

## REVIEWS

Smith, Malcolm: *A Physician at the Court of Siam*, 164 pages, London 1947.

As the author says, he was among the very few foreigners who saw the inner life of the sovereigns of Siam. Dr. Malcolm Smith was physician to Her Majesty Queen Saovabha, whose name is spelt a little differently in this book. The Queen was the consort of King Chulalongkorn and mother of His two immediate successors to the Throne. The doctor thus moved about in what the average Siamese of those days regarded as exalted circles. In compiling his book he had access to the best possible sources and had for informants exalted personages who were more or less direct participants in the life he describes.

The central figure of his book is of course that of the Queen herself. The author starts by giving an account of her antecedents, then goes on to give a picture of her childhood, her married life in the early part of King Chulalongkorn's reign, continuing that phase of her life to the death of her husband and finally her life as a monarch's mother. In this final phase of her life he attended upon her as her physician-in-ordinary. The remaining 27 out of 164 pages are devoted to disconnected chapters on the subjects of polygamy in Siam and of the Court Physicians of the old school. The book is supplemented by an epilogue, an appendix and a bibliography.

Dr. Smith's treatment of the Queen is mostly from firsthand observation. Certain small details will need more reliable confirmation. The incident, for instance, of the conveyance in a dilapidated cart drawn by two ponies of Queen Saovabha's dead body from her country villa to the Grand Palace, is denied by the very lady from whom Dr. Smith says he got his information. Possibly the doctor did not understand Khun Puey's Siamese accurately. Strange too is the incident of the anointment of King Rama III's dead body by His successor, King Mongkut, which mentions that the dead body

was made to sit up to receive the new monarch's libation. Such is contrary to custom and usage, but as the information seems to have come from authoritative quarters, one has to acquiesce by admitting the possibility of the evolution of custom since those days. Not a very convincing conclusion however.

To one brought up under entirely different notions and standards of aesthetics, a great deal of misunderstanding is permissible. In the case of Dr. Smith, although his work is not by any means without such inaccuracies, it may be said after all that it is a fairly reliable record.

D.

Bangkok, 13th December 1948.

McFarland, Bertha Blount: *Our Garden was so Fair*, Revell Co, New York, 141 pages, 1948.

This "Story of a Mission in Thailand", as the author describes it, is practically an autobiography of a couple of pioneers in education and philanthropy. The author came out to this country from the United States in 1908 to join the staff of one of the most appreciated of the institutions organised and run by the American Presbyterian Mission of Siam, namely the Wang Lang School for Girls on the site of the present School for Nursing of the Medical University in Thonburi. She eventually rose to be its Principal. The School was ably organised by its first head, Miss Edna Cole, and reached the zenith of its glory during the McFarland administration. Her marriage with Dr. George McFarland in 1925, though necessitating her theoretical severance from the Mission, enlarged the scope of her activities and social connections. It is in fact the joint life and accomplishments of this couple that inspired the book under review.

This pleasant little work took shape during the complete cessation of their former multifarious activities in educational philanthropic, intellectual and even commercial fields, and the enforced leisure consequent upon their restriction at the time of the South East Asia War. It thus commences with a scene in the garden of

Holyrood, their happy home during the first stages of that campaign. The leisure thus enforced among the natural beauties of plant-life in a Bangkok garden could not fail to arouse a naturally gifted writer—however indifferent she might have been before on account of other interests—and to create such an eloquent tribute to the seasonal changes of Siamese flora. The impression was probably so deep that this curtain raiser—as it were—has given its name to the whole book.

The main interest of the book is, however, to follow. Chapter II, *Under Five Reigns*, is in fact a short resumé of recent history going back the length of her husband's life to the reign of King Mongkut. Though the resumé is quite concise, it is perhaps one of the most accurate descriptions of the last three-quarters of our century that have appeared in print. Then follows a family history of the McFarlands and of their pioneer work in Siam, primarily as missionaries but secondarily including very many cultural activities, among which may be mentioned Dr. McFarland's pioneer work in medical education entitling him to the widespread reverence due to their foremost professor from so many generations of Siamese medical men. Then are given the landmarks of their married life, the celebration of Dr. McFarland's seventieth birthday amid his numerous pupils and Bangkok folk in general, the evolution of the Thai typewriter through the initiative of his brother and then perfected by Dr. G. McFarland himself, the Wattana Wittaya Academy for Girls, their *magnum opus* the Thai-English Dictionary, and other milestones in their interesting co-operation. The book goes on to give descriptions of their trips into the interior and Angkor and various other topics. It is altogether pleasant reading and highly instructive. It reveals above all a largeness of spirit such as has happily prompted many an American to venture forth and adopt our country as his home and to champion our cause in so many fields of activities. It is this spirit which has raised citizens of the United States in Siamese eyes and has facilitated amical relations between the two peoples inspite of the great distance that separates us and the diversity of our cultures.

