White Herbert Thirkell

A Civil Servant in Burma

Herbert White

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Sir Herbert Thirkell White
A Civil Servant in Burma

TO
MY WIFE
WHO SHARED
MY LIFE IN BURMA
FOR MORE THAN THIRTY-TWO YEARS

PREFACE

This is not a guide-book, or a history, or a study of manners and customs. It is a plain story of official life for more than thirty years. It does not compete with any of the books already written about Burma, except, perhaps, the monumental work of General Fytche. While pursuing as a rule a track of chronological order, I have not hesitated to wander into by-paths of dissertation and description. I could not write without attempting to give fragmentary impressions of the people and their character. As far as possible I have limited my narrative to events within my own knowledge; my judgments are based on my own observation.

I have to express my acknowledgments to the friends who have given me photographs to illustrate the book. My special thanks are due to Mr. A. Leeds, I.C.S. (retired), for a large number of characteristic and charming pictures.

H. T. W.

September, 1913.

NOTE

Burmese words are spelt according to the Government system of transliteration. Consonants have the same power as in English. *Y* after *g* combines to form a sound approximating to *j*: *gyi* = "jee"; after every other consonant it is short—*mўo*. *Yw* is pronounced "yu." Vowels and diphthongs have the sounds given below:

Every letter, except *y* after *g*, is sounded separately, including final vowels. Thus, *lu-gale* is pronounced "loo-ga-lay." These instructions are crude and unscientific, and may excite the derision of purists. They will enable anyone to pronounce Burmese words with some approach to correctness. In the case of Shan names I have as a rule adopted the Burmese forms rather than the Shan forms in official use, which no one who does not know the language can pretend to pronounce properly.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTORY: A RETROSPECT AND SOME COMPARISONS

Burma is a Province of the Indian Empire. It is not, as some suppose, a Crown Colony administered directly under the Colonial Office. Nor is it, as others do vainly talk, a foreign State where Britain is represented by Consuls. It is the largest, yet the least populous, of Indian Provinces, more extensive even than undivided Bengal. The estimated area is over two hundred and thirty thousand square miles, larger than either France or Germany. According to the last census (1911), the population is about twelve millions. On the west, its seaboard washed by the Bay of Bengal, Burma marches with Bengal, Assam, and Manipur; on the east, with China, French Indo-China, and Siam. To the north, it stretches, through tracts unadministered and unexplored, to the confines of Tibet. The mass of the people are Burmans, a Mongol race akin to Chinese and Siamese. Other races in Burma are Talaings, scattered over the Irrawaddy Delta and the Tenasserim division; Shans, who occupy the great plateau on the east and are also found in the northern districts; Karens, whose home is Karenni, but who are widely spread over Lower Burma; Kachins, people of the hills on the north-east; and Chins, of many clans, inhabiting the hill-country on the north-west border.

From the middle of the eighteenth century Burma was ruled by the dynasty of Alaungpaya, corruptly called Alompra. Alaungpaya seems to have been a Dacoit chief who began his career at Shwebo,[1] and made himself master of the whole country. In his time the Burmese were a warlike people, withstanding the might of China, and carrying their victorious standards into Siam. Ten Princes[2] of his House ruled over the whole, or part, of his kingdom. In 1826, after the First Burmese War, the Provinces of Tenasserim and Arakan were annexed by the East India Company, the central block from the sea to Tibet remaining under the Burmese King. In 1852 the Province of Pegu was conquered. In 1862 Pegu, Tenasserim, and Arakan were combined to form the Province of British Burma, and placed in charge of a Chief Commissioner directly responsible to the Government of India. In 1885 occurred the Third Burmese War. Early in 1886, Upper Burma, all that remained under native rule, was incorporated in the British Empire. Burma continued to be administered by a Chief Commissioner till 1897, when the first Lieutenant-Governor was appointed.

These elementary facts are recorded for the benefit of any who may be thankful for geographical and historical information about distant dependencies of the Crown. We all know the story of Cape Breton. Most of us have met people who think that our connection with Burma began in 1885; that Burma regiments are manned by Burman sepoys; that, to cite an alien instance, Bengalis serve in the Indian Army. Even what was long regarded as the mythical confusion of Burma with Bermuda was seriously printed in a London weekly last year, and all the newspapers told how an officer who entered the Army in 1886 served in the *Second* Burmese War. Errors like these justify the platitudes of the preceding paragraphs.

When I first became acquainted with Burma, the system of administration was comparatively simple. The Province consisted of three divisions, each under a Commissioner. Subordinate to the Commissioner were Deputy Commissioners, each in charge of a district. Under the Deputy-Commissioner were subdivisional and township officers, in charge respectively of subdivisions and townships. These jurisdictions still remain. In those distant days townships were further divided into circles, the territorial unit of administration, constituted primarily for revenue purposes. Each circle

[1] *Môk-so-bo-myo*, the hunter's city.

[2] See p. 107.

was in charge of a Taik Thugyi,[3] a native official of position and dignity and often of considerable wealth. The Taik Thugyi collected capitation tax and land and fishery revenue, the main sources of the Provincial income, and received a substantial commission on the returns. Except as a tax-collector, he had no statutory powers. But he was the chief man in his circle, and, if of strong character, exercised great influence. Every village had its headman, called the Kye-dan-gyi,[4] with onerous duties and incommensurate powers and emoluments. In recent years circle and village organization has been reformed. Taik Thugyis have been abolished or are in course of abolition. The village is now the administrative unit. The Ywa Thugyi[5] is the local judge and magistrate, with extensive powers and a respectable position.

Except of purely Imperial offices, such as Post and Telegraphs, the Commissioner was the head of all Departments in the division. As Sessions Judge he was also the chief judicial officer. In like manner the Deputy Commissioner controlled every branch of the administration in his district. The bulk of petty revenue, criminal, and civil work was done by Assistant Commissioners, Extra Assistant Commissioners,[6] and Mўo-ôks,[7] in charge of subdivisions and townships. Most of the Extra Assistants and all the Mўo-ôks were natives of Burma. I think it is true that early in 1878 no Burmese officer exercised higher powers than those of a third-class magistrate, and not one was in charge of a subdivision.

The judicial administration was controlled by a Judicial Commissioner, who was the High Court for the whole country except Rangoon, and who was always deputed from another Province. When I joined, the late Mr. J. D. Sandford was Judicial Commissioner. In Rangoon the reins of justice were in the strong hands of the Recorder (the late Mr. C. J. Wilkinson). The Judicial Commissioner and the Recorder sat together in a quaint tribunal called the Special Court, which heard appeals from the decisions of each of its members. When the Judges of the Special Court failed to agree, a difficult position occurred. The High Court at Calcutta exercised anomalous jurisdiction in certain cases. Except the Judicial Commissioner, the Recorder, the Judge of Moulmein, and a Small Cause Court Judge or two, there were no officers occupied exclusively with judicial work. All exercised judicial and executive functions. Divisional, Sessions, District, Subdivisional, and Township Judges, who now flourish in luxuriant abundance, were not even in the bud.

The rank and file of the police were mostly Burmans, with some admixture of Indians not of a very good class. The superior officers, District and Assistant Superintendents, were men of experience, well acquainted with the people. A few military officers still remained in the civil police, Major T. Lowndes[8] being Inspector-General. Perhaps the best-known of the British officers were Messrs. Perreau, Fforde, Jameson, and Dixon, and Major C. A. Munro. The Burmese officers—inspectors and head constables—were all men who had risen from the ranks. Every one of them had to enlist as a constable and work his way upward. The system was not without merit, and was well suited to the idiosyncrasy of the Burmese race. One distinguished Talaing officer held the rank of Superintendent of Police, though without a district charge. This was Maung Shwe Kyi, who was a King on the Siamese border at Kawkareik. One of the bravest and most resolute of men, his good service was recognized by his inclusion in the first list of Companions of the Order of the Indian Empire. His son carries on the tradition of his family.

The Forest Department was in its early lusty youth vigorously directed by a single Conservator, Mr. B. Ribbentrop,[9] assisted by a small but very able staff. Burmese teak had long been a staple

[3] Great or headman of the circle.

[4] Principal taxpayer.

[5] Headman of the village.

[6] Members of the Provincial Civil Service.

[7] Literally, heads of townships, members of the Subordinate Civil Service.

[8] Major-General T. Lowndes, I.S.C.

[9] Mr. B. Ribbentrop, C.I.E.

product of great value; its care and development were the main duties of forest officers. The forest law was, and still remains, complex, logical, meticulous. I venture the humble suggestion that its exceeding obscurity may be due to the nationality of the pioneers of forest administration in India. We were taught forestry by Germans of great ability and high scientific attainments, who framed the statutes of their department as if they were metaphysical treatises. They created a great and efficient branch of the administration. But they enveloped its principles in a mist which baffles the ordinary lay intelligence, and can be pierced only by the philosophic mind, made, or at least trained, in Germany.

Supreme over all was the Chief Commissioner (then Mr. Rivers Thompson[10]), assisted by a small but capable secretariat, which worked for long hours in a small office on the Strand Road in Rangoon. The Secretary, Major C. W. Street, was a military civilian of character and ability. The Junior Secretary was Mr. R. H. Pilcher, C.S., who had been Assistant Resident in Mandalay, and was most learned in the Burmese and Shan tongues. My old friend, Mr. G. C. Kynoch, was Assistant Secretary. None of these survives.

The higher officers entrusted with the general administration, as distinct from special branches, constituted the Commission. In the Commission were included the Chief Commissioner, Judicial Commissioner, Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, and Assistant Commissioners. It was composed of Indian civilians, officers of the Indian Staff Corps, and uncovenanted[11] officers. Civilians were few in number. Burma was not considered of sufficient importance to have men assigned to it after the open competitions. Men were sent thither for their sins, either permanently or for a term of years. A Chief Commissioner's wife is said to have told one of these young men that other Provinces sent their worst men to Burma. However this may be, no doubt Burma was regarded as a place of banishment, a dismal rice-swamp (or, as was once said, a howling paddy[12]-plain), where the sun never shone. I remember, while still in London, the commiseration expressed with one of our seniors whose deportation to this dreary land was announced. All this was fiction, falser than the Roman's conception of Britain. I found Burma a bright and pleasant land, green and forest-clad, with a climate healthier on the whole than the average climate of Indian plains; its people singularly human, cheerful, and sympathetic; its officers of all ranks companionable and friendly. My own considered opinion is that, in many respects, Burma was one of the best provinces for a public servant. It is true that, at first, with only British or Lower Burma open to us, with but little variety of climate, we were rather cribbed and confined. The rains, lasting from May to October, began to pall about the middle of August. Fungus growth on boots was displeasing. The Province was (it still is) expensive, and promotion was slow. It took Sir Harvey Adamson and myself, who were contemporaries, over seven years to get a step of substantive rank. But there were compensations in the lightness of the work (except in the Secretariat), in the charm and attractiveness of the people, in the excellent good-fellowship of our brother-officers, in the hope that before long we should be in Mandalay, and that united Burma would give ample scope and opportunity. Burmese cheroots, too, cost only eightpence a hundred.

Among the military civilians were men of conspicuous ability, trained in the school of Sir Arthur Phayre, whose name is still reverenced throughout Burma, and who stands in the first class of Indian statesmen and administrators. Many of them had taken an active part in the pacification of Pegu after the Second War, and were thoroughly familiar with the Province and its people, their language and customs. I yield to none in high appreciation of the men of my own Service. They have done as good work in Burma, and have got as near to the people, as any men in India. But military civilians also have maintained to this day an honourable record, and have furnished to the

[10] The late Sir Augustus Rivers Thompson, K.C.S.I., Lieut.-Governor of Bengal.

[11] This term, formerly in ordinary use, is now obsolete.

[12] Paddy is the local name for unhusked rice.

