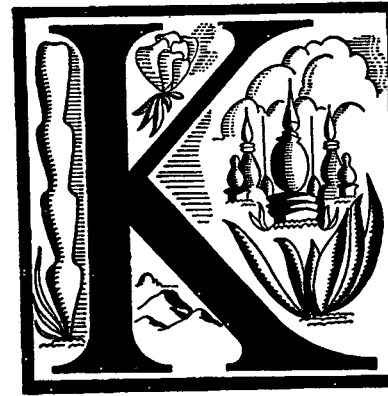


*Kru Sri Moh*  
*of Thailand*

by  
*Kenneth E. Wells*

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KRU SRI MOH has finally accepted you," reported a friend.

"Good!" I replied, "after five years! What did he say?"

"He said you could put two and two together!"

This wait-and-see attitude towards young missionaries usually resulted in his taking them to heart. He understood their ways and background better than most Thai, for he had virtually grown up in Dr. Marion Cheek's home. Mrs. Cheek had taken him to California for a year when he was a young man because he was quick to learn, could speak English, and would lend a hand with her children. His sympathy for missionaries was probably heightened by his seasickness on the homeward voyage back in 1890. Ever afterwards he made vivid to his countrymen the perils and hardships of those who crossed the sea for the gospel's sake. What chasms and cliffs of icy water he conjured up! That he should sit in judgment at all was pardonable for he was the peer of any man. That his comment showed restraint was characteristic.

When Kru Sri Moh was a baby, his mother kept dry torches at hand in their bamboo house and a fire going to

drive off wild elephants. Tigers took their dogs, pigs, and chickens at night. His only formal schooling was two years under Miss Edna S. Cole, now doyen of all Presbyterian missionaries. Despite this, at twenty he was a logging superintendent in the teak jungle; at twenty-four he was the author of a textbook; at thirty-five he retired with ample means; at thirty-eight he was an instructor and later professor in McGilvary Theological Seminary; at forty-three he was ordained to the ministry and served Thailand's largest church, and these two positions, pastor and teacher, he held when he died at seventy. "Kru" means "teacher."

As a boy he played with Chao Keo who later became Prince of Chiangmai, and the two remained lifelong friends. He was an intimate friend of the mayor of Chiangmai, who once gave four hundred ticals towards a Christian church because Kru Sri Moh was such a good neighbor. His business partner was Boon Yee, able brother of the Rev. Boon Itt, classmate of Dr. John Timothy Stone at Auburn Seminary.

Kru Sri Moh's appearance was striking. He was taller than most of his race, and fairer. He was lean, silver-haired, and with a mustache the envy of his compatriots. His hands were expressive, the hands of his artist-father, and these deftly portrayed the dramatic episodes of his sermons. His children, five girls and four boys, were likewise remarkable. Two of the sons were musicians, all four are teachers, and the one who went to Union Seminary in Manila led his class. A grandson who followed did the same.

At the age of sixty-nine Kru Sri Moh was called back to the pulpit of the city church. At this second installation he

said, "You have made a mistake in choosing me; I am but an old and dull knife. You know the proverb, 'Do not listen to one under seven or over seventy.' I am near the border."

His great work at this time was to draw scattered groups into a Christian fellowship. Like John the Aged, he could look benignly upon them and say, "Little children, love one another." Most of the country pastors of the province were his pupils. He had traveled to every village and church through rain and shine to visit them time after time. Now he called them all together at a Sunday Homecoming Service. All night the local chefs remained up to prepare rice and curry for 1,300 people. The church was packed and overflowing. At Kru Sri Moh's urging, tongue-tied elders arose to bring greetings from remote villages, and country choirs, shaky of key but firm of faith, sang stirring hymns to native melodies.

But Kru Sri Moh could also be imperious. The only person able to take him to task was Mrs. Daniel McGilvary, frail, quiet, and nearing eighty. She had helped care for him as a boy and to the last he would listen respectfully while she upbraided him for his high-handed ways. But his was the impatience of a man used to getting things done. When twenty-three years of age, he was sent up the river seven hundred miles with 30,000 rupees, his boat little more than a dugout, his route beset with jungle, rapids, and bandits. Later when he needed two more elephants to handle logs, he wrote an old friend, "I need two good elephants, but I haven't a rupee to pay for them. Shall I send two mahouts?" The old gentleman replied, "Send your mahouts. I have two elephants worth 6,000

rupees. Pay for them when you can." The following year Kru Sri Moh paid the bill.

Himself a man of integrity, drive, and breadth of view, he was irked by niggardliness, sloth, and ineptitude. Near the close of a vesper service he paused to ask some late-comers: "How did you come—by lantern light?"

But when some non-Christian officials suddenly appeared at the close of a village service, and it was his only chance to reach them, he explained gently, "I have just been saying . . ." and gave the whole sermon over again! Of a short-sighted group he once remarked, "If they don't see the fruit, their mouths won't water."

On one occasion he read in church a list of contributions:

"Smean Dang,—twelve *stangs*" (five cents). A significant pause. Perhaps the light was bad. Had he read the number aright?

"Smean Dang,—twelve *stangs*." Surely it couldn't be the highly paid Dang! For the third time—

"Smean Dang,—oh yes, assistant of Dr. X,—TWELVE STANGS!" Thereafter contributions rose markedly!

