

Part 1. Correspondence

Introductory Note

In the present collection there are 48 letters. Thirty-two are to Henry Alabaster's cousin, Percy Criddle, 17 from Henry, four from Henry's wife, Palacia and eleven from business acquaintances. Fourteen were to Percy's mother, addressed as Auntie, eight from Palacia and three from Henry. Henry's aunt had cared for him and his two elder brothers ever since their parents had both died in 1840 when Chaloner was only 18 months old, Henry, four and Charles, seven. A final letter, from King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) to Palacia on the death of her husband is added at the end. Other correspondence already quoted by Adrian Alabaster in his *Quintet of Alabasters* (*loc. cit.*) is not included.

Editing of the letters has been minimal: the idiosyncratic use of dashes (in place of commas and full stops) by Palacia and others has often been retained. Insertions and interpolations are put within square brackets, with '?' if in doubt. Foreign words, titles and names of ships, etc. have been italicised. Transliteration of some of the Thai names has been difficult, especially as they are not spelt consistently, even by Thais themselves, but Air Chief Marshall Siddhi Savetsila, Henry's grandson has kindly explained their titles¹ and checked names that would otherwise have remained in doubt.

The chronological order in which the letters are listed here is tentative because some of the letters are undated or the dates not easy to read, although context and watermarks where available have been used as guides.

¹ Prior to 1940 there was a range of personal titles, some of which, emboldened in the lists below are used by Henry for the people he was dealing with in his letters,

Nobility of the Royal Family

1. H.R.H. Krom Phraya
2. H.R.H. Krom Phra
3. H.R.H. Krom Luang
4. H.R.H. Krom Khoon
5. **H.R.H. Krom Mūn**

Knighthood of commoners

6. Chao Phraya
7. Phraya
8. **Phra**
9. **Luang**
10. Khoon

Transcribed Letters

Henry was appointed as Interpreter to the British Embassy in China on 3 May 1856² and joined his brother in Hong Kong on 9 October, but then at the end of the following January he left for Bangkok arriving there on 16 March as a Student Interpreter, and within a few days had what was the first of many meetings with Rama IV, King Mongkut and members of the Royal court³.

1. 10 April 1857, from Henry Alabaster, aged 21, at H.B.M Consulate, Bangkok to Percy Criddle, aged 12.

‘My dear Percy,

At last, here I am settled in Bangkok, and have a little spare time to write to you. I hope you do not think me unkind for having failed to write to you on the voyage, which was owing to my having more as it were, to write, than I could get through in the time. It was not from forgetfulness, for I continually think about you and about what you are going to be. It is time you made up your mind on the subject, though not in a hurry. But when you have settled what to be, don't make the mistake some people do, who think that because they are to be a doctor, there is no need to work at mathematics; or because they wish to become [an] engineer, Latin and Greek are useless to them: depend upon it, the boy who does not, whilst at school, learn all he can, regrets it afterwards. But, especially, I hope you get on with your French & German; every gentleman ought to know French and

² Phraya Vana Phrukra Picham [Savetsila, son of Henry] (1950) *Biography of Mr. Henry Alabaster*. Typescript foolscap, 21 pp. + Appendices.

³ Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*

German in these days. In choosing a profession, I hope you will not think of gaining Government Employment. Such is only fit for people who already have a small income and want to add a little to it with moderate work, not for people who don't care for hard work but want good pay. I believe Civil Engineering and Architecture will always be good civil professions for good men, and [I] should not be sorry to learn you had determined on becoming an Engineer. A good Civil Engineer at the present time has a great choice of well-paid employment, from cold Canada to hot India. But enough of this for the present or you will think me a horrible bore.

You will have seen from my letters to your Mama what a pleasant passage out I had, what a lot of nice people there were on board and what fun we used to have with the concerts and dancing and theatricals.

One of the officers was a ventriloquist and would make people rush to the side to look after a man drowning and calling for help when after all, it was himself making the cries. At other times he made people fancy someone up aloft in the rigging was calling out their names, or he would set a bird singing in somebody's pocket or a baby squalling in the cabin, and, when it was examined into, no one was up aloft, and there was no singing bird to be found and no baby to be discovered anywhere.

For theatricals the Captain made a regular little theatre built on the deck with floodlights, and curtains and greenroom complete, and ladies used to help to dress those gentlemen who acted as ladies and really got them up splendidly, so that nobody knew who they were. I only acted twice, once as a lawyer when it took me two days to get the flour out of my hair, and the second time as a lady when they chopped off all my whiskers and moustache, which have not fully come back even now. By-the-bye how is your moustache growing? Do you still keep the manure on or do you prefer the watering system? –

I find many changes in Bangkok, everybody has taken to building nice houses on shore, and very few of the respectable Europeans now live in floating houses. My house is very incomplete at present and I am not yet living in it, so will describe it some other time. The Consul's house is an immense one – very large lofty rooms, with a passage running through the midst, 12 feet broad, and verandas, each 80 feet long and 12 feet broad running all round. Two floors just alike, and below, rooms for the public office.

[George] Knox⁴ has built a good sized cutter yacht, to go out to sea in when ever he can get a holiday; it was built entirely under his own directions, which shows that he must be a clever fellow, for all he has learnt about ship building is from books and observation; he has never been taught. She was launched a few days ago and unfortunately, like the *Great Eastern*, stuck on the slips, in forcing her off from which they knocked a hole in her, but she is now all right again and Knox hopes to finish and rig her in less than a fortnight.

I am principally busy about getting my house in order; Knox is living in it, but that does not prevent my having a bathroom built, and setting carpenters to work to make a back entrance from the kitchen, and to knock up cupboards and servant's rooms. I am also, as opportunities offer, getting a little furniture; such a splendid bookcase graces my room now [and a] beautiful carved desk, with glazed front and sides. My boy is so proud of my lamp and cruet stand, and finger glasses and dish covers, which he considers increase his own importance wonderfully. And talking about servants, I am obliged to keep such a lot; first there is a 'boy' who is head servant, butler, valet, upper housemaid and housekeeper. Then a small curiosity whoremama [= pimp?] begged me to take him at very low wages; he is a very sharp little fellow and, when older, will make a

⁴ George Knox was the newly appointed Interpreter at the new British Consulate, with nine years experience of Bangkok, training the King's brother's small army of 2000; soon he was Acting Consul. (see Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*).

sharp boy. Then [there are]: a swaggering Chinaman, my cook; a quiet gentlemanly Siamese, my teacher; [and] an old Chinaman who will grow vegetables when I want flowers, my gardener. Lastly, four ‘boatmen’, lazy vagabonds, all going to be sent off in a few days when some very superior men are coming; of these four, one is specially charged to take care of the boat, a second is Under Housemaid, and the other two have to make themselves generally useful,

I shall expect a letter in return for this, telling me all about Horton and Princes.

Yours affectionately,
He[nr]y Alabaster’

2. 17 October 1857, from Henry Alabaster, aged 22, at Bangkok, to Percy Criddle, aged 12.

‘Dear Percy,

Since I last wrote to you I have had, one way or another a great deal of fun – A fellow named Markham⁵ has been made first assistant at our Consulate and I have invited him to stay with me until our new houses are finished. He is a jolly fellow, up to all sorts of larks. The officers of the *Saracen* are also very jolly fellows and between us we have got on gloriously with tiffins⁶, dinners &c., &c., every day.

Markham and I went up the country for a few days, hoping to shoot some deer and wild boars, but we had no luck though we

⁵ Possibly ‘Johnny’ Markham, later Vice-Consul at Shanghai, who famously won £1,500 on an outside chance on his old circus horse (named Miss Mowbray) winning a race against two well known steeple chasers, and who bought and set up a farm known as ‘Markham’s Farm’; see *Sir Edmund Hornby, an Autobiography* (1929) London Constable & Co. Ltd. 396 pp. in which, incidentally, Sir Edmund also refers to his friendship with Henry’s brother, Chaloner Alabaster.

⁶ East Indian name for luncheon

worked hard all the time. One day we got lost in the jungle, a terrible place consisting of the thorny bamboo of which some of the thorns are as much as two inches long, and these trees are so close that it is with greatest difficulty a way can be forced through them; a gun is of no use as there is no room to use it.

On the outskirts of the jungle we found numerous snares for catching deer – nooses with a slipknot which, catching the foot of anything running past, were drawn tight by the animal's effort to escape.

The rice fields are now all under water: near Bangkok the water is generally about two feet deep; where we went the water was from 3 to 5 feet deep; while up at Yuthia⁷ (some 70 miles inland) it is 7 or 8 feet deep. Now, we should have thought that the water would have been deeper in the low lands near the sea than in the higher land a hundreds miles up the river, but we see the reverse is the case, and the Physical Geographers here are rather puzzled by it. The best explanation seems to be that the water comes down from the hills too fast for the river to carry it off, so it rises very high as the water will behind a sluice; lower down, the river grows deeper and wider and is sufficient to carry off nearly all. This explanation is simple enough to all conscience and yet people make all kinds of conjectures about it.

The rice always shows its green tops just above the water, growing just as fast as the water rises.

We have had two or three grand Siamese festivals lately – one of them, called *Lovka-toom* lasts for three nights, and the King gave a display of fireworks every night; the fireworks consist of rockets, Roman candles and fiery trees – none of them particularly well made.

The Royal visits to the temples are also grand affairs – the Royal Barges are magnificently gilt all over, the attendant barges, some hundred in number, each with about 50 paddlers, are also very

⁷ The ancient capital of Siam, on the Chao Phya River, also spelt 'Ayuthayer and Ajuthia on maps (Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication)

handsome. When the procession is in motion all the boats plying on the river run up between the houses and into the creeks, not daring to be on the water at the same time as the great Emperor.

Now young fellow, take care what you're about.

Yours affectionately

H[enr]y Alabaster'

3. 21 November 1857, from Henry Alabaster at the British Consulate, Bangkok, to Percy Criddle, aged 13.

'Dear Percy,

I see it is your [13th] birthday today, so must wish you many happy returns of it, and hope you may be able every birthday to look back on the past year and feel it has not gone by without making you wiser and more useful.

I shall take your advice about purchasing slaves – and leave them alone – for I find that any Englishman buying a slave is liable to transportation, a manner of seeing foreign lands which is not at all to my taste.

Although so late in the year, it is still very warm, the thermometer ranging from 72 to 77 [°F = 22-25°C] or even higher, yet the Siamese call this the cold season.

Our houses are not getting on very fast, for the contractor wants to get more money out of us and is delaying the work in hopes we shall give in to him.

I go out every afternoon for a pull on the river and my arms are getting strong as iron from the exercise, so I don't think you will be able to thrash me when I come back, as you have the impudence to threaten.

We had a great fire two nights ago; the royal timber stores, two prince's palaces, a college of priests and a prison were burnt. Many of the prisoners died in the flames – and several people were drowned in the confusion that resulted from it on the river, which was

lumbered up with floating houses, and crowded with boats of those interested and their observers.

It is not the custom to bury people in Siam – the bodies are embalmed and kept some time, then burnt with beautiful scented woods, spices &c. – and the ashes, I believe, collected in an urn. The other day I was present at a very grand burning.

I am going up country to visit a Siamese farm.

A happy New Year to you,

Yours affectionately,

H[enr]y Alabaster.’

[In May 1858 Henry was appointed 2nd Class Assistant and promoted to 1st Class in March 1859⁸].

4. 13 November 1859, from Henry Alabaster, aged 23, at Bangkok Consulate, to Percy Criddle, aged nearly 15.

‘My dear Percy,

This mail leaves a day sooner than was advertised – consequently I am disappointed of the pleasure of writing you a long letter as I had intended to do.

You will see from the letters to Auntie what we have been trying to do of late and what I hope to do one of these days. But I find nothing in the letters from home to tell me what you are going to do. You are, I am afraid, but a lazy fellow. However, no doubt you will mend when you grow a man, which will be very soon. What are you going to be? I think engineering a good profession, and my friend Tolurè might be some help to you. If you are to be an engineer, you ought to be able to be articled in about three years time;

⁸ see Phraya Vana Phrukra Picham (Savetsila), *loc. cit.*

so that you have time to pick up the education of a gentleman first. Why don't you learn to sketch? I do so often regret that I cannot⁹.

In a few days it will be your [15th] birthday, so be sure I drink your health over it. And this letter will come to you just about the New Year to bear my wishes that it may be one of many happy returns.

