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FIVE YEARS IN SIAM

H. WARINGTON SMYTH



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FIVE YEARS IN SLAM

VOL. I.

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Five Years in Siam

FROM 1891 TO 1896

BY H. WARINGTON SMYTH

M.A., LL.B., F.G.S., F.R.G.S.

FORMERLY DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MINES IN SIAM



WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. I.

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET

1898

TO
MY FELLOW-WORKERS IN SIAM
IN MEMORY OF
THE COMRADES WE HAVE LOST
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

οὐ καλῶς λέγεις, ὦ ἄνθρωπε, εἰ οἶαι δεῖν κίνδυνον
ὑπολογίζεσθαι τοῦ ζῆν ἢ τεθνάναι ἄνδρα οὗτοι τι καὶ
σμερὸν ὀφελός ἐστιν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκείνο μόνον σκοπεῖν,
ὅταν πράττῃ τι, πότερον δίκαια ἢ ἀδίκᾳ πράττει, καὶ ἀνδρὸς
ἀγαθοῦ ἔργα ἢ κακοῦ.

INTRODUCTORY

OF Siam and the Siamese much has of late been written. The subject, however, cannot be said to have been exhausted. Though not a few books, quite a number of 'papers,' and innumerable press articles, dealing with the King, the country, or its people, are in existence, it is yet a fact that the inquirer can light on no authority of recent date from which to obtain reliable information dealing with either in an extensive or general manner. Such modern books as are to be found are, with few exceptions, accounts of travel, written after a superficial glance at the subjects they deal with by persons new to their surroundings. The 'papers' and press notices are mostly devoted to some one subject, or some particular question, and, though often written by men who knew what they were writing about, as a source of information they are scrappy as well as difficult to obtain.

Possibly no Government has ever been the subject of more vituperative abuse on the one hand, or of more silly adulation on the other, than has the Siamese. The chief offenders have been hasty Westerns, who would not give themselves the chance of understanding that between the

ways of modern Europe and those of old Indo-China a great gulf lies, the voyage over which might well occupy the thought of a lifetime.

But though the Siamese differ from us much, they yet possess the same human nature, and are no less amenable to proper treatment. Neither round abuse nor extravagant praise are good for them, any more than for us. Properly told, the truth will be always received in the spirit in which it is given. Treated as gentlemen, they will treat you as such. Contrary to what some had led me to expect, the Siamese Government behaved to me throughout my service in a manner at once dignified and generous. Although my criticisms and reports were often severely plain, bordering, I fear, on rudeness, there was never any friction between us.

In money matters, some have had cause of complaint, owing, generally, to their own lack of firmness, or to the deviousness of some particular official, but in this line I never experienced any trouble in my own affairs. Contrary also to the character I constantly heard given them, the people of the country did not appear to me inveterate thieves, or altogether incessant liars. In reality I found them grateful for kindness, ready to share their last mouthful without expectation of reward, and quick to respond to generous trust. In fact, I find myself their debtor; in the service of the Government, and among the people, I saw much I would not willingly forget.

I do not pretend to a complete understanding of either, for 'The character of a people has such complexity of aspect, that even the keenest observer knows not

always, not, perhaps, after long inspection, what to determine regarding it.'¹ The light and shade of the Asiatic character must ever be enigmas to us; and the longer one lives with an Eastern race, the less confidence can one feel in one's knowledge of what they are and what they think.

In this sketch of Siam and the Siamese I have tried to pay off part, at least, of my debt, in recording, as truthfully as possible, that which I have seen with my own eyes, that the reader may be enabled to some extent to form a fairer judgment of them than has been perhaps generally possible, and, with the mind of the true critic, see somewhat of the 'manner of existing as the nation itself sees it, and so participate in whatever worth or beauty it has brought into being.'

At the same time, by showing plainly what are the real difficulties to sound and healthy reform in Siam, coming as they do from within as well as from without, this book may assist the reader to understand the important character of the work which the King and those who are loyally working with him have set before themselves, and to admire the courage they have displayed in the most difficult and complex of tasks—that of grafting the civilisation of modern Europe on to that of a conservative people of the Far East. No undertaking can call for more patience, more perseverance, or more discrimination, or better deserve the cordial sympathy of Englishmen.

Let me say at once that none of my journeys were entitled to the name of explorations, and there are no new discoveries recorded here. All the ground I covered was

¹ Carlyle, *Miscellaneous Essays*.

already known to geographers, and to those persons who were interested in Siam.

I have no midnight attacks by armed men, and no hair-breadth escapes from wily savages or prowling beasts, to recount. From Singora to Muang Ngoi and from Tavoi to Siemrap the only firearms needed were cheroots and matches, and our chiefest foes were floods and fevers. A book of travel containing such a confession is an anomaly for which my profusest apologies are due. In Indo-China, however, resort to force is a confession of the traveller's inability to comprehend the influences at work around him. The more sensational the less true we may expect his delineation of life and things to be.

On the Buddhism of the country I have touched but very lightly, as this most interesting subject has already been exhaustively treated by such writers as Alabaster and Gerini.

Of the Chieng Mai side and the western Lao States on the Me Ping branch of the Me Nam, it will also be observed that very little is here said. The first reason is that, to my great regret, I never visited that part of the country, and the second, that it has received a large amount of attention, and has been carefully, and almost minutely, described.² The establishment of a British Consulate, and the Yearly Trade Report published in connection with it, together with the fact that both the Borneo Company and the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation have agents in several parts of the country looking after their extensive

² By Holt Hallett, in *A Thousand Miles on an Elephant*, and A. R. Colquhoun, in *Amongst the Shans*.

interests, combine to make it unnecessary to enter into a description of it here.

Of Bangkok it is also unnecessary to speak at length, inasmuch as that city has been admirably described from the visitor's point of view in several works,³ which give a good idea of the *Wats* and other buildings and characteristics of the city.

The illustrations in this book are principally from my notebooks, a few from photographs. Their lack of artistic merit is due to the fact that a crude sketch done on the spot is apt to give a less inaccurate idea of the reality, and, therefore, to be of more value in a book of this sort than a more highly finished drawing touched up at home, or improved by an artist who has never been within some thousand miles of the place.

To Colonel Woodthorpe, R.E., C.B., I owe the very valuable drawings facing pp. 172 and 174; to my mother, those facing pp. 180, 244, and facing p. 94, Vol. II.; to my brother of the Bays, several sketches made by him when in Siam; and to my old friend and comrade Nai Suk, the Siamese drawings, and the native airs in the Appendix. To my cousin, Inez Story Maskelyne, I also owe much assistance during the earlier stages of the book.

³ *Temples and Elephants*, by Carl Bock (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington: London, 1884); and *Land of the White Elephant*, by Frank Vincent (by the same publishers, 1872).

A more valuable and accurate account of the city is, however, to be found in a recent book, *The Kingdom of the Yellow Robe*, by a former resident, Mr. E. Young,

which contains some charming illustrations by another old resident, Mr. Norbury (Westminster, Archibald Constable, 1898).

The Natural History of Bangkok is being described from time to time in valuable articles by Mr. S. S. Flower, of the Royal Museum, who is making an exhaustive study of the subject.

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CROSSING THE BAR

CHAPTER I

THE RIVER AND PORT OF BANGKOK

THE first land made by vessels bound to Bangkok is that of Cape Liant, known to the Siamese as Lem Sa Mesan, and the islands off it form an awkward landfall in the thick weather of the south-west monsoon. Here the Siamese Government have built a much-required light-house.¹ It is the second important light in the gulf, the other being the melancholy screw-pile sentinel on the bar of the Me Nam Chao Praya.

When, for the first time, I passed the latter on a chill

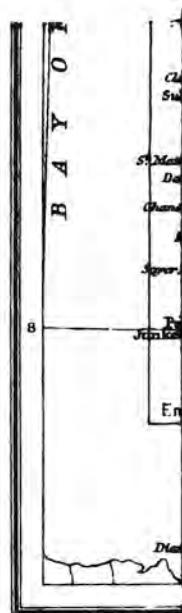
¹ It stands on Kaw Chuen, at a height of 468 feet above high-water, and has a range of about thirty-five miles in clear

weather. It is a revolving light, flashing twice every eighty seconds. A fixed beam covers Hin Chalan, four miles south.

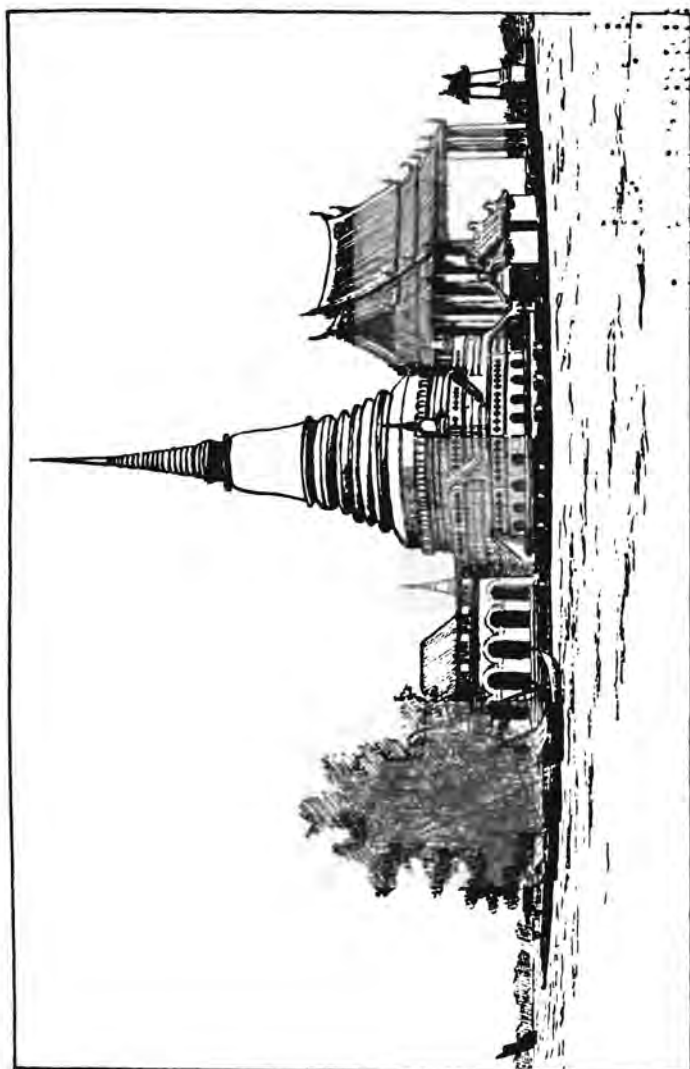
November morning, and watched him blink his last before the rising sun, I confess my heart sank at the prospect the day brought. All around an expanse of dirty, mud-brown water, about fourteen feet in depth at its best, stuck here and there with fishing stakes, which gave to the whole scene a disorderly, ragged sort of look, and rimmed along the north horizon by the long low stretch of unrelieved mangrove towards which we made our way. Having seen the yet vaster and more forsaken expanses at the mouths of the Hugli and of the Rangun River, I remembered that something more hopeful might lie beyond, until there came into my mind the encouraging yarns spun by kind friends in Singapore of the horrors of Bangkok. I would warn the reader never to believe a word he hears from Straits friends about either Bangkok or Siam; they are all grievously prejudiced against it. Even the cricket eleven, consisting presumably of lusty specimens of British pluck and manhood, dared not accept the invitation of the Bangkok C.C. to go up and play a match. Bangkok is to the Straits a land of myths and terror.

As the ship slowly makes her way, stirring up the mud astern, an extensive stretch of brilliant green rivets the attention on the port side. It is the roofs in the fort, painted 'invisible' green of a gaudy kind, far outdoing the modest mangroves. The total absence of marks, and the strange irregularities of the tides,² constitute the chief difficulties of crossing the bar. There are no leading marks. The lighthouse stands alone outside, and there is nothing to give a cross-bearing but the lightship inside the river, which burns a meagre red lamp like a cigar end. If the weather is kind it is visible for five miles; but at times, in the drift of the south-west monsoon, its radius is more like five ships' lengths. Sunken junks and other obstructions on each side of the lightship—placed there to

² Appendix i.







THE PAGODA IN THE RIVER

1000

1000

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1000

keep out an enemy, and quite useless for their purpose—block the fair way. The lead is generally a fair guide on the bar, the bottom on the west being mud, gradually passing into sand on the east. But the tides which run across are often difficult to calculate for, and even the old pilots, who have pitched about in their boats outside for twenty years past, can take a ship up no better than a skilful skipper who follows his sailing directions.

Owing to the inefficiency of the lightship light, and the great difficulty of keeping off the west banks inside the Black Buoy at night—due to the cross-set of the flood—there is certainly much need for a light at the Black Buoy; and a Government which felt more interest in assisting shipping would long ago have put one there. It would not only be invaluable for the main channel, but also for craft passing through the south-east. In default of this the light should be improved on the lightship. Except the light at Kaw Chuen, nothing for the last six years has been done towards improving the port. A cone should also be hoisted at the lighthouse during high tide, while there is twelve feet of water—or any depth of the sort that may be thought more convenient.

Captain Hamilton^{*} gives an account of how they crossed the bar in 1720. 'Siam bar,' he says, 'is only a large bank of soft mud, and, at spring tides, not above ten or eleven feet water on it. It is easy getting into it in the south-west monsoons, because in two or three tides, with the motion the ship receives from the small waves and the assistance of the wind, she slides through the mud. My ship drew thirteen feet, and we had not above nine on the bar when we went into the river; but coming out with the north-east monsoons, the sea being smooth, we were obliged to wharp out with anchors and halsers;

^{*} *A New Account of the East Indies*. Capt. A. Hamilton, 1688-1728. Edinburgh, 1727, 2 vols. 8vo.

and if the ship draws any considerable draught of water we are sometimes two springs in wharving over, but at twelve feet draught I got over in four tides.'

The 'small waves' and 'sliding through the mud' refer to the middle ground, which, had it been harder, would have cost the life of many a vessel. From this description it would seem that the bar has deepened to an extent of two feet or so.

Crawfurd took a week to warp out, a process for which the ship was totally dismantled. Ten days more were spent in getting the ship rigged again, and nine more in watering and wooding in the roads at Kaw-sichang. Truly there was leisure in those days! Now vessels must cross with the morning tide, finish loading, and leave the same day.

On further acquaintance this same bar turns out a really interesting character. What old sea-secrets he has to tell on a breezy afternoon, when the gulls scream round, and the fishing craft are plunging out to their stakes or skating under sail across the mud flats; of the fleets of square-rigged ships beating out in the old days, twenty at a time; of the huge, many-masted junks warping out with their great wooden anchors and long grass ropes; ay, and further back, of the broad-sterned Dutchmen and the piratical Portuguese—until, of a sudden, a threatening squall begins to flash and growl in the north-west, coming up across the wind, and cutting short our cogitations; and the long lug-rigged boats are running home, and, in a few minutes, not a sail of the sixty that were bobbing in sight is left, and the lonely old bar is in his passion shrieking and howling at his maddest.

But it takes a long time to learn his secrets. I saw none of them that morning. In humble guise, in some small craft, his acquaintance must be made—

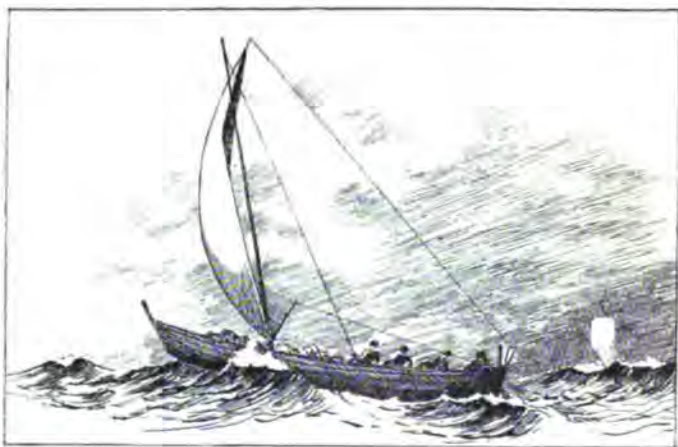
Running before the southerly seas,
Creeping to windward in the shimmering noon,
In the sudden chill of the off-shore breeze,
And the howl of the mad monsoon.

Only thus, at last, by patient knowing, he grows upon one; and his eccentricities, his wildness, and even his sulks become a part of his charm and beauty. But no steam-launch fiend and no steam-boat man is admitted to this intimacy.

As the ship turns into the river the long low-lying village of Paknam comes in sight. It is a village of some little importance, with a population of about six thousand, consisting mostly of fishermen. It is connected with Bangkok by a metre gauge line, the first railway built in the country, whose passenger traffic is already sufficient, after four years' running, to pay a modest dividend, and there are signs that it will in time obtain more of the fish traffic to Bangkok. At present all the fish are transhipped from the big boats from outside to smaller craft, which take them up to the Bangkok market. These boats are quite a peculiarity of the place, and are all of a type known as *rua chalom*, distinguishable by their high stem and stern-posts, their long finely modelled lines, and their queer viking-like double rudders, hung on each quarter. When the big square-headed lug-sail is hoisted, the rudder on the leeward side is used, that on the weather side being often hoisted up. Before the wind both are in use. This is a favourite type with the Chinese on all parts of the 'inner gulf,' and even as far south as Champawm and east to M. Kleng, and very smartly they sail them. The larger boats of this type which are used for trading purposes often carry the two mat lug-sails which are usual in the gulf, and have a *kadjang* or plaited covering amidships; but either *rua pets* * or small two-masted junks are

* Chapter xxi.

generally preferred for cargo, owing to their greater carrying capacity size for size. The *rua chalom* is thus usually only used for fishing, and is a 'day' boat without much shelter. The larger class are manned by seven or eight men, and pull as many oars in light winds; the smaller, almost entirely confined to the Bangkok River, are just long enough for four men to use their oars, which they do with wonderful effect. In the latter, to save weight, very often only one rudder is carried, and is shifted from side to side as required, while an oar is temporarily used



RUA CHALOM—RUNNING

to keep her straight. Off the wind they are exceedingly fast, but to windward they sadly need some such contrivance as a centre-board or lee-board, and it is astonishing that neither has found its way to the gulf, although the centre-board has long been known in Formosa, and as near as Hainan, and the lee-board is familiar at Shanghai.

Here at Paknam in the old days all foreign ships had to unload their guns and ammunition; thus far

foreign warships have a right to come by treaty ; and here all craft bring up, to be boarded by the Customs people.

Across the river lies the low mud island of the Inner Fort, armed with some fine breechloading guns of large calibre with disappearing carriages, and with a complement of some sixty men of the Marines.

Just to the north of it stands the little *Wat*, or monastery, known as the *Prachadi Klang-nam*, 'The Pagoda in the River,' one of the prettiest and most characteristic things of the kind in the country, highly typical of the land we are entering, where, as in Burma, the pagoda and the monastery form such a large part in the life of the people.

To the lover of architecture, fresh from home, accustomed to see the 'construction,' and to expect an architectural reason for every ornament in a building, the lofty white pagoda of Burma and Siam, varying though it does in shape and character, is at first a disappointment ; from a distance being too like an elaborate effort in confectionery, near at hand a rather meaningless mass of white-daubed masonry.

But to a man who has lived and travelled in pagoda countries, the infinite variety of shape, the grateful relief it gives the eye, wearied of the everlasting green, the welcome it offers, shooting far above hill and jungle, to the tired traveller, and the memories it raises of pleasant faces and kindly hearts, combine to give the pagoda a value half artistic and half sentimental, but which is very real and grows in strength.

And when the flood waters are high in October and the yearly *Thot Kathin* * comes round, and every one is busy offering their gifts at the monasteries, then the *Prachadi Klang-nam* is the goal of thousands of cheery peasants, come to make a little 'merit' and have a jolly time.

* The laying down of monks' garments in the monasteries by way of giving alms.

From sunset on to dawn the little isle lies a blaze of brightness in the great dark river; the crowded boats come and go into the ring of light, and the long-peaked yards of the fishermen stand inky against the glare. The deep bass of the monks intoning in the high-roofed *Bawt* swings across the water, with the subdued mirth and chatter of the never-ending stream of people circling round the pagoda.

Laughing, love-making, smoking, and betel chewing, the good folks buy their offerings, and none omit a visit to the *Bawt*, to light their tapers before the great Buddha, nor alms to the musicians, who have come here under their accomplished old teacher from the capital.

The boats of the visitors lie swinging in the tide to long bamboos worked into the mud, or moored in crowds along the island. The tired children lie in rows athwartship, the tallest just fitting in to the broadest beam, and all sleep soundly heedless of the din, while the mother sits aft watching and waiting for the father and the elder ones. And so the fun and merit-making go on. Then suddenly the morning light breaks across the river, followed by the level rays of the sun himself. Every one is off now. The fair stalls are empty, and the lights are smoking in a dissipated way. Every man, woman, and child is upon the river. A little water to the mouth and a comb to the hair and all are fresh again, commenting on the lines of a new racing canoe from their own village, or laughing at the capsize of a rival, till the sun has climbed two hours from the horizon, and pretty faces, cheery voices, gay dresses, all are—gone.

The Sailing Club House lies opposite, a place of many happy memories. Two years ago the club tried at this festival to revive the races, which had formerly led to such keen rivalry that the authorities had stopped them. Money prizes were given, and some very good races, especially among the small four and five paddle boats, took place over



A CANOE RACE

10. 1000
1000. 1000

a course about a mile long, off the Club House, opposite the Fort. A larger class of market boat, paddled by mixed crews of men and women to the number of sixteen or twenty, gave capital sport. The women crews, with their cross sashes of yellow, green, or blue, not only looked but often proved the smartest. Their rate of stroke was from thirty-six to thirty-seven for the first half-minute, after which it varied—now a long sweeping dozen to rest the tired muscles, then a spurt again, and finally they passed the line going splendidly and striking sixty-two to the minute, soaked and laughing, and ready to do it again. A race for the four-oared fishing boats was also most successful, the winning four rowing thirty-six of their powerful long strokes to the minute—a most remarkable performance, considering how well it is shoved through.

These things, too, I knew not, on that November morning. But I saw with wonderment the little brown children working their small canoes about the river, and diving into the steamers' wash; saw the pretty lines of betel and cocoanut palms, the distant perspectives of yellowing padi, the snug riverside cottages, the floating houses on their rafts, and at last, before us, Bangkok.

But where was the Bangkok I had read of—that Venice of the East, delighting the soul with its gilded palaces and gorgeous temples? Before us lay but an eastern Rotterdam; mud banks, wharfs and jetties, unlovely rice mills belching smoke, houses gaunt on crooked wooden piles, dykes and ditches on either hand, steam launches by the dozen, crowded rows of native rice boats, lines of tall-masted junk-rigged lighters, and last, most imposing, towering even above the ugly chimneys of the mills, British steamers, and Norwegian and Swedish barques and ships—the Swedes always distinguished, as of yore, by their light paint and quaint balustrades.*

* Appendix iii.

I had yet to learn that there are many Bangkoks, and this was the port of Bangkok, the commercial and the European Bangkok, where the rice⁷ and teak⁸ are milled and cut and shipped away.

But all other wonders were as nothing compared with the steam-launches, which, the farther one penetrated, became more innumerable, and apparently observed no rules either of the road or of courtesy. One began innocently to ask where the harbour-master was. 'Harbour-master!' ejaculated the skipper viciously, as he opened his whistle for the fiftieth time, and went hard astern to avoid an erratic cargo boat; 'it's every man for himself here!'

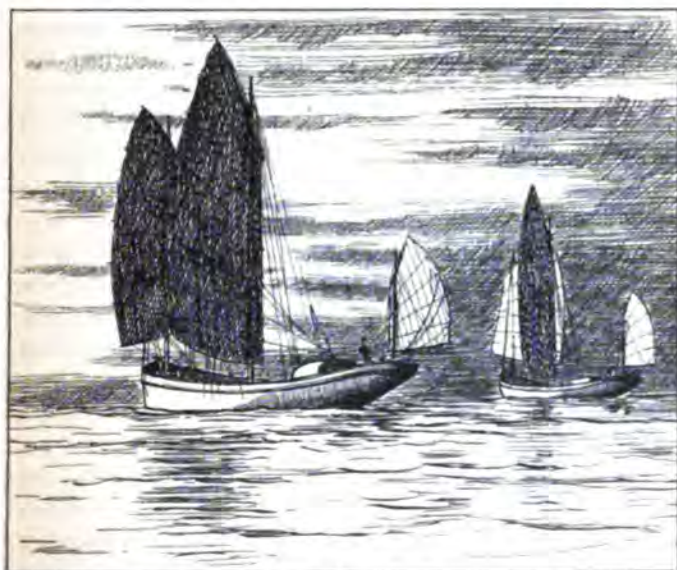
And so, indeed, after five years' sailing and pulling about the port of Bangkok, I left it—still the same. Launches without lights tearing full speed, with a fair tide, right along the shop fronts, lighters and cargo boats anchored anywhere, and no rules but one: 'Thou shalt not rebuke or in any way inconvenience a Chinese coolie, whatever he may do.' He is the master of the port. He may grapple on to a steamer with his cargo boat as she comes up river and seeks her moorings. He may refuse to cast off when the captain has to change her berth; he may, and probably will, refuse to load the ship in any way but his own, even to the peril of ship and cargo; he may spit and smoke on the poop, and may generally lord it. But he must be allowed his sweet will; and if an officer cuts his rope away, or a quartermaster kicks him over the side, there is a general strike, and the captain is dropped on by the agents. For the Chinaman is a privileged person, and the port is run for his private edification and enjoyment. And Providence loads the ships; skippers do not interfere, or allow their officers to interfere; it could only mean trouble for them with the agents.

⁷ Appendix iv.

Appendix v.

We anchored in deep water (a characteristic of this goodly river from the bar inwards for over fifty miles), at the tail of a long row of steamers in the middle of the stream.

On the east side of the steamers lay the fair way, with here and there a junk sedately riding in the middle of it. And along the shore the rice mills stood, conspicuous by their long galvanised iron roofs and the occasional howls of



LORCHAS—AFTER RAIN

their ear-piercing sirens, which, joined to the everlasting screeching of the launches, make this a noisy reach, to say the least.

On the west lay the row of *lorchas* that form a characteristic of Bangkok, and are an outcome of the perverse nature of our friend the bar.

Owing to the shallowness there, ships can only load

down to twelve or thirteen feet, according to the phase of the moon. They then go out and complete loading at the lovely anchorage of Kaw Sichang, twenty-five miles south-east of the lighthouse, in the south-west monsoon, or at the open roadstead of Anghin, about twenty miles east of the same, during the winter months. To these places the balance of the cargo goes out in the Chinese-manned *lorchas*, which are, as a rule, flat-bottomed craft of from 200 to 240 tons of European build, with the three batten-lug-sails of the junk rig. The vessels, of which over sixty are owned in the port, are fine craft, and when turned out clean, with new gear and sails, have a very smart appearance. But this is soon lost. The ruffians who command and man them are too lazy to hoist their sails up properly, too dirty to keep them clean, and too wilful to obey orders; and owners see their craft returning every trip with ropes chafed through, and sails pulled out of shape by bad setting and sheer carelessness. It is a great wonder that more accidents do not occur among them. At night they anchor anywhere in the fair way of the river, and they will be beating out over the bar half a dozen at a time, with or without lights, according to pleasure. Side-lights are never carried; and when the proposal was made some time back that they should be made to do so, in the interests of safety and of shipping generally, their owners objected that the crews would not be able to remember which light should be shipped on which side, and that accidents would happen owing to their being wrongly placed. A more remarkable contention could not be advanced: for, first, it is impossible to ship a starboard light in a portside screen if properly made; and, secondly, men who can beat a 200-ton craft out over the bar by night or day in any weather, and make Kaw Sichang many times a month without serious mishap, must have brains enough to distinguish between red and green.

Abreast of these *lorchas*, along the shallower western shore, on the inside of the bend, the up-country boats lie when they have sold their rice, and their pleasure-loving crews would do a little of the gaiety of the capital before returning home. So, while mother does the shopping and buys the cargo of salt and cotton stuffs, father takes the children up to town for a ride in the tram or a visit to the nearest monastery, where some merit-making is going on or a cremation taking place; and in their best *panungs* and little white jackets the youngsters buy fairings, or sit and



FLOATING HOUSES

smoke and chew their betel in front of the *Lakon*. A theatrical performance is sure to be provided for the occasion, and there the elder boys and girls watch untiringly the whole night long the story of the King of Snakes or of the lovely Princess, and the small ones coil themselves up and go to sleep within ten feet of the big drum. In the morning grey they are off back to their floating house, and get a start behind some tow boat for a few miles, in company with twenty other craft, on their month's journey of poling and pulling homewards, to where the water is

clear and runs over the shaded shingle banks, and where the noisy drunken *Farang* they met in Bangkok streets is never seen.

A little higher up begin the floating houses: here a colony of Malays, with their graceful little fishing canoes lying in front; there, a row of Chinese-owned shops, displaying their goods to the passing boat-people.

And many tongues are heard and many colours seen among the floating Asiatic population of the upper river. The coolies, boat-builders, carpenters, and sawyers are all Chinese, and Chinamen form the majority of the market-gardeners, smiths, and tradesmen. The Malays work the machinery of the mills and are padi cultivators, and they share the fishing with the Annamites and Siamese. The latter are the boat and raft men, and cultivate the fruit and padi of the suburbs. The Javanese are gardeners, the Bombay men are merchants, the Tamils cattlemen and shopkeepers, the Burmese gem dealers and country pedlars, the Singalese goldsmiths and jewellers, and the Bengalis are the tailors.⁹ But everywhere the Chinaman is advancing, and the Siamese is handicapped by the *corvée* customs of his country.

And then comes consular Bangkok, where fair-sized verandahed houses, flagstuffs, tennis-lawns, and flowering trees adorn the eastern bank; where, in the days when I first saw them, a couple of American citizens occasionally dined with their minister, or libelled one another in his office; where the official staff of the Portuguese consulate wandered alone and forlorn up and down his bunding in the last stage of boredom; where the French minister admired the colours of the tricolor at his mast-head, and dreamt of the future; and the British consul was besieged by litigation-loving subjects of the Empress, intent on

⁹ Mr. C. S. Leekie's admirably concise paper on the British share of the trade of Siam, in *Journal Soc. of Arts*, No. 2, 168, vol. xlii.

ruining their friends in costs—some of which things are much changed now.

And this same consular Bangkok has played in the past, and will in the future continue to play, an important part in the history of Siam; and, to those who know a little of its working, it will appear not unnatural that extra-territoriality should seem as unpopular with the Siamese as it does unpronounceable.

In the tennis, cricket, dinners, and club life which centred round it, it was much like any other settlement



THE TIDAL RIVER

of the kind, except for its more cosmopolitan character. At one table would be seated Danes, Germans, Italians, Dutch, Belgians, Americans, and Britishers—the language invariably that of the last. Frenchmen there were none, except one or two officials of the consulate, who generally held aloof, and one popular trader, who, with the conspicuous gallantry of his race, long held the only French mercantile house in Siam above water, and who was at a later date rewarded by a proud and grateful country with an official position in Cambodia.

Very charming, too, could this life be, though nothing perhaps could have been more out of touch with that of the people in the midst of which it used to thrive. Not unnaturally, of Siam, and the Siamese as they were, it could know but little. It had its routine of work by day, its drive and tennis after five; it drank whisky and soda from sundown to dinner, and was waited on by machine-like Chinese till it went late to bed, and late it arose next day to begin again. It had not the leisure to notice, or to attempt to understand, the curiously complicated civilisation by which it was surrounded.

Yet from it the globe-trotter got his information about the Siamese, and by its after-dinner measurements he 'sized up' their character.



PRA RAMA



THE ROYAL SHRINE

CHAPTER II

OFFICIAL BANGKOK AND A FEW OF ITS CAUSES—THE GOVERNMENT IN 1892

My business, however, soon took me to the other Bangkoks that are yet to mention. A long drive along an unutterably filthy road, where thrive the most unsurpassed of smells, to which dead dogs, diseased Chinamen, or festering drains all give their contribution; where such part of the road as is not occupied by the tram is choked with broken-handled rickshas, Chinese cook stalls, and rickety gharries; where those receivers of stolen goods called pawnshops offer valuable watches, curios, or pistols for a song; and where such gentlemen as HANG ON, dentist, and SAW LONG, carpenter, display their boards. This is Chinese Bangkok, malodorous and ill-mannered. Through it, to the peril of your ponies and your springs, you may reach the cleaner and pleasanter Bangkok of the

Siamese. Here the little thatched cottages crowd along the *klongs*, the boats lie thick, the children bathe and run, and the tall *Wat* gables uphold their gaudy tiles to the sunshine. Like all Siamese towns, it is, even inside the walls, full of gardens—not gardens such as we know, but gardens run wild, plantations of tall palms, waste places, trees, and greenery. Then, as you approach the palace, the centre of Siamese official life, the roads broaden out, whitewash glitters in the strong light, high roofs glisten, and the coloured *Prachadis* stand up clear into the blue above.

This is, in fact, the capital of Siam, as it is revered and feared by the people of the country, the residence of the King, whence emanate his good laws and his bad governors, the source at once of their loyalty and their want of patriotism. *Krung Tep* they call this place of contradictions; and to them it is the city of cities, the heavenly abode, the centre of commerce, the place of wonderful inventions. To those who have visited it, it is also, unaccountably, the home of such thieving as was never dreamt of in their jungle home, of much drinking, of more gambling, and of outrageous, all-devouring officialism. And truly, I suppose, no place was ever less easy to fathom. With some real earnestness and actual endeavour is mixed such a thoroughly Oriental luxuriance of idleness, frivolity, intrigue, and dishonesty that the overwhelming preponderance of the latter makes the despair of the friends of the country and a never-ending source of fun and joy to her cynical foes.

Like Carlyle's mystics, to scoffers the Siamese are a ready and cheap prey. 'But sober persons understand that pure evil is as unknown in this lower universe as pure good.'

Οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο χωρὶς ἐσθλὰ καὶ κακά,
'Ἄλλ' ἔστι τις σύγκρασις ὡς ἔχειν καλῶς.

Descendants of a hardy race—of whom the Shans form the elder branch of Tai Yai—the Siamese, as the Tai Noi, came down into Siam, split in two the people in possession of the plain of the Me Nam Chao Praya, and so gave rise to the two nations, the Kamen, or Cambodians, on the one side, and the Mon, or Peguans, on the other.

With the details of their history, uncertain and full of myth as much of it is, and singularly little known to the Siamese themselves, I will not trouble the reader. How they moved from capital to capital, ever towards the plains, from Sawankalok to Pitsunalok, to Ayuthia, and finally to Bangkok; how lustily they fought their enemies, the Talaings,¹ the Burmese, and the Cambodians; how wilily they cajoled their cousins, the Lao, and their sea visitors, the Malays—all that belongs to ancient history: and yet in some measure to the present too, for it has left its mark.

Among the results of the constant warfare were the never-ceasing interchange of prisoners, of provinces, and of ideas; and these Indo-Chinese peoples all acquired the same methods of protecting themselves against their rivals, and the same notions of diplomacy.

Not one of the nations concerned has been able to retain its independence, except the Siamese. Oriental duplicity and arrogance have been their ruin. Pegu, Burma, Annam, Cambodia, and the Malays have disappeared as powers, because they would not regenerate themselves, and time was not allowed them by the Inexorable to do it at their leisure. It was always by their intrigue and their stubborn adhesion to the old falsity of dealing, which they called diplomacy, that their downfall came.

Siam, owing to her central position among her old rivals, and because she has realised what blind adhesion

Or Mons.

to the old principles—or want of principles—meant to her, has so far escaped. On what does she stand to-day? On the belief of Englishmen that she is in earnest to do what her old rivals failed to do, and what has had to be done for them. On her realisation of this fact largely depends her future.

In considering the extent of her earnestness there are some aspects of the case, the results of her past history, which her enemies ignore because inconvenient, but which must in common fairness be taken into consideration. To align herself with the present, Siam must effect in herself a revolution as complete as any ever effected in the West. For the untruthfulness, the intrigue, and the dishonesty to which she has been nurtured she must substitute the sincerity and honesty which is so foreign to the Asiatic nature.

The difficulties in the way will be best understood by those who know how rare is true straightforwardness, and how blindly tradition is revered among the people of a country like Siam. Tradition is as sacred as the King's person. Like the King's acts, it is never questioned. However incongruous or unjust, anything which can be referred to the magic word *tamniem*—‘custom’—is, without further ado, invested with a sanctity which commands the greatest respect and even devotion. For this one word, dishonesty and corruption are forgotten—frivolity and sinful waste of time at what may be a crisis of the country's life may be forgiven.

The all-important revolution of her inward life, which is the first necessity of the future, is too often confused by the Siamese themselves, as well as by their advisers and critics, with what people are pleased to call ‘civilisation’—electric lights, crested notepaper, and photographs, the superficialities of modern life. And nothing is more dis-

couraging than the lack of comprehension, so often evident, as to the distinction between the two.

On the other hand, it is not to be expected that, brought up among the old traditions, the Siamese, as a people, should be able thoroughly to grasp the true meaning of the new phenomenon, called Western civilisation, suddenly thrust upon them. The adoption of a new principle or of a new morality is possible to no nation in a day; to be permanent such things must come by slow growth and by steady struggle. Japan has done what would have killed a feebler nation. No people in the tropics can have the Japanese vitality. In Siam the work must of necessity be gradual.

In the old days the outlying provinces were ruled by vassal chiefs, who, as long as they paid certain tribute to the King *de facto*, might rule or misrule, as they wished. Their sons succeeded so long as they were agreeable to the over-lord. In fact, the governing was done by contract: 'If you look after the province and pay me, I keep your family in power'—until the stronger rival came along.

Throughout Indo-Chinese history no such official ever received a salary; it was the recognised right of the Governor to make what he could, and for his subordinates to do the same, each according to his position and ingenuity. The Governor might, and generally did, monopolise all the trade he could, using his official power to crush all rivals. In this the old kings set the example. The subordinates followed the great man's example, and in a similar position the people would have done the same. For it was *tamniem*. In moderation no one questioned the method, for it was the only one open to an official by which to make his living. Thus, under the majority of governors, bent on securing a competence for their large families, any man who had made a little money was liable to be brought to court on some fancy charge, and have

his goods confiscated, while the highest bidder always got the verdict of the judge.

Siam, after many hard knocks, especially from Cambodia, and from the Burmese last in 1767, rising again and again, and turning the tables on her foes, had finally acquired suzerain rights over all the Lao States to the Sibsawng Punna, and over the Malay Peninsula down to Keda and Tring Kanu, and these she ruled on the old lines prescribed by immemorial custom and the practice of the nations about her.

The present King it was who first admitted the duty of the governor to govern, not for himself, but to his conscience and for his people. Consider what a change was here. These same feudal lords, whether Burmese, Cambodian, or Siamese, had, in the persons of their ancestors, ruled for ages for themselves. Their people were their food, and they were graphically said to *kin* or eat the province under them, and the people's prayer was for protection from fire, water, thieves, governors, and malevolent people. And here was the King of Siam imposing restriction on their exercise of lordship, demanding of them justice for the weak, and otherwise breaking all *tamniem*. They said 'Yes' with their tongues and swore 'No' in their heart, as is the pleasing Oriental way. Moral responsibility is little known in Eastern language or philosophy; yet the King had, through his early training and his own goodness of heart, learned its meaning, and proceeded to try to educate his rulers to it.

Was ever a more difficult task set any monarch, or any leader of a revolution? And in this one thing, to strip it of its complications, in the recognition of its importance by the King, and in the passive but stubborn resistance offered to it by the majority of his nobles has lain the struggle of the present reign. To this end salaried commissioners have been appointed one by one to

the chief outlying provinces, until, within the last few years, the feudal lords of all the great districts on the Me Kawn, to the west, and in the Malay Peninsula have found themselves suddenly robbed of half their power by the comparatively unostentatious gentleman who came with the King's orders from Bangkok, who not only advised and reported to headquarters, but without whom they soon found no administrative action could be taken. The great difficulty has lain, as might be expected, in getting the right men, and in many cases they have proved little better than the *Chaos* whose dignities and duties they usurped. But at least they were immediately responsible to Bangkok, and could be recalled and censured, if necessary, with more facility than the proud old *Chaos*. Not unfrequently the Commissioner from Bangkok was almost incapable of understanding the special character and needs of the people under him, or of adapting his ideas to his surroundings. 'Reform' would be his war-cry, and, as young reformers will, he would tilt against such windmills as it was hopeless, or not even desirable, to break through. But on the whole, taking the evil with the good, the *Ka Luang* has been a distinct gain to the people, and the majority of those whom I have seen at their posts were doing excellent work for the country, and devoting themselves to it in an admirable spirit.

It is usually said that the last century of the enervating climate of the plains has robbed the people of Siam of much of the backbone which made them take and give their hard knocks so cheerily of old, and that they have greatly deteriorated since the days of their wars with Burma. Yet, to judge by the old writers, they seem to have had the same characteristics and the same faults then as now.

In Turpin's '*Histoire de Siam*'² the quaint and, on

² Paris, 1771, 2 vols. 12mo.

the whole, singularly accurate description of Siam penned in the days of the old capital of Ayuthia exactly fits the present time.

'The character of the Siamese,' it says, 'partakes much of the nature of their climate;' and the reader will find that the anomalies which astonish the new-comer at Bangkok existed not less then than at the present day. The arsenal was filled 'with cannon and muskets, rendered useless by rust,' and, owing to their 'invincible indolence,' they never gave themselves the trouble to clean them. The prisons presented a most affecting object. 'The truth' could never 'reach the Throne.' The chiefs only exercised their power to accumulate riches, and officers charged with the distribution of subsistence to the soldiers preferred selling it for their own emolument.³

What alteration has taken place has been very recent, and has been for the better; but a great deal has to be done before these things cease entirely to be true.

To this same 'invincible indolence' is due the want of truthful straightforwardness which we meet with in the Siamese, as in other Asiatic peoples.

It is true that I have known and travelled for years with two, at least, of my men who never told me a lie, and who were truthfulness itself in all their lives. But one is forced to believe, and the Siamese themselves declare, that such men are rather exceptional.

³ In 1891 a large quantity of rice was reported to have been sent up from Bangkok to Lakawn Lampang to relieve the distress there caused by famine; but it never reached its destination. I have known similar cases in which even the rations of the troops were appropriated to their own use by officials, the men having to live on roots and the remains of last month's rice. A typical incident occurred

in 1888, when a regulation came into force by which any one exporting a bullock must produce its official sale paper with the animal. 25,000 blank sale papers found their way direct from the Government printing office to the hands of the cattle traders. The result was the worst year for cattle lifting, and the largest export on record. Somebody benefited.

Among the officials the moral qualities are more lacking, on the whole, than among the people. The latter have a quiet goodness peculiarly their own; but they are good by accident, and as long as by accident there is no reason to be otherwise. To do a thing because it is right is beyond them; to abstain from a thing because it is against their good name, or involves serious consequences, is possibly within the power of a few; the question of right or wrong does not enter the calculation.

These failings are shared by nearly all the Asiatic races in greater or less extent. The good qualities which are the peculiar charm of the Eastern are yet many. And, taken by the standard of everyday life, the Siamese, with his cheerfulness and friendliness, his hospitality and gentleness, his patience under trial, and his charming simplicity, can, in comparison with many Asiatic races, and not a few specimens of the latter-day *farang*, hold his head high. It is when he joins the ranks of officialdom that the snares close in, and if his fall commences it is not from wickedness but from weakness—a failing common to his neighbours, and not unknown in the world beyond Siam.

The shortcomings of the Siamese character have been responsible for the slow advance the King has been able to make, and for the number of European officials who have been appointed to the various departments of the Civil Service; and to the failings of many of those Europeans, one is bound to admit, have been due yet more complications.

The King of Siam has been, probably, the worst-served Sovereign in the world. His wishes, his advice, and his orders were ignored as long as they could safely be so treated. No reliable information was allowed to filter through to him, and while twice a year the tongues of all the nobles in the land swore loyalty and allegiance, the lives of fifty per

cent. of them were in defiance of the principles he had laid down, and were one continued disloyalty. Greed, idleness, or indulgence have been their lord and master, and the gentle unquestioning peasantry bore it all because it was *tamniem*, and they knew the King knew not.

Besides these things, the energy and capacity so conspicuous in the women of Siam, which makes them the workers and the business people of the country, is in the palace confined in an unnatural and unhealthy atmosphere of intrigue and gossip, with the worst results. It is not a question to go into here; its only excuse is the ever-formidable *tamniem*.

As says the candid Megaronides :—

Amicum castigare ob meritam noxiam
Immœne est facinus, verum in ætate utile
Et conducibile;

and my criticisms must be taken in this spirit.

In the *corvée*, debt slavery, the old prison system, and other more or less unhappy institutions handed down to her from the past, Siam has had a heavy legacy of burdens.

But these things are not evils peculiar to Siam, nor are they due, as her enemies constantly assume, to the innate wickedness of the Siamese character. They are inbred with the Oriental scheme of things; they are the immediate result of her geographical position and of her history; and they were common to the nations round her, and were fitted to the needs of the times. To her frequent intercourse with her old rivals, to the wholesale frontier shifting, and to the invasions and counter-invasions which formed their constant recreation, her possession of methods and customs good and evil, common to the majority of Indo-Chinese nations, is largely owing.

She alone has tried to battle with the evil in them,

and for this reason she is entitled to no small amount of sympathy and respect.

In 1892 the King created, in addition to the old Council of State, a Council of Ministers of twelve members, mostly heads of departments, and composed of his own younger, or half, brothers, and a few of the higher nobles. The more important departments were the Foreign Office, the Army, the Navy, Public Works, Agriculture, Justice (Heaven save the mark!), Education, and Finance.

The internal administration was carried on by two separate Departments, one for the North and one for the South, a source, as may be supposed, of great confusion and delay.

The Foreign Office had been for years managed by a particularly able and pleasant brother of the King, Prince Denawongse. At this time arrangements, the credit of which was principally due to Prince Damrong, were being made to get an experienced adviser from Europe, and soon after the services of M. Rolin Jacquemyns, a Belgian international lawyer of note, were transferred from Egypt, where he was employed under Lord Cromer, to Siam. This was a very great blow to the old diplomatic notions; for with such an adviser, whatever mistakes might, in the opinion of some, be made, at least no prevarications of the old deceptive sort would ever be possible; and European notions of strict adherence to all promises and to principles of honour would prevail.

Of the Army and Navy, the latter was by far the smartest organisation. It is most regrettable that, owing partly, no doubt, to the inherent laziness of the nation, but also largely to the way in which the conscription is conducted, as well as to the wretched pay and to the manner in which the services are generally carried on, the *Tahan* ⁴ is universally looked down upon.

⁴ The term applied to the men both of the Army and Navy.

The girls will not speak to him, and the common people avoid him; he feels he is an outcast, with the inevitable result that when he gets the chance he behaves as such, and generally goes to the bad.

The whole military instinct of the people seems to have been killed, and men and families will face anything rather than the prospect of serving, either for themselves or their relatives. No effort seems to have been made to create an *esprit de corps*. The men are tacitly permitted to assume the character of trained bands of coolies, to do whitewashing, or to figure in processions—a treatment which they very properly resent.

All the repeating rifles, officers, and drill-books north of the equator will not make fighting men, with a military spirit, under such circumstances. The surroundings need radical alteration. A military pride which depends to no small extent on smart uniform, regular pay, and good food must be created. The Siamese are plucky enough in face of natural danger, and quite unmoved before death, and, if treated generously and firmly in the way they understand, they will follow you to anything. This, at least, is the opinion of many of those who have had most to do with them. And such material seems not so bad to work on.

In the Army, which consists of a number of skeleton regiments with long names, European instruction has been practically abolished, except in the case of one overworked Danish officer, who, with the pluck of his race, a prodigious voice, and a strong constitution, has long done practically the whole of the drilling of the men.

There are three regiments of cavalry, who straddle a dozen broken-down mangy Australians, and a couple of score jovial little Siamese ponies of eleven and a half hands; two artillery regiments, with some 7-lb. field guns, and eight Infantry regiments, of which four line regiments are credited on paper with two battalions each.

The Navy, on the other hand, though it has had to fight against the lack of spirit I have referred to, and against the rôle of a picnicing institution generally assigned to it, has, mainly owing to the energy and strength of character of another Dane, Commodore de Richelieu, acquired a smartness and efficiency far beyond anything else in Siam. It has been very uphill work, and the jealousy of the many influential Siamese towards any successful foreigner has made it harder. But in spite of old ant-eaten hulls, worn-out machinery, and bad material, the Commodore and his Danish officers have created a really creditable force, the efficiency of which is considerable and is yearly extending. A battalion of marines on the march can keep their distances, and step it with an accuracy which has called forth no little praise from British naval officers who have seen them, and which would not disgrace any force in the world, with such a short training as they get.

The training barque which takes the youngsters away in the gulf some months every year is the most refreshing sight in the country, and the cleanest, smartest, and most efficient thing the Government can boast of. It shows what can be done with Siamese properly trained. But even in the Navy the devilment of Siamese officialdom often interferes.

When the Commodore is away, inspecting coast stations, the mice do play, and every time he returns he has to listen to and settle many hundred cases of complaint by the men for unjust treatment or unfair punishments from the native officers; and it is only after many years' struggle that he has been able to make it impossible for higher officials to do the men out of their small pay, as is still occasionally done, by one method or another, in some other Departments.

The men for this service are taken mostly from the

Mons or Peguans, a strong, handsome race, very like the Siamese, remnants of the old wars, who live mostly up-river and to the north-west of Bangkok, in separate communities. They preserve their own customs, and in their monasteries the boys learn to read and write the Mon language, and many hardly know anything of Siamese. There are five *Wens*, or reliefs, each serving for three months in turn with twelve months at home. Boys who are *Luk mus*, or sons of soldiers, are got very young, and are kept till eighteen or twenty, and often turn out very smart.

The people of the coast on the east side of the Gulf, from Bangplasoi downwards, are also under the Rawng Law, as the Navy Department is called, as well as people of Cambodian or Malay descent in similar circumstances to the Mons.

The unpopularity of this service seems to be gradually diminishing before the efforts of the Commodore, but still remains very strong, especially where natives are in charge.

Both services suffer from lack of European officers. The native officer never can be got to understand that he can be dignified without being arrogant, that discipline can be obtained without cruelty, and that respect for their officers is the first, and self-respect the second, step by which men must be trained.

The European officers are, moreover, seldom thoroughly trusted, and, as a consequence, are never given a free hand. Those in the services suffer from the same disadvantage as the civilians in this respect. Owing to their own want of wisdom in the past in selecting Europeans, picking them up, as they often did, anyhow and anywhere, the Siamese have had several rude awakenings, and they consequently suspect every one they employ. This leads to a system by which almost every one in the

service finds himself watched and hampered by some Siamese, to whom is given almost equal powers, and who has generally sufficient influence to clog his movements. Or he finds himself left severely alone, paid his salary, but allowed to do nothing, with the work all going through other channels, or being done in direct opposition to the advice or opinions he is paid to give.

The enforced idleness or discontent thus caused has brought about the ruin or the resignation of many good men, and by resignations of this sort the Navy has been a heavy loser.

The Public Works Department has concerned itself chiefly with making or improving roads and bridges about Bangkok. Outside the capital the total absence of public works is notorious; and it forms one of the chief grounds of complaint by provincial governors that the money raised by them, which should be devoted to improving communications in their districts, is swallowed up in Bangkok.

Under it comes also the Royal Railway Department, at the head of which was a distinguished engineer who came out originally as Krupp's agent. It has the largest staff, and has been the most expensive luxury, of any of the Government departments. After eight years' work it has constructed ninety miles of railways.

The Post and Telegraphs also come under the head of Public Works, and the former, under the able management of two Germans, is a model of efficiency. Extending to all parts of the country, it has great physical difficulties to contend with; yet the mails, carried as they are by foot-runners, often through the worst and wildest jungle, travel quickly and are seldom lost. Of all Siamese officials the postman, with his neat jacket and his native *panung*, whether in the capital or the jungle, is the smartest, the most polite, and, I need hardly say, the most welcome.

The Telegraphs have had a chequered history. Large sums have been from time to time spent in buying material, making clearings, putting up posts, &c.; but the absence of competent linesmen, the want of care, and the depredations of elephants, floods, and storms, make the few wires that have been erected useless for half the year.

Of the Ministry of Justice at this time the less said the better. It must at least be admitted that it was beautifully impartial in the way in which it imprisoned the complainant, the defendant, and all the witnesses it could get, and the mothers and wives of those it could not get, without distinction. It left them to settle their differences in the course of years, and such as did not die of cholera, dysentery, or starvation might, if they were unusually lucky and had the means, be let out in ten years' time by the clemency of their lordships. People had an unreasoning dislike to finding themselves and their relatives in prison for ten years or for life for having been witnesses of a theft, even though it was *tamniem*; and, with remarkable selfishness, they would turn their backs, and refuse to see or help an innocent man. What were their lordships to do with people in whom the sense of justice was so deficient, especially as it was wilfully depriving them of the means of livelihood?

The Department of Agriculture and Commerce, to give it its full title, was little more than a land-tax office for collecting the taxes on padi land, &c. Under it was the Survey Department, the splendid work of which is, like that of the Navy, due to one man. Mr. McCarthy, formerly of the Indian Survey, was appointed Director-General some years ago. Giving the best years of his life to the work, struggling not only against the perilous fevers of mountainous jungles in the north, but also against prejudices, misrepresentations, and hostile criticism at headquarters, he had, with the aid of Siamese assistants trained

by himself, connected the triangulation of Siam with that of the Indian Survey, and was then engaged in bringing it down through the Lao States to Lower Siam. I saw a good deal of the work subsequently, and was able to judge, so far as a man not trained as a surveyor could, of the enormous difficulties that had been gallantly overcome by Mr. McCarthy and his right-hand man, Mr. Smiles; and, in my opinion, it forms the finest piece of scientific work that has been done or is likely to be done in the country.

Under the Ministry of Agriculture was also placed the new Department of Mines, to which Mr. de Müller and myself had just been appointed for two years. Our work was to be the inauguration of a new Government office for the regulation of mining affairs, the beginning of a geological survey, and the drafting of a code of mining regulations.

There were a dozen or so of big mining concessions in existence, covering in some cases a hundred square miles, a weariness of the spirit to their owners, on which, for the most part, no rents had been paid and no work had been done. They had been mostly granted to men of the concession-hunting type, whose sole object was to sell their concessions as soon as possible for the highest price to some gullible company. In some cases the concessionnaire came well out of it; but not one of these concessions ever paid one penny in royalty, and the production of mineral from them, as represented by figures, is 0. How many hundred thousand pounds were subscribed and spent in some three of these concessions alone is better not stated.

To put an end to such scandals, Mr. de Müller at once tried the experiment, commonly successful in new countries, of granting prospecting licenses at low rates, followed by mining leases of small blocks. Before the latter could be granted, maps and specimens must be produced in evidence

of the *bona fides* of the affair, in order that the Government might have some chance of putting its foot on mere speculation, and on these lines the draft of the mining regulation was drawn up.

Besides these concessions, there was the enormous tin-producing industry of the Siamese Malay States which needed taking in hand.

The Department of Education was under Prince Damrong, who was at the time in Europe studying educational matters.

On his return, with the admirable logic which distinguishes things Siamese, his study of educational methods was rewarded by promotion to the Ministry of the North, the Educational Department going to a venerable nobleman of much learning and erudition, best known as the man who has not accounted for a paltry matter of several thousand pounds which came to him in the capacity of chief of the Customs. What Education lost by the transaction, the provinces of the North, and subsequently the whole interior, gained, for Prince Damrong is possessed of a power of organisation and a capacity for work which is equalled by few other Siamese.

The education of the country has been carried on, as in Burma, by the monks in the *Wats*, or Buddhist monasteries, which are scattered all over the country. Boys are sent by their parents, at eight or nine years of age, to give their service to some particular monk, a friend or relative of his family. In return for this service he is taught the A B C, the rules of Buddha, and such religious principles as he may pick up. At fourteen or fifteen he will leave the *Wat*, or dawdle on, playing his afternoon football and paddling the abbot's canoe. If of a religious turn of mind he will, doubtless, don the yellow robe of the novice, and renounce the world in favour of the more abstruse studies of the Scriptures.

Whether this education is adequate is a matter which is much debated. There is little doubt that it might be easily improved. The actual result is that every man and boy in Siam can, often with much labour, it is true, read and write his own name, and make out a bit of a letter on paper. He has no books to read, but he knows a few things which he may or may not do; he has learnt the Pali formulæ, and all the jungle cries, and if he lives near Bangkok he has heard of a country beyond the sea whence violent and angry men with white faces come, who are always in a hurry and say 'Goddam.'

Though born with an undoubted taste for geography, his knowledge does not extend much beyond this, and his own village.

In the capital it had been decided to augment the teaching of the *Wats* by means of organised schools of a more advanced character, and several schoolmasters had been appointed from England.

The teaching of the sons of the King, as yet too young to go home, had been entrusted to several private tutors, Oxford graduates, while a school for girls of high birth had lately been put under a Cambridge lady, and has since been carried on with great success by a lady graduate of London University. For want of any educational institution of an advanced character, a number of the King's relations and of the nobility were annually sent to England, France, or Denmark, to learn European languages or study special subjects. It was only in cases of exceptional ability and character that the experiment, judged by after results, could be regarded as successful. The average boy does not repay the expense incidental to his education 'at home.' Too often, when he returns to the East, the rupture with the traditions of school or home life in Europe is so sudden and complete that their influence is nearly obliterated. In other cases, men who were likely to be

of real use to their country were too often shelved by the jealousy and intriguing of their enemies, and were condemned to retire to a life of inactivity and uselessness. The King's visit to Europe, if it does nothing else, will probably make this sort of thing impossible in the future.

