



CREMATION OF THE QUEEN OF SIAM.

ON the 31st of May, 1880, the King of Siam with most of his harem, and accompanied by many of the princes and nobles, started for "Koh Bang Pra Inn," an island in the river, near the old city of Yuthia, where he had erected a splendid new country palace. There were in the company quite a fleet of boats and small steam launches. The queen, with her infant daughter and several of her female servants, occupied one of the royal barges, which was towed by a steam launch. This lady was half-sister to the king—the same father but different mothers—and whom he had taken as his chief wife, and elevated to the rank of queen. There are several more of his half-sisters in the palace in the capacity of inferior wives, and since the death of the late queen the king has elevated another of her sisters to the rank of queen.

When the royal company had proceeded part way on their journey, by some mismanagement the steam launch of one of the noblemen ran into the queen's barge and capsized it, and, although surrounded by boats and people, such was the consternation which seized upon all, that the queen with her child and one or two of her servants were drowned before the crowd recovered their senses sufficiently to act. When the news reached the king he was overwhelmed with grief and rage. As soon as the bodies were recovered the whole company returned to Bangkok—the nobleman was degraded, and is probably still in jail. The body of the queen was enclosed in a golden urn, and placed in one of the buildings near the palace, where it lay in state, await-

ing cremation. The body of the little princess was also put into a small urn, and placed by the side of the mother. All the paraphernalia of the queen were placed near the urn containing her remains; and all the toys and playthings of the little princess were placed near her urn. Cooked rice was brought in daily and placed before them, as if they were alive. Priests came every day and recited prayers, and the king visited the remains daily.

As soon as possible after the accident, orders were sent to the governors of the different provinces to provide timber and material for the erection of the "Pramane," or sacred building, in which the cremation was to take place. Large trees were felled and floated down the river, and others were brought up from the sea-coast. Men were drafted from all parts of the kingdom to work upon the building. The jewellers of the city were drafted to make jewellery to distribute as presents. Large timbers, perhaps fifty feet high, were firmly planted in the ground in the form of a cross, and terminating in a spire perhaps 150 feet high. The floor of the building was about ten feet from the ground, and there were four entrances. The whole framework was covered with wicker-work made of bamboo, and that again covered with a kind of brownish paper, which gave the structure a substantial appearance. Around the building were artificial mountains, made of the same flimsy material. Fountains were playing around, and the whole had the appearance of a structure which had been years in building, instead of a few weeks. A square was enclosed around the building by a wall or fence of the same material as the building itself. The space within this square was floored

with a kind of matting made of bamboo. On each side of this square were stands and buildings for priests, and theatres and other amusements. On the south side of the square was the king's pavilion.

All things being ready, and a propitious time set by the astrologers, on March 12th the remains of the queen and the little princess were taken in procession to a large temple near the palace, where they remained over night. On the 13th was a grand procession conveying the remains from the temple to the cremation building. The procession was a nondescript affair, very long, and, upon the whole, imposing. It is impossible to give any estimate of the number of people present on that occasion. All who could be spared from the homes in a city of at least five hundred thousand inhabitants were present. The governors of the fifty-six provinces were present with their suites. The governors of all the tributary states with their followers. As the grand procession came off on Sabbath none of the missionaries were present, but all the representatives of European powers were there.

On the 14th the relics of Buddha were conveyed from the palace to the Pramane, and on the 15th the urns containing the ashes of the king's ancestors. Wednesday, March 16th, was the day set apart for the cremation proper. The golden urn, sparkling with jewels and precious stones, was taken away, which left the remains in a simple copper urn. Green banana-stalks were placed round to keep the fire from igniting the building. Sticks of sandal-wood were placed under the urn, and at six p.m. the king struck the spark which consumed the remains. The fire on such occasions is struck with a kind of punch, which causes a sudden compression of air and produces fire. After the fire was lighted the relatives and friends of the deceased

all came forward, each in turn, with a stick of sandal-wood and several wax candles, and cast them into the flames. When the flame arose too high it was kept down with water. Mourning women were chanting dirges the while. On the day after the cremation the charred bones which remained were collected and placed in a small golden urn, to be kept in the palace, and the ashes were collected and scattered upon the river. Magnificent fireworks were kept up every night, and the whole ceremonies were kept up eight days.

One great feature of the affair was the distribution of presents. Vast quantities of presents were given to the priests, consisting of yellow cloths, boats, etc. Small silver coins, value from eight to fifteen cents, were placed in limes and thrown among the crowd, and for which there was a scramble. The king frequently threw them out with his own hand, and delegated others to scatter them in different parts of the crowd. Vast quantities of small coins were thus distributed. Lottery tickets were placed in a kind of nut and distributed. The articles distributed by lot consisted of almost every imaginable thing, from a diamond ring to a common waist-cloth. Good care was taken, however, that no valuable articles reached the common people. Neither did any of the foreigners receive anything of much value.

The whole affair from the beginning was a harvest for the priests. Leaving out of the question altogether the timber furnished by the governors of provinces and the conscript labour, the affair must have cost at least 150,000 dollars, and some estimate it much higher. It was a vast scheme of merit-making. Every article distributed made merit for the deceased and for the king. The building will be taken down, and the materials will never be used again for a similar occasion.