D.

Bangkok, 10th March 1949.

## RECENT SIAMESE PUBLICATIONS

### 34. *Varasar Silpakorn* (Journal of Fine Arts) 1948.

The Royal Fine Arts Department is to be congratulated upon the completion of its second year of the publication of the *Fine Arts Journal*, consisting of five numbers. The first year was productive of four only. The interest of their contents is well kept up. Each number is as before divided into sections of (1) literature and arts, (2) archeology, records and history, and (3) customs and matters of general interest.

Among matters which would have more appeal to the foreign student are :

a. *Records of the time of the King Chulalongkorn's Coronation*, (I, pp. 34-41; II, 46-53; III, 63-77; IV, 52-59;). The series began last year (1947) and is now continued through four volumes and not yet concluded. It contains not only accounts of the ceremony but also the diary of that King's official life in the first few years of His reign beginning with number III of this year. This diary, it may be added here, was kept up by royal scribes for the whole of that as well as of the two succeeding reigns and did not cease till the Revolution of 1932.

b. Prabhasiri's *Notes on Siam*, (I, 42-55; II, 54-63; III, 78-84; and V, 53-65.). These are a mine of valuable notes of reference for the student of Siamese history, especially in connection with Chinese records.

c. An attempt at the identification of 'Alangkapuni', the foreign captain of a vessel, who, according to the *Annals of Ayudhya*, presented an ostrich and a lion to the last King of Ayudhya shortly before its fall. The captain was, at the time of writing of the *Annals*, taken to be an Arab. He is now identified through the contemporary records of the French priest Brigot with a certain Allan Powney, who helped the King of Siam to fight the Burmese in 1765 (I, 56-63).

d. The series of correspondence, which commences every number, between their Royal Highnesses Princes Naris and Damrong. The brothers were separated by force of circumstances from 1933 onwards, the latter taking up a voluntary exile in Penang most of the time. As may be expected, the correspondence contains much interesting material for the student of Siamese history, customs, arts and archeology. Such matters should be catalogued and perhaps separated from the personal side of the correspondence.

e. Short notes by different authors on various subjects. The following might be cited as examples :

1. The *maesü*. This is a supernatural female agency, which, having shaped the child in the womb of its mother, is supposed to have claim over it until the third day's rite has been celebrated. Hence the formula recited by the equivalent of a Christian godparent :

Three days the spirit's child,  
Four days (art thou) child of man;  
What man owns this child,  
Take him.

This is obviously reminiscent of pre-Buddhistic animism which prevailed in the country. The note was written by Prince Damrong (I, 84);

2. The *varsa*, by Sthirakoses (I, 64-73);

3. *A guide to the rural pastimes and sights of Lopburi*, by Tri Amatyakul (II, 74-81);

4. The *sraddha*, i.e. the autumnal equinox, by Sthirakoses (IV, 76-80).

f. The illustrations are really very useful and each number is well and profusely illustrated. They serve to bring to the eyes of the reader various ceremonial paraphernalia and technicalities of art and the theatre.

35. Boribal Buribhand, Luang : *The Buddha's Footprint at Saraburi*, (เรื่องพระพุทธรบาทจังหวัดสระบุรี) 34 pages, Bangkok, January 1949.

This is another handbook and a compilation of old sources of information regarding one of the most popular of Siamese Buddhist monuments. Phrabad, as this monument is known in this country, has been for no less than three centuries and still continues to be one of the holiday grounds of Siam. Its fetes, taking place twice a year in the dry season, is always well patronised by the Siamese public.