Before Prince Damrong became Minister of the North in 1892, the south-west provinces of the peninsula, and the south-east towards the Cambodian frontier, had both been under separate ministers. Beyond complicating affairs generally, they did very little, and left the local Governors, for good or ill—sometimes distinctly for the former—pretty much to themselves. Recently, all these provinces have gradually come under the jurisdiction of the Minister of the Interior, to which title Prince Damrong has been advanced, and a vast improvement in the administration has been made.

Bangkok had long been equipped with a Lord Mayor and an incompetent police force, under the Home Department, composed of all the most useless and lowest of the population, and rigged in a marvellous uniform quite in the style of the pantomime policeman. It was chiefly remarkable for the tightness of its trousers, the size of its helmets, and the charming gradations of colour through which it passed from its original ethereal blue. It was an example of sadly misdirected effort after 'advance.' The finest built man in the world would look a scarecrow in such a uniform, while the Siamese was never intended by nature for trousers. His own national *panung* is a rational dress of the most becoming and practical kind; cool in the hot weather, giving freedom to the limbs for exercise, and easily tucked up in the mud or rain. The Burmese *pasoh*, the Malay *sarong*, and the Siamese *panung* are most admirably adapted to the purposes required of them; and when they are exchanged for the European garment

the result is to rob their wearers of individuality, and reduce them to the appearance of the half-caste, the horror of every true native. So much is this the case that no self-respecting Siamese youngster will don the trowsers in Bangkok, and the police uniform, as it was, was one of the chief obstructions to the creation of an



IN ROYAL BANGKOK

esprit de corps so badly needed in the force. A change of uniform, which is, I believe, now effected, has long been looked on as one of the first reforms needed to make efficiency possible. A clown cannot keep order.

Some of the first inquiries naturally made about a

country like Siam are with regard to the method of collection, and the amount, of the Revenue.⁵ Beyond the fact that everything, from fishing stakes in the gulf to fruit-trees in the jungle, seemed to pay a tax, nothing certain was until recently known by Europeans, or, indeed, by Siamese. That there was much misappropriation and much unexplained leakage was apparent to the most casual observer.

⁵ Appendix vi.



IN THE BANGKOK RIVER

CHAPTER III

THE ME NAM VALLEY

SUPAN—THE LOWER ME NAM PLAIN—CROSS-COUNTRY KLONGS—
AYUTHIA

A SHORT trip to the Bo-Yat district in Chantabun at the beginning of the rainy season of 1892 was followed by another to the north-west in August, to a district situated between the provinces of Supan and Kanburi. I had as interpreter a Siamese gentleman, who spoke French and had learnt a little mineralogy in Paris, and we were accompanied by an assistant surveyor and six boatmen. We were practically a Government prospecting expedition, and were sent to report on some rich ruby mines supposed to exist in that direction, which had been for years nursed in secret by the Government, and of which no one knew anything definite.

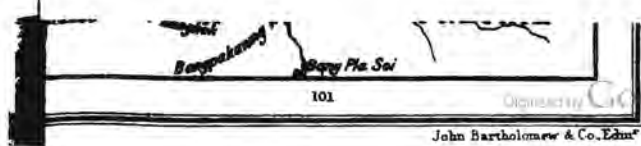
From the Me Nam we entered the principal cross-country waterway, which runs south of west to the Tachin river, one of the Me Nam outlets, which leaves the main river above Chainat, and flows through the formerly rich Chinese sugar district of Nakawn Chasi into the sea twenty-five miles to the west, at the large fishing station of Tachin.

With the flood-tide we reached the sluggish, reed-filled reaches where the tides meet, in time to catch the ebb running westward. With culpable short-sightedness, the Government is allowing this and other magnificent *klongs*, which form the highways of the country, to silt up year by year. Boats which miss the tide remain fast in the mud until the next high tide brings water enough to release them—an event which, for the greater part of the month, occurs only once in the twenty-four hours.¹ Armed dacoit gangs have been in the habit of waiting at these points, and making their descents at night on the boats lying helpless between the banks; and in the dry season, before the rains have raised the water-levels, the heavy-laden country boats are often at the mercy of the bad characters infesting the *klongs* for days together.

With these *klongs* properly dredged and policed, Siam could boast of as fine lines of communication as Holland itself. They represent an enormous amount of well-spent time and labour by a more long-sighted generation. A very small expenditure would insure their being kept open all the year round, and this, with a few cart-roads where water-carriage is not available, would in my opinion be far more beneficial to the country than any number of railway schemes which are never carried into effect.

There has been much talk of a railway to Petchaburi, just south of Ratburi, in this direction. There is no

¹ Appendix i.



doubt that the Siamese, like the Burman, is very fond of a jaunt in a railway-carriage. But it is exceedingly questionable whether he will be the better in any way for being able to get to Bangkok, the royal and iniquitous, in three hours instead of three days. He will go oftener, perhaps; he will gamble more; he will discover that drunkenness is not disgraceful; and he will learn to rob or knife his friend with less compunction. It will be a grand thing for the shopkeepers, the opium farmers, and the gambling dens, and will, through them, indirectly benefit the revenue. And it will assist materially in ruining what character the Siamese peasant is possessed of. But to talk of its developing the country in any other manner is, to my ideas, hypocrisy. For with their sea communication, and their two lines of cross-country canal connection, water transport is the cheapest and the easiest for the whole of the produce of the western provinces of Kanburi, Ratburi, and Petchaburi. What Siamese is anxious to break bulk and load railway-waggons at Petchaburi or Ratburi, to have to unload again at Bangkok before reaching the required destination? He can transport nothing in Bangkok except by water. There is, and there can be, no bridge over the Me Nam at that point. Coming from the west, he finds himself cut off from the main part of the city by the river; he must take to the water. The total gain by rail will be perhaps a day and a half, in a country where time is cheap, at a cost of handling his cargo twice more than is now necessary. Such a method will take long to commend itself to the ordinary Siamese, more especially as his boat lies handy at his door, and the family may just as well spend a week or two in the journey to Bangkok and back, and they will get a change and meet some friends, and his wife will be able to show the children how a smart Siamese woman does her bargaining. Moreover, Petchaburi is a *cul-de-sac*,

and leads to nowhere. The mountains westward into Tenasserim are, with their scanty Karen population and jumbled, intricate nature, practically impenetrable for a railway, and the districts lying south of Petchaburi are equally sparsely inhabited.

In this direction there is in Siam a vast deal of only half-innocent misconception as to the true nature of what we call civilisation. The Siamese have been too often encouraged to regard railways as the one sure step to prosperity and to the sympathy of Europe. Because England and France are a network of railways, it does not follow that it will be useful, desirable, or possible to connect every town in Siam with every other town, irrespective of all other considerations. Because telegraphs and telephones have spread with modern progress in the West, they will not necessarily prove the first and most indispensable accompaniments of reform in a country of the far East.

It may sound well in newspaper paragraphs to say 'there is to be railway and telegraphic communication with Muang so-and-so.' But to the man who knows the country it would be, in most cases, far better evidence of real effort after advance to hear that existing tracks have been improved, deep watercourses bridged, and dacoity put down with a firm hand. But the doctor who prescribes moderation in the use of the railway drug, and such simple remedies as the above, taken in a solution of common sense, meets with much the same contempt as one who should propose a little work to an idle patient, suffering from nerves. A few main lines, wisely chosen, to open districts which are not by nature accessible to water transport, are of the first importance. But a development of its canal system is only needed to make the greater part of the Me Nam valley the richest and most productive rice-growing plain in the East. Not one-

quarter of it is under cultivation, for the simple reason that without canals, or with its canals blocked and silted up, there are no means of access and no means of irrigation. The latter is as important as the former, but it has ever been disregarded by the Government.

A day's steady work against the stream in the Tachin brought us to the mouth of Klong Sawng-pinawng, up which we travelled on the third day to the village of that name. It was my first experience of the country and of the scenes which, in time, acquired such a peculiar charm. I sat on the roof of the deck-house, looking far away across the great silent stretch of country that lay steaming in the morning sun to the blue horizon, and vividly was reminded of the wide fenlands at home, with bamboos in place of willows, and palms for poplars. But there were no distant Cambridge towers to look for, no Peterborough or Ely to make its presence felt. Only a scattered village here and there, and the high-roofed *Bawt* of some monastery beside the winding silver streak. As the day wore on the wind freshened and set the palms and bamboos swaying; a far tall sail crept swiftly along some distant dyke, an urchin cried shrilly at his wallowing buffaloes, or the steady chip of the adze came and fell astern as we passed a boat-builder's wide-roofed shed.

At Sawng-pinawng was a delightfully shady *Wat*, where the monks were skilled in building the little narrow canoes in which they go their morning rounds at the river-side houses, to beg their food of the charitable. These tiny craft have their centre of gravity so high, owing to the lofty stem and stern, that when unoccupied they will not float upright. Their beam is exactly sufficient for a man of small proportions to sit on the little stool amidships; they taper at the ends till there is hardly room for a respectable mouse, and in length they vary from seven to thirteen feet. I had a sort of prejudice

in favour of the notion that a 'funny,' or a light four, is as hard to 'sit' as anything afloat. But at Sawng-pinawng I learnt that this was another of those illusions which life dispels. I spent the best part of an hour trying to get a boat's length from the bank in one of these ingenious craft, and in swimming ashore again to renew the attempt. I subsequently mastered a more roomy type, but I shall retain to my last day the greatest admiration for the watermanship of these Siamese mendicants, who even when bent old men go forth, and on their dexterity with their one little paddle risk their begging bowl and its contents, even on the waves of a wide windy river. For the meditation proper to a mendicant monk they seem perilous craft; on the other hand, their crankness makes it impossible for the paddler to turn his head to look at a pretty girl, which is doubtless just as well for some holy brothers.

With regard to the begging rounds of the inmates of the monasteries, some unnecessary sentiment has been expended by Europeans on the givers of the daily dole, who are considered, apparently, to be badly used in not receiving thanks for their charitable action. This has been encouraged by the habit of representing Siam as a 'priest ridden' country, as if the yellow-robed votaries of meditation were a priestly class apart from and eager to grind down the people. Nothing can be further from the truth. They are not priests, and perform no priestly offices, nor do they admit that they worship 'idols,' as some missionaries and many authors² state.

They are strictly of the people. Peasants and princes, jungle men and officials, all go into the *Wat* some time; for unless they use the opportunities at hand how shall

² C. Bock, in *Temples and Elephants*. Even Prince Henri d'Orleans, who having travelled widely in Buddhist countries should know better, calls the figures of Buddha 'idols' in *Around Tonkin*.

they make enough 'merit' to rise higher in the next life? So a few months' retirement from the vanity and sorrow of life, to the calm and meditation of the shady *Wat* precincts, is essential to every Siamese at some time; and the longer he elects to stay and to shun the frivolity of the outer world the greater become his chances hereafter. If his piety be great, the people in the village begin to send their sons to him for their education, and, like the tutor of a college, he will have a whole family of lads on his 'side' at different times. The *Wat*, instead of being a burden and a tax to the villagers, is an institution to which they owe many of the blessings of their life, the education of their sons, the opportunities of 'making merit' which are so valuable, and the little gaiety they enjoy at the religious ceremonies of the year. They look upon it with the pride that 'Varsity men do on their college, where the family has gone perhaps for generations. And they would stint themselves rather than have to let the prior and his train of monks pass by without a contribution to the alms-bowl; and as to expecting thanks, why, they should rather thank the mendicants for giving them the opportunity by their presence of making a little merit. For it is more blessed to give than to receive. It is the giver who reaps reward.

Next day our elephants and ponies were ready, and we left the tools, &c., to come on by bullock cart. Three days in a north-west direction brought us to Ban Binghoa Wen, a miserable group of shanties buried deep in the jungle; and here in a grass-thatched shed ten feet by six we spent an entertaining week. Our journey was over flat country, diversified here and there by a few outlying spurs running eastward, with detached hills rising to a height of some 500 feet. From the top of some of them the hill masses, rising from 2,700 to 3,700 feet, between us and the Me Nam Kwa Yai, could be seen hidden in

rain far to the westward. A few poor agricultural villages of Siamese, Mon, and Lao are scattered through the neighbourhood. I was surprised to find myself looked upon at first with suspicion, and ultimately with mild astonishment. It came out that an European—I regret to say an Englishman—had travelled in the neighbourhood of Kanburi, intent on mining, some years before, and his reputation for brutality and coarseness had spread hundreds of miles. It had, no doubt, lost little in the process, and it was commonly supposed that all Europeans must be the same. Subsequently the same story was often repeated in the Lao States and other parts of Siam, and at such times I confess I felt less proud of our Western civilisation. It is a humiliating fact that there is nothing so low as the Westerner of the baser sort.

It was the height of the rainy season, and though on the way up we were fortunate in having a dry spell, the rains now broke upon us in earnest. I regretted exceedingly then, as often afterwards, that I was not an entomologist, for the numbers and varieties of bugs, both biting and otherwise, which made our lives a burden to us would have amply repaid a connoisseur for all the morning heats, the evening deluges, and the nightly chills which we enjoyed. I obtained, however, much experience which afterwards proved useful. First, I learnt to disbelieve in the wealth of ruby mines discovered and reported by Siamese officials. Beyond some black and opaque stones, which turned out to be Hercynite² or iron-spinel, we found no trace of colour.

² According to experience at Chieng Kawng, this mineral is invariably accompanied by sapphires, and an exhaustive search may result in the discovery of these gems. The rock from which they appear to be derived is a nepheline basalt described by Mr.

Prior of the British Museum, who has examined it, as consisting of small porphyritic olivines in base of purple augites, magnetite, nepheline, and a little felspar. The country rock of the neighbouring hills is a hard quartz grit.

It is possible that red spinels have been found, and mistaken for rubies; but we found none, nor could we make out that the natives of the district had ever seen or heard of any. Secondly, I found the impossibility of getting Siamese to work in a *Baw*, owing partly to their laziness, and partly to their rather justifiable fear of the *Pi*, or spirits of the place, who seem to have a particular dislike to people digging up the soil, and lay them low with fever in no time.

So I spent the week doing coolie labour myself, sinking pits and washing gravel in the shallow valley, where the rubies should have been; for which, I hope, the village tiger was duly grateful, as at the day's end I was much too tired to go in search of him, though we heard him two nights, and he killed a big sambar within five hundred yards of camp just before we left.

Our only sport were snipe and wood-pigeon, in the fields we passed through on the way to work.

Our old guide was undoubtedly the feature of the trip. I was told that we were to have a reclaimed robber to show us the way, and I had visions of tamed burglars at East-End-Mission teas.

When a benign grey-haired old gentleman looking rather like a bishop was introduced to me at Sawng-pinawng, and it was explained that this was the man, and that he had often cut down men in cold blood in their tracks, one's notions of things as they should be received a severe shock.

But truth is stranger than fiction, and it was scarcely surprising, at last, to see how, at every village we came to, he received his court like a veritable monarch. As soon as he arrived hosts of visitors came crouching in before him, all invariably armed. He sat like a king, with his venerable grey head and smiling keen old face, looking round upon them from the dais and dispensing

his favours and my cigars right royally. His slightest wish was carried out at once, and I, a Government official, was received and hospitably entertained by the good people, because I was the friend of the man who had once defied the Government, who had led an absolutely unscrupulous career as a dacoit leader, and had been feared for miles in all directions. The Government had in some way made its peace with him; he was allowed to retain his ill-gotten gains in elephants and cattle, and in return he was a reformed character, who showed a pious horror of dacoity, and was not above assisting the Government with a little information at times. He was a charming old fellow, so kindly and so pleasant with the children, it would have been a thousand pities to behead him. He was plucky too; and when we ran short of rice, owing to the loss of some from the carts in crossing a stream upon the road, he rode a night and day upon his elephant to Kanburi and back to replenish our stock, through a country infested by men who longed to get their sights in line upon him; and one night, when I returned from work, he had gone off alone with my M.H. carbine, and came back later having planted two bullets in 'him' (the tiger), though he failed to bag him, as the beast escaped in the dusk. The old gentleman and I became great friends, and years after he would come to the office in Bangkok and shake me by the two hands for minutes together, with which doubtless a Norwegian knife I gave him had much to do.

What with tigers and dacoits, the poor peasantry were at their wits' end how to keep their cattle; in two villages we passed through, oxen had been taken by the former right out of the cattle-pen the same week, the brute having leapt the hurdles with his kill apparently on his back. As to the dacoits, the people begged us to represent the state of affairs in Bangkok, and get Praya

Surisak, in whose name they seem to have great faith, sent up to suppress the gangs in the district.

On our return journey we found the rains had transformed the country; streams which we had passed ankle deep we now swam the ponies over, and we had to leave them halfway, and take entirely to the elephants. The latter, however, had great difficulty in the vast seas of mud into which the lowlands were transformed, and on one occasion one got bogged—a thing which very rarely



TRANSPORT FACILITIES—BOGGED

happens to an elephant.* We were warily seeking our way across a wide expanse of swamp, the elephants advancing, sounding with their trunks, and trying every step carefully. It got very sticky, and the smaller of them suddenly swung round on his hind legs trumpeting, and rushed out. The other, trying to turn, plunged into a deep soft patch, where he immediately sank to his

* Cf., however, Mr. Rankin's account of the 'Elephant Experiment' in Africa.

belly, and lay over on his side, roaring with fear. We jumped off, and cut his saddle gear adrift, for the mud would bear us and even ponies safely, and then we stood clear, and encouraged him. He fought his way out slowly and pluckily with infinite patience, but was quite cowed on getting back to *terra firma*. It was a hard day for them, for we were sixteen hours on the march, through very rough prickly bamboo jungle, which tore the poor beasts' ears, while the big elephant-flies drew blood all over their bodies. If you can get shelter, never travel by elephant at night through prickly bamboo.

We met between forty and fifty ox-carts, all bound from the plains to the hill districts to get above the floods of the end of the rainy season. In the centre of the Me Nam plain the people do not keep oxen, as they have no place for them when the floods are out, but only the big black buffalo, which love the water, and live in it by day, and gather at night upon the high *klong* banks or about tree clumps. The few ponies they have are put in a stable on piles above the waste of waters. But in the villages around the edge of the plain, whence high land can be reached, the homely little red oxen are bred in numbers, and it is from these places they are brought to Bangkok for export ^a to Singapore, and it is in these districts that the cattle thieves abound; for there is a ready market for the oxen, while the buffalo is not easily tampered with by any one not its owner.

It was pleasant to be back at Sawng-pinawng, where we really could keep dry, and where our rice and curry was varied with Indian corn and custard apples. All my gun ammunition was finished, and so the snipe were as thick as mosquitoes, and, under the circumstances, quite as irritating. On leaving in the boat, our men stood to their work gamely, going all night and all day with occasionally

^a Appendix vii.

a rest for their meals or for a bathe. The standing position adopted in all the boats of the country makes it possible to continue at the oar for very long. The action is similar to that of the gondolier, but is easier to the novice, as, instead of resting the oar in a slippery crutch, it is held by a grommet of grass turned on to the head of the upright, which holds the oar some two feet above the deck and gunwale. The motion in a light boat, when the oarsman often sways one leg to the swing of his stroke, is singularly graceful, and the position, standing high up aft and looking forward, is very convenient in the narrow winding water-ways so often to be navigated. To *chau* a boat thus alone takes a little practice; the tendency of the boat is, of course, to run round on the side away from the oar, and this is met by turning the wrists over, and feathering under water as the hands are brought back. And so we swung along hour after hour with something of the measured beat one used to know, down the long straight *klongs*, until at last we reached the thickly peopled villages and the green palm plantations, and burst into the broad Me Nam again at Bangkok.

The country to the west of where we had been, up the valleys of the Me Nam Kwa Yai, and Me Nam Sisawat, the eastern branches of the Me Klawng, has evaded map-makers in a singular manner, and the Siamese Survey have only been through it in one or two directions. The usual route to the *Prachadi Sam Awng*, or Three Pagodas, which has been the point of departure for more than one British-Siamese frontier delimitation commission, has usually been up the Me Nam Kwa Noi to the western source of the Me Klawng.

The scattered Karen population of the divide has been utilised for the transport of the expeditions and for the jungle-clearing work.

Leal crossed by this route during the last of his many

journeys between Siam and Tenasserim, and a very clear account of it is given in the 'Government Gazette,'⁶ January 25 and February 8, 1827.

The valleys of the Me Klawng basin are inhabited largely by the Mons, or Talaings, who are a fine agricultural people, the remains of the old Peguan Empire, cultivating their padi, Indian corn, and fruit gardens along the banks of the rivers, and preserving their language and customs in the monasteries. Teak grows on the hill lines between the Me Nam Kwa Noi and Me Nam Kwa Yai, as far down as lat. 13° 50', the most southerly point it is known to reach in Indo-China.⁷ But it has never been worked, owing chiefly to the smallness of the streams, which in the hot season are a collection of dry sand-banks and occasional buffalo wallows, and in the rains are mere rushing torrents.

The hard woods, with which the open jungle, known as *kok*, forming the approach to the hill country, abounds, have been largely used for sleepers for the Korat Railway, and, being of small size, they were fairly easy to transport by water, though, owing to their weight, they have to be floated by bamboos.

Another outcome of the extent and densely jungled character of the mountainous western country, and of its sparse population, is the number of big game animals found there, which far exceeds that on the less pronounced eastern watershed of the Me Nam Valley.

Kanburi, following the modern tendency of Siamese centres of population, has, since the last century, come south towards the sea. The old town of that name, on the

⁶ In *Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War*, &c., compiled and edited by H. H. Wilson, Government Gazette Press, Calcutta, 1827. It is given by Dr. Anderson in *English Intercourse with Siam*.

⁷ 'Young teak trees' I have seen mentioned as growing at Meimbun in the Sulu islands. Guillemard, *The Cruise of the Marchessa*, John Murray, 1886, vol. ii. p. 25.

Sisawat River, was destroyed by the Burmans in their invasion of 1776, and now it is resuscitated at the junction of the east and west branches of the Me Klawng. It is perhaps chiefly famed to the British as the residence of an operator on the Bangkok-Tavoy telegraph line, who can never keep his line open to the frontier for a fortnight together, and is quite unintelligible when he is open to his neighbour on the Burma side. It is more favourably known generally for its pepper, sugar, and tobacco, and for its great possibilities when dacoity shall be suppressed. I have not been in the district for some time, and one may well hope things have improved; for they certainly could not be worse than they were in 1892.

What perhaps had struck me most in the great plain was the vast amount of rich open country undrained, and unclaimed except by the buffalo and the heron, where the wild solitude was made audible by the unceasing sighing of the wind and the monotonous chirping of the insects in the grasses. All over the lower Me Nam delta the same thing is observable. North-east of Bangkok the great alluvial plain lies a lonesome waste of swamps and grasses from the banks of the Me Nam to the Nakawn Nayok River. In the absence of waterways there were no settlers, and those who attempted to go back into the prairie, or *Tung Yai* as it was called, soon had their little shanties overturned by the inquisitive and playful elephants, which come down at certain seasons from the higher wooded lands on the edge of Dawng Praya Yen. In 1892 a company was formed to dig canals across this waste, and so to drain and populate the district. It was a magnificent enterprise, which reflected the greatest credit on its originators. But it has been hampered from the outset in a manner which is highly instructive. By the terms of the company's contract with the Government all people settling along the canals subsequent to their digging

were to pay certain dues, and the company would have the land, on the completion of each *klong*, to sell or cultivate.

No sooner did the company begin work than people suddenly appeared along the lines mapped out, armed with title-deeds all in order and just granted by the then Minister of Agriculture. The company made the mistake of turning out a lot of these title-holders, thus taking the law into their own hands. They would have done more wisely to have turned to the Government, and gone against the real wrong-doers in the Agricultural Department, but they knew the dilatoriness of Government enquiries where officials' reputations were involved, and acted for themselves. So the claims of the holders of title from the astute Minister of Agriculture, and the counterclaims of those whom the company placed in possession, have led to a pretty muddle, which has gone on getting more involved for years. A special commission has had to try to unravel the mess, with the result that the company seems likely to suffer heavily.

Thus, by the duplicity already referred to, the most public-spirited and far-sighted scheme which has been attempted in Siam of late years is threatened with ruin, and has made hosts of enemies, many of whom are powerful to do it harm.

The scheme involved the cutting of three main canals running east-north-east from various points on the Me Nam side, to be connected by smaller north and south canals at equal distances. In 1895 the centre one had gone ten miles in, and to the westward, in the wake of the huge excavators, fields were being cleared and houses were rising on their posts. Eastward the wide expanse lay without a break; here and there the black back of a wild elephant could be seen, or a streak of water lying in one of the many old river beds, now silted up, which were the ancient mouths and channels of the Me Nam. On their margins

old tree trunks are constantly turned up from ten to twelve feet down in the deep soft ooze, and the fact that they are identified as mangrove shows that the whole of this part of the delta is of extremely recent geological formation. Tradition makes Lopburi a seaport, where, at all events, the tide was felt as late as the ninth century, and, as the tide influence reaches to Ayuthia at the present day, it is credible enough. But the wrecks which tradition places on the edges of the Dawng Praya Yen and Dawng Rek are less to be believed in, unless they were those of surprisingly primitive mariners. The depth of the marine sands formed below the thick covering of river deposit shows that the sea has occupied the site of Bangkok at no distant geological period; but the tendency generally is to under-estimate the time required for the deposition of immense thicknesses of alluvial soil. Nature works slowly, and the sailors and boat builders of the gulf need feel no nervousness when they read Professor Keene's startling prophecy, that 'the time is approaching when the narrow inlet at the head of the Gulf of Siam will be entirely filled in, and when it will be possible to pass overland from Mergui and Tenasserim directly eastwards to Chantabun in South-East Siam.'^a

In 1896, notwithstanding the visits of elephant herds, who came frequently to enquire into the working of the excavators, and to whose mind the electric light was a distressing innovation, the central canal was completed to the Nakawn Nayok River. Locks have been fitted at each end, and thus the early freshets in the Bangpakong or Nakawn Nayok River will be admitted at the north-east end, and will irrigate the whole country between the two rivers.

^a *Geography of the Malay Peninsula, Indo-China, &c.*, 2nd Edit. London, 1892. 'The Narrow Inlet' has an area of over 3,600 square miles of an average depth

of from 10 to 15 fathoms. To join Tenasserim and Chantabun a further area of 2,250 square miles will require to be filled up to a mean depth of 16 fathoms!

As that river is a short one, the freshets die down early, and the gates at that end will therefore be shut to retain the water, while at the western end the waters of the Me Nam floods, which come later, will be admitted as soon as they are high enough. The canal is about forty feet in width and ten in depth, and thus forms an admirable highway for native craft, while the high banks of material which have been deposited by the excavators, some thirty feet back from the edges, will make good paths in all weathers.

South of the company's operations three old canals run from the neighbourhood of Bangkok east-north-east, east, and east-south-east to the Bangpakong, and these, like their opposite numbers on the west, are being allowed to silt up to such an extent that Klong San Sep, the northernmost, is impassable in March and April. The character of the country to which they form the high roads is similar to that on the west. Next the sea, a zone of mangrove swamps, where the twisting winding creeks are the home of the mosquito and the monitor, and where an occasional fishing village stands aloft on its piles above the mud. Inside this again, where the land is higher and the mud more firm, that most useful of plants the toddy or *Attap* palm (*nipa fruticans*) is cultivated. Its long graceful leaves, when dried and yellow, form the roofing of half Siam, and admirably they turn both rain and sun. Here and there, towards the sea, salt is made by evaporation in wide flat salt fields, and the whole of the lower Me Nam valley is supplied from here.

Inland of this again, along the straighter artificial *klongs*, we reach the groves of cocoanut and *areca* or betel palms, of oranges and jack fruit, and then the lower padi fields, where the grain is not so good as farther north, on account of the brackish tidal water that occasionally flows in.

East by south of Bangkok, on the winding Bangpakong, lies the important little town of Petriu, where a number of rice mills have been erected, the centre of a considerable trade and of a rich padi-growing plain watered by that river, where some of the grain is renowned for its quality; and farther north lies Prachim, the administrative headquarters of the province, and the point of departure to the gold-mining districts of Kabin and Watana. One or two small steamers run from Bangkok to Petriu every week.

Ayuthia, or *Krung Kao*, the old capital, is well worth visiting, and has been often described, as it is a pleasant afternoon's steam from Bangkok. The old brick pagodas still stand scattered over many square miles of country, attesting to the former size of the town, and contrasting in their deep red colouring with the dense vegetation all about. In their style they follow that of the towers of Angkor, without the exquisite detail of that wonderful ruin, and with loftier but not more effective proportions. There are still a few fine *Wats* standing, as at Wat Chang, where the big Buddha is. But the best idea of what the old place was like is to be gathered from such authors as Hamilton and Turpin. From the north-east comes in the Nam Sak River, and the neighbourhood is cut up by a perfect network of intricate creeks, which afford highways for the people in their country boats, and which drain and irrigate the dense fruit plantations, and the wide treeless expanses of the padi plain. The banyan and the peepul, the palms and bamboos, are seen at their best, and the appearance of comparative wealth and prosperity strikes the observer who has seen other parts of the country very favourably.

There is a curious zone destitute of bamboo to the north-east towards Pakprio, which is peculiar, and unlike most parts of the country, where the feathery summits of the giant bamboo clumps form, as a rule, such a delightful

feature of the landscape; as around the town of Bat-tambong, where the same thing is observable, it is largely owing to the excessive depth of the yearly inundation, which is often in this part over six feet.

The most interesting sight in Ayuthia is the annual 'elephant hunt,' when some two hundred of these animals from the lower slopes of the Korat range and the grass



HERD OF WILD ELEPHANTS

tundras about Nakawn Nayok are driven by a *cordon* of tame elephants into the stockade erected for the purpose outside the city, for the selection of some of their number for domestication.

The same performance is gone through in a score of places in Siam every year. But it is on a smaller scale, and is effected by small parties of foresters in the distant jungles far from the ken and applause of men.

But the 'hunt' at Ayuthia has long been a royal event, at which it has been the custom for the king, or his representative, to be present, and all the beauty and fashion of Bangkok to attend.

The herd often arrives thoroughly tired out and sick of being everlastingly badgered to move on by the wide semicircle of mahout-ridden tuskers, who have patiently driven them for a month. The result often is that they pass tamely enough across the river, and into the converging line of stakes leading to the keddah. The sight when the two hundred animals come down the steep bank to the river is rather curious—like a waterfall of elephants, if the expression is permissible.

There is always some trumpeting and crushing at the narrow entrance to the kraal, the leaders at first being afraid to go in, although usually led by a tame tusker, and the rear ones being in a hurry to get out, as they hope, from the narrowing lines in which they find themselves. In this rush the most remarkable thing is the care taken of the young calves, who get beneath their mothers and come out of it without a touch, and although there is much pushing and 'greasing,' as it is called at Westminster, there is never any trampling on small animals. But for this display of terror they are quiet enough, for they are tired and hungry, and they slowly circle round, kicking up the dust, but in no excitement. The new-comer is generally disappointed, and remarks, 'They don't look like wild elephants, do they?' The poor things are doubtless far from feeling it. On more than one occasion this passivity has been the cause of the animals being unnecessarily tortured by order of persons in authority during the capturing operations, which take place on the second day, in order to increase the excitement of the spectacle. The last case of the sort which occurred to my knowledge was done by order of a prince who, having resided in Europe sufficiently long to acquire at least one European language with some fluency, had been placed in the most important position in the richest province of Siam, to guide local officials in the way they should go,

and to civilise the country. He had prongs and fireworks for the purpose, and has not, I fear, to this day received the thrashing he deserved.

The selection and capture of the best animals is carried out in the manner which is general in elephant-catching countries of the East, and which is fully described in all its details by Sanderson in his incomparable book.⁹

A certain number of tame tuskers go in, each carrying his mahout on the neck, and his rope-man, with two long coils of rattan cables, upon his back. The herd never attempt to fight the tuskers, and the animal required soon finds one of the latter on each side of him. The men then try to get the noose of the cable over one foot, generally with the assistance of a long bamboo. As there is often one foot off the ground even when standing still, it is not generally difficult. The moment it is over, the coil is dropped, and the tusker makes off with the end to the nearest of the huge teak or *mai-tukien*¹ posts which surround the enclosure. Here the end is made fast by the attendant men waiting behind, and the captive, finding his movements hampered, generally makes some wild rushes, straining the strong rattan and threatening almost to dislocate his hind legs. In his rushes to one side and the other, each time that he approaches the big posts a lashing is slipped round the cable, and thus it becomes gradually shortened in until it has no play left. The tame tuskers approach again, and, if he shows fight, the biggest takes him end on with his forehead, and by sheer weight bears his head and tusks down²—thus, as it were, holding him—while the others come alongside, and a strong bind-

⁹ *Thirteen Years among the Wild Beasts of India*. London: W. H. Allen & Co., Ltd., 1893.

¹ Burm. Thingan; *hopea odorata*.

² In training the tame tuskers a great point is made of their

getting their head and tusks higher than the opponent's. The position gives greater freedom and power, and also protects the mahout.

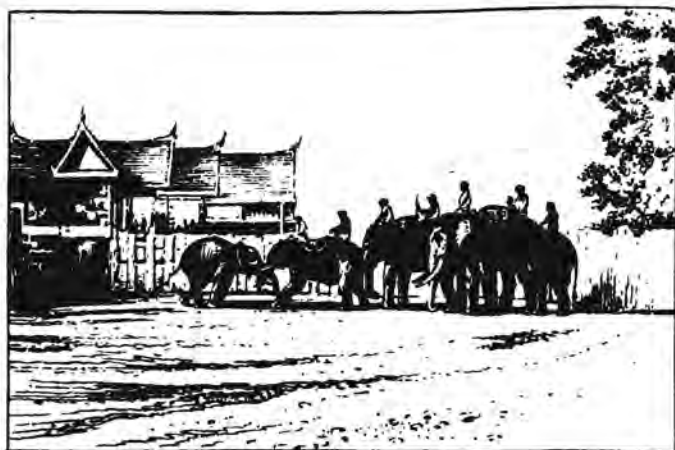


GOING INTO THE SCRUM

70 .VIMU
AMROELAO

ing is passed round his neck. With this he is securely fastened to the big tuskers on either side, and is marched to the exit, where he is untied and hustled through the narrow space. His journey is then a short one to the long high-roofed shed which does as stables, where, moored to an enormous post, he is fed and trained by his future *maw*.³

Eventually the herd is let out into the open to go down to the river and bathe and drink, surrounded by the



QUIETING THE VICTIM

long-tusked sentinels. While they stand in doubt and vexation, waiting and looking about them, very often one or two more captures are effected; but it is a more difficult matter outside in the open than inside the keddah, as there is more scope for the frightened animal. Now and then some of the herd, on these occasions, break through the line of tuskers, and the crowd of Siamese who are collected round in a large circle a little way

³ Lit. doctor = mahout.

behind stampede to the nearest point of safety. The elephant, however, can run down the best runner, and every year some one gets killed in this way. A little hesitation, a trip in the rough ground, a kick, and it is over. Some of the crowd, who are more used to it, face the charging animal with sticks and stones, and, as he is only in search of peace and quiet, he nearly always changes his direction to pass clear of them.

The most memorable thing I saw was the fight made by a fine young tusker about five years old, who was noosed outside the keddah just as the herd was being driven off to water. His rage and terror were unbounded, and the poor little fellow screamed like a baby and fought like a lion. The three big tuskers engaged in trying to bind him could effect nothing with him, and he broke everything they tried to lash him with. But the stout rattan cable still held. All of a sudden, to his repeated cries, there came up four elephants from the herd, side by side in solid phalanx, with their tails straight out, and roaring vengeance. The leader was a fine old female, probably the mother of the captive; the other three doubtless the friends and relations who were his particular chums in the herd. The tame tuskers seemed scared, and would not face them, and the four surrounded the little animal, which still whimpered piteously. There they held their position, and the Siamese crowd gave them a shout of applause and admiration. They kept turning round and round the captive, and charging now at the distant but admiring crowd, now at the tuskers, who turned tail, like the people, over and over again. At last the trained animals were mustered in large force, and the brave creatures were driven off. They went away into the jungle to the northward, and were last seen crossing the river to the north-east at the same fast pace.

It was suggested that these four elephants seem to

have worked with a sense of the value of combination. The real explanation probably was that, being chums, and being accustomed to move together, when one moved off towards the cries of the little captive the others went too as a matter of course.

Nothing is really more noticeable in a large number of elephants than the total lack of any appreciation of the power derived from united effort. If the elephant possessed in any way the sense ascribed to that wonderful animal the beaver, no elephant-taming and no keddah operations would be possible. The majority of the yarns ascribing reasoning power to the elephant have no evidence to support them, or can be accounted for on other grounds.⁴ The same exaggeration is to be observed in the height formerly ascribed to the full-grown elephant.⁵

The little tusker continued raging and crying sadly, fighting with a despairing pluck which gained him the sympathy of all who saw him. At night-time they had still failed to get another lashing on him. He should have been, and let us hope he was, given his freedom; for no animal which takes his capture so to heart is likely to live; and, sad as it seems, about twenty-five per cent. die before they are tamed, from injuries received during their first struggle or from too much moping. There is doubtless something to be desired in the way in which they are often looked after. It shows how gentle an animal the elephant naturally is that he is often fit to ride in five weeks' time.

One happier youngster on the same occasion broke loose altogether, and had a most gratifying morning in Ayuthia, destroying boats and market booths. His track was clearly marked by the *débris* for a couple of miles.

⁴ Such as occur in La Loubère and Bowring, and notably those which relate the feminine blandishments by which tame female ele-

phants were supposed to lure wild ones to their captivity.

⁵ The Asiatic elephant never exceeds ten feet to the shoulder.

The trained animals were so demoralised by the events of the day that when the herd was to be corralled in the evening, and a number made a rush at the line of the sentinels, they not only made no attempt to stop them, but for some minutes stampeded themselves. It was a scene of the wildest confusion. Everybody seemed to be occupied in running. The mahouts were the only people not thus engaged, but they were belabouring their mounts energetically. As the country is pretty open all round, they were, on the whole, in the safest position.

With an admirable skill and combination they proceeded, when they had got their animals in hand, to round up the flying portions of the herd. Reserves came up just at the weak points, and over a hundred and sixty were successfully driven into the enclosure; but a score or so of the best tuskers had got away.

In Siam the tusks are never cut or blunted as in India. In many parts of the country the elephant spends a large part of his captivity holiday-making in the jungle, more especially in the Malay Peninsula, as, for instance, at Champawn and Sungkla, where there are large numbers of domesticated elephants for whom there is little or no work for the greater part of the year. The animals are loosely hobbled in the jungle, and are there left to enjoy themselves for weeks at a time, the mahouts going out to look them up occasionally. Even those who are harder worked are put out at night in the forest, and have to look after themselves. The consequence is that in a country where the royal tiger and the leopard abound the animals must be allowed to retain their tusks for self-defence. At night they will be usually found standing together head and tail for purposes of mutual support, each protecting the rear of his companion while his own is also guarded. In the few cases I have known of elephants being attacked by tigers, the latter has always come off

second best, in one case being killed outright. If once the tiger gets on the elephant's back, the latter's only chance seems to be to bolt through low jungle and sweep the enemy from his back. Sanderson has remarked the curious fact that the elephant rarely attacks a man on the back or neck of another elephant, and that the mahout is practically safe among a wild herd. Perhaps in the same way the comrade of an attacked elephant gives no further assistance when a tiger reaches the back. For the protection of his flanks the elephant uses his hind feet. The kick is administered with incredible swiftness, and is very violent. It is always best to approach an elephant, like a horse, from his head, for, though a docile creature, he is easily startled, and will then act with the swiftness of instinct. Once he has had a good look at you, and has heard the sound of your voice, and especially when he has received a bunch of bananas at your hands, there is no fear of his being startled by the *farang* dress, which is at first a puzzle to so many. The sense of touch in an elephant is most delicate, and in riding the beast it is astonishing how little pressure of the knee or toe is necessary for his guidance. The apparent absence of direction by the mahout which results from this has been the cause of a large number of the incredible stories one hears of the elephant's reasoning powers.

A long acquaintance with a Siamese mahout would divulge a vast amount of interesting information about the animal, but unfortunately I had not the opportunity of ever becoming sufficiently intimate with one for the purpose of acquiring much of his varied store of knowledge and experience.

Among the ordinary people the animal forms naturally enough the theme of endless story and much fable, from which little that is accurate can be gathered.

As is to be expected from the character of the people,

and from the life of the majority of the domesticated elephants in Siam, their training is seldom carried to the degree of perfection that it is in India, and sometimes one travels with animals who have the least possible notion of the respect due to the orders of their mahouts.

A few months later the Ayuthia herd has swum the rivers, and is back in its haunts, having nearly forgotten the uncomfortable experiences it had among those horrid men folk. But the sight of a party up in the most remote parts of the Tung Yai seems to recall the subject with peculiar vividness. In the spring of 1896 there must have been some humorous old heads among the elephants in the district, for they apparently decided to try a little man-driving for a change. They are said to have descended on a survey camp, walked over the tents, played football with the sextants, drawn out the pegs, sunk the boats, and successfully corralled the whole terrified survey party in Bangkok in four days' time.



TETHERED



ON THE UPPER RIVER

CHAPTER IV

THE ME NAM VALLEY

CHAINAT—RAFTING—PAKNAM PO—NAM PICHAI

FOR a few months after the Supan trip, during the absence on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula of the other half of the department, I was in charge in Bangkok, preparing for a start on another ruby hunt,¹ which proved a longer and more interesting one than the first.

On December 2, 1892, I left Bangkok in what is

¹ *Notes of a Journey on the Upper Mekong*, by the author. Published for the Royal Geographical Society, John Murray,

1895. In that account much was omitted, necessarily, which may perhaps find a place here.

known as a picnic boat, a long low-hulled craft, with an extensive cabin amidships, in tow of a steam launch provided by the Navy authorities. The boat leaked so badly that at Pakret we had to send her back, and next day another arrived which was but little better. As the flood waters were falling fast, it was out of the question to wait, so we pushed on.

Europeans are generally in a hurry to assume that their own methods are necessarily the best for all countries, and in this matter of boats I have seen it stated that, because the natives use dug-out trees for the principal part of their boat's hull, 'they have not yet learned the art of boat-building.'

I have seldom travelled in one of these European-built picnic boats that did not leak, for, after a year or two, the heat opens up all their seams beyond possibility of satisfactory caulking. For the narrow winding waterways their long straight bottom makes them quite useless, for they cannot turn. They are very crank and desperately slow, and cannot travel on the rivers either as safely or as fast as the native craft. In a squall of wind or a sharp current, with all their top hamper, they are positively dangerous.

In the native boats, on the contrary, the Siamese have attained a high degree of perfection, and their boats, as also those of the Lao, are admirably adapted to their purposes. With simple means every requirement has been met, so that in the Me Kawng boats the Lao have actually for centuries been in possession of the uncapsizable and unsinkable, the long-sought ideal of the Western boat-builder.²

Owing to the rapid fall of the water our troubles began on the third day, when we turned from the eastern or Ayuthia branch into what is now the main channel at Sikok, an intricate, winding piece of river, which is the bugbear of all the rafters and boat people from the north.

² Chap. viii.



MARKETING ON THE ME NAM

3500

With much worry we got as far as Chainat, a place of some 3,000 inhabitants, like most Siamese *muangs* so scattered as hardly to be called a town. We then sent our launch back, as, drawing nearly six feet, she could not go farther. It was impossible, we found, to make any way with our clumsy picnic boat under oars, it was equally impossible to pole her; so, as there were no native boats to be got here, we had to wait until we could borrow the Governor's launch to tow us on to Paknam Po. In the meantime, we had leisure to see something of the rafting industry, Chainat being the duty² station for all teak rafts going south. The deep still reaches were full of rafts moored to the banks waiting for the payment of the duty by the owners, and we were told that an unusual amount of timber was coming down this year. We subsequently met large numbers of rafts on their voyage down, and they form a curious feature of the river life. The logs are first collected on the rivers at the edges of the hill country, and lashed into small rafts. Raheng is the great re-rafting and measuring station of the Me Ping; and all the teak of that river and the Me Wang which escapes the timber thieves, or which is not floated by floods over the banks and neaped out in the padi country, passes through it. Sakotai and Pichai are the stations on the Me Yom and the Me Nam, though in the latter we saw the big rafts were often not made up until below Pichit. These two streams unite as the Nam Po above Paknam Po, and, owing to their narrow winding nature, the rafts are usually longer and narrower, and more loosely lashed, than those on the Me Ping, where the river wanders over a wide sandy bed.

By an ingenious method the outside logs are arranged so that, in case of running foul of the bank, they form a kind of patent collapsing fender running under the others.

² Duty is calculated on what is known as the *pikat* rate. Appendix v.

Each raft consists of about 120 logs, there being six or seven logs in the end rows, and as many as ten or more in the centre. At the ends, roughly made oars are placed to work athwart ship, and so cant the head or stern as becomes necessary. Amidships, on a slightly raised platform, is a tiny hut, in which the wife of one of the rafters cooks the rice, and where they shelter at night. It is invariably surmounted by the timepiece of the raft, the champion fighting cock, strutting conceitedly up and down. On him the fortune of the voyage depends, for, if he omit to crow at the proper hours of the night, the routine of work is thoroughly disorganised, and, if he meet his better in the fighting pen, the very cooking pots will go to pay his owner's debts.

The rafts of the Me Ping are usually larger, and contain an average of 150 logs, the end rows having ten and the middle rows as many as sixteen logs. They are also fitted with fenders, which can be cut adrift in case of there being danger of stranding and breaking up.

When working past shallows or bringing up for the night, the excitement and shouting are terrific. Three or four hands jump overboard astern, each with a stout stake at the end of a long hawser. The sharp ends they drive into the bottom, clinging on to the top with all their weight, till the great floating mass drags them over splash into the water. Repeating this again and again, and laughing and splashing, they gradually get the stern end in the required direction, or bring it to a standstill, while other hands are working the transverse-set oars at the fore end, and more are shouting and shoving with twenty-foot bamboo quants.

In the water half the day, and in the sun and wind the rest, they are strong, well-tanned, healthy specimens of humanity, as are the whole boating population of the river.

Under favourable circumstances the journey of a raft

occupies from three weeks to a month, excluding stoppages, but the logs⁴ of which it is composed have often been cut four years before they reach Bangkok, and numbers of saw-yards and boat-building shops flourish in secluded spots on those that never reach the mills.

The defacement of owners' hammer-marks on logs, which has long been assiduously practised by the timber thieves, has at last been the subject of a royal decree of a practical character.⁵

There are eleven sections, and the principal provisions are for the detention by Duty Station officers of all timber suspected of having had marks defaced or altered, whether by fire or otherwise; for public notice to be given of all such timber; for its reclamation by owners within three months; for six-monthly inquiry on all attached timber not reclaimed, &c., &c.; and heavy penalties are awarded for alteration or defacement of marks, or for being in possession of defaced timber without producing satisfactory evidence of ownership.

This will be a great assistance to the principal timber firms, and under Mr. Slade, an extremely able forest officer from Burma, lent by the Indian Government, and his assistants, there is no fear of its becoming a dead letter, as new measures are too much inclined to be.

From Chainat we wound our way past the first low hills of quartzite, and brought the monastery on Kao Kawn Sawan astern of us. In due course we reached the junction of the two main rivers at Paknam Po, the most considerable riverside place that we had passed.⁶ From

⁴ Each log yields about a ton of timber, of about 50 cubic feet, and the number of full-sized logs floated down in the way described up to 1890 was 45,000 to 50,000 annually. In 1891-92, owing to small rise of water, only 12,000

reached Chainat. Since then the number has averaged from 60,000 to 70,000 a year. Foreign Office Trade Reports and Appendix v.

⁵ January 17, 1897.

⁶ Paklat, Angtawng, Prom, and Intaburi are all largish places, with

here the up-country navigation proper may be said to begin, and the north land boats lay in rows in all stages of repair and disrepair, like the locomotives outside the shops at Swindon. The Governor's residence is at Nakawn Sawan, below a scattered *muang* credited with some 5,000 people.

The character of the two rivers here is quite distinct. The Me Ping from the west rushes down in a shallow torrent over its sandy bed, while the Nam Po comes gliding gently through its deep narrow channel, past the groups of sharp gabled floating houses that cluster along its banks, bringing the ever-green floating weed which one meets in quantities below. The Me Ping is sudden and capricious in its movements, and in the flood season it rises and falls irregularly, changing its level to an extent of four, six, or eight feet in comparatively few hours. These rises and falls, which occur sometimes as often as three or four times in the season, make the raft work uncertain and even exciting. The Nam Po, on the other hand, is constant and reliable; during and after the rains its rise is sure and regular, until high water is reached in October and November, and then the fall begins inch by inch, and gradually foot by foot it sinks to its bed again. Thus, whereas floating houses avoid the capricious stream of the Me Ping, the Nam Po is for half a mile the main street of the town, and the rice boats, and the shops and houses lie thick along the banks, moored to the great teak mooring posts, which by their height attest to the amount of the yearly rise of the river.

The secret of the river lies in the great overflow swamps and backwaters about Pichit, which act as safety valves to it, as the Tale Sap on a larger scale does to the Me Kawn in Cambodia. With the rise of the floods these backwaters

from 15,000 to 16,000 people among them, who live mostly in their gardens and plantations, and

the towns, if such they can be called, make but little show along the river side.

become vast inundated lakes, holding large bodies of water in reserve, and, as the level falls in the river later on, they slowly part with their store of water. Thus considerably does nature work to make the great yearly inundation of the lower Me Nam plain gentle and beneficial, and to tame the angry water spirits into blessing instead of cursing. Old Turpin aptly says: 'The Me Nam is to this kingdom what the Nile is to Egypt,' and on its yearly rise and fall depends the life of the people.

We spent some charming days in Paknam Po, seeking for a boat to take us on. In my little sculling boat three of us could travel paddling Siamese fashion, and we went up and down the rows of craft bargaining with their owners. All kinds there were: the huge towering rice boat with its double rudder, but ill adapted to the poling on the upper rivers; the long-tailed shallow-built Me Ping boats; the more roomy, deeper *rua nua* used on the Pichai and Me Yom Rivers; the long swift *rua pet* with its graceful hull; and the endless forms of dug-out canoes, some bright and shining with *chunam* varnish, some white and bleached with many suns and rains, some tight and stiff, some shaky and older than their skippers.

The Western is not good at driving bargains in the Eastern way. The business necessitated much talk on any subject unconnected with what we had in hand, endless tea drinking, and innumerable visits and counter-visits, all of which must be gone through with an air of the utmost unconcern about hiring a boat, and as if we intended settling permanently in Paknam Po. Intensely anxious to get on, I found the greatest difficulty in not betraying my impatience, and the fact that, beyond the commonplaces of every-day life, I was dependent on an

¹ Turpin's *Histoire de Siam*. The same idea has not unnaturally struck other more recent

writers. Mouhot, vol. ii., McCarthy, *Proceedings R.G.S.*, vol. x., 1888.

interpreter did not tend to improve my temper. Reliance on an interpreter is always unsatisfactory, and in Siam, where for some reason all interpreting is bad, it is maddening. The deviousness of Siamese replies when translated into English seems simply insulting, and the amount of talk which takes the place of simple 'yes' or 'no' is distracting. It was not until afterwards, when I knew more of the language, that I realised how unreasonable I had often been, and how very much that was valuable and entertaining I had lost. He who travels not knowing the language of the people he is among adds another to his list of hardships; for there is no ointment to the lonely spirit like the sympathy of human intercourse. Yet it must also be confessed that the Siamese chatter so interminably that even when one understands them one is often thankful to get out of reach of their voices. At moments when silence was most welcome there was always some one to commence some aimless rubbish. My people could never understand that one could want to be alone, either to read or write or think. The Siamese is afraid of loneliness, and, I think, dare not 'face himself.' Even at night his tongue-wagging propensities are not curbed, and often, after a long day's march, a man would wake, and, sooner than lie awake alone, kick his neighbour, and begin to chatter at the top of his voice. One of the first phrases to be learnt, and the last to leave the tongue, was the 'Eh, ning si' required to procure silence in the weary camp at night.

How often, when intending to break camp by daylight, the cook, who had to be up first to prepare the day's rice, would rouse us all at 3 A.M. with his rasping voice, and one of my assistants would begin discussing what coloured *panung* he should wear that day, or go out strutting in the moonlight to look at its effect! The result was, of course, that if much physical effort was required of them they

had talked themselves weary ere they were halfway through.

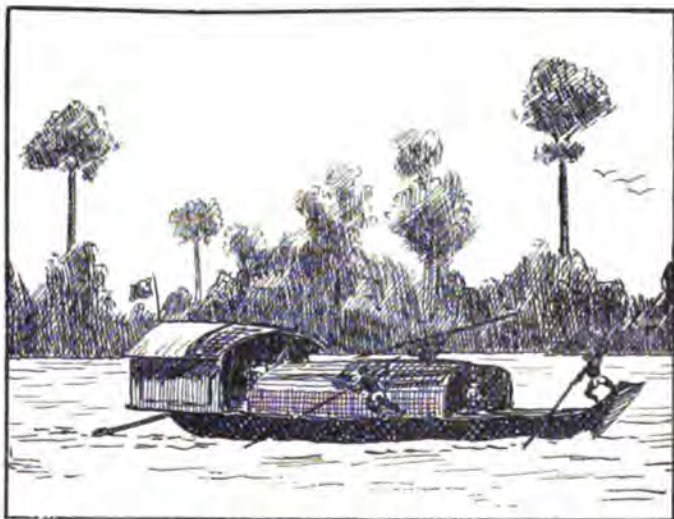
My party consisted of three Siamese assistants, with boys and cook, and a sergeant and guard of six men, made necessary by the amount of silver we had to carry. Since then Prince Damrong has introduced a most useful system, by which travellers can have orders on the commissioners in the various provinces. And had I known when I started what I learned later on, the guard should have been dispensed with entirely and the number of people cut down very considerably. For no dacoits will touch a white man, and in the Lao States they don't exist; while the advantages of a small party are the ease with which transport and food, even in a wild country, can be obtained, the speed with which one can travel, and the comparative absence of crowd and worry.

We completed our bargaining at last, and obtained a fine roomy *rua nua*, with her owner and skipper as steersman and four finely built men as crew, to take us to Pichai for 130 ticals (about 8*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*).

We started on December 15, leaving the attractions and gaieties of the Paknam Po shops with real regret. Whereas our picnic boat had not been able to hold us, our present ship accommodated our four selves aft, the skipper, his crew, and our sixteen men amidships and on the fore-deck, with all our stores and a cargo of salt below.

And for those who say the Siamese never work I would prescribe a week's trip up river, poling eight hours a day against the three- or four-knot current, sometimes for hours without a rest. There is scarcely a harder or more skilled manual labour in the world, as any one will agree who tries it. As each man comes up to the boat's head, he selects without a second's hesitation the spot on stem or branch or earth to bear the thrust, and with

unerring aim he plants the iron prong of his twenty-foot quant in the desired place.⁸ The inner end is in his shoulder, and his whole weight is on it at the same instant; and slowly, with body extended almost horizontally, he treads along the gangway. At the after end he springs up, snatches the pole in, and as he walks across, abaft the central deck-house, swings it clear of everything above his head, and returns forward for the next turn.



POLING UP STREAM

Occasionally the quant slips, or an eddy catches the boat, and a man goes overboard; but they only chuckle 'Man overboard!' and he scrambles in aft, laughing at his clumsiness.

⁸ Quanting in English waters, where the banks are straight-cut, clear, and firm, is very different to poling in those wild, unkempt rivers; just as cross-country walking in this well-trimmed little

island is travelling made easy to the jungle-wallah from the East, who has jumped, and slipped, and cut, and scrambled his twenty miles a day.

The steering is an art of itself, for the 'run' of these boats, with their cut-up forefoot, is peculiar. Quantmen are generally indifferent steersmen. A great deal depends on a quick eye to detect eddies or under-water obstructions ahead, and to be in time to make her feel her helm; and with flat-bottomed craft, which turn so easily and make such leeway, it calls for some skill to keep the craft at the right distance off the bank and at the proper angle relatively to the current, the thrust of the poles, and any wind that is blowing. The helmsman constantly calls out directions to the men as the current cants her, and they plant their poles more squarely or more obliquely, as required. The rudder is a long big-bladed oar, with a cross-bar handle. A rope from the roof of the shelter holds it up and in position, so that the blade is immersed. The length of its reach astern gives it great power, and to starboard the helm the handle on the starboard side is raised, the great blade thus cutting in obliquely.

Our life for three weeks was, roughly, that of several hundred thousand other human beings in the Me Nam valley. At the first streak of dawn the great bell of the monastery above clanged us into wakefulness, and the chant of the monks and the childish voices of the boys came whirling down through the cold mist with the gusts of north-east wind. With the thermometer below 50°, sometimes at 42° Fahr., our teeth chattered as we rolled up our beds and got our morning wash. We luxurious ones had a cup of early cocoa, and went on paddling in the skiff to seek some pigeon or other form of curry; but the hardy men did their two and a half hours' poling before thinking of any breakfast.

As daylight came, and the mists dissolved before the rising sun, the colouring grew out from the morning grey. The red clay banks, the bright tiles of the monastery

roofs, the varied greens of bamboo and palm, with the yellows in the dying leaves and in

The many knotted water-flags
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge—

all lit by the crimson rays of the low sun, made pictures that will never fade from the memory.

Some time after nine we brought up for the morning rest, and were often glad to moor in the warm sunlight, for in the shade the thermometer in December was seldom above 64° till after 10 A.M. And nothing unnerves the Siamese like cold. They do not understand taking exercise for warmth. They sit shrivelled up, with their blankets round them, without heart, and capable of nothing, unless compelled to work by force of circumstances. The poor little sand-martins,⁹ too, these chilly mornings were piteous little objects, sitting outside their holes upon the banks by hundreds, trying to get into the warm sunshine, with their wings up over their heads, just like the Siamese in their blankets. All the other birds, including the herons,¹ doves, and pigeons, which abound along the banks, seemed sluggish too, and we could always approach quite near and stock the larder for the day with a low expenditure of ammunition.

