OXFORD PAMPHLETS ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

No. 17

# BURMA

BY

MA MYA SEIN




HUMPHREY MILFORD

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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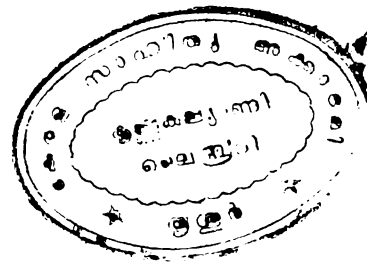


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BURMA is much in the news today, and this account of its people, history, resources and politics will be eagerly read. The country is mountainous and heavily forested, and the 17 million inhabitants cluster on the fertile banks of the great rivers and on the coastal plains. Except along the great southward-flowing rivers communications are difficult. As in India, three-quarters of the people are agriculturists, and more than half the cultivated area is given over to the growing of rice, of which about three million tons are normally exported in each year. The relations between India and Burma are given perspective, and there appear to be sound economic reasons to anticipate more 'good-neighbourliness' now that Indian immigration is restricted. The pamphlet concludes with an account of recent Burmese politics, and emphasizes the need for full nationalist support in the work of reconstruction that will be necessary to restore prosperity to a country greatly devastated by war.

Ma Mya Sein, M.A., B.Litt. (Oxon), was Principal of the Buddhist Girls School in Rangoon, Chairman of the Rangoon Education Board and Director of Women's Civil Defence, Rangoon, before the invasion of the Japanese. She travelled to Chungking by the Burma-Yunnan Highway and is now in India. Ma Mya Sein is the author of *Administration of Burma* (1938) and was the only woman delegate to the Burma Round Table Conference.

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# BURMA

## The Country

ANY consideration of Burma and its future must take into account the important part played by its geographical isolation in shaping its individuality. Situated between the two vast countries of China and India, it has been profoundly influenced by the life and culture of its great neighbours, but immense and almost impenetrable mountain barriers have enabled it to retain distinctive characteristics and to develop a strong national consciousness. Burma for most of its history could only be approached from the sea, but it lies away from the main trade routes and most of the coastline is rugged and unfriendly. Tales of its enormous wealth were told by early travellers, but Burma was less often visited than other parts of the East.

With an area of 260,000 square miles, Burma occupies the westernmost and most fertile part of the Indo-Chinese peninsula. On the east lie the Chinese province of Yunnan, French Indo-China and Siam or Thailand. To the north is the rugged region where India, Tibet and China meet. The Bay of Bengal and high mountains divide it from India. The country is split into natural divisions by a series of rivers and mountain ranges which generally run from north to south. In the centre, the valleys of the Irrawaddy, Sittang and Salween rivers open out into a flat delta country. On both sides of the central plain, there are high hills which end in coastal strips.

The Chin and Kachin Hills cover the north and north-eastern areas. Cut by densely wooded valleys, their rugged slopes render communications very difficult. Many mountain torrents joining at the foot of the hills form the two main streams of the Irrawaddy river, on the banks of which most of the ancient capitals were established. Around Mandalay, Amarapura, Ava and Pagan, pagodas of all shapes, sizes and age crown nearly every hill-top, and the curved-

tiered roofs of monasteries can be seen in clumps of shady tamarinds and palms. In the dry zone in Central Burma towns are few and villages are far between. Cactus and thorn bushes are the main vegetation. Arable land is cultivated with cotton, beans, sesamum and chillies, except where a good water-supply makes possible the growing of paddy. South of Thayetmyo, however, the vegetation becomes more luxuriant, and the Irrawaddy Delta is a vast and monotonous plain of paddy lands intersected by a network of tidal creeks.

The Pegu Yoma, a low ridge of hills ending in the spur on which the famous Shwe Dagon pagoda at Rangoon is built, divides the valleys of the Irrawaddy and the Sittang. The other large river of Burma, the Salween, is one of the most picturesque in the world. It rises in Tibet, cuts gorges through the mountains of Yunnan, drains the Shan Plateau and enters the Gulf of Martaban at Moulmein, whose harbour is enlarged by the entrance of two more rivers at the same mouth.

The great Shan Plateau, averaging 4,000 ft. above sea level, stretches across the Shan States and the Karenni States. Wooded hills run from north to south, and in the alternating valleys the labour of man is seen in the ridges of paddy fields and terrace cultivation.

Arakan, with its seaport town of Akyab, is a narrow strip of country adjoining India. It is shut off from the rest of Burma by the Arakan Yoma which stretches seaward and ends in dangerous reefs and detached rocks. It contains rich alluvial plains and is one of the most fertile parts of Burma. The coast-line is broken into many low islands by a network of estuaries and creeks.

Tenasserim lies between the Bay of Bengal and the high mountain ranges which divide Burma from Siam. The country is hilly and scoured with the deep channels of many streams. Off the coast are the picturesque islands of the Mergui Archipelago.

Burma has a typical monsoon climate; the three seasons—the dry-cold, the hot and the rainy—run into one another with very little margin, though the coming of the rains in

mid-May and their going in mid-October are usually marked by violent storms. The annual rainfall in the coastal regions of Arakan and Tenasserim ranges between 200 and 250 inches; in Rangoon and the Delta it averages 100 inches; and in the dry zone in Central Burma it is never more than 30 inches. The temperature varies almost as much as the rainfall; the dry zone is the hottest in summer and coldest in winter (varying between 100° and 60°), while on the coast and in the Delta the temperature varies only between 90° and 70° in the hot and cold seasons. The Shan Plateau, the Chin Hills and the Kachin Hills have a temperate climate; snow seldom falls even on the highest hills, but in the extreme north of the Kachin country there are hills clad with snow for the greater part of the year.

## The People

*The Burmese.* The Burmese comprise roughly two-thirds of the population of Burma, which is now estimated to be over 16,800,000; of the remaining inhabitants about seventy per cent are said to be able to speak the Burmese language with facility. We know very little about the aborigines except that they were probably Indonesians, who were completely displaced by swarms of immigrants pouring into Burma from north-western China and Tibet along the course of the great rivers. Generally speaking we can say that between 500 B.C. and A.D. 500 there was a great deal of tribal movement and tribal warfare, but by the ninth century the position of the immigrants was more or less consolidated—the Mons in the deltas of the Irrawaddy, the Sittang and Salween, and the Burmese in what is known now as Upper Burma. About the thirteenth century, the Tai or Shans came into the plains of Burma and pushed themselves in wherever they could. In the sixteenth century the Mons and the Burmese may be said to have merged, but they continued to fight each other till Alaungpaya finally crushed the Mons in A.D. 1756 and founded the town of Rangoon (*Yan-kon*) to mark the end of strife. From then on, the absorption of the Mons by the Burmese has been very rapid. In fact, the assimilation of

the smaller groups, including the Indian and Chinese immigrants, has been progressing so steadily and imperceptibly through the centuries that the various races have been transformed into a united and strong nation sufficiently cohesive to maintain a virile existence.

