

MISCELLANIES.

BERMAH:—its situation, extent, population, productions and trade; manners and customs of the people; their language,—and those of the Peguans and Karens, education, books, &c. By BENEVOLENS.

The situation in which I have been placed a few years back, has put some facts in my possession, a communication of which will, I trust, throw light on the geography, language and mythology of Burmah, and the progress of Christianity in that empire. In my remarks, I propose to make reference to the Encyclopædia Americana, which contains some of the most recent information I have seen regarding the country. I blame not the writers of the articles to which I shall refer, for their incorrectness, for they seem generally to have consulted the best authorities they could obtain.

In consequence of the reduction of large portions of territory to British sway, the empire now extends only from 15° 30' to 25° 30' north latitude, and from 94° to 98° 30' east longitude from Greenwich; consequently its length cannot be more than 600, nor its greatest breadth so much as 300 miles. These have been its dimensions since 1825.

The population is a subject attended with much difficulty, as there is no census or register kept, by which it can be ascertained with much accuracy. Symes, in 1795, estimated the inhabitants at 17,000,000; Cox, in 1800, at 18,000,000; Canning, in 1810, thought this estimate too high. Others have estimated it at 12 and at 4 millions. Some suppose that the population found on the banks of the rivers, should be regarded as a fair representation of the populousness of the country generally, and others that nearly all the inhabitants are congregated on the rivers. I have made many inquiries of natives who have traversed the country, and they uniformly testify that the people living in the interior exceed those residing on the banks of the rivers. If so, and I doubt not that it is, they have been both over and under estimated. A gentleman who has spent twenty years in the country, and been more extensively conversant with the people than any other foreigner ever was, estimates them at 10,000,000. These estimates, however, were designed to include not only the inhabitants of the Burman empire, in its present extent, but as it was in 1823, including Arracan and the provinces on the east of the Salwen, since ceded to the English. Arracan is known to be more populous than the other provinces. An attempt was made a few years ago, to take a register of the inhabitants in the Tenasserim province, but their confidence not having been fully secured, they were apprehensive of some sinister design, and fled from their villages to the jungles *en masse*. The most probable estimate of the population, and that indeed very indefinite, would be from 8 millions to 12 millions for the Burman empire.

Concerning the *productions and trade*, the language of the Encyclopædia is: "In the northern part it is mountainous, and abounds in gold, silver, precious stones, and marble; also in iron, lead, tin, antimony, arsenic, sulphur and petroleum, which issues from the earth in abundance. In the southern districts, owing to the numerous rivers, the soil is marshy and extremely productive. Here grow rice, sugar cane, fine tobacco, cotton, indigo, and all the tropical fruits. Land is cheap." This last statement deserves a passing remark. All the land of the empire is regarded as the property of the king, and no portion, however small, can be held by any other person in fee simple. The privilege of occupying a certain portion of land is usually sought from some officer of government, and though granted, may be withdrawn at the officer's pleasure. A present of course, must accompany any such application for ground, which may be regarded as rent. The privilege of occupying such ground may be transferred, but the ground cannot be bought or sold. In the British provinces, the land all belongs to the E. I. company, and the occupation of it is granted by their officers as agents, but it is not sold.

The extracts proceed; "timber for ship building, especially teak, *Tectona grandis*, which grows most luxuriant in a wet soil, on the banks of rivers, is abundant. The price of labor is high. All but the lowest lands produce grain, or serve for pasture. Of manufactured goods, Burmah exports cotton and silk stuffs, glass, saltpeter, powder, porcelain and marble images of Gaudama, to which the workmen in stone give an exquisite smoothness. The East India company builds vessels even of 1000 tons burthen in the Burman docks; and the shipwrights there, (giants in comparison with the puny Hindoos,) find constant employment." Specimens of glass or porcelain, manufactured by Burmans, here mentioned as exports, I have never seen, or previously heard of. They import considerable glass, and a great deal of coarse Chinese porcelain. If the East India company ever built ships in Burmah, it has ceased to do so for many years. Some English merchants have built a few, but not recently. The Irrawady is said to extend "1200 miles into the interior." From this we must deduct, at least, one-third.