Yours affectionately
He[nr]y Alabaster'

5. 5 December 1859, Henry Alabaster, British Consulate, Bangkok, to Percy Criddle, aged 15.

'My dear Percy,

One would think you had forgotten how to write, for you have not even sent me a line to tell of the length of your moustache or the thickness of beard and whiskers. What do you do with yourself in your little country paradise? Is your whole time spent in digging potatoes, or are you much occupied in the evening helping the maids of the village to draw water? Do you ever go out anywhere? Do you ride or shoot, or learn farming, or read books? Are you still great on naval affairs? Write and tell me something or I shall think you have turned into nothing better than a lubberly country bumpkin.

I think I wrote to you that I had bought the hull of a yacht; I gave about £6 for it and have had it hauled up on land until I can afford to put her in order, which will cost me £40 or £50 more. She is a small schooner, 31 feet long, and used to be very fast; I shall be very glad when I can put her to rights, for then, every two or three

⁹ Evidently Henry overcame this deficiency, for he, like his wife, Palacia and his aunt, Mary Ann Rebecca Criddle, is listed as an artist in *Dictionnaire des Peintes, Sculteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs* by E. Bénézit. Libraire Grund, 1976; see also Letter No. 6, 13 December 1859 & Letter No. 14, 12 January 1877. Both Henry and Palacia exhibited at the Suffolk Street Galleries and at the Norwich Fine Art Association (see Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*)

weeks, I shall spend a day or two at sea in her, which will be excellent for my health.

My boat [sketch inserted], which I have rigged with a jib, spritsail and jigger [a small mast on the stern], does not sail well in light wind, but when there is a good breeze, she goes along splendidly, one gunwale just in the water, the little waves coming over and in, every now and then. And I sit astern, holding the sheet in my hand (the sheet, you know perhaps, is the rope with which the corner [clew] of the sail is made fast) and ready to let go just at the moment when otherwise the boat must go right over. Now, I should like to take you for a sail.

I go out shooting occasionally, but not with much success. I am but a poor shot and, moreover, to get snipe, the only game near Bangkok, one must wade in the paddy fields – 18 inches to 3 feet [45cm to 1m] of mud, slush and water – which is not to my taste.

Yours affectionately
He[nr]y Alabaster'

6. 13 December 1859, from Henry Alabaster at Bangkok, to Percy Criddle (only photocopy available).

'Dear Percy,

Here, I am perspiring though it's winter, and Siamese call it dreadfully cold, the thermometer standing at 74° [F = 23.3°C].

I've been for a ten days exercise up the river, living all the time in a boat and having to shoot jungle fowl, pigeons &c., &c., and catch fish for my own and my man's dinner – glorious fun! They told me it was no use fly-fishing in Siam, so I took the rod you gave me and tried what I could do. Nobody can say now that fish will not take the fly, ever, for I had capital sport. [Very?] fine sport also when float-fishing, astounding the Siamese very much by the fineness of my tackle. We have perch & jack [pike?], dace, roach and carp, all very like those in England, and all manner of others, which I have

never seen anything like [before?]. Other birds too of all sizes, some as big as myself, some beautiful for the colours, some famed for being good eating and some merely curious.

Up at “[Prophleure?]”, which I reached, there were beautiful roads and lots of ruins – I spent three days there shooting, sketching, riding and eating, enjoying myself immensely. For an account of all I saw and did, you must refer to the letter I have sent your Mama [which], I am afraid, you will not have patience to read.

We are today going to a grand audience at the Palace – where our new Consul, Sir Robert Schombergk [*sic*] will deliver the Queen’s letter to the King of Siam. I must see about getting ready for it, so, goodbye.

Yours affectionately
H[enr]y Alabaster.’

7. 27 March 1860, from Henry Alabaster, British Consulate, Bangkok, to Percy Criddle.

‘My dear Percy,

Last mail brought me your letter about working, shooting, wrestling and making love. Of the first you don’t say much, of the last, a good deal.

I hope you are not going to play *Don Juan* to all the pretty girls in Harlow [Place] – mind, I limit you to Ellen & Eliza W[?] or, on second thoughts, as I agree with you that they are not the perfection of fascination, I will consent to your trying your charms on any one other, but no more [than one]; you must leave some game for Chal¹⁰ when he returns, or he will never stay in Harlow.

I am a martyr to rheumatism, and its twinges are now bothering me, much to the detriment of this letter.

¹⁰ Probably Henry’s elder brother Charles.

If you want, study those things that are just at present so thoroughly the rage in England. If you have no heart for classics, and as little for mathematics, you should persuade your Mama to go and join [your cousin] Charlie [in New Zealand] – you will be able to buy no end of an Estate out in the Colonies and be quite a swell there.

We are just suffering under the hot season – my garden is being dried up and myself wilted. My boat after lightly distinguishing itself as a sailing craft has had to be taken out of the water for repairs. I nearly got upset once, but now know her thoroughly and am as safe as if she was a tub. Knox's yacht (cutter) is a beautiful thing.

The other day the King fed us at the Palace in honour of the Siamese New Year; of course the food was miserable. H[is] M[ajesty] was very gracious and absurd – some said 'screwed'.

Sir Robert [Schombergh, the Consul] is not back, and I hope he will delay as long as possible, for we get on much better without him.

We have a new second Assistant named Parker. He is deaf, stone blind of one eye, half blind of the other, and the day after his arrival, his left eye got inflammation and the poor fellow has been shut up in a dark room ever since.

Write again when your numerous avocations give you time and

Believe me as ever
Yours affectionately
He[nr]y Alabaster'

[From May 1860 until December 1861 Henry served as Acting Interpreter and as Interpreter to December 1871¹¹; he also served as Interpreter and acted as Consul in Knox's absence¹²]

¹¹ See (Savetsila), *loc. cit.*

¹² See Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*

8. 30 May 1860, from Henry Alabaster, aged 24 (on 22 May) at the British Consulate, Bangkok, to Percy Criddle.

‘My dear Percy,

I owe you a few lines, and they shall be about our popular Bangkok amusements – boating and billiards. Of the latter, all I can say is that I am a great muff at it and that it is a jolly game. One of the merchants with whom I am very intimate has put up a private table, and another proposes to follow his example, so that there will be a very good chance to practice.

Of boating, I have more to say. A year ago, only one boat here was fitted with sails, so I had mine rigged to race with it, but the man who rigged it knew little about boats; my antagonist sailed round and round me. Then I tried to cut out a suit of sails, but they were of such things that everybody laughed at them; the[y] bulged in and out, and in a few days stretched into such queer shapes that ‘twas hard to say what shape they were originally meant to be. So I cut out a new suit; this was much better than the last, but was still a regular shore rig, and, moreover, the boat was still dull. So I cut them up once more and at last the boat sailed well, so well that I determined to cut out one more suit, and now I have done that and had her half-decked, she looks like a regular little bay Yacht, and races beautifully. She was before rigged as a sloop, with a jigger (a little sail stuck out behind), then as a spritsail boat with two sprits (1) [refers to a sketch; see extract of letter in Fig. 1, below]¹³, and now has two fine long raking masts and full [gaff] rigging as a fore and aft schooner (2).

¹³ This is different from the sketch in Letter No. 5 in which there is a gaff, not a sprit for the rigger.

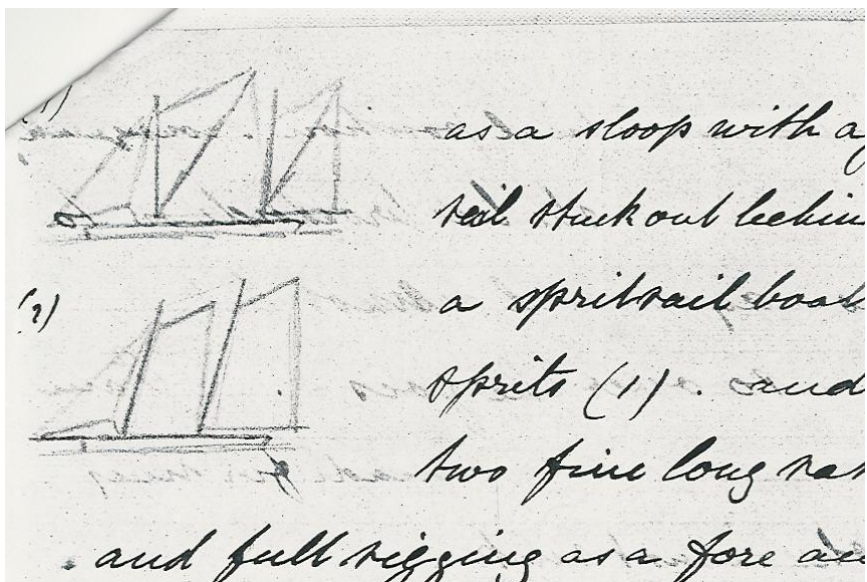


Fig. 1. Extract from Letter No. 8 (actual size)

We have had some fine breeze weather lately and, with all her sails close reefed, she has dashed about, gunwale under, at a splendid pace. One of our sailing fleet has been twice capsized through the incompetence of those in charge of her. For my own part, I see no peculiar danger in boat sailing for people who are careful and know their business, but the poor fellow who has had two duckings has curious ideas and generally manages to stop the way [i.e. forward movement] of his boat, just as she is in a critical position. Consequently, down comes the squall, [and] as she has broadside on to it, [and] she has no way on and cannot luff up [i.e. turn up] into the wind, so over she goes. I am going to have airtight cans made for my boat so that she cannot sink.

We have four sailing boats owned in the Consulate, five or six owned by other residents and always one or two from ships in port, so

that we look forward to getting up a good regatta. They are all ordinary rowing boats, from 12 to 30 feet long.

I hear you are becoming a good shot! Jolly amusement, is it not? I shall hope to hear from you ere long – when you had better tell me what you are going to be for ‘tis time you made up your mind.

Yours affectionately
H[enr]y Alabaster’

9. 28 December 1860, from Henry Alabaster, H[er]. B[ritannic]. M[ajesties]. Consulate, Bangkok, to Percy Criddle, aged 16.

‘My dear Percy,

I hope and expect this will find you in Germany¹⁴. You will be polished out of your nonsense a little and, if you determine not to behave otherwise than as a gentleman, you will always be glad of going there. French & German are almost indispensable acquirements nowadays and, if you become a doctor, they will be especially useful. Doctoring is a good profession for the thoroughly steady and industrious, but like all other respectable occupations it is over-stocked and only thoroughly steady, good, enterprising men will get on.

You must, however, remember that in Germany you will meet a great many disreputable, low fellows, both English and Germans, so don’t let them do you out of your good name.

This is Christmas – I hope you have enjoyed it, and I hope the ensuing year may be a bright one for you.

I am pleased at the move to Addlestone [near Chertsey]. Your mother will now have nice friends new, and if you should be there, you too will have some decent companions. Horton [in Surrey?] was tolerable only for the prettiness of the Cottage & the country. Otherwise ‘twas a beastly hole, out of the way of everyone, Harlow

¹⁴ He did not arrive in Heidelberg until 17 October the following year (1861) and enrolled at the University on 21 December, see Oriole Vane Veldhuis, *loc. cit.*

Place too big, and those cads the Woolheads & Majors a devilish deal too little. I know not which was most ridiculous, the inactivity of the farmer's daughter or the nursemaid-out-of-place manners of the upper servant's visitors. I am jolly glad you are out of it. The boys were miserable companions for you, the girls you could only mix with for their present, and your future, harm.

At Addlestone there will be many absurdities to laugh at, but they are the weaknesses of decent people.

When I hear you are in Germany, I shall; send you £5 for pocket money, so if you are about to start, on receiving this, your mother will perhaps advance one or two *sous*.

We had a big party here on Christmas day, about 40 persons, mostly missionaries, so it was not particularly lively. On New Year's Eve, Sir Robert [Consul in Bangkok] has about 50 guests to supper. I have got up a theatrical company, mustering at least three men who would be considered excellent actors anywhere. I am Manager & Stage director, Commander in Chief, Minister plenipotentiary and decorator. Under my auspices appear Finch & Mason, the funniest men in the world, Adamson the steadiest going old or young woman in Heathendom, and Gwin [*sic*] who would have been extra first *prima, prima donna* at Covent Garden if he hadn't been a man. With these, one lively youth, one inanity and two heavy men, my company is fine indeed. Then, I have two fiddlers who fiddle wonderfully. Come in Sir! Walk in! Nuffin [i.e. nothing] to pay! And only the trouble of walking out again!

