

# The Late King Chulalongkorn.

On 23rd October, 1910, H. M. the King Chulalongkorn died after a reign of 42 years in the 58th year of his age. It will be the duty of abler pens than ours to give an account of what Siam owes to the deceased monarch in regard to the position she now fills in the rank of nations. It may not, however, be deemed inopportune if from a sense of gratitude and duty this Society records what Siam owes to this monarch from a literary point of view, especially as, encouraged by his august example, it has also tried to investigate the arts, science and literature in regard to the country over which he reigned.

The son of King Mongkut, a monarch who during the years he remained in the priesthood and during his reign had learned to appreciate the benefits which his country would derive from the influence of western culture on the civilisation of the East, the young prince was brought up under this beneficent rule. By it the King was guided when he came to the throne in initiating the education of his people also in the material sciences of the West. He knew that it was necessary for Siam to adopt some of the forms of European culture, with which she was brought into daily contact, and hence his desire that his own sons and the sons of those with whom to a certain extent the future government of the country would rest, should make acquaintance with western civilization. It was also due to his initiative that the schools were reformed and a sense of duty and patriotism instilled in the youth of the country.

Already in the time of King Mongkut a Government Gazette had been issued at somewhat irregular intervals, in which the King made his officials acquainted with government work, and this Gazette was continued in regular form weekly by King Chulalongkorn, and the volumes so issued form historical Documents of the greatest importance. It may be mentioned that whilst the first volume, issued in 1874, contained with a reprint of the old laws etc., 433 quarto pages, the issue of 1909 contained 1504 quarto pages besides reports. In addition to this Gazette the King ordered the different

ministries to issue regular reports on the working of the departments under their control, and from their study a true account of the progress of Siam may be had, as no trouble was taken to represent matters other than in their true light. The historical sense by which the King was always animated guided him in this respect.

Printing, which only played a comparatively unimportant part in the reign of King Mongkut, under whom it may be said to have been first introduced, was extensively used and through the King's initiative the government issued some of the best literature of Siam. All these early editions have become very rare. As unfortunately no second edition was printed by government, other printing presses reprinted them, and this they did without critical insight. It is known that on the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of Bangkok as capital the direct descendants of Phra Buddha Jot Fa, the founder of the present dynasty, the children of King Mongkut established the Library which was called by the name King Mongkut held whilst in the Priesthood the "Vajirañān." This library was afterwards constituted by the King with the unanimous consent of the other members of the Royal family as the National Library, in memory of the 100th birthday of King Mongkut. It considered it its aim to make generally known and preserve the sacred, historical and profane literature of Siam, and in its constitution the names of three Sovereigns of Siam are united inasmuch as the present King as Crown Prince was elected the first President. In connection with this library formerly a Literary Magazine was issued to which King Chulalongkorn frequently contributed, and many articles written by King Mongkut were printed in it, and these are a mine of wealth for the student of Siamese history and literature.

Quite apart from the fact that King Mongkut may be said to have originated modern Siamese prose, these articles are and always will remain a norm of Siamese style, of which both in prose and verse King Chulalongkorn remained a past master. The first idea of the right of ownership in literary productions was manifested in disallowing articles appearing in the magazine to be reprinted, and many years later a general law on this matter was passed, which in the main follows the principles laid down by the Berne convention.

As a fit complement to the library the King also instituted the Royal Historical Research Society in 1907, whose aim it is to collect, preserve and eventually make known for future generations as much as possible copies of foreign as well as domestic documents showing the relations of Siam with foreign countries as well as those having reference to purely domestic affairs. The first work issued under the auspices of this Society was a commentary written by the late King on the diary kept by the Princess Krom Hluang Narindrdevi.

The King also allowed the letters which he addressed to his daughter on his last journey to Europe to be published. The style in all publications of the King was straight and to the point. There was no straining after effect, and they may be considered as examples of the best Siamese style. Foreign words were only used if they were better able to convey the sense than the corresponding words in Siamese, and it may be sincerely hoped that at a no very distant date the King's literary remains both in prose and in verse may see the light.

Under King Mongkut treaties were first made with foreign nations, and the King considered it his duty to make Siam better known throughout the world by sending for the first time exhibits to the International Exhibition in Paris. This policy was continued in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, and he thought it a fit memorial of the centenary of the foundation of Bangkok as capital to open an exhibition at which Siamese art, industry, science and commerce were displayed, and at the same time instituting a permanent Museum. At nearly all international exhibitions Siam was worthily represented and a permanent commission was instituted of which the present King was made President.

The yearly agricultural exhibitions were due to the initiative of the deceased monarch, as he rightly thought that by competition and rewards he would rouse the latent energy of his people.

We have hitherto only dwelt on the literary side of the King's character from a secular standpoint, and it remains to add a few words about the position he felt he had to occupy as a Buddhist

sovereign. He issued after completion of a reign of 25 years the editio princeps of the Tipitaka, and in truly kingly generosity had it distributed amongst the literary institutions in Siam and foreign countries.

Preparations were in active progress to issue also the commentaries to the Tipitaka, and it was intended that they should be printed in ancient Cambodian characters, whilst the Tipitaka had been printed in Siamese characters. For the commentaries a new fount has been in active preparation. The King died, but one of the first acts of His successor on the throne was to give orders to continue with the work, and thus in Siam will be issued within a short time the whole of the Buddhist scriptures, a work redounding to the fame of the two sovereigns with whom it is connected.

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