

## 1. The early years and family ties

Henry was born on 22 May 1836 (the year before the accession of Queen Victoria) into what was evidently a close and caring family; he and his elder brother, Charles (Charly), two years older, occasionally stayed with aunts and uncles and were often mentioned tenderly in family letters that have come to light. In these letters, health was ever a topic of concern, for neither James Chaloner nor his wife Harriet was strong, and their first child, Mary, had died at just one year old. So it is not surprising that they had moved to the increasingly popular seaside town of Hastings, thus escaping the unhealthy and oppressive, almost Dickensian living conditions in London – poor water supply, inadequate sanitation, choking air pollution and congested horse traffic, especially in Piccadilly where the family millinery business was located. Some idea of the filthy state of the roads can be gained from a contemporary woodcut (Fig. 1) showing, incidentally how the problem was often dealt with *ad hoc* by child road-sweepers at a penny a time.



Fig. 1. *A Thaw in the Streets of London*  
(by M. Jackson; from the London Transport Museum).

For the Alabasters of Piccadilly, the perceived value of a healthy sea voyage had been an important consideration in support of the decision for James Chaloner to journey to America in 1837 to try to validate the deeds to Indian Land there<sup>2</sup>, but his seven months absence from home must have made it very difficult for his wife, Harriet bringing up their two young sons, even with support from the rest of the family. A letter written to her by her mother-in-law<sup>3</sup>, shows that when young Charly was then ill, some of the burden had been taken by her sister-in-law, Katherine (Kate), newly married to Dr. John (see Family Tree on p. xx),

‘Charly is quite as well as when at home, or perhaps I may say, better. He is with his aunt Kate, who makes him a bed in her room, and they are delighted with him. [...] Kate says she will take both children in the spring, and quite pleases herself about her family, so you see, I have a kiss for Henry. As to Charly, he is so good and happy that I think he will soon be well, but Mr. Greaves wishes him to have a flannel shirt next his skin. So, if you have no objection, we intend to try it. [...]

Business is flat, and Fanny [her daughter-in-law, Frances Alabaster *née* Poppy] goes to Suffolk tomorrow<sup>4</sup>, but we do not think it advisable to send Charly there at present; if he goes on well, he is better where he is, as Mr. G[reaves] is very careful about his getting cold, but gives him no medicine for his cough, except a little linseed tea [a medicine to allay irritation] and carigen [*sic*] moss<sup>5</sup>. Do not think, by this, that his cough is worse, but it is no better, and that

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<sup>2</sup> John S. Alabaster (2011) *An Alabaster Quest: A Claim to North American Indian land, 1837*. Occasional Monograph No. 4. The Alabaster Society, 116 pp.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, 7 September 1837 written by Mrs. Mary Alabaster to Harriet (City of Westminster Archives Acc. 2369, Letter No. 37a).

<sup>4</sup> Frances had married in 1834 James Chaloner’s brother Henry who had died two years later and she would have visited her father Charles Poppy and family, farming at Witresham. She died in 1842.

<sup>5</sup> Carrageen moss, coined only in 1834, after the place in Ireland, was later also known as Irish moss, a seaweed (*Chondrus crispus*), used as a decoction for coughs, and also with milk as a *blanc-mange*.

appears now to be his only complaint. His appetite is very good and, in all other respects, he is quite well'<sup>6</sup>.

Actually, Charly's health remained poor, as did that of both parents and, to add to their burden James Chaloner's mother died in June 1838 when his wife was six months pregnant with their third child, Chaloner who was born in the September. The last letter we have from James Chaloner, an unusually short one, written in a shaky hand to his sister Mary Ann Rebecca in July 1839, described his poor health and his hope of a recuperative holiday with Harriet on the Isle of Wight<sup>7</sup>. But Harriet died of consumption (tuberculosis) on 6 March, 1840, soon to be followed by James Chaloner himself on 22 May, young Henry's fourth birthday!

The effect on Henry and his two brothers, aged only seven, four and almost two, respectively can scarcely be imagined but, fortunately the rest of the family was there to step in and help. James Chaloner's sister, Mary Ann Rebecca (the artist) had married Henry Criddle and he and Frances Alabaster had been made executors to James Chaloner's will. Henry Criddle and his wife were childless at the time (four years after their marriage) and, as he regarded himself as a trustee to the three young nephews, he and his wife became, in effect, the loving parents to all three children. In due course, on 21 November 1844 their own, first and only son, Percy was born.

## **Education**

All the Alabaster boys were extremely fortunate to attend King's College, London, a truly progressive establishment; the School had been founded in 1829 as a junior department of the newly established King's College in the Strand, London and had,

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<sup>6</sup> As it turned out, Charles remained in poor health and, despite a restorative sea voyage to settle in New Zealand, died there as a young man of tuberculosis.

<sup>7</sup> City of Westminster Archives Acc. 2369, Letter No. 49.

for example, appointed Gabriele Rossetti to teach Italian, John Sell Cotman as Master of Landscape Drawing and, in 1855 had appointed its first science master at a time when few schools taught the subject. The Alabasters all did well. Henry was awarded a School scholarship in 1850, aged 14, a School Classical Scholarship in 1851, then a Senior Scholarship, a Certificate of Honour and a Certificate of Chemistry in 1854-5 and gained the equivalent of a degree as an Associate of the College in the Applied science Department in 1855.<sup>8</sup>

Although Percy did not attend the same school, he was intelligent and could at least benefit from having his elder cousins around and developed a particularly close relationship with both Henry and Chaloner that was expressed in the early letters<sup>9</sup>. These were laced with plenty of brotherly, almost fatherly advice, as well as giving him easily digested news of their travels and adventures abroad,

Henry, for example wrote on career choices, admonished Percy on his illegible handwriting, poor spelling, laziness and bad temper, and urged him to be hard-working, honest and, especially to be obedient to his mother. Reading between the lines, it is quite clear that, as a child, Percy was spoiled and wayward! Yet a strong, enduring family bond developed between the two, Percy looking eagerly to Henry to answer the questions that arose in his mind and Henry acting as his confidante and mentor; he lectured him on geological collections and stressed the importance of studying practical, applied subjects, as well as the necessity to include Latin and Greek, if only to show one's mental capability.

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<sup>8</sup> Adrian Alabaster (1999) *A Quintet of Alabasters*. Able Publishing. 259 pp.

<sup>9</sup> School of African and Oriental Studies Archives (SOAS Archive), MSS 380824 and 580823, respectively.

## 2. Service in the British Foreign Office

The letters Henry wrote to Percy (especially some recently come to light and transcribed in Appendix 1) tell us much about Percy, but even more about Henry; indeed, they are virtually the only source of information about his inaugural travel abroad and his first impressions of life in the tropics.

### Journey to China

Henry joined the China Consular Service in 1856, aged 19, having graduated at King's College, London and then been recommended by the principal of the School. It was the only establishment in England that taught Chinese, and the Foreign Secretary, Lord Clarendon, who in 1854, wanted to expand the service, felt that proficiency in the language should be taken into account in recruitment and thus accepted such nominations. Henry came just within the age limits of 16 to 20.

That August, Henry left England from Southampton and



Fig. 2. View of Gibraltar from the sea

later described his journey to young Percy in simple, clear language, also in historical context and in a way that would appeal to a young boy just twelve years old. Landmarks he mentioned included: the vines along the coast of Portugal where 'our best Port wine is made'; Gibraltar [Fig. 2] that 'once belonged to the Spaniards

but Sir George Rook[e] took it by surprise'.

He mentioned Malta being British, strongly fortified and having a beautiful church with mosaic and containing beautiful

tombs of Knights of St. John who used to fight the Turks in Palestine a long while ago’.

He urged him to follow his route (Fig. 3) – three days from Gibraltar to Malta, another three to reach Alexandria, ‘which, if you look at your map, you will find is an Egyptian city’!

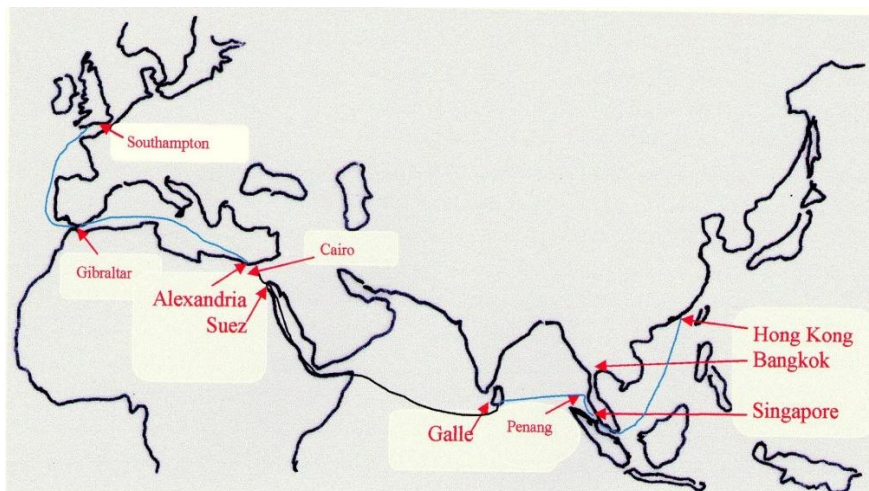


Fig. 3. Map showing the route of Henry's first visit to the Far East

There followed a six-hour train to Cairo, crossing the River Nile which

‘if [it] did not overflow every year, the ground would be too dry to grow anything, for it very seldom rains in Egypt [...].

‘we rode about the town; the streets are very narrow and dirty, and the houses very tall. When a carriage goes about, two good runners run before it and make everyone get out of the way; we had twice to pull up our donkeys close against a wall, and once I backed into a shop, for none of the shops have fronts and so it is very easy to ride into them.’

He experienced his first night under a mosquito net and made a 5 a.m. start to cross 84 miles of dessert and reach Suez on the Red Sea by nightfall. Then, on board the *Bentinck*;<sup>10</sup>

‘Most of the sailors were black men, called Lascars; there were about 200 of them and they used to sleep on the deck so that we often trod on them by accident but they did not mind that at all. Their food is mostly rice and fish for they cannot afford anything else. One of them stole another’s clothes one day, so the Captain had their bundles searched and so found out the thief, who was flogged.’<sup>11</sup>

Heavy showers in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) prompted a dis-course on the water-cycle but then the cool of early morning and evening enabled Henry to explore and describe the local country-side:



Fig. 4. Cinnamon Tree

‘[...] three of us got up early and walked to the Cinnamon Gardens where trees grow [Fig. 4] which have such a pleasant smelling and tasting bark; the bark only is eaten. It was a beautiful walk; by the seaside where the trees grew on rocks which must be under water every tide; through woods of cocoa and palms and other fruit trees, over half-broken-down bridges and at last the Cinnamon Gardens which were very pretty and had some

beautiful flowers in them and, among others, a root which had the scent of camphor. After a rest we started on our return, and met a postman carrying letters to Colombo, a town about 60 miles from Galle; he ran along at a steady rate of five miles and hour and was soon out of sight. By the time we were half-way home, it was past eight o’clock, and the sun was very hot on us, so we sat down by a stream,

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<sup>10</sup> A side-paddled steamer, built by Thomas Wilson & Co. of Liverpool in 1843, covered the Suez-Calcutta mail service; the concession for the Suez Canal was granted in 1854 but it not inaugurated until 1869.

<sup>11</sup> Appendix 1, p.99: Letter No. 4 (1 November 1856).

bought some cocoa nuts for a halfpenny each and, having drank the milk and eaten the solid part, continued our walk, very much refreshed.

There are great numbers of snakes in Ceylon but we did not see them; we saw, however, a large alligator, 6 feet long lying in the road; just as we came up, a dog rushed at him and he ran off into a marsh by the roadside. We reached the hotel at about nine o'clock and found a very good breakfast waiting for us. The rest of the day we spent indoors, looking at the goods brought for sale, etc., and in the Evening we again walked out to hear the frogs and see the fireflies, the phosphorescent waves and the lighthouse.<sup>12</sup>

Six days steaming brought Henry to Penang:

‘as we entered the harbour we noticed lots of fishing places built over the sea; a number of long bamboo poles are driven into the sand and on the top, above high-water mark, a kind of floor is built, or sometimes a small hut; the fisherman sits here and watches his nets which are stretched all round on bamboo stakes; when the fish come in he pulls up his nets and catches them.’<sup>13</sup>

It took two more days to get to Singapore, arriving there in September 1856, and another eight to reach Hong King where his younger brother, Chaloner, (who, aged 16 in 1854, had been recommended for the China Consular Service) was awaiting him with growing anticipation after two years of separation. Indeed, Chaloner’s dairy entries show him keen to be joined by his ‘manly brother Henry’, after having learned of his selection and pictured in his mind the progress of his journey –

12 January, ‘Henry is coming out; he was 1<sup>st</sup> on the list. Hip, hip, hurrah

31 July, ‘Henry must now have begun his travels 2 months and he will be here, I hope. I pray God bless him; he is a brick’;

8 August, ‘Henry, I suppose has passed Ushant’; and,

9 October, ‘Henry is come all right’<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Appendix 1, p. 104: Letter No. 5 (Late November 1856?).

<sup>13</sup> Appendix 1, p. 105: Letter No. 6 (7 December 1856).

<sup>14</sup> For other relevant diary entries for 1856, see Adrian Alabaster (1999) *A Quintet of Alabasters*, Able Publishing, 259 pp and SOAS Archive, MS 380823.

## Hong Kong

Henry, continuing his account wrote,  
‘[...] I was soon seated under the veranda of our house enjoying the view of the harbour of Hong Kong [Fig. 5] which had four or five men of war in it besides more than a hundred merchant ships. [...]

Our house is some distance up the hill, higher than any other house in the Island and, besides having such a beautiful view of the harbour, is cooler than the town.

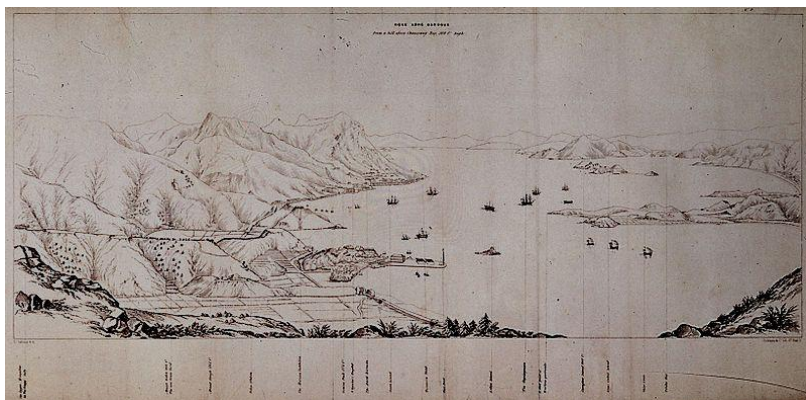


Fig. 5. View of Hong Kong Victoria harbour from above  
Causeway Bay, 1845

A stream runs down the mountain at the back of our house and every morning I climb up the stream which is full of large blocks of granite, on which we walk to keep our feet dry (sometimes we slip which is rather unpleasant). I then bathe in a pool or sit under a waterfall and, when my bath is over, return home and feel as jolly as possible. The water is now very cold early in the morning and makes me shudder as I get in, but this of course makes the pleasure of getting out greater than ever.

There are lots of Chinamen in Hong Kong; they are dirty fellows and often very impudent, but are generally very good tempered. They are very proud of their [pig-]tails and to make them seem long, plait

silk in their hair. Many of them are strong fellows, but they are terribly afraid of an Englishman.'

But eagerly awaited reunions can be disappointing. In this case, neither party could have realised how much each had changed over two years. Henry had continued his academic studies much

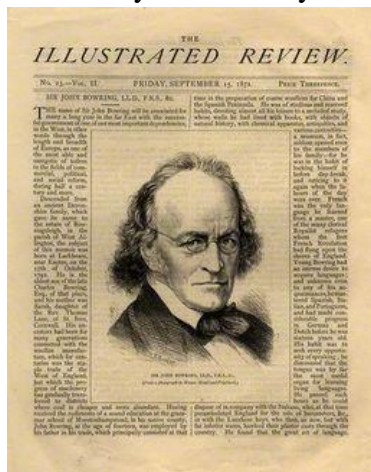


Fig. 6. Sir John Bowring,  
1871

(by Richard Taylor after Maul &  
Polyblank)

knowledge. It is, therefore, not altogether surprising that, even within a couple of days of their reunion, they quarrelled. Confiding to his diary, Chaloner reported,

'Had 2 tiffs with Henry, one on scientific grounds, he denying that I could perceive light and darkness, the other to come the elder brother on my damning the boys [his servant's] eyes out [...] I told him I did not come here to be lectured by him or anyone else'.

longer than had Chaloner which made him even more 'the elder brother'. But this was offset by Chaloner's much greater practical experience of the East: he had received special coaching in the language from the Chinese Secretary; had been on friendly terms with the Governor, Sir John Bowring (Fig. 6) and his family; had travelled in the region; and had also experienced Chinese hostility, witnessing at first hand their rioting and looting. So, although he may have been the younger brother in both years and academic training, he was much superior in local

### 3. Transfer to Thailand

How well Henry fitted in at Hong Kong is not clear, but there were opportunities for postings elsewhere, including Thailand where a British Consulate had just been established following the successful negotiation by Sir John Bowring of a Trading Treaty with the Siamese during March and April 1855<sup>15</sup>; an expenditure of £6000 had been authorised for land and buildings<sup>16</sup>, and a Mr. Forrest had been relocated there from Hong Kong in November. By February 1857 Henry's transfer had also been arranged – as a student interpreter – and his departure from Hong Kong on the 14<sup>th</sup> was reported by Chaloner to Percy,

‘Henry has gone to Siam which I suppose you know is south of China. He has gone in one of their Men of War’<sup>17</sup>.

#### First impressions of Bangkok



Fig. 7. Wat Paknam c.1900

He arrived in Bangkok on 16 March and the next day wrote to Percy describing the last stages of his journey, ‘Having passed this [island of Pulo Obi] we were in the Gulf of Siam and, altering our course to NW, arrived off the mouth of the River Menam<sup>18</sup> in five days, during which we were becalmed several times and had one squall which carried away our fore-top-gallant mast.

The ‘bar’ of the River Menam is a mud bank

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<sup>15</sup> Sir John Bowring (1857) *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, Vol. II, Ch. xvi, pp. 248-487. J. W. Parker, London.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to the British Foreign Office 1856, No. 45 (10 October) and Letter from the Foreign Office (19 October 1956).

<sup>17</sup> SOAS Archive, MS 380825, Letter No. 12 (14 February 1857).

<sup>18</sup> The old name for the Chao Phraya River, the main river in Thailand which flows through Bangkok.

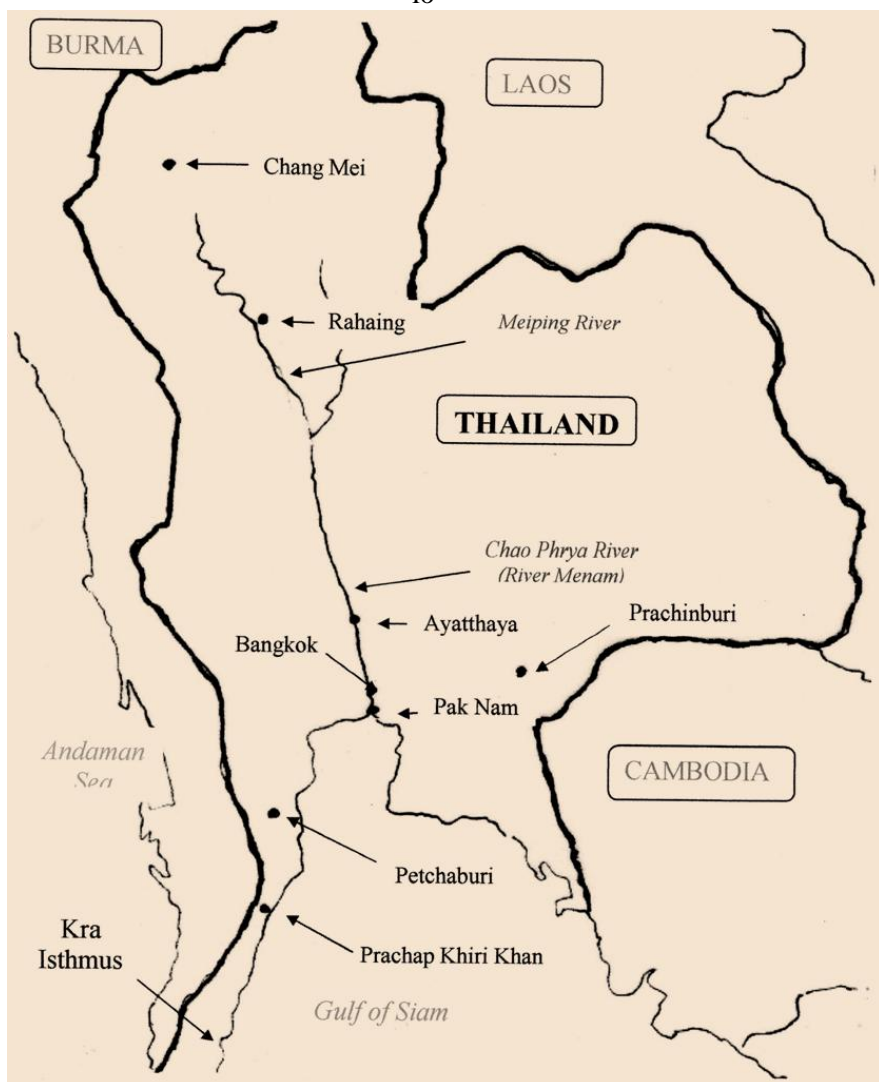


Fig. 8. Map of Thailand showing main places mentioned in the text.

several miles off the mouth of the river – the deepest water is never more than 14 feet – so our ship had to wait for the pilot to take her across so, when she anchored, I got into a six-oared boat and in 2½ hours landed at Paknam [Figs. 7 & 8], a town at the mouth of the river – The Governor was very polite to me and, having given me dinner, lent me a boat to take me to Bangkok – so off I went and till it grew dark amused myself by watching the banks of the river which is [here, a phrase has been cut off in the copy] uncommon and so deep that the largest ships can sail up it for 45 miles or more without a pilot.

The banks of the river are lined with trees & bushes so that you can see no ground – near the sea the mangrove abounds; it is the only land tree which is not killed by salt water and among these trees and bushes were thousands of pelicans and other birds. Behind these bushes, in some few spots, were groves of cocoa nut, rice fields, sugar plantations and orchards and occasionally a hut raised high on poles to protect its inmates from floods, snakes and wild beasts, for much the greater part of Siam is wild jungle, abounding in tigers, elephants and many other savage animals, and the banks of the river swarm with alligators.

It soon grew dark and then myriads of fire-flies danced through the air in all directions – crowding round the bushes on the banks till every branch seemed lit up with a row of tiny lamps.’<sup>19</sup>

It was all very new and strange. There was no city to compare with what Henry had seen in Singapore. Bangkok, even a decade later comprised just the old walled city, about a mile across, containing principally the Grand Palaces of the Kings and temples, and, beyond the walls: markets, the various consulates, a congested urban area to the east, a few residences to the west on the right bank of the river and more temples (Fig. 9, overleaf). In the words of Henry’s son,<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Appendix 1, p. 109: Letter No. 9 (17 March 1857).

<sup>20</sup> Phraya Wannaphrukphichan (Tong Khun) (1950) *Biography, of Henry Alabaster* 29 pp (typescript).

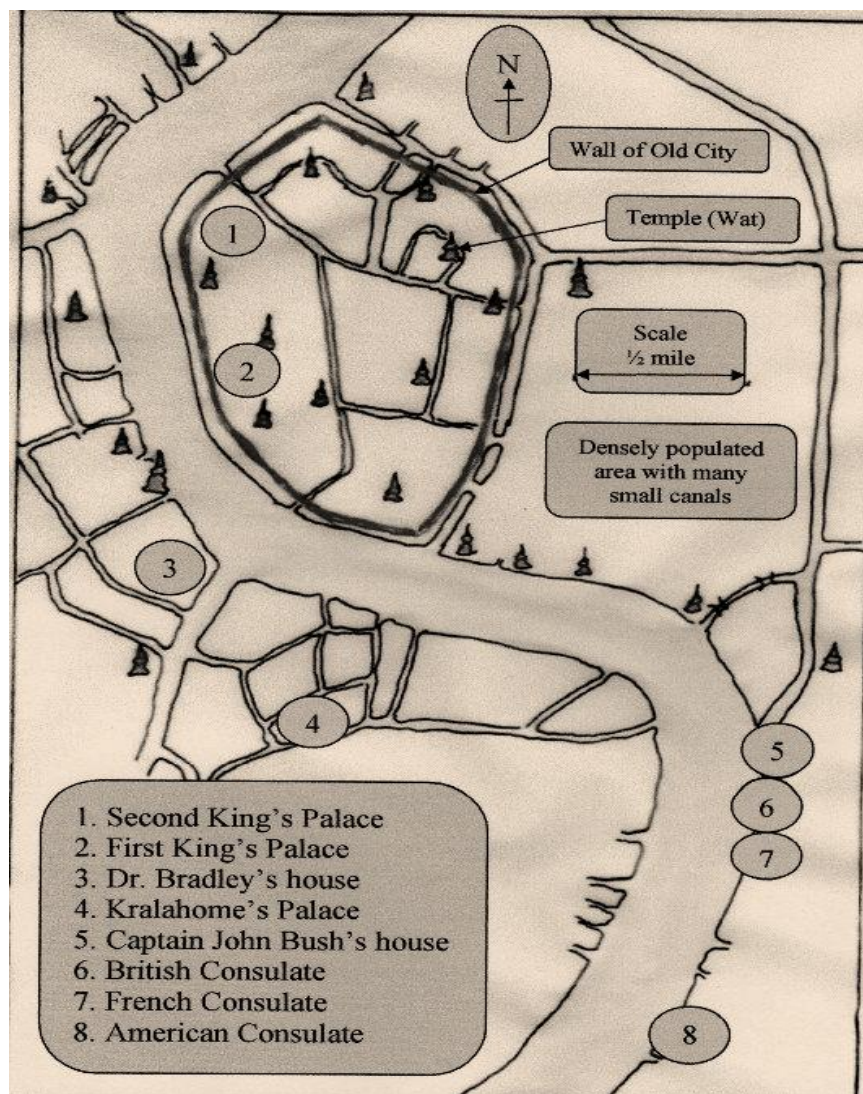


Fig. 9. Simplified map of Bangkok  
(based on that by Margaret Ayer in *Anna and the King of Siam* by Margaret Landon)

‘roads, electricity, waterworks, hospitals, schools, trains, engine boats, post and telegraph services were not known in Thailand yet. Only wooden and thatched houses located far from each other were [to be] seen here and there. The rest were orchards, paddy fields canals and empty pieces of land. Sail boats [and] paddle boats were used as



means of water transport, while one had to walk or take a ride on horseback, elephant or cart [Fig. 10] in travelling by land. For royalty, he or she would travel in a palanquin while a nobleman would have a litter as a means of transport.’

