in desolate places. The boats also contained presents of many descriptions given by the king, the government officials, and the common people according to their wealth or their faith.

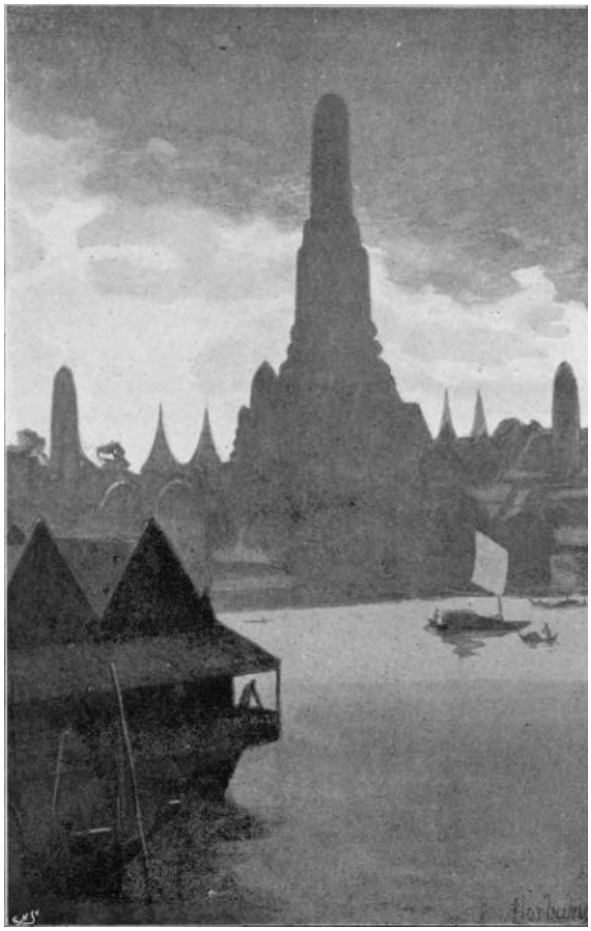
In the evening, as soon as it was dark, the king came down to the bank of the river to examine the boats and their contents. He descended into his state barge, attended by his chief officers, and headed a long procession, accompanied by the chief ladies of the palace, and by crowds of people who had been drawn to the place by the prospect of seeing the fireworks. The boats, crowded by natives, drew after them the other boats containing the baskets of food and the piles of robes. Wherever the king stopped, presents of eatables and priestly garments were distributed to the brethren who resided in the temple, and fireworks were let off in honour of the sovereign's arrival, and as a mark of gratitude for his benevolence. At a later date, when temples became multiplied to such an extent that the king was unable to personally visit them all, he entrusted the distribution of the presents to his relatives, and officials of high rank.

The custom of presenting robes at the end of the rainy season is now universally observed throughout the whole kingdom, and is looked upon as an excellent way of making merit, though, in common with all the other religious observances of the country, its primary meaning and origin are unknown to most of the worshippers.

The festival is known as the "Thot Katin", and is celebrated with great rejoicing and merriment. [Pg 344] "Katin", or "Kratin", is derived from the Pali word, "Katina", and means "severe" or "difficult". The term is applied to three separate things. It means a pattern of a priest's robe made of patchwork; it is the name of the robe itself, which must be made of raw cotton and completed in a single day and night—a difficult task; and it also denotes the merit which the maker will receive as a reward for his meritorious exertions. The other word, "Thot", means "to lay down", so that the whole expression used as the name of the ceremony of the presentation of the priestly vestments, means "Laying down robes made after the Katina pattern", on the floor or on a table, for the priests to take up.

The holidays last during the month of October, and are celebrated with processions on land and water. The water processions in Bangkok are singularly attractive on account of the number of people who take part in them, and the variety of costume, and display of oarmanship which they then exhibit. All day long, lines of canoes, gondolas, and gilded barges carry the worshippers and their offerings to the many temples in the city. The holiday attire is unusually brilliant, and as the numerous colours flash by in the swiftly gliding boats, one begins to wonder if there are any tints or shades of colour that may not be seen on the Menam. After prostrating themselves before the idol, and presenting their gifts to the priests, the people hold a great aquatic carnival.

[Pg 345]



WAT CHANG AT SUNSET.

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The following account of this ancient ceremony is quoted from "The Bangkok Directory" and is presumably a translation of a native composition. [Pg 347]

> "All the temples in Bangkok and its suburbs, which have been made by or dedicated to the king, expect a splendid visit from him annually, between the middle of the eleventh and twelfth moons. This is the season appointed by the most ancient and sacred custom for the priests to seek their apparel for the year ensuing. In conformity with this custom, the King, taking a princely offering of priests' robes with him, visits these temples.
>
> "The ceremony is called 'Thot Katin', which means to lay down the robes sewed up in patches according to a given pattern, for the priests to take up. The pattern is the 'Katin', which in ancient times the priests of Buddha used in cutting their cloth into patches to be sewed together to make their outer and inner robes. The cloth was cut with a knife because it would be wicked to tear it. In olden time, in Buddha's day, the custom was for the priests to go out themselves to seek old cast-off clothing, and the best of these they would patch together to form the three kinds of priestly robes required. This was one conspicuous mode of self-mortification. But that mendicant custom has gradually given place to the present one of making the garments of new cloth dyed yellow; and prepared by the princely donations of thousands of the affluent, and the more humble contributions of the multitudes of the poor. They begin to make preparations for this season months before the time, until in Bangkok alone, there are many thousands of [Pg 348] priests' suits in readiness by the middle of October for distribution at the temples. The cloth is dyed yellow for the purpose, as tradition says, of imitating somewhat the custom of Buddha and his early followers, who preferred a dingy yellow colour for their robes, for the express purpose of making themselves odious in the eyes of the world, that there might be no door of temptation open to them to be conformed to the world. In those days it was the custom of robbers and murderers in Hindustan, where Buddhism began its course, to wear red and yellow clothing as an appropriate badge of their profession. The better classes of the world regarded them with horror, and fled from them. Now, Gautama Buddha, when a prince, had a host of ardent friends who urged him not to abdicate his throne. But he was full set to do it; and this was the mode he took to cut himself off from their sympathy. By assuming the robber's garb, he would rid himself of such ruinous tempters, and yet secure another class of admirers, who would delight to walk with him in the road to Nirvana, to which his whole heart and soul was devoted.
>
> "Although there are so many hundreds of Buddhist temples in Siam, none are omitted from this annual visitation. The royal temples are visited by the king, or by some prince or nobleman of high rank, who goes in the king's name. Outside the

capital, these royal temples are always visited by deputies of His Majesty, bearing priests' robes and other things provided by the king.

"When His Majesty goes in person, he does so with great pomp and splendour, [Pg 349] whether by land or water. If by water the finest state barges are displayed. There are some ten or more of these splendid boats, each with some august name attached, to distinguish it from the others. These barges are called 'royal throne boats'. Only one appears in the royal procession at a time. They are from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and eighty feet in length, and from six to eight feet wide. They gradually become narrower fore and aft, and taper upwards. Hanging from the stem and stern are two large white tassels made of the hair of the Cashmere goat, and between them floats a royal banner. A little abaft of midships there is a splendid canopy about twelve feet long, having the ridge curving downward at each end, and covered with cloth of gold, and the sides tastefully hung with curtains of the same costly material. Within is a throne, suited to this little floating palace. The bows of the barges to convey the priestly robes and other gifts, are formed into heads of hideous dragons, or imaginary sea-monsters, with glaring eyes and horrid teeth and horns. The whole boat is richly carved and gilded to represent scales, often inlaid with pearl and other precious things, while the stern forms an immense tail, curving upwards to the height of twelve or fifteen feet. It is in this kind of barge that the king always rides. When he would appear in his greatest glory, he is seen seated on this, his floating throne, wearing a gold-embroidered coat, and golden shoes. He has generally the Crown [Pg 350] Prince with him, and sometimes other royal children follow him in a barge of second rank, being all beautifully attired. We must not forget to mention the huge jewelled fan, the royal umbrellas, white and yellow, which have their appropriate places in the dragon barge, and help to distinguish it from all there in the imposing pageant. The dragon barges are propelled by sixty or seventy paddlers, who have been trained daily for a full month for that express service. They have been taught to paddle in unison, all striking the water at the same moment, and all raising the blades of their paddles above their heads, at an equal height. These royal boatmen, by their public training on the river, become a pattern for all others in the procession.

