

REWARD OF MERIT

By WILLIAM H. LEACH
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WNU Service

ALL Crawfordsville had crowded into the little town hall for the homecoming celebration. The dignitaries of the occasion were organizing at the entrance for the march to the platform. There village officials and the local preachers crowded around the speaker of the day, eager to be recognized as part of the essentials.

The platform was empty save for the chairs carefully arranged and one man who sat at one end. He was a huge hulk of a fellow, dressed in a well worn doughboy uniform with a decoration on his breast. A pair of large dark glasses covered his eyes. The speaker noticed him and turned to the chairman in inquiry.

"Soldier of the World war," he explained. "The only one we have who won a croix de guerre."

"Blind?"
"Blind as a bat, and stone deaf."
"How did he get his decoration?"
The chairman brought up his hands in indication of ignorance.

"In fact, I don't know much about him. No one does. One of the papers got hold of him some way and we brought him in for the celebration. Eager to come, too, when we finally got the message across to him."

"Ump! Too bad," the speaker, evidently relieved that he would have little competition for attention turned back to his group and they marched to their positions. It was a great day for Crawfordsville.

But it was a greater day for Peter Kelly.

He might be blind as a bat and deaf as a post but his imagination was seeing wonderful sights on this day. His mind surveyed twenty years in a second. He saw plenty and famine, wars and peace, pain and joy, love and hate. But above all these rather petty things—petty to him just now—he saw one great ideal of human service; he saw the justification of a life-long ambition which had been handled roughly but now came to claim its own.

It was just twenty years before that he had stood on the platform of the village school of Crawfordsville and received his diploma.

Senator Harrington had addressed the class which was graduating. His subject had been "The Compensation of Public Service." He recounted the story of his own life, telling of the rise of the barefoot boy to a position of great responsibility.

Young Kelly had eagerly listened to each word. He could still recall, word for word, parts of that great address.

"My young gentlemen," the senator had said, "there is but one rule to a successful and happy life. That is the standard of unselfish service. All other things fall. All that glistens is not gold. But it is written in the very blood of the universe that the man who serves his fellow men will be smiled upon by the gods. The law of service never fails. The reward of sacrificial living may be long delayed—the mills of gods grind slowly—but the reward is inevitable. Sooner or later his fellow citizens will call him from his humble abode of labor and place the crown of public esteem upon his brow. Some day he may stand, as I stand here, before those whom he has served, beloved and respected by all. His words then will be the golden apples of advice which they consume with eagerness and affection."

From that day Peter Kelly began to live. Of course he had to start in a rather lowly capacity.

He got a job as timekeeper in the local woolen mills, but the opportunities for service are present in a place as common as that. He found himself lending aid to the families of those who toiled. More than once he paid the doctor bills for some hard-pressed toiler. The men took the money and smiled at what they considered his naive philosophy. They thought that it was the bunk. But the mills of gods grind slowly. He could afford to wait.

Then he broke out on earth and the World War was on. Pete kissed his old father and mother goodbye and joined the first contingent of volunteers in the county. For a time he really tasted the sweets of public esteem.

There were parties, dinners and pretty girls.

In the fever of the moment he married one who swore that she would be faithful to him till death and he marched away with a proud and happy heart.

War was not all that he expected it to be.

Where he looked for idealism he fought lice and muddy trenches, profanity, dirty stories, fights and sex. But he kept the flame of idealism high. His heart had been touched in a way that the others could not understand. He was fighting for democracy—

fighting that wars should be no more—fighting to go back to Fanny and hear her words of approval.

Then one day he woke up in the hospital.

His eyes were bandaged. He felt the smooth hands of the nurses as they moved and washed him. He did not hear their voices, so he learned that he was deaf. When the bandages were being changed he found that he could not see.

He was blind.
What a penalty to pay in the fight for democracy.

One day they stood him up in a line and some one pinned a medal to his breast and kissed him on the cheek.

Afterwards it dawned upon him that he had been honored.

But there had been no thrill. It was all a part of military regime. Then they brought him back across the ocean and placed him in a school. He learned to listen by the pressure of the hand and they taught him a useful trade—that of making brooms. Finally as full fledged broom-maker he went back to Crawfordsville.

His mother was still alive and he started the broom industry in the woodshed of his home.

His old mother would lead him around as he sought to make his sales. Fanny, the war bride, had secured a divorce on the grounds of desertion. At least, that was the reason the judge gave the public.

In reality the magistrate felt that no bright girl should be tied for life to blind Pete Kelly to pay for a moment's madness.