The present compilation by Luang Boribal is made up of :

A. A dissertation on the significance of the cult of the Buddha's Footprint in general, quoted from the late Prince Damrong's *History of Buddhist Monuments in Siam* (1926);

B. The story of the Buddha's Footprint at Saraburi, as given in the Pali Punnovada Sutta, an apocryphal work outside the range of the old Buddhist Canon of the *Ti-pitaka*, quoted from Prince Damrong's Introduction to the *Lay of Punna's Teaching* (1923), a Siamese poetical piece, *chanda*, dating from the last days of the Ayudhya regime ;

C. The story of the same monument according to the *Annals of Ayudhya*, quoted also from Prince Damrong's Introduction to the *Lay of Punna's Teaching* ;

D. Miscellaneous information in connection with the Phrabad, quoted from the Statement of Khun Klou (publ. 1918), which has been summarised in English in JSS vol. XXVIII, part 2.

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Bangkok, 10th March 1949.

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST IN OTHER JOURNALS

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London.

1948, parts 1-2.

Wales, H.G. Quaritch: Culture change in Greater India, pp. 2-32.

*Monsieur Coedès said, in his Histoire ancienne des états hindouisés d'Extrême-Orient, that one of the most delicate problems facing archeologists is how Indian aesthetics, planted in the countries which are here included in the term of Greater India, gave birth to Khmer, Javanese and other Hindu arts of the Far East.*

*It is now Dr. Quaritch Wales, who, taking up, as it were, the challenge thus thrown out, elaborates a suggestion he had formerly made of distinguishing a western from an eastern zone of Greater India. The former comprises Burma, central Siam, the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra; whilst the latter, a more complex one, consists of Cambodia, Java and Champa. He deals here with the characteristics of each zone. The article is one of the most interesting treatments of recent years of the history of South East Asia.*

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malayan branch.

Vol. XX, part 1. 1947.

Hutchinson, E.W.: Ancient History in Greater India, pp. 156-160.

*A learned and useful summary and review of Coedès' Histoire ancienne des états hindouisés d'Extrême-Orient.*

Vol. XXI, part 1.

Lineham, W.: Langkasuka, the island of Asoka, pp. 119-123.

*Langkasuka is the ancient name of an ancient settlement at the base of Kedah Peak in Kedah. This claim to connec-*

tion with the Indian Emperor Asoka is intriguing. The tradition in Siam would seem to support this contention for the name exists in the annals of Nakon Sridharmaraj, the modern title of the governor of which state used to be also Sri Dharmasoka, 'the righteous Asoka'. The title in Siam probably referred to some old monarch's name, adopted naturally on account of the great prestige of the Indian Emperor.

Vol. XXI, part 3.

This number consists of an intensive index to papers which have been published in Volumes 1-20, extending over the period between 1923 and 1947. It has been compiled by C.A. Gibson-Hill. Its great value is obvious.

### Bulletin des etudes indochinoises.

Tome XXIII, no. 2-3, 1948.

Voyages d'autrefois au Laos, pp. 123-144.

These are excerpts of travel-notes by several authors, among whom may be mentioned such famous geographers and explorers as Pavie and d'Aymonier.

### Ancient India.

No. 4 (July 1947—January 1948).

Ghosh, A.: Taxila (Sirkap) 1944-5, pp. 41-84.

A detailed description of the "most explored ancient site in India", dealing in turn with its chronology, structures, pottery and other finds.

### Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Vol. XII, parts 3-4.

Stede, W.: The Self and its complications. pp. 652-8.

*The problem of interpreting the Buddhist philosophical term anattā has occupied much attention and controversy from*

*scholars of Buddhism since the time of Mrs. Rhys Davids. In Siam the term attā has undergone perhaps some modification and among many people it has absorbed some of the nature of the old animist spiritual ego.*

Dunn, C.W., Hla Pe & Stewart, J.A.: Country Life in Burmese Literature. pp. 703-712.

*This study of Burmese bucolics in her literature, mostly in the shape of songs from mediaeval to modern times, opens out a vista of parallels with Siamese literature of the present age.*

### Museum.

Vol. I, nos. 1-2, July 1948.

The publication of this new quarterly review by Unesco is well worth the scholar's attention, outside of museographical quarters. Its foreword, signed by Julian Huxley, recently Unesco chief, sums up its aims and scope thus :

"Unesco takes pleasure in launching MUSEUM for the benefit of the museums of the world, on whom Unesco calls directly for co-operation in its programme and for aid in its work of establishing the intercultural and international understanding basic to the peace of the world."

*MUSEUM is bilingual, presenting its matter in English and French. It contains an editorial in which the scope of this publication is dealt with at some length. Among its contributors are some of the leading museographers of France, such as de Salles (in Les Musées de France), R. Huyghe, P. Stern, P. Rivet, A. Leveillé and René Grousset.*

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