

A GALLERY OF PICTURESQUE PERSONALITIES

William J. Gedney¹

I don't have a serious scholarly paper like the other ones we've heard. Some people have to leave and they thought this was going to be important and it's not. It's very light and trivial compared to these very heady papers we've been having yesterday and today. This you'll really have to regard as kind of a chaser because it doesn't amount to much. This is how I decided on my topic, called in the program "A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities." What happened was that in Washington at the AAS meetings [Association for Asian Studies, March 1980] several of you told me that you were going to be participating in this conference, which was very nice to hear. But then, driving back through Pennsylvania and Ohio, thinking about that, it suddenly dawned on me, "My God, I'll probably have to get on my feet at some point, and what will I do? What will I say?" I can't say, "Thank you for the gold watch," because there probably won't be any gold watch, and actually these papers have been worth lots more than a dozen gold watches. I can't say, "I'm going to miss you all after I retire," because I'm not going anywhere. Now that I won't have to teach classes and go to department meetings and silly things like that, I'll probably see more of all of you than before.

So what to do? Well, thinking about it as I drove along--and I got a speeding ticket as a result of not having my mind on my driving--I thought about the fact that during the last few months so many people have been asking me about those early years in Thailand. I'm not one to think about the past; it's always so horrible that I'd rather think about the future! But recently people have expressed a great deal of interest. I went to Thailand first in July of 1947 and stayed continuously for six and a half years, and came back with Choy² in January of 1954. When I first went to Thailand I was the only academic, and so for the first year or so I had the whole place to myself, and it was just great. During those early years I did meet a great many very, very interesting characters. And so I thought I might tell you about some of them.

William J. Gedney

I decided, along about Akron I guess it was, that I would eliminate all of the foreigners because so many others met the various foreigners, although some of them are very interesting: old Mr. Wood and Mr. Hutchinson, two elderly British gentlemen in Chiang Mai who were amateur historians; Josie Stanton, the wife of the ambassador—I used to say that she looked like a Hapsburg and acted like a Vanderbilt. She was the queen of the American establishment, and is still alive, of course.³ There was also Jim Thompson, the silk king. But as I say, I decided to eliminate the foreigners because so many other people did meet the foreigners, and some of them knew them better than I did. I also decided to eliminate the prominent Thai people that so many other foreigners met, like Prince Dhani, Prince Wan, Prince Prem, Phya Anuman, and so on. I tried to pick people whose names are known in the political or cultural or literary history, but whom very few if any other foreigners—and very few local people, for that matter—had a chance to get acquainted with. I ended up with five people. Two are Cambodian and three are Thai. Two are women and three are men. They are all dead now.

Let me start with the Cambodian “Picturesque Personalities.” One was very much anti-establishment, that was the rebel leader Dap Chuan, and the other was very much traditional establishment, that was Princess Malika. Dap Chuan was named “Chuan,” and “Dap” was his military title from the days when he had been in the French army, like the Thai expression *naay d’dap*, “lance corporal,” I guess. I came to meet him, as I was already telling some of the rest of you, purely by accident, on one of my many visits to Angkor. I used to go there whenever I was sick and tired of my studies and wanted a break, and it used to be very cheap. You could go and stay in the French hotel at Siam Reap and knock around looking at the ruins, and spend much less money than one spent day-by-day in Bangkok, especially if you bought your Cambodian money on the black market in Bangkok before you went. That made it even cheaper. On one of my many trips I decided that, having seen all of the major ruins, I would like to visit a very famous temple called Banteay Srei, which is off to the northeast of Angkor.

At that time I had a little tiny car, just a little tiny car. I think it was a Morris, what used to be called a touring car, with two seats and a top that we always had down. I went all over Thailand and all over Cambodia in that little thing. I used to break the springs all the time until somebody discovered that Jeep shock absorbers would cure that, so with the Jeep shock absorbers I could go anywhere without

A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities

breaking the springs. Well, I looked over a map and I headed off. To the north of Angkor there are two huge, dried-up, water reservoirs, which presumably once held water for the capital city, much like the Sukhothai arrangement that we heard about this morning [see "The Ancient Settlements of Sukhothai," by Srisakra Vallibhotama, this volume]. They are dried up, and, I suppose, have been for centuries, and are now filled with sand. And I got stuck. I don't remember whether it was going to or coming back from the visit to that temple, it's all forgotten now, but I got stuck. I got stuck in that sand, and the more I tried to get out, the deeper I got stuck--Woody [Hiram W. Woodward, Jr.] tells me he got stuck in the same place on a bicycle! And, while I was struggling with the darn car, suddenly I was surrounded by men with guns! And, to make a long story short, they "took me to their leader," who was this fellow, Dap Chuan.

