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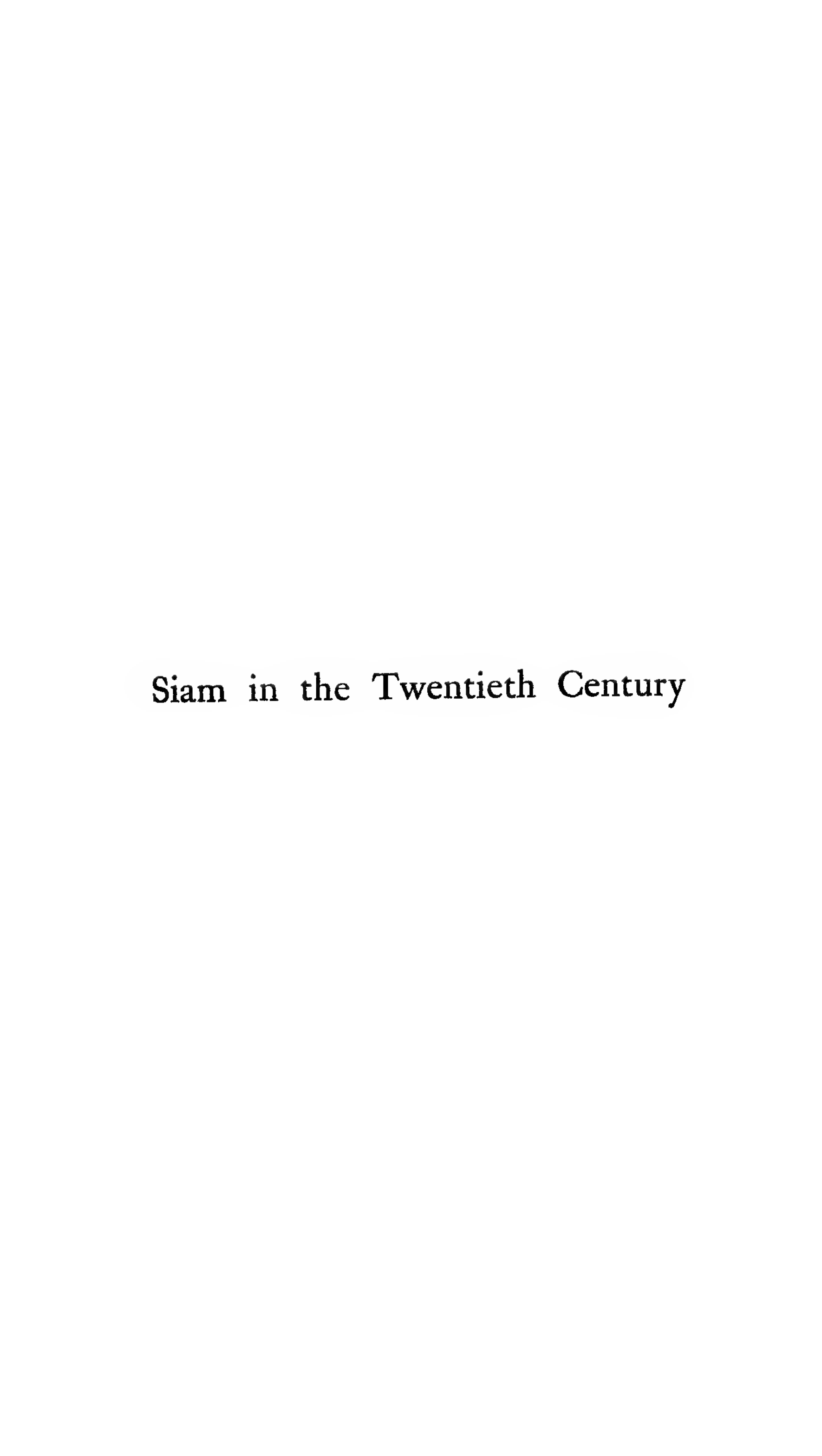

Siam in the Twentieth Century

Wat Sahket, or Golden Mount, Bangkok.

Siam in the Twentieth Century

BEING THE EXPERIENCES AND IMPRESSIONS OF A BRITISH OFFICIAL

BY

J. G. D. Campbell

One of His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, and recently Educational Adviser to the Siamese Government

LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD
Publisher to the India Office
1902

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TO

MY MOTHER

Preface

A GOOD many books have been written on Siam, but few of conspicuous interest or merit. That of Sir John Bowring, though published nearly fifty years ago, may still perhaps claim to be the standard work on the country. By far the best book of recent years is Mr. H. Warington Smyth's "Five Years in Siam." It is full of interesting and out-of-the-way facts; but it is written in the form of an itinerary, and the present volume, which is entirely different in arrangement and method, does not pretend in any way to enter into competition with it. Mr. Young's "Kingdom of the Yellow Robe," containing a very readable account of Siamese manners and customs, appeared in 1898, the same year as Mr. Smyth's book. Most English readers, however, have probably derived much of their knowledge of Siam from Mr. Henry Norman's extremely vivid sketch of Siamese politics and persons in his "Far East," which, though highly coloured, is generally acknowledged to be not the least faithful description that has been given of the

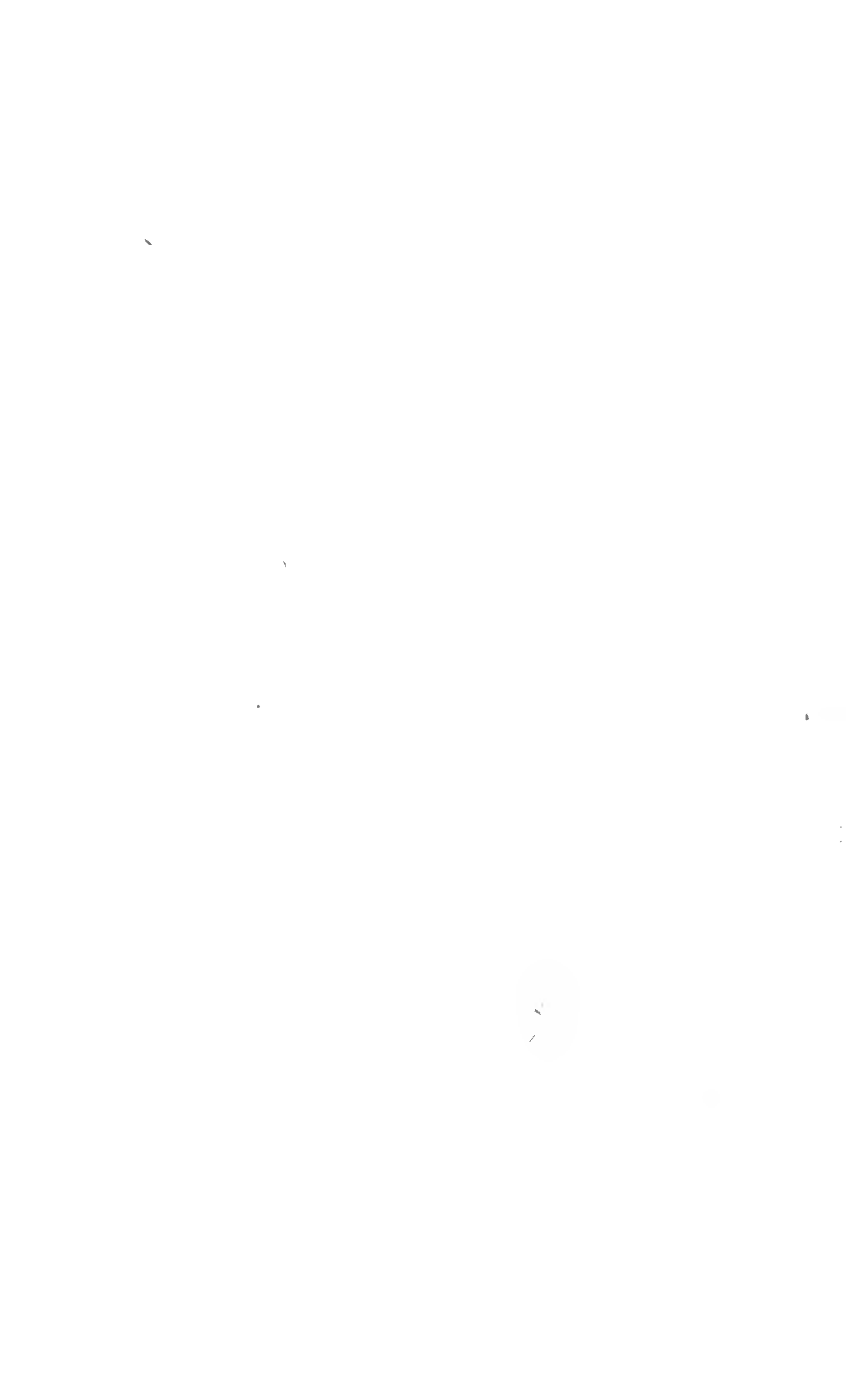
country. An equally entertaining account of the Siamese of an older generation is to be found in "The English Governess at the Siamese Court" (published in 1870), by Mrs. Leonowens, who taught the present king and his brothers and sisters as children. Her intimacy with the life of the Palace makes her book especially valuable, and it is characterised by no little pathos and humour. But to return to our own times, mention must not be omitted of Mrs. Grindrod's admirable little "Geographical Summary of Siam," nor, last but not least, of "The Bangkok Directory" (published at the office of the *Bangkok Times*), which is a mine of accurate and useful information, and is indispensable to residents in Siam.

In the Siam of to-day, though there are ample opportunities for research, Bangkok can only boast of two *savants* of any general reputation, viz., Major Gerini and Dr. Frankfurter. To them I am much indebted for some valuable information on early Siamese history and institutions, which could have been procured from no other source, and is not to be found in books. I also wish to express my deep obligation to my two kindest of old college friends, Mr. Henry Newbolt and Mr. Hugh Chisholm, for their most welcome help and advice, and to another old Oxford friend, Mr. A. D. Innes, for giving me the great benefit of his experience in revising the proofs.

I must add one word of personal explanation. In 1899 the Siamese Government applied to our Foreign Office for the loan of a British official for two years to reorganise the education of their country. Sir George Kekewich, Secretary to the Board of Education, kindly suggested my name; and accordingly I went to Siam in October, 1899, on two years' leave of absence.

J. G. D. C.

March, 1902.



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SIAM IN THE XXTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

LESS than four days from Singapore, but off the beaten track of steamers running from Europe to the Far East, lies the little-known land of Siam; a land in which a picturesque and ancient civilisation still lingers, but is rapidly beginning to disappear before European and Western influences. It is a land of varied interests and one which may well appeal to the antiquarian or artist, or to the student of politics and society. Yet but few travellers find their way thither, and the Europeans to be met with in the country are practically all drawn there for other and more material reasons than those of research or study. It is, indeed, to be regretted that the man of leisure and cultivation, whether his tastes lie in the comparative study of manners and beliefs or whether they take a more practical

direction, does not think of paying a visit to Siam and gathering some of the rich harvest that is still there to be reaped. From year to year, as the seasons roll on, the old order is ever changing, yielding place to new. The past years cannot be recalled, nor the present ones stayed in their course, and all we can do is to fix, as best we may, the glimpses we catch of the procession as it moves on in front of us in its never-ceasing march. What modern traveller in Japan has not wished that he could put himself back forty years, and see that still delightful country in the days when European custom had not yet staled her infinite variety, when neither court nor people had yet adopted our graceless Western garb, and advertisements on a European and even American scale did not meet the eye at every turn? No amount of books or reading can take us back those forty years. But here in Siam, a country no doubt of less varied interest than Japan, but hardly second to any other in the East, the opportunity is still offered; though, while the years are gliding by, how many care to take advantage of it? I have accordingly, during my stay in Siam, brief though it was, thought it worth while to note carefully my own impressions, and to gather at the same time what information I could from the Siamese themselves and older European residents for the benefit of the general reader at home and the future visitor to the country. Few things can be more fascinating than to watch

the flowing together of the two streams of Asiatic and Western civilisation, to see old landmarks gradually disappearing and new ones taking their place, and to speculate on what course the current will take in coming years. For Asia, it must be remembered, has its claim equally with Europe to be regarded as a civilised continent. It is no mere savage Africa or Australia. Civilisation in Siam, such as we now see it, or at any rate as it was a short time ago, dates back many centuries, with its roots firm in the past. While in itself it is well worthy of study, it is doubly interesting now that it is being brought in contact with the dominant civilisation of the world, and it is possible to mark what portions of it are sufficiently healthy and robust to survive.

The situation is one indeed which must be especially attractive to the historical and social student. A civilisation and a religious and political structure that have lasted so long and stood the test of time for so many centuries must needs have at least some elements of good and vitality in them. Such a civilisation cannot be wholly broken up; though it is a delicate fabric, and if it be handled roughly, what is good in it may be destroyed more easily than what is bad. For any one who is practically acquainted with the East can hardly fail to see that it cannot be altogether Westernised. Nature has set up physical barriers that are not for man to break down, and the Asiatic will always

remain Asiatic. In our empire of India we have probably been led astray by a false sentiment and gone too far in the attempt to introduce European ideas and institutions ; but the error, if such it has been, was a pardonable one and natural in the days when experience had yet to be bought. It is a wiser course to improve and purify such institutions and customs or beliefs as we find in existence, than to attempt a wholesale clearance of them. No doubt sweeping administrative reforms are often necessary, and least of all in Siam would any one deny this to be the case. A firm and strong government is never amiss, but the firmest hand has often the most delicate touch, and strength may be accompanied by a wise discrimination. And if this be true, or even partially true, as regards the political and administrative future of a country, still more does it apply to all those countless elements of customs, manners, ceremonials, and beliefs which go to make up what is known as the civilisation of a people. How often has not the would-be reformer to confess to himself a feeling of despair! How often does he wonder whether it is all vanity, and whether the people whose condition he has devoted himself to raising were not better in the state of ignorance and backwardness in which he found them! Such thoughts indeed must often occur to those who have tried to improve the condition of an Oriental people. With all their vices, with all their ignorance and superstitions, and with

all their sufferings, were they not happier, nay, even if there be an end higher than happiness, were they not perhaps better before they came in contact with the European and his civilisation?

In many points of detail there is no doubt too good reason for such misgivings; but there are few in the present age who are prepared to subscribe to Rousseau's theory that savage is preferable to "civilised" life, and that virtue is to be found only in a state of nature, while there are almost equally few who would not maintain likewise the inferiority of the semi-civilisation of such countries as Siam or India or China. But, whatever our opinions on this point, we have but little option as regards the practical question. The force of circumstances has proved too strong. Laws over which we have no real control, the laws which govern our expansion, have compelled us to interfere first in the trade and afterwards in the political and administrative affairs of tropical countries. We have come for good or for evil, and we cannot now draw back. It only remains for us to define clearly our duty and to act up to it. We came originally and intend to stay in these countries from motives primarily of self-interest, and we are bound in turn to face the responsibilities towards the inhabitants that our presence entails on us.[1]

[1] See Mr. Benjamin Kidd's "Control of the Tropics." On page 46 he says: "We have to recognise . . . the utter futility of any policy based on the conception that it will be possible in the future

It is, perhaps, in the domain of religious beliefs that the greatest caution and circumspection are needed. As the study of Oriental religions and ethical systems has the strongest attraction for the purely scientific enquirer, so we are beginning to realise that grave practical issues also may be bound up with them.

It was largely a want of sympathy with the religious attitude of our Indian fellow-subjects which led to the Indian Mutiny, and we are told by the most competent observers that the missionary question is at the bottom of the recent trouble in China. In Siam, happily, no such grave consequences are likely to ensue, but even here the position of the missionary must be one of increasing delicacy. There are few other countries, too, where the study of religious beliefs and ceremonials is likely better to repay the enquirer. Buddhism is, indeed, nowhere to be found in anything like the pure form in which its doctrines were first enunciated by the Great Teacher. Speaking roughly, it has everywhere expanded from a philosophical and ethical system, as it originally was, into a religion, and in the course of its expansion has drawn into itself countless forms and superstitions that are more or less separable or inseparable from it. It is, however, in the countries of Ceylon, Burmah, and Siam, where what is known as

to hold our hands and stand aloof from the tropics. There can be no choice in this matter."

Southern Buddhism prevails, as opposed to the Northern form, which assumes its extreme type in Thibet, that this noble religion retains its greatest simplicity and best repays study; and in Siam the existence of a court and court ceremonials, and of a monarch who considers himself as the last surviving Defender of the Faith, greatly enhances the interest attaching to it. But this interest is not simply an academic one. Such a religion is not a mere thing of forms and ceremonies, nor even of lifeless dogmas and superstitions. It is the outward manifestation of the ideals and aspirations of the people, being at least as much the effect as the cause of them. Buddhism differs no more from Christianity than do the whole aim and theory of life of the average Oriental from those of the Englishman or American. To change his religion except in name it would be first necessary to alter his entire character and theory of existence. And so it is that in attempting to wean a people from an old religion we are often unconsciously cutting at the roots of their ethical system and civilisation. Such a task, indeed, is not to be undertaken with a light heart.

Religion furnishes but one instance, though perhaps the most important, of the danger of interfering hastily with the institutions of an old civilisation; institutions which though, at first sight, they may appear arbitrary and even obsolete, are often in reality the concrete embodiment of the

spirit and character of the people. However loth we may be to accept the conclusion, it cannot be doubted that in his most essential characteristics the Oriental, or at any rate the Oriental of the tropics, will always remain distinct from the European; and these points of difference must necessarily be reflected not only in his habits but in his thoughts, religion, and government. But even in those respects in which we feel that his laws and institutions can be Europeanised with advantage, the transition must needs be a gradual one. Thus in Siam, to take an instance, the movement from *status* to *contract*, to use the phrase of the jurists, is now only just commencing. Hitherto the great bulk of the people have been dependent on some lord or master, for whom in return for protection and favours received they have been willing to work under a system of semi-serfdom. The process of turning the retainer into a freeman who may work for hire, is now going on, and has been accelerated by European influences. Without for a moment questioning the general beneficence of the change, we may yet doubt whether the bulk of the people, as is shown by their willingness and even eagerness, when free, to sell their services to some powerful person, did not prefer the old system, and whether it was not more suited to their temperament. At any rate much harm might be done by carrying out such a change too rapidly.

It requires, indeed, the most careful and sympa-

thetic study of the ways, thoughts, and habits of an Eastern nation, to say to what extent they are capable of being Westernised. Nor can the academic reformer at home who attempts to legislate for a people with whom he has no practical acquaintance, make up for such deficiencies by the excellence of his intentions. The East is not the West with a few centuries of lee way to make up. It is something totally different. The fact that many Eastern institutions bear a certain resemblance to those of European countries in past ages, is apt to mislead us into entertaining false hopes for the future. Still the similarity is interesting often from a scientific, if not from an immediately practical standpoint. The history and development of the social structure of the Siamese and of the old Cambodians from whom it was derived, with its points of resemblance to and difference from that of mediaeval Europe, can hardly fail to arouse the interest of the historical enquirer. It is an exceedingly complicated subject, and one that is still far from having been cleared up. It has consequently been no easy matter to obtain accurate information about it.

There is in this corner of the world much also to attract the philologist and ethnologist. The relation of the chief Indo-Chinese peoples to one another, and how far their origin can be traced to a common Mongolian stock are questions of considerable interest, and in spite of the devoted labours

of one or two individuals, not much light has yet been thrown on them. It seems now to be established that the Siamese, as well as the races akin to them in Indo-China, once dwelt in the provinces of Southern China; but there is still ample scope for enquiry both into the early history of the various tribes before and after they migrated southwards, and also into the linguistic affinities of their speech, which is of the so-called agglutinative and non-inflective type.

Apart, however, from the question of their remote past, another interesting subject for investigation claims notice in the analysis of the various sources which have combined to produce the art and civilisation of these peoples. There are comparatively few who are aware that within the confines of the present kingdom of Siam, in territory that was formerly part of the old Cambodian Empire, there are to be seen some of the most stupendous and magnificent ruins that are to be found anywhere on the face of the globe. These are the ruins of the mighty *Angkor* or *Nagkon Wat* (*i.e.*, temple), which the distinguished French traveller, M. Mouhot, has spoken of as a rival to that of Solomon and erected by some ancient Michael Angelo, and as grander than anything left us by Greece or Rome. Such remains from their size and gorgeousness alone must appeal to the imagination of even the most ordinary traveller, but the fascination they exercise is enhanced when we reflect that these

inscriptions and works of art may help to throw much light on a civilisation that has now wholly disappeared. Comparatively little has been accomplished so far, and there is a wide field for research still open—research compared with which the minute questions that often occupy antiquarians nearer home sink into insignificance. Yet the very existence of these and other remains indicates the great height to which the old Indian civilisation, that once dominated Cambodia through its ruling class, must have attained and the important influence it must have exercised through all Southern Indo-China.

But it is not only for the antiquarian or artist, the historical or religious student, the lover of travel and adventure, that Siam is full of interest. It is also a country which is not unlikely in the near future to attract to itself again the attention of the practical politician. I have already in speaking of the missionary question touched on one of the problems which might acquire importance, and indeed there are few questions in which the scientific and practical interests do not shade off into one another. The missionary problem, however, is not of course peculiar to Siam; it is only a part of the more general one that awaits solution in most of the non-Christian countries of the world. But Siam has its own particular interests, its own particular difficulties. First and foremost it has now become the buffer state between the French and British dominions in the East. So important

is its position, that it is the country which during recent years has been more near than any other to embroiling us with our great neighbour across the Channel. And if we have not heard much of the Siamese question of late, it is not that it is dead, but only dormant. France in the last decade has swallowed a great morsel of Siam—a somewhat indigestible one, it is true; but she has drawn to a nearer point of vantage, and is only waiting for an opportune moment to spring upon her prey. She is in occupation of one of the principal Siamese ports and refuses to evacuate it except on conditions that the Siamese find it almost impossible to grant. The Siamese capital is full of French intrigues, and it is a matter of notoriety that religion and philanthropy are often prostituted to political ends. When the Siamese question does at last come to a crisis, it will require a clear brain and a firm hand to deal with it.

Then too the Siamese question may present itself to us in another phase, as not wholly unconnected with the great Far-Eastern question, which has been so prominent of late. It is not only that a very large portion of the population consists of Chinese — who are increasing so steadily and monopolising so large an amount of the work and the trade of the country, that they are more than likely before many years to be the dominating people not of Siam only, but of the whole of Indo-China, and either to swamp the indolent and

lethargic natives, or transform them by fusion and intermarriage till they are past recognition. It is not only that Indo-China, not excluding even Burmah and the Malay Peninsula, will probably before the end of this century be a practically Chinese country. But over and above these considerations Siam has a close geographical connexion with China. It may, it is thought, form one day a most important outlet for the trade of Southern China. It was on account of the trade of Yunnan that the French were first attracted to the Mekong and to Tongking, and it is the same force that helps to draw them to the valley of the Menam.

Meanwhile, however, Siam is still Siamese. The Chinese, great as may be their numbers and influence, are still aliens, and but little inland trade from China filters as far as Bangkok and the sea. It is with a Siamese government that we have to deal, and it is Siamese ideas and institutions that prevail in the country. The more pressing question, therefore, for the practical politician is to consider, taking the country as it now is, what are to be our relations with it in the immediate future. The problem is a complicated one. It is not merely that with which we have been so often confronted, of a savage or a semi-civilised country, lying adjacent to the boundaries of our own empire. Another great European Power, as I have already said, has marked Siam out for her own; and any attempt on our part to increase our influence is

being watched by the French Colonial party with extreme jealousy. No doubt nothing could fit in better with our interests than an independent Siam, provided no restrictions are put on our trade, and provided also that the country is properly administered and developed. But French intrigues apart, it is, I fear, impossible to feel any real confidence that the present state of affairs can be a permanent one. The government and administration of the country leave much to be desired, nor is any substantial improvement likely to take place under the present *régime*, so that, from whatever quarter the moving impulse may come, some change seems destined to take place before long both in the interests of European commerce and the people themselves. But, whatever the future may bring forth, it is to be hoped that the feelings and wishes of the Siamese will receive some consideration on the part of those who have control of their destinies, and that political cynicism will not be carried so far that we at any rate shall suffer them to be handed over for some *quid pro quo*, from which they personally derive no benefit, to the mercies of a Power whom they deservedly detest, and whose record of colonial government is not such as to inspire any confidence that their material interests will receive adequate consideration.

There are indeed a few people of sanguine temperament who hope, if not expect, that the Siamese will eventually be able to dispense with

European guidance, and that, if international complications can be satisfactorily settled, they will be able to exist as an independent and wholly self-governing nation. They point to the undoubted progress that has been effected in the past generation and to the many reforms which have been introduced, while the analogy of Japan is generally brought forward by way of clinching the argument. Japan has now taken her place among the great Powers of the world, and it may perhaps be admitted, in the fraternity of civilised nations. Japan fifty years ago was as barbarous as Siam now is, or even was twenty years ago. Japan began her new career, unwillingly indeed at first, by allowing the introduction of European and American commerce, and then continued it willingly by herself inviting the advice and assistance of Western nations. Siam would seem to have been following an almost precisely similar course. She too has apparently seen the need of remodelling her administration and institutions on Western patterns, and of taking into her counsels European advisers. What is more, the enlightenment of the Siamese king has struck the imagination of foreigners in a way that no personality in Japan has ever affected them. The resemblance, however, it must be reluctantly admitted, is a superficial rather than a deep one. A practical acquaintance with the country shows the reforms introduced to be for the most part half-hearted ones ; they are imposed on the people from

outside, and they are not taken up in the thorough-going and enthusiastic manner in which they have been accepted by a whole nation in Japan. To any one who has visited the two countries, the great contrast in national character is obvious. The Japanese are bright, quick-witted, and persevering. The Siamese too are quick in their way, but they are apathetic and indolent to a degree. It is "grit" they are wanting in. To sum up the difference, the Siamese are a tropical people, while the Japanese are not, and here we are at the root of the matter. What tropical people has been able to stand independently by itself when once it has been brought into close contact with Western civilisation? Without going so far as to assert positively that no tropical nation can, we shall be guilty of no over-statement in saying that the burden of proof lies on those who affirm the possibility.[1] Time alone can show, but it seems

[1] What makes the future of Siam so particularly interesting is the fact that it is the one remaining independent State of tropical Asia. Will it continue to retain its independence or not? Mr. Kidd in his "Control of the Tropics," p. 51, writes: "There never has been, and never will be, within any time with which we are practically concerned, such a thing as good government in the European sense of the tropics by the natives of these regions. . . . The tropics will not, therefore, be developed by the natives themselves. However we may be inclined to hesitate before reaching this view, it is hard to see how assent to it can be withheld in the face of the consistent verdict of history in the past, and the unvarying support given to it by facts in the present. If there is any one inclined to challenge it, let him reflect for a moment on the evidence on the one side, and the

more than doubtful whether Siam will ever fight her way into anything like the position which Japan has won for herself by a perseverance and force of character which it has been the fashion in some quarters to underrate. If, indeed, Siam eventually should succeed in doing so and defeating the expectations of the majority, there are few of us who would not rejoice. For with all their faults the Siamese are a singularly attractive people, and that their individuality should be merged and lost in that of some powerful neighbour would be no small cause of regret. The gaiety of nations might not be eclipsed, but it would certainly be diminished.

difficulty that will present itself to him of producing any serious facts on the other side."

CHAPTER II

GEOGRAPHY AND COMMERCE

THERE are few parts of the world of which the educated public in Europe know so little as the Indo-Chinese peninsula. Books of travel in Central Asia, and Africa, and South America are eagerly read, while the names of the small band of explorers in this region are scarcely known. Of the few visitors who have a passing acquaintance with Bangkok or Saigon hardly any have penetrated into the interior, and yet here are some of the richest, not to say most interesting, districts of the earth, where not unimportant political issues may be fought out in the future. The whole of Indo-China, with the exception of the appendage of the Malay peninsula, may be regarded geographically as one country, shut off from the rest of the continent by rough mountain barriers, and possessing marked physical features of its own. The peninsula is one long slope downwards to the ocean from the uplands of the north and north-west, which culminate in the lofty mountain ranges of Thibet, and

the rivers flow in a uniformly southerly or south-easterly direction into the Bay of Bengal, the Gulf of Siam, and the Southern China seas. Roughly speaking, it is drained by four or five great rivers. On the western side the Irrawaddy with its tributaries, and the Salween, which for two hundred miles forms the boundary of Burmah and Siam, drain Lower and Upper Burmah, and find their way into the Bay of Bengal, to the west of the long and narrow Malay Peninsula. The Menam, with its great tributary the Meping, has its source in the Laos uplands, and fertilises the whole of central Siam, issuing at last, through land that its own rich deposits have formed, at the head of the Gulf of Siam. The Mekong, by far the longest river of Indo-China, has its rise further north in the highlands of Thibet. After a devious course, during a great part of which it forms the present boundary between Siam and the French possessions, it enters the territory of the ancient kingdom of Cambodia, and at last, forming a delta, reaches the sea in the French colony of Cochin China, whose chief town, Saigon, is situated on a smaller river a little to the east of it. Owing to the rough and mountainous character of the narrow strip of country between the lower Mekong and the China Sea, there is no room for other rivers of importance in Southern Annam; and it is not until we get north as far as Tongking that we reach another great river basin, that of the Red River, which, running more in an

easterly direction, drains Tongking, and which the French hoped would form a means of communication between their colony and the province of Yunnan in Southern China.

It is of great importance to understand the river system of Indo-China, not only for purely physical and geographical reasons, but even more because it affords the key to the commercial, and indirectly to the political situation. It will be readily understood that in an undeveloped and tropical country, thickly overgrown with jungle and forest, where roads and railways hardly exist, the great rivers would naturally form the highways of commerce, even if it were not for the fact that the richest lands lie close to the fertilising waters, and form the chief centres of population. This consideration alone would make this river system of great interest, even if Indo-China were an isolated region, and had no connexion with other parts of the world. But valuable and much coveted as is the trade of Indo-China itself, the control of its great rivers has proved an object of still keener competition, because they have been thought likely to form the lines of trade communication between the sea and the rich and thickly-populated provinces of Southern and Western China. It was as much with Chinese trade as their ultimate objective as from a desire to make territorial acquisitions in Asia that the French first established themselves in Cochin China; and when they found that the

River Mekong did not realise their expectations, they then turned their attention to Tongking, in which region it seemed possible that the Red River would form the easiest means of access to the trade of Yunnan as well as that of the Shans and Laos. Similar considerations would seem to have underlain British policy also in the Far East. It has been reiterated over and over again, and with perfect truth, by British journalists and politicians, that Great Britain is not desirous of acquiring further territory in China or elsewhere in Asia. British policy is a purely commercial one. Whatever happens, we are told, Great Britain must have possession of the trade of the Yangtze Kiang, and if China is to be divided into spheres of influence, this valley must be earmarked as British. Now, of course, the Yangtze is one of the most magnificent waterways, and flows through some of the richest and most populous regions in the world; but why should Great Britain have laid any special claim to its commerce on that account? It was in great measure because the recent acquisitions in Burmah had brought her into close proximity with the upper waters of that river, and because it might be hoped to connect Rangoon on the lower Irrawaddy with far-distant Shanghai by a nearly continuous water communication. A railway was earnestly advocated from Burmah to Yunnan, and a line was actually commenced by way of Konloon on the Salween River. The difficulties, however, have proved

greater than was anticipated, and as recently as December, 1901, Lord Curzon, on the occasion of his visit to Rangoon, said that the physical obstacles were so enormous that the extension of the line to Yunnan would be financially unremunerative and politically unjustifiable. On the other hand, in the same year M. Doumer obtained the sanction of his Government to carrying the French line from Tongking into China. But there remains yet another possible means of access available into these provinces over and above the regular Chinese lines of communication from Canton and by the Yangtze, and that is the route through the Laos and Shan states from Bangkok by the Menam and the Meping.

It was hoped indeed originally by the French that the Mekong might afford a great outlet for the trade not only of the Laos and Shan states, but even of Southern China. The first blow to these hopes was given by the results of the expedition of exploration which they sent under de Lagrée in 1866. The members of it finally had to abandon their boats and take to light native ones, in which they struggled northwards as far as latitude 22° N., where the river first becomes serviceable for natives going down stream. For general purposes of commerce, however, it seems now admitted that the navigability of the Mekong from the sea ceases far to the south of this. It may be considered a good waterway up to the fourteenth parallel, where

the first great rapids are met, and perhaps a useful one, though to a less extent, for trading purposes, as far as the eighteenth; but beyond that, so obstructed is its course by rapids, its chief value as a channel of communication ceases. The French themselves recognised this at the time,[1] and one of the results of their discovery was their attempt to obtain a new trade route in Tongking to the northern Laos and Yunnan. Indeed, so far from affording facilities for communication with China, the Mekong is of very little value as an outlet for the trade of Indo-China itself, and cannot be compared with the Menam in this respect. The fourteenth parallel, where the first great rapids occur, is but little to the north of Bangkok, and from them there are still more than three hundred miles to the sea. The Menam must form the great

[1] Whether the French ever wholly lost faith in the Mekong route or not, at any rate their belief in it revived after the unnavigable character of the Black and Red Rivers had been proved, and hence their determination to wrest it from the Siamese, which led to the events of 1893. "Ever since de Lagrée started upon his memorable expedition up the Mekong in 1866, in search of a highway to Yunnan, the French have felt for that river and its adjacent territories the affection of a proprietor and a parent; and neither the verdict of M. de Carné, one of the party, that 'steamboats can never plough the Mekong, and Saigon can never be united by this waterway to the west provinces of China,' nor a long series of subsequent failures, have for one moment dispossessed their minds of the idea that the French flag upon the Mekong means a great and immediate local trade, and the ultimate monopoly of the inland Chinese markets."—Lord Curzon in *The Nineteenth Century* of July, 1893, page 49.

outlet for Indo-Chinese trade, and whether it ever draw to it any considerable amount of the commerce of China itself or not, its superiority to the Mekong is obvious. With its tributary the Meping it affords far more direct access to Northern Siam and the Laos States. It flows into the sea considerably to the north of the point where the Mekong reaches the ocean, and besides these important considerations, it passes through a region which is far more fertile and populous than the valley of the Mekong. It will be easily understood, therefore, with what covetous eyes the French now regard the valley of the great river and those of its tributaries, which constitute all that is most valuable in Siam. The Menam and the Meping are fortunately navigable for small craft almost for their entire length throughout the year, and when the waters are high at the end of the rainy season it is quite a short journey from the Laos States down to Bangkok.

The Menam, indeed, is such an important feature of Siam, that more than one traveller has compared it with the Nile. It is the inundations of the Menam and the rich alluvial soil which it carries with it that combine to make its valley one of the most fertile in the world. It is one of the finest rice-producing regions in Asia, and the export trade in rice from Siam has on the whole been steadily increasing, though it is true that the amount exported in 1893, when the crop was exceptionally large, had not been exceeded as late as the year

Temple at the mouth of the Menam.

1900. When a system of irrigation is properly developed, and there are further facilities for communication, especially by canal, the wealth of Siam from this source will receive a still further increase. Rice has for long been the chief product of the country. The paddy is brought by water to Bangkok, as a rule, any time between January and July, according to prices and the requirements of the markets. At Bangkok it is received in the rice mills, by far the greater number of which are in the hands of Chinese, and after it comes out of the mills it is shipped to the Straits or China, where there is a large demand for it. As a rule something like half a million tons have been exported on an average during the last few years, the value being roughly between two and three million sterling, or about half the total export trade of Bangkok.

Next to rice, the most important article of export is teak. For a long time Burmah felt practically no competition from Siam in this branch of trade, but the Siam teak trade steadily increased, till in 1895 it reached over 61,000 tons, or nearly half the Burmese export. No proper restrictions, however, were put on the cutting of trees, and the forests were becoming ruined, when the Government was induced to send for an Indian forest expert, who for the last five or six years has with great ability and industry organised a Forest Department, and has regulated the leasing of the forest preserves. It is no wonder, then, that the exports have fallen

off rather than increased since 1895; but the Siamese teak has nevertheless steadily gained in reputation and value, and is considered as good as, if not better than the Burmese. It must be remembered, too, that a considerable amount of teak in North-Western Siam finds its way down the Salween into Burmah instead of to Bangkok. Most of the teak industry is now in the hands of four European firms, and the superior quality of the teak shipped from Bangkok is largely due to this fact. It is interesting to note that the teak-bearing forests extend along the western watershed of the Menam as far south as N. lat. 13° 50′, but on the eastern only as far as 17° 40′. Here again we find a point of superiority in the Menam over the Mekong.

There are various other exports from Siam of less importance than these. In the British consular reports a variety of articles are enumerated, among which pepper, gamboge, hides, and salt fish may be mentioned. By far the largest imports are cotton goods, and we naturally find hardware, cutlery, machinery, and many other European manufactured goods regularly brought into the country, while the trade in kerosine oil is increasing. The total imports in 1898 reached £2,622,183. Opium showed an increase of as much as £48,040 that year on the previous return. It is imported from India by Singapore, the purchases being made by the Siamese Government, and is re-sold to the opium farmer. The writer of the consular report

of 1899 considers that on the whole British imports are holding their place, there being nothing which would lead him to imagine that the United Kingdom was losing ground as compared with its rivals. One weak point, he says, is of course in the cheap lines, where British merchants are liable to be supplanted by the foreigner.

If possibly we can contemplate our share in Siamese trade without dissatisfaction, we cannot so regard our position as carriers of that trade. In 1892 British shipping formed eighty-seven per cent. of the total number of vessels which entered and cleared the port of Bangkok, the Germans only contributing seven per cent. In 1898, however, a heavy blow was struck at British predominance in this respect by the transfer to the German flag of Holt's steamers, the only regular line plying between Bangkok and Singapore, which, it was estimated, made a reduction of thirty-three per cent. in British shipping. It was followed by an even heavier blow when, early in 1900, the Scottish Oriental steamers trading between Bangkok and Hongkong, and with about double the tonnage of the Singapore line, were sold also to German purchasers. Both these lines now, though nominally under a different company, are controlled by and run in connexion with the powerful North German Lloyd Company, which is rapidly acquiring the position of the predominant steamship company of the Far East. The consequence

is that the relative positions of British and German shipping in Bangkok are now something very nearly the reverse of what they were only a few years ago.[1] It is natural that the British community in Bangkok should have felt extreme soreness on the subject, and that this soreness should linger. Some recriminations passed at the time, and it was suggested that if the steamers had been offered openly for sale, there were British companies ready to come forward and purchase them. On the other hand, the agents of the owners denied that they had made any concealment, and said they were actuated by purely business motives. It is probable that they were, but at the same time it is difficult for private companies to enter into competition with a great concern like that of the North German Lloyd, with its large subsidy and with the powerful influence of

[1]

		1897.	1898.	1899.	1900.
British	p.c. of vessels ...	74	76	65	38
	p.c. of tonnage ...	77	78	67	38
German	p.c. of vessels ...	5	6	16	45
	p.c. of tonnage ...	8	7	19	51
French	p.c. of vessels ...	5	5	6	5
	p.c. of tonnage ...	2	2	2	2
Scandinavian	p.c. of vessels ...	14	9	5	3
	p.c. of tonnage ...	11	7	4	2
All others	p.c. of vessels ...	2	4	8	9
	p.c. of tonnage ...	2	6	8	7

For some months in 1900 the Hongkong steamers still sailed under the British flag, so that the percentage for 1901 of British vessels will be considerably smaller, and of German larger.

the German Government at its back. There is no doubt that German prestige has increased in consequence of these two transactions, even if their importance is sometimes exaggerated. It is not likely that British trade will suffer greatly in the immediate future, and British goods are still imported freely, though carried in German bottoms. But what the ultimate effect may be, who can tell? The German scheme is a far-sighted one, and it has yet to be proved that those who adhere most strictly to the doctrines of orthodox political economy necessarily profit most in the long run. At any rate, German prestige will be increased in the Far East, and something more will have been accomplished towards the building up of that great mercantile marine, the formation of which is a necessary preliminary to the project so dear to the German Emperor's heart, the expansion of the Imperial navy.

Almost the whole of Siamese trade naturally finds its way to Bangkok. In the Laos districts to the north, however, the trade is principally with Yunnan and French Indo-China, and to some extent with Burmah on the west. It was, indeed, through the Laos district that the great Golden Road, famous in olden days, passed from Yunnan into Burmah. There are unfortunately no great waterways leading east and west, and railways are non-existent, the only lines in Siam being the short one from Bangkok to Paknam at the mouth

of the river (a private enterprise), and the more important Government line to Korat, about one hundred and seventy miles to the north-east, opened in December, 1900, by the king. Mr. Colquhoun, the well-known writer and traveller, and the advocate of the railway from Burmah to Yunnan through the Shan States, was also the first to press the building of a railway from Bangkok to Chiengmai, in the north-western Laos district, which might ultimately connect with the Burmese and Yunnan railway. This railway has now been carried on by the Siamese as far as Lophburi, but whether its ultimate destination is Chiengmai or some other place does not yet appear to be absolutely certain. There is, of course, water communication already between Chiengmai and the Gulf of Siam; but as Prince Henri d'Orleans pointed out in urging his Government to make a railway along the Red River, the railway from Rangoon to Mandalay parallel with the Irrawaddy has proved a decided success, and there seems every chance that a railway between Bangkok and Chiengmai would give a great impetus to Siamese trade and industry. Doubt has been thrown on the advantages to be gained from building comparatively short-distance railways to places like Petchaburi in Western Siam, which are at the end of a *cul de sac*. Railways certainly carry with them the disadvantages as well as the advantages of civilisation. Still, to judge from the rate at which

railway construction has proceeded during the last ten years, there is very little fear of Siam being overburdened with railways for a long time to come. The danger seems all in the other direction. It is early yet to judge of the complete effects of the railway to Korat. It is a good many years since it was commenced, and for some time a portion of the line has been open to use, every year a fresh bit being added. The returns so far have been very satisfactory, and are an indication that this railway is likely to be an important factor in opening up the country between the lower Menam and the Mekong, and drawing its trade to Bangkok; so much so, that the French have been urged by some of their advisers to build an opposition railway to the coast of Annam. The building of a railway down the Malay peninsula to join the line already commenced from Singapore can also only be a question of time. Such a railway would not only develop the Malay peninsula, but bring Siam, by connecting Bangkok with Penang, much closer to Europe. A short line, too, from Bangkok to the seaside places on the east coast of the gulf would be a great boon to Europeans. Meanwhile the waterways continue to be the chief means of communication throughout the country. Much has still to be done towards developing the canal system, both in constructing new canals and in improving and keeping in order those already in existence. Mr. Warington

Smyth, indeed, estimates that for want of proper canals and irrigation, not one quarter of the valley of the Menam is under cultivation.

The road communications are also most imperfect. There are no regular roads except in Bangkok itself, and the immediate neighbourhood of Chiengmai, which has forged ahead of the capital in this respect. Apart from these the best roads are mere jungle tracks, fit at the most for bullock carts, while nearly all the carrying is done by elephants and ponies, the latter being of service chiefly during the dry weather. It must be obvious that if Siam fell under the rule of a power like Great Britain, the face of the country would be completely transformed in half a generation, while its wealth would be many times multiplied.

As it is, the total volume of trade of Bangkok is considerable, amounting as a rule to over six millions in the year. Owing to the bar at the mouth of the Menam only vessels of light draught are able to come up the river, the water over the bar at high tide rarely measuring a greater depth than thirteen or fourteen feet. The consequence is that all the more important trading vessels have to take in their cargo at two outside stations in the Gulf of Siam. One of these, Anghin, is on the mainland, and the other, Koh si Chang, is an island about twenty miles from the mouth of the river, the former being used while the north-east monsoon is blowing, and the latter during the period

of the south-west. There is very little doubt that the removal of the bar would amply repay the expense it might incur. But the Siamese do not seem to entertain the slightest intention of taking up the project, and the question is never debated in Bangkok except as a purely academic one.

Another suggested proposal, which would revolutionise the position of Bangkok and have very much more far-reaching results, is the scheme for making a canal across the narrow Isthmus of Kra in the Malay peninsula, which, it is estimated, would shorten the distance from Calcutta to Hongkong by 780 miles, and from Ceylon to Hongkong by 510 miles. If this were carried out, Bangkok and Saigon would at once gain enormously in importance, while Singapore on the other hand would lose in proportion. Such a scheme is therefore not likely to meet with the enthusiastic approval of the British Government, and as it could not possibly be carried out without their consent it may be dismissed for the present as outside the region of practical politics.