Mongolian in appearance but darker in complexion than the Chinese, the Burmese have been described as 'perhaps the most attractive people in the whole of the British Empire'. They are open and frank, they have natural good breeding and courtesy of manner and they easily adapt themselves to those with whom they come into contact. Their love of laughter and light-heartedness have often led to the criticism that they are irresponsible and lacking in perseverance and ambition. Life in Burma has not been particularly strenuous, and when the prevailing conditions did not encourage any accumulation of wealth, the Burmese took life easily, enjoying its pleasures in youth and in old age doing acts of charity. Now the Burman is adjusting himself to modern conditions. He still lacks training in skilled occupations, for which he seems to be temperamentally suited, but he has been trying to take his place in the industrial life of the country.

Most Burmese are agriculturists, living in villages rather than on their own land. In Upper Burma, the villages are usually surrounded by a bamboo or thorny hedge with a gate which is closed at night. A family owns up to 15 acres of land, a yoke of bullocks, and its own house and garden, separated from neighbours by a cactus hedge or a bamboo fence. The ordinary Burmese house is built of wood or bamboo and is raised on posts about five feet high. It has an open front or verandah with steps leading to the dwelling-rooms, which have little or no furniture, and underneath is a hand-weaving loom or a little shop by which the women of the family supplement the family earnings. Nowadays the houses are becoming more substantial, and chairs, tables, beds, lamps and other household articles are coming into use. Just outside the village is the monastery with its shady trees and well-swept grounds, where resides the *pongyi*. He teaches boys the three R's and advises the villagers in their religious and

social problems. The staple diet is rice, to which is added a dish of meat, fish, vegetables and various savoury leaves. The Burman is well nourished and, although there are very few really rich people, there is little of the grinding poverty that is seen in India and China.

Life in the towns is quite different. The houses are similar to those in India, and having no caste system, the Burmese have mingled freely with the immigrants.

Burmese women occupy a place in society not greatly different from that held by their sisters in the West. They have never adopted the veil like Muslim women in India nor bound their feet like Chinese women. They have always enjoyed equal rights by law and custom. Most of the petty trade is in their hands, but they are content to work in the home and for the home; a woman very seldom leaves the home of her parents or her husband to follow an independent career. There is reasonable freedom of choice in marriage, which is more of a civil contract than a religious union; the woman does not change her name nor does she wear a wedding ring. Divorce is easy but is not common, and there is no objection to the remarriage of divorcees and widows.

*The Shans.* Next to the Burmese, the Shans are the most numerous people in Burma. Driven out of south-western China by Kublai Khan in the thirteenth century, some of the Shans went westwards and overran Burma for two centuries, while the others went south, founded Ayuthia and became the progenitors of the modern Siamese. The Shans resemble the Burmese, but as a rule they are fairer and more slender. They are muscular and well-formed and average at least an inch taller than the Burmese. As a race they are exceedingly ready to adopt the habits and ways of the peoples with whom they come into contact. In the plains there is not much to distinguish them from the Burmese, but they cling to their liking for small communities and are averse to subordination to one central power. At present the Shans are less acquainted with modern civilization than the Burmese of the plains, and their standards of literacy and education are lower.

*The Karens.* The Karens are the third most numerous

people in Burma. Many speculations about their origin have been made, but the most probable theory is that they were tribes in China who were pushed south by the Shans and afterwards driven into the hills by the Mons and Burmese. Antagonized by the Burmese rulers, many Karens became converts to Christianity when the British came, though the majority are still Buddhists. Of heavier and squarer build than the Burman, the modern Karen in the plains who adopts Burmese dress and language can hardly be distinguished. In Karenni, legally the only native state in Burma, the Red Karens are of an entirely different physical type; they are small and wizened but very wiry, and have been wild and truculent towards their neighbours.

*The Chins and Kachins.* The Chins are said to be an offshoot from the original Tibeto-Burman immigrants who left the main body in the extreme north of Burma. They marched down the Chindwin, and, climbing the hills west of the river, spread westwards into the Lushai country and southward over the Arakan Yoma. Living as they do in small village communities among the hills, they are split up into many tribes speaking different dialects. They are more warlike and more backward than the people of the plains, but adapt themselves to modern conditions of life and do good work in the police and the military forces. The Kachins inhabit the great tract of country to the north, north-east and north-west of Burma, among the hills at the headwaters of the Irrawaddy and Chindwin.

On the whole, one can say that the races of Burma—with the exception of the few Selungs or sea-gypsies, living on the islands of the Mergui Archipelago—are all from the same original stock. They came from the same countryside and are more or less distantly related and connected; the animosities between the three sub-families—the Mon-Khmers, the Tibeto-Burmans and the Shans— have been bitter at times, but the assimilation and transformation of these races into a united nation has been steadily progressing for centuries.

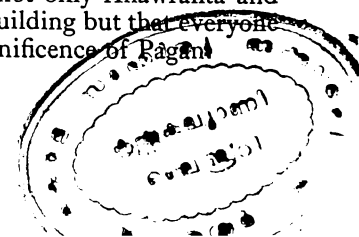
# BURMA

## History

The early history of Burma is made up of a mass of legends from which can be traced the movements of the various immigrant tribes and their petty quarrels and strifes. Wave after wave of Mongolian people infiltrated into Burma and scattered over the country, living in isolated units with little or no political organization. In spite of racial ties, Burmese traditions refer to India rather than to China, for it was the great Hindu expansion overseas that brought writing, customary law and other elements of civilization to Burma. The ruins at Prome, Pegu and along the Arakan and Tenasserim coasts indicate a period when Indian culture was dominant, though never so deeply entrenched in Burma as among the Chams and Khmers of Cambodia and Siam.

