

Reginald Le May

Dr. Reginald Le May, Honorary Member of the Siam Society, died on 22 January 1972 at the age of 87. He served in the British Consular Service in Siam from 1908 to 1922, and from 1922 to 1933 he was Economic Adviser to the Thai Government. During the twenty-five years he lived and worked in Siam as well as during his long and fruitful retirement, Dr. Le May was deeply involved in the study of Southeast Asian culture in general and of Thai art in particular. His publications, from 1920 to 1954, varied from specialised monographs to more general works of popularization.

Starting in 1920, with the assistance of two other members of the Siam Philatelic Society, Le May published *The Standard Catalogue of Thai Stamps*. In 1925, his own collection of Thai stamps was prepared for the National Exhibition of 1926. When this was cancelled owing to the death of King Rama VI, the collection was presented to the National Museum and Library, where it can still be seen today.

In 1926, Le May's first book on Siam appeared. This was titled *An Asian Arcady, (An Account of Northern Siam)*, dedicated to H.R.H. Prince Purachatra, and published by Heffer and Sons of Cambridge.

In 1930 Noel Douglas of London published Le May's *Siamese Tales, Old and New*. A second edition was later published by Probsthain of London.

In 1932, the Siam Society published Le May's work on *The Coinage of Siam*. This was for long a standard work on the subject, and was reprinted by the Society in 1961.

In 1934, Le May retired from Thai Government service and went up as a research student to Pembroke College, Cambridge. He spent the following three years writing his *magnum opus* on *Buddhist Art in Siam*, which gained for him the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and was published by the Cambridge University Press. It has since been reprinted twice by Tuttle of Vermont and Tokyo, and is still on sale.

Finally, to crown his work, in 1954, Allen & Unwin published *The Culture of South-East Asia*, which has had three editions in England, a special one for India, and another edition in the German language.

Dr. Le May's connection with the Siam Society was always very close. In 1928, he was one of the leading spirits behind the Society's appeal for funds to build a home of its own. It is said that it was he who approached Mr. A.E. Nana, the business magnate, who, in addition to a donation, thereupon agreed to present the Society with the three *rai* plot of land on Soi Asoke. And it was apparently also Le May who obtained the free services of Mr. Healey, a leading architect in Bangkok at that time, to design the Hall of the Society which has been in use to this day.

Reginald Le May's affection for this country and the Thai people was hard to match. Indeed, to the last days of his life, he called Siam "the country of my adoption."