



***ANNA HARRIETTE
LEONOWENS***

***THE ENGLISH
GOVERNESS
AT THE SIAMESE
COURT***



***ANNA HARRIETTE
LEONOWENS***

***THE ENGLISH
GOVERNESS
AT THE SIAMESE
COURT***

Anna Harriette Leonowens

The English Governess at the Siamese Court

**Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace
at Bangkok**

EAN 8596547014867

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

I. ON THE THRESHOLD.

II. A SIAMESE PREMIER AT HOME.

III. A SKETCH OF SIAMESE HISTORY.

IV. HIS EXCELLENCY'S HAREM AND HELPMET.

V. THE TEMPLES OF THE SLEEPING AND THE EMERALD
IDOLS.

VI. THE KING AND THE GOVERNESS.

VII. MARBLE HALLS AND FISH-STALLS.

VIII. OUR HOME IN BANGKOK

IX. OUR SCHOOL IN THE PALACE.

X. MOONSHEE AND THE ANGEL GABRIEL.

XI. THE WAYS OF THE PALACE.

XII. SHADOWS AND WHISPERS OF THE HAREM.

XIII. FÂ-YING, THE KING'S DARLING.

XIV. AN OUTRAGE AND A WARNING.

XV. THE CITY OF BANGKOK.

XVI. THE WHITE ELEPHANT.

XVII. THE CEREMONIES OF CORONATION.

XVIII. THE QUEEN CONSORT.

XIX. THE HEIR-APPARENT.—ROYAL HAIR-CUTTING.

XX. AMUSEMENTS OF THE COURT.

XXI. SIAMESE LITERATURE AND ART.

XXII. BUDDHIST DOCTRINE, PRIESTS, AND WORSHIP.

COMMON MAXIMS OF THE PRIESTS OF SIAM.

XXIII. CREMATION.

XXIV. CERTAIN SUPERSTITIONS.

XXV. THE SUBORDINATE KING

XXVI. THE SUPREME KING: HIS CHARACTER AND
ADMINISTRATION.

XXVII. MY RETIREMENT FROM THE PALACE.

XXVIII. THE KINGDOM OF SIAM.

XXIX. THE RUINS OF CAMBODIA.—AN EXCURSION TO THE
NAGHKON WATT.

XXX. THE LEGEND OF THE MAHA NAUGKON

PREFACE.

[Table of Contents](#)

His Majesty, Somdetch P'hra Paramendr Maha Mongkut, the Supreme King of Siam, having sent to Singapore for an English lady to undertake the education of his children, my friends pointed to me. At first it was with much reluctance that I consented to entertain the project; but, strange as it may seem, the more I reflected upon it the more feasible it appeared, until at length I began to look forward, even with a glow of enthusiasm, toward the new and untried field I was about to enter.

The Siamese Consul at Singapore, Hon. W. Tan Kim-Ching, had written strongly in my favor to the Court of Siam, and in response I received the following letter from the King himself:—

"ENGLISH ERA, 1862, 26th February.
GRAND ROYAL PALACE, BANGKOK.

"To MRS. A. H. LEONOWENS:—

"MADAM: We are in good pleasure, and satisfaction in heart, that you are in willingness to undertake the education of our beloved royal children. And we hope that in doing your education on us and on our children (whom English, call inhabitants of benighted land) you will do your best endeavor for knowledge of English language, science, and

literature, and not for conversion to Christianity; as the followers of Buddha are mostly aware of the powerfulness of truth and virtue, as well as the followers of Christ, and are desirous to have facility of English language and literature, more than new religions.

"We beg to invite you to our royal palace to do your best endeavorment upon us and our children. We shall expect to see you here on return of Siamese steamer Chow Phya.

"We have written to Mr. William Adamson, and to our consul at Singapore, to authorize to do best arrangement for you and ourselves.

"Believe me

"Your faithfully, (Signed)

"S. S. P. P. MAHA MONGKUT."

About a week before our departure for Bangkok, the captain and mate of the steamer Rainbow called upon me. One of these gentlemen had for several years served the government of Siam, and they came to warn me of the trials and dangers that must inevitably attend the enterprise in which I was embarking. Though it was now too late to deter me from the undertaking by any arguments addressed to my fears, I can nevertheless never forget the generous impulse of the honest seamen, who said: "Madam, be advised even by strangers, who have proved what sufferings await you, and shake your hands of this mad undertaking." By the next steamer I sailed for the Court of Siam.

