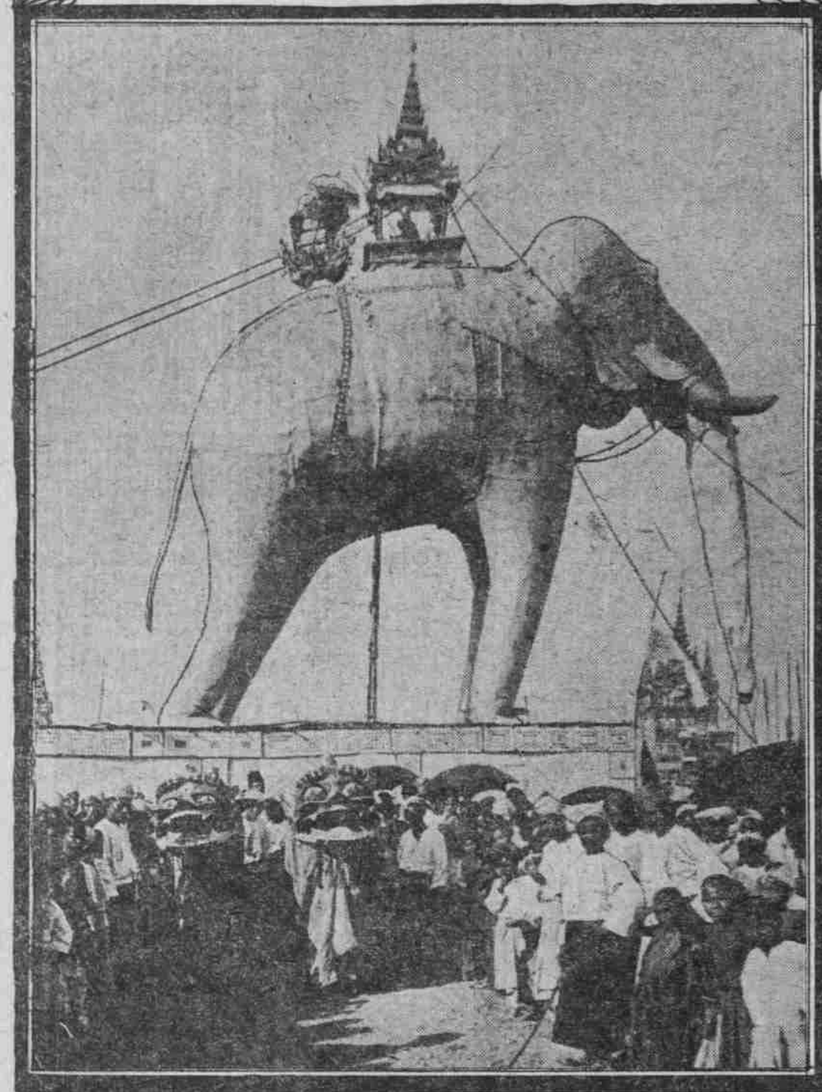
"RETURN OF THE GREAT GLORY"

Funeral Festivities of the Late Sadaw, or Vicar General, of the Buddhists in Burmah One of the Strangest and Most Remarkable Festivals in the World

DANCING GIRLS WHO TAKE PART IN THE CEREMONIES

NO FUNERAL OF THE SADAW IS COMPLETE WITHOUT THE SACRED PEACOCK

BOXING IS A PART OF THE CEREMONIES. HERE THEY KICK WITH THEIR BARE FEET, AND GIVE VIOLENT UPWARD KNOCKS WITH THEIR KNEES



GIANT ELEPHANT 100 FEET HIGH, REPRESENTING THE SACRED WHITE ELEPHANT FROM THE SHRINE OF ITS BACK IS SUSPENDED THE GILDED COFFIN

THE MAGNIFICENT FUNERAL PILE WHICH IS SET AFIRE BY SKY-ROCKETS

BY CAPTAIN FRANCIS THATCHER, LATE INDIAN STAFF CORPS.

