

SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 2005, ISSN 1479-8484

Editor's Note:

The following account, written by the surgeon, William Hunter, relates his experiences in Pegu in 1782-1783. The observations were made on a voyage that had been ordered by the British East India Company. The account was originally printed at Calcutta in 1785 by John Hay under the title of *A Concise Account of the Kingdom of Pegu; Its Climate, Produce, Trade, and Government; The Manners and Customs of its Inhabitants. Interspersed with remarks Moral and Political*. The additional appendices, one on "An Enquiry into the cause of the variety observable in the fleeces of sheep, in different climates," and "A Description of the Caves at Elephanta, Ambola, and Canara" are unrelated to Burma and are thus not included in the text below.

M. W. C.

A CONCISE ACCOUNT OF THE KINGDOM OF PEGU

William Hunter

Preface

As the subject of the following pages was begun to be digested two years ago; and some changes in the state of the country which they describe, have, since that time, come to the author's knowledge; the reader will observe a few anachronisms, which it would have been difficult, and perhaps, not very material, to guard against. Indeed, to delineate exactly the present state of a country where revolutions are so frequent, and so sudden, as they are in Pegu, is next to impossible. Suffice it, then, to remark, that what is contained in the sequel relates to the state of affairs as they were in August and September 1782, except where the contrary is expressly mentioned.

Introduction

The country we are about to describe is one of those which we have but a

superficial knowledge of; and the reason is that it is very little frequented by Europeans. The three great motives that have, hitherto, led us to form a more intimate acquaintance with the remoter regions of the globe, have been, the rage of conquest, zeal for propagating religion and the spirit of commerce. Pegu has never become the object of the first, with any European power; and, though a few Missionaries may have been sent there, for the purposes of the second, they never were able to gain such a footing as to be able to give us a distinct account of the country, or of its inhabitants. Besides, even when they had an opportunity of knowing the truth, a prejudice in favour of that religion whose interest they came to promote, and a desire to render the professors of every other as odious as possible, has led them into frequent misrepresentations. Lastly, the trade to Pegu has never been esteemed a national concern; it has been, always, very limited, and carried on by a few private adventurers; who were, in general, such as had not a capital sufficient to begin any other branch of commerce. Any man, who could find money enough to purchase a small vessel, on the Coast of Coromandel, might, by carrying a little tobacco, some blue cloth, and a few iron nails, to the island of Carnicobar, get, in exchange for those articles, which had cost him almost nothing, a ship-load of cocoa-nuts; for these, he could procure at Pegu, a cargo of wood, which he afterwards sold, to great advantage, either on the Coast, or in Bengal.

That the commerce of Pegu has not yet become an object of greater attention, will, I hope, appear, from the following pages not to be owing, so much to its wane of importance, as to other accidental circumstances; and I do not despair of convincing the impartial reader, that it is both worth our while, and practicable in itself, to remove these obstacles, and from putting our intercourse with Pegu on a more respectable footing, and extending it on a larger scale, to derive great national advantage.

Viewed in this light, the information we have been able to collect, with regard to this country, is a matter of some importance to the politician; but, differently considered, the philosopher may, perhaps, find something in it not unworthy of his attention, as furnishing materials for completing the history of human kind. Since an emulation arose, among the nations of Europe, for making discoveries in countries before unknown, this most noble of all sciences, as well as almost every other, has received great improvements. The moral philosopher has been furnished, by those uncultivated nations, with facts, which he would have looked for in vain among people whose minds have been made, by habitual intercourse, to deviate from their natural bent, and conform themselves to the artificial rules, prescribed by custom.

It is curious, and a pleasing task to trace a resemblance between some of the customs that prevail in those remote and uncivilized countries, and those of nations to whose manners we have been more habituate, and it is, also, a task, from the prosecution of which we may derive no contemptible improvement. There are

many things established by custom, nay, in some instances, stamped with the sanction of law, and practised every day, among us, which, in the eye of an impartial observer, are unreasonable and absurd: having been accustomed; from our infancy to see them, we become totally insensible of their impropriety; yet, place before our eyes the practice of a distant, and barbarous people, which agrees with our own in every essential point, and only varies in a few inconsiderable circumstances, the absurdity strikes our sense at once, and is thence reflected on that custom of our own which we had formerly looked on without any disapprobation. It is also in the history of those nations where society is yet in its infancy, that we must look for the natural and undisguised operation of the human passions; for, in vain should we expect to find the genuine effect of those emotions in a race of men among whom refinement has introduced a studied uniformity of conduct, on all occasions.