Towards noon or one o'clock another halt was made, and the men would eat the cold remains of their morning rice, eked out with a little *kao lam* or *knom tue*—excellent concoctions of rice and cocoanut, sold by the wayside villagers to passers by.

Very often in this month, owing to unusual cloudy skies, the maximum reading of the thermometer was no higher than 76° Fahr. in the shade, a most delightful climate for the tropics.

The afternoons were spent in steady poling, and about

⁹ *Hirundo Chinensis*.

¹ Of herons alone there are here many species; Appendix xvi.

an hour before sundown, as the temperature fell and the wonderful colouring grew again, we brought up below a monastery, or, if in a lonely part of the river, alongside a sandbank where we should be free from malaria and creeping things. At these times our musical talent was in requisition, and whether in the monastery rest-house, high above the deep river shadows, or out beneath the sky upon the sand, the boatman's two-stringed fiddle would jig cheerily, or the wail of a melancholy minor air drift out from the firelight, melting into the chilly darkness round us. These tunes, with a little practice, soon become intelligible to the Western ear, and then they seem singularly adapted to their surroundings in their wild, sad monotony, so like the scenery of the country.² Monotony, long monotony, is the keynote of the jungle. For days the same—the same everlasting green, the same tall trunks, the same dust and heat, the same hunger, the same thirst and weariness, the same great fire blazing overhead, the same brassy, glaring sky beyond—and only now and then some glorious bit of mountain top, or vivid colour, a rest and a full meal.

If this is anticipating somewhat, it is to explain the expression to my mind of the native music. Its appropriateness impressed itself upon one the more one travelled in the country; and so imitative of the great nature round it does it seem to be, that the kind of recitative with which some of the airs commence reminds one exactly of the piping of an insect of the cicada species—heard especially at night among big forest trees—which commences with a high note, reiterated in the fast two-four time in which so many of the native airs are set. Often at night I have sleepily heard one of these insects begin in the tree above, and have started into wakefulness, thinking some one was about to break into a tune upon a fiddle; and only when

² Appendix xv.

the time suddenly increased and reached the long sing and fall along the scale have I realised that it was only the 'steam-saw' insect. The stars throbbing in the velvet deep above, and the fireflies flashing in the trees, all seemed to follow the same two-four time; and the notes of the tinkling *tokay* far off in a distant village seemed to harmonise the whole shrill orchestra of nature, which is such a feature of the tropical jungle night.

The prohibition against playing musical instruments contained in the old monastic rules was added, I feel sure, by some unmusical disciple of Gautama. And so, perhaps, think others, for among the monks we found many keen musicians, who were refined and thoughtful men, by no means given to laxity in their monastery life.

From the accounts of Mr. Colquhoun^{*} and some missionaries, I was prepared to find the monastic system of the country an effete institution, sunk in the worst immorality, and bereft of all its influence among the people. If it be the case in Chieng Mai, of which I cannot speak by personal observation, it is in no sense true of the Lao people generally, or of the Siamese I went among. That the latter do not put the same thoroughness into their religious observances as do those keenest of merit makers, the Burmese, is admissible. But of the charge of wholesale immorality my observation entirely acquits the *Wats*. Wherever one went the monks were people one conversed with a great deal, for they were always hospitable and kindly. Their generally refined tone seemed to be one of their characteristics. They did not pretend to any sanctimonious ignorance of the world, for which perhaps they seemed the better men. The majority had some pursuit which they followed as a variety to their meditations, such as collecting minerals, medicinal herbs, music, painting—often crude enough, poor fellows,

^{*} In *Amongst the Shans*.

architecture, or boat-building, in which they excel. The open conditions of life in the monastery, and the rules of occupation, do not favour immorality; and public opinion has as wholesome an influence there away in the jungle, if the hasty Western would believe it, as in his own small set in London. Black sheep exist, of course, here and there, as they do in every society of the world; but scandals are hardly more frequent among them, and should no more influence our judgment of their general character than in the case of the clergy in Christian lands.

Mr. Colquhoun, judging by the absence of modern repair to the *Prachadis* and *Wats* which he noticed, jumps, somewhat hastily I think, to the conclusion that 'all religious zeal was dying out among the people.'⁴

The fact is, by an omission which must rejoice the hearts of Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries, no 'merit' is credited to the Buddhist who repairs a pagoda or a monastery. On the other hand, making a new pagoda, or building a new *Wat*, however unlovely from an artistic point of view, is among the highest of merit-making acts. This, with the destructive influences of the heavy rainfall, the great heat, and the rapid growth of vegetation, is the explanation of the lack of repair of all Indo-Chinese buildings of any age. No demerit attaches, as the same writer appears to think, to building a pagoda which is mud inside. What matters the material, says the Buddhist to such critics, when the most lasting edifice will stand but as a grain of time in the great sands of eternity?

Not on the vulgar mass
Called 'work,' must sentence pass
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice;

⁴ In *Amongst the Shans*.

but, on the act of building the sacred shape, and on the raising of the gleaming point to scare the evil spirits, and remind the passers-by of the teaching of the Lord.

Poverty of material may mark the architectural decadence of a building race, as in the substitution by the later Cambodian builders of the easily cut laterite blocks for the hardly worked sandstones which the architects of Angkor Thom first used. But it does not necessarily reflect on their religious feelings.*

Except perhaps in Bangkok, where the evil influences of civilised veneer are at work, the generosity of the people to the brotherhood of mendicants, the intense reverence of high and low for them, and the earnestness of their endeavours to obtain the merit which is to them what the saving of the soul is to Christians, cannot be reconciled with the theory of the decadence of religious feeling. Nothing surprised me more than to witness the respect with which one of my boatmen was regarded by his former comrades when he donned the yellow robe. Several times he came to visit me, and it was evident he had become a great man in their eyes, and they felt that no attention was too good for him. He was no longer called by his name; but they *Korab'd* him and *soa'd* him as they would a noble of the land. They served him on their knees, and no trace of familiarity could be observed. The past was forgotten; he was to them a holy man, retired from the world, living the noble life of contemplation. He told me of his own struggles with his thoughts in the times of meditation, and of his life of real austerity; of the early repetitions before the Buddha in the first chill dawn, of the long hours puzzling over those horrid *pali* texts, and of the slow orderly procession round the

* The instance cited by Mr. Colquhoun is that of a pagoda built by the zealous Burmese in

the days of the religious fervour the decay of which he deploras.

village, when they might not look up, nor address their friends; of how their meditations were broken by the cheerful voices of the neighbours passing by; of how one or two played football to work off their pent-up feelings beneath the wide-spreading banyans about the *Wat* grounds, and of the disapprobation of the stern old prior, who ruled with a rod of iron, and often made him wish he were back in the world again. The evident earnestness of the whole thing left a most vivid impression on my mind. Often, too, it happened that one of my people asked for a day's holiday, and subsequently I found he had spent the whole of his time, and his last month's wage, in a grand merit-making festival, with all his relations, at the family *Wat*. One often saw these merit-making feasts in progress, and, if quaint to our notions, they are real enough to them.

Ten or a dozen families combine, and hire the neighbouring bandmaster with his half-dozen pupils for some ten ticals^a a day. They decorate the largest boat they have with an awning spread on bamboo uprights, gaily ornamented with red cloth, and long streamers flying in the wind. Then with their offerings of sugar-cane and cocoanut *knoms*, or cakes, and betel nut, they proceed with much gonging to the monasteries in turn, all dressed in their brightest *panungs* and scarves and their whitest jackets. At each they leave their gifts, and at some they get perhaps a sermon in return. Entering the *Bawt*, or chapel, where the dim Buddha sits looking to the east, emblematic of the principles of life and hope, they sit round upon the floor, while the band tunes up and gives a kind of voluntary. There is the tinkling *tokay*, with its boat-like form and bamboo cross pieces, there is the circle of small gongs in the centre of which the master sits himself, striking them with unerring precision; there is the little

^a About 13s. 4d.

piano drum played by a youngster, who taps and jars on each end alternately, and there is perhaps a loud-voiced clarionette. Lastly and largest the big drum, like its noisy brethren in other lands, tries to drown the rest and take the whole glory to itself.

The abbot walks in with his fan before his face, and some novices behind, and there follows such silence as the chatter of the children will allow.

The responses they all seem to know by heart, and they join in casually, here and there, with the reverence of a West End congregation. The women kneel on one side, the men squat upon the other near the door. They smoke their cigarettes the while, or hold them in their clasped hands before their face, as they peep through their fingers at the girls. Now and then an old woman, after three or four prostrations, rises and walks across the floor to spit her betel through a crack, and with a loud reprimand to some noisy child returns to proceed with her devotions. Then comes the sermon or the pronouncing of a sort of blessing, to which they listen on their faces, till the old monk has come down from his high pulpit and walked to his seat upon the side dais. After that it is a free-and-easy, and if you play the flute you will be welcomed.

What strikes one at first as great irreverence by degrees becomes explained as their habits and ways of thought are better understood. Their mental attitude at such a gathering is not at all described by our 'Service.' Each one is come there to make merit for himself. By his own exertion alone, by favour of none, by help of none, it must be gained.

Within yourselves deliverance must be sought.

The monk himself cannot assist them; the Lord Buddha has shown the way, but he cannot help them.

No man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him.

They pray to none, they pray for none.

Pray not ! the darkness will not brighten ! Ask
Nought from the silence, for it cannot speak.⁷

They are there merely to conclude an act of merit : to lay their gifts before the yellow-robed brotherhood. In kneeling in the *Bawt* they are but reminding themselves of the golden rules of life, but bowing to the sum of merit which the Buddha represents to them, to the blessedness of which that gilded figure is the emblem.

They may *wai* to the *farang* or to the Governor, for these two in their own spheres represent to some minds an accumulation of merit in past existences ; how else should they now be so fortunate in life, and possess so much authority and wealth ?

Each man's life
The outcome of his former living is ;
The bygone wrongs bring forth sorrows and woes,
The bygone right breeds bliss.
That which we sow we reap.⁷

Hence, if you can fix your mind on the rules of life and repeat the formulæ with a cigarette in your mouth, there is no irreverence done to any one.

Again, the easy-going open-air life deprives ceremonies, even those of a religious character, of their stiffness. In the royal presence, in the Palace at Bangkok, every one smokes if he can, his Majesty himself setting the example ; and merit-making is not incompatible with gaiety and fun.

It is touching evidence of the longing in human nature to walk with and assist the loved ones on the spiritual

⁷ *The Light of Asia.*

path, that, notwithstanding the Buddhist belief that a man can only rise by the sum of his own actions, and not by any aid from others, yet the merit-maker often strives to share the merit gained with his most beloved relations or with his familiar friend.

Such scenes we lived among as we journeyed our ten miles a day against the stream.

The first night we moored at a fine *Wat*, at Paknam Chieng Krai, where the monks were busy rebuilding the landings and the *sala*, or rest-house. We were given interesting particulars of a gang of ruffians, some thirty in number, who had been here five days before with four boats, one a large comfortable *rua pet*, armed with repeating rifles, who had gone on, up river they knew not whither, to do a little quiet pillaging. They were said to have sat composedly smoking in their boats, watching the fleet of the Minister of the North descending the river, when he recently returned from his inspection tours. We had not the luck to meet them.

Two days from Paknam Po we reached Paknam Koe Chai, a picturesque village, where the channel of the Me Yom joins the eastern branch.*

The village is in a lovely spot, upon a sand spit, shaded by tall *ton yangs*, the most beautifully proportioned as also the most useful of the Indo-China trees.²

* Generally known among the river population as the *Me Nam* simply, or *Me Nam Pichai*. The Me Yom is also known at this point as *Me Nam Kao*, or 'old main river,' as formerly it was the more important branch. It now discharges a part of its water into the Me Nam Pichai near Pitsunalok, and the latter has therefore at this point the larger volume.

² *Dipterocarpus levis*, and, I believe, *D. Turbinatus* mentioned by Sir Joseph Hooker as occurring

about Chittagong.—The Burmese Kanyin, the Dammar or Gurgun tree. It grows throughout the length and breadth of Indo-China, and is the most dignified of forest trees. It often stands in graceful shade-giving clumps of four or five in the neighbourhood of streams forming the favourite resting-places of caravans. Those I have measured average 90 feet to the lowest branch, but some exceed 120, and have a circumference of 25 feet. The oil is

Here conspicuously stands a little shrine, where those who are about to navigate the wild lonely reaches to the northward deposit their offerings to the *pi* or *nats*,¹ which inhabit the solitary rivers, and might resent being disturbed by passing boats. A short distance higher is the stockaded village of Chumseng, and then for seventy miles lies a thinly inhabited stretch of country of tall grasses, old river channels, swamps and forest patches, where the log-like crocodiles doze on the mud, and the friendly apes run along the sands. The banks are often thirty feet high on either side, for the river has cut its way deep through the soft laterite and the red and yellow clays. The villages are few and far between, until the neighbourhood of Pichit is reached, when they cluster more thickly along the river, which forms the high road. Beyond, at a lower level, lies the great land of backwaters, far to the horizon; in the rains, a vast navigable sea; and, even in the dry season, with no suggestion but infinitude and dampness. Here and there a deep-cut creek comes into the main river, communicating with the *naungs* beyond, which fills and drains them as the level in the river regulates. A hundred yards from the grove of palms, in which a village shades itself, the cry of an immense world of bird life comes from the distant water patches, where thousands of wheeling pelicans and herons circle beyond the reach of sight. Behind you there is nothing but the cultivated patches, and the line of palm and bamboo crests, to tell where the river winds its course.

When the rains are over, and the floods begin to fall, half nature seems leagued against the fish, which at that

always procured in the same manner—by cutting pockets in the trunk a few feet from the ground to catch the oil, from which it is ladled out at each visit

every few days, a burning branch being thrust into the orifice before leaving to stimulate the flow of oil. This kills the tree in a few years.

¹ i.e. guardian spirits.

season swarm in myriads in every pond and stream throughout Siam.

The population is engaged, in spite of Buddhist notions, in the very practical occupations of damming *klongs*, and netting rivers where the great *pla chawn* may be seen leaping six feet into the air. The innumerable styles and the ingenuity displayed in the way of netting, and the fish traps, which are set at every yard, would be wearisome to describe. They betray a total absence of the sporting instinct, which, like the native propensity for shooting sitting birds, is at first intensely shocking to the Britisher. However, in these matters, as months go by, ammunition ebbs low, and belts get shortened in, one's scruples vanish sadly; and the most sporting islander must needs condone and even practise the only methods by which his rice and curry may be varied. When fish traps are not successful, old folks may be seen sitting in their little dug-outs in the reeds with a short rod and worm-baited hook. When the fish do not bite fast enough, they stir the reeds and water with the rod to 'call them up.' It is useless wasting sentiment on fish that let themselves be caught in such a way. The fish traps are either of a simple basket make, placed in the water to block some channel as the floods recede, or of improved lobster-pot pattern, with an entrance which is narrow at the inner end, and guarded by the projecting ends of the canes of which it is constructed. The latter are well illustrated in the books of Messrs. Colquhoun² and Holt Hallett³ from drawings taken from Garnier's work.⁴

The hundreds of thousands of tons of fish thus caught every year are dried, salted, and pounded into many

² *Amongst the Shans.*

³ The famous *Voyage d'Ex-*

⁴ *A Thousand Miles on an* *ploration dans l'Indo-Chine.*
Elephant.

different forms of food of varying consistency and flavour. *Pla heng*, a dried form of river fish, rivals the 'Bombay duck' in delicacy, and is invaluable as a *kep kao* or addition to the simple rice; *nam prik*, the 'Worcester sauce' of the Siamese, is a fishy paste of a pleasingly mild type compared to some of the more virulent varieties of *kapi* and its oils, so dear to the inhabitant of Indo-China, whether Burman, Chinaman, Malay, or Siamese.

The kingfishers and the terns, the pelicans and cormorants, the egrets and fishing eagles join the general fish-hunt in endless numbers and varieties. They stalk beside the children netting on the sands, or swoop across the fishermen in the boats. The fish keep leaping in silvery shoals, and above them the noisy screaming hosts dart swiftly about the river, or, satiated, soar slowly far aloft. About the edges of the turmoil the sentinel heron stands peering at the water, and the taciturn great cormorant sits unsociably on a lonely snag, much disapproving of the clamour.

A good deal of *nam oi* is made from the sugar-cane about Pichit. The cane is ground out by a rough mill worked by buffaloes, and the liquid is drunk as a kind of luxury by the Siamese. Its proper destination, however, is the boiling vat, where a bamboo fire blazes underneath, and gradually drives off the water. The brown sugar left is dried into little cakes, which are sold wrapped neatly in green banana-leaves. The good people at the mill are always anxious to make a visitor drink any number of bamboo cups full of the treacly beverage.

Pichit is a small place where provisions can scarcely be obtained; and, indeed, when the guns failed us, it was with difficulty we could buy either fowls or ducks for the necessary *kep kao*, and we used to send out regular foraging parties along the banks.

At Pitsunalok, one of the ancient capitals, we spent a

charming afternoon. There are the remains of old walls and monasteries to be visited, and, after the eternal foliage, to see at last a massive building before you, rising boldly up against the sky, was like a feast to a half-starved man. The lateritic blocks, the red bricks, and coloured tiles used in the great Wat Chinaret give to it a wealth of colouring which was almost startling found far away there in the wild nature we had been passing through. For my own part, I spent my whole available time wandering through the cloisters, and thinking, maybe, of other cloisters, and those with whom I had walked in them, far away. And when we went on that night I felt a new man, with a world of new things to think about. There is no more civilising influence to the lonely traveller who is leading a purely physical existence than a bit of architecture. Sketching has a similar effect. To gaze and watch things for their form and colour, to try to catch the delicate variations in tint and shadow, keep the mind in an element which is above that of one's surroundings, and give it a healthy vigour it is otherwise likely to lose. For the constant physical demands upon the system in such journeys, the fact that the whole life is one of alternate bodily exhaustion and repair, and the perpetual contact with people who have seldom any notions beyond the hour and the minute, have undoubtedly a demoralising effect upon the mind. Thus it is that the best friend a man can have on such trips is a hobby, or a well-loved, well-thumbed book, which may be relied on, like an old comrade, to have ever something new to say. For 'Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potencie of Life in them, to be as active as that Soule was, whose progeny they are ; nay, they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.' Geographical Journals gave one good reading too, for they made the

inconveniences one met appear very small compared to those encountered by other wanderers.

The buildings at Pitsunalok, like those throughout Siam, show traces of the Cambodian influence. Indeed, the architects of Siam from earliest days have been wont (not unwisely) to go to the Angkor ruins for their style, and, though there have been developments to suit special needs, on the whole there is little that is original in Siam. What does not come from Cambodia may be traced to Hindoo or Burman influences. This does not prevent much of the *Wat* architecture, especially the effects of the interiors of the *Bawts*, being impressive. The Siamese architect has always realised that he should not try to hide his roof. More, perhaps, in the tropics than elsewhere, the roof, which shades from the sun and turns aside the rain, is the most important feature of a building. If it be but a grass thatch on four crooked uprights, and be able to protect from those two enemies, it fulfils its functions, and nothing else is asked of it as an edifice. The roof is the emblem of hospitality, the assurance of peace and rest. The absence of it is exposure, fever, death. Nothing in the world is so gaunt, so melancholy, or so heart-breaking as a roofless *sala* at the end of a march in the rainy season. And so it is appropriate that on the roof of the *Bawt* the chief architectural ornamentation of the building is expended. Its gables rise in triple tiers, the unequalled colouring of its tiles glows in the sun far across the padi fields, and, curving gracefully, it comes sweeping down wide beyond the low walls, covering them, too, under its protecting eaves. Inside, the low windows admit but a feeble light. The great central height and the tall columns of the aisles are more suggested than made visible. A cunning ray far up lights the great calm face of Buddha, and below the gilding on the pillars glances now and then. All is silent, cool, peaceful.

A little below Pitsunalok is the connection between the Me Yom and Me Nam Pichai, which is assuming important proportions, and now carries a great deal of water from the former river into the eastern branch. The channels have constantly shifted even in historic times, and the effect of each flood season is so apparent on the outer edges of the curves, where great falls annually take place, that the monasteries are all built some way back from the stream, and are only discoverable by the tall teak or bamboo flag-poles which stand upon the bank.

On the inner curves each yearly flood deposits its contribution of soft rich mud, and this is the favourite ground for tobacco-planting, and the rows of shades with which the young plants are protected from the sun follow the receding water.

Above Pitsunalok the current was in places strong, but, with all our party at the end of the tow rope, we tracked the boat by with ease. At the mouth of Klong Toke, a large tributary from the east, our skipper sold off the greater part of his salt cargo, and, drawing only three feet, we were able to pass the shallows which occur above. With all hands in the water for hours at a time, we hauled to the cheery 'Ao, he lo' which is the Siamese version of the traditional 'Yo heave ho.'

A good deal of boat-building is to be seen all along the river, for the boat in the plains takes the place of the bullock cart and the elephant elsewhere, and forms the only means of communication and transport.

The boats are built with flat bottoms of solid wood. A wide teak log is used, or, better, a trunk of *mai-takien*,⁵

⁵ *Hopea odorata*. This gigantic gloomy-looking inhabitant of the deep jungle is invariably supposed by the Siamese to be inhabited by a spirit, owing doubtless to the

feverish nature of the places it loves most. Like the *Dipterocarpus*, it is found in every part of Indo-China.

the most prized of boat-building woods. It is readily known in the jungle by its enormous size. Its durability; the fact that it defies all the tribes of boring worms which destroy most boats' bottoms, and the great length it grows to, cause it to be eagerly sought for for all large craft, both on the rivers and on the sea-coast. The hollowing process is practically the same in all dug-outs, great and small, and may be seen in all stages at the monasteries and other boat-building places on the rivers. The tree is hollowed



RICE BOAT—AWAITING CARGO

with a narrow-bladed long-handled adze, and is then sunk for some time in water. When well soaked it is brought ashore, and turned upside down over a fire of shavings. This is regulated carefully, that the heat may be moderate and evenly distributed and the expansion gradual. When the sides have separated sufficiently, and the line of gunwale has reached an even curve all round, the ribs and knees are fastened in with hard-wood pegs. The former extend above the sides to receive the upper planks which may be added, and then the whole receives its coat of oil.

The result of this dug-out type of craft is that a vessel is obtained which never leaks, which does not hurt by

running on a snag, and which lasts for twenty years without serious repair. Broad of beam, with rounded sections, no keel, and rockered ends, it is quick to turn and always manageable in any current; and, with the comfortable deck-house fittings and ample outriggered decks and gangways, the most up-to-date English boat-designer would find it hard to improve on the larger river craft.

The Chinese boat-builders, who build to sell, use more teak than *takien*. The hollowing process is too slow and laborious to pay in the trade, so very wide planking is used instead.⁶

In the first week in January we reached Pichai, over a month out from Bangkok. The journey in November month, before the waters fall, could be done by steam-launch in eleven days. We comforted ourselves with the reflection that we had seen much which otherwise we should have missed.

⁶ Prices were as follows: 13-ft. dug-out canoe, 13s. 4d.; 16-ft. *chau* boat, 11. 6s. 8d.; 27-ft. *chau* boat, *mai-takien* bottom, 61. 13s. 4d.; 40-48-ft. *ruapet*, with 8 ft. 4 in. beam and 8 ft. 4 in. draught, 201-311. These include oars, deck-houses, &c., complete.



A HILL MONASTERY

CHAPTER V

THE LAO STATES

NAM PI—VALLEY OF THE NAM NAN—TEAK FORESTRY—MUANG
HIN VALLEY—MUANG SA

FOR some days we were constrained to wait at Pichai while the elephants were being brought in from the country round. These delays are often very trying to the Western, but they are generally inevitable, and are not caused, as writers¹ too often assume, by the desire of local officials to obstruct, but simply by the nature of the journeys to be performed and the scattered positions of the homesteads. A traveller arrives at some quiet jungle *muang* without word of warning, presents his papers, and requires fresh boatmen, fresh elephants, or fresh oxen, as

¹ C. Bock in *Temples and Elephants*.

the case may be, to proceed to the next township—perhaps a week distant. The officials have to send out to the surrounding villages, some of them a day or a day and a half's journey, to summon the householders on the *corvée* roll. These men may be harvesting, or away fishing, or gathering jungle produce back in the forest. They must leave their occupations, have a meal, and lay in a scanty stock of rice, tobacco, and betel, and start away for a week or a fortnight's absence without more ado. And yet if the men are not forthcoming within an hour or two the foreigner grumbles that the officials obstruct and delay him, and, when explanations are made him, declares they are all fabrications and lies, and storms about the *sala*.

That the Eastern's idea of urgency does not accord with our own I have frequently been made only too painfully aware; but when one sees the unfair and unreasonable attitude adopted by some travellers, one is fain to agree with the jungle folks that the *farang* is a very difficult fellow. One book on a journey through Siam to the western Lao States is crammed full of statements about the dilatoriness, duplicity, and even active opposition of the authorities in the various *muangs* traversed; and the author, whose chief pursuit was images of Buddha, which he designed to remove out of the country, failed to see that the attitude he adopted to the people was alone responsible for his troubles. But a person who sees no harm in touching a woman's face in her husband's presence,² in carrying off images against the expressed wishes and even prayers of the people, and in imputing

² The person is held almost sacred in Siam. To touch the person in any way, however slightly, is a grave breach of decorum, and in passing a seated person the greatest care is taken not to step over or touch any stray

limb which may project across the space to be crossed. People up country, who have not seen many white skins, often ask to be allowed to touch the hand or arm to see what it is really like, but always with profuse apologies.

ill motives and making unsupported accusations against every one in general, should not expect to get much enjoyment out of life in any community.

Our stay in Pichai was made pleasant by the Governor, a tall, smart young fellow of about thirty-five, who talked and looked one in the face in an open way which was quite refreshing. He sent us over admirable dishes of sweetmeats, dried prawns, and other luxuries; and though the house we were lent had a galvanised iron roof, and was consequently some 5° hotter than the boat had been, we had a very jolly time. The skipper and crew of our boat looked in in the evenings to join the evening concert, and local talent in the shape of an old fellow who taught the two-stringed fiddle came out brilliantly with some wonderful execution.

My three *Nais*, the gentlemen assistants, developed in character as I got to understand them better, and I was much struck later on with the ease with which they all adapted themselves to our life on the trail, as if they had been doing nothing but this all their lives. The chief of them was my French-speaking interpreter of the Supan trip; the second, Nai Suk, or Master Cheerful, a good surveyor, and a perfect genius at all forms of amusement. He was such an admirable companion, and was of such sterling character, that I took him with me on nearly all my later journeys, as much for his social qualities as for the work he did. Long before I could converse with any one in Siamese, we were able by signs, diagrams, and such little of each other's language as we knew, to exchange ideas on most subjects. His quickness in catching an idea from the first lines of a sketch was all the more striking, as the Eastern and the Western generally start from two far different points and march by different routes to the same idea, and it often takes some time to get upon common ground. He had the bump of locality general among

his people, only developed considerably by his training in the military cadet school in Bangkok, formerly under Colonel Walker, a British officer. We met many old messmates of Nai Suk's about Siam in one position or another, and I was always struck with the evident influence that training had had on them.

Nai Suk rode and shot well, but he was nothing if not a musician. In a short time he had picked up half a dozen English songs, which he played on the accordion. His knowledge of Siamese music was extensive, and his execution in certain melting love-songs, which he sang *false* through his nose in a bewitching manner, won him, I was assured, the greatest admiration wherever he was heard.

The third, Nai Kloi, was a quiet, unassuming fellow, with considerable knowledge of the ways of jungle travel. Like Nai Suk, he was a lieutenant in the reserve, and was a handy man, who could put his hand to most things, including photography, carpentry, and tailoring. He always made a good job of what he undertook, and had a remedy for everything. His special work was looking after the transport.

Pichai is not an interesting place, beyond being the head township of a very large province extending away to the Me Kawng at Chieng Kan and to the boundaries of the Lao principality of Nan on the North. The young Governor, like his father before him, is very popular with his people, and there is no doubt that he is not only a very honest but also a very able ruler. His merit has been recognised in Bangkok; and when, on January 6, we left with our train of elephants, it was with the expectation of meeting him again in Luang Prabang, to which he had just been appointed commissioner.

Our first destination was some iron mines at Nam Pi, just off the main trails to Nan and Paklai (on the

Me Kawng), whence all the *daps*³ and jungle-knives of the district come. Here again it was the old story. The jealous *pi* of the locality insist on having a white buffalo sacrificed by any person working the iron ore; and though I insisted on the fact that I had made a special arrangement with all the *pis* before leaving Bangkok, yet I had practically to do everything myself, and so spent a couple of days burrowing about in the cooler climate of the shallow pits, from two to seven fathoms deep.

No systematic work appears to have been done. A little desultory scraping goes on occasionally, the only tool used being an iron-shod staff; but many of the larger pits had not been worked for half a century or more. Such are *Baws* generally throughout Siam.

The ore itself is a limonite, or brown iron ore, of very average quality, and seems to be 'derivative' from surface decomposition, as in many other parts of the country, where it occurs in small quantities—sufficient, however, to give rise to the stories of enormous mineral wealth brought down by most travellers in Siam, who are apt to forget that ordinary ores cannot pay buried at least a month's journey in the interior, where labour, provisions, and means of transport are conspicuously absent. The quartz rock which generally underlies the ore patches at no great depth appears to be a quartz sand which has been metamorphosed under pressure into its present hard condition. In or in close connection with it the ore is rare and poor; it occurs chiefly near the surface, where the quartz has decomposed and assumed the appearance of a soft sandstone.

The ore has the peculiar property of bringing bad luck to any house in which it is stored, and of killing any tree

³ The Burmese and Shân *da*, or curved two-handed sword, used for defence and jungle work gene-

rally, and without which no man or boy ever leaves his house.

under which it is put. So state the Lao inhabitants of Ban Nam Pi, and they should know.

On January 10 we were off again to the northward, crossing the western end of the schistose hills, which here turn the river west past Muang Fang. Our course lay for a fortnight up the rugged valley of the Me Nam, here known as the Nam Nan (or Nan River). The trail crosses the stream by none too shallow fords at the Lao villages of Ban Taluat, Cherim, and Muang Fek, and the marches between them are long rough scrambles high on the waterless shoulders of the hills.

One day's march was much like any other. Before daylight the mahouts were off to catch their elephants, and the cook was boiling an enormous dish of rice for the day at the watch-fire which had blazed all night. At the first streak of dawn all hands were out, shivering in the misty air, joking with chattering teeth as they packed the stores and blankets and filled the water-bottles up. 'Chang ma leo!' was the cry we got to know so well, as the huge beasts came shuffling in to the monastery enclosure, and each man went to his appointed billet and hoisted his gear up to the mahout. There was always great rivalry as to who should be loaded first; and then away we went in front, smoking lustily to get warm, on ponies or on foot, brushing down the heavy dew in showers, splashing through the chill, clear watercourses, or climbing steadily up the long steep mountain shoulders a thousand or more feet above our last night's camp.

As we cleared the cold mist and the sun rose above the tangled mass of mountainous forest in the east, we had most gorgeous glimpses through the tall grey tree-trunks around us of the reds and yellows of the winter foliage. At length the sun's rays, climbing down the heights, touched the white lakelike mists, and they whirled and melted; and then below us, far and near, as

still we rose, we saw the billowy seas of wild forest, high on jagged ridges in the sunlight, or darkened in deep shadows far down in the torrent valleys.

The march was diversified by the shrieking, wailing, and laughing of the gibbons, whom we could watch leaping and swinging with their long arms down from the tree-tops of the ridges opposite; sometimes by the gaudily decorated caravans of pack-oxen we met, clanging their deep-toned bells harmoniously; sometimes by the quiet-eyed elephants we passed, climbing warily along the treacherous pathway; or by the singing gangs of jocose and half-shy Lao, bearing packs of cotton, tobacco, or other produce southward, and who, with their cheerful greeting, sat down to have a chat.

The custom of the Lao (formerly general in Siam)⁴ of shaving the head, with the exception of a tuft at the top, is a neat and cleanly one for a hot climate, and, when one gets used to it, gives the men, with their fine physique and upright bearing, a smart appearance. The women grow their hair long, as do the Mon and Burmese, rolling it up neatly high at the back of the head. This, with the pretty horizontally striped petticoats they wear, and their full, well-proportioned figures, makes them far more lady-like in general appearance than the Siamese women, who cut their hair short and adopt the *panung*. And as the men among the Lao do more of the outdoor work, the women, who have just as much freedom as in Siam, are more given to weaving silk and cotton petticoats, and to various womanly pursuits about the house; and they lose nothing in charm thereby.

If water was to be reached by nine or ten o'clock, we

⁴ It was introduced in the 18th century, and called the 'Mahat Tai' pattern; cf. *The Tonsure Ceremony*, Capt. G. E. Gerini, Bangkok Times Office, 1895. The

haircutting fashions in vogue among the coster people of some parts of London form a curious parallel.

waited for the others to come up for breakfast ; if not, we halted under the buttresses of some gigantic forest tree,⁵ or—

In the dried river channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go, warbling so softly and well,

and there did justice to our cold rice and curry and the refreshing tea in our water-bottles. After an hour's halt our warm morning's clothing was slung on our backs, and we were off once more. Then came the thirst and the weariness of the day, as the sun rose high, glaring angrily at us through the scanty leaves. Sometimes the welcome clearing or the distant roofs came in sight at one or two o'clock ; sometimes it was not till three or four that we reached our camp, and the elephants would come in wearily some hours after us, carrying their trunks upon their tusks, or resting each leg alternately upon another, as they stood to be unloaded, squirting dust, trumpeting, and blowing through their trunks in deep rumbles like a lot of animated locomotives.

The ponies, of which we had five, were most domesticated creatures, and when their feed of unhusked padi was not forthcoming, they came about the camp, pushing their noses into our cooking pots, unrolling our bedding, and eating everything which was left unguarded. When they chanced to meet any of the elephants there was a tremendous to-do ; it seems natural enough that the pony should fear the elephant, but why the elephant should feel such uncontrollable alarm at a ridiculous unkempt little object, eleven and a half or twelve hands high, has always been a mystery to me. Yet so it is, and it used to be as bad as one of the shunting puzzles formerly in fashion at home, to get the one past the other in the narrow trails, where the jungle was often almost impenetrable on either side.

⁵ Such as the Thytsi, or Thitpok [Burm.], *Tetramela nudiflora*.

If our resting-place was at a village our guide always went off to call the head men, who soon turned up and helped us in getting water, firewood, and any provisions that were to be had. And by supper-time, usually just before sunset, half the neighbourhood was squatting by us, chatting away like old friends—men, women, and children alike. Their cheery kindly nature, their honesty, their hospitable instincts, and their decided good looks impressed not only me but the rest of my party very greatly, and during the whole time we were among them it was the same wherever we went. No wonder, then, if there remains a warm corner in one's heart for the Lao of Nan.

As the shadows lengthened, the women and children wended homeward, and the men wrapped themselves in their long red and white striped cloaks for a yarn by the crackling fires. Cheroots were lit, and, pacing by the stream to the shrill whistling of the cicadas overhead, one watched the

Sun's slow decline

O'er hills which, resolved in stern silence o'erlap, and entwine
Base with base, to knit strength more intensely.

And then down the heights fell the wonderful tropical night, which can never fail to exercise a spell upon those who are privileged to meet it in the solitudes.

In an hour more the camp was wrapped in silence; now and then the guard^{*} rose and threw another log upon the flickering fire; the cry of a far-off sambur, the call of a prowling tiger, or the trumpet of a startled elephant rose on the cold air above the steady roar of the rapid below, and then grateful oblivion between two blankets.

* Each village generally provides a guard of men, who lie out in the open by the fire all night with no covering but their long

cloaks. On the hill trails, of course, this was impossible, owing to the absence of villages.

But when fever was among us those sounds only made the desolation audible. How horrible the cold night watches then became; how intense, how unrelieved the solitude! These hours are all forgotten afterwards, but at the time the tension is almost unbearable. And what tricks one's brain could play! How often the long startling whistle of a tree beetle brought one back to the steep inclines and sharp curves of the G.W.R. among the narrow Cornish valleys; how the steady sound of the distant river carried one again to the quiet green behind the Abbey, where the roar of London is so subdued! Even the fireflies flashed like the lights of far-off cities; and then at last the day dawned.

Nearly all the way to Nan we were passing among the broad-leaved teak-trees (*ton sak*).

The teak-bearing forests of Siam lie around the sources of the Me Nam, and extend along its western watershed as far south as N. lat. 13° 50'. On the eastern side of the Me Nam basin they only reach as far south as 17° 40'; and whereas large quantities of teak have been worked for half a century in Siamese territory, and floated down the Salwin to be exported as Maulmen teak, none has ever been worked on the Me Kawng side.

During the last sixteen years the industry has assumed such proportions that all the western forests in the neighbourhood of the streams available for floating timber have become practically exhausted, and the engagement last year by the Siamese Government of experienced officers of the Burma Forest Department came none too soon as a precautionary measure.

The lessees of the forests are for the most part Burmese British subjects, and now the Borneo Company and Bombay Burma Trading Corporation each have extensive leases. The working of nearly the whole of the leases is in the hands of British subjects in one way or another, the

financing being done by the more important trading companies in Bangkok, who advance large sums at high rates of interest on an agreement by which all the timber is taken over on the banks of the streams at a fixed rate. This capital remains locked up for a period of from three to four years, the time which the timber usually takes to reach the market, and is estimated to amount to some 880,000l.⁷

The lender has a first lien upon the logs produced, or upon the elephants, in which a large part of the capital is invested, but the security is none too good, and depends largely on the goodwill of the up-country officials. It is thus not surprising that the large firms have, of late years, endeavoured to get the leases into their own hands; the result is, of course, a far healthier state of things generally. The trees selected are girdled by the forester at the end of the dry season, and a great deal of waste has been caused in the past by the custom of girdling the trees at a considerable height from the ground, eight or even ten feet up. The girdled tree dies, and is quite dry and ready for cutting in three years' time, but I believe it has been customary in Siam to cut right into the tree a few days after girdling in order to kill it more quickly. It is then felled in less than twelve months; but the tree is not so dry as if allowed to stand longer.

When the tree is felled, the forester puts his hammer-mark upon it, and then the elephant comes into requisition, and drags the log into the nearest tree track, and along it to the neighbouring *hue*, or creek, where it is left ready for the rains. These tracks, often deep cuttings, polished by the continual friction till they look as if small wandering glaciers had been at work grinding them out, were constantly crossed in the forest journey from Muang Fang to Nan.

⁷ Foreign Office Report on Teak Trade of Siam, No. 857.

The agent of the purchasing firm now comes along, and puts the purchaser's hammer-mark upon the log in the presence of the forester, covering it all over, to make the work of defacement difficult for the expectant timber thieves lower down.

With the advent of the rains the elephant begins the 'ounding' of the creeks and rivers; the logs are unplied, and pushed and hauled with tusk and trunk into the stream, and, as the water carries them away, the elephant works down along the *hus*, clearing stranded logs, disentangling the piles which often get jammed hundreds at a time, and generally assisting them to the main river, where in time they will reach the rafting stations, and be caught and private-marked and lashed into the rafts we met below.

We saw very large numbers of small logs cut, and I subsequently found that the most wanton destruction of young trees has gone on in the neighbourhood of the Nam Pat and Utaradit.*

As yet comparatively little work has been done in Nan territory, owing to the reluctance of the chiefs to lease the forests, caused largely by their dread of the *farang*. The great teak reserve of Siam thus now lies in this quarter.

As the vicinities of the streams in the extensively worked districts have become exhausted, the price per log

* It is estimated [Foreign Office Trade Reports] that the number of underraised logs, useless for the foreign market, floated down the Me Nam and Salwin in a good year amounts to over 50,000, representing a total loss of over 150,000*l.*, and an actual loss to the revenue at ten per cent. of over 15,000*l.* This goes on year after year, with the difference that in some years

it is less, and some years more. It is to be hoped that Mr. Slade will be properly backed up by the Government in enforcing the clauses of the leases prohibiting the felling of trees under a certain girth, and that new regulations will be introduced in Nan, where, so far, natives have worked by simple permit from the chiefs without any restrictions.

in the stream beds has increased.⁹ More labour has become necessary, and the price of it has risen.

Since 1893 the extension of French rule to the left bank of the Me Kawng has introduced yet another complication, the effect of which is detrimental to the foresters. The Kamus, who have formed for years the bulk of the forest labour, came from the left bank of the Me Kawng. The French authorities are now doing all they can to put a stop to emigration from that already thinly populated district. The consequence is that the supply of Kamu labour is falling off, and the forester must engage the less industrious and less reliable Karens, Shans, or Laos, who require a wage forty per cent. higher than that formerly paid to the thrifty Kamus.

At Muang Fek we had to stop a day to give the elephants a rest, for some of them were tired out by the long rough march from Cherim on the day before. I seized the opportunity to go off down the river in a little *rua sala*, or dug-out, to try and make out something further of the geology of the district. In a forest country like Siam the dense vegetation is almost as great a difficulty to the geologist as snow or ice can be; and in the few places where outcrops occur, the excessive rainfall and the changes of temperature have so decomposed the surface rocks that nothing of their true nature is often visible. Stream beds and watercourses are the only places where observations can be made. The schists we had been passing over had all a steep dip to the westward, the angle being as high sometimes as 65°, and their thickness must be very great. My investigations with the hammer were

⁹ In 1889 logs in the main river were priced at 21 rupees. In the Salwin, on which side the exhaustion of the forests is far greater,

they averaged 40 rupees. Since that time there has been a rise of some 40 per cent. in prices, and this is likely to continue.

always a great source of wonderment not only here but wherever I went in Siam. The gem miner could never understand why I cared for other things than gems; the gold washer could not conceive why I sought to find any other mineral in the sand; the tin miner of the Peninsula could scarce be patient with me for my affection for pretty pieces of tourmaline and wolfram; and my own followers did not bless the weight of specimens which accumulated every day. 'Di me, nai?' 'Is it good, nai?' was the invariable question; and if I said yes, having found a well-developed crystal, they asked me where the gold was. And then I would try to explain; but they only thought me a little mad.

From Muang Fek we had rough marching, till we reached Muang Hin at the head of a valley parallel to that of the Nam Nan, but draining north to join it at Muang Sa.

We had hired two more elephants to lighten the loads of the others, and these two, male and female, were never separated by a dozen yards. They were loaded up together, they marched ahead together, they bathed at night together, and they fed on the same bamboos. If the tusker was frightened at the strange things handed up to the mahout, his mate swung round, caressing him with her trunk till he was pacified; if she was moved round to the side of the *sala* he whirled off after her, *malgré* all the mahout had to say to it. They were finely proportioned animals, and had the swing and pace which the hill elephants, accustomed to light loads and hard climbing, acquire.

For what the camel is in the desert, and the dog upon the ice-floe, that is the elephant in the forests of Nan. For hauling teak, for collecting rattans or jungle grass, for carrying tobacco, rice, or cotton, and for any journeying away from home, he is indispensable to his master. The

loss of the ubiquitous bamboo itself, 'that staff of life,' as Colonel Yule calls it,¹ would not be more disastrous to the Lao than the extinction of the elephant. In his own person he combines the functions of all the mechanical and other means of communication to which we are accustomed. He bridges rushing spates, and navigates deep torrents; he climbs over rocky passes, or ploughs through the mire of flooded swamps; where he cannot persuade he will force his passage, and even the trees go down before him, as before a great jungle plough. The 'tunkle-tunkle' of the bamboo bell about his neck, or the crashing downfall of a huge bamboo clump, constantly betrays the presence of this invaluable factotum, the source and standard of wealth of every Lao householder, and the most gentle of the household pets.

The peaceful scenery of the Hin Valley, with its villages, its palms, and its yellow padi fields, where the homely little oxen moved about, was in charming contrast to the rough forest country we had come through. We seemed to be in civilisation again. The children shouting to the cattle, the drum of the distant grey-roofed monastery, the gentle cooing of the doves, and the thump, thump of the industrious rice mills, seemed strangely sweet to the ear. Three days we marched down that lovely valley, resting each night in spacious *salas*, where the old chiefs came out to visit us, with welcome cocoanuts and sugar-cane; admirable old fellows some of them, but inclined to bore tired men at the long day's end. It was ideal cold season weather, and the morning marches were most exhilarating across the golden straw of the padi fields, among the hospitable village roofs peeping from their snug surroundings, past the waking buffaloes blinking sleepily, among dim figures and blurred distances under the wintry foggy sun.

¹ *Mission to Ava.*

On January 21, after a cold night in which every one talked to keep warm, we had a rough piece of climbing over Kao Talung, a characteristic outcrop of the limestone series which is a feature of the country and rests upon the schists. The same evening we reached Muang Sa, a place of some importance, a day south of Nan. There is a considerable population, and some trouble is taken about irrigation. We stayed a week as guests of the Chao Muang, or chief, who, being away in disgrace at Chiang Mai, for something very like rebellion of a mild kind



THE MUANG HIN VALLEY

against the Chao of Nan, was represented by his young brother Chao Bun Yun.

The elephants profited the most of our party by this rest, though one was attacked by a tiger and rather mauled. The beast sprang on his back from a bamboo clump, and the elephant burst away through the low *kok* jungle, and contrived to sweep Master Stripes off his back; but the deep claw-marks all down his flank showed that it had not been easy work.

I was busy making expeditions in various directions in pursuit of rumoured gold mines, and the work was the hardest I ever experienced. The temperature had risen greatly. In a three days' journey we made up the Nam Wa, a big affluent from the north-east, the roughness of the jungle tracks, which in many places would only admit of a man stooping low, tired us out completely, Lao and all, by the day's end.

The only redeeming features in this expedition were our camps at night, and the last day's journey in boats, returning down the river. We had the usual long *rua salas*,² or dug-outs, and the whole day we balanced and dodged down the rapids in them. As we got beyond the rocky mountain spurs, the river widened out and rushed over its shingle beds. Then after sunset it was most exhilarating flying down along the broad expanses of moonlit water, with the roar in front telling of a rapid, and the shrill piping of the insect world on the far-off palm-fringed bank. But by way of gold we had only got a little yellow copper ore and some iron pyrites.

I was much struck up this river with the number of women we met suffering from goitre, who seem in no way inconvenienced by it, and by the number of fine healthy men and boys who were in temporary camps collecting jungle produce, to sell in Sa or Nan, or to use in their own homes.

The last night at Muang Sa we dined in the chief's house. It was a great event, and endless were the preparations. Half the *muang* squatted outside in the courtyard, or on the lower platform of the house, to watch us. We sat cross-legged before an excellent collection of dishes, of which our host, Chao Bun Yun, first tasted each in turn to show they were not poisoned. We then fell to on such curries as we had been accustomed

² About 50 ft. by 2 ft. 8 in. beam, and 1 ft. 4 in. depth.

to, while a trio of sweet-toned flutes² played a very pretty air with the monotonous repetition which, now that one was accustomed to it, so suited one's surroundings. Anon a fellow sang a lay or extemporary rhyme about our doings; but the Lao language as sung is quite incomprehensible even to the average Lao-speaking Siamese, and we therefore had to content ourselves with the barest outline of the matter. After him two girls sang alternate



Monastery Library M. S.

verses of a war-song, which they extemporised; the nasal tones soared in startling independence, and then sank gently to the soothing refrain of the flutes again. Then, last, a lad and girl gave us a little piece of opera; their only additional ornaments were wax tapers lighted on their fingers, and singing in falsetto he took alternate

² Appendix ix.

verses with her, each waving hands and arms in the not ungraceful attitudinizing so dear to the inhabitants of Indo-China. Between whiles conversation at our table pursued its course, and the spectators, I need hardly say, joined in promiscuously. But the flute refrain runs in my head yet.





MONASTERY GABLES

CHAPTER VI

THE LAO STATES (*continued*)

MUANG NAN—MARCH TO CHIENG KAWNG

AT Nan we stopped some days in one of the numerous *tumnieps* outside the eastern wall of the city, and not far from the river bank. We had a pleasant view of the red brick walls and high-roofed gates of the town, and there was no lack of life about us. Before sunrise streams of plaid-wrapped women passed, hurrying from the suburbs along the river to the morning market within the walls; when the mists had risen and the sun shone out the scene was enlivened by the arrival of a caravan of *Haws*, their emaciated but hardy mules and ponies looking sadly in need of rest after the long journey from Yunnan,

and then, till nightfall, that constant talking, which accompanies nearly all exchange of goods or money in the East, dinned the ear unceasingly. They are not ideal neighbours, for they are no more sweet of savour than of face and tongue, and their want of cordiality to strangers is only equalled by that of their ferocious dogs which guard the rows of packs in camp. They have a strange dislike to removing any of their innumerable garments even in the hottest weather, and of cold water they have as great a horror as of telling the truth. Sheepskin coats, sandals, opium, raw silk, ox bells, tea, and beeswax are their usual wares, with excellent walnuts which they give the children as advertisements.

These caravan men are most of them Mohamedans, remnants of the Taiping rebellion, and are all styled *Haw* by the Siamese and Lao, whether from Yunan, Kwangsi, or the other neighbouring provinces of China. After the rebellion these same people mustered in considerable numbers, under different colours, from which they get their names of Black Flags, Yellow Flags, and the like, and settled on the borders of Tongkin and Luang Prabang, and their armed incursions have made them a terror to the French, the Annamites, and the Lao districts round Luang Prabang and Chieng Kwang, and have necessitated more than one Siamese military expedition to the north to drive them off.

Their usual caravan route from Puerh and Sumao is very much west of Nan to the important centre of Chieng Mai *via* Chieng¹ Tung, and the Chieng¹ Sen plain, or M. Fang, if the floods are out over the low lands.

The trade of the country generally is carried on either

¹ I use *Chieng* instead of *Keng*, which is perhaps more familiar in this country, because the latter is merely a Burmese attempt to

pronounce the *Tai* word *Chieng*, which is that used by the *Shans* themselves.

by these people or by Shân bullock caravans or Shân packmen.²

The only shops in Nan were along the main trail northward, and at the north-east corner of the walls, and were for the most part in the hands of Burmese British subjects. The yarns and piece goods they had for sale were for the most part of British manufacture, but the quantities were insignificant.³

They brought out a few poor sapphires from Chieng Kawng to show me, and some coloured quartzes from the neighbourhood. There are a few of these Shâns or some Burmans in every large inland town of Siam, and they always seem delighted to see one. As soon as they learnt one was a *Nai Angkrit*, an Englishman, the head men, decent respectable fellows for the most part, would come round in full force with presents of fruit, or any other little luxuries they had, and a cheroot and a yarn were greatly to their taste. They, most of them, knew Rangun and Calcutta, and were delighted to exchange notes on these and other subjects; they would go to any trouble to make one comfortable, and when we left they would come out all along the road to see us off. There were big rogues among them, badly wanted by the Burmese authorities, but, so far from bearing ill will, they courted rather than avoided one, and were excellent company. Their minds are cast in a sporting mould, which cannot fail to meet with response in the average Englishman. As long as we were their foes they asked for nothing better than a chance of shooting us. When we won, we had proved ourselves the better men, and so worthy of their regard. Against their best efforts we pacified

² Further particulars are given in Appendix viii.

³ Mr. Lyle in his report for 1896 says that Rs. 86,600, about 1,800*l.*, represents the total of the

united stock-in-trade of all the traders in the place. He shows that the scarcity of money and difficulties of communication render all business very dull.

Burma, and they now never tire of expressing their admiration of the way it was done. With their picturesque *passohs* and neat pink turbans, with their comparative energy and their appreciation of a bit of fun, they were always welcome folks to meet.

Besides teak wood, the productions of Nan Province are chiefly cotton and tobacco, which are grown in all the hill villages more or less; sticklak and cutch, the export



of both of which may be expected to increase; hides, elephant tusks, and buffalo, and deer horns.

The export of elephants to Chieng Mai and Burma is said to amount to from two to three hundred animals a year, but these figures cannot be maintained for long.⁴

Rupees from India are the current coin, and though efforts have been made to introduce the tical from

⁴ The export of these animals westward from the left bank of the Me Kawng has entirely ceased since the French occupation.

Bangkok, it was impossible to pass it anywhere but with a few of the traders having dealings with the capital.

The population of the town of Nan cannot exceed 10,000, including the 'old town' to the northward and the suburbs by the river. There are some 60,000 living in the plain around, and McCarthy puts the total population of the province at about 250,000. Inside the walls the view is very countrified. The houses stand among groves of cocoanut and banana; elephants, dogs, and fowls abound, and shady lanes run here and there. In the centre there is a large space, with the *Sanam* or court-house, the chief's residence, and the principal *Wats*. These last buildings, though somewhat ambitious, being much decorated inside with atrociously glaring paintings, are not so pleasing as some of the smaller and simpler ones in the State, of which perhaps the best and most typical is that at Muang Sa. In the out-of-the-way jungle villages simplicity is supreme. A row or two of bricks to form a wall, three feet of air above by way of windows, and the sharp pointed roof above, sweeping low down beyond the short pillars that support it. At the inner end, which may be bricked up, the Buddha sits serenely, watching the slow-waving banners, white memorials of the dead, that swing from the roof in front of him.

The resemblance of the rising tiers of roof, common to even the smallest monasteries in Burma and Siam, to those of the wooden *Stavekirker* of Norway cannot fail to strike all those who have had the good fortune to see both, and in Nan some very good examples exist.

But the sight of Nan is the morning market in the open centre of the town. Here from all sides, as daylight advances, the women folk collect, bringing their baskets full of fruit, rice-cakes, cigarettes, and flowers. They sit behind their goods in rows, chatting and laughing softly.

The total absence of noise and fuss, such as usually pervades a crowd of Asiatics bartering, and the apparently small amount of business transacted, made one suspect that the Nan ladies value their market most for the social opportunities it affords. They were always charmingly dressed, and the scene was full of colour. The hushed sound of the bare feet moving, the muffled chat and laughter, the morning mistiness, and the promptness with which the whole scene melted as the sun broke in, left a strange and charming impression of unreality upon the mind.

But it was very real with my companions, who were up and dressed in the glory of silk *panungs* at astonishingly early hours, to be off to spend the morning there. The market at Nan was the only event for which they were never late.

The old chief of Nan had lately died, and the present chief, the Rajawong, had not yet been officially appointed from Bangkok. I saw much of him, and was greatly impressed with his bearing. Tall, well built, with iron-grey hair, he combined dignity and activity in a manner I had rarely seen. His features were good, showing little of the flatness characteristic of the Indo-Chinese; and in conversation the expression of his face was in most striking contrast to that of the generality of Siamese officials.

Many beautiful faces are to be seen in Siam, among the children and the young men and maidens; but it is a physical beauty which fades with sad swiftmess, and is essentially weak, lacking the strength lent by character and purpose.

The impress of nobleness on the face which is the result of a lifetime of battle and high ideal is seldom seen among the aged; at best, a look of worn-out amiability. In this man the grim lines about the mouth, with the thoughtful eyes, seemed to belong to a character which

had at least faced life seriously. The quick shades of expression and his alertness in conversation made talking with him like talking to an educated Western, and therefore a pleasure which I enjoyed surprisingly.

I was struck with the temperate and dignified account he gave of Chao Sa's disaffection; he seemed to regard the whole question from the point of view of the critical onlooker, without bias or other feeling than that of regret. The stern simplicity of his house, and the old-fashioned style of his reception of us, was in marked contrast to the tawdry civilisation of Bangkok swells.

Of the old chief it is told that, when his son was Governor of Pre, opium-smoking, then a capital offence in Nan, was proved against him, and the old man pronounced the sentence of death against his son with the words, 'If the *Chaos* do not obey the laws, how shall the people do so?'

Whether my friend is equally strong my short acquaintance with him does not enable me to say, but I am sure that no official in Indo-China ever showed more promise of making a good ruler.

So far as the people of Nan are concerned, few governors could have an easier task. Without police and without force, law and order are here maintained unbroken. The old penalty of death inflicted for opium-smoking, elephant-stealing, and theft had been replaced by milder punishment, owing to the intervention of the Bangkok Government some two years previous to our visit, but only one man had been put in prison since then.

The commissioner from Bangkok was a tactless old gentleman, who was soon afterwards succeeded, I was glad to hear, by a more able successor.

During our stay the beginning of the cremation-building for the late *Chao* was made in the wide open space before the east wall of the city. An enormous forest tree,

over sixty feet in length, was got on end as the first 'stone,' so to speak, of the temporary edifice. A scaffolding of bamboo was run up some fifty feet, forming three sides of a rectangle in plan. On the fourth side of the rectangle an inclined plane was dug to the bottom of the shallow pit which occupied the centre.

A long rattan rope was led from the outer end of the spar up over the scaffolding and down to the ground beyond. A party of a hundred men laid on to the fall, and ran away with it with a shout, and, as the end rose, the base ran down the plane into the step prepared for it. On coming upright the spar was brought up by the scaffolding, and was lashed there while the base was filled in.

As February the 1st dawned through the mists on Nan shivering before its fires, we renewed our march northward to Chieng Kawng. Three routes were open to us, and, as usual, hardly any information of a reliable character was to be got about them. I consequently elected to take the most northerly, in order to follow our old friend the river as long as possible, and see as much as we could of the Nan Valley.

We made four and a half easy marches through open inhabited country to Muang Ngob, passing numbers of well-to-do villages with palisades round them, and pretty little *Wats* with whitewashed walls, where we camped at night, soothed by the rush of the shingly river or the 'tinkle' of the gable bells in the strong night wind.

