

Cady of Cleveland, and several of Mr. Gandhi's friends in Chicago and Washington, D. C., have contributed.

Sincerely Yours,

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### SIAM, ITS COURT AND RELIGION.

Mrs. Anna Harriette Leonowens, who served as governess at the royal court of Siam between 1862 and 1867, has published an extremely interesting book, which contains the gist of her experiences during that period. Her story is fascinating and instructive, as are all tales of travel which contain the genuine impression that foreign countries make on travellers; but the picture which she unfolds before our eyes is by no means a pleasant one. She describes the king, his prime minister, his wives and children, as semi-barbarous. She descants from time to time on the benighted condition of their religion, contrasting it with the blessings of Christianity. Nor can we help being struck with the truth of many of her sad observations, especially considering the degraded condition of the people. And yet, with all the drawbacks with which Siamese society, and especially the Siamese court under King Maha Mongkut, was afflicted, our authoress finds much to praise both in the country and in the character of the people. She met many whom she learned to love and admire, among these the crown prince and heir apparent to the throne; and it is noteworthy that the more our reading progresses, the more appreciative she becomes of both the country and its inhabitants. We have gained the impression that the sad pictures which she unfolds to our eyes, especially in the first chapters of the book, are to a great extent due to the utter ignorance of her surroundings and the forlorn condition in which she, a woman with a young child, was placed. It was a bold undertaking for a widow to venture into an unknown country, where the institutions, marriage relations, religion, language, social institutions, not to speak of the climate, civilisation, and political conditions, were so different from her own. Although in her own home barbarism was in 1862 not yet so entirely extinct as not to harbor polygamy and slavery, and although there is much in America as well as in England that is un-Christian, she says of Siam:

"I had never beheld misery till I found it here; I had never looked upon the sickening hideousness of slavery till I encountered its features here; nor, above all, had I comprehended the perfection of the life, light, blessedness and beauty, the all-sufficing fulness of the love of God as it is in Jesus, until I felt the contrast here,—pain, deformity, darkness, death, and eternal emptiness, a darkness to which there is neither beginning nor end, a living which is neither of this world nor of the next."

Her characterisation of Siam in Chapter XXVIII. reads as follows:

"With her despotic ruler, priest and king; her religion of contradictions, at once pure and corrupt, lovely and cruel, ennobling and debasing; her laws, wherein wisdom is so perversely blended with blindness, enlightenment with barbarism, strength with weakness, justice with oppression; her profound scrutiny into mystic forms of philosophy, her ancient culture of physics, borrowed from the

<sup>1</sup> *Siam and the Siamese. Six Years' Recollections of an English Governess at the Siamese Court.* By Anna Harriette Leonowens. Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co. 1897. Pages, x, 321.

primitive speculations of Brahminism;—Siam is, beyond a peradventure, one of the most remarkable and thought-compelling of the empires of the Orient; a fascinating and provoking enigma, alike to the theologian and the political economist. Like a troubled dream, delirious in contrast with the coherence and stability of Western life, the land and its people seem to be conjured out of a secret of darkness, a wonder to the senses and a mystery to the mind. And yet it is strangely beautiful reality, etc."

In describing the temples, she speaks of the idols and of the black darkness of idol-worshippers; yet she feels the spell of the religious art which surrounds the Buddhist places of worship. She describes the emerald idol as follows:

"The lofty throne, on which the priceless P'hra Kĕau (the Emerald Idol) blazed in its glory of gold and gems, shone resplendent in the forenoon light. Everything above, around it,—even the vases of flowers and the perfumed tapers on the floor,—was reflected as if by magic in its kaleidoscopic surface, now pensive, pale, and silvery as with moonlight, now flashing, fantastic, with the party-colored splendors of a thousand lamps.

"The ceiling was wholly covered with hieroglyphic devices,—luminous circles and triangles, globes, rings, stars, flowers, figures of animals, even parts of the human body,—mystic symbols, to be deciphered only by the initiated. Ah! could I but have read them as in a book, construing all their allegorical significance, how near might I not have come to the distracting secret of this people! Gazing upon them, my thought flew back a thousand years, and my feeble, foolish conjectures, like butterflies at sea, were lost in mists of old myth.