I HAVE been in places that the foot of white men has seldom trod and I have looked upon things the like of which few men of my color have witnessed but of all sights the glittering, unique and fantastic pageants of the purple and gorgeous East attending the funeral festivities of a Sadaw or Vicar-General of the Buddhists in Burma is unparalled throughout the world.

The word "festivities" is used advisedly for the Buddhist monk does not "die" as an ordinary individual, he "returns" to the highest heaven of the spirits, therefore a Buddhist monk's funeral is called a "pohn-gyee-byan"—the return of the great glory.

Even a junior member of the order of the great yellow robe is cremated with great ceremony and state, but when a distinguished head of the order dies, such as the illustrious Sadaw who recently passed away and whose obsequies I describe here it is a great event.

As tens of thousands of the faithful flocked in masses from every part of the empire to attend the great pageant a white man here and there, drawn by the strange and fantastic, followed in their wake. Like them, a craving for the unusual sights of life, drew me to the scene.

Long before the arrival of the first pilgrim the corpse of the Sadaw had been carefully washed by his chief supporters and monastic scholars (a group of whom are shown in the accompanying illustration surrounding the Sadaw) and the intestines taken out. The cavity of the stomach had been filled with ashes, sawdust, spices and other substances likely to dry up the humors and the skin sewn together again. The body had been spread over with a thin layer of wax and tightly swathed in white cloth from head to foot. The linen had been then varnished over with wood oil and then every particle of the corpse covered with gold leaf. The body was now placed in a coffin made of a single log roughly hollowed out and with a very substantial lid. The lid was not fastened down for a considerable time and a pipe led from the coffin into the ground to assist in drying the Sadaw's body, but this last was hardly necessary for the Vicar-General was already a withered up old man of great age at the time of his demise. The inner coffin was then varnished and gilded all over.

Then an outer casket was prepared called a "payoung boing" which was sumptuously gilded and painted in the panels which were fringed with mosaic bits of looking glass, colored glass and zinc. The paintings represented religious subjects, scenes from the life of Shin Gautama; his famous meetings with the old man, the sick, the dead, and the monk; his departure at night from the magnificent court of King Thoodawdana; his ascent to Tawadebutham and the like. Rearing himself over the top of the sarcophagus stood the figure of an immense dragon recalling the pious dragon chief that sheltered the Lord Buddha from a flood of rain by coiling seven times round his body and expanding it's hood as a covering.

This all being completed, a substantial building of teak, open all round, was erected, with the tapering ecclesiastical "paya-that" rising over it; above this was fixed an immense white umbrella with deep white lace fringe and round about hung a number of paintings representing the different races of men—the swarthy Hindu, the oblique-eyed Chinaman, the Kareum, with his pig tattooed on his back, and the ghastly white-faced European, with his dog and gun. All the paintings were grotesque and some simply horrible in their delineations of the torments of hell. Here and there in this odd kind of mortuary chapel were "Kehnnaya," gay tinselled pasteboard figures of men with birds' lower extremities.

Boxing as One Feature of a Funeral

Here the body lay in state and a constant stream of pilgrims from all parts of the country flocked to visit it and to say their religious sentences and make offerings of fruit and flowers as they would at a pagoda. The lying in state lasted several months, during which time a continuous succession of festivities were celebrated with dances, plays, all kinds of games, such as the popular national one of Gohn-nyire toh pure. Gohn or khon means to jump and nyire is to deny or bluster. A more noisy and contentious game it would be difficult to find—and boxing, which is a very common institution, but hardly carried out according to the Queensbury rules, for they kick with their bare feet and give violent upward knocks with the knee and have many other unorthodox devices for knocking one's opponent out, and all the while wild bursts of music fill the air. At the end of this period the final act of this strange ceremony or series of ceremonies takes place, and the accompanying photographs will give some idea of the weird and fantastic magnificence of the scene, which is mostly splashed out in vivid blotches of crimson and gold.