Fig. 10. Old postcard of bullock cart, c. 1900  
(by J. Antonio)

Soon after his arrival Henry had the first of many meetings with Rama IV, King Mongkut (Fig. 11) and members of the Royal court, the splendour of which he would no doubt have found in stark contrast to the state of the world outside the royal palaces.

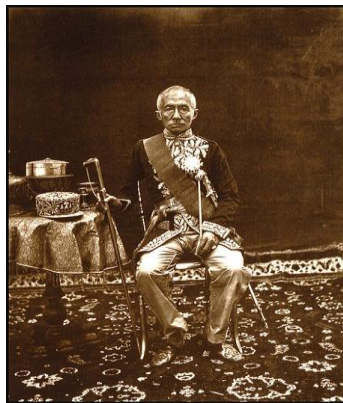


Fig. 11. King Monghut  
( from *Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand-Singapore Relations*)

## Engaging with his new environment

There is little doubt that Henry fitted in well in Thailand, judging from his letters to Percy which he tried to write regularly, once a month. They indicate generally good relations at that time with his colleagues, Thomas George Knox, the newly appointed Interpreter and John Markham<sup>21</sup>, First Assistant at the Consulate who Henry invited to share a house with him while waiting for his own new accommodation to be built there.

He seems soon to have adapted to his new watery environment, buying himself a boat to navigate the Chao Phraya River that winds through the centre of Bangkok and at that time providing the main means of transport between the Consulate and the Royal Palace and the principal route into the hinterland of Thailand. He sent Percy a scale-model of a Siamese barge with seven paddles, 'six in front of the house on deck or cover and one to steer behind', and though his own boat was rowed about by just two men, it would have been his much treasured means of escape from the tedium of routine consulate work:

'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.'<sup>22</sup>

'I think I told you before that it is now the 'April' season in Siam, that is, there is a shower almost every day. Every night there are severe storms round Bangkok but they seldom burst over the city itself and so every evening, as I go out in my boat, I sit in safety and watch the magnificent lightning flooding all around, sometimes a great ball of fire burst out from behind a dark cloud and is gone in an instant; sometimes there appears for some seconds a sheet of fire falling like

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<sup>21</sup> He is probably the one who is listed in *Reports of Journeys in China and Japan performed by Mr. [Chaloner] Alabaster, Mr. Oxenham, Mr. Markham and Dr. Willis of her Majesty's Consular Service in those Countries*. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1869.

<sup>22</sup> Appendix 1, p. 119: Letter No. 18 (21 November 1857).

rain, sometimes, like a flight of millions of rockets, it rushes about in the sky and never comes to earth, sometimes pouring down in a wide column, it reminds us of the pillar of fire which guided the Israelites. And there are many other forms which it takes, full of beauty and wonder.<sup>23</sup>

‘People go about in boats and have battles with fireworks<sup>24</sup>. I went out with a lot of others and in one grand battle our magazine was blown up and the boat (a great rice-boat like a coal barge) was nearly set on fire. I was sitting over it and first got a steam, then a sulphur, & lastly a water bath – it gave me a good idea of what it would be like in a house on fire – the fire not so dreadful but the smoke, awful. We succeeded in getting it out but the loss of our magazine stopped our fun and we had to go away – beaten.’<sup>25</sup>

Henry had good reason to imagine what it was like to be in a burning house, for fires were not uncommon – he mentioned three occurring in the city between April and November:

‘There was a large fire in Bangkok a week ago and 50 houses or more were burnt down – the houses all being built of wood and thatch were quite burned up and nothing but a little charcoal left.’<sup>26</sup>

‘Since I last wrote to you we have had a large fire here – a college of priests burnt out. The Siamese are very bad hands at putting a fire out and, had there been a little more wind, the fire would have spread tremendously and perhaps burned down our Consulate – but luckily the evening breeze had fallen and so the fire was confined to one building. It has frightened the Siamese very much and they have ordered a number of fire engines from England and America.’<sup>27</sup>

‘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

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<sup>23</sup> Appendix 1, p. 112: Letter No. 12 (21 June 1857).

<sup>24</sup> Every year during September and October.

<sup>25</sup> Appendix 1, p. 116: Letter No. 16 (30 September 1857).

<sup>26</sup> Appendix 1, p. 110: Letter No. 10 (27 April 1857).

<sup>27</sup> Appendix 1, p. 115: Letter No. 15 (6 September 1857).

with floating houses, and crowded with boats of those interested and their observers.’<sup>28</sup>

Although the river was normally crowded with traffic, it all disappeared into adjacent creeks and canals when the king was on the water (Fig. 12), as occurred with royal visits to temples which would involve a flotilla of perhaps a hundred attendant gilt barges, each with 50 paddlers.

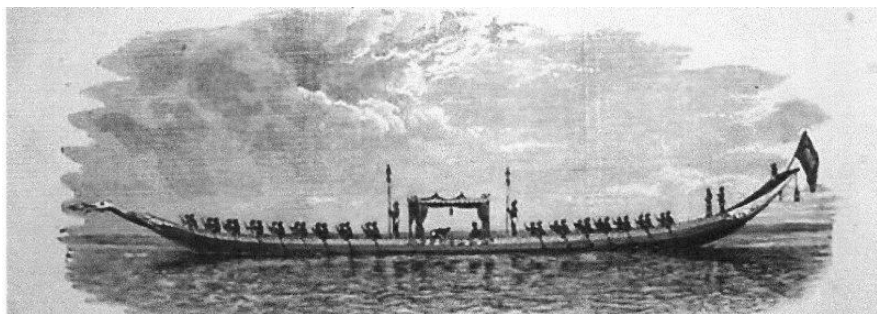


Fig. 12. Royal Barge of 2<sup>nd</sup> King (*The London Illustrated News*, 21 November 1857)

Henry, too, in learning about the country’s customs, visited temples and also attended festivals and funerals. He explained that ‘the bodies are embalmed and kept some time, then burnt with scented woods, spices &c’. Most unusual were the rituals attending an eclipse of the sun on 18 September<sup>29</sup> when guns were fired, fireworks let off and temple gongs beaten to frighten away the dragon who wanted to swallow the sun! He also explored beyond the city:

‘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 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

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<sup>28</sup> Appendix 1, p. 119: Letter No. 18 (21 November 1857).

<sup>29</sup> This was a partial eclipse of relatively short (1.8 minutes) duration (Wikipedia).

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. [...] The rice always shows its green tops just above the water, growing just as fast as the water rises.<sup>30</sup>

Henry was venturing into the hinterland and adapting rapidly to Siamese life. Most important of all, even at the beginning of September, after less than six months in the country, he reported to Percy that he was getting on so well with the language that he felt he could go about comfortably anywhere in the area. He also kept four servants who he found lazy, one of whom, a drunkard, he actually put in prison for a week for his drunkenness, an action unimaginable in England but quite acceptable in Bangkok at that time. He had even thought of sending two of them away to be replaced by slaves until he realised that an Englishman making such a purchase would be liable to transportation, 'a manner of seeing foreign lands which is not at all to my taste!'

While Henry and, no doubt other staff at the newly established consulate, were adapting to Thailand, the Thais for their part were consolidating their good diplomatic relations with Britain, as Henry forewarned Percy<sup>31</sup>,

'The Siamese are going to send an embassy to England so you will have a chance of seeing some of the people I live amongst [Fig. 13] I am afraid, though, that they will not dress as they do here, for England is such a cold place. They will bring some presents for the Queen but I have not heard what they are going to be; when they sent presents before, they sent as the most precious, a few bristles from the

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<sup>30</sup> Appendix 1, p. 117: Letter No. 17 (17 October 1857); the rice, the so-called 'floating rice' is a slender, non-glutinous grain introduced from Bengal.

<sup>31</sup> Appendix 1, p. 111: Letter No. 11 (26 May 1857).

tail of a white elephant. White elephants are very rare; when one is caught, the king and all his court go to meet it – and escort it to a golden stable where it lives like a king all the rest of its days and is worshipped as a God – one died a few years ago and they have not yet found another.’<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 13. Siamese envoys sent to England in 1858<sup>33</sup> (by J. Antonio)

### **Bad news from home**

The future course for Henry was soon to be upset by events at home; his uncle's health had been failing during 1857 and by the end of the year he was dead. The shock to the family was immense, and for Henry, as for his brothers, it must have been like the loss of a father; we have no extant letters from Henry for 1858 that might well have dealt with the matter but Chaloner certainly wrote eloquently on the subject to his aunt, comforting her and reassuring her that he and Henry could be counted upon to ensure her future financial security. The absence of correspondence from Henry that

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<sup>32</sup> Appendix 1, p. 111: Letter No. 11 (26 May 1857).

<sup>33</sup> Instructed to pay the deepest respect to the Queen, the seven-man mission went on their knees upon approaching her at the Inner Court of St. James bearing a tray containing the royal communication and a gift from King Mongkut, as described by the interpreter, Mom Rachothai Kratai Isarangkura (Thai Foreign Office, Government Public Relations Department, Bangkok).

year and the fact that he was in England early in January 1859 suggests that he returned home on compassionate grounds; this would probably have been after May when he was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Assistant.

### First home leave and reflections on Thailand



Fig. 14. Percy Criddle as a boy

Henry stayed with his aunt at Horton, near Epsom, enabling him to give both her and her 14-year-old Percy (Fig. 14) much needed material and moral support, so much the more effective than being reliant on letters from afar. This would have been particularly important for Percy, clearly a wayward boy, now left without the stabilising influence of his father. But, as well as continuing to admonish him for his deficiencies, Henry could be much more direct in encouraging him with career choices and exciting him with stories of his adventures in Thailand, a country with which he was truly enchanted.

Henry's enthusiasm for the Orient was, indeed, soon expressed (in January 1959) in effusive verse. The poem<sup>34</sup>, an allegorical epic of some 65,000 words, is divided into five parts, Part 2 of which, amounting to about a fifth of the whole, dealt explicitly with Thailand and neighbouring Laos, 'Far in the East, from snow capt [*sic*] peaks'. We can share his impressions and rather idealistic mood by quoting just a few lines and verses:

On through the vales of Laos, through many a fertile plain  
Rich with overloaded orchards, golden with ripening grain,  
Sheltered by kindly mountains from whose dark caverns run  
A thousand streams whose jewelled beds lie sparkling in the sun

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Alabaster (1859) *Jeu d'Esprit*, published in *Alabaster Chronicle* (2003), Spring/Summer, No. 20. pp 7-25. (Parts 1, 2, 4 & 5 are highly allegorical).

Whose banks are bright with Almandine<sup>35</sup>, their sands with rubies red [...]

And brighter far than these rich fields, the richest gems excelling  
The lovely race of Laos maids [Fig. 15] in these sweet valleys dwelling,  
Their form, their grace so exquisite, their face so strangely fair,  
I never dreamt what beauty was until I saw it there [...]<sup>36</sup>



Fig 15. Hmong girls, Plain of Jars, Laos  
(by Oliver Spalt)

Through forests dark with stately teak and prairies richly green [...]

And noble gates of crusted gold [...]

And gilded spires and burnished domes [...] [Fig. 16]

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<sup>35</sup> An iron aluminium silicate of the garnet group of minerals.

<sup>36</sup> The consul, Robert Schomburgk who visited the Chang Mai area in 1859-60 reported '*They wear the Lao petticoat, more or less ornamented with gold thread, and embroidered with silk of bright colours. The married women are moreover dressed in a jacket or spenser, closely fitting as far as the waist, and from thence expanding more amply until it reaches nearly to the knee [...]* young ladies, unmarried, do not dress above their waist' (Andrew Forbes, CPA Media, 2005).



Fig. 16. The Grand Palace, Bangkok

Ayuthia's<sup>37</sup> monarch holds a feast. From all the nations near  
 Princes and Lords come pouring in to taste the royal cheer:  
 And throngs of well-trained elephants, and troops of mettled horse  
 And palankeens<sup>38</sup> by runners borne push eager on their course  
 And junks sail in with staring eyes, and to the boatmen's song  
 Full many a barge with carvings quaint darts gracefully along.  
 From Ava<sup>39</sup> and Cambodia, from Cochin and Malay,  
 From China and from far Japan the princes meet today  
 And in the hall of banqueting in solemn stillness wait  
 Till the deep rebound of the trumpet's sound, proclaims the monarchs state  
 Loud from the deep-voiced multitude the shouts of welcome ring  
 And twenty thousand mighty chiefs do homage to the King.  
 Again the trumpet's voice is raised – the tumult dies away –  
 The monarch bids his nobles feast, and bids the minstrels play,  
 And filling high his crystal cup from out the sparkling bowl,  
 "I pledge ye nobles, in my wine, I love ye with my soul,  
 Oh well a monarch may be proud of such a brave array

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<sup>37</sup> The old capital of Siam, also known as Ayutthaya.

<sup>38</sup> Palanquins.

<sup>39</sup> Formerly known as Innwa and, until 1841, the capital of Burma.

Of faithful loving lieges as that I see today.  
My crown is but a mark of care – my sceptre but a toy  
But whilst I have my subjects hearts – I want no other joy".

## Return to Thailand

Henry travelled back to Thailand a little later that year, Chaloner receiving a brief note from him from Galle in Sri Lanka *en route* there on 28 February 1859<sup>40</sup>. In March he was appointed 1<sup>st</sup> Class Assistant and then, in April he reported again to Percy<sup>41</sup>,

‘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 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 [i.e., who don’t mind] 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. [...]

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<sup>40</sup> See Adrian Alabaster (1999) *A Quintet of Alabasters*, Able Publishing, 259 pp. and SOAS Archive, MS 380823.

<sup>41</sup> Occasional Monograph No. 3, *loc. cit.* (Letter No. 1, 10 April 1859).

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



Fig. 17. British Consulate, Bangkok  
(from Minney, *loc. cit.*)

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 [Fig. 17].

[...] 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 [i.e., pimp?] begged me to take him at very low wages; he is a very sharp little fellow and, when older, will make a 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.’<sup>42</sup>

All through Percy’s teenage Henry mixed trivial news with serious advice on his education and career. There was much on the intricacies of sailing and fishing, and accounts of shooting trips, riding, sketching, billiards and details of the theatre company Henry ran; all this was evidently matched to some extent by Percy’s accounts of his working, shooting, wrestling and making love – ‘Of the first you don’t say too much; of the last a good deal’!. At the same time, Henry briefly mentioned formal Grand Audiences and entertainments at the Palace, and Christmas and New Year parties at the Consulate.

### Of boats and sailing

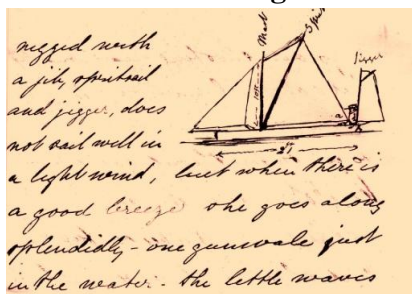


Fig. 18. Henry’s sketch of his boat in 1859

Of the leisure activities Henry described to Percy, sailing figured several times. In December, he wrote, no doubt stimulated by Knox’s newly built boat,<sup>43</sup>

‘I think I wrote to you that I had bought the hull of a yacht [Fig. 18].; 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

<sup>42</sup> John S. Alabaster (2009) *Henry Alabaster of Siam: Correspondence and Career*. Occasional Monograph No. 3. The Alabaster Society, 63 pp. Letter No. 1 (10 April 18757) [Henceforth referred to as *Occasional Monograph* No. 3].

<sup>43</sup> Occasional Monograph No. 3, *loc. cit.* (Letter No. 5, 5 December 1859).

very fast; I shall be very glad when I can put her to rights, for then, every two or three weeks, I shall spend a day or two at sea in her, which will be excellent for my health.

My boat which I have rigged with a jib, spritsail and jigger [a small mizzen 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.'

But, clearly, Henry was not satisfied with the excitement of just 'little waves coming over and in'; he wanted something more challenging and, within a few months was writing again to Percy,<sup>44</sup>

'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

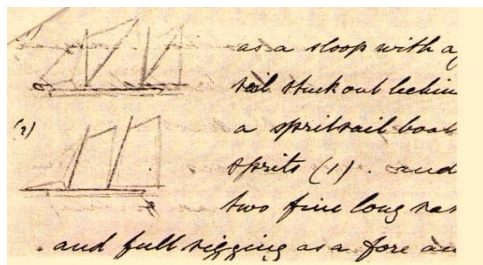


Fig.19. Henry's sketches of his boat in 1860

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 [Fig. 19]. She was before rigged as a sloop, with a jigger (a little sail stuck out behind), then as a spritsail

<sup>44</sup> Occasional Monograph No. 3, *loc. cit.* (Letter No. 8, 30 May 1860).

boat with two sprits (1) and now has two fine long raking masts and full [gaff] rigging as a fore and aft schooner (2).

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.’

## **Work at the consulate**

During its first three years, largely as a result of the trading treaties, the work of the consulate was growing – drafting port and harbour regulations, making trade reports, negotiating local taxes, dealing with the problems of British subjects, examining possible canal routes, etc. – and by July 1859 there were even complaints that the staff were short-handed and overworked, all three of the founding members having died.<sup>45</sup>

From May 1860 Henry was Acting Interpreter. Clearly he had gained some considerable mastery of the language relatively

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<sup>45</sup> The treaty with Britain had opened the way for similar agreements with France and the United States in 1856, Denmark and the Hanseatic cities in 1858, Portugal in 1859, Holland in 1860 and Prussia in 1868; Siam’s trade doubled in value between 1850 and 1868 to about ten million *baht* (*Siam, Cambodia and Laos 1800-1950* by Sanderson Beck).

quickly, difficult though it was with its five tones and syllabary<sup>46</sup>, but perhaps he had been helped by his earlier introduction to Chinese (also tonal) and perhaps too by Knox who, after serving in India and China in the 65<sup>th</sup> and 89<sup>th</sup> Regiments had been in the country since 1848 when he was training the Second (i.e. non-ruling) King's army and had been married to a Thai lady since 1854.

It is important to note that, in a country like Thailand, full of political intrigue, Knox's military involvement with so important a member of the royal family would have had its consequences, as will be apparent later, especially as Knox's wife's aunt was married to the Prime Minister (the Kralahome<sup>47</sup>) (Fig. 20) a man with considerable power and influence on whom the king was greatly dependant<sup>48</sup>



Fig. 20. The Kralahome  
(from *Ode to Friendship* loc. cit.)

### **Animosity and alliances**

In Thailand a First King and a Second King were both in office at the same time but what authority the monarch had, rested with the First. When Henry arrived in Thailand, the Second King was the younger brother of the First (i.e. ruling) King, Mongkut Rama IV but, in 1848, the latter was not yet on the throne because his father, the scholarly King Rama II had been usurped earlier (in

<sup>46</sup> Thai has a syllabic alphabet of 44 basic consonants each with two inherent vowels, 18 other vowels and six diphthongs.

<sup>47</sup> The spelling is sometimes rendered as 'Kalahon'. He is also known as Suriyawong of the powerful Bunnag family.

<sup>48</sup> Background to the political intrigue in the country is given in *A New Siam* by Charles Kimball (Google) and in books (*loc cit*) by Margaret Landon and R. J. Minney (*loc. cit*).

1824) by his half brother. Mongkut had then become a priest and was still in the priesthood when the usurper, King Rama III died 1851; in that capacity he had devoted himself to study sciences and languages and had tried to reform Thai Buddhism, for which purpose he had learnt Sanskrit and the closely related Pali language. At that time he was clearly a scholar without political interest or influence.

The Second King, also very accomplished, was popular and widely expected to ascend the throne in 1851 but had been overlooked by the Thai elder statesmen in favour of Mongkut. Now, in the 1860s, the Second King's continuing popularity engendered a dangerous degree of jealousy and rivalry between the two brothers, the tension no doubt exacerbated by his having being made the Superintendent of Artillery and Malayan Infantry.

Thus, Knox's earlier military involvement with the Second King would explain, at least in part, why King Mongkut was suspicious of him, but furthermore, Knox's high opinion of the Second King had been cryptically revealed in Bowring's account of the Treaty negotiations, published in 1857, and probably available in Thailand and known to Mongkut<sup>49</sup>.

Bowring reported that 'Captain K\_\_\_\_, an Irish gentleman agent of the Second King' opined that the Second King was 'thrown too much in the shade but is the cleverest man in the kingdom.'<sup>50</sup> These facts help to explain why, when the British Consul, Sir Robert Schomburgk (Fig. 21, overleaf) left Bangkok in 1864, and Knox took his place, the King wrote to Queen Victoria praising Sir Robert and asking for someone like him to be sent 'direct from England'<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Bowring, *loc. cit.* p. 293.

<sup>50</sup> Captain K\_\_\_\_'s identity is explicitly revealed by Bowring (*loc. cit.*) later in the text, on p. 329, as 'Captain Knox'.

<sup>51</sup> Margaret Landon, *loc. cit.* Also there had been complaints against Knox from the Kralahome reported by the Foreign Office on 7 January 1865 but followed by

Sir Robert had been sympathetic to Thailand's interests and, amongst other things, had allowed Henry to help Thai officials in their work, in particular with the construction of a 10-km New Road, parallel to the river and connecting the area occupied by diplomatic representatives to the royal court at the Palace,



Fig. 21. Robert Schomburgk (1804-1865)

'day after day [he] went out through the fruit orchards and rice fields, jumping ditches, wading through mud, surveying the ground to plot out these roads'.<sup>52</sup>

Henry was well qualified for the task, having had to produce civil engineering drawings, with calculations, in gaining his Certificate of Honour at College; the road was under construction in 1863 and opened in March the following year.

Henry's wide interests and capabilities and his close contact with Thais may have given him a certain sense of superiority among his fellows and seem also to have been a cause of tension between him and Knox. Even as early as 1857 Knox had reprimanded him for his 'patronising and contemptuous attitude' as well as for contacting the Kralahome directly rather than through Consulate channels; at some time Henry was even allowed access to the Kralahome's library where he translated Buddhist scriptures into English. To the further annoyance of Knox, he also received the direct help of renowned Thai scholars in his studies, not only of the Thai language but of Sanskrit and Thai Buddhism, in the course of which he, like the king, learned something of the Pali language.

Henry's Thai improved sufficiently for him to serve as Interpreter from 30 November 1864, when Knox was appointed

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a letter from the King to Mason stating that he had no objection to Knox as Consul (FO 1965, Nos. 1 & 7 respectively,

<sup>52</sup> *Siam Repository*, 18 April, 1872.

Consul. As such, dealing with both government and foreigners, he would have become well aware of the dominant political power of the Kralahome's family, the difficulty of the King's position at court and the pressure, particularly from the French, to gain control of Thai territory.

### Home leave and a second tour of duty

Henry was on home leave for Christmas 1864 which ensured, as far as his brother Chaloner was concerned, that 'the dear old lady' as he sometimes addressed his aunt would be 'jolly and comfortable',<sup>54</sup> and the following September he married Palacia



Fig. 22. Chelsea Parish Church  
by Walter Greaves  
(Leeds Art Gallery)

Fahey in Chelsea Parish Church (Fig. 22,) and was back in Bangkok with her early in 1866. She found the social life there much to her liking, judging from a letter she wrote to her mother-in-law on 1 February<sup>55</sup>,  
'My dear Mrs. Criddle,

How very kind of you to send  
that dear little portrait of Harry  
[Henry] – 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 moreen<sup>56</sup> will do very nicely 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 17<sup>th</sup> Nov. arrived yesterday instead of Sunday –

<sup>54</sup> SOAS Archive MS 380823, Letter No. 34 (28 December 1864).

<sup>55</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3, Letter No. 12 (1 February 1866).

<sup>56</sup> A stout woollen or woollen and cotton material, either plain or watered, used for curtains, etc.

There is to be a Ball at the Consulate, I believe tomorrow night – which will make the second in one week. Mr. Pichenpach 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 [Fig. 23] – which is not quite cheerful to hear, altho’ there were some few discords, and I fancy Percy would have rushed out of



Fig. 23. Siamese band

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 Company 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 famously<sup>57</sup>, everyone takes great interest



Fig. 24. Victorian croquet

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

<sup>57</sup> Croquet, had been introduced into England about 1851; it was publicised in *The Field* from 1866 by Walter Jones Whitmore, becoming a popular new experience for Victorian women being a game playable outdoors in the company of men at so-called ‘croquet parties’ (Houston Croquet Association 2006).

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 –

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 –'

There is just the hint of some professional tension between Knox and Henry and yet, on a personal level, the gift of a boat



Fig. 25. Gravestone for Herbert James Alabaster

showed a commendable degree of generosity to the young couple. For Henry too, the social life during this second tour of duty would have been made much more agreeable having the support of his young wife. For both him and Palacia the birth of their first child, Herbert James in July 1866 would have been an added joy, though not, unfortunately, a long-lasting one for the baby died at just two weeks old on 5 August and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Bangkok. The effect on Palacia would, no doubt have been devastating though there are no

letters of hers extant that may have referred to the tragedy until eight years later.

### **A bid for promotion**

Henry's opportunity of involvement with the Thai government, already considerable, would have increased further with the departure on 5 July 1867 of Anna Leonowens, who had arrived in Bangkok in 1864 as tutor to the Royal Court in which

position she had had considerable influence, not only on the future king and court but on the reigning king himself when she was also acting as his secretary<sup>58</sup>.