In the following pages I have tried to give a full and faithful account of the scenes and the characters that were gradually unfolded to me as I began to understand the language, and by all other means to attain a clearer insight into the secret life of the court. I was thankful to find, even in this citadel of Buddhism, men, and above all women, who were "lovely in their lives," who, amid infinite difficulties, in the bosom of a most corrupt society, and enslaved to a capricious and often cruel will, yet devoted themselves to an earnest search after truth. On the other hand, I have to confess with sorrow and shame, how far we, with all our boasted enlightenment, fall short, in true nobility and piety, of some of our "benighted" sisters of the East. With many of them, Love, Truth, and Wisdom are not mere synonyms but "living gods," for whom they long with lively ardor, and, when found, embrace with joy.

Those of my readers who may find themselves interested in the wonderful ruins recently discovered in Cambodia are indebted to the earlier travellers, M. Henri Mouhot, Dr. A. Bastian, and the able English photographer. James Thomson, F. R. G. S. L., almost as much as to myself.

To the Hon. George William Curtis of New York, and to all my other true friends, abroad and in America, I feel very grateful.

And finally, I would acknowledge the deep obligation I am under to Dr.

J. W. Palmer, whose literary experience and skill have been of so great service to me in revising and preparing my manuscript for

the press. A.

H. L.

**I. ON THE THRESHOLD II. A SIAMESE
PREMIER AT HOME III. A SKETCH OF
SIAMESE HISTORY IV. HIS
EXCELLENCY'S HAREM AND
HELPMEET V. THE TEMPLES OF THE
SLEEPING AND THE EMERALD IDOLS
VI. THE KING AND THE GOVERNESS
VII. MARBLE HALLS AND FISH-STALLS
VIII. OUR HOME IN BANGKOK IX. OUR
SCHOOL IN THE PALACE X.
MOONSHEE AND THE ANGEL GABRIEL
XI. THE WAYS OF THE PALACE XII.
SHADOWS AND WHISPERS OF THE
HAREM XIII. FA-YING, THE KING'S
DARLING XIV. AN OUTRAGE AND A
WARNING XV. THE CITY OF BANGKOK
XVI. THE WHITE ELEPHANT XVII. THE
CEREMONIES OF CORONATION XVIII.
THE QUEEN CONSORT XIX. THE HEIR-
APPARENT.—ROYAL HAIR-CUTTING XX.
AMUSEMENTS OF THE COURT XXI.
SIAMESE LITERATURE AND ART XXII.
BUDDHIST DOCTRINE, PRIESTS, AND**

**WORSHIP XXIII. CREMATION XXIV.
CERTAIN SUPERSTITIONS XXV. THE
SUBORDINATE KING XXVI. THE
SUPREME KING: HIS CHARACTER AND
ADMINISTRATION XXVII. MY
RETIREMENT FROM THE PALACE
XXVIII. THE KINGDOM OF SIAM XXIX.
THE RUINS OF CAMBODIA.—AN
EXCURSION TO THE NAGHKON WATT
XXX. THE LEGEND OF THE MAHA
NAGHKON**

[Illustration: Fac-Simile of Letter from present Supreme King of Siam:

Transcription follows:]

Amarinde Winschley

Palace Bangkok

March 6th 1869

Mrs. A. H. Leonowens

New York

Dear Madam,

I have great pleasure in condescending to answer your sympathising letter of 25th November last wherein the sorrowful expressions of your heart in relation to my most beloved Sovereign Father in demise which is a venerated burden and I have left to this day and ever more shall bear this most unexpressable loss in mind, with the deepest respect and lamentation, and resignation to the will of divine Providence;—are very loyal to you too to ful, and

share your grief in behalf the affection you have for your royal pupils, and the kind remembrances you have made of them in your letter, loves you too with that respect and love your are held in ther esteem, for such disinterestioness in imparting knowledge to them during your stay here with us. I have the pleasure also, to mention you that our Government in counsel has elected me to assume the reins of Government notwithstanding my juvenility; and I am pleased to see the love the people have for me, most undoubtedly arising from the respect and veneration they have had for my beloved royal Father and I hope to render them prosperity and peace, and equal measure, they have enjoyed since the last reign in return.

May you and your beloved children be in the peace of the divine Providence.

