Annales de la Propagation de la Foi 1830

AMONG the missions entrusted to the Congregation of Foreign Missions, that of Siam is one of the most interesting. The king, though not very fond of Christians, does not worry them at all, and the Siamese do not show any great repugnance for Christianity. The Chinese whom trade attracts to Siam are easily converted every year, and a fairly large number are baptized, as we shall see in the letters we shall be inserting; but here, as elsewhere, there is a shortage of evangelical workers. The Vicar Apostolic, Mgr. Florent, Bishop of Sozopolis, an infirm old man, has with him, in the kingdom of Siam, only two European priests. It is true that there are three others in the island of Pinang, which also depends on the vicariate of Siam, although it belongs to the English; but these missionaries are in charge at the same time of the Chinese college and of the Christians of the island; they cannot suffice for so much care. The Bishop of Sozopolis, deeply grateful for all the help that the Association de la Propagation de la Foi provides to the missions, has sent us a letter in which he expresses his gratitude.

In the last issue, the Associates read with great interest the letter written to them by the Bishops of the United States of America, meeting in council in Baltimore. Today, yet another bishop, an apostle, has come from the depths of Asia to thank them for the help they have sent him, and to ask for its continuation. We shall begin by inserting a few letters from M. Bruguière. This missionary, who was professor of theology at the Carcassonne seminary, has written to his former students, to rekindle in their hearts the fire of apostolic zeal he had kindled there while he was among them.

Letter from M. Bruguière, apostolic missionary, to his family.

Batavia, ***

You will be pleased to learn of my happy arrival in Batavia: we anchored in front of this city on Saturday, July 1, 1826, at seven o'clock in the evening, which is about the same time as noon in Raissac.

The city of Batavia is the largest of all the Dutch possessions on the island of Java. There are around one hundred and forty thousand inhabitants of various nations. The Malays are half-civilized; their complexion is similar to the color of red copper. They have almost no beard; but to compensate for this little defect, they have a superb head of hair, which they preserve with the greatest care. They gird it with a handkerchief tied around their head in the shape of a turban. Their faces are gaunt, flattened and almost square; the whites of their eyes are sunken, their noses blunt, their mouths open, their lips protruding outwards, their teeth extremely black, which they owe to the habit they have acquired of chewing a certain leaf called betel, in which a little lime is wrapped. They are almost completely naked, and have no shoes of any kind. Many wear a poisoned dagger hanging from their belt every day. If you had the misfortune to be wounded, even slightly, by this weapon, you would infallibly die. These daggers are dipped in the juice of a poisonous tree, whose exhalations are so malignant that they kill all the trees around them. Unfortunately, these peoples are almost all Mohammedans. Batavia is also home to a large number of Chinese, whose facial features are a little more regular than those of the Malays. Their hats are almost funnel-shaped, ending in a sharp point. Their heads are almost entirely shaven: they have only one tuft of hair, which

they plait into a braid, sometimes girding their foreheads; but more often than not, they let this braid float in the wind: it usually reaches down to the bottom of their legs.

The Europeans who live here are generally Protestant; there are also Catholics, some of whom are French. I'm staying with a Belgian Catholic, who was happy to take me in, as well as my colleague, without asking for any board, which is no small service in a town where you can only find lodgings for 28 francs a day. The town lies at the entrance to an immense plain, covered with evergreen grass and a prodigious number of trees, all unknown in Europe. These trees never lose their foliage, and some produce pepper, others cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, coffee, oranges, lemons, limes and coconuts. There are sugar canes; they resemble our reeds, but they are a little bigger and their nodes are closer together.

All Batavia's streets are very wide and straight, lined with trees and canals. The stagnant waters of these canals, continually exposed to the action of a scorching sun, contribute, by their morbid exhalations, to making Batavia a very dangerous colony. It is usually referred to as the European cemetery. Here, from ten in the morning until four in the evening, no one is allowed to go out other than in a car, on pain of death. You must not eat or drink excessively, not even water, you must not get angry, you must not scratch your finger, you must not be too strong or too weak, and you must not stay inside the city all day. To neglect any of the sanitary precautions in use in the country is to risk perishing. If you go to Mass after six o'clock in the morning, you must take a carriage; people who are going to hear Mass must do the same – It would be very dangerous to go to church on foot after eight o'clock in the morning. As soon as the sun rises, you see the whole plain, and especially the marshes, covered with an infinite number of tiny butterflies shining like little stars; it looks as if all the trees on the plain are about to be consumed by fire. When you're new to this island, you'd think it was paradise on earth; but when you get to know it better, you compare it to the world, where all those who let themselves be seduced by its deceptive appearances fall victim to its perversity. Yet the love of gold compels many Europeans to overlook all these fears.

There is no European fruit here. The horses are very small, but the snakes, lions and tigers are enormous. All things considered, our Languedoc is infinitely better. I'm thinking of leaving Batavia in the next few days for Macao. Adieu, my dear relatives, I embrace you with all my heart. My affection extends farther than the space that separates us.

BRUGUIÈRE, missionn. apostol.

Letter from the same, to M. de Gualy, vicar general of Carcassonne.

DEAR SIR,

I am taking advantage of the stay I am obliged to make in Batavia, to have the pleasure of talking to you for a while. First of all, I'd like to ask you about the young seminarians from Carcassonne, who had shown such zeal for the missions. Have they persevered? I fear that most of them have forgotten their promises; but finally, if there are still some of them, I beg you to see them, and to tell them on my behalf all that charity can inspire in you for the glory of God and the salvation of infidels: indeed, one cannot help but be moved, seeing what I see here with my own eyes. I'm on an island that contains five million Malays, all Mohammedans without exception. Only a very small number of women married to Europeans follow their husbands' religion. However, it is some two hundred years since the Portuguese, and the Dutch after them, established settlements on this island, and there is as yet no trace of their zeal. They come here to enrich themselves and enjoy the pleasures of life; they never speak of religion to the islanders, not even to the slaves, whom it would be so easy to instruct. The same indifference is shown towards the Chinese, of whom there are fifty thousand in Batavia alone; they are all idolaters. The resistance of these

peoples to the truths of the faith cannot be given as a pretext, since elsewhere they are converting. This is also the state of the inhabitants of Sumatra, Borneo, New Guinea, New Holland, and almost all the great Asian Archipelago. Christians are to be found only in the Portuguese possessions and in the Philippine Islands, which are in the power of the Spaniards.

There is a kingdom to the north-east of China, called Korea. Christianity penetrated this country through the zeal of a young Korean, who converted in Peking at the beginning of this century. Returning home, he became the apostle of his compatriots, converting many of them: his zeal earned him martyrdom. The neophytes, finding themselves without the help of religion, applied to the Bishop of Peking for a priest. The Prelate sent them one, who worked successfully for the conversion of these peoples; but he was arrested and martyred a few years after his arrival. Since then, the Koreans converted to the faith have regularly sent a deputation to Peking every year to request a priest, but always in vain; the Bishop has always found it impossible to satisfy their requests: in 1817, they wrote to Rome for the same purpose. They wrote again this year. The Procurator of Propaganda, whom I saw in Macao, told me about it. He would like some French priest, full of zeal and courage, to devote himself to such a holy undertaking. The Ecclesiastic who will have this vocation can be assured that he will have the happiness to suffer a lot for the glory of God: he will operate many conversions; and in few years he will obtain the crown of the martyrdom. Many times I have wished to go to the aid of these peoples, but shouldn't I stay at the post entrusted to me? and abandoning it to go elsewhere, wouldn't that be showing inconstancy? However, if the Sacred Congregation were to address us missionaries as it does European priests, I'd leave right now.

The Protestants who live here have no more principles on which to base their faith than those in Europe. I know a Lutheran minister who won't hear talk of Luther; his wife is a Calvinist, but she condemns Calvin. In the past, they granted Catholics entrance to heaven, as if by grace. Today, having become more generous, they admit Mohammedans and idolaters: at least, that's what I've been told by those who are willing to admit what they think. Morals are preached, but the dogmas of faith are ignored. Everyone has the right to make up his own Credo according to his own interpretation of the Bible. I tried to get hold of their catechism, but they don't have one printed, according to what the Catholic priest told me. In their explanations of Scripture, they admit or subtract what they see fit. I know a Lutheran who goes to Mass when his minister is ill, and a Calvinist who continually goes to the Lutheran temple. No wonder they neglect the natives. Only Catholics have the right and the zeal to beget children to Jesus Christ. Pray, then, to the Father of families to send out laborers to gather such an abundant harvest. Pray to the God of mercies to remove iniquity from the hearts of these poor infidels, so that they may open their eyes to the light of the Gospel. Many times I would have liked to know enough Malay to be able to converse with them; but I have studied too little of the language to be able to speak it, and no one would be willing to interpret for me. This people have a false religion, and observe it. Why shouldn't they be able to embrace and observe a true religion? I say the same of the Chinese, who are singularly superstitious. The doors of their houses are all covered with a sort of yellowish paper, on which are traced signs of superstition: almost all of them have in their stores the figure of Confucius and an evil genie. However poor they may be, they burn small candles in front of these idols. One of them had placed next to his pagoda the image of Notre Dame de Marseille, holding the infant Jesus in her arms; he honored her with the same cult. I was scandalized by this, and made him offer to sell it to me; but he wouldn't consent, and had my interpreter reply that it was the Mother of God; that it had been given to him as a gift, and that he couldn't sell it for any price. I would have liked to enter into conversation with him and instruct him, but I had a Protestant for a conduit and deists for listeners, so I was obliged

to give up trying to convert him. Please send us missionaries, but missionaries worthy of the name; that is, priests who combine humility and love of prayer with charity and zeal for the salvation of souls.

I am, etc.

BRUGUIÈRE, missionn. apostol.

Letter from the same, to the seminarians of the major seminary of Carcassonne.

Poulopinang, February 6, 1827

Sirs.

I was supposed to go to the Cochinchine mission, but Divine Providence changed my destination. Urgent needs and the death of one of our confreres obliged me to go to the Siam mission. Fortunately, I arrived nearly four weeks ago in one of the Christian regions of this apostolic vicariate, which comprises several kingdoms: the Malaca peninsula and all the provinces to the north are in its district. In all these vast countries, there are no European priests. Only in Bangkoc is there the Vicar Apostolic of this mission, an old and infirm prelate, without a coadjutor, whom I may find at the tomb on my arrival. I hasten to leave to reach him. I intend to cross the entire peninsula, either to shorten my journey, or to gain a more accurate knowledge of the attitudes of the peoples inland. These peoples are all pagans or Mohammedans; all the priests to whom I have spoken of them have assured me that they are not far from the kingdom of God; they seem only to be waiting for a charitable missionary to show them the way. Come then, gentlemen, and gather such an abundant harvest. Come, all of you, but mainly you who gave me such great hopes when I left France; be afraid of drawing down upon yourselves the sentence pronounced against the unfaithful servant, by resisting any longer the voice of God who calls you. What will you answer the just Judge, when these unfortunate people accuse you, before his tribunal, of being in some way the cause of their reprobation, since you have refused to let the light of the Gospel shine in their eyes? Fear that your resistance to grace will spread bitterness over the rest of your days, and that the sad memory of having been unfaithful to a vocation so noble and so meritorious will be a source of sorrow and remorse for you. For me, if I could have any regrets, it would be for having waited so long to go where the Lord wanted me to go: but I have the consolation of being able to say to myself that the obstacles did not come from my side; and as soon as a respectable and holy Prelate, whom I still have the honor of calling my Bishop, allowed me to follow my vocation, I immediately followed it. I know how painful it is to grieve for relatives whom you respect and love. Didn't Jesus Christ, speaking to the first missionaries, threaten to reject them if they loved their relatives more than Himself? Isn't it better to obey God than men? "

Finding myself about to enter countries which are completely unknown to me, unaware of what Providence has destined me for, I hasten to speak to you, perhaps for the last time. I bequeath to you my heritage and I charge you to continue the good which I have begun, but which the brevity of time and my lack of merit will not allow me to complete. I do this in the name of God who calls you, and in virtue of the word you gave me before we parted.

Don't be frightened by the difficulties; they are not as great as we imagine in Europe. The climate is harsh, but not unbearable. In just a few months, you will know enough of a language, however difficult, to make yourself heard. There is employment for those with a weak temperament and for those with a robust one; for those who like the uniform and quiet

life, and for those whose zeal is more active. We have colleges to run, existing Christian communities to govern, and others to form through the conversion of infidels. In the missions, we find places where it is cold, many where it is hot, and some where the climate is temperate. It would be a mistake to judge the temperature of a place solely by its latitude. There are even lands close to the line, which are very healthy and very favorable to Europeans: such is Syncapour, which is only thirty leagues from the equator. I know this from experience and from the unanimous report of travelers. It's true that the heat of the climate, or unhealthy exhalations, sometimes kill missionaries; but aren't there accidents in Europe that shorten the days of many of its inhabitants? After all, such a death is precious in God's eyes. In all the places I have visited, I have found not only Europeans, but also European women who, above all considerations, have scorned the perils of a long crossing, and the rigors of a murderous climate, for purely temporal interests. These people, weak as they are, have found no contradictions; but suppose a Priest intends to go to a distant country to procure the glory of God and work for the salvation of souls? A thousand voices are immediately raised to oppose his pious project: they accuse him of temerity; they reason about the missions as if they knew them; they talk about the temperature of a place as if they had been there; and they intercede for the peoples whose apostles they once were. Happy, Messieurs, if the father of the family, answering their prayers, chose you to be the successors of their zeal and success! But happier still, if you are faithful to the grace of your vocation! What! while heresy, gathering all its forces, sends preachers to all parts of the world; while Protestant zealots make the greatest sacrifices to provide abundantly for the needs of their missionaries, we Catholics, the true children of the Church, who alone have received the order to teach and baptize all nations, would remain idle, and contemplate with a dry eye these unfortunate people passing from one error to another, when it is so easy for us to make them see the truth! For, to the shame of heresy, wherever there are Catholic missionaries, the efforts of sectarians are absolutely null. This concludes my letter; time does not permit me to say more. I wish with all my heart to see you again in this world. God grant that my wishes may be fulfilled!

I am, etc. BRUGUIÈRE, missionn. apostol

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We will recall here what we said when speaking of the Malabar mission: the peoples living within the apostolic vicariate of Siam would easily convert to Christianity; but priests are lacking, apart from the Bishop and his Coadjutor, there are only six French priests in this mission, two of whom are in charge of the Chinese seminary at Pinang. Although the Siamese government has little sympathy for our holy religion, it is not opposed to the practice of worship, nor to the introduction of missionaries. In other kingdoms dependent on this apostolic vicariate, priests are urgently needed. We must take advantage of these favorable conditions as a matter of urgency; who knows how long they will last? Will we never be able to say that the harvest is abundant, without being forced to add that the laborers are too few to gather it! The Vicar Apostolic of Siam, Mgr Florent, bishop of Sozopolis, had long been asking for a coadjutor: the Sovereign Pontiff, on the proposal of the Directors of the Missions étrangères seminary, has appointed M. Bruguière, who has been consecrated bishop of Capsa, to this dignity. The Associates will read with interest a notice, written by this Missionary, on the natural history of Siam and on the religion and customs of the Siamese. As this notice is very long, we will only give the first half today; we will reserve the second for the next issue.

Letter from M. Bruguière, Siam Apostolic Missionary, to the Directors of the Foreign Missions Seminary.

Bang-Kok, May 19 1829

Sirs.

The mission of Siam is without doubt the most extensive of all those entrusted to our care. Syncapour has just been placed under the jurisdiction of our Vicar Apostolic by the Holy See; the island of Nias and Padang will probably also depend on it in the future. Padang is located on the west coast of the large island of Sumatra, at three and a half degrees of southern latitude. Monseigneur d'Halicarnasse has long been urging Mgr de Sozopolis to send a missionary to Achem on the island of Sumatra; His Grandeur is only waiting for a favorable opportunity to realize this project. The only Italian Barnabite priest left among the Burmese and Pegouans in the vast kingdom of Ava has written to beg him to take on this mission, having obtained the authorization of the Holy See. I urge His Grandeur to accept this new responsibility. The Apostolic Vicariate of Siam thus comprises, or will comprise, the immense expanse of country that lies between the Ganges in the west, and the borders of Tong-King and Cochinchina in the east; and descending from north to south, from the borders of China to Syncapour, which comprises an area of about twenty-two degrees of latitude. Mgr. Boucho is due to leave soon for the island of Nias and for Padang; when he has a missionary available, he will send him to Sumatra. We are asking you, with renewed urgency, for subjects to send to the missions we are willing to open.

The Siam mission is not like several others; elsewhere, we find Christian communities fairly close together, which the same missionary can care for; here, they are mostly separated from one another by mountain ranges, vast forests, swamps and deserts that are very difficult to cross; so that we would need missionaries scattered in the various places where Christians are gathered in greater numbers. On the other hand, we have the greatest difficulty in training good catechists among the Siamese, a people who are indolent, light-hearted, and who do not like to concern themselves with serious matters; so that we are

obliged to do almost everything ourselves. The local priests do offer us some resources; but, as they need a long training before being promoted to the priesthood, they are hardly ordained before the age of forty: so they soon become old and infirm. We now have twenty-one students at our minor seminary, most of whom show great aptitude; they study successfully, but constancy is not the virtue of the Siamese; most of them don't persevere and withdraw when least expected. I must confess, however, that I had let myself be warned too much, both against the Christians and against the native priests. As for the former, we found many good ones; and as for the Siamese priests, I can declare that, with a few exceptions, they are zealous, fervent ecclesiastics of irreproachable conduct; they are, in every respect, as good as European priests; but they are few in number, and, as I have already observed, soon old and out of service.

Among our Christians in Bang-Kok, we count around five hundred and fifty who have been brought from Cambodia; they are the best Christians in Bang-Kok. Chantabon is home to an almost equal number of Christians, Cochinchinese by origin, who are the most fervent in the mission; there are also Christians in Merguy and Tavay. Father Jean Pascal, a native, who takes care of them, writes us that they listen to his instructions attentively and profitably. Since the Burmese war in 1809, there have been no Christians on the island of Jonkselam; those who escaped death retreated to Punga, on the coast of the Malaca peninsula. I'm told that several have apostatized; we attribute this misfortune to a lack of spiritual help and instruction. There are no Christians left in Quéda; those who were there have retreated to Pulo-Pinang, where M. Boucho counts sixteen hundred Christians, and the number is increasing every day. The Christians of this island are exposed to great hardships at the hands of Protestant missionaries, who employ all sorts of means to make them apostatize and win them over to their side. Fortunately, their efforts are not accompanied by any success. The same cannot be said of morals: several Europeans or descendants of Europeans are constantly setting traps for innocence, and they are all too often disastrously successful; however, falls and scandals are much less frequent than in the past.

We need to think about sending a missionary to Syncapour, in response to the wishes of the Holy See, which has just handed this island over to our care. *Multiplicasti gentem, sed non magnificasti lætitiam.* The island is home to a nascent Christianity made up of all kinds of nations. The government of the Compagnie des Indes has erected a chapel and, I believe, a small house for the priest in charge. He was sent by the Archbishop of Goa, who will no doubt call him back as soon as he learns that the Holy See has entrusted our Vicar Apostolic with the care of this Christian comunity.

Returning to our Siamese people, they show a particular distancing from Christianity, and this opposition is even more noticeable among the women of this nation than among the men. This evil is attributable to the corruption of their morals, to their indolence, lightness and inconstancy, and above all to their belief in talapoins. However, the true Siamese do not form the majority of the country's population; the majority of the inhabitants are a mixture of Chinese, Cochinchinese, Cambodians, Laotians, Peguans, Malays, etc. It is among these that the majority of the Siamese are to be found. It is among these that we can hope to make proselytes. We already have several Chinese neophytes, and their number would increase if we could have a missionary who could speak their language; but where can we find him?

We fear that the war which is about to break out between Siam and Cochinchina will be detrimental to the interests of religion, especially as a large number of our Christians are soldiers. God forbid that the horrors which took place in Juthia last century during the Burmese war should be repeated in Bang-Kok!

The inhabitants of the Kingdom of Laos seem more inclined to embrace Christianity than the Siamese. Entry to this country is not easy, but it is not impossible. The region has

been almost entirely ravaged by war. The former governor died in prison. The King of Siam has appointed another, who is asking for a missionary. He has even offered to donate a pagoda to make a church, and to pay for the priest who would follow him to Laos. Monseigneur is very keen to send a missionary there. On a mountain in this province there is still a church, a large Christ and books written in European characters. One of our Christians, who visited the church, said he saw old women coming to pull out the weeds with which it was filled. The gentiles, whom he asked what this building was, told him it was the pagoda of the Pharans (Christian church), whose village was some distance away; he did not see this village. This account is entirely consistent with the one given to us by another Christian a long time before. The man who gave me all these details is an old Cochinchinese, a fervent Christian. He showed me the route to this country, and gave me the names of all the places you have to pass through to get there. He even drew me a sort of geographical map. I compared it with a printed map I happened to find here, and was pleased to see that they were quite similar. It seems that in the past, the first French missionaries had planted the true Faith in this country, but that the revolutions which the kingdom of Siam has been the scene of for so many years, having interrupted communications with Laos, these unfortunate Christians were abandoned.

The King of Ligor recently expressed his desire to have Christians in his country. If he has been so slow to declare himself on this subject, it is because he was afraid of offending the King of Siam, to whom he is feudatory. I am convinced that he would now gladly receive a priest, and let him do as he pleased. He doesn't like talapoins, whose impostures he knows well. A missionary could do Ligor a lot of good,

The king of Achem also likes Christians. He has several in his service. Mgr d'Halicarnasse, on the one hand, and the late M. Eyot, on the other, have often urged our Vicar Apostolic to send a missionary there. He is willing to comply with their wishes when he has the power to do so.

So there are many places where missionaries should be sent, but where to find them? We need powerful reinforcements to get us out of the mess we're in; so send us missionaries, but send us saints rather than scholars.

As far as I'm concerned, I'd love to be able to go and evangelize these poor people; but it's useless to talk about it to Monseigneur, who would remain here alone, and his state of infirmity hardly allows me to leave him, at least until I have a replacement. I'm now in charge of our college, where I have to teach two theology classes a day, four Latin classes and two Scripture lectures a week; I'm also obliged to perform curial duties for our flock in Bang-Kok. I tell you all this to make you feel how much we need collaborators. If I had at least one replacement, I could follow my taste by going to preach to the idolaters.

I am, etc.

BRUGUIÈRE, Apostolic Missionry.

Letter from Mgr Bruguière, Bishop of Capse, to M. Bousquet, Vicar-General of Aire.

J. M. J.

Bang-Kok, 1829. 9

Dear Sir and Friend,

You ask me for a few notions about the country where I now find myself, about the customs, habits, religion of the inhabitants, etc., etc., etc. You are asking me to do an immense amount of work. However, in order to prove to you that there is nothing I am not

willing to undertake to please you, I am going to put my hand to the task. I shall try to be as brief as possible, without omitting anything essential. My intention is to say nothing uncertain or dubious; it is very possible, however, that I may miss a few inaccuracies; but they will be quite involuntary: I am an eyewitness to most of the facts contained in this report. Perhaps you'll find my narrative a little disorganized; please forgive me for this oversight. I have written on several occasions and only in moments of leisure, which I rarely have.

The apostolic vicariate which forms our Mission covers all the provinces of the Kingdom of Siam. The bishop even has jurisdiction over several neighboring states; he will certainly send Missionaries there when France provides more of them.