A single remark concerning the currency of the country will suffice. Instead of coin, silver and lead in bars are used, and their purity is strictly tested in trade. The forging and stamping of these bars forms a separate branch of business. These are still used to a limited extent; but at Rangoon, and even at Ava, the Madras currency is very general.

"The Burmans are skillful weavers, smiths, sculptors, workers in gold and silver, joiners, &c." Their skill as silk weavers cannot be questioned. In gilding too they excel; but in nearly all the other mechanical arts, are extremely rude. In such a large population, doubtless, a few persons may be found, who, possessed of peculiar natural ingenuity, may be deemed skillful, but I speak of the general body of artizans.

"Meudagee removed the royal residence to the new city of Ummerapooa (190 leagues east of Calcutta,) on a tongue of land which runs up into the lake of Tounzemah. Ava, once so magnificent a city, about four or five miles distant, now lies in ruins." The present king again changed the royal residence, and while Ava has been built with more than ordinary magnificence, Amperpooa is utterly desolate. Rangoon is mentioned as an "important trading city," and it is added, "many Europeans reside there." If three or four, at most, can be called many, this is true; not otherwise. Rangoon is however a place of second, if not of first importance, as being the seat of all foreign trade. The trade is principally with Calcutta, Maulmein, and Penang.

In regard to *manners and customs* of the people a few particulars may be noticed. "The Burmans are all fond of painting both their faces and hands. They slaughter no tame animals, and live simply; and for the most part, on vegetables." It is a very unusual thing to see a Burman with either hands or face painted. The men are usually tattooed upon the body and legs, the women frequently besmear themselves and their children with turmeric, or white clay, and other substances, which they regard as greatly conducive to beauty. The other remark is generally true; but it often happens among the wealthy, that though they will not violate the precepts of their religion by killing "tame animals" themselves, they keep Mussulman servants to perform the office for them, and when an animal is once dead, no Burman scruples to eat his flesh. Hence domestic animals that die of themselves are frequently eaten. "The chief amusement of the Burmans is their theatre, where declamation, dancing and music alternate; the higher classes are fond of dramatic spectacles. The new year is celebrated with all sorts of purification. At this time, young women appear in public with water, and sprinkle every one they please; it is considered improper to sprinkle females first." They are also fond of horse-racing, boat-racing, cock-fighting, &c. Throwing spears at a mark is a favorite sport at certain periods of the year. It is very common for persons of all ranks to spend half the night at chess, and other games.

"Among the Burmans, the distinguished dead are burned; the poor are interred; the richest are embalmed, commonly in the ancient simple mode in honey." The practice of embalming the priests is almost universal. They are usually preserved in the way above mentioned many months, and then burned with great ceremony. The death of any important character, and often of ordinary ones, is signalized by music continued at intervals, day and night, for three or four days; then a feast is made for relatives and friends. They have funeral processions, which are sometimes very becoming, but often irregular and trifling.

The Burman *language* is spoken to a greater or less extent, and with more or less purity not only throughout the whole of the Burman empire as it was in 1823, but also at Penang, Bangkok and various places in Siam and the Laos country. In different places

there are slight variations in dialect, but in all, the written languages and books are the same. Thus in Arracan, beside the use of a few peculiar words, there is a greater roughness of pronunciation than in most other places, owing to the different power they assign to the character (2) *rah-gauk*. The people of Ava, Rangoon, &c. pronounce it like our *y*: while the Arracanese give it the full rolling sound of an Irish *r*. While the former almost invariably say *Yan-goon*, the latter speak more conformably to the English orthography, *Rangoon*. In Tavoy, and among those who come from thence, the variations from the colloquial dialect of Ava, are greater than at any other place. Still, the same books are taught in their schools, as in other places, and are understood.

The Burman alphabet consists of 10 vowels, and 32 consonants. The general form of the letters is circular, every letter is composed of one or more circles. The vowels are expressed by symbols before and after, above and below, the consonants. The various combinations which are made by these are classified in a regular manner and constitute what they denominate a *them-bong-gyee*; this is their spelling book. All of these combinations, amounting to some thousands, must in their mode of education, be thoroughly committed to memory before the least attempt is made to read. Besides the words formed by the simple combination of consonants with one or more vowels, most of them are capable of expressing a different meaning according as they are pronounced with a different stress, or quantity of voice. To indicate these, they have appropriate marks. A *shay-pouk* (2) placed after any combination, denotes a grave and heavy stress; *ammyect* (.) placed underneath, requires a light and quick pronunciation, and where these do not occur, a natural tone is implied.