*Pagan dynasty.* The kingdom of Prome lasted about five centuries before it was destroyed by obscure civil wars, when its people moved to the north, and Thamokdarit, the Chief of the Pyu, built his capital at Pagan. Its authentic history begins with King Anawrahta, A.D. 1044–77, who brought Burma under the sway of one king. He conquered the Mons of Thaton and carried away the king and people with their treasure, including the Buddhist scriptures and relics; he razed the walls of Prome and conquered the nearer Shans; he gave help to Pegu when it was raided by Chiengmai, and when the Buddhists in Ceylon suffered under Hindu persecution he sent them monks and scriptures. In his reign, Hinayana Buddhism superseded the Mahayana, Pali became the language of the sacred books, and the people adopted the Mon alphabet. Anawrahta reorganized his kingdom, and tradition credits him with the foundation of the irrigation system and many other beneficial institutions. For more than two-and-a-half centuries Pagan flourished as the centre of Buddhist culture and civilization. It is said of that 'golden age of Burma' that even a widow could afford to build a pagoda, and certainly the millions that still stand today in the barren wilderness of the dry zone give one the impression that it was not only Anawrahta and his successors who took to pagoda-building but that everyone contributed to the architectural magnificence of Pagan.





*Shan domination.* In A.D. 1253 the Tartars who had swept across Asia annexed Yunnan and demanded tribute from Pagan, which was then beginning to totter under the pressure of the Shans. In 1287 Pagan was sacked and the dynasty collapsed. The Shans overran the entire country, but they had always lacked cohesion and Burma became split into the principalities of Ava, Toungoo, Pegu, Martaban, etc., which were soon fighting one another. The first European traveller who came to Burma, Nicolo di Conti, a Venetian merchant, found the Mon kingdom of Pegu fairly prosperous and settled in 1435, but Upper Burma remained disorganized. The kingdom of Ava could not assert itself; year after year rebellions took place, till in 1527 the Shans finally took Ava. Burmese refugees flocked to Toungoo, an independent state, which now became the centre of Burmese nationalism. It was the king of Toungoo who once again united Burma and enlarged its dominion to its greatest extent.

*Toungoo dynasty* (1531–1752). Tabinshweti, king of Toungoo, seized Pegu, Prome and Martaban, and invaded Arakan and Siam, but it was left to his successor, Bayinnaung (1550-81), to extend the boundaries of Burma to Manipur and Yunnan on the north and to Chiengmai and Ayuthia to the east. The suzerainty of Burma over the Shan States dates from this time. Bayinnaung twice reduced Ayuthia by siege and destroyed Chiengmai; but his campaigns exhausted Burma, and the strain of the intermittent Burmo-Siamese wars in the next two centuries led to the disruption of the country. By the eighteenth century Lower Burma was depopulated, and the rich Delta gradually became overgrown with jungle and tall grass. When Pegu ceased to be a seaport, the Burmese court, not realizing that the future of Burma lay on the coast, moved back to Ava in 1635. As soon as the Mons recovered their strength, they rebelled and set up a king at Pegu. They made constant raids on Upper Burma, and in 1752 forced their way into Ava and burnt it to the ground.

*Alaungpaya dynasty* (1752–1885). The Ava dynasty collapsed, but when Alaungpaya of Moksobomyo (Shwebo) defied the Mons and won his first battle, the Burmese

flocked to his standard. The Mons were cleared out of Upper Burma and finally crushed in 1756. Dagon was taken, enlarged and renamed Rangoon (*Yan-kon* or end of strife) and replaced Syriam as the port of Burma. Once again the whole of Burma was united under one king. His vigorous and energetic successors began to widen their kingdom, and once again the kings of Burma frittered away their resources in long campaigns and useless sieges. They sent expeditions into Siam, destroyed Ayuthia and ravaged the country, invaded Manipur and Assam and repelled the Chinese invasions. The Burmese began to think that they were equal to anything. But the country was thinly populated, and the drain on Upper as well as Lower Burma was such that the framework of administration cracked and bands of robbers infested the whole kingdom. Thus when their expansion towards India brought them into hostile contact with the English, the Burmese sustained their first defeat. In 1826, Arakan and Tenasserim were ceded to the British, but relations worsened and the second Burmese war broke out in 1852. The whole of Lower Burma then fell into the hands of the British. After the second Burmese war the British became alarmed over French intrigues, and when a Franco-Burmese treaty was signed in 1885, the British decided to end the independence of Upper Burma. The dispute of the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation with the Burmese Government was the immediate cause for the outbreak of the third Burmese war. Mandalay was taken, King Thibaw was deported, and the whole of Burma became part of British India in 1886.

## Administration

The Burmese king was an autocrat. Between him and the people there were no intermediate feudal lords, no assemblies —no one to check his power or ambitions or to give stability to the administration. All officials were appointed by the king and held office during his pleasure. There was no definite law of succession; as the king had more than one wife, it was usually the son of a strong-minded queen or a

capable prince with the biggest following who seized the throne and appointed a new set of officials. Until the reign of King Mindon, no salaries were given to the officials, who had to get as much as they could out of the people. This naturally led to so much oppression and cruelty that the Burmese proverb says, 'Fire, war, storms, robbers and rulers are the five great evils'. Away from the centre, however, the administration of local chiefs was good and reasonable and on the whole the peasantry were more comfortable and prosperous in Burma than in many other countries. The people elected their own headman (*thugyi*) who collected the revenue or tribute payable by the village; in distributing the burden among the people, he was assisted by a group of villagers called *thamadi*. Cultivators were generally called upon to give one-tenth of their produce, the rice collected being kept in provincial granaries. In time of war, the village had to supply its quota of men, fully equipped and provided with the necessities for a campaign. Those who stayed at home compensated those who had to go to the front. In the same way, those who were in the service of the king had lands given to them, and their relatives, the *nauk-htauk*, worked on the lands and supported them. The central government seldom interfered in local affairs, so there grew up a system of strong headmen whose authority prevailed over more than one village and whose office tended to become hereditary.

This strong hereditary headmanship was the stable feature in the administration of Burma, but unfortunately it was done away with by the early British officials who came from India. The village system of 'one village, one headman' had worked well in India and was a powerful instrument of pacification, so the larger units were broken up into such small villages that the headman's remuneration was not sufficient to attract any villager of good standing. As the functions of government increased, the headman has gradually become the maid-of-all-work and lost the respect of the villagers. In towns, the ward-headmen fared badly too; they became mere tax-collectors with no power or influence. The situation became worse when, under the Rural Self-

Government Act, another set of elected representatives of the people were created by the establishment of the Circle Boards and District Councils. It would have been much more logical to make the headmen the electorate and to give powers of taxation and expenditure to a committee of headmen of a district.