He had his headquarters there in the jungle nearby, just a short walk from the place where I got stuck. He had a very nice pavilion. It was very simple, with a dirt floor, and poles and a thatched roof, but airy and comfortable and spotlessly clean, and there were other very simple structures around for sleeping, and eating, and so on. He spoke pretty good Thai, and he had a wife there with him. He must have been forty-five, and she must have been about forty. She was a typical country woman from northeastern Thailand, so of course she spoke Thai. And for a couple of hours we had the most wonderful conversation. I'll never forget it. He was a very gaunt fellow. Hollow cheeks, sunken eyes, very thin. I heard stories that he was tubercular, but I sometimes wonder if people didn't assume that he was tubercular because of his looks.

He was much interested in me: here I was knocking around in this little car, interested in the ruins, and so on. But of course we got to talking about politics. This must have been about 1949 or 1950, and, as I recall, at that point it wasn't clear yet that the United States was going to come down squarely on the side of the French, who were trying to recover their control in Indochina after World War II, and he was one of the men fighting against this, fighting for Cambodian independence. The gist of his talk, and he repeated this again and again and again, was, in view of the American experience, having fought a war of independence against the British, why was it that the United States was not on their side now--Ho Chi Minh, and himself, and the other rebel leaders--in their war of independence against the French? And, of course, I told him that I couldn't agree with him more, but then he would go on with the same sort of talk.

William J. Gedney

He finally told me that if I was going to knock around Cambodia in this way I might get shot by some of his men or people of some other rebel group because they would assume that I was a Frenchman. He told me I should have an American flag on the car. So, when I got back to Bangkok, and before I went to Cambodia again--I didn't want to go to the embassy and ask for a flag; they would want to know what it was for and they probably would have said, "No, don't do that, don't run around in this way"--I went to a tailor and drew a flag and he patched it together, and it worked! For some years I used that whenever I went to Cambodia. I did run into some trouble because of this, going through towns. The French stopped me a couple of times. The questioning was something like, "Embassy?" No. 'Consulate?' No. 'Take it down.'" So, I developed a practice of taking the flag down as I approached a town, and then when I got through the town I'd stop and get out and put the flag up again. Well, I never got shot at!

My next encounter with Dap Chuan was perhaps a year later. I was in Cambodia again, again looking at the ruins, taking a vacation from studies in Bangkok. Everyone used to go to the lounge in the hotel, after a long hot day looking at the ruins, for a drink--cognac and soda we usually drank--and there was M. R. Kukrit [Pramoj]; he was fairly young then, a journalist, and was with a group of his fellow journalists. I had heard that Dap Chuan was coming into town for a funeral; a cease fire was being declared between the rebels and the French so that he and some of his men could come into the town for the funeral. And I told Kukrit that I had heard this, that I had happened to have met the man on a previous occasion, and asked if he would like to meet him. "Oh yes!" he said, he would. So we went out. Somebody told us where to go and watch for Dap Chuan and what time, and we went out and sure enough he came along, and I stepped into the street as he came along and asked if he remembered me. "Oh, yes," he said, he remembered me, and so I introduced them and walked away, and I've always thought that Kukrit had his doubts about Gedney after that! How come Gedney happened to be such pals with this guerrilla leader?!

My next encounter with him--well it wasn't so much an encounter at all--was later on, perhaps in another year or so. I was in Phnom Penh, staying for some weeks, studying. Again I stayed at the French hotel, and suddenly one evening as I was in my room working or studying or whatever, I heard shooting all over town and I went down to the desk and asked what on earth was going on. They

A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities

said, "Well, haven't you heard? Dap Chuan is coming out of the jungle and he is coming down to the capital to declare his allegiance to King Sihanouk." And the Cambodian soldiers who had been fighting him and his kind--although, of course, they were really sympathetic to him--were so delighted that they were shooting their guns into the air out of joy at the news that he was coming to town.

He died a few years later, as some of you know better than I, in the jungle. There were various stories that he was shot by his own men, and other stories that the CIA was involved, and others that Sihanouk was involved. I have often thought, without really having studied the life of Dap Chuan or other people like him, that he was a revolutionary of the sort that one sees so often. Having had a negative aim all of their lives, fighting against things, once the victory is won they don't know how to act, and they have to keep on fighting, each other if nobody else. Well, so much for Dap Chuan!