Commission many valuable officers. I was just too late to know Colonel David Brown (Brown-gyi[13]), whose memory still lives in the Province. Colonel Horace Browne,[14] Colonel A. G. Duff, Captain C. H. E. Adamson,[15] Colonel W. C. Plant, are among the notable soldier-civilians of my early service. Other officers, afterwards well-known, were Mr. de Courcy Ireland, the first officer of his Service in India to become a commissioner; Mr. A. H. Hildebrand,[16] the first Superintendent of the Shan States; and Johnny Davis, of Papun, whose knowledge of Burma and the Burmese was unique. When I joined, all the divisions were in charge of military officers, and with one or two exceptions, military and uncovenanted officers ruled every district.

In 1878 there was one line of railway, 160 miles in length, from Rangoon to Prome on the Irrawaddy. To and from Toungoo, a station on the Burmese frontier, the journey had to be made by way of the Sittang River, and occupied about a fortnight. Once upon a time, a man started from Toungoo with a friend. They travelled in separate boats, in one of which was stored all the provisions for the voyage. The commissariat boat started first, and my man never saw his friend again till he reached Rangoon. For a fortnight he had to subsist on such scanty fare as he could pick up on the river-bank. When I saw him soon afterwards, he was perceptibly thinner and still full of wrath. Toungoo is now on the Mandalay line, and is reached in a few hours. There are 1,529 miles of railways in Burma; lines to Mandalay, to Myit-kyi-na in the extreme north, to Alôn on the Chindwin, to Moulmein, one of our ports, to Lashio in the Northern Shan States, in mid-air on the way to China, to Bassein and Henzada in the Delta. The sea-borne trade has made immense progress. In 1878 it was valued at £15,684,920; in 1911 at nearly £43,000,000.

The garrison consisted of two battalions of British infantry, one of which gave a detachment to the Andamans, five Madras regiments, and five batteries of artillery. Troops were stationed at Rangoon, on the frontier at Toungoo and Thayet-myo, and at Moulmein. There were no troops in Arakan. There were no military police. The Province was in a state of profound peace, though there were occasional dacoities on the borders, and, as always, Tharrawaddy had a bad name.

Of Rangoon in those early days, separate mention may be made. One glory it had which still abides. The Shwe Dagôn Pagoda, most sacred and most illustrious of pure Buddhist shrines, dominating the landscape, rose golden to the sky. From far the traveller approaching Rangoon from the sea caught sight of that amazing shaft of gold, and instinctively did reverence. In the bright winter sunshine, in the blue haze of summer heat, in the veiled mysteries of tropic moonlight, it towered awe-inspiring, stupendous, divine. On feast days and sabbaths the platform was thronged with worshippers, surely the brightest, best-humoured, most laughter-loving of all pious crowds. Even now one can imagine no scene more gracious, more mystically serene and lovely, than the pagoda in the light of the full moon, when all that is tawdry and unseemly is charmed away. But thirty years ago, before the platform was covered with modern shrines not all in harmony with æsthetic canons, it was still more gravely and austerely beautiful.

In recent years the erection of new buildings on the pagoda platform, already overcrowded, has been forbidden. This probably is wise and right. Being in the centre of a fort, with an arsenal in close proximity, the pagoda is in military custody. The presence of the arsenal is a menace to the safety of this famous shrine. A serious explosion would shatter the fabric and irreparably destroy one of the wonders of the world. The pagoda would be the natural place of refuge in time of serious disturbance. For this reason, among others, the continuance of military control is essential. But the removal of the arsenal to a distance is an urgent necessity.

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[13] *Gyi*, great.

[14] Major-General Horace Browne, I.S.C.

[15] Colonel C. H. E. Adamson, C.I.E.

[16] Mr. A. H. Hildebrand, C.I.E.

After its occupation in 1852, Rangoon was carefully laid out on a systematic plan, with straight streets of varying width. The broadest road, edged with shady trees, ran from Soolay Pagoda up to the cantonment, as fine a thoroughfare as could be seen in East or West. In the early fifties some far-seeing benefactor planted along Godwin Road[17] a glorious avenue of padauk, and earned the blessings of men later born. Three times, at the approach of the rains, these stately trees burst forth for a day in petals as beautiful and as fleeting as fairy gold. Then one drives under a canopy of gold, over a golden carpet of fallen flowers, amidst a crowd each bearing a golden blossom. To see this lovely sight you must live in Burma. It comes too late in the season for the casual visitor.

The main lines of the plan of Rangoon have been preserved, and are as at first designed. But the past thirty years have seen many changes. In 1878, though there were many strangers within its borders, Rangoon was still a Burmese town. Now it is the third port in the Indian Empire,[18] a vast city of over a quarter of a million of people, speaking a pentecostal variety of tongues, among whom Burmans are a dwindling minority. Then the cantonment, no doubt of needlessly vast extent, occupying a wide space on every side of the pagoda, was like a picturesque park, studded with little wooden houses, each surrounded by an ample shady garden. Halpin Road, by some sentimentalists called the Ladies' Mile, with a humble but select gymkhana[19] at one end, was restricted to the use of the military and civil community. Now the gymkhana has been quadrupled in size, and far more than quadrupled in membership. Jehus of all races and classes raise the dust of Halpin Road in dogcarts, landaus, and motor-cars. A great modern hotel occupies a large space; houses of a decadent type, planted as close together as suburban villas, have devastated the pretty cantonment; natives of wealth and position live on sites once reserved for the sovereign race. Doubtless all these are signs of progress. But they shock the æsthetic sense. The Pegu Club was housed in Cheape Road, in a wooden building not long ago dismantled. On the Royal Lake a few boats afforded exercise and pastime. If your boat upset, you were fined for illegal bathing; and if you scrambled back into your boat, you were fined for embarking elsewhere than at the prescribed jetty. Dalhousie Park, it may be gratefully admitted, has been much improved, mainly by the devoted attention of the late Mr. John Short. It is now beyond imagination the home of the picturesque, its lovely lawns and winding paths fringing the lake, with the pagoda shining in the middle distance. Except a few public offices, there were no buildings of importance. Government House was of wood, with a small masonry annexe, near the present imposing and luxurious, but hardly beautiful structure. A neighbouring house was used as a guest-house, to accommodate the overflow of visitors, till some years later it was sold by a frugal Chief. The General Hospital, of wood saturated with generations of microbes, was then, and for long after, a disgrace to civilization. It has now been replaced by a magnificent pile, the best-equipped hospital in the East, one of the best-equipped in the world. The race-course, round the parade ground, was about two-thirds of its present size. The little race-meetings twice a year, where one knew all the ponies and riders, when lotteries were of small value and attended by one's friends and acquaintances, when bookmakers were unknown, and we did our mild gambling at the totalizator, were more enjoyable and more truly sporting than the present-day monthly meetings, where more than half the owners are Chinamen or Indians, and almost all the riders professional jockeys. In wealth, in luxury, in comfort, Rangoon has made great advances in the last thirty years. Yet I doubt if it is quite as pleasant a place of abode as it was a generation ago.

The outskirts of Rangoon were rustic or, as we say, jungly. About this time a tiger swam across the river from Dalla, then a mere village, and was shot by Mr. G. G. Collins, an Inspector of Police,[20]

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[17] Called after General Godwin, who commanded the force in the Second War.

[18] The population of Rangoon in 1881 was 134,176; in 1911 it numbered 293,316. In 1878 its trade was valued at £10,484,469, as compared with £32,040,000 in 1911 (private trade alone).

[19] A Chief Commissioner, newly arrived, whose face was not yet familiar, was told by a barber in the town, in the course of his ministration, that he should try to join the gymkhana, as that was the way to get into society.

[20] Afterwards of the Commission.

under a house in Godwin Road. Within the last ten years a similar incident occurred. One morning an old woman, selling cheroots on the pagoda platform, half asleep or half blind, opened her eyes, and saw in the dim dawn moving near her stall what she took to be a large cat. She waved it away, and it went off. It was a tiger which had strolled up the grassy slope of the Pagoda Hill. The pagoda was being regilt, and was encased in lattice-work. The tiger climbed half-way up the trellis and there stopped, till, after some ineffectual attempts, it was shot by an officer of the garrison. This strange event has an explanation. A nat[21] came riding on the tiger to inspect the gilding of the pagoda. He rode half-way up and then dismounted, pursuing his journey on foot. On his return, he was much surprised and displeased to find that his steed had been killed. Some say that he was unable to resume his journey, and is still there. This story was current in Rangoon on the evening of the occurrence.

[21] *Nat*, a spiritual being in Burmese mythology. For a full account of nats the curious may refer to Sir Richard Temple's learned and sumptuous work "The Thirty-Seven Nats."

CHAPTER II
EARLY YEARS AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

My personal acquaintance with Burma dates from January, 1878. I came to India as a Bengal civilian, attached to the Upper Provinces, liable to serve in the North-West Provinces, the Punjab and Oudh. It was doubtless for that reason and because I had shown some aptitude for the study of Persian that the Government of India were pleased to post me to the Central Provinces, and then, before I had even joined at Nagpúr, to order me to Burma. As in those days our covenants did not bind us to serve elsewhere than in the Province of our choice, I think it likely that, after a term in Burma, I might have obtained a transfer to the North-West Provinces. However, I went to Burma and stayed there; and so far as my official career is concerned, I do not suppose I should have done as well in any other part of India. Certainly I should not have had elsewhere so interesting a life, or found so congenial a people.

On our arrival in Rangoon, my wife and I were hospitably received by two residents, Mr. E. C. Morrieson, a man of my own year, and Mr. C. F. Egerton Allen, then Government Advocate, afterwards acting Recorder of Rangoon, and still later in the House as member for Pembroke Boroughs. Their kindness was in accordance with the traditions of the country, which, I am glad to say, are still maintained. A comparatively new Province, in some respects it may be a little behind the times, Burma has always cherished the primitive virtues, conspicuously that of hospitality. Perhaps to some extent this is ascribable to the influence of the *genius loci*. For in the world there are no kinder or more hospitable people than the Burmese. The generous manner in which strangers are received may be one reason why hotels in Burma have, if possible, a worse repute than those of India.[22]

Our first station was Bassein, one of the four ports of Burma, situated on a fair river some sixty miles from the sea, in the midst of the Delta of the Irrawaddy. It was then the headquarters of a district. Not very long afterwards it became the headquarters of the Irrawaddy division, carved out of the overworked division of Pegu. In those days the only approach to Bassein was by river steamer. Even now, though Bassein is linked with Rangoon by rail, the river journey is easier and pleasanter. Our little vessel steamed now on the broad flood of the main river, now through narrow winding channels, called locally "creeks," which intersect the delta in countless profusion. Though searchlights in the bows were then unknown, we ran on, by day and night, between densely wooded banks. Now and again the passage was so narrow that branches of trees crashed through our cabin window. Here and there, on the mud of a bank left bare by the tide, we saw crocodiles and bands of chattering monkeys. Except at the large villages, where we halted to take up and set down passengers and cargo, the solitude was perfect save for a few huts on the riverside, a casual fisherman in his dugout, a boat full of men and women going to market, or of monks (pôngyis) in their yellow robes. The hideous sampan and the still more horrible lighter or barge had not yet invaded these sacred recesses. Such larger craft as passed us were the stately Burmese boats, built on graceful lines, propelled by sail and oar, with high carved sterns on which the helmsman sat aloft. Such people as we saw were all Burmans or Karens. The kala[23] was as rare as a black swan.

My Deputy Commissioner was Mr. G. D. Burgess,[24] one of the first civilians deputed to Burma, of the same year as the late Sir Denzil Ibbetson, of lamented memory. Mr. C. U. Aitchison,[25] who

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[22] This is, however, a matter of taste. A lady told me that the only thing which made it worth while to come to Rangoon was the Strand Hotel, with its general comfort and its incomparable omelette. The pagoda merely impressed her as "a messy place." Perhaps she was only playing upon the poor Indian's simplicity.

