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MARKS

VISIT TO THE KING OF
BURMAH AT MANDALAY,
IN OCTOBER, 1868





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A VISIT
TO THE
KING OF BURMAH
AT MANDALAY,

IN OCTOBER, 1868.

*WITH REMARKS ON THE PROSPECTS OF
CHRISTIANITY IN BURMAH.*

BY THE
REV. J. E. MARKS,
MISSIONARY OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL
AT RANGOON.

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BURMAH.

INTERVIEW WITH THE KING.

THE following important letter from the Rev. J. E. MARKS has just reached the Society. Never before was so good an opportunity offered to any Christian Church for the propagation of the Gospel in BURMAH as this which the Society is now invited to take. Some of our readers may remember the striking letter which the late Bishop of CALCUTTA wrote in October, 1862, urging on the Society the extension of Missions along the east side of India; which was followed in 1866 by an appeal on the subject from the *Missions Committee* and the *Standing Committee*. Since then, through the energy and zeal of Mr. MARKS and his fellow-labourers, the Missions of our Church have been gradually pushed forward beyond Rangoon and Moulmein, until they have now reached the capital of Burmah. In the present state of the Society's funds some special effort seems necessary if this advantageous post is to be secured to Christendom, and to be made a base for farther operations. Our Missions and schools are insufficiently manned, and we have no resident Bishop in Burmah.

“The British Residency, Mandalay, Upper Burmah,
20th October, 1868.

“It is now my duty and my pleasure to address you with regard to my Mission to the King of Burmah. My former letters have put you in possession of the first stages of this attempt, but I think it better that I should here briefly recapitulate them.

In 1863 I met, in Rangoon, the Thōnzay Mintha (prince), one of the sons of the King, who had fled from the capital. I gave him several Christian books in Burmese, and spoke to him about their contents. He became reconciled to the King, and, on his return to Mandalay, asked me to come and see him at the capital. He has several times since sent me kind messages, but, as you know, my

work and absence in Calcutta and England left me no leisure to visit the capital.

After the Bishop of Calcutta's visitation last year, the way seemed open to establish Mission schools and stations along the Irrawaddy ; and accordingly, in two Missionary journeys, schools were formed at Zelloon, Henzadah, Myan Oung, and Thyet Myo.

At this time I received several letters from Captain E. B. Sladen, the British political agent at the Court of the King of Burmah, telling me of conversations which his Majesty had had with him on the subject of Christianity, and his (Captain Sladen's) belief that a Mission of our Church in Mandalay would not only not be opposed, but would (under GOD) effect much good. One of these letters I forwarded to the Bishop of Calcutta, who directed me to proceed to Mandalay with the twofold purpose of ministering to the English residents, and endeavouring to pave the way for a Church Mission. I met in Rangoon Mr. J. S. Manook, an Armenian Burman, who is the King's Kulla Woon, or minister for foreigners. I told him of our wish to have an S.P.G. Mission in Mandalay, and he promised to lay the matter before the King. Shortly afterwards I received from him the letter, a copy of which I sent you, in which he said his Majesty the King of Burmah was pleased at our proposal to establish in Mandalay a Christian church and school for the benefit of his people, that he would give every possible assistance, and entrust the children of the officials to us for education. I showed this letter to the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Fytche (in 1865 a member of your Standing Committee), and I sent it to the Bishop. Both agreed that it was an opening of which the Society ought to avail itself, and that I should proceed to Mandalay, and there ascertain what could be done. Colonel Fytche furnished me with a letter to the King. It was, however, advised that I should not enter Mandalay until I had heard of the return to that city of Captain Sladen, who had been appointed to lead an exploring expedition to reopen the old trade route through Burmah to Western China.

Whilst waiting to hear of Captain Sladen's return, I received from the Governor-General in Council, on the application of Colonel Fytche, through the Bishop, an appointment as visiting minister of Henzadah, Myan Oung, Prome, &c.

Mr. Chard, of St. Augustine's College, having opportunely joined our Mission, I was enabled to leave Rangoon on my pastoral and Missionary tour. Accordingly I left on the 28th of August, accompanied by six of my best first-class boys from Rangoon.