A good deal of the country here, especially eastward, seemed to have been disforested by fire, and fast-growing grasses and bamboos had so completely occupied the soil that the scene was a most unusual one, and the absence of forest trees suggested that they had suffered extermination. What policy the Siamese Forest Department is going to adopt with regard to fire-protection generally will be

interesting. It is a very important question in any country depending so largely on its forests for rainfall, and for material, as does Siam. The *Rai*, or hill clearing, carried on every year by the various *Ka* tribes is working wholesale destruction quite out of proportion to the small benefit derived, which is at the most two or three crops of hill rice or cotton. As soon as they are deserted the grasses sprout in the clearings, and choke off more useful saplings. During the dry season they catch fire, and each year the flames advance, creeping farther in beyond the edge of the forest standing round, rendering the mature trees unsound, killing off the seedlings, and impoverishing the soil.

Scientific forestry seems to have adopted fire-protection, which retains the soil and moisture in the forests, seconded by systematic clearing, thinning, and improvement fellings, as the only means of retarding deterioration, and assisting the propagation and growth of the seedlings of the useful trees. For this the grasses must be exterminated and the bamboos cut, to free the valuable young trees in their struggle for existence.

With the rapid exhaustion of the teak, and the extensive annual forest destruction going on, the problem is one which, it is to be hoped, will receive the serious attention of the Siamese Government.

At Muang Ngob we crossed the river for the last time. It is here a youthful babbling streamlet, bearing the name of Nam Ngob, sweet and unpretentious-looking, with its cradle hardly out of sight.⁵ There is nothing in its aspect to suggest the important functions and lordly titles it assumes farther down. Near the source are

⁵ The Me Nam Chao Praya, as it is known in Siam, rises in the mountain mass of Doi Luang, in 19° 35' N. and 101° 24' E., scarcely

twenty miles from the Me Kawng. Its height when it first becomes a stream is about 1,400 feet.

several salt wells, whence, during the rainy season, the brine is lifted from a depth of five or six fathoms, the water being then evaporated. The salt thus made supplies a great part of Nan Province. The wells are protected by spirits more vindictive than those at Nam Pi. Monopolists find them more effective than police, and less expensive.

Our course now lay westward, and in a long rough march we crossed the watershed into the Chieng Hawng plain, some 2,000 feet above sea-level. The view of the valley from the top of the pass was very fine, but the distant ranges were lost in the haze which is so prevalent throughout these countries with the southerly winds of February and the following months.

From Chieng Hawng we made a short march through the dark chilling tracks by which the Dawng Choi is crossed. This was the finest but most depressing bit of tropical forest I remember seeing in Siam; for hours we saw no ray of sun, and no particle of sky through the dense vaulting of foliage far above us. The great grey trunks rose like stone pillars through the gloom, and echoed back our voices. Both Lao and Siamese gave over their chatter for the time; not a laugh or joke was heard, but the splash of feet hurrying through the mud to reach the sunlight. We camped in a clearing in the afternoon to rest the elephants, who were tired after their twelve hours' march from Muang Ngob; the men revelled beneath the hot blue sky, and recovered their spirits as fast as they had lost them.

Our numbers were now much increased by various additions. There was a gentleman sent from Chieng Mai as 'commissioner' to help us on our way, and eventually receive my report at Chieng Kawng. He travelled on a fine tusker, with his assistant on another, and at night he aroused my admiration by the matter-of-fact way in which

he made his camp. He usually travelled an hour or two ahead of us, but I used to be up with him at the end of the day, and watch him select a spot for his encampment. The two comfortable howdahs were taken off, and formed the rear with a few branches towards the jungle. The long-peaked roof in front was lengthened out into a comfortable shelter by mats and bamboos, a tiger-skin or deer-skin was spread below, and, as soon as his men had lit the fire and wrapped their plaids around them, the work was done, and they had only to contemplate the steaming of the rice for supper. He had two white ponies, with pinky eyes and noses, of which he was very proud. Anything in the way of an albino is thought much of in Siam, and, oddly enough, a good many albino forms seem to occur. A little lad in Nan was brought me by his brother to ask if I could do anything for his eyes, the European being appealed to everywhere for all ailments of the flesh. He was physically weak, and suffered much from the strong glare, but was a cheerful child withal. The so-called 'white' elephants are albinos, and I have seen albino crows and monkeys.

But beyond his camping and his ponies our commissioner was not quite satisfactory. He expressed unbounded devotion to me so frequently that he obviously did not mean a word of it; he was obsequious and polite to one's face, but the least of the things he did when one's back was turned was to cheat the villagers who brought supplies.

Another recruit to our party was Chao Bun Yun, who had been so hospitable at Muang Sa. He had orders to accompany us the whole way to Bangkok. He left Nan with three lads as his only following, one of whom was the chief performer at our great entertainment there. They carried the whole of their impedimenta, Shân fashion, in packs swung on bamboos across the shoulder. Camp

to them was the simplest of affairs; a deer-skin was their bed, their plaid their covering. They were all small of build, and were the hardiest among us. Born jungle men, their eyes were quick to note every edible herb along the trail, and their ears caught every jungle sound. They knew the forests round them as Londoners know the Strand; they could imitate every note and cry, and follow any trail. Comrades on the march they joked and chaffed familiarly; in camp the *Chao* was chief, and all familiarity vanished promptly.

An official with his sons, who were also *Chaos*,^a and who knew the country, were also sent as far as Chieng Kawng with us, to act as guides. They were handsome, hardy fellows, tattooed from knee to waist as is the fashion with the Lao Pung Dam, or western Lao. They were very useful, for, as usual in Indo-China, it was absurdly hard to get any information about one's route. Every night, when the morrow's orders were given out, it was necessary to find, if possible, the probable length of the next march, where water might be found, or rice be bought. Numbering as we now did about seventy men, with twenty-two elephants, these were considerations, and one could not go ahead recklessly with a pocket full of rice and a bottle of cold tea, in the same way as we used to do later on, when only mustering four or five. Consequently any one who knew the route was called into the circle round the fire to give us his experiences. The Sháns and the Siamese have a well-defined bump of locality, and, what is remarkable, understand and habitually practise the art of map-drawing. The illustration of the country under discussion, roughly projected on the dusty floor of the *sala*, presents no

^a In Nan the villages are all *Muangs*, as settlements are all 'cities' in the United States, and

Chaos are as numerous though not as proud as 'princes' in Rome. ✓

difficulties to their minds, and many a fairly accurate map, with the cardinal points shown upon it, I have seen drawn, only rudely, it is true, by an elephant mahout or by a village headman far back in the jungle. The relative positions were always remarkably well given. But when it came to scale and distances our difficulties began. The looseness of expression usual in the East does not lend itself to detail.

'How far is it from this point to that?' one would ask, pointing to the map.

'*Rapratan*,' not so far, *Korab*.'

'Is it a day's march?'

'Probably more, *Korab*.'

'Is it two?'

'If you march strongly you might do it in one night;^a but I think the elephants will take two nights, *Korab*.'

'Oh! then it's about as far as from so-and-so to so-and-so,' one exclaimed joyfully, mentioning some known distance, and thinking at last one has got a scale to go by.

'Ah, no, *Nai Korab*, it is not so far.'

'Then why shall we take so long?'

'*Rapratan*,' the first day is very rough, *Korab pom*!'

'Is that all?'

'There is no water at Hue Lek in this month, so you will have to camp short of that, at Hue Sai. The elephants could not possibly get in, in one day, from Hue Sai, *Korab pom*.'

'How long would it take them?'

^a The 'May it please your Honour' with which every Siamese or Lao of low estate interlards his sentences with wearisome regularity.

^b 'One night's' journey means

in Siam two days; the idea is the traveller will spend one night upon the road. Similarly 'two nights' is a three days' journey, involving two nights' camping.

'If they start at the third watch in the night (i.e. 3 A.M.), they might be in at the sixth hour of the night' (the next midnight).

'Well, that's too long. Are you sure there's no water at Hue Lek?'

'*Rapratan*, there is none there now, *Korab*.'

Then in come two individuals who declare they know a man who passed there in this month last year, and there was not a drop of water from dawn to the first night watch. Owing to the care with which they give their details, one decides they cannot be true, and so orders are at length given for elephants and cocoa at daylight, and we push on to Hue Lek next day and wade knee deep through the lovely running stream. Then the chaff of the whole camp is on their heads, and at the next township we hear that Hue Lek is never dry.

In the matter of nomenclature the traveller must be furnished with a strong digestion. Any one who looks at the maps, especially the French maps of Indo-China, will be astonished at the number and the large print of the names. They are as thick as those on the map of England, yet one may go for days without seeing a village. Most of us bent on acquiring information were anxious to obtain a name for everything we passed, and the *Nais* with me were bitten with the fever. So every stream and hill, every pond and rock, almost every open space, much more every mountain peak, was recorded with its name in their notebooks. The discovery of discrepancies suggested an investigation. The result was highly creditable to the amiability, if not to the veracity, of the Lao. Whenever we had asked for a name we had invariably been given one. Was there a rocky channel to the stream, our informant had called it *Hue Hin*; was the quantity of water small, it had suggested to

him the title of *Hue Noi*; did we question him of some high peak towering five thousand feet into the cumulus, he called it *Doi Luang*; or if the sun was particularly hot, the patch of forest was *Pa Rawn*. All were perfectly correct descriptions; the stream was rocky and the mountain was a magnificent mass, but, though the names satisfied us for the time, from a strictly geographical point of view they were not always satisfactory in the end.

Again, local names in one valley are different in the next. *Hue Nai*, the 'near stream,' becomes the far stream viewed from the other side. *Kao Deng*, the 'red mountain,' is very red to those who see it from the west when the evening sun is on it; to those on the eastern side it stands out *Kao Kio*, dark blue and even deep purple against the light of the departing day.

Thus, to the inquirer everything will be named, and, as long as it is recognised that the names are often local descriptions applied to features of country known to and current among but a few thousand or a few hundred of jungle dwellers, no harm is done. But undue importance is often attached to them, and erroneous deductions are apt to be made as to the extent of the population with which the country is covered.

On many of the lower reaches of the Me Nam, for instance, there are houses scattered at intervals for miles; each group of two or three has the name of Bang So-and-so, and even a solitary farm place is Ban Something. With the assurance from the boatmen that Bang So-and-so is quite a large place, and Ban Something is an important point on the river, the population-monger is able to make the river bank in his map show up quite respectably.

These facts explain the disappointment under which the French Colonial press is now suffering, on finding that all the grand names and capital letters they used

to see in the maps of Luang Prabang and the Me Kawng left bank are but empty titles, and that the splendid country which was to have paid for Tongkin is but a vast depopulated jungle, possessed of no roads, cafés, or other conveniences of civilisation, in which respects undoubtedly it should not have so disappointed its new masters.

We reached Muang Kawb by a long and splendid march over the hills which separate it from the Chieng Hawng Valley. We started at 3 A.M., every six or eight men having an eight-foot torch of split bamboo. At first we crossed a *huc* several times, and preternaturally cold it felt at that hour. Then came the steep climb upward, with the flare of the torches on the huge tree-trunks rising into black night, and below the glancing of the lights dodging up the hillside; a strange, weird scene, which one was, however, too sleepy to appreciate. Sunrise brought life and wakefulness; but though, as usual, far ahead of every one and in just the place for game, I saw nothing but the for once silent forest waking for the day.

The variations of temperature were very marked, ranging between 42° Fahr. in the morning and 93° in the afternoon.

We descended to the beautiful Muang Kawb Valley, splashing along the chilly stream called Hue Pot in a narrow glen, shut in by lofty heights and full of glorious tree ferns and dense foliage. The temperature was 10° Fahr. below that of the hills we had left, and we were only too glad to get out into the sun for warmth. I reached the Muang at 2.30 P.M., the rest straggling in towards four, and the poor elephants dead beat at 6.30, after over fifteen hours' going, having done nigh on thirty miles of climbing. My two boys who kept up with me on coming in fell so sound asleep it was impossible to wake them. Chao Bun Yun's sharp eyes during the

early morning had detected two tigers prowling along parallel to the trail, but being alone at the time with only his *da* he refrained from open hostilities, and when they sighted him they did not stay to parley. As usually happens to the man who has no rifle in his hand, it was granted him to see several sambur in the Nam Pot Valley. All the beasts of the forest, tigers and snakes included, avoid mankind if possible; and, as man makes the most noise, they have the first warning. Hence the fact that one sees so little game, although the country teems with it. At night one hears their voices all about, and in the morning one sees their tracks by the waterside; but secure in the protecting forest gloom they are seldom visible to the quickest eyes.

It is only when the tiger is pressed by hunger, or the snake is trodden on, that an accident occurs. Even the tiger's spring is by way of a surprise, and when eating their meal of *Kao nio* the Lao squat facing one another, that each may command the view behind the other, and prevent such contingencies. Chinamen are different; a tiger will take a Chinaman without provocation, as will a shark; for he is fat and porky, and is as unpopular with animals as with men. It is a sure 'draw' to the most good-tempered elephant to put a Chinaman in front of him—possibly because he is so ready to exhibit signs of fear that the animal's contempt is provoked beyond control.

As will be gathered, a day's march, which one may say is the unit of distance among the jungle folk of Siam, is a most varied quantity. It depends on the country one is in, whether forest, mountain, or plain; on the time of year; whether the torrential rains, when it may take half a day to cross a stream, or the hot dry season, when one must accommodate one's marches to the distances between the streams or the puddles that are not dried up. Lightly equipped for a short journey, one may do well over twenty

miles a day for some time, but it is exhausting to keep up the rate. With men and elephants, the former often sick with fever, the latter with sore backs, or lack of green food, fifteen miles is an outside limit. In some of the rocky stream beds, when all are stumbling knee-deep in ice-cold water, and the rocks cut like knives, ten or twelve miles is quite enough for man and beast, and a day's rest is often necessary. Speaking generally, four miles in Siam is equal to six in a temperate climate, and five in any respectable jungle country where there are decent tracks, or where the eternal rice, fowl, and salt fish may be varied.

It is curious, perhaps humiliating, in this great age of intellect triumphant, to what extent one's whole interests and ambitions are inclined to centre in the commissariat. There was no denying it: with a good meal and good digestion, whatever Carlyle may say, one's temper, one's mental power, and one's physical strength are equal to all emergencies. Dispossessed of either one, and the whole scene changed. If abominable and revolting, it is perhaps all the more, like many truths, not to be disregarded. This became more marked as we went on. Rice is excellent for a time, but at the end of some months the European begins to appreciate the fact that he was not brought up on such a diet. In the Lao States we used *Kao nio*, the glutinous rice which is general in the hills, and is prepared by steaming over boiling water. It is excellent stuff and moister than the ordinary rice, and is quite passable eaten alone. It is handy for travelling, as the particles adhere to one another, and every man on starting can take a handful, like a ball of dough, in his bag or haversack. But the Siamese did not thrive upon it. It seems to predispose those unaccustomed to it to diarrhoea; and after three months of *Kao nio*, notwithstanding its very pleasant taste, all the Siamese seemed as glad to return to *Kao chau*, the ordinary boiled rice, as the European may be after six

months to eat meat again. We got a bit of venison, monkey, or pig sometimes, but they gave us all dyspepsia, and we eventually forbade pig in camp. Eggs in Siam may often be obtained, but are generally peculiar. They are kept for the next *farang* who may arrive. They are best in omelettes.

We had plenty of herbs with our curry which Chao Bun Yun picked up along the trail, and when our tea ran out he found a very creditable substitute. Owing to the limited character of transport facilities generally at one's disposal, it is impossible to take much in the way of tinned things. But a few articles, such as cocoa, tea, and coffee, some tins of soup, of milk, or marmalade, are highly desirable as luxuries, and worth their weight in gold when the inner man is out of sorts and wants encouragement. The craving for sweet, which often comes over one in jungle life, is peculiar, and, like want of salt, spoils the appetite for other things if not satisfied. To cure this we had an admirable recipe called 'Suk pudding,' as it was his invention, and consisted of rice, hot water, and anything sweet which was to be had. I tried to introduce it in Bangkok society on my return, but it was not appreciated. To us it was like custard.

We remained at Muang Kawb a day to rest the elephants, and came in for some excitement in the shape of a village fire. It was the hottest part of the day when the alarm was raised. The Lao, who are fatalists, were dazed and useless. But our people went to work in style. Fires in the grass-thatched dwellings of these regions develop rapidly. In less than ten minutes two houses were burnt to ashes. We unroofed the frightened neighbours to leeward, at the rate of four minutes per house, and then devoted ourselves to saving the rice stored in bins at the ends of the houses. Getting the grain out in baskets from among the burning rafters was a peculiar

experience, as owing to the strong sunlight it was impossible to see much of the flame; and contact with it was the first warning of its presence. We cut down a row of banana palms, the split trunks of which are the best of wet blankets, and threw them on the flames. All the rice was saved, to the lasting gratitude of the owners, who came home at night after their day's work to find everything else burnt. And when they came round to thank us, the men, who people constantly declare are mainly heathen savages, sent them away laden with an extensive and varied collection of Bangkok raiment which could ill be spared by any of them.

Two days west and three days north down the valley of the Nam Ing, among the falling teak-leaves, and we had reached Chieng Kawng at last. The heat had much increased, and the forest fires and absence of shade and water made the last few days very exhausting to the party.

The Nam Ing Valley is chiefly interesting now as being specially guaranteed to Siam by the Anglo-French agreement of January 1896. Whether its teak forests will ever be worked depends probably on what may be done in opening up the country by railways; for the Me Kawng seems worthless for floating timber.



KACHA SI



NANG MAKE KALA, AN ANGEL WHO CAUSES LIGHTNING

CHAPTER VII

THE LAO STATES (*continued*). THE ME KAWNG

THE ME KAWNG'S COURSE—HIGHWAY TO YUNAN AND RAILWAYS—BUFFER
STATE COMMISSION—ANGLO-FRENCH AGREEMENT, 1896.

Few can regard the Me Kawng without feeling its peculiar fascination. That narrow streak, connecting far countries with the distant ocean, what scenes it knows, what stories it could tell! Gliding gently here, and thundering in fury there where it meets with opposition; always continuing its great work of disintegration of hard rocks and of transport of material; with infinite patience hewing down the mountain sides, and building up with them new countries in far climes where other tongues are spoken, it never stays its movement. How few men have seen its upper waters! What a lonely life altogether is that of the Me Kawng! From its cradle as the Gergu River in the far Tibetan highlands to its end in the stormy China Sea, it never sees a populous city or a noble building. For

nearly three thousand miles it storms through solitudes, or wanders sullenly through jungle wastes. No wonder one sat and watched it by the hour listening to its tale. For though but dull to read of, the wide deep reality rolling by before one had an intense interest for a lonely man.

Rising in about $33^{\circ} 17'$ N. lat. and $94^{\circ} 25'$ E. long., in the greatest nursery of noble rivers in the world, where six huge brethren have so long hidden the secrets of their birth, it flows south-east through Chinese Tibetan territory to Chiamdo, where the tea caravan road from Lhasa and Tibet on the west crosses eastward towards Ta Chien Lu and China, over 10,000 feet above sea-level.

Onwards through unknown territories of deep valleys and high mountains, inhabited by semi-independent peoples who have been described by Captain Bower,¹ Mr. Woodville Rockhill,² and a few other intrepid explorers, to Makham and Dayul, it is intimate with pines, yaks, and snowy solitudes, and is known as the Nam Chu, or Chiamdo Chu, till the Gartok-Dayul road crosses it by a rope suspension bridge of the usual Tibetan type. Below Dayul, in lat. 29° , it becomes known by the Chinese name of Lantsan Kiang; and here its neighbours, as it were to bid farewell ere turning off, as schoolboys do, to their life's work in other lands, come down together linking arm in arm, and three great rivers flow in parallel valleys, within fifty miles of one another, whose graves are in as many distant seas, thousands of miles asunder.

To the east the Kinsha Kiang, the Di Chu or Drechu of Tibet, Capt. Gill's 'River of Golden Sand,' flows southward still for two degrees of latitude ere bending eastwards into Sechuen, to become the great river of the heart of China, the Yangtze Kiang.

On the west, the Nu, Lu,³ or Lutse Kiang, known to

¹ *Geogr. Journ.* vol. i. No. 5.

² Nu becomes Lu with the

³ *Geogr. Journ.* vol. iii. No. 5.

Chinese.

the Shâns as the Namkong, and to Europeans as the Salwin, rolls its much-debated waters southward. Flowing in a narrow mountain bed, the valley scarcely thirty miles across, it has long been recognised that its great volume of water could not originate anywhere in the restricted watershed south of lat. 28°, but must come from a long way north. In the latitude of the Bhamo Tali route, of the three rivers, Me Kawng, Salwin, and Shweli, the Salwin is unquestionably the largest,⁴ and yet has the narrowest basin of the three; while the French missionaries who have long been established near the Nu Kiang, between 28° and 29°, where it would be beyond the influence of the monsoon, speak of it, even there, as the 'Great River.'⁵

Frequent and rapid variations of level, which must be expected of a short river, do not moreover take place in the Salwin; and its yearly rise, although very high, is both gradual and regular, thus proving that its course is a long one, and that it relies for its supply on the drainage of a considerable area of country. As we know it cannot find this south of lat. 28°, owing to its very limited drainage, it must have its head-waters north of that point. Thus geographers have, with a very few exceptions, long identified the Nu Kiang⁶ with the Giamsa Nu Chu,⁶ the next great river west of the Lantsan or Chiamdo Chu crossed on the Tibetan high road in Dayul, and which farther north receives the waters of the Seramdo Chu and Su Chu,⁷ and is thought to rise about 92° E. long. and 32° N. lat.

Prince Henri d'Orléans, who crossed the Salwin in 1895

⁴ Colborne Baber, Report of the Grosvenor Mission, *R. G. S. Suppl. Papers*, vol. i. part 1.

⁵ Col. Yule in Gill's *River of Golden Sand* (1888), L'Abbé Desgodins in *Le Thibet*.

⁶ Kiang and Chu are Chinese and Tibetan equivalents for 'river.'

⁷ Woodville Rockhill, *Geogr. Journ.* vol. iii. No. 5.

in lat. 28°, confirms the view of its Tibetan origin, but in no way solves the question of its source. He says it is there a hundred yards across, 'a large and fairly deep river coming from a great distance,' but, for reasons which he does not give, identifies it with the Oi Chu of Tibet, which has been believed to be a small affluent of the Giama Nu Chu flowing into it at Menkong. If this view be correct, the Giama Nu Chu yet remains to be identified in its lower course. The result of his subsequent journey across the head-waters of the Irawadi, along part of Colonel Woodthorpe's route from Assam to that river⁸ in 1885, is that he is of opinion that none of that river's affluents rise farther north than the southern watershed of Zayul, and, therefore, that its origin is not Tibet, as suggested by General Walker.⁹ It seems probable that by Oi Chu the Prince means Giama Nu River, and this would accord with the view generally held on the subject since 1885,¹ and confirmed by Major Hobday's explorations in 1891.

Thus his plucky and difficult journey has not, except in the names of some of the Irawadi's head-streams, altered the map from that published by the Geographical Society ten years ago;² nor has it materially affected the chief features of the three main branches of the Irawadi, the Nam Kiu, Nam Tsan, and Nam Dumai, as given in the map with the account of Colonel Woodthorpe's expedition in 1885.

The Lantsan Kiang, south of Dayul, for 300 miles of its course through China proper, is very little known.

Cooper in 1868 followed it down from Batang to Tseku, while Prince Henri d'Orléans, during his journey

⁸ *Proc. R. G. S.* vol. ix. No. 1. 1887.

⁹ The Lu River of Tibet. *Proc. R. G. S.* vol. ix. No. 6.

¹ *Ibid.* vol. vii. No. 2. Colonel Yule's remarks in discussion on

Pundit A.—k's explorations, and *ibid.* vol. iv. No. 5. Remarks of Major Sandeman and Colonel Yule.

² *Ibid.* vol. viii. No. 8, Aug. 1886.

from Tongkin to Assam in 1895, crossed it in lat. 25° 53', and followed it northward some 180 miles before striking west across the Salwin, and the upper drainage of the Irawadi.³

The country is very wild, the heights between it and the Salwin crowned with forests of pine and oak. The valley of the latter, which he followed for twenty miles, is many hundred feet below the former, and is wider, greener, and more thickly wooded.

The Lantsan Kiang is deep down in the mountain ditch it has made for itself beneath bare and rocky walls. A few scattered villages of Lusns and Mossos exist along its valley; but it is eloquent of the conditions of life in this part of its course that Prince Henri's party took forty-one days to reach Tseku, and had to make their own mule tracks as they proceeded.

In 25° 18' the famous Tali-Bhamo route crosses the river at a height of 4,700 feet above the sea, by one of those ill-repaired iron suspension bridges which are the pride of Yunan, and the terror of the unaccustomed traveller. The river at this point, deep in the narrow rift, is quiet for a few miles; but there are no boats built or used along its course—a fact which is scarcely surprising, for it has already fallen a thousand feet for every parallel of latitude in coming from Chiamdo, and averages a drop of 900 feet to each degree down to Chieng Hung in lat. 22°. There is no trade from north to south, and between Tibet and the Shân States there is no town worthy of the name upon its banks.

The Tali-Bhamo route has been admirably described by Mr. Colborne Baber in his Report of the Grosvenor⁴

³ *Geogr. Journ.* vol. viii. No. 6. For a more complete description of the country and people cf. the same author's *Toukin to China*: London, Methuen & Co., 1898, which,

however, contains no definite or conclusive particulars concerning the eastern sources of the Irawadi.

⁴ *R. G. S. Suppl. Papers*, vol. i. part 1.

Mission, which to readers of travel has become a classic. He has shown the great difficulties of the route presented by the gorges of the Lantsan, Lu Kiang, and Lung Kiang, which, as we approach Shân territory, assume their better-known names of Me Kawng, Salwin, and Shweli.

With their characteristic churlishness, and with that deliberate intent to hamper trade which these unmannerly rivers betray in all their movements, they stretch their deep valleys directly athwart the lines of communication. The Me Kawng is flanked by steep passes rising to 8,000 feet, and the sulky Salwin has sunk its bed over 2,000 feet below that of the Me Kawng, and has surrounded itself with such an atmosphere of plague and pestilence, malaria, and superstition, that it is a far greater source of terror to the caravan men than the slippery zigzags of the climb to the Me Kawng. Amiability, possibly owing to the struggles of their youth to reach the outer world, is not a characteristic of either the Salwin or Me Kawng.

It is curious what an effectual barrier this great river region has proved to communication between the Chinese and Indian Empires. A more interesting country, geographically, geologically, and ethnologically, does not exist, and fortunately there are few so impossible commercially.

The Europeans who have entered it scarce count a score, and it has remained a land of mystery to the last. A few travellers like Bower, Rockhill, Bonvallot, and Prince Henri d'Orléans have crossed it by the Tibetan high roads in the north, and a few plucky and devoted French missionaries have lived among its peoples at Batang, Tsoku, and Into. By the Tali-Bhamo route a few more, among them some well-known names, have penetrated it—Cooper, the lamented Margery, Colborne Baber, McCarthy, Cameron, Gill, and latterly Count Széchenyi, Colquhoun, and that unostentatious traveller

Dr. Morrison. But the uncompromising ruggedness of the country has only become more apparent, and it is evident that any permanent and efficient communication between Western China and Burma will have to attack the physical obstructions obliquely up the lines of drainage, and farther south.

More than one route has been proposed by which, in the parlance of the day, to 'tap' the trade of Yunan and South Western China from the side of the British possessions. It seems to be admitted by those who are able to judge that, notwithstanding the ravages caused by the Mahomedan rebellion, the population and the wealth of that part of China are sufficient to promise a vast development of trade as soon as some means of communication is devised. For years it has been the subject of an extensive literature, partly exhortative and partly controversial, into which it is not necessary to enter at length. Unopened markets are in these days of competition not very common, and a sense of the importance of South Western China and that part of South Eastern Asia known as Indo-China, as future openings for trade, has been extending with the spread of the British and French influences on the west and east, in Assam and Burma, and in Cambodia and Tongkin.

Our French neighbours in Indo-China were not slow in entering for the race to Yunan, and, as is their wont, commenced with brilliant dash. The naval expedition under Captain Doudart de Lagrée started from Saigon in 1866 to explore the Me Kawn, which at that time it was hoped would provide a water highway into the heart of Yunan. The mystery of this vast river, coming from they knew not where, and the patriotic desire to be the first among the nations of the west to reach the countries which had aroused so much speculation, gave additional motives for the expedition.

But all hopes of the navigability of the Me Kawng, as we understand the term, were at once dispelled. They had to leave their boats, and with wonderful pluck and perseverance, which only those who know the country can fully appreciate, they struggled bravely on in native dug-outs to Chieng Hung, and thence reached Yunan Fu and Tali Fu, and brought back, two years later, the wealth of information which is embodied in the charming work of Francis Garnier; but the gallant De Lagrée did not live to see the accomplishment of his purpose, and died at Ting-Chuan.

When Tongkin became a part of French Indo-China, it was hoped by the French Colonial party that the Red River would do its duty where the Me Kawng had failed, and would carry the merchandise of France into the coveted markets of Southern China. But disappointment again awaited sanguine prophets, and, notwithstanding the close proximity of Tongkin to Eastern Yunan, no perceptible advance has yet been made commercially.

The taking of Tongkin, and the obvious advantage in point of distance which it conferred upon its owners, aroused keener interest upon the subject, especially among commercial men in this country; and the result has been a close consideration by the Chambers of Commerce and other bodies of the railway schemes and surveys for uniting Burma and the British Shân States with Yunan, which have been put forward at various times.

The best known of these is that which has been so assiduously advocated by Messrs. Hallett and Colquhoun,² which was, briefly, to attack the Yunan plateau through the Siamese Shân States from our Tenasserim port of Maulmen. This line would avoid the difficulties of the

² *A Thousand Miles on an Elephant. Amongst the Shâns.* Journ. of Soc. of Arts, No. 1-789 vol. xxxv. &c.

Salwin gorge by starting the other side of it, would cross by low passes to Raheng in Siam, viâ Myawadi, and would then ascend the Me Ping Valley and cross the watershed into the Me Kawng drainage to Chieng Rai and Chieng Sen. It would then follow the right bank of the Me Kawng, crossing at Keng Hung to the Chinese frontier, making Sumao its objective. The advantages offered by the route were its comparative cheapness, and the absence of the serious physical difficulties presented by the other possible routes, which it was supposed would make the expense of railway building prohibitive. It would pass over no height exceeding 2,200 feet, and would follow to a large extent existing caravan routes through a territory containing a large⁶ population; and it would, moreover, be easily connected with Bangkok.

The chief objection naturally was that for over 300 miles of its course it depended on the practical goodwill and co-operation of a foreign government—that of Siam.

The acquisition of Upper Burma, with the whole of the Burmese Shân States, introduced a new factor.

Our frontier now became conterminous with that of China, and any line of railway we might push through in the direction of Yunan would do what must be done at some time and in some way for administrative purposes—namely, open up our own Shân territories, and would have a strategical as well as a commercial value.

Hence the Indian Government have naturally given their attention to the investigation of the British rather than the Siamese Shân States, with a view to a practicable line to the China frontier.

The result is that a route has been found crossing the Salwin at the Kunlon Ferry, in lat. 23° 25', and a railway

⁶ Estimated by Holt Hallett at 2,000,000: probably an exaggerated figure.

has been commenced to connect this point with the Burma Railway at Mandalay.

Mr. Scott, the distinguished Superintendent of the Northern Shân States, is of opinion that it will be practicable to extend this line from Kunlon towards Shunning Fu, whence it may eventually be carried across the Me Kawng, and up the Yang pi to Tali Fu.

This view has apparently been corroborated by the surveys which have been made and accepted by the Indian Government, who are satisfied that the Kunlon line does not end in a *cul-de-sac*, as has been stated by advocates of the more southern route.

The position adopted by the Imperial and Indian Governments with regard to the connection of Burma with the valley of the Yellow River was very clearly given by Lord Salisbury, in June 1896, in reply to a deputation of the Associated Chambers of Commerce who asked the support of the Government in opening up trade routes, either from Maulmen, viâ Siam, or from Rangun through British territory, viâ Karenni, by building or guaranteeing a railway, and obtaining the permission of the Chinese Government to continue it from the frontier into their territory, viâ Sumao. Lord Salisbury pointed out that it was impossible to expect the Government to give money for a railway in other people's territory; and that a railway through an independent country such as Siam would be under foreign control, and to all intents a foreign railway. As far, however, as our own territories were concerned, if capitalists found the money, they might be sure of the assistance of the Government, and he had little doubt that once on the Chinese frontier the Chinese would find it to their own obvious interest and to the advantage of their customs to facilitate our entrance into Yunnan. He added that the Indian Government was very anxious to complete the Kunlon

Ferry line and bridge over the interval between that place and the frontier.

Since that, the Government have been questioned on the subject of having a survey made to assist those interested in the Maulmen scheme, and it is evidently felt by the Chambers of Commerce that the French Government has been in advance of our own in the matter of securing concessions of railway rights in Southern China for its subjects. It is an undoubted fact that we are inclined to treat the Chinese Government with far too much consideration. It is absolutely futile to deal with them as with Europeans. The French recognise this, and have bullied with admirable results, while our concessions to the Chinese along the frontier have very greatly diminished their respect for us. But though in these matters officially we often work slowly, we generally work surely in the end.⁷

Such, in brief, is the result up to the present time of the endeavours, costly in men and money, to reopen the old 'golden road' to China, which had their beginning with the mission to Ava in 1795, and the end of which is not yet.

At Chieng Hung (lat. 22°) the Me Kawng first becomes navigable to the natives. Bamboo rafts are used for taking salt down as far as Chieng Lap,⁸ their crews returning overland. It was here that De Lagrée's expedition finally left the Me Kawng and struck north and eastward into China. Though they had been obliged to leave their dug-outs at Muang Len or Tang Aw, Garnier returned to the river again and again, as they advanced to Chieng Hung, to see if it were practicable for boats, and always with the same result. For Tang Aw is the highest point at which the people can force their boats against the current. Several ferries exist above Tang Aw, the tolls of which go

⁷ This was written before the important events of January 1898.

⁸ Colonel Woodthorpe, *Geogr. Journ.* vol. vii. No. 6.

to the Sawbwa of Chieng Tung, the most important of which is Chieng Lap, where the main trail, by which Lord Lamington entered Muang Sing in his journey to Tongkin in 1890-91,¹ crosses the river.

Colonel Woodthorpe has ably and vividly described this bit of country in a paper² which is the more valuable as it gives the impressions of an experienced explorer.

Chieng Hung was the head of the old confederation of Twelve States, called the Sibsawng Punna, and owned allegiance for many years to both China and Burma. By a treaty in 1892, we ceded Chieng Hung and Muang Lem (to the westward) to China, on condition that she should not cede any portion of either to any other country without our consent. These concessions were probably a mistake, on the principle that all concessions made to China are mistakes. They are attributed by the Chinese to fear, and they think none the better of us for dealing with them in the way we should deal with the civilised Powers of Europe.

When France seized the Siamese territory north of the great eastern bend of the Me Kawng in 1893, China practically handed over the trans-Me Kawng portion of the Sibsawng Punna to her in defiance of the treaty with us.

The fact that France was bent on extending her territory west of the Nam U, and on occupying Muang Sing, the capital of the small State of Chieng Keng,³ which strides the Me Kawng at the twenty-first parallel, and which, having been tributary to our State of Chieng Tung, was now part of the British Empire, became apparent as soon as what was known as 'the buffer State Com-

¹ *Proc. R. G. S.* vol. xiii. No. 12.

² *Geogr. Journ.* vol. vii. No. 6.

³ The Keng Cheng of Anglo-Burmese writers. The first word is the Siam *Chieng* again. In the

second, I am at a loss to account for the presence of the *Ch*. Lord Lamington gives the correct Siamese name as here used. *Proc. R. G. S.* vol. xiii. No. 12.

mission' began its investigations, when the statements of their claims by both sides aroused much mutual recrimination in Paris and London. Owing to the attitude adopted by M. Pavie, the French Chief Commissioner, who declined to recognise the existence of such a State as Chieng Keng, Mr. Scott, our Commissioner, was unable to effect a settlement with him on the spot, and the difference was referred to the Home Governments. It is unnecessary to go at length into a dispute which nearly assumed serious proportions, and which was settled by the Anglo-French Convention of January 1896.

Suffice to say that M. Pavie contended that Muang³ Sing was merely a town of the Siamese province of Nan, which lay on both sides of the Me Kawng, at Chieng Kawng and the Nam Ing, basing his view on the fact that the chief of that place, who had moved his residence from the right bank to Muang Sing as late as 1885, had, when threatened by a force of Nan men in 1888, taken the oath of allegiance to Nan, in order to be left in peace. The previous season he had already, however, received a British mission from Burma as representing the rightful suzerain.

At the time of the French aggression in Siam we had in contemplation a similar arrangement with her as regards Chieng Keng as we had already made with China concerning the trans-Mekawng part of Chieng Hung. When the blow of 1893 fell on Siam, the further consideration of such an arrangement with her became impossible, and we retained our rights in Chieng Keng, with the result that the first act Mr. Scott had to perform on reaching Muang Sing, the starting-point of the Boundary Commission, was to haul down the French flag which had been hoisted there; and the second, to garrison it with a few Goorkhas under Mr. Sterling, who is well known for

³ This is the Mong Sing of retain the Siamese form of the Anglo-Burmese writers. I again name.

the excellent work he has done as the superintendent of this portion of our frontier. M. Pavie's view made the creation of a buffer State, or neutral zone, between British and French possessions, which both Powers were ostensibly agreed in thinking desirable, an utter impossibility. If the Me Kawng was to be the dividing line, and the French were determined to have everything on the left bank of the Me Kawng, the *raison d'être* of the Commission never existed, and no delimitation was necessary.

In the meantime Chieng Tung, the capital of the most important of all the trans-Salwin Shân States, had been garrisoned from Burma, and the garrison at Muang Sing was retained pending settlement of the dispute. Then, in January 1896, came, to the surprise of many people, and the horror of not a few, what Lord Rosebery graphically, but with the lack of accuracy which is apt to accompany smart sayings, called 'the Surrender of Siam.' The agreement made with France did, it is true, surrender our claims on the left bank of the Me Kawng, and put an end to the proposal of a buffer State in that region. But for what consideration? The extent of the surrender can only be measured by what was got for it.

It is just here that Lord Salisbury's critics, who did not know the circumstances, allowed themselves to be misled. It will be remembered that England and France mutually agreed, *inter alia*, to guarantee the integrity of the Me Nam Valley from armed intrusion. The two territorially extensive districts of the Korat plateau and the Cambodian provinces on the east, and the Malay Peninsula on the west, remained outside the clause of neutralisation—an omission which, far from implying a formal division of them between the contracting powers, left them in exactly the same political position as they had previously occupied. The whole force of the agreement centered in the Me Nam Valley, which upon the map, to

those who did not know the country, appeared sufficiently unimportant, in point of area, to give good excuse for a howl of criticism. As a matter of fact, the Me Nam Valley, for practical purposes, is Siam. Its population is more than five times that of the two excepted regions combined; and the present value of its trade, of which considerably over ninety per cent. is in British hands, may be placed roughly at seven times their combined total.

I may add, incidentally, that the population and trade of the smaller western (or Malay) part of the excepted regions are considerably larger than those of the whole of the extensive territory on the east which borders the French possessions. To argue therefore merely from the appearance of the map is not likely to lead to conclusions of value. It seems to have been the opinion of the nation, when Lord Rosebery was in office, that the four and a half millions of the Siam trade was a thing we were bound to keep from being closed against us, and indeed, almost, that it would be worth fighting for. This being so, when Lord Salisbury snatched seven-eighths of it into permanent safety, at the expense of Chieng Keng, one would have expected general applause. That this was not accorded was, I presume, due to the fact that it was not known generally what serious anxiety the forward policy of the French Colonial press and party was occasioning at the end of 1895. Lord Salisbury in the House of Lords spoke of the 'apprehensions which it was legitimate to feel with respect to the future' of Siam before the completion of the agreement, and said they were in his judgment much more serious than they seemed to be generally thought. The remark passed apparently unnoticed, but it was the key to the whole position, and those who were in Siam and knew what was going on at the time were aware that the agreement was just in time to save Siam from the cupidity of a certain section of the

Saigon and Tongkin Colonial party. The end of 1895 was full of unrest in Bangkok ; and from the perpetual shower of diplomatic notes kept up on the Bangkok Foreign Office on every conceivable subject, it was felt that some pretext for fresh aggression might be discovered any day. Under the persistent bullying there was every fear that the Siamese might lose their heads. Chantabun was still occupied, and the twenty-five kilomètre zone was worked by the French agents until the Siamese authority had practically disappeared there. The Siamese were declared not to have fulfilled any clauses of the treaty with France of 1893, and all their protestations, arguments, and appeals for settlement by arbitration were met by absolute refusal to discuss.

Such a state of affairs, accompanied by the cries for advance, echoed excitedly in the papers of French Indo-China, could hardly last. The ladies began to realise their jewellery and send their wealth to Singapore, and the men tacitly referred everything to the future, and, in despair at the threatening attitude of their eastern neighbours, became if possible more dilatory than they are by nature. As a boy may be bullied into anything, so no doubt the Siamese were bullied into about the most unsatisfactory do-nothing condition they were ever in. The Eastern character cannot rise through trial of this sort, as the Western may ; it lies down and lets the wheels go over it. And, indeed, with so little guarantee for the future, it was hardly human nature not to despair ; for the Siamese, like other people, desire to see some hope of a return for their labour. The outlook had become quite hopeless, and people openly discussed the possibility of French annexation.

It was under such circumstances that the Anglo-French Agreement of January 1896 was announced. The Government in Paris had no been a party to the

advance-at-all-costs policy, and the agreement with regard to the Me Nam was evidence of the good faith of their protestations of friendship for Siam. But as regards Chantabun and the twenty-five kilometre zone they were immovable, and the undesirability of interfering in matters connected entirely with the 1893 treaty was appreciated by our Foreign Office.

The King, who thoroughly understood the position both before and after the agreement, was now like a new man, and the amount and character of the work he set before his Council in 1896-7 is an earnest of what is to come, and a measure of what the so-called 'Surrender of Siam' meant to him, and to the more serious of his ministers.

But perhaps the best evidence for the need of the guarantee of the Me Nam was the tone adopted by those who had so strenuously urged what they were not ashamed to call the 'ruining' of the Siamese. The French Indo-Chinese press affected to disbelieve, and subsequently to disregard, the agreement altogether. The first complaints were followed by loudly expressed regrets at the opportunities for annexation of Siam which had been allowed to slip; and the whole subsequent policy has been to discredit the agreement, and to encourage the belief that it cannot stand. 'A betrayal of the rights of France over Siam' is the latest title given to the agreement. Siam is regarded as the only chance of making the French Indo-Chinese empire pay its way, and the experience had with regard to the Me Kawn and Lao territories, acquired in 1893, holds out no encouragement that the thinly populated Korat plateau will pay. It must be Bangkok and the Me Nam, and if the Paris Government will not move it is the Colonial policy to make it move.

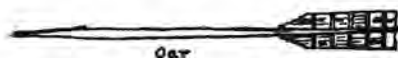
This digression is somewhat necessary to explain why Chieng Keng was given up. However much one must

regret its loss, it must be pointed out that the French presence on the left bank of the Me Kawng does not, as has been suggested, interfere with our ability to reach China by rail from the Burmese or Siamese Shân States, should we ever wish to do so. And it may reasonably be asked how we should like to have retained Chieng Keng, which, one is bound to admit, is not very easy of access, or very valuable in itself, and to have lost the Siam trade, by some quarrel cleverly picked by the French Colonial party, in which they would not of course have been the aggressors, and in which we could not legitimately have interfered.

The Anglo-French Agreement, in point of fact, marks the inception of the magnificent policy of open ports and commercial freedom for all which the British Government has recently, with such admirable fearlessness, proclaimed with regard to China. It has not in England been estimated at its true value.



MASHA NU, SON OF HANUMAN AND NYMPH OF THE SEA

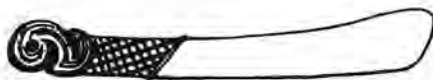


Oar



Rudder

1 0 1 2 3 Feet



Fishing Rudder

6 0 6 12 inches

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAO STATES—THE ME KAWNG (*continued*)

CHIENG KAWNG—GEM MINES—GOLD

WHEN I sat on the bank at Chieng Kawng looking across the wide leaden-coloured stream, and at the endless forest wastes beyond, on that side devoid even of the teak-tree, I seemed so utterly removed from all the world that it would have been like a wild mad dream to think that this should ever prove a bone of contention to European Powers. The interest of the river for us was far from political. There it lay before us, our highway homeward; on its bosom we were to travel for the next two months; its bays and narrows and broad reaches we were to explore and learn to know; its refreshing watery breeze would be in our nostrils, and the flash of the ripple gladden our eyes for many a day to come. The exhilaration of the wave-topped water after the endless tree-trunks was like that of the country after a long spell of London.

We interviewed the *Chao*, summoned the Burmese head-

men, and at once started on our examination of the gem deposit. This owed its discovery to some Burmese Shân diggers in 1890, who were attracted by small water-worn crystals of hercynite, called by them *nin*, and considered to be the invariable accompaniment of the sapphire. These crystals occur in the stream beds, on the left bank of the river opposite Chieng Kawng, and the Shâns had prospected with their usual indefatigable patience for some years, and at length were rewarded by the discovery of a very fair sapphire-bearing gravel at a depth of from twelve to twenty feet—varying with the surface irregularities of the *hue*, or stream, beds in which it lies. It is from five to eighteen inches thick, and consists of a water-rolled gravel with a large number of angular fragments of a particularly beautiful basalt, which, sometimes extremely hard and sometimes decomposed into a soft bluish or (in some places) reddish clay, seems to be the origin of the gravel here, as in the other gem-bearing districts of Siam. The long flat-topped hill, in which all the gem-bearing streams have their rise, seems to consist entirely of this rock, and it forms the bed-rock under the gravel. In the gravel we also found opaque corundum, quartz generally in white boulders, but in some cases in transparent crystals, and a few small garnets. The sapphires are very often opaque, or very pale in colouring; and the percentage of stones of rich colour and good water appears to be much smaller than at Pailin. Although much water-worn, the form of the hexagonal crystal is often very distinct among the larger stones, and it is noticeable that the sapphire in Siam appears to be far less brittle than the ruby, which is, as a rule, so fragmentary that the crystallisation is seldom distinguishable. The fault of the sapphire is generally in its colouring, of the ruby in the number of its fractures.

Although we searched and inquired carefully to dis-

cover if a sapphire had ever been found in the matrix, such an event seemed never to have occurred.

The basalts of the hills, the decomposition of which has produced the clay which is the base of the gravel, and which we found in all stages of decomposition, from hard sharp-edged fragments to soft yielding clay, was, I concluded, the matrix in which the sapphires were originally formed.¹ And from subsequent observations in the Chantabun neighbourhood I see, at present, no other possible hypothesis.

As for the rubies we had been sent to report on, a very short survey of the diggings aroused the suspicion that no rubies had ever been found in them, and that the splendid stone sent to the King in Bangkok by a Siamese official, as having been found by him at Chieng Kawng, and on the strength of which the expedition had been organised, was something very like a fraud. Subsequent inquiries confirmed this view, and we were able to trace the ruby as having been bought by the official in question from a Shân digger, who gave the name of the mine it came from in Burma. Seeing some small garnets he mistook them for rubies, and to obtain the *κρύδος* his discovery entitled him to he bought the best ruby he could and sent it to the King. Our report was doubtless not favourable to the advancement he coveted.

I see recently by a Tongkin paper that a French mining engineer has also 'found rubies and sapphires in such profusion that the success is assured of any company which may be formed to carry on mining operations.' The actual locality is not given. I sincerely trust it is not Chieng Kawng. For the Shân diggers, the most enduring gem-seekers in the world, have now (1897)

¹ Professor Henry Louis has taken the same view. *Mineralogical Mag.* vol. x. No. 48. It consists here of a glassy basalt (porphyritic

olivines and augites in base of lath-shaped felspars, augite magnetite, and glasse).

nearly entirely deserted the diggings there, owing to the hardships and difficulties attending work in that remote region.

The uncertainty of the position of the gravel, which in places has been apparently denuded away, or has not been deposited at all, must be borne in mind in prospecting, or else in calculating the gem-bearing area very erroneous conclusions may be arrived at. The Shân diggers use iron-shod bamboos for boring small holes wherever they find *nin* in the *hus* beds, and prodding downwards they tell by the sound if the gravel is present. Sometimes they have searched for weeks in this manner with no result; or again they find the gravel and sink their pits to it, only to find it very thin or poor in gems. The hardships endured are very great, and, one would think, were hardly compensated for by the results. Felling jungle, digging, soaked for hours, in the cold slimy clay pit, far from shelter or supplies, shivering with fever and dying of dysentery, we found them everywhere following the scent of the *nin*: all for love of the free forest life, and of the gambling element which accompanies it, and for the chance of a sapphire or two worth sixty or a hundred rupees.

The method of washing is much the same anywhere among the gem-diggers in Siam. When the pit is sunk, and the night's accumulation of water baled out, the gravel is taken out in baskets, and washed in the stream. A long bamboo, pivoted on a short forked pole and weighted at the shorter end, is often used for hoisting and for pumping a deep pit. A shallow basket of bamboo strips is used for cleaning the gravel. When the clay is freed by the motion of the basket beneath the running water, the man throws the big stones out, gives it another wash, and then 'vans' the remainder, so that he gets the lighter stuff on the outer edge. This is picked over rapidly and

thrown away, and then hand and eye run more carefully over the remaining stuff, every sapphire or garnet or other piece of colour being picked out for leisurely examination later. About noon the day's work is done, and all return to their bamboo shanties, to spend the day in gossip, in gambling, or in sorting and gloating over their stones in the sunlight, perhaps for the hundredth time. It is curious the perfect good faith observed among themselves; two or three stones may be passed round a whole crowd of onlookers without the slightest fear of loss. For chaff and good-nature there is no place to equal a Shân gem-miners' village.

The total output of these mines in 1892-3 did not probably exceed 25,000 carats of saleable stones, or an average of about 125 carats for every man engaged. But statistics are not easily obtained where none are kept, and when the questioner is designedly presented with the most conflicting stories. When not engaged in stupendous exaggeration the gem-digger is the most modest of men. He gives a mournful account of his success, and protests that he has no stones worth the name. He pulls out a few sorry specimens for you to look at, followed, if he thinks you wish to buy, by a better selection from another sheet of dirty paper. Only after an hour's tea-drinking, betel-chewing, and general conversation, just as you insist you must be going, slowly out of infinite wraps of paper and cotton wool, from some inner place, he produces that which takes your breath—the 'lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart.'

As soon as we had finished our visits to all the existing diggings at Hue Pakham and Hue Pung and other places, it remained to try and ascertain the extent of the deposit.

Our numbers were now reduced by the return home of all the Nan men, and when the elephants and their

mahouts had left us we felt a bit lonely, for they seemed our last link with the south.

I left most of the remainder at Chieng Kawng, as being useless for a prospecting trip, and took the headman of the diggers, with one or two of his big-bodied Shâns to help, and with three small dug-outs went for a few days' excursion up river to the Chieng Sen boundary, and so got a first experience of Me Kawng navigation.

Camping at night on sandspits, as far from the jungle



as possible to be clear of tigers, from sunrise to sunset we worked hard up the valleys of every stream between Chieng Sen and Chieng Kawng. At the Chieng Sen boundary we found what appeared to be regular granites, with gradations into gneissose and schistose masses, and into syenite and mica syenite. Coming down river to Hue Nam Ngau we came on mica and short schists, in which the schistose structure was often beautifully marked, diorite rocks, and greisson. Below this are some large rounded masses of basaltic character, followed by a series of altered basalts

standing up jagged and sharp from the water, and cutting the feet and hands like knives.²

Whenever we found granitic outcrops or pebbles, we failed to find the *nin* or any sign of gem gravel; but below the magnificent basalt sheet, which is a feature of the river east of Hue Nam Ngau, we came upon no more granite, and were once more in the gem-bearing area, draining from the same long hill.

The scenery of the Me Kawng, at this point, is very like what we saw lower down on the way to Luang Prabang, only on a smaller scale. The valley bottom is from six to seven hundred yards in width; the greater part of this, at low-water season, is a stretch of dazzling sand, over which the only sound which combines with the roar of the distant rapid is the grating of the particles blown in ripples before the noonday wind. Here and there the sharp edges of some half-buried rock stand up, scrubbed to a wonderful brilliance by this self-acting polisher, which seems never out of order. By the agency of the wind-swept sand in the low-water season, and of the dense sediment-bearing torrent which rushes over the whole space at high water, the rocks of the Me Kawng have taken on the polish which makes them so peculiar. The appearances of the schists above Luang Prabang, of the veined limestones below, and of the red granite above Wieng Chan, are singularly beautiful, and from their surface brilliance are often highly deceptive. The sands contain a great deal of quartz with iron pyrites, mica, and magnetic iron, and are particularly glaring in the sunlight.

In the midst of this scorching wilderness of rock and

² Mr. Prior finds these to consist of porphyritic plagioclastic feldspars in medium-grained base of lath-shaped feldspars, magnetite, and augite. Some specimens are decidedly schistose, and others are

porphyritic basalts of slightly different character. They are all evidently of much greater age than those of the Chantabun gem districts.

sand, where by day the most hardened bare feet can scarcely walk, the river eddies swiftly, thirty feet below, among its rocks, and a hundred and sixty yards in width. At some points it seethes through narrows scarcely sixty yards across, and these are the rapids which are the most difficult to pass. Not only have the wave-ridges and out-lying rocks to be reckoned with, as in ordinary rapids, simply caused by a rough inclined bottom, but unexpected whirlpools have a way of laying hold of a boat's quarter and dragging it off in some direction quite in opposition to the wishes of the crew. The curious explosions of surface water which take place continually, and often hurry boats across stream at right angles to what one imagines to be the current, show something of the enormous pressures fighting it out below. For want of a heavy lead I could never get an idea of the depth of water in such places, but above Keng Luang, below Luang Prabang, we had over twenty fathoms. The wide bays, which have in many places been hollowed by the powerful back eddies, forced inwards by rock obstructions, are very remarkable, and give one a not unwholesome notion of one's own insignificance. Trying, with a hammer, to get a chip of basalt awakened a certain respect for that quiet but grim-looking eddy which had found the weaker places, and worked its way, doubtless not without some expenditure of time and energy, sixty yards back into the rock.

Vast backwaters occur here and there, cut off by the crags and sandbanks from sight or sound of the river; low bushes creep, two or three feet high, about the marge, and the slowly drying mud retains the tracks of tiger, deer, and even snakes.

Numbers of birds, especially herons, also left their marks where they had waded after fish in the soft slime, and in the early mornings they could be seen standing along the water's edge half shrouded in the mist.

In the river, seated on a rock, the Large Cormorant was very common, but more frequent still, and far more sociably disposed, was the Little Cormorant. We did not, however, meet him south of Luang Prabang, while the larger species, which is common all over Siam, we met, and dined off, for want of better, frequently.

The most remarkable bird we heard and saw was the Great Pied Hornbill, who flopped his way far overhead across the forest. In after years we met him in Tenasserim in such numbers that his loud croak and noisy flight became a nuisance. Pea-fowl were abundant, adjutants rare, and eagles numerous—whom, from the distance they kept and my own lack of knowledge, I failed to make out. One unknown friend whose voice we learnt to recognise so well, but whom we never met, I would gladly hear again; his loud cheery note echoing across the great valleys, even in the heat and silence of the day, seemed a necessary accompaniment to the scenery; and at night the sad wild cries of the owls, and notably of the Collared Pigmy Owlet, and in the dawn the long-drawn whooping of the Gibbons, made one think that the forest folk had their joys, and sorrows too, in the valley of the Me Nam Kawng.

A two days' journey north and east to the other boundary of the gem area, the total length of which is some ten miles, was chiefly interesting as taking us beyond the signs of tigers, and into numerous wild elephant tracks, which are not to be met along the river. These rulers of the forest, who have long ago amicably settled their own boundary disputes, doubtless had leisure, in the intervals of felling bamboo-trees and hunting sambur, to discuss the efforts of France and Great Britain to come to a similar agreement. If they are now French subjects, they may at least congratulate themselves that their realms are likely to be less invaded either by the trader or the sportsman than might otherwise have been the case.

Poling crank dug-outs against the stream of the Me Kawn, as practised by the Lao along its banks, is even more admirable than the form of that exercise in vogue on the Me Nam. For on the boat's fore-deck there is scarcely room for two to pass, and she rolls and lurches all the time. It were endless to explain the antics of a boat working her way up-stream; hurried at four miles an hour by an upward eddy into a great rock bay, caught and held by the quant poles for a moment at the upper edge of rocks, and thrust slowly up the falling incline of water to the smooth glassy intake at the top, staggering and halting, and ever steered unerringly by the deep rudder aft. Between the worst rapids a good three miles an hour is kept up; and entering them the great danger is that of being canted broadside as she shoots into the current. It is in this manner that most of the wrecks occur, but, notwithstanding the mermaids who try to clutch at swimmers, few men are ever drowned.

In many places the boats are unloaded altogether and hauled over by ropes, an occupation in which a day or two is often expended, where the distances are long.

For going down stream the boats are converted into lifeboats, by the simple and ingenious process of lashing bundles of bamboos along the gunwales. These not only provide the air compartments necessary to keep the boat afloat if filled, but also, reaching from the gunwale to the water's edge, add some two feet of beam to her, making her quite uncapsizable. Thus, with all our boasted civilization, the Lao might twit us with being all behind them in lifeboat-building, at least until the time of Great-head's boats.