[23] *Kala* is as nearly as possible barbarian, and has a connotation of contempt. It is applied by the Burmese to all foreigners from the West, Indians or Europeans. A Chinaman is a cousin, so is a Siamese. Neither of these is a kala.

[24] The late Mr. G. D. Burgess, C.S.I.

[25] The late Sir Charles Aitchison, K.C.S.I., successively Member of Council and Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab.

succeeded Mr. Rivers Thompson as Chief Commissioner early in 1878, visited Bassein this year in the course of a tour in the old Government steamer, the *Irrawaddy*. Recognizing Mr. Burgess's rare ability, he called him to Rangoon soon afterwards to act as secretary in place of Major Street, who went on leave. This was exceptional promotion for a man of about eight years' service. Mr. Burgess was a man of great capacity, of untiring industry, of immense power of work, of exceptional mastery of detail, of singularly sane judgment, one whose opinion, as Mr. Aitchison said, was always worthy of consideration. For several years he worked in the secretariat, afterwards did excellent service as Commissioner at Mandalay and elsewhere, and in due course became Judicial Commissioner of Upper Burma. In that high office he had full scope for his industry and sound judgment. His rulings, especially on points of Buddhist law, illuminated many dark places, and are still cited with respect. Mr. Burgess's health was undermined by excessive work in the secretariat. In 1898 he had to take leave, and, by a melancholy accident, died at sea on his way home. He was one of the ablest officers who ever served in Burma, and, if his health had not failed, must have risen to the highest posts. If he had a fault officially, it was a tendency to interfere too much in detail and to do the work of his subordinates. No doubt, as Mr. Aitchison used to say, and as others have often said, the great administrator is he who does his own duty and sees that those under him do theirs. But the defect I have ventured to note is the defect of a generous quality.

In those days the education of junior civilians was left to take care of itself. There was no Land Records Department and there were no elaborate circulars prescribing a course of training. What sort of training a junior officer enjoyed, or whether he had any training at all, depended entirely on the quality of his first Deputy Commissioner. I need hardly say that I regard as preferable the present system, under which every young officer is passed through a definite course of practical instruction in all branches of his work. But even now a great deal depends on the personality of the Deputy Commissioner. It was my good fortune to begin my service under the guidance of an excellent officer and a high-minded, great-hearted gentleman. Never had green griffin a kindlier or abler mentor. And to the end of his life Mr. Burgess treated me with the kindness of an elder brother. I was placed in charge of the Treasury; given Third Class magisterial powers, that is, power to imprison for one month, fine up to fifty rupees, and, such was the barbaric darkness of that age, to whip; and set to try petty criminal cases, learn Burmese, and prepare for the departmental examinations. I confess that I had a charmingly idle time. In those happy days life was not in the least strenuous. The busiest time was when the head accountant went sick for about a month, and I had to do his work as well as my own. In this way I did thoroughly learn the Treasury system, even if I forgot it afterwards. The zeal of youth betrayed me into a somewhat serious blunder, whereby I incurred the formal censure of Government. This, though recorded, was never officially communicated to me, and does not seem to have done me any harm. I cannot call to mind anything amusing or interesting in the court or office work. If there are tales, others must tell them. It was not in Bassein that a Third Class Magistrate sentenced a cattle-thief to imprisonment for one week, the normal sentence then, and, I hope, now being one of two years' hard labour. Called upon for justification, he gravely explained that he had to observe some measure in his sentences. If he gave a man a whole month for cattle-theft, what sentence could he pass if he convicted a man of murder? Nor was it here that a young magistrate fined a woman Rs. 10, or in default rigorous imprisonment for two years. It was elsewhere that an officer fined his own servant judicially for "spoiling the Court's soup" by using an oily cloth to wipe the plates withal. These stories, current in Burma long ago, are possibly all invented. Similarly mythical, I suspect, are the legends of the young civilian who gratefully accepted advice not to try a long shot, lest he should strain the gun; of another who on the voyage out kept under his pillow a revolver wrapped in paper and labelled "Dangerous"; of a third who was persuaded to rise at mess, as the representative of Government, and forestall the President in announcing the toast of "The Queen." But many years later, with my own ears, I heard the health of Her Majesty proposed, "coupled with the name of General –," and the gallant General respond on behalf of his Sovereign.

Bassein was a charming station, with that mingling of non-official and official society which doth ever add pleasure. The great rice firms, Messrs. Bulloch Bros., Messrs. Strang Steel and Co., Messrs. Mohr Bros., and others, had mills on either side of the river, and the presence of their representatives helped to form a festive and sociable community. We were all young and all cheerful. Though there was no club, we managed to meet and enjoy life. Besides an inchoate attempt at polo, then just coming into vogue, riding in the fields and jungle, and playing lawn tennis, were the principal amusements. Golf had not been introduced. I am afraid ladies had rather a quiet time, for dances were of very rare occurrence. But bachelor frolics were many, and the spectacled Deputy Commissioner who looked grave enough on the Bench was leader in every frivolity. His Saturday night whist dinners were often more hilarious than the occasion indicates. I refrain from recording instances of light-hearted jests perpetrated from time to time, partly because they were too trivial for immortality, partly lest the serious reader think us more childish-foolish than we were. The survivors of those joyous days will call to mind many a noisy revel. No harm was done. Mr. Kipling would have found no copy for the mildest of plain tales.

There were reminders of historic times. One of the Public Works officers was a veteran who had fought at Chillianwallah. Another resident had learnt his work under Brunel. Less pleasing relics of the past were a few old men branded on the forehead and sent into transportation from India. Some, but not all, were mutineers. They were not in confinement, but eked out a wretched existence on two or three pence a day.

I saw something of district life. More than once the Deputy Commissioner took me on tour with him, and I had opportunities of learning methods of sound administration. The Deputy Commissioner was the head of the district, and, as already stated, controlled all except the purely Imperial departments. Even over Forests, Public Works, and Education he exercised paternal sway. He was explicitly declared to be the head of the police. And he was the chief executive officer, with as much influence as his personality secured. He cherished his own District Fund, his pet child, and had a fair amount of money to spend on minor works. Often he was his own road-maker. As District Magistrate, with power to try all but capital offences and impose substantial penalties, and as District Judge, with unlimited original civil jurisdiction and wide appellate powers, he directed the judicial administration.

He constantly travelled slowly through the district, and was personally known to all the people. In most districts the volume of work was not beyond the capacity of an able and energetic officer. We in Bassein were fortunate in possessing the ablest Deputy Commissioner in the Province, and the district flourished under his benign and firm rule. It was an invaluable object-lesson to accompany Mr. Burgess on tour and mark his procedure. Always accessible to the humblest villager, yet strict in upholding the authority of his subordinates, Myo-ôks and Thugyis; halting here and there to investigate disputes in revenue matters, to hear complaints, to try cases; treating the local officials with kindness and consideration, while preserving his place and dignity; inspecting village records; checking capitation tax returns and land revenue rolls; visiting fields on which remission of revenue was claimed; taking a day off now and then to shoot snipe; the Deputy Commissioner's progress tended to the happiness of the people and the peace of the countryside. I have no doubt that this was the best system of administration ever devised or practised. The separation of judicial and executive functions, the curtailment of the Deputy Commissioner's powers, the attempt, happily so far not successful in Burma, to diminish his authority over the police and his responsibility for peace and order, are all steps backward; to vary the metaphor, they are solvents which will gradually destroy the vitality of the administration and weaken the foundations of good government laid by our predecessors. I have no right to speak of other provinces of India. In Burma there is a comparatively simple social organization. With a strong feeling of personal independence and a full measure of self-respect, the people looked up to the officials and recognized that they were better off under authority than if they attempted to govern themselves. Above all, they knew that in the last resort they could

rely on the justice and firmness of British officers. Under this system the moral and material welfare of the peasant and trader was promoted far more surely than by the introduction of Western methods unsuited to the idiosyncrasy of the race. Nor does this proposition preclude Burmans from obtaining by degrees an ever-increasing share in the offices of the administration. As qualified men become available, by all means let them undertake higher duties. But do not let us try prematurely to impose representative institutions on people who neither demand nor understand them. Above all, let us avoid the pernicious cant of thinking that our mission in Burma is the political education of the masses. Our mission is to conserve, not to destroy, their social organism; to preserve the best elements of their national life; by the maintenance of peace and order to advance the well-being of the Burmese people.

At Bassein, in town and district, I first saw Burmans at home, and laid the foundations of many lasting friendships. My first two clerks were Maung Pe,[26] and Maung Aung Zan. One has long been the respected Second Judge of the Small Cause Court in Rangoon, the Aristides of his race; the other is the first Burman District Judge. A well-known character was U Bya, the Judge of the Bassein Small Cause Court, an officer of age and dignity, who, it was said, had raised himself to his honourable rank from the humble position of peon in the Treasury. Although contact with foreigners had to some extent begun to affect the Burmese character, it must be remembered that the time of which I write was only twenty-five years after the taking of Rangoon, a shorter period than has now elapsed since the occupation of Mandalay. Even in Pegu the Burman was far less sophisticated than he has become in recent years. The great rice-plains of the delta were not nearly all under cultivation. The farmer worked his own moderate holding with the help of his family and of reapers who came down annually from Upper Burma. The inroad of coolies and settlers from Madras and Bengal not yet begun. The delta was sparsely peopled, and everyone was happy and contented.

After leaving Bassein, I spent a few weeks in Rangoon as personal assistant to the Chief Commissioner. The personal assistant combined the posts of private secretary and aide-de-camp, without the emoluments, and with only part of the work of those offices. Under Mr. Aitchison's tolerant régime, the duties were extremely light, and consisted mainly in ciphering and deciphering telegrams. By him and by Mrs. (now Lady) Aitchison, we were treated with unvarying kindness. The days spent as members of their official family are days of happy memory. Mr. Aitchison was one of the first batch of competition walas, and was rightly regarded as a distinguished ornament of our service. At a very early stage in his career he became Foreign Secretary to the Government of India. That high office he exchanged for the comparative obscurity of Burma, only because he differed from the Viceroy (Lord Lytton) on points of frontier policy. He was a man of exceptional ability, of resolute character, with the most delicate sense of honour, a chief whom it was a pride and pleasure to serve. The Governor-General being his own Foreign Minister, Mr. Aitchison had been brought into close personal relations with every Viceroy[27] who, up to that time, had held office. In his judgment, among these statesmen, the man of genius, the one who got most quickly to the root of a difficult problem, was Lord Lytton. As the two men were by no means sympathetic, this opinion is of special value.

We came to Rangoon early in 1879, at a time of great excitement. The preceding October had seen the death of Mindôn Min, who ruled the Burmese kingdom for more than five-and-twenty years. King Mindôn, or Min-taya-gyi Paya, was an enlightened monarch, worthy to be placed in the same class, though not side by side, with Solomon and Akbar. He wrested the throne from his incapable brother, Pagan Min, whose headstrong folly had involved his country in the Second Burmese War. With rare magnanimity, he neither slew nor blinded the deposed King, but allowed him to live in peace in his own house for the rest of his days. Indeed, Pagan Min survived his successor. Mindôn Min was

[26] Maung Pe, I.S.O., K.S.M.

