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ANGKOR: RUINS IN CAMBODIA



FIG. 1. GIANT VISHNU IN A SIDE ENTRANCE, ANGKOR VAT

ANGKOR

RUINS IN CAMBODIA

BY
P. JEANNERAT DE BEERSKI

WITH SIXTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS REPRODUCED
FROM DRAWINGS BY THE AUTHOR
AND FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
AND OF MY
LITTLE BROTHER CLAUDE
WHO WERE BOTH LAID TO REST
IN THE FAIR LAND OF
THE KHMERS

PREFACE

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to introduce this work on one of the most precious treasures contained within the domains of the French Colonial Empire with an expression of the deepest respect and gratitude to His Excellency, Monsieur Albert Sarraut, Ministre des Colonies, who entrusted me with an artistic and literary mission to the Ruins of Angkor in 1919.

I have fulfilled this mission to the best of my abilities, and my most valued reward will be to believe that I have gained the approval of Monsieur Sarraut and of those who helped me in my task. Amongst them may I mention Monsieur le Résident-Supérieur Baudouin and Monsieur le Résident-Supérieur Pasquier, and gratefully thank them for their charming courtesy and disinterestedness.

I am also greatly indebted to a few true friends whose advice and encouragement proved invaluable.

P. J. DE B.

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The Musée Guimet, Paris, kindly placed at the author's disposal the following illustrations:—

Nos. 53-58, photos of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient of Hanoi.

Nos. 9, 37 and 38, sent to the Musée by the Service des Arts Cambodgiens and taken for the Société d'Angkor, both of Phnompenh.

PART I
INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER I

ON THE WAY TO ANGKOR—EXPECTATIONS

i

I WELL remember passages of a conversation I had with a friend some time before my journey to the Far East, to Angkor.

“Beauty is ever fresh,” I was saying; “it is the brightest gem of nature, as boundless as the universe, as changeable as the vague outline of a mist. And yet I believe that every facet of art, the science of beauty, has been examined before or since the beginning of this century. Nothing is left for the traveller who wishes to visit wondrous, remote and unknown regions, the last resting-places of mystery, where so far it has not been hunted out of its lair by Western civilisation.”

My friend looked at me; then he replied:

“What you say is more or less true. No spot of this world of ours keeps entirely virgin in its bosom the startling treasure of an obscure art; but, if no hidden arts are waiting for the enthusiast, some, I assure you, have remained entombed in countries so weird and incomprehensible that mystery reigns there still, baffling all men. I have seen several of these precious regions, and none was more fantastic and remarkable than Angkor.

“Culture is a torrent which flows for all eternity; on some arid soils it leaves no mark; on others it continually effaces what it had fashioned, modelling anew, covering the destruction of a kingdom by the foundations of an empire. Also, above its seething waters, solitary rocks emerge on which sedentary traditions have established

their settled nest ; but there it is picturesqueness, not magnificence, which meets us ; our intellect is amused, our soul in slumber. Now, if I may develop the simile, torrents sometimes flood a tract of land unexpectedly and return to their beds, leaving behind them the mark of a temporary passage. Culture in the same way has leaps and spasms, invades a wilderness, turns it into a powerful realm, then capriciously retires. . . . The population to which it taught the many secrets of human learning dwindles, falls and is decimated, but there grimly stands in the regrown forests the forgotten and romantic masterpieces of genius.

“ In such regions one can reach mystery and grandeur ; time has brushed away the pettiness of human nature and has spared the relics that prove its virtues and strength.

“ Go to Angkor, my friend, to its ruins and to its dreams.”



ii

Unexpectedly I was given the chance of going to Angkor, and I became afraid lest all I had been told about the distant marvels would cause disappointment.

The lights of Saïgon had vanished at a curve of the canal that joins the Cochin-Chinese harbour to the Mekong, and I thought of what I had seen and felt in Port Said, Djibouti, Colombo, Singapore and Saïgon. The Orient had already caught me in its snare, languishing, yet lively ; the Orient of movement and lulling reverie ; but mystery, real mystery, although I had often felt its gentle touch, had been elusive and unattainable. The temple of Buddha's tooth in Candy, for instance, endowed with the halo of renowned shrines, was infected by the outstretched hands asking rupees and cents at every door, open or shut, for the purchase of sacred flowers, for the glimpse of royal jewels and the view of ugly wall paintings. An astonishing *cour des miracles* waited as soon as a

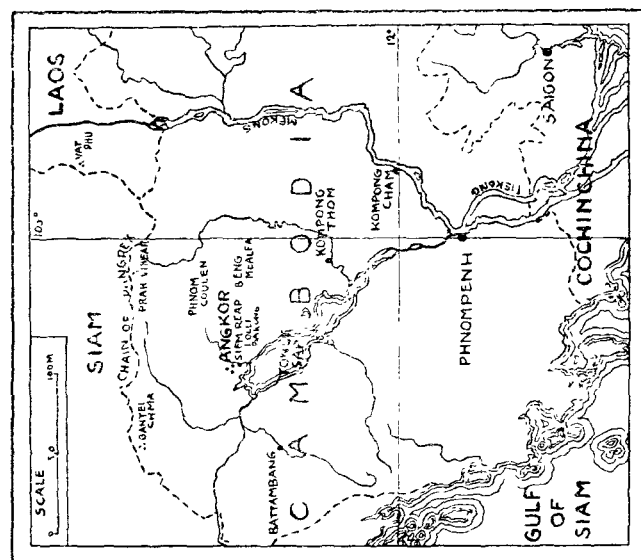


FIG. 2 MAP OF CAMBODIA

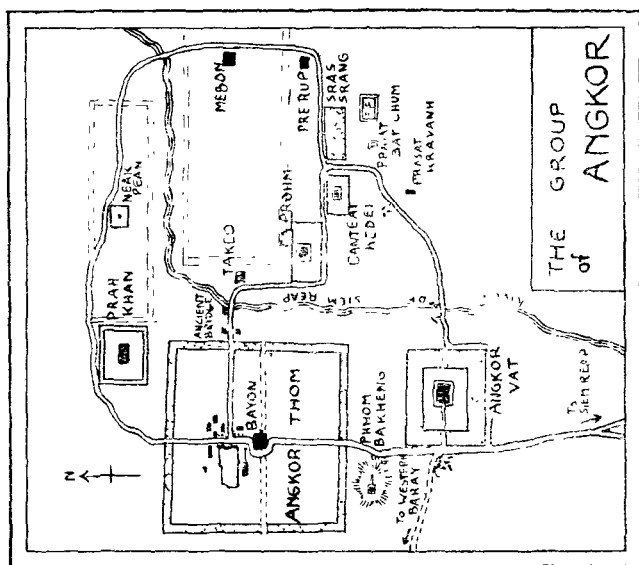


FIG. 3 PLAN OF ANGKOR

traveller walked between their ranks, and these paupers were squatting, sordid and repulsive, on a narrow ridge between ditches of muddy water where hundreds of tortoises swam slowly. Mystery had again glided close to me at a wild beasts' market in Singapore: all the miserable animals had an incomprehensible veil of fear, stupor and revolt in their widened pupils, and the perfume of the jungle still clung to their fur or feathers; but dirtiness and intolerable natives sent poetry away. At Saïgon the fire of a Chinese pagoda on the night of my arrival took my breath away; something savage hovered about the hurrying coolies trying to save their property from small shops propped up against the burning sanctuary, above the frightened children standing in the glare of flames, the weird porcelain dogs and dragons glowing fiercely, the embroidered screens smouldering to ashes, the idols scorched by the sparks, the falling beams cleft asunder and breaking into red brands, above the water carried in pails from hand to hand and disappearing in the sputtering tongues of fire. The scene was strange and prepossessing, but a French fire-engine ignominiously brought me back to the present.

Now I was going farther inland, uncertain, still expectant.

Our steamer toiled against the current of broad waters descending from the peaks of Southern China, lazily pouring liquid and mud, fertilising a vast basin. Darkness obliterated the shores, and as I came back on deck next morning I saw edges of trees and bushes empty of life under the rays of a merciless sun. We touched two townlets, and after one and a half days' sailing Phnompenh, the capital of Cambodia, was discerned, dozing on the right bank of the Mekong. Its low houses were overshadowed by numerous pagodas with tortuous roofs ending in long, thin and elegant horns, which were gilded and painted and rose flame-like into the air. The royal palace was

sumptuous ; many brightly coloured buildings shimmered vividly, especially the silver pagoda, which is reputed for its floor of solid silver and for a life-sized Buddha of pure gold adorned with diamonds and rubies of extraordinary value. Near by, in a special room, the emblem of royalty or “Prah-Khan” is preserved : it is a sword, the only object left of all the Angkorean treasures ; the blade, of dark steel, is inlaid with gold ; the handle, made of the same metal, is partly covered with rich enamels, and the purity of the design, the beauty of finish made me wonder whether the huge ruined temples reached the same standard of perfection.

I stayed for some time in Phnompenh, went to visit Kompong-Cham and had a first taste of Khmer architecture in the shrines of Vat Nokor. Finally I started towards Battambang on a good road. I crossed gorgeous forests and at the end of the trip found myself in a native craft that was to take me to the other side of the great Cambodian lake.

Now I really was on the last stage of my voyage. I felt far, far away—no more trains, no more sloops, no more chars-à-bancs. . . . Night had come again and I plunged into sleep.

CHAPTER II

THE PROVINCE OF SIEM-REAP—THE GREAT LAKE—IN THE
SMALL TOWN OF SIEM-REAP—THE MODERN CAMBODIAN
AND HIS INHERITANCE

i

THE province of Siem-Reap is the heart of the ancient Khmer empire. The monarchs and nobles there lavished their wealth on monuments and made the district one of the art centres of the world. It is crossed by a river rising in the mountains of Kulen that furnished the sandstone of the temples. Little torrents nourished by fresh springs fall from the heights and join to form the Stung Siem-Reap, crossing for more than half its course an arid region, poor and sandy, where rise rocky hillocks covered by scanty trees; then it arrives in a rich land, by the kings chosen as their residence, passes on the skirts of Angkor-Thom, goes through the town that gave its name to the province and which was already in ancient times a flourishing commercial community, and, after trudging in savannahs flooded during the rainy season, it mingles with the waters of the great lake, the Tonle-Sap, or sea of fresh water, as the natives call it.

A sea it is truly, more than a hundred miles long, about twenty-six miles wide. This enormous expanse of water is an ever-changing scene of endless attraction. It has all the beauty of our lakes . . . the dreariness of water flapping in tiny waves and beating the shore so softly that no foam bleaches the ground; of trees seeming to hurry to the water's edge, hustling, pushing, crushing each other to plunge their thirsty branches in the mirror which

reflects them ; of flowers and brown leaves which fall and leisurely drift away from the land. But our lakes are silent and melancholy ; however blue the sky and the water may be, a certain sensation of sadness always creeps into our soul. The Tonle-Sap is too clear, too great, too noisy to allow your becoming sorrowful ; it is more impressive and wilder than our lakes ; imparting the same impression of beauty, it seems fiercer and more uncertain. The numerous craft sailing its waters do not convey an idea of security like our barges and rowing-boats, but seem to be in dread of tempests and storms. The lake and the firmament shine like molten gold, giving dazzling richness to all things around.

But the heat is frightful and numbing ; you lie coiled in the corner of your boat where shadow is densest, continually craving for drink to cool your parched, burning throat. To cross this lake in a barque is like crossing the Styx before entering hell . . . crossing a river of red-hot lead. The Annamites, who row standing with the graceful movement of Venetian gondoliers, silhouetted against the clouds of blinding orange, appear to be the helpers of terrible Charon. They never tire, these boatmen, and all day long, all night long, pausing only for their meals, they lean forward on their long oars with unvarying strength, now and then swallowing a draught of "chum-chum," the dreadful rice alcohol, to keep up their vigour.

Night on the Tonle-Sap is as frightful as day ; the lessened heat is still too crushing to allow you to sleep and always gives an impression of something impending. The warmth, weighing on your chest, pervades everything and weakens everything. A smell fills your nostrils ; not the smell of closed flowers that makes summer nights so perfumed, not the smell of nature at rest when all is quiet . . . it is more like the smell brought by the wind from battle-fields after a deadly slaughter, a smell that makes your head ache, created by rotting flesh, by pools of

stagnant blood. It stinks at intervals as if a corpse swam alongside. A dog on the far shore howls to the unseen moon—sound to stop the bravest in the depths of a wood; the long, even yell resounds piercingly in the stillness. Real fear creeps into your veins, born of dampness and of darkness, born of the mists of the forest, caused by all that is black, all that is ghastly, the same fear through which armies fly, confronted by no enemies; in fact, greater than the fear of death, the terror of stealth. At last, worn out, you sleep, and in the morning when you awake you understand the source of your horror: you had become feverish under the sun's rays, and at night you had been floating among a lot of decomposed fish, for this is the period when they are captured in thousands and when the fishermen throw away their entrails. You laugh at your mistake and look outside, at the hour when the lake is in all its glory.

On one side the water stretches illimitable; on the other looms the coast of savannahs, where mangroves with tall and numerous roots resemble thickets perched on spider legs, and where small trees with black and dirty trunks show sparse branches, twisted, wrenched, like the imploring arms of nymphs metamorphosed by evil gods. Bunches of grass, caught in the boughs when the waters of the annual flood retired, have dried yellow and from afar appear like flowers against the dark green leaves. Lacustrine villages spread on broad strips of sand. In front of the huts women salt or smoke the fish brought back by the men in the bottom of long, narrow canoes, lying half pulled out of the waves. These fishermen are Cambodians; but other races have come to increase the number of those who live on the denizens of the lake. Annamites sit in the boats they leave but rarely, and, with their large conical hats, seem to be huge mushrooms growing in the mud.

There are also heavy Chinese junks in which entire

families live ; their ship is their only property ; they are born and they die within its planks ; sometimes as many as four generations are huddled together beneath its roof. The women cook the food ; the children play under the straw cover ; the men, stepping on the sides of the deck, steer and give impulse to the junk with long poles which they push in the bottom of the lake ; whilst the two round eyes painted at the bow look out for fatal reefs. At the prow, high above the water-line, there is a diminutive altar where perfume-burners mingle in their smoke the mell of incense to appease the genii of the Tonle-Sap. Occasionally a man, standing on a boat, throws his net with a wide-sweeping movement, and afterwards hauls it in, the fish he has caught jumping and wriggling in agony. From time to time a sand-bank offers to the gaze a yellow surface, like the back of an enormous stranded beast, and near it float many violet flowers, so numerous that it is they that appear to be a strip of soil emerging from the lake, and that sampans passing through them in long lines are apparently grounded : the fishermen who want to go through have to push their craft, standing waist-deep in water.

Birds everywhere beat the air with their wings and fill it with their cries. Suddenly one swoops downwards, disappears in a whirl of foam and rises again, water dripping from its feathers, a carp or an eel squeezed in its beak. Another flies in haste to steal its prey ; they fight, rolling over each other ; with a flap of the wing they separate, but clash again, white feathers dropping like snowflakes. Eager in the contest, they loosen their grip on the fish, which falls into the beak of a third thief, who flees to devour it in peace.

Wild ducks soar above in long triangles, necks outstretched to pierce the wind, obeying their leader, who takes them to pleasant and undisturbed marshes. The sharp cries of moor-hens come to your ears from the thick

reeds that are bending their heads over the water. Sometimes one of these birds can be spied between the plants, swimming with quick, jerky motions of webbed feet. Coots, with a disk of pure white on their heads, grebes crested with tufts of brown feathers, disturb the calm surface. Kingfishers in their rapid flight caress with wings of sapphire the ripples of the waters and shoot all of a sudden into a hole full of fish bones and dug in the bank. Many cormorants, motionless on a piece of wood, dry their black wings spread out to the sun rays, or else swim, necks and heads only emerging from the waves. Grave marabous, on the highest branches of a dying tree, hold a council of bald-headed sages, the ugliest among the feathered race that inhabit the kingdom ; and a few heavy pelicans, cramming the pouches of their bills, appear from afar like lotus flowers, very fat and rosy, lulled on the moving wavelets. White egrets fly upwards and vanish at your approach, and herons wait patiently, unlike the cranes which in great troops walk briskly in the shallows and plunge at every step their long curved bills into the weeds.

The innumerable birds live on the swarms of fish or on the scarabs, dragon-flies, gnats and nudges that fill the torpid air.

On remote shores, in lonely corners of the banks, crocodiles expose their rugged skins, yawn and close their ferocious jaws with a snap of steel, living snares to all things that come. Otters, silent, roam to seek the young trout shining under the foam. Many animals which sting and bite, many plants that perfume and poison ; death, in ambush for life, attracts by covering its own infected body with jewels to appear beautiful.

Into this magic scenery the Brahmans came and made it theirs, choosing it for its easy access from the south by the Mekong and the lake ; for its proximity to mountains of sandstone which permitted them to accomplish their

gigantic dreams of builders; for the fish that furnished an endless supply of food, in addition to animals of the woods; for the rice that would easily grow in the fertile country; and, lastly, for its healthy climate, scorching but dry.

ii

Having stayed for forty-eight hours in the uncomfortable confinement of the sampan, where it is impossible either to stand up or sit down in the approved manner, uncommonly pleased am I when a sturdy peasant offers to carry me from our point of anchorage to firm soil. He bends under my weight, my legs hanging between his arms, and wades across mud; then he lets me down in the midst of a bunch of curious brats, apparently highly amused at my face, get-up and unofficial way of landing. I jump into the saddle as soon as possible and gallop away, lending but an inattentive ear to the natives who have come to meet me and wish to explain the way I have to follow. Soon punishment repays rashness and I roam along deeply rutted tracks, struggle in pools, sweat and curse, spur on my poor pony, that shies at buffaloes or slips in the mire, cuts through hedges, where portions of my garments are abandoned, and steps at the end of a wearisome run of some five miles on to a road, very clean and dry, but perhaps going, for all I know, in an opposite direction to that in which I want to ride. Inquiring from natives in my best pidgin French is equal to questioning dumb, graciously smiling machines. I am getting desperate when a faint rumble finds an echo in my brain, and to my surprise a dilapidated char-à-banc (it appears that even in so distant a district one of those horrid cars has found its way from heaven knows where) creaks under the brakes and checks its course a few yards away. The chauffeur, wearing the topee that distinguishes him from lesser human beings who have not the

THE SMALL TOWN OF SIEM-REAP 29

honour to serve white men nor the education and social standing permitting them to exhibit the, to them, unnecessary headgear, apologises volubly for my own mistake, and, ordering a child to climb up a coco-nut tree and bring me one of the juicy fruit, thus cooling my spirits, he proceeds to entrust the horse to yet another "nha-que." Proud like the Lord Mayor of London's coachman, he starts anew his engine and rushes through a pretty little town, casting angry and haughty glances at the men and women gathering at our approach ; swears when dogs venture near the wheels or when a bullock calmly allows the rattling machine to roll within six feet of its horns and only then turns round in order to race down the road, dashing for safety just where it is least expected to be found, and forcing the quarrelsome driver to lessen his speed.

Eventually a coquettish house rises within view between the trees and plantations ; a French gendarme, accompanied by his wife, offers me a welcome and introduces me to the rooms that will henceforth be my home. The bedroom (I shall change it later on for one more cheerful) has a frieze, consisting of a series of three wretches hanging by the neck and roped to the thickest branch of an oak, repeated right round the top of the walls, so that one cannot escape the gruesome profiles.

My venue has been quite eventful, but not very dignified, and yet I really am within four kilometres of one of the greatest temples of the world, within ten of one of the wildest and most romantic of ruined cities.

If I have begun the relation of my experiences so lightly it is merely to contrast present-day conditions to those met with no doubt a thousand years ago, and to give another instance of pathos and bathos existing almost a stone's-throw from one another.

However, I cannot complain. The month being that of February, I have not been able to use the prosaic

steamer right up to Siem-Reap, as I would have done between July and December ; across the great lake discomfort has been forgotten in a feeling of novelty and quaintness ; in Siem-Reap the old car and other marks of Europeanism cannot distract one atom of beauty from the ruins of Angkor, which I shall see to-morrow.

iii

In the fever and excitement of experiences altogether new I refuse to remain indoors for long and stroll out to see the surroundings. The little town is one long street, or rather road, running along a winding river in which irrigation wheels of wood turn patiently, uttering a sing-song of creaks and splashes. At one end the market-place is surrounded by houses in masonry, where Chinamen keep and sell their goods and often give, as change to purchasers, tiny copper coins which appear to have been designed and minted six centuries ago. In the central quarter an old Siamese citadel and the buildings reserved for the one or two French officials connect the commercial side with a double line of Cambodian cagnas, each with its rectangular garden and hedges of bamboo or cacti. Bonzes, in their saffron robes draped like togas, stop occasionally in front of the doors which have ornaments in red paper and yellow lettering ; the small boy attendants hold out the begging bowls until they are partly filled by an inmate of the house, and then they pass on, stepping round a tiny earthen stupa modelled for a religious festival. More priests disappear in the distance on the way to a secluded spot where they will eat their one daily meal. Bullocks graze in an enclosure ; the gong of an Annamite pagoda calls the faithful to prayer ; the trunks of arecas and palm-trees rub against each other, swayed by the wind ; prisoners in chains break stones, and free Cambodian peasants pass from dwelling to dwelling or farther into the fields for work or pleasure.

These natives are splendid men, with muscular limbs and supple figures, the agility and development of savage animals and the beauty of the true offspring of nature, unspoiled by the weakening exactions of our life. They show the human creature growing under the fire of a tropical sun, under the showers of tropical rains which break on bare shoulders, and sustained by simple food taken directly from the fertile lands on which they thrive.

For the moment the mind within the body is forgotten, but the instant a coolie turns his head and looks one straight in the face one meets a gaze that speaks of an inherited racial genius. The brow is broad, the lips are sensuous, and the eyes, big, dark and sparkling, have a penetrating glance which reveals a lofty soul not humbled by defeat.

None the less the Khmers, as they are often called, are merely a shadow of what their fathers were, and have even forgotten their former deeds. A foreign nation now governs them, and the territory bearing their name is but a dwarfish realm when compared to the ancient empire. But should nothing remain to ensure their immortality except the relics saved from the wreck of their ancestors' ambitions and achievements, it would be sufficient to place the word "Khmer" on the same level as that given to Egyptian, Assyrian, Hindu or Chinese, marking a famous epoch in the vicissitudes of intellect.

The neighbourhood of the Tonle-Sap is richer in archaeological remains than any other found in the East, and the conceptions of the Cambodians are as admirable as their ability to turn them into realities.

Angkor-Thom, the old capital, founded in the ninth century after Christ, covered an area of some five square miles. . . . You can compare to it no city of Europe at that time: the kingdom of Wessex had just become the kingdom of England under half-legendary kings, Eggerht, Æthelwulf, Alfred; the Franks were governed by

Charlemagne ; and Angkor-Thom was already a town of more than a million souls. In antiquity the Athens of Pericles, the Rome of Cæsar were not as big !

Within the walls of the buried city there are many temples, and round it numerous fanes, scattered in all directions. Between these main buildings a crowd of smaller relics are like dinghies harassing vessels of the line of which Angkor-Thom is the flagship.

We shall begin by visiting the latter ; but before starting let us study what is known of its creators.

CHAPTER III

THE LEGEND OF KAMBU SVAYAMBHUYA, FOUNDER OF
CAMBODIA—A SKETCH OF KHMER HISTORY FROM THE
FIRST TO THE TWELFTH CENTURY AFTER CHRIST

i

CENTURIES ago the world was very young ; hardly any culture, hardly any civilisation had tempered the wildness of the earth ; nearly all its surface was entirely dead land, or else overgrown with powerful vegetation.

Cambodia was a desert of sand and of rocks ; nowhere was a drop of water to be seen, and nowhere could one hear the delightful murmur of a tiny stream. Everywhere enormous mountains were lying like huge beasts dismayed by the frightful heat that came from the sun above, from the sand around, even from the ground below, which seemed on fire.

Sometimes terrific winds swept over the land, and then one passed in narrow passages, between great natural walls eaten by time, cut into peaks, into points, falling abruptly into the sand that jumped and roared and beat them, then slipped back, throwing up its anger in dust. But the immovable cliffs felt in the end these everlasting attacks, and their bases were gnawed and opened with caverns big and small, where the sand entered with a rush to fight the grey brutes in the darkness, whilst the sky looked on silently.

On the right, on the left, crags went into the unknown. . . . Rocks, rocks everywhere and all around, of all shapes, pointed or curved, flat or very high. After skirting sharp corners one came to vast, void deserts where a

solitary peak, placed in the middle, looked like a boat on tranquil waters. Soon again, however, the rocks came back into their own. They had strange shapes: a lion emerged from the sand and raised its rough head; a frog, lifelike and alone, crouched as if ready to plunge into the wavy dunes; another monolith was tall and straight like a tower. Light played in the sullen landscape and going from peak to peak, from crest to crest, cast enormous shadows on the soil. Long alleys started, and behind, in the background, rocks always looked and waited; one passed them; again rocks and rocks! Oh, how wild it was, how savage, and how great! . . . And everything was so silent. A small creek was hiding there in the shade, with a very narrow opening; an arm of granite came forward like a jetty and ended by what looked like a lighthouse. Nature seemed false; it was too weird to be true; surprising also the dazzling glare of the sands and the gruesome immobility of the mountains.

One day two eyes dried by tears, covered with long eyelashes, dim and spiritless, two eyes that might have been grey but seemed now white like a corpse's, were looking on that terrifying land around them. They had followed an endless trail, those eyes; they had seen many landscapes from the sea to the snows, but never had they beheld nature in such a fearful garb, that of a beggar, but of a dangerous beggar, poor, but cruel. Those eyes had wandered always together, always looking both in the same direction, with the same expression of bitter disappointment on the laughing scenes that God put in their way; they had always found nature appealing and lovable, but they had always run away from it, and still more from men and beasts, except from the man whose lights they were and the beast which bore that man. We must say it was a human being, but it might as well have been a soul without a body, a soul in desperate search of loneliness, but which could not find it.

At last, for the first time since he had left his native land, a smile curved his thin and bloodless lips. Kambu Svayambhuva—for such was his name—had at last found the goal of his pilgrimage, the land where he wanted to die, life being too heavy, for he had lost Mera, the woman whom Siva himself had given him.

Kambu arrived in a valley edged in with fantastic rocks and he saw a steep path going to a hole in the cliff. He reached a sombre grotto, and there the walls were wet ; the sun, however strong, could not pierce in here. He looked around : stalagmites and stalactites formed smooth columns. He lit a torch, entered and soon came to an inner lake shining dimly ; then he went through an extremely narrow passage, slippery and steep. All at once the prince found himself in an immense cavern with a chaos of boulders ; he went down, he went up, he skirted precipices, he went round needles, behind blocks of stone, he climbed, and below under him he was bewildered by a floor from which rocks surged as to the assault of the ceiling, white and far above, lighted by rays of sun coming through a crack. The torch sent a red glare on rough surfaces, but there remained dark, cruel corners. Water lay in holes, and moss had clothed stones with green ; brown mud spread on the soil, and dripping water had made lines of rust on the walls, on the granite, eaten up and gruesome like devils in their den.

Kambu went into other great rooms, where similarly clear and fresh water remained in basins. Stalactites overhead, white and shining, gave the impression of wonderfully thin drapery hanging in folds ; beneath them the limestone, carried by the ever-falling drops, creators of all the unforeseen beauties, had exactly the appearance of white lava in layers. The trembling reflections of the crackling tallow lit those caprices of nature and enlivened them with the half-defined gestures of ghosts outspreading veiled arms to stifle eavesdroppers,

and the smoke of the burning wood trailed off in volutes. The stranger passed through many huge caves, through low alleys floored with clay, damp and soft. Occasionally an opening in the stone let a sun ray thrust its warm, delusive light and place a shining spot unusual in the blackness. He came to a crypt, and in a startling way the stalactites were again erected in the fashion of columns or obelisks ; one even seemed to be the giant preaching-chair of a cathedral. Light for ever danced and clutching to asperities of the granite made it resplendent under a varnish of silver, while the brand he held in his hand was red and its smoke blue.

He leaned over a hole, sparks dropped and hissed as they reached the wet bottom, and all at once the torch went out. Kambu turned about ; all was gloom. But he still thought that he heard the hissing of the sparks in the water. . . . The hissing became clearer and clearer, louder and louder ; so much so that the prince believed himself mad and put his palm on his brow. No, reason had not yet abandoned him, something *was* hissing ; the wind, perhaps, racing in the caves ; no, it was not the wind, as it came from all directions. Fear was gradually gaining access to his heart and sweat moistened his temples. A queer light began to show details of the grotto ; a long and narrow creature, with a huge head, was creeping towards him. The light brightened, and to his horror Kambu was surrounded by huge, many-headed snakes, whose eyes shone with green and old gold, and who crawled on the ground, emerging from distant recesses or coiling round the shafts of stalactites. The long bodies curved and glided, revealing magic colours ; the serpents raised their heads and stretched them with slow, undulating movements, and their piercing eyes were always looking into those of Kambu.

The prince, however, was courageous ; proudly unsheathing his sword he advanced towards the greatest

snake, which then reared almost straight up on its tail, opening like a fan its numerous heads, and, to the astonishment of the man, it spoke:

“Who are you, stranger, coming in the caverns of the Nagas, masters of this land?”

“I am Kambu Svayambhuva,” he answered, “King of the Arya-Deça. My wife was Mera, the most beautiful of all women, and it was the great Siva himself who gave her to me; but she is now departed from this world and I have left my country in order to die in the wildest desert I could find. I have found it now; it is this land; and you may kill me.”

He awaited death calmly, but instead of feeling his bones crack and break under the pressure of the monstrous snake he heard the latter speak again:

“Your name is unknown to me, stranger, but you spoke of Siva, and Siva is my king, as I am the King of the Nagas, the great snakes. You seem to be courageous too; therefore abide with us in this land you have chosen and end your grief.”

Kambu remained, and, living in one of the grottos, he came to like the Nagas, who were genii, who loved men and could take human shape. They became friends, and in exchange for the food and hospitality they gave him he spoke to them many a time of the beauties of his native country. He described the laughing valleys, where men and beasts lived in peace, where natives grew their rice and also the cotton with which they made their clothes; he told them of the great rivers sweeping in large and majestic curves on the plains, passing through cities noisy and happy; of the hills covered with enormous trees; of the mysteries of the forests.

Several years afterwards Kambu had forgotten his lost wife and now loved the daughter of the Nagas' king. In the midst of rejoicings he married her, and, as deserts and

rocks were no longer necessary to his mind, the snakes, who possessed the powers of demi-gods, turned their arid kingdom into a beautiful country like that of Arya-Deça. They all gathered on the threshold of the caves. The king then pronounced strange words and drops of water were seen to come out of the granite. As the first of them touched the burning sand Siva himself was revealed, looking contentedly on that work of creation. The water soon made a little stream, hurrying over the earth, but mere grains of dust could yet stop it for an instant or change its course. Other little streams gushed from other rocks and joined the first, then flowed quicker and quicker on their way. Soon a noise could be heard coming from them, like the whisper of joy, the first sound of happiness heard in the wild country : a little song, sweet and expressive, telling of the powers of water, which changes fire into cinders, reefs into dust, which quenches the thirst of man and of beasts, which makes plants grow, which forms the clouds and the immense ocean. . . . Water! the greatest of the elements! And the little song went on gaily, but increased in strength; it became a hymn, a roar, and, beating the rocks with foam for the first time, ran fast towards the sea.

As a natural consequence of water being in the land, moss began to grow on the river banks, grass on the plains, and a few grains brought by the wind found what they wanted in order to live and did not die in birth as they had always done before. They flew on the wings of zephyrs, the germs of the forest giants; they glided, one on a rock, another in a valley, others on hills, in holes, in glens, between two stones or stopped by a reed. They rolled uncertain of the place where they would dwell, but at last remained immovable for eternity, all to the task they had to ripen and live. Earth covered the seeds little by little, and under the thin crust of glebe a few drops of

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humidity rested on them ; like fairies they caused tiny green shoots to show their tender heads to the sun. The great orb which formerly killed life on this realm caressed the small leaves, and under its warmth the young trees prospered, at the same time sending their roots deeply into the soil in all directions, to defy the greatest winds, the most ruthless of storms. Then they rose and proudly emerged from the blades of grass ; sap moved in their veins, and buds were more and more numerous, turned into branches or leaves ; other buds grew, other branches, other leaves. Later on they became colossi and protected under the shadow of their foliage other grains and other boughs. The forest broadened out ; lianas joined trunk to trunk ; flowers exhaled their perfumes, showed their exquisite forms and delicate hues. Animal life flourished under the protection of the uncouth vegetation. At first insects, innumerable and of every conceivable shape, climbed along the bark and bent grass under their weight, or else flew to suck the heart of blossoms ; then little creeping things, green, grey or yellow lizards, and frogs in the marshes and toads which already sung at night. Bigger creatures arrived, from the hares to the stags ; the high princes of the jungle, rhinoceroses, bears, huge elephants ; at last panthers and tigers. . . . The toil was ended, the vast deserts had become glorious scenery, and Kambu marvelled at the power of the Nagas, his friends. A famous race of men descended from him, and this is how, according to the legend, the kingdom came to be called Cambodia, of the sons of Kambu.

ii

As Arya-Deça is a name sometimes given to India, the truth arising from the myth is that the Khmers originally came from the great peninsula, cradle of many a race. This assertion is, moreover, strengthened by the physical

traits of the race we are studying, decidedly Aryan in every characteristic.¹

The new people, however, did not immediately prove its importance, and towards the beginning of the Christian era it was eclipsed by the arrival of fresh invaders, probably of Javanese extraction, who were divided in two armies, one of which formed the nucleus of the Cham race, future hereditary enemies of the Khmers, whilst the other settled round the delta of the Mekong. Thus came into existence the kingdom of Fou-Nan, which rose to great power and had several dynasties of monarchs, one of them being founded by a Brahmin usurper, Kaundinya, who was probably born near Madras and brought with him the culture of his motherland and its religion, Sivaic Brahmanism.

Fou-Nan was an extensive realm made up of vassal states which were under the sceptre of separate princes, each of whom swore allegiance and paid tribute every year. Of these principalities Cambodia was the fiercest and most turbulent, and it could have broken its bonds of vassalage long before if it had not been itself divided into petty parties, continually squabbling one with the other. At last, towards the end of the fifth century, the Cambodian parties were joined under one crown, and Bhavavarman, a Cambodian prince, wrested the supreme power from Fou-Nan.

¹ Khmer history is for the most part vague and inadequate, but Sanskritists, sinologues and scholars versed in the ancient Cambodian language, formerly undeciphered, have been able, by means of long researches in the annals preserved in the court of Phnompenh, in foreign manuscripts or inscriptions, and especially in the mass of epigraphic remains found in the ruins, to draw the broad lines of events which marked the progress of the nation. The first documents are too much permeated by fictitious narratives to be of real value; of the second, those which speak of the Khmers are too few, and the last mostly record pious gifts to shrines; yet much is already known, and more eventually will come to light. (Cf. *L'Empire Khmèr*, by Georges Maspéro, Phnompenh, 1904.)

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After centuries of internecine turmoils and foreign wars chiefly directed against the Chams, the year 889 saw the crown, which had been gloriously upheld by great monarchs like Jayavarman II., rest on the brow of a young king, Yaçovarman, who was destined to be the founder of Angkor-Thom. . . . However, as it nearly always happened, the reign began in civil war. Several harmful clauses darkened the Cambodian constitution, but none more than the law of succession. Truth to tell, there was none; the eldest son of the emperor was not necessarily the heir; all the persons of royal blood, even women, had a right to ascend the steps of the throne, and should the reigning house become extinct a Brahmin could be elected. As soon as a king died the five great dignitaries of the empire named his successor and did not always accept him whom the late sovereign had designated. We can well imagine the intrigues that took place, and it is quite obvious that this state of affairs was one of the chief reasons which brought about the eventual fall of Cambodia.

Therefore Yaçovarman had to fight for his title and at this early stage of his career was only saved from death by two faithful followers who fell under his eyes. When the rebels had been routed he thought of evading "the return of those criminal hopes which look for the feeble points of a kingdom and kill the sovereign."¹ Thereupon he organised a system of spies and began the building of an "impregnable, terrifying" citadel which he called Yaçodharapura, now known as Angkor-Thom. In the centre of his citadel he erected the Yaçodharagiri (the Bayon) Temple of Siva, and began the Imperial palace and the Phimeanacas, which were only completed after his death. But he did not stop at that. To the west of his capital he dug the vast artificial lake of Yaçodharatataka (Western Baray), in the middle of which was raised the

¹ In this part of the chapter all that is put in inverted commas is taken from inscriptions.

shrine and convent of Yaçodharacrama (Western Mebon). Farther away, near some temples, the work of his father, Indravarman, the fane of Lolei is attributed to him. Before Yaçovarman Khmer emperors had patronised art, but he gave it an unprecedented impulse, and he often mentions that he founded more than a hundred abbeys.

Physically a giant, since he could slay elephants and lions without weapons (according to inscriptions), he was also ambitious and warlike. His reign was a series of terrible contests, in which, as he candidly admits, defeats were not unknown, but victories more frequent. We hear of a naval expedition in which he had "broken in the great sea thousands of boats, fresh and white," and his enemies "through fear of him jumped into the waters." In Champa he invested a fortress which Çri Jaya Indravarman, ruler of that realm, had built on the Vek mountain. This king was deposed and a Cham general placed in his stead. But the defeated Chams reorganised their armies and followed Yaçovarman. They prepared an ambushade and surrounded him with twelve forces. Yaçovarman was forced to retreat until he came to the Trayacar mountain, where he was able to fortify a camp and to inflict a defeat on his enemies. Once again he narrowly escaped death and was saved by two followers. Thanks to the victory of Mount Trayacar, he could lead back his army into Cambodia without further loss.

Great in warfare, great in building, Yaçovarman also possessed the genius of an administrator. To ensure strength and peace to his kingdom he contracted alliances with neighbouring monarchs. At home he stopped theft and piracy, organised taxes, laid down the rules of the four castes and fixed the ranks of nobility in the aristocratic class. He did everything to gain the friendship of strangers living in his country, and it is no doubt to his love of art and science that we owe the marvels which immortalise his name. Anticipating and following in the

footsteps of most great monarchs, he called men of valour to his court, and whenever he defeated a rival "he took into captivity his heroes and his scholars."

His empire, which extended from the sea to India, China and Champa, reached all its natural boundaries and comprised most of what we now call Siam, Cambodia, Cochin-China and Laos. He died, still young, in A.D. 908.

Angkor for a long time was to retain its lofty rank, except for a short spell between 928 and 980 (?), when Chok Gargyar was made the capital of Jayavarman IV. and of his youngest son, Harshavarman II. The eldest son of Jayavarman, who had probably been excluded from the throne by palace intrigues, then took the head of government, no doubt after killing or imprisoning his wretched brother. He returned to Yaçovarman's citadel, which he restored and embellished.

Of the other kings we need only stop at a few great names.

Suryavarman I. reorganised the castes, made laws for the boundary provinces, contracted an alliance with China and Champa against the Annamites, and built and repaired numerous temples, the chief of which are Phnom Chisaur, Prah Vihear, Eukosey, Phnom Sandak and Prah Khan of Kompong Svai.

Suryavarman the second of the name was even more famous than the first. Very warlike, he conquered Champa in 1153 or 1154. The Chams, defeated in the plain of Caklan, were placed under the rule of a viceroy, Prince Harideva, brother-in-law of Suryavarman. The crushed nation did not meekly accept the yoke, and after different attempts to recover their freedom they crushed the viceroy at Virapura. In 1159 the former and dethroned king of Champa, Çri Jaya Harivarman, even captured Harideva in the plain of Mahiça and proclaimed his independence.

The reign of Suryavarman, although an epoch of

conflicts, was also one of happiness and prosperity ; then it was that the Brahman Divakara, by order of the king, began the building of what is the masterpiece of Khmer architecture, Angkor Vat.

The end of the glorious reign was clouded by unfruitful campaigns against the Chams. Dharanindravarman II., Suryavarman's successor and cousin, continued these struggles, and in 1164 his son came to the throne under the name of Jayavarman VII.

At the beginning of the latter's reign Cambodia was invaded several times by the troops of Jaya Harivarman, king of Champa. One of these attacks, in 1170, was particularly disastrous : the treasures of the temples were stolen by the Chams, who immediately returned to their country. In 1175 a usurper, Vatuv, took the crown of Champa ; this caused a new war, again advantageous to the Chams.

Jayavarman now realised the feeble constitution of his armies and proceeded to reorganise them patiently and thoroughly. In 1189 he was ready. . . . First he ensured the neutrality of Annam and then had a glorious revenge for his dreadful defeats. At the head of his forces he placed a Cham refugee whom he had raised to the rank of yuvaraja. This commander captured the enemy capital, Vijaya, and King Vatuv. Surya Jayavarman, Prince In, was proclaimed viceroy, and Champa for the second time came under the Khmer crown. Meanwhile the prisoner king was escorted to Angkor-Thom. It appears that he gained the good graces of Jayavarman VII., and two years after his fall he was given a Cambodian army to reconquer the throne, which Surya refused to abandon ; but he was beaten and killed by Surya.

During this reign Cambodia reached its zenith. Possessor of immense riches, sovereign over huge territories, Jayavarman VII. founded many monasteries and closed the glorious list of magnificent builders by finish-

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ing Angkor Vat. Yet, like one of the most famous of European monarchs, Charles V., he left the throne at the supreme height of his fame to spend the last years of his life in the bosom of religion, which to him was now Buddhism. His son, Indravarman II., was crowned before his death in 1201.

The name of Jayavarman VII. fitly ends the long line of Angkorean monarchs. Indeed Angkor was yet far from its fall; it was renowned everywhere for unimaginable treasures, for its gold and its gems, for its temples and palaces. For two centuries more it retained its lofty rank, but decadence was already rampant. The Siamese, who so far had not figured in history, were increasing in strength, and in the last years of the fourteenth century the mighty buildings were definitely abandoned to the forest.

PART II
ANGKOR-THOM

CHAPTER I

THE MOAT, THE GATES, THE WALLS OF THE TOWN—THE
FIVE GIANTS OF THE BALUSTRADE

i

THE memories of those monarchs who ruled over the immense country I have crossed for days fill my mind as I wander slowly towards their capital.

It is night. . . . At this hour approaching dawn the moon has set, the stars have vanished after a last wink and the slightest glimmer cannot be discerned in all that surrounds me. Enveloped as in a shroud of absolute darkness, my mind is shut to all external things and only thinks of the past, of those kings and princes, of those ministers, of those men, in fact, who filled the land with life and then, like genii, disappeared.

Nothing is greater than mystery, nothing is so appealing. . . . Mystery is the flower of imagination. . . . Anything which is not clear makes one think and dream; and what enjoyment in life is there but dreaming?

If one saw one's surroundings as they really are no joy could enter one's heart, for truth is cruel. . . . A flower may be pretty, but who knows that it does not grow by the rotting of a corpse? . . . A bird may have bright plumage, but who knows that it is not a tyrant among its folk and that all the colour of its wings hides a small yet nasty brain? . . . A woman may smile deliciously, but who knows that the blackest intentions are not hidden by the sweet curves of her lips?

Only the mystery hidden in the pistil of the flower, in the feathers of the little bird, in the features of the woman

permits us not to see their real ugliness ; and as we think that all this is beautiful and not a mere mask, we can be happy to see it.

Mystery, source of thought ! is there any place in the world where you reign with greater force than here ?

This is indeed the land of mystery, the land where everything serves but to conceal, where leaves cover insects, where trunks hide beasts, where vegetation shelters temples, in their turn enshrining weird idols. . . .

My small horse steps uncertainly on the road, and only the stamping of its hoofs on the stones reveals that I am always on the right trail. The sun is master in this realm and nowhere is day more bright ; the moon reigns in the night and its rays are clearer than anywhere else ; yet when the white crescent has set and when dawn has not come, no darkness could be imagined as dense ; it is like the day of doom before the long trumpets of the calling angels have awakened the dead.

Noises and murmurs tell me, however, that this is not the empire of death and that I am not the only traveller of the gloom ; animals are all around and increase the mystery of nature, so terrible and so great.

The country is also one of sudden changes. Night and day, life and death, nature and civilisation battle continually, and their victories are sudden . . . but uncertain whether the fruit of conquest will remain long within their grasp, they immediately make the most of their superiority and almost no transitions exist.

At present night is all-powerful, but day takes its revenge and sends its rays in all directions. Darkness has just died when light is already acknowledged supreme master.

The road is a long strip of red soil bordered on each side by the wild forest of bright green. The virgin vegetation casts misty shadows, fresh and resting, where night lingers. Turning round I can see that

I have left behind me lofty towers, their heads over the tops of the trees: it is Angkor Vat, but I shall go and see it last.

Wild-fowl cross the road, not frightened by the noise my small horse makes; squirrels, more timid, scurry along lightly in great hurry, their bushy tails waving like flags. Quickly they jump on a trunk and are hidden by the leaves. Then lizards that warm their cold blood, lying lazily on the ground, soon catch sight of me, and in terrible fright run as fast as they can to their holes—strange, small things; suddenly they disappear into tiny furrows where nothing is able to follow them. Numerous are those yellow lizards, and I cannot take my eyes off them; they seem so amusing, like a motionless piece of wood which all at once flies away, only its little feet moving, with a tail stuck up like a mast.

As they are now all gone I look round again; unconsciously I pull strongly on the reins; my pony stops, its front legs stiff, and I stare in amazement. . . . No, I cannot go forward, for in front of me appears a wonder. . . . I dare not approach any nearer, for will it not vanish, this unreal monument, this gigantic work of man?

ii

The forest ends abruptly in a straight line to my right and to my left, on the verge of a broad moat deeply dug in the ground. This, the first defence of the city, is more than a hundred yards wide, but time has lessened its depth and now the bottom is made of brown, cracked mud where rushes grow. I cross it on a causeway which continues the road and is bordered on either side by big heads fallen and broken, by fragments of enormous legs and arms, by sections of a Naga's body now shapeless, and farther away the strangest and most impressive gate that can be seen awaits my coming.

A dark opening, broad and high, is fringed with

lianas like the entrance to a cave. . . . Through here all comers to the city had to pass, and in honour of this function it has been built in a style grandiose and elegant, forming a whole, incomparable in its strength and expression.

On either side of the entry a three-headed elephant seems to hold on its massive back the entire weight of the innumerable stones above. Only its front legs and triple head are shown ; a rope to which hangs a bell is hooked to its neck ; its broad feet trample lotus leaves and water plants slightly carved in the sandstone, and the three long trunks pluck at a bunch of aquatic flowers—an appropriate decoration indeed, as water once flowed beneath. The trunks form thin columns, adding lightness to the whole. Mahouts, almost entirely rubbed away, sit on the huge pachyderms, and on top of all smiles an enormous four-headed titan.

His heavy features have an expression of eternal philosophy, for what has he not seen, this giant now alone in the forest ? He broods over the remembrance of past glory and, solitary, always laughs at the nothingness of men, who move and make great noise for a short time, then die to add their quota of dust to the earth, whilst he, immovable and silent ever since his creation, remains when all that surrounded him in ages gone by has perished. He nevertheless smiles a kindly welcome to those who pass under him. His long ears end in heavy jewels, his heads are covered by three tiaras at the summit of which bloom stone water-lilies. Between each of his faces a tall, thin woman, nearing in her fragile elegance the figures that adorn Gothic cathedrals, seems to whisper ironic things into his ears. What does she say, this archaic princess of the woods, to the giant who guards the gate ? . . . Probably : “Look, another man, who, like so many others, will pass under us, then vanish for ever.” Whatever it be, a cold shiver runs through my veins at

the sight of this very, very old, abandoned work of man, recalling death more than life.

At first I thought that the monster was solitary, but there are many friends around him : besides those already mentioned, there are other women emerging from the stones, forming a delightful necklace for his throat. The latter maidens are most sympathetic, not sarcastic like their tall sisters, who stand above them and look at me with a quiver of cruel mockery. Their hands (the hands of the merciful girls) are crossed in prayer, their eyelids lowered, their lips as if murmuring a never-ending hymn to some unknown power ; reposeful little women, prayer always being a rest.

The gigantic faces are all cracked, and the moss which fills the interstices of the stones forms wrinkles, adding to their years. On top of the broken domes that shelter the four brows, lianas have given them strange hair. Many of the small figures under their chins have fallen. The Colossus' sway has gone. . . . Beneath him the gate is open to all comers. . . . They have vanished in the night of ages, the days when he allowed to enter only those whom he wished, when strong timber doors (the holes that held the cumbrous beams in their places are still noticeable) shut in the city. What has he seen ? Pageants going to the temples and great processions when the emperors left or entered their capital ; armies going to war full of hope and coming back victorious ; then the ordinary, common life of that ancient people : the bullock carts, the placid elephants, the peasants coming to sell their goods in the market, the joyous life, the awakening, the movement of thousands of men, women and children. . . . For a city's gates are its eyes and ears ; everything that enters or goes out passes through them ; therefore what does he not say with his cold smile, the eternal onlooker ?

All grandeur is now but a memory ; the jungle is as

thick within Angkor-Thom as without ; nature has invaded everything ; the statues, the fragments of which strew the ground of the causeway, fell into the ditch after their long guard ; the wooden doors rotted ; the wild beasts were the only creatures the giant saw, their howlings were the only sounds heard by his long ears ; and then a white race came and cleared away the bushes, the trampling of men once more resounded within the echoing gate, the stones which had fallen into the moat were again placed on each side of the doorway, and the giant smiles, always smiles. . . . But is it not with disdain now, at the work of trying to renew his splendour ?

The whole history of a nation is inscribed in its capital ; the whole history of a town is contained within its walls, encircling the life of the febrile city, and in its gates, which like triumphal arches once announced, and now recall to mind, the marvels of an extinguished race. That is why an unquenchable melancholy envelops the soul when this wonder is seen, wonder that ought to fill one's artistic nature with joy.

iii

At last I cross the threshold of the dead city ; a vault covers my head at a height of thirty-two feet, the passage is fifteen feet wide ; by these measurements the size of the work can be imagined.

Having come to the middle of the gateway, I see unexpectedly that it widens to form two recesses raised above the ground and accessible by five steps ; at the back of each of these is a door ; there on the right sit five monkeys ; noiselessly they leap into a room, into which I follow them, and I enter an absolutely dark chamber ; still farther another room, narrower than the last but of greater length, completed the accommodation of the sentries ; the monkeys are no longer in it ; like sprites they have pierced the stones. Formerly I would

have been stopped by soldiers fully armed, but now timid quadrupeds run away from me, and my only companions are blue and yellow butterflies flying uncertainly round my horse's head.

On either side extends the wall built with laterite, enclosing the city in a vast square. Its whole length is seven and a half miles, and inside, leaning against it, a quantity of earth is heaped up, which made this defence wide enough for three two-horsed chariots to pass abreast on top. When the town was attacked a numerous army could be placed there to defend it. The fortifications were reached near the gate by steps, very few of which remain, and by long, inclined ways for cavalry and war engines. The wall was of great strength; it is only in a very few places that it has been destroyed by time. Trees, bushes, plants of all kinds have grown and flourished, and the footpath that stretches along it is very rarely used, so that drooping trunks or intricate lianas stop one at every step. The wall does not fall abruptly into the waters of the moat; between the two runs a narrow path. The moat has its edges in laterite, and there is an old belief that it was filled with savage crocodiles to add to the security of the city by preventing foes from swimming across.

Yaçovarman, founder of Angkor-Thom, was right in saying that he had built a town "impregnable and terrifying."

iv

Angkor-Thom possesses five gates; the roads passing through four of them converged towards the exact centre of the town occupied by the chief temple, the Bayon. The eastern side has an extra gate that faces the Imperial palace. They have all remained in a good state of preservation, but the northern gives the best idea of their ancient beauty.

Natives have given a name to each of them. The southern is called the " Gate of the Lake "; the eastern are those of " Victory " and of " The Dead "; the western, the " Gate of the Spirit Kao "; the northern, the " Gate of the Spirit Nok." Some of the ancient races of Asia were in the habit, when building a city, of placing under its bulwarks live slaves to make it invulnerable to attack, and in the last names we probably find a memorial of the two men whose souls were to protect the Khmer capital.

It is at the " Gate of the Dead " that I descend from the wall after a last look at the forest spread out at my feet, and I turn to gallop straight along the ancient avenue that leads to the heart of Angkor the Great. But outside the city a footpath hardly visible attracts me. Once more I go into the surrounding jungle.

Terribly thick and repulsive is it here, for everywhere only tall plants overgrown with thorns prosper. I do not know what force pushes me and presses me to enter. I leave my mount and, guarding my face as well as possible, back bent, I follow the path. Thorns continually catch my coat, like little hands pulling me back ; some cut my skin ; one snatches away my helmet ; but I persevere and after a walk that seems very long I am well repaid for my pains.

I find five giants, one behind the other, crouching on the ground, and now understand the fragments of legs and arms on the edges of the road leading to the first gate I have seen : they were the last remnants of the gorgeous balustrades that lined the causeway. . . . The hand-rails were two awful Nagas lifting their frightful heads, slightly turned inwards as if to terrorise men, intruders to the town ; but the imaginary beasts were checked in their effort by one hundred and eight giants, who, sitting on one heel, their strong arms round the crawling bodies, held the snakes on their knees.

Only five giants remain, crowned with the pointed



FIG. 5. GIANTS OF THE BALUSRADE

mukutas, their ears, necks, wrists and ankles covered with jewels; they are the last who hold the skeleton of a fantastic serpent; they are the only ones who have kept their long guard, who have kept their vow. Time has not left them unharmed, and, if not entirely destroyed, they are mutilated, especially the last three, who have lost their arms and whose bodies show deep wounds. Moisture has covered them with white veneers, and they appear to suffer from a loathsome skin disease. None the less, however old and dilapidated, they have held to the last, and although their numerous companions have fallen, they still can give us an idea of the entire composition. This ornament is one of the most powerful and original produced by any race. The pose of the giants is exactly similar, but those near the extremities have several heads and arms, and the expressions differ greatly, some being perfectly calm, others showing disgust, the best, frightful anger; one especially, near the "Gate of the Lake," with frowning eyebrows, wrinkled forehead, lips drooping, flaming eyes, round and in high relief, is the masterpiece of an artist who has attained here, in fantastic sculpture tempered with realism, to greater perfection than the Chinese, past masters in the art.

One is able more or less to reconstruct in one's mind the unique appearance of the buried city's approach: the road, the trees, the causeway, the monsters and snakes, the heavy wall and the four-headed dome all reflected in water, where crocodiles dozed and floated like logs. . . . What other town in the world could boast of such fortifications?

CHAPTER II

IN THE RUINED CAPITAL—THE FOREST—A VILLAGE AND ITS INHABITANTS

i

I AM now in the ancient capital, but nothing tells me that I rove in what has been one of the most flourishing centres of human energy ; as well as outside the walls, the forest is thick, and vegetation is entirely free.

