

SEBHĀ RECITATION  
and  
THE STORY OF KHUN CHĀNG KHUN PHAN<sup>1</sup>  
by

HIS HIGHNESS PRINCE BIDYA.

*Sebhā* may be defined for the purpose of this paper as story-telling by the recitation of rhymes previously composed. An important feature of *Sebhā*, which distinguishes it from Rural Rhymes, is indicated by the expression *previously composed*, Rural Rhymes being extemporised songs.

It is a long time since I had the pleasure of reading before this Society a paper on Rural Rhymes, which, as I then said, *touches the fringe of Siamese poetry*. My present paper is on a kindred subject, and as only a few members of my audience to-night heard me on the last occasion, perhaps you will pardon me if I repeat a few remarks which I made fifteen years ago.

In the first place, I would like to renew the statement which I made in my previous paper that the Thai of this country are a poetically-minded people. This, I maintain, is proved by the existence of innumerable illiterate rhymesters among our rural population, and the crowds which gather round them with obvious enjoyment as they sing their extemporised songs into the small hours of the morning. The expression *illiterate rhymesters* sounds like a contradiction in terms, but such people are to be found all over the country, and there is no need for me to labour the point. I submit that an illiterate person who can compose rhymes and sing them extempore is a poet by nature, and that his extemporised songs are the product of an elementary but poetical mind. Poets are said to be born, not made, and the saying seems to apply forcibly here.

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<sup>1</sup> Read before the Thailand Research Society on September 24, 1940.

This paper does not pretend to be a treatise on Thai Prosody. My subject, however, calls for a brief explanation of one branch of it. *Sebhā* recitation is a form of entertainment, without the glamour of a *khōn* (โขน) or *lāon* (ละคร), and can be most inexpensive. *Sebhā* rhymes, on the other hand, form a most important section of Thai poetic literature, and *Khwan Chāng Khwan Phan*, the *Sebhā* story, occupies a prominent position among our literary works.

It is difficult to explain Thai poetry in English; one runs the risk of being asked to *explain his explanations*. I will, however, try to indicate to you presently how *Sebhā* differs from other forms of rhyme. Meanwhile, it may be stated as an established principle that rhyming is an essential feature of Thai poetry; that with us, in fact, nothing is poetry unless it rhymes. Some Thai poets have attempted to introduce blank verse into our writings, but without success. I have myself produced blank verse in Thai and introduced it into one of my talks on poetry; not in order to persevere with the attempt, but rather to prove its futility. On that occasion the futility was amply proved, for my audience did not recognize the blank verse in the talk; they thought I was speaking in prose all the time.

This paper, as I have said, is by no means a treatise on Thai prosody, but, in order to make myself clear within my confined subject, it seems necessary to describe briefly the Thai poetical system. Broadly speaking, Thai poetry may be classified under three main divisions, namely, the *Klon* (กลอน), the *Glōng* (โกลง) and the *Chand* (ฉันท์). In addition, we have the *Rāi* (ร่ำ), which is neither prose nor verse, and may be said to come between the two. Quasi-poetry would seem to be an adequate description of it.

The *Klon* is of indigenous origin. It prescribes no rhythm, but consists simply of a number of syllables in each line, usually six or eight, rhyming according to a system which I shall describe presently.

The *Glōng*, I believe, is Chinese in origin, but the method of rhyming is our own. Each quatrain of *Glōng* contains two sets of rhymes, and it has to follow a system of tone-placing,—certain tones being required in certain parts of the lines.

The *Chand* is an adaptation of Sanskrit poetry, but apart from the rhythm, which follows the Indian original, we add our own method of rhyming. The combination of rhyme and rhythm makes *Chand* difficult to write in our mainly monosyllabic language, and it cannot

be attempted without the possession of an extensive vocabulary. Unfortunately, if a writer employ too many unusual words, the average reader fails to understand him; he sounds all too mystic, and the reader wisely declines to risk his sanity in attempting to follow him.

I have pointed out that with us nothing is poetry unless it rhymes. But when I say *rhyme*, I mean it not as understood in English prosody. In English, rhyme means agreement in the terminal sounds of two or more words or metrical lines, such that the last stressed syllable and any sound following it are the same, while the sound or sounds preceding are different. That is the Oxford Dictionary. Put more simply, but perhaps less accurately, rhyme is the correspondence of sound which occurs in the terminating words or syllables of the verses.

In Thai poetry, broadly speaking, there are two systems of rhyming. In extemporised songs, such as Rural Rhymes, correspondence of the same sound occurs in the terminating words or syllables of all the lines; that is to say, the same rhyme goes on from beginning to end. For instance, if the first line end with *may*, the second may end with *say*, and then *lay*, *clay*, *betray* and so on all the way down. A rhyme-word may be repeated, of course, but there must be a suitable interval before each repetition.

In my paper on Rural Rhymes, I explained at some length the rhyming of extemporaneous songs, that is to say, the easier kind of Thai poetry. Here I propose to show you the other system, namely, the rhyming of songs which are not extemporised.

Sebhā poetry is a variety of *Klon*, usually *Klon 6* (กอน ๖), which corresponds to the trimetre in English. I propose to demonstrate the system of rhyming to you by taking some English verses. Here, then, are some lines from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* :—

Calm and still light on you great plain,  
That sweeps, with all its autumn bowers,  
And crowded farms and lessening towers,  
To mingle with the bounding main.