[27] The first Viceroy was Lord Canning. Many people erroneously think that Clive or, perhaps, Warren Hastings was the first who attained that dignity.

an able administrator, and quite master of his kingdom. He held in his own hands all the threads of government, and kept himself informed of all that happened even in the remotest corners. Peace and order were reasonably well maintained, and projects for developing the resources of the country were initiated. The teak forests were opened out by English firms. Many Europeans, principally French and Italian, were attracted to his Court, and employed in various capacities. Among other reforms may be mentioned the levy of regular taxation on land and incomes, and the payment of salaries to officials. The practice had been for an official to be placed in charge of a local area, which he was expressively said to "eat." After paying his dues to Government, he squeezed as much as possible for himself. In this reign, though the custom was not abolished, its prevalence was restricted. The King was a very pious Buddhist, a generous benefactor of the pagoda at Rangoon, and a steadfast pillar of his religion. He discouraged the taking of life, the use of opium, the consumption of intoxicating liquors. Like Solomon in wisdom, he rivalled him in the number of his wives. Although he declined to make a treaty ceding any part of his dominions to Great Britain, he respected the frontier-line laid down by Lord Dalhousie, he kept on good terms with our Government in Lower Burma, and he had the good sense highly to appreciate Sir Arthur Phayre. So long as he ruled in Mandalay, there was no likelihood of any expansion of British territory at his cost.

The death of Mindôn Min threw the whole of Upper Burma into confusion. By a palace intrigue, in which the principal actors were Queen Sinbyumashin and the Taingda Mingyi,[28] the Thebaw Mintha,[29] was placed on the throne. King Thebaw was about eighteen years of age. He seems to have been a dull youth, of no character, good or bad. The beginning of his rule was stained by the murder of most of the sons of Mindôn Min, a massacre as ruthless and almost as many-headed as the slaughter of the sons of Ahab. Though the Princesses were not killed, they were consigned to captivity. Of the massacre of the Princes, two extreme views have been held. The young King has been represented as a monster of cruelty, himself personally responsible for this atrocity. The cynical suggestion is that, in Burma as in other Oriental countries, it was a measure of ordinary precaution for the King to remove possible rivals and pretenders; in so doing, Thebaw was no worse than his predecessors. As a matter of fact, most likely neither the King nor his much-maligned Queen had much to do with the massacre. It was, no doubt, the work of his Ministers, chiefly of the blood-stained Taingda Mingyi, a name to all succeeding ages cursed. But it is also the case that this wholesale butchery, though not without precedent, was not in accordance with the practice of Burman Kings, at least, in recent years. Certainly no such deluge of blood sullied the opening days of King Mindôn. The probable explanation is that the title of the new King was felt to be precarious, while his personality did not compensate the insecurity of his claim. He was not the eldest, nor the ablest, nor the most popular, of Mindôn Min's sons. For these reasons, I conjecture, some of the Ministers thought it desirable to remove potential centres of revolt and disaffection. I cannot believe that my learned and mild-tempered friend, the Kinwun Mingyi, though nominally the head of the State Council, approved this savage measure. The stories current at the time, of the King priming himself with drink, and personally directing the slaughter, were certainly false. It is true, however, that in the early days of his reign King Thebaw was much under the influence of a titular Prince, Maung Tôk,[30] and that these two boon companions did hold drunken orgies together. After Maung Tôk's removal there is no record of intemperance in the Palace.

The massacre of the sons of Mindôn Min sent a thrill of horror through the civilized world. Our Resident at Mandalay, Mr. R. B. Shaw, entered vehement protests. He also sheltered two Princes, the Nyaung-yan and Nyaung-ôk Minthas, who were, I understand, brought to the Residency by M. d'Avéra, and whose lives were saved by their despatch to Lower Burma and thence to Calcutta. In

[28] *Mingyi*, one of the four principal ministers. Literally, great lord.

[29] *Mintha*, prince.

[30] See p. 126.

Rangoon the Press and public were loud in condemnation, and clamorous for action. In the interests of humanity and civilization the Indian Government were urgently pressed to intervene. They nearly did so. Preparations for the despatch of troops were begun. One regiment, the 43rd Light Infantry, actually came over from Madras, in hot haste and with the barest camp kit, and was sent to the frontier. All its officers expected to be in Mandalay in a fortnight, and sore was the indignation of the British regiment in Rangoon that these new-comers should go to the front while it remained in cantonments. The Rangoon Regiment had its consolation. For all their term in Burma the 43rd stayed on the frontier, and never put a foot across it. The Government of India were fully occupied with troubles in Afghanistan, which some few months later culminated in the murder of Sir Louis Cavagnari at Cabul. At home, Ministers were staggered by the disaster of Isandhlwana in February of this year. Both Governments had their hands too full to find leisure for upholding the cause of humanity in Upper Burma. It was a very near thing. Had there not been pressing affairs elsewhere, we should doubtless have occupied Mandalay, and almost certainly set up a protected King. The time was ripe for intervention, but not for annexation.

At Government House we were kept moderately busy by telegrams with Mandalay and Calcutta. One fine morning the Nyaung-yan Prince appeared, with the design of attempting (to speak proleptically) a Jameson raid on Upper Burma. The secret history of this incident I may not tell. Let it suffice to say that the Prince was sent back to Calcutta with all speed in a Government ship. To soothe public feeling in Rangoon a Press *communiqué* was issued from the Secretariat, informing the world that in respect of Upper Burma the attitude of the Government of India was one of "repose and defence," a phrase which was received with mingled surprise and derision. The explanation I may perhaps disclose after many years. The telegram of the Government of India authorizing the announcement was signalled, or at any rate transcribed by me, in the words given to the Press. But what the Government of India wrote was that their attitude was one of "reserve and defence." Curiously and perhaps somewhat ingenuously the Rangoon Volunteer Rifles adopted, and for many years retained, as their motto the words "Repose and Defence." Of late they have become more energetic, and this motto has been discarded as inappropriate.

Government House maintained the hospitable traditions of the Province. All the officers of the 43rd were entertained and housed during their very brief stay in Rangoon, and, though tourists were fewer than in later years, we had some visitors. Of these the most distinguished was General Ulysses Grant, ex-President of the United States, who in his voyage round the world touched at Rangoon. With him came Mrs. Grant, their son Colonel Grant, a Cabinet Minister, a doctor, and a man of letters. General Grant seemed to me to talk, in moderation, as much as other people. I had the honour of being instructed by him in the mysteries of the constitution of the United States, and even of discussing with him the possibility of a League of Anglo-Saxon Peoples to impose peace on the world. He impressed us all as a man of strength, dignity, and character. The growing port and city of Rangoon interested him, and he foresaw and foretold its early and rapid increase. May I tell here a trivial story? At a reception at Government House in honour of General Grant, whereat all Rangoon was present, one of the highest officers brought down the house by withdrawing a chair on which the Commissioner of Pegu was about to sit. As the Commissioner weighed about twenty stone, he was somewhat seriously annoyed by this frolic, though not, I am glad to say, hurt. I record the incident, and refrain from moralizing.

Though wealth has increased and the standard of living has been raised, there seems to have been more money to spend in Rangoon in those days. The great merchants vied with Government House in their entertainments. One at least left a lasting impression. More than twenty years after I tried in vain for some time to explain to my old native coachman where he was to drive. At last my meaning dawned on him. "You want to go to Leishmann Sahib's house." Now, Leishmann Sahib had opened his doors to General Grant, and about a year later had left Rangoon for ever. Rice and teak were the sole sources of wealth. The oil-fields were as yet unexplored. The price of rice had not

risen to its recent fictitious height. There were no limited companies with opportunities for unlimited speculation.

About this time the Diocese of Rangoon was constituted, and Dr. J. H. Titcomb was consecrated the first Bishop. Coming straight from England, with no knowledge of the East, Bishop Titcomb's inexperience betrayed him into some pardonable mistakes. Very soon after his arrival, he surprised some friends with words to this effect: "Though I have been here such a short time, I regret to say that already sorrow has visited my household. I have had to give my cook a week's leave to bury his grandmother." For a cook to ask leave to attend his grandmother's funeral is much the same as for an undergraduate to prefer a similar request in Derby week. I mean no disrespect to a good man's memory by telling this innocent story. The Bishop won all hearts by his kind and gentle bearing, and was, I am sure, an excellent occupant of the new See. He was the first Prelate with whom I was privileged to play lawn-tennis.

A little earlier had been tried the eccentric experiment of appointing a Forest Officer to the charge of the Education Department in the temporary absence of the Director. The acting Director played the part of Balaam with a difference. In his first and last Annual Report, instead of blessing, he freely cursed the Department and all its works. Mr. Max Ferrars still flourishes. He has returned to his early love, and professes literature at a German University. He will forgive me for exhuming this early incident of his career. The Education Department, from time to time, has incurred much obloquy, for the most part undeserved. Its errors have been due to want of intimate knowledge of the language and customs of the people. Certainly it has never merited the cynical censure, perhaps unwittingly implied in a Government Resolution which, in removing an officer as an incorrigible drunkard, remarked that he might obtain employment in the Education Department.

CHAPTER III
THE FIRST SUBDIVISION: THE SECRETARIAT

My first subdivision was Pantanaw in the Delta of the Irrawaddy. The town from which it was named stands on a narrow creek through which used to pass the steamers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company plying between Rangoon and Bassein. Long since the mouth of the creek has silted up. When next I visited Pantanaw, as Commissioner, I had to approach the town in a small boat of the shallowest draft. But, in '79, the arrival of the Bassein steamer was the event of the week. Pantanaw is said to be a Talaing (and portmanteau) word meaning "The abode of the people who have to use mosquito nets." If the Burma Research Society correct this statement, I must bear it. At any rate, if the etymology is false, the connotation is true. Burma could show places where mosquitoes were more numerous and more valiant, where even cattle had to be put under nets at night and prisoners in jail protected by iron gratings. But the mosquitoes of Pantanaw were plentiful and brave enough. After a short time one seems to become more or less immune against ordinary mosquito bites. The new-comer is more succulent and more attractive to this friendly insect. It is the song of the creature which is a persistent annoyance. But the mosquito of these parts has no curious taste. To the last he bit me as well as sang in my ears. In those days the local mosquito apparently was not of the kind which carries malaria. Or perhaps, owing to the backward state of sanitary education, he had not yet learned his trade. Cholera and smallpox excepted, the delta was comparatively free from serious diseases. Though swampy and water-logged, it was not beset by malignant fevers.

Our house was humble. In accordance with the usage of the time, it was built on piles, so that the rooms were 8 or 10 feet above the ground. Thus we lived well out of the mud and out of reach of snakes. An open, slippery, wooden stair ascended to the doorway. The walls were of mat, and the roof was of thatch. I am willing to believe that there was a plank floor, though I have a vague impression that we trod on split bamboos. The house consisted of one fairly large room, divided into two by a mat partition reaching nearly to the unceiled roof. One part was the bedroom, with a bathroom attached, the other was a combined dining- and drawing-room. Tacked on was one more room, about the size of a three-berth cabin. This was the study or library. Having mosquito netting over door and windows, it was habitable even after sunset. During our sojourn, Government very kindly began to build a nice new house for us. It was our Promised Land, of which we had but a Pisgah-sight. We watched its progress with interest, often visiting the work and suggesting small improvements. We were transferred about a week before it was finished. I slept in it once, twenty years after.

Pantanaw was a depot for Ngapi, that malodorous compound of decayed fish in which Burmans delight. The public buildings were a courthouse with a police-station hard by, a hospital, a schoolhouse, and a bazaar, or market. The rest of the town consisted of native houses of fishermen, traders, and brokers. In the dry weather, the foreshore was covered with huts. Bitter and ceaseless were the disputes between brokers and traders about claims to hut-sites on the sands. The streets were causeways of loose bricks. Except through the town itself, we had one walk, over one of these brick paths to the Burmese cemetery. The whole subdivision supported one pony. He lived in ease and affluence, as you could not ride for half a mile without coming upon an impassable stream. We were the only European inhabitants. Two other people spoke English, a Jew shopkeeper named Cohen, whom Burmans, not holding him in high respect, preferred to call Maung Hein,[31] and an Arakanese schoolmaster, with whom I maintained an intermittent acquaintance to the end of my service. Our nearest English neighbours were the subdivisional officer of Yandoon and his wife, who on one red-letter day paid us a flying visit. Our medical attendant was an Indian hospital assistant, or as now

[31] There is a subtlety here. *Ko* is one of the Burmese equivalents of Mr., more respectful than Maung.

he would be called more appropriately, Sub-assistant surgeon, a very capable, good man. The civil surgeon lived at Maubin, the district headquarters, a day's journey off. To young civilians of the present time, this would seem an impossible place for a man with a wife and child. We enjoyed life and were happy. The experience was of use to me, years afterwards, as secretary, when young officers complained of their posting by the Chief Commissioner to remote and unpopular stations. Even the young wife could not be played with effect. But I believe I got myself disliked.