Burma is now administered by a highly organized permanent civil service. The village tracts are grouped into a township under a *myook* who is in some respects like the old hereditary headman. He supervises the land and village system, helps to suppress crime, collects revenue, settles disputes, acts as Government banker, registers deeds and issues stamps for sale and generally performs the duties assigned to him by higher authorities. In fact, he is the backbone of the administration and corresponds to the *myothugyi* (circle headman) of olden days. Two or three townships form a sub-division under a Sub-divisional Officer. The Deputy Commissioner, who is in charge of two or three sub-divisions, is responsible for all the functions of government in the district. To help him he has the District Superintendent of Police, the Superintendent of Land Records, the Superintendent of Excise, the Divisional Forest Officer and other officials of the different services. Three to eight districts make a division, which is under a Commissioner. The connecting link between the district officials and the Governor, who is at the head of the Government, is the Secretariat consisting of heads of departments and Secretaries of Government.

When Burma was first annexed, it became part of British India for the sake of administrative expediency; after much agitation, Burma was separated in 1937 and the Burmese request for the appointment of a Governor with parliamentary experience was granted. The Governor appoints the Ministers, and they have a constitutional right to determine policy except in the 'reserved' departments of Defence, External Affairs, Excluded Areas and monetary policy, for which the Governor can appoint three Counsellors. In addition the Governor has special responsibilities in the exercise of which he is guided by the Instrument of

Instructions given to each new Governor by the Secretary of State. Thus the constitutional development of Burma ultimately rests with the British Parliament, which can retard or hasten it.

The legislature is bicameral, consisting of a Senate with 36 and a House of Representatives with 132 members. The Senate continues for a maximum of seven years and the House of Representatives for five years. Communal representation was introduced into Burma when it was part of India, and forty seats are reserved for the Karens, Indians, Anglo-Burmans, Europeans, Commerce and Industry, Rangoon University, Indian Labour and Non-Indian Labour. Of the 36 members of the Senate, 18 are chosen by the Governor at his discretion and the remaining 18 are chosen by the House of Representatives in accordance with the system of proportional representation, each group voting separately. The qualifications for the franchise are higher than in India, but a larger percentage of the population enjoy the vote in Burma—23 per cent in Burma as against 14 per cent in India. The percentage of literacy among women also being higher in Burma than in India, nearly all the women in towns and many in the villages are able to vote.

## Resources and Trade

*Agriculture.* Rice is the staple food of the Burmese and it has been cultivated in Burma for centuries, though its export was forbidden under the Burmese kings. Now rice and rice-products are by far the most important export and comprise 40 per cent of the total.

The great mass of the population, nearly 71 per cent of those working for their livelihood, are engaged in agriculture and forestry. The area occupied for cultivation in 1940 was about 21½ million acres, of which about 18 million acres were cropped in that year, rice cultivation covering more than 12 million acres. Rotation of crops is not unknown, and double-cropping and mixed cropping are quite common in Upper Burma. The Upper Burma cultivator has a fairly constant economy, as he grows a variety of crops—millet, cotton, sesa-

mum, maize, peanuts and beans. More often than not he owns his fields and has cottage industries to supplement his income, so his prosperity is not so dependent on the export price of paddy. In Lower Burma, however, where the soil is rich and rainfall abundant and constant, rice is grown almost universally.

During the years 1930–35, a wave of foreclosures left non-agriculturist bankers and landlords in control of about half the paddy lands of Lower Burma. In 1939, 49 per cent of the total area of 19½ million acres was worked by tenant farmers, in Lower Burma the figure being 59 per cent, and in Upper Burma 32 per cent. In the thirteen principal rice-growing districts of Lower Burma about half the land in the hands of non-agriculturists was in the possession of Chettiyar firms, and the absentee landlords were mostly non-Burmese. A Land and Agriculture Committee to consider the various problems of tenancy alienation and indebtedness was appointed and a Tenancy Act and Land Alienation Act became law in 1939. A Land Purchase Act giving power to the Government to acquire land for distribution to agriculturists was passed in 1941, and further measures were in process of being initiated to provide land mortgage facilities.

The exportable surplus of rice is about 3 to 3½ million tons, of which about half is taken by India, Burma's best customer. Great Britain, Ceylon and Malaya continued to buy Burma rice, and West Africa and the West Indies increased their purchases, but from 1930 to 1938 the six leading food-importing countries of Europe reduced their net imports of rice and wheat by more than half and this decrease fell heavily upon Burma as the nearest source of rice from Asia. The Netherlands Indies, which once exchanged their sugar for Burma rice, also began to grow their own paddy. Burma will have to find new markets for her surplus rice or grow some other marketable crop.

With better means of communications, less rice was shipped in the husk, so rice mills (which prepare the rice for export) constitute the chief industrial enterprise of Burma. The smaller mills are owned by Indians, Chinese or Burmans

and the labour is supplied by Indians and Burmans. The rice export trade, indeed almost all export trade, is in the hands of non-Burmans.

Next in importance to the cultivation of rice comes that of sesamum, the expressed oil of which is used in Burmese cooking and is exported. The area sown in sesamum in 1937 was 1,427,132 acres. Groundnut is also grown for the same purpose and its acreage is increasing. The other crops, which normally take up about 1,500,000 acres each, are legumes and cotton. With modern methods it is possible for Burma to have a greater cotton-growing future. Only small quantities of cotton are turned into finished goods within the country, though in olden days nearly every house had its own spinning-wheel and handloom. Textile goods constitute the major portion of Burma's imports.

Sugar-cane is among the newer general crops in Burma. Although the Burmans have always had a kind of sugar made from sugar-cane and a variety of toddy palms, there was no commercial sugar refinery till 1930. From about 1920 the Netherlands Indies reduced their imports of Burma rice. In Java they diverted land which once grew sugar to paddy. India developed its sugar industry and embarked on a policy of tariff protection. Burma, which was then part of India, had similarly to begin to grow its own sugar requirements and set up sugar factories.

Tea is cultivated in the Northern Shan States. The plant is indigenous, and has been under the supervision of European experimentalists. The production of tung oil has also been successful. Burma tobacco is considered to be of excellent quality and flavour, but in general the tobacco trade suffers from unscientific methods, lack of standardization and uneconomic marketing.