Having thus endeavoured to show that his subject is not altogether void of importance, the author hopes it will not be deemed impertinent to add a few words which the subsequent relation is collected. And, first, a great many of the facts he learnt by actual observations; having been in July 1782, on a passage, from Bengal, on the service of the Hon. East India Company (to join the Detachment in the Carnatic), on board a ship (the *Success Galley*) which was totally dismasted, and obliged to put into the river Syriam, to refit; and secondly, he was informed of others, by conversation, both with the natives, who are very communicative, and many of them, speak the language of Hindostan, and with foreigners, of different nations, who have been settled in that country, for many years. From the short time he resided there, his information, with respect to many circumstances, was, unavoidably, imperfect; but, where this was the case, he has always frankly confessed his ignorance, and never ventured to assert, as a fact, any thing which he was not, either, an eye-witness of, or informed about, on enquiry, from the most unquestionable authority. He hopes that his having communicated the little information he has been able to collect, will induce some person, who has had better opportunities of being informed, to give to the world, a more complete account of the matter; and, in the mean time, he will lie under the greatest obligations to any Gentleman, whose observation has been more accurate, or more extensive, than his own, if he will condescend to correct him where he has erred; or communicate any certain information, with respect to those points, where the author has been able to give nothing better than doubt, or conjecture.

Chapter I

Situation and extent of Pegu; A Short account of the Revolutions in its Government; Description of the Capital; of the Coast; Face of the Country; Climate

Pegu is a kingdom of the farther India, situated on the E. side of the Bay of Bengal, between the 15th & 24th degrees of N. Lat. It is bounded on the west and south-west, by the sea; on the south-east, by the kingdom of Siam; on the north, by that range of mountains which bounds the empire of China to the south-west; and on the north-west, by the kingdom of Ava. Its extreme length is, from S. by W. to N. by E. about six hundred miles; and its greatest breadth, about three-hundred and fifty miles. These, at least, are the limits described by the generality of Geographers, and represented in our maps; but, I must be confessed, that the boundaries of this country, except on the sea-coast, where it has been frequented by navigators, have never been ascertained with any tolerable degree of accuracy.

This country was formerly subject to a prince of its own, who did not acknowledge a dependence on any other power, but about forty years ago, there happened a great revolution, by which, this once powerful kingdom was reduced to the state in which it now remains, that is to say, nothing more than a province of the kingdom of Ava, governed by deputies sent from thence, who may be removed at the pleasure of their sovereign. The particulars of their revolution I have not been able to learn; only, there was once remarkable circumstance attending it, which it is worth while to mention, as it gives us a higher idea of those people's abilities, in the art of war, than we should, otherwise, be disposed to entertain. At the time, when the people of Ava, after having defeated the Pegu army, penetrated to the capital, there was a French frigate lying in the harbour. The Commander and his crew took some steps to oppose the invaders, but without effect; the city was taken, and all who made any resistance were put to the sword. The victors next turned their arms against the ship. Those haughty Europeans, secure within their wooden wall, and trusting to the dormant thunder that lay behind it, thought all the power of Ava unable to hurt them; how great, then, must have been their surprise, to behold innumerable boats; filled with armed men, who, not in the least deterred by seeing many of their companions sunk, and their boats dashed to pieces, persisted in their attempt, surrounded, and boarded them on all sides! The officers were put to death without mercy, and the others condemned to perpetual slavery. Some of them remain there at this day. However, we shall lower our ideas about the military prowess of the troops of Ava, if we give credit to another account which is given of this affair, and which indeed appears to me the more probable one of the two. They say, that a great number of firerafts were sent down the stream; that the ship, to

avoid them, was obliged to get under way; that she soon after ran aground, was boarded in the confusion, and so became an easy prey. However this may be, the people of Ava made this country their own by right of conquest; and the first use they made of that right, was to remove the capital from the spot where it stood, on one branch of the river Syriam, to another branch of the same river. The old metropolis had the same name with the river on which it stood; the new one got that of Rangoon, which it retains to this day, It consists of two parts, the one of which is enclosed by a high stockade, and furnished with gates; but without a wall, or any place where guns can be mounted, and this is called the fort. The other part extends a considerable way down the river, and is entirely open. The houses are all constructed of wood, and raised on pretty high pillars, which is a necessary precaution, as the flowing of the tide lays most of the town under water. The streets are not paved; and are only passable by means of a plank, which is laid along from one end to the other, so, that when two persons meet, one of them is often obliged to step into the mire.

The whole country is low, and the land can only be seen at a very small distance from sea. Add to this, that the water is shallow, a great way off from the Coast, so that one gets into three or four fathoms, before one is within sight of land. Thus a person who is unacquainted, is much at a loss, and a circumstance which, unless he is aware of it, will encrease his confusion, is this, that the chart published in our English directory, in even the latest editions, lay down the entrance of the river twelve miles too much to the southward. Hence it comes, that, after a man has got into the latitude of the place, by the chart, he is surprised to find no land within the reach of his eye. This error is rectified in a new chart of Pegu, which is inserted in the last edition of the French *Neptune Oriental*. The tides, near the bar, at the new and full Moon, rise about twenty feet perpendicular, and their flow is amazingly rapid. When the *Success Galley* came out of the river Syriam, in September 1782, she gradually shoaled her water, 'till the man at the lead called out *two fathoms and one foot*, which was less, by two feet, than the draught of the ship; She was, consequently, aground, but the mud is so soft here, that it gives no resistance for a fathom under its surface. She deepened, by degrees, into three fathoms, when an anchor was let go; and, the flood coming in, the ater rose, in a very short time, to six fathoms and a quarter.