Overtaken by the poetry of nature, I no more think of man. All kinds of trees grow vigorously and fill space in the most pleasing disorder ; nothing here is mastered by another force ; all is free in the splendid freedom of nature in its virginal state. Banyans stretch their long branches overhead, covered with dark green leaves that form a trembling curtain under which you step ; other branches are entwined with them, and innumerable trunks stop your view everywhere. You believe you are in a green prison with no openings, but as you walk the prison goes forward with you, and truly, as everything here, you can do what you like. No eyes look at you, except perhaps the unknown ones of the trees, but they are as untroublesome as invisible, and should they magically show themselves they would probably appear full of goodness and sympathy.

One feels perfectly secure in this wilderness where everything is excessive ; where trees are bigger than those one is accustomed to, where leaves are greener and flowers brighter ; where Life, the strange and baffling goddess who is the mother of Nature, has made her child

more powerful than in the far countries where one was born. Life! Everything speaks of life.

The sun's rays, filling the sky with glamorous light, pass through the holes left in the foliage and as the latter moves, ever swayed by a light breeze, the shafts thrown by the flashing orb dance on the ground, skip quickly like wistful little spirits over the bark of trunks, suddenly make an orchid gleam like a twinkling star in the night of green, then recoil back to kiss the earth or a slender liana; and it appears that the sun is alive, that the shrubs are alive. Surya, the sun god, plays with nature, and this playfulness appeals as the games of untamed animals. In order to show his joy the emperor of heavens is brighter and sends more and more numerous his yellow, shining arrows, until he pierces everything; the plants smile in response and their colours become more crude, their odours more penetrating; the sun, excited by the game, casts terrible heat, and all things would retire before such an unforeseen vigour in our cold countries of Europe. But in this forest nature replies with equal strength, and, instead of cracking, burning, withering under the violent strokes, it appears to expand, to rise. . . . Fresh boughs grow and lengthen, other flowers bloom into tender petals, and what would prove to be devastating fire in many regions is here a creative force.

All at once my interest in this spectacle disappears as I see a lofty tree. Its branches and trunk are completely white and bare, and they seem to be the giant limbs of a great skeleton, remaining upright, and on which three vultures are smoothing their wings.

I have only forgotten one thing and it is death; life has subdued my gaze, then, with no warning, the grim spectre has revealed my mistake. Death always follows life and reigns everywhere on an equal footing; one rises where the other stops; usually they are distinct from each other, but here they mingle; life is born of death, and death

takes hold upon life. Oh, how gruesome this rotting tree and these fatal birds in the midst of luxurious vegetation !

At this moment I myself feel uneasy and understand the great truth of tropical torpor ; man here does not exist in all his powers ; he is the only creature that does not come to its full development.

“In florid beauty groves and fields appear,

Man seems the only growth that dwindles here.”

All the mighty forces of nature unite to make him only what he was originally, an infinitesimal portion of nature. All take away his personality. His strength does not vanish ; it goes to sleep. . . . Sometimes, rarely, he awakes and breaks his foes in fury ; he creates wonders like those of Angkor ; but time is his worst enemy and allied to nature vanquishes man, who returns to his sleep, even forgetting that he ever tried to break the chains paralysing him.

Yes, it is a truism for Asia ; man will always be the servant of nature there . . . always.

In our countries we are used to think it our tool ; we have subdued and tamed it ; but in the far regions of the tropics it comes into its own and puts us in our true place. We think we are altogether free from it, but really we are merely a tiny part of its boundless body and will never be able to liberate ourselves from its laws.

ii

Annihilated is the numerous population that filled the city in which I now walk, thinking I am in a region never touched by a human foot but mine. . . . Yet it was formerly composed of streets lined by houses in which many families lived peacefully. Only two paltry villages now remain within the walls. They give us a glimpse of what Angkor-Thom looked like, for, if the genius of the race is no more, its ancient habits have been left almost

free from time's defacement. The temples were magnificent, as we are going to see ; the nobles' palaces were no doubt rich and gorgeous ; but the humble dwellings were certainly built at hazard, and in the lanes and alleys of poor quarters the scene was *en grand* what is found now *en petit* in the aforesaid hamlets.

The descendants of the famous warriors and builders live in huts constructed on piles and reached by short ladders of bamboo. Ten or twelve of these habitations are scattered round a pool in which big buffaloes cover themselves with slime to defend their skin from the attacks of mosquitoes and other stinging insects. With sudden movements of their long crescent horns they splash water and mud over their backs and legs, or else plunge their massive heads under the surface, to make them appear again soon afterwards, their large nostrils opening with a noise of steam. All day long they rest in the mire of half-dried ponds, unless they are taken to pull the primitive ploughs in the rice-fields or to graze in the meadows, when usually a tiny boy leads them with a small rod or rides, sitting leisurely on their broad backs.

Around the pool women carry casks of water tied in pairs to a stick they hold on their shoulders and walk in rhythmic grace towards their kitchen, which is composed of an iron jar placed above a small fire. Children gambol naked in the sun, run about or sit in a circle ; they generally seem serious and have but occasionally the beaming laugh of white babies ; yet they are happy, as happy as can be, free to satisfy any whim of theirs ; they know no school, they have no fear of spoiling their clothes, and their expression of anxious curiosity is all the more amusing. Dogs with sharp ears look like little wolves and saunter at random. Black pigs, their puffed bellies trailing on the ground, lead their litters of fussy piggies and grunt in search of food. Thin, hungry cats are coiled under silk looms.

A light cart drawn by oxen issues from the narrow road cut with the axe, where deep ruts show the path continuously taken by vehicles. The oxen tread heavily, stepping from side to side, their knees almost knocking together, heads lowered, and with long filaments hanging from nostrils to dewlaps. A man crouches in the cart, driving the beasts of burden with blows on their cruppers, and a woman with empty baskets on her knees chews betel-nuts sleepily. The wooden wheels creak terribly on the wooden axle, frightening every wild animal. A horseman follows, riding without saddle or stirrups, legs tightly gripped and hands pulling on the piece of rope he uses as reins. The little horse, pressed by the feet, retained by the fist, ambles in a half gallop, its back always remaining on the same level for the comfort of the rider. Nothing can be seen more agreeable to the sense of harmony than this man almost naked on that naked horse, rather resembling a centaur, his long mane and tail streaming in the wind, or some other beautiful and wild inhabitant of the woods.

The little caravan stops; in one movement the oxen are freed from their yoke and wander placidly to ruminate; the small pony, as soon as the weight it bore has slipped down, goes to eat, or advances towards a glossy mare, angrily shaking its head against gadflies. Chicken, led by a proud, long-legged, but scantily feathered cock, find insects or grain strewing the ground, and sometimes wild-fowl and birds bear them company. Bowls of rice sprinkle white spots among the greys and yellows of thatch, the reds, blues and browns of sarongs, the green of thickets and the opalescence of skies. Youths bring back dead branches for the fires; maidens, standing as straight as the caryatides of the Erechtheion, carry babies on their haunches.

All this has the sweetness of primitive life. . . . So far from the turmoil of agitated civilisation one feels the joy

of rest, the lack of want, the happiness in simplicity, which is the best that can be found ; and one is really astonished that all our work, all our troubles, are to no end, for these human beings know what pleasure and peace are more than the richest amongst us. Vanity of the white race, which thinks itself greater because it has made life more complicated !

iii

I already descry indistinctly between the leaves the stones of Siva's shrine, of the Bayon.

CHAPTER III

THE BAYON—MYSTERY OF THE FANE—BRAHMANISM—THE
LEGEND OF THE GENII, BUILDERS OF ANGKOR—PLAN
AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEMPLE—MYTH OF
BRAHMA CHATURMUKHA

i

THE entrance to the temple opens amidst plants that shudder in the cool breeze of dawn and shelter beneath their foliage chimeras whose forms are nibbled by the inclemencies of age. There are lions half squatting on their hind legs, their heads upraised, their tails resting on their backs, with open jaws armed with long teeth, and eyes rolling in endless anger. . . . Impressive works of imaginations fertile in dreams of terror. These beasts of sandstone, inexact in shape, are rather heavy; their limbs and bodies do not show the play of muscles, their manes, ears and mouths are conventionalised, and it can be easily seen that they were not inspired from living animals; yet they hold their duty of protectors with honour, their whole form slightly lowered, ready to spring in surprise on intruders into the dead secrets. Tendrils have clung to their skins, moisture has placed white patches on their heads, rain and time have covered them with black and grey stripes, winds have brought seeds which, becoming grass, resemble fluttering fur, earth has partly buried their aggressive claws, spiders have spun their webs between their sharp teeth; but none of these things are able to make them forfeit their mission and abandon the sacred buildings to bad spirits.

Nagas help them in their task, desperately fighting

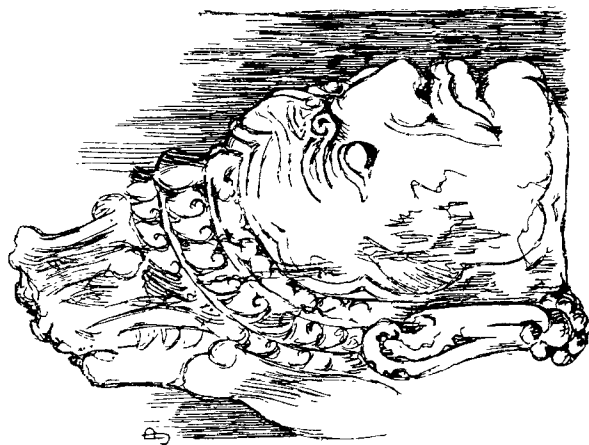


FIG. 6. HEAD OF A GIANT

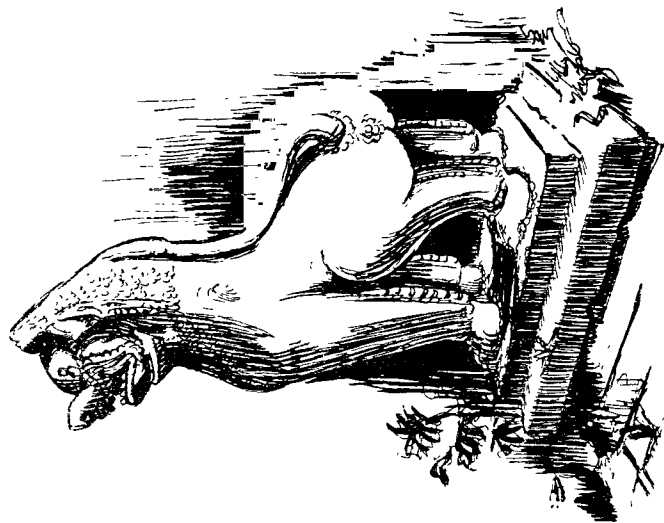


FIG. 7. DECORATIVE LION

against Garudas, who squeeze some of the serpents' heads between their legs, and lift up their arms, about to strike the remaining ones down.

Stairs flanked by these sculptures take you to a double terrace and soon you come to encircling ruined galleries, to columns entirely broken or leaning in all directions, to walls loaded with thousands of figures in half relief, men, beasts, objects of all sorts standing out of the stones heaped everywhere. Gates lead to dark passages and to long avenues ending by an opening, brightly lighted. . . . Seeing all these cloisters, all these rooms where mystery lurks, an unquenchable envy to plunge into the labyrinth of the temple seizes you, even if you were to meet some Minotaur in a recess of these cavern-like halls. Not having, like Theseus, the thread of Ariadne to guide you, you soon lose yourself in the extraordinary interior of Siva's temple.

The more you see the more you want to see. Ever advancing, you never wish to retire.

Whilst running you twist your ankle in a hole left by a missing paving-stone ; but a small head grimaces and you approach to discover its detail ; then your eyes are caught by a princess reclining on a couch carried by slaves ; by a hunter, sending his arrow in the neck of a fox ; by a warrior, standing in full armour . . . and you never look behind you.

Why has man such a thirst for knowledge ? Whenever a secret is unfolded numberless problems rise on the way it has revealed, and one never rests until death. Old doctors whiten their hair searching for microbes of unknown illnesses from which they do not suffer, spending their short years within closed rooms when pleasure calls them outside. You may say it is for the human race, for retribution, for glory. . . . No, it is a love for the fleeting forms of mystery, and, if a corner of truth's veil is waved aside by their hand, they behold a sight that fills their remaining days with joy and contentment.

And one searches the Bayon with equal eagerness for the treasures of thought it contains.

Similarly explorers brave deadly climates to tread on soil still obscure to other men. Why dare so much for so small a fame? . . . Merely because they have moments of exultation, for ever sealed to sedentary human beings. They seem to possess the world and touch to divinity; nothing is above them, nothing commands them; they sleep where they desire, they stop when they want to do so, they go forward or go back at their will; they kill, untroubled by laws; they eat, they shout, they leap in a place where nothing says—Stop! . . . But, above all, they walk with a certain anxiety, ignorant of that which shall befall them at the next step, always with a danger ready to crush them. Even if they were to die, their death would be left as an enigma to the friends from whom they parted. There is an unholy happiness knowing that your present look may be the last, that the ground beneath your sole may be the dust of your tomb, that the howling of a jackal may emerge from the same mouth that will feed upon you.

In the Bayon no such dangers exist, yet the frame is weird enough to make one shudder.

Looking at *The Last Judgment* of Michelangelo, have you not the impression of fear and of doom, although you merely visit a chapel of the Vatican? . . . Here, in a country far from the rumours of Europe, lost in an unending forest, shut in the temple of a cruel god which was erected by an extinct race, in buildings abandoned to the wild beasts, something throttles you as you cross a threshold behind which all is blackness.

You walk endlessly and never find a place where you have already been; the gloomy palace of Siva continually lengthens as you advance, and indeed seems resolved to keep you within its walls. . . . Shall I walk for ever, always in the Bayon, till I fall of exhaustion? Fresh rooms

gape before me ; nowhere do I meet the slightest resistance. I inspect passages and cloisters, chapels and nooks at my wish, but never finding an opening to the outside, shall I die, lost here ?

ii

Meanwhile ideas change and pleasant thoughts take the place of gloomy forebodings. Some of the small rooms have a homely appearance, which proves misleading, and I almost expect to meet there the *braves gens* familiar to your eyes through the works of Dutch masters like Metsu, Gerard Dou, Jan Steen or Vermeer.

It is in similar interiors, with the same effects of light and shade, with walls of this greyish tint, with doors opening on landscapes of trees and verdure, that plump and healthy ladies daintily make lace, look lovingly on a sick child resting on their lap, or else caress a spaniel or a cat which places its muzzle on gowns of satin.

I await the appearance of a doctor with a high hat, a black robe and a look of great learning. I almost see servants, honest-looking and naïve, preparing a hare or a chicken freshly killed for the evening supper, paring apples or pears, cleaning copper bowls or silver ewers ; housemaids with white bonnets and tight bodices going out to buy onions, ham or spices at the grocer's, fish, oysters and vegetables at the market. A window, through which a ray of sunshine glimmers, calls for an old woman sitting in an arm-chair and reading, with the help of glasses, a heavy Bible. The paved floor seems provided for the games of small boys ; the narrow stairs will perhaps take one to some music-room where a young man plays on a viola, accompanied by his bride tapping on the keys of a harpsichord. These places that look so cosy have taken my thoughts far away from the East, and when I behold a chamber where stones are placed in disorder and where red marks on the pavement resemble

poured claret I recall a tavern picture by Teniers in which men play cards, smoking tobacco in long pipes and filling glasses with wine.

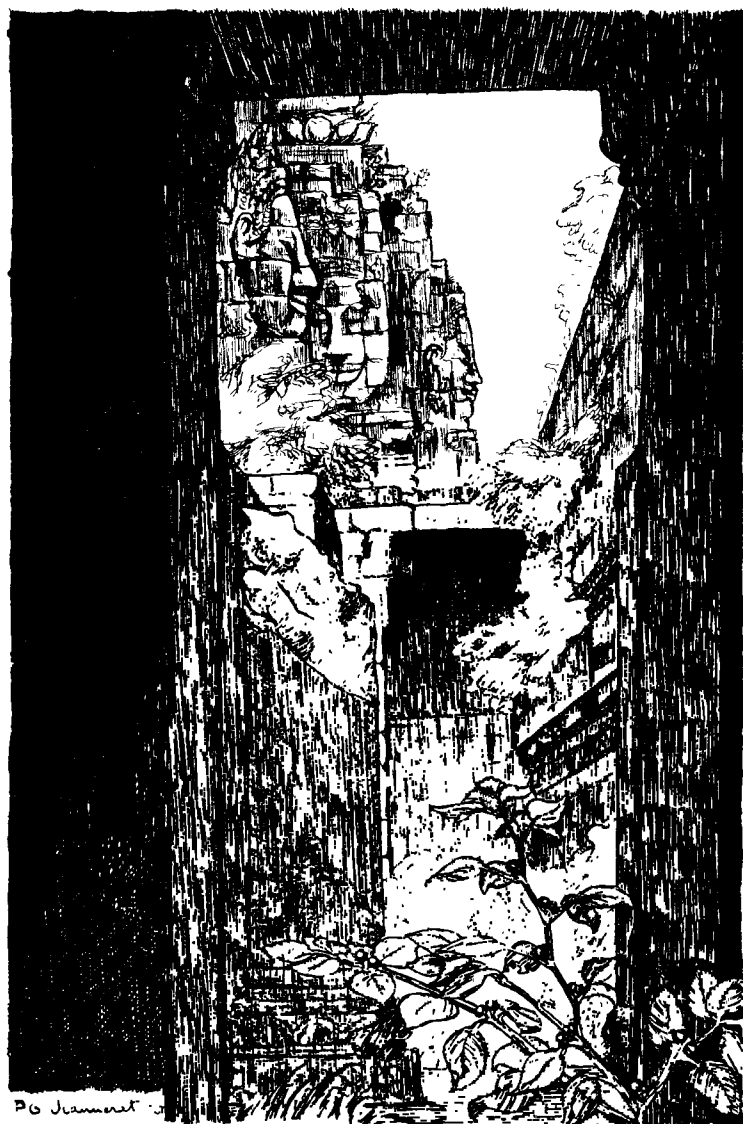
Farther on a gloomy passage reaches a humble recess, lighted by rays that come there after descending from a crinkled vault, after creeping unnoticed along damp walls, arriving at last, pallid and sallow, regretfully showing the dim outlines of a retreat where four holes are dug in the ground. What can have happened here? What was this den used for? The four basins, evenly spaced, were perhaps filled with sacred substances, or were perhaps hearths over which the food offered to lingas was cooked. It is possible that I am now in the laboratory of an alchemist; and one may have seen here, long ago, an old man with crooked nose and nervous green eyes bending over a low fire, warming some poison destined for men or beasts, and looking at the fatal drink that simmered with a faded smile of devilish hope.

Few facts being certain about this forgotten people, the different temperaments interpret at their will what they see: cruel minds see blood everywhere; poetic souls dream of languishing music and strange religious rites; lovers of luxury see pearls, diamonds, gold and silver shining in transparent shadows, decking the gowns of princes and high priests; scholars and archæologists think of the customs and laws of the Khmers; but everyone feels mystery and gropes his way amongst problems recurring a hundred times, his intelligence always wide awake, never thinking of the flowing hours, a continual interest urging him to see more.

One never tires in the Bayon; how its solitude is seething with the invisible!

iii

And, particularly prepossessing fact, it is the whole spirit of Brahmanism and of a Brahmanical race that haunts the curious shrines.



P. G. J. J. J. J.

FIG. 8. IN THE BAYON: GLIMPSE THROUGH A FALLEN ROOF

Nothing is able to explain a religion with more clearness than the works of art by it inspired. . . . Catholicism would be empty, meaningless, if great cathedrals, glorious paintings, marvels of the minor arts did not show us how men's souls were stirred by its dogmas. What lengthy sermons of faith we hear, contemplating a masterpiece of Fra Angelico ; what a psalm, what a hymn ascends along the columns of Amiens, Salisbury or Lincoln. Mohammedanism lies in the curves of arabesques. Haughty pagan gods are vividly suggested by the *Apollon Belvedere* or the *Venus de Medici*.

To understand Brahmanism one must live in the Orient, one must see the ruined temples of Angkor. Then the legends become alive, and the idols, with numerous heads, uncountable arms, with unearthly masks, tell you dimly their arcana.

Reciprocally works of art only display their entire beauty when the conceptions of their creators are known ; the *Moses* of Michelangelo would keep to himself a great part of his fiery soul had we not read the Old Testament.

The glamour of the Bayon is similar to that of Brahmanism, and with a small knowledge of the latter much of the former's shadow is transformed into light.

The creed of the Hindus¹ is based on the simple and clear belief that "there is but one Being, without a second," this one being taking the form of a giant Universal Spirit who is all and does all. The great Brahman, as it is called, is a unity to which everything must return in the end, and anything that seems separated from him is an empty delusion. Unfortunately superstitions of all sorts have befogged the fundamental tenet, forming an almost incomprehensible mythology.

The main source of the perplexing complications arose from the popular idea that the Universal Spirit is a humorist, not always restricting his jollity to the limits of good

¹ Cf. *Hinduism*. Sir Monier Monier-Williams. London, 1906.

taste, who loves amusements whether they be good or evil, and reveals a portion of his own self in all objects, visible, material, invisible and spiritual. Gods, demigods, demons, genii, men and beasts are emanations from his essence and are sure ultimately to return to it.

From such involved circumstances all philosophical ideas, all forms of science and learning, all possible thoughts lead from the popular theme to the true knowledge. Brahmanism has come to be a bottomless sack wherein most contradictory phases are crammed to please every mind. Every human being can find in it what he pleases.

Are the worshippers sensuous, they join the Vamacarins, act in the revels and debauches of monstrous rites, and attempt to gain by means of orgies the powers of magic. On the other hand, if they crave virtue, they become fakirs, stricter ascetes than the mediæval stylites. Should they possess speculative, or practical, or sentimental, or sceptic souls they are certain to discover a sect to which they can adhere. A paradise is within reach of everyone on earth, the rogue or the saint.

At the beginnings of the world the Universal Spirit desired to create all things for his personal amusement and to this end took the shape of activity and became Brahma, the creator. In order to continue his task he became Vishnu, the preserver, and lastly Siva, the destroyer. The three form the Trimurti, the triad of peremptory gods who are, none the less, subject, like other beings, to the law of general dissolution, who have a body and a soul, who truly eat the nutritive offerings of adorers and are carried away by the passions of men. Each god, moreover, has two natures, one at rest, the other active; the latter is especially personified by his Sakti or wife.

Brahma, the creator, is father and lord of all creatures; but, strangely enough, he hardly possesses any cult, and, in spite of his being the first of the Trimurti, he is the least

important to popular minds. His creative capacity has almost entirely been taken over by Siva, whilst that of his fatherly attentions to human beings and animals is the appendage of Vishnu. Sarasvati is the Sakti of the god, who has four faces and is supposed to have uttered the four Vedic hymns with his four mouths; gifted with four arms, he holds a rosary, an alm-box or urn of sacrifice, a sacrificial spoon and the Vedas, and he rides on a goose, Hamsa.

Vishnu's functions of pervading and preserving have widened to numerous powers. He is to Brahma and Siva what Christ is to Jehovah: the saviour of mankind and of all dwellers of the earth, who through his love preserves his adorers from evil. Often he had to save the world from demons who had acquired unrestrained might and for this incarnated his essence ten times in men or animals.

The god's wife is Lakshmi; he is represented with four hands, a club, a shell and a disc, and his mount is Garuda.

Siva, the idol of the Bayon and the deity whose effigy was placed above the gates of Angkor-Thom to show kind features to the Khmer people and to grimace horribly before invaders and foes, is perhaps the most characteristic figure of Brahmanism.

Siva . . . the god before whom all bend the knee and stoop the head to the dust, the all-powerful, terrific destroyer, black lord of demons who dance in phantasmagoria around him amidst flames . . . Siva, the dissolving force of nature, incarnated in Bhairava, the terrible devil, delighting in the destruction of all things, laughing to thundering echoes at the cries of pain and of distress, searching for creatures that suffer and making them shout in agony . . . perpetrating crimes and tortures, covering himself with the blood of victims: a ghost of panic, plunging his long nails in torn skin and flesh, haunting cemeteries, and opening his nostrils to the stinks of rotting corpses; wearing snakes as garlands and skulls as

necklaces ; followed by whole armies of deformed imps and spirits, with long tusks as teeth, arms that reach down to the ground, unusually large feet and hands that clutch and strangle, with hair made of ropes that were used to hang slaves. And he rides on a snorting bull or on a tiger whose tongue and jaws are soiled with bloody drivel, trampling on all creatures, leaving behind him only cinders and tears. He is the knife that stabs, the fire that burns, the floods that drown, the avalanche that crushes, the illness that kills, and the poison that infects. He swims in an ocean of gore and lives upon entrails. It is he who hovers over battle-fields and executions ; it is his voice which is heard in thunder, and his eye that is seen in lightning. He is the demoniacal power for whom pangs of death are smiles of happiness.

Yet sometimes, more jovial in his mood, he dances the Tandava on the Himalaya Mountains, excited by the fumes of alcohol, surrounded by dwarfish buffoons who giggle like drunkards. He is also personified in the eternal creative essence, perpetually restoring things to life after their dissolution. He is the master of the universe, Visvesyara, the supreme lord, Isvara, the one great god, Maha-deva ; he is the dew and the rain which help growth, the earth that engenders nature, and is represented under the symbol of the linga and yoni.

This third member of the Hindu Trinity, who now plunges into pleasures and feasts, now destroys everything to create it once more, is, lastly, the Mahayogi, who, like Buddha, has attained to the highest summits of perfection by fasting, meditation and austerity. He is given the form of an ascetic monk with matted hair, and his naked body is besprinkled with ashes. He remains everlastingly in the same spot, fixed in immobility, teaching by his example the force that can be attained by the restraining of passions and the denial of the senses, preparing the soul by abstract contemplation for a flight towards

supreme knowledge, and, lastly, making it one with the spirit of the universe.

Siva is also identified with Kala, time, with Rudra, the dissolving power of nature, with Vayu, the wind, and the Maruts or storm gods. He sometimes takes the shapes of ether, air, water, fire, earth, the sun and the moon.

Such is the master whom the Khmers brought with them ; one of the weirdest and strongest inventions of the mind ; the most fascinating of cruel idols in the world ; the three-eyed, the blue-throated, the moon-crested Siva.

iv

The abode of such a deity had to be strange, fearsome, dismal and uncanny.

The faithful, when they entered the temple, or even, if they were not allowed to do so, when they saw it, had to feel impending disaster ready to strike them down, should they at any time disobey the ministers of the frightful god.

The priests felt, with that intuition which seems an in-born gift in the leaders of any religion, that they could reign over a fierce and intelligent race merely by awe and superstitious terrors. If they could own a shrine which by its exterior appearance made man shudder, if they kept secrecy round the dim figure of their idol, all the uninitiated would believe that they possessed unknown powers and be too fearful to dare to face their will. So they called to their help all the inventiveness of Eastern minds, all the imagination of demoniacal artists, and uniting to these the grandeur necessary to retain their work from caricature and ugliness have fashioned the Bayon, which is probably the most expressive structure in the world, impersonating to a remarkable degree, in an amassment of immovable stones, Siva, the god of earthquakes and cataclysms.

It is extraordinary how this building, forgotten for centuries, has kept life imprisoned within its walls. In the silent rooms which wind round and round like a chain you feel almost certain to hear soon a piercing peal of laughter ; in the empty passages, where not a flower, not a leaf trembles, you believe that men or dwarfs or beasts will soon dance and play, madly moving legs and arms. It is impossible to feel the loneliness of the surroundings, the weight of years which have oppressed these vaults. Everything is old, and cracked, and dirty, yet an invisible hand seems to stir the stones, and there always seems to be a mysterious apparition impending, which in a blinding flash will make all cracks vanish, all the dust of ages fly away, all crumbling towers rise defiantly towards the clouds, that will make the walls recover their colours, the floors their carpets, the ceilings their draperies. The temple does not even seem to be asleep ; it seems to pretend slumber, dozing with an eye mischievously half open.

I cannot think of any other ruin in the world which has kept this youthful quality of life. Luxor and Thebes, old Athens and ancient Rome are things of the past ; you cannot imagine them regaining their splendour ; and yet one knows everything of their former glory, of the peoples who conceived and built them. The Bayon, veiled in mystery and historic gloom, does not appear dead, damaged, dismantled ; it is still new in the impression it gives and fresh in the thoughts that it conveys.

But the more I think the more I find that it must be this quality of mystery and secrecy that gives it its unabated vigour. You do not place a parallel between the Cambodians and their work ; the founders of the Bayon, lost in forgetfulness, are unreal, and the legends of genii told by old natives appear to be truth ; in this weirdest of structures you believe the weirdest of tales, and if the temple of Siva were founded by demi-gods they might

still fill its rooms with their shades and give them this unaccountable life and movement.

It was my guide who told me how the wonders of Angkor rose from nothingness ; he spoke while we were sitting in a dark cella, pierced by a single ray of sunlight shining on a beautiful stone head which had fallen on the pavement and was smiling softly in death.

The words, coming as a song, seemed almost to emerge from the tight lips of the little dethroned idol, like a voice from the shades of the unknown world, far from land and sea. The story came as in a dream, and my thoughts wandered once more far from the twentieth century when I was there, silently sitting in a tiny, dark chapel, lost in the jungle of Asia.

This was the tale :

“ The gods, with their wives and their slaves, riding in chariots that shone like the light of day, armed with swords, resplendent like diamonds, and bows as strong as the biggest of trees, were travelling among the clouds, flying fast like the smoke of fire. They had been journeying for days now, and their steeds, as white as the petals of lotus flowers, were foaming at the mouth and were wet with sweat, which was dropping like rain. Under them they saw a wide lake and deep forests, where birds sang sweetly ; they saw rivers shining under the last rays of the sun, and cool shadows which would give them good repose ; moreover, the giant trees were no doubt hiding from their view glorious temples, in which they would be honoured. So the chariot drivers directed their fiery horses to the earth and at last landed in a great clearing enclosed within huge trunks and lianas. The gods had hardly put their feet on the soil when genii, humble and astonished, came out to ask what their lords wanted. The all-powerful masters of the earth and of the sky, of paradise and hell, said that they wished to have food brought them and shelter for the night. The inhabitants of the

woods then went back into the depths of the jungle and soon brought back stags, that were still panting in the last agonies of death, streams of blood flowing from their wounds; now and then the poor beasts would shake terribly in pain, and red spots, like rubies, would cover the hides of the white horses. The genii also brought hares and peacocks and wood pigeons; they brought mangoes and bananas and coco-nuts, and laid all these gifts at the feet of the gods. The latter, much pleased, thanked them, but wanted to know in what banqueting hall they would partake of this luxurious feast. The genii looked wonderingly, with eyes wide open, and said that the grass would be a soft spot to sit on, and that one could not find a more gorgeous roof than the blue of the sky. . . . The gods laughed loudly, shaking like big banyans in a storm, and inquired whether, truly, their hosts had not built great temples and palaces which would offer them a fit resting-place. When they heard that no such things existed in the land, they described to the genii the wonderful buildings, farther to the west, which had been erected by faithful men who had no powers to be compared with those of their hearers, who were demi-gods. They spoke at length of the immense rooms, with curtains made of materials as light and transparent as the morning mists, with tables and thrones of gold and silver, with cups and vases of jade; they spoke of the shrines where glorious statues shone like suns and stars; of towers of porphyry and marble, and of courts in which fountains murmured softly. Night had now come, and the gods lay down to sleep; the genii went back into the holes of trees, and all became quiet and silent. When dawn came the noble visitors had gone, and the poor forest dwellers wept, for they thought that the deities would have tarried longer in their lands had there been palaces to receive them. . . . So they met often, and one day all went to great mountains and tore them down; then they brought

back huge blocks of stone, and in one night all the marvels of Angkor were raised, filling the country with buildings which put all others to shame. When, much later on, the gods came again, they were surprised, and stayed long, enjoying the life in the great temples built in their honour."

The voice stopped and I arose. I went slowly up a long corridor lined with carvings, and, looking through the empty space between two columns, I saw a blue sky, a sky as bright as the most resplendent of sapphires. I looked so long that tears came to my lids, as that tint was dazzling, and specks of sunshine seemed to quiver around me. Somehow these specks took shape, and I saw a procession in the clouds, dim at first, then becoming more and more distinct as it approached. A long row of indistinct figures, of a gleaming yellow, like a ray of sunlight passing with difficulty through a fog; the mist surrounding these shapes was like dust rising on a road under the tread of heavy feet; gradually spreading like smoke, it mixed with the heavenly azure. It was lengthening into the shape of a golden bar cutting the sky; it passed and went away. Perhaps only a cloud of unusual appearance, it became almost real in my mind, and I wondered whether I had seen the procession of the legend, the long suite of the gods once more travelling over this land. Was this the retinue of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva? Had I had a vision of the creator, preserver and destroyer? Had my earthly eyes beheld a sight of another world?

The words of the myth were repeated again and again by my imagination, and once more I thought of the sacred guardians in rows, following a herald who held a long pennon inscribed with holy words and fluttering in the wind; I thought of the neighing stallions stepping proudly, harnessed with red leather and wearing plumes waving between their ears; the host swelling and always marching past in increasing numbers; the soldiers by the mere strength of their glance opening a passage in

the clouds for their masters; groups with arms intertwined, laurel held in elegant hands and garlands of poppies and marjoram hanging from shoulder to shoulder; small children with pensive pupils which seemed to reflect the sky; divine mothers holding in the cradle of their arms babies who struggled to catch a flying robin, or else were asleep, their little fists closed over their eyes. Strong slaves pulled the cords tied to the heads of donkeys and mules with their long ears laid back over their necks. Then angels, clothed in transparent garments with rose and bluish reflection, stroked the glossy hides of ponies. Every figure had a halo surrounding its form and limbs, seeming to shed light on the general fog. Flowers fell under the hoofs of animals and, crushed, lent their delicate odours, which intermingled with incense rising slowly and darkening the mysterious mist. Cavaliers holding back their chargers, which had long cloths covering their cruppers, dismounted, plucked a crocus of the clouds and offered it to some blushing courtesan, who manifested her pleasure by the glimmer in her large black eyes. A powerful hand pierced a cloak and snatched quickly at a veil hiding fair features . . . and the gods played. Many porters carried litters covered with vases of gold and alabaster, with chandeliers and crystal lamps. Pages, each with a small dagger fastened to his belt, held in leash half-tamed leopards, which showed now and then, with a snarl, hardly reassuring, their white canine teeth.

A whole troop of young men softened by the notes of their instruments the creaking of wheels, the clashing of swords, the tread of an immense horde. They were handsome and dreamily breathed into their flutes, from which effluvia of song came as naturally as from the throat of a nightingale; their fingers moved nimbly along the reeds, now closing a hole, now another, caressing quickly the wood, or else stopping in suspense when a long-drawn, melancholy note flowed out, trembling. There were also

fat eunuchs, who clumsily pinched the chords of megums ; they hurriedly followed on their flat feet, tossing their heads and almost weeping as they saw the road always as long, always as dreary, and did not perceive the slightest hope of rest. . . . The funny instruments they held in their arms, close to their breasts, had the shape of crocodiles, with moving scales and tails lifted as handles, and seemed to writhe as they were jerked up and down under the touch of the players.

And then came more youths, bringing with them more sounds of music and song ; these used vinas to interpret their souls, making the long mandolins sigh, cry or utter notes of hope and joy. Yet others had harps and tsong-gonks, tharans and fiddles . . . and a concert, expressive but somewhat wild, excited the grace of dancers, who tirelessly turned like leaves carried by a hurricane. Finally there appeared a string of Bactrian camels, which closed the list of the orchestra, for between their humps drummers beat fiercely on nagonahs, in cadence with the plod-plods that echoed in the clouds as the animals' hard feet struck the heavenly road. Oh, they were superb beasts, with long hair falling like brown fringes from their necks, humps and fore limbs, and rings of steel piercing their nostrils.

At last . . . the gods themselves !

First the minor deities in palanquins, with attendants shading them with parasols and keeping away flies and midges with fans made of marabou or ostrich feathers, which were waving like the flowers of papyrus at the end of long wands. . . . Also peacocks with their tails spread like delicate screens hid from too curious gaze the faces of the immortal princesses. . . . Crowns of pearls and cloaks of satin, rings of emerald and bracelets of lapis lazuli, necklaces of diamonds and belts inlaid with filigree ; the fortunes of whole worlds enhancing the beauty of round shoulders or slender necks ; howdahs lined with

the furs of chinchillas, blue foxes or sea-otters . . . the worthy gods of earthly kings and rajahs who owned fabulous fortunes.

Un éblouissement . . . Surya . . . the sun god, standing in a lotus chariot drawn by seven green mares that seemed to be the leaves of the shining flower. . . . It was Aruna, the legless half-brother of the prince of light, who drove them with unerring certainty. Two female archers preceded him, Usha and Pratyusha, ready to scatter the armies of night.

Durga was seen next, seated on a lion—a terrible goddess on a terrible beast ; but how stately they were ! One with fine, haughty glance ; the other with a black mane covering shoulders and neck and belly, its retractile claws revealed as sharp crescents whenever a vicious gleam came to its yellow eyes. It seemed on the alert to crush the skull of a victim with one blow of its paw ; it twitched its tail and yawned.

Soon Kartikēya came in the vision ; he was standing in full armour and held a shield in embossed leather, covered with flowers so delicately designed that he seemed to carry the natural beauties of a garden on his arm. Riding with him were Ganesa and Skanda, the sons of Siva, the former leading dwarfs and imps and buffoons, who roguishly copied the grimaces and gestures of their elephant-headed commander ; the other, having under his orders the armies of his father, rode on a giant peacock, which with spread wings and tail seemed to float like a lovely boat of dreams.

Afterwards came Indra, carried by his four-tusked elephant, Airavana. The god of the watery atmosphere was covering the path under him with dew and was hardly discernible in a damp mist. Closely behind him was Varuna, who held the dominion of water and was drenched from head to foot . . . then Kuvera, god of wealth, in indescribable luxury, everything on or around him being of gold and precious stones, having his glory outshone by

the maidens, more beautiful than stars, who surrounded Kama, god of love.

Soon, however, a gloomy figure approached: Yama, judge of the dead. None the less he could not darken the procession, and he shrank into the background at the appearance of the three greatest gods, of the three eternal masters, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, in all their splendour and majesty.

Varuna led the sun chariot down and down nearer the earth, and as it touched the distant tree-tops it seemed to vanish in a smear of blood. . . . Everyone was showing signs of fatigue. The herald's pennon was leaning, as if the wind passing in its folds was too strong for the hand that carried it; the guards were slackening their steps, and the soles of their feet dragged along, causing the cloudy dust to scatter; the children were asleep and their mothers also. The steeds did not lift their knees as high as before; the elephants seemed to doze as they passed; some old men had to be carried by younger ones; the gods were asking whether fine palaces were in sight; and at last, although the answer was not affirmative, they ordered that all should come to land and seek rest.

The immense retinue touched the ground in a broad clearing and the genii came out of the dens they had hollowed out from the trunks of banyans. They were enormous; they seemed surprised. . . . But I need not repeat the legend; enough is said!

"The genii built this temple, the Bayon, and over it erected many towers with many heads fashioned to their image. . . . At night, when men, animals, insects and trees are asleep, when water is as black as ink, when the sky is not speckled with stars, they wake and the monstrous mouths speak."

I turn round at this voice to see my old guide, bent double, whispering the strange words. I laugh and walk away.

v

The next day I return and study the plan and architecture of the ruins.

The general design consists (in accordance with one of the two almost invariable rules of the Khmers) of a number of tiers decreasing in size as they increase in height, used as platforms for many edifices. The holy of holies, being in the centre of the topmost, glorified gradin, is reached, therefore, by a gradual ascension calculated to ennoble the soul and lift up the mind above the pettiness that grovelled in the streets of the town.

The first precincts used to be a rectangular wall of laterite with a coping, some one hundred and sixty yards long from north to south, and two hundred and twenty-four from east to west. Now nothing but a wreck, it allowed entry into the temple by two gateways, probably very simple and placed in the exact line running between the Gate of the Dead and the Western Gate of Angkor-Thom, so that these could be seen at the end of perfectly straight roads, formerly flanked by shops and houses. The way joining the Gate of the Dead to the main façade is still clearly marked and, apart from the obstruction afforded by low bushes and a few tree trunks, the defences of the city can be easily reached on that side. The western road is replaced at the present time by a winding path that ends frequently in a medley of thickets, and I lost my way twice following it.

Inside the laterite wall there was a small park, square ponds—used no doubt in religious ceremonies—and terraces that lay between the first-mentioned doorways and the gopuras of the second enclosure. It is naturally on the eastern face—that is the honoured face of the Bayon—that the most important work was accomplished, and the terrace there is broader and has many flights of

steps ornamented with the lions already described, and the balustrades of Nagas.

As may be noticed in many other Khmer temples, the designers displaced the north and south axes of every storey so as to make them rise in a slow incline on the chief side, obviously causing the one opposite to be more abrupt. Through these means the structure gained in perspective and grandeur, qualities which the architects understood thoroughly; somehow they always seemed to hit on the best conception that would enhance the powerful appearance of their works, or else used to the utmost the natural picturesqueness of sites like hill-tops or the neighbourhood of water.

The second enclosure is also the first tier of the pyramidal building and is raised seven feet above the soil. This time one finds not only a wall, but a long line of cloisters that could be called twofold, as there exist passages with vaulted ceilings, resting on the one hand on solid walls decorated with bas-reliefs that form a continual screen of figures, and on the other on square pillars; and as in front of the latter there is yet another row of smaller if similar columns that upheld a half vault leaning on the capitals of the taller pillars.

A narrow terrace runs along the edge of this verandah and is furnished with the marginal, ever-recurring Naga as a parapet. The galleries are cut up into sections by three gateways on every side, one in the centre and two at the ends. Moreover, the back wall is pierced with three doors in each gallery—that is to say, twenty-four in all—walled up ages since. The middle ones of these are preceded by several steps that went down to the gardens.

This portion of the building is that which has most suffered, both at the hands of vandals and from the slow but sure work of nature; all the vaults have fallen in except those of the entrances; the columns are broken or else lean to the right or left in disorderly alignment;

luckily on the greater part of their surface the back walls with their bas-reliefs are intact and are still like a book dealing with the life and beliefs of the nation. The more important gateways consist of a cross-shaped room lighted by big windows; a door is placed at the four extremities of the cross, and the vault, topped by a tower, rests on columns; the bigger room is flanked by two smaller ones and preceded by a third, reached through a portico set up on six huge pillars; all the columns are square and ornamented with delicate carvings in low relief, showing pearls, leaves and volutes, and niches in which Apsaras dance on lotus flowers; the maidens are sometimes in groups of three, sometimes in twos; but on those of the porticoes the divine dancers are replaced (and this is the only temple where I see such decoration in such a position) by small pictures of daily life; now a man kneels and holds on his head a pole, at the top of which two acrobats hang by one foot, tricks made for a couple of spectators who look on with open mouths; now a forester struggles desperately with a tiger; now there are jugglers or wrestlers, and an amusing scene of two old women quarrelling and coming to blows.

The intermediate entrances are merely noticeable, as has already been said, for modest porticoes and steps; the corner gateways are also cross-shaped and have two doors giving on the park, two others giving on galleries.

The cloisters surround a wide court in which the fragments of carvings, of walls, of pilasters are collected, and where two rectangular rooms, called "libraries"—no one knows why—are raised on high bases provided with extremely steep staircases.

Beyond them starts the second storey, much more complicated than the first, and giving to the whole temple an impression of extraordinary intricacy. Its description, if at all clear, must be brief and omit many details that intensify the beauty and romantic appearance of the

Bayon. Outwardly it is rectangular and formed as the last into galleries which have in the same way bas-reliefs of war, peace and religion. But these galleries are duplicated—that is to say, there are two cloisters separated by a wall; that outside is composed of a whole and a half vault like those one has already seen; the other has but a single one. The inside rows of galleries are on a higher level than those outside, and steps and doorways cut into the dividing wall permit one to go to and fro between them; similarly every cloister has not an evenly elevated floor, so that it is cut up into room-like recesses with steps, perrons and, in places, stone partitions. Moreover, there stand five gates on each face, and the pair that flanked the middle one leads to other galleries and chambers, perpendicular to those above mentioned, their roofs often touching the top of the third tier, sometimes allowing a narrow space through which the sky can be seen. All the structures frame in small courts shaped more or less like an L, of which the two branches would be nearly equal. Over the gateways and at each angle of the cloisters there is or was a tower.

Flights of steps enable one to reach the third and last floor, whose plan is like a Latin cross, the eastern arm slightly longer than the others. This eastern part of the platform has a long suite of passages and rooms, with steps going down to the pavement and towers overhead; following them one comes to the holy of holies, placed exactly underneath the huge central dome, the summit of which is nearly one hundred and fifty feet above the level of the town.

The sanctuary is a dark, oval room with plain walls; it has four doors, and around it stretches a passage topped by a vault at a great height and without windows or any openings for light. The passage reaches double ante-chambers, each preceded by an elegant porch. Around these rooms there is a succession of chapels, fronting the

outside; they are small, triangular and placed behind little halls aired by two windows and a door facing the terrace. On this storey there are also three other cells, each crowned with a tower and forming the entries to the northern, southern and western doors of the holy of holies, and finally a small sanctuary near the second of them and a couple of structures flanking the main—eastern—entrances. The entire terrace is encompassed within the full space left by the buildings and turrets of the second storey and is bordered by a balustrade.

vi

The pages that have attempted the description of the temple's great structural characteristics can convey but a faint and difficult understanding of the Bayon to those who have not been there; yet it was necessary to give the skeleton-like explanations to enlighten the curiosity of readers who cannot conceive the depth of a building's "soul" if they have not, more or less clearly in their minds, the clue to its plan. It is easier, all the same, to find the meaning of the relics of olden times (of course on condition that a visit to them is impossible), when writers do not go deeply into the facts of the mere mechanical points of a palace, a tomb or a prison, but simply attempt to devote their whole powers in a research of the monument's "atmosphere."

How many volumes of travel are then as passionately full of life as the most alluring work of romance? Who would not read the books of archæologists, even extremely long, when they can impart to our intelligence the hidden aspirations, the dim revelations of slight fragments of human toil . . . shall we say like dolmens and menhirs, since the whole humanity of centuries ago, of modern times, even of years hence, is contained in those rough-hewn stones? Human nature does not change; some of its goodness or badness may be more developed at some

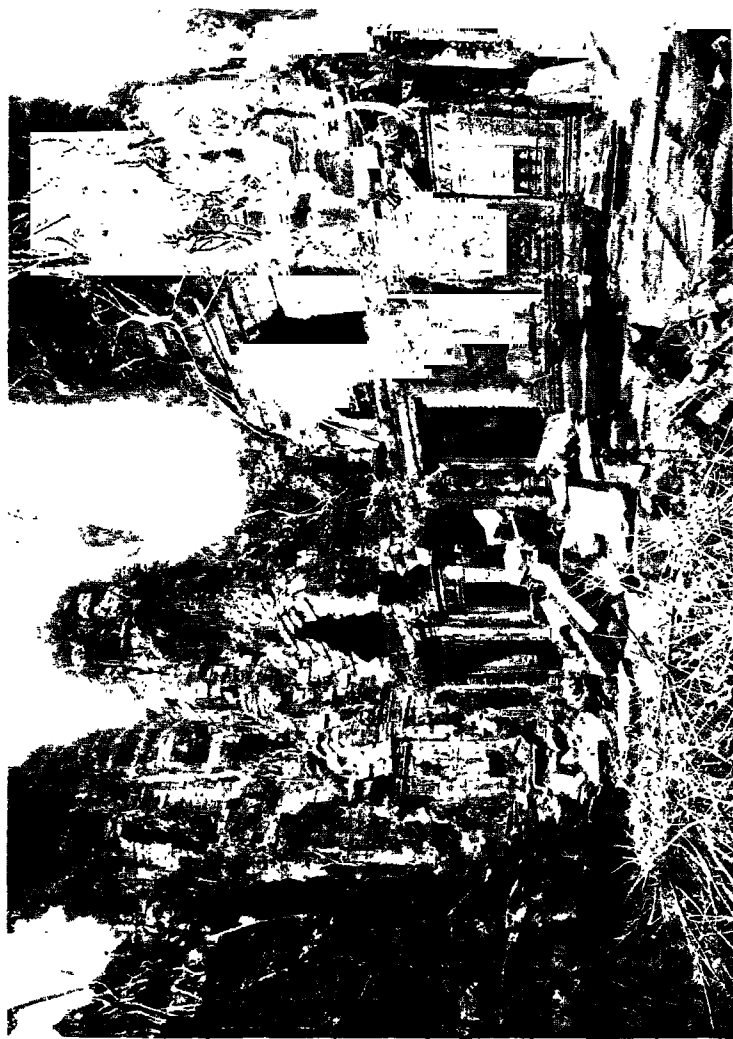


FIG. 9. NEAR THE HOLY OF HOLLES, BAYON

periods than at others ; but we always possess within our skull or heart, or whatever is the source of our feelings, the germs of the most debasing vices and of the most angelic qualities. This is so true that throughout history the brightest eras, when man seems to have vanquished at last his animal longings, are followed by times in which he shows the greatest contempt for ideals and revels in the pleasures of the flesh. Moreover, all individuals have ideas, passions, thoughts, which if only well expressed would create masterpieces. The great human geniuses are those who are able to turn into tangible matter or manner these marvels of their mind and of those of their fellow-men. It is why the achievements of these masters not only disclose their own souls, but those of their contemporaries. Thus, to return to our subject, it is better to go into the inward symbolism of a statue or a church than to give an exact measurement of the nose of the first or of the nave of the last.

This is the only excuse I can offer for the haphazard way in which I put down my thoughts as they come, not in order, not in majestic array, but like a troop of unruly urchins, blackening the pages with scribbles of feeling.

And then, perhaps, in the attempt to explain facts, one often falls into fiction. A cold enumeration of yards, feet and inches, of materials, of theories, is the falsest description possible. . . . It is boring to all but specialists and only produces a notion of chaotic information. Very often the descriptions of castles in novels, of caravansaries in poems, are more vivid than those of the Duomo in Florence, or of the Kremlin, simply because we have a truer knowledge of their elusive beauties. Angkor, we must not forget, is as weird as the inventions of Flaubert, and does not bear the servile means of figures.

But if all this talk is correct as regards the exact disposition of rooms, cloisters, galleries and halls, it is not of the decoration which, like the eyes in a human face, is

placed over the structural basis to express the ideals of the creators. It envelops you in a whirl of artistic sensations and every stone is worth a prolonged study.

All the same the frame adds much to its fascination and the two can hardly be separated . . . it would be like plucking a flower from a bush : naturally it retains for a time its freshness, but soon withers under your gaze and lacks all the vegetation that grew around it. A lost diamond set on a ring may still be full of fire, but it no longer seems to glow as fiercely as when it glittered through the movement of an aristocratic hand. This is what you think when you have a fragment of delicate volutes in your palm, one which you have picked up from the dust ; it still possesses its elegance of line and its lightness of touch, but you regret its fall from the general scheme and wish you could place it back in the small hole left by its disappearance. What is true of the tiny portion of a design is true of the huge surfaces cut, carved and hollowed by the hands of divine workers. In every nook, in every cavity, at each corner, on the pilasters, on the walls, on the pediments, at the summit of the towers, everywhere, a stone vegetation rises in volutes, in circles, in *fleurons*, and adapts its supple curves to the shapes of the stone. In each place it is exactly suited to its need and nowhere does it seem exaggerated, superfluous or burdensome. This can be said of very few national styles and only of the highest. . . . The Greeks knew the exact proportion needed for their buildings and fashioned delicious structures in which nothing can hurt the eye. The Khmers knew it also, but it must be expected that their ideals were not similar ; climatic conditions greatly affect feelings, and these were opposed ; the national laws, democratic in Greece, despotic in Cambodia, could not bear the same fruit, and their arts are as distant as darkness is from light, but both had the genius of harmony, and each one in its particular way is perfect. The Khmer

saw around him the spell of tempestuous life, of vegetation rising with unequalled rapidity and extraordinary abundance ; the sun over his head was dazzling, the night was not reposeful, but filled with the intense movement of animal life, with the daily hunt of tigers, with the trumpetings of elephants, with the glimmer of stars, and his achievements are also tempestuous, abundant and fiery ; but he also saw the majesty of a blue sky, of his rivers, of the immense lake over which he floated in a canoe, and his temples are majestic, strong and immense. The blendings of all these qualities, which were part of his soul, are the essential characteristic of the Khmer's style, and placed apart they would lose their full allurements.

Anyone understands this well as he goes into the Bayon, and he has no difficulty in admiring the whole scheme and the detail at the same time. From the first wall to the holy of holies there are so many rooms through which you must pass, so many pieces of decoration which you must see, and every portion is so effectively personal and expressive, that when you leave the temple you cannot but feel that you have grasped in this visit the secret of this wonderful nation's greatness and shortcomings.

At first you find yourself on a terrace, and there the monstrous lions and terrorising Nagas appear as the petrified superstitions of the people ; they stood to guard the shrines from the bad spirits who roamed everywhere, waiting for an opportunity to spring within the enclosures and work mischief. One sees then that the Khmers, as can only be expected in the circumstances of their religion, were ready believers of myths, as truly their descendants are now ; courageous in the face of enemies seen or felt, they had a childish fear of all the mysterious powers of nature and of the forces which seemed to rule the lives of men. Not understanding illnesses, they had recourse to magicians, who were asked to entreat, either by words or gifts, the sprite who had chosen a human body for

residence to return to his own world. They had unlimited belief in ghosts and could be easily made to obey orders if these seemed to come from the unknown. Farther on you arrive in the long galleries of bas-reliefs, and all the pages of mythology, war, peace and death are the most comprehensive illustration we have of their culture, and therefore of their intelligence. From the scroll-work of leaves and boughs, from the forms of animals which are represented on the frames of doorways and almost everywhere, you guess how they loved the soil and its fruits, how they studied closely the great models found in the forests; and, by the way in which they co-ordinated each design with another and yet made almost every one different from the last, their great mastery of balance and their abundance of ideas. This is as evident in the apparent jumble of rooms and closets and recesses which really are all made on a definite and well thought-out plan. Also in this maze of erections they show their thoughts of complication and secrecy. The holy of holies is confusing with the austere walls, deprived of any ornament, probably to concentrate the mind on prayer and adoration; but it is absolutely dark, surrounded by equally gloomy passages and by a network of galleries, chapels and peristyles, almost as if they feared that the god could be reached too easily, or even that he would take flight if he were not hidden within the complexities of a labyrinth. Lastly, the towers with their decoration, astounding in its effect, are enough to give a true notion of their genius. There are more than fifty domes from about thirty-eight feet to fifty-five feet in height above the pavement of the galleries or gates which they crown, and all without an exception have again the four faces of Siva carved to form masks, touching each other by the lobes of their ears. They are so powerful, so "heroic," that the men who could mould such features must have possessed extraordinary energy and courage. In the face of peril

or in acts of vengeance they must have been terrible. The spirit of the Brahmines who lived in the Bayon must have been as implacable as that of the priests of Somnath, who, after the sack of their shrine, led the armies of the all-conquering Mahmud into the sandy deserts, having pretended to be guides, and, when tortured for treachery, laughed in their agony: "We have led the spoilers of temples, the slayers of cows astray in the wilderness, and here shall their bones whiten, to tell how the Great God was avenged."