*Forests.* Teak has always been the most valuable tree commercially, while bamboo is probably the most useful forest product from the point of view of the people. The necessity of getting and keeping up the supply of teak for naval purposes first turned the attention of the Government of India to the question of the conservation of forests. When the annexation of Burma added rich forests of teak to the

Empire, the Government selected the best tracts of teak forests and land not suitable for other cultivation and formed state forest reserves, which now total more than 20,000,000 acres. About 500,000 tons of teak are felled annually, 80 per cent of which is exported to India. The Forest Department has also begun systematic plantations of teak so as to ensure a constant supply. Pyinkado, the next most valuable tree, is used mainly for railway sleepers because of its resistance to white ants. There are also other jungle and rare woods which find a ready sale. Forest earnings, which form approximately 20 per cent of the total revenues of Burma, show a good margin of profit.

*Mineral Production.* Burma has a wide variety of minerals, of which the most valuable is undoubtedly petroleum. For centuries the Burmese have dug oil from the shallow wells of Yenangyaung area along the Irrawaddy river, the right to dig for oil being restricted to a few families. In 1886 the Burmah Oil Company was established and boring for oil was started in the next year. The production in 1887 was 2,335,305 gallons, and in 1904, when the first modern well was sunk by American drillers, it rose to 118½ million gallons. In 1937 the total production was more than 300 million gallons, or one-half per cent of the world yield. The Burmah Oil Company is the largest single employer of labour. In 1935, it had 19,094 employees in the fields in addition to its workers in the refinery and tin plate workers in Syriam.

The other important mineral products are silver, lead, tungsten, tin, copper, precious stones, limestone and clay. The largest mines are those of the Burma Corporation at Namtu, not far from the Chinese frontier. Before the war, Burma was the largest producer of tungsten in the world, the main deposits lying in the Shan States and Tenasserim. In 1938 Burma produced 212,827 carats of rubies and sapphires. Jade of all varieties and colours is found in the Mogaung valley and exported mainly to China. The amber mines are situated in the thickly wooded Hukawng valley. The cutting and polishing of stones is quite an important industry in Mandalay and Rangoon.

*Foreign Trade.* Being an agricultural country, Burma's

main imports were manufactured goods, mainly textiles and iron and steel. In 1937–8, the total imports amounted to Rs. 23,80,00,000, of which India accounted for about half, Britain about one-fourth and Japan about one-tenth. The exports were valued at Rs. 50 crores, 2,842,838 tons of rice valued at Rs. 20 crores accounting for 40 per cent. The foreign trade fluctuated widely, depending mainly on the price obtained for rice. When the depression came and the price of rice fell, the value of foreign trade fell to as low as Rs. 65 crores in 1933–4 from Rs. 105 crores in 1929–30. During the decade ending 1936–7 Burma had a trade balance of about Rs. 30 crores, a large part of which was cancelled by overseas remittances, and rice exports were about three million tons.

## Communications

Waterways form the most important means of communication in Burma. There are innumerable craft, from the village canoe carrying fruit and vegetables to a local market to the large cargo steamers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. The Burmese love water. Wherever possible, they establish their villages by the bank of a river, and the riverside is the playground of the children and the meeting-place of the village maidens. Nearly the whole population turns out to greet a steamer. These people are not likely to abandon their beautiful waterways for the dusty roads unless there is a strong compensating advantage. The whole of the timber and quite three-fourths of the rice are carried by water from the forests and fields to the ports for export.

The Irrawaddy river, which flows through the middle of the country from north to south, is the main artery for freight; its tributaries bring down the produce of the hinterland; its delta with its innumerable creeks has a canal system which provides transportation for all parts of the great rice-producing areas. The Twante Canal, widened and deepened in 1935, enables the largest river steamers to go direct from Rangoon to Mandalay. The Pegu-Sittang Canal, which connects the Irrawaddy and Sittang rivers, was the only line of communication between Rangoon and

Toungoo before the railway was built in 1885, and even now it is used a great deal for the transport of grain to Rangoon and all the timber that is floated down the Sittang. The Salween river, hemmed in by hills and mountains, has rapids extending a score of miles, but is otherwise navigable from Moulmein to the Kunlong ferry near the Chinese border. A boat connexion between the Salween and the Irrawaddy is possible during the rains. Tenasserim and Arakan have many navigable rivers, and a large boat traffic exists between the islands that cluster round these coasts.

The first railway, from Rangoon to Prome on the Irrawaddy river, was opened to traffic in 1877. Eight years later another line was built to Toungoo, then a frontier town between British Burma and the Burmese Kingdom, and now most of the important towns are linked by over 2,000 miles of metre-gauge line. The building of the Ava bridge across the Irrawaddy in 1934 made through traffic from Rangoon to Myitkyina possible. The opening of a road and railway from Mandalay to Lashio in 1903 revolutionized transport in the Shan States, hitherto dependent on pack-animals for the China trade.

From time to time the question of linking the railway systems of Burma and India has received attention. Three routes have been surveyed, but the desire to develop internal communications and the fear of greater Indian immigration have prevented any schemes from being worked out. After this war, the question of linking up the railways of India, Burma and China will, no doubt, be revived.

Road construction has been slow in Burma. Roads were looked upon as feeders to the rivers and railways, which already provided transportation for inland traffic. The cost of making metalled roads is high because of the scarcity of good stone and the high cost of labour, and in 1940 the mileage of roads suitable for wheeled traffic was only 17,000, of which 12,500 was motorable. The main trunk highway is from Rangoon to Mandalay, parallel to the railway. Another road goes from Rangoon to Prome, along the banks of the Irrawaddy and through the oilfields of Yenangyaung. The Shan States now have excellent roads. The Man-

dalay-Lashio road has been extended to the frontier, from whence the highway leads on to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan.

Since European travellers reached the Bay of Bengal, they have been trying to find a short-cut land route to China. Many attempts were made before and after the British annexation of Burma, but it was not until after the Chinese moved their war-time capital to Chungking that anything materialized. The Burma-Yunnan Highway is a great achievement. It has been of great value as an emergency measure, but its usefulness after the war is still doubted by most people. Ordinarily the volume of inland trade between Burma and China is not very great and it has declined in recent years. Between 1927 and 1937, the value of Burmese exports to China fell from 5½ million to 1 million Shanghai dollars. Some eighty per cent of the Chinese imports into Burma consist of raw silk, and with the preference for imported silk goods any large increase in this trade is improbable. There are products of Burma like tung oil, bristles, skins and hides and the minerals of Yunnan which would use this road, but the Burmese still feel that the Sino-Burmese trade can never be more than a fraction of their maritime trade and they fear the increase of Chinese immigration.

