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From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824 the Beginning of the English Conquest

G. E. Harvey

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G. E. HARVEY

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PREFACE

By Sir RICHARD CARNAC TEMPLE, Bt.

I PROMISED Mr. Harvey to write the Preface to his book on the History of Burma, and now that I have his typescript before me I fulfil my promise. It is well over fifty years since I first landed in Burma, when Thayetmyo and Toungoo were on the British frontier, when it used to take three weeks by boat to reach the latter from Rangoon, what time the bore in the Sittang served. It took one fourteen days to reach Thayetmyo from Rangoon up the Irrawaddy in the rains of 1871. Circumstances have changed the amenities of travel almost inconceivably since then. At that time the corners in the Irrawaddy stream were rounded by fastening hawsers on to trees on the bank and steaming round by degrees with their help, as the current was stronger at such spots than the horse-power of the river steamers.

It is now also approaching forty years, after a long absence in India after the Thayetmyo days, since I first saw Mandalay in the war of 1885 onwards. It had been well known to me by reading as a place of romance in the distance beyond the frontier, approachable only by the favoured few, and it was as to a land of romance that I approached it in the greatly improved means of travel reached by the middle eighties of the last century—finding my way through the miles of complicated streets from the river shore to the walled and moated city and the stockaded palâce in its midst. For three years, April, 1887, to December, 1889, I was the first Cantonment Magistrate and the first Vice-President of the new Municipality—and to me it fell to dismantle the great city and change its features, within and without its walls, into the Cantonment of Mandalay. To commence also at the same

time the fashioning of the great modern provincial town of the British Indian Government variety out of what was virtually a mediæval Burmese capital was a work of absorbing interest and an unforgettable experience.

I was necessarily in close touch with the greater personalities of the King's régime and had to learn much of the recent history of his rule and his people, which created in my mind a strong desire to ascertain all that the scant leisure hours during my many duties permitted of their origin and earlier story. I have therefore long taken an absorbing interest in Burmese History and in all works which purport to teach it.

A great deal has been written on Burma, and there are valuable monographs on her history and anthropology. But of the two, it is history which has been the less studied till quite lately. The reason for this has been the difficulty of finding such material as exists—though there is a great deal of it—and rendering it intelligible. Of late years the Burma Research Society, founded in 1910, has begun to collect material of all kinds, and this book may be regarded as one of the first-fruits, for it is written by an office-bearer at the instance of one of the Society's founders, Monsieur Charles Duroiselle, who is himself responsible for much of the most enduring work that is being done on Burma and her archæology.

Up to this year the only full length History of Burma, based on original sources, has been Sir Arthur Phayre's, which was published in 1883, but excellent as that great work is, much that was not available to him has naturally come to light since then; thus, he had not access to the inscriptions, or to Chinese sources.

In the length of time that circumstances of government service and health have made it necessary for Mr. Harvey to consume in bringing out the result of his many labours, Sir George Scott has also produced a general History of Burma, published this year under the title of *Burma from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. He has clearly consulted the authorities, and he has written his book with all the literary skill which

distinguishes his former writings. But I agree with his own statement in his preface "that parts of the narrative are flippant," and taken altogether it is a light book. It does not interfere with a work like that before me. There is plenty of room for both, and the student would do well to study Mr. Harvey after running over Sir George Scott, if he would dive seriously into Burmese history.

Mr. Harvey's book presents us with a mass of original work and incorporates the results of research up to the date of going to press. But it is something more than a work of scholarship; it is also a singularly sympathetic study of the peoples of Burma; it is a book written with the heart as well as with the head. I venture to stress this point, because I am old enough to remember the seamy side of native rule. Things which sound incredible to-day were commonplace under native rule two generations ago, yet anyone who records them now is dismissed as a hostile critic—so short is human memory, so rapid has been the growth of nationalist sentiment. Burmese, like all oriental, and indeed most general, history, is a sombre record, a fact that many modern Burmese "patriots," as those of other nations, are apt to forget; the tendency is to regard the past as a golden age, and even Thibaw now has his halo.

People who want tendencious writing will have to look elsewhere, for this book glozes over little. But the beauty of the ancient world is described with equal vividness. Thus, Mr. Harvey writes of the Pagān Dynasty: "The legacy of their fleeting sway enriched posterity for ever. It was they who made that sun-scorched wilderness, the solitary plain of Myingyān, to blossom forth into the architectural magnificence of Pagān. If they produced no nation-builder like Simon de Montfort, no lawgiver like Edward I., they unified Burma for more than two centuries, and that in itself was an achievement. But their rôle was æsthetic and religious rather than political. To them the world owes in great measure the preservation of Thēravāda Buddhism, one of the purest faiths mankind has ever known. Brahmanism had strangled it in the land of its birth. In Ceylon its

existence was threatened again and again. East of Burma it was not yet free from priestly corruptions. But the Kings of Burma never wavered, and at Pagān the stricken faith found a city of refuge. Vainglorious tyrants build themselves sepulchres, but none of these men has a tomb. . . . These men's magnificence went to glorify their religion, not to deck the tent wherein they camped during this transitory life." It is a kindly and just judgment.