"Not that Buddhism has escaped the guessing and conceits of a multitude of writers, most trustworthy of whom are the early Christian Fathers, who, to the end that they might arouse the attention of the sleeping nations, yielded a reluctant, but impartial and graceful, tribute to the long-forgotten creeds of Chaldea, Phenicia, Assyria, and Egypt. Nevertheless, they would never have appealed to the doctrine of Buddha as being most like to Christianity in its rejection of the claims of race, had they not found in its simple ritual another and a stronger bond of brotherhood. Like Christianity, too, it was a religion catholic and apostolic, for the truth of which many faithful witnesses had laid down their lives. It was, besides, the creed of an ancient race; and the mystery that shrouded it had a charm to pique the vanity even of self-sufficient Greeks, and stir up curiosity even in Roman arrogance and indifference. The doctrines of Buddha were eminently fitted to elucidate the doctrines of Christ, and therefore worthy to engage the interest of Christian writers; accordingly, among the earliest of these mention is made of the Buddha or Phthah, though there were as yet few or none to appreciate all the religious significance of his teachings. Terebinthus declared there was 'nothing in the pagan world to be compared with his (Buddha's) *P'hra-ti-moksha*, or Code of Discipline, which in some respects resembled the rules that governed the lives of the monks of Christendom'; Marco Polo says of Buddha, 'Si fuisset Christianus, fuisset apud Deum maximus factus'; and later Malcolm, the devoted missionary, said of his doctrine, 'In almost every respect it seems to be the best religion which man has ever invented.' Mark the 'invented' of the wary Christian!"

In another place our authoress says:

"As often as my thought reverts to this inspiring shrine, reposing in its lonely loveliness amid the shadows and the silence of its consecrated groves, I cannot find it in my heart to condemn, however illusive the object, but rather I rejoice to admire and applaud, the bent of that devotion which could erect so proud and beauti-

ful a fane in the midst of moral surroundings so ignoble and unlovely,—a spiritual remembrance perhaps older and truer than paganism, ennobling the pagan mind with the idea of an architectural Sabbath, so to speak, such as a heathen may purely enjoy and a Christian may not wisely despise."

Pure Buddhism knows no idolatry, and Mrs. Leonowens herself in summing up the doctrines of Buddhism, mentions on page 203 that all idol-worship is condemned in Buddhist doctrine. She nevertheless speaks again and again of the idolatrous religion and her condemnation is to a certain extent justified. Her judgment of the situation is about the same as that of a Puritan of the old type would be should he visit Rome and speak of the Roman Catholic Christians as "idol-worshippers" pure and simple. For Buddhism and Romanism are very similar in their ceremonies. Here also it is noticeable that her harsh judgments of the religion of Buddha are found in the beginning of the book, while later on her views appear to be modified; and it will be interesting to read her description of "Buddhist doctrine, priests, and worship."

While attending to her lessons, Mrs. Leonowens incidentally gave her pupils some information about God, and she relates in this connexion the following incident:

"On translating the line, 'Whom He loveth he chasteneth,' she looked up in my face, and asked anxiously: 'Does thy God do that? Ah! lady, are *all* the gods angry and cruel? Has he no pity, even for those who love him? He must be like my father; *he* loves us, so he has to be *rye* (cruel), that we may fear evil and avoid it.'"

It is a fact that we, the white nations, meet all nations with a haughtiness calculated to impress them that we are a superior race. Haughtiness seems to us proper, although I should think the superior race need make no show of its superiority if it is genuine. However, when we observe haughtiness in others we are impressed with the barbarity of showing haughtiness. Mrs. Leonowens says:

"The characteristic traits of the Siamese Court are *hauteur*, insolent indifference, and ostentation, the natural features and expression of tyranny; and every artifice that power and opulence can devise is employed to inspire the minds of the common people with trembling awe and devout veneration for their sovereign master. Though the late Supreme King wisely reformed certain of the stunning customs of the court with more modest innovations, nevertheless he rarely went abroad without extravagant display, especially in his annual visitations to the temples. These were performed in a style studiously contrived to strike the beholder with astonishment and admiration."

As to the future of Siam, our authoress abstains from uttering an opinion; She says:

"What may be the ultimate fate of Siam under this accursed system, whether she will ever emancipate herself while the world lasts, there is no guessing. The happy examples free intercourse affords, the influence of European ideas, and the compulsion of public opinion, may yet work wonders."

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### INSTRUCTION IN GEOMETRY BY PAPER-FOLDING.

The devices in common use in the text-books for visualising instruction in elementary geometry are limited almost entirely to combinations of black lines on plane white paper. Other visual, palpable, and especially *motor* aids are resorted