

New Siamese Ambassador an Interesting Personality

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WITH the coming of the Siamese ambassador to this country, soon expected in Washington, diplomatic society will be enriched by a singularly interesting personality. Phya Charoon Raja Maitri, first envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary from Siam to the United States, has had a career, probably more remarkable than any of the associates whom he will meet in diplomatic circles. Cousin of his king, as he is, he has been prince, priest, beggar and finally not only prince again, but one of the most trusted advisers of the throne. That he is accredited to the United States is proof of this latter, for King Chulalongkorn is himself an admirer and a student of the institutions of this country, and is so deeply interested in strengthening the ties between it and his own land that he has recently been considering a trip hither. Up to the present, however, Siam has been content with a consular representative to the nation, Hon. Isaac Townsend Smith, formerly United States consul to Siam. The new ambassador is the sixth sent from his country, the others being accredited to Berlin, Paris, London, St. Petersburg and Yeddo.

Phya Charoon Raja Maitri is about 37 years old. Like most Siamese he is below medium size, according to our standards, but is of fine physique, deep-chested, muscular and straight. Man to man he could probably make easy work of the average American thirty pounds heavier than himself, for he has been a fine athlete, proficient in the severe exercises of wrestling and sword play, and he still keeps his youthful suppleness and strength, which is

unusual for an Oriental of his age. Despite his dark skin he is a fine looking man. His eyes are calm, steady and well set, his forehead broad and unwrinkled, his mouth firm and well controlled; the general contour of his face regular and pleasing, and his expression informed with the dignity of a man who respects himself and is accustomed to respect from others. Behind this dignity there lurks a jovial spirit of which no indication shows in the face. His excellency is fond of a good joke and of a good story, whether as relator or listener. He is also fond of a good dinner, and is an epicure without being in any degree a glutton. His ceremonial dinners are famous in Bangkok, the capital of Siam.

No minister accredited from a foreign court to this country will find himself in more radically changed surroundings than the Siamese ambassador. Bangkok is perhaps more given to magnificent ceremoniousness, both socially and officially, than any other capital in the world. To him Washington will seem strangely informal—perhaps strangely dull. Also, he will have difficulty in adjusting himself to the new conditions of rank, or rather, lack of rank. He comes to a country where all men are equal, from a country where no two men are equal. At the Siamese court no two officials or dignitaries can walk or stand abreast, because every man is on a different social plane from his fellow. Much as the new ambassador will find to surprise him in the American theory of equality, nobody will see evidences of his surprise, for he is a trained diplomat in the highest sense of the word; tasteful, courteous, suave; and with that equality of acquiescence and adaptability which much mingling with all classes of men imparts.



VIEW OF RIVER FROM PHYA CHAROON'S GARDENS.

But though the inner man may accept our standards, it is probable that the outer man will abide by those of his country. In that event Washington will see some dazzling costumes when Phya Charoon arrays himself for affairs of state. It may even be necessary to detail a special police guard for him as he drives through the streets, for his jewels are valuable enough to tempt a professional crook to almost any risk. In Siam his collection of jewelry is no finer than that of many other men of high rank, but Siam has been amassing gems for many generations. The ambassador has emeralds, rubies, pearls and sapphires sewed into some of his ceremonial costumes, beside which the richest display of an American ball room would pale its ineffectual fires to nothingness. Besides these he has his more personal jewelry; priceless diamonds, opals, beryl and pearls, in rings, pins, belts and pendants. With all his decorations on, chief among them blazing the blue-white diamonds of the Order of the White Elephant and the prismatic gorgeousness of the "Chinese Crown," he is literally a dazzling center of radiance. His favorite costume and that which best becomes him is the native Siamese "panung" and embroidered jacket. This "panung" is the universal garment of Siam for both sexes and is a long piece of cloth so arranged and wound about as to form a pair of baggy trousers. The ambassador's outfits are of silks that cannot be matched in this country, unless in the wardrobe of his excellency Wu Tingfang, and many of them are magnificently embroidered and jeweled. On his feet the ambassador wears sandals. He wears no hat; doesn't own one, in fact. In his own country his head is sheltered by a parasol carried by a slave. It is to be hoped, in the interests of picturesqueness, that he will adhere to this custom and bring the parasol bearer with him.

His home in Bangkok is worthy in its ap-

pointments of so magnificent a person. It is a spacious palace by the river side, filled with retainers and slaves, who serve him, his several wives and their numerous children with the silent and perfect exactitude of Oriental service. The carvings and bronzes and other work of art in this palace would furnish a whole museum. When he goes forth from this house, whether to court, to worship or to the play, it is in a superb boat, manned by twenty rowers, for in Bangkok, the Venice of the east, local travel is all by water. He has a separate slave for each detail of service, especially trained, and the bearer of the betelnut box would never be expected to carry the parasol, or the steersman of the ceremonial boat to tend a door in the palace.

Not always has Phya Charoon lived thus. Siam is the home of the most rigid Buddhism and the ambassador is a pious Buddhist. By the precepts of that religion, as practiced in Siam, every nobleman must serve in the priesthood a certain time. The king himself has been a priest. Phya Charoon spent his allotted time as a novice in one of the monasteries, where he became so imbued with the religion that he donned the yellow robe of the mendicant, renounced his riches and begged his food from door to door. In this guise he once accepted with becoming gratitude a small coin from an Englishman who was afterward flattered to be his guest. Nor could the Briton, being challenged at Phya Charoon's table to recall where he had met his host previously, remember the circumstance until the prince repeated the pious proverb with which he, as a beggar, had acknowledged his benefactor's gift. In the intervals of his begging the princely priest made so profound a study of the Buddhist creed that he is now regarded as the highest authority on certain intricacies of dogma.