It is with such works that the cruelty of a race is perceived. . . . No men who did not have bloodthirsty souls could have invented such a decoration. The Bayon resembles some foul hydra with all these heads, and so far no Heracles has been found who could cut them off at a blow. The horrors of invasion have passed over Angkor, vegetation has tried with its roots, lianas and branches, nature attempted with its winds and its rain, to destroy the domes, but although some have crumbled to the dust, although others are tottering, enough of them remain to give the impression of rocks emerging from the waves formed by the innumerable roofs of the galleries.

vii

Formerly the four-faced towers were supposed to represent Brahma, and a certain legend would make this fact particularly appealing.

I stopped facing one of these giants, with lips as sensuous as those of the most self-indulgent creature, with full cheeks which spoke of passion and eyes that seemed to glitter with desire.

These masks could have been a happy illustration of the myth explaining why Brahma became four-faced.

The god, once upon a time, was deeply plunged in meditation, motionless, mumbling his prayers with lips parted and downcast eyes. . . . All his thoughts were in

a land of ideals and virtue, his soul had altogether departed from all *terre-à-terre* beliefs. . . . His smile was gentle, his eyelashes cast long shadows over his cheeks, his ears were shut to all outward noises, his lids lowered to all outside spectacles. . . . What greatness there was in this figure, silent and cold as stone, yet full of the highest thoughts and of the greatest conceptions. It seemed that nothing could stop for an instant the flight of his soul upon the path of virtue and inner happiness.

It was rare that man, genie or god could find pleasure in inmost purity ; it was rare that man, genie or god discovered that the greatest joy resided in moral meditation. Yet Brahma was no doubt the most enviable of beings as he sat praying, holding between his fingers the beads of an amber rosary. First men stopped to watch him, stood still for a long time, then went away marvelling at the strength of the god, who had then only one face like them ; two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and one mouth had so far been quite sufficient for all his wants. Later on animals, reassured by the immobility of this strange being, sniffed at his clothes, turned around him ; a jackal even bit his toes, but with no effect ; a tiger roared just behind his back ; an eagle landed on his crown ; lizards crawled over his arms, and a woodpecker, believing him to be nothing but a log, tapped on his chin to see whether a caterpillar would emerge from the nape of his neck ; butterflies fluttered near his ears, and a field-mouse began to build a nest in his lap. But Brahma did not stir ; his skin had not the slightest quiver ; his thoughts did not wander for one moment from his prayers ; for you must, according to religious laws, stay motionless whilst meditating.

The god's position had remained unchanged for hours, and then for days, and then for months ; his hair had grown long, and his nails were crooked like claws ; he seemed rooted, and, whether under rain or sunshine, his

limbs and body did not show uneasiness ; during the greatest storms his head did not stoop, when the thickest oaks had to acknowledge the power of the Marus with bows, or else fall, broken at their base.

For how long would he have crouched imbued in prayer no one could tell, as he did not betray the least weariness.

Winter had come, and on the field where Brahma sat, at the foot of the Himalayas, snow fell abundantly and covered the grass, the branches and the god with a mantle of shining white. . . . Yet not a shiver ran through his veins, not a shudder told that he felt the biting cold. Gradually as the flakes fell thicker and thicker not a thing in all the region kept its natural colour ; slowly every tint from the brightest blue to the most violent red, from jet-black to gaudy orange, lost its peculiar appearance ; each one blended like the colours of the spectrum into white, the most dazzling, the purest white. Animals themselves, or at least those that remained, took the virginal hue and the hair of foxes and ermines, the feathers of some birds were blanched . . . and all was white ; even the dark leafage of pines had to abandon its gloomy green ; the few flowers that could grow in this temperature were white ; the sky, the earth were white ; water had turned into ice . . . and the curious effect of all this whiteness was that nothing seemed to possess shape, nothing could be distinguished from the rest, and indeed soon nothing seemed to exist. Brahma opened his eyes and saw nothing. As the pure sight under his gaze did not disturb his prayers he did not close them again. He looked, but he could believe that he was in a cloud or a fog, as neither men nor beasts nor objects stood out from the white gloom.

It was at this time that Tilottama, stepping over the frozen earth, discerned her god, deeply thinking under ice and snow. But she was also robed in white, a mantle of white silk on her head, a shawl of white cashmere on her

shoulders, and Brahma did not see her more than the whitened trees, or the whitened mountains and streams. She seemed to be an unsoiled, ephemeral spirit walking on an unsoiled, ephemeral planet. She, and the hills, and the woods, and the plains around her were invisible to any eyes, and the motionless god remained undisturbed. The girl at last stood still before him, then slowly took off her veils and garments. As she unfastened a buckle of ivory her robes fell suddenly to the ground and revealed to the eyes of Brahma a dream in flesh, a hope realised, an inexplicable incarnation of the utmost loveliness. At first, dazed by the eternal white rays, he merely noticed a blur, a spot of darkness rising from the snow ; then he saw the most beautiful woman, and, however intent he had been on thoughts of righteousness, he could not take his gaze away from the charming form. All his ideas of meditation flew away from his brain like a troop of unpleasant crows ; but he had just recommenced a long incantation and he had yet to stay motionless, according to law, till he had finished hymns and religious songs.

Tilottama was standing as an idol of burnished gold, for her skin had that delightful dark hue which at first attracted the notice of the god. Indeed it could be understood why Brahma had forgotten his ideals of thought when he saw that ideal of flesh. The features of the girl had been created in the rarest mould : a mouth as bright and fresh as a lotus bud besprinkled with dew ; cheeks full and round, with a delicate colouring of blood appearing under the surface, which was as smooth as silk ; a small chin with a dimple at its base, as if ready to receive a drop of rose water or a kiss ; hair, black like the fur of otters and trailing on the ground like the train of a queen—and then—two eyes, blacker than the hair, blacker than night, blacker than doom, in the centre of which two spots of gold shimmered : the sparks of a fire of beauty, stolen from the treasures of the goddess of love.

This head made of the gems of womanly charm was merely the crown of a figure made of the jewels of feminine loveliness. Forms exquisite and glorious. How fair was Tilottama ! What grace was hers !

All at once she dropped her brow, lifted her knee and started to dance a pradakshina with undulating movements and supple torsions. She trod softly over the earth and so lightly that no marks were left on the snow ; she took a step forward, then one back ; she raised her toes and touched them with her fingers ; she flung one arm to the right and pulled it back as an invitation ; her neck bent back ; her lips opened to show pearly teeth and a small tongue impertinently pointed. Her pupils went from one corner of her eyes to the other in languishing appeal ; her eyebrows contracted, a wrinkle crossed her forehead, then vanished in a smile ; her tresses trailed on her shoulders and breasts, and she would resolutely throw them back in the wind, emphasising the modelling of her limbs. She turned round the god, slipped behind his back, came later with a pace more lascivious. She ran, seemed to stumble, almost touched the ground with her elbow, but in a natural effort, unnatural in its case, rose again like a reed when the breeze has stopped. She flew like a wraith, jumped, whirled, laughed. She danced like Salome must have danced, and Brahma, like Herod, was vanquished. Each time when she disappeared behind him he desired to turn his head, but he would not break the rules of religion ; he cursed inwardly, but knew that he could not move ; he hurried his prayers, but still he had many to say before being able to rise and clasp the tantalising girl in his arms. He followed her with ravenous gaze as long as he could, almost forcing his eyes out of their sockets, but she was soon again invisible behind his back, and he would boil with anger until she appeared once more on the other side. The circle where she danced was now cleared of snow, and wild hyacinth and iris grew

under her feet ; she was ever more beautiful, ever more joyful, ever more exhilarating. Greatly amused at the vexation of the god when she went out of the field of his vision, she would muse, roguish and frolicsome, coming so near that Brahma could feel her breath passing like a burning simoom of temptation.

This, however, could not last, and he soon smiled ; all the gloomy expression of annoyance leaving his features. . . . Tilottama came in front of him, and then went to his left, but . . . lo . . . as soon as his two eyes could see her no longer another face appeared on that side of his head ; as she went behind, a third face was there and two more eyes to gaze at her ; lastly, a fourth took shape on the right side of the god's head ; he assumed his name of Chaturmukha, the four-faced, and could finish his prayers at leisure, without missing a single gesture of the delightful dancer.

Yes, it could be thou, Brahma, whom I now see in this temple of Cambodia ; it would be thine eyes that ache for the forms of a woman ; it could be thy mouth craving for the kiss of a girl. . . . And who knows that the ghost of Tilottama, dancing with the same voluptuousness, does not come to haunt the dream of all these stone colossi when they feel lonely and forlorn ?

CHAPTER IV

THE BAS-RELIEFS OF THE BAYON AND THEIR MERITS,
ARTISTIC AND ETHNOGRAPHICAL—THE ANCIENT CHAMS
—POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION OF THE CARVINGS

i

IN the whole of Cambodia there are only three temples, which possess an immense series of bas-reliefs: the Bayon, Banteai Chma, some eighty-five miles north of Battambang, and Angkor Vat. The first two are earlier than the third. I have not seen Banteai Chma, but I shall attempt to give an idea of the Bayon's admirable panels.

The style of the sculpture is naturally primitive, and, as in all ancient arts, many conventions replace lacking knowledge. For instance, a river is represented by two parallel lines sweeping downwards, between which many fish are carved; seas or great lakes are similarly reproduced without the lines; the size of important persons is made in proportion to their rank; the defeat of a chief is shown by the broken shafts of his parasols. Perspective was an unknown science, and the different planes are placed one above the other, usually separated by horizontal lines.

Yet, in spite of these naïve defects, the sculptors were so scrupulous, so attentive to every detail, they so desired their meaning to be understood that they have reached an extraordinary standard of perfection. Some scenes are so life-like and so true that one cannot believe that the men who used rough tools to fashion these wonders had not previously made sketches during their rambles. Everything they wished to convey is as intelligible as if

they had supplemented the figures with complete inscriptions, and this is, no doubt, what they were particularly ordered to achieve. The carvings were most likely, like the "Bible of Amiens," to be comprehended by illiterate plebeians, or even by equally ignorant nobles who desired their deeds and beliefs to be preserved from oblivion. It can be gathered that the artists had a strong love for their work, since nothing seems to be hastily outlined or reluctantly fashioned. Most of the scenes have a precious finish, and one can well imagine, years ago, the Khmer sculptors, in great numbers, filling the vast cloisters with the bangs of their mallets and chisels, with the dust of scraped stone, and stepping back from time to time to see the effect of their toil. Moreover they were all, no doubt, under the supervision of a supreme overseer and master, who, like Phidias in the Parthenon, walked everywhere and added a touch of his genius to the achievements of lesser craftsmen. . . . The entire series, which stretches for over half-a-mile, reveals a startling evenness of merit.

The scenes are not finished everywhere; sometimes a whole row of figures is missing, at other times they are only roughly hewn; and this cannot be the result of the capital falling into foreign hands. The temple was begun in the ninth century and Angkor was not definitely abandoned by the Khmers before the end of the fourteenth; so the cause is rather the death of a king, either Yaçovarman himself or one of his immediate successors; and when another emperor came to the throne he wanted the skill of the sculptors to be used on works which would perpetuate his own glory. But we cannot be sorry for the neglect, because the Bayon, as it stands, is the achievement of one generation, and at that perhaps the worthiest. Besides, the method of working can easily be detected: the stones, somewhat polished, were placed in their definite position, and thereon the sculptors lavished their dexterity; they did not at once sketch in the whole composition, but

mostly finished row after row, often beginning several figures at once, but rarely starting on different parts of the wall. When they had sketched out the drawing of persons, beasts and objects in deep, incisive and clear lines, they cut out to a depth of about three-quarters of an inch all the portion which was to be left as background, and then they rounded the remaining surface with unerring blows of the chisel, with broad touches that prove their sureness of hand, and they made it yield at their will all the beauty it possessed. They appear to have been confident in their cleverness, and nowhere can a corrected mistake be found. It is impossible to know whether they had cartoons which they copied, but it is probable ; if not, one ought to notice hesitations and fumbings which are nowhere evident.

ii

Arriving at the eastern gateway of the first storey I turn to the right and walk along the loquacious walls, following them in their entirety. The scenes seem to unroll under my gaze with absolute clarity.

An army is marching ; with their close-cropped hair and peculiar features the soldiers can be recognised as Khmers. They advance in order, lances leaning on their shoulder, and shields, long, rectangular, pointed at the top, resting on their left arm ; but they seem tired and their knees are slightly bent. Passing in a wood some turn round and talk—unseemly act if they were going to battle—one even drinks from a bulky vase. They return from victory, and the birds in the branches add their twitter to the rumble of the happy horde.

Danger, however, is near ; a mahout has seen something suspicious and directs the attention of his master with his goad ; another urges on with vigour the great animal he rides. After a short suspense the army comes across dead bodies, whose features are distorted and

ghastly. . . . Now on the alert the soldiery brandish their weapons. An officer on horseback, galloping to the rear, orders a movement ; he is promptly obeyed, and infantrymen run to reinforce the vanguard. An ambush was prepared by the enemy, but, undismayed, the Cambodians defend their lives by a dashing charge ; elephants canter, chiefs shoot arrows and come in contact with their opponents, Cham troops, who are identifiable by the strange helmet they wear, in the shape of a flower, with its petals covering brow and ears. At their sight the Cambodians become vicious ; catching their foes by the neck they pierce their eyes with lances, they tear them limb by limb ; they rush impetuously and the rows of Chams begin to retire. The retreat soon turns into a rout, pursued by the terrible warriors, who, with thrusts and blows, make frightful carnage. The Cham standards fall, the parasols of their generals are broken ; one of the latter tries to pull out in agony an arrow from his cheek ; others in howdahs, plated with iron, strike the mahouts, who in turn prick the elephants. The beasts thunder past, but not fast enough to escape the angry arrows that fall as thick as rain from the sky. The Cambodian elephants, maddened by the din, the fury, the slaughter that have free scope over the battle-field, take hold of dozens of spears in their trunks and break them ; then they rush towards their cousins of the enemy camp. At the end of the panel fresh Cham regiments come to help their unhappy comrades, but what undisciplined troops compared with the martial Khmers ; they march heavily in a disorderly crowd ; they hold their weapons clumsily and the horsemen do not know how to ride. As can only be expected, they will have no more luck than their predecessors, and the first ranks are already shattered by a single cavalry officer, accompanied by one pikeman.

At last the Homeric struggle is ended and the victors return.

And episode follows episode, all of great merit, both artistically and historically. The entire habits of the great nation, of which only these ruins remain, live once more, live eternally on the long surfaces of sandstone ; but a faithful account of every detail would impart monotony, since the expression, the movement, the very charm of all figures cannot be grasped as on the spot. I have tried to convey a notion of the continuity of the scenes and of the interpretation that can be given to any portion of the designs, but it will obviously be better to study the sculptures more generally, beginning with the illustrations of the higher castes.

iii

The emperor is often met in different acts of his life, and he always has been given a truly aristocratic demeanour ; even in exuberant actions he retains an aloofness, almost a nonchalance, which many European *grandeės* would envy. It is again a fact which makes one marvel : the artists have been able to express, by subtle variations, impossible to put down as mannerisms, the differences of birth and social rank ; the increase in size already aided their thought, but they have remarkably differentiated the gait of commoners from that of patricians. When they drew peasants they rendered their gestures awkward, as if impeded by the practice of handling heavy tools and stooped by the habit of bending low down in front of their lords, whereas the latter are lofty and grand in their every movement.

The king always wears a *mukuta* and heavy jewellery. His breast is bare, or covered with a short coat, or in war-time with a square breast-plate. Thrice he is represented fighting animals, unarmed.¹ The first time the prince,

¹ It is not absolutely certain whether the tall figures represent a monarch, but they have no insignia of divinity except, in one case, a frontal eye, which could mean *Siva* ; yet as that god is always shown with a

surrounded by many attendants, holders of sunshades, is in a life-and-death grapple with a huge python, which has entwined its slimy body round his shoulder and legs ; but he is already getting disentangled with both hands and crushes the serpent's neck with his foot.

Farther away he strikes an elephant to the ground, in the presence of numerous parasol and fan bearers. The contest is nearing to a close ; the elephant, one hind leg seized as in a vice by the noble's wiry fingers, cowers, afraid of the blow which it soon will receive. Finally, the same king assails a lion with equal success. He has passed his right leg behind the animal's back and breaks its spine by bending back the hideous head with his right fist.

Now, if we read the inscriptions left by Yaçovarman we shall notice that he repeatedly boasts therein of his colossal physical strength. " With the arrows which his left hand sends, as well as his right, he gained victories. With a single blow of his sword he broke in three pieces a thick and hard bar of copper. With his left arm only he has killed an elephant in the rutting season, as if he desired to ridicule the lion, which, to kill the elephant, needs both its front paws."

It is possible that the glorious monarch we see everywhere, young, elegant, courageous and mighty, is no other than the famous founder of the temple. In sculpture, to be shown aiming arrows, even with the left hand, would not prove rare skill ; breaking a bar of copper with a sword would be similarly unconvincing ; but killing an elephant with the mere power of muscular arms gives an idea of immense strength ; and to emphasise his scorn of lions

small beard, holding a trident, riding on Nandin, or with his sakti on his knee, well, always clearly impersonated, the third eye may here be only the proof that the emperor was Sivaic. At any rate many details tend to demonstrate that it is a king and not a deity whom we see struggling against fierce beasts.



FIG. 10. YAÇOVARMAN II(?) FIGHTING A LION

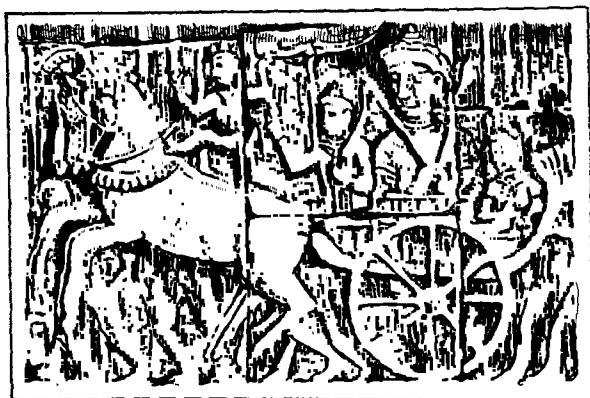


FIG. 11. HORSE CHARIOT

the prince slays one in the same way. Therefore this Hercules, this figure which repeats the valorous deed of the Assyrian Guilgamech, is probably the brightest and most interesting of Khmer monarchs.

Palaces with aerial roofs and square columns reveal assemblies of women and courtiers beyond drawn curtains. The princesses gather in pavilions and, ever feminine, carefully arrange their hair and necklaces, pour perfumes on their shoulders or look complacently in mirrors. Their pleasures were numerous; they went for long rides in chariots, or else for journeys on the rivers in canoes provided with cabins, and followed by simpler barges in which musicians played soft tunes to lull the royal passengers. The exhibitions of jugglers and acrobats were fashionable among the nobility, and the parks were stocked with tame animals. Some of these beasts, to say the least, bore a dangerous appearance; not only were does, stags, cranes, otters, dogs, rabbits and monkeys entrusted to the care of keepers, but even rhinoceroses and tigers. It seems, however, that the most popular spectacle was that provided by the graceful dancing girls.

The decorators of the Bayon took obvious pleasure in rendering the luxury of the aristocracy; yet the more modest classes of the empire appealed no less to their interest. It is peculiarly charming that much of the wall surface was reserved to immortalise the *faits et gestes* of those castes which form the backbone of a nation. It is equally eloquent in showing that the emperor and the Brahmines exactly valued the importance of the common people. Only where and when the working classes were understood could they be found on works of art. No such scenes are ever met in Assyrian bas-reliefs, and the brothers Le Nain were despised in the seventeenth century.

Much has been said about the cruelty of the reigning classes in Cambodia, and although it is no doubt correct

in warfare for slaves, in justice, or as regards the grandees who could possibly become the creators of disturbances, the people must have enjoyed a great amount of freedom and security ; otherwise one could not explain why the ministers of Siva would have allowed a part of their idol's dwelling to be degraded by the figuration of despised folk.

Every scene relating to the existence of plebeians has a delightful simplicity. The men, women and children are, like those we see at the present day, toiling in the rice-fields and villages. The greatness of the royalty and aristocracy having vanished, their members cannot be as real to us as the humble natives, whom we can easily place as the ancestors of the modern Cambodians. The rough human beings, in the attitudes of their everyday life, are exactly the same in face, carriage and clothing as the coolies who are standing close to them, carrying hatchets, and ready to cut a passage in the bushes for me.

I have peeps into the private and public life of the commoners : now girls play with children ; now a man is having his head scratched by his wife ; now do we see the hubbub of market-places petrified, now the movement of enormous field-kitchens. Everyone who has travelled in the East knows what a native market is like—the chattering, the cackling, the howling emerging from human lips, birdy beaks and puppish jaws. Michelangelo's remark when gazing at Ghiberti's *St Mark* : "Speak," need not be repeated here ; the busy throng of happy sellers and buyers does not only speak, it shouts, and a deaf visitor would not be surprised, I fancy, if a friend closed his palms over his ears. Near the kitchens men tear down branches and kindle fires, on which are placed enormous round saucepans ; cooks and scullions and roasters run everywhere, come to the pots with empty trays and go back with them piled with food ; they rush in apparent confusion, fry maize, plunge a whole pig in boiling water, arrange fruit or vegetables on flat dishes. Not far away,



FIG. 12. TREASURE BOX

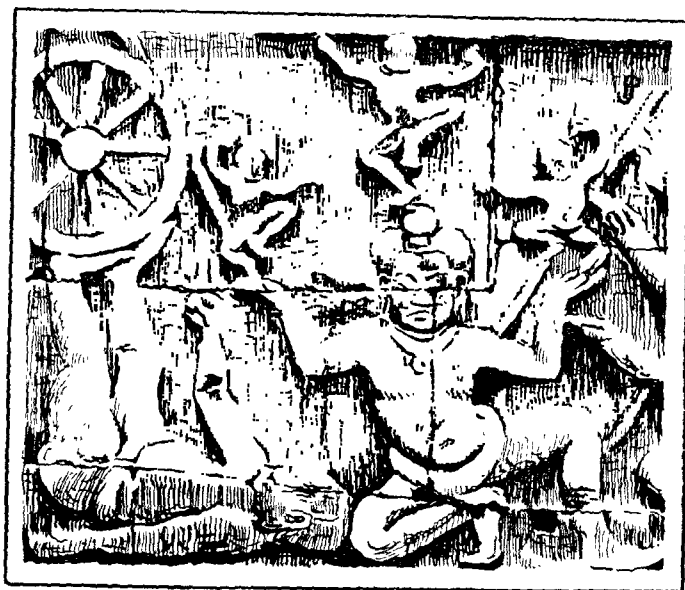


FIG. 13. JUGGLERS

under a tent, coolies sit in small groups of four or five and eat greedily. All this takes place in the shade of a forest. Two gorgeous peacocks, with necks gracefully bent, proud heads and trailing tails, rest in the company of squirrels and of a whole troop of monkeys, which gambol joyfully and look down curiously on the creatures beneath that resemble them in shape but have strange ways and cannot approach them in agility. It is, in fact, the Cambodian woods as they are to-day. The artists, not content with displaying their knowledge of human manners, give to the beasts their real ways—the haughty peacocks lifting up their aigrette of small feathers; the squirrels cocking up their pointed ears, ready to leap; and the monkeys running about on all-fours and making great fuss under the leafy screen; one even is searching for the fleas of its mate, which docilely lies on its back. The realism of every detail is astonishing, and the quality of truth added to those of imagination and poetry could not fail to create masterpieces.

Cooks and tradesmen are not the sole actors on the Bayon's stage. Builders are engaged in felling trees, raising walls and balustrades, smoothing stones by means of simple machines, and in pulling a ponderous monolith on which stands the architect, fat and angry. Fishermen in small boats are fruitfully occupied, and it will not be long before their baskets are full. Stately Chinese junks float between them, bringing goods from distant lands, and crocodiles in the water partly rob man of his prey. Gamblers eagerly await the result of pig or cock fights, and faithful subjects in long processions take numerous offerings to stately shrines. Among the pedestrians bullock carts contain pilgrims of higher rank, preceded by slaves carrying sunshades, but no single figure is more pleasing than the happy father with two children on his shoulders, one on his arm, and with the last and smallest desperately clinging to his belt and complaining bitterly

at the injustice of having to walk. The good peasant has a kindly smile, which speaks of unbounded patience, and no paintings or sculptures can be more touching. We have here an immortal proof of the pure qualities the Cambodian possessed. When you also remember the reproductions of sweet women, caressing grim soldiers or nursing babies, you will no longer doubt that, in spite of their savagery, the Khmers were not insensible to the soft pangs of the heart, and that children and women were loved and respected.

The priests, it is stranger to notice, were not similarly honoured, and whenever the artists could place them in ridiculous positions they did so. The Brahmines and anchorites, dressed very sparingly indeed, are always thin, ugly, weak and cowardly. How often are they found scrambling up trees at the approach of a panther when other woodmen quietly continue to gather wood or fruit ! In one case a sensual hermit has come to the edge of the water and sneakingly spies at bathing maidens. I am inclined to laugh at these caricatures, but I ought to remember that caricature is generally a sad thing ; it is human grandeur depreciated ; it is the loftiness of the soul violated ; it is genius made laughable. Caricature does not only exist in an engraving or a book ; it is there pathetic in its bathos under our very steps, under our eyes. Caricature is what is shapeless and paltry in life ; it is a hunched back, a splay-foot ; it is the barrel-organ, throwing into the ears of passers-by a flood of notes, gay supposedly, but which, through the pity of it, find the same path to our feelings as the most lugubrious of thoughts ; it is the clown drowning in antics the struggle and terror of his life. Caricature is a kind of vengeance which sadness takes upon pleasure ; it is sorrow ironically assuming the garbs of gaiety. Beneath the reproductions of hectic priests and flabby architects one discovers the tears which they caused the miserable slave-artists to

shed, slaves and artists who instilled much of their hatred and rancour into these forms.

Siva, in shrines or in episodes of his legend, is of course seen a thousand times, and on many walls he coolly witnesses the battles of life of which he is the creator.

iv

What flashes on the mind, however—nay, what strikes it with unbounded force—is the feeling of awe that absorbed the attention of the designers when they had to satisfy all comers as to the martial spirit of the Cambodians. The Bayon was built at a time when struggles never stopped, were it civil war, conquest or defence against invading foes; the tread of armies was continually shaking the foundations of the town . . . the triumphs of victorious generals or the anxiety of departing forces continually making public feeling waver from hope to despair, from glory to gloom. Everything is silent round the temple now, but the blasts of trumpets, which disturbed the city eleven centuries ago, have an everlasting echo in the horns placed for all eternity on the lips of stone warriors. There were thousands of soldiers in Angkor-Thom; there are thousands at the present day, petrified in the huge fane. The first panels I came across dealt with combats, and many more as exciting in the tale they have to tell show the heroism of the formidable forces which kept under the yoke of their iron rule the vast plains encompassed by the mountains of Siam, China and Champa, and by the ocean.

I have already noted the soldiers, not very tall in stature, but broad-chested and muscular, with a very light sarong and ropes round their shoulders and over their breast. They have no headgear and their hair is cut short. Nearly always armed with lances or javelins they carry a long shield or else a small round one. The officers of lesser rank are either on foot or on horseback, and have

as a weapon a sort of narrow hatchet fastened at the end of a bamboo handle and which the woodmen still use and call "phkeak." Generals and princes ride on elephants, on which are fastened embroidered cloths and rich howdahs. Mercenaries or vassal tribesmen were incorporated in the armies ; they are distinguished by short beards, and some of them, at any rate, could be Chinamen with strange helmets, in layers and openwork.

War elephants had tiaras on their heads sometimes, or a cap in leather or other heavy material, in which two round holes were cut for the eyes. Horses were ridden without stirrups, and the saddle was a simple covering of wool or cotton. Standards and flags were very numerous and gorgeous, with dog-tooth edges, flaming pennants and complicated patterns ; some consisted of a small figure of Garuda, Vishnu on Garuda, a dancer, or yet a monkey, probably in bronze. Stout nets fastened to long staffs were carried before important nobles to stop arrows, stones and such light missiles.

This was not all, and by the inventions contrived for the army one perceives how very important fighting was—how it called upon the country's men, resources and intelligence. Some of the massive elephants carried a pair of baskets, in which two archers were posted—sharpshooters, no doubt, who from their elevated position could mark and slay commanders and nobles. Other elephants were loaded with heavy catapults, also worked by two men ; similar instruments, exactly like enormous crossbows, were rolled on wheeled barrows and probably used in sieges or for the defence of fortified camps. Perhaps the most ingenious device was thus composed : a platform provided with a step was raised on strong wheels and concealed behind an enormous shield, big enough to cover two warriors from head to foot ; these men stood on the platform, one foot on the step, ready to spring up suddenly, throw their javelins and drop once more behind



FIG. 14. COMMONERS



FIG. 15. A HAPPY
FATHER



FIG. 16. SOLDIERS CAPTURING A WILD BULL

the protective shield; their left hands were probably holding on to a bar of metal, which steadied their balance on rough ground. A few of their brothers-in-arms pushed the machine forward.

The splendid troops above described are very often found in fierce battles, and the courage they display is only what might be expected. In one case they are fighting rebels; the belligerents on either side have the same facial type and the same uniform. In the end the faithful soldiers bring back the heads of the revolted generals to an important Brahmine, possibly the king's guru. But to judge the full valour of the Khmers, as it is given us to understand by the Bayon's bas-reliefs, one must see them pitted against their hereditary foes, the Chams.

Before continuing it is perhaps time to say a few words about the latter.

Incessant campaigns and invasions have reduced this people almost to extinction; once the most dangerous adversaries of the Khmers, they now form the scanty population of a few villages at the southern extremity of Annam, and, strangely, one or two communities, expelled from their own lands, have taken refuge amidst the modern Cambodians and settled down, keeping themselves well separated, however, from the neighbouring natives, different in race and religion. They are Malays both in physical and moral characteristics, although their long exile from the parent stock has somewhat altered their appearance. At the present day they are slack, slovenly and have lost all their energy; they are bad agriculturists and worse in education, but their tall stature—above the average of Annamites and pure Malays—the *je ne sais quelle hauteur* with which they hold themselves up, well-set and proud, proves, as I also saw in the modern Khmer, that the wretches met in the provinces of Binh-Thuan and Phan-Rang, in hamlets near Kratié, are not the spent descendants of equally poor and

worthless savages. The ancient Chams were courageous beyond superiority, wilful beyond words, as can be gathered from a perusal of their own or enemy inscriptions and chronicles. The men who, time after time, repulsed the hordes of the Khmer emperors and, after routs which neared annihilation, were able to reconquer lost ground and even overrun large tracts of the enemy realms were no puppets and weaklings. Unhappily numbers, if overwhelming, will break the most glorious resistance, and whilst the Khmers, also exhausted, were trying in vain to crush the growing power of the Siamese, the Chams, after six centuries of gradual decay, found their kingdom wrested from their grasp by the yellow Annamites, and in despair lost their remarkable qualities : the sun of their glory had set.

Their degree of civilisation was similar, to a certain extent, to that of Angkor, although they certainly never reached its wealth, beauty and greatness. They were Brahmanical, and still retain this religion, modified and made yet more strange and impenetrable ; some of them have gone over to the Muslim faith, which never seems to have had any success on the shores of the Tonle-Sap. Their monuments are numerous and mark the country of Annam like the giant spur-posts of a departed world. They are nearly always single cells, tower-shaped and in brick or red stone, ornamented with heavy designs which entirely lack the freshness and suppleness of Khmer art, but have nevertheless a great deal of power. Sometimes they are gathered in a valley, site of a large town, and near them the usurpating Mongolians have built their pagodas, overgrown with dragons, flaming dogs and bearded lions ; and the little children look on the ancient walls that tower above the paternal cagnas and do not dream that the ignorant fellows in the south of their country, almost forgotten, once ruled over the fields in which they drive the grey buffaloes. Mi-Son, the old

capital, is the richest of those archæological relics, but taken together cannot be compared even to a temple of the second rank in or near the chief city of the former Cambodian empire. Others, all the same, have a peculiar beauty, given them by the landscape, which decks them with the green carpet of undergrowth, the emerald mantle of leaves and the blue crown of clouds. They sometimes stand on a high cliff over the Chinese Sea and then form the extinguished lighthouses of an extinguished culture; mariners see them from afar, beaten by tempests, standing silent and grim, above the surging and restless immensities of water; waves sputter, roar and howl; the sun sends its burning shafts, which gild and polish the stones; torn leaves turn round them like madcaps and shoot out towards the "large," like the dead thoughts of the dead temples; white and brown sails pass on the horizon in ever new continuity, and clouds float overhead in long processions.

Some of the shrines are in the hills that form a ring round the plains of Annam and stretch in dreary flatness, crossed by the mandarin roads. The inequalities of ground, rather similar to the *ballons* of the Côte d'Or, are covered with pine and dense jungle, and lead little by little to high mountains, where life is wild and untamed. The ways and lanes turn in many zigzags, cross many a copse, many a wood; in places they follow rivers which, like that of Hué, could all be called "rivers of perfumes," winding like ribbons of azure and silver. The name is poetic, but true. They are calm and flow between banks green with luxurious vegetation. In the neighbourhood of villages there are orange groves, plantations of marantas and ginger, slender arecas and dark banana-trees; everywhere else tall banyans and bo-trees, but chiefly pines, which shed their needles to form a slippery carpet under your feet. Yes, they are "rivers of perfumes," of the inexplicable perfumes of nature, of the flowers, of the jungle,

of the wild and of the beasts. In these forests the last bricks of Cham chapels crumble into dust. And in the high mountains which form a background to the flatness of fields and the low roundness of hill-tops a few are lost at the foot of enormous rocks or in ravines, only visited by gaurs and wild elephants. The country is beautiful, and its former inhabitants were worthy of it. The Cambodians were never able to crush them entirely; this task was left to be accomplished by the young and fresh invaders from the north, when the stars of the two old Indo-Chinese civilisations were on the wane.

It is therefore in the figuring of battles between the two most important powers of the peninsula at that time that the military greatness of the Cambodians can be fathomed. Two dauntless races were confronted and the ensuing combats were necessarily terrible and bloody. The Khmers are shown to advantage, and if we were to believe integrally their view of the contest their foes would cut a very poor figure. Always the assailants (except in one case), the former without losses or apparent difficulty mow down entire rows of quaking soldiery; nothing seems able to resist their onslaughts, and, although we should not positively accept the version of Cham faint-heartedness, we may with security imagine the ancient veterans under the masterly command of a Yaçovarman, as reckless, as mighty in muscles and courage as they are carved in the bas-reliefs.

The enterprises of these men were not confined to land; the sea formed a ready stage for war, but the fighting ships seem to have been more like transports for soldiers than truly constructed for manœuvres on the waves. Long galleys, with rows of oarsmen, have their decks covered with warriors, and the Cham ships are no match for them.

As I ponder over my acquired knowledge of the carvings I believe that they illustrate the history of Yaçovarman

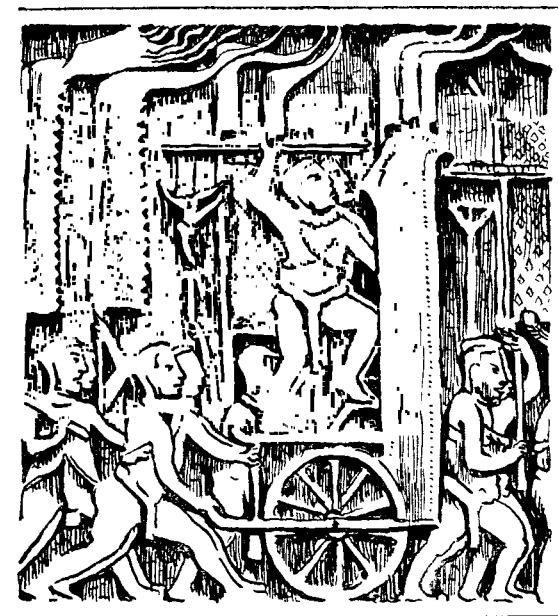


FIG. 17. WAR ENGINE AND STANDARDS

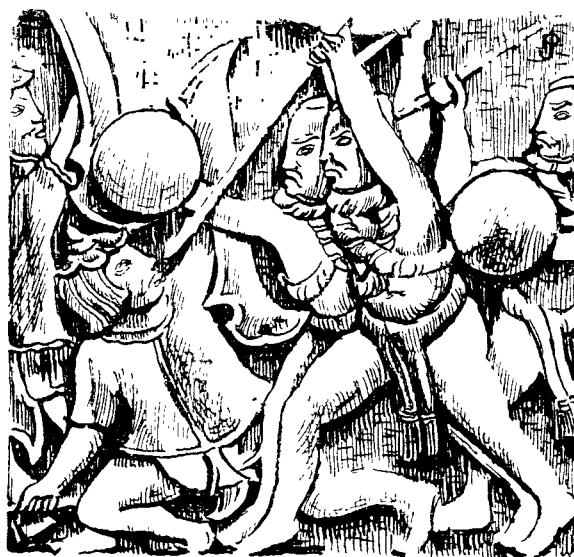


FIG. 18. KHMERS AND CHAMS

and of the subjects under his sway. It is a fact that no important event of his reign does not find its equivalent in the sculptures of the galleries. The emperor, shortly after his coronation, had to crush rebellions, and we have noticed struggles against rebels; later he won a great victory on sea over the Chams, and that we have also found. His many campaigns on land could not be more numerous than those on the stone; but remember especially that war when, victorious at first and then defeated and repulsed, the emperor could only crush the Chams as he reached Mount Trayacar; and I have seen only one panel (unfortunately very damaged) where the Khmers *do* for once retire before the Chams, and when they are coming to the slope of a mountain. Now it is only natural that a nation's pride should allow its victories to be perpetuated but not its defeats, and I could only discover this one proof of their failing. . . . If we reflect on it, however, we shall soon perceive that the retreat to Mount Trayacar was glorious, and a splendid effort of endurance and inflexibility, worthy to form a theme for one of the decorations. The great building activity of this epoch has its place among the carvings; and as for the emperor himself, who was extremely proud of his muscular strength, I have already dared to advance that he is met in the Bayon, using his prowess against an elephant, a lion and a snake. The temple was founded by this monarch, and although no inscription in Sanskrit or Ancient Khmer can irrefutably enforce my hypothesis, I believe it is founded on truth.

V

I would like to linger and study many more details, like that of the statue of a female deity wantonly attacked by vandals, who light fires near her pedestal, hammer at her head, dash against her their lances and try to break her arms, with the help of ropes and vigorous elephants. Yet

their fury is spent in vain ; the statue, tall and massive, bears the blows as only stone, bewitched stone, could ; and flying Apsaras hover in the sky like the angels of Christian pictures, bringing the laurel crown of martyrdom to tortured saints.

The figures appear to have revealed some of the secret of their origin. I have made a closer acquaintance, it seems, with the ancient grandees and pariahs, peasants and soldiers, but Nature calls me back and, looking over my shoulder at the vast forest, I feel drawn away : the appeal of the present surpasses for a moment that of the past.

CHAPTER V

A STORM—MORE REFLECTIONS ON THE BAYON'S SIGNIFICANCE—THE TOWERS OF FOUR FACES

i

STILLNESS is in and on all things. Warmth, coming from the sky of grey steel, rests on the earth like a heavy cloak, which enslumbers life under its folds. The motionless stones seem to have changed to their image every object surrounding them. My vision resembles some huge painting—of which I am but a speckly detail—as everything around me is petrified, like mere reproductions. The artist is God; the frame, all the immensity of the horizon; and the picture, what I see. Some instants, especially when one is solitary in a savage portion of the globe, take one's feeling of existence away. My steps, although I walk slowly and on tiptoe, are so noisy in the general dumbness that I stop, uncertain whether arms will not rise from the pavement to clasp my feet in a snare.

Statues, if they have a soul, as poets imagine, must be exactly like me in this state. The body, paralysed, is senseless; the thoughts are amazed. The brain is powerless to set the limbs in motion. . . . The eyes are open, the nose sniffs; yet it is fruitless to attempt to change one's position.

The blood of men and beasts stops. The sap of things flows no longer. A bird, perched at the end of a bough, remains still and seems to be a flower. Butterflies, wings closed, showing their brown sides, are like dead leaves posed at hazard. Pools of water without a ripple reflect the impassible skies.

The elements rest before the tempest, taking breath for their savage struggle, and there is uneasiness in the unknown. It is almost like the arrival of a knight in front of a lair in a desert. He feels the dragon which hides, but sees it not ; he feels the impending battle, and the noise of the conflict soon to be heard makes the present silence more oppressive.

The song is stopped in the throat of the lark, the howling in that of the jackal. A gag has been placed in the hundred mouths of Nature, and even the zephyrs cannot cause a leaf to tremble. The clouds have ceased their continual wanderings. Dust no more floats in the sun. The unfathomable jungle is spellbound. The wild beasts are asleep, the insects have ceased their work. Even hunger, which creates the movement of all creatures, leaves them in respite.

Suddenly, with no warning, the charm is broken. . . . Wind starts to blow strongly, making the bushes on the big heads wave like plumes on a hat ; the sky darkens. A troop of bullocks runs past, shaking its wooden bells ; a flight of shrieking parakeets crosses space, the advance-guard of the storm. A first peal of thunder, far away, is rolled by the echoes of the air. The wind grows in strength and the secular trees shudder with fear. A few drops of rain fall with a thud on the stones, and leave marks as big as pennies. A curtain is pulled over the sun ; verily, as if Nature had advanced night for a war of demons. All is dark and the earth is ready to form the stage of the tragedy. . . . I shall have the honour to be the only spectator of the scaring play. With elbows on knees, cheeks resting on hands, I wait like the famous Stryge of Notre-Dame, ever interested, gazing from the steeple over the city ; I gaze from the Bayon over the forest.

The thunder which pierced the air in separate roars is now a long and continual howling with rumbles of

deafening magnitude. The wind in hurricane pushes shapeless forms with its wings and growls in unseemly cries : the unknown noise made by Leviathans that have come down from the boundless immensity of the universe to grumble near the earth ; confused words hurled in imprecation ; some Hercules of the stars fighting some lion of the lower regions ; birds with brazen wings breaking trees with their feathers ; vultures of shadow looking for prey lost in this ebullition ; vast trouble created by unseen, cruel devils with the shapes of those that haunted the dreams of early Flemish painters, of Hieronymus Bosh, of Petrus Cristus, of Brueghel the Elder, passing in the nebulæ with eyes of fire, mouths from which emerge double tongues, as long and sharp as swords, bellies open in which crowd worms and lizards, with fangs armed with hooks, noses as long as trunks and tails like those of sharks, leaving dark trails of their passage, suddenly effaced by lightning, which glimmers, defeats the shadows crouching low, and flames like the eyes of a god sending death.

I listen ; I try to perceive some explanation of this chaos, I try to understand the vanishing shades which pass before me, ruffled. Dismal and grating sounds answer me ; lightning blinds me. These are voices beyond man, he cannot know their meaning. It is a first taste of our life after death ; hideous, hateful moments, giving us a glimmer of the torments of the damned. Capricious forces send you this first taste of the tomb. Souls pass over your head, and the rain which falls is their tears. They are the distracted bounds, the desperate bursts of immeasurable sadness falling from dead spirits above ; the souls pass and go, but there are always fresh sobs and fresh tears . . . dreadful vision of hell on earth.

The squall continues, ever tearing from the trees leaves, which disappear in whirlwinds, carried far, far out, lifted

in spasms, broken, pulled, imploring their return to the native trunks. Birds, terrorised, surprised on the wing by the tempest, remain for a second motionless ; using all their strength against the storm, but soon they are swept away, and speedily mix with the flying leaves.

Everything is snatched, wrested, wrenched, broken and floats in bunches over your head. Pebbles and blocks of stone are rolled on the ground, splashed with mud, covered by pieces of fallen bark, by dead grass and distorted lianas.

Thunder bursts like bombs thrown by armies of giants. Lightning, like golden scimitars, cuts and uproots five or six trees at a time, digging the glebe in deep holes, where underground beasts, moles and wood-lice, are confounded by this earthquake. The lofty timbers, when they fall, cleft and split, bring down many other trees and shrubs in their destruction, or else remain leaning, resting their bullied trunks on the thick branches of a friend.

From under the foliage a man hurries, his body scantily clad in broad banana leaves ; he runs, his naked feet plunging in the mire and soaked grass, his back bent, his head drooping ; the shower of water makes his skin shine like bronze. He sees a tall bo-tree and squats against it ; but the diluvian downpour gushes through the vault of green and splashes on his hair. . . . Hesitatingly he gets up again and vanishes in the mist.

Then a cart pulled by bullocks emerges along the road, which is more like a river now, the ruts changed into streams. The carriage toils heavily against the elements, its thick wheels sunk deep in the slime. The noise of the tempest is so great that I cannot hear the curses of the driver, a sturdy peasant, who has the greatest difficulty in maintaining the oxen on the path. Only fastened by the yoke, the poor ruminants, lashed and burned by the rain which pricks them like arrows, maddened, moreover,

by the roar of thunder and the flashes, which light the country from end to end and cause everything to appear bigger and ghastly under the yellow glare, bolt or stop suddenly, turn their cruppers outwards and catch their horns in the harness or in the rope pulling their nostrils. After a time, with the help of many blows, the driver leads them away, and once more I only see vegetation, stones, water and clouds, and only hear the concert of Nature's voices.

The strength of the storm subsides, thunder is now stifled like a distant call, and lightning only resembles the last sparks of a candle soon extinguished. But the rain continues and is drumming persistently, continually on the forests and the roofs. . . . Nothing can be as monotonous. . . . I am enclosed in a hall of crystal—water falls, falls, never stops. Branches sway under the weight, and their slender boughs bend so much that at every instant they are on the verge of snapping. Trees lower their arms, tired by their everlasting prayers to the sky.

At last a ray of light is able to pierce the clouds and the rain now forms many drops of sunshine breaking into a swamp. The heat slowly shapes a light mist. . . . The rain stops. I can still for a long time hear leaves and flowers dripping. Then birds and insects come out from their hiding places, and fill the temple with life. Corpses of unhappy butterflies and scarabs drift slowly in the current of narrow streams.

Later, in this land of magic, the sun drinks all humidity. . . . A few last drops roll slowly on the cheeks of the giant masks, which seem to weep silently.

ii

The weather being particularly cooled and refreshed after this shower, I wish to roam in the daedalus. . . . I am going down to the eastern terrace when some impulse

makes me turn round to enter within the precincts by the main entrance.

“This massy portal stood at the wide close
Of a huge hall, and on its either side
Two little dwarfs, the least you could suppose,
Were sate, like ugly imps, as if allied
In mockery to the enormous gate which rose
O’er them in almost pyramidic pride :
The gate so splendid was in all its *features*,
You never thought about those little creatures,
Until you nearly trod on them, and then
You started back in horror to survey
The wondrous hideousness of those small men,
Whose colour was not black, nor white, nor grey,
But an extraneous mixture, which no pen
Can trace, although perhaps the pencil may ;
They were misshapen pygmies, deaf and dumb. . . .”

Indeed I could make no truer description. “The massy portal” stands in “pyramidic pride” and crushes under its weight and height two chimpanzee-like buffoons, who are squatting down, it seems humbly, but in fact to spy, watch and listen. One difference there is all the same : Byron’s dwarfs are living beings, whilst these never were. They are statues, one leg lying flat on the soil, the other with knee lifted and sole fairly placed on the dust, and their right hands closed on their thighs, their left with palms upturned. Graced with mukutas, bracelets and ear-rings they set off, by the richness of jewels, the repulsiveness of bodies fit for carnivals, the antics of Punch or the sensuous court of some Semiramis. A hump is on their back, their chest laps over their wrinkled stomach ; they are neither “black, nor white, nor grey,” but with all these tints dappled on their skin ironically by time ; the spots of agile leopards on cripples, the blackness of majestic doom on ridiculous maggots, the whiteness of virginity on what is disgusting, and the greyness of fresh-born dawn on what is finished and decrepit.

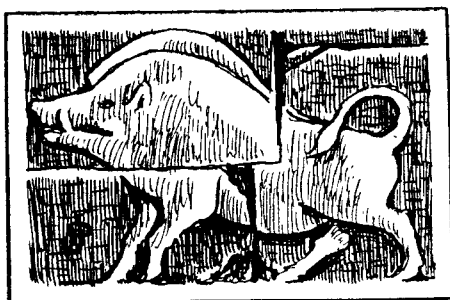


FIG 19. BOAR

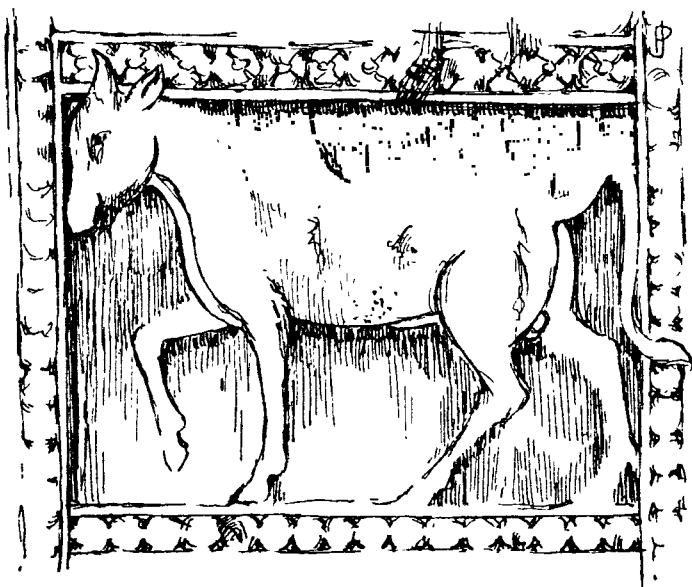


FIG. 20. BULL (GRAPHIC ON)

REFLECTIONS ON THE BAYON 121

Kala persisted in his hatred, and there is scarcely a thing left undone for their abasement ; half their faces are broken, their elbows are bruised ; through moisture they get mouldy, and through birds, filthy ; but if you look down, there are ashes of sticks of incense collected in tiny mounds.

How curious are all the rooms behind this doorway ! Porticoes are shut ; windows face walls raised a few inches away ; doors lead everywhere or nowhere ; passages end in blind alleys ; chapels are without altars ; columns are placed for no definite use, and bats, fluttering bats, pass from vault to vault, from chamber to chamber.

Somewhere natives have set up some planks, and, when I ask for them to be put aside, I find that they save unwary visitors from the abyss of a well of unknown depth. Its facings of stone fall vertically, and, what is strange, a very narrow and winding hole, broad enough to allow the arm to pass through, but some six or seven yards in length, connects it with an exterior gallery ; there, a stone from the bas-relief can be displaced and reveals the tortuous cavity. The pit could not have been for drainage, which is effected by discharging gaps concealed beneath the paving stones of courts or halls, and allowing rain water to flow from storey to storey down to the earth until it is at last vomited by spouts graced with ornaments of elephants, only the heads of which are rendered, seizing a crocodile by the tail : a motive of great beauty, with the curve of the trunk and of the sinuous form of the batrachian, and also well suited by its theme to the job allotted to it, since the crocodile is essentially an aquatic beast. But to return to our cistern. It is well within the bounds of possibility that it served as an oubliette. Consecrated to the "Maha-Deva" of the Hindu pantheon, the Bayon must have witnessed acts of great cruelty, and human sacrifices were probably not rare, especially after a fruitful campaign,

when foreign princes and chiefs were executed and offered to the gods as means of propitiating them. Adults and children, immolated near the lingas, were given in exchange for the idol's benefactions; nay, a peasant points out to me that, if the hole pierced in the thickness of the walls were too small to offer passage to a man, this is not the case for the slender body of a snake. What an appalling drama is then set forth before my eyes; and it is no wonder that I lean over the gloomy well with a sort of weakness, and that I draw back with a sigh—sigh for all the atrocities cloaked under the name of religion.

Horrid sanctuary of religious infamy, if your stones could speak they would have the worst of tales to relate: the pale captive dragged to the edge of the pit and thrown in; the swinging doors closed with a thud, making the torches of guards flicker unsteadily; then the agony of the wretch, with one leg or both shattered by his fall, the famine, the damp, the rats and worms . . . lastly, after a few days, the slimy cobra introduced by the long hole, shut once more by some detail of the carving and invisible to the non-initiated; the perfect foulness of the final torture of half-paralysed flesh; the bite, the poisoning, the death in horrible pains.

iii

Did all this really happen in the pit? Is it mere imagination? But at least, as I leave that spot, my heart is saturated with disgust, and I can see nothing but baseness and depravity in the temple.

Almost every stone of it is carved and hollowed with designs; sometimes a wall which has slipped down reveals some recess formerly concealed from human eyes, yet having volutes of leaves covering its sides . . . but did not Siva, like Argus Panoptes, possess a hundred eyes or more, which, like those of the mythical lynx, could

THE TOWERS OF FOUR FACES 123

pierce walls and night? And what would he have thought if they had not made his habitation as luxurious as possible?

Moreover all the flourishes of the carvings seem to be somehow pervaded by the abominable badness of the last member of the Trimurti. Idols stand adored by human-bodied monsters with heads of vultures, chimeras or serpents, their vile figures contrasted with those of dainty women holding lotus-buds delicately. All round, the dragon's face of Rahu is the centre of waves of entangled foliage, flowing like blood from his mouth. On the crests of roofs lines of ascetics meditate; false windows are sculptured with half-drawn blinds, and make you believe that some sneaking genie is watching behind the lace; false doors make you think that they close the access to sanguinary retreats; Nagas spit garlands, and the stones are cold in the shadow and burning in the sun.

But what ever call you by a stealthy spell are those fifty-two towers whose domes look towards the four cardinal points of the compass with the pupils of enormous masks; you are followed by the gaze of cold eyes, spying at you through a crack in a vault, half-hidden by the trunk of a tree or by the wind-swept foliage, forming high above you an assembly of gods.

The first idea that comes to the mind is one of curiosity as to how the Cambodians conceived and modelled the faces of Siva. The lord of destruction who so dominated their spirits, who was so dangerous and so fierce, could, it is fancied, be imagined as a bloodthirsty, grimacing Titan. Especially after the views we have had of the lions, Nagas and such devilish beasts who possess bristling whiskers, rolling eyes and threatening rictus, it is only natural for us to expect the Sivas to have yet more monstrous countenances and horrifying features. Indeed, with a vague remembrance of Tibetan images, what can we not foreshadow? . . . Will we see incongruous fiends,

some counterpart of the eight Dharmapalas? Will the resident power of the Bayon have, like Beg-Tse or Ts'angpa, a fat, wrinkled, half-decomposed nose, red temples and glaring orbits? Will his hair fly upwards in sparks, will he have bones and skeletons dangling from his neck, and will his diadem be formed of dripping scalps? Will we see him devouring mangled limbs? . . .

No; the Cambodians were too great artists, too clever masters, to have recourse to such obvious and paltry means of striking imaginations with fear. They have given the temple an atmosphere of groping ghastliness, of perfect hellishness, by the tranquil smile of the two hundred and eight heads surrounding you in their snare of gruesome calmness.