From what has been said concerning the situation of this country; and, still more, from the prospect one has, in going up the river, which is lined on both sides, with thickets and marshed; one is naturally led to suppose, that it must be very unhealthy; and yet, there are the strongest reasons to believe, that the person who should suppose so would form a most erroneous judgment. The natives are, perhaps the most robust and muscular race of men that we meet with any where in India; they are seldom attacked by diseases; and, what is still more to the purpose, Europeans, who have lived here many years, enjoy an uninterrupted good health. A

person that has resided, even for a short time, in Pegu, would also join the testimony of his own sensations to all these other proofs of its salubrity. Even during the rains, which all over India make the most disagreeable and sickly time of the year, the air, in this place, is temperate, and has an elasticity, unknown at the corresponding season, in any other part; which gives vigour to the whole animal system, and enables it to support a great deal of fatigue. Perhaps the rapid motion of the times may account, in some measure, for this unexpected healthiness of the climate; at least, I know of no other cause to which it can be ascribed.

Since the above account was written, a ship arrived at Coringa, from Rangoon, brings accounts of another revolution having taken place there; antient Peguers have risen against the Birmah Government and expelled them from the place. The town is said to have been almost totally burned down, in this commotion, which thought to have happened between the 5th and 15th of September, 1783. This is not the first attempt the Peguers have made to reciver their independence, but they were never so successful before. There can be no doubt that the king of Ava will endeavour, with his whole force, to bring them again under subjection, and what the result of the contest may be, time only can determine. In the mean time, it may deserve the consideration of Politicians, how far it may be for the honor, or the interest, of an European power, to interfere in the dispute.

By later information. I find that the Peguers only kept possession of Rangoon for three days; the Birmahs having, at the end of that time, reduced them, and recovered their authority.

Chapter II

Description of the Inhabitants; their Persons; a remarkable Badge worn by the Birmahs; Dress; Manners and Disposition; Military Character

The inhabitants, as I have observed, are of a muscular make; their stature is about the middle size, and their limbs, in general, well proportioned. Their complexion is swarthy, being a medium between that of the Chinese and of the Inhabitants of Bengal. In feature they resemble the Malays; their face is broad; the eyes, large and black; the nose, flat; the cheek-bones, prominent; and the mouth, extremely wide. They wear, on the chin, a tuft of hair, of unequal lengths; and shave the rest of the face. Their teeth are always of a jet-black, which is, however disgusting it may be to an European-eye, is, among them, esteemed a great ornament; and accordingly, they are at very great pains to accomplish it. I could not learn at Pegu the method

of dying the teeth practiced there.¹

They wear various ornaments in their ears, many of them in common with other eastern nation; but one that appears to be peculiar to this people, is a thin plate of gold, rolled up in the form of a quill, about the thickness of a finger, which is thrust into a hole made in the usual part of the ear, large enough to receive it. The foregoing description is chiefly applicable to the Birmahs, that is, the natives of Ava, or their descendants, who are now very numerous here, as the Government is entirely in their hands. The original inhabitants of Pegu, have faces more nearly approaching to the oval form, their features are softer, more regular, and seem to express greater sense and acuteness, than those of the Birmahs, with whom, in other respects, they nearly agree. The Birmahs, however, who pique themselves on being descended from the conquerors, and wish to be distinguished from the nation they subdued, use a badge for that purpose, which we must conclude they value very highly, from the sufferings they undergo to obtain it. The thigh of every Birmah, including the hip and knee, is of a jet-black, which has a very singular appearance; and this mark they receive in their childhood. It is made by the repeated application of an instrument with a great number of sharp points, placed close together, something like that used in carding wool, 'till the part is entirely covered with drops of blood. After this, they apply a liquid, of which galls is a principal ingredient. This excites a considerable degree of fever; and it is computed by the natives themselves, that about two children out of five, perish, in consequence of the operation. Some persons of a higher rank, have, instead of this, their thighs covered with the representations of tigers, and other wild beasts, imprinted by a process similar to the former. I would not be meant, by any thing that has been said, to insinuate that this practice was first instituted on the conquest of Pegu, by the Birmahs; on the contrary, I believe it to be of much greater antiquity; and all I mean to say, is, that the accidental circumstance of its preserving a separation between them and the original natives of the country, has undoubtedly enhanced its value in their esteem. It is not easy to conjecture what has given rise to an operation, which occasions so much pain and danger to the person who undergoes it; but it is not altogether peculiar to this people; for we meet with practices similar to it among other nations: That which resembles it the most, is the operation of *tattaowing*, used by the natives of *Otaheite*.