Furthermore, in 1867, Henry was Acting Consul in Knox's absence, taking judicial cases and attracting praise from the Foreign Office in London for the promptness of his trade dispatches. By the middle of June the following year, with 18 months experience in this new role, Knox's leave having been extended, Henry was seeking advancement, pointing out that, after 12 years service, a salary of £500 a year as Interpreter was just not enough<sup>59</sup>. He must have been quite painfully conscious of the fact that, at that time, his younger brother, Chaloner (Fig. 26), still unmarried, was much better paid, whilst Henry now had a wife to support, with the prospect of dependent children to come.



Fig. 26. Chaloner Alabaster

Knox was consulted about the question of promotion and seemed to be favourably disposed, 'unless there is local opposition', describing Henry as 'so deserving an officer' and suggested the position of Vice Consul at Rahaing up the Meiping River in Thailand (Fig. 8) . Sir Robert also supported a promotion but indicated Chiang Mai in the north. Nothing was decided and, reading between the lines one senses a reluctance to station him at Bangkok, perhaps because of rivalry with Knox

and probably having too strong a sympathy for Thai, rather than British interests.

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<sup>58</sup> See Margaret Landon, *loc cit.*

<sup>59</sup> See FO 69 46



## 4. Triumph and disaster

The year 1868 was an important one for Henry who had made his bid for promotion in June, following which Knox had been made Consul General at the beginning of August, so opening up the possibility of his filling the vacancy of Consul, made all the more likely by his acting as such at Bangkok in Knox's absence on leave.

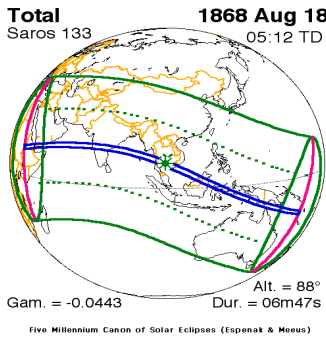


Fig. 27. Path of the Eclipse over Thailand, 18 August 1868 (Wikipedia)



Fig. 28. Sir Harry Orde (1819-1885)

More importantly, perhaps, was his being deeply involved in the King's expedition to view the eclipse of the sun (Figs. 27 & 31). This was a total eclipse, casting a shadow of relatively wide width (245 km), tracking across Thailand with a maximum duration of about six and a half minutes (Fig. 25). The King had predicted the event to the minute for the 18<sup>th</sup> of the month and wanted to make it a grand occasion attended by Sir Henry Saint George Orde, (Fig. 28), Commander-in-Chief for the British Strait Settlement, as well as for other dignitaries, including many foreign diplomats, French scientists, and members of the Royal court and Thai Government. As interpreter, Henry, played a most prominent role in the whole proceedings and promptly wrote a long, almost triumphant account of the occasion for the Foreign Office, not forgetting to mention the honour, he received on arriving at the observation

site in receiving a royal salute and a gold coin from the king's hand<sup>60</sup>. Official group photographs (e.g. Fig. 29) show Henry standing next to or close to the King<sup>62</sup>.

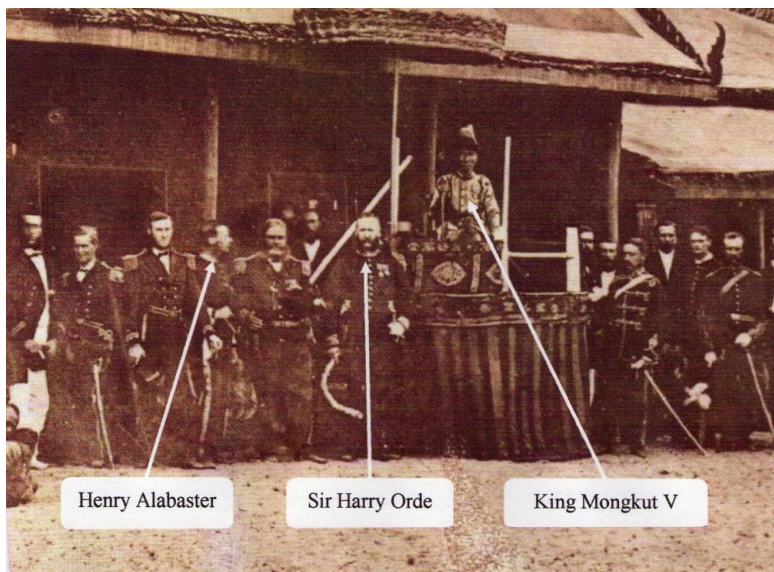


Fig. 29. Party that observed the solar eclipse  
at Bann Wa Kor, Tambon Hua Wan, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Thailand  
(from *Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand-Singapore Relations*)

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<sup>60</sup> For the full text of his report, see Angela Alabaster (2002) Henry Alabaster's Account of the Total Eclipse of the Sun, 1868. *Alabaster Chronicle* No. 18, Summer/Spring 2002, pp. 32-39. [copied from FO 69 46], also reproduced in Appendix 2, whilst other details of this and a later eclipse are given in Dr. Malcolm Smith's book, *A Physician at the Court of Siam*, County Life Ltd., London, 164 pp., 1947.

<sup>62</sup> Thai Government (2005) *Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand – Singapore Relations*. Amarin Printing and Publishing Public Company Ltd., Bangkok. ISBN 974 417 703 9. (Kindly supplied by Khun Siddhi Savetsila).

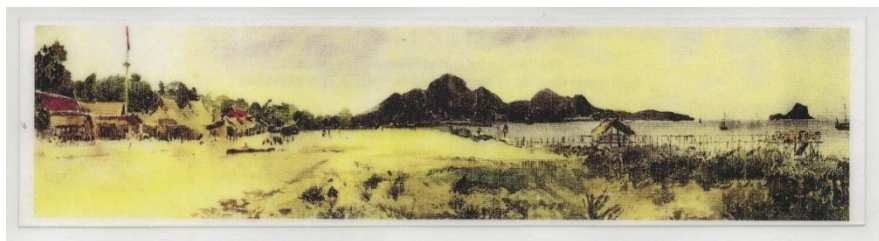


Fig. 30. Painting by Palacia of the Royal Camp at Bann Wa Kor

Unfortunately, the site chosen for the viewing (Fig. 30) was marshy and mosquito-ridden and many who attended contracted malaria, including almost all from the British consulate as well as the king himself and his eldest son. The king's health was of great concern to all, his continued living presence being crucial for several reasons: to maintain the stability of the government in the face of internal tension between himself and the Kralahome; to avoid problems of an uncertain succession; and to resist external political pressures, particularly from the French. The king was attended by both Dr. William and Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, but neither was allowed to administer quinine so, inevitably, on 1 October, he died.



Fig. 31. Solar total  
eclipse, August  
1868

This was a dark day for Thailand, analogous to the very eclipse itself (Fig. 31). The immediate concern was for the Royal succession and the transmission of political influence. The King's son, Chulalongkorn and his cousin were elected First and Second Kings, respectively but Chulalongkorn was only aged 15 and so the Kralahome became Regent, holding all the power with support from his son who succeeded him as Prime Minister. The solar eclipse had lasted just a few minutes. It would be five years before the present shadow would pass and the new King would come of age in 1873 to be in a stronger position to try

to exercise his own authority and continue with the reforms so ably started by his father.

### **‘An act of outrageous violence’**

In the meantime, a month earlier, on 1 September, what had started as a relatively minor local incident in Bangkok developed into something much more serious, reverberating in London and threatening not only good diplomatic relations between Britain and Thailand but, in particular, Henry’s career. On 10 September he reported the incident to Sir Henry Keppel (appointed the previous year as Commander-in-Chief, China Station)<sup>63</sup>:

‘An act of outrageous violence having been committed with the sanction of the PM [the Kralahome] in an attempt to arrest Chinese opium smugglers, attended by a conflagration which spread and destroyed British property estimated by the losers as worth about £500, I thought it my duty to demand a searching investigation in my presence and, after some enquiry, to claim compensation for the British subjects. Both my demand for full enquiry and that for redress having been treated with contempt and having no appeal (owing to the king’s illness), I considered it my duty to inform the Siamese Government that I should apply to the administration on the China Station.

I have yet hopes that the PM will give way before the mail closes, but even if he does not there can be little doubt that he will yield as soon as a higher officer than myself comes on the scene or, if, as I hope and expect, the King recovers, as soon as His Majesty recovers control of his Kingdom.

It is unfortunate to be, even for a short time, in opposition to the PM, even when, as in this case I have the secret sympathy of many of his own best men – but His Excellency has ever been accustomed to measure his strength now and then and the antagonism has never outlasted the defeat.

In conclusion, I beg to repeat that it is with the Kralahome alone I am contending – with the other ministers [...] I am on the most

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<sup>63</sup> FO 69 46.

satisfactory terms [...] In showing that the interests of our subject nation of India [since Indian-held property had been destroyed] will be supported as firmly as those of British-born subjects and in fighting my battles according to my own judgement, I trust that I shall not incur your Lordship's disapprobation'.

`That last phrase betrays Henry's justifiable apprehension for he had not told the whole story and, in due course their Lordship's disapprobation was indeed, incurred! In fact, there followed an extremely protracted exchange of communications to and from London over a period of no less than four years and nine months involving: Clarendon; Earl Granville (his successor as Foreign Secretary in July 1870); Lord Stanley (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs); the Attorney General; both Knox and Kennedy from the Consulate; Sir E. Hammond, the British Consul in Hong Kong; D. K. Mason, Consul for Siam in London; the Siamese Foreign Minister; and Sir Harry Orde. Such a long period was partly attributable to the slow delivery of mail and personnel by boat, but also to the fact that important details took time to emerge and be mulled over (including those of the national flag which were not at first mentioned, but later became vital) and then, when everyone had had their say, Henry's future had to be carefully reviewed.

## **The Kralahome**

Henry explained that the Kralahome was the most prominent of the nobles of Siam, one of whose duties was to control the opium trader, appointing The Opium Farmer who had the monopoly of boiling and selling prepared opium throughout Lower Siam. As it also happened, this farmer, a wealthy Chinaman, was married to someone brought up in the Kralahome's family! He had been in post for just a few months but his tenure had already been marked by many accounts of unusual violence in which houses and vessels had been attacked and plundered by his agents, professing to be

searching for opium. The arson on 1 September was the latest of such incidents. The opium smugglers who had been attacked in this case had made a concessionary arrangement with the former Opium Farmer<sup>65</sup>, an arrangement, however, not acceptable to the new one. Later<sup>66</sup> it also transpired that the old one was in partnership with Mr. Pichenpack, a German merchant who was a great friend of Henry!<sup>67</sup>

So part of the animosity between Henry and the Kralahome could have been engendered by their respective personal relationships with some of the parties involved. To complicate matters still further, persons with whom the former Opium Farmer had been involved had fed false information to Henry for their own ends in trying to destabilise the Thai government<sup>68</sup>.

The Kralahome warned Henry that if the Chinese thought that he supported them against him there could be Chinese riots and so urged him to drop the case. But Henry was insistent: he wanted an inquiry for which he produced his own witnesses, though the judges refused to question them; he wanted to question those produced by the Kralahome but was denied the privilege; moreover he disrupted court proceedings and the judges then refused to appoint a time to continue the case<sup>69</sup>. What he did not seem to appreciate was that, by custom, there was no prosecuting attorney, no lawyer for the defence and no jury! Henry also alleged that the treaty with Britain had been violated and he even applied for help to the British Admiral of the Fleet who, fortunately, declined!

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<sup>65</sup> Under the Treaty between Britain and Siam (1855), import duty was fixed at 3 percent for all articles, one of the two exceptions being opium which was to be free of duty but had to be sold to the opium farmer or his agents.

<sup>66</sup> FO 69 48.

<sup>67</sup> Palacia, in a letter home on 1 February 1866 (*loc. cit*) has mentioned attending a party given by Mr. Pichenpack.

<sup>68</sup> FO 69 49.

<sup>69</sup> FO 69 46.

## Compensation

Had there been quick agreement to pay for the losses, all would have been well, but the Kralahome was initially reluctant to do so, being distracted, it was said, by the king's illness. However, on 30 September compensation was indeed paid to those whose property had been destroyed by fire<sup>70</sup>, it having been made clear to Henry by a third party that the Kralahome had never refused it. And that had been even before Henry had called for a gun-ship!

## Official judgement of the incident

Knox (Fig. 32) had returned to Bangkok in November 1868 and in his initial report home had agreed that Henry's claim for compensation had been justified.



Fig. 32. Thomas George Knox  
(1824-1879)

However, he criticised him in several respects – for undue haste in interfering in the Thai judiciary investigation, for calling on the support of a gunboat from the navy and for opposing the Kralahome, particularly because, despite his faults, ‘his predilections have been for some years past strongly British’. One can see that this would have been even more important now that the king was dead because, as well as being Prime Minister, he had become the all-powerful Regent. However, Knox did

volunteer the judgement that, with the exception of this particular dispute, Henry's performance had been satisfactory, and he also mentioned, in mitigation, that his health was ‘far from good’.

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<sup>70</sup> FO 68 & FO 69 48.

## Sick leave

Dr. 's diagnosis and advice to Henry at that time was, 'If you remain here over another hot season or continue to have your energy taxed beyond, to the amount they have lately been by harassing official duties, the already exhausted nerve force will but probably degenerate further into some serious lesion of the nervous system'.

The result was that Henry was soon advised to return to Europe, was granted leave of absence and set sail for England *via* the Cape on 10 January 1869<sup>71</sup>. Before doing so, however, he took time off in December to relax and travel north with Palacia to visit places of historic and religious interest, including Phrabut (The Sacred Footprint) armed, as he said, with 'very excellent letters of commendation or command to the authorities of the towns I was likely to stay *en route*.'

## Journey to Phrabut

Their trip, later described in vivid detail by Henry in Chapter II of his book on Thai Buddhism<sup>72</sup>, was ideal in helping him to recover his health by allowing him to escape the tensions that had arisen from the event of 1 September. Much of his account is reprinted here in the main body of the text, all abridgements being collected together in Appendix 5. As we read the account, we can share his ease in escaping to the hinterland, can picture the terrain, the people and the temples and hear him explaining the local history and religious practices to Palacia<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> FO 69 48.

<sup>72</sup> See *The Wheel of the Law. Buddhism Illustrated from Siamese Sources by the Modern Buddhist, A Life of Buddha and an Account of the Phrabut Taipei*. Reprinted by Ch'eu Wow Pub. Co. 1971, 323 pp. [also available on line]

<sup>73</sup> Henry's account on pages 263-285 of his book is reprinted here extensively, the rest of the text, much of it dealing with architectural matters, being reproduced in Appendix 5.

## By river from Bangkok to Samklok

[p. 263] Be the season wet or dry, there is only one way of travelling from Bangkok that is, by water; for even when the floods have left the rice-fields, the numerous canals and branches of the river which reticulate the flat alluvial plain of the Menam eventually prevent land-travelling. The travelling boats generally used are propelled by four to sixteen men who stand and push the oars, which are attached to high standing rowlocks. These posts or rowlocks have to be high as the men do not stand on the bottom of the boat (as in the gondolas I have seen in the Mediterranean), but on deck. The middle of the boat is covered by a house or cabin in which the traveller lives. The stores and luggage are all stowed away under the deck, and the cook generally makes his kitchen just at the back of the house. On this trip, as my wife was with me, we took two boats: one to live in, the other for cook and servants.

The first part of a journey from Bangkok is always rather tiresome to old residents – they have seen the [p.264] same things so often –



Fig. 33. Riverside housing in  
Bangkok  
(*bangkok.sawadee.com*)

they pass the temples, the palaces and floating-houses of Bangkok, then a mile or more of teak and bamboo rafts moored for sale just above the city, and then village after village of poor-looking bamboo shanties, all very similar, and none very picturesque. If the start is made in the afternoon, soon after nightfall one is interested in passing a village of

sugar-cane sellers; a row of small stalls, built over the water, in each of which sits a girl with a heap of large bundles of sugar-cane, lit up by a flaring torch, hailing every boat that passes to purchase her ‘*oi chin*’, the thin yellow cane which is a favourite sweetmeat among the Siamese.

The reader can picture our progress – the two boats keeping pretty close, the boatmen, in high spirits, singing catches or chaffing passers-

by, and now and again indulging in a race, or dropping their oars and enjoying a smoke; for when I go on a pleasure excursion, I always let my men do much as they like, provided they don't do what I dislike. My wife and I are comfortably reclining in the cabin on a heap of cushions, uttering perhaps an occasional growl at the mosquitoes, but otherwise very comfortable. I smoke contemplatively, and do not disturb myself much with moonlight effects and darkness visible, but my wife who has never made such a journey before, is full of lively enjoyment and thinks every fresh bush that flashes with fireflies more lovely than the one she has praised just a moment before. She is charmed with the water rippling past the boat, she finds life and change in the plash of the oar and the merriment of the boatmen, and she thinks that she never knew so fine a night for travelling, though indeed [p. 265] in Siam, almost every night is fine from October to May.'

### Overnight in a traveller's rest-house at Samklok



Fig. 34. Typical traditional  
Thai house

'A little before midnight we stop for the night at a *Wat*, or Buddhist monastery, just below Samklok, which is the largest village between the old and new capitals. The monks' dwellings and temples are hidden among thick trees, but we find two *Salas* or travellers' rest-houses built on piles by the shore (Fig. 34), and in one of these we spread our beds, and pitch our mosquito-curtains. As the erection of

resting-places for travellers is a recognised means of merit-making among the Buddhists, there is no lack of them in the populous parts of Siam. Every temple has two or three of them, and others are placed at the mouths of frequented canals and in other convenient spots. They are almost always quite simple buildings, consisting of a plank floor raised above the ground, with a tiled roof supported on wooden columns, and no walls, for it is so warm a climate there is no need for

walls. Some are more solidly constructed with bricks.’

### **Practices of the monks**

‘Before daybreak we hear the monastery bell waking the inmates, and as soon as it is light we see two or three boats, canoes, paddled each by one or two monks, who are starting off to collect their day’s supply of food. Two of the canoes are larger, and hold monks who have some pretensions to scholarship, and who, instead of paddling themselves are paddled by their pupils. All these monks have shaved their heads and eyebrows, and wear the significant yellow robe said to have been originally adopted by Buddha, because it was the dress of outcasts, and so its use would be a standing declaration against caste; but I do not know whether this story has any foundation; I have not yet found good authority for it.

[p. 266] According to strict rule, the monks ought to sweep their monastery before going out to collect food, but I have not observed this to be the practice.

As we pass along the river we notice the monks’ boats stopping before the houses on the banks, and at each stoppage their food-pans receive a ladleful or more of rice and condiments, the donor, generally a woman, rising her joined hands to her forehead as a mark of respect and gratitude to the representative of the priesthood – the *khun*<sup>74</sup>, or benefactor, as she calls him who has given her an opportunity of making merit. He, for his part, looks stolidly, as if unconscious that he has gained anything by the merit the other has made. It is not now the custom, as, according to the legends, it was in Buddha’s time, to reward the donor by preaching the law to them; in fact, very few of the monks, except in the greater monasteries in the towns, know much of the law, or could preach it with any effect. Only a few of the number have any idea of remaining monks all their days and the majority relinquish after a few months, or at most a few years, the orders they have taken on them, not from any preference for a monastic life, but in compliance with their religious idea that every man should be a monk for some part of his life.

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<sup>74</sup> Sanskrit *khun*, the meanings of which include ‘excellence’ and ‘quality’.

We presently stop at another monastery, and breakfast in its *Sala*<sup>75</sup>. Our appetites have been invigorated by the cool morning air, and by a short walk in the *Wat* grounds, where we have shot some pigeons. [p. 267] It is altogether improper to shoot birds in temple grounds, but on this occasion one of the monks has invited us to shoot the dark birds, as he only wishes to have white ones. We are very glad to avail ourselves of his proposal, but we cannot help thinking him a very bad Buddhist. Two or three sad fights have arisen from foreigners ignorantly or wilfully shooting in temple grounds against the wish of monks; and I am sorry to say that, in the last of them, not only were the monks punished, as their cruelty probably justified, but the foreigners, who had brought their thrashing upon themselves, had a large compensation obtained for them by their Consul. The case I refer to was not English<sup>76</sup>.

After breakfast we push on until nearly noon, and then rest for a while at another *Sala*. There is no difficulty in finding one, for we pass an astonishing number of temples. The monks are now taking their last meal for the day, as they must not eat after midday. Once the sun has begun to fall, they must be satisfied with tea and cigars until the next morning. In regard to this matter of fasting, as also in regard to continence, I believe that most Siamese monks carry out the rules of their order very creditably.’

### **Local native prosperity**

‘Some of the villagers come in while we are taking our rest, and having been obliged by an inspection of my breechloader, which they believe to be a gun that requires to be loaded with shot only, and has no need of powder, they are easily led into conversation. They are not Siamese, but the descendants of Peguan captives [originally natives of Pegua, Burma]. I ask them whether they are any better off now than they were before foreigners frequented the [p.268] country, that is, before the treaty of 1854; and they say, much better off; that in former

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<sup>75</sup> Sanskrit *Sâlâ*, meaning a house.

<sup>76</sup> Prince Henry of Prussia, when visiting Japan, got into trouble when he inadvertently shot near temple grounds (see p. 87).

times they used always to go in person when called on once every three months for the *corvée*, or service of one month, to which they are all liable, and that their crops were often ruined in their absence; but now they can get a good price for their produce, so they attend to their fields, and pay a composition in money for non-attendance at the *corvée*, and thus grow richer every year. They neither know nor care much about state affairs and are even unaware that their King died nearly three months ago.'

### By canal to Yuthia



Fig. 35. Painting of Ayutthaya, ordered by the Dutch East India Company, Amsterdam (*Wikipedia*)

'During the afternoon we pass from the winding river, with its fringe of trees, which has almost constantly, from the time we left Bangkok, limited our view; and entering a narrow canal, make a direct course for the former capital of Siam, Yuthia [i.e. Ayutthaya; Fig. 35], through the still flooded rice-fields, a wide, open, treeless plain, in some parts bounded by low jungle, in others level to the horizon, which is backed by a few very distant chains of hills.

The many temples of the old capital next rise into view. First, one or two conspicuous spires tower over the horizon, and presently afterwards the whole city appears, a crowd of spires of varied forms, but mostly ruinous, lying in the midst of luxuriant jungles, fruit and shade trees.

The Siamese call this place *Kroong Kao*, the old capital or simply *Menang Kroong* the capital town; but among foreigners it is better known as Yuthia, a corruption of *Ayutthaya* or *Ayodhya*, 'the unassailable', a part of the long state name which belongs as much to the whole country or the present capital as to [p. 269] the old one. The



Fig. 36. Buddhas in Ayutthaya, the second overgrown by fig-tree roots

old capital belied this part of its name by being captured, and in great measure destroyed, by Burmese invaders in 1767, since which it has ceased to be the seat of the Government. It is now a large, populous, and flourishing town, though half-buried among jungle and ruined temples, which present a most desolate and melancholy appearance [Fig. 36].

These temples, having been built on a scale only suitable for a capital city, and endowed with extensive lands which cannot be re-granted for secular purposes, are necessarily, many of them, deserted and covered with dense jungle. It is a remarkable transition to pass from some canal, half-choked with weeds, and bordered by masses of ruins and tangled jungle, directly into the main street of the town, a wide canal about a mile in length, crowded with boats, with a line of floating-houses on each side, and behind them on the banks numerous well-kept temples and houses. The whole length of the street is a bazaar, and such of the boat-shops as cannot find room in it are moored in close lines on one of the smaller canals running from it. These boats serve both as dwellings and shops for the traders, who lay in a stock worth one or two hundred pounds at Bangkok, and then quietly journeying to Yuthia, wait there until they have disposed of their to goods. No European trader lives at Yuthia.'



Fig. 37. Typical river view  
(*Bangkok.sawadee.com*)

## Sight-seeing at Yuthia

‘We stay a day at Yuthia, that I may show my wife the three sights

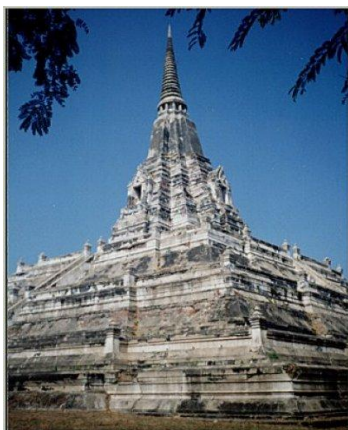


Fig. 38. Golden Mount,  
Ayutthaya (by Alan Ingram)

which all travellers thither are supposed to see. Two of them are temples situated some five miles apart, and the third is a place of elephant-catching, some distance from either of the others, so that the three together give a good day's work. The first is the Mount of Gold [Fig. 38], the highest of the spires, [p. 270] which differs from most Buddhist towers in having three accessible terraces round it (Fig. 36). The highest terrace commands a view over most of the tree-tops. From it we count about fifty spires, so there may be some truth in a native assertion,

that Yuthia had two hundred temples. There is nothing very elegant about the spire to justify its grand name; and its height, which I judge to be about a hundred and fifty feet, is nothing very great; but as a good illustration of one of the forms of Buddhist spires, it is worth describing.’

Henry describes various temples and monasteries in some detail, including their history, symbolism and the etymology of their names<sup>77</sup>. One of the sites of interest mentioned is,

‘[p. 273, continued] the stockade for elephant-catching, a strong enclosure into which once a year are driven the elephants from the neighbouring jungles, that the King may select such as he desires to have domesticated for use. Elephants are supposed not to breed in confinement, and are therefore kept in this half-wild way.’

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<sup>77</sup> (See Appendix 5 which comprises those parts of Chapter II that are not quoted here – in his pages 270-273).

### Onward to Nophburi (i.e., Nothaburi)

‘The nearest route from Yuthia to Phrabat is by a branch of the river flowing from the east; but as our [p. 274] object is to see Nophburi, we take a smaller branch, and keep a northerly course. The main river lies to the west of us. Our channel, which is about the size of the Thames at Richmond, is more picturesque than the broad river below Yuthia, the trees on the banks not being dwarfed by too wide an expanse of water. The floods being still over the country, enable us to avoid many a bend of the river, and make short cuts across fields, and along what, in a month or two hence, will be cart-roads. The white paddy-bird is very abundant; there are a good many large herons, and occasionally we find teal, water-hens, plover, and other birds fit for the table. My wife is charmed with a bright blue plume of kingfisher’s feathers, and, in fine<sup>78</sup>, the gun has quite a good day of it. In the evening, we put up at a *Sala*, one side of which looks over a wide lake, and the other looks on the river, overhung with graceful clumps of bamboo, all bright green and golden in the lights, and a rich brown in the shadows – an exquisite picture. I try fly-fishing, at which the natives smile pityingly, as they never saw fish eat feathers; but they seem just as pleased as I am when a number of little, dace-like fish fall victims to the new guile. In the meantime my wife adds another pretty sketch to her collection<sup>79</sup>. With darkness comes dinner, then a chat with the monks and early retirement within our mosquito curtains, for the mosquitoes are both numerous and virulent. We are unfortunate in not having any *Pyrethrum roseum*, which infused in alcohol makes a varnish for the body which eventually keeps the vermin away. The friend who taught me the use of it found only one fault with it – it was expensive; so each

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<sup>78</sup> In fine = in conclusion.

