

## IN MEMORIAM

**Phraya Indra Montri Sri Chandra Kumar (Francis Henry Gilès).**

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With the demise of the above named gentleman, one of the foremost of the foreign Servants of State who ever served the Kingdom of Siam, it may be said, without exaggeration, that the Siam Society has lost one of its most outstanding and picturesque members, a personality of note not likely to be forgotten as long as there shall be a Siam Society. Mr. Giles, or Chaokhun Indra as he was better known to people in Bangkok, was born on the 23rd of August 1869 in the town of Plymouth, England, and came from a family of British naval officers. As a matter of fact Mr. Giles was meant to become a naval officer himself but his eyesight was already in his youth too weak for service on the high seas. Although Chaokhun Indra was not to be a sailor, his subsequent career on terra firma was so brilliant that he had no reason to regret his fate. Indeed Mr. Giles reached one of the highest administrative posts in the kingdom, admired by all, from the king to the lowest official, for his integrity, energy, sharp intelligence, wide outlook and an all-round knowledge, not only about his own branch of service, but also of most things outside.

Soon after his disappointing interview with the Royal Navy Mr. Giles was accepted in the British Colonial Service which he entered as a cadet; he was only 18 years old when he arrived in Burma in 1887. The next ten years saw Mr. Giles on service in several places, both in Burma proper and in the Shan States and ultimately reaching the position of an Assistant District Officer. Mr. Giles had an very active mind; and being a keen and accurate observer, besides being endowed with an excellent memory, he acquired a good knowledge of a number of languages during these years—besides Burmese and Shan, also Hindustani, Karen, Chin, Padaung and others. If memory serves right, he could at one time speak as a dozen different languages of those spoken in Burma. Later on Mr. Giles also mastered Siamese to perfection.

In 1897 the Siamese government, being in need of an experienced official for service in their Ministry of Finance, asked for the "loan" of Mr. Giles, a loan which resulted in his staying for good in this country—for the good, not only of the government of Siam, but also of himself. Mr. Giles was at first occupied with the checking of the annual budgets of the kingdom, scanning the expenses of the various ministries and departments; next he was transferred to Monthon Prachin in the capacity of a special treasury official. That was at the time when the division of the kingdom into circles (monthons) and provinces was introduced. During his two years' service in Prachin Mr. Giles became convinced that the manner in which the taxes were collected was wholly unsatisfactory, and also that the holding of land was quite irregular.

On his reporting on these matters to his ministry he was recalled and appointed a Director of the Exterior Revenue Department, i.e. for collection of taxes outside the circle of Bangkok. Mr. Giles then worked out a new system for collecting taxes all over the kingdom (with the exception just mentioned). However as the taxes were to be collected by the provincial authorities the department was now transferred from the Ministry of Finance to that of Interior which was then headed by that eminent Servant of the State, His late Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. Mr. Giles served in his new capacity till 1915 when, on the retirement of Prince Damrong, his department was united with the Bangkok Revenue department into one big department, under the Ministry of Finance, with Mr. Giles as Director-General. At the same time His late Majesty King Vajiravudh conferred on Mr. Giles that high and proud title which he held till his death. This title of Phraya Indra Montri Sri Chandra Kumar was a very old title and hails back to the halcyon days of Ayuthia. Chaokhun Indra served as a Director General of Revenues until 1930 when his failing eyesight forced him to retire after thirty--three years efficient and faithful service to a king and a country which had become as dear to him as his own. Besides being honoured with high decorations Chaokhun

Indra also received a high salary worth his eminent services, namely as much as 2500 Bath a month (at pre-war exchange £ 230). Chaokhun Indra's decorations included the Grand Cross of the Order of the White Elephant; the Grand Cross of the Order of the Crown of Siam; the Special Star of the Chapter of Chula Chom Klao, the Ratanaphorn Order in diamonds, etc.

Besides his services as a Director-General of Revenues, Chaokhun Indra's talents as an organiser were sought for in other ways. Thus, for instance, during the catastrophic inundations in 1917 he was appointed Comptroller of rice whereby the hardships of the common people were lightened.

After his retirement Chaokhun Indra did not return to his native country but chose to remain in his adopted fatherland, being too fond of the fair land of the Thai and too interested in its welfare and its many cultural problems to part from it. Being sincerely concerned about the moral education of the youth of Siam, Chaokhun delivered a notable lecture in the Teachers Association, a lecture still remembered by many Thai teachers. To our Siam Society Chaokhun Indra was attached with the strongest bonds; at its inception in 1904 he was one of the founder members, and as a vicepresident he served on the Council until 1930 when he was elected president. Nobody who has served on the Council of the Siam Society during the 8 years of Chaokhun Indra's chairmanship is likely to forget his direction of the affairs of the Society. Chaokhun was wise, firm, foresighted and humorous at the same time, and we all felt that the affairs of our Society were in good hands. As I said in the address (I), presented by the Council to Chaokhun Indra on his 70th birthday, in 1939, during his time as president he conferred many benefits on the Society, and the members of the Council felt it a privilege to serve under his sage leadership. Indeed we felt inspired by our president's enthusiasm and sustained interest in the various sides of the research work falling within the scope of our Society. It must not be forgotten that our Home was built and

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(I) Vide JTRS (JSS), Vol. XXXII, page 61

inaugurated during Chaokhun Indra's presidency and that his name is perpetuated on a marble slab in the lecture hall.