The men have long black hair, tied on the top of the head; over which some wear a white handkerchief, in form of a turban, others go with their heads bare and decorated with flowers. They wear about their loins, a piece of party-coloured silk, or cotton cloth, which is afterwards passed over the shoulder, and goes round the body. Those of higher rank have this cloth so long as to hang down, over their thighs and legs; which, among the lower class of people, are bare. The women have

¹ This line is pulled up from the author's note. He follows it with an account of how teeth was blackened in India, which we do not include here. M.C.

a kind of short jacket, to cover the upper part of their bodies; and the remainder of their dress is a piece of cloth, which is fastened round the loins, and hangs down to the ankles. This is doubled over, a few inches, at the fore part, where it is open, so that the thigh is discovered, in walking, thro' its whole length. This mode of dress, they tell us, was first introduced by a certain Queen of Ava, who did it with the view of reclaiming the hearts of the men from an unnatural and detestable passion, to which they were at that time, totally abandoned; and succeeded so well, that she is remembered at this day, with gratitude, as a public benefactress to the kingdom.

In their behaviour to strangers, they are obliging, and show a degree of frankness that one would by no means expect to meet in a nation, whom we have been accustomed to look upon as barbarous. They express a great curiosity to see the manners of strangers, which makes them often come into their houses, and observe all that is doing, without appearing to be under any constraint. They also take pleasure in imitating the dress and behaviour of those whom come among them, and appear highly delighted when a stranger imitates any of theirs. In return, if you go into their houses, you are received with great hospitality; the people are eager to find something that may give you satisfaction, and seem very happy when you show any marks of being pleased. They have none of that strictness which distinguishes the other eastern nations; but will themselves conduct you, with the greatest alacrity, thro' every part of their dwelling. The merit of their complaisance is so much the greater on this account, that it cannot in any degree, be ascribed to fear, as a stranger is here entirely in their power, and the people have a very high idea of their own military force and prowess.

And not without reason; for they are in reality, a formidable nation: Numerous, brave, possessing great strength of body, and capable of sustaining fatigue; they only want a regular discipline to render their power truly respectable. Their principal weapons are the spear and scimitar, both of which they handle with great dexterity. But the use of gun-powder is not unknown to them, for they often employ muskets with match-locks. They are frequently at war with the Siamese, over whom they have been often victorious. The prisoners taken in the expeditions they detain, and employ in the occupations to which they were brought up. Many of the ship-builders at Rangoon are Siamese, who have been taken in war. For carrying any desperate enterprize into execution, they have a set of people, who, very probably have been criminals reserved for the purpose, to whom it is death to return without having effected the business that they were sent on. This appears a strange piece of policy, as one should imagine, that those men, whom we cannot suppose to be bound by any principles of honour, or actuated by any affection for the state to which they belong, lie under great temptations to join the enemy. What means are used to prevent so probable a consequence; whether they are accompanied or commanded by men, who are more worthy of trust, and able to restrain them; or encouraged by the hope of rewards on their return with success, I

have not been able to learn. Be this as it will, it is very well known, that the Birmahs are not singular in his practice, which is adopted by many of the other despotic powers of the East.

Chapter III

Of the Religion of Pegu; Its objects; Of the Priests, or Talapoys; Of their Places of Worship; Anniversary Festivals

Their Religion bears some analogy to that of the Gentoos; particularly in the adoration which they pay to certain consecrated bullocks, and in their abstinence from eating beef, or, to speak more properly, from killing cattle in order to eat them; for they differ from the Gentoos in this, that they will sit down to table with any one, and partake of whatever is set before them, without excepting that species of viand we just now mentioned; and if one goes into their houses, they never fail to request he will eat among with them.

The Objects of their Worship are numerous, and among the rest, they pay adoration to an evil deity, to whom they make presents, after any thing unlucky has happened, in order to appease his resentment, to which they ascribe the misfortune.

The Priests, the ministers of this worship, are called Talapoys, and are easily distinguished by their dress, which consists of a yellow cloth, negligently thrown over their bodies. Their heads are shaved and constantly bare. This order is not, like that of the Bramins, confined to any particular cast, or tribe, but any man who will confine himself to the rules of the society, may become a Talapoy. He is thereby bound to celibacy; but to compensate for this, he is abundantly supplied with all the other enjoyments of life, without any trouble or care of his own. Every morning before the rising of the sun, the Talapoys walk in procession thro' the streets carrying in their hands a box to receive the contributions of the people; and many of them are attended by servants, with baskets, for the same purpose. All the inhabitants wait at their doors, and put into these boxes the finest rice, and provisions of various kinds, while the Talapoy takes no notice of them, but walks slowly on with his eyes turned upwards, like one whose thoughts are employed on concerns of a higher nature, and who looks on sublunary things as unworthy of his attention. This body of men is very numerous, and has a considerable influence in the state. If a man who is in danger of prosecution from the laws of his country, flies to the Talapoys, and they chuse to give him an asylum, the ministers of justice dare not touch him there; and even when a criminal is condemned to death, if those priests interest themselves in his favour, they can prevent the execution of the sentence. Thus, among those unenlightened nations, where superstition reigns with unabounded sway, and where this great truth, that God is a lover of order and not