Mention has been made of rice and teak, especially the former, as the two most important exports of the country, while there are not a few other natural productions of considerable value. Every country, of course, has its own specialities, but there is nothing exceptionally distinctive about either the flora or fauna of Siam, differentiating them from those of similarly situated tropical countries. To

any one steaming up the Menam for the first time all the usual features of the typical alluvial river of the tropics present themselves. There are the familiar mangrove trees clustering thick on the low-lying banks. Then comes jungle with more varied vegetation, rank and dense, and the high tops of cocoa and other palms rising above their more lowly companions, while here and there is a small clearing for the typical jungle house, raised on wooden piles, or perhaps a larger opening through which may be seen a glimpse of low swampy paddy fields stretching away in the distance. Bangkok is reached after a twenty-five miles journey from the mouth. Above Bangkok we are in the centre of the paddy cultivation, and the scenery preserves a monotonous and uniform character, but beyond Paknam Po, where the Meping and the Nam Po unite to form the Menam,[1] it becomes more broken and varied. The further north we go the more mountainous is the country, and between Raheng and Chiengmai the stream of the Meping is interrupted by more than thirty rapids. At Chiengmai we reach the great centre of the teak industry, and here the huge teak forests become the most characteristic feature of the vegetation. Cotton also is cultivated in the upland country, a certain amount being taken for the native looms, while the rest is

[1] Strictly the Chao Phya Menam or lordly river, for Menam itself is nothing more than the Siamese for "River," meaning literally the Mother of Waters.

Areca Palms.

exported overland into China. Tea and tobacco are also grown for local consumption. The usual tropical fruits abound, and there are probably few countries where there is a greater variety, and where so many kinds reach a high level of excellence. Nearly all the market gardening is in the hands of Chinese, and it is by them that the Bangkok markets are supplied. Many of the vegetables, however, for European use have to be imported from China and elsewhere.

The jungle and forests of Siam, as of Indo-China generally, abound in big game, including tigers and elephants, while rhinoceroses and crocodiles are to be found in the rivers. The sportsman, it is true, who goes in quest of these will have to be prepared to take considerable trouble in pursuit of them, for the ordinary traveller by the usual waterways does not as a rule find very much to shoot. One has described Siam as the worst sporting country he knew, lamenting that the large stock of ammunition he brought with him in his overland trip from Burmah remained untouched ; but then he does not seem to have turned aside at all from the frequented highway between Chiengmai and Bangkok, and no one expects tigers and elephants and other wild animals to visit of their own accord the populous haunts of man. The elephant is so peculiarly associated with Siam and such a halo of romance has grown around him, that he deserves more than a passing mention, apart from the fact that among

the animals that are indigenous to the country he is the most useful for purely practical purposes.

Siam is known even to many whose ideas regarding it are of the vaguest, as the land of the white elephant. The national standard is a white elephant on a red ground, and to this animal special sanctity is attached. All white animals indeed have been held in reverence by the Siamese, who believe according to their doctrine of metempsychosis that their forms receive the souls of superior beings. But the white elephant has been an object of special veneration, and is popularly considered the habitation of the spirit of some Buddha. To trace this feeling of veneration to its origin we have to go back to the old sun-worship. Both the white elephant and the white horse were regarded as emblems of the sun itself, and in the Vedic writings the possession of the white elephant is considered as one of the attributes of the universal monarch. Hence the great rivalry among the sovereigns of Indo-China, each of whom regarded himself as the lawful descendant of the Vedic kings, to possess the largest number of white elephants; a rivalry which became a fruitful source of wars. Among all these nations Siam alone now retains her independence. She is the last stronghold of the white elephant.[1] It is of course well known that there is no such thing as a white elephant strictly speaking, a pinkish grey of

[1] See an interesting article on the decadent white elephant in the *Asiatic Quarterly* for January, 1901.

a lighter shade than usual being the nearest approach to white that can be found, but the word *white* is not a correct translation either of the Burmese term or the Siamese, which means *albino*, and no doubt some scope must be allowed also to the imagination which perhaps assumes the hue to be lighter than the facts warrant. Great rejoicings took place when an elephant of the desired colour was found, and amusing accounts have been written of the festivities that were held during the reign of the late king and even that of his present Majesty at the capture of one of these animals, which was formerly always the occasion of the most gorgeous ceremonies that even Siam could display. They were tended with the greatest care and surrounded with every luxury, being all but worshipped as deities. Now, indeed, sad to relate, in an age of growing disbelief the glamour has worn off, and they are not treated much better than if they were quite ordinary commonplace animals, though very exaggerated statements have been made as to the neglect which they suffer. There lingers even yet, as far as I can gather, a widespread feeling of reverence towards them in the popular mind. They are still paraded on State occasions, though it would be interesting to see whether all the pomp and ceremony with which new arrivals were treated a generation ago would be repeated in these latter days.

But if the white elephant has fallen from his once mighty estate, his more plebeian-coloured brethren

continue to be held in no less esteem than formerly, being quite invaluable for the purposes of practical life. They are especially serviceable in the jungle and forest districts of the north, where travelling during the rainy season would be well-nigh impossible without them, and many an industry would be seriously hampered. Their strength and usefulness in hauling the great teak logs to the river, following them up in the water and keeping them from going down the stream, are remarkable. In this work the intelligence they exhibit is no less striking than their great strength. Fresh supplies of elephants are obtained by means of tame ones, which are let loose and which when recalled are followed by wild ones. One of the great events of the year used to be the elephant hunt at Ayuthia, which the king attended in person. About two hundred wild elephants from the jungle are driven into an enclosure made for the purpose, and from these a selection is made of those most suitable to be retained. Similar hunts take place also in other parts of the country.

The invaluable services of the elephant for travelling, especially in the wet season, have been mentioned. When, however, the ground is not too swampy nor the jungle too thick, ponies are generally used. The hardy little Siamese ponies, usually not above eleven hands high, have a strength quite out of proportion to their size. They are bred in the upland districts, and some hundreds are usually exported every year from

Chiengmai into Burmah. Although the Siamese cavalry are mounted on them, their paces are not suited for ordinary riding, and Europeans who wish to indulge in this most healthy of all recreations at Bangkok or Chiengmai, provide themselves with Australian horses or ponies. The latter are also used sometimes in harness, but most people find the native pony more serviceable, if less showy.

In addition to the export of ponies from Chiengmai, there are also, besides those sent to Burmah, a large number of bullocks (amounting in 1898 to 14,000) exported from Bangkok to the Straits and Sumatra, where Bangkok beef is said to be a well-known commodity. The cattle trade is in the hands of our Indian fellow-subjects, most of whom gain their livelihood from this occupation. A certain number of cows are kept in Bangkok, but there is great difficulty in procuring good fresh milk, the Siamese—like the Chinese and Japanese—never using this to us most indispensable article of food. A few of the more venturesome of the Europeans get in their daily supply from the Indians, but this being generally considered a very risky proceeding, the great bulk of the foreigners content themselves rather with tinned milk, of which there are now endless varieties to suit every palate. It is the buffalo, however, and not the horse or the ox, which is the most familiar animal in the fields of Siam. With his great strength and (except towards Europeans) docile

disposition, he is of the greatest service in the chief agricultural operations. He is used both for ploughing and threshing, and in the swampy paddy fields is quite invaluable. Wild buffaloes are said to be not uncommon in the mountain forests of the north,[1] but there are probably few Europeans who have ever seen one in his native habitat.

As regards other domesticated animals, the less said the better of the loathsome pariah dogs, which are one of the greatest eyesores in Bangkok. They have one virtue, it is true, that of performing to some extent the useful function of scavengers, and therefore deserve some toleration, which otherwise they would certainly not for a moment merit. They are an equal offence to the eye by day and to the ear by night, when they make the darkness hideous by their constant howlings and barkings. The Siamese cats are almost as famous as the white elephants. It would be wrong to say that they are as rare, for they do exist; but they are hard to procure, and so great is the demand for them that they are very apt to be stolen. They are of a light fawn or dun colour, with faces, ears, and paws well marked in black, and bright blue eyes, their tails having a peculiar twist or "kink" in them resembling a portion of a corkscrew. They are of a gentle disposition, and apart from their unusual appearance do not seem to have any particular merit not possessed by other cats.

[1] See "Temples and Elephants," by Carl Bock, p. 295.

There are many sights and sounds which the dweller in Siam, and indeed in Bangkok, will carry away with him, and which will long linger in his memory as if they were a part of the place itself. The endless chirping of the grasshoppers, and humming of insects, with the roaring of the bull frogs during the rains and the croaking of their lowlier brethren, will always associate themselves in his mind with the warmth and splendour of the tropic nights. The familiar little lizards darting about the walls and ceilings of his room, and the loud resonant cry of the tokay[1] often breaking into his slumbers will not readily be forgotten. The mosquitoes, which in venom and ferocity rival those of any other region of the earth, will, it may be hoped, pass like a bad dream into the oblivion they deserve. But the beautiful little fireflies merit a better fate. As they flash to and fro against the background of darkness, or light up the trees and shrubs with their brilliance, they form a picture which the imagination will long be glad to treasure amid more sombre and prosaic surroundings.

With regard to mineral productions Siam has for many years enjoyed no mean reputation, and the accounts given by travellers in the past have caused hopes to run high as to the wealth the country conceals beneath its surface. Its proximity, too, to Burmah with its famed ruby mines, has no doubt added to these hopes. It is, therefore, with no little

[1] A large striped lizard, so called from the sound it makes.

disappointment that the reader closes the pages of Mr. Warington Smyth's able and candid book, which contains the record of the journeys taken by him to various parts of Siam and its dependencies for the purpose of making investigations into this very subject. No very definite information seems to me to be given by him as to the possibilities of mineral production in the future. In fact, the only conclusion to be drawn from his reports is a purely negative one, that, whatever the wealth of the country may be, all enterprise in this direction is practically doomed to failure (at least as regards Siam proper) as long as the present imperfect state of communication exists, and the supply of labour is so very precarious and ineffective. Thus Mr. Smyth says that it is to his mind a very doubtful matter whether the European will ever make the gold of the Mekong valley pay him, though with improved communications, and by adapting himself to circumstances, and employing native labour and methods on an enlarged and improved scale, it may be possible. He speaks of the European importing at vast expense great quantities of valuable machinery before ascertaining the circumstances of the country, and also of his difficulty in controlling the native workman, who comes and goes at his pleasure, and when he has made enough money to last him for a few months, suddenly betakes himself off one fine morning, not always without a few convenient head of cattle.

In discussing the difficulties of tin mining at Prachadi, in Western Siam, where labour has to be largely imported, Mr. Smyth suggests that the only method likely to prove successful is to pay Chinese coolies by the amount of ore produced, instead of by the day; a system of payment which, I may add, is found to answer best in other industries, such as tobacco planting in Sumatra, where the Chinese are paid according to the number of trees that they grow. From the apparent failure of the promising enterprise at Prachadi, owing to causes which are prominently at work in every other part of the country, Mr. Smyth argues that reckless talk about the "rapid development of the enormous mineral wealth of Siam" is under existing circumstances premature and misleading.

Nor can much comfort be derived from enterprises in other parts of the country. The management of the Kabin gold mines in Eastern Siam was taken over by an English company not long ago, with every prospect of success, and according to the British consular report of 1898 the mines were being energetically developed with Cornish miners, Scotch engineers, and an English manager. This company has now gone into liquidation. Indeed, it may be said that while gold exists in various parts of the country it has never been worked successfully by Europeans, though it is washed for by natives. In the province of

Battambong, in South-eastern Siam, sapphires have for many generations been washed by Shans and Burmese, and about 1890 it was estimated by an eminent authority that some five-eighths of the world's supply of sapphires came from this district. In the neighbourhood of Chantaboon and Kratt rubies are found, but they are not of good quality, and the industry is not of great importance. All these gem mines are now in the hands of an English company. The most important mining industry, however, is tin. This is chiefly confined to the Malay peninsula, and its geological continuation to the north. The tin industry is mostly in the hands of Chinese, and is carried on on a large scale on the west coast of the peninsula, and to a much smaller extent on the east coast. The annual output of tin from the west-coast provinces, according to Mr. Smyth, amounted a few years ago to between three and four thousand tons, but has since steadily declined owing to high charges and bad administration. Silver, antimony, copper, and lignite also exist in various parts of the country, and petroleum has been found and worked on a small scale north of Chiengmai.[1] All minerals in the country belong to the Crown, to which royalties are paid by the concessionaires. There is a special mining department at Bangkok under a competent English expert, and

[1] I am indebted for this information to the kindness of Mr. H. G. Scott, the Director of Mines in Siam.

concessions are granted on lines approved by the department. But the successful working of the mines must depend to a great extent on causes beyond its control, and their future is necessarily bound up with larger questions of policy.

As regards population, no very definite figures are obtainable. The numbers for the whole country have been estimated as low as five millions, while other writers have put them at seven or eight times as much. There seems to me no good reason for going minutely into the grounds on which such varying opinions are founded, for the total arrived at can at best be approximate and based to a certain extent on guesswork, though it is to be hoped that before long it may be possible to obtain trustworthy statistics. Suffice it to say that the most reliable authorities place the whole population at between five and ten millions.[1] The bulk of these are of course the Siamese proper, who form the greater part of the inhabitants of Southern Siam, where there is also a large Chinese element, as well as a certain Cambodian, or mixed Siamese and Cambodian population, in the eastern provinces. In the north, especially in the old semi-independent Laos States, the Shans and Laos preponderate.

[1] There are a little over a thousand Europeans and Americans in Siam, of whom nearly a third are probably British. See "Bangkok Directory," p. 90. Respecting the number of Chinese, see Chap. X.

These, however, are of the same stock as the Siamese, all of whom go by the generic name of Thai or freemen. In the mountainous districts there are still many tribes who are not of Thai descent, the best known of whom are the Kareens with their various subdivisions, and there are descendants of the Mons and Peguans, who form villages of their own to the south and west of Bangkok. The population of the Siamese Malay States may be put down as something like half a million, the Malays and Chinese probably outnumbering the Siamese themselves.

Except for its dependencies in the Malay Peninsula, consisting of the States of Singora, Kedah, Patani, Kelantan, and Tringanu—which stretch roughly on both sides of the Peninsula from latitude 11° N. to latitude 6° N. as far as the British settlement of Penang and Wellesley Province, and continue for another two degrees down the east coast—Siam is now a compact kingdom, wholly under the direct administration of the central Government, reaching at its most northerly point to a little beyond the twentieth parallel. In 1893 it was shorn entirely of its territories to the east of the Mekong by the French,[1] while the former semi-independent and tributary Laos and Shan States in the valley of the upper Menam between the eighteenth and twentieth parallels are now incorporated into Siam proper. The country is

[1] See chap. xi., on International Questions.

divided into eighteen provinces or circles. Some of these, the best known of which are Battambong, Korat, and Angkor, were wrested from the ancient kingdom of Cambodia during the nineteenth century. But it is the provinces in the Menam valley which contain most of the wealth and population of Siam; and all the country to the north of Korat (as well as much to the south-east of it), which lies between the hundred and second meridian and the Mekong, and forms the greater part of Siamese territory not affected by the Anglo-French convention of 1896, is up to the present little explored and thinly populated.

The whole of Siam lies well within the tropics, but in a country which extends for some five hundred miles north and south considerable varieties of climate are naturally to be met with. The further north we go the greater are the extremes of temperature, and in Chiengmai, the so-called capital of Northern Siam, which is about 900 feet above the sea level, there is a far keener cold weather than in Bangkok, which is four hundred miles to the south. In the mountainous districts of the north the nights are always quite cold for several months of the year. In Bangkok, where most of the European community have to live, and the climate of which is therefore of special interest to them, the cool weather is of short duration. It commences with the blowing of the north-east monsoon early in November, and continues off

and on until the middle or end of February, when the monsoon has lost most of its force in these latitudes, and southerly winds begin to prevail. There are often but two or three weeks of cool weather, and sometimes practically none at all. On the coldest nights the thermometer falls to a little below 60° Fahrenheit, while in the daytime it does not exceed 80°. Towards the end of January, however, the weather gradually becomes hotter and hotter, till the end of April or beginning of May, when the south-west monsoon breaks as a rule, and the longed-for rains commence. The latter part of March and April are the hottest time of the year, the thermometer rarely falling below 80°, and in the daytime usually rising to nearly 100°. The wet season lasts from May till October, but the rains are not continuous, and there are sometimes spells of dry weather for two or three weeks, especially in June and July. The heaviest rains occur in August and September, and sometimes even in October. The rainfall varies much in amount in Siam. In the high lands on the Burmese frontier there are often two hundred inches of rain in the year, but in the lower Menam valley and in the Bangkok district, where the force of the monsoon has been broken by the mountain ridges of the Malay Peninsula, the average rainfall is scarcely sixty inches.[1] The rain does not usually

[1] I am indebted to the Borneo Company for the following figures with regard to the rainfall in Bangkok. They started

fall in Bangkok until the afternoon, and then only perhaps for an hour or two. The mornings are almost invariably fine and bright, at any rate till September, and it is generally safe to make arrangements for any out-of-door work or amusement in the early hours of the day during this season. By October the south-west monsoon is beginning to work up through the west to the north, and by the middle of November the north-east monsoon has again set in. During the latter part of November and December very rough weather is often experienced in the Gulf of Siam, especially on the western coast. The climate of Siam is not on the whole unhealthy. No doubt fever may be easily caught in the jungle, especially

taking measurements again in June, 1900, after having ceased doing so in 1891.

1882	rainfall	53·64 inches	1887	rainfall	55·12 inches
1883	„	43·21 „	1888	„	46·01 „
1884	„	33·76 „	1889	„	70·07 „
1885	„	59·86 „	1890	„	48·90 „
1886	„	65·77 „	1891	„	37·37 „

1900	June	rainfall	11·63 inches	1901	Jan.	rainfall	1·75 inches
„	July	„	3·31 „	„	Feb.	„	2·30 „
„	Aug.	„	7·49 „	„	Mar.	„	5·10 „
„	Sept.	„	12·12 „	„	April	„	1·50 „
„	Oct.	„	4·29 „	„	May	„	5·13 „
„	Nov.	„	1·50 „				
„	Dec.	„	nil „				

Total for season 1900–1, 56·12 inches.

1901	June	rainfall	6·62 inches
„	July	„	5·63 „

during the rainy season, when travelling should as far as possible be avoided. Bangkok itself, though enjoying an evil reputation in neighbouring settlements, is really a healthy town, or would be if it had decent sanitation and a supply of pure water. In March and April there is usually a good deal of cholera among the native population, due as a rule to their drinking the river and canal waters, which have then become low and brackish, every householder being obliged to collect his own rain water in tanks. Cholera, however, though by its awful suddenness it impresses the imagination as few other diseases do, rarely attacks Europeans who observe proper precautions. Fever and dysentery are really more to be dreaded. Illnesses of this nature may occur at any time, but perhaps the worst seasons are about May, at the commencement of the rains, and again towards their close, about September and October. The latter months are also generally trying to the health, for the atmosphere then is close and heavy, and the dry thunderstorms which herald the end of the rainy season are very depressing. Taking the year all round, Bangkok is certainly far healthier than one might expect, considering both its latitude and its conditions, nor, except during March and April, is the heat at all excessive. Those who have lived for any time both in Bangkok and Singapore seem unanimous in preferring the former on the score of climate. I have, indeed, never met any one

who expressed a contrary opinion; so, too, the Government officials from Burmah all seem in this respect to prefer Bangkok to Rangoon. Undoubtedly the best time for travelling is the dry season, and the later part of it, even although it is getting hot, is preferable to the first two months. The country is usually flooded during November and early in December, and until the waters have subsided it is safer to remain in Bangkok. January and February are the best months for field and jungle.

Siam is not a country of great towns. There are few besides Bangkok of any size or importance. Europeans, whose work takes them much into the interior, are fond of saying that Bangkok is not Siam, in fact that Siam is absolutely different from Bangkok. This saying has a large measure of truth, for the old-world provinces of the interior are very different from the semi-Europeanised capital. At the same time Siam is inconceivable without Bangkok. What Paris is to France, Bangkok is to Siam, and even more. It is the seat of a very centralised system of government and administration. It contains, for practical purposes, the only permanent residence of the king, who is the source and fount of all power and privilege, and who rarely leaves it except on very short visits. It is here that all the chief nobles and officials, except the very few who occupy high posts in the provincial administration, have their work and their

dwellings. It is here, too, that they take their pleasures, for anything like the country life of the wealthy Englishman, or even of the more town-loving continental in Europe, is unknown to the Siamese. They may have considerable estates in the interior, from which they derive a portion of their revenues, but they never live on them and rarely, if ever, visit them. It is in Bangkok alone that is to be found not only the court, but all the aristocracy of Siam, and the very small element there is of a middle class—every one indeed, save the patient millions who are the source of the country's wealth, and who, low as their standard may be, still possess virtues which are disappearing from the capital. It would be difficult, therefore, to exaggerate what Bangkok is to the Siamese. To the European, too, it is generally more or less synonymous with Siam. It is here that almost all foreign residents in the country are to be met with. All the Government officials, except a few who are engaged on survey or on the railway, have their work and offices in Bangkok. Here, too, are all the mercantile community except a small handful, chiefly British, at Chiengmai and elsewhere, and perhaps one or two individuals scattered about the country in mining and other industries. Bangkok, therefore, has a unique importance in Siam; but apart from this fact it is one of the most interesting of the great cities in the Far East. Tokio and Kioto may have finer works of art. Peking may

strike the political imagination more forcibly. Shanghai shows evidence of its enormous commercial importance, while Hongkong and Singapore appeal to Britons specially as outposts of their great Empire. But no other town can boast the same combination and variety of interest; none presents to us in such close juxtaposition a thriving bustling European community side by side with an oriental court, still keeping up the formalities of bygone centuries; none such a quaint mixture of the ancient and modern, of the grotesque and the commonplace, of material comfort and squalid barbarism; nowhere else are to be seen such diversities of life and nationality, such picturesque incongruities.

The expectant visitor, after sailing up twenty-five miles of the broad and stately Menam, will probably derive much disappointment from his first experience of Bangkok. His earliest acquaintance will most probably be with a long, dingy, squalid road, running for several miles parallel with the river, and connecting the mercantile quarter with the old walled city, a road lined on both sides with third-rate Chinese shops, and thronged with Asiatics of every hue and costume, a perfect bedlam of coolies, rickshaws, carriages, bicycles, and that culmination of modern civilisation, electric trams. With a further knowledge Bangkok will win on his affections. The broad roads and open spaces in the city, with the picturesque gables of the temples, the pagodas

and tapering *prachadees* peeping through the foliage, the effective masses of colour against the backgrounds of white and green, the lovely glimpses of water and trees as he crosses the canal bridges, cannot but appeal to his artistic imagination. It is not, however, until he has been some time in Bangkok, and has spent one or two days in being rowed about the less known *klongs* or canals, that he realises the full beauty of the place. For it is on her waterways only that picturesque Bangkok reveals herself. The title of "The Venice of the East" is often applied to her more in irony than seriousness, but few who have taken in the full beauty of her *klongs*, which, with their bits of old temples and palaces peeping through the thick tropical foliage that overarches them, seem to suggest a combination of a glorified Cherwell and a Venetian canal itself, would feel that the city of the Adriatic has so much reason to consider herself wronged by the comparison. Anyhow, in a prosaic sense the analogy holds more than good. Bangkok is built upon the waters. The great majority of her population live in floating houses. The shops and bazaars open on to the waterways, and boats supply far the easiest and most popular means of communication. On the land the most picturesque objects are the *wats* or temples. Whatever may be said of their architecture, their shapes and colours are very effective, and most suitable to the setting in which they are

Canal in Bangkok.

placed. The graceful gables of their roofs are a specially attractive feature, and the colouring and ornamentation are striking at a distance. But what appears to the observer some way off as beautiful mosaic work often consists of stucco with tawdry glass and broken crockery, though no doubt cleverly arranged. Still there is some fine work to be seen, the doors of many of the temples, which consist of mother-of-pearl and ivory inlaid in black lacquer, being particularly beautiful. There is little of artistic or other merit as a rule inside the buildings, with the exception perhaps of the temples containing the famous emerald Buddha and the great sleeping idol, which are unique in their way and well repay a visit.

Nor is the element of human interest wanting. There in the midst of the city is the royal palace itself with its court ceremonies, and from time to time the most magnificent pageantries. In the lower social strata the spectator is struck by the diversities of nationality that make up this huge city of half a million souls. The Siamese themselves form the chief element. Next to them come the ubiquitous Chinamen, who are variously estimated as constituting from one fourth to one half of the population ; then, too, there are Laos and Shans from up country, kinsfolk of the Siamese, and not easily distinguished from them, Annamites and Cambodians, Malays, Burmese, Singhalese, and Indians, a regular anthropological museum,

and what is very noteworthy, almost all with their special occupations and provinces of work. Nowhere, too, in the East is to be found such a representative gathering of European nations, the smaller communities, such as the Belgians and Danes, being well to the fore.

To those who do not simply carry their own habits and customs about wherever they go, and who feel the charm of the freshness and novelty of a new life and surroundings, Bangkok will offer no little attraction. To the average European, especially the Englishman, it must be confessed, whose one object is to make money and lead as comfortable and enjoyable a life as the circumstances of his exile will permit, Bangkok is not the most agreeable of residences. It has one advantage, perhaps, over many of the other big towns of the East. With its diplomatic body and consuls from all the chief civilised states, and with Government officials drawn from divers quarters of the globe, it affords a more varied and interesting society than is to be found in, at any rate, the big colonial capitals of the British Empire. But this point of superiority apart, existence is dull and limited it must be admitted, from the strictly Western aspect. There are the usual recreations of lawn tennis, golf, bicycling, riding and racing, which are always to be found wherever a certain number of Englishmen are gathered together; but these are not of a very exciting nature, and gay ladies will miss the

garden parties and the dances, the excursions and the picnics which help to pass time pleasantly in Singapore and Hongkong. A great drawback to Bangkok, too, is the fact that there is no place for the jaded European to go to for a few days' change. There are no hill stations up country. The only resorts are the island of Koh si Chang in the Gulf of Siam, and Anghin and Siracha on the eastern shore. But at none of these is there any hotel, and those who wish to get the benefit of the sea breezes can only do so at the inconvenience of carrying with them all their provisions and most of their furniture, not to mention servants. There is really nowhere to go for a holiday short of Singapore or Hongkong.

Of the other towns in Siam Chantaboon is the only port of importance. Its occupation by the French, who have held it since 1893, has not interfered with its trade, and it continues the great emporium of the Cambodian provinces. Its population of about five thousand consists of Chinese and Annamites, Shans and Burmans, who are engaged in working the gem mines in the neighbourhood. Korat, which is about the same size, has just been connected with the capital by rail. It is situated on a high plateau to the north-east of Bangkok, and, though not hitherto of great commercial importance, ought to develop considerably in the future. Chiengmai has already been spoken of as the capital of Northern Siam. It is of special

interest to great Britain, owing to its proximity to Burmah, and to its being on the trade route from Moulmein to Southern China. It is difficult to say to what importance it might not reach if it were connected by rail with Bangkok on the one hand, and a line from Burmah to Yunnan on the other. As it is, it is the centre of a not inconsiderable trade, most of which goes to Moulmein. Its population, composed chiefly of Shans and Laos, is probably at least fifty thousand, and considering that for a great part of the year it is several weeks' journey from Bangkok, it is surprisingly civilised. The roads in the neighbourhood are more developed than those round the capital itself, and it is of interest to hear that there are more than four hundred bicycles there.

Ayuthia, the old capital, is still a considerable town. It deserves a visit not only on account of the fine ruins in its neighbourhood, but because of the picturesqueness of the town itself, which is more of a "Venice" even than Bangkok. Lophburi contains many old Hindu ruins of an early date, and later ruins of the time of Phaulkon, in whose day it was a place of great importance. Ratburi and Petchaburi are the most important places in the south-west, and are likely to increase in size when the new railway is finished. But with the exception perhaps of Chiengmai, the capital of the north, Bangkok completely overshadows all the other towns of Siam.

CHAPTER III

SIAM IN THE PAST

THE advance made in the science of ethnology during recent years has only served to show how little we know of the subject. It has enabled us to see that the old theories and subdivisions of mankind into two or three leading groups were absurd and unscientific; but we have very little positive knowledge to put in the place of them. Not much more than a generation ago it seemed as if the new science of comparative philology was going to solve all difficulties. We had only to trace the affinities of a language to be able at once to place the people who spoke it in its proper group. But though this science has been of the greatest service and is indeed invaluable in all ethnological research, yet so complicated are the conditions of the inquiry, so inextricably confused have become the various races through conquest, intermarriage, and other causes, that language by itself cannot be considered by any means a sufficient criterion. The colour of the skin, the size and shape of the skull,

and other physiological or anatomical distinctions may all contribute their share of help. But there is no one principle yet of classification, and for a long time ethnology seems likely to be tentative and empirical.

The difficulties the science has to encounter are well illustrated in the case of the races of Indo-China. In this peninsula we have some of the most interesting and intricate of ethnological problems awaiting solution, and it is possible they will never be wholly cleared up. We have indeed by the help of our two main guides, language and physiological characteristics, been able to come to certain broad conclusions, but these are only of a very general character, and there are numberless questions which still require an answer. The most comprehensive statement we can make with regard to the peoples of Indo-China, including therein the Malay Peninsula also, is that the great bulk of the people are of Mongol descent and are akin, though remotely so, to the Chinese and Mongols of Central Asia. The Mongols, however, as is evident from the traces of other peoples, were not indigenous there, but came down in successive waves from the provinces of China south of the Yangtze, where they appear to have originally dwelt. In Indo-China and Malaya they found earlier races of Negritic and possibly of other stock. In the Malay Peninsula the original inhabitants were certainly Negritic, and

the modern Malays, who are presumably a branch of the Mons or Peguans, are the descendants of the earliest wave of Mongolian invaders who came down from the north, probably about six or seven hundred years before the Christian era, and mingled more or less with the aboriginal inhabitants. From the mainland they seem to have crossed to Java and Sumatra, subsequently returning from the islands to the Malay Peninsula. Till not long ago it was customary to regard the Malays as a distinct branch of the human race; but though at first sight their speech, which has quite lost its tonic character, seemed to bear little or no resemblance to that of the other inhabitants of Indo-China, recent research has shown a certain affinity between the Malay and Mon languages. Moreover, it is impossible to resist the strong physiological evidence of their kinship. The short stature, the broad features, and flat noses all point to a common ancestry.

The next to descend from Southern China were the Mons and Cambodians, probably a few centuries later than the Malays. The Mon language has practically lost its tones, but two tones, I am told, are still traceable in it. All these Mongolian races spoke originally "toned" languages, in which the same word might have several different meanings according to the tone of voice with which it was pronounced. Siamese has still three tones in regular use, a high, low, and middle, while

Chinese and Annamese, which is the most closely connected of all the Indo-Chinese languages with the parent stock, employ still more gradations. Thus in Siamese the word *ma* may mean "to come" or "a horse" or "a dog" according to the pitch of the voice in which it is uttered. There are practically no grammatical inflexions in these languages. They have been called monosyllabic, but it has been shown that this monosyllabic characteristic did not originally exist in them, but was the result of phonetic decay, which no doubt caused the device of employing different tones to distinguish meanings to be adopted.

After the Mons and Cambodians came the Thai or Siamese, who probably reached the upper Laos country not later than the Christian era, though they did not descend to the lower Menam valley till about the eleventh century. They are still more closely connected with the Chinese than are the Mons, and separated from them later, as is shown by the relatively large number of Siamese elements in the Chinese language, and they appear to have dwelt in the plains of Southern China, while the Mons lived in the hill country. The Annamese would seem to be a still younger branch of the same stock. But whether the Burmese are related to the other Indo-Chinese peoples, and if so, how closely, it is difficult to say. The Burmese language is connected with the Thibetan group, which fact indicates that the Burmese originally

dwelt on the slopes of the Himalayas before descending into the valleys of the Salween and Irrawaddy. It is just possible that the Mons and Thai may have been of the same stock, and once had their abode in the Thibetan plateau also, before migrating eastwards into Southern China. The great similarity of character between the Siamese and Burmese tempts one to think that this may have been the case.

The Thai Shan race, the common ancestors of the Siamese, Laos, and Shans, after their exodus from China, remained for some centuries in the Laos Mountains and the valley of the Upper Menam, and it was probably not till the eleventh century that the Siamese or Thai, as they still call themselves, descended into the rich plains of the Lower Menam. The generic name "Shan" is undoubtedly the same as "Siam," which, however, is not used by the people themselves, but probably originated with the Portuguese. It has even been suggested that the old Shang dynasty in China was of this Shan stock, and that consequently this race was for long the dominant one in Southern China. The modern Siamese probably have not unmixed Shan blood in their veins; their ancestors must have intermarried with the other inhabitants of Indo-China, not only with the Mons, Cambodians, and Burmese, but with members of that Negritic stock, the earliest inhabitants whom we know of in the country, and of whom there are

distinct remains at the present day in the Malay Peninsula. There are traces to be found of other races and languages, but for practical purposes we may take it that the great bulk of the people in Indo-China, at the time when the Thai left their home in China, were Mon and Cambodian, superimposed on and fused more or less with a Negritic or other primitive stock.

It was about this time that the great Cambodian Empire was rising to fame and becoming the predominant power in Indo-China, which it continued to be until its decay some centuries later. The origin of the people who showed these evidences of civilisation caused much perplexity till recent years, but it has now been established without doubt by the study of the inscriptions, which are in Sanskrit, and the works of art in the celebrated Angkor Wat, that they were an Indian race. It has been assumed that the whole people were Indian, but it seems much more likely that the great mass were of the same Cambodian stock as we now know it, that is, were descendants of Mongolian immigrants from China, who were separated by the Thai from their Mon kinsfolk in the West. It is said that there are Caucasic fragments among the hill tribes, but these, if they exist, are probably very few, and can be accounted for as fragments of the ruling class after it had decayed and fallen from its high estate. As in Java, so also in Cambodia it is probable that the Indian

immigrants, who seem to have been traders, by their superior civilisation and astuteness acquired sovereignty over the comparatively barbarous people of the country, and forming themselves into a ruling caste were strong enough to hold this power for many centuries. The mighty works of art and civilisation which they have left behind were of course planned and directed by them, but may have been carried out under their supervision by the people themselves, whom they trained for the purpose. If indeed the whole people had been Indian and thoroughly imbued with Indian civilisation it is difficult to believe that considerably wider traces of their handiwork would not have survived.[1]

What is really of interest, however, from the point of view of Siamese history is simply the fact of this mighty civilisation existing in Cambodia, whether it permeated the whole people or not, when the Siamese first entered Indo-China and were feeling their way southwards. It had the most profound effect on their future, for it has given their civilisation a distinctly Indian complexion. Their alphabet, their religious ceremonies, and many of their customs, even their language, with its large admixture of Pali words, all bear witness to Hindu influence; and this fact coupled with their Chinese or, at any rate, Mongolian descent makes

[1] I am indebted for this information to Major Gerini. His views have been reproduced more fully in Mr. Warington Smyth's "Five Years in Siam," vol. ii., p. 230.

the name of Indo-Chinese peculiarly applicable to them. That the Cambodian civilisation was of a high order is clear, not only from the records of the intercourse of the Empire with China, but also from the gigantic remains and magnificent works of art which are still to be seen at Angkor. The comparatively few European travellers who have visited this temple all unite in declaring it the most colossally stupendous as well as one of the most architecturally beautiful structures they have ever beheld, so that while it rivals or eclipses the Egyptian pyramids in one respect, it hardly falls short of the highest Hellenic standard as regards artistic detail in the other. The huge building, which is between two and three miles in circumference, contains a multitude of courts, colonnades, and chambers. There are twelve superb staircases, the four in the middle having from forty to fifty steps, each step a single slab, and over five thousand columns, while everywhere the stones are fitted together in a manner so perfect that the joinings are not easy to find. The walls and portals are covered with sculptures, the exterior of the temple being ornamented with bas reliefs of scenes from the Ramayana, the great Sanskrit epic poem, with vast processions of warriors, horses and chariots, and animals of all sorts, both real and mythical. Angkor Wat was certainly commenced as a Brahminical temple, but before its completion Buddhism had become the religion of the land, and

so it is that we find here, as in the temple of Boroboddo in Java, artistic representations of the deities of both the religions.

We can understand then how profoundly Siamese civilisation must have been influenced by a people who were capable of producing such works. Hindu remains are scattered about throughout the land, and we can trace Hindu influences everywhere in the rites and ceremonies, both religious and semi-religious, of the Siamese. It is probable that they remained for some centuries tributary to the Cambodians. When they threw off the yoke is uncertain. Siamese tradition puts the date in the seventh century ; but it was probably later, as the Cambodians must still have been then at the height of their power. It is not really until they established themselves in Ayuthia as their capital in 1350 that anything like trustworthy Siamese history commences.

Uthong, king of the Siamese, who then dwelt in the north-western portion of the present kingdom, wrested Southern Siam from Cambodia, and founded his capital of Ayuthia, forty miles north of Bangkok, on the banks of the Menam. Ayuthia is said to have been the site of a former city which had fallen into ruins, as had other towns in the neighbourhood owing to the ravages committed by both the Siamese and the Peguans or Mons on Western Cambodia. It soon was brought into a flourishing condition under its new possessors, and remained

the capital of their country for more than four hundred years. The dynasty founded by King Uthong lasted for upwards of two centuries, and fifteen kings reigned at Ayuthia in a line unbroken save by one usurper until the year 1556, when the Peguans took the city and carried back with them the eldest son of the king as a hostage. Siam, however, soon recovered its independence. The old dynasty continued till 1602, and another short one followed until the year 1630, when a child king was on the throne and was deposed by the Regent, who founded a new line in which ten kings succeeded one another with the interruption again of one usurper. The fourth king of this dynasty was the celebrated Narai, the most famous who has ever ruled in Siam. His reign is notable for the closer connexion then formed between Siam and various European countries, and for the introduction and establishment in it of many European merchants, among whom was the renowned Constantine Phaulkon, whose career forms one of the most extraordinary and romantic episodes in the history of any country. Many years, however, before the reign of Narai, Siam had become tolerably familiar to at least one European country. The Portuguese, the most enterprising navigators and explorers of that age, had established regular trade with Siam early in the sixteenth century. For some time they maintained the exclusive right to commercial and diplomatic relations with their new friends, but as

soon as the star of Holland was in the ascendant on the seas, the Dutch stepped in and claimed their share of what was to be had. So we hear of a Siamese ambassador going to the Dutch in Java in 1604, and a few years later proceeding to the mother country itself. But it was not until the reign of the liberal-minded Narai that anything like intimate relations were formed between Siam and the nations of the west. It was he who invited the Portuguese of Malacca to establish themselves in his country, and permitted the Dominican monks who accompanied them to build churches and preach Christianity—conduct which we are inclined on sentimental grounds to admire all the more in this monarch of a semi-barbarous people, when we call to mind that this was the century of European history chiefly memorable for the bloody and internecine strife between the rival factions into which this same Christianity was divided. The encouragement also given to the Jesuits by Narai led to important political results. It was at their instigation that both the Pope and Louis XIV. conceived the idea of converting Siam to Christianity, political motives no doubt also contributing considerably to the zeal of the French sovereign. In 1673 letters were sent to the king of Siam by both Clement and Louis, and in September, 1685, the ambassador of the "Grand Monarque" was received by him in state; an event which is probably the most familiar in past Siamese history to most Europeans, owing to the

numerous copies of the print commemorating the noteworthy scene. Considerable concessions were made to the missionaries at the request of the French envoy, and they were allowed complete liberty to preach and teach, as well as other privileges. It was not, however, religious affairs only that occupied the king and his guest. Narai was anxious to have some set-off against the Dutch, who were becoming uncomfortably near neighbours in the Malay Peninsula, and he offered territorial concessions to the French on condition that they would assist him. A French regiment was accordingly despatched to Siam, but before it had been there many months popular discontent broke out ; a rising took place in which the king and his European prime minister were eventually murdered, and the ambitions of the French, both secular and religious, were nipped in the bud. It has been reserved for our own generation to witness another and more serious attempt of the same people to establish themselves in Siam. Now they have not only popular sentiment but also the ruling classes against them.

To those who care to study present events in the light of the past and to watch how history repeats itself in different ages, the occurrences I have just described are of special interest also, in view of what has so recently taken place in China. In both cases we see how even a long-suffering Oriental people may set a limit to what it will permit to be wrung

from it by the rapacity of Western nations. In Siam two centuries ago and in China in 1900 that limit was reached; the pride of the people was touched to the quick, and they rose. Whether religious or secular motives predominated in either case who can say? Whether it was intolerance of the missionaries' teaching, mingled perhaps with just resentment at their tactlessness, or anger at the territorial concessions extorted by foreign powers that was the moving cause, it is impossible to determine. But the lesson remains that even a nation, which we think sunk in the slough of Oriental apathy, has its measure of political pride and religious sensitiveness, and that not only the rulers, but the people themselves, are factors which have to be reckoned with.

During all this exciting and eventful period of Siamese history, the king's chief adviser and right-hand man was the European, Constantine Phaulkon, who furnishes one of the most romantic figures to be found in the annals of any nation. He was by origin a Cephalonian Greek, and born in 1630. He came to Siam in the company of some Siamese officials with whom he had been wrecked in India, and by his address and accomplishments rose rapidly in favour with the king, ultimately attaining to the post of chief minister. In domestic affairs he introduced many salutary reforms, and was the author of much useful legislation. He effected improvements in the agriculture of the country, and

did much for the better regulation of commerce. His name, too, is conspicuously associated with public works of importance. He constructed a fort in European style for purposes of defence on the west bank of the Menam opposite to the site of modern Bangkok. He also built a magnificent royal palace in the ancient city of Lophburi, as well as a castle to the west of the town, and a wall strengthened by towers and a parapet. He is credited too with having designed other works of perhaps a more practical character, such as canals and reservoirs, which, however, were not completed when death overtook him. In all these matters Phaulkon undoubtedly proved himself a wise and enlightened ruler. But how far his foreign policy and the warm support he gave to the French and the Jesuits conduced to the interests of his adopted country, how far even they sprang from unselfish motives on his part, it is difficult to judge. Different interpretations have been put on his conduct according to the bias of the writers who have described it. The Jesuits cannot speak too highly of him. On the other hand he is put down by others as a vulgar intriguer and self-seeker. No doubt his motives were mixed. The furtherance of Christianity and civilisation, as well as the glorification both of Siam and himself, all probably seemed to him to be attainable by the same means. There are few great patriots who have not had some share of "that last infirmity of noble mind," and it would

be idle to deny that considerations of self may have entered into Phaulkon's motives.

With the deaths of Narai and Phaulkon closes one of the most eventful chapters of Siamese history. A new dynasty thereupon arose which in its turn ceased when the Burmans invaded Siam, and after several years' warfare finally captured and destroyed Ayuthia, the capital, in 1767. At this crisis another great name in Siamese history comes to the front. Phya Tâk, Chinese by extraction, who had been the holder of high office in Northern Siam, expelled the Burmans and established himself as king at the new capital of Bangkok. He successfully repelled all further attacks from Burmah, and consolidated the dominions of his country, subduing the northern provinces and obtaining recognition of suzerainty from various states in the Malay Peninsula. In fact, he may be regarded as the founder of modern Siam. A career of great prosperity seems to have eventually turned his head. He became haughty and unpopular, and was finally overthrown in 1782 by his prime minister, who established the present dynasty.

Glancing back at the four centuries and more that had elapsed since the new foundation of Ayuthia, we see a steady increase of power on the part of the Siamese, till at the end of the eighteenth century they have become the strongest nation in Indo-China, and are fully a match for

their powerful neighbours the Burmans on the north-west. Their career has been a chequered one, as might have been expected, but usurpation and popular risings have not been more frequent than in most Oriental monarchies. As regards their civilisation and institutions, we do not know much until the country came under the notice of European observers in the sixteenth century, and from their descriptions we gather that there has been very little change until the disintegrating influences of the nineteenth century began to work. There appears to have been a distinct civilisation of a kind for many hundred years in Siam, as there was at a still earlier date in the neighbouring kingdom of Cambodia, and many of the forms and ceremonies which have continued to the middle of the nineteenth century, and even to the present day, were in existence three hundred and more years ago. The form of government prevailing was absolute monarchy, yet we see that the people, though in many respects servile, long continued to possess those martial virtues which launched them on their career of conquest; and were always ready to rise against their king and support a usurper if their loyalty was strained too far.

Originally the Siamese had been a free people, as their name of Thai implies, forming an aggregate or federation of self-governing communities or principalities. But their political and social condition was in time completely changed under

foreign influences. In the old tribal days the village was the unit of government, as it has continued to remain in Burmah, and as it is now under the revived system in Siam itself. The heads of households elected the chief men of the villages. These again chose the higher officials over a wider area, and so on under a complete system of elective local government. The villages were thus free communities, and, except in the case of pasture land, individual ownership of property, as far as has been gathered from the records, seems to have prevailed; though an account, given by Prince Henri d'Orleans in his "Around Tongking," of a tribe of Thai which he came across to the north-east of Luang Prabang, suggests that there may have been in some instances communism in landed property. Of this tribe Prince Henri says that the village chiefs divide every year anew the lands, which are possessed in common, allowing the cultivators full private rights in the produce. But I have heard of nothing analogous to this elsewhere in Siam.