In ten days we finished our work at Chieng Kawn. I wrote my report for the Chieng Mai authorities, and handed it to our commissioner friend. During our absence up river he had cast a longing eye on a pony

belonging to the Chao Huana, and his method of setting about getting it was instructive. He knew we had a worn-out pony we wanted to get rid of, so, to employ the Chao Huana's purse and make him need some ready cash, he, full of his importance as commissioner from Chieng Mai, ordered the poor *Chao* to express his eagerness to take our pony off our hands at an exorbitant price; he then hoped to be able to persuade the *Chao* to sell him the beast he coveted. Unfortunately I got wind of it, and when the *Chao* with a long face, in reluctant obedience to his orders, begged me to sell him the pony, I expressed my sincere regret that I could not think of parting with such a valuable creature. The poor *Chao* became quite cordial, and when I turned to the commissioner and asked him if he did not think I was quite right, he expressed his usual conviction that I was always right, with less enthusiasm than was his wont. When we parted he pointed out, in a speech of some length, his own various good qualities, and begged me to let them be known to the authorities in Bangkok.

Our farewell to the Shán diggers and head-men was of quite another character. Although for ten days they had worked unceasingly for us, poling boats, cutting through jungle, sinking pits, marching in stifling temperatures, carrying packs, and camping in the cold night dews, it was all we could do to make them take any present from us. They were quite distressed at the idea of our wishing to pay them, and declared they only worked to please me, and not to take my money. If a man's blessing is any good, I have never ceased to bless them in my heart. Any one who meets Mong Unn will meet a true man.

The last function at which we assisted by our august presence was the first day of the cremation of the old *Chao*, which took place in the open space before the chief *Wat*. Little booths for the spectators were put up all round the

square, and in the centre was the funeral pyre, ornamented with white and red draperies, and many-roofed umbrella pinnacles. We went in state with the new *Chao*, all our people following in their best silk *panungs*, looking very cheery, for they love such things. We first had some sword and spear dances in slow time by men waving silver-handled weapons. Then came the boxing between the champions of the various villages, whose names were given out before each round. Having saluted the master of the ceremonies on bended knee, they began to feint and watch, stepping and dancing round each other with much posturing and gesticulation. By the extravagance of these antics their backers judged their chances. There would be a rush in, a kick, a feint, and a retreat; more antics, daring each other to come on, and then suddenly business—a close-fought bout of round-armed blows and rapid kicks of quite remarkable dexterity.

The umpire and official seconds squatted by ready to interfere; and at the end of each round a man brought water in a silver bowl, which he handed to the boxers on his knees. Victor and vanquished received three rupees apiece from the *Chao*, so there was no gain to fight for but the honour of the thing, and the reputation of a man's village.

The enthusiasm was intense, but culminated in uproarious delight when the small boys had their turn. They showed a lot of pluck and not a little science, and their uncles and fathers danced round encouraging them with tears of joy and laughter streaming down their faces when the youngsters fought an extra good round; and all the time the flutes kept up their weird, melancholy air.

By night a crowd listened, wrapped in their long plaids, to the extemporising of a blind singer, who with waving tapers sang in a low voice and rapid two-four time, not a dirge on the great chief departed, but a cynical com-

mentary on life in general, and politics in Chieng Kawng in particular. The sea of heads squatting before him shook now and then with a roar of laughter, and the clouds of tobacco-smoke would cease an instant, while the sound broke out across the dim-lit square. Then it died again, and his low rapid words mingled in the quiet with the intoning of the monks, who gabbled Pali from their pulpits round the pyre to keep away the spirits.

With such social attractions toward, it was hard to tear ourselves away.

We left Chieng Kawng on February 25, 1893, and reached Luang Prabang in twelve days, after making some short expeditions into the country on either bank of the river. The actual journey down need only occupy five days; the journey up, from twelve to fifteen. It is generally safe to multiply by three for the upward voyage on the rivers of Siam.

We spent three days up the valley of Nam Ngau, looking after gold. It is the next river east of the Nam Ing, in the vicinity of the Pa Keng Ngau, a poisonous forest of the Dawng Choi and Dawng Praya Yen type, with, like them, a shocking reputation for fever. The dense vegetation which makes them so cold and gloomy appears to be probably due to the richness of the soil, which remains as the insoluble portion of the calcareous rock of the great limestone series. In places the limestone has gone through a certain amount of dolomitisation, and the rainfall has attacked it with less success; in others, the calcareous matter has been removed in solution over large areas, leaving a rich red loam which becomes covered with these dense feverish growths of vegetation.

During the time we spent on the Me Kawng we met numbers of boats, with crews varying from six to eight, who were out for short spells of gold-washing in the sands of the river. The great time is after the rainy season, and

it would seem that every high water brings down, or stirs up and redeposits, gold in small quantities, in certain of the sands. Below Nawng Kai, for instance, there is a large sandbank, known as the Hat Kam, where the whole population turns out to wash gold, for one day in the year, when the floods have subsided. That one day's work is declared to exhaust the bank, until another year's flood has had time to do its work.

Higher up river, from Chieng Sen downwards, the usual place selected for washing would be a foot or two down below some rapid turn of river, where an eddy is formed in the floods, especially by the roots of the low bushes which grow about the sands.

The method of procedure is the same everywhere, each digger having his washing-pan, a wooden dish thirty inches wide and five inches deep at the centre, afloat in the river, anchored to a stone. A basket of gravel is shaken over it, only the smaller stuff finding its way through, and the larger stones being thrown aside. A rotary motion is given to the pan by the continual shifting of the hands from left to right, at the same time a depression of the rim is sent round 'against the sun' which alternately expels and dips up the water. The lighter material, such as quartz and mica, being thus got rid of, the minerals of greater specific gravity, including magnetite, which remain, are carefully washed out into a small wooden box, which is eventually carried home and handed over to the woman, who, I was told (for I never saw it done), use mercury for freeing such gold as is possible. While the 'vanning' is going on, any visible gold is taken out and put away in a quill, and in this way each man makes from one to two *huan* a day of eight hours' work. It is generally very fine float gold and very highly water-worn. At two *huan* a day, which is a very high average, a party of eight men will wash a fifth of an ounce per day. They seldom

work for more than a few weeks at a time, just to get enough to get a little bangle or two for the chief, and instead of cutting systematic trenches the work is carried on in the usual Indo-Chinese happy-go-lucky manner. A fee of from three to four rupees per man is demanded by the authorities.

Another form of alluvial gravel is worked up the valleys of some of the tributaries of the Me Kawng, notably the Nam Beng, Nam U, and their streams on the left, and Nam Ngau and others on the right bank. These gravels are generally coarser and less water-worn, as is natural, and occur in the old stream beds in the valley bottoms, and often some very fine nuggets are obtained by the Ka Che and Lus who stream them. A Chinaman from Luang Prabang tried the experiment of working regularly with Ka Che labour on the Nam Beng; but the place became so poor that at the end of six months he gave up the venture, considerably out of pocket. The poverty was due to the Ka Che swallowing all the decent-sized gold they obtained.

The origin of the gold is no doubt in great part the quartz veins which are met with constantly in the mountain ranges, but which as a rule were hard and unmineralised at surface, and in which I never saw a sign of gold. It is possible, as in other lands, that the calcite and crystalline limestones which are so abundantly superimposed on the schists of the district may also have something to do with it. But I had neither the means, the time, nor the instructions to make the very extensive investigations which would have been necessary to go seriously into the matter. We inquired very carefully on this point, but none of the Lao or Ka Che ever seem to have known or worked gold-bearing reefs, or any form of deposit but the usual alluvial. From the mineral composition of the sands of the Me Kawng I incline very strongly to the idea

that there is gold disseminated sparsely all through the extensive crystalline schists, and that to the denudation and disintegration of these rocks, as well as possibly to that of the quartzites, the presence of gold in small quantities over such an extensive area is largely due. I have no doubt that the decomposition of iron pyrites, of which there is a great quantity in the Me Kawng sands, is also constantly freeing more gold, although possibly in small quantities only.

Whether the European miner will ever make the gold of the Me Kawng Valley pay him is, to my mind, a very doubtful matter. 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. But the European generally begins by importing, at vast expense, great quantities of valuable machinery, before knowing the circumstances of the country. He employs a large staff of Europeans, who get laid up with fever, or drink themselves to death. And he rides rough-shod over native prejudices. The native of Siam, including the Lao, is not a very possible kind of workman, as money is indifferent to him, and he has seldom cause to work himself to the bone in order to acquire it. His love of freedom and doing what he likes makes him extremely difficult to control, and he goes and comes at pleasure. In his own native way of doing things this does not matter; but for European requirements it is otherwise, and these facts are at the bottom of all the labour difficulties in the country. If he wants money for the cremation of a relative, or if last season's rice crop was a poor one, he will lift his pack, take his *dap*, and go off down to the nearest bit of work he knows of—the Korat railway works, the Kabin mines, or Bangkok itself—and lend a hand for a small remuneration. But he does it as a gentleman, and when he has got what he

requires, one fine morning he is gone again as suddenly as he came, not always without a few convenient head of cattle. It is not weakness of muscle or want of intellect that makes him rank so far below the Chinaman as a coolie, but his want of steadiness and love of play. All this at present tells very largely against European enterprise in Lower Siam—how much more on the Me Kawng! As a French writer humorously puts it—when speaking of the Bassac and Lower Me Kawng Lao—‘No one can tell exactly what we came to seek in this Promised Land of fever. Doubtless this region is charming, but—the devil! where are the inhabitants? The few miserable people seen here and there, rowing desperately against an impossible current, sleep nine hours out of the ten, under the pretext that man was not sent into the world to work like a buffalo. Certainly this is very philosophic, very true may be, but it does not do business, and there is a great deal needs doing. It is incredible! Since the Resident of Stung Treng has paid his coolies \$8 or \$9 per month, every one short of money has flocked en masse to the place. They are able by working diligently for three weeks to earn enough to live in idleness the rest of the year. With \$10 the Laotian pays the slaves who will work for two years. . . . Meanwhile let us live in hope,’ he despairingly concludes.



CHAPTER IX

THE LAO STATES—THE ME KAWNG (*continued*)

KA AND OTHER HILL TRIBES—RAPIDS—VOLCANOES—NAM U.

WHILE in the Ngan Valley we saw some desultory gold-washings, and fraternised with the Lu inhabitants. Some fifty women and children came out to greet us at the *sala*, and an orchestra of four flutes played to us at supper and far into the night. We had a hot march or two together, and I never met people more ready to make the best of everything than these who accompanied us, chaffing, laughing, and shouting, under their packs, like a lot of merry boys. Their dress bears a very pleasing resemblance to that of the stage pirate, and, with the good looks of the parents and the pretty faces of many of the small children, they were very prepossessing.

These Lus came originally from the Sibsawng Punna, and have been partakers in the general movement of the peoples, on the borders of Southern China, which has been going on for years towards the south-west. It has been

due in great part to the marauding tendencies of the *Haw* bandits, in the north and east, towards Tongkin, who are accountable for the ruined and depopulated condition of the fine countries about Chieng Kwang, east of Luang Prabang; in part, to natural expansion.

Of these tribes, who are quite distinct from the Tai or Shân peoples, there are two groups, which, although not differentiated by most writers, appear to be quite distinct.



KaChe

The first forms the *Ka* (i.e. slave), or aboriginal, group of tribes, who were thrust by the Siamese Shâns away into the mountains, and who to this day, living side by side with the Lao, are extremely primitive in their customs, and most industrious in their habits.

While the Lao inhabit the mountain valleys, these people live on the ridges and heights never less than 3,000 feet above sea-level, and their clearings in the forests on the high hill slopes are often visible many miles

away. As the cold weather gives place to the hot months they are busy clearing the *rai* on the mountain sides. They work upwards, cutting the trees so as to fall down the slope, and the felling of the topmost row brings down all the trees ready to fall below. For two or three months the trees are allowed to dry, and then fire is set to the whole, burning up everything, valuable and otherwise, and manuring the ground with the ashes. In March and April, before the rains, the lurid smoke of the *rai* fires, added to the natural haze prevalent with the south-westerly winds at that time, makes the air so dense, that one often cannot see peaks three miles away, and the sun sets a round red ball in the murky atmosphere. The destruction of valuable timber is enormous, and but scanty crops of tobacco, cotton, and hill rice are obtained in return. After six or seven crops the people move off to some new place, and leave the old to grow up a wilderness of impenetrable low scrub, where valuable seedlings have no chance of life, and their place is taken by long grasses and bamboos, and where forest fires take place continually.

In the western Lao country of Chiang Mai these people are represented by the *Lawa*; north of the Me Kawng, near Chiang Kawng, we found them called *Lamet*; and as we descended the peoples of the Nam Beng and Nam Ta hills were *Ka Hok* or *Ka Yuen*. The *Ka Mus* (or *Kamuks*), already referred to as such good foresters, are settled in large numbers in Nan, where they liked the strict justice of the Government, and in Chiang Mai, where they found a—to them—remunerative employment in teak forestry.

The Siamese name *Ka Che* is, in reality, a generic name applied to all of them. They are short, thick-built people, and live in small communities, the village boundaries being always marked in the jungle paths. They are spirit-worshippers almost entirely, and, for the most part, are

singularly stupid, the *Ka Mus*, who are the most numerous, being the most intelligent. The *Ka Hok*, whom we had as carriers on several occasions, are probably the most backward. Their dress consists chiefly of a long silver hair-pin piercing the knotted hair behind, and large silver earrings or a flower fixed in the lobe of the ear. It was impossible to get at their names, when we wished to pay them, and they were solemn and silent even among themselves. Of these people it was not difficult to believe the tale given by the *Lao* to account for their condition.

The *Ka Che* was the elder brother of the *Lao*, and on the death of their father he had first choice in the partition of his personalty. There was a box containing two bundles, and an elephant and her young one. The *Ka Che* took the first bundle, which lay at the top, and found therein the tiny waist-cloth which he wears to-day. The *Lao* got a fine *panung*, the Siamese form of *dhotie*, which he has ever since adopted. The *Ka Che* saw his mistake, and next chose the biggest elephant, and took her home with him, leaving the young one to the *Lao*. But she, thinking always of the little one, ran away and returned to where it abode with the *Lao*. Thus the *Lao* obtained all good things, and the *Ka Che* retired disconsolate to the hills, and has continued to live without *panungs* or elephants. Although the *Lao* says the *Ka Che* was the elder brother, he has had no compunction in ill-treating him in the past, and has always looked upon him as his private property, especially in Luang Prabang; and about 1878 a *Ka Che* insurrection, followed by an emigration of many thousands into Nan and Chieng Mai, was the result.

Notwithstanding their wild and savage mien, we found our *Kas* gentle, harmless folk, patient and enduring on the march, and grand climbers.

The second group, to which our *Lus* belonged, comprises the *Yao*, *Yao Yin*, *Lanten*, *Meo*, *Musur* (called by



A Kawa:

Shan Chinese hill tribes

A HIGHLAND KAW

the Shâns Mu-hso¹), *Kaw*, *Kuwi*, and others, nomadic hill peoples, all in process of moving from the north-east to the south and west. Their homes seem to have been the highlands of Yunan, Kweichau, and Kwangsi in Southern China, and they preserve their love of mountain scenery and their picturesque costumes as a common mark of distinction.

The *Lanten* and *Yao Yin* most resemble the Yunanese in dress and customs. The former even preserve the pig-tail and eat with chop-sticks, and the women wear the loose shirt and baggy trousers. Their houses are long low sheds with a hard mud floor, such as the Chinese build in Lower Siam, and they are industrious cultivators, and have more ingenuity than most of the other tribes. For instance, for pounding rice a foot mill is used among the peoples around, which is a long beam working with a pestle at the heavier end and a footboard at the lighter. Here a couple of girls stand, stepping on to raise the pestle, and off, to let it fall, and the rhythmical bump of the mill is a familiar sound in every village. The *Lanten* have substituted water power for the girls, and a trough is placed at the lighter end which is filled with water from a bamboo pipe, and then descends, raising the pestle. As it reaches a certain point the water is discharged, and the heavy end falls back into the mortar, to do its work upon the padi.

The *Yao Yin*, who are very like them, seem to be among the cleanest and the smartest of the hill tribes. They are clever silversmiths, and use that metal largely in the fastenings of the dresses, and the women do some very lovely silk embroidery. The men wear the usual loose dark-blue sailor-like trousers common to all these

¹ *Geogr. Journ.* vol. vii. No. 6. Prince Henri d'Orléans has some interesting remarks on the more northern of these tribes, as well as

on the Tai races on the Me Kawnng above lat. 22°, in his *Tonkin to India*.

tribes, and the women have a particularly fine coloured headdress which stands high above the head in a most ornamental way. When the French occupied Muang Lai and the Sibsawng Chu Tai² in 1888, large numbers of these people came west into Muang Sing, and the northern parts of Luang Prabang.

They say there are twelve tribes of Yao. It is curious how this number twelve occurs among these peoples, and is even used geographically.

The *Meo* are a particularly fine people, and also claim to distinguish ten or twelve tribes among themselves. Fifteen years ago none were to be found west of Me Kawng, and since then numbers have come down, gradually extending their clearings and following the limestone formation which yields the very rich soil already mentioned, and which has suffered less denudation in this than in other parts of Indo-China.

They cultivate, besides the hill rice, Indian corn, tobacco, hemp, and vegetables, and, in some villages, the poppy, though we did not come across it. We met some of the women, who on seeing us, as usual with these folks, bolted off into the jungle like deer, carrying their children on their backs. They wore a short kilt and leggings, an open jacket with a sailor's cape, and a neatly folded turban, ornamented here and there with the pretty silk embroidery common among them.

The *Musur*, *Kaw*, and *Kui* are very much alike, but whereas the *Musur* have, many of them, settled a long way west, on the right bank of the Me Kawng and in Chieng Mai territory, we only met the *Kaws* on the Nam U.

We saw large numbers of *Musur* crossing the Me Kawng at Chieng Kawng, men, women, and children all stooping under heavy loads, and swinging their arms prodigiously. The women folk were extremely shy, but the children

² Lit. 'Twelve tribes called Tai.'



KA KIEN AND KA MU PEOPLE

soon got over that, and then the rest came crowding round to examine our guns and other curious possessions.

Mr. Scott tells me that the Chinese call them Law 'Hè, and they themselves use the name La 'hu, the *h's* in both the last two being very guttural. The Siamese form Musur suggested to Colonel Woodthorpe that M. Pavie could at once lay claim to them as French *protégés* on the evidence of the name, which was obviously a rude attempt at *monsieur*, disguised by the perfidious English and the wicked Siamese.

The Musur custom is, it appears, to burn the dead, except in the case of accident, when they bury. This is the Lao custom also, while none of the other tribes practise cremation, but have their burial grounds in the jungle near the village, and generally leave some rice and other food at the grave for the spirit to partake of.

All these three tribes are alike in being of short stature in comparison to the Lao, and the women are absurdly tiny people. They are wonderfully cheerful and enduring, and the patient expression on their faces strikes the new comer even more than their pretty dresses.

The men, with their coloured turbans, short double-breasted jackets, and wide trousers elaborately trimmed, all have sufficient resemblance to one another to confuse new arrivals. And when one meets them at some jungle work, with their trousers tucked up round their thighs, their jackets and turbans off, they are quite transformed, and look the wildest creatures imaginable. But they are all the soul of gentleness.

The No-Man's-Land between China, Tongkin, Burma, and Siam, which has paid tribute to each in turn and belonged to none, and which is the present abode of these races, is still little known to Europeans, chiefly owing to the difficulties of entering and leaving Chinese territory. Dr. Morrison in 1886-7 made one of his lonely and

unpretentious tours all through this country, succeeding, where so many had failed, in entering and leaving China by the Sibsawng Punna and the Lao States of Siam, actually going over the much-talked-of Keng Hung Sumao route. It was a remarkable performance for a solitary man, not knowing any of the languages, and his experiences, should they ever be given to the world, will be as interesting as they are sure to be entertaining.

The Lus we came in contact with were certainly the tallest of all these peoples, and seemed the most civilised. Indeed, in the Nam Ngau Valley many have adopted Buddhism, and built monasteries; and some have even followed the western Lao custom of tattooing from waist to knee, and of shaving the head around the central tuft of hair. Their language bears a great resemblance to the Lao. In fact, when crossing streams, for which purpose their clothes go in a bundle on their heads, their distinguishing marks were gone, and one could not tell if they were Lu or Lao.

They own some remarkably fine dogs, very like collies in appearance, with the same handsome head and ears and black-and-tan coat, but with a Manx tail. Chao Bun Yun brought one away with him; but he was a great hunter, and some months later we lost him, to our great sorrow, in the Dawng Praya Yen: each party supposed him to be with the other, until the end of the march, and then it was too late to turn back for the search, and we never saw him more.

A charming feature of these Me Kawng villages is the absence of the usual yelping packs of pariahs—the people having long-haired breeds of mountain dogs for which they really care.

At Ban Pak Ta, a beautifully situated village at the mouth of the river of that name, we passed from Nan into Luang Prabang territory. We sent back our men and

boats and obtained fresh ones, with pilots who knew their rapids below. We met a few Ka Che bringing down rice on bamboo rafts for sale, and the Lao people of the village were no longer our old tattooed friends, but Lao Pung Kao, or Eastern Lao from Luang Prabang. Among them were a few men with slight beards and whiskers, a quite unusual appendage.

Below this place we made our first acquaintance with Me Kawng Rapids, and learnt one or two things about them. One is, in shooting down, never to follow near on another boat. Whatever the reason may be, the passage of a boat seems to cause a hollow in the hissing, spinning surfaces, which fills up with a most peculiar rush of foaming water like a breaking sea. We followed close on Nai Suk's boat, and his people had the pleasure of seeing our boat dive into the great whirling hollow, followed by a breaking rush of water, which caught us astern and hurled us round broadside, on which half a dozen steep waves rushed delightedly over us. Our long bow oar and nine-foot steering rudder were ludicrously helpless, for we spun round in a complete circle and were entirely swamped. Our bamboo air compartments kept us afloat, and we succeeded in keeping her off the rocks, which was the main point. Finally we emerged at the lower end, looking very damp and foolish.

Where the eddies, which hurry up the banks inside, come out into the stream again, there is a crackling sound, a noise like throwing water upon burning sticks, and every now and then a whirlpool with a steep vortex breaks into existence ten or twelve feet in diameter, which lays hold of the bow or stern of a boat, and whirls it off in some direction, while the other end is in the grip of a current rushing with equal energy some other way. If one end then hits a rock, it is best to be on shore.

In some of the rapids with sloping bottoms the first

jump over the edge is very pleasant; the fun then comes in the short roaring waves. Everybody on board is fully occupied; the man at the bow oar canting her head this way and that, the helmsman helping from the other end to make her take it straight, the men at the oars pulling for all they are worth, and the rest bailing mightily, or shouting to encourage any one who has time to listen. If the rapid is a bad one, the crews land to have a meal before it, and stop to chew some betel, and compare notes after it. So it is always a sociable event.

The ebb and flow of waves in the sandy bays above the rapids were very curious, for they came in and broke, in places running up many feet like spent waves of ocean.

Large bamboo rafts are much used in shooting these rapids, but are, of course, incapable of ascending them. They are like floating villages, with enormous round-roofed sheds covering them almost completely. They are over a hundred feet long and twenty or thirty feet wide, and have their ends turned up. There are three or four oars a side, and about ten at each end working transversely to keep the structure straight when in the rapids. They carry between thirty and forty people according to size, and travel practically with the stream alone; and they cannot make way against a strong head wind in a stretch of quiet water. When they reach Luang Prabang the rice and cotton is unladen and the raft broken up. Some of the Lao crews are away months on these journeys seeking cargo. Part go up to bargain with the Ka Che, while the others build a temporary village by the main river, and proceed to make the raft. Up the Nam U and other streams the rafts of course are smaller. We met many of these temporary trading villages from Luang Prabang, and inquiry showed that the town has to import nearly all its rice, as an extremely small portion of the consumption can be grown in the plain.

From a place called Ban Tanun I went across with a few Ka Che carriers to the volcanic vents marked on Mr. McCarthy's map, and known to the Lao as Pu Fai Mai. It was a hard march, owing to the heat, but we were well rewarded on topping the hills above the Hong Sawadi plain, when we looked down on the lovely cultivation and distant village roofs below. The people were all Lao Pung Kao, and here lying half awake in the *salq* I first heard the sweet wailing notes of the *Ken*, the reed organ so largely played in Luang Prabang.

Among our Ka Che packmen was one who was what the Siamese call *Ba chi*, literally 'mad from tickling,' because, say they, his mother tickled his feet too much when he was a baby. It was only necessary for one of his companions to dig him in the ribs for him to burst out into a number of obscene remarks, which at any other time, being a quiet fellow, he would never think of using. Calling him by name and telling him to do anything, he repeated the whole sentence rapidly, and rushed to do the act demanded of him with fervent haste; in this way it was possible to make him do anything, or say anything. He always seemed quite unconscious of what he had said or done while under this strange nervous excitement. Subsequently we many times travelled with men who were subject to this nerve-malady, as it appears to be. Twice we observed it among the Lao, in one at Luang Prabang, and one near Korat; and subsequently in more than one individual among the Karens of the Ratburi frontier range. The only notice of it that I know is the description of *Latah* by Mr. F. A. Swettenham in his 'Malay Sketches,'* where he describes identically the same symptoms, so that it evidently extends from the extreme north to the extreme south of Indo-China.

* London, John Lane, 1895.

The volcanoes were a trifle disappointing. Each of the vents was about 200 yards long and 80 wide, and about 200 feet above the plain. They slope gently in a direction 20° east of south, and they are most active towards the south. Slight smoke rises in places, but one can walk practically all over the bottom slag. A few large cracks occur at the south-eastern corner, whence smoke and free sulphurous acid rise in small quantities; the ground is very hot here, and a couple of feet down the cracks are at red heat, and a bamboo thrust in will take light. There were traces of the action of sulphuretted hydrogen and of carbonic acid, and the crust of sulphur at the openings may be due to the decomposition of the former gas. The high coloration due to iron chloride was most characteristic. There seems to have been slightly more going on when Mr. McCarthy visited the place a year or two before, but there are no signs of great activity in the past. In the rains there is naturally a good deal of steam, and more spluttering than we saw. There evidently exists at present a dormant volcanic action which is probably growing weaker; for the emanation of the sulphurous gases is looked upon generally as denoting a diminution of activity. I saw no signs of any line of dislocation, and it was not evident why the vent should have occurred in this particular spot. From the blackened stumps of bamboo lately fallen in, there is, apparently, a gradual advance southward.

The action seems very local, and does not appear to have influenced the geology of the neighbourhood very largely, although owing to the jungled condition of the country the nearest spot where one could form an opinion and see anything were the rocks of the Me Kawng ten miles away. The magnificent scenery of the river between Chiang Kawng and Luang Prabang, through which we passed, seems to be largely due to the dislocations of the schists, which have been subject to powerful pressures,



A LAO WOMAN



A TAI NUA WOMAN



LU WOMEN

34
35
36
37
38
39
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and in places present remarkable contortions.⁴ Specimens from these rocks are chiefly silicates of magnesia and iron, with sometimes alumina and iron. Farther east mica schists predominate.

The high peaks, towering 5,000 feet above the river, which give it such a sombre appearance, are generally of the very extensive limestone series. They present tremendous precipices on some of their sides, and their outlines are particularly bold. Seen against some of the lurid evening skies which accompanied the first heavy thunder-storms of the season, while the crashes pealed and echoed off the cliffs of the narrow valley, they completed a scene which convinced me the people had certainly every reason to believe in spirits.

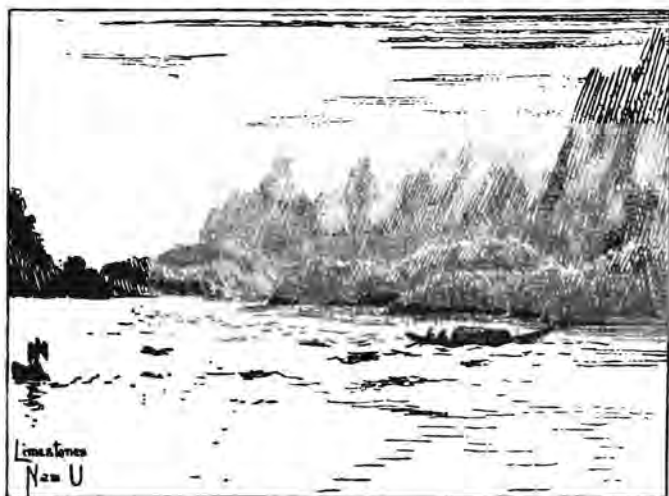
Some miles above Luang Prabang the large and important tributaries of the Nam U and Nam Suang enter the Me Kawng, whose volume at that town is about a third greater than at Chieng Kawng, where Mr. McCarthy found it to discharge about 42,000 cubic feet per second in low-water season. The clear transparent water of these tributary rivers forms a strong contrast to the brown sediment-laden water of the Me Kawng.

During a voyage up the Nam U as far as Muang Ngoi we met many Kaws, and visited some families of them living in their curious fishing huts in the middle of the river. There was fishing going on still, both with rods and nets and the river was full of fish-traps. Across the head of the rapids rows of fishing stakes are firmly planted in the pebbles and boulders of the bottom. Every twenty yards or so a roofed staging is erected, above a gap, on a group

⁴ Specimens from the many intrusive dykes of porphyritic basalt in this district consist of large light-green to pale-brown pleochroic augites, and a few plagioclastic feldspars, porphyritic in a

dense base of lath-shaped feldspars, augite, and magnetite. The base is of varying density. The worst rapids always occur in the neighbourhood of these rocks, both in the Me Kawng and Nam U.

of stakes, ballasted with stones and strongly buttressed on the down-stream side. A platform goes all round inside, and the whole is roofed and walled by a thatch of *Ya Ka*, or jungle grass, down to the water's edge. The only light admitted is thus through the water below, and into this a couple of men will gaze, as they silently sit and smoke their long pipes, by the hour together. Now and then they detain a passing fish or two, with the aid of a spear, or a wide dip net. And the little wives hush the children



and steam the rice, on the narrow three-foot floor around the edge, with the utmost complacency.

The scenery of Nam U is remarkable for the lofty limestone precipices which are met at intervals all along its course.

Extensive dolomitisation has taken place at some points, and at others, such as in the reaches above Pak Bak, a very strong odour of sulphuretted hydrogen is given

off from newly fractured rock. In short, the limestones are by no means uniform in composition, and the skeletons of decomposed silicious limestones are often met with, and travertine deposits, in parts of Luang Prabang such as Pak Si, may be seen in process of deposition. Here and there small villages of Lus, of a rougher type than those on the Me Kawng, nestled a little way back from the river. We saw the people here making paper on stretched linen sheets, and cutting up tobacco; and they cultivate a little silk and cotton and grow bananas and sugar-cane, which latter, with the cormorants we shot, were the only additions to our larder to be got—and what we obtained at many of these places had to be bartered for, as the villagers refused money. We fell back on Chac Bun Yun's jungle menus, which included a pungent but wholesome herb, in place of tea, butterflies' bodies, a species of cricket fried, and the frog known as *ongan*, from his booming note.

The difficulties of the commissariat on this river were chiefly owing to the constant passing of boats from Luang Prabang, which go up river to trade for rice, for salt, from the salt-fields westward near Muang Sai, and other supplies, and who of course pick up everything they find, so that the villagers have little left but what they themselves need, and that is not much.

We met numbers of these boats, their three or four men, with their *panungs* tied tightly round their middle, poling lustily without cessation, for many miles at a time, against the rapid current. All had the inevitable cock crowing on the roof. Owing to the narrow and intricate channels in some of the rapids, the boats are smaller than on the Me Kawng, carrying only about 12 cwt., and my own was only about 45 feet long, over all, 3 feet beam, and 1 foot 3 inches deep. The midship shelter, where one lived, gave about 3 feet headroom.

A good number of rice rafts were also being got ready for the voyage down, when the water should have risen.

We had some days of heavy rain, which stopped our progress, as the Lao cannot work in the cold drenching rain, and the poor fellows made the boat vibrate with their shivering.

We ascended the worst rapid, Keng Luang, in one of these downpours. A more dismally amusing scene than this could hardly be imagined: the clouds low on the dripping hills around, the drenching torrents slanting with the wind, the wild grey river, and the forlorn and shivering human beings struggling with the boats' loads across the slippery rocks, and hauling at the ropes, or floundering in the torrent when a boat got swept away. This would often happen when a boat got the least bit across the current, but in all emergencies our men showed great pluck and pertinacity as well as judgment. When we got through, each man would rush to the now cold rice pot to get a handful to munch ere pushing on.

One must certainly ascend these rivers to appreciate in full the art of navigating them.

Muang Ngoi, the largest 'town' on the Nam U, has about a hundred houses. Muang Sun and Muang Kwa have only about sixty between them, and have no pretensions to the title of *Muang*, except perhaps that they are inhabited by Lao, and not by hill people. This gives a fair idea of the density of population. The word *Muang*, which generally means a township or governor's residence, in this region means rather a Lao village, as opposed to a Ka or hill-tribe village; the head of a Lao settlement, as belonging to the dominant race, being virtually the head of the surrounding hill-villages.

During the voyage up, at Bau Pak Chim, we fell in with a queer pup, black and striped with rusty brown like a tiger, and possessed of elegant white cuffs and shirtfront.

He seemed so civilised that he became my property for the sum of one rupee, and under the name of Rover then and there began his travels.

Muang Ngoi is beautifully situated in a gorge of limestone precipices, with a little cultivated plain in rear of it. It has the main street, with a ditch on each side, characteristic of Lao *Muangs* in Luang Prabang, and is overlooked by a monastery situated at the foot of a pagoda-tipped knoll which commands the valley. When the Haw came down in 1887, the Lao weakly forsook this commanding spot, and the delighted enemy, who must inevitably have suffered very heavily if the place had been held, trundled the mountain guns, which had been left there, into the river. We met a number of the little *Kui* people coming in here with heavy loads of rice and cotton, bending double under their enormous packs, the broad straps of which they place across the forehead.

The high-road of the country is the river, the limestone ridges offering effectual barriers to communication of other kinds, and there being apparently in this part no elephants available for transport.

The rise in the water level owing to the breaking of the rains had covered the sandbanks, where gold-washing is generally pursued, and we returned down river with little information on the subject but what was hearsay.

The limestones provide admirable niches and caves for conversion into shrines, which the Lao are quick enough to avail themselves of, and Buddhas innumerable gaze forth upon the passing traveller. The places were bedaubed with numbers of paper tricolour flags stuck against the rocks by some of the French agents of the 'Syndicat du Haut Lao,' who had been this way and found no other outlet for their energy. It is, I believe, a form of mania which occasionally attacks otherwise harmless persons.

For descending the river our boats were fitted with

their bamboo air compartments, and had the gunwales raised, precautions that were very necessary. We had some exhilarating minutes in the two worst rapids, Keng Kang and Keng Luang, which were made more weird to look upon, and more difficult to shoot, by the low mists which hung above them and the large amount of water going over. Having appeased the river spirit, who is especially unamiable at Keng Kang, we pulled and bailed mightily, and by luck and non-interference of the spirit



PAK SUUNG ME KAWNG

avoided both rocks and the heavy surf of the centre with success.

The last day in to Luang Prabang we instituted a long-distance race between the boats, which aroused much enthusiasm. When rowing hard, the Lao got into what rowing men call a 'bucket,' of dimensions quite shocking to the orthodox oarsman. I was able to instill Third Trinity ideas on the subject into my crew, with the result that we reached Luang Prabang, and cooked and ate our supper, before Nai Suk, who had stroked his men pluckily all day, was heard hailing us in exhausted tones. We fed him, and

then went to a Lao concert given by the commissioner, and the others arrived before midnight. The Lao were much surprised to hear that rowing was not an unknown art off the Me Kawn, and they were polite enough not to say what they thought of me when I described a racing eight.



CHAPTER X

THE LAO STATES—THE ME KAWNG (*continued*)

LUANG PRABANG—HAW INCURSIONS—SIAMESE EXPEDITIONS—PEOPLE—
TRADE—NAVIGABILITY OF THE RIVER—PAK LAI—WIENG CHAN

LUANG PRABANG was our headquarters during all the time we were in the neighbourhood, and we made various short expeditions from this point. Notwithstanding the heat of March our stay was pleasant, for every one was kind, and the able and energetic commissioner, Pra Prasada, excelled himself in his efforts to make us comfortable and assist us in our work.

The town, known of old as Lan Sang, the Plain among

the Elephants, received its present name from the *Prabang*, a golden image of Gantama Buddha, said to have come originally from Ceylon to Cambodia, and thence to have been brought to Luang Prabang. Since its first arrival it has been removed to Wieng Chan, thence to Bangkok, whence it returned once more. When the Haw sacked the place in 1887, some 'wily old Lao' carried it off and buried it in safety.¹

This event was the result of a sad bungle, and unsettled the country for a long time. The incursions of the Haw had since 1870 been confined to the territory east of Luang Prabang. They had ravaged Sibsawng Chu Tai, Hua Pun Tang Ha Tang Hok, and they had penetrated to Chieng Kwang and even to Wieng Chan in the great easterly bend of the Me Kawng at the 18th parallel. Here they were checked and nearly exterminated by Praya Mahamat, another column being broken up by Praya Rat at Tung Chieng Kum, and then the great mistake was made of depopulating the district in order to deprive the Haw of foothold in the future, the people being ordered to move west. The Haw returned in great numbers, and settled in Muang Puan.² An indecisive effort was made by the Siamese at the beginning of 1885 to clear the country of the marauders. Two columns converged on the Haw stockade at Tung Chieng Kum, one under the command of a fine old character, Praya Pichai, father of the present governor of Pichai, the other under that of Praya Rat, who seemed to have his full share of the weaknesses of the Court where he was bred—conceit, arrogance, and ignorance.

Owing to disagreement between the two leaders, and lack of commissariat arrangements, the siege of the stockade was not marked with success, though it showed

¹ McCarthy, *Report on a Survey in Siam*, which is full of interesting information.

² *Ibid.*

that the Siamese can be as casual and cheerful sniffing powder as tobacco-smoke.

Mr. McCarthy,² who was present part of the time, bears witness to the indifference they showed to their wounds, and to the cold and exposure at night, to their cheery spirits, and the shouts of defiance they exchanged with the Haw, and to the general happy-go-lucky method of warfare employed.

Praya Pichai moved off northward to Muang Teng,⁴ sending his sick and wounded to Luang Prabang, and negotiations were entered into with Chao Lai,⁵ the most influential man in the Black Flag Country, whose father had been invested with power to administer the Sibsawng Chu Tai by the old *Chao* of Luang Prabang. He had always shown a great objection to any idea of Annamite encroachments, and he had been an enemy of the French, and had been mixed up with the Black Flag and Haw movements on their frontiers. He now sent a letter accompanied by presents to Praya Pichai by the hands of his two sons. The outcome was in every way satisfactory, and Praya Pichai, who with his whole party was down with fever, returned to Luang Prabang. The mortality among the Siamese due to fever alone was very heavy, and Praya Pichai himself died of it soon after.

In 1887 another effort was made finally to clear the Haw out of Siamese territory. Prince Prachak was sent to operate from Nawng Kai, and Praya Surisak proceeded to Luang Prabang. While Praya Dejo marched from Nawng Kai, and occupied Tung Chieng Tum without much opposition, owing to the retreat of the Haw, Praya Surisak pushed on to M. Teng. Thinking, it would seem, that Chao Lai was not acting squarely, he placed the two sons, who had come down to receive him, in close confine-

² *Report on a Survey in Siam.*

⁴ Dien Bien Phu of French maps.

⁵ Deo Van Tir of French writers.

ment, and eventually sent them down to Bangkok. Mr. McCarthy, who was on the spot, pointed out that such a proceeding could only end in disaster—it would throw Chao Lai into the hands of the French, but his expostulations were not attended to, and he shortly after had to return to Bangkok to recover from serious illness.

Praya Surisak, having, as he thought, accomplished his purpose, returned down river, and was overtaken by the news that the Haw were at Luang Prabang.

It seems incredible that no force had been left at Muang Ngoi or Luang Prabang to preserve the ascendancy over the Haw which had been gained. Yet so it was, and when Chao Lai suddenly determined, as might have been anticipated, to demand the release of his sons, and advanced towards Luang Prabang, no opposition was offered, and his Haw levies reached it with the disorganised Lao flying before them in a panic.

A guard of twenty British Burmese traders was the only force available to defend the old chief, who declared he would stop and die in the place rather than run away. His sons, however, compelled him to go off down river in a boat, as his people had mostly done already. The town was fired and looted, and the Haw returned the way they came, while the old chief went down to Bangkok.

At the end of the year the French forces advanced against the Haw from the side of Tongkin to Muang Lai, and as the Siamese under Praya Surisak were far away still in the Me Nam Valley, they occupied the plain of Teng; and thus the Sibsawng Chu Tai fell quietly into the hands of France.

Praya Surisak arrived too late, and found M. Pavie, who had been travelling with a Siamese escort to whom he owed his life on one occasion when surrounded by the Haw, now threatening him with force if he did not retire. It was mutually agreed that each party should maintain its

position until their respective Governments could be referred to, and then Praya Surisak devoted himself with some ability to reorganising the country.

The rather strange step was taken in Luang Prabang of abolishing the feudal relations existing between the people and the chiefs, while the old *Chao* was heaped with honours and asked to retire, and his two sons took up the reins of government. It is doubtful if much benefit was derived from the first step, and it is quite certain that the second, betraying, as it did, a distrust of the old chief, who was universally loved and looked up to, could not but have ill effects. These events, with the desecration of the *Wats* and pagodas by the Haw, a second fire which burned a great part of the town, and an epidemic of something very like cholera, had tended to unsettle the impressionable townsfolk, and make them feel that somehow they had lost *bun*, and luck was against them. This feeling was only just beginning to die away at the time of our visit, and to its disappearance the energetic and public-spirited commissioner had largely contributed by his cheery activity and go-ahead administration. He was undoubtedly master of the situation, the two chiefs having neither the ability nor the knowledge to take the initiative. Very pleasant and easy-going fellows they were, like all Luang Prabang men, more inclined to enjoy the blessings of life than to combat its evils. Pra Prasada, on the other hand, was possessed of an unusual amount of keenness and kindness of heart. He taught himself English, and carried on the whole administration of the province at the same time with such good effect that when we arrived he was able to give me the latest European news from the papers, and was the most popular man in Luang Prabang.

The Lao population of the town, including suburbs, was at this time about 9,000, while the province was put

down at 98,500, of whom probably a quarter lived on the narrow strip on the right bank of the Me Kawng.

The town nestles round a little pointed, pagoda-tipped hill about 200 feet high, known as *Pu* or *Tat Chawm Si*, and, were it walled like Nan or Chieng Mai, it might have bid defiance to the Haw. For on the west it is protected by the Me Kawng, and on the north-east and north the Nam Kan flows beneath it. From the river the roofs are seen amongst the bamboos and palms, high above the high-water level of the rainy season, when the torrent rises forty feet. The red-tiled roof of the *Wat* on the *Pu Chawm Si* and the lofty pagoda pinnacle at the summit dominate the whole plain to the mountains, and the boom of the great drum which strikes the watches rolls rumbling round their flanks to the distant villages.

Wide streets at right angles to one another are the characteristic of the new town around the pagoda hill, the Government offices and buildings having been placed by Pra Prasada on the south and east. On the promontory of land between the Nam Kan and Me Kawng, beyond the residence of the Chao Luang, and beyond the market which is held in the wide main North and South Street, the thatched houses cluster close together.

We had ample opportunity to note the decided contrasts between these people, who belong to the Lao Pong Kao, or eastern branch of the Lao race, and their western brothers of Nan or Chieng Mai, who are the Lao Pong Dam.

The Tai or Shân race, which is found from Manipur around the basin of the Irawadi to Yunan and Tongkin, and from the edge of Tibet in 28° N. Lat. to Cambodia and to Lat. 7° in the Malay peninsula, is the most numerous and most widely distributed of the races of Indo-China.

The Siamese themselves, the most southerly representatives of the race, have been largely influenced by their

surroundings in the seaboard plains and by contact with the Chinese, Malays, Cambodians, Mons, and others. The Lao, though of the same branch originally as the Siamese, have, by remaining in the mountainous inland districts, retained with greater purity the characteristics of the race. The western branch, however, which seems to have migrated south by Chieng Sen and the Me Nam Valley, has been considerably influenced by the Burmese—as, for instance, in their language as it is now written. The eastern branch, which appears to have followed a more eastern route down the Nam U and the Me Kawng, retain a written language very like the Siamese, and have adopted the Me Kawng Valley as their home. It is curious, by the way, how much both branches dislike the word ‘Lao’ being applied to themselves. They invariably maintained they were Tai, and not Lao, as our friends the Lu had also done. Both words, ‘Lao’ and ‘Lu,’ seem originally to have meant ‘man,’ and now are usually applied by their neighbours when out of hearing.

The Lao of the Me Kawng struck us as, if possible, much lazier than the Lao Pong Dam, and as having more vices. The men all smoke opium habitually, and, though there is very little drunkenness, the people drink their full share of the native liquor, while theft is not entirely unknown. There is no doubt one cannot condemn Indo-Chinese mountaineers for smoking opium, for it is, in moderation, the best antidote that exists to the terrible fever bred in these hills by long marches, varying temperatures, and empty stomachs. At the same time, the Nan men do without it, and they are almost the only people in Indo-China of whom it can be said. My experience of opium-smokers was not, so far, a favourable one, as the majority of my escort were hopelessly addicted to it, and dreamed their way through life with as little exertion to themselves as possible; they were perfectly useless for any

purpose whatever. A wider experience showed that the Shāns, as a rule, do not take to the drug in excess, and that its use in moderation is certainly beneficial to them. This has long been maintained by Mr. Scott, whose opinion, based on long experience and careful observation, is to my mind conclusive.

The Luang Prabang folks, however, take what is a necessity to many of their hill-climbing neighbours, and, as lazy people will, use it in excess. Opium and an idle life combined are certainly not beneficial, and in Luang Prabang both are very largely indulged in.

One vice all too common has mercifully not been introduced, and the day that gambling comes among the pleasure-loving Lao will be an evil one indeed. Its demoralising effect among weak-minded Easterns like the Siamese is only too apparent around the capital, where it is the cause of robbery, dacoity, and even occasionally of murder. And it is very greatly to the credit of the Siamese that they have recognised this fact to the extent of suppressing it in Luang Prabang, whereas its encouragement would have been a great source of revenue.

The people were not overburdened with taxes, there being only a poll-tax of eight rupees for heads of families and four for unmarried able-bodied men per annum. *Corvée* had practically been abolished, and a regular rate of wage established for all men engaged in Government work, whether Lao or hill men.

Prince Henri, whose business was to decry Siamese administration, declares that the taxes were very heavy. I saw no evidence of this in Luang Prabang, true as it has been of Siam proper. But when the French took possession in 1893 they increased the poll taxes so greatly that Prince Henri's remarks became true, and *corvée* was reintroduced.

The character of the Luang Prabang people was written in their market. Instead of getting the business over in the early morning, the women sat in their booths till nearly noon, gossiping and chatting with the men folk who wandered slowly up and down. It was the fashionable lounge of the city; silk petticoats and scarves glanced in the sunlight, and pretty lips flashed smart remarks; the beauty, wit, and wealth of Luang Prabang was there gathered for the admiration of the hill man or the foreigner. In the afternoon it was resumed again, but not on so large a scale; in fact, the afternoon market was monopolised by that class in Luang Prabang society which answers to those Londoners to whom, in their craving for excitement, evening papers are a necessary condition of life. They got the latest gossip in its most garbled version, and enjoyed that pleasure of hearing about other people's business which attracts so many among 'civilised' communities of Western lands.

But it was at night when the sun was set that social life was at its merriest. A most curious custom existed for the respectable women folk to go out walking arm-in-arm along the road, singing in chorus, and chaffing passers-by. It was most unlike the behaviour of the women anywhere else in Indo-China; the Ka and hill girls run away into the jungle at the bare sight of strangers, and the Lao and Siamese women generally at least wait until they are spoken to, and, though good business women and terrible chatterboxes at times, are modest and hard-working. The Luang Prabang ladies reminded one of persons in pince-nez and tailor-made petticoats who elbow people to one side at railway stations in London.

When they went home—which they did early, for they were evidently not entirely emancipated—one heard at last the subdued notes of a *ken* drifting on the night air, whose owner was serenading some fair lady. In their



love for music lies the best quality of the Luang Prabang people; they are essentially musical, and the little city was before all a place of sweet sounds.

The deep note of the drum at the pagoda, the clear tones of the monastery bells which answered it, and the evening calls of the bugles from the scattered guard-houses were delightful to listen to after the jungle sounds which had so long been our only music; and my most vivid impression of the place is still the orchestra of sound which vibrated round the valley at nine o'clock as one turned in upon a mat out in the hot verandah. And then long into the night would rise and fall the quick *ken* notes, whose player was wending homeward.

In the hall of the Government offices, lately built by Pra Prasada, there were often held in the evening functions of the nature of a 'literary joust' or contest in wit and repartee, which answered more to the old Westminster 'challenge' than to anything I know of. We had a full orchestra of a couple of *kens*, a couple of two-stringed violins, and a high-pitched flageolet. The girls sat along one side in all their finery of silk, flowers, and gold bangles, chewing betel to give them confidence, and the men along the other, smoking to calm their nerves. One of the young women would then suggest a subject, and the champion on the other side proceed to extemporise on it to the best of his ability. The orchestra had ceased, and only the gentle *ken* notes accompanied him as he sang. The nasal high-pitched tones are not very lovely to the Western, but the substance appeared to be admirable, to judge from the laughter and applause. After each verse the singer would relight his cigarette, or take a piece of betel; chaff and banter passed round, while the orchestra struck in with the refrain in rapid two-four time, and all joined with clapping hands in the Malay fashion and with the tinkling metal. The effect of this

was sometimes wonderful; the monotony had ceased to be wearisome.

Another kind of musical repartee is also fashionable, and there is a very good description of it in Prince Henri's book.⁶ His account of Luang Prabang is the best I know, and it is relieved from being dull by the pleasant little bits of cheap patriotism and hearty anti-English sentiment which enliven it. A few inaccuracies in regard to the relations between the Siamese and Luang Prabang are not of sufficient importance to spoil a really charming picture of the place.

The power of extemporising is cultivated not only in the Lao States but in Siam. My stout boy Deng, who was anything but a poet in ideas or appearance, used as we got nearer home in all our journeys to sit up late crooning the most astounding blank verse about our trip. As we neared Bangkok his excitement became intense, and we could not get him to sleep at all; as he had no idea of music, it was sometimes trying. He generally began by an elaborate introduction of all the characters of the piece, which took some two hours; he then described every event he could remember, and got to about the fourth month of our journey somewhere near sunrise, when we were up to make a start.

The *ken* played in Luang Prabang is an improved and more highly developed type of the reed organ which is in use among the *Musur* and other Chinese frontier tribes.⁷ The sound is produced by reed pipes, which give a singular sweetness to the instrument, its only fault being its small compass. The larger Lao instruments have only fourteen reeds, the more primitive even fewer. Of these, two are the same note, and are used for the drone, which is employed a good deal as in the bagpipe, and thus there are

⁶ *Around Tonkin and Siam*. London: Chapman & Hall, Limited, 1894.

⁷ Appendix xv.

only thirteen different notes, though on a large one with sixteen reeds in my possession there are just two octaves. Above the little wooden air chamber into which the player blows there is a hole or air escape in each reed. In blowing into the instrument no sound is produced until the air escape is closed; the vibration of the little metal tongue of the reed then communicates itself to the column of air in the speaking length of the pipe, and the note sounds whether the vibration is produced by an up-take or down-take draught in the pipe—in other words, whether the player blows or draws the wind. This saves the constant pausing for breath which would otherwise be necessary to the human bellows, and crescendo and diminuendo effects are beautifully produced by regulating the breathing. The speaking length is regulated by openings cut in the reeds, from half an inch to an inch in length, and when the pipes are arranged in two rows, as is usual, these openings are cut on the inner sides, and so are not very apparent. The lowest note on my big *ken* (low E) has 3 ft. 6 in. speaking length, the highest 11 in. They are generally classified in lengths; thus we have six *sawk* (10 ft.), four *sawk* (6 ft. 8 in.), and two *sawk* (3 ft. 4 in.) as the most usual lengths, but the first is a most exhausting instrument to play, and is the rarest, although its deep notes are not to be surpassed. The length is an inconvenience, especially as the player usually carries it with him wherever he goes on his journeys. The most usual is the four-*sawk ken*, as it is a convenient length to sling across the back, and has some fine notes. The pipes, which are often beautifully marked by heating over a fire, are fixed into the air chamber by an air-tight packing of beeswax. To replace a reed or repair damage, the beeswax is worked away, the bands of withies loosened, and the pipe firmly pushed out from the lower end. The tongue of the reed often gets caught, and a few smart flips of a springy bamboo

lath generally releases it. An alloy is most commonly used for the reed tongue, but silver is preferred, for the quality of its note and its lasting power. The air chamber is generally made from a fruit known as *buk lamut*, or other hard wood, and a deal of labour is spent in hollowing it, shaping the mouthpiece, cutting the parallel slits for the pipes, and in polishing and finishing it off. The *ken* is certainly the most elaborate and most musical of Indo-Chinese instruments; but its arrangement is at first puzzling to the learner, owing to the disposal of the notes so as to suit the fingers of the two hands and enable them to give the combinations used by the Lao players.

The Siamese instruments appear to be arranged for a pentatonic series, consisting of the 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 of a major diatonic scale. But the *ken* of Luang Prabang is arranged for our full major diatonic scale with its relative minor, and is invariably in beautiful tune. In the single reed of Nan, owing probably to the greater difficulty of adjusting the breath, the intervals are generally less satisfactory to the ear. It is, however, pierced for eight notes, and is undoubtedly meant to express the whole series of the octave.⁸

Every man in the place could play the instrument, and every girl has been serenaded by it. These were the most important occupations in life for the upper classes—which is to say, as every one, since the ‘abolition of slavery,’ was as good as his neighbour, for every man and woman in Luang Prabang.

Mr. McCarthy called the new régime a ‘mild republicanism,’ and Prince Henri also, not inaptly, likened it to one of the old Greek republics. The *Chao*, although looked up to, was kept well in hand by his *sena*, or council, and laws were very light. Every one wore gold bangles in preference to silver, which, like work, was only fit for *kas*, or moun-

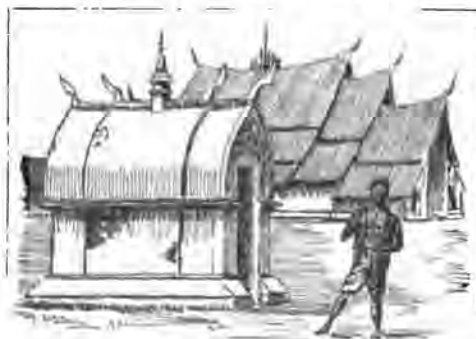
⁸ Appendix xv.

tain folks. The rice mill was never heard in the town, the rice itself was all imported. Weaving silk was a lady-like pursuit indulged in as a pastime, instead of politics or painting; fishing for the men took the place of golf or cricket. As has been hinted, the true rulers were the ladies, to which some ungallant persons attributed the general flight in 1887.

The Lao police, who had been lately enrolled, had duties of the lightest nature. They shared with the few Siamese guards the duties of fire watchmen, and very efficiently they did their work.

The *Wats* of the town, notwithstanding their desecration by the Haw, who fired some, and dug into the pagodas or upset them in their search for valuable loot, were many of them in fair condition during our visit. They show a few points of difference from the style of the Western Lao; notably in the general low effect of the buildings, and the lanternlike adornment in the centre of the roof line, which, though occasional in the west, is hardly ever omitted here. This, though purely an exterior ornament, reminds one very much of the lanterns with which one is familiar in college halls at home. Brick and stucco are used more largely for the walls, the porches are a little less ornate and are approached by fewer steps, and generally the outline is less effective than some of those we had already seen. The monastery precincts are generally enclosed by a wall—~~head~~ of a timber palisade, and the entrance is often through a rather effective gateway; within, numbers of *wihan*, or shrines, stand round the *Bawt*—pretty, solid little buildings with brick-vaulted roof. They are generally under fourteen feet in length, the height being about seven-eighths of the length, and the result is a very nicely proportioned little structure. It has an entrance at one end, and at the inner end a figure of Gautama sits in the

quiet ; the upper ridge of the roof is finished off with the customary snake finial and the little central 'lantern.' The true arch is, as in China, not understood. Wherever the weight comes, a horizontal beam is placed, upon which, in woodwork, perpendicular supports are placed, or, in stonework, the masonry is built up. The gate at Wat Prabang is an instance. The arch is merely an ornament, and it must be confessed an unusual ornament ; but the weight of the superstructure is taken entirely by the horizontal beams which are seen inside. This fact is one of the chief causes of the rapid decay of the buildings



WIHAN LUANG PRABANG

of Indo-China ; the first signs of age always show themselves in the horizontal crosspiece, for it is a shortlived and inefficient substitute for the noble arch.

A large number of the old ruined monasteries, which of course go 'unrestored' to rack and ruin, still contain a few fine fragments of wood-carving and fresco work, as well as some of the effective gilding on black or red ground, with which the traveller in Siam becomes familiar.

During our stay in the town we were accommodated in the schoolhouse lately built by the Commissioner, in which Mr. McCarthy, the Director-General of Surveys,

had recessed during the rains with his survey parties. Many were the stories we heard, both from Lao and Siamese, of his tremendous energy and his contempt for obstructions. I had some of his preliminary sheets with me, and they were a constant source of admiration during our trip. The self-constituted critics who have assisted to make his work harder than it was by nature have no conception of the determination and accuracy with which the work has been done, the difficulties of transport, commissariat, and communication in such a country, or the tremendous hardships to be endured. It must be remembered that it was done entirely with the assistance of one experienced man, Mr. Smiles, and of a staff of young Siamese trained by himself—a class of man from whom, as a rule, no accurate work or long-applied effort can be got, and who yet contributed a mass of good work to the survey by route surveys, traverses, and the like, where accuracy was a first essential. In the face of a great deal more than difficulties of nature, the Indian triangulation has been connected with Chieng Mai, Luang Prabang and Nawng Kai, along the northern border of Siam, the Bangkok triangulation has been extended along the coast, and over twelve hundred positions have been determined by star observations for latitude or for azimuth, or by time and latitude observations.

