

SIAM AND ITS ROYAL FAMILY.

The city of Bangkok, the capital of Siam, wrote Mr. J. C. Black of the British Consulate a few weeks ago to the *Illustrated London News*, has witnessed a splendid royal and national festival, continued seven days, at the coming of age of the Crown Prince, his Royal Highness Somdetch Phra Papama Oratsadimj Chowfa Mahavajirunhio, son of the King. Siamese boys have their heads completely shaven, except a small knob of hair on the top, and this is cut off, with much ceremony, on their fourteenth birthday, when they "put away childish things." The occasion brought to Bangkok all the Rajahs, nobles, chiefs, and governors of the Empire, from Kodah, in the Malay peninsula, to Laung Prabang, in the far north-east, near the Chinese frontier. On Thursday, Jan. 22, the ceremonial act was performed at the royal palace.

It was a scene of gorgeous magnificence in the palace courtyard, where so great a company of persons of rank, sumptuously attired, were assembled in the pavilions erected for them, in front of a stately temple—its walls glistening white, its windows shining gilt, its roofs, tier above tier, of bright green and yellow tiles, with a lofty minaret and golden pinnacles. In the centre of the courtyard was an artificial mound, representing Mount Meru, sacred in Hindoo mythology as the abode of the god Siva. It was partly covered with a material looking like silver, and was decorated with shrubs and flowers, and with puppets or figures, afterwards set moving to amuse the spectators. At its base was a fern-shaded grotto, in which holy water, brought in bottles from four sacred fountains in India, was to spout from the mouths of seven carved monsters on the head of the youthful Prince.

Trumpets sounded, and the king, attended by some courtiers and nobles, descended the palace steps. A large umbrella, richly embroidered, was held over him. Seated then in a palanquin, he was borne round, while the band played the Siamese national anthem, to a pagoda-like building, which his Majesty entered, and soon reappeared in full royal robes, stiff with gold and precious stones, with the tall, pointed Crown of State. The king is a handsome man of pleasant and dignified aspect. Shortly afterwards the young Crown Prince was brought out in a palanquin, surrounded by courtiers, who carried huge fans sparkling with jewels. His Royal Highness was attired in glittering robes of silver embroidery, with diamonds, and wore a small conical cap, just covering the top-knot. The king received his son and placed him by his side, while all the princes, nobles and officers of State passed before them, bowing thrice, and doing homage to the heir-apparent. On each side were ranged others of the royal children, among them a pretty little girl with long hair and fringe, who was almost weighed down with the gold and jewellery of her dress.

A procession was formed, in which all the resources of pomp and pageantry were lavishly displayed. Preceded by a band of lictors in green and scarlet, came representatives of every nation and tribe in the Siamese empire; Laos, Malays, Karens, Tongus, Peguans, and Mons, in their distinctive dresses and ornaments. There was a troop of hundreds of girls, marching in fours, beginning with the tallest and ending with the smallest infants, wearing a brilliant uniform; and a troop of boys, all in Scottish Highland costume, marching to the strains of a lively Scottish tune. Amazons, or female guards of the palace, in soldiers' uniform, were part of the procession. The superb dresses of the nobility, gold-embroidered and studded with jewels, suggested immense riches. Under bright sunshine, the varied harmonious grouping of colors in this grand moving spectacle was most effective, realizing the highest idea of Oriental splendor.

The hair-cutting ceremony was performed within the pavilion by the king, with scissors of precious metal, severing the four locks that grew in the top-knot on his son's head. The young Prince came forth, clad in white, with a small black helmet; he was borne in state to the mound representing Mount Meru, and bathed in the sacred grotto; after which, in another pagoda, he was presented with the ancient crown and sword of the kings of Siam.

Processions and entertainments were kept up seven days, to the delight of the population of Bangkok and vast numbers of people from the country.

SIAM AND ITS PEOPLE.