After quoting the early European visitors' accounts of Pegu in its days of power, which read so extravagantly to modern eyes, Mr. Harvey makes the following illuminating remarks: "These men saw the East in all her glory, such as we no longer see her. We have lost that vision and are the poorer. Yet we have lost it because we have grown richer. Our standards have altered. We no longer accept the pinchbeck and bone which even kings among our forbears were fain to wear as gold and ivory. Our Europe is no longer the little Christendom of Gothic times, living on the scanty produce of grey skies, trembling at every rumour of Saladin or the victorious Turk. She is sovran Europe who holds the East in fee and the whole world beside. We have come to know that all that glitters is not gold, but these first voyagers did not know it. They came from evil-smelling walled towns, where folk dwelt in kennels and died like flies of epidemics caused by their own insanitation. To men who lived in the cold and changed their clothes but once a year and went unwashed for months, the sunshine and the clean water, the children splashing all day in the creeks, the girls at the well, were one long delight. Ordure vanished quickly under the tropical sky, and instead of fetid narrow streets and overhanging houses, they saw the airy spaciousness of Pegu city in its heyday, and wide ways sweeping out of sight towards the four main gates. Men who had wrung a fourfold crop, at best, from the hard northern soil, saw a miracle in rice with its forty-fold out-turn, and in the mango a rare and refreshing fruit. They did not stray inland far from the capital, these simple sailormen. They saw little but the wealth of a

kingdom heaped together on one man, the prince who peacocked it in his palace, and they took such vestures, such jewels, such pomp and circumstance, to be a type of the whole country."

Mr. Harvey ends a well-told account of the death of Alaung-payā (Alompra), during his last expedition to Ayuthia in Siam, with the burning words: "So he was buried with the ritual of the kings in the palace city [Shwebo] which once had been his lowly village, and the mourning of an entire people. They would never see his like again, the village headman who had made himself lord of Burma and received the homage not only of the tribes, but also of French and English captains kneeling to receive his orders in respectful silence. . . . He had reigned only eight years and was under forty-six when he died; but men are remembered by the years they use, not by the years they last."

Speaking of another great man of the past, Anawrahtā, the founder of the Pagān Dynasty, Mr. Harvey writes of the effects of Buddhism on Burma: "His chief monument, the Shwezigōn Pagoda, built in A.D. 1059 and still unfinished at his death, is a solid pagoda of the kind so common all over Burma. Yet it attracts worshippers daily, while finer temples built by his successors are deserted. Its popularity is due to the exceptional sanctity of the relics (Buddha's collarbone, his frontlet from Prome and his tooth from Ceylon), and to the shrines of the entire pantheon of the Thirty-Seven Nat spirits, who, as it were, have come circling round in homage to these relics. If anyone doubts the debt Burma owes to Buddhism, or wishes to see what she would have been without it, let him wander here and contemplate these barbarous images of the heathen gods. Asked why he allowed them, Anawrahtā said: 'Men will not come for the sake of the new faith. Let them come for their old gods and gradually they will be won over.'" The local oral tradition which Mr. Harvey here quotes shows that a Buddhist leader was influenced by the same feelings as the early Christian missionaries in Europe. The images at the Shwezigōn Pagoda cannot, however, have been those of the

Thirty-Seven Nats as they now exist, as so many of them were living human beings long after Anawrahtā's date. The illustrations of my own collection of images and drawings of this order of Burmese supernatural beings (see *The Thirty-Seven Nats*, 1906) will also show how the all-pervading faith in the Buddhist religion in Burma has changed the old barbarous representation of the Nats into something that is noble in expression and beautiful in feeling.

The first successes of the village headman of Shwebo, Alaungpayā, are told with a swing, a raciness and an insight into the Burman character that make instructive reading: "The deficiency of the races of Indo-China in power of combination on a large scale is natural to people whose inherited instincts were formed in a country of great distances and bad communications. But when roused to enthusiasm they have shown considerable capacity for combined action. Among the Burmese the years 1752-7 are a model instance. Alaungpayā was not the only prominent man in Upper Burma. Independent attempts to form centres of resistance [to the Talaing invaders] had been made at Mōgaung in Myitkyinā district and Salin in Minbū district. Some of the leaders were men of better birth [than Alaungpayā], who had not to go back nine generations to claim royal blood. They were masterful men with considerable followings, who could have ruined the common cause by insisting on their rights. Not one of them did so, and the hereditary nobles ended by placing the territorial cadres at the disposal of Alaungpayā."

One more quotation and I have done with this particular point. Writing of the doings in 1823 during the days of Bāgyīdaw, "the Impossible" from the British point of view, Mr. Harvey remarks that the Assamese campaigns, "waged amid strange races and magnificent scenery, powerfully affected the imagination of the Burmese, as they swarmed through the passes, or floated for hundreds of miles down the Brahmaputra river on rafts. They marched with the tread of conquerors, and the earth seemed to tremble under their feet. The succession of victories confirmed the opinion they had of them-

selves and whetted their appetite for further conquest. Among the commanders who thus won fame was Mahābandūla," of whom much was heard in the first British war with Burma in 1824. Mr. Harvey's account of Mahābandūla is just and discriminating, and the following remark shows that in historical judgment he rises above racial feeling: "He was an imperialist of the most aggressive type, yet it is unjust to regard him as responsible for the war of 1824. He did, indeed, force it on, but in advocating it he was merely the mouthpiece of the entire people."

There is one criticism which it would not be difficult to level at this book in places. At times it reads almost like a jumble, in which the wood cannot be seen for the trees. That is not the fault of Mr. Harvey but of his subject. Except when Burma has happened to come under the rule of one man or of one dynasty, or say under two or three definitely separable rulers whose careers can be clearly followed, its history is a jumble very difficult to disentangle. It has in fact been the prey for centuries at a time of small tribes, or even cliques, ruling over small areas, always fighting and for ever getting the better of each other alternately. It is a disheartening matter for the historian to try and give a clear view of the various happenings under such circumstances. The hierarchy of the Thirty-Seven Nats is closely connected with personages of historical consequence, and I soon found, in trying to trace out the stories in historical sequence, how difficult it was to fix the place in history of the individuals concerned. Much of Burmese history is necessarily the relation of the small doings of princelings and mere raiders, and yet if the story of the country is to be rightly presented it must be all told. But it cannot help being confused to the rapid reader, and anyone wishing to understand history in such conditions must in fact be patient and careful.