We passed without stopping at Zelloon and Henzadah, and arrived at MYAN OUNG late on Sunday evening, the 30th. On the following

Schools.

day I examined your Mission-school, which is under the care of MOUNG BAH GLAY, one of my pupils from Moulmein and Rangoon, whom I baptized at the latter place last year. I had every reason to be pleased with the state of the school, helped and fostered as it has been by the kind interest and liberality of the Christian residents of the station. On the Wednesday evening we

had divine service in the Court House, and there was a large attendance. It was thought better that I should visit HENZADAH; so on the Saturday I left at eleven and arrived there at six. On Sunday I held service in the Sessions Court in the morning, and in the evening taught a large number of the Burmese boys. Our school there is doing remarkably well. I left Henzadah on the Monday, and arrived at three o'clock on Wednesday at MYAN OUNG. At half-past five we had divine service attended by nearly all the Christians at this happy little station. We left at three o'clock on the following morning, and on Friday arrived at PROME. On the Sunday we had early morning service, with sermon and Holy Communion, in the Government school house. In the afternoon I gave religious instruction to my own and other Burmese boys, and in the evening we again had service, with a very large congregation. I hope to be able to build a church at Prome, shortly. The steamer came in on the Monday, and I left at daylight on Tuesday, arriving at THYET MYO at two o'clock. At the wharf I was met by our teacher, Arthur Moungh Tsway (who was baptized by Rev. C. A. Berry, from our Rangoon school, in 1865), and twenty-seven of his pupils. I remained at Thyet Myo from the 15th to 30th of September, teaching our school there, and endeavouring, by my Sunday help, to repay in some measure the kindness of the station chaplain, the Rev. J. R. Ward, who has most energetically and successfully maintained our Mission-school in efficiency. Whilst I dreaded to think of its finances, he had managed, through the exceeding liberality of the good people of Thyet Myo, not only to keep it solvent, but also to keep a balance in hand.

We left Thyet Myo on the 1st of October, in the steamer *Lord William Bentinck*, which, with the flat *Prome* in tow, was crowded with Burmese passengers. I need not detail all the incidents of our voyage. I enjoyed it greatly, as I was going through a country which I had not visited before, and the scenery was beautiful and the weather pleasant.

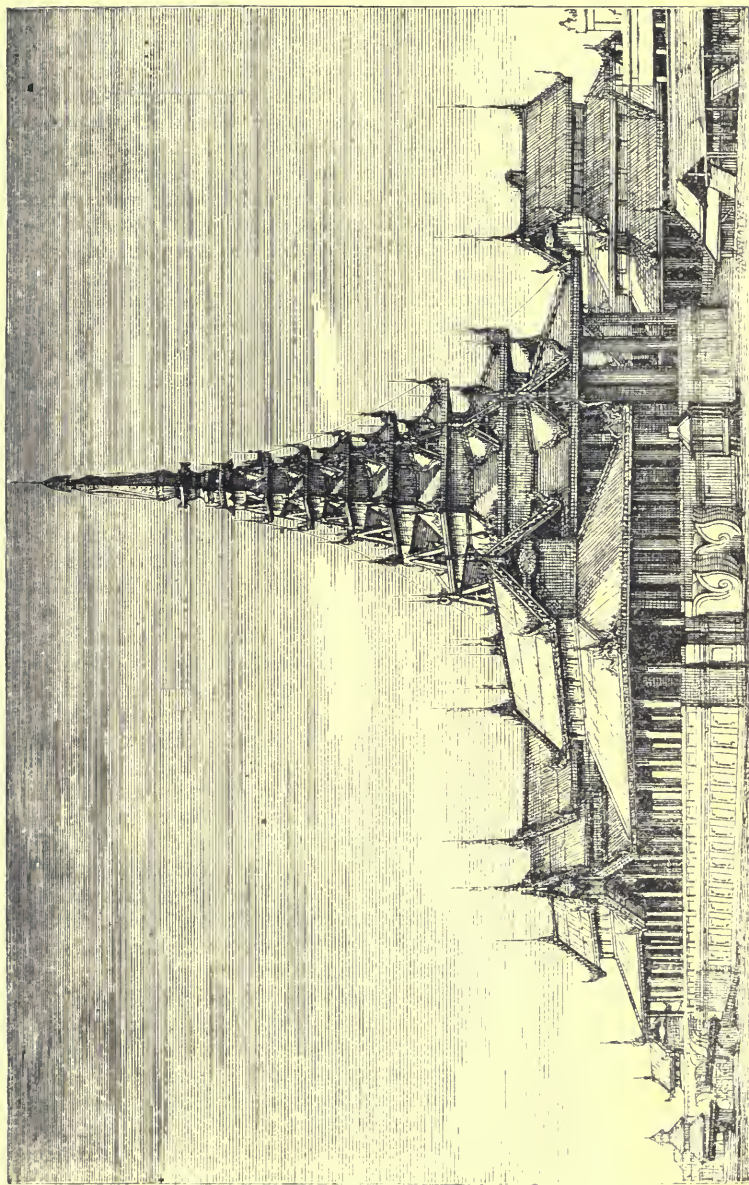
We passed Ava and Amerapoora, and reached the capital city of Mandalay on the 8th October, where we were most hospitably received by Captain Sladen, who had but recently returned from his expedition. On the following day the Kulla Woon came to tell me that the King had been very impatient about my coming; was very glad to hear of my arrival, and would appoint an early day for an audience. On Saturday I went out to see the city. It is large and well laid out, the streets wide and at right angles, but the houses mean and irregular. The city is inclosed by an embattled high brick wall, with several imposing gateways. Both wall and gate appear to be more for show than for use. The suburbs appear larger than the city. A hill on the N.E. is completely covered with Buddhist buildings and emblems. There are in Mandalay more than 20,000 yellow-robed Buddhist priests, &c. On Sunday we had English service at the Residency, but very few people attended, the notice having been imperfectly circulated.