"Preceding the King's personal barge, there are usually from forty to sixty royal guard-boats, over one hundred feet long, and from five to six feet wide, going in pairs. They are modelled after the King's own boat, but smaller, and the canopy is made of whitish leaves resembling the palm leaf, sewed together, and ornamented with crimson cloth bordered with yellow. Under the bow and stern of these boats, float a pair of long grey tassels, made of the fibres of pine-apple leaves, and between each of these hangs a golden banner. They have fifty or more paddlers, and two men in each boat beat time with a long pole decorated with white tassels, which they lift up and strike down end-wise on the deck of the boat.

"In the rear of the King's barge come princes, nobles, officers, and multitudes of [Pg 351] still lower grades, who all follow the King to the temple in boats of various fashions, down to the simple one-oared skiff with its single half-naked occupant. Each prince and nobleman sits proudly under his own canopy, attired in his best court robes, having duly arranged about him gold or silver water-pot and tea-pot, and betel and cigar boxes, all of which have been given to him by the King, as insignia of his rank and office.

"The boatmen have various coloured liveries. Those of the King's dragon barge and its mate usually wear red jackets and caps. On the guard-boats we see many colours; some have red jackets and leather caps of ancient style; in others the men have only short pants, and narrow fillets of palm-leaf about their heads. Brass bands follow in the procession, and companies of native men-o'-war's men, who close up the moving panorama.

"The floating and other houses along the line of the King's advance have each prepared a little table or altar, upon which they display the choicest fruits and flowers, wax candles, pictures, and other ornaments, as marks of respect to their sovereign. The native and foreign shipping display their colours. The small craft on the river and canals where he is to come, clear out for the time, to make a wide and open passage for him. Formerly none were allowed to watch the royal procession, except from behind closed doors or windows, but now all such restrictions are withdrawn, and the people enjoy the sight of their beloved King, [Pg 352] and take part in the general rejoicings.

"The priests' garments being neatly folded and put up into bundles of a suit each, are borne with the King in the royal throne barge. When he arrives at the landing of a temple, he remains seated until several suits of the yellow robes have been carried up to the door and put in care of an official, to await the approach of His Majesty, and until other officers of state and a company of infantry, together with the musicians, have had time to leave their boats and place themselves in position for receiving him. The handrails of the steps which the King ascends are wound with white cotton cloth, and the flagged path from the landing to the temple is

covered with grass matting exclusively for him to walk upon. When the King is in the act of ascending the steps of the landing, 'Old Siam' blows her pipes and conch shells, and beats her drums; the military form in double line and present arms, and the brass band plays the national anthem.

"Having reached the door of the 'bote', the King takes one suit of the priests' robes, and bearing it in both hands, walks in and lays it on a table prepared for that purpose. On this table are five golden vases of flowers, five golden dishes of parched rice, tastefully arranged in the form of bouquets, five golden candlesticks with their candles, and five incense sticks. His Majesty first lights the candles and incense sticks. He then worships before the sacred shrine of Buddha, the sacred books, and the assembled priests. He next makes a request to the chief priest to [Pg 353] renew his covenant to observe the five rules of the Buddhist religion. These are, first, that he will not take the life of any man or other sentient creature; second, that he will not oppress any man; third, that he will not take to wife any woman belonging to another, while there is the least unwillingness on the part of the woman, or of her parents or of her guardians, to the transaction; fourth, that he will not lie, nor deal falsely with mankind, nor use abusive language; fifth, that he will not use intoxicating liquors as a beverage. When the King visits the temple, if it happens to be one of their four sacred days, their custom makes it necessary for him to promise to observe three other rules in addition to the above five; first, that he will not partake of any food after midday on any sacred day until the next morning after light has appeared; second, that he will not on sacred days indulge in any theatrical or musical performances, nor in any way allow or cause his person to be perfumed; third, that he will not on such days sleep on a bed that is more than ten and a half inches high, nor use any mattress, and that he will deny himself as becometh a devout Buddhist. If the King is conscious of having transgressed any of these rules since he last renewed his obligations, he is supposed to confess his sins mentally before Buddha, and promise solemnly that he will earnestly endeavour to avoid such sins in the future.

"His Majesty having renewed his obligations, then proceeds to make a formal [Pg 354] presentation of his offerings to the priests of that temple, whereupon they respond in the Pali tongue, 'sâdhu, sâdhu' ('well, well'). The chief priest then addresses the fraternity as follows: 'This "Katin" robe has been given to us by his most illustrious majesty, the King, who, being endued with exceedingly great goodness and righteousness, has condescended to come hither himself and present these garments to us, a company of Buddhist priests, without designating any particular person by whom they shall be worn.' They then distribute the gifts amongst themselves, after which they bow down and worship Buddha, reciting a few Pali sentences. This distribution of garments is not always done in the presence of the King, but sometimes after he has left the temple. The late King Maha Mongkut made an innovation on this old custom, by bringing with him extra suits of yellow robes and giving them to certain priests who had distinguished themselves as Pali scholars. It is also usual to make a few other gifts to the priests, of such things as they are apt to need, as bedding, boats, and table furniture, but these are not considered any part of the real 'Katin.'

"As the King is about to leave the temple, the priests pronounce a Pali blessing upon him, and he again worships Buddha, the sacred books, and the priests. Then rising, he walks out of the 'bote,' and descends to the royal barge, with the same ceremonies as when he ascended. He visits several temples during each day, and spends some time in each one. The value of each priest's suit which the King [Pg 355] offers, is supposed to be about ten Mexican dollars, and the aggregate value of the offerings he makes on these successive days is probably not less than ten thousand Mexican dollars."

Song Kran. Song Kran is an angel who rises with the sun when he enters the sign Aries. The date of the holidays held and ceremonies performed under this title is ruled by the sun, and is not definitely fixed. But each successive year the court astrologers announce the event, and then for four days the celebrations take place. The King takes a state shower-bath, and invites the priests to assemble at the palace for prayers and breakfast. The laity have their own special religious services and their own amusements. They gamble and pray, go to the theatres and temples, feed the priests and feed themselves as they do at New Year. Buddha's image is bathed by the old women, who also sprinkle water over the elderly people and priests present, with the idea of calling down blessings on those who are bathed, as well as on themselves. As a general rule the ceremonies begin about the eleventh or twelfth day of April.

Kan Wisakha Bucha. This is the name of the holidays connected with a very important day in the Buddhist calendar—namely, the day on which Buddha was born. According to the tradition, it is also the day on which he died, and the day on which he attained Nirvana. This anniversary day has developed into a three days' celebration, of which the most noticeable feature is the extensive alms-giving that is then practised in imitation of Buddha's benevolent deeds. At night, [Pg 356] illuminations on a small scale take place, but there is no great state function.

Khauwasa is derived from the Sanskrit "Varasha", meaning "rain" or "year." The Wasa season lasts from July 8th to October 4th, and has already been mentioned as the period of Buddhist Lent or

confinement. The priests only, fast and do penance, and even for them there are no fixed rules, except that which forbids them to remain outside the temple enclosure between midnight and dawn. Several forms of self-mortification have been invented, such as spending the night in a cemetery, thinking of death; sleeping in uncomfortable postures, and only eating once in twenty-four hours. But if the penitent gets tired of doing penance, he may give it up. He will still retain all the merit he has made by what he has already done, though of course the quantity to his credit is less than it would have been had he persevered to the end.

The general ceremonies for the people begin at the end of the period of confinement. The food given to the priests at this time is a first-class investment, as it purchases one hundredfold its value in heavenly entertainments in the very next existence. Everyone therefore is very anxious to secure a hungry priest for his guest.

KAW PRASAI. The ground surrounding the different monasteries is always covered with sand, so that in wet weather the feet of the priests may not get covered with mud as they walk from their cells to the temple. Once each year fresh sand is brought and built up into little hills in the [Pg 357] temple grounds; hence the above name, "Kaw" meaning "to build," "pra" meaning "holy" and "sai" "sand." The building of these holy sand-hills is a substitute, amongst the poorer classes, for the more laborious and expensive way of making merit, involved in the erection of a prachadee. The sand is moulded as nearly as possible in the form of the spiral relic mounds, and is ornamented with small flags. The sand is bought from the monastery, which thus obtains money for building purposes, or for the purchase of more sand for the courtyard. Small coins are placed in the holy hillocks, and these become the property of those who find them when the hillocks are demolished.

CHAPTER XVIII. [Pg 358]

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES (*continued*).

