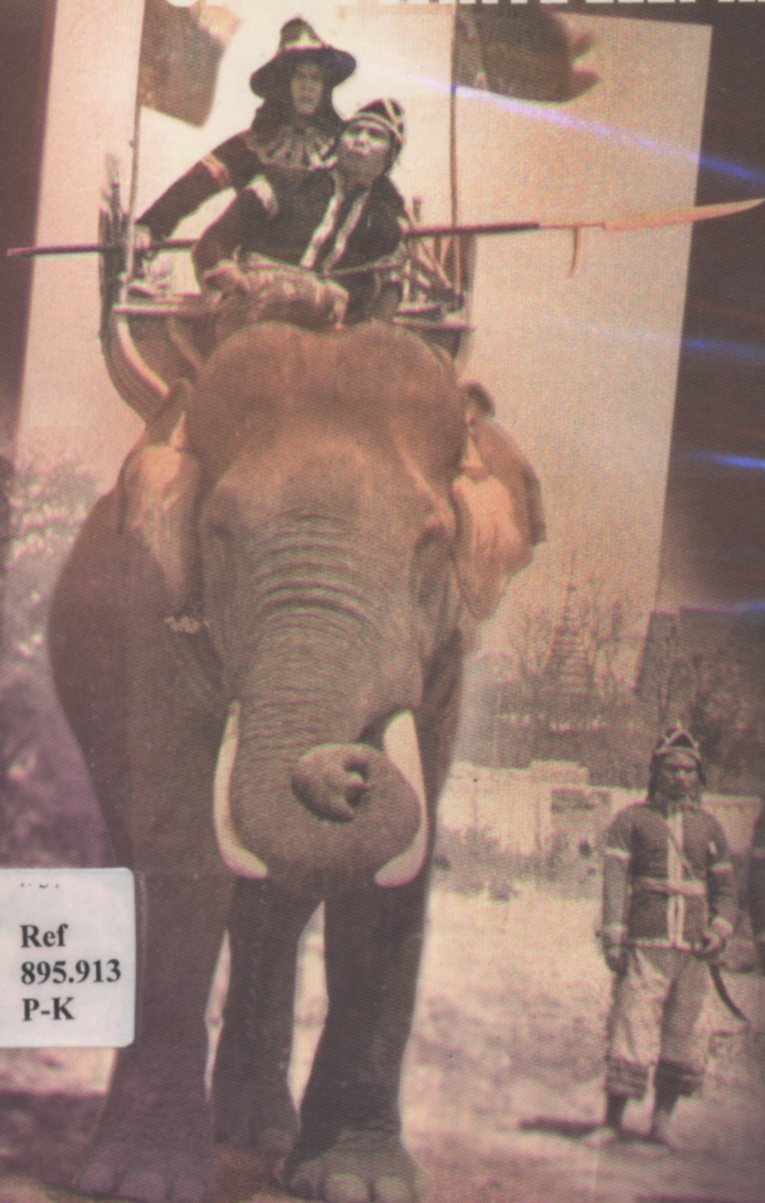




THE KING OF THE WHITE ELEPHANT



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Preface

This novel is based upon certain well-known episodes in the history of Thailand : the invasion of the country by her neighbour, ostensibly with the object of securing a few white elephants, but in reality for the purpose of personal aggrandizement ; the defeat in single combat of the ambitious and aggressive ruler by the greatest and noblest of Thai warriors ; the decisive victory of Right over Might ; and the exercise of that spirit of charity and compassion embodied in the teachings of the Enlightened Lord Buddha, whose noble words, uttered over two thousand four hundred years ago, still stand to-day as a kindly light towards which humanity must strive if it is to be saved from destruction.

It is the story of the olden days of the East, when nations rose up in arms at the mere word of their King, for what cause they knew not, except that they had been ordered to. Nations that today, with the enlightenment bestowed on them by the Lord Buddha, have realised the follies of their forefathers, and forgiving and forgetting, have, aggressed and aggressor, victor and vanquished alike, joined hands in brotherly love to work for the commonwealth of Mankind.

In the main it is the story of a King who ruled over Ayodaya 400 years ago. He defended his realm with his own sword and risked his life for his countrymen. In this land where elephants abound, the White Elephant is esteemed the

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most noble of all and so the people acclaimed their chivalrous Monarch "*King of the White Elephant.*" His name was Chakra. He had no love for the vanities of his court but gave himself wholly to the welfare of his Nation. He fought bravely but he loved Peace, and to **PEACE** this story is dedicated, for "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war."

Pradi Banomyong

BANGKOK
11 MAY 1940

CHAPTER I

THE OLD KINGDOM OF AYODAYA

Our story takes place in the capital of The Thai Kingdom, Ayodaya, in the year A.D. 1540 during the reign of the young King Chakra.

The Kingdom of the "Free People" is what The Kingdom of The "Thai" means. They had migrated, these keen apostles of individual and national liberty, from the far off mountains of Yunnan, driven, probably, by the Chinese invasions which spread gradually from North to South. They remained for a century at Sukhoday, then advanced again towards the Gulf of Thailand which forms the southern border of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula.

A free state had come into being, of monarchic and absolute form, but limited by the traditional benevolence of the Kings and by the tolerance and mutual aid taught by the religion of the Lord Buddha, and supported by a pervading sentiment of national independence.

Ayodaya is an old Pali word which means the absence of war, Peace--a wish and a symbol which was not realised; for the city, after many vicissitudes of fortune, was finally destroyed by the Burmese King in A.D. 1768.

