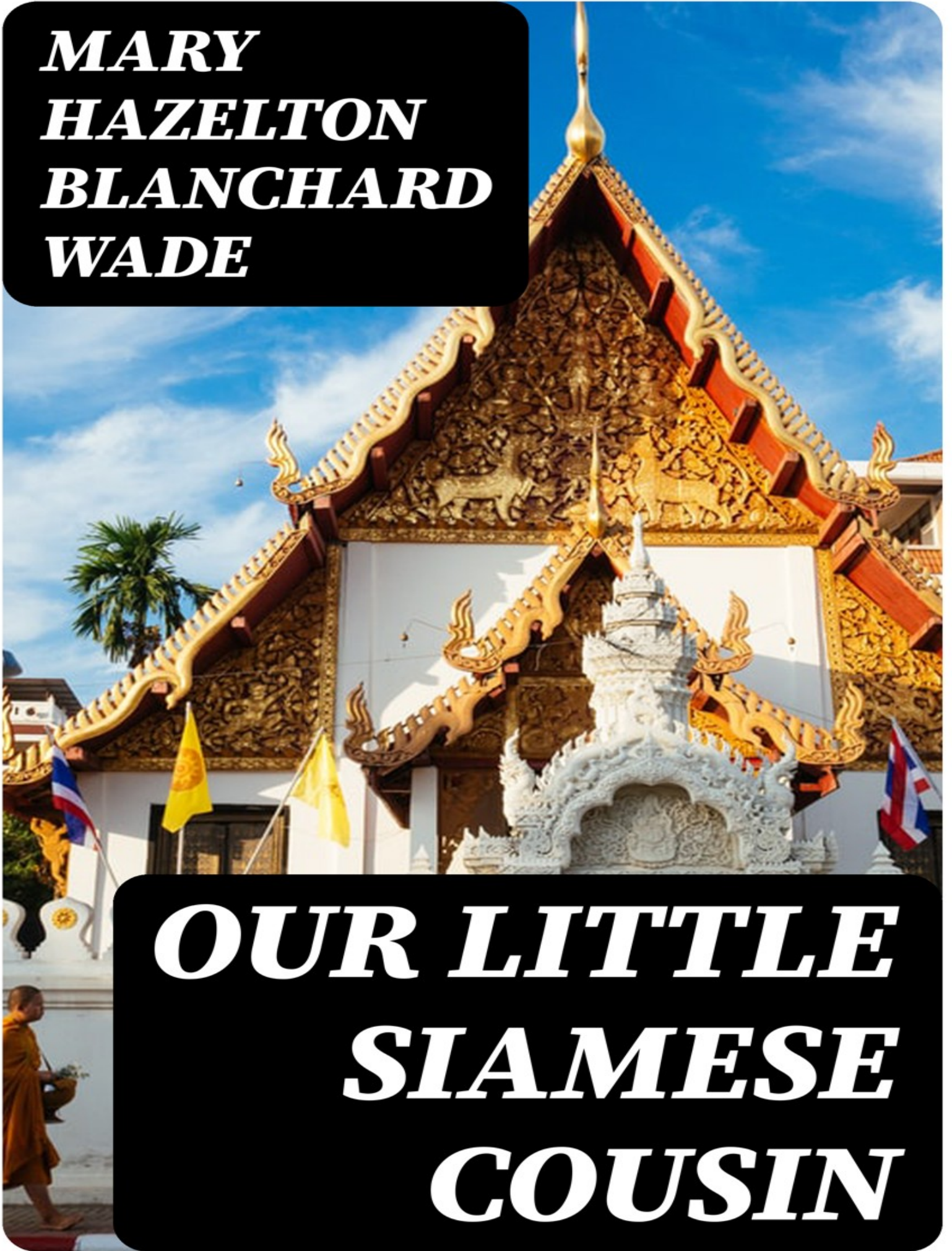


**MARY
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**OUR LITTLE
SIAMESE
COUSIN**



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Our Little Siamese Cousin

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Preface

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MANY years ago there came to America two young men who were looked upon as the greatest curiosities ever seen in this country.

They belonged to another race than ours. In fact, they were of two races, for one of their parents was a Chinese, and therefore of the Yellow Race, while the other was a Siamese, belonging to the Brown Race.

These two young men left their home in far-away Siam and crossed the great ocean for the purpose of exhibiting the strange way in which nature had joined them together. A small band of flesh united them from side to side.

Thus it was that from the moment they were born to the day of their death the twin brothers played and worked, ate and slept, walked and rode, at the same time.

Thousands of people became interested in seeing and hearing about these two men. Not only this, but they turned their attention to the home of the brothers, the wonderful land of Siam, with its sacred white elephants and beautiful temples, its curious customs and strange beliefs.

Last year the young prince of that country, wishing to learn more of the life of the white people, paid a visit to America. He was much interested in all he saw and heard while he was here.