LOY KRATHONG. The Loy Krathong festivals were established by King Pra Luang, the founder of the Thot Katin ceremonies, and they originally occurred in connection with them; but they have gradually become separated from them, and have now an independent existence of their own. Whereas the Katin ceremonies owe their origin to a superstition propagated by worshippers of the Buddhist faith, the Loy Krathong festivities are an outgrowth of Brahminical worship. The old "wat" visitations, with the presentation of robes to the priests, originated, as we have seen, in a peculiar belief as to the actions of an ascetic priesthood, and were afterwards definitely established as annual occurrences by the king. Their connection with the ceremony about to be described, was due to accidental circumstances that did not arise for several years after the initiation of the older festival. The later ceremonies which were connected primarily with the Katin, and which have now become a separate function, originated, according to the late king's account, in the following manner.

In the reign of Somdet Pra Luang there lived a famous Brahmin who was noted in the capital, and [Pg 359] in all the surrounding country, for his great wisdom. There was no branch of knowledge whose depths he had not fathomed. He could read the stars, cast horoscopes, foretell eclipses, and fulfil the duties of a weather prophet. He was well versed in the mysteries of the theory and practice of medicine, and knew the names, habitats, and virtuous properties of all plants that grew. As a theologian he could explain the origin of all things, and discourse upon the subtle doctrines of all the religions then known. He was an authority upon law, could tell what had been the customs of many people, and devise plans for firm and wise government. As a scholar of ancient practices he was unrivalled, and knew all the details of the growth and development of all religious and social usages. Such a man found great favour in the eyes of the sovereign, who made use of the Brahmin's great wisdom in the management of his subjects. He gave him many honours and appointed him to fill many important positions. Amongst many offices that he held, two were given him on account of his unrivalled knowledge, namely, those of chief physician, and chief judge.

This encyclopædic philosopher had a young and graceful daughter whom he called Nobamas. And as became the child of so wise a father, she also was well skilled in many arts and sciences. Her beauty was the subject of every song, and her name was in everyone's mouth. The whole nation were enthusiastic in their praise of her, and so great were her charms and abilities that even her own sex regarded her not with envy, but were proud that one of their number should be [Pg 360] distinguished. She was almost as learned as her father and was wont to discourse upon all subjects with great intelligence. She was a clever poetess, a skilful musician, and an artist of great power. And when the poets of the country had exhausted all their vocabulary in describing her beauty and her talents, they began to sing of the honours she ought to receive, and greatest of all these was the honour of becoming the wife of the king. One day the king listened to a group of musicians who were merrily singing, and the subject of their song was the wondrous Nobamas, fit only for the wife of the sovereign. The song scorned the idea of her wedding any one of less degree, and eulogised her to such an extent that the listening monarch's curiosity became very great. He returned to his palace, and sought for the ladies of his household. He told them all he had heard, and enquired if any of them knew anything of this peerless creature. To the king's

eager enquiries they returned answer that the song was true, but that no words could adequately describe the charms of the Brahmin maiden. The king could no longer restrain his desire to possess so fair a creature, and he sent the most elderly ladies of his retinue, according to the custom of the country, to ask her father for her hand.

The ladies went, and their mission was entirely successful. The old counsellor who had received so many favours from his sovereign was glad to have an opportunity of showing his gratitude in this way, so he willingly presented his renowned daughter to his royal master. He sent her to the [Pg 361] king, who ever afterwards treated her with great tenderness and affection, and soon made her chief of the ladies in the palace. They both of them enjoyed the greatest happiness when in each other's company, and whenever Nobamas was not engaged in fulfilling her duties in her department of the palace, she held converse with the king, delighting him with her great wisdom and knowledge, and charming him with her compositions in music and poetry.

Soon after their marriage there occurred a celebration of the Katin ceremonies, and the king desired the fair Nobamas to accompany him on his water procession. Now, although this beautiful wife had married a Buddhist king, she still remained true to her Brahmin faith, and worshipped her own idols and spirits according to the precepts her father had taught her in her early childhood. It was a Brahminical custom that, at the end of the year, all people should prepare suitable offerings to present to the genii of the river, in order to obtain pardon and the absolution of their sins. Towards the end of the year, when the people were getting ready to celebrate the Katin, Nobamas secretly prepared to perform her own religious rites, and for this purpose she made a small boat-like structure, called a "Krathong." This she formed out of plantain leaves, and loaded it with paddy husks to make it float in stable equilibrium. She stitched strips of plantain leaves together, and pinned them round the edge of the little boat by way of ornament. Over the ballast she spread smooth clean plantain leaves, and on this green [Pg 362] leafy deck she placed a little cargo of betel-nut, sirih leaf, parched rice, and sweet-scented flowers. She took several fresh fruits of a fleshy character, such as the papaya and the pumpkin, and deftly carved them into representations of fruits, flowers, and animals, and piled them up in a conical arrangement in the centre. The artificial flowers she stained with the juices of other plants to make them resemble real blossoms. Here and there she fastened one of her own sketches or paintings, and finally finished the work by adorning it with storied umbrellas of paper, tiny flags, toy implements, tapers, and scented incense sticks.

On the first evening of the Katin ceremony the boats were arranged in front of the palace landing, as usual, and the state barge with the glass throne was moored there, pending the arrival of the king. Suddenly everyone's attention was attracted by a strange-looking object that was being floated to the royal landing. It was the Krathong that Nobamas had made. She intended to light the tapers and the incense sticks, and send the float adrift to bear her message to the spirits, at the same time that the royal party should set out to visit the temples. But as soon as the Krathong was come to the landing, all the ladies, and the members of the royal family, who were assembled there to wait for the coming of the king, crowded round it, and begged to be allowed to examine it, so Nobamas had to explain the design and the meaning of this, her handiwork. So great was the interest exhibited by everyone in the pretty toy, that no one noticed [Pg 363] the arrival of the king, and he seeing the crowd so noisy and so attracted, enquired what was the cause of their merriment and amusement. Someone told him that everyone was busily admiring a float that his beautiful consort had made. He then ordered the object to be brought to him that he might also see and hear about it. When he saw it he could not find sufficient words to express his admiration of the skill that had designed and constructed it. He requested to be allowed to keep it, and Nobamas knelt before him and presented him with the decorated krathong. He again praised the work, but more still did he praise her who had made it. But when he had examined it a little longer, he discovered its purpose, and said, "This is the offering of a lady of the Brahmin faith." And Nobamas answered him, saying, "That is so, for I am a Brahmin, and hitherto Your Majesty has not interfered with my religious belief, so at this season of the year, I have made this little krathong with the intention of floating it down the river as an offering to the spirits of the water, as is right and proper for a maiden of the Brahmin faith to do."

Pra Luang was a good Buddhist and a devout believer in the teachings of his own religion. Still, the krathong looked very pretty, and he had a great desire to light the incense sticks and the tapers and send it adrift as Nobamas had intended. But he was afraid of the opinions of the people. For if he should make this offering to the spirits and not to Buddha, he was afraid the people might upbraid him and accuse him of having abandoned his religion for that of his wife. [Pg 364] But he could not resist the temptation to see what the krathong would look like when it was illuminated, so, not without some little misgiving, he lit the lights upon the leafy boat. And still he was not satisfied, for he wanted to see it drifting away into the darkness, with the tapers reflecting their glittering light in the flowing waters. Therefore he cast about in his mind for some excuse to explain his actions, and presently he spoke in a loud voice that all around him, whether upon the landing-stage, the banks of the river, or in the boats before him, might hear, and said, "To all the property, such as temples, pagodas, and spires that are dedicated to Buddha on the banks of this river; to all his sacred relics, such as his bones and hair, wherever they may be in the subterranean regions concealed from the eye, under the river, or in places which Buddha has pressed with his feet, when moving in his might or in his natural state; to his footprints in this river, or in the ocean which receives the stream of this river,—to them I offer this krathong and its contents as worthy of the great Buddha. To him and to the relics and to his property I reverently dedicate this krathong. And whatever merit I may obtain by this deed, that merit I do not appropriate for myself, but give to the genii, in whose honour the krathong was

first made by Nobamas, for I too reverence the spirits she intended to honour." Having finished this speech in defence of his actions, and having satisfied his own conscience, he placed the brilliantly illuminated little float in the water, for the stream to carry away to the sea. [Pg 365]

But all these proceedings, though very complimentary to Nobamas herself, did not in any way realise her idea as to what was due to the water-spirits from one who was a Brahmin. As she had now no offering, she at once set to work to make one. She hastily gathered fresh leaves and bound them together into a square, shallow box. She cut bits of banana stem to fasten to it, and in the middle she quickly stuck a few tapers and joss sticks, borrowed from the people round about her. Into the boat she cast anything she could find, lit the tapers, made her vows and resolves mentally, and cast the toy adrift to follow the one the king had already launched. The monarch saw it, and knew who had made it so quickly, for there was but one woman in the land who had the knowledge and the skill to construct a new krathong so easily. He was loud in his praise, and the people stirred by the example thus set them, took everything that they could find that would float, stuck lighted tapers and incense sticks in them, and put them in the water, till presently the river was all ablaze with twinkling lights, and the air was full of the joyful sound of merry laughter.