I beg to remain,
Yours sincerely

Somdetch Phra Chulalonkorn Klou Chow-yu Hua Supreme King of Siam on 114th day of reign

I. ON THE THRESHOLD.

[Table of Contents](#)

MARCH 15, 1862.—On board the small Siamese steamer Chow Phya, in the Gulf of Siam.

I rose before the sun, and ran on deck to catch an early glimpse of the strange land we were nearing; and as I peered eagerly, not through mist and haze, but straight into the clear, bright, many-tinted ether, there came the first faint, tremulous blush of dawn, behind her rosy veil; and presently the welcome face shines boldly out, glad, glorious, beautiful, and aureoled with flaming hues of orange, fringed with amber and gold, wherefrom flossy webs of color float wide through the sky, paling as they go. A vision of comfort and gladness, that tropical March morning, genial as a July dawn in my own less ardent clime; but the memory of two round, tender arms, and two little dimpled hands, that so lately had made themselves loving fetters round my neck, in the vain hope of holding mamma fast, blinded my outlook; and as, with a nervous tremor and a rude jerk, we came to anchor there, so with a shock and a tremor I came to my hard realities.

The captain told us we must wait for the afternoon tide to carry us over the bar. I lingered on deck, as long as I could dodge the fiery spears that flashed through our tattered awning, and bear the bustle and the boisterous jests of some circus people, our fellow-passengers, who came by express invitation of the king to astonish and amuse the royal household and the court.

Scarcely less intelligent, and certainly more entertaining, than these were the dogs of our company,-? brutes of diverse temperament, experience, and behavior. There were the captain's two, Trumpet and Jip, who, by virtue of their reflected rank and authority, held places of privilege and pickings under the table, and were jealous and overbearing

as became a captain's favorites, snubbing and bullying their more accomplished and versatile guests, the circus dogs, with skipper-like growls and snarls and snaps. And there was our own true Bessy,—a Newfoundland, great and good,—discreet, reposeful, dignified, fastidious, not to be cajoled into confidences and familiarities with strange dogs, whether official or professional. Very human was her gentle countenance, and very loyal, I doubt not, her sense of responsibility, as she followed anxiously my boy and me, interpreting with her heart the thoughts she read in our faces, and responding with her sympathetic eyes.

In the afternoon, when we dined on deck, the land was plainly visible; and now, as with a favoring tide we glided toward the beautiful Meinam ("Mother of Waters"), the air grew brighter, and the picture lived and moved; trees *grew* on the banks, more and more verdure, monkeys swung from bough to bough, birds flashed and piped among the thickets.

Though the reddish-brown water over the "banks" is very shallow at low tide, craft of moderate burden, with the aid of a pilot, cast anchor commonly in the very heart of the capital, in from ten to twelve fathoms of water.

The world has few rivers so deep, commodious, and safe as the Meinam; and when we arrived the authorities were contemplating the erection of beacons on the bar, as well as a lighthouse for the benefit of vessels entering the port of Bangkok. The stream is rich in fish of excellent quality and flavor, such as is found in most of the great rivers of Asia; and is especially noted for its *plattoo*, a kind of sardine, so abundant and cheap that it forms a common seasoning to

the laborer's bowl of rice. The Siamese are expert in modes of drying and salting fish of all kinds, and large quantities are exported annually to Java, Sumatra, Malacca, and China.

In half an hour from the time when the twin banks of the river, in their raiment of bright green, seemed to open their beautiful arms to receive us, we came to anchor opposite the mean, shabby, irregular town of Paknam, or Sumuttra P'hra-kan ("Ocean Affairs"). Here the captain went ashore to report himself to the Governor, and the officials of the custom-house, and the mail-boat came out to us. My boy became impatient for *couay* (cake); Moonshee, my Persian teacher, and Beebe, my gay Hindostanee nurse, expressed their disappointment and disgust, Moonshee being absurdly dramatic in his wrath, as, fairly shaking his fist at the town, he demanded, "What is this?"

Near this place are two islands. The one on the right is fortified, yet withal so green and pretty, and seemingly so innocent of bellicose designs, that one may fancy Nature has taken peculiar pains to heal and hide the disfigurements grim Art has made in her beauty. On the other, which at first I took for a floating shrine of white marble, is perhaps the most unique and graceful object of architecture in Siam; shining like a jewel on the broad bosom of the river, a temple all of purest white, its lofty spire, fantastic and gilded, flashing back the glory of the sun, and duplicated in shifting, quivering shadows in the limpid waters below. Add to these the fitful ripple of the coquettish breeze, the burnished blazonry of the surrounding vegetation, the budding charms of spring joined to the sensuous opulence of autumn, and you have a scene of lovely glamour it were

but vain impertinence to describe. Earth seemed to have gathered for her adorning here elements more intellectual, poetic, and inspiring than she commonly displays to pagan eyes.

