

SACRED SIAMESE BUDDHAS in BERKELEY

The Largest American
Collection of Ancient
Bronze Images From the
Land of the White
Elephant Is Now Owned
in the College Town



PRINCE SIDDARTHA



THE REMARKABLE COLLECTION OF SIAMESE
BUDDHAS NOW PRIVATELY OWNED IN BERKELEY

By Amy Dudley

SEVERAL of the wealthy eastern connoisseurs of antiques have collections of Buddhas, but none can compare with the one belonging to Miss Elizabeth C. Rankin of Berkeley. It is the largest collection of Buddhas on the Pacific coast and the most complete collection of Siamese Buddhas anywhere in this country. It was procured with great difficulty and was brought out of Siam after overcoming many obstacles. It can never be duplicated.

The present king of Siam, a highly educated man, recognizes the importance of preserving these ancient relics and some time ago issued an edict strictly prohibiting any further exportations.

The ancient laws of Siam made profanation of a statue of the Buddha an offense punishable by fearful penalty. "If a thief steal an image of Buddha and use various devices for removing its ornaments, such as washing or smelting, let him be put into a furnace or treated exactly in the same way he treated the image, and thus pay for his wickedness."

One of these bronze images of Buddha is more than 1,000 years old. One thousand years! One can hardly grasp the significance of 1,000 years. Life's longest span is but one-tenth of that duration. English history of 1,000 years ago borders on the mythical. Hardicanute was king of England and Peter the Hermit and others were leading their hordes of undisciplined crusaders to destruction in their efforts to rescue Jerusalem from the Moslem. This, the so-called new world, laved and guarded by the waters of two great oceans, was unknown for five centuries thereafter.

If these silent graven images could speak what might they tell us? But need they resort to speech? Rhys

Dauids, the oriental scholar, says: "Buddhism is the history of more than half the people in the world for more than 2,000 years. It appeals not to sword, but to intellectual and moral suasion, with never a religious persecution in all its history." The last fact alone makes it worthy our respect. "When our ancestors were in the depths of savagery Indian sages were indulging in metaphysical disquisitions which are even today the admiration of western savants."

Into this inheritance came Gautama, the Buddha, 560 years before Christ. His teaching was pure philosophy. He was an iconoclast, a reformer and a leveler of caste—that curse of India—and he preached not only the brotherhood of mankind, but of all living creatures. The irony of fate has made representations of him, who abhorred idolatry in all its forms, the presiding images of innumerable shrines throughout all Asia.

These 17 bronze Buddhas came from the ruins of Ayuthia—"the Abode of the Gods"—ancient capital of Siam. There is no question of their authenticity or antiquity. Ayuthia was founded in the year 1350 upon the ruins of a still older city, so ancient there is only tradition concerning its beginning. Ayuthia was destroyed in the seventeenth century by the Burmese, after two years' siege. Finding they could not reduce it by famine they set it on fire, the burning lasting two months. A thick jungle now covers the site of the old city and in the midst of it are the ruins of the temple, the most magnificent of that age, when the rulers of Siam were dictators of the fortunes of Indo-China. Some of these images show the marks of fire and burial, and one of them has lost

the jeweled eyes which it originally possessed. Many images were broken up by the Burmese at the time of the invasion to obtain the jewel which is always within the head of a Siamese Buddha.

The casting of bronze was known to the Siamese and had reached a high degree of artistic perfection in the earliest times. Numerous images of immense size were made, and the process of casting was performed with great ceremony; many jewels and articles of value were thrown into the melting pot.

All oriental religions are symbolic. Meanings are multiple. But whoever takes the trouble to get beneath the surface finds an imperishable truth—"the one running through all." Nature herself is cryptic. Sometimes she speaks in riddles. Ofttimes she refuses to speak at all.

Each one of these statues tells its own story. Prince Siddhartha sits in royal robes awaiting the hour when he shall quit his golden prison "to find the truth; which henceforth I will seek, for all men's sake, until the truth be found."

And did he find it? Each must answer that question for himself. But never is seen a representation of the Buddha in any of his many forms without that look of "ineffable calm" which distinguishes him from all others. There are 103 distinctive marks of a "great being." Not all of them are found on every image, but some of them are found on all images of the Buddha.

These Siamese Buddhas—of the type known as "Kata met Pet"—are seated in attitude of meditation, the Hindu form of prayer, on pedestals, showing the upturned sole of each foot, the crossed feet signifying the completion of the "circle of destiny," an idea of conservation. Some of the pedestals

represent a lotus blossom, most sacred of all symbols, typifying universal evolution and the primal law of nature. It is the symbol of Vishnu as Narayana, or the Supreme Spirit which moved over the face of the waters before the creation of the world, and from his wand came the lotus from which Brahm, the self-existent, sprang. The halo or glory, universally indicative of sainthood, is in these images represented in the form called "srot." Sometimes it rises from the head, flame-like; sometimes it is a lotus bud. It is also a Vishnuvian symbol. The extreme point may be seen to bend slightly to the right, indicating a high type of



THE THOUSAND YEAR
OLD BUDDHA



THIS BUDDHA HAS EYES
OF MOTHER OF PEARL

THE BUDDHA FROM WHICH
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in the mental realm; the ability to get back to the origin of things—truth. The position of the left hand with upturned palm, the right hand unclasped, bending downward, denotes the perfect medium of spiritual communication—the ability to receive, the readiness to give. Thrown over the right arm, leaving half the body uncovered, is the cloak of the Buddhist priest, symbolizing duality in all its forms.