Dr. Lee a missionary of the American Presbyterian Board in Petchaburi, near Bangkok, wrote last New Year to a friend of another class of this people with whom he comes daily in contact. "The Siamese are," he says, "in many ways a peculiar people and far from being as bright as the Chinese or Laos who occupy the country with them. If we want a mechanic we hunt for a Chinaman and, as a general thing, he will see at a glance what it would take us an hour to show a Siamese. Of course, I see more of them in a medical way, and often find it very hard to know how to handle them. In the surgical side of my work they cause little trouble, for it is what I give them or nothing, but in the medical part of it the beauty of the scene changes. Being trained from earliest youth to think the virtue in medicine lies in nasty medicine and immense doses, they seldom come to us until everything and everybody else has given the case up. Every case of that kind improved or cured is one point gained for Christianity, but if we fail we get ourselves classed with their own bungling doctors. Then, again, it is a very hard matter to get them to take the medicine as you tell them to; it cuts us out of the use of some very fine drugs that we dare not trust to their care.

"They are a great people to cut one another and in this way furnish all the surgical work a young man ought to ask for. They use a short cutlass (much like an American cornknife) for anything from cutting grass to cutting each other, and I assure you when they fight it is not for fun. The knife always finds the bone and often the tissues that are far deeper. But that is enough of the horrible for this time. All the mission workers but my wife and I are (by Bangkok law that is,) gone to Bangkok to attend an annual mission meeting, and we are having a frolic trying to make the cook understand the difference between "khi," which is egg, and "ghi," which is chicken; he sees a difference evidently, for he brings us sausage fried, with the temperature at 85 in the shade."

Siam as a nation, says Dr. Lee, is miserably poor. "What little the people can make out of their fishing and the cultivation of rice is taken away from them by the thousand "officials" that have to be supported. Then, what is worse, the debtor is the absolute slave of the creditor, and as the wages of a man will not pay the legal interest he remains so and his family after him. Of course, this takes all the zest out of life, and the people get careless and lazy.

Their army and navy is a huge joke, a gunboat at the mouths of the rivers, and a couple of regiments of soldiers could dictate terms to the whole kingdom. There is no such thing as justice in their courts of law, it is the party who can offer the largest bribe that wins the suit; happy for them that they think the glory of law-suits lies in winning the suit for they will make beggars of themselves to win their point, and be happy in doing it—another evil result of their native stupidity. The very narrow policy that the Government follows makes mission work among the people very hard indeed. It is almost impossible for a foreigner to buy property here, and when we do get it, it is usually in some out of the way place, just where a mission church should not be. This is the trouble here at Petchaburi. We are too far away from the thoroughfares of the town, where the masses of the people won't come to find us. I feel that our medical work could be doubled if the hospital were on the market street, but I doubt if we could buy the ground to build it on, even if we had the money to build the house.

We meet one idea in our medical work that causes us no little trouble, it is that Buddhistic idea of merit making. They think we are rich people who have come out here to "make merit." It is very hard to give them any pure Christian ideas of anything, particularly of an unselfish motive. Even our church members are so full of these remnants of their old Buddhistic life that I doubt if they will ever get free from them on this side of the grave.

There is a popular idea in my native country that the king of Siam is right on the verge of being a Christian, and I find this also a mistake. He gives every evidence of being a Buddhist in all his interests. True, he has inaugurated many Western reforms, but when you take out of his motives the "merit" and the "political," it leaves you the old negro sum in "addition" (0+0=oty-ott). He is far in advance of his fathers and such praise as he is entitled to on that score I am glad to give him, but to say he is a Christian or anything that looks like it is certainly a great mistake.

I have only been here a short time, but it seems to me that much hard work will have to be done before either the King or very many of his subjects will be made Christian. We are praying that our medical work may be one of the means that God will use to revive his work here in this midnight land. Can you not find it in your heart to join us in this petition?