The king was highly delighted with the sight, and ordered that it should occur annually in honour of the wise and beautiful Nobamas. And he entreated the genii of the river to take possession of the hearts and minds of all his subjects at this season of the year, for ever and ever, and compel them to hold a great festival, which he named "Khan Loi Phra Prathip Krathong." "Krathong," as previously explained, means "a little basket-like boat containing small flowers and other offerings suitable for the water-spirits;" "loi" means "to send adrift" or "to float," and "prathip" is derived from the Pali word "padipo", meaning "a lamp" or "taper." There are those in the country who say that all the descendants of those who witnessed the first ceremony, are slaves of Pra Luang, and that at the proper season their minds are forced to obey his wishes, and send adrift the taper-bearing floats. [Pg 366]

For seven hundred years the ceremony has existed, but its details have changed with each succeeding generation. A few years after its initiation, the king ceased his visitation to all temples that were not near at hand, and all the fireworks that used to be let off on his arrival were brought together to make a gorgeous display at the palace landing. The king sat on a throne to watch the general amusement, and then sent adrift one or more krathongs.

Since the foundation of Bangkok the ceremonies of Thot Katin and Loy Krathong have branched off from each other. The late king introduced several changes; for, whereas previously, all the floats were provided by his own officials at their private expense, those sent off by the king himself were made at his expense, and greatly reduced in number. The common people, of course, please themselves as to the number and value of the krathongs they send adrift.

At present the festival occurs twice each year; first on the third, fourth, and fifth day of October, and again on the first, second and third of November. The people have various theories as to why they make offerings to the spirits of the water by means of illuminated krathongs and floating fireworks, though they all agree that it is a good way of making merit. About midnight or early morning the king comes down to the royal landing in front of the palace, and pushes off a big krathong, whose tapers he has lit with his own hand. The royal children and princes follow suit. As they float away into the darkness, they give the signal to the thousands of people who are waiting to do the same thing. Night is soon turned into day. Fireworks are thrown into the water, the bright little lights sail over the dancing waves, and the river is soon dotted all over as far as the eye can reach, with lights of many colours, that twinkle, fizz, or splutter for a long, long time. The krathongs take many shapes, and illuminated palaces, ships, rafts, lotuses, and boats ride on the river, carrying their little offerings of food and tobacco as a gracious gift to the "mother of the waters", amidst the blare of trumpets and the shouts of many voices. Away by the sea shore, the crested billows bear the same offerings out to sea, to be soon lost and drowned in the deep dark ocean. [Pg 367]

Eclipses. Whenever an eclipse occurs, the natives turn out of their houses and indulge in a very noisy demonstration. Though their actions on these occasions cannot be described as strictly of a religious character, yet as most of the so-called religious ceremonies have been developed from superstitions, the superstition that forms the basis of the popular theory of eclipses may here be fitly given. The native astrologers are able to calculate the time of these astronomical phenomena, with considerable accuracy; but as they do not understand the use of logarithms, their methods are tedious and lengthy. When an eclipse occurs, the people beat drums and gongs, shout their loudest, let off fire-arms, and in fact make any and every noise they can think of. Some people say that a demon is eating up the moon, or the sun, as the case may be, and that only in this way can they frighten the monster away, and so prevent the loss of these brilliant luminaries. But there is another story quite as fantastic, which also attempts to account for a lunar eclipse. [Pg 368]

In times long ago, so long ago that no man knows any one who can remember them, it was the custom of the Sun to descend to earth and hold daily conversation with his younger brothers, the Emperor of China and the King of Siam. These two potentates held long and weighty consultations with the renowned and brilliant king Sol, taking his advice on all matters of importance, discussing with him all the details of state management and intrigue, and seeking his aid when foreign powers attacked their thrones. The stars and planets formed the retinue of the solar monarch, and were employed as ambassadors both in times or war and of peace.

At that time the King of Siam dwelt at Ayuthia, then the capital of all the kingdom. Owing to the constant visits of the sun, life was longer and less liable to disease. Such was the vitality imparted by the warmth and cheerfulness of his rays, that no man began to talk of growing old until he had lived for about two thousand years. [Pg 369]

The King having reigned peacefully and with great success for over two hundred years, decided to abdicate in favour of his son, who was a mere youth of not more than one hundred and sixty or seventy years of age. Now after this young boy had ascended the throne, old King Sol made up his mind to do his best to assist the youthful sovereign in the difficult art of right government. To this end he kept his watchful eye ever fixed upon the young king and his doings. He never slept, or took a holiday, but hour by hour, and day by day, poured forth his shining light in loving guardianship of his royal nephew. The services of the stars were no longer required. When they found themselves of no importance in the administration of government, they became suspicious and angry. They met together and formed a league, vowed to revolt against their liege lord, and to proclaim a republic at the earliest opportunity. Like all true conspirators they hid their deep designs, and while pretending sleep, they only blinked and snoozed, ever on the alert for anything which they might use for the disadvantage of their powerful monarch. As they lay in wait, they said one to another, "Why does our king never go to sleep now? Aforetime he took his nightly rest as all respectable monarchs should. Why these sleepless hours?" [Pg 370]

It happened that the old King, who had abdicated the throne, had a daughter of the most lovable disposition, who was also exceedingly fair to look upon. She was called Rosy Morn. Whenever she came to her father, he lost any lingering desires for regal pomp and splendour, for her presence was refreshing to him above all things on earth. No one except his own family had ever looked upon her. Beautiful and good, chaste and simple, she was beloved by all her relatives, with a love that was half worship.

Her days were spent in rural pursuits of charming simplicity. She gathered flowers and made wreaths of them to deck her own fair head; she talked to the birds who never hid their gorgeous plumage when she approached them; and she listened to the voices of the spirits that frolic in the rain-drops and the dew, as they chattered and laughed in every floral cup. One day, having sung her father to rest, she wandered forth to stroll in the still green woods around her home.

In these woods there was a cavern, whose entrance, hidden by a mass of tropical foliage, had never been discovered by any one except Rosy Morn, who, keen lover of nature as she was, knew every secret nook and corner of the whole forest. Through this secluded cavern there ran a brook, clear as crystal and pure beyond description. Whenever the maiden was tired of wandering through the woods, she made her way to this safe retreat and bathed her tiny feet in the clear cool water. Thus happiness and peace attended her day by day, and her mind, pure and tender, knew no other excitements except those of simple wonder and delight. [Pg 371]

But one day a butterfly of unusually brilliant appearance flittered across her path. It was larger than any she had ever seen before, and the colours of its wings were of the most resplendent tints. She chased this wonderful little creature, and tried to catch it, but without success. It flew from palm to palm, and from fern to fern, now hiding itself behind some radiant blossom, now poising itself high out of reach upon some feathery branch. Suddenly a light appeared, in whose brilliancy the hues of the butterfly were lost, and the eyes of the maiden dazzled so that she could not see. It was the chariot of old Sol coming over a neighbouring hill. She turned and fled, and retiring to the cave, quite unconscious that she had been observed by anyone, she sought to cool her heated body and refresh her weary limbs by bathing in the sparkling waters that ran through her retreat.

But old Sol had seen her, and being struck by her wondrous beauty, the like of which in all his rambles he had never beheld before, he drove after her with furious speed, and discovered the place where she had concealed herself. He entered into the cavern, but as she was lying down asleep after her bath, he did not disturb her, but sat down quietly by her side, and waited patiently for her to open her eyes. When she awoke, she was startled by his dazzling presence. [Pg 372] He calmed her fears, revealed to her all his majesty and power, and then cast himself before her in the humble suppliant attitude of a devout lover. The maiden, unable to resist either the glory of his station, or the sincerity of his submission to herself, accepted him as her lover, with great shyness and trembling. They plighted their troth, and wandered arm in arm about the cavern. They agreed to keep their engagement secret, and to meet regularly at noon every day in that place, until such time as it should be convenient to disclose their intention to their friends. For about two thousand years they kept their betrothal a secret, but at last, through some mischance, the stars, eager for revolt, got an inkling of their monarch's misconduct. They set a watch, and one day when he was paying his accustomed day visit to his sweetheart, they seized his chariot, and driving with furious speed, they rushed home to spread the news. Elated with their discovery they proclaimed aloud all they knew of Sol's behaviour, and declared a republic.