Now young fellow, take care of yourself as you love me – and, if you want any advice about anything or get into any scrapes, write to me and you know I shall do my best for you. And don't do anything that will vex your mother.

Yours affectionately
H[enr]y Alabaster'

Anna Leonowens arrived in Bangkok in 1864 as a tutor to the Royal Court and left in July 1867.

10. undated, probably late 1864 or early 1865, Henry Alabaster to Mrs Criddle (Extract from Notes only).

‘Charles is hard up and I hear has not been able to make remittances he would have liked to make¹⁵. Fortunately I am able to take his place, and Palacia¹⁶ will make the 1st quarterly payment which you will accept with the love of your Henry’.

[Henry married Palacia Emma Fahey on 2 September 1865 at Chelsea Parish Church, near her home¹⁷].

11. 4 September 1865, from Peninsular & Oriental Company

[This is a Document describing Insurance for £300 for baggage of Henry Alabaster (aged 29) & wife (Palacia) for passage from Southampton to Singapore *via* Egypt].

12. 1 February 1866, from Palacia Alabaster at Bangkok, to Mrs. Criddle.

‘My dear Mrs. Criddle,

How very kind of you to send that dear little portrait of Harry [Henry Alabaster] – thank you very much indeed, and for all in the little box you kindly sent – it has been some time coming; we only received it a day or two ago – the green moreen¹⁸ will do very nicely

¹⁵ Charles Alabaster, Henry’s elder brother was ill with tuberculosis and died on 18 January 1865, in New Zealand,

¹⁶ Henry was probably affianced to Palacia Emma Fahey, and on 2 September 1865 married her at Chelsea Parish Church, near her home, see Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*

¹⁷ See Adrian Alabaster, *loc cit*,

¹⁸ A stout woollen or woollen and cotton material, either plain or watered, used for curtains, etc.

for the chairs and sofas, and it is quite a treat to have some decent spoons and forks – we have hitherto been eating with something like brass ones.

Mr. Knox has just returned in a man of war – he coolly kept back the dispatches at Singapore; the consequence was, your letter of the 17th Nov. arrived yesterday instead of Sunday –

There is to be a Ball at the Consulate, I believe tomorrow night – which will make the second in one week. Mr. Pickenpach gave one last Friday and, as he is a bachelor, Mrs. Campbell & I received the people – we enjoyed ourselves very much – had the Prime Minister's Grand Band – which is not quite cheerful to hear, altho' there were some few discords, and I fancy Percy would have rushed out of hearing immediately, notwithstanding the numerous attractive young ladies –

We are so sorry to find you write in such low spirits; you really should get some advice and take everything strengthening –

The Borneo Company¹⁹ are going to lend me a piano until ours arrives; it is a most dreadful affair, but it will make some kind of noise.

Our croquet is getting on famously²⁰, every one takes great interest in it – but the playing at present is quite unequal – all are beginners but Harry – so of course the opposite side to him gets always beaten, the lawn is dreadful – quite mountains and valleys, time will improve it. The Garden is getting [on?] – I suppose just now yours may be covered with snow, while ours is quite green and requiring a great deal of water – we are approaching the hot weather very quickly –

We have our new boat – a present from Dr. Campbell and Mr. Knox. It is a very nice one and goes along beautifully –

¹⁹ See also Letter No. 35, 17 January 1879.

²⁰ Note that the game is being played long before the establishment of the Croquet Association (in 1877).

Wish Percy [Criddle] very, very many Happy returns of his Birthday [21 November]. I suppose before it comes round again – his fame and name will reach even Siam, he will have created such a sensation –

With best best love
Believe me, my dear Aunt,
Yours very affectionately
Palacia E. Alabaster –'

On 18 August 1868 Henry (as Acting Consul) witnessed the eclipse of the sun with the King of Siam, Rama IV²¹ near Prachuap Khiri Khan on the Gulf of Siam. The King died soon afterwards.

In 1869 and 1870 respectively, Charles Chaloner and Edward Percy were born to Henry and Palacia. Henry had returned to England in 1870 where he and Palacia seem to have been hard up, being lent £100 by Henry's brother, Chaloner who was on home leave in 1871²². In April that year, Henry was recorded as lodging with James and Ann Pearson at 16 Leonard Place, Chelsea²³ and that year he published, in London, *The Wheel of the Law* a treatise on Buddhism²⁴. He was asked by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) to

²¹ Described by Angela Alabaster (2002) Henry Alabaster's Account of the Total Eclipse of the Sun, 1868. *Alabaster Chronicle*, No. 18, pp. 32-39.

²² See Adrian Alabaster, *loc cit.* and *1871 Census Return for Henry Alabaster* (kindly provided by Laraine Hake).

²³ See the 1871 Census Return (kindly supplied by Laraine Hake) where he is described as Vice Consul in H. M. Service. Incidentally, he is listed as aged 32, although actually aged 35, as it is clear that in 1837, according to his father's letters (City of Westminster Archives, Acc. No. 2369, pp. 16 & 65) he was already on the point of walking and beginning to teethe.

²⁴ *The Wheel of the Law: Buddhism Illustrated from Siamese Sources by the Modern Buddhist, A Life of Buddha and an Account of the Phaobut Taipei*. Reprinted by Ch'eu Wow Pub. Co. 1971, 323 pp. Reprint of London Edition 1871; also, *The Wheel of the Law*. Ideological Book House, Varanasi, 1972, Delhi, 322 pp.

serve in his government which he did from 1872²⁵ having returned alone to Bangkok.

13. 31 May 1872, Henry Alabaster, aged 36 (on 22 May), ‘on board S.S. *Cyphrenes*, approaching Port Said’, to Mrs. Criddle.

‘Dear Auntie,

One third of my voyage is happily accomplished, and we have so good a ship and pleasant a set of officers & passengers that we may anticipate a pleasant continuation. Had it been a P & O sta[tion] we should have been packing our traps for the abominable land passage through Egypt, but now we have no need to trouble ourselves. I got a cabin I wished for, and it is a delightful one. Had it been my first voyage, I should certainly have been disappointed at not stopping to see Gibraltar and Malta, but, as it is, I enjoy the direct travelling.

We have a pleasant party on board – eight gentlemen and four women and children. Of the eight gentlemen, three can play the piano, one being perhaps a professional musician, but we know not; he is a German. Another German on board speaks English & French and was promoted and won the Iron Cross for gallantry in the field. He is going out as a merchant’s clerk. The Iron Cross is only given in wars against the French.

I was at first puzzled by the name [of the ship,] *Cyphrenes*, but have worked it out from various sources. It is another form of the name *Cephrene* or *Cephren*, an old Egyptian Monarch whose statue, one of the four oldest known, was exhibited in the French Grand Exhibition. He was builder of the 2nd Pyramid of Giseh [= Giza], near Cairo, the 1st Pyramid, or Great Pyramid having been built by *Cheops*. Our ship belongs to a body of ship owners who decided to distinguish their ships by Egyptian Historical names. *Cheops* is a

²⁵ *Chronicle of Thai Postage Stamps*, p. 208, courtesy of Khun Siddhi Savetsila

well-known name, and their first vessel received that name. Then as 2nd ship, this one naturally got its name from the 2nd Pyramid.

Our voyage is, of course, very uneventful: fine weather, people who won't quarrel, and babies who don't cry when they cut teeth, all combine to promote dullness, and the married woman on board doesn't flirt. There is an old Captain on board who has left his wife & children, and we sit together and praise up our respective wives, discovering so many excellencies we never saw, when we were with them²⁶, that we are getting spooney over our own property, and shall feel quite vexed if our wives ran away – at least he will.

Love to Percy
Yours affectionately
H[enr]y Alabaster'

14. 1872 (probably early June) Thursday, from Palacia Alabaster at 13 Victoria Road, Twickenham, to Mrs. Criddle (in pencil, in another hand, 35 chess moves and 'June 21st - 1872 P[ercy] C[riddle]', probably the date of receipt).

'My dear Mrs. Criddle,

You will be glad to hear I have had a letter from Henry from Port Said [probably Letter No. 12] – all well – and [he] had rec[eive]d mine. It is probable you have heard at the same time – but I would not risk it –

I hope you are quite well and Percy also – we have had a beautiful day today quite a summer day for a wonder –

My Boys are well – Charlie sends his love to Grandmama.

²⁶ It is clear that Henry was returning alone to Thailand, for Earnest was born to Palacia in 1872 at Twickenham where she wrote to him that year (Letter No. 14) evidently joining him there later.

In 1873 Henry received the honour of serving under King Rama V, and decided to resign from the British Service²⁷; see letter No. 17, and earned the epithet from the British, ‘snake in the grass’.

15. 7 December 1873, from Palacia Alabaster, at Fitzroy Villas, Amgend Park, Twickenham to Percy Criddle, aged 29 (on 21 November).

Dear Percy,

I was glad to get your letter for it seemed such an age since I had heard anything of you – I have been a long time answering it, but you know how full of business I always am – I hope you are getting on well in every way – I shall be very pleased to pay you a visit some of the these days, but I have not the slightest idea where the Hop Exchange is [Southwark St., London, S. E.]²⁸ – I am very pleased to hear Mrs. Criddle is coming, but when? I hope she is well – I shall try and give the children a Christmas tree – and I hope you will be agreeable enough to come this time – possibly it may be on the 6th – have you any engagement for that Evening? Little [Edward] Percy [her second son] is not quite the thing – but Charlie [Charles Chaloner, the eldest] and Baby [Earnest] are all right now – they all had influenza severely about a month ago – & the Commencement of it with poor Baby was another of those dreadful fits – which I need not say alarmed me again very much – Henry writes in tolerable spirits.

With love

Ever Yours sincerely Palacia E. Alabaster’

²⁷ See Phraya Vana Phrukra Picham (Savetsila), *loc cit.*

²⁸ See Letter No. 27, 25 August 1877; this was probably Percy Criddle’s business address in conducting business in Paris. In 1871 he and his Harrer family were living in 131 St. Georges Road, Southwark above his business (see Oriole Vane Veldhuis (2003) ‘Chips of Alabasters...; My Great German Search’ *Alabaster Chronicle* No. 21, pp. 10-23.).

16. After 1872, perhaps 1873, from Palacia Alabaster at 2 Fitzroy Villas, [Twickenham] to Percy Criddle (black-edged; watermark, ‘JOYNSON 1872’).

‘My dear Percy,

I am waiting Mrs. Maughan’s answer. I did not find her at home – I am very pleased you will come – and do not feel injured at being asked to sing to our Piano. I hope tomorrow will not be inconvenient – for the Maughan’s for, as I am thinking of going to the sea on Wednesday, I am afraid Tuesday wouldn’t do for me – I will write again as soon as I get an answer –

In haste

Sincerely Yours

Palacia E. Alabaster’

17. 13 April 1874, from Palacia Alabaster at [2 Fitzroy Villas] Twickenham, to Percy Criddle, aged 29 (black-edged; watermark, ‘JOYNSON 1873’).

‘My dear Percy,

Thanks for Sending my letter – I have had none to-day from Henry [in Siam] – In my last (yesterday week) he said he had, in writing, that he was engaged by the King – at 280 dollars the month – that he was not going to the mines – but nothing whatever about you – I certainly never expected you would write – after being here – I liked Miss [Alice] Nicol²⁹ very much – I was annoyed at not being able to disguise that I was as much bothered by the Secrecy as I was – but I thoroughly enjoyed the rest and quiet on the river – I shall see

²⁹ Percy seems to have been courting Alice Nicol, with Palacia acting as chaperon. He married her on 8 September 1874, although he already had a mistress, Elise Harrer to whom he had been engaged in February 1863 and by whom he had had five children; the sixth and last was born seven months after he had married Alice and a month before Alice bore her first child to him (See Oriole Veldhuis Vane, *loc. cit.*).

you again shall I not before you leave – I shall be able to find a substitute for myself as regards [a chaperon for?] Miss Nicol coming out – in case I do not go – the Doctor & his Wife will be leaving in September or October –

In great haste,
Yours very sincerely
Palacia E. Alabaster'

18. 18 July 1874, from Palacia Alabaster at [2 Fitzroy Villas] Twickenham to Percy Criddle.

'My dear Percy,

You will not be at all too early – I quite enjoyed my Evening on Wednesday, my not remaining certainly ought not to have prevented your doing so – had I thought of such a thing, I should not have hesitated.