The other "Picturesque Personality" from Cambodia that I want to tell you about was a lady; she was Princess Malika. When I knew her in about 1950 or 1951 she was very old, I think in her seventies or so, and she is long since dead. She was a daughter of the nineteenth-century king, Norodom. Her husband, Prince Harirak, who at that time was long since dead, had been a son of the same king, so they were half brother and half sister. Her husband had been exiled by the French--way way back, in the twenties or so--to Singapore, but she had her home there in Phnom Penh, rather a modest house, with a living room all full of old-fashioned European furniture and bric-a-brac.

She spoke perfect Thai, just perfect Thai! She explained to me that her father, King Norodom, had imported nursemaids and teachers to see to it that his children learned Thai. She had no accent and was very fluent. But she did have some funny expressions. I remember that she referred not only to the city of Bangkok, called in Thai, *krun thêep* but also to the whole country of Thailand as *baan-kòok*. But this perfect Thai of hers was in spite of the fact that she had never been to Thailand, except once, she told me, when she went through Thailand by train to Singapore to visit her husband when he was in exile.

She was a little bird of a woman, very serious and very straight, and quite a scholar. She was engaged in updating the Cambodian royal chronicles and she was scared to death that the French would get hold of this because, she told me, she was saying things she was

William J. Gedney

sure that the French wouldn't like. I went to see her many times, and each time she would tell me endless stories about what she was putting into these chronicles, and what she was deciding to leave out. Much of it was wasted on me because I didn't know enough about the Cambodian royal family or about Cambodian history. I have often wondered what happened to those chronicles; Michael Vickery would have a great time with them, wouldn't he?

I have often felt that it was a blessing that that little old lady died long before all of the things that have happened in Cambodia. I am sure that she would have dropped dead in horror at the first news of some of the things that have happened in the last few years.

She had a big fat daughter who was Minister of Education, who used to be there sometimes when I would go to see her. She didn't speak Thai, but she could understand my Thai, and she spoke French. So we got along fine because she spoke that kind of Indochinese French, you know, very distinctly articulated and so much easier to understand than Parisian French! But she wasn't interested in the old things that I was interested in, and we never had much to say to each other.

After I saw Princess Malikaa for the last time—it just happened to be that I didn't see her anymore—one of my Cambodian teachers in Phnom Penh told me a story about her. He and some others had been appointed by the king, Sihanouk, he was king at that time, to a committee to devise a typewriter keyboard for Cambodian. There were problems because, as you know, Cambodian piles up letters vertically above and below the line, more than Thai does. Well, this teacher of mine said that he and the others on the committee felt very proud of themselves because they felt they outdid Thai in getting things on the line, and they submitted this to the king. Well, Princess Malikaa, who was a great-aunt of Sihanouk but had the rank of princess grandmother—he had no surviving grandmother—heard about this and she went straight to see the king. She said, "These scoundrels that you have appointed to this committee are destroying our language!" So he said, "Yes ma'am, whatever you say," and he tore up the plan and dissolved the committee. So that was too bad! Of course, later a typewriter keyboard was devised, maybe after she died and had no chance to protest. I can't think of anything more interesting to say about Princess Malikaa, but she was sure a "Picturesque Personality," out of another age.

A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities

Turning to Thailand, then, there were three people that I chose, as I drove through Cleveland, and the first one was the novelist Dokmai Sot; that was her pen name, her real name was M. L. Bupha Kunjara. I got acquainted with her when I first went to Thailand, although I don't remember why. I went with a whole sheaf of letters of introduction from Thai friends in the States, and I don't remember whether I had a letter to her, or whether one of the other people that I had a letter to took me to see her, but I met her within just the first week or two that I was there, and saw a lot of her and her family. She belonged to this Kunjara family. They are descended from a son of King Rama II, named Kunjara, whose house they still occupy to this day, a huge wooden house right near the Lak Muang area right near the Grand Palace. It's a huge, old-fashioned, traditional, wooden house which Prince Kunjara built, and they always boasted that it is the oldest surviving house in Bangkok, older than anything within the old Grand Palace, everything within the Grand Palace having been destroyed and rebuilt.