But however insignificant these local ambitions, fights and victories were in the world's view, they were mighty happenings to the inhabitants of Burma. The war with the Chinese in the thirteenth century was to the great Emperor of China an

affair with a small people beyond his boundaries—a matter to be left to the discretion of one of the officers on his frontiers. To the Burmese, however, it was a struggle between two mighty peoples, to be recorded with the same attention to the actual facts and the same perception of proportion that they subsequently bestowed on their fights of the same description with the great British Empire.

The Burmese nevertheless have always been happy tellers of tales. Their capacity for relating a story well is remarkable and makes their historical records enticing reading, apart from their high or low value as history. Many a page of the *Hmannan* or *Glass Palace Chronicle* is a delight to peruse, and the same may be said of almost any other Burmese Chronicle one may consult—the narrative is so vividly and so humanly told. Mr. Harvey has been therefore wise in drawing largely on the legends of Burmese history and so made his work more thoroughly of the soil than would otherwise have been possible. The story, for instance, of the end of Narathīhapate, the last king of the Pagān dynasty—the Tarōkpye Min, the king that fled from the Chinese—as quoted from the *Glass Palace Chronicle* in this book—is told with the fascinating skill and power of the born story-teller.

The happenings in most history are so frequently horrible that one often wonders how life could have been tolerable. Much greater is the wonder as to how so much that is beautiful in art, that is wonderful in philosophy and noble in religion, could have come into existence. Burma is no exception. Much that happened there has been terrible, and simple devastation went on for long periods together so constantly and so completely as to constitute a nightmare.

Such periods are to be found in all Eastern history and in Western history as well, and yet philosophy, religion and the arts of peace have flourished exceedingly. How was it? Anyone who has experience of street riots knows that the trouble is confined to the streets in which it occurs. Life in the rest of the town—even in a street or two away from the riot and outside it—passes on quietly as usual. So it is

with war. In the area actually concerned it is terrifying, all-absorbing and destructive of every amenity. Elsewhere the countries concerned are affected, of course, but private life goes on quietly in much the usual way, and when communications are long or difficult it is not affected at all. So the poet can write, the philosopher can think and study, the priest can preach, and the artist work, just as they have always done. Thus it was possible for the great philosopher-historian Al-Bīrūnī and the equally great poet-historian Firdūsī to produce their world-renowned works at the court of such a raider and restless warrior as Mahmūd of Ghaznī. It is in fact a mistake to suppose that because a man has been a cruel invader and conqueror, he was therefore a man of low intellectual attainments and cared nothing for the arts and the higher living. Timūr Lang (Tamerlane) was anything but an illiterate man caring nothing for the beautiful things of life, for all his shocking sack of Delhi and many other similar deeds. So it was in Burma. The greater rulers, cruel as they frequently were, were mighty builders, and under them the arts and religion flourished. Under such men there were constant periods of general peace. When the country was divided up among petty local fighters, however complete the anarchy supervening in one locality, there was peace in another at the same time. Like all other countries, Burma has always been a good place for the top dog to dwell in, but even he has had his bad times as well: a condition that is apparently inseparable from human life.

Anyone who has worked, like myself, in the same field, will quickly realise the labour which has gone to the making of these few hundred pages. It has involved ransacking Chinese and Portuguese records, Dutch and English State Papers, and working through native Burmese material of which much is unprinted and in defective languages. How valuable such research can be the transcript *verbatim* of the Chinese General Staff Report on the invasion of Burma in 1765-9, in the days when Hsinbyūshin sat on the throne of Alaungpayā, is a strong instance. Often it is the very virtue of a piece of historical research that leads to its overthrow by those who come

after, but whether Mr. Harvey's conclusions endure or not—and I think that they are generally sound—his book will form a starting-point for searchers of the coming generation. It has blazed a way through the jungle so that others may build the road. The great feature of the book is the flood of light it throws on the still many dark places of Burmese history. It constitutes distinctly a step forward in our knowledge of the subject.

R. C. T.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

MR CHARLES DUROISELLE, Superintendent, Archæological Survey, Burma, suggested in 1918 that I should write this book. Since then he has guided my reading and given me access to his notes—the accumulated notes of a lifetime—so that the first half of this book is largely his, and the only reason his name does not appear on the title page is that he has not seen the final draft.

Next to him my chief collaborators were J. S. Furnivall, H. F. Searle and J. A. Stewart, members of my own service, and Professor G. H. Luce, Rangoon University; with these four I have been in regular consultation for several years. My thanks are also due to Mg San Shwe Bu (Honorary Archæological Officer), Mr Justice May Oung, Maung Mya (Archæological Assistant), Mg Po Kye 2 (Subordinate Civil Service), C. K. De (Secretariat Librarian, Rangoon), R. Grant Brown (Indian Civil Service), Miss L. M. Anstey, Arthur Waley, W. A. R. Wood (His Britannic Majesty's Consul-General, Chiengmai), G. W. Wheeler (Bodleian Library), George Cœdès (Librarian, Vajirañana National Library, Bangkok), and many others.

The reader will find the footnotes intelligible if he remembers that authorities are referred to by means of abbreviations or keywords which are printed in italics and are explained in the alphabetical bibliography at p. 373. Only the italicised portion of a reference is given in the bibliography; thus p. 95 refers to *ARASI* 1915-6 Duroiselle "The Ari of Burma and Tantric Buddhism"—the bibliography expands *ARASI*, the periodical containing Duroiselle's article, but does not give the article, even s.v. *Duroiselle*.