I do not think Mrs. Nichol [*sic*] quite liked our taking her by storm –

How is the 'Mum'³⁰; give her my best love – I must see her down here before I leave – the house is let – un-furnished from Sept.

My love to Miss Nicol
I am Yours sincerely
Palacia E. Alabaster'

19. Tuesday (perhaps after the house was let in September 1874, and before Palacia sailed from England to Siam), from Palacia Alabaster at 3 The Grange (the home of James & Florence Fahey), to Percy Criddle.

'Dear Percy,

Will you kindly let me know – where the Office of the Glen Tin is to be found – if you send me a post card by return – I can call

³⁰ Could this refer to Percy's mistress, Elise Harrer?

tomorrow – I am thinking (if the weather should be bad) of coming down to Addlestone on Saturday.

Trusting you are all well at home.

Believe me

Yours sincerely

Palacia E. Alabaster'

20. 23 April 1875, from Palacia Alabaster at Bangkok, to Mrs. Criddle.

'My dear Auntie –

I have been a very very bad correspondent since I came out – for many reasons. I have written very seldom home, but I hope you have heard from them any news they have had – there are more Steamers running between there and Singapore than when I was here before – but frequently two leave or arrive on the same day – sometimes I know nothing of the departure of a mail until I see the steamer pass – which it does to turn – as the river is broader past us – but of course any letters are too late – & again I have been very very busy – getting the house in order – with the children and with visitors. You will have seen by the Papers our visitors were pleased with their reception – Dr. Schustes was very, very nice – the others here were Assistants – and well Considering –

I was very very pleased to receive your little note – Henry has been talking of writing to you a long time – he had a very harassing, but at the same time – a very satisfactory time during the disputes – he is pretty well now, but feeling the depressing effect of the climate – we have all until quite lately been suffering so much with fever – we think the house is too close to the city to be healthy – I am going to take the children to the sea, or I hope Henry will get a week's leave at least – Charlie is so well, in such spirits – for a long time he was wretchedly ill – feverish – & entire loss of appetite – Percy [aged five] is well – altho' not looking as well as when I arrived – Earnest is

not much thinner – and had quite got over his dysentery which began in the Red Sea & continued so long – but lately has a return of it – Dr. Gowan says it is not serious in children – he is as noisy & uproarious as ever – & is a puff-puff up & down the verandah [*sic*] I don't know how many times during the day – much to the astonishment of such as myself who feel it an undertaking to get once along it – the children are very much admired – the Siamese say they are so different from the European children they have seen here “they quite touch their heart” –

I am often thinking of you all & wondering how you liked your little house – I hope you have all kept – pretty well – that you have quite got over the severe cold – the [?] here Commenced [?] and we are supposed to have had only a moderate hot season – we have been fortunate – for we certainly had a vary cool – cool season.

You will have heard from Chal[oner] – before this of his intended marriage³¹ – some of the Missionaries here made a journey from America to China in 1866 & liked them all very much – the young lady is a great favourite in China –

Since writing the above – I have decided to let Percy [her son] return with Mrs. Campbell to Europe – I have thought it best to part with him again for his sake – but these partings nearly break my heart I wish they were all over –

With best love from all of us to you all – not forgetting the Greeves [*sic*] Katie – & Mrs Prior –

Very Affectionately
Palacia E Alabaster.’

³¹ Chaloner had hinted at his possible marriage, in writing to his aunt in January 1875, but she seems not to have approved when he did marry (see *Transcript of Sir Chaloner Alabaster Correspondence 1840-1880*, School of Oriental and African Studies Archives, 2004, University of London, MS380823); this was in September 1875 to Laura Macgowan who was, incidentally, fluent in Chinese (see Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*).

21. 18 December 1875, from Palacia Alabaster in Bangkok, to Mrs. Criddle.

‘My dear Auntie,

I was so pleased to get your little note – I am lazy in writing – but it has been lazy weather here – very, very hot – but now it is delicious, and I am hurrying to do all sorts of things while I can – I actually require two blankets at night –

I was glad to have better accounts of you in [your son] Percy’s last letter. I should like to see you with your little grandson [Norman, born to Alice, 14 May]³² – he must be a great pet –

Henry is down the coast with the King. H[is] M[ajesty] has not been well – and has gone to get up his strength – I am afraid he will not be back by Xmas –

You will have heard of my little Percy having hooping cough – it was unfortunate for Mrs. Campbell, but for my Percy – a good thing. I so miss the child – and wish (as I shall certainly not come to England in the Spring) that I had kept him here – The boys here are very well – Charlie [aged six] chatters away in Siamese – is a great fisherman – can row, paddle, & is delighted to be in the yacht, the bigger the waves the better he likes it – is delighted to have a book read to him – but not likes learning to read himself – I think he is stronger & better than when at home – Earnest is well & gets prettier I think – he is very much like little Percy – they are very much admired. The natives as they pass along the road are very anxious to touch them – at which they are very indignant.

I am going to try to get up a Xmas tree – that’s to say if the missing box does not prove to be the toys –

I have lent my room also for a Concert, so we shall be quite gay for a time – we are fortunate in having some very musical people – so we expect a treat –

³² See Oriole Vane Veldhuis, *loc. cit.*

I hope all [the Greaves family] are well at Hammersmith. Give my love to them & all friends at Addlestone – I am so sorry to hear about Miss Catlow – I should so like a letter from Miss Maria – I suppose it is too late to wish a Merry Xmas –

Many happy New Years to you & all – & Believe me, with best love from the Boys & myself.

Yours affectionately

Palacia E. Alabaster'

22. January 1876, from Henry Alabaster, aged 29, to Mrs. Criddle.

'Dear Auntie,

This is to wish you a Happy New Year, and to ask you to give my love to the Greeves [*sic*], and to ask Ada [Greaves] to give an account of herself. I intended to send you an account of a long (14 days) yachting trip I have just returned from. I am *Sadet* as the Siamese call it³³, 'In the suite of The King'. We had a pleasant time and I was nearly drowned.

But I am not my own master, and this New Year has seen me on duty from an early hour on New Year's Day, with no time to write letters,

I do not complain. The more I am used, the more necessary I become & the better I hope will be my remuneration. I am as proud as ever I was; now, having made my position without anyone to thank for it, and having the pleasure of drafting the most important dispatches for the Foreign Minister 'who did not wish me back in Siam', and of suggesting & drawing up laws, accepted and passed by the Government which 'objected to my presence'. To complete the picture, Palacia now leads society and her parties are the only largely attended ones. She and her lady friends decline to go where Mr.

³³ '*Sadet*' was used by the Royal family, meaning 'go' (on a trip) (Khun Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication).

Knox's daughters go³⁴, & so make successful parties impossible except in our own house. We had a very successful party a month ago, costing half a bottle of claret only – no supper, no band, and such a bad piano, but people somehow like their parties, and amuse themselves.

Kind regards to Smiths, Grants, Browns, Walkers, Pidcocks &c.

Yours affectionately

H[enr]y Alabaster

“Earnest continues like Chal – comical, clever, naughty and sensitive”

23. 11 October 1876, from James Fahey at 3 The Grange, Shepherd's Bush W, addressed to 'Percy Criddle Esquire', aged 31 (watermark, 'A PIRIE & SONS 1875').

‘Dear Mr. Percy,

Thank you for the Cheque for £20, which crossed mine in the post.

My reason for suggesting crossing it and making it payable to order, arose from a Cheque once forwarded to me being stolen – and although crossed, the crossing had been removed, and it was paid out over the Counter the Bank claiming indemnity as the crossing had been removed. However that's passed –

Believe me,

Very truly yours

James Fahey'

³⁴ Knox had married a Siamese lady (see Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*), whose aunt was married to the Regent (see Minney, R. J. (1962) *Fanny and the Regent of Siam*, Collins, London.

24. 12 January 1877, Henry Alabaster, aged 40, at Bangkok to Percy Criddle, aged 32.

‘My dear Percy,

I have just returned from a delightful excursion with the King and am in excellent health.

I have your letter of November 23rd and thank you for complaining about the stores. Please charge me with the extra supply you are sending out.

You mistook my meaning as to Mason’s case being high in the thousands. I am by no means the only person who orders from Mason, and all his cases are consecutively numbered. Moreover, the large orders – orders for coin &c. – could not be diverted from him; they go to him as Govt. import.

You are, I fear, nettled at my doubt whether you would fill certain orders, as perhaps any inquisitiveness as to your income. Some of your own letters justify a doubt as to whether you are not inconvenienced by having to find cash. I am often inconvenienced.

Charlie fell from a bridge at Petchaburin³⁵ [Pechabun/Prachin Buri] and has I fear sustained permanent injury to his arm and shock to his system. He was in agony and delirious with the dislocation. Palacia was much knocked up by the incident, but has recovered. Earnest is well and strong. I wish I could afford to send the children home in the spring.

I am requested to order the following:

1. For Phra Pricha³⁶ – an aluminium, binocular telescope, very long in the body and, of course, the best in the world.
2. For H.R.H. Prince Kamalat. A jeweller’s lathe to work by hand or foot, with every fitting for cutting and polishing sapphires &c, with spare apparatus and about £20 worth of diamond dust, and with best books on the subject of cutting precious stones. In executing this order

³⁵ A town 150 km south of Bangkok

³⁶ ‘Phra’ refers to the third grade of knighthood for a commoner, the eighth grade overall (Khun Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication).

you can charge, say £5 to £10 for investigations as to practice of the art & tools in [?], and send your own notes on the subject. Send every tool that is used, and besides the large lathe, send a small hand lathe for use when travelling. The cost, including fir[eigh]t should not exceed £100.

3. For Luang Pinit³⁷ – a very small prismatic compass for surveying, graduated 0-360°, to be very small, with a ring to attach it to [a] watch chain as a charm, to be electroplated. (Get Stanley to make it).
4. For Prince Kaph – a duplication of the above.
5. For myself. A Prince has begged my fishing tackle from me; please send me a fresh outfit. 1 Emersal rod with upright rings, 1 walking stick rod, tackle case with lines, floats &c., 4 patent floats; 4 case floats, spare lines, 12 dozen spare hooks of various sizes on gut, 1 case of spinning tackle (four sets of hooks in the case), 4 sets barbell [*sic*] tackle; winch-running line; 2 folding landing nets; net handles; bait buoys, disgorgers, 2 extra sets of spinning tackle to be bound on thin brass wire instead of gut &c.: gut of which our river sharks bite through.
400 yards of very stout plaited lines [diagram inserted of cross section showing a bundle of about 8 threads] for sea fishing; 100 yards of best copper wire (in four coils) of about 1/20 inch diameter.
[There follows a 2 inch (5 cm) break in the photocopied text, probably where the sketches mentioned below were inserted]
Eight brass hooks, as shown [above], and eight very strong rivets as shown or larger.
2 dozen brass hooks, barbed edge, bound on to very thin brass wire, say, 1/50 inch diameter.
I intend to sell most of this, so don't treat as a personal order.
6. Francatelli's cooks guide (that ordered before did not arrive).
7. Two copies of books on Precious stones, I believe by [Fruchway?]. It contains several plates showing general size of diamonds of 1 carat, 2 carats and I had had it. Tennant may know the book.
8. Stores for myself & Dr. Gowan
1 doz 2lb tins Hog's lard
1 doz 1lb tins Salmon
1 doz 1lb tins Fresh Herring

³⁷ 'Luang' refers to the fourth grade of knighthood for a commoner, the ninth overall (Khun Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication).