However, by the time the Thai had thrown off the Cambodian yoke the old free and elective system of local government seems to have disappeared and a highly centralised one to have taken its place. The change in the social structure, due undoubtedly to Cambodian influences, was even more profound. The individual freedom of the old Thai had vanished, and in its stead we discover

a system of personal feudalism, if it may be so called, by which every man was under allegiance to some lord or master, the apex of the whole structure being the king, who was the supreme lord and master of all his subjects. This system, known in certain of its aspects under the modern name of *corvée*, has continued till quite recent times, and it is only in the last few years that steps have been taken to abolish it. In the outer provinces it has been theoretically done away with, and a man can no longer be legally called on for personal service by an individual master or the government, a regular capitation tax having been substituted for it. In Bangkok, however, and the nearer provinces, owing to the strength of vested interests, the old system still prevails, though personal service can always be commuted for money, and in many cases is never called for. The system will probably die out altogether in the course of years, with or without the help of legislation. Still it is by no means to be condemned as an anachronism in a country like Siam. Many men are eager to get the help and protection of a powerful noble, and are only too willing to sell their services in return.

I have spoken of the feudalism in Siam as being personal. It is, indeed, very different from the territorial feudalism of mediæval Europe, where a powerful hereditary nobility lived on their landed estates, and formed an *imperium in imperio.* In Siam there never have been hereditary nobles

We cannot say when the institution of nobility first commenced in the country, but it seems to have been regularly systematised for the first time in the fifteenth century. A title was conferred on a man for life, and always in connexion with some office, every one of note remaining in the Government service till the end of his days. Even now this is the case, though the practice has become to a certain extent modified, and there are actually titles confined to certain Government departments, which are handed on from one holder of office to another.[1] Naturally there have always been influential families, and the son of a powerful noble, though born a plain commoner, was and is sure to have the chance of rising to distinction. Nevertheless theoretically one man is as good as another, and even in practice there has always prevailed—amid somewhat anomalous surroundings it must be admitted—a strangely democratic spirit. There is absolutely nothing resembling caste, and even a slave may rise to the highest office. It is only the equality of opportunity that is wanting.

Although the word "territorial" is inapplicable to the so-called system of Siamese feudalism, the dignity of the various grades of nobility is measured in terms of land. The ordinary freeman is con-

[1] An attempt has been made to give English equivalents to Siamese titles, as when, for example, a Phya is called a Marquis, but Siamese titles, being essentially official and not hereditary, correspond much more closely to our orders of knighthood than to inherited titles.

sidered worth twenty-five *rais*, which is the amount of land he is supposed to be able to till. Nobility commences with four hundred *rais* and rises to ten thousand, and the fiction of conferring an estate with a title of nobility is still preserved.[1] Of course the wealthy classes own a good deal of landed property which they let or cultivate by slaves or retainers, but the bulk of the land belongs to those who till it, subject to the paramount ownership of the king. All the nobles, except the few who have work in the provinces, live in Bangkok. There are no great country houses or castles, and so there has never been anything resembling the feudal power of the great European nobles.

Slavery in Siam, though it has frequently been confused with the so-called *corvée*, is a quite distinct institution, so much so, that a man who owed service to another might be sold, or sell himself, in slavery to a third party, whose rights under the transaction were subject to the prior claims of the feudal lord. There is a class, however, who form a link between the two institutions, and have been placed under both heads. These are the descendants of prisoners of war, who constitute the majority of the army and navy, the obligation to such form of service being hereditary. This is far the harshest form of *corvée* that has existed in Siam, nor is it likely to add to the efficiency of either branch of the service. Happily the severity of the system is somewhat

[1] See Frankfurter's "Elements of Siamese Grammar."

mitigated by the enlightened provision of recent years, enabling a boy on passing a certain educational standard to free himself and his posterity for ever from this most hateful of all services.

When slavery originated among the Siamese no one knows. But it undoubtedly was of Cambodian, or, at any rate, of Indian origin, for the seven distinct forms of slavery known to Siamese law seem directly derived from the Hindu law of Manu.

These seven forms may for purposes of convenience be reduced to three.

1. *Prisoners of war.*

Most of these are employed in the army and navy. This form of slavery has already been described under the head of *corvée.*

2. Slaves by *birth.*

3. Slaves by *purchase.*

These might be *irredeemable*, such as young girls sold as concubines, or *redeemable* on the payment of a fixed sum of money.

Slavery in Siam would never appear to have been of a very harsh character, and bears no resemblance to the plantation system of America. The slave, except in a few cases, seems to have been well treated, and could generally buy his freedom, and it has been remarked that "bondman" would be a much more suitable name for him. But, mild though slavery always was, it was considerably mitigated by the enactments of the late and the present king, and in 1874 his Majesty by decreeing

that no one henceforth could be born in slavery, and by forbidding his subjects to sell themselves for debt, evinced his determination to abolish it altogether. Debt slavery, however, still practically exists under another name, the custom being for a man or woman, on receiving so much money, to agree to serve the creditor for so many years. But though attempts have been made to put restrictions on this practice in recent legislation, it is not likely to die out as long as gambling, which is the great cause of debt among women just as much as among men, prevails to the extent it does. His Majesty in decreeing the abolition of slavery was certainly actuated by the highest and noblest motives. But if the enactment is not to remain a dead letter, he must take the equally necessary step of abolishing gambling, or at any rate, restricting it within decent limits.

The present dynasty commenced, as we have seen, in 1782. The second king of this line died in 1824, leaving two sons by his queen, and an elder son by another mother. The latter usurped the throne which he occupied until his death in 1851, when the two legitimate brothers succeeded him, reigning together as first and second king respectively. The elder of these, the first king, was Mongkut, father of the present monarch, and one of the most notable princes who has ever held sway over an Eastern country. He was one of the most conspicuous instances of the philosopher king,

having spent twenty-seven years, the long period of his brother's usurpation, in the priesthood, diligently studying the Buddhist scriptures and philosophy, and at the same time ardently cultivating modern science. Whether owing to original defects in his philosophy, or to the trying and demoralising position in which he found himself as an Oriental despot, and which it would require the perfections of a being higher than man to be proof against, he certainly did not realise the ideal which Plato despaired of ever seeing attained, except in rulers who could unite philosophy and kingship in their own persons. And yet he may be considered, in spite of many defects and faults, chiefly of temper, to have been a wise and enlightened monarch, and to have conferred great benefits on the country he ruled over. It was in his reign that Siam was for the first time really opened to European commerce, and treaties were made in 1855 and 1856 with the representatives of Great Britain, the United States, and France; which did not even require to be extorted by force, as was the case in Japan about the same time. The king was exceedingly generous with his money, and spent a great deal on various improvements, doing much to better the condition of his subjects, whose burdens he lightened by lessening taxation. Although all through his life he was an ardent Buddhist, he showed the utmost toleration towards other religions, inviting missionaries to settle in the country and to build

schools. He had the greatest respect for the precepts of Christianity, holding them in as high veneration as those of Buddhism; but what he considered the illogicalities of its dogmas were an offence to his subtle Oriental intellect, and he warned the missionaries against imagining that "any of his party would ever become Christians, or embrace such a foolish religion." It was quite as likely he thought that Christians would become Buddhists, as that Buddhists should embrace Christianity.

But this monarch was no mere religious recluse. He gained a knowledge of Latin from the French Catholic missionaries, and learned to read and write English fluently, if not correctly, corresponding himself with Englishmen of distinction, such as Lords Clarendon, Stanley, and Russell, and was an Oriental linguist of no mean order. He was also keen in the pursuit of science, especially astronomy, and only a few months before his death in 1868, he inaugurated a great expedition to a spot in the Malay Peninsula, to which he invited the Governor of Singapore, to witness the eclipse of the sun. His linguistic studies were characterised by a minuteness worthy of a German professor. He wrote various philological disquisitions, but unhappily for the peace of others, did not confine his labours in research and composition to his own language. Mrs. Leonowens, who is the best authority on the character of the king and on the court life of this period, describes this trait of his Majesty:

"Before my arrival in Bangkok it had been his not uncommon practice to send for a missionary at midnight, have him beguiled or abducted from his bed, and conveyed by boat to the palace, some miles up the river, to inquire if it would not be more elegant to write *murky* instead of *obscure*, or *gloomily dark* rather than *not clearly apparent*. And if the wretched man should venture to declare his honest preference for the ordinary over the extraordinary form of expression, he was forthwith dismissed with irony, arrogance, or even insult, and without a word of apology for the rude invasion of his rest.

"One night, a little after twelve o'clock, as he was on the point of going to bed, like any plain citizen of regular habits, his Majesty fell to thinking how most accurately to render into English the troublesome Siamese word *phi*, which admits of a variety of interpretations—ghost, spirit, soul, devil, evil angel. After puzzling over it for more than an hour, getting himself possessed with the word as with the devil it stands for, and all to no purpose, he ordered one of his lesser state barges to be manned and despatched with all speed for the British consul. That functionary, inspired with lively alarm by so startling a summons, dressed himself with unceremonious celerity, and hurried to the palace, conjecturing on the way all imaginable possibilities of politics and diplomacy, revolution or invasion. To his vexation, not less than to his

surprise, he found the king *en déshabille* engaged with a Siamese-English vocabulary, and mentally divided between 'deuce' and 'devil' in the choice of an equivalent. His preposterous Majesty gravely laid the case before the consul, who, though inwardly chafing at 'the confounded coolness' of the situation, had no choice but to decide with grace, and go back to bed with philosophy."

In private life the king, though he had a kind heart, was capricious and despotic. It comes as a surprise to us that a man of his training and of his lofty ideas and intellectual capacity, should have sunk to the low level in which we frequently find him. There is probably a taint in the blood of most Oriental monarchs inherited through many past generations, which predisposes them to acts of tyranny and cruelty; but it would be almost impossible for any human being to find himself in the position of a king of Siam, surrounded by the most abject servility, with every temptation and invitation to sensuality and indulgence, and not to suffer deterioration. Certainly the king did not fulfil the promise of his earlier days. Again to quote from Mrs. Leonowens, whose book supplies us with numberless details regarding his character: "As husband and kinsman his character assumes a most revolting aspect. Envious, revengeful, and subtle, he was as fickle and petulant as he was suspicious and cruel. His brother, even the offspring of his brother, became to him objects of jealousy, if not of

hatred. Their friends, he thought, must be his enemies, and applause bestowed upon them was odious to his soul. There were many horrid tragedies in his harem, in which he enacted the part of a barbarian and a despot. Plainly, his conduct as the head of a great family to whom his will was a law of terror, reflects abiding disgrace upon his name. Yet he had this redeeming feature, that he tenderly loved those of his children whose mothers had been agreeable to him. He never snubbed or slighted them; and for the little princess, Chow Fâ-ying, whose mother had been to him a most gentle and devoted wife, his affection was very strong and enduring."

It has been mentioned that at the king's accession his younger brother became second king. The unusual institution of a second king seems to have been not uncommon in the Indo-China peninsula. In Siam, though it was in abeyance during the reign of Mongkut's usurping elder brother, it existed throughout the present dynasty and continued till the death of the son of Mongkut's younger brother, who succeeded his father in 1866, and died in 1885. Now there is only one king, nor does it seem likely that the office of second king will ever be revived. It is hard to see exactly what the origin of this institution could have been. In Sparta, the historic country of the second kingship, whatever may have been the mythological explanation, its *raison d'être* was no doubt that it might serve as a check upon

what would have been the unlimited authority of the sole king; just as in more democratic days a second Chamber is generally regarded as exercising an equally necessary function in a popular constitution. Whether the institution may be considered to have worked successfully in Sparta is at least open to doubt, but at any rate it had a rational basis, and to a large extent fulfilled the purpose for which it was originated. In Siam, however, the second king was in no sense the equal of his royal colleague, but always remained in a strictly subordinate position. Though the centre of much ceremonial, and occupying socially a high position in the state, he yet had no real power save what was entrusted to him by his superior, and only shone with a light reflected from the majesty of the supreme king. He had no definite functions or share in the government, though as a rule he seems to have occupied himself largely with military matters, and was a sort of royal Commander-in-Chief. The position, indeed, must have been a painful one. It served to arouse the jealousy of the first king, and a ruler who possessed even the virtues of Mongkut was led to harass his brother with continual vexations of the pettiest nature.

The second king, who was in the year 1851 elevated to this office by the unanimous voice of king and council a few days after the coronation of his elder brother, was a quite as remarkable, and in most respects a far more attractive personality.

It is worth while dwelling for a short time on his character and accomplishments, in order that it may be seen how it was possible for a Siamese, fifty years ago, to be a man of culture and a true gentleman. When in the year 1824 Mongkut retired into the priesthood, on the usurpation of his throne, the younger brother, on the other hand, threw himself into active life and the service of the state, in which he obtained both high military and civil employment. In the course of his work he was brought much in contact with Europeans, and took advantage of the opportunity to perfect himself in English, in his familiarity with which language he far surpassed his brother, and also of acquiring a knowledge of military and naval science as well as of engineering and various mechanical arts. He was well read in English literature, and took the keenest interest in what was going on in the great world of the West. He was much more easy of access to Europeans than his royal brother, receiving them with less stiffness and ceremony, and admitting them to far greater intimacy. Nor was his culture merely superficial or even intellectual. He was gentle and chivalrous alike to men and women, and we may feel sure that even if he had occupied the more exalted position of his brother, he would never have been guilty of those acts of meanness and cruelty which stained the first king's character. He was not merely generous with his money, a virtue which

costs little to the possessor of wealth, but engaged in active philanthropy, visiting the poor and relieving their distress. In fact in nearly every respect he might have been tried according to the ethical standard not of his own, but of a Christian country, and found not wanting. Even his brother, who was not likely to err on the side of excessive partiality, could not refrain from praise when he wrote as follows : " He made everything new and beautiful, and of curious appearance, and of a good style of architecture, and much stronger than they had formerly been constructed by his three predecessors, the second kings of the last three reigns, for the space of time that he was second king. He had introduced and collected many and many things, being articles of great curiosity, and things useful for various purposes of military acts and affairs, from Europe and America, China and other states, and placed them in various departments and rooms or buildings suitable for those articles, and placed officers for maintaining and preserving things neatly and carefully. He has constructed several buildings in European fashion, and Chinese fashion, and ornamented them with various useful ornaments for his pleasure, and has constructed two steamers in manner of men-of-war, and two steam yachts, and several rowing state boats in Siamese and Cochin Chinese fashion, for his pleasure at sea and rivers of Siam ; and caused several articles of gold and silver, being vessels and various wares

and weapons, to be made up by the Siamese and Malayan goldsmiths, for employ and dress of himself and his family, by his direction and skilful contrivance and ability. He became celebrated and spread out more and more to various regions of the Siamese kingdom, adjacent states around, and far-famed to foreign countries even at far distance, as he became acquainted with many and many foreigners, who came from various quarters of the world where his name became known to most as a very clever and bravest Prince of Siam. As he pleased mostly with firing of cannon and acts of marine power and seamen, which he has imitated to his steamers which were made in the manner of the man-of-war, after he has seen various things curious and useful, and learned marine customs on board the foreign vessels of war, his steamers conveyed him to sea, where he has enjoyed playing of firing in cannon very often. He pleased very much in and was playful of almost everything, some important and some unimportant, as riding on elephants, and horses, and ponies, racing of them, and racing of rowing-boats, firing on birds and beasts of prey, dancing and singing in various ways pleasantly, and various curiosity of almost everything, and music of every description, and in taming of dogs, monkeys, &c., that is to say briefly that he has tested almost everything eatable except entirely testing of opium and play." [1]

[1] Mrs. Leonowens, p. 225.

Unfortunately his life, especially towards its close, was embittered by the jealousy and distrust of the first king, and his days were brought to an end in sadness in December, 1865. He was succeeded in the office of second king by his son George Washington, so called after his father's favourite hero, and it is pleasant to think that the son proved not unworthy either of his father or of his name. With the death in 1885 of George Washington, whose memory is still warmly cherished by the few Europeans in Bangkok who knew him, the second kingship ceased to exist in Siam. The accession of the present supreme king in 1868, two years after his cousin had been raised to the subordinate office, opens the latest chapter of Siamese history, a chapter which, it is hoped, will not close for many years to come. The discussion both of civilisation and government in modern Siam is reserved till later, but I may perhaps anticipate it by saying that little of the progress that has been effected during the last thirty years would have been possible, but for the influence of the king. To those who have come under the charm of his remarkable personality, it is both invidious and difficult to give a just estimate of his character and actions, and the time has probably not yet arrived for doing so. But even though, like his father, he may have failed to fulfil completely the promise of his boyhood and youth, nevertheless his reign has been characterised on the whole by a

His Majesty the King.

spirit of liberality and enlightenment, and he is perhaps entitled to a place among the small band of progressive rulers that the East has produced. Unhappily one swallow does not make a spring, nor has one man, king and despot though he be, power to effect the regeneration of a whole people. Their salvation must come from themselves and not from outside, and whether the Siamese are capable of rising to the occasion and working out their own future is a question which depends for its answer on far deeper considerations than the character of an isolated individual.

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTER AND CIVILISATION

The Siamese, like all other tropical peoples, differ widely both in civilisation and character from those of temperate regions. The influence of climate on a nation's character is no less marked perhaps than on its physical features. It requires, however, countless generations before its work begins to be felt, and it is therefore impossible for us with the scanty historical records or other means at our disposal to trace the different stages of evolution of the national character of such a people as the Siamese, and to determine what traits in it are due to the effects of physical surroundings or to other causes. To do so even in the case of European peoples would require a historical perspective infinitely longer than we can command, and in dealing with Asiatic and tropical nations, of whom our knowledge is particularly limited and scanty, we must for the most part accept the facts as we find them, and can only hope to account for them in the most general way.

Certain broad differences distinguish the races living in the tropics from those that inhabit temperate regions, differences so marked as to justify us in forming without hesitation the generalisation that they are largely due to the effect of climate operating through many generations, and not to be obliterated in a day by the introduction from outside of new and artificial institutions. But we cannot go much further, nor can we hope to find any clue to the less vital but still marked differences that distinguish many races living in close juxtaposition, as for example those of India.

We must rest satisfied that the chief changes and developments in national character and civilisation are due to the slow and gradual operation of natural laws. No one would deny this as regards the past. If, however, the past is to serve in any way as a guide to the future, then we must accept the conclusion that a national character or civilisation that has been evolved through countless generations cannot be suddenly altered in a day. We may be told that the rate of progress is now so enormous that the past serves as no useful criterion for our calculations, that fifty years of the modern world are fraught with more for good or evil than a cycle of the ancient. The wonderful material advance made by England and other European countries not only in the last four hundred years, but even

during the last century, will be pointed to as evidence of this fact. It will be urged that not only has civilisation taken these enormous strides in our own and other countries, but the national character has passed through corresponding stages of evolution in an equally short time. The savagery of the fifteenth century, nay, even of the eighteenth with its slave trade, its noisome prisons, and its barbarous penal code, strikes the imagination forcibly in contrast with the gentler and more philanthropical spirit that prevails at the opening of the twentieth century. Nor would any one deny the immense importance of these changes. Certainly the nineteenth century will ever be memorable in the history of the world, not only for the vast material progress that has taken place in it, but even more for the growth of that humanitarian spirit of which it is impossible to say how far it is a direct effect of such physical progress, and how far it is due to an independent ethical evolution.

Nevertheless it may be possible to lay too great stress on the externals of civilisation. The changes that strike us, for example, in the character of the leading European nations during the last two or three centuries, are probably more superficial than they at first sight seem to be, and what substantial progress has been made by any people has only been possible because their character contained in itself the germs from which alone such growth

could take place. As in the case of the individual the study of the laws of heredity tells us that we have often to go back several generations to account for some trait or characteristic, so must we also in the case of the nation. The more closely historical and social phenomena are examined, the more clearly will it be seen how long is the chain of causes that give rise to an effect which may strike the superficial observer as having been arbitrarily produced. In the case of tropical peoples especially, erroneous impressions are apt to be formed. They resemble children in many respects. They are docile and impressionable, but, like children, though they may have acquired the surface manners of grown-up people, they act from different motives and under different sanctions. We must, therefore, pause before we hastily assume that, having reached a certain point, their characters are fully formed, and that they are capable of dispensing with all external restraint in the future.

Let us glance back fifty years or more to a time when European influences had hardly begun to work, when Siamese civilisation was in appearance, as well as in reality, still a purely native growth. From the accounts given to us in the early and middle parts of the late century, we infer that but little change in the manners and customs of the people had taken place during the two hundred years or so that had elapsed since the early

European visitors of the seventeenth century had recorded their impressions. Siam was a land which could fairly lay claim to a civilisation of a kind. It had institutions, ceremonials, an art, and an ordered religious worship of its own. Even education was to some extent diffused, and, if there was little native literature, yet learning was held in much reverence. But, even for an Asiatic community, the government was singularly despotic. The abject servility shown by the Siamese to their king has become proverbial, and it is hard to say whether the spirit of subjection under which they lay, or the forms and ceremonials in which it manifested itself impress the imagination most. For it was not only the king who was treated with this servile deference. The whole social fabric rested on the principle of the submission of the lower to a higher authority. All the nobles had their own retainers and followers, and while the king was worshipped by them almost like a god, they in their turn expected no less homage from their inferiors. To speak of the society as feudal, though this name has been given to it, is perhaps misleading. In Europe we think of feudalism rather as supplying a check to the absolutism of the monarchy. The associations of the word are with the power of the great territorial nobles, and not the king himself. This was the case, too, even in Japanese feudalism. And though in Siam there was, and there still is to some extent,

a graded social hierarchy, yet the position of the king was so supreme, and the power of the aristocracy so overshadowed, that the sight which rivets our attention above all others is the monarch seated in transcendent grandeur on his throne, with his courtiers crawling in front of him on their hands and knees, and vying with each other to perform his slightest behest. Even so late as the middle of the nineteenth century Sir John Bowring wrote: "The groundwork of all Siamese institutions and habits is a reverence for authority. This principle is pushed to forms of the most extravagant excess; on the one side of assumption, and on the other of prostration."[1] What strikes us, too, more than anything else in reading Mrs. Leonowens' amusing and, at the same time, pathetic account of her life at the Siamese court, is the subservience of everybody to the caprices and whims of the monarch. It is always a case of "*Hoc volo sic jubeo.*" Any wish or command on his part, however unreasonable, has to be promptly executed. Though in many respects an enlightened man, and one who could have borne comparison with many European sovereigns as regards education, ability, and a sincere desire to serve his country, he was completely spoiled by his position. Much of the good he did with his right hand he undid with his left, and it is hardly possible to believe that the man who at one

[1] Bowring's "Siam," vol. i. p. 124.

moment showed himself such a wise and even benevolent ruler, and also the kindest of friends, was the same who on other occasions presented himself in the character of the harshest and most capricious of despots. Happily such scenes as took place at Court in his reign would be impossible under the rule of his more enlightened son, the present king, albeit the habits of servility fostered for so many centuries cannot be eradicated in a single generation; and though under fairer and more constitutional forms the supreme authority of the monarch, both in affairs of government and social life, is practically undiminished, as far as appearances go great changes have taken place. Any visitor to Siam hoping to see the courtiers crawling about on their hands and knees as they did not many years ago will be disappointed. In 1874 the present king assembled his ministers, nobles, &c., and having ascended the throne he promulgated the decree emancipating them from the degrading position of crawling in public; after which the whole assembly rose from their hands and knees and stood erect for the first time in the presence of their sovereign.[1] A reception now at the Siamese palace is *mutatis mutandis*, very much what it would be at any other modern court. The king dresses in quite a simple uniform in European style, without the

[1] See Young's "Kingdom of the Yellow Robe," p. 131, where the decree is quoted from the Siam Repository.

jewels and ornaments with which Indian princes love to bedeck themselves, walks about, and talks affably to Siamese and foreigners; and no one would suspect that under that quiet and unostentatious, yet dignified exterior, he wields among his subjects an authority greater than the Czar of all the Russias.

It is the same, too, with the nobles and their dependents. The crawling and cringing are relegated as far as possible to the background; but the spirit of servility still lingers, and even the forms, as those who are familiar with the private life of the Siamese know full well, continue as of old. Nor is the political and social influence of the princes and nobles a thing of the past. A man in a humble position must needs look to favour from one or another of them to advance him in life. A minister, when he is shifted from one department to another, takes many of his trusty lieutenants with him, and only a few years ago it was his practice to remove all his subordinates bag and baggage. An amusing instance of this occurred in the Education Department, when the Minister of Public Instruction was transferred to his present office from the Customs, and most of the tide waiters were suddenly metamorphosed into inspectors of schools. One of these worthies still continues to give his country the benefit of his skill and experience in matters educational. He is there to stay as long as the minister, but his educational

functions have, it is needless to say, been minimised as far as possible.

Though the servility of the Siamese has become almost a byword, and though, in spite of legislation to the contrary, they still in practice adhere to slavery, yet there is a certain openness and manliness in their ordinary demeanour, and none of that cringing and fawning habitual among Indians and many other Orientals. In his relation to Europeans the Siamese of the lowest class, though not, as a rule, wanting in respect, is independent enough. In pecuniary transactions he will not grovel and metaphorically lick your boots to make a rather better bargain with you; and if you do not like his terms, you need not take them. Siamese servants too are at times even more casual than English ones. Though when they have been long in service they often show great attachment to their masters, and are greatly preferable to the Chinese in this respect, yet they always remember that they are perfectly free agents and stand up for themselves if they think they are not getting their full due. There is, therefore, some indication that the Siamese are not so thoroughly imbued with servility as is generally supposed, and that with the gradual modification of their social and political fabric they may eventually show a greater desire for and appreciation of liberty than is the case with many Asiatics. Still, in estimating Siamese civilisation, and in drawing from it auguries as to their political and social

future, this spirit of subjection is a great factor to be reckoned with, and being as it is, perhaps, the most marked trait in which the Siamese, in common with other tropical peoples, differ from Europeans, I have put it in the foreground in the summary which I am attempting to give of their character.

The next characteristic of the Siamese which calls for note, and which is due even more directly to climatic causes, is their incorrigible indolence. All tropical peoples place their *summum bonum* in a state of passivity and inactivity, in direct contrast with those of temperate regions, who find their highest pleasure in the exercise and development of their faculties, whether physical or mental. But though they all consider that the ideal existence consists in having sufficient to eat and nothing to do, it is true that they are not all apparently equally indolent. The stress of competition has been too great in many cases. The Indian ryot works as hard as the French peasant. If he did not he would be starved out. At the same time, once lessen the pressure, and he would immediately relax his energies owing to the laziness engendered by a hot climate and the deadening of all social ambition; for the vision of a higher standard of comfort does not appeal to the average Oriental. Give him enough to eat, and that is all he cares about.

In Siam, Nature has been exceedingly bountiful. The valley of the Menam is one of the richest districts in the world. Rice is there cultivated with

the minimum of toil, while bananas and other vegetable products almost drop into the lap of the happy countryman. There is no pressure of population as in India or China, and the natural consequence ensues. The people are probably among the laziest on the face of the earth, and laziness has become thoroughly ingrained in their disposition. Unfortunately too for the Siamese, it is not merely the forces of nature they will have to contend with in the future, but like their almost equally indolent neighbours, the Malays and the Burmans, they are confronted with the competition of one of the hardest working nations in the world, the Chinese, who are gradually driving them out inch by inch, and who may before long swamp them almost completely. In Bangkok all the hard labour is done by Chinese. The coolies in the rice mills and in the private houses of the Europeans, those who make and mend the roads, who pull the jinrickshaws, carry burdens, and water the streets, are all Chinamen. Hard work of this kind no Siamese would look at. Not that it is beneath his dignity; he is not too proud, but simply too lazy. And to go a little higher in the scale of employment we find all the market gardening of any considerable extent in the hands of the Chinese, the flower gardeners and not a few of the syces being Malays, while most of the *petit commerce* with the larger retail trade is monopolised again by the Celestials, except in the case of some Indian shops and a few

large European stores. In the interior also the Chinaman is making his way: he is even ousting the native Siamese from the cultivation of the soil. The mines, on the other hand, are worked by Burmans, who, though they too have a considerable reputation for laziness, would almost seem to yield the palm in this respect to the Siamese.

What then, it may be asked, do the Siamese do? Nothing, if they can help it. Many of them are of course retainers, and do household work in the houses of the Siamese aristocracy, who naturally do not employ Chinese servants. There is very little of a middle class in Siam, but the members of it, such as it is, usually seek to get employment in a Government office under an influential minister, and look to him for promotion. They have no idea of striking out an independent career for themselves in commerce, or manufacturing, or in one of the professions, though perhaps an exception should be made in the case of a few who practise medicine. The lower classes, when not in service as retainers, seem to eke out a scanty livelihood by a little buying and selling, but if there is anything like real work to be done, it is always left to their womenfolk. Often in the early morning have I watched some boat coming along one of the *klongs* into Bangkok with its load of bananas, cocoanuts, and garden produce for sale, paddled by a couple of lusty women, while the men reclined at their ease in the stern smoking, or chewing betel. Indeed, in

speaking of the physical laziness of the Siamese lower classes it must be understood to apply only to the sterner sex, for the women are genuine workers; and yet they do not seem to transmit their aptitude for work, whether inherited or acquired, in any degree to their sons. It appears to be only continued in the female line.

I have been told that in Bangkok, at any rate, the Siamese now work much harder than they did a generation ago. With the influx of Europeans and the increasing competition of the Chinese, and with the spread of the town, the price of necessaries has greatly increased, and life involves a harder struggle for every one, so that it may well be that many individual Siamese are now confronted with the choice of doing some work or starving. It is hoped moreover that, as the country is further opened up and developed, the increasing pressure of population on the means of subsistence will be a good instead of an evil, in that it will force the people to become more energetic and enterprising. That this effect is bound to follow to some extent is almost certain, but unless a restriction is placed on Chinese immigration, it is improbable that the native inhabitants will, after so long a period of indolence, gain strength in sufficient time to withstand the force of the flood which is threatening to submerge them.

But whatever the economic results may be, this indolent disposition of the Siamese must needs

remain another great factor, no less important than their spirit of servility, in estimating the general and political situation. This indolence and passivity are coupled with the usual fatalism of Orientals, which is the direct outcome of their general character rather than of any particular religious tenets, and minimises their power of resistance to any form of attack. It is such qualities as these that put all tropical peoples at the mercy of the more vigorous nations of the world, not only economically, but politically. That when a country like Siam expands all the chief business and trade must fall into the hands of Europeans or Chinese will hardly admit of a doubt, and it looks as if in their politics and administration a position of dependence is in the long run as inevitable for them as in their commercial relations. It is not the defects, the anomalies, the absurdities in Siamese government and administration that make one doubt so much their political capacity. The history of other nations in the past has been as full of these, and they have emerged triumphant. Most of even the graver faults may be changed in a generation or so, under competent European advice; but what no European adviser can alter are the fundamental qualities of the Siamese character.

Before leaving the discussion of the Siamese character as it bears on their political capacity or incapacity, there is one other leading trait deserving mention. This is their extraordinary levity. They are a merry, light-hearted, pleasure-loving people, but

they have the defects of these qualities, and they are little more than a nation of full-grown children. The serious business of life is quite beyond them; what appeals to them are its shows, its scenic effects, and its pageantries. They are great at organising processions and illuminations; into this work they put their whole heart and soul, and while engaged in it they suddenly become earnest and energetic. To quote the common saying, while they play at work, they work at play. The business of the administrative departments is of secondary importance compared with the various court ceremonials. Levées, processions, cremations occupy a large part of the time not only of the king himself, but also of his Ministers, who, even in spite of the best will in the world, have to neglect their official duties. They are not infrequently kept up in the palace till nearly daybreak, and cannot therefore be blamed if they do not appear at their offices, if, indeed, they come at all, until the day is far advanced. It is damping to the ardour of the new European Adviser, when on his first appearance at his office he sends at a late hour in the afternoon to inquire if his Minister is coming, to learn, as happened in my own case, that the Minister is only just up and having his bath; and if the humorous side of such an occurrence strikes one at first, it becomes annoying when repeated week after week and month after month, and the most ordinary official business gets into hopeless arrears.

Few Siamese seem really capable of grasping the serious nature of work. A Cabinet Council will break off suddenly in the midst of a discussion to admire some new European toy brought in by one of its members. For, like children, the Siamese have a passion for novelty, and that not only in things but in persons. They are always delighted to get a new man out from Europe, but with the novelty the charm is apt to wear off. I have never, I think, seen the Siamese so serious, with attention so riveted, as when for several weeks in the spring of the year, during the time the south wind blows steadily, they assemble in thousands every afternoon for hours at a stretch to fly their kites in the Premane ground. That for them is the real business of life. To their credit it must be said that in this display they show considerable skill, as they do in organising processions and illuminations. The sight is a bright and gay one with the coloured figures dotted all over the green grass and the white kites sailing overhead under the cloudless blue sky. But the situation is not without its pathos.

It may appear ungracious to have put forward so prominently the leading weaknesses of the Siamese character, when so little has been said on the other side. My object has not been to give merely a simple enumeration of the various qualities which make up the sum total of the Siamese character, but rather to show how that character betokens political capacity or the reverse, and how con-

sequently it affects the practical situation. It is a more pleasing task to touch upon other aspects of their civilisation and to show how much there is admirable both in it and in their character. What strikes one most in the Siamese social and political fabric of half a century or so ago is the absolutism of the monarchy, which has been but little impaired in reality up to the present date. Yet such has been the effect of European and Christian influences, that it would be impossible to imagine a Siamese monarch of this century acting with the caprice and cruelty of which the late king, and still more his predecessors, were guilty. The Siamese, though not a people of very deep feeling, are naturally humane and kindly, both in relation to their fellow human beings and the lower animals, and it only required some outside help to bring out these good qualities which had been partially hidden under the crust of semi-savagery that had enveloped the country till within quite recent times. Even within the last hundred years it was possible for the most barbarous occurrences to take place. After the Burmese war, we are told, "The king of Laos arrived as a prisoner in Bangkok about the latter end of 1828, and underwent there the greatest cruelties barbarians could invent. He was confined in a large iron cage, exposed to a burning sun, and obliged to proclaim to every one that the king of Siam was great and merciful, that he himself had committed a great error, and deserved his present punishment. In

this cage were placed with the prisoner a large mortar to pound him in, a large boiler to boil him in, a hook to hang him by, and a sword to decapitate him ; also a short, pointed spike for him to sit on. His children were sometimes put in along with him. He was a mild, respectable-looking, old, grey-headed man, and did not live long to gratify his tormentors, death having put an end to his sufferings. His body was taken and hung in chains on the bank of the river, about two or three miles below Bangkok."[1] Such a piece of cruelty is in our day quite inconceivable, nor is there any fear of a serious relapse from the present standard of humanity. There are probably few other Oriental nations so essentially kindly as the Siamese. They contrast favourably in this regard with their neighbours both to the north and south, the Chinese and the Malays, though perhaps they have no claim to superiority over the Burmans, who resemble them so closely in many respects. In this connexion it is interesting to note that the Siamese and Burmans are two of the nations which practise Buddhism in its purest form and on whom that religion has its strongest hold. Buddhism may no doubt claim some of the credit for the existence in them both of this virtue. The Siamese, it is true, do not in practice act up to the Buddhist doctrine of the sacredness of all animal life. Many individuals, however, do, and to release animals, destined for

[1] See Bayard Taylor's "Siam," page 70.

human food, has not been an uncommon form of making "merit" in the past. The growth of humanitarianism is further shown in the improvements in the penal code and in the prison reforms which have been effected in this generation. In the middle of last century the treatment of prisoners was very barbarous, and resembled what the traveller may see nowadays in China. Criminals in irons and wearing *cangues* or wooden collars were marched round the streets, while at night they were loaded with chains and so crowded together that they had scarcely room to lie down. The punishments inflicted were no less savage, branding and cutting and burning alive being resorted to for some offences.

The natural kindliness of the Siamese also comes to light in their treatment of their children. One of the most pleasing sights, among much that is squalid and ugly in the streets of Bangkok, is to see not only the mothers, but also the fathers carrying in their arms and fondling their little soft-eyed, brown-skinned children, who have at that early age a distinct attractiveness. You rarely come across any evidence of harshness or unkindness, so that one thinks of our own East End children, and what they often suffer at the hands of drunken and brutalised parents, and asks whether we are after all so much more civilised than they. It is no less pleasing to find the attachment of parents to children equally marked among the upper classes, and even among the most exalted in the land. The present

king, like his father before him, is usually accompanied on state and other occasions by one or more of his small sons, who generally form one of the conspicuous features of the palace receptions and ceremonials. Not the least moving incident in the late king's life is the passionate grief he showed at the death of his favourite daughter. When we read the story we are inclined to forgive him his many faults and shortcomings and feel that here is the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. The aged also as well as the young are treated with kindness, and parents when they grow old are never allowed by their children to go in want. Yet there can be no doubt that the family bond is not nearly so strong in Siam as it is when we see it at its best in European households.

Historians have always considered the position of women to be one of the most crucial tests of the civilisation of a people. It is true that many nations among whom women occupy a most degraded position have in the past been successful, as the world reckons success, in the conflict of peoples. But now that that struggle is more intense, and its issue depends on moral rather than physical qualities, their future history is likely to be very different. The health of the body politic is bound up with the health of the family, which in many respects may be more justly regarded as the unit of the State than the individual being. Where polygamy or gross immorality prevails, there true

family life is impossible, while the people who suffer them to exist in their midst are doomed to sure and certain effacement. In whatever country Mahometanism has planted itself it has cast a blight on its social institutions by the stigma it has placed on woman. No such charge, however, can be brought against Buddhism. The Buddha himself laid great stress on the virtue of chastity, which is still highly honoured by both sexes wherever that religion prevails; and though he was not able actually to forbid it, he discouraged polygamy to the best of his power. Even if it cannot be claimed for Buddhism that it has accomplished anything like what Christianity has achieved in elevating woman to her rightful place and making her the true helpmeet rather than the handmaid or mere plaything of man, yet it must be remembered that it has had far greater physical difficulties to contend with. In the hot regions of the earth sensual indulgence is far more prevalent, and more directly attributable to natural causes than in the colder countries of the north, and the emancipation of woman is consequently much more of an uphill task. It can be said of Buddhism that its influence has at least been all on the right side; and when we remember the thousand arguments that have been advanced in the name of both religion and morality to degrade and debase the weaker sex, this is indeed saying much to its credit.

In Siam at any rate, whatever be the causes, the

position of women is on the whole a healthy one, and contrasts favourably with that among most other Oriental peoples. No one can have been many days in Bangkok without being struck by the robust physique and erect bearing of the ordinary women. It is by no means uncommon at first for a stranger, till quite close to them, to mistake them for men, the similarity of their dress and their short-cropped hair lending themselves to this deception. They do far more than their fair share of physical work, and though this fact is certainly due to causes which do not betoken a complete emancipation, yet it has worked indirectly for good, since in making them strong and healthy it has tended to improve their status in other respects. Indeed, it is useless to attempt to raise women morally and mentally unless we attend to their physical development. So it is that not only as regards hard labour, but in the ordinary business of life, the average Siamese woman is often the better half of her husband. She thoroughly understands not merely the domestic but also the economic affairs of the household, and enjoys as great a share of freedom and liberty as do most of her Western sisters. Polygamy, it is true, is permitted in Siam; in the lower classes, however, it is increasingly common for men to restrict themselves to one wife. This is no doubt due partly to motives of economy, wives being considered an expensive luxury; but other reasons, if I am not mistaken, are the sounder instinct which

prevails as to the value of family life and the direct influence of the wife herself, who will not readily brook rivals. Unfortunately as we ascend in the social scale, we find a less wholesome condition of affairs. It is the case, I believe, that even among the well-to-do classes, probably owing to European influences, there is a greater tendency to monogamy; and though it is quite common for wealthy men to take to themselves subordinate wives and concubines in addition to the principal wife, the latter nevertheless retains a position of superiority over the others. But it is not until we reach the top of the social ladder that European ideas receive most cause for repulsion, for the rulers of Siam in the number of their wives and concubines have proved themselves not unworthy rivals of Solomon himself. It is not perhaps unreasonable to hope that the Crown Prince will, by his example and influence, practically give the deathblow to polygamy, which is already discredited.

The king may have two or three queens, who enjoy that title in superiority to the other wives. One of them is as a rule predominant. The queen *par excellence* of the present reigning monarch and the mother of the Crown Prince is, next to his Majesty, the most powerful personality in Siam. She is a remarkable personage, and though her character may not be considered altogether above criticism, she is undoubtedly one of the chief forces to be reckoned with in the Siam of the present day.

Her Majesty the Queen.

The Siamese ladies of the upper class, though by no means confined to lives of strict seclusion, do not appear much in public, and still less, with one or two exceptions, mix in European society. Though there are clear indications that some of them, like the queen, are capable and energetic women, yet it is impossible that the education diffused among them can reach a very high standard. But if this is the case, it is not because the authorities hold obscurantist views on the question of women's education. An excellent school under English mistresses, of which I shall have more to say in a later chapter, was started a few years ago for the daughters of noble and wealthy parents, and the generation now growing up who benefit by it should turn out to be one of well-educated, if not highly-cultured ladies.

It will thus be seen that women, in spite of many drawbacks, occupy a position in Siam, not only in the lower but even in the upper classes, far better than in India or, indeed, in most other countries in the tropical East. No obstacle is placed either by Government or society, as I can testify from my own experience, in the way of the education on modern European lines of girls of the higher class, and I believe the general organisation of girls' education is only a question of time and money. No objection was raised to a proposal to send to England well-to-do girls to be trained for the teaching profession; only the certainty of

their being married within a few months of their return renders such a scheme impracticable; but there is no reason why some should not go to Europe for the completion of their general education. There is, indeed, considerable liberality of thought in Siam with regard to women. To mention a small matter, but one which may serve as an indication of how the wind blows, bicycle riding established itself as a suitable occupation for ladies in Siam with far more ease than it took to break down the prejudice with which it was at first regarded in our own country, and the Queen's carriage is usually followed every evening by a troop of young lady bicyclists from the Palace. Thus the outlook for the future is fairly encouraging; and even though polygamy be not legally prohibited, there can be little doubt that, with the increase of education and spread of European ideas, the status of women will be materially raised.

Looking, then, broadly at the character of the Siamese, we see that though its leading traits do not make for political capacity, yet in essentials it contains much that is worthy of admiration, and is quite compatible ultimately with a fairly high civilisation. They have, of course, the defects of most Orientals, and it would not be fair to judge them too hardly. As regards respect for truth, which, like other of the cardinal virtues, is supposed to have but a feeble and frail existence east of Suez, judging from my own experience I

should say that on the whole they are at the worst not inferior to average Asiatics, though falling considerably below the Teutonic standard. Many no doubt have said in their haste that all Siamese are liars, and very unfavourable pictures have been drawn by some writers of their veracity. But the lying among the lower classes seems to be more often due to a certain carelessness and generous disregard for truth (characteristic also of the Irishman) than to innate depravity, though the ruling classes cannot be acquitted of extreme shiftiness and untrustworthiness. These classes, too, have a very different standard of honour from ours. No Siamese would dream of preferring a request to any official without first making a propitiatory offering, nor can even the best of them understand that Europeans may look at the matter in a different light. They refuse to believe that a man, because he happens to be white, could scruple to turn his position to profit, and I am afraid there have been cases in the past which would to some extent justify their incredulity.

As regards commercial honesty on a large scale it is impossible to speak, for the simple reason that Siamese are never in a position to conduct big business transactions, so that we cannot draw comparisons between them and, for instance, the Chinese and Japanese. In smaller dealings they are on the whole honest; they may at times cheat, but they have none of that natural genius for pre-

varication and subterfuge for which so many other Asiatics are conspicuous. It would be quite wrong to associate with the Siamese the idea people in England have of the wily Oriental trader, ever seeking to get the better of his adversary in a bargain, and generally succeeding. Happily they are not cursed with that *vendendi cacoethes*, to adapt an old expression, which seems to prevail from the Levant to the China Seas. Their bearing, as I have said, is unusually open and frank, nor is there anything in it suggestive of the oiliness and lubricity so common in the characters as well as the persons of many nations in the East.

There is one count, however, on which the Siamese cannot be so easily acquitted. Mr. Warington Smyth suggests that the notoriety they have acquired for thieving is undeserved, but my own painful experience, and that of many of my neighbours in Bangkok, lead me to a somewhat different opinion. An experienced Indian police official once remarked to me that he knew no people in whom the predatory instinct was so strong, and it is certain that the robberies in Bangkok have been remarkable for their number. If this appears inconsistent with the conclusion I have come to with regard to their general honesty, the explanation, if there be one, is that while the bulk of the community are fairly honest, there is a thieving minority who by their skill and success have attracted more attention than they would

otherwise deserve. I have known of a house close to my own robbed four times in a fortnight, and yet every time the thieves effected their escape. It is certainly most advisable for any one intending to reside in Bangkok to content himself with as few valuables as possible, or else to keep them safely locked up. The thieves probably find it easier and more congenial to live by stealing than by honest labour.