I have taken advantage of long leave in Europe to consult unpublished state papers in the India Office, and the usual Dutch and Portuguese sources. Chinese sources have been translated in the files of the Political Department. As to the native sources, they are so little known outside Burma that explanation is necessary.

It has too long been the fashion to deny the existence of historical material in Burma. But it is a question of standard, and the native material, though modest in both quantity and quality, is better than in the rest of Indo-China. Inscriptions may be rare in the fifth to the tenth centuries, but from the eleventh there is literally a deluge of them; and whereas in Campa, Cambodia and Siam, scripts have in the course of centuries undergone such profound changes that the compilers of later chronicles could not read the earlier inscriptions, in Burma inscriptions from the eleventh century onwards are in what is practically "square Pali," which is still used in the *kammawasa* (ordination service). Hence after the eleventh century the chronology of Burmese chronicles is reliable. Unfortunately the inscriptions used by historians were often copies containing dates which had been seriously miscopied (*Duroiselle*, "List" v, vi); this, and the tendency of the chroniclers to overlook inscriptions such as the Myazedi (p. 43), which did not happen to be in the collection near the palace (p. 268), resulted in the chronicles often being several decades out from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Some 1,500 inscriptions have long been printed in the six volumes of *Inscriptions*, which are useless to philologists because the spelling has been modernised and the copying is defective—there is one page which contains eighty-two mistakes; this is now being rectified, for the major inscriptions, in *Epigraphia Birmanica*, issued by Mr Duroiselle, which retains the original spelling and gives a large photograph of each text.

Second to these, and inferior, are the vernacular chronicles. One of them, the Yazawingyaw, goes back to the fifteenth century (p. 104). Other early works are the sixteenth century *Razadarit Ayedawpon* (p. 170), and the curious *Pawtugi*

Yazawin (p. 188), written probably within a generation of De Brito's death (1613) by some burmanised Portuguese captive. But the standard chronicles are eighteenth and nineteenth century lucubrations, such as the *Hmannan Yazawin*, compiled by a royal commission in 1829; linguistic criteria show them to be based on material which is clearly late; save for quotation of archaic songs, their style reveals no archaisms of so marked a type as to suggest that their basic MSS. date from before the sixteenth century. Indeed it could hardly be otherwise. Although some sort of palace records were kept in the Pagan and Pegu palaces before that date, the country possessed no developed civilisation with diffused private or institutional papers. Vandals like Thohanbwa 1527-43 and Alaungpaya 1752-60, rebels like those who in 1564 burnt down Bayinnaung's capital, helped to destroy such records as there were. Changes of dynasty would lead to their neglect and dispersion. For such as survived, there were no proper record-room methods; mildew, white ants, and the accident of fire prevented MSS. from reaching any great age, especially those which were not strictly religious. It is the rarest thing in Burma to find MSS. as much as two centuries old even in the imagination of the possessor.

The chronicles abound in anachronisms (p. 340) and in stock situations which recur as regularly as in a yellow back. But it was not the eighteenth century compilers who started the fashion of romancing; they were only following precedent, for close study will show that perhaps as much as half the narrative told as historical down to the thirteenth century is folk-lore (pp. 315, 316, 327, 329). When a standard history of Burma comes to be written, it will be necessary to divide the reigns of such kings as Anawrahta into two parts; the first part will be The Evidence, e.g. inscriptions showing him to have actually existed and what he did, and the second part will be The Anawrahta Legend. Such division is not feasible within the limits of this little pioneer work, and although critics trained in the history schools of the West will be shocked at my treatment of the Pagan period, anyone

familiar with the atmosphere of Further India will be able to supply his own comment on these pages, which reproduce the miraculous narrative objectively. Nor is it practicable to produce a lucid and well arranged book at the present stage, when the chief desideratum is to collate and record evidence much of which is scattered and untranslated or unprinted.

The chroniclers regard general conditions in early times as being the same as in their own day, the eighteenth century. The only evidence we have as to what they really were consists of exiguous inferences from mediæval inscriptions and of occasional references by foreign travellers; so far as it goes, such evidence gives one the idea of a stationary civilisation, the same in the Middle Ages as at the time of the English Conquest in 1824. What the English found is so easily ascertainable in print that, in the interests of space, I have omitted it, and refer to general conditions only when the narrative contains contemporary evidence to show what they were.

The main Burmese record is the *Hmannan Yazawin* down to 1752 and thereafter the *Konbaungset;* both are official. Local histories such as *thamaings* are frequently late, some, such as *Ko Hkayaing Thamaing*, being written a decade ago; written by individuals, they have not the range and accuracy of the great official compilations, but some, such as the *Shwemawdaw Thamaing*, must have been maintained at pagodas for centuries and record valuable traditions.

Alaungpaya, as his behaviour at Pegu in 1757 indicates (p. 235), destroyed many Talaing records; tradition says his successors did so, and the Talaings after they were conquered had neither the heart nor the means to maintain archives. I have used a Burmese MS. version of *Razadarit Ayedawpon;* the British Museum MS. "History of Pegu," by *Sayadaw Athwa*, used by Sir Arthur Phayre; Burmese MS. translations of the *Thatonnwemun Yazawin* and the *Paklat Talaing Chronicle;* and *Schmidt's* German translation of "Slapat ragawan datow smim ron."

The best Arakanese records, Maharazawun (148 *angas*), Do We "Rahkaing Razawun" (48 *angas*), Nga Me "Mahara-

zawun" (24 *angas*), are practically unobtainable, being in palm leaf copies which are few and far between. San Shwe Bu has given me a few notes from Do We, Nga Me and others, and I have used Phayre's Arakanese MS. in the British Museum. *Dinnyawadi Yazawinthit*, the only printed Arakanese history I know, is a third hand piece of work. An admirable though slender check on Arakanese chronology exists in the dated medallions issued by the rajas of Arakan from the fifteenth if not the tenth century onwards (p. 137).

