FROM A SIAMESE MANUSCRIPT of the early 19th Century. An interesting inscription on the cover reads: "An alphabet and spelling book (Siamese language) for J. C. Williamson, Lieut. U. S. N., U. S. Str. 'San Jacinto', from the second King of Siam, &c.,". This is in the handwriting of the king himself. Siamese belongs to the Tai group of languages; it bears a distant kinship to Chinese, but is closely related to the rest of the Tai group. The alphabet is derived from the Cambodian (which is of South Indian origin), and the characters are written from left to right. Siamese is a monosyllabic language—that is each word consists of a single vowel followed or preceded by a consonant. Of late years, however, and to supersede the use of European words which were creeping into Siamese to express modern objects, compound words have been formed and pressed into service. The construction of the sentences is straightforward and simple, but the foreigner experiences great difficulty with the tonal system, since a word may sometimes have five different meanings depending upon its vocal inflection. A further difficulty awaits those who have to appear at court, inasmuch as there exists a special vocabulary of words reserved exclusively for court use, and woe betide the person who sullies the royal ear with the common or garden variety of speech. Siam has an abundant prose literature, mythological and historical, while poetry has flourished since ancient times. The coarse paper used in this manuscript is of native manufacture, and is peculiar to Burma and Siam. It is made from the bark of a large creeper found in the forest, and, as will be seen, is nearly of the texture of pasteboard. When the paper is used in its natural white shade black ink is employed, but when its surface is blackened, the writing, as in this example, is in gamboge. Palm leaf manuscripts, as in Burma and Ceylon, are also common in Siam, and are largely used by the Buddhist scribes—or were, before printing became general.