The key to the understanding of many of the minor traits in the Siamese character is that childish simplicity already alluded to. Whether it be a misnomer or not to speak of a people of so old a civilisation, now possibly on the downward path, as a young nation, they are certainly a nation of children. And so it is that we are prepared to find in them that spirit of curiosity and enquiry which no observers have failed to remark. Children and grown-up men, officials and priests, and country folk will all put the stranger through the most minute questions as to his apparel, mode of life, his salary, or what not, nor will they show in doing so any embarrassment. It is a natural instinct in man asserting itself, and the self-consciousness and reserve which are the products of a complex civilisation are by no means a subject of unmixed satisfaction in comparison with it. Indeed, the contrast between the happy childlike gaiety of the Siamese and the weariness, the fever, and the fret of Western life must often give us pause. As when

troubles thicken round him the grown man often looks back with a sigh on the free and careless days of his boyhood, so must we often cast a longing look behind upon the times—

> Before this strange disease of modern life,
> With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
> Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife.

That happiness and contentedness are very generally diffused among the Siamese I think there can be little question, and to overthrow or seriously interfere with the social fabric of a people who have entered on so goodly a heritage, is not a task to be regarded lightly, unless we feel that we have something better to give them in place of it. But whether or not happiness be the chief end of existence, we may well hope that contact with Western civilisation will prove ultimately a blessing rather than a curse to the Siamese.

On its intellectual side the civilisation of the Siamese has never reached a high stage of development. Their literature practically amounts to nothing, and what exists is chiefly in the form of translations from the Chinese. All their higher literary education is in Pali, in which their sacred books are written, and which has become for them a sort of second language. It is studied in the monasteries, and a man's learning is usually measured by his knowledge of its literature, but I cannot myself place a very

high value on the educational advantage to be derived from such studies. The Pali scholars in Siam must be considered rather as erudite than highly educated men. Still, education up to a certain point has been fairly well diffused. It is often asserted that every man in Siam can read and write, and though this statement is an exaggeration, yet certainly a majority, owing to their training in the *wats*, could acquit themselves of the charge of being illiterate. Nor have the Siamese ever accomplished anything in the way of scientific discovery or invention. No industry or manufacture other than agriculture has been developed in the country, and all material improvements have been introduced from outside. The people seem to have no aptitude either for commerce or manufacture, though a certain money-making fever has lately taken hold of the upper classes, and there is but little hope of their following the example set them by the Japanese and becoming a mercantile nation.

It is perhaps in the domain of art that the Siamese show the most natural talent. Latterly they have almost ceased to produce, but some of their old pottery and silver work has genuine merit, and the embroidery still done under the supervision of the clever wife of the Minister of Public Instruction is both original and beautiful. The fact that good artistic work has been accomplished and is still being carried on to a very limited extent, coupled with the æsthetic taste exhibited by the

Siamese, not only in their shows and pageants, but also often in the details of their everyday life, such as the ordinary dress of the men, forbids us to despair of the future. In the ornamentation of their religious buildings, which are often effective from a little distance, there is not much real beauty or originality, much of the design being Chinese. The plaster and stucco façades and doorways of the temples are generally covered with bright pieces of broken crockery and glass very skilfully inserted with endless labour, representing flowers and mosaic work. This, with the coloured glazed tiles on the roofs, the shapes of which are very graceful, and the gilded *prachadees* shining in the brilliant sunlight, produces far off a dazzling effect. But the materials used, being perishable and common, do not bear close inspection, and this florid arabesque work soon crumbles away, leaving in its place dust and sundried bricks. The gates of inlaid mother-of-pearl in black lacquer are, as has been mentioned in a previous chapter, beautiful, and seem to survive longer, but as more "merit" is gained by building a new temple than by repairing an old one, there is often little done to preserve the *wat*, which gradually disappears half buried in dense tropical creepers and tangled jungle foliage. Much grace is exhibited in the dancing of the Siamese, which is slow and stately and performed to the accompaniment of music in a minor key. I have seen dancing by a troupe of girls before the king

Siamese Dancing Girls.

which struck me as better than any I have witnessed in Japan. In the kindred art of music the Siamese may also be credited with some talent. They have a variety of native instruments, and there is often no little pathos and sweetness in the music produced by them. The creditable performances, too, by Siamese bands indicate that they cannot be altogether without aptitude for European music; though the boys and girls in the schools show such little evidence of talent for it that it is hardly worth the trouble of teaching them, and few of the Siamese who have been in Europe seem to have acquired any taste or love for it.

It must be admitted, then, that in the sphere of intellectual achievement, in scientific progress and invention, in literature and philosophy, and also, with some reservation, in art, Siamese civilisation has accomplished practically nothing. Not that individuals have not shown a love of learning and science—as, for instance, the late king and his brother, the second king. These, however, were exceptional men, and it cannot be said that there is a high standard of education, at any rate among the older generation, of upper-class Siamese. But though their civilisation is wanting on this important side, it is far more developed in the direction of all that makes for refinement and agreeableness in social life. Because the Siamese differ from us in many points in their way of living, which after all are purely conventional, it would be wrong to

disparage their civilisation. Certainly in most of the essentials of good breeding and manners the better Siamese need fear no comparison with Europeans of any nation. The uniform courtesy and kindness with which I was invariably treated I shall always remember with gratitude, and in the Director of my own department I had the good fortune to be habitually associated with one who combined some of the best qualities of an English gentleman with his own native charm and courtliness, not to mention considerable mental culture. That the life of the upper-class Siamese would to an Englishman be one long boredom is true, his chief occupation consisting in attending long palace functions, varied by a few flying visits perhaps to an office, with none of the solid mental interests or the outdoor physical pursuits which to us are the salt of existence. Such as it is, it seems to suit their temperament well enough. Whether a new generation educated more on English lines will retain and transmit to their posterity English habits and tastes, it is hard to say. But the experiment is worth trying, for we shall never readily admit that our mental and bodily faculties were given to us for no further or fuller use than the average Siamese appears to have found for them.

CHAPTER V

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

In spite of the European influx, the manners and customs of the Siamese show but little sign of change. Even the upper classes, by whom foreign influences are more felt, and who, when mixing with Europeans, adopt many of their superficial habits, throw these off in the privacy of domestic seclusion, and become thoroughly Siamese again. Such things as shoes and stockings and tables and chairs are once more relegated to the category of unnecessary superfluities. In the lower classes, though here too there are superficial changes in manner—as, for example, in the dying out of the deferential salutation paid to one another in the streets—the old manners and customs remain naturally still less impaired. It is pleasant, in a world that is becoming rapidly overgrown by dull and monotonous uniformity, to note this conservatism in the Siamese, and to see a people that can boast of an old and picturesque civilisation clinging to many of its ancient habits and customs.

In Oriental minds there generally lies lurking, whether expressed or not, a certain contempt for the European and his ways, mixed strangely with a feeling of jealousy and half admiration. While the white man imagines that it is he who is exploiting a dark race and turning it to his own profit, his victims meanwhile entertain as contemptuous an opinion of him as he does of them. There is no doubt that in his heart of hearts the Siamese really believes that the European is an inferior person. While the Siamese is lazy and enjoys himself, it is the European who does the hard work of administrative government, builds railways, and toils in the merchant's office. It is the Europeans who are the workers and do the labour of the hive, while the queen bee is enjoying a life of ease. The Siamese wonders and laughs, and there is no question that, given his point of view, he has chosen the better course. It is he who is the real master of the art of living. All he cares about is to be let alone and have the dirty work done for him. He goes his own gait, and allows the foreigner to go his. This temperament, common in some degree to all Orientals, is specially characteristic of the Siamese, who are essentially easygoing and pleasure loving; hence there is no large city in the East, where European influences are equally strong, that has nevertheless preserved its individuality so much as Bangkok.

A happy carelessness is what strikes the observer

as the chief characteristic of those he sees around him, both of young and old, in the market-place or by the wayside. An easy, lighthearted people these, whom trouble touches gently, and who are not smitten deeply with the pathos of mortal things. How different from the hard, set faces, where toil and privation have ingrained their marks, of those who throng the streets of our typical big towns! From an early age when, as a boy, he runs about laughing and naked and spends half his day splashing in the water of the nearest *klong*, to the time when, grown more sedate and mature, he has become a regular attendant at the various festivals and shows which occupy so much of his life, the Siamese remains the same simple child at heart, gay and pleasure-seeking, with but little heed or thought for the future. And yet in a world where man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward not even the Siamese can escape the universal lot, and sorrow and sickness and death find their way across his threshold too. On his life, as on that of others, they have set their stamp and coloured his thoughts and habits and beliefs.

The more primitive and impressionable a people the more marked are the great natural epochs in the individual's lifetime. His entrance into and his going out of the world are accompanied by rites and ceremonies which happily, even if they do not die out, become more simple and less ostentatious with the progress and growing complexity of

civilisation. The only surviving ceremonies attending the birth of children in Siam would seem to be of Hindu origin, and consist of the shaving of the hair on the head a month after birth; and a name-giving rite. The babies and younger children, who receive much devotion both from their fathers and mothers, are often covered with a thick yellow pigment, supposed to be a preventive against mosquitoes and other insects. While quite small they are thrown by their mothers into the tepid waters, with a tin float tied under their arms to keep the head from sinking, and learn the art of swimming as early as walking. After he has once found the use of his legs, the Siamese boy for the next few years leads a life of extreme publicity. He is always *en évidence*, playing and running about in the streets, or bathing, or paddling in one of the *klongs*. He is indeed an amphibious little creature, and seems to belong to one element as much as to the other. Unburdened by clothes, he can hop in or out of the water as the spirit moves him, drying himself in the sun, which never fails to shine the greater part of the day in Bangkok, even during the rainy season. At the age of ten or so the boy is usually sent to one of the neighbouring *wats* to learn reading and writing from the priests. Education was free in Siam long before it became so in England, and, though statistics are wanting, there is no doubt that most parents have for a considerable time taken advantage of this

Siamese Mother and Child.

gratuitous schooling for their boys, and that a majority of Siamese men can read and write to some extent. Unhappily the girls have not the same opportunity, and most of the women, even of those occupying comfortable and respectable positions, are illiterate.

There are two epochs of importance in the early life of a Siamese which deserve special mention. These are the shaving of the top-knot and admission to the priesthood. The head of a Siamese child, whether boy or girl, is wholly shaved at an early age, with the exception of a tuft in the centre, which is twisted into a knot on the top of the head. This top-knot is tended with the utmost care, and is frequently decorated with a costly pin or a garland of flowers. It is removed at the age of about eleven. This event is looked upon as one of great importance, and is regarded as marking the entry of the boy or girl on a new phase of existence. The religious and secular elements of the life of a people like the Siamese are so inextricably interwoven that it is dangerous to attach too great a religious signification to any particular event, but we can perhaps find the closest parallel to this ceremony in the "first communion" of a Roman Catholic child. At least they are both celebrated at about the same age, and both are typical and emblematic of a profound change of purpose and life. The ceremony of the shaving of the top-knot has attracted much attention, and has been de-

scribed in fuller detail than any other by writers on Siamese customs. Suffice it here to say that it is celebrated at very great expense and with the most elaborate religious rites, lasting usually for several days. The interest to us does not lie in the details of these rites, which it would be tedious to repeat, but in the symbolical significance of the ceremony of tonsure in many diverse countries and ages. The Siamese ceremony seems to date back to a remote antiquity, and is probably of Brahminical origin, but its importance remains unimpaired by the lapse of time.

Every Siamese is supposed to enter the priesthood for at least three months, and he does so usually at the age of twenty or twenty-one, though he may postpone the event to a later age. He can continue a priest as long as he wishes after this period, or cease to be one at any time. Thus there is no hard and fast line between the laity and priesthood, as there is in Christian countries. In fact, the terms priest and priesthood are somewhat misleading, there being no strict English equivalent for the Siamese "Phra." This subject will be treated of later in the chapters on religion, the ceremony of ordination being only mentioned here as forming a necessary incident in the life of every Siamese male, whether king, noble, or peasant.

Marriage, the next great natural epoch, is universal in both sexes. Few men remain unmarried

long after twenty, and few women after eighteen, while the latter marry usually at a still earlier age. Marriage is almost entirely a matter of arrangement, although the preferences of the young couple are generally considered, and love marriages are not unknown. Women are not brought up in that strict seclusion so common in most Oriental countries, and it is therefore possible for young men and maidens to see something of each other beforehand. At the same time one sometimes hears of marriages being arranged where the parties have never met. However, whether there is already mutual liking or not, the affair has always to be formally settled between the parents, and the help of go-betweens is usually resorted to. Many other formalities too have to be gone through, such as the fixing of an auspicious day for the wedding, and of the amount of money to be paid by the bride's and bridegroom's parents. There is a good deal of ceremony and feasting in connexion with the event, which is not strictly of a religious character, though priests are always invited and prayers are offered. Polygamy is permitted, but the principal wife always remains head of her husband's household, and the subordinate wives occupy an inferior position. There is no similar ceremony attending their marriage, which is simply in the nature of a business contract. It is becoming more and more common for a man, especially in the lower classes, to content himself with one wife, and there are signs that the

practice is spreading also among the wealthy, especially those who have come under European influence. Divorce is easily obtained by both the husband and the wife. When the marriage is annulled, the wife is treated liberally, all the money that came from her side being given back to her with any earnings, while she is allowed the custody of half the children.

There is probably no surer test of the progress a nation has made from barbarism than the manner in which it disposes of its dead. A civilised people, it is true, will always love to show honour to its great ones after they have departed this life, and friends and relatives will never willingly withhold the last token of respect and affection for those whom they have loved. Still the tendency must be, certainly in all but those few cases where a whole nation are the mourners, to make the last sad rites as simple and unostentatious as genuine grief will permit. The present generation has witnessed a great change in this respect in England, and the trappings and the pomp of woe that once found so much favour are being gradually discarded. Elaborate funeral ceremonies become repulsive not only in themselves, but also because they are the outward and visible sign of superstitious beliefs which do not readily lose their hold of an ignorant people. It is not that sentiment is giving way to the hard matter of fact of a materialistic age, but that it is becoming purged of its grosser elements in the

direction both of a greater refinement of taste and purity of belief. Nowhere is the note of barbarism in Siamese civilisation more conspicuous than in the ceremonies that are customary after death. The higher the rank of the dead person the more gorgeous is the ceremonial, but in all classes the greatest importance is attached to it. Cremation is almost universal, burial being resorted to only in a few exceptional cases. With us the increasing practice of cremation, as opposed to burial, is justified mainly on hygienic grounds. Sentimental arguments also are sometimes adduced in its favour, such as that the total destruction of the mortal remains prevents the mourner dwelling on the rotting corruption in the grave, and makes his associations with the dead spiritual rather than material. These considerations, however, would not seem to weigh so very greatly with the Siamese, whatever may have been the original motive which led them to adopt the practice. It is common to keep the corpse of a person of position for months and even years before cremation, the more exalted the station the longer the ceremony being postponed. Thus the late king's body was kept nearly two years, and the Crown Prince, who died in the year 1895, was not cremated till January, 1901.

The ceremonies attendant on the cremation of a great personage are most costly and elaborate. A large wooden building, called a Premane, is erected some time before, and is decorated

for the occasion in the most lavish manner. Other buildings are put up round it for priests and officials, and for the various shows and festivities which form a necessary accompaniment of the ceremony. In the case of royal cremations these buildings are usually raised on the large piece of ground in front of the Palace, called the Premane ground, which British residents associate chiefly with the game of golf. The ceremonies last for several days. There are prayers and religious rites each day, followed by more mundane festivities in the form of theatres, shows, wrestling matches and fireworks, celebrated in the presence of the king and royal family surrounded by the nobles and high officials of the court. On the last day of the religious ceremonies the king himself ignites the fuse which sets fire to the pyre on which the urn containing the corpse is placed, and the guests throw in candles and sandal-wood flowers to increase the flames. The charred bones are collected after the burning and placed with much ceremony in an urn, in which they are preserved by the relatives of the deceased. Similar rites, though not on so elaborate a scale, take place in the case of private individuals, and no expense is spared on these occasions. Often on seeing some specially handsome erection in Bangkok one learns on inquiry that it has been put up for some cremation; and as these buildings are not supposed to be used again for the same or any other purpose, it may be judged how great the expenditure is.

Much of all this ceremonial is no doubt in the nature of a survival, and conveys but little meaning even to the educated Siamese. In the various rites, however, that are practised both on the occasion of death, and afterwards at the cremation, it is possible to see what a strong hold the doctrine of animism, as it is called, must once have had on the minds of the ancestors of the Siamese—a hold it seems to have possessed on all primitive peoples. The ceremony of cremation was as necessary for the repose of the soul as in the days of Odysseus or Æneas. The coin put in the mouth of the dead reminds us of the Athenian obol and the grim ferryman of the Styx, while the hole made in the wall for the coffin to pass through, lest the spirit should refuse to go out by the door, has its analogue in many a savage practice and belief. The reverence paid to the remains of the dead points to the existence of some form of ancestor worship in the past. How far it prevailed it is impossible to say. At any rate, though offerings are still made to deceased friends, there is nothing in Siam at the present day at all corresponding to the ancestor worship which really forms the religion of the great Chinese Empire.

Such are the prominent events in the life of a Siamese; but, important as they are and dearly as he loves anything in the nature of a ceremony, he is a being who lives essentially for the present

rather than the future, and it is in his ordinary everyday life and habits that we shall find his most characteristic self exhibited. The happy *insouciance* of the Siamese from childhood upwards has been already referred to. It is the bright, careless disposition which allows itself to be so easily read on his face that gives an attractiveness to features which would otherwise be remarkable only for their plainness. The flat nose, wide nostrils, large mouth, thick lips, and black bristly hair form an *ensemble* of which it is difficult to give an adequate idea by means of the pen only. The natural plainness is even more marked in the women, among whom a pretty face is very rarely to be seen, but in this sex also the frank cheerfulness of their countenances atones for a multitude of defects. The Siamese, as is well known, are a small race, but many are apt to exaggerate this smallness, as they do that of the Japanese, being misled by the representatives of the people they come across in Europe. The truth is that, as in Japan, the lower classes are much better physically developed than the well-to-do, whose indolent and sensual lives and practice of close intermarriage inevitably produce a small and puny race.

The ordinary Siamese, though several inches shorter than the average European, is lithe and well made. He does not take readily to outdoor pursuits, but when he does he usually shows considerable proficiency. His suppleness and agility

are displayed in the game of football, which is one of the few outdoor exercises that can lay claim to be considered national. It is played by four or five men, who kick a light wicker ball from one to the other, keeping it up with a skill that few of our half-backs could rival, for several minutes at a time. Many of them too sit their spirited little ponies admirably, without saddle or stirrups, and they are nearly all good swimmers. Even the boys of the upper classes, in spite of their habitual indolence and inferior physique, take kindly to games when once they are started, and more than one English public school could testify to their prowess in the gymnasium or the playing fields. There are grounds now for hoping that in another generation or two, under the influence of the new educational *régime*, the ruling classes in Siam will become physically a finer race of men than they are at present.

The national garment of the Siamese of both sexes, called the *panung*, is a piece of cloth about one yard wide and three yards in length, wrapped round the waist and limbs, descending to the knees, and passed between the thighs, the two ends being tucked in at the waist, one in front, the other behind. It is a mystery to the uninitiated how this garment manages to keep up! The costliness of the material used, cotton or silk, varies with the means of the wearer. The *panung* combines in an admirable degree the qualities of usefulness and

gracefulness, at any rate in the case of the male sex. It leaves the limbs bare from the knees downwards, and has the appearance of loose knee-breeches or knickerbockers. The *panungs* of the rich, being often of beautiful silk, are very handsome, their very simplicity adding to the effect. They are to be seen of all hues—orange, green, blue, red, and purple in every shade—each day of the week, it is said, having its appropriate colour, and this variety greatly enhances the picturesqueness of a Siamese crowd, all classes alike wearing the *panung*. It must, however, be admitted that it is not so becoming to the women, whose figures no more than their faces are their strong points of attraction. Surely the almost universal custom, which prescribes in the case of nearly every other race a loose and flowing robe as the proper dress for women, is the outcome of a true æsthetic instinct. What the Siamese woman loses in grace she no doubt gains in freedom of movement, but it is to be hoped that the advocates of rational dress for women may hit upon some happy combination which will not wholly sacrifice beauty to utility. The poorer classes are entirely barelegged and barefooted, only those of a better condition wearing long silk or cotton stockings to meet the *panung*, and shoes often of patent leather with buckles—at least outside their houses. A white jacket worn over a light vest or singlet completes the costume of the well-to-do men, "the man in the street" preferring to be without

further encumbrance than the *panung*. The women, as a rule, wear a scarf over their bosoms, but this is sometimes discarded by married women of the common sort. The ladies of the upper classes, though all adhering to the *panung*, wear muslin, silk, or satin embroidered jackets trimmed with costly lace, and jewelled buttons and brooches. It is most exceptional to see a Siamese in his own country in European dress, though the military uniform consists of a tunic and trousers after our fashion; this is worn by the king himself, and by many of the nobility on state occasions, and even in everyday life. Ladies are never to be seen in any but the national costume in their own country. No divergence from it would be tolerated. How unlike Japan, where, unhappily, European costume is *de rigueur* at court for both sexes! It may safely be asserted, I think, that the spirit of conservatism of the Siamese in this respect is at least as healthy as the spirit of innovation exhibited by the Island Empire.

For men, it seems to me, it would be difficult to improve on the Siamese costume, the only drawback to it being that it can hardly afford adequate protection to the knees and legs from the mosquitoes after sundown. It is cool and healthy, and although exceedingly simple, yet lends itself to the marking of distinctions of rank (if, indeed, this is to be reckoned an advantage), owing to the variety of the material employed. How often must poor

Europeans, when suffering in a temperature of over ninety degrees, from the tortures of stiff collars, frock-coats, and tall hats, envy the Siamese round them their delightful costume! May the Siamese never be so foolish as to follow the benighted example of the Japanese! Another great point in favour of the *panung* is that it is so distinctively national. It is absolutely different from the short, loose trousers of the Chinese or the *sarong* of the Malays. I have never myself seen any garment elsewhere in the East at all resembling it, nor have I read or heard of any other country in which a similar costume is worn. Being so unique, it is all the more to be hoped that it will not be lightly discarded.

The men and women of the lower classes go invariably bareheaded, nor is there anything at all distinctive about the headgear of the well-to-do. *Topis*, straw hats, and soft felt hats are all commonly worn, especially the last named, but neither the turban of the Burmans nor the fez of the Mahometan Malays has found favour with the natives of Siam. The hair of both sexes, which is coarse and bristly, is allowed to grow after the shaving of the topknot, and is then cropped short. Various fashions have at different times prevailed. Not many years ago it was the custom to shave the head, except for a patch in the centre, where the hair grew in the resemblance of an inverted clothes-brush. This fashion has happily disappeared

Siamese Girl.

under, we may presume, the pressure of æsthetic considerations.

In connexion with the subject of dress mention must be made of the Siamese love of jewellery. This is to be expected in a country where precious stones form so large a part of the natural wealth, and the buying of jewels is consequently an obvious way of investing money. Thus there are few Siamese, even of those in a humble position, who do not possess at least a few valuable ornaments, while the children are often decked out with bracelets and necklaces, though not to the same extent now as in former times. The Siamese, however, both rich and poor, usually keep within the bounds of good taste in the wearing of jewels, and are rarely guilty of the extravagances which other Orientals and even Europeans indulge in. Most ladies are connoisseurs on the subject of precious stones, and some possess very costly ones, but the setting is often rude, and somewhat mars the brilliant effect otherwise produced by a gathering of well-born ladies at one of the great receptions.

There is nothing characteristic about the secular architecture of the Siamese. The Palace itself is in the Renaissance style, and the houses of the great nobles are all square modern buildings, such as might be seen anywhere in Europe. The reception-rooms are furnished in Western fashion, and lack none of the comforts of our civilisation, though how

far these are appreciated by their owners it is difficult for a foreigner to determine. There is hardly anything of a middle class in Siam, and between these mansions of brick and stone and the wooden houses of the poor there is a wide difference. The typical dwelling-place of the Siamese, such as he lives in everywhere, except in the crowded bazaars of Bangkok, where the lines of wooden shops are continuous, is an isolated teak house built upon stakes or piles. It is always raised a few feet from the ground to avoid the damp and the floods, so common for part of the year in the valley of the Menam, while the space between the ground and the house is used as a receptacle for refuse and rubbish. This method does not sound likely to be very conducive to health, but the pariah dogs, hateful though they are, have the merit of serving as public scavengers, and minimise the evil. Pigs, too, may help in the good work, if there happen to be Chinese near. The interior is stuffy and unattractive, the ventilation being very inadequate according to our notions. There is no proper fireplace, the cooking being done on bricks placed over a charcoal fire. There are usually, however, partitions dividing the house into two or three rooms, so that the sleeping apartment is kept distinct.

The staple article of food is of course rice, as it is in all Southern and Eastern Asia, Siam being one of the greatest rice-producing countries of the

world. The usual accompaniment of this is fish curry, meat being practically never used by the poorer Siamese, who have not acquired the Chinese predilection for pork. Still fish affords scope for a considerable variety of dishes. The people are also not averse to decayed prawns and salted eggs, and are skilled in the making of various hot sauces and condiments, the favourite one of which is called *namphrick*, and contains several ingredients, among them red pepper, brine, and ginger. Large quantities of fish are sent to Bangkok from Paknam, at the mouth of the river, but they are plentiful too in the upper waters of the Menam, while eels and mud fish abound in the small *klongs*, both in the capital and up country. Fruits also, especially bananas, which are not excelled in quality or quantity by those of any other country, form another article of daily food, and the Siamese would not be true Orientals if they were not masters in the art of preparing varieties of sweetmeats. The lower classes usually eat their rice and other food out of bowls with their fingers. There is a strong prejudice, it is true, in modern Europe against this habit, but those familiar with the daily spectacle of Chinese shoving their rice into their mouths with chopsticks will not be inclined to admit that the Siamese method is so barbarous in comparison. The Siamese, as a rule, have but two meals a day—one in the morning between seven and nine a.m., and another about

five or six in the evening. The hours of the upper classes are so irregular, and depend so much on the movements of the king, that it would be rash to say there are any fixed hours for meals; but the lower officials, with their regular office hours from ten to four, or eleven to five, usually, during this time, content themselves with frequent potations of tea and numberless cigarettes, supplemented occasionally by some light refreshment bought from an itinerant vendor.

As regards drink, the Siamese are certainly a temperate people. The ordinary folk take a little water or tea with their food, but most of the tea is consumed between meals. They rarely touch spirits or strong drinks, though European influences are every year making themselves more and more felt among the wealthy, who do not show the aversion to wine and whiskey which their fathers before them did. At a mixed dinner party you will see a Siamese taking his wine as readily as if his ancestors had enjoyed the inestimable benefits of Western civilisation for generations. Time, indeed, has its revenges even in conservative Siam. A writer of the seventeenth century, speaking of the king of his day, tells us that "he keeps a good table, but his religion forbids him to take wine, brandy, and strong potations, so that his ordinary beverage is water or cocoanut milk: the people would be greatly scandalised did their sovereign or his chief officers fail to observe this law." [1] Weak

[1] Bowring, vol. i. p. 94.

tea, without sugar and milk, is the national beverage, as it is in China and Japan; but as the Japanese have their *saki*, so have the Siamese their *arak*, which is distilled from fermented rice, and in late years European spirits have found increasing favour with those who can afford to purchase them. There are few instances, however, of over-indulgence, and there is very little drunkenness among the Siamese, certainly less, I should say, than among the Japanese, who, indeed, have the excuse of living in a colder country, and, it might be added, of having advanced further on the path of civilisation. Personally I have but rarely seen a drunken Siamese, and the Chinese, it may be remarked incidentally, are even less addicted to drink.

Drinking and smoking are sometimes linked in our minds by a somewhat unfortunate association. Whatever may be the case in Europe, there is happily no reason for this juxtaposition in Eastern countries. The Siamese though they indulge little in strong drink are, like most other Orientals, habitual smokers. Occasionally one may see in their mouths the familiar briar-wood pipe, but they usually consume their tobacco in the form of cigars, and still more commonly of the native cigarettes These cigarettes consist of the strong, coarse tobacco of the country wrapped in a dried banana leaf, and are often of the thickness of an ordinary cigar. The children take to smoking when quite young, and among the familiar sights of Bangkok

are small boys going into school or caddying on the golf links with their cigarettes tucked in penholder fashion behind their ears. Sometimes the specially acute observer is credited with seeing a child of still tenderer age solacing himself in the intervals of taking his natural nourishment from his mother's breast with whiffs of the weed.

Women fortunately do not indulge in tobacco to the same extent as their Burmese sisters. But they do not yield to the other sex in their devotion to betel chewing. The betel is one of the chief necessities of life in Siam. The betel nut so called is strictly speaking the nut of the areca palm; this is crushed and wrapped up with tobacco and red quicklime in the betel leaf, which belongs to a creeping plant, and in this form it is chewed by the Siamese. The mixture is strongly astringent and bitter in flavour, and produces a stupefying effect on those not used to it. It fills the mouth with a red saliva, which stains the lips and requires to be spat out. Spittoons abound everywhere for the purpose, and frequent red stains on the ground, and even on the floors of rooms and offices, mark the prevalence of the habit which, it must be admitted, is to Europeans most offensive. It has the effect not only of discolouring the gums and lips, but of making the teeth completely black. This is considered a mark of beauty, but whether it has the merit of preserving the teeth seems to be an open

question. The practice of betel chewing is said to be not quite so universal as formerly, and I have come across instances even among the lower classes where it is not customary. Still it is not only one of the most offensive, but also the most prevalent of Siamese habits, as it is in Burmah and to a less extent in India and China. No Siamese entertainment would be complete without dishes containing the little green rolls, and few Siamese go about without their betel box in their pocket or carried by a servant. These boxes are often of great value, and suggest the costly snuff-boxes of our ancestors of the eighteenth century.

Opium smoking is happily not nearly so common among the Siamese as among the Chinese, and yet it is a custom that dates far back in the country. Even as early as 1837 the then king issued an edict against the introduction and sale of opium within his dominions. But this proved ineffectual, and it was considered eventually the better course to control the trade by making it a Government monopoly. Much has been said and written on the opium question, and it has attracted largely the attention of philanthropists in England. From my own experience I should say that like alcohol it is a source of great evil as well as considerable good, though it has not perhaps equally brutalising effects, and that the merits of the question of the prohibition of either

opium or alcohol are pretty much the same. To the Chinaman his pipe of opium is just as necessary as his glass of beer to the British workman or his whiskey peg to the Orientalised European. If a statesman is of opinion that the total prohibition of the sale of alcohol is expedient, then he might extend the prohibition to opium also, but not, I think, otherwise. The trade in opium seems to me to be no more worthy of censure than that in brandy and whiskey. At the same time if a Government like that of the Siamese take it into their own hands it is their clear duty to minimise the evil by limiting the sale as far as possible, and not to encourage it for the sake of filling their exchequer.

The transition from opium to gambling is a natural one, if for no other reason than that these are two of the principal sources of Government revenue. Unhappily the Siamese, though far less addicted to opium smoking, are every bit as inveterate gamblers as the Chinese, through whom this national vice has assumed much larger proportions, and has, in fact, become thoroughly systematised in the country. The public lotteries and gambling houses which are scattered over Bangkok and the provinces are farmed by Chinese, who pay a large yearly sum to the Government for the privilege. Various methods of gambling are in vogue in these houses, and do not differ materially from those to be found in Europe. The

commonest form is for the players to stake their money on one of the first four numbers. The *croupier* takes a handful of shells which he counts out into heaps of four, and the winning number is decided by the remainder, which is over after all the possible heaps have been formed. It is interesting for the observer of human nature to step occasionally into one of these ill-lighted and ill-ventilated dens with half-savage Chinese and Siamese squatting round on their haunches. In spite of the strange difference of surroundings, the set faces, the strained tension and absorption of the players, can hardly fail to remind him of similar scenes to be witnessed in many a land which prides itself on its superior civilisation.

Gambling is one of the greatest curses of this country, as it is of China. How far it is an irremediable vice and how far due to the limited and monotonous lives of its devotees it would be difficult to say. Certain it is that in Europe the increase of education, the cultivation of new interests, and a growing sense of social and civic obligations, have done much to lessen this evil, which still even at this opening of the twentieth century is one of formidable proportions and a most fruitful source of misery. It is, therefore, not impossible that good government and the advent of a higher type of civilisation may effect something in countries like Siam and China. At present, however, there are no indications of im-

provement, but rather the reverse. It is true that the Siamese Government point boastfully to the fact that the number of gambling houses is diminishing. Nevertheless the revenue derived from this source is increasing, and no *bonâ-fide* steps, as far as I can ascertain, have been taken to check the growth of the evil. It does not, indeed, follow that the Siamese are doing wrong in making gambling a Government monopoly, and still less that they ought to go to the length of some of the British colonies in totally prohibiting it. I once spent a morning listening to cases being tried in a police magistrate's court at Singapore, and was surprised to find that almost every case consisted of an offence against the gambling laws. The natural propensity is so strong that it cannot be crushed by legislation, and the magistrate himself informed me that his experience led him to the opinion that it would be better for the Government to legalise gambling and devise some means for keeping it in check.[1]

[1] The same view has been expressed to me by police officials from Burmah, where, as in Siam, there is a large Chinese element. On the other hand, the Dutch have completely succeeded in stopping gambling over a great part of Java. The explanation of this seeming inconsistency appears to be that it is possible to stamp out gambling in a docile race like the Siamese or Javanese, but that it is probably impossible to do so where there is a large admixture of the stronger and more wilful Chinese, as there is in Siam and in Lower Burmah. In Java, of course, there are practically no Chinese of the coolie class.

Still it is a heroic endeavour on the part of the Colonial Government, and is in striking contrast with the action of the Siamese, who regard with far too great complacency the growth of this curse, which, in combination with the natural indolence of the people, is the chief impediment to their further progress. It is impossible not to consider the tacit encouragement the Siamese have given to gambling as one of the chief blots on their administration.

Happily there are other pleasures of a more innocent character than gambling in which the Siamese love to indulge. Chief among these must be reckoned the theatre, which plays so large a part in their life. Any one who has visited a provincial Japanese or Chinese theatre will have a very good notion of how a Siamese *lakhon* strikes the observer. Like so much of Oriental art, the theatre is saturated with conventionalism. The stage is filled with angels, heroes, and semi-mythical figures from history dressed in as gorgeous attire as the purse of the company permits, but there is no attempt at the imitation of real life which forms such an important element, if not the most important, in Western art. Neither in Chinese nor in Siamese theatres is there consequently any acting in our sense of the word, though that it is possible for histrionic art to be evolved out of such rude and primitive beginnings is shown in the case of Japan, where there are

now some really fine actors—at least in the chief theatres of the capital. Not only the *mise en scène*, but also the plays themselves, generally founded on old Hindu legends, are thoroughly conventional, and the delighted audiences never seem to tire of the repetition night after night of the old, old stories. There are both public and private companies, the latter being owned by wealthy noblemen, who also possess their own theatres. The best-known theatre in Bangkok is the property of an influential Minister. Many performances are given on private occasions, and few great cremations would be complete without an accompaniment of theatrical shows. There are, indeed, not many days on which any one who has occasion to go about the streets of Bangkok fails to see at some corner an improvised theatre with a dramatic performance, generally by Chinese. For one of the commonest ways of making religious "merit" is to give or bequeath money for such purposes, and if the enjoyment it occasions is any criterion of the usefulness of the expenditure, then the money must be considered to have been well spent.

There are various other mild diversions with which the Siamese beguile the weary hours. Their fondness for watching and laying wagers on the battles of fighting-cocks and fighting-fish would no doubt touch a responsive chord in the hearts of many not so far from home. Another very characteristic amusement is the sport of kite-flying, which

engrosses the attention of young and old alike from February to April. This is the season when a steady south wind, a precursor of the south-west monsoon, sets in during the afternoon and evenings, and at this time the inhabitants of Bangkok assemble in their thousands for their favourite pastime on the Premane ground. There is a great art in the flying of these kites. The contest consists in the attempt of the flyer of one kite to entangle and bring to the ground that of his antagonist. It evokes great excitement among the spectators, who sit round in groups watching the mimic battle for hours at a time with keen enjoyment.

Such are among the everyday amusements, nay, the regular occupations of the Siamese; but no proper notion could be given of their life if we did not take into account the frequently recurring festivals, whether religious or secular. All, indeed, partake to some extent of a religious character, as they did, for example, in ancient Greece, where the great Olympic festival and the Athenian drama were strictly religious; for it is only in modern Europe and America that a sharp distinction has arisen between Church and State such as is perfectly unintelligible to more primitive peoples. As evidence of the conservatism of the Siamese it is worthy of remark that some of their most important ceremonies remain substantially the same as they were three centuries ago, at a time when Englishmen of the Elizabethan age were taking

their pleasure in similar pageants and progresses, and the Venetian lagoons were presenting spectacles hardly more brilliant than those on the waters of the distant Menam. Thus a writer at the end of the sixteenth century tells us how "The King comes out of the city, accompanied by the whole of the nobility, in barges richly gilded and covered with ornaments, with great display and noise of musical instruments. They proclaim that the King is about to order the waters to disperse; and this is the great festival of the year. A mast is raised in the middle of the stream, adorned with silken flags, and a prize suspended for the best rower. All the contending boats put themselves in trim, and at a given signal start, with such cries and shouting, and tumults, as if the world was being destroyed; the first who arrives carrying off the prize. But in the contest there is terrible confusion, boats running against and swamping one another, oars tangled and disentangled in a disorder admirable to look at from around. So that the people are not so barbarous, but they imitate the ancient Trojans (as in the same manner, Eneas, when he arrived in Sicily, had the festival of his galleys, giving precious prizes to the most alert); and when these Siamese have won the prize, they return to the city with such rejoicings, shoutings, and tumultuous music, that the noise shakes both the waters and the land. Then the King having returned to the city, the people say he has driven back the waters,

because these heathens attribute to their kings all the attributes of God, and believe they are the source of all good." [1]

Another observer gives the following description of one of the king's progresses. "Sometimes he goes upon the river in barges, each of which has from eighty to one hundred rowers, besides the praos of the King, of which there are seven or eight. He is followed by three or four hundred others, holding the nobles: in the midst of each boat is a gilded pavilion, in which one may sit; and in this manner the King is frequently followed by fourteen or fifteen hundred persons. When he goes by land it is in a gilded chair carried on men's shoulders: his guard, and those who compose the Court, follow in order, keeping entire silence, and all who meet them in the way are obliged to fall prostrate before them. Every year during the month of October, he shows himself to his people, one day in a procession by water, another by land, when he repairs to the principal temples, followed by his whole Court; two hundred elephants lead the procession, each having three armed men, and followed by a band playing on musical instruments, trumpeters, and a thousand foot soldiers well armed. The nobles follow, some among them having as many as eighty or one hundred followers; after them follow two hundred Japanese soldiers, the King's body-

[1] Diogo de Couto, 1542–1616 (Bowring's "Siam," vol. i. p. 101).

guard, his riding horses, and his elephants; then the officials of the Court, who carry fruit or other offerings to the idols; after them the highest nobility, some of whom are even crowned; one of them bears the royal standard, another a sword which is the emblem of justice. His Majesty then appears on a throne placed upon an elephant's back, surrounded by persons carrying parasols, and followed by the heir apparent. His ladies follow upon elephants, but in closed chairs, which screen them from sight; six hundred men close the procession, which usually consists of fifteen or sixteen thousand. When the King goes by water, two hundred nobles head the procession, each in his own barge, with from sixty to eighty rowers; four boats filled with musicians follow, and fifty richly ornamented royal barges. After these come ten very magnificent barges, covered with gold even to the oars. The King is seated on a throne in the most splendid of the barges; on the forepart of the vessel one of the nobles bears the royal standard; the Prince and the King's ladies follow, with their suite: I reckoned four hundred and fifty boats in all. The people repair to the banks of the river, with joined hands and drooping heads, showing the utmost respect and veneration for their sovereign."[1] This annual visitation to the temple still takes place every October at the close of the rainy season, and the

[1] Van Schenten, who lived eight years in Siam, 1636 (Bowring, vol. i. p. 94).

procession of the gorgeously decked State barges is one of the most magnificent sights that even Bangkok, that city of shows, can exhibit.

In the following month occur the festivities in connexion with the anniversary of the present king's accession on November 16th, when all Bangkok takes holiday and turns out to see the illuminations (illuminations I have rarely seen surpassed) in the streets, on the public buildings, and on the river banks. Flags and inscriptions and Chinese lanterns line every thoroughfare, the roads are thronged with gaily-dressed crowds, and at night even the bright stars of the tropics are eclipsed by the constant succession of rockets and other fireworks. A State ball is given at the Foreign Office, to which are invited the *corps diplomatique* and the leading European residents. The Siamese nobles and officials appear there in all the splendour of blue and scarlet and cloth of gold, with epaulets on their shoulders, and swords clanking by their sides, a sight which recalls the brilliance of European courts and levées, but with a strange stream of barbarism running through it withal. Then, too, there are more holidays and more fireworks on the occasion of the Chinese and Siamese "New Years," about the beginning of February and April respectively. Between these two there may have occurred a succession of cremations, more or less splendid, with theatricals and other shows dear to the popular heart. Then

perhaps a new temple is opened with a week's bazaar and fairs and *fêtes*, culminating in a grand procession; or a new Buddha has been found, and is led in pomp and triumph to his appointed dwelling-place. Besides all these there are a large number of regularly recurring religious festivals which it would be impossible here to enumerate, but which have been described fully in other works; all these, it is needless to say, affording occasion for further rejoicings and more holidays. The most familiar of them to Europeans is the "swinging" festival. No visitor to Bangkok can be there many days without noticing the huge swing in one of the busiest thoroughfares within the city walls, which at once excites his curiosity, so unlike is it to anything he has seen elsewhere. This gigantic erection (about one hundred feet high) stands apparently for no purpose all the year round, resembling an enormous gallows in a land which has been converted from rapine and bloodshed to the ways of peace. But for two days, while the swinging festival is being held, it becomes the great centre of attraction to the whole city, which flocks round it in its multitudes. The ceremony is of the nature of a harvest festival, and appears to be of Brahminical origin.[1] It commences with the usual

[1] There are quite a number of so-called Brahmins in Siam who take a leading part in these festivals. These are the descendants of Brahmins who came over in the early days of Buddhism to give instruction in the new rites and ceremonies.

procession, which is followed by swinging games. The object of the competitors in these games is to catch in their teeth, while swinging, bags of money which have been placed on the ends of a long pole close by the swing. Their endeavours are watched with the greatest excitement by the spectators, who, it need hardly be added, lay wagers freely on the result.

Among the specially religious festivals of the year the annual pilgrimage to Phrabat holds such a unique place, and is so interesting because of its resemblance to similar journeyings of piety in other lands, that it deserves special mention, though it has been described in detail by many travellers. Phrabat, the Mecca or the Lourdes of Siam, is a mountain some miles to the north-east of Ayuthia, from a place above which, called Tarua, it is reached by land. On it was discovered in 1602 a supposed footprint of Buddha, closely resembling the well-known one on Adam's Peak in Ceylon, which also is claimed by Buddhists as belonging to the founder of their religion. A commission of inquiry was at once held on the genuineness of this footmark, which is between four and five feet long, and one and a half broad, while the impression is nearly three feet deep. The report being naturally favourable, the King at once ordered a temple to be erected on the spot. It is of great magnificence. The exterior is gilt, and over the centre is a dome, terminating in a pyramid

120 feet high. The gates, which are approached by a broad marble staircase, are of the handsomest workmanship, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and adorned with gilt pictures. Inside is a silver image of Buddha on a throne set with precious stones, while in the middle of the building is a silver grating over the footprint, which is covered with offerings and cannot be clearly seen. The worshippers crawl in, carrying offerings and candles, and any observer who has visited Lourdes can hardly fail to be reminded of the scene that may be viewed on any summer day before the shrine of our Lady of the Grotto. Indeed, there is much else to bear out the analogy. The mixture of gross superstition and genuine religious feeling, the unquestionable piety of the worshippers side by side with priestcraft of the baser sort, the mingling of devotion and worldliness, are the lights and shadows in a picture at once attractive and repellent, whether we see it on the mountain of Phrabat or on the slopes of the Pyrenees.

The footprint on Phrabat is not so celebrated as that on Adam's Peak in Ceylon, which is variously claimed as belonging to Adam, the Brahminical god Siva, and Buddha himself. Similar superstitions occur in the folklore of various races, and even the footprint of Christ is shown on the Mount of Olives.[1] In other religions they do not

[1] Mr. Alabaster ("Wheel of the Law") mentions another supposed footprint of Jesus in the Mosque of Omar, and two at the

occupy a very prominent position; but in Buddhism a peculiar veneration has always been attached to the footmark of the great Teacher, which is distinguishable by a variety of elaborate signs, the wheel being a special feature in it.[1] Of the one on Phrabat it may be remarked that, if the proportions of the various parts of Buddha's body were at all similar to those of any other man, he must have been, judging by it, over thirty feet in height. But why chain the flights of fancy with such cold, matter-of-fact calculations?

