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In these sketches the author introduces samlor drivers and doctors, servant boys and teachers, village farmers and government officials. Through his sympathetic account of the thoughts, background, and way of life of each of these people, he conveys something, too, about the heart of Thailand, about the similarities and differences in the cultures of East and West.

Those with little knowledge of Thailand will be enchanted at the portrayal of customs, beliefs, and environment vastly different from our own; those who already know and love the Thai people will recognise in these pages the same gaiety and charm which endear the country to the foreign visitor.

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$A 3.50
Professor T. H. Silcock was a Senior Research Fellow in Economics at the School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University when this book was written.

His association with Thailand dates from 1942, when he was a prisoner-of-war on the ‘death railway’. Since then he has visited Thailand many times, including a period as a consultant to ecafe, two visits for field work, and an appointment as a special lecturer at Chulalongkorn University.

During this quarter-century of interest in Thailand Professor Silcock has come to know many aspects of Thai life often denied to the foreigner. His knowledge of the language has enabled him to mix with a large cross-section of the population, and his work has taken him from Bangkok seminar rooms to remote villages all over Thailand.


George Capper was born and received his art training in Chile. Since then he has lived in the Middle East, Asia, and Australia, always with his sketching pencil near at hand.
This book was published by ANU Press between 1965–1991. This republication is part of the digitisation project being carried out by Scholarly Information Services/Library and ANU Press.

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Proud and Serene
By the same author

The Economy of Malaya, 1954, rev. 1963
Fiscal Survey of Sarawak, 1956
The Commonwealth Economy in Southeast Asia, 1959
Readings in Malayan Economics, 1961 (editor)
Towards a Malayan Nation, 1961
The Political Economy of Independent Malaya, 1963 (editor with E. K. Fisk)
Southeast Asian University, 1964
To Her Majesty Queen Sirikit

on the occasion of the completion of her third cycle
Tribute to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit

At your feet
I see them lay their hearts, loving the grace,
The delicate, cool perfection of your face,
   Serene and sweet,
   In tender pride
That you, their dear one, win the world’s acclaim
And yet are truly theirs, bearing their name
   By their King’s side.

Their Queen you reign,
Humbly secure, upheld by loves that flow
To merits not yours alone but long ago—
   An unseen chain
   Of influence, through
The web of all illusion, in which men live,
That draws their erring, human hearts to give
   Their loves to you.

To another throne,
Another creed, I bow; I cannot share
The homage, amply offered there,
   And yet—I own—
   Half lose my heart
In the love of home and land they proudly lay
Before you, where you modestly, sweetly play
   Your difficult part.

First published in the Bangkok World,
24 January 1965
Preface

These sketches are all based on real individuals whom I have met and admired in Thailand. I have tried to show them in their setting partly because this can illuminate character, but mainly to portray the Thai scene itself. Sometimes I have changed the names, if the publication of the name might cause embarrassment. Occasionally an event has been changed in the interest of brevity or simplicity. I have not been particularly severe in disciplining my imagination concerning features of my characters' lives which are not known to me. Yet I have tried to portray real Thai scenes as I have seen them.

Character cannot be understood in an environment of light and no shade. I have not attempted to conceal or gloss over features of Thai society that do not appeal to me, any more than I would in writing of any other society. I hope my deep love for Thailand will be apparent to any reader.

I have taken the liberty of seeking and obtaining permission to dedicate these sketches of my Thai friends to their beloved and beautiful Queen. The occasion of the completion of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's third cycle provided both an opportunity for celebration and a stimulus to complete the work in time. For non-Thai readers—for whom, of course, the book is mainly intended—it is necessary to explain that the ancient Thai system of reckoning time runs in cycles of twelve years, each year within the twelve with its own special name. Every Thai knows the name of the year of his birth. One's own birthday, on the third time it comes round in one's own particular year, is called one's third cycle and is a time for special rejoicing; and the Thais will regard the third cycle of their dear Queen Sirikit as a special day for them all.

The poem which serves as a dedication was first published in the Bangkok World on 24 January 1965. I have long admired not only
Her Majesty's elegance and charm, but the character which is so apparent in the discharge of her very exacting duties. It is a source of pride and satisfaction to me that I have been given permission to dedicate the book in this way.

It is an impressive fact that such diverse characters as those whom I have sketched here, and many more besides, are deeply devoted to their lovely Queen. If a foreigner praises her the reaction is one not merely of pleasure, but of pleasure mixed with some embarrassment, as if one were praising a mother or a wife—surprising a private treasure in their hearts.

A work of this kind is hardly one in which to make a judicious assessment of the political functions of the Thai monarchy. There is no direct intervention, but many Thais feel it is important to be able to express their love for their institutions and culture in a personal form, unrelated to the complex and often compromising forces that create power in Thai society. To a people so deeply deferential and yet so passionately devoted to their country as the Thais, it is profoundly important that they should not direct their loyalty and deference to whatever shady character is able from time to time to gain a position of power in this or that Department.

In these conditions, while there is much that the throne can do to encourage patriotism, professional performance, integrity, courage, and the like, everything depends on the affection that the people feel, not only for the institution, but for their King and Queen. One of my Thai friends expressed it neatly when she said, 'It is our duty to love our King and Queen, but we are lucky that they are so easy to love'.

15 February 1968
Canberra
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I Prathang and Sa'ad

The Thai Civil Service is often criticised, even by people who respect and admire Thailand. It is described as corrupt and self-seeking; and in these days, when Thailand is becoming a target of the international communist propaganda machine, the same things will no doubt be said with much more venom.

There are ways and ways of attacking such evils as corruption. It needs to be criticised, but the obvious purpose of much of the criticism we hear is not to achieve reform but to provoke hatred. Much of what we call corruption in Thailand results from the heavy involvement of the Thai bureaucracy in business, which can be explained originally in terms of quite respectable nationalist motives. A good deal more of it results from a complicated social structure of underpayment of the civil service combined with patronage by politicians and businessmen. Nearly all Thai civil servants are underpaid. Nearly all of them respect status and receive occasional favours from their political bosses. By no means all of
them are corrupt. Getting to know Prathang and Sa'ad as people in their setting helped me to realise more clearly the temptations and pressures of the civil service situation.

Prathang is a Deputy District Officer in a fairly remote village in Thailand's central plain, and Sa'ad is his wife. They live in Lion Village, and Prathang's district is Bangrachan, in the province of Singhburi. A Deputy District Officer is really a pretty junior officer in the Thai hierarchy, but Sa'ad never refers to him except as 'the Deputy'. Her father was a peasant, and no doubt in the days of the absolute monarchy she was brought up to regard the King's servants as a very superior, almost divine, type of being, instruments of the great line of kings who had saved Thailand from the foreigner and were leading it forward into the modern world. Though her children are adolescents now, and she must have been married for many years, it is still a great source of pride, almost of wonder, to her that she is the wife of a Deputy District Officer. I think she has better things to be proud of, as I hope I can explain later.

There were no really good rural maps of Thailand available from which I could choose my villages in advance, in Bangkok. I chose the district and then laid down certain characteristics for the village I wanted to visit, so that the District Office would not be able to choose a show place or a specially convenient village. I wanted to see some of the fairly remote ones, and get some idea of the real difficulties. In Bangrachan I did not know of the existence of Lion Village, but the terms I had laid down made the District Officer decide on Lion Village as soon as he received my letter. However, having decided, he forgot all about it until I turned up in front of his desk. There were a few minutes of the kind of face-saving flap that goes on in any government office when the officer responsible has been caught out making a mistake. Perhaps I was meant to be deceived, or perhaps everyone knew I was joining in the make-believe so that no discourtesy would appear to have been shown.
One of the clerks remembered about Prathang’s orchard house in Lion Village, and Prathang was summoned to the office and a plan hurriedly improvised. I was told that a house was available for me to stay in, and one of the Deputies, Mr Prathang, had made the arrangements and would take me there as soon as I wished.

That was how I first met Prathang. Later I got to know him much better, for I spent three nights in his orchard house, and two evenings and one night he stayed to keep me company. But at first sight he was not a particularly striking person. He is small, even for a Thai, and looks less strong than he is. He has a rather round face with short hair, and a very attractive smile, winning but not hearty. He gives the impression of enjoying your company, but having to overcome a measure of shyness.

At this our first meeting he had to improvise a welcome for me, while keeping up some of the make-believe that everything had been planned before. This entailed making a number of hurried arrangements, and getting off a message to his wife, Sa’ad. I was assured not only that a room was available for me, but that I would not need to make any arrangements about food, as all this had been laid on already. I am quite sure that he simply sent a message to Sa’ad, asking her to make the arrangements, and that she organised it, three miles away from her home, without previous notice.

Even after we left the District Office I was not allowed completely to abandon the pretence that everything had been organised by the District Officer in advance. I am sure Prathang and Sa’ad knew that I knew the facts; and I knew they knew I knew. However, the fiction was decently preserved. District Officers must not be seen to forget.

We went as far as we could in the direction of Lion Village in a four-wheel-drive car that the government provided. For the last mile or so we drove along an irrigation dyke, shaped rather like a road but deeply eroded on both sides. For the last half mile we had to walk along a narrow path with willing hands co-operating to carry the foreigner’s unwieldy luggage.
The centre of Lion Village is a coffee shop where this path reaches the river bank. Before the irrigation canal was built the path connected with a buffalo cart track, but the land it ran through was dense jungle where there were still tigers. Now it ran through orchard land on both sides, and just before we reached the coffee shop we turned off to the left, through about thirty yards of orchard, to reach the orchard house.

Thai rural houses are nearly all raised up on stilts because of the annual flooding of the plain. This house was unusually high, more than ten feet above ground level. The platform at the top of the access ladder was made of roughly shaped planks, the gaps between which provided drainage. One side of the platform was furnished with a swinging garden seat where it was pleasant to sit in the evening or early morning, looking out over the orchard, if one's skin was protected from mosquitoes. The other was provided with large water jars and served as my bathroom. When we arrived one of the villagers was already filling them with river water—a remarkable piece of organisation by Prathang, with no telephone in the village.

The house itself was made of unpainted wood and a galvanised iron roof. There were no windows, the walls leaving a gap below the eaves which gave sufficient light. The floor boards were closely fitted together, but there was a difference in level in the middle, about eight inches high; this was a convenient place to sit, for there were no chairs. The gap between the levels was left unfilled and used for throwing away waste such as floor sweepings, or washing-up water. The main room was L-shaped, enclosing a small bedroom almost filled with a wooden bed, unprotected from mosquitoes. I preferred to set up my portable bed (which had its own mosquito net) in the leg of the L, above the break in the floor level. In the main part of the room there was an enormous table; and the most puzzling thing about the orchard house was that—apart from two pressure lamps—this was almost entirely covered with piles and piles of Thai books, mainly about farming.
That evening Sa’ad brought me a surprisingly delicious Thai meal in one of the multiple containers, one above the other, that are so common in Southeast Asia. It was simple but excellently prepared—well-cooked rice, two curries, fried eggs, and roasted nuts. She sat and talked as I ate—I doubt if she had ever talked to a foreigner before—and as we talked the puzzle of the orchard house resolved itself. Prathang had been a peasant’s son, the brightest one of a family whom the parents went through terrible struggles to educate. He won his way from the little village school to the town secondary school and then to the university, in competition made harder by the fact that many of his rivals grew up in homes where English was spoken and books were common.

The great day arrived when he secured an appointment to the Civil Service, married Sa’ad, and began slowly to work his way by examinations up the Civil Service ladder. Then he went down with polio, which left his arms feeble and both legs crippled.

This was where Prathang’s peasant toughness began to show. He became convinced that if he went back to work on the land he could recover his strength. A new irrigation scheme was just being opened up behind Lion Village. He applied for a piece of jungle land, and began to open it up and cultivate it in his spare time.

As a civil servant he might well have got better land, for the Thai Civil Service looks after its own in these matters; but he was not prepared to wait. At first he worked on crutches, but he persevered, and gradually first the orchard and then the orchard house took shape. Slowly his strength came back, until now only a slight limp remains.

If this were all, it would be a tale of courage that could have given Sa’ad far more to be proud of than being married to one of the King’s servants. But it was not all. As he returned, with his academic knowledge, to farming work, many of the pieces of advice from the Agricultural Department began to come alive. He introduced new practices in water control, seed selection,
composting, pesticides. The villagers of Lion Village, who were astonished at a government servant developing land with his own hands, saw it producing a yield that they had never dreamed of and began to ask his advice.

So it came about that he left various leaflets and magazines about agriculture in the orchard house, for the villagers to read; for most village men in the central plain of Thailand are now literate, though they can afford all too little to read. Pamphlets and magazines led on to books, and when I came to stay in the orchard house the big table there was piled high with books on agriculture and related subjects.

It was an untidy mess to be sure—no sort of order or arrangement. It was used by semi-literate farmers, not scholars. But there were mottoes round the wall, and notices of the young farmers' clubs and other activities. Prathang's orchard had now become one of several modern orchards. While I was there the first Japanese tractor was brought down the path to the coffee shop.

Sa'ad told me all this rather apologetically. It was her Deputy's misfortune, not a source of pride. She was ashamed that in the orchard house she had no servant to help with my food. When I told her we had no servant at home in Australia she found this an unbelievable traveller's tale. No university teacher in Thailand could possibly live without a servant. As the extraordinary story of basic wages was explained to her she was almost in tears to find that the Australian basic wage was higher than her Deputy's salary. That was one of the reasons why I took notes of her life and that of Prathang, and why I told her that I wanted to do a broadcast in Australia about her Prathang because I thought Australians would be glad to know him. The broadcast, which I gave some weeks later, after I returned to Canberra, was to lead me to meet Prathang again.

When I left Lion Village I was able to give a bookcase for the orchard house, in return for Prathang's hospitality, and a little girl with some secondary education promised to help with arranging
the books. I mentioned the beginnings of the orchard house library in my broadcast, and this was passed on to the Canberra Metropolitan Lions Club.

On my next visit to Thailand I had the pleasant duty of visiting Bangrachan to ask Prathang to make out a list of books, which the Canberra Lions Club had promised to buy—through the Lions Club in Bangkok—for the villagers of Lion Village.
2 Thawi and Priya

The lack of transport and most of the comforts of life in the Thai countryside can be depressing. There is still too much poverty, too little stimulus to change. Yet the people themselves, even in these difficult conditions, are usually enough to offset any depression. Many rural Thais are not merely charming. Their response to their conditions can often be an inspiration.

Take Thawi, for example. He is the headmaster of the village school in Kokemaw, and I stayed three nights in his house, and I feel I got to know him fairly well. Kokemaw is a village without a road at all; the only way you can get there is by boat. It is up on the northern edge of the central plain, five miles from Chumsaeng, which itself is little more than a huddle of Chinese shops along narrow alleys, though it is called the district capital, and is connected by a very second-class road to the national road system, as well as having a railway station and the river.
Kokemaw itself is attractive, for all its isolation. From the landing stage to the temple there is a track which might just be called a road: the surface has been improved with stones and simple drainage, and I think it could be used almost at once after the annual flood subsides. The rest of the tracks are probably difficult through most of the rainy season, though when I was there they were firm. At right angles to the road there is first an avenue of ornamental palms, then parallel to this a small muddy track on which the few village shops stand, and then the low wall of the temple courtyard. Like most Thai temples, this one is peaceful but rather unkempt. It is a place of retirement from the cares of this world rather than of any strenuous cultivation of the religious life. There are inscriptions exhorting the faithful and commemorating pious donors of former times. During the day the temple hall is used by the school. This was originally a temporary arrangement, but it has lasted since most of today's parents were pupils there, for (as Thawi told me without bitterness or rancour) the government has never yet been able to provide the budget for a building. I think that inwardly Thawi is resigned to teaching in temporary buildings for the rest of his life, but as a loyal government servant he would not dream of admitting this to a foreigner.

Thawi's house is on the main road, and near the landing stage, a key position. It is the most modern, though perhaps not the most expensive, house in the village. For the headmaster is an important person, addressed with respect as Headmaster Thawi, though his salary is not enough for him to keep up with the more successful farmers. Any headmaster is an officer of the government, an agent of modernisation, living among the villagers, and in many villages (as in Kokemaw) he is the only one. The village headman, though paid a little by the government, is partly one of themselves and only partly a representative of the government. The teacher is posted there from elsewhere.

The Thais have had a system of primary education for forty years, but in the early days the training of teachers was naturally
not very thorough. I never asked Thawi about his own training, but I do not think it can have been more than an apprenticeship in a secondary school. Certainly he envies his daughter her training in a teachers' training college in Bangkok. Understandably some of the older teachers are a little jealous and defensive, obstructing the methods of the young upstarts; and because they have so much status in Thai society, primary education is not as good as it could be.

I asked his daughter, Priya, how she enjoyed teaching in a small village like this after working in Bangkok for three years. Did she miss the big city? She answered that she did, but that when she was in Bangkok she missed Kokemaw. It is fortunate that the Thais enjoy their rural life so much. There is still far less movement to the towns than in most of the less developed countries; but on the whole there is a tendency for the more intelligent ones to stay in the towns. I could understand anyone liking the peace and beauty of Kokemaw, but I felt there must be little mental stimulus. Later I was to learn better; but I must get back to her father.

I found Thawi very courteous, deferential and attentive, always a little more formal than the occasion demanded; and at first this made me apprehensive about staying in his house. I knew I should be comfortable. I had been sent to his house because, as the representative of the modern world, he had a bathroom and lavatory in his house, though most Australians would not recognise it as such. The bathroom was mainly a status symbol; all the water had to be carried up in buckets from the river. Having done some water-carrying as a prisoner-of-war, I was constantly reproached by them for being too sparing with the water; but I noticed that (as they could not afford a servant) the family all bathed, in the Thai way, in the river. In Thawi's house I did not even have to use my portable bed, for a bed was provided. It was not my comfort that I was concerned about. But I was worried that it was the headmaster's house and I wondered whether it would inhibit my contacts with the children of the village. If you have only a short
time in each village, and have to win people's goodwill, it is very helpful if the children are friendly. In sufficiently remote villages one may be the first foreigner some of the young children have ever seen. One has the same sort of advantage that an elephant might have: they find one peculiar, rather large and mysterious and strange. Fortunately I enjoy the company of Thai children very much and I also find that if I spend some time with them it helps to break the ice with the older people. I was worried that the children might be scared of the headmaster's house.

My fears proved quite misplaced. In spite of his formal manner, Thawi obviously made every child in the village welcome. They all seemed to come at one time or another to see the foreigner, and the first evening there I had a great crowd of children, some showing off their Thai dancing or singing songs from the radio, while the smaller ones experimented with pulling my toes or my ears. After that evening I was far more welcome and at home in the village.

Then came the occasion when Thawi felt he had to keep me in order. I had arranged to talk to the children in his school at one o'clock, and promised I would come home for lunch from my interviewing sharp at twelve. The people I was interviewing knew this, but they were Thais, and, like most Thais, easy-going about time. Perhaps I was influenced by their attitude. My questionnaire was filled in, but I was getting information from informal chat, which seemed worth a hurried lunch. But Thawi had changed the arrangements while I was out; perhaps Mrs Thawi had some cooking problem, or perhaps he had overlooked some feature of the time-table. The foreign professor had said noon; he could count on this and would arrange for him to address the children at noon. At ten past twelve an agitated Thawi interrupted my interview and invited me, courteously but firmly, to ride back to the school—over the rough path through the rice fields—on the step of his bicycle. I was shaken, physically as well as morally, when I came to talk to the children.
This may seem a small matter to someone from the Western world; but anyone who saw the extraordinary respect with which Thawi spoke to me—the equivalent of 'Doctor Professor' in almost every sentence—would know something of the struggle I had caused, the struggle between his responsibility to be an example of the orderly modern world to his children, and his deep feelings of respect for status. I was tremendously impressed that the modern world, and the children, had won.

Yet the most impressive thing of all was still to come—Thawi's own research project. It all came out rather gradually. Quite early in the visit he mentioned that he was most fortunate to have me there, because he had a little project of his own on which he would like my advice. Later he opened up about it and I saw Thawi as he really was. Through the teachers' association he was himself organising a research project, taking in schools in five different provinces, on the teaching of elementary reading of the Thai language. He had become convinced—that after much inner resistance—that the modern method of teaching words first and then the analysis of them was better adapted to the minds of children at the ages at which he was teaching them than the old method of word-building that he had used for many years. Yet he knew very well how hard it was to convince the older teachers who had been trained like himself. So he had set to work to devise a comparative study of results in different environments to prove his point.

His Bangkok-trained daughter had agreed to transfer from working at a more senior level, in a better school, so as to join her father and help in his research. Together they were tackling the problems of organising this work, and they asked me for some technical help.

I may have been able to help a little, on one or two points; I wished I had had more time to study the project. But it made me feel very small indeed. I was being treated with all this respect and status as a man of learning, and here was a man, with virtually no training, a country schoolmaster in a village without a road,
teaching in temporary buildings into his late forties, still fired with this enthusiasm for applied reason, this compassion for the difficulties of ordinary people in achieving it, and this deep sense of personal responsibility that are the marks of the outstanding teacher everywhere. Who was I to receive so much respect from Thawi?

After my return to Bangkok I was able to talk about his research project to the research division of the United States Operations Mission, and I hope this may bring him some help. I should have been happier if our own Australian help to Thailand had been on such a scale that we could have done it ourselves. Perhaps we can think about Thawi when we think of overseas aid.