For Siamese chronicles I am mainly indebted to Mr. W. A. R. Wood, who furnished me with a précis. Shan chronicles are so consistently reckless with regard to dates, varying a couple of centuries on every other leaf, that I have disregarded them. As for the remaining races, such as Karens, Chins, Kachins, they were illiterate, and there is no record.

Hence our main authority is the standard Burmese chronicles. It is impossible to study these, especially in conjunction with the other native records, without acquiring considerable respect for them. No other country on the mainland of Indo-China can show so impressive a continuity. The great record of substantially accurate dates goes back for no less than nine centuries, and even the earlier legends have a substratum of truth. But that which gives continuity also gives false perspective; the record is that of the Burmese, the energetic and dominant minority who possessed an abiding palace and a continuous tradition. Written in the shadow of the throne, the chronicles tell little of general conditions, and their story is not that of the peoples of Burma, or even of the Burmese people, but simply that of the dynasties of Upper Burma. In a land of centrifugal tendencies, facts are distorted to fit into a centripetal scheme, and the Burmese capital is made to occupy the whole of the canvas, while races such as the Shans, who for centuries were of at least equal importance, and the Talaings, who were probably the leaders of civilisation to the very end, are scarcely mentioned save as a foil.

The Pagan period appears to have unity, but, apart from inscriptions, material is lacking; the Shan period is seen

to be chaotic, because the chronicles were becoming fuller with the growth of the monastic system and the diffusion of literacy. Thibaw 1878-85 is notorious; yet if our only evidence were the Burmese court records, he would appear as a model monarch who spent his time uttering sublime sentiments, making ideal arrangements for religion, abolishing monopolies, etc., etc. The chronicles for the period of Pagan, which read so charmingly, were written by men who thus describe the First Anglo-Burmese War, 1824-6 (B.E. 1186-7):—

> In the years 1186 and 1187 white strangers from the west fastened a quarrel upon the Lord of the Golden Palace. They landed at Rangoon, took that place and Prome, and were permitted to advance as far as Yandabu; for the King, from motives of piety and regard to life, made no preparations whatever to oppose them. The strangers had spent vast sums of money in their enterprise, so that by the time they reached Yandabu their resources were exhausted, and they were in great distress. They then petitioned the King, who in his clemency and generosity sent them large sums of money to pay their expenses back and ordered them out of the country. (*Crawfurd* I. 304.)

It is difficult to see the history of Burma in its true colour and orientation, because material is lacking. Weakness is the predominant feature of central government in the East, and in Burma most of our material is that of the central government; hence the story told in this book is sombre. But it is less depressing than that of many eastern countries, and it would not be depressing at all if only we could get out of the palace and among the people. It is a people which must sometimes have wondered whether its government did not emanate from a vampire rather than a king, and yet it never lost its buoyancy or missed its hold on the essentials of civilisation. The clergy may have been recluses, but they not only lived beautiful lives: they fearlessly maintained the Law of Mercy. When greater races bound the feet or veiled the face of their women, or doubted if she had a soul, the Burmese held her free and enthroned her as chieftainess and queen.

Perhaps some better equipped writer will tell this story and portray the life of which we catch glimpses in many an old

song. When he appears, much that is ugly will recede into the background; at present it clogs the foreground. Those who would have it omitted forget that a historian has no power to suppress an integral part of the record; neither the rules of his craft nor the dictates of his conscience allow it, for, in the words of one of the greatest of Liberals, John Morley: "The law of things is that they who tamper with veracity, from whatever motive, are tampering with the vital force of human progress."

G. E. H.

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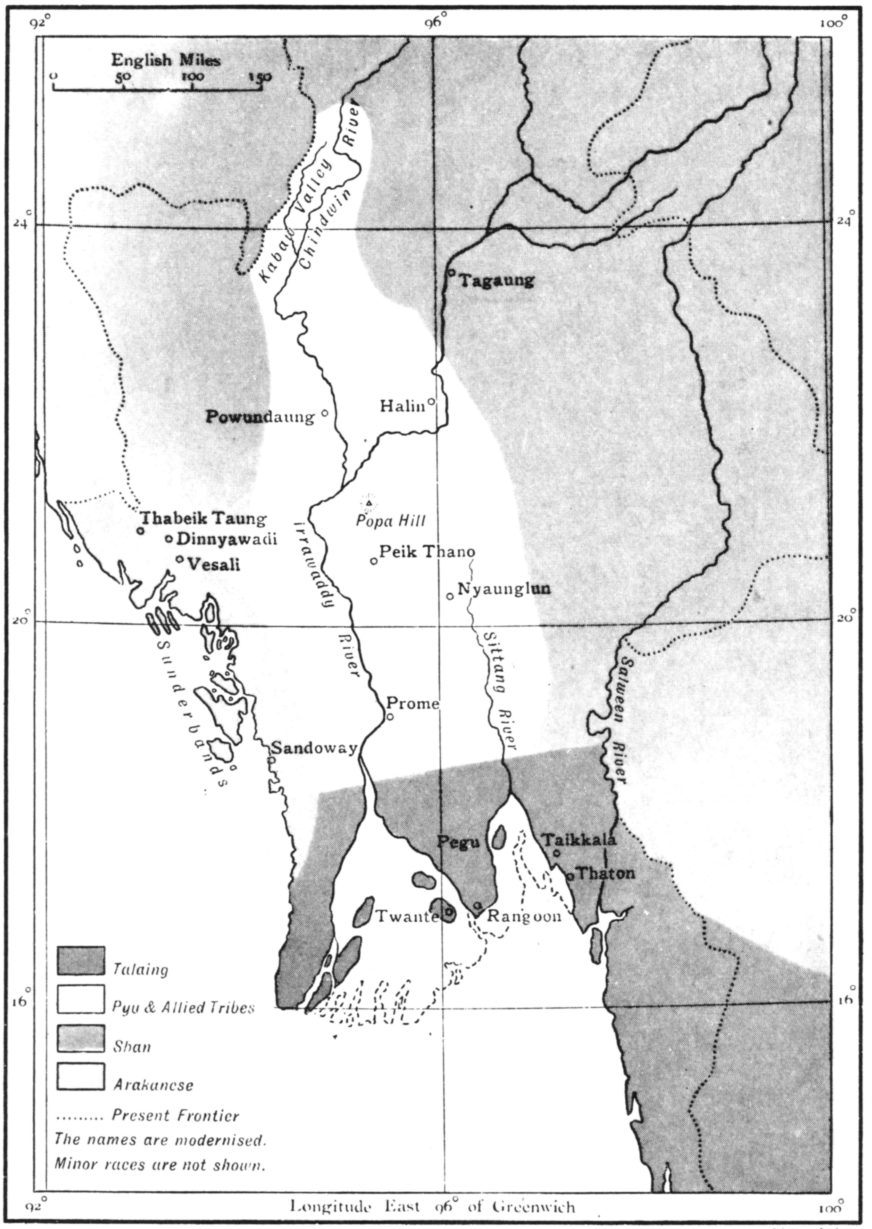
CHAPTER I