Now let us, in thought, return his visit, and take part in the games and sports of the children of Siam.

We will attend some of their festivals, take a peep into the royal palace, enter the temples, and learn something

about the ways and habits of that far-away eastern country.



CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST BIRTHDAY

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IF you had seen Chin when he was born, you would have thought his skin yellow enough to suit anybody.

But his mother wasn't satisfied, for the baby's nurse was told to rub him with a queer sort of paste from top to toe. This paste was made with saffron and oil, and had a pleasant odour. It made Chin's skin yellower and darker than ever.

It did not seem to trouble him, however, for he closed his big brown eyes and went to sleep before the nurse had finished her work.

After this important thing had been done, the tiny baby was laid in his cradle and covered over. This does not appear very strange until you learn that he was *entirely* covered. Not even the flat little nose was left so the boy could draw in a breath of fresh air.

It is a wonder that he lived, for his home is very near the equator and the weather is extremely warm there all the time. But he did live, and grew stronger and healthier every day. Each morning he was rubbed afresh and stowed away under the covers of his crib.

He had one comfort, although he did not realize it. The mosquitoes could not reach him, and that was a greater blessing than you can, perhaps, imagine. There are millions of these insects in Siam,—yes, billions, trillions,—and the people of that country are not willing to kill one of them!

"Destroy the life of a living creature! It is a dreadful idea," Chin's mother would exclaim. "Why, it is against the laws of our religion. I could never think of doing such a thing, even if my darling boy's face were covered with bites."

If she were to see one of Chin's American cousins killing a fly or a spider, she would have a very sad opinion of him.

She was only fourteen years old when Chin was born. People in our country might still call her a little girl, yet she kept house for her husband, and cooked and sewed and spun, and watched over her new baby with the most loving care.

The father was only a little older than the mother. He was so glad that his first baby was a boy that he hardly knew what to do. He was quite poor and had very little money, but he said:

"I am going to celebrate as well as I can. Rich people have grand parties and entertainments at such times. I will hire some actors to give a little show, at any rate."

He invited his friends, who were hardly more than boys themselves, to come to the show. The actors dressed themselves up in queer costumes, and went through with a play that was quite clever and witty. Every one laughed a great deal, and when it was over the guests told the new father they had enjoyed themselves very much.

After a few months, Chin had grown strong enough to walk alone. He did not need to be covered and hidden away any longer. His straight black hair was shaved off, with the exception of a round spot on the top of his head, and he was

allowed to do as he pleased after his morning bath in the river was over.

The bath did not last long, and was very pleasant and comfortable. There was no rubbing afterward with towels, for the hot sunshine did the drying in a few moments.

Nor was there any dressing to be done, for the brown baby was left to toddle about in the suit Dame Nature had given him. It was all he could possibly desire, for clothing is never needed in Siam to keep one from catching cold.

Chin's mother herself wears only a wide strip of printed cloth fastened around her waist and hanging down to the knees. Sometimes, but not always, she has a long scarf draped across her breast and over one shoulder.

There are no shoes on her little feet, nor is there a hat on her head except in the hottest sunshine. There are many ornaments shining on her dark skin, even though she is not rich; and baby Chin did not have his toilet made till a silver bracelet had been fastened on his arms, and rings placed on his fingers.

After a year or two the boy's ears were bored so that gilt, pear-shaped earrings could be worn there. Soon after that a kind relative made him a present of silver anklets, and then he felt very much dressed indeed. Few boys as poor as he could boast of as much jewelry.

Chin was born on the river Meinam in a house-boat. There was nothing strange about that, for the neighbours and friends of the family had homes like his. It was cool and pleasant to live on the water. It was convenient when one wished to take a bath, and it was easy for the children to learn to swim so near home.

Yes, there were many reasons why Chin's parents preferred to make their home on the water. Perhaps the strongest one of all was that they did not have to pay any rent for the space taken up by the boat. A piece of land would have cost money. Then, again, if they should not like their neighbours, they could very easily move to a new place on the river.

Chin's father built the house, or the boat, just before he was married. He had some help from his friends, but it was not such hard work that he could not have done it all alone.

A big raft of bamboo was first made. This served as the floating platform on which the house should stand. The framework of the little home was also made of bamboo, which could be got from the woods not far away, and was very light and easy to handle.

How should the roof be protected from the heavy rains that fell during a portion of the year? That could be easily managed by getting quantities of the leaves of the atap palm-tree for thatching. These would make a thick, close covering, and would keep out the storms for a long time if they were carefully cemented with mud.

The broad, overhanging eaves would give shade to baby Chin when he was old enough to play in the outdoor air, and yet not strong enough to bear the burning sunshine.

Of course, there were many windows in the little house, you would think. There were openings in the walls in the shape of windows, certainly, but they were openings only, for they were not filled with glass, nor any other transparent substance. Chin's father would say: