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Boon=Itt  
One of God's Own



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By

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REV. BOON BOON-ITT

## Boon-Itt, One of God's Own

By John Timothy Stone.

### NORTHFIELD.

ON the tennis courts of the Northfield Student Conference in 1889, an interesting match was going on. From the side a number of students were twitting the players, but it was evident the sympathy was with the agile, black-haired fellow with a "W" on his jersey. A well placed ball near the back line won the game of the test set and called forth general applause. All we heard was this, "Good for you, Johnny Boon!" Then we saw for the first time that merry smile, that hearty, quiet laugh, those white teeth and those keen, friendly eyes of the man whom years afterward we learned to love as our friend "Boon-Itt."

What Boon-Itt was when playing tennis he was everywhere—quick, cheerful, companionable, capable, modest and always popular. None of the fellows in Auburn Seminary ever looked upon him as a foreigner. It was hard to walk with him without having arm clasped in arm, or having a friendly hand upon his shoulder. He was one of those noble chaps that naturally won the admiration and affection of all who knew him. He never had to tell a man he was a friend; it was indelibly and genuinely stamped

in his very face, and everybody who knew him seemed to admire and love him.

### WILLISTON.

In Williston Seminary, his preparatory school at East Hampton, Massachusetts, his many nicknames revealed his popularity. Lithe, muscular and courageous, he had few equals on the athletic field or on the campus. He could swim like a fish and had no rival. Humor, tact and unselfishness stamped his character everywhere. At Williams, faculty and students regarded him with equal favor. He was a faithful student, favoring the languages, philosophy and scientific subjects, among which biology held first place. His biology note books were filled with fine color drawings.

### BOYHOOD.

Boon-Itt came to this country with Dr. and Mrs. D. R. House, who returned from Siam in 1876. He was then a boy of eleven. His Christian mother, Maa Tuan, was the daughter of the first Siamese to receive Christian baptism. She was the first woman of Siam to seek to educate the women and girls of her own country; she was a graduate of the Girls' Boarding School in Bangkok, which is now the Harriet House Memorial School, and later she became matron of that school. In 1880 his mother had in one of her classes in the royal palace the wife of the king. Boon-Itt's father was a

Christian Chinese, the principal man in his village. When Dr. and Mrs. House were returning to this country this Christian mother committed her little son Boon to them. Thus his early American home was in Waterford, New York, and very quickly he gained the American spirit and became a genuine American boy. He was sixteen when he went to Williston.

#### WILLIAMS.

He entered Williams' well trained to do the best kind of college work. Boon was an earnest Christian. The Y. M. C. A. at Williams' was influenced by his genuine and attractive personality. As one has written :

" He was always modest socially but was the considerate gentleman, the soul of honor, above pettiness and meanness, versatile in his accomplishments, loyal and stimulating in his friendships."

The class of '89 at Williams' had no member with a better general record than Boon-Itt.

#### AUBURN.

My own acquaintance with him began at Northfield when returning from the tennis court that day, to Marquand Hall. Knowing his popular favor at Williams', (a reputation which had reached to Amherst as well,) it was a delight later to realize the ripening of that acquaintance into friendship during student days at Auburn Theological Seminary. That year was his last in the Seminary and

my first, but we were closely associated through the fellowship of an eating club. The ten students (five seniors and five juniors) who sat about that table quickly grew into each others' lives. One of the ten writes :

" To take from our thought of Auburn life the memory of Boon would be to lose one of the very happiest recollections. How we missed him when he finally did leave! Not because he made any effort to keep himself in a position of prominence, but because he could not help being first. He was all unconscious that he was so relied upon. There was no seeming about him; his life always sounded, because it was true. He was keen but ever kindly; sympathetic but in his expression of sympathy there was a true courage, hence its helpfulness. His interest went out to every part of the Seminary life and in athletics, classroom or prayer meeting, he was an inspiration."

Professor Arthur S. Hoyt said of him :

" He wrought as a master workman. It is ours to see that his work goes on and that his name lives in the hearts of young men."

It was during his post-graduate year at Auburn that some of us who were under classmen learned to know him best of all. His dear old room in Morgan Hall will always have the central place in the affectionate memories of student days. If a cloud ever came over the student horizon Boon knew how to get down town and come back with a big bag of oranges and then his genial room-mate and he held open house for the crowd.

In the summer of '93 two or three of us met him at the World's Fair,

little dreaming that so soon he was to sail ; scarcely a friend knew just when he was to return. He slipped back to Siam rather than sailed. He could not stand "good byes." He loved this country and his friends here with all his heart. During his Seminary days he acquired American citizenship, and although his vision of the homeland and his opportunity there never faded, many of us felt that it was a silent cross for him not to be able to remain as well as to return. This country had moulded him, had gained for him precious friendships, was in a sense his real home ; but gladly and with enthusiasm he returned to the land which one has termed "his land of re-adoption through life."

