

it. For weeks before the time the temple-grounds are swept, the shrubbery trimmed, and the *salaks* or lounging-places newly painted or whitewashed. Some of the temples can only be reached by water, and so, for a month before, large numbers of men are drafted from the country to man the king's boats. Every morning, day after day, the air is filled with the clamor of their voices on the river, as every few minutes some fifty of them in training for this service dart by in one of their long narrow boats, moving at the top of their speed.

The season is ushered in by a great display of fireworks, exhibited for three successive nights on the river in front of the palace, the king himself being present to witness them. Then the visitation commences, and for twelve or fifteen days, from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon, the king, with all the princes, ministers of state and high nobles, makes a business of it, visiting on an average four temples each day. The first three days are devoted to the temples near the palace that are easy of access by land.

His majesty, seated under a golden canopy upon a golden throne, borne aloft on the shoulders of many men, in grand procession, with bands of music and companies of soldiers going before him, and a long retinue of princes and nobles following, visits and inspects these temples, and makes his customary offerings.

Then he visits the *wats* or temples that are more remote. As the boat processions escorting him pass by on the river, the scene is very animated and picturesque. Let me describe it to you as I have often seen it.

On these occasions the river is fairly alive with barges, singular in shape but graceful and pleasing to the eye, each propelled by from forty to eighty boat-men, who give a wild outcry as altogether they strike their long paddles into the water, and then raise them above their heads and brandish them in the air. Two men in each boat keep time for them by striking long decorated poles upon the deck.

A splendid array of guard-boats lead the van. They come in pairs, a score or two of swift-sailing canoe-like vessels, fifty feet long perhaps, with an awning over the centre covered with bright crimson cloth, with a rich border of gold embroidery. In these boats are the spear-men, the men with swords and shields, and some fifty boatmen in scarlet uniform. Then comes boats with bands of music, heralding the near approach of his majesty. And now he comes, in his magnificent barge one hundred and twenty feet long, and propelled by eighty men, all keeping time with their paddles. The lofty prow of this stately vessel, and its loftier stern, that towers up some fifteen or twenty feet from the water, are covered with gold, and gleam in the noon-day sun. Flaunting in the breeze, from the extremity of stern and prow, are two graceful plumes of white horse hair, and between them a little banner-like apron blazing with gold. In the centre is a kind of pavilion, with an arching roof hung round with curtains of the richest cloth of gold. Under this, on a richly-cushioned seat or throne, sits the lord of the realm, attired in garments of gold brocade. Seated at a respectful distance are four noblemen of high rank, his immediate personal attendants. There is always another royal barge in the procession, to which his majesty may be transferred in case of accident.

Another beautiful barge follows this, in which are little princes and princesses, a dozen perhaps, with garlands around their heads, arrayed in garments of gold tissue, and a profusion of necklaces, bracelets and anklets, several of each. Their royal father is very proud of them, and fond of having them with him on such occasions.

And now come a crowd of elegant barges. In these

are the nobles of the realm. Their barges are of like pattern with their sovereign's, smaller and less splendid, but like his, having a lofty curving stern, waving plumes and banners, and an arched and gilded canopy. Each has a score or two of boatmen, who fill the air with their shouts as they keep time in dipping and raising their paddles. These are followed by the less imposing barges of the nobles, till more than a hundred boats and at least five thousand boatmen have rushed by to the landing of some Buddhist temple.

And now, after all this pomp and parade, you will want to know what is done in these temples. After waiting a few minutes at the landing for the princes and nobles, the royal guard, and band of musicians, to be ready to receive the king, he, with his sceptre in his hand, steps from his barge to the landing, when his eighty paddlers, all, as one man, raise their clasped hands three times very slowly and reverentially to their heads, and bow to a level with the seats. Then if the temple is near he walks to it on matting spread for the purpose, a servant respectfully holding a long-handled large state umbrella over his royal head. If the temple is more distant, a gold throne, mounted on a strong wooden frame, is ready at the landing to receive him; and he is borne away by eight sturdy servants, escorted by soldiers, noblemen of rank, with swords, walking by his side as a guard of honor.

Entering the temple, he finds the yellow-robed priests, one or two hundred or more, awaiting his arrival. Kneeling on the mat that has been spread before the huge brass or gilt image of Buddha there enthroned, he lights the candles and incense sticks on the altar, and putting the palms of his hands reverently together, prostrates himself before the idol, and also before the head priest, as custom requires him to do, monarch though he be. He next makes a formal presentation of yellow robes to the head priest and some eight or ten others of the most deserving. He takes the suit designed for the head priest in both his hands, and, in a kneeling posture, he makes an offering of it, first to the idol, and then turning to the priest presents it to him. He then distributes the other suits, and those thus honored retire for a few minutes to an outer room and put on their new robes. Returning, they, with the whole shaven-headed, yellow-robed company, prostrate themselves three times in quick succession before the idol, and chant their monotonous prayers in the sacred language, making the temple ring with their heavy nasal tones. The chief priest then addresses the others, praising the goodness and righteousness and condescension of his illustrious majesty, and pronounces a blessing upon him. Nearly an hour having been thus spent, the king, after again prostrating himself before the idol, returns to the landing, attended as when he came, and receives the same mark of respect (worship almost) from his boatmen and others, as he steps into his royal barge and moves off, to make a similar visit to some other temple. These visitations all over, there is another display of fireworks for three successive nights, and the *Taut Ka-in* ceremonies are ended for a year.

While the royal temples are being thus visited, the common people in city and country go out in companies in their boats, in holiday dress, with bands of music and merry shouts, carrying to their favorite temples and priests presents of yellow robes, fruits and flowers.

We see from this how strong a hold the false religion of Buddha has upon the hearts of the Siamese, and how great the influence of the government must be in upholding it, and how much of the time and treasure of the kingdom is worse than wasted in the worship of idols and the support of the priests.

Will not my young friends join in the prayer that this