The kingdom of Siam extends from the fifth to the eighteenth degree of northern latitude. It is very narrow in the south, and quite wide in the north. It is bordered to the south by various Malay peoples of little importance, to the north by a few little-known peoples whose territory extends as far as China; to the east by Cambodia, Cochinchina and the sea; to the west by the sea and the kingdoms of Pegu and Ava. (The kingdom of Siam is not contiguous with Cochinchina; it is separated from it, to the south, by the sea and by Cambodia, and to the north, by Laos. Mgr de Capsa incorrectly counts the Kingdom of Laos as part of the Kingdom of Siam. Laos is very extensive; this country is little known; it is divided into several small kingdoms; at the end of the last century, there were seven of them: is there one that is superior to all the others? We don't know. The King of Cochinchina and Tongking exercises a right of suzerainty over part of this country that borders on his states: no doubt the King of Siam also wishes to exercise the same rights over the part of Laos that touches his territory. M. de la Bissachère included Laos in what he called the Annam empire. Mgr Bruguière makes it part of the kingdom of Siam; neither of them is entirely correct; the fact is that, up to the present day, Laos has always been distinguished from the kingdom of Siam and the so-called kingdom of Annam, which now includes Tongking and Cochinchina. However, a portion of Laos is included in the list of Tongking provinces drawn up in the fifteenth century by the king of Tongking, Lê Thânh Tông, fourth of the Lê dynasty. The petty kings of Queda, Ligor and others are more like simple governors than true sovereigns. The king of Laos must not be as dependent on the king of Siam as these petty kings.)

Bang-Kok is now the capital city of this empire, since Juthia was burnt by the Burmese some eighty years ago. Bang-Kok is situated at the end of the Gulf of Siam, roughly in the center of the kingdom, i.e., at the thirteenth and a half degrees of northern latitude, and at the ninetieth degree of eastern longitude (Paris meridian). I must point out that the description of the kingdom of Siam as I have just indicated includes many small kingdoms which have their own names on geographical maps. But they are all part of Siam; such are the kingdoms of Queda, Ligor, Laos, etc.

The climate is very hot in Siam, but much less so than on the other side of the Ganges. (Whenever I speak of the peninsula beyond the Ganges, I mean the peninsula that Europeans call the peninsula below the Ganges or Indostan; this is relative to the different countries in which we find ourselves). Over an equal latitude from the equator to the eighth degree, either north or south, the heat is excessive and constant; neither the cold of winter nor the mild temperature of spring is ever felt; the sun, like a blazing stove, sets the atmosphere ablaze. It's hard to breathe at times. The slackening of the nerves and organs, and a continuous, abundant sweat, reduce the body to such a state of weakness that we don't have the courage to make the slightest movement. We begin to breathe when the sun approaches the zenith; then the sky is covered with thick clouds that form an immense parasol for several months; abundant rain refreshes the atmosphere and revives the body's strength. These clouds always accompany the sun from north to south, as far as the twentieth degree of

latitude. At the beginning and sometimes at the end of the rainy season, the sky appears to be on fire; for several hours without interruption, we hear frightening bursts of thunder; lightning often falls, and then the air becomes calmer. All that's left is a dull thundering that's nothing to be feared. In all the regions between the two tropics, the rivers burst their banks periodically, at least once a year. The Bang-Kok river is a singular phenomenon. It only overflows a month after the rains have stopped. As the river grows, the water becomes clear, and it becomes muddy again when the river decreases, i.e., when the rains have stopped. It is not easy to discover the cause of this phenomenon (Mgr Bruguière generalizes too much in what he says about the rains, thunder, floods and other meteorological phenomena that occur in the regions between the tropics. There is great diversity: the rainy season is not the same everywhere; thunder is not equally frequent everywhere; the rivers that overflow regularly are mostly only those that are long and have their source in the mountains of China or Thibet; before flowing into the sea, these rivers receive a large number of streams: their overflows are caused less by the heavy rains that fall in the areas near their mouths than by those that fall in the mountains from which they descend, and from which flow the rivers that join them; this explains why floods occur some time after heavy rains: sometimes these rivers even overflow, even though little rain has fallen in the regions they cover with their waters. Rivers whose source is less distant from the sea also sometimes flood, but less frequently and less regularly. The great Tongking river overflows almost every year, breaking the dikes built to hold it in its bed, and then flooding the whole southern province: there are, however, years when this disaster does not occur).

At the far end of the Gulf of Siam, the tides run in the opposite direction to those in Europe. Every year, the highest tides occur in November, and the lowest in May. Every month, the highest tides do not occur, as in France, on the first and thirteenth of the moon, but on the fifth and nineteenth; finally, in the tides that occur every day, it is not when the moon passes the meridian that the tide is at its highest period, but about five hours later. Around the time of the new and full moon, the tide rises for almost twelve hours and falls for the same length of time. The second tide is almost imperceptible on the other days of the moon. The tide rises and falls twice in twenty-four hours, just as it does in France. You can write to the members of the Bureau des Longitudes, asking for an explanation of this phenomenon. (The bottom of the Gulf of Tongking has more or less the same peculiarities with regard to the ebb and flow of the sea as the Gulf of Siam; the highest tides also occur there in November, and it is also on the fifth and nineteenth of each moon that the tide is at its highest; but there is a remarkable difference between the tides of the Gulf of Tongking and those of the Gulf of Siam: in the former, the tide usually rises only once in twenty-four hours; it rises for six or seven hours, and falls for the rest of the day: On days when the water rises and falls twice in twenty-four hours in the Gulf of Siam, it rises and falls only once in the Gulf of Tongking; and vice-versa, on days when, extraordinarily, the ebb and flow is felt only once in the Gulf of Siam, it is felt twice in the Gulf of Tongking.).

The kingdom of Siam is a flat country. There are vast plains, immense forests and marshes everywhere. There are few major rivers. A few hills or steep mountains interrupt this monotonous aspect from time to time. These hills are little more than a mass of rock covered by a light layer of earth. Vegetation is very vigorous in high places, but weak and almost non-existent in swampy areas. As the old ones fall, new ones are born. There are, however, two species of tree that are completely stripped of their leaves for two or three months at a time; these are the cassia tree and a species of cotton tree different from the one that produces cotton in Europe. Finally, I saw a tree that loses all its leaves at once, and at the same time grows new ones. It's a tall tree, and at the end of its branches it produces small bunches of highly fragrant yellow flowers. Malay women use them to make a kind of oil or essence for their hair.

The forests abound in timber. There are trees of prodigious height. Although these trees are very large, their size does not correspond to their height. Quite often in these woods, you come across rotten trunks, the remains of old trees that time has knocked over, next to which new shoots are growing to replace them. Few trees produce fruit that is fit to eat. The fruit you do find is usually bitter and sometimes dangerous. When traveling through these forests, you must carry provisions with you. It is not wise to carry money, as you run the risk of being murdered. These woods are full of game; there are many birds unknown in Europe; their song is unpleasant, none of these birds has the melodious voice of the nightingale and the warbler. All you hear everywhere are high-pitched, mournful, monotonous cries. The most remarkable bird species are peacocks, cockatoos and parrots of all colors. There's also a small bird about the size of your thumb. Its plumage is charming, half red, half white, with a few shades of green. It is, if I'm not mistaken, the bird that Europeans call hummingbird. These woods are also home to wild roosters and hens, whose song, shape and plumage perfectly resemble domestic roosters. I've often heard them crowing in the middle of the forest. To catch the male, a domestic rooster is placed in a secluded spot, and a net is set up nearby. The wild rooster immediately runs to fight the newcomer. The hunter hiding in the undergrowth pulls the net, and the rooster is caught. I've seen black swans, but I don't think they're native to Siam. Among the birds remarkable for their size is the one the Siamese call Noc-Ariam: when it walks, its head rises at least a foot and a half above a man of ordinary height; it is proportionately large; its feathers are ash-grey; sometimes its neck and upper back are red. Its head is as big as a man's; its beak, which is nearly two feet long, is shaped like a cone. It sometimes flies so high that it is impossible to see; but its sharp, piercing cry announces its presence, even when the height of its flight hides it from view; this bird feeds only on seeds and grasses, its eggs are similar to those of the ostrich; it is very common in Siam, and sometimes comes to fly around our seminary.

I have seen a bird of prey called Noccasoun, which has a particular talent for providing for itself: when its hunt has not been successful, it attacks the vulture by the throat and forces it to share with it the prey it has already devoured. This singular combat is often renewed at Bang-Kok, in the place where the dead are skinned. I'll tell you below what I mean by skinning a dead man.

The most curious quadrupeds to be found in the forests of Siam are :

1º the monkey; there are monkeys of all shapes and sizes; there is one that has the facility to stand on its hind feet and walk more or less like a man; but it has its hocks as if paralyzed, so that it drags its legs and rises with difficulty when it has fallen to the ground, This is probably the monkey that Buffon calls Orang-Outang; indeed, the Malays call Orang-Outang the men who inhabit the woods.

On the Tongking side, there is said to be a very dangerous monkey; if it meets a man in the middle of the woods, it takes him by the arms, starts laughing with all its might for quite a long time, and ends up strangling the unfortunate traveler. When you have to go through these forests, you take two pieces of bamboo with you (bamboo is a species of reed that is very tall and has branches; it is good to eat when it is tender. The Indians make great use of bamboo: their houses, furniture and seats are made of bamboo; they use it to make sails, boxes, etc.); when the monkey appears, you put your two arms in these bamboos; the monkey, as usual, grabs the traveler's arms, or rather the bamboo covering them; the traveler gently withdraws his arms without the monkey noticing, and pierces him with a stab. This is not difficult, as the animal closes its eyes when it laughs. There is another species of monkey here, which may be called the Legless Ass; it can hardly take a step, so weak are its legs; but this defect is eminently compensated for by the ease with which it can leap from one tree to another, and support itself continually suspended by its front legs. I think I saw one in Java.

A few years ago, a previously unknown animal appeared in Siam: it is a quadruped the size of a bull; its head resembles that of a monkey; it has a large, long tail; its neck and upper shoulders are red, the rest of the body is black. One of our Christians killed one a few years ago. When it appears in a place, all the other ferocious animals abandon the country for as long as it is in the vicinity. His cry, which resembles the lion's roar, makes the tiger tremble. It has just been announced that one has appeared in the vicinity of Chantobon. This animal is thought to have originated in China.

These woods are also home to the gazelle, the wild goat and bull, the buffalo and the bear. There are two species of bear: the first resembles the bear found in France, but is blacker: this animal is timid and flees at the sight of man; the second is very ferocious, the size of a calf, with a russet coat. Voltaire didn't believe there were bears in Palestine; what would he have said if he'd encountered them in the forests of Siam? There are also wild boars, rhinoceroses and unicorns. The rhinoceros is, after the elephant, the biggest and strongest of all quadrupeds; its head is similar to that of a pig, armed with two horns, one of which is placed almost at the tip of its nose; it has one much smaller than the other. The unicorn, if we are to judge by the head that hunters brought to Pinang some time ago, is much larger than an ox; it differs from the rhinoceros in its shape and in the way its horn is placed; it is on the forehead and points upwards. This animal always runs in a straight line, the stiffness of its neck and whole body hardly allowing it to turn sideways; it can even hardly stop when it has gained momentum; it knocks over with its horn or cuts with its teeth the trees of mediocre size that stand in its way. So the unicorn is not a fabulous animal, as some philosophers have insinuated to contradict Scripture: it's a real animal, and a different species from all the others. Excellent remedies are made from its horns, teeth, blood and heart, all of which are sold at a very high price.

Of all the quadrupeds found in these woods, the elephant is undoubtedly the most curious and useful. Siam is the region of India with the largest number of elephants. The Asian elephant is much bigger and stronger than the African elephant, ranging in height from nine to thirteen feet; its tusks are usually five feet long and fifteen inches in circumference; I have measured some that were over six feet long; they are hollow at their roots and end in a point. It is a very dangerous animal when it wanders alone in the middle of the desert; it cruelly kills the unfortunate traveler it can reach: sometimes it lifts him into the air with its trunk, then throws him to the ground with violence, and pierces him with its tusks; sometimes it crushes him under its feet; sometimes it digs a pit in the sand and buries him alive. To avoid his fury, it's not always safe to climb a tree; if the tree isn't too big, he cuts it down: it's said that if the tree is too big, he calls other elephants, who come running at his voice. When they have gathered in sufficient numbers, they water the base of the tree, and with the help of their horns, tear out its roots and topple it over.

Reduced to a state of domesticity, the elephant no longer resembles himself: he is gentle, docile and intelligent; he obeys his driver's voice, runs to him when he calls, gives him what he asks for with his trunk; when he is tired, he strikes the ground with his trunk, making a sound similar to that of the horn to warn his mahout that it is finally time to take a rest. We currently have two of these in Bang-Kok, one of which very often goes to the bazaar to beg for fruit; when he has filled his trunk, he returns and shares the proceeds of his quest with his driver: the other stands at the gate of the king's palace and when they bring a large vase filled with rice, and a spoon; the elephant takes it with his trunk and gives rice to all the talapoins who pass by. It would be hard to imagine the extent of the elephant's affection for his master without incontrovertible proof. When his driver falls asleep in the middle of the woods, the elephant approaches him to guard him, chasing away any insects that might bother him; if he is still asleep when it is already dark, he places him lightly on his tusks and brings him to his hut. I'm assured that when a wild elephant approaches, he takes his driver, who is

sitting on his neck, girdles him with his trunk, places him under his mouth and fights with his tusks. The elephant's affection for its driver leads it to secure him in this way before attacking its adversary.

When traveling, elephants eat little during the day, but spend the whole night filling their large stomachs; they eat hay, tree leaves and rice grains; they are fond of sugar cane and especially spirituous liquors; but they must not be made to drink any: it takes very little to intoxicate them, and when they are drunk they no longer recognize their masters. He sleeps little, and lies down a little on one side, unless his driver has tied him to a tree by both hind feet. Elephants are very fond of water; they like swampy places and are happy to walk in rainy weather. When they find water, they water themselves with their trunks; if they don't find any, they draw some from the bottom of their stomachs; they throw some earth on top of it, and wipe themselves with a cork of hay, or with a tree branch which serves at the same time as a snuffer to chase away the insects that bother them. He lies belly down to receive his load or the traveler who is to ride him; he does the same when he encounters deep quagmires, dragging himself along on his belly and knees; the weight of his body being distributed over a wider base, he sinks less if he encounters a river, first probing the depth of the water with his trunk; As long as he finds bottom, he walks; when he finds none, he dives and swims between two waters; he then returns to the surface to breathe, dives again, and so on until he reaches the other side. The elephant is the only mount you can use on long journeys; in the middle of a swampy country, where there are no paths or tracks, you always have to have an axe in your hand to clear a passage; the elephant helps with its trunk and feet, and cuts down or skims over branches and medium-sized trees. From time to time, we are obliged to shout to rally; the guide sometimes throws small tree branches on the road he has taken, so that those following him do not go astray; finally, there are places so covered with brush that we are obliged to set fire to them. Instead of a saddle, a large covered basket is attached to the elephant's back, and the traveler sits in it as best he can. You must take care to cover your head and face; without this precaution, you'd be risking your life, as the sun tears your skin to shreds.

Elephants are very strong, and carry cannons, men, etc. on their backs; you can make them walk for more than twenty-four hours, if you take care to feed them well. I rode one for more than fifty hours; in that time, he had only six hours to eat and rest. I felt sorry for the poor beast, but it was not in my power to give him any relief.

I'm sure you'll enjoy reading my account of how to catch and tame the wild elephant. In March, a few female elephants are released into the woods; shortly afterwards, they are recalled with a horn; they return accompanied by a considerable number of wild elephants. They are brought into a park surrounded by high palisades, and the gate is closed on them. Men standing on a terrace, defended from the front by large tree trunks, throw a net or shoelace over the elephant they want to catch, and seize it by the foot. There is no torture they do not inflict on it when they have it in their power: they lift it into the air with the help of a machine, they beat it, put fire under its belly, make it fast for a long time; they overturn it with violence, pierce it with a sharp iron, and finally force it, by the violence of the torments, to receive a master. The domestic elephants help with the maneuver, they surround the wild elephant, threaten it and force it to walk. The greatest number of elephants are caught at some distance from Juthia.

It is very difficult to kill this animal with a firearm; the bullet flattens on its skin: there are however a few parts of the body where it can be mortally wounded: such are the eyes and the top of the head. The same is true of the rhinoceros and the unicorn.

If it is dangerous to come across any of the animals I have just mentioned in these forests, the danger is much greater if you come across the tiger: it is without doubt the most ferocious of all these animals; rage and fury are painted in its eyes; it slits throats more for

pleasure than for need; it drinks nothing but blood: its audacity equals its cruelty; it attacks the elephant with advantage, tearing its trunk, jumping on its back and often ends up making it its prey. When the elephant sees the tiger coming, it puts its trunk in its mouth and presents it with its tusks; when the tiger foresees that force will not succeed, it resorts to cunning. It is ungrateful and insensitive; it even seems that good treatment irritates it instead of appeasing it; the person who looks after it is sometimes the first victim of its cruelty. He is gifted with singular speed and agility: the tiger resembles the cat in the shape of its body and in the way it seizes and tears its prey. Three species of tiger can be distinguished in Siam: the largest species, which the locals call Sua-Crong, is the most dangerous. The Sua-Crong tiger is the size of a calf, with red, white, yellow and black stretch marks on its skin. The tiger of the second species is called Sua-Dau: it's as tall as a large mastiff; it doesn't dare attack a man in the face, it can't hold his gaze; it waits for the moment when it isn't seen: its skin is strewn with small black and yellow tufts mixed with a little white. The third species has skin like the gray cat, but is twice as big; it always flees at the sight of man; it feeds on fish, birds and chickens; it prowls around barnyards at night and steals everything it meets; it's a kind of fox; the Siamese call it Sua-Pla. Tigers climb trees that are slightly inclined; they can't climb straight ones. Would you believe that in the tiger and the elephant we still find a remnant of the empire that God once gave to Adam over all animals? The tiger, as I have already said, cannot bear to look at a man; and even when he has slit his throat, he tears the skin from his skull and drops it on his face, to spare himself the sight of an object so frightening to him.

The elephant also has difficulty seeing a man placed directly in front of him, even at a certain distance; and to force him to pull over to one side, he draws a mouthful of water from his stomach, which he floods over the curious indiscreet; when he is about to pierce a man with his teeth, he closes his eyes, which sometimes makes it easier for him to escape.

There are many squirrels in Siam; one among them flies, if I may put it that way, without wings: the skin next to its ears can be stretched a great deal, which makes it easy to reduce the weight of its body. It flies by taking off from a tree, and heading in a diagonal line towards a lower one.

I don't want to end this article on quadrupeds without mentioning a species of rat the size of a cat; when tamed, it is used in houses to catch rats smaller than it, and to destroy insects. The cat, which is not reputed to live very well with rats, does not quarrel with this one: it respects it, because it fears it. When we passed through Queda, the governor presented one of these rats to the Siamese ambassador; but he gave two elephants to the English ambassador.

In Siam, as in other parts of India, lizards are very numerous. The most remarkable are,

1º the schalin: it has small wings or membranes that it deploys when it wants to run faster; we found a few near Ligor;

2º the taquée, which is fairly large and prefers to live in inhabited areas; it even makes its home in beds; it is not dangerous: the Siamese intoxicate it with tobacco and eat it;

3º the hias; they live in forests, and are gray; they are about three feet long; I saw some below Thalong;

4º tacoums; they are up to eight and even ten feet long; they live in deserts, and do not harm men: one of our students met one near the sea some time ago, but the lizard had no sooner seen it than it went into the forest;

5 ° the crocodile; this is a species of amphibious lizard, sometimes twenty-two feet long; its voracity is proportionate to its size; it is very greedy for human flesh. If a small boat skims the river, the crocodile presses its head firmly against the sand, and raising its back, it overturns the boat and devours those inside. The crocodile uses this stratagem mainly in the Cambodgian river. This monster has a mouth lined with four rows of very sharp teeth; when

it is old, four of its teeth protrude from its mouth, like a boar's tusks; they are shaped like a quarter circle. Some crocodiles have russet backs; others have dark brown backs; the underside of the belly is white. I only saw those of the latter species, of which there are many in the Bang-Kok river. There are also a few sharks that swim up the river at some distance.

There are several species of snake, some of which are very poisonous. These are

1º Ngu-Luam (ngu, in Siamese, means snake). It sometimes reaches the size of a medium beam, and is proportionately long. Its skin is superb, forming a pattern of very different colors. I saw one that was still very young, but already nine feet long and six inches in circumference; it swallowed a chicken with the greatest of ease. His father swallowed an ox. To catch his prey, he hides behind a few tree trunks or in the undergrowth, attaches his tail to a tree and forms a circle with the rest of his body. Deer, monkeys and buffalo passing by are caught as if by a shoelace; the snake girdles them with several knots and suffocates them; sometimes it applies them to the tree to which it is attached, and embraces them with such violence that it breaks and crushes all their bones; it floods them with its saliva and then engulfs them. Its gullet can expand in an extraordinary way. This snake has no venom. It crawls with difficulty; if spotted in time, it can easily be avoided by fleeing. The ngu-luam is probably the one described by Buffon as the divine serpent.

2º Ngu-Xang, or elephant snake. It is so called because its tail resembles an elephant's trunk; it is tanned and shorter than the ngu-luam snake, but just as big. Nor does it have venom. In autumn, these two species of snake come to Bang-Kok. We caught one last year in the garden.

3º Ngu-Kon-Kop. This is a medium-sized snake, mottled white and black; it has its venom in its head and tail. If it bites, there is a remedy; if it stings with the stinger armed on its tail, there is no remedy. Whoever has been wounded by one experiences a sudden dizziness; he falls, a mortal cold spreads through all his limbs, and he expires instantly. I saw one of these reptiles that our students had killed. Ngu-kon-kop means snake that wounds with its tail.

4 ° Ngu-Fai, meaning fire snake. This snake is probably of the same species as those God sent into the desert to punish the Hebrews. Indeed, it is impregnated with a venom so active and burning that it consumes all plants it encounters in its path; if you touch it with a piece of dry wood, the wood burns and takes on the color of charcoal. It does not have the same effect on green wood. Woe betide anyone who approaches it, for he will expire the instant he is bitten. When this snake is dead, you can touch it with impunity.

5 ° Ngu-Sam-Lian, meaning three angles, because this snake has a triangular shape. It's a venomous şerpent, but it's more dangerous at night than during the day. If a man walks in the dark with a torch in his hand, this reptile lunges at him. When this happens, the only thing you can do is throw the torch away and run. The snake immediately runs after the flame. A few years ago, one of Monseigneur's servants almost fell victim to its fury. He only avoided danger by abandoning the fire in his hand.

6º Ngu-Hau; i.e., barking snake. This is an arm-sized viper. Its bite is fatal and causes inexpressible pain. This snake sometimes imitates the sound of a bell. Sometimes it hisses so that it can be heard from a great distance. A few years ago, Monseigneur was bitten by one of these vipers. It was placed at the head of his bed. The good Lord allowed him to see it while it was still asleep, which gave him the means to kill it. There's a species of viper whose bite makes you faint. The body of the wounded turns green. After three hours, the patient dies, if he is not given help within the first hour of being bitten. A Siamese was bitten by one of these snakes near our garden, but we had time to apply the remedy.

7 ° Ngu-Ngon-Kai, i.e., cock-crested snake. This reptile is remarkable only for the malignity of its venom, and the crest or aigrette it has on its head. It is perhaps the regulus mentioned by the prophet Isaiah.

8 ° Ngu-Sung-Travan, i.e., the rays of the sun. This is the most beautiful of all snakes, and one of the most dangerous. It is half an ell in length. Its color is a celestial blue, slightly purple. Its skin is covered with scales. As long as the sun is over the horizon, it shines like crystal. Its scales continually shoot out little sprays of light that look a little like the sun's rays. It loses its brightness at night, but regains it in the light of the torch; its bite is lethal. It is said, however, that some people know of an effective remedy when applied immediately after being wounded. This serpent is the image of sin; beneath its most enchanting exterior, it conceals a deadly venom. Remarkably, anyone bitten by this reptile always dies the first time the sun rises after this accident. So, whether you've been bitten at seven in the morning, or at midnight, you're sure to die the next day at sunrise. This snake is quite common; we have some behind the seminary chapel; fortunately it's not very fast.

9 ° Ngu-Pling, i.e., leech snake. This is a finger-long snake, shaped and colored like a leech. It is rarely found except in swamps, where it lives buried in the mire. Anyone unfortunate enough to be bitten by this snake dies almost instantly.

10 ° Ngu-Khiang-Khon, i.e., snake that lunges at man. It is found mainly along certain coasts. It jumps into boats close to the shore; it lunges at men, twists around their necks, and kills them with its venom.