#### HOME AGAIN.

From the first he studied tirelessly to perfect himself in the use of his mother tongue. He spoke perfect English. He had gifts as a writer and used them for the Mission Press. In company with Dr. Eugene P. Dunlap he went through the Peninsula on the mission boat "Kalamazoo," on one of those famous evangelistic tours. By word and stereopticon they gained the interest of the villagers everywhere. Boon-Itt gave to this the same zest and gained the same exultant pleasure which he always found in life. In one of his letters he wrote :

"It is great joy to tell the story of Jesus to the multitudes who have never heard it before."

Recently we learned an incident in his life which shows Boon-Itt's quick and fearless thoughtfulness. It happened on one of these same evangelistic tours with Dr. Dunlap. They were camping in the grounds of an old Brahmin temple. Dr. Dunlap writes :

"We had our tents on either side of the entrance to the Temple, in the shade of so-called sacred trees. We used the Temple as a chapel and dispensary. In the altar at one end of the Temple was a hideous, delapidated old god. We placed our medicine chest in front of the idol and held services there, often in the morning, often at night, and ministered to the sick during the day. One day we were out among cholera patients and returned to our tents just before dark. When I was about to enter my tent, Boon-Itt called out loudly, 'Don't go into your tent,' then ran into his own tent, seized his gun and shot a king cobra which was coiled under my cot. The cobra measured eleven feet in length. The bite of the cobra is fatal, the victim dying in from fifteen to twenty minutes. The snake is so vicious that in certain moods it chases people. This cobra was held by the people to be a guardian of the temple. It had its den just back of the idol before which we kept our medicine case for several weeks. The people were very much enraged on learning that Mr. Boon-Itt had killed their object of worship. We plead his defence before the Acting Governor of the province, holding that we were justified in killing the cobra rather than suffering death, and the Lieutenant Governor pacified the people. I never think of this narrow escape without gratitude to Boon-Itt for saving my life."

#### HIS HOME.

Four years after his return he married Maa Kim Hock, who had been educated at the Hrrriet House School.

A splendid scholar herself and a daughter of one of the first families in Siam, she gave herself in earnest consecration to their great life work. It was just about this time that Boon-Itt was offered a very large salary in gold by a commercial house, supposed to have been between five and ten thousand dollars. Firm himself in his devotion to his life work, he consulted her as to this position. She at once replied :

“ I think we will be far happier at the Lord's work on a little money than to leave it for this large sum ”

\$700 or a little more per year meant more to them than ten times that amount in other employment.

#### PITSANULOKE.

Three children were born to them—a boy and two girls. Their home was at Pitsanuloke, about a month's journey up the river from Bangkok. Here they developed the Boy's Boarding School, which has never had a dollar of foreign money. The land, an old palace ground, was given by the Siamese Chief Commissioner in 1889 ; the teak buildings cost over 4,000 ticals, every tical of which was secured by Boon-Itt in Pitsanuloke. In the competitive government examinations the boys of this school gained the highest percentages over the boys of the Government Public School and the Royal Survey School.

#### BANGKOK.

They continued here until the visit of Secretary Arthur J. Brown of our Board, evidenced that the work in Bangkok was insufficient to meet the great need there, especially as the intelligent, well-to-do classes were so rapidly gaining interest in foreign ideals and methods. He also pointed out the great need of the thousands of bright young men who naturally flocked to the great metropolis. Here gathered hundreds of young men and women, who had been educated in the Christian Boarding Schools, many of whom were Christians. Dr. Brown noted that these young men would become a great power for Christ if properly led. In Boon-Itt he saw the man to meet this need—one who was able to speak the high Siamese as a native, one who was acquainted with the intricacies of Siamese life and etiquette, and who knew the natural characteristics and felt the pulse of the nation. Writing of Boon-Itt, he said :

“ He is one of the most remarkable men I have met in Asia. At the head of his 'clan,' whose family home is in Bangkok, he is widely and favorably known in the capital. Young men like him and resort to him for advice whenever he visits the city. The Government has repeatedly offered him lucrative posts but he would rather live in a tumbledown native house with a small salary as a missionary, than accept the position of an official or a trader on a high salary.”

Owing to this great demand Boon-Itt moved to Bangkok.