When the glorious monarch had said farewell to Rosy Morn for that day, he found that his carriage had been stolen, and that his conduct was known. He wept bitterly, shedding tears of pure gold. The mountains, on whose majestic forms he had so often cast his cheery, warming rays, now took pity on the distressed king, and opened a passage in the earth by means of which he could return to his home in safety. Every day he came to visit his sweetheart, driving in a new chariot through the mountain caverns. Ever as he drove along he cried aloud in sorrow for his misfortunes, and ever as he wept his tears fell down to earth in streams of purest gold. These precious tears hidden away in the ground are now the gold mines of Siam. It took him twelve [Pg 373]

hours to get home. Then he turned, and rode back during the night, taking another twelve hours' journey just to get a momentary glimpse at the faithful maiden. All this time Rosy Morn wandered about in caverns and mountains also. Her heart was heavy with her grief, and she wept bitterly. Her tears fell wherever she walked, in streams of purest silver, giving rise to the silver mines of the country.

After a long time the revolted stars made a compact with their lawful king. For two weeks each month the maiden was to live with King Sol in some distant home, but during the other half of the month the stars were to be permitted to gaze upon her lovely face and call her moon. One other stipulation was made—namely, that Sol should never kiss Rosy Morn whenever there was any one looking on. But this latter part of the agreement he occasionally breaks, for during the eclipse of the moon he is seen by many thousands of people, impudently kissing her silver face before the public gaze. Then the dwellers upon earth make a great noise to remind him of his promise, and to let him know how very shocked they are.

Though this story exists in the native legends, it is not generally accepted as giving the true theory of the eclipse; the idea of sun- or moon-eating demons being far more popular. But this [Pg 374] latter story also gives an account of the origin of the gold and silver mines of Siam. The cave in which Rosy Morn and Old Sol held their daily meetings, is said to be near Ayuthia. Until a few years ago, pilgrimages were made to this cave, and into a bottomless pit, every one according to his rank, cast in gold and silver as a memorial of the day when silver and precious metals were first discovered in the kingdom of Siam.

CHAPTER XIX. [Pg 375]

THE PILGRIMAGE TO PRABAT.

About one hundred miles to the north-north-east of the city of Bangkok there stands an isolated hill, whose sides are greatly scored with "rays" that plainly indicate its volcanic origin. As all the surrounding land is but a wide stretch of low level plain, flooded in the rainy season, the jagged peak is a conspicuous object for many miles away from its base. The hill is known as Mount Prabat. The name "Pra-bat" is a compound of two words, meaning "the holy foot," and is given to the hill because popular superstition asserts that in a hollow in its rocky sides there is a footprint of the holy Buddha.

Thousands of people every year make their way to the spot to worship this memento of their Master's presence on this earth. From Bangkok the pilgrims ascend the Menam Chow Phya in boats, until they reach the old ruined capital of Ayuthia, from which point, the rest of the journey, some fourteen or fifteen miles, is made by land. Some people trudge the whole way on foot; some ride in the picturesque buffalo carts, or in the cumbersome bullock waggons; while others travel by means of elephants. The howdah of the elephant is no gorgeously caparisoned seat, like those [Pg 376] so often seen in Indian pictures, but is merely a plain wooden saddle, covered over with a light canopy of basket-work which shields the head from the heat of the sun, and the thorns of the long spiny creepers that hang from the branches overhead. The Siamese elephant does not kneel in order to allow the passenger to mount, but he lifts one of his front legs, and bends it at the knee so as to form a kind of step. A sharp iron spike, stuck in the end of a long rod or pole, is the weapon used by the mahout or elephant driver to guide the beast and to urge it to greater speed. It functions both as whip and reins.

The road, in the height of the pilgrim season, is thronged throughout its whole length with crowds of people going and returning, and there are plenty of enterprising Chinese and Siamese at convenient intervals along the track, anxious to make a little honest profit by supplying the devotees with food. Rice is the chief article offered for sale, and is cooked in bamboo shoots, which here take the place of the ordinary iron pot. Sugar obtained from the palm tree, and wild honey in the comb, from the trees in the neighbouring forest, are also largely disposed of as palatable forms of light refreshment.

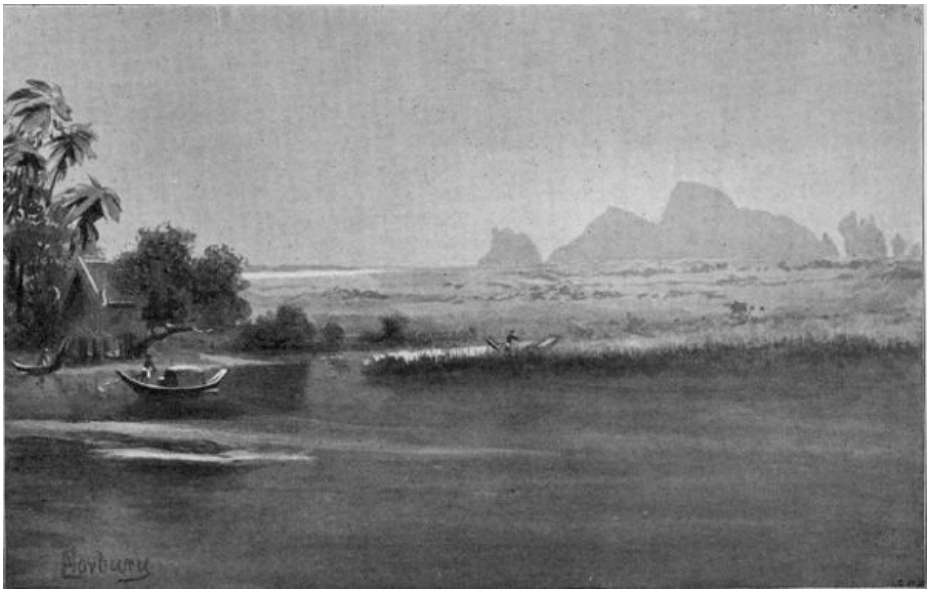
On the hill, and round about it, there are many temple-like buildings and houses for the attendant priests. Salas, rooms for preaching, halls filled with hundreds of idols, and huts made of bamboo for the use of the pilgrims abound at the base of the hill, and testify to the large number of [Pg 377] worshippers who annually frequent the place. On trees and temples, on shrines and shanties, are hung innumerable bells, which when light are swung by every breeze, and when heavy are banged by the worshippers. A native band performs hour by hour, and endeavours, unsuccessfully, to drown the clear sweet melody of the bells in its harsh discord of gongs and drums. The mountain is dotted all over with the usual white spire-crowned pagodas, and, over the footprint, a particularly beautiful shrine has been erected. Its roof is built in seven stories which overlap each other, and upon the summit rests a very tall prachadee with a snow-white spire and a richly gilded base, which indicates with dazzling brilliancy, the whole day through, the exact locality of the sacred spot. The whole structure is placed on a small projecting platform in the rock, and the ascent is made by a series of about fifty or sixty steps cut in the solid rock. Up these steps all truly devout Buddhists crawl on their hands and knees, and as the result of the visits to the shrine of thousands of worshippers who year by year have come to bow before the footprint

of their ancient teacher, the steps are distinctly worn and polished.

The external walls of the building are covered with brightly coloured mosaics; the outer surfaces of the heavy doors and windows are beautifully inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and the whole of the interior is decorated with a series of perspectiveless frescoes, illustrating various scenes from the [Pg 378] life of Buddha. The platform of rock is about thirty feet square; and inside the building the floor is laid with plates of solid silver covered over with a carpet of pure silver net-work, which is polished intensely bright by the knees of the devotees. Two copies of the sacred footprint are hung on the walls. Both are made of pure gold, and one of them has all the mystic symbols inlaid with precious stones. The footprint itself is about four feet long and one foot and a half broad, and both in size and shape bears no resemblance whatever to the footprint of anything either human or divine. It is in a dark hole, and cannot be distinctly seen. The golden copies on the wall are apparently purely imaginative. Railings of solid bars of silver enclose the depression in the rock, and render minute examination perfectly impossible. A gilt canopy with flowing curtains of cloth of gold is suspended from the roof immediately above the object of the people's veneration.

The numerous worshippers enter on their knees. They carry wax candles in their hands, and crawl up to the depression, prostrate themselves devoutly at its edge, fasten a bit of gold-leaf on the sides of the hole, sprinkle holy water on their heads, and then crawl out again on hands and knees. Offerings of bottles, looking-glasses, wax and paper flowers, and other tawdry objects are heaped in piles on the floor. The more valuable gifts are carefully preserved elsewhere. Those who cannot afford to give anything at all, satisfy their consciences by carefully fanning the footprint itself.