These islands at the gateway of the river are, like the bank in the gulf, but accumulations of the sand borne down before the torrent, that, suddenly swollen by the rains, rushes annually to the sea. The one on which the temple stands is partly artificial, having been raised from the bed of the Meinam by the king P'hra Chow Phra-sat-thong, as a work of "merit." Visiting this island some years later, I found that this temple, like all other pyramidal structures in this part of the world, consists of solid masonry of brick and mortar. The bricks made here are remarkable, being fully eight inches long and nearly four broad, and of fine grain,—altogether not unlike the "tavellae" brick of the Egyptians and ancient Romans. There are cornices on all sides, with steps to ascend to the top, where a long inscription proclaims the name, rank, and virtues of the founder, with dates of the commencement of the island and the shrine. The whole of the space, extending to the low stone breakwater that surrounds the island, is paved with the same kind of brick, and encloses, in addition to the P'hra-Cha-dei ("The Lord's Delight"), a smaller temple with a brass image of the sitting Buddha. It also affords accommodation to the numerous retinue of princes, nobles, retainers, and pages who attend the king in his annual visits to the temple, to worship, and make votive offerings and donations to the priests. A charming spot, yet not one to be contemplated with unalloyed pleasure; for here also are the wretched

people, who pass up and down in boats, averting their eyes, pressing their hard, labor-grimed hands against their sweating foreheads, and lowly louting in blind awe to these whited bricks. Even the naked children hush and crouch, and lay their little foreheads against the bottom of the boat.

His Majesty Somdetch P'hra Paramendr Maha Mongkut, the late Supreme King, contributed interesting *souvenirs* to the enlargement and adornment of this temple.

The town, which the twin islands redeem from the ignominy it otherwise deserves, lies on the east bank of the river, and by its long lines of low ramparts that face the water seems to have been at one time substantially fortified; but the works are now dilapidated and neglected. They were constructed in the first instance, I am told, with fatal ingenuity; in the event of an attack the garrison would find them as dangerous to abandon as to defend. Paknam is indebted for its importance rather to its natural position, and its possibilities of improvement under the abler hands into which it is gradually falling, than to any advantage or promise in itself; for a more disgusting, repulsive place is scarcely to be found on Asian ground.

The houses are built partly of mud, partly of wood, and, as in those of Malacca, only the upper story is habitable, the ground floor being the abode of pigs, dogs, fowls, and noisome reptiles. The "Government House" was originally of stone, but all the more recent additions have been shabbily constructed of rough timber and mud. This is one of the few houses in Paknam which one may enter without mounting a ladder or a clumsy staircase, and which have rooms in the lower as well as in the upper story.

The Custom-House is an open *sala*, or shed, where interpreters, inspectors, and tidewaiters lounge away the day on cool mats, chewing areca, betel, and tobacco, and extorting moneys, goods, or provisions from the unhappy proprietors of native trading craft, large or small; but Europeans are protected from their rascally and insolent exactions by the intelligence and energy of their respective consuls.

The hotel is a whitewashed brick building, originally designed to accommodate foreign ambassadors and other official personages visiting the Court of Siam. The king's summer-house, fronting the islands, is the largest edifice to be seen, but it has neither dignity nor beauty. A number of inferior temples and monasteries occupy the background, and are crowded with a rabble of priests, in yellow robes and with shaven pates; packs of mangy pariah-dogs attend them. These monasteries consist of many small rooms or cells, containing merely a mat and wooden pillow for each occupant. The refuse of the food, which the priests beg during the day, is cast to the dogs at night; and what *they* refuse is left to putrefy. Unimaginable are the stench the sun of Siam engenders in such conditions.

A village so happily situated might, under better management, become a thriving and pleasing port; but neglect, cupidity, and misrule have shockingly deformed and degraded it. Nevertheless, by its picturesque site and surroundings of beauty, it retains its hold upon the regretful admiration of many Europeans and Americans, who in ill health have found strength and cheer in its sea-breezes.