Of course Thawi is not a typical Thai teacher. He would not be typical in any country. He is not a statistic. Yet we are all apt to be discouraged from time to time about the great difficulty of raising living standards in the less developed countries. Thawi was an immense encouragement to me, and may be so to others who want to help.
I never knew the name of the small girl who danced with such enthusiasm and skill in Thawi’s house. She was pleased when I referred to her as Silapin, which roughly means ‘Artiste’. She had no shyness about dancing, or—for that matter—about singing, mainly songs from the radio, hardly appropriate to a child of nine. Yet it was difficult to get her to talk, either that night or on either of the next two days. Probably she was puzzled by my uncouth accent. She was certainly not uninterested. Her eyes were very large, and they seemed to have nowhere to look except at the strange red man who had invaded her village.

Her dancing was not the classical dancing of Thailand, which upper-class girls—and sometimes boys too—are taught as an accomplishment. Classical Thai dancing is generally slow, featuring the arms (and particularly the hands) as much as the legs, and its special character is a poise, a balance which terminates—but does not depend on—movement. Her dancing was much more
rapid and vigorous, though the arms and finger positions were characteristically Thai. Perhaps it was a country dance of local origin, or perhaps she had watched travelling dancers in Chumsaeng. I had not enough knowledge to say, though I enjoyed her enthusiasm and sense of rhythm.

Her parents—Thawi told me—were rice farmers, in a village where many were abandoning rice for more profitable crops. They must have had very little land, for her father had gone off to work for long periods in Bangkok. She had a brother about two years younger and a sister born nine months ago.

Though she would not talk to me, I could hardly avoid speculating what was going on behind those large, expressive eyes. I knew something of the general framework of her life from what I had seen around the villages. There would be a good deal to be done in the home. Already she would help, perhaps for hours, in the kitchen, but probably her chief task would be carrying. There is always water to be carried from the well or the river, though she would not yet be strong enough to carry the two four-gallon tins quite full. With a nine-month baby in the family she would spend a good deal of time, also, carrying the baby around, strapped on her back.

Her school was clearly not the usual village school. Thawi was a guarantee of something better than that. In many of the country schools books and equipment are so inadequate and teachers so few that much of the time is wasted; but she would have learnt to read effectively and do some simple arithmetic as well as learnt something of hygiene and social studies. Thawi had long ago noticed her singing and dancing abilities and encouraged her to practise. In this she was better cared for than most country children.

For her, more than for most village children, the coming of the transistor radio must have been a great transformation of life. To her parents, of course, and to nearly all the farmers, the transistor radio meant access to an entirely new world. Her father, who had
been in Bangkok, would know of this world; but to her mother and aunts and uncles it would be little more real than the world of gods and angels, transmitted without detail in the words of others. Now the news, the advertisements, the gossip, came into their home; and to my Silapin came also music. The songs were mostly sentimental adult rubbish, but at least they gave her songs to imitate and to practise, every day, and not only at the festivities of harvest time.

The singing and dancing at the various festivals after the harvest would have been her most recent memory, when I arrived in the village. Probably indeed the recency of these entertainments, with electric lights and loud-speakers brought in for the occasion, contributed something to her repertoire and her enthusiasm to perform for the foreigner.

A few weeks further back would be the harvest itself, a time of hard work on a rice farm, even for a small girl too young herself to harvest. There was much cooking and carrying to be done, for when their own fields were being harvested food had to be provided for all the others who were helping, even though on other days—when her parents were helping in neighbours’ fields—the work would be lighter. All the same, it was a happy time. Her parents and uncles were happy that the rice had escaped the floods and the droughts, the worms and the rats, that sometimes ruined a year’s work. They were tired but gay, and the children could be gay too.

Further back still would be the flood, covering the whole village as it did nearly every year—as indeed it had to do if their crops were to be properly irrigated. Every house stood upon posts, and on some days every year the water would be swirling round them. During most of the two or three months of flood part of the raised mound on which the house stood would be above the water, but the paths were flooded and visiting or shopping could be done only by boat.

This year she would probably have been able to handle a boat herself, and it would be several years since she learnt to swim. Yet
the water must have been a source of childhood fears. A child of one or two is in constant danger at such times, and the parents' fears could not help being communicated to a sensitive child like her, even if they did not deliberately frighten her for her own protection. Overcoming these fears, swimming and then rowing, conquering the ancient enemy, was part of the fun of the flood season, part of the relief of growing up.

It would probably be during the flood time that she would remember her baby sister's first wai or salutation. As soon as hand movements can be controlled, parents and brothers and sisters begin trying to teach manners and status—long before a child can walk or even properly crawl. The small hands are brought up in front of the face, first (of course) with the help of the others, very soon after the recognition expressed in a smile. The refinements of depth of bow or height of the hands will follow later; but the first introduction of courtesy is a source of delight and family pride.

To a child of nine the few months back to the beginning of the flood season would no doubt seem as long as many years to an adult. How much further back would her memory be clear and sharp? Would she remember—perhaps with something of a shudder—the time of transplanting? Probably she was too young herself to have had a hand in this back-breaking work itself. In any event, with a new baby in the house she would have had plenty to do. This would be a time when her father—and her mother too, so far as a recent birth allowed—would be bent double transplanting every individual rice plant by hand from the seed-bed to the fields. Bundle after bundle would be pulled up and each root pressed in by hand under the muddy water. Nor was this, like the harvest, a time of relief and gaiety. All the anxiety of the year lay ahead, and parents with aching backs would have short patience with a child.

I thought it unlikely that she would remember any sequence before the present year. Yet surely she would remember the arrival of the new baby, and the weeks afterwards when, by ancient
custom, her mother had to lie close up against a blazing fire, while
the rest of the household looked after her as well as the baby. I
could not tell whether her memory stretched any further back, to
a time before the baby was there, perhaps to curiosity about the
great pile of wood that her father, like his ancestors before him,
was building for the post-natal fire.

Even among our own people, even with the help of our own
memories, we can know so little of the memory and the mental
world of a child. My attempt to see behind those big sensitive eyes
was a painstaking, bookish thing. She had shown me, in the quick
movements of her arms and legs, in the rhythm, the rise and fall
of her voice, something of the culture in which she grew, the culture
that would make her a Thai woman of the central plain. She had
not shown me the shape of her life behind the big black eyes. I
had responded, as we all do, with the sense of our common human­
ity, to the eyes of a fellow human being. Yet what that common
humanity is remains a mystery. The reconstructed memory, the
picture of her life, was a construction of my adult sophistication,
my imagination loaded with the traditions of Europe.

She was there on the river bank, of course, to see me sail away
in the hired boat. Her eyes stared at me to the last, absorbing me
in her Thai imagination.
4  Wai Khru: Respects to my Teachers

There is one day in the year, in Thailand, when it is the custom for all Thais to pay respect to their teachers. If you have ever been someone’s pupil you are his ‘child in learning’, and on that day in particular you owe him respect such as that which a child pays to its own parents. You bring your gift and you make your wai, raising your hands together to your forehead, and bowing in respect.

The teacher to whom I wish to pay special respect in this chapter, and whom I shall here call Mani, is the most recent Thai to give me formal lessons in the Thai language; but like any foreigner who tries to learn Thai, I have been encouraged by undeserved praise, helped along by most considerate advice, and surrounded by unfailing and courteous co-operation, from literally hundreds of Thais. From scholar-prince to illiterate peasant every true Thai loves his language, and is eager to introduce the interested stranger to its subtleties and its riches. Mani was keener than most,
but the finesse and the range of her mind, and her sensitive insight into her own language and mine, turned her keenness into great teaching.

I shall return later to the experience of being taught by Mani; but as a good Thai she herself would expect me to pay respect first to those who taught me first.

First I salute Lek, the first of all my teachers of the Thai language. Lek was a small, gentle, unassuming man, but as a teacher he was a strict taskmaster. He had once been married to an American who had studied Thai by modern linguistic methods, and as she learnt from him about the finer points of the language she had obviously taught him her scientific approach. I was taught very firmly that speech came before writing and listening before speech. First he would teach me to listen; then he would teach me to speak with a correct accent. After that I could talk to Thais who didn’t speak English and listen to their answers. If I didn’t understand, but could repeat what they said correctly, any English-speaking Thai could help me with the meaning later. In that way every Thai, and not merely Lek himself, would become my teacher.

All this is, of course, easier said than done. I spent long hours of phonetic dictation, reproducing the exact sounds that had been said, in words that I did not know at all. I confess that I sometimes wondered whether Lek himself had had to listen too much. Years later, when I met Mrs Lek in America, I told her about this endlessly thorough drill that I had been given. I did not reveal my suspicion that Lek’s pupils had it tough because he too had had it tough. So I salute not only Lek but Mrs Lek, who taught me to hear Thai sounds.

Later Lek agreed to teach me to read Thai, but he had an unknown helper to whom I must make my bow. Nit was only eight years old when she became my second teacher. She was my servant’s daughter and came in the holidays from her village school to live in the servants’ quarters of my small house. She herself was
learning to read Thai, and when I saw her school readers I bought copies myself and used them as my readers too. She would sit at the table with me and play at being the teacher. She was too young to be over-respectful, once she became accustomed to me, and she had the acute ear of a child. Every time I made a mistake, however slight, she would raise her little hand and make me read the passage again.

I have completely lost touch with her in the intervening years, but I here make my bow to Nit also. She will have grown up by now and I hope she may have become a teacher. If so, her first pupil, now a grey-haired grandfather, would be delighted to join her ‘children in learning’ when they make their bow to her.

It was a good many years before I had another Thai teacher. I had tried to improve my Thai, both on visits to Thailand and at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, but had no more Thai teachers to whom I must now make my wai until I was recommended to Daeng in London. By teaching me to read economics in Thai she opened up a professional avenue which made it possible later for me to write about Thailand, and so indirectly stimulated this book. Economics was my subject, not hers, and it needed a good deal of preparation to help me read my first economics books in Thai. She taught me conscientiously and well, and because she was a good teacher, and technically a Thai, I must make my wai to her. Yet I make it—in this place—with my fingertips below my chin, and without a bow, as a formal token of respect only. For Daeng, though a good teacher, is only formally a Thai. She had been married for many years to a foreigner, and was the only Thai, among all the many hundred Thais I have met, who ever said a harsh word about her Queen.

So—in this place—I pay only my formal respects and pass on, returning to Bangkok and introducing my teachers in Chulalongkorn University. The main purpose of my visit to Bangkok was research; but my previous experience in Southeast Asia enabled me to get some teaching work to do in Chulalongkorn University,
which helped me greatly with my work. One of the advantages was that I was able to arrange for members of the Department of Thai to give me further language teaching. I was given an intensive six-week course, and four separate lecturers all took a hand in training me.

I must honour each of the four separately, but before I do so it will help if I describe the arrangements; for these are very much a part of the conditions of university life in Thailand. One of the basic facts about Thai universities is that the lecturers and professors have nearly all spent a good many years abroad and acquired European or American standards of living, and are all so desperately underpaid that they badly need extra money. Every department must have its own gold mine for its staff; the scientists and accountants work on contract for industry, the political scientists give supplementary lectures for civil servants, and so on.

The Department of Thai has to make its living out of foreigners, but it is most scrupulous not to take advantage of fellow academics. Before I was allowed to pay a reasonable price for my instruction I had to satisfy my colleagues that somebody else was paying. Later, when I had experienced the quality of teaching given by Mani and Suthi, in particular, I realised how generous this gesture was. I was getting individual attention from some of the best linguistic minds in Thailand for a fee that I would pay an ordinary schoolmaster in Australia to coach my son for his Higher Certificate, and yet they had qualms about overcharging me.

This is all part of the special fellow-feeling of academics in Thailand; what they unite to protect is not academic freedom—they have no chance of that—nor even the opportunity to do research, which few of them can afford. They protect their comparative freedom from commitments, their life as a community, their opportunity to do interesting work. I missed many of the features of a university in Thailand, but not the sense of being accepted as a member of an academic community.

Ladda, the youngest of my teachers, had only recently taken her M.A. I believe she had spent only one year abroad. She was
married, but had no children, and had only recently joined the academic staff. She gave me conversation practice, so I was able to learn something of her attitude to life, which was very much that of the students in Thai universities who have not been abroad.

It is a nationalistic attitude, jealous of foreigners rather than hostile to them, impatient that Thailand's progress is not more rapid, critical of corruption in their government, and very tenacious of Thai institutions. She had plenty of indignation that she had to spend her time earning extra money, rather than doing real work, though she did not seem to have very clear ideas about what research she wanted to do. At present she wanted time to learn more about her subject, so that she could teach more effectively. I tried to encourage this indignation; too many of the lecturers who were still quite young had settled down to accepting a life with no real academic opportunity; I did not want Ladda to go the same way.

I doubt whether I had much influence with Ladda. I did not conform at all to her picture of what a foreigner in Thailand ought to be. I saved money by doing what Thais did. I ate their food, lived in a Thai house, even travelled in buses. I could not understand why this should make her angry, and her reasoning, when she explained it, did not convince me, though it increased my understanding. They themselves, she said, could not live like monks or peasants, they had to keep up their status as university lecturers, but their salaries were insufficient so they were constantly having to contrive to make more money. Foreigners who tried to live like Thais did not really share the life of the Thais. Of course, if we lived in hotels and travelled everywhere in taxis we met fewer Thais, but this did not matter; it was only fair, if we were paid so much more, that we too should have to struggle to make ends meet. It made her ashamed when she saw foreigners in their fine houses and big cars, but it was better to make her ashamed because that was better for the Thai people. Ladda had a point, of course, and it was not only she who felt ashamed, but I was not convinced that she had the right answer.
I make my bow to Ladda in her struggle, her fierce pride, her undiscouraged scholarship. She taught me conscientiously and capably the lessons I wanted her to teach me, and she disturbed me and widened my understanding.

Suthi was a few years older than Ladda. He had not merely studied for some years abroad; he had taught Thai in a foreign university. It would have been a waste to ask Suthi to give me the rather routine instruction that I had from Ladda. Suthi introduced me to several new techniques of learning and gave me a great deal of stimulus and instruction. He was accustomed to my difficulties, and competent and matter-of-fact in dealing with them. His techniques had been developed for dealing with groups of students, and he was the only one of the four who made me miss the stimulus of competition and discussion with fellow students.

It was interesting to contrast his attitude with Ladda’s. Suthi had been abroad long enough, and had come back badly homesick. He found the Bangkok to which he returned too much infected with foreign values. Thais were more committed, less relaxed, than he had known them before. They smiled less, were less accepting, took life more strenuously. Suthi deplored all this. Economic progress was all very well, but the price could be too high.

He was unable to take me for the full six weeks, for ten days from the end of the period he took his ordination and went into a monastery for three months. Perhaps it was his imminent ordination which made him exceptionally conscious of the contrast between Thai values and those he had learnt abroad. He was not taking the yellow robe for life, only for a period of training—though later, when I visited him in his monastery, he had adapted well to monastic life, and was living up to his vows with enthusiasm. Yet perhaps while he was teaching me he was consciously preparing himself for this life. He taught me that the Thai gentleness is threatened by the earnest triviality of the Western powers and even more by the earnest hate-manufacture of the communists. Much of the Thais’ urge to economic progress comes not from
a desire for material things themselves, but from a fear that Thailand may not be strong enough to resist these foreign pressures. Suthi’s homesickness may have been a vain longing for the past, generated by too much pressure while he lived abroad, and strengthened by his anticipated religious vows. Yet, like a vigorous caricature, it taught me something of the struggle and nostalgia that must be hidden in every modern Thai heart.

Lamyong, my third university teacher, was married to a senior army officer. She used to drive up to our lessons in a big, sleek German car, with a smart driver. I wondered at first why she undertook this work, and even why she taught in the University at all. She did not appear to need the money like Ladda and the others. She did not show the excitement about her subject that Mani showed so abundantly. One possibility is that she enjoyed the personal status of a university teacher, even though her social status would be higher as a senior army officer’s wife.

I never felt that I really solved this problem; but a hint that I received when I met her husband gave me a clue. He seemed a very earnest, enthusiastic professional soldier, who had been on many special training courses abroad since leaving the military college. He was obviously deeply concerned about the defence of Thailand, though he was very much aware that in the top levels of the army, success depended on money and social influence. I came to believe that he only half accepted the army’s code of values; that he had assimilated Western values sufficiently to spend most of his time on his military duties, and not have enough left for the directorships and the use of influence that are necessary if a senior officer is to supplement his pay and live at the standards demanded among the army’s top brass. Lamyong had been educated well in the old-style learning of the Thai language, and her small earnings helped to keep up the brave outward show.

Lamyong had much less contact with the West than any of my other teachers. She was a grammarian, rather a pedant, trained in the Pali and Sanskrit roots of the language. She reminded me, in
some ways, of an old-fashioned Latin teacher in the sixth form of an English public school. She did not exactly deplore the changes in culture and manner of speaking of the past twenty years; rather, she refused to recognise them. I am sure that some of the idioms and phrases she taught me were obsolete, and these I hope I have forgotten from lack of practice. Yet I learnt much new vocabulary from her, and gained a much greater understanding of the background of the modern Thai language; for language—in spite of all the modern theories—is not merely something spoken, it is also something learnt, and the methods of learning and of selecting the teachers help to mould the way people try to speak. Lamyong's Pali and Sanskrit pedantry is as relevant to Thai as the Ciceronian prose and the discipline of the old public school teachers is to modern English. People do not really speak that way, but some important people try to, and this influences others.

I was amused at one sidelight on Lamyong's teaching. She wanted me to practise reading Thai handwriting, and gave me a clearly written examination-script that she had been marking, so that I could practise on it. The student was plainly the 'teacher's pet' type. Not only was everything very neatly written, in Thai that kept all the rules; all the ideas were taken, completely unaltered, from the government's current propaganda line. There was nothing in any one of the answers that showed the least effort at original thought or criticism.

She had given him extremely high marks, and I expressed mild surprise when I returned the script to her. There was, admittedly, nothing seriously wrong. It was the kind of 'safe' paper on which the average university teacher usually feels compelled to give a higher mark than he would wish to, marks it down as much as he honourably can, and then feels a bit sick about the examination system. Lamyong clearly had no such feelings.

When I pointed out that he showed no evidence of having a single idea in his head she admitted this, as if I had raised an interesting new point. The next day she went out of her way to
refer to the matter again. She had been thinking about what I had said, and felt that it was, indeed, more important than she had thought that students ought to learn to think for themselves. Had I any suggestions as to how we should achieve this?

I make my wai to Lamyong also. Perhaps my hands are raised, not to my forehead but only to the level of my nose; perhaps my bow, though sincere, is not very deep. She is still learning the craft of teaching, but her heart is in it.

So I come back to Mani, the most recent and much the best of my Thai teachers. To her I make my wai with the deepest bow, the most profound respect and affection. I enjoyed learning and using the Thai language before I met her, but she turned it into an enthusiasm—some would say an obsession. She did this not so much by any technique as by the capacity to communicate, across the barrier of a different culture, her own two enthusiasms: an enthusiasm for the scientific analysis of language, and an enthusiasm for Thai language and culture.

She loved the individual words and the special phrases of her own language in a way that I recognised as similar to my own love of our English words, but with a much deeper knowledge. When I asked her about a word or phrase she would consciously taste it, test it in combination with other words and phrases, and then start to talk about it, writing down notes about it, all higgledy-piggledy over the page, in her beautiful, but not always very legible, Thai handwriting. A great spate of ideas flowed out of her enthusiasm, setting the phrase in its social context, saying what associations it implied, giving analogies and parallels, with all the disorderly exuberance of a living language and an uncontrollable excitement about it. I would treasure her scraps of paper, mapping (afterwards) the course of the lesson, recapturing, consolidating the vast area we had covered.

I believe, and hope, that I helped to release this enthusiasm. I cannot imagine her expecting a whole class to keep up with her swift mind, racing through the by-ways of another culture. With
a class she must have checked the flying feet, leaving many inviting glades unvisited, giving time for notes to be taken, for a common and partly repeatable sequence to be attained. Something must have been lost, but I cannot believe any sensitive student could fail to respond to the enthusiasm of that brilliant and well-stocked mind.

The speed was so great, the impact so deep, that it far exceeded any notes I could make. I have now no idea what I learnt from Mani and what came from other sources. The most vivid thing in my memory is the excitement, the stimulus, the impulse to learn. Mani herself is rather a small, tubby person, with the kind of baby face that makes a non-Thai think she must have fair hair and wide blue eyes, though of course her actual colouring is the black hair and eyes and the golden-brown skin of every urban Thai. She is married to an honest, capable, and extremely professional junior civil servant, and has to work herself, in spite of having two small children, to keep up even a standard of life far below that to which she became accustomed in her long years of study abroad. If ever I feel tempted to condemn Thai civil servants for running business ventures on the side, or engaging in petty corruption, I think of what it must mean to be Mani. Modest though she is, she can hardly fail to be conscious of her own talents. The pressure to accept opportunities to have what she and her husband must consider a normal life must be very great.