Enough probably has been said to show that the Siamese year is an almost continuous succession of shows and festivities. Not even the Athenian populace in the days of the demagogues, nor the rabble of Rome when it clamoured for the circus games, could boast a more uninterrupted record of idleness and amusement. In fact, the life of the Siamese is one long round of play, only broken by short periods of work. Nor have they any cold grey skies nor biting winds in that genial climate to temper their joy and cast a gloom over the brightness of the scene. Nature herself assists

Church of St. Radigonde at Poitiers; also the prints of the two feet of Ishmael on a stone in the temple of Mecca. There are reported to be other footprints of Buddha in Thibet, Canton, the Malay Peninsula and the Laos country.

[1] According to Mr. Alabaster the superstition arose probably from fleetness of foot being considered in early days one of the characteristics of a great man. The wheel was attached to the foot to convey the notion of speed, and then came to be considered as part of the footmark.

with sunshine and warmth, and those mellow nights of moonlight that only the tropics know.

So much, then, for the relaxations and amusements of the Siamese. But how does all this fit in with European life and habits? Incongruously enough, it must be answered. The populace itself has been little affected by the European influx, except that a livelihood is not to be had on quite as easy terms as formerly; but foreign influences have begun to tell to some extent on the routine life of those above the lowest class. The mercantile community with their Chinese clerks and coolies lead an existence wholly apart from the Siamese and see little of them. In the Government offices, however, where the clerks are for the most part Siamese, and where Europeans occupy positions of responsibility, in nearly all departments some regularity has been introduced. The Ministers come and go still as they please, but the ordinary clerk has to conform to European times and seasons. Thus, not only are there regular office hours, but the European Sunday has been introduced, and on that day all Government offices as well as the leading places of business are closed, while no official notice is taken of the Siamese *wan phra*, or holiday, which occurs at every new phase of the moon. Siamese names too, taken from Indian languages, have been given to the European days of the week. Monthly salaries are paid regularly at the close of the European month, and the new

A Siamese Klong.

year is reckoned, for financial and other official purposes, as beginning on the 1st of April, though this date does not coincide strictly with the commencement of the Siamese year, which varies with the moon. On the other hand, the years are not numbered in European fashion, the Siamese era dating from 1781, when Bangkok became the capital. For example, the year 120 commenced in 1901.

Such changes, it is true, are but superficial, and yet they may portend deeper ones in the not-distant future. It is the surface of the waters that is first ruffled by the freshening breeze before the mighty troughs and furrows appear. The softening of manners and the growing spirit of humanitarianism have been already referred to; but it must be admitted that what changes have hitherto taken place have been of a destructive rather than a constructive nature. Old beliefs have occasionally become weaker, and the rigidity of old ceremonies in some instances has been relaxed. But what has taken their place? Have the Siamese become in any real sense Europeanised? Of the lower orders it may certainly be said that they have not. The slight spread of education, confined for the most part to the capital, is but an affair of the surface. Superstitions linger on; soothsayers and astrologers are resorted to by rich and poor to fix the proper hours and seasons for all the chief events of life and for any undertaking of importance. Charms and talismans retain their potency.

Ghosts and spirits still people the woods and streams, nor has the day of giants and mermaids yet passed away. These supernatural dwellers on land and in water have all to be propitiated, and life carefully ordered so as not to give them offence. Nor are such superstitions confined to the poor and lowly only. Among the better educated there may be here and there a sceptic, but the old beliefs are still diffused among all classes. The few Siamese who have been educated in Europe are no doubt in a somewhat different category from the rest of their fellow-countrymen, but even they come very much under the old influences again after they return. They are not sufficient in numbers nor have they been so completely transformed as to leaven the whole lump. Taking the governing classes as a whole, in spite of a certain approximation in externals, there is still a wide gulf between them and educated Europeans. How far the Oriental point of view is essentially different from the Western, or how far the difference can be ultimately bridged over by education and increase of intercourse, is one of the questions which time alone can answer, and there are few of those awaiting solution in the present century that are of greater interest. But, whatever the issue, the lover of quaint customs and ceremonies and the student of old-world beliefs are likely for many years to come to find much to attract them in this little visited corner of the world.

CHAPTER VI

GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

THE Government of Siam frankly proclaims itself to be an absolute monarchy. There is no mincing of words. It would, indeed, be difficult to conceive an essentially non-military state with so many European elements introduced into its constitution in which the sovereign was so supremely autocratic. With the growing complexities of what passes for civilisation, it is naturally impossible for the king to concern himself with all the details of government, and it is not easy to ascertain how far he does personally interfere in questions of administration. He is certainly not one of the great rulers of the East such as our imaginations love to picture them. He is not an Abdurrahman Khan, jealously watchful of all that goes on in his kingdom, and denying himself sleep and recreation in consequence; nor has he the restless energy of a William II. of Germany. Yet he is both a man of ability and a man of masterful temperament. Accustomed from his boyhood to have his own

way in all things, and not brooking any disobedience, he makes his will felt whenever he chooses to do so; but he would seem of late years to have taken less active interest in the affairs of government than he apparently did in times past.

The monarch has an absolute power of veto and initiative. He has always had the assistance of a Royal Council, or *Senabawdee*, and now under more constitutional forms he is advised by a so-called Cabinet Council, established in 1891, consisting of the Ministers of State at the head of the various departments—Foreign Affairs, Finance, the Interior, Public Instruction, &c.—who have executive powers. There is also a legislative assembly of between forty and fifty members, consisting of the Ministers and nominees of the king. So great, moreover, was at one time the ardour for reform that some years ago a representative assembly was established; but enthusiastic advocates of democracy will learn with regret—though, perhaps, not altogether with surprise—that it proved a complete failure, and does not now, I believe, form a part of the constitution, even on paper. The Council of Ministers is the real power in the State, provided always that it does not overstep its proper limits and act counter to the wishes of the king. It is the Council which checks every year the estimates sent up by the various departments, and regulates the amount of money to be allowed to each, while it has complete power to block any administrative scheme or legis-

lative proposal that does not meet with its approval, and to hang it up for an indefinite period.

In matters of supreme importance, such as the making of foreign treaties, &c., the sole executive power remains vested in the king, but in ordinary departmental matters each Minister exercises it within his own peculiar province. The different Ministers are quite independent of one another, except in so far as they look for their supplies to the Cabinet and Treasury. Each Minister has a Vice-Minister, and under him are various officials and clerks of different grades. Nearly all departments now have the assistance of European advisers or other officers, whose power and authority vary with the nature of the work to be done. As it has been the policy of the Siamese to play off one European state against another where foreign affairs are concerned, so in matters of home administration they have been careful not to let themselves be saddled with officials of one single country, but, acting on the principle of *divide et impera*, have taken samples of as many different nationalities as possible. They have in particular shown partiality to two of the smaller European communities, Denmark and Belgium, from which countries respectively two of the king's most trusted advisers have been chosen. The British element nevertheless largely preponderates and seems to have relatively increased of late years. Perhaps the chief reason of this preponderance is the fact

that it is British officials only who, from their experience in India and Burmah and other Eastern countries, understand thoroughly the conditions under which the work in Siam is to be done.

Most of the chief posts in such important departments as the Treasury, Inland Revenue, the Customs, and the Education Department are held by British subjects, the leading officials in the Police, the Survey, the Forest, and the Mines Departments being also of the same nationality. The Post Office and the Railway are in the hands of Germans, while the European officers in the Navy are Danes, a people who are also prominent in commercial enterprise in Bangkok; and the legal advisers to the judges are Belgian lawyers. Frenchmen, however, have practically not been employed at all during recent years. A Dane, one of the most efficient officials in the country, is at the head of the provincial gendarmerie; but the Siamese have taken the control of their army into their own hands, though the Italian Major Gerini, so well known for his research work in Siamese history and archæology, is at the head of the military cadet school.

Some of these Europeans hold the title of Adviser, while others are Directors, or occupy under other names the posts in the various offices. The title of Adviser is a not unfamiliar one in the annals of British rule, being known in the Indian dependencies, in the Malay States, and elsewhere. It is one that suggests the iron hand in the velvet

glove. The Adviser, or Resident, is the real ruler of the state in which he has been placed. He has in the last resort the supreme executive power; and though he may be careful to hide the reality under external forms, it is his will that always wins the day. In Siam, however, an adviser is an adviser, and nothing else. He may have a certain amount of executive and constructive work to do, but any new scheme or proposal he suggests has to be approved at any rate by his Minister, and if it is a matter of importance may even require the sanction of the Cabinet Council or of his Majesty himself. If the adviser happens to be a strong man he will probably succeed, provided he is given the time, in pushing through in the long run many of the reforms he has at heart; but no one who has not been under Government employment, or at any rate resided for some time in Siam, can conceive what past masters the Siamese are in the art of delay and obstruction.[1] Even some antiquated Minister who may seem the very incarnation of stupidity and lethargy will prove to have a shrewdness and energy, little suspected at first sight, in blocking what does not suit his fancy; and when

[1] 'The one diplomatic receipt of Siamese officials is "Delay, delay, delay again and again; and if pressed, ask, as a last resource, for the advice of the person who is pressing you; then say that you must refer it to headquarters; and thus keep the ball rolling, until he perhaps gives it up in despair of ever getting to the bottom of your diplomacy"' (A. R. Colquhoun, "Amongst the Shans," p. 255).

those qualities are combined in him, as sometimes, unhappily, they may be, with a strict economy of truth, it will be understood that the European reformer has no easy task. Begging, cajoling, coupled with a little judicious flattery, and threatening, have to be resorted to in turn, and it often requires all the tact of a diplomatist, and a knowledge of the Siamese character that few Europeans possess, to know which course to adopt at any particular juncture.

If, however, the Siamese are so averse from acting on European advice, why should they go to the great expense of getting out advisers on high salaries? This question has often been asked, nor is it very difficult to find an answer to it. Probably a large majority of Siamese officials, certainly of those of the old school, dislike reform both in the concrete and the abstract; and this dislike is intensified when reform is thrust upon them by foreigners whom they both despise and hate, while utterly failing to understand them. Is it not due to these same foreigners that the good old days have gone by, never to be recalled, when they could line their pockets with public money, and such barbarous innovations as vouchers, accounts, and audits were never dreamed of? On the other hand there is probably a minority who are more or less anxious for the advancement of their country, though they may not always approve of the lines and methods suggested by Europeans. Their imaginations have

been struck with the splendour and prosperity of Western nations, but few of them have any intelligent perception of the moral and intellectual, hardly even of the material, elements which combine to form that greatness. The king himself, far more enlightened in his younger days than most of his subjects, has seen, as have also some of his intimate counsellors, that if Siam is to preserve her independence—if, to use an Oriental expression, she wishes to "save her face" in the eyes of Europe—she must put her house in order, or at any rate keep up an appearance of doing so, whether she likes it or not. Whatever the king's personal views may be about reform in general (and some of his admirers have perhaps praised his sympathy with it in somewhat exaggerated terms), he must undoubtedly have recognised that there were certain abuses which it was not to his interest to tolerate any longer. What his officials gained by the corruption and peculation formerly prevalent was to him sheer loss, and a rigid control over the expenditure of the various Government offices, a proper system of audit and accounts, and a reorganisation of the great receiving departments, such as the Customs and the Inland Revenue, could not but have in his eyes beneficial results. That passion, moreover, for novelty, which characterises all Siamese, probably had some influence in leading them to seek the services of so many foreigners. The old officials have had to acquiesce and disguise their hostility as

best they may. The foreigner need fear no face-to-face attack in the open, but he still has to be on his guard against pitfalls and ambuscades.

Although there may be a few Siamese who are honestly glad to get the assistance of Europeans in their government, and others who tolerate them in a half-hearted fashion, yet there can be no doubt that there is a universal horror among them of anything in the nature of a permanent European Civil Service in the country. Of course the predominant reason for this feeling of dislike is the not unnatural idea that such a step might be the precursor of loss of independence. But then their eagerness for change often makes them desirous to get a substitute for a man just when he has mastered the situation, and is beginning to be most useful—at any rate they like to feel that they can always get rid of him if they want to do so.

There have been several cases of arbitrary dismissal of trusted servants in the past, but it is only fair to say that in some instances the fault has not been entirely on the side of the Government. It is probable, too, that the Siamese do not realise what hardship is entailed on a European who is turned adrift when the days of his youth are past, and who has to seek fresh employment and to commence life over again. It is so easy to scrape together a livelihood in Siam, where no Siamese of any position ever knows what it is to be in want, that the keen competition and struggle for

existence in Western lands, where almost any man is liable to go under, cannot be easily comprehended. In procuring the services of Englishmen for the Education Department, I saw how important it was to attempt to secure for them as permanent a position as possible, and to give them some sort of protection against arbitrary dismissal without compensation. Any suggestion of a regular Civil Service I found absolutely stank in the nostrils of the Siamese. Pension rules on Indian lines had been worked out and proposed by the Financial Adviser, but had been hung up like so many other proposals in Siam, and were waiting indefinitely for the approval of the Council. I endeavoured therefore to get a compensation scheme passed for members of my own department; but I received little support from the Treasury, and some grudging concessions, which were at first made, were ultimately withdrawn. All idea of a general pension scheme has now been abandoned, and any foreigner who takes service with the Siamese Government without something to fall back upon at home must incur a considerable risk in doing so. The necessity of providing security of tenure and a reasonable pension for their European employés, if they really wish to get good men and to keep them, cannot be impressed too strongly on the Siamese, and it seems to me an obvious duty of any Financial Adviser to urge them in their own interests to accept a scheme to that end.

Even among the Siamese themselves there is nothing corresponding to a regular Civil Service. All those above the lowest class aspire to Government employment, and any one of passable education, who has a little interest, can always secure a post. As regards really educated men, especially those who can speak and write English with ease, the demand indeed exceeds the supply, and good clerks and interpreters are not always to be had for the asking. But though European officials try to get as capable subordinates as possible, and there is thus an ever-widening door being opened to merit, the Siamese themselves are actuated largely by personal motives. There are consequently a good many incapables in high places; but in the case of the lower posts European influences have certainly made themselves felt. A regularly organised service with different grades, and promotion strictly by merit, must be a question of time. It can only be started in a tentative fashion, and it is satisfactory to note that the certificates given by the Education Department for various degrees of proficiency in their examinations are acquiring a recognised value, and are of the greatest help to youths in securing employment, both in Government and commercial offices. There is a possibility that out of them may arise later a regular entrance examination, which it will be obligatory on all who desire a post under Government to pass. It is fair, however, to say that

though there is much favouritism still shown in the bestowal of places, and it is very difficult for any Siamese to rise to a high position without considerable interest, yet there is no theoretical objection to a man of the lowliest origin working his way upwards. Instances have been known even of slaves and sons of slaves out-distancing their well-born competitors; for the Siamese, to do them justice, are exceedingly tolerant in respect of social distinctions, and they are far from being snobbish. The difficulty in the past has lain not in any strong caste feeling, but in a want of equality of opportunity. This difficulty ought to to be largely obviated in the future by the spread of education; and the system of scholarships just started, by which poor boys may proceed from the lower to the more advanced schools, should help greatly towards this result.

In subordinate positions the Siamese are not without some aptitude for ordinary office work. Their very vices become virtues. For, owing to their physical indolence, they feel none of those irresistible counter-attractions in the way of outdoor pursuits and of fresh air and country pleasures which make life at a desk such a burden to many Englishmen. Under strict supervision they will do their work well, or at least passably; but in positions of responsibility, and where they are not under the control of a stronger will, there is a great difference. They may make good sub-

ordinates, but they are bad masters, and it is here that the rock ahead lies in the future. Considerable improvement is taking place, and may be expected to continue in the organisation of the Government services, and no one could dispute that many reforms have been already carried out, while still more may soon be looked for. At the same time I cannot help thinking that as improvement in the past has in great measure been forced on the Siamese from outside, so all hope for the future rests on the assumption that the real direction of affairs will remain in the hands of Europeans.

Not many years ago Siam had the reputation of being one of the worst-governed countries in the world. It would be easy to quote page after page from the accounts given by travellers, even within the last decade or two, in which they dwell on the ruinous taxation, the cruelty and corruption of officials, and the laziness and immorality of the people, and compare the Government with that of neighbouring principalities, all to the disadvantage of Siam. There is probably exaggeration in most of these accounts, but there is no doubt that the indictment as a whole is a true one. There was no limit to the rapacity of officials, who squeezed those whom they were set to govern as unmercifully as any Chinese mandarin. Justice was sold to the highest bidder, while the spirit of the people, degraded already by gambling and drink, was further broken by serfdom and the *corvée*. In

the whole field of administration it is pleasant to say that there has been a decided change for the better in the last few years. The official extortion under the present system of taxation is no longer possible, while there is reason to believe that justice is more strictly administered. Nevertheless abuses still continue which do not so obviously meet the eye, but which must cause the greatest pain and misgiving to all well-wishers of Siam.

Much of the credit for the reforms that have been carried out is due to the late M. Rolin-Jaequemyns, the General Adviser, who, to the great loss of Siam, died in January, 1902. A Belgian international lawyer of repute, and formerly Minister of the Interior at Brussels, he was on the point of taking high office under the Egyptian Government when he was invited to Siam in 1892. By his tact and judgment, and his happy freedom from all ostentation, he acquired a great influence with the king, without at the same time creating jealousy or making enemies among the nobility—a most difficult feat in Siam—and he probably did more than any other individual to suggest the lines on which the reforms that have been set on foot during the last ten years should be carried out. One of the most pressing of these was to put the finances of the country in order, and to bring into the exchequer the money that was finding its way into the pockets of extortionate officials. At the end of 1896, therefore, the services were procured

from the British Government of a Financial Adviser, who has since been succeeded by Mr. C. Rivett-Carnac, formerly Accountant - General of Burmah. Systematic rules are now in force according to which most of the revenues are collected under the supervision of two able experts from Burmah and brought to the central Government, though little has been done to alter the old heads of taxation. The officials both in Bangkok and the provinces are paid fixed salaries, and have to account for all the moneys that pass through their hands. Regular estimates are sent in before the commencement of the financial year by each department, and the probable expenditure and revenue for the coming year are balanced by the Treasury and the Government in due orthodox fashion. The machinery is getting into perfect order, and all Bangkok has for some years been looking expectantly for the publication of a Budget, though it was not till the end of 1901 that the Government mustered up courage to publish one.

The reason for this reluctance is not far to seek. The king, anxious to have his finances put in order, wished to have his revenues brought into his Treasury, instead of being stopped on the way by corrupt governors and officials; but so long as the money comes in regularly and systematically the Siamese do not seem to trouble themselves much as to the sources from which it flows. The total revenue is now roughly about thirty-three million

ticals, or nearly two millions sterling. Of this revenue it was for long an open secret that a considerable, if not the greater, share was derived, as it still is, from gambling, opium, and spirit licences. No reasonable person, indeed, could expect such abuses to be swept away in a day; it would be quite sufficient if they were gradually diminished year by year and other sources of revenue substituted at intervals for them. A Government could not afford to give up half, or even a quarter or an eighth of its income all at once, even in a fit of moral enthusiasm. The Siamese, however, are taking no real steps to reduce the evil in any substantial degree. They have, it is true, suppressed some of the less important gambling houses, but I am informed by one of the best authorities that this is likely to be of little practical effect. The revenues derived from the houses, which are let by auction to the highest bidders, vary, of course, from year to year according to the profits expected, which depend on the prosperity of the people; but the general tendency has hitherto been for this revenue from what is the greatest curse and the source of most evils in the country to increase rather than diminish, while the Government looks on and grows rich. The whole taxation of the country requires remodelling, and till this great reform has been accomplished the financial condition of Siam can only be regarded with the reverse of complacency.

The rest of the revenue is derived from customs (which have been managed under European advice for more than ten years) and other taxes, among which may be mentioned the tax on paddy, that on fruit trees, and the triennial poll-tax on Chinamen, bringing in about six hundred thousand *ticals*. It was estimated fifteen years ago on good authority that some five or six millions sterling were squeezed annually out of the people by tax gatherers and monopolists, and out of these more than three millions were known to come into official hands, though only twelve hundred thousand found their way into the Treasury. Large sums are still appropriated in good years by the gambling and opium farmers, and there can be no doubt that there is even yet a great deal of squeezing and corruption, though more disguised than formerly, among the officials; but as regards the collection of the taxes generally an enormous improvement, as the worst enemies of Siam would admit, has been effected, and the people are immeasurably better off than they were ten years ago.

Many pages might be written giving detailed information of the changes that have been made for the better in various departments during recent years. The administration of justice in particular has been improved, owing to the efforts especially of M. Rolin-Jaequemyns, through whom the services of several Belgian lawyers were engaged to assist the judges; and the Siamese call in a

European adviser to help at the so-called International Court, before which subjects of Treaty Powers sue Siamese subjects as defendants—those cases in which they are sued by Siamese being brought before their Consular Court. Although, however, so perceptible an advance has been made in the administration of Siamese justice, no one would be bold enough to suggest that we are yet within a measurable distance of the time when the extra-territorial jurisdiction of the Consular Courts may be dispensed with, and it is doubtful whether that day will ever arrive.

Much of the continued progress in this province during the last few years is due to the present Minister of Justice, Prince Rabi, who is one of the most prominent and strenuous of the younger school of Siamese statesmen. Educated in England, and a graduate of Oxford, he set himself on his return to his native country to the task of infusing something of the Western spirit into the department over which he was to preside. Not content with mere superficial changes, he attempted to lay a firm foundation by establishing a legal school, with the object of training up a competent body of Siamese lawyers. How far his efforts will meet with success time alone can show. So far the laborious study of the law does not seem to have been taken up with great ardour by his fellow-countrymen. All the chief legal business is in the hands of foreigners, and the king has had to intrust for the time being

the position of his Attorney-General to a Singhalese. But whether or no the Siamese are ever able to produce among them a body of learned jurists and advocates in the near or distant future, they may at any rate be congratulated on the improvement in the legal machinery that has already taken place. The old days, not so long distant either, when plaintiff, defendant, and witnesses might all be locked up indefinitely with delicious impartiality, when it was simpler for the accused to confess at once to a crime of which he was innocent, than to undergo a preliminary course of torture in addition to the inevitable punishment, when judgment went almost invariably to the highest bidder—these days, at any rate as regards Bangkok, have happily gone by; let us hope never to return. This at least is so much to the good in the interests of humanity and civilisation.

Prison reform has naturally followed, and the horrors which were common a generation ago are now no longer possible. The gaols, as recently as within the last twelve years, have been described by observers as the foulest holes imaginable. In the best of them men and women were condemned to sleep in the same den, with a chain run through their leg-irons at night, while the stench was intolerable. This has all been changed, at least in Bangkok and the nearer provinces, and if any criticism is to be made now, it is that the prisons are almost too comfortable for the inmates.

The police force, too, has been entirely reorganised during the last few years under able and energetic officials from the Indian and Burman services. The ludicrous descriptions of the police of a short time ago, when they were clad in the most incongruous garments, and, as far as either appearance or efficiency were concerned, seemed more calculated to find a *raison d'être* for themselves as scarecrows than as an embodiment of the majesty and the terror of the law, are no longer applicable to the neatly clad force in khaki tunics and knickerbockers, which is composed partly of Sikhs and partly of Siamese. Police duty is perhaps not the work to which Siamese turn as their most natural avocation, and the calling is not one that is held in the highest estimation. But still the force has during the last three years been licked into something like shape, and under the control of the present British officers would supply a much-needed want in Bangkok and the neighbourhood in suppressing thieving and crime, if improvements in legislation and general administration kept pace with the expansion and increasing efficiency of the police themselves. It is unfortunate that practically none of the legal measures suggested by the Inspector-General of Police have been adopted by the Government, so that much of his good work has been thrown away and his task made ten times more difficult. One great reform, however, has been recently introduced. The act for the regulation of pawnshops, which had been

dangled for years before the eyes of the public, was enforced in 1901. The high premium which was formerly put on successful thieving now no longer exists, and there are already signs that this branch of crime is on the decrease. The provincial gendarmerie, too, is being developed under the superintendence of one of the most active European servants of the Siamese Government, and considerably larger grants are made annually both to it and to the police.

As regards the army and navy a few words may suffice. Siam has no longer any enemies of her own calibre to fear, now that all the native states in Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula have been swallowed up by one Power or another; but the army may serve as a very useful supplement to the police and the gendarmerie, and might also prove of great service in the not very probable event of a Chinese rising on a considerable scale, though it would be quite valueless against European aggression. Sound work has been done by the Danish officers, and in particular Admiral de Richelieu, in improving and raising the standard of the navy, and by Major Gerini in training the young military cadets. Certainly the navy (such as there is of it) would not be found wanting now as it was at the crisis in 1893,[1] when the descriptions given by impartial eye-witnesses of what happened sound more like a chapter out of "Alice in

[1] See Chap. XI.

Wonderland" than a true and veracious narration of historical facts. Still no amount of European skill and energy is ever likely to make either branch of the service thoroughly effective, even relatively to their small size, while the *personnel* of both is such that neither patriotism nor *esprit de corps* can be looked for, and while the men are drawn solely from classes which are largely of foreign extraction, and doomed to this particular service under a perpetual serfdom.

But amid all the changes that have taken place and are still continuing it is probably the reform in provincial administration that affords the greatest cause for satisfaction to the friends of Siam, due as it is largely to the initiative and energy of one man, a Siamese. Prince Damrong, the present Minister of the Interior, has been singled out by every recent writer as a man of exceptional strength and capacity. Though he may not be intellectually the ablest nor the most cultivated among the ruling class, he is without doubt the hardest worker and the most competent administrator. Personally he does not spare himself, and amid all the frivolous distractions and laborious puerilities of the Palace, he still finds time, unlike most of the Ministers, to attend regularly at his office, which he has brought to a state of something like European efficiency. It is fortunate that what is perhaps the most important post in the Government should be held by such a man, for there is undoubtedly no one else in Siam

who would have been capable of accomplishing even a part of what he has succeeded in carrying out. I have already mentioned the deplorable accounts given by travellers in comparatively recent times of the state of provincial Siam, and how unfavourably it contrasted with that of the less civilised and far more unsophisticated Laos and Shan states to the north. The centralisation of the whole system of administration under a strong Minister at Bangkok, to whom all the officials in the provinces are now immediately responsible, and the substitution of the direct collection of nearly all the taxes by the Government itself for the old farming system, have struck at the root of the evil. Many an official's fingers must still itch as the revenues pass through his hands, but though there is not much moral reform to boast of, the administrative achievement is no mean one.

A few years ago Prince Damrong introduced bodily the Burmese system of local administration. The whole kingdom, including the Malay dependencies, is divided into eighteen circles or *monthons*, all of which, except the metropolitan circle of Bangkok, are under the Ministry of the Interior. At the head of each is a High Commissioner, who is directly responsible to the central Government and resides in his *monthon.* The *monthons* are subdivided into provinces, these into villages, and the villages into hamlets. At the head of every hamlet, consisting often of twenty

families, is placed an elder, and these elders elect the headman of the whole village. There is thus a complete system of local government with the village as unit, but ultimately under the controlling influence of the central Government. The interesting feature of this system is that, though imported from outside, it is by no means purely artificial but largely a revival. Village government, though it had been practically crushed out in Siam, seems to have been a characteristic of at any rate the Thai or Siamese race in earlier times, even if not of Indo-Chinese peoples generally.

If Prince Damrong could be taken as a typical Siamese there would be few grounds for misgiving as to the future of the country. There are in Siam one or two men of great ability, such as Prince Devawongse, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and his popular and capable lieutenant, M. Xavier, who is Portuguese on his father's side, and several of the rising generation are young men of no little promise; but there is no reason to think that such men as Prince Damrong are likely to multiply. Siam has always succeeded in producing one or two notable men in every generation, and it would be difficult among the Siamese still living to match for strength and capacity the late Regent, who was perhaps as enlightened in his views as any of the later generation. It is a noteworthy fact that most of the capable men of the older generation who have deserved so well of their country, including Prince

Damrong and Prince Devawongse, were brought up in Siam without the benefit of a European training and have been in a large measure self-educated. European education and ideas must stick of course to a certain extent, though we have not yet had sufficient experience to judge how far this is the case; but there is a distinct tendency among Siamese after their return to their native land to revert, and traits and characteristics which have for several years been in abeyance, and perhaps have never yet been outwardly developed, assert themselves in more congenial surroundings.

The changes that have been made during this generation, and especially in the last five or six years, have, in appearance at any rate, been probably even greater, taking the various difficulties and obstacles into consideration, than all but the most sanguine of the friends and admirers of Siam could possibly have expected; and not a little of the credit for what has been effected is due to certain individuals among the Siamese themselves. At the same time I see no reason for jumping to the conclusion that Siam is on the road to working out her own salvation, and that, in the not distant future, she will be able to dispense practically with European aid and administer her own affairs as an independent nation. There is, unfortunately, quite another side of the case. It is not necessary by way of proof to point out the continuance of the graver administrative abuses

which unhappily still linger. The Oriental at his best is slow to move, and due allowance must be made for his natural conservatism. Nor is the undoubted tendency among the Siamese to official corruption, nor the certainty that it would break out with nearly all its old virulence, except for strong physical sanctions, absolutely damning. We need only to look at the general conduct of the Siamese government and administration and the spirit that pervades them to make us hesitate before indulging too freely in hopes for the future.

The Siamese, taken as a nation, seem to be almost wholly destitute of business capacity or political aptitude. Their national indolence and levity might predispose us to doubt gravely whether their administration was likely to be of any very sound or healthy nature, and when we look at the actual facts corroboration is not wanting. Ministers, with a few honourable exceptions, attend at their offices with the utmost irregularity. Sometimes they do not put in an appearance for weeks. Letters remain unanswered in spite of reiterated demands for a reply, and the merest details are left unattended to. These are affairs of every day. But over and above the sins of daily omission, the interests of public business are ruthlessly sacrificed to the periodical shows, ceremonies, and enforced attendances at Palace functions which form the serious occupation of the higher Siamese official. Few weeks pass without the occurrence

of some new festival or ceremony which exacts the whole of his time and energies while it lasts, and it would be possible to take the months of any year *seriatim* and show how short were the breathing spaces during which he was allowed to devote his attention to the work of his office, even if he had the will to do so. Nor is there the slightest indication of a change for the better, and I fear that the Siamese will continue to play, as they have played in the past, till the day of reckoning at last arrives. What is no less serious is that these pomps and vanities are not only regarded as the chief business and occupation of the officials, high and low, but that they form the first charge on the public revenues. To give an instance; at the end of the financial year, 1900–1901, retrenchment was the order all round, the royal cremations, which took place in January and February, 1901, having upset all calculations, and special demands to meet expenses connected therewith were made on the Treasury to the extent of a million *ticals*, or nearly a thirtieth part of the revenue. This is only a sample of what is continually occurring, and here at any rate there is no concealment. But the indirect and backstair methods of finding funds and resources for similar objects are far more reprehensible in European eyes. A Government department may perhaps be requisitioned to provide labour, money, or materials for a procession, or some other totally irrelevant

object, or a Minister may seek to ingratiate himself with the king by a freehanded liberality with property that does not belong to him. The Minister of Public Instruction, for example, one fine day suddenly removed from the principal school in Bangkok the paving stones, which could not be replaced except at a very great cost, in order to make a present of them to his Majesty for his new palace at Dusit Park.

It is such proceedings as these, indicating as they do the incurable levity of the Siamese in serious matters, that cause us most misgiving.[1] To do them justice, they do not consider these methods other than legitimate. But if we absolve them from the charge of dishonesty it is only at the expense of any claim they may have to be considered capable of self-government. Large sums are spent annually on fireworks and trumperies which might be usefully devoted to the development of the country and the welfare of the people. Railways, roads, canals and irrigation are urgently needed. Hospitals and schools are left unbuilt. Hundreds and even thousands of his Majesty's

[1] It is amusing to hear it gravely stated that the King has a fixed civil list, and that he has thus placed his finances beyond his own control. Of course he can always get what money he wants out of the Treasury. Thus, in 1901, when the Treasury were in great financial straits, he informed them that they must provide for a private pleasure trip which he was preparing to take to Java with several hundred attendants. I was told that this trip cost half a million *ticals*.

subjects die of cholera and fever every year in Bangkok alone for want of a proper water supply and sanitation, while moneys continue to be thrown away on purely ephemeral objects.

It is their negative qualities as much as any positive vices that are the stumbling block of the Siamese. Yet bribery and corruption still go on, less openly it is true, and less unchecked than formerly, and there are indications that it is the opportunity more than the will that is wanting. It is rash, perhaps, to dogmatise about the distant future, but there can be little doubt that if the control of the European officials, limited though the authority be of the most influential of them, were at present removed, nearly every Government office would relapse into the most hopeless confusion. All serious attempts at work would cease, accounts and ledgers would be relegated to obscurity, corruption would again be rampant through the land, and Siam would once more be the realm of "Chaos and old Night."

CHAPTER VII

RELIGION

THE Buddhist religion was introduced into the Menam Valley probably as early as the third century[1] of the Christian era, though till quite recently the event was dated several centuries later. The Siamese or Thai, however, did not descend into the lowlands till some hundreds of years afterwards, but presumably their conversion took place long before they reached their present abode. Buddhism was introduced into Indo-China from Ceylon, which in turn had received it from India more than two hundred years before the birth of Christ, and it is only in Ceylon and Indo-China that the religion exists in anything like its pure state. Ceylon, Burmah, and Siam are the three strongholds of Southern Buddhism, there being little development or variation in these countries from the doctrine of the Pitâkas, which formed the original Buddhist canon. On the other hand in the northern countries, and notably in Thibet, where

[1] See the article by Major Gerini in *Asiatic Quarterly* for January, 1901.

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the extravagances of Lamaism have become famous, Buddhism in all essentials has been metamorphosed into an entirely different creed, presenting little or no resemblance to the pure form in which it originally existed. We shall see, indeed, later that even in Siam considerable divergences are to be found, not only in popular practice but also in popular belief and doctrine from orthodox Buddhism. Nevertheless it is a great advantage to study Buddhism in Ceylon or Burmah or Siam, for in these countries the old ideals are still cherished, at least among a minority, and here alone is it possible to bring to some extent to the test of practice the precepts and the theories of life and existence laid down by the founder of the religion.

The story of Buddha has been so often retold that it will suffice to give the barest outline of it. Born about 500 years before Christ at an Indian town some hundred miles to the north-east of Benares and heir to his father's throne, Gautama, the future Buddha, committed the great act of his life in the twenty-ninth year of his age—the great Act of Renunciation, when, moved by the sufferings of humanity, he abandoned father and home and wife and child to devote himself entirely to the religious life. After several years of penance and self-mortification he saw the error of his ways and the folly of extreme asceticism, and after undergoing —as the legends tell us—temptation similar to that by which Christ was tried in the wilderness, he

Wat Chang, Bangkok.

eventually attained the fulness of wisdom and enlightenment under the Bo tree, and became Buddha. The rest of his long life he devoted to preaching and teaching, setting an example of perfect charity and unselfishness; a figure hardly inferior to that of Christ Himself.

The relation of Buddhism to Brahminism is somewhat analogous to that of Christianity to Judaism, or even perhaps of Protestantism to Catholicism. Gautama made no pretence of founding a new religion. His object was to purify and widen Brahminism, not to supplant it: to free it from the ceremonies and formalities which had grown up like weeds around it, and to open the road to salvation to all who were willing to follow him, regardless of caste and class distinction. At the same time, though much of his ethical and metaphysical teaching can be traced back to Hindu sources, notably the doctrine of transmigration, which he adopted with certain modifications, and which is the key to his system, yet such was the spirit of his teaching, such the force of his personality, that it was not long before Buddhism was recognised as a new religion, separate and distinct from the parent that had given it birth. It was not, indeed, possible to put the new wine into the old bottles.

Buddhism has always been recognised as one of the great world religions, but, as taught by its founder, it is really more in the nature of a

philosophical system than a religion properly so called. It is true that a variety of definitions have been given of the word "religion," and though our ears have become accustomed to the expression "natural religion," yet it is doubtful whether a system which bases itself entirely on natural law, and takes up a purely agnostic position with regard to the supernatural, is strictly entitled to the name. This, however, is rather a question of words and definitions, and subject to the above explanation the use of the term may be conceded. Buddhism rests on no supernatural basis like Christianity or other religions. It is completely agnostic as regards God, and the ultimate origin of things. It assumes two great laws, the law of universal causation and the law of moral justice or retribution, and these laws form the foundation of its system. Every effect has a cause, and as the law of causation is subject to that of justice, all sorrow and suffering must be due to some previous offence against the moral law. Hence the necessity of a previous and a future existence to explain and remedy the inequalities of the present life. The supreme object of man is to accumulate merit, so that he may better his position in another state, and ultimately attain to Nirvana, a cessation from all worldly emotion and consciousness, if not an entire cessation of existence, which is the goal to which the endeavours of all Buddhists must be directed. For all existence is evil, and so are all human passion and desire.

The doctrine of transmigration was taken from Brahminism, but as Gautama denied the existence of the soul, a difficulty arose as to how the continuity of existences was to be explained. Gautama eluded the difficulty by inventing an elaborate metaphysical theory, according to which the merit and demerit a man made in his life, his *Karma*, as it was called, at once gave birth to a new existence after his death, and so the chain continued until the *Karma* no longer necessitated further existence, and Nirvana was reached. The whole theory of transmigration seems to us a bold assumption, but it must not be regarded as a piece of supernaturalism. It was considered by the Buddha to be strictly a necessary deduction from natural laws. For we are limited to the knowledge we derive from observation of the objective world and of our own selves, and to the inferences we may draw from these observations. Beyond that all is unknowable. An inquiry into first causes is fruitless; and as in metaphysics so in psychology. All wrong action, says the Buddha, is the result of desire; desire again is caused by ignorance. Beyond ignorance he does not go. It is the ultimate cause of evil in his system, and it is consequently on the extirpation of ignorance that the practical efforts of Buddhists have to be concentrated. For the purpose of getting rid of ignorance and desire Buddha lays down certain moral precepts,—the five great commandments which are

binding on all men, and are directed against killing, lying, stealing, adultery, and the use of intoxicating drinks. The observation of these commandments, combined with a life of charity and philanthropy, and the additional practice of meditation, which is necessary to a life of the highest sanctity, indicate the path along which salvation is to be sought. It will be seen, therefore, that Buddhism on its practical side contains an enlightened code of ethics, comprising positive and negative duties, but its sanctions are all purely selfish. It is his own salvation and his own reward that are man's supreme objects. There is no appeal to love of God, or sense of duty, as the ultimate mainspring of right action.[1]

It is a difficult matter to estimate the practical effect in the world's history of a great religion, or to compare the influences wielded by different creeds. Religions are evolved gradually, like other social phenomena, and it is often impossible to say in their later manifestations to what extent they are causes, or to what extent effects, of the characteristics of the

[1] It has been attempted to free Buddhism from this charge of selfishness by asserting that the Buddhist, inasmuch as his consciousness will cease after this existence, is really working not for himself but in order to decrease the misery of sentient beings. Such an explanation, however, seems to me to be wholly inconsistent with that theory of moral justice, which is of the essence of Buddhism and according to which a future existence is necessary to rectify the present anomalous distribution of happiness and misery, and recompense will be made in another life for merit acquired in this one.

peoples among whom they are to be found. There are, of course, certain first principles existing in all religions from the commencement, marking out the lines along which future development must take place; but considerable divergence is at the same time possible, and to realise that this is the case, we have only to glance at the widely different forms which the same creed has assumed in succeeding ages and among varying races. Take for example Christianity, the religion most familiar to us. Consider the entirely different ethical standard which prevailed in the so-called Ages of Faith, from that which we find in the industrial civilisation of the present day. Is it that we have arrived at a truer notion of the principles of Christianity, or are we unconsciously modifying them to suit our purpose? Do the old ideals of self-abnegation and humility, or the qualities that now most find favour among us, of self-reliance, practical forethought and worldly wisdom, approach more closely to the teaching of Christ? Let us even confine ourselves to the present times. What community is there between the Christianity of the Spaniard or Italian, nay even of the Irishman, and that of the Englishman or Scotsman? Are the same virtues held in esteem, are the same ideals followed and reverenced? The Catholicism of Southern Europe, so far as its practical effect on the great majority is concerned, as little resembles—say the Presbyterianism or Wesleyanism to be found in the United Kingdom

as it does the Buddhism of Siam or Japan. Cause and effect have become inextricably confused, and have acted and reacted on one another, till it is well-nigh impossible to unravel the tangle. Writers from diverse points of view have attributed to religion effects both good and evil, for which man's own nature is largely responsible. While on the one hand it has been made in one form or another a scapegoat, from the days of Lucretius to those of the author of "The Service of Man," on the other hand, virtues have been attributed to it which man was capable of attaining by his own unaided efforts. What should we have been at the present day without Christianity? Should we have found a very different state of things in Siam or China if Christianity and not Buddhism had been the religion carried by the missionaries to their inhabitants; or would they have failed wholly or in part to assimilate it, because unlike Buddhism, Christianity was not adapted to their character, nature and requirements? These are questions that it is impossible to answer, even roughly. All we can say, perhaps, is that a religion must harmonise to some extent with the natural bent of the people, if it is to take root among them, and must contain within it a potentiality of developing along the same lines as the national character. At the same time this is not to belittle the enormous effect that may be exercised on the history of a people, as of an individual, by a conversion from outside; though if this effect is to be

far-reaching and lasting, it must be because of the existence of moral and social needs which the particular religion is calculated to supply.

But in spite of the difficulty of unravelling cause and effect in the history of religious phenomena, the future of social science would be almost hopeless, if we could not generalise to some extent from the facts of the past as to the force and tendency of such enormous factors in man's history, as religions like Christianity and Buddhism have proved themselves to be. Still more is it possible to make an *à priori* comparison of them, from the nature of their doctrines, and the character and teaching of their founders. Therefore, before going on to speak of the particular developments and characteristics of Buddhism as found in Siam, which is after all my only justification for entering on this difficult subject, I may, perhaps, be allowed to glance briefly at the nature of Buddhism in the abstract, and to measure its worth, as far as it is possible to do so, by the standard of Christianity, which is the religion we know best, and which few critics, even of those who cannot bring themselves to believe its dogmas, do not consider to be the highest of all the great faiths of the world, and perhaps the highest to which man will ever attain.

The most striking difference, as has been already indicated, between the two religions, is that whereas Christianity is based on the supernatural, and the Divinity of Christ is of its essence, Buddhism on the

contrary, though in later ages overgrown with miracle and superstitions, and from the outset employing sanctions and laying down doctrines which seem to us outside the ken of ordinary human knowledge, yet purports to rest entirely on natural laws. At any rate, everything of a supernatural character may be cut away and the essence of the philosophy, or of the religion, if we may continue so to call it, remains untouched. Buddha is a man, whereas Christ is God. The Divinity of Christ forms the all-important element in His personality, and it is precisely this element which is lacking in that of the Buddha. Whether, indeed, an ethical system unsupported by religious dogma can suffice for the needs of man, is one of the problems of the present age, a problem as yet unsolved. Whether it be possible for a law to exist without a law-giver, or an obligation to be binding without some personal power to enforce it, may still perhaps be open questions. It may be granted that some of the world's noblest lives have been animated simply by duty for duty's sake, and few more stirring words call to us across the ages than those of the old Roman moralist of a pagan day,

> Summum crede nefas animam præferre pudori,
> Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas.

But certainly the past as a whole does not warrant us in believing that ethics can dispense with the help of religion, at least in the case of the great majority,

and we shall see that the Buddhist nations themselves have revolted against this idea. The belief in a God on whom man can throw himself, in whom he can seek comfort and support, in love for whom lies his supreme motive of duty and conduct, would seem, except in the case of a gifted few, to be a necessary basis of morality. It is this that Christians find in Christ, and that Buddhists fail to obtain from Buddha, though it is true that the masses of his followers have raised him to the position of a sort of deity. Hence the dominating place occupied by the personality of Christ in the Christian religion, a place to which that of Buddha, deified though he may have been in later ages, has no analogy whatsoever. Christianity is, indeed, no mere ethical code. Strong as may be the feelings of duty it invokes, it is the passionate devotion to Christ that is the mainspring of Christian conduct; it is love for Him, and no mere abstract sense of duty, still less in the true Christian is it a desire to better himself in another world, that is the stimulus to all high endeavour. It is the concrete pattern and example of Christ's life that are the beacon and guiding light, to which His followers direct their footsteps amid the darkness of doubt and despair. Contrast with this the influence of Buddha. It is not even as moonlight unto sunlight. Go into a Buddhist temple and look at the serene countenance of unruffled peace and ineffable wisdom, as it smiles down on you from its lofty pedestal, suggesting

almost the calm of the Epicurean gods, and then think of the face of anguish under the crown of thorns, the face of the Man of Sorrows, who suffered and died to save mankind. What is the Act of Renunciation, great and admirable though it be, compared with the agony on the Cross? Can we wonder at the entirely different nature of the two religions, that while the dominant motive of the one is self-sacrifice and devotion to a personal ideal, a cold impassivity is the chief characteristic of the other?