The Capital, it is said, was founded in or about the year A.D. 1350 by King Phra Chao Uthong at the junction where the Mae Sak meets the Maenam Chao Phraya, the largest river

of the Kingdom which flows towards the South emptying itself into the China Sea. Far away appeared the artificial hill of Phu Khao Thong, the golden mount, erected by ancient tradition in every important town situated in the open plains.

The City was situated on a fortified island and, in its interior, the royal residence itself was protected by a wall which also likewise protected, according to the practice of peoples of Mongolian race, ministries, public offices, temples, etc..... Outside the City were quarters reserved for the inhabitants of foreign nationality.

The two rivers were the principal means of communication for the citizens. They moved on them day and night on their small boats which, though seemingly unstable were yet overloaded with fruits, betel nuts, salted fish, cloths and even furniture. They passed slowly up and down and across one another's path without accident, skilfully propelled by their oarsmen.

The houses, floating dwellings which appeared like large structures on pontoons, and the markets, where confused murmurs rose to the sky, crowded the edges of these waters which flowed past them. There were no quays; for the river-side residents were the proprietors of the ground opposite their floating houses; connection with the land being afforded by emergency flying-bridges, which were hemmed in by the "sampans" (pirogues) lying so close together that one would have imagined that they must collide. He who wanted to cross the river chose one, the oarsman of which, well set in the stern, appeared deserving of his confidence; sometimes he clambered over several boats already overloaded, and their motion threatened to make him lose his balance. But as everyone in this part of the world living near water knows how to swim from tender childhood, there was no apprehen-

sion, and a fall only raised a laugh.

Ayodaya was a city of great fame. To the traveller who arrived from China by the mountainous paths of the North; to the stranger who came from India through the dreaded forests of the West; to the European, sometimes lost in these remote parts of the world after many days of travel, who came to sell the latest fascinating inventions of the West, it presented an aspect of magnificent splendour and unequalled wealth.

The palaces, the wats (temples) were inlaid with glittering materials which twinkled in the bright sunshine like jewels in fairyland. There were roads straight and well maintained, which ran by the side of the many canals or passed over them by means of bridges. And all around spread fertile fields and paddy-land, well watered by the Maenam flowing towards the Gulf of Thailand.

At long intervals, the big gabled roofs, extended by the curved antennae, the characteristic roofing of Far-Eastern Asia which originated in Burma and Sumatra, replaced the sober Greek lines and the copious curves of India.

The sun brightened the gilded and multicoloured glass with which the doors and the windows of the temples were ornamented. The buildings were tall and shapely and the monumental doors were wide enough to allow the crowd to pass through in haste on those festival days when they brought their offerings to the Lord Buddha.

Vihar Mongkol was the most sacred temple, the one where King Chakra liked to worship. Its roofing was supported by high wooden pillars lacquered in red and decorated with gold. Every wall was covered with frescoes; the doors were framed and crowned with sculptures; the panels of the windows, gilded on black lacquer, reproduced the divine beings, good or evil,



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who are believed to inhabit the heavens.

In the centre, gigantic and looking like a block of gold, a Statue of Buddha reigned supreme. The Enlightened Lord, the possessor of the highest wisdom, dominated with His thoughtful and benevolent smile the faithful and prostrate worshippers; and it was in front of Him that the Sovereign himself used to come to lay down his offerings and formulate his desires.

CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG KING CHAKRA

It was the middle of the sixteenth century, the time when, in Europe, three Sovereigns equally brilliant and equally selfish, the French King Francois I, the German King Charles-Quint, and the English King Henry VIII, struggled to establish their supremacy in the European world. Educated people were deeply troubled by the Reformation already in full swing, Calvin had established himself at Geneva in 1536 and Luther had died in 1540, and the gloomy clouds announced the wars of religion which would soon overwhelm these intolerant countries. In the meantime great navigators hastened to the discovery, soon to the conquest, of new lands, initiating an expansion and extension of Aryan influence in Asia, Africa, America, and the South Sea Islands, an influence destined to be checked only four centuries later. In the Far-East, it was the Portuguese flag which dominated the seas by its brilliant but fragile supremacy. Magellan had just gone to the Philippines where he subsequently met his death and Albuquerque had established himself at Malacca as early as 1515.

The young King Chakra, known to History under the name of Mahha Chakraphatr, presents a character quite extraordinary in Thai History and deserves to be studied. Brought up by an old priest in the temple, he showed a remarkable aptitude for religious studies and adapted himself to every one of



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the most painful necessities of the novitiate.

When he came to the Throne, after the premature death of his father, the ceremonies and the splendours of the court were disagreeable to him, and he did not fail to use his simple and severe tastes. A kind of Reformation was set in motion by the chief of the Thai State in its proper sphere at the epoch when similar aspirations were beginning to appear in the West.

CHAPTER III

A CUSTOM TO BE OBSERVED

On this day, the anniversary of the Royal Coronation, tradition makes it a day of official ceremonies and of public rejoicing.

From the morning, a crowd of officials and courtiers hasten towards the Palace to pay their homage and offer their best wishes to the Monarch. The gates are wide open, the soldiers lined up through the courtyards, with a gilded spear and shield in their hands.

Each wears the gala uniform suited to his rank: the precious cloths, brocaded with gold and silver, the helmet with a shining point, the gown with flower-designs woven in golden threads, the broadsword of ceremony with its flashing sheath and a hilt-guard decorated with precious stones. And waiting for the solemn ceremony, all stand in the Grand Throne Hall and await the propitious moment determined by the priests for the performance of the usual rites.

The Throne Hall, the place most revered, where His Majesty will appear in all solemn attire, is high and supported by ornamented columns.

The spacious hall has sufficient room to hold easily every courtier gathered therein. The girders of its roof are worked and lacquered in red. On the walls are frescoes representing religious or sacred scenes.