It is satisfactory to know that the quality of the work is appreciated by such an experienced authority as Colonel Woodthorpe.

Apart from the survey itself, there is another result which is, to my mind, of untold value to the Siamese. It has been proved that Siamese can do careful and accurate work while enduring physical hardships of no mean kind. In face of the general experience, no result could be more valuable than this.

One of the attractions of Luang Prabang is its fishing,

which, although carried on by small drift nets, can be of an exciting kind. Small sharp-lined canoes are used, with two men, one at each end, and they drift down the current with their net out. Holding the head and foot ropes ready to haul in in one hand, they paddle gently with the other, one foot often assisting to give the necessary direction to the boat's head. The net is thirty fathoms long by two wide, and is floated by calabashes at intervals of a fathom, and sunk by stones.

The *pla leum*, which is caught extensively in March, April, and May, is also known in the Me Nam, but here grows larger and averages 70 lb. in weight.

The famous *pla buk*, which I have never seen, as it comes up to spawn in June, July, and August, is much prized for its roe, and Mr. McCarthy gives the measurements of one he assisted to catch as length 7 ft. and girth of body 4 ft. 2 in., and it weighed 130 lbs.; in contrast to the *pla leum*, it has neither scales nor teeth, and such a fish is worth ten rupees. It descends after the rains, but is not caught then, as it travels deeper down. The Lao say that it breeds in the retired backwaters above Nawng Kai. M. Pavie believes that it comes from the sea, but, although it seems to be known at Bassac, I could never hear of it lower down, or as being known in the great lake of Cambodia. On the whole, its haunts seem to be between the 14th and 20th parallels.

The great drawback to the Me Kawng Valley, and to Luang Prabang particularly, is the virulence of the fevers contracted by nearly all strangers who stay long within its borders, and which kills untold numbers of the native population every year.

The number of Siamese who died of fever alone during the expeditions against the Haw bandits was appalling, and it was only when quinine was sent up in large quantities that the mortality was checked. So great a reputation

did this wonderful drug acquire that it was, during our visit, a regular import, exposed for sale in the market-place.

Our own party suffered in the usual way, and although we were in the valley at the best time of year our boats were sometimes like hospitals, only two men besides myself escaping. The fever was generally of the remittent type and very dangerous, but by taking it in time and nursing the men with care we had only two cases which became serious. The temperature rises to 105° at an extraordinary rate, the patient gets a yellow tinge in the eyes and on the face, and often the only way of saving him is to administer violent purgatives or emetics, which reduce the temperature and afford relief at once. Without these death generally ensues within forty-eight hours in the more virulent attacks. It was often pitiable to see the way the Indo-Chinese native would collapse when attacked by it on the march, and in time one becomes a walking dispensary, ready for all emergencies.

It is, no doubt, irritating sitting up at night with these people when they are raving, and their comrades are too tired after a hard day to do their duty by them, but any one who does it will perhaps learn what gratitude is like.

The intermittent type, although exhausting to the system, is not dangerous, unless it continues for long periods and internal complications supervene; very congested liver and spleen are the usual results, and malarial sores and indigestion combine to make the patient's life a sorrow to himself and a nuisance to his fellow-men.

Dysentery and inflammation of the eyes were the two other diseases one was most often asked to prescribe for in the Lao country. The usual native method of treating dysentery makes it almost certain death, and the European is only appealed to when too late.

The use of quinine is, to my mind, often overdone in malarial countries. People think that they have only to take five grains every morning,³ and fifteen and thirty or more when 'feeling down,' in order to defy the malady. If they escape malarial poisoning, they at least acquire quinine poisoning, and help to ruin their digestion. And if once fever does get a hold of them, the efficacy of quinine to them is nearly lost.

Moreover, for a long journey where transport is so difficult, quinine cannot be carried in sufficient quantities to keep up a regular daily allowance to oneself and one's men, as well as to meet the requirements of those who are constantly brought to the traveller needing it sorely. The only possible way would be to determine to ignore the health of one's fellow-travellers, and to refuse help to the villagers, a course which only one man I ever met dared to recommend, and he was a Protestant missionary.

The way is to deal out a morning allowance only in bad places, or when the party is subject to rapid changes of temperature, and when any man looks ailing or off colour in the least give him a couple of pills, and see him swallow them on the spot.

Our stay in Luang Prabang was most fatal. To make up for the lost time, every one ate rice cakes and *k'nom*s from morn till night, for it is nice to have enough. But there was a price to be paid for the sudden change, and sometimes only five out of the twenty were good for anything.

The trade of the place was unimportant. The imports consisted of opium from Chieng Tung and Yunnan; the usual piece goods, cotton yarns, thread, sugar, kerosene, and tea in small quantities from Bangkok; and woollen cloth, dyes, gold thread, needles, and betel-boxes in still

³ M. Pavie told me he did this regularly.

smaller quantities from Chieng Mai, nearly the whole of which were British goods.

The French vice-consul, who had no exequatur and who kept a shop, imported toys, satins, scent, tricolour flags, and other useful articles. In two months nearly 20,000 francs' worth were imported by the Black River, Nam Nua, and Nam U route from Tongkin, with some loss in the Nam U Rapids. The store was certainly well stocked. Except tricolours and medals inscribed 'Syndicat Français du Laos, comptoirs à Luang Prabang, Houtène, Bassac, Kieng-Hong,'¹ with which all visitors were presented, the goods did not, however, seem to find their way out again. In a fit of generosity I bought some presents for my men, flowered woollen stuffs by way of *pas*, or mantles, for best occasions; they volunteered the information that they would have preferred a bit of Lao work, as these would not last and would not wash. Their artistic taste was also offended by the colours, and, in short, they objected to them on every ground. I was not surprised, therefore, to find that the store was heavily subsidised, and that the Lao prefer their own rough cotton and silk stuffs, which stand wear and tear much better. The Luang Prabang people wear silk almost entirely, as the silk worm is bred extensively, and the texture of the silk-woven garment is so durable that it outlasts many cotton ones. The taste displayed in the quality of the colouring is far superior to what it will be twenty years hence, if cheap European goods are largely imported. Horizontal stripes of white, yellow, and red shades on black grounds are most usual for the women's petticoats, and check patterns of the same colours are frequent in the men's *panungs*, but are less common on the whole than in Nan. Some of the

¹ The insertion of 'Kieng-Hong' (Chieng-Hung) at that date is an interesting index to the extent

of the French ambitions at the time.

gold- and silver-embroidered trimmings are lavish in their ornament.

The export trade, although scarcely larger, was more interesting. The chief articles were: gum-benjamin and silk, of each of which two qualities are distinguished, wax, sticklac, cutch, cardamom, a little ebony, cinnamon and indigo, rhinoceros and deer horns, which are used by the Chinese for medicine, ivory, cotton, and fish roe.

Of these the largest and most valuable was gum-benjamin. This resin is only produced in the eastern part of Luang Prabang. Like nearly all the other exports, it found its way to Bangkok either by the Me Nam or Korat routes, and thence was shipped to London for the French and Belgian markets, where it is in demand for manufacture into balsam. Nearly twenty tons were exported annually, valued at about \$21,000 (2,300*l.*)

Ivory used to come from the whole of the eastern Me Kawng country, but the total did not exceed four tons annually, or about \$17,000 worth (1,900*l.*), and of this but a small proportion came from Luang Prabang. It remains to be seen what effect the French occupation will have on these exports; it may be regarded as certain, at all events, that every endeavour will be made to divert the trade to Annam or Tongkin; at present, small as it is, it shows every sign of falling altogether.

The other exports appear very insignificant when reduced to pounds sterling, and the total value of the import and export trade of the province, including the caravan trade at the north-western frontier, seems never to have exceeded 80,000*l.* annually, or about a third of that of the whole Siamese Me Kawng Valley to the great lake.²

² Estimating the total at 240,000*l.*, made up as follows: Luang Prabang, 80,000*l.*; Korat Plateau (chap. xi.), 120,000*l.*; and

the Lake Provinces (chap. xxi.), 40,000*l.* The French occupation of the left bank has so far only materially affected Luang Pra-

The greater part of the trade of the town was in the hands of Chinese traders. It nearly all went by boat to Paklai, and across by elephant to Utaradit, and then by the Me Nam, the way we had come to Bangkok. Another route was the one we followed when returning by river to Nawng Kai, thence by cart to Korat, and then by pack-bullocks to the Me Nam. The first occupied four weeks in descending and more than seven weeks in ascending; the latter, being more overland, was still longer, and more expensive.

The question arises whether the lines of communication along which the country will be opened up in the future will follow these routes, or will take the Nam U and Black River route to Tongkin, or one of those from the lower Me Kawng between the 16th and 19th parallels, over to the Annam seaboard.

The Black River route does not seem to compare with that by Paklai and the Me Nam, owing to the greater physical difficulties in the rivers; while the practicability of the Annam passes for trade purposes is very doubtful, for the affluents of the Me Kawng, by which access must be got to the neighbourhood of the Annamite watershed, seem by all accounts very unfit for navigation. In their default extensive railways will be needed.

The result of the introduction of tariffs, if such should be resorted to by the French on the Me Kawng, will most likely be to kill the import trade entirely. For French goods are not suited to the wants of the people, and if they cannot get British and German goods at a cheap price they will do without.

It is noticeable that Prince Henri, in his consideration of the question,³ does not even mention the great artery,

bang's share of the total. I find Mr. Robert Gordon in 1891 estimated the total at 250,000*l.* (*Journal Soc. of Arts*, No. 1,998, vol.

xxxix.) Mr. Black follows Mr. Gordon's figure (*Geogr. Journal*, vol. viii. No. 5).

³ In *Around Tonkin and Siam*.

the Me Kawng, which it has been constantly asserted is to lead French commerce from Saigon into the heart of Indo-China, if not into China itself; and he actually considers at some length the advisability of building railways from its banks into Annam. In fact, he seems in that connection to accept the verdict of Francis Garnier against the possibility of its being used as a navigable waterway. This opinion—formed as it was by a man who was himself a sailor, and who therefore knew what boats could do, and who had unequalled opportunities for judging the Me Kawng both at high water and at low—has been too much ignored by the French Colonial party.

Statements about the navigability of the river have been so constantly reiterated by persons who wished it to be navigable that when they obtained command of it in 1893 there is no doubt most Frenchmen believed they had obtained a navigable waterway into Yunan. Not only is this not the case, but it does not even form a high-road for their own Lao acquisitions. The applause which has been justly given to M. Simon, of the French Navy, for getting the steam launch 'La Grandière' up past all the rapids to Tang Aw, is in itself proof of the difficulties of navigation to be overcome. Had the Me Kawng been the waterway it has been stated to be, the exploit would not have deserved anything but a passing notice. Prince Henri speaks of it in one passage as being 'in the future one of the widest and deepest waterways open to the extension of civilisation.' No doubt there are parts of the river where this may be true—below the Kawng rapids in lat. 14°. For the rest of its course a great many superlatives of opposite meaning are the only ones which express the truth. That steam launches of moderate draught will be able to navigate the reaches of river which intervene between the chief great rapids, but that they cannot navigate—that is, ply with regularity

and certainty—in the neighbourhood of the rapids themselves, are conclusions our experiences very soon forced upon us. That with a sufficient expenditure of time and the aid of numbers of men it is possible to get a steam launch over the worst of the rapids is self-evident, but that it can only be done once in a way as a *tour de force*, and at an expenditure of time and money quite out of proportion to the results, is equally obvious. There seem one or two practical objections even to this. It will be nearly impossible to come down again—impossible without risking the ship more than any skipper would care to do. Owing to the sparse population, it must be extremely difficult to get the number of men necessary for the haulage of the boat, and, if obtained, the question of food supply will in many places be a difficult one to solve.

The building of tramlines to join the navigable reaches, or the erection of locks, would cost more than the Manchester Canal has done, and would have, allowing for an enormous increase of steam launches, boats, and population, about a ten-thousandth part of the tonnage to make it pay.

Lieutenant Simon has, in my humble opinion, done a magnificent service in a plucky and sailorlike manner. One would like to have seen and helped him at it, and know how he passed Keng La and Keng Luang and the Chieng Kan rapids.

And one would also like to know what the two years' voyage necessary to get the 'Grandière' and the 'Massie' to Tang Aw cost, what they will do there, and how they will get down again. Something has been said about 'inspiring terror': one feels inclined to hope the *Nats* and the cormorants are duly impressed, but inspiring terror in the Lao could be done so much more cheaply.

There are five main rapid-barriers on the river: Kawng, in lat. 14°, over 300 miles from the mouth, and

only a few miles north of the latitude of Bangkok; Kemerat, lat. 16° , some sixty miles in length; Wieng Chan to Chieng Kan, lat. 18° , thirty miles in length; Tarua, or Keng Luang, lat. 19° , twenty miles in length; and the Ban Tanun, Keng Hau, and Keng La series, in the east and west, reach above Luang Prabang, stretching about fifty miles, with short intervals between.

A glance at the map also shows the geographical advantage which the Gulf of Siam has over the Me Kawn



as an outlet for the trade of Indo-China. To attain the latitude of Ayuthia, sixty miles from the sea, by the Me Kawn route, a boat journey of nearly 400 miles and a transhipment of goods over the great Kawn barrier must be accomplished. Utaradit, which is not twenty miles from the parallel of Chieng Kan, is only 250 miles beyond Ayuthia, and can be reached in three weeks without transhipment. Chieng Kan is 500 miles from Kawn, and separated by ninety miles of rapids.

The splendid elevated plateau of Tung Chieng Kum and Chieng Kwang is the only portion of the new possessions of France which do not naturally communicate with Bangkok.

The truth, which has long been insisted on by competent observers, is at last becoming recognised, and some writers in the French Colonial papers, not without reason, display some feeling on the subject. 'We are in a fair way,' says one, 'to deceive ourselves bitterly about this Laos country, and this time the opponents of colonial expansion will enjoy a laugh. . . . One condition essential to the rational development of the country is the existence of means of communication provided by nature, or, lacking these, roads made by men. Now the former are wanting, or nearly so, since only the Me Kawng traverses a portion of these vast territories, and its navigability in the upper parts is still a problem which is far from being solved; for the brilliant achievements of Lieutenant Simon prove nothing'—I should have added 'commercially.' 'Above Kawng,' says another writer, 'the Me Kawng may serve for trade, except in the spring, when the water is very low. Above Wien Chan the Me Kawng does not appear to be practically navigable, and, pending the details of Lieutenant Simon's voyage, his arrival at Luang Prabang may be conducive to French prestige rather than to trade.'

And now the most recent proposal⁴ is that a railway should be built from Saigon to Bassac, two points connected by the most navigable portion of the Me Kawng. It is not apparently put forward as an alternative route to the Me Kawng, but is described as the true and only means of opening 'the riches of the Laotian soil,' thus leaving the poor Me Kawng altogether out of count.

On April 1 we started for the south, this time in double boats lashed together with strong crosspieces, on

⁴ Bulletin of the Paris Geographical Society.

which a light bamboo deck with a rounded cover is placed, forming a very roomy deck-house. On the 4th my boat was swamped in Keng Seng. On the 5th we shot Keng Luang, a magnificent contraction between walls of rock, lightening our boats of their cargo for the purpose. From here the river bed was much the same all the way to Paklai, but the hills of the valley grew lower, and stood farther back, and the feathery bamboos and long grasses took the place of the great forest trees. The argillaceous slates south of Keng Luang are very remarkable for the regularity and steepness of their dip to the west. The great mountain masses which rise to the east of Luang Prabang, and which culminate in Pu Bia, 9,355 feet, the highest peak among the many which exceed 7,000 feet in that elevated zone, seem to be due to an upheaval which has tilted the strata on the west, and subjected it to severe stresses.

This part of the river teems with bird and animal life, and we shot peafowl, jungle-fowl, crow-pheasants, and several species of heron,⁵ and saw the tracks and heard the night cries of tiger, leopard, sambur, and the weird and beautiful whistle of the night hawks. Crocodile and pig abound, and, except for the occasional hull of a wrecked boat lying battered on the rocks thirty feet above low-water mark, we saw hardly a sign of man until we reached Paklai, where, after passing the last of the teak-bearing hills rising away to the westward, we arrived on the 7th. It is the most important place between Luang Prabang and Chieng Kan, and has 800 inhabitants. The trail to Utaradit and Pichai branches off here, offering the shortest route across to the navigable Me Nam and the south.

Below Paklai to Chieng Kan the river assumes a new aspect, and winds, tamed, in still reaches between low

⁵ Notes on a Journey to the Upper Mekawng, John Murray, 1895, and Appendix.

rounded hills. The Pied kingfisher and the Little Indian kingfisher were poising in the evening air, and the black-billed terns were whisking and darting about the still water; the pigeons and doves became numerous along the banks, and their gentle cooing made it all seem most peaceful.

We were some days in Chieng Kan trying to dry the things damaged in the rapids, and visiting the magnificent hæmatite deposits in the neighbourhood. These, like the galena and copper lodes of Nan, cannot be of any commercial value for years to come, until conditions and communications are vastly changed. 'Exploit the mines!' exclaimed a French writer after the French annexation of 1893. 'It must not be forgotten that these famous mines are at such enormous distances that, with the exception of gold mines, transport alone would cost so much that it would be folly to dream of working them.'

Chieng Kan is a forest of cocoanut palms,⁶ beneath which, in snug well-built houses, live a colony of some thousand Lao, who are mostly settlers from the neighbourhood of Muang Puen to the N.E., which was devastated by the Haw. A good many of the women have cut their hair short after the Bangkok fashion, but except for this all the people retain the best characteristics of the Lao, and are as well-built and good-looking as any people we met. Our stay was rendered most pleasant by their confiding geniality, and by the general air of prosperity in the place. Our outlook from the *sala*, high above the wide still river, was very charming, and the little fishing craft away up stream looked like so many gondolas in the evening light. A good number of British Shân pedlars had married wives and settled here. As usual, they were most friendly and hospitable, and their women folk came

⁶ It is often stated that the cocoanut requires sea air if not sea spray; but the tree flourishes here

and elsewhere in the interior many hundred miles from the nearest sea.

round with great presents of fruit, and by their cheerful faces justified the selection of their husbands.

There was a fine cool *Bawt*, or chapel, attached to the monastery, where I spent the heat of the day, answering the questions of an eager crowd of monks who sat round, and explaining what I could of the outside world and my own country, its customs and its thoughts. A more earnest or attentive audience could not be imagined, and their questions were intelligent. The idea of the sea seemed, not unnaturally, as difficult to them to grasp as the idea of the earth going round the sun often was to lower orders among the country folk. The yellow robe of the monk is among the Lao like the scholar's gown at home; the *Wat* is the college where philosophy and letters are taught and studied. The refinement of many of the men is largely owing to its influence upon them, when as lads they wore the yellow garment of the pupil. And where the numbers of the laity are so small there is less idleness and luxury in the monasteries than is possible in many parts of Siam; and monks and pupils may be met far out in the jungle with robes tucked up, felling trees to build the abbot's chamber or cutting grass for the monastery thatch.

Five days south from Chieng Kan lies Muang Loi, and the pass over the watershed to M. Lom Sak, a Lao district rich in minerals and cursed by fever and dacoity, the latter entirely due to its proximity to Siam.

Eight days west lies Pichai, the capital of the province to which Chieng Kan belongs.

The rains had fairly begun at Luang Prabang, and when we left Chieng Kan in our new set of boats and with our new crews we had plenty of evidence that the fine weather was breaking up—cool fresh mornings with the thermometer 62° Fahr., hot steamy noons with maximum of 104° (in the shade), and heavy flashing clouds and squalls beating mercilessly into the boats at night.

In fitting out the boats for the trip down the rapids to Nawng Kai, one could observe and admire, not for the first time, the handiness of the people in manipulating the bamboo, making out of it ropes, floorings, crosspieces, roofs, oar blades, and grommets, as well as the invaluable air compartments to go along the gunwales.

In three days we descended the rapids eastwards, which are caused, not by inclination of the bottom, but rather by the narrow space into which the water is compressed in the deep rock ditch, which it has cut for itself at right angles to the strike of the sandstones and conglomerates, and which causes the eddies and whirlpools which are so troublesome to the navigator.

The best time to pass them is at high-water season, when the wastes of sand, which extend on both sides to the low hills, are covered by the water, and way can be made close along the edges of the hills beyond the current's reach.

It was a hard time for the men, especially the steersmen, working the long oars at high pressure for hours together to keep off the rocks, and they were glad enough to reach the more peaceful Ang Pla Buk, where we could hear once more the booming note of the *pla lin ma*¹ under our boats, denoting deep still water.

Wieng Chan, the old capital of the State of that name, which harried all its neighbours with success at the beginning of the century, still shows signs of its former glories in the fine ruins of Wat Prakeo, Wat Luang, and others. In contradistinction to the *Wats* at Luang Prabang, its old rival, the remains here are chiefly remarkable for the great effect of height, which is undoubtedly one

¹ 'Dog's tongue fish'; the note at first is like the booming of bullfrogs, only deeper and more sonorous; it is heard in deep water in all the rivers of Siam.

This musical note is said to be produced by the vibrations of the body of the fish against the boat's bottom.

of the chief glories of architectural effort. The buildings stand commandingly inside the old ruined walls on the top of flights of steps, and the tall columns and narrow windows, leading the eye upward by their lessening breadth, give a splendid effect of loftiness. But the gorgeous tiles of the old roofs have long since disappeared, and the delicate leaves of the destructive and beautiful *Ficus religiosa* now crown the summits in their place. Wat Luang, a peculiar combination of shrine and fortress, had escaped destruction till eight hundred Haw came down in



1887 and toppled the pagoda summit in the mud in search for loot. This desecration was amply avenged by Praya Mahamat and the people he got together, who, after a stiff fight, drove the remnant of the marauders into a *Wat*, and captured and executed every one of them.

The site of Wieng Chan was well chosen, being in a fine plain watered by the Me Kawng and its northern tributary the Nam Ngum, and at one of the gates of the splendid Tung Chieng Kum plateau. The villages along the banks, shaded by magnificent banyans and rich in fruit

gardens, seemed prosperous and happy, and the French could not do better than restore to the old capital some of its former importance.

A day's journey from here between steep clay banks, and we reached Nawng Kai.



'KEN' PLAYING
(Sketch by a Siamese)



SI CHOM PU PHAN, KING OF MONKEYS

CHAPTER XI

THE LAO STATES (*continued*)—THE KORAT PLATEAU

NAWNG KAI—KORAT—COMMUNICATIONS AND TRADE—DAWNG PRAYA YEN
—KORAT IN THE DRY SEASON OF 1896—THE RAILWAY—THE FRENCH
CONSULATE.

AT Nawng Kai we felt quite near home again. From the top of the steep bank above the boats we looked out south across the great flat plain, and saw the solitary sugar-palms¹ swaying their shaggy heads as if in welcome.

Loving solitude, the tough gaunt form of the palmyra is always met with in wild open spots, where the winds and rains may best beat upon it, and the jungle stands back respectfully to give it space. Least graceful and most stalwart of Palmaceæ, it never bows its head as does

¹ *Borassus flabelliformis*.

the feathery cocoanut or the delicate areca, but its great spiked leaves stand out defiantly against the sky, and only drop along the trunk when death itself compels them to give way to younger shoots. Like many rugged natures, it has a soft heart. The watery rustling of the leaves in a fresh wind is one of the sweetest musics in the world, and its fruit and the sugar made from it are both delicious, and are rightly valued by the Siamese. It is not without a rough sense of humour, too, and the liquor extracted from it is the most seducing and pernicious of intoxicants. The tree always exercised on me a great attraction on account of its love of salt air and the beauty of the spots it always likes to live in. On that day, as we hailed them with delight, I had in my mind one noble specimen which I hoped yet to see again, standing up fifty feet above a lonely sandspit, where it braves the onslaughts of both monsoons, and listens for ever to the ceaseless breaking of the waves; an old friend under whose chattering canopy I have slept, and which has been a faithful landmark for many miles at sea. Even the Siamese showed something like emotion at seeing again the well-known forms, and the first man on the bank top shouted back: 'Here, quick, come and look; there are *Ton Tuns* just as in Bangkok.' And up they rushed. Cart tracks spread in all directions before their delighted eyes; the far-off groaning of *kwien* wheels came slowly down the wind, to show that we had really left the mountains and had now the plains before us. They all grew very cheerful, it seemed so homelike to them, and in three days all our sick but two were fit to travel. The glorious width and distance of the great plain, the vast expanse of sky, with the cumuli massing for the rains around the wide horizon, streaked with the thin black lines which are so ominous to the traveller, all seemed to mean change from the torrents and hills and fevers of which

they had had enough. Change for the better or for the worse, man does not always care, so long as it be relief from the burdens of the past. Four months earlier we had been equally glad to leave the plains and climb the first ridges of the hills; a month later, we should be thankful to be able to wipe the whole Korat plateau from our memories; but still we looked forward to it, for so mercifully is life ordained.

Nawng Kai is a scattered township with a population of some 5,000 people, and is the most important place between Korat and Luang Prabang. It owes its existence to the downfall of Wieng Chan in 1828, since which it has been the chief Siamese administrative post of that portion of the Me Kawng, and has more recently become the chief distributing centre of the northern end of the plateau, resorted to by the Chinese traders from Korat. A hundred boats or so per annum used to pass between Luang Prabang and Nawng Kai, so that a portion of the trade of the former place found its way south by this route; but few of the cargoes exceeded 20 cwt., and this trade has been reduced of recent years.

The Commissioner, Prince Prachak, was a brother of the King, and a man of considerable energy; he dabbled in chemistry, and was a devotee of Reform with a big R. He was extremely affable to us, and thoroughly bore out his reputation for kindness to those who pass by his far-off post. A lonely life, with no one of sufficient rank to be an equal, is inclined to encourage a somewhat lordly manner in the Siamese, as in other persons. In Siam the rank of an official is apt to be considered to be in proportion to the loudness of his voice when speaking to inferiors; and thus a rather undesirable habit is sometimes acquired by high officials of shouting at their guests. A reply of any length is often hardly listened to; the thoughts seem soon to wander at the sound of another voice, and the speaker may be suddenly interrupted by the loud-voiced introduction of

some quite new subject. Occasions once or twice arose when it was necessary to meet loud-voiced officials on their own ground; I always found that the real article made by 'coaching' crews upon the Cam had more lasting power than any other. Prince Prachak, in accordance with a fashion which has been a good deal adopted in Siam, wore blue spectacles. Behind blue spectacles and a moustache some persons find the protection they often need. Hide a man's eyes and cover his mouth, and it will be found very difficult to gauge the percentage of truth or of prevarication his words contain. Some Siamese officials, if tried on the evidence of their eyes, would inevitably be condemned to be hanged. To such persons blue spectacles are most useful, but others should avoid them, as there is that about them in the East which suggests dishonesty, and may thus give quite an erroneous impression.

Some of the Commissioner's reforms savoured, I thought, rather of zeal than of discretion; but I had not the opportunity of saying so. The Prince was anxious to persuade the Lao to settle down and take to trades, and to work steadily in the evenings instead of wasting their time in *ken*-playing and love-making. Nothing undoubtedly could be more desirable, but the people could not be brought to look on the matter from the Prince's point of view, and still continued their desultory life—ploughing, planting, and reaping as the seasons pass; washing for gold in the sands, with trips into the forest now and then, and a caravan journey to Korat, or a fishing expedition to *catchpla buk*; each and all weaving their own silk garments, building and thatching their own cottages, hollowing their own boats, mending their own carts, and making and tuning their own *kens* for the sunset hour. The Prince has every right to be disappointed with them, but such reforms take time, and do not bear being rammed down people's throats. But his Highness had so much of interest to disclose that

he had little opportunity for listening to the views of other persons.

During our stay at Nawng Kai we had some charming rides about the country. I was lent a powerful cream-coloured pony of 13 hands, though it is rare that the Korat breed exceeds 12 or 12½. We saw a good deal of these ponies afterwards, and all they want seems to be the introduction of some new blood, better looking after, and more careful training. The mares seem, as a rule, very small, and I saw few exceeding 11½ hands. The general characteristics of the pony of the Korat plateau and Siam are: small muzzle, large jowl, prominent forehead, thick short neck, good chest, hog mane, straight shoulders, clean legs, upright pasterns, small feet, barrel very large for size of legs, greatest rotundity behind (the girth thus being very far forward galls the elbows), round, rather weak quarters, sloping croup, tail very low, usual colour chestnut, also black, white, and grey. They are never properly trained, and have hard mouths; though small, they are very wilful, and the native method of balancing on a cushion and having a string bridle leaves the pony every chance of success in a difference of opinion with his rider. They are very much addicted to sore backs, probably owing to the friction of the very hot and badly padded cushions used as saddles. The only grooming they ever get is at the journey's end, when the rider doubles up each leg in turn under the pony, giving it an upward jerk at the highest point to which it can go. The pony is then at liberty to water, feed, and stable himself where he can, and, being a sociable creature, he generally tries the cook's quarters, or the inside of a bullock cart where the dirty plates are put.

Without the little ceremony referred to he would next day profess his total inability to take his rider half a mile—except in some parts of Siam, where even this small attention is omitted.

The pace which is cultivated is a kind of run ; it is very rapid, and the word ' pitter patter ' quickly repeated best gives the sound on a hard track. This pace is seldom maintained for more than 300 yards at a time by the native rider, and a short walk follows. Rising from the saddle is quite unnecessary.

The beast thrives equally well on the rank grasses of the rainy season and the burnt-up remnants in the dry ; he prefers young bamboo sprouts to any other vegetable, and it is only going through deep forests such as the Dawng Praya Yen that he is unable to find something to suit him. A little unhusked padi mixed in water takes the place of oats, and is given him when hard work is on hand.

The average pony saddle from home or from the Straits was invariably too large, too heavy, and too hot for these little animals. Moreover, when, as often happened, one was travelling without ponies, it was an incumbrance. The last few years I adopted the simple plan recommended to me by my brother of the Bays, of a saddle consisting simply of a saddle-tree (with ' dees ' for forage bag, field-glasses, &c.) with stirrups attached, a surcingle (about six inches wide), and a rug folded to one-eighth its size, fitted with pockets for the points of the saddle-tree on each side of the withers. I found this light and suitable to the smallest pony or the biggest horse, and it did not gall the very susceptible backs of the former. In addition, it was easily carried or stowed away, and the rug was always useful. For bridle the simplest headstall of leather, with ring snaffle of small size, is the best. One long rein of webbing—the best material for the tropics—was made adjustable in a variety of possible ways.

The best ponies in height and pace come from Chonlabot and Rayawng, and prices vary much in different parts of the country. With time to pick and bargain a very fair

pony can generally be got for 60 ticals (4*l.*), and the best ponies seldom exceed 120 (8*l.*) The native pays from 30 to 40 ticals (2*l.* to 2*l.* 13*s.*) for the ordinary undersized creature with which he is content, while the officials often pay fancy prices and manage to secure the pick of the country. A really domesticated pony is thought a great deal of, and an owner on one occasion flatly refused to sell me an animal for which I offered a good price, because, said he, 'it is like the cat, and I am sure the children would cry if I sold it.' Even raising the price could not alter his decision. It is at least pleasant sometimes to meet a man who does not want to make money over a horse.

The town lay along the right bank of the river shaded by banana and betel palms, and here and there a small *Wat* stood back in its enclosure. Many of the houses were squalid and untidy, and pariahs and pigs thrust themselves upon our notice. It was apparent we had reached the Chinaman again, and that the people we were among were more sluggish and unenterprising than our highland Lao, bearing, in fact, the brand of the plain's muddy monotony upon them.

There were some thirty shops in the main street kept by Chinamen and fitted with a very small assortment of goods entirely English, except the matches, which are Japanese, and the paper umbrellas, which are Chinese, and are both fashionable and useful, some cotton piece goods, a little cotton yarn, some nails, shoes, sandals, belts, and odds and ends. I was mostly interested in the headgear, my pith sun hat being ruined by the rain and my felt one having been lost overboard in our last big squall. I obtained a rather successful high-crowned steeple hat of Puritanic type which would have been most becoming a few centuries ago. I was also looking for some shoes, my last pair being nearly done, but no shoes that I could wear

could be had for love or bribery. The few who wear shoes in Siam are neatly made people with the smallest feet and hands imaginable, and, though by no means a big man, I could never wear either the shoes or rings or bracelets of the Siamese. Though their feet are always broad, as barefooted people's should be, and the toes are developed as distinct and subtle as the fingers of the hand, they still take the smallest footgear. In fact, even the biggest of the jungle people are most neatly built; they have neither the heaviness of the Chinamen nor the awkwardness of the Ka Che; they seldom run to flesh, and in physical development, with their cleanly chiselled muscles, they are fine specimens of manhood. Looking at their feet as they crossed a slippery tree-trunk high above a stream, how idiotic seemed the common pointed boot of Bond Street! Being reduced for the next three hundred miles to the native methods of walking—for I had to save my remaining pair, already nearly done, for state occasions—I can attest to its undoubted advantages from many points of view. The native mountain-sandal with a strap between the toes is impossible to any but the most hardened feet, and the Siamese with me, not being accustomed to it, could never use it. The only time when a shod man really has the advantage is over sharp rocks, or sunburnt sands, or when the elephant flies or leeches are particularly bad. The wear and tear on the rough tracks and alternate immersion and drying of one's footgear is ruinous, as five soleless pairs of shoes did testify.

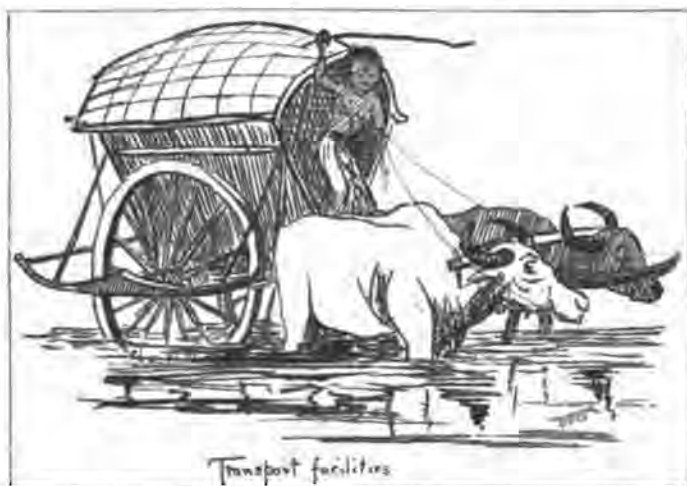
Having finished our business with the Commissioner, we packed our carts and started southward on the 20th. The *kwien*, the cart of Siam, the ship of the jungle lowlands, is a most admirably adapted contrivance. There is ne'er a nail or metal fastening used in the construction, for the jolting and straining are too great for any metal to

stand. The body of the carriage, like a cariole in shape, is light and shallow, and ribbed somewhat like a boat; the intervening spaces are filled in with plaiting, and the pole which spreads below it forms a double backbone to the whole concern.

The wheels, which are broad and heavy, are made of four or more felloes dovetailed together, and have very long wood naves to distribute the weight on the hardwood axle-tree. Of the latter, three or four spare ones are always carried for a long journey, and the outer end, which emerges from the box of the wheel some three feet from the side of the car, is inserted in an outrigger, which is lashed to cross-pieces fixed under the two ends of the car. The weight is thus distributed on many parts, and the danger of collapse of a particular fastening greatly minimised. The inner end of the axle-tree is fitted and works in a socket of solid wood under the body of the car. If either axle goes with the stress of a sudden dive into a deep hole or a jump over a fallen tree, the ends of the outrigger are unlashd and pulled outwards until the axle-tree is out of the socket; the damaged axle is drawn out of the wheel, and a new one shaped and put in place with the loss of only a few minutes. The lashings of bamboo strip are wonderfully pliant and elastic, and hold where no other fastening could do so. The outriggers are turned up at the fore ends like sleigh runners, to prevent being dug into the deep mud, and possibly damaged, and to give a lifting motion to the cart. The carts carry from three to five hundredweight, according to the state of the road. A very large cart, of the sort used, in Lower Siam for buffalo, where there are not many oxen, has wheels eight feet in diameter. A plaited roof, which varies in shape according to the part of the country, is a necessary adjunct, and keeps the rain out very well, making the cart, if it is not full, a very good sleeping berth.

Two of our people were still unable to walk, and consequently travelled in great style, lying each in his cart, and making up the number to fourteen.

The distance to Korat is 210 miles, and occupies traders from a fortnight to three weeks according to circumstances, but on the second day at Hue Luang, where we camped through a terribly wet night, one of the best of our men became so ill that I decided to push on with a couple of men and three carts lightly laden, and



to try and get him into Korat, where I thought we might obtain medical assistance of some kind.

Hence it came about that my little party pushed on, leaving the others to follow more comfortably. The country was not interesting, and we had no work to do in it but to cross it; the rains were in full blast, the streams rising rapidly, and the *nawngs*, or wide open swamps, were becoming impassable morasses, defended by hosts of elephant flies, mosquitoes, ticks and leeches, which drew blood

have delighted the souls of the practitioners of a more rapid mode of travel. We twice obtained new relays of oxen, but the speed was melancholy. Sometimes three hours passing a stream thirty yards in width, carrying the carts over our shoulders; sometimes floundering in mud up to our knees, across a vast plain of tall grasses, to the next firm ground two miles away; at others trying to catch the oxen, who seemed to know what they were in for—such was our nine days' pastime. We made an average of twenty-one miles a day, although, owing to the state of the tracks and the innumerable interruptions which make travelling in Siam such a delightful uncertainty, it meant often being on the move for over twelve hours to accomplish it. My pony had the usual Siamese sore back, and brought up the rear; he could not be amiable. Poor little Rover, who had very small legs to carry his big head at that time, swam most of the distance, and had a ride occasionally when nearly exhausted. The two boys walked pluckily all day, and never failed to chaff the passers-by—an employment for which, I admit, I was not myself prepared.

The drivers were good fellows, and cut the firewood for camp, and were always ready to go on at any time of night, when the blurred moon came out a bit; but the heroes of the hour were those patient-eyed little oxen, who toiled so silently, while the great blood-sucking flies settled black upon their humps, and the leeches left them bleeding copiously below. In the heaviest rain we had to stop, because in rain the oxen lose their pluck and gall their necks; then they would be turned loose to get a hurried feed, and we lay down to get a sleep beneath the carts.

But in the midst of it, all the sick man, who was suffering from abscess of the liver following on a long dose of malarial fever, began to our astonishment to mend; and it dawned on me that the unceasing and almost unbearable

jolting of the cart he lay in had very possibly been the means of freeing him of the abscess. At all events, on our arrival in Korat he was alive, and in a short time was nearly recovered and able to go on down to Bangkok. But though we were very pleased with ourselves, and the carts we met were much astonished at the rate we had come in the state of the weather, we were none of us anxious to repeat the performance under similar circumstances.

The plateau we had crossed averages about six hundred feet above sea-level, and consists of a series of low-lying swamps bordering on the tributaries of the Nam Mun and other rivers flowing in the Me Kawng, which are separated by low ridges of laterite covered with a fairly open shadeless forest of small hardwood trees, known as *kok* by the Siamese. The north slope of these ridges is drifted with blown sand, which is brought up over the ridge by the southerly winds which most prevail.

Between them and the swamps occurs the low bamboo scrub, which here accommodates itself to the salt districts. In these places the salt rises as an efflorescence into the top earth, which is scraped off to a depth of some inches, and placed with water in vessels. The brine is run off, and the water evaporated in boiling pans. The work is generally carried on after the rainy season, but the product is coarse and bitter.

On favourable situations near the streams, and as a rule some way from the main trail, the villages will be found among the padi fields and gardens. To these places it is necessary to go to buy food, and get the headmen out to help the carts across the stream, if it be deep. There are seldom a hundred houses in any of them, there is little to be bought, and generally the Lao Pung Kao seem far inferior to their western brothers in the refinement and comforts of life.

At the fords along the stream banks a belt of magnificent forest usually grows, where the mighty Ton Yang and Ton Takien stand in splendid groups. The men and oxen camping in their shade across the ford seem like dolls, and make one realise the huge scale on which things are; the stream which flows quietly thirty feet below looks innocent enough until the oxen reach it, and then one sees it is a powerful rushing torrent. In the dry season it is an empty sandy bed, with a few stagnant pools up and down its course; in the rains, a muddy deluge overflowing the surrounding country.

At one time of the year without water for thirty miles, at another drowned to a depth of several feet, the Korat plateau is a territory of such extremes that irrigation and cultivation generally are carried on under much greater difficulties than in any other part of Siam I have seen. Dr. Morrison imputes the backwardness of the people to their own apathy and indolence, and not to the fault of the country, which, he says, 'is undoubtedly rich and capable of great development.' While entirely agreeing with him as to the indolence of the Lao Kao, of whom I have no very great opinion, I think, on the other hand, that the country has had a great deal to do in shaping their character. All plain dwellers lose some part of their earlier mountain energy, though they often acquire industry of a new and more civilising kind. But the Lao Kao of the Korat plateau seem to me to have lost much of the vivacity which is still found in the people of the same race in Luang Prabang, and to have failed in acquiring anything in its place. Reared from childhood among their sleepy buffaloes and patient cattle, toiling slowly through life in seas of mud and clouds of dust, they must become different in character to those who drink clear running water and climb thousands of feet to reach the neighbouring village.

The amount of salt in many parts of the soil of the plateau makes it inferior for padi growing, and large numbers of villages are thus made desperately poor. The beautiful villages which are here and there to be met with on better land have no extended market to grow for, and consequently cultivate but sparingly. As long as there is no outlet for the Korat plateau, these villages, when a few caravans from the salt areas are supplied, have no incentives to energy beyond their own simple wants. Cut off from the outside world by the belt of the Dawng Praya Yen, a little barter and interchange among themselves is not unnaturally all they understand. Their rice and salt, their cattle² and their hardwoods, silks, and jungle spices, sticklac, cardamoms, tobacco, hides, and horns are exchanged among themselves, or sold to the few Chinese traders who care to risk the laborious cross-country journeys and the caravan trail through the forest belt.

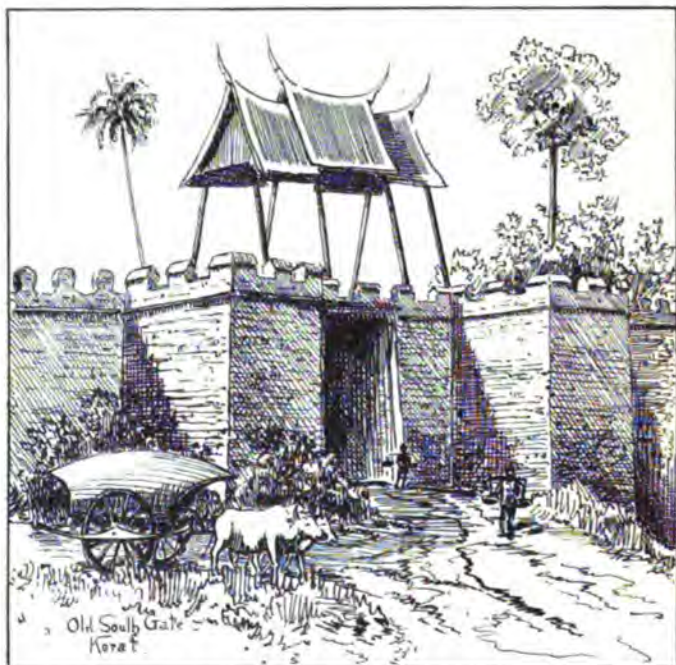
Communications are, on the whole, worse than in any other part of the country. Distances without water in the hot season almost impossible to man and beast, bogs and unbridged torrents in the rains, no *salas*, or rest-houses, along the trails, dacoity not yet put down, and the least possible official recognition of the importance of encouraging trade: such are some of the causes of the lethargy of the people—attributable, first of all, as I think, to the nature of the country, and secondly to the incompetence and lack of interest of the official class.

Korat, the trade centre of the whole plateau, has only 5,000 inhabitants; Ubon, the other great town of this portion of the country, 4,000. As Dr. Morrison truly observes, 'more people live in a city in China than in a whole province of Eastern Siam.' The places called *Muang*,

² In the future a large export of buffalo and oxen may be looked for, as the plateau is eminently suited

for rearing cattle, and it has already a good reputation in this respect.

or 'town,' do not exceed a couple of hundred houses as a rule. Disease—fever, smallpox, dysentery, and lately cholera—seems, so far, to have kept down the population, which one would have expected to show signs of increase since the cessation of the old perpetual warfare.



The total value of the export and import trade of Korat cannot much exceed 120,000*l.* a year.³ It is

³ Mr. Black estimates the total at 200,000*l.* This, however, seems an over-estimate for the plateau, and, according to his estimate for the whole Me Kawn Valley (250,000*l.*), only leaves 50,000*l.* for Luang Prabang and the Lake

Provinces (*Geogr. Journ.* vol. vii. No. 5). Dr. Morrison calculates that the number of bullocks leaving Saraburi with imports for Korat do not exceed an average of sixty a day, and putting the total population at a million, and allowing that

entirely carried on from Korat by pack bullocks through the Dawng Praya Yen to Saraburi, which is a few hours by boat from Bangkok. The journey of ninety miles occupies from ten to thirteen days, and the cost of carriage is about 10*l.* per ton, notwithstanding which the Chinese still contrive to make a profit.

Korat is surrounded by a high brick wall built on an earthwork, and by a wide moat outside. It is less than a mile each way, and two main roads intersecting one another near the centre join the four great gates. The gates were picturesque structures, but the upper parts being built on the usually horizontal cross-beams, which time and exposure have decayed, they have nearly all had to be pulled down to save the heads of the populace, and with Siamese regard for a certain form of economy—and the approbation, perhaps, of some antiquaries—they have not of course been rebuilt. The town itself is like a sink, deep inside its wall. Water is brought into it from the Klong Takron some way above, and is led under the Chinese quarter, with what result to its purity may be imagined, and brought through the walls to be distributed in little ditches to the various patches of jungle which flourish all through the city. None of this water ever escapes at the lower, or eastern, end; it is evaporated, or it filters through the sandy soil in course of time, in either case leaving its refuse and impurities in the heart of the town. When there in 1896 with Dr. Morrison, it was possible to

a third of these spend four ticals, or 8*s.*, in the year on imported articles of clothing, he has shown that the imports under this head could not exceed 50,000*l.* Another 10,000*l.* may be added for hardware, which is used less in the plateau than in Lower Siam, owing to its weight and difficulty of packing, which make it unsuitable to

caravan trade. Of the imports about one third may be said to be sold about Korat itself, one third to be taken east to Ubon and the Me Kawn, and one third to be distributed along the Nawng Kai trail. The exports, including cardamoms, cattle, silk, and skins, can hardly amount to another 60,000*l.*

understand how it was that in the rains of 1893 we had found the town a series of unsavoury swamps.

Pra Prasadit, the Commissioner, is one of the men in whom one can place one's hope for the future of Siam. Bad as the condition of people about Korat is now, it was much worse before he came; and hampered as every good man in the country is likely to be, he has done a great deal for the province. His conversation was quiet and modest, he was up in all home politics, and conversed with good sense on many things: every one who had to deal with him was cheerful in demeanour, and the offices clean and tidy. But he certainly requires a municipal engineer.

The immediate neighbourhood of Korat has a fairly large population of *Lao Klang*, or 'Middle Lao,' as the Korat Lao like to call themselves. They are hardly to be distinguished in reality from the lower *Lao Kao* of Ubon or those of Nawng Kai. There are a number of flourishing villages with good padi, and fruit, land along the tributary streams of the Nam Mun. This river, to which the whole plateau south of lat. 17° may be said to drain, is probably the largest affluent that enters the Me Kawng on the right bank. It is navigable during seven months of the year for craft drawing four or five feet from Ta Chang, twelve miles from Korat, for two hundred miles to Pimun, at the top of the fifteen miles of rapids over which it goes to seek the Me Kawng. During the height of the rains these rapids become navigable for a couple of months.

A twin-screw launch of fifty feet in length and twelve feet beam was run on the river by a Siamese trading company in 1891-93, and the arrival of the railway at Korat was looked forward to with the greatest eagerness. It was a plucky venture, and deserved success. The great difficulty was found to be caused by the snags, and an increase in the trade would have made it worth while to clear the river channel systematically. Dug-outs are used

all along the course of the river and on all its affluents, and the people rely largely on these waters for their fish; but the winding courses they follow in their deep beds make them too slow to be the ordinary highways of the country.

The great industry of Korat is weaving *panungs*, which are of a peculiar shot silk, and are made in most tasteful shades of green, pink, or other colours. As usual, the only way to buy them is to let it be known you wish to see them, and gradually the women folk come round with



large selections. You might walk about and seek for them for ever in the shops.

The Chinese quarter is outside the western gate, where the main trail comes in from Saraburi, and the scene when a caravan of a couple of hundred oxen is arriving, with their great bells clanging over their humps, and another caravan is being packed to leave, is animated enough. It is said that Chinamen in Siam, like Englishmen in the States, get the best girls to marry them; for they have more to offer, and treat the ladies with more consideration than do the men of their own nationality.

The Chinese in Korat build a rather curious kind of

dwelling of large mud-bricks; the corners are built up a distance of three or four feet above the mud roof, and a wide thatch roof is placed on these covering the whole. The result is a cool substantial building, with an inner store room fairly safe against thieves, where there is more secure and more ample stowage room than in the wooden houses of the country. Beyond this they are not so good, as living on the ground is unquestionably less wholesome than living on piles six or ten feet above it.

Having finished our work with Pra Prasit, and rested all our party, we started one ominously fine hot morning for our last short march to Saraburi, only ninety miles away. All the people were looking bright in their clean, smart coloured *panungs*, and were in high spirits at the thought of home. In ten hours they were not recognisable for the same people. The sun was setting—at least, it was getting dark—thick clouds covered the whole sky, and discharged their contents in volleys at us. We were mostly indifferent to the rain, for we were up to our necks in water. A far line of trees lay ahead of us black against the sky; once there we should be on land. The thing was to get there, and to take the carts. The oxen swam, and the men hoisted the carts shoulder high; fortunately, the water reached the noses of only the shortest.

A few acted as marks to keep them going right. A fire was lit on the far shore as a beacon, and to warm the men as they arrived. Now and then a mark disappeared, when he slipped off a shallow place into twelve feet of water. At midnight we had all reached the nearest monastery, the carts arriving by degrees; some rice was boiled, but only three or four could eat it, the rest lay sleeping like logs.

The next day we obtained pack oxen, and put our sick men, who were now fairly strong, on ponies. We outflanked the floods by moving to the higher land on the

edge of the forests to the southward, rejoining the main trail subsequently at Ratbukao, where we were fortunate enough to find a *tumnisp*, with a good roof on it, the only one on the trail. Here we were delayed three days, the *klong* ahead of us having risen ten feet in the night. We could not go back, as the water was out behind us. As rice and quinine were giving out, and men were knocking up with fever, we spent the second day building a bamboo raft and rigging rattan ropes across the current. Big trees and branches came tearing down the stream like huge missiles. The water kept rising all the time, and when our ship at last started on her trial trip, all the lines carried away, and she went off down stream, tearing through the tree branches, and eventually breaking up. We returned home to our supper bruised and weary, and rather tired of the cold water we had been working in; but the lessening size of the rice bags warned us we must try again. Next morning we started for a spot some miles higher up, made a new raft, and by nightfall had it ready for sea. The rain ceased, and at daybreak our beautiful raft was blocking the trail, which lay clear before our rejoicing eyes.

Chantuk is a miserable village of a hundred houses; even the monastery had no *sala*. But we got some rice and *pla heng*, and heard about the wonderful raised roadway they were making for the rail at Pakprio, and of the extraordinary fire-carriage being erected there. The two runners with the mail bags came in and had supper: they were worn and done up, and said the *Tang Luang*, or the Great Trail, in the forest, was up to the thighs in mud and nearly impassable; two men dead of fever lay in the track. Soon after, three new arrivals came in, one a woman sobbing; they had left the bodies of two comrades in the trail, too frightened of the spirits to bury them. Hearing that the upper route to the southward was in

better condition, we next day pushed on for Ban Kanong Pra, in the steamy heat of the morning and the pouring deluge of the afternoon.

The oxen, floundering in the heavy mud and with sores and coughs from the steady rains, had a miserable time, and did not reach their destination until late at night. We reached the village at dark, and the good people put themselves out to accommodate our party.



The *Nais* and I climbed into a little newly built rice store on high piles, which we exactly fitted. It was clean, and we lit a fire below to warm it. We got bowls of hot rice and dried shrimps, and with cigars from my haversack had an enjoyable evening, listening to the din of the rain from our bedding of dry thatch. For the next three days it did not cease, and we struggled through the twilight of the soaking forest, and camped as best we could. The incessant thunder of the pitiless downpour on the leaves,

mingling all night with the groans of the sick men, the uneasy dreams of ever-rising torrents and scantier rations, the feverish longing for the dawn, the dreary welcome streaks of day, the long chill hours splashing through the dripping mists, the breathless battling at the fords, and the necessity of appearing to enjoy it all—such are the main features of travelling in the rains. No one who has been privileged to go through it can forget the pluck and patience of the native character, or can come out of it without the loss of many prejudices, and the acquirement of a new and ineradicable respect for the men who bore it with him.

At the outer edges of the forest we passed numbers of pack caravans camped to await the improvement of the weather and subsidence of the streams, and to save the oxen and preserve their goods. The panniers are placed in rows, forming the sides of a laager, into which at night the animals are driven for protection from tigers and dacoits. Each pair of panniers is covered by a thatch, and at night the caravan men creep in on the tops of the panniers, and under the *bai lan* covering. For days at a time they often have to wait until the streams subside or the rain ceases. Our own oxen were cut off within a dozen miles of Pakprio by the sudden rising of a stream we had crossed a couple of hours before; and there they camped two days, while my people lived in the *sala* and dried one garment at a time, and I listened to my own tongue again from the lips of a kind-hearted Scotch engineer, who gave me a veritable bed to sleep in and his own ample clothes to wear, my own at this time being more practical than ornamental.

The first locomotive in this section was being erected, and my men *wai*-ed to it on their knees as they passed, in the way they would to any being whose power they feared and respected. It was not a little startling to witness the

simple old-world people of their own accord giving the sign of respect and submission to the great power which, they seemed to feel, lay in that dignified creation standing there so silently. Little, perhaps, they knew the appropriateness of the act to that conqueror of worlds—steam-power.

Our short ninety miles had taken us sixteen days; during the time it was tantalising to think that the railway might one day take us through in half as many hours.

At Prakprio and at Ayuthia, which we reached by boat, we had the first news of approaching troubles on the French frontier. As we made our way down river, the comparatively large population living along the banks of the Nam Sak, and subsequently of the Me Nam, contrasted markedly with the insignificant and scattered villages and towns we had been passing through for the last five months. The news of troubles which we had heard were confirmed as we passed down to our landing at the lower end of Bangkok by the presence of a French gunboat, and there once more was the white ensign flying out from the poop of H.M.S. 'Swift.' It seemed like home-coming in reality to see this bit of British territory, so clean and smart, after all the miserable squalor of our journey; it was quite exhilarating to look at her. The old 'Swift' is gratefully remembered by many a banished Bangkokite for the refreshing breeziness she introduced among us in the months that followed, and no ship's complement ever left more grateful memories behind them. The smartness and efficiency in which Captain Kirby and his officers kept her made her the admiration of the French ships on the station.

Nearly three years later it was my lot to go up to Korat again, and in several ways the contrast to the former trip was very great. My object was the Chantuk copper

mines, which were under water when we came down in 1893; I was obliged to go on to Korat to get the necessary instructions to the village head-men from the Governor there. ✓

Dr. Morrison, the Australian traveller, was in Bangkok at the time, and proposed starting by Korat for his long journey to Yunnan. Although a short time previously I had drunk his cocoanuts, and taken the welcome that was meant for him at Chantabun, through being mistaken, to my glory, for the famous doctor, he seemed to bear but little malice on that account, and for ten days or so we became fellow-travellers.

We were able to go all the way to the King's summer residence at Bangpail along the line. Trains could run part of the way, but, owing to the sinking of the abutments of some of the bridges, trollies had to be used for the rest. The unprofessional observer could not but be struck by the small amount of bed-ballast on the line, and six inches seemed certainly very little for a country of such heavy rainfall, and, in fact, every heavy rain has necessitated such extensive renewal of ballast that in all eighteen inches has been laid down in many places.

With so little ballast as six inches and only fifty-pound rails, no fast running will be possible. The engines, however, are a cheap design, not likely to run fast, being hardly up to their work under ordinary circumstances. They are of two types—two-couple twelve-inch, and three-couple fourteen-inch cylinders for the hill sections. The most expensive part of the rolling stock is the royal saloon carriage and the 'officials' carriage.

The line has been delayed by a good deal of very unfortunate friction between the Royal Railway Department, represented by Herr Betsche, the Director-General, and Mr. Murray Campbell, the engineer who contracted to build the line. The failure of the bridges entailed

enormous additional expense and delay, in transport by river to the higher sections of the line, and prevented the contractor from being able to push all his stores up by the line as it proceeded. The question whether the failure of the piers was due to faulty designing by the Railway Department or to bad construction by the contractor, together with other innumerable questions connected with this, have lately been referred to arbitration.