We heartily enjoyed the delightful freshness of the evening air as we glided up the Meinam, though the river view at this point is somewhat marred by the wooden piers and quays that line it on either side, and the floating houses, representing elongated A's. From the deck, at a convenient height above the level of the river and the narrow serpentine canals and creeks, we looked down upon conical roofs thatched with attaps, and diversified by the pyramids and spires and fantastic turrets of the more important buildings. The valley of the Meinam, not over six hundred miles in length, is as a long deep dent or fissure in the alluvial soil. At its southern extremity we have the climate and vegetation of the tropics, while its northern end, on the brow of the Yunan, is a region of perpetual snow. The surrounding country is remarkable for the bountiful productiveness of its unctuous loam. The scenery, though not wild nor grand, is very picturesque and charming in the peculiar golden haze of its atmosphere. I surveyed with more and more admiration each new scene of blended luxuriance and beauty,—plantations spreading on either hand as far as the eye could reach, and level fields of living green, billowy with crops of rice and maize, and sugar-cane and coffee, and cotton and tobacco; and the wide irregular river, a kaleidoscope of evanescent form and color, where land, water, and sky joined or parted in a thousand charming surprises of shapes and shadows.

The sun was already sinking in the west, when we caught sight of a tall roof of familiar European fashion; and presently a lowly white chapel with green windows, freshly painted, peeped out beside two pleasant dwellings. Chapel

and homes belong to the American Presbyterian Mission. A forest of graceful boughs filled the background; the last faint rays of the departing sun fell on the Mission pathway, and the gentle swaying of the tall trees over the chapel imparted a promise of safety and peace, as the glamour of the approaching night and the gloom and mystery of the pagan land into which we were penetrating filled me with an indefinable dread. I almost trembled, as the unfriendly clouds drove out the lingering tints of day. Here were the strange floating city, with its stranger people on all the open porches, quays, and jetties; the innumerable rafts and boats, canoes and gondolas, junks, and ships; the pall of black smoke from the steamer, the burly roar of the engine, and the murmur and the jar; the bewildering cries of men, women, and children, the shouting of the Chinamen, and the barking of the dogs,—yet no one seemed troubled but me. I knew it was wisest to hide my fears. It was the old story. How many of our sisters, how many of our daughters, how many of our hearts' darlings, are thus, without friend or guide or guard or asylum, turning into untried paths with untold stories of trouble and pain!

We dropped anchor in deep water near an island. In a moment the river was alive with nondescript craft, worked by amphibious creatures, half naked, swarthy, and grim, who rent the air with shrill, wild jargon as they scrambled toward us. In the distance were several hulks of Siamese men-of-war, seemingly as old as the flood; and on the right towered, tier over tier, the broad roofs of the grand Royal Palace of Bangkok,—my future "home" and the scene of my future labors.

The circus people are preparing to land; and the dogs, running to and fro with anxious glances, have an air of leave-taking also. Now the China coolies, with pigtailed braided and coiled round their low, receding brows, begin their uncouth bustle, and into the small hours of the morning enliven the time of waiting with frantic shouts and gestures.

Before long a showy gondola, fashioned like a dragon, with flashing torches and many paddles, approached; and a Siamese official mounted the side, swaying himself with an absolute air. The red *langoutee*, or skirt, loosely folded about his person, did not reach his ankles; and to cover his audacious chest and shoulders he had only his own brown polished skin. He was followed by a dozen attendants, who, the moment they stepped from the gangway, sprawled on the deck like huge toads, doubling their arms and legs under them, and pressing their noses against the boards, as if intent on making themselves small by degrees and hideously less. Every Asiatic on deck, coolies and all, prostrates himself, except my two servants, who are bewildered. Moonshee covertly mumbles his five prayers, ejaculating between, *Mash-Allah! A Tala-yea kia hai?* [Footnote: "Great God! what is this?"] and Beebe shrinks, and draws her veil of spotted muslin jealously over her charms.

The captain stepped forward and introduced us. "His Excellency Chow Phya

Sri Sury Wongse, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Siam!"

Half naked as he was, and without an emblem to denote his rank, there was yet something remarkable about this

native chief, by virtue of which he compelled our respect from the first glance,—a sensibly magnetic quality of tone or look. With an air of command oddly at variance with his almost indecent attire, of which he seemed superbly unconscious, he beckoned to a young attendant, who crawled to him as a dog crawls to an angry master. This was an interpreter, who at a word from his lord began to question me in English.

"Are you the lady who is to teach in the royal family?"