The above is a quatrain of four-foot lines with enclosing rhymes, *bowers* and *towers* being enclosed by *plain* and *main*. This system of enclosing rhymes forms the nearest approach to Thai rhyming, which I propose to demonstrate to you by means of a concoction of mine invented for the purpose :—

## ON THE WOLD

The Girl appears so coy ;  
 The Boy appears so cold ;  
 Together on the wold  
 Behold them wend their way.

Are they in love, the two,  
 Who seem more grave than gay ?  
 'Tis hard, I think, to say ;  
 They don't betray their mind.

But why this vain desire ?  
 And why aspire to find  
 The truth that hides behind  
 A blind of mental haze ?

It may well prove accurst,  
 This thirst for mental maze ;  
 So let's remove our gaze  
 And haze beyond the wold.

You will observe that each line of the above verses contains six words or syllables. The rhyming looks like the English enclosing rhymes, but does not actually enclose. The terminating word of the last line of each quatrain is left loose, i. e., it has no correspondence of sound with any of the rhyme-words above it. We call this loose word the *throw word* (คำทิ้ง), which means that it is thrown out from one quatrain and caught in the next to continue the rhyme.

In Thai rhyming we have what we call the external contact (สัมผัสนอก) and the internal contact (สัมผัสใน). The Thai word for contact is *samphas*, which has a wider meaning than the English expression *rhyme*, for it embraces not only the rhyme proper, but assonance and alliteration as well. In most cases, however, *samphas*, when used by itself, means rhyme ; where we use it to mean more than that, we add a qualifying word. In the following paragraphs, therefore, when I say *rhyme*, I mean *samphas* (contact) only in the narrow sense.

In demonstrating the Thai system of rhyming to you by means of the verses above given, I propose to explain the external contact, or external rhyme, only. The external rhyme is an essential feature of our poetry—there cannot be a poem without it. I propose to touch on the internal contact, or internal rhyme, later on.

Now look at the first quatrain of my concoction, and observe that the last word of the first line is *coy*, and that the second word of the second line, *Boy*, rhymes with it. They are the first set of rhymes in the quatrain, and have to be there to bind the first and second lines together.

Next observe *cold* and *wold* in the second and third lines, and also the second syllable of *behold* in the last line. They are the second set of rhymes in the same quatrain, and they too bind the lines together. Notice that the last word of the quatrain is *way*, and that it is the throw-word which is taken up and rhymed in the quatrain which follows.

Now look at the second quatrain and see that in this case the first set of rhyme-words are *two* and *who*, the latter being placed at the beginning of the second line. The throw-word *way* from the first quatrain is followed by *gay* and *say* in the second and third lines, and again by *betray* in the fourth line. The word thrown out by this quatrain is *mind*, which is rhymed in the next quatrain with *find*, *behind* and *blind*.

In all this compulsory rhyming, only one latitude is allowed: the non-terminal rhyme-word of the second line of the quatrain, and that in the fourth line, may be placed in the first, second or fourth syllable. You will notice that the second and fourth lines have two rhyme-words each, and when I say non-terminal, I mean, of course, the one which is not at the end of the lines. You will observe that in the demonstration verses above—I have placed the non-terminal rhyme-words in the three alternative positions.

In addition to all this compulsory rhyming, there is what we call internal contact (สัมผัสใน) or internal rhyme, which is voluntary. The internal contact is important on account of its generally beautifying effect, and many Thai poets would never willingly write down a line without it. But here I should sound a note of warning: internal rhyming is easily overdone, and all potential laureates must beware of it.

There is another feature of Thai rhyming which must now be briefly mentioned. Thai being a tonal language, the tones enter into our prosody and occupy an important position in it. There are rules which provide that the rhyme-words must be in specified tones in specified places. It can serve no useful purpose for me to explain the tone-placing system at length here. Suffice it to say that Thai

poetry is governed by systems of rhyming which differ according to variety, and that in some varieties, such as *Sebhā*, it is governed by rules as to tones as well.

You now see that Thai poetry consists principally of rhymes, and this may give rise to the suspicion that the Thai poet is so occupied with rhyming that he can hardly pay attention to the substance of his poem, or anything else. Such suspicion is not wholly unreasonable, but I can assure you that we manage to write pretty well all that we want to say. We write on historical subjects and on travels; we produce love-epistles, plays, short stories, and long tales which fill volumes. We write philosophically, sentimentally, descriptively, ironically, and even humorously. If Thomas Carlyle is right when he says that *humour has justly been regarded as the finest perfection of poetical genius*, the Thai poets may claim to possess that perfection to quite a fair extent.

But after all that I have said about rhyming, you must not run away with the idea that Thai poetry is all rhyme and no rhythm. That is not so. For, although rhythm is not compulsory in the indigenous form of poetry, every discerning reader knows that rhythmical movement is found in all good *Klon*. Such movement is not sustained or regularly continuous, but it is distinctly discernable,—provided, let me repeat, that the *Klon* is good.

What I have said concerning rhythm in *Klon* may sound paradoxical to some members of my audience, for Thai prosody does not prescribe a swinging movement in the indigenous form of poetry. Yet all good *Klon* have it. I will give a few lines of *Klon* 8 (กลอน ๘) which will convince you that they swing in rhythmical movement which, if not in regular order, occurs in every line. Here is a quatrain of Sundorn Bhu (สุนทรภู่), a famous *Klon* poet. Do not read them with your eyes only, but listen to them also with your ears. You will then recognize the swing:

จะรำปางนางสวรรค์เสวยสุข  
 ในปรางมุขพิมานสโมสร  
 เฝยพระเกลดแลคนแผ่นดินดอน  
 เห็นไกรสรกลอดลูกในหิมวา

You see that every line is rhythmical, but they do not all swing exactly alike. In this connection, I would give a piece of useful advice to the less discerning members of my audience: read poetry

not with your eyes only, but with your ears also. When reading silently to yourself, you do not physically hear your own voice, but mentally you do. If you bear this in mind, you will appreciate poetry much more.