<sup>79</sup> Palacia, like Henry and his aunt, Mary Ann Rebecca Criddle, is listed as an artist in *Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs* by E. Bénézit. Librairie Grund, 1976 and both Henry and Palacia exhibited at the Suffolk Street Galleries and at the Norwich Fine Art Association (see Adrian Alabaster, *loc. cit.*)



Fig. 39. Floating houses (by S. Hatano)

coat [p. 275] had to be made to last as long as possible; and, in short, he could not afford to wash oftener than twice a week.

Our night is rather disturbed, not only by the mosquitoes, but by a number of dogs who

swarm about our quarters, and are made restless by our presence. Buddhists are forbidden to kill animals; so, when ever their dogs, or any other domestic animals, have the mange, or otherwise become a nuisance in the house, they take them across a river, and leave them to pass the rest of their lives in some monastery, whence it arises that almost every temple is infested with diseased and half-starved dogs; and in some cases, pigs and other animals add to the nuisance.'

### **Hospitality from the Governor at Nophburi**

'Despite such little inconveniences, we pass very agreeably the two days occupied in journeying from Yuthia to Nophburi, the *Louvo* of old French writers on Siam. The correct name is *Lophaburi*, which means 'the new city'. We first take up our abode in the *Kambarien* of a monastery – that is, a large enclosed building used for preaching. My experience of these preaching-halls has been, that they are invariably large and dirty, and that their furniture consists solely in a chair or pulpit for the preacher, who, on great days of the church, recites a number of sentences in the Pali language to a prostrate crowd, mainly consisting of women, not one of whom understands a word that is said, A corner of the hall is generally used as a lumber-room for articles used as ornaments at the cremation ceremony of people whose friends are ready to go to some expense on the occasion; and among this rubbish will usually be discovered a litter of puppies, with a savage mother, who [p. 276] never will be quiet. We are very glad to

be rescued from such a place by the Governor, who at once calls on us, and installs us most comfortably in a large and clean floating-house [Fig. 37]. In front of this house there is nearly eighteen feet depth of water; yet we are assured that, soon after the floods abate, all the water in the river will disappear, no boats will be able to approach the town, and water will be only obtainable by digging wells in the sandy bed.

My wife is charmed with our quarters; there are two lovely views up and down the river, and within a few hundred yards are many more 'perfect pictures' than she will ever find time to transfer to paper.

We are not far from the old palace, the favourite residence of the King of Siam in the days of Louis XIV, when a Greek, Constantine Falcon, by sheer ability, rose to be Prime Minister of Siam, and would probably, had he not been assassinated, have succeeded in handing over the country that had used him so well to the Jesuits and soldiers of the French monarch. His story, a very romantic one, can be read in Sir John Bowring's *Siam*; so I shall not repeat it here<sup>80</sup>. The ruins of his house and chapel, which are European in style, still exist, and traditions of him, by the name Chai Yin, or Phya Wichaiyen, survive among the people. He is said to have built an aqueduct to bring into the palace water collected on hills some eight miles distant. Whether the work was ever completed and in action, I cannot say; but its remains do him much credit as an engineer; and the large earthenware pipes or tubes are excellently made. He also built smelting furnaces and began to work the neighbouring copper mines, a work which it might [p. 277] pay to try once again; for such surface specimens as I obtained were very promising.

The Palace outer walls are very extensive, and the gates handsome; but the beauty of the place has been much destroyed by the late King building a new and ugly palace on the site of the old one. The old

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<sup>80</sup> Bowring, *loc. cit.* There are actually two different accounts which are included as Appendices on pp. 385-487: 1) *History of Constance Phaulcon* (a translation of *Histoire de M. Constance par le Père d'Orléans*, Tours 1690) which depicts him, at length, as a hero and 2) an account by Kämpfer (1728) *History of Japan*, London Vol. I, pp. 19-21 which dismisses him, briefly, as a villain! (He was married to a Japanese lady).

ruins were picturesque; but now there is a labyrinth of whitewashed, prison-like dens which are quite an eye-sore. Even the old gates have been mostly spoilt with whitewash.



Fig. 40. Black Ear Catfish  
*Pla Tepo*

(by Eddie Miunce,  
[www.fishtailand.co.uk](http://www.fishtailand.co.uk))

We spend several days in Nophburi, seeing the sights, and feasting on *Pla Tepo*, [Black Ear Catfish, (*Pangasius larnaudii*), Fig. 40] a rich and delicious fish, the pig of the waters, as the Siamese call it, which is rather an uncommon luxury in Bangkok, but so abounds here that a fish of four pounds weight, which is an average full-sized fish, costs less than four pence.

The obliging Governor seems to take a pleasure in exceeding the courtesy our letter of commendation demands from him.

He waits on us several times a day to learn what more can be done for our comfort; he escorts us on walks and rides; for we have now escaped from the flooded lowlands, and only use our boat to and from our floating penthouse. He is as kind as it is possible to be, and we find that everyone else is also civilly disposed.

In country places I have almost always found the Siamese of all ranks a kindly people though sometimes shy; but in Bangkok, where they are more used to foreigners, and see many bad specimens of them, and where also the worst conducted and most drunken natives congregate, the lowest class does not always show such good feeling.'

### Old trade and industry at Nophburi

'Nophburi has a considerable trade in limestone and [p. 278] lime and also in white clay called *Din siphon*, used as a medicine, cosmetic, &c. This clay is dug up near the river side, in a very soft plastic state, and, being moulded into lumps, and dried in the sun, becomes like a lump of chalk. Plastered over children, it is believed to keep them cool; it whitens the young ladies' dusky faces, and foreigners find it convenient to pipe-clay their white boots, and to chalk the tips of their billiard cues.



Fig. 41. Custard-apple

The rides and walks about the town are very pretty. The distance of the town walls from the palace appears to prove that it was formerly a populous place, though now no longer so. Much of the space inside the walls, and some ground outside, is covered by plantations of custard-apple trees [*Annona reticulata*; Fig. 41]; but we do not notice any other fruit-trees as particularly abundant.

We, of course, visit the copper mines already spoken of – that is, we visit the hill where the copper ores are. The only traces of work that we see are the ruins of a furnace, and the inclined plane on the hill-side, down which the ore seemed to have been rolled. We pick up several heavy stones, covered with verdigris, and from a cave one of our men extracts a little copper pyrites. The place certainly looks promising. The Governor, who is very anxious to see his province become of more importance – and to that end desires to have the mine worked – visits them with us and points with regret to the camping-ground of an English mining engineer, who, some twelve years ago devoted himself to the task of re-opening the mines and unfortunately died of jungle fever [malaria] within a few days after discovering specimens of very rich ore.'

### **By elephant to Phrabat**

'After two or three days spent rambling about Noph-[p. 279] buri, we start for Phrabat. Our friend the Governor has provided us with seven elephants and guides; the cook has packed his pots and kettles; and my wife and her maid have, by aid of a ladder, been placed in a *howdah*, about as comfortable as a washing-basket, on one of the elephant's backs, there to remain until the end of the journey. I, unwilling to be made a prisoner of, learn at once to mount my animal in Siamese style, that is, to clamber up by the aid of the elephant's knee, for Siamese elephants do not, like the animal which the fellows of the Zoological Society of London exhibit at fourpence a ride, kneel to be mounted, but simply raise one knee a very little, to be used as a step. [p. 279 continued in Appendix 5; p. 280 continued] My elephant,

which is the tallest, shows surprising accuracy of judgment in knowing when he can safely pass an overhanging branch without damage to his *howdah*, and when it is necessary for him to stop and break away the obstacle with his trunk, or select another passage. [pp. 280-282 continued in Appendix 5; p. 282 continued] Some heavy body is heard crashing through the grass and brushwood, evidently in flight; and we step on to a smooth lair, still smelling strongly of a tiger, whose white and tawny hairs lie there in some quantity ' [pp. 282-285 continued in Appendix 5].

### **Phrabat**

Eventually the party arrived at a highly decorated building containing the actual Phrabat within, its floor strewn with the offerings of pilgrims, who would have included the King himself, and although they discovered that 'likeness to a foot there is none', Henry can recognise that the value of such offerings is in focussing attention on Buddha's life and that such a

'life of conscious virtue, a life free from anxiety as to the future, is the life of the truest happiness, and that freedom from anxiety can be obtained by a man's own efforts; that he is not a toy or puppet, exposed to be victimised by malignant spirits unless saved by an intervening deity, but that he is the absolute ruler of the destiny of his own soul, controlled only by the law of perfect justice.'

### **Return from holiday to face the music**



(Fig. 42. British Consular flag  
(Crown Tudor version by Clay Moss)

Whatever peace and 'freedom from anxiety' and hope from 'the law of perfect justice,' Henry may have achieved in pursuit of the Phrabat would be disturbed when he returned to England the following February. Consulate Flags (Fig. 42) had not been mentioned in his first report about

events in September 1868, but evidently those flying over the consulate had been hauled down over a period of several days. The Siamese government complained that this had created ‘in the minds of native and foreign subjects, feeling of dire foreboding and great distress.’ Later the Kralahome told Knox that he regarded the hauling down as an attempt at intimidation, as was Henry’s changing of the livery of the consular boatmen from the traditional blue to red – like Indian war paint!<sup>81</sup>

Henry had then said that they had been taken down for repairs, but it was evident that such repairs were usually made by prisoners although, apparently, none was in custody at the time! Kennedy, one of the officers at the Consulate who, under instruction, had taken down the flags, was questioned in London in May, having been repatriated after some month’s convalescence following the Malaria outbreak<sup>82</sup>. His replies, however, were not at all clear and were officially considered ‘far from satisfactory’<sup>83</sup>, one comment of his interrogators being that he had ‘shuffled out of it’<sup>84</sup>. It is tempting to conclude that he knew jolly well that the flags had not needed repair and that he had equivocated to protect Henry.

This turn of events seems to have hardened Knox’s attitude who, whilst attributing Henry’s reluctance to admit the truth to his

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<sup>81</sup> FO 69 48 and FO 69 49.

<sup>82</sup> A report to the Foreign Office on 17 October 1868 stated, ‘The mail is written by men who, some of them can hardly stand’ (FO 68).

<sup>83</sup> Kennedy said that he did not know whether the flags really required repair or not, and that he also ‘believed he forgot’ to explain about the flags to the Prime Minister’s Office when asked to go there towards the end of September!

<sup>84</sup> The unfortunate Kennedy had played another controversial role in the affair in being sent to Singapore to explain the situation to the Governor of Singapore, Sir Harry Orde, all at a cost of \$250 (FO 68). Orde opined that Henry had no right to claim an apology from the Kralahome for breach of Treaty Rights – an opinion shared by the Attorney General – but otherwise he thought the incident should be judiciously smoothed over. Later, even he was mildly criticised by Lord Granville for allowing himself to get involved! (FO 69 49) Trouble all round!

having a nervous temperament, concluded to Clarendon (Fig. 43) in February that<sup>85</sup>,



Fig. 43. Earl of Clarendon,  
Foreign Secretary  
(9 December 1868 to 6 July 1870)

‘though Mr. Alabaster has more than average abilities, he is sadly wanting in judgement and therefore likely after to get into trouble. I have no desire to injure him, but I have no hesitation in stating that I believe it would be far in the interests of the public that he should be sent elsewhere, for if he returns here he may be in charge of this Consulate at any moment and the circumstances that have taken place will make his position more difficult than ever’.

By July 1869, with Hammond accepting the strong case against Henry and finding Kennedy’s report ‘far from satisfactory’, it seemed that the door to the Bangkok consulate had been closed, though Clarendon had yet to make his final judgement.

Incidentally, earlier that year, in April, , Lord had had to rebuke Henry’s brother, Chaloner for being an ‘injudicious, hot-headed public servant’ in his involvement in military operations in China; he must have wondered about these Alabasters!

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<sup>85</sup> FO 69 48.

## Sojourn in England

Returned to England, Palacia gave birth to three more boys:



Fig. 44. Henry & Palacia's  
sons

(G. Hawkins, Brighton)

Charles (1869), Edward Percy (1870) and Ernest (1872) (Fig. 44). It would have been a difficult time for the family having the extra mouths to feed, yet living on sick pay and also having no permanent home<sup>86</sup>. At some time, probably late 1864 or early 1865, before he was married, Henry had started quarterly payments to help support his aunt. Now his finances were indeed far too low to continue; he had had to pay half the cost of his passage home and two thirds of that of his wife<sup>87</sup> and, furthermore, as his creditors in Bangkok

had not been paid, he had had to wind up his estate there. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that he had needed the loan of £100 from Chaloner who had also put a further £200 into the Bank to help support their Aunt as well as Palacia and the children.

Henry was, nevertheless, very busy writing up his studies of Thai Buddhism in *The Wheel of the Law*, an erudite work which included the account of his trip north with Palacia in December 1868 and was hurriedly produced and published in 1871<sup>88</sup>. No doubt he ensured that copies went to Thailand where they would have impressed the Thais with the breadth of his scholarship and the extent of his sympathy with and understanding of their culture.

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<sup>86</sup> In April 1871 Henry was recorded as living in Chelsea and in January 1872 his address was in Twickenham.

<sup>87</sup> FO 69 48.

<sup>88</sup> *The Wheel of the Law* (*loc. cit.*).

By August 1870 Henry felt that his health had improved enough to warrant his return to Siam and took up the matter of his promotion which had remained in abeyance, not realising, perhaps, that the Foreign Office considered that his re-employment in Thailand was then quite out of the question,. At one stage Henry even tried, unsuccessfully, to force the situation by actually booking his passage there for the 29<sup>th</sup> September and was obliged to cancel his ticket!<sup>89</sup>



Fig. 45. Earl Granville,  
Foreign Secretary  
(6 July 1870 to 21 February  
1874)

Earl Granville (Fig. 45), who in July had replaced Clarendon, considered the possibility of Henry filling a vacant Vice-Consulship outside Siam, such as Cayenne (French Guiana) and Saigon (Cambodia) but these were refused by Henry because he was convinced that his unique value lay in his knowledge of Siam – the language, its people and their affairs. He appealed for temporary employment but by April 1872, as a consequence of his refusal, he was finally deemed to have resigned<sup>90</sup> and was, therefore, considered ineligible for a

retirement pension, even after 15 years of service! This strikes one as an extremely harsh decision, for he had a wife and family to support yet received neither private money nor other income nor had any other profession to fall back on. As he saw it, he had, after all, given consistent satisfactory diplomatic service and in the process suffered poor health, and yet been disgraced, simply for one small misdemeanour. Moreover, he had ‘stood by his duty’ in

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<sup>89</sup> FO 69 51.

<sup>90</sup> FO 69 55 According to his grandson, Henry’s service for the British crown may have ended on 31 December 1871. Certainly Foreign Office documents show that by 29 December the Siamese were objecting to his return to Siam and that his appointment had been cancelled (FO 1971, No. 48).

being loyal to Britain, even refusing what he considered better, direct employment with the Siamese Government.

But now, having been rebuffed by Britain and having received a direct invitation from King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) to serve Siam, he had decided to accept and in May was once more embarked for the East.

### **Initial impact of King Chulalongkorn**



Fig. 46 The young King Chulalongkorn

We must not allow the trials and tribulations of Henry during the period 1868 to 1873 to blind us to important changes in Thailand taking place at the time. When Henry returned he would find that the young king (Fig. 46) had visited Singapore in 1870, the first foreign country to be visited by a Thai monarch<sup>91</sup>, where he studied politics, economics, public health and education. He had: released prisoners; prompted religious liberty; freed his own slaves, soldiers and debtors; stopped the practice of branding; and by January 1871 had abolished slavery (a tax being levied to compensate former slave-owners).

Furthermore, on 16 November at his new coronation on reaching the age of 20, he would end the practice of prostration before royalty, at least in theory.<sup>92</sup> New trade regulations had been proposed, a Treaty with Italy had been ratified, although on the negative side, there had been continuing trouble with the French.

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<sup>91</sup> *Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand-Singapore Relations* [2005] Thai Ministry of Culture, ISBN 974-417-703-9

<sup>92</sup> Queen Saowna Pongsi continued the practice until her death in 1919 (Dr. Malcolm Smith, *loc cit*) and I also found, in private, in the 1980s that servants of at least one Minister would serve his guests on their hands and knees.

## 5. The post-1872 period

Angela Alabaster has already written of the enormous contribution that Henry, in direct service to the King, had made to further the modernisation and reputation of Thailand and the degree of its appreciation by both king and country. Also, using some of the correspondence available at the time, she shed light on the nature of family and social life in Bangkok, once Palacia had joined Henry there. For Palacia, on the negative side were included: the depressing impact of a tropical climate on health and welfare; the pain of separation from children away in England; the strain of Henry's surveying trips; and the disruptive demands of the King for meetings held in the middle of the night. On the other hand there were: attendances at grand receptions and concerts at the Palace; recuperative trips to the seaside during the cold season, hard though their preparation was; the creation of a beautiful and productive pleasure garden out of nothing in the grounds of one of their government houses; and the satisfaction of successfully entertaining at home. Now, other letters, since made available in print and in archive<sup>93</sup> provide additional new information, particularly of events linked with Percy and Knox.

Initially Henry returned alone to Thailand, leaving Palacia with their young family at Twickenham, and whilst they would have acknowledged the good sense of delaying the exposure of young children to a tropical climate and of allowing time for Henry to make the necessary arrangements for their housing, the separation must have been hard for them both. However, she kept in close touch with both her mother-in-law, Mrs. Criddle,

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<sup>93</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3.



Fig. 47. Arms of the King of Siam, embossed in gold leaf on purple leather

A photograph of a piece of leather, clearly cut from a larger piece, provided by Nan Kenyon and presumably once belonging to Henry Alabaster

addressing her as ‘Auntie’ in later letters, and with her grown-up nephew, Percy.

### Catching up on Percy



Fig. 48. Percy Criddle as an adolescent

Percy (Fig. 48), always a source of anxiety to his mother and the rest of the family had been sent to Germany ten years earlier, in 1861 at the age of nearly 17, to stay with a friend of his mother, Marianne Wiss in order to be educated in fashionable Heidelberg<sup>95</sup> and, as Henry hoped and wrote to him<sup>96</sup>,

‘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.

[...].

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<sup>95</sup> Details of Percy’s German connections, mistress and the children of hers he fathered are given by Oriole Vane Veldhuis, *Chips of Alabasters: Harrer/Criddle/ Vane/Veldhuis or Harrer/Vanes:My Great German Search*. Alabaster Chronicle No. 21, pp. 10-27.

<sup>96</sup> Occasional Monograph No. 3: Letter No. 9 (28 December 1860).

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 [Schomburgk, 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.'



Fig. 49. Elise Harrer, 1863  
(by J Schulze;  
from Alma Criddle, *loc. cit.*)

Far from being polished out of his nonsense, Percy decided, at 19 to get engaged to Elise Harrer (Fig. 49), a near neighbour in Heidelberg and, furthermore, despite advice to the contrary, decided not to pursue medicine but to make music his career, drawing the exasperated comment from Chaloner in China, then administering justice to Chinese natives, 'I wish I had Percy here; I would commit him as a vagrant'!

As Percy was clearly in no position to support a wife and family, his mother's permission was refused, but a

few years later, in March 1866, the expectation, at least by Marianne Wiss in Germany and presumably also by his mother in England was that he would then marry, though there is no evidence that any marriage took place. Nevertheless, in the autumn Elise, evidently pregnant, came to England and gave birth to a daughter the following May. Percy's double life is now documented for the first time, since the birth was registered under the surname Vane for both parents and child! Two more girls, again named Vane were born, and in the 1871 Census Return, Elise was listed as head of the household, wife of a retired tradesman. Since Percy was actually in business in Southwark where they all lived, this shows that privately at least he disowned her and their offspring.

After the 1871 Census, three boys had been born but all were registered as Criddles, sons of Percy and Elise Criddle! What Percy told the outside world we do not know, nor how he regarded his mistress and the children he had fathered, nor how he represented them all to his mother and cousins, Henry and Chaloner or to Elise's family in Germany. Perhaps the arrival of his sons and heirs caused him a change of heart and to move towards public recognition of his Criddle family.

In any event, Henry and Palacia kept in touch with Percy, Henry in correspondence from Thailand and Palacia with reciprocal visits and correspondence in England. In 1874 Palacia, somewhat bothered by the secrecy, was party to a meeting between Percy and Alice Nicol, for whom he had seemingly fallen, and a further meeting between Percy, Alice and Alice's mother who had evidently been 'taken by storm'<sup>97</sup>.

Percy did not waste any time and married Alice on 8 September that year, though not before impregnating Elise again in August, so that in 1875 Cecil (Vane) was born to her on 19 April and Norman Criddle was born to Alice on 14 May! In subsequent

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<sup>97</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3, Letter No. 18 (18 July 1874).

letters Palacia made no explicit mention of Elise or her children though she did write of Alice and her offspring<sup>98</sup>

Was she then just being tactful? For only a year later, writing to Auntie from The Grange, Shepherds Bush she wrote, ‘I hope you are keeping well, also Alice and her big family’<sup>99</sup>, this time surely including the Vane cohort. There are no more letters from Palacia that mention Percy or his family and one wonders how the family viewed his behaviour. Was he ‘patronised and snubbed by relations’ a phrase he used much later in life describing how an immigrant to Canada (as Percy had then become) might be treated were he to return home to England?<sup>100</sup>

Although we are left in the dark about Percy’s private life, his diaries<sup>101</sup> and later correspondence will show the continuance of family contact and the development of a business relationship between him and Henry.

## **Palacia’s return to Bangkok**

### **Some notable visitors**

After the house in Twickenham had been let in September 1874, Palacia returned to Bangkok with the children and busied herself with the new house and visitors, remarking to ‘Auntie’ in the following April on the increase in the tempo of life, mentioning, in particular Dr. Arthur Schuster (Fig. 50, overleaf)<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3, Letter No. 25 (17 June 1877).

<sup>99</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3, Letter No. 30 (20 May 1878).

<sup>100</sup> Alma Criddle (1973) *Criddle-de-diddle-ensis*. A Biographical History of the Criddles of Aweme, Manitoba Pioneers of the 1880s. 288 pp.

<sup>101</sup> Percy’s diaries were transcribed by his granddaughter, Alma Criddle, whose old typescript was re-typed on computer by Myrna Paquette who then kindly made them available.

<sup>102</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3, Letter No. 20 (23 April 1875).



Fig. 50. Dr. Arthur  
Schuster, FRS  
(1851-1934)

As a young man of 24, accompanied by the much older Norman Lockyer as his assistant, he had been appointed (on the invitation of the King of Siam to the Royal Society of London) to lead an expedition from England to photograph a total eclipse of the sun on 6 April in order to investigate the coronal spectrum<sup>103</sup>. In addition to Newspaper reports, an account of the visit was made by Schuster in the prodigious scientific journal *Nature*<sup>104</sup>; this provides some insight into the

increase in interest in science in Siam at about this time and also Henry's involvement in it.

Obliged to wait in Bangkok for 24 hours before the steamer was ready to take the party to the observatory which had been erected at Bangtelue, near Chulie Point, they joined a meeting of the 'Young Siamese Society' and gave a lecture on spectrum analysis and its application during solar eclipses; this was interpreted by Henry, with the help of the King's private secretary and Prince Dewam, and was clearly understood and also well received by those present. Schuster reported,

'On the day of the eclipse, several telescopes, one of which had been lent to the King by Dr. Janssen<sup>105</sup>, were set up on the lawn in the front of the palace. The local time was determined by Mr. Alabaster and Capt. Bush<sup>106</sup> [Fig. 51], in order to find the exact time of the different



Fig. 51. Captain John  
Bush  
(by Derick Garner)

<sup>103</sup> Both were later knighted and made fellows of the Royal Society

<sup>104</sup> Arthur Schuster (1875) *Science in Siam*, *Nature*, 22 July, pp.233-234.

<sup>105</sup> Pierre Janssen (1824-1907) was a French astronomer who, along with Norman Lockyer is credited with the discovery of the gas Helium.

contacts. As totality approached, the King made a speech to the members of the Royal Family who were all assembled, telling them why solar eclipses were observed, and why large sums of money were spent for that purpose. During totality, his Majesty observed the corona and the protuberances through a telescope, carefully noting down what he saw and making a sketch of the protuberances. He had ordered one of the Princes to take photographs of the corona. Two photographs were thus secured, which by no means are inferior to those taken at the Observatory of Bangtelue. The original negatives of these photographs have been sent to England as a present from the King to the Royal Society.

At our camp the Siamese also showed a great interest in the eclipse. The eagerness with which the ex-Regent looked through his telescope contrasted in a characteristic way with the quiet indifference with which his European secretary went to sleep during totality.

The King of Siam informed us that he did not profess to be an astronomer, and I was therefore rather surprised to hear afterwards that on his journey to Calcutta he had taken regular sights with the sextant and calculated himself the position of the steamer.

But the taste of the Siamese for science is not merely confined to astronomy. Wanga, the second king, is a mineralogist [and] has a large mineralogical collection and a nice chemical laboratory in which he makes his analyses.

Let us now turn from what the Siamese have done for science to what they are going to do.

The King has instructed Dr. Gowan to erect an observatory in which regular barometric and thermometric measurements are to be made. The rainfall and the tides will also form a subject of measurements. Other instruments will be added in time. As the Siamese have a great fancy for photography, we shall perhaps soon see regular photographs of the sun taken in Bangkok. Various spectroscopes and telescopes are at the present moment on their way out from England. It is also intended to build a chemical laboratory in the Palace.