There is no through road from Rangoon to Bangkok, though in the dry weather a trip can be made to Siam by way of Kengtung and Chiengmai.

## Education and Religion

Early writers on Burma have emphasized the fact that 'few among the Burmese did not know how to read and write because the monk, to whose care little boys were entrusted, always taught them to read and write'. It is not known how far back this state of things can be traced, but it is a remarkable fact that Burma had universal education of a sort long before anything of the kind existed in Europe. Education is co-extensive with Buddhism, which is professed by about 85 per cent of the people. According to Burmese

Buddhism, every boy joins the Order when he is in his teens. The story of Prince Siddhartha's renunciation of worldly pleasures is re-enacted when the boy, dressed in his best clothes, goes round the town or village in a procession and then exchanges his finery for the yellow robe and follows the monks to the monastery. He remains there for any length of time he desires—some never return to lay life again. Thus every Burman Buddhist is in close touch with the clergy and his whole life is coloured by the teachings of the Buddha. There are no organized Buddhist missions, but the wandering monk is ready to live in any village which will give him food and shelter and a boy or two to live with him and attend to his wants. These boys, and others who come from home every day for lessons, are taught to read and write Burmese and to understand the Buddhist scriptures. In no other Buddhist country do the monks occupy themselves in education to anything like the extent they do in Burma.

The Burmese king was the protector of the Buddhist religion and the ecclesiastical commission appointed by the king was the mechanism on which the Buddhist clergy relied for power to unfrock its undesirable members. The British policy of non-interference in religion did away with this power. The *thathanabaing* who was appointed by the British Government was merely the nominal chief *pongyi*, and without the backing of the state he had no means of preventing undesirable elements creeping into the priesthood. Unfortunately some *pongyis* have been persuaded by political agitators to help in elections and political movements and have become disinclined to teach the young. When the Government proposed to assist vernacular education, it made many attempts to induce the monks to come into the educational system. They were supplied with books; instructors were sent round to the monasteries to train teachers; money grants were given; and lay teachers, appointed and paid by the Government, were supplied to the monasteries. None of these measures succeeded, however, in raising the standard of efficiency of the monastic schools.

As part of British India, Burma was greatly influenced by

Lord Macaulay's Minute on Education, 1835, which committed India and Burma to a system of English education. The aim no doubt was utilitarian; the East India Company wanted clerks and the schools were expected to supply them. The trouble is, that that is the only thing the schools ever did. There has been little relationship between the subjects taught in school and the conditions of life in Burma. Emphasis was laid on English; parents believed that they were giving their children the best start in life by sending them to an English school. Soon there grew up a number of young men and women who could not read or write their own mother-tongue correctly, who did not know the history and traditions of their country and who became cut off from the mass of people whose educational needs had been neglected. The Government spent large sums of money on secondary education of boys and girls regardless of the means of the parents or the ability of the pupil, while pupils in primary schools and the children of poor parents received little or no assistance. The average annual cost to the Government per student in the University was about Rs. 800, in the secondary schools about Rs. 40, while in the primary schools it was Rs. 7-5-0 in 1935–6, Rs. 8-9-0 in 1937–8 and Rs. 9-2-0 in 1938–9. It should be the reverse: there should be one state system of education whereby primary education is offered free to all who choose to avail themselves of the offer, while secondary education is not assisted without some kind of selection. In Burma, the towns have been favoured at the expense of the villages, the rich have been favoured at the expense of the poor, and the gulf between the educated townspeople and the ignorant peasants has been growing wider. When rural self-government was introduced, the lack of educated intelligent men in the rural areas prevented the scheme from being properly worked. The same drawback appeared in the elections of the members of the legislature, when English-educated town-bred men, elected to represent a rural constituency of which they had very little knowledge, used it merely as a stepping-stone to a political career, leaving the rural areas without leaders or representatives.

In spite of all the defects of the educational system, when

Burma was part of India it was the most literate province. In Rangoon, where most of the wealthier Burmans live, 820 men in 1,000 are literate, a figure most probably not equalled in any other city in Asia of comparable size outside Japan. Burma has a smaller number of university students in proportion to her population than Bengal, Bombay, Madras or the Punjab. Wealth and intelligence are more widely diffused in Burma than elsewhere, and hereditary ability is likely to be found among the descendants of generations of headmen, who now seldom have any opportunity of higher education. The only way to get more men of ability for the administration of the country is to seek them up and down the land and to educate them at public expense.

## Relations with India

For many centuries intercourse has taken place between Burma and India, but Indian culture has never been as deeply entrenched in Burma as in other parts of south-eastern Asia. Behind the mountain barriers, the various groups of Mongolian immigrants had become welded into a nation and at no period do we find any tendency for union between the two peoples. It was by accident that the political union was brought about, and it was administrative expediency that kept them together. From the beginning there was opposition to the placing of Burma under the political tutelage of India, and in the decade before the separation of Burma from India many unfortunate incidents occurred which made Indo-Burmese relations one of the most difficult problems facing the administrators of Burma.

The final Report of the Riot Enquiry Committee, established by the Government of Burma after the Indo-Burma riots of 1938, put forward a strong plea for the re-examination of the whole Indian question. Indian immigration, in its modern phase, had its origin in the change that took place in the economic life of Burma when the Suez Canal opened up new markets for Burma's rice. There were large tracts of cultivable land in Burma, and a rapid extension of the area under paddy-cultivation followed. For the most

part the waste lands were cleared and brought under cultivation by Burmese, but the chain of services intervening between the agriculturist and the consumer of his produce fell into the hands of non-Burmans, especially Indians. Indian traders and Indian labour came into Burma not only for the rice trade but also for the development of trade and industry in general. The Chettiyar community in particular, though events have made it unpopular, performed a useful service in providing agricultural credit. Burma therefore has been greatly developed by Indians, but the fact remains that the Burmans are none the richer for it. The bulk of the earnings of Indians was remitted yearly to India. Hundreds of Indians were also brought in to fill the subordinate posts in Government and commercial offices. For some time there was no competition between the two peoples: each had their own sphere in the economic life of the country; but conditions changed. As education expanded, and Burmans became ready to take their place in the various departments of administration and in commercial firms, they were faced with keen Indian competition. Among the uneducated, there was the same rivalry. The small peasant proprietors have increasingly lost their lands to non-agricultural absentee landlords (who were mostly Indians) and have been compelled to seek a footing in occupations other than agriculture, where they could not compete with people whose standard of living was lower than their own. This competition between the two peoples may not be as extensive or acute as some nationalists think, but in times of acute economic distress, as in 1930, the Burmese found the Indians a convenient object of resentment, and Indo-Burmese relations deteriorated rapidly.