The extremely spongy nature of the top soil, the great depth to which it reaches, and the numbers of culverts and small bridges necessary to carry off the large quantities of water during the rains have added greatly to the difficulties of construction across the Me Nam plain. As far as Ayuthia the line runs parallel to the river, and though new villages may later on spring up in its neighbourhood, for some time to come the river is likely to monopolise the goods traffic, and to remain the centre of the population, as being a cheap highway open to all, and one to which the Siamese are accustomed by use and tradition.

From Ayuthia (42 miles) it turns eastward to Pakprio (Saraburi), on the Nam Sak, which is the starting-place for all the caravans for Korat, goods coming thus far by water. At Keng Koi (73 miles) the line leaves the river, and can be said to be no longer in competition with water traffic. It begins to ascend the poisonous *terai* through dense low scrub towards the first rock-cutting at Tap Kwang, and from here to Hinlap it is winding its way into the forested hills of the dreaded Dawng Praya Yen. The work above Keng Koi has been attended by such mortality that it has often been almost impossible to procure coolies, and the contractor's staff, owing to deaths and sickness, has been permanently short-handed.

In five years about five thousand coolies and thirty-six Europeans have died from sickness contracted while



A PACKMAN



A YOUNGSTER AT MARKET

engaged on the line, and of these far the largest percentage lost their lives above Prakprio.

The difficulty of getting coolies to face the climate has, especially during the rains, brought work at times almost to a standstill in several of the higher sections.

Railhead was at this time at the eighty-first mile, two and a half miles below Hinlap, and it was a short walk up the Great Trail to the house of Mr. Roy, the Scotch engineer in charge of the section. A large clearing a quarter of a mile square, surrounded on all sides by sharp limestone peaks and dense forest, reminded one not a little of Ka Che clearings in the north. It was dotted by sheds and coolies' houses. When Mr. Roy took charge a twelvemonth earlier the daily mortality was very large; of five hundred picked Chinese brought up by his predecessor, only eighty-six remained on his arrival. When we were there there was a colony of two hundred Chinamen and four hundred Lao in the place, and there was not a sick man among them. The extension of the clearing, and the admission thereby of sun and air, and the introduction of a good water supply by wells and by pipes over a mile long, as well as the gradual acclimatisation of the men, all contributed to this result.

The most remarkable outcome of the advance of the railway, to my mind, was that it was now possible to get men actually to live in the heart of the forest, which for years has borne such an evil repute amongst them that more than four nights spent in it was looked upon as certain death. It was very sad that a few months later Mr. Roy should have succumbed to the very disease he had so ably fought for the people under him.

By a most rare combination of tact, ability, and geniality he had obtained a remarkable influence over the Lao. While every one, whether French on the east or English and German on the west, had been busy cursing

the Southern Lao for their uselessness, Mr. Roy had been using them extensively,⁴ and had come to prefer them in many ways to the Chinese. They have no preconceived notions of how to do things, nor are they ruled by the secret societies in Bangkok like the Chinamen; they are more tractable, and, as Mr. Roy declared, work just as hard. His opinion of them, based on a considerable experience, tends to corroborate the view that the fault does not always lie with the Lao, but often in the judgment of their judges. There they were, the short round-faced Lao Pung Kao whom one has been accustomed to despise; cheerful, chaffing, hardworking, and unwashed, living gaily in their distant camps along the railway clearing sometimes a mile from the nearest water. This section of the line passes through a number of deep cuttings. The very pretty blue crystalline limestone which forms the country rock contains large veins of calcite, and being very susceptible to the percolating action of water is very much fissured by that agency. A number of questions connected with the removal of dangerously fissured rock in cuttings, and with the percentage of 'rock' and 'earth' allowances payable to the contractor, have also been among the subjects referred to arbitration.

Owing to the character of the limestone crags and fissures, steep gullies constantly cut across the line, and a very large number of culverts has been necessary. The water supply is also a source of trouble to the camps along the clearing owing to its total absence in the dry weather, and in the rains to its excessive abundance.

At Muak Lek, half the distance through the forest is more than done, and an easier section begins. The watershed is topped a short distance beyond at the hundred and

⁴ Thus confirming in a remarkable manner Mr. Robert Gordon's remarks on the question of labour,

made in 1891. (*Journ. Soc. of Arts*, No. 1998, vol. xxxix.)

third mile at a height of about twelve hundred feet. The clearing then runs down gentle undulations to the valley of the Nam Takron, which it reaches close to the Great Trail at Pak Chong. From there the line will run parallel with the stream along its left bank in a more north-easterly direction down the Chantuk Valley along the flat-bedded sandstones of the locality, passing out into the plain below Ratbukao, and bridging the stream some miles beyond the Lao village of Si Kiu.

Dr. Morrison and I had followed the railway clearings as far as Pak Chong, enjoying the prodigious hospitality of Mr. Murray Campbell and his agents; while our pack bullocks followed the trail in charge of our servants. We rejoined them at Pak Chong, and, camping at Chantuk, Ratbukao, Songunn, and Kokruat, reached Korat in five somewhat easy marches, our animals, owing to absence of food as we advanced into the dry parched plain, being good only for short stages.

It was curious what a difference there was in the appearance of the country now compared with that when we saw it in the rains in '98. Where we lost our raft, and saw the trees sailing past us, we now walked knee deep across a clear pebbly stream twenty feet below. Where then only the rain roared upon the leaves, we now heard the 'put, put, put' of the Burmese conical, the harsh call of the *nok kacha*, the Chinese francolin, which was very abundant, but impossible to get near, the distant cries of jungle and pea-fowl, the hammer of the woodpecker, the gentle cooing of the doves in the bamboos, and the clear pipe of the Kōil echoing in its peculiar way across the heated valley. When I returned up it ten days later the young green was just sprouting, brought on by the first thunderstorms of the season, and game abounded; we heard barking deer, and at the copper mines we crossed both pig and tiger tracks.

The plain was parched and deep in dust. The *klong*, which at Ratbukao is cool and clear, was now like warm pea soup flavoured by the bodies of the countless buffalo from all the country round who spent the whole day wallowing in it. But we gladly bathed in it, for want of better, along with crowds of monks, and strong Lao girls, who came to carry water to the village. Considering the character of the little water the people have, it is not surprising that skin disease is very prevalent among them, especially when one has seen the state of the inside of their houses. Throughout Siam, though the cleanliness of the person is of the first importance, the dwellings are suffered to be inconceivably filthy. Any old rubbish is allowed to collect that will; no one troubles to remove it. Pillow-coverings are never washed, mosquito-curtains are often black with dirt, and blankets and bedding are allowed to accumulate all the rubbish on the floor. Yet few people can be made more cleanly by being disciplined, and if only some Deputy Commissioners from Burma were able to inculcate their views on cleanliness in a few districts in Siam as they do in Burma, they would effect a revolution in the slovenly households of the people. The trouble is that the ruling classes are as bad as the people in this respect, and consequently the criticisms of a stray European here and there can produce no effect in opposition to the example of the great of the land. Besides skin disease, we found a great deal of smallpox among the children, and we were asked the moment we reached Korat whether we had any vaccinating lymph, of which, like quinine, the people thoroughly appreciate the efficacy throughout the country. Sore throat and fever were also so prevalent that when returning with packmen, as being preferable for light loads and quick marches, I had the greatest difficulty in engaging men at the villages along the trail in place of those I frequently had to send back.

At Sikin a young Danish engineer was just beginning work on the most advanced of the railway sections; his labour was entirely Lao.

The population of the villages along the last sixty miles of line before Korat may be estimated as not exceeding four thousand.⁵

The deep sand of the tracks outside Korat made unpleasant walking; but on our arrival we were comfortably accommodated near the Governor's residence in a nice bungalow among the lotus ponds and betel palms.

The most striking innovation in Korat was the French Consulate.

There were no French subjects, and there was no French trade; but a very charming consulate was being built at a cost of thirty thousand francs to replace the present building occupied by the consul and his interpreter, where we were most hospitably entertained.

Two tricolours floated in the compound, and M. Rochet informed us the flag would soon float over the whole of the country round. We learned further from him that Korat was a Cambodian city of great magnificence until ruined by the rapacious Siamese of late years. Encouraged, doubtless, by our innocent appearance, he also informed us that Cambodian was the language of the country people round Korat, and of the plateau generally, and that Siamese was not understood except in a few villages, being spoken only by the Governor and his followers.

It was difficult to understand what our host took us for. The doctor's bland expression and keen interest doubtless encouraged our informant; but when he asked innocently how it was the consular interpreter spoke only

⁵ Songunn, 300 houses; Sikiu, 250; Chantuk, population of 50; Ratbukao, 70; and a few other villages of similar importance.

Siamese, the flow of our host's original and entertaining information ceased entirely.

The consul's life must be a singularly lonely one, for he has not the distraction of work to occupy his mind. About a hundred registration papers had been sold to Chinamen at eighteen ticals apiece. None of these persons were French citizens, and hardly any had ever been in a French colony or protectorate, or their parents before them. The sale of papers did not reach this figure without considerable advertisement, and the consul has bravely faced the sun and heat in the market-place many weary hours, searching for Chinese to shake hands with and invite round to see him. He seemed so anxious to sell that, I am sure, the doctor's kind heart was touched, and if they had been a little cheaper perhaps we might have indulged in one between us. The French consulate merits support, as any trade development which may haply result from it will be to the advantage of British importers almost exclusively. No other route from Korat can ever compete with the Saraburi route to Bangkok, even disregarding the advance of the railway; and all increase of trade therefore means increase of British trade, unless artificial obstructions such as tariffs are erected against it.

The attitude of mind of the French consul towards everything Siamese was instructive. To him, as to many of the less educated officials of the French Colonial empire, Siamese is synonymous with all that is most wicked and abominable in the universe. It is impossible for some of those afflicted with this mania to speak with moderation on things Siamese, or to deal with them according to the canons which generally rule in political or business intercourse.

The Governor was very sociable, and proposed assisting Dr. Morrison on his way north by sending the best man he

had available a few days' march with him. But the plan had to be given up, owing to the fact that this man was his best French scholar, and could not consequently be spared from the translating work necessary in the office to keep pace with the voluminous correspondence with which M. Rochet daily flooded him.

On March 8 I left the doctor with great regret outside Korat. He was going to start in, for him, comparative luxury. He had sufficient goods with him for an ox cart or so; I believe I am not exaggerating in saying he had for his twelve months' journey a bottle of brandy and a change of clothes; and he had two followers and some notebooks.

My march back to Chantuk was hot and uneventful. The men travelled well, and except for enormous centipedes and scorpions we hardly saw any living things in the parched plain. Some very curious revolving columns of wind crossed our path with a roar, whirling dust, leaves, straw, and twigs into the air, and carrying them in a dark revolving column up to the cloud strata which lay apparently some two thousand feet above us. We met some cheery Lao from the Me Kawng, who had been west to sell their buffalo, with their long *kens* slung on their backs, looking in the distance like guns. We also met a caravan of Shân peddlers with their packs on little wooden 'horses' across their shoulders.

At Sikiu the people seem to be more like the northern Lao, and from our camp in the *sala* the lights could be seen gleaming in the houses, and merry voices and fitful *ken* notes sounded long into the night.

The 'copper mines' are some old trenches dug about twenty years ago at points many miles apart, on what appears to be a great main lode running in a general north and south direction.

It is two fathoms wide and highly mineralised, but

owing to the large amount of water in the workings, and to the very decomposed state of the exposed stuff, some extensive pumping and prospecting will be needed. The mineral seems to occur native and in the blue carbonate, and in the northernmost working near Chantuk the lode seems productive throughout. It is situated in beautiful park-like country which is full of game.

The fact that the people are beginning to lose any of their prejudice against work is largely a result, I believe, of their discovery that, at all events with most Europeans, they will not fail to get paid for it. In the old days the Siamese official, who was the only employer they knew, paid for nothing; and I have frequently heard the greatest surprise expressed when we paid men for work for which we requisitioned them. Once they have put their hands to work, unless it be very wearisome and monotonous, they are keen and cheerful over it. As long as any fun can be got out of it, they will stick to it; and I have often been struck by the way in which men we had the very greatest difficulty in getting could hardly after a bit make up their minds to leave us; and coming away for three days, many of them have continued on for six or more. These men developed in character as we got to know them most curiously, and individuals often reminded me by their peculiar traits of school or college friends. There would be the genial kindly man who helped the others over fords, the wit who kept them laughing, the songster who set them singing, the awkward-looking scholar who knew more Pali than all the others had ever dreamt of, the strapping athlete who had boxed the champion of Bang Mai to a standstill. There were inseparable chums, who were always half a mile ahead talking earnestly, who shared the same tobacco box, and cooked their rice apart from the rest; there were the rivals who watched one another across the

fire to see when they had gained a point; there were the sportsmen and the fishermen; and there were the excitable youngster and the experienced old hand, the favourites of the party. We seldom had a man who was a commonplace nonentity; we hardly ever paid off our men but it was saying goodbye to a lot of friends, who for a short time at all events had made our little moving society very pleasant.

It was somewhat curious on emerging from the forest to contemplate civilisation represented by a drunken engine-driver addressing the world in choice Billingsgate, and attempting to use a spanner on his firemen. It evidently astonished some of the Lao, but an old hand who had become accustomed to it said, '*Farangs* do that constantly; this one is *denti*, very bad; but I've seen lots like that.'

So far as I have been able to observe, the volcano mentioned under the name of Patavi by M. Mouhot, and inserted in some maps at the approach to the ranges east from Keng Koi, has no existence whatever in fact. M. Mouhot elsewhere mistook the results of the solvent action of water containing carbonic acid on calcareous limestones for the effects of volcanic convulsions. It has been frequently stated in my hearing that traces of volcanic action were visible at Kaw-Si-chang, Petchaburi, Patavi, Prabat, and many other places, but in every case the belief appears to be originally founded on M. Mouhot's geological errors, and the fissured and pitted structure, which has encouraged the impression, is merely the common effect of the rain water, of which in Siam there is a very heavy annual fall, on the largely soluble limestones which are the most characteristic formation of Indo-China.

The only undoubted activity of a volcanic character in Siam is to be seen in the Pu Fai Mai already described. A few warm springs occur in places, as at Bangpra,

Renawng, and on the Me Prachi; they are on the whole singularly free from mineral matter.⁶

* An accurate and most carefully compiled report on the Korat Plateau and the Lower Me Kawng trade was written some years ago by Mr. W. R. D. Beckett, H.M. Consul at Chieng Mai. It was full of valuable information which, I

believe, is nowhere else to be found. Unfortunately, owing probably to reasons of a political nature, it has never been made public. Mr. Beckett has the rare gift of making his trade reports interesting as well as accurate and exhaustive.



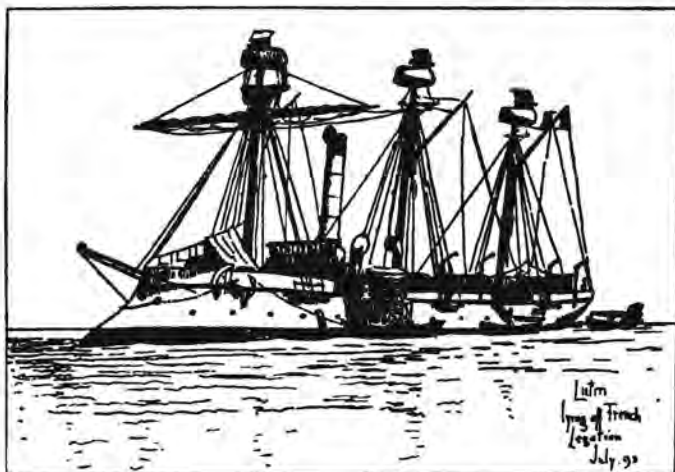
Joint of clapper



Cattle bell



The "Big Ben"
of Nawng Kai



CHAPTER XII

THE AFFAIR WITH FRANCE OF 1893—THE ENGAGEMENT AT PAKNAM, AND THE BLOCKADE

THE official story of the French aggression of 1893 in its various aspects has been told in the Blue Book on the Affairs of Siam, which appeared in August 1894.¹ It falls naturally under three heads. There was the long-planned occupation by French troops of Stung Treng and Kawng on the Lower Me Kawng in April. In this and a subsequent advance from Annam, though it was a purely aggressive action, the British Government, owing to the remoteness of the scene geographically and politically, felt it had no reason to meddle.

Then came the threatening approach of French war-ships to the Me Nam ; the protests of Lord Rosebery, which

¹ An account is also given in *The Far East*, by Mr. H. Norman, but it is strongly coloured by the undisguised anti-Siamese tone

adopted—which is, by the way, curiously inconsistent with that writer's earlier contributions to the *Pall Mall*.

were nearly in time to prevent their entering the river; and the action at Paknam, brought about by the determination of the French Commander to enter the river in face of M. Pavie's orders, and by the culpable folly of the Siamese in opening fire. The outcome of this event were the ultimatum of M. Pavie; the blockade declared on the refusal of the Siamese to accept its terms; and the far more severe penalties exacted by M. Le Myre de Vilers. In as far as this was a quarrel between France and Siam, the British Government again held aloof; but in so far as the measures of coercion adopted by France were liable to injure British interests, Lord Rosebery was obliged to assume a watchful attitude.

The third chapter was that connected with the results of the expansion of the French claims on the Upper Me Kawng, which suddenly brought England and France face to face north of the twentieth parallel. The attempts to reach a settlement by which a buffer State should be defined between British and French influence, desirable as both Governments professed to think it, failed completely. There is no reason, to my thinking, why we should not be neighbours on the Upper Me Kawng, so long as zealous French officials of a certain type, who are too common in Indo-China, can be persuaded to apply themselves entirely to the administration of their own territories, and less to the exploitation of other people's, than has been their wont. Herein, however, lies the danger, and there is no doubt that we shall need to keep a vigilant eye on China in that neighbourhood, if we do not wish to see some further very surprising cessions of territory. For France is bent on pushing the wedge through Chieng Hung to cut us off in Burma from the valley of the Yangtze, and she will force China to give her what she wants there. From a military point of view, the neighbourhood of the French possessions at that point need cause no anxiety. The best thing for

us an enemy could do would be to attempt to march an army, native or otherwise, from Tongkin to Chieng Tung.

The first announcement of coming trouble was made in March 1893, when for negotiations which were already on foot between the French and Siamese Governments, with the object of the delimitation of the eastern frontier of Siam, was substituted a 'claim' on the part of France for the recognition of the 'incontestable' rights of Annam.

Considering the diffidence with which all such claims had up to that time been put forward, and the surprise owing to their antiquity with which they had been generally received, it was not obvious to most persons that a definite policy had been agreed on with regard to them, and that this time they were going to be pushed to the uttermost. They had been outlined in M. Lanessan's book, assiduously propagated by M. Deloncle, and hinted at by M. Waddington, but they had never been defined. It was therefore pardonable if both the British Government and the Siamese mistook the completeness of the change of policy which was veiled under the new claim. The Siamese still imagined that it was a rough-and-ready form of delimitation at which they could 'protest' and 'insist'; and then, before the exercise of force was dreamed of, they won public sympathy by offering to arbitrate. Arbitration was not included in M. Lanessan's programme. By way of reply the Me Kawng posts were occupied. The French demands now put forward were moderation itself to what came later, but they were always confused by references to 'Annamite territory.' Now what precisely was meant by Annamite territory had up to this point not been stated. In 1889 the French Government did not wish to extend their territory to Luang Prabang;² it was thought in more quarters than one that it was still only a question of the Lower Me Kawng. The Siamese did not realise the

² Blue Book on the Affairs of Siam, p. 21.

change which had taken place, and were disposed to continue to defend their position by argument or offers of arbitration. Even as late as June 5, when the capture of Captain Thoreux, who was in command of a French column upon Siamese territory at Kawng, had aroused more feeling, the Siamese were still inclined to take their stand on the legality of their acts from the standpoint of international law. Lord Rosebery's advice had been consistently to the effect that it was important to avoid a breach of friendly relations between the two countries, and in view of this fact, and of affairs as they developed in May and June, it was astonishing that the Siamese still mistook the temper of the French Government. Their position was on the whole logically correct, but practically it was a great mistake. The language of their replies was a little too supercilious to be dignified, and the tone adopted was the one thing likely to anger the enemy. Many Siamese have complained bitterly to me since that England did not stand by them. Where they acquired the idea that England could embroil herself in an affair which as yet did not concern her, and which, with conciliatory management, could have been settled in a fortnight, I never knew; but I always tried to point out that if Lord Rosebery's advice had been followed, his exertions in the direction of moderation on the part of the French would have had a chance of success.

Inquiries have proved that the Siamese were justified in the capture of Captain Thoreux and in the death of M. Groscurin, to the extent that both were in command of armed forces of a foreign Power which were committing acts of aggression, and indeed of actual warfare, in territories administered by Siam and generally admitted to belong to Siam. The accounts first published detailing the treacherous murder of M. Groscurin were proved quite false at the trial, his own party having been the first to

open fire. It is impossible to blame the Siamese for these acts, or for standing on their defence. But the wisdom of the tone they adopted, irritating as it assuredly was, is more open to criticism. Academic discussion and desultory correspondence brought matters to the end of the first chapter. On July 10 M. Pavie gave notice to the Siamese Foreign Minister that two more French vessels were ordered to join the 'Lutin,' which lay at anchor in the river at Bangkok.

This was a thunderclap. It was obvious that coercion was meant; the pretexts that the British and other Governments had taken the initiative in sending ships, and that they went for the protection of their countrymen, were too transparent. There were one English and one Dutch war-vessel only in the river. There were only three Frenchmen in Bangkok outside the Legation, and one gunboat apiece seemed a high allowance. Three questions were at issue—certain claims by the French Government for compensation for losses stated to have been suffered by French travellers in the interior, caused by actions of Siamese officials; the Me Kawnng frontier; and the incidents of Captain Thoreux and M. Grosgrin.

There is no doubt that the Siamese had every intention of ultimately doing their duty in these matters, and of giving such satisfaction as should, on careful inquiry, seem equitable. But unfortunately, as has too often been the case in business transactions in the past, there seems to have been constant delay on the part of the Siamese, and the willingness to come to a speedy and satisfactory settlement was concealed by the tone in which negotiations were carried on. It is undoubtedly hard that a weak Asiatic kingdom may not argue a question of right and wrong with a first-class European Power on a basis of equality; but it is a fact in practical politics which should not be ignored, however little creditable it may

appear. The small boy at school who argues with a big one is likely to score a kick behind for his 'cheek'; nations are only bigger children, doing it on a larger scale. The tone of the Siamese was largely due to the consciousness of their own right intentions, and they did not understand that they had not in practice given proof of them to the French Government. Thus those who gave the wise, but necessarily unpalatable, advice that it was best to back down promptly made little impression. The attempt to force a settlement on them by the presence of additional ships in the Me Nam aroused a patriotic spirit of opposition among the Siamese which was not unwarranted. M. Pavie in his announcement to Prince Devawongse was straining the treaty beyond its limits in terms which were of the most threatening character. 'L'amiral,' he said, 'insiste beaucoup pour que, conformément au Traité, ce bâtiment [*'Inconstant'*] remonte à la capitale, le Gouvernement lui ayant fait connaître qu'il considèrerait ce fait comme un droit indisputable.' The clause of the treaty runs, 'Les bâtiments de guerre français pourront pénétrer dans le fleuve et jeter l'ancre à Paknam; mais ils devront avertir l'autorité siamoise pour remonter jusqu'à Bangkok, et s'entendre avec elle relativement à l'endroit où ils pourront mouiller.'

The Siamese reply showed that the pretext on which the ship was being sent was groundless, and asked in dignified language that France should not therefore insist on sending her. This request, backed by Lord Rosebery's representations to M. Develle that British ships were not being sent to join the 'Swift' in the Me Nam, resulted in telegraphic orders being sent to stop the 'Inconstant'; she was not even to go to Paknam, the point to which by treaty she was permitted to go, but she was to remain outside the bar. If Commander Bory disobeyed these orders he would be completely in the wrong, and if, further,

he passed Paknam and went to Bangkok direct, as subsequently was found to have been his intention all along, he would be responsible for a clear breach of the treaty, which would put Siam in a far more favourable position.

But on July 11 the Siamese Foreign Office made the unpardonable blunder of 'forbidding' the 'Inconstant' and 'Comète' (which it now appeared was also expected) coming even to Paknam—their right by treaty; and on the next day it repeated the mistake in more peremptory terms, adding that all necessary instructions had been given to the naval and military authorities. While sympathising keenly with the Siamese, it was impossible not to see that such open defiance of France was bound to end in disaster. On the afternoon of the 13th, being Wan Pra, the Buddhist Sunday, I had the curiosity to go sailing in my small yawl to Paknam, to see what was the position of the 'naval and military authorities' there. I went aboard the 'Coronation,' where a good deal of chaff went on about the coming battle, which nobody expected, and for which they were not the least prepared. Of the whole complement no one had ever seen a gun fired except the Commander; the men were fresh drafts from the padi fields, and did not know a cartridge from a projectile. The whole of the crews of the other vessels were in a similar condition, and the forts were manned in the same manner. The armament of the ship consisted of a 70 lb. R.M.L. gun forward, four brass saluting carronades aft, and a five-barrel Hotchkiss on the forecastle head. When I was leaving a message came off from the Commodore to get up steam, as the 'French fleet' was in sight, but it was all regarded as a joke. I went up to the inner fort opposite Paknam and saw the Commander, who had no idea of what was going on outside. When I remarked on the fine physique of the men he had under him, he replied they were good enough, but they had never fired a shot of the big

- guns, and he hoped they might not have to until they had had much more training.

I moored my boat under the fort, and went up by the afternoon train, convinced that the river was not in the least impregnable, as the King had been led to believe, but that, as they would never dare open fire on a first-class Power like the French, it did not really matter.

I doubt if those responsible for the defences ever considered what would happen if they succeeded in sinking a French ship. The whole French nation would have risen with a shout, and vengeance could not have stopped short of the conquest of the country.

On the other hand, if a real defence was intended, it was astonishing that the active loyalty of the brave Danes who, in a fit of enthusiasm, joined the Siamese side had not been recognised by properly granting them commissions, instead of their being allowed to fight as mere adventurers. Moreover, the position of the defences seemed as badly chosen as possible; they involved an initial outrage of treaty rights, and they were so placed as not to be as efficient as they might be. If it was ever intended to destroy an enemy it could have been done most cheaply and efficiently in the narrow channel of the river above Paknam; a few well-laid mines, and three or four guns efficiently served and masked in the attap swamps, would at a range of three hundred yards or so defy all chances of a ship's succeeding in getting by, whatever the circumstances of tide and weather, while it would have imposed on the other party the responsibility of infringing the treaty.

Sitting in the verandah before dinner, the sound of firing to the southward was distinctly audible. It only lasted about twenty-five minutes in all, but there was no mistaking its character. After dinner sirens could be heard in the river, and from the wharf it was evident that two or three vessels had come up with the strong flood tide,

and were turning and anchoring below the 'Lutin,' a manoeuvre which they performed splendidly in the dark crowded stream. The armourers on board the 'Lutin' were very busy; there was considerable excitement, but people soon got sleepy and went to bed, to await events on the morrow.

It appeared that after I left Paknam that day the 'Coronation' and 'Makut' took up their positions inside the barricade on each side of the passage. The French accounts give a large fleet as being anchored inside; but, besides these two, there were only two very old-fashioned gun-flats with a big gun each, and the training barque, lying farther up river, armed with six brass carronades for saluting purposes, which would have looked pretty in my boat.

About 3 p.m. H.M.S. 'Pallas,' lying outside the bar, sighted the 'Inconstant' and 'Comète' coming from the eastward, and they were joined by the 'J. B. Say,' a small local boat running between Saigon and Bangkok. About five o'clock M. Pavie's message was delivered by a Siamese steam launch on board the 'Inconstant.' The captain of the 'J. B. Say' went on board the 'Inconstant' to act as pilot, a second captain, brought especially for the purpose, taking charge of the 'Say' and leading the way with a pilot from the pilot-schooner. Meantime the Siamese harbour-master, Captain Vil, had boarded the 'Inconstant,' according to his orders, with the request that the ships should wait. The Commander, mistaking him for a Dane of the Siamese Navy, was anything but polite, and poor Captain Vil retired over the side, with the parting shot that he was a German, and fought in the war of 1870-71.

The flood tide was very strong and a rain squall was coming up, increasing the darkness of the short twilight. As the ships steamed in, the 'Say' leading, with 'Incon-

stant' and 'Comète' following, two blank cartridges were fired by Commodore de Richelieu at 6.30, and then six or eight shots were fired across their bows.

The ships cleared for action, hoisting big French ensigns at each masthead, and opened fire in return upon the fort at about 6.45. Their first shot fell short in the mud, and all the rest went screaming overhead into the mangrove swamps. Not one man was hit in the fort.

When they began in earnest, the sixth and tenth Siamese shots found their mark, the latter going through the deck and out of the starboard bow of 'Inconstant.' With the strong flood tide under them the ships were doing about 12 knots.

On nearing the obstruction, 'Inconstant' had taken the lead, making a great curve to the northward just before reaching it, and looking as if she would go right into the sunken ships. She passed close to the lightship, at this point practically free of the fire of the fort. The 'Coronation' fired a round with her 70-lb. and then weighed, and, having no time to turn, went full speed astern, approximately on the course marked in the chart. At the second discharge of her big gun the gun-carriage broke through the deck, making it impossible to train the gun any further. The 'Makut' and 'Coronation' had each an European commander and engineer, and, owing to the total lack of training of the crews, these officers were running alternately to the gun to sight and fire it, and then back to the bridge to steer the ship and telegraph to the engine room. As the 'Coronation' and 'Inconstant' converged, the 'Inconstant' had to put her helm over sharply to port to keep clear of the shore; the 'Coronation' had just time to go full speed ahead and port her helm hard over to escape being rammed; she just grazed clear, her ensign staff being carried away by the 'Inconstant,' and all her boats, which had been lowered to give

the 70-pounder a clear berth, were stove in. They heard the command to fire on board from the 'Inconstant,' but owing to their awnings escaped fairly well from the rifle fire directed on them. There were 216 shot marks in the hull; two melinite shells, bursting right inside her, were delivered from the 'Inconstant' when she passed her stern, knocking out the port-quarter for many feet to within three inches of the water-line. 'Coronation' went ahead and dropped anchor; the big gun embedded to starboard, with the assistance of other weights brought over on the same side, kept her injured port side out of water while repairs were effected. The 'Makut's' gunners were just as useless, and the practice made by the Commander running about the ship, assisted by his engineer, was not of the best. She was punished fairly severely, but was able that night to follow up the French ships as far as Bangkolem Point, where she waited for further orders, and was eventually joined by 'Coronation.'

The inner fort saw practically nothing, for night had set in by the time the two vessels reached Paknam. There was five minutes' desultory firing of the wildest kind as they passed that point, but the only person who suffered was an old woman in Paknam, who was killed by a Hotchkiss bullet from the ships. No more shots were fired, and the vessels of course proceeded to Bangkok.

In the meantime the 'J. B. Say' had received one of the 'Coronation's' projectiles just below her water line, and she was quietly run aground in the mud on the east shore, the people being taken off next morning.

The men who stuck to the business best were the three who formed the crew of the machine gun of the 'Coronation.' They had found out how to work it, which was more than their inexperienced comrades had done with the other guns, and so they plied it heart and soul. But having never received instruction in the art of firing or of sighting

it, the captain of the gun had one arm over his head and his eyes shut, while with the other he turned the handle without ceasing.

Curiously, all the pantries in all the Siamese vessels were smashed, and the waste of good whisky was said to have brought tears to the eyes of at least one gallant officer, as he went from one to the other trying to get refreshment.

The loss on both sides is eloquent proof of the wildness of the firing which took place. Considering the material on the Siamese side, it is a wonder that they hit anything, while, taking into consideration the highly trained character of French sailors, it is equally a matter of surprise that the Siamese vessels came off without heavy loss. The French had three men killed and three wounded; the Siamese, fifteen killed and twenty wounded, all by the machine guns in the tops and the rifle volleys at close quarters. Not a soul in the forts was touched.

It must be confessed that Commodore de Richelieu, who had charge of this defence, was given very little chance. His proposition to close the channel finally, by sinking another ship across it, was outvoted at the Council. Notwithstanding his representations, his whole force was made up of a fresh *Wen* of men who had had no training. His requests for proper material for mining and other things had been met by constant delay. The fort was not nearly finished at the time, and, of the three officers there besides himself, only one spoke Siamese; the others were two Danes from the Survey Department who had only just arrived in the country, and who volunteered, not knowing a word of the language. During the action these officers were running breathlessly to their guns in turn up and down half-finished steps and gun-platforms, avoiding pitfalls as best they might, and communicating their orders in languages which none of the astonished gunners understood. A field gun battery added to the din by an accurate and rapid cannonade directed with precision at

the sea. For this target the eager gunners considered sights unnecessary.

The under-officering of the men, and their own lack of training, would have resulted in a collapse of discipline, had fighting been renewed. The crew of the 'Coronation' threatened their commander if he should fight any more, and the crew of the 'Makut' said they were ready to fight ashore, but not in the ships. The commander at the inner fort was fired at the same evening, and, although the men at the outer fort were known to be discontented, no effort was made by the Siamese authorities to communicate with any of these officers as to events in Bangkok, or to support their authority. Without commissions for which they had constantly asked, daily expecting a renewal of attack from the rear, absolutely alone, with their men discontented and on the verge of mutiny, ill with dysentery as some of them were, with their reports and complaints unattended to by their superiors, their lot was not enviable for the next few days, during which time they were loading shells and cartridges, and keeping their night watches, constantly expecting an attack by the enemy, or their own men. Who was responsible for this state of things has never been clearly made out. Perhaps it is as well.

Such was the blunder of July 13. Fortunately its execution was so bad that Siam was saved from the full results which its folly had nearly brought upon it.

The King, with good sense, refused to listen to the advice which urged a renewal of the fighting, and the next day an engagement was entered into by both sides to refrain from hostilities.

Some reports were subsequently spread of the treatment received by the people on board the waterlogged 'J. B. Say,' the morning after the engagement, from the officers of the outside fort, to whom they surrendered, and by whom they were eventually sent to Bangkok in a launch. It was stated that they were roughly handled, and that

their boxes were broken open and rifled of their contents. This was of the character of many of the reports current at the time. The real facts were that the captain, who was taken ashore to the fort, was, as is usual in such cases, blindfolded when taken in. Having lost his keys he requested the Danish officer, on returning to the ship, to break open the box containing his papers, and this was done. On taking leave of the officers, to proceed to Bangkok, he was profuse in his expressions of gratitude for the courteous treatment he had met with at the hands of the commanding officer and his lieutenants.

The action of the 13th put the game into M. Pavie's hands. It was open to the French to say that they had been fired on without provocation, in the exercise of the rights to which they were entitled by treaty. France was aroused, not unnaturally, by the reports which reached home, and demanded instant settlement of the dispute.

An ultimatum was accordingly addressed to the Siamese Government by M. Pavie on behalf of his Government, demanding: 1. The recognition of the rights of Annam and Cambodia on the Me Kawn and withdrawal of Siamese posts. 2. Payment of an indemnity of 3,000,000 francs. 3. Satisfaction for the 'murder' of M. Groscurin, and the attack on French ships at Paknam, etc. The first clause was still obscure enough to justify the request of the British Government for further definition.

One sympathises keenly with the Siamese Government in their difficult position, called upon to punish as murderers and culprits men who had acted under circumstances of war, in accordance with their duties as soldiers. However unwise the reply to the ultimatum with regard to the trans-Me Kawn territory, one could never but admire its general tone. Looking at it from the Siamese point of view, it was impossible to swallow without a word of protest the insinuations contained in it. But it was not a time to refuse anything on grounds

of sentiment; and it was most unfortunate that the reply to the first demand contained a qualification which was tantamount to a refusal of an important part of it. As the province of Luang Prabang was what was nearest M. Pavie's heart, as it was the thing he had been working and waiting for for years, it was impossible that the acceptance of all his other demands would satisfy him, if accompanied by the refusal of Luang Prabang.

In 1889 M. Waddington distinctly stated³ that 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 southward to the Me Kawng, and below that point to make the river the dividing line between the two countries, until it entered the territory of Cambodia.

Relying on this, and on the perpetual assurances of M. Develle that the French Government intended to respect the independence and integrity of Siam, England had looked on at the quarrel on the lower Me Kawng with comparative indifference. But it was now suddenly becoming apparent that the French scheme of aggression included robbing Siam of Luang Prabang, a province which had been acknowledged to be under Siam for the last eighty years, and to which the rights of Annaam were the most ghostly both in point of age and unsubstantiality.

To persons at home it was a surprise; to those who knew the activity and frequency with which French agents, headed by M. Pavie, had been travelling all over that country planting tricolours, and hinting vaguely at the impossibility of the country remaining under Siam, it was but the natural expansion of French claims for which an opportunity had long been sought.

But besides being a matter of serious import to Siam, depriving her as it would of nearly a third of the whole area of her territories, it opened up other more serious

³ Blue Book on the Affairs of Siam, No. 3, p. 3.

matters in the north, for it threatened to bring England and France face to face west of the Nam U. That Luang Prabang could not fairly be included in the term 'left bank of the Mekawng' was implied by Lord Rosebery's instructions to Lord Dufferin of July 20.⁴ But the claim was definitely made by M. Develle to Lord Dufferin on July 22,⁵ and thus the third chapter in the Franco-Siamese question was opened.

The weakness of the French claims to Luang Prabang was lucidly and concisely stated at the time by Mr. Curzon in a first-rate article in the 'Nineteenth Century' of July 1893. He showed that the 'incontestable rights' of Annam to that province were contested by French writers, by French maps, by the history of the last eighty years, and by the admission of the French Government itself. The claims of Siam, on the other hand, were based on actual possession dating from the last century, and by the practical consolidation and active development of her rule during recent years. While Siam had made proposals for friendly discussion and delimitation, and subsequently for a neutral zone pending settlement by international arbitration, France had made no replies but reiterated assertions and forcible advance.

The claim that, because Luang Prabang was tributary to Annam in the last century, it now belongs, irrespective of recent history, to the French, as Lords of Annam, is sufficiently startling, and opens up the widest possibilities in the future of political geography. If Great Britain was ever going to stand in the way of the French advance towards the Burmese frontier, it must have been done then. With the explicit statement of M. Waddington, and the repeated assurances of M. Develle himself at our back, Luang Prabang might have been saved to the Siamese, and our influence in the Sibsawng Punna

⁴ Blue Book on the Affairs of Siam, No. 173, p. 79.

⁵ *Ibid.* No. 185, p. 83.

retained. M. Develle's excuse for including Luang Prabang in the ultimatum, in spite of all that had gone before, was simplicity itself; there was no attempt at justification; 'the ultimatum,' he said, 'having once been published to France and to Siam, it was impossible for the Government, in the excited state of public opinion, to withdraw, or modify it.'⁶ This we apparently accepted, on the distinct understanding that an independent territory should be constituted between the French and Indian Empires later on—an assurance easily given, as it was certain there could be found a way out of it, if eventually thought desirable. It would have been well had we stood out about Luang Prabang as we did about Angkor and Siemrap, which Lord Dufferin may be said by his firmness to have saved to Siam.⁷

Our experiences of the promises and assurances of the French Government in regard to the Siamese question were singularly unfortunate.

We had been assured that the integrity of Siam should be respected, and that Luang Prabang was not aimed at. We had been assured that the 'Inconstant' and 'Comète' would stay outside the river. We had been assured that the rights of third parties would be scrupulously respected; we were practically assured that the French territory should not march with ours; and, subsequently, we were assured that Chantabun would be evacuated 'within a month.'

Yet nearly 100,000 square miles were now claimed of Siam, including Luang Prabang, and the additional concessions extracted from the Siamese by M. Le Myre de Vilers seriously restricted the exercise of Siamese sovereignty over another 3,000 square miles along the frontier. The 'Inconstant' and 'Comète' proceeded in face of orders. The French flag was subsequently hoisted in

⁶ Blue Book on the Affairs of Siam, No. 194, p. 89.

⁷ *Ibid.* No. 248, p. 110, No. 328, p. 171.

our State of Chieng Keng. The position assumed by the French Commissioners rendered the labour of the buffer State commission impossible from the outset. And Chantabun is still occupied, four years after it was to have been evacuated.

It is impossible to accuse the French Government of having intentionally attempted to mislead our Foreign Office. M. Develle's *bona fides* is evident to every one who has read the Blue Book. Circumstances, and the aggressive policy of the Colonial party, headed by such persons as M. Lanessan and M. Deloncle, were too strong for him. The inability of the Home Government to control the ambition of irresponsible officers in the East has been apparent for many years. In Siamese affairs it has been hurried from point to point largely against its will, and has been placed in positions from which it could not honourably retreat. It is easy for eager colonial officials, who have nothing to lose and much to gain, to find pretexts for actions which involve the Home Government in a forward movement. The Colonial press of Indo-China, when not engaged in mutual recrimination, is employed in fabricating the necessary material. The danger of this state of things is very apparent, and the guarantee of the Me Nam Valley has for the time saved it from the *coup* which a certain section of the French colonials even yet hope may one day be delivered against it.

On the receipt of the reply of the Siamese Government to the ultimatum signifying the King's readiness to give up the left bank of the Me Kawng up to the eighteenth parallel, M. Pavie, as was to be expected, signified his intention of hauling down his flag.

In the meantime, although the city itself was full of eight-day troops hastily called out, there was little excitement among the people at large. Holiday crowds went down to look at the French gunboats. The fact

that the English vessels lay above the French, between them and the arsenal and palace, gave rise to a popular notion that they would not allow the Frenchmen to go up for warlike purposes, and people often asked me, 'When are they going to fight, Nai?' This idea, doubtless, was connected with the kind of absurd rumour which, at an earlier stage, went even as far as Paris, that British officers were teaching the Siamese torpedo practice.

By the way of preparing for emergencies, the French vessels festooned their cables up and down their sides to protect the engines and the vital parts, and then painted them over white like the rest of the hulls. The 'Lutin' fitted fighting tops with machine guns to all her three masts, and these produced a greater impression on the Siamese than anything. There is no doubt that for river work of the kind that was expected they would be of the greatest use.

After the firing on the 13th was over Captain Macleod sent up a steam pinnace with small-arm men to reinforce the 'Swift' if necessary, and the 'Linnet's' arrival in the morning had a reassuring effect. The King's proclamation and the mounted patrols in the streets insured perfect quiet in the city, and it is creditable that during the whole of the troublous period not a single instance of lawlessness or violence was known to occur.

On July 24 the French Minister did not hoist his flag, and soon after went down river with the French gunboats, the people along the river remarking casually, 'The King wouldn't let them remain any longer, so they had to go.' They could not cross the bar until the 26th owing to the state of the tides, and they remained at anchor between the forts at Paknam. On that evening, sailing down river, I met numbers of steamers and other craft going out to escape the blockade, which was notified to begin on that day at 5 P.M. Three days' grace was given

to friendly ships to clear, and all ports between Lem Chao Lai and Lem Krabang were included. The greatest confusion prevailed as to the date of the commencement of the blockade, the French Government at home declaring the 31st was intended, and the French officers on the spot enforcing it with, once more apparently, no respect to the orders of the Home Government. While on the 29th the Quai d'Orsay represented that no objection could be made to a French man-of-war entering Singapore, as commencement of the blockade would not have taken place, a British steamer was stopped by French ships outside the bar, thus making it clear that the blockade was already effectual. The Admiral did not arrive until the 29th, and he then issued a revised order of blockade, adding a second zone from Lem Ling to Kaw Samit, thus shutting the port of Chantabun, with three days' grace. Meantime on the 28th the Siamese signified their unconditional acceptance of the terms laid down by France. As a matter of fact, the blockade could hurt no one but the British, whose trade and shipping it alone affected. It would not in any way touch the Siamese, and they yielded, not to the prospect of blockade, but to the consideration that in the long-run they would have to pay the bill, and that every day would make it more exorbitant. One can only say that this resolution had been better arrived at sooner. The fact was that the party of resistance, who had kept a great part of the real truth from the King, received a severe blow on July 13, and the King, to whom that event had been a rude shock, had now awakened to the real character of the crisis. It is not easy for Europeans to understand the difficulty of the position of a monarch like the King of Siam, surrounded by barriers of etiquette and tradition which are well nigh impossible to correct information, as well as by persons whose chief interest is to represent things always as they ought to be, without respect to how they are.

The blockade, which had been instituted without any warning or details as to its character being given to the British Government at a date five days earlier than that notified by the Government in Paris, was continued to August 3. Throughout the naval operations in the gulf the French officers showed an admirable independence of the home authorities.⁸

The period which followed on the raising of the blockade was an important and anxious one. The French Government demanded the two guarantees for the fulfilment of the terms of the ultimatum which have since that date been a perpetual source of irritation: the occupation of Chantabun, and the withdrawal of all armed forces from Battambang, Siemrap, and from a zone of twenty-five kilometres from the Me Kawnng.

On August 20 M. Le Myre de Vilers, the special envoy of the Republic, was received by the King. Thereafter commenced a long period of delays. M. Myre de Vilers complained, not I fear without some reason, that the Siamese did not approach the question in the proper spirit, and were putting him off. The Siamese complained, with as much show of justification, that M. de Vilers' object seemed to be the humiliation of Siam by the forced imposition of further clauses.

The accusation of delay made against the Siamese could only extend to the negotiations. In the important respects of payment of the indemnity and evacuation of the left bank the greatest promptitude was shown. Although the movement had to be effected in the height of the rainy season, all the posts beyond the Me Kawnng were withdrawn by November 11. The Siamese had been similarly accused of delaying the surrender of Captain

⁸ And not a little rashness. But for the forbearance and self-restraint, under what savoured of deliberate insult, displayed by

Captain Macleod of the 'Pallas,' the bottom of the gulf would now be decorated by quite a considerable French armament.

Thoreux, their accusers ignoring the fact that the journey to and from the Me Kawng outposts would occupy a month at least. Whenever delay occurred in the conduct of affairs up country, it could always be traced on inquiry to the conditions of communications, and not to the determined procrastination of the wicked Siamese. It is unnecessary to go at length into the additional proposals which M. Le Myre de Vilers attempted to force down the throat of Siam, and which are given at length in the Blue Book; but it is noteworthy that one of them, Article X., opened up the subject of registration, which has since become the burning question. On the objection of the Siamese it was withdrawn, and was not embodied in the Treaty or in the Convention as subsequently signed on October 3, 1893. Although thus admitted to be indefensible, it has actually, without the support either of international usage or of express stipulation, been put into practice by the French officials from that date to the present time, with the most serious results to Siamese authority and administration in the interior.

The signature of the treaty, and the departure of M. de Vilers, brought a tardy conclusion to the acute stage of the Franco-Siamese quarrel.



CHAPTER XIII

WESTWARD HO—RATBURI—THE SIAMESE—SERFDOM—
KARENS—MINING.

OWING to the dislocation caused by the events of 1893, it was not until the beginning of February that we were able to begin our cold-season field work.

In that month I started westward to inspect the tin mining concession being worked in the province of Ratburi (or Rajaburi), and from there I had instructions to find my way to the tin provinces on the west coast of the Peninsula, 400 miles south.

Some notes on the country traversed have already appeared,¹ but a few additional remarks may, perhaps, be made here.

We first journeyed by the usual cross country waterways and in two tides reached the beautiful Me Klawng River, a clear stream running over a sand bottom beneath the long evening shadows of the tall *ton yangs* and feathered palms. Owing to the higher level and steeper incline of its bed, the tide in the Me Klawng only runs up twenty-five miles or so, as far as Ratburi, and there is a general easterly current through the canals connecting it with the Tachin. Extensive padi lands and fruit plantations lie along its banks, and a large population exists in the three western provinces of Kanburi, Ratburi, and Petchaburi.²

¹ *Geographical Journal*, vol. vi. Nos. 5 and 6.

² The affix *buri* is an old Siamese

word for a town or *Muang* of importance, and is very common in the older cities. ✓

the last of which is the most important, and has since that time been made the seat of a Lieutenant Governor, having jurisdiction over the other two. At the time of our visit the state of affairs in Ratburi could not be worse. We were kept some days waiting for transport, and during that time I went out in the country a good deal, as well as up and down the river sculling, and on all sides Rover and I heard the same story. Dacoity and cattle-lifting were rife; bands of cattle thieves roamed from Petchaburi to Ratburi, and Ratburi to Kanburi, and back again, selling in one province the spoil from the other, without let or hindrance.

'The best head of cattle which I have lost,' a farmer told me, 'are to be found in the Governor's compound. He knows the movements of the robbers, but takes no steps against them unless they omit to pay him his proper share. He remains within his house, and no complainant can get a hearing without paying for it. The detachment of soldiers at the *Muang*? They are the worst of the lot, and for want of pay hire themselves out to any one who wants to pay off grudges. A broken head costs a *salung* (about 4*d.*), and you may get a fellow knifed for two *salung* (8*d.*) at present quotations. Bangkok? No. Any complaints which reach Bangkok are hushed up there. The Governor has interest, and can pay for it. If only the King could know the truth, he would soon stop it.' This belief in the King is met with all over the country: however bad government has been, it is always 'The King does not know,' and it is a shrewd guess at the facts.

Though the energy of Prince Damrong has long since brought about a great change in the estate of things in the interior, and the reforms which have been pushed on since the guarantee of the Me Nam Valley are doing still

more in that direction, the outlook at the time was a poor one for the peaceful farmers.

One could not but be struck by the patient resignation and cheerful indifference generally displayed in the face of all misfortunes by the ordinary country people. Like true fatalists, they were convinced there was no help for it; and so it was best taken unconcernedly and good-humouredly.

Among Western nations oppression and injustice may awaken great qualities and may form noble characters, but among Easterns an imperturbable indifference such as this is the result. The peacefully minded bow down without a struggle, the harder hearts are driven to join the dacoit gangs. The 'blessedness of sorrow' is not for the Buddhist of Siam; he takes it differently; he laments his want of 'merit' from the last sphere of existence, and, as mental anguish or triumph are beyond his ken, his sufferings, like his ambitions and enjoyments, are purely physical, and with any digression are soon forgotten. This indifference is less apparent in the children.

Every foreigner in Siam has been struck by the brightness and intelligence of the youngsters. In face and build, in manner and disposition, they often reminded one very greatly of children at home. English children do not, it is true, smoke at four, or paddle their canoes to market at five. But the same frank and easy method of greeting you, the same intense interest in your possessions and pursuits, and the same pertinent string of questions, come from both, and make the Siamese quite unlike the podgy Chinese boy, the sedate little Malay, or the fat-bellied little Indian brat. No children in the world are happier, and, though they are allowed pretty much to look after themselves, there is no country where there is more family affection among the humble folks. It is curious that, in brightness and intelligence, the children are on the whole far superior

to the grown-ups. The reason appears to lie partly in their character, partly in their life.

Caught young, and trained in the way he should go, the Siamese may be turned out a smart, well-set-up fellow, capable of doing anything and being led anywhere. He likes discipline as little as the Malay or the Burman, but when subjected to it is as good a man as could be wished for.

{ The trouble is that the majority of Siamese are never subjected to any other discipline than the exactions of a local Governor, or, if of higher rank, the snubs of senior men. There are no inducements to make a man smarten himself up and push ahead unless he can command official influence. If by ability he brings himself to the fore, he becomes the mark for squeezing officials and jealous rivals.

Deprived of the incentives which generally make good citizens, he is in danger of becoming content to loaf away his time, and gradually sink back into the old life which his ancestors lived before him, and which once he felt, for a moment of his lifetime, he was fit and able to rise above. At forty he is too often an old man, thoroughly enslaved to whatever form of indolence has gotten hold of him.

Owing partly to these facts and partly to the climate, it is comparatively rare to find an old man vigorous enough to be a leader. Whereas with us the powers and influence of a man attain their highest and widest towards his sixtieth year, the Siamese if he lives to attain that age has long since given place to younger men.

To this result the rise of a totally new school of thought and method is also largely contributing; and thus with few exceptions young men are in power. The rapid advancement of the younger generation has not been without evil consequences to themselves as well as to the

country. Strong-headed and inexperienced, the lack of gravity and wisdom has been often sadly apparent in their councils.

A few fine characters have stood in marked contrast to the majority of their countrymen in this respect. The father of the present King and the old Regent were both men who in their old age exercised a powerful influence on all they came in contact with. And now and then one meets other notable exceptions.

Among the country folk the youngsters grow up into shapely little people, with a fund of gay humour, and no small share of good looks. Brown skin lends itself to varieties of complexion just as much as white, and among the youngsters who have not been exposed unnecessarily to wind and weather the complexion is often wonderfully delicate.

If not so brilliant as the Burman, the dandy of Siam, with a bright bud of *dawk mali* behind his ear, his gay shot *panung*, and a coloured cloth thrown theatrically across a well-built chest and muscular shoulders, is in his way quite as dressy a production as the frock-coated one of Pall Mall.

The girls make up in character what they seem to the Western to lack in dress, when compared with their sisters of Burma or the Lao States. The *panung* and short-cut hair, and above all the black teeth, which to the Siamese youth are so bewitching, do not attract the Westerner. But the women are the workers of the country; no sowing or reaping can be done without them; no bargain can be driven if the good wife or the clear-headed daughter be away; nothing can be undertaken without their counsel.

When once they have found their mates, the country people remain very faithful all their lives, and, although it is no disgrace to those in high places to have as many

wives as they can afford, the great majority of the people are monogamist.

Where the nose is flat and the mouth is blackened by betel, the eyes are the most striking feature of the Siamese. There is a kindness in the dark depths which is most attractive; they seem to glisten with the sympathy and twinkle with the laughter of the genial heart beneath them.

An outcome of the comparative rarity of writing in Siam is the extreme credulity which is found among all ranks, and the gossip and exaggeration to which they are prone. Had I not lived in old England, and been in British colonies, I should have said the Siamese were more devoted to gossip than any other people. Their credulity really does perhaps exceed our own. Even the monks in the *Wats* are not free from it, and it is startling the rapidity with which an ordinary physical phenomenon sometimes develops into a miracle, without any deliberate design. In perfect good faith, I have been told of monks who raised people from the dead, and who had the secret of producing gold from nothing. Not a few inmates of the monasteries have spent their lives in seeking after the spell, and some have become keen chemists and mineralogists in consequence.

Another pursuit, perhaps more legitimate to a brother of the yellow robe, has been the search after the secret potion which can float the holy man straight to Nirvana.

The absence of a middle class is largely the result of the old feudal system, which in later years has degenerated into a regular form of slavery, by which the mass of the people were the slaves of the governing class, and the governors lost sight of their duties as rulers in the fixed contemplation of their privileges as masters.

‘Every Siamese subject was, until recently, theoretically the serf of the King; but as the King could not use the

labour of the whole nation directly, he delegated his powers and ownership to those nearest in rank to himself, who again transferred part of their privileges to those beneath them, exactly after the fashion of European Feudalism in the Middle Ages.' ³

Like all similar institutions, this form of feudalism has not been without its advantages. All that is to be said for and against slavery, of which the reader knows far more than I do, may be said for and against it. It is not necessary to demonstrate that a sudden abolition of an institution so deeply rooted as this would be a national danger, as well as impracticable. As among ourselves popular representation has needed a long education and patient practice, so emancipation must come to the Siamese by slow degrees.

Unwonted liberty may with the Eastern degenerate into licence, as with the Western; and when among ourselves the true meaning of the responsibilities of freedom are still so largely misunderstood, can it be doubted that suddenly to confront the intensely conservative Eastern mind with the fulfilment of ideas which are so entirely foreign to its nature would be both unwise and unsuccessful?

One of the King's first acts was to decree the abolition of the legal status of slavery for all children born of slaves since 1868. The natural improvidence of the people, which is another outcome of the squeezing propensities of the rulers, has in large measure defeated the object of the decree. The newly found freedom presented no obvious advantages; in times of scarcity they were thrown on their own resources; in times of trouble they had no one

³ Mrs. Grindrod's *Siam: a Geographical Summary*, London, Edward Stanford, 1896. This carefully compiled and brightly written little book contains concise

information on almost every subject connected with the country. Notwithstanding the difficulty of getting accurate information, singularly few mistakes have crept in.

to appeal to. The old system seemed to offer protection, and afford relief from the anxieties of the future. Thus many still sell themselves to wealthy chiefs, and in return for the payment of 'their debts, contracted through thriftlessness or gambling,' they give their labour, and that of their families, to the chief. Theoretically these debt slaves may gradually work off their debts, and win their way back to freedom. Practically they seldom do so.

To this is undoubtedly due in large measure the decay of Siamese industries, and the difficulty of buying anything of *pukka* Siamese make in the bazaars. The pretty gold inlaid work which used to be so unique can seldom be obtained except through some nobleman who has in his 'service' a skilled craftsman. A fortunate person may get a present of a bowl or cigar box, but, except in the pawnshops where the last spoil of light-fingered gamblers is disposed for sale, it is almost impossible to buy them.

It is the same with other skilled workmen, and, working for their masters and not for themselves, they lose the enterprise and the opportunities of freemen, and the Chinese cut them out in all the trades.

The Siamese are obviously handicapped from the start in competition with immigrants from other countries, and as long as this form of serfdom exists they must continue to be so.

Corvée, which, by impressment of the services of the up-country folks for Government business, has weighed very heavily on the people, is being considerably modified. It is impossible to abolish it entirely in a thinly inhabited country, where the difficulty of communication prevents the importation to any point of the labour required for Government work.

The native population of a district must be utilised for

its policing, its roadmaking—Heaven save the mark!—its canal-cutting, or for transport purposes.

Formerly this was done pretty much at the discretion of the local Governor, who could compel the men to come out at any time, even during harvesting, if he chose. No payment was made them, and they generally had to find their very rice and food. Officials could build themselves houses and stables in the most florid style of split bamboo for next to nothing by this convenient method. Was it not all *ratchakan*, Government work? What could be more important to the Government and the country than that his Excellency the Governor should be protected from the rain and his ponies from the sun? Was it not right, therefore, that the materials should be obtained without payment, like the labour?