On my replying in the affirmative, he asked, "Have you friends in Bangkok?"

Finding I had none, he was silent for a minute or two; then demanded:

"What will you do? Where will you sleep to-night?"

"Indeed I cannot tell," I said. "I am a stranger here. But I understood from his Majesty's letter that a residence would be provided for us on our arrival; and he has been duly informed that we were to arrive at this time."

"His Majesty cannot remember everything," said his Excellency; the interpreter added, "You can go where you like." And away went master and slaves. I was dumfounded, without even voice to inquire if there was a hotel in the city; and my servants were scornfully mute. My kind friend the captain was sorely puzzled. He would have sheltered us if he could; but a cloud of coal-dust and the stamping and screaming of a hundred and fifty Chinamen made hospitality impracticable; so I made a little bed for my child on deck, and prepared to pass the night with him under a canopy of stars.

The situation was as Oriental as the scene,—heartless arbitrary insolence on the part of my employers; homelessness, forlornness, helplessness, mortification, indignation, on mine. Fears and misgivings crowded and stunned me. My tears fell thick and fast, and, weary and despairing, I closed my eyes, and tried to shut out heaven and earth; but the reflection would return to mock and goad me, that by my own act, and against the advice of my friends, I had placed myself in this position.

The good captain of the Chow Phya, much troubled by the conduct of the minister, paced the deck (which usually, on these occasions, he left to the supercargo) for more than an hour. Presently a boat approached, and he hailed it. In a moment it was at the gangway, and with robust, hearty greetings on both sides, Captain B——, a cheery Englishman, with a round, ruddy, rousing face, sprang on board; in a few words our predicament was explained to him, and at once he invited us to share his house, for the night at least, assuring us of a cordial welcome from his wife. In the beautiful gondola of our "friend in need" we were pulled by four men, standing to their oars, through a dream-like scene, peculiar to this Venice of the East. Larger boats, in an endless variety of form and adornment, with prows high, tapering, and elaborately carved, and pretty little gondolas and canoes, passed us continually on the right and left; yet amid so many signs of life, motion, traffic, bustle, the sweet sound of the rippling waters alone fell on the ear. No rumbling of wheels, nor clatter of hoofs, nor clangor of bells, nor roar and scream of engines to shock the

soothing fairy-like illusion. The double charm of stillness and starlight was perfect.

"By the by," broke in my cheery new friend, "you'll have to go with me to the play, ma'm; because my wife is there with the boys, and the house-key is in her pocket."

"To the play!"

"O, don't be alarmed, ma'm! It's not a regular theatre; only a catchpenny show, got up by a Frenchman, who came from Singapore a fortnight since. And having so little amusement here, we are grateful for anything that may help to break the monotony. The temporary playhouse is within the palace grounds of his Royal Highness Prince Krom Lhuang Wongse; and I hope to have an opportunity to introduce you to the Prince, who I believe is to be present with his family."

The intelligence was not gratifying, a Siamese prince had too lately disturbed my moral equilibrium; but I held my peace and awaited the result with resignation. A few strokes of the oars, seconded by the swift though silent current, brought us to a wooden pier surmounted by two glaring lanterns. Captain B—— handed us out. My child, startled from a deep sleep, was refractory, and would not trust himself out of my fond keeping. When finally I had struggled with him in my arms to the landing, I saw in the shadow a form coiled on a piece of striped matting. Was it a bear? No, a prince! For the clumsy mass of reddish-brown flesh unrolled and uplifted itself, and held out a human arm, with a fat hand at the end of it, when Captain B—— presented me to "his Royal Highness." Near by was his Excellency the Prime Minister, in the identical costume that had disgraced

our unpleasant interview on the Chow Phya; he was smoking a European pipe, and plainly enjoying our terrors. My stalwart friend contrived to squeeze us, and even himself, first through a bamboo door, and then through a crowd of hot people, to seats fronting a sort of altar, consecrated to the arts of jugglery. A number of Chinamen of respectable appearance occupied the more distant places, while those immediately behind us were filled by the ladies and gentlemen of the foreign community. On a raised dais hung with kincob [Footnote: Silk, embroidered with, gold flowers.] curtains, the ladies of the Prince's harem reclined; while their children, shining in silk and ornaments of gold, laughed, prattled, and gesticulated, until the juggler appeared, when they were stunned with sudden wonder. Under the eaves on all sides human heads were packed, on every head its cherished tuft of hair, like a stiff black brush inverted, in every mouth its delicious cud of areca-nut and betel, which the human cattle ruminated with industrious content. The juggler, a keen little Frenchman, plied his arts nimbly, and what with his ventriloquial doll, his empty bag full of eggs, his stones that were candies, and his candies that were stones, and his stuffed birds that sang, astonished and delighted his unsophisticated patrons, whose applauding murmurs were diversified by familiarly silly shrieks—the true Siamese Did-you-ever!—from behind the kincob curtains.