VIEW OF THE CITY OF MANDALAY.

On Monday, October 11, we had our first interview with the King of Burmah. I went to the palace (which seems to occupy about one-eighth of the city, and is itself fortified by a stockade all round) with Captain Sladen and the Kulla Woon. The accompanying photographs will, better than any description which I can give, convey an idea of the King's palace. On reaching the steps we all had to take off our shoes, and then walk a considerable distance to the apartment in the garden where the King was receiving. We entered the room, in which were very many of the Burmese high officials and ministers seated on the floor. We too seated, or rather squatted ourselves down. In a few minutes the King came in attended by a little boy, one of his sons. The King is a tall, stout, thoroughly Burmese-looking man, about fifty-five years of age. He had on only one garment, the pulso or beautiful silk cloth covering from his waist to his feet. He reclined on a velvet carpet, near which the little prince placed the golden betel-box and water-cup, and then reverentially retired. As the King entered every Burman bowed his head to the ground and kept it there. His Majesty, according to his usual custom, took up a pair of binocular glasses, and had a good stare at us. He then asked if I was the English Poongyee? when did I arrive? how old was I? &c. &c. He then asked me what requests I had to make to him, assuring me that all were granted before I spoke. I said that I had four requests to make:—1. Permission to labour as a Missionary in Mandalay. 2. To build a church for Christian worship according to the use of the Church of England. 3. To get a piece of land for a cemetery. 4. To build, with his Majesty's help, a Christian school for Burmese boys. With regard to the first, the King said very courteously that he welcomed me to the royal city: that he had impatiently awaited my arrival, &c. &c. I was to choose, with Captain Sladen's advice, a piece of land for a cemetery. That with regard to the church and school his Majesty would *build them entirely at his own cost*. I told him that the Bishop of Calcutta had most liberally offered 100*l.* towards the church. The King replied, 'It is unnecessary, I will do all myself.' He directed me to prepare the plans, adding that the school was to be built for 1,000 boys. The King said that it was his wish to place some of his own sons under our care, and he sent for nine of the young princes, fine intelligent-looking lads of about ten years of age, and formally handed them over to me. He handed me a hundred gold pieces (worth 50*l.*) to buy books, &c. for the school. The King talked about his high regard for Captain Sladen, whose word he could so implicitly trust; of his desire to do all the good in his power, and especially to be friendly with the English. He asked me whether I would procure machinery for him from Europe. I said that, with every desire to oblige his Majesty, I must decline all commercial or political business; that my province was simply that of a religious teacher. The King was evidently pleased with my answer. The interview having lasted over two hours, his Majesty concluded by inviting my boys and self to break-

First
interview.