It seems strange to live in a house without windows. We use wooden shutters to keep out robbers when we are away, but I can assure you we are not guilty of such things as window glass, sash doors and the like, but then one does not mind it so much when the temperature stays at 85 degrees in the shade most of the day. This will not last a great while though, for in a couple of months, even by the time you get this letter, the sun will be right over our heads and then we will know what life in the tropics means.

The Siamese are spirit worshippers, a thing that causes no little trouble in teaching them doctrines of the Godhead. All the words in their language that convey any idea of a spirit are very far from teaching a correct idea of the Holy Spirit. Attempt to talk to them of the person and work of the Holy Spirit and they seem to grasp your meaning with all desirable intelligence, but cross question them a little later and you will find that the idea you at first thought so clear is nothing but their native idea of spirits in general.

Then we have trouble about their keeping the Sabbath. Their own year has thirteen months of twenty-eight days, and their native periodical, religious holiday coming twice a month it is almost impossible to get them to remember when the Sabbath comes. We have a few calendars written off by our old language teacher in Siamese, but it is almost labor thrown away, for a calendar is an enigma to most of them.

AN ENCOURAGING TESTIMONY.

A remarkable instance of the effect of Christian teaching is related in a Tamil letter from the matron of a large school in South India, a translation of which has been received by the Rev. Henry Law Harkness, of Worcester, and is printed by him in the quarterly paper of the Daily Prayer Union. The letter runs as follows:—

It would be impossible, even in many letters, to describe fully the quickening work of the Holy Spirit amongst the girls of this school during the last two or three months. The children have been greatly changed. They were to be seen in groups around the school praying and reading the Bible, with sounds of weeping, and crying "What shall I do to be saved?" For the last few days there has been less of weeping, but they are singing praises to God. Formerly, I awoke them with difficulty at five o'clock, when it was my practice to read a devotional book to them and pray, after which they went to their usual work. In the same manner in the evening, after reading, advice and prayer, they learned their lessons, and at nine o'clock retired to rest. But now there is no need to awaken them; they themselves rise at four or half-past four, sing hymns, and recite verses out of the Bible, and conclude by praying very earnestly.

A Prayer Union for the Holy Spirit has been newly formed here; and all members assemble together at twelve o'clock and sing a hymn; a few of them speak, and all of them offer up a short prayer. Except during the time they are at their studies, the whole day is occupied in prayer and praise. They always look forward to Sunday; and when the day comes, this place is indeed a house of God. They get up at four o'clock in the morning, and sing joyful and sweet hymns, repeat texts, and

pray. After their meals they go round the school three times singing and praying; besides that, each one reads, meditates, and prays in private. Thus through the whole day, not one child, from the youngest to the eldest, can be seen idle, or heard speaking vain and useless words. However hard the heart of any sinner who sees all this, it must be touched and softened. The Lord, who is infinite in wisdom, is showing his great wonders to these poor children, whilst he often hides them from the learned and wise of this world. Last month, in the September meetings, the native pastors and missionaries, when they saw this change in the girls, said with astonishment that no such thing had happened in the school since it was founded. In the large meeting also of the missionary ladies, Bible women, and school-mistresses, with other visitors, my daughter Gnana-sundran, stood up and bravely told of the quickening work of the Holy Spirit which she had received. It is impossible for me to tell you fully of the change, and the happiness experienced by my other children. Although small outward troubles may arise, it is a great comfort to witness the altered state of these children, and I am confident that God has brought me and my children to this place for our great good. I humbly ask you to pray that the Holy Spirit may continue this blessed work among the children, and that he who has begun the good work may vouchsafe to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

HE FAILS NEVER.

Though we fail indeed—
You—I—a score of such weak workers—He
Fails never. If he cannot work by us,
He will work over us. Does he want a man,
Much less a woman, think you? Every time
The star winks there, so many souls are born,
Who all shall work too. Let our own be calm.
We should be ashamed to sit beneath those stars,
Impatient that we're nothing.

—Mrs. Browning.

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