Within the university group in which she works, Mani is, I think, outstanding. Yet in the conditions of her life she is only one of many. She has a Thai capacity for contentment, is always gay and gracious, yet her life is one of great strain to make ends meet. I would not insult her with my sympathy. Her great gifts, the swift, intuitive flights of her mind, call only for respect, a respect which I am honoured to pay her. Yet I wonder how long it is to be before Thailand can give an adequate life to people as gifted and as dynamic as Mani.
5 Ujjeni

One of my academic friends once asserted in an argument that the only valid reason for learning a foreign language was to read its poetry. This is, of course, one of those ridiculous overstatements that could only be made in an academic argument. The core of truth in it is that other things expressed in a language can be more easily translated. The best translations of poetry give only a part of the original, conveying in another language something that the translator chooses to convey, and deliberately sacrificing other parts, which would hamper the achievement of the chosen goal. My own knowledge of Thai has not yet reached the point at which I can understand Thai poetry, and if I had never met Ujjeni I should not even have enjoyed the distant view which has made me so regret that I shall never learn enough to gain a real appreciation of it.

I met Ujjeni through the *Tribute to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit* which forms the opening of this book. After the poem had been
printed in the *Bangkok World*, one of my friends—actually it was the teacher whom I have elsewhere called Mani—suggested to Ujjeni that she should make a Thai translation, and it was through this that we met and I was subsequently led on to try to translate some of her poems. The experience has been a rewarding, if rather humbling, one and has certainly given me a great appreciation of Ujjeni herself.

When Mani first suggested a translation I was quite sure it would be impossible. I insisted that my poem was essentially the reaction of a European, and that several of the basic ideas were incompatible with Thai thinking or expression and could not be expressed in Thai at all. I remember trying to explain what I thought would be the difficulties. One obvious one was the need to decide whether to use either the royal or the religious language. Should I, as a foreigner, be translated as using the royal language, in which a commoner must describe himself as a slave? If so, the point of the first stanza—seeing and being moved by the depth and completeness of the Thais' devotion—would not be conveyed; or should I be made to use the language of equality, which in Thai would convey arrogance or at least discourtesy? Should the Buddhist allusions in the second stanza be conveyed in Buddhist words based on Pali, and so miss the suggestion that the belief itself is an error, which is half contradicted in the third stanza? If not, how could the allusion be conveyed at all?

Mani was quite convinced that these problems could be solved. When Ujjeni had made her translation I saw that my doubts were valid, but that Ujjeni knew more than I did about what a translation was. She had not solved the problems. They may be soluble, but only at the cost of much clumsy writing. She had cut them right out. She was writing in Thai, for Thais, and the detailed implications of foreignness involved in the different moods of the stanzas would be as false to a Thai poem as would be an English rhyme scheme.

She set about reproducing, through a remarkably exact translation of my phrases, the mood of the last stanza, and used modified
royal and religious language suitable to this mood throughout. However, the thing that was impressive was the way she contrived to use elegant and felicitous Thai phrases which almost gave the impression that the original must have been written in Thai.

When I had read the translation I was anxious to meet Ujjeni. I felt that she had understood my meaning and made a conscious choice of what could be conveyed in Thai. It had, of course, taken a great deal of work to reach an adequate understanding of her translation. I had a crib, because I had written the crib, but still needed to look up many of the literary words she had used, and explore many new idioms. By the time we met I felt that I had achieved an understanding at last of one Thai poem.

Ujjeni, when I met her, turned out to be a middle-aged Thai lady, with big, rather sensitive eyes, and a manner which combined candour and friendliness with a sense of a withdrawn inner self—almost a quality of mysticism. She works now in the personnel department of a great international company and has to be constantly writing, telephoning, meeting people. All the time she is outgoing and efficient. I have sometimes wondered whether it was just because I knew she was a poet that I always had the sense that in the middle of all this activity she was also sitting quietly listening, and that if I chose I could sit and listen too. It may be a trick of my imagination, but I do not think it is. Every time I have met her I have had this feeling; and when we met away from the office, at her own home, although there was still this contrast between the world in which we spoke to one another and the unexperienced world, the contrast became less sharp, and something of the other world came into the conversation.

Her house was an old aristocratic house that appeared to have been built for a noble family in the days of the absolute monarchy. We sat on a verandah removed by only two steps from a formal garden of lawn and trees. The surroundings were peaceful, old-fashioned with an air of faded elegance. I tried to draw her out to talk about modern Thai poetry, both its relation to its own literary
background and the character of the people who were now writing.

For some ten years Ujjeni was a university teacher, and at that
time her knowledge of Thai poetry and the quality of her writing
gave her a position of leadership among some of the young writers.
It is clear that she misses both the stimulus and the excitement of
this position of intellectual leadership. Many of her business
colleagues have to learn Thai for their work, but none of them
seems to love the language for its own sake as she does. Her family
and her work leave her little time for literary contacts. Yet she is
still writing and publishing.

She showed me some English translations of a few of her poems,
with which she was most dissatisfied; she felt that the translator
had not interpreted her correctly. I took this as a challenge to try
and make amends. The translation that follows this chapter is one
of the results. The main result, however, was to help me a step
further on the way toward appreciating Thai poetry.

I already knew some of the difficulties of translation. The most
obvious is the difficulty of deciding how to convey some under­
standing of the verse form itself. This applies to all Thai verse, not
only to Ujjeni's. The basic forms are simple and fairly flexible,
depending on the number of syllables in a line or given part of a
line, and a system of rhymes both at the end of a line and at definite
points in the middle. But because Thai is a tonal language the
basic forms are more like the underlying tempo and rhyme scheme
of a song than the structure of a poem in English. A tone melody
has to be woven into the basic rhythm, and obviously there is
nothing anyone can put into an English translation to convey this.
These tone melodies are not very complex, but with short and long
syllables and five different tones there is room for a good deal of
variation. It is possible to imitate in English the Thai rhyme
schemes, and some years after I met Ujjeni a Thai writer, Mom
Seni, translated some of the Thai classics in this way. If this is
done, then English stress rhythms must be used to take the place
of Thai tone melody. To me these are so different that the feeling
of the original is not conveyed at all. There is the additional disadvantage that poetry, which in the original Thai sounds smooth and natural, in English sounds artificial because of the strain of pulling the language out of shape.

When I had thought a little about this it seemed that the best compromise would be to look for a verse form in English that roughly corresponded to the Thai form. People who translate Latin hexameters into English usually use blank verse (although it is perfectly possible to write hexameters in English) simply because blank verse has the same kind of function, the same flow and scope for free variation, as the Latin hexameter. It is possible to apply the same principle to Thai, but even this does not really solve the problem. For example, one Thai verse form, called a sakrawa, is extremely common and ranges in subject matter from the typical English four-line epigram to the English sonnet; it is a quite essential part of it that its length is rigidly fixed, but the length is eight lines. Perhaps I can convey some idea of what a sakrawa is like by using a little rhyme I wrote in English, in approximately the sakrawa rhyme scheme, in my little friend Tim's autograph album (the compulsory rhyme-words are in italics). The rhyme was as follows:

So I sit and write you a rhyme
for the time when I must depart,
wishing you god-speed from my heart
as you start your long journey too
through life's winding pathways and turn,
as you learn, to find friendships new,
aims to honour, goals to pursue,
straining through the mists to the light.

For a sakrawa there are also conventions about beginning and ending that I could not reproduce in English, but the length and rhyme structure are the same. To imagine a Thai sakrawa, however, you must remember that every syllable in Thai must be said in a
definite tone. A different tone makes it nonsense or gives a different meaning.

Every such set of sixty-four syllables in Thai will therefore necessarily have something like a tune running through the rhymes. Some types of tune are not allowed in a sakrawa, but naturally not all the details are prescribed—a tune that keeps the rules may be pleasant or unpleasant, just like any other piece of poetry or music.

When we translate a sakrawa we cannot reduce the subject matter to four lines to make it an epigrammatic quatrain or expand it to fourteen to make it a sonnet, but eight lines in English does not give the impression of a fixed length, which is important in the Thai. I doubt if anything better is available than the octave of a sonnet, but no one can really be satisfied with this.

The Thai form which comes nearest to blank verse is the klawn paet, which Ujjeni likes to write. Yet it is almost as unsatisfying to put a klawn paet into blank verse as it would be to turn a sakrawa into the octave of a sonnet. The continuity of the klawn paet is kept up by the same rhyme scheme as in a sakrawa, which makes it reminiscent of terza rima, whereas its loose division into four-line stanzas in a continuing whole recalls the Scottish ballad. The length and tone melody are freer than in a sakrawa. Thus the klawn paet is like blank verse only because—with the easy rhyming of the Thai language, and the scope for variety in the tonal melody—its structure leaves the poet the same kind of freedom to improvise as blank verse gives, and it is therefore used in much the same way. In the poem, 'This Has Just Come Clear to Me', which I have translated here, I have compromised by using blank verse, with rhymes or half rhymes occasionally to suggest the stanza structure.

Another real difficulty is the ending of a Thai poem. Thai poetry follows an Indian tradition of endings that fade away. To a Thai ear any ending that is conclusive or sharp sounds unpleasant; many Thai poems have a meaningless last syllable ɨɨ-i which represents the fading away of the voice. Yet English poetry likes to end on
a rhyme, or, if it is blank verse without a concluding rhymed couplet, to use some dominant word to show finality. A translation that is to be acceptable to the English ear must have an ending, but it is usually difficult to achieve one without at least slightly distorting the Thai.

One difficulty that was unusually severe in translating Ujjeni was her use of elegant and literary language. Modern Thai poetry uses many special literary words that probably ought to be translated by rather old-fashioned literary words in English. This may create difficulties in any modern translation, but Ujjeni has an unusually rich literary vocabulary, and yet likes to write about peasants, depressed conditions of life, and other topics where a modern English poet would tend to use realism and the vocabulary of common speech or dialect. I believe there is no sense of incongruity in the Thai, though of course a foreigner with rather limited knowledge of the language cannot be sure. Yet any attempt to translate at all literally seems very incongruous in English. It is difficult to convey Ujjeni's sensitive but often highly elaborate phrases and at the same time to reproduce what she is trying to say.

I cannot pretend to have tackled all these difficulties successfully. I only hope that my translation combined with these comments will give some idea of her work. For the effort certainly gave me a deeper appreciation of her, both as a poet and as a translator. As a poet she seems very rich in colourful expressions, conveying her impression vividly yet in unusual phrases that charm by the pattern of tones and sounds or by the internal rhymes and echoes. Yet she is not writing merely decorative poetry. Many of her poems are designed to interest people in improving the conditions of peasants and other poor people. At times, indeed, her portrait of the noble, unspoiled worker or peasant seems to a Western reader overdrawn. The motive, however, is compassion much more than indignation. Ujjeni is a devout Catholic, educated in mission schools, and she is concerned to show poverty as a social evil to be overcome, and an individual opportunity for compassion and help, rather than a
consequence of a bad karma, the accumulation of demerit in previous lives.

The religious motive is transparent, for Ujjeni is a most gentle and sensitive person; yet even she was mildly harassed by the police under the dictator Sarit for alleged communist sympathies, when she wrote one poem, in lighter vein, about the oxen reflecting on the failure of human beings to speak. The poem, however, is as unlike communist propaganda as it could possibly be. It combines a light satire with an almost wistful humour, that could not possibly generate hatred, though it might arouse shame.

It is very difficult to reproduce the character of Ujjeni’s social comment. Much of it gives a Western reader the impression of being old-fashioned, because its language is that of social responsibility addressed to a ruling class. Her feminism also has something of a Victorian flavour. Yet these impressions are largely illusory, because the conditions which she is trying to change are not really the same as those of the Victorian era, even though there are Victorian echoes. Many of the poems would, however, be difficult to translate into English—especially into elegant literary idiom—without strongly suggesting the Victorian era.

When I had read, and tried my hand at translating, some of Ujjeni’s poetry I returned to her own translation of my poem. I was amazed at the clear-headed choice of what could be done and what could not, at the ability to create a Thai poem out of the very phrases I had used, making me feel myself that I must have written them in Thai, and at the expert craftsmanship in her phrases and her rhyming. Not for the first time, I felt a bungling barbarian.
6 This Has Just Come Clear to Me
(A translation of a poem by Ujjeni)

Just that brave look in your eyes, a fighter born,
and the beautiful ruby mouth, most winning,
pure and fresh, moist with life, its intimate shade
not blurred or dried up like a painted red,
your figure too, graceful and charming like a slim bamboo,
looking far too strong to be compared to a flower,
the dark skin, so deeply tanned by the air and sun,
attracting more than any false sheen—

perhaps, indeed, my darling, in those days,
my life was quite astray, insanely possessive,
seeing only the beautiful body, honey sweet, spreading its charm,
that you scattered more and more, making me desire you.

When I came to realise that you must rise hours before dawn,
your brave heart quite unafraid of any danger,
taking your boat swiftly, cutting through the canals,
alone with only your small sister beside you,
that you must paddle against a current boiling all around you,
taxing your strength to the limit, straining your shoulders, to snatch
a profit of a few att, bearing your pain,
as the poor do, in honesty, with no thought of fear—

yes, my darling, I recall those days again;
my brains were so shallow, my head so stupid all through,
that I dared, in the rash folly of my heart,
to find you amusing, a nature of no importance;

but when I saw you standing up, unflinching,
in the bright glare that the fine ladies flee from—
hurrying under their parasols, afraid to burn their complexions—
you seemed to stand out lovable beyond the power of words.

You held the sugar-canies in your arms tightly, binding them
together;
they were heavy beyond your strength, strong though you are,
and a sharp leaf cut your cheek, making the blood gush out;
yet you turned smiling, broadly and happily.

Then indeed my darling I came to see
that the mind, even in a sheath of fine silk,
can be but a glitter, not glowing with happiness, like your heart
in this black dress, from which men turn their eyes.

When evening fell, I saw you smiling and laughing
by the kitchen fire, unabashed, absorbed in helping,
while young and old teased and joked
together, in fun, forgetting their cares, easing their hearts.

You slept beside your little sister, looking so beautiful,
like a bright print that an artist would seek out,
a small knife beside you, close to your body,
looking like a mother bird, warding off danger.

Then, my darling, I could do nothing but
gaze perplexed at you, dear soul, blessed one,
with thoughts revolving in me, too deep
to be expressed in any words.
I beg only to kiss that little hand,
so coarsened and rough and hard,
for those two hands are like a stream,
pouring out faith, soft and dear, my heart's delight.
7 Manas

When I first met Manas he was introduced to me as a man who wrestled with a bear to keep himself fit. Later I visited his home and met his wrestling companion, a real bear from the Thai jungles, though not fully grown. It was not long before the bear grew too strong even for Manas and had to be destroyed.

Now that Manas is blind and looks an old man I like to think of him as he was, when we were both much younger, and he could wrestle with bears. Indeed he was rather like a bear himself, a big man, with a big head and shoulders, and close-cropped hair. He loved the more remote parts of Thailand, where he could observe and hunt wild beasts. The only way he could pay for his travel to these areas was by organising hunting expeditions for his foreign friends, and he often did free-lance business in this field so that he would not be tied down.

It was not only the wild parts of Thailand that he loved; he loved the country as a whole. He told me several times that he had
visited every one of the five hundred or so districts of Thailand, and that very few other Thais had done this. I travelled with him from time to time, and he certainly seemed to know people everywhere in the country.

There was, I always thought, a peculiar quality in Manas’s love for Thailand. It was not that it was more intense than that of other Thais. Nearly every Thai I have met has a great pride in Thailand and a deep affection for the country. Yet for most of them it seems to be a strong sense of belonging, engendered by their culture and expressing itself partly in love for their King and Queen and their own institutions, partly in attachment to one or two particular places. Manas’s love for Thailand seemed to be rather self-consciously all-embracing. Physically he loved the country as a whole, prided himself on his knowledge of it, and was willing to give up a great deal to travel frequently throughout its length and breadth. Culturally he seemed equally anxious to soak himself in everything Thai; he loved Thai poetry, but apparently with little discrimination of different types or levels; he liked to explain Thai architecture or customs to his foreign friends, to teach them how to use the *phakhaoma*, or Thai cotton towel, for public bathing, how to return a Thai gesture of greeting, how to play Thai chess. He loved to recount old Thai stories. One of his favourite stories is included as the next chapter in this book.

Thais, of course, are like East Asians rather than West Asians in their attitude to Europe. Having successfully resisted the advance of Europe, they have no deep colonial scars. Like Chinese and (to some degree) Japanese, they can explain differences in culture with a self-confidence which does not need to assert that in every respect their own standards are the best. Manas expected me, in most matters, to prefer my own culture and to recognise that he preferred his. His love for things Thai was not assertive, but I was surprised at its universality; it seemed the kind of interest that a foreign specialist in Thailand would welcome in his Thai friends, but not what he would actually expect a Thai to have.
As I learnt more of Manas's life I think I came to understand these feelings. For Manas, though born a Thai, had not always considered himself a Thai. His experiences, as I came to understand them, showed me something of the way in which Thailand has absorbed other races into its culture and life.

Manas's father was French. His mother was Vietnamese by birth. But Manas himself was born in Thailand and was thus a Thai national. When he was quite a small boy his father asked him what he was, and Manas replied proudly that he was French. His father wisely told him that he was a Thai, and that he had better see that he became a good Thai.

Manas told me that his first reaction was disappointment. Later he realised that he had been isolating himself from other boys by trying to claim that he was different. Once he could be one of them he could try to achieve leadership in his own right. He must have done pretty well at school, though no one ever told me so. Of all the Thais I met who had never studied abroad I think Manas spoke the best English; but of course he spoke French much better. After he left school, his father managed to get him into the military college. How he did this I have never understood. Of course Manas is intelligent and also a very fine physical specimen, big enough to carry two normal Thais under his arms. But he is not of pure Thai race—and to get into the military college... I have never heard of another case.

In one sense the military college is the heart of Thailand. It is the place where the Thai national identity and Thai nationalism are most earnestly cultivated, and also the place where most of the nation's political leaders are trained. Almost every time I told Manas I was visiting some new province he would offer to give me an introduction to the Governor, with whom he had been at college. I didn't usually follow these up. A social introduction to a Governor is often an embarrassment in research, though there are times when the help given offsets the risk of being too closely identified with the government. On the occasions when I did take
it up, Manas was remembered with some warmth and affection, but also with surprise. It was years since he had made contact.

Clearly Manas did not take any great trouble to keep up his acquaintance with his important friends. Such trouble is very much the life of the Thai army. Acquaintance and patronage are essential for success, though without ability and some of the military virtues they will probably not carry an officer very far. Perhaps Manas felt he was shut out from this higher army life of social contacts and exploitation of opportunities. Yet I doubt if his origins would in fact have gone against him, once he graduated into the circle of army officers.

Nor would he have been debarred by either lack of ability or lack of effort. Thais are not lazy in the way some other Southeast Asian people are; but they take life rather easily. Manas was a fairly typical Thai, but at least rather better organised—more punctual and conscientious than most. Yet the competitive army life would not have suited him, for all his easy manner and his capacity to hold vast quantities of liquor. In one important respect he didn’t fit. He had far less sense of social standing than most Thais—certainly less than any other army officer that I know. Manas would offer to introduce you to a prince or a boatman, with very little sense of incongruity between the two. I know no other Thai who would do this.

It is difficult to explain the significance of this without giving a misleading impression of Thai society. One could easily form the idea that Thai classes were rigidly separated in some sort of caste system. On the contrary, there is a good deal of movement up and down the social scale. The ordinary Thai tries to move up. He respects success with much less reservation than a European, who is apt to have nagging thoughts about camels going through the eye of a needle. To the Thai it seems obvious that a superior position gives you more opportunities to do good, as well as relieving you from many of the pressures of desire and involvement which are such a manifest source of evil. It is, of course, wrong for
a Thai to be too much involved, even with achieving success; but if success comes it is clearly a blessing. He then accepts his new position and expects to be recognised as a patron or prospective patron by those less fortunate. If, on the other hand, he loses money or status and moves down, he accepts this as the result of his karma—his accumulated merit or demerit. He finds himself paying for some misdeed perhaps in the past, perhaps even in a forgotten earlier incarnation. Recognition that he is paying a price that must be paid, and that helps to clear the slate, should enable him to accept his more lowly position philosophically, to seek to placate and please those able to help him, and to avoid allowing even the increased pressures of poverty to make him too much involved.

I have the impression that Manas never fitted into this status system. When he gave up being a European he gave up the status of being a European, but switched to identify with Thais as a whole, in the way, perhaps, that his father identified with Europeans as a whole—a blend having in it something still surviving from liberty, equality, fraternity, and the enlightenment, as well as something of the superior European minority in a non-European sea, recognising every other European as a potential ally. So it was with the Thais as a whole that he identified himself, a passionate identification, no less dominant an influence in his life for never being wholly reciprocated. For, to the ordinary Thai, being a Thai is natural; and being natural it is particular, tied to a local loyalty, an identified rung on the ladder.

Because of his abilities and his universality Manas naturally had a leaning to public life. One line in which he was relatively successful, when external conditions were favourable, was political journalism. Yet he was too much involved with Thailand as a whole to settle for an office assignment, a regular column in one newspaper. He was a free lance, seeking out new information, new causes to further, and selling his copy now here, now there. Nothing could be allowed to hold him so firmly that he would not be free to visit
some new area, lead a hunting expedition in this or that wild district, or find out more about another aspect of Thai culture: jewellery or erotica, architecture or the range of uses of the Thai *phakhaoma*.

