

"2. It will afford early indication of any departure from health, and will thus draw attention to conditions which, if neglected, may lead to permanent disorder. Without such a record, the early signs of disease, which are commonly slight and gradual, are very likely to pass unrecognised, and thus the opportunity will be lost of seeking advice at the time when preventive or curative measures can be most successfully taken.

"3. A trustworthy record of past illnesses will enable your medical attendants to treat you more intelligently and successfully than they otherwise could, for it will give them a more complete knowledge of your 'constitution' than could be obtained in any other way. This knowledge is so important that life itself may in many illnesses depend upon it.

"4. The record will further be of great value to your family and descendants; for mental and physical characteristics, as well as liabilities to disease, are all transmitted more or less by parents to their children, and are shared by members of the same family. 'The world is beginning to perceive that the life of each individual is in some real sense a prolongation of those of his ancestry. His character, his vigour, and his disease, are principally theirs. . . . The life-histories of our relatives are, therefore, more instructive to us than those of strangers; they are especially able to forewarn and to encourage us, for they are prophetic of our own futures.'—(*Fortnightly Review*, January, 1882, p. 31)."

We have now said enough to show the general character of these original publications. We ought to add, however, that they may be purchased separately, and therefore, notwithstanding the prizes offered for the best Records of Family Faculties, we think it probable that the "Life-History Albums" will have the better sale. They are inexpensive to buy, and, apart from the trouble of writing them up at intervals, require for their keeping no other kind of expenditure.

GEORGE J. ROMANES

### SIAM

*Temples and Elephants: The Narrative of a Journey through Upper Siam and Lao.* By Carl Bock. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, and Co., 1884.)

THE expedition undertaken by Mr. Bock in 1881-82 to the Indo-Chinese mainland was practically a continuation of his previous ramblings in the Eastern Archipelago, a graphic account of which he has given us in his "Head-Hunters of Borneo." Of both the main object appears to have been rather archaeological and ethnographical than strictly scientific, and of both the incidents and results have also been somewhat analogous. In each case some hitherto unvisited tracts were explored, or at least traversed, each was marked by a striking absence of any stirring adventures "by flood or field," both yielded, besides some additions to our geographical and ethnological knowledge of the regions in question, a considerable amount of "curios and treasure-trove"; but the quest of the "tailed people" proved as bootless in Further India as it had in Borneo.

In other respects "Temples and Elephants," although far less profusely illustrated, compares not unfavourably with "The Head-Hunters." It is uniformly written in surprisingly good English, and it gives us for the first time a tolerably clear account of the region of the water-parting between the head waters of the Menam and the Middle Mekong basins, and indeed of the whole course of the Menam almost from its source to the Gulf of Siam.

The source itself was not actually reached, but it was ascertained with some certainty to lie altogether within Lao territory, or about 20° N., 99° E., and not further north in the Shan States, as shown on all recent maps, even that accompanying vol. viii. of Reclus' "Géographie Universelle." By taking boat at the now ruined city of Fang, and sailing down the Me-Fang and Me-Kok, the Mekong was reached just below Kiang-sen, where, a thousand miles from its mouth, it was found to be still a magnificent stream "twice as wide as the Menam at Bangkok." This was the furthest point reached, and on the return route the narrow but rugged water-parting was crossed by a pass 2000 feet high leading down to the Meping, as the Upper Menam is here called. Henceforth the rest of the journey was made entirely by water, proving that for small craft the Menam is navigable almost from its source to its mouth. Even the dangerous rapids near Mutka, above the Lao and Siamese frontier, were successfully run by the ingeniously constructed boats specially adapted for navigating this section of the great Siamese artery.

All the chief towns in this basin were visited, and a very full account is given of such important but almost unknown places, as Raheng (Rahein), Lakhon, Lampon (Labong), Cheng-mai (Kiang-mai), Muang-Pau (Prau), and Kiang-hai, all except Raheng lying within the western Lao domain. Raheng, the northernmost town in Siam proper, appears to be the centre of a very considerable trade with the surrounding lands, and some strong arguments are urged in favour of the projected railway between that place and the capital. Such a line would present no engineering difficulties, running as it would through an almost perfectly level country; it might be cheaply constructed by Chinese coolie labour, available on the spot; it would run through the most densely peopled districts in Siam, and would at once open up a vastly productive region, whose almost boundless resources are now lying waste.

"The agricultural resources of the district of which it [Raheng] is the centre and natural outlet are extremely rich. Its timber alone is sufficient to insure prosperity; but it has further sources of wealth in the varied indigenous products of the country, and still more in the entirely undeveloped resources of its fertile soil. All that it wants is a railway to carry the products of the country at all seasons and without delay to the markets of the world, and to enable it to receive the large imports which an increasing population would at once necessitate" (p. 137).

But most readers will probably turn most eagerly to the chapters devoted to the habits and customs of the Karians (Karens), Mussus (Mosses), Ngion (Shans), and especially of the Laosians (Laotians, Laos), whose political and social institutions, domestic life, religion, arts, and daily pursuits are here very fully described. The remarks on all these subjects will be found both interesting and valuable to the ethnologist, because mainly the result of personal studies made on the spot by a shrewd and experienced observer. Mr. Bock speaks of the Laos as of a finer type, fairer, and better-looking not only than the Malays but even than the kindred and more civilised Siamese. They are described as of superior physique, lighter complexion, with good, high foreheads, more

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-north-east 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,