11 ° Ngu-Sing. This snake has no venom. When it sees a man, it runs towards him, turning on itself like a circle. If it can reach him, it gives him a great blow with its tail and continues its race; this singular accident happened, among others, to one of our priests.

12 ° Ngu-Samelang. This is a sea serpent. It is venomous; its bite is not painful, but the effect is no less fatal: those who have been bitten feel drowsy for some time afterwards, forcing them, so to speak, into sleep. Woe betide him if he gives in to this inclination! Once asleep, he will never wake up again. The only way to save the patient is to prevent him from sleeping, even if it means using the most violent means. After twenty-four hours, there is no longer any danger. This snake can be recognized by the way it swims: it rises above the water, and descends to the bottom in a perpendicular line and with speed. This snake and others like it are numerous in these seas, mainly in the straits and near the coasts. I've seen them myself, but I don't know what species they were. Many people have told me about a snake with wings, but I didn't want to mention it here, because none of those who told me about it have seen it. If the fact is true, then the dragon so often described by the ancients is not a fabulous animal; it seems to me that the avenged Bible speaks of this winged serpent.

The Burmese are to Bang-Kok what the Psykers were to Egypt. They appear in public with snakes in their hands or twisted around their necks: they make them beat each other, they get bitten, they put them in their mouths, they take them even into their holes with their own hands. They know several herbs whose juice stops the effect of the venom. It's true that they sometimes fall victim to their own temerity. Often the venom is stronger than the herb's virtue, and the doctor dies despite all his knowledge. The greatest number are seen during the flood, and some climb trees. It's a terrible sight to see a tree bristling with snakes. It rarely happens, because there are almost always places that are not flooded. I've heard many other stories about snakes, but they don't seem to me to be sufficiently proven, so I won't go into them. These facts may be true, but they are not certain. The Burmese and some Siamese eat snakes; to make them bigger and fatter, they put silt in the hole where the reptile is. The snake doesn't like the smell of silt, so it retreats as far as it can to the bottom of the cave, shrinking, but gaining in size what it loses in length. After a few days, they open the cave and kill the snake.

I'd like to place here all the most remarkable venomous and non-venomous insects.

Throughout this part of India, there are two types of scorpion: black and yellow. Black scorpions are absolutely like those you have in France; they sometimes reach a length of four to five inches. In such cases, their sting is incurable, and the patient dies within

twenty-four hours, in the midst of the cruelest pain. Yellow scorpions are long and multi-legged, ranging in length from four to ten inches. Their sting produces the same effect as that of black scorpions; if not fatal, the pain ceases after twenty-four hours.

There are also three species of leeches,

1° sea leeches. They are about the size of a leg. The Siamese eat them. They say they are delicious. They are sold every day at the Bang-Kok bazaar. The second species is the freshwater leech. It differs from yours only in that it is sometimes the size of three fingers, and up to a foot long. The last species lives in the ground, needs no water and is small.

Among the insects that have no venom, the following stand out:

1º the bee, of which there are four species: the large species is similar to the hornet. The second species differs in no way from the common bee; it is very widespread, and no one takes the trouble to raise it; it places its combs in the hollows of old trees, and sometimes hangs them from branches; its honey is excellent. The third species is slightly larger than a gnat; in Pinang, its honey is collected to make vinegar. The smallest species resembles a small midge; the honey it produces is in such small quantities that no one bothers to collect it.

2 ° The inghoi. A small, shiny butterfly. The inghoi resemble small flying stars scattered in great numbers in the middle of the woods; they produce a charming effect on a dark night. Every tree branch seems to shoot out electric sparks.

3º Mosquitoes. They are very common in Bang-Kok and very inconvenient; their bite causes a very sharp itch. They are most abundant towards the end of the rainy season. The only way to avoid them is to immerse yourself in thick smoke.

4 ° The ant. In Siam, no insect is as inconvenient, as numerous and as diverse as the ant. There are white ants, black ants, red ants, gray ants; some fly, others crawl. Some are small, some are middling, and some are the size of a thumb. They're everywhere, on the ground, on trees; we eat them, we drink them; they're with us in our bedroom. They accompany us everywhere, even to the altar; they spoil all edibles, pierce wood and devour books. Bookshelves are placed in water to protect them from their voracity, but care must be taken to ensure that the vase containing the water is very wide; without this precaution, books would not last long. They form themselves into a platoon, and with the help of this kind of bridge, they reach the other side. The Talapoins build their libraries in the middle of a pond; they are obliged to set sail to study.

I have not seen any tree in Siam that is known in Europe with the exception of the orange and pomegranate trees. I will only tell you about those whose names you know.

1º The palm tree. There are several species, such as the date palm, the coconut palm, the sago palm, the areca palm and the one the Siamese call Ton-Tan. All these trees have one thing in common: their stems are bare, straight, tall and highly elastic, topped by a superb plume made up of several leaves or branches that fall in a semicircle, like the feathers of a hat. The date or palm tree itself produces an oblong cluster containing dates, which are pasty, yellow and sometimes blackish. The fruit is delicious and sweet, but hot.

2º The coconut palm (it seems proven that there are coconut palms at the bottom of the sea on the coasts of Siam): the average height of this tree is forty-five feet; I have seen some, however, that were nearly a hundred feet tall, including the leaves, which are from twelve to twenty feet long and three and a half feet wide; its fruit is nut-shaped, twice the size of a man's head; it contains slightly sweet and very fresh water. The inner wall of the nut is covered with a white, hard, unhealthy substance; it tastes a little like almonds; a liquor is made from it which has the color and taste of milk; oil is also made from it; the nut is wrapped in a thick, elastic husk which resembles oakum; when the fruit is ripe, whatever the height of the tree, the shell never breaks when it falls. Coconut palms almost always produce fruit and flowers at the same time; some produce a nut barely the size of a thumb, while others produce fruit the size of a bushel.

3º Sago. People don't eat the fruit of this tree, but the wood; they cut the trunk into small pieces, boil it and form small grains from its substance, which we call sago.

4 ° The areca tree produces a fruit similar to a large walnut, which the Indians only chew.

5º The ton-tan is unremarkable; it is on the leaves of this tree that the Talapoins write their religious books,

6º The tamarind: this bushy tree is as tall as a large elm; its leaves are black-green, the length and width of a finger; they are cut like those of the sensitive; its flowers are small and light yellow; its fruit is shaped like a large pea pod; this pod contains small berries covered with a sort of yellow, sticky, acid paste; it is used to make very healthy jams that taste like grapes.

7º The nutmeg tree: its leaf is more or less like that of the cherry tree, but paler, thicker and less pointed; its branches, four or five in number, grow at equal distance from the trunk and form a circle; above the first branches a new circle is formed, and so on until there are five or six tiers which always decrease in size; its fruit resembles a small green peach; the nutmeg is in the middle of the pulp.

8 ° The clove tree: the Indians send you the embryo of its flower after the leaves have fallen off; this is what you call cloves.

9 ° The cacao tree: its leaf is pale green and plain, forming a diamond shape two inches long and five-quarters of an inch wide. It produces a pod the length of a finger, shaped like two cones joined at the base. This pod contains flat, yellow berries, similar to a large bean. The kernel from which chocolate is made is enclosed in this berry. The fruit is attached immediately to the trunk and large branches; this tree is pyramidal in shape, with a whitish trunk,

10º The cafier: its leaf is quite similar to that of the ordinary laurel, but less thick; its flower is small, white and sweet-smelling; it produces a small green fruit that turns red when ripe. This fruit or fleshy substance contains two small beans, i.e. coffee.

11º Tea. A shrub seven to eight feet tall, its trunk is entirely covered; it has the shape of a cone resting on its base; it resembles the blackthorn in the shape of its leaves and the spikes with which it is bristling; its flower is white and fragrant, somewhat related to that of the apple tree; it produces a berry slightly larger than a pea; the leaves are picked and browned, which is what is called tea.

12 ° The cinnamon tree: similar to the sauce laurel; cinnamon is nothing other than the second bark of this shrub; as far as I know, there is no cinnamon tree in the kingdom of Siam, but I thought you would be pleased to know about it.

13 ° The pepper tree: this is a species of ivy that is supported with stilts; it produces a bunch the length of a finger, the seeds are attached to this bunch, these small seeds are nothing other than pepper; white pepper is that which has been shelled; black pepper has not been shelled.

14 ° The vine: Bang-Kok and the surrounding area is home to a species of wild vine; the vine stock and shoots are bristling with a sort of purple hair; the leaves are a little rough to the touch; the grapes it produces never reach perfect ripeness; they are bitter; however, they can be made into wine if fermented with sugar; this mixture produces a liquor that tastes like Cyprus wine. In some places, it is not necessary to mix sugar with the must: the grape yields a fairly good wine that can be kept for at least ten years, as Monseigneur has experienced. The Siamese neglect the cultivation of this vine, which would produce good grapes if cared for and planted in a favorable exposure. It cannot be propagated by cuttings, as the vine shoot dries up as soon as it is cut; but seeds can be sown, and the resulting stock bears fruit after three years. This vine produces a large number of bunches everywhere, but there are places where its fruitfulness is nothing short of prodigious. There's an island near

one of our Christian communities (I use this word because I can't think of a more appropriate one to express a gathering of Christians who form a parish), which abounds in wild grapevines. Some of these vines bear up to thirty bunches, one of which sometimes yields twelve, fifteen or even eighteen bottles of wine; the seed is a little smaller than a plum; the pip is as large as a coffee bean, but less thick; a single man can hardly carry a bunch any distance; I have all these details from Monseigneur himself. He has spoken to me about it several times, he has seen the fruit, I have seen the seeds, M. de Vaussel, the naturalist, has carried some to France; after that, can we be surprised at what the Holy Spirit tells us about the fertility of Palestine?

15 ° Cotton plant: its branches and leaves, which are few in number, resemble those of the lilac; it produces a small white flower in the shape of a bell; the cotton and the seed are enclosed in a membranous envelope the size of a thumb; it opens itself when the cotton is ripe; to separate the seeds from the cotton, we use a small machine made up of two cylinders placed horizontally; we turn them one on the other by means of a crank, the cotton falls on one side and the seeds on the other; we then beat the cotton with a rod to mix it well; we also use the string of a bow for this; this is what you call rowing cotton. There is another species of cotton plant, but the cotton it produces is too short to be used for canvas.

16º The blackcurrant: this tree is very similar to the acacia; but it has no thorns; its flower is small, yellow and fragrant. You will no doubt be aware that its fruit is about the size of a finger and a foot long; some are much larger, black and used medicinally.

Orange trees are very common, and one species produces oranges as big as melons; the French call it the pamplemousse.

Some of the trees I have mentioned are found only in Pinang; but as this island is part of our mission, and has been dismembered from the kingdom of Siam, I thought I should make no distinction. In the forests of Siam, there is a tree whose wood is odoriferous; it is much sought-after by people constituted in dignity; it is, if I am not mistaken, the tree that Europeans call Eagle wood. The Siamese call it Calam-Pae: it can only be found in a forest belonging to the King of Cochinchina. This prince guards it carefully; only kings and great mandarins can obtain it. Many wonderful qualities are attributed to this tree, including one which seems too extraordinary to be true, and which I'm sure you won't mind if I pass over in silence.

Fruit trees are more numerous than in Europe, and the species are more numerous; but the fruit they bear, with the exception of four or five species, is inferior in quality to ours. In general, they have a bitter or insipid taste. Some have a foul odor, but we have the advantage of fresh fruit every day.

Among the plants that deserve some attention are,

1° the banana or Indian fig tree: its leaves are about eight feet long and nearly two feet wide; its fruit is oblong, a little curved; it tastes like a fig; this fruit is healthy, but cold.

2º Sugar cane. This plant resembles the reed, but its knots or rings are closer together; it is whitish or violet in color; it has the taste and consistency of corn stalks, give or take a little. The Siamese make sugar in a very simple way. They place two large, intermeshing shafts perpendicular to each other; on one of these shafts, another shaft is fitted horizontally, turning the whole machine. The canes are placed between these two shafts, and the water that flows from them falls into a press, from where it is put into a boiler; after the water has boiled for a while, the sugar is fully formed.

3º Betel. This plant, so widely used in India, is a pale-green species of ivy. The Indians continually chew the leaf, after coating it with a light layer of lime. (The Indians eat the lime and put sugar in the mortar.) They quite often add a lump of areca and a pinch of smoking tobacco. Nothing is more disgusting than to see these people ruminating without interruption. A blood-colored saliva flows from their mouths that makes the heart leap, but

you have to be careful not to let it show. This strange composition gnaws at the tongue and blackens the teeth. Every morning in Bang-Kok, small boats filled with lime and betel are seen; Siamese fishmongers invite passers-by to buy this merchandise, in much the same way as, in certain French towns, itinerant lemonade sellers invite travelers to refresh themselves; to encourage them to do so more effectively, they themselves set the example.

4º Borapet. This plant grows in the air, so to speak. It hangs from trees without clinging to them or embracing them tightly like ivy and other plants of this kind. Its roots are usually raised from the ground to a height of four feet. I don't think there are any in Europe. The Siamese attribute great virtues to this herb.

Vegetable plants and vegetables known in Europe do not thrive in the torrid zone. The stem of the onion is like a thread. Cauliflower is the size of an apple. Small white melons with smooth skin are quite good. In addition, these peoples have no shortage of other vegetables that are completely unknown to you. They have one, among others, whose flowers are at the top of the stem and the seed is hidden underground.

The Siamese have no other cereal plants than rice. They sow it in furrows in small square fields enclosed by a dike. Water is introduced into the field and must remain there until harvest; if there is no water for some time, the plant perishes or fails to produce. At flood time, the fields near Bang-Kok are completely inundated for quite a long time; but the rice always rises above the water, following the river's rise; if the water suddenly rises by one meter, the rice grows by the same amount within twelve hours. Rice is closely related to oats in both the color and shape of its leaves and ear. To separate the grain from the husk, the ear is placed in a mortar and beaten with a large wooden pestle. Rice is the staple food of humans and animals alike. Nothing could be simpler than the way the Indians prepare it. They put the rice with a little water in an iron or earthen vessel, place the pot on the fire and, as soon as the grain is a little swollen, take it out and eat it immediately without any further seasoning. Rice prepared in this way is neither good nor bad, and has no taste whatsoever. There are several types of rice. Some are white, some are black, and some are sown and harvested in three months.

Siam also grows a type of millet that is quite good. The Siamese also grow corn or Turkish wheat, but they get no use out of it; they simply toast the grain while it's still on the cob, and eat it as bread. Wheat doesn't prosper; if you sow it, ants eat part of it and weevils gnaw the rest. Monseigneur tried to sow some in the middle of a pool of water to keep away by this voracious insect, but he was no luckier; one liter produced five ears, so that it had to be abandoned. Only rice is spared by these insects.

Poor Siamese don't pay much attention to flowers, but large landowners, mandarins and princes decorate the galleries in front of their houses with them. The species are few in number; few plants produce flowers with a pleasant scent; several are odorless; but in compensation a large number of trees, mainly those that produce spices, exhale a perfume that can sometimes be inhaled at sea from a distance of more than a league.

Having told you about so many useful trees and plants, it's only fair to say a word about those that are harmful. Don't worry, this article won't be long; I'll just talk about two poisonous plants.

1º Mai-Sac: this is a tree whose leaves poison the water in any stream where they fall. You must therefore take care not to refresh yourself indiscriminately at all the springs you find. As for rivers, the volume of water they contain, which is continually renewed, renders the effect of the poison null and void.

2º Rangtang: a poisonous herb found in the forests of Siam, mainly in the western part; its leaf is slightly larger than that of the vine; it is bordered by a fiery red border: it is in this border that the venom resides; if you touch it, you immediately feel an unbearable burning. Your first instinct is to throw yourself into the water to extinguish the devouring

fire; but instead of the relief you expect, you find death. The only way to cure the patient is to place him on a rack and light a fire underneath. Once the red band has been cut, the inside of the leaf can be safely eaten. When the elephants see this plant, they tear it off with great care and throw it far away from them; they know that their lives are at stake. The king puts some of these leaves on public display in Bang-Kok, so that everyone can see them and avoid danger. One of our priests has seen this plant.

We have a tree, in our garden, called Mai-Tourang; it bears a fruit which produces a singular effect; if we express a few drops of the juice it contains on the skin, we are obliged to scratch several days in a row without interruption; water only increases the itching; there is only mud applied to the place where we experience this cooking, which can bring some relief.

Siam is a very fertile country, but poorly populated and even more poorly cultivated: there are ten times fewer inhabitants than in France, on an equal area of land. If the population is to be judged by the number of people born within a ten-year period, compared with the number who died in the same period – a comparison I made myself in one of our Christian communities – It seems to decrease by a ninth every year, so that in less than a century Siam would be nothing but a desert, were it not for the multitude of foreigners attracted by trade, many of whom have taken up residence in the country. Indeed, there are perhaps as many Chinese as there are real Siamese. The main causes of this frightening decline in population are: 1º polygamy; wealthy individuals have several wives; the last king had a thousand; 2º the multitude of Talapoins; the number of these voluntary bachelors can be estimated at four times the number of men living in Bang-Kok and the suburbs; 3º the uncleanliness of the inhabitants; they build their houses on a heap of mud; they live among pigs, whose accumulated refuse exhales an infectious stench: They know neither how to build new canals to facilitate the flow of rainwater, nor how to clear the existing ones of the quantity of mud, leaves and weeds that pile up insensibly. Europeans are shocked by such carelessness, but only they notice it; they are astonished by the observations made about the dangers of this excessive dirtiness. In general, the people of southern Asia are hardly clean, if the individuals I have seen are anything to go by. This negligence, combined with the influence of the climate and the unhealthy foods the Siamese make great use of, results in a large number of diseases, such as cholera morbus, dysentery, pernicious fevers, intermittent fevers, scabs, ulcers, colic and so many others that it would take too long to relate. I never hear of anything but the dead and the sick. The Siamese are especially prone to a kind of sickness they call being caught in the wind. We see people who, appearing to be in perfect health, suddenly fall into a faint; we have great difficulty in bringing them back; if the patient does not die within twenty-four hours, he is soon restored. I've been called in several times, during the night, to give Extreme Unction to people suffering from this singular illness: the next morning, I'd find them sitting next to a large plate of rice and meat, eating with a hearty appetite.

It is to all these causes combined that we can attribute the weakness of their temperament; they have much less strength than Europeans; the slightest exercise tires them: the other Indians are hardly more robust than the Siamese. Chinese doctors know how to recognize a European among a hundred Asians, by the mere movement of the arteries; all they need to do is feel the pulse.

However fertile the kingdom of Siam may be, its inhabitants are no richer for it; all the cash and all the trade is in the hands of the king, the princes, the mandarins and the Chinese; for in this country the nobility is not exempt from trade: the king and the princes have their ships, their stores, their merchandise; some even have the right to monopolize it. The main exports are gold leaf, sugar, salt, cotton, some silks, indigo, pepper in small

quantities, rice, elephant, rhinoceros and unicorn tusks, and dyewood; they have a type of wood that produces a beautiful amaranth red.

Imported items include dyed cotton cloth, porcelain and earthenware vases, hardware and a few firearms; but these items must not be too precious, as they would not find buyers. The only currency in Siam is silver: the country's coins are almost round, in the shape of a button; the strongest are only worth three francs, and two are given for a piaster. This money is pure when it has not passed through the hands of counterfeiters. For things of little value, the Siamese give small shells in exchange. Food is very cheap here, but nothing is as cheap as oxen: people sometimes give one for a franc; they have become a little more expensive recently, due to the large number of ships that have come to Bang-Kok.

It's time I told you about the Siamese, after having spoken so much about Siam: the inhabitants of this country are not called Siamese, but Thai, that is, free people par excellence. If ever there was a misapplied name, this is it: all Siamese are born and die slaves to the prince and the great mandarins; after working all day on public works, they receive a bit of bad rice and sometimes a beating with a stick; but in the end, they are happy with their lot and find that everything is perfect in their country.

The origins of these peoples are not very difficult to understand: according to a tradition generally widespread among them, the Siamese descend from a colony of Burmese who went to settle in Ligor; from Ligor these new settlers spread out along the sea, going northwards, and founded Juthia, the ancient capital of the kingdom of Siam. Indeed, the physical appearance, religion, customs and dress of the Burmese and Siamese are very similar, but the language is different. Although these two peoples share a common origin, they are no friendlier; there is great antipathy between them. The Burmese have often ravaged Siamese lands in the last century, taking the king and his entire family captive. Our Christians suffer greatly from all these wars and revolutions in these unhappy times; the Missionaries are their only resource and consolation; they must gather together those who have fled into the middle of the woods, and lead them to a place of safety: They have to redeem the slaves and often themselves, provide rice for all when they have none for themselves and are deprived of all help and resources from men; it is in these unfortunate circumstances that the oracle of Jesus Christ is verified: If the heavenly Father feeds the little birds, how much more will he feed you? I could quote you facts which prove how much divine providence takes care of those who belong to God; but it is not to a Priest, and to a Priest such as yourself, that we must provide proof of God's goodness towards men.

Before speaking of the manners and customs of the Siamese, I thought it appropriate to give you an idea of their religion; but I must exhort you in advance to have courage, for it is necessary to have it to support the reading of all the absurdities and extravagances I am about to describe.

The Talapoins, who are like the priests and doctors of religion, disagree on many points; most of them no longer know how to read the old books of religion, so that each one assumes the right to add or subtract certain articles; they forge fables which they spout in public; they demand to be taken at their word; but they find contradictions among their confreres, which excites arguments and even brawls among them: It makes those present laugh at their expense. Nevertheless, they retain their authority and empire not only over the people, but also over the princes. I will therefore confine myself to reporting the articles of their belief which are generally accepted by the Siamese; I will first give you a summary of their doctrine, and then explain each article in detail ....

1 ° There are many gods; their multitude is innumerable; many are married; they have children; the others are unmarried. Idols are images of divinity; Christians call pagodas both the idols and the temples that contain them.

2º There is one among them who is eternal and who necessarily exists; but he is not the greatest of gods; another, whom they call Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau, has more power, even though he was created; the first is called Phra-Hin.

3º Heaven and earth are eternal; they necessarily exist, yet Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau, who is not eternal, who was created, who was born and died on earth, created heaven and earth.

4 ° There are angels; they are uncreated.

5° All men have their origin in one man and one woman.

6° The soul is immortal (they have no idea of spirituality).

7° There is a heaven and a hell; heaven is above our heads; hell is under our feet; there is fire, but it is not eternal.

8º There are demons, but we don't know where they come from; these demons have a chief who is in the depths of hell, the others are his satellites; some are on earth: they torment the reprobate.

9º There is a God who writes down the deeds of men, good or otherwise; his name is Phra-Phum.

10° The souls of the dead undergo a special judgment.

11° Men can easily avoid hell, but not women; they can only overcome this difficulty by giving large alms to the Talapoins. We must agree that if their salvation depends on this condition, they will all be saved.

12 ° All animals are our brothers; they were once men, and will be again – trees are animate.

13 ° There was once a flood in Siam; the god Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau placed the rainbow in the clouds, to reassure men against the fear of another flood.

14 ° There will be a general resurrection: this world will come to an end; Phra-Sian, who has already come, will descend to earth a second time; he will make men eternally happy (Phra means God; thus Phra-Sian, the god Sian or Messiah).

Siamese morality boils down to these two points: Give alms to the Talapoins; don't kill any animal: the more a man eats, the more merit he has before God.

I'm not going to tell you about all the abominations they recount about their gods: I don't know them myself; I only know that an honest man cannot listen to all these licentious stories without feeling a strong sense of indignation, and without imposing silence on the impudent narrator; such, however, is the subject of the speeches that the Talapoins make in the public squares to a large audience, made up of people of all ages and sexes. It's absolutely the same fund of religion as among the Greeks and Romans; it's the same code of immorality in every time and place. The devil is always similar to himself: but let's get down to the details.

From all eternity, there has existed a god called Phra-Hin; this god had a hen; one day, he felt like trying out his power: he collected some of the garbage his hen had made, formed two little dolls from it and brought them to life: it was from this first man and woman that the human race originated. The Flood came shortly afterwards. The angels, who exist from all eternity, took charge of governing heaven and earth: they are not gods; they have a more perfect nature and much more power than men; they govern everything, and it does not seem that anyone has entrusted them with this administration. The sky is divided into twelve concave levels; these twelve heavens are supported by a high mountain called Khau-Soumeng; the angels are distributed among these twelve heavens; some are white, others red; there are also green ones; I don't believe there are any of any other color: they are generally of colossal size.