He had his successes and enjoyed them frankly, like a Thai. Yet he had not really the temperament for success. I believe his journalism, in three different languages, was always his main source of income, but his range of other occupations would be a census-taker’s nightmare. He had been a soldier and a travel agent, a hunter and a retailer, a translator, a commission agent, and an economic investigator. It was at least a full and interesting life, and his family had enough to live on. Then his writings annoyed the dictator Sarit.

At one time he greatly admired Sarit, when Sarit showed consummate skill in handling the students’ protests after the ‘dirty election’ in 1957. Even later he was less critical than many, but perhaps because he basically admired Sarit’s energy, generosity, and colourful personality he felt too secure in expressing his disappointment. Nothing dramatic happened. He merely heard from one newspaper after another that his articles were no longer acceptable.

Without his journalism he ran into severe difficulties. It was at this time I heard from him about modern Thai money-lenders—including many of the branches of banks. Their method is very simple. To get a loan, you have to write a cheque. Writing dud cheques is a crime punishable by a prison sentence in Thailand; but banks and others enjoying political protection can insist on your writing a cheque against a non-existent balance, and hold this as a weapon to control you thereafter.

Even worse disaster was to follow. A road accident on one of his trips into the country left him half paralysed for a year; and soon after he learnt to walk and to write again, he inexplicably lost his sight.

He lives in seclusion now, far away in jungle country, at the top of a high mountain. The wide view is one he used to know, and the air is cool.
Some of his former friends say it is his karma. A man who killed and led others to kill all those animals—surely the laws of life cannot be averted. One of the few things about Thai Buddhism that I find really disagreeable is the Thais' use of animals solely as counters for merit-making purposes. Thais are not in any way kind to animals. Every year thousands of fish and birds are trapped for the sole purpose of selling them to people who want to earn merit by setting them free. The most devout Buddhist does not condemn the catching of them or regard it as a scandal. A Thai will row some distance to avoid killing a fish in sight of the temple, for fear of offending his religion. All this time he will leave the fish without water suffering in the boat. I have talked with a number of sincere Buddhists who are not vegetarians. Almost without exception they regard it as not merely morally neutral but positively sinful to try to insist on humane killing of the meat one eats. The only way to avoid complicity in the killing is to leave it entirely to someone else.

Manas is a Buddhist, but he is free of this rather painful moralising. His attitude to the beasts he hunted was the odd mixture of interest, admiration, and often pity, combined with animal enjoyment of the chase, which most of us who do not hunt find contradictory, genuine, yet inexplicable. But seeing him with the bear, his wrestling companion, I felt I half understood it.

Somehow I cannot see Manas's karma at least in this life—I can speak of no other—weighing at all heavily on him. He is complex certainly, but essentially gentle. Except perhaps once. He spoke of only one occasion when his military training was put to use. This was 'when we had that trouble with the French'.
Once upon a time there was a monk, who, having studied for many years in his monastery, came to the conclusion that he understood women. He realised that this made him, probably, unique for it is everywhere understood that a man cannot understand women. He also came to the conclusion that he would be wasting his time if he stayed in the monastery, for surely a man who understands women can become very powerful in the world, since to understand something is to have power over it. So he put off his yellow robes and went out again into the world dressed as a common man. But he could not disguise his shaven head.

He walked far on that first day outside the walls of the monastery which he left at dawn. By mid-afternoon he was very hot and tired, so when he came to a grove of trees outside a village he sat down to rest in the shade, not far from the village well.
young and pretty girl came to draw water from the well, and as he was thirsty he walked across to her and asked her for a drink of water.

She gave him some of the cool, freshly drawn water and when he had drunk and washed his face to refresh himself she asked,

‘Well, Pithit, who are you? where are you from? and where are you going?’

For she was curious about this man who, from his shaven head, had obviously been a monk, but was now wandering the world dressed as a common man.

He answered her very frankly.

‘Yes, I was a monk until this morning. I had been a monk for many years that I spent in studying.’

‘What did you study, Pithit?’

‘I studied women—and very recently I realised that I knew all about the subject. I understood women perfectly and so I decided to put off my yellow robes and come into the world and use my knowledge to gain power.’

‘What do you mean, you understand women?’

‘I know all about them. I know what they think, and what they will do, and how and why they will do it.’

‘If that were so you would be a very clever man—but I do not think it is so, for no man understands women.’

‘Surely I do.’

‘Can you prove it?’

‘How?’

As he was thinking of a way to show his skill, the pretty girl smiled to herself and suddenly began to scream at the top of her voice. ‘Help! Help!’

The man nearly jumped out of his skin with surprise.

‘What are you doing, woman?’ he said.

‘Surely you understand,’ she mocked.

But he did not understand, even when he saw a crowd of men coming out of the village. When he saw that they were armed with sticks and axes and even some old guns he became frightened.
'What are they coming here for, with so many arms?'
'Surely you understand! You'll soon see.'
'What are they going to do?'
'I shall tell them that you molested me and tried to make love to me and they will kill you.'
'But I haven't done anything to you.'
'No. But when I tell them you have they will believe me, and will kill you!'

The man was very frightened and she began to laugh at him.
'Do you want me to save you?'
'Yes, I will do anything, give you anything!'
'Jump into the well, and I will save you.'
'Jump into the well . . .?'
'Yes, quickly or I shall not save you.'

So the poor man who didn't want to be killed saw nothing for it but to jump into the well.

When the men from the village arrived they asked the girl why she had screamed. Had somebody attacked her? Where was he?
'Oh no,' she said, 'a poor man who must have been a monk was trying to get water from the well to drink when he fell in. I wasn't strong enough to pull him out so I cried for help.'

The men gathered around the well and sure enough there was a man in the water, who was nearly drowning for he could not swim. Quickly they let down a rope and drew him up, more dead than alive. When they saw what a bad way he was in they carried him back to the village, lent him clothes while his were being dried and told the woman to bring him a warm drink. When she came he asked: 'Why did you do this? First you put me in danger by threatening to tell lies about me, then you made me jump into a well where I nearly drowned, then you saved my life and cared for me. I do not understand.'

The girl smiled.
'I thought you knew all about women, how and why they do things! Let this be a lesson to you, Pithit, that you do not know everything.'
And she went away smiling.

The next morning when he left the village he saw the pretty girl smiling among the people who came to say good-bye, but he forgave her for surely she had taught him a valuable lesson and now his knowledge was complete. He knew all about women. So he went on his way, thinking how to make use of his knowledge.

At the end of the second day he came to another village and was sitting in a pavilion in the temple grounds when a woman came by. He greeted her politely. Because he was a stranger to the village, the woman stopped and asked him who he was, where he was from, and where he was going. So he told her how he had studied women and thought he knew all about them but how his education had been incomplete until the woman at the well had taught him a painful lesson that had completed his knowledge so that now he really understood women and all their tricks.

As he described his fear of the men who came at the girl’s cries and told how he had nearly drowned in the well she began to laugh quietly, but when he said that now he really understood women and all their tricks she laughed so much that he was alarmed and said:

‘What is the matter? Why do you laugh so loud?’

When she had recovered and was able to speak she said, ‘You don’t know anything yet. Women have stranger tricks than that.’

‘I don’t believe it. I know them all.’

‘I will show you something a woman can do, that you have never heard of.’

‘What can that be?’

‘I will let you make love to me in front of my husband.’

‘Impossible.’

‘Come with me and you shall see.’

The man was anxious to see how she could do the impossible so he went with her to her house where her husband was waiting. She introduced the traveller to her husband who was very glad to meet him for they saw few strangers in that village. While they
were drinking coconut water together the woman said to her husband, ‘Do you know, Pithit here has come all this way because he is a musician and has heard that you are the cleverest flute player in the country.’

This pleased the husband very much and he began modestly to say, ‘Well, I can play a little,’ but his wife interrupted and said, ‘Oh, don’t be modest. Show him you can do what nobody else can do. Anybody can play the flute when he can see where to put his fingers, but you are the only one who can play blindfolded. Let us show him!’

The husband agreed, so she blindfolded him completely with a cloth and put a bag over his head, leaving only his mouth uncovered and put his flute into his hands. When she had done this she turned to the stranger and with one twist of her wrist let fall her simple skirt to the floor.

‘Are you ready?’ she said. ‘Go.’

The husband was ready and began to play, and the stranger, excited by the beauty of her body, was ready too. He drew her into his arms and to the sweet music of the flute they began the sweet dance of love together. The noise they made sounded faintly to the husband, who thought they were applauding his skill, so he played faster. The faster his playing, the faster their dance became, until at last they were quite exhausted by passion. Deftly the woman drew on her skirt, and said in a composed voice, ‘That’s enough,’ and as she untied the cloth from her husband’s eyes she added, ‘and let that be a lesson to you not to say to a woman that anything is impossible!’

Her husband agreed with her for he thought she was speaking of his flute playing, and the man agreed, ‘for’, said he, ‘this has been a lesson to me that I do not know what a woman knows’.

He ate with his host that evening and stayed in the house for the night. Next morning he went on his way thinking that now he surely knew everything and must find some way to use his power.

It was midday when he reached the next village and he felt
hungry. So he went to a house where, as he could smell, some food was being cooked, and asked for a little rice. The woman who was cooking the food was young and beautiful and innocent-looking and when he saw her he thought surely here was a woman he could understand.

'Of course, Pithit, you may have some rice, and some of this curry too. But tell me, who are you, where do you come from, and where are you going?'

So he told her. When he spoke of his studies she looked at him with admiration as if she agreed with him that he must know all about women. When he told her of the lesson he had learnt from the woman at the well she too laughed and began to interrupt him but he said, 'Wait, there is more', and told her of the woman whose husband played the flute blindfolded. She no longer laughed but began to look more and more scornful.

'Why,' she said, when he said that now he really knew women and all their tricks, 'you have seen nothing. What that woman did was too easy. Any woman could do that. I can do more than that.'

'Surely,' he said, 'there is no more any woman can do!'

'Ah, but there is!' she said. 'I can let you make love to me with my husband watching!'

'He must be a very bad husband then!'

'He's a very good husband and loves me very much!'

'Then what you say is impossible!'

'I'll show you. I'm just going to take this food to him in the fields where he is working. You come with me and do as I tell you and I'll show you nothing is impossible for a woman.'

He walked with her to the fields and as they went she gave him certain instructions. When they reached a grove of trees he climbed into one of the taller trees and she went to fetch her husband to his meal. When they came back it was obvious that the husband loved his young innocent wife very much. He thanked her for bringing his meal and said she ought not to come so far all alone, for it was dangerous for so young and pretty a girl to be alone.
She laughed and was helping her husband to spread a cloth when a loud voice came out of the tree.

'Hey, what are you doing? Are you not afraid that lightning may strike you? Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Have you nothing better to do than to strip yourselves naked and make love in broad daylight?'

The husband shouted angrily.

'What do you mean, make love? We are getting ready to eat.'

'I saw you. I can see you enjoying yourselves in that indecent fashion there. You ought to be ashamed.'

The husband was more angry than ever, and drew his knife and began to climb the tree, saying he would kill the man who spoke so of his innocent good wife.

But the wife threw her arms about him and said, 'Don't do that. You mustn't kill a man. Besides, it may be that there is a spell on this tree and from up there it may look as though we were making love. Let him come down and you go up to see if he was telling the truth—perhaps it is something to do with the tree and its great height.'

The husband agreed and said he would kill the man if he had not been telling the truth. The man came down from the tree and agreed that the husband could kill him if he had not been telling the truth. No sooner had the husband turned his back and begun to climb the tree than the woman threw off her skirt and beckoned to the stranger, who began to caress her in wonder at her beauty. She was no less skilful than beautiful and soon they lost interest in everything but the delight they were sharing. So engrossing did they find each other that the man forgot the flute player's wife and they hardly listened when the husband shouted from the tree.

'But it is quite true, sister mine. From up here it does look as though you are making love. How strange. You look as though you are having a very good time, how very interesting.'

So interesting did he find the sight that he came down the tree slowly and the woman, satisfied at last, had time to dress and to sit
demurely beside the food waiting for her husband. The stranger watched her innocent smile of welcome to her puzzled husband, as she said, 'You see, I was right. Are you not glad that you didn't kill him but did as I said? You see, a woman knows things a man does not understand.'

But the stranger understood one thing. He got up and said good-bye.

'But', said the husband, 'will you not stay and eat with us? Where are you off to in such a hurry?'

'I am going back to my monastery,' he said, 'for now I know that I know nothing.'

And as he walked away he said to himself, 'Nothing at all. Least of all women.'

And this the Wisdom of Solomon could not fathom, either.
Ui is a village headman in a country village in the middle of Thailand's dry northeast region. When I first met him it was already late in the afternoon, and I had spent nearly two days in reaching his village from Bangkok. I had travelled all day in the bus to Roi-et. The next day, after an hour or two in the government offices, I had ridden a rickety country bus over rough, unsealed roads to the District Office, and there arranged for a jeep taxi to take me to Ui's village. Having chartered the taxi myself, I rather expected to be the only passenger, but I was reckoning without the intense pressure on all transport that is felt in the northeast. We were travelling over a road that was just being built: road engineers in Thailand have to reckon that their roadbed will be used continually, almost as soon as the trees are cleared and the first grader has passed over the trace. It was impossible to waste a vehicle on a solitary foreigner and his folding bed. Nor were there only human passengers. Until I protested vehemently and had them moved
elsewhere, a consignment of three ducks was comfortably lodged on my bed.

The District Agricultural Officer and a policeman were among the passengers, and after a brief stop to deliver the ducks and other cargo we all drove up to Ui's house. Ui had, of course, no telephone and our arrival had not been announced, although I had written to the District Office a full month in advance. At half-past four in the afternoon a foreigner was suddenly presented right at his door, wanting to stay three days in the village.

I hardly expected Ui to be delighted about my visit. I expected rather agonised consultations, perhaps with the priests about lodging me in the temple, perhaps with his wife or his neighbours. What actually happened surprised me. He made casual conversation—polite, fairly respectful, sometimes a little playful—with the Agricultural Officer and, from time to time, with me. He did not commit himself, or anyone else, until nearly the time when the car had to return. Then quite suddenly he gave instructions that I should set up my bed in his outer room, and gave a whole series of orders for people to come round and see me. No one was consulted at all.

The plans were not very efficient; several details had to be changed later. I should not regard Ui as either a particularly able or a particularly decisive man. Yet he had some strength of personality, and gave the impression of a reserve of power. The chief thing I noticed about him was this habit—when he had to make a decision—of sitting and chatting apparently aimlessly with the people concerned, never obviously asking relevant questions, never consulting, never even obviously thinking, and then suddenly reaching his decision.

Ui could read, but was clearly not an educated man. He trusted his intuitions; but he had been headman for many years and had apparently learnt by experience that he made fewer mistakes if he allowed time to let his impressions of character form, and to let all the circumstances make an impact on him.
The headman usually has to be one of the richer villagers, for the government pays him only a nominal salary. Ui was probably not the richest man in the village, but by village standards he was comfortable. He had some land and a small herd of buffaloes that he rented out, and I think his sons, and a little hired labour, did most of the work on his farm. He would gladly have accompanied me on all my interviewing, but I had to insist on just being introduced, and doing the questions by myself. His willingness might have signified merely exceptional hospitality—or excessive suspicion—but at least it must have meant he was not overburdened with work.

The house was old-fashioned, but very spacious for a village house. It was built of unshaped poles, mat walls, and thatched roof, with thick, planed, but unpainted floor boards. It had two wings, of which the one on the left was probably the original house, and the other, with its highly polished floor, a reception room built on when he became headman. Between the two was a platform some twelve feet wide and stretching back some eighteen feet, unroofed except for the back corner, where a shed about six feet square adjoined the old house. This was partly roofed with corrugated iron and served as the kitchen. The other side of the platform at the back carried some ten large water jars and a space for washing. The water must have been carried some distance, for there was no well, and rain had not fallen for several months.

The space where my bed was set up must have been the outer room of the old house, but it had now been walled in as a dormitory for the young men, adjacent to the sleeping quarters where Ui and the womenfolk slept. I suspected that Ui’s domestic arrangements were a little unorthodox, but I did not look into that. When the outer door was bolted for the night I saw that a long knife had been leant up against it. This was a great comfort to me. I had been told where the nearest lavatory was—some three hundred yards away, at the school—and at night fierce dogs prowled around the houses. In case of need, I could travel armed.
Perhaps the knife called up other associations in my mind, as I lay awake listening to the breathing of the young men. This had been very wild frontier country not so many generations back. These were Isan people—people of the northeast of Thailand, neither quite Thai nor quite Lao. For a good many centuries the Lao princes, the dwindling Khmer empire, and the Thais busied themselves with preventing one another from organising this area, and a number of tiny states remained independent and self-supporting. Strangers would hardly be welcome in such conditions, and trade would be limited.

I suddenly felt very much a foreigner and wondered whether I should be able to cope. I was no longer, I felt, among my friendly and charming Thais. Even the language was different. This was an area that spoke Lao. Nearly all the villagers had been to school and had been taught how to speak standard Thai—which differs from Lao about as much as broad Scots from standard Australian—but they did not feel at home in the language or speak it among themselves.

I wondered how they felt about Thailand. Was this a colonial situation, like the one I had known in Malaya? Did they want to be Lao citizens, or hanker for their old unattached status? I was not primarily concerned to answer these questions, but they had some bearing on my work.

At least I was able to observe Ui’s reactions. Most of the headmen I met had an attitude to the government rather like that of a foreman to the boss or a corporal to the army. They had their job to do, and formally identified themselves with authority; yet they could only do their job if they were accepted; and this often involved identifying also with the ordinary people’s feeling of being separate from the government. Ui’s position was not very different; but one had the feeling that he was speaking and acting not merely for the people as something separate from the government but for the Isan people as something separate from the Thai government. In this respect he was like a Chinese civil servant in pre-war
Singapore who accepted British rule as the best thing available. Ui was prepared to work for the Thai government, but rather resented what he regarded as an inferior status of Isan people. Yet in one respect he was quite unlike any colonial civil servant. He resented the position of the Isan people precisely because he regarded them as Thais, quite as much entitled to consideration as any other Thai.

Once I showed him a pin I had received from Queen Sirikit for blood donations to the Thai Red Cross blood transfusion service. He was as delighted as any other Thai that the Queen had given it to me and that I admired her; but he resented the fact that these things happened in Bangkok and not for his Isan people.

In character, too, Ui and most of his fellow villagers seemed to differ from central Thais, particularly in their style of politeness. Ui was affable, in a gruff, rather earthy way. In things that really mattered—whether to me or to his villagers—he was considerate and would often go to some trouble to help. But it was done without the subtle consideration for your comfort, the unfailing grace and charm, that characterise the politeness of the central Thai. Thai politeness is meant to make social relations happy and enjoyable, rather than to deepen them. It is charming but in a way unselective; as a human soul you are entitled to this consideration, though it varies according to the relationship. A farmer will be polite with different material gestures and different verbal gestures from those of an educated townsman; but the essential charm is the same. Ui was a lot more blunt, yet one felt that he was feeling his way towards a closer relationship. I came slowly to appreciate his toughness, his judiciousness (within the limits of his knowledge), his practical concern for the welfare of his villagers. I think he, too, came to enjoy the foreigner’s company and to begin perhaps to respect me, or at least to wish me well. It was an approach to friendship less sweetened, but also less complicated, by the pervasive grace and gentleness of central Thai society.

Ui, of course, did not cease to think of me as a foreigner, but
I seemed to become his particular foreigner, to whom he could explain his hostile reactions to foreigners with the expectation that I would be on his side. I had experienced this before, with intelligent but uneducated Asians in remote areas—an Indian village teacher trying to communicate to me his delight when he heard of the sinking of the British warships, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, off Malaya, a Japanese innkeeper explaining his feelings about war crimes and the bombing of Hiroshima. They were not arguing; they were just unaware of some of the deep divisions which tend to separate men from one another, and expressed their own point of view without reserve because they had achieved some feeling of personal trust. Ui regarded me as an American, and I had no wish to stress the difference, yet he explained to me some of his feelings about Americans.

It started with his comments on communists, when we heard American bombers flying far overhead on their way to Vietnam. His comments on them were unprintable, with a hatred that made him quite incoherent; his independence of mind, his concern for his villagers' welfare, and his pragmatic, critical loyalty, would make it virtually certain that he would be singled out for a midnight murder if their terrorists came to his village, and he probably realised this. Yet these deep feelings were not the ones he could express for long. He went on to the disturbance of his villagers' way of life, and one of the disturbances he resented was the need to bring these American soldiers in.

I found myself translating his Thai, with its Lao accent, into the cockney phrases of my fellow soldiers when I returned to England at the end of World War II. They fitted almost exactly: the girls, the soldiers with too much money, the rising prices of all their little luxuries, and then the girls again, and a phrase that we might translate, 'but I suppose we must have the bastards here'. Then, without any attempt to conceal the train of thought, he asked me with real solicitude whether I did not feel lonely travelling by myself through all these villages. Every woman in the country, he
said, was interested only in getting a foreigner for herself. I need do no more than look and beckon.

He expected me to share his contempt, both for the women and for my presumed countrymen, even though—because he had come closer to me—he felt a fellow male with me and half wanted me to take his advice. It was too complicated to explain to Ui that had I had the time and the inclination for such adventures I should have found his unpolished, eager, doubtless very loyal, Isan women no match for the delicate, graceful, affectionate, and essentially temporary women of central Thailand. I did not have the inclination or the time, and basically on these matters I suppose I shared Ui's northeastern values, so I did not take his advice.