[Pg 379]



PRABAT HILLS FROM NEAR AYUTHIA.

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The Siamese are not the only people in the world who have been known to reverence a supposed [Pg 381] footprint, nor is Prabat the only place where the impress of the feet of the holy of old is pointed out. The footprint superstition is world-wide. There is the well-known footprint on Adam's Peak in Ceylon, which is claimed by the Buddhists as marking the place where Buddha once stood. It is worshipped by the Brahmins as being that of Siva, while the Mahomedans assert that it was made by Adam, and Christians have been known who have stated that they believe it to be the footprint of St. Thomas. On the Kodam Rasul Hill near Hyderabad, the Mahomedans have found a footprint of Mahomed. At Thanet, St. Augustine left the marks of his feet upon a rock upon which he pressed heavily when he landed upon our heathen shores. In a circular chapel over a foot-like depression in the rocky sides of the Mount of Olives, the footprint of Christ is pointed out to travellers. On the other side of the world the inhabitants of the island of Samoa exhibit a similar memorial of Tiitii; while the ancient Mexicans claimed to possess an equally authentic relic of Tezcatlipoa.

In a "Life of Buddha", written in Sanskrit, it is said that when Gautama was born he bore in his person a number of signs or personal peculiarities that at once foretold that his ultimate destiny was that of a powerful emperor or of a widely renowned and worshipped teacher. There are thirty-two chief and eighty minor signs given, and they mostly refer to personal characteristics considered handsome or beautiful in men or women according to the Oriental idea of beauty. [Pg 382] Some of them do not appear to the mind of the European to be at all conducive to an impressive or handsome presence. For instance, the wonderful being who is born with the thirty-two major distinguishing marks of future greatness or holiness, has amongst other things, a skin of the colour of gold, arms so long that they reach far below the knees when he stands upright, and a thin butterfly kind of tongue long enough to reach round and enter his ears when fully produced. Upon his fingers and toes there should be a network of lines described with mathematical regularity.

The worship of the footprint in the Far East extends back for many years, and in many of the oldest sculptures that have been brought from India, there are to be seen distinct representations

of the sole of a foot with the mark of a wheel in the centre. At first, all other marks, except this universal one of the wheel, varied considerably in character, and were few in number. But the imaginations of the Eastern worshippers gradually added further ornamentations until the sole of the foot was covered entirely by a collection of symbols. The elaboration of these signs reached its greatest height in Siam and Burmah.

There is nothing in the earliest scriptures to warrant the present widely-spread superstition, and, in fact, it is not until many years after Buddha's death that any mention of such a belief is to be found in the Sanskrit writings.

The Prabat relic in Siam was discovered in 1602 A.D., by a hunter named Boon. It is very [Pg 383] probable that he had at some time or other been a pilgrim to Ceylon, for such pilgrimages to Adam's peak were not uncommon in those days. One day when hunting in the forest he noticed a depression in the rock, which he thought resembled the relic in Ceylon. He proclaimed his discovery to many people, and the king, hearing the report, sent a body of learned monks to the place to examine the footprint and report upon its authenticity. They examined and compared it with the copies they possessed of the one in Ceylon, and returned to the king, declaring that it was perfectly genuine. Thereupon, the sovereign, being only too willing to accept the conclusions of the monks, made no further enquiry as to the character of the discovery, but built a shrine over it, and ordered his people to worship it annually. This they gladly did, for their national pride was intensely gratified by the belief that they had in their country so unmistakable a proof that the holy Buddha had once resided amongst them.

In all the well-known Buddhist footprints the figure of a wheel or disc occupies the centre. It probably first represented speed, and was therefore symbolical of fleetness of foot, an attribute of greatness in early days. In later times it lost the form of an ordinary chariot wheel, and became the Chakkra or quoit of Vishnu and Indra. Its form is well seen in the watermark on Siamese stamps, and on the old Siamese coins. In the hands of Vishnu and Indra it was a powerful weapon of destruction, as it always annihilated all those enemies against whom, in their wrath, they [Pg 384] hurled it. In the Buddhist mythology it has lost its material character, and taken on a new significance, as representing the pure moral teachings of Gautama, which when cast by holy men against the ignorance and sin of the world will effectually destroy them.

The other marks on the footprints in Siam and Burmah are later designs added by credulous and imaginative worshippers. They are grouped symmetrically round the central Chakkra, and represent various attributes of royal power, and holiness, or else are symbolical of different natural and supernatural ideas. The principal of them are mentioned below. There are the sixteen heavens of the formed Brahmas, and the six heavens inhabited by the inferior angels or Devas. Another sign represents Mount Meru, the centre of each system of the universe. There are also depicted on the sole of the foot, the seven mountains which form a ring round Mount Meru, and the seven belts of deep dark ocean that lie in the valleys between them, and in whose waters monstrous fishes and water-elephants gambol and amuse themselves. Then there is another ocean, the eighth, in which float four worlds inhabited by human beings. In the first of these worlds, the men have faces such as are familiar to the dwellers upon our own particular planet. In the second, the faces of the inhabitants are square in shape, while those of the third have a round moon-like visage, and those of the fourth have countenances bounded by semi-circles. Another compartment of the footprint holds Mount Chakrawan, the great mountain of crystal [Pg 385] which encircles the world and forms a wall around it. The heavens are represented by a group of stars. The Himalaya Mountains, that appear so often in Hindoo legends, are not forgotten, nor are their seven lakes in which bloom lotuses of many different colours, ever omitted. Five rivers flow from the Himalaya Mountains, and on their banks are the great forests inhabited by fabulous beasts and birds. The Naga king, the seven-headed cobra who shielded Buddha, with his seven hoods, during a time of danger, finds a place in another compartment. But amidst all these curious and mystic symbols there is no animal of evil disposition, for upon the foot of the holy man there was nothing of bad omen. Figures representing royal authority occur in the form of a palace, a flag, a throne, a royal sword, a white seven-storied state umbrella, a spiral crown, and a golden ship.

It is rather surprising that the late king, who was very hostile to many popular superstitions, encouraged the worship at the shrine on the hill at Prabat. Perhaps he half believed in it himself, or perhaps he thought it good for his people to be reminded as often and as forcibly as possible of the life of the founder of the national faith. The reader need scarcely be told that not only is the whole footprint purely fabulous, but that also there is nothing in the authentic history of ancient times to warrant the notion that Buddha ever set foot in Siam at all.

The two following stories referring to Buddha's feet are given by Alabaster, as being translated [Pg 386] from the Burmese "Life of Buddha" by Bishop Bigandet.

> "During all the time that elapsed after the rain, Buddha travelled through the country, engaged in his usual benevolent errand, and converting many amongst men and angels. In the country of Gaurint, in a village of Pounhas, called Magoulia, the head man, one of the richest in the place, had a daughter whose beauty equalled that of a daughter of the angels. She had been in vain asked in marriage by princes, nobles, and Pounhas. The proud damsel had rejected every offer. On the day that her father saw Gautama he was struck with his manly beauty and deportment. He said within himself, 'This man shall be a proper match for my daughter.' On his return home he communicated his views to his wife. On the

following day, the daughter having put on her choicest dress and richest apparel, they all three went with a large retinue to the Dzetawon monastery. Admitted to the presence of Buddha, the father asked for his daughter the favour of being allowed to attend on him. Without returning a word or reply, or giving the least sign of acceptance or refusal, Buddha rose up and withdrew to a small distance, leaving behind him on the floor the print of one of his feet. The Pounha's wife, well skilled in the science of interpreting wonderful signs, saw at a glance that the marks on the print indicated a man no longer under the control of passions, but a sage emancipated from the thraldom of concupiscence."

The story goes on to relate how the father made a further offer of his daughter to Buddha, and how the saint preached to the parents a sermon that stilled their longings to possess him for a son-in-law. They returned home with their still unmarried daughter. She never forgave the man who had refused her love, and cherished for him a lively and life-long hatred. [Pg 387]

The other story tells of a visit paid by the saint Kathaba to the pile upon which Buddha was laid for his cremation.

"Standing opposite to the feet, he made the following prayer, 'I wish to see the feet of Buddha whereupon are imprinted the marks that formerly prognosticated his future glorious destiny. May the cloth and cotton they are wrapt with be unloosened, and the coffin as well as the pile be laid open, and the sacred feet appear out, and extend so far as to lie on my head.' He had scarcely uttered this prayer when the whole suddenly opened, and there came out the beautiful feet, like the full moon emerging from the bosom of a dark cloud."