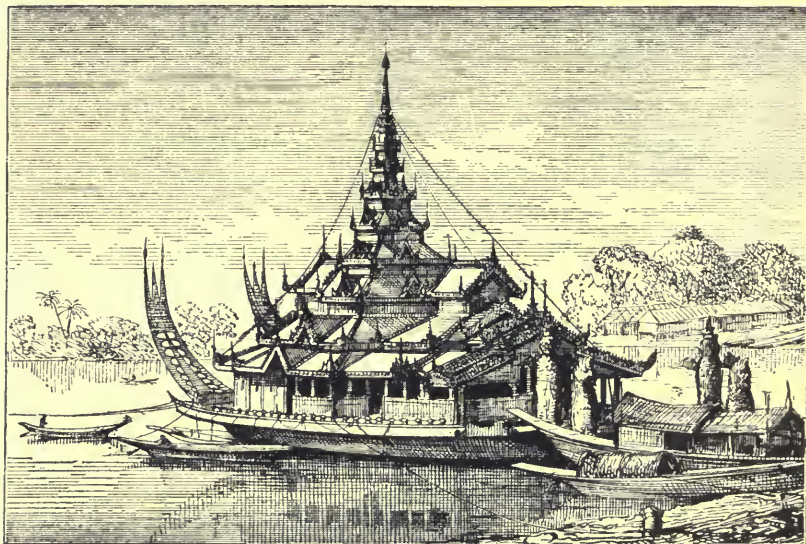
MANDALAY.—THE KING'S PALACE.

fast in the palace on the following day. He kindly accepted the presents of beautifully bound books which the Calcutta Committee had been good enough to forward to me for him.

Tuesday, 13th. Captain Sladen being too poorly to accompany us, my five boys (Moung Gye, Moung Hpo Too, Moung Bah Ohn, Moung Tsan Hlah Oung, and Moung Hpo Ming) went with me to the palace at nine o'clock. We travelled in covered bullock-carts, as it is considered very wrong for a poongyee to ride on horseback. We found the King in the Hman nan dor (or glass palace) attended by several of his queens and daughters. My boys prostrated themselves, as did the other Burmans, whilst I squatted down in a cramped position, being obliged to keep my feet out of sight. The King was seated on the highest of a flight of six steps. Second
Interview. He began by asking if I was comfortably housed and cared for. He reiterated his promises of yesterday, and expressed his hope that all would not be in vain. He made me tell him about each boy, and he addressed some kind words to them. I presented him with a pretty telescope, and the boys gave a lot of English toys to the young princes. In return the King gave two pussoes (silk cloths) valued at 3*l.* to each boy. I also presented to the Queen, through his Majesty, a box of beautiful needle and crotchet work made and presented by the Burmese girls in Miss Cooke's school. The King pulled out two or three pieces of work, but did not seem to know much about them. He tossed them to the ladies behind him, who evidently valued them highly. The King began to speak to the boys about religion. He told them that they should not lightly forsake their ancestors' creed. I interposed, when he laughingly said, 'Oh, Pone-dor-gyee' (high poongyee, the name he always gives me) 'I and you will talk about these matters alone by ourselves.' I replied, that I should be delighted to converse with his Majesty on those subjects which were of the highest moment to all mankind. The King said that he only wanted to guard the boys against being rash and foolish, or changing their religion to please men; that he was perfectly tolerant; that he had never invited a Mussulman, Hindoo, or Christian to become a Buddhist; but that he wished all to worship according to their own way. He told me to make what use I pleased of his steamers between Rangoon and Mandalay, and to grant passages to and fro to any boys whom I might wish to send. We were then conducted to another apartment, where a sumptuous breakfast was served to us in English style. My boys and I sat down to table, the Burman attendants wondering to see our lads freely using knives and forks instead of the orthodox fingers in eating. Suddenly my boys and all slipped off their chairs on to the ground, and when I looked up to see the cause, I found that one of the elder princes, a lad of about seventeen, had entered, having been deputed by his father to see that all was right. More than thirty different kinds of sweetmeats, all made by the Queen's own hands, were offered to us. After breakfast we were conducted by one of the woons or governors over the royal gardens, which are unlike what are

generally known as gardens elsewhere. There were very few flowers, but a number of shrubs and young trees, planted in no order as far as I could discover. The place is neatly kept, and is divided into two parts by a canal of stagnant water.

I went again to the palace by appointment, with my boys, yesterday morning, to take the plans for the school and teacher's residence. I send you a rough copy of the plan for the school; that for the teachers' houses is in the same style, but smaller. The King was in the same part of the palace—the Hman nan dor. He approved of the



MANDALAY.—THE KING'S BARGE, OR WATER PALACE.

plan with one exception, viz. that the school must not have a triple roof, such being only for princes and poongyees. My house is to be so honoured. The King's minister for Public Works was called into the presence, and ordered at once to commence the work, and to use all expedition in its completion. The King gave me 100/.