That is how I remember Ui, the man of authority in a distant, harsh, rather self-contained region, the man who became almost ready to be my friend. One incident, in particular, near the end of my stay, summarises much of my experience of Ui and of that region to which he belonged.

It was already dark and the dim oil lamps had been lit when they brought a half-witted stranger, a wandering mental defective, to his house. There had been some commotion, chaffing by the young men, and barking of dogs; probably it was still too early for them to bite. They brought the idiot up the stairs, and he sat in the lamplight, grinning and trembling and not answering a word to any questions.

Ui occasionally threw him a question, but without much hope of success. Sometimes he asked a question of one of those who brought him in. Mostly he just talked generally about idiots and their ways. I asked about the government's services for such people, and he replied that the government here would not thank him for burdening them with an idiot.

Finally he made up his mind. 'Nobody will take him in here', he said. 'Take him to the far side of the village and drive him out.'
As I left the aircraft at Chiengmai airport I could not help recalling my last visit to Chiengmai. Then we had all made the journey together to accompany Boonma, who was coming to take up a new job in the Social Welfare Department. My friend Jaroen, who had been at school with Boonma, was delighted that he had been appointed here, and asked me to come up, with the whole Jaroen family, to see him into his new home.

I had been very pleased to come, not only because it would be fun travelling overnight, second-class, by rail, with a Thai family—buying hot dumplings in rice paper, and sweet black coffee in a polythene bag tied round a single straw, from the station platforms; seeing other Thai families, relaxed and at home, in the small hours of the morning—but also because I had developed a deep respect for Boonma. He had started life as a farmer’s son and had grown into one of those intensely serious-minded—even dedicated—civil servants, who are perhaps not common, but certainly to be found
in every Department. It was difficult to prevent him talking shop all the time, and it was clear that the jockeying for position, the quest for patronage, the quarrels, the budgetary obstacles, were daily frustrations in a genuine struggle to achieve his professional objectives.

We had two days in the Chiengmai area, and it was then that I first saw the farms that I was now going to visit for my research. I did not pay much attention to them then, for we were being shown the sights of Chiengmai district by one of Boonma's future colleagues, a civil servant named Chamnian, very different from Boonma. He was very affable to everyone, obviously very prosperous, and plainly a man with other financial interests outside his government duties. He showed us the summer palace and the two great shrines of the area, and drove us through the grounds of the new university, but his chief concern was clearly to take us to the shops where all the beautiful girls of Chiengmai were employed to sell silk. In one, I recall, a former Miss Thailand was running a sideline in men's hats inscribed—in large letters on the side—with 'A Memento of Sushila'. I found our host's sparring with the girls amusing, but Boonma was plainly uninterested. He was sizing up the country, and clearly realising that it was not here, in these prosperous valleys, that he would be working to relieve distress.

Now it was my task to look at the fields, and later to question the farmers. I had plenty of opportunity to see the farming, for the village I was to visit was nearly fifty miles down the valley, and the District Officer drove me down in his land-rover. The valley was wide, but the hills on both sides were steep and high. All the available land was taken up, and the fields and farms were small. This was the dry season, and in many parts of Thailand nothing was growing, but here there was plenty of irrigation water and every field seemed to be growing tobacco, peanuts, garlic, or some other off-season crop.

At the end of our journey we turned off the main road, which by now (in spite of the dry season) seemed barely passable, and went
along a mile of side road, built by the villagers themselves. This was the village where I was to work for three days, and it was in this village that I met Lüan.

The headman called together as many of the farmers as he could muster, and I picked out the ones I wanted to visit and arranged suitable times and places. Most of them were going to be at home some time during the next three days, and I worked out a suitable program of work. Lüan, however, did not want to see me at his home. He was clearly anxious that I should do the interviewing in the fields, and naturally I was very willing to do this; normally Thai farmers like to be questioned relaxing in the shade, which suited me at the time, though it meant a separate trip to the fields later.

I had heard that Lüan was a good farmer, and I thought perhaps he wanted to show off his farm to the visitor. I did not realise that his purpose was to take advantage of what he believed to be my great knowledge of Thai farming. Clearly if I travelled all over Thailand seeing farms and questioning farmers I must have much to teach him.

Now I am an economist, and not even an agricultural-economics specialist. I would no more dream of trying to tell a farmer how to do his job than of trying to tell an industrial manager how to do his; and I soon realised that Lüan, who was constantly in touch with the latest extension work, was the last person I could help in this way. It took a little time to convince him that I really was ignorant about most of the points on which he felt he needed more knowledge, but he was undeterred even then. He began asking me about what I had seen in farms elsewhere in Thailand, and his questions on climate and soils were intelligent and searching. He was plainly on the look-out for innovations that he could bring in on his farm, but was not simply imitating what others did. He seemed rather more vague about the relevance of different rates of wages, different loan-terms, in other places. Then he began to realise that he was getting near to my own interest. It was remarkable to see him fastening on to a new kind of information and
beginning to ask questions about co-operatives and similar matters. Plainly he had trained himself, more or less intuitively, to have a scent for knowledge, and to go after it whenever he had a chance. I wished I could have had him as a student.

He showed me what he was trying to do in his off-season farming in the rice fields. His knowledge was not co-ordinated, but I was amazed how active his mind was on all the problems of his farm—the water control from his irrigation pump, the improvement of his soil, the uncertainty of some prices and greater stability of others.

When we came to the formal questionnaire—for, of course, I let him try to make use of me first before I put it to him—I found I already knew much of what I wanted to know, from the flood of questions he had asked me. I had not, however, seen his tractor. We talked a bit about investment, and it was clear that his doubts about whether he should have bought it were very sensible ones. He knew how to use capital productively and many of his shafts of thought about it made sense to me.

In trying to find out how he would use new capital I ran into a surprise. The one thing in which he was interested for the present was sending money to his children. Indeed this was at the moment the main purpose of all his farming operations. I made up my mind to ask more about this when my farming questions were finished, for he was plainly a most devoted father, but there was little I could find out about new investment for the present. For some years at least there would be no more investment for Liian.

I found that his irrigated fields were giving two good crops of rice a year, that he was also using almost the whole area for off-season crops and constantly trying out new ones. He had been using fertilisers for many years, beginning with the quantities recommended by the Agricultural Officer, but trying different quantities for himself. He had, however, apparently never thought of deliberately using a method on one area and not on another so as to get a comparison. The idea seemed to appeal to him, and I
could see him making a mental note of it. I was making a mental note about the Agricultural Officer, who knew him but had apparently never realised how useful he could be if he could be taught an experimental attitude.

While we were still on the questionnaire his wife joined us with a cold drink. We finished off the questionnaire, and I began to ask about the children. A change come over Lüan. Hitherto he had been shrewd, inquisitive, keen on every aspect of his job. Now he became the proud father, delighted to have the opportunity to tell me about his wonderful children. The elder one had to come first for she had done very well. She was in Chiengmai city, training to be a teacher, and this had been quite expensive; but last year their son had succeeded in getting into Chulalongkorn University and had gone to Bangkok. This was a very great expense; but for the moment they were not interested in the expense.

The mother began telling me about his career, in the village school, at the secondary school ten miles away, in the pre-university classes in Chiengmai, and now away in Bangkok. She was any mother, anywhere, with a son who was a genius. I shared her love, her pride, her anxieties. She was speaking Thai, of course, and unlike her husband she lapsed quite often into pure northern dialect, which is virtually another language; but I felt sure it did not matter. I knew what she was talking about, and I could not help knowing what she was saying. The detail was unimportant in comparison with this shared experience of our human heritage.

In time, this contact beyond all language came to an end. I knew something about universities and I had to be questioned; and to answer I had to question in turn. They had not brought the boy’s letter with them and they did not understand much about faculties and subjects and could not remember the names. They knew some lecturers’ names, but without a University calendar I could not work out what subjects he was doing, or give them much information. We talked about Chulalongkorn University without really making much contact.
I thought of the boy, in his uniform of open-necked shirt and trousers, walking about the grounds of the University, feeling unguided and insecure as so many of them do, often holding hands—even the boys—to give one another some feeling of security. The lecturers would give them mainly English books to read, which they would read painfully and with little understanding. Often the more intelligent ones would be unable to co-ordinate what they read with the lecturers’ notes, while the less intelligent—provided they could merely follow the lectures—would not trouble to try to do so, and would pass their examinations.

Living in Bangkok was also often difficult for boys from the provinces. If they came from the central plain they would have a good chance of having relatives in the city; but Chiengmai was another matter. Lüan himself had never been to Bangkok, and he told me he had no relatives there. I thought of his son living in very crowded lodgings with other boys from the provinces; and the struggle for a peasant’s son suddenly became more vivid to me. He would have changed a good deal already at the senior secondary school in Chiengmai, but it would still be a very different world from his own. He would need great strength of character to remain sane and balanced through such an upheaval.

Lüan was spared most of the anxieties that I felt on his behalf. He may have had other anxieties but he had no doubt at all that this was merely a step in an inevitable progress to the ranks of the senior civil service. His son was going to be an official. He would pass his examinations and enter the King’s service. The present difficulties and expenses were merely minor hurdles along that road.

With rather less confidence, I shared their hope. I felt it would be a good thing for Thailand if a son of this Lüan and his wife should reach the ranks of the senior civil service. Boonma was much in my mind. Perhaps this boy too would remember the ordinary peasants in the country, of whom he had once been one. Perhaps he too would be dedicated to their service.
I expressed the hope that Lüan’s son would indeed become a government official, and added the further hope that he would be able to come back to the country and help the country people.

Lüan was quick to disagree. ‘It’s no use helping people in the country’, he said. ‘People in the country can’t afford to pay. The only ones who make money in the country are those who oppress the people. I wouldn’t want him to do that. He must live in the city where there are Chinese and foreigners who can pay for his help.’
It was an interesting experience to return to Peace Hall, the Sala Santitham or headquarters building of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, or ECAFE as we called it even then. I had to interview a young Chinese, with a Thai name and a Thai wife, who was a member of the local staff of the secretariat. He was a recognised source of information for the secretariat on the activities of the Chinese business community. When I met him he gave me his information in a business-like way, seemed to be accepted both as a Thai and as a member of the Chinese community, and was clearly satisfied with his position as a local member of the international organisation. ECAFE had obviously settled down. It was more than a dozen years since it had moved into the new building. When I had joined the staff of the organisation as a temporary consultant, it was overcrowded and uncomfortable in the Paruskawan Palace, one of the palaces of the old régime which the Thai government had lent while the new offices were being
built. Peace Hall had given us all the space we needed then; but of course no civil service fails, in time, to subdivide its offices. I noticed that I was interviewing in an office cut out of one of the old wide, comfortable corridors. Across the narrow passage was the room where Chalin had worked in the old days. This room too was sadly subdivided, but I went in, half hoping Chalin would still be there.

Chalin, I learnt, was no longer an international civil servant. Her husband had become a very important official in the Thai government, and Chalin had joined the ranks of the decorative but very forceful Thai ladies who meet informally in one another's houses and arrange what is to happen: the groupings which determine Thai political power, the marriages which shape the key families' future, and the contracts which operate the economy. I should have realised it would come to this. She would not fit into this society, but the laws of promotion are inexorable.

When I first came to ecafe I lived in a little house in a Thai compound, surrounded by rice fields. At the end of the day I would leave the international world behind and drive home to my compound, where no one could speak a word of English. I could retire to my house and read; but as we had no electricity in those days I usually read only for my work, not for pleasure. Whenever I could, I would sit under one of the other houses, or on the steps of my own, chatting as best I could with anyone who would join me. Looking back I wonder at the patience of my companions, for my Thai must have been execrable. But they persevered, and so did I. Our conversation acquired, first an area of mutual intelligibility, and later an increasing range of topics that could be discussed.

In the office I spoke no Thai at all. I found, however, that I often had bits of conversation from the night before, which I had not understood and wanted to repeat to a Thai who knew English. Chalin was an economist in the same division, and I would often go and pester her with questions during morning tea.
She was not altogether a reliable informant, for she had a great sense of fun, and would often pull my leg, giving me unlikely explanations or teaching me phrases that had allusions or double meanings, to amuse my village. Thais enjoy word play and this eager foreigner was a natural butt. It was only later that I realised some of the tricks she had been playing. She did not actually teach me wrong meanings—so far as I know, no Thai has ever deliberately done that; but she would teach me words that were incongruous in my position, or that suggested improper rhymes.

Later she would sometimes have lunch with me and introduce me to Thai restaurants, teaching me Thai swear-words, proverbs, and the like, sometimes with the more junior Thai economists, sometimes alone. From her, and from the others, I pieced together something of the situation of the locally recruited staff of the international organisation.

Like other international organisations this one had quotas of members from the different participating countries. Neither Chalin nor I ever understood how the complicated system worked, but she was one of the fortunate ones who somehow was reckoned on Thailand's quota. She had an American Master's degree and the junior economists all had Thai degrees, at the Bachelor level. One thing they all resented was that although there were by then a few Thais with Master's degrees, nearly all of them had been sent abroad by the government and were obliged to come back and serve their own government, for a purely nominal salary, for twice as many years as they had studied abroad. Chalin was one of the very few with a higher degree who was untied, and her United Nations salary enabled her husband to concentrate on his professional job instead of earning money on the side. The rest of the economists, having been trained in a system which had no higher degrees, also resented their inferior status in their own country. They were quite accustomed to foreigners being paid more for the same work: their own government paid foreigners up to three times as much as Thais, whenever they needed foreign help; but
the Thais were always preferred for positions of authority. The status of the locally recruited officer was thus a source of great resentment among Thai graduates, and the international bodies—though prized by the politicians for the prestige that they brought to Bangkok—were never really accepted in Thai society.

I could see that all this put Chalin in a difficult position, but being a Thai she never seemed much put out by it. She herself fitted very well into the international society, in which she could have spent most of her time. It would not have been difficult for her to know all the right people, and to spend most of her leisure time cultivating the international attitudes that might—with her professional ability—have carried her to one of the very highest positions in the organisation. Yet she had not only family links with the Thai official class; she also had to look after the other Thais on the staff.

This would often become apparent at the international parties given by the various senior international civil servants in their homes. Of course some of the Thai staff were always invited: there could be no colonial exclusiveness in an international organisation; but the multi-racial assembly would busily chatter away in English or French, drinking hard and getting a little noisy and flirtatious, while the Thai contingent would nervously cluster together and talk Thai, most of the girls drinking soft drinks and looking demure. Chalin, of course, was at home on an American campus, and could hold her own at any cocktail party, but she always seemed to have an eye on what was happening (or not happening) between the Thais and the others.

Only about half of these others were European. There were Indians, Indonesians, Pakistanis, Philippinos, Japanese, and, of course, Chinese from several different countries. Most of them had spent long periods abroad, and the international atmosphere was very much what it would have been in Geneva or New York, except perhaps for the Chinese. For at this time the Chinese in Bangkok were still very much a separate community, and the Chinese in
the international organisations did not quite know where they stood. None of them as yet was trying to secure acceptance simply as equal members in the different Southeast-Asian countries: some were openly and aggressively supporting the Chinese nationalists in Taiwan; others were trying to be as neutral—as Chinese in a merely cultural sense—as they could. It was not, of course, politic to support the communists in Bangkok.

Chalin seemed to me, then, to share the prevailing feelings among Bangkok Thais about the Chinese. I remember, once, she was in my car driving through a Chinese suburb when we saw a large fire, with the fire brigade bringing up hoses to put it out. The proceedings seemed so inefficient and wasteful, with hoses leaking and running to waste everywhere, that I stopped to see if I could lend a hand. I have virtually no experience in fire-fighting, but even I was able to cut out some waste of water; having done it, however, I felt it more prudent to slip away unobserved. It was not, after all, a suitable hobby for an international civil servant, and journalists might soon be on the spot.

Back in the car, Chalin reproached me for interfering. It was the business of the Chinese. Why not let them burn a few houses if they wanted to? A little questioning brought out the comment which I later heard from many Thais about fires in the Chinese quarter. They were all started deliberately for the insurance. If I had not been clearly an ignorant foreigner I should probably have been beaten up. It was obvious that the fire brigade had been bribed, and there was I butting in and being heroic.

This was not the first time that Bangkok had broadened my experience. I am still in no position to make up my mind on these extraordinary allegations. I contented myself then, and still do, with treating this as an instance of the feeling between two communities living in the same city.

As it happened, I was able to put the fire out of my mind without much difficulty; for Chalin and I were driving out of Bangkok on my first excursion to another province. She had agreed to accom-
pany me to the great temple at Nakhorn Pathom, some forty miles away. Although the road was in some places badly broken up with pot-holes it was an easy outing for a Saturday afternoon, and I had a special reason for going there as soon as I felt sufficiently confident about my driving.

Ten years before, I had been a prisoner-of-war in a Japanese camp in Nakhorn Pathom. The great temple stood up, impressive and unexplained, behind the perimeter fence. We could never visit it; we could never ask the monks to explain its vast size or tell us its age. If we survived we should be moved elsewhere without ever visiting it. The temple became almost a symbol of captivity, and I promised myself that one day I would come back, a free man, and go all over it.

The promise seemed improbable enough at the time, but here, ten years later, I had the chance to fulfil it. Chalin was the Thai I knew best at the time, and she would provide an excellent contrast to the situation ten years earlier.

With Chalin’s guidance I found the right road out of Bangkok, and once on the main road there was no real difficulty. I had perhaps not realised what a handicap it would be to have no idea at all of the meaning of any road sign—for in those days Thailand had no international signs, no concessions to the foreigner. The temple, however, was unmistakable.

I wanted to see it from the camp-site before we went over it, and Chalin tried to humour me by asking the local farmers for information. In the end we found a raised path that just might have been a perimeter, but the whole place was now vegetable gardens, changed beyond recognition.

All this, I think, was quite unintelligible to Chalin. For all her Western training, she was a Thai in cultivating detachment. This deliberate effort to repeat an experience, so as to close the rhyme, and put it away completed, was alien to her way of life—probably even wrong. However, she was a good guide to the temple, which is very sacred to the Thais and (according to some accounts) the
oldest Buddhist temple in the whole kingdom. All the time, I was enjoying the experience at two levels. The temple was beautiful, rather overpowering, in its own right, but I was also back ten years, enjoying intensely the power to go where I liked within its quiet compound.

I was enjoying Chalin’s company at two levels too. Her willingness to try to understand the foreigner’s ridiculous play-acting, her capacity to combine flippancy with genuine reverence for what the temple represented, above all the fact that this was 1954, not 1944, and I was no longer in an all-male society.

Rhymes are all very well. One word echoes another and the poem comes to an end. The book can be put away or taken out. In real life rhymes are not so easy to close. This was my last excursion with Chalin.

That was how I had closed the rhyme some twelve years before; and here I was in the office where Chalin had worked; and now the international organisation itself, Chalin’s life and mine, were making a new and complex rhyme-scheme. Was it something so very different that she was doing at her formidable parties? What rhyme was my Chinese informant bringing to a close? And what was I doing myself in the pattern? I put the book back on to the shelf.
Vanlop wanted to get into the foreign service. He wanted to be a diplomat. This was not so much his ambition as his obsession, the ruling passion of his life. He was lent to me as my research assistant for a few weeks while I was teaching at a university. He guided me to a few of the Thai sources that I wanted, but I soon found that he knew little about them. It was not that he was lazy. I gave him a task of compiling biographical notes on Thai politicians, and no ant could have scurried about more industriously, digging out the facts from the sources I told him to use. Yet he seemed to lack imagination as well as knowledge.

He was a post-graduate student, working for a higher degree. When I questioned him within his own limited field in political science he seemed well enough informed. He was certainly not stupid, for he could follow complex arguments in a field unfamiliar to him. Yet in matters not far removed from his field, and in matters which had a close bearing on his life, he seemed oddly ignorant; and it seemed that no one had ever stimulated his imagination. I felt at first sad about him, rather than irritated; it
was not difficult for me, within a space of a few weeks, to make use of his special qualities for my own purposes. No economist, however, finds it easy to tolerate waste; no university teacher likes to see a fine young mind still running in set grooves, pursuing daydreams, especially in post-graduate work. Vanlop was not my student, his development was not really my problem in any professional sense, yet I found myself worrying about him.

There was, of course, one field in which his imagination was particularly vivid. He was constantly picturing the life of a career diplomat in foreign countries, finding out about the way they lived, the special allowances and privileges they enjoyed, the status they were accorded as representatives of the King of Thailand. Yet even here there were puzzling gaps in his knowledge and interest. He was studying a topic in Thailand’s foreign relations for his Master’s degree in the hope that this would improve his chance of selection for the foreign service; and he knew the facts well, the achievements, the formal results of the negotiations. Yet, because it was not explicitly in the books and documents—because Thais are not given to analysing in black and white the techniques they used in the past—he seemed never to have reflected on how the results were achieved, what understanding of the foreigner’s motives was implied, what appreciation of the pressures to which the foreigner was subject, or the purposes he was required to serve, and the alternatives that were open to him.

Of course it is natural that the Thais pay great respect to their diplomats. If there is one country that owes almost everything to its skilled diplomats it is Thailand. For sheer sustained brilliance, over more than a century, Thailand’s diplomacy is probably unsurpassed. This brilliance does not appear to be the result of thinking out and formulating appropriate principles of policy, and training its representatives accordingly. It is not in this that Thailand shines. Many of Thailand’s diplomats seem amateurs among the world’s professionals; and they so often appear to bring off their victories by good luck, by a fortunate turn of circumstances, that Thais
themselves are sometimes deceived, thinking their success is due to the continuing care of their nation's guardian spirit. Yet their luck has been repeated too often for any analytical Western mind to accept it at its face value.