Crows and vultures are angels, because they eat human flesh; others claim that all angels are white and very beautiful; choose between these two opinions. In the middle of heaven, there's a large pool in which the angels bathe: when there are too many of them, the

pool can no longer hold the water, which spills over the edges and produces rain. Lightning has two causes: the first is an old woman who, to mock us, waves a mirror in the air; angels are the second cause: sometimes they shoot fire with their lighters; the fire that spurts out causes lightning. Thunder is produced by a horrible giant who has lodged himself in the firmament; he has teeth similar to the tusks of a boar; when he scolds his wife, he does so in a tone so high that it makes the earth tremble; this is thunder; but he is not always content with scolding, he sometimes pursues her with his axe in his hand; if, in the fit of his fury, he drops his axe, it produces lightning.

Phra-Athit and Phra-Chan: sun and moon. These two gods were once men; they were brothers; while they were on earth, they gave alms to the Talapoins: the eldest gave them a large sum of gold every day; the second gave them silver: they had a younger brother who also gave alms to the Talapoins, but he only gave them rice in a very black vase. After their death, they became gods; the first is the sun, the second is the moon; the third was not so happy; as punishment for his avarice, he was metamorphosed into an excessively black monster; he has only arms, nails and ears; his name is Phra-Rahu. This punishment hasn't made him any better; jealous of his brothers' happiness, he has long sought an opportunity to kill them; he fights with them frequently, and this is the cause of the eclipses. The Siamese, not happy to see their sun and moon devoured, make a terrible racket to make Phra-Rahu let go. The whole time the eclipse lasts, there's nothing but shouting and screaming; people beat the drum; they strike with redoubled blows on large bronze basins; they fire rifles; the king fires the cannon from the fortress; the disorder is at its height; it would be easier to stop the eclipse than to cure them of this prejudice; they are very angry with the Christians, because they remain quiet: "You Pharans," they say, "don't like stars that do you such great service, since you don't take the trouble to help them in such pressing danger." They say that it is not the earth that walks, but the sun: when it rises, it rides an elephant; when it reaches the highest point of the horizon, i.e. midday, it changes mounts and sits on a buffalo or a horse, for it seems to me that I have heard one and the other, so it comes down mounted on one of these animals; at six o'clock in the evening it goes to hide behind the Khau-Soumeng mountain of which I have already spoken to you: there's no need for him to go under the earth, because there are no inhabitants, nor can there be; they couldn't stand on their feet. There are stars that are deities; the fixed stars are set in the firmament. Siamese doctors disagree on the cause of the darkness seen in the moon; some say it's a tall tree; others say it's an old woman peeling rice; some of the more learned say it's a man busy making a basket.

The earth, the air, the sea and the rivers are all gods: the earth is flat, and a large buffalo supports it with its nose, so that it doesn't fall into the void; but as the buffalo has forgotten to give it a point of support, the earth is no more solid. The ebb and flow of the sea is caused by an enormous cockroach; when it leaves its cave, the water rises; when it re-enters, the tide falls. It's not just ordinary people who believe all this nonsense; there are many others who claim to be educated and who believe it. To seriously maintain to a Siamese who has never had any communication with Europeans that we have passed under the earth and have found neither buffalo nor elephant; that the sun is not a man, still less a god; that it is a million times bigger than the earth; that we can protect ourselves from lightning; that we can travel in the air without being a bird, etc., is to take more trouble than you can afford. The least inconvenience one could experience would be to be called an impostor. An English ambassador and others told the King of Siam that Europeans had found a way to ascend into the air, to sail without sails or oars, by means of water vapor, that they had invented wind guns: the King replied that he did not believe them.

The gods I've just mentioned are the visible gods and the invisible gods. The most famous and greatest is Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau or Phra-Chau; he was born, I don't know in what

century, for he has a father and a mother. As long as he remained a man, he committed all sorts of crimes; his name was Songmana-Caudom, meaning ox thief. Finally, blushing at his behavior, he felt like becoming a god; to this end, he dressed in yellow and became a religious or solitary; he soon had as many as five hundred disciples. Tired of always living in the same pagoda, he began to travel; from the island of Ceylon, where he was at the time, he came with a single step to a mountain above Juthia (there is a distance of five hundred leagues between these two regions); he was surprised by the rain; he took refuge in a cave which still exists today; he left the imprint of his body there; he instituted the Talapoins. Having gone begging, he ate so much pork that his stomach burst, and the god was suffocated by hemorrhaging before he had changed his dress, which, in the eyes of the Talapoins, is a sure sign of disapproval. They add that their god wanted to return to the island of Ceylon before he died; he left his disciples his yellow robe; whoever takes this robe becomes a god, and becomes a man again as soon as he leaves it. As soon as Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau died, he was annihilated; and yet he was a god and still is; he is even the most powerful of all the gods; and Phra-Hin, who exists by himself from all eternity, who created Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau's father and mother, was obliged to give way to him. Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau, who is not eternal, created heaven and earth, which are eternal: when he came into the world, earth existed, yet he created it. Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau is in hell, since he died with his yellow robe; he is not in hell, since he is a god; he is nowhere, since he is annihilated. However, the Talapoins do have his body, which was first placed in a coffin. When an indiscreet person dared to get a little too close to the coffin, the already dead and annihilated god had enough strength to kill him with a kick. Would you believe that the Talapoins agree with all these contradictions? A Siamese king was so shocked by this article of their belief, that he had it erased from their religion book; but it doesn't seem that they took much trouble to comply with the prince's orders. When they feel pressured by the Christians, they change their battery. Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau, they say, was born before heaven or earth existed: where then were his father and mother, they ask, and where was he himself, since he had nothing on which to stand? For according to their principles, nothing can exist in space without a point of support; then they know only how to reply: "That's how it is in our books", or else they laugh and move on to another question. Those with a little education feel the weakness of their religion; they make it their duty not to enter into dispute with Christians. Don't argue with Pharans, that is, Christians," they say, "for they will make so many objections to you, they will ask you so many times why and how, that you will soon be reduced to silence."

Everything that belonged to Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau is an object of veneration for the Siamese. From time to time, the King of Siam sends a richly ornamented vessel to Ceylon, to bring back a few relics of this alleged god: it is not yet three years since the last voyage. The cave where he retreated, the fountain that flows from it, the imprint of his foot, have become an object of pilgrimage for the Siamese: the vestige of this foot is about five feet long; it is strewn with precious stones and covered with a cloth of great price; small iron rods have been planted all around it, into which the pilgrims thread the gold rings they offer to the god. The king has placed guards to ensure that no one removes these offerings. On another nearby mountain, onlookers are shown the bed and some small pieces of furniture that once belonged to the god Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau. Long after the god's death, an impostor engraved all these footprints and body imprints of Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau on stone, and publicized this marvel in the country; the Siamese, who are so superstitious, believed everything without examination. The neighboring Talapoins took advantage of the situation to provide themselves with abundant alms; they publicized that they had the god's body; they gave pilgrims monkey teeth, which they passed off as Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau's teeth; it is said that they still distribute them today. It's not difficult for the Talapoins to deceive the Siamese; they're taken at their word. On one occasion, they slit the throat of a child to take away his jewels; they then placed

the body next to an idol whose mouth they bloodied with the blood of this unfortunate child; they went to the king to accuse the idol of having devoured this child. The king believed them without examination (the gods cannot lie); the idol was condemned to have its mouth closed with a padlock and to bear the infamous name of man-eater. The deceit was finally discovered and the Talapoins were punished by death; the poor god nonetheless kept his name and his padlock.

Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau's two brothers succeeded him one after the other in the dignity of chief of the Talapoins; I'm sure you're longing to get to know these singular characters; I'll satisfy you (I'm obliged to use the terms used in the Catholic Church to designate the dignity and different ranks of the Talapoins; I'm very sorry, but I can't express my thoughts any other way). The Talapoins form a kind of religious and hierarchical order; they have a general, provincials, priors, simple religious, novices and postulants or disciples, and finally scholars and doctors. According to their statutes, the simple Talapoin must obey the head of the pagoda in everything. Around four o'clock in the morning, they give the signal to the Siamese to prepare rice for them; around six o'clock, they go to ask for alms; the devout Siamese, and especially the women, wait in a respectful posture for the Talapoins to pass; they give them rice, fruit, meat, cakes, sometimes money: they must receive everything, without saying anything, without thanking or even saluting; it seems that they are faithful to their rules in this respect. Once back in the pagoda, the Talapoin beggar bows at the feet of the superior, and makes his confession. The sins of the Talapoins are of a particular kind: for example, having looked sideways, having looked beyond five cubits, having returned a salute, having inadvertently killed an insect, etc. Once the confession has been made, the superior inflicts a suitable penance. They do, however, teach that killing any animal, even inadvertently, through no fault of one's own, is an irremissible sin; but contradiction is not what embarrasses them.

When all the Talapoins have returned from the quest, the pagoda superior ushers the whole community into the refectory; if the proceeds of the quest have been considerable, they gorge themselves on meat; they eat again at midday; the rest of the day is devoted to play and sleep. From midday until the following morning, the Talapoins are not allowed to eat anything; but malicious tongues accuse them of having departed from the primitive rule on this point, as on many others. Around six o'clock in the evening, the drum is beaten to reunite them; all the exercises are announced to the sound of the drum; between six and nine o'clock in the evening, they recite a prayer formula which lasts a long hour and which almost none of them understand. In some pagodas, the Talapoins pray every morning for a quarter of an hour: it is said that this custom is not ancient, and that they wanted to imitate the Christians. The Talapoins are dressed in yellow; they shave their heads and eyebrows twice a month, on the first and fifteenth days of the moon. According to their rules, they shouldn't wear silk robes; they should sleep on a plank; when they go out, they shouldn't talk to anyone, and they should have a fan in front of their eyes that only allows them to see five cubits; a layman armed with a large stick should always be at their side to beat them roughly if they broke any point of their rule; but the king, who claims to be the supreme head of religion, has dispensed them from all these observances, and the Talapoins have not felt it necessary to protest against this innovation; the lay corrector now only accompanies them when they enter the king's palace. The Talapoins may be regarded as the priests or ministers of the Siamese religion: they give the people a kind of lustral water to which they attribute great virtue; newlyweds must appear before them to be sprinkled with this water; they have several rites which they have imitated from Christians; they have a Lent, an Easter, a Paschal candle, a rosary, relics and holy water like us. They write the names of their gods on a piece of paper and wrap it in a cloth; they attach small strips; they give these so-called relics to the Siamese,

who must carry them with them at all times: it is, they say, a preservative against all sorts of ills or unfortunate accidents; they also have an ordination.

The admission of laymen to the profession of Talapoin takes place at the beginning of their Lenten period, i.e., in their ninth month, which corresponds to our month of July. Shortly before this time, the prince sends areca and betel to certain pagodas, a piece of wood to clean their teeth and nymphaea flowers for newly professed members. The day set for the reception is usually the fifteenth of the moon; the recipient is placed in a boat with an old Talapoin: his relatives accompany him, as do onlookers; the procession heads for the pagoda to the sound of instruments: licentious songs are sung in honor of the gods, but in a language that, fortunately, those present cannot hear. On arrival at the pagoda, the recipient is ushered into the ceremonial hall; the superior sits on a mat or carpet, much like a tailor; in one hand he holds a fan which covers his face slightly, in the other he holds a gilded wooden mallet. The recipient bows before him, with his relatives at his side, one of whom carries an empty cooking pot; a second, a fan; and a third, a piece of yellow cloth: the assistants place themselves in much the same way, forming a semicircle. After the first customary questions, the superior says to the postulant: What has been your conduct in the world? are you married? do you owe money? do your creditors consent to your entering the pagoda? what about your relatives, etc.? In the end, he urges them to cast aside this profane garb (he's dressed in white), and don the yellow garb that will make him a god. The recipient is immediately stripped, dressed in the yellow garb, and given a fan and a pot in his hands; from then on, he's called Phra (God): he's worshipped, and has the right to ask for alms. The Talapoins greet no one, not even princes; but ordinary people must greet them, or rather worship them, for they call them gods. The way to greet them is to join hands and raise them to the forehead; the most hurried turn sideways and place their hands behind their ears; the majority do nothing. These strange divinities are not immovable; it is the robe that makes them gods; if they leave it, or if it is taken from them by force, they become men again. A Talapoin who has made profession must remain in the pagoda for at least three months; after this interval, he may abandon his state and resume it at will. To advance in rank, a Talapoin must resume the secular habit and re-enter the pagoda a second time. Talapoins can only make profession at the age of twenty; before that time, they are only postulants. The provincial, who has the same authority among them as bishops do in the Catholic Church, has two assistants and exercises jurisdiction over a number of pagodas. It is said that when he dies, the council assembles; a layman appointed by the king presides over it, collects the votes and chooses whomever he sees fit to fill the vacancy. The general, who is at the same time the head of all the Talapoins, has jurisdiction over all the pagodas in the kingdom of Siam; he has four assistants; on his death, the king chooses his successor from among the four assistants.

The Talapoins live in the pagodas; they are housed in a house adjoining the temple; the pagodas of the great dignitaries are distinguished from the others by large columns which are raised in front of the temple (I'll explain below what these columns mean).

The Talapoins are the custodians of religion among the Siamese and Burmese; they speak Pali when they understand it; it's the Latin of the Siamese: this language is largely composed of Malabar and Cambodian words; it also has some Malay and Siamese terms. The books that deal with religion are written in this language; these books have a singular form, they are light slices of palm branches or leaves that the Siamese call Ton-tan; they are eight to ten inches long and an inch and a half wide: they engrave on these leaves certain characters that they blacken to make them more legible; these books and these characters are very similar to those of the Sanskrit language, if not the same.

The Talapoins, as I have already said, have a Lenten period, but this is not a time of mortification for them; this Lent begins in July and ends in November; they preach in their pagodas and elsewhere throughout this time; they invite the Siamese, to the sound of the

drum, to come and hear them. At the appointed hour, a young Talapoin appears, carrying a large vase containing the book of religion wrapped in a precious cloth; the preacher follows him in silence and climbs onto a pulpit placed outside the pagoda; the humbly prostrate assistants listen avidly to stories of revolting absurdity, mingled with obscene anecdotes often invented by the Talapoins themselves: At the end of the sermon, they take care to warn those present that he who gives the preacher such and such a dish, seasoned in such and such a way, will acquire much merit; he who gives such and such a stew will have much less; it's always the stew that the preacher doesn't like. After finishing his speech, the Talapoin takes with him baskets filled with meat, fruit, cakes and candles, to which several silver coins are attached. Wealthy people invite Talapoins to preach in their homes, and make the same offerings. For the whole of their Lenten period, they can preach every day and eat wherever they are invited; for the rest of the year, they preach only on the eighth and fifteenth of the moon. Their Passover, which they call Passa, almost always falls in November: at this time, the king, accompanied by his entire family and the great lords of the court, visits the main pagodas and offers new robes to the Talapoins: It's a truly magnificent sight, this gathering of boats richly decorated and decked out with flags, some gilded, others painted in different colors; the shouts of the rowers mingle with the sound of the instruments; the bodyguards and soldiers accompanying the prince seem to glide over the surface of the water with a speed the eye can barely follow. But what a pain it is to think that all this pomp and circumstance is intended to honor the devil and his ministers! The white elephant, the monkey, the horse, the white rat, are invited to the ceremony: it seems to be the feast of the white animals. The people, in turn, visit the pagodas; everywhere there are processions, shouts and an appalling tumult; they sing, they laugh, but when they reach the pagoda, they hardly bother about the gods; they haven't come there to pray to them, nor to offer sacrifices; all the time is spent eating and drinking, and there are real orgies that last for whole nights: this is how they sanctify their Passover feast for a month.

Although the Siamese profess to believe that it is not permitted to catch fish, they nevertheless fall into this alleged crime every day: to appease the god who presides over the river, who is highly irritated by all these daily murders and by many other grievances of which the Siamese are guilty towards him, such as that of throwing garbage into the river, of striking the water while rowing, etc., to appease him, they say to the god, "I'm going to kill you!" and to appease him, I say, they make offerings to him; they give him fruit, eggs, rice, areca, betel, candles ; they invite him to forget his grief and to eat the food offered to him with a hearty appetite – this last ceremony takes place at the same time as the previous one. On the outside, the Talapoins are rigid observers of the article of their religion that forbids the killing of animals. It is forbidden to catch fish near their pagodas; they chase away any fishermen they come across with stones. Their houses are general hospices where all kinds of animals are received: monkeys, pigs, hens, crows and pigeons are in large numbers. It is said that this exposes them to great temptations, and more than once they have violated the right of hospitality to the point of slitting the throats of their guests and even eating them. In addition to the animals that the Siamese place in their pagodas, to preserve them from death, the Talapoins also feed others, out of charity, they say, to their relatives who have become dogs, cats, monkeys and birds. Unfortunately, these animals are not always grateful; more than once, they have devoured their foster fathers. Some time ago, a huge tiger was taken from Siam; the poor beast was running the risk of his life, due to his known misdeeds in the neighborhood; the Talapoins came in a body to ask for mercy for him; the governor, obsessed by their repeated requests, granted the tiger his life, albeit reluctantly; but the ferocious animal was not grateful to his liberators: the first use he made of his freedom was to take a Talapoin and devour him in the nearby forest.

The Talapoins exercise no jurisdiction over the Siamese, unless they are invited to do so by the king or by private individuals: they bless houses, if they are asked to do so; they visit the sick to teach them, they say, the way to heaven. When they enter the house, they are worshipped and their feet are washed: all those who perform this function do a very meritorious work. The Talapoin performs a number of superstitious ceremonies with this statute, forcing the dying person to cry out with him repeatedly: Hora-Hang! Hora-Hang! is the name of one of their gods.

If the Talapoin is invited to a funeral ceremony, he places himself in the same boat as the body of the deceased; he reads a book during the journey: when the place destined to burn the dead is reached, the Talapoin pulls back the sheet with which the coffin is wrapped as gently as he can; he fears that the dead man will notice and that he will cause him to die. The Talapoin receives the shroud and many other rewards for his services.

Every year, during the month of the flood, the king sends a deputation of Talapoins to order the waters to recede: as prudent men, they choose the moment when the waters begin to recede. They were not so fortunate when they went to the port of Bang-Kok to ward off cholera morbus; they all perished, and several died while performing their diabolical ceremonies.

This is what they teach about their state: to be Talapoin is a meritorious work, to be Talapoin for a long time is an even more meritorious work; to be Talapoin until death is a great sin; if you die with the yellow robe, even if you don't have the time to take it off, you are infallibly damned: this robe goes to hell, where it hangs from a big iron bar that breaks seven times a day, such is the quantity of yellow robes hanging there.

Nothing equals the mad veneration of the Siamese for this species of religious; they despise them and adore them: it even happens that after the death of a Talapoin, they fight over the body, as no one wants to give in, they place a boat in the middle of the river, in which they deposit the corpse; they tie two other boats to the first; each party rows in an opposite direction, the one whose rope breaks is defeated; the other takes the body in triumph and goes to burn it.

The king himself is entirely devoted to them, although he is forced to admit that the conduct of his gods is highly scandalous (his own words). He feeds three hundred and fifty of them every day; he gives them every exquisite thing he can find, while his soldiers starve, if I may put it that way. When he is presented with a few fruits or jams, he does not eat them, but sends them to the Talapoins, giving them to them with his own hands. No kind of food is forbidden to the Talapoins; they eat meat, provided they have not killed the animal themselves, although it is proverbial among them that he who kills commits the sin, and he who eats will suffer the penalty. They teach that their merit, and that of those who give alms, increases in proportion to the quantity of food the Talapoin takes; so they gorge themselves on meat to acquire this supposed merit: we see pagoda chiefs, after devouring a bushel of rice, fruit and pork flesh, having their disciples squeeze their bellies so they can eat even more. A reasonable man could never believe that such brutal gluttony could be ranked among the first virtues, if he didn't see it with his own eyes: what is even more inconceivable is the blindness of these infidels, who give no other proof of the divinity of their Talapoins than their insatiable voracity. "How can our Talapoins not be gods, since they eat so much," replied a Siamese to whom I pointed out the ridiculousness of his religion?

We don't just have Talapoins, we also have Talapoines. The article concerning them will be very short, and above all less boring: they are old widowed women, for the most part, who, not knowing what to become, retire to a convent they call Haran. Dressed in white, they have to recite a kind of rosary; but it's not painful, you can talk to your neighbor, even have fun, as long as the grains of the rosary slip through your fingers. Although they are not goddesses, they do have the right to beg for alms, but they are not held in the same esteem as

their brothers, the Talapoins. The people call them Xi, i.e. pagoda people; their houses are close to the temples, but outside their precincts; they are few in number; when they pray, they are obliged to turn their backs.

After Pra-Phu-Thi-Chau, the god with the greatest reputation is Phra-Sian, which means God Messiah: this god was born near Juthia, in a village whose name is given; he has no father and his mother has been dead for many centuries. In his youth, Phra-Sian was very indocile: his mother forbade him to go fishing, but he always had his line in his hand; she urged him to become a Talapoin, but the god constantly refused; finally, Phra-Sian suddenly changed for the better, abandoned sin and became a Talapoin. Although he had never studied, he knew, as if by inspiration, how to speak Pali; he became so learned in religion that no doctor has ever been able to compare with him; after his death, he became a god. The Talapoins, his confreres, erected a golden statue of him; but the head was never able to unite with the trunk, and the Talapoins were greatly embarrassed when, to their great astonishment, the god's own head, whose body had not yet been burnt, was placed on the statue: the Siamese claim to possess this statue to this day, and that Phra-Sian must be reborn to make the universe happy; the time is not yet fixed. The Talapoins teach that extraordinary signs, in heaven and on earth, will let men know that his second coming is near; they say that the world, as it is today, must end before this fatal catastrophe; there will be great wars; men will slit each other's throats; their size will diminish noticeably; they will all be no more than pygmies the height of a doll; they will need a fang and perhaps a ladder to pick the vegetables from their gardens. Before the end of the world there will be two suns, then three and successively up to seven; these suns will cause seven general calamities. When the second sun appears, rivers will dry up; large rivers and probably seas will dry up later; plants and trees will dry up successively; when the earth is completely stripped of grass and plants, animals will die; men will die only after the animals; finally, when the last sun appears, the whole universe will be reduced to ashes. Then Phra-Sian will descend from the heavens and resurrect all men; the earth will be transformed into a delightful garden; there will be no more calamities in the world, no more sorrows, no more illnesses, no more hell; men will be immortal; they will enjoy eternal peace, joy and bliss, occupied only in contemplating the august face of Phra-Sian. To hasten the arrival of this liberating god, abundant alms must be given to the Talapoins.

Phra-Thumalai is a god with the power to withdraw souls from hell: when he descends into it, the fire of the abyss is extinguished. The reprobate continually pray to him.

Phra-That-Xulamuni: this god resides above the twelve heavens inhabited by angels; he is colossal in stature, column-like and green in color. All men who die in the state of righteousness come before him to pay their respects; they are well received, if they add a nymphaea flower to the merit of their good deeds. After spending some time in heaven, these blessed souls obtain permission to return to earth: they are reborn great lords, princes, kings and even Talapoins. And so it begins all over again: he who has been in heaven may fall into hell, and vice versa.

Phra-Vet-Somdon was first a bird; then he became a snake, an ant, and was successively metamorphosed into all kinds of animals; finally he became a man and a great lord. Disgusted with his riches, he wanted to become a hermit or a recluse; he gave all his wealth to the poor, died and was placed among the gods. The Siamese tell of this god's horrors against purity. The Talapoins like to talk about the abominable anecdotes of Phra-Vet-Somdon in their speeches, because they are sure to have a large number of listeners.

Phra-Phum: this god is the busiest of all; he is obliged to record all human deeds, good and bad, in a large book. Charitable Siamese build small chapels in front of their houses to protect Phra-Phum from the ravages of the air. This concludes my catalog of Siamese divinities; it would be infinite if I were to give an account of each of these gods.