My official colleague was the subdivisional police officer, Maung Shwe O, Inspector, afterwards Assistant Superintendent. He was a very smart, good-looking man, whose subsequent career was distinguished. I maintained friendly relations with him as long as I stayed in Burma. The clerks in my office were Burmans, who spoke and wrote only Burmese. Very capable and efficient were many of these vernacular clerks, thoroughly versed in office routine and management, and well educated in their own language. My head clerk, Maung Shwe Tha, was a man of presence and dignity, with, it was said, a trace of French blood in his veins. The Circle Thugyi still, I hope, survives in honoured retirement. His son became one of the most useful members of the Provincial Service.

The subdivision was of very large extent. Comprising the townships of Pantanaw and Shwelaung, it stretched past Kyunpyathat to the sea. At Shwelaung there was a Myo-ôk, but at Pantanaw I was my own township officer. I had to try all civil and criminal cases, to copy English correspondence, and to do the revenue and executive work of the township. Though during my year at Pantanaw I had only second class powers as a magistrate, still, without a Myo-ôk at headquarters, and with all these various duties, it might be supposed that I was grossly overworked. On the contrary, I had an easier time there than ever after fell to my lot. Still young and zealous, I believe I did all there was to be done. But I found time to be on tour about half of every month, while in the cold weather I spent more than a solid month in the jungle, walking over rice-fields, inspecting, measuring, and computing the out-turn of every holding in respect of which remission of revenue was claimed. As there had been a somewhat widespread failure of the rice crop, this was a task of some magnitude. The development of the country and the growth of work are impressed on me by nothing so much as by a comparison between the Pantanaw subdivision in 1879-80 and the same area in the present day. Then, with the help of one not very efficient Burmese Myo-ôk, I did all the work of the subdivision with ease. Now that area is a large part of the Ma-u-bin and Myaung-mўa districts. It occupies half the time of a Deputy Commissioner and District Judge, and half the time of one or two subdivisional officers, who break down in succession from overwork, four or five township officers, and several judicial and additional Myo-ôks. The Shwelaung Township is now the Wakèma Subdivision, one of the most laborious charges in the Province. A very small, obscure, and swampy village was Mawlamyainggyun, now the headquarters of a township, and one of the most flourishing towns in the Delta. I have always cherished the belief that I was the first European official to discover it.

In those days and in that part of the country there was a remarkable absence of serious crime. During my year at Pantanaw one murder was committed and one dacoity was reported. Of the dacoity I made a full meal. The report reached me when on tour in the middle of the rains. Off I went in a small open dugout to make an investigation on the spot. Arriving, drenched to the bones, with no kit, I held the inquiry, clad in a bath towel, reclining in the balcony of a Burmese hut, partly sheltered by a mat-wall. I fared sumptuously on boiled eggs, rice, and jaggery (palm sugar), fare, which I commend, as, if not noble, yet enough. A mat on a plank floor was a sufficient sleeping-place. I never found any difficulty in sleeping on boards. The really hard bed is the bosom of mother earth with too scanty an allowance of straw. The report of the dacoity was false.

At Pantanaw I learned to talk Burmese with fluency, if not with accuracy, and to read it with ease. I had to talk it or be silent half my days. And all office work had to be done in the vernacular. But too early and too long a stay in the Secretariat and constitutional indolence prevented me from acquiring a profound or scholarly knowledge of the language. Up to a certain point Burmese does not seem to me abnormally difficult. The written character, though at first sight it looks impossible, is

much easier than, for example, Urdu script. But the attainment of real proficiency is a laborious task. The want of good literature is a discouragement at the outset. For, as a literary medium, Burmese is singularly defective. According to one of the best authorities, the high-water mark of Burmese prose is reached in the State papers of the Hlut-daw.[32] As if one should seek for models of prose in Blue-Books. A wealth of idioms, a chaotic grammar,[33] a variety of delicate accents, combine to bewilder the student. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, most of our officers have a good knowledge of the spoken and written language, and some are finished scholars. One thing all can do: all can read petitions and other vernacular papers, and are less in the hands of clerks than officers are understood to be in other Provinces.

Here, too, I had opportunities of learning in practice something about two of the main sources of revenue, land and fisheries. Though the Land and Revenue Act, recently brought into operation, is not the most lucid of statutes, the land-revenue system is free from complexity. Its chief merits were sweetness and simplicity,[34] as an ingenious printer tried to make the Burma Government plead for its transliteration scheme. The State was the landlord. It was, then, an article of faith that there were no tenants in Burma, that every man cultivated his own moderate holding. Though not literally, this was for a long time approximately true. In the Delta land was to be had in abundance, and Burmans and Karens for the most part cultivated their own farms. A constant and sufficient rainfall and a fertile soil combined to yield a rich harvest. Regular settlements were not begun till a year or two later. Meanwhile the rates of land revenue were absurdly low. Each holding was supposed to be measured yearly by the Circle Thugyi, who had no training in surveying. The Thugyi gathered in the revenue of his Circle and received a liberal commission on the collections. If crops failed or were destroyed by drought, floods, or rats, generous remissions of revenue were granted after inspection by the subdivisional or township officer, or, where large sums were involved, by the Deputy Commissioner himself. When I hear urged against the proposed nationalization of land the consideration that the State would be an austere landlord, requiring its dues each year without pity or indulgence, I cannot help remembering that it was far otherwise in Burma. It may be, however, that in other countries the system would not be worked by a Service whose members from their youth up are trained to sympathize with the people, to regard as their title to respect the name of the cherisher of the poor. Besides land revenue, the only tax paid by the cultivator was capitation tax. This was paid by all sorts and conditions of men, except the aged and infirm, at the rate of Rs. 5 for a married man, and Rs. 2/8 for a bachelor. It was a crude and unscientific tax, falling equally on rich and poor. But it was a light burden, and crushed no one. The standard of living among Burmans and Karens in the Delta was moderately high. Luxuries were few, but comforts were universal. Walking over miles of rice-fields in familiar talk with Thugyis and farmers, I became acquainted with the conditions of the cultivators, and I laid the foundation of lasting esteem and affection for the people.

My subdivision included many of the great fisheries of the Delta. All the streams and creeks were divided into fisheries, which were sold by auction once a year. The Court House would be filled with bidders, all fishermen, and the bidding was often reckless. The large fisheries sold for substantial sums, the total annual revenue being about five lakhs of rupees. Inspection of fisheries and examination of the methods of working were among the subdivisional officer's duties. Fishermen destroy living creatures, and by good Buddhists are held to be children of perdition. But they enjoy life, regardless of the doom in store. A visit to one of the great fishing villages was an agreeable incident, pleasantly varying the monotony of official routine. The whole village turned out in boats to welcome us. Boats paddled by girls in bright attire, carrying troupes of dancers gracefully posturing,

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[32] Council of State at Mandalay.

[33] As to grammar, Latter helped us in those early years. Students of to-day, more fortunate, have the invaluable help of Mr. Bridges' book.

[34] What it really wrote was "clearness and simplicity."

crowded the stream in picturesque profusion. Races between canoes filled with crowds of shouting paddlers went on throughout the day. At night would be presented a pwè, or many pwès. Pwè is one of the hardest worked of Burmese words, and represents perhaps the most characteristic feature of the country. In its best-known sense it means an entertainment, usually dramatic, or of the nature of a ballet. But a race also is a pwè, and so, singularly enough, is an examination or a Durbar. The legitimate drama is a puppet-show, the dolls being cleverly worked by strings from behind the stage, and the dialogue hoarsely recited by the manipulator with hardly an attempt at ventriloquial effect. Less highly esteemed by Burmese connoisseurs is a drama played by real actors and actresses. The stock characters are the prince, the princess, and the clown. The princess, unabashed, arranges her hair, makes up her cheeks and eyebrows, and even manages to change her dress in view of the assembly. The clown, by boisterous and often indecorous jest, raises peals of merriment. The ballet pwè is a set of posture dances, performed either by one, two, or three girls, or by groups, generally of girls, sometimes of young boys. Dancing is accompanied by choric songs, often topically composed for the occasion. If distinguished visitors are present, the choral song is written to honour and welcome them. The orchestra consists of drums, gongs, cymbals, and other barbarous instruments placed in a circle round the agile executant. In bygone days no charge was made for admission. That was an essential condition. Now I hear with horror of so-called pwès played in enclosures where money is taken at the door. A pwè lasted for hours. Almost invariably it was performed in the open air, under the moonlit sky, the spectators, men, women, children, and babies, sitting on mats, smoking cheroots, enthralled from dusk to dawn. For my part I liked best the ballet, danced by groups of young girls, daughters of the town or village, and after that the drama played by human actors and actresses. But I must admit that in a puppet-show the comic white horse gaily prancing over the boards was a joy which never failed. During my year at Pantanaw I was a welcome guest at many pwès, none of which I attended with greater pleasure than a ballet danced by the girls of a large fishing village.

All our travelling was by water. There was not a steam-launch in the Delta. Even the Deputy Commissioner did all his journeys in a rice-boat. Such a luxury as a houseboat had not been designed even in a vision. An officer going on tour hired a fairly large boat with three or four rowers, and with a helmsman (pènin) perched aloft in the stern. Often one had the same boat and crew for successive journeys. My pet pènin was a man of authority (awza) and presence, traditionally reputed to be an ex-dacoit. I hope he did not relapse in the troubles which came a few years later. The forepart of the boat was for the crew and servants. The after-deck, covered by an arched roof of bamboo, formed a chamber sufficiently roomy wherein was space to sit or lie but not to stand upright. Privacy was secured by arrangements of kalagas (curtains). In such a boat I travelled for a week, a fortnight, a month at a time, halting at infrequent villages, interviewing headmen and Thugyis, trying cases, and doing revenue and executive work. As a rule I travelled alone, always unarmed and without a guard. No precautions were needed in that time of profound peace, when we felt, and were, secure from danger. Propelled by long oars, the boat moved generally with the tide. But I have known Burmans row with, and against, the tide for hours at a stretch, a fact which may surprise people taught to regard the Burman as an idle fellow. He is neither idle nor lazy. When occasion demands, he will work as hard as anyone. The farmer and fisherman each has seasons when he must rise up early and late take his rest. What the Burman does not care to do is to make toil a pleasure; to work merely for the sake of doing something or for the purpose of amassing wealth beyond his needs. With a fertile country, with no pressure of population on subsistence, with few wants, why should he strive or cry? For him progress and the strenuous life in themselves have no attraction. We are trying to teach him our ideals, to show him how far superior is our civilization. When we shall have succeeded, we shall have spoilt the pleasantest country and the most delightful people in the world.