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<sup>106</sup> Captain John Bush (1819-1905), Harbour Master at Bangkok and captain of the royal yachts.

The King's bodyguard are being instructed by Mr. Alabaster in taking surveys. At the moment I write this they are out on a surveying expedition.

All this shows that the inhabitants of Siam have a great fancy for science, if it does not show more. Strong liking for a subject is generally accompanied with, if not caused by, the ability to deal with it and to overcome its difficulties. Let us hope that some of the Siamese will take up their favourite subject, not as amateurs merely, but with all the seriousness of a profession. Many of them visit Europe for several years. If some of these were to go through a course of science, the knowledge thus gained, added to their natural intelligence and love of science, would soon make them good observers and able experimenters.

In the meantime it will be interesting to watch the growth and development of a country in which science is the recognised and favoured study. English men of science cannot refuse their sympathy to a king who, under great difficulties, does his best to improve his country, and who readily accords to science the position which they are striving to obtain for it in their own land.<sup>107</sup>

### **Palacia's family concerns**

For Palacia, stimulating as such visits must have been, she was finding the climate trying to the health of the family which suffered from fever and dysentery, the house being too close to the city to be healthy, and although there were opportunities to take refreshing trips to the sea, she decided, reluctantly to send Percy back to England in company with Mrs. Campbell<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> There was a further report listing nearly a score of people involved in the exercise (*The Siam Weekly Advertiser*, Vol. VII, No. 319) which included the acknowledgement, 'During our stay, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Alabaster, our hosts, on behalf of the King, entertained us in the most hospitable manner, taking care that those who were ill should have all possible attention and be restored to health as fast as good doctors and kind nursing could accomplish it.'

<sup>108</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3, Letter No. 20 (23 April 1875).

One can understand Palacia's concern for the children's health in Bangkok, especially after having lost her first born there, and we can see her difficulty in deciding to send one of them back to the uncertainties of far away England. Indeed, at the end of the year when she writes to 'Auntie',<sup>109</sup> we get a glimpse of her regret alongside her pleasure in experiencing the growing up of the other two boys,

'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 [in England] – 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.'

And a year later we read in his uncle Percy's diaries of the child being brought down to spend a couple of weeks holiday with Percy, Alice and family, but learn that, on being taken back to Mrs Campbell, she then wanted the boy 'to go elsewhere as she doesn't want him any more, etc., etc. [...] we shall see.' No doubt the situation was explained to Henry when Percy wrote to him the next day and subsequently, but what actually happened is not recorded, though we do, however, read that Percy later bought the young lad a rocking horse for his birthday in December.

Close though the personal ties between the two families seem to have been, many of the entries, in 1876, in fact, are primarily related to business deals with Henry.

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<sup>109</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3, Letter No. 21 (18 December 1875).

## Percy's business interests and dealings with Henry



Fig.52. Percy Criddle  
as an adult

Percy (Fig. 52) was in business of some kind by 1871, described as a merchant in 1873, named as a wine merchant on his marriage certificate in 1874 and, as his diary shows, was clearly involved with that trade two years later, attending sales and dealing with consignments of sherry, tasting port wine and complaining of having to deal with wine touts. His wider trade interests included, on one occasion, even buying two pianos for a customer, and he probably had business connections with Palacia's brother James Fahey and G. Nicol (a relative of Alice) as well as the Glen Tin Smelting Company. He had been in formal partnership with a Mr. Harry Smith (a family friend) who, even after its dissolution, continued, not only as a friend but in working for him, particularly in fulfilling one of the orders Henry sent from Thailand. Even so, the relationship does not appear to have been ideal, judging from extracts of his diary entries for 1876:

'31 May: I discovered on Monday that he [H. Smith] had engaged himself for a Cricket match for Whit Monday despite his long standing engagement to go to Witley but with me, Nicol [perhaps Alice's brother], etc. Of course he made a shuffling excuse – as usual – which I didn't choose to accept. He is certainly a very curious animal – quite a *luis naturas* [*sic*: a freak/a sport of nature] – but should be a little cautious how he continues to persistently endeavour to play with edged tools – as – some fine morning he will discover that he's in a pretty particular fix at my hands – and – as I've let him off so frequently – I may not be inclined or able to stop the extremely unpleasant circumstances that will be presented to him. One would have imagined him possessed of sufficient brains to see that I'm not

to be humbugged forever – but apparently he is utterly blind and sticks his head in the sand.

June 1: Wrote to H. Smith informing him that my patience is exhausted.

June 6: The war with H. Smith brought to an end and harmony restored by mutual explanations.

July 20: Shall be glad when H. S. returns.

Aug. 8: Back to office very tired (the weather is hot again) and whilst in train home, H. Smith my partner – Damn his infernal bad play.

Aug. 14: The Office is in a filthy dirty state – an inch thick in dust – and the place smothered in papers – old bread – straw - & broken corks – I must bring in a Reform Bill, I fear, and destroy the cherished cobwebs of my worthy & lazy ex-partner.

Dec. 23: Smith is taking a holiday today [...] Idle listless man! [...] and everlastingly making excuses for staying away from business.'

Altogether there were nearly forty entries for the year 1876 referring in some way to business with Henry, but the transaction that fell largely on Smith's shoulders was one very large order – for specimens for a museum<sup>110</sup> and prescribed in great detail. Such delegation of responsibility by Percy was made despite Henry having stressed that the order, reiterated at length,

'will require great care on your part to protect my reputation for supplying good things and which, I hope will, moreover, remunerate me for my part in it.

[...] To effect it you will have to go to Paris and examine the articles comprised in the Museum'

The items covered mammals, birds, reptiles, dried plants, minerals, a microscope and specimens mounted on microscope

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<sup>110</sup> Appendix 1, p. 120: Letter No. 19 (16 June 1876).

slides<sup>111</sup> all probably destined for the first museum in Thailand which was established inside the Grand Palace in Bangkok. The order was a very valuable one – amounting to more than 15,000 francs – and not without financial risk since Henry had already spent £50 on bribes and would send Percy £650 on account, a sum more than three times his annual salary. It was a project which would be one of many ways in which Henry was trying to modernise Bangkok and put it on a par with European capitals and, at the same time seeking to improve his own finances.

Percy's rather negative reaction to the order when he got the letter on 2 August was that it

'will, I fear, involve a couple of journeys to Paris – waste much time and bring but small profits.'

And since he hated travelling, he sent Smith in his stead! He did, however, deal with the microscope himself and

'amused myself all the evening with it. I am dreadfully ignorant in microscopy so mean to have a week's study. Saw a Flea – Bees' tongue – Spiders' legs – sma1l moth – sundry Diatoms, etc., etc. – and was much pleased.'

How pleased Henry was, we do not know, but we do learn from an entry on 20 September that year that he had other alternative, perhaps more reliable business contacts,

'H. Smith very busy getting catalogues & price lists for me – to go to Siam – on every side I find that D. H. Mason<sup>113</sup> has received fine orders – Why Henry couldn't have given them to me instead of some

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<sup>111</sup> Some of the stuffed specimens obtained by Henry were still extant in the Zoology Department of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok when Beryl and I visited there in the 1980s.

<sup>113</sup> It is likely that the second initial should be 'K' not 'H', since D. **K.** Mason was the Consul for Siam in London in 1868-9; unfortunately the location of the holograph of the London diaries is unknown (Myrna Paquette, personal communication, 25 June, 2011).

of the finicky poor & troublesome ones he does – passes my understanding.'

If there was dissatisfaction on Henry's side, there was also irritation on Percy's, expressed in his diary,

'Dec. 11: Got a letter full of grumbles from Henry on Saturday.

Dec. 23: No letter from Henry this mail – therefore – no money.

Really matters are becoming too hot with his desultory & un-business like *manoeuvres*.'

Nevertheless, there were more orders from Henry (mentioned in the diary) and much activity in preparing invoices, Bills of Laden, receipts, getting discounts, and dispatching cases to the East – law books, wine, boots, fishing tackle, compass, surveying instruments, including omnimeters,<sup>114</sup> photography apparatus, photographs and photograph albums (for the king), an electrotyping machine and drawings for a yacht. The inclusion of scientific instruments among these orders confirms the growing interest in Thailand in science.

### **Prince Sai's Ointment**

There was also mention in Percy's diary of Henry's 'patent medicine scheme' and the following year (1877), Articles of Agreement were drafted between him, Prince Sai Sanitoongsa (a 'dear friend' of Henry's) and Dr. Gowan, on the one part, as Principals, and Percy Criddle on the other, as Agent, to manufacture and market a secret medicinal ointment ('Prince Sai's Ointment') and other medicines. Details of the formulation, its method of preparation and alleged efficacy were placed in an envelope marked, 'Confidential Recipe for Ointment. To be opened on conditions mailed in letters'; reproduced in Appendix 3, they reflect well on Gowan as a pharmacologist and Henry as entrepreneur,

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<sup>114</sup> A theodolite with a microscope that can be used to observe vertical angular movement of the telescope.

seeking to stimulate interest in the unique quality of Siamese benzoin<sup>115</sup> resin and specifying the use of a mortar of English Wedgewood!

### **Increasing both business and risk**

As time went on Henry's business activities with Percy seemed to increase, as judged by the number of relevant documents available – three in 1877, four in 1878 and nine in 1879.<sup>116</sup> But there are signs that Henry had some doubts about Percy's character, pointing out to him in one letter,<sup>117</sup>

‘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.’

The letter included orders for:

- 1) Books, materials, machinery and tools for making jewelry (for Prince Kamalat),
- 2) Fishing tackle of all kinds (for another Prince),
- 3) Stores (for himself and Dr. Gowan – tinned food (lard, butter, fish, hare, ham, cheese, sausages, vegetables of all kinds, jams and apples), and bottles of assorted fruit and pickles – which would doubtless be important for Palacia's entertaining of guests,
- 4) Prismatic compasses for surveying (for Luang<sup>118</sup> Pinit and Prince Kaph),
- 5) A pair of diamond earrings for Prince Sai,
- 6) Office furniture and stationery for himself, and

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<sup>115</sup> The resin, Benzoin Siam is obtained from the tree, *Styrax tonkinensis* found across Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

<sup>116</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter Nos. 24, 26-29, 31-37, 39, and 42-44.

<sup>117</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 24 (12 January 1877).

<sup>118</sup> ‘Luang’ refers to the fourth grade of knighthood for a commoner, the ninth overall (Khun Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication).

7) ‘An aluminum binocular telescope, very long in the body and, of course, the best in the world’ for Phra Pricha<sup>119</sup> who was a close friend of the King.

We are beginning to see something of Henry’s clientele – titled commoners, royalty and the King himself. Phra Pricha was Governor of the Principality of Prachin Buri which Henry had visited and had, perhaps had dealings with him in connection with the gold mines there.



Fig. 53. Type of stoneware supplied by Henry for Thailand

Others of his customers were H. R. H. Krom Mün Aditron<sup>120</sup> who wanted camera and ancillary equipment and H. R. H. Krom Mün Naret who was to receive about a thousand pounds worth of artificial stoneware on behalf of the King – statues, columns, vases and ornamental bowls (e.g., Fig. 53). There are, however, signs in a following letter<sup>121</sup> that, with this growing trade, cash-flow was becoming a problem for both Henry and Percy:

‘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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Phra’ refers to the third grade of knighthood for a commoner, the eighth grade overall (Khun Siddhi Savetasila, personal communication).

<sup>120</sup> ‘Krom Mün’ refers to the fifth grade of nobility for the Royal family (Khun Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication).

<sup>121</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 29 (19 June 1877).

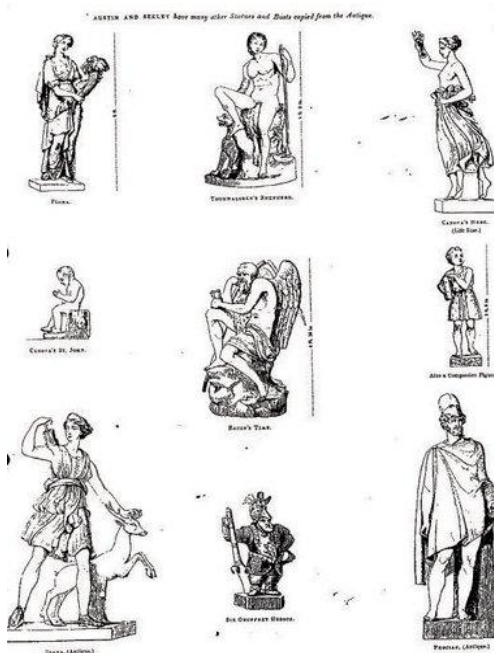


Fig. 54. Page of Austin & Seeley catalogue

I enclose an order for one additional piece omitted in that occasion, and send the photographs [see drawings in Fig. 54] 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 [sic]<sup>122</sup> 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.

Whatever the state of Henry's finances, 'locked up in teak and unpaid bills', he still sent money to his aunt through Palacia who seems also to have been dealing with some of the business

<sup>122</sup> The partnership of Felix Austin and John Seeley of New Road, London was formed in 1840 and continued until c. 1872. It specialised in garden ornaments made of artificial stone (a mixture of Portland cement, broken stones, pounded marble and coarse sand) and was patronised by Queen Victoria.

transactions in England<sup>123</sup>. Perhaps she was considered more reliable than Percy who was later criticized by the Consulate General of Siam in London for his dilatoriness<sup>124</sup>.

A variety of further orders, specified to Percy in great detail<sup>125</sup>, continued to be dealt with. They included: a gold enamel and diamond box as a present from the King to the Ex-Regent on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, with Siamese lettering in diamonds; a hundred pounds worth of roses for the Royal Garden plus dahlia bulbs, fuchias and geraniums; and a gold-rolling machine.

Yet Henry was not succeeding financially, having given up his Agency with Mason and, by September 1878, was saying that he was a ruined man with his income below expenditure. One of the main reasons must have been the long interval between placing orders and receiving payment of his bills (which would have affected Percy in turn), drawing the wry remark; when, at last, he received payments in 1879 from Krom Naret and Prince Kamalat and was able to send Percy a draft,<sup>126</sup>

‘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.’

Henry was not unique in having to suffer from late payment of bills; on one occasion, even Mason mentioned to Percy that he was going to Siam to see the King about sundry amounts owing to him.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 30 (20 May 1878) & Letter No. 32 (12 September 1878).

<sup>124</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 33 (4 January 1878) & Letter No. 37 (22 March 1879), respectively.

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 31 (11 August 1878) & Letter No. 37 (22 March 1879), respectively.

<sup>126</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 44 (23 November 1879).

<sup>127</sup> Percy’s diary entry, 2 October 1876.

## Henry's main preoccupations in Thailand

Although Henry was much occupied in business deals with the establishment, he was, as we learn from his son and from newspaper reports,<sup>128</sup> actively engaged in helping Thailand to



Fig. 55. Bangkok Bar Lighthouse  
(photo by Dmitry Rostopshin)

modernise. He completed the construction, at the King's behest, of a Kew-type botanical garden, the Saranron Garden, of which he was the director and which contained a great variety of plants, including orchids collected when accompanying the king to various Thai provinces, thereby, gaining him the title of 'Father of the Orchid'. He was also

director of the museum and established a library of foreign books of which he was in charge. He was the general manager for the surveying, construction and maintenance of roads and bridges, and also, being mindful of the importance of river transport in maintaining contact with the outside world, had persuaded the King to purchase and erect a lighthouse<sup>129</sup>, now modernised (Fig. 55).

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<sup>128</sup> See: Tong Khun (1950) *Biography, of Henry Alabaster*; and *The Siam Samai Record*, Vol. 2, p. 217, 1884.

<sup>129</sup> Agreed in 1867. Adrian Alabaster (*loc. cit*) quotes part of the correspondence of Henry and Captain Geoffrey Hopkins from May 1874 in the *Siam Advertiser*.

He is also reported to have initiated the establishment of a Post and Telegraph Office, ‘trained the staff and arranged the first postal deliveries’<sup>130</sup>; ‘people put their letters into the post box and postmen (Fig. 56) came to pick up the letters



Fig. 56 An early postman (*Philatelic Museum, Bangkok*)

three times a day and deliver the letters to certain addresses’<sup>131</sup>. The British Consular Post Office in Bangkok, established in 1868, dealt with communication between consulates and international mail sent by diplomatic pouch to Singapore for forwarding. At that time domestic mail, largely limited to the royal family, was delivered by messengers or friends. In 1875 the Prince, Bhanurangsi Sawangwongse, younger brother of the King, published a

newspaper (called, *Court*) for royalty and high officials for which British India stamps were used for delivery since Thailand had none of her own. This is said to have laid the groundwork for the Thai postal service for the general public which was marked by the issue of the first of its own stamps in 1880 (Fig. 57) and the appointment of the Prince as first Director General of the Post Department<sup>132</sup>.

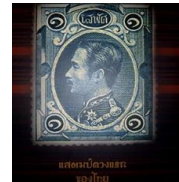


Fig. 57, First Thai postage stamp

In 1875, having helped to start the Survey Office, Henry trained the first Thai surveyors and plotted the route for a land telegraph cable from Bangkok to Battambang in French-held Cambodia and, in due course, such a route was promoted by the

<sup>130</sup> Derick Garnier, *Henry Alabaster, 1836-1884*

<http://www.anglican thai.org/alabaster.htm>

<sup>131</sup> Tong Khun (1950) *loc.cit.*

<sup>132</sup> Philatelic Museum, Bangkok.

French Consul, Dr. Harmond and the authorities in Saigon.<sup>133</sup> Henry suggested employing James McCarthy to map Thailand's frontiers with Burma and French Indo-China<sup>134</sup> and after the death in 1883 of the Kralahome, who had opposed telegraph lines, the King ordered a line to be built to Burma<sup>135</sup>.

But Henry's main responsibility was as legal advisor to the Thai government, dealing with affairs of state through Thai officials, including the Foreign Minister<sup>136</sup> who, ironically had hitherto objected to him remaining at the Consulate. One of his suggestions was to send Siamese envoys to Europe and America, rather than deal with foreign powers through their consuls in Bangkok, Prince Prisdang being the first of such appointment in 1881; he was reported as concluding negotiations in 1882 with Berlin, Vienna, Paris and London<sup>137</sup> and later a Thai Embassy was sent to America.

Henry's exacting schedule but evident relish in his work is described in one of his letters home to his Auntie<sup>138</sup> from which it is also clear that he was increasingly involved with the King in both work and play,

‘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 it<sup>139</sup>, ‘in the suite of The King’. We had a pleasant time and I was nearly drowned.

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<sup>133</sup> *New York Times*, 15 April 1882. In due course a team of American surveyors under a 3-year contract went to Bangkok to ‘establish a system of telegraph’ (*New York Times*, 30 May 1885).

<sup>134</sup> He worked from 1881 to 1883 produce the first scale-map of Siam.

<sup>135</sup> Sanderson Beck, *Siam Cambodia and Laos 1800-1950*.

<sup>136</sup> There is some doubt as to his identity but it is probably the Prince, Somdet Krom Phraya Theawong Waropakan who held the title Kromamun for whom Henry worked as an International Law adviser (Tong Khun, 1950, *loc. cit.*)

<sup>137</sup> *New York Times*, 15 April 1882

<sup>138</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 22 (January 1876).

<sup>139</sup> ‘*Sadet*’ was used by the Royal family, meaning ‘go’ (on a trip) (Khun Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication).

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. : 's daughters go<sup>140</sup>, & 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.'

It is also clear from the letter that, not surprisingly, there was continued animosity between Henry and Knox. Knox had been negotiating with the Foreign Minister (who was advised, no doubt, by Henry at his elbow) over the status of Chiangmai regarding claims to disputed teak forests on the Salwin River and the drawing up of a Treaty. Knox had evidently lost patience, resulting in complaints to Lord Granville about his using 'unrefined' language; and at one stage the Siamese Government even stated that it 'could no longer consult with Knox in the Salwin business!<sup>141</sup> Added to that, a dispute between the two Kings<sup>142</sup> had led the second one to take refuge in the British Consulate where he remained safe from his enemies for some six weeks or so until it had to be resolved by the diplomatic intervention of Sir Andrew Clarke, the new

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<sup>140</sup> Knox had two daughters, Caroline and Fanny (see Margaret Landon, *loc. cit.*).

<sup>141</sup> FO 1872, 1873 & 1874.

<sup>142</sup> Suspicion had been cast on the Second King when a fire had broken out in the Royal Palace in December 1874 and his troops who had been training in the palace grounds at night were stopped from helping to put it out.

Governor of the Straits Settlement<sup>143</sup>. Then, soon after, there followed another complaint about Knox endorsed by Henry<sup>144</sup>, Knox was increasingly at odds with the Siamese Government and with the ex-patriate community, especially Henry and it was about this time that Mrs. Knox is said to have called Henry ‘a snake in the grass’!<sup>145</sup>



Fig. 58. Siamese musicians in Bangkok  
(by J. Antonio)

Palacia’s letters home at about that time (June 1877) describe their fitting in with life in Siam – of Henry’s industry and their busy social life, despite the weather that could be very depressing for her,<sup>146</sup>

‘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[ing] last week – some musicians [Fig. 58] came down here & H[is] M[ajesty] engaged them for the even[ing] & invited

<sup>143</sup> FO 1975; Clarke was the second Governor of the Straits Settlement from 4 November 1873 to 7 May 1875.

<sup>144</sup> FO 1975, Memo of 11 March; this time the complaint was from a British subject but endorsed by Henry and nine other prominent, respectable citizens including: S. J. B. Ames, one of the Commissioners of Police, Captain John Bush, the Harbour Master and Dr. Gowan.

<sup>145</sup> R. J. Minney, *loc. cit.*

<sup>146</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 25 (19 June 1877).

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 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*] 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.'

From Henry's correspondence with Percy<sup>147</sup> we know of one of his visits to Phetchaburi (commonly known as *Khao Wang*; Fig.



Fig. 59. Phetchaburi today

59), near which King Mongkut had built a palace in 1860 and a tower nearby for his astronomical observations. On this occasion, it is likely that he had combined an official visit to the observatory with an outing for the children,

'Charlie fell from a bridge at Petchaburin<sup>148</sup> 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'

<sup>147</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 24 (12 January 1877).

<sup>148</sup> A town 150 km south of Bangkok.

At some time, in 1877 or 1878 Palacia did actually come home with the two boys to England, staying with her parents at The Grange, Shepherds Bush, and returned to Bangkok early in 1879 leaving all three children with their Fahey grandparents.<sup>149</sup> She found Henry was working as hard as ever and was soon, herself in the thick of entertaining again.<sup>150</sup>



Fig. 60. HMS *Foxhound*

‘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 [Fig. 60] – but it has not intimidated the Siamese – and the Officers think them a very pleasant & good natured people – I have heard that “*Foxhound*”<sup>151</sup> is leaving tomorrow. I suppose you will have seen something of the affair in the papers before you get this [...]

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<sup>149</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 38 (1 April 1879) from Eliza S. Fahey, Palacia’s sister and Letter No. 40 (7 May 1879) from Edward Percy Alabaster.

<sup>150</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 41 (26 May 1879).

<sup>151</sup> A 4-gun screw gunboat of 455 tons, 125ft. long and with a speed of 10 knots, launched at Barrow in 1877; under the command of W. H. G. Nowell, it was anchored opposite the Golden Pagoda of the Royal Palace and caused consternation among the Palace Guard.

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



Fig. 61. Ulysses S. Grant

King misses him very much – with these exceptions it has been a very gay & busy time since I returned – General Grant's visit <sup>152</sup> – he had to prepare the Palace for him [Fig. 61] & 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 [of Prussia]<sup>153</sup> who is I think in Japan now – will come before long –

[...] 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 .'

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<sup>152</sup> He was the ex-President of the USA on a 2-year world tour after leaving office. Henry's sister-in-law, Laura Alabaster reported from Hankow, China that the General and his wife had been charmed with Henry and his wife 'and seemed to appreciate their kindness and attention' (see SOAS Archive, MS 380823).

<sup>153</sup> The 18-year old prince was arrested for shooting near a temple and imprisoned for several hours, for which the Governor of Osaka had to make a grovelling apology and was then dismissed! (*The Straits Times*, 11 January 1898).

### **Knox and the gunboat HMS *Foxhound***

Why did Knox try to intimidate the Siamese with a gunboat, he who had once rebuked Henry for simply threatening such an extreme action? The story actually begins four years earlier with an unexpected surge in antagonism between Knox and the Kralahome. The root cause was the arrival in Bangkok in March 1875 of Knox's younger daughter, Fanny. For the Kralahome then wanted her to marry his son, Nai Dee and when she refused he felt greatly insulted, especially as he had earlier wanted his son to marry Knox's elder daughter, Caroline who had also refused! Added to that, Fanny had fallen in love with Phra Pricha, Governor of Prachin whose family (the Amatyakuns) were equivalent to and rival of the Kralahome's (the Bunnags).

After Phra Pricha married Fanny on 10 March 1879 he was arrested within a few weeks, accused of various crimes; a closed trial was held in his absence, with no witnesses and he was sentenced to be flogged. Naturally, Knox was outraged at such treatment of his son-in-law and, failing to get any redress either officially through the Siamese Foreign Minister<sup>154</sup>, or at a personal level through the King, actually called up the gunboat which arrived on 12 May though leaving after a couple of weeks without effect.

Knox's response is reminiscent of the gun-boat diplomacy Henry had attempted in 1868. Ironically, too, in this case the British Foreign Office actually considered the possibility of seeking a retrial in the presence of the Consul, the very arrangement for which Henry had been criticised! On 26 June a Parliamentary Question was raised about Knox's action, and this time it was Knox who was reprimanded and instructed to return home to explain matters. The Thai authorities then demanded that he should remain away and he was lucky to retire with a pension of £1026, a generous two thirds of his salary – again this was an outcome in strong

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<sup>154</sup> Chow Phrya Bhaunwong, half-brother of the Regent (Minney, *loc. cit.*).

contrast to the treatment Henry had received (no pension) when he was deemed to have resigned.

Further charges were brought against Phra Pricha, including murder, and on 24 November he was actually executed! Not surprisingly, the outside world was outraged<sup>155</sup>. Three days later Fanny, with a £500 price on her head arrived at the Consulate disguised in saffron priest's robes and made her escape to England.

We do not know what Henry felt about the affair but he must have had mixed feelings about its grim irony, remembering what had happened to him when he had opposed the Kralahome in 1868; and surely, any satisfaction he might have felt at seeing the tables turned so dramatically would have been dulled by such a cruel ending.