#### A NATIONAL HERITAGE.

Poetry is an important part of our culture; it is a national heritage of great value. Among the Thai people generally, poetry-mindedness, or the poetic instinct, remains to-day much as it was. But in the higher social order, we have to deplore the decline of intelligent appreciation of the value of poetry or of our poetic literature. The spread of Western education has, in a measure, contributed to this. But it must be remembered that in the West the rapid progress of modern forms of education has not caused the decline of poetry as an important factor in the cultural life of their people.

#### SEBHĀ ENTERTAINMENT.

Sebhā is about the simplest form of entertainment there is. There is no need for a stage, nor must there be much room. A reciter and his castanets are all that are really necessary; nobody and nothing else. But a reciter cannot keep up for hours all by himself, and where an entertainment is intended to last any length of time, two or more reciters have to be employed. An orchestra is not a necessity, but it is usually provided. In addition to lending greater dignity to an entertainment, an orchestra provides a pause in the recitation to give the reciters a rest. When a reciter wants a pause to take breath, or for a drink or a cigarette, he brings a passage of the rhymes to a close by singing it,—not merely reciting. The orchestra, knowing the signal, strikes up, playing the tune indicated by the singer. Needless to say, the loud Thai orchestra would drown the man's voice if he continued to sing, so he lights a cigarette, or takes a drink, or even goes out for a breath of air.

When Sebhā entertainment is provided at important functions, it is usual to have two or more reciters, both men and women, in addition to an orchestra. On a number of occasions, when Sebhā was recited before King Chulalongkorn, several reciters took part; one notable performer, a very good one, was the late Prince of Chumborn, father of the present President of the Council of Regency. If you can imagine yourself listening with your eyes closed, Sebhā is like

a modern radio play. Different characters of the story are represented by different reciters: the part of the heroine is recited by a woman, usually the prima donna of the company; that of the hero by the chief male reciter, and so on. There is also the reciter who is the equivalent of the radio announcer; he recites what is not anybody's part. I suppose that those of us, who were present at *Sebhā* recitations before King Chulalongkorn, heard the best thing of its kind. I propose presently to transport you back for fifteen minutes to King Chulalongkorn's time.

*Sebhā* entertainments are given on occasions when large numbers of guests are gathered, such as house-warming, birthday or tonsure ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> In the *Sebhā* book, *Khun Chāng Khun Phan*, a description is given of a tonsure ceremony during which *Sebhā* is provided for the entertainment of the guests. The custom is that when the religious part of the ceremony has been performed, and the monks have departed, the guests are invited to partake of food. Everybody stays to dine. After the meal, or during it, entertainment takes place, usually *Sebhā*, which is the correct thing for a tonsure ceremony.

You will understand that I am speaking of days gone by; for, except occasionally through the radio, one hardly ever has an opportunity to listen to *Sebhā* nowadays. A tonsure ceremony is unheard of in modern Thailand, and for house-warming or birthday celebrations, we give cocktail parties consisting of buffet dinner and dance, a jazz band providing the music. If there is singing, the songs are in Thai words set to non-Thai music. And so *Sebhā* as we knew it is gone. I doubt if fifty per cent. of my audience this evening have ever met a *Sebhā* reciter face to face, but let us repair the omission.

I have much pleasure in introducing to you not a *Sebhā* reciter, but *the* *Sebhā* reciter, master of his art. He was pre-eminent in King Chulalongkorn's time, and is the only man whom His late Majesty decorated with the Arts Medal for proficiency in music. When I said a few minutes ago that I proposed to transport you back to King Chulalongkorn's time, I meant, of course, that an opportunity would be provided for you to hear the master reciter who performed before that King. The gentleman is now seventy-three years of age, and I am fortunate in being able to persuade him to come this evening.

<sup>2</sup> The *Sebhā* contains too much conjugal trouble, and it is on that account, I presume, regarded as inauspicious and tabooed at marriage ceremonies.



Here, then, is Phya Snoh Duriyang (พระสนอสนมดริยวงศ์), the *acharya* of his art. He is accompanied by one of his pupils, and they will give a short recitation. The words recited will be a dialogue between the hero of the story and his first wife, whom he wakes up in the middle of the night while asleep with her second husband. I fancy that even those of you who do not follow the words will detect in the recitation the sneering voice of the man, and the voice of anger of the woman. I don't know, but you may. Let us now have the recitation.

## (RECITATION)

Let me now convey you back from King Chulalongkorn's time, and proceed to the next part of my Paper, which gives an historical background to the *Sebhā* book.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

The authorship of the *Sebhā* book, *Khun Chāng Khun Phan*, is mixed; it is the work of many writers. I mean by this that parts of the book were composed at different times by different writers, many of the authors being the professional reciters themselves. Thus we find in the book many very fine passages mixed with others of middling quality. If you asked me the age of the book as we have it to-day, I would say it has none, for it is made up largely of interpolations introduced at different times, with little, if any, of the original text left. Separate chapters of the book were revised and put together for the first time, as Prince Damrong has pointed out<sup>8</sup>, in the Second Reign, but since then there have been many more interpolations. The book appeared in printed form for the first time from Smith's Press in 1872. Forty-five years later, it was re-edited and published by the Vajirañān Library under Prince Damrong's direction. Each edition had its reprints, the latest being that which was issued by the present Silpakorn Department in November 1939. Students must be warned against misprints in this issue. If we compare Smith's edition with the Library edition, we find much difference not only in the rhymes, but also in the details of some parts of the story. Smith's Press published the book sixty-eight years ago from such manuscripts as it could obtain at the time, and it goes without saying that the Press had no access to the manuscripts in the Royal Library which

<sup>8</sup> In the introduction to the Vajirañān Library edition, 1917.