You are not met with wild savagery but with refined cruelty. The smile of Siva slowly and surely makes you quake. It is not a fiendish scream, at the sound of which your hair stands on end suddenly but which also gives you an immediate consciousness of your peril; it is a snake-like, crawling, surreptitious sensation which soon spreads through your soul. It is not the grim leap of a wave that drowns you in one gulp; it is the dreadful and hopeless sucking of quicksands. It is not the one blow that kills; it is the long torture that steals your life by tearing an atom of flesh every few minutes. The faces could best be compared to those of a Chinese torturer, rejoicing more in the expectation of your pain than in the actual vision of your flowing blood.

No better mask can be put on to a face than that of a smile. Slightly curving lips, eyes placed in shadow by the lowered lids utter not a word and yet force you to guess much. Certain smiles can mean everything, but never say it frankly. Naturally I do not pretend that a child's smile, or even that of some men and women are not plain and hearty; but I am now thinking of the expression of some Monna Lisa or complicated offspring

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of civilisation and learning. Primitive and simple creatures cannot smile enigmatically; it is only those beings who, knowing much and scorning more, hide their ideas behind layers of refinement. Great knowledge imparts great contempt, great scepticism, in many cases deep-rooted misanthropy, and all *that* is enforced in a smile.

Smile, and you will never be known. . . . Smile, and you will keep to yourself the depth of your own self. . . . Smile, and others shall have some dread of you, in their complete ignorance of your powers of love or hatred. . . . Smile and be a microcosm of God; for what is God, but mystery?

God, mystery . . . parallel words, both carried to your heart by one glance cast at a single gigantic head. Godliness in the majesty and the size; mystery in the expression; both oozing like moisture from it. If you look at the idol attentively the arc of the lips will seem to become more accentuated and the dents at the corners of the eyes to deepen. The divine irony that is found in him for a moment rapidly changes into passion or forgetfulness as your own thoughts wander. He has power over all; no one can face him with indifference or, however cloyed, help being struck by some novel freshness and distant glow of spiritual existence.

One finds at one time that he has the disturbing sneer of sadism, at another the chilling disdain of overwhelming superiority, or else the annoying hypocrisy of absolute egotism. Always, however, pure goodness is non-existent, and one feels that his ideas can only range between controlled wildness and unlimited culture of evil.

And I ponder over the unsolvable riddle hidden within the brain of this old sphinx of another nation. Unlike Oedipus I am not faced by a nervous beast, half-woman and half-griffin, who stops travellers to test their cleverness by the enigma she asks them to penetrate, and who

in her spite and hysterical fit at finding a peer, throws herself over a precipice. I do not wish to fly away like the shepherd in Ingres' painting, nor to be as familiar as the son of Jocasta who, quietly leaning forward and with a finger interrogatingly outstretched, talks with the monster as with an inquisitive friend, his self-assurance not a whit confused by the presence of whitening ribs and half-devoured limbs. Neither spurned nor attracted, I waver between retreat and approach.

The colossal head is no more similar to the great sculptured rock of Egypt which stands near the Pyramids like a faithful dog set to watch the massive piles by some Lycurgus and, bound by a vow, almost sunk in the sand dunes of the desert, bears the attacks of ages with unflinching patience. . . . The great Siva is not as passive and not as solitary in a boundless emptiness. The forest is not as peaceful as the Sahara, and the god not as inert as the neighbour of Cheops' tomb.

He is more a sphinx who has returned from a journey among the mortals, who has attempted vainly to find a wit equal to his own, and, finally resting in his lair, dozes in boredom and forced inactivity—ready, however, to spring up once more and make another visit to the earth. Or perhaps one that has not as yet started on his voyage, and broods over the puzzling conundrum which is to baffle the understanding of sages.

I am hypnotised like a poor dove caught by the piercing eyes of a python ; I am stupefied and retained by invisible cords to this spot of ground. . . . Able to glance in all directions I see, like a drunkard, my vision repeated everywhere. I turn about, to the right and to the left, but always meet enormous masks, and am gripped by their silence, throttled by my own anxiety. Not one sphinx is here, but hundreds ; not one problem, but thousands, and I am overwhelmed as if, in a nightmare, miserable man that I am, I found myself on Mount Olympus, in the midst

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of Jove, Athena, Ares and Poseidon, the laughing-stock of their mockery.

A surprising thing amongst many others is the beauty and similitude of the towers of four faces. The type is that of the Khmers, broad and strong, with rather flat noses and clear foreheads, long ears, the lobes of which are stretched by weighty ear-rings; the eyebrows are well defined, the eyes straight and big, the lips thick and the mouth firmly cut. Originally every one of the eyes was open, but rain has effaced the upper lines of the orbits in places, and many of the gods seem to be asleep or even dead; and then the torrents of water, in a last pious gesture for the mighty corpses, have as it were closed their eyelids so that they may rest in peace.

They have perhaps been steeped in slumber or in death, but all at once they awaken or resuscitate, and their true nature arises: that of destruction. As by a miracle red comes about and around me . . . I am surrounded with the colour of slaughter. The forest is on fire and the stones are red-hot; the soil is glowing and the sacred basins are pools of blood. . . . Then, looking at myself, I find that I am red, perhaps burnt, and I pale under my coat of scarlet at the sight of my hand, tinted as if I had plunged it in a barrel of wine or a crime. In frenzy, almost in appeal, I raise my gaze to the sky, but that is also red, red and red. Yes, I must be in that country of agonies where men are red and cause all things to be red, and where nature is red, causing all things to be red. . . . As for the masks, they smile like the gruesome Moloch of Carthage; fire lights their jaws, their nostrils and their pupils, and undoubtedly they are consuming the bodies of children.

My nerves are shaken and my heart moved. I rush past the heads, which become enormous as I draw near. Down staircases in mad steps I run, then in the rooms; and, knowing that night is coming, and that it would be

unsafe to be still in Angkor-Thom with no torch nor weapons at the late hour when animals begin their hunt, I hurry towards my little mount tied to some trunk near a stone kruth. My intentions are sensible, but it is the lot of man to act at variance with reason, and, noticing that the sun has set, and that therefore the vermilion which affected me so much has left the temple in a weird semi-darkness, I return and cross the rooms, feeling my way in the gloomy passages, dimly lighted in day-time and perfectly black at twilight. I have to be careful, for there are holes in the pavement, deceptive corners with jutting stones, and particularly low ceilings or friezes. Ultimately I come again amongst the giants, who have assumed a different aspect, like that of ghosts. At this instant one of them, next to me, cries. I had already felt nervous, and that voice adds the overflowing drop to my sensations. I remember the saying of my guide: "When men, animals, insects and trees are asleep, when water is as black as ink, when the sky is not speckled with stars, *they* wake and the monstrous mouths speak." It is true, upon my word, and soon I shall see them come to life and talk among themselves. At such a time beasts flee, and what would happen to me if I intruded and discovered their secret? I must not remain a moment, and, although at this very instant I see an owl hooting for the second time, and fluttering from a crack just between the lips of the near head, I finally go away.

iv

The Bayon is the whole Cambodian nation turned to stone; from the summit of the central tower to the level of the ground all the qualities and vices, all the greatness and baseness which distinguished that race are disclosed. The structure is personal and the decoration explicit. We have there the religion, the monarchy and the people; we see their simplicity of mind, the faith in their gods and



FIG. 21. AN INNER COURT, BAYON

their kings, the blind belief they showed in their superiors, yet the slight malignity they entertained for intellectual labour; also their warlike spirit, their freedom, and their character, sweetened by the love for women and children. We see their admiration for nature and their history. . . . Indeed the entire kingdom and its inhabitants can be said to be contained in the area enclosed within the surrounding wall.

Later they might have erected more magnificent buildings, but never they, nor any other nation, have condensed once again, in a single monument, the souls and the manners of an age. The Bayon is unique and worthy to rank with the proudest buildings of the world for this extraordinary particularity.

Had we only this one temple left, it would be sufficient to understand the whole number of facts we know appertaining to the Khmers.

CHAPTER VI

THE BAPHUON, AS IT WAS AND AS IT IS—AN EXAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS ICONOCLASM

i

ON the edge of the road which skirts the Bayon one passes two pagodas with roofs of tiles and small bells ringing modestly ; two big Buddhas, made of masonry, are concealed beneath plaster and lime-coloured paint, and at their feet a few relics of older idols are collected : here a firm fist holding the shell of Vishnu, there the biting features of Lakshmi. A bonze in orange and yellow robes kneels before one of the statues and from time to time utters verses from a sacred book, looking up at the merciful head lost in the shadow of the woodwork, which almost touches its brow in places . . .

“ Rise up ! Be not sluggish !
Enter upon a right and regular life.
He who follows virtue rests in bliss
Both in this world and the next.
Walk along the path of righteousness,
Not along that of vice.
He who follows virtue rests in bliss
Both in this world and the next.
Rise up ! Be not sluggish ! ”

and the echo's sound in the heights of the thick beams says again : “ Be not sluggish ! ”

Often, when great winds blow rain in all directions, and, passing between the teak columns, sprinkle Gautama with the spit of heaven, little birds in great numbers crowd beneath the gables and some perch on the usnisa of the

prophet. . . . They cry and flutter, whistle and sing, bathing the aged image in waves of lively twitters ; then leaves scuttle along the pavement, and increase the noise with the slight grating of their dry slipping. The soft bells send a mad little peal almost of laughter, if not of childish fear, and once or twice an urchin beats the soil with his naked feet, lies down in the balmy and gentle shadow of the good Sakya-Muni, and is amused to see the liberated foliage play at hide-and-seek.

At a few yards' distance from the meagre refuges for prayer, constructed by modern worshippers to shelter the two Buddhas, both the work of late inhabitants of the capital who thrived when Brahmanism had been wholly excluded from the Cambodians' hearts, a sala or rest-house for travellers offers its scanty hospitality, and near it starts a narrow footpath traced through bushes by rare natives, and marked now and then with the foot-prints of a wild or tame animal that followed the track of man. Where it ends one comes to the Baphuon, which constituted with the building already described in the last three chapters the proudest shrines of the city.

ii

Behind an earthen bank, some three hundred and thirty yards from the Bayon, you are in the lands of the temple, which covers a space of about ten and a half acres. Its main entrance, giving on the great square, is now one mass of chipped and battered blocks, above which stand pieces of walls or remains of window frames ; and these fragments, dreadfully dismantled, can almost serve as fair specimens of the state of preservation of the whole. No large monument of Angkor has suffered to such an extent as the Baphuon ; and to fancy this beautiful house of a god as it must have been before the work of usurping priests, vandal troops and encroaching vegetation had disfigured it, is nearly an impossible task. . . . Then it is all the

more extraordinary that the alliance of the three scourges, formidable in their unity and determination, has been unable to rob the temple entirely of its charm. Calamities can gather together and then break a mighty soul, but never humble it, and, in the same manner, destructive afflictions are perhaps able to raze wonderful works of architecture to the ground, but as long as a single stone is left, or one row of columns spared, the miserable remnants will preserve their power of pleasing the mind through the eye, and even sometimes be gifted with a sweet taste of melancholy, more touching, generally, than pure æsthetic grace.

An old house possesses a soul, given it by the many families that flourished under its protection. What a faithful friend a home is! We seem to see it look with loving solicitude upon the youngest progeny of its owners, and stop the storms with its gates and its bricks, the rain and hail with its slates or thatch. The habitation paid for by the industry of ancestors appears to convey to the descendants the care and attentions of their forefathers, and thus the stones, cement, wood and metal are truly impregnated with the spirit of generations. If, in after years, the ancient mansion is left and gradually covered with scars, inflicted through the neglect of ungrateful humans, it becomes sympathetic like a maltreated and faultless servant, and the wounds in its frame exact as much pity as if they were ailments of flesh.

Now, when it is not only the nest of a family that is deserted and injured, but that of a nation's faith, the pathos of its dismembered parts touches the sublime and is then the source of the endless stream of exalted poetry, flowing at the sight of a ruined abbey, mosque or pagoda, whatever religion it once contained or dogmas it once glorified.

iii

In its prime the Baphuon was splendid. Tcheou-Ta-Kouan, a scholar who was a member of a Chinese embassy sent by the Emperor Tch'eng-Song to Angkor in 1296, and who left a relation of his journey, says that the view of it was really impressive. He tells us that it was then called the copper tower, and was of greater height than the tower of gold, otherwise the Bayon. We shall try with the clue left to us by the damaged erections, and a certain amount of imagination, to reconstruct the copper tower and to see it as it was when Jayavarman V., who reigned from 968 to 1002, inaugurated it, and gave to the masterpiece of the "guru," Yogisvarapandita, the proud name of Hemagari, the "Golden Mountain," or of Haimaṣringagiri, "The Mount of the Golden Horn."

A few steps rose between the level of the large and noisy square and the foremost erections: several rooms with doors and windows, porticoes, and one or more domes. The tinted stones formed a fine setting for the throng of Brahmines, for the plainly attired slaves, for attendants in luxurious garb exhibiting the wealth of a lord who, alighting from his palanquin or gilded chariot drawn by pawing steeds of pure breed, mounted the stairs slowly to visit the shrine and bring to the idol rich gifts and tokens of fealty. As soon as the gate had been shut behind visitors, they were surprised no doubt by the silence and quiet magnificence of the gardens and dependencies. The rarest flowers and trees had been planted and clothed the base of buildings with rustling vegetation, and in their midst one long and broad pool, preciously tinted and totally tranquil, reproduced in immaculate clearness the smallest details of the shining towers, bending reeds and strolling priests, so that there appeared to be a temple rising towards the grey clouds and another plunging in the blue waters, one lot of plants growing and the other

drooping, and a company of men standing whilst the others were suspended like acrobats by their feet. If a swallow perchance cut the air with its wings, another was swiftly swimming, and then, if a roguish zephyr with puffed cheeks and twinkling eye blew away the reflections, a whole picture, false but delicate, made by its evanescence the truth of things more sure and stronger.

Gopura and advanced galleries were joined by a narrow and attractive gangway that was made of two lines of rectangular and well-cut slabs, raised on three rows of elegant columns that emerged from the pond, straight and graceful, like the lotus flowers touching their drums. After running for more than two-thirds of its length, the avenue stopped at a small belvedere, placed in order to make you loiter and look around, and gaze dreamily at the greenery and water, lastly at the temple, whilst you still resisted the imperious call of the massy mountain of stone.

Later, leaving the pavilion, you resumed your stroll on the miniature bridge, and two hundred and twenty yards from the outside porch you were at the bottom of steep stairs that separated you from the thresholds of the second enclosure. The eastern face of the lower tier was like a high wall of reddish monoliths with round mouldings and with its upper edge holding up a long gallery, offering to your sight a monotonous number of false windows, which increased your curiosity as to what they were hiding.

The Baphuon, alike in this respect to its yet more ambitious neighbour, consisted of a series of three storeys raised in pyramidal shape and ending by a lofty dome, the tallest of Angkor-the-Great. The three vast terraces were provided at their very edge with long galleries. The first and third were broad enough to have a wide space between these erections and the foundations of the higher structures, but the second had a mere narrow passage, and as soon as you left the room that introduced you to the inner portions of the temple you found yourself at the



FIG. 22. ON THE SECOND STOREY, BAPHUON

starting-point of steps, and, standing on the third or fourth of these, you were almost able to touch the pediment under which you had passed. The court of the first tier had two chapels in it and ways slightly raised on very short colonnettes in a position perpendicular to the sides, but with two branches parallel to the latter, permitting access to the said chapels.

The bases of the second and third storeys were in two distinct portions, marked by a sensible offset of the upper courses from those beneath them. It was easy to walk on the platforms, but they were made only for effect, no use whatever being apparent. Every storey increased in loftiness as it went farther from the soil—from thirteen feet of the first, to twenty-three of the second and thirty-three of the third—and every one had eight towers—four at the angles and as many at the centres of the galleries of circumvallation. The holy of holies was, of course, under the central dome, and four little staircases led to the doors that opened on to it.

It is not certain to what deity it was consecrated, but King Udayadityavarman, fifty years after its erection, set up a linga there.

iv

The style is already very far removed from that of the Bayon ; the gradual simplification of lines and search for majesty had made here a great advance and prepared the Khmer minds for Angkor Vat, their ultimate achievement. But how little of all this is left for our contemplation. Already we have noticed how the gateways are despoiled ; the park has broken all bonds, as can well be expected, and no paths, no plantations of men are still obeying the rules of gardening. Like a troop of school-boys, as soon as the hand of a master was no longer felt, the grass and weeds suffocated the roses and went off out of bounds ; the less hardy bushes and flowers died,

and the rough thickets and trees ran over all beds and lawns. Yet this was nothing compared to the work of foolish religious fanaticism and bad restoration.

The restoration (if such a word can possibly be applied to it) was crowned by the final spoiling of the gangway, the beauty of which was one of the most original glories of the building. For no cause, at least no obvious cause, the bridge-like avenue of supreme airiness, with its columns dipping in the light ripples of a great pond, has been changed into an ordinary causeway; which effort also made two insignificant pools out of one praiseworthy one. The toil was not difficult, and the ruthless block-heads even simplified it; they only had to set up two facings of stones against the outside columns and, after that, to fill the empty space with earth and pebbles. This they did, but, as slack as they were stupid, they could not go and fetch the necessary material at any distance, and merely pulled down a portion of the galleries to complete a horrible work with bits of delicious carvings, and defaced a thing of beauty to create one that, if mildly put, is worse than commonplace.

The identity of these madmen will always be rather dark, luckily for themselves and their memory, but, considering what we are going hereafter to relate, they probably were Buddhists who came into their own after the total overthrow of the Hindu religion. We will well own that, as regards ideals, the development was for the good of the nation, but as regards art and many other things it was a death-blow. We will, further on, go more deeply into this, but a sufficient example of the downfall of taste is the state in which they put the shrine we are now visualising.

At some undetermined period they took possession of it, and immediately, in their blundering arrogance, settled down to raise for the fame of their faith's founder an eternal monument. But how far beneath their boast

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was their ability ! and what they imagined was going to become in a short time a superb achievement was to be in the end an enormous and ridiculous abortion. Their desire was nothing less than a statue of the sleeping Buddha which should cover the entire western face of the third storey ; and they began by uprooting rooms, galleries and cellars, and used all the stones they gathered in a cumbersome and weighty pile, one hundred and thirty feet in length and thirty-four in height. This much finished, they tried to hew out of the badly joined stones the shape of Gautama ; then it was that their littleness was exposed . . . they did not even have the courage of their offence, and after some clumsy blows of the chisel abandoned everything to form for centuries the accusing testimony of their total lack of any sense of proportion and of the smallest atom of artistic temperament.

The head is noticeable with ball-like protuberances for the eyes, the hair dimly figured, a broad slash for the mouth and a flat bump for the nose ; the arm on which the right ear is resting is blocked out ; but that is all, and in all horribly done. How could thinking beings err so widely from the mark, and invent such a poor manner of showing their respect and their love ?

Sleeping Buddhas figure the sage at the end of his life entering Nirvana, paradise only reachable to “ him whose senses have become tranquil, like a horse well broken in by a driver ; who is free from pride and the lust of flesh, and the lust of existence, and the defilement of ignorance—to him whom even the gods envy. Such a one whose conduct is right remains like the broad earth, unvexed ; like the pillar at the city gate, unmoved ; like a pellucid lake, unruffled. For such there are no more births. Tranquil is the mind, tranquil the words and deeds of him who is thus tranquillised, and made free by wisdom.”¹

¹ “ Dhammapada.”

Nirvana is the peaceful bliss where everything is light through elevation of thoughts—and the defilers of the Baphuon have used in an appalling way the inspiration they drew from that state of felicity to make a rough and awkward screen of crushing size and effect.

Buddha, when he left this earth and went to sleep in that peaceful universe of freedom from pride and the lust of flesh, and the lust of existence and the defilement of ignorance, in no wise wished his name to be remembered by an absurdity, which would be risible, were it not risen from the spoils of beauty. The annihilation of “pride” was to be represented by a presumptuous statue more than ten thousand times bigger than man; the extinction of the “lust of flesh” by an enormous body, all in flesh, empty in intelligence; the extinction of the “lust of existence” by a gigantic horror, eternal in monstrosity, and the passing-away of “ignorance’s defilement” by the truest piece of naïve and striking absence of knowledge and culture imaginable.

That was their aim, and by the failure of that aim they have sealed their contradiction to the holy words: “Tranquil is the mind, tranquil the words and deeds of him who is thus tranquillised.”

I wonder whether any of my readers has seen a piece of statuary impersonating strife and unrestfulness better than the unfinished *St Matthew* of Michelangelo. He fights, turns round in defence against the marble that will not relax its hold; one knee is thrust out after a mighty strain and pierces the stone like mud; the shoulders tighten, stiffen; the muscular neck writhes; the head suffers and seems to look back at the matter which clings to it like glue. What vigour in the blows of the hammer which has chipped off the block in deep hollows to free the martyr; but the saviour’s hand dropped down; *St Matthew* will always be a prisoner of the marble.

Yet I believe that the aforesaid Buddha is more rest-

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less ; but this time it is the strife of the paralytic who feels his frightful weakness : he has not even the compensation of the struggle, of the venting of his anger in frantic movements ; he is retained by the enormity of the stones clasping his form ; and the pygmies who came to his rescue only enlarged his misery by giving him a tormenting glimmer of hope. He now looks out forlorn, like a lion placed in a cage too small for him. This Buddha is a horrid, misshapen embryo.

V

The other parts of the building are in a hardly better condition ; the sanctuary is but an uncouth chaos of stones, with a pedestal deprived of the statue it upheld ; the entire southern and eastern sides of the topmost tier have crumpled down, and the blocks are left in an incline cut into two equal parts by a tower which, strangely, has successfully withstood the rush of the avalanche and is now cut against the sky and tree-tops like a jewel rising out of rubbish ; it presents, almost intact, its three decreasing stages ended by a lotus flower with broad petals, pierced with a round hole where the shaft of a metal ornament was poised. Here also the soil and crawling plants have endowed the work with the appearance of untouched nature, and from below the temple seems to have been cut from a hill, the top of which was left in its original state. Going up these faces by a narrow staircase, very recently made, one is surprised, when the ascent is finished, at the maimed appearance of the remains, at the small number of turrets left, at the rarity of fairly well-preserved galleries. Vegetation has somewhat hidden the ugly scars, but it has not been able here to erase them.

If one wishes to be refreshed and pleased it is necessary to come very close to the erections and look at what could always retain its charm unimpaired : the decoration. . . .

The artists have figured in the Baphuon all the abounding fauna of the region—buffaloes, goats, horses, panthers and elephants, and many besides.

The legends of the Ramayana have also been fruitfully used, and the whole sculpture placed near the doorways much resembles that which is carved round the porch of San Zenone at Verona—little scenes in low relief on plain backgrounds, and found within square or rectangular frames where flowers and pearls are incised. Small animals are rendered in uncountable numbers, merely through a desire and a love of reproducing their forms.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT SQUARE OF ANGKOR-THOM—THE ELEPHANTS' TERRACE—THE IMPERIAL PALACE—SYMBOLS AND DREAMS

i

IF one wishes to know the inhabitants of a town, the first visit should necessarily be made to the main square, where men and their work gather like flies attracted by a light or, rather, like blood flowing to the heart. The streets converge like veins, and traffic follows them like ships all blown in one direction by a constant wind. This is especially true of the ancient cities which were built round a vacant space, left as a meeting-place for the natives and strangers, as a spot where every branch of the community's learning and trade had a part, and where in a moment the habits of the dwellers could be comprehended. There indeed were the mountebanks, the loafers, the housewives, the urchins, the merchants, the nobles passing on the way to their palaces, the beggars holding out their dirty hands, the courtesans exhibiting their bright gowns, and the thieves showing the resourcefulness of their sagacity.

At the gates one can get a notion of the outer look of peasants and citizens, of their attire, but it is difficult to gather information regarding the mind, for they are all on the move. The streets are also but lanes for rushing people. The houses, in which can be found the virtues of family life, are too often the haunts of vice. Good qualities love the open and relish in visibility; faults love small corners and have free play in the dark. . . .

Thus, on the whole, to discover ugliness, go where men are in twos or small parties ; to discover the beauty of broad happiness, of free vitality, go where they are in crowds ; and it is in the squares that the throng is densest.

All the joy and exuberance of Angkor, one could affirm, were condensed before its decadence in the big empty area where now cattle graze. . . . Terrible downfall of the existence of a people ; in the very centre of its empire, where it once felt most secure, a few cows roam idly.

Tears ought to be shed over the ashes of a capital ; it is infinitely sadder to stand on the emplacement of a dwindled power than on the tomb of the greatest men. Indeed a Bismarck and a Napoleon may have been said to impersonate the whole of the population over which they ruled ; but at best they can only be taken as the essence of an era and not of generations, whereas a Babylon and a Persepolis were all and saw all. After their destruction the Babylonians and Persians vanished, and over the soil in which they lie buried the ghosts of world-conquerors whisper the gloom of their fate. . . . Yet, in spite of everything, they are still giants, and the desert which now isolates them upholds again the honour of their name, preventing the anathema of disrespectful visits. The stain is doubly dark only if the ruins are, as it were, pushed aside by miserable modern slums and looked on by ignorant tourists as the disconnected curios of a historical museum. If, like Angkor, they are wild and austere, lost and forgotten, they rise aloft as the memory of a genius, scolding the pettiness of our goals. " Pass on, fool," they seem to cry, " and leave us alone ; we are too tall for you." But often this rebuff appears to be almost a call of anguish, lest their wretchedness be too glaring. The square in which I find myself, where long ago life was overflowing, is void and glum, and one perceives that it could never more be a place where games and feasts be witnessed. Respect moves us to leave it as it is, not to touch it, not

to alter its appearance ; and even Nature, perhaps not the blind force one generally supposes, is subject to feelings of pity and consideration. It is surely astonishing that fig-trees and banyans have not invaded the square of Angkor-Thom, for everywhere else, even on the roofs of the halls and the summits of the towers, they have placed their broad shadows. The peasants are those who say that it is in reverence to the emperors' memory, and one is forced to accept this explanation for want of one more plausible.

The greater portion of the western edge of the square is occupied by a terrace, more than three hundred and eighty yards long, which also formed the monumental entrance to the Imperial palace. It is reached by means of five flights of steps—one in the centre, two at the extremities, and the others, much smaller, quite close to the first. The outer facings of the central stair, and of that part of the terrace which lies between it and the two little perrons, are decorated with impressive Garudas, supporting at arm's-length the weight of the cornice.

ii

The monsters seem to struggle in an endeavour to escape from the clinging stone ; in a frantic effort they pierce the inert matter, the sinews of their arms stiffening, their thighs working mightily ; they grimace, angered by the resistance they meet with ; but already the eventual result seems almost certain, and as they lean forward you expect them at any moment to escape and fly away with extended wings.

Alternately they have been given heads of tigers or vultures to prevent monotony, and one in every two crushes the necks of three Nagas with its hind legs.

Continually, whenever Garuda is seen, he is engaged in a desperate combat with his enemies, the snakes, except when he is holding his office as Vishnu's mount. The

origin of the hatred existing between the fantastic beasts is again caused by the eternal feminine. . . . Once upon a time there lived a learned Brahman who had two wives, and these wives were sisters, Khadru and Vinata. Both wished within their hearts to have numerous and flourishing children and heirs—of course they were jealous of one another. Khadru became the mother of a thousand children, the Nagas, from whom the entire species of snakes descends, but Vinata was not so lucky and had only two sons : Aruna, the skilful driver of the sun's chariot, and Garuda who was immediately incensed by Vinata, vowed the destruction of the Nagas, and eventually with the help of his invincible heroism was able to kill all of them but one, whose life he spared.

The fight of these legendary beings is one of the greatest existing symbols. The snake is first of all the earth, the soil in movement ; of the same colouring as the stones and the pebbles, it likes them and rubs its cold scales against their smooth surface. There is something striking in the gait of the snake ; noiselessly it passes in slow, sweeping curves, so low on the dust that it seems its spirit ; it crawls stealthy, solitary like a rope of sand ; it seems to receive the impulse of its action from the earth itself. How it goes forward is incomprehensible ; it has no legs, no claws ; it does not walk, nor does it tread ; it floats ; it does not exert itself, it does not use muscles ; it is carried along by the glebe. It is never seen painfully retracting one part of its body to stretch the other like worms and in that way awkwardly, with clumsy retard, finding its path ; often, indeed, it is found in no hurry, but then it is like leaves in a current, perhaps carried slowly for some time, but soon dashed in bewildering speed amongst the swirls of a torrent. The long coiling form is inherent with controlled vigour, always on the alert and, should a step sound too near, it darts miraculously like the swiftest arrow, thrown with enormous strength, not



FIG. 23. GARUDAS, ELEPHANTS' TERRACE

by a jerk and stiffening of its muscles, but by some gesture of the earth ; it is flung straight and quivering, as truly a tool of the soil as the lava that gushes from wide craters, and commanded by the same magic force which causes the bosom of granite to open in earthquakes and swallow villages. Yes, the flimsy reptile is more the son of the soil than Antæus was : it clings to it, embraces it, lives in a furrow, crawls in ruts, rising like dust suddenly and frantically, but always to rest on it again, leaving it, only to return like a faithful lover. And its weird sound, the low whisper which evaporates on the sand, seems to remain for ever between two stones ; it does not emerge to be lost in the azure of skies, but sticks low and pervades the mud. And its two eyes, small, piercing, are like black diamonds, found in the entrails of the rocks, and they cause as much tragedy as the precious stones—amethysts, rubies and emeralds—that give rise to envy, jealousy and crime amongst men, attract virtue from its throne and make it sordid in the horrors of rapacity, that glitter like evil and are as hard as a cruel soul ; the eyes of snakes are indeed like them ; they fascinate the birds of the air and by a morbid intensity make lovely larks and doves fall into the trap of poisonous fangs. And at last those fangs, pierced and venomous, throw you into the arms of death to perform the last hymen with the earth, when, naked, you will kiss the cold ground and in a ghastly marriage make your body one with the dust.

On the contrary Garuda joins in this figure all the characteristics of the air. In his heavy shape we must not look for lightness only and delicacy ; he is not the air of poets—transparent, languid, meek and delicate—no, his is the strength of the great element, marvellous, but not always innocent. He possesses the head of vultures, with the eyes reputed to be the acutest in nature, and with the power of smell which is able to notice, in spite of wide distances, the odour of carrion ; he has also the wings of

the same rapacious bird of prey unmatched by any others ; in the lofty regions of the clouds he glides, and remains suspended to the stars by a thin thread, which allows him never to tire, to reign where all is vapour, and trace vast circles in emptiness. His arms and hands are those of men—the most useful implements we possess, for few things are more wonderful in nature than the palm and the five fingers attached to it, which strike or hold, caress or strangle, create music on instruments, and fashion thoughts or, at least, lastingly inscribe them ; and they are shown there to personify the power of air to strike or caress, to sing or murmur, to hold or to liberate. Finally his body and legs are those of tigers : suppleness incarnate, grace in flesh, and crushing power turned into limbs, abdomen and breast. They are the velocity of the wind, the sudden leap of storms and the grace of clouds.

Therefore the battles of the giants are more than a meaningless decoration ; they display the everlasting rivalry existing between what is base and what is high. That cold, silent, passionate war repeated many times, facing the square and preceding the palace, forms an ever-present reminder for the two halves of our minds, one virtuous, the other depraved, in endless conflict, never gaining a decisive victory and never being utterly beaten. And if Garuda appears to be successful, it is more to show the road we should strive to enter than that which, in fact, is ours. And the very finish of the tale, the sparing of the last survivor of a fatal species, shows our weakness, our desire to leave in this world a part of the vice we found in it, a feeling of our regret to know that our duty is to be good !

Side by side the Garudas stand, and their troop stops at the small stairs, flanked by three-headed elephants with straight-falling trunks.

iii

The rest of the terrace is decorated no less grandly by an Imperial hunt in the sombre forests of the realm. There are the formidable elephants which have given a name to the structure.

The forest in which they travel is impenetrable to all but tiny creatures, able to squeeze their smallness between the fissures of the undergrowth, and to the biggest animals, which crush chasms for their passage in the virgin vegetation. The elephants are ridden by servants and princes, and tread as quietly as if they were on an excursive promenade. Their steps of even length have no respect for any obstacle.

The princely hunters, at ease in the slight howdahs, look on more than they act. Sometimes a noble aims an arrow or brandishes a spear, but the pachyderms themselves do most of the killing. Be it a bull they have reached, the wrinkled trunks, with finger-like endings, coil round its neck and press and squeeze—we can almost hear the bones crack and see the strongly built ruminant fall shapeless; be it a stag, the same trunks are stretched out again, grab the antlered beast, and we can imagine them lift it and throw it against a trunk, where its ribs would be broken, limbs rent, and blood would flow on the grass. The same thing happens to boars and gazelles, and it is easy to bring back to mind the picture of the models continuing their march, with tusks red and soiled by bits of skin, torn fur or dripping gore, their feet pounding victims into the slime and leaving a track of crushed plants and slaughtered game.

Some details are especially vivid: a tiger snarls savagely and plunges its claws in the tough muscles of an elephant, but, pressed by a pair of the enormous mounts, it gasps for its last breath in a final roar. An imaginary sinto rears up, but the elephant it attacks is equal to the

danger and accepts the challenge. After a carnage the fine animals pluck a branch and brush away the dust from their heads. In one place a tribe of savages attempts to make them retire, but the futility of their wish is appalling; they pay dearly for their rashness and are killed.

The true feeling of hunting is there—the brutal action of destroying lives for pleasure, of attacking agile creatures to pit one's skill against theirs. One even perceives almost a hint that the sculptors did not very much admire that particular kind of hunting in great battues, in which the human hunters are out of danger on moving fortresses, the elephants, and where the game has not a chance of escaping. The artists had a correct sense of attribution and show the elephants as the main factor in whatever success ensues. Moreover, we conceive how cruel is man, who captures the intelligent brutes, born for peace, and changes them into instruments of death.

All the pachyderms, almost life-size, are magnificent none the less, and the whole effect has an indescribable splendour.

iv

The "Elephants' Terrace," we have said, masks the eastern side of the palace, an immense rectangle of some one hundred and eighty-two thousand square yards, which was a veritable town enclosed in another, as there is no reason to believe that the present king of Cambodia differentiates from his illustrious ancestors in that respect, and the palace of Phnompenh holds, as well as the Royal habitations, an entire population of skilled workmen, who are exclusively at the prince's service. But almost at that must our conjectures stop, the houses, pavilions, official rooms and state chambers having vanished.

Continuing the main staircase of the terrace a branch of it crosses a court and is again graced with the vigorous Garudas. It finishes at the real gateway of the palace,

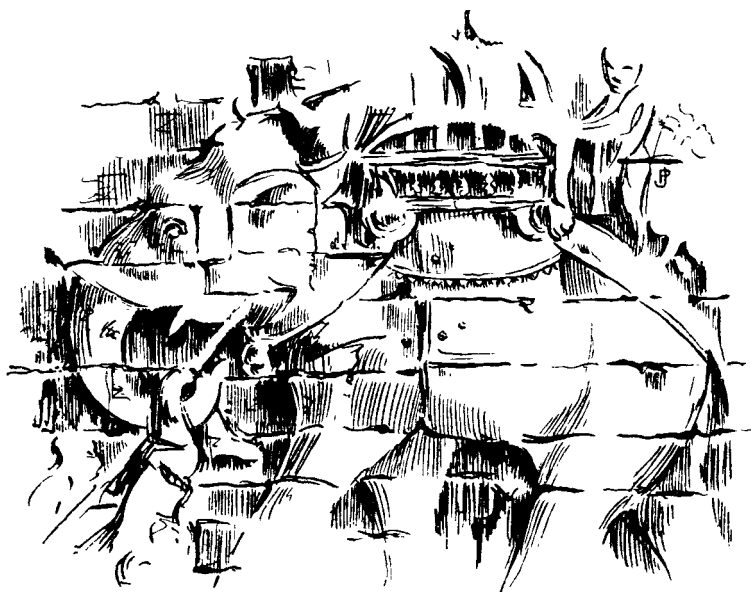


FIG. 24. HUNTING ELEPHANT



FIG. 25. POLO PLAYER

1

2

3

which is extremely pure in style and one of the gems of the capital. On some of its columns Suryavarman I. ordered the oath of vassalage of all the chiefs under his crown to be inscribed in well-formed letters. Giving on the same quadrangle are two doorways opening on to a long court, which runs right round the palace, strewn here and there with the cavities of basins. Enclosed as it is between two walls it was perhaps used as a defence against trespassers, and guards may have paced there, up and down, day and night, for the safety of the sovereign.

When Angkor-Thom was in its glory everything concealed within was impenetrable to common mortals, especially to strangers, and the only man who might have left us a description of its wonders, the always curious Tcheou-Ta-Kouan, was not allowed to enter. We are not deprived of this liberty, but are no better off than the Chinaman who lived seven centuries ago: the defences are no longer efficient, but time and death have replaced the sentries. We may go in, but it is the dwellings that have departed; Kala and Siva have left little trace of the Imperial wealth.

The private lands of the monarch are divided into four portions. The first of these is provided with three gates, giving access from the outside, the second with two, the others with none. The first two, I shall venture to say, were probably more public than the last, which remained strictly forbidden to all but the privileged few and servants. The second is the largest and still contains four small, separate laterite buildings with one door; the natives know them now as the jeweller's towers, and their massiveness may explain the assumption ascribed to them as the safes wherein the Crown jewels were deposited. Near them is a cruciform terrace; three of the arms of the cross were provided with steps, but the last was not, seeming to imply that something was placed there. On a bas-relief of the Bayon, girls are seen dancing on a platform

like this one, with balustrades of Nagas, and here, perhaps, the king watched his dancers go through their graceful acting. A statue of Ganesa is now in their stead, with a few beheaded stone friends. A hundred yards away stands the Phimeanakas, the chapel of the emperor, small, with four staircases flanked with lions, with elephants at the angles, a miniature gallery running on top of the tiers, just big enough for one person to pass at a time, and in the middle a shrine, where, it is known, a Vishnu resided at some epoch distant from our own.

Farther off one comes across the most ornate artificial lake of a region that is not lacking in them ; and next to it lies a smaller pool, on the edge of which women kneel, and fill little baskets with the stagnant water. They laugh and chat, and after the liquid has run out of their receptacles they look in them attentively and, with the tips of their fingers, take a few grains of shining dust . . . it is gold. The precious metal lies in infinitesimal quantities in all the sand that forms the soil of the province, and although it has no real commercial value through its rarity, the magic mineral is like a vague reflection of the invaluable wealth once amassed by the Khmers. Richness has not entirely abandoned the ruins of Angkor the Great, and where it was once most visible, in the abode of the mighty Varmans, it has spread so as not to attract theft but to create a sensation of wonder ; the very earth on which prodigal nobles stepped is impregnated with the detritus of their luxury.

The largest Sra ¹ is furnished with gradients ; the lowest has fishes and crocodiles sculptured on its surface, and as they rise the figures become parrots, peacocks and eagles, accompanied by their little ones ; a vulture is naturally drawn as it cleans the feathers of its wing with its beak ; other birds fly and others fight ; some pick

¹ Pool.

grains and some pluck flowers. Higher still are groups of kings and their wives, separated by the threatening heads of Nagas ; then snakes entwined, and the bust of Apsaras. All of a sudden the rows change ; the one where fish were seen is plain ; the birds have given way to sea-monsters, water-elephants, with the body of a pike, but the front paws and head of the land animals, to dragons and crocodiles, tortoises and sea-horses. Another metamorphosis is found on the eastern side : the princes have very much decreased in size ; the lowest step is again bedecked with carp and salmon and such creatures, but now and then a Garuda comes into view, accompanied by females, sweet in body, but with their grace impaired to our sense by heads similar to that of their husband. The dancers form a little frieze above the monarchs and neat steps lead to the water. On two of the edges the topmost gradient does not exist and a paved path runs along the pool.

v

I am in the playground of fairies here, or, more accurately, in a land of Eastern princesses, which is almost the same thing. I loiter in the park of the palace, where the ladies of the seraglio loved to walk, where the waves of the lake heard their joy or their sorrow and returned to their velvet eyes the image of their charms. Among the brake, handsome girls, still very young and just penetrated with the longing of love, kept minahs, no doubt, and honoured them with the rank of confidants. The lively little feathery officials then repeated their secrets to young men, and there were other idylls on the earth which caused again many smiles and a few tears. Also in the vicinity were the hated eunuchs, with their sly glances and high-pitched voices ; little children played with delicate, liquid-eyed and wet-nosed gazelles ; peacocks trailed their regal feathers, and funny monkeys,

each with a silver chain tied to its waist, mimicked the sentries, holding a twig like a lance.

Come back, old days ! come back, old thoughts, to fill a new mind ; come back ! charm my dreams and make everything live again. In this haven of romance fact is absent ; then let imagination arrive and beautify my soul by taking out of it some of the gloom my modern education has put there. Render me care-free, heedless, even reckless, and place within my reach the nobility of ancient times.

So far modernity, speed, science have confined me in materialism, and if I have wandered to such distant lands it is to forget. . . . Help me, you jungle and you ruins ! Make me forget !

And never, never is the call left unanswered, if only the heart is its source. It has oft been quoted that stones would have many wondrous stories to tell if they could but speak, and leaves and beasts if they could but whisper in the fashion of man (I, for one, have said it) ; but they *do* speak, they *do* sing, they *do* recite marvellous poems, and we can hear them if we wish. It is certainly their language that has taken effect when we feel transported from our own being, carried into a paradise of fancy. And it is their ineffable tongue that moves us so in the presence of a thing of beauty. Listen, listen, wayfarer, and look ; whilst corols and blossoms open and close like lips, twigs nod in appreciation, and the breeze, complacent messenger, brings to your ears the voices of the lovely bards. Lean forward, and when a bird sings hark to the syllables it utters, and when a bubble bursts, catch its little cry. Spirits and goblins skip around, and boughs and ripples have long conversations with them ; you are their guest, therefore be polite and lend a willing ear to their prattle. Orpheus once held in the spell of his subtle lyre every being and vegetation and rocks ; it is your turn, human kindred of Orpheus, to be captured by the



FIG. 25. SIDE TERRACE OF THE ELEPHANTS, TEOTIHUACAN.

lays of nature. . . . This is what she says : " History is a record of grandeur and decadence, one coming on the heels of the other ; many towns like Angkor were great, some are now in the depths of obscurity's precipice. But as long as a thing has a past, it has a present. All that was is, all that is will be ; and thus it is that learning has come down to you, thus it is that your actions will go down to your children ; everything done takes effect ; it may flourish directly or indirectly, but it does not perish."

I am meditating in this way (someone may call it dreaming) and find myself again in the big square. Yes, the charm of ruins, after all, is their eternal freshness and novelty, for they can recall, however decrepit they are, the former appearance of their full-grown beauty, mellowed by imagination.

A veil is seemingly torn, and all I have seen or thought of rushes to my mind in order to enlighten my understanding.

Now it is a page of Bernier's travels I remember—omrahs and rajahs conveyed to the Hall of Audience of the Great Mogul on the shoulders of six men, in rich palanquins, or riding on horseback or elephants, with finely equipped guards and numberless footmen.

Now numerous lines from epics or tales flock in disorder, all of gaudy scenes ; long paragraphs on palaces and short stanzas on nobles, on ceremonies and on feasts, which, somehow, fit in and crowd the square of Angkor-Thom with ghosts of marvellous things and men.

CHAPTER VIII

MORE ON THE GREAT SQUARE—THE MEMOIRS OF TCHEOU-TA-KOUAN—THE TOWERS OF THE ROPE DANCERS

i

AM I mistaken? My enthusiasm might sweep me too far. . . . I think not; and now I shall try to present a truthful picture of the place already embellished in my mind with passages of men's writings taken a little everywhere, and demonstrate that the Khmer capital had nothing to envy the Mogul's city, perhaps not even the rapturous inventions of poets.

First of all, before introducing the actors, let us lay out the scene: to the south rose the grim Bayon, with all its turrets; to the west the portals of the Baphuon and behind them the tall tower of surpassing pride; on the same side the palace, with its magic entrance; next to it the Leper King's terrace; opposite them twelve towers, two long buildings called the Ambassadors' Palaces and a pair of pools. Directly facing the palace stairs lay a straight road and at the end of it one of the town's gates, that of Victory; to the north another one of these and different smaller shrines, a glimpse of which could be caught between the trees and mansions. Now, imagine over the monuments the Far-Eastern sun and Oriental sky, the smells coming from near-by gardens and the wild wind bringing in its cloak the noises of the gloomy jungle that started at the immediate edge of the suburbs and fields.

What has now been described is standing more or less at the present day, exhaling to-day or passing to-day; but the stones, instead of being brilliant with pigments

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extracted by artificial means, are of greenish, bluish and reddish greys, given them by wear and time. All the lighter erections are no more, and the forest has conquered, little by little, every bit of ground; so much so that it now enframes the square, checked in its rush, to all appearance, by a feeling of dread or esteem for the last stronghold of the dead empire.

For further information we must glance over the only book appertaining to Angkor before its destruction, but even that manuscript was compiled when the Khmers were tottering under the repeated attacks of relentless foes. Tcheou-Ta-Kouan is our sole authority, but we should not grumble vainly, and on the contrary should thank Providence that caused this inquisitive stranger to put down his impressions; moreover, a few minutes spent in his company will prove most entertaining, for he is naïve and sincere. Nevertheless readers ought to be warned that, as regards distances and many details, he is repeatedly very inaccurate; also, not being well versed in religious matters, every statue or image is to him a figuration of Buddha.

ii

The gates of the city were surmounted in his time by *five* heads of "Buddha," the middle one of which was ornamented with gold—a fact which may account for its disappearance. They were open to all but "dogs, and criminals who had had their toes cut off."

The Bayon, which he calls the "Tower of Gold," marked the centre of the kingdom; it had around the main dome more than twenty towers of stone and hundreds of stone cellas—these we have already noticed without his help; but he goes on to say that on the eastern face there was a bridge of gold (obviously the terrace), two golden lions on either side of it, and eight "Buddhas" of gold placed at the base of the stone rooms. What he thought of the

Baphuon, the "Copper Tower," has already been mentioned. The temples outside the capital were very wealthy ; one possessed a sleeping "Buddha" in bronze, whose navel, allowing fresh water to flow in silvery jet, formed a continuously running fountain ; another shrine, five "lis" from Angkor-Thom, contained within a golden cupola and "tens" of small houses, a gold lion, a gold "Buddha," a bronze elephant, a bronze ox and a bronze horse. "Nothing is lacking," he adds.

"The palace, official dwellings and noble houses are all set towards the east. The tiles of private apartments are made of lead ; those of the other buildings are of clay and yellow. The piers of the bridge are enormous ; Buddhas are sculptured and painted there. The main building is magnificent ; the long verandahs, the covered corridors are bold and irregular, without great symmetry. The Hall of Council has windows with gold frames ; on the right and on the left are found square columns carrying from forty to fifty mirrors, arranged on the sides of the windows ; underneath elephants are represented. I have heard it said that in the interior of the palace there are many marvellous places, but the defences are very severe and it is impossible to go inside it."

This is most interesting, because it would seem to prove that the "Elephants' Terrace" not only formed stands from which the monarch and his court watched the games and processions taking place on the square, but was a glorious foundation for some public buildings at a convenient distance for both the sovereign and his subjects. Some shapeless masses of stones found on it have puzzled all students and this would account for them ; and, when one reflects upon it, it is quite certain that such an important work must have been undertaken for more serviceable usage than that of a mere platform to be occupied on rare occasions.

"The piles of the bridge" were ornamented, according

to our narrator, with carved "Buddhas." Now, he already spoke of the terrace preceding the main porch of the Bayon as a "bridge," and the "Buddhas" could very well have been the Garudas I so much admire. But let us find more convincing arguments. Tcheou-Ta-Kouan, describing the "Hall of Council," only notices the important characteristics, the great number of columns and mirrors, and the "elephants." These could not have been small; they formed a very important item of the decoration and they were "underneath." I am inclined to identify those beasts with the splendid hunting frieze. Moreover, he gives, so far, quite fair detail, and afterwards writes that he heard of many wonderful places in the palace, but that he was unable to see them. The "Hall of Council" was therefore outside the king's abode. Yet it could not have been far away, the Chinaman not counting the sovereign's visits to it as ventures from his dwelling.

But, leaving these conjectures, let us read on, amused by the quaint style:

"His Majesty has five wives, one for the private apartment, properly so called, and four for the four cardinal points of the compass. As for the concubines and girls of the palace, I have heard of a number varying from four to five thousand, divided into several classes; but they rarely cross their threshold. Under them are the women who serve the palace, named *Tchén-kia-lan*; they are not less than one or two thousand and, married, live a little everywhere; but over their brow they shave their hair and there place a mark of vermilion, as well as on both temples. These women alone can go into the palace; anyone beneath them cannot.

"Men and women anoint their bodies with perfumes composed of santal, musk and other essence.

"As servants, one buys savages who do this service. Those who possess many have more than a hundred;

those who have but a few possess from ten to twenty ; only the very poor have none at all. They are called the *Tchouang thieves*. Brought into the town they do not dare to show themselves in the open. If, in a dispute, one gives to one's adversary the name of *Tchouang*, he feels hatred entering to the very marrow of his bones, these creatures being deemed so much beneath human kind."

Life did not always seem to run very smoothly for the emperor and still less for princes of the royal blood. Another Chinese manuscript, even older, being of the seventh century, tells how each sovereign, when he came to the throne, threw his brothers into a secret prison, after having ordered their nose or fingers to be cut off, and, providing for their sustenance, thus kept them away from all offices or charges.

"The new prince," Tcheou-Ta-Kouan writes, "is covered with iron, so that knives and arrows, striking his body, can do him no harm. It is thanks to this precaution that he dares to go out. When he does go out cavalrymen start in front of the escort ; then come the standards, the pennons and the band. Some three to five hundred girls of the palace, clothed in embroidered draperies, with flowers in their hair, hold thick candles and form a troop ; even in daytime these candles are lit. After these come other palace girls, carrying royal objects in gold and silver, and the whole series of ornaments, every one of differing shape, and the use of which is unknown to me. Yet others follow, armed with lances and shields, who are the private guard of the prince ; they also form a troop. Next come the bullock-carts, the horse-chariots, all bedecked with gold. The ministers and nobles ride on elephants and, going forward, gaze far ahead ; their red parasols are innumerable. After them the wives and concubines of the king arrive in palanquins, in carriages or on the backs of elephants. They certainly

have more than a hundred gold sunshades. Behind them there is the prince, standing on an elephant and holding in his hand the precious sword. The tusks of the animal are covered with gold. He has more than twenty white parasols decorated with gold and the handles are of the same metal. Numerous elephants throng around and cavalry protects him. If the king goes to a spot close by he merely uses a gold palanquin, carried by four girls of the palace.

"Most frequently the king wishes to see a little gold pagoda, in front of which is a gold Buddha. Those who desecrate his presence must fall prostrate and touch the soil with their brows; it is called *san pa*. If they fail to do it they are seized by the masters of ceremonies, who do not release the offenders before it has cost them something.

"Twice every day the king gives an audience for the affairs of government. There is no settled list. Those of the officials and of the people who wish to see the prince sit themselves down on the floor to wait for him. After some time one hears distant music inside the palace, and outside men blow in conches as a welcome to the king. I have heard it said that he only used a gold palanquin and he does not come from afar. An instant later one spies two girls of the palace draw up the curtain with their slender fingers, and the sovereign, holding the sword in his hand, appears at the gold window. Ministers and commoners join their hands and strike the soil with their brows; when the noise of conches has ceased they may raise their heads again. If the king allows them, they also come nearer to sit down. Where one takes a seat there is a lion's skin that is deemed a royal object. When the business is finished the prince turns round; the two palace girls drop the curtain; everybody gets up.

"One perceives by that," he decides, "that, although its being a kingdom of *Man* and of *Mo*, they do not fail to know what is a prince."

Many conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing passages, but none so clear as the truth which underlined the traditions found among neighbouring countries of the fabulous wealth of Cambodia. The Khmer treasures were quoted in the empire of the Great Khan like those of Crœsus and Golconda in Europe. Even then, at the close of the thirteenth century, Angkor was on the very eve of its decisive capture and final abandonment to the mercy of nature. Tcheou-Ta-Kouan found the country-side devastated by the incursions of the Siamese; it was not long before the capital itself suffered from the fury of invaders. Yet the gay city offered a picture of luxury and ease. The old traveller's description of the king's suite, when he went out of the palace, is truly magnificent, and it cannot be said that he was in the least blinded by regal splendour; if anything his words are cold. . . . Between the lines you find much gold, much silver and appalling numbers of attendants, of elephants, of horses; the troop of girls, who held aloft flaming torches sending out the fragrance of burning sap, must have offered at night a bewildering spectacle, lighting as it did the shining carriages, wealthy nobles, caparisoned animals and martial guards.

Unluckily the writer does not put down a word about ceremonies, especially religious ones, and we must attempt to guess their impressiveness; nor is he more talkative about the games, but for that we need not only call to our aid our powers of imagination; we have merely to look at the carvings on the northernmost perron of the "Elephants' Terrace." A throng of disparate spectators crowded around: proud nobles on the stands, priests, haughty soldiers in armour, well-to-do traders with their slaves, poor men in rags pushing each other to have a better view, pretty women, fathers carrying beaming infants on their shoulders and, in the arena, the athletes busy with their last preparations.

Then the fun began (what we discover on the stone);



FIG. 27. ONE OF THE TOWERS OF THE ROJE DANCLRS

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first of all bullock-cart races excited the onlookers, then wrestlers plied their skill. Afterwards duellists fought with javelin and shield ; other competitors shot with the bow ; and both these exercises were in vogue with the higher classes, as the antagonists were shaded by parasols. Another game was also popular : horsemen, divided into two camps, spurred their mounts and galloped towards a central spot ; they were provided with long, curved sticks, and when they met the horses plunged and reared ; the players struggled to hit with their clubs something (now invisible) on the ground. All this bears a striking resemblance to polo, and as the latter is an Indian game it would not be surprising to find it in Further India.

In some respects the Cambodians were very primitive, especially in matters of justice, but their manner of discriminating guilt from innocence is not very much more extraordinary than the laws enforced in all other countries at this period.

“ Disputes between citizens,” notes Tcheou-Ta-Kouan, “ even insignificant ones, always come to the sovereign. Formerly they did not have the chastisement of bastinado, but only, it has been told me, pecuniary fines. In grave cases they neither decapitate nor strangle ; they dig a trench outside the western gate, drop the criminal into it and refill the hole with earth and stones, well pressed. For lighter offences they cut the fingers, hands or feet, or else amputate the arms. Debauchery and gambling are not forbidden ; but if the husband of an adulterous woman finds her at fault, he squeezes between two splinters the feet of her lover, who cannot endure this pain, gives over all his property and then recovers freedom. There are also cheats and swindlers. When somebody loses an object and suspects someone else, who denies the charge, they heat oil in a bowl ; the accused plunges his hand therein ; if he is really the culprit his hand is all burned ; if not, the flesh and skin retain their former aspect.