- 1 doz 1lb tins Jugged Hare
 1 doz 1lb tins Calves head & ham
 4 York Hams, from 10 to 14 lbs
 6 Tins North Wilts Cheese – 2 lbs to 4 lbs cheese in a tin
 2 doz 1lb tins butter (The Danish kind with a cow for brand is
 the best
 1 doz square tins Oxford sausages
 1 doz assorted French Patês, truffles (1/4 lb boxes)
 4 doz 1lb tins carrots
 2 doz 1lb tins peas
 2 doz 1/2lb tins fresh mushrooms
 1 doz tins asparagus (medium size)
 1 doz 1lb tins tomatoes
 1/2 doz 1lb tins palestrine [*sic*] soup
 1 doz 1lb tins hotch potch
 1/2 doz 1lb tins mock turtle
 1 doz 1lb tins kidney
 1 doz 1lb tins Apricot jam
 1 doz 1lb tins Strawberry jam
 1 doz 1/2lb tins red currant jelly
 8 doz quart bottles [tart?] fruit, assorted
 1 doz mixed crystallised fruits in glass-stoppered bottles
 1 doz 2lb tins Normandy pippins
 1/2 doz quart bottles Canadian p[ippins?]
 1 doz quart bottles Pickled Walnuts
 1/2 doz quart bottles Pickled Cabbage
 1/2 doz pint bottles Capt. White Pickle
 9. [No item number 9]
 10. For H.R.H. Prince Kam[alat]
 Specimens in duplicate of the best imitation of precious stones,
 arranged in a neat case, with note as to where made.
 11. For myself
 Two desk diaries, Octavo size, 3 days on a page.
 Two desk diaries, 6d., pocket book size
 1 Aluminium bronze pocket pencil
 1 Penknife
 1 doz hard drawing pencils H and F for drawing plants &c.
 1 doz ordinary pencils for writing
 12. For myself

The No. 9 Sound Quality Stationers Cabinet, Fig. 600 in Waterloo & Sons Catalogue, Foolscap size with slate dates and complete with fittings £2.17.6. (Send Waterloo & Sons Catalogue – at present I have only Mason's, and am sending him several small orders from it.) Please send an extra slate and reserve of paper &c. with the cabinet.
2 Blue glass pen trays.

And now I wish you a happy New Year & the same to Auntie.

Yours affectionately

H[enr]y Alabaster

P.S. 13. For Prince Sai³⁸ Sanitoongsa (a very dear friend of mine who will help your business), Now orders

A pair of diamond earrings, each earring represents a [sketch inserted showing an arrow passing through a small disc] feathered dart or arrow. The earring is not suspended, but fixed to the ear by a pin with screw end. The design is shown in a priced catalogue sent by Williams & Co., Jewellers of Hatton Garden and the earrings [?] are to be rather smaller than the design shown. The order is sent to you (instead of to Mason who has already sent out one pair) because you say you can get jewellery made cheaper than some others. You will of course get the catalogue in question

At the same time send out design & price for diamond for the earring [sketch of feather inserted] to screw on as the preceding, both in plain diamonds and in diamonds, emerald & ruby, i.e. peacock feathers.

14. One Brownings Dicrotic Binocular. Object glasses 3 [number?] £6.11.0³⁹ for Chanum Suradet.

15. One Brownings Panergetic Binocular. Aluminium, 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ glasses, £12.10.0.

³⁸ In 1877 Articles of Agreement were drafted between Prince Sai, Henry Alabaster & Dr. Gowan on the one part, as Principals, and Percy Criddle on the other, as Agent, to manufacture & market a secret medicinal ointment ('Prince Sai's Ointment') & other medicines (copies of the draft agreement, receipt for legal expenses from Nicol Son & Jones of 48 Lime Street, London, dated 5 October 1877, and confidential recipe for the ointment, kindly supplied by Nan Kenyon through Laraine Hake).

³⁹ Sums of money expressed here, and elsewhere, in pounds, shillings and pence (£. s. d.).

25. 19 June 1877, from Palacia Alabaster at Bangkok to Mrs. Criddle.

‘My dear Auntie,

I am always scolding myself for not writing to you more often – & yet, just at the moment, perhaps, I am sitting down to write, somebody comes and interrupts – & I am obliged to put it off –

I hope you are keeping well – & that Percy, Alice [his wife] & the two little ones [Norman and, perhaps Evelyn] are the same – I suppose I shall find the house & garden much altered when I come next year. What a large party of little ones we shall be able to have – Alice – two, Ted’s two, my three (big boys) and I do not know how many of Katie’s – I never hear anything of her – I hope Mr. & Mrs. Greeves [*sic*] [and] Ada [Greaves] are well – Henry has been wonderfully well through all the hot season, the trip with the King & then our own trip in the cold season quite set him up – Charlie & Ernest are not quite so well – I think require sea-air. I am going to take them down the coast for a few weeks – I am a martyr to prickly heat – which makes me exceedingly irritable – & disagreeable – We are going on very quietly in Bangkok – one week much the same as another – and the time slips away very quickly – H[is] Majesty gave us a little change & a very pleasant even[in]g last week – some musicians came down here & H[is] M[ajesty] engaged them for the even[in]g & invited a few Europeans to the Palace – & received us in the Drawing room of the New Palace – he has exceedingly nice manners – & altho’ the music was inferior we enjoyed ourselves – H[is] Majesty is anxious for more music – & we are going to get up a concert among our friends – we have good players on Piano, violin & violincels [*sic*] & several good vocalists – How are the Callows and also Miss Grant – Henry is just starting off on a surveying trip – not very good weather for such work – I think he will have to join us at the sea-side after – it is such hard work preparing for these trips to the sea – we have to take everything – with us – & I am so tired just now

with my attempt to prepare I can hardly stand – Our garden is so prity [*sic*; i.e. pretty] now – the ground was public three years ago – & covered with brick bits – now we have a good lawn with beautiful clumps of bamboo – & throughout the year never without bouquets on the table – but the climate just now is fearfully depressing.

Our best love to yourself, Percy & Alice & kisses to the little ones –

Ever Yours affectionately
Palacia E. Alabaster'

26. 25 August 1877, Elosserez in Paris to Percy Criddle at Hop Exchange Southwark Street, London, S.E.

'Sir,

We have received your favor [*sic*] of yesterday containing cheque amount £210 which is duly placed to your credit or the balance of your account, with thanks.

We will be very much obliged for receiving your new orders, and with this hope, we remain, Sir

Yours faithfully
Elosserez.

27. Probably between 20 and 24 November 1877]⁴⁰. Order for His Royal Highness, Krom Mūn Aditron⁴¹, from Henry Alabaster probably to Percy Criddle (added in another hand, probably Percy Criddle's, 'arr. 4/1/78').

'Two photographic Cameras with double swing backs,' complete with stands, and each with two extra backs or slides.

⁴⁰ This estimate is based upon the average transit interval of 43 ± 2 days for five letters dated in Bangkok by Henry Alabaster and recorded on arrival in England by Percy Criddle.

⁴¹ 'Krom Mūn' refers to the fifth grade of nobility for the Royal family (Khun Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication).

2 Lenses from Tench – One the very best he can supply for *Cartes de visite* portraits [small photographic portraits mounted on a card, 3½ by 2½ inches].
one to well cover a circle of 10 inch diameter – say a 10 x 8 plate for large half length portraits.

Cameras are of course to match the lenses, but the larger camera should have its slides fitted with frames to take two sizes of plates, or even three if advised by the maker.

100 Glass plates of each size

A few dozen prepared dry plates for use with the larger camera.

Two Glass plates with cover &c. fitted as usual and both of them fit for dipping the largest size plates herein ordered.

Two reams pink albumenised paper. H[enry] A[labaster]’

28. 16 May 1878, Henry Alabaster, aged 41 at Bangkok to Percy Criddle, aged 33 (written in another hand, probably Percy Criddle’s, ‘arr. July 1/78’).

‘My dear Percy

I enclose orders for about £1000 of the artificial stoneware from Austin & Seely. By a subsequent mail I shall send the photographs in case of doubt.

As perhaps you will not be able to finance their order and wait for your money as, under any circumstance, it is to come by Masons’ acc[e]ss[e]d direct to Bangkok without transhipment, I think you had better take the order at once to Mason, receive your 1/3rd discount of Com[missio]n and he will then do the whole business conveniently for all parties.

In great haste

H[enry] Alabaster

[New page]

Ordered

Through Percy Criddle Esq., from Austin and Seely by H.R.H. Krom Mün Naret for their Majesty the King.

1. Group of 2 boys, one holding grapes.)
2. Group of 2 boys, one holding pomegranate) complete with pedestal.

3. Pair – Hebe & Proserpine [Greek mythical figures, both daughters of Zeus], 5ft. high with pedestals.
 4. Quartet – Fire, air, earth & water with pedestals
 5. Column & vase, height 9 ft.
 6. Three children with apples, group, height 4 ft. with pedestal.
 7. Basket of flowers capped with pineapple supported by 4 children, with pedestal – £50.
 8. Two Vases pedestals & circular edging as shown
 9. Four Vases pedestals
 10. Sixty basket vases
Six wide vases without pedestals (tazzas)⁴²
Four vases with cover, with pedestals
 11. Two wreathed vases & stands
 12. Two vases with figures & pedestals
 13. Two vases with Heads & fruit & pedestals
 14. One Square Tazza
 15. One Large basket on griffins
 16. Two vases or tazzas on roughened pedestals
 17. Two – Three children bearing basket with pedestal
 18. One vase supported on three lions
 19. Four Eagles
One Flower Vase 5ft. 8in.
 20. One pair of Lions
 21. Pair of vases cornucopia stems supported by children
 22. Pair of vases cornucopia stems supported by children with dog & goat
 23. 1 Diana 7ft. high and pedestal
 24. 2 Statues (app Roman Emperor & Roman woman) with pedestals
 25. Tragedy & comedy with pedestals
 26. Two coarse looking women with pedestals
 27. Children & big dog – to be sent with proper pedestal
- Bangkok) H[enr]y Alabaster
May 16th 1878)'

⁴² Shallow ornamental bowl supported on a foot.

29. 17 May 1878, Henry Alabaster at Bangkok, to Percy Criddle [added in a different hand, probably Percy's, 'Arr July 10 /78'].

'My dear Percy,

Two days ago as the mail was closing I sent you [a] memorandum of a very large order for artificial stoneware to be shipped to Siam direct in a vessel of Mason's. I can send you no money towards this Indent as all mine is locked up in teak and in unpaid bills, and I believe it will be best to go to Mason and ask him to do the business & let you have your 3rd of the discount & com[missio]n – which will be nearly 12%. I shall write to him in the same sense and he will probably agree.

I enclose an order for one additional piece omitted in that occasion, and send the photographs so that there may be no mistake. Remember, the coming out in Mason's ship is an absolute part of the order; if sent otherwise they will not be accepted. The object is to get them whole, and to avoid transshipment, which increases breakages – and also to get enough freight for Mason to fill a ship.

Please tell Austin & Seely to try to pack them better than the last, which were very poorly packed. They must remember that on board ship no one regards any instructions as to 'this side upwards', 'glass with care'; indeed, when they are shipped you should go yourself, tip the Captain & Mate, and promise them from me £10 each if they turn out in first class order in Siam.

Yours affectionately

H[enr]y Alabaster.

Ordered

From P. Criddle – by His Royal Highness Krom Mün Naret for His Majesty.

1. Group of three children, one procuring water, two drinking
 1. Child seated with basket beside him
- Both to have suitable pedestals

Bangkok)
May 17th 1878)'

H[enr]y Alabaster

30. 20 May 1878, from Palacia Alabaster at 3 The Grange, Shepherds Bush W, to Mrs. Criddle.

‘My dear Auntie,

Henry wished me to send you the enclosed cheque with his love – I have also a shawl, which he sent you & I intended bringing myself, but unfortunately I don’t see a possibility of doing so for some time to come – for Charlie has been ill for some days – and now it turns out to be measles. I am keeping the other children from him – but I am afraid they will have it also – everyone consoles me by saying they could not have it at a better time – but it is a nuisance to have come just now –

I hope you are keeping well also Alice and her big⁴³ family – whom I was intending to see soon –

With love to all,

Believe me

Yours Affectionately

Palacia E. Alabaster’

31. 11 August 1878, from Henry Alabaster at Bangkok to Percy Criddle [added in a different hand, probably Percy’s, ‘Arr. 24/9/78’]

‘My dear Percy,

I enclose a diagram for a gold enamel and diamond box – hinged without lock, intended as a present from the King to the Ex Regent on his 70th birthday. It must, therefore, reach Siam by December 20th at [the] latest and to do so would have to leave England by 5th November at [the] latest & of course by mail with a special letter to Kein Ching to hurry it on, as it is for the King. I have stated my opinion that ‘it cannot be done’. You will get this about 20th Sept[ember]. You will at once fly to a first class jewell[er]y and

⁴³ This, being underlined, may well refer to Percy’s mistress Elise and her children by him.

give him 5½ weeks to finish it and he will decline to pledge himself. He would have to give you a written undertaking so that, if not delivered in time you could refuse it. 'Tis a fair order and no fair price will be complained of, so I am sure you will do your best.

Please telegraph to me, 'Alabaster – Siam-post, Singapore' either the word 'No' or else the cost in tens of pounds; 'fifty' if it would cost five hundred, 'forty eight' if four hundred and eighty, never mind fractions. I will then send you an immediate remittance [?]co – [??tell]. I will send you or Palacia four hundred pounds this month – if you don't execute the order you can apply it as I may advise.