of confusion, is either totally unknown, or which is equally bad, is neglected; the persons who as ministers of his worship, and interpreters of his will, hold in subjection the consciences of the people, have always been found to obstruct the administration of justice; and thus give encouragement to vice, instead of conducting men into the paths of virtue. That the impunity which the Talapoys sometimes ensure to crimes must have these bad effects, cannot be doubted; and yet, where the Government is so rigorous as it is in Pegu, we must allow, that such a lenient power, if lodged in proper hands, and used with moderation, may often be the means of preserving a useful member to society, by affording an asylum to those who may have offended against the laws, or incurred the capricious displeasure of a tyrant, more thro' ignorance than from any ill intention. But, at any rate, let us not trespass against the impartiality which is required of ever person, who undertakes to relate matters of fact, by leaving the reader impress'd with an idea that the Talapoys extend their protection only to the guilty: No! be it ever remembered to their honor, that they have often received into their houses, and treated with the greatest hospitality strangers, who have suffered shipwreck on their coasts. Besides these, there is also a society of Priestesses, or female Talapoys, who undergo the same tonsure, wear the same habit, and are enjoined celibacy as well as the others. It is curious to observe the agreement which subsists, in many circumstances, between those priests, and the clergy of the Romish church, especially when they were in the plenitude of their power, two or three centuries ago. It would be superfluous to trace the particular instances, as they must be onbvious to the reader.

Their places of worship, as well as those of the Gentoos, are called Pagodas; but they differ in form from those that we meet with in other parts of India. To give an idea of the whole, it will be sufficient to describe, in a few words, the Golden Pagoda, which is the most remarkable, and stands about three miles from Rangoon, on an eminence, to which you ascend by a flight of stairs. The Pagoda is a round building, or rather a Polygon with a great number of sides, about thirty feet high, terminated above by a round spire of a very great height, which ends in a point, but differs from a cone in this respect, that a line drawn on its surface, between the apex and the base, is not a straight one, but forms a curvature inwards, so that the whole approaches to the form of a speaking trumpet. This spire is covered with gold, from which the Pagoda takes its name; and at the top is a ring, round which are hung a number of bells, that make a continual jingling noise, by the agitation they receive from the wind. The building below is hollow, and there is one passage which leads into it; but this is shut up by an iron gate, which is only opened when some religious ceremony is to be performed within. Round the building are placed, on the ground, a number of figures, cut in stone, representing wild beasts, of enormous size. Close to this Pagoda is another, similar to it, but inferior in size; and no person is allowed to come within a certain

distance of these, without pulling off his shoes. In the neighbourhood of the eminence on which the two large Pagodas stand, there are many small buildings of the same form, enclosed with iron rails, and the roofs of these also are covered with gold. We at first supposed them to be tombs, from their number, and the smallness of their dimensions; but the inhabitants assured us of the contrary, and said, they were servants, or attendants to the great one. The houses of the Talapoys are also, most of them, at a small distance from the Pagoda. Two great festivals are annually solemnized at this Pagoda; the first and principal one is on the day of the full moon immediately following the vernal equinox; and the other, on that full moon which happens in the month of August. Multitudes of both sexes flock from all quarters to the celebration of these, particularly of the first, to which they tell us, there often come visitors even from the confines of China. Close to this place is a pond, the water of which, the natives believe to have a great efficacy in the cure of diseases.

Chapter IV

Of the Government of Pegu; Its form; Regulations of the Police; Of the four principal Magistrates; The Meoon; The Reoom; The Cheekaw; The Shabundar; Of the dignity and power of the King of Ava; History and Character of the present King

In the Government of this country, we see despotism prevail in its full extent, and despotism too of the very worst kind; for the inhabitants are under the absolute power of a set of petty tyrants, who are themselves nothing more than slaves to the King of Ava. As they have little or no emolument, except what they can raise by extortion, it is exercised in the most unlimited manner. They take cognizance of all disputes between individuals, that come to their ears, without the case being laid before them by either of the parties; and on whatever side the cause is determined there is a never failing charge brought in against both, for *justice*. As they express it; and this price of justice, is often three or four times greater than the value of the matter in agitation. An instance of this kind fell under my own observation, in a trivial dispute, which happened between two English Getlemen, when the Judges condemned each party to pay tripple the sum contested, for justice, which neither of them had ever thought of seeking at such a tribunal. Yet, however absurd this may appear, it is, perhaps, nothing more than a prejudice, arising from the force of habit, that makes us look with contempt and indignation on those mercenary retailers of justice, and yet feel no similar emotions, when we see, in a country famed for the wisdom of its Government, a poor man, by appealing to the laws of that country, in a cause where equity is plainly on his side, reduced to ruin; merely because his antagonist is rich. But the inconveniences that this Government labours