But let us resume our tour. By day or night, as the tide serves, our boat moves on the bosom of the wide river or threads the windings of narrow creeks. In the rains I have been rowed against a storm of wind, in a shroud of thick darkness. Again, I have skirted miles of forest-clad banks, each

bush alive with myriads of fireflies, an amazing and memorable sight. When villages were scarce, a halt would be called and breakfast taken under the shade of a mighty tree on the grassy margin of the stream. If we stayed at a village for a day or two, our temporary home was a zayat, one of the many rest-houses built by pious hands for the comfort of wayfarers. Every village had on its outskirts at least one zayat, where the traveller could rest as long as he pleased. With the help of a few kalagas and mats lent by the villagers, a zayat could be made quite comfortable. It was somewhat startling to have a snake drop from the thatched roof on to one's plate at chota haziri.[35] But such an unpleasing incident was rare. Twice in the dry season I ventured to take my young family on tour, and each time we were swamped by cataracts of abnormal rain. Once we were putting up in a roomy zayat, when, soon after dark, a hurricane of wind arose, and a deluge of rain began to fall. The kalagas were blown in, and the baby almost blown out of his cot. We were rescued by the headman, who came with a train of lantern-bearers, and hospitably bore us off to his house. The rest of the night we spent under the family mosquito-net, the family finding quarters elsewhere. The mosquito-net was of stout opaque cloth, and covered the space of a fair-sized room. My wife went no more on tour in the Delta.

A pleasant interlude was an occasional visit to Father Bertrand at his mission-station in a remote corner of the subdivision. It is a common pose for the man of the world to profess to regard missionaries with suspicion, if not dislike, and to hold native Christians in abhorrence. My experience has led me far from these conclusions. The longer I lived in the Province, the better I came to like, the more to respect, missionaries, and the more esteem I felt for Burmese and Karen Christians. The principal missionary bodies in Burma are Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and American Baptists. Among all these I have found valued friends. One of the most venerable personalities of my early years was the saintly Bishop Bigandet, whose name will always be held in reverence. Apart from the religious aspect, the educational and civilizing value of mission-work cannot be overrated. Some of the best schools and one of the only two colleges are maintained by missions. Though Burmans generally adhere to their own creed, those who have become Christians are for the most part men of good standing. I do not think there are many bread-and-butter converts among them. In an Upper Burman village I found a Christian headman, who told me that his progenitors had been of the same faith. A mission, it was said, had been established there in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and the altar-fire had been kept alive for three centuries. It seemed a creditable record. But the most abundant harvest of mission-work is yielded by Karens. The heathen Karen, the missionaries call him, is an uncouth, savage person. The Christian Karen, though lacking the grace and charm of the Burman, is a law-abiding citizen, with many sterling virtues. Even by Burmese officers it is recognized that there is very little crime among Christian Karens. For this backward race missionaries of all denominations have done a vast amount of educating and civilizing work. Without wishing to make any invidious distinction, I know nothing more praiseworthy than the devotion of Catholic missionaries, who live ascetic lives in solitary places, sacrificing the world to their vocation, subsisting on nothing a month, and giving alms out of that wage. While on this subject, I may mention the admirable work done among lepers by Catholic missions in Mandalay and Rangoon. At each of these places is an asylum for these hapless outcasts, where all the nursing and attendance are done by nuns and sisters. The devotion of these gentle ladies is beyond all words of reverence. Another excellent Catholic foundation is the Home of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Rangoon. Here aged and helpless men and women, without distinction of race or creed, are received and kept in comfort. It is pleasant to record that the Home has been warmly and liberally supported by a Burmese Buddhist, my worthy friend the Honourable Maung Htoon Myat.

The memory of Father Bertrand has led me far from Pantanaw. Our first year in a subdivision was full of novelty and variety, not of an exciting kind, and perhaps not of interest except to ourselves. Though I learned something of the people, my stay was too short. I have no claim to

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[35] Early breakfast.

intimate knowledge of the Delta, such as that of my successor, Mr. de la Courneuve, or my lamented friend Colonel F. D. Maxwell,[36] who knew every creek and channel, and, apparently, every man, woman, and child, and who was the leading authority on all questions relating to fisheries. While at Pantanaw I made the acquaintance of the remarkable man who planned and executed the Irrawaddy Embankments, the late Mr. Robert Gordon. The mere financial value of this colossal undertaking to the people and to Government may be reckoned by millions of pounds. The work has stood the test of time, and still remains a monument of skill and foresight, and a source of enormous revenue.

In 1880 I spent a year in the Secretariat. After acting for a short time as Assistant Secretary, I was retained as third man to prepare the Annual Administration Report and see through the Press the departmental Reports and Resolutions. My friend Mr. Burgess was acting as Secretary, the Junior Secretary was Mr. E. S. Symes,[37] one of the most brilliant men of his time. He became in succession Secretary, Chief Secretary, and Commissioner. When the highest prizes of the Service were within his grasp, a career of great distinction was prematurely ended in melancholy circumstances early in the year 1901. *Sunt lacrimæ rerum.* Whatever of Secretariat work I knew, I learned from Mr. Burgess and Mr. Symes. The Chief Engineer and Public Works Secretary was Colonel Colin Scott-Moncrieff.[38] This year, Mr. Aitchison went to Council, and was succeeded by Mr. C. E. Bernard.[39] One of the last civilians from Haileybury, a nephew of John and Henry Lawrence, Mr. Bernard came to Burma with a great reputation. After serving for a short time under Sir John Lawrence in the Punjab, and later with unprecedented distinction in the Central Provinces under Sir Richard Temple and in Bengal under Sir George Campbell, he became Secretary to Sir Richard Temple's Famine Commission, and then Secretary to Government in the Home Department. He was much trusted by Lord Ripon, with whose political opinions he sympathized. To him, I believe, is mainly due the wide extension of Municipal Administration in India. This, perhaps, can hardly be regarded as his title to fame.

In the period covered by my recollections Mr. Bernard holds a foremost place, and will be often in the story. He was one of those rare souls who are the salt of the earth. Bearing, I believe, in appearance some likeness to John, in character he was akin to Henry Lawrence. Deeply and sincerely in sympathy with the people, despising the gaud and glitter which some regard as essential in dealing with Orientals,[40] hating the shadow of injustice or harshness, his sole desire was to do his duty to the utmost of his strength. His kindly consideration was no mark of weakness. On occasion he could be stern and unbending. He exacted, as he yielded, obedience. Combining with the finest moral and intellectual qualities eminence in all manly pursuits, he stands forth as an ideal figure among the men who have built up the Indian Empire. No more chivalrous, high-minded gentleman ever served the Crown. As an administrator, his knowledge of detail, his extraordinary memory, his power of rapid work, were almost unparalleled. It is ungracious to suggest even minor defects in one to whom I owe so much and who inspired in those privileged to be near him all reverence and affection. It may be that impatience of delay and of any failure from the best led him to do the work of his subordinates and that sometimes his judgment erred. But what nobility of soul, what zeal for righteousness, what effacement of self, what courage and resolution, what fervent, unaffected piety! Twenty years later, when mourned by all good men, Sir Charles Bernard had long gone to his rest, his widow was again in Burma. On the eve of her departure, entirely of their own initiative, representative Burmans of Rangoon brought her an address and a piece of Burmese silver-work as a token of respect for her husband's memory.[41]

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[36] The late Colonel F. D. Maxwell, C.I.E.

[37] The late Sir Edward Spence Symes, K.C.I.E.

[38] Sir Colin Scott-Moncrieff, K.C.S.I., K.C.M.G.

[39] The late Sir Charles Bernard, K.C.S.I., for some years Secretary in the Revenue and Statistics Department at the India Office.

[40] "Don't let them do that, they'll take me for a Burmese Minister," he called out, as officious underlings were hustling some carts out of his path as he rode through Mandalay.

[41] Among many mistaken appreciations of Burmese character is the notion that Burmans have no sense of gratitude. This story

No one but Mr. Pepys could make interesting the record of daily journeys to the Secretariat and the compilation of Blue-Books. Let it suffice to say that we established a precedent by observing the prescribed date for the issue of the Administration Report, a gloomy volume which no one save the compiler of Moral and Material Progress has ever been known to read. Mr. Regan, the indefatigable Superintendent of the Government Press, who never once failed in any undertaking, or in the fulfilment of a promise, risked his life in a sampan and hurled the copies for India on to the mail-boat a few minutes before she left her moorings at midnight. The Report was not lightened by the statement that "a little tasteful carving relieves the baldness of some of our police officers." That was not the fault of the printer.

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indicates the contrary. Since my retirement I have been touched by the frequent receipt of letters and other tokens of remembrance from Burmese friends obviously disinterested.

CHAPTER IV
SOME ASPECTS OF BURMESE LIFE AND CHARACTER

One of the odd jobs which fell to my lot in my first year was to consult the Elders of Bassein on the opium question. They were unanimous in their condemnation of opium in every shape. Some races consume opium in moderation, as Englishmen drink beer, without visible harm. Indians, Chinese, Shans, Kachins, may be consumers of opium, and none the worse in health or morals. The Burman is differently constituted. Perhaps by temperament he lacks restraint, doing nothing without overdoing it. Whenever a Burman takes to opium, he drifts into excess and becomes an outcast from decent society. The feeling of the better classes is perfectly consistent on this point. The term "bein-sa" (opium-eater) is among the most opprobrious epithets that can be applied to anyone. Among other races people of decent standing use opium as a relaxation without loss of caste. Among Burmans it is not so. Throughout my service I knew only one man of position who was reputed to be a bein-sa. Even in his case the reputation may have been undeserved. In Upper Burma, in the King's time, the use of opium by Burmans was strictly prohibited, and I believe the prohibition was generally enforced. Exceptions were made in the case of Chinese and others. But the suggestion that when we occupied Upper Burma we found a flourishing though illicit opium traffic in full swing is quite unsupported by facts. As a race, it may be said that Burmans are singularly free from the opium vice. The more difficult it is made for Burmans to procure this drug, the better it will be for the country.

Similarly, but in a less marked degree, intoxicating drinks are avoided by good Buddhists. I was many years in Burma before I saw a drunken Burman. I am afraid that the habit of drinking is on the increase. The most popular liquor is what is vulgarly called "toddy," no relation to the concoction dear to Britons. It is not a spirit, but a juice extracted from the tari palm, and should rightly be called tan-ye, or tari. Unfermented, freshly drawn from the tree in the cool of the morning, it is a pleasant and refreshing drink, if somewhat oversweet. It ferments rapidly of its own accord. Fermented, it is a heady liquor, stealing away men's brains. In dry tracts, where the tari palm abounds, the consumption of tari is very common, though still, I think, not among the better classes. The Burman has no head, and succumbs at once to a comparatively small quantity of liquor. In his cups he is a quarrelsome, truculent savage, one of the most dangerous of created beings. Hence, in districts where palm-groves decorate the landscape, violent crimes, murders, cuttings, stabbings, are lamentably frequent. It has been suggested that if all tari and kindred palms were destroyed, the golden age would come again. Besides tari, country-made spirits are consumed in large quantities, and illicit distillation is commonly practised, a lucrative trade which fine or imprisonment fails to suppress. For European liquors, except, perhaps, bottled beer, as yet little taste has been acquired. I should like to say that the habit of drinking is confined to labourers and peasants; but it cannot be denied that many people of position, who should set an example, indulge in it. Yet, on the whole, to drink is the exception; to abstain is the rule.