It was a large family. Their father had been a *mòmrâatchawon* with the title of *câwphayaa*, *Câwphayaa Theewêet*--lord chamberlain, I think, was his function--but he was a great patron of the ballet, and in the huge central hall of this house apparently he had lots of performances put on. He was long since dead, of course, when I met the family, and the oldest son was the head of the household. He had the rank of *Phya Theewêet*, the same title as his father. At the time that I knew this *Phya Theewêet*, the older brother of the novelist I want to tell you about, he was an old, old man, and stone deaf. And I was fresh from the United States having learned Thai before I went but never really having practiced it much, shouting at the top of my lungs trying to make myself understood to this old man. Usually he misunderstood and I'd have to start over. His family too had to shout to him. Mostly there wasn't much conversation with him and he spent all his time just stalking around surveying the house and property.

Then there was another sister--they were mostly half sisters and half brothers, apparently the father had had lots of wives--Chalaem who has now inherited the house, and then Bunlua, whom many of you know, Bunlua Kunjara.⁴ She has been very active in more recent times in linguistics, in TEFL, and applied linguistics, and turns up at conferences in Hawaii and Singapore, and so on. She said to me once in Hawaii, just a few years ago, "Why didn't you tell us, way back then, about the phoneme?" And I said, "You never asked!"

William J. Gedney

There was a younger brother, M. L. Khap, who had been military attaché at the Thai embassy in Washington all during World War II. That was when M. R. Seni Pramoj was ambassador, and the Thai embassy in Washington was the headquarters of the Free Thai, who declared their independence of the Japanese-controlled government in Bangkok. M. L. Khap, the youngest brother in this family, was military attaché. He later went back to Thailand, and after Phibul [Luang Phibul Songkhram] came back to power, he got mixed up with Phibul. He became the information officer or something of the kind, and then there was some sort of scandal about a bus line in the newspapers. The rest of the family always made it very clear that M. L. Khap was the black sheep and the less said about him the better.

Well, to come to M. L. Bupha, the one that I am going to tell you about, she was a famous novelist, and she is still regarded very, very highly. When I knew her she was no longer writing; that is part of the story that I want to tell you. She was just around the house, there, and we had the most wonderful conversations. She had a sparkling wit. I don't remember much of what we talked about, so I guess it wasn't very serious. I think it was mostly about words and language, and we always spoke Thai. I remember that we agreed in an early conversation that we didn't like people who spoke Thai and kept sprinkling English words in. So then, when she would do that, I'd come up, if I could think of it, with the Thai word, and win that one, so to speak.

She had a sharp tongue. I remember after I'd been there only two or three weeks and had seen her several times she decided to have a dinner for me. They set up a table in the center of this great big hall, and had a very nice dinner, with family and friends, a dozen people maybe. She had me on her right, and she needed me all evening. I still remember how embarrassed I was. She said, "Do you know the expression, '๓๓/๕๕'?" And I said I did, and I tried to explain what it means. "Ah ha! That shows that you were lying when you said that you had only men teachers in the United States!" This was her way; she kept trying to catch the other person up. Always teasing, a lot of teasing.

I thought she was very beautiful. She had a crooked front tooth and it seemed to me that that just emphasized the beauty of her face and eyes and so on. I said to a Thai friend once, "Don't you think that Khun Bupha is a very beautiful woman?" "Oh," he said, he "would never, never think of trying to decide whether such an exalted

A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities

personage is beautiful or not!" So that put me in my place.

Some time later, since so many people had been hospitable and kind and helpful to me, I decided that I ought to have people to dinner. I was still staying at the Rattanakosin Hotel. After four or five months I decided to rent a house and get servants and that's what I did, but while I was still at the hotel I decided to have various Thai people who had been kind to me to dinner. But when I asked her she said, "Oh no! Oh no! Respectable Thai people would never go into a hotel." Of course, now they do, but in those days a hotel was still regarded as more or less equivalent to a brothel. And besides, she said, she followed a policy of what she called "*kèp tua*," that is, keeping herself to herself; she hardly went out of the house compound, except to visit very close friends and relatives. But she played lots of cards. I remember that when other people found out that I was seeing a good deal of her, they said please try to get her to stop playing cards and do more writing. But she wasn't writing anymore.