under are not only those of despotism, the unhappy subjects feel those of anarchy too. There are about twenty persons concerned in the Government of Rangoon, who, though one is subordinate to another, and though matters of the first consequence are determined in a council of the whole, can yet act separately; and any one member of this body can, by his own authority, give out orders, which no inhabitant of Pegu dares to disobey. These orders may be contrary to the sense of the whole body, in which case they are, indeed, reversed in council; but then, there are instances, and I myself observed one, of such orders being, notwithstanding, repeated, more than once, by the same person, and obeyed, each time, till they were again reversed; nor was any redress obtained by the party aggrieved, or any effectual measures taken to prevent such a contempt of authority for the future.

The case was this: A black inhabitant of Madras, several years ago, had contracted debts, to such an amount as obliged him to leave that place; and he chose to retire to Pegu, where he was resident when the author arrived there. On his absconding, a sentence of execution was past, in the Mayor's Court, against his goods, and among these, a ship then lying in the roads, which was accordingly sold for the benefit of the creditor's. She became the property of an English Gentleman, who made a voyage in her to the eastward, and on his return, put into Rangoon, a little before the author's arrival there, to purchase a cargo of wood, and give the vessel some necessary repairs. The man, to whom she had formerly belonged, laid claim to her, and on application to one of the Magistrates, (I believe the Cheekaw) procured an order to stop from working, the artificers, who were then employed in refitting the ship. The owner of the vessel, on representing the case to the Council of Rangoon, got this order immediately reversed, and the artificers were again set to work; but very soon obliged to stop, by a repetition of the former order, which was again reversed by application to the Council; and this farce was acted over and over, about six or seven times in the course of a month, to the great detriment of the owner, who had the mortification to see vessels, that had arrived after his, dispatched long before her. It is true, the allowance of these vexatious proceedings may be ascribed, less to the wants of power in the Council of Rangoon to prevent them, than to their desire of extorting money, or some such corrupt motive; but this will make no material difference in the condition of the subject, to whom, if he suffers oppression, it is exactly the same, whether the oppression arises from the impotence or the corruption of the Government, under which it is his misfortune to live.²

Yet, bad as the Government of this country is in many respects, we meet with some circumstances in the regulation of their police, which may deserve the attention, perhaps the imitation, of more enlightened nations. There is here a body of men always ready to appear in arms on the least alarm, so that if any tumult

² This paragraph was pulled up from the footnote.

arises, it is quelled immediately. They are also useful for another purpose: From the nature of the materials of which the houses in Rangoon are constructed, accidents from fire are very common; and when ever this happens, the people above mentioned (who from this have got the name of Fire-men) are instantly assembled to extinguish it. In short, their office is much the same with that of watchmen among us, but with this difference, that the former execute their office more effectually than the latter: For we have never heard of rioters being able to overpower and beat the watch at Rangoon, though nothing is more common with us than such adventures. We shall presently have occasion to speak of the strictness with which the laws are enforced in Pegu, and of their great efficacy in restraining the inhabitants, even from vices to which they had contracted the strongest propensity, from long habitude, before those laws which prohibit them were made. But it may not be amiss just to mention here an instance, that places in a striking point of view, the vigour, with which all measures regarding the Police are carried into into execution in this country. It is well known how incorrigible and impatient of restraint an English seaman is, especially when just landed, with his pockets full. In such a case, we know, it is no easy matter to restrain him from excesses, even in Europe, where he is perfectly aware that the laws will be put in execution against him. It must then be still more difficult where he thinks he has got among naked savages, and has been for some time accustomed to a country where the inhabitants are terrified at the very sight of a European; which is literally true with regard to those parts of India, where our principal settlements are formed. Yet, as we have seen, at Rangoon, that the crew of an English vessel (*The Earl of Dartmouth*, Indiaman; left on the island of Carnicobar, on her passage, from Madras homeward), in number about fifty, who were carryed there after having suffered shipwreck, notwithstanding they had treated their own officers with contempt, and, totally disclaiming their authority, had plundered the wreck of many valuable jewels, were very soon taught to behave themselves quietly; and from that time, while they continued there, which was for the space of about two months, they never were the authors of any riot or disturbance.

The principal magistrate in this place is the Meoon, who presides in Council, and is, indeed, in great measure arbitrary there; as I believe, there is hardly an instance of any point being carried against him. He can give absolute orders about public works, or the employment of public stores. The present one is of the blood royal of Ava; but whether this is a necessary circumstance or not, I cannot pretend to determine. The inhabitants look up to him as to a deity; and such is their veneration for his person and office, that no one is permitted to come into his presence without taking off his shoes. If you are permitted to sit, it is on the ground, where you must keep your face turned towards this petty monarch, and above all things, be careful not to present to him the sole of your foot; so that your posture is not a little inconvenient. Yet, this man, when he goes to the Court of

Ava, which he is obliged to do once a year, is treated by the sovereign with no more regard than the meanest slave; and must, if required, perform the most menial offices about his person.