The prince of the demons is called Phaja-Jom; he is both king of the underworld and judge of the souls of the dead; he meets four times a month, on the first, eighth, fifteenth and twenty-first of the moon. Phra-Phum brings his book; according to its contents, the guilty party is more or less punished. Execution of the sentence is the right of the Jom-Phra-Ban: they are hideous giants with long, sharp boar-like teeth protruding from their mouths. Their function is to guard the gates of hell, to go on earth to take the souls of the dead and to torment the reprobate. Here's a summary of Phaja-Jom's penal code: all reprobates are thrown into a great lake of fire and brimstone. This punishment is common to all the damned, but there are special punishments for different types of crime: for example, the soul of a person who has fished with an angling is hooked by the throat with a large hook and suspended like a fish; the soul of a person who has killed a pig has its head cut off and its belly split open; the soul of a Talapoin who has eaten at forbidden times has its mouth opened with two fangs and is made to swallow molten copper. For certain crimes, the soul is impaled on a green tree; this tree grows, vegetates, and the guilty soul remains in the same state until the tree dies and falls into decay. Observe, I pray you, that this tree is planted in the midst of hell, and therefore vegetates in the midst of the fires and flames of that place of torment. He who steals from a temple or dumps garbage nearby will be transformed into a monster whose belly will be as wide as the kingdom of Siam; his mouth will be as narrow as the eye of a needle. Anyone who falls asleep in a pagoda will be turned into a toad; anyone who slumbers while a Talapoin preaches will be turned into a fat worm. After suffering these torments for several centuries, the souls of the reprobate will enter the body of an animal; when this animal dies, the soul will pass into the body of an animal of a different species, and successively up to the elephant and the monkey; finally the soul will become man a second time. We have a woman in Bang-Kok who says publicly, like Pythagoras, that she remembers undergoing three metamorphoses before being reborn into the human species.

It is from this false persuasion that animals are our brothers, that comes the prohibition to kill them. The devout Siamese buy fish while they are still alive and throw them into the river; they offer, as I said earlier, pigs and other animals to be fed in the pagodas until they die a natural death. So the Siamese spend money to keep an animal alive, they give it a hospice; and it has never occurred to them to found a hospital for the relief of their sick brothers: the beasts are their neighbors. Such is man when he is deprived of the light of true Religion!

To prove just how criminal it is to kill an animal, even inadvertently, their doctors tell the following story. Once upon a time, there was a recluse who was very devoted to the Talapoins; he gave them such abundant alms, that from the water alone, which he used to wash the rice he gave to the Talapoins, a river was formed, deep enough to receive ocean-going vessels. One day, while washing his beard, he inadvertently killed a small fish in the water; he thought he had nothing to fear from an involuntary accident, but he was mistaken: the unfortunate solitary died, and fell into hell. He was strangely surprised to see his hopes so cruelly frustrated: "What!" he said, "can we, without injustice, refuse a little rice to someone who, during his life, gave so much to the Talapoins? It's true," he was told, "that you've done a great many good deeds, but you've lost all the credit for them by inadvertently killing a small fish. Every hundred thousand years, two angels will come and lightly sweep the summit with a fine cloth. When this operation levels the mountain with the plain, you'll be out of here. Despite this formidable stop, the Siamese are no more reserved; they kill and eat animals like other nations. I was travelling with a Siamese who stubbornly maintained that men and animals were brothers: he had no difficulty, however, in slitting the throats of the hens that fell into his hands, without mercy. "Because," I said, "if it's true, according to your principles, that this hen is your sister, you're committing a horrible crime by slitting the

throat and eating one of your relatives!" "Well, well," he replied, "good faith excuses me, I'm exempt from crime until she shows me a certificate of kinship.

Although it is generally forbidden to kill animals, the Siamese do not have the same esteem and affection for all animals; they abhor dogs, I don't know why; it would be a disgrace to a Siamese to pet a dog; On the contrary, they love the cat because it strangles the rats that gnaw through the Talapoins' books; crows and vultures are ranked among the angels; the hare is considered to have a great deal of wit and cunning; it is credited with all the feats of skill that the ancients and moderns attribute to the fox. But nothing equals the veneration that the Siamese have for the white elephant: the king must have at least one, it's like a palladium to whose fate the life of the prince and the prosperity of the empire is attached; if the elephant dies, the king loses all the merit he had acquired by feeding it, and must even die in the course of the year following the elephant's death. This apprehension is the reason why extraordinary care is taken of his health. The white elephant has the title of Chauphaja: this title corresponds to the first-class grandee of the Spaniards; it ranks immediately after the princes of the blood. He would be severely punished if called by his own name; he lives in a kind of palace, with a large court, officers, guards and valets; he wears a kind of diadem on his head; his teeth are set with several gold rings; he is served in gold or vermeil crockery; he is fed sugar cane and other delicious fruits. When he goes to the bath, a large procession accompanies him; one of the guards taps in cadence on a copper basin, another spreads on his head the great red parasol, an honor reserved for great dignitaries; his officers cannot withdraw from his presence until they have saluted him deeply. When he is ill, one of the court physicians must treat him; the Talapoins come to visit him; they recite several prayers to obtain his cure; they sprinkle him with their lustrous water. Despite so many good offices, the white elephant is often ill-tempered, and more than once he would have killed all the Talapoins, if they had not taken care to keep at a distance that puts them out of reach of his lordship's teeth and trunk. The one we have at the moment is very unruly, and we had to cut his teeth. Every evening, there is a grand concert at the elephant's home: etiquette dictates that his excellence must only fall asleep to the sound of the instruments.

When the white elephant dies, the king and the court are in the greatest affliction: his body is given funeral honors worthy of the rank he occupied during his life. If he accepts them, it's an infallible sign that the giver has great merit; if he scorns them, it's proof that he's not pleasing to heaven. I dare not guarantee the certainty of this last fact. He who can take one of these animals is exempt, he and all his posterity, from all taxes and drudgery. It's hard to pinpoint the cause of such extravagant veneration for this animal. I believe I saw somewhere that the ancient kings of Siam claimed to be the sons of a white elephant; some Siamese, thinking differently, say that the soul of the deceased king enters the body of an elephant: this second opinion is not very opposed to the first; others confess that they know nothing about it.

The white monkey enjoys more or less the same privileges as the elephant: he is Phaja, he has a mouth in court, he has officers at his service; but he is obliged to give way to Phaja the elephant. The Siamese say that the monkey is a man who is not very handsome, to be sure; but who cares, he's no less our brother; if he doesn't speak, it's out of prudence, he's afraid that the king will make him work for him without giving him any wages. It seems, however, that he once spoke, since he was sent as generalissimo to fight, if I'm not mistaken, an army of giants. With one kick he split a mountain in two; it is said that he ended this war with honor; I don't know if it was his ancient bravery that earned him the kindness of the King of Siam.

The Siamese have more respect for white animals than for those of any other color; I've been told that when a Talapoin meets a white rooster, he greets it; but he doesn't pay the

same honor to a prince: I've never seen that. The Siamese are also forbidden to break an egg, on pain of damnation. They say that eggs are animated; if they want to eat them, they have someone else break them - it's usually the Malays and Chinese who do this for them. Trees and plants also have souls, according to the Siamese, which puts them in the cruel alternative of dying of hunger or being damned; they have a marked predilection for the poplar, which they place in front of their pagodas; those brought from Ceylon are held in higher esteem. When a Talapoin wants to cut down a tree, he sends one of his disciples to give the first axe blows, i.e. to kill it, and when the tree is killed, the Talapoins finish the operation themselves.

It is from this cult and consideration for animals and plants that the Siamese take their names: one is called dog, the other cat; we have the elephant prince, the tiger prince, the pomegranate lord; we have had the princess of the golden horse's foot and many other names that are worth little more.

In my digression on Siamese metempsychosis, I had lost sight of Phaja-Jom and his satellites. When a man is in agony, Jom-Phraban, emissary of hell, climbs onto the roof, to seize the soul as he passes; on the other hand, the three dogs that had belonged to a reprobate, come to rescue her; these dogs are called Phuto, Tamo, Sangko. If they don't think they're strong enough, they call for an angel; then a terrible struggle begins, and the fate of the soul depends on the outcome of the fight: the one who is victorious takes the soul with him. Some Siamese claim that it is Phra-Sian who takes this soul (and takes it around the world), then passes it over a bridge thrown over the abyss. If the soul shows fearlessness, its salvation is assured, and it ascends to heaven at once; on the contrary, if fear seizes it, it loses its balance and falls into hell. Not all Siamese accept this last circumstance; it seems they have borrowed this article of their belief from the Mohammedans.

Independently of the demons in hell, the Siamese recognize another kind of devil in the air, called Phi, who, they say, are the demons who do harm to men, sometimes appearing in horrible figures. They blame these evil spirits for all the calamities that befall the world. If a mother loses her child, it's Phi who has done it; if a sick person is in a desperate state, it's Phi who has caused it. To appease him, they invoke him and make offerings to him, which they hang in deserted places; they don't believe that these spirits are gods, but they say that they are very powerful and that it's good to be gentle with them; they often offer them cakes, coconuts, rice and betel; they are convinced that these airy gods come to breathe in their scent. I asked my guide what these baskets were: "It's a gift to Phi", he replied simply. The Siamese believe that contagious diseases, such as the plague and cholera morbus, are real beings, that they are demons; they conjure them up and chase them out of town; some chase them with a dagger in their hand; they call this killing the plague. Among the Siamese, there are a good number of men perverse enough to pray to demons to harm their enemies. Every kind of superstition is known in Siam; spells, enchantments, evil spells, philtres, evocations of the dead – in a word, all the awful secrets of black magic – are put to use when no other means can be found to achieve one's ends, and all this is done with the help of the demons they call Phi. These diabolical operations produce such extraordinary effects, that it is impossible to explain them naturally; the apparitions of the demon take place so frequently and in such a public manner, that it would be bad faith to persist in denying it; to do so would be to accuse of imposture MM. the apostolic vicars and MM. the missionaries who testify not only to having seen with their own eyes the effects of the operations of the demon, but also to having examined them with all the attention of which an educated and prudent man can be capable. From the fact that these wonders rarely occur in Europe, we must not conclude that the same must be true in Asia – Europe is an entirely Christian country, whereas most of Asia is still under the empire of the devil.

Be that as it may, there must always be proportion between cause and effect: a single sign of the cross, a few drops of holy water, the mere presence of a Christian who happens to

pass by, renders all the effects of the enchanter useless, and is enough to make all the spectres flee and all the science of the magicians null and void. Did God institute the sign of the cross to prevent a natural and necessary cause from producing the effect for which it was intended by the Creator? It is said that these are the secrets of physics, but can we believe in good faith that a Siamese is a more profound physicist than all the members of the European academies? But that's enough on this subject; I'm afraid I've said too much; you French have nothing to fear.

The Siamese are convinced that these demons are nothing other than the souls of those who have not been burned. They distinguish two kinds of Phi. The first, which they call Phi-Suk, i.e. cooked devils, are the souls of those whose bodies have been burned. These souls do no harm, and are not even on earth. The others, which they call Phi-Dep, i.e. raw devils, are the souls of those whose bodies have not been burned. The bodies which, according to their laws, may not be burned are those of pregnant women, those of people who have died a violent death, or a lightning stroke, or some other similar accident. All these bodies are deposited in a small open house they call Paxa. This is the place where sorcerers go to perform their diabolical operations. The Siamese have temples and idols (Christians call pagodas the temples and idols of pagans) which are, they say, the image of their gods. They think that once these statues are inaugurated in the temples, they become real divinities; they don't make sacrifices to them as such, they only make offerings of flowers and candles four times a month, on the 1st, 8th, 14th and 21st of the moon. Sometimes the people gather in the temple to play instruments. In times of great calamity, they carry in procession some of their most famous idols. When they need rain, they expose their pagodas to the sun. If the rain is too heavy, they uncover the temple roof. They imagine that the idol will restore serenity to the heavens. Many of these idols have no name other than that of the material of which they are composed. They will say that the god of gold, the god of glass etc. is in such and such a pagoda; wherever a statue comes from, it will be well received in Siam, and its apotheosis will soon be made. Europeans who come to these countries must avoid giving the Siamese any kind of figure, if they don't want to contribute to their superstitions. Not only do they never give the infidels any engravings, but they even courageously refuse the king's commission to buy statues for him when they go to Bengal; no matter how angry and threatening the prince gets, they remain firm in their refusal. This made the king say more than once that, of all his subjects, Christians were the only ones who could say no.

A few years ago, a glass statue was brought from the kingdom of Laos; this idol is highly regarded at court. Last year, another one was brought in, made of gold; this one is as highly regarded today as the glass one. It was thought that the glass god had become jealous of his rival. It was rightly feared that spite might lead him to take some desperate decision, and that he might even lead the Laotians, his former compatriots, in revolt. Our king, as a good politician, wanted to prevent this misfortune. So he put the poor god in chains and gave him guards.

Siamese temples are unremarkable: they are square, oblong buildings, quite low to the ground; their roofs form a very sharp angle, and are usually decorated with leaves or bizarre gold figures. The idols are placed at the back of the temple; they are seated on a sort of tier; in front of them is a support in the shape of an altar; they are gilded and adorned with a high, pointed cap. Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau is placed in the middle; he is usually of colossal stature. One of these idols is over forty feet tall, and has been depicted lying on the ground. All these statues have a hideous and sometimes horrible shape; some have the head of a bird or a snake; some have the shape of a man in the upper part of the body, and resemble an animal in the lower part.

In front of the larger pagodas, there is a small courtyard enclosed by a masonry wall. In the part of the wall facing the temple, brick columns terminating in a golden spire are built.

The highest columns are called Phra-Chaïdi. It was one of their gods who sacrificed his life to preserve that of his father. The lowest are pierced with several holes; they are called Phra-Chaïraï, and represent the four brothers of Phra-Chaïdi. They would not save their father, and as punishment for their inhumanity, they were transformed into furious gods after their death. In a fit of rage, they pierced their bodies with several holes, filled the holes with cotton, swallowed a large quantity of oil and burned themselves. Phra-Chaïdi means the kind-hearted god, and Phra-Chaïrai, the cruel god. When the Siamese want to build a pagoda, they place twelve main stones in the foundations, which they call the twelve marvelous sons. Opposite the pagoda, but at some distance from it, they erect a wooden column. On this column they display a flag; sometimes they place two statues armed and dressed in European style, as if to guard this flag. Finally, I'll end this boring article. Such is the blindness of a people who nevertheless have enough penetration and judgment; such is the man abandoned to the sole lights of his reason and enslaved to the empire of his passions; such would we be ourselves, if God had not enlightened our ancestors, and given them the graces necessary to embrace the truth once they had known it. When we hear the Siamese spout so many extravagances that they believe to be incontestable truths, we can't help but laugh with pity; but when we consider that their obstinacy in error must cause their eternal doom, we are forced to shed tears over their strange blindness. Pray to the Father of mercies to enlighten their minds and remove iniquity from their hearts, so that they may recognize and adore God their Creator and the one he sent, his Son, the Redeemer of the world.

In the midst of so much folly, it is easy to glimpse many of the dogmas of the Christian religion, such as the creation of the world, the creation of the first man and woman, the existence of angels and demons, the immortality of the soul, the flood, heaven, hell, the incarnation of the Word, his second advent, the virginity of his holy Mother, the signs and calamities that must precede his second advent, the end of the world, the resurrection, the judgment, eternal bliss.

They have many of the rites of the Roman Church. The Talapoin hierarchy is absolutely the same as that of the Catholic Church. The Siamese believe that their religion comes from the island of Ceylon; but none of those I interviewed could tell me when it began among them. Their religion is absolutely the same as that of the Burmese and Pegouans. It was originally the same as that of the Chinese monks who were followers of Fo. Even today, they have much in common. It is indisputable that all these peoples derived this system of religion from the ancient inhabitants of the peninsula beyond the Ganges; but did they all receive it immediately from the Indians, or did the Chinese or Burmese communicate it to the Siamese? I don't know. Tongking and Cochinchina were once provinces of China. It is probable that the same was true of Siam. The kings of Siam are still obliged to send an ambassador and gifts to the Chinese emperor every three years: if so, would they not have received their religion from their former masters? I leave it to others more learned than myself to decide a question which is of little interest.

The Portuguese were the first to preach the Gospel in Siam; this mission was some time later entrusted to French missionaries, and they have maintained it ever since. It was in Siam that our first Vicars Apostolic began to exercise their jurisdiction; it was in Siam that the first general seminary was founded for most of the Oriental missions below the Ganges. This seminary no longer exists; the wars of the Burmese and the distance of the area have prompted the Vicars Apostolic to establish special seminaries in their respective provinces. A few years ago, another one was founded at Pulo-Pinang (Prince of Wales Island), but it is staffed only by young Chinese ecclesiastics from the province of Su-Tchuen. They are obliged to travel more than eight hundred leagues by land or sea to reach their seminary, and as many to return to their country.

Although the mission of Siam has far fewer Christians than the flourishing missions of China, Tongking and Cochinchina, the holy ministry is not without success. Siam may not be a fertile land, but neither is it entirely barren; God has his chosen ones there as elsewhere. There are Christians of solid piety; I know of some who have generously confessed their faith in torment. Every year, a certain number of adults are baptized; some are even obliged to make rather painful sacrifices. The Bishop, who is in a better position to judge the dispositions of these people, claims that if there were a greater number of European priests in Siam, many infidels would convert. Indeed, the Christian community of Pinang, which is cared for by two French priests, is prospering and increasing significantly; a very large number of faithful, relative to the population, are asking to be educated.

It's true that many of these neophytes, such as the Chinese, return to their homeland; but who cares? They are no less children of the Church, even though they no longer belong to our mission. The Siamese are difficult to convert, but this difficulty should not discourage a missionary; there are many other nations to whom he can preach, such as the Chinese, the Cochinchinese, the Cambodians; for in the kingdom of Siam there are at least as many foreigners as native Siamese. There are many adults, especially among the Chinese, who ask for baptism at the point of death. There is no hospital in Bang-Kok; when a foreigner is ill, his only resource is the pagoda, where he finds shelter from the harsh air and a little rice, but that's it. The bishop has seen fit to build a large and comfortable house in the grounds of his seminary. He receives all the sick who present themselves there, without distinction; they are fed, cared for and instructed in the main articles of the Christian religion: almost all receive Baptism.

When the adults stubbornly refuse to listen to the missionary, his ministry is not unfruitful; he consoles himself by baptizing the children who are in danger of death, and there are no obstacles in the way; the relatives believe that he is administering a remedy that will restore them to health. It's remarkable that for nearly two centuries since Baptism has been administered in this country, there has been hardly a single infidel who suspects that his child is being baptized. Our Christians, who often baptize more than we do, are so discreet that I can't help admiring their profound silence. The princes and the people are persuaded that we practice medicine; they call it doing good works; as for us, we let them believe what they want. If it is never permitted to speak against the truth, there is not always an obligation to tell the whole truth. Almost all these children die after receiving Baptism; they are all predestined, praying for the conversion of their relatives and the prosperity of the mission. This ministry does not flatter the self-esteem, no doubt; but the effect is no less solid, and it is less dangerous; the shortage of Priests obliges the Bishop to employ simple faithful for this good work. Christian soldiers in Laos baptized a great many of them. We can easily see from this that the presence of a missionary is not entirely useless in Siam; native priests, either here or elsewhere, will never be able to replace European missionaries. Priests in the Indies are edifying, fairly learned and even zealous; but they lack the activity and talent needed to find resources on occasions when all seems hopeless, and the courage to push a perilous enterprise to the end. They can preserve and care for the Christians who already exist; but I don't think they would greatly increase the number of neophytes, if they were left to their own devices; they are gentle, quiet and know how to possess themselves; they do well when they have a European priest at their head; then they have courage and work successfully for the conversion of infidels. Perhaps they even do more good than the missionaries, because they know the language and customs of the country better; they know better how to insinuate themselves with the infidels; but, once again, they need a guide. Send us humble, obedient and zealous priests; it's not absolutely necessary for them to have great talents, as long as they are holy, that's enough. You don't need transcendent genius to argue with ignorant infidels who profess the most absurd and revolting errors. The sanctity of the missionary has

more force with them than a syllogism. However, we must expect many difficulties; it is the character of true Religion to always have enemies and contradicts. Jesus Christ promised his Apostles no other reward in this world than persecution and suffering.

The difficulties that now stand in the way of the spread of the Faith in these regions are the same as those encountered in the early centuries of the Church: superstition in some, indifference, passions, love of independence in others, fear in all. The prince fears his subjects, and the subjects fear incurring the prince's indignation if they embrace Christianity. Another temptation is polygamy and fear of Europeans. The colossal power of the English in India has inspired terror throughout the East. They have overthrown the Mogul empire, and the last successor of the Gengiskans and Tamerlans has become the pensioner of a merchant company: their flag flies over a coastline of more than sixteen hundred leagues. This formidable and ever-growing power has caused consternation in all the courts of Asia. The King of Siam fears that he will be overthrown from his throne on the very first day. When he sees a European, he always thinks it's an English emissary; he doesn't distinguish between priest and layman. My presence in Quéda caused a sensation; the king was informed by an extraordinary courier; and without the protection of the King of Ligor, who took it upon himself to remove all difficulties, I would have been obliged to take another route. The King of Cochinchina has closed all his ports to the English. The Emperor of China has expressly demanded that the English company take no European missionaries on board any of its vessels. An Asiatic prince will never be persuaded that a European is coming from the end of the world just to convert infidels, at the expense of his own life; they always suspect some hidden purpose; they fear it may be some spy sent into their states by the Europeans, to plot some conspiracy or map out places, towns, provinces, etc. A geographical map, a book written in an unknown language, a few lines drawn on a piece of paper, dropped by chance into the hands of a provincial governor, are enough to set a vast empire in motion and cause violent persecution. Many do not distinguish between Christians and English; others know different European states quite distinctly. I was astonished to hear Malays, Siamese and Chinese speak to me in some detail about France, the revolution, Bonaparte and certain aspects of his life; but they imagine that all Christians are in common cause; they even believe that when the English approach, all their Christian subjects will unite with them, so little do they know the principles of Christianity.

Grace is stronger than hell, and God is powerful enough to pull out of the darkness of infidelity those he has chosen from all eternity. In the Vicariate Apostolic of Siam, especially in Pinang, there are Christians from all parts of the globe. Respect, veneration and affection for the Priests; decency, modesty and recollection in the churches, are the main characteristics that distinguish the Christians of this country. Public services are held with an order and solemnity that caused me as much surprise as edification the first time I witnessed them. I would not have expected to see a bishop officiating in Siam with a pomp and circumstance that is not to be found in the cathedrals of France. The young ecclesiastics, and even the altar boys, perform the ceremonies with an exactitude and ensemble not often found elsewhere; it's true that this is due in part to their character. Almost all our Christians can read, and many know plainchant. The Chinese, on the other hand, have neither taste nor aptitude for singing.

More instructions, sermons and catechisms are given in Bang-Kok than in any church in France. Would you believe that stations are preached here during Lent, and that three sermons are given every week!

The priest has no difficulty approaching the sick, as he does in France; he doesn't need to be gentle to get them to confess: the patient and all his relatives warn him; they call the priest even before the danger is imminent. It never occurred to them that a minister of religion could make the illness worse.

The Christians of Bang-Kok have not yet forgotten their first fathers in the Faith, the Portuguese missionaries. They make it a point of honor to speak their language; they all take Portuguese names; many even want to be considered as sons of the ancient Portuguese established in the Indies. They imitate them in the architecture and decoration of their churches, in the order of their processions and in many other ways. They readily adopt European costume, but they're not choosy: one wears a round vest, the other an English habit; one appears in public dressed as a gamekeeper, the other as a gendarme with two enormous colonel's epaulets. Children can be seen wearing a large striped robe, or a kind of red pourpoint, like Henri IV, most often barefoot. They're the only ones who don't notice the bigotry; they're convinced that this is the real European costume.