I have asked many men what traits were outstanding in Kru Sri Moh. Invariably their answers included "*Ote tone*," (endurance, overcoming hardships and difficulties). Said the mayor, in Thai idiom, "He was the same at the end as at the beginning," that is, he carried through, he stuck it out. This trait impressed them because he lived in a society where an excuse was all too frequently accepted in the place of accomplishment.

*Kwam ote tone* (the overcoming spirit) was characteristic of him. He was dying of cancer. For several months he had lain on a mattress at the top of the verandah stairs, holding court for a constant stream of neighbors and old friends. By his side was a bottle of morphine and a notebook. Between seizures of pain he wrote his last treatise on Christianity.

Never did he reveal this "overcoming spirit" more magnificently than on his seventieth birthday. The house was ablaze with lights, and the guests, preponderantly young, filled every room. There was a gorgeous cake from the capital, heaps of lesser cakes and of presents, and roses everywhere. He stood tall, straight, and cheery as he greeted the crowd—all his children and grandchildren, his pupils and old friends. But for support he was gripping the back of a chair. In the tropics only the exceptional man reaches seventy. People had come for 500 miles to do him honor; he would not let them down. Calling on his nerve, his knuckles white on the chair, he *stood* before them in the role of a gracious host, and smiled. The guests smiled back, but mist was in their eyes.

That night Kru Sri Moh had been a Christian for sixty years. Probably the senior of them all, and certainly one of the early converts of the first missionary, Dr. Daniel McGilvary. He wished his birthday celebrated with a devotional service and he asked me to lead. I recalled to their minds the memorable sermon Kru Sri Moh had preached ten months before under happy auspices at Dara, the Mission girls' school. He was dedicating two new cottages for students who would practice housewifery. The girls were dressed in their best, there were refreshments

at hand, the sun shone pleasantly through the palms, and the young crowd watched attentively the pastor's expressive hands—and toes. He had slipped off his shoes to stand barefoot on a clean grass mat. A half-grown pup at the slipper-chewing age came sidling up behind the speaker. The children were fascinated. Could the pup resist the temptation? No, he couldn't. Grabbing the nearest shoe he made off, with half the audience after him. When the shoe, and quiet, were restored, Kru Sri Moh went on with the text. (Lamentations 3:27) "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth," and applied it to home economics. "I have been grateful to Mrs. Check," he said, "that she taught me to sew, mend, sweep, and wash. Since then I have never feared work of any kind." That day the dignified Kru Sri Moh taught the dignity of work. He spoke truly. After his wife died, when his large house was running over with grandchildren, orphans, and waifs, despite his gray hair and many duties, he would seize a broom or dust-cloth and by precept and example lead in putting the house to rights.

His letters home from America were printed and used as geography-readers in the schools in northern Thailand. In them, four traits appear which distinguished his service and sermons in later years.

He wrote in terms his parents understood. "All the money in Chiangmai and Lumphun could not pay for this building. Its height is three times that of the Kiu Pagoda." In after years his speech and manners were acceptable in any level of society. "No matter what the group, he made his meaning clear," said an official.

Again, his descriptions were accurate and vivid. "Our boat was tossed like a leaf on the MePing River . . . The ships were moored so compactly you could not shoot a clay marble between the masts." His account of building operations—the materials used, size, and cost—would satisfy a contractor. Decades later his sermon illustrations showed the same realism and accuracy—the mahout clinging to the neck of an enraged elephant, the lost boys in the Chiangdao Cave, the MePing in flood and the drowning man.

Then there was the range of his interests and reading. Everything mattered to him, the Chicago Fire, war in South America, insane asylums in Canada, sea lions, the Revolutionary War, and the size of vegetables. Like a born teacher he absorbed facts and passed them on. Later his sermons contained sayings of Confucius, scientific facts, European legends, Buddhist lore, as well as Biblical material. The Book of Proverbs he knew almost by heart. Men of every age and clime, their needs and hopes, stirred him. Nebuchadnezzar eating grass, Elijah on Carmel, Christian fighting Apollyon—he read these as an actor reads his lines, and with dramatic power he made them live before his audiences.

Finally he was a crusader, a man of action. While writing of the neat cemeteries in Hongkong and the absence of garbage on the streets of Oakland he intimated clearly that something should be done about such things in Chiangmai and Bangkok. "Wherever there was a drowning, a fire, sickness, an epidemic—he was there," people say. But not as a spectator. "Where there was a need, he could be counted on," said the mayor. His benefactions

did not simply cost him money, but energy and inconvenience as well. The houseful of children, for example—year after year, wards to be fed, clothed, disciplined, and educated. And his help with funerals! Country people died in the city hospitals with only a wife or a child at hand. There are no morticians in Chiengmai. At this juncture Kru Sri Moh would bring the deceased to his home and see to all the arrangements including the burial service.

“What do you recall in Kru Sri Moh?” I asked a contractor. His face grew gentle, a soft light appeared in his brown eyes, “When my daughter lay dying . . . he worked by love . . . When he spoke, he never forgot God.”

# *Dona Martina of Chile*

by  
*Helen J. Elmore*