Phra Montri, an influential Siamese nobleman, a graduate of Columbia College, donated sufficient money to augment the amount raised by other Christians to erect a new church. He wished Boon-Itt, whom he greatly admired, to carry out this work. Cottage Prayer Meetings were organized and largely attended. Christian worship began in many a home. A movement was on foot to found a Christian community in the neighborhood of the new church and school building. In his eagerness to reach young men not only on Sunday but throughout the week, he desired a Reading Room, Gymnasium, etc. Classmates and friends in this country became interested and two churches of which two of his Auburn student companions were pastors, became responsible to the extent of \$500 a year for this new work and equipment.

#### HIS DEATH.

Just at the beginning of this promising work Boon-Itt was suddenly stricken with cholera and after ten days' suffering, died on May 8, 1903. Physicians who loved him, the best the land afforded, could not save his life. The blow fell heavily. It stunned his earnest fellow-workers, but did not overcome them. Such noble souls as Dr. Eugene P. Dunlap and Hon. Hamilton King, United States Minister Plenipotentiary to Siam, heroic statesmen of the East, quickly rallied around

those who were equally enthusiastic among Boon-Itt's countrymen, and they determined to carry on his noble work. Their first thought seemed to be to perpetuate his influence.

A Siamese Committee was at once formed, of which Dr. Dunlap was made chairman. It was made up largely of Christian young men closely associated with Boon-Itt in the work he had begun at Bangkok. One member of this committee was a young nobleman of great promise, high in government service, another, one of their best business men in the employ of a large European firm, two others, prominent school teachers. They selected an appropriate site and, raising the entire amount, purchased a lot in one of the very best parts of the city.

#### BOON-ITT MEMORIAL.

A committee in this country was immediately appointed by the Foreign Board, of which Rev. J. F. Fitschen, Jr., (Boon-Itt's classmate,) pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca, New York, became the chairman. Popular meetings were held in various cities in New York State and in other parts of the country; and through these and the religious press something over \$11,000 was raised. Owing to a deterioration in money value through a change in the Siamese currency standard, it has since been necessary to augment this sum by

about \$3,000. We are grateful, however, to state that sum has practically been completed and that Dr. Dunlap, who has just returned to Siam, takes with him the promise of all needed funds, so that the building is entirely free from obligation.

Extracts from some of the letters written by his Siam associates show the great hold Boon-Itt had upon the young men of his country :

"Boon-Itt's whole heart was stirred by the deplorable state among many of the young men of his country and he was filled with compassion for them. He gave himself in noble effort to found a place for the rescue of the perishing that he might lift them up to a better life. Through his leadership our hearts were filled with pity for young men who were wasting their minds, their bodies and their lives. Alas! When the leader on whom we had depended for guidance in the way was cut off, all our benevolent thoughts seemed to subside. What a loss to Siam! But now, through the favor of God, the seed that Boon-Itt planted is becoming a tree. It is shooting forth its leaves and its blossoms and we shall soon see its fruit. God has favored us by giving us helpers in America."

I quote from another who has known him and worked with him there :

"His ten short years in Siam were filled with splendid work for his own people. Returning from America, he was willing to take up any kind of work and cheerfully engaged in whatever the Mission assigned him. He made a deep impression upon all classes of people. He literally 'went about doing good.' He endeared himself to all. All looked upon him as a wise leader and were willing to follow him. He studied their

needs, both temporal and spiritual. Through his influence the young Christian men organized an institution known as the Christian United Bank of Siam; this was the first banking house founded by Siamese. It was organized after the manner of the Savings Bank and is still maintained and has proven very helpful to the Christian community of Bangkok.

"He also persuaded three Christian men, one of them a high noble, another his own brother, Boon-Yee, and the third a zealous Christian worker of splendid business ability, to organize a Steam Rice Milling Company on a Christian basis; that is, there was to be no work on the Sabbath day, and a fixed portion of the income was to be devoted to Christian work. This Company has been very successful. It was also under his leadership that the Christians of the city united, in building the most beautiful Protestant church erected in Siam. The Siamese are justly proud that the lot was purchased and the church building erected without a single contribution from America. Boon Itt was superintending the erection of this church when he was taken away. In many other ways he led his fellow Christians in aggressive Christian work and in general evangelistic work as well as in measures for the education of Siamese ministers for Christ."

When Dr. Dunlap was soliciting funds for the Boon-Itt Memorial work among young men of the city of Bangkok, he called upon Prince Damrong, Minister of the Interior, for a contribution. The Prince replied with deep feeling :

"I am glad to help in a memorial to that splendid man. Boon-Itt was a true Christian. You may not know that I offered him a position which would have led to high titles of nobility from the King of Siam, to the Gov-



ernorship of a large province, and would have increased his income financially manifold. And yet he declined these high honors and financial benefits that he might continue in the service of Jesus Christ; and that, when I knew he was working on a very small salary from the Presbyterian Mission. Had he not been a true Christian fully devoted to Christian work, my flattering offers would have certainly led him into our service."