BURMA BEFORE 1044

BURMA ABOUT 700 A.D. (Conjectural)



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CHAPTER I

BURMA BEFORE 1044

BURMA,[1] being little more than the valleys of a river system shut off from the outer world by hills and sea, is fitted to be the home of a unified people. But even now the process of unification, though accelerated, is incomplete; and when history began, the country was a medley of tribes.[2]

Perhaps the earliest inhabitants were Indonesians but they have left scarcely a trace and in any case they were displaced by Mongolian tribes whose home was probably in western China. These were the Mon and the Tibeto-Burman tribes from eastern Tibet. Doubtless they came down the great rivers, but the routes, order, and dates at which they came are purely conjectural. The Mon (Talaings) spread over Burma south of Henzada. The traditional names of the Tibeto-Burman tribes are Pyu, Kanran, and Thet; perhaps the Thet are the Chins, and the Kanran the Arakanese; the Pyu, now extinct, may be an ingredient in what afterwards became the Burmese, and they seem to have been pushed inland from the Delta coast by Talaing pressure from the south-east, as if the Talaing route into Burma was down the Salween. The Karens may have been earliest of all.

These races came, owing to causes such as drought and ethnic pressure, in successive infiltrations, each driving its predecessor farther south. Down from the north they came,

[1] *Myamma* is the same word as *Mien* the Chinese name and *Man* the Shan name for Burma. The derivation from Brahma is on a level with the derivation of English from angels. The mediæval scribes with the name Brahma before them write not Brahmadesa (land of Brahma) but Myammadesa (land of Myamma), and an eleventh century Talaing inscription (*RSASB* 1920 21) calls the Burmese *Mirma*.

[2] See the current Census Report, Imperial Gazetteer, *Lowis*, *Halliday*, *Smeaton*, *JBRS* 1911 Gilmore "Karen Folk-Lore" and Grant Brown "Origin of the Burmese" *ibid.*, Temple "The People of Burma" in Journal of the Royal Society of Arts 1910 with which read *Vincent Smith* "Oxford History of India" 47.

tribe after tribe of hungry yellow men with the dust of the world's end upon their feet, seeking food and warmth in tiny homesteads along the fertile river banks, seeking that place in the sun which has been the dream of the northern races in so many ages. The infiltration lasted centuries. The Shans did not enter the plains till the thirteenth century and the Kachins were penetrating Upper Burma when the English annexed it in 1885. Many of the immigrants must have been settled in before the Christian era. They lay thinly scattered over the country, illiterate animist tribes with little political organisation. Men dwelt in isolated units, divided by forest and hill, a scanty population whose hut-fires sent up smoke here and there above the jungle. The unit was doubtless the village, with communal tenures and rigid clan customs.[1] If after a time kings came into existence they were little more than tribal chiefs

> . . . in times long passed away,
> When men might cross a kingdom in a day,
> And kings remembered they should one day die,
> And all folk dwelt in great simplicity.

We read of seven kings who went up to do battle against Taikkala (Ayetthima in Thaton district); but as their realms were all pressed in between the mouths of the Salween and Sittang rivers, each kingdom must have been no larger than a township.[2]

Indeed there can hardly have been political units of any size before writing came into use.[3] Although it was not unknown before A.D. 500, no inscriptions of earlier date have yet been found. It was brought, probably about A.D. 300, from South India to the Pyus first of all, as part of the great Hindu expansion overseas; the earliest Pyu inscription contains Kadamba letters which were in use at that date near Goa on the Bombay coast. Hindus had come long before but it was not till this time that their cultural influence took root; they brought writing, customary law, and other elements of civilisa-

[1] *Forchammer* "Jardine Prize," *Clayton*, *Hertz*, *Furnivall* "Myingyan Settlement," his "Syriam Gazetteer," and his "Land as Free Gift of Nature" in Economic Journal 1909. As late as 1794, out of 8500 parishes in England 4500 were farmed on the common field system.

[2] *IA* 1893 and 1894 Taw Sein Ko "Kalyani inscriptions."