Prince Damrong had forty-five years later. Poetically, the Library edition is greatly superior to its predecessor. Prince Damrong's capable assistant, the late Prince Kavi, was one of the finest poets of his day, or of any day, and I have a very shrewd suspicion that he gave his own touch here and there to smooth off the rough edges of a number of lines. Such treatment was necessary where obvious clerical errors occurred in the manuscripts (Smith's edition has many such errors), or where different passages, written at different times by different authors, did not dovetail smoothly into one another. On the other hand, opinions differ as to the propriety of adopting an obviously new version and rejecting the old one, such as the episode of the *Golden Boy* (กุมารทอง). Prince Damrong has explained the point fully in his Introduction to the Library edition.

It is generally believed that the *Khun Chāng Khun Phan* story is based on fact, and that the book is, therefore, a historical novel. There is a historical document which bears this out. The document in question is called คำให้การชาวกรุงเก่า or *Statement by a Citizen of Ayudhya*, which was made in Burmah after the sack of that city by the Burmese in 1767. The citizen's name is not known, but plainly he was a man of position who was taken to Burmah as a prisoner of war.

Prince Damrong, in his Introduction to the Library edition, quotes the above document to show that Khun Phan, the hero of our story, was born in 1485 of the Christian era; the year which, in English history, witnessed the landing of the exiled Henry, Earl of Richmond, at Milford Haven in Pembrokehire. The battle of Bosworth Field was then fought, wherein Richard III was beaten and slain, and the Earl of Richmond became Henry VII, first of the Tudor Kings. Khun Phan was about seven years old when America was discovered. It was in his life-time that the much-married Henry VIII succeeded his father on the English throne. It is interesting to compare the number of the Eighth Henry's Queens with that of Khun Phan's wives in the story. Henry had six; Khun Phan, five. Khun Phan had the advantage of Henry, for it was not necessary for him to divorce the current wife before marrying the next one.

To return to Thai history as indicated in Prince Damrong's Introduction, the story of Khun Chāng Khun Phan is based on events which occurred during the reign of King Rāmādhīpati II of Ayudhya, (พระรามาธิบดีที่ ๒). That King reigned between 1491 and 1529, Christ-

ian era. According to the document quoted, the King of Luang Phrabang, whose capital was then at Vieng Chan, desired to be on friendly terms with the King of Ayudhya, and asked the latter to accept his sixteen-year-old daughter. The King of Ayudhya welcomed the suggestion, and in due course the princess started on her journey from Vieng Chan to Ayudhya. The King of Chiengmai heard of this, and, objecting to an alliance between Ayudhya and Luang Phrabang, sent a large force to intercept the young lady and carried her off to Chiengmai. The King of Ayudhya was naturally greatly incensed at the outrage, and he ordered an army to be made ready to march on Chiengmai to avenge the wrong. The King consulted one of his trusted councillors on the choice of men to fill positions of command in the army. The councillor submitted Khun Phan's name, and gave it as his opinion that the vanguard alone, with Khun Phan in command, would suffice to subjugate Chiengmai, and that there was no need to employ any other section of the King's army. The King agreed. But Khun Phan was then in prison, and he had to be released and re-instated. He was put in command of the punitive expedition, which marched without undue delay. Chiengmai was sacked, and Khun Phan brought back to Ayudhya not only the princess of Vieng Chan, but also the Queen of Chiengmai and her daughter, the King having escaped into the jungle. The King of Ayudhya was not disposed to deal harshly with the Chiengmai royal family, and sent word to the refugee King to return to his city, where his Queen was escorted back to join him. The young princess of Chiengmai was kept as a hostage against her father's future misbehaviour, and she became one of the minor queens of Ayudhya.

I take it that Khun Phan outlived the King whom he served, for that monarch was only forty years of age when he died, having been on the throne for twenty-five years. It is on record that when Khun Phan felt himself too old for military service, he presented his famous weapon to the Sovereign then on the throne. The weapon became one of the two chief swords in the regalia of the Kings of Ayudhya.

The above is the historical background of the book. I will next give you an outline of the story itself. The title of the book is, to me, a conundrum. Khun Phan is a notable historical figure, and hero of the story. Khun Chāng, though one of the principal characters, is subsidiary to the hero. But why does his name come first in the title of the book? Khun Chāng may be the elder of the two

men, but that is no sufficient reason. I do not propose to solve the riddle.

#### THE SEBHĀ STORY.

In giving an outline of the story. I have to exercise considerable restraint lest I keep you here half the night, for the story fills three good-sized volumes.

A friend once consulted me on the idea he had in mind of translating *Khun Chāng Khun Phan* into English. I found myself unable to promise much help; it would take more time than a lazy man could afford. Many of you know Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights*, unexpurgated edition, with footnotes everywhere explaining the significance of words and phrases—on religion, customs, beliefs, social practices, and so on. That is my conception of an adequate translation of *Khun Chāng Khun Phan*, footnotes and all.

