

The Aims of the Society.

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Perhaps in discussing the aims of the Society, I am, as the Siamese saying has it, "selling cocoa-nuts to the gardener." But everyone who has tried to go deeper into questions connected with the history, literature, science, art, or economic conditions of Siam, has seen his path hampered, and this must be taken as my excuse for this undertaking. It is a foremost aim of this Society to smooth the way; by the publication of our Journal and by the discussions in our meetings to furnish everyone with the material on which to base his conclusions. I consider that we are the workmen to collect the materials on which the master builder may at some future day erect the edifice, in the shape of an encyclopedic work on Siam.

Many, of course, are the obstacles which beset our way. The known history of Siam, as a political entity, only dates back as far as 1350, the foundation of Ayuthia by the Chiengrai dynasty. From that date we can in a rough way trace the history up to our own times. We have in the Phongsavadan, as written by Somdet Phra Boromanujit, a beacon, so to say; and we may in some instances supply missing links from the history of neighbouring countries and other documents. But this labour has scarcely been commenced, if we except such works as Anderson's "English Intercourse with Siam in the Seventeenth Century" and Lanier's "Etude Historique sur les Relations de la France et du Royaume de Siam de 1662 à 1703," and Sir Ernest Satow's "Intercourse between Japan and Siam in the Seventeenth Century." But in all these books the "culturhistorische" element, as the Germans call it, is missing, the element which gives life to the dry bones, the element which we can trace in literature and folklore, in the three-fold division of the Traived—the Rajasat (art of Government), the Horasat (astronomy), and the Nitisat (rules of conduct)—and in the folklore tales as they have been edited in Siamese, but not, unfortunately, generally accessible, with the exception of, for

instance, short notices appearing in Bastian's book, and in Benfey's "Orient und Occident."

It should be our duty to help in collecting the chronicles, where all this can be found, and necessarily the question of a bibliography arises. The excellent work of Satow is known to all who are interested in Siam; but since its publication some 20 years have elapsed, and during this time many books, good, bad and indifferent, have been published, monographs have appeared in Journals, and books have turned up which were unknown to the compiler. In other cases the bibliography must be corrected as an apparent reference may be misleading. Thus "Ed. O'Farrell, Siam au Vingtième Siècle" is mentioned, a highly promising title; but it is only a skit the scene of which was laid by the author, for reasons perhaps known to himself, in Siam. The portraits in Hausleutner's "Gallerie der Nationen, Stuttgart, 1796," which is not mentioned by Satow, were taken from La Loubère; but from preconceived ideas the faces of the people are painted black, while a Queen of Siam appears in what might pass muster as a European Court dress and her complexion is white. And by the way, how hard such errors die is made apparent from Schlegel's "Siamese Studies"; starting from the theory of Siam meaning black, he argues that the conquerors of Siam must have been white, or, as it is now the fashion to say, Aryan. Again Satow marks with a sign of interrogation the "Voyage des Ambassadeurs de Siam en France." But the book exists, was formerly frequently quoted, and is in part interesting reading, although it is written more in honour of Louis XIV. and his Court than as a relation of the doings of these Ambassadors.

Of Siamese literature we appear to have only the bibliography contained in Pallegoix' "Grammatica Linguae Thai," and comprehensive as it appears to be it requires revision. We require a real catalogue raisonnée, and to edit such a one should certainly be one of the aims of the Society.

A closer study of the various dialects of the Thai languages is desirable, including all the dialects spoken from the frontiers of Yunnan down to Singora. Hand in hand with these studies should go those of an epigraphical nature. It would be interesting to trace in detail the connection of the different alphabets in which the Thai languages are written; for here also we can see that all these alphabets appear to be a modification of some Indian alphabet and that

the materials used in and for writing, account for the difference in the characters.

In close connection with these studies are of course those of an archæological nature. We ought to try in giving a description of the monuments, not over numerous it is true, to trace the gradual development, the influence which led to the modification of style from the Brahmanic art to Buddhist art, and I am sure we should be able to arrive at historical conclusions of no mean value, especially if we take into consideration the statues of the Buddha, their varying features, their connection with the Hindu Gods. The same may be said of the coinage of Siam, though there might be great difficulties inasmuch as up to recent years no date was shown on the coins.

What enormous influence the Aryan India had on the neighbouring countries in the South and East, is shown by Professor Kuhn in his excellent monograph on the subject (Munich, 1901). This we can trace in Siam, in historic times, in the collection of laws, while at the same time we can in many instances elucidate obscure points in Indian laws by that of Siam. This is seen in the law on domestic institutions, marriage and divorce, and in the law on debts where we find the well-known Indian maxim that for a claim wrongfully entered double the amount has to be paid to the accused. In the law on slavery, too, we find the same seven kinds of slaves as in the law-book of Manu, and this in spite of the fact that the recension of Siamese law was made only at the beginning of last century. We can trace the curious custom to mark a place where spirits are sold, by a red flag, to the Laws of Manu, where the same custom is mentioned. All this will necessarily soon be a thing of the past, and it is for us to see that these records are kept.