CHAPTER XX. [Pg 388]

THE ELEPHANTS.

The Siamese Twins and the Siamese White Elephants are the two objects round which many an Englishman grouped all his knowledge of "The Kingdom of the Yellow Robe" until the political troubles of the past few years drew public attention to this hitherto little known country. The elephants have given rise to a proverbial expression in England, which is a little misleading when viewed in the light of Siamese opinion. To give to a European a useless and troublesome present is known as giving him a "white elephant," but to give a Buddhist a present of a white elephant would be to give him possession of a creature which, kindly treated, would cause blessings and good fortune to fall in showers around him in this and all future existences.

The white elephant has been held in great respect in many countries, and has played a great part in many legends. In Enarea, in Central Africa, elephants of this colour are reverenced.

When Shahab ud-Din, in 1194, attacked and defeated Jaya Chandra of Benares, he captured from his conquered foes a white elephant which refused to make obeisance to its new master, and made a furious assault upon its driver when he attempted to coerce it into respectful behaviour. [Pg 389]

In the time of the grandfather of Mahomed, when the Christian king of Himyar advanced against Kenanah in Hijaz, to revenge the pollution of a Christian church at Sennaa, he secured his victory beforehand by going to the scene of battle upon an elephant whose skin was of the colour of milk.

In Siam the representation of the white elephant is everywhere conspicuous. The national flag is "a white elephant on a scarlet ground." The mercantile flag is "a white elephant on a blue ground." On every temple and official building in the land there is a representation in stone, plaster, or colour of this wonderful creature. But the *body* of a real white elephant has never yet been seen. The creature who bears the name is simply an elephant which is a little lighter in colour than the ordinary elephant. For the sake of convenience we shall refer to it as the "white elephant," though there is no such name for it in the native language, and though its colour is very much more like that of a dirty bath-brick. Even this distant approach to whiteness is not distributed generally all over the body, but is usually confined to a few solitary patches near the extremities. These blotches of lighter colour are not natural or hereditary. They are often the result of an eruptive affection. The irritation that accompanies the disease causes the animal to rub the affected part against the trunks of trees or other hard material, and so to destroy the epidermal surface. All so-called white elephants have, however, a few really white hairs which are not to be accounted for in this manner. [Pg 390]

The white elephant has at times been worshipped with a veneration which, though we may consider it misdirected, may charitably be regarded as laudable in intention. It has been believed that this particular animal contains the soul of some very distinguished person, possibly that of a Buddha, who in some future age will appear in human form to enlighten and bless the world by his counsel and example. This being the belief, the adoration that is offered to such an animal is reasonable.

The white elephants in the stables at Bangkok have chiefly been captured in the Laos territories in the north. When one of them is caught, the finder is handsomely rewarded, and there is

general rejoicing throughout the land. It is immediately handed over to the king, who provides for its earthly comforts ever after. It is of priceless value, and cannot be bought or sold.

About twenty years ago a body of Brahmin astrologers who are permanently attached to the court, declared that the present reign would be an especially happy one, and that several white elephants would be caught. Both their forecasts have proved correct. Their prophetic utterances were conveyed from one end of the country to the other, and large rewards were offered to the men who would discover a white elephant. For a long time a most diligent search in forest and [Pg 391] jungle was made by the native hunters. Every place where elephants had ever been seen or heard of was examined with great care and perseverance, but without success. One day, however, a number of men caught sight of an elephant of excellent shape, but his colour gave no evidence that he was one of the kind they were searching for. On looking closer at the mud-bespattered animal, they were attracted by some peculiarity in the skin, and also by the pale Neapolitan yellow colour of the iris of the eye. This latter mark being considered as one of the chief beauties of a white elephant, they determined to capture the animal. This was a matter speedily accomplished. They then took the animal home and gave it a good bath, patiently scrubbing and scraping away until all the accumulated mud and dirt upon it was removed, when to their almost infinite joy and astonishment they beheld a most beautiful specimen of the white elephant family. It was of pale bath-brick colour, and on its back there were actually a few hairs that could, without any flattery, be truly called white. This elephant is said to be the finest example of the kind ever captured.

The excitement which prevailed in the whole land to its furthest boundaries, and affected the whole population from king to coolie, is said to have been unrealisable to the English mind. It was more than a mere national rejoicing, for in many thousands of homes it was mingled with that deep superstitious veneration in which the Oriental mind satisfies its longings and its imagination. Gorgeous preparations were made for the elephant's reception. The king travelled [Pg 392] up the river as far as Ayuthia to meet it; Bangkok was decorated and illuminated; every nobleman was arrayed in his richly embroidered cloth of gold, and was followed by his retinue of servants. People from outlying districts poured into the city to swell the enormous crowd of spectators; every available ornament for personal use was displayed; the brightest colours were donned; flags and bunting were hoisted; and when the noble animal appeared, surrounded by gaily gilded state barges, a group of Brahmin priests descended to the river's edge to receive the living cause of all this rejoicing. To it they read an address, of which the following translation is a part:

> "With holy reverence we now come to worship the angels who preside over the destiny of all elephants. Most powerful angels, we entreat you to assemble now, in order that you may prevent all evil to His Majesty the King of Siam, and also to this magnificent elephant, which has recently arrived. We appeal to you all, whom we now worship, and beg that you will use your power in restraining the heart of this animal from all anger and unhappiness. We also beg that you will incline this elephant to listen to the words of instruction and comfort, that we now deliver.
>
> "Most Royal Elephant! We beg that you will not think too much of your father and mother, your relatives and friends. We beg that you will not regret leaving your native mountains and forests, because there are evil spirits there that are very dangerous; and wild beasts are there that howl, making a fearful noise; and there [Pg 393] too is the big bird which hovers round and often picks up elephants and eats them; and there are bands of cruel hunters who kill elephants for their ivory. We trust that you will not return to the forest, for you would be in constant danger. And that is not all: in the forest you have no servants, and it is very unpleasant to sleep with the dust and filth adhering to your body, and where the flies and mosquitoes are troublesome.
>
> "Brave and noble elephant! We entreat you to banish every wish to stay in the forest. Look at this delightful place, this heavenly city! It abounds in wealth and in everything your eyes could wish to see or your heart desire to possess. It is of your own merit that you have come to behold this beautiful city, to enjoy its wealth, and to be the favourite guest of His Most Exalted Majesty the King."[J]

Then the Brahmin priests baptised the sacred beast with holy water, and, after its purification, bestowed upon it the highest of the titles which the king can confer upon his subjects. The title was written on a piece of sugar-cane. Upon this cane there were also a number of sentences describing the virtues, qualities, and perfections of the new nobleman. When the baptismal ceremonies were over, the sugar-cane was handed to the beast, that he might eat it, a part of the ceremony which the elephant understood, and performed with noteworthy despatch. It was then lodged in the royal stables, with a few other brethren who had previously experienced the same [Pg 394] fêting and reverence.

Old accounts tell us that the white elephants were treated, during their lives, with the greatest respect and care. Their stables were comfortable, and their food consisted of such dainties as were thought most likely to be appreciated by them. Their food was presented to them upon silver salvers, by servants who knelt as they offered the dish. Their eyes were reverently wiped; they received cool sponge baths at frequent intervals; and it might fairly be supposed that they led about as lazy and luxurious a life as any creature could desire. If they were ill the wisest of the court physicians were sent to them, and their ailments received as much weighty consideration as those of a king. At death they were deeply mourned for, their departure from

this life being attended with the usual eastern pomp and ceremony.

They do not live in this condition now. As Henry Norman says in his book on "The Far East"—"they are in a plight that would shame the bear-cage of a wandering circus; tended by slouching ruffians who lie about in rags and tatters, eking out a scanty livelihood by weaving baskets, and begging a copper from every visitor in return for throwing a bunch of seedy grass or rotting bananas to the swaying beasts, which raise their trunks in anticipation of the much needed addition to their scanty diet."

Elephant stories are prevalent in the myths which cloud and hide the purer ideas of the Buddhist faith. Shortly before the birth of Buddha, his mother Queen Maia had a vision. The four kings of [Pg 395] the world removed her to the Himalayan Forest, and there seated her on an immense rock. She was bathed, robed, and adorned by a number of queens, and was then led to a golden palace standing on a silver mountain, and requested to rest on a couch, with her face turned to the west. She did so, and beheld a golden mountain on which the future Buddha marched in the form of a white elephant. It descended the golden mountain, and bearing a white lotus flower in its trunk, and trumpeting loudly as it came, made its way to the couch of the astonished Queen Maia.