I am not giving a translation of any part of the book this evening, but only a bare outline of the story. Starting at the beginning, then, we have the description of three well-to-do families residing at Supan (เมืองสุพรรณ). Khun Krai (ขุนไกร), the hero's father, is a famous soldier in command of the King's forces in the district. The head of the second family, Khun Sri Vijai (ขุนศรีวิชัย), has charge of the King's elephants in the locality, and is famed for his great wealth. The third family is that of another army man, Pan Sorn Yodhā (พันสรโยธา), a rich, well-born man married to a rich, well-born wife.

The three families soon have a child each. Each wife has a dream before conception, the vision of Khun Sri Vijai's wife being unpleasant but humorously described. She dreams that a large elephant falls down from a cliff and is killed. As it lies rotting, a pelican comes along, picks up the dead beast in its beak, and flies with it into the lady's room through the window. The bird deposits the elephant on the sleeper's bed and snuggles itself besides her. As long as the vision lasts, the dreamer does not appear to mind, but she soon wakes up very sick indeed. The lady rouses her husband to ask what the dream portends. To you and me, it would seem that the dream portended an indigestion, but that is not what the dreamer's husband tells her. He says that she is about to have a son who will become a wealthy man possessing more than five cart-loads of money. The boy will, however, be bald from birth. In due course Khun Chāng is born, and, sure enough, it is an infant destitute of hair.

The wife of Khun Krai dreams that the god Indra pays her a visit, and gives her a ring set with diamonds of great brilliance, a sure sign that a hero is about to be born.

The lady of the third family dreams that the artist of the gods presents her with a ring of the most masterly design and exquisite workmanship, presaging the birth of a famous beauty, fit to be the heroine of any story.

Now it seems that before the three children are allowed to grow to adolescence, it is necessary to kill off their fathers. Khun Krai is a warrior of great distinction, and his son cannot supplant him as a top-knotch hero during his life. Khun Chāng, son of the rich master of elephants, cannot indulge in his pranks and act the part of a vain-glorious man of wealth under the eyes of his sane and influential father. Pretty Pim, the heroine, too, would find it less easy to indulge in secret love in her father's life-time, nor would her foolish mother be able to force her into a second marriage through fear of a supposed royal displeasure at the alleged misdemeanour of her first husband. Pim's father, an officer and a man of repute, would not fall into the trap which is set for his silly widow. I have anticipated the story to this extent in order to show why the fathers are disposed of before their children have grown up.

The manner of death of each man is interesting. The hero's father, a famous warrior, meets his death by the sword. No swordsman can kill such a redoubtable fighter except by order of the King. Khun Chāng's father, a man of enormous wealth, dies as a consequence of the possession of such riches; he is disposed of by a band of robbers who come to rob him. He, a powerful fighter himself, is surprised and outnumbered. Pretty Pim's father is the only man of the three who dies a non-violent death.

The King is a queer and thoughtless autocrat. His reason for ordering the execution of the hero's father is atrocious, but the incident is interesting in one important particular. According to the story, the King one day conceives a desire to hunt wild buffaloes, and orders preparations to be made. It is Khun Krai's task to round up the buffaloes and herd them into a kraal in front of the royal stand. On the appointed day, on the arrival of the King, Khun Krai, with 500 men under him, drives the buffaloes towards the kraal and attempts to herd them in. But the wild animals, ferocious by nature, and mad with fright, begin to attack the onlookers, whereupon the King shouts

to Khun Krai to ward off calamities. Khun Krai, spear in hand, rushes in to turn the buffaloes from the crowd, and in so doing kills a large number of the animals. The rest of the herd stampede back to the jungle, leaving many dead buffaloes on the ground. The King is furious, for he considers that the animals have been cruelly and uselessly slain. For what the King regards as his criminal folly, Khun Krai is ordered to be beheaded, his property to be confiscated, and his family to become palace slaves. The royal command as regards decapitation is carried out on the spot, but the second part of the order cannot take effect on the same day owing to the distance of Khun Krai's residence. Warning is sent to his widow by a friend at court, and she has time to escape with her little son, Plai Kaco (พลายแก้ว), afterwards to become Khun Phan, hero of the story.

At this point I may be permitted to make a digression in order to touch on a point which some scholars might regard as important in regard to the date of the story. You will perceive that the King in the story hunts buffaloes, not elephants. Now, according to authentic history (พระราชนิพนธ์พงศาวดาร), from the first dynasty of Ayudhya to King Chulalongkorn of our time, the Kings hunted elephants, never buffaloes. The primary object of elephant-hunting was not sport, but the selection and capture of suitable animals to be trained for service in the Royal Elephant Department, for army and other work. That is why the elephants were driven into a kraal before their capture. Elephant-catching in the open was, and is still, done, but not when the animals are in large herds.

In the *Khun Chāng Khun Phan* story, a whole herd of wild buffaloes, after charging the crowd in a mad rush, stampede and escape to the jungle. The kraal is empty, and the hunt is a failure despite the elaborate preparations that have been made, including the the journey of the King, who, as usual, travels in state. The King's annoyance at the fiasco is understandable. I do not mean to imply that the incident justifies his wrath to the extent of ordering the execution of the most important man in his army. But what a disappointment it must have been to him!