Indian influence again we can trace in the often misunderstood expressions, "Savoi Rajasombatti," "Kin Muang." They are survivals from the time the Aryas conquered India; for the conquered were the food, the king and the nobles were the eaters. So it is laid down in the Rig Veda, as is shown by Professor Weber in the Râjasûya (Berlin 1893). It is curious to note too that in Siamese law, theoretically at least, a higher position is reserved for the Brahman, for which, unless we proceed historically, no *raison d'être* exists. We still have for the Minister of State (Senapati) a name which properly signifies a General, and that this was the original meaning we can learn from the Rajaniti, and also in the

expression as it occurs in the title of the Ministers of State having an arm of might (Parakramabahu).

The Thai calls the Chinese his younger brother, and his language has affinities with that of China. The Burman also calls the Chinese his relation, but no affinity of language seems to exist, though both Burman and Siamese were immigrants into their present homes. The Thai is himself considered a Mleccha. But who they were, or who the autochthones were, whom the newcomers drove away, must be a matter of speculation until we find archæological remains to serve as a basis of history. There are amidst the Thai population now living in Siam tribes whose language and manners are different from those of the surrounding populations. To a certain extent we can trace the wanderings of the Thai race from the South of China to what is now called the Menam Chao Phya valley. How far such a mixture of people and race has taken place, is best shown in the names of the different populations. For us at the present time "Yuen" means Annamese; but the Lao of the North designate themselves by the name of the "Thai Yuen"; and the Annamese of Annam are called the "Keo." And Camoens, it may be recalled, says :

See how in distant wolds and walds lie pent
The self-styled Gueons, salvage folk untamed ;
Man's flesh they eat, their own they paint and sear,
I randing with burning iron-- usage fere.

This again would lead us to an investigation of the economic conditions of Siam. The sources for this are not very numerous, especially if we take into consideration that the population of Siam is an agricultural one, and that trade in former years was a sort of revenue in the hands of the Government, entirely new conditions being brought about by the treaties. We should be interested in finding what means were adopted to create the supply of coined money, how copper tokens of $\frac{1}{8}$ th and $\frac{1}{16}$ th of a fuang were created to do away gradually with the cowries. More interesting even is the attempt which was made to create a gold coinage, of which one now meets with specimens at very rare intervals. An investigation into these economic conditions will necessarily lead to an enquiring into the agricultural conditions and the natural produce of the soil, while meteorological observations carried on for a number of years should be published. All this might perhaps lead the enquirer to ask about

the distribution of the people, which I take it, was originally determined by their capacity to cultivate the soil. In this connection too it would be interesting to enquire into the relations of the old titles, Phan, Mun, Khun, Hluang, and the new titles of Indian origin Phra (vara, excellent) and Phya (varyas, more excellent)

The origin of the industries, handicrafts and arts is well worth studying. On the gold and silver worker's art and handicraft nothing seems to have been published; and it is interesting to find that in countries so wide apart as Russia and Siam the same kind of work is produced, though it would appear by different methods. Similarly with painting, sculpture and the potter's art. It is now known that the so-called Swankhalok porcelain was made in Siam ; whether other kinds of porcelain were ever made in Siam is doubtful, no kilns having been found. We know that porcelain was painted in Siam in recent years, but that most of it was prepared in China for the Siamese market. About the symbolical character of the designs, by which Chinese as well as Siamese porcelain is distinguished from the porcelain of Europe, we have no very definite notions. Whether we shall ever be able chronologically to fix the date of the different specimens in the absence of distinguishing marks, appears doubtful. But to go deeper into the subject, even if we are liable to make mistakes, is well worth while in this fascinating study.

The history of arms and weapons is also one which requires elucidation - how far they were emblems of rank, in the same way as the vessels given to noblemen as a mark of their dignity.

A word might be said, too, of music and theatricals. Certainly Mr. Warington Smyth, in his book, gives some specimens ; in old books we have the specimens given by Gervaise and La Loubère; in more modern times Ellis has written about it; and last but not least Professor Stumpf in his " Tonsystem und Musik der Siamesen " has produced certainly the most important essay on the subject. But we want more, and a comparative study in connection with theatrical performances, the ordinances governing such performances with regard to dress and with regard to the sex of the performers, and also in connection with the instruments used, would be highly interesting.

The field is far from exhausted, and in conclusion I may be allowed to point out that " *Facies non omnibus una, nec diversa*

tamen qualem decet esse sororum” characterises the civilisation of all people, whether they live in the north or the south the east or the west. And furthermore as Goethe says :—

Wer sich selbst und andre kennt, wird auch dies erkennen
Orient und Occident sind nicht mehr zu trennen.