Time passed and I acquired a wife, and Choy and I were down at Hua Hin once, and there she was. And Choy still tells about this experience with great bitterness because Khun Bupha was so amused at this little country girl that I had taken to wife. Oh, Choy burns at the memory of that encounter! We had a car, at that time we had a much bigger car, and I said that we were going back to Bangkok in a day or two, and if she wanted to go back with us, we would be glad to have her go back. Oh, she said, she wouldn't subject herself to the dust and the rough roads! She would go back on the train. But it would be a help if we would take back some of her stuff. She had been down there on an extended vacation and apparently had a lot of stuff. So we took a lot of her stuff back, baskets and bundles, and took them to the house and ran right smack into the old brother, the deaf one. It took forever to explain to him, shouting at the top of my lungs, why we had Khun Bupha's luggage, but no Khun Bupha! "What have you done with Khun Bupha?!" Well, I finally made it clear to him.

Our next encounter with her was a great surprise. After we came back to the States a year or so later, Choy and I spent a year in Washington, D.C., because ACLS [American Council of Learned Societies] had a project, and I was supposed to collaborate with George Trager, who was teaching at Georgetown, so I had to go to Washington for this. Working with a Thai we were going to produce a textbook, which we did produce, but it was a pretty miserable thing when we got finished, but that is another story.

William J. Gedney

Anyway, we had an apartment in Hyattsville, Maryland, a suburb of Washington next to Silver Spring. It was like one of the apartments they build in Ann Arbor, a two-story development, and very pleasant. After some months we decided to have a dinner party and invite all our American and Thai friends, and some relatives of mine from the area. We had lots of friends in the embassy because they used to call up and say, "Khun Choy, come at once! We have thirty people who are arriving from Thailand who have had no rice for three days. Come and help us!" So, I was always running her down to the embassy to help with the cooking.

And so we were going to have this dinner party, and a day or two before the party I got a call from a good friend of mine, Khun Chun Praphawiwat, an old friend from wartime who now was cultural attaché at the Thai embassy. He contrived to stay in the United States for nineteen years; he saved a lot of money and is now retired in Thailand, at the age of seventy something, living very comfortably on his savings. But he called and said that Ajaan Sukit Nimanhem, an old friend of his and an old friend of mine, was arriving unexpectedly, and he asked if he could bring Ajaan Sukit to dinner also. I said of course. Well, he said, he also has a new wife, being divorced from his first wife—he and his first wife had founded a school and then she ran off with a naval officer and got a divorce—so now he was remarried, and I said, of course, bring him and his new wife. So they came, and since it was winter his new wife was all bundled up in overcoats and shawls and scarves, and when she got all of the things off it was Khun Bupha! And Khun Chun had known this and had wanted to surprise us. Well, it sure surprised us!

He was the hit of the evening. I had an uncle who for years told about the professor at that dinner party; it was Ajaan Sukit, telling, in English for the benefit of all those other people, the most wonderful stories and jokes. It was great fun. All the while Khun Bupha, this very haughty lady, stayed demurely in the kitchen, asking Choy with great deference to explain all the appliances and gadgets and utensils, and so that was quite a switch. Choy had always pretended to be very jealous of Khun Bupha, but she got over it that night!

Later Ajaan Sukit went off to India, you know, to be ambassador, and of course Khun Bupha his wife went along, and we never saw them again. But some years later, it must have been in the 1960s, Choy and I were in New Delhi and happened to run into some Thai students there shopping, and they arranged a dinner for us. And in

A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities

the course of the evening they started telling, I guess I asked, about when Ajaan Sukit had been ambassador in New Delhi and Khun Bupha was his wife. They said she never came downstairs for social functions or anything else, except once in a blue moon, and then he had to carry her down, and afterward he had to carry her back upstairs again. She died in New Delhi, and I don't know what of, but I imagine it was a combination of hypochondria and inertia.

Later on, after she died, he married a lady from Chiang Mai who was his wife when he was ambassador in Washington during the Kennedy years; that was later. But after Khun Bupha died he told close friends that he had never consummated that marriage. And that, it seems to me, was "*kèp tua*" carried to an extreme! Why on earth did she marry him? And why did he marry her? People have often wondered. Well, I think, for her, she must have gotten bored with the monotony and the confinement of the life that she had been living for so many years, and thought that this was a chance to go out and see the world, and of course it was; he travelled a great deal and was very cosmopolitan. Why did he marry her? Well, it was like Onassis with Jackie Kennedy: a self-made man who had come out of nowhere, reaching for the moon, so to speak, in the form of a beautiful woman of the highest social rank. He had to show that he had arrived by being able to marry such a wife.