The Committee that was set up by the Burma Legislative Council, to confer jointly with the Simon Commission in 1929, held that the first step towards responsible self-government was the separation of Burma from India. They added that Burma's political connexion with India was wholly arbitrary and unnatural. They declared that Burma's political subservience to India had seriously jeopardized her financial and economic interests and even threatened to denationalize

her. The Simon Commission therefore recommended the immediate separation of Burma from India, and after much controversy Burma was separated from India in 1937 and given a constitution which was in some ways more liberal than that of India.

The question of a financial settlement between Burma and India was first considered by the Government of India in 1931 when a tentative scheme was drawn up. Later an independent commission, consisting of the Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery, Sir Sydney Rowlatt and Sir Walter Nicholson, was appointed by the Secretary of State for India to examine the whole problem. The Report submitted by them in 1935 became the basis for the subsequent settlement, by which Burma assumed 7·5 per cent of India's net liabilities. Thus Burma separated from India owing the latter Rs. 50·75 crores, which it undertook to pay in 45 annual instalments. In addition Burma had to pay 3·5 per cent interest on her indebtedness and 7·5 per cent of the pensions of the Central Government of India subject to annual decrements over a period of 20 years. It was believed that under normal conditions, Burma stood to gain annually about Rs. 325 lakhs by the separation. The India Office building in London is jointly owned by India and Burma and the Secretary of State for India is also the Secretary of State for Burma. Burma had also the assistance of the technical services of the Government of India; and civil aviation and certain specialized services continued under Indian direction during the period of adjustment. The Rangoon branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of India, with which the Imperial Bank and all 'scheduled' banks must maintain deposits, continued to manage the currency and central banking functions of the Government of Burma. Indian coins remained legal tender in Burma but bank notes were specially printed.

The Indian population in Burma according to the 1931 Census was 1,017,825, of whom 630,000 were born outside Burma. This formed 6·9 per cent of the total population as compared to 4·9 per cent in 1872. From estimates made of the Indian population after 1931, the figure shows a decrease of nearly 100,000, but it cannot be concluded that the

decrease in the movement of Indian labour was being sufficiently self-regulated. The Baxter Commission was appointed to study the whole question of immigration, and its recommendations became the basis of negotiations between the two Governments. An agreement was reached, and from October 1941 Indian immigration into Burma became subject to regulation and restriction. An Indo-Burma Trade Agreement was also signed in 1941 by which Indian goods imported into Burma will enjoy a 15 per cent tariff preference over non-Empire goods and a 10 per cent preference over Empire goods. Indian finished textiles were granted a 15 per cent preference over all other imported piece-goods of whatever origin. India is one of Burma's best customers, in normal years taking about 60 per cent of the exports. Burma and India can each supply what the other needs. India imports rice, timber and petroleum and gives Burma coal, textiles, iron and steel. Since the separation, trade relations between the two countries have become closer. Exports to India increased from 50·9 to 60·5 per cent and the percentage of imports from India increased from 48·8 to 55·6. The two countries can benefit by fostering mutual trade. If the Burmans can be sure that their economic growth and interests will not be stifled or overlooked, and the Indians in Burma can be assured that their status in Burma will be the same as that of Burmans, then Indo-Burma relations will be placed on a good footing and a better understanding between the two countries will be established.

## Nationalism

When Mandalay fell into the hands of the British after a very short war and King Thibaw was taken to India, the people did not realize the full significance of the situation. King Thibaw had not been a popular king like his father Mindon, and the people thought that the British would place another king on the throne. Such a solution did occur to the British, but the character of the Burmese dynasty was not such that it would make a puppet king possible. At first the British attempted to rule the country through the *Hluttaw*

(Council of Ministers) but the Burmese central government had become so weak that its control did not extend beyond the regions of the capital. When direct administration by British officers was substituted, the people knew for certain that it was the end of the Burmese kingdom. A wave of resistance broke out all over the country, even in Lower Burma which had been under the British since 1826. Although the Burmese armies had been defeated in a few weeks, the pacification of Burma took five years. Much of the unrest was caused by gangs of dacoits and criminals but there can be no doubt that elements of true nationalist spirit permeated the disturbances and other periodical risings. Burma has a more homogeneous population than most countries and a strong sense of racial unity has developed.

As part of British India, Burma participated in its constitutional reforms. In 1897 Burma was created a province of a Lieutenant-Governor and was given a nominated Legislative Council. A beginning had also been made in local self-government by the establishment of municipal and town committees in 1874. Under the provisions of the Morley-Minto reforms the Legislative Council was enlarged. The Government of India Act of 1919, however, left Burma out of the working of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme. Strong protests were made all over Burma and nationalist societies began to grow. Deputations were sent to India and England and agitation took place in many parts of Burma. About the same time dissatisfaction with the educational system resulted in the university and schools' boycott and the establishment of National schools all over Burma. Most of these schools later accepted grants-in-aid from the Government and carried on the work of fostering the growing pride in race and country.

In 1923 Burma received its second reformed constitution. Under the dyarchical system, Burma had a Legislative Council of 103 members, of whom 80 were elected from a franchise of about two million. The post of Lieutenant-Governor became that of a Governor, and Burma's interests were represented in the Indian legislature by two members

in the upper house (Council of State) and four members in the lower house (Legislative Assembly).

The decade prior to the separation of Burma from India was marked by political and economic unrest. The collapse of rice prices during the period of depression caused a rapid growth in the indebtedness of the rural population and the large-scale alienation of land resulted in serious agrarian problems. The first Indo-Burman riots took place in 1930. There was dissatisfaction over the Simon Commission Report in June and in December, and a rebellion broke out in the Tharrawaddy district. The cause was most probably economic, but though limited in area the rebellion exhibited many of the characteristics of one of those periodic nationalist risings that used to take place after the annexation. None of the main political parties joined the movement, and it soon developed into a looting campaign directed mainly against Indians. This uprising was followed by anti-Chinese riots. Burmese nationalism had directed its attention towards the Indians and Chinese because it was these two peoples who were most obviously in the way in those types of employment into which the Burmese were now anxious to enter.