The person next to him in the Government of Pugu [sic], is the Reoon. His particular office, independantly of his being the second in Council, seems to be the administration of justice; as complaints are generally laid first before him; though when doubts arise, or the matter is of greater consequence than usual, the othermembers are called to give their sentiments upon it.

The third Officer is the Cheekaw, of whose particular department, if he has any distinct from his seat in Council, I know nothing; and,

The fourth is the Shabundar, who presides over the customs on goods exported or imported, and over every thing that relates to shipping, arrived or sailing from the Port. When a vessel comes off the bar, it is usual to send a boat up to town for a pilot, and the Shabundar is the person applied to for that purpose. When she arrives, it is required to deliver a list of her cargo and stores to the same person; his officers are put on board to prevent any contraband trade; and when she is ready to depart, he orders a pilot to conduct her down the river. A pilot who should carry a ship out without this order, would expose himself to the severest punishment. The present Shabundar is an Armenian; and indeed, a foreigner is generally pitched on for this office, because, most probably, none of the natives are qualified for the task. All public orders are made out in the name of these four principal Officers.

From what has been said of the respect that is paid to these men, and of their inferiority to the King of Ava, we may judge of the high veneration which that monarch is held in by his subjects. And indeed, they look on him as the greatest of men, or, perhaps, something more than human. But, it is a truth, established both by reason and experience, that an arbitrary throne is far from being the most secure. There are no laws to give it stability, no constitution to guard its rights; The pillars which support it are mere brutal force, and the dread of a tyrant's vengeance. When these prove unable to resist the torrent of indignation that takes its rise from the distresses of an injured people, the whole fabric is overturned in an instant. Another reason why a despotic crown totters on the head of its owner, more than any other, is this, that if a competition arise, the body of the nation has neither interest in the dispute, nor any certain rule to determine its choice. This we see exemplified in the kingdom of Ava; which, in the seven months immediately preceding our arrival at Pegu, had been subject to three different sovereigns, two of whom were deposed and murdered, by their relations, who aspired to the throne. The present King is uncle to the former, whom he has put to death from these ambitious motives. He has banished from his Court all those who held any office under his nephew; in the number of whom is the Recon's eldest son, who filled a place of great honor about the person of he late King; After being wounded

fighting in his defence, he was obliged to seek his own safety, for a while, in concealment; is now rendered incapable of any employment, and reduced to a level with the meanest of the people. His father sided with the usurper, and came down with a body of armed men to establish his authority in Pegu; for which service he has been rewarded with the important office he at present holds in that province: And though the eldest son is now restored to his father's house, yet all the train of attendants, and all the respect, that he was naturally entitled to, by his birth-right, are become the portion of his younger brother.

The usurper, since his accession to the throne, has established some new regulations, or rather reinforced some old laws, which had fallen into disuse, of such a nature as would lead one to think that he has turned devotee, or, at least, finds it convenient to wear the mask of hypocrisy, to palliate, in the eye of the world, the violence he has done to the rights of loyalty, of nature, and of humanity. One of these prohibits the killing of beef, which is founded on the religious worship paid, by the Gentoos, to the Ox; and it is the only circumstance in which we can trace a resemblance between their religion and that of the Birmahs. The second forbids the use of wine, or spiritous liquors of any kind, under no less a punishment than death itself. This last regulation has been attended with very good effects, as the Birmahs were formerly very much addicted to drunkenness; but with such strictness are punishments inflicted here, that not an instance of intoxication is now to be seen; if any one of them is prevailed on to taste liquor, he is at infinite pains to remove the smell from his mouth, by every means in his power.

Chapter V

Some Account of the Laws; Of Punishments; Trial by Ordeal; Laws regarding Marriages; and Debtors

Here we are naturally lead to speak of the laws, but this is a subject which it is impossible for any person, from a short residence to obtain much knowledge of; and besides, the only law, properly speaking, that exists here, is the will of the prince. However, there are certain ancient customs, which are observed as general rules, when they do not come in competition with this sovereign will; and I shall endeavour to communicate whatever knowledge I have been able to pick up concerning these.

The end of all laws is the prevention of crimes, but among the means which may be used for attaining this end, there are some, which, though very powerful in themselves, have so much injustice in their nature, that the more civilized nations have rejected their use. I mean, those punishments, which, altho' the offender himself may have got beyond the reach of the law, yet tought him in

his nearest concerns, his family, and relations. This principle has its influence, at present, even in our own laws; by which a young person, born and brought up in affluence, is reduced, without any crime of his own, to the lowest ebb of misery and want, because his father has been guilty of high treason. But among us, however much the crime of one person may affect the fortune of another, it can expose to personal suffering no one but the delinquent himself; but, in Pegu, where the nicer principles of justice and humanity are less attended to, the mode of punishment we have been talking of is exercised in its greatest extent. If a person commits a capital crime, and escapes before he can be brought to punishment, his wife, his children and his nearest relations are put to death without mercy.