I have written to His Highness Mom Chao Prisdang⁴⁴ now in England studying engineering, asking him to send you his address so that you may call on him and get his assistance in having the Siamese lettering in diamonds done without mistake. I also send you the lettering on large-scale.

Please keep this order particularly quiet and don't let Mason or anyone else know anything about it. You act the preference by special request – in this case on account of your having the character of sending things quicker than Mason. Poor Larry who is dead had the best character in this respect.

H. R. H. Krom Mün Naret who sends this order requested me some time ago to request you to send out a hundred pounds worth of roses &c. for the Royal Gardens, the roses – mostly on [their] own root, but a few standards – sent as before, also a number of dahlia bulbs. Send a few other plants: sweet briars, fuchsias & geraniums according to judgement. If a direct steamer comes you might send two Wardian cases of Geraniums. The great amateur gardener here who is in charge of the King's flowers says he has 15 kinds of dahlias & 60 kinds of roses, many being of your sending. He hopes he will

⁴⁴ This is probably the person, H. R. H. Prince Prisdang who in 1881 became the first Thai Ambassador for Europe and America (see Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*)

now get many new kinds. Of the dahlias he has had 6 lost and wants to get again: full violet, full purple, purple white-edged, yellow and red spotted. I daresay you can find many varieties in England.

I notice accounts – Palacia has I hope settled them.

I notice Mason not answering you decidedly about the stoneware order. If necessary, telegraph for funds. I cannot stand any of Mason's nonsense.

I am asked to order for a friend a 'gold-rolling machine'; one is shown in Feira's *Illustrated Catalogue of Tools*, p. 39, No. 324 to roll up to 10 inches wide. Invoice to Chamûn Wichit.

Your idea that I could do better than as Mason's Agent is, I think, quite erroneous. I shall, now that I have given up his agency be barely able to meet my expenses. If it had been £600 a year, it would have been a magnificent thing; even at the figure it really attained, it was too good to lose without the greatest regret.

Yours affectionately

H[enr]y Alabaster'

32. 12 September 1878, from Henry Alabaster at Bangkok, to Percy Criddle [added in a different hand, probably Percy's, 'Arr. 23 Oct 78']

'My dear Percy,

I have several kinds of pens, but no good ones; I am now using a Pickwick [nib] which is a horrid bad pen – makes writing a bore which matters less as I have nothing to say, except that I am practically a ruined man, that is, my income is below my expenditure.

I have yours of August 1st with invoices &c. – thanks. I will send money to Palacia next mail & ask her to pay balance, as also amount due to the old lady. I am exceedingly busy and fairly cheerful considering the reverse I have had in six months. I suppose something will turn up.

Love to Auntie.

Yours affectionately
H[enr]y Alabaster
Where is the lens that was sent for repair?

33. 4 January 1879, from D. Kellason at the Consulate General of Siam, 6 Great Winchester Street Buildings, London, E.C., to Percy Criddle, aged 34 (watermark ‘[JOYN]SON [SUPER]FINE’).

‘My dear Mr. Criddle,

I am sorry you are troubling yourself so much in respect to finding means for the acceptance – under any circumstances of course it will be met. – after we can discuss the matter.

I telegraphed our friend on the 11th Dec. and have not received a reply.

What I complain of is dilatory remittances continually cause me the pledging of securities, – and you will know the result, – the little margin you fondly hoped for was yours – vanishes. –

I hope Mrs. Criddle has perfectly recovered, –

Faithfully yours

D. Kellason’

34. 17 January 1879, from Andfurrse for The Borneo Co., Ltd., Singapore (via Naples) to Percy Criddle, Esq., Addleston [sic], Surrey [note in another hand, probably Percy’s, added, ‘Arr 15/2/79’].

‘Dear Sir,

We have now much pleasure in handing you – Enclosed demand draft on the Bank of England p £870. – at exchange 3/7½ being equivalent of \$4800 – at the request of our Bangkok friends.

As on a previous occasion, our friends wished us to receipt you this account by invoice, but we could not succeed in getting any Bank here to give us a telegraphic remittance and had to take it on demand.

We will thank you to acknowledge the receipt of the above,
We remain Dear Sir,
Yours faithfully,
Andfurrse'

35. 18 January 1879, from B. [W. K???] at Alexandra Hotel, London (letter embossed with golden crown surmounting embossed initials: S (in gold) P (in black) & B (in red); watermark 'SUPERFINE KENT') to Percy Criddle.

'Dear Sir,

I have come to London and know that Mr. Alabaster had no time to write to you by this mail.

I shall be very glad to make your acquaintance if you will favour me with a visit at my Hotel,

Yours truly
B.[W. K???]

36. 23 January 1879, from D. Kellason at the Consulate General of Siam, 6 Great Winchester Street Buildings, London, E.C., to Percy Criddle (watermark 'JOYN[SON] SUP[ERFINE']).

'My dear Mr. Criddle,

The draft you need not worry about – it shall be duly revised tomorrow –

I give up my share of this transaction to friend Alabaster for his trouble in some of my affairs – therefore I shall only charge interest upon the sum outstanding –

Faithfully yours

D. Kellason

P.S. Things sound queer out there.'

37. 22 March 1879, from D. Kellason at the Consulate General of Siam, 6 Great Winchester Street Buildings, London, E.C., to Percy Criddle (watermark '[JOYN]SON [SUPER]FINE'; not written in Kellason's hand, but signed by him).

'My dear Criddle,

Mr. Alabaster writes to me under date 3rd February that he had remitted or was about to remit to you One hundred Catties – say £900 for account of shipment of stone per I. C. Munro

Has this yet come forward?

Yours truly

D. Kellason'

38. 1 April 1879, from Eliza S. Fahey at 3 The Grange, Shepherds Bush, to Mrs. Criddle (edged in black; watermark 'A PIRIE & SONS 1877).

'My dear Mrs. Criddle,

We had a letter from Palacia on Saturday from Singapore; she had arrived so far safely. She had a very comfortable time of it, until the last week & because of her baggage: when the Captain took offence at something she said and made it very uncomfortable for her the rest the journey, she stayed the night at Singapore: and was, when she wrote going to start for Bangkok.

All the Boys have had something the matter with them: Charlie, his neck; Percy, his throat; Earnest swollen glands. I hope all at Gables House are well. But the weather is so very cold and trying, My Mother has been very unwell. Father has been away, he to visit to his friend at Farnham he returned home yesterday.

Please give my kind regards to Mr. & Mrs. Criddle and with love to yourself from us all,

Believe me

Yours affectionately

Eliza S Fahey'

39. 26 April 1879, from Nimching at Singapore to Percy Criddle at 131 St. Georges Road, Southwark, SE, London (via Naples; watermark 'JOYNSON 1971') [added in another hand, probably Percy's in pencil, 'Arr May 24/79'].

'Dear Sir,

We are in receipt of your favour of 20th March inst. Including a B/L [= Bill of Laden] for our care at the address of Mr. Alabaster for S.S. "*Kashgar*" – As soon as the said Steamer shall have reached this port he shall take delivery of it and forward to Bangkok as requested at our earliest opportunity –

With Compliments

We remain, Dear Sir

Yours faithfully

Nimching, T.'

40. 7 May 1879, from Edward Percy Alabaster [aged about 8] at 3 The Grange, Shepherd's Bush, to Mrs. Criddle (edged in black; watermark 'A PIRIE & SONS 1877').

'My dear Mrs. Criddle,

I hope you are very well. We had a letter from Mama, she said she was at Bangkok, and she said Papa came to see whether she was on board, but would not go on board till he had herd that she was on board the Captain gave two loud whistles.

We had two fine days but today is wet. How is Norman? [his cousin, Norman Criddle]. Mama said the Thermometer Earnest gave her was up to 80 [°F = 26.7°C] what a difference it is ours is 60 [°F = 15.6°C].

Love from Grandmama and all.

Yours affectionately

Edward Percy Alabaster'

41. 26 May 1879, from Palacia Alabaster at Bangkok to Mrs Criddle.

‘My dear Auntie,

I have been wanting to write to you before – but somebody or something has always come at the important moment to prevent my doing so –

Henry is very busy with the Siamese – sent for at all hours of the day – and woken up out of his sleep at night – I wish they would see that his salary is inadequate – which it most certainly is – it is wonderful how he manages such an amount of brain work – Mr. Knox has managed to get the Gun boat here – but it has not intimidated the Siamese – and the Officers think them a very pleasant & good natured people – I have heard that “*Foxhound*” is leaving tomorrow. I suppose you will have seen something of the affair in the papers before you get this –

I was very glad to hear you were all well. Now must be the time for enjoying England – the gardens must just be lovely – Oh, if Henry & I could only be there with the boys – I believe I miss them more & more – & when there will be a prospect of seeing them I do not know – I was so glad to get your account of them – Is it not sad about Ted’s wife – I am sure it must have been a dreadful blow to him – poor little babies without their Mamma!! There have been several deaths among Europeans since I arrived – in a small community like this it is always very depressing. My chief friend here, Mrs. Clarke, I suppose took alarm – anyhow she has gone to England with her little girl, and I am very very sorry – she is a great loss to me – one of the young princes has also died after a very short illness – he was a very nice fellow – a first rate *aide de camp* – & the King misses him very much – with these exceptions it has been a very gay & busy time since I returned – General Grant’s visit⁴⁵ – he had to prepare the

⁴⁵ He was the ex-President of the USA. Henry’s sister-in-law, Laura Alabaster reported from Hankow, China that the General and his wife had been charmed with

Palace for him & his party, paper paint – whitewash & furnish in twenty four hours – which I think may be considered hard work & not accelerated by pelting rain which would insist – upon running into the rooms, washing the carpets &c. – as soon as we had succeeded in arranging them – but that is all over – & who (amongst distinguished foreigners) will next pay Siam a visit – remains to be see[n] – the German Consul is in hopes that Prince Henry who is I think in Japan now – will come before long –

Will you give my best love to the Callows. I intend writing to them before long – I hope they are keeping pretty well – how glad you must all be to have got through the winter. I think Henry is looking very well in fact it is the general opinion – I did not see any change in him when I returned – but – he certainly knocks up sooner than he did –

With our love to you all & kisses to the children

Believe me

Yours affectionately Palacia E. Alabaster'

42. 19 June 1879, from Nimching at His Siamese Majesty's Consulate, Singapore to Percy Criddle at 131 St. Georges Road, Southwark, SE, London (via Brindisi [Italy]) [added in another hand, probably Percy's, in pencil, 'Arr 14/7/79'; watermark 'JOYNSON 1871].

'Dear Sir,

We are in receipt of your favor [*sic*] of the 7th May last, enclosing a B/L [= Bill of Laden] for a case sent through our care to Mr. Alabaster – The case has been forwarded yesterday per S.S. "*Bangkok*".

Henry and his wife 'and seemed to appreciate their kindness and attention' (see *Sir Chaloner Alabaster Correspondence, 1840-1880* by John S. Alabaster, *Occasional Monograph* No. 2. The Alabaster Society, Letter No. 55 [original held at the School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London. MS 380823]).

We remain, Dear Sir,
Yours faithfully
Nimching, T.’

43. 1 July 1879, from Borneo Co., Ltd., Singapore to Percy Criddle at Addleston [sic], Surrey (added in another hand, probably Percy’s, in pencil, ‘Arr Aug 1/79’).

‘Dear Sir,

At the request of our Bangkok friends & on account of H.R.H. Prince Krom Mün Naret, we beg to hand you herewith a Cpt [= capital?] draft by Ourselves on Messers K & I Henderson, 7 Mincing Lane, London in your favor [sic] for £522.15/- receipt of which we will thank you to acknowledge.

We are Dear Sir
Yours faithfully
For the Borneo Company Limited
[illegible]
Manager’

44. 23 November 1879, from Henry Alabaster at Bangkok, to Percy Criddle (added in another hand, in pencil, ‘Recd. Jan 2/80’; watermark ‘JOYNSON SUPERFINE’).

‘My dear Percy,

The stores & wines are here in excellent condition. I am very seedy – indeed have had a very wretched time for some months.