Thus from internal evidence, it is possible to argue that the origin of the *Khun Chāng Khun Phan* story dates back to the time when Kings still had wild buffaloes rounded up and driven into kraals for capture. Those of you who know the history of Burmah may remember that one of the early Kings of that country was gored to

death while out on a buffalo-hunt. The early Kings needed buffaloes, for they farmed land extensively, and stored the produce in royal rice-godowns (อาณาจักร) against famine and war. Nowadays we breed buffaloes almost exclusively in captivity, but we did not always do so. At any rate, the buffaloes would not be driven into a kraal except for capture. It is possible, therefore, to argue from internal evidence, slight though it be, that the kernel of the *Khun Chāng Khun Phan* story goes back further than the foundation of Ayudhya, and that the exploits of the hero were afterwards attributed to a man who was born some hundreds of years after. In a similar manner, much wisdom and many valiant deeds are attributed to legendary heroes such as Phra Ruang of this country, King Arthur of England, and Vikramaditya of India. Again, there may have been many Khun Phans in the past, just as there may have been Ram Kamhangs from the famous King of Sukhodai to Phya Ram Kamhang of to-day.

Having come to the end of my digression, I will now return to the narration of the story. After the death of their fathers, the three children grow up, but appear to forget one another. The hero, Plai Kaeo, is brought up by his mother in a distant town, and does not remember little Pim, the heroine, a playmate in Supan many years ago. Strangely enough, Khun Chāng, who continues to reside in the same town, also loses sight of the girl, and does not seem to know that pretty little Pim has grown into a beautiful young woman. Khun Chāng is presumably the oldest of the trio, and is the first to marry. His bride is mentioned for the first time on page 51 of the Library edition, but within the same page she leaves him a widower. Meanwhile Plai Kaeo grows up to be a lad of fifteen with a strong desire to serve in the King's army, a curious aspiration in view of the fate which has befallen his father. Education begins and ends in a monastery, and it is there also that a man learns to be a fighting man. Military proficiency includes the possession of power which renders a man impervious to an opponent's weapons. A sword-cut has no effect on his person; a bullet misses him, however good a shot the man behind the gun may be. He is an adept in occult powers, and can employ spirits to do his bidding. He can cast spells to put people to sleep, to keep an opposing force standing still, and, easiest of all, to make a woman fall in love with him. All this ability may be acquired in a monastery, and our hero enters one such institution in Supan

whose head monk is capable of imparting all forms of knowledge. As a novice in the monastery (ਸਾਮਠੀ), our hero learns to preach in the most approved style, and on one occasion, when his master is indisposed, the novice preaches in his stead. Beautiful Pim is in the audience, and she and the novice become mutually attracted. Khun Chāng is there too, and he falls in love with Pim at once. Many episodes follow, interesting and humorous, but in places positively vulgar. To cut a long story short, the hero leaves the novitiate and enters into illicit love with the heroine, but he soon leaves Supan to go to his mother, the understanding being that he will come back with the old lady to arrange the marriage. In the meantime, Khun Chāng approaches Pim's mother for her consent to marry her daughter. The widow is inclined to listen to him on account of his great wealth, but Pim is horribly rude, much to her mother's annoyance. In due course, Plai Kaeo returns to Supan with his mother, and his marriage to Pim takes place. Khun Chāng suffers great mental agonies, for, as an old friend, he is invited to attend the wedding as the *groom's friend*, which in English means *best man*.

Next comes war against a force sent by Chieng In, otherwise Chiengmai, to occupy a distant town within the Kingdom of Ayudhya. In looking for a man to command an expedition to drive out the invader, the King recalls the late Khun Krai, and causes an enquiry to be made as to whether the dead warrior left a son who might possibly succeed him. Khun Chāng reports to the King that the late Khun Krai's son, Plai Kaeo, is a great fighter, perfectly fit to take his father's place in the royal army. The King sends for Plai Kaeo, whom he puts in command of the force marching against the invader. Khun Chāng has his eyes on Pim still, and with her husband absent, he sees his chance. He organizes his propaganda machinery and sets it in motion. Rumour is spread all over the town to the effect that Plai Kaeo's army has been routed, and its commander slain. After allowing sufficient time for the false news to soak in, Khun Chāng calls on Pim's mother with a casket containing ashes alleged to be those of Pim's husband, forwarded from the North after his cremation. His agents explain to the widow what is alleged to be the law of the land, namely, that an army commander who has committed the crime of being killed in action suffers the penalty of having his wife "confiscated"—she becomes a palace slave. The only escape, therefore, is to give Pim in marriage to Khun Chāng before there is



time for the law to be put into force. A woman is plainly not a widow, they argue, when her husband is alive; certainly not the widow of a slain army commander when her civilian husband is able and willing to pay bribes. The stratagem works, and in spite of her daughter's obstinate opposition, the widow agrees. Pim's second marriage accordingly takes place, but before its consummation, the hero turns up after having won the war. There's complication for you!

Plai Kao is now Khun Phan (ขุนphan), the rank having been conferred on him by the King as a reward for his victory. I may here mention, in parenthesis, that the name Khun Chāng (ขุนช้าง), is a misnomer. In his case, *Khun* is not a title of nobility granted by the King; it is just part of the name given him by his grandparents soon after his birth.

Khun Phan arrives by boat, accompanied by a retinue befitting a victorious army commander,—plus a new wife. Pim has had her name changed to Van Tong on account of a severe illness; according to the family astrologer, the change of name has saved her life. I may say here that it is an old belief in this country that a sick person at death's door often recovers on a change of name.