Monseigneur is in residence at the seminary. I don't know what word to use to designate the place where His Grandeur lives; it's neither a palace nor a bourgeois house. Imagine a few planks laid on four joists, forming a long square covered with corn straw, and you'll have a pretty good idea of the place His Grace has chosen as his home. His wardrobe is not rich; it consists of two cassocks, one of which is purple, reserved for solemnities; the other is black, patched on one side and torn on the other; this is the one Monseigneur usually wears. He has a pair of shoes, but he only uses them to say Mass. The chapel matches the simplicity of the furnishings. A small silver chalice, copper ewers, a mitre presented to him by his Christians, a wooden crozier, a ring whose bezel contains a piece of glass as a precious stone: this is the chapel of the Vicar Apostolic of Siam. Monseigneur enjoys this state of poverty; his only concern is for his seminary and his poor. He was reduced to terrible hardship for several years; he received nothing from France. It's easy to imagine his distress in a country that offers no resources. Today, thanks to the charity of the fervent souls who make up the Association for the Propagation of the Faith, Monseigneur can hope to provide for the needs of his seminary. Moreover, if Monseigneur de Sozopolis is poor in precious furniture, he is rich in virtue. Above all, I admire his equality of soul, which nothing can disturb: such examples of gentleness and patience were much needed!... "

For the moment, we're enjoying a fair degree of tranquility, but we mustn't rely on it; it's a serene day on a stormy sea, which could be followed by a violent storm at any moment. The king we have never dares to demand anything of a Christian if it is forbidden by our holy religion. When he gives an order to Christians, he first asks them if they can do it without sin; he sees that his predecessors were so wrong to have persecuted Christianity, that he always fears to incur the same fate by imitating their conduct. He is especially severe on the sanctification of the holy day of Sunday. When he summons Christians on a feast day, all they have to do is tell him that they are busy exercising their religion on that day, and he immediately revokes his orders. How many Frenchmen would call this delicacy of conscience fanaticism or childishness unworthy of a king! but he will be their judge at the Last Judgment. "

I must not let you be unaware that the enemy has come to sow tares among the good grain; but fortunately this bad seed has not so far produced much fruit; I mean the Methodist missionaries that various Protestant societies have sent at great expense to the four parts of the world. They take the title of apostolic missionaries, even though God and His Apostles did not send them. They have published a journal of their missions, in which they put whatever they want. There are some who have dared to compare their work to that of the Apostles; however, if the success of their confreres is to be judged by the success of those I have seen, the fruit of their labors is no consolation. We have one in Pinang who spreads piastres far and wide; his wife seconds his efforts, using the same means; but they work in vain. Nobody, or almost nobody, wants to join them. When an infidel wants to be instructed in the Christian religion, he goes directly to the Catholic missionaries; he sees in the same place several societies opposed to each other, all claiming to be the true church of Jesus

Christ; and yet he always chooses the Catholic society, which promises him no temporal advantage. Where does this preference come from, which a Chinese, a Malay, a Cafre gives to Catholics over Anglicans, Armenians and Methodists? Is it not because the legitimate spouse of Jesus Christ, the true mother of the children of God, carries with her such obvious characteristics of legitimacy that it is easy, even for the most ignorant infidels, to distinguish her from all those who are mere husbands? The greatest danger does not come from English preachers - the crowd of Europeans with no morals, no religion and almost no moral principles, who flood the East Indies, are even more to be feared. But of all these travelers, the French are perhaps the most dangerous; their light, bantering tone; What do you expect these poor Indians to think, when a fool who prides himself on being a compatriot of the Vicar Apostolic and of the Missionaries, and on professing the same Religion, attacks the principles of that same Religion by his indiscreet speeches, his impious jokes, and dishonors it by his immoral conduct? What do you expect them to think when they see him attending no services, or coming only to cause scandal? The English, it's true, are no more edifying; but we have a ready answer: they're heretical Englishmen; that's enough to destroy any impression the bad example may have caused. But what can be said, what means is there to stop the scandal, when it's a Catholic Frenchman who's giving it? Monseigneur is also ill every time the arrival of a European is announced; but divine Providence fortunately does not allow these visits to be frequent; few French people come to Siam. How sad it is to be reduced to dreading the presence of a compatriot, whose sight should be so apt to produce the keenest feelings of joy and satisfaction in this foreign land, so far from the homeland!

I must now tell you about the manners and even the physical constitution of the Siamese; but as I have pointed out to you that Siam contains many foreigners, I thought you would not mind if I told you at the same time about the customs and prejudices of all these peoples, when they do not conform to those of the Siamese.

The Siamese are of mediocre size and fairly uniform, with almost none of the physical defects so common in Europe. Perhaps a single province of France contains more blind, lame, etc., than the whole kingdom of Siam. Their heads are square rather than round; their faces are flat and diamond-shaped; their cheeks are a little hollow, the cheekbone, lips and the part of the jaw that corresponds to them are a little prominent, their noses are crushed, their eyes are black and fairly well-slit, and their hair is very black, rough and bristly. Siamese men and women like to shave their heads, but more often than not, they simply cut their hair very short. They keep a tuft of hair in front, which they pull back a little and anoint with a kind of oil. Their complexion is copper-red for some, lemon-yellow for others. I saw Asians from all the kingdoms and almost all the provinces between the fifth and forty-first degrees of latitude (north), and the 91st and 118th degrees of longitude (east), meridian of Siam, that is, from Lygor to Chinese Tartary, and from the Ganges to the sea. It seemed to me that all these Asians had several features in common, either in body shape or color: each of these nations undoubtedly has its own characteristic features; indeed, one can easily distinguish a Cochinchinese from a Siamese, a Chinese and even a Tongkinese; but this difference is hardly more perceptible than that which exists in Europe between a Frenchman, a Spaniard and a German. The Malays are a people apart: they are blacker and have more pronounced features than the Siamese: there are some peoples who are very close to the equator, and who are nevertheless as white as those of the Europeans who have a very dark color; such are the inhabitants of the island of Nias, which is only at the second degree thirty minutes of latitude (north), and the 95 of longitude (east), of the meridian of Paris. They are a very gentle people, with simple and pure morals: all those who come to the places occupied by Europeans become Christians. In all the different peoples I have just mentioned, the complexion is uniform; one does not see on the same face, as in Europe, the shades of blond-

chestnut, white and incarnate. It's as if they were all wearing yellow paper masks. The eyes of the Chinese are smaller than those of the Siamese; their eyelids are slit diagonally and form an angle as they descend towards the nose; it looks as if they are continually dozing, but this is not the case, as they are the most astute and cunning people in the world: to deceive a Chinese, or not to be deceived if you have frequent dealings with them, is almost a prodigy (I'm talking about the pagan Chinese). All the nations that inhabit the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, Bengal and, in a word, all the inhabitants of Indostan are blacker, in equal latitudes, than those below the Ganges; but their features are similar to those of Europeans, and there are marked nuances in their faces; perhaps their bodies are drier and more slender than those of Europeans.

The Siamese costume is very simple; they go barefoot and bareheaded, and their only garment is a piece of painted cloth that they tie to their belt; they pull it up at the back, which gives the cloth the shape of underpants (I'll call it langouti): this is common to both men and women. People of mediocre status rarely use parasols; high-ranking people, on the contrary, always have one. The women of the market cover their heads with a hat, which is nothing more than a basket of reeds. When an inferior appears before his superior, he adds a silk belt to his costume; the color varies according to the dignity of the wearer: mandarins of the first class have a white belt. On the first day corresponding to the four phases of the moon, which can be considered Siamese Sunday, the entire court wears white langouti. The King is in no way distinguished from his subjects either by the form or the richness of his costume. Princes sometimes wear shoes that resemble sandals. When inferiors appear before a mandarin, or any other dignified person, they remove their shoes, if they have any, which is very rare; the same applies when they enter church. In Pulopinang, the Malays who have embraced the Christian religion scrupulously observe this custom. In Siam, little boys are in a state of complete nudity until the age of ten or twelve. Little girls are given langouti at the age of five or six; the infidels are so stupefied that they see neither the indecency nor the dangers of such an abominable custom. However indecent the costume of the Siamese, it is tolerable when compared with that of certain Indians on the other side of the Ganges, whose shameless impudence equals brutality. Christian women are more familiar with the rules of modesty so befitting their sex; they are always decently dressed when appearing in public. The Siamese don't use pocket handkerchiefs; they have a very simple way of cleaning their noses; they can't see without horror a European taking his handkerchief, using it and putting it back in his pocket; don't you think they're right?

The luxury of the Siamese is not in the richness of their clothes – they are almost completely naked – but in their jewels and gems of all kinds. Children are covered head to toe in gold and jewels. Asiatic pomp and the lack of care that some people take of their children are sometimes the cause of much misfortune, and it has happened that thieves, meeting these children in out-of-the-way places, have cut off their arms and even slit their throats to seize their jewels. There are Indians who wear rings up to their toes; there are women who wear gold pendants or brooches hanging from their noses; I think they come from Indostan.

The costume of the Chinese, Tongkinese and Cochinchinese is very decent: they all wear, men and women, wide pants with a jacket or shirt over them (Chinese and Cochinchinese women wear pants like men, but Tongkinese women do not, except for those married to mandarins (in which case they adopt the Cochinchinese costume); they wear a kind of skirt that goes down to their feet, but which they raise a little high when they work in the fields, or have to walk in the mud. Over this, they wear a dress, which they cross in front and fasten to the right side with two ribbons of the same fabric as the dress; this dress reaches below the knees. Their breasts are covered with a piece of silk cloth or fabric, which they tie with cords; when they dress in ceremonial garments, they put a second dress over theirs, often made of silk, with very wide sleeves, and which crosses in front like the dress

underneath. In Tongking, not all men wear pants; mandarins and soldiers do, because they wear the Cochinchinese habit; the rich, men of letters and a large number of those who lead a sedentary life commonly wear them; missionaries, local priests and all catechists and pupils of the House of God always wear them. Among the other inhabitants of Tongking, there are many who never wear them; others who wear them only very sparingly: the pants of the Tongkinese are shorter and wider than those of the Cochinchinese. All Tongkinese, whether they wear pants or not, have their loins girded with a belt, one end of which is passed between the two thighs; this belt is a piece of canvas dyed pale pink, six or eight inches wide, which runs two or three times around the body: in the hot summer months, some Tongkinese, when they are in their homes, or busy in the fields, keep no other garment than their belt; for some years now, this custom has been prohibited.). Honest people in China wear a long silk dress, topped with a kind of blue silk ratchet, usually lined; they have small white silk boots and cloth shoes open at the back; their soles are half leather and half cardboard or thread; some are richly embroidered. The Chinese have hair so long that it sometimes reaches down to the ground; they shave part of their heads, keeping only the hair in the middle, which they braid into a plait and let hang down the back; sometimes they gird their heads with it: the Cochinchinese do not braid their hair, but tie it on their heads. The Siamese, on the other hand, loathe beards and pull them out with tweezers. The costume of Chinese women differs from that of men only in that their dress is longer; they keep all their hair, which they tie in the Cochinchinese style. From the age of five or six, their toes, with the exception of the big toe, are twisted and turned under the soles of their feet. This barbaric custom began some time after our common era. It was introduced by Emperor Schou, of the 16th dynasty, to make women more sedentary; indeed, they walk with difficulty; it's as if they were in shackles, or walking on thorns. This practice is not generally adopted. Chinese ladies always carry a large fan; when they go out, which is very rare, they sit on a stall-like seat, covered at the front and carried by two men. In Macao they enjoy a little more freedom; in many places they smoke like their husbands; in this they are imitated by the Spanish ladies of Manila. In Macao, I saw Portuguese women smoking, but I don't know if this practice is general; Malay and Siamese women chew tobacco like sailors, but they mix various ingredients with it.

In Siam, and in all parts of Asia where Christianity has not been able to improve their lot, women are all, more or less, slaves to their husbands; the threat that God once made to their sex in the person of Eve is visibly confirmed. Among the great, women are locked up in the Harem, from which they almost never leave. When the Princes give an audience, they are placed at the back of the gallery, but in a lower place, or behind a straw cloth which allows them to see and hear everything without being seen by anyone. They never eat with their husbands; in their presence they make sure that they are not on a level with them. If a wife were to sit in a place where she was higher than her husband, or if she were to inadvertently hang a handkerchief or belt over her head, it would not take much more to upset the household and perhaps lead to an open break-up. The husband would regard this action as an insult to his person, and as incontrovertible proof that his wife wants to dominate the household. Asking a mandarin for news of his wife, greeting her, speaking to her, even in the presence of the husband, are all things that are forbidden in Siam and elsewhere; such behaviour would cause as much astonishment as scandal. An Asiatic will never be persuaded that a woman is important enough for a sensible man to concern himself with her affairs, or take an interest in her health: in one province of this kingdom, men would think themselves dishonoured if they passed through a place that had been soiled by the presence of a woman. One of our priests had been on a mission to these people and was sometimes told: "Don't go that way, the women go there. The men don't want them to enter the house through the same door as they do. By the same principle of fairness, they refuse them the entrance to heaven. They think it would be unworthy of a man to be in heaven with a woman. People of the lower

sex may leave their homes, but not to go for a walk; it is only to work in the country or to do some small business. While the husband usually plays, drinks, sleeps or works for the Prince, the wife provides for the whole family by her work and industry. Christians are the only ones who do not share these prejudices. They behave towards their wives in much the same way as Europeans. Polygamy is permitted to all men. The King gives the title of Queen to only one of his wives, to whom all the others are inferior in every way. She is called Ackhamaessi. Private individuals who have several wives also have the right to choose one who bears the title of Mia-jai, i.e., Great Wife; she has authority over all the others. When a Siamese wants to marry, he does not take a wife, he buys her: the price is not fixed; it depends on the wishes of the parents of the future wife. By virtue of this contract, the law grants the husband the right to beat her, send her away or sell her as a slave. He only has the right to kill her in one case. These rights are not reciprocal. For example, if a wife flees to her parents because of ill-treatment, the husband has the right to claim her as his own under a contract of sale; but wives who are pushed too far very often poison their husbands. Parents have the right to sell their children, and they often do so. Nothing is more common in Siam than to see children sold into slavery. The condition of these poor children is not very harsh, as the Siamese are naturally gentle. Their parents can buy them back by returning the money they received. This custom, inhumane though it is, is less barbaric than that of the Chinese who suffocate their own children. In the province of Fokien, the parents keep all the boys alive, but they hardly keep more than two girls. Any girls born after that are mercilessly put to death. It is the mothers themselves who become the executioners of their own children: when the wife has given birth, the husband comes in and asks if she has given birth to a boy; if, on receiving a negative answer, he leaves the room in a bad mood, the death warrant is pronounced against the innocent creature who has just been born. The unnatural mother immediately takes her daughter and suffocates her with her own hands! The government is far from cracking down on the guilty. It is a generally accepted maxim in China that nature grants parents the right to kill their children or bring them up as they wish. During a persecution of Christians, some of our books were seized. A commission of learned mandarins was appointed to examine them; all of them, with the exception of one, declared that these books contained nothing bad. The one who was of the opposite opinion maintained that this Religion was bad and the books pernicious, because, he said, one of these books relates that the God of the Christians severely punished a father who had unjustly killed his daughter (he had read the Life of Saint Barbara); which, he added, is obviously dangerous. Doesn't a father have the right to kill his daughter as he pleases? I don't think these horrors take place in every province of the empire. Perhaps we could even say that this execrable custom has diminished significantly in some places: since Christianity has appeared in China, the infidels are beginning to blush at their barbarity. It is to be hoped that as the number of Christians increases, infanticide will become an almost unknown crime in this unfortunate country.

It is said that the Siamese are less vicious than many other infidel peoples, but this does not mean that they have great moral virtues. Pride, insensitivity, cruelty even, fornication often pushed to the most shameful excesses, have always been and will always be the prerogative of infidels. All these Indians, so extolled no doubt because they were pagans, are nothing less than perfect men. It is impossible for them to be in good faith about some of the things they indulge in; their fate is no doubt to be pitied, and there is no sacrifice that a charitable Christian would not have to make to obtain their conversion. But after all, it's easy to see that their reprobation is their own work, and that divine justice only punishes their voluntary hardening; on the contrary, all those who are faithful to following their conscience are always those who become Christians. The Brames, the Samnias among the idolaters, the Santons and Dervishes among the Mohammedans, are distinguished from the common infidel only by a more arrogant pride and a deeper hypocrisy.

The Siamese are gentle, light, thoughtless, shy and cheerful; they like cheerful people. They don't like arguments, or anything that smacks of anger or impatience: I mean scientific arguments, because in other matters, they often push the argument to the point of a formal combat with several champions. They would be almost scandalized to see a priest continue Mass after having spoken zealously and vehemently in his sermon. They are lazy, amusement-loving, fickle; nothing fixes their attention and nothing distracts them; they are great seekers; everything pleases them, and they ask for everything, from the most precious objects to things of the least value. This fault is common to both the people and the great. A prince of the blood does not think it beneath his dignity to ask for tobacco, a pencil, a watch or a pig. The king is no more delicate than his subjects. It's true that they're not angry when you ask for something in return. Siamese politeness demands that we give each other gifts. During visits, the first things offered are tea and betel. When I left their homes, I was accompanied by several servants, some carrying rice, vegetables and fruit, others meat, fish and so on. They put all these different edibles in large bronze vases, which they take care to carry in such a way that everyone can see what they contain. In the midst of all these people, you look like a food supplier who has just been shopping. The Laotians make their presents in a very delicate and ingenious way. They stand in front of the person they wish to honor with their kindness and pay their compliments. In the course of their conversation, they deftly place the gift they wish to present before him, without his noticing, greet him again and retire; they say that one should not make a show of one's gifts.

The Siamese are generally generous givers. According to an ancient custom, the king must give public alms several times a year. On these occasions, rice, linen and money are given to the poor in his name. It is said that the current king distributes a certain quantity of food to Bangkok's beggars every day.

The king and the people are very fond of games for pure amusement or exercise; they have other games that are less frequent, such as wrestling, pugilism, cockfighting, fighting with small fish or two snakes. They have a game they call Nang because of the leather used; this game is always very dangerous because of the swords, daggers and halberds with which the rope and jumper are bristling. It's a big magic lantern. They also have rope jumpers; but the game they enjoy most, and to which they run with a kind of fury, is the one they call lameng-lakhong: it's a kind of drama, part comedy, part pantomime. It is said to be the school of all vices. The talapoins, who are certainly not scrupulous, condemn this play, which they themselves attend, disguised under the guise of ordinary clothing; this is said without slander. I think you'll have enough charity not to believe that I'm an eyewitness to these latest events. It's not the attendees who pay the actors, it's the individual who has the games performed. When it's the king who has public games performed, his treasurer pays the expenses. He sets the player's salary according to the degree of pleasure the king appears to take in the performance.

Siam rarely sees fanatics mutilating or killing themselves in a criminal display of courage or piety towards their false gods. They leave these atrocious scenes to the people of Indostan; they are convinced that their lives are too precious to sacrifice so easily. About two years ago, however, an unfortunate man announced that he would burn himself publicly; he did indeed climb onto the pyre, but no sooner had he felt the heat of the flames than he threw himself into the river.

The Siamese are said to be witty and intelligent; but as the King takes into his service all those who succeed in any profession, their laziness and the state of servitude in which they live do not allow them to develop their talents and industry: it is the Chinese who do everything. They alone exercise the mechanical arts. Most Siamese do not have the means to obtain the workers they need. They have to do everything themselves: they are at once masons, carpenters, weavers, tailors, etc.; I leave you to judge the state of perfection of the

works that come out of their hands. They have the same kind of architecture as the Chinese. It's nothing but trinkets, pavilions, several roofs placed one on top of the other, columns and pyramids, some of which they cover with gold leaf. This architecture may have some charm, but one would be hard-pressed to find that character of nobility and grandeur found in European monuments. This luxury of architecture, however defective, is reserved for a few pagodas, and for public monuments, of which there are a very small number. Private individuals don't look that closely. They simply erect a few stakes on which they place a straw or reed hut, which looks rather like a bird's nest. Father, mother, grandparents, children and all their pets are crammed in. The richness of the furnishings matches the magnificence of the architecture: a mat to sit on (a mat is a fabric made of straw, or of that species of reed that resembles esparto), a board or railing to lie on, a stone to place the saucepan on, a few small vases, a net to suspend small children when they want to sleep – this is all that decorates the interior of these sad little dwellings. The most elegant or the least poor have wooden houses. The princes, though very rich, are hardly better housed. They sometimes hold court under a shed. The city of Bangkok and its suburbs are built in this style. It is cut in all directions by a large number of canals, on which sail a great many boats and gondolas. Those of the king and princes are decorated; those of private individuals and even of the great mandarins do not have to be: you can only go out and visit by boat. There are few horses and no palanquins. You'd think you were in Venice, if the costumes and language of the inhabitants, and the miserable shacks that line the shore, didn't soon alert you to the fact that you were in Siam. In Bangkok, we find what we frequently see in China. Chinese merchants, to save themselves greater expense, build their houses on the river. They form rafts from bamboo (bamboo is a large reed; there are several species: this tree is very useful to the Siamese, as it's good to eat), and moor them on both sides to joists planted along the current. They build their houses and stores on these rafts; as the ropes holding the rafts to the joists are sunk, the house rises or falls with the tide. If necessary, the store and merchandise can be moved to another location in an instant. The anchor is weighed, and with the help of the oars, the house and its inhabitants travel at little cost. Bangkok has ramparts, but they are weak and exposed on all sides. A few years ago, a few brick walls fitted with cannons were built at the entrance to the port. The Siamese call them forts. I don't know what Vauban would have called them.

While I'm on the subject of Bangkok's ramparts, I'd like to tell you about a fact that proves how a false religion can sometimes turn a naturally gentle and humane people into a ferocious people. When a new gate is built on the city walls, or when an existing one is repaired, it is stipulated by some superstitious article that three innocent men must be sacrificed. Here's how this barbaric execution is carried out. The king, after secretly holding his council, sends one of his officers near the gate he wishes to repair. From time to time, this officer seems to want to call someone; he repeats several times the name to be given to the gate. On more than one occasion, passers-by turn their heads when they hear him shouting at them, and the officer, assisted by other men stationed nearby, immediately arrests three of those who have been watching. Their death was now irrevocably decided. No service, no promise, no sacrifice can deliver them. A pit is dug inside the door, and a huge beam is placed over it at a certain height; this beam is supported by two ropes and suspended horizontally in much the same way as the one used in wine presses. On the day set aside for this fatal and horrible sacrifice, the three unfortunates are given a splendid meal. They are then ceremoniously led to the fatal grave. The king and the entire court come to greet them. The king personally instructs them to guard the gate entrusted to them, and to come and give warning should enemies or rebels come to take the city. Immediately the ropes are cut, and the unfortunate victims of superstition are crushed by the heavy sledgehammer that falls on their heads. The Siamese believe that these unfortunate victims are transformed into the

genies they call Phi. Private individuals sometimes commit this horrible homicide on their slaves, to establish them as guardians, as they say, of the treasure they have buried. Not five years ago, this cannibalistic ceremony was repeated in Bangkok. Among the three unfortunate men arrested was the son of a wealthy Chinese merchant. The father offered a large sum of money to redeem his son. It was all in vain; the judgment was irrevocable. The devil has always wanted to be worshipped through human sacrifice. So the same man who dares not kill an insect, for fear of committing an irremissible crime, has no qualms whatsoever about slitting the throats of three of his fellow human beings. He thinks he's done something that will bring peace and prosperity to an entire empire! On this occasion, Divine Providence protected the Christians in a special way: it allowed one of the princes of the blood, who greatly favored the Christians, to be called to the council where this barbaric resolution was taken. The very next day, he had them secretly warned not to pass through the gate for any length of time, or at least not to look back, no matter what shouts or noise they heard, because their lives were at stake.