Christianity is essentially a religion of love. The primary and dominant motive of the Christian is love of God and of Christ, and following from this love, and subordinate to it, is the desire to do justly, and to love mercy. It is not the salvation of his own soul that is his end, still less is it to lay up treasure for himself in another world, though this may follow as a legitimate reward on right-doing. But what of the Buddhist? To accumulate merit, he is deliberately told, must be his supreme object, so that he may better himself in a future life, and ultimately attain to that blissful state when he is to be freed from all the evils of existence. It is true that it is only by following a high ethical standard that merit is to be won, and that actions are to be judged by motives even more than by consequences. Indeed, it is by upholding this moral law, as well as by the example of its founder's noble life, that Buddhism, illogically and as it were in spite of itself, has exercised

such an enormous spiritual influence. It is also true that active charity and philanthropy are inculcated. But all this is centred in a man's own self. No Buddhist could, like St. Paul, consistently wish himself anathema from his Master for his kinsmen and his brethren,[1] and herein lies the gist of the whole matter. The Buddhist might make sacrifices in this life, but the ultimate object is his own personal good. The hope of attaining salvation is no doubt one of the chief supports of the Christian, but to say that desire for it should be the chief spring of right action is, it cannot be too urgently insisted, a false view of Christianity, according to which a man must first lose himself to find himself. The more definitely he puts before himself his own salvation as the supreme end of life, the less likely is he to attain it. It is just the same paradox as we see in the pursuit of happiness; the certain way of not finding it is to be continually seeking for it. Now this difference between Christianity and Buddhism is not a merely philosophical distinction. It is of vital practical importance. It explains the entirely different colouring of the two religions: the fervour, the depth, the intensity of Christianity as compared with the placidity, the shallowness, and the egoism of Buddhism. But Buddhism, it must be added in fairness, is much better than its creed would warrant. It has been largely saved by the personality of its founder, unimportant though it is compared with that of Christ, by his noble example

[1] Romans ix. 3.

of charity and devotion to his fellow-men, and by the high code of morality which he enjoined on his followers. The life of Buddha is second only to that of Christ, and it is in consequence of this fact that Buddhism is probably next to Christianity the most spiritual of the world's religions. There are thus, in spite of the essential egoism of the creed, many examples of unselfishness and devotion in Buddhist countries, much charity and pity for suffering humanity; for Buddhists, happily, have often forgotten their Master's theories in his beautiful life and example. But the religion as a whole remains vitiated by its inherent defects, and lacks the high impulse which has led to such deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice as have ennobled the annals of Christianity. In Buddhism it is the great motive power that is wanting.

This is no place to make further inquiry into the illogical nature of Gautama's system; how it was that, with the importance he attached to the moral law, dominating as it did his whole philosophy, he yet stopped short, and did not push his theories to their natural conclusions. Man's moral nature and needs must always be the most convincing evidence of the probability, if not the necessity, of the existence of a moral ruler, and must afford the chief grounds of hope for man's future. Yet Gautama, while assuming the moral law, professed himself a complete sceptic as to God, and adopted an attitude of thoroughgoing pessimism as regards

human existence. It would be easy to criticise his position in this as on many other points, but I am only attempting to make a practical investigation of the results of his religion. The conclusion is just what we should expect, that his doctrines, though their effects have been neutralised and corrected to a great extent by the example of his own life and by man's better instincts, have quite failed to inspire that enthusiasm or intensity of moral fervour which characterises a religion like Christianity. In judging a religion in its concrete form we must take into consideration the temperment of the people among which it is to be found; but even after making full allowance for Oriental apathy, the light of Buddhism must be pronounced pale and ineffectual beside that of the religion of Christ. It has not been, and never could be, the same active force in the world's history. It may be that it has covered a wider area and made more nominal converts; but it has never had the same hold on nations or individuals; it has never permeated into every nook and cranny of life; it has never penetrated the inner relations of man to man, nor could we imagine it asserting its power in the solution of the ever-increasing number of problems to which the complexity of Western civilisation gives rise.

The difference in the strength of motive power supplied by the two religions is perhaps more important than seems to many at first sight. I

have heard it remarked by more than one European in Siam, that after all Buddhism, with its high ethical code, is as good a religion for all practical purposes as Christianity. Now it is perfectly true that the ethical standard set up by a religion is of the greatest importance. Mahometanism with its comparatively low standard can never be the same spiritual force as either Christianity or Buddhism. But at the same time it would be a great mistake to make its moral code the sole criterion of the value of a religion. Even among men of the same faith the standard of ethics differs widely. Morality in any age is a matter of conscience, and the extent to which conscience is enlightened will always vary enormously among individuals, not to say generations. The more elaborate and intricate the rules of conduct that a religion enforces, the less vitality is it likely to have ; for these are things that pass away. What makes a religion live is the moral force and enthusiasm it inspires, and it has been the glory of Christianity to have animated its followers with a passion of self-devotion towards Christ and their fellow-men, rather than to have prescribed rigid rules of conduct which often serve but to deaden religious life. Christianity has thus been an expanding religion, and has been able to suit and adapt itself to the varying requirements of different ages and peoples, where other creeds with elaborated codes and formularies have stood still. Yet Buddhism also compares not unfavourably in

this respect with other religions. It is the case that many rites and observances of a petty character were prescribed by Buddha, particularly for his monastic order; but the Five Commandments, which are generally considered sufficient for the ordinary layman though not so simple and all-embracing as those in which Christ summed up the law, afford little ground for criticism as to their far-reaching and comprehensive character. They are in thorough harmony with man's best instincts, practically covering the whole field of morality; and though two of them are open to criticism, being possibly stated in too dogmatic a form, they constitute an admirable guide to life; while the Buddhist who obeys them in spirit as well as letter, following at the same time the example of active charity set him by his Master, will give little cause for reproach. The ethical standard is excellent, but, as I have said, it is the motive power that is lacking in force.

The despairing view of life adopted by Buddha, and his denunciation of all human desire and passion, have no doubt also contributed to this weakness. A creed of pessimism can never inspire fervour in its followers. Even if it compel intellectual assent, it cannot arouse emotional enthusiasm, and it is wholly in spite of this leading tenet of its founder that Buddhism has exercised the great influence that it has in the world. But just as the inherent egoism of the system, even if not consciously realised by all Buddhists, has tended

to lessen its moral force, so too has its pessimism added to its sterility. Here again we find a great contrast in Christianity. Christ, though He by no means minimised the evils of the world and the flesh, yet regarded the body as not unworthy of reverence. Domestic affection and the joys of home and family life received His sanction and approbation; and herein we find one of the causes of the enduring influence of Christianity, which has been a source of inspiration to charitable and philanthropic zeal and endeavour in a way that Buddhism could never have been in spite of Gautama's own noble life. Instead of standing outside the currents of national life, Christianity takes a leading share in all the great movements, and is even expected to suggest a solution of most of the chief problems of the day. It has become a great social religion, though how far in this, its latest development, it has adhered to the spirit of its Founder, may perhaps be questioned. Christ doubtless was no socialist, though His religion has certainly been accused of being too quiescent and unpractical for those who have to fight their way in life, but it is by no means clear that He would have approved altogether the ideals which now find favour in most Western countries, and which receive apparently the countenance of the Church. Mr. Lecky in his latest book has truly said that the virtues now held most in respect—keenness in the pursuit of wealth, worldly success, constant fore-

thought to provide for the future—are the result of Industrialism rather than Christianity, suggesting that some of Christ's best-known precepts would seem strange if affixed to our public buildings;[1] and it does certainly seem that, even allowing for difference of circumstances, the spirit of modern competition in its extreme form is hardly consistent with true Christianity.

Nevertheless it must not for a moment be supposed that Buddhism is a thing altogether apart from the life of the people. What it lacks in intensity it makes up to some extent in diffusion. Essentially suited to the habits of a quiet, contemplative race who are not of the stuff that heroes and martyrs are made of, it probably exercises a wider, though not so deep, an influence in the lands in which it prevails than Christianity does in the West. Being hampered with little dogma, it does not provoke the same reaction as most other creeds, and anything like general dissent in Buddhist countries is unknown. Though far from wielding the force of Christianity, or even of Mahometanism, Buddhism appeals perhaps more directly to a larger

[1] "We should hardly write over the Savings Bank, 'Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow will take thought for itself,' or over the Bank of England, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth,' 'How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of God,' or over the Foreign Office, or the Law Court, or the prison, 'Resist not evil,' 'He that smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,' 'He that taketh away thy coat let him have thy cloak also'" ("The Map of Life," p. 214).

portion of the population; and while it cannot be denied that the higher precepts of Buddha are as frequently violated as are those of Christ in Western countries, the mild and gentle spirit of Buddhism is spread far and wide throughout the lands where it is found in its purer form. At least there is less sham Buddhism than sham Christianity, nor does it lend itself in the same way to hypocrisy. The close connexion with the people of the priesthood or monkhood (whichever name be adopted as most suitable, for there is no exact equivalent of the Burmese or Siamese terms) contributes largely to this result. The majority of the priests are drawn from the lower orders, and not confined to the more or less educated classes as in Protestant countries. Every man becomes a priest for at least a few months in his life, and though this practice may have its bad side, it at any rate keeps the priesthood in close touch with the people. Nor does familiarity necessarily breed contempt; for, though the Buddhist priest is not always immaculate, there is undoubtedly a widespread feeling of reverence for those who for the sake of leading a better life endure restrictions and forego pleasures to an extent that is beyond the capacity of ordinary mortals. To the very defects of Buddhism must also be attributed, at least in part, another happy consequence, the spirit of tolerance with which it may be justly credited. There are not the awful chapters in the history of Buddhism

Royal Wat.

which disfigure that of Christianity. *Corruptio optimi pessima* is undoubtedly true of religions, and the misplaced zeal of unenlightened consciences in what is supposed to be a good cause may produce the direst results. Persecution is alien to the spirit of Buddhism, which is suffused with charity and gentleness. It is, indeed, in some ways refreshing to leave for a while the war of sects at home in order to sojourn in a land where religion is pervaded by the true spirit of—shall we call it Christian?—charity.

The ethical code of the ordinary Buddhist layman is practically comprised in the observance of the Five Commandments, which are to be supplemented by a life of active charity. These have the merit of great simplicity, though certainly not so comprehensive as those of Christ. The fact of their being more precise and dogmatic may have enabled them to exercise more practical influence for good at certain stages of the religion's history, but in the long run must prove a source of weakness no less than strength. Thus to take the First Commandment, which has always been specially associated with Buddhism, that which forbids the taking of life. It has been the peculiar distinction of Buddhism to have taken the lead of other religions in this important matter, and it may fairly be claimed that in relation to their general civilisation (for the comparison must be a relative one) Buddhist nations of the purer type have

shown their superiority in practice as well as theory to others (not excluding Christian peoples) in the sacredness which they attach to both human and animal life. The gentle and kindly spirit noticeable among Buddhists, side by side often with much that is barbarous, is no doubt attributable in part to this feeling, and high ideals as regards man's relation to the lower animals, ideals such as will perhaps commend themselves to future generations among ourselves, are to be found more widely diffused among thinking men in these countries than is the case in the far more civilised Occident. The law would certainly seem to us to be far too rigid, inconsistent as it is with war, with capital punishment, and with the eating of flesh, none of which practices are condemned by the majority of reasonable men; and even among Buddhists it must remain to all but very few a counsel of perfection perhaps, but not a command to be strictly obeyed. Even those who are far more advanced than the ordinary Englishman, men who would look with as much horror on the sufferings entailed by our field sports as we do on the gladiatorial shows of ancient Rome, do not, as a rule, accept it in its entirety. Few refuse to eat animal food, even if they hesitate to take life themselves for the purpose, or refrain from the killing of noxious vermin; though I can myself vouch that there are Buddhists who would feel compunction in destroying even a mosquito—

surely a crowning test of human long-suffering. The fact that this precise injunction cannot be accepted literally by the great majority must, no doubt, be something of a stumbling-block, and may be a justification for laxity in other matters. At the same time Buddha has set up a lofty, if somewhat impracticable, ideal, which is a legitimate source of pride to his followers, and for which the world as a whole is the richer.

The same criticism applies, though in a far less degree, to the commandment enjoining abstinence from intoxicating liquor. The ideal held up in this case is a far more practicable one, and finds favour with an increasing number of Christians, not to mention that it commended itself to the founder of Mahometanism. In this matter the Buddhist compares his creed favourably with that of Christ. But here again we may doubt, without wishing to belittle the value of the ideal set up, whether it was not wiser to leave mankind to work out their own freedom from such a curse as that of drink, than to lay down a law which it is so difficult and possibly even undesirable for them to accept in its complete entirety. The other commandments against lying, stealing, and impurity have been approved by the moral judgment of all ages. They are less artificial and are more directly the outcome of man's own moral instincts. With regard to the question of women, Buddha, unlike Christ, set up celibacy as the ideal to be aimed at, but if this was too much

to demand of any man, he considered that he should at least be content with one wife. Polygamy he strongly condemned, without actually forbidding it, and if Buddhist countries have been largely polygamous this fault must not be imputed to their religion. The natural tendency of all Eastern peoples is towards polygamy, and Buddhism, though it has always regarded woman as inferior to man, adopted from the commencement an attitude of commendable enlightenment on this subject. It is true that the races of Indo-China, even in pre-Buddhistic days, seem to have treated their women well, nor is there probably very much difference in this respect between the Buddhist peoples of Burmah and Siam on the one hand and the Mahometan Malays and Javanese on the other. Still the influence of Buddhism has undoubtedly been on the right side, as that of Mahometanism has been the reverse, and if the rulers of a country like Siam were truly Buddhist in spirit the status of women, at least in the upper classes, would be altered very much for the better.

The Buddhist code of ethics is, it will be admitted, a lofty one, and if it is open to criticism, it is on the ground that it sets up possibly too high and impracticable an ideal in certain respects. The negative precepts comprised in the Five Commandments are to be supplemented by active charity if positive merit is to be acquired. Nor,

were it not for the inherent egoism and pessimism —defects of Buddha's philosophical system—which have done much to spoil the effect of his life and example, would man require a much higher standard of conduct. But these defects apart (and in reality they only serve to turn what would otherwise be a healthy naturalism into a morbid and unhealthy one) it is the intellectual even more than the ethical aspect of Buddhism which appeals to so many. To begin with, it is essentially not a religion of supernaturalism. The difficulties which a would-be believer in a religion founded on revelation and the miraculous has to contend with, the strain he has to put on his intellect for the purpose of satisfying the cravings of his moral nature, are avoided by the Buddhist. No violation of natural law, no improbabilities, need vex his spirit. Discard all that is supernatural and dogmatic in Buddhism, and it remains essentially the same, a religion based on the recognition of the moral law. Even a doctrine like that of transmigration, which need not, of course, be accepted in all its naked literalness, yet embodies a great idea which it is an honour to Buddhism to have insisted on. It is really a somewhat crude and popular way of stating a truth, that has only been brought home to us in recent years, that no effect is produced without a long previous chain of causation, of which the links are past numbering. It foreshadows, indeed, in its quaint way the great

scientific discovery of the law of evolution; and to have grasped such a truth even imperfectly, and to have adapted it, as Buddhism has done, to great moral and ethical purposes is surely no mean achievement. Even if we do not believe that the virtuous beggar may be reborn a king or that the tyrant may revert to a brute beast, yet we feel how much cruder is the belief that all mankind are immediately destined to an eternity of heaven or hell. How much more scientific is it to suppose that many a stage has yet to be travelled over before man can reach the final goal of his long journey.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "We are what our own deeds make us." It is in thoughts like these that the essence of Buddhism consists. It is a religion founded on the great laws of justice and righteousness, which we derive directly from our knowledge of our own moral nature, and which are as real to the Buddhist as any of the great physical laws founded on the observation of our five senses. Long and painful must be the process from wickedness to goodness, a process which each man must work out for himself. In such a system vicarious sacrifice has no place. It would be revolting to both the reason and the moral sense of the true Buddhist. Nor must it be supposed that merit-making is of the crude nature that it is often thought to be, intimately dependent as it is on the moral law.

The fundamental weakness of Buddhism consists, indeed, in making the accumulation of merit the *summum bonum* of the religion, which is thereby degraded into an organised system of selfishness. At the same time, selfish as the ultimate motive may be, true merit-making is vitally bound up with the moral law. Mere external acts are not by themselves sufficient if the motive be not praiseworthy. Thus, if a man leaves money to build temples or for works of charity, his motive being to spite his heirs, the deed will not profit him. A good act necessitates a good motive, and thereby a good character, and it is to the evolution of moral character that Buddhism attaches supreme importance. The philosophical position may be an inconsistent one, and it is certainly open to damaging criticism. Fortunately, however, few men are philosophers, and there are many Buddhists who take the moral law as their guide without seeking to analyse the ultimate motive which prompts them to follow it. Acts of genuine piety are performed in Buddhist as well as Christian lands, especially among humbler folk, and though the Buddha does not arouse the same fervour or enthusiasm as Christ, yet a desire to imitate his noble example frequently serves as a sufficient incentive to right conduct without ulterior considerations of selfish gain. In so far as his followers are animated by a devotion to him and to his life, and are not mere cold and cal-

culating adherents of his system, they are under the influence of real religion. After all, a creed must be judged to some extent by the concrete shapes it has taken, as well as by its abstract doctrines; and tried by this new criterion Buddhism, as we find it in countries like Siam, will by no means meet with the same meed of either praise or blame as the original system. It has altered undoubtedly for good and evil. Degraded though it may be in many respects, it has at least some claim now to the title of a living religion, and that this is so is due to Buddha the man rather than to Buddha the teacher, to his life and character rather than to his theories and his philosophy.

CHAPTER VIII

RELIGION (*continued*)

It is no exaggeration to say that the history of Buddhism in Siam, as indeed in other countries, is one of continued protest against some of the cardinal doctrines of the Buddhist system. There seem to be certain religious ideas common to all peoples who have reached a given stage of development, which, like nature, however much you drive them out, will always come back. These are the belief in a God who partakes so far of a personal nature that human beings may worship and pray to Him, and also in an individual immortality, without the hope of which the present life is but a dreary and meaningless waste. There have, it is true, been periods of history in which these ideas have been relegated to the background, but these have been as a rule times of decay, or at any rate of transition. The healthiest and most active ages have all been those in which there has been, I do not say the most slavish subservience to dogmas and outward ceremony, but the greatest

vitality of belief. The Buddhist system was, as we have seen, in regard to belief in God, purely agnostic. The Buddha himself did not pretend to be more than a man, and all inquiry into the ultimate causes of the world and of existence he regarded as outside the sphere of our knowledge, and therefore as necessarily fruitless. That such a system could have continued to prevail in all its original austerity was quite impossible. Whatever the future may contain, history tells us that there is at least no parallel to such an occurrence in the past. Putting aside the natural tendency of man to superstition and supernaturalism, which belongs to the lower side of his nature, all that is best in him craves for support from a power outside and beyond himself. This is not merely the result of ignorance. The wider his knowledge and the more conscious he is of his own insignificance, the greater will he feel this necessity, and the more will he learn how little he can depend on himself. And though no doubt in countries like Siam we need not go so far to seek the causes which led to the revolt against the agnosticism of Buddha, it cannot be questioned that in different stages of development the moral needs of mankind remain much the same, and are likely to do so in the future.

Worship and prayer are the two forms in which man holds communion with a Being higher than himself. In some cases they may not be formulated in words as they are in others, but it is

difficult to understand how the moral nature of man can receive its full sustenance, how it can grow and expand, if it is thrown back on itself, and is not able to satisfy the yearning for the help and sympathy of something higher. Readers of books on Siamese religion will probably receive the most contradictory impressions as to how far the people do really worship and pray to an unseen Being. It has been stated dogmatically by good authorities that they do not; that what are supposed to be prayers are merely the repetition of formularies, that the so-called worship is but a recital of the abstract virtues of the Buddha. But with all diffidence I venture to assert from what I have seen and heard that such an opinion is absolutely erroneous. Even if instances of actual prayer could not be cited, it does not follow that they are not resorted to. Much real prayer is not expressed in words, but consists in the silent yearning of the heart. It is difficult to draw a hard and fast line between the vague aspiration of the soul and actual prayer, and many an avowed agnostic would probably have to plead guilty to what in essentials amounted to prayer if his inmost nature were laid bare. It is, therefore, far more probable that many Siamese, who do not consciously pray, do so virtually. At the same time it is hardly necessary to press this point, as there can be very little real doubt that most of the people are accustomed both to worship and pray in letter as well as in spirit.

My own observations and inquiries among the Siamese themselves certainly favour this conclusion.[1]

Equally ingrained in man's nature with the craving for some supernatural Being in whom he may find comfort, strength, and help, is the passionate longing for another life, strictly undemonstrable though such a life may be. It is possible to point to but few countries and ages in which the bulk of the people have not cherished a belief in a future existence. There have been, it is true, waves of scepticism from time to time, especially among the cultured classes. But even among those whose reason has bidden them look upon such a belief as a delusion and vanity, few can quit this life without casting a longing, lingering look behind. There is nothing more pathetic in all literature than the wistful yearning of the Roman poet of nineteen hundred years ago :—

> "Soles occidere et redire possunt.
> Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,
> Nox est perpetua una dormienda."

Mankind, indeed, whatever the intellectual bias of the age, has always been in revolt against the doctrine that death is the end of all things. Writers

[1] There is much less formal worship in Siam than in Christian countries. On the Siamese Sunday, or *Wan Phra*, the great majority of the *wats* are empty, and what worshippers there are, are invariably women.

on religious subjects have generally ascribed this feeling to that belief in righteousness which demands that the inequalities of this world should be set right in another. This belief no doubt has its weight. But what is really the main cause of the desire for immortality would seem to be that instinctive craving for life which continues to exist even in the most wretched, that horror of ceasing to exercise those powers and faculties of the body and mind and affections, the use of which virtually constitutes living. To cease to think and to love, even to gain a heaven where thinking and loving in the manner that we think and love on this earth no longer exist, to be cut off from all the mental interests and ties of affection that bind us to our present existence, this is a prospect which can allure but few. So, too, the shadowy underworld of the Homeric religion was too unhuman to satisfy; and we can well understand how it was thought better to be the slave of a poor man on earth than to rule over all the kingdom of the dead. Men so diverse in their views as Dr. Johnson and Professor Huxley have both more than half seriously expressed their horror of annihilation and even their preference for hell; and in this opinion they must have many a sympathiser, for "who would lose, though full of pain, this intellectual being?" It is not merely immortality in the abstract for which man craves, but individual personal immortality, an immortality in which the chain of his existence and self-con-

sciousness, the *repetentia nostri* of Lucretius, is not broken through, and which is a real continuation of our present life. Pantheists may devise systems in which the soul is absorbed into the Universal Spirit, Positivists may believe that mankind will be content to merge their future in that of abstract Humanity; but in doing so they violate the most profound and, I venture to think, one of the highest instincts of the human breast.

There is, therefore, no need for surprise that Buddhists have revolted at the doctrine of Nirvana. Whether Nirvana be total and complete annihilation or no, may be uncertain. The learned differ, and the issue still remains *sub judice*, where it seems likely to stay for ever. But Nirvana at the very least means a complete cessation from all worldly desires and consciousness, an entire negation of all individual existence, which, coupled as it nevertheless is with a notion of positive beatitude, is far too subtle for any but a born metaphysician or theologian to grasp. There can be no reasonable doubt that such an interpretation finds no favour among the Siamese, and I believe it has been repudiated still more openly in the countries of Northern Buddhism. It is quite true that it is a matter which does not arouse very much interest or controversy. The upper classes, being pervaded to some extent by a spirit of scepticism, regard it naturally as only of academic interest, while the masses do not as a rule look so far ahead as

Nirvana. Their thoughts are centred, when religiously inclined, on the next life, and all they aspire to is to be reborn in a better position on this earth, or at most in one of the heavens. Nirvana is much too distant for them to trouble themselves about it. But in so far as the Siamese have any opinion about Nirvana, I am quite convinced from my inquiries among members of different classes that the conception of the majority differs widely from that of orthodox Buddhism.

As regards the more material religious sanctions, which are really the only sanctions employed by Buddhism, there is but little difference between that creed as it is popularly held and Christianity. The higher motives, however, which animate the Christian—devotion to God and love of Christ—are absent, and it is therefore only rarely and, as it were, by accident that we come across in Buddhist countries the beautiful characters which have illuminated the pages of Christianity. Taking again the Siamese for our concrete example, though we may find much natural kindliness, much generosity, and much unselfishness, we fail to detect those acts much more those lives, of devoted heroism and self-effacement, which necessitate a higher motive than the desire of accumulating merit to produce them. The Siamese are not a people of lofty ideals or noble aspirations, though this defect must not be altogether laid to the door of their religion, for their own apathetic natures have conspired with the

teaching of their creed to deaden anything like enthusiasm. At the same time the ordinary homely virtues are fairly prevalent, nor, if the people fail to rise to the heights of Christian endeavour, do they fall into the depths of vice which disfigure Western civilisation. There may not be the same noble examples of altruism and self-sacrifice, but the spirit of charity is widely diffused, and nearly every man is ready to give of his little. The conception of purity and chastity may not be so lofty as in Christian lands, yet, taking all the circumstances of the case into consideration, there is probably less flagrant immorality of an objectionable sort. The worst forms of vice are regarded with horror, and rarely heard of; and excepting possibly in the topmost social stratum of all, a fairly high standard of sexual morality may be said to prevail, certainly for an Eastern country. Drinking, the curse of European countries and of our own in particular, is not a characteristic vice; and it is unpleasant to think that contact with our civilisation has done much of late years to counteract the influences of Buddhism in this respect, and that the use of intoxicating liquors has become much more prevalent.

The special virtue of Buddhism, kindliness to lower animals, is often said to exist more in theory than practice; but that is hardly my impression, though I must admit that the kindliness is more of a negative nature, and consists rather in a general

tolerance and absence of cruelty than in any positive love or affection for the brute creation. It is true that such sports as cock-fighting have a certain vogue, but, though these are condemned by public opinion at home, they are after all not much worse than many amusements which are regarded as legitimate in Europe. Not a few Siamese would look on our field sports as barbarous and brutal, and would scorn to "blend their pleasure or their pride with sorrow of the meanest thing that feels." It is often urged that their refusal to put animals out of suffering is really far more cruel than many acts of which they are guiltless. But is not their attitude to the lower creation in this respect, even if a mistaken one, precisely that which we adopt towards our fellow human beings? Of the two other Buddhist commandments against lying and stealing, I have spoken in a previous chapter. It must, I fear, be confessed that here human nature has proved too strong, and that the Siamese rise very little, if at all, above the not very elevated Oriental standard.

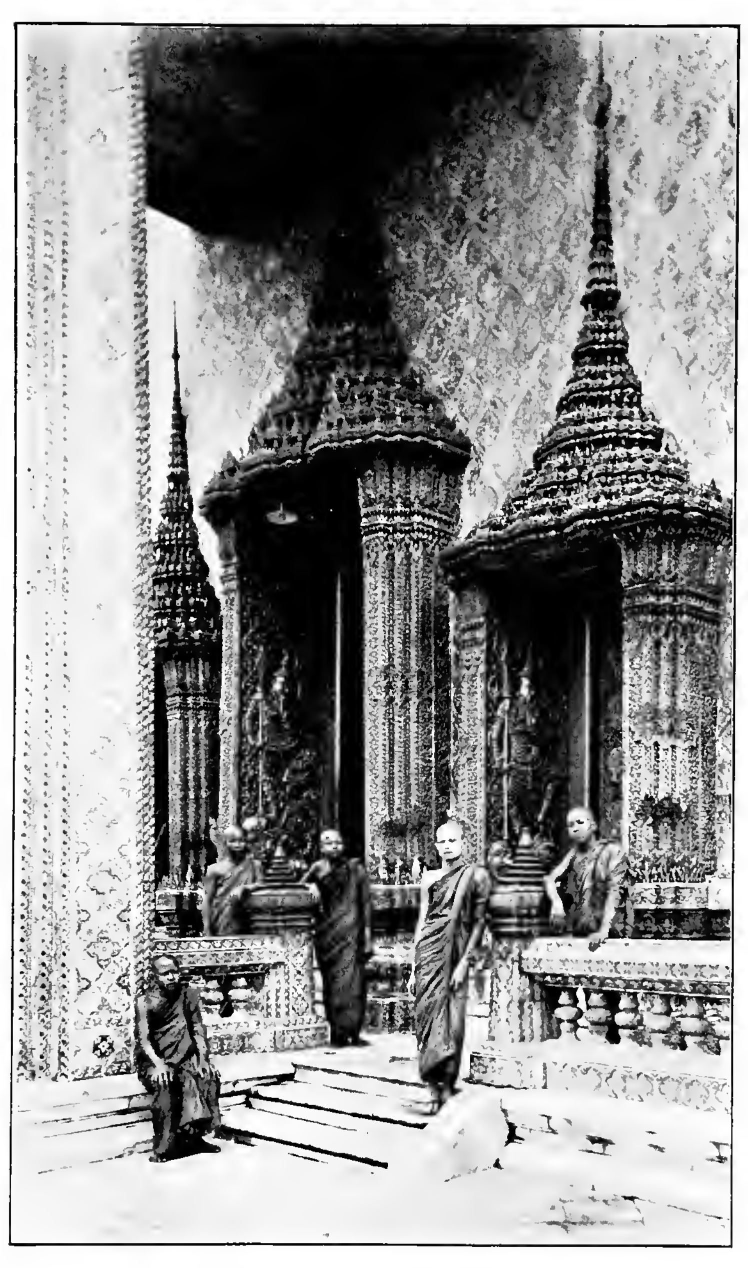
It would be impossible to close this comparison between Christianity and Buddhism as we see it in its concrete form without saying a word about religious toleration. Toleration, in so far as it is the product of indifferentism, has its bad as well as its good side, and we see both facets in Siam. Undoubtedly it is one of the greatest merits of Buddhism that it adopts such a tolerant attitude

towards other creeds. Essentially it is the most philosophical and least dogmatic of all the great world religions. Aiming as it does at the ultimate extinction of all emotion and desire, its natural tendency is to minimise the force of those passions which have led to religious persecutions amongst other peoples. Whether such an attitude of tolerance is necessarily bound up with a large amount of indifferentism it is difficult to say in the abstract. Certain it is that among the Siamese there are not that fervour and depth of religious conviction that are to be found in Christian and Mahometan countries. At the same time it is impossible not to pay a tribute of admiration to the generous breadth of view that one finds among a people who in so many respects are ignorant and backward. The position assumed by the king and his predecessor towards Christianity and Christian missionaries, often under considerable provocation, deserves the highest praise. Though both sincere Buddhists, neither of them has ever put any obstacle in the way of Christian teaching or proselytising. The present sovereign has openly advised his subjects to adopt the religion they think best; he has entrusted the education of his own children and of those of the higher classes to Christians and foreigners, and he has shown as truly liberal a spirit in this matter as could possibly be desired. It may perhaps be regarded as significant of Siamese tolerance that at the entrance of one of

the principal temples in Bangkok, that within the enclosure of the royal palace, statues are placed on either side, one of St. Peter and the other of Ceres. It is not equally to the credit of Siamese art that these foreign importations are far the best specimens of sculpture in any of the temples.

It may be true that such an ignorant people as the Siamese, however good-natured, could not show such a spirit of tolerance if their religious convictions were very strong, though their tolerance may in part be attributed to an assurance of the superiority of their own creed. How far their Buddhism remains diluted with older beliefs, it is impossible to say. It was engrafted on the old pagan spirit-worship still to be found in something like its primitive form among some of the mountain tribes in Indo-China, and these superstitions, these beliefs in ghosts and spirits, still linger and form a very large portion of the real religion of the people. Many a little shrine may be seen, by any one walking through the jungle, with candles and offerings, which has no connexion with Buddhism, but is placed there to propitiate some spirit of the trees or streams, though genuine ancestor worship, as it exists in China, is not to be found in Siam. Buddhism nevertheless, however much it may be mixed up with old pagan beliefs, is still the religion of the country, and keeps closely in touch with the people through the almost universal practice of every adult man entering the priesthood

for a certain time. Many remain in it but for a few months, others perhaps for years, then tire of it and go out; while those whose tastes are least worldly may continue to wear the yellow robe for the rest of their days, Probably nobody could estimate accurately the weight of the various motives which induce different men to spend their lives in a monastery. There are, I am certain, many who do so from feelings of the most genuine piety, for surely the reverence paid by the mass of the people to these "holy men" rests upon some solid foundation. On the other hand, there can be little doubt that a good many of the priests are lazy and worthless fellows, willing to put up with the restrictions of the monastery in order to be saved the trouble of earning their daily food. This is what we should naturally expect *à priori*, and Siamese from whom I have made inquiries have admitted that it is the case. As regards the monasteries in the interior, different travellers have expressed very different views. Mr. Colquhoun can hardly speak too ill of them, while Mr. Warington Smyth holds a much more favourable opinion. It is not always a sound canon of criticism to take two extreme views and strike an average, but in this case I fancy the truth lies between the two very opposite conclusions that these travellers have arrived at, though probably Mr. Smyth's view is nearer the mark. There is no doubt a great deal of idleness in the *wats*, and it is



Temple Doors with Buddhist Priests.

deeply to be regretted that so much of Siamese strength and manhood should be thus wasted and frittered away; also there is probably some profligacy and immorality to be found mixed up with true piety and simplicity of life and manners. But, at their worst, the Siamese monasteries have never sunk to the depths into which those of England fell in the fifteenth century.

The direct value of the monastic system in Siam seems to consist in holding up a certain ideal of living to the people, and affording a refuge to those who would fain renounce the world and its ways. The priests or monks are not a separate caste as they are in Christian countries, having no special powers conferred on them by ordination, as have our own clergy. They perform few of the functions that we associate specially with the priesthood. They may be called in occasionally to conduct some religious rite, but the wide duties of charity and practical philanthropy which are now becoming more and more the recognised province of the Christian ministry fall outside their scope. Most of the learning there is in the country, consisting entirely in Pali scholarship and theological study, is no doubt to be found in the monasteries, as it was to a great extent in Europe in the Middle Ages; but from what I have heard, I am not inclined to put a very high estimate on it, and the world would probably not be much the poorer for its loss. Still, secular education owes a considerable

debt to the priests in the past, and much valuable assistance is being rendered to the young and struggling Education Department at the present time by wearers of the yellow robe.

The monastic life does not carry with it any great burdens. Of course, a somewhat stricter code is enjoined than on those who continue in the outside world, and the monasteries in Bangkok, which are under the direct control of the king, are subject to a still more severe *régime* than the others. The only real hardship from our point of view would seem to be the enforced abstinence from food after midday. I am assured, however, by Siamese of various classes that they soon get used to this, and do not feel it at all after a time. Besides, certain liquid foods—such as oil, honey, melted butter—are allowed in cases of extreme faintness. Few Europeans would not consider the ease and idleness of such a life somewhat dearly purchased. But it has great attractions for the Siamese, whose pleasures are chiefly of a negative order, and any one in the upper classes is able, as a rule, to pass his six months or so very comfortably and happily.

It is not only the monastic life which seems thoroughly suited to Siamese habits, but the Buddhist religion generally that appears to be admirably adapted to their needs and character. It is such a comfortable religion, an educated Siamese remarked to me once, that you will

never find the people ready to exchange it for another. All a man has to do is to observe the five commandments,[1] which the average Siamese does not find particularly difficult to keep, adopting as he does a somewhat low standard of what is needed; and for the rest he can live his life free from all care and anxiety. A little positive merit making, in the way of giving charity or building temples, is a good thing too, and will better his chance in the next life; but there is no necessity for him to embark largely upon works of supererogation. The particular form of Buddhism we find in the country has no doubt developed itself to suit its environment, and is as much an effect as a cause of the moral character of the people, just as we see is the case with Christianity in various Western countries. This is a fact that must be reckoned with by those who would convert the Siamese to what they consider a better and higher religion. Buddhism has become inextricably intertwined with Siamese habits, customs, and character, and it is difficult to see how a conversion to Christianity could be more than nominal. Christianity, such as we see it at its best in some of our Western nations, requires a depth and force of character, a virility and strenuousness on the part of its devotees, that are almost wholly lacking in the Siamese, and it is hard to imagine that they will ever gain these

[1] Which forbid killing, stealing, lying, adultery, and drinking intoxicating liquors.

qualities with or without a conversion. They might become Christianised after a fashion, but their Christianity would probably be little better than their Buddhism ; in fact, they might lose much of the good of one religion, without gaining the compensating benefits of the other, and the result would no doubt be very similar to the lower types of Catholicism of Southern Europe, with which their religion has even now many points in common. Enthusiasts who believe that no creed outside Christianity can contain any element of truth may adopt a different standpoint, but those whose horizon is more extended, will admit that the question of proselytising is not so simple.

It will be argued perhaps that in the early centuries of Christianity nations were converted wholesale, and why not the Siamese? But the analogy does not hold good. When Christianity made its great conquests it had an open field before it. The Western world had lost nearly all its beliefs; the pagan systems of Greece and Rome were discredited and laughed at, while the barbarians were practically without a serious religion. And not only was there an opportunity for a new religion, but also, in the utter chaos of character and principle, a demand for a great moral reform. Christianity supplied both wants, and suited as it was to the strong and healthy characters of the Western nations, it at once achieved an easy conquest. So, too, did Buddhism over the spirit and ghost worshippers

of Indo-China. They likewise had no real religion, and nothing to administer to their ethical needs. But what is the case at present? The Siamese have now been in possession for a full thousand years of a religion which has adapted itself to their requirements and character, and to which they have adapted themselves. It has become a portion of their life. It has interwoven itself not only with their ethics and morality, but also with their external ceremonials, and political and social institutions. Second to no other religion except Christianity in its spirituality and ethical standard, it is yet capable of bearing to a considerable degree the test of intellectual analysis. For though a large accretion of dogmas, such as commend themselves to the popular mind, has grown round it, yet none of these are essential to it. The people have their dogmas, while the freethinker can still retain his admiration and affection for Buddhism as an ethical system, if not as a religion in the real sense of the word. It appeals, to some extent, to all classes and all minds, in a manner that Christianity with its essentially dogmatic basis perhaps cannot do, and it has its roots deep down in the national life. Can it then be such an easy matter to compass its overthrow? In dealing with the savage, the missionary has practically a clean surface to build on. In seeking to convert the followers of an old religion, he has a long and laborious work of destruction in front of him before

the process of construction can be commenced. No man can pass from one dogmatic system to another without going through an intervening phase of scepticism, and in raising the spirit of scepticism, the missionary will find that he has summoned to his aid a force which will speedily pass out of his control. Is it easy for a people, a people, too, more intellectually subtle than our own, to cast off the dogmas, that have grown dear and sacred to them from association since their earliest days with all they love and revere, that have been handed down to them through countless generations, and are bound up with all that is best and most admirable in their characters, for those of an entirely new religion in which, as it is popularly expounded, they discover much that jars both on their reason and moral sense?

Hence it follows that the work of the missionaries among the Siamese, so far as conversion to Christianity goes, has been practically fruitless. On the other hand what success they have met with in this respect in Siam has been almost entirely among the Chinese, who, apart from their ancestor worship, are without any definite religion, and are therefore much more easy subjects for conversion, besides probably having a greater natural capacity for positive Christianity. The missionaries, both the French Catholics and American Protestants (for England is entirely unrepresented in this field of labour) have done admirable work in Siam in

advancing the causes of civilisation and education, in ministering to the sick and needy, and in setting a high example of charity and philanthropy. Some, naturally, are more self-seeking than others, some are less suited in respect of education, tact, and breadth of sympathy for the task they have undertaken; but there are not a few who have exchanged the comforts and pleasures of home for life-long labour under a tropical sun, from the noblest motives, and who have achieved results that deserve the highest admiration and praise. Much of the advance of Siam has been directly or indirectly due to the missionaries. The late king and his brother were very largely influenced by them, and to them they owed much of their moral and intellectual enlightenment. For many years, too, they have done the most important work in advancing the education of the people themselves. Both Catholic and Protestant schools flourished in Bangkok before the Government set its hand to the work of education; and even now, the missionaries have a closeness of touch with their pupils, and an influence over them, far more important than the imparting of mere intellectual knowledge, which state-paid teachers can hardly hope to rival. It is in the general work of civilisation in its broadest sense that the missionaries will find their truest field, and it is hard to think that some of their chief obstacles and stumbling blocks come from their own people. What are the Christian virtues on

which the preacher most often dwells? Chastity, sobriety, humility—these are surely to be reckoned among them. When the Siamese sees these virtues commonly set at nought by those whose religion specially inculcates them, is not the task of the missionary made ten times more difficult? *Maxima debetur puero reverentia.* The Siamese are a nation of children, quick to perceive, imitative, impressionable. A heavy responsibility, therefore, lies on those who come to Siam for the purpose of filling their purses and furthering their own ends, if they do not at least set before these people the example of a clean and honourable life.

CHAPTER IX

EDUCATION

In the past the education of the Siamese as of the Burmese has been conducted entirely in the monasteries, and probably there have been few countries where, till within comparatively recent years, there has been such a wide-spread system of popular education as in these lands of Buddhism. Almost every boy enters the *wat* school, usually at about the age of eight or ten, and the consequence is that a large proportion of Siamese males have learned at any rate the rudiments of reading and writing, though they may not advance much further. Siam could not of course compare with the most progressive Western lands at the present time, but popular education is certainly as much diffused there as it was in many a European country at the beginning, perhaps even the middle, of last century. The power of reading and writing is not, indeed, the same instrument in the hands of the Siamese that it is in those of the European. He has no literature of his own by which he may advance step by step

into the higher realms of education. A few worthless books, chiefly translations of Chinese plays and ghost and fairy stories are all that he has. Still a love of reading is fairly general, and it is not uncommon for any one taking an evening walk in Bangkok to see a family circle, gathered around one of its members reading aloud to them. But, beyond this point, education has never progressed among the masses, except in the case of priests who have devoted their lives to the study of the Buddhist Scriptures.

The first to introduce secular education of a more advanced nature were the missionaries. Much of the rapid improvement in civilisation and manners among the ruling class of the past generation was due to their influence. Their educational work is now restricted to a humbler, but hardly less important sphere, and till the Education Department took the matter in hand a few years ago they practically monopolised the field outside the education given in the *wats.* It is difficult to estimate the work of the missionaries by actual results. The influence of the best of them reaches so much further than the mere domain of things intellectual. No doubt the better equipped government schools with their expert masters and mistresses can now leave them behind in the matter of examinations, but still there is no reason for depreciating the important work they have done and are doing. Personally I should

have been glad if the state could have held out a hand to help the missionary schools, but as they naturally made the Christianising of their pupils the cardinal point of their system, it was impossible for a Buddhist Government, however well disposed towards them and liberal in its views, to give them any assistance. Still it is not a mere nothing that the government and Christian schools should work on side by side in perfect harmony and friendly rivalry, and those who have had experience of the obstacles to progress caused by religious rivalries and animosities will realise what an advantage this is.

The Government has now for some few years set its hand to the task of supplementing the voluntary efforts of priests and missionaries, but so far its work has been on a very small scale.[1] It has done something to improve the *wat* or temple schools by adapting the buildings to educational needs and providing apparatus; while it has effected even

[1] It is a source of satisfaction that two Englishmen deserve most of the credit for what has been done by the Government for education. My friend and colleague in the English Education Department, Mr. R. L. Morant, when he was out in Siam as tutor to the late Crown Prince some ten years ago, succeeded by his energy and force of character in inducing the Government to lay the foundation of all subsequent reforms. During recent years Mr. W. G. Johnson has shown great skill in carrying on the organisation of the primary schools, working as he has done under enormous difficulties, and with most inadequate help from the Treasury. I am deeply indebted to him for the generous help he gave me when I was in Siam.

more for higher education, by opening schools for children of a better class (one of them for girls) where the instruction is mostly in English, and higher subjects may be taught; and also by instituting a small training school. But up to the present the education in these schools has hardly advanced beyond the elementary stage, though considerable progress is now being made, while as regards the *wat* schools no sort of regular organisation can be established, till a much greater number of trained teachers have been turned out, and a system of inspection becomes possible on a far larger scale than hitherto.