The more important question, the more serious question, is "Why did she quit writing?" This is often asked, and sometimes I see magazine articles about her and the question is asked, "Why did she quit writing?" After World War II she wrote nothing. And I think I know the answer to that. She wrote a sort of novel of manners about the upper classes—one of her novels is called *Phêu Di*—and I think after World War II this class, the upper middle class and the aristocracy, had changed. They didn't talk or live or act the way they had before, when she knew them when she was young, and she was out of touch. So she'd lost her material, and I think it's as simple as that. So she turned to cards and strange marriages! OK, that's enough for, as Choy always calls her, "my old girlfriend Bupha."

The next person I want to tell about I knew only very briefly and in a very limited context, but it was such a fantastic experience that I must tell you about it. I had a good friend and teacher, M. R. Sumonnachat. He taught history at Chulalongkorn University, and I read literary classics with him, as I did with lots of other people around town. I went to see him so many hours a week, sometimes at

William J. Gedney

Chula in his office and sometimes at home, and got well acquainted with his family. He is long since dead but his widow, Khun Somrot, is still alive and is an official in the Ministry of Education, and a fine poetess.

He broke his leg. He broke his leg coming back from somewhere on the train. As it slowed down near his home he thought he would save time by jumping off the train instead of going on to the station and then finding his way back, but he made a bad jump and broke his leg. And about the same time he had a teenage son who broke an arm playing ball or something. Later that same son broke his parents' hearts by running away from home. He disappeared for about a year, and where was he found? He was found playing traditional Thai music with a group like the one we heard last night! But that's another story.

M. R. Sumonnachat told me that he wanted his broken leg and his son's broken arm to be treated by a traditional Thai doctor, but there was a hitch. This doctor lived across the river in Thonburi and had no transportation, and it would be necessary for someone like me with a car--at this time I had this little Morris--to go to the riverbank and wait for the doctor to come across in a boat and bring him to the house, and then wait until he finished the treatment and take him back. This would have to be done each time that there was to be a treatment, and of course I had to say that I would do it because I was so indebted to this man, for years and years and years of the most wonderful teaching, and friendship, and so on. The friendship later went to pieces because he was on the opposite side in the Jit Phumisak troubles later on. But that's another matter; at that time we were still very good friends so, of course, I said I would help.

Well, it turned out this doctor was a famous man, Luang Sup Chalasai. He had been a naval officer, and he was one of the leaders of the 1932 revolution, and then he had a career in politics. Khun Udom [Warotamasikkhadit] and I were talking and he reminded me that Luang Sup Chalasai was Minister of Education at one time, and that the National Stadium is named after him. When he left politics he didn't take the yellow robe of a Buddhist monk; he took the white robe of sort of an Atharvavedic witch doctor, or magician, or what would you call it? His main activity in this new life was going around and consecrating spirit houses, *săan phrá phuum*, at people's homes, where they had a new house, or when they had had troubles and were reconsecrating a spirit shrine. But he also mended broken bones.

A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities

Well, it was fascinating to watch him treat the father's broken leg and the son's broken arm. Mostly it was magic spells, with a lot of blowing, and so on, but there were two elements in his cure that I thought really had a lot to them. One was this. I had broken a leg skiing when I was young and had a great big heavy cast on it, and then when finally the cast was taken off I had no strength and the leg took a long time to recover. And then along in the 1940s or so, before I went to Thailand, there was much talk about how that was bad; the smaller the cast the better, and the sooner the cast could be taken off the better. Well, that's what he was doing! Just splints on the broken arm and broken leg. Light splints, and not left on any longer than necessary. Well, I thought, "Ha! This man, without knowing it, is very, very up to date!" That was one point in his method of cure. The other one was psychological. He was the most wonderful storyteller. He was a fat man, jolly, full of laughter, and full of the most wonderful stories. Of course, Sumonnachat was a teacher of history, and I was a student of history, and although I didn't care much about the thirties that this man was telling about, it was all great stuff. He would tell these endless--well not endless, but long--stories, and he would finish the story and he'd say, "Does it still hurt? Ha! Forgot all about it!"

Most of the stories that he told I've forgotten, but he did tell one that was very interesting. He and two other leaders of the 1932 revolution went down to Hua Hin where King Prajadhipok, Rama VII, was at the time, and presented him with an ultimatum. You remember that they said something to the effect that we demand that you give us a constitution. And the king's answer in effect was, "Well, I've always thought that that would be a good idea, so great." So it ended peaceably, but he told about how when they presented the actual document to the king, the king was in such terror that he was trembling from head to foot and couldn't hold this document when they handed it to him; somebody else had to hold it for him. OK, so much for Luang Sup Chalasai.