Fig. 62. Probably Henry's  
two Thai Sons (from Nan  
Kenyon)

### **An unexpected turn of events**

In May 1879, Palacia writing home seemed perfectly settled again into life in Bangkok but then, in Henry's letter to Percy six months later, though trading matters were satisfactory, his relationship with Palacia was changing for the worse,<sup>156</sup>

'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 known.'

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<sup>155</sup> Expressed, for example in the *New York Times* 12 April 1880.

<sup>156</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 44 (23 November 1879).

This does not sound simply like the effects of overwork in a hostile climate. A more likely cause would be Palacia's discovery that, on 28 June, a son, Tong Khun had been born to Henry by his Thai wife, Klib<sup>157</sup> (Fig. 62), the child having been conceived when Palacia was in England in September 1878. Whether or not Palacia was summoned back to England by Percy and went there we do not know. In any event, a second son, Tong Yoi (Fig. 62) was born in 1881 and Palacia was certainly present in Bangkok the following year.

### **Henry's last days**

Of Henry's remaining time in Thailand we know very little, except for the continuation of some commercial business with Percy and a few further political developments. In 1881, Henry's recommendation that Thailand should send its own envoys to Europe and America rather than rely on negotiations through the consulates in Bangkok was finally put into effect. Thailand's sympathies remained strongly with the British and proposals to build a canal across the Kra Isthmus (Fig. 8) by Ferdinand de Lesseps, the constructor of the Suez Canal, were resisted in 1882 (and, eventually, cancelled in agreement with the British so as to protect the regional dominance of the harbour of Singapore).

In January 1882 Fanny Knox made a desperate, ill-advised expedition to Pra Pricha's province *via* Saigon, was taken prisoner by the Siamese and then rescued (for the second time) by the Consulate. The very next day, her enemy, the Regent died and then, in July her father and then her mother also died.

There had been deaths too in Henry's family – of uncle John Greaves, aged 69 on 22 September 1897 and Auntie, aged 76 on 28 December 1880.

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<sup>157</sup> Khun Siddli Savetsila, personal communication (letter of 24 February 2005).

Finally, Henry's turn came on 8 August 1882 at the relatively young age of 46, the cause, 'congestion of the brain', Palacia receiving a most sympathetic and helpful letter from the king<sup>158</sup>:

'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 [Thai?] 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.'

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<sup>158</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3: Letter No. 47 (8 August 1884).



Fig. 63. Monument to Henry in  
Bangkok

True to his word, the King subsequently erected an impressive monument to Henry in the Protestant Cemetery in Bangkok (Fig. 63) that included within it a bust of Henry (as on shown on the front cover) and four laudatory plaques quoting from both the Bible and John Graham (see Appendix No. 4). Fulsome praise followed in the local press in which it was reported that the burial service was attended by royalty, court officials and the royal band<sup>159</sup>

Percy was soon informed of the situation before he later (in July) emigrated to Canada with his two families now grown to eleven in number, including his mistress Elise and his wife Alice, the mothers of his children,. According to his

eldest son by Alice, the move was necessitated by ‘a financial crisis’<sup>160</sup> which would not be surprising bearing in mind Percy’s relaxed attitude at times to his business dealings with Henry and his penchant for gambling on cards and horses. It has been judged<sup>161</sup> that Percy lived off Henry’s commissions until that source dried up, that he had also used up his wife’s money and, furthermore that, had it not been for the sale of his mother’s paintings he would have been in financial trouble. And after his mother died, emigration of the

<sup>159</sup> *Siam Samai*, Record book II, Issue 26, p. 207.

<sup>160</sup> Alma Criddle (1973) *Criddle-de-diddle-ensis: A Biographical History of the Criddles of Aweme, Manitoba Pioneers of the 1880’s*. 288 pp. SBN 0919212808.

<sup>161</sup> Oriole Veldhuis, personal communication (e-mail 22 June, 2011).

family to Canada was made possible through his wife Alice's inheritance from her brother Henry Nicol.

## Postscript

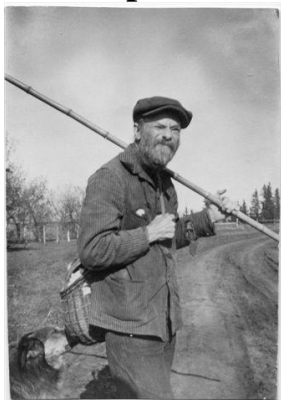


Fig. 64. Charles  
Alabaster (1869-1945)

It is not the purpose of the present account to pursue Henry's family story beyond 1882 except perhaps to mention that Percy had some further correspondence with Palacia when her eldest son, Charles (Fig. 64) visited Manitoba, Canada for several months in 1903. Charles 'was well educated, spoke several languages, did a lot of reading and enjoyed fishing but was rather a "strange" person who could not get along with Percy and went to live with his cousin Edwy Vane'<sup>162</sup>. Ironically, Percy described him in his diary as a 'supremely idle selfish dog' and was almost as scathing about Charles' two brothers: 'Mr. Ernest is I fancy very like Mr. [Edward] Percy – for No. 1 only'<sup>163</sup>, a remark that betrays some of his own character defects.

Of Henry's Thai descendents, mention should be made of his two sons Thongkam and Thongyoi, the former particularly because of the account he made of his father's contribution to Thailand, and also of Henry's grandson, Khun Siddhi Savelisila (son of Thong Kam) who has served Thailand with distinction and also supported the Alabaster Society research into his grandfather's life.

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<sup>162</sup> Personal communications, Nan Kenyon (4 September and 14 October 1992).

<sup>163</sup> Personal communication, Myrma Paquette (E-mail 23 June 2011 ).

## 6. Summary and conclusion

Henry had the good fortune to be born into an upward-moving branch of the Alabaster family which had been involved since the end of the eighteenth century in straw-hat making in the London East End, an industry that had benefited from preferential government trade tariffs and a rising fashion-conscious middle class. His grandfather, Charles married into the property-owning Dearmer family and moved the business to the fashionable and more affluent West End – Piccadilly – where it was continued by the next generation, Henry's father, James Chaloner, and his Alabaster aunts, Mary Ann Rebecca and Katherine.

Although he suffered the loss of both parents to tuberculosis when only in his fourth year, he and his two brothers had the further good fortune to be brought up and cared for by their aunt Mary Ann Rebecca and her husband, Henry Criddle. The excellent education they then received enabled his elder brother Charles to enter the Church and both Henry and his younger brother Chaloner to start their careers in the service of the British Foreign Office in China.

When Henry graduated in 1855, the British Empire in the Far East included India<sup>164</sup>, Ceylon, much of neighbouring Burma, and Hong Kong in China. British trading and political influence in China had been extended by the establishment of Treaty Ports there following the first Opium War and then a Treaty was negotiated with Thailand, a former British ally in the defeat of Malaya in 1824.

After a short period with his brother Chaloner in Hong Kong, Henry joined the newly established consulate in Bangkok where he quickly mastered the language and served faithfully and effectively the interests of both the British Crown and Thailand until the fateful year of 1868, one of initial triumph but culminating

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<sup>164</sup> The British East India Company which effectively ruled India was dissolved in 1858 in favour of direct British Crown control.

in unexpected change of fortune. That summer, acting as Consul he had been publicly honoured by the King of Siam during an international gathering to celebrate the prediction of the eclipse of the sun, but a few months later, with the King on his deathbed, he had clashed with the all-powerful Prime Minister over his rightful claim for compensation to Indian (i.e. British) citizens whose property had been destroyed by opium traders. Rashly, he reinforced his justifiable protest by hauling down the consular flag, an act which upset the Thais and which he initially failed to report to the British Foreign Office<sup>165</sup>. Such obfuscation and his subsequent refusal to accept postings outside Thailand led to his dismissal without a pension and an uncertain future for him and his family.

But recognition by the new young King of his undoubted ability (and no doubt his deep understanding of Thai Buddhism shown in his erudite book, *The Wheel of the Law*<sup>166</sup>) led to his return to Bangkok to serve the Thai crown directly. His further contribution there was considerable in helping to modernise the country in the fields of culture, education, technology and infrastructure and particularly in that of foreign affairs, protecting Thailand's sovereign independence, especially in resisting French demands for territorial concessions.

It is unfortunate that the initial friendship and admiration he held for his senior colleague, Knox in the British Consulate later

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<sup>165</sup> When Angela and Adrian Alabaster visited the British Consulate in 1973, the hauling down of the flag was the only thing they could tell about Henry! (Angela, personal communication).

<sup>166</sup> Henry's book was the only authority quoted by Edward Blair Michell (Henry's successor as Legal Adviser to the Siamese Government) in his, *Siamese-English Dictionary*, Bangkok, 1892 (see pp. viii, ix & xvii) since it 'contained a mine of copious and accurate information reflecting the meaning of Siamese words especially bearing upon religious and philosophical learning'.

tended towards rivalry and a degree of conflict between their respective families, though fortunately, it did not become a dominant feature of his life in Thailand.

During his lifetime trade with Thailand increased, Henry playing his own small part in importing European goods – technical books and tools, scientific instruments, garden statuary and sculpture, as well as plants – all of which was achieved with the help of his young cousin Percy Criddle in England for whom both he and his wife Palacia maintained a close bond despite Percy's rather wayward character. Diplomatic activity also increased especially with Britain whose expansion of its Consular facilities was duly supported by Henry<sup>167</sup>.

Henry's substantial contribution to Thailand's development was recognised and appreciated by the King who erected a fitting monument to him in Bangkok and also made financial provision for his widow, Palacia and for Henry's children.

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<sup>167</sup> Henry, in giving evidence to the Diplomatic and Consular Commission, reported in January 1873, recommended increases in staff and student salaries based on his own experience; and in the 1980s there followed a threefold increase in the volume of Foreign Office correspondence about Thailand compared with earlier decades.



## Appendix 1. Letters from Henry Alabaster to Percy Criddle

Transcribed here are nineteen letters from Henry Alabaster to Percy Criddle for the years 1856-57; they include seven already published: five for 1856 (Nos. 1-4 & 6)<sup>168</sup> and two for 1857<sup>169</sup> (Nos. 17 & 18). Thus there are twelve hitherto unpublished transcriptions for these early years. Please note that Letter No. 1 in the latter publication should have been dated 1859 not 1857.

One letter (No. 19) dated 16 June 1876<sup>170</sup>, supplements the rest of the correspondence of 48 items in the latter publication.

Six letters (Nos. 1-4, & 6) are transcribed from original copies and are marked (\*), the remainder from only photocopies. All the transcriptions have been sent to SOAS together with photocopies of all originals and all copies except Nos. 17 and 18.

### 1. **August 1856 [neatly written in a large hand]\***

Dear Percy

,

You are a very good fellow to write to me, write often, and do not forget to love me.

I am glad you have an aquarium and hope it may get on. You shall have a long letter when I get to China.

Mind you work as well as play; when you get a prize I shall be so glad that I think we will have a party in China to drink your health.

Your affectionate cousin

Henry Alabaster.

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<sup>168</sup> Laraine Hake (1999) Letters between cousins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Alabaster Chronicle* No. 13, pp. 12-19.

<sup>169</sup> *Occasional Monograph* No. 3.. (Please note: letter No. 1 in this publication should be dated 1859 not 1857)

<sup>170</sup> Kindly made available by Jo-Ann Saville

## 2. September 1856, Singapore\*

Dear Percy,

It is preciously hot here but we have lots of fun and I hope you at home are as jolly as we are, What do you think of a lot of ladies and gentlemen playing blind-man's buff; that is how we amuse ourselves.

I often think of you and wonder what you will be like when I come back – I hope you work hard, and remember God's command to honour your father and your mother.

When I get to China I will write again, so now Good bye and may God bless you.

Yours affectionate Cousin  
Henry Alabaster

## 3. 15 October 1856, from The Albany, Hong Kong\*

Dear Percy,

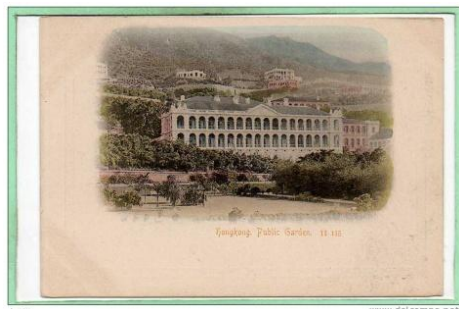


Fig. 65. The Albany, Hong Kong (from [www.Delcampe.net](http://www.Delcampe.net))

As you are, I am afraid, too lazy to have read any letters to your mama, and so know nothing of my travels, I will tell you some now. After leaving Southampton we first saw the Isle of Wight which you have seen too, then we got out of sight of land and next day entered the Bay of Biscay which is a very deep sea and often very stormy, but it was quite smooth when we passed.

Then we steamed all day along the coast of Portugal which is a very pretty place and has many vines from which our best Port wine is made, and after five days came to anchor opposite Gibraltar which is a town built at the bottom of a steep mountain and fortified very strongly. They have cut long tunnels in the rock and made loop-holes for the

canons, so that when they fire the smoke seems to come out of the rock and the enemy cannot kill the gunners. It once belonged to the Spaniards but Sir George Rook[e] took it by surprise.<sup>171</sup> They have often tried to get it back but cannot; once they sent a fleet which prevented the garrison getting provisions but the Governor made some cannon-balls red-hot and fired them at the ships so that they were burnt, and those not burnt sailed away in great fear.

On the coast of Africa, which is opposite here, are pirates who wounded the Prince of Prussia the day before we came, while he was picnic-ing.

Three days after leaving Gibraltar we came to Malta, where there is a very large harbour which belongs to the English, and they have fortified it strongly. The Maltese are clever divers and will find a sixpence [a silver coin worth 3 New Pence] thrown to the bottom of the harbour.

There is a beautiful church, all the inner walls of which are covered with mosaic, that is, pictures made out of small coloured pieces of stone; in this church are many beautiful tombs of the Knights of St. John who used to fight the Turks in Palestine a long while ago. If you look at some of the pictures of Sebastopol seen from the sea, it will give you an idea of Malta seen from the sea as they are very much alike, the entrance to the harbour of both being defended by similar forts.

After spending two days in Malta, we left and in three days reached Alexandria. The night before reaching Alexandria the sailors had a lark, one of them dressing up as a donkey, another as an old woman, another as a soldier and others according to their taste; they then came and sang songs to the passengers, and the donkey kicked about making much confusion and fun; and then they brought round a hat and collected money from the passengers after which they sang some more songs and danced hornpipes and then went away. I will tell you more about my travels next letter. So hoping that Pug, the aquarium and the lessons all go on satisfactorily, I remain

Yours Affectionately  
H[enr]y Alabaster.

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<sup>171</sup> In 1704.



Fig. 66. Pompeys's Pillar at  
Alexandria

#### 4. 1 November 1856, Hong Kong\*

Dear Percy,

In my last letter I told you how we journeyed to Alexandria which, if you look at the map, you will find is an Egyptian city.

We landed in a small boat and jumped into an omnibus which was drawn along very fast by two mules; the streets were very narrow and had no pavement, so everybody walked in the road, and it was fine fun to see their alarm as we drove past, for we poked our driver in the ribs with an umbrella which made him drive very fast indeed.

The hotel we stayed at was a very large one, and all the rooms very lofty, as most rooms are in hot countries.

After dinner I and two others went out for a walk in the Grand Square which is a large open sandy space surrounded by the principal houses of the city; here we found a number of large dogs roaming about and howling, so we collected a lot of stones and soon drove them away.

Next morning we hired donkeys and rode out of the town to see Pompey's Pillar which is a column cut out of one piece of granite 73 feet long, and nearly 9 feet through. [Fig. 66]

The donkeys were very good ones and galloped beautifully. The saddles are not like English saddles but are very comfortable [a sketch inserted,

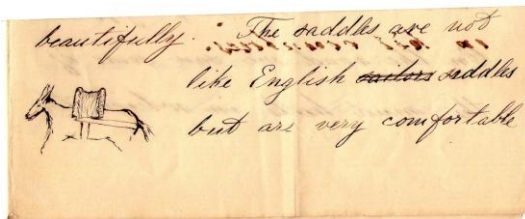


Fig. 67. Henry's sketch of an Egyptian Donkey-saddle

as Fig. 67]; they are like a cushion about eight inches thick, shaped as I have just drawn; those who ride on them must take care and keep their balance, as the saddles often roll over; rider and all. Soon after coming back from our

ride we were taken to the railway station, and in six hours reached Cairo, the chief city of Egypt. On the road we saw some of the mud huts in which the poor country people live; they are about 6 feet long and broad and 5 feet high with no windows, and instead of a door have a small square hole through which those who live in them have to crawl.

We also crossed the River Nile, a large river which rises 28 feet every summer and overflows the greater part of Egypt; after a few months it subsides and then the farmers sow their seeds and get large crops. If the Nile did not overflow every year, the ground would be too dry to grow anything, for it very seldom rains in Egypt.

When we reached Cairo we went to the hotel which we found full of passengers coming to England, so not being able to get rooms until they left which was some hours after, we looked for donkeys, and found so many that only by hitting right and left with our sticks we managed to get off on one donkey each, instead of mounting on six or more as the donkey boys wished. So we rode off to the Citadel which was built by Saladin who fought with Richard Coeur de Lion. In the Citadel are Pasha's palace, the Armoury, the Mint, that is the place where money is coined, and a beautiful Mosque or Mahomedan [*sic*] temple, and also a well 260 feet deep which has a winding staircase leading down to the bottom.

When we had seen these we rode about the town; the streets are very narrow and dirty, and the houses very tall. When a carriage goes about, two good runners run before it and make everyone get out of the way; we had twice to pull up our donkeys close against a wall, and once I backed into a shop, for none of the shops have fronts and so it is very easy to ride into them.

When we returned to the hotel we found plenty of bedrooms ready for us; the beds all have light covers or curtains to keep out mosquitoes, a kind of gnat which bites very badly. So we chose our rooms, dressed for dinner and soon after dinner went to bed.

At five o'clock next morning five two-wheeled omnibuses, each made to carry six passengers and drawn by two mules and two horses, came to the hotel and a party of us got in directly and set off to cross the desert. The desert consists of sand, sometimes level so that we could see a good way, and at other times all little hills and valleys so that we could not see any distance.

On our journey, which was 84 miles long, we saw plenty of thistles, the only thing which grows in the desert except a thorn tree, which is [growing at] about the middle of it; this tree has got a number of strips of rag hanging about it, hung there by travellers who have visited it. We also saw the 'Mirage' which is a mist in the distance, looking just like a stream of water; but when you go near you find nothing.

In the evening we reached Suez, a town at the north end of the Red Sea; it is a dirty place with nothing in it worth looking at, so we were all very glad to go on board the steamer *Bentinck* next day.

The *Bentinck* is a large ship and we had plenty of room in our cabins. Most of the sailors were black men, called Lascars; there were about 200 of them and they used to sleep on the deck so that we often trod on them by accident but they did not mind that at all. Their food is mostly rice and fish for they cannot afford anything else. One of them stole another's clothes one day, so the Captain had their bundles searched and so found out the thief, who was flogged.

As I daresay you will be tired by this long letter, I will tell you of the rest of our voyage in another letter. I am very happy at Hong Kong. I hope you are working hard and not forgetting your music. Don't forget to love yours affectionately

Hy Alabaster

P.S. I was very glad to hear you have done so well at school. Do it again.

**5. [Late November 1856[?], only part of a letter, evidently about Ceylon from Hong Kong]†**

Sheet 3

this insect gives out no light but, when disturbed by a wave breaking or a boat passing, it shines like a silver star. After a good walk we returned to the hotel and got in just before the most violent shower; heavy showers are usual in Ceylon [Sri Lanka] at about 9 or 10 in the evening owing, probably, to the intense heat during the day, making the water go up into the air as steam; when the sun goes down, this steam gets cooled, changes into water and falls as a heavy shower. When the showers had passed away we went to bed.

Next morning three of us got up early and walked to the Cinnamon Gardens where trees grow which have such a pleasant smelling

and tasting bark; the bark only is eaten. It was a beautiful walk; by the seaside where the trees grew on rocks which must be under water every tide; through woods of cocoa and palms and other fruit trees, over half-broken-down bridges and at last the Cinnamon Gardens which were very pretty and had some beautiful flowers in them and, among others, a root which had the scent of camphor. After a rest we started on our return, and met a postman carrying letters to Colombo, a town about 60 miles from Galle; he ran along at a steady rate of five miles and hour and was soon out of sight. By the time we were half-way home, it was past eight o'clock, and the sun was very hot on us, so we sat down by a stream, bought some cocoa nuts for a halfpenny each and, having drank the milk and eaten the solid part, continued our walk, very much refreshed.

There are great numbers of snakes in Ceylon but we did not see them; we saw, however, a large alligator, 6 feet long lying in the road; just as we came up, a dog rushed at him and he ran off into a marsh by the roadside. We reached the hotel at about nine o'clock and found a very good breakfast waiting for us. The rest of the day we spent indoors, looking at the goods brought for sale etc. and in the Evening we again walked out to hear the frogs and see the fireflies, the phosphorescent waves and the lighthouse.

Next morning we again embarked in the steamer *Malta* and proceeded on our voyage, the rest of which I will describe in another letter.

We are very jolly at Hong Kong; there has been a fire, six houses burnt down; I helped to pump the fire-engine; if you want to read about it, read my letter to your mamma. Work hard, be a good boy, do as your mamma bids you, and so Good bye.

Yours affectionately  
Hy Alabaster

**6. 7 December 1856, Hong Kong. No. 2 P.S.\***

**Dear Percy,**

You must read this as a postscript to my other letter; if you think it too much trouble to read both as soon as you get them, you can put this by for a week or until you have some spare time.

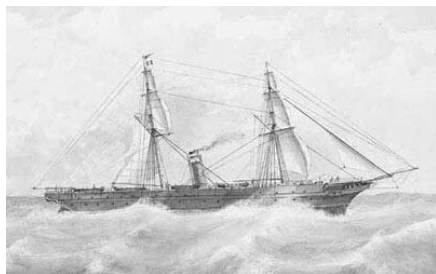


Fig. 68 Drawing of S.S. Malta  
(from [georgemacdonald.info/malta.jpg](http://georgemacdonald.info/malta.jpg))

On board the *Malta* [Fig. 68] I found Lieut. Ray, a cousin of Mrs. King; he was a very jolly old gentleman and used to join us in all sorts of fun.

After six days steaming we reached Penang, an island close to the Malay Peninsula (see your map), belonging to the English; as we entered the harbour we noticed lots of fishing places built over the

sea; a number of long bamboo poles are driven into the sand and on the top, above high-water mark, a kind of floor is built, or sometimes a small hut; the fisherman sits here and watches his nets which are stretched all round on bamboo stakes; when the fish come in he pulls up his nets and catches them. Penang is said to be a pretty place but it was too late to land when we cast anchor; and next morning it rained heavily until we left, so I was unable to land.

After leaving Penang we steamed two days through the Straits of Malacca and arrived at Singapore. The Straits are full of beautiful islands, all the land down to the water's edge is covered with trees, palms and canes. One evening we had a very slight squall, the water was of a dark green colour and as smooth as glass. I was watching the sun setting behind a black cloud when, suddenly, a lot of small white-crested waves started up in the distance, every moment coming nearer; as they passed between us and the sun, all the little waves reflected the rays of the sun and made the sea sparkle as if it were on fire, then they came by us, with a gust of wind and left everything as calm as before.

Singapore is a town and island belonging to England; there are a good many fine houses where Europeans live but most of the people are Chinese. There are a great many ships at Singapore of all nations from England to China, and in general a number of English men of war. We found lots of carriages for hire and drove all about the town; it is a capital place to buy walking canes and sticks, but one has to look very sharp or he will be cheated and made to buy bad canes for twice the price of good ones.

Eight days after leaving Singapore, we reached Hong Kong. Although it was Sunday and Church-time we were quickly surrounded by boats, and boarded by people asking after news and looking for friends. Among these were Chal [Henry's brother] and Adkins who took me ashore, and I was soon seated under the veranda of our house enjoying the view of the harbour of Hong Kong which had four or five men of war in it besides more than a hundred merchant ships.

Beyond the harbour were the mountains of the coast of China, while on our side lower down the hill were the Governor's house, the Cathedral and other handsome English buildings.

Hong Kong is a mountainous island; there are several peaks; the highest (1000 feet) is at the back of our house. Our house is some distance up the hill, higher than any other house in the Island and, besides having such a beautiful view of the harbour, is cooler than the town. A stream runs down the mountain at the back of our house and every morning I climb up the stream which is full of large blocks of granite, on which we walk to keep our feet dry (sometimes we slip which is rather unpleasant). I then bathe in a pool or sit under a waterfall and, when my bath is over, return home and feel as jolly as possible. The water is now very cold early in the morning and makes me shudder as I get in, but this of course makes the pleasure of getting out greater than ever.

There are lots of Chinamen in Hong Kong; they are dirty fellows and often very impudent, but are generally very good tempered. They are very proud of their [pig-]tails and to make them seem long, plait silk in their hair. Many of them are strong fellows, but they are terribly afraid of an Englishman.

The policemen are nearly all Indians whom the Chinese are not so much afraid of; so one day not long ago a lot of them caught a policeman who had been bullying them and threw him into the sea where he got well ducked.

If I travel any more I shall have fresh places to describe; if not I will tell you more about Hong Kong when I write again. Till then, Good-bye.

Yours affectionately

Hy Alabaster

I enclose some Chinese pictures for you.

**7. 14 January 1857, Superintending of Trade, Hong Kong†**

Dear Percy,

I sent you a long letter last time so you must excuse me this time and be content to know that we are well. I was sorry to hear that your fish get on so badly, you must catch some more.

Yours affectionately

Henry Alabaster

**8. 5 February 1857, Hong Kong†**

Dear Percy,

As you are such a good correspondent I do not like to miss sending you a letter every month but I have not much to tell this time.

As Canton is one of the largest cities of the world, we cannot take it without a great many soldiers, so we have left off fighting until some more troops arrive. Not long ago one of our war steamers, the *Sampoon* was attacked by a number of Snake-boats which are very long boats with an immense number of rowers; they are very swift and carry very big guns.