Plans for
building.

towards school furniture. I told him that I would procure a plan in Rangoon for the church. He repeated that it would trouble him very much if no English poongyee came to Mandalay. I assured him that his liberality would not so be despised, but that I really would myself return and open the school. After some further general conversation the King spoke to the boys, and especially to one Arracanese boy whom I adopted in 1863. He repeated what he had said before about not forgetting the religion of his ancestors. I said that the boy's ancestors had not heard the good news which I taught him. The King took no notice of what

I said, but continued to the boy, 'Always remember the Yittānah thōn bah (the three objects of devotion), the Pāyah' (deity), Tāyah' (law), and Thingah (clergy).' I said, 'Christianity teaches us to worship the everlasting God, to obey His law, and to receive instruction from the clergy.' The King seemed annoyed for a time, and then repeated, in his usual good-humoured manner, 'I cannot talk with you about religion in public; we will talk about it privately on your return.' He added, 'Do not think me an enemy to your religion. If I had been I should not have called you to my royal city. If when you have taught people they enter into your belief, they have my full permission;' and then, speaking very earnestly, 'If my own sons, under your instruction, wish to become Christians I will let them do so. I will not be angry with them.' I could not help thinking at that moment of poor Judson and his associates in 1823-24. What a wonderful change has come over the land since that time! May it not be that God is even now answering the fervent prayer of those devoted men in the time of their greatest peril, 'O Lord, open the eyes of the King of Burmah?' He was brought up as a priest or poongyee; is learned and devout as a Buddhist. But he has not yet found peace. He is now earnestly seeking to acquire merit by the performance of good deeds. He has asked me to be his almoner; to send his bounty to my brother at Ceylon (the sacred island of Buddhism), and to other places. The Kulla Woon told the King that on the previous day (Sunday) he had been present at our service, and had heard me pray for his Majesty and the royal family. The King was much interested, and told me that he had ninety children. I gave him a copy of our Prayer-book in Burmese. He read aloud the 'Confession,' and then read two or three pages silently. He said that he would study it attentively.

Toleration.

I have now told you, at greater length than I fear you will care to read, the result of my mission to this country. I have now to ask for help to carry out this work, whose commencement God has so blessed. I return to British Burmah (D.V.) in about a week, on my way to Rangoon, having to start three new schools—viz. at Shway-doung, near Prome; at Kyangyin, a town of 10,000 people near Myan Oung; and at Yandoon, a very large town on the junction of the Panhline, or Panlang river, with the Irrawaddy. I wish to be in Rangoon early in December so as to liberate Mr. Warren, who goes up to Calcutta for ordination.

New schools.

I have written to the Bishop of Calcutta to ask you to send out a clergyman, ordained before he leaves England, who, after a brief stay at Rangoon, would come up here and relieve me. His salary here should be 300*l.* per annum (Rs. 250 per mensem)—of which I believe the English Government would pay Rs. 100 a month for his services to the English residents. With the Bishop's permission, I shall come back here and commence work as soon as Mr. Warren returns to Rangoon. But very earnestly do I ask your help. A great door and effectual is opened unto us, and God in His providence has called us to work for Him. There will

Clergyman asked for.

be no expense except the Missionary's salary, and more than one-third of that will be paid here.

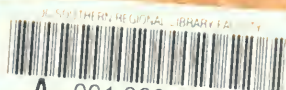
The opening up of the old trade route to Western China *viâ* Bhamo will give increased importance to Mandalay. Captain Sladen's most successful expedition will doubtless produce great results, and as these long dormant nations seem rising into new life and into contact with the Western World, so let us avail ourselves of the opening which GOD has made for us, and hold up the light of our Christianity to those who have so long been enthralled in the gloom of Buddhism, the religion which is 'without hope, without GOD in the world.'

The plan for our church I will try to procure in Rangoon or Calcutta. It will be built of wood, but will, I hope, be a handsome structure. I look for gifts. It may be that some of those kind friends at home whom I met in 1865 may be inclined to help me in furnishing our church—for I can hardly allow the King to do more than the building. For the altar and altar-cloths, communion-plate, font, harmonium, &c, I must appeal to Christian liberality, and I hope that I shall not ask in vain.

I have now only to apologize for this long letter, and most earnestly again to urge this new Mission on your immediate attention."



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