Hence, *san*, (natural) to go up a river;

san (heavy and protracted) to differ, vary;

san, (quick and light) to stretch out straight.

As the language is fundamentally monosyllabic, the Burmans are accustomed to unite two words, whose meanings are closely allied, to express a single idea; sometimes six or eight are strung together. As many words have two, three and even ten significations with the same orthography, this manner of connecting words is of important service in removing ambiguity. The verbs are very numerous, but the nouns are not so, especially those expressive of science or mental affections. This defect however is in a great measure supplied by the privilege of drawing from the Pali such as are wanted; and all verbs may be made nouns by the annexation of a substantive affix.

The numerous noun, verbal, and adjective affixes, give great precision to the language. By these are indicated the regimen of nouns and verbs, the number, relations, and often the form of objects, and the time of actions are expressed very exactly. Where number is spoken of, if reference is had to an object having a specific form, an affix is added to the numeral to indicate that form; thus *long*, *round*, is applied to all things globular, as eggs, eyes, fruit, &c.

bya?, is thus applied to things flat, as paper, boards, mats, &c. Nouns and verbs are also qualified by affixes which indicate the rank both of the speaker and auditor. Pronouns too, indicate the same. Different words are, moreover, used to denote the same acts when performed by priests or sacred characters. Thus, the boiled rice of the common people is called *ta-men*; of the priests, *soone*. The common word for eating is *tsak*; but, if priests are spoken of, it is *pong-bay*. Although these modifications of the language make it very precise, they greatly increase the difficulty of acquiring it, and still more so that of writing it with accuracy.

The construction of sentences resembles the Latin, in that the accusative always precedes the verb by which it is governed: but it is also marked by long periods, and great involution and thus seems more like the German. In translating a regularly constructed sentence from our language into Burman, the order would be almost entirely inverted.

Though many other languages are spoken in Burmah, this is the one in which all judicial business is transacted, and the records of the high court are kept. In regard to these other languages, it may not be improper here to make a few remarks.

The most important is the *Peguan*, called *Talieng* by the Burmans, but among the Siamese, *Mawn*, by the Peguans themselves, *Mone*. Though the alphabet of this language is the same as the Burman, with the exception of two additional consonants, the power of the letters vary exceedingly, and the whole structure of the language is widely diverse. The Peguan abounds in gutturals from which the Burman is free; and the words in a sentence follow more closely the English idiom. The various representations made of it by classifiers of languages, are exceedingly incongruous as the language has never yet been learned by any European so fully as to justify them in speaking of it so freely as they have done.* The writer studied it a few months, and compiled a small vocabulary of three or four thousand words. He regrets extremely that his circumstances prevent further attention to it, for the present, but hopes at some future day, if a merciful Providence bestow life and health, to resume it. This is an original language, much older than the Burman, abounding in works of history, religion, and romance. It was formerly spoken in all that portion of territory between Frome and the Malay country. It has been a favorite object of the Burmans, since their conquest of Pegu, to obliterate the language, and, it is consequently, *not generally* taught in the *Kyongs* (priests' houses) under the Burman government, but is spoken in Peguan families all over the southern and eastern part of the country, and is taught at Martaban, Maulmein, Amherst, Ya, and among many thousands in Siam. Many Karens understand it sufficiently for all purposes of business. The gospel of Matthew, John's epistles, and several tracts have been translated

* The alphabets given by Mr. Crawford and Capt. Low are so uncouth that a native would scarcely recognize half of them.

from the Burman into it by *Ko Man-poke*, a learned Talieng and Burman scholar. One tract has been printed. The number of this people and their character loudly call for more efficient efforts to spread the knowledge of Christianity among them.

The Karens are a simple people, scattered over all the Burman territories, but are most numerous on the mountains which separate Burmah from Siam. Till very lately, their language was never written. Recently, it has been acquired by Messrs. Wade and Mason, and reduced to writing. So far as the Burman and Talieng alphabets are adapted to express it, they have been employed, and but few additional characters are required. This furnishes important facilities in regard to printing, as the Burman types will, with trifling modifications, print the three languages.