Dr. Dunlap has stated that he has not presented a cause of the Siam Mission in the past thirty years to the royal family, princes and nobles of Siam, that it has met as cheerful and liberal response as did the cause of the Boon-Itt memorial work for young men.

He led the Siamese Christians far along the way of self support and aggressive work for their own people. A good number of Siamese young men are doing gratuitous Christian work in the city of Bangkok and in other parts of Siam as a result of his influence. It is our belief that ere long we shall see a number of Siamese ministers of Christ who were thus led to consider the ministry.

Dr. Dunlap also recently related an incident showing the deep interest manifested by the Siamese in the memorial to Mr. Boon-Itt. Shortly after the King of Siam's return from ten month's tour in Europe, he was riding over the city of Bangkok in his automobile, to view the improvements that had been made during his absence. When he came to the Boon-Itt Memorial building he stopped the auto-

mobile and admired it. That night, before opening the meeting of the council of state, the king said: "Today when out viewing the city I saw an attractive building on the Wordchak Road. What building is that?" The Crown Prince of Siam replied: "That is the Boon-Itt Memorial building, erected for the benefit of the young men of Bangkok. It was my pleasure to make the first Siamese contribution to it." Then the Minister for Foreign Affairs, brother of the King of Siam, addressing his Majesty, said: "I, too, had the privilege of giving help to it." Then the Minister of Finance, another brother of the King of Siam informed the king of his contribution, and the king pleasantly remarked: "Why, everybody seems to have given to that building. I think that I shall have to give something too." We have been assured that the King and Queen of Siam will furnish the Audience Hall, intended to seat some four hundred people, and one other room of the building. Whilst it is a pleasure to know that royalty has taken such a deep interest in the founding of the Memorial to the late Mr. Boon-Itt, at the same time we are glad that many of the poorest peasants cheerfully gave to this Memorial, as well as a large number of the Christians of Siam and Laos.

MRS. BOON-ITT AND HIS SON.

Mrs. Boon-Itt has married one of the teachers in the Christian High

..School, a Christian teacher and a lay evangelist in the city of Bangkok: his name is Kroo Pluang (pronounced Plüáng). Mr. Boon-Itt's son Samuel, (named after Dr. House) is the very image of his father. He is about eleven years old, very attractive and of sweet disposition, and an earnest Christian, having united with the church during a revival two years ago. He is a pupil in the Christian High School, and like his father, has many friends in school.

Whilst the Boon-Itt Memorial work is carried on after the manner of the Y. M. C. A., the Y. M. C. A. Constitution modified—translated into the Siamese language—is its constitution; yet, it is not in connection with the world's Y. M. C. A. work, but is a part of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions work in Siam, under the direction of the Siam Mission. Its Board of Directors is made up of members of the Siam Mission and a number of Christian young men members of the business community of Bangkok. Mr. S. E. Conybeare has recently gone out to the Secretaryship of the Boon-Itt Memorial work and will soon be in charge. Mr. Conybeare is a graduate of Coe College, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa), has taken some special courses in the University of Chicago and has had large experience with men in newspaper work and with young men as Principal of High School.

Mrs. Conybeare is also a graduate of Coe College (the Conservatory of Music), and is an able associate in the work. Their support has been guaranteed by the First Church of Oak Park, Illinois.

The formal opening of the building is expected in the near future. Bangkok being a city of 886,000 people will furnish quite a large field for the work of this institution among young men. Diplomats representing Europe and the United States at the Court of Siam, were contributors to this work, as well as heads of the foreign business houses. It is reaching all classes of the young men of the city and whilst it is meant largely for the Siamese people, it has an international bearing.

Dr. Eugene P. Dunlap, who is the President of the Board of Directors, would be glad at any time to give any specific information as to the work, or enumerate any opportunities to assist in its growing development.

During our Seminary days two or three of us were camping, in the summer of '92, on the far side of "Old White Face" in the deep woods of the Adirondacks. We had two weeks together and grew to know Boon as only man can know man after nights together in the open. It was there we saw his real friendship with the Unseen Friend, and hallowing the memory of those days spent in God's Great Forest together, I seem to see again his quiet,

manly self kneeling at night beside the trunk of a great tree. In the outline of that moonlit figure I see again, a truth that abides: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "He being dead, yet speaketh" and in the light of such a life "the Night shineth as the Day."

Our own country has been blessed in the training of such a life, and back from the land in the far East comes the song of victory as we unite in our memorial to him who ever serveth and loveth because he loved the One who brought life and immortality to light.

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