But I was weary and disheartened, and welcomed with a sigh of relief the closing of the show. As we passed out with our guide, the glare of many torches falling on the dark silent river made the swarthy forms of the boatmen weird

and Charon-like. Mrs. B—— welcomed us with a pleasant smile to her little heaven of home across the river, and by the simplicity and gentleness of her manners dispelled in a measure my feeling of forlornness. When at last I found myself alone, I would have sought the sleep I so much needed, but the strange scenes of the day chased each other in agitating confusion through my brain. Then I quitted the side of my sleeping boy, triumphant in his dreamless innocence, and sat defeated by the window, to crave counsel and help from the ever-present Friend; and as I waited I sank into a tumultuous slumber, from which at last I started to find the long-tarrying dawn climbing over a low wall and creeping through a half-open shutter.

II. A SIAMESE PREMIER AT HOME.

[Table of Contents](#)

I started up, arranged my dress, and smoothed my hair; though no water nor any after-touches could remove the shadow that night of gloom and loneliness had left upon my face. But my boy awoke with eager, questioning eyes, his smile bright and his hair lustrous. As we knelt together by the window at the feet of "Our Father," I could not but ask in the darkness of my trouble, did it need so bitter a baptism as ours to purify so young a soul?

In an outer room we met Mrs. B—— *en déshabillé*, and scarcely so pretty as at our first meeting, but for her smile,

remarkable for its subtle, evanescent sweetness. At breakfast our host joined us, and, after laughing at our late predicament and fright, assured me of that which I have since experienced,—the genuine goodness of the Prince Krom Lhuang Wongse. Every foreign resident of Bangkok, who at any time has had friendly acquaintance or business with him, would, I doubt not, join me in expressions of admiration and regard for one who has maintained through circumstances so trying and under a system so oppressive an exemplary reputation for liberality, integrity, justice, and humanity.

Soon after breakfast the Prime Minister's boat, with the slave interpreter who had questioned me on the steamer, arrived to take us to his Excellency's palace.

[Illustration: THE PRIME MINISTER.]

In about a quarter of an hour we found ourselves in front of a low gateway, which opened on a wide courtyard, or "compound," paved with rough-hewn slabs of stone. A brace of Chinese mandarins of ferocious aspect, cut in stone and mounted on stone horses, guarded the entrance. Farther on, a pair of men-at-arms in bass-relief challenged us; and near these were posted two living sentries, in European costume, but without shoes. On the left was a pavilion for theatrical entertainments, one entire wall being covered with scenic pictures. On the right of this stood the palace of the Prime Minister, displaying a semicircular *façade*; in the background a range of buildings of considerable extent, comprising the lodgings of his numerous wives. Attached to the largest of these houses was a charming garden of flowers, in the midst of which a refreshing fountain played. His Excellency's

residence abounded within in carvings and gildings, elegant in design and color, that blended and harmonized in pleasing effects with the luxurious draperies that hung in rich folds from the windows.

We moved softly, as the interpreter led us through a suite of spacious saloons, disposed in ascending tiers, and all carpeted, candelabraed, and appointed in the most costly European fashion. A superb vase of silver, embossed and burnished, stood on a table inlaid with mother-of-pearl and chased with silver. Flowers of great variety and beauty filled the rooms with a delicious though slightly oppressive fragrance. On every side my eyes were delighted with rare vases, jewelled cups and boxes, burnished chalices, dainty statuettes,— *objets de vertu*, Oriental and European, antique and modern, blending the old barbaric splendors with the graces of the younger arts.