The last one is Prince Bavaradej. He's famous, you know, for having led an attempted counterrevolution in 1933. He was a son of Prince Naret, and he was one of that "galaxy" of half brothers of King Chulalongkorn, who helped King Chulalongkorn modernize the country, which David Wyatt knows much better than I do. Prince Naret's chief accomplishment was building the railway system in Thailand. Well, Prince Bavaradej was his oldest son, and he had led this attempted counterrevolution in 1933, and lost, and had to flee

William J. Gedney

the country. He remained in Cambodia in exile for sixteen years, and he came back in 1949, I believe it was, under an agreement with the Thai government that he would have nothing to do with politics. He was an old man then and I guess they thought he was harmless.

Well, how I came to meet him was this. I was complaining to Prince Dhani that I had been to Cambodia many times and I really hadn't tried to study Cambodian; but I really didn't see any way that I could study Cambodian, certainly not in Thailand, and even in Cambodia, with the kind of people that I met when I went there. "Oh," he said, "I know who can help you, Prince Bavaradej," who had just recently come back from Cambodia, "must know lots of people in Cambodia who could help you." So, he wrote a note to Prince Bavaradej, who had a home down at Hua Hin, so I went down there and went to see him. Well, I don't remember it exactly, and I'm sure there was a lot of conversation before we got to the point, but he said, yes, of course, he would write letters to various people in Cambodia, and he was glad of the chance to send a few little gifts to some of the people there who had been kind to him during the years when he was in exile.

When he was in Cambodia he had started something which he then continued at his home in Hua Hin when he came back to Thailand; that was a little cottage industry, printing cloth. A number of people have made a big success of this in Thailand, haven't they, a sort of little cottage industry where you get good workmen and then you train them to produce things in forms and shapes and colors and designs that'll be saleable to foreigners and to urban people in Bangkok, and so on. Well, he had this little industry going, and he gave me letters to people in Phnom Penh, that's how I met Princess Malikaa, and various teachers, and so on, and that was just great.

But I took a great liking to Prince Bavaradej, and it seemed to be mutual, and I saw a great deal of him at Hua Hin and also at his house in Bangkok. His house was not on Thanon Naret, which is named after his father--and is the street that Sulak [Siwaraksa] lives on, isn't it--but on Thanon Pramuan, which is nearby. It happened that a famous man of letters, Prince Bidayalankarana, who often used the pen name "N.M.S.," also had his home on Thanon Pramuan, and he produced a magazine which he named *Pramuan Mâak*, after the name of the street. I remember once being at a dinner party at the home of Prince Bavaradej, and saying, "Thanon Pramuan, now that is where Prince Bidayalankarana lived." "Oh, yes," some old lady said, "We

A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities

were part of that circle.” Well, I nearly died of delight, because they went on and on and on, telling about the life in that literary circle of the famous writer, N.M.S.

Why did I take such a liking to Prince Bavaradej and find him so congenial and so admirable? He was authoritarian and reactionary, and yet he’s one of the people that I have liked most and admired most in my life. How come? Well, I have been thinking about this, trying to explain it to myself. He was a man of great intellectual curiosity, and deep and broad knowledge. One of his cousins, Princess Sip Phan, Prince Dhani’s sister, who was also my teacher for many years, told me once, when she found out that I was seeing a good deal of Prince Bavaradej, that she regarded him as the best-educated Thai of his generation because he had a first-rate Thai education, and an excellent French education, and an excellent English education. He spoke perfect English; we always spoke English. With everybody else I spoke Thai, but with him it was always English because it was just absolutely perfect.

But, besides his intellectual curiosity and his vast knowledge, he had a kind of total integrity that I’m afraid I found lacking in other members of the royal family, even some of the ones that I came to be fondest of. He had this total integrity, never anything false in him. He never said anything just for show, or to please you, or to please somebody else. I’ve often thought that of all of the grandsons and granddaughters of King Mongkut whom I’ve known—they are dying off now but there used to be dozens of them around, you know—he was probably the one who was most like the grandfather in the knowledge, the intellectual curiosity, the integrity, the intense integrity, and strong opinions forcefully expressed.