It is amusing to a Burman scholar to read what has been gravely written and published, in regard to the *Ruk'heng*.* The propriety of calling the language spoken at Penang, the Malay, and that at Singapore, the Singapore, would be equally as manifest as the propriety of distinguishing the language used in Arracan from the Burman used elsewhere. There is only a slight variation in pronunciation, and perhaps, a few provincial phrases, but it might as well be said that the Scotch do not speak English, as that the Arracanese do not speak, read, and write Burman. Other languages are spoken in Burmah by foreigners to a considerable extent, as Hindostanee, Chinese, &c., but they claim no special regard here.

"Every Burman," says the *Encyclopedia Americana*, "learns arithmetic, reading and writing." This is generally true of the men, and yet there are many thousands who are utterly ignorant of either, and so are three-fourths, if not nine-tenths of the women. The arithmetic which most learn, is rather a series of tables made ready for them, than any ability to calculate for themselves. Their writing is taught with their reading, and both are learned at the same time. "It is common for court ladies to cultivate literature, and many in the humbler spheres of life are found not inattentive to the advantages of education. The monasteries are freely open for the admission of male pupils, in which, under the gratuitous instruction of the priests, they learn to read and write, on a plan, fundamentally the same as that denominated the Lancasterian. * * * There is no such thing known as a classical education; no definite period of time, or course of study, is ever contemplated by the pupil, as the term and the object of his application."

In common writing, the Burmans use a thick paper, blackened with charcoal, and a pencil of soft stone. Royal and court orders are written upon a long palm leaf, with an iron style cut to a point at each end. Books likewise are written in the same manner upon palmyra leaf, and when finished, the edges are trimmed and sometimes beautifully gilt. The writing is made legible by rubbing the leaf with oil. Works in prose as well as poetry, are read,

* *Ruk'heng* is the same as *Arracan*, and though not exactly expressive of the Burman pronunciation, is more nearly so than *Arracan*.

some being works of fiction, and others of a religious character; of the latter kind, the *Dzat* and *Wootto*, or those books which illustrate the influence of merit and demerit, are the most extensively read. Few individuals have the means or the opportunity of collecting private libraries.

The Pali or Magadhi is, with slight modifications, the sacred or religious language of all Buddhist nations. Various facts and authorities lead to the supposition that it is the same as the Sanscrit, except those changes which have been made to create a greater correspondence with the vernacular dialects. For example, the Pali of Burmah, Pegu, and Siam, are all substantially the same, but the orthography differs.

Thus, in Burman Pali, *tha-tha-nah*, religion;
 Siamese do. *sah-sa-nah*, ditto.
 Burman do. *thee-la*, religious law;
 Siamese do. *see-la*, ditto.

The Siamese have no letter equivalent to *th*, and cannot utter that sound; hence the *s* sound is uniformly substituted for it.

"The form of the Pali characters among the Burmans is quadrangular," says the Encyclopædia. "This quadrangular character may be found in the libraries of the priests and rulers, but is very unusual. The common circular Burman character is almost universal. A thorough knowledge of Pali is very seldom acquired, except by the most talented of the priesthood. A smattering of it is however very common. Again the work above-quoted says:

"The literary Burmans translate from the English all important works of science, particularly on astronomy and law." No Burman ever yet had sufficient knowledge of the English language to translate the simplest work from it, much less any on science. No European work has been translated into their language except by foreigners. A dictionary, compiled principally by Rev. A. Judson, with various additions not always correct, by Rev. J. Colman and Rev. Felix Carey, was published at Calcutta in 1826 under the supervision of Rev. J. Wade, and although confessedly incomplete, is exceedingly valuable. Mr. Carey published a small grammar many years ago which is now entirely out of print. One has also been compiled by Mr. Judson, and considerably enlarged and illustrated by other missionaries. It is still in manuscript, owing to the constant demand on the press for religious works. The way is now open for an easy acquisition of the language. I reserve an account of translations to a subsequent communication.

ENGLAND AND AMERICA FOR THE WORLD. The following is an extract from a letter dated London, May 23d, 1833, addressed to an English gentleman in China. Alluding to the correspondence of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the writer says:

"We have observed with much pleasure what you have said respecting the Americans wishing to print Chinese (versions of the)