“ Now, if two families are at variance, and no one knows who is in the right and who is in the wrong : . . . In front of the palace there are twelve small stone towers ; each of the opponents sits on one of these towers ; at the bottom of the two towers the two families watch one another. After one, two, three or four days he who is guilty manifests it in some way ; either he becomes covered with ulcers or boils, or falls a victim to some catarrh or malignant fever ; he who is innocent does not suffer from the slightest complaint. They decide in this way between the just and unjust. It is what they call divine judgment.” ¹

One is forced to find some humour in the last instance of Khmer judicial expediency. After sitting four days on top of a tower it would be truly wonderful to remain intact. I think that, if nothing else, giddiness and weakness, through hunger and thirst, might cause one to experience a nasty fall ; and the picture of each family, surveying its antagonists under the stress of anger, impatience and hatred, whilst its chief is in an awkward posture on the point of a narrow turret, is quite perfect in bathos. But all this is not to be taken too seriously. The twelve towers stand now almost whole, and inside them a few pedestals and fragments of Vishnuist statues show their affectation as chapels. Secondly, there is no means of reaching their summit, and these assertions (however sorry we may be for the loss of picturesqueness our negation entails) can be safely discarded in company with the equally futile present name, “ The Towers of the Rope Dancers.” The peasants now affirm that ropes were tied from one to the other tower and that equilibrists passed at a dangerous height on the flimsy bridge for the entertainment of the populace.

¹ The Chinese MS. was translated into French by Mr P. Pellot in the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, April-June 1902.

CHAPTER IX

OTHER MONUMENTS IN ANGKOR-THOM—THE AMBASSADORS’
PALACES—A FOOTPATH AND A DISMAL POOL—PRAH
PITHU—THE LEPROUS KING’S STATUE. TERRACE AND
LEGEND—THE GREAT BUDDHA OF TEP-PRANAM—PRAH
PALILAY

i

ANOTHER example of fallacious epithets for monuments is that given by the two edifices placed behind the “*Prasat suor Preat*,” the “*Towers of the Rope Dancers*.” Their name, as aforesaid, is the “*Ambassadors’ Palaces*,” and it is extremely unlikely that the kings who had to live in wooden buildings, however fine, would think of putting some in stone at the disposal of inferiors. Whatever destination they had, they are very fine and in no way unworthy of their close proximity to the agglomeration of remarkable religious and secular buildings. Some of their rooms are more spacious than those I have seen anywhere else in Angkor, and are lighted on both sides by very big windows. If I were to take their shape into consideration, I would be inclined to say that they were monasteries or schools for priests, especially the northern one, which precedes a number of tiny erections of exquisite detail and forming models of the classical Khmer style. But here also I can only trace a large interrogation mark. *Débris*, prone in the tall grass, possess rare grace; one of them, a girl dancer, with her head cocked on one side, lifting her arms and stepping on the point of her toes, is a pretty figure of simple playfulness. I leave her suddenly and come to a footpath.

ii

Now a footpath in a wood, in a forest, in the country, or in the wilds is a true lane towards dreamland. It possesses, perhaps, none of the straightforwardness of a road—in fact it is not half so definite. A road, it is well known, permits access to some spot of especial value; it may have been laid out for commercial purposes or as a link between two centres of recognised importance. It is as simple but as harsh as a fact; it says openly and affectedly, “I am a thoroughfare that will repay any man for the exertion he shall need to follow the way I define.” It is sure to end *somewhere*. But what of a footpath? It is not nearly as frank; it merely entices one by a rural smile of mischievous welcome; it may stop abruptly at any meaningless spot, ceasing to run all at once, only in a spirit of contradiction. “Ah, you wish to go on,” it says; “then you shan’t.” But also it is attractive like doubt; it is indeed quite possible that one will have to turn back, with the unpleasant perception of having wasted a certain amount of energy; yet it is as probable that one will reach some saintly and secluded little spot where one will dance for joy. And then the narrow lane itself is many a time the real value given in exchange for one’s trouble. What R. L. Stevenson has said of one road in the forest of Fontainebleau—that it is “conceived for pageantry and triumphal marches, an avenue for an army”—is very nearly true for all; a footpath, on the contrary, has been traced, no one knows when or how, for the philosopher, the poet, the loafer, for man when he is alone. It does not really exist as a causeway to enable one to reach a point of the earth, but rather the point of an argument or of a thought.

In Europe it is the last bit of nature which has refused to be tampered with. Originally the track of animals that chose freely where their hoofs would touch the ground,

a footpath is as fickle as the beasts' temperaments. For no cause it coils on itself, forms large circles, goes straight for a certain distance to turn all at once in an opposite direction ; it does not run according to the law of least resistance like a stream, but would climb steep hills, pass over rocks, wind tortuously in the midst of thorns, and shun a beautiful bit of glen to look down upon it from the uncomfortable edge of craggy cliffs . . . and that is the spirit it has kept fresh down to our very era, an open challenge to our horrible taste for symmetry.

In tropical regions a footpath is flimsier still ; consisting usually of a thread-like piece of bare soil, it becomes so vague now and then that it is necessary to use all the trained instinct of a Red Indian and the patience of a snail to see where it proceeds on its zigzaggy course. In other places, to assert its importance, it is shut in between walls of thick undergrowth, as distant in their imperviousness as the stars are in their remoteness.

The footpath which causes this outburst of rhetoric is jolly like a springtime brook and flows, literally flows, with the impatience of a young torrent . . . at least this is what it seems to be when I ride down it, holding back my nervous steed with one hand and shading my eyes with the other to catch a glimpse of a tiny bird that pours into my heart the overflow of its gladness. Bees, neat pilferers, rob the flowers of their juice and go back busily to their hive in the trunk of a rotted tree to make, with magic formulas entrusted to their care by a good genie of epicures, delicious honey in mysterious alembics. And the rare substance might be, O misery, the future plunder of one of the small black bears, so inoffensive, grunting in the heat under its fluffy woollen coat, walking lumberingly on its crooked paws, poking its nose wherever it can fit ; sympathetic little animal of great shyness, unfortunately very seldom met in the clearings of the sumptuous forests of Angkor. I see also witty squirrels, terrified lizards,

fattish toads, and even a small doe that rushes through the bushes, bringing and taking with it a loud noise of snapping twigs.

iii

Idling in the romantic, natural passage, I come to a group of ruins, the existence of which I had known, but momentarily forgotten. They are all joined under the collective name of "Prah Pithu," and probably constituted the special quarter of the Brahmines near the north-easterly corner of the city. The whole group consists of five temples, one terrace and one artificial pool, the "Sra Ta Tout." The first temple I approach by the footpath has nothing unusual about it, except that inside the shrine two rows in low relief of meditative Buddhas are placed in exactly the same pose; only on one side can a change be seen, where three kneeling adorers are introduced.

Without waiting I continue my rambles and am at last stopped by a marshy pond, and there also stands the terrace with its few steps under the protection of stone elephants with broken tusks and trunks, sadly dozing in the green shadows. The pond is of stagnant waters that smell horribly and purge the near-by vegetation of its sweet fragrance. The disgusting smell of putrid leaves and wood pervades the air, and over the green cloth of mossy stillness that covers the stenching water myriads of mosquitoes hover like the fumes of fever, lurking in the traitorous neighbourhood. A few flowers float here and there, but like the coronals of death; a few birds twitter here and there, but like the heralds of death; a few insects shine here and there, but like the scavengers of death, as several of them are burying the stiff and damp carcass of a weasel. The sky alone is clear, clean and fresh, and to look upwards is really to look into a different region of purity and even of mirth, for eight parrots of jolly

plumage play in mad antics and joke with madder tongues. The clouds roll by smoothly, steadily, with fat, good-natured cheeks and benignant aloofness ; but high, very high, a dark, very dark, one belonging to their troop is fleeing hurriedly under the blue mist. The black mass is a stranger to those that are blue, its shape is ceaselessly altering ; a bump is smoothed out at one end and immediately grows on to another side ; it stretches or gathers impetus by uniting itself into a compact whole ; it is carried much quicker by the wind ; it catches up and passes the peaceful drift of clouds. And they seem to look surprisingly at this pressing companion who casts away the immemorial commandments, prevalent among the cirrus, cumulus and stratus tribes, of obediently following each other and not distancing nor pushing one's comrades. But the stormy cloud takes no notice and comes right overhead. Suddenly it opens, breaks and falls in small black spots that get frightfully mixed up, rising, swooping, twirling, fighting, crying like a crowd floating in air. As it broadens out and nears the soil the problem is solved. I see innumerable wings and tails, legs and beaks ; it is a band of crows, croaking their hungry calls. They flutter hither and thither without order, a rabble of thieves ; lastly, alighting on the branches of the trees, they make the forest alive with an angry mob. One of them, bigger and bolder than the rest, perhaps their leader, darts out from a low liana and, after several bounding jumps as its feet touch the ground, and several beats of the wings to regain its balance, it stops, and for the first time I find that a wretched ox has staggered to this pool, and probably after a last lap at the placid, deadly water has freed its humble spirit to search for a better fate. Its corpse lies in the mud ; the legs are rigid, the tail straight. the ribs stretch the dry skin devoid of hair in places, the stomach is limp and puffed out, the neck is twisted, bearing still the humiliation of an imaginary yoke, and the

miserable old eyes, dim like unpolished glass, reflect truly the poor beast's departed mind. One horn, as a last revolt against the torturing earth that held it in bonds of servitude, is tearing the glebe.

The crow advances a few leaps and plucks at the haunch of the dead animal, but the latter lifts its hind hoof in a ghastly return to life. The startled bird flies away, to land on one of the stone elephants' heads, sending out its guttural note three times; the other carrion-eaters move unsteadily and join in chorus to its voice. There is a lull and then four crows stand on the ox and the feast commences; the great beaks open yellow in expectation and close again, crammed with gore; one or two bones begin to show dry and white. I am loath to see the sombre meal and throw pebbles at the dismal revellers. Surprised at this unforeseen attack they shriek away, battle to show which would be the worse coward, and soar above the tree-tops, a numberless host.

A heavy stake half stands out from the reeds like the handle of Time's scythe, discarded and useless, since death appears to have collected its harvests in this place. All things are terrible and wear a horrid aspect; the crows are once more in the excitement of their debauch. . . . Poor stone elephants that must always look on the depressing spectacle and unwillingly lend their backs as a perch for the birds of ill-omen and for the denizens of the marshy pool, the mosquitoes, mercenaries of malaria!

I am thankful that such a lot is not mine and leave the waters to their stillness, the leaves to their rotting, the beetles to their burying, the mosquitoes to their buzzing, the birds to their devouring and the stone elephants to their silent watch, and stroll to see the other pleasant, square pool and the temples.

They possess, of course, many attractions, but although Nature and painting, architecture and sculpture can tell again and again the same story, writing becomes tedious

if it does. This is chiefly because Nature and the three first-mentioned arts are different every day and every hour, according to the mood with which we approach them, but literature, especially prose, is exactly what it says, nothing more. The former are mainly expressive and greatly moulded by the mind of him who wishes to find grace and deep meaning in them ; the latter is itself the moulder of the intelligence that fathoms it, and can never be more than what its creator made it.

I return later to the great square, the real starting-point of any visit to any building of the town, and study other relics. My brain and heart were already imbued with ideals, but in this wondrous country the subtle soul-stirring sensation cannot be abated, and the longing for more beauty reveals the lesson already learned, that where the adorning quality reigns it is more necessary than life.

iv

Almost continuing the "Elephants' Terrace," another similar but less ambitious work, decorated with parallel rows of sitting nobles and princesses, is famed for a statue, supposed to be that of a leprous king, legendary founder of the Khmer capital, but more probably representing an ascetic Siva. Yet one of the attributions does not entirely exclude the other as many emperors consecrated shrines to Brahmanical divinities and ordered images to be placed in them, which, although they had all the attributes of the gods, were the effigies of former monarchs or of dead courtiers, high in rank and distinguished. In the Bayon and elsewhere short inscriptions were traced on the frames of doorways to perpetuate the names of the nobles whose mortal bodies had been used as models for the particular idols set up within the chapels ; they are short and concise : "The god Sri Jayakutideva, sacred form of the lord Sri Jayakutipandita, the saintly guru." It even appears that the great aristocrats wished to join the worship of

their own persons during their lifetime to that of the Hindu deities. In 923 çaka, Nerapativiravarman, elder brother of Udayadityavarman I., offered to Vishnu a statue of Vishnu "which is his own image."¹ Punnagavarman gave to Siva one of Siva "which bears his own features." Legend and history can therefore link hands, and the statue may be both of Siva and of a king, although it is harder to believe the latter to have been leprous, no marks on his skin, no swelling of the ankles being noticeable.

Among works of art some lend themselves more than any other to myths and mysticism ; they do not come to our mind as made by hands, but rather by thoughts ; they seem, although we may know every detail of their vicissitudes, to have existed since the world's beginnings. They are as familiar as trees and rocks, and have become the centres round which lesser or even greater things gather, acknowledging it as their "representative." They are landmarks by which a period is brought to mind as a whole ; they have embodied the meaning of an age. And all these honours may not arise from an intrinsic merit, but from a belief attached to it, a tale, a memory. This is the case with the "Leprous King." He was placed in the present position centuries ago. He is the only figure that has given its name to a monument. The whole terrace is now his pedestal, and popular beliefs have attributed to him many wonderful happenings, and have weaved on his theme stories that are told in the evenings round the fires. None of them is more curious than that one which originated from a discovery made a few months before my arrival. A hole was noticed between the rows of noblemen and noblewomen ; it was quite deep, and where it ended the detail of a bas-relief came to light. This led to excavations and, after coolies had used shovels and pickaxes, a repetition of the whole seven rows of lords

¹ Cf. "L'Apothéose au Cambodge," by G. Coedes in a *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*.

LEGEND OF LEPROUS KING 171

and their womenfolk was revealed, exactly copying the decoration and shape of the outer facing some six feet from it. To the cool intelligence of white men it was rather inexplicable, and the only motive we could discover was that, finding the terrace too small and thinking that to move the stones forward after they had been carved was too difficult, also having slaves at their disposal ready to repeat the sculptures without a murmur, the builders hid the finished portions behind new layers of material. At the "Elephants' Terrace" the same proceeding occurs twice, once at the northern perron, where, concealed behind a small staircase, a huge, five-headed horse stands frontways, having on either side a company of warriors and dancers. The second time the great design of Garudas is continued in disregard of the small flight of steps just south of the grand central staircase, as if it had been added later when it was deemed that the separation between the Garudas and the Imperial hunt was not accentuated with enough strength. At any rate, these "corrections" are most valuable, because the masking materials have preserved the carvings, and we possess perfect examples even unfinished, just as the sculptors left them.

Now that the logical (or silly) version has been put forward I am going to relate the story by which the natives explain the carvings, which now grace narrow subterranean passages, finishing in steps that have been left by the modern restorers to lead up to the level of the terrace of the "Leprous King." The legend, of course, lacks any historical foundation, but speaks well for the imagination of those half-savages.

"It was at a time when the town had just been surrounded by walls, when the first monuments embellished the wild forest, and when the king, who had come to the earth as a baby, rocked in a palanquin of gold resting on the wings of swans, saw all his wishes granted him. He was young and handsome, great in warfare and

administration, but his heart was cruel. Everyone hated him, everyone except his wives, the only creatures to whom he showed the good qualities of his soul; he gave them many things they desired and was wont to spend hours in their company. Four of them, four sisters, were his favourites, whom he loved more than any others and whose whims were law. Their names were Tieya, Kramoth, Vodey and Roum-Say-Sock.

“One day they came to the monarch and told him that court life and etiquette weighed heavily on their shoulders, and that, if only he were to accompany them, they would like to seek adventures. . . . At first he mocked them, yet, when he found out that they were in earnest, he himself felt ready enough to leave his pomp behind for some time and to wander away: a knight-errant with his four ladies. So they secretly made their preparations and started out before dawn, leaving nothing that could betray their secret.

“The morrow found the land wavering between joy and sadness; some thought that now their ambitions could be gratified, others that the riots and revolutions sure to arise would bring ruin and bloodshed. Two famous generals claimed the crown, Vey-Vongsa and Thornit; they immediately hurried to the provinces friendly to their cause and called up their armies.

“Meanwhile the king and the four fugitive girls were enjoying the novelty of their escapade. They passed through numberless plains and woods and, some two months after leaving Angkor, tarried in a town where they heard of a hermit, renowned for his powers of foretelling future events, and who lived in a grotto at a distance that would mean two days of hard riding. They set out. The holy man was dirty, but learned, and as soon as the king came in his presence he guessed his rank and asked him to sit down on a jackal's skin while he would ask of the gods the enlightenment of prophecy. At last he spoke after

an ecstasy that lasted a day and a night : ‘Thou wert a king, O lordly visitor, but never again wilt thou be called king ; thou didst many a bad action, O lordly visitor, but never again wilt thou do another. Two great armies are going to battle, and thou alone wilt defeat them both ; yet, in the midst of thy glory, thou wilt find the mud of life, also four pearls that are hidden therein.’ The monarch was puzzled, especially by the last words, and continued his travels with Tieya and Kramoth, with Vodey and Roun-Say-Sock.”

At this development of the romance the Cambodian narrator, never excelling in concision, finds full scope for his love of anecdotes and recites to his marvelling hearers all the extraordinary things that happened to his hero and heroines ; there is no end to the predicaments in which they fall and to the unexpected way in which they escape from all dangers. But having begun to give only the outlines of the tale, and being unable to record it word for word as it was translated to me, I shall relate directly the culminating events of the story.

“The king entered the camp of Vey-Vongsa and offered him his services. The general did not perceive his suzerain under the garb of an adventurer and gave him the command of a wing. In a memorable combat the so-called mercenary killed Thornit, after which he went over to the routed army. There, revealing his identity, he reorganised the ranks he had been the main factor in undoing, and then crushed Vey-Vongsa’s battalions, the latter finding death at the hands of his late, disguised ally.

“Unlimited triumph was the king’s, and, at the head of the dead pretenders’ forces, he marched in the direction of Angkor, to put once again the Imperial sword in his sheath.

“The hermit had said, be it remembered, that in the midst of his glory the prince was to find the mud of life, and it was at this time that the mud of life splashed and

soiled his noble figure. Hardly had he tasted the fruits of his glory than the nadir of his career was at hand.

“It came in the shape of an old hag. As the monarch was riding, object of the flattery of obsequious vassals, the woman in tattered rags limped along, seized the bridle of his charger, and before anyone had had time to frustrate her plan, the horse was rearing with a dagger thrust into its breast. The palfrey fell, and as the king lay prostrate in the dust the crone threw herself upon him; it was a queer struggle, that of the pauper and of the all-conquering sovereign, both rolling on the ground, the rags and the silk mingling in unprecedented fusion. The knotty arms of the woman were wound round the neck of the prince and her cheek was laid close against his. She was torn away and stabbed, an avenged victim who had seen her daughter defiled by the pleasure-seeking king years before. He rose to his feet, apparently unharmed, but the seeds of leprosy were penetrating his flesh, for the woman was a leper.

“The malady alarmingly gained strength and soon the king’s escort was reduced to his four favourites, Tieya and Kramoth, Vodey and Roum-Say-Sock. Instead of a state entry into his capital the miserable monarch passed the gate on foot and the inhabitants shunned his presence. Instead of a ceremonious return to his throne he was ordered to remain outside his palace, on the terrace that now bears his name, and there he was left to die of hunger and despair. The loathsome days that he spent and the black desolation of his soul were unbearable, yet he would not bow to misfortune and waited for the end bravely, royally. The four sisters had been taken away from him and wept for their lost master; but their spirit was equal to his own and laboriously they began to pierce a secret passage into the masonry of his prison. Finally, after many anxieties and efforts, they reached him, brought food and love, soothed his sorrow, and remained with him



FIG. 28. A NOBLE FROM THE DECORATION OF THE
LEPROUS KING'S TERRACE.

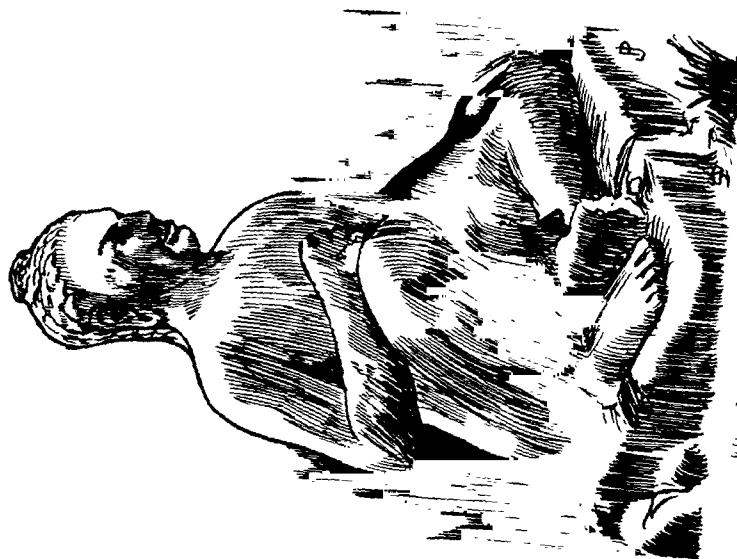


FIG. 29 THE LEPROUS KING.

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till he died, and then they themselves died, the four pearls he was to find hidden in the mud of life, the four faithful sisters, Tieya and Kramoth, Vodey and Roum-Say-Sock."

To this day the image of the "Leper King" has remained on his terrace. The secret passage is revealed to all eyes. Gold leaves have been pasted on the statue's forehead and occasionally it sees a village girl who has come to pray.

The stone monarch is absolutely naked, his hair is plaited and he sits in the Javanese fashion. The legs are too short for the torso, and the forms, much too rounded, lack the strong protuberances of manly muscles; but, however glaring are his defects, he has many beauties, and as a study of character he is perhaps the masterpiece of Khmer sculpture. Whilst his body is at rest his soul boils within him. . . . He is not the wretched creature stung bitterly by the shafts of agony and mortification, but the wicked noble at the time of his greatness. His features are full of passion, with thick lips, energetic chin, full cheeks, aquiline nose and clear brow. He sneers, and never has ignominy of mind been more clearly expressed—the mouth, slightly open, showing the teeth,¹ and the eyes seeming to gloat over the shame of a fallen and hated foe.

V

Taking leave of the satanic figure I use another foot-path to reach the old monastery of Tep-Pranam. There a stella in sandstone, one of the finest that can be found in the country, covered on its four faces by long inscriptions in Sanskrit and in the ancient Khmer language, relates the foundation of the Buddhist convent by Suryavarman in A.D. 1005.

By this time my readers have gathered that little is left

¹ This peculiarity of the teeth being shown in a smile is absolutely and strangely unique in Cambodian art; even in a more or less faithful repetition of the statue at Vat Khnat the lips are pressed together.

of wooden constructions and the houses of the monks are no more ; their halls, their chapel, which were not constructed in stone, as the congregation was poorer than the Brahmanical, have lengthened the list of departed buildings ; and yet Tep-Pranam is the most important Buddhist relic in Angkor, chiefly on account of an enormous effigy of Sakya-Muni that bore the test of ages.

Few things are more impressive than a Buddha and his expression of inner happiness and repose. In the Far East, in Japan, in China, in India or Java the merciful prophet has found artists who could interpret in a way never attained in countries distant from those where the sun rises the charm of *Peace*.

It is a lesson to all those who desire to understand the Eastern spirit that no other races have attained summits as high as theirs, either in the art of terror or in that of pellucid calm. They are the creators of Siva and the creators of Buddha. The two opposite poles of human ideals stand in the old capital of Cambodia two hundred yards one from the other, and both in the act of meditation : Siva the ascetic, Buddha the thinker. A symbol could even be drawn from their respective sizes ; the latter is huge, a giant, his usnisa more than thirteen feet above the soil, his doctrines as high above human nature ; the other, the destructor, the sprite, the devil, is as big as *man*.

Yes, few things are more impressive than a Buddha, and I remember one case when I was startled out of countenance by the emotion I felt at the unexpected vision of Gautama. It was earlier than my visit to the Tonle Sap. Some days after my arrival in Phnompenh I went with two friends to see the tombs of the later kings of Cambodia at Oudong. The "Phnoms," conical pyramids placed over the ashes of the dead princes, were visible miles away, shining in the sun at the top of two hills. We stopped at the end of the road and saw a long



FIG. 30. THE BUDDHA OF TEP PRANAM

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flight of steps climbing steeply to a pagoda, modern but picturesque, the whitewashed walls of which showed up clearly against the green of plants.

Outside it was very simple, but as soon as the wooden doors had been closed behind me I felt my throat squeezed, squeezed so much that I gasped. Massive, enormous columns of a diameter wholly exaggerated for the roof they had to support stood like two rows of soldiery, absolutely plain, of a greenish white tint. The beams overhead were black, invisible; the pavement bare; light clung to every bit of whiteness as if it had no possible hold on the dark prevalent colour; and, at the very end of the nave, a Buddha, sitting on a throne, was so big that his knees, from the place where I looked, appeared to need to pierce the walls in order to find room—so big that his head was using all the available space of the slanting ceiling, and even then he had to bend his neck a little. The structure must have been built round the statue. The god was apparently stifled—some reformed ogre shut up in a human cabin, and his two enamelled eyes glowed like distant stars in the upper gloom. His skin was painted with gold, and it was no wonder that natives fell on their knees at the threshold, not daring to go any nearer.

I have rarely seen anything more grandiose; never has the notion of a power above us been enforced with more surprising suddenness. There was such a contrast between the holy figure and the building in which it was confined, between the figure's reposeful countenance and the ordinary human beings around, shifty, unassured, unsettled, mortal.

The Buddha at Tep-Pranam is the opposite as regards site: he is free. The columns around him are the trunks of fig-trees and the vault above him is green and trembling; but he imparts the same calm to beholders, the same restfulness to the soul. Moss and creepers would place a cloak round his shoulders, but pious pilgrims pluck out

the blasphemous plants and, unsheltered, ungarbed, he dreams as quietly as when a wooden roof covered his silent figure. And it is his final meditation.

vi

Prah Palilay is the last temple I see in Angkor-Thom, and, of the usual type, it seems to have been half-Buddhist and half-Hindu if we are to believe the pediments; some show Vishnu and one, Sakya-Muni, adored by two kneeling elephants and a man, a woman and a child. The tower has partly crumbled and at present looks like the straight shaft of a chimney, under which other Buddhas have been poised on a table-like altar.

vii

If the dead city contains numerous beauties, all the wilderness outside its walls owns as many treasures . . . even more. As soon as Angkor-Thom is left behind, in every direction, along tracks clear or hardly traced, some stellas, fallen stones and buildings prove that the Khmers not only toiled in the capital, but surrounded it with structures sometimes rivalling or surpassing the Bayon in size and majesty.

PART III
OUTSIDE ANGKOR-THOM

CHAPTER I

AN OLD KHMER BRIDGE—MEDITATION ON THE RIVER-SIDE
—TA KEO—TA PROHM—COOLIES CLEARING THE TEMPLE
—BANTEAI KEDEI—INCIDENTS AND IDEAS ON THE
SHORE OF A LITTLE LAKE—THE SMALL SANCTUARIES
OF PRASAT BAT CHUM AND PRASAT KRAVANH—THE
BIGGER SHRINES OF MEBON AND PRÉ RUP

i

I ENTERED the capital through the Southern Gate and now leave it by the Gate of Victory, where, as I am told, a portion of the great balustrade of giants and Nagas will be restored from the adjacent mounds of earth and from the dry moat.¹ The road, which lies in a straight line from the Imperial Palace almost right up to the river of Siem-Reap, turns just before coming to the ancient Khmer bridge that spanned the waters, and then passes on a modern one, inæsthetic, but useful.

The name of the old bridge, Spean Krom, the “underneath” bridge, was indeed suitable, for it reposed, buried in the ground, until, in May 1920, it was dug up, and the earth that filled its “arches” and weighed down its floor was scattered to the four winds of heaven. The piers are placed very close together, because the builders, ignorant of the arch, could not trust heavy pressure on the delicate corbel-table arrangement if it were to be audaciously broad. For this same reason very few bridges have firmly withstood current and weight; most of them have been either carried away or, like that one I am seeing, metamorphosed into walls by the alluvion of the stream which clogged between the piers. The waters, checked

¹ The work is now completed (1922).

as by dams, make wide bends round them and again join their old beds some hundred yards farther away. Usage, wear and incessant traffic caused the Spean Krom to be reinforced several times, and when the Cambodians had lost most of their energy the necessary material was fetched from two small temples near by, Thom-Manon and Kau-Say, which, from fanes, became quarries.

ii

The river, pressed between steep and high banks, is very enticing, and even materialists cannot help but feel poetry gushing down the stream, which murmurs as if busy, intent on an important task ; the ripples follow one another in close array, quickly passing, mingling, reflecting with their thousand mirrors the gleams of sun rays. They whisper and shine like echoes of zephyrs and of day ; they form a turbulent screen for shoals of silvery fish. A tail breaks the surface from time to time and leaves a few bubbles, which burst soon like tiny explosions of light. Branches dip their leaves into the waters and the wavelets pull these leaves that trail and hold on to their stems, it seems, reluctantly—perhaps because the stream speaks in a tantalising way ; it appears to call the foliage, to attract it by fair words.

“Come, sweet leaf, do come, and I shall show you wonders. Why do you foolishly stay in the grip of that tree ? Why do you foolishly cool its trunk with the dampness you absorb ? Why always hang in the same place ? Why always see the same corner of wood and forest ? . . . Come, and in a long, pleasant journey I shall make you see innumerable beauties. Break your chains in twain, escape ; and you will float, lulled on my wavelets, rocked by the movement of my heaving breast, carried by the strength of my current. I shall embrace you softly. A dragon-fly perhaps, with wings of gauze and eyes of velvet, with a body so slender that a breath of wind bends it like a frail bamboo

shoot, and so light that it can safely rest on a spider's web, will alight on you ; then you will form a delicious boat, swiftly sailing down, down, between rows of bowing reeds.

" Soon arriving amongst graceful canoes you will hear the songs of boatmen, the lays of the river. A young girl will sing at twilight, and for an instant, stopped against an oar, you will listen to the rhythmic strains. And once more you will go, but the hand of a child will pull you out dripping on to the deck of his craft, and the little boy, with a smile, will throw you again on to my bosom. You will behold the most luxurious shores in the world, green and brown, and yellow where there is sand, white where there is chalk, and red where there is iron. Live you will, happy for ever in your endless travels, drifting in an elysium of pleasure—close to my heart, for I love you, sweet leaf. Come . . . "

Some leaves, tempted, abandon their parent branch ; quickly they vanish among the waves. Poor leaves, too easily persuaded ; for a short time all will run smoothly, but then pain and death await you ; without sap you will wither and become wrinkled and black ; you will be turned in whirls and made giddy ; you will be choked with water, almost drowned ; you will not see the banks, only a blue desert of clouds, a green chaos of waves ; and after long torture in rapids, where, thrown from rock to rock, you will be torn and shattered, whitened with foam and blinded with spray, after passing through rubbish thrown away by fishermen, after crossing grease left on the surface by a sloop, you will arrive at an ocean of bitter water to die miserably at last, bitten by the salt of the sea.

O you perfid stream, lying water, maskèd wretch ! you resemble life, that life which, when young, seems so tender and charming, so perfect, calling to some human souls to float in its stream, to yield their thoughts to its current ; and then, when it is too late, reveals its real nature, its monstrous struggles, its despicable end.

Yet many leaves resist the incitation and many minds the enticement; they are the strong ones and remain. Therefore I behold puppets: the leaves. . . . On the larger stage of the world there are bigger puppets: men; and the ones like the others are lost by a passing weakness. What a lesson for the poor peasants around, if they were only able to learn it. Long ago ease dragged them to slackness and now they are mere nonentities.

iii

But the stream and its philosophy are some distance away, for I have walked towards Ta Keo, which is passed when on the road to Ta Prohm. It has terraces so green and luxuriant that one is mistaken for a time and might behold some hanging gardens of Babylon, setting off five naked belvederes, lofty and austere, which cut boldly the limit between the cloudy shrubs and the flowery skies.

The stone of these erections is rough and coarse and proved perhaps too hard for the delicate tools of decorators, as a chisel was used on it in my presence, with the only effect of becoming blunt. So the shrines, unpolished, uncarved, have only the vigorous and harsh appearance of flat surfaces of greyness, cut up here and there by dense and sharp shadows.

Ta Prohm, on the other hand, has ornaments that always equal those of the Bayon and often excel them in purity, if not in originality. A portion of its outside wall lines the road and one turns in to the temple at a gate, furnished with four great heads, somewhat like those of Angkor-Thom, but on a smaller scale, and where Garudas replace the three-trunked elephants.

I hear the shock and thud of implements, and cries come from human lips. Men are working close by, for the "*Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*," which has undertaken the preservation of the ruins, saves little by little what is left of them from the encroachment of plants,



FIG. 31. A CORNER OF TA PI CHU.

and has fallen stones put back into their right place when it is thought necessary or appropriate. Batches of coolies, who toil every day, are under the immediate supervision of "caporals," who themselves carry out the commands of a French *conservateur*.

What is done is regrettable from a poetical point of view, and takes away picturesqueness and romance ; but it must be understood that marvels like Angkor are heirlooms entrusted to our care, heirlooms which we must hand down to our descendants in the best possible condition. This can only be accomplished by uprooting the vegetation that throws down entire walls and towers with its constant pressure and by placing supports here and there to strengthen endangered pieces of architecture. Besides, one must make the best of anything, and the natives who clear Ta Prohm are a pleasure to watch. Most of them are fine, tall, well-formed ; one or two are truly formidable, their arms being tough like wood, and their necks and chests so muscular that they would not dishonour a champion wrestler. What is especially noticeable, in spite of dark hair and eyebrows, of black teeth and deep-set eyes, is the good nature of their features, the loyalty of their looks, the humour and apparent joy they put into the wielding of levers and ropes.

The "caporal," with an old felt hat discovered in the castaways of some traveller, walks hither and thither and in the half-chanted, soft Cambodian tongue admonishes or gives orders to his inferiors. They have built low sheds, under which bowls and kettles, clothes and green cigarettes are partly sheltered from the heat ; a youth puts the finishing touches to the midday meal, since the sun is already high up in the zenith, and preserves victuals from prowling dogs, for here, wherever man is, dogs are also to be found.

Fires are disseminated among the buildings and are fed with tangled plants, some superb, that robbed the stones.

With hatchets and "phkeaks" men climb on the roofs or scatter in the courts, and cut, cut till their arms clasp huge bunches of greenery, which they let fall with a rustle on the top of dry twigs, already ablaze. From between the leaves long, lazy rolls of smoke pour towards the clouds and curl round towers and widen and ooze and disperse above the heads of tall trees. Flames appear only rarely and then are hidden by fresh fuel piled up higher and higher, like green and brown bushes inhabited by a sprite who vomits dark smoke. The coolies who walk, surrounded by fumes, are indistinct, almost appalling, sometimes entirely smothered by the shifting screen. Their shapes are passing, transient, and are soon erased; arms and bodies roughly drawn, a pallid visage, going on the wings of smoke. All of a sudden a change of the breeze and the vague ghosts become again good natives, black with soot and cinders. In the end there is nothing more to burn in this part of Ta Prohm, and as the smoke has lifted, a palace is left, which seems to have arisen from the ground, whilst the reeking heaps were concealing the growth of mysterious shrines. It is then that great quantities of earth are taken away from many a place and collected in mounds on the side, revealing a terrace, some sintos with their legs shattered and their jaws crammed with sod, some dvarapalas with broken clubs in their hands, some Nagas in pieces, and walls and gopuras, pure and beautiful. At the same time agile boys climb on the fig-trees, that have their roots riding bestride vaults, and begin by sawing the highest branches, letting them down by means of ropes. To cut the trees at the base would be folly, for they would fall all of a piece and crush a portion of the edifices. The work is slow, but sure and safe; almost leaf by leaf, twig by twig, the wild growth dwindles, remorselessly attacked by adolescents who sit on forked branches like apes.

On the ground, heavy poles, placed on an incline, creak

and bend when superfluous boulders are thrown down into a ditch. Propped up against a chapel a broad ladder of bamboo affords passage to coolies, who, in sixes or dozens, puff and shout, lifting monoliths to their rightful position, abandoned years since. First of all one of the big stones has to be disengaged from the clinging earth and crawling plants; then two, three or four ropes are slipped under it; then a stout branch is tied beneath the loops; and, finally, the labourers squat down and place the pole on their shoulder. . . . One, two . . . Han! with one voice and one action the workmen stand up and falter forward. If they have to go far they stop and collapse half way, rest and take breath, chattering and joking. . . . Once more: han! han! up again. All of it repeated until, with a hand swept across their face, gathering moisture at the finger-tips, they smilingly go and fetch another stone, pleased at the task already accomplished.

No grumbling, no hatred, but clean, decent behaviour; everyone enchanted to gain thus his livelihood.

Day by day, hour by hour, the monument gets rid of the cloaks of nature, and many things come to light that, under different circumstances, would have been left buried. Rooms encumbered with blocks and rubbish regain their spaciousness; cloisters with high, carved canopies, which enframed lingas or statuettes cut away by heretics, find once more rays of light caressing their walls; figures of sleeping or preaching Buddhas no longer feel stones leaning against their backs and brows; and, what is still more valuable, precious heads of glorious workmanship are recovered from their tomb of clay; whole statues or interesting fragments enchant again human eyes.

Almost touching Ta Prohm, the other temple of Banteai Kedei, also big enough to have been a town, brings to the

mind all the melancholy thoughts that haunt ruins ; and in its meanders one feels struggling in one's soul the thwarted aspirations of a Childe Harold. In vain, alas ! for the dim gropings of an ordinary intellect cannot discover, like the romantic pilgrim, an interpreter who reaches the lofty heights of genius ; yet the mossy edifices and grass-covered pavements possess the beauty of savage poems ; they merely need a Lord Byron to turn their silent voices into florid language. . . . Angkor, like Troy or Rome, is even worthy of an epic.

I walk absent-mindedly, gazing with vacant eyes on masterpieces, and continue my way, led by caprice, turning to the left although the right is equally charming, and kicking pebbles which scatter and beat the bushes.

How far I have gone would be impossible to say. A lane tortuously crawls between high walls of sand where creepers have grown, which dapple with green the whiteness that is fiercely struck by the sun on the one hand, and lost in bluish shadow on the other. Crickets jump in haste on the dust ; they spring frantically and spread out their wings ; the breeze carries them in curving flights to the steep banks, to which they cling desperately for a while, then slip back and start again with a powerful jerk of their wiry legs when they deem I am coming to dangerous proximity. The way broadens and reaches a tiny beach on the shore of a delightful rectangular lake. I even remember its sweet name now : Sras Srang, " the pool of ablutions." It is curious how every footpath on which I start unknowingly ends in the water of pools ; the last find was very dismal ; this one, on the contrary, is enchanting. A carpet of lotus flowers rests on the wavelets near the land and, somewhere in the centre, a husky tree leans on one side as if to drink, or as if it were to lie in the liquid for a final rest. A square has been enclosed in low fences and, above the surface, the green shoots of rice peep modestly. There is something soft and

reposeful in the atmosphere ; there is absolute peace. A gentle tug uncloses my fist, and my horse, faithful companion more precious than I can tell, which followed me quietly while I strayed, letting the reins bend limply in my grasp, is edging towards the rippling freshness. It puts its head down and, its hoofs deep in mud, swallows water with gasping breath. A parakeet ventures over the lake, alights on the small tree half-plunged in slime and water, and begins to chirp in piercing notes and sudden shrill twitters, which disperse like so many imprecations. Several more green fellows fly to join it and, as they are all hidden in the foliage and sing blithely with all the power of their tiny, busy hearts, it is the poor tree itself that seems to shriek, imploring help for its drowning trunk. Then a noisy flutter and the bustling musicians sail over the banyans on the far shore. The sudden silence after the uproarious concert is surprising, and for a time my ears, unused to subtle sounds, cannot perceive the faint rustle of reeds or the slippery retreat of frogs into the waves. A small terrace projects into the water, looking like an old quay which, it is said, was built for the convenience of the emperor and his courtiers, and where they were wont to loaf and watch the coming and going of swans, the maidens making foam and splashing with their oars, and the sparkling boats gliding slowly with sterns curved like tails, and stems in the shape of herons' necks or heads of Garudas and snakes, and which seemed to be stealthily swimming, so as not to disturb the repose of noble girls who reclined on cushions under roofs of gold.

There is a cella in the centre, and the idol set under its vault must have been continually urged to listen to the prayers of naïve souls, concealed beneath the proud exterior of aristocratic mien. This shrine was, no doubt, an object of pilgrimage for young princesses, who thought that the god who deigned to live in such humble but charming surroundings was gentle and merciful. It was

perhaps a chapel to Kama, God of Love. The spot would suit the temper of the strange power, terribly strong and yet terribly tender, of that passion which carries away kingdoms, empires, whole worlds, and inhabits also the humblest dwellings. Yes, it might be a fit abode for the human and superhuman feeling, impersonified in Eros, in Cupid, under a thousand names, but which keeps everywhere the same conformation and creates the same acts. Love could occupy this quiet nest embedded in water, whence he could fly at will over the earth and burn hearts and scorch men and women, freeze hatred, and also cause thoughts to rise high, to soar far to ask from the unknown the strength needed to adore God more than flesh. There is some inexplicable sensation that Kama rested there for some time after his travels-without-end. Is it the soft hues of water under a pitiless sky? Is it the perfect freedom from agitation, unforeseen amidst the thriving life of the jungle? Is it because one feels love to be a rest, a change from our clanging hubbub? and is it because this place has an inner appeal for tranquillity, doubly effective after all the disturbance experienced among the coolies? . . . At any rate, I recall on the sand, damped by murmuring ripples, many nooks in different countries I have seen, which gave me the same impression that love had come one day and had left there, when he went away, a part of his spirit; as if, in truth, that weird lust, neither a virtue nor a vice, for it kills as much as it generates, owns snug retreats in all lands, where it stops, where it roosts in the fashion of a migratory bird, volatile like it.

V

Behind a curtain of verdure a sala, set up for pilgrims or occasional travellers, is derelict and in the worst state of decrepitude. Its roof, formerly covered with red tiles and retaining but a few of them, is perforated by broad gaps which, with indented outlines, seem to be mouths

wishing to devour the rare leaves that fall through them, and even parts of the clouds ; the leaning columns, made of wood, are picked by the bites of lice, small, destructive insects, which leave on their trace holes as true and clean as those pierced with gimlets ; and the planks of the floor, when they are not missing, bear my weight miraculously ; but I sit down and wait. Why have I chosen this dirty hovel ? Probably because every man, for some unaccountable instinct, likes to have a ceiling, however rotten, overhead. What am I waiting for ? Anything that might come. I am ready like a hunter, waiting for game at the edge of a brook.

But the sun is bright, much too bright for my poor pupils, and lethargy gradually benumbs my limbs ; all objects become queer and hazy. I close my eyes and seek rest in the grey uncertainty of my thoughts. My topee has fallen over my nose, my hands are behind my head, and in this position I take a half-dozing siesta. . . . Happily the tiredness does not last and I rouse myself, still dulled by sleep, which flees but with difficulty in the tropics. Once it has taken even a momentary hold on your body it leaves the flesh tardily and often renders it languid for the rest of the day. One feels a torpor and one's hands are clammy, swollen, uncomfortable, and one's cheeks are red and itchy, and one's hair is wet and heavy.

I peer through the bushes and perceive that my short drowsiness prevented me from noticing the arrival of five children, one of whom is a tiny mite, doddering on podgy legs with toes turned in, and maintained upright by the grip of a brother who walks, leaning behind him. He is a real bambino, and it was perhaps his ringing, merry laughter that woke me up. The whole five of them rush into the water and play in the same way as any infants, dabbling in shallow pools ; they spatter, push, fall, scream, smile and make as much disturbance as they can, under the amused and encouraging gaze of small

birds, which are good judges as regards frisky tumults. Eventually they go back to their home, a cagna in the shadow of a copse, a quarter or half a mile away.

Now young women walk straight into the ripples, without a pause to take their sarongs off ; but I see that they have dropped on dry land a clean, neatly folded sampot, which will replace that wetted by the bath. The little females are beautiful and do their business with wonderful pudency and thoroughness. They squat down and rub their arms and neck and face with smooth hands, and sprinkle their hair, and stand up again to clean their feet, one with the other, as they deign not or need not use their fingers, and turn back, the drenched cloth clinging close to their figure, which appears in all the modesty and purity of youth and budding life. Bashful, indeed, they are ; they place the dry silk *over* the wet one, and when the former is safely tied on their breast they undo the other, wring it well, and return whence they came. At the moment when they enter the path I leave my hiding place ; but although slightly scared they do not blush, knowing that I could not possibly have seen anything unseemly. It is thus that savages wash among themselves, girls in the company of girls ; they have no thought of impropriety and conceal their charms even from their sisters. Not until they have grown to womanhood and motherhood do they sometimes, very rarely, spurn the shawl wound round their bosom, and have solely for a garment some coloured piece of silk over their loins. I tread on their footsteps, not for long ; they plunge into the bushes and, swinging into the saddle, I trot in the direction of new shrines, indicated to me yesterday and not always easy to find.

The first I recognise on the side of the road, on top of a hillock, the foot of which is immersed in rice-fields, is

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Prasat Bat Chum. Standing on the stirrups I spur my mount into the thickets, where it warily steps, and I can for an instant believe that I am nearing some country mansion in England: the grazing oxen look like our breeds of cattle, the flitting swallows are certainly not exotic, and a thin column of smoke rising near brick monuments, whose shape can hardly be ascertained with short glimpses through avenues of trees, is quite as welcoming as the smells of a good meal that greet visitors in Kent or Surrey. But apart from this attractive approach the sanctuary has nothing remarkable which can detain us, except, perhaps, a few Buddhist inscriptions that record the piety of a minister, Kavindrarithana, who lived in the reign of Rajendravarman, in the tenth century of our era.

A thousand yards from Prasat Bat Chum I reach Prasat Kravanh, "the sanctuary of cardamom," a group of five brick chapels, built on a straight line. The central erection is of greater dimensions than the other four and is ornamented within in a way I have met nowhere else: three of the brick walls afforded large panels for decoration and have been covered with low reliefs, carved in the brick itself. We have already seen similar work on a much smaller scale in a temple of Prah Pithu, but there it was added by later Buddhists, whereas here it is probably of the same epoch as the architectural portions and the scenes shown are Brahmanical. The main figures are far bigger than life-size and far too cumbersome to be agreeable; the room is small, and its space lessened by the gaudy and inappropriate sculpture. On one side Vishnu, four-armed and holding his attributes, is standing with one foot on land and the other placed on a lotus flower held by a woman whose bust stands out of the waters of a river or of the sea. Opposite, the same deity, perched on the shoulders of Garuda, is adored by two lesser persons. On the back wall Siva reigns, eight-armed, erect and

solemn, in the very midst of a concourse of tiny figures, arranged in parallel rows. Men and women are in the crowd and every one of them clasps his hands on his heart. Above everything lies a scaly crocodile, and a linga on the ground points to the Sivaic character of Prasat Kravanh.

vii

It must be more than four o'clock already. I hurry back because I wish to see Mebon and Pré Rup before evening and they are not near. Galloping past the Sras Srang I venture on a new road, not yet finished, which will eventually give easy access to the two temples, will touch huge Prah Khan and run into Angkor-Thom through the Northern Gate, joining again the completed highway in front of the Elephants' Terrace. This road, like most in the region, is raised on embankments above the low ground of the plains, so that when the floods come towards the end of June they are all like endless jetties, advancing in an ocean of water and tree-tops, for the forest at one's feet is plunged in the deluge and only the highest growth appears like bunches of verdure, thrown everywhere in the current. Fish swim among the bushes, and it is weird to think of these denizens of the depths passing where birds built their nests, and meeting flowers which, before they wither in the damp, must resemble sea-anemones, shining dimly in the greenish liquid. The dwellers of the air have soared and fly from branch to branch, but no longer alight on the soil where they found worms ; the fish have extended their sway and profit by their momentary empire to have their fill of insects, otherwise reserved for the species of song and feathers. On this part of the land two totally different worlds reign in turn, two totally different elements possess power one after the other. . . . For centuries tigers, panthers, stags, boars and many other legged beasts have retired in June, to reappear in January ; for centuries carp and trout and such-like have

invaded the region in the second month of summer, to fly once more to their haunts of the rivers in the middle of winter ; and either wheels or oars are used by humans to go from village to village.

At present, of course, the waters are at their lowest ebb and my ride is through flourishing growth, in parts, however, rather dry and yellow. If I had not been told, it would have been quite impossible to guess that the ground around me was at one time replaced by the heaving and glassy surface of an enormous artificial lake, which covered an area of no less than four square miles. And it was on an island in the middle of this, the Eastern Baray, that the temple of Mebon was erected.

Here it is, but I can hardly see anything, and ask for the help of two natives, who follow me respectfully. They run, the good men, always anxious to oblige, and, while one is holding my pony, the other climbs with me by means of stout lianas to the top of the first tier, for Mebon also is built in several storeys. I have hardly recovered and am still rearranging my clothing when I stumble on to a magnificent stone elephant, whose feet lie in blossoms and whose back is caressed by light branches ; creepers are wound round its neck, and its broad ears afford a good setting for several gold and blue beetles quietly sleeping. We pass over a second wall and step into long buildings without roofs ; we continue on our course, climb to the second tier, where, at the corner, stands another elephant . . . the two beasts and their six companions, which I have not seen, are happier, it seems, than those which surveyed with despairing looks the tragic marsh and scenes of Prah Pithu. We go up a staircase flanked by two brick towers, where holes show the emplacement of vanished stucco, and, at the top of a third storey, five brick sanctuaries are guarded by lions, old and funny, provided as they are with falling bonnets of dead leaves. The decoration of the temple is heavy.

Pré Rup, in which I roam after leaving Mebon, is about a mile south of the latter and five miles on the road from Angkor-Thom. The top storey is reached by a long flight of steps, extremely impressive, between walls of a vegetation which, moreover, throws garlands from side to side, securing lions as with lassos. Five chapels are raised on the top and have kept some of the covering plaster : like most Khmer cellas they have on either side of their doorways two niches, occupied by figures, but in this case, instead of the usual Devatas, one finds goddesses, who are all very tall and whose legs are of a length quite disproportionate to the rest of the body ; their feet are drawn with heels together and toes turned right out, a bad, unseemly mistake, which, I gather from my perusals, stands almost alone in Cambodian art. One of the goddesses has four faces and four arms.

The bricks inside the rooms have become absolutely white or entirely black and give vaguely the impression of strange draught-boards. The holy of holies contains a couple of Buddhas, standing up under their coat of red lacquer, pricked and blanched by moisture ; one of them is slightly smaller than the other and they are like a husband and wife, the mythical hosts of this lost fane, waiting for guests in an ancient hall where the effect of colour is striking : dull red amongst black and white, and leaves which thrust their green through some gaping crack.

The name of this temple means " to turn the corpse," a gruesome epithet, which also describes one of the processes of cremation when the dead is moved on the funeral pile until he is consumed by the flames. This weird name naturally indicates a legend, which the villagers are particularly fond of telling, but which is not very fine and certainly not appealing ; it is too human and meagre and not very original.

Sdach-Peal was a king inclined to appreciate good

cheer, and of the men whom he liked none was more valued than his gardener, the Ta Tasak Phaem. In the country of Himavan, some distance to the north, the court was assembled, and thither did the gardener accompany his sovereign. The former's speciality was a certain kind of cucumbers, and of the latter a great propensity to eat them. Sdach-Peal called the Ta Tasak Phaem and ordered him to keep vigilant guard round his plantations, for there was a danger of the fruit being stolen ; but he was not confident in the obedience of the gardener and went himself under the cover of night to see whether his beloved plants were in safety. Unfortunately the servant was only too watchful, attacked him whom he thought to be a prowler or vulgar thief, and inflicted on the king a mortal wound. Sdach-Peal died near the Sras Srang, where his body was discovered ; he was incinerated at Pré Rup and buried at the Trapeang-Kmoch, near Prasat Bat Chum—so it is said.

viii

What I fear has happened : night is upon me, and in the gloom of the undergrowth I find my path with difficulty. A sinto, against which I bump, gives me an impression of total decay, for its toothless jaws gape like the rictus of an ancestor, unkind and absurd. I cannot help smiling at my own comparison of this fantastic, cold, lifeless creature to a grandfather in woollen slippers and loose-fitting dressing-gown ; and yet, if the stone monster were to see and ponder, the same conclusions as those which cause a certain old man to gaze on us, irony imprinted on his lips and half-pity lurking in his eyes, must flicker through its declining brain, for we, the young, ignore with perfect impartiality the lessons and experience of beings who have spent many years on this earth and invariably shrug our shoulders at the sayings of aged parents and at the model of spoiled human work. Both tell us life must not be

taken too seriously, as time comes and undoes most of our toil, hopes and cravings, but still we continue to strive and struggle. . . . In fact antiquity, either in humans or in things, would lead us all to be epicures and hedonists.

Away at last ! the coolness of evening nips and flushes my cheeks ; the clouds take on the colour of roses and form an immense, changing, overturned garden of iridescent beds and enthralling disorder. The four hoofs of the horse clang sharply on the stones and a toucan sends me, as I rush past, its almost human “ Kua-a-a-a ” —good-night.

CHAPTER II

A LONG RIDE ON ELEPHANTS—BAKONG AND ITS VAST PROPORTIONS—LOLEI AND A STATUE OF DURGA—PRAH-KO AND ITS BULLS—THE STYLE OF THESE TEMPLES—THE JUNGLE AFTER A FIRE

i

I HAVE arranged to go to-day for a long ride through the jungle to the old temples of Bakong, Lolei and Prah-Ko, south of Siem-Reap, in the district of Roluos, which is rich in relics of olden times. Some of these are particularly interesting; like the Prah Thom, "the great Buddha," an image of the saintly prophet carved at the summit of one of several stone blocks, each of which measures from fifty to sixty-two feet in height and has at its base small grottos, occupied by Annamite priests; or like the Chhat Maha Rusei, "the parasol of the great hermit," a cumbrous monolith, shaped like a mushroom, under which nineteen statues sit elbow to elbow. But I shall only see Bakong, the greatest ruin of that region, Lolei and Prah-Ko.

A heavy step outside, a bang at my shutters, and I am out for our expedition. Two huge brutes, looming grey in the night, are waiting for me, restlessly moving their tapering trunks. I mount a short ladder and, stepping on the rough skin of the elephant's neck, I sit on a howdah, far above the ground. All is silence around, and our mahouts, called "cornacs" here, with a slight pressure of their feet, start the daunting animals, which soon walk, their broad feet coming flat on the road, pressing it hard as if they were afraid lest it should slip from under their

weight. We pass through the narrow street of the village and, except for a noise of scuttling under the arecas, everything is as yet asleep and still. A river stops our way and we follow it for some time ; then at a ford the elephants enter the water and drops splash, gleaming and sputtering as they plunge once again into the inky blackness of the wavelets ; a long noise of breathing and we receive a shower—our giant mount wished to refresh its skin and cooled us at the same time ; the cornac swears at this and gives a cutting slap with his bamboo pole down the elephant's side. Plosh, plosh, the last steps in the river ; then on the mud, the mire sweating humidity under the strong pressure. On the distant line of the woods a pale light announces dawn ; it gradually spreads and appears to be a shroud, soon to fall over the earth ; small clouds overhead receive tinges from the delicate brush of aurora and flit away again in the general half-gloom ; the trees and roofs are cut in perfect blackness against the whitening sky. A bird-song starts in the nearby branches and a cock, from under some shed, sends its sharp crow, instantly followed by calls which continue for a long while, waking life little by little ; and wherever one is one harks to this cry of roosters answering again and again, and one feels more at home, for even if everything else is singular the familiar sound in the early morning always remains the same, strangely enough ; moreover, as it is heard when the eyes can hardly see, it goes much deeper into the soul, and many thoughts come at that time to the mind of exiles—thoughts of farmyards, and bright kitchens, and bonny maidens, and hay-stacks, and lavender.