As we waited, fascinated and bewildered, the Prime Minister suddenly stood before us,—the semi-nude barbarian of last night. I lost my presence of mind, and in my embarrassment would have left the room. But he held out his hand, saying, "Good morning, *sir*! Take a seat, *sir*!" which I did somewhat shyly, but not without a smile for his comical "sir." I spied a number of young girls peeping at us from behind curtains, while the male attendants, among whom were his younger brothers, nephews, and cousins, crouched in the antechamber on all fours. His Excellency, with an expression of pleased curiosity, and that same grand unconsciousness of his alarming poverty of costume, approached us nearly, and, with a kindly smile patting Boy on the head, asked him his name. But the child cried aloud,

"Mamma, come home! Please, mamma, come home!" and I found it not easy to quiet him.

Presently, mustering courage for myself also, I ventured to express my wish for a quiet house or apartments, where I might be free from intrusion, and at perfect liberty before and after school-hours.

When this reasonable request was interpreted to him—seemingly in a few monosyllables—he stood looking at me, smiling, as if surprised and amused that I should have notions on the subject of liberty. Quickly this look became inquisitive and significant, so that I began to fancy he had doubts as to the use I might make of my stipulated freedom, and was puzzled to conjecture why a woman should wish to be free at all. Some such thought must have passed through his mind, for he said abruptly, "You not married!"

I bowed.

"Then where will you go in the evening?"

"Not anywhere, your Excellency. I simply desire to secure for myself and my child some hours of privacy and rest, when my duties do not require my presence elsewhere."

"How many years your husband has been dead?" he asked.

I replied that his Excellency had no right to pry into my domestic concerns. His business was with me as a governess only; on any other subject I declined conversing. I enjoyed the expression of blank amazement with which he regarded me on receiving this somewhat defiant reply. "*Tam chai!*" ("Please yourself!") he said, and proceeded to pace to and fro, but without turning his eyes from my face, or ceasing to smile. Then he said something to his attendants,

five or six of whom, raising themselves on their knees, with their eyes fixed upon the carpet, crawled backward till they reached the steps, bobbed their heads and shoulders, started spasmodically to their feet, and fled from the apartment. My boy, who had been awed and terrified, began to cry, and I too was startled. Again he uttered the harsh gutturals, and instantly, as with an electric shock, another half-dozen of the prostrate slaves sprang up and ran. Then he resumed his mysterious promenade, still carefully keeping an eye upon us, and smiling by way of conversation. It was long before I could imagine what we were to do. Boy, fairly tortured, cried "Come home, mamma! why don't you come home? I don't like that man." His Excellency halted, and sinking his voice ominously, said, "You no can go!" Boy clutched my dress, and hid his face and smothered his sobs in my lap; and yet, attracted, fascinated, the poor little fellow from time to time looked up, only to shudder, tremble, and hide his face again. For his sake I was glad when the interpreter returned on all fours. Pushing one elbow straight out before the other, in the manner of these people, he approached his master with such a salutation as might be offered to deity; and with a few more unintelligible utterances, his Excellency bowed to us, and disappeared behind a mirror. All the curious, peering eyes that had been directed upon us from every nook and corner where a curtain hung, instantly vanished; and at the same time sweet, wild music, like the tinkling of silver bells in the distance, fell upon our ears.

To my astonishment the interpreter stood boldly upright, and began to contemplate his irresistible face and figure in

a glass, and arrange with cool coxcombry his darling tuft of hair; which done, he approached us with a mild swagger, and proceeded to address me with a freedom which I found it expedient to snub. I told him that, although I did not require any human being to go down on his face and hands before me, I should nevertheless tolerate no familiarity or disrespect from any one. The fellow understood me well enough, but did not permit me to recover immediately from my surprise at the sudden change in his bearing and tone. As he led us to the two elegant rooms reserved for us in the west end of the palace, he informed us that he was the Premier's half-brother, and hinted that I would be wise to conciliate him if I wished to have my own way. In the act of entering one of the rooms, I turned upon him angrily, and bade him be off. The next moment this half-brother of a Siamese magnate was kneeling in abject supplication in the half-open doorway, imploring me not to report him to his Excellency, and promising never to offend again. Here was a miracle of repentance I had not looked for; but the miracle was sham. Rage, cunning, insolence, servility, and hypocrisy were vilely mixed in the minion.

Our chambers opened on a quiet piazza, shaded by fruit-trees in blossom, and overlooking a small artificial lake stocked with pretty, sportive fish.

To be free to make a stunning din is a Siamese woman's idea of perfect enjoyment. Hardly were we installed in our apartments when, with a pell-mell rush and screams of laughter, the ladies of his Excellency's private Utah reconnoitred us in force. Crowding in through the half-open door, they scrambled for me with eager curiosity, all trying