The most common occupation of Bangkok's inhabitants is fishing and sailing; but being often on the water, they are no better navigators. They have no notion of nautical science: if they don't have the wind behind them and the land beside them, they lose their heads. That's why it takes them years to make a two-month voyage; although they only set sail in the most favorable season, they're not always lucky: I frequently hear of shipwrecks. It's true that it's not entirely the fault of the sailors and the captain; the poor construction of the vessels has a lot to do with it. For the most part, they are nothing more than Chinese junks, which at the slightest headwind can no longer hold their course and go adrift. These junks are almost crescent-shaped, with only three single masts and no yards, straw or reed sails, rattan cables and wooden anchors. I didn't notice that they had any spare masts or sails. Recently, European-style vessels have begun to be built, but I'm afraid that the vice of maneuvering will not make navigation any safer. If the Siamese don't often consult the chart when they're at sea, we have to agree that they often consult the devil. They draw superstitious characters on the masts and rudders. When I was with them, I would express my displeasure; they would laugh, but they would not amend. The Chinese are perhaps even more superstitious on their ships: they always have an idol with them, worshipping it several times a day, consulting it, praying to it, asking it for good weather and a favorable wind. They can't eat without first offering her every dish. It's true that pilots sometimes take advantage of the superstition of their fellow pilots. When he wants to eat fresh meat, he tells the captain that the idol is asking for a duck or a chicken for dinner. The captain doesn't dare refuse when the idol demands something, for fear of its resentment: this is to the crew's advantage, for the idol doesn't eat, but is content with the smell of the meat. Nothing makes them tremble, and the idol is always their last resource. One of our confreres had thrown something into the water that was causing him embarrassment, and this was enough to set the whole vessel into turmoil. Many claimed that this action was a very bad omen, while others didn't know what to make of it. They went to ask the devil what he thought of the matter, but the good Lord allowed him to give an answer so ambiguous that no one could understand it: so the tumult gradually died down, and the missionary was out of danger. He ran the risk of being thrown into the sea if the demon had given an unfavorable response. In addition to the idol, they often have a large snake. They imagine that shipwreck is inevitable if the snake escapes. I'll take this opportunity to point out that several Asian peoples have a great veneration for the snake; it seems that the devil likes to be worshipped in the reptile he used to seduce the first woman.

In Siam, the sciences are no more flourishing than the arts. Siamese doctors can barely read and write. They have no idea of physics or astronomy, as you can see from the sample I gave you when I told you about their mythology and visible gods. They don't yet

know how to make an almanac. I've heard that they need help from the Chinese, who are hardly better astronomers. They have an easier way than us to discover the secrets of nature or to explain a phenomenon; they don't lose themselves in conjecture like our profound physicists; when some fact embarrasses them, they have their answer ready, pen-phra, pen-phi, they say, that is to say, it's a god, it's a demon. Do they see a barometer announcing a storm or a calm? Pen-phi, there's a devil in there! Mathematics is absolutely unknown to the Siamese. They do, however, have some knowledge of arithmetic; they express quantities using ten digits, as follows: nung, song, sain, si, hoc, hok, tchet, peet, kaou, soun. ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ ๖ ๗ ๘ ๙ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 The calculation of decimals is accepted by all the civilized peoples of Asia. The Siamese proceed in the same way as we do for multiplying units, up to ten million; they have no term in their language to express higher quantities, nor do they even suspect that one can be found. They have their own words for the numbers cent, mille, dix mille, cent mille, million, dix millions, 100, roi; 1,000, phan; 10,000, mun; x00, 000, sèen; 1,000,000, kot; 10,000,000, lan.

They are no more versed in geography than in other sciences, and take every city they hear about as a kingdom. It takes time to make them understand that you can be, for example, French and Narbonnais at the same time. I found some who seriously asked me if the Cafres were originally from France.

No Siamese, not even the Talapoins, are interested in literature or history. The only work of this kind is the Annals of the Kingdom. They are said to be accurate; they are in the custody of a mandarin who does not allow anyone to read them, especially when he is in a bad mood. According to an ancient custom, the king must have these annals read to him when he is free from any serious occupation. Almost all Siamese are interested in medicine, but almost no one studies this science; it is not necessary to take degrees at a faculty, nor to sit examinations; it is enough to be equipped with a few herbs and a few recipes. The first, and often the only, remedy that Siamese doctors order for their patients is a bath. Are you cold, are you hot, do you have a cold or a fever? They order baths in circumstances that would make a French doctor shudder, but experience proves them right. On the contrary, it has been shown that treatment according to the principles of European medicine is always dangerous and often causes death; I've seen it with my own eyes. The diet we impose on patients is no less extraordinary than the treatment. In France, the most severe diet is prescribed for major illnesses; here, the patient is made to eat, even if he is in agony: if he refuses to take food, he is forced to do so, and indeed this is what saves him. It has been proven that a patient who insists on taking only broth while suffering from a fever is unlikely to recover. In Europe, patients are given fresh fish, poultry, fresh eggs and well-cooked, liquid rice. In Siam, such foods would aggravate the illness; the patient is fed fresh pork, salted and sun-dried bran peas, barely swollen rice, and sometimes salted eggs; in India, chicken flesh is an unhealthy food, containing mercury. Siamese doctors rarely feel for the pulse: the opposite is true of Chinese doctors, who sometimes spend half an hour examining it. As for surgery, this is an art virtually unknown to our doctors. In these countries, the sick often make plaintive cries for the slightest infirmity; they say it relieves them.

The Siamese bathe frequently, even when they are well. Their way of bathing is very simple and much more beneficial than in Europe. Dressed, they go down into a pool of water or into the river, and throw a bucketful of water over their heads. They say it's the only way to get the body's inner heat out. They love fire no less than they love water. They light it everywhere, throwing small coals to one side and the other in their houses, which are all made of straw or wood; these imprudences often cause fires. Last year there were as many as eleven. Last December's fire consumed nearly fifteen hundred houses. When these calamities occur, the tumult and disorder are extreme. The crowds are immense, and all that can be heard from all sides is weeping and confused cries. Some flee with what they can save from

the flames; others rush to grab whatever they can. Some are crushed or suffocated under the debris of their burning homes. Many are trampled underfoot, and many perish as victims of their own recklessness and greed. In these sad conjunctures, everyone thinks only of himself, and the desire to save himself from peril means that he cares little for the misfortune of others. This thought stifles all other feelings, for it is not among infidels that one should look for acts of heroic devotion to one's fellow human beings. As common as they are among Christians, they are rare among pagans.

If the fire threatens to engulf the city in flames, the king, the princes and all the mandarins personally visit the site to give the appropriate orders. All the elephants are summoned; these animals, whose strength is prodigious, knock down all the houses that the flames have not yet reached, and throw the debris far and wide. In this way, they stop the fire by removing the material needed to sustain it. I'm sure you're aware that the houses of Christians are the only ones spared by fire. This particular protection of Providence in favor of Christians has been in place since time immemorial. The infidels agree; more than once, carried away by fury and driven by the effect of diabolical jealousy, they have tried to burn the Christian camps with their own hands; but they have never succeeded – they have been disconcerted, or the fire has made no progress.

Siamese etiquette and politeness differ greatly from ours. When the Siamese salute, they join their hands and hold them in front of their faces, and sometimes above their heads; they sit on the ground, or lie down, depending on whether the person they are addressing is more or less elevated in dignity. If they are obliged to change places, they walk deeply bowed, or they drag themselves on their knees and hands; if they are before a great prince, the king or the vangna, they are always prostrate on their elbows and knees: this posture is very uncomfortable when the audience is prolonged. Whatever situation they find themselves in, they always try to place themselves lower than their superiors. When speaking to an equal, they call him sir, than, and refer to themselves as kha, meaning servant. If they address a superior, they give him the title of monseigneur, chankha; but if the superior is very high in dignity, they call him khorap, i.e., deign to receive my homage; in this case they themselves take the humiliating denomination of dixan, which is a diminutive of dierexan, meaning animal. In audiences, when a Siamese speaks to his sovereign, he refers to him by the word thoun-xramong, i.e., placed on my head. If the subject speaks of himself, he designates himself by the word phom-cheveu, or Touli-phrabat, i.e., dust from his divine feet. When they speak of the king among themselves, they give him titles, many of which would certainly not please a French king. For example: khoun-loang, the nurturer of the talapoins; chauxivith, the master of life; chau-pheendin, the master of the earth; chau-muang, the master or proprietor of the kingdom, the city, etc. In the books, they call him phra-ong, i.e., divine person or god. To rule, in Siamese, is translated as savenirat, meaning to eat the people; it is also said saverinaja sombat, i.e., to enjoy or spend wealth. We don't say of such and such a mandarin that he is governor of such and such a city; we say: he eats such and such a city; and often we say more true than we think.

The Siamese always speak in the third person, either when talking to someone or about themselves. When they answer in the affirmative (they rarely say no), they simply repeat the honorific title of the person questioning them. For example: Did you do such and such a thing? -Monseigneur. They do have personal pronouns, but they rarely use them. Kou, which corresponds to the pronoun moi, I, denotes pride or anger in the person who uses it. Meung, meaning you, tu, is a very offensive term. Man, meaning him, is hardly more honest. The king, speaking of himself, calls himself kha, meaning your servant. He designates those to whom he speaks by the title with which they are decorated. Men and women are usually given the title of Nang, which corresponds to the French word madame. After the age of thirty, the title of old man, thachei, is commonly given to anyone who has no other.

Magistrates and all those who are constituted in dignity, place themselves in an elevated position away from their inferiors; they always have tiles to lean on; they sit, they lie down, as they please. The noblest posture is to put the right leg on the left knee and hold the foot with the hand. The king, when giving audience, is placed on a high golden dais; his seat is closed by mirrors, and those present are prostrate on a rich carpet that stretches the length and breadth of the hall. If gifts are offered to the king, they are spread out in front of the giver. The audience room is square and very spacious, painted red with a few gold designs; there are no seats, no furniture other than a few crystals and some rather beautiful chandeliers. It is said that a European ambassador, admitted to the king's audience, was greatly surprised when he was forbidden to stand; as he found no seat to sit on, he immediately took his decision as a man of resolution, and lay down full length in front of the king. The prince, in despair at seeing someone else take such a noble posture, had him presented with a seat as soon as possible.

The great ones ask foreigners whom they are visiting for the first time only three questions, and these are always unimportant and sometimes ridiculous. The Siamese of lesser status do not ask more witty questions; I have found some who, after asking me, as is customary, how old I was, overwhelmed me with impertinent questions, such as Are you God? Are you rich? How many times do you eat a day? Pray, preach to us in your language, etc.

The Cochinchinese salute by joining their hands with their fingertips; they bring them to their knees, bow, rise and bring their hands to their heads; they perform this ceremony standing up. The Chinese salute in much the same way in their ordinary salute; but in the grand salute they kneel one in front of the other and bow their heads to the ground several times. In front of the Emperor of China, you stand covered, but you can't look him in the face; when a mandarin speaks to him, he fixes his eyes on one of the buttons of his jacket. The imperial majesty does not allow the prince to address any of his subjects who are not constituted in dignity; when he wishes to speak to a private individual, he makes him give the button to place on his bonnet, and thereby elevates him to the dignity of mandarin. The emperor always has twenty-four mandarins in front of him; when the prince laughs, they laugh and finish at the same time as he does; if he's sad, all the faces are sad and serious; it's as if their faces are spring-loaded and the emperor has the secret of making them move at his will. To uncover yourself in front of a Chinese is to insult him. In Peking, priests are allowed to celebrate Mass with their heads covered by bonnets. I've seen Pekingese hear Mass on their knees, with their arms hanging down and their heads covered, even though the Blessed Sacrament was exposed; for them, this is the most modest and respectful posture. In Siam, when the king dismisses his officers, they must join hands and bow their heads to the ground three times. Among the Burmese, when the mandarins leave the audience, they join hands behind their backs until they are out of the room.

The Siamese take their meals at seven in the morning and around five or six in the evening. They have neither tables nor seats; the place setting is on a mat or carpet: before serving, the dishes are placed in large brass vases; these vases are round and covered with a cone-shaped lid. Meat is cut into small pieces and placed on porcelain plates, sometimes smaller than a saucer. They have no spoons, forks or knives; they only have a small mother-of-pearl spoon for scooping from dishes, and their fingers are sufficient for everything else; on more than one occasion, their fingernails are used as knives, toothpicks and earpicks. The Siamese love strongly spiced stews; fresh pork, fish, fruit, jams and pastries are the ordinary fare of the rich; the poor make do with a handful of bad rice and a little dry fish. They sometimes eat a kind of earth that they fry, which is a very unhealthy food. The Siamese drink water; they also drink a lot of tea. People of low status often overuse a liquor they call lau or arac; it is extracted from rice by distillation; it is a very dangerous liquor. The king and

princes abhor anyone who drinks arac. Any mandarin suspected of using it will be disgraced. It is a trait of Siamese politeness to take turns drinking the sauce in the common dish. The king is distinguished from his subjects only by the richness of his crockery; no one is allowed to enter the palace kitchens when the dishes are being prepared; an officer, who has the prince's confidence, has the dishes sealed and accompanies them to the dining room; the king alone breaks the seals; but before touching the dishes, he has all the food served to him tasted by an officer; only after having taken this precaution does he dare to eat. Mealtime is a sacred time for the Siamese. If a master needs his slave for an urgent matter while the latter is eating, he waits until he has finished, or calls someone else. The king himself respects this custom. I have not yet been able to get my clerk to interrupt his dinner; if he is at table when I need him to give the Sacraments to a dying man, I am obliged to take another, for he laconically replies: I'm eating. Although the Siamese are not fussy about their choice of food, they can still be considered delicate when compared to the Chinese and Cochinchinese; these peoples delight in a taste of dog, worms, rats, lizards, snakes and silkworms. Brooded eggs, when the chick is already formed, are a highly sought-after delicacy, served only on the tables of princes and mandarins. They also eat bird's nests. I wanted to add that the Cochinchinese eat with relish the vermin with which their hair is abundantly supplied, but I feared giving you nausea.

They are very fond of raw fish, when it is still alive. It is fashionable among them to fill their mouths when eating; instead of a spoon and fork, they use two small round sticks in the shape of a spindle. They make fun of Europeans for drinking milk and eating cheese, and for being completely baffled if they don't have their hands armed with knife, spoon and fork. I forgot to mention that the Chinese always offer the first morsel in their meals to the devil. For some years now, opium, which was unknown to Siam and all its neighboring nations, has become one of the biggest commodities. Everyone takes this dangerous juice as a smoke as they do tobacco. I don't know if you could find a man in a mediocre condition in the ports who didn't use it; governments may prohibit it, but the force of habit outweighs the fear of punishment; we see the unfortunate effects of opium every day, and yet people would rather kill themselves than go without. So far, I have not heard that Christians have contracted this unfortunate habit; but it is very widespread among infidels, and this is a new difficulty standing in the way of their conversion. No missionary gives Baptism to a catechumen unless he has first renounced the use of opium. There are many who generously make this sacrifice, however painful it may be. It is the Europeans who have spread the use of opium throughout Upper Asia; they sell to these unfortunate Indians, at the weight of gold, the poison that should give them death, and makes them commit many crimes to obtain it.

To have merit with the Siamese is to have a big belly and eat excessively. If a man of this caliber passes in the street, the good Siamese can be heard exclaiming with admiration: "Oh, what merit this man has!" The present king didn't think it necessary to give more convincing proof of the queen mother's merit, than by reporting the amount of fruit the princess ate for dinner. The people of Siam share their prejudice on this point; they extend this prejudice to their judgement of other objects. So when they hear you say that such and such a painting, such and such a statue, smells of masterpieces, they say to you good-naturedly: "Are they really that big? If, in addition to all the advantages we've just mentioned, a man has a square waist, a broad, flat face, almost no nose, small, slanted eyes, black teeth, three-inch-long fingernails and a long braid of hair, then in the eyes of the Chinese, such a person is the epitome of perfection, the ideal of beauty, beauty par excellence. If a Chinese man of this build appears in front of his compatriots, holding a fan in one hand and a long red pipe in the other, all those present rush to give him marks of respect and veneration: We said to each other, "How blessed this man must be! Look at those beautiful black fingernails! Admire his big belly!" You may think it's a joke, but it's

absolutely true. A Chinese Christian assured me that one of his compatriots owed his fortune to the length of his fingernails. The Burmese tattoo their bodies; they say that this beautiful design gives a man a martial air.

If you find so many customs and prejudices opposed to your own shocking, you should know that there are many things about Europeans that Asians don't like. For example, they despise Europeans because they have big noses, blond hair, white teeth, ruddy cheeks and, for the most part, big blue eyes. They express their contempt quite openly. They find it peculiar that Europeans trim their fingernails; but the item of blue eyes is what pains them most. They abhor all animals with blue eyes. Some time ago, a thief took a horse away from a Christian; but he gave it back to him the next morning, because he noticed that the horse's eyes were a little like those of a European, which was the reason he gave. Although it was eleven o'clock at night when I arrived in Bangkok, the seminary students who came to visit me soon realized that I had blue eyes; this did not please them; they went to join their fellow students and told them this unpleasant news. The way we dress, the way we sit, the way we eat, the way Europeans walk, all make them laugh at our expense. It often happened to me, when I was out walking, that a large number of men came running up to me and looked at what I was doing with surprise. On one occasion, one of them asked my companion: "What's this Christian doing going to the same place over and over again?" But they can't contain their indignation when they see the European ladies sitting at table, leaving their homes, going for walks, riding horses. What! they say, is it possible for a civilized nation to tolerate such abuses? Is it conceivable that a man should have so little self-respect as to allow his wife to eat with him? The Chinese cry out even louder against this practice.

When a Siamese man dies, his parents place his body in a well-covered coffin; they don't let him pass through the door, they lower him into the street through an opening in the wall. They take it around the house three times, running as fast as they can. They believe that if they don't take this precaution, the dead man will remember the way he came, and come back during the night to play some evil trick on his family. On arrival at the pyre, the relatives uncover the coffin and hand the body over to the person responsible for burning it, in exchange for a coin which is placed in the deceased's mouth. The sampareu, as he is called, washes his face with coconut water. If the deceased ordered before his death that he should be eaten by vultures and crows, the sampareu skins him and feeds the flesh to the birds of prey, who make sure to attend the ceremony early; this is what led the Siamese to rank these birds among the angels. After this horrible and disgusting operation, the emaciated skeleton is thrown into the flames; sometimes, the nerves being contracted by the activity of the fire, the corpse straightens up or jumps out of the pyre; No matter how hard the sampareu tries to hold him back with his iron forks, he often escapes; the sight of the corpse's convulsions is truly horrifying: the mouth contorts horribly, the eyes pop out of their sockets, the fat flows abundantly and causes an unbearable stench. For his part, the sampafeu somehow operates on this livid skeleton – it's like watching a scene from hell. Relatives attend the ceremony in mourning attire. In great mourning, the Siamese are dressed in white and have their heads shaved.

As soon as the King of Siam dies, his face is covered with a golden mask, and several thousand talapoins come in succession to pray beside the body. Some time before the day fixed for the funeral, the new king holds public games and gives money to the poor for the repose of the deceased's soul. Instead of making this distribution individually, bills payable on sight are thrown, or several silver coins are placed in fruit and thrown into the crowd, causing a large number of attendees to be trampled underfoot. The body of the deceased king is placed on a magnificent parade bed. The bed is placed on a gilded hearse: all around are the guards; some carry figures of elephants and tigers, others figures of giants. The chief of the talapoins rightfully performs the ceremony; he is mounted on a chariot, also

gilded, and precedes that of the king. Both chariots are pulled by men. A prince of the royal family leads the mourning; he carries a large vase filled with rice, which he throws to and fro as he goes. The king, the princes and all the mandarins form the convoy. The women of the palace, several thousand in number, follow the mourners; they try, as best they can, to express a pain they do not feel; they shed tears, cry and sob. To this end, before leaving the palace, they use a violent remedy that forces them to shed tears. Nothing is missing from the scene, except the reality of the feeling. They recount, in the most elegant and refined terms, the fine deeds of the prince they have just lost; they recall the memory of his justice, his gentleness, his administration and all his qualities; they spread commonplaces about the prosperity of his reign and the rest. Although the manner in which these ladies deliver the prince's funeral oration is hardly conducive to tears, the good Siamese, who consider substance more than form, are moved to tears and weep heartily. The women's voices and cries are heard, but not seen; they are in a galley covered with a tapestry hanging. The new king sets fire to the pyre. No ordinary fire is used for this ceremony, but the fire kindled by a thunderbolt, which is carefully preserved. If the flame rises straight up, the king is in heaven; if it flickers, it's a very bad sign; care is taken to choose a day when there's no wind. The amphitheater where the bodies of princes are burned is made up of several columns and pavilions placed one on top of the other, decreasing in size. The bones that have not been completely consumed by the fire are collected and ground to powder; they are used to make a kind of paste and to form small statues. These statues are placed in a special temple. The king visits them often and honors them as gods. Private individuals are also free to make statues from the bones of their relatives, but they may not place them in temples.

On the death of the king, all subjects, male and female, must shave their heads and mourn; on the death of the queen, only the women and officers of her household mourn. The Chinese funeral ceremony differs greatly from that of the Siamese. As soon as a Chinese man dies, his son must buy the water he needs to wash his face from the devil; but the devil is so foolish that he mistakes pieces of paper covered with copper foil for good gold. The soul tablet is then made, i.e. a board is written: "Here resides the soul of such-and-such", and it is believed that the soul is sitting on these characters. This is the order observed at funerals. A monk leads the way, banging two basins together while reciting a few prayers, so that no evil genie will stop the dead man on his way. Another buys the demon the right of way, but always pays in paper money. The bonze is followed by four men in ceremonial garb, who carry the soul or tablet of the deceased on a stretcher. The soul rests on a handsome pavilion supported by four columns. Two magnificently dressed children are placed beside it. The dead man comes next, and is placed in a rich coffin. Behind the corpse stands a bonze wearing a red scarf. Relatives and the rest of the convoy follow. Care should be taken to carry the coffin in such a way that the feet of the deceased are always in front; without this precaution, the dead man could easily observe the house from which he left, which must be carefully avoided, lest he return the following night to strangle one of his relatives. If the convoy encounters a bridge on its way, care must be taken not to cross it without first asking permission from the evil genie who presides over it; to do so would compromise the dead man with this spirit, who could cause him more than one bad incident in the next world. To prevent this misfortune, the relatives tell him frankly the reason for the journey; they ask him for mercy for their importunity, and give him a few paper candles as payment; in return for this small tribute, the dead man continues on his way in complete safety.

Chinese tombs are oven-shaped, and the door is closed with a large stone on which is written the name of the deceased. There is usually a small paved enclosure in front of the tomb. Two or three days after burial, relatives come to visit the place where the body has been laid to rest. This is called perfecting the sepulchre. On certain days of the moon, they

light small candles in front of the tomb door. I witnessed this superstitious ceremony in Macau.

On its return, the convoy brings back the soul tablet. It is placed in a sort of chapel known as the ancestors' room. Three cups of tea are given to the ancestors every day; they are visited and greeted on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month, on the anniversary of their birth and death, and whenever a matter of great consequence is to be undertaken; on all these different occasions, small candles are lit in front of the tablets. Twice a year, a large meal is given to all dead relatives, but it's the living who eat the food, the dead content themselves with the smell; at the end of the ceremony, they chase them away and send them back to the other world; this feast lasts several days. If a young man dies before having contracted marriage with the person of the sex he has betrothed, the latter may, if he wishes, marry the tablet of the deceased; the ceremony is the same as in a real marriage. Often parents, fearing that the soul of the deceased will be destitute in the other world, and exposed to hunger, take care to send him a hotel furnished with clothes, servants, money and especially pigs; besides, the expense is not ruinous, it's only paper, which is converted in the other world into gold, furniture, houses, horses, men, but it must first be reduced to ashes.

The emperors of the current dynasty begin work on their tombs as soon as they ascend the throne. They usually dig out a mountain and build a city and an underground palace, so that everything is ready when they move in after their death.

In Canton province, as soon as the parents have completed the funeral, they send for a magician to find out from him which day the deceased has chosen to suffocate one of his family members; the sorcerer designates the day of his choosing. The relatives, warned in good time, set up a table laden with delicate meats in a separate, well-sealed room. On the appointed day, the revenant invisibly enters the room prepared for him, and eats invisibly as well; after the meal, he reflects on the blackness of the deed he is about to commit; he thinks how ungrateful he would be to cause the death of people who have treated him so well; these reflections soothe him, he returns to the other world, and then his relatives have nothing more to fear. The Cochinchinese we have in Bangkok perform the same funeral ceremonies as the Chinese, except that they carry a small idol. When they arrive at the burial site, the relatives lie down on the ground and the dead man passes over their bodies.