Many creatures begin to move and a head peering under a straw curtain tells that man also will soon come out to work or play. It is not long. A shrill voice : “Damrey, damrey !” and tiny little chaps follow us, running, looking at the elephants, which go on their way with the same

sure and patient pace. Laughter emerges from pouting mouths and the children are happy to caper after their slumber ; but they carefully stay at a safe distance, somewhat awed by the bulky beasts that shake their heads when a barking dog ventures too near.

We come out of the village and in a short while the last youngster goes back, after a last wondering look over his shoulder. . . . I see him, running fast, having already forgotten us, hurrying to join in the games of his happy comrades.

As under the magic wand of some fairy all objects assume shapes : light arrives ; shrubs and huts take relief and rise from the shadow of night like visions.

We now plunge into waste lands, dried and withered by the heat of many days. There is but a flat plain, cut up here and there by clumps of bushes not much taller than a man ; and dreary do I find this monotonous scene, which continues out of sight with the same discoloured grass and the same plants, too low to give any shadow. The sun, by this time well up above, mercilessly pours its heat upon our backs ; we tire, thrown from side to side by the sway of our mount. our feet dangling, our helmet pulled over our eyes. We try to distinguish some accident of view and at last see small woods of coco-nut trees, which tell that a hamlet is there, near a pool, marsh or spring. Five or six grazing horses catch sight of the elephants and rush away, showing us their hoofs as they vanish in a cloud of dust. Two or three peasants wipe, with a weary gesture, their wet brows ; we do the same, melting under the glowing rays, sweat piercing our coats, to be dried immediately. The coco-nut trees stand around us now, and we are pursued once again by “ nyos ” and barking dogs. But shadow refreshes us only for a while ; wild, untilled ground is not yet left behind and I feel worn out, as if I had been dragged for days, tied to the hump of a camel in a scorching Sahara. Surely the

sun cannot be fiercer there, nor can there be less shadow among the dunes of deserts.

The elephants seem to wander ceaselessly. We reach a rough trunk, which marked the line of the horizon, to see the plain spread out as far again, and we are for the moment the only moving creatures in this wilderness. The elephant which carries us walks between bushes, other bushes, fresh bushes of wrinkled appearance; the elephant which follows us places its feet almost on the exact marks left by its leader. Our tiny caravan, lost in the heat, passes on an unmarked trail as surely as if it were a road worn by much traffic. The mahouts know the region so well that a broken bough is a sign and a thicket slightly above the average height a certain *point de repaire*. Sitting one knee on the skull of the beasts they goad them on with jerky movements of their other foot. The huge ears of the pachyderms, torn and cut at the edges, move unendingly like the wings of an enormous black butterfly and strike the skin of their neck with a slap of wet cloth; the trunks, rolling up, rub with a noise of crunching paper.

A herd of buffaloes obstructs the trail, all staring at us, muzzles raised horizontally, long horns laid straight on withers, nostrils strained to catch any smell of danger, ears attentive to reveal uncertain sounds. We come nearer and they do not move, barring the road with their fat, grey forms. We begin to think that the half-wild beasts are slightly alarming, since two elephants are no match for fifty pairs of sharp crescents, and buffaloes are apt to charge for no special reason. We come nearer and they stand still; we are almost on them. At last one head goes down and this spreads panic into the whole troop; they shuffle and jostle, and we are confronted by cruppers instead of heads. The herd gallops clumsily, separated in two bands, one to the right, one to the left; when twenty yards away they stop and stare again. We ride

betwixt two rows of searching looks . . . their gaze is on us all the time ; the necks bend as we move onward ; some of the animals, which were already sideways, turn round slowly to front us ; and when they are mere specks in the distance they still untrustfully look in the direction of the two monsters who disturbed their rest.

The next creatures met are oxen, cows and calves ; but this time we are far off when they stampede, tails propped perpendicularly above their backs, like a brush of hair mounted on a stiff pole. The young race wildly in circles ; yet, as they understand that we mean no harm, they eventually continue to graze quietly.

A sigh of relief escapes from our lips as the edge of a not very dense forest, *forêt claireière*, as the French call it here, looms in view, and the expectation of cooling shade revives weakened energies. Alas ! all trials are not ended. Hardly have we penetrated under the vault of the trees when we feel maddening stings at the nape of our necks and even down our backs, and, killing the assailants with our fingers, we guess that they are the far-famed red ants, the horrid insects which possess in tiny abdomens the courage of lions, the cruelty of weasels and the dogged obstinacy of bulls. Their opponents' size does not matter to them and, though often unattacked, they close their formidable jaws in his flesh ; nor do they relax their firm grip, even when half-crushed to death. It is not long before we realise that at every branch we touch a legion of the incorrigible armies invades our clothes and, slipping down collars, up sleeves, beneath belts, ruthlessly and wantonly pursues a war to extinction (its own in this case ; but, should it be larger, whose ?). . . . The mahouts with their bamboo sticks push the leaves aside ; yet a diminutive red coat (the words can be doubly applied for the uniform and fighting spirit) finds a means of dropping unnoticed, carefully chooses our weak points, swiftly makes use of his weapons . . . and receives an overwhelming blow.

ii

Hours have flown ; the light forest is in the background, no longer tempting, since we are aware of whom it is the domain. The land around is fertile and well tilled. I am told we are already within Bakong, that we have left behind the first defences. This temple also must be vast. Nothing proves the information to be correct until I descry, in the centre of a copse, the summit of a spoiled turret, poised in the greenery like an egg in a nest, a bare and spotted egg, dropped by a gigantic eagle which has just sprung from the tale of some Sindbad. Ah ! here are again a rabble of children, sure announcement of the nearness of a village. The heralds, young, with puffed stomachs and bronze-coloured skin, ever manifest their presence unobtrusively. To all appearances they have been lying in wait and suddenly surround us with their ring of glittering teeth, not yet polished with betel, and sparkling pupils, full of fun, of the joy of life : the most delightful embassy the peasants could have sent us, for it speaks of hope, of the future, and will put us in the right frame of mind to see ruins that can never get rid of their melancholy and therefore can never help from saddening while they embellish our souls.

Women, full jars on their heads and as tall and splendid as the renowned figure in the *Fire at Borgo*, flatten themselves on the hedges to let us go by ; when the lane is contracted they turn their backs to us, stoop their heads, raise their shoulders and, casting a sly glance at our mounts, utter a restrained cry, intimidated by the trunks that sway from side to side and tear in bunches the flowers and buds of pineapple plantations. The ananas are in bloom, and their curved leaves, prickly at the edges and brown at the tip, as if they had been tempered in fire like lances, form a brilliant corolla for the stem and petals of discreet tints, from rose to purple and azure—a plant which

is really beautiful and useful, since it sheds gracefulness and tasty fruit.

All the inhabitants of neighbouring hamlets are now pressing on our footsteps, for not often do white men tarry in this direction, and it is a great event for the simple people. We stop in front of a high laterite wall, strengthened and widened like those of Angkor-Thom by earth piled up inside. The two elephants remain standing, surrounded by inquisitive brats, who point to each other their peculiarities and give vent to their opinion by exclamations, strenuous waving of arms and kicks, while we enter through the ransacked gopura and find ourselves at the starting-point of a causeway, which is laid across a moat and is some hundred yards in length. Two Nagas, truly enormous, their bodies being about three feet in diameter, are placed as balustrades, but not held up by either giants or short pillars, merely flat on the ground ; their heads are ugly and, lifted abruptly at right angles to the soil, produce an anatomical anomaly, as the spine would have to be broken before it could assume such a position. But let us go farther and explain the many differences which exist between the style of these temples and that of Angkor-the-Great.

On the other side of the water we see the slight wooden pagodas of living worshippers and the dwelling of the bonzes. I come across the pedestal of a sinto, of which three faces are carved with scenes extremely primitive in draughtsmanship ; one might represent the combat of Bali and Sugriva. Beyond the moat and the berm that lies within it stands another wall of laterite, which isolates the shrines. These are a cohort of towers, placed regularly on a rectangular plan and lining the approaches to five tiers of a pyramid, the top of which is accessible through a gopura, preceded by two rather long erections and leading to steep staircases ornamented with lions. At the corner of every tier an elephant looks out over the wide

panorama. Crowning all is a sixth platform, that on which rested the most important sanctuary, now non-existent. In its place a pagoda, itself falling to ruin, furnishes a counterpart to the verses :

“As in those domes, where Cæsars once bore sway,
Defac'd by time, and tott'ring in decay,
There in the ruin, heedless of the dead,
The shelter-seeking peasant builds his shed ;
And, wond'ring man could want the larger pile,
Exults, and owns his cottage with a smile.”

On the august monument, where strange gods once bore sway, the priest of Gautama, heedless of the vanquished, erects a shelter for the quaint images of his own faith, but does not wonder that man should want the larger pile. Wishing himself to possess it, he proudly sets his handiwork above that of the artists whose task he assumes, and his ragged, lamentable effort shows in a striking way the revolutions which time effects. Meek Buddhas, under the humble roof of decaying wood, and served by ignorant peasants in yellow draperies, who do not hinder the venue of the poorest being, reign where some powerful and domineering deity, the sight of whom was forbidden to all but the noblest by the rules of wilful ministers, held a nation under his hand. How transient is popularity, for gods and mortals !

iii

Meanwhile Time has swung his scythe and a few grains of sand have dropped to the bottom of his hour-glass ; his long white beard sweeps the sky.

Once again our elephants carry us. They walk on the road that joins Bakong to Lolei. The road, finished by the ancient Khmers, is only a short segment of the highway which formerly ran from Angkor-Thom to Kompong Thom, a distance of one hundred and thirty kilometres as the crow flies. The line of communication is very wide



FIG. 32. DEVAIA, IOTET



FIG. 33. DVARAPALA, IRAH KO

here and clear, edged in by paddy-fields and woods. We cease to use it three hundred yards from Lolei and go to that monument by paths between deep furrows. When we arrive at our goal the old story is repeated, and, as the natives are viewing our beasts to their heart's content, I manage to escape and climb quickly to the topmost terrace of a series of three by stairs which once had many sintos and gargoyles in the shape of a lion's head. Welcomed by the furious howls of yellow dogs I hardly wink at the salas and cagnas, established on very clean and dry soil, and am transported into an old, old world as soon as I attempt to acquire a good understanding of the four chapels which complete the temple.

They are those in which Yaçovarman dedicated four statues of Siva and Devi, and we even know by inscriptions that the divine couple was adored under the names of Yaçovarman's ancestors; the two front chapels were consecrated to his father and grandfather, Indravarman and Mahipativarman, and the two behind to his mother and grandmother, Indradevi and Rajendradevi. Whether the statues were likenesses of the dead is not mentioned, but very probable.¹

Also of bricks the cellas are built with great industry. Each one has a door facing the east and three false entrances. The decoration is very finished: on either side of the doors of the shrines to male divinities stand Dvarapalas in niches which represent the whole tower on a reduced scale; the two other chapels have, instead of men, fat Devatas on guard.

I am using my pencil and my wits, but before long a swarm of peasants will gather in a stifling ring. Hungry and growing weary I draw back to lunch with my friend under a thatched roof put at our disposal by the bonzes.

The two elephants are being washed and the water makes their skin almost black. In ever composed and

¹ "L'Apothéose au Cambodge," by G. Coedes. Also look back, page 169.

languid movements they collect, with coiling trunks, much of the grass placed at their feet and munch it with the sedulous air of gourmets.

iv

One in the afternoon, the midday rest for moving creatures, but I will not avail myself of the right, and, looking forward to a confidential interview with the ancient things, I stretch my limbs and return to the shrines.

The rigour of this climate leaves no respite; I therefore find it difficult to stay in the full glare of Phœbus and so step all at once into one of the chapels. Several uninteresting images share the strange abode and, always eager for fresh impressions, I search the darkest corner as soon as my eyes have become accustomed to the penumbral environment; but I discover nothing worth mentioning. I violate the solitude of three of the chapels with similar disappointment and, half-disheartened, stop before the last, expecting nothing more.

Presentiments, however, do not always come true and my eyes rest at last on a statue, the statue of a woman, worthy of a prolonged contemplation. It leans against a pedestal and its legs are sunk in earth up to the knees. Lessing saw rightly that one of the main beauties of the Laocoön group is the entwining of the serpents round the legs of the Trojan priest and of his sons, from whence arises the feeling of impeded flight and immovability. How impressive in this instance is the soil which entraps the goddess; it seems to suck her down, to take her, to woo her; it has torn her from her base and, its crooked claws in the skirt, grappling in a monstrous fight invisible to humans, slowly attains its end. The goddess cannot move, cannot escape, and in the gloom of this sanctuary a prodigious and impassioned combat protractedly takes place and will last like the wars of the Vedas for millenaries.

Is it your revenge, Mother Earth? . . . Are you

torturing the horrible sakti of Siva, who, even more sanguinary than her impiteous mate, has forcibly impregnated you with gore throughout the ages? . . .

Or, on the contrary, is it you, Durga, who willingly take to your grave? . . . You have been forgotten by men, and, having jumped from the pedestal that witnessed your greatness, you founder to inexistence. . . . How cold is your eye, how disabused the arc of your lips!

This statue, like every statue which has memories and romances to relate, wants to be patiently, thoroughly, completely studied; and I do look at it, attempting to read carefully the message of its features. I touch it; I pass my hand over its brow: how fascinating is this figure, how dangerously fascinating! It is probably the portrait of Yaçovarman's mother or grandmother, for why should it not be since we know that one of them stood once on this very spot. So from this womb, perhaps, the conqueror was born; by these breasts, perhaps, he was suckled; no wonder that his spirit was so dauntless and fierce. What a hard soul dwelt in this powerful woman; little tenderness shines from these eyes, little goodness flows from this mouth. Yet the stone in parts has the velvety softness of flesh.

Anaxarete could be thy name, O statue, instead of Indradevi or Rajendradevi, if thou hadst been born in Cyprus, for thy bosom never trembled at the approach of a lover and thy present appearance would then be the curse of an infuriated Aphrodite.

But where am I going to? From the Hindu pantheon I wander to the Greek Olympus, from the mother of a Khmer emperor to a heartless maiden of the Mediterranean.

When my enthusiasm has partly abated I think and meditate over the greatness of artists who are able to stretch their hand through the centuries and occasion in my mind a storm of conflicting pictures, of conflicting imaginings which have left me moist, entranced, in the

temple of Lolei, near the tragedy of a desecrated altar, near the mutilated form of a statue, of a mere statue of mere stone. . . . What is art that it can carry us away in whirls of fancy to the farthest limits of this universe without effort and without groping ? A god himself is art, a wondrous god who gives language to matter and life to pulp, a god who joins all faiths in his stupendous hand, crushes them and, taking their essence, imparts through his human servants their highest ideals and beauties to the rest of humankind.

His servants were more faithful to his precepts years ago, and how we seek the ambrosia which they collected from their master's cup ! I have feasted on many of the divine drops in Angkor. The same cannot be said of most lands.

v

The last of the shrines we intend to visit, Prah-Ko, "the sacred ox," is situated between Lolei and Bakong, almost alongside the latter. It is extensive, but not built in tiers. Several moats and gopuras and small dependent buildings, in a deplorable condition and concealed in the wildest growth, are very difficult to place on a definite plan and are scattered round six sanctuaries. These were also erected in honour of Siva and his female counterpart. In front of them, prostrate in the grass, there are two statues of Nandin, the god's bull. The beasts, whose backs are clad with a kind of saddle-cloth fringed with tassels, lie down in quite a natural pose, the usual pose given them by the Khmers when working in the round ; but, as far as I know, they are the only sculptures of their kind in the Angkorean region. I saw another at Oudong, and no doubt there are many in different parts of the country. These two, however, have the particularity of having originated the name of the monument wherein they rest.

The six towers resemble those of Lolei and Bakong and

besides, they can more easily convey a notion of their former state. But let us investigate more deeply the details of the three temples, for they set an interesting problem.

First of all in Bakong, a building made on the general principle of the Bayon or Baphuon—that is to say, in gradually decreasing storeys—no cloisters are to be found, only little towers and other small erections, and the former are in brick. The bricks are very small, 6 inches by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 1 inch, extraordinarily hard and compressed, shaped with infinite care, and laid in flat layers into massive walls without cement. It is wonderful how resistant and good they have proved; some of the towers are almost intact; the best of them, with very fine proportions, are quite unique in their way. The ornamentation round the doors and the niches of Devatas and Dvarapalas are mostly in sandstone, “inlaid,” one might say, in the coarser substance; and, at the present day, the whole is superb, since the florid decoration stands out with vigour and perfect balance. The pilasters and upper portions have a series of well-applied mouldings, which, among and above large portions of bare wall, give solidity and lightness. Indeed, those towers could not be improved, especially when they rise at the top of an enhancing flight of steps; but Time capriciously has here taken away all that was defective and left what was satisfactory.

What was defective? . . . Well, an overburdening of finery; for not only were there the carvings we perceive, but in places we find remains of stucco which covered the bricks entirely and was modelled into florid designs, altogether over-abundant. It is in Prah-Ko that this plaster is most visible. No doubt the stucco was brightly painted, and it is evident that, made of material rough in grain, it could not approach the delicacy of stone-work. Further, even the stone-work of these temples, which from a distance looks quite fine, is terribly heavy in close

proximity. Technically, the carving is excellent, but repellent in conception; deeply hollowed, the stone has been used with consummate dexterity and great ease; it was made to give exactly the effect intended, but the gaudiness of this intended effect is abusive. A single lintel was turned into the receptacle for a swarm of weird figures and plants, confusedly mixed, but more or less combined in clusters which balance each other.

Let us take one specimen. Fantastic Makaras, lions with elephants' trunks, resembling with their massive forms, their huge paws, their large mouths, some antediluvian monster, are placed at the two extremities and ridden by audacious cavaliers. From their jaws emerge garlands, that flow in curves and are covered with buds and growths, stumpy dwarfs, fat serpents, which rear and struggle, creeping towards the centre, where they almost meet, being only separated by an enormous lotus flower. Under the flower an *ascète* meditates, above, Brahma is amused by two dancers, and a whole line of praying monks forms a crowning margin. The whole—volutes, animals, men—is distorted and convulsed. Somewhere else a threefold creature attracts my attention; it appears to be Ganesa, the elephant-headed, human-bodied son of Siva, but his trunk merges and becomes one with the neck of a quadruped which he rides . . . and there are other details I have never seen in a monument of Angkor-Thom or of its immediate vicinity. The Devatas are short, plump, ugly matrons, not the sisters of the graceful girls we admired elsewhere. The Dvarapalas are one of the redeeming features, for their pose of quiet arrogance, of confidence in their own strength, would be difficult to excel; and yet, leaning on their long tridents and lances, they have no replicas in the monuments I before visited. The naïveté and archaism of the Nagas of Bakong have already been noticed. The lions are equally jarring to our sense of beauty; their head could well be the



FIG. 34. OPENWORK SHELLA FOUND NEAR TAKFO

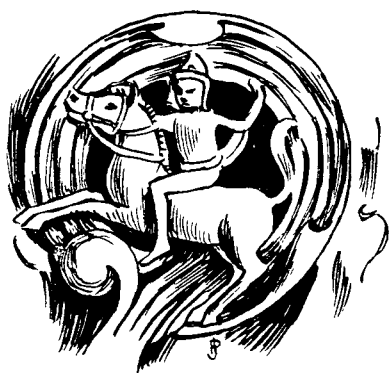


FIG. 35. CARVED VOLUTE



FIG. 36. DETAIL FROM A LINTEL.
LOILEI

exaggerated masks of disgusting savages, and are closer to Chinese style than to other Khmer work. The elephants also are crushing in appearance. Indeed, all the parts which are undoubtedly of a same period differ from those of Angkor-Thom. Only statues like the Devi of Lolei are not dissimilar from those met in the ancient capital, but they can easily have been placed in their shrines long after these were completed.

The three temples of Bakong, Lolei and Prah-Ko seem to be of a much earlier date than those of Angkor-Thom, and this apparent difference in age is one of the most baffling problems which we are left to explain, as Lolei was finished, according to inscriptions, in the reign of Yaçovarman, and the two others by his father Indravarman. Moreover, they do not stand alone in their characteristics and cannot be taken as showing a special school, limited to this region; Pré Rup and Mebon possess many of their peculiarities, and other shrines from the South to the North of Cambodia prove how far-spread these were. Yet there can be no doubt that such temples seem to be more primitive, both in decoration and architecture, than the buildings of the classical Khmer period. To say that they were built more or less at the same time as the Bayon is not more startling to travellers who have seen both, than to say that Signorelli was a contemporary of Michelangelo (should we ignore the respective dates of the two masters). One finds in Signorelli a tendency towards the violence of mighty Buonarrotti, yet in the frescoes of Orvieto only the germ of the Sistine is planted. In Bakong and Lolei most of the beauties of the Bayon may be felt, but in embryo.

Let us take one example, which is decisive: an archæologist has discovered distinct types of lintels. The first has, as chief ornament, a curved moulding, which follows the line of the supporting columns that stand on either side of the doorway and cuts the stone in two distinct portions,

the one inside the curve being deeper than that outside and conveying still more the idea of an archway. Later this feeling for architectural effect in the carving of the lintel was gradually lost, and there exist two distinct steps in the evolution : one, when the central moulding is slightly bent in contradictory curves, becomes a garland or a snake, and loses to a certain extent the virtue of being an essential part of the door frame ; the last when, still extant, it is merely used as a theme to fill the surface with beauteous designs.

The lintel of the first type is very seldom found, and only in very small and old monuments ; the other is that prevalent at Bakong and Lolei, more pretentious, grander, finer dwellings for idols ; and the last is that used by the greatest artists of the empire for their masterpieces. In this detail of structural and decorative expression a clear transition is marked, somewhat parallel to that of Gothic architecture, from the early form to the flamboyant, from the merely constructive to the ornamental.

Lolei could not have been built just before Angkor-Thom, and, as we know that Khmer emperors were sometimes wont to attribute to themselves the works of their predecessors, Yaçovarman may have put his name to an already-standing monument, and Indravarman may have done likewise. It is impossible that Cambodian art could have developed with such rapidity, from the style of Lolei to that of Angkor-Thom, within a space of ten or twelve years.

vi

As we return through the forest the red ants do not assail us ; they have gone to sleep in their nest perhaps, or, having repaired to the ground, are in search of other quarry. The vermilion face of sunset has a deeper glow to-day, and low, black clouds are tinged with the brightness of coral. The breeze, when it flows towards us, is

acid and sulphureous ; but we only have occasional whiffs, for the wind blows with persistence from behind. Yet we already know that there is a jungle-fire somewhere in front, and later on we cross a scene of desolation.

Flames like awful wizards have torn to fragments the proudest trees, and now blackened stumps lift their gnarled heads above a soil, bare and grey with ashes, which burn the feet of the elephants. The beasts' trunks hang limply and cannot forage on the way, as sap has been dried and foliage consumed. The only light is a dim reverberation, reddish and distorting, which battles with the first glimmers of a timid moon and freshly awakened stars. Now and then the wind molests sparks, which fly away like bees from their hives and rise up in streams to fall back in rain. Every odour of scorched wood and vegetation intoxicates us, fills our eyes with tears and our throats with bitterness. We pass over a plain which once was green and luxuriant, but fire in its long mantle of flashing velvet has torn life away. No happiness dwells under the vault of night, and the crumbled, stained skeleton of a small animal teaches how a bright comedy of movement and beauty can suddenly become the emblem of a tragedy of fear and torture : a slender paw, a singed skin, a few bones are all that are left of a gay and pretty creature. The crocodiles have abandoned their pirate dens, since they know that for theft this is no more the place. No more do tigers and wild cats hide in brambles, their spine undulating, to spring at a beguiled fallow-deer or hare. No more a stealthy tread and breaking twig reveal the slitted eyes of a leopard staring at you in gloom. No more do serpents sting some young and little thing in the place of its birth. No more. . . . No more. . . . All that had legs has run away ; all that had wings has flown away ; all that had fins has swam away.

Zephyrs no longer start the chant of reeds and leaves. Doves no longer warble lovingly. Stags no longer call

their hinds. Foxes no longer bark for their cubs. Cicadas no longer chirp with their brittle wings. No longer. . . . No longer. . . . All sounds have been checked ; all that had voice has been silenced.

It is peace after massacre, lull after destruction.

A spark alights on my hand, yet does not scald. It is not a spark ; only a fire-fly. I was despairing too soon ; man always despairs too soon. Nature is not depressed ; it thinks not of present dejection, but of future joy. Little torch-carrying insect, you have brought light into my spirits.

CHAPTER III

THE FATE OF PRAH KHAN—ITS SLOW DESTRUCTION—
VEGETATION AND ANIMAL LIFE IN THE BUILDINGS—
NEAK PEAN

i

PRAH KHAN, a temple second only to Angkor Vat and the Bayon in the rich region of Angkor, is perhaps the saddest, the gauntest, I have seen. It lies north of Angkor-Thom, smothered in the densest part of the forests, and as yet, ever since its abandonment by the original dwellers, it has not felt or borne the touch of the renovating hands, either of modern archæologists or of bonzes who have established their dwellings in many ruins. More than any other monument it is able to display the gloomy, superb, withal delicate harmony which reigns in the mixture of free vegetation and ruined works of men, of remains of human toil and untamed animal life.

Nature here has completely vanquished man, but it is proud of its conquest, almost avaricious of its spoils; it fears lest the work of its eternal foes should be revealed to newcomers and grasps the ancient shrine like a precious treasure.

In spite of its immense vastness, Prah Khan is totally hidden and appears like a foundered galleon, of which nothing emerges or floats above the waves of vegetation. The Bayon, Baphuon, Mebon, Pré Rup, stolidly resisted the forest's might, and thrust their tiers and turrets like decks and masts through leafage and thorns; but this fane spreads outwards, not upwards, and, built on an even level, has allowed trees and bushes to grow at their will.

In its prime it contained, no doubt, every kind of habitation from palace to hut, from a god's sanctuary to miserable sheds for beasts of burden and despised servants ; it was an enormous suburb of Angkor-Thom, and to guess the number of beings it sheltered, from the high priest to the grooms, and the number of some of the accessories it needed one can read the inscription that describes the importance of the distinctly smaller temple, Ta Prohm.¹

There were 18 chief officiants and 2740 ordinary officiants ; 2232 assistants, among whom were included 615 women dancers, were in attendance ; 66,625 men and women served the gods, and the total population was no less than 79,365 souls, counting the Burmese and Chams. The treasury contained objects in gold and silver, 35 diamonds, 2 fans with pearls, 40,620 pearls, 4540 precious stones, copper, bronze, tin and lead, 967 Chinese veils, 523 sunshades. And the list mentions paddy, beans, millet seeds, butter, curds-and-whey, honey, molasses, teel oil, camphor, mustard, wax, pepper and other ingredients.

The causeways across moats possessed the impressive rows of giants and Nagas like those of Angkor-Thom, but the gates had not the heads of Siva. In return the great wall was decorated at intervals by mighty Garudas of sandstone, standing out vividly from the common laterite ; and inside one found series of entrances, peristyles, small and big courts, chapels and towers, all somewhat low but ornamented in the best manner. Prah Khan in its finest portions gives an impression of solidity and robustness, sadly in contrast with heaps of débris and masses of crumbled material.

Why has Providence suffered such marvels of human toil, such wealthy abodes, to be thus spoilt ? . . . Lintels are split, tympanums cracked, roofs crushed, and columns thrown down to such an extent that it is not possible to

¹ Cf. "La stèle de Ta Prohm," by M. G. Coedes, *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1906.

imagine the old splendour of a temple, which covers an area of at least six hundred acres. . . . Why this destruction ?

Asking myself the question, I presently come across the statue of a Dvarapala. The stone guardian, legs mown down, broke in pieces on the ground. Earth has gradually collected round him, and I can see only his mask with empty orbits. The torn, lifeless eyes turn their gaze for ever to the infinite of the skies and resemble the blind pupils of my knowledge, which tries in vain to understand the enigma of this solitude.

Yet Angkor was perhaps cursed like Sodom and Gomorrah for its vices, its depravity. . . . Near the Dvarapala I see a spider's web, and its lightness is intensely attractive. It is brushed by the passing breeze, and dew has enriched its thread with diamonds and strings of pearls ; it forms a mantle of supreme airiness, a veil of supreme delicacy for a small dancing Apsara, and the preciousness of it has caused me to forget that it is a snare, a mere instrument of death. A butterfly, living flower, whose wings flutter like the sparks of jewels, is at last caught, and a horrible hairy spider rushes out, runs across the web of silver and sucks out the life of the golden insect. The long-legged brigand who exacts such a toll from every dainty traveller of the air was concealed by his web of beauty, and perhaps within this temple of glory was hidden the spirit of cruelty who caused endless sorrow ; the ghost of cruelty who took shape in the bodies of ferocious Brahmans and of princes, insane with pride :

“ Oh ! many a widow, many an orphan, cursed
The building of that fane ; and many a father,
Worn out with toil and slavery, implored
The poor man's God to sweep it from the earth,
And spare his children the detested task
Of piling stone on stone, and poisoning
The choicest days of life,
To soothe a dotard's vanity.”

The thousands of slaves, under the merciless despotism of the Khmers, achieved temples so luxurious and wonderful that we are ready to excuse any crimes when they bore such fruit ; but divine justice is less susceptible, and it is possible that some deity decreed centuries ago that

“ . . . not a stone shall stand to tell
The spot whereon they stood,
Their very site shall be forgotten
As is their builder's name.”

And that condemnation has almost been fulfilled.

ii

Prah Khan seemed invulnerable at first, protected as it was by walls, moats and thousands of fanatics ; yet the curse took shape in the heart itself of the citadel—to be more exact, in the hearts of its defenders. The gods of the Hindu pantheon were repudiated, and Buddhist monks set up their quarters in the old palace of the evicted idols between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. The change was not very important for the buildings which were still monasteries, only of a different faith, but it brought about some deteriorations that started the long list of grievous injuries. . . . Once the tide of these injuries was set in motion, it could not be checked and gathered impetus every moment.

The statues of Brahma and Siva, and Vishnu, of Ganesa and Indra, of Durga and Lakshmi were melted down, broken or thrown out ; and the insipid priests appear to have vowed that they would cut away from bas-reliefs the images of the former tenants, especially of Siva. Gifted with a patience which would be to their honour had they used it to a better end, they went into every chamber, inspected almost every wall, and deliberately effaced as many figures of the Maha-Deva as they could.

The lean recluses, with stern faces, no hair, wrinkled



FIG. 37 RUINED HAUT, PRAH KHAN

DESTRUCTION OF PRAH KHAN 221

lips and narrow brows, stepped noiselessly, and, armed with the hammer which has always found a refuge in the hands of religious iconoclasts, they foolishly attacked the thoughts and beliefs of departed artists in the works of beauty the latter had wrought ; and the shrines, after centuries of peace, after years of greatness when they had formed the gaudy retreats of all-powerful Brahmans and the glory of a people, resounded under the cruel strokes of adversity.

And that was but a beginning, a mild beginning, prophet, announcer of evil. Soon a worse scourge approached with terrible suddenness ; the maddened troopers of long-repulsed conquerors poured into the fane, and, drunk with victory, drunk with hatred, drunk with blood, assaulted the stones after having killed the men who sold their life to a stubborn god called patriotism. The relentless soldiers passed with the roar of an unexpected, short avalanche. Spears, mallets, ropes, catapults, elephants, horses, all were used by an infuriated mob, increased perhaps by the mass of slaves who, freed from the rigorous and loathed discipline, turned their ire against the monuments, cause of so much pain. . . . The tempest rushed to other lands, too short to have been altogether fatal, and ancient Prah Khan, firm in its despair, patient in its doom, was left solitary, silent, scarred like a veteran for whom hardship is already a habit.

After battles, after downfalls, creep the human and animal jackals, profiting by the ruin of others. The animals lifted their pointed ears and muzzles, howled at the smell of carrion and crawled into the precincts ; then they devoured corpses and licked their chops, uneasily looking back all the while to see whether some avenging warrior should stop their dark and loathsome meal. The timid eaters, tongues dripping with the warm blood of valiant soldiers, were startled suddenly one night, and like shades leapt over helmets, skulls, breastplates and

overturned chariots, and vanished once again in the forest. The newcomers who had disturbed the four-legged thieves were thieves themselves. Of low birth, with long, untidy hair, chopped and dirty hands, small, unsteady eyes, they also gazed around to notice any possible enemy, and, seeing that they were alone in the ruin, they each made their way into the empty halls. Much portable booty had been carried away by the Siamese, but they knew well, the vampires, that hidden treasures were still to be discovered. For instance every statue had been erected over a hole in which was laid a little gold or some precious stones to consecrate the idol; some were, no doubt, very valuable, others less, and the treasure-seekers overturned the socles, dug beneath the pavements, found what they desired and went to other spots, repeating the process. Those hirsute ravishers stayed as long as anything of commercial value was to be gathered, and then they also deserted the temple. Nature became sole possessor; and although bands of robbers made the ruins their headquarters from time to time, and some peasants came to fetch stones for their huts, or the ruling lords to build a stronghold, vegetation was free to invade Prah Khan in its turn.

All this happened to every shrine of Angkor, but some suffered more from one evil than from the other. The temple in which I take notes is able to give a perfect example of the final result.

iii

The edifices were originally painted gaudily no doubt; startling reds and blues on backgrounds of greens and yellows, golds and silvers, put to advantage by details of real metal of previous kinds. Within and without coats of crude pigments singularly enriched the common material. Countless storms washed all colours away, then rounded the sharp corners, caressed bold mouldings,

smoothed violent reliefs. The rain, aided by the sun, tinted the stones afresh, gave them hues varying from black to purple, and amongst the débris plants multiplied in thousands.

It is not easy to reach Prah Khan. After trudging in muddy lanes and advancing slowly along boggy paths I wait patiently until the coolies have cleared the thorns, and I ride on, receiving the stinging blow now and then of a suddenly distended twig, or feeling the disagreeable tickling of a spider's web, which catches on my face.

In this fane one hardly walks through doors; one generally has to pass through breaches in the walls or over the roofs. In the courts one treads not on a pavement, but on mounds of stones which have been cast down. One often, if not wary, places one's foot in a hole, filled only with dead leaves. Sometimes paths are almost impracticable, and the excursions among the edifices become strenuous rock-climbing. It is not rarely that a block gives way, and one rolls down; luckily lianas are like ropes, and indeed the vegetation, which certainly is one of the most formidable impediments to progress, turns out to be in many cases a welcome help. One crawls on all-fours into a dark passage and is astonished to find under a chaos of boulders a room which is still nearly intact, a cloister free from all rubbish, but isolated and shut in by thick partitions of fallen monoliths.

The vegetation has imprisoned the temple with indescribable violence. The most monstrous of all its agents are the gigantic fici of soft wood, with whitish slender trunks, only divided into branches at a great height. Their roots are so broad and so strong that, when the wind destroys one of them, it does not uproot it, but breaks it in half. The roots of the ficus are unquestionably the most grasping of all plants; they cannot be torn away, even the smallest; they have become a part of the stones; indeed they cannot resist knives, but pull, pull as much

as you can, as long as you may, and the plants baffle you, and the inequalities of their bark open and laugh at your presumption. With writhing, tortuous, tenacious tentacles they clasp the achievements of men like octopuses their victims. The roots have an appearance which is almost muscular; their bends look like elbows and their ends like finger-tips; moreover they seem to feel their way and to move. They have a surprising manner of pressing themselves into the slightest fissure, of crawling beneath monoliths, and the havoc they have made is not to be reckoned. One comes to believe that their doings are guided by a brain, that their growth is commanded by a spirit. They have dislodged entire roofs; they have disaggregated entire shrines; they have poured down like streams of water; they have carried away numberless stones; they have caused whole towers to tumble. There are hecatombs of crushed erections leaning almost to the top of remaining turrets. The hand of ruthless man was no doubt very guilty, but that of nature beyond expression. Like a fury rejoicing in its conquest, in the kill, nature has closed its fist over the temple and squeezes, squeezes, squeezes, pitilessly and for evermore. It will not rest, one feels, until no stone shall stand. The fici, crowded together, struggle over the prey; their roots are mixed up, coiled, entangled like a brood of snakes on a half-strangled beast, breathing with difficulty. Prah Khan tries to defend its remaining parts; the sanctuaries, galleries and chambers in serried ranks attempt to frustrate the common foe, but they are no match, alas! for tropical flora, and plants, big and small, swarm over what is already a corpse. Humus has settled all round, and creepers have woven their tapestry. Dark ivy decks sandstone, laterite and trunks without discrimination; vines tie tendrils in every nook; ferns, in broad bunches, emplume a withered tree or a pedestal. Lianas balance in swooping garlands or hang loosely like



FIG. 38. VEGETATION IN PRAM KHAN

the long and thin tresses of dryads. The monuments are pierced with wide gaps, besetting in their look of dismay ; the sandstone is worn away by humidity, gnawed in slabs ; the laterite, ruddy or black, is spongy and a world of tiny cells ; mosses and lichens and mildew flourish abundantly and dazzle by the patterns they display, patterns which give to every chapel the vagueness and softness of pointilliste paintings.

Well, nature has been frightfully harmful ; yet may we complain ? . . . With inimitable perfection it has preserved the atmosphere of the temple and adapted its forms to it. The tall trees are full of majesty ; the undergrowth has the mystery of sculptured detail. Pictures, masterly in composition and colour, charm the eye at every step : a portico in the midst of banyans ; a gate opening on to a nest of verdure ; a colonnade which has become a shrubbery, windows through which appear boughs of tender green ; a cornice crowning thick bushes, or, on the contrary, walls with a coping of new grass. Besides, the undefinable intricacy of the foliage is a glorious wreath of eternal freshness laid on the relics of an art, on the tomb of a nation. . . . Wherever a stone has fallen, O infinite poesy, a flower grows ! And, as if it wished to intensify the beauty of the scene, the sun, like Jupiter when he visited Danaë in her brazen jail, reveals his wealth in a shower of gold.

iv

And then beasts abound.

Wishing to be more intimate with the present denizens of Prah Khan I chose a secluded spot, a little haven, which well answers my purpose. My point of observation is inside what was a big hall ; near by, at the height of my elbows, unusual little figures are carved like the divine Devatas on an abdomen like that of wasps. A hippogriff looks at me with his big round eyes ; a row of Apsaras is

placed three yards away. I am sitting on the branches of a fruit tree, at the level of the upper frieze ; a screen of bushes ensures my invisibility, and a fallen stone has left a kind of battlement, which allows a perfect view of the outside. There, there is a small clearing, secret and delightful, carpeted with thick grass and with what looks like giant forget-me-nots. On the edges stand leaning trees, whose trunks entirely disappear beneath lianas and ferns, dark and light, big or diminutive, solid or delicate, fresh or withered ; and a few red and bluish orchids droop over the brow of a life-size Buddha, smiling, oh how reposefully, in the gentle elysium of which he is the eternal guest.

The first moving creatures which recompense my patience and help to increase my curiosity are the small friends or enemies I have seen elsewhere a thousand times. . . . Tiny black ants run busily just under my nose ; they all come out of one hole and all disappear into another ; now it is a white egg they are carrying, now a larva, now some seed three times as big as themselves, which they pull, going backwards. Big grey ants, with claw-like appendages on their backs that give them the look of monstrous malefactors, lumber along, blunderingly tripping over a microscopic pebble and trying to out-distance the red ants, that have a particular taste for their flesh. As soon as I see the latter, those perverse cannibals of the insect world, I wonder whether I shall have to move on ; but luckily they are not as numerous as in the district of Bakong and therefore not unbearable. . . . A bite now and then merely awakens my vigilance when it has been a little dulled by prolonged waiting. After all, every joy must be gained at the expense of a little pain, and besides the mere bother of a temporary ache, there is a certain amount of pleasure at the sight of so much courage, of so much tenacity in so reduced a form—in the same way as there is pleasure to be got from the inimitably

gentle buzz of mosquitoes, although that tender sound may soon mean an itchy spot on your cheek.

Weeny bees alight on my hand and begin to clean their heads with their front legs; again and again they pass them over their eyes, and then rub them one against the other as if to shake away the dust, after which, with their back legs this time, they wipe their wings, first underneath, then above; then they rub their legs together once more, now as if they were pleased by the persevering performance. Finally they suck the salt they can find on my skin. . . . Delightful, clean, proper little folk.

But should I continue to detail every insect visitor of my refuge there would be no end to the account, for I notice scarabs, butterflies, ordinary flies and green-flies and dragon-flies, and praying mantis, and numerous others to which I can give no name.

A beetle mysteriously vanishes, gulped away; after a careful search I spy a brown and green chameleon, its tail in a spiral, its fingers tightly grasping a slender branch, and so motionless that it might be dead except that its eyes, enclaspd in a thick skin and consisting of a hole large as a pin-head, sinisterly roll and stare. Contrasted with the stillness of this figure, the speed of a legion of lizards seems incredible.

Squirrels are ever a-rummaging and birds winsomely a-piping, especially orioles and personages with bright blue beaks. . . . I hear a mighty noise in the trees. What is it? I hear screeching and spitting and screaming, all the uproar that goes with heated arguments in the society of the lesser genera of the jungle when they feel safe. The branches of two or three trees are shaking as in a storm, and here are monkeys in a great band. They are not new acquaintances: I have met them or their congeners every day and in many ruins, sometimes in amusing circumstances, as when they sat for a grand debate presided over by no less a figure than the Leper

King; but on each occasion, and whether they were gibbons, macaques or cercopitheques, their antics in absolute liberty, jumping, caracoling and swinging, and their expressions, varying from disgusting anger to saintly beatitude, were eminently refreshing.

Numerous rovers, however, are less pleasing; the poisonous centipedes hide behind fungi, black scorpions underneath stones, and infinite species of snakes stealthily glide. Yet being offensive, they are especially cautious, and what one usually discovers is only their tracks on the sand.

Big animals are even more elusive, and I was never able to detect a panther in the temples, although Prah Khan is reputed to be infested with them. I would give much to see the dappled carnivore in the mossy lair of an old sanctuary, or crouching near a carved doorway in front of two kruths, its speckled fur standing out of the shadow of a tower.

Presently a flight of ill-smelling bugs drives me away from my observatory, and, going to fetch coolies, I decide to continue my walk.

v

We start. Forcing my way through a peristyle, I notice a number of round holes in the columns and entablature. These holes, not rarely discernible even in the centre of a bas-relief, seem rather inexplicable if they were not contrived to afford a grip for wooden frames during the smoothing of the blocks. In this case, however, the material is plain, and the holes may have held in place a metal covering. . . . None the less these explanations are pure humbug to a stalwart fellow, smoking slowly and laughing broadly; his opinion is that they are the fingerprints of a giant, who, after kneading and modelling clay into the shape of a building, poured over it a marvellous liquid that had the property of turning everything into

stone. As a matter of fact the Cambodians call sand-stone mud-stone.

We near a monument with rows of enormous and unfinished round columns, placed in a narrow space and archaic in appearance. This erection is probably one of the oldest in Angkor and has no replica in the whole kingdom. We go through cloisters and rooms and quadrangles, which all bear the mark of utter ruin, and in spite of the intense life which every bush conceals, a sensation of emptiness comes over me. The forest is thick, heavy, damp and black. Branches and foliage hide light and protect humidity which leaks between the stones. The air becomes oppressive and rare. I shiver in the watery warmth. The leaves, when I graze them, abandon one of their jewel-like drops of dew. Vapours ooze from amassments of humus. My boots are soiled with mud and brown blades of grass. I do not feel free, and, as I drop from a path that climbs over a vault into a gallery as close as a cellar, I believe I am underground. Here are pillars that could easily be beams of support, there are walls which have the soft touch of subterranean soil, and the low passage, half-filled with earth, has the deep, hollow resonance of a mine.

A resinous torch in my hand projects lugubrious shadows that dance frantically. Soon they appear divided into pieces, as mad, as lurid, into swarms of bats crying like mice and rats, uttering sounds that possess something dismal when they come from above. I am the centre of a whirl of the little beasts, of beady eyes, round ears and membranous wings, which look especially rigid and cold and unreal. Bats seem almost primeval, and they are terribly gloomy. More than owls they haunt cemeteries, crypts and doleful towers, and never have I seen such a flood of them. They throw themselves down from holes of blackness and, after making the flame flicker, swoop upwards again and cling to the stones with

the crooked claws of witches. Everywhere their squeals and their wings cross each other in an ebullition of fear and excitement. The eddies of their passage, violent and sudden, cause the flame to add sparks and sputterings to the confusion, the ground to add dust to the fray. The natives and myself wave the torches, and then it is hell. It is the hell of red flames, of black flying sprites, of blood-curdling shrieks, of sombre shadows and blue-brown, choking smoke. . . . We all run. The bats are more and more grisly ; their wings beat my arms and glow rosy as they dart between the light and my eyes. One or two fall, half-burnt, and draggle on the pavement until I end their agonies with a stick. The whole scene is ferocious and weird ; the natives shout behind me hoarsely, for their own amusement, to terrify the poor purblind beasts, and I could almost think I hear harpies pursued by Zetes and Calais. . . . When I escape from the gallery and drop my torch, which continues to burn like a wan beacon, I find the heavy atmosphere extraordinarily light and the cloudy sky extraordinarily clear.

I see the last of Prah Khan at the northern gate, where at one end the huge heads of a Naga are held up by the multitudinous hands of a giant whose head lies broken in the glade, beside the remains of his comrades of the balustrade.

vi

The fig-trees, as I have pointed out, have performed many freaks—when, for example, they knocked down lintels or columns and replaced them by their roots which prop up the other parts of the building. Yet no vagary is as capricious or extravagant as that of the little shrine of Neak Pean.

This shrine, in an unwelcoming copse, cursed with brambles, and reached after riding through an unwelcoming plain, cursed with gadflies, rises in the middle of round



FIG. 39 A FALLEN HEAD



FIG. 40 DANCING APSARAS, PRAH KHAN

tiers, of which the second from the bottom is made of the "curved snakes" that gave it a name. These Nagas do not rest on balustrades, but are like a step; their tails are entwined like the thick fibres of a rope, and their heads stop on the eastern side, affording a passage. The lowest tier is carved with lotus petals, so that, when water filled the pool which isolates the temple, the whole looked as if it floated on a vast water-lily. On the outer limit of the pool and on its axes are very low vaults with ornamental gargoyles, probably fountains; one is the head of an elephant, another that of a crocodile, the third is shapeless, and the last, the most interesting and best preserved, that of a man with his mouth wide open.

The sanctuary itself is a casket, a doll's house, a delicious miniature, and a monstrous ficus has raised its trunk on top of it like a tower and spreads out its foliage in a fastuous dome. Its roots sprawl over the entire cella, not covering, by a curious effect, two of the four sides where are carvings of a tall figure, perhaps Vishnu, and a third where the door opens, enframed by an arch of vegetation. At one angle the head and front legs of an elephant peep through the wood.

The door is tiny, made for dwarfs, and I must bend double before going in. A Buddha is not surprised at my intrusion, but shows well enough that he does not care for my presence; he takes almost all the room. I cannot stand up without banging my head, and a few seconds only have flown before I step outside once more. The giant tree is poised above the roof like a gaunt dragon, guarding the spirit of the idol imprisoned in a diminutive but sweet cell, much too small to let any host find it convenient as a lair, not even a fox or a wild cat.

CHAPTER IV

PHNOM BAKENG—A HILL AND A FANE—AN EXTENSIVE PANORAMA

i

ON the side of the road joining Angkor-Thom to Siem Reap and some four hundred and fifty yards from the former a rocky hillock appears like a hump, thrusting its eminence above the flatness of the plain.

Its flanks, almost vertical on the western side, are less steep on the eastern, and there were fashioned long stairs of hundreds of steps. These rose straight up like some ladder of Jacob made to reach the clouds, but all their stones have been torn away by the Siamese to build fortifications, and only two enormous lions which marked their base rest in the thickets. A bold crow has chosen one mane for a perch, and as I draw near it slowly opens its wings, reminding me of a knight's crest or of the bird that sat on the stone lion of Raja Ananghal's palace and clamoured for food.

Having successfully overcome a rather difficult bit of climbing along a slippery path, I step on to an artificial plateau, cut by human hands from the top of the mamelon. With their usual habit of enhancing the powerful appearance of monuments, by placing them, whenever possible, on the most picturesque site, the Khmers have reared on it a temple. Two lines of lingas, starting on the edge of the slope, lead to a modern hut, which contains a "Buddha's foot"—that is, a reproduction of a supposed imprint of Buddha's foot, strange for its depth; and continuing the lane marked by the lingas I walk between a

few columns which prove that there began a short covered passage. I pass a wall and then arrive in the grounds of the sanctuary.

The innermost shrine stood above a pyramid of five terraces with twelve small towers each and four grand staircases, still in wonderful condition and ornamented with almost all the lions that snarled on the string-boards. Round the base little brick pavilions are lost in the brushwood, and two stone erections, lighted by narrow lozenges, hold in their keeping only religious remains, of which a Ganesa is the most interesting.

In a corner one finds the wooden houses, salas and pagodas of Annamite bonzes who left Phnom Bakeng in the recent past. . . . As a matter of fact one discovers traces of their handiwork on the whole plateau, and nowhere is it more captivating than in their former gardens, which were laid out at the eastern end of the tiers. Plants with large red flowers grow among the tall grass ; others with pink and blue blossoms show the emplacement of old beds ; banana-trees, dark, with broad leaves, bend their head, at which hangs a bunch of fruit ; and, above all, white jasmine in shrubs and clusters displays its bloom and envelops with its tenacious and heavenly fragrance the troop of sintos, whose muzzles open wide to absorb the soothing, benumbing, adorable perfume.

ii

At the summit of the pyramid a colossal heap of rubbish and a deep hole, which may prove that there was a crypt far beneath, are all that can be seen of the central sanctuaries ; but from such a height a marvellous, enthralling panorama of the forest spreads at your feet. . . . Trees, tall, broad, magnificent, in groups, in bands, in crowds, in armies, sway, scatter and press to the farthest distances. A stretch of wild, tumultuous vegetation that cannot be understood until seen : bo-trees and fig-trees

and banyans, arecas and palms, guavas, mango-trees and innumerable other species, for miles in every direction, like the end of a cataclysm, of a bore that engulfed cities and temples. And, indeed, beneath the sea of foliage, which is swept by the wind in the manner of waves, old monuments are being swallowed down; leaves shoot forth between the stones, stones smile between the flowers, the fanes disappear little by little, plants clasp them, the tide of greenery is always rising, but what delight it must be to drown in verdure and perfumes!

Yes, viewed from above, the forest is the same as a boundless ocean:

“How fearful
And dizzy ’tis to cast one’s eyes so low.
The crows and choughs, that wing the midway air,
Show scarce so gross as beetles.”

And the murmurs, rather the sighs of vegetation are drawn and plaintive as the note of surf beating a lonely isle. When I half close my eyes and hear the bells of a herd of buffaloes, which is grazing far beneath, everything tends to make me believe that I stand near that sunken city of Brittany and legend, and that I am aware of the knell of its carillon, rung by the deepest currents.

iii

Here and there, however, some accident of view attracts the gaze.

To the west water—real water—glimmers. The Occidental Baray forms a smooth mirror for the sky of a lighter blue than the forest on the horizon. The glimpse of that vast artificial lake, which was either a harbour for Angkor-Thom, connected by a canal to the Tonle-Sap, or an immense preserve for fish during the rainy season, when the quadrupling of all natural reservoirs made the capture of the gilled animals most difficult, reminds me of a joyful



FIG. 41. MAIN STAIRCASE, PHNOM BAKENG

ride on elephants, a siesta in the village of Vat Khnat, a few shots at pigeons, of the paradisaic scenery of the Baray itself, with its sandy shores and high, shaded banks, and of the western Mebon, in which little carvings of animals are the only ones I discovered resembling those of the Baphuon.

Several minutes I stay, the Baray a magnet for my thoughts, until I discern a stronger one farther away and to the left. Again it is water, but this one appears boundless, and I quickly recognise the Tonle-Sap itself, the great lake which soon, alas! will bear me back from Angkor to "civilisation." On this side of the Tonle-Sap projects another "Phnom," like the one I use as post of observation. Called the Phnom Krom, it is situated in the midst of the savannahs; for months in the year it is surrounded by the overflow of inundations, and forms a solitary mount, arid, rough, beaten by wind, beaten by storms, somewhat like the Mont St Michel, since the vestiges of a monastery are visible on its highest point.

To the east I distinctly see the mountains of Koulen, where are found the quarries of the ancient Khmers. To the north, oh, very far, more like the faded line of a mist than anything more substantial, I divine the presence of the chain of the Dangreek which separates Siam and Cambodia, and where a forbidding fane, the Prah Vihear, is lifted like an eagle's nest, almost inaccessible and visited by pirates, who hear the trumpeting of wild elephants and the roars of kingly tigers.

The mental image of this temple makes me dream of all the scattered buildings which are now an innumerable host and the fantastic tokens of a lost and bewildering culture. Verily, this immeasurable jungle withholds in its womb monuments as grandiose as those that have taken possession of my soul. . . . They call to my love of the beautiful, but they are out of reach, at distances

that would mean days and weeks of travel in bullock-carts, sampans and howdahs, among dangerous animals, in dangerous neighbourhoods, and among totally uneducated tribes. I have not the time, I have not the power, and the call will remain unanswered, at any rate for years, more probably for ever. If I could only see Vat Phu in Laos, Banteai Chma, the great Prah Khan of Kompong Svai and, much nearer at hand, Beng Mealea, a gem of purity, it would be enough. . . . I cannot ! Oh ! after all, I need not lament, for the group of Angkor is, without doubt, the most important of all ; and once more pivoting on my feet I am entirely subjugated by the perfection of Angkor Vat, which swells magically above the trees and looks like a lordly ship tried and invulnerable to cyclones.

Angkor Vat—I have and shall repeat it many a time—is the masterpiece of the Khmers. I have passed by it or penetrated within its halls every day since my arrival ; I know it inside out ; but I have left its description to the last, to keep it as the crowning chapter for you, reader . . . and because I shun such a description, knowing my powers to be so unworthy of the task.

I rest for a while, leaning now on one, now on another of the stone lions, which are smaller at the top to increase the effect of perspective from the bottom ; and then I go down the steps of Phnom Bakeng, down the path, and I have a sensation of sinking, of diving. . . . The forest closes behind my back.