Chaokhun Indra was a frequent contributor to the Journal of the Siam Society as will be seen from the undermentioned list; viz:

- 1) Some gleanings of manners and customs of the Chinese people as revealed in historical narratives and novels. JSS. Vol. XX. page 187.
- 2) Adversaria on elephant-hunting together with an account of all the rites, observances and acts of worship to be performed in connection therewith, as well as notes on vocabularies of spirit language, fake or taboo language and elephant command-words. JSS. Vol. XXIII, page 61.
- 3) An account of the rites and ceremonies observed at elephant driving operations in the seaboard province of Langsuan, South Siam. JSS. Vol. XXV, page 153.
- 4) An account of the hunting of the wild ox on horseback in the provinces of Ubol Rajadhani and Kalasindhu, and the rites and ceremonies which have to be observed. JSS. Vol. XXVII. page 89.
- 5) An account of the ceremonies and rites performed when catching the Pla Bük, a species of catfish inhabiting the waters of the river Mekhong, the northern and eastern frontier of Siam. Vol. XXVIII, page 91.
- 6) Note explaining the origin of the name of the town, of Pakhampho in the province of Nakorn Sawan. JSS. Vol. XXVIII, page 213.
- 7) The Koh Lak tradition. JSS. Vol. XXX. page 1.
- 8) Note about a love philtre. JSS. Vol. XXX, page 25.
- 9) An ancient Chinese blood-test for proving parentage. JSS. Vol. XXX, page 29
- 10) A critical analysis of van Vliet's Historical account (of Ayudhya), Parts 1-6, Jss, page 155 and same volume, page 270.

To Chaokhun Indra's literary achievements may be added that it was due to his suggestion and advice that Nai Thien Subandu (Phra Phraison Salaraks) made his translations from the Royal Burmese Chronicles, the Hmannan Yazawindawgyi, about "Burmese invasions of Siam" and "Intercourse between Burma and Siam," as published in JSS. Vols. V, part; 1 VIII, part 2; XI, part 3; XII, part 2 and XIII, part 1.

Of Chaokhun Indra's above quoted ten papers those treating the hunting of elephants and wild oxen and the catching of the huge Pla Bük are naturally of great importance for the study of Thai customs and folklore. They may be called classic ones on these matters. As superstition wanes and public instruction spreads in Siam, it may have been in the nick of time that Chaokhun Indra saved these interesting beliefs and ceremonies from utter oblivion. As regards his analysis of the van vliet papers, future historians will acknowledge and praise Chaokhun Indra or his searching and penetrating work in elucidating the nappenings during the bloody reign of cruel King prasat Thong in the first half of the 17th century C.E.

In his moving tribute to outlate friend (published in the book distributed at Chaokhun Indra's cremation), His Highness Prince Dhani Nivat, Krom Mūn Bidyalabh says rightly that the deceased nobleman was extraordinarily intelligent and, in spite of his infirmity, being blind for the last twenty one years of his life, he was always wide awake to every thing happening around him, following the affairs of the world with the keenest interest. Chaokhun Indra even undertook a long and arduous trip to North-east Siam where he, in the province of Srisaket, visited the famous ancient Khmer temple of Phra Vihar which, like an eagle's nest, stands on the crest of the forbidding Dungrek range. After this expedition he was able (from the descriptions of those accompanying him) to give an exact account of what this wonderful place was like. So with the contents of books read to him, his keen and

marvellous memory would retain everything, even the smallest details. During World War II Chaokhun Indra, though still a British subject, was not interned but was allowed to remain quietly in his own house. After the war when Chaokhun Indra had become still more infirm he had to give up attending the meetings in the Home of the Siam Society, wherefore the Society elected him an Honorary Member. However, Chaokhun Indra's interest in the affairs of the Society did not slacken, and he was forever asking for news about its doings.

Chaokhun Indra was a tall and strikingly handsome man with fine aristocratic features which involuntarily commanded respect. His death took place on the 31st October 1951 after a painful illness due to a fall. His mortal remains were deposited in an octogonal urn, as befitting a Phraya of high rank, and were later on cremated with Buddhist rites.

To the above, which in part has been culled from His Highness Prince Dhani's obituary (in Siamese), I would like to add from my long and intimate friendship with this remarkable man that I always felt enriched after one of our long and deep conversations which might cover such diversified subjects as history, politics, Thai culture, military strategy and-religion. Indeed when I left Chaokhun Indra after such long talks I often had the impression of verily having been sitting at the feet of one of the "wise men of the East" I shall never forget this charming and interesting man whose friendship has meant so much to me, and to whom I owe a deep and heartfelt gratitude. Peace to his ashes and honoured be his memory !

*Sorgenfri, Denmark*  
*in April 1952.*

E. Seidenfaden.

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