The Siamese have two eras, one civil and the other in use only among the Talapoins; they are now in the twelfth century of their vulgar era, i.e. the year 1191. They have a period of twelve years, which they resume when it is over; they call this period rop, i.e., revolution. Each of these years bears the name of one of the twelve constellations of the zodiac: all of Chinese origin; here are their names and their order: the 1. is called the year of the rat; the 2.º, of the cow; the 3. º, the tiger; the 4.º, the hare; the 5.º, the large snake; the 6.º, the small snake; the 7.º, the horse; the 8.º, the goat; the 9.º, the monkey; the 10.º, the hen the 11.º, the dog; the 12.º, the pig. They have two years: one religious, which begins on the first day of the December moon, the other civil, which begins roughly on the first day of the April moon.

The year 1828 corresponds to the year of the pig. Their year is made up of twelve lunar months; the first two months have a specific name, the others are designated by the ordinal number according to their rank, i.e. the third, the fourth month; thus, if you ask a Siamese in which year, in which month he was born: I was born, he will reply, in the fifth moon of the year of the hen. I made such and such a journey in the fifth moon of the year of the horse, and so on. Every three years, the year has thirteen months; only then do they count twice the eighth month, which corresponds to our month of July. They have weeks like us: Sunday is the first day of their week; they call it the day of the sun, and Monday the day of the moon. The other days are named after certain stars that I suspect are planets; in this case, the days of their weeks would have the same names as those of the ancient Romans. The natural day is divided into eight equal portions of three hours each, which they call jams. The

jams of the artificial day are divided into three mongs or three of our hours; the hours of the night are called thoum; the mong and thoum contain three malicas, each malica comprises eight bats, ‘ the bat is divided into sixteen nathés, the nathé is the last division of time among the Siamese, our hour contains 384 of them.

All these periods and names seem ridiculous to us, but not to them. As the Siamese are very superstitious and very fond of judicial astrology, they say that these names help them to know which year, which month, which day of the moon or week is the right one to undertake a journey; they also help them to know when it would be dangerous to continue. They also claim to know the fate of a child born, for example, in the year of the tiger, and the inclinations of a child born in the year of the hare. Other omens are taken from animals and birds. Often an accident, which is nothing out of the ordinary, is enough to overturn all their ideas and make them change their minds.

I’ve already told you about a few Siamese festivals or ceremonies, but I haven’t mentioned them all: I’m going to give you a kind of calendar which will contain them all according to their rank and the relationship they have with the moon; for among the Siamese, as among other idolatrous nations, the moon is the main object and basis of their superstitious worship.

1.º The 1.º, 8.º, 15.º and 22.º days of the moon are holy days for the Siamese, they call them Lord’s days; fishing, hunting and all other works of this nature are strictly forbidden on these days. No meat or fish can be found in the bazaar; offenders are fined and caned on top of that. The whole court must eat white lobster on this day. There is, however, a place where meat can be sold, provided it is only for talapoins.

2.º On the 1st and 15th of the moon, preaching at court and wherever the talapoins are called; but these preachings are nothing less than edifying: the day before, all the talapoins shave their heads and eyebrows.

3.º The first three days of the April moon are solemn feast days for the faithful Siamese. On this day, Lucifer opens all the gates of the abyss; the souls of the dead who are trapped there come out and have a meal on earth with their families; they are treated splendidly. On one of these three days, one of the talapoins goes to the palace to preach before the king; at the end of the preaching an agreed signal is given, and immediately cannons are fired in all parts of the city, to drive the devil from the walls, or kill him if he dares to resist. From the very first day, a precarious king is appointed, with the title of phaja-pholla-thep; during these three days, he enjoys all the royal prerogatives (the real king remains locked up in his palace); he forms a guard of honor from all the convicts in the kingdom. A flag precedes him, and he marches to the sound of instruments. Everything he comes across in his path belongs to him; everything he finds in the bazaar or in stores that are not closed, is confiscated for his benefit. He also sells all vessels entering the port during these three days. On the first day, he goes to a field near a pagoda (an imitation of the ceremony that takes place in the emperor’s palace on that day). He makes a few furrows with a golden plough, then leans against a tree trunk, places his right foot on his left knee and stands on the other foot only. This is how he came to be known as the “hopping prince”. While the phaja is in this noble and convenient posture, one of his officers sows rice, beans and a type of pea. After this operation, three cows are let loose in the field just sown. The first grain eaten by one of these cows will be very expensive in the course of the year. The public is now sufficiently informed, and everyone takes their precautions.

4.º At the beginning of the July moon, the prince sends nymphaea flowers and small bundles of wood to the talapoins to clean their teeth and gums.

5.º July 15th, general ordination of the talapoins, beginning of their Lenten season. This is the time of year when the talapoins have the most freedom, indulge in the greatest excesses of eating and fall into all sorts of crimes.

6.º The 15th of the November moon, Easter for the Talapoins. They call it passa in their language. This festival lasts about six weeks. It is on this day that the king, accompanied by his entire court, visits the main pagodas with extraordinary magnificence, to greet the talapoins and give them new robes. The people celebrate the solemnity of this festival with all kinds of excesses. Unbridled licentiousness reigns everywhere.

The Siamese government is monarchical and feudal. In and around the capital, everything is done immediately in the name of the king; but in the outlying provinces, nothing is done except in the name of governors, whose dignity is hereditary in the family. In Siam, the crown is hereditary, but the eldest member of the royal family does not succeed by right; the king has the option of choosing his successor. Each of the prince's wives aspires to the honor of becoming queen mother. Intrigues are formed, and the various parties employ all sorts of means to bring to the throne the prince they favor. This happens mainly when the reigning king dies before having designated his successor. It does not seem, however, that these court intrigues ever produce open ruptures. If the empire does experience revolutions, the cause is almost always the discontent of the people, the revolt of governors, the ambition of private individuals and often foreign wars. I don't know what the situation of this kingdom was fifty years ago, but since that time, and especially since the disastrous death of the unfortunate Constantius, whose throat was so cruelly slit by those he had showered with benefits (Constantius was not an ambitious adventurer, as some French historians would have us believe); since that time, I say, it has been subject to many revolutions; in less than forty years we have seen three different dynasties. Only Christians have shown inviolable loyalty to their rightful sovereigns. Not a single one, in the midst of all the upheavals, has taken sides with the rebels; although persecuted by these same princes, they have always been their last resource.

When a prince is declared king, he must walk around the walls of the capital with all the pomp and circumstance of royal majesty. Carried on a stretcher in the shape of a daybed, he throws a large quantity of small silver coins into the crowd. I'll come back to this ceremony below. When the king comes out, which rarely happens, he is preceded by an officer who carries a rod in his hands; this officer is ordered to clear the crowd. Anyone who dares to approach the prince without permission is liable to death. One must stand at a very great distance and prostrate oneself face down; one must even take care not to choose a high place, as one would run the risk of life, even if one were lying face down. On one occasion, a sentry on the rampart had no time to dismount as the king passed, and was about to be put to death; but the prince, who is naturally kind, forgave him. In Siam, it would be very unwelcome to rush to meet the prince and cheer him on. The Siamese, who know court etiquette inside out, flee as soon as they hear the signal that the king is approaching. All Asian rulers, kings and subjects live in isolation from one another, fearing and shunning one another. The king of Siam does not allow his children, who have reached the age of thirteen or fourteen, to stay in the palace; he forms a house for them; when they come to audiences or attend certain ceremonies, they must always be in a separate place and at a great distance.

The palace that the prince occupies is made up of several individual buildings that have little more appearance than a bourgeois house; the architecture is very simple. The palace is enclosed by three walled enclosures. The outer enclosures and gates are manned. The inner enclosure is guarded by women, of whom there are around four thousand, forming an army corps with its own commander and officers; those with the rank of private soldier stand guard at the main gate, armed with a musket-like staff; these women are not counted among the king's wives, but receive their pay and their stage like soldiers in Europe. In the third enclosure, which is entrusted to the care of these women, we find a curious garden; it's a vast enclosure containing in miniature everything found in the universe. There are woods, mountains, cultivated fields, rivers, a sea with islands and reefs, warships, merchant ships of

every nation, boats, a town, villages, a bazaar, a market run by the palace ladies, a fortress with cannons, temples of every religion known to the Siamese, mannequins representing the different peoples of the earth with their particular shape and costume. Finally, all the rarest quadrupeds, birds, trees and plants that the king has been able to procure have been assembled here. The Siamese call this garden Suam-uthajam, meaning garden of delights, or earthly paradise; it is modelled on that of Peking. As these Asian palaces are home to people who have never seen the world and never will, we don't want to deprive them of the consolation of forming a slight idea of it. At night, this vast garden is lit by an infinite number of chandeliers. The ladies of the harem go down into the Suam-uthajam, and amuse themselves until the return of dawn, if they please. When there are repairs to be made, workmen are brought in by ticket. I have all these details from several of our Christians whom the king has called to work in this singular garden. When you pass the pavilion in front of the palace, all the rowers must sit down and everyone must lower their parasol; there are archers to make sure no one misses.

The King of Siam walks and eats only to the sound of instruments, i.e. cymbals, bassoons and tambourines are struck in his presence; a few other crude instruments are played at the same time; our musicians make hoarse, bizarre sounds, the least annoyance of which is monotony. The distinguishing marks of royal dignity are 1.º the manner of striking the basin, which they call chong-keck; 2.º the golden parasol; 3.º the gilded ivory chair with a balustrade on either side. The princes of the blood have only a silk parasol, they can choose between white and green or red; their chair resembles that of the king, except that it is smaller and less ornate. Grand dignitaries of the first order, known as chau-phaja, have a red parasol, but the fabric is not silk; their chair is plain and unsupported. The great dignitaries of the second order have a red parasol, but their chair is like a net. Ordinary mandarins have neither parasol nor chair. The king gives the princes a box containing five golden vases, the first for water, the second for arec, the third for betel, the fourth for lime, and the fifth for smoking tobacco. The governors-general receive this box, but the vases are made of vermeil; the dignitaries called phra have the box, but the vases are only made of silver; the lower mandarins do not usually receive these distinctive marks. A mandarin, or any other dignified person, never goes out without a procession; among his officers there is always one who carries his parasol, a second his betel box, a third his chiroute, a fourth a lighted wick, and sometimes a fifth who receives in a golden vase the residue from chewing phaja.

After the king, the vangna is the first person in the kingdom, commanding in chief all the armies when the king is absent; he has more power than the former constables of France: he has a palace and a court of his own; he even has the title of second king. The vauglang comes immediately after the vaugna. These two dignities are not hereditary. The chau-phaja also have a great deal of power; several have hereditary governments; they have the right to levy taxes in their respective provinces, without being obliged to account for them to the king; they are high justiciars; they are liable for certain charges; in the event of war, they must provide troops. They may be regarded as the great feudatories of the crown; they have under them inferior governors or rear-vassals. They can be dismissed, or even sentenced to death for the crime of felony.

I did not want to give you details of the ceremony that takes place when the King of Siam ascends the throne, before telling you about the great dignitaries and their distinctive marks. Here is a description of the ceremony. The entire path through which the king must pass is lined on both sides with an infinite number of small, very rich altars; they are loaded with vases of flowers, paintings and cassolettes in which perfumes are continually burned. Chinese mandarins are in charge of this service. The archers and their officers lead the way, all in their own uniforms; they carry only rods; their commander is carried on a stretcher; they are followed by four great mandarins: these are on horseback, dressed in long robes;

they wear a bow in saltire and have several small flags of different colors attached to their backs.

The army comes next; it marches in two ranks; the different regiments are distinguished by a particular uniform. They carry muskets and bayonets. The artillery is at the rear. The leaders are in the center; in the middle of the ranks, two Christian officers each carry a standard of inordinate size; they are on horseback and dressed in European style. On this occasion only, the generalissimo or meethop wears a turban I don't know how many aunts long; his head appears to be the size of a muid; this turban is white and edged with gold braid. The king comes immediately afterwards: from as far away as he can be seen, everyone bows down; all the musicians, placed next to the altars I mentioned, play their chords. The Siamese find this music admirable; I won't take the liberty of contradicting them, but I won't retract what I said earlier. The king is seated on a rather rich throne, which can be reached via several steps. The throne is set beneath a magnificent baldachin supported by four columns. One of his officers stands before him, holding a large fan in his hand, which he waves continuously. Two other mandarins, positioned on either side of the throne, carry the monarch's two large golden parasols. The prince's only costume is a lan-gout, a rich belt of gold cloth and a felt hat. The hat is black, with large folded-down brims, perhaps a yard in diameter, topped with a plume and adorned with gold braids and tassels. The king is the only one without a robe: all the people in the procession, whether princes, mandarins or soldiers, are decently covered from head to toe. On one side, the king carries a large scimitar, and on the other, a large gold vase filled with small silver coins, each worth seventy-five centimes: He holds a gold goblet in his hand, and uses it to draw this coin from the large vase, which he continually spreads among the people throughout the journey; a young prince, who immediately follows the king, does the same: as these vases are soon empty, men loaded with bags of money have been placed close to the prince to make up for them. This profusion, considerable as it is, is nothing compared to the quantity of bills thrown into the crowd; some represent the value of a horse, an elephant; others the value of a house, a ship, etc. Whoever finds one of these bills has only to present himself before the treasurer-general, and he instantly receives the value of the objects mentioned on the bill. Anyone who finds one of these tickets need only appear before the treasurer-general, and immediately receives the value of the objects mentioned on the ticket. Following the king come four princes on horseback, their heads covered with feathered hats. All the other princes of the royal family, numbering eighty, follow in cavalcade and close the march; they are all accompanied by the officers of their houses. One of these officers holds the horse's bridle, a second carries the scimitar, a third spreads the parasol over the prince's head, the others carry betel, arec, lime, tobacco, fire, etc., which the Siamese cannot do without for a single moment. Throughout the cavalcade, the vaugna remains at the palace gate, guarding it with a naked sword.

When a prince is elevated to the dignity of vaugna, he must leave the palace he has hitherto occupied, to take possession of the palace assigned to the person invested with this dignity; but when he goes to the city, he finds the gate closed; he is obliged to draw his scimitar and scale the ramparts. Only then can he and his retinue enter the palace intended for him.

The ceremonies I have just mentioned, however unusual they may be, are not superstitious; the same is not quite true of the ceremony performed for the king's children who have reached puberty.

When a prince of the royal family has reached the age of thirteen or fourteen, the king, as I said earlier, prepares a home for him and keeps him away from his person; but first, he must take a new langouti, and have his hair cut by a talapoin. For this purpose, the most qualified people from the four nations in Siam are brought to court; each must wear the costume peculiar to his country. A sort of mountain is formed, with a path leading to the

summit. Their tents are pitched at the highest point of this mountain; a little lower down, the figure of one or two elephants is placed to give water; this water falls into a basin at the very bottom of this artificial mountain. When everything is ready, the mandarins and soldiers take their places in two rows. In this order, the procession leaves the palace for a fairly long procession. The prince who is the object of the ceremony is seated on his chair and carried on the backs of his officers; on his head he wears a very high, but not pointed, cap; he has slippers on his feet; his arms are covered with gold bracelets; a sort of bell is waved in front of him, as if to signify that he is still a child. The princess who is to become his bride walks before him with clasped hands, holding a bundle of peacock feathers between her thumb and forefinger. When the procession enters the palace, the prince bows at the feet of his father the king; the king takes him by the hand and leads him to the temple where the ashes of their ancestors are deposited. The young prince salutes them, or rather worships them; this ceremony is repeated for three consecutive days: on the fourth day, the talapoin cuts his hair in the temple of the ancestors, and he is given a white langouti instead of the red one he wore in the ceremony; the same day, he goes to the dummy mountain, always accompanied by a large retinue, washes in the basin; once this is done, he climbs with three or four great lords to the top of the mountain and enters the pavilion. What he's doing there, no one knows except those accompanying him; it's thought to be another superstitious ceremony. This has much in common with the ceremonies used by the Romans, when their male children took on manly dress.

In Siam, court etiquette stipulates that the king must have a soothsayer close to his person; the prince consults him on the success of the war, the outcome of a battle and other cases that often throw the poor soothsayer into trouble; when the soothsayer is fairly accurate, the king pays him handsomely; if the prediction proves false, the prince has him caned and exposed in this state to a blazing sun, to teach him to be more circumspect in the future. Some time ago, this soothsayer, who sometimes predicts what he himself will do, announced that a Christian village would be burnt down on a certain day. Fortunately, the agent was arrested just as he was about to carry out his commission. He revealed the whole plot, and the soothsayer received a severe beating, but he nonetheless retained the king's trust. According to an ancient custom, the king of Siam has a treasury which he must not touch except in extraordinary cases; the successor always adds to what his predecessor has already amassed: the current king is said to be very rich. It seems that all Asian princes follow this practice. Every year, the Emperor of China melts down silver worth around thirty million francs. These ingots are given the shape of a large square brick. The prince has all this silver transported to Tartary, and thrown into a pond he has had dug near a river. Mandarins and a considerable body of troops guard this treasure. This is the destiny of the enormous sums that Europeans regularly send to Canton every year, in exchange for a few silks, porcelain far inferior to those from France, and tea. It seems to me that it would have been better if this money had remained forever buried in the bowels of the earth, at least it would have spared unfortunate slaves from hard labor.

In this country, the law of nations is not the same as in Europe: war is waged as the Assyrians once did. Cities are destroyed, the countryside devastated and the inhabitants taken captive. On the outskirts of Bangkok, we see villages made up of Burmese, Peguans, Laotians, Malays and others. These devastations are equally fatal to the victors and the vanquished. In the course of a single campaign last year, which lasted only six months, countless men died of hunger, fatigue, misery and disease.

The military profession is hereditary, and so is rank. No one here knows what it means to dismiss troops; you're a soldier until death. The Siamese have no costume, or to put it more accurately, the Siamese only have a uniform when they are under arms. The different regiments are distinguished by the color of their uniforms. The chiefs wear a small silk robe

embroidered with gold. The Christians are dressed in European style; they are all either engineering officers, medical officers or cannoneers. Some of them agree that, were it not for the special protection of Providence, they would have fallen victim to their ignorance several times over; and yet it is they who know the most. It is said that the Siamese are not lacking in courage, but they have no knowledge of the military art.

At the moment of departure, the army climbs into small boats and positions itself in the middle of the river. The talapoins, who are to be found everywhere, consult the omens, pray to the devil, make the general lift one foot, then the other; they make him do a thousand other antics of this kind. One of them climbs to a very high seat, from where he throws buckets of a kind of lustrous water over the whole army. The Christian soldiers stand aside, however, so as not to receive this infernal water upon themselves; the king finds nothing to say. A mannequin is erected to represent the prince or rebel to be fought: in the past, it was a criminal condemned to the ultimate torture; the present king, who is very human, has substituted a mannequin. The executioner unloads a great blow of the axe on the head; if it falls on the first blow, the omen is favourable; if it doesn't, it's a very bad omen. Once the ceremony is over, the general proudly draws his scimitar, and the army marches off to the sound of instruments of all kinds. Although the Siamese are great observers of omens on all occasions, they are even more so when at war: the flight of a bird or the cry of an animal is enough to make these brave soldiers tremble; they are more afraid of the gambols of a monkey that wanders into the middle of the ranks, than of the whole enemy army. These superstitious ideas often have very sad results. They believe, for example, that if a boat crosses the river just as the balloon (meaning a small boat) carrying the general is about to pass, the army is threatened with some great disaster. To avert this omen, they put to death all the unfortunates in the boat. To prevent such unfortunate accidents, the army is always preceded by public criers sent by the prince, who warn all the boats they find in the river to line up along the shore when the army approaches; but it is rare, despite these precautions, that some misfortune does not happen.

When the army leaves the river, the munitions of war are put on the elephants. The different battalions march under their flags, but with little order. These flags are red with a few designs of various colors. The flag of the naval army bears an elephant as its coat of arms; it is with the help of these flags that the general makes his orders known; the different ways in which they are waved announce to the army whether it should advance or consider retreating. The Siamese are said to fight in platoons. They hide behind trees and undergrowth to fire at the enemy with greater advantage. If they are very numerous, they form a crescent to envelop the enemy army. When elephants are well trained, they wreak more carnage than several soldiers put together. They fight with their tusks, their trunks, their feet and the enormous mass of their bodies. It is very difficult to wound them mortally with a firearm.

The Siamese have some fairly good laws, but others are far from perfect. Evil would nevertheless be tolerable, if these laws were observed; justice is very badly administered. When the parties appear before the judge to plead their case, he has both parties put in prison, so that the accuser can pay the costs, if the accused, although guilty, has no money to pay the costs. The judge has a talent for dragging out the case, in order to extort money from both sides. There's no way of complaining to the king, the magistrate is always right; he knows how to muddle the case so well that he is almost always absolved, and the unfortunate accuser is punished for telling the truth and seeking justice for an unjust vexation.

In this country, money is an infallible means of evading the law and getting out of trouble. Even a criminal can have his sentence reduced to almost nothing; all he has to do is promise money to the executioner. Custom, which has the force of law in the kingdom, allows creditors to demand thirty percent; but it is rare for them to be satisfied with such an enormous interest: if the borrower is poor and in urgent need of money, the lender demands

sixty and even one hundred and twenty percent; if, at the end of the term, the debtor cannot pay the debt, the creditor has the right to take him as his slave; failing that, he can take his wife and children. I must say, to the praise of the present king, that he lends money to his subjects, without demanding any usury; but the great phajas are not so delicate. a If a master hits his slave with the instrument with which he stirs the rice, or with the little spindles which the Chinese use as forks, the slave is free, and the master loses his money; but if he knocks him out with a stick, the slave cannot complain. This, it seems to me, is an extraordinary prejudice.

The law allows parents who have sold their daughter to her husband to keep her in their home as their servant for as long as the tree planted in front of their hut on the wedding day remains standing. The newlyweds are careful to choose an arequier, which rots easily. Custom sets this term at three years. Thus, by virtue of this singular contract, the wife becomes the husband's slave and the parents' servant. This abuse does not exist among Christians.

Asylum is granted in Siam. Our churches and their surrounding enclosures also enjoy the right of asylum. The king has never under any pretext interfered with this privilege. A criminal who flees to a pagoda cannot be forcibly removed. The king can only ask the talapoins to hand him over. If he takes the talapoin robe, it's rare that he won't be pardoned. This alone is enough to give you an idea of the sanctity of these monks. Since I've been here, I've often heard of some offence committed by these so-called Siamese gods. Not even a fortnight ago, one of these holy characters murdered a man who rebuked him for his bad behavior. He was not punished by death, although he was convicted. At the moment, sixty of them are legally accused of various crimes.

The penal code is not severe. The king finds it hard to sign a death sentence; he's always afraid of committing a sin. However, the question is asked. There are also a few horrendous tortures unknown to Europeans, reserved for serious criminals; but I doubt they will be used once in a century. A private individual condemned to the ultimate torture has his head cut off. Great lords are knocked unconscious, sewn into a sack and thrown into the river. This seems to me to be a sad privilege. After capital punishment, the greatest and most dishonorable punishment is to be condemned to feed elephants. The unfortunates to whom it is inflicted are obliged to go every day to collect a certain quantity of grass. When, despite their efforts and fatigue, they are unable to perform their task, they are beaten severely. They can't get replacements, they can't get help, and they can't buy the grass with their own money. They are branded on the forehead; their sentence lasts as long as their lives. As a rule, all criminals are branded in the face. Slaves brought from afar who are not to be redeemed have their master's name branded on their arms. All Chinese entering Siam must wear a certain ligature on their arm to prove that they have paid the king some sort of fee. A criminal sentenced to death is obliged to walk three times around the city walls, warning passers-by that he, N... convicted of such and such a crime, is condemned to the ultimate torture.

I believe I've fulfilled my commission, perhaps going beyond your wishes. You will find on a separate sheet of paper a note on the language of the country; it will give you an idea of the oriental languages, for they all have many affinities between them.

I commend to your fervent prayers and holy sacrifices the infidels, Christians and missionaries in the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam; but I especially commend to you the one who has the honor of being

Your most humble servant and most loyal friend, BRUGUIÈRE, miss. apost.