[3] See note "Inscriptions the Touchstone" p. 307.

tion.[1] They founded kingdoms in Java and Sumatra, and dotted the coast from Bengal to Borneo and Tonkin with little trading principalities such as Prome, Rangoon, and Thaton. Their coming was generally peaceful, for if they came as individual traders they would be welcomed; and if they came in numbers to set up independent communities, there was usually room in so thinly populated a land. But as time went on there was less room, at any rate in the places most worth having; and a few traditions such as the following suggest that at times there was petty fighting:—

THE STORY OF THE TALAING HERO KUN ATHA.

Thamala king of Pegu [A.D. 825-37] made his younger brother successor to the throne and, promising to welcome him on his return, sent him to learn wisdom from a famous teacher at Taxila. Now on the border between the realms of Pegu and Thaton there dwelt an aged Karen couple working their *ya* fields, and they had a daughter, and Thamala the king made her his chief queen. And the months and the years went by, and she conceived in her womb, and the king forgot his brother Wimala.

Now Wimala, having learned wisdom, bade farewell to his teacher, and returned home. But because his brother the king forgot his promise and welcomed him not, forthwith in anger he slew his brother the king. And inasmuch at that very time the queen gave birth to her son, he ordered that the new-born babe also be slain. But the queen, with grief in her heart, hid the babe outside the town near a pasture where buffaloes graze; and the *nat* fairies guarded him, and day by day he grew in wisdom and strength.

When he was sixteen years old, Hindu strangers came to the land. They were angered because the Talaings had driven them out, and they came back saying "We will fight and regain Hanthawaddy." Led by Lamba, a giant seven cubits high, they came in their ships and surrounded Pegu town and sent a letter to Wimala the king. And when he had the letter, Wimala the king sent out messengers to seek a champion; but though the messengers searched, they found no champion.

Now at that time a certain hunter went hunting in the forest, and he came to where the wild buffaloes graze, and lo! among the buffaloes there stood a valiant youth. And the hunter returned home, and he told his wife, and she said "Husband, if this be true, tell it to the king, and he will reward thee." And the hunter told the king, and Wimala the king sent ministers to fetch the youth. And when they brought him, at once Wimala the king knew him for his nephew,

[1] See also *IA* 1891 Temple "Burmese Arithmetic," 1886 Phayre "Notes on Early History of Pegu," 1897-8 Temple "Currency and Coinage among the Burmese," *Hobson-Jobson* s.v. "Viss."

> and he ennobled him and called his name Atha-kumma, because he should conquer his enemies. Then Wimala confessed his sin, and in that moment Atha-kumma plighted his troth to fight the Hindu strangers. But first he waited seven days, and sought the buffalo who was his foster-mother to ask her leave, and she gave him leave and shewed him how to fight and conquer. Then he returned to Pegu town and did battle there,[1] and speared the Hindu giant in the side, and took prisoner seven ships and three thousand five hundred Hindu strangers. He built Kyaikatha [the pagoda of Atha, in Thaton district]. And Wimala the king made him successor to the throne. (*Nanda-thara.*)

The Burmese are a Mongolian race, yet their traditions, instead of harking back to China, refer to India. Their chronicles read as if they were descended from Buddha's clansmen and lived in Upper India. Even their folk-lore is largely Hindu. Most of their towns have two names, one vernacular, the other classical Indian,[2] just as the Latin Church made it the fashion for every city in Europe to have a Roman name whether the Romans had been there or not. A few of these classical names are due to actual immigration from the original namesake in India; thus Ussa, the old name for Pegu, is the same word as Orissa, and Pegu was colonised from Orissa. The surviving traditions of the Burmese are Indian because their own Mongolian traditions died out. The only classes who could read and write and keep traditions alive were their ruling class, the Indian immigrants.

In Upper Burma these immigrants came overland through Assam; in Lower Burma they came by sea from Madras. In some localities, such as Thaton, Prome, Pegu, Rangoon, and in many a town in Arakan, Indian immigrants doubtless formed a large proportion of the population; indeed the name "Talaing" is probably derived from Telingana, a region on the Madras coast whence so many of them came.[3] Like

[1] Tradition points to a stone pillar near a monastery at Hinthakan, half a mile north-east of the Shwemawdaw pagoda, as commemorating the site. See p. 113.

[2] The name of the Irrawaddy (Sansk. *Iravati* = "giver of refreshment") happens to be also the ancient name of the river Ravi in the Panjab. See *RSASB* 1915 31 and 1917 26, 35.

[3] This derivation of Phayre's is still the best. See *Halliday*, *Hobson-Jobson* s.v. "Talaing," *JBRS* 1914 Blagden "Talaing." The ætiological tale that Alaungpaya christened the people Talaing meaning "downtrodden" is disproved by the occurrence of the name Talaing in Burmese inscriptions as early as 1107 (*Inscriptions* 1913 18).

good Hindus, they built little shrines; and it is probably these shrines that form the original strata of such pagodas as the Shwemawdaw at Pegu, the Shwedagon at Rangoon, and the Shwezayan at Thaton, all of which may well date back, in some shape or another, to before the Christian era. They brought their clergy with them, just as chetties and European merchants do now in Rangoon, and with as little result on the people at large. As a rule their religion was a domestic matter, but in the course of centuries they became so numerous as to effect peaceful penetration. Moreover, their Hinduism begun to include Buddhist elements after 261 B.C. when Asoka conquered the Kalinga and introduced Buddhism into South India. Its spread there doubtless took some time—the absorption of a religion is a slow process—and its spread to Lower Burma probably took longer still. What must have been a decisive factor was the rise, in the fifth century after Christ, of a great Hinayana centre at Conjeveram in Madras under the commentator Dhammapala; ancient Talaing writings frequently mention Dhammapala and Conjeveram, and the earliest Talaing inscription is in the Pallava alphabet used there in his time.

