

Written for this Paper.

## NEW YEAR IN ASIA.

Next Monday will be New Year's day in America. It will not be New Year all over the world. Nearly every Asiatic nation has its own calendar. The New Year festivities of the Chinese take place during the latter part of January or the first of February. Russia has a New Year about twelve days different from ours, and the pretty girls of Burmah do not celebrate their New Year until about the first of April. In my trip around the world a few years ago I struck a number of queer New Year celebrations, and I find that every nation celebrates the day differently. The people of Burmah and Siam have the most curious customs. The Burmans think that a spirit king at that time descends from heaven to earth and upon the manner of his coming depends the prosperity of the year. The astrologers fix the time of his appearance and they give the signal when he has come. Then cannons are fired, guns are shot and every man and woman in the country makes a prayer and pours a libation of water on the ground. This is the last night of the old year, and the next morning is to be the beginning of the New Year holidays.

### THE BURMESE WATER FEAST.

New Year in Burmah begins with a great water feast, and the Burmese girls and women for this day reign supreme. I wish I could show you a Burmese girl. She is as pretty as any of her kind the world over. She is straight, well-formed and fine looking. Her red lips are luscious, her eyes are large, brown and velvety, and her cheeks are the color of the cream of your own Jersey cow, with a faint tinge of red in the center. She wears but two garments, one is a white saque of fine silk or cotton, which covers the arms and bust and falls to the waist, and the other is a strip of silk or cotton of the brightest colors, which is wrapped tightly around her waist, hips and loins, and fastened with a twist at the front. It falls to her feet and when she walks she kicks her bare heels out behind, so that the only exposure of her person is from her foot to her knee. She wears rings in the lobes of her ears as big around as a silver quarter, and she smokes cigars as long as a lead pencil and as thick as the wrist of a two-year old baby. She has more rights in the way of business and love-making than has her American sister, and on New Year day she is more giddy than ever. As soon as the day breaks she gets a squirt gun made of tin or bamboo and with a bucket of water goes out to saturate her gentlemen friends. No one is safe from her, and boys and girls, men and women, devote the day to sprinkling and soaking each other. No one has the right to get mad on this day, and a boy has the right to pour water over his father, and the girls drop bucketfuls from the roofs of their houses down the backs of their parents and Europeans as well as Americans are soaked. At a New Year not long ago an Englishman in a tall plug hat arrived at Rangoon, Burmah, on New Year's day. He had letters of introduction and he went to present these wearing a high silk hat, a long frock coat and light pantaloons. At the front door he found four pretty Burmese girls, who told him in their lingo they were going to throw water over him. He thought they were

asking whether he wanted to see their father, and he raised his hat and said "Yes." Upon this he got about four gallons of water and he was drenched to the skin. Another Englishman who was treated in this way picked up the girl and dropped her into the bath tub from whence she was getting the water. She was a high-toned Burmese girl, this action was entirely contrary to New Year etiquette, and caused, it is said, the young man's social ostracism.

### THEY BATHE THEIR GRANDMOTHERS.

The Siamese New Year is the 27th of March and the holidays last for five days. There is no tax on gambling at this time and all the gambling houses of Bangkok are opened. Thousands of these half-naked Siamese squat about playing fan tan and one of the funniest customs is that the children have of bathing their grandmothers on New Year's. The ugliest looking old women of the world are the Siamese. The maidens are plump and bright-eyed. They are short, seldom over five feet in height, but they are straight and well formed. They wear nothing but a strip of cotton cloth a yard wide and about three yards long, which they wind about their hips and fasten by pulling the ends through between the legs and tucking it into the belt at the back. This is the dress of the common woman, and it is only the better classes who have anything about the shoulders, the bust and the neck. In such a costume a plump girl looks well, but a scrawny wrinkled old woman looks horrible. The Siamese women cut their hair short. It grows coarser as they grow older and it stands up like a shoe brush all over their heads, these grandmothers have bristles about an inch long. They all chew the betel and long before they have grandchildren their teeth are black and their lips are cracked and stained. They squat around the house on their haunches doing little but smoking cigarettes and chewing betel nuts and they vary the puffing out the smoke with the spitting out betel juice. This betel juice is red and it looks just like blood. The most of the houses of Bangkok are right on the river and the children dip up the water in buckets and pour it over these old hags as they sit on the porches in the sunshine. They act as though they loved their grandmothers and they probably do. After they are through pouring the water over them they sprinkle them with perfume and powder their necks and faces. They also give them a new suit of clothes on New Year's Day, consisting often of a new waist cloth and a Turkish towel.

The celebration of New Year's Day is sanctioned by the Buddhists and the Siamese believe that the souls of those Buddhists who have gone to purgatory come back to earth on that day. The people pour water out on the ground in celebration of this and they always go to the temples and visit the shrines. Every idol in the kingdom is bathed with perfumed water and incense is burned by the cord. They lay flowers upon the idols and they weave garlands and put them into Buddha's hand. The children play tricks upon one another much the same as we do on Halloween or April first. They black each other's faces and put each other into the river. They have a water celebration much the same as in Burmah and the king has a reception of his officers much the same as has our President.

### SIAM'S MOCK KING.

Speaking of the king, Siam has another queer holiday, during which the king nominally gives his power over to a mock king, and the whole of Siam takes part in this celebration. The governor of the province sent me an invitation to it while I was in Bangkok, and I watched the proceedings in company with an Austrian prince, who was visiting Siam at that time. There were thousands on the streets, and the rich Siamese as well as the poor were out. There were lots of royal babies, who were dressed in nothing but diamonds. I remember one young prince, who had a cupful of diamonds upon him, and his sole dress was these and a silver belt. He was about four years old, and he was smoking a cigarette. There were lots of pretty Siamese girls, many of whom wore silk waist cloths, and through the crowd came a number of Siamese debtors, with chains about their legs. They were going to work, and were not allowed to take part in the festivities. The celebration took place in a great court near the city market of Bangkok. We waited about three hours before we heard the procession. Then a noise arose like that of a thousand dogs with tin cans tied to their tails rattling over the stoniest of streets, and a moment later we saw about 2000 naked legs carrying 1000 half naked Siamese, who carried banners and escorted a wrinkled old prince as their king. This old king was as black as the ace of spades, and his under jaw was no thicker than your finger. He was dressed in gold and silver clothing, and he had a crown on his head that looked like a pyramid of ice cream. The people cheered him as he came up, and he stopped in front of our party and wagged his thin lower jaw at the governor, saying something that I could not understand. Right near here there was a great swing fastened to a beam across two poles about 100 feet high. From the top of this beam the ropes holding the swing were hung, and on the board at its foot four naked Siamese stood. A purse of money was tied to a long bamboo fishing pole and fastened to one of the uprights; so that the money hung about thirty feet out from the swing. The pole was so bent that the bag of money hung quivering from the topmost point, far out to the side of the swingers. The feat was for them to get the money while the swing was moving. They first knelt and prayed to the king, and then went up and down upon the swing until they swung themselves high up in the air and nearer and nearer the money. At last one of them reached it. According to the rules he had to bite it off with his teeth and to hold the money in his mouth until the swing stopped. This is no easy feat, and the people went wild. Then other four men took their places on the swing, and more money was put up, and so it went on. I was not able to learn just what it meant, but I was told that it was semi religious in character and that it came from the Brahmins.

### QUEER CHINESE CUSTOMS

The Chinese New Year festivities often last for three weeks. The people prepare for them, and the last days of the old year are the busiest. Every one wants money, and the storekeepers are getting ready for their annual settlement. All debts are expected to be paid at the end of the old year, and