To any one who has set before him the interesting task of organising Siamese education, the problem naturally presents itself as a twofold one. He has to strengthen and broaden the basis of popular education on which the whole structure must naturally rest ultimately; it is necessary to proceed also at the same time with the higher parts. One of the greatest difficulties that the educational reformer in Siam has to contend with is due to the apathy of the ruling class. In European countries it has been possible to advance popular education rapidly during the last century, because those who had influence in the country were men who themselves thoroughly realised its benefits, and were able to see the whole question in proper perspective. In Siam there are a certain number of shrewd clever men in the governing class, most of whom,

greatly to their credit, owe chiefly to themselves what measure of education and culture it is their good fortune to possess. But what they have acquired is the education of the practical man of the world. It is derived from newspapers and periodicals rather than from books; and the narrow resources of their country, in the way of literature and other refining influences, do little to obviate these limitations. The ideal, therefore, of even the best and most energetic of the rulers of Siam is not a high one. In fact it is not an undeservedly hard thing to say that scarcely any of them understand what education really means. Their view is almost purely utilitarian. It is largely the commercial and material one, and narrow too at that. To turn out good book-keepers and accountants, or manufacture clerks who can speak and write English fluently, is a standard considered good enough for all except the most highly privileged of the Siamese youth, and there are very few who would not pronounce it sufficient even for the most nobly born. But the conception that the object of education is to train and develop all the faculties of the body and mind, regardless of mere bread and butter ends, to form and strengthen the moral character, to widen the sympathies, and in a word to humanise a man by bringing him in touch with the best that has been thought and said in the world, is one which has yet to be realised in Siam. Even the technical standard adopted is but

a narrow one. The Siamese parent, in any position above the lowest class, has his eye on a Government office for his son, and nothing beyond. Subjects like drawing, mechanics, or physical science are looked upon with suspicion. What is the use of them? They will not help a boy into the Treasury or to a post in the Interior. Every other calling is despised, and, indeed, hardly any other is possible, for how can one expect engineers or manufacturers, or skilled artisans, let alone scientific inventors and artists of originality, in a country where not the smallest educational encouragement is given to any who have an aptitude for such callings?

While, then, public opinion remains what it is in Siam, it will be a matter of great difficulty not only to establish a sound system of higher education in the country, but also to put the elementary portion on a thoroughly comprehensive basis. It is, therefore, most important, in the interests of popular education itself, to push on that of the upper classes, for, till the rulers of the country realise what education really means, there is little hope that the foundations will be firmly laid. Even from the purely utilitarian standpoint the need is pressing. If Siam and the Siamese are to have any future before them, they must not be content to import practically all their manufactures, or leave the few that are carried on in the country, in the hands of Europeans and Chinese. Why should not the Siamese become engineers and run their

own rice-mills and saw-mills? Why should they import all their cotton goods, and not follow the example of India and set up mills of their own?[1] Why should they be forced to obtain their very umbrellas and matches and countless articles of daily use from China and Japan? The national bent of the Siamese is no doubt quite away from this sort of work, but if this feeling of disinclination is to be conquered, it can only be done by educating the people on the right lines from earliest boyhood and giving them a proper technical training. Then too there is the artistic side. The Siamese may have failed to produce works of great artistic merit in the past; still they have not been wholly unsuccessful in this direction, and I do not think that any one who has lived among them, and has observed them closely, will fail to have detected countless indications that they possess a considerable share of the artistic sense, even if it have in it a large alloy of barbarism. India, China, and Japan all bear witness to the numberless ways in which this sense can be turned to account, and it would be a happy day for the Siamese if they could find a means of livelihood from some of the arts and crafts which keep so many of their Oriental neighbours busily and profitably employed. Here too is work for education,

[1] It seems to me, speaking without any expert knowledge, that the humid climate of Siam would be admirably suited to cotton-spinning.

but the Siamese have hitherto failed to grasp the situation. It is something that the Government have decided to introduce manual and art teaching into their schools, and it is to be hoped that the foundations are being laid on which it will soon be possible to raise a comprehensive system of technical and art instruction. At the same time technical instruction is for the few rather than for the many, and only the pick of the boys in the elementary schools can hope to profit by it.

What, then, of the many, it will be asked, and what sort of mental provision is considered most suitable for them? It does not seem to me that the question differs materially from that which presents itself in England, or any other European country. The great mass of the population in Europe have to live by manual labour of a more or less unskilled sort, and so too have the Siamese, in so far as they do any work at all. Any one who is called on to organise or improve the educational system of a country is not bound to go into the ulterior question as to whether education is beneficial to the bulk of the people. He has to take the answer for granted as his working hypothesis. Still, his views on the subject will probably modify his action, even unconsciously, and at any rate the question is sufficiently interesting in itself to deserve a brief consideration. It is not unnatural, perhaps, that in a country like Siam one should frequently hear the opinion put forward that the establishment of

popular education is likely to do more harm than good, and that the people would remain better and happier without it.) The same opinion is often freely expressed in England. In English country districts I have frequently heard these views stated by men of no little standing and weight, and it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that there is, at any rate in the rural districts, a considerable body of opinion, even if expression be not always given to it, against the policy pursued for the last generation with regard to popular education. That these views are often sincere, and not based merely on selfish considerations, cannot be doubted, and it is impossible not to attach some importance to them when held by so many whose character and position entitle them to be listened to with respect. Even the enthusiast, perhaps, can hardly fail to have misgivings at times in the presence of such adverse criticisms; but without going into the question at all in detail, I think there can be little doubt as to the side to which the balance of argument inclines. As long as the intellect remains stunted the moral faculties have not their full chance either, and it seems to me unanswerable that it is the duty of the rulers of any country, wherever it may be feasible, to give the fullest opportunity they can to the individual man and woman to realise their better selves to the utmost, and to make the highest use of the various powers and faculties that nature has implanted in them. Political, economic, and

other causes may perhaps militate against the carrying out of this policy in its perfection, but it is certainly an ideal which we should attempt to realise as nearly as the nature of the circumstances permits.

I take it, then, for granted that the policy of establishing a sound system of national education in Siam is a right one, even if, though I am not disposed to make the admission, there had to be a period of painful transition before the full benefits could be obtained. The practical question still remains, how far it is possible to extend and improve the existing structure under the conditions which we find prevailing. The *wat* schools furnish us with a not unsatisfactory basis, and it seems undoubtedly the right course to utilise and improve them as far as possible, rather than to make a clean sweep and adopt an entirely new system. This is what has been done with no little success by British officials in Burmah, where the conditions are very similar; and the example is encouraging. Furthermore, all questions of economy apart, education in the *wats* is a national institution in the country, handed down from the distant past, and rooted in sentiment; and to break with such national institutions, unless there are grave reasons for so doing, is always a serious mistake. It cannot certainly be said that the standard of education and methods of instruction hitherto prevalent in the *wats*, or the nature of the buildings and the general equipment of the schoolrooms, are calculated to cause a high feeling of

satisfaction. But with patience and, what is no less necessary, with money, it will be possible, no doubt, to turn them into very creditable schools; and in Bangkok itself considerable progress is being made at the present time in this direction. The two chief needs are to alter and adapt the buildings (also to build, where wanted, new ones in the temple enclosures), and to improve the teaching staff. Fortunately the Siamese are open-minded on both these points. They do not object to the necessary alterations being made in the buildings, nor have they any scruple about the admission of lay teachers into the schools. The priests themselves welcome them, and the only difficulty is to obtain a sufficient supply of men competent to teach. This, however, is, I hope, only a question of time, provided always the Government are willing to allow adequate grants for the purpose. The low rate of pay has not been enough to attract teachers hitherto, but considerable improvement has now been effected. Education has, indeed, been starved in the past. The sum spent on it in comparison with other departments has been till quite recently ridiculously small, and is still in my opinion inadequate, though it has been increased more than threefold between 1899 and 1901. The money spent on education amounts roughly to about one-fortieth; in 1899 it amounted to less than a one hundred and twentieth part of the annual revenue. Contrast this with the state of affairs in a country like England, where the popular

education grant is something like an eighth of the normal revenue, exclusive of the large sums levied as rates by school boards, the huge endowments of public and other schools, and, last of all, the fees paid by individuals to institutions which are more than self-supporting. It must be allowed that a new country has to spend a relatively large amount on public works, but against this must be set the fact that Siam is so circumstanced that a navy is a luxury, and an army a superfluity; while, moreover, it has not any national debt.

Before 1900 the sphere of the Education Department was confined to Bangkok alone, but it has now taken over the provinces as well from the Department of the Interior. Up to the present the administration of these schools has been left entirely to the priesthood, but the Department is now tentatively feeling its way towards a system of secular inspection in the nearer "Circles." It will be some years, however, before they have sufficient organising teachers and inspectors to undertake the work thoroughly. Even Bangkok itself is very far behindhand. The school accommodation is not a quarter what it ought to be according to the English standard; but this defect will be remedied in a few years, if the present plan of adding or enlarging so many schools every year is carried out. There is a great dearth, too, of qualified teachers, while systematic inspection is only now being organised. What the teachers lack in skill and experience they

THE AUTHOR'S RESIDENCE IN BANGKOK.

often, indeed, make up in zeal. Sometimes in their desire to prove their emancipation from the old methods they may even show an excess of this good quality; as when a teacher, having to give an object lesson on a policeman, in the exuberance of his ardour brought into school a real live member of the force, scorning mere commonplace illustrations. The training school for teachers has been in existence now for nearly ten years, but the inducements held out to young men in the past have been so few that it has had very little material to work on. It has been found necessary to establish scholarships to persuade students to enter, and also to revise entirely and raise the scale of salaries for teachers. It may prove that even these inducements are still insufficient, and that a further rise will have to be made in the near future. What is really necessary is to make the Siamese feel that the teaching profession, with all its drudgery, has as much to attract as the ordinary Government office. Till that is done education will continue in a very parlous state.

There are three Government schools, in addition to an Anglo-Siamese school under Siamese masters, all of which are entirely controlled by English teachers, and are on quite a separate footing from the *wat* schools. Two of these are for boys and the other for girls. King's College, which was started in 1897, is a boarding school, and is intended for the sons of noblemen and parents of

the upper class. This school, though starting from small beginnings (the original pupils knew practically no English and were very backward), has had a very successful career, and considerable credit is due to the Headmaster, Mr. A. C. Carter, of Trinity College, Oxford, and his English assistants, also all Oxford men, for what has been accomplished. In a somewhat obscure situation, on the other side of the river from the city, it has hitherto been very cramped, and there has been no room for expansion. A scheme has, however, now been approved, I am glad to say, by the Government, to remove the school to a new and extensive site and to more than double its numbers, so that it has now a chance of developing into something really like an English public school. The girls' school, known as Sunandalaya, is also a boarding school and is for a similar class of children, the daughters of noblemen. It is much smaller than King's College, and has had rather a chequered career since its foundation nearly ten years ago. The difficulties in the way of girls' education are naturally much greater, and a considerable strain is often put on the patience of the English ladies in charge of it. Still, the importance of educating the future wives of the rulers of Siam on European lines, with all the enormous consequences that may be involved in doing so, is so great and the interest of the problem so striking, that it is worth undergoing some sacrifices and facing periods of depression and discouragement in

so good a cause. Happily the prospects for the future are now considerably brighter than they were some little time ago. The other boys' school is a day school, and from its lower fees is more calculated to attract the children of middle-class parents. It is under a trained English headmaster with trained English assistants. The curriculum is very much the same as at King's College, and English is taught from the commencement. This school also is just about to be moved to a new site with room to double its numbers, so that, for the next few years at any rate, Bangkok is sufficiently provided with accommodation for higher education of such a nature as is likely to satisfy its limited demands. The curriculum of these two boys' schools, with one great exception, is very little above that which would be found in a primary school in Europe. Perhaps they might be classed in their present stage of development as higher primary schools. The exception I have alluded to is that most of the work, practically all in the higher classes, is in a foreign language, viz., English, and this of course makes the training given far more valuable than that of the ordinary elementary school. The standard is now rising every year, and with the better teaching staff and other facilities provided, it will not be long before these institutions are entitled to rank as genuine secondary schools.

One serious obstacle to further improvement arises from the fact that there is no Siamese litera-

ture—not even any translations to speak of—and that consequently it is impossible to cultivate in the boys a love of books and taste for reading, as few of them can read English for pleasure. This is an incalculable loss, for the test of a good school lies far more in the stimulus and bias it gives to a boy's tastes, than in the amount of information it crams into his head. (The curriculum has not presented any very complicated problem so far. It is that of an ordinary English school, with of course differences for such subjects as history and geography. Later on, when education is more advanced, more difficult questions will arise. To what extent, for instance, will it be advisable to teach foreign languages other than English, and even Latin and Greek, in view of some of the boys going to European Universities? How far will subjects like political economy, as taught at home, be applicable in an entirely different social and economic environment?) As regards the classics, I may perhaps be allowed to say in passing, that I think a very strong case will have to be made by their advocates, before they ought to be introduced into the curriculum of a Siamese school. Though personally I am a firm believer in the benefit of a classical education at home, for those boys who can profit by it, I think to force the classics on the Siamese youth would be the greatest mistake. What are the chief among the many advantages gained by an English boy in learning Latin and

Greek? In the first place he acquires a linguistic training, a power over words and expression that none of the modern languages, so similar to his own in respect of construction and loss of inflexion, could possibly give, and secondly he gains an insight into an entirely different civilisation and new ways of thought, which cannot fail to broaden his mind and sympathies. Now these advantages in the main can be obtained for the Siamese by the study of a modern European language such as English or French. No doubt a knowledge of Latin and Greek would add a further element of culture, but, considering the multiplicity of subjects that now have to be taught, they should be regarded as purely a luxury for the few, and in no wise part of the ordinary school course. English will always have to be a necessary subject, and French, and possibly also German, should be made optional.

As regards the higher problem of the comparative values of Western and Eastern studies that had to be faced in India in Macaulay's day, no question has yet occurred in Siam. When, indeed, it arises, it will probably be found to have been already answered. The Siamese have practically elected for Western education, and when the higher regions of ethics and metaphysics are reached, there is little likelihood of their striking out an altogether fresh development. Pali and Eastern scholarship have been confined hitherto to the *wats* for the most part, and comparatively few laymen so far in Siam seem

to have shown any great aptitude or inclination for the study. A more practical question is that of the advisability of sending Siamese boys to Europe for education. There are probably few things on which the Siamese Government have squandered money more uselessly in the past. Boys have been sent to Europe, often at an early age, when they were not in the least able to profit by European schools or training; they have been brought up without any system or any regard to the position they were likely to occupy in Siam; and they have frequently returned, having gained far more harm than good, with expensive tastes and often not a few European vices. There can be little doubt that it is the right policy, and the Siamese themselves are beginning to realise it, to educate all boys, save in very exceptional cases, in Siam itself, till near the end of the school age; and for this reason the enlargement of the two leading schools in Bangkok is a matter of no little importance. It may be thought that the Siamese youth will thereby fail to gain the spirit of the English public school, but there is no reason why almost all that is best in the English public-school system should not be transplanted and fostered with due care in Bangkok; and the great success of King's College is evidence that this is possible. Personally I believe the English public schools, with all their faults and limitations, especially on the intellectual side, to be far the finest educational institutions in the world,

and to turn out on the whole the most valuable products; nor do I see any reason why, with certain differences in detail, Siamese schools should not be run on the same lines. There are different ideals of virtue and character, both moral and intellectual, in different countries, and a certain variety of type is no doubt a good thing. No training for example could turn the English boy or undergraduate into a German; nor need this be regretted, for the Englishman and German have their different parts to play in the world. After all, the qualities fostered in the best type of English schoolboy, those of manliness, independence, honour, truthfulness, and *esprit de corps*, are not to be regarded lightly anywhere; and in Siam it is perhaps more necessary to inculcate them even than it is at home. The Siamese boy, though far more naturally lazy and apathetic than his English *confrère*, takes readily with a little encouragement to outdoor games and pursuits. It is more difficult, however, to impress him with the English sense of honour and *esprit de corps*, and it is therefore of the greatest importance to train him in these qualities. There is no need to make an English boy of him; let him preserve his Siamese individuality: but the Siamese ideal in the past has been so essentially different from the English, that there is no great danger of his turning out what some Siamese are afraid of, too Anglicised a product. There may be instances when it will be advisable to send a boy to

England at an earlier age, but I think in most cases it will be found quite soon enough to let him go at the age of seventeen or eighteen. A few of the best, though only a very few, may be prepared for the Universities, and as time goes on, the proportion of these may increase; for the majority, it will be enough if they see something of the best English home life, by being placed in a suitable family, and if they are allowed to complete their general education. Afterwards they may receive some special preparation for a profession; but as most well-born Siamese youths aspire to places in Government offices, this preparation will not as a rule require to be of a very technical character. Some will perhaps go in for the study of medicine or law, and it could be wished that others would attempt to master the principles of commerce and manufacturing, with a view to applying their knowledge on their return to their native land. Fortunately the Education Department now realises the gravity of the question; it is beginning to enforce its control over the students in Europe, and to insist that in the case of every boy a definite and consistent programme shall be carried out according to its instructions.

Some boys are sent to Europe by their own parents, but the majority are selected by the king and educated at the public expense. Two "king's scholarships" are now given annually to cover the cost of a European education for several years.

They are thrown open to competition, and are invariably gained by the two best boys in the English schools. The Education Department also now receives regularly a grant to send abroad one or two students for training in education; and other departments, I hope, may follow suit. The Forest Department has recently established scholarships for students to be educated at the Forest College at Dehra Doon in India, and these are competed for in general subjects at the same time as the "king's scholarships." It would be very advantageous if this examination could develop into a regular Civil Service entrance examination, as seems not unlikely to happen. It would prove a great blow to the favouritism which still largely prevails.

Apart from the general work done by the Education Department, other departments have special schools for training in their particular subjects. Thus there are law and medical schools for older students, a survey school, and military and naval cadet schools. The military school is in some respects one of the most successful educational institutions in Bangkok. It not only gives a special military education, but takes boys at the early age of eleven or twelve. This, in my opinion, is a great mistake. It would be much better to allow these boys to receive their education with the others at King's College, where the curriculum is much more extended and liberal, and not to begin

the work of specialisation till the age of seventeen or eighteen. The schools of law and medicine are naturally not very advanced, but still they fulfil a useful function, and when further developed may perhaps serve as a nucleus of that university which, it is hoped, may one day have its seat in the Siamese capital—though that day is still, I fear, far distant. There seems to me a great opening for medicine especially. The Siamese practitioners are often very successful, more so even than European doctors, in simple cases of ordinary fever and dysentery, the usual local maladies. But their knowledge is entirely empirical, and when the case is at all complicated—for example, if a fever is due to some graver complaint, or where a knowledge of anatomy or physiology is required—they are quite out of their depth. As regards law, all the practice of importance is still in the hands of foreigners, and it seems to betoken a strange defect in the character of the Siamese that they do not attempt to take their share in this lucrative profession.

Apart from the Sunandalaya School which I have mentioned, for the daughters of the nobility, and one or two small schools in Bangkok, the Government have as yet made no systematic provision for girls' education. The boys have always been taught in the *wats*, but the girls have no corresponding advantages, and the consequence is that the Government have nothing to build upon. It is

not that they are unwilling to move, or that there is any social prejudice against women's education. The Government have already made a start, and the American missionaries have done their best work in this field. But there is a dearth of Siamese teachers, and the Education Department has now a scheme in hand for training girls of a lower class as pupil teachers at Sunandalaya, and possibly sending some of them to Europe to complete their training. It must naturally be some time before this scheme can bear fruit.

It will be seen from the above sketch that education in Siam is still in a very backward state, though the outlook now is not altogether discouraging. On the one hand, popular education needs extending and improving by the provision of more school buildings, and the supply of more skilled teachers, which can only be secured by holding out adequate inducements to them to adopt the profession; while, on the other hand, the education of the upper classes needs much further developing, and this, not only as an end in itself, but as a necessary means to putting education generally on a better basis. Between these two requirements lies the need, in my opinion the very important need, of some systematic technical and art instruction. To attempt to start offhand a technical school on English lines, even if the ways and means were forthcoming, would be out of the question. The time for it is not yet ripe. But I hope a beginning has been made in this direction

now that the services of competent manual and drawing teachers are being obtained for the schools, and that a good technical school may be started before many years are over. Certainly, if the Siamese are to take part in the economic struggle between the nations, they will have to bestir themselves, and not leave all commerce, and manufactures, and engineering in the hands of foreigners. These points will be sufficiently obvious, at least to Europeans.

There are also various other questions of interest that claim our attention. That of the education of boys in Europe is, as I have said, fraught with great difficulties, and the best solution is undoubtedly to give the entire school education in Bangkok. The question, too, of the curriculum, which is at present simple enough, will become more complicated later. But more important than the actual subjects taught, seems to me the spirit in which the teachers enter on their work, and the ideal they set before themselves of their task. To teach Siamese boys is not the same thing as to teach an English class. Differences in character, in mental aptitude, and external conditions all have to be taken into consideration. Tact and delicacy on the part of the teacher are essential. While on the one hand attempting to mitigate their national faults, he will have at the same time to do all that he can to avoid offending their national susceptibilities. He may feel bound to explain to them that they do not hold the exalted

position in the world which many of them imagine they do, but he will have to be most careful not to lower their national self-respect. For a nation, like an individual, that loses its self-respect is hopeless; and unless it has some belief in itself is likely to accomplish little in the future. I have heard of one teacher who habitually reduced his class to tears by dilating on the historical insignificance of their country. For the Siamese are a proud people, excessively sensitive to the opinion of others; and their possession of this trait is by no means the worst feature in their character. That what I have said applies even with greater force to moral and religious beliefs hardly needs pointing out. Happy is it that the religious tolerance of the Siamese makes the task of the English teacher an easier one than it might otherwise be.

The passage of poorer boys from the Siamese to the English schools is now made possible by a system of scholarships recently started; and my respect for the Siamese increased greatly when I found they raised no objection, on the grounds of social difference, to the scheme when it was suggested to them. Whether the nation as a whole will profit largely by a good system of education, if ever established, it is difficult to say. Though intellectually quick—up to a certain point they are quicker than English boys—they show no signs of becoming an intellectual people. A few among the upper class who have been to Europe

are fairly well-read men, and possess good libraries, while the late king and his brother furnished conspicuous instances of high ability. There seems, however, so far to be little taste for intellectual research or pursuits among them, though perhaps it is premature yet to judge. The inhabitants of India have had a brilliant past in the domain of poetry and abstract thought, while it is many centuries since the Chinese attained distinction both in philosophy and material science. The peoples of Indo-China have no such past to boast of. Possibly the fact that they can hardly, therefore, be intellectually exhausted may serve to justify a hope that their future will not be altogether barren.

CHAPTER X

THE CHINESE IN SIAM

THE Chinaman abroad is not so well known to the European public as the Chinaman at home, about whom there has been no lack of literature in recent years. Not that the Chinese do not remain the same in essentials all the world over. *Cœlum non animum mutant* is more applicable to them than to the inhabitants of any other country. There are naturally superficial differences, which it is interesting to note; but it is not so much on account of these, as of the indications we obtain of the lines on which the Chinese are likely to develop under a more stable Government and better economic conditions than they find at present under their own rulers, that it is worth while to give some consideration to the subject of this chapter.

The great difficulty in obtaining accurate and trustworthy information about anything in Siam is well illustrated by the enormous differences in the estimates of the number of Chinese in the country. Thus the "Bangkok Directory," an eminently reliable authority, says that for the

country as a whole it would probably not be too much to say that a fourth of the inhabitants are of direct Chinese origin. As it supposes the total population of the country to be about nine millions, the number of Chinese in Siam would thus be between two and three millions, which is certainly below rather than above the popular estimate. On the other hand, one of the best possible authorities, in whom I am loth not to place implicit credence, has informed me that he did not believe there were more than four hundred thousand Chinese in Siam, nor more than eighty thousand in Bangkok itself. Certainly the Chinese are generally supposed to form at least a third of the population of Bangkok, which may amount to half a million or more, and Siamese themselves, who would not care to exaggerate on this point, have told me that they considered the Chinese even to outnumber the Siamese. These estimates of four hundred thousand and eighty thousand for the country and city respectively were based on the collection of the triennial poll tax; but I cannot help thinking that a great many more Chinese must have evaded the tax than the officials allowed for—not, indeed, an unlikely supposition. The evidence of one's own eyes is apt to be fallacious, but one can hardly day by day see the crowds of Chinamen that throng the streets of Bangkok and not believe that this computation must be much below the mark.

Chinese immigration takes place both by way of Bangkok and through the Shan states in the north. The great majority of Celestials, of course, come to Bangkok, where an overwhelming proportion of them are settled. The regular steamers plying between Bangkok and Singapore and Hongkong bring new supplies weekly to the labour market. Many of these are natives of Singapore and Hongkong themselves, particularly in the relatively well-to-do class; but the great mass of the coolies come from Hainan and Swatow, especially from the former; and it is interesting to remember that if the French ever take possession of this island, a very considerable proportion of the population of Bangkok, perhaps nearly a quarter of it, will become *ipso facto* French subjects. The Chinese, being an essentially gregarious people, love large cities, where also there is more chance of making money, and so most of them remain in the capital and its neighbourhood; but they are scattered throughout the land, and in any town of considerable size form a large proportion of the population, becoming the chief business people of the place. Travellers describe them as the ubiquitous Chinese. Wherever there is an opening for trade, there will they surely be gathered together, for they have as keen a scent for dollars and rupees as vultures for a carcase. Nor does anything come amiss that brings grist to their mill. They are ready to take up any form of work, and are proving themselves

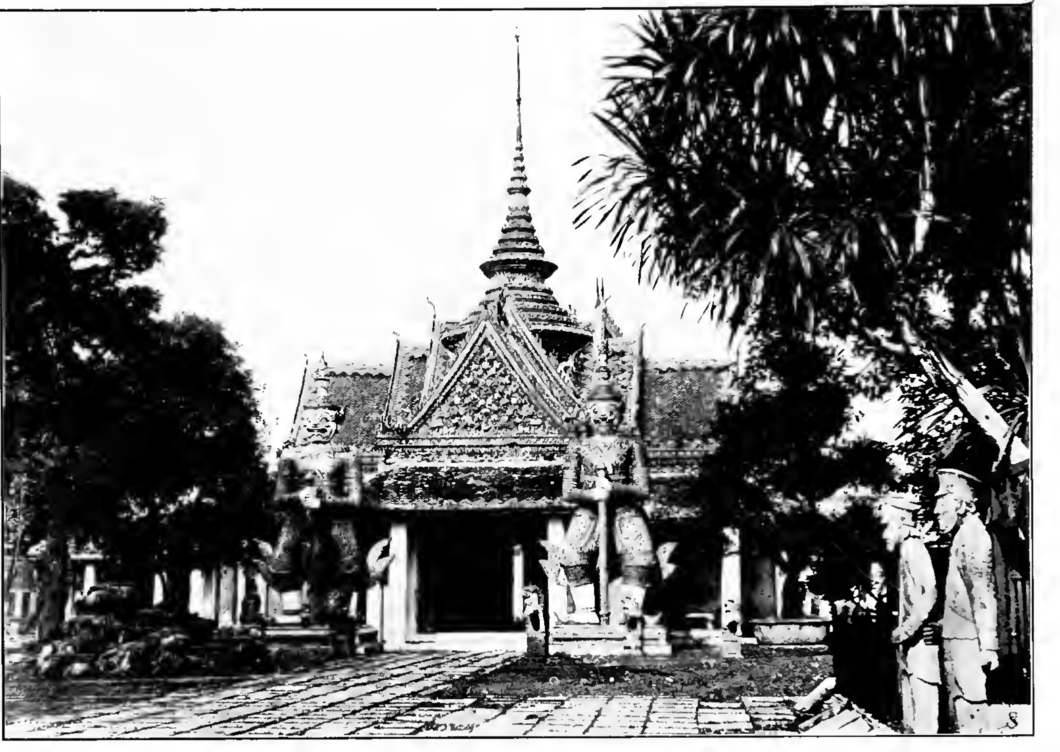
the most adaptable of peoples. Whether it be gambling farming, which appears to be their special province, or ordinary commerce, whether skilled craftsmanship or manual labour that affords an opening, there are always Chinese ready to avail themselves of it; and they seem to have an eye for opportunities which escape the notice of less shrewd or energetic competitors. Thus not only do they dominate all the townships of any importance by gradually creeping into the most lucrative employments; but by their willingness to do all the hard work that is required, they are making themselves more and more indispensable every year as labour is needed in increasing quantities for the construction of railways and other such purposes, and so are supplanting the lazy, quiet-loving natives who have virtually sold to them their birthright for a mess of pottage. Prince Henri d'Orleans compared them with the Jews (not perhaps an unmixed compliment from a Frenchman), and he took his comparison so seriously that he accounted for the total absence of Jews from Eastern Asia by the impossibility of their coexisting with the Chinese in the same country; for how could there be room together for two such peoples bent on the same objects, and always on the look-out for the same chances? The Chinese, indeed, have a wider scope than the Jews, for although money-making in its various branches is undoubtedly their *forte*, yet they are not above

the hard manual labour which the Jew despises. By their complete self-sufficiency they are able to perform all the functions required of the population of a large country, which is not the case with the Jews, whose sphere is more restricted.

Thus it is that the Chinese go forth and conquer, for there is absolutely nothing to which they will not turn their hands. In Siam, apart from one or two European shops in Bangkok, almost all the retail trade of any importance has fallen to them. There is no provincial town of any size but has its Chinese community, and its Chinese shops with cheap European goods, mostly English and German, supplemented perhaps by Chinese paper umbrellas. In the capital itself, besides catering for their own fellow-countrymen and the Siamese in the way of provisions and necessaries, the Chinese enjoy a considerable European custom. The most successful general dealer, "The Whiteley of Bangkok," as he styles himself, is a Chinaman from Singapore, and anything from groceries to periodical literature can be procured at his shop. Then, too, there are carpenters, tailors, and shoemakers innumerable, and it is difficult to see why in cases, at least, where comfort rather than appearance is the chief consideration, resort should be had to the expensive European stores for furniture, clothes, &c., which can be bought at half the price from the humbler Chinese establishments. The gambling and lottery farming also seems to fall naturally into their hands.

Although seldom employed in Government offices, they form the majority of the lower clerks and accountants in the banks and commercial firms. Of those who act in this capacity, some have been educated in the missionary or Government schools in Bangkok, while the rest hail from the British colonies of Hongkong and Singapore.

In past times it was the Chinese who did much of the artistic work attributed to the Siamese. Thus a great deal of the so-called old Siamese pottery was really the product of Chinese workmanship from Siamese designs; but unfortunately more utilitarian influences now prevail, and almost all artistic impulse seems to have died out in Siam. There is plenty of other work, of a grosser sort, however, for the Chinaman to do, and what with road making, railways, and bridge building, ship loading, and general coolie labour, he need never lack employment. Not only does he work for hire, but in addition to ordinary trading he seeks a livelihood in other ways on his own account. Thus in the coast villages of the Malay Peninsula he is an energetic fisherman, and exports timber and jungle produce, he plants pepper and grows vegetables; and though the Shans and Burmans monopolise the working of the gem mines, for which they have a peculiar talent, the Chinaman is to be found in most of the other mining districts of the country. According to Mr. Warington Smyth there were nearly fifty



Entrance to a Temple.

With Figures borrowed from the Chinese.

thousand Chinese in Puket in 1884, though the mining population has since decreased considerably; and this writer notes how with characteristic patience the Chinamen in certain districts work the tin down with crowbars on the hillside, and calmly knock out the crystals with their hammers, a process which no other person but a Chinese coolie could make worth his while.[1]

To the European resident who is not an employer of labour, or does not direct a commercial establishment, the Chinaman is chiefly familiar in his capacity of domestic servant. A few may have Siamese "boys," but the cooks almost always, and the coolies invariably, are Chinese. It cannot be said that they are employed by Europeans on account of any great love inspired by them, but simply because necessity knows no choice; and though as a rule residents in China itself speak well of them as servants, it is certainly different in Bangkok, where they are only tolerated as a necessary evil. Even among the best, there is rarely that bond of attachment between master and servant, humanising the relation and elevating it out of the region of the sordid, which, for instance, is generally to be found in the case of Siamese servants. Even if the "boy" be honest and reduce his pilfering and squeezing to a minimum, the arrangement is only regarded as one of mutual advantage to both parties, and one which

[1] "Five Years in Siam," by H. Warington Smyth.

can be readily broken to suit either of them. The truth is that the Chinaman in Bangkok is a travelled man, and for better or for worse he has gained the independence of mind which comes from seeing foreign lands. Unlike his countryman at home, he does not feel bound to the spot, but has learned from experience how easy it is for him to pack up his few belongings and betake himself elsewhere if the spirit moves him; nor, dogged and obstinate being that he is, if he has once made up his mind to go, will anything induce him to stay. Unpopular with Europeans, the Chinese, taken as a whole, are no less so with the Siamese, who, however, are so kindly and tolerant a people that they appear to suffer them gladly in their midst. They have no difficulty even in obtaining Siamese wives, for the Siamese woman is a shrewd, practical person, and is willing to put sentiment in the background for the sake of obtaining a hard-working and not unaffectionate husband who has his little savings and a thriving business. The Chinaman is thus obtaining a regular foothold in Siam, and though the bulk of the Chinese population are still migratory and continually flit backwards and forwards to China (which they regard as the home of their old age, and in which they hope to have their bodies laid at rest), yet a generation is growing up which is likely to have the same feeling for Siam that the Straits-born Chinese have for the country of their birth.

The Chinaman born in Siam is almost invariably the son of a Siamese mother, for there are but few purely Chinese women in the country. Nevertheless, though often unable to speak any language but Siamese,[1] he is proud of being a Chinaman and wearing the queue like any other Celestial, and continues to bear his clan and family name. The *Lukchin*, as he is called, is a somewhat remarkable specimen, and affords an undeniable confirmation of the theories of those who believe in the virtues of a mixed descent. He has undoubtedly far more "grit" in him than the ordinary Siamese; and a missionary who has probably had more experience of his character than almost any one else, informed me that he considered the *Lukchin* to possess in full measure the good qualities of both races, the vigour, hardheadedness, and energy of the Chinaman, coupled with the suavity and kindly temperament of the Siamese. Of course in the second and third generation there is a tendency for him to get lost among the natives of the country, and there will soon be a good admixture of Chinese blood among those who pass for pure Siamese, an admixture which may in time considerably strengthen the weak and apathetic Siamese character. Naturally it is almost entirely among

[1] In making inquiries in one of the largest boys' schools in Singapore, I found that the great majority of Chinese boys could speak no language but Malay. They were very reluctant, however, to make the admission.

the lower classes that the mixture takes place, but wherever a new strain is introduced the effects are generally noticeable at once. Thus in the highest stratum of Siamese society the family which is admittedly ahead of all others in ability and force of character, and which includes among its members the queen and her full brother, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, has Chinese blood in its veins. Few regular Chinese, it is true, have opportunities of rising to the highest posts, but one remarkable family of three brothers have reached positions of high executive authority. The distinguished Phya Rasadan,[1] Rajah or Governor of Trang, like his two brothers the Rajahs of Renawng and Langsuan, is a Chinaman. He has proved himself a model administrator. He himself introduced the Burmah village system into his province; he has built roads, encouraged public works, and improved the agriculture of the district. He has also suppressed robbery, and, in fact, made Trang a model province. As regards his relation to the Siamese it is worthy of mention that in February, 1901, he came to Bangkok, and formally changed his nationality by going through the ceremony of having his queue cut off in the presence of a large gathering of princes and officials at the residence of the Minister of the Interior.

Whether or not the Chinese intermingle so far with the Siamese as to produce a permanent effect

[1] Cf. "Five Years in Siam," vol. ii. p. 8.

on the national character, yet assuredly they are a great and increasing force in the country. They form an invaluable, if somewhat turbulent, element in the population. The secret societies, which seem to be almost as invariable concomitants of the Chinese as their very pigtails, are the bane of the authorities, especially in Bangkok. The Secret Societies Act passed a few years ago, making all such associations illegal except under certain conditions, does not appear to have had much effect, and of course no Chinese societies have registered themselves under it. At the same time there is not much fear now of any general combination, as the Chinese in Siam come from widely different parts of the empire, and are consequently very much divided by internal feuds and dislikes—often, indeed, not understanding one another's speech. In fact, a few years ago a serious riot arising out of a feud between two secret societies could only be quelled by calling in the aid of the military. For the Chinaman resembles the Cornishman, who just tolerates a Devon man, but regards the inhabitant of every other English county as a foreigner. At the time of the great crisis in 1900 there was of course some anxiety in Bangkok, and most of the Europeans began to polish up their revolvers, but there was no real danger, and the dreaded July passed off quite quietly. The truth is that the Chinese in Bangkok, as in any other foreign land, are under the influence of very different feelings and actuated

by very different motives from their fellow-countrymen at home. To begin with, they are themselves foreigners, and have not therefore that same emotional and unreasoned hatred of the foreign devil that has proved such a powerful incentive to insurrection in China. Then, too, they have had the advantage of such educational enlightenment as a voyage to another land gives; and they know also on which side their bread is buttered, and how foolish it would be for them to throw away the comparatively golden opportunities of making money for which they have sacrificed so much in forsaking their native land. Besides, they have no means of escape. There is no unlimited *hinterland* behind them, and practically their only way of leaving the country is in a European ship.

But though his mind has undoubtedly been broadened by seeing new men and new customs, the member of the ordinary coolie class still remains in a very ignorant state. It is said that during the Chino-Japanese War posters were put up all over the Chinese quarters in Bangkok announcing the great victories gained by the Chinese armies and fleets, and that the news was accepted with credence as implicit as it would have been in any remote corner of the Flowery Empire itself. Nor does the Chinaman seem to lose any of his innate stubbornness and pigheadedness with change of scenery and surroundings. He always remains convinced that his own way of doing things is

the best, and no amount of persuasion will move him. Although he is, when he chooses, one of the hardest workers in the world, nothing, if he elects to be idle, will induce him to change his mind. The shipping firms, for example, are completely at the mercy of the coolies they employ for loading and unloading; and if these worthies take it into their heads to cease work, there is no remedy, and the departure of the steamers has to be postponed. During the three or four days over which the celebration of the Chinese New Year is spread all business necessarily stops. The banks and important firms close, and no ships are able to leave the port. Bangkok for the time being becomes a regular pandemonium; life is rendered more or less unbearable by the noise and fumes of squibs and crackers fired without cessation night and day for the purpose of keeping off devils and evil spirits during the coming year.

Such is the impression left on the foreigner by the character of this remarkable people, who are spreading over all South-eastern Asia, even if their progress has been checked in other parts of the globe. It is indisputable that they possess a force and vitality, an aptitude for work, and a power of endurance that are conspicuously absent in the other races of these regions. Even though in a minority, they are already the backbone of the labouring population, and as time goes on will become more and more indispensable. I have

made inquiries of employers of labour in various parts of the Far East, and the answer of all is that the native peoples, whether Malays, Javanese, Siamese, or what not, are worthless in comparison with the Chinese. It may be granted, then, that they will spread further and further until they form practically the working population of nearly the whole of the tropical Far East; though it does not seem at present likely that they will encroach much further on India, where competition is now keen and it is almost as hard to procure a living as in China itself. So far the European does not feel particularly concerned, for white men are excluded anyhow by physical conditions from manual labour in these countries. The question which really interests him is,—how far are the Chinese capable of raising themselves to a higher grade and entering on competition with him in the sphere of commerce and manufacture, as they have successfully competed in the domain of labour with their Asiatic neighbours? And with this question is mixed up an even more important one, the question of the place that China is likely to take among the Powers of the world. What is to be her political as well as her commercial and economic future?

The idea of the Yellow Peril was perhaps first forcibly brought to the public attention by the late Mr. Charles Pearson when in an often-quoted passage he prophesied: "The day will come, and perhaps is not far distant, when the European

observer will look round to see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression, or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so, in government, monopolising the trade of their own regions, and circumscribing the industry of the European; when Chinamen and the nations of Hindostan, the States of South America, by that time predominantly Indian, and it may be African nations of the Congo and the Zambesi, under a dominant caste of foreign rulers, are represented by fleets in the European seas, invited to international conferences, and welcomed as allies in the quarrels of the civilised world. The citizens of these countries will then be taken up into the social relations of the white races, will throng the English turf, or the salons of Paris, and will be admitted to intermarriage. It is idle to say that, if all this should come to pass, our pride of place will not be humiliated. We were struggling amongst ourselves for supremacy in a world which we thought of as destined to belong to the Aryan and to the Christian faith, to the letters and arts and charm of social manners which we have inherited from the best times in the past. We shall wake to find ourselves elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside, by peoples whom we have looked down upon as servile and thought of as bound always to minister to our needs."[1] This idea, if

[1] "National Life and Character," by Charles Pearson, p. 84.

it was ever taken seriously, was, at least as far as the Chinese are concerned, thrust into the background by the utter inefficiency betrayed by them in their war with Japan, but has since been somewhat revived by recent events. In the Boxer movement the Chinese certainly evinced a vigour and a capacity for combination that took even their friends by surprise. How far, then, does this movement betoken a power of recuperation which will make China a real force to be reckoned with in the future history of the world?

Sir Robert Hart, whose knowledge of the Chinese is unique, gloomily predicts that in fifty years' time there will be millions of Boxers in serried ranks and war's panoply at the call of the Chinese Government, which, if it continues to exist, will encourage, uphold, and develop this national Chinese movement. "Twenty millions or more," he says, "of Boxers armed, drilled, disciplined, and animated by patriotic—if mistaken—motives will make residence in China impossible for foreigners, will take back from foreigners everything foreigners have taken from China, will pay off old grudges with interest, and will carry the Chinese flag and Chinese arms into many a place that even fancy will not suggest to-day, thus preparing for the future upheavals and disasters never even dreamt of. All things indeed seem to point to the conclusion that China is likely to occupy in the latter part of the century a much stronger position than she does at

the commencement. She may no doubt have then at her disposal a large body of troops trained on more or less modern methods and armed with more or less modern weapons, which, combined with the difficulties of penetrating any distance into her huge territories, will make her practically invincible while acting on the defensive, and will enable her to dictate terms to foreigners settled in her own country."[1] It does not, however, seem to me, speaking with all due deference to Sir Robert Hart's great authority, that the facts of the case compel us to take such an alarmist view of the future as he has propounded in his article. The Chinese are a race of singular vigour and capacity for work. They are remarkably resolute and determined, and when animated by a strong emotion, such as hatred of foreigners and missionaries, show a power of combination that does not always characterise them. But they have their limitations, and limitations which it does not appear likely that the lapse of time will materially interfere with. They have all the defects of their qualities and more. They are frugal, industrious, and intelligent up to a point; they have a wonderful power of imitation, and can go ahead admirably on lines laid down for them by others; but they are conservative in the worst sense of the word—pigheaded, mechanical, and utterly wanting in originality and initiative. They may follow closely

[1] *Fortnightly Review*, November, 1900.

on the heels of Europeans, but they will never be abreast of them. They may have new models and inventions, but they will never have quite the newest; and it is just this which will make all the difference. Acting on the defensive when the other conditions are so much in their favour, these points of inferiority will not matter; but their whole history and character seem to indicate that they will never be able to compete successfully with Europeans, if they attempt to come out of their shell and assume the offensive. The only real danger would seem to lie in the possibility of the Japanese, a far quicker and more agile-minded race, exploiting the Chinese and organising them to victory under their own leadership. But all these things lie on the knees of the gods.

As in war and politics, so with commerce and manufacture. Here again the Chinaman is hampered by his limitations. Commerce, it may be admitted, is his *forte;* but what sort of a commercial future can we augur for him from our present knowledge and observations? In Siam and other neighbouring countries he is gradually getting all the *petit commerce* into his hands, and perhaps may eventually absorb nearly all the retail trade. He also attempts higher flights. Thus out of nineteen rice mills in Bangkok, the great majority, fourteen or fifteen I believe, are owned and managed by Chinese, and in one or two cases even Chinese engineers are employed. The profits in this busi-

ness have fallen off so much in recent years with the decline in the price of rice, that the field has been left largely to them by Europeans, who are not content with such low returns. Many small steamship lines too, in the Straits and neighbouring parts, are in the hands of Chinese, who, by their economy and minute supervision, are enabled to run at a small profit what to a European would mean loss. In some cases even individual Chinamen amass considerable wealth; and the visitor to Penang or Singapore is sure often to remark the luxury and splendour of the equipages in which they turn out for their evening drive. But allowing for individual exceptions, there can be little doubt that the Chinese, taken as a whole, are lacking in the qualities both of imagination and enterprise, which, next to integrity, form the most important elements in commercial success on a large scale. Herein they are totally unlike the Jews, with whom, as I mentioned, they have been compared; nor does there seem to be any cause for fear that a house of Chinese Rothschilds may one day dominate the financial world. The enterprise to make great ventures, to lose all or to gain all, a quality which has done so much to place the British at the head of commercial nations, and the imagination to see new openings, and conceive new situations—these are characteristics which are pre-eminently wanting in the Chinese. They are too slow and cautious. To such an extent is their economy carried that they are penny-wise

and pound-foolish. Thus a Chinese shipowner will go on with old and worn-out machinery, till some day there is a breakdown, involving a heavy bill to pay, rather than incur the expense of replacing it by new before it is too late. The Chinese will invariably be behind their Western competitors in matters involving enterprise and expenditure on a large scale. On their own soil, where conditions are so favourable to them, where they understand the demands of the market, and have an unlimited supply of the cheapest and not the least efficient labour in the world, they may prove serious rivals. Much doubtless of the local trade, and, though probably to a less extent, of the local manufactures will pass into their hands. At the same time all evidence seems to point to the conclusion, that neither in politics nor in commerce are they likely to take the position of a world power. There remains, however, still the possible danger of their being exploited not only politically but also economically by their Japanese neighbours.