Around the neck and passing under the right arm is the emblem of the ascetic, the sacrificial cord, rather than the sacred thread of the Brahmanic caste; for Buddha was of the Kshatriya, or king and warrior caste, and therefore would not be shown as wearing the cord of the Brahmanic priesthood.

In the Yataka Kalapa is written: "It is bootless to worship the Buddha; nothing is necessary but to revere him. Statues are only useful in so far as they refresh the memory; for as the farmer sows the seed and gathers in the grass in good season, so will the man who trusts in the Buddha and holds fast by his sacred law obtain deliverance and pass in Nibhan."

In his last words, the dying Gautama counseled his disciples: "All compounds are perishable. Spirit is the sole, elementary and primordial unity, and each of its rays is immortal, infinite and indestructible. Beware of the illusions of matter."



How the "Bit" Grew Out of Money Customs of the Early Days

By E. C. Stock

IN the days of old in San Francisco there were some extraordinary conditions, when one looks back at them from the standpoint of modern times, and yet, what today seems bizarre, was in those days taken as a matter of course.

In the early, that is in the very early days, from the time Sam Brannan started the California Star in the first part of 1847 in the village of Yerba Buena, which subsequently became the city of San Francisco, down to as late as 1853, small change was scarce and the only medium of circulation in the ordinary lines of traffic was the Spanish money which held sway until after the discovery of gold by Marshall at Coloma in 1848. The subsequent rush of gold seekers brought with them the current coins of the many parts of the world from which they came. The coin from the east was at par, the peso of Mexico and old Spain was accepted for a dollar, and the smaller denominations were received in trade according to

size, that is, the medio peso of the two countries named passed current for half a dollar, the dos reales of those nations, the one franc piece worth in France 20 cents, the German mark, the 2 skilling of Norway, the English shilling, and in fact anything that was of the size of an American quarter, was good for 25 cents no matter what the current worth in the country of issue was, and the same with the reales and the vingt centimes of France, in fact anything that was the size of a dime was accepted as a "bit," the equivalent of 12 1/2 cents. When the gold came from the mines it was used as a circulating medium on the basis of sixteen dollars an ounce and every merchant had a pair of gold scales on his counter to weigh "the dust" as the products of the mines was called. Then came the issues of the several private mints that were run by Baldwin & Co., Wass, Mollart & Co., Moffatt & Co., Kohler and others that coined five, ten and twenty dollar pieces and some of them 50 slugs.

This state of affairs continued until 1854 when the branch mint in Commercial street, on the north side, a little west of Montgomery, was started and from that time on the American issue took the place of all other coins. In the days before the mint was operated there were a few shrewd speculators who took advantage of the money market to turn an honest dollar. They sent empty nail kegs to Mexican and South American ports and had their agents fill them with the coin of these countries, coins of all denominations, which they procured two for one in those countries and had them shipped here, disposing of them dollar for dollar in gold dust, for people wanted change, and the smaller coins were disposed of at similar rates. Before change was plentiful, about the only coin in circulation was the old fashioned Hispania dollar and when a half dollar was wanted one of these was divided in two with a hatchet and if a quarter was wanted the halves

were again divided and such was the change of the very early days.

The bit became one of the institutions of the city. The early residents of the city disdained anything smaller than a quarter, declaring that they had no use for "bits," what they had and half dimes or their then foreign equivalents were tendered. In that way the term "bit" came to be applied to the real, and finally it was extended to two, three, four, five, six and seven bits, and then came the dollar. As late as the sixties, if goods were sold for three, five or seven bits it was impossible to make the even change, as the people did not want pennies or half pennies, so if any one made a three bit purchase, equivalent to 37 1/2 cents a fifty cent piece was tendered and the store keeper gave one bit in change, sometimes a dime, sometimes a real, and if the customer handed over a two-bit piece of no matter what national issue and a bit, or a quarter and a dime it was accepted as 37 1/2 cents, and the same with the other odd amounts under a dollar. Nei-

ther store keeper nor customer complained, it was the custom of the city.

The time came, however, when the decimal coins were used and goods sold for the exact figure, but during war time, that is, the war of the rebellion, dimes and half dimes became very scarce. About that time a little Englishman who kept a saloon at the southwest corner of Washington and Davis streets inaugurated the selling of beer at 5 cents a glass. If the customer passed over a quarter to pay for his individual drink he was given two dimes in return, but if he laid down a dime, he was politely told that he could "have another" but if he declined, the proprietor calmly took the dime, placed it under the blade of a tobacco cutter and split the coin in two. In that way he divided the money. This, however, was of but short duration, for he was called on by the federal authorities and told that while there was no law to prevent him from doing what he wanted with his money, he could not mutilate coin of the country and endeavor to pass it as current money.