I did not feel it was for me to explain to Vanlop the skill with which Thai diplomacy had been conducted: the understanding—seventy years ago—not only of British and French national objectives but of the different pressures that made up those objectives, so that they could use, from time to time, an influential business firm, a far-sighted official in London, a local consular official, or a fire-eating colonial governor, to alter these pressures subtly to their own advantage; the great finesse with which they handled both Japanese pressure and the angry British reaction to their apparent yielding to that pressure. Why should I have to explain this to a Thai, and a Thai—at that—who had set his heart on a diplomatic career? If Vanlop knew the facts and felt no warmth, no appreciation of them, I could do little about it. I did, however, once express my enthusiasm about a speech I had heard made, by an eminent Thai diplomat, at a meeting of the British Royal Institute of International Affairs. I tried to explain how skilfully he had sized up the motives and preoccupations of his audience and contrived to create just those feelings of sympathy, just those slight doubts and fears, that he wanted to create; and how all this had been done with the air of a charming Oriental amateur, not quite at home in a foreign language and a foreign culture. I tried to give substance to Vanlop's ambitions in diplomacy by sharing with him the enthusiasm of the few specialists on Thailand in the audience at this flawless performance, and then asking him how the Thais managed to do this. I might as well have asked for his views on aero-dynamics.

Probably—I thought—Thailand really did not train people for this kind of diplomacy. It must have been mainly a matter of selection—selection of outstandingly able people, combined with the basic cultural training which is given to every Thai from childhood. As I thought of the successes I realised that many of
them really emerged from this basic training, this need to be sensitive, to size up a social situation so as to respond to it with every participant in view, yet without becoming too involved or committed. Pick someone of outstanding ability, who has grown up under this training; set him to study foreign languages and culture deeply; give him enough to respect and admire in his own culture, so that he remains a Thai; and then set him to learn by experience. Perhaps this was their recipe.

Then if so, why had it not worked with Vanlop? Was he simply a sow's ear, that no one could ever make into a silk purse? This might be part of the explanation, but it did not ring true. Somewhere there was something going wrong with the training, with the underlying Thai culture, that should have either made Vanlop a good diplomat or at least saved him this intense anxiety to become one.

Suddenly it came to me that those Thais who saw the salvation of their country as dependent on a guardian spirit were—in terms of their own allegory—right after all. 'There is hope for this our Ayuthaya so long as men still hear and hold fast in their hearts the sayings of the ancient writers.' Their supple and civilised defence grows out of their ancient culture, their detachment, their care for the spiritual living-space of every individual human soul.

Vanlop, it seemed, was too committed. Something, that was giving him this intense desire to achieve his aim at all costs, was interfering with a very significant element in his life, almost with his birthright as a Thai. To be content with what you do—not in the sense that you have no objectives, or never work hard, but in the sense that ultimately achievement does not matter, that lasting commitment to one goal is pursuit of a shadow.

Yet another day came when the sense of grievance was too much for Vanlop. Some clerk in the public service commission had told him that twenty-four names had been selected, and his was twenty-fifth on the list. There were still vacancies, but these had now been held over to next year. Plainly there was a conspiracy to keep him out.
The story restored my faith in Thailand. Vanlop seemed to have the capacity to pass examinations. He memorised with feverish intensity, he knew all the rules, could give all the answers. Yet his knowledge of English—as an instrument to use—was so poor that I had had to work with him exclusively in Thai. His understanding of anything that it might take to make a diplomat was negligible. For the safety of Thailand I was thankful that their staff shortage did not compel them to scrape any further down towards the bottom of the barrel.

Vanlop was still muttering in impotent fury. He had an uncle who knew the Foreign Minister’s cousin. He would have an inquiry set up and force them to fill every vacancy, so long as qualified candidates were available. I knew that he had opportunities in other ministries. In some his industry, his capacity for following rules, would be valuable. Perhaps I should try to persuade him to go into something like local-government supervision. However, I realised that I could have no effect on him.

Eventually we got down to work and the crisis passed. It was about a week later that I had a new lesson about Vanlop.

He had been telling me about his struggles in primary school and secondary school. There were always boys whose parents had studied abroad, who knew more English than he did, and had even read English books at home. It had been hard to beat them, but he soon found that they always thought they knew better than the textbooks. Some of the teachers who had foreign friends were prejudiced in favour of these boys, but he always studied hard and always knew his book and could argue if the teacher was unfair. Generally the teachers did not like an argument.

I had left him with feelings very near disgust; then later that evening I needed some of my papers back urgently. Vanlop had never told me where he lived. I had a contact address where I could telephone, and usually he would call back fairly quickly. This time I had to see him. With some effort I persuaded someone at the contact number to explain where it was, and I hurried over
there. It was a roadside shop, far from prosperous, on the edge of a slum.

A young Thai, probably a brother by his appearance, offered to fetch Vanlop for me. I knew he had my papers with him, and could not clearly explain what I wanted. If he came we should merely waste more time. Very reluctantly he agreed to lead me to Vanlop’s room.

We crossed a foul canal that had, with overcrowding and obstruction of the flow, become an open sewer. A few feet away was Vanlop’s home—a single room on the edge of a Bangkok slum, never free from noise or the stench of the canal.

I thought of his schooldays again, of how perhaps an occasional high mark had led him to realise that he could use examination successes as an escape from the stink and the din; of the constant anxiety he must have felt, when he reached the upper secondary school and the university, to conceal his home from the other boys; of his desperation if ever he slipped behind in the competition. It is not natural for a Thai to become so involved; but then it is not natural for a Thai to live in a Bangkok slum. Poverty, indeed, is familiar in Thai society; and even in traditional Thai society some effort was made to escape such poverty; but it was poverty with a sense of space, and with patrons who were proud but not unkind. Here in Bangkok was an impersonal crowding of the body and of the soul, and Thais have poor psychological defences against crowding.

The special obsession with the foreign service was, no doubt, peculiar to Vanlop. It symbolised escape as well as status—escape to a dream world of cars and deference in distant cities. Yet Vanlop’s sickness was only a more acute form of something I had seen here and there among other young Thai intellectuels. Most of the avenues to advancement in traditional Thai society were uncertain; they depended on the goodwill of others; they might demand effort or sacrifice; but they did not demand this fanatical absorption in the formal and unreal world of examinations.
This is an unhappy accident of the contact of Thailand with the West. I thought how true learning gave breadth, not fanatical narrowing. The true way to rise through learning was through its liberating power, not essentially different from the cool, detached learning of the Buddhist monasteries. Vanlop, for all his tedious obsession, became for me a source of sadness, of sympathy. In imitating our universities Thailand was borrowing one of the treasures of our culture. Something had gone terribly wrong that in the process Vanlop's intelligence, industry, and devotion had been so distorted.
I came to like Wut in my own Western way, and to accept and appreciate his liking for me, even though at times it jarred a little. I found him cheerful and spontaneous, with a zest for life and an attractive gaiety, in spite of difficult conditions. He liked me for what I could do for him, and was so entirely candid and unreserved about it that I was almost able to accept it. For to a Thai in Wut's position such liking carries no insincerity or lack of genuineness.

The rather cruel epigram, that Thais are the most charming people that money can buy, can—if interpreted with kindness—help in understanding and liking them. Wut helped me, just by being so candid and spontaneous in playing his part, to understand that in conditions of great inequality it is we, not the Thais, who are hypocritical about what it takes to make a friendship.

He was only eleven when I came to know him. So far as I know he had no family. Yet this does not mean that he is to be pitied as an orphan or a child of a broken home, in the Western sense of those
phrases. A fairly high percentage of Thai children spend some part of their childhood living with real uncles or courtesy uncles, either because the parents are permanently or temporarily separated, or because of housing or other economic difficulties. A Thai child is brought up to believe, very early in life, that he has to make his way in the world himself. Yet it is a more kindly world than ours; people do not expect to have to care for only their own children.

Wut had left his village some years earlier to come to Bangkok as a dependant of my landlord. My landlord gave him his food and part of a room, and paid for his schooling, in return for casual services in the house. He was about the same age as my landlord's own son, and could play with him or do things for him as required. He was not a servant with set duties, but a dependant, expected to do what he could to repay his board and lodging.

When I rented a part of the house I paid a few dollars a month for service. Wut was given part of this and was told to look after me. He was supposed to wait on me at meals, but this merely meant being around to talk to me and take messages to the kitchen if necessary. He rarely had to bring any food, as the house servants looked after this.

Being a small boy, he was not very skilful, and of course not reliable. However, as I saw him at every meal, and listened to his chatter about the day's doings, I soon came to like him. I felt I should be paying him a regular wage, but my landlord would not hear of my spoiling him in this way. He particularly asked me to pay him only for special services and to limit what I gave to a few cents.

This led to a number of games between us. Wut's object was always to get some money out of me, and I think he soon realised that my object was not simply to prevent this, but I doubt if he ever understood what any of my objects were.

At first I persuaded him to talk about his school, to see if I could find some interest that I might be able to stimulate with a little
bribery. School, as seen through Wut's eyes, however, seemed a very depressing place. He was not so much afraid of his teachers as ashamed to let them know how little he understood. He had come in to Bangkok from a country school in which he had barely learnt to recognise his letters and to count. He had gone into the lowest grade, with other children mostly younger than himself, and so far as I could understand he had stayed there for more than two years, being unable to pass his tests.

Perhaps he sometimes found a lesson interesting, perhaps he sometimes did more than try—without enthusiasm—to memorise something he had been taught. If so he never told me about it. Wut was no scholar and I could find no way to help him by any presents or rewards.

Where Wut himself took the initiative was in trying to buy things for me from the shop next door. It was no trouble at all for me to go round myself, and I usually enjoyed a chat there; moreover my wants were much too limited for Wut's liking. Sometimes I would let him buy me shoelaces or a bottle of beer, and he would put on a substantial commission for his trouble. He found it very puzzling that I checked prices, and refused to let him overcharge me, especially when he found that if he brought me correct change I usually gave him some or all of it. If I wanted to help him why should I take trouble to find out prices, to save money that I obviously didn't want?

He was always trying to do something special to please me. The motive was so transparent that at first this annoyed me. It would irritate me that he hid the shoe-cleaning brushes away and, once a fortnight or so—when the fancy took him—gave my shoes a tremendous polish, while otherwise leaving them quite untouched. I tried to solve the problem by giving him a tip at the end of the month for some job that he had done regularly, and ignoring his special efforts. This had no effect on his behaviour; it merely hurt his feelings. He liked to do special things for me and to receive special payment for them. It made him feel wanted and useful,
and in time I came to feel that I wanted Wut as he was, to be happy, rather more than I wanted my shoes cleaned; perhaps even more than I wanted to teach him habits of reliability that would be useful later.

One morning Wut came upstairs to my room while I was dressing, and told me—with an unusually broad grin on his face—that there was a flood. I thought this was some piece of Bangkok gossip, and asked him where it was.

‘Down there’, he said, pointing down the stairs. ‘You’d better not put your socks on.’

I looked down the stairs, and saw the bottom stair and the whole ground floor covered in muddy water. Perhaps I should explain that I had a bedroom and a small sitting room, with the typical Thai highly polished floor, upstairs, and there—as most civilised foreigners do in Bangkok—I lived barefoot. I had my meals downstairs in a room with a stone floor, built in the space underneath the old house. It was cool and pleasant there, and I would often sit there in the evening until the mosquitoes drove me away. I left my shoes on the bottom stair, and my first thought when I saw the flood was that my shoes had floated away.

When I anxiously inquired about them, Wut could not control his giggles. He had in fact found them, fairly waterlogged but not yet floating, and put them on a high piece of stone to dry. Wut was not really surprised at the flood. There is, of course, some flooding every year in Bangkok. It was some years since the water had actually invaded this house, but it covered the garden nearly every year. Obviously, however, he found the adventure delightful, and I decided I had better enjoy it too. He set my breakfast on the table as usual, though the table legs were in four inches of water, and found it a delight almost too intense to bear when I rolled up my trousers and sat with the water bathing my ankles.

Even this was not the pinnacle of his happiness. When the water rose a further half inch it flowed over the edge of a raised goldfish pond, and he had to go out and get a hand-net to catch the fish and prevent them swimming away.
Later he was busy paddling about getting flat stones from the garden to build a ford out to the gate. As I put my shoes on in the taxi I felt I had started my day well, and could not help thinking how irritating and frustrating the experience would have been if I had not been infected with Wut’s gaiety.

As the flood receded Wut did heroic work in cleaning up the damage, and I was able to pay him with a clear conscience. We also had plenty of fun together watching the frogs that the water left behind. It added much to my enjoyment of my hours at home that Wut was so delighted and amused at all the animals in the garden, the birds and grasshoppers and lizards that I might have taken for granted, or even found annoying.

One day, however, when I returned from the University, Wut met me at the door with simulated terror on his face and laughter breaking out around his eyes, and asked me to come with him because there was a large animal in the dining room. It turned out to be a carved wooden elephant, fully four feet high, that my landlord had brought back from Chiengmai and decided to stable in my dining room. This intrusion—quite without my consent—might well have been a source of domestic discord if Wut’s gaiety had not wrapped the beast in charm and made me happy to live with it.

Just before I left the house I decided that I would like to take Wut to see a film. As usual, when I told him, he was quick to profit from the occasion. He told one of the maids to tell me he was ashamed to go in a big cinema without proper shoes, so we went to a shoe shop first and fitted him out with a new pair.

I think he enjoyed going in a taxi to a big cinema in another part of the city, but the James Bond film, which I was sure he would like, proved something of a disappointment. It was run with the normal English sound track and Thai sub-titles, like many new foreign films in Bangkok. In the country cinemas, and on television, I have seen very skilful dubbing into Thai; indeed I find it quite delightful to see frontier Americans in old T.V.
westerns carrying on their act in Thai; while in the rural cinemas live actors behind the screen will often lace the Thai dialogue with their own satire. However, the sub-titles of the James Bond film were clearly printed, and Wut asked no questions. It was only after the film was over that I realised from his comments that he still could not read enough to understand the plot.

When I left the house I missed Wut even more than I had expected. I went to stay with old friends, who looked after me with great kindness and affection. I was far more comfortable than I had ever been on my own. Yet they were middle-class people with some of the cares that status brings, even in Thai society. None of them had Wut’s uninhibited fun, and none of them was able to play quite so frank a role.

I had succeeded in getting the better of both Wut and my landlord by finding that I could trust one of the other dependants—a shipping clerk—and commissioning her to buy some presents for Wut, when they could be useful to him, with the rest of the money that I had felt I should pay him. I forbade her, however, to let either him or my landlord know.

Before I left Thailand, I felt I had to see Wut again. I paid a courtesy call on my former landlord, and as usual the rest of the household who had looked after me came to greet me. I talked with all of them, but particularly with Wut. He answered my questions, but seemed inhibited until he came to see me off. Then he stood by the gate and talked away, excited as usual, about many of the things we used to talk about. I felt very happy to spend a few minutes with him again, so happy that I forgot what should have been as clear in my mind as in his. Before I left he actually had to ask me to give him some money.
It is only in the country towns now that one sees the real 
*samlor*, the Thai type of pedicab, long and narrow, with the driver pedaling in front. Only the noisy motor- *samlors* are allowed in Bangkok; and they have been officially banned, and now wear the label *taxi*. Even this may not save them for long, because the government repeatedly threatens to drive them from the Bangkok streets.

Officially the reason is traffic safety; and this might indeed be reason enough, for the drivers are even more reckless than the taxi drivers, and the vehicle offers less protection. Yet it is widely said in Bangkok—and probably truly—that the government fears even the less numerous motor- *samlor* drivers, in the way it used to fear the far more numerous pedallers. For your *samlor* driver is a poor man with many of the critical attitudes of the uprooted, yet he is not under the control of any employer, cannot be easily kept under observation, and talks to everybody. Moreover, he usually comes to Bangkok for only a few months, or at most a few years, from.
the countryside, to which he then commonly returns with some savings, a few interesting possessions, and a keen scent for rumours. Recently I have been delighted to hear that the *samlor* drivers have been showing their affection for their Queen in a very practical way. Her Majesty, as President of the Thai Red Cross, is much concerned to encourage blood donors. Many *samlor* drivers have been encouraging one another to give blood; and their contribution has been so great that the Queen has publicly praised them for it. Her intervention may have brought them a reprieve from being turned off the streets.

If the government ever does really ban the *samlors* it will create quite an upheaval in Bangkok life. Throughout the city there are long lanes stretching back from the main roads, where the vast grounds of the old spacious days have been subdivided as the real estate values have risen. Many of these lanes, which may be a mile long, are barely wide enough for two cars to pass with care. Buses cannot enter; and a mile walk in the Bangkok climate is well worth avoiding. Only *samlors* can cruise for passengers along the narrower lanes, and they do good business there.

Talking to a *samlor* driver has a different flavour from talking to the driver of a modern taxi. This is partly because the design of the vehicle compels him to sit in front of you, while in a taxi—if you wish to talk—you sit side by side. The *samlor* driver is often willing to talk, provided you can manage the language, but a man who must talk over his shoulder, against the background of a noisy engine, can hardly chatter at length. His comments are apt to be sharp and shrewd. The taxi driver will often try out his few words of English. I have never known a *samlor* driver try to answer me in English.

The bargaining pattern is also different. Of course you must agree on the price before you start your journey. The taxi driver will rarely stay and argue. He may accept your counter-offer, if he realises he has mistaken you for a fool; but if he doesn't accept he will usually merely go. The *samlor* driver bargains like a saleswoman
in the market. Most of his customers are working people. They are accustomed to spending a little time to get the right price.

It is part of the game to bargain; yet I am usually rather weak with samlor drivers, for they are genuinely poor and have a hard life. Nearly half their normal daily earnings go for rent of the samlor, and they can usually take only short trips, because of their slow speed.

I have an additional ground for not being too hard on samlor drivers. It was a samlor driver who gave me a new reason for admiring Thailand, as the country where even the thieves are civilised. To explain this I must say something about my travelling habits in Bangkok.

Normally I adapt my travel to the season and time of day. When I first went to Bangkok it was a delightful adventure to ride in the buses. In the early 1950s they had very few seats, and nearly everyone stood. The Thais were still surprised and delighted to see a European on a bus, and I could count on several conversations, in English or Thai. The whole atmosphere was friendly and amusing, and there was always an element of uncertainty, because it was difficult to know the routes or identify the buses.

Returning a few years ago I found all this changed. There are bus maps. There are numbers on the buses. If you get a seat, the buses are quite comfortable, and there are many more seats. Yet not all the change is for the better. No one talks to you any more; and between the seats there are just as many people standing as before, with less standing space.

However, I knew some of the routes and soon learnt others. Outside the rush hours the buses were cooler than taxis, and reasonably convenient. Of course they were very much cheaper.

The time when buses really fail is the wet season. The rain does not fall, it flows out of the sky. Most of the buses have only shutters for windows, and of course these are all tight shut. Occasionally a passenger plunges out of the submarine to an unknown destination. Only by a keen sense of timing can you gain some impression of
your whereabouts; and if you do venture out it is impossible to know in advance whether there will be any shelter within a hundred yards.

Naturally, in the wet season, I took taxis, difficult though they were to get at this time. Only after the dry weather returned did I venture to use a bus when taking a couple of parcels on a visit to a friend’s house. At least, I thought the dry weather had returned. Within a few minutes the shutters were down and a cataract of rain was flowing all round us.

Sometimes these rains are brief, and I stayed on in hope. By the time I realised I must face the rain I knew I was past my destination, in strange territory. I leapt out into the rain and found myself beside a long dreary fence, with water over my ankles and the nearest friendly shop some eighty yards away. Then I saw a waiting _samlor_. The usually open cab was completely buttoned up in oil cloth, and the driver held the flap open to let me out of the rain. Fortunately he knew the road I was going to, and could get there himself without directions from me. Normally one has to direct a _samlor_ driver, at least part of the way; but I should have needed navigating instruments to direct him that day.

It was very warm in this smaller submarine and everything except my feet began to dry. My rescuer felt it fitting to give me a little lecture on riding in buses. It had to be given staccato, but it was to the point. He did not actually accuse me of stealing the rice from his bowl, or say that I deserved all I got; but the message was clear, and I was too like a wet dog to feel any disposition to argue. He was not hostile, merely telling me how things should be done in Thailand. He wanted to keep me dry. When we reached the house he wanted to ring the bell himself, and to bring the servant out into the rain so that he could drive right into the porch and keep me comfortable. I directed him to the back door, confirming him in his belief that I was mad. There I paid him a little more than he asked, picked up my parcels and made a short dash to the shelter of my friend’s house.
I was looked after most hospitably, as always in any Thai home; but here again my hostess gave me another, very gentle, lecture on the inappropriateness of a European riding in buses and samlors. It was really my status that worried her, but of course this was never mentioned. There was a danger to health, there was a grave risk of accidents, but above all I was simply asking to be robbed.

I took it meekly—after all she had been very kind to me. Then I played a game of chess with my host, and the conversation turned to one of the men who had helped me with my research. I had forgotten his surname; and as it is my usual habit to make notes on the backs of the visitors’ cards that educated Thais like to exchange with you on every visit, I looked for his card to find the surname.