The faith existed side by side with Brahmanism. What the excavator[1] finds in Burma is often Hindu rather than Buddhist. In some sculptures Buddha appears as an incarnation of Vishnu. The legend of Duttapaung,[2] the Pyu chief, is tinged with Sivaism, for he is described as having three eyes; and what look like phallic emblems have been found at Pegu.

Doubtless these changes affected for the most part only the towns, the trade centres, and the rulers who, if not foreigners, intermarried with foreigners. The bulk of the people outside went on in their old quiet way worshipping stocks and stones—the usual animism and spirit worship of simple races. Religious strife is scarcely mentioned; but that there were occasional struggles between Hinduism and Buddhism is indicated by traditions such as

[1] See note " Ancient Sites " p. 309.

[2] *IA* 1893 Taw Sein Ko " Folk-lore in Burma—the three-eyed king."

THE STORY OF THE TALAING HEROINE BHADRADEVI (TALAHTAW).

Tissa [A.D. 1043-57] was a heretic king [of Pegu]. He . . . made no obeisance to Buddha, to the Law he hearkened not, he honoured the Brahmans. He threw down the images of Buddha, he cast them away into ditches and marshes.

Now there was a certain merchant's daughter who clung to true religion. Bhadradevi was this maiden's name. From her tenth year up she went out to listen with her parents and she hearkened continually to the Law. She had exceeding great joy in the Three Gems. Daily she said the Three Names of Refuge with care. And it came to pass that the time when she was in her first youth was the time when the king cast down the images of Buddha. At that time the maiden went down to bathe, and by chance she thrust her hand against an image of Buddha. And she drew it up, and it glistened with gold. She asked "Who has caused this image to be cast away?" And the old slavewomen made answer "Lady, this king follows the word of false teachers. Verily it is the king who has caused this image of Buddha to be cast away. Whoever greets, honours, or bows before Buddha at the pagodas, him the king causes to be slain and to be brought to naught." Thus said the slavewomen. When the maiden had heard their words, she spake on this wise "I obey the Three Gems. I can endure death. First wash the image clean, then set it up at a pagoda." She herself and the slavewomen washed it and set it up at a pagoda. . . . Now as she was setting up the image, these things were told to the king. And he sent runners to call her. The maiden, that ring adorned with gems beyond price, spoke to the king's runners saying "Let me abide here before the image." And she made haste to wash every image of Buddha as many as were there, and to set them up, every one. And after a time the king sent more runners. When the maiden came before the king, she spake unto him. But he listened with anger, and spake in this wise "Take her to the elephants that they may trample her to death." Then the maiden caused gentleness to soften the king and the elephants and the elephant-men, and continually she said the "I take refuge in the Lord" and she called on the Three Names of Refuge. And the elephant dared not tread on her, but he roared with his voice, neither could the elephant-men make him run at her. Many times they brought other elephants, but no elephant dared tread on her. So men told the king in fear. When the king heard these things, he spake in this wise "Cover her with straw for the funeral pyre." But the maiden caused gentleness to work again, and she called on the Three Names of Refuge. Men stirred themselves to burn her, yet she burned not. So they told the king in fear. Thus spake the king "Bring her here." They brought her to the king, and he said "O maiden! When I see the image of Buddha thy teacher fly up into heaven, then mayest thou live. But if from the image of thy teacher there fly not up seven images,

eight images, I will have thee cut into seven pieces." And he had her led to the foot of the ditch . . . and she prayed on this wise "O image of the Lord of Bliss! I thy handmaiden set up thy images. Buddha is lord everywhere, his Law is lord everywhere, his Church is lord everywhere. As Buddha, his Law, his Church are everywhere lord, so may eight images of Buddha fly up into heaven at the king's hall!" And in the twinkling of an eye there flew eight images up into heaven . . . towards the king's hall. And the maiden returned and pointed them out to the king. With many men he saw them, it was a wonder far and wide. Then said the maiden "O earthly king! Buddha my teacher is gone to Nirvana. Thou hast been able to see only his images fly up into heaven in his stead. Thou hast followed false teachers and called them better. Let thy handmaiden see *them* fly up." Then the king commanded them to fly. But the false teachers could not fly. And the king drave them away . . . and he caused the maiden to bathe and he raised her to be his chief queen . . . and he returned thanks and followed true religion ever after. (*Schmidt.*)

Civilising influences were strongest round the coast and in the Delta. Upper Burma lay inaccessible; true, it was nearer to China, which from the second century before Christ used trade routes through Burma,[1] but China's interest seems to have been limited to these routes, for traces of any influence of hers are hard to find (p. 73). Tagaung in Mogok subdivision received civilisation from Upper India, but not till some time later than the Talaings, judging from the fact that the earliest writing so far found there is in North Indian script of the tenth century.[2] Again, in the seventh century a Talaing princess married a Tibetan king. But though instances such as these show that the tedious overland route was in use, it was round the sea-coast that development centred, and especially in the south where the river mouths brought down the produce of the interior. Roman shipmasters,[3] trading in Ceylon and Madras, heard of Sobanas River (Irrawaddy, Salween, cf. Suvannabhumi), and Golden Land (the Delta, Malaya and Sumatra).[4] Ptolemy, the Greek geographer, writing

[1] Two were along the Irrawaddy and Salween rivers; the third, down the Chindwin river and through Manipur, took the caravans a three months' journey to Afghanistan where the silks of China were exchanged for the gold of Europe (*BEFEO* 1904 Pelliot "Deux itinéraires" and *Hunter* I. i).

[2] See note "Führer's Inscription" p. 310.

[3] See note "Eastern Shipping" p. 310.

[4] See note "Golden Land" p. 310.