Let us turn to pleasanter topics. The amusements of the people are many and various. In the village street you will see men sitting over a chess-board playing a game very much like the chess known in Europe. The moves and rules are similar, though the shape of the pieces and their names are different. A bad habit prevails of finishing each move by thumping the piece loudly on the board. Card games are also in high favour, the most esteemed being the game called "ko-mi," literally, "catch the nine." Of course, cards are played for money. The Burman is a born gambler, and indulges his propensity on every available occasion. We have austerely set our faces against gambling in every form, especially gambling with cards, and interfere not a little with this fascinating pastime. Perhaps, contrary to the current opinion derived from tales of travellers and legends from the hills, the real defect of the Englishman in Burma is that he is too serious, too little inclined to make allowances

for a joyous, light-hearted people. Public gambling is sternly discountenanced. For many years the Legislature has been occupied in devising measures for its suppression, meeting by fresh enactments the ingenious efforts of the Courts to find means to rescue the gambler from the meshes of the law, of the gambler to sail as near to the wind as possible without capsizing. To the impartial observer these alternate struggles of the Legislature to make its prohibitions effective, of the Courts to provide loopholes for the gambler to escape, afford much healthy amusement. I have taken a hand in the game on both sides in progressive stages of a varied career. Let me not be thought too flippant. If Burmans would be content to have quiet little ko-mi parties of friends in their own houses, I for one should be the last to object. But it is a well-known fact that gambling parties are not conducted on these principles. Practically it may be said that in every gambling party someone makes a profit apart from the chances or skill of the game. This is the essential distinction of a common gaming-house, and the practice is properly discouraged. When it is added that gaming parties constantly lead to brawls, affrays, violent assaults, and indirectly to thefts and embezzlements, perhaps the attitude of the earnest official may be regarded with sympathy. Pitch-and-toss and other forms of gambling in public places are prohibited, as in most civilized countries. Lotteries are exceedingly popular; they are for the most part promoted by the intelligent Chinaman, to the detriment of the guileless Burman. A pleasing form is that known as the "thirty-six animal" lottery. The punter stakes on any of the animals on the board; the winning animal, having been previously secretly determined, is disclosed when the stakes have been made. There is room here for deception. King Thebaw is supposed to have ruined half Mandalay by State lotteries established for the purpose of raising revenue. No one will be surprised to hear that lotteries on races, to which the authorities are discreetly blind, are warmly supported by Burmans of all classes; they are of a mild description, tickets are cheap, and really hurt no one, like the capitation tax. It is almost superfluous to record that cock-fighting is a favourite pastime; this, too, is against the law, but it is hardly on this account less popular. I have heard of, but never seen, fights between buffaloes and even elephants.

An innocent game in which so far no one has found the taint of sin is Burmese football (chin lôn). It is played in the village street or any open space, with a light, open-worked bamboo ball, by any number of players. Some Burmans attain great proficiency, kicking the ball with toe or heel, catching it on their shoulders, making it leap unexpectedly by mere exertion of the muscles. Real football is, of course, an exotic, but has attained great popularity. It is seldom that the introducer of a national game can be identified, but in this case due credit can be given to the right person. British football was introduced into Burma some forty years ago by Sir George Scott. When his statue adorns Fytche Square, among other trophies a football must be carved at his feet. The game is played with zeal and enthusiasm by countless Burman boys and young men. To see Burmans kicking a football with naked feet is a lesson in the hardness of the human sole. Football matches attract great crowds of Burmans in Rangoon and elsewhere. Mercifully the adoption of the Association form of the game has been ordained. To think of hot-headed Burmans engaged in the rough-and-tumble of Rugby excites lurid imaginings. As it is; the referee has an arduous and anxious time. For the most part, however, good-humour and a sporting spirit prevail.

Pony-races, races of trotting bullocks drawing light carts, elephant-races, boat-races, are among the most popular sports. These also, here as elsewhere, give opportunities for gambling; but, apart from this, great interest is taken in them. In one of my subdivisions on one day of every week a local pony race-meeting was held, attended by the whole population of the small headquarter town, and often graced by the presence of the leading officials. In those parts of the country which are comparatively or absolutely dry Burmans are good riders, accustomed to ponies from their childhood. Their saddle is horribly uncomfortable to a European, their stirrups short, their knees near their noses. The favourite pace is a smooth amble, untiring, it is thought, both to rider and to steed. I have seen a Burman, to avoid a soft place, ride a pony for some yards along the parapet of a bridge with a good drop below.

As might be expected in a country where the waterways are many, Burmans are an amphibious race, good swimmers, at home in the water, and expert in the management of boats with oars and sails. Wherever there is a stream, the whole population bathes either at dawn or dusk. Men, women, and children swim about together, and perfect decorum is observed. Of course, boat-races are a popular amusement. Long shallow canoes, paddled by twenty or thirty men, all shouting a boastful song, contend in these races. At the goal is a wand suspended through a hollow bamboo. The man in the bow of the leading boat carries off the wand. There is thus never any dispute as to the winner. The pace is pretty good, but not nearly so fast as that of a good English four or eight.

As strict Buddhists, Burmans are supposed to abstain from animal food, or, at least, from taking life for the purpose of providing food. For fishermen, who must break this precept daily, special uncomfortable hells are reserved. Hunting and shooting are practised at grave risk of future disaster, and usually by the younger men who think they have time to make up for these derelictions, or are giddily thoughtless of the hereafter. A pious friend of mine in Upper Burma used to be much scandalized at the levity of his aged father, who persisted in coursing hares when he ought to have been making his soul. But as regards the consumption of flesh of birds, beasts, and fish, there seems to be no practical restraint among any class. So long as you are not instrumental in causing death, you may safely eat the flesh. Beef and poultry are freely eaten when available. Often stolen cattle are slaughtered and eaten. The flesh of no creature which has died a natural death, except perhaps dogs and tigers, is despised. Things which to our taste have weird scent and flavour are highly appreciated. The most popular article of food is ngapi, a composition of fish suffered to decompose and prepared in many ways, all equally malodorous in result. This is universally used as seasoning of rice at all meals. Then there is a dreadful fruit which grows in the south, called a "durian," a large green fruit, bigger than an average cocoanut, with a thick rind, containing big seeds embedded in a sort of custard. It emits a disgusting odour, which cannot be described in polite language. Of this fruit Burmans are inordinately fond. In the King's time, every year as the season came round, His Majesty used to charter a steamer solely to bring up a cargo of durians. When, in later years, I told the Ministers that we were about to build a railway to Mandalay, the Prime Minister's first remark was: "Excellent; then we shall be able to get our durians fresh." To my mind the taste is worse than the smell. Yet many Europeans regard this fruit as a delicacy, and eat it freely, even greedily. My theory is that the taste was painfully acquired by officers stationed in remote places where durians grow, and where there is nothing to do. By these pioneers others were persuaded to essay the high adventure. Of a habit so difficult of acquisition and so morbid, the devotees are naturally a little proud. One might suppose that the nostrils of people who love ngapi and durians were proof against any smell. On the contrary, Burmans are very sensitive to the smell of oil burnt in cooking, which they regard as *odor nervis inimicus*, particularly hurtful to the sick, but grievous to anyone. The third characteristic article of diet in Burma is let-pet (pickled tea). So far as I know, this is the ordinary tea of commerce, grown almost entirely in the Northern Shan State of Taungbaing. It is not used to make an infusion; the leaf is prepared for use as a condiment. The trade and cultivation are entirely in the hands of Shans and Palaungs. Let-pet was brought down from the hills packed in long baskets borne on bullocks, now more commonly by train. It was formerly an article monopolized by the King. I have not heard of any European professing to like the taste of let-pet.

The Burman is first of all an agriculturist. He is only a moderately good carpenter, though he can put the bamboo to many uses. As a boat-builder he excels, fashioning large boats on lines of grace and beauty. Also he can, of course, make his own flimsy house of mat and thatch, or a more substantial dwelling of teak or jungle-wood. But the few manual industries in which Burmans really shine are those which have an artistic basis. Where the secret of a glaze is known, as at Bassein in the delta, and at Kyaukmyaung, the port of Shwebo, pottery is practised as an hereditary art, and many gracious shapes and designs are fashioned out of ductile clay. Silk is grown by an obscure race called Yabeins. But it is as dangerous to cultivate the silkworm as to be a fisherman. More often, therefore, imported

silk is used on Burmese looms, where cloths of lovely mingled colours and delicious wavy patterns are still produced. Alas! this charming domestic industry is on the wane, and both silks and cottons are now as a rule imported from Europe. The fine natural taste of the people is deteriorating. One of the saddest signs of this degeneracy is the substitution of the ugly gingham or silk umbrella for the darling, bright-coloured little tis,[42] which used to preserve the complexions of Burmese maids. This cruel sacrifice to economy and utility has almost succeeded in spoiling the incomparable dazzling glory of mingled colour which used to characterize a Burmese crowd. On the occasion of a royal visit to Mandalay, when boat-races were being held on the Moat amid the most picturesque surroundings, the delightful effect of rows upon rows of gaily dressed Burmans lining the farther edge was marred by a forest of imported umbrellas reared hideous to the sky. However, word was sent along the line that it was disrespectful to raise an umbrella in the presence of royalty. And as if at the touch of an enchanter's wand, the horrible excrescences disappeared and light and beauty reigned once more.

An extraordinarily effective art is the lacquer-work of Pagan. Bowls of exquisite shape, boxes for sacred books or for carrying the necessary betel, offer choice specimens of the artist's skill. The designs in rich colouring on these lovely works are full of vigour and originality. Lacquering is a laborious art. A really fine box or bowl takes months to complete. The most elaborate work is based on a foundation of horsehair, the finished product so flexible and supple that a bowl can be bent till the opposite sides meet without the fabric cracking. I confess that, as regards my own treasured specimens, I am content to know that this can be done without putting them to the test. Even at Pagan the hateful modern spirit has begun to shed baleful influence. Mingled with bowls and boxes, consecrated by use and wont, may be seen cigar cases of Western shapes and other signs of decadence.

Burmese silver-work and wood-carving are world-renowned. These fine arts are still flourishing. Besides fashioning portable articles, such as figures of men and elephants, or ornamented boxes, wood-carvers show their skill and taste in elaborate designs on monasteries and other public buildings. Some of the carving on monasteries in Mandalay, the Queen's Monastery in A Road, and others of earlier date, is of the highest æsthetic merit. The specimens of wood-carving in the Palace have never appealed to me so intensely. In the presentation of figures the execution is bold and dignified. Wood-carving seems to me to have preserved its native simplicity, to have been less affected than other arts by devastating Western contact. Silver-workers still produce fabrics of grace and beauty in the best indigenous fashion; but too often degenerate teapots and decadent toilet-sets give evidence of debasing utilitarian propaganda. I grieve to hear that electric light has been installed on the Great Pagoda in Rangoon as well as in the temple of the Yakaing Paya.[43] Much have we done for Burma. But it is sad to think that we have sullied and smirched the tender bloom of Burmese art and artistic ideals.

Of the national character, indications will be found scattered over these pages. It is a mass of apparent inconsistencies. Kindness and compassion are noticeable virtues. Children are treated with indulgence, not always according to discretion. You will see a constable come off a long spell of sentry duty, and straightway walk about with a child perched on his shoulder. No orphan is left desolate. No stranger asks in vain for food and shelter. Yet these good people have a full mixture of original sin. They produce dacoits who perpetrate unspeakable barbarities on old men and women. Sudden and quick in quarrel, the use of the knife is lamentably common. Gay, careless, light-hearted, with a strong if uncultured sense of humour, they can be cruel and revengeful. The statistics of the Courts reveal a mass of criminality as shocking as it is surprising. Murders, dacoities, robberies, violent assaults, are far too numerous. I can understand the prevalence of crimes of passion and impulse; but in a land flowing with milk and honey, a fair and fertile land where there are work and food enough for everyone, I cannot understand why there should be any such sordid crimes as theft and embezzlement.

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[42] *Ti*, an umbrella; also the ornamental summit of a pagoda.

[43] The Arakan Pagoda, as we call it, at Mandalay.