My wallet was missing. My first thought was that a dozen or more cards—several days’ work—were lost, and virtually irreplaceable. Then there were the various documents of the Thai bureaucracy that would need to be replaced with much loss of time. There were a few hundred baht in Thai money—twenty dollars or so—and some personal items, including the blood transfusion card that all donors are encouraged to carry in case of an accident.

At first, of course, we searched the lane outside the gate. If it had fallen there it might have passed unseen because of the rain, though little except the money would have survived the soaking. I had paid the samlor driver, so it had probably fallen in the samlor, and he might be anywhere in Bangkok, quite untraceable.

A little later my hostess firmly put me in a taxi, with a loan of enough money to get me home, and another batch of gentle comments on the danger of riding in buses and samlors. The drivers were all thieves. Indeed I was lucky to have dropped my wallet and not had it taken from me by force.

When I reached home, the servant showed me a parcel that had been delivered by hand. It was wrapped with great care and neatness—half an hour’s work at least. In Thailand you do honour to a respected friend, relative, or official by spending an enormous
amount of time on something that must be purely transitory. The more hours are spent, and the more transitory is the pleasure given, the greater is the honour, the emphasis on the recipient's greater significance and importance.

The parcel contained my wallet. It was quite dry, so it could only have been returned by the samlor driver. Every card must have been studied to show which was my own, with my address on it, yet everything was replaced in order, except that one of my own visiting cards was with the blood transfusion card, which carried my photograph. Only the money was missing.

My servant was very indignant that my 'money pocket' was empty. The man who brought it back was a thief. Even my servant hinted that I should be more careful. Yet I was feeling almost nothing but relief. The loss of the money was by now quite unimportant to me. I realised that if he had returned the wallet to me in the samlor I should at most have given him five baht. If he had brought it home with all the money, I might have given him twenty (one dollar), and forgotten it within a week. As it is, I have remembered him for years, and now proudly present him to his Queen as one of my Thai friends, who knows his own interest but also understands the human heart. For enclosed within the wallet, written in English—no doubt laboriously and with a dictionary to check the spelling—was the following letter ('pocket money', I realised, means 'money pocket'):

Dear Professor T. H. Silcock

I just pick up your pocket money. Please excuse me for my selfish, because of my poverty I get all your money

?
Writing about Tim is rather like writing about a close relative. It is hard to stand back far enough to get her into perspective. Indeed it is through Tim that I come nearest to fitting in to the Thai family system, for to her I am always ‘Elder Uncle’. I have seen her growing up since birth and her parents are my oldest and dearest Thai friends.

Of course I cannot quite fit in to the Thai system. To Tim I am obviously Mother’s elder brother, or perhaps my senior status is because I am a foreigner. In my own mind, however, I am clearly Father’s younger brother, junior to him not only in years but in gratitude for many services which I cannot ever repay. I have tried to get over the difficulty by playfully putting myself on Tim’s level and calling Tim’s mother ‘Mother’. It began when I was playing chess with her father, and Mother wanted the table for a meal. Tim was told to go and wash her hands and uncle—in a more gentle manner, but quite firmly—was told to run along too. From
then on the game was that Mother was very strict with us. The position of uncle to Tim, but at the same time a child of her parents, is sufficiently incongruous to enable me to take my place in the intimate circle, in a playful Thai way, without making anyone ill at ease.

These adjustments are very important in Thai society, and any foreigner is apt to feel clumsy in adjusting to their graceful tact and sense of status. We are always forgiven, and generally the attempt to conform is appreciated, but our instincts are different. You have to be brought up as a Thai to capture all the subtle shades of adjustment to one another.

A foreigner always feels, even after years of friendship, that he is getting these things wrong. The little servant girl—a child of about twelve—came down in the car to the beach with us and Tim and she and I all played in the sea together—the two children just young things playing with an adult. In my parents' time, in Europe, when servants were commonplace, this intimacy would have been inconceivable, but I enjoyed it. Going home in the car, the four of us—Tim, her cousin, the little servant girl and I—could not sit comfortably side by side in the back seat and I took the little girl on my knee. This brought down a sharp rebuke on her shoulders, and she was made to stand against the door. Play was play, but she had to travel second class.

Tim herself is an outgoing child, responsive and affectionate, particularly to anything bigger than herself that is willing to play with her. She loves to play with the big Alsatian dogs that lie around the house in the day and guard the compound from thieves at night. When she was a very small girl, not much taller than the dogs, she used to play particularly with one of the dogs which was called Lucky. For some reason which I have forgotten they used the English word, rather than a Thai name. I think I was expected to recognise and be partial to Lucky because of his name, but I never cared very much for the dogs. I could not help remembering what they were for; and though I have no partiality for thieves, these dogs were no ordinary watch-dogs, intended to alert the house and the police.
Elder Uncle never fed the dogs at table, and never played with them, and this Tim was willing to forgive, for most grown-ups were the same. She found it harder to understand that I did not even recognise Lucky. Yet she was a generous child, and I think this too was forgiven me. I tried with some success to share her delight in seeing a Thai-fied version of Lassie going through stupendous feats of canine intelligence on television, and this restored her faith in me.

I was invited to visit her kindergarten, and was interested to see the preliminary education of the well-to-do. I have seen many Thai elementary schools, both in towns and in the country. The chief difference in Tim’s school was, of course, the superior quality of the furniture, and the fact that the teachers were clearly well groomed and well spoken. Classes, too, were much smaller. Such equipment as could be afforded in country schools was usually modern and well thought out, for within the finance allowed in a very poor country, Thai education at this level is impressive. In Tim’s school finance appeared to be no obstacle to anything that was required.

As always, I was impressed with the standard of politeness. Thai children, at all social levels, are carefully trained to be polite—not merely the politeness of the wai to any grown-up, on meeting or parting, the politeness of ducking your head if you pass a grown-up on the stairs, so that your head will not be above his, the politeness of terms of address, but also the more difficult politeness of making other people, whatever their social situation, at ease in that situation. A country schoolmaster with over forty children of different ages cannot, of course, do as well as Tim’s teachers, but he thinks it important to try. Thais regard manners as extremely important. A fault of character is more easily forgiven than a lack of manners; for Thais are very tolerant of differences in character, and realise that the progress of the soul is an arduous business, taking many lifetimes, but good manners should be taught in childhood, and a Thai that lacks them is no better than a foreigner.
I noticed at the school that none of the other children were as tall as Tim, though she was far from being the oldest there. Her tallness is very much part of her character. It affects her charm, which is the charm of long things—long fingers and arms, even long eyelashes. In a few years it may make her awkward and leggy; and, being a Thai, she may, when she is grown up, find her height a handicap; but at present it gives her both charm and dignity. A few years after she left the kindergarten, when she was eleven years old, I once went with her and her mother to an agricultural show at Kasetsart, the agricultural university of Thailand. She was about the same height as her mother and one of the young demonstrators began explaining to her the working of a group of poisons, under the obvious impression that she was an undergraduate.

This brought home to me the fact that she must, for many years, have been treated by casual visitors and strangers as much older than she was. She responded to the challenge sometimes with a great effort of dignity and politeness, sometimes with a petulant withdrawal into childhood. Perhaps also her height, together with a comfortable and loving family circle, produced another feature of her character, a superficial knowingness about the ways of the world, combined with a childish playfulness that is often surprising and always attractive. If the soul passes, as Thais believe, through many different bodies, it must surely learn adaptability.

I introduced Tim to the game of Monopoly, and in a way this was a great success. Her parents made most of their money out of real estate, and Tim is not their daughter for nothing. It is very difficult to beat Tim at Monopoly, as I know to my cost. For a good many weeks Tim would suffer from serious jealousy if Elder Uncle spent more time playing chess with her father than he spent playing Monopoly with her. This seemed to me reasonable enough; after all I had taught her the game; but since I had settled down, over many years, to playing at least one game of chess a day with her father, it made it difficult to get enough work done when I was staying in their home.
It was a change from Monopoly sometimes to let Tim tell me about the fairy stories she was reading. It seems to me rather characteristic of Thailand that, while the translation of the world's classics and technical literature into Thai is still sadly deficient, fairy stories from all over the world have been lovingly translated into Thai for Thai children. Thais will sometimes claim that they work hard only at play; but this collection and translation of the world's fairy stories seems more in keeping with Thais' behaviour toward their children in buses. No Thai will give up a seat to a woman, unless she is visibly pregnant or carrying a baby in her arms; but everyone is expected to give up his seat for a child.

Listening to Tim's fairy stories was a very chastening experience. Anyone who thinks he is beginning to feel at home in a language should persuade a nine-year-old child to tell him some fairy stories. The excitement, the words tumbling head over heels, the mixture of esoteric and childish vocabulary—if I even recognised a story I already knew I felt I was doing well. Of course there were many I did not know, for Tim's collection drew on India, Japan, Korea, and other Asian countries, as well as on Europe.

I left Thailand for a few years, and it was during this time that Tim caught up with her mother in height. She also went to the big school. This was a school in the heart of Bangkok, near the former royal palace. When I visited it, a poem displayed near the entrance commemorated the initiative of Queen Saowapa, in establishing it to give education to girls no less than to boys. She was a pioneer in female education and also built up the Thai Red Cross, so that the school (Queen's College) and the Red Cross headquarters (Saowapa Institute) are both named after her; and she was the only consort before Queen Sirikit to administer the Kingdom during the King's absence and earn the title Somdet (Phra-Boromo-Rachini) Nart, or Ruling Queen.

Tim has become a very unimportant person now. But she is proud to wear the uniform of the Queen's College, and to have left her childhood behind. She is being trained to be one of the
charming and very formidable women who largely run the business of modern Thailand. In appearance and manner they are graceful, deferential, exquisitely polite. They let the men speak, in mixed company, and when they speak they are likely to adopt the manner of a very small girl in the presence of her elders and betters. Yet they have the education and ability, and through their contacts have the power, to exercise decisive influence. Many of Thailand’s important businesses are in their hands, for if their husbands are civil servants the business will be in their names—and not only nominally. Yet they are not only doing business on behalf of their husbands. Most professions have women in senior positions, doing responsible work. No one should be deceived by their deferential manner.

For Tim there is no more Monopoly now. Homework has to be done and there is a grim family rule that the television set is out of bounds until the homework is finished. She has begun to carry the burden of civilisation. From what she tells me, she is studying (in Thai) very much the same curriculum as in a European school, and is subject to the same pressures. Religious knowledge, of course, is different; but once, when I asked about the meaning of metta, when we were having lunch together, it was Tim who replied to me that it was the disposition to cause happiness to others, while karuna was the disposition to save them from suffering. It was said in very much the special tone of voice that a young girl uses to speak of sacred subjects in Western society also, and I was amused that the difference of religion did not affect this.

One thing that seemed to be unchanged was Tim’s relation to the dogs. She would feed and play with them, talk to them and comment on their character, their soulful expression. Her favourite she now seemed to call merely L—no doubt, I thought, a result of beginning to learn to read English. Though I really had little interest I wanted to show I remembered. “‘L’ is “Lucky” isn’t it?” I asked.

There was a terrible silence. Tim went very red, but she was a Queen’s College girl now, and managed not to cry. But how could
Elder Uncle be so *stupid*? Her mother, as usual, was able to change the subject, to make everyone happy again.

After Tim had gone to bed I was told that Lucky had run out into the road and been killed by a truck.
If you wish to visit almost any of the villages in the district of Damnoen Saduak in Ratburi province you have to go by boat. I was provided with a boat from the landing stage near the government offices in the provincial capital to take me down the river to the lock of the Damnoen Saduak canal. There I had to take my folding bed—with the rest of my luggage packed inside it—along the tow path and board a water bus. My bed was laid, rather precariously, across the bows, protruding on both sides, and sometimes clearing the waves by no more than a few inches. I could not get a seat near it, so I resigned myself, with what fortitude I could find, to the possibility of total loss and the probability of wet blankets or smeared questionnaires.

The District Office in Damnoen Saduak was reached without serious mishap and the officials there were helpful. The Agricultural Officer had arranged to go with me in a government launch to the village I was to visit. I was even given a sketch-map on
which I could follow our progress through the main canals.

A little way along the main canal, which was fringed by shops and merchants' houses, we turned into a side canal, past a large school to which the pupils seemed to have access only by water, and began passing between the farms. Every major farm had its share of the canal bank, though I was told that some lay further back and were approached, and watered, by very narrow canals which the farmers had themselves dug. Every farm had its landing stage, and also its pump.

These were not irrigated rice fields but vegetable farms, each farm consisting of a series of long strips of land a few yards wide, separated by a system of canals some six to ten feet wide. Each farm appeared to be a self-contained water system, the level of water being maintained (at that time, which was the dry season) higher than that of the canal, by means of irrigation pumps. Within the farm's own waterways the farmer had power-driven pumps mounted on boats, watering the crops, spreading fertiliser or spraying with insecticide. The boats themselves were power-driven.

The favourite pump looked an old-fashioned affair, an endless chain, made of wood, that one could imagine being worked by a man using pedals. In fact they were driven by diesel engines, and the official told me they were more efficient for the purpose than more 'modern' suction pumps which had been tried out and usually discarded.

I was impressed by the large amounts of capital that these farmers had been able to invest. I already knew that this province had higher yields per acre of most vegetables than any other, but the extent of the prosperity surprised me.

Soon our boat came out of the canal into a small river, went winding along the river for a mile or so, and then entered another, narrower canal. As if this started a train of thought, the Agricultural Officer told me I was to stay in the temple. When I originally planned the trip I had written to District Offices saying that, as I had my bed with me, I could sleep anywhere, and had mentioned
the temple as one possibility; but no village had yet offered me accommodation with the monks, so I began inquiring about the fasting, the appropriate behaviour for a non-Buddhist among them. The Agricultural Officer tried to reassure me. It was a Christian temple, not a Buddhist one. But this was even more disturbing. No doubt it would be comfortable to live in European accommodation, but how much would it interfere with the work? My guide had just begun to explain that there were no Europeans there, when the village came into view.

It was dominated by a large, new-looking church, built in a medley of European styles, and appearing far too big for the village. Near it was a brick-built two-storey building which turned out to be the school and the mission, a Roman Catholic mission, run by a Thai priest, Father Chawalit, who was to be my helpful and charming host.

The Agricultural Officer led me up to the mission and introduced me to Father Chawalit, who came out to greet us, and then took me to my room—a room furnished in simple European style, with an iron bed, a chair, and a desk. When the preliminaries were completed I asked if Father Chawalit could get together a group of villagers to meet me and let me explain my research plans. The Agricultural Officer wanted to be present, and I was amused at the priest's handling of the situation. He said it would be best to get a large group together the following evening. As I was to stay only three days I was a little anxious about the loss of a whole day.

I need not have worried. When the Agricultural Officer had gone back to his office, Father Chawalit explained. 'You didn't want him there, did you? He won't come back tomorrow, once he has returned to Damnoen Saduak. We needn't even arrange the meeting. I'll get some people around informally this evening. Meanwhile, let me introduce you to Saef, who knows all the farmers and will guide you and arrange for you to meet anyone you like.'

Saef had been christened Joseph, but was always called either Saef—the local abbreviation of Joseph—or Khru Saef (School-
master Saef). He was introduced to me as one of the market gardeners in the village, but he was an educated man, and for many years had been a schoolmaster. In the end he gave it up for market gardening because he grew tired of having no money.

I think Saef was a moderately successful market gardener, though probably not one of the leading gardeners in the village. He was clearly an intelligent man and talked like a man who also had common sense. His hands were not a farmer's hands, but they looked strong and practical. However, the other villagers clearly respected him for his learning, for the fact that he had taught many of them, or their children, rather than for his wealth or standing as a farmer. This became quite apparent when he accompanied me to farmers' homes and joined in the conversation.

Saef was very helpful to me in making the villagers feel at home with me. The fact that Father Chawalit introduced me to him was enough. He knew little about doctrinal differences and accepted me as a fellow Christian. The villagers in his village were far franker about their difficulties with the government than most other villagers had been. As often as not I felt that they were complaining of very normal government activities in the twentieth century; but at least it was useful to get their extreme individualism at first hand. Saef and his followers were far less tolerant of tax gatherers than their Saviour.

I believe that as a result of my association with Saef I obtained better figures about their harvests than I would otherwise have done. At first, however, Saef was inclined to think he already knew all about the villagers' attitudes, and could save time by answering for them. I was able to persuade him to keep quiet and let them answer for themselves, when I explained what I was doing. Saef had the attitudes of an educated man. In principle he certainly wanted to get at the facts. Yet he was an educated man in a very special position. For ten years almost his sole contacts had been with uneducated farmers and with the priest.

The farmers were accustomed to defer to what Saef had to say
on matters of fact. Even if they thought he was wrong, it was impolite to make an educated man and a schoolmaster lose face. So Saef, though he believed in getting the facts, was inclined to think he knew them. In one of my questions I wanted to know whether the farmers would use any money they got to pay off their debts to the Ratburi merchants, who supplied them with seeds, insecticide, and petrol on credit. Saef was convinced that repayment of this debt would be first priority. Their relations with these suppliers, who also bought their crops, were all-important. I realised that this was true, but wanted to verify whether—even so—repaying debt was more important than other investments. When I asked, and cross-checked, some said they would repay, others had other priorities. These farmers invested a great deal of money, not all of it their own. Their ideas about debt were worth knowing.

Saef was convinced also that I should find major differences in attitude between the Christians and the Buddhists. They differed on fundamentals and therefore their attitudes must be different. I found few significant differences, except those which plainly followed from the fact that most of the Christians were renting their land, on rather favourable terms, from the Church, while the Buddhists had no such advantages.

Saef’s attitude to the priest was very deferential; yet I had the impression that in a way the priest deferred to him too, rather as a young officer will defer to a sergeant-major. In many practical matters Saef seemed to be the priest’s non-commissioned officer, knowledgeable about the villagers, and able to do many practical things that could hardly be done appropriately by one in Holy Orders.

For the Church in this village was much more than a spiritual power. Many decades ago the Church had cut the canal that opened up this whole area, organising the villagers to work for their own welfare. One decade ago it had organised a road connecting the village to the main road—a great and unusual advantage in the
Damnoen Saduak district. The priest helped to organise a Gardeners' Association to obtain help from the government; he mobilised research workers from Kasetsart University to advise on diseases of their crops. In all this constructive activity Father Chawalit's predecessors had used the help of devout and knowledgeable farmers, and Father Chawalit used Saef, as Saef was proud to be used.

One evening I asked Saef what he knew about the endless-chain wooden pump, or lahad, that seemed to be such a feature of this part of the province. I had heard how a similar pump had played a critical role in enabling Chinese miners to compete effectively with the Europeans for several decades in the tin mines in Malaya, but these had themselves been worked by water power, a larger stream driving the wheel and a smaller one being raised by it. There were Chinese tin mines in south Thailand, only a few hundred miles away, and I wondered if the lahad had come to them that way. We did not solve the problem. Locally it is firmly believed that the first lahads there were driven by pedals, their ancestors themselves supplying the motive power.

Saef was, however, interested in my comments on Chinese miners, for these villagers, including Saef himself, were acutely conscious of their Chinese descent. Chinese have been settled in Ratburi province for many decades, perhaps many centuries. When the Damnoen Saduak canal was completed in the latter part of the nineteenth century they began specialising in growing vegetable crops for the increasing Bangkok market.

In this province the Chinese and Thais have intermarried for several generations and Saef's village—a strongly Catholic island, conscious of its difference—is proud of its difference from both the Chinese and the Thais. Saef put it to me in the crude language of the village. Pure Chinese, he said, were dirty, and pure Thais were lazy. Clearly in their own community godliness was associated, not only with cleanliness, but with productive work.

When my research was finished I sat in the tiny coffee shop, talking with Saef. He had been with me for a good part of my time
during these three days, and we had talked of many things; we had mentioned religion often, but never at any depth. This time also we spoke superficially, but he told me a little about the missionaries he could remember. He spoke of them with affection. They had lived the Christian message and their Church had profoundly influenced this prosperous little village. It had acquired the power to dominate the economy, yet its influence was benevolent, even affectionate.

As the little bus carried me over the new road, built by devout Christian hands for the Church which ministered to them, I thought of the tightrope that Father Chawalit and Saef walked, balancing between a Church which left the economy alone, withdrawing from the people's needs, and a Church which served them so well that it acquired great wealth. I thought of the powerful Church that I had seen in the Philippines, benevolent too in its way but raised far above the people, so that the struggle for priestly influence became one of the bitter contests of Philippine nationalism. Here the work was still responsive, affectionate. Their creed was not mine, but as I left I paid it my respect.

We were nearing the main road now, and a red and white pole across the road barred our passage. The driver stepped aside to the little hut from which the pole was controlled. My bus, too, was paying its tribute to the Church.
17 The Accident

After the accident, when we realised we were alive and might not have been, we went and drank iced orangeade in a little country cafe not far away. It was reassuring and strangely intimate to be sitting there together, Arom and Pradit and I, not saying very much, relaxing into thankfulness, with some of the thankfulness spilling over to one another.

I have met Arom since. I was in her home town and visited her school. I met some of the people she had talked about before it happened, her headmaster and a colleague from the American Peace Corps. I saw her talking to the girls in the school’s airy corridors. I picked up a pile of examination papers that she was going to mark. Part of her life became real to me and the rest grew more vivid in my imagination. I renewed my thankfulness that she was alive, like me.