The birth of Buddha was attended by a number of portents which betokened that a most distinguished person had appeared on earth. Either he was a Buddha or a universal emperor—

"A Chakravartin, such as rise to rule
Once in each thousand years."[K]

If he were the latter, he would possess "seven gifts", tokens of his future universal power. One of them was

"... a snow white elephant,
The Hasti-Katna, born to bear his King."[L]

By the signs on his foot, which we have already described, he was known to be a Buddha. One of these signs is an elephant, named Chatthan. This is the three-headed elephant on which Indra rides, and is represented in many Siamese decorations, and in the royal coat of arms, but in all [Pg 396] the sculptures which represent the sole of Buddha's foot, the elephant possesses only one head.

There is also in Siamese story a king of elephants, Chatthan or Chaddanta, who lives on the shores of the lake Chatthan in the Himalayas. Here he resides in a golden palace, attended by eighty thousand ordinary elephants. The elephant Chatthan is sometimes known as "the elephant of six defences," an allusion to his possession of six tusks.

When the great king Mara (who reigns over all the Mara angels, and corresponds in the Buddhist scriptures to the Satan of the Bible) came to tempt the Buddha as he sat under the Bo-tree, in the time when he attained the wisdom and holiness of Buddhahood, it is said that he came on an elephant. He assumed an immense size, and brandishing numerous weapons in his thousand arms, advanced to the tree, riding on his elephant Girimaga, which was no less than a thousand miles in height.

A number of similar elephant stories could easily be compiled, for they are plentifully distributed in the legends of the East. Probably the great size and strength of the beast are the bases upon which the stories rest.

How important the elephant was in former times may be gathered from a letter written to Sir John Bowring by the late king, when that nobleman visited Siam in March 1855, on a diplomatic mission. Sir John's steamer had scarcely anchored at the bar at the mouth of the river, when a letter was handed to him from the sovereign, welcoming him to the country in very flattering terms. The letter was signed when the king suddenly added a postscript, saying, "I have just [Pg 397] returned from the old city Ayudia, of Siam, fifteen days ago, with the beautiful she-elephant which Your Excellency will witness here on Your Excellency's arrival."

Every few years there is a great elephant "hunt" at Ayuthia, to procure elephants for government service. A large kraal of quadrangular shape is erected. Its walls are six feet thick, and there is but one entrance. Inside the walls there is a fence of thick stakes set a few inches apart from each other. A herd of wild elephants is driven by tame ones into the enclosure, and the best of those thus obtained are noted. A good elephant should be of a light colour, have black nails on his toes, and his tail intact. As many of the stronger elephants often lose their tails in fights, it is not always possible to obtain an animal which is both powerful and handsome. The chosen elephants are lassoed, and their feet bound together. The tame elephants render great assistance in the work, and vigorously prod with their tusks any captives who become obstreperous. After a few days' dieting and training the captured animals are ready to be taught their several duties.

Writers upon foreign countries generally consider it a portion of their task to make mental if not outspoken comparisons between their mother land and the land they have been discussing, and they generally make their comparisons in favour of the former. Yet it is not easy for any man to [Pg 398]

hold the balance fairly, and to say in what way a nation is wanting; for whether the comparison be of things moral or social, there arises the difficulty of fixing a standard of measurement. Morality cannot be weighed in a balance or measured with a foot-rule. What is reprehensible in one country may be at least excusable in another. Take, for instance, the effect of climate upon national morality. In a cold country a man who is not born to wealth must either work or starve. Hence arise the pushing, prosperous, practical, so-called civilised nations of the world. But in a warm and fertile country where the fruit grows to your hand, and the earth brings forth her abundance for your maintenance, where the sun and the rain perform nearly all the agricultural labour that is needed, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the people do not hanker after work. It is therefore scarcely permissible to call them lazy according to the general acceptation of the meaning of the term. They have no particular liking for long and vigorous toil in the blazing heat of the sun, and their apparent indolence is the result of their environment. It will never be otherwise until humanity has lost its human nature.

The progress of any Oriental nation towards civilisation, such as we understand it, must of necessity be slow. Their intense conservatism is not easily to be abolished.

To the country of Siam these remarks are particularly applicable. Those who describe the habit of chewing betel-nut as disgusting, forget that there can be no one universal standard to judge by, [Pg 399] and that many European habits appear equally revolting to the Eastern. When speaking of the dirtiness of their dwellings it would be as well to remember the slums of the great European cities, and the defective sanitation of the majority of their dwelling-places. And when pronouncing judgment upon the slowness with which educational reforms are being undertaken, it should not be forgotten that we ourselves, in spite of our long educational history and our modern reforms, number our illiterate voters by hundreds.

The climatic, racial, and social differences between the nations of the East and of the West are too great to render it easily possible for a member of either to sum up for or against the general moral condition of the other. The present writer, while believing that the evolutionary laws of growth and development apply as well to nations as to animals and plants, is well content to leave to others the task of estimating the intrinsic value of Siam's present moral and social condition; hoping only that his attempts to portray briefly some of the manners and customs, the ideas and interests of her people, as he has actually seen them in daily life and intercourse, may help to give a truer notion of their condition and prospects, than would more lengthy criticisms founded on general observations of those merely political matters which necessarily bound the horizon of the casual and passing traveller.

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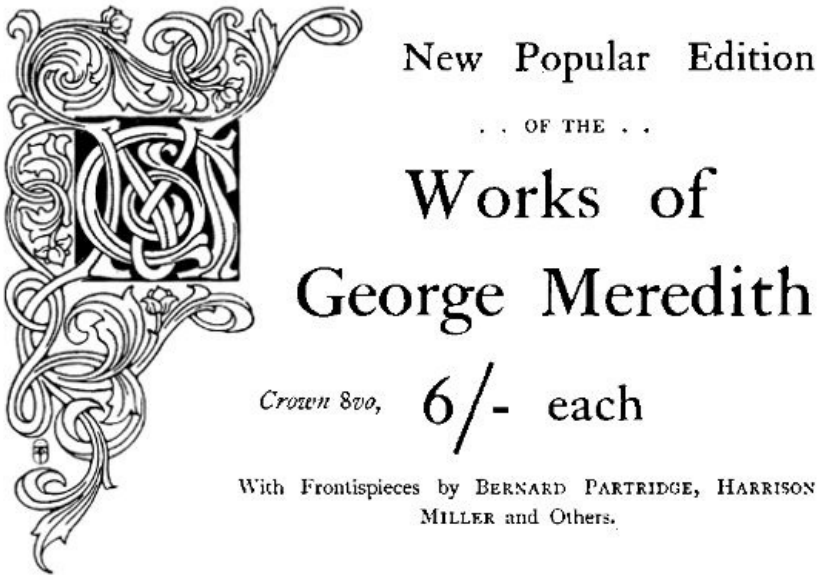

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FOOTNOTES:

[A] "Chulakantamangala." Captain Gerini.

[B] See Chapter X.

[C] "The Wheel of the Law". Alabaster.

[D] "Siam Repository."

[E] "Siam." Miss Cort.

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[G] "Siam", Bowring.

[H] See "Buddhism", Rhys Davids.

[I] A Siamese "chang" or "catty" is equal to about 2-2/3 lbs. avoirdupois.

[J] "Siam". Miss Cort.

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Transcriber's Notes

Minor punctuation errors have been silently corrected. Some hyphenation inconsistencies have been standardized.

The two pages of ads at the beginning of the book have been moved to the ads section at the end of the book.

LoI: Added Fishing Lugger, page 174.

LoI: Changed "Klong" to "Khlong" to match illustration caption.
(Orig: Klong near Petchaboorree.)

Page 2: Changed "suceess" to "success."
(Orig: new sovereign owed much of his suceess.)

Page 18: "kharki" may be a typo for "khaki."
(Orig: postmen in their yellow kharki uniforms)

Page 115: Deleted duplicate "of."
(Orig: cut into rectangular pieces of of the same size)

Page 261: Changed "foo" to "food."
(Orig: they must not partake of solid foo of any description.)

Page 268: Changed "obselete" to "obsolete."
(Orig: these counsels are so many obselete laws,)

Page 270: Changed "he" to "be."
(Orig: his mind should he well controlled.)

Page 325: Changed "carcases" to "carcasses."
(Orig: better spent in burning dead dogs' carcases.)

Page 335: Changed "the" to "he."
(Orig: With mingled joy and grief the parted with his long-loved)

Page 338: Changed "he" to "be."
(Orig: Whatever he ordered to be done in his own provinces)

Page 358: Changed "estabished" to "established."
(Orig: afterwards definitely estabished as annual occurrences)

Page 395: Changed "on" to "one."
(Orig: On of them was)

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