Oh, he got off wonderful things, and I wish I had kept a record of the wonderful things that he said. I remember a couple of them because I have been quoting them ever since. One had to do with the Protestant missionaries. He said, “You know, the Protestant missionaries have been in Thailand a hundred years.” This was about 1950, so he was roughly right. And, he said, “They have spent so much time and energy and money, you’d think they’d get discouraged. Because if you count up the permanent converts they have made it would average out to about one per year.” I asked him once what the great difference was between the military at that time, in the early fifties, and in the days before 1932, in the days when he had been Minister of Defense. He said, “I can answer that in one

William J. Gedney

word, ‘discipline.’” He got off something wonderful about the French in Indochina. It went like this. He said, “You know, the French in Indochina claim that they give the people of Indochina the same education they give their own people, and it’s true. Most of the people in Indochina receive the same education as most of the Frenchmen that come out from France to Indochina, that is, none at all!” Every conversation with him was just studded with things of this kind.

He had a fatal flaw. He thought that when the country was in bad shape it was up to him to set it right. Of course, this happened when he attempted a counterrevolution in 1933. I was told a story once that indicated that this also happened at the time of the revolution in 1932. The story was that when the revolution broke out he got in his car and had his driver take him up and down the avenue, with the idea that either the leaders of the revolution would see him and call him in and say, “You are just the man we want to help us,” or the populace would rise up and say, “We want you as our king!” Well, nobody noticed him! I’ve never seen this story in print anywhere, and I suppose it’s because nobody noticed him!

He didn’t get over this business of thinking it was up to him to save the country, because it came out years later, and I was involved, and I don’t think that this story has ever been told. The kids around my house, Choy’s younger brothers and other young people around the house, when they knew I was seeing him quite a lot, got to singing pieces of an old *likee* about him. I remember one fragment; it went “*lây câw wɔɔradèet khâw pàa, ʔaw mǎa khrɔɔŋ m+ang.*” (Chase Lord Bavaradej into the forest, and set dogs to govern the country.) And fortunately they were not singing that one afternoon when he suddenly appeared at the front door!

I nearly dropped dead of surprise, but he was all business. He said, “I want you to help me. The country is in terrible shape. We’ve got this awful government.” I guess Phibul was prime minister and Nai Phao was head of the police, and it was a bad period. “This government is so terrible,” he said, “I’ve decided the only way to save the country is for the Americans to come in and take over and make it a colony. And I want to see the American ambassador to tell him to do this. But I’m not supposed to engage in politics so I can’t go and see him, and I can’t even invite him to come to my house to see me. I want you to arrange a meeting.” And I said, “Well, how?” He said, “I’m going back to Hua Hin and I want you to go to see

A Gallery of Picturesque Personalities

Ambassador Stanton and tell him where my house is so that he can pretend going on vacation to Hua Hin and he can take a stroll down the beach. And then suddenly he wants a drink of water, or he wants to know what that bush is, or wants to ask for a cutting of this tree. And he'll happen into a house, and it'll be my house, and I'll be able to tell him that the Americans have got to come in and take over the country."

Well, I said, "OK, I'll deliver your message." And I did. I remember that I went to see Ambassador Stanton at the embassy. And he was much interested; he was a student of Thai history and wanted to know all about what Prince Bavaradej was like. But he said, "Of course we can't do anything like this, and I wouldn't dare go and see him, even in such an accidental way as that." So that was the end of that. Well, enough for that.

Before I sit down I have to say that I can't tell you how grateful I am to Pete Gosling, who had the idea for this conference, and John Whitmore and the staff of the Center, who have helped arrange it. And mostly to you participants. You know, I always tell the family, when birthday or Christmas or Father's Day is approaching, "Give me something consumable--we all have too much stuff around--something I can use up, like cigarettes or a bottle of liquor, or something like that!" Well, all of you have certainly given us very consumable things, fine food for thought, and it's just marvelous.

We've been talking about the extremely high quality of the papers at this conference. Now, I'd like to think that it's because you're all my students, or former students, and friends, and so on! But I don't think that's it. I think it's because--and I've been saying this to many people, and perhaps many of you have heard this opinion--I think it's because Thai studies, whatever branch it is, is something that only the ones that have a good deal of brains, and an awful lot of diligence and high scholarly standards can survive in. Well, anyway, I'm very grateful for all of this, and when I do kick off don't bother with a funeral; this has been much too much! Thank you.

William J. Gedney

Editors' Notes

1. Professor Gedney spoke informally and without notes. This is a transcription of a tape recording of his remarks. Minor changes have been made to adapt these remarks to written form.
2. Mrs. Choy Gedney passed away in March of 1981, ten months after the conference in Ann Arbor.
3. Josephine Stanton was later killed in an automobile accident in Connecticut.
4. M. L. Bunlua Kunjara has since died.