Pradit I have never met again, but he too became more real to me some days later when, in another town, I met another govern-
ment Medical Officer, who had worked with him. The mention of Pradit brought us together, and after an evening’s talk, mainly about the Medical Service, I was invited to cancel my hotel booking and go and sleep in the local Medical Rest House. Talking far into the night with two other young Medical Officers made Pradit more real too. I should dearly like to meet him again.

The three of us had first met at the bus station at Bangkok, at five o’clock in the morning. We were to travel all day in one of the main line buses to the northeast, and Arom and I both arrived some twenty minutes early to get corner seats. Neither the bus station nor the buses are luxurious. The station is a wood and corrugated iron affair, without even tarmac, let alone protection from the weather, for the buses. The bus area has become heavily pot-holed, and passengers have to pick their way through the pools of water and try to avoid being splashed as the buses pass. When I had put my hat in a corner seat and asked one of my fellow passengers to keep the seat for me, I went and bought myself a plate of fried rice and egg and a glass of coffee, eating at one of the metal tables that a few restaurant contractors are allowed to set up in the bus station premises. When I returned Arom was sitting in the seat in front of me, a middle-aged, obviously middle-class Thai woman, with an intelligent and kindly but by no means beautiful face, who turned and spoke to me in a remarkably good English accent. She was an English teacher in the town where I was going, though she had not studied abroad.

We talked a good deal during the next five hours. The seats on Thai buses are not high, and passengers in the corner seats tend to sit diagonally because the buses are crowded. The person in front has to turn a little, but she seemed very willing to talk to me, and over wide stretches of rice land there is little else to do. The speed, the wind through the open windows, and the crowding make reading very difficult.

Not only was she a senior English teacher in a high school in the provincial capital; she was also the wife of a District Officer in a
district some twenty miles away, and the mother of eight children. Such a work load would not be uncommon for a middle-class Thai. They are virtually compelled to entertain visiting officials lavishly and their salaries are totally inadequate. Arom had been to a relative’s wedding in Bangkok, and was distressed that she had not had the time or money to buy things for her children. Apart from this she seemed relaxed and jolly about her life. There were difficulties, of course, when the car broke down—probably it did that fairly often on unsealed Thai roads—or when she had to entertain during examinations, or when the children were ill. The relaxed attitude of the Thai middle class never ceases to astonish me when I hear the details of their life. I wondered how many normal days there were in her life, when none of the eight children was ill, the car was working as it should, and there were no examinations and visiting officials.

When we stopped for lunch I persuaded her to come and sit with me. I had an ulterior motive, apart from enjoying her company and wanting to find out more about a provincial secondary school. She would help to protect me, at least a little, from the bus-boys. Sometimes I find the bus-boys quite tolerable, and they have never done me any harm; but that day I was not in the mood for them. There always seems to be a group of them at every bus station, teenagers with American hats or clothes and a few words of English, who invariably gather round every foreigner. They say, ‘You! You!’, if they cannot say anything else; they want to make contact. It is quite clear that they expect the contact to be profitable in some way. No doubt they have had profitable experiences from appearing, to American soldiers with money and no local knowledge, to be the first English-speaking person in a strange town. Most of them seem quite harmless, with no one objective in view except the general one of making money. A few are looking for commissions from hotels, liquor shops, perhaps brothels; most are in no sense part of the underworld, but merely a reflection of the needs of American soldiers far from home. To anyone who can speak Thai they are
useless, and they know it; but having made the contact—and being, at heart, polite young Thais—they keep it up for a few minutes, ask a few civil questions, perhaps make some complimentary remark, and then pass on. The sameness at every bus station grows a little monotonous.

Being with Arom protected me. It might not have done so if she had been young and pretty, but she was clearly not that sort of woman. The bus-boys left us alone, and we talked more comfortably than in the bus. She began to tell me about her colleagues from the American Peace Corps, and she was clearly an enthusiast for the Peace Corps. This was no theoretical approval, but was based on personal experience. When I met her colleagues I understood. They spoke excellent Thai, were modest and adaptable, and had both the desire and the ability to help. I too had favourable personal experiences, though some reservations about the concept, and we were led on to discuss aid in general.

While we were talking she gave two baht (ten cents) to a beggar who came to our table, and hurriedly sent him away. I should not have commented, but I did. The man was a leper, and Arom did not want me to see him. She was ashamed that a foreigner should see lepers begging in Thailand.

I think Thai civil servants are the only ones in Asia who feel this particular mixture of shame and involvement. Everywhere else that I have been, Asian leaders are glad that Europeans should see how bad things are. Personally, I find the Thai attitude more attractive. It is, of course, futile to blame the attitudes generated by colonialism, but it is difficult not to find them unhealthy.

My other travelling companion, Pradit, shared this feeling of responsibility and a kind of shame. He too was a junior civil servant, a doctor, second in command in a rather large Health Centre. Taking the journey as a whole I probably spoke more with Pradit than with Arom, for our seating made conversation easier; but it was well over an hour before we began to talk at all. Even when we began, we talked far more about the journey itself,
places along the way, places to stay, previous travel experiences. I found out much less about him.

At first I think he was deterred by the fact that I talked to Arom in English. Pradit's knowledge of English words was good, but he was not happy using it in conversation. I made some conversational overtures to him in Thai, but I think he felt that if we really began talking he would have to make the effort in English. When Arom and I switched—on some topic which I have forgotten—to talking in Thai, and went on in Thai for some time, Pradit took an opportunity to join in.

The conversation suffered, however, from the fact that it had not been begun in the ordinary Thai way. Generally on these occasions Thai conversation is unlike our own, which first establishes the willingness to talk and then probes for a common interest, a mutual friend, a place that both have visited, so that the conversation can have more content. The Thai style is to talk freely about things that everyone has in common, one's occupation, one's family, one's reason for travelling. This gives orientation, prevents anyone saying anything that will hurt, enables each to feel that he is important. Personal bonds are not necessary and are not sought. Thais are very competent at small talk which is not shallow and formal like our own, but which orientates and establishes a friendly acquaintance without either staving off or seeking closer contact.

Pradit and I had not begun in that way. Our professions and situations emerged only gradually. When I found that he was a Medical Officer I asked him about the various food vendors who brought things to sell to bus passengers at most casual stops. He had not previously advised me against anything that was on sale, though I had consulted him about prices. When I asked him, he condemned virtually everything that was on sale, including even boiled eggs and peanuts boiled in their shells. Officially almost nothing was safe to eat in the countryside. Yet Thai death rates are not high, even by the standards of Southern Europe, and the country people eat these things. Pradit, being a Medical Officer,
would not buy in the bus, but I should be surprised if he was as careful at home. Probably it was necessary to convince the foreigner that Thai standards in principle were no lower than our own; but in fact his main effort would be to get people to use lavatories, co-operate in controlling malaria, and accept vaccination and protective inoculations.

He told me the official policy was to suppress these casual food vendors. This would take most of the fun out of Thai country bus travel; but about this he showed his commonsense. As a government servant he would not actually condemn the policy, but he explained that if people were allowed to buy only in the licensed shops they would become less careful; and the health inspectors would merely be bribed—like the other officials—by the people who got the licences. As usual, I felt that Pradit would express Bangkok's wishes officially, but had learnt a great deal that was not recognised in Bangkok.

Most of the time, however, we talked about unimportant things, and soon the conversation flagged. For a time I tried to keep myself occupied by seeing how many words of a Thai notice I could pick out as we passed at fifty miles an hour. Soon my eyes grew tired and I began to feel sleepy. Arom had dozed off; Pradit was reading a magazine. I was about to doze off myself when the wheels suddenly started to drag and a spray of dust surged up from the road all round the bus. The driver did not brake suddenly; the bus did not skid or tilt, and I was not seriously alarmed. Arom woke up with an inarticulate cry and then turned and said in English, 'Oh! It's an accident!' This seemed to me to show remarkable consideration for her foreign acquaintance in such a crisis. Pradit jumped up and seized the rail above his head, shouting to me in Thai that I must stand up. This did not seem to me, I remember, a very good idea, and I stayed where I was.

The bus slowly drifted to the wrong side of the road, slowing down all the time. It stopped on the grass bank, about two feet from the drop down to the drain.
When we were all out of the bus we realised how near to a serious accident we had been. Not only had the tyre blown out; with bumping over the gravel road the wheel itself had cracked. Only the driver's cool head and very skilful driving had saved us from overturning either by a skid on the road or by swerving into the drain. Arom was enthusiastically praising the driver's coolness, while I praised his skill. Pradit came back to the importance of standing up in a crisis. He had attended many victims of bus accidents, and those who stood up were rarely badly hurt. No doubt this was good advice to a prospective patient, but I hope he does not give it to too many of his friends. If half the passengers had done it that day the bus would almost certainly have overturned.

It was Arom who pointed out the cafe, and as we drank we discussed future travel plans as if we had been a party of old friends travelling together. We had decided to share a taxi, if one could be obtained at all, and had gone back to the road to hail a passing car and send a message, when I saw the Ubon bus coming and decided to try and stop it. The bus was full, but perhaps the spectacle of a foreigner stranded by the roadside may have helped to soften the driver's heart. Pradit negotiated, and the driver agreed to take our party of three and two others.

The new bus was much worse crowded than the other, and it was only right that the newcomers should have the least comfortable seats. My feet were roasted against the engine, and I think Pradit, at the back of the bus, did not sit down at all for the first forty miles. We were separated from one another, and the new passengers were in no mood to talk to the intruders. Later I learnt from a bus-boy that the other passengers from the accident arrived at two o'clock in the morning.
In Dirck Jayanama’s *Thailand in World War II* Puey has written the following account of his capture on an intelligence mission behind the Japanese lines:

I find it hardly possible to believe that, within less than a second at that time, so many different thoughts came flooding into my head. From the time that I became conscious that there were people surrounding me, to the time that they reached me, so many different thoughts and images passed through my brain that I do not know which came before, which after. I thought of my lover in London; I thought of Mani Sanasen’s last words to me before we left England; I thought of my friends still in India; I thought of my two friends still hiding in the grove near by; I thought of my friends and relatives living in Bangkok; I thought of the official letter from the High Command to ‘Ruth’ that was still in my wallet; and I thought of the poison that lay in a pouch against my chest. This last thought was the last to come to me. Ought I to swallow the poison? Or should I let them capture me alive? Better let them take me dead! For there
were many, many secrets that I carried with me; and if I were captured alive I should be forced to betray these secrets. Better yet not to let them capture me! As for these documents which I carried on my person, I should still have the power to protect them as long as I had life. If I died, how could I protect them? Life is a thing so fresh and beautiful; and so long as life lasts we may still hope. If the Japanese do torture me, I suppose it would be more comfortable to die now. Yet I saw that there were no Japanese in the group coming to capture me. Don’t do it then! When you meet a tiger you might as well face a fight to the death. Better let them take me alive! Don’t die yet!

Since I read this very moving account of his capture I have often thought how different the recent history of Thailand would have been if he had taken the poison which the army had provided for him in case he was captured. There might well have been no loans from the International Bank to Thailand, and hence no rapid rural development. The influence of the Bank of Thailand might have disappeared with the death of its founder, Prince Viwat, in 1959, or even earlier. Without either the loans or the steadying integrity of the Bank, Thailand might well by now have degenerated into the hopeless corruption of some of its neighbours, and perhaps been overrun by communism.

There is, however, for me an even stronger reason for thankfulness that he faced the prospect of torture and decided to survive. In a time when heroic qualities in the West seem paralysed by the smallness of men in comparison with the greatness of events, Puey has lived his life—in a comparatively small country—on a heroic scale. His bearing is so modest, almost to the point of diffidence, that in his presence it is difficult to believe the scale and the range of his achievements. He once privately reproached me for extravagance in comparing him with Prince Viwat. For anyone who knows the Thai scene this is as if Winston Churchill accused one of extravagance in comparing him with Robert Menzies.

After an outstanding undergraduate career at Thammasat University he was a postgraduate student at the London School of
Economics when Thailand was invaded in World War II. Giving up his studies to join the British army, he was selected as the leader of the first party to be air-dropped into Thailand behind the Japanese lines. Though the drop was a complete failure (most of the equipment fell in the middle of a village) and he was almost immediately captured, his influence on all the Thais he encountered was such that he was able to establish a complete secret network in Bangkok, while still nominally remaining a prisoner-of-war. He was even sent back by air to London, before the end of the war, to try and negotiate with the British government on behalf of Thailand.

All this, however, was merely a preliminary to his career. Within a decade of taking his higher degree he had mobilised enough influence to bring about a major reform in the Thai budgetary system, had been appointed Deputy Governor of the Bank of Thailand, and had resigned this position in protest against financial irregularities by the Prime Minister.

For a young man in his early thirties this might well have been the end of a promising career, but not for Puey. There are several reasons for this. One is, of course, Puey’s great value to the Thai government. He is not merely a very able and very practical economist and administrator. He is also a transparently honest and firm man, in a country where dishonesty is very easy and firmness usually undervalued. His character inspires confidence. Yet there is one special feature which would be important anywhere, but is especially important in Thailand. He is able to believe in people, even while feeling compelled to protest against some of their actions. He is no self-righteous protester, prepared to blacken characters for the sake of condemning wrong.

In the particular case in which he felt he had to resign, the Prime Minister had, for political reasons, condoned a serious financial irregularity. I believe that Puey accepted the fact that the Prime Minister considered this necessary because of the way political power was organised in Thailand. He spoke strongly and forthrightly to the people concerned, making it clear that he could
not accept such 'necessity', but was on this occasion prepared to resign privately and without publicity. It was a moral stand, not a political protest. He was to show his capacity for political protest later, when he had a goal to achieve and protest could help.

After a spell as Financial Counsellor in Europe he returned to the Bank as its Governor. Partly through his own resignation, partly though those of other key men, the Bank had acquired a good deal of moral authority. It administered most of the overseas loans to Thailand, and lenders who had good reason for caution in lending to the Thai government were prepared to trust the Bank. In bringing Puey back to head the Bank the Prime Minister was knowingly setting limits to his own capacity, and that of his ministers, to divert public funds to private uses. He had sources beyond Puey’s control, but he realised that it was for Thailand’s good that a great part of the country’s assets should be in safe hands. A few years later, when he established the Budget Bureau, he made Puey head of that too.

Since Puey has been Governor of the Bank he has had plenty of opportunity to make use of political protest. When he had been Governor five years the Bank published a collection of his public speeches. This makes it easy to see what he has been trying to do and to observe his mind and character at work.

There have been well-timed attacks on abuses, where a shift in public opinion could be effective. Here, a speech would mobilise business opinion against a monopoly in foreign trade. There, a criticism of inefficient public enterprise would set people asking questions. Direct abuses in government Departments were needled, but without pointing to any particular individual. These attacks have certainly stimulated press comment and had their effect on the organisation of Thai society. They are limited in scope, lacking in personal bitterness, and timed (apparently) to achieve a specific effect.

Yet there is another kind of comment, designed to achieve a more long-run result. Here the aim is to change the nature of Thai
banking by playing on a fundamental inconsistency in the character of Thai bankers. For Thai bankers at present have to be two things at once. They have to organise a professional service, with all the necessary skills and qualities of character that a banker must possess to command public confidence; yet they are also actively involved in Thai politics, furthering the rather shady interests of particular politicians and business groups.

The chief occasions for Puey's long-run efforts are his annual speeches at the dinner of the Thai Bankers' Association, and sometimes also his speeches at professional associations or faculty meetings. His aim here is to make Thai bankers more professional and strengthen them against the abuses that come from associating with politics. This aim he also pursues in his teaching; for like many Thai civil servants Puey was a part-time lecturer in a university, and unlike most of them he continued to teach even when he had risen to the highest levels of the service. In one of his books—a textbook based on his lectures—there is a fascinating attempt to derive, from Buddhist ethics, the moral duty of the practising economist. Clearly one of his motives in continuing to teach is his conviction that it is, above everything, important to train Thai professional men who will be firm in carrying out their professional obligations.

Not many years ago he made front-page news in Thailand by asking to be allowed to resign his post as Governor of the Bank to serve full-time as Dean of the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat University. The Prime Minister persuaded him to stay on and hold both posts simultaneously. Reluctantly he agreed to do this for a time, but from then on he treated his university post as the more important, and preferred to be called the Dean rather than the Governor.

The next time he was invited to the Thai Bankers' Association he was in excellent form. It was the first time, he said, that the Thai Bankers' Association had invited the Dean of Economics to address them. However, he thought it would interest the assembled
bankers to know something of the topics on which the Department hoped to undertake research projects. He then proceeded to enumerate several problems which were worthy of investigation; every one of them involved some scandal on which a bit of public reaction might lead to some cleaning-up.

Though this was in part a playful reaction, the underlying intention involved, in transferring his attention increasingly to university education, is far from playful. Puey has become convinced that the forces of decency and professional integrity are not strong enough in Thailand, mainly because not enough is done in the universities to train character in the future professional leaders. This is partly because university teachers give too little of their time to their university work. The main reason is that they are paid very little, and feel they have to spend some time supplementing their income. No doubt Puey feels that if the Governor of the Bank of Thailand gives up his position to teach full-time it will have an effect in two different directions. It will help stimulate the morale of university teachers and encourage them to give as much time as they can possibly afford to their university work. Yet it is perhaps even more important that it will stimulate new attitudes towards university teaching among those who have good reason to respect the importance of Puey’s work. Senior civil servants and businessmen may manage to despise Thai university teachers; but most of them know from practical experience the influence Puey has exerted. The shadier ones may not like him, but none of them can despise him.

Since his first attempt to leave the Bank Puey’s influence among Thai intellectuals has greatly increased. Many of the keen young academics, even in fields far from his own, now look to him for leadership and inspiration. This is not only because of the distinction that he has brought to the academic profession. In spite of his great responsibilities he has found time to produce important scholarly work in the Thai language: among others, a book on public finance and a half-share in the best individual text on the
economy of Thailand. Yet there is another reason for his standing among intellectuals beyond his own field. For this surprising man is also a literary artist, not only in prose but in verse.

I do not know whether he has published any serious poetry; if he has, I have not seen it, but for me it is a hard struggle to read Thai poetry and I have very little idea what is available. I know that two of his speeches to the Thai Bankers' Association were made entirely in verse—elegant, graceful verse with plenty of wit and verbal playfulness, clearly the work of a man who is at home in the medium. His recent vivid and effective account of his wartime experiences quotes some verse that he wrote when, with a group of other young Thais, he was undergoing preliminary training in the British army; so that he must have been writing verse for over twenty years.

Once I congratulated him on the fact that he had produced these speeches in verse, and wondered whether he was the only Central Bank Governor in the world who would either think of doing such a thing or have the talent to do it. He smiled his charming deprecatory smile. I thought once again how difficult it was to remember, when talking to him, the achievements of this diffident man. For not merely is he modest to a fault; he is not in any way physically distinguished. He is of average height for a Thai, a little bald, with nothing except his smile that is easy to remember. Looking more carefully one notices the uniformly quick movements, invariably smooth and unrushed, that must contribute something to the vast amount of work he gets through, and the air of kindly authority that seems natural to him in talking to any subordinate. Yet even these things convey little of the power of his personality.

He ignored the element of congratulation in my question, choosing to treat it as mere curiosity about why he should have taken the trouble to write in verse instead of in prose. It would not, he said, have been worth the time if he had not had a good many critical things to say about the government, which the new
Prime Minister might find hard to take. He was a good man—they all began this job with good intentions—and the main thing was to point out what needed to be done. It would be much easier for the Prime Minister if it was said lightly, in verse.

How many men are there, in present-day politics, who could cite—with complete candour—such civilised 'reasons of state' and implement them with such felicity? The courage to join a foreign army for his country's good, to face charges of treachery and risk torture, alone; the strength to resign, privately and on grounds of principle, an important post, on the threshold of his career; the grace, even in this crisis, and in later crises, to seek the good in his adversary and not to vilify; the ability to administer a great and powerful institution, combined with the humanity to care deeply about the moral development of an individual student; and, with all this, the capacity to clothe his thoughts in vivid and distinguished prose or in graceful, felicitous verse: these are the qualities that make Puey an inspiration to many young professional Thais. These are the qualities which make me, personally, richer for having known him.
Professor T. H. Silcock was a Senior Research Fellow in Economics at the School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University when this book was written.

His association with Thailand dates from 1942, when he was a prisoner-of-war on the 'death railway'. Since then he has visited Thailand many times, including a period as a consultant to ECAFE, two visits for field work, and an appointment as a special lecturer at Chulalongkorn University.

During this quarter-century of interest in Thailand Professor Silcock has come to know many aspects of Thai life often denied to the foreigner. His knowledge of the language has enabled him to mix with a large cross-section of the population, and his work has taken him from Bangkok seminar rooms to remote villages all over Thailand.

That his knowledge of Southeast Asia is not confined to Thailand can be seen by the list of his other publications, which include The Economy of Malaya (1954), The Commonwealth Economy in Southeast Asia (1959), Towards a Malayan Nation (1961), The Political Economy of Independent Malaya (ed. with E. K. Fisk, 1963), Southeast Asian University (1964), and Thailand: Social and Economic Studies in Development (1967).

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George Capper was born and received his art training in Chile. Since then he has lived in the Middle East, Asia, and Australia, always with his sketching pencil near at hand.

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