But the Government has long since fixed a regular rate of pay for *ratchakan*, and though, owing to the nature of the country and the distances to be traversed, men must still often be called out at times when they little like it, at least they get remuneration for their labour, and the time is not entirely lost to them.

Under ordinary circumstances every man gets two *salung* (8d.) a day, an average rate of wage in Siam; and there are local rates for boat, elephant, or ox cart hire in the different provinces, which are given one by the Governor. Of course payment for *ratchakan* is a detail not unfrequently omitted by officials.

The Chinese in Siam have always been exempt from *corvée*, and have only had to pay a triennial poll tax of about six shillings. Considering the money they make out of the country, and the freedom of action they enjoy when compared with the native Siamese, it is no wonder that the children of mixed marriages adopt the pigtail when they can. They are the Jews of Siam; and though they have been subject to a little fleecing by local

authorities, they have on the whole enjoyed an immunity from official interference which they have neither merited nor appreciated. Their only return has been that species of high-handed rowdiness which results from the methods followed by Chinese secret societies elsewhere. Cowardly attacks by large numbers upon solitary individuals, an occasional corpse in the river, or a headless trunk upon the track, mark the spread of their activity. The societies are nearly as powerful in Siam as the King himself. By judicious use of their business faculties and their powers of combination, they hold the Siamese in the palm of their hand. The toleration accorded to them by the Government is put down to fear; they bow and scrape before the authorities, but laugh behind their backs; and they could sack half Bangkok in a day. The societies need total suppression, as in the Straits, and the Chinese should be taxed and governed proportionately to the Mons and other Asiatic races who have taken up their abode in the country.

For a thousand years there has been communication between China and Siam, and there has been a continual immigration from the former country. The grandfather of the present King, to whom are due the hideous specimens of Chinese sculptural art which desecrate the *Wat* grounds in Bangkok, greatly encouraged the importation of Chinese and their ideas and customs; and for the last eighty years the inflow has been constant. The old junks brought down large numbers,⁴ and like them the Scottish Oriental boats now often bring over a thousand at a trip, of the lowest types from about Swatau and Amoi. Of raw imports to Siam the Chinaman certainly heads the list. On the average twelve hundred arrive in Bangkok every month, and until recently the peninsula States received some thousands every year, on the east by junk direct, on the west *via* the

⁴ Crawford's *Embassy to Siam*, vol. ii.

Straits. In five years' time, probably forty per cent. have survived, and twenty per cent. are married. A Chinaman's coffin is one of the most frequent sights in Bangkok.

The spread of the education which has been commenced in Bangkok may do much towards evolving a new class in Siam. The few well-to-do families who have not been identified with the officials have been too scattered for the exercise of the mutual support and common interests which alone could give them the importance of a class. There are already signs of the rise of a new element in the new generation, wherein the young fellows begin to owe more to the knowledge and breadth of interests they acquired during their education, and to the friendships they then formed among their contemporaries, and have since kept up, than to their official connection.

The Military College and the School of the Survey Department have both for some time been turning out a very hopeful lot of lads, possessing a good groundwork of English and general knowledge, including surveying and other things, as well as in many cases a capacity to think for themselves. Notwithstanding a certain dandyism in dress and manner, some of the best stuff in the country is to be found among them. As the best-dressed swell in Piccadilly is generally the man who has done the most in his shirt-sleeves in some far-off corner of the empire, so a certain fondness for dress is the most hopeful sign with the Siamese youth. He is less likely to be a gambler or a loafer.

Of a new boarding-school for high-class boys, known as King's College, which has been lately started under Mr. A. C. Carter, the principal, a great deal may be anticipated. It is to be run on public school lines, and should provide a training far more suited to the circumstances in which Siam now finds herself than the costly, and often in its results very questionable, education which is acquired by lads sent

to Europe. In its effects on the rising generation it should be one of the most far-reaching and beneficial of all the educational institutions in the country.

Unfortunately education, like other branches of the service, is retarded by a hopeless want of policy. Experiments which are begun, often at great expense, are not carried out. Want of money, or a change of mind, betray the fickleness of Siamese ambitions. A short-lived enthusiasm for the latest scheme gives way to complete indifference and a new hobby. While the Legation authorities in Europe engage new men, Bangkok may decide on a new line of action. Experienced and able men who have given six or eight years' service to the Siamese, and whose heart has gone into their work, are told there is nothing now to occupy them, and the Government would be glad if they would take themselves off; while at the same moment, doubtless able but inexperienced men, who have no ideas of the conditions and requirements of Eastern life, are engaged in London for work of an identical nature.

Such has too often been the reward of service in Siam. In nothing have the Siamese contrasted more with the Japanese, whom they would wish to emulate, than in the mode of parting with some of the old employés of the Government. In Japan they are fêted and honoured, and large numbers go to see them off, and wish them a warm farewell. In Siam they have too often allowed them to go alone on board ship, with only a few compatriots and a junior clerk or two to say good-bye. Too often there have been no thanks, and no recognition of past services, even of a cold or formal kind; a little gratuitous abuse for what they failed to do having not seldom been their substitute. They were dropped overboard like an old bottle that is done with and forgotten.

However unreasonable some employés may often prove, it would be more politic and more dignified for

the Government to make a point of giving all, without distinction, a generous send off; and in the case of men who have enjoyed their confidence, and who have been devoted servants, later disputes and mutual recriminations might well be buried in the recognition of former services and sympathies.

During our stay at Ratburi, the river was almost at its lowest, and was so shallow that even the light sculling boat had difficulty in passing the sandbanks, and *vau pels* would take nearly a week to reach Kanburi.

Later in the year I visited Ratburi about *Thot Katin* time, when boats could navigate the flood waters over all the plain, and the sandbanks were deeply buried by the brown water. The long freshly oiled canoes were out in their racing colours, and the populace was bent on that combination of merit-making and merry-making to which they are addicted. The Siamese, like people of other creeds, consider it necessary to hedge against possible eventualities in the next world. Some nationalities do it by buying masses, some more tardily on their death-beds, and others by self-inflicted tortures, but the Siamese do it as cheerfully and, since it is amusing, as frequently as possible.

A very excellent institution on these occasions is the *Yike*, a theatrical performance of a farcical character, acted entirely by men and boys, in contradistinction to the *Lakon*, in which women only act. There are but few accessories. The dramatic instinct of the Siamese, which is largely developed, supplies them with an imagination superior to scenic effect. In the *Lakon* there is more display. Costly dresses and supple posturing are *de rigueur*. The performance is entirely pantomimic, and is accompanied by the tinkle of the orchestra, and the clash of choruses all night long. In the *Yike*, on the other hand, the point of the performance lies in the dialogue.

The stories all bear a family resemblance. There are generally a king and a queen, who marry their son or their daughter to a foreign princess or monarch, as for instance the King of Cambodia. The newly married couple fall out. Generally a love-potion given by one to the other, which unfortunately acts in a manner directly opposed to what was intended, is the immediate cause of all the trouble. Then other lovers, and endless complications, come upon the scene. There is the funny man with the red nose who comes to make love to the lady, and matters reach a rather indelicate stage, when the husband returns and knocks at the imaginary door, which is closed in his face.

The red-nosed gentleman is placed in the biggest rice basket, where, to the intense joy of the children in the audience, he is very restive owing to the heat. The husband, whose suspicions are roused, makes his attendant search the imaginary house, on the pretext of getting some imaginary bananas and rain-water, to refresh his master after his walk, while the unfortunate lady runs in and out on to the imaginary verandah in the greatest trepidation. The man in the rice basket is constantly nearly betraying himself, and the fun goes on with jokes and topical allusions for hours together. To the children it is the height of happiness, and many a small boy holds a fat brown baby astride his hip, watching intently every change of feature of the funny man all through the performance, scarcely noticing his burden. Occasionally he changes it from one hip to the other, throwing the whole weight of his body to the opposite side to counterbalance it. When the searchers get near the rice basket he gasps with anxiety and squeezes the poor baby till it howls. He dabs its nose with his disengaged hand to silence it, and only when all danger of discovery of the funny man is removed, by some subtle scheme devised by the anxious

dame, is he sufficiently relieved to attend to the little brown thing in his arm.

In this country, where the respective spheres of action of the two sexes are so little differentiated, where women smoke cheroots and guide the plough, and where both are dressed alike, boy nurses have charge of the small children as frequently as girls. It is as often as not an elder brother, or the son of a slave, who accompanies the small charge everywhere; who gives it cigarettes and sweets, who carries it when tired, who washes it, who fans the mosquitoes off, and sleeps beside it. And except when rendered momentarily forgetful by an exciting *dénouement* at a *Yike*, or by the gambols of a Rover, they seem singularly apt and gentle at the business, and handle their charge with a *sang-froid* which I must admit evoked my greatest admiration. One had been accustomed to regard babies as a kind of dangerous explosive, or a variety of rare china, which must either burst or break at the first touch. But it is reassuring to know that even men folk may handle them in safety.

Rover, by his accomplishments and his geniality, earned a popularity among the children which always stood us in good stead subsequently, and to his introduction we owed many of our jungle friends.

From the peculiar tan stripes in his black furry coat, he was given the name of 'Tiger' by the children in every village. The Siamese are accustomed chiefly to the half-wild prowling pariah, for which no treatment is too bad; and Rover's training and appearance came as a great source of wonderment. He was by no means shy of making himself at home in every house we went to, and he was always accorded a place of honour. His manners and good looks were generally admired, and during the day he was the pet of the place, playing with every one in turn, including the buffaloes, who objected strongly. At

night he lay at the foot of my bed, and his tone to any one approaching was quite altered. But at Ratburi he astonished the natives as well as his master by exhibiting a trait which was quite unsuspected. There was a flock of sheep, almost the only one in the country, kept by a local official, which fed in the plain west of the town. We had temporary quarters in some houses erected by the old Regent in the days when Ratburi was a royal residence. A square compound was made up by these and other



Rover.

buildings, with some railings. A gate led out of it into the plain. When Rover first perceived the sheep he went off full speed to inspect, and half an hour later he returned with the whole flock in front of him. He headed off every attempt at escape, galloping round the astonished crowd, giving them his deep short bark. He placed them in the corner of the compound by the river, and then sat down in front of them to survey his handiwork.

The owner of the flock was seriously alarmed as to the dog's intentions ; but he never attempted to bite them,

and as soon as they were penned in the spot he had selected he went about his business chasing pariahs.

He did this again and again during our stay when there was nothing else on hand, and his business-like air over it was most curious. He had never to my certain knowledge seen sheep before. He was only two months old when we got him on the Nam U, and there were no sheep within 500 miles of that. All we knew of his pedigree was what the villagers had told us, that his parents had been brought by a Haw caravan from the north. I can only conjecture that they were descended from the breed employed in guarding the sheep and yaks on the south-western slopes of the Tibetan plateau.

The caution with which I noticed he treated a snake-skin we came across was also no doubt in large measure intuitive.

In common with all the long-haired Shân dogs he was particularly devoted to *Kao nio*, the glutinous rice of the highlands, and the low country with the *Kao Chao* fare had at one time told severely on his health. The natural instinct of cleanliness in all these dogs is most remarkable, and the youngest puppy has never to be taught anything in this respect.

They have the greatest contempt for the miserable pariah, but the latter by their numbers often make the visit of a stranger like Rover one of constant warfare against great odds.

The town of Ratburi has a population of about 5,000. Ruined villas, rusted railings, and dilapidated roads attested to its former importance. A filthy market-place, tenanted by a noisy crowd, was evidence of the inefficiency of the authorities. One has only to walk round a Siamese town to guess the character of the Governor, and we quickly concluded we should find one of the worst here—as indeed we did.

After six days of promises and prevarications, the only advance we had made in getting transport was that we had decided not to trouble the chief, who, poor man, had doubtless much else to think about.

Accordingly next day, after the negotiations of the usual kind with the neighbouring farmers, we got the carts which he had professed himself unable to procure, and started for the mines, which lay some forty-four miles to the westward. I cheerfully reported the old gentleman to Bangkok, thereby carrying out faithfully my promises to him, but he knew, and I guessed, that he would hear no more about it; and so we parted, as amicably as might be.

As the dry season was well advanced, the padi plain, and the open *Kok*, or small-wood jungle, through which we passed, were burnt to a cinder. Straw for the oxen was carried in the carts, and without it they would have had nothing to eat. At night the jungle fires glimmered round us; by day the blackened grasses smothered us till we looked like coal-heavers. The hot wind laden with ashes from the smouldering fires choked the little oxen, and the only drink they got was the dew at night. But as usual they bore it patiently, and when we reached the clear stream of the Me Prachi men and oxen bathed and drank their fill. It seemed we had a foretaste of heaven there.

At Prachadi, the headquarters of the mining, we were most comfortably put up by the hospitable manager, Mr. Heggie. It was no longer necessary to form a laager at night; for the cattle-loving tigers were far away in the cooler depths of the forest of the main range to avoid the heat, and the cattle-lifting men folk were as far off in the other direction to be out of reach of the redoubtable manager. Under his protection quite a settlement had sprung up. Besides the Chinese coolies, a number of

Siamese had settled in or near the clearing. By a judicious combination of kindness and determination Mr. Heggie had won the confidence of the Karen population of the surrounding hills, and had created a little oasis at Prachadi, in which the persons and property of all were perfectly safe. The past of some of the settlers would not perhaps have borne minute investigation; others had good reasons for keeping out of reach of officialdom not always of their own making. They one and all knew that here they could settle down to peaceful habits without interference, and that any person attempting lawlessness would have to reckon with *Nai Heggie*, and the popular opinion at his back.

He had more power with the Karens (or *Kariens*, as the Siamese call them) than the official under whose charge they theoretically were. To have won such influence over such timid and suspicious folk as the Karens was no mean thing. No people we had met, not even the Ka Che of the north, to whom they bore a strong resemblance, are more truly children of the forest. The mere mention of a stranger was sufficient to make them shuffle uneasily. Their sole ambition is to be let alone. They declare they do not like to buy their food; they must grow it all themselves, or the taste of freedom is not there. Each season away they go, to find sites for the next year's clearings, deeper in the mountains. They turn their backs resolutely on the lowlands, with their rumours of towns and governments, and smite and burn their way farther into the wilderness.

There is a little story current in the neighbourhood which explains, with admirable conciseness, the real reason of the advantages in life enjoyed by the Western.

The Burman, the Siamese, the Karien, and the Farang were all eating their breakfast by a river one morning, when Pra Chao, the Great Lord, came down and wanted

to be ferried over. With characteristic dilatoriness, the three first decided to finish breakfast first and then take him across, but the Farang got up and left his food to carry the stranger over. As a reward he has ever since been given nearly all the blessings in the world.

Credulous and superstitious in the extreme, every sight and sound they encounter portends to their minds either good or ill. Keen sportsmen and admirable jungle men, they know and follow readily the trail of any animal. Once they get to know you, they lose their bashfulness, and make capital companions. And then they laugh and gambol like a lot of children, which indeed they are in simplicity and ignorance. Yet they have not disdained to adopt vaccination to stay the ravages of smallpox, and old kerosene tins instead of baskets for their packs upon the march—a sensible innovation by which they can keep things dry.

In appearance they are small people, not quite so dark or fleshy as the Ka Che; the young folks are great hands at adornment, and any quantity of small change is strung around their necks to help keep the spirits off. And as the money they know best, and use most, is the rupee, the face of the Empress greeted one at every turn, here as in the north.

Their long hair is rolled up in a head-cloth like the Burmans, but in its disposal in a long horn standing out in front is more like the adornment in fashion among the Lolloos which is described by Mr. Colborne Baber.⁵

The mines were situated on a series of alluvial valley bottoms draining eastward from the granites of the main axial range. The tin-bearing gravel rests on a bed of clay slate which, in places, is much altered on approaching

⁵ Report of the Grosvenor Mission. This method of doing up the hair is an old form which the Burmans, Shāns, Kās, Lolloos, and

Karens have all retained with little variation. Cf. *The Tonsure Ceremony*, by Captain Gerini.

the junction with the granite. It contains enormous granite boulders, the constituent minerals of which may be seen in every variety of combination and every stage of decomposition. The overburden seldom exceeds five feet in depth, and the blue *Karang* averages from four to eight feet. The concession in Rathburi was one of the first granted by the Government under the new system introduced after December 1891, the date of the creation of the Department of Mines. All minerals in Siam are royal—that is, belong to the Crown. By the treaties made



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with foreign Powers Siam agreed, among other things, that foreign subjects should 'be at liberty to search for and open mines in any part of the country,' and 'that such suitable terms as should admit of the mines being worked' should be arranged between the Consul and the Siamese authorities. Under this clause, previous to 1891, some thirteen mining concessions had been granted by the Siamese Foreign Office, chiefly to subjects of treaty Powers. Two more were afterwards granted on the old lines by the Government against the advice of the department, and were shortly after surrendered by the conces-

sionaires. Not having examined the country, and knowing nothing of its mineral value, they found there was the work of a lifetime before them in prospecting alone, for which they would be paying full mining rents over a territory a large portion of which was absolutely useless to them. The ideas of many European applicants on the subject of mining were most curious. On finding, or hearing, of a piece of copper or lead ore they instantly applied for a mining lease, demanding that all the territory for many miles round the spot where it was found, or supposed to have been found, should be reserved to them 'to keep others out.' On the request for accurate information, maps were supplied rivalling in accuracy and detail the famous chart published in that instructive book of travel 'The Hunting of the Snark.' A good deal of the work of the Mining Department consisted subsequently in what was euphemistically called 'correcting' these maps, and in finding out what the applicants really did intend to represent. Scale, cardinal points, names, and other details which generally go to make a map were treated with glorious contempt. Pencils and torn foreign notepaper were the materials used in the composition of these records, and humble requests for the use of more lasting materials were met with the noblest scorn.

When it became known that the Mining Department proposed in the future to cut down the size of the areas granted to a matter of a few hundred acres for each block, varying according to the nature of the deposit, there was a great outcry that treaty rights were to be infringed. The real objection admittedly was that 400 acres did not sound so well in a prospectus as forty square miles.

Mining men, however, universally admitted the advantages of the change. They were now able, for a fee of forty ticals (2*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*), to acquire the right to prospect

in any given province of Siam for a period of twelve months. This could be renewed as often as was desirable, and by doubling the fee they could reserve an exclusive right to prospect over a certain area of ground. It was thus possible at a cheap rate to explore thoroughly a promising spot, and to form a reliable opinion as to its prospects, before applying for a mining lease.

Under these circumstances a fairly accurate idea could be obtained as to what land it was actually important to include in the lease; the poor ground could be omitted, and rent need not be paid for what was not wanted. The size to which each block was limited was fixed; but no limit was placed on the number of blocks which could be taken up by one party, provided there was reasonable prospect of his being able to work them. In case of his failure to do so, as each block was subject to a separate deed, any block on which the lessee's covenants were not duly performed would revert to the Government. Thus the large monopolies which so often conduced to inefficient development of a property, and kept out other competent people, were made impossible. *Bona-fide* mining was the thing to be encouraged, and the whole policy of the department, which has unfortunately not always been successful, has been to control the objectionable type of adventurer, who regards what he calls mining as the last resort to which he can always turn. In a country like Siam, removed from the stronger and healthier currents which circulate about such places as Hong Kong and Singapore, a great deal of the refuse of civilisation is apt to become stranded. Extra-territoriality is the stock-in-trade of this class of individual; he investigates the treaties, and finds he has a right to this and a right to that. He may open mines; very well, he will float a mine; he will probably be able to pick a living in the process. He may go up country and potter round, and terrorise the

small officials. The Government is bound to give him a passport, and, armed with that and his consul's protection, he is afraid of no man. He will live on the country folks, and become a local swell. If any one hits him back, when he is drunk, he will complain to his consul; his word will always be accepted, for he is a noble white man.

If 'the opening up' of the country is to be heralded by an inrush of this character of person, it is perhaps the greatest misfortune which can befall the peasantry. Only those who have followed in his wake, or who have known of what he is capable, can perhaps appreciate how thoroughly undesirable he is. Perhaps, however, he is one of those necessary evils which are bound to accompany the advance of Western civilisation, as scraps of orange-peel and paper do a big London crowd.

The difficulties which, in the present state of communication in Siam, attend on all mining or other ventures which require efficient labour, very soon made themselves felt at Prachadi. The two questions of carriage and labour are often quite disregarded by the promoters of the new undertaking until the plunge has been made, and then they suddenly present themselves as the most formidable barriers to success. Mr. Heggie had studied the matter, and had made the best arrangements possible, and yet the difficulties proved nearly insurmountable. With the exception of the last seven miles in the hilly country approaching the mines, there was a very fair cart-trail all the way to Ratburi. From Ratburi to Bangkok water transport was available, and thence to the market of Singapore freights were comparatively cheap.

The cost of this transport from the mines to Singapore averaged about 2 ticals (2s. 8d.) a *pikul*, or about 2l. 5s. a ton, a most favourable rate which hardly any mining district in Upper Siam can equal. Large outlay in the purchase and maintenance of carts and oxen is generally

necessary, and the wear and tear over the rough forest trail is very great.

The death-rate among the coolies, who are generally Hainanese imported direct, is large in all the mining districts, which, being as a rule in the hill ranges, are the worst for fever and dysentery. The death-rate from these causes among new arrivals has, in many cases, exceeded 60 per cent. Panic accounts for many more, and as new drafts go up country the effect produced by the stories they hear is such that bolts and bars cannot keep them. As advances have to be made to all these men, it is a serious matter to lose 70 per cent. by desertion before arriving at the mines, and 60 per cent. of the remainder in the next rainy season. The local authorities, when requested to assist in finding and arresting the deserters, reply, 'If you bring the escaped men up before us, and charge them with breaking their contract, we will assist you by putting them in goal.' During a scare at Prachadi the rate of desertion was eight men a day, and the manager of Watana on one occasion despatched a party of 120 men from Bangkok, of whom, notwithstanding close supervision, only forty arrived at the mines five days later. It is quite impossible to get Chinese who have been any time in the country to go to a mine, even by promises or advances of a most exorbitant kind.

At Kabin and Watana, in the neighbourhood of Prachin, Lao labour has been to some extent utilised; but so far sufficient control has never been obtained over it. On the western side, however, it is impossible to get native labour in sufficient quantity, even temporarily, and imported labour, with all its drawbacks, has therefore to be relied on. The only plausible plan that offers any chances of success seems to be that Chinese should be engaged on what is known in Cornwall as the *tribute* system; and that, instead of being paid by the day, they should be paid so much

per *pikul* of cleaned ore produced. As many tribute parties as could be got together would thus be at work on different parts of the lease, the rates per *pikul* varying according to the circumstances of the ground worked by each party, and other considerations, in the usual way. This at least would give the Chinese a stake in the place, and the *tankes* always know how to get the best out of their men when working for themselves.

At the time of our visit there were only sixty-four men at the mine, of whom not more than fifty were usually available. Under favourable circumstances they were turning out five *pikuls* a day of cleaned ore (running 72 per cent.*).

As a matter of fact, from many causes, the output after we left fell far below this average, and, though the company had several hundred acres, nine-tenths of the property have not been worked,⁷ and, owing largely to the difficulty of getting them, there have never been so many men employed on it since. There is no doubt that the Chinese miners of the peninsula would have gone to work in a much more thorough manner. The company seem to have been very timid in following the advice of their manager, and to have had a sort of idea that money could be coined out of it, without any preliminary development, by half a dozen coolies. In a new jungle country of the character of Siam, defeat was the only result to be expected. The apparent failure of such a promising enterprise, from causes which are prominently at work in every other part of the country, shows that reckless talk

* Twenty producing days per month (the other ten being necessary for 'stripping') would give an output of 100 *pikuls* a month, or about 4,000 *tics* (286*l.*) Working expenses, wages, and transport absorbed 2,400 *tics* (160*l.*) The expenses of 'clearing' the jungle

are not included, as it could be done cheaply on a large scale by Karen foresters at long intervals. Nor does the figure include the manager's salary, which was trifling.

⁷ It was complained at the commencement that the territory granted was too small.

about the 'rapid development of the enormous mineral wealth of Siam' is under existing circumstances premature and misleading. There are very few people as yet capable of working a mine successfully in Siam.

During the fortnight we spent in the neighbourhood, we prospected the surrounding valleys fairly well and with good results. We crossed to the next principal valley to the southward, and spent a night there in an old clearing. We had some of the men from Mr. Heggie's 'reformatory' as guides, and they turned out good fellows. We had some good sport with jungle fowl and barking deer,* which abound on all sides, and the cries of the peacocks and the gibbons are seldom silent. The spot we camped in had an evil name for tigers and fever. Surrounded by steep forest-clad heights, a feeling of lassitude came over us in the steaming valley bottom which it required the greatest determination to fight against. Everybody was intensely weary, and, difficult as it was to keep the eyes open, some of the men never closed them all night for fear of a tiger which they declared was prowling round in the dense scrub. We struggled through our work next morning, and, glad to leave the miserable spot, stumbled sleepily homeward in the shimmering afternoon, the hilltops dancing in the heat around us. How joyfully we reached the breezy open spaces about Tung Mai Deng! Here the men could laugh and talk aloud without fear of offending uncanny spirits, and could speak of the tiger by his name, instead of whispering about 'it' and 'that fellow,' as was necessary in the Nam Rawn Valley to prevent his hearing and being wroth.

How many boughs and stones the thoughtful Yen had placed beneath the gloomy Thingan trees I did

* Muntjac. *Cervulus aureus* deer of the forest mountain tracts [Siam, *Ikeng*]. Next to sambar of Siam.
[Siam, *Kwang*], the most common

not count. Without this precaution it seemed we should never have returned. It is always necessary to leave your card in this form as a mark of respect to the *Chao* of any particular piece of forest you enter, to show you have been by, and do not forget that you owe immunity from danger to his good will. Treated thus courteously, he generally protects you from falling branches and other ills while in his particular bit of forest.

Our next duty was to reach Puket by the nearest route we could. Our best course seemed to lie over the frontier into the Tenasserim provinces of Burma, and then down the western side of the peninsula, presumably by boat.

The only transport we could get would be Karen porters, and now we found the wily Governor of Ratburi, by way of giving us the necessary written orders to the head-men, had so worded the document that the Karens need not come out unless they wished, and as at this season they were burning their *rai*, preparatory to planting the hill padi, they refused to disturb themselves. The old gentleman was thus very nearly even with us. Without the Karens we could only return the way we came; our complaints would not avail to get us on, or to injure him.

We held a council of war. Our scholar, Nai Dau (Master Star), drew up a formidable document in Siamese, but the difficulty was the seal. In an official document in Siam, the chief feature is the seal, or *Kra*; however strictly worded, it has no weight whatever without it. It is by the size and intricacy of design of the round red disk at the end that the importance of the writer, and therefore of the document, is gauged. The *Kra* is looked at before the text, and often in lieu of it. The village elders have it handed round that they may judge of the amount of respect the document should be received with. By its

diameter they know the degree of importance to be attached to the orders it brings, and the character of the obedience to be paid to them, and they suit their actions accordingly.

By a providential circumstance our host was possessed of a handsome and useful ornament, around the top of which was elegantly stamped in Roman letters an inscription relating that it contained Somebody or Others' (and sons) best gold medal aromatic birdseye tobacco, warranted to possess endless virtues, and patented, and what not, in many lands. Its diameter approached five inches, and the impression judiciously taken off in red paint in the correct fashion presented a complicated and imposing design.

In the hands of a British Karen from the other side we sent it out to the settlements at Suanpung and Ban Mai that night. 'The *Kra* did its work. On March 4 we were off once more in triumph, Westward Ho! with over fifty packmen.

As a rule I have no use for Chinamen in the jungle, but late one evening, previous to our departure, a sturdy young Chinese crept in and asked to speak to me. The long and short of what he told me, and what we made out by inquiry about the place, was, that he came up with the *Tauke* as a clerk; besides being docked of his pay he had been made to put up with a lot of bullying, including being tied up and thrashed for the loss of some money, for which, it appeared from investigation, he was in no way responsible. He had tried to get away down to Bangkok, but had only scored more thrashing, and threats of worse. The *Tauke* was one of those dear, amiable-looking heathen who are capable of any barbarity. Having satisfied myself of the truth of the main facts, and that San the clerk had friends in Bangkok who would fight his case for him, and

avenge him if his body should be found in the river, I agreed to take him down with us, and get him to his friends. Unnoticed, he accordingly started down the trail in the early morning of the day we left; he met us a few miles out, and was thenceforth one of our party.



PI FAYE, PRA RAMA'S ASTROLOGER



NANG SIDA, PRA RAMA'S WIFE

CHAPTER XIV

THE MALAY PENINSULA—TENASSERIM TO PUKET (OR JUNK
CEYLON)—TIN MINING

THREE short marches over the densely forested mountains of the great axial range brought us by an unfrequented trail to the wild scenery of the Tenasserim River. or Me Nam Amla, we had heard so much about, at Bankiu. We crossed the frontier at the watershed. It seemed like a magic line to me, and for some days I saw beyond nothing but that it was British territory. Nai Suk did not approve of this enthusiasm, for he pointed out, too truly, that food was just as scarce, the country just as rugged, and transport just as difficult as on the other side. But how goodly a thing is imagination. Life is worth living in proportion to the imagination that is in one. And in the jungle, as in ordinary life, it is so often choked by dyspepsia, fever, and other worries, that any assistance to its activity is

welcome. Man finds little joy in the contemplation of the present, or in the view limited to the tree-trunks close around him. But his happiness lies largely in the possibilities of the future, in the dim suggestiveness of far blue hills and distant shrouded valleys, and in the play of his imagination about them.

From the river we sent back our Karen packmen. They were as impressionable, as thoughtless, and as unreliable as children, but they turned out fine fellows on the march. The last we heard of them as they dropped beyond the ridge was the mournful long-drawn cry with which they love to wake the echoes of the forests, and which is like the first few bars of a sad unfinished song, so characteristic of their wandering life.

Molto Sostenuto.



How its notes recall the scene!—the flashing river, the hazy heights towering into the still, hot air beyond, and the untracked wilderness all round us.

Owing to the scarcity of dug-outs, it required many days to gather sufficient for the party. The Karen crews absolutely refused to go down river direct to Tenasserim, owing partly to the fears with which the unknown seemed to inspire them, and partly to their anxiety to finish their *rai* clearings before the advent of the rains. The scanty population on the lower river rendered it impossible

to get reliefs as we used to do on the Me Kawng, so it was not fair to insist. Thus it came about that we turned northward. Owing to the boat and commissariat difficulties, I went away up river to collect the necessities with Yen as my only follower, leaving Nai Suk in charge of the party.

There can be few places in the world so well stocked with game as the Tenasserim. Rhino, pig, and tiger left fresh marks upon the banks, sambur and barking deer called far above us, and, with peafowl and jungle-fowl, contributed to our larder. It is the misfortune of the average traveller in such a place that he has other work on hand than shooting. He has not, moreover, the transport necessary either to carry more than an absolutely essential quantity of ammunition, or to remove more than a small amount of spoils. He necessarily regards sport from a strictly unsportsmanlike point of view. It is no longer an end in itself, but a means to an end—the stew-pot. Consequently exuberant yarns from communicative Karen sportsmen about *kwai pa*¹ and *kating*² had to go unchallenged.

The scenery of the river is magnificent. It winds and struggles first north, then east, then south, and finally north again and west, combated by the granites of the axial range, and by the slates and grits, the conglomerates and sandstones, which have become distorted and metamorphosed in magnificent confusion along their flanks.

By day we paddled steadily in our cranky dug-out up the wide still reaches, or struggled knee deep through the shallow shingle rapids. By night the thunder growled upon the distant ranges, and a strong wind roared about the forest-clad peaks a thousand feet above us. In the lulls the call of a prowling tiger came fitfully up the narrow

¹ The wild buffalo.

[*gavæus gaurus*] fairly common in

² The gaur or Indian bison Indo-China.

valley, the swooping owlets wailed with infinite sorrow, the metallic *tuk tuk* of the Malayan night-jar and the shrill chorus of the cicada and tree beetles reached us for a moment—and then the next rush of wind drowned all again.

One night we camped on a bamboo flooring in the lower boughs of a tall tree. On the floor above was a Karen with his two small boys whose watch-fire had attracted us, and the upper stories were occupied by a whole colony of Great Hornbills, over fifty in number. Below, in the basement, a colony of otters lived in the bank. The Karen was sociable and liked his tree, as many do ten-storied hotels in Western cities, for the sake of the life and movement in it. Our host was from up river, bent on making a new clearing. It appeared that his abode was partly chosen owing to the danger attending sleeping nearer to the ground. The disarmament of the population by the Indian Government has produced remarkable results in the suppression of dacoity, but bears somewhat hardly on the jungle folk. Tigers have a thorough appreciation of the advantages which the absence of firearms confers upon them in the exercise of their sovereign rights to eat whom and what they like.

After ten days Nai Suk brought up the rest of the party in the craft we had sent for them, and then followed an easy week's march down the magnificent telegraph road to Tavoi, our *barang* and our sick men going in boats in the river below us, as far as Myitta, and thence by elephant. The erection of the telegraph line and the building of the road by the Indian Government from Tavoi through Myitta and along the Tenasserim up to the frontier at Bongte has naturally resulted in the almost complete abandonment of the longer but formerly more generally used Amla³ route. The village of Amla on the Tenasserim has of late years dwindled to a few houses,

³ Burm. *Amya*.



ON THE GREAT TENASSERIM

2000

and the trail is now so overgrown as to be almost impassable.

Marching down the frontier road with easy gradients, bridges and P.W.D. bungalows at every stage, and with beautiful views along the wide telegraph clearing, was a most luxurious experience in the way of travel, to which the hospitality of Captain and Mrs. Cronin in Tavoi⁴ was a fitting climax. The Karens under his jurisdiction were largely Christian, and present the unique phenomenon of missionary success among an Eastern people. Whether their Christianity is in every way satisfactory seems very doubtful, but my experience of them is not large enough to entitle me to a decided opinion.

We shall none of us forget the kindness of Captain Browning and his officers of the B.I. s.s. 'Camilla' which took us to Mergui, nor the hospitality of Mr. Batten, the Deputy Commissioner, during the ten days we spent in this most lovely of seaside places. The absence of nearly all the boats and the whole male population at the pearl fisheries⁵ in the Archipelago necessitated our waiting for the next steamer bound south. In Mergui at all events we were safe from the Tavoi telegraph, by which, as the time we had been given was nearly up, we had feared recall. With our work not half done we had no intention of going back, so it was as well to avoid too much communication with Bangkok. Fortunately, when we passed Tavoi the line was in its usual condition of 'interrupted'; we left with it our best wishes for its speedy repair.

Mergui, which is known to the Siamese as *Muang Mahit*, was, for more than four centuries previous to the conquest of Siam by the Burmese under Alaung Pra in 1767, a Siamese possession. As the port of Tenasserim, called by the Siamese *Tenau* or *Tenausi*, and as the starting-point of the overland trade routes to Siam, it was a place of

⁴ Siam. *Tawai*.

⁵ Appendix x.

some importance.⁶ In 1824, during the first Burmese war, it fell into our hands, together with Ye, Tavoi, and Tenasserim. But the Burmese occupation had been its ruin. Instead of a starting-point for caravans of traders, it became in their day the headquarters of marauding bands whose object was to cut throats across the border. The Siamese were not behindhand in retaliation, and the animosity engendered has only disappeared within the memory of man. The efforts of British officials in Tenasserim to restore the old trade relations have been frustrated for ever, partly by



the growth of British power in the Straits, which has created Singapore and Penang, and has suppressed the piracy which was formerly rife in those waters, and partly by the wonderful development of steam navigation, which has revolutionised communication between the east and the west, and has made sea carriage, formerly so precarious, now cheap, safe, and expeditious.

Moreover, the population of the province seems never

⁶ For further particulars of its history, cf. Dr. Anderson's *English Intercourses with Siam in the*

Seventeenth Century. London, Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co., 1896.

to have recovered the massacres and devastation by which the Burmese accomplished their conquest of the country between 1760 and 1767; and in the trip up river to Tenasserim the extent of the old clearings showed that a comparatively large and thriving population once lived in the present solitudes, where the only sign of life is an occasional porpoise gambolling for the edification of a solitary blue reef heron.



Both in the style of some of the monasteries and the frequency with which Siamese is used by all the border people, the influence of Siam in the past may still be detected. Our impressions of Mergui were varied. I admired the appearance of the damsels, and ventured to draw Nai Suk's attention to what seemed to me their good looks. 'Pretty!' exclaimed he in high disdain. 'Why, they have white teeth!' In deference to British susceptibilities the *Nais* had by this time all white teeth, but on their return

to Siamese soil the discoloration due to the betel, so dear to the heart of the Siamese, once again resumed its prominence. My expostulations were met by the unanswerable argument that if they kept their teeth white the girls would have nothing to say to them. Yen best remembers Mergui for the opportunities for merit-making which the innumerable shrines presented; and he was lost in rapture at the architectural beauties of these buildings. Against an evening sky their outlines are very charming, but the garish day betrays the fact that the roofing is mostly corrugated iron, and the scrollwork is not the wood carving for which Upper Burma is justly renowned, but consists of rather tawdry iron castings. Iron is a cheap and lasting material in such a climate; but from an artistic point of view, that from which one must regard all architectural effort, it cannot claim to be satisfactory, while in practice it is not desirable, owing to the manner in which it heats the building. The coolness of the *Bawts* of Siamese monasteries, due to their tile or in some cases *attap*-thatch roofing, forms one of their chief charms. Another characteristic of Mergui is its boats, and very pretty and peculiar little craft they are, differing entirely from the types of the East.

A Chinese-owned coasting steamer, the 'Setthi,' at length put in, and took us on to Puket, passing through the lovely scenery of the Mergui Archipelago and stopping at the Siamese ports of Renawng and Kopa.

While we lay in the latter place I went away one day with the mate in the gig to put a mark on one of the most dangerous sunken rocks with which the entrance to the mouth of the Kopa River abounds. It was merely a small tree from the jungle, with an empty kerosene tin on the top, but it outlived most of those engaged in that morning's work. The mate was one of those men with whom the East is familiar. He had good manners, and spoke as a man of

education; he quoted Horace, and gave me the botanical names of the trees on shore; he had had a command, but drink had ruined him. When the vessel foundered three weeks later off the Moscoes he went down in her, with over sixty native men, women, and children for whom there was no room in the two lifeboats. As she was under the Siamese flag, there was never any inquiry.

Our fellow-passengers were numerous and select. There was the Rajah of Trang, who had been on a visit to his brother of Renawng; there was Phra Srisdi, Prince Damrong's secretary, who had been to Burma to inquire into methods of administration there for the information of the Siamese Government; and there was a young latter-day Chinaman, partner in a Chinese firm at Rangun, going to Penang for his holiday, and to see his relatives. He was educated in Burma, but he might as well have been in England. His literature was English and his interests were entirely English; he was a keen photographer, and knew the names and addresses of all the best London makers. He spoke of 'home,' meaning England, as if he had lived all his life in Eaton Square, and in an extempore athletic competition we got up on the sandbank abreast the anchorage he won nearly every event, beating even our champion, Nai Suk.

On April 13 we rounded the black sea-swept rocks of the southern point of Junk Ceylon island, tufted only with a few hardy grasses, where the low wind-shorn trees nestle in nooks and crannies, as if it were the coast of Cornwall. The tides are very strong here, and Captain Low relates having been nearly lost on this headland in 1825. We anchored in Puket Bay towards evening, and in the course of the night got into quarters on shore. Say, our fugitive Chinaman from Prachadi, elected to stay with us, instead of going on home by Penang, for which I offered him the money; and as I had to send home our

old cook, who was quite broken up by fever, he took his place. Being hardly a master of the art, only the simplest things could be required of him. He could light the fire and boil the water; the rice was cooked by the boys, this being one of the earliest accomplishments of every Siamese; anything more elaborate required the united efforts of the whole expedition.

The town of Puket is known to the Chinese as Tongka, and it exists by tin.

For centuries Junk Ceylon,⁷ as it has been called by Europeans, has been known as the most important tin-producing port of the Peninsula, and it has been described by many visitors.

It was a familiar bone of contention between the Siamese and their rivals and neighbours the Burmans, and it changed hands with almost the same frequency as Tenasserim. About 1810 it finally became Siamese, but Captain Low's⁸ account of the island in 1824 shows that its prosperity then was at a low ebb. His description, referring as it does to a time when there was a population of hardly 5,000 souls, nearly entirely Siamese, and when the gently sloping hills 'were clothed with wood to their tops,' and the levels were still 'covered with grass and forest,' is evidence that the greater part of the tin workings which have so transformed many parts of the island are the work of the last sixty years. The output of 500 tons a year, which was the estimate in Captain Forrest's time forty years earlier, had been apparently reduced to about 300, and it was supposed that the best mines had been pretty well exhausted. It is curious to note that Pang Nga was then the chief seat of government, and was also the principal port of the district, and the Salang tin

⁷ From the Malay *Ujong Salang*, 'Salang cape.'

⁸ *Journ. As. Soc.* vol. vii. part ii.

actually went to Pang Nga, and was exported thence to Penang or across the Peninsula.

The most flourishing period in the history of the island was apparently during the time of the late Rajah, when there was a population of between forty and fifty thousand people, and roads were made to all the more important mining districts. The Rajah's chief claim to fame in the eyes of the people lay, however, in his having killed a tiger single-handed, for which act he is still remembered.

The whole island is a gigantic tin mine. The granite



of the hills is full of tin, the soil of the valleys is heavy with it. There is tin under the inland forests, and tin beneath the sea. In search of tin the indefatigable Chinamen have transformed the scenery. The valleys have been turned inside out, the hills have been cut away, the sea has been undermined, and the harbour has disappeared. Leaving the ship a mile out in the bay, one crosses banks of silt derived entirely from the tin workings up the river. The snug port, which thirty years ago protected any number of vessels of many hundred tons, is now a boat harbour which accommodates a few *tongkans*, and

double-tailed *sampans*.⁹ The little docks, where the fishing craft lie, are old tin workings, the banks of the river are heaps of tailings, quartz and hornblende crunch beneath one's feet, and the decomposing granite scents the air. Inland, beyond the town, the open valleys lie cleared of jungle. The stained water of the streams runs between mountains of tailings, grown over here and there with a few coarse grasses, and deep red pools lie in between. A brown-roofed cottage occasionally shades itself beneath a cluster of cocoanut palms, which alone seem to flourish on the rough waste lands. Close by a few industrious streamers are at work, and far away gangs of men may be seen busy on a large paddock, with a face five fathoms deep.

With these evidences of the enormous wealth of the island we were at once struck by the abominable state of the roads, and the miserable condition of the town. Coming as we did straight from the order and cleanliness of Mergui, the contrast was very marked.

The police complained of bad wages, and worse quarters; the Chinese, of the bad quality of the opium supplied to them, and of the high taxes; the miners, of the exorbitant royalties, and additional charges imposed upon them; everybody else, of the rapid diminution in the prosperity of the place; and all united in unanimous abuse of the methods of the 'special commissioner.' The last it was not our business to listen to; the rest seemed amply justified. The police got \$6 (13s. 4d.) a month, and had to find themselves. Their barrack collapsed while we were there.

The opium, from all that I could find out, must have

* Captain Low's description of the harbour (p. 590) shows that he landed in the bay which lies to the north of the roadstead off Tongka now known as 'Paket Harbour.' Ta Rua, the 'boat landing,' the principal village men-

tioned by him, was, as is usual, some way inland. This bay is much more protected from the east than the road off Tongka, and is in every way an admirable harbour.

been adulterated in Puket. The same quality was supplied to Renawng, but no complaints were ever made of it there. The necessities of life, such as rice, were taxed, and ordinary articles, such as *attap* for roofing purposes, had to pay import duty, although they came from Gerbi, Trang, and other Siamese provinces near by, where duty had been already paid on export. It was calculated that, taking all the farms and taxes into consideration, the Government took forty per cent. of the earnings of every coolie in the place. The royalty charged here and elsewhere in the Siamese States was one slab in every six, and was collected after smelting, when the stamps were being affixed for export. This was equivalent to over sixteen and a half per cent., and stamp fees in addition brought the Government's share up to an even higher total. The shallow alluvial deposits being now nearly all worked out, most of the mines were either working deep paddocks with an overburden of sometimes fifty feet, or had been compelled to commence hydraulic operations on the stanniferous granite of the hills. It is no wonder, therefore, that with these high figures, and the increased expenses incidental to the more complicated operations now necessary to reach the tin, many undertakings had been closed down which under more favourable circumstances would have paid their way satisfactorily.

The total population of the island, including Malays and Siamese, was probably at this time about 30,000, of which the mining population was under 20,000, and was decreasing. In 1884 there were nearer 50,000 Chinamen in the island. The output of tin in 1894 exceeded 2,500 tons.¹ Ten years earlier it was estimated at twice that. Then every month brought new immigrants. Now they

¹ Particulars are given approximately in Appendix x.

were leaving in large numbers, and every year saw a large reduction in the population. In the old Rajah's time the roads were in good repair, and it was possible to take ox-carts up to the inland mines without trouble. During our visit, the only workmen upon the roads were eager miners, who were demolishing them for the tin that lay beneath, or patient drivers rebuilding breaches in them sufficiently to get their buffalo carts across. The indifference of the Government to the condition of the roads imposed a further burden on the miners, especially the more distant ones. The incompetence of the Government officials in regard to all mining questions resulted in the accumulation of unsettled claims and counter-claims, and in quarrels over water rights and boundaries, which still further hampered them, and were a source of danger to the public peace.

With one of the junior commissioners, whose functions had been practically usurped by the 'special' commissioner, I went to one mine where the *tauke* had been deprived of water by his neighbour, who had tapped his lead at a higher point, and demanded a fee of some thousand dollars for its renewal. Our friend, who had some fifty men upon the mine, had done no work for three months, and quite acquiesced in the position of affairs. The other *tauke* had more men and more guns, so, after a preliminary fight, he had decided to wait patiently for the rains, when he hoped to get some water.

The impression left on my mind after finishing our work in Puket was that the 'special commissioner,' Praya Tip Kosa, must be imbued with a profound hatred of the Chinaman, and must be very anxious to see the last of him. Beyond the very high qualities of which he is undoubtedly possessed—qualities shared perhaps equally by the buffalo—I confess I have no great admiration for the Chinese coolie, and I felt perhaps a slight sympathy with

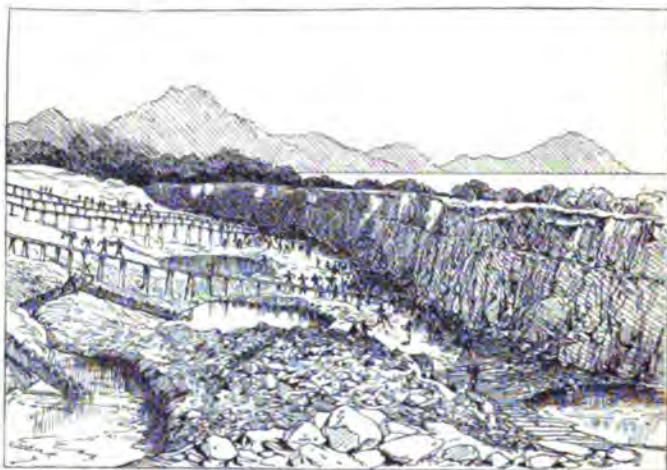
the Commissioner on the object it was natural to attribute to him. I ventured, consequently, to congratulate him in my most genial manner on the very thorough and efficacious methods he had adopted to turn the Chinese out of the provinces under his charge. My remarks were received with singular coldness.

I was told in Bangkok that he was an extremely clever man, a fact which no one who knew him would think of disputing; and one could not presume to suppose he had adopted this policy of bleeding the western States without being fully alive to the obvious consequences. It is only surprising that the Siamese Government should acquiesce. He was recently reappointed for another term of office, and every mark of confidence was bestowed upon him. His success in revenue-remitting has been undoubtedly very great; he has made it a fine art, and is said to maintain an average return to Bangkok of \$500,000 annually. No Governor could have done more in this respect, and certainly no governor in the world could have spent less on the provinces under his charge.

Besides the Government offices and the special commissioner's own residence, we noted three other instances of public works which need to be recorded to show that some money is spent in Puket. A piece of road near Naitu was repaired before we left, for a distance of some two hundred yards. It may have cost a hundred dollars. Secondly, when the police barrack fell down, a brand-new bamboo shed was erected, I believe not at the expense of the policemen. Thirdly, the tide gauge, marks, and buoys in Puket harbour all showed undoubted signs of paint. The paint, it was true, was paid for by Captain Weber, a local resident in charge of the police, but it was put on by men in Government service.

I am certain that the Government in Bangkok have never realised the disastrous effect which the system had

on the distant provinces. The revenue each year was maintained at the proper figure, and therefore no questions were asked. The money went to Bangkok, and the P.W.D. spent it in improving the look of the town. Visitors were impressed with what was being done in Bangkok, and went away persuaded that Siam was an enlightened country. The poverty-stricken condition of the provinces did not come under their notice. 'That's all our money,' cried a disconsolate provincial Governor to me, spreading



Lo Gi's Mine

wide his fingers towards a canal in Bangkok beautifully embanked, with a charming road on either side. 'I have had to roof my court-house at my own expense.'

When Prince Damrong became Minister of the Interior the provinces began to obtain some consideration, and there is no doubt that now the policy of starving the provinces for the benefit of the capital is beginning to be discredited. In the last eighteen months the advance has been very appreciable, and in some parts very remark-

able; but there remains a vast deal to be done, and in some cases the men to whom the work is given are not fitted for it. What the new financial measures will effect in this direction I am not aware. By all accounts Puket has not yet derived any advantage from them, or from the enlightened sentiments which are just now fashionable at Bangkok.

The method by which the alluvial tin is worked by the Chinese is the same in all the States of the Peninsula. While many of the paddocks, or open cast workings, generally known as *Mueng K'sa*, are quite small, and employ comparatively few men, there are some remarkable excavations round Puket. The largest, known as Lo Gi's mine, had a face of six hundred yards in length, and employed about nine hundred men. The *Karang* was a stiff blue clay, five feet thick, containing a fine black ore, and overlaid by nearly seven fathoms of over-burden. The sea at high water had been accustomed to flow over this, but was now dammed back by a series of flood banks, which would have done credit to a fen-man. The output was about two and a half tons a day; and with all the *konysis* at work, the number of men travelling in the long lines up and down the plank ways with their loads gave a good idea of the size of the place.

During the first part of our visit the majority of the mines were simply stripping off the over-burden in preparation for the rains. During the dry season there is not, as a rule, sufficient water to do the washing, although a few mines use small centrifugal pumps to raise the water which collects in the old paddocks. The wooden chain pump is, however, most commonly used, and is worked either by small overshot waterwheels about three feet wide and five feet in diameter, or else by half a dozen coolies walking a long axle round by wooden treddles. During the rains there is often a very heavy strain upon the pumps,

as might be supposed, and they are kept going constantly day and night.

The hill workings, generally known as *Mueng Len*,² are, however, the most interesting, from a mining point of view, as much ingenuity and not a little science are displayed in them. They lie along the thickly jungled granite hills which form the backbone of the island, and are a prolongation of the coast range running south through Takuapa and Takuatung. The granite, when it comes in contact with the overlying sandstone series, becomes stanniferous, and the tin is scattered through its mass in small black crystals as one of its essential ingredients. The nearer the junction the richer the granite, and in some of the deep cuttings good sections are exposed showing the granite veins ramifying through the red micaceous sandstone above it. In the Naitu district, these veins on closer examination are seen to carry tin disseminated through them, the richer patches being invariably near the walls of the vein. Away from the junction the granite becomes poorer, until at some depth it ceases to pay to work. Tin miners all the world over believe in the edge of the granite for making tin, and here is no exception.

Farther east, on the other hand, the tin does not necessarily follow the junction, but is largely worked from soft quartzose veins running through the harder surrounding granite.

In other districts, near Sitam, to the northward, there are small lodes running in a north and south direction through the granite. In their gossany appearance they are far more suggestive of tin, but they seem to have been shattered and dislocated, for they seldom run uninterruptedly for more than a few fathoms. They pinch out

² *Mueng Kra* is also used for small hill workings, where there is only sufficient water for washing purposes during the rains, and

which are therefore dependent on the rains entirely; e.g. in Langsuan, Chapter xvii., etc.

others it becomes almost assimilated with the granite. When first cut it is fairly hard, but a season's exposure transforms it to a clinging clay of a deep red, which adds greatly to the colouring of the stream works, and contrasts gorgeously with the heavy green of the surrounding forest.

The whole of the workings are open cast, and the chasms and gashes which cut far up the hillsides, and are, in many cases, visible for miles across the country, have all been worked out by water power. Watercourses have been constructed along the hills many miles in length, and at a cost of many thousand dollars. They generally follow the contour lines, but in places are taken through a projecting shoulder by a cutting, or carried across a deep nullah on an ingenious aqueduct. The finest of these is at Taw Sun, and measures two hundred feet in length and sixty-five in height. It is made entirely of short hard-wood trees lashed together by rattans collected from the jungle round. It is stayed by giant bamboos, and has a tall archway in the bottom of the gully to permit of the passage of an elephant.

The greatest activity is in the rainy season, but some of the mines have water power all the year. The stream is brought to the head of the open work, and the water from it directed down the face of the rock at the points required. The men stand high up the rock face, working with their iron-shod pikes to assist the stream, and the loosened masses keep tumbling away towards the bottom. The water runs out through long sluice boxes of wood, or deep ditches cut in the yielding granite sometimes to a depth of ten feet. The gradient is a very gentle one, and here and there men stand raking over the bottom with their chankols. The tin, of course, settles mostly at the upper end; but the finer stuff, which may float away below, is induced to settle by the distance over which it travels and

by the constant stirring it receives. To avoid the trouble of digging out the stuff and redressing, these washing-boxes may be over a hundred yards in length, they are constantly raked over from top to bottom, and very little tin has a chance of escaping at the lower end. At the end of days or weeks the tin is shovelled out.

A fan-like deposit of detritus spreads its glistening surface out into the valley, wherever one of these mining streams escapes. It flashes in the sun with all the tiny particles of the granitic minerals like a snow bank. It buries the vegetation deeper, and creeps farther forward every season. Some of the workings present a perpendicular face of fifteen fathoms, and looking down them one was reminded of some of the great stopes in the Cornish mines. The best way to get an impression of the whole thing was to follow a watercourse along the range, going through the cuttings, crossing high above the working faces, and over the trestle bridges. The distant views to be obtained of forest, land, and sea were very beautiful, for the indented nature of the coast always placed a bit of blue water in the picture. To my great astonishment we waded through quantities of magnificent bracken—our own true English bracken. How homely it looked in its familiar red !

We were surprised to find that there is very little fever among the miners. The Siamese West Coast provinces, in fact, have generally acquired a good name in this respect, and, although beri-beri is complained of, the work seems even in the rains comparatively healthy. It may in some measure be due to the large clearings which have been made, and the amount of work which has been done in turning up the soil, by which perhaps the malaria has to a great extent been let off, in the last three or four centuries. It may be in part due to the extent of the granite formation, which seems often healthy in its effects. Or the sea-breezes may in some measure account for it.

How different things are generally on the eastern side we afterwards found for ourselves.

The smelting is all done in Tonga itself in the little iron-bound mud blast-furnaces which are familiar throughout the peninsula, and the tin as it is run off is made into slabs of about 90lbs. weight for export. The charcoal is entirely derived from the neighbouring jungles.

The Chinese *tauke* is in a position to work mines



KINA RE

which no one else could possibly make pay. Very often he does not look to the actual mining for a profit, but to the gambling, opium, and spirit shops attached to the *kongsi*, and to the food and stores with which he supplies his coolies.

The foreign community in Tongka consisted of Captain Weber and his wife, who were hospitality itself to me, one or two missionaries, the Lieutenant of Marines in charge of a company of men from Bangkok, and two or three officers of the Siamese gunboat which usually lies off the town.

This force has before now been called into requisition to quell riots among the Chinamen, and in one case nearly twenty thousand of these people threatened Tongka. Commodore de Richelieu, who was then in charge, had less than a hundred men at his disposal; but they went in boldly at their work, and, though they were not allowed to fire, joyfully broke up the crowd bit by bit in detail with their bayonets and captured the barricades erected by the rioters—a very creditable performance, as, deprived of the power to use their firearms, they had no advantage over the rioters but that conferred by superior discipline.

During our stay I was rather struck with the difficulties the Siamese seamen of the Navy have occasionally to put up with in their training. The Commander on board the gunboat then lying in the bay was a Dane, who as yet spoke no Siamese, and only very broken English, in which he had to communicate to the Siamese *surang*⁴ any order he had to give. Not unfrequently the First Lieutenant, who had been on the lower deck in the British Navy, had to interpret the Captain's English to the *surang*. The chief engineer, who was an Austrian, had to communicate all orders in the engine-room *viu* the captain and the *surang*, and not one of the three officers could speak six words of Siamese between them.

This somewhat complicated method did not naturally last for very long, for the Captain soon learned enough English and Siamese to make himself understood without assistance. But for some months the ship can have been hardly prepared for an emergency.

The police, who had for years been under Captain Weber, numbered about sixty, and consisted of a number of Sikhs, and some of the Siamese-speaking Malays who are the people of the country. The latter make very fair

⁴ Skipper.

policemen, but, though better jungle-wallahs than the Sikhs, they are not such good fighting men. They are a short, rather good-looking type, with the qualities of the Malay and the Siamese curiously intermixed. They were armed with Snider carbines and bayonets, and their duties were to patrol the roads by day. By night, by common consent, people chiefly remain at home, and the police go into their stations. We spent a charming evening at one of the up-country stations listening to these fellows singing; it was my first experience of Malay airs, but I am glad to say not my last, and one characteristic refrain I have often heard since :—



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