Several balls hit the *Sampoon* and one killed the pilot; when she turned to attack them they ran away into shallow water where she could not get at them.<sup>172</sup>

Since my last letter to you, the Chinese tried to poison all the Europeans in Hong Kong. A Chinese baker put a lot of arsenic in his bread and, having supplied his customers as usual, left his shop and set off in a steamer for Macao where he could easily have escaped but, as it happened, some of his bread was taken aboard the steamer and the Captain, finding it made everybody ill, kept him prisoner until another

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<sup>172</sup> There was considerable hostility between China and its foreign guests in Canton, as elsewhere, following the trading Treaties made after the Opium Wars, culminating in an Anglo-French force marching on the city in December 1857 and resulting in a further treaty signed the following June (see Carr, Caleb (1955) *The Devil Soldier: The Story of Frederick Townsend Ward*. Random House, New York, 355 pp.). Chaloner also wrote to Percy about the situation, showing little or no sympathy for the Chinese. Henry gives no clues about what he felt about it.

steamer came after him, when he was brought back and put in prison. Nobody was killed but a great many were made very ill and everyone was terribly frightened.

I am going off to Siam in a few days and when I get there I will write and tell you all about my journey. I wish I could be with you to help you in your Physical Geography. Pay attention to your French and let me know how you get on. I shall never forget you, so you need not think of such a thing. God bless you.

Yours affectionately

Hy Alabaster

**9. 17 March 1857 [written in a poor hand, evidently from Bangkok]†**

Dear Percie,

In my last letter I promised to send you an account of my voyage to Siam, so now I will try to redeem my promise, but it is very difficult to write letters here, for I am busy all day till 6 o'clock when it gets dark and we have to light our lamps – and then the mosquitoes (large gnats) crowd round and suck our blood – irritating us so much that we are glad to get to bed where the curtain protected us from them.

If you take your atlas you will see at once how a ship must steer to get from Hong Kong to Siam – A few hours after leaving Hong Kong we lost sight of land and our course was Southwest – We had made a good wind for what is called the Northeast Monsoon was blowing. In this part of the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean, the wind blows NE half the year and SW the other half – and these winds are called the monsoons – but you will I suppose have learnt all this in your Physical Geography.

On the sixth day the weather which had been calm and fine – changed – the wind blew fiercely – the sky was covered with clouds – and the swell of the waters kept increasing till the ship pitched & rolled, so that nothing could stand on deck. At breakfast we had to keep tight hold of our plates but at dinner – you would have laughed had you seen us – the table had tumbled over and been lashed to the mast whilst we, seated on low stools, had the greatest difficulty in balancing ourselves and our plates – however, we managed and by midnight came to Pulo Obi, a small Island [where] ships sometimes stop at for provisions as there is plenty of

good water, pigs and fowls and few inhabitants. Having passed this we were in the Gulf of Siam and, altering our course to NW, arrived off the mouth of the River Menam<sup>173</sup> in five days, during which we were becalmed several times and had one squall which carried away our fore-top-gallant mast.

The 'bar' of the River Menam is a mud bank several miles off the mouth of the river – the deepest water is never more than 14 feet – so our ship had to wait for the pilot to take her across so, when she anchored, I got into a six-oared boat and in 2½ hours landed at Paknam, a town at the mouth of the river – The Governor was very polite to me and, having given me dinner, lent me a boat to take me to Bangkok – so off I went and till it grew dark amused myself by watching the banks of the river which is [?] and so deep that the largest ships can sail up it for 45 miles or more without a pilot.

The banks of the river are lined with trees & bushes so that you can see no ground – near the sea the mangrove abounds; it is the only land tree which is not killed by salt water and among these trees and bushes were thousands of pelicans and other birds. Behind these bushes, in some few spots, were groves of cocoa nut, rice fields, sugar plantations and orchards and occasionally a hut raised high on poles to protect its inmates from floods, snakes and wild beasts, for much the greater part of Siam is wild jungle, abounding in tigers, elephants and many other savage animals, and the banks of the river swarm with alligators.

It soon grew dark and then myriads of fire flies danced through the air in all directions – crowding round the bushes on the banks till every branch seemed lit up with a row of tiny lamps. [The rest of the letter is missing]

#### **10. 27 April 1857, Bangkok†**

Dear Percie,

I received a letter from you the other day with which I was very pleased, but you should be more careful about your spelling. I have not time to send you a long letter by this mail. It is very hot here. There was

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<sup>173</sup> The old name for the Chao Phraya River, the main river in Thailand which flows past Bangkok

a large fire in Bangkok a week ago and 50 houses or more were burnt down – the houses all being built of wood and thatch were quite burned up and nothing but a little charcoal left.

I have bought a boat and two men row me about in her. I sent you half a sovereign [50 New Pence] by last mail; I hope it came safe to hand.

I was very pleased to hear you had been getting on so well at school – I hope you will continue to do as well; next time you get a prize I will send you a [golden] sovereign [£1].

Yours affectionately

Henry Alabaster

#### 11. 26 May 1857, British Consulate, Bangkok†

Dear Percie,

The Siamese are going to send an embassy to England so you will have a chance of seeing some of the people I live amongst. I am afraid, though, that they will not dress as they do here, for England is such a cold



Fig, 69 White Elephant

place. They will bring some presents for the Queen but I have not heard what they are going to be; when they sent presents before, they sent as the most precious, a few bristles from the tail of a white elephant [Fig. 69]. White elephants are very rare; when one is caught, the king and all his court go to meet it – and escort it to a golden stable where it lives like a king all the rest of its

days and is worshipped as a God – one died a few years ago and they have not yet found another.

You tell me in your letter that you are fond of geology – you will, I think, find in my collection, one drawer full of minerals and fossils – you may have them all – and remember that the use of a collection is to assist your learning, it is no use making a collection unless you try to know all about the specimens it contains. A little red book called *Varley's*

*Minerology* is a good book to begin with; it costs 2 s. [2 shillings = 12 New Pence] and is published by Weale & Co.

You tell me you often wish to ask me questions, and I am very pleased to hear it, I wish, as much as you do, that I could be with you to answer them, but God has sent me here and so I am contented and happy. I hope, on coming back to England, to find that you have not forgotten me, but have remembered my wishes and been always obedient to your Mama and Papa and attentive to all your duties; then you will find I shall love you even more than before.

I live quite alone and keep a boat and four servants, two of whom I shall send away and buy slaves instead – but all Siamese are lazy and so I can hardly get anything done – my best boy often gets drunk – he was very bad this morning so I have put him in prison for a week. In England, no one would dare to put their servants in irons and send them to jail, but it is the custom here.

The other day a floating house got adrift on the river and had three collisions with ships which knocked it almost to pieces; it was so exciting, going after it in a boat and trying to get a cable made fast to the shore, but of this you will find a long account in my letter to your mama. Now with love, Believe me,

Yours affectionately  
Hy Alabaster

**12. 21 June 1857, Bangkok, Siam†**

Dear Percy;

As I suppose you are now able to read my writing, I shall not take the trouble of writing with a [?] pen.

I think I told you before that it is now the ‘April’ season in Siam, that is, there is a shower almost every day. Every night there are severe storms round Bangkok but they seldom burst over the city itself and so every evening, as I go out in my boat, I sit in safety and watch the magnificent lightning flooding all around, sometimes a great ball of fire burst out from behind a dark cloud and is gone in an instant; sometimes there appears for some seconds a sheet of fire falling like rain, sometimes, like a flight of millions of rockets, it rushes about in the sky and never comes to earth, sometimes pouring down in a wide column, it reminds us

of the pillar of fire which guided the Israelites. And there are many other forms which it takes, full of beauty and wonder.

Since I last wrote I have been on a picnic; there is an account of it in my letter to your Mama.

I have just had a dog given me, full of fun & mischief.

Hoping Sambo is all right and you all right too, and wishing you merry holidays, I remain

Yours affectionately

Hy Alabaster.

**13. 24 July 1857, British Consulate, Bangkok†**

Dear Percie,

I have a great deal to say to you but have no time as we are very busy and the mail is going.

I have sent you a small model of a Siamese Barge – The paddles are too large; they should be about 2 or 2¼ inches long in the same proportion as those I have sent – and there ought to be seven of them – six in front of the house on deck or cover and one to steer behind.

I am glad you are getting on in Algebra; it is capital stuff to exercise your wits.

I am getting on very jollily but have no time for geology or anything.

Yours affectionately

Hy Alabaster

**14. 12 August [1857?], Bangkok†**

Dear Percy,

Before telling you the news I must say a word or two about your last letter – you seem to think that Mr. Menzies cannot know much about minerals because he had to look very close before he knew whether it was silver or lead you showed him – but the truth is, there are so many substances in nature, and many differing so slightly, that the more a person knows the more careful he is in giving his opinion.

You seem to be really very fond of Geology and mineralogy, and if you continue to be so, and to work at it, you will always be glad of having done so, for it is not only a pretty and amusing pursuit, but a very

useful one in many cases – but in order to study mineralogy with any success, you ought first to learn a little chemistry, for there are two principal ways or principles of arranging specimens in a collection, one by sorting them according to their appearance, such as shape and color [*sic*], the other by separating them according to their chemical composition, i.e. according to what they are made of – and I think you will see that this last is the only sensible method – for instance, what interest should we take in learning that Haematite ‘was generally found in nodules (or lumps) which on being broken showed several layers, each layer consisting of a mass of little needles or columns, all pointing outwards’ but Chemistry teaches us that Haematite is a valuable ore of Iron and then we feel an interest in it – and so it is with all minerals – even the ‘gems’ or ‘precious’ stones are not valued simply for their beauty, but because nature has but few (at least few that we know of) and art cannot mimic them. I know of one case in which a beautiful topaz was long mistaken for a diamond and valued as one, but the owner, wishing to sell it, gave it into the hands of a chemist who said, ‘this is only a topaz’. It was as beautiful as a diamond and would last as long, but Chemistry said it is not really the same, and its value fell to comparatively nothing. So don’t think that you are a mineralogist because you have collected and named a lot of stones, but learn what they are made of – what they can be used for and the process by which the useful parts of them are separated from the useless.

From all you tell me, I should think you are a very lucky fellow in having a master like Mr. Menzies.

Work away at French, German, English and mathematics, they are much more useful than Latin and Greek which are thought a great deal too much of at English Schools. In olden times when there were no Natural ‘Sciences’ and few ‘Arts’ to learn, people worked hard at Latin and Greek ‘because they’d nothing else to do’, but now it seems to me disgraceful that people, instead of teaching children all the useful and beautiful discoveries that have been of late years made for the benefit of man, still tie them down to the same course of study that their great-grandfathers followed and still waste their greater portion of their time on those two useless languages, Latin and Greek. However, you must work at these though you don’t like Greek, or nobody will believe you are any better than a charity-boy – so work away – amuse yourself with Mineralogy.

You may find this letter hard to understand but it only requires a little thought.

Yours affectionately

Hy Alabaster

**15. 6 September 1857, H. B. M. Consulate, Bangkok†**

Dear Percy,

Since I last wrote to you we have had a large fire here – a college of priests burnt out. The Siamese are very bad hands at putting a fire out and, had there been a little more wind, the fire would have spread tremendously and perhaps burned down our Consulate – but luckily the evening breeze had fallen and so the fire was confined to one building. It has frightened the Siamese very much and they have ordered a number of fire engines from England and America.

H.M.S. *Saracen* is here now refitting so I expect we shall have lots of fun with the officers.

Our New Consul [Schomburgk] has not come yet, and has not written to say when he is coming. We hope it won't be for a long while as Mr. Gingell is a very jolly fellow.

I'm getting on nicely with Siamese and can speak quite enough to go about comfortably anywhere in Siam. I shall be a regular native long before I see you. I hope you are getting on in French and German; they are useful even out here.

There's a sovereign [golden coin worth £1] lying in my desk – only waiting for news that you have carried off a prize at school after hard work – when that news comes it will I hope soon find its way into your purse.

Remember me to Mrs. Menzies, Mrs. King & Gertrude and ask them to remember me kindly to Mrs. Davison when they write to her.

Now to conclude – work hard and play in earnest but think of one when you pretend to be doing the other – And believe me

Yours affectionately

Hy Alabaster

**16. 30 September 1857, H. B. M. Consulate, Bangkok†**

Dear Percy,

I was very glad to hear you had won a prize at school, and will forward the sovereign I promised, enclosed in this letter. I hope you will try to earn another next year.

We have an eclipse of the sun visible here on the 18<sup>th</sup> September<sup>174</sup>; as soon as it commenced, all the gongs of the temples were set a-beating, guns were fired and fireworks let off, making such a noise that one could have fancied Bangkok was being assaulted by an army of Chinamen.

This noise continued until they had frightened away the dragon who wanted to swallow the sun, that is, until the eclipse was over.

I think I have told you what strange temples there are in Bangkok; the other day I discovered one stranger than any I had seen before. I at first thought it was a great junk hauled on shore but on going nearer, it proved to be built of stone or plastered brick, and painted junk fashion. Under the stern, a doorway led into the hold from which two flights of stone steps afforded us the means of going up on deck. The poop was divided into three cabins; in the centre one an old priest was living who told me that the side cabins are used for burning dead bodies in, which piece of information was corroborated by the thick coat of soot which lined their walls. Thence I mounted to the galley to have a look around, but a temple on one side and thick orchards on the others prevented me seeing any distance; the flowering trees and shrubs in the temple grounds were very beautiful, especially the jasmines which are not trained against walls as in England but depend on their own stems for support, and grow so large as to deserve to be called trees.

We have two new Government Officers in the Consulate – by name [George] Knox and [John] Markham, both very good fellows.

We have had some rare fun with fireworks. Every year during this & next month we have fireworks on the river and a kind of carnival – ‘*Saturnalia*’ I think it is called in Latin.

People go about in boats and have battles with fireworks. I went out with a lot of others and in one grand battle our magazine was blown

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<sup>174</sup> A partial eclipse of magnitude 0.37 (Wikipedia)

up and the boat (a great rice-boat like a coal barge) was nearly set on fire. I was sitting over it and first got a steam, then a sulphur, & lastly a water bath – it gave me a good idea of what it would be like in a house on fire – the fire not so dreadful but the smoke, awful. We succeeded in getting it out but the loss of our magazine stopped our fun and we had to go away – beaten.

I am in a great hurry and must conclude.

Yours affectionately

Hy Alabaster

## 17. 17 October 1857, Bangkok†

‘Dear Percy,

Since I last wrote to you I have had, one way or another a great deal of fun – A fellow named Markham<sup>175</sup> 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

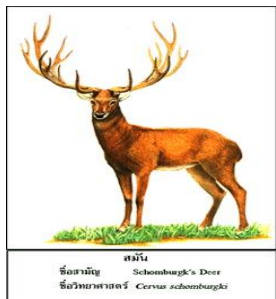


Fig. 69 Schomburgk's deer

*Saracen* are also very jolly fellows and between us we have got on gloriously with tiffins<sup>176</sup>, dinners &c., &c., every day.

Markham and I went up the country for a few days, hoping to shoot some deer [e.g. Fig. 69] and wild boars, but we had no luck though we 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.

<sup>175</sup> Probably ‘Johnny’ Markham, later Vice-Consul at Shanghai. He is probably also the one who is listed in *Reports of Journeys in China and Japan performed by Mr. [Chaloner] Alabaster, Mr. Oxenham, Mr. Markham and Dr. Willis of her Majesty's Consular Service in those Countries*. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty 1869.

<sup>176</sup> East Indian name for light luncheon

On the outskirts of the jungle we found numerous snares for catching deer<sup>177</sup> – 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 Yuthia<sup>178</sup> (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 hundred 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 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

Hy Alabaster'

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<sup>177</sup> It is likely that it was Schomburgk's deer (*Rucervus schomburghki*) that they were after; the species is now considered extinct as a result of over hunting.

<sup>178</sup> The ancient capital of Siam, on the Chao Phya River, also spelt 'Ayuthayer and Ajuthia on maps (Siddhi Savetsila, personal communication)

**18. 21 November 1857, the British Consulate, Bangkok\***

‘Dear Percy,

I see it is your [13<sup>th</sup>] 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 to 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,

Hy Alabaster.’

There is no correspondence dated 1858, presumably because Henry was back in England, but between November 1859 and June 1876 there were 19 items which have been transcribed elsewhere<sup>179</sup>.

**19. 16 June 1876, Bangkok\***

My dear Percy,

I now entrust you with an order which will require great care on your part to protect my reputation for supplying good things and which, I hope, will moreover, remunerate me for my part in it.

It is for the purchase of a Museum as by list below. To effect it you will have to go to Paris and examine the articles comprised in the Museum.

In the Natural History Section, the specimens (*choix d'élite*) may be choice or may be cats, rats, rabbits, pigs, etc. Now I want the *Mammifères* to be choice even though I have to add fifteen hundred francs or even two thousand francs to the named fixed price of 9000 francs. I must have a lion, and an *Orinthorynchus* [*anatinus* or Duck-billed Platypus]; I should also particularly like a 'white bear', a chimpanzee or gorilla, and a small walrus complete with tusks. Of course there will be a wolf and a fox and a seal. Zebras I guess are too rare. A whale would cost too much for freight. An American Bison's head & horns would be acceptable. I don't want a tiger or leopard, I have enough of them here, but a giraffe would be charming. Don't want a camel or dromedary. Among birds, common birds are just as good as others, but I want either a Condor or a large Eagle. Of course there will be some humming birds, and a bird of paradise. A common peacock would provoke comparison with the splendid peacock we have here, but if a white peacock be in the collection it will be welcome.

On the subject of reptiles, fishes etc. I have little to say, but if there be an alligator or crocodile in the collection it should be the American Alligator which I believe differs from the brute which swarms in Siam.

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<sup>179</sup> Occasional Monograph No. 3.. (Please note: letter No. 1 in this publication should be dated 1859 not 1857)

The botanical collection will, I suppose, consist mainly of books of dried plants, but I hope that the collection includes good samples of 'woods' in blocks showing how the woods look when protected, etc.

I understand that the mineral collection is large and fine and that the specimens are full-sized and fit for cases in a large building. I see no mention of models of fossil animals, etc. Perhaps in France they do not, in the words of the poet, 'reconstruct an animal that is extremely rare', but I wish they did, for models of *Ichthyosauri*, pterodactyls, etc. are of great interest; they relieve the dullness of museums, by their charming eccentricities. I do want a pterodactyl.

I don't want two-headed dogs or four-legged fowls; I have them (and a two-headed snake) already in my museum.

All the above remarks apply to a collection sold by *Éloppe & Co.*, *Rue de l'École de Médecin, No. 10 à Paris* – (be careful as there are two forms of name) – and by them styled '*Musée d'Histoire Naturelle*', *Grand format, choix d'élite*, 6076 specimens, price 9000 francs; packing, etc., extra 500 francs.

I have show cases – so the paper trays are mostly unnecessary, but such as are necessary (if any) with bottles for powders and small specimens, etc. etc. – and extra packing for transport by sea will be, I suppose, another extra, and the special animals I require will further increase the cost. I am prepared then to give 1200 – twelve hundred francs in all for a really good collection delivered on board ship, I to pay freight onwards. I hope the total will not exceed this or my profit will be very small. I have no fear about anything except the big beasts; they must be pretty good, but if you feel you can get them and yet be under my limit so much the better for me, as I am under contract. If the full number of 25 *Mammifères* be maintained and the lion and *Orinithorynchus* which I am bound to supply, included therein – the white bear, giraffes, bison's head etc. might be put in as extras, and assuming their cost not to exceed £70 or £80 I might, perhaps, get that sum in addition to my contract money.

Perhaps there will be a good discount.

At the same time, and from the same firm, I wish to have sent (as part of my contract) the following:-  
*Nécessaire de Minéralogie* @ 500 francs

Five (5) boxes of minerals – fragments – of all kinds for experiment @ 10 francs each box.

Two sets *Échelle de dureté* (with diamond) @ 12 franc each

One Collection in five series of Applied Geology as per

pages 20, 21 of their *Catalogue – grand format* 925 frcs

One Collection *Écologie Agricole*, 3 parts 610 frcs

1 *Tableau de l'Élué du Globe aux différents âges* 2.50

1 « « *la structure universelle du Globe* 3.50

1 *Coups détaillées des terraines* 10.00

1 *Physio typé (gravée à Bienne)* 170 plates 300.00

Besides this, I want a microscope and a number of mounted objects for the same. You will, in Paris, probably get all that is wanted for 250 francs or you may get it in London – second hand – preferred as it is to form part of the ‘Museum of a European Philosopher’ which I have contracted to supply. This Microscope is not for work but pleasure, so don’t go in for extravagance. All I want is something to show for the money and to illustrate on a large scale the beastliness of Siam waters.

I prefer not to have Éloppe & Co’s name on these things. I want the names of the objects or numbers and a catalogue, but no name of the seller. Otherwise they will spoil future business.

I wish them to send me full particulars of their collections at 1000 francs that I may, on arrival of the great collection, be in a position to take orders. I must know what the collection contains, its cost with [?] etc. to on board ship – also their discounts.

This contract business is a risky one without full information.

You will ask what you are to have. I propose in the first instance to pay your expenses for two visits to Paris & back, say £10 each visit, and 2½ p.c. commission, and half the discounts. If this should prove unremunerative, I must increase it, but it seems to me that it is fair enough.

I shall remit in advance about two thirds of the money; the remainder, I must draw and remit when I get accounts and advices of shipment.

On no account let this fall through as it has cost me £60 in presents to get the order and, if not executed, I lose that sum. Also have it executed as quickly as possible.

The Minerals, small birds, etc. may be sent by Menageries for transshipment at Singapore but, unless freight is very moderate, the larger animals will have to be kept until a vessel is laid on direct for Bangkok.

Insure everything if possible – right through to Bangkok.

In the event of your being able to fill the order better by purchasing from other than Éloppe & Co., use your discretion, but remember we must have more than 600 specimens, and we must have them quickly.

I now recapitulate the order with reference to Éloppe & Co.'s published catalogue – (which you had better write for immediately)

	francs
1 <i>Musée d'Histoire naturelle, Grand Format,</i>	
<i>Choix d'élite, 6076 specimens (p. 30)</i>	9000
<i>Carrier et emballage</i>	500
One lion – one <i>Orinthynechus</i> (p.27)	
(if not already included in the collection)	800
Extra allowed to cover all expenses f.o.b. and	
to provide choice animals as above	1700
1 <i>Nécessaire de Minéralogie</i> (p. 17)	500
5 boxes of fragments for experiment (p. 17)	50
2 sets <i>Échelle de dureté</i> @ 12 fr. (p. 17)	24
1 Collection Applied Geology	
5 <i>séries grandes format</i> (p. 20-21)	925
1 Collection <i>Écologie Agricole</i> , 3 parts (p. 22-23)	610
1 <i>Tableau de l'Élué du Globe</i> (p. 31)	2.50
1 « « <i>la structure du Globe</i> (p. 31)	3.50
1 <i>Coups détaillées des terraines</i>	10.00
1 <i>Physio typé (gravé à Bienne)</i> 170 plates (p.27)	300.00
1 Microscope – with lot of mounted objects	250
	14675 <sup>180</sup>

This total of Frs. 14675.00 will be diminished by half the discounts allowed which are probably considerable, and will be increased by your travelling expenses, expenses in Paris and 2½ p.c. commission and by cost of transport and freight.

I hope that £550 will cover the outlay for freight & insurance extra – but I don't want to starve the Museum for the sake of fifty pounds.

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<sup>180</sup> Henry missed out the cost of the '*Catalogue – grand format*' at 925 francs.

I shall have to bear a heavy loss by the exchange as my contract assumes the dollar to stand at 4/2 whereas it stands at 3/10.

I shall probably receive £400 on this amount within a few days and shall at once remit it to you. I hope you will almost at once start for Paris – but it would be worth looking at some of our English shops (Stevens, for one) before starting. I doubt if stuffed beasts are very dear.

Yours

Hy Alabaster

P.S. I shall, within the month, put you in funds, £650 for this order to cover freight out, etc. – any balance can go to general account.

This last letter is the first of a number of records of Henry's business activity in Thailand, being followed by three items in 1877, four in 1878 and nine in 1879<sup>181</sup>.

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<sup>181</sup> Occasional Monograph No. 3. (Please note: letter No. 1 in this publication should be dated 1859 not 1857)

## Appendix 2. Henry Alabaster's account of the eclipse of the sun in 1868 (PRO FO 69/46)

H. M. the King of Siam having determined to view the Eclipse of August 18 at Whai wan, I was invited (as was also the French consul) to attend as guest of the Government. The King was very anxious that some High British official should be present, and, having learnt from me that Colonel Sir Harry Orde, the Governor of the Straits Settlements would probably accept an invitation to meet His Majesty there, gladly sent an invitation which Sir Harry Orde gladly accepted.

I enclose the original note of His Majesty.

His Majesty left the capital about a fortnight previous to the Eclipse. In the meantime the Prime Minister (the Kralahome) and his lieutenants erected quite a town in the distant jungle to which we were about to resort, and in order that the guests might lack nothing, a French cook with about forty European and Chinese Assistants was sent to organise a kitchen, a steamer was kept running for several weeks conveying stores, and the mail steamer diverted from its course in order to bring luxuries from Singapore.



Fig. 70. HMS *Impregnable*

Fearing that the desertion from the capital by the majority of the officials, the removal of all the gunboats etc., might tempt disorderly Chinese to make a riot, I suggested an increase of police force (my suggestion was adopted); the force doubled and police stationed throughout the part of Bangkok which might be

called The Foreign Settlement. Thus under the influence of the Eclipse I was able to obtain without difficulty that which I had been trying for, for over a year.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> instant I left on the finest gunboat in the Siamese navy, the *Impregnable* [Fig. 70]. Captain Hammond, the French Consul, not being prepared to go on that date, did not go at all, though two other vessels

were subsequently offered to him. With me were my wife, Mrs. Campbell, Messrs. Kennedy and Gould of the Consulate, and two British merchants. A large party of Europeans and Americans, including the U.S. Acting Consul were allowed passage on the same vessel.

On arrival on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, I received a message from the Prime Minister requesting me to remain on board until everyone had landed, as the king wished to give me an official reception. I did so, and, on landing was received at the end of the pier by the Second Foreign Minister and other officers and forthwith conducted to the outer gate of the Palace, where the King, surrounded by his family and ministers, cordially welcomed me and proceeded to fire a salute of seven guns with his own hand – an extraordinary honour. His Majesty stood to the guns, watch in hand, and fired with the most perfect precision, saying he would show his Officers how to keep time.