As soon as Khun Phan's boat has been tied up, Van Tong rushes from the house to meet her husband on the landing. She weeps on his breast and imparts to him her long tale of woe. Khun Phan flies into a rage, and shouts to his men to surround the house while he goes in to cut them all down. At this critical point, the new wife, Lao Tong (ลาวทอง) intervenes. Emerging from inside the boat, she warns Khun Phan against taking the law into his own hand, and implores him not to take violent action without hearing the other side of the story. Van Tong flares up; one sympathizes with her under the circumstances. Her husband tries to appease her by representing Lao Tong as merely a minor wife, and bids the latter *wai*<sup>4</sup> her senior. You know from world politics that appeasement is never any good. Van Tong does not want a *wai*, and her cruel innuendoes against Lao Tong make the latter retort with equally nasty insinuations. A non-aggression pact is now impossible. Van Tong becomes aggressive, and Lao Tong saves herself from blows only by taking cover behind their common husband. In interfering in a cat-fight, the husband receives a slap on the face intended by Van Tong for her rival. Mistaking her intention, he becomes exceedingly angry. He uses

<sup>4</sup> Make obeisance to.

sharp words against Van Tong, who now turns her insolent tongue on him. This increases his anger so much that he draws his sword, whereupon Van Tong runs shrieking into the house. Her husband now turns his back on her, and is about to enter the boat with Lao Tong when an attempt is made by a third person to persuade him to stay. This proves unavailing; he replies in sharp anger that he has broken with Van Tong for good, and that he will have nothing further to do with her.

So ends an exciting episode. Khun Phan and Lao Tong go and live with his mother, and Khun Chāng has Van Tong after all.

Some time after, the King sends for both men and requires them to reside at Ayudhya to receive further training to fit them for higher appointments. The two men apparently bury the hatchet, and work amicably together in the service of the Sovereign. But one day Khun Phan receives word from his mother that his wife, Lao Tong, has been pining away, and is now seriously ill. The news upsets him greatly, and on his confiding the trouble to Khun Chāng, his pseudo-friend, the latter sees a fresh opportunity to do him another bad turn. Whilst exhibiting deep sympathy, Khun Chāng suggests that it is surely possible for Khun Phan to slip away for a time and leave a friend to do his work in his absence. The victim falls at once into the trap, and on Khun Chāng undertaking never to give him away, and to work in his stead, Khun Phan slips out and soon arrives home. Lao Tong picks up at once, and is back in her usual good health before the next incident occurs.

One day the King notices Khun Phan's absence, and asks Khun Chāng why his fellow-official is not in his place. Khun Chāng is ready with a false report, and he informs the King that Khun Phan finds it impossible to live apart from his wife, and has run away to see her. He goes on to magnify his victim's supposed offence by stating that his own attempt to restrain Khun Phan from breaking the palace rules nearly resulted in bloodshed. At three o'clock in the morning, so runs Khun Chāng's tale, Khun Phan climbed over the palace wall and stole out of the city.

The ever credulous King believes the whole story. He declares that Khun Phan's conduct merits the severest punishment, but in view of his past service, His Majesty refrains from ordering his instant arrest and execution. However, if the fellow imagines that he cannot live without his wife, she shall be parted from him for good. He

orders, therefore, that Lao Tong be brought to Ayudhya immediately for imprisonment within the precincts of the inner palace, and that her husband be forbidden to enter the city on pain of instant death.

Lao Tong has the usual bad dream foreboding ill; and, sure enough, an officer of the King's bodyguard soon arrives with the royal command. Naturally, husband and wife are greatly distressed, but the King must be obeyed. Naturally also, they are anxious to know the reason for the King's displeasure. The officer repeats to them Khun Chāng's false tale, adding that His Majesty's great wrath is due less to Khun Phan absenting himself without leave than to his climbing the palace wall in the dead of night,—a very grave offence.

Khun Phan remains sulking at home for some days after Lao Tong's departure for Ayudhya, but he soon finds life unbearable. He therefore bids his mother good-bye and sets out alone for fresh adventures. There follow three famous episodes, known as ตีดาบ ชื้อม้า หา कुमार, that is to say: making a sword, buying a horse, and finding a boy. These he needs in preparation for his adventures.

The sword-making is described in the book at considerable length, beginning, like great countries at war, with the collection of scrap-metal. Khun Phan's sword-metal consists of pieces of iron from the spire of a pagoda, nails from the coffins of victims of violent death, nails from city gates, and the five kinds of iron, whatever those may be. Gold and silver, too, go into the crucible, and mysterious chemicals also. The ceremony of making offerings to benevolent gods and appeasing malevolent spirits is described, as are the melting of the metal, the forging of the sword, and so on.

Compared to sword-making, horse-buying is a simple matter. The acquiring of a boy, however, is a complicated business, for *boy* in this case is the spirit of a babe unborn. There is an old belief in this country, as in many other countries, that people can acquire power over spirits; that a man can keep them in his house to watch over him, to warn him of coming dangers, and generally to serve him. Ability to control spirits is thus a valuable asset, and even to-day one hears of men reputed to be spirit-keepers (เก็บผี). I have myself been warned against one such person and that he is capable of sending his spirits to harm me if he felt so disposed. The warning is quite recent, but the kind friend who gave it is over seventy years old. This spirit-keeping is neither witchery nor sorcery as I understand the words; neither spiritism nor spiritualism. What is the name of the

power residing in Aladdin's lamp which, when the lamp is rubbed, brings forth its attendant genie? Spirit-keeping gives similar power. The spirits have to be fed regularly, or they become hungry like you and me. Once when Khun Chāng's household spirits fail him, he threatens never to feed them again.