After completing his priesthood he studied diplomacy and then traveled. He

was already a fair linguist, Bangkok being a very cosmopolitan city and many of the young children speaking four or five languages. In English he was particularly proficient, the present king, his cousin, having a liking for the English language, which he had imbibed from a British governess, and which he imparted to many of his associates. So the new ambassador is not likely to need the services of an interpreter in Washington. Travel gave polish to a naturally fine mind and Chulalongkorn when he came to the throne recognized in Phya Charoon a man of good counsel, keen judgment, slow to form an opinion and slow to express it; quick of apprehension, and with unusual powers of concentration and assimilation. The king associated Charoon with himself intimately and together they worked out many problems of statecraft. That "Bismarck of the east," Prince Denawongse, the king's brother, has also been the ambassador's preceptor in diplomacy.

Washington will find Phya Charoon a distinct acquisition, not only because of his picturesque personality, but on the side of his social aptitudes. He is a ready, brilliant and at times a witty conversationalist. In disposition he is kindly and considerate and he has self control, instilled by his years under the severe restrictions of the Buddhist priesthood. This has not impaired the natural gaiety of his disposition. He is possessed of a healthy curiosity; not the kind which finds expression in the innocent but often embarrassing questions which flow from the Chinese minister's placid lips, but the sort which impels its owner to the liveliest interest in all strange and foreign matters. Although he is not a "ladies' man" he is profoundly courteous to women and much given to paying compliments so Orientally complicated and abstruse as to be difficult to turn off. His household in Washington will probably be purely official. It is not likely that he will bring any of his wives with him. FREDERIC DEAN.



WAT CHENG BUDDHIST TOWER.

People in the Lime Light of Public Print

“LORD MINTO,” says The Candid Friend, “has the knack of popularity which does not come to all our pro-consuls. The Canadians all love a good sportsman, and the cabmen of Ottawa swear by him since they dined with his excellency in May. His visit to Dawson City was a clever move, for it confirmed the grumbling patriotism of the miners, while his visit to Washington for the McKinley fetes, private though it was supposed to be, was regarded with great satisfaction by the official circles.”

Soon after the formation of the German empire the artist, Anton von Werner, was appointed to paint the scene of the German imperial proclamation. He first made a sketch to submit to the old Emperor William. In this the various personages were grouped in the same order as during the ceremony at Versailles, William standing on a raised platform, with Bismarck at his left on a lower step, and on his right the crown prince, whom the artist had represented with one foot on the upper level. The emperor examined the sketch and at once noted the position of the Crown Prince Frederick. He frowned, took his pencil and made a thick, rapid stroke through his son's right leg. “Not yet!” said he.

On one occasion, just previous to opening in one of the large eastern cities, Joseph Jefferson discharged his property man, Bagley, for humiliating him before a number of friends by familiarly addressing him as “Joey.” Bagley got drunk right away and that night paid his way to the gallery to see Mr. Jefferson in “Rip Van Winkle.” When the angry frau had just driven poor, destitute Rip from the cottage, Rip turned

and, with a world of pathos, asked: “Den haf I no interest in dis hous?” The house was deathly still, the audience half in tears, when Bagley's cracked voice responded: “Only 80 per cent, Joey—only 80 per cent.”

Captain J. A. T. Hull, chairman of the committee on military affairs in congress, is to have a contest in his home district for renomination next year. His opponent

is Judge S. F. Prouty, now of the district bench. If personal beauty was to be the sole question upon which the contest was to be decided Captain Hull would win hands down, for Judge Prouty is far from handsome.

However, an incident has proven that he is not the ugliest man in Des Moines. At the court house, relates the Chicago Tribune, there is employed a bailiff named

Thomas, who wears side whiskers of more than the usual length, and who combs them straight out from his face. His hair is somewhat grizzled and he is more or less unkempt.

Not long since a man who desired to see Judge Prouty came to the court house. He did not know the judge by sight, nor was he familiar with the court rooms, so he inquired in the office of the county clerk.

“Just go through that door,” answered the clerk, indicating Judge Prouty's court room, “and the homeliest man in there is Judge Prouty. It's the best description I can give you of him, and you can't make any mistake.”

The man proceeded to carry out the instructions given him. He entered the room and hurriedly scanned the occupants for the homeliest man, court being adjourned and the judge being off the bench for a few moments. Finally his eye settled on one of the number, and, approaching, he inquired: “Is this Judge Prouty?” It was Thomas, the bailiff.

Victorien Sardou was trained to be a doctor, but drifted into playwriting and had very hard early struggles. He is now, however, a very rich man and resides in a summer residence that cost him \$150,000. If an ignorant theatrical manager ventures to suggest an alteration in one of Sardou's plays the author roars, “Not a line—not a word—not a syllable!” Even the actresses are in his power, for he decides the colors of their dresses.

Lord Morris died at his residence at Spiddal, County Galway, Ireland, a few weeks ago. There were few more conspicuous figures in English political and social life than the genial and intellectual Irishman, certainly none of whom so many good stories are told. Lord Morris had a broad, mellifluous Galway brogue, of which he was extremely proud. “Thank God,” he once said, “no one, drunk or sober, who hears me speak could take me for anything but an Irishman.”



BERTIE THE LAMB ON A TRIP AROUND OMAHA—Photos by a Staff Artist.