The best thing that could happen would be for a telegram to summon Palacia back to her children so that she would go happy, otherwise with very vile temper and long fits of nervous irritability – & or – I shall have a quarrel with her and break the heart of one of the best women I have ever known⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ Perhaps Palacia had discovered that Henry then had a five-month old son by his Thai wife who had conceived in September 1878 when Palacia had been in

I enclose a draft for [inserted, ‘L Malherbe, 132 Fly St. Denis[?], Paris’] £120 to my account having at last got payment from H.R.H. Krom Naret – and been paid by Prince Kamalat for the models of diamonds – jewel working machinery etc. I have only waited some three or four years – and get no interest. Yet you think it a fine thing for me to get orders.

I shall be glad to receive an account current.

Love to the old Lady and to Aunt Kate.

Yours affectionately

H[enry] Alabaster

Draft is payable in London’

45. 20 February 1880, from Florence Fahey at 3 The Grange, Shepherd’s Bush, to Mrs. Criddle (edged in black).

‘My dear Mrs. Criddle,

I am sure you will be very sorry to hear my dear Mother in law died this morning at 4 A.M.

Believe me

Yours sincerely

Florence Fahey’

46. 13 July 1880? from Henry Alabaster at Rozel Villa, St. Margaret’s, to Percy Criddle (edged in black; watermark ‘A PIRIE & SONS 1880).

My dear Percy,

I don’t think I shall be able to get to Addlestone – (I shall try)-

All Saturday & Sunday I propose (unless special business hinders) to be at home at Rozel Villa on the River Bracely – over Richmond Bridge turn to right along path – beside river – pass under Railway Bridge pass end of St. Margaret’s Avenue Rd. Then leave

England. The son, Tong Khun had been born on 28 June 1879 (personal communication from Khun Siddli Savetsila, letter of 24 February 2005).

river bank (as the house has no back gate) and you reach the house in a few seconds – a semi-detached –

Yours affectionately
H[enr]y Alabaster'

47. 8 August 1884, from King Chulalongkorn at the Grand Palace to Palacia

'Dear Madam,

No word can express my condolences on hearing the sudden and untimely demise of your husband my most beloved and faithful friend Mr. Henry Alabaster, who has served in my service for more than ten years since, and I am fully aware that he never will quit my service in his life and during the time of which I have always experienced his best ability, intelligence, zeal and devotion to me and my government, and I would not find any man of the same virtues I found in him. Be assured, dear Madam, the loss you are now sustained in him is also great to me, that it is my unspeakable grief, and my entire and sincere sympathy is with you and I really shared your great misfortune.

In consideration of his good service, the various duties imposed upon him of which he had carried out faithfully and devotedly so satisfactory to me, that I have directed a pension of £300 per annum be granted unto you throughout your long life as a widow of Mr. Alabaster, also the allowance of £200 a year be granted for the education of his two children and his funeral should be conducted with all honours of the first class Phya [= Chao Phraya?] in my service, of which he was actually deserved and also a monument of European style shall be erected by me at his burial ground.

In conclusion I beg to assure you that I shall give you any assistance you require for your comfort until you shall reach your home in Europe, and I pray that the Providence shall bestow his blessing on you thereby lessening your grief, which is so essential to

your health, that should be preserved in order that you may be able to console and bring up your children to the man of high qualities as their father has been in my estimation.

Believe me,

Dear Madam,

Yours very faithfully

(Signed *Manu Regia*) [By the King's hand] Chulalongkorn R.S.'

48. 17 August 1884, from O. Frankfurter at Bangkok to Percy Criddle, aged 39 (black edged).

'Dear Sir,

Mrs. Alabaster has requested me to inform you of the death of her husband Mr. H. Alabaster [aged 48], which took place on Friday the 8th of August. Death was probably caused by congestion of the brain. Although medical help was at once summoned, Mr. Alabaster never recovered the faculty of speech from the first attack which took place on Friday morning at 4 a.m. until the time of his death at 8.30 p.m.

As far as the present arrangements go, Mrs. Alabaster will leave for England as soon as the affairs of her late husband are settled. At the present time she is still too much bowed down by her grief to be able to write to you personally.

Mrs. Alabaster wishes to be remembered to Mrs. Criddle & yourself.

Believe me to be

Dear Sir

Yours sincerely

O. Frankfurter'

Part 2. Note on Thailand's Independence

Henry Alabaster's Role in Perspective

Thailand's Early History

Thailand stands out as one of the few countries that escaped the wave of conquest and colonisation by European countries that swept other parts of the world – especially Latin America in the 16th century, North America in the 17th century, and Africa and even Asia in the 19th century. The question arises, why?

That is not to say that Thailand as we know it today has always been clearly defined and independent. The states of Indo-china first emerged during the early years of the Christian era when the blocking of the northern trade routes by movements of nomadic peoples stimulated trade with India. This was when Hinduism and Buddhism came to the area then known as the kingdom of Funan whose northern border cut west to east across the centre of present day Thailand. (shown approximately as a dashed line on the map inside the front cover). Subsequently there was a close connection between central Thailand and the Mon kingdom of Burma to the west, although it did not then extend southwards into the Malay Peninsula, which was controlled from the 8th to the 13th century by Sumatra. During the 11th century the Khumer Kingdom to the east annexed central Thailand together with the northern part of the Malay Peninsula, but by the 13th century the Thai people had established their own kingdom in central Thailand and in the 14th century a separate wave of Thai invaders penetrated further south to U Thong. This latter group became dominant, establishing their capital in Ayudhya⁴⁷ 70 miles up the Chao Phya River that runs through Bangkok, and extended their influence over the Malay Peninsula. In 1431 the Thais sacked the ancient capital city of Ankor to the east in present-day Cambodia (Kampuchea), enslaving the population. The northern part of Thailand remained fairly independent until it was annexed by Burma in the 16th century.

So, Thailand had been much affected by waves of conquest and colonisation, at least within South East Asia. And, incidentally, these varied ethnic

⁴⁷ Variouslly spelled: Authaya, Ajuthia

influences in Thailand can be traced both in the material and features of the images of Buddha that were fashioned there over these nine rather turbulent centuries⁴⁸.

European Influence in the Late 16th and 17th Centuries.

European influence, on the other hand was of a different order. Until the end of the 16th century, it was Portugal that enjoyed a trading monopoly in the Far East, which included Indian cloth to Thailand (then known as Siam), Arab competition having been effectively controlled from Portugal's bases in East Africa and Goa in west India (not liberated from Portugal until 1961). But Portugal's resources of manpower and finance were insufficient to develop a power base on land. Then, with the union of Portugal and Spain in 1581, the Dutch, being consequently excluded from the lucrative trade between Lisbon and Northern Europe, turned to the Far East, and by 1602 the Dutch United East India Company had been established. Colonial rule soon followed in Bratavia, Java, and a further monopoly of trade set up from which even the Chinese were excluded, although the Dutch failed to gain a monopoly of trade with Siam; three French missionaries got there first in 1660, to be followed by a diplomatic mission in 1638, and further development in terms of Dutch trade or colonisation was also thwarted by civil war⁴⁹.

The Burmese sacked the city of Ayudhya (Ajuthia) in 1767 and the capital transferred to Bangkok⁴⁸. By the 19th century, however, a period of peace and modernisation was beginning, and there was a vigorous indigenous trade in the area, financed by China and Japan rather than by Europe. The East India Company (of England) established under Elizabeth in 1601⁵⁰, having failed to make inroads into the spice trade, had turned its attention to India early in the 17th century and had become formal ruler of Bengal by 1764, subsequently sharing control with the British crown until 1858⁴⁹.

British Initiatives in the 19th Century

It was at about this time that Britain again sought to establish trade with the Far East – in particular, China, Japan and Siam. The Opium War with China

⁴⁸ Harold Osborne (Ed.) (1981) *The Oxford Companion to Art*. The Art of Thailand, pp. 1127-1129. The University Press, Oxford. Book Club Associates, London.

⁴⁹ J. M. Roberts (1995) *The Penguin History of the World*, Third Edition. pp. 611-613,

⁵⁰ The role of Thomas Alabaster (1550-1624) in the formation and running of the East India Company is thoroughly described by Sue Andrews and Tony Springall in *Hadleigh and the Alabaster Family* (2005) pp.166-169.

had ended in 1842 with the Treaty of Nanking, and five Treaty Ports (including Hong Kong) had been established each with a British consulate⁵¹. In 1855 Sir John Bowring (Governor of Hong Kong) was in Bangkok negotiating another Treaty whereby Siam agreed to the appointment of a consul⁵² and to extra-territorial powers; Englishmen would be permitted to own land in certain districts, customs and port dues fixed and trade facilities granted. Similar agreements were signed with other countries later. Little did Sir John know then what a strong and unexpected influence his actions would lead to once the Siam consulate was established and one young student interpreter in particular had been appointed.

Henry's Arrival

In 1854, Sir E. Hammond, Consul General in Hong Kong had suggested that entrants to the consular service should be taken from the language class at Kings College (the only institution in Britain teaching Chinese, although very badly indeed). They would be chosen on the recommendation of the Principal, the Rev. R. W. Jelf, such patronage then being the norm, for open competition was not agreed to until 1860. His recommendation was reportedly based 'not only on their [mastery of!] Chinese, but on their intelligence, aptitude for business, steadiness in character, gentlemanlike manners and above all moral and religious principles'⁵³ &⁵⁴. Thus it was that in September 1856 Henry Alabaster was appointed, although he remained only briefly in Hong Kong before going on to Siam in the following March as a student interpreter⁵³.

The Situation in the Kingdom of Thailand

At that time Siam was extremely fortunate in being governed by Rama IV, King Mongkut, who was an exceptional character, a distinguished scholar and a man of many parts who was well aware of his country's shortcomings, and anxious to make improvements. The situation in the country has been described by Henry's son as follows:

'At that time, roads, electricity, waterworks, hospitals, schools, trains, engine boats, post and telegraph services were not yet known... only wooden and thatched houses were to

⁵¹ The role of Henry's brother Chaloner in the British diplomatic service in China has been described by Adrian Alabaster (*loc. cit.*) and a synopsis of his correspondence published as *Occasional Mongraph* No. 2 by the Alabaster Society.

⁵² The consulate was established in Bangkok on 11 June 1856.

⁵³ P. D. Coates (1988) *The China Consuls*. Oxford University Press. p. 75

⁵⁴ Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*

be seen here and there. The rest were orchards, paddy fields, canals and empty pieces of land. Sail and paddle boats were used for water transport while one had to walk or take a ride on horseback, elephant or cart in travelling on land. Royalty would travel in a palanquin while a noble man would have a litter. Thai literate men were rare at that time – not to mention those who knew English, who were very few. It was very difficult to find an English interpreter. Starting to learn the Thai language by oneself ... was truly difficult for Europeans who previously had spent their lives in civilised countries’⁵⁵.

The king had spent many years as a Buddhist monk, and as such had had the unique opportunity as a prince of the royal family to travel all over the country for a first hand view of its condition. He learned Pali in order to study the Buddhist scriptures in their original language, and was awarded a doctorate in Religion. He learned Latin from a French bishop and English from missionaries. He was keen to learn all that he could of western science and culture. He was interested in maths and astronomy and, incidentally, accurately predicted the time of the eclipse of the sun in 1868, the calculation being confirmed with his watch on one hand and the firing of a pistol in the other before a large company of court officials, including Henry and influential guests assembled in a temporary township built especially for the purpose in the jungle!^{55 & 56}

Henry’s Contribution

When Henry first arrived in Thailand he may have been poorly versed in Chinese and entirely ignorant of the Thai language, but he was otherwise well equipped to make a contribution to the development of the country. He had gained a School Classical Scholarship to enter King’s College, and his interest in languages led him, not only to fluency in Thai, but also to study Sanskrit. He had graduated from the Applied Science Department of the College and gained a Certificate in Chemistry in 1854-5. For his Certificate of Honour he had had to pass exams in natural philosophy and maths, and had to produce plans and drawings of a line of railway or canal with appropriate calculations. The examination for the Senior Scholarship required knowledge of surveying, geology and practical mechanics⁵⁴.

He was to serve in the consulate for nearly 16 years during which time he was allowed to help Thai officials in their work, one of his main achievements being the survey and construction of the New Road in Bangkok. After King Rama

⁵⁵ Thongkam Savetsila (1950) *The Biography of Henry Alabaster*. 21 pp. foolscap and appendices. (Translated from Thai by Thongkam’s grand-daughter, Virginia Bird; Copy with the Alabaster Society).

⁵⁶ Angela Alabaster (2002) Henry Alabaster’s Account of the Total Eclipse of the Sun, 1868. *Alabaster Chronicle*, No.18. pp 32-39. The Alabaster Society.