The main platform of all political parties in Burma was the advancement of Burmese nationalism, but the most extreme form was expressed in the Thakin movement. Thakin means 'master' or 'lord' and it was widely used as a term of address to the Europeans. Young Burmese of extreme nationalist views adopted the term for themselves when they formed the Dobama Asi Ayon or 'We Burmans League'. They advocated the use of the Burmese language and everything Burmese. In addition to being in touch with Indian agitators, the Thakins co-operated with the All-Burma Students' Union, the All-Burma Cultivators League, the All-Burma Workers' League and the Pongyis' League. They admired the Soviet system and their tendency was towards communism. Riots and strikes that followed were as much manifestations of anti-British sentiments as of economic unrest. After the outbreak of the European war in 1939, some extreme nationalists expressed their admiration of the Hitlerian system, while others began to look to Japan to help

them to gain independence. In the Thakin party, the majority turned to totalitarianism as the rallying-ground for anti-British sentiments.

From 1937 to 1941, Burma had three ministries. No party was strong enough to give a stable government to the country. Dr Ba Maw, whose Sinyetha (or Poor Man) Party only controlled 14 out of 132 seats in the legislature, formed a coalition government and for a time was very popular. Soon it became obvious that he could not fulfil the exaggerated promises that he had made at election time, and with the outbreak of students' strikes and labour troubles, he fell into disfavour in 1939. U Pu of the Peoples' Party next formed a ministry which did not last very long. In September 1940 he was replaced by U Saw, who had broken away from the Peoples' Party and had founded yet another party called the Myochit (Patriot) Party. U Saw's administration provided the country with a completely Burmanized leadership. It proclaimed as its programme an intensive Burmanization of the Government services and promised to seek national honour and complete home rule through evolution rather than revolution. Meanwhile Dr Ba Maw resigned his seat in the House of Representatives and with the Thakins formed the Freedom Bloc. At a meeting in Mandalay, he declared himself Anashin (dictator) and made seditious speeches. He was arrested and tried and was in prison at Mogok when the Pacific war broke out.

Leading nationalists desired some kind of a pledge from His Majesty's Government regarding the status of Burma after the war. In November 1941 the Secretary of State for Burma announced that it was the objective of the British Government to help Burma to attain Dominion Status as speedily and as fully as may be possible in certain contingencies immediately after the conclusion of a victorious war. The Governor confirmed Mr Amery's statement, and in compliance with the request of the Cabinet appointed a Burman as one of his Counsellors. In the same month U Saw visited London, it is said for the purpose of securing a pledge of immediate and complete dominion status for Burma. If this was his purpose, he was not successful. He went on to the

United States and, after the Pacific war broke out, he was detained on his way back to Burma on the ground of having been in contact with the enemy.

Any attempt to reconstruct Burma after the war can only succeed if it gets full nationalist sympathy behind it. At the same time Burmese nationalists need to be less absorbed with the internal problems of Burma and to take more cognizance of world affairs. Perhaps the shock of war will bring a sense of added realism into Burmese politics and persuade political leaders that Burma's problems must be considered now not merely as internal concerns of a unique and isolated 'Golden Country' but as part of the whole international system. Closer contact with China, India and Siam as a result of the improvement of communications in war-time and the importance of Rangoon on the Far Eastern air routes will make it increasingly necessary for Burmans to have a realistic outlook towards external relationships.

## The Future

Much has happened in Burma since 7 December 1941. Although the war had come to the East, the people of Burma did not think that it would reach Burma. Since the British annexation, no invader had entered their land; for over fifty years they had had good government, peace and prosperity. Although they were proud of their race and often spoke of the days of the Burmese kings, they were for the most part happy and contented so long as the price of paddy was good. They were as free as any people of the world from all kinds of tyranny. Burma had no feudal or caste system and no industrial proletariat. No one was very rich, and no one died of starvation. The resources were great while the population was still small. In fact, Burma had a good start over most countries in the matter of an ideal social organization. The people were adjusting themselves to the *tempo* of modern life. It was only a matter of time before the country became a full member of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

In February 1942 all appeared to be lost. The Japanese troops had entered Burma and were advancing towards

Rangoon. The people were dazed and puzzled. Excepting for a small handful of extremists and the rabble that follow behind an invading army to loot and destroy, the Burmese people were not pro-Japanese; neither did they fully support the British. That most dangerous thing—apathy—prevailed. Those in the districts did not know what to think and what to do. All they knew was that they must make themselves safe from looters and dacoits and make the best of the existing circumstances.

The country has been devastated and the people ruined. The first thing to do after the war will be to rehabilitate the country and help the people to get back that peace and prosperity which all desire. One cannot yet visualize what the general trend of the world will be after the war, but Burma with its homogeneous population and its indigenous institutions of democracy will certainly be more than a mere Road, and will have a part of its own to play in the comity of nations.

By the time that further bombing and a second campaign has finished, Burma will be in sore need of material assistance and it is difficult to see how the nation can be rebuilt without the help of capital from outside. On the one hand, foreign investors and commercial undertakings will be chary of risking capital in Burma unless they can foresee a reasonably long period of stable government without the spectre of repudiation or of expropriation on Mexican lines, on the other hand Burmese national sentiment will demand closer control of foreign investments and enterprises in the national interest of the country and the fullest opportunity for local capital and enterprise to take part in Burma's commerce and industry. Burmans were gradually coming to realize that, under the 1935 constitution, they had much of the substance of political power but they were still resentful of the fact that they had so small a part in the economic life of their country.

In the sphere of administration, it is good to know that the Burmans and British of the Government of Burma, now in Simla, are tackling with energy the great problems of all sorts which the rehabilitation of Burma after the war will

involve. The catastrophe of war has at least broken many precedents and cast off many incubi. It has brought to many branches of administration the opportunity for a fresh start on lines more attuned to contemporary Burmese aspirations and for the employment of more modern and efficient methods. Perhaps after all some good will come out of the present tragedy: in the words of the Burmese proverb, *Myay oke myah pyo lay ya, kyauk oke hnint ti lay ant*, 'As the bricks have fallen down, let us build again in stone'.