

OBITUARY

Mom Chao Ajavadis Diskul

In Prince Ajavadis Diskul, who was cremated in the presence of Queen Rambai, Prime Minister M R. Kukrit Pramoj and thousands of mourners at Wat Thepsirin on January 22nd after a fatal heart attack last December 4th, Thailand loses a distinguished patriot who gave his whole heart to his country and would gladly have given his life for it; and the world is poorer by a philanthropist, a man of good will to all, and a grandseigneur of the old school. The Siam Society mourns in him one of its highly esteemed, most active members, a former President and Honorary Vice-President at the time of his death. He is survived by his widow, H.R.H. Princess Siriratna Busabongs Diskul and their son Riddhi Damrong Diskul, brothers and sisters.

Here was a man who had no enemies. Among those who met him personally or knew of him through his many, widespread activities, both national and international, it was hard to find a detractor or anyone who would bear him malice. Even those who might at times disagree with him recognised his unselfishness, immaculate integrity, his sense of justice and his truthfulness—all the qualities of a “just man”. “His real joy in life,” said one of his closest friends, Prince Hubertus zu Loewenstein who flew in from Germany to participate in the last rites for ten days, “was to give help and joy to others.”

Prince Ajavadis, third surviving son of H.R.H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab and grandson of King Rama IV Mongkut, was born March 23rd, 1913 in Bangkok at Voradith Palace on Laan Luang Road. The house of his birth was recently transferred to Bang Pa-in and is now part of the temple grounds on the island in the Mae Nam Chao Praya river there, not far from the burial ground of the Diskul family, where his ashes now rest in the shade of the Buddhist temple built in the Gothic style by King Rama V Chulalongkorn.

The young Prince was fortunate to grow up under the tutelage of his distinguished father. Vang Voradit must have been the most interesting house in Bangkok at the time. Due to the personality of Prince Damrong, the man who put Thai historiography and archaeology on their modern foundations and who, as his King's trusted adviser and minister created the new educational and administrative system, his residence was a center of ideas and activities, evolutionary in method but highly progressive in content, which were to transform the country. The son's mind was shaped early by this inspiring atmosphere, and it was easy for him to adjust when he was sent to Europe for his education—to the same English school incidentally as his elder cousin and later his close friend, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj.

It was again Ajavadis whom Prince Damrong called to his side from Oxford University in 1932 when due to the revolutionary regime he was compelled to leave Thailand for a few years of exile in Penang, Malaysia. By the same events, the son found himself shut out, at least in the political field, from a career that had seemed natural for him, i.e. following in his father's footsteps. Feeling that he would not then be welcome in the government service, he chose a different line, economics and finance, to serve his country when he returned to Bangkok in 1933. The MEA and the Bangkok Bank of Commerce became his main affiliations; of the latter he was Managing Director for years, still not retired at the age of nearly 63. His far-flung travels gave him experience and insight in many countries of the world, including Russia and, most recently, China. He was a charter member of the Lions Club in Bangkok, several times its president, and a district governor. In addition, he engaged in a wealth of charities up to the limit of his strength and beyond, he put many students through college, supported Buddhist *wats* and Christian churches; he helped anyone, Thai or foreigner, who came to ask for his help, always generously. His last project was the fund to celebrate the fourth cycle of His Majesty.

Despite his station in life, Prince Ajavadis claimed no privileges for himself. Whatever professions of respect he received were given to him readily, in spontaneous affection. One reason for this was perhaps that he never used his rank for personal advantage but, as far as was in his reach of power, for the common good and the well-being of others. He believed that privileges have no justification except as a means to assume a greater share than others of the burden and obligations in serving. This was important to him. He considered this a distinctive attitude which had enabled the Chakri dynasty to rouse and rally the Thai people after the destruction of Ayuthaya and to lead them safely, as an independent nation, through the century of colonialism and two world wars into this modern age. No regime, he believed, could in the long run exist if in violation of this it preferred power to service. By his life and virtue Prince Ajavadis Diskul has set for himself a monument in the hearts of men, more incorruptible than stone or steel.

Volkmar Zuehlsdorff