CHAPTER V

FIRST VIEW OF ANGKOR VAT—THE PARALYTIC PINHEA KEI
—THE HUGE SHRINE'S IMPRESSIVENESS—A VISHNUIST
IMAGE—TOPOGRAPHY OF ANGKOR VAT—KHMER
ARCHITECTURE

i

THE arrival before the last temple we shall visit together is one of the most impressive sights which can enchant human life. It is as unexpected as grandiose, and counts among those visions which are beyond all conceptions, however often they have been imagined in our dreams, or in moments of reflection by means of printed pages. Angkor Vat is unlike anything else on earth, and as it cannot be placed in the mind besides any well-known building, one cannot at first master one's feelings and express them in words. There is an immense moat as foreground, which is not in keeping with our sense of proportion ; no feudal castle, no mediæval town was ever sheltered behind such a broad expanse of water. There is a gateway beyond that, but that gateway would be enough to form a glorious shrine by itself. Yet farther away five gigantic domes seem to rise at so great a distance that it is hard to conceive that they are part of the *one* entirety, and that that entirety was not a city, but only the luxurious abode of a god.

What is also remarkable is that every portion logically leads to the others, until, when one has at last mastered the idea that one stands before a single building of stupendous size, the gaze goes from one to the other without break and hindrance, and smoothly passes from the

water of the moat to the gopuras with turrets, and thence to the crowning towers, the biggest of which forms a link between earth and heaven. One is at once overtaken by a conscious feeling of the Almighty's presence. Even if that particular notion is somewhat altered later on, so that one finally thinks Angkor Vat was built more for the pride of a people than for the love of a deity, there can be no doubt that the first impression, as one is merely confronted by the main lines of the structure, is extraordinarily imbued with the spirit of a supreme power. . . . In one magnificent swoop the eyes are raised to the pure firmament and remain there for an instant, subdued.

ii

Below grey clouds a kite, white-headed and red-plumed rover, surest of flyers, uses its skill and experience in air navigation. Its long and narrow wings rarely flutter in repeated beats and mostly remain outstretched, as the bird of prey wishes to glide in large curves and descends imperceptibly. Meanwhile its forked tail perpetually moves and alters the direction of its flight with accuracy and easy grace. All at once the kite gathers its sails and falls like a bolide within a few feet of the water, at which moment it checks its dashing dive and, grasping a floating object in its talons, rises again to its splendid realm. Teal and green pigeons pass in dense feathery rushes, leave one or two stragglers, and repose in the branches of a tree or on the pure ripples, when leaves come to ground and spray flashes.

Young women fill gummed baskets with water and walk back to a village, which is situated in front of the temple. There also is found the bungalow reserved for travellers, and one or two of the brilliant trees which have no rival in their genre—Stevenson gives them their French name, *flamboyant*, not knowing the English, and I am as ignorant as he. In complete bloom they have no leaves

and look like huge bunches of deep red roses. The torn petals of their innumerable flowers cover grass and soil with the vivid colour of Mephistopheles' cape ; and those that are carried away by gusts of wind scatter like rubies thrown at random by blind fortune, or like insects of fire.

The hamlet is close to a sra called " the horse's pool," and on its boundary stands one of the small relics, more or less shapeless, with two or three upright doorways, a smiling Devata, the broken portions of a lintel, and festoons of foliage on battered and creviced walls. One comes across them in forests, in unlikely places, very near oft-beaten tracks and oft-seen sanctuaries. They are always found by luck : by a hunter who, picking up the victim of his faultless aim, discerns mocking eyes between the bushes, and, putting these aside, discovers a tiny Apsara, ornament of a tiny shrine ; or else by a coolie, who, having taken a short-cut and wielding his knife to make a way through thorns, strikes the stone of a small edifice. Two were thus revealed in a very short while not long ago, and one of them was entirely smothered by orchids from the summit to the ground.

Those shrines are numberless, and a list of them would fill many pages. Most of their names are poetic, inspiring and lovely : " The sanctuary of the orange grove," " The sanctuary of the hidden lady," " The chapel of buds," " The shrine of singing reeds." Others are terrible : " The sanctuary of plague," " The temple of ghosts." . . . And the one I am talking about, standing on the boundary of the village, has a tale attached to it that makes it appealing and lovable.

A ruin possesses much more charm if one comes to it with the belief that something wonderful happened there, or even the disbelief that any supernatural occurrence was witnessed by its stones, but at any rate with the knowledge that it is a nest of folk-lore. The strongholds of crusading barons attract us by the thickness of their

battlements, which speak of sieges and combats, by their crypts that speak of dark events, their tottering dungeons that, when they no longer protect men, at least form the last defences of romance and are places where fairies come, where imps dwell, and to which clings the soul of chivalry like ivy. Ta Prohm Kel is the supposed scene of legendary deeds, and the few blocks emerging from the grass have a special value, since it is reputed that they have seen the paralytic Pinhea Kei.

He was a poor old man, who had crawled near the chapel with a last effort and unable to move any farther had, of course, stopped there. For years he had been like a part of the monument, and had become grey like the stones.

His life was drawing to a close. The rainy season had just ended, and a storm forty-eight hours earlier than the day on which the tale begins had closed the series of tempests that had ravaged the country and filled the lakes and rivers to an appalling extent. The water was still sparkling over the fields, and everyone was making ready for the spell of benumbing heat about to dry with astonishing speed the drowned lands and cause the emerald-green of paddy to renew the mystery of growing life, to herald the happiness of harvest time.

Pinhea Kei sat thinking intelligently, felt joyful, and in spite of his infirmities thanked the gods and lauded their mercies. He looked in the direction of the magnificent temple, which was spreading proudly on the far side of the moat, when a splendid horseman galloped across the causeway. The steed neighed as it turned towards the cripple. With a sudden jerk the beast drew up; the cavalier lightly jumped off the saddle and walked with noble ease till he came up to Pinhea Kei, who was marvelling and had not uttered a word for astonishment. What could that handsome stranger want of him?

"Hail, happy man!" said the stranger, "your spirit is valiant and your soul very pure; you might have been expected to curse the gods, who have condemned you to immobility and misery, yet you did thank them for the hopefulness and glory of the season, and no imprecation left your wrinkled lips. I am Indra, and for your virtue I make you a present of this horse."

So saying, he placed the bridle in the hand of Pinhea Kei and vanished.

The paralytic was greatly astonished. . . . It was good indeed of the great Indra to listen to his heart and admire it, but it was queer that he should give a horse to a creature that could not walk, much less ride; and the old man wondered and wondered, staring at the charger that was his. The animal was very tame and had a kind look in its large pupils. It started to pull at the reins; Pinhea Kei called out to it to stop, but the animal heeded not, and still tugged. But lo! as it pulled the paralysed arm lost its stiffness and became supple and strong; then the old man placed the reins in his left hand, and his numbed left arm was also transformed into a muscular limb. The same thing happened to both legs. Pinhea Kei once more thanked the gods, and tears of gratitude rolled down his cheeks. Afterwards he lifted himself into the saddle, and the miraculous beast with a strong leap rose into the air towards heaven.

iii

Only short descriptions are able to impart a swift notion of prodigiousness; and this is why I began the chapter with a few words on the general view of Angkor Vat. Besides, as a certain interval is necessary to become fully conscious of the intended effect, I then passed into a by-way to tell the tale of the cripple. Eyes have a power of seizing at once all minor things and of uniting them into a comprehensive whole, words are incapable

of doing this; yet to do justice to the scene, I must devote more attention to details.

The moat, about two hundred and twenty yards broad, and with its limits marked by enormous steps of sandstone, circumscribes the enceinte, which itself stretches for almost two and a half miles on a rectangular plan. To the west the moat is crossed by the main causeway, with facings of laterite formerly hidden by rows of tall round columns, which have mostly collapsed, and whose drums are used by lizards as adequate platforms for sun baths. In the centre two branches of the causeway lead to steps that go down to the water, and naturally there were formerly Nagas, skirting the limits of the paved and wide path. At the very beginning of this path lions are the first ornaments met by worshippers, and young Cambodians playfully ride on their backs—delicate beings on atrociously grinning mounts—or rest in the space between their legs. On one side of the causeway the waters have dried up, and the moat is nothing but fertile rice-fields. Buffaloes are grazing, and around them many false egrets are assembled; these birds, resembling small white herons, very often accompany the ruminants and feed on the insects that infect their skin. Like the shark's pilot, and like the lynx which was supposed to discover quarry for the lion by means of its acute smelling and seeing powers, and to receive part of the pittance as its share, the waders are on very good terms with their intimidating friends and sometimes even perch on their foreheads or horns. On the other side the water remains, and, as children laughingly cover each other with spray, as ponies are being washed by natives, as teal and cormorants swim in large masses, as a little girl looks at a nenuphar spread in her hands, as the wavelets, scattered by the approach of oxen, widen in increasing circles, every colour of rainbows is profusely bespattered on every object. I see all the

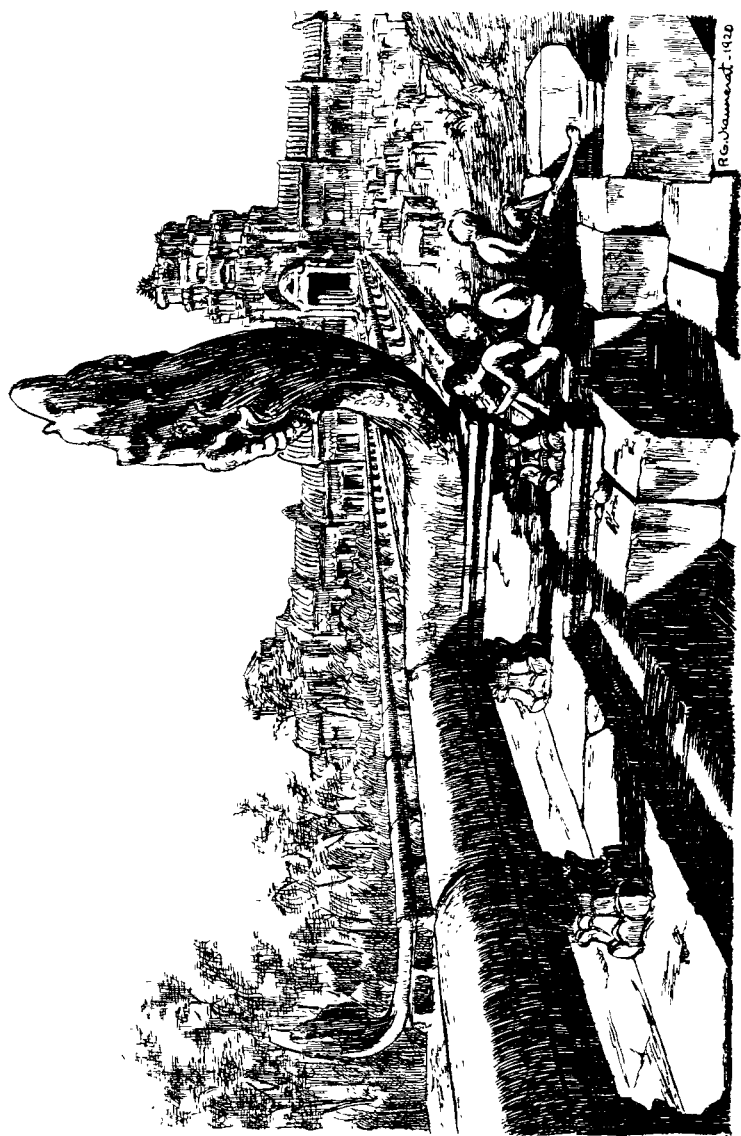


FIG. 42. IN THE PARK OF ANGKOR VAT, THE WESTERN GOPURAS

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most delicious hues : golds, ochres and shimmering silvers ; shining and sparkling spots in the sun ; in the shadow subtle tints, greens of buds, roses, delicate blues and tender purples ; in places sombre browns and sepulchral blacks ; also varying, unsettled pigments like those no doubt prevalent in the depths of the sea, like the unsubstantial glimmer of corals, medusas, star fish, shells in mother-of-pearl, and of oysters that possess the treasure of a jewel. It is indeed as if the whole view were the masterpiece of divine painters, and the broad flat leaves of lotus, which are covered with the blue, pink and rose of petals, the silver of dew, the gold of sun-rays, the brown of dead leaves and the yellow of pollen, appear to be the palettes which they used and afterwards dropped near their completed task.

The bridge takes one directly to the chief entrance of the temple ; but before coming to the actual building composing it I walk across a strip of once vacant soil, overgrown with trees, running between the moat and the foremost enclosure and occupied by several villages, which, lying in the shadow of Angkor Vat, are protected by its presence, and concealed in the thick vegetation that forms a margin in the interspace of the two defences. The enceinte is open in the centre of each of its sides with monumental gates ; of these the northern, southern and eastern are by much the smallest, yet consist of several rooms, and an ordinary earthen bank, perhaps added at a more recent date, is a means of reaching the eastern from the outside. But the western gate, as it has already been said, would be enough to form a glorious shrine by itself. It is only the antechamber, if one may thus express it, of the largest monument in the world, yet it measures one and a half times the breadth of the moat and comprises three ways for foot-passengers and two porches for chariots and elephants. Pedestrians go up steps, walk through doors and porticoes and cross rooms.

Minor rooms separate the three passages, and two extensive wings, in the shape of cloisters, end by false doors, which, if pulled down, would give into the high and broad gateways, the floors of which still bear the lines of deep ruts, worn in the stone by countless wheels.

In the side entrances for pedestrians two enormous, eight-armed and almost identical Vishnus are the ponderous reminders of past religions. One has only recently been dug up and reinstated in his former shrine ; it is white, coarse, not very interesting, and almost totally ignored by the neighbouring villagers, who cannot in this case feel enough reverence for the resuscitated idol. But the other is the sole Brahmanical image of the Angkorean districts, which has to all appearances been molested neither by conquering vandals nor by the ministers of rival creeds ; and it is honoured by an antique cult, which has found an echo in the hearts of living pilgrims. Its companion sculpture is left unguarded against the torrents, which in storms pour down through the hole at the top of the turret ; whereas it is itself preserved from such degradation by a tiled roof poised above the old edifice. The statue for which total indifference is shown is not distinguishable for the meanest ornament or mark of respect, whereas the other is gilt from its bonnet to its toes, and therefore intensely shines when the sun enters through the door open in front of it in the morning, through that at its back in the afternoon, or through both at noon, when light and heat are reverberated by every block of stone. Often rags and flags are hung to its arms, and it is always surrounded by the scrolls of incense smoke.

Moreover, most Cambodian children spend a certain period in the bonzeries, as a form of education, and serve the ordained priests. When they are on the point of beginning this stage of their career, they cut a long tuft of hair, which they had allowed to grow on their otherwise

close-shaven cranium ; this is done according to long-established rites, and one of these is to lay the hair at a Buddha's feet. Now no spot of the whole region is as often used for the ceremony as the abode of the great Vishnu, and many of these peculiar offerings are collected near his socle. Numerous locks brushed away by draughts and dirtied by dust huddle in the corners of the chamber.

The Vishnu has no very great artistic merit, but he gains in position what he loses in æsthetic beauty. In a well-lighted room, encompassed between recesses of darkness, where the headless body of a Lakshmi is momentarily lifted above a heap of rough stones and spoilt figurines, seen through the frames of finely proportioned doorways, and half obstructing the gaze which now and then is able to pierce through great distances and even reach the farthest end of a long cloister, the tall, thin giant becomes huge and extremely dignified. With this single monolith, shaped in the form of a stiff god, who firmly holds attributes in his eightfold grasp and looks beyond the coolies who, peradventure, kneel in prayer, the sanctuary is adequately furnished ; and the simplicity of the main portions accrues the preciousness of the scanty detail, be it a hanging creeper or the carvings of walls and window-frames. And then, really, it is the exception occasioned by this figure which lends it a significance of the highest order. The statue certainly was not the biggest, nor the most sacred, nor the most magnificent of the innumerable idols that filled the thousands of cellas of Angkor. . . . The linga of the Bayon and the other Vishnu of the holy of holies of the fane, in which it occupies a lesser sanctuary, were both incomparably richer and hallowed. Of course it may easily be surmised that their very wealth and importance caused them to be stolen or destroyed ; but there were also a countless host of humbler images, which were not

suffered to reign peacefully in their diminutive dwellings. Even the statue of which it is a sosia was ruthlessly thrown outside. Perhaps this imperturbable Vishnu miraculously resisted the hatred and assaults of conquerors like the female deity immortalised on one of the Bayon's bas-reliefs ; and in awe the would-be destructors returned whence they came. He is left with three arms broken, but nevertheless adored by ignorant peasants, who, taking him to be an image of Buddha, revere the impersonification of a member of the now overthrown Trimurti.

iv

As soon as the Occidental gate is passed, one finds oneself at the starting-point of a paved avenue, five hundred and twenty yards long, raised some seven feet above the level of the ground, and cut up by six projections on either side, which give it the aspect of a cross with multiple branches. The borders of this lane are provided with the handrail of polycephalous Nagas. It leads through clumps of palms which languidly bend their feathery heads, passes between two small erections and joins an esplanade similarly adorned with the sacred snakes and spreading right round the temple proper like a supporting course. Straight in front the main building of Angkor Vat, the most splendid amassment of stones, the most gigantic of shrines, the best preserved of Khmer ruins, blocks the view with its enormous bulk. In the centre a terrace is set up and rises to the level of the first entrance.

The temple consists of storeyed and concentric galleries, of which the development is sensibly greater on the honoured side, the western ; the builders copied in this respect the example set by those of the Bayon and Baphuon. These galleries, three in number, are raised on bases which are doubled in height at every superior



FIG. 43. APPROACHES OF THE MAIN PILE, ANGKOR VAT

storey. The lowest gallery is exteriorly provided with a verandah, which is only interrupted at the entrances constructed in the middle of each face and at every angle. The gallery of the second storey is connected with the preceding one by a group of three covered approaches, crossed by a fourth at right angle, and enframing four pools, provided with steps. Inside the different galleries large courts are designed and stretch round the base of the next storey; in them are found edifices, called libraries, of extremely elegant shape. The first gallery measures two hundred and sixty-five yards from east to west by two hundred and twenty-four from north to south, and it is in reality composed of eight peristyles separated by the central gopuras and angular entries.

The gallery of the second storey supports a tower at each of its four angles. It should be noted that these towers have never been finished and were all abandoned when they had reached exactly the same height, so that it is hardly apparent that anything is missing, and indeed, by the absence of their higher portions, they perhaps enhance the glory of the five crowning domes that overshadow them.

From the second gallery one passes into the court of the second storey and comes to the foot of the central pile, which, placed on a socle no less than forty feet in height, commands the whole of the building. A foot-bridge takes one to the monumental staircase, which gives access to the upper parts of the temple. Every side of the massive basis is in truth provided with three staircases, but all except one are so steep that they cannot be used without danger. The central pile is made up, above the socle, of a belt of galleries with interior verandahs, four courts and other galleries disposed like a cross, and which abut on little rooms that precede the holy of holies. Four cupolas crown the angles of this, the third storey, and stand as the attendants

of an enormous dome, which looks down upon the earth from a height of two hundred and fifteen feet.

Angkor Vat is conceived grandly in an obtuse-angled triangle, of which the extreme point is the glorious tower. The effect of the two sloping lines, which converge to the apex, is carried out first of all by the towers of the upper storey, then by those of the second,¹ then by two lofty chapels (the so-called libraries) in the court of the first storey, the roofs of which stand well above the vault of the nearer galleries, and finally sinks to the earth, after passing on the crest of the lowest, angular entries.

The whole has an austere magnificence which can but gain by nudity; and if we regret in the Bayon and every other shrine the work of coolies, who get rid of all vegetation, it can here be done with impunity, since monuments of this style of majestic superbness are seen at best through the perspective of straight, unencumbered walks and set in the midst of lawns and carefully tended trees. Also the almost perfect state of preservation in which it stands to this day needs not the mystifying, curious and romantic concealment of tropical plants. Half-tumbled-down buildings can shine under a mask of moss and thickets like the clever eyes of an old and witty woman, sparkling behind holes cut in velvet; but the unwrinkled cheek of youth becomes in no way more entrancing when it blushes beneath lace, and the brightness of fanes hardly blemished by the ravages of time may stand naked. . . . What is the use of curtains of foliage, hanging before the purity of undefaced stones? . . . Any cathedral, any church, any palace is young as long as it firmly remains as it was at the time of its inauguration. And Angkor Vat is so enormous that the blemishes it incurred since the twelfth century, the few

¹ As above stated, they are unfinished, but even thus they help this composition, and undoubtedly would have done it more definitely if completed.

defacements of some of its portions, are not able to make a notable difference to the general impression it gives of unalterable and unfaded freshness.

v

Here one can study the architecture of the Khmers with an ease to be found nowhere else ; the temple possesses most of the constructive peculiarities of Cambodian shrines and exhibits them with extreme clarity.

There are many doubts as regards the exact sources from which the ancient Cambodians drew their art. One hypothesis is that the Aryan invaders, founders of the empire, brought with them a finished and complete culture ; but it is unlikely, for then we would find remains dating much further back than those actually existing. Another is that Brahmanical missionaries entirely taught the inhabitants of their adopted country the sciences and learning of the land of their origin. Yet in this case nothing would be discovered in Cambodia but servile reproductions of Indian art, whereas Khmer art is very original, and indeed surpasses in many respects the supposed root of its development.

Of course one cannot deny a decided feeling, approaching Hindu achievements. What may be possible is this : a first inkling of sculpture and architecture was already a part of the education of the Aryans who made the valley of the Mekong their own ; but this accomplishment was slight enough to permit a new style to rise gradually. The first trials of their skill were all done in wood and have perished. Later, perhaps, influences from the outside—from India, Java or even China—increased the original conceptions, but were so well absorbed that they could not imperil the peculiar Cambodian sensibility.

When the Varmans became all-powerful monarchs, they wished to build gorgeous temples, and wood, which so far had been sufficient for their wants, was no longer

adequate for such tasks. Stone was first used. . . . The artists, however, totally ignored the technique which the new material required. For ever they continued to build in stone as they had built in wood. It is extraordinary that they were never able to improve the manner of their construction, and from the ninth to the twelfth century no alteration is to be perceived.

Two kinds of stone were used : laterite for surrounding walls and in some cases for lesser edifices in poorer shrines, but especially as foundations which were then hidden under sandstone. For temples like the Bayon or Angkor Vat true hills of hewn monoliths were necessary to support the actual structures. All the finer work was done with blocks of sandstone, which were juxtaposed after having had their surfaces smoothed so carefully that the joints even now are often hardly discernible, and this is what saved the erections many a time from total ruin, as no cement was ever used. A fatal mistake was made none the less when the vertical joints were not always contrived to avoid being placed exactly one above the other, so as to cause the pressure of the upper parts to weigh evenly on all the base line and save big portions of the structure from utter collapse through the displacement of a single stone. The corbel-table vaults are elegant in shape, almost ogival, yet without the arch and keystone the Khmers found it impossible to complete large rooms or very broad galleries in stone ; sometimes even, behind pediments of the ordinary elliptical outline, they constructed a wooden roof with steep inclines, and the holes where rafters were introduced are still seen.¹ The architects went as far in rare cases as to place, instead of stone lintels, strong beams of iron-wood, entirely fitted in a hollowed stone.² It seems,

¹ At Prah Vihear such roofs were resting against pediments, not elliptical, but having the appearance of triangular gables.

² In the Baphuon.



FIG. 44. FRAGMENT



FIG. 45. CHISELLING ON MOUNTING



FIG. 46. A GODDESS



FIG. 47. A PRINCE (?)

therefore, that they did not trust the strength of the latter, and when the beams, however resistant—so resistant that now and then they have borne the burden to this day—at last rotted, a crash was unavoidable.

Then with all these failings, and many more, it is astonishing that the Cambodians were able to turn their gigantic dreams into realities; and there is certainly no other example of a race which, without the knowledge of technical details—absolutely necessary, it appears to us, to the most backward of masons—of a race which had to fetch stone from quarries twenty miles away, finishing the greatest buildings in the world with monoliths that are sometimes upwards of six tons in weight.

There was no improvement in technique, but much in the conception. In Angkor Vat we are far from the intricacy of the Bayon, from the exaggerated bristling of turrets, from the uncertainties of the plan, from the weird gloom and mystery of sharp-cornered passages and unexpected cellas. Everything is simplified, everything is grand and majestic. No longer are we terrified, but crushed by haughtiness and impressiveness.

Angkor Vat is the architectural zenith reached by the Khmers; no zenith was ever loftier.

CHAPTER VI

KHMER STONE DECORATION — THE DEVATAS — GREAT
GALLERIES OF BAS-RELIEFS—RELIGION AND EVOLUTION

i

If any part of the buildings can be taken as absolutely characteristic of Khmer architecture it is the doorway. The door has an ordinary rectangular frame; next to the frame are two jambs, rarely round, mostly polygonal, on which rests a lintel. The whole of this is deeply set between two pilasters and a high pediment; moreover, if a tower is erected behind the doorway, a series of pediments placed one above the other climbs up at every stage of the tower, and the last look like square balconies. It is on the doorway, too, that embellishments on the whole are most abundantly lavished; the jambs are grooved and ornamented with little flowers; the pilasters are gloriously carved, as the lintels and the pediments which have their edges occupied by the swaying bodies of Nagas and their extremities marked by the manifold heads raised like acroters. But the doorways are only a detail of the decoration of a temple like Angkor Vat. The columns, chiefly square, have bases when small and often none when big; the capitals are simple but provided with delightful pearls, petals, pistils and rows of beads. The lotus flower gave inspiration to the Khmers for many patterns and for the endings of their towers; the other more conventionalised plants are difficult to recognise, but amongst them may be the leaf of the acanthus. Every window and false window is guarded by round bars of stone, turned and shaped like wooden ones. The massive tiers of the



FIG. 48. DOORFRAME
DECORATION



FIG. 49. CHASTITY

temple, the bases of the paved avenues and terraces have strong mouldings, covered with lace-like carvings. The balusters, walls, copings, friezes and dados show surfaces worked as finely as jewellery, and their richness is unimaginal.

Usually little figures are introduced in the designs. Sometimes the scrolls of plants emerge from the half-body of a lion, the stalks continuing the line of the belly and hind legs ; or else they end in the form of a bird, of which the wings grow like a flower, and the beak becomes again sepals and stamens.

Sometimes the tiny figures are quite separate and seem to skim from flower to flower like bees in search of perfumed blossoms. Little hunters with bows and blow-pipes run between buds and petals in wild pursuit of stags and monkeys ; little horsemen gallop over the twigs of a light vegetation, and the arms of little natives support the arches of slender branches. A favourite theme is two fighting parrots, violently turning round and round, beak to beak. Even gods and demons take their share in the detail, and in a decoration which consists of volutes in flat and very low relief, and which must have looked very much like tapestry when painted, as it undoubtedly was, Siva is seen dancing, Brahma meditating or Ganesa dozing. As a matter of fact the artists were occasionally so scrupulous that they inserted legends, taken from Hindu epics, as the complements of their slightest patterns. In rows of niches, side by side, dancers find enough room for their graceful occupation, or warriors to stand up on all kinds of rearing mounts—horses, stags, elephants, bulls, tigers and many more.

A curious thing, however, is that Angkor Vat is not as excellent as the older temples in the display of plant ornamentation. Its figures are truly superior, but its rolling growths have lost some of the fullness and broadness of earlier work ; the curves are stiffer, colder, less

natural. But they seem somewhat meagre only in comparison to other Khmer achievements, and, if we knew of no others, we would admire them without restraint.

Some writers have thought that there was too much of this decoration in Angkor Vat, but I cannot feel in the same way. With the relative scarcity of similar efflorescence in European buildings in mind, it was hard for such authors to grasp the difference that lies between superfluous and burdening decoration and that which is merely luxuriant and beautifying, although extremely plentiful. Angkor Vat has no ornamentation that can be taken as an end in itself, such as one expects to find too often in India and Java. The said ornamentation is always maintained within the limits of its usefulness; it is always adapted to the piece of construction it is meant to adorn. Never does it shock by too great an intensity of relief, by a confusion, which might impair the grandeur of the architectural entirety. . . . Indeed, if it were not there, Angkor Vat would lose lightness in its impressiveness and an unexplainable quality of unearthly dignity, and shall I say vagueness, caused by its luxuriance. The distances are always pure, never spoilt by too much unevenness of surface; they merely have a sense of delicate shading, given them by the low reliefs embellishing part of their stones. And, when viewed closely, the decoration possesses merits altogether unbelievable.

The drawing of volutes and of curves is the branch of art in which the Khmer is unrivalled. He possessed the imagination of the Gothic worker, the gift for harmonious charm of the Greek, the power of the Renaissance craftsman, and that prodigality and wealth of ideas that can exist only in the East. It would be difficult to find a theme for the disposition of masses which has not been touched by the Cambodian: circles within squares and overlapping circles, diamonds, triangles, ovals, festoons,

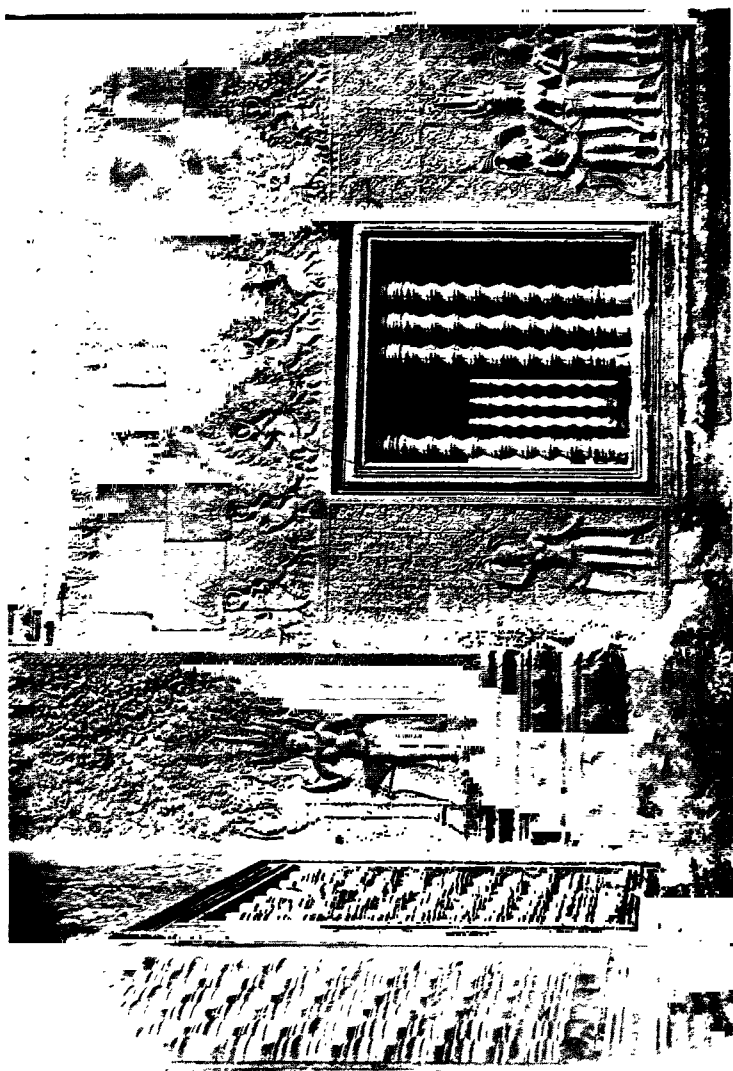


FIG. 50. WALL CARVING, ANGKOR VAT

tile shapes, overhanging grapes ; the zigzag of the Moor, the dented ogive of the mediæval carpenter or mason, the row of pendants and masks of the Athenian and Roman, the reversed spirals of the Quattrocento, even the flame-like exuberance of rococo or the solemn lines of Louis XIV. In fact, all periods and schools are juxtaposed, intermingled and grafted to unite in the most lively and fertile of styles. And, what is extraordinary, an exact repetition of a single group of carving is rarely findable in one pattern ; the opposite parts, corresponding to each other, are often different, either through a diminutive figure, a bud, or the overturning of a leaf. Now imagine this astounding fertility exposed on thousands, hundreds of thousands of square feet of stone, and you will dimly understand what has been achieved by a savage race in the distant jungle of Cambodia.

ii

But at the same time the elaborate flora of stone is above all a frame for more ambitious sculptures. For instance, in Angkor Vat, the Devatas, the divine wives, are more numerous than anywhere else.

Let us once and for all describe the faults which are but too obvious, and then let us admire at leisure the gentle poetry of this population of girls who have been multiplied all over the temple, and greatly help to give it the sensation of dim unreality. In number they are uncountable, and, considering the many artists who had to perform the task, the eventual result is remarkably even in merit ; but inevitably some of the figures must be worse than others and some faces less beautiful. Taken as a whole, however, they are charming, and the most important drawback lies in their feet, a difficulty of perspective, the Khmers have not been able to master. In this shrine, where the relief is particularly low, they did not model the forms by cutting deeply into the stone and have drawn

the feet in profile while the girls are seen full face. Besides, the clothes are stiff and flat, yet their curves are well managed, and they do not impair by the simple and strong lines of their folds the general sweep of limbs and torsos.

Now that we have eliminated the strongest objections we can enjoy the sight of the dainty maids like the passing of a bevy of damsels in the lanes of some western park. Some stand under panoplies and arches of intricate foliage, some against a background of carved vegetation. To come across the greatest agglomeration of them one needs go up to the second storey, and there is truly the dwelling-place where they reign alone on every wall of the vast courtyards and have turned them into the silent apartments of the largest of seraglios. . . . What a delightful troop of odalisques they form ! One sees them on the sides of doorways, as if ready to cross the porticoes and wander away in the galleries ; one sees them against the plain surface of naked walls, walking arm in arm as in a joyful garden, and treading on mouldings overgrown with flowers ; one sees them at the entrance to chapels, on the point of going inside, it seems, and praying, or else roguishly beckoning one to look at them, to come near in the half shadow of mysterious corners. They are in small groups, two, three, five or six ; they daintily pass, arms locked, hands pressed, fanning themselves or smelling the buds of precious flowers, on which perches perhaps a tiny tame bird. They are nude down to the waist ; their embroidered sarong hangs loosely to below the knees ; one end of the cloth is tucked in the belt and is folded on the side, the other is sometimes held by a dainty hand or slung over a forearm or shoulder. The Devatas possess anklets, bracelets, necklaces, which come to a point between the breasts ; but more often the last are absent, and the softness of the flesh is more alluring than the supposed gold and diamonds. It is in the headgears that fashion, womanly love of self-adornment and originality meet to

give us a style of feminine arrangement, extraordinary in elaboration and marvellous in dexterity. The more lowly women gather their hair in a chignon on the top of their head and allow a long tress to flutter freely between wavy objects which resemble plumes or reeds. Some girls have brushed their hair in a kind of halo, tied in stiff knots and pointed locks, and have stuck flowers or jewels in the dark waves that enhance the pure oval of their face. And then many of them, not wishing to copy their sisters, have invented fantastic coiffures, in front of which the ablest of head-dressers would stare and acknowledge that he does not know the rudiments of his profession. They are composed of strings of pearls, crescents, roses, jewels closely allied in shape to fern leaves, of lotus flowers, clusters of precious stones, of a bewildering mixture of nature and artificiality, that attracts both by its strangeness and the real taste that underlies it, and which is decidedly becoming to the Khmer type of beauty. . . . But there is more in these figures than ordinary richness.

In Europe there have been great painters who fashioned worlds of their own, equivocal and weird, or sanguinary and abhorrent; but two of them, taking opposite subjects, have poetised and spiritualised the human body to such an extent that, although one sees its form, one gets only an impression of the soul, free from all flesh. These are Perugino and Watteau.

Perugino, by means of a refined knowledge of perspective and a wholesale reduction of accidental effects, lays before our gaze boundless landscapes in which saints pass and pass again, without passion, almost without thoughts. All gestures are slow, all poses lifeless. Yet every one of these qualities or defects tends to make one forget one's senses, and Perugino's characters are truly incarnations of the spirit, perhaps uninteresting, but of the spirit none the less.

Watteau, a greater genius, displays on his canvases a mentality of exquisite sadness. The children of his

fancy are melancholy and unsatisfied, but it is not because they crave for unholy pleasures, but because they have lost, or rather never have possessed, bodies. Those people, who roam, dance, converse or play idly, have no mad desires ; they are souls dwelling in an elysium of peace and repose.

These two masters only leave a trail of gentle perfume, never to be found in Asia, Africa, America or Europe—a perfume light but penetrating, soft, radiant, that has never passed over sensuality. One, Perugino, has fashioned a race of mystic saints ; the other, Watteau, a race of mystic aristocrats. At Angkor Vat the Khmers have fashioned a mystic race which is neither holy nor profane, but part of both.

At first, since the Devatas do not appear timid, one is impressed, as when confronting pretty strangers who, one feels, will soon be friendly. Naturally they are somewhat unusual, the quaint little women of a dead race, and one understands the strangeness of the meeting. . . . The gap separating one from them, however, is not broader or more impassable than that existing on the occasions when one wishes to talk to the laughing-eyed Japanese or Annamite women, or to the well-built Cambodian village girls. They seem to have that torpor of the Orient in their pose, that half-reluctance, and that sweetly awkward fidgeting of hands that do not know where to rest composedly. But the present native women speak and move, whilst these stand palpable but motionless, and the smile on one's lips becomes forced ; one looks uncomfortably at the Devatas, waiting for something that occurs not . . . and at last one perceives the chasm that separates them from one, the chasm of centuries besides that of racial differences. It is at this moment that one considers how unreal they are, how immaterial ; and the maidens of Angkor Vat are soon akin in one's mind to the heavenly spirits of Perugino and the ephemeral courtiers of Watteau.

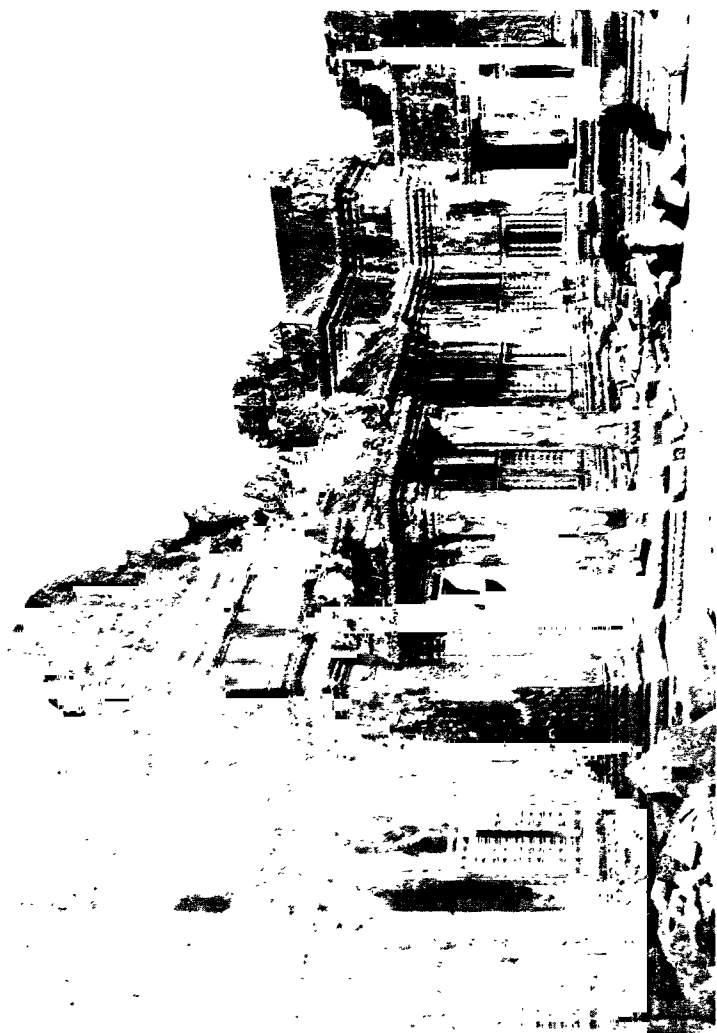


FIG. 51. IN THE DEVATAS' REALM

They are divine wives. The gods of the Hindu pantheon are more like monarchs, and their wives and courtesans more like queens and noblewomen; yet their spirit of heavenly uncertainty is maintained, and, similar to the creations of the Italian master, they have the assurance of heavenly creatures, and perhaps the indifference for mankind which is unpleasant in his work. Similar to the progeny of Watteau's dreams, they are languid like aristocrats and have the wavering expression of free-born, wealthy, all-powerful creatures who do not exactly know what they want.

iii

The galleries of the first storey, which stretch for a length of over half a-mile, also offer a sight certainly without an equivalent; and even the whole aspect of the temple and the already described decoration cannot boast more interest than the eight long cloisters with a double line of columns and their high wall overwrought with immense carvings. By the effect of perspective and light and shade the galleries are pervaded by much softness and grandeur. Sunshine pours between the tall pillars, scatters on the floor and brightens the lower half of scenes where many characters of Hindu legends and beliefs, and of a chapter of Khmer history, weep, laugh, battle, live for ever. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are illustrated here as no other epics, no other works of literature ever were, on a scale which has no parallel, with a spirit which is its own.

Oh, the superb halls! . . . The superb exhibition of art and religion! . . . The superb achievement of a school of learning and philosophy! . . . What the Sistine Chapel is to Christianity, and Boro Boudour to Buddhism, Angkor Vat is to Vishnuism—namely, a sanctuary where the chief dogmas and lores of a faith are pictorially displayed with consummate feeling, strength and perfection.

Vishnuism was the branch of Brahmanical religion towards which the Cambodians gradually inclined, after the period of savage conquest and of the founding of Angkor-Thom had come to an end. Originally the Khmers were followers of Sivaic Brahmanism. It was doubtless this frightful god who, if he were the cause of their being extremely cruel and ferocious, also provided them with the necessary hardihood and strength of will to enable them to become a nation of mighty warriors. This can be further demonstrated by the parallel, which later existed between the growth of milder creeds and the gradual decadence of their followers. Siva was pre-eminently a god fit to be adored by fighters and led his worshippers from victory to victory till they finally reached unequalled greatness. But when conquests brought wealth and welfare in their train, the masses craved a more humane idol, a master to whom they could speak with the voice of the heart and not of terror, who would understand their need of sympathy and love. Imperceptibly Vishnu took the place of his rival. In the twelfth century he reached the apogee of his predominance and was the god for whom Angkor Vat was built. . . . Still later, and for the same reason, Buddhism was adopted as the sole religion of the Khmers; better men, they became worse soldiers, and could no longer withstand the onslaughts of their enemies.

Sivaism had been the inspirer of the Bayon, strange, cruel and powerful beyond expression. That shrine of Angkor-Thom was the soul of the nation petrified; a soul profoundly superstitious and believing, for whom the Maha-Deva was supremely, unquestionably existent and almighty. War was the chief occupation of the Khmers at that time, and, with its rough touch, it had hardened, but fortified, all hearts.

How many lives of obscure men are overflowing with thoughts of real greatness! The world with every

generation is filled once again with courage and honour, with abnegation and love. In these lives the entire genius of mankind secretly marches past in glorious and unknown parade. The qualities of the great races come once more in many new-born frames every year; the beauty of peoples is continually poured into newly throbbing hearts. They grow and rarely come to the surface in a compact whole. . . . The élite of countries is for ever renewed and their aspirations for ever thriving. But, this being true, what can cause the difference existing between some epochs and others? Centuries should always add an even quota to the treasures of mankind. . . . It is not so, because all the qualities of a nation appear only when pressed to the surface by providence; and providence as such is never so fruitful as when it comes in the guise of war or religion. When men are stirred by great events which endanger their very homes, or else by the exultation, excitement and enthusiasm of conquests, or yet when they confide body and soul to the care of a god whom they wish to glorify, then do they use their entire wits and all their qualities and faculties. Only at those periods can art and literature be fully expressive of the whole nation. When the Bayon was built there is little doubt that the Khmers were deeply religious and in the very midst of their military career; thus it is not surprising that the fane is what it is, since their faith was cruel, and since war brings to their fullest development the worse vices as well as the better qualities of the fighters.

On the contrary, when the foundation stone of Angkor Vat was laid, an important change had taken place: Sivaism had all but disappeared; the milder Vishnuism had come instead, and the yet more benevolent Buddhism had a strong hold on an important part of the population; several kings even had attempted to follow the steps of Sakya-Muni. A still greater revolution had been effected in the general morals and feelings of Cambodia: untold

wealth won by the might of arms led to the same consequences as were later to be witnessed with the Moguls in India. Hardy warriors had become too rich¹; masses of gold had impoverished their intellect; they were less inclined to believe dogmas implicitly, and were more anxious to exhibit their luxury than their faith. Angkor Vat, unlike the Bayon, is not the achievement of an entire race, but of a proud aristocracy; and pride, haughty pride, is everywhere evident. Fatal results were imminent. . . . More decadence in the people, less cruelty, softer hearts, and what conquest and Sivaism had accomplished was finally undone by weakness and Buddhism. Angkor Vat is the gem of ancient Cambodia, but soon after its completion a civilisation and an art were almost effaced from the surface of the earth.

¹It is instructive to observe how the uniforms worn by the stone soldiery in Angkor Vat had lost simplicity and gained gaudiness since the days of Yaçovarman.

CHAPTER VII

VISHNU, LORD OF ANGKOR VAT—INTERPRETATION AND CRITICISM OF THE GREAT BAS-RELIEFS—KHMER SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND

i

THEN it is Vishnu who is the lord of Angkor Vat. Besides the tall statues we have already discussed two were found, or, rather, one statue and the head of another, which reproduced a lion-headed and a boar-headed god. It is not difficult to place them as figurations of Naha Sinha and Varaha, of Vishnu as a boar and as a creature half animal and half human, at the time when he came down to the earth to deliver it from the tyranny of the demons Hiranya-kasipu and Hiranyaksha. Yet we must search the long galleries of bas-reliefs and the first storey's south-western and north-western vestibules if we desire to discover larger and more explicit reproductions of portions of the popular god's legend. The first sculptured panel I shall deal with is in the southern wing of the eastern gallery.

The sons of Diti and Aditi, the Asuras and the Devas, wishing to become immortal, thought that they could attain such felicity by churning the Sea of Milk, one of the seven concentric circular seas which surround the seven concentric circular continents. They came to that sea and found the great snake Vasuki lying at the bottom of it; they seized the serpent and, using it as a rope, wound it round the Mandara mountain, which would prove a suitable churning stick, and with much vigour began to churn the Sea of Milk. At the end of a thousand years

the snake Vasuki vomited a scorching poison, endangering the Devas and Asuras. They asked the help of Siva, who, however, disappeared; but Vishnu came and carried the poison away. After this the churning recommenced until the Mandara mountain sunk in slime. Again Vishnu proved his powers; he took the shape of a tortoise and, diving to the bottom of the sea, placed himself as a pivot under the mountain. Henceforth the toil continued unhindered, and at last there appeared on the surface Dhanvantari, the gods' physician; the multitude of Apsaras; Lakshmi, goddess of good fortune and beauty; Uccaihsravas, the finest of horses; the jewel Kanstubha; and, finally, the Amrita, drink which ensured immortality.

On the whole the huge work of art displays the entire myth. At the two ends are the servants holding in hand the elephants and horses of the gods, the Devas, and of the demons, the Asuras. The Asuras are on the left; powerful, grimacing, with a crested helm on their head, they pull with all their might at the body of Vasuki; while the Devas, on the right, clasping the tail of the snake, their head covered by the pointed mukuta, lean forward and give way, waiting for the instant when it will be their turn to pull. At regular intervals six bigger and somewhat unidentifiable personages stand out of the crowd; on the side of the Devas they are perhaps Brahma and Siva, or yet Rahu, a demon who squeezed himself among the deities to drink the divine Amrita, and, lastly, Hanuman, the great monkey who appears to have been especially dear to Cambodian hearts. In the centre looms the Mandara, resting on the tortoise, and a second image of Vishnu, whilst a little figure is on the summit of the mountain, apparently keeping its balance with great difficulty on account of the swift circular motion of its stand. The sea naturally is represented by fish, crocodiles, serpents, sea-lions, which, near the formidable churning stick, are cut in pieces and torn asunder by the terrific



FIG. 52. GALLERY OF THE FIRST STOREY, ANGKOR VAT

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disturbance of the waves. The sky is embellished by a flight of Asparas, who swing garlands over the contending parties.

Before leaving the subject of the Churning of the Sea of Milk—a favourite subject with the Khmers, who carved it many a time, incidentally in the Bayon—I must mention that it is repeated in Angkor Vat on a very much smaller scale.¹ In this case the scene, although less artistic, possesses more detail: the sea has not only fish, but lines for ripples; the mountain is a curious, tall, trunk-like growth; just above the tortoise emerge the heads of Lakshmi and the horse Uccaihsravas; Vishnu clings to and seems to climb up the mountain; on either side of him are placed two discs, probably the sun and the moon, who revealed to him Rahu's subtle trick, and there is always the smaller figure on top of Mount Mandara, but it seems more secure at its post.

To conclude, as soon as the Amrita was produced, both the Devas and Asuras wished to possess it, and a frightful war ensued, in which the Devas were victorious. Vishnu, however, captured the priceless elixir and became immortal and invincible. The destructive struggle between the gods and demons is possibly the subject-matter of the magnificent decoration of the western wing of the northern gallery, where a great number of duels takes place between gods and demons.² Twenty-one Devas are of supreme rank, and we can count among them Kubera on the shoulders of a Yaksa, Skanda riding a peacock, Indra on the four-tusked elephant Airavana, Yama in a chariot drawn by oxen, Siva in one drawn by bulls, Brahma carried by a Hamsa, Surya standing in front of the solar disc in an aerial chariot driven by the half-man and half-bird Aruna, and Varuna on the back of a Naga.

¹ South-west vestibule.

² This rests on no proof whatever, as similar contests abound in the Puranas.

Vishnu's seventh incarnation, when he appeared on the earth in the body of Rama to destroy, at the end of the Treta Age, the demon Ravana, was set forth at length in about twenty-four thousand stanzas by the inspired hermit Valmiki. Several passages of that epic, the Ramayana, had already been used by the sculptors of the Baphuon and other shrines, and in Angkor Vat some of its episodes were narrated on stone with exceptional industry. The sad but heroic tale of Sita's love, of Rama's prowess, of Lakshman's faithfulness inspired the Khmers into some of their best sculptures, and several small panels are exquisite in feeling and delicacy.

The first of them is the bending of Janak's bow by Rama—feat which won for him the perfect companion of his life, the exemplary spouse, Sita—and then in quick succession come the contest with the ogre Viradha, who tried to kill the hero and his brother Lakshman, and that with the monstrous Raksasa Kabandha¹; Rama's hunt of the other demon Maricha, who beguiled him away from his wife by assuming the appearance of a deer with sapphire antlers and a hide of gold and silver²; the meeting of Rama on Mount Malaya with the exiled prince of the monkeys, Sugriva¹; the duel between Sugriva and his cruel brother Bali, and the latter's wives mourning over his corpse²; the finding of Sita in her captivity by the monkey general Hanuman¹; the arrival at Rama's camp of the deserting Raksasa Vibhisana¹; Sita's ordeal by fire and Rama's triumphal entry into Ayodhya on the Puspaka chariot drawn by geese.¹ But the largest illustration of the Ramayana is in the northern wing of the western gallery, where is seen the terrible, merciless battle waged by Rama, Lakshman and their allies, the monkeys, against Ravana and his horde, the demoniac Raksasas. Rendered with perfect accuracy, the bloody contests near Lanka are revealed in a confused mass, a mass from which several

¹ North-west vestibule.

² South-west vestibule.

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details can, however, be brought to light : Nila is killing Mahodara, helped by the son of dead Bali, Angada, who pulls out the tusk of the Raksasa's elephant ; Angada is met somewhere else fighting Vajradamstra, and once again fighting Narantaka ; Sugriva using all his might against the dreadful demon Kumbha ; and, in the place of honour, Rama, standing on dauntless Hanuman and followed by Lakshman and Vibhisana, is going to let fly an arrow at Ravana, who, in a light car drawn by lions, is engaged in repelling the attacks of Nila, a great monkey of baffling agility and resourcefulness.

Krishna, the most popular of all Vishnu's incarnations, at any rate in India, is as often visible as Rama in Angkor Vat. We first see him an incorrigible child. Although his adoptive mother Yaçoda has tied him to a mortar in order to keep him quiet, Krishna, not in the least discouraged and crawling on all-fours, pulls the mortar along the ground and, as it becomes wedged between two arguna-trees, pulls these down with astonishing ease.¹ The second time we see the "dark god," he is in the rôle of a saviour, lifting up Mountain Govardhana to protect his friends the cowherds and their flocks from the storm created by infuriated Indra.¹ And then we find a victorious Krishna, in the company of his wife Satyabhama and of his army, bringing back the recaptured Maniparvata after defeating Naraka.² It should be said that the actual combat against Naraka is perhaps carved in the northern wing of the eastern gallery, but that vast panel, like the one next to it, in the eastern wing of the northern gallery, is so insufferably bad in conception, in drawing and in detail that we shall leave it for the moment. The last of these two bas-reliefs is also reserved for the legend of Krishna, unquestionably recognisable as his victory over Bana, related in the *Harivamça*.

The Mahabharata is not an epic with Krishna as hero,

¹ South-west vestibule.

² North-west vestibule.

but at any rate it records the incidents of the god's later life; and in the southern wing of the western gallery, where the famous battle of the Pandavas and Kauravas is rendered, we discover the four-armed deity driving a chariot, and therefore know that the occupant of it is Arjuna. Another character easily identified is Bhishma, pierced with many arrows and dictating his will; and we also notice the Brahmine Drona, who was appointed general-in-chief of the Kaurava armies after Bhishma's fall.

Vishnu reigns in other bas-reliefs, which up to this time have not revealed from what text of the Puranas they have been taken. One only need be mentioned: Vishnu appears in his favourite and traditional pose—that is, sleeping on a snake which floats on the sea, whilst the god's wife holds his feet in her lap and lotus flowers issue from his navel. But what lends some undiscovered signification to the scene is that nine great deities come to adore or visit the reposing god. Two of them are rather mysterious; one rides on a lion and the other on a horse. But the remaining seven are not new figures in the temple; they are Siva on his bull Nandin, Yama on an ox, Indra on his elephant, Skanda on a peacock, Brahma on his goose, Kubera on a giant Yaksa, and Surya on his solar car. Lesser gods and Brahmans and *ascètes* and Apsaras also congregate for prayer, and the whole is perhaps an allegory in honour of the kindest of Hindu idols.

ii

From the above enumeration one is bound to come to the conclusion that little but the glorification of the Trimurti's second member was in the mind of the fane's artists; yet two of the finest and biggest bas-reliefs have quite a special character, and three small panels were carved for Siva. The first of these three is the story of Kama, god of love, who tried to seduce the stern Maha-Deva by wounding him with an arrow made of sugar-



FIG. 53. RAMA AND MARICHA



FIG. 54. DEVAS CHURNING THE SEA OF MILK

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cane, but the wretched and imprudent god was reduced to cinders by a glance from his would-be victim and was mourned by his mother Rati. The second is an anecdote of the Ramayana in which Ravana angered Siva by shaking a mountain on which the latter was playing, and as a punishment Siva crushed the mountain and with it the arms of the demon. The third is a "conversation" with no very distinctive details.¹

In the southern gallery are found the two vast bas-reliefs which, perhaps more than any others, excite interest; in the eastern wing, the representation of Paradise and Hell according to Cambodian lore; in the western wing, a great military review taking place under the eyes of a Khmer emperor.