An enormous funeral pyre was constructed of bamboo matting, pasteboard, brightly painted and covered with glittering tinsel. This was in the form of a seven-roofed spire, representing the number of heavens of the nat-dewahs. It was square up to the height of 30 or 40 feet, where there was a platform on which was placed a sort of cenotaph resembling the gorgeous payoung bohng or outer casket in construction and decoration. Above this towered, some hundred feet higher, the great bamboo canopy. Numerous other spires were arranged aroung the great central one, all glittering with gold and flashing with thousands of tiny mirrors and colored glasses, to be burnt along with it. No function of such importance as this would be complete without the two national emblems being represented—the peacock and the white elephant.

On one side of the funeral pyre, with its gaily decorated seven-roofed spire towering towards the heavens, stood an enormous white elephant on a mosaic teak platform, made of pasteboard painted white, with a richly painted howdah perched on its back, a hundred feet in the air. It was certainly a curious spectacle, with its companion, the peacock, on the other side, with its glittering upstanding tail, sparkling in its thousands of facets of multicolored mirrors, reflecting the flashing lights and myriads of falling sparks and bursting fire-balls, innumerable rockets from every side. Now comes a part of the ceremonial which seemed to outsiders strangely absurd, but had a religious significance to the Burman and quite in keeping with his national characteristics. Some half a dozen stout rattan or coir ropes were fastened to the car and all the able-bodied men or as many as could hang on to the ropes seized them and commenced a frantic and uproarious tug-of-war. There was no selection of sides or numbers, and reinforcements were always ready to back up the side which was on the point of losing. This contest went on for hours. The explanation of this curious rite is this: It is considered of the greatest possible merit to drag a pohu-gyee's body to the funeral pyre, and this Koothoh falls to the share of those who win in the tug-of-war.

Grotesque Spectacular Incineration.

At last the coffin was brought to the pyre and hoisted up to its lofty platform, beneath which is stored a great quantity of combustible material; wood soaked in oil, pitch and abundance of scented chips. Around the cars surged thousands in their bright-colored silk garments and variegated head-cloths. Many wore horribly grotesque masks, representing the weirdest kinds of devils—the whole scene being lighted by thousands of torches and colored fires; shrieks of demoniacal laughter and shouts of derision rent the air; snatches of chants and songs mingled with the angry cries of men fighting and quarreling, for now the culminating point is reached when the pyre is about to be lighted. On ordinary occasions a lucifer match would be sufficient or even the fire obtained by the friction of a plug in the hollow bamboo, but these methods are too worldly and would fail to satisfy the sanctity and dignity of the illustrious Sadaw. The pyre had to be lighted by rockets fired from a distance. Scores of these had been prepared weeks beforehand and carried round triumphantly in procession by the people who had made them, preceded by bands of music with young men and dancing girls, singing and dancing of the potency of the powder and the accuracy of the aim which will attain for them the glory of setting fire to the pyre.

Huge Sized Rockets.

Each rocket had a figure of some kind, a nat-dewah, a tiger, a bear, attached to it. Some of them were of huge size, constructed of the trunks of trees hollowed out and crammed full of combustibles, in which sulphur was the chief ingredient. Many were eight to ten feet long and five or six feet in circumference and secured by iron hoops and rattan lashings. Then, amid the shouts of the multitude, the rockets were exploded and the sky, literally liquid gold and fire, lighted up the strangest scene imaginable. The largest of the rockets were mounted on go-carts and many others guided by a rope fastened to the paya-that. Many of the rockets failed to have any other effect than making a great splutter, others toppled off their go-carts amid screams of derision from the crowd, but it was not unattended by loss of life, as might have been expected, for some of the bigger rockets flew off at a tangent into the crowd, where its fiery belchings found many victims, but this was only incidental and was to be expected.

In the midst of the flashing lights and thundering reports one lucky rocket plunged right into the inflammable materials piled below the bier and in a few moments the flames were leaping like great yellow tongues, licking the topmost pinnacle of the spire. It was the beginning of the end. Roof after roof fell, setting fire to all the surrounding spires and offerings placed round the basement. The joints of the bamboos exploded with the noise of pistol shots, whilst the swaying crowd cheered each separate occurrence, and when finally the central spire fell with a hiss, a shout of triumph rose from the assembled multitude, suggesting anything but death and pious observances.