So in the back room Peter Kelly worked on his brooms all day long. He worked with his fingers but his sightless eyes looked toward the heavens. The eyes both saw and pleaded. He was making brooms which would make housework lighter. It was honorable employment. There was the pleading that some day his own townspeople would call him forth and express their loyalty to him.

Every time a compensation check came his mother used the opportunity to protest.

"It's a fool you were, Peter," she would say. "What's the use of the money when you can't see nor hear. Your fine friends have forgotten you. They gave you dinners when you went away. But they won't buy your brooms now."

Peter would shake his head.

"It takes time," he would say, "but the rewards of service are sure."

Then one day two men called at the house to see him.

They asked the mother if he had really received the French decoration for bravery. She proudly displayed the cross.

Then they gave the invitation for him to participate in the homecoming celebration. Peter was to have a seat of prominence on the platform.

Thus, at last, comes the hour of triumph.

Now the great hour has arrived. Unable to hear a word said his mind draws its own pictures. He hears the speaker giving a word picture of the battle in which he fell. Leaning forward in his chair he nods to the audience. He thinks he hears cheers. He knows that they soon will be calling on him to say something. He knows—has known for years—just what he will say when the time comes.

In the meantime the program goes smoothly on. A local preacher gives the invocation. A quartette sings, the chairman introduces the speaker in a ten-minute speech. The great man steps up and orates. The entire assembly, tired with sitting on folded chairs, rises and sings America.

It is not until the room has been practically vacated by the noisy, sweaty throng that the chairman notices that Peter has been left on the platform. He motions to the custodian to go to the platform and bring him to the door.

The custodian touches his arm. The blind soldier interprets it as his cue to speak. He takes one step forward and smiles. Then in the heavy unregulated voice, so common to those who cannot hear, he begins:

"Fellow citizens. This tribute which you have today paid me touches my very heart. More than that it justifies my philosophy of life. I have always believed and still do believe that when one sacrifices for his country and his fellowmen, sooner or later, the reward will come. Sometimes it is long delayed but it comes. The mills of gods grind slowly. Let the little boys and girls here treasure these words in their hearts."

Again the custodian touched his arm. He yielded to the touch and accompanied him from the platform. Proudly he marched through the central aisle to the door, nodding to one side and another as he went.

People generally were not much impressed with the quality of the meeting. Most of them agreed that the speaker was awful. "Full of baloney," one expressed it. "Wasn't the blind broom-maker funny sitting on the platform," said another.

But the day ended in a flame of beauty for Peter Kelly and a strange spirit of peace took possession of his soul. For the spirit of service had received its reward.

Contrasts in Siam



A Quaint Siamese Cart.

Prepared by National Geographic Society
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SIAM still is oriental in spirit, but possesses modern occidental appointments of great variety. In assimilating things western, Siam has maintained its distinctive individuality. Few countries offer more startling contrasts.

It is not unusual in Siamese cities to see policemen halting motor and street car traffic to make way for some kaleidoscopic medieval pageant. With modern hospitals and dispensaries available, many people still prefer medicinal concoctions made from rhinoceros horns, snake galls, and strange herbs. Slow-moving ox carts and shuffling elephants vie with motorcars for the right of way on many country roads. Siamese Rebecas in Bangkok fill their jars (or oil tins) with water at sanitary street hydrants. In some parts of north Siam tiger whiskers are considered much more effective in punishing an enemy than is a police court.

Yet, on the visit or the king and queen of Siam to the United States in 1931, when King Prajadhipok revealed his keen interest in athletics, radio, and motion pictures, and discussed in excellent English with newspaper correspondents and business leaders such things as free press and democracy, while the queen played golf, many people were amazed to discover how modern the royal family really was.

Again, through the forthcoming visit of the king for further optical treatment, the "Land of the Free" in Asia will meet our United States and mutual appreciation will be increased.

Siam a Land of the Free? Such is the meaning of Muang Thai, the name by which the Siamese have always known their country. Superficially, it might seem somewhat of an anomaly; for, until less than two years ago, when a constitution was born, Siam was the sole remaining absolute monarchy in the Family of Nations.

Yet the name Muang Thai has significance. Of all the numerous races and tribal groups who in successive migrations have swept down across southern Asia, only the Siamese have emerged victorious. Against many vicissitudes they have maintained their complete independence and forged themselves a modern state.

Today we can step aboard the magic carpets provided by Imperial Airways, K. L. M., and Air-France at London, Amsterdam, or Marseilles and be whisked away to this interesting oriental land in a little over a week, for Siam lies at the aerial crossroads of the Far East. Or we can go by boat and drop off at Penang, Singapore, or Hong Kong, as Bangkok is linked to Penang by train, to Hong Kong by local steamer, and to Singapore by both.

