

regular features, and nostrils not so dilated as those of their neighbours. A curious peculiarity is the power of bending the elbow the wrong way, and similarly distorting the wrist joint, so that the hand can be bent over till the back of it touches the arm. This, however, does not appear to be the result of any special conformation of the joints, but rather of a long and severe course of training, in which "force is often resorted to in order to distort nature's handiwork" (p. 321). It will be remembered that one of the distinctive features of Krao, the little specimen brought from Bangkok by Mr. Bock, was a remarkable pliancy of the joints, extending even to the toes, which were almost as prehensile as those of the higher apes.

Amongst the illustrations is a curious design by a native artist (unfortunately "invested with artistic merit" by the English engraver) representing a scheme of the universe, with Mount Zinnalo, the Meru of the Hindus, as the centre. Above all is the outer darkness, or Buddhist *Nirvana*, usually supposed to involve extinction, or at least absorption in the divine essence, but which our author agrees with Mr. Alabaster in identifying rather with the highest heaven, a place of perfect happiness or repose. But however this be it is obvious that the Laotian Buddhism has been otherwise profoundly modified by the older cult, on which it has been engrafted, and from which it still takes its colouring. This older cult was little more than a universal spirit-worship, probably the first distinct stage in the evolution of all religious systems. Hence "the desire to propitiate the good spirits and to exorcise the bad ones is the prevailing influence on the life of a Laosian. With 'phee's' to right of him, to left of him, in front of him, behind him, all round him, his mind is haunted with a perpetual desire to make terms with them, and to insure the assistance of the great Buddha, so that he may preserve both body and soul from the hands of the spirits, and, by making merit either in almsgiving, in feeding the priests, in building temples or prachedees, he may ultimately attain supreme happiness" (p. 198). At Muang-Fang the people are shown a telescope, whereupon they immediately ask, "Can you see the spirits through it?" And when it is reversed so that everything seems to fade away in the distance, they are hugely delighted at such a wonderful instrument, which has the power of making all things—spirits of course included—near or far off at the will of the owner!

Then these spirits, some of which, such as the phee-ka, are very baneful, require to be thwarted by all sorts of counter-charms, conjurings, exorcisms, spirit-dancings, and other devices of the professional medicine-men, and even of "paid mediums." For this institution—somewhat of an anachronism in the West—still flourishes in the Far East, where almost every family has its private mediums, who are consulted on all urgent affairs, and who, when required to question the spirits, work themselves into a state of ecstasy, and utter short, incoherent sentences, regarded as the oracles of the spirit world.

Amongst the illustrations are a coloured engraving by the author, giving a good idea of the "white elephant" visited by him at Bangkok, and a life-size portrait of the enlightened young King of Siam, to whom the work is dedicated. There are also an index and a small sketch-

map of the route followed, in which the geographical nomenclature is, as usual, at variance with that of the text. Thus we have Kiang-mai, Toune, Me-ouang, Chandaw, for Cheng-mai, Tunn, Me-wang, and Shandau respectively.

A. H. KEANE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

[The Editor urgently requests correspondents to keep their letters as short as possible. The pressure on his space is so great that it is impossible otherwise to insure the appearance even of communications containing interesting and novel facts.]

The Remarkable Sunsets

ALTHOUGH the prevailing mist and fog do not make the summit of Ben Nevis as a rule a favourable situation for viewing sunsets, yet, when clear and fine, the colours of the sky shine out with far greater clearness and purity than at lower levels. For about a week at the end of last month we had fine weather, and the colours of the sky before sunrise, after sunset, and even during the day, were of the most extraordinary character.

On December 30 before sunrise the lower sky to eastward, between a cloud-bank and a thin dark band of stratus, was pale green, above the stratus it was yellow, passing into red higher up. This arrangement of colour was not observed again; on other days the sky was red or yellow at the horizon, passing into green and blue higher up. At sunset on the 30th the colours were of the most gorgeous description—dark smoky red below, passing into blue and violet without any intermediate shade of green.

Similar colours have no doubt been seen as well at lower levels at sunrise and sunset, but here we see the sky round the horizon coloured in the most wonderful manner all day long—usually a copper red under the sun, and a peculiar dirty green at the opposite azimuth. But it is impossible to give any idea of the exceeding beauty and weirdness of the tints at sunrise and sunset—the whole sky near the sun gleaming with constantly changing masses of colour, indescribable tints of red and green mingled in wild confusion.

On December 31 the thin edge of the crescent moon (three days old) was bright green, but I have not observed any unusual colour in the sun itself.

R. T. OMOND

Ben Nevis Observatory, January 9

I BEG your acceptance of the two inclosed clippings from the *Saturday Press* of this city, together with an advance sheet from Thrum's *Hawaiian Annual* for 1884, which contain nearly all that has been put into print here about the wonderful "after-glow" which has excited such attention in so many parts of the globe. In the first communication of September 19, I recorded the important date of September 5, when the first and most brilliant display was observed, being moved thereto by the arrival of the news of the Java eruption, whose proximity in time seemed to lend especial importance to the phenomenon. In the second notice is recorded an observation of like phenomena in lat. $24^{\circ} 06' N.$, long. $140^{\circ} 29' W.$, 1100 miles east-northeast of us, from the log of the bark *Hope*, Penhallow, master, on September 18.

In my article in the *Hawaiian Annual*, the record is brought down to November 25, during which month the glow continued, somewhat diminished. Since then it has again increased in a marked degree. I have also been enabled to definitely connect ourselves with Melanesia and Micronesia. Brig *Hazard*, Tierney, master, arrived from those parts on December 5. Capt. Tierney is reliable and intelligent. He reports to me that on September 1, when off the south-west coast of New Ireland, about lat. $5^{\circ} S.$, long. $152^{\circ} E.$, he first observed the "glare," as he termed it; and again on September 3 off New Hanover, two degrees further west. It was identical in character with what he has seen since arriving in Honolulu. It would seem to have been rather less brilliant than was first observed here September 5, as described in the inclosed clipping. During his voyage from New Hanover, sighting Ascension, calling at the Marshall Islands, and thence to Honolulu,