The former begins with three superposed ways, which are occupied by the ranks of the dead, advancing towards judgment. They seem to know already what their future life will be, for along the two upper roads rich, elegant men and women pass in palanquins, on horseback, under the shadow of sunshades, whilst on the lowest, wretches already suffer terrible tortures at the hands of tall, muscular demons, who pull them with ropes by the nose or ears, beat them with clubs and lead them to animals that tear them to bits. In this state the souls arrive in the presence of eighteen-armed Yama, judge of the dead, who sits on an ox and is assisted by Vrah Dharma, "saint justice," and Citragupta, the recorder of good and evil deeds. Henceforward the bas-relief is divided into two horizontal portions, separated by a frieze of Garudas. The blessed enter lofty palaces in the upper register which is Paradise, and the damned are brought to Citragupta, who shows them the gate of Hell with his mace; by an opening the guilty plunge into the frightful realms of horror, where they are received by devils, who, rightly, treat them in an abominable manner. Small inscriptions,

¹ All three are in the south-west vestibule.

which explain the different parts of the carving, inform us of the fact that there are thirty-two hells and tell us how each torture is reserved for some special deed. Every vice and abomination is pointed out, and, over and above the usual crimes of murder, theft, immorality, scorn of the gods and their ministers, we find what awaits those who are sinful in spite of their living in abundance, who eat non-consecrated meat, who take advantage of confidence, who are incendiaries, who degrade houses, gardens, pools, wells, who are greedy, who cut trees in consecrated spots, who sow discord among kings, who envy riches, and even those who live in exile and who do not pay their debts. Among the thirty-two gehennas there is the hell of "trees with sharp thorns," of "coupled mountains," of "choking," of "tears," and one which is "cold."

Now we shall end our list of sculptures in the fane's galleries by a short account of what is undoubtedly, with some of the Bayon's decoration, the most valuable basis for an ethnographical and historical study of the ancient Khmers. Unlike those specified up to now it is not religious, at least not essentially religious. Again short inscriptions, engraved here and there in the stone, prove of great help. We are present at an audience held by the monarch for the call of his troops, and, a little farther away, of the said troops marching past and probably bent on a warlike expedition.

"His majesty, the sacred feet, lord and master, Parama Vishnuloka," holding a ceremonious council on the top of a hill, is surrounded by his Brahmines, by servants, *ascètes* and guards. The four great ministers of the Crown are placed on his left, "Cri Varddha," "Dhananjaya," the "saintly lord and master of merits and faults, the fourth" (in order of precedence no doubt), and "Cri Virasinhavarmma," who seems to read from a scroll the names of the high officers of the army. The latter make the obeisance and go down from the hill-top to assume

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their rank in the departing regiments. At the foot of the hill a numerous crowd of princesses, in palanquins and light carts drawn by hand, hurry forward with numbers of servants and slaves, some of whom carry provisions. And then for the remainder of the bas-relief, about ninety yards long, stretches the procession of soldiery. The generals ride on elephants, and the name of each is carefully inscribed, nearly always in the same, probably prescribed, formula; round them are their battalions on foot or on horseback. In the centre we meet once more his Majesty Parama Vishnuloka, riding a powerful elephant, and also the "sacred fire," followed by a concourse of Brahmines and the royal sacrificer. Right at the end of the panel—that is to say, forming the first legion of the column—we are astonished to see weird soldiers, the "Syam kuk," the Siamese mercenaries, commanded by a compatriot.

Our curiosity is at once roused by the two portraits of his Majesty Parama Vishnuloka; unfortunately we are not able to say who he was with irrefutable certainty. The form of the name proves that it is a posthumous one, one of those which were given to Cambodian monarchs after their death to point out in the realms of what deities they now resided. No similar name can be found except the "Vishnuloka" of Jayavarman III., who reigned çaka 791-799 and is out of the question. Besides this there are five sovereigns whose posthumous names we ignore, and our choice must rest, for different reasons, either on Udayadityavarman (çaka 971-1001) or on Suryavarman II. (çaka 1034-1095?). The latter was the chief builder of Angkor Vat, but the monarchs were wont to honour their ancestors, as, for instance, we have seen in Lolei; on the other hand the inscriptions are probably not contemporary with the carvings, although written early enough to ensure their correctness, and the posthumous form of the name may not mean that the king of the bas-relief was dead at

the time of its completion. The given names of the ministers and generals are not more convincing, for we find some of them in one reign, some in the other, and the Khmer grandees often appropriated the titles of their forefathers.

However, in spite of all that, let us turn to another side of the question. The enthroned prince is of the same size as the Vishnus of other carvings in the temple; he is honoured by the same centralisation in his vast panel and is recognisable by at least an equal number of sunshades—sign of rank. Was his Majesty a peer of the greatest Devas in his own eyes and in those of his subjects? . . . What is even more likely, was he believed to be an incarnation of Vishnu, since he wears a similar mukuta and similar ornaments, and since his ensign in the military procession is Vishnu riding on Garuda? . . . Vishnuism was especially suitable, with its doctrine of incarnations, to an Eastern potentate who desired to be adored. Yet more far-reaching thought, was Vishnu worshipped in Angkor Vat under the form of this Parama Vishnuloka, of Udayadityavarman or Suryavarman II.? For this kind of assumption we must have some proof and must wander into a by-way.

As could only be expected, a legend is told about the origin of the fane. Before the deciphering of the small inscriptions the carving in question was known as the procession of Prah Ket Mala, and Parama Vishnuloka as the king of that name. The tale is shortly this: Princess Sophavodeï or Teivodeï, wife or daughter of King Bat Von Ascar, saw in a dream the god Indra, and ten months later she gave birth to a son, Prah Ket Mala. Years passed and the young prince grew in strength and beauty. One day Indra saw him and, cherishing the splendid being, took him to the heaven of the Thirty-three; but the other deities detested the "smell of man" and asked Indra to lead his favourite back to earth. Indra could not



FIG. 56 H. M. PARANA VISHNULOKA IN COUNCH

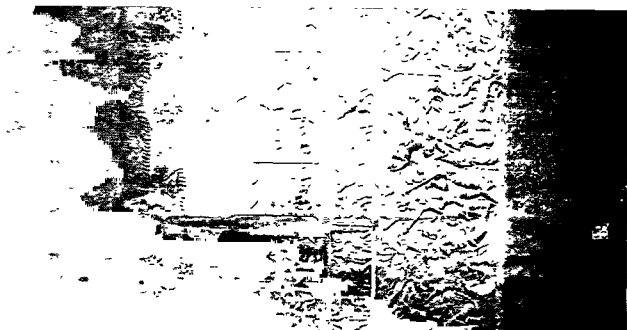


FIG. 55. PARADISE AND HELL

refuse, but, before accomplishing the wish of his congeners, he caused a palace to be built for Prah Ket Mala, which was an exact replica of the heaven of the Thirty-three. The palace is Angkor Vat.

This legend, as marvellous as all the others we have already told, has the merit at any rate of being almost historical. It is well known among the learned society of modern Cambodia, it has been put down in a native *satra*; moreover there is an invaluable testimony of its antiquity in the long inscription incised on the columns of the passage joining the first and the second storeys of the temple: "If I come back after this life," says the author, "let it be in the womb of a queen, like the Cau Ket Mala who flew to heaven, where Indra received him as a son, who came back from it to reign here and build this *nagara* with the aid of Brah Bisnukar, and who continued to reign after the latter, his task accomplished, had returned to heaven!" This inscription dates back to the year çaka 1623.

Some archæologists found analogies between Angkor Vat and royal palaces, yet it is, without a shade of doubt, a temple. To find a way out of the difficulty one need only stretch the legend ever so little and say that a king lived, that he died, that his people thought he had been received by Indra, then Angkor Vat was built and the spirit of the monarch was taken to have returned to his native land to be adored in it.

Prah Ket Mala and Parama Vishnuloka are one and the same, and another proof of the worship of Vishnu under the appearance of the monarch is that Angkor Vat is known as Bishnuloka or Vishnuloka in epigraphical relics contemporary with its erection; now we are aware that the names of some Khmer shrines are also meant to describe the idol adored therein.¹

¹ Cf. "Les bas-reliefs d'Angkor Vat," by G. Coedès, *Bulletin archéologique de l'Indochine*, No. 2 of 1911.

At any rate the portraits and all the reasonings, tales and hypotheses attached to them are captivating, since they may not only give the image of a great king of Cambodia, but of the very idol of the largest temple on earth.

iii

We cannot leave the bas-reliefs without very shortly pointing out the fascination they exercise on the man who appreciates works of art, not only for their antiquity or archæological value, but also for their intrinsic power of pleasing æsthetically.

The carvings are in very low relief, for the Khmers, who generally carved deeply into the stone, at any rate outside their buildings on lintels and pediments, found out that, as regards interiors bathed in penumbra, such method was unsatisfactory. Very low relief for decoration, in which figures are mainly introduced, is more rarely used than one is apt to believe, and yet its adaptability to the embellishment of extensive rooms or galleries is unquestionably pre-eminent. In front of it one is never struck by a great number of small and very dark shadows always disagreeable and "patchy" when stretching along extensive, unportioned walls. The hollows which penetrate the stone for no more than half-an-inch make it soft like rippling water, like dawn or twilight, and this quality has been enhanced by the Cambodians, whose technique in sculpture was astonishingly complete. Often does one hear in Europe that an artist has attacked blocks of marble to ravish from them treasures of beauty they imprisoned, but here the bosses and swellings of the material seem to have risen to its surface as naturally as cream on a bowl of milk.

The sandstone of Angkor Vat has a delightful smoothness and delicacy of grain; its greyness is charming, and here and there it has been polished to the resemblance of black marble by the touch of reverend pilgrims; here and

there thin layers of gold have been placed on especially sacred figures, like that of Parama Vishnuloka ; here and there also disgusted natives have spat at portions they hated in the scenes of hell, and red betel stains the stone. It is comparatively rare that rain has worn away the carvings, and the finish, the love of detail have been stretched to their farthest limits. . . . In the uniforms, dresses, jewels, weapons, harnesses, chariots, carts, howdahs and mansions, everything can be studied down to knots of rope, to patterns on cloths, to the slightest ornament. A great harvest of data is to be gathered for a mental image of the ancient Cambodians in Angkor. No less careful are the reproductions of flowers, of trees, of animals. Overwhelming above all is the life, intense and superabundant, swarming in the cloisters. In the Bayon such spirit was equally visible, but now we are not in the presence of campaigns between Khmers and Chams, but between gods and giants, and we seem to feel that the latter combats are loftier, on an altogether different plane—truly in the clouds. There are no longer half-naked soldiers rushing impetuously, but super-human creatures struggling for the possession of worlds, with a strength inconceivable to our weak limbs. . . . The fighters have indeed been idealised, but their savagery certainly not lessened. I am sure I am not wrong when I say that there is no livelier work of art than the great battle of the Ramayana. In it the monkeys bite breasts and legs, arms and faces. They jump at men, pierce their shields, seize their weapons, pull their limbs. They throttle one warrior with their feet and at the same time strangle another with their hands. They stop rushing steeds and cut their throats with their teeth. They check charges, throw stones and rocks, wield trees and branches, or else weapons they have wrenched from an enemy's grasp. Catching up flying Raksasas they force them to fight. They break the necks of lions and monsters and attack

powerful chiefs in the midst of their guards. They come and help each other. Freeing themselves from a group of demons, they escape only to slay more. They pull back the wheels of chariots and overthrow elephants. . . . It is all a seething mass of figures, a torrent of flesh. The characters are so numerous that they appear to crush one another eagerly to form a part of the scenes, to show one arm or a head even, if no more ; and most of them are drawn in impossible and exaggerated postures, yet they seem perfectly natural. We gaze not on gods, monsters and men who move with forced and maddened gestures, but merely on creatures infinitely more supple than ourselves. This apparent contradiction can be somewhat explained as soon as we perceive that it is the science of line which produces the miracle ; never have curves been richer and more graceful, more lithe and strong. Line was the greatest gift the Khmers possessed ; it allowed them to create unique masterpieces in foliage carvings ; it permitted them to fashion creatures which, human in shape, assume postures contrary to anatomy and yet lose no reality from it, only gaining a vivacity or else a grandeur and reposefulness which immediately place them above us mentally as well as physically. . . . Besides, some groups are so perfect an assemblage of such lines that they have the "peaceful" effect or, to speak more clearly, the gift of completely pleasing the beholder, of putting his mind to rest—an accomplishment which has always been taken as the test of all that is superior in art.

Too often, however, similar groups are in such quantity that, together, they form bas-reliefs much overcrowded and disconcerting in the abundance of actors. As this is always true as regards the great combats of Angkor Vat, we miss there the horizontal and clearly separated planes of the Bayon ; but in other scenes even the composition is remarkable, the balance and symmetry admirable—*The Churning of the Sea of Milk*, for instance, or some of the

small panels in the vestibules, like *Rama killing Maricha*. In the huge figuration of *Paradise and Hell* we find another specimen of excellent arrangement of masses and also an extraordinary proof of a further quality, imagination. Paradise, we must confess, is dull ; it is a city of well-fed people living comfortably in spacious palaces, served by beautiful slaves and musicians ; but Hell. . . . Oh, it is truly gruesome and vivid and alive. Miserable beings, whose ignorance, baseness or contempt of warnings have led them to this, suffer so terribly that we have more pity in our hearts than hatred in our souls. Thin men, women with hanging breasts, are pushed by demons who beat them with maces, or pulled by others who have fastened ropes to their wrists or necks. The wretches pray the tormentors, clasp them round their knees . . . to no avail, and they are dragged by their hair, gored by bulls, torn by tigers, throttled by snakes, crushed by elephants ; dogs are ready to bite them, and even a rhinoceros is there to torment them. Received in a desert where thorns, brambles and cacti abound, they have their bones broken by demons, they are burned by fires and crushed by mountains. Devils cut their noses and tongues, others poke glowing brands into their mouths, torture them with pinchers, hang them to branches, crush them in mortars, stretch their limbs, pierce them with a thousand arrows, throw them into narrow cages, where vultures attack them.

Other characteristics of the Angkor Vat compositions are the careful study of expressions, the splendid rendering of animals and, finally, a few sparks of humour, which brighten some details, as in the battle of monkeys and demons, where a small warrior, holding his sides, bursts with laughter at the proceedings, or in the battle of Devas and Asuras, where three panic-stricken servants or bandsmen fly ignominiously.

In the historic gallery all the beauties of the Cambodian style are united and very few of the mistakes are apparent.

The long line of soldiers, passing beneath a canopy of glorious forests, is a decorative frieze of absolute clarity. The drawing of men and horsemen is almost Greek in its purity ; the poses are expressive of strength and steadfastness, of nobility in the emperor and his courtiers ; the movement very true in the crowds of princesses and slaves and in little anecdotic details, like that elephant which is unsteady and is punished by his mahout. Some foreshortenings are masterly. Reproductions of types are most interesting, as in the Brahmans round the sacred fire and the Siamese mercenaries with their flowing head-gear and clumsy demeanour. The humour and caricature is similarly present in the priests, lank and ugly, especially in that one who, helping to carry the High Sacrificer in his palanquin, turns sideways to place the shaft from one to the other shoulder and grimaces with ridiculous anguish.

A last word, unfortunately, must be devoted to the two execrable northern and eastern wings of the eastern and northern galleries respectively, but only to say that their worthlessness does not detract from the reputation of the great artists of the classical Khmer period, for inscriptions definitely state that " As Mahavishnuloka had not finished these two (galleries ?) H.M. the king Onkaravarman Rajadhiraja Ramadhipativarman ordered the Vrah Mahidhara, the king's artist, to fashion (these bas-reliefs ?)," and prove the posterior date of these weak achievements.

iv

From *basso-rilievo* to statuary there exists but one step, and yet the differences between the two are so much the result of their respective callings that they cannot possibly be discussed under one heading. Statuary, first and foremost, must be solid and firm ; *basso-rilievo*, more akin to painting, can have all the gracefulness and lightness



FIG. 57. THE BATTLE OF MONKEYS AND
RAKSASAS

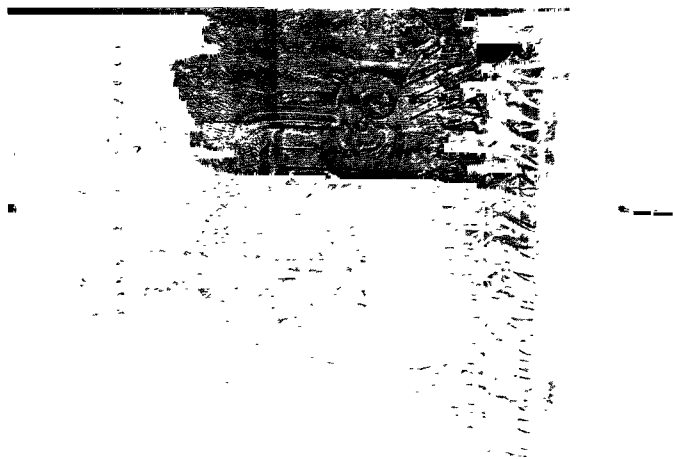


FIG. 58. ARMY ON THE MARCH, HISTORIC
GALLERY

KHMER SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND 279

which its less rigid appropriateness allows. Khmer wall carvings are close to imperfectible beauty in their genre ; Khmer work in the round is gifted with numerous qualities, but is still extremely archaic in general expression . . . the main characteristic of archaism being stiffness. Among the low reliefs there are some unfortunate exceptions to the average high standard ; among the statues there are some fortunate exceptions to the average frigidity, and the most striking which can be indicated is the Naga used as a handrail. Of course as an idea it cannot be excelled, and it seems astonishing that no one else thought of it : the long, slender body of a snake is not only the sole but the ideal subject drawn from animal life to form a balustrade. The Cambodians, besides, have treated that scheme so as to change it into one of those conceptions that are a boon for all time and every nation. The manifold heads of the monster, spread fan-wise like the neck of the angered cobra, are raised at the top of staircases, at the sides of avenues, at the corners of terraces, and they have a curve so majestic, withal so elegant, so full, withal so audacious, so sweeping, withal so stable, that one knows not whether the beast will rush at one or whether it will fly to the sky ; at any rate it fascinates one by its rearing, cambering, bending harmony. The airiness of the design is impaired when, as in the Bayon, a Garuda is introduced in it and massiveness is too apparent. Massiveness, in fact, is the great detrimental factor in Khmer statuary ; it is paramount in the ever-recurring companions of the Nagas, the lions, in the elephants, in the Dvarapalas, finally in the idols themselves.

The lions, squatting and grimacing, have been described long since ; nevertheless I must mention a way of carving them which is certainly original and no doubt impressive.

At the Prah Khan of Kompong Svai, and also in one or two other shrines, a few sintos lift their front paws on

high, their bodies stretched to their fullest extent, and, similar to the lines of giants outside the gate of Angkor-Thom, to the Garudas and even to the Nagas, they are the outcome of an extremely sanguine and restless art.

The Dvarapalas, standing with clubs in their hands, are impassive but heavy, and they furnish the connective link between the purely decorative statuary and the figurations of deities ; we are leaving the sphere of the merely superficial and outward and entering the deep and mysterious world of gods and goddesses.

For some unaccountable reason these have been relegated by most authors who have dealt with the subject among the decidedly second-rate and even absolutely bad remains of a vanished civilisation. I have to say that such writers could never have been philosophers, thinkers or poets, and they exhibit an extraordinary lack of insight and psychology. The main basis of their attacks is the above-stated heaviness and the incapability of the Khmers to show the play of muscles or any liveliness . . . it is true ; but without excusing the artists, by saying that a part of these defects might have been intentional and symbolical, I can at any rate ask whether the body is the only half of a statue to be studied ? The divine images are uncommonly stiff and usually uninteresting in their pose — standing up on podgy legs, their arms slightly raised to hold attributes. Sometimes they are crouching like the Leprous King, sometimes lying down like sleeping Buddhas, but they are always statuesque in that their base is broad ; they are secure on their pedestals and do not appear thin and fragile when in an open space. The muscles are non-existent, but there is never any coarseness, and, statement which I do not believe can be said of any other school of art on the earth, there is not the slightest sign of obscenity or gross sensuality in all the Khmers have left us. And then let me repeat : Is the body the only half of a statue to be studied ?



FIG. 59 NAGA

KHMER SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND 281

Greek art is supreme in the rendering of arms and legs, of torsos and necks, but it fails in the expression of the soul. How many statues whose body impersonates passion and vigour, like the Borghese warrior, have so empty features that they seem to be born fools, cold to the superb glory of war, of passion, of life! How many goddesses or mortal women endowed with such splendid figures that they appeared ready for the struggles towards utopias and what is loftiest in the mind have a head ornamented with beautiful hair and nose and brow, but with the most stupid of smiles, which causes us to look at them as animals of pure breed, good no doubt to give birth to healthy progeny, but certainly no geniuses! The achievement, which of all Greek art incarnates movement and life to the greatest degree, the Nike of Samothrace, has a flowing vestment made of wind and two wings made of the air of heaven, but . . . it has no head! Do we feel incommoded by the absence? Not in the least! and, however terrible it may sound, I am inclined to assert that its loss has proved to be an asset to its beauty; we could not imagine the vapid expression of some Venus de Medici on top of the swooping marble. Many Greek statues can with impunity lose their head, and, contrarily to breathing human beings, they become all the better. Only one statue, to my mind, has united a perfect head to a perfect figure, and that is the slave of Michelangelo. . . . Therefore if we pardon the Hellenes for their more or less vacant faces, let us be as kind to the Khmers and pardon them for their more or less wooden figures, and praise them for the heads, which, in many cases, are wonderful studies of human, rather superhuman, souls. Further, a large number of people deem the face superior to the body. Leonardo writes, in his treatise on painting, that if children have proportionately much greater heads than men, it is because Nature probably fashions the head first, which is the case containing the intelligence and vital

spirits. Now the highest calling of art is to choose the finest things that Nature offers to our gaze or understanding and then to imitate that as closely as possible, and the greater art therefore is that which follows the precepts of Nature. She tells us that the head is from our birth the most important detail of ourselves, that it acquires its final development first, and also that it is the primordial object of her interest. . . . We should do the same. The human features reveal the soul, a thing the body does but indirectly, by movements occasioned by the brain ; when it comes to subtle sensations and longings, the mouth and pupils are the only means of disclosing inner thoughts. In this capacity of the eyes painting gains an advantage that places it on a higher summit than sculpture ; yet the latter is often sublime, not only through harmony, grace and beauty, but by expression, which resides chiefly in the face. A beautiful figure is as inferior to a passionate and living head as a charming descriptive poem is to one of the great passages in literature speaking of souls' battles and souls' victories.

Everyday searches and excavations increase the mass of treasures the old Cambodians abandoned, and rare are the statues which are not worth a passing glance ; the vast majority are arresting, many are captivating, a few are more than noble. But, again, we must not look for what we cannot expect to find. Ruskin thought the most sublime heads were those imbued with gentleness, goodness and sanctity. If such is the case, the Khmers cannot be compared to a Botticelli or a da Vinci, since they have never been able to model a face resembling the Madonna of the Pomegranate or the Virgin in the St Anna picture ; a certain sweetness is reached in some Devatas and Apsaras, but then it is mischievous and perhaps slightly sly. We must be conscious of the Khmers' surroundings, of their beliefs, of the conditions under which they worked, probably by force. . . . Further, ought we to bow

KHMER SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND 283

before Ruskin's dogma? One of the two men we have chosen for their power of depicting ideal love has put down in a startling passage, speaking of the human animals :

"Their malignity has no bounds. . . . In their prodigious pride they would rise against heaven, if the weight, too great, of their limbs did not maintain them on the earth. There is nothing, neither on land, nor beneath it, nor in water, that is not pursued, disturbed, spoilt by them. . . .

"O world, why dost thou not open to precipitate in the deepest holes of thy abysses and gulfs, and no longer show to the light, so cruel and pitiless a monster ? "

The opinion of the supreme genius of painting is an irrefutable proof that to many great men their own species is the incarnation of sprite. Well, in the East, where life is more turbulent than in the West, where it is brought nearer to the mighty truths, artists could not be inspired to the reproduction of pure goodness, especially as their original religion (I am talking of the Khmers and Sivaism) was unable to start them on such a line of pictorial style. That is why their masterpieces are like the Leprous King and the Lakshmi of Loleï, impersonifications of dire cruelty. But they are living and powerful and masterly. What could be imagined more vindictive than the huge giant's head (Fig. 6), more evasively vicious and cold-hearted than that goddess's head (Fig. 46), more haughty, aristocratic and contemptuous than that prince's head (Fig. 47), to whom could be applied Shelley's lines :

" . . . a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed."

Brahmanical effigies are not found in great abundance, but Buddhas, big and small, contemporaneous with the founders of the finest temples, inhabit every shrine; taken away from their more humble dwellings they have superseded their formerly superior neighbours. Most Brahmanical statues were destroyed, but the Sakya Munis, becoming popular, escaped a similar fate, and are at present adored by natives and revered by visiting epicures. Most of them have the calm, peaceful, enviable smile of inner contentment (Fig. 61), yet some seem more personal; like the statues of Indras and Kamas, they are probably portraits and possess now ironical bonhomie (Fig. 62), now wistful superiority (Fig. 63), now different shades of evident or hidden yearnings and affections, which one marvels to perceive unmistakably quivering on stone masks. So far we noticed the expressions, but have forgotten to mention the purity of some profiles, the admirable rendering of big eyes, strong eyebrows and full lips, the delicacy of the modelling and the softness of the chiselling.

What we have lost with the chief idols of the temples, the gold, silver and bronze statues, is without doubt irreparable, as for those undertakings the best sculptors were certainly commandeered. Luck, however, was on our side when bronze statuettes were found, which prove the ability of the Khmers to treat metals; the statuettes are extremely scarce, but equally wonderful.

Under my eyes stands a little Siva, or rather Durga, who was the honoured occupant of a private altar or diminutive chapel. . . . In spite of her tiny size she is characterised by the qualities of the big statues; she is firm and grand, passive and impressive. The features are very fine for so small a scale and, of course, cruel. Although she is gifted with eleven heads and eleven arms on either side (a symbol?), only one head and two arms are in proportion to the body; the extra heads are so



FIG. 60.



FIG. 61.



FIG. 62.



FIG. 63.

THREE BUDDHAS AND A FIGURINE

KHMER SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND 285

contrived as to look like a helmet, the extra arms, thinner and not as well defined as the others, to look like two wing-like and lightning appendages. The whole is beautifully finished, and how sad it is that we cannot see the little goddess's giant congeners !

CHAPTER VIII

FEASTING IN THE TEMPLE AND AT SIEM REAP—NATIVE
MUSIC AND DANCING—THE PEACEFUL FANE AFTER
THE FAIR—THE LEGEND OF THE EMERALD BUDDHA
AND THE HOLY OF HOLIES

i

THESE are days of happiness for the natives, since the festivals in honour of the Cambodian new year have begun, and Angkor Vat is thronged with pleasure-seekers. Some three weeks ago the first planks and poles for the sheds were brought, and huts have sprung up very quickly. Many peasants from distant villages have come in their carts. Everything has been prepared, and everything is ready.

The village of the Horse, on one side of the road which runs along the moat, is in an uproar ; the dwellings pour forth men and women, boys and girls, who, after looking at two elephants, mix with the crowd of strangers. There is a whirl round the stalls of Chinamen, round the hovels under which games are organised. The scene much resembles the lesser fairs of our own hamlets . . . cakes and sweets are displayed on large trays or on the freshness of banana leaves, and fat sellers hand them over to impatient purchasers ; tea is provided somewhere else and chum-chum, white rice, meat and dried fish. Here urchins throw soft balls at dolls which fall backwards when hit ; there little girls ravenously gaze at a forbidden toy and are quickly dragged away by the hand. Labourers are sitting round long tables enjoying food and drink, and their dogs, or the dogs of others, sniff on the ground for

dropped morsels. Noise and even rowdiness are not lacking, of course; either an old woman loudly curses a naughty child, who has stolen a biscuit; either maidens are shrilly discussing the merits of a piece of finery, or an escaped bullock causes a momentary panic as it runs and knocks down several stays to the joy of youngsters, who, while they hand over to the rightful owners some dust-bespattered delicacies, manage to keep back not a few for themselves.

The high causeway is a ceaseless stream of colours, flowing in opposite currents. Everyone has issued from his bedchamber in his brightest raiment, and besides the habitual yellows and oranges of the bonzes, who slowly wend their way between family and friendly groups, the iridescent and gaudy colourings of Cambodian silks are unusual and effective. Now and then an untoward and displeasing tint is visible, but it is like a speck of mud on a clear road . . . merely a speck. The bluish greens, the greenish greys, the greyish reds, the reddish violets are bathed in sunshine and emblems of joy.

At the imposing gopuras girls with flowers in their hair stand on the steps and call the attention of passers-by to baskets of oranges, mangosteens, guavas and custard-apples. In the vaulted rooms gatherings of youths squat round the carpet of a voluminous and calm celestial, who throws the dice and causes piastres and cents to change hands, especially to his personal advantage. Cigarettes and betel nuts are smoked and chewed respectively in alarming quantities; squibs burst in many corners, above all in the vicinity of the giant Vishnu, and smoke rushes out of the doorways.

Streams of humans and colour continue along the magnificent avenue with all the majesty of a broad river, and at last scatter in eddies on the vast terraces, where bricks are hurled into the spreading branches of stately mango-trees, and a hailstorm of the large fruit, famed for their

nectarous juice, falls heavily, a pleasing shower for all concerned. Coco-nut palms are climbed at the same time ; knives split hard rind, lips get wetted with vegetable milk, palates tickled with unctuous pulp. But the greatest concourse of people walks straight into the lofty cruciform gallery, and, as I draw near, I catch the sounds of music. The orchestra—an orchestra of amateurs who gather together for pure enjoyment in the true spirit of art—is seated on mats ; the players are dark and smiling, the instruments varied and interesting. I notice clarinets, small drums placed between the legs and held fast by the toes, rings of cymbals on a wooden frame, a kind of flat harp struck with tiny hammers of steel, curved xylophones of bamboo, string instruments, somewhat similar to banjos, and two-stringed violins, peculiar on account of the hairs of the bow passing between the strings of the fiddle. The tunes are soft, haunting. Far are we from the astonishingly expressive but barbarously loud tomtoms and flutes of the Chinese and Annamites. Cambodian music is mute, quick and yet “groping” ; nothing in it is substantial, nothing finite ; it is vague, sensitive poetry rising ecstasically along the columns of splendid cloisters, rummaging in galleries and rooms ; it is spasmodic and distant, weird and delicious, rhythmic without frenzy, simple without monotony ; it is captivating but not entrancing, dreamy but not sorrowful. An eager audience silently listens to the strains, and now and then a native takes a few steps and soon prays fervently in front of another silent audience . . . of Buddhas this time. . . . Touching is this strength of faith which closes the ears of the adorers to the near-by *charivari* of revellers. I wonder whether this capacity of the natives to turn their mind at a second’s notice from the senses to the soul, from the soul to the senses, is a sign of shiftiness and mediocrity, or, on the contrary, of innate philosophy and balance ; does it prove their moral cleanliness, since they are able



FIG. 64. AN ASSEMBLY OF BUDDHAS IN A PASSAGE

to leap from feasting into prayer, from prayer into feasting, without a pang of conscience, an instant's hesitation?

Let us away. I climb to the second storey, thence to the third, and there is hardly anyone in these parts of the fane—a father, perhaps, showing the courts to his daughter; a band of pilgrims scattering paper ribbons and joss-sticks; a beautiful girl who, like many of her sisters, touches the round and blackened breasts of Devatas in order to gain the future bliss of motherhood. . . . As the Devatas are probably the effigies of their great-great-great-grandmothers, there is something eminently touching in the naïve and tender request to the women who engendered the race, that the latter may be perpetuated by these young brides, humble and far from reaching the luxury of their dim ancestors.

Then, in the loftier and more sacred portions of Angkor Vat, there is rightly no disturbance and hubbub; the temple retains its unequalled aloofness, though it cannot be truly said that the crowd now assembled in the dependencies and at the foot of the pile is in any way jarring. It only increases the meaning of the dead things; it infuses spirit and action into them—indeed, such a throng is opposite in effect to the congregations which fill Gothic cathedrals and Renaissance churches, and place therein by means of their clothes a note incongruous and absurd.

ii

Night once come, flares light up and chattering parties start on the way back home. The entire population of Siem Reap went to the fane, and, as I ride towards my own residence, I catch up many torches held aloft and dropping burning resin, which makes trails of fire on the lane. At a cross-roads the peasants follow a wide circuit to evade the ghosts of a dark sala; my horse shies and then gallops. Trees pass like massive walls with projecting

masts ; bend after bend, hedge after hedge, startled coolie after startled coolie, until I arrive at the outskirts of the little town. Across the winding river I distinguish the signs of a festive side-show and become inquisitive. My mount is left behind. I venture on a flimsy bridge consisting of shaking planks. I come within the compound of a pagoda ; Chinese lanterns are swaying slowly on either side along strings ; more people are eating and drinking. Two ancient Khmer towers remain in the dark, and the pagoda itself, with its sloping and storeyed roofs, its lamps, its slender pinnacle, its flaming horns and trembling bells, is awake and shining. Inside, around the elegant pillars, worshippers are looking at twenty or thirty priests in their saffron robes, who squat on the floor, a fan in their fingers, several sacred books and copper spittoons near at hand, and who chant jerkily always on the same mournful tone, now raising their voice, now lowering it, now spitting, now coughing, now bending their lustrous hairless head, now lifting their gaze to the altar piled with Buddhas of all shapes. The bonzes stay in the same pose ; the natives walk in and out. The night is moist, warm, peaceful ; the moon is dim ; it hides behind half-transparent clouds which allow a timid glimmer to pass, lighting in trembling uncertainty the ripples and the trees. On the opposite bank some music starts, Annamite music, made of raucous noises mingled with gentle ones—notes of continual recurrence and dismal monotony at this distance ; the sound of flutes tempering the beating of tom-toms . . . and it goes on, it goes on . . . the tom-toms ring fiercely . . . and it goes on . . . then they soften . . . and it goes on . . . then they stop, and irrigation wheels creak as they turn in the current. The moon still shines, the Chinese lanterns also shine, yet all this light is unreal . . . the music starts again, stops once more. It is then that the white man does not feel at home.

iii

The next day is spent in the same way until evening, when the native governor of the district celebrates his coming into a new bungalow. At the end of a banquet, at which half-European and half-Asiatic dishes were served, there is dancing.

Now the ballet is the highest and truest expression of modern Cambodian art. In the plastic branches the precepts and schools of olden times have been crippled and altered; strength, fullness and broadness have flown on the never-returning clouds of defeat and forgetfulness; statuary and decoration, although they have a nervousness and arid gracility which is certainly picturesque, have far overstepped the line which separates the great from the meagre, and in many cases they have been altogether smothered in ugliness. But dancing has remained within the strict rules which ensured its preservation; it is immemorial and has survived from the furthest ages; it has floated over the living débris of Angkor; it has been handed down almost unaltered; and even now, chiefly religious in spirit, draws its motive not only from Cambodian legends, but from Hindu epics like the Ramayana. The divine Apsaras of Angkor have daughters who dwell in the king's palace at Phnompenh. In the innermost apartments of the royal residence pretty girls are trained from infancy; there they master the great difficulties of their art, and there they display it on certain occasions, attired in brocades and diamonds set in gold, which represent the greater part of the Crown's wealth, and moreover in a way which discloses, perhaps more than any other spectacle of the Far East, the sensitive, symbolical, mythical and secular soul of that oldest and most incomprehensible portion of the globe.

One of these dancers, after her hair had turned grey and her limbs heavy, chose Siem Reap for a home, and she

taught several village maidens the principles of her former calling ; then she equipped them herself, and, as I am going to see them act now, my descriptive pen is free to do what it likes.

Long before the appointed time a dense multitude has struggled to secure the best places, and as soon as a small band has struck the first bars of a strange tune a little apparition glides forward at the signal of the ballet mistress, who is clad in white. Every neck is stretched out, all eyes intensely fixed, and a few fingers have found a haven between the lips of marvelling children. Matrons strike sticks one against the other and tremulously sing in monotones : ah, ah . . . ah, ah . . . ah. . . . Vibrating shadows quiver and spangles sparkle.

Three, four, five dancers move on the matted floor of the shed. Very thick and ornate silks are draped round their limbs and torsos ; their necks, ankles, arms, fingers and hips bear the weight of large jewels ; white blossoms hang down their right cheek, which, like the rest of their features, is concealed beneath a thick layer of white powder, and their costume is completed by a high, thin and complicated tiara ending in a sharp point. All this showy apparel is somewhat shabby, threadbare or faded, and the jewellery is only gilt cardboard and bits of glass ; but although these girls are only the misty reflection of the luxurious bayaderes of Sisowath,¹ they are at least quaint and romantic in their assumed frippery and personality.

We witness the delicate wooings of immortal beings, the cruelty of demons, the courage of demi-gods ; and suddenly what was not fresh and right in attires and actors vanishes. A very subtle sensation comes over one, and it is the great victory of an art absolutely refined and pure over our too ready sense of criticism. The softness and smoothness of slow and solemn steps, the elegance

¹ The present king of Cambodia.

and grace of groupings, the deep feeling and symbolism of the slightest fluttering are irresistible and all-pervading. Nothing exists of the spectators, of the frame, of the musk scent of naked arms and shoulders, of the million insects which buzz round the flares, of the smoke. The visual powers and intelligence are concentrated, riveted on the mysticism of this sacred tradition.

I know not what myth is rendered, whether the performers are Vorvong and Saurivong, or Souvannaphon and Ket-Sonyon, or Sotat and Kessey, or even Rama and Sita, whether they are nymphs and gandharvas, fairies and demons, or heroes and princesses. Yet I am sure of one thing . . . I am a witness to acts which are infinitely æsthetic, which are neither morbid nor sensuous, which are neither vile nor empty, but the moving realisation of all the thoughts which the ruins may have brought to my mind, and those thoughts are among the best I have ever had. Indeed, this ballet is one of the most staunch and eloquent defenders of tradition and heredity; it is the beautiful soul of a long-departed race, which is revealed in the every gesture of a few village girls.

A prince—as in all men's parts, the character is taken by a virgin whose temporary sex is shown through the help of two wing-like epaulettes and a breeches-like sarong—a prince boldly advances across the stage, and, seeing a sweet lady becomes enamoured, and approaches the low platform on which she reclines. The attending maids retire behind curtains and we admire a scene of seraphic love of untainted chastity; but the courtly wooer is not yet successful and turns his back sorrowfully. No sooner has he vanished than a devil, whose mask is outrageous—green with red eyebrows, provided with curving tusks and gaping mouth—drags away the tearful and resisting beauty. . . . Then the prince is told the truth by the frightened handmaids and gives chase, leading his horsemen, whose quality is only distinguished by the whips in

their hands and their prancing actions. The demon is caught up. A gorgeous, flashing duel takes place; the bride is saved, and the play ends in a triumph of joy.

None of the pantomime is hurried : each detail is sacred and sober and ceremonious ; the feet, when on the ground, always rest perfectly flat, and the fingers, elbows and knees are so supple that there seem to be no bones in them. From time to time two male buffoons, in their everyday sampots, give gaiety to the proceedings with their curiously clever mimicry, and it is with a clear feeling of content and beatitude that I leave the spot when the last torches have been extinguished, and when only a mere handful of flowers, a few trampled mats and the never-lacking marks of a meeting of human beings speak of any past ceremony.

iv

A short time later Angkor Vat has resumed its former aspect, and I am again almost alone to view its immense prospects. On the paved avenue I have just seen some dead leaves. A sudden hurricane arose ; the air was twisted in a long, writhing pillar, taking with it both dust and the dead leaves. The leaves soared, flew away and pattered as they clashed one against the other ; they lost themselves in the clouds and laughed as they believed they had reached the stars. But it was only an Icarian flight ; the wind stopped breathless and they fell back ; their light, metallic voice was muffled. The leaves for a moment were awakened from long-lasting sleep, and so was the temple during the celebrations . . . it has now resumed its former aspect.

The buffaloes lie in the mire ; coolies are fishing with large baskets, which they quickly throw into the water ; the teal, the pigeons, the cranes, the kites are there ; the grey and glaring stones are smitten by the sun, and the bulky mass of the fane, made up of blocks, each of which

was laid with a blessing and a curse—a blessing from the Brahmans, a curse from the slaves—impresses always by its silent and mighty hymn of a faith to its gods, and the silent and mighty bane it testifies, a bane brought about by the evil utterance of an oppressed caste. There is, too, the striking antithesis between the movement, the passion of the bas-reliefs, the intimidating mystery of the sombre rooms and galleries, and the serene immobility of the Buddhas who people them. These Buddhas, tall or small, lean or plump, in wood or in stone, leaning or straight, broken or whole, sitting, standing, preaching, taking the earth as witness, meditating under the cobra, or lying ready to enter Nirvana, are smothered under coatings of dust and bats' excrements. They are one and all rooted to their place, and, in contrast to the undaunted energy of the original carvings, seem immersed in an inviolate, eternal and blissful repose.

The same repose seems to have enshrouded the five towering domes, especially when, in broad daylight and with blithe minahs fluttering round their summits, they look like the busy hives of a land of giants. Oh, how superb they are, the five domes, at any time!—at dawn, when they shine like silver; at noon, when they are resplendent; at night, when they perform the task of some Atlas and uphold the firmament; or in the evening before the final plunge of Surya, when the soil, the trees, the lower parts of the buildings are black, but when they and the clouds glow with the tint of blood; the domes then belong, not to the earth, but to the sky, and as they loom threateningly, high over one's head, as they seem to grow in the oncoming gloom, one wonders whether they will disappear, and whether, after all, what one has seen was only a vision, a mirage of the wilds.

No, it cannot be an apparition, the huge, central cupola shaped as a lotus bud. Nevertheless, what is it? What does it conceal? Is it a monument of glory, or is

it a tomb, for its swelling contours resemble suspiciously the phnoms which rise over the remains of the later Cambodian kings at Oudong, and of their wealthy subjects elsewhere ?

Well, it can be either—nay, it may be both : under it is the holy of holies, which was found walled-up at its four entrances with monoliths, placed behind paintings and a standing, golden Buddha. In 1908 the lonely and grim sanctuary was ravished, but found devoid of its idols, devoid of interesting remains ; it kept its dark secret, a secret intensified by the wondrous legend whispered from ear to ear, and which caused the curiosity of white archæologists to rise to such heights, only to tumble back, shattered. The legend is that of the Emerald Buddha.

v

The famous Emerald Buddha has vanished from our world and has returned to the unknown region whence it came. . . . In several places—Bangkok amongst others—pagodas to the “ Emerald Buddha ” are extant, but the image is no more, and one in jade or even in glass takes its place in the minds of adorers. Yet there can be little doubt that it once existed, and this is a version of its history as sometimes told :

An Indian sovereign sent it to the Great Khan. It was escorted with untold pomp and two hundred boats were in its train. The fleet was wrecked off the coast of Cambodia, and with costly reverence the invaluable jewel-statue was brought to the emperor of the Khmers, who, up to this time, was a devotee of Brahmanism, but who took the event as god-sent and became a convert to the rival faith. The Emerald Buddha was enthroned in the newly finished Angkor Vat.

There it remained for two centuries, and no profane hand was ever given the chance of touching it. When the second century came to a close, war was upon the land

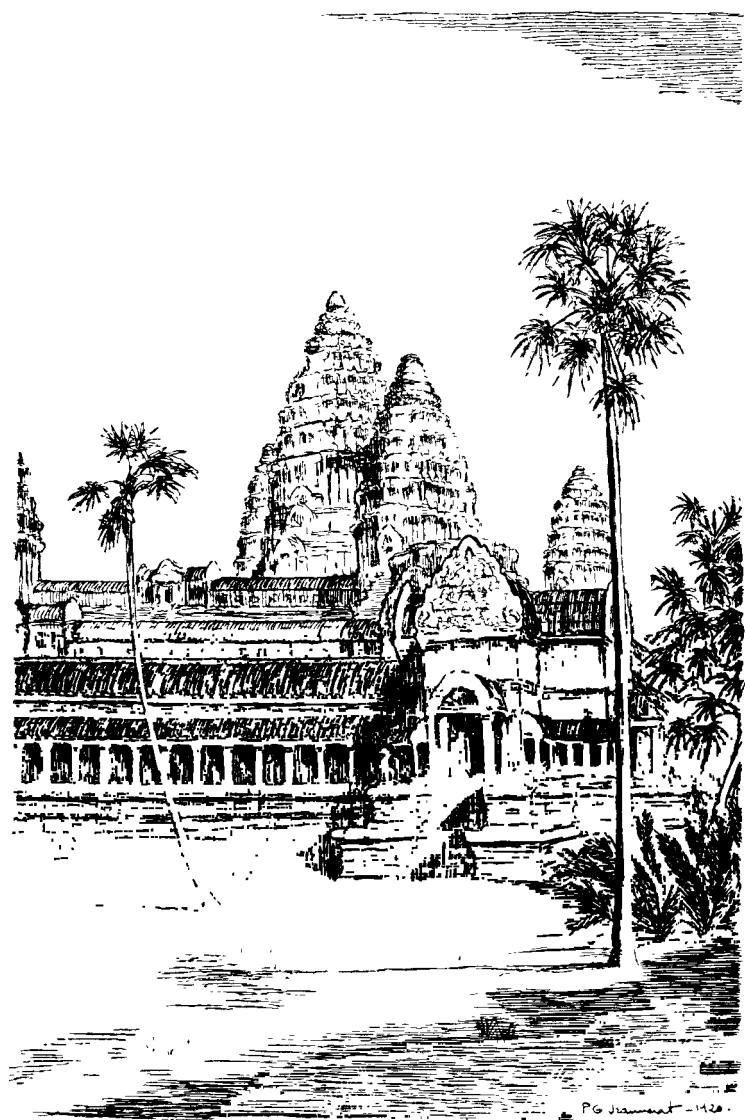


FIG. 65. THE TOWERS OF ANGKOR VAT

and the Cambodians were weaker. Unexpectedly, while the monarch was praying in his huge temple, a Siamese army surrounded Angkor Vat, and the defence was hastily organised. For many days the garrison successfully resisted all attacks, and the moat was reddened with the blood of foreigners and the causeways encumbered with their corpses. All charges were unavailable ; wave upon wave of surging soldiery failed to effect a breach and take the temple-fortress by storm. At last the besiegers resolved to use patience and waited for famine to do its work.

The besieged stubbornly fought against the spectre of hunger as they had done against men, but the new enemy was immaterial ; it could not be pierced with a lance, and increased its advantage every hour by sucking out the vitality of fierce warriors. The latter themselves became true spectres and roamed, dropping their shields and helmets, for they were too weak, their belts and bracelets, for they had grown too thin. A mace or a sword in their thready hands, they squatted on the walls with big red eyes, gaping jaws and hanging tongues.

However, if the Siamese ventured near the fortifications, the ghosts of men rushed out with nervous, horrifying vigour ; little more than skeletons, they battled like ravenous wolves. Their foes retreated, and it was horrible the combat between healthy soldiers and hungry soldiers, the strong fearing the wraiths, slowly backing away along the bridges, whilst the demented Khmers threw themselves on their shields, on the points of their javelins, and whenever they fell little blood flowed from their dried-up veins, but whenever they could find a passage between lances and arrows, they jumped teeth foremost, cut throats open, and retreated stark mad.

Surely no siege like this was seen before or since, and the interior of Angkor Vat offered an unheard-of spectacle :

jewels, riches, coins, inlaid armours strewing the park, the shrines, the avenues ; the living skeletons picking up a gold vessel to see whether a grain of rice had been forgotten in it, and throwing the precious vase away in disgust when their lust for food remained ungratified. The fanatic priests exhorted the fighters, and the population, the sacred dancers, the nobles tried to cheer them ; foremost, the emperor, worthy of his rank, gave the example of defiant courage and strength of heart. This lasted for months, but it could not last for ever, and Angkor Vat was in the throes of its last extremities. One day more, the victors would invade the blood-stained temple and return to their country, an emperor figuring in the list of their spoils.

A final council of war was summoned by the unhappy prince, and he thus spoke to his generals and retinue :

“Faithful warriors, a sovereign of the Khmers can never be put in bonds or in chains ; he must rather die than add this insult to the misfortune of his subjects.”

The curt and courageous speech was received with consternation, yet all knew the hopelessness of the situation and admired their king.

Slowly he went up the grand staircase, and, entering the supreme shrine, he stood in front of the Emerald Buddha, which was smiling in green transparency ; he murmured a short prayer, then ordered the four entrances to be walled up, and he remained with the idol while workmen heaped stone on stone, hiding the doorways and separating the monarch from light and from life.

They were not a moment too soon, for the gates had been stormed and the trumpets of the conquerors resounded in the park. Princes, officers and men gathered together round the holy of holies since they could not

commit suicide, the emperor having the privilege of being alone and uncopied in his important actions ; and they died without a moan, killed by the Siamese, who plunged their swords into their breasts unopposed, and severed heads as if they had been those of unfeeling statues. Meanwhile the emperor on his throne, close to the Emerald Buddha, was expiring in darkness.

So, lore tells us that Angkor Vat formed at one time a marvellous tomb, and that the last Angkorean king had as a funeral pile the enormous fane. . . . What a mausoleum !

Death is superb, and the monuments erected in honour of death, tombs, take a great part of its solemnity. Death is very much above us, leading our soul to some region where absolute knowledge enlightens the brain, and where our littleness is abandoned for the superhuman happiness of truth. All this is an insoluble problem that cannot be touched as long as we thrive in our prison of flesh, but we have an inner perception that death is a means of reaching many a thing unreachable ; and a tomb is not so much to recall the memory of a departed body as the visible record of our admiration for the beneficent repose, which eventually closes all eyes and allows the rays of some new and wonderful life to shine on what is immortal in us.

vi

I have come to one of the short alleys that lead to the holy of holies. Behind me are a gateway, layers of buildings descending as in folds towards the ground level, and a glimpse of the gyveless forests ; beside me, small windows, barred with round colonettes, a Devata beckoning siren-like with all the charm of her sex, several stumps of statues. Otherwise I am alone, and in front there smiles not the Buddha, who, his hands opened in the direction of visitors, prevented me from passing at the

three other entrances. . . . There gapes a doorway and blackness.

This is obviously the side from which the penetralia sneered an empty laugh, an echo to the bright hopes entertained by those who violated its secrecy.

Birds sing and I feel a desire to enter. I am on the brink of the most secluded of abodes, and a "tokey" sharply utters its healthy call: "To—Key . . . to—qué . . . toqué!" It is slang, French slang and rude slang at that, which comes instead of a welcome. "Madman . . . madman" does the beast cry good-humouredly. The guttural voice of the old denizen of the ruins, who has lived long and perhaps knows much, fails not to disquiet me. Does he mean that it is absurd to intrude on the august presence of an idol's spirit, since the idol itself is no longer in occupation? The thought of it was immediately followed by the big lizard's retort.

I notice the latter slowly creeping in the direction of a clumsy daddy-long-legs, which bangs its brainless head with futile impotence on a high cornice. The lizard is a hideous creature, bumpily skinned and dappled all over in red, crimson, purple and yellow. It creeps, squeezing its very visible self between stones, and in a flash the insect struggles, now with a purpose, in its mouth; the thin legs and wings look like overgrown whiskers close to the slanting nostrils, but before long, after one gulp, the lizard is clean-shaven again, and, as I place a foot upon the lower step, a shriek of victory disturbs the flies . . . and me. "To—Key . . . to—qué . . . madman."

Why should I be affected by a mere reptile, however old and learned among its species? Surely it cannot teach me a lesson. Yet Angkor Vat is its true habitation, and I am only a stranger, a wandering stranger, curious and often at fault. Perhaps I should list, but I have no intent to do so.

Three more steps. Reaching the threshold I spring inside. All is dark ; not a crevice permits light to filter through ; the door is, as it were, hung with an ethereal black muslin, which checks every reflection. And boldly I make a further step. . . . My foot finds no floor ; I stumble into a hole. I cling on with both arms and hands, draw myself out, touch a pair of cumbrous pedestals without statues, see nothing, hear bats squealing in the vault. I remain perfectly still for a moment, then cautiously feeling the ground I avoid the treacherous cavity and soon emerge once more into the passage. The lizard has retired in some interstice. I am none the better for knowledge and all the worse for torn skin at the palms and knees.

It seems as if the "tokey's" chaff was merited, his prophecy realised. . . . Oh, no ! I neither regret nor curse my taste for the mysterious. I even would grin if I heard the noisy cry repeated, and I rejoice since I have been in that "sanctum-sanctorum" of the most gorgeous of Khmer fanes.

Indeed I have stood within the inmost sanctuary of the grand deity of old Cambodia ; the tower which crowns the whole building, which sheltered the statue or statues of Angkor Vat's Lord, has sheltered for an instant my humble brow. I do not feel the blood which drips from my fingers and along my legs.

Till the end of my life I shall remember the pride that was mine, the great sensation of awe and wonder and greatness in the gloom of Angkor Vat's holy of holies. It was the crowning moment of my long journey, the minute I had looked forward to for days. It will probably be my last memory of Angkor.

The few seconds passed in darkness filled my soul with light. No trouble has been too great, no fatigue too wearisome, no drawback too terrible now. The heart of the gigantic building has throbbed in my breast and the

thin drops of blood that stain the soil have sealed a strange baptism of beauty.

This very evening my little caravan will start on its way to the Tonle-Sap. Angkor will be for me a thing of the past.

March 1920–June 1922.

APPENDIX

IN the foregoing pages it has been my aim to impart to the reader something more than a passing knowledge of what is to be met with in the northern jungles of Cambodia. . . . And, if I have been at all successful, it is probable that many will have felt the powerful call, which such beauties provoke. For those who not only would long to see Angkor, but who are fortunate enough to be able to follow the bent of their desires, I have decided to add this appendix in order to indicate the easiest means of reaching the ancient capital of the Khmers.

The “Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes” has a regular service of liners from Marseilles to Yokohama, which calls on the way at Port Said, Djibouti, Colombo, Singapore, Saigon, Hong-Kong and Shanghai. The traveller, whether coming from East or West, is to leave his ship at Saigon.

From Saigon the steamers of the “Messageries Fluviales de Cochinchine” take one up the River Mekong into the interior. Phnompenh is reached in thirty-six hours, and Siem Reap a day later, provided the season is favourable—that is to say, the Tonle Sap navigable. Sloops are able to reach Siem Reap from the beginning of July to the end of December; sometimes, however, the waters remain deep enough for another month. During that period a very comfortable bungalow is open to visitors and every means of locomotion provided, from bullock-carts, horses and elephants to a char-à-banc (alas!).

The “Messageries Fluviales de Cochinchine” issue

tickets, costing £22 and £26 respectively, for short trips of six and a half and nine and a half days. They comprise the river and lake journey, hotel accommodation in Phnompenh and Angkor, guides, etc., and should prove extremely useful to hurried globe-trotters.



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