But there on earth they will tell you all is changeful, sad and unreal, and one more death brings but nearer to the final rest of Neh'ban. When the last smoldering embers have cooled, the monastic brethren search for any pieces of bones that may remain, and these are carefully gathered up and pounded down, mixed into a paste and molded into an image of Buddha, which is stored up in the monastery.

ON BEAUTIFUL RIVERSIDE DRIVE

New York City's Beauty Spot Has Cost $10,000,000.

With the completion of Riverside drive to Washington Heights New York may safely boast of the finest and perhaps the costliest driveway in the world. The extension of the drive with its elaborate parking of the Hudson shore will probably be thrown open to the public during the Fall. Many of the architectural features meanwhile have been completed, the carefully graded slopes have been covered with grass, and for upward of a mile the new drive is practically completed. The extension commences at One Hundred and Thirty-fifth street, in line with the great steel viaduct which crosses Manhattan valley and, following the line of the Hudson shore in great sweeping curves, finally joins Boulevard Lafayette near One Hundred and Fifty-eighth street. The cost of this mile of parking will be in excess of $3,000,000.

The new section of Riverside Drive conforms to the general plan and decorations of the present park. It is carried along at about the same height above the river and at every point commands an uninterrupted view to the west and north. The extension will be richer, however, in architectural features. Considerable variety has been left to the western face of the slope by breaking it at frequent intervals with elaborate stone arches or massive walls and winding staircases. There will be four of these arches at the ends of the cross streets, flanked by rows of steps connecting the various terraces of the drive. The stone work throughout is very massive, the exposed surfaces being of light granite.

The entire western face of the new park will be broken by a series of walks connecting the several terraces. These in turn will be shaded with a wealth of foliage. One of the features of the upper level of the drive will be an elaborate public shelter at the foot of One Hundred and Fifty-second street. The lower terraces will be supplied with public comfort stations. Those at One Hundred and Thirty-eighth street and One Hundred and Fifty-first street have already been built. The treatment of the cross streets also marks an improvement over the older section. The street arches, which are of granite, are arranged with interior staircases, so that the drive may be reached conveniently from the street level on either side. The river view from the new extension of the drive is even finer than from the lower park. There are fewer unsightly objects between the drive and the river, such as docks and coal yards. The drive front at this section describes a beautiful curve outward, ending in Washington Point, while the unbroken line of the Palisades bounds the opposite shore of the Hudson.

A broad driveway, a bridlepath and one or more footpaths will extend from end to end of the new extension. The main drive will be 60 feet in width, bordered with grass, and eventually it will be overhung with shade trees. The bridlepath winds from side to side, in some places descending to the upper terraces of the park. At several points where the drive crosses one of the granite bridges the bridlepath merges into the main drive. The footpaths extend on both sides of the drive for practically the entire distance, while still other paths run along the various terraces of the eastern slopes. One of the novel features of the extension is a great interior pipe gallery which runs its entire length. The gallery, which is four feet beneath the upper level of the drive, is six feet square, thus making it convenient from end to end. It is connected with the surface by a series of manholes at intervals of 150 feet. The gallery will be used for wires and pipes of all kinds.

The river front along the line of the new extension has presented some interesting engineering problems for the builders of the drive. First of all, it was necessary to bridge Manhattan Valley with a great steel causeway, a span nearly seven blocks long. The drive had to be carried high over the houses and factories of this section, while at the same time maintaining the general level. At other points great retaining walls have been built upward of 100 feet in height of solid granite. The most curious feature of the drive from an engineering standpoint is the great extension or apron outside the retaining wall in front of Trinity Cemetery. It was originally intended to cut away the western part of the cemetery from the drive, but it was found to be impossible to gain admittance. The only thing to do was to go around the cemetery, and since the New York Central tracks bounded it on the west the problem was a difficult one. A massive retaining wall was built to the height of the drive and the roadway has been actually extended over the tracks for a distance of 50 feet without any visible means of support.