In the long curving sweep of Bangkok's river highway, the Me Nam Chao Bhraya, is revealed the pageant of Siam's commercial activity. Many of Bangkok's 80 rice mills line the water front. Chinese junks and lighters clutter their wharves, with endless queues of perspiring, bare-backed coolies dumping baskets of rice in their holds. Other boats lit their rough matting sails and slip downstream to the off-coast island of Koh Si Chang, where deep-draft steamers take on cargo.

Nearly 90 per cent of all Siam's foreign trade moves up and down this waterway, accompanied by all the strange smells and cries peculiar to an oriental port.

As a capital city, Bangkok is not old. It is but a few years senior to Washington, on the Potomac. The New Rama I bridge, its enormous spans etched sharply against a background of colorful temples and water-front shops, gives the city its date line. This 475-foot structure, first to link two portions of the city, was dedicated in April, 1932, in commemoration of the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Bangkok and the reign of the present Chakkri dynasty.

Extensive festivities brilliant in oriental splendor attended its dedication. At six o'clock in the morning on that April day, after having said prayers and lighted incense before the statue of the Rama I, which stands at the approach of the bridge, King Prajadhipok, clad in ancestral garments, cut the thread of silk that barred the entrance. Then, mounting the golden pa-

languin, surrounded by parasols of state, and accompanied by the princes and high officials, he made the first crossing of the bridge.

America has touched Siam in many ways. Through American missionaries modern medicine was first practiced and progressive schools developed in the country. Americans brought the first printing presses and also adapted the 44 consonants and 20 vowel and tonal marks of the Siamese written language to the keyboard of a typewriter.

Aided by American advisers of foreign affairs, Siam, in 1923, secured the abrogation of joutgrown extraterritorial treaties and won her complete sovereignty.

Originating in the mission schools, the physical-training idea has spread rapidly throughout the land. The late king himself was Scout Chief for the Wild Tiger corps. Although that organization has since ceased to function, its spirit is carried on in a Boy Scout organization known as the Wild Tiger Cubs.

Education has become compulsory. More than 86 per cent of local schools and 50 per cent of government schools are situated in monasteries or are modern outgrowths of the old temple schools. In Bangkok, too, is a well-functioning university and medical school.

In the east of Siam, bordering on French Indo-China, is a wide mountain-encircled plateau, 500 feet to 500 feet above sea level and tilted slightly to the east, so that it drains into the mighty Mekong.

During the six-months' dry season this territory is very arid, and during the rains it is often heavily flooded; consequently it is the poorest section in Siam, and the people often have difficulty in securing a comfortable livelihood.

Until recently, when the railway was extended beyond Nagor Rajasima (Korat) to Ubol Rajadhani, the people were severely handicapped in getting their produce out to market centers. Considerable wealth, however, lies in the redwood and other forests located in the mountains. These and other resources will be developed because railroads and highways are being extended into the region.

Chandaburi province, bordering the Gulf of Siam, finds prosperity in its forested hills, in pepper, coffee, and in ruby, sapphire, and zircon mines.

South Siam embodies about one-half of the elongated Malay peninsula, with its population gradually shading into almost pure Malay. Like lower Malaya, it is rich in minerals, especially tin, and also produces considerable quantities of rubber. In normal times an average of nine million dollars' worth of tin annually goes into foreign marts from these mines.

Eastward, westward, and northward from Bangkok stretches the vast alluvial plain of central Siam, level as a table top—the rice granary of the country. It is the heart of the kingdom and the source of nine-tenths of its wealth. An area of roughly 50,000 square miles is enclosed between the high mountain backbone that extends along the Burma border and the battlements that face the Korat plateau.

What the Nile is to Egypt the Me Nam Chao Bhraya is to this fertile valley. Every year during the summer rainy season the river overflows its banks and stretches out through its network of canals and distributaries, depositing rich silt and providing the required water for the rice lands.

Nearly two-thirds of all Siam's export trade consists of rice. Most of the people devote their lives to its cultivation.

Chiangmai, second city of Siam, was founded in the Eleventh century, and subsequently gained ascendancy in neighboring principalities. Because of its importance, it long sat on the fence between Burma and Siam and was pulled first one way and then the other, according to which rival sought by force of arms to claim its allegiance.

Chiangmai is attractively located on the Me Ping, one of the chief tributaries of the Me Nam Chao Bhraya. Beyond it stretches a rice plain backed by the imposing 5,500-foot mountain of Doi Sutep.

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THE HOUSEWIFE.

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