IV had died (in 1868), Henry was invited in 1873, the fifth year of King Chulalongkorn's, (Rama V's) reign to serve the Thai crown directly. His activities were very varied: he functioned as private secretary to the king; was chief interpreter; sorted out trade problems and complaints from the international community; was director of the museum which he established (the remnants of which are still extant in the Zoology Department of the University of Chulalongkorn); managed the library of foreign books, and the botanical gardens and zoo which he set up at Samanrom; was in charge of all survey work, the training of Thai surveyors and the building and maintenance of roads and bridges in Bangkok; established a post and telecommunications service; increased the police force; and played an important part in education before the establishment of a Ministry of Education, recommending overseas education for the elite and supervising the first team of ten Thai students who went to study in England. Such service earned him several nicknames; one was, 'Father of the Orchid' and another, *Khru* (meaning 'teacher')⁵⁵.

Resistance to Colonisation

Perhaps Henry's greatest service was in foreign affairs. *Luk Khru*, (meaning 'teacher's son') touched on this in his biography of his father:

'In those days it was very difficult to find Thais who were well versed in foreign affairs. Thus having Mr. Alabaster serve under the Thai crown was very beneficial. It could be said that Thailand was very lucky as the superpowers were spreading their influence closer toward Thailand. Mr. Alabaster was well aware of the intentions of certain countries [France especially] towards Thailand. His assessments proved close to the facts since he had served under the crown in China before and also had worked in the British consulate...long enough that he knew how to handle the superpowers. I could recall his remarks that Thailand has taken good care of him, thus he would be faithful too and try his best for the interest of Thailand. He would be on the watch that no nation would bully Thailand. It is also noteworthy to say that during his service Thailand had never lost even a bit of its soil due to the ability and wisdom of King Rama V'⁵⁵.

Thailand was of course hemmed in on both sides, Britain occupying Burma to the west and France in occupation to the east. France had recently acted aggressively (in 1843) in the Isle of Basilan, near Mindanao at the southern end of the Sula peninsula, much to the consternation of the Governor of the Philippines. Then in 1862 it had taken several provinces by force in Annam (near Saigon), and it was reported, 'The French are making towards Bangkok, and many are of the

opinion that in a few years all Siam will be under the French Government’⁵⁷. This was despite recognition by the French in 1856 of Thailand’s suzerainty over Cambodia! In the event Thailand renounced her rights there. It is fair to say that the French were generally hated in Thailand, whilst the British, certainly in the form of the consul, Mr. Thomas George Knox, were distrusted. There was considerable animosity between Henry and Knox, probably partly because of Henry’s sympathy with Thailand, his command of the language and his good relations with King Rama IV, the Regent and his family, and King Rama V. So it is not at all surprising that he changed sides, so to speak, earning himself the unpleasant epithet, ‘snake in the grass’!⁵⁸ He immersed himself in the language and culture of the country and, for one thing, having thoroughly studied Thai Buddhism, wrote a book on the subject⁵⁹.

A Thai Consulate was established in 1863 in Singapore, which was visited by King Chulalongkorn in 1870, the first foreign country visited by a Thai monarch⁶⁰. There he studied politics, economics, public health and education Henry recommended that Thai envoys should be sent to Europe and America rather than rely on negotiations through the consulates in Bangkok (including Mr. Knox for Britain), and in due course this was put into effect (in 1881). And he advised too on international law. In one of his later letters (to his Aunt in England in January 1876) he comments wryly on his duties and relations with the Knox family:

‘This New Year on duty from an early hour. I do not complain. The more I am used the more necessary I become and the better I hope will be my remuneration. I am proud as ever I was now – having made my position without anyone to thank for it – and having the pleasure of drafting the... important dispatches for the Foreign Ministers “who did not wish me back in Siam”, and of suggesting and drawing up laws – accepted and passed by the government which “objected to my presence”⁶¹. Palacia [Henry’s wife] now leads society, and her parties are the only largely attended ones. She and her lady friends decline to go where Mr. Knox’s daughters go [Knox had married a Thai lady!] – and so make successful parties impossible except in our house.’

⁵⁷ Margaret Lanon (1946) *Anna and the King of Siam*. George G. Harrap & Co., Ltd., p. 268.

⁵⁸ R. J. Minney (1962) *Fanny [Knox] and the Regent of Siam*. Collins, London

⁵⁹ Henry Alabaster (1971) *The Wheel of the Law*. Gregg International Publishers Ltd., London Edition. 323 pp.

⁶⁰ *Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand-Singapore Relations* [2005] Thai Ministry of Culture, ISBN 974-417-703-9

⁶¹The phrases in quotation marks refer, I think, to alleged complaints from the Thai authorities about him that were reported by Knox.

An Overview

It would be unfair to imply that Henry was alone in supporting the interests of Thailand; he can be regarded as an enabler, and it is important to stress the enlightened and receptive attitude of both King Rama IV and King Rama V, as well as members of the royal court in responding to his initiatives. Other Europeans were brought in by the king, such as Dr P. Gowan, as Court physician, Mr. James McCarthy, as Chief of the Survey Department, not to mention Anna Leonowens, as teacher to King Rama V and to other children of the royal household during the years 1862 to 1867⁵⁷.

Also, it would be wrong to overemphasise Henry's role in preserving the territorial integrity of Thailand, for it was in the interests of both Britain and France to preserve a buffer zone between their neighbouring territories to the west and east, respectively. Nevertheless, his services were, and still are much appreciated in the country; he is commemorated by a huge tomb and statue erected by the king in Bangkok, and is remembered by his family there, now living under the name, *Savetsila* (meaning 'white stone'), a name bestowed by the king on Henry's two Thai sons. It is a strange twist of history that Henry's grandson, Air Chief Marshall Siddhi Savetsila, Doctor of Law also served his country well in international affairs, first in trying to subvert the Japanese occupation, and later as Foreign Minister and member of the Privy Council.

Index

- Acting Consul, 12, 19
Acting Interpreter, 12
Addlestone, 15, 16, 25, 28, 42, 48, 49
Age orphaned, 1
Ajuthia, 6, 53, 54
Alabaster Chronicle, 19, 22, 56
Alabaster, Adrian, ix, 2, 4, 9, 12, 17,
 19, 26, 29, 40, 55
Alabaster, Angela, ix, 19, 56
Alabaster, Chaloner, ix
 Age orphaned, 1
 Friendship with Sir Edmund
 Hornby, 5
 Intended marriage, 26
 Lending money to Henry, 19
Alabaster, Charles
 Age orphaned, 1
 Death, 17
 Hard up, 17
 In New Zealand, 12
Alabaster, Charles Chaloner
 Aged six activities, 27
 Birth, 19
 Health, 22, 25, 34, 39, 44
Alabaster, Edward Percy, ix
 Birth, 19
 Health, 22, 27, 44, 45
Alabaster, Ernest
 Health, 22, 27, 30, 34
Alabaster, Laura. *See also* Macgowan,
 Laura
Alabaster, Palacia, ix
 Letters to Percy Criddle, 1
Alabaster, Thomas, 54
Alexandra Hotel, 43
Ankor, 53
Auntie. *See* Criddle, Mary Ann Rebecca
Austin & Seely, 36, 38
Borneo Company, 18, 42, 48
Burma, ix, 53, 57
Callow family, 34, 47
Cambodia (Kampuchea), ix, 53
Campbell, Dr, 18
Campbell, Mrs, 18, 26, 27
Cause of death, 51
Clarke, Mrs., 46
Criddle, Alice, 23, 27, 34, 35, 39
Criddle, Alma, ix
Criddle, Evelyn, 34
Criddle, Mary Ann Rebecca, ix
 As artist, 9
 Portrait of Henry, 17
Criddle, Norman, 27, 34, 45
Criddle, Percy, ix
 Advice on career, 3, 9, 12, 15
 At 131 St. Georges Road,
 Southwark, 45
 Correspondents, 1
 Croquet, 18
 Disputes, 25
 Eclipse of the sun, 19
 Education in Britain, 56
 Elosserez, ix, 35
 Establishment of British consulate,
 55
 Fahey, Eliza S., 44
 Fahey, Florence, 49
 Fahey, James, ix, 29
 Fahey, Palacia Emma
 Marriage, 17
 Family tree, xii
 Fishing, 10
 Foreign affairs, 57
 Frankfurter, O, ix, 51
 French colonialism, 57
 Funan, 53

- Gables House, 44
Gowan, Dr., 26, 32, 33
Grant, General
 Visit, 46
Grant, Miss, 34
Greaves family, 26, 28, 34
 Ada, 28
Hake, Laraine, 19, 33
Hammond, Sir E., 55
Harlow Place, 11, 16
Harrer, Elise, 22, 23, 24, 39
Henderson, Messers. K & I, 48
Hop Exchange
 Southwark Street, London, 22
Income below expenditure, 41
Insurance, 17
Interpreter, 2
Jelf, Rev. R. W., 55
Kein Ching, 39
Kellason, D, ix, 42, 43, 44
Kenyon, Ann, ix, 33
Khumer Kingdom, 53
Knox, George
 Building his boat, 4
 Distrusted by Thais, 58
 Gun boats, 46
 House in Bangkok, 4
 Keeping back mail, 18
 Marriage, 29
 Parties boycoted, 29
 Present of boat, 18
Leonowens, Anna, 17, 58, 59
Lodging with James and Ann
 Pearson, 19
Macgowan, Laura, 26
Majors, 16
Malherbe, L, 49
Markham, Johnny, 5
Marriage to Palacia Emma Fahey, 17
Mason's, 30, 33, 36, 38, 40, 41
Maughan, Mrs., 23
Nicol, Alice, 23, 24
Nimching, T, ix, 45, 47, 48
P & O, ix, 17, 20
Parker, Second Assistant, 12
Pickenpach, Mr., 18
Prachin Buri, 30
Prachuap Khiri Khan, 19
Prince Sai's Ointment, 33
Prior, Mrs., 26
Promotions in 1859 & 1859, 8
Resignation from British service, 22
Return voyage to Bangkok, 20
Richmond, 49
River Bracely, 49
Rozel Villa, St. Margaret's Avenue,
 49
Sailing
 Cutting sails, 13
 New boat from Knox &
 Campbell, 18
 Purchase of a yacht, 9
 Repairs to boat, 12
 Yachting trip, 28
Salary from the King, 23
Savetsila, Khun Siddhi, ix, xi, 1, 20,
 28, 30, 31, 35, 49, 59
Savetsila, Phraya Vana Phrukra
 Picham, 2, 8, 12, 22
Schombergh, Sir Robert, 11, 12, 16
School of Oriental and African
 Studies, ix, 26, 47
Schustes, Dr., 25
Ships
 Foxhound, 46
 S.S. Bangkok, 47
 S.S. Cyphrenes, 20
 S.S. Kashgar, 45

- Saracen*, 5
- Shooting, 11
- Siamese, 41
 - H.R.H. Krom Mun Aditron, 36
 - H.R.H. Krom Mun Naret, 36, 38, 40, 48, 49
 - H.R.H. Mom Chao Prisdang, 40
 - H.R.H. Prince Kamalat, 31, 32
 - Luang Pinit, 31
 - Phra Pricha, 30
 - Prince Kaph, 31
 - Prince Sai Sanitoongsa, 33
- Siamese festivals
 - Autumn, 6
 - New Year at the Palace, 12
- Siamese, H.R.H. King
 - Chulalongkorn (Rama VI), 1, 19
 - Invitation to Henry, 57
 - Letter to Palacia, 50
 - Singapore visited, 58
- Siamese, H.R.H. King Mongkut (Rama V), ix, 2
 - Character, 55
- Sketching, 11
 - Sketch of boat rigging, 14
- 'Snake in the grass', 22, 58
- Southwark Street, London, 35
- Student Interpreter, 2
- Surveying trip, 34
- Thai Consulate established, 58
- The East India Company, 54
- The Grange, 24, 29, 39, 44, 45, 49
- The Wheel of the Law*, 19, 58
- Theatricals, 16
- Twickenham
 - 13 Victoria Road, 21
 - Fitzroy Villas, 22, 23, 24
- Veldhuis, Oriole Vane, ix, 15, 22, 23, 27
- Weather
 - Cool season, 26
 - Hot season, 34
 - Temperatures, 7, 10, 45
- Westminster Archives, ix
- Williams & Co., Jewellers, 33
- Woolheads, 16
- Yuthia. *See* Ajuthia