Khun Phan's *Golden Boy* is a spirit of this description, but it is the spirit of an unborn infant whom he calls son. There are two versions of the Golden Boy story. The old version you will find in the edition published by Smith's Press. The new version will be found in the Library edition. I have no time to go into details here, but I may say that the old version is more in accord with general belief as to the method of procuring the spirit of an unborn infant; while the new version, known as the *Bua Kli* episode (นางบัวคลี่), sounds like modern surgery to me. However, the new version is more dramatic and excellently written, and is popular with Sebbā audiences.

To continue the story. Khun Phan is now armed with his wondrous sword and well-mounted on his powerful horse, with his spirit-son, Golden Boy, as his constant companion. He is ready for fresh adventures, the first of which takes the scandalous form of stealing his first wife from her second husband. He arrives in front of Khun Chāng's residence in the dead of night, accompanied by Golden Boy and the rest of his attendant spirits. Khun Chāng's spirits come out to meet them, but are overawed by the visitors. It is easy for Khun Phan to cast a spell over the household and put every one into deep sleep. He enters the house, wakes up Van Tong and takes her away after tying Khun Chāng up. The scene is prettily described: Van Tong waking up in surprise and stupefaction; her resentment at finding Khun Phan in the room, with Khun Chāng ignominiously tied up; the return of her love for Khun Phan after the fresh love-spell which he casts over her, and finally her going away with him, torn between her sense of duty to the second husband and her love for the first. The night journey of two lovers mounted on the same horse; the early morning disclosing the beauty of the forest with fragrant flowers in full bloom; the bath in a lotus pool, and finally rest and sleep under the shade of a banyan tree,—these make very pretty reading, though vulgar at times.

Next morning Khun Chāng moves out with a strong force to retrieve his loss and have his revenge. With foresters to guide him, he is soon

on the track of his enemy. Khun Phan, asleep with Van Tong under the banyan tree, is awakened by Golden Boy, who warns him of the approach of the foe. He ties straws into human figures, which he orders his spirits to vivify, and they make a formidable array of warriors. The two sides soon come to grips, but the human fighters are no match for the vivified straw figures. Khun Chāng, seeing that the battle is lost, runs away on his elephant charger. On being caught up by Khun Phan on horseback, and asked "Where are you going now?" he barks back, "No business of yours."

Khun Chāng soon finds an opportunity to approach the King with the report that Khun Phan has set up in revolt against His Majesty; that in fact he aspires to the throne. The King is less credulous than usual, but the matter must be investigated. He accordingly orders two of his principal court officials, with two military commanders, to march with 5,000 men to inquire into the charge. Khun Chāng goes with them as guide. They come upon Khun Phan in the forest, the latter having as usual been warned by Golden Boy. He orders his spirits to remain invisible, and advances alone to meet the King's force. He is polite to the court officials, but refuses to be taken. The two military commanders become abusive, and a fight ensues in which Khun Phan slays them, his spirits dispersing the King's soldiers.

Khun Phan is definitely in the wrong this time, and the King's order for his arrest goes out to every part of the Kingdom. After a time, he gives himself up to the governor of Pichit, who brings him to Ayudhya. The King appoints a special tribunal to try the case. Khun Phan manages, partly by honest means and partly by casting spells upon his judges, to vindicate all his actions, and the charge against him is dismissed. The past misdeeds of Khun Chāng come out in the trial, and he is made to pay a large fine in addition to the heavy penalty of losing Van Tong. He goes home in great discomfiture, waiting for another chance.

But Khun Phan is not content with his good fortune. Too soon he petitions the King for the release of his other wife, Lao Tong, who has all this time been confined within the precincts of the palace. For this inopportune action, the King orders him to prison straight away. Thus the hero suffers imprisonment for a most trifling offence; because, like Oliver Twist, he asks for more.

During the hero's absence in prison, Khun Chāng, who is no adept in love-spells, takes the heroine back by force, and thereby hangs more of the tale.

Some time after, there is war with Chiengmai following the abduction of the Princess of Luang Phrabang, and the hero is released from prison to be given command of the punitive expedition. You will remember the historical allusion to which I referred in the earlier part of this Paper.

It is convenient here for my narration to come to a close, though we are still very far from the end of the story. We have no more time.

I have a few words more to add in conclusion. The love of two men for the same woman is a theme as old as the hills, to be met with every day both in fiction and in real life, the one, in fact, having its root in the other. The outline I have given is, I believe, sufficient to show that the story is a good one. There is nothing in the treatment of the plot, its details and embellishments, which is too fantastic to be worthy, at any rate, of a measure of credence. For we must bear in mind the mentality of people of past generations, who believed in occult power: such as are attributed to the hero. They had faith in spells and charms and other forms of magic, just as did their contemporaries in other parts of the world. When did the peoples of Europe and America cease to believe in magic? Throughout the Middle Ages, a struggle against the practice of sorcery was waged, and thousands of persons were executed. It is on record that in Salem, Massachusetts, a score of witches were hanged in 1672. May I remind you here that Khun Phan was seven years old when Columbus discovered America? In Scotland, the last execution of witches took place in 1722, more than two centuries after Khun Phan's death.

I have quoted these dates to show that there is nothing fantastic in an old-time story picturing the hero as an adept in magic. Modern-minded readers who think otherwise should keep aloof from King Arthur and Charlemagne, and countenance neither Merlin nor Angelica of Cathay,—perhaps not even Alice in Wonderland.