His Majesty then led me across the courtyard of the Palace to a spacious Audience Hall, and, while refreshments were being served, conversed for some time about the Eclipse, showing a knowledge of the subject I was unprepared to expect. After the audience, The Prime Minister led me to his house and thence to that erected for me close beside his own.

It is remarkable, and yet consistent with the whole course of Hospitality shown by the Siamese Government on this occasion, that the Siamese Ministers did not provide for themselves the comfortable accommodation provided for their guests. The Prime Minister himself, rather than allow any beyond my own party to take up rooms in my house, gave up room after room in his house until it became a hive of European and American ladies and gentlemen, his reception room became a club room and he only had a bedroom to himself. When I brought away some of his too numerous guests, he fetched them back and it was only after some resistance that he agreed that they should take their meals with us. Knowing His Excellency well, I know what an effort it must have cost him to show such politeness to the Foreign ladies who had, uninvited and unexpected, come down upon him in such numbers. His Excellence's attentions continued; time after time he called to learn whether anything was desired. Other Siamese officers vied in offering civilities. Such hospitality, such attention, I have never seen anywhere before, never

expect to again.

But all the time there were two sources of uneasiness: the first, the weather had been overcast, and although it improved on the 15<sup>th</sup>, there was a general expectation that we should not see that which we had come to see: second, the French were complaining and dissatisfied, and saying the Siamese were so suspicious of them that they would give them no assistance. (This was unfair; the Siamese, if I was not misinformed, wanted to do everything for them, even to feeding them.) As an instance of what resulted, I may mention the following, M. Pierre, the botanist of the Expedition, wished to make a journey. "The jealous Siamese" said some, "gave him no carts or assistance, believing he came to spy out the land". I asked him whether he had applied for them, he said, "No"; his chief had determined to take nothing from the Siamese, so had refused to ask for assistance for him. I spoke of it unofficially to a Siamese officer and in a few hours the gentleman was on his way rejoicing with three carts and ten coolies. For this, and some other services I had the fortune to render M. Pierre, I am to have the pleasure of receiving a duplicate set of the plants collected by him (embracing he believes more than 200 new varieties) which I shall forward to the Kew Museum. Also my name, or my present official position is to be attached to a remarkable rush that grows in muddy holes in Siam, I believe it was only the irritating cloudy sky that caused the ill will for, as the weather improved, it all passed away and the Siamese civilities, sacks of potatoes etc., were freely accepted.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the Emperor Napoleon's Fete Day was celebrated – all ships dressed gaily and many salutes were fired. The Chief of the French Expedition and the French Consul had not been able to agree as to their respective positions in regulating the ceremonials of this day – which was one of the reasons that the French Consul remained in Bangkok.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> the Governor of Singapore arrived in his yacht, the *Peiko* but, as it was Sunday, he deferred landing until tomorrow. Early on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, HMS *Satellite*, Capt. Edye, arrived and their suites landed under a salute of seventeen guns from the shore battery and were at once conducted to the Prime Minister where HRH the Foreign Minister also awaited them. In the meantime the King conceived that it would be well to establish a second observatory some miles distant and himself started off to select the spot. We waited nearly three hours until His

Majesty returned and invited our attendance.

Colonel Orde was received with as much ceremony as the situation admitted of. A line of soldiers presented arms on his approach and the King awaited him seated on a temporary throne with about two hundred princes and officers in brilliant silk and gold jackets kneeling round him. I presented His Excellency, Capt. Edye and their officers and the King then introduced them to the chief Princes and Nobles. The conversation was limited to formal civilities and expressions of satisfaction the visit gave to His Majesty.

As soon as the ceremony was over, the King willingly submitted to have some photographs taken of himself surrounded by his guests. This ended, Col. Orde was conducted to the residence built for him, and a very excellent tiffin served up. Col. Orde's house was next in size to the King's Palace, and I think the supply of provisions, wines etc., was not inferior to any I have seen or heard of on Colonial Governor's tables.

In the evening Col. Orde and Lady Orde and Capt Edye, I and my wife, etc., in all a party of 8, were entertained in the interior of the Palace and introduced to His Majesty's children and nine of the favourite ladies of the Palace and next morning the unprecedented intimacy allowed us with the royal Family so increased that they threw off all customary reserve and, while the King and several of His Majesty's wives were conversing with Col. and Lady Orde in one room, in the adjoining Audience Hall I and other gentlemen were talking for full  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour with Princes and Princesses, several of the latter young ladies of 15 to 18. The pleasant manners of these young Princesses and the frankness and intelligence of their conversation exceeded my expectations. They spoke the simplest language but sifted of the rough and course expressions which are so general as to be almost a feature of the Siamese language. To those with me who could not speak Siamese they spoke a few words of English. His Majesty, one of the kindest of fathers, heard the buzz of conversation and ringing peels of laughter, accepted it with perfect good humour, smiling, as he said on his return, "What a noise you have been making".

The whole time was, as it were a picnic. For once the Siamese laid down the screen they ever hold at Bangkok between foreigners and themselves, and I hope that their doing so has given them more

confidence in Foreigners, as it has given Foreigners a much increased esteem for them.

In the afternoon, the King's eldest son rode out with a large party of Foreigners, and another party of Foreigners were delighted with an elephant ride.

Then came the eventful day. As soon as day broke a busy crowd might be seen mounting their telescopes in front of their houses; and as the clouds chased across the sky, thickening every hour, the excitement became intense. A gun announced the commencement of the Eclipse, but the earlier stages were imperfectly seen. Suddenly, as the total phase was about to commence, the warm air from the earth seemed to fly up direct towards the sun, though the chilled air above, scattering the clouds over our heads, and the glorious corona and its starlet beads and fountains burst forth with splendid clearness.

A. roar of wonder and delight rose from the whole colony. The Prime Minister is said to have rushed into his house and called to his wives, "Now will you believe in what foreigners tell you? "

I shall attempt no description of the Eclipse itself. That will be given by the French astronomers, but I may note the effect on myself and those around me. My party all felt subdued and somewhat hysterical; a party of staid missionaries a short way off cheered violently; the Siamese, after the first roar of wonder sat silent, the women half frightened; some native women ran into their houses. The Prime Minister ran about like a young man and was running with me to my observatory when the sun burst forth again. He took me in at once to the King and I sat down with the rest of the Council who had already assembled. Again the screen was dropped. The King and his ministers sat round smiling, talking and even joking, phrases of ceremony were cut down to the shortest – freedom of speech allowed to the utmost.

The King gave a full and clear account of the causes of the Eclipse, shewing how thoroughly he had read up the subject. He finally presented me with a golden coin (a custom of Siam on remarkable occasions) and the interesting meeting broke up.

In the meantime Col. Orde and his party had made observations of the Eclipse but not such as to be of any scientific value beside observations made by practicing French astronomers working with the finest

instruments.

In the afternoon the King visited Col. Orde at his residence – an act of remarkable condescension. In the evening, Col. Orde was entertained with a theatrical representation.

Next morning, His Majesty and Guests again underwent the photographic operation and immediately after the Town of the Eclipse melted away like a snow heap in the sun. All the nonofficial visitors had left immediately after the Eclipse. The King left about noon on the 19<sup>th</sup>, steamers and sailing yachts, crowded to excess, hurried off immediately after. The *Satellite* steamed away to China, the French *Frelon* having preceded her to Saigon with the news of the great success.

Col. Orde decided to embark in the afternoon and I should have been pleased to have escorted him on board but, unwilling to detain longer the *Impregnable* which had again been placed at my service, I took my leave of His Excellency and, embarking simultaneously with the Prime Minister, we started homeward, leaving the dismantled town where I had experienced such hospitality, been allowed such extraordinary intimacy and witnessed the grandest astronomical phenomenon.

HBM Consulate, BK, Aug 24 1868 H[enr]y Alabaster

### Appendix 3. Recipe for Prince Sai's Ointment

Take of Yellow Wax, 2½ lbs.

Olive Oil, 80 fluid ounces (½ gallon)

Yellow Resin, 2 lbs.

Rectified Oil of Turpentine, 8 fluid ounces

Oxide of Zinc (British Pharmacopoeia), 1¼ lbs.

Carbolic Acid, 10 fluid ounces

Tincture of Benzoin and Camphor, 20 fluid ounces

English Oil of Lavender, 5 fluid drachms

Melt the yellow wax and yellow resin with forty fluid ounces of the olive oil and strain through flannel while hot. Then rub the oxide of zinc into the smooth cream with the remaining forty fluid ounces of olive oil and add to the melted wax, resin, and oil. Next add the rectified oil of turpentine, the carbolic acid, tincture of benzoin and camphor, and English oil of lavender, and stir until cold.

The carbolic acid thitherto used in the preparation of this ointment has been Calvert's No. 2 crystalline. Mesors. [*sic*] Brown, Ball[?] & Co., however, advertise carbolic acid answering to all the tests of the British Pharmacopoeia at about half the price of Calvert's No. 2 acid. It would be well, therefore, to examine a specimen of this; and, if it does not smell more offensive than Calvert's No. 2, to use it in the manufacture of the ointment. The wax resin must be melted with the oil in a water bath, not over a direct fire. Then the cream formed by rubbing the oxide of zinc with the remainder of the olive oil is to be added cold to the hot wax, resin, and oil, stirring briskly to prevent curdling. This reduces the temperature considerably, and so prevents the oil of turpentine and other volatile ingredients being driven off to any great extent.

The carbolic acid is to be liquefied in a water bath before being added. Do not liquefy it at a too high temperature – 120° Fahr[enheit] is amply sufficient.

The oxide of zinc must be prepared by raising the carbonate to a high temperature, not Hubbuck's oxide, which, though beautifully white, does not make so good an ointment. It is also highly important that the directions to rub it to a smooth cream before adding the melted wax &c.

be attended to; as if it be merely added in powder the ointment will not be smooth and uniform in consistence.

Tincture of Benzoin and Camphor is to be made by adding two ounces and a half of finest Siam benzoin and five ounces of camphor to twenty fluid ounces of rectified spirit digesting with frequent agitation for a week, and filtering.

Prince Sai's Ointment is antiseptic, balsamic, deodorising, disinfectant, and eminently healing.

Boils, carbuncles, burns, scalds, wounds, ulcers, sores, chilblains, piles, itch\* [marginal insertion '\*soriasis' (*sic*)]<sup>182</sup> and skin diseases in general are rapidly cured by it.

It is unrivalled as an application to chapped lips, face, and hands, and to chafing in the folds of the joints.

As a preventative and cure for sore nipples in nursing an extensive experience has proved it infallible; and no fear need be entertained that the infant may be harmed, even though the ointment have [*sic*] not been entirely wiped off before giving it the breast.

Chapped lips, face, and hands, should merely be lightly smeared with the ointment.

To sores, wounds, &c., it is best applied on a lint or clean soft rag.

N.B. Before the ointment is put into pots for sale it should be rubbed smooth in small quantities at a time in a large wedgewood [*sic*] ware mortar.

The lids of the pots should be made air tight by some means, say a luting of almond meal and water.

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<sup>182</sup> Namely 'psoriasis', patches of thickened, silvery-white skin, not usually sore.

## Appendix 4. Inscriptions on four plaques inside the tomb of Henry Alabaster (numbered left to right).

### Plaque No. 1

The helm may rest, the laurel bough may fade  
Oblivions grasp may blunt the victor's blade  
But that bright, holy wreath which learning gives  
Unborn by hate, unharmed by envy lives  
[John] Graham<sup>183</sup>

### Plaque No. 2

Thou shall be close to the man  
whom the king delighteth to honour  
*Ester vi, 9*

### Plaque No. 3

Thou good and faithful servant,  
thou hast been faithful over a few things.  
I will make the ruler over many things.  
*Matthew xxv, Chap. 21, Verse*<sup>184</sup>

### Plaque No. 4

Come unto me all ye that labour  
and are heavy laden and I will  
give you rest  
*Matthew vi, Chap. 28. Verse*

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<sup>183</sup> *Oxford Prize Poems, being a collection of such English Poems as have at various times obtained prizes at the University of Oxford.* University of Oxford, 1839. Lines 82-85 (pp. 290-294) of a 99-line., untitled poem.

<sup>184</sup> This should be Verses 21 & 25.



## Appendix 5. Abridged extracts from *The Wheel of the Law* by Henry Alabaster

(Ch. II, pp. 263-285, excluding parts already quoted in the main text)

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Upon an extensive square base rises a pyramidal tower in three parts, tier above tier, separated by wide terraces. Cornices of many forms, round and angular, encircle it in close succession. Deep flutings and re-entering angles reduce the squareness of the four corners. Two in flights of steps on the north and south sides led to the terraces.

From the highest terrace, which is about sixty feet from the ground, the tower rises for about thirty feet more in the same pyramidal form I described for the lower part. In this portion are two niches containing images of Buddha about seven feet high. Above the niches the still tapering tower is without cornices and quite smooth for about fifteen feet; and thence changing from a square pyramid to a cone, it rises about forty feet to a point. The upper part of the spire is ornamented with narrow beadings or rings, lying close one over the others.\*

The tower is built of brick and, and seems to be almost

\* Some Buddhist spires are supposed to represent or symbolise, by their various tiers and cornices, the various tiers of the Dewa and Brahm heavens; and possibly the three huge of this temple may

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solid, excepting a small chamber, to which access is obtained from the highest terrace. We find nothing but bats in the chamber, which seems to have suffered from fire. Previous to the Burmese invasion, it probably contained some idols or relics. I know of no other large spires, or *Phrachedi*, as they are generally called, which have an accessible chamber, though such are found in a few of the smaller spires.

Leaving this, we, after some time, pass a temple newly built or repaired, and ornamented with a mosaic of broken bits of coloured crockery set in plaster, and representing flowers and other fanciful designs, with gay saucers let into the walls, bright china birds on the cornices, coloured and glazed tiles for the roof, and all the usual accessories of the modern Siamese florid style – a style which has an excellent effect at little distance, the form, and often the colour being

good, but is most disappointing on close inspection, the materials being too common and perishable.

The second great sight is *Wat Cheuen*, built, I am

have been meant to typify the world, the Dewa heavens, and the heavens of the formed Brahmas. In other temples I have counted the rings of architectural ornament, but have seldom found them tally with the number of heavens. The temple above described is of the form called *Phra Chedi*, which represents the primitive Tope or relic mound. The nearest approach to the form of the old Topes is shown in some *Chedis* or *Sathups*, which are bell-shaped with a small pointed spire rising from their crown. The *Phra Prang* differs from the *Phra Chedi* or *Sathup* in being terminated, not by a pointed spire, but by a straight column rounded at the end, a form said to be derived from the Linga, and therefore not really Buddhistic. Great confusion exists as to the proper application of the terms *Phra Prang* and *Phra Chedi* or *Sathup*, the words being often misapplied. Thus the spire of *Wat Cheng* at Bangkok, though a *Phra Prang*, is often called *Phra Chedi*. This misapplication is, to a certain degree, warranted by the derivation of *Chedi*, viz, *Chaitya*, 'a holy place'; and it is to be observed that though *Chedi* is used for all relic spires, *Prang*, and *Sathup* are seldom misapplied.

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told, by a princess Cheuen. We land at a small Chinese joss house, with fantastic roof, and great red placards of unimpeachable morality on the outside, and within darkness, dirt, tinsel, and peacock's tail offerings, flaring tapers, sickly-smelling pastilles, and an old gray-bearded, long-nailed filthy Chinaman in charge of it; everything in fact, as I have seen it in Hong-Kong. Behind it is a well-kept Buddhist monastery, with a large *wihan* or idol-house, and *bort* or most holy building, i.e., the building where take place the assemblies of the monks, consecrations, &c. The *bort* according to invariable custom, has not far from its walls eight *sema* \* or boundary stones, cut in a shape somewhat like the leaf of the *Ficus religiosa*, or Po-tree, which mark it out as the most sacred part of the temple; and in the same courtyard are also numerous small spires. In an adjoining court is the idol-house, and in close vicinity are the monks' residences and preaching-hall. Not far distant is the part of the ground set apart for cremations, the recent use of which is proved by two or three heaps of fresh ashes. The hall for idols I judge to be about one hundred and twenty feet in length, square, and about eighty in height; perhaps this is an overestimate. Externally it is an ugly building – a Chinese pagoda spoilt – but internally it is very effective. The

\* The *Sema*, or *Bai sema*, (Sancrit, *Semā*, a 'boundary' or landmark), are eight stones placed one at each point of the compass round the most holy part of a temple. When the ground is first dedicated, eight *luk nimit* or round marking-stones, are sprinkled with holy water and buried to mark the limits from which evil spirits are warned off. Over these *Luk nimit* are built small platforms supporting the heart-shaped *Bai sema*, generally covered by an elaborately carved or mosaic-worked canopy.

walls are pierced with a fretwork of pigeon holes in each of which is a gilt idol about a finger in length. All around on hundreds of pedestals are figures of Buddha and his disciples in various attitudes. From a few inches to six feet in height; and in the centre, on a broad pedestal or throne, between six huge red pillars, whose capitals are lost in the darkness which hides the roof, is seated a colossal image of Buddha, in what Buddhists call the position of contemplation, the legs crossed, the right hand clasping the right knee, and the left lying palm upwards across the thighs. The head is indistinct, as there are no lights in the upper part of the building. The general expression is that of profound meditation, and the effect decidedly grand. The size we cannot judge with any accuracy, the only clue we have being that a priest, who has ascended as far as the hand to dust it, seems no larger than the thumb of the image. The idol is, I believe, made of brick and plaster, covered with lacquer, and then gilt.

On the right and left of this great seated figure are two standing figures about twenty feet high, representing Sariputra and Moggallana, the disciples of the left hand and the right hand.

The third sight is [pp. 274-279 are quoted in the main text]

[p. 279, continued]

We have a choice of two roads. One is a well-made road which follows the high ground, so as to be serviceable in all seasons – a work dating from the time of Nophuri's greatness; the other is a track across the lowland, much more direct than the former, and as the country it traverses is now dry, we determine to follow it. Our great difficulty is to tell when we are in it, and when not; for where it crosses fields, the farmers have obliterated all trace of it, run their dikes across it, and planted their rice over it; and in other parts it is so covered by long grass, and a thick jungle of young trees, and fresh shoots of old trees, that only a practiced guide can recognise it. It has probably never been really cleared. A body of men with axes, swords, and bill-hooks has, may be, some three or four years ago, cut a fairly straight track thorough the jungle, avoiding large trees, and from that time to this, the road has never been retouched, and scarcely ever used except by an occasional foot-passenger. We constantly lose our way two or three times, and

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even when on the track, our progress is slow, the leading elephant having to stop continually, while the way is cleared of bamboos and awkward branches. Part of this clearance is done with swords, but the elephants help considerably with their trunks, breaking off great branches, and throwing them aside. [p. 280 is continued in the main text]

[p. 280 continued]

Our journey is said to be about twelve miles in length, and by the time half that distance is accomplished, which we know by finding a rest-house in the jungle, I get thoroughly tired of being shaken upon an elephant, and take to my legs, which I find enables me to make quicker progress, although it is very hard work brushing through grass higher than one's head, and straggling away from the bamboo thorns which every now and then make one a prisoner. We see one little deer cross our path, but no sign of the tigers which are said to be numerous.

After a while the stillest of the jungle is broken by the sound of a bell, tolling probably as a summons to the monks to get inside their houses before nightfall. The increasing gloom of the undergrowth, and the rich golden fringes of the tops, is a further sign of approach of sunset, and we hurry on to our destination having by some lucky chance lost our jingle track and found a good road on which fast walking is practicable.

Just before sunset, I and two men who have kept up

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with me, emerge from the bamboo jungle on to a grassy plot on the skirts of the monastery. Before me on a heap of rugged rocks is a small but very elegantly designed temple of the kind called *Maradop*, a square building with carved columns round it, supporting the projecting cornices of a most elaborately decorated pyramidal roof, terminating in a tapering spire, surmounted by the symbol *Chat* or royal parasol in stages. I judge it to be about a hundred feet high. The whole roof is richly gilt, and the last rays of the setting sun resting on it make it gleam like a mass of flames. Behind it is a dark limestone hill, whose rugged side and many peaks are dotted with numerous little white spires, on some of which hang yellow cloths, the offerings of pilgrims. Near the *Maradop* are residences for monks, idol-houses, numerous rest-houses for travellers, and an unusual number of large bells, each covered by a small roof. Most of the rest-

houses are of wood, but we are introduced by an official of the place into a brick one. Having selected quarters, I anxiously await the arrival of the elephant party, which has evidently got lost in the jungle, and in the meantime the men make as much noise as they can on the bells by way of signal to the lost ones. At last they arrive, a full hour after dark; the cook sets to work at the fires we have made ready for him, our dirty quarters are illuminated and swept and we make ourselves fairly comfortable for the night.

First thing in the morning we take a walk. We find the monastery well kept, several slaves being attached to it in order to sweep it, cut the grass, &c. There seems to be no residents in the neighbourhood except the monks, officials, and servants of the temple.

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Of monks only ten are now in residence, others having gone off travelling. Most Siamese monks travel a great deal, only remaining in their monasteries for the three months of the rainy season known as the Buddhist Lent,\* during which time residence is imperative.

We are struck by the unusual number of *Salas* or rest-houses, erected to shelter the crowds of pilgrims – men and women who resort hither in the month of February each year. A very pleasant house has been erected for the King. Passing from the courts of the temple, with their crowd of spires, idol-houses, preaching-houses, and bells, we ascend the hill-side, a mass of jagged rocks, and climb to one of the points, on which there is a spire, [p. 282 continued in the main text]

[p. 282 continued]

We look about for the footprints of all kinds of animals which an old traveller (Bishop Paligoix) assures us he found imprinted there in the hard rock, but we only find many little hollows, due apparently to fossil shells. We also search for what he describes as the butterfly-plant, but do not find any. I once had some of the plants brought to me from Phrabat, and

\*The Buddhist Lent lasts from the middle of the eighth to the middle of the eleventh Siamese months, corresponding roughly with the time from July to October, the worst part of the 'rainy season.' The custom of remaining in one place during this time is believed to be an imitation of the practice of Buddha himself. The Siamese word for it is *Wasâ* which is a form of the Sanscrit, *Varsha*, meaning 'rain' and also 'a year'. The time of *Wasâ* is spent in the monastery, or *Wat*. This word *Wat* is rather curiously derived. It represents, I believe, the Sanscrit, *Vâta*, 'an enclosure, grove', &c., which is derived from *Vâta*, the *Ficus indica*, one of the Buddhist sacred trees. If *Wat* does not come from *Vâta*, it may come from *Vâsa*, a dwelling place.

found their leaves indeed very like butterflies, with green wings striped with red. I have never seen any specimens except from Phrabat<sup>185</sup>.

On our return to the monastery, the monks invite us to see the Phrabat. We mount a flight of steps to the rocky platform on which stands the before-described *Maradop*. Its walls are all covered with a common but brilliant mosaic; the large double doors are very elaborately and beautifully inlaid with mother-of-pearl figures set in black lacquer. The inner face of the walls is painted\* with scenes from the life of Buddha, &c. The floor is covered by a mat of plaited silver-wire. Some incense-sticks burn before a small image of Buddha, and a most miscellaneous collection of offerings is heaped around, comprising European and Chinese toys, bottles, pictures, mirrors, common jewellery, and odds and ends of all sorts, for the most part neither beautiful, useful, nor valuable. The more valuable gifts are probably taken care of elsewhere. On the walls are fixed two large gold plates, one jewelled, which are full-size representations of the design supposed to have formerly existed in the Phrabat itself, a collection of statues which I shall describe in the next chapter. These figures are more curious

\* The inner faces of the walls of Siamese temples are frequently painted with scenes not only taken from their religious histories and mythologies, but also from European drawings. There is a very good example in Wat Bowera Niwet, at Bangkok, where, by compounding native and European drawings of different dates, the artist has introduced us to a scene of ladies and gentlemen of the time of Louis XIV, having a picnic and dance on a hill, under which is a railway tunnel with a train about to enter it; and not far off a contemplative Buddha is pondering on the mutability of human affairs, or, perhaps, on the change of fashions. In some cases, a whole story is depicted in a series of tableaux.

than beautiful, excepting the central disc (see the engraving), which is really very handsome.

We next examine the actual Phrabat, with is in the centre of the building and find it to be a hole in the rock about five feet long by two broad, perhaps a monster relative to the fossil shells we have seen outside. The grating which usually covers it is removed to enable us to see the bottom, but the temple is so dark that we cannot see much of it. We move aside some of the offerings lying on it, but can see nothing of the pattern

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<sup>185</sup> Jean Baptiste Pallegoix (1805-1862) published *Description du Royaume Thai* (2 Vols.) 1854, Mission of Siam, Paris. ISBN 9747534053.

except the five marks of the toe-nails – five grooves in the rock, which some declare to have been made with chisels; and on inquiry we are told that the other marks were long ago destroyed by an accidental fire. Likeness to a foot there is none.

Yet to this holy footprint year after year crowds of Siamese flock with varied offerings, and even the most enlightened of them – the late King for instance – have observed and encouraged the practice. Whether the King considered it politic to encourage the delusion that there existed in his country a mark of the special favour of the founder of his religion, or whether he merely supported it as a formal duty, or whether he had himself, if not a belief in it, yet a respect for it as one of the generally received symbols of his religion we cannot tell, but probably the latter was the preponderating reason. Probably he made offerings to the Phrabat monastery in the same spirit that lie raised spires in conspicuous places, the summits of hills and headlands – in the same spirit that he build images of Buddha; not that he wished the Phrabat, or the spires, or the idols to be worshipped but that he believed in the utility of everything which

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attracted the thoughts of men, even but for a moment, to the great Teacher of the law of the avoidance of sorrow – to the Prince who, in the prime of manhood, gave up a throne, and a life of luxury and honour, and became a wanderer and mendicant, that he might teach men by example as well as precept that a life of conscious virtue, a life free from anxiety as to the future, is the life of the truest happiness, and that freedom from anxiety can be obtained by a man's own efforts; that he is not a toy or puppet, exposed to be victimised by malignant spirits unless saved by an intervening deity, but that he is the absolute ruler of the destiny of his own soul, controlled only by the law of perfect justice.



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