Two characteristics distinguish Burmans from most other Eastern races. They have no caste, and there is no seclusion of women. Socially, therefore, we can meet on equal terms. A Burman does not shrink from eating and drinking in our company, or need to undergo elaborate and expensive purification if by accident or design he is sullied by our contact. If I go to visit a Burman, I am received by his wife and daughters, and in turn when, often with the ladies of his house, he comes to see me, he is welcome to associate on friendly terms with my family. The absence of caste does much to facilitate the task of administration. Partly owing to the intelligence and docility of the people, but mainly on account of this lack of caste, we were able, for instance, to carry out, with no serious trouble, measures for suppressing plague. Our real difficulty, I may say parenthetically, was to find the right measures to take. In the end what some people call the disgusting practice of inoculation seems to have been found most beneficial. In some places people were encouraged to be inoculated by making the occasion a festival; pwès were held, small presents given to children, prizes distributed by lotteries in which the chances were free. In Sagaing last year, out of a population of ten thousand, eight thousand were inoculated. The local officers and their wives underwent the operation, often more than once, by way of inspiring confidence, as for the same purpose my wife and I were vaccinated years before at Pantanaw. Among those inoculated there were no cases of plague. The ridiculous suggestion that inoculation tends to spread plague has been, we might almost say, disproved by specific experiments in Burma and, I doubt not, elsewhere.

To resume. Burmese women hold a position as dignified and assured as in any country of the world. Every Buddhist believes that women are inferior to men, that a really good woman may have the luck to be born a man in a future incarnation. Every Burman knows that a woman is as good as a man, and often better. It was in my experience that occurred the pleasing incident elsewhere told not quite correctly. A young woman came to me for a reduction of her income-tax. She said she earned her living by selling in the bazaar.

“What does your husband do?” I asked.

“He stays at home and minds the children.”

This was an exceptional case, but it illustrates the relative position. Burmese women take an active part in the business of the country. Most of the retail trade is in their hands; sometimes they manage more important commercial affairs. The control of a stall in bazaar or market is regarded as a very desirable occupation. Is it indiscreet to suggest that opportunity for gossip is an attraction? Often a wife takes great interest in her husband’s official or private work. If one has business with a police-sergeant or Thugyi, and finds him absent, one does not seek a subordinate, but discusses and settles the matter with the Sazin-gadaw or the Thugyi-gadaw.[44] It is on record that, prisoners being brought to a police-station in the absence of any of the force, the sergeant’s wife put them in the cage, and, herself shouldering a da, did sentry-go till relieved. After these instances it need hardly be said that in her own household the Burmese woman is supreme. Her position is equalled only by that of a French mother.

Girls may not go to monasteries for instruction, so elementary education is not universal among women as among men. But many girls, especially of the richer classes, learn to read and write. I think more women are literate than among other Eastern people. Practice in the bazaar, at any rate, makes them ready at mental arithmetic. One day I was holding an amateur examination of a monastic school. The mothers sat round, admiring the academic gymnastics of their infant prodigies. Presently I set in Burmese form a variation of the old theme of a herring and a half. All the boys and all their teachers took slates and began to figure laboriously. Almost before they had begun the bazaar women in the circle laughed and gave the answer. One pleasing characteristic of Burmese ladies, rare among people of warm climates, may be mentioned. Those who have not lived roughly, but have been properly

[44] Sergeant or Thugyi’s wife.

housed and tended, preserve a youthful appearance in the most surprising manner quite to mature age. Very rare among women of all classes is the aged appearance of comparatively young women.

An admirable trait is the remarkable absence of serious crime among women. It is quite rare to find a woman in prison, and I remember no instance of the execution of a woman. While gaols in Burma provide quarters for 15,000 men, they can accommodate only 354 women. These seem to me very remarkable figures. There is no crowding on the women's side of the gaol. Indeed, if imprisonment of women were abolished in Burma, no harm would be done. I suppose Burmese women produce fewer criminals than any other civilized race. Not that they are all angels; they are apt to be hasty and to offend with their tongues. Sometimes the bazaar is the scene of actual conflict between angry fair ones. But on the whole Burmese women are strikingly innocent and well-behaved. Good mothers and honest wives, light-hearted and sociable, they are justly held in high esteem.

Burmese girls enjoy much freedom. You may see them laughing and talking at the village well, sitting at the domestic loom, walking in the roads, engaged on household duties. Infant marriage is unknown; no Burmese girl marries except to please herself. Like other Orientals, girls come early to maturity, and marriages at fourteen or fifteen are not uncommon; but as often as not a Burmese maiden does not marry till she is eighteen or nineteen, or even older. She must not wait too long, or she will be laughed at as an old maid.[45] The relations between the sexes are much the same as in Western countries. Boys and girls and men and women fall in and out of love and break one another's hearts after the best traditions of romance. Jealousy is a prevalent vice, and many die for love.

Buddhism recognizes and allows polygamy, and it is incorrect to say that plurality of wives is uncommon. Several different kinds of wives are described in the Law of Manu, which contains even an account of the popular modern character, the wife like a mother. But many, probably most, men live happily with one wife all their lives. In any case, the first or principal wife has a distinct and honoured place in the household. No ceremony of marriage is necessary or, among the mass of the people, usual. The high Buddhist theory, how different from the practice of this joyous people, regards life as a mistake, this world as a vale of tears, transitory existence as the supreme evil, and bids us all aim at the goal of eternal rest. Therefore no Burmese monk would bless a marriage; he is more at home at a funeral. Mutual consent is the sole essential of a marriage. Similarly, divorce is easy. No Court need intervene. Ordinarily, separation is effected by arrangement between the parties, sometimes in the presence of the village elders. Although the Courts have not, perhaps, said the last word on the law of the subject, it is commonly accepted that, even without fault on either side, one party to the marriage can insist on divorce against the wish of the other party to the contract. In this respect men and women are on equal terms. The safeguard against capricious divorce is supplied by strict rules for the division of property at the dissolution of a marriage. In the case mentioned above, the one who insists on separation must abandon all property to the reluctant partner. Though so easy, divorce is far less common than might be expected. Most married people live together till death parts them. It is not unusual for divorced people to come together again. An appreciable proportion of the crimes of violence is due to the refusal of a woman to rejoin her divorced husband. I do not suggest that the Burmese law and practice of divorce would be suitable in communities of a more complex type. The comparatively even distribution of wealth, the fertility of the soil and the scantiness of the population, the absence alike of great fortunes and of abject, pinching poverty, the kindly disposition of the race, probably combine with more obscure elements to render somewhat primitive conditions possible. It is quite certain that in the stage which Burmese civilization has reached the simple marriage law works well and produces no obviously ill-effects. It need hardly be said that there is no bar to the marriage of widows.

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[45] *A-pyo-gyi.*

CHAPTER V
ON THE FRONTIER

Early in 1881 I went for a very short term to Myaung-mў̆a, in the Delta. The subdivisional officer having suddenly broken down, I was sent to superintend the taking of the Census. At Myaung-mў̆a, newly constituted the headquarters of a subdivision, there was no house. I lived in a zayat near the Court. Myaung-mў̆a is now the chief town of an important district, with a Deputy Commissioner as well as a Divisional and District Judge. Having finished the Census, I went to Bassein, riding most of the way over bare rice-fields. Everywhere I was received with the generous hospitality characteristic of the Burmese people, and I made many pleasant acquaintances among Thugyis and villagers. One village headman lives in my memory, a stalwart Karen who in his youth had been the champion boxer at the Court of Mandalay. He said so, and he ought to know. Probably his position was not one of high eminence; Burmese and Karen boxing is a mild game. The challenger leaps into the ring; slapping his chest, he dances round, bidding all come on. It is one of the rules of the game that the players should be equally matched in size and weight. With much difficulty a competitor is found to fulfil the requirements and accept the challenge. At last preliminaries are arranged, and the boxers face each other in the ring. They may kick, and they may slap with open hand, but not with closed fist. As soon as a drop of blood is drawn from the slightest scratch, the fight is at an end. Gloves are not worn. This may sound barbarous, and should be exciting; as a matter of fact, it is very harmless and extremely dull. In my experience, Karens are better at the game than Burmans.

For the rest of my time as subdivisional officer, I stayed at Bassein as the guest of Colonel William Munro, the Deputy Commissioner, an officer of the old school who had spent his life in Burma. Colonel Munro made use of the aptitude presumed to have been acquired in the Secretariat during the past year and set me to write all his annual reports on the sole basis of the figures in the appended statements.

My next charge was the frontier subdivision of Mye-dè in the Tha-yet-mў̆o district. The headquarter town was Allan-mў̆o, called after Major Allan who was Quartermaster-General when the frontier was demarcated. Allan-mў̆o lies on the Irrawaddy, just over five miles north of Tha-yet-mў̆o,[46] the district headquarters. The distance had to be more than five miles, or travelling allowance for the journey would have been inadmissible. Above Allan-mў̆o were the villages of Myedè and Mobôn. Long ago were two young Princes, blind. It was foretold that if they went down the Irrawaddy they should recover their sight. So they set out on a raft. Presently, at a place where they landed, they perceived a glimmering of the sky and exclaimed: “Mo-bôn; there is the sky above.” A few miles farther on, landing again, they saw the ground on which they stood, and cried: “Mye-dè; there is the earth beneath.” Thus was the prophecy fulfilled and the places received their names. Six miles north of the flagstaff on the fort at Myedè, then no longer a place of arms, was the starting-point of the frontier-line laid down by Lord Dalhousie’s personal direction.

The subdivision was a compact area of about a thousand square miles. A comparatively barren land, fringed by hills of no great height, intersected by many watercourses, now beds of dry sand, anon rushing torrents. These mountain-streams come down with sudden violence. Often returning from a walk or ride, one sat awaiting the subsidence of a river bubbling over a sandy bed where an hour or so before one had passed dry-shod. Sad stories were told of travellers cut off in mid-stream by a rapid flood and forced to spend the night on a diminishing islet of sand. As a rule these chaungs[47] were not too deep to ford on pony-back, though as often as not the pony created a painful diversion by sitting

[46] *Tha-yet-mў̆o*, not the city of mangoes, as might be supposed, but the city of slaughter.

[47] Streams.

down unexpectedly and wallowing in the waves. In these northern wilds were no teeming rice-fields, no fat fisheries. The people were poor and unsophisticated, raising scanty rice-crops with the aid of primitive irrigation works, earning a precarious livelihood by boiling cutch (catechu) or cultivating taungya[48] on the hillsides. One valuable crop they had, sessamum (hnan); but the farmer could not reckon on a good hnan season every year. Scattered among the hills were villages of tame Chins who had drifted down from their own land in the distant north-west of Upper Burma. Here were to be seen women with faces tattoed in close blue lines, according to legend a precaution against the too demonstrative admiration of their Burmese neighbours. The effect was singularly unbecoming, and already the younger women were organizing successful resistance. Chins were excellent settlers, careful and frugal cultivators, their villages models of neatness and cleanliness as compared with Burmese villages similarly situate. Much as I love Burmans, I cannot honestly commend the state of their villages. Fenced in as a protection against dacoits, the houses closely jammed together with no respect for order; the paths, especially at the gateways, trodden into pulpy masses of mud by the trampling oxen; the ground-floor of each hut a pen where cattle are installed each night; a Burmese village is an insanitary though often picturesque abode. Even the odours seem to me less fragrant and pleasing than to some more enthusiastic votaries. In the simple agricultural conditions of this primitive community, the revenue work was very light. The only trouble arose from disputes about irrigation and rights to water. Bench work in criminal matters was not excessive, and most of the civil cases were tried by the Myŏ-ôk (township officer). There was ample leisure for travelling. All the touring was done on Burman ponies, strong and willing little creatures, averaging about 12½ and never exceeding 13½ hands. At that time it was an article of faith that horses, or even ponies of Waler or Arab or country-bred classes, could not live in Burma. We have learnt better in recent years. Most of the riding was along jungle paths through *in*

[48] In *taungya* cultivation, the farmer prepares a piece of forest-land by setting fire to the trees and undergrowth, and fertilizing the ground with the ashes. Rice and vegetables are sown broadcast. Except by careful Chins, the same piece of land is not used again till the forest growth has been renewed. It is a wasteful plan, rightly discouraged.

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