NOTE.—This chapter was written before the publication of the Anglo-Japanese Agreement of 1902.

CHAPTER XI

INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS

THOUGH Siam, as we have seen, has been known to the European trader and missionary for three centuries and more, the real period of European influence practically commences with the ratification of the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Great Britain in 1855, which was followed by treaties with France, the United States, Germany and other countries. Since then the bulk of European commerce, and the number of European residents, have steadily grown, and in the last decade the rate of increase has been more than proportionately great. Siam is a rich country. It is one of the best rice-producing lands in the world. There is great wealth in its teak forests in the north, and though its other products are overshadowed in importance by these two, yet they are by no means to be regarded with contempt. In his search for new markets the European merchant has naturally cast his eye on Siam, and the competition for Siamese trade is every year keener and keener. It is a prize

well worth struggling for in itself. But additional importance has been lent to the Siamese question by the fact that it is not only Siamese trade that is at stake, but that the country which controls Siam may, it is thought, command one of the most important routes to the provinces of Southern China.

For many years after the signing of the treaties with the chief Western Powers, Siam was suffered to pursue the even tenour of her way, and wealth and commerce grew steadily if slowly. Nearly all the trade fell into British hands. British merchants established themselves and invested capital in the country, whilst almost all the exports were carried in British vessels to the neighbouring British colonies of Singapore and Hongkong. Meanwhile, France, who had very little material interest in Siam, had been pushing her way steadily in the eastern part of the Indo-China peninsula. In 1862 the French established themselves in Lower Cochin China, and in the following year assumed the protectorate of Cambodia. In 1866 they despatched the scientific expedition already referred to,[1] the result of which was to dissipate their hopes of gaining access to the trade of Southern China by the Mekong, and to force them to turn their attention elsewhere. In 1874, accordingly, they made a treaty of commerce with the Government of Annam, which led to their forming within the year a protectorate over the whole of Annam, embracing

[1] Ch. II., p. 22.

Tongking and Northern Cochin China. Thus the whole of Indo-China, east of Siam, became virtually a French possession. Just about the same time the British by their conquest of Upper Burmah in 1885, had advanced to the extreme north-western portion of Siam, and by the suzerainty they thus acquired over the Burmese Shan States, which stretched eastwards of the Upper Mekong, forming a buffer state between China and Siam, actually came in contact for a short distance with the new French Indo-Chinese Empire. Here, at last, were Great Britain and France face to face in the Far East. A few years before, their territories had been separated by many hundred miles, but now by their advance from the West and East respectively, they had become coterminous. True, the line of contact was not a very long one, but quite a new and unexpected state of affairs had thus arisen. It is, therefore, not surprising to find the French Ambassador, M. Waddington, calling on Lord Salisbury in 1889 with a proposal for the neutralisation of Siam. The French Government, he stated, had a twofold object in view. They wished to establish a strong independent kingdom of Siam, with well-defined frontiers on both sides, and they desired to come to an arrangement by which a permanent barrier might be established between the possessions of Great Britain and France in the Indo-China Peninsula. Such an arrangement would be advantageous to both countries, and would prevent the

complications which otherwise might arise between them. It would be necessary in the first instance, that the frontier between Cochin China and Siam should be fixed, and Her Majesty's Government would no doubt desire a settlement of the boundaries of Burmah. As regarded the frontier of Cochin China, the French Government did not wish to extend it to Luang Prabang, but they would propose to draw a line from a point nearly due east of that place southwards to the Mekong, and below that point to make the river the dividing line between the two countries until it entered the territory of Cambodia. They considered that, both on the French and English side, the boundaries of Siam should be defined up to the Chinese frontier.

To this Lord Salisbury replied, that while sympathising with the general objects indicated by the Ambassador, he was unable, without fuller particulars as to the contemplated arrangements, to express an opinion on his proposals, but that he would have the question examined, and should be glad if M. Waddington could let him have more exact details as to the proposed line of frontier between Cochin China and Siam.[1]

The French representative, it will be observed, specifically renounced any claim on the part of his country to the province of Luang Prabang, which had been in the undisputed possession of the Siamese

[1] Blue Book on Siam (No. 1), 1894, Nos. 3 and 309.

for seventy years, and was marked as part of Siam on French official maps, in which the frontier line was drawn considerably to the east of the Nam U; France had, moreover, in fact acknowledged the sovereignty of Siam by the Convention of May 7, 1886, which provided for the appointment of a French Vice-Consul there.[1] It is interesting to note this pronouncement in the light of subsequent events. After a prolonged consultation with Lord Cross, the Secretary of State for India, Lord Salisbury, eventually replied to M. Waddington on the 27th August, that Her Majesty's Government was favourably inclined to such an arrangement by which a strong independent kingdom of Siam with well-defined frontiers would be established. He forwarded at the same time a map supplied by the India Office, which showed the approximate boundaries of Siam towards the north-west and north, such as they had hitherto been considered to exist. The western boundary of Siam was absolutely demarcated as far as the northern limit of British possessions previous to 1885. Lord Salisbury added, that on hearing from his Excellency what were the views of the French Government as to the limits of Siam on the east and north-east, he would be happy to consider with him what was the next step that

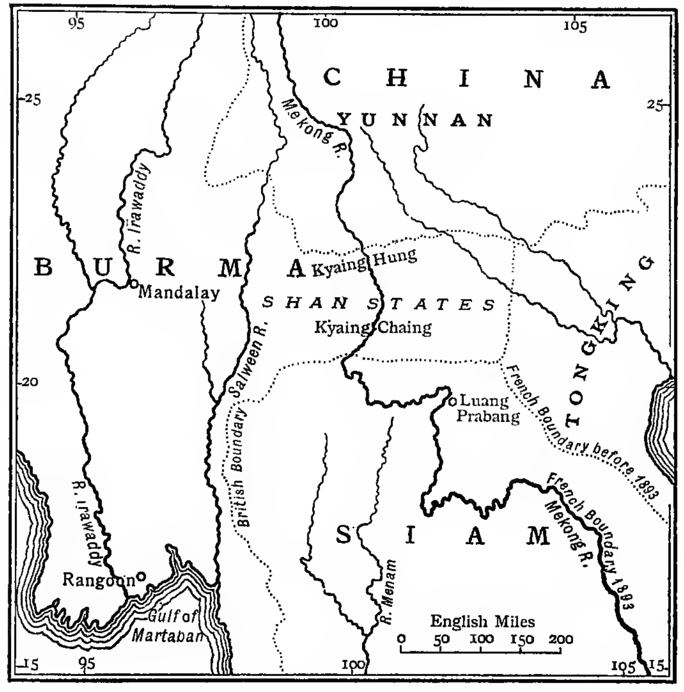
[1] Those who wish for fuller information on this subject should consult the forcible article by Lord Curzon in the *Nineteenth Century* for July, 1893, in which the question of the Franco-Siamese boundary is discussed at length.

should be taken for the purpose of carrying his proposal into effect; at the same time he remarked that the extent of territory claimed by Siam, and the validity of those claims, could, of course, only be determined in communication with the Government of Siam itself.

No answer was ever received to this letter, and the subject was not revived until the 16th February, 1892, when M. Waddington made an entirely new proposal. He said that his Government were of opinion that, in order to avoid further differences between the two Powers, it might be advantageous that each Power should bind itself to the other not to extend its influence beyond the Upper Mekong. He subsequently repeated his proposal on May 10th, explaining in answer to an objection made by Lord Salisbury, that he did not mean to say that the present sphere of influence either of France or Great Britain actually extended up to the Mekong, that his proposal was not an assertion of present rights, but (as he expressed it) a prophylactic. As a matter of fact, the State of Kyaing Chaing (a dependency of the formerly Burmese and then British feudatory State of Kyaington) extended east of the Mekong. It was intended to transfer this state to Siam if she would accept it, just as it was proposed to hand over Kyaing Hung, the northern portion of Kyaington, to China; but the transfer had not yet been made, and consequently it was impossible that the exercise of British influence

should for the present be restricted to the west of the Mekong.

Meanwhile a change of Government had taken place in England, and the reins of the Foreign Office had passed into Lord Rosebery's hands.



M. Waddington, who had had no reply to his proposal from Lord Salisbury, again recurred to the subject in conversation with Lord Rosebery, who explained in two notes on December 23, 1892, and April 3, 1893, that the British Government had acquired rights in certain

districts east of the Mekong, notably in Kyaing Hüng and over Kyaing Chaing,[1] and that they proposed to make over the former to China and cede the latter to Siam; but if Siam should at any time abandon the district of Kyaing Chaing, the rights of the British Crown in regard to the whole of that district, whether to the east or west of the Mekong, would revive. Under these arrangements with China and Siam, the possessions or Protectorate of Great Britain would nowhere extend to the east of the Mekong; but Lord Rosebery thought that such a specific engagement as M. Waddington had suggested would be open to misconstruction and likely to cause alarm and suspicion on the part of Siam. Until the arrangements were completed and the French Government had furnished more definite explanations of their views with regard to the frontiers of Siam on the east and north-east, Lord Rosebery did not think there was a sufficiently clear basis for a formal engagement between the two Governments with regard to their respective interests and spheres of influence in these regions.

The negotiation was not further pursued by the French Government. A new phase had meanwhile been entered upon, and action had begun to take

[1] Kyaington, Kyaing Chaing, and Kyaing Hung are the names as they are pronounced in the Burmese dialect. They are here given as they are written in the Blue Book. Kyaing is the equivalent for the Siamese Chieng.

the place of discussion. In 1887 there had been disturbances on the north-eastern frontier, Luang Prabang being attacked and occupied for a time by semi-Chinese marauders called Chin Haws; and the French then proposed to send commissioners with a Siamese expedition that was being equipped, in order to come to some arrangement about the frontier. Several years, however, elapsed, and nothing was concluded. In July, 1891, came the sudden news that the French had occupied Point Samit (which lay a few miles north of the Siamese frontier on the Cambodian coast) and Tung-Chieng-Kham (long. 103° 25′ east and lat. 19° 40′ north), in the district of Müang Phuen, to the north-east of Luang Prabang; but later the Government ordered that these places should be evacuated. It was just subsequent to these events that M. Waddington renewed the proposal he had previously made to Lord Salisbury, that the Mekong should be the limit of the British and French spheres of influence, and in March, 1893, in conversation with Lord Rosebery, he made for the first time the startling statement that his Government did not admit that any part of Siam lay on the left bank of the Mekong, but regarded the country lying on that side as belonging to Annam, a statement directly conflicting with his previous declaration regarding Luang Prabang. Events now began to march rapidly. In the same month accusations were

made against the Siamese of invading Annam, and the French Minister at Bangkok received instructions to put forward a claim bringing the boundary of Annam up to the eastern bank of the Mekong. The Siamese naturally protested, but expressed their willingness to refer any doubtful points to arbitration. The French, however, insisted on an immediate evacuation of the positions occupied by the Siamese in what they asserted was the territory of Annam. They had no intention, they declared, of renouncing any of the rights of Cambodia and Annam.

The French followed up their claim by taking action, and in April came the news that they had occupied Stung-Treng, situated on the Mekong within the Siamese frontier between the 13th and 14th parallels, and a few days later that they had taken the island of Khône below the rapids. The Siamese still offered arbitration. The French would accept nothing but the immediate concession of their demands, and matters began to look very black. Lord Rosebery, to whom the Siamese appealed, urged them to take no action which would precipitate a rupture with France and to exercise great caution; and the substance of his advice was communicated to the French Government. Meanwhile an attack had been made on the French positions at Khône. This, the Siamese asserted, whether rightly or wrongly, was not instigated by their Government, but was the

work of the half-barbarous tribes in the neighbourhood, who were always ready to take advantage of a disturbance. However, the result was unfortunate, for several Annamite soldiers were killed or wounded, and Captain Thoreux, who was in command, was taken prisoner. This occurrence, whoever may have been responsible for it, naturally irritated public opinion in France, where there was a perceptible stiffening of policy and every day an assumption of a more and more aggressive attitude on the Siamese question, so that it became increasingly difficult for any other Government to interfere in the matter. Lord Rosebery continued to urge the Siamese to avoid a breach of friendly relations with France and to comply with the French request to obtain the liberation of Captain Thoreux, who had been made prisoner in an encounter which took place on territory that they claimed to be under their authority, and in opposition to their wishes and instructions. The Siamese contended that Captain Thoreux had been in command of an aggressive and hostile expedition, and that his capture was thereby fully justified. But as an act of grace they consented to hand him over to the French. This attempted justification, however, on the part of the Siamese was hardly consistent with their previous disclaimer of responsibility, and throws some doubt on their *bona fides* in the matter. There was undeniably a strong feeling in Bangkok in favour of

resistance, and preparations for defence were being pushed on feverishly.

The French continued to advance along the Lower Mekong, while the Siamese retired, evacuating several more posts. On the occasion of the abandonment of one of these posts in the early part of June, the French accused the Siamese of treacherously murdering one of their officials, a M. Grosgurin, who was conducting the Siamese back to the Mekong. The French alleged that he had been taken ill on the way and massacred with his escort by the Siamese, and they at once signified their intention of demanding reparation for this outrage. The Siamese, however, denied the French allegation, which as a matter of fact was proved to be quite untrue at the trial subsequently held, M. Grosgurin's party having been the first to attack the Siamese. Nevertheless, further fuel was added to the flames, which were now mounting high.

In the previous April the British ship *Swift* had been despatched from Singapore to Bangkok at the suggestion of the British Minister, who had telegraphed that it was advisable in the event of possible complications that a British gunboat should be sent to Bangkok to protect British property and maintain order. Since then the crisis had become more acute. The British merchants in Bangkok had taken alarm, and were urging the Foreign Office to take immediate steps to protect British

lives and British trade (which formed ninety per cent. of the total amount), in view of the rumours that the French, who had already occupied one or two islands in the Gulf, were going to send a squadron to Bangkok and close the port. One of the chief dangers to be guarded against under the circumstances, they said, was rioting on the part of the lower classes of the Chinese population, which would greatly endanger the lives and property of foreign residents. Instructions were therefore sent on June 28th to the Commander-in-Chief of the British naval forces on the China station to send a second ship to Bangkok, and to hold a third in readiness to proceed there should her presence be required. Accordingly, a few days later, the *Pallas* was despatched from Singapore. An explanation was given to the French Government, who had shown a tendency to resent this action on the part of the British, that it was necessitated by the possibility of a native rising caused by the approach of the French; such a rising would endanger life and property and prejudice British commercial interests, which were dominant in Siam. At the same time, assurances were given that the British Government were urging the Siamese to come to a friendly understanding with France, and were ready to take any steps to contribute to that result. On their side, the French undertook that any further movements of their fleet would at once be intimated to Her Majesty's Government.

Early in July M. Pavie, the French Minister, notified the Siamese Government, that it had been decided to send two more French gunboats to Siamese waters, in addition to the *Lutin* (which was anchored off the French Legation), for the protection of French subjects during the present state of uncertainty. The reason given was that the British Government had ordered several ships to proceed for this object, and that the French Government were only following the example initiated by other Powers. The vessels were expected to arrive at the bar on the 13th July, and a request was forwarded from the French admiral that arrangements might be made for supplying them with pilots, and that they might be permitted to proceed to Bangkok according to what he considered to be a right under the treaties. The Siamese answered that they had received no notice that the British Government intended to send ships to Bangkok or any other point on the Menam, in addition to the *Swift*, which lay off the British Legation, just as the *Lutin* was anchored off the French Legation, and they protested against the claim that any foreign Power could, as a matter of absolute right, send as many ships as it thought fit to Bangkok. Siam, they argued, would thereby be deprived of her natural right to protect herself, and if she were to accept such an interpretation of the treaties, she would abdicate her right to maintain

her own independence. Under the Treaty of 1856[1] French men-of-war are entitled to enter the river and anchor at Paknam; should they want to proceed to Bangkok, they must inform the Siamese authorities and arrange with them as to the place where they may anchor. Under this clause France was entitled to send as many ships as she pleased as far as Paknam. Before they could proceed further, she was bound to inform the Siamese and make arrangements with them as to the anchorage. Whether in the event of a refusal on the part of the Siamese she had any further power is not quite clear from the wording of the article. But it is not likely, as the Siamese urged, that they intended to allow any number of foreign ships to come up to their capital simply on giving notice, for such notice would prove an unmeaning formality. This interpretation, too, is borne out by the article[2] in the British Treaty of 1855, which does not permit British ships to proceed beyond Paknam except with the consent of the Siamese authorities.

Be this as it may, the Siamese were promptly informed by M. Pavie that the French gunboat *Inconstant* would go up in spite of opposition, and their reply was to commence closing up the mouth of the river. Lord Rosebery reminded the French of their promise to keep our Government informed of the movements of their fleet, and pointed out that the two additional British ships from Singapore

[1] Treaty of 1856, Article 15. [2] Article 7.

were instructed to remain outside the bar at the mouth of the river; therefore the reported intention of the French admiral to force his way up to Bangkok could not be based on any act of the British. The authorities in Paris were inclined to show moderation, and the Foreign Minister, M. Develle, in reply to Lord Rosebery's remonstrance, telegraphed that the ships already sent would remain outside the bar, and that the intention of sending others had been abandoned. On the very day, July 13th, that these assurances were given by the French Government, came the news that two French gunboats, the *Inconstant* and the *Comète*, had successfully passed the defences at the bar and were anchored off the French Legation at Bangkok. As Lord Rosebery at the time expressed it, there was no reason to doubt the good faith of M. Develle himself, but the French Government were drifting into a position of extreme gravity owing to the action of their officers, which appeared to be uncontrolled and irresponsible. On the morning of the 13th M. Pavie had informed the Siamese Government that the ships would be ordered to remain outside the bar, and it was reported by Captain Macleod, commanding the British ships off the bar, that the French naval commander had received a message with these instructions before entering the river. This was denied by the French; but even if Captain Macleod were mistaken, they were at any rate fully warned of the change of

General View of River, Bangkok.

intention on the part of their Government, Captain Macleod himself having sent word to them that they might expect instructions from Bangkok to wait outside the bar. Of this they took no notice, and being piloted by a local boat, proceeded at once to enter the river. When they were opposite the fort at the mouth of the river, and a mile or two below Paknam, the Siamese fired two blank cartridges by way of protest, and then several shots across their bows. The French replied, and after an engagement of about twenty minutes, in which the French had three men killed and three wounded, and the Siamese fifteen killed and twenty wounded, the French proceeded on their way up to Bangkok.

The fight at Paknam has been graphically described in more than one book, and as it has quite a local interest it is unnecessary to give a detailed narrative of it here. It has, indeed, proved a perfect godsend to Bangkok in its hours of dulness, and to render it anything like justice would require the ungrudging inspiration of the epic muse.[1] To those who are sceptical as to the lengths to which inefficiency and maladministration can go may be recommended a perusal of the accounts of this affair, which it would be hard to

[1] The best account is that given by Mr. Warington Smyth in his "Five Years in Siam." Mr. Henry Norman's description (in his "Far East") is a vivid one, but it is written with too anti-Siamese a bias.

match in the annals even of this land of topsy-turveydom. It proved a bitter awakening to the better Siamese; and the king, it is not going too far to say, has hardly been the same man since.

We have now reached another stage in the Franco-Siamese question. Here were three French gunboats in Bangkok prepared to enforce the demands of their Government. The Siamese were technically in the wrong in having opened fire on the French, who had a right, under their treaty, to anchor at Paknam above the fort. At the same time their intention clearly was to proceed to Bangkok, and, moreover, the French Minister had agreed that the ships should remain outside the bar, so that some justification could be pleaded. But really it was no question of technicalities. It was a case of a strong Power against a weak one; a case of "might is right" if ever there was such. The pity was that Siam by neglecting Lord Rosebery's sound advice had played into the hands of the French. But the heads of the Siamese had been turned, and they had foolishly imagined that they were capable of resisting a first-class European Power. The French Minister was now master of the situation, and he at once sent his ultimatum to the Siamese. His demands were: (1) That the whole of the left bank of the Mekong should be ceded to France; (2) that an indemnity of three million francs should be paid for the sufferers on July 13th; (3) that the officers responsible for

the French ships being attacked and Grosgurin's murderers should be punished.[1] Forty-eight hours within which to comply were to be allowed, at the expiration of which, in the event of non-compliance, the French ships would leave Bangkok and a blockade of the Menam would be established. The Siamese agreed in substance to the second and third of these demands. With regard to the first they declared that no explicit definition had ever been made to them as to what constituted the rights of Cambodia and Annam on the Mekong, but as they were anxious to secure peace they agreed to cede to France the country lying to the south of the 18th parallel and to the east of the Mekong. These concessions were not deemed satisfactory, and the French Minister announced his intention of leaving Bangkok on the 26th.

So far the British Government had confined its action to counselling Siam to prudence and moderation. It had been continually assured by the French that they intended to respect the integrity and independence of Siam, just as it had been assured by M. Waddington that France laid no claim to Luang Prabang, which, with other districts, formed the territory of Siam lying east of the Mekong and north of the 18th parallel, and was therefore excepted from what the Siamese, in answer to the French ultimatum, expressed their willingness to concede. Up to this point the

[1] Blue Book, No 167.

British Government had looked upon the dispute as merely centred round the question of frontier on the Lower Mekong, and not directly concerning it. If, however, France were to take possession of all the Siamese territory east of the Mekong she would not only violate her promise to respect the integrity of Siam, but she would come in direct contact with Burmah, not to mention the fact that Great Britain possessed a reversionary interest in that part of the trans-Mekong territory of Siam which had belonged to the Shan States. The British Government could not therefore view this new claim on the part of the French with indifference, and Lord Dufferin was instructed to discuss the question with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs with the object of ascertaining, if possible, the real intentions of France. Lord Dufferin laid stress on these facts, and pointed out that, although at the outset of the dispute the English Government had considered the misunderstanding between France and Siam in regard to obscure questions of delimitation on the Lower Mekong as beyond their purview, the situation was entirely changed when the expanding claims of the French Government jeopardised the integrity of the entire kingdom of Siam, and brought France nearly half-way down to Bangkok and into actual juxtaposition with ourselves and Burmah. Such a transformation of the French pretensions, he added, was undoubtedly calculated to excite alarm in England. M. Develle

did not justify this new departure, but replied that public opinion in France was equally excited, observing that the terms of the first article of the ultimatum having been published to the world, and all France being acquainted with them, he could not now alter them. At the same time he assured Lord Dufferin that an acceptance on the part of the Siamese of the first article should not militate against a settlement of the question of the buffer state between France and England, the importance of which he fully recognised, and which stood outside the Franco-Siamese dispute. France was then allowed, though under protest, a free hand to exact the terms of the ultimatum, and the Siamese were urged by the British Government to accept the French demands unconditionally. The blockade meanwhile was enforced on July 25th, the real sufferers by it being the British.[1] Here again it may be remarked incidentally that the French commander seems to have taken matters under his own control, as M. Develle had informed Lord Dufferin that the blockade would not commence till the 31st. It continued, however, only until August 3rd, as the ultimatum was accepted unconditionally on the 27th by the Siamese, who also agreed to certain

[1] The French could well afford to enter on this blockade with a light heart. The British share of Siamese commerce at this time was about 90 per cent. of the whole. That of the French amounted to ·03 per cent.

additional terms demanded as guarantees; among which were the occupation by France of Chantaboon, pending evacuation of the left bank of the Mekong, and an undertaking by Siam to keep no military force within a distance of twenty-five kilometres from the right bank of the river nor in the provinces of Battambong and Angkor.

These terms having been accepted, negotiations were now commenced for the conclusion of a definitive convention between France and Siam, the French plenipotentiary being M. Le Myre de Vilers. Not content with the supplementary terms which under the guise of guarantees the French had added on to their ultimatum, M. Le Myre de Vilers now proposed articles which not only exceeded the terms of the ultimatum and of the supplementary guarantees, but were in Lord Rosebery's words calculated to materially infringe on that independence and integrity of the Siamese kingdom which the French Government had so explicitly pledged themselves to respect. The French, among other proposals, stipulated that the Siamese should not only not construct any fortified post or military establishment in the provinces of Battambong and Angkor, and within the twenty-five kilometres' radius of the Mekong, but that within these reserved zones the Siamese should be subject to a variety of other restrictions, and that the French should have power to establish agencies as they saw fit. Such proposals, if ac-

cepted, would not only have thrown open the Siamese frontier for five hundred miles, but would have given France control over a large and important portion of Siamese territory west of the Mekong. As Lord Dufferin wittily represented to the French Government, the Siamese were now in possession of an ultimatum, a penultimatum, and an ante-penultimatum.

Fortunately considerable modifications were made in the French demands, though the concessions extorted from the Siamese were much in excess of those originally required, and at length a treaty of peace was signed on October 3, 1893. With it came to a conclusion the acute phase of the Siamese question. Not to mention the restrictions placed on her in the provinces west of the Mekong, Siam had lost all her territory to the east of it, including a great portion of the province of Luang Prabang, to which the French had time after time declared they laid no claim. The claim, indeed, when put forward was a preposterous one, and was in direct violation of that principle which is the safeguard of all property, whether of individuals or nations, the principle on which are founded the laws of prescription that prevail in all civilised countries. On equally valid grounds, as Lord Dufferin said, might England lay claim to Normandy, Gascony, and Guienne. The only difference really was that France was dealing with a weak Power, whom she could coerce.

Whether our Government could have saved Luang Prabang to Siam is a question which has often been raised, and undoubtedly there was a feeling at the time among the mercantile community in the East that the attempt should have been made. But probably Lord Rosebery went as far as he could consistently with prudence. To have stood in the way of French claims to territory on the left bank of the Mekong would have been running a very serious risk of war with France, and that almost entirely on behalf of another country, though British interests were to a limited extent involved. At any rate once the ultimatum was issued it would have been dangerous to brave public opinion in France, excited and largely misinformed as it was. Even in spite of our policy of moderation and conciliation there was a considerable feeling against England. It was thought that we had been urging the Siamese to resistance, and the report was current, though it was at once contradicted, that British officers had been instructing the Siamese in torpedo practice. Another factor, too, had to be reckoned with. It is possible that the French Government itself would have been willing to moderate its demands in response to British protests. But it was obvious they were not free agents. The policy they were pursuing was that of the Colonial party in Indo-China, who had got completely out of hand and were bent on having things their own

way.[1] It was this party who were responsible for the additional terms demanded from Siam as supplementary guarantees for carrying out the ultimatum, and also later for those inserted in the proposed articles of the treaty. In particular the attempt to gain practical control over Battambong and Angkor was part of their avowed policy, and the annexation of these provinces was openly advocated in a book published by M. de Lanessan, the then Governor of Indo-China. There is no doubt that Battambong and Angkor would have gone the way of the trans-Mekong districts but for the firmness of British diplomacy, while if Siam had adopted whole-heartedly Lord Rosebery's advice to accede at once to the French demands instead of vacillating between submission and resistance she would have lost less than she did. Siam really owes a very great debt of gratitude to Great Britain for her assistance in 1893, a debt which has not been lessened by the terms finally obtained for her in 1896. The amount of their actual loss was obvious enough to the Siamese; what they did not so readily realise was the narrow escape they had had from incurring a far greater one, possibly even that of their national independence.

[1] Lord Curzon writes that the fiery Chauvinism of the Colonial Jingoes of Tongking and Saigon exceeds anything that he has anywhere encountered. Fortunately this has been neutralised to a great extent in recent years by the moderation and conciliatory disposition of the Government in Paris.

It only remained now for Siam to carry out her obligations under the treaty, and meanwhile the French continued to occupy Chantaboon, a port which they have not yet relinquished, though the Siamese loyally fulfilled their share of the contract many years ago. The task of settling their frontier and of creating, if possible, a buffer state to the north of Siam, had still to be arranged by Great Britain and France. Unfortunately the negotiations, which caused at the time much soreness and friction, came to nought. France was allowed to incorporate the land east of the Mekong, to which Great Britain had a reversion, from the point where the river leaves China to where it reaches Siamese territory; and nothing but the Mekong separates her new acquisitions from the British Shan States. It was, however, no small compensation for this failure that the two Powers were able as a result of their negotiations to come to an agreement in January, 1896, by which they guaranteed the independence of the basin of the Menam river. It is true that this did not constitute the whole of Siam. There were excepted from the agreement the districts of the Korat plateau and the Cambodian provinces to the east, and of the Malay Peninsula to the west, but Lord Salisbury carefully pointed out that these were as much integral parts of Siam as hitherto, and any interpretation of the Convention which threw doubts on the full right of the Siamese to them was misleading. To say, for

example, as the French Colonial press are in the habit of doing now, that the eastern provinces are within their sphere of influence, is absolutely in defiance of the Convention. The area chosen was selected, not because the claim of the king to the rest of his territory was less valid, but only because it was the area which affected British interests as a commercial nation. As Mr. Warington Smyth has pointed out, the Menam valley is for practical purposes Siam. Its population is more than five times that of the two excepted regions combined, and the present value of its trade may be placed roughly at seven times their combined total. It is obvious, therefore, that both politically and commercially Great Britain, not to mention Siam itself, benefited greatly by this agreement, and it was far more than an equivalent for the not very valuable territory east of the Mekong which had been practically surrendered to France. It secures all the most important part of Siam from the further aggression of the French Colonial party, who were far louder, and undoubtedly more genuine, in their outcries against it, than were the Opposition in England; and British merchants in Siam now enjoy a feeling of peace and security which would otherwise have been impossible after the events of 1893 and the period of unrest that followed them. The French have learned how little they have gained by their course of action. They now realise how worthless is the territory they have

acquired on the Mekong compared with the valley of the Menam, of which they are consequently all the more covetous.

Since 1896 the situation has not materially changed. The Siamese continue to distrust the French, and much irritation is felt at the continued occupation of Chantaboon, which costs France a considerable annual sum without apparently any compensating advantages. French trade with Siam is almost a negligible quantity, and French influence in the capital and the country generally is small. The policy of enrolling as many Asiatics as possible as French subjects, which seems to be one of the chief occupations of the French Legation in Bangkok, may no doubt give France numerous opportunities of causing petty annoyance to the Siamese Government, but can hardly strengthen materially her interests in the long run. British trade is still paramount, though the number of vessels flying the British flag is far smaller than it was a few years ago. The majority of the important appointments are held by British subjects. English is the second official language of the country, and is likely to remain so. The Europeans in the Education Department, which is now rapidly expanding, all hail from the United Kingdom, and their numbers are increasing every year. English is thus the language of the schools, and will probably continue so. The younger generation of Siamese are being brought up not only to speak the

English tongue, but what is equally important, to acquire English habits and ideas. English is the language of the Bangkok press, and the leading paper, the *Bangkok Times*, serves British interests with a moderation and good sense which are in striking contrast with the hysterical shrieks that are heard from Saigon. The British, too, though they may not all be individually popular, for they have a way of riding rough-shod over feelings and prejudices which they will not take the trouble to understand, are no doubt reckoned by the Siamese as amongst their most useful and conscientious servants. Siam has always been treated fairly by Great Britain, who has never encroached an inch on her territory, and has gone out of her way to uphold Siamese independence. That Siam should continue independent is of the first importance to British interests in the Far East. What Great Britain wants is not territory, but an open market for her trade, and also a strong and respectably governed state to separate her possessions from those of the French. Siam, therefore, has everything to gain from her and nothing to fear. If she threw herself unreservedly on the British Government and took them into her confidence instead of coquetting with a variety of nations; if without necessarily sacrificing her independence, she invited them to help her to put her own government into thorough order, it could not but be for her real interest. At least, it would be wise on her part to increase the stake of

the British in the country by encouraging the investment of British capital, and granting concessions to British subjects. The greater the amount of British money sunk in Siam, the more likely would our Government be to protect her against foreign aggression.

There is one other nation which is rapidly acquiring a position of greater and greater commercial, though hardly, I think, political influence in Siam, and that I need not say is the German. All over the Far East the German merchant is ubiquitous, and even in Singapore and Hongkong themselves he is proving a serious rival to the British. It is true that the German capital invested in Siam is for the most part of a floating character, consisting as it does in steamers which could, if the necessity arose, be transferred elsewhere. But it is not so easy always to build up a new business in a strange country, and German interests in Siam are growing on *terra firma* as well. The visit of Prince Henry of Prussia to Bangkok in December, 1899, was supposed by many to be of some political significance, but if so it was probably only in a very general way. It is a fact that the stake of the Germans in the country is increasing greatly, but hardly to the extent that would make it worth Germany's while to risk a serious quarrel with France in order to preserve Siamese independence. The only nation which Siam can possibly hope may do this for her is Great Britain.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

It must be obvious that in spite of the new lease of life she obtained in 1896, and of the comparative quiet of the last few years, the position of Siam is a precarious one. Dangers threaten her from without and from within, but her worst enemy is really herself. There can be little doubt that if she put her government into an efficient condition, if she developed the resources of her rich territory, opening it up as the British have done in Burmah, or the Dutch in Java, to foreign trade and commerce, and if she inspired merchants with a sense of security, then, with Great Britain behind her, she would be, humanly speaking, free from all risk of foreign aggression. But can we hope that she will rise to the occasion? I have tried to show in an earlier chapter what slender grounds of confidence there are, judging *à priori* from the Siamese character, that she can ever attain thorough efficiency while at the same time preserving her complete independence. Her people are lazy and

frivolous, with the laziness and frivolity of many generations, nor are essential race characteristics changed in a day, even if they do not bear their stamp till the end of all time. No other tropical nation in the East has maintained its independence, and are the Siamese to prove an exception to the rule? When, too, we look at the actual condition of affairs, the grounds for confidence are not greatly increased. On the surface many improvements have been effected in the last few years, but the present *régime* is far from satisfactory, and not likely to lead to any substantial changes for the better in the future. The Siamese employ a large number of Europeans in different Government departments, but they are clever enough to keep the real power in their own hands. Some reforms which do not interfere with vested interests are allowed to go through, others are passed with a flourish of trumpets for the express purpose of throwing dust in the eyes of Europe. Those reforms, however, which in any way touch the interests, or offend the prejudices of the powerful, are obstructed or mangled till at last they are quietly put on the shelf; while not a few which do not apparently contain any seeming ground of offence are never proceeded with, simply on account of the *vis inertiæ* with which the Siamese character is weighted to the earth.

In reality there is no effective European control. Not only are the different administrative posts

parcelled out among different nationalities who have about as much idea of combination as the European Concert, but in each separate department it is the Siamese who retain the executive power. The European adviser is literally the adviser and very little else. He is no doubt able to carry certain minor reforms, but in the long run the power is not with him. That pleasing fiction which prevails in so many lands we know, and which veils absolute ultimate authority under the specious guise of "advice," is too transparent for the not unsophisticated Siamese. They are determined to be their own masters, and the king in particular is quick enough to let any European who talks big know his proper place. I should be only too glad to think that I was thoroughly mistaken, and that the Siamese might, though slowly, develop for themselves an efficient government in which, as is the acknowledged ideal of most of them, they could ultimately dispense with all outside assistance. This would be the happiest solution for our own country of a very difficult problem, not to mention that it would cause much greater reason for confidence in the latent possibilities of Oriental nations generally. But though this solution is still not altogether beyond the bounds of hope, there are few, if any, who have a first-hand acquaintance with Siam that really believe in it. It is quite clear from the present state of affairs that not only can the Siamese not afford

to dispense with European assistance, but that this assistance should be made much more effective. What Lord Milner has said of Egypt applies with equal force to Siam: "It is not enough to have well-qualified Europeans in the Egyptian service in order to keep things straight. It is necessary that there should be some power behind them to give effectiveness to their advice," and, "European skill is useless without European authority."[1] The present *régime* has now lasted some time, and before many more years elapse the day of reckoning must come. Siam if still found wanting, will have to choose between voluntarily abdicating a portion at least of her authority and being forcibly deprived of the whole of it. Inefficiency may be condoned for a certain time, especially if there is some outward appearance of reforms being introduced, but in the last resort it must be wiped out. In these days when the pressure of population is rapidly increasing, when soon every available inch of the world's surface will be required for man's use, misgovernment in one of the most fertile tracts of the globe will not be long tolerated. Siam then will have to arrange her affairs while there is yet time.

What at present is the outlook? She has nothing to hope from France. On her other side is Great Britain, who has no wish for her territory, and would gladly help her to retain as large a

[1] Lord Milner's "England in Egypt."

measure of independence as possible, but who at the same time cannot save her in spite of herself. The only course open, it seems to me, premising always that she does not ultimately prove capable of self-government, is for her to give British officers a real control in the conduct of her affairs, and in return to ask for British protection against outside aggression. Whether Great Britain would, or would not, accept such a *rôle* is another matter. She could only do so at the risk of giving offence to France, though nobody could maintain that her acceptance was an infringement of the treaty of 1896. It would hardly be possible for Great Britain on the other hand, either on political or purely commercial grounds, to allow France to annex the country. If she shrank from imposing on herself the burden of a protectorate, the only alternative would seem to be to allow a less powerful people, as for example the Dutch, who perhaps know how to manage Orientals in some respects better than anybody else, to take over the country subject to certain conditions and restrictions. British commerce, which would be practically destroyed in the case of French annexation, might thus be safeguarded, and it would not be necessary to protect the Burmese frontier against a great military Power. The question may seem an academic one, and certainly may not arise for solution for years; on the other hand, some unexpected turn of events may cause it to become

urgent, and it would be well that our Government should make up its mind beforehand what course to adopt, in case it has to act on an emergency.

Sentimentalism is, however, still a considerable force in politics, and there are not a few who object on principle to any suggestion of interference with the government of independent nations, even in the tropics. The prevailing notion in the middle of the nineteenth century among thinking men was that a paternal government was only a temporary expedient, and that all nations would eventually develop a capacity for looking after their own affairs. The great advantages, nay even virtues, produced by self-government and the abolition of all unnecessary restrictions, were being clearly realised in the temperate regions, and it was not yet perceived that the principles of undiluted liberty and *laissez-faire* might require a limited application. In the last fifty years most European states have largely extended the bounds of freedom, though in some, *e.g.* Spain, this freedom is little more than a name. But in the tropics there is a different tale to tell. One after another the nations of tropical Asia have lost their independence. Siam alone remains, nor is the state of affairs in that country such as to cause any searchings of heart to those Western Powers who have incorporated the territories of neighbouring peoples. If they turn to the other hemisphere (for Africa need hardly be considered)

the friends of liberty have not much more cause for comfort. True it is that, owing to a variety of circumstances, no great empire has swallowed up the independent states of tropical and sub-tropical America. Many of them, even boasting the name of republic (a name which seems to have a lingering charm, and always to evoke in some minds associations with the palmy days of Athens and of Rome) are rotten and corrupt through and through, and it must be sufficiently obvious now that their doom has already been written by the finger on the wall. National independence for those who are capable of profiting by it, is one of the most desirable consummations. A healthy patriotism, which is the seed-bed of more virtues than are dreamed of in many philosophies, is not only not inconsistent with a wide and tolerant spirit of humanity, but actually necessary to it. Just as the man who best fulfils his duty to his family makes the best citizen, so too, to quote the great poet of our age, "That man's the best Cosmopolite who loves his native country best." We should certainly, therefore, be chary of interfering with the independence of any nations who prove themselves worthy of it, though it must always be remembered that recent history has shown that patriotism may be as noble a growth in a great and extended empire as in a tiny republic. On the other hand it is just as foolish, just as wicked to give way to a false sentimentalism, and permit incapable peoples, to

whom self-government is a curse rather than a blessing, to manage their own affairs, as it would be to allow children to choose for themselves the way they shall go. And even if we Western nations do not owe this duty to them, we owe it at least to ourselves, and to the world at large.

Clearly we have ample justification for interference, for insisting that these tropical countries shall be properly and efficiently governed, and that their vast riches shall not be allowed to lie buried or remain undeveloped. As Mr. Kidd has pointed out in his "Control of the Tropics," the temperate regions of the earth are being rapidly filled up. Soon there will remain only the tropics, with which countries like England and the United States have already an enormous trade, and from which they obtain a large portion of their food and other supplies. The necessities of our own expansion and the interests of the world in general, which require the utilisation of all available resources and a free interchange between different countries of their varied products, demand that the wealth or these lands, among the richest and most fertile in the globe, shall not be suffered to lie idle. It is obvious, however, that they are no fit place for the white man to work in; no amount of acclimatisation, as those who know the fierce tropical sun are well aware, will ever enable him to do so.[1] They

[1] Professor Huxley has suggested ("Collected Essays" vol. ii. p. 252), that the discovery of preventives against fever will enable

cannot be made colonies in the proper sense of the word, not colonies like Canada and Australia, where the men of our race can labour and make their homes. Yet, like India and other countries, they can be administered by white men, and will have to be, if their own native inhabitants are unable to govern them efficiently and develop their resources. But they must not be held by any one nation in a selfish or exclusive spirit. They will, as Mr. Kidd says, have to be governed as a "trust for civilisation." If we have any right to interfere at all, we must pay due regard to the interests of other nations, and, above all, to those of the natives themselves. Happily England seems now to realise these duties. She opens the ports of her tropical possessions to all countries alike. She imposes no preferential tariffs in the interests of her own manufacturers, and, furthermore, she recognises that the welfare of the people she governs must always be her first consideration. Unfortunately a different policy finds favour with most other European nations, who still look upon their tropical dependencies as sources of revenue and profit to themselves. The Siamese are sharp enough to see how much better off their Burmese neighbours are than those in Cambodia and Tongking, where the interests of a handful of French traders and manufacturers, and of French officials who are far

the white man to work in the tropics. But no inoculation can make him proof against the rays of the sun.

more than a handful, are paramount. Their destiny, apart from accidents which no man can control, is largely in their own hands. It is just possible they may surprise both their friends and enemies alike, in throwing off their lethargy, and so prove themselves worthy of independence. In this event, if they will only follow the sensible policy of encouraging the investment of British capital, and increasing the British stake in the country, they may practically rely on Great Britain to secure their autonomy and integrity.

There are, indeed, not a few capable and energetic individuals among the Siamese, but there is one man on whom the eyes of all well-wishers of Siam must at no distant day be turned, and whom its most thoughtful friends are now watching with most anxious interest. That man is the Crown Prince of Siam, who has just finished his education in England. The world has not so often witnessed the sight of an independent Oriental autocrat with a thoroughly European training, that it can afford to be indifferent to the spectacle which will be presented to it when the Crown Prince takes in his hand the reins of government. Will he remain faithful to the better ideas he has imbibed in the West? or will he, after a few years, relapse into Eastern sloth and apathy, as so many of his promising countrymen before him have done? He will have an almost unique opportunity. Although the ultimate future of his country must depend on

more deep-seated causes than he has power to control, he may considerably modify the course of events, and postpone even the inevitable for a generation or more. It is difficult for those who have never lived in an Eastern country to realise what enormous influence one man may wield. In every department of life, in politics, in society, and whatever else is not included under these comprehensive heads, the sovereign's word is law. Not only courtiers, but ministers and statesmen, men often of strong wills and clear purposes, hang upon his lips, and anticipate his desires and his utterances. We are reminded of the old scenes, so graphically described by Tacitus, in which Roman consuls and senators vied with one another to be the mouthpiece of the yet unexpressed wishes of Tiberius, except that in Siam, unlike Rome, the monarch has no need even to make a pretence of conciliating or following public opinion, save within very wide limits. No minister would dare to deliver himself on any matter of importance without first ascertaining the leanings of the king, and then he would not hesitate to get up and speak in a sense diametrically opposed to his convictions of an hour before. And if the sovereign has this power in affairs of state, still more is his influence felt in all the small matters of daily life and social usage, which go to form so large a portion of the civilisation of a country, just as "The little unremembered acts of kindness and of love" do of a

good man's life. Whether the position of an individual in such isolated splendour be enviable or not, there is no denying that it is one of tremendous power for good or evil, power such as can hardly fall to the lot of any single man in the democratic lands of the West. If the future ruler of Siam is able to renovate his country, and to steer the ship of State into untroubled waters, amid the wrecks of empires and kingdoms with which the East is strewn, then he will indeed have made for himself a name worthy to live in history. But his task will be no easy one; it will necessitate a life of unremitting vigour and vigilance, a life also of patience, tact, and extreme forbearance. And though the future king be unable to instil into his people the political energy which will enable them to dispense with European assistance, he may yet, even in the sphere of Government, accomplish the most far-reaching reforms. Still more will he have the opportunity of advancing the moral and social welfare of his subjects. Uniting as he will in his own person both East and West—Eastern by birth and nature, Western by education, and in not a few of his sympathies and ideas—it may be hoped that he will be able to combine the advantages of both civilisations; that while profiting by the lessons he has learned in Europe, he will at the same time preserve much that is praiseworthy in the institutions and customs of his own country.

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The red line indicates the approximate boundary of French possessions before 1893.
The dotted red line indicates the approximate Northern boundary of Siam before 1893.
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