When a case occurs where the evidence is so equal on both sides that the judges cannot determine which party is in the right, there is a kind of Ordeal prescribed, for discovering the truth. This kind of trial is founded on the belief that a just and all-mighty being, who will, they think, certainly interpose in such doubtful cases, for the protection of innocence and the discovery of guilt. The earliest instance of it that we meet with in history, is the practice ordained in the Mosaic Law, for determining the guilt or innocence of a woman suspected by her husband of adultery, and very minutely described in the book of Numbers, chap. V. In this case, there was a particular interposition of Providence for the discovery of guilt, as the water which was given the woman to drink, could not, from any natural cause, have produced the effects that are there related. In many cases, on the other hand, the supernatural power was supposed to be exerted in the behalf of innocence, and the laws of nature to have their usual course, if the person suspected was guilty. Of this kind is the story of the vestal who dragged a ship up the Tiber, to prove her virginity; and in the same class we may place the trial used among our ancestors, in which the party accused was to walk, blind-folded and bare-footed, across a number of red-hot plough shares, laid parallel to one another, at unequal distances, and the proof of innocence was his escaping un-hurt. But there are other cases, where it is certain that a crime has been committed, and we only want to discover the author of it. Where there were no circumstances that limited the suspicion to a small number, the ancients used, for coming at the truth, a method, which depends on the same principle with all the others; I mean the casting of lots, which we see exemplified in the 7th chap. Of Joshua. Of nearly the same nature is a practice in use, at this time, among the natives, in many parts of Hindostan: When something has been stolen, and the thief cannot be discovered, all the persons suspected are made to chew a quantit of raw rice; when from their method of doing it, or its effect on their teeth and gums, their guilt or innocence is supposed to be discovered: And, the persuasion, which the persons themselves, who are suspected, entertain of its efficacy, has often, in reality, betrayed their guilt. Either of these methods might also be used, where the suspicion lies only between two persons; but, in these cases, we find mention made of several others. In particular, we must

refer to this head, the practice so frequent a few centuries ago, of judicial determinations by single combat; and of the same kind is the trial now used in Pegu. The two parties are obliged to dive into a pond set apart for that purpose; when he who can remain the longest under water is pronounced innocent, and sentence past in his favour. The practice appears to be, and certainly is, in itself, absurd; as the proof of innocence is rested on a man's ability in an art which depends on his corporeal powers, and is to be acquired by frequent exercise; but yet, were we to grant the principle before-mentioned, on which it is founded, it would be perfectly just; and it is, undoubtedly, quite as much so as the method that was used, all over Europe, in the days of Chivalry. For is an expert diver may now easily prove his innocence at Pegu, a vigorous combatant enjoyed the same advantage, not long ago, in Europe.

Theft is always punished with death. The most common way of executing a capital sentence is beheading, which they perform, very dextrously, with a sabre, while the criminal is in a standing posture.

A Foreigner may marry one of the natives, on which occasion, he pays a certain stipulated sum to her parents; but, if he leaves the country, he is not permitted to carry his wife along with him: So strict is the law, in this particular and so impossible it is to obtain a dispensation from it, that some men who have had a great affection for their wives, have been obliged, on their departure, to carry them secretly away in jars, which were supposed to be filled with water. However, if the stranger, on going away, leaves a sufficient allowance to maintain his wife, and returns in the space of three years, he can claim her again; but if he prolongs his absence beyond that period, she is at liberty to marry another.

When a man is unable to pay his debts, the creditor acquires a property in his person, and may sell him for a slave, detaining from the price as much as the debt amounted to. Hence it comes, that a man, when he purchases a wife, is obliged, besides the original price, to pay all her debts, unless he would chuse to resign her person into the possession of her creditors.

Chapter VI

State of the Arts in Pegu; Language of the Birmahs; Their Manner of Writing; Their Music

There is no circumstance that enables us to judge of the advances that a nation has made towards civilization, better than a knowledge of the progress which the arts have made among them; nor is there any thing that has a greater effect on the manners and customs of a people. However, a very short discussion will suffice for this part of our subject, for it must be owned that all the arts, except one or two,

which have probably owed their improvement to Europeans, since they began to visit this country, are in a very rude state in Pegu; and we may venture to say that this will long continue to be the case, as the cultivation of arts is not esteemed an honorable employment; every idea of that kind being annexed solely to the profession of arms.

The first employment of mankind, in every age and country, that could be called an art, has been the culture of the earth. As soon as societies began to be formed, and men, tired of the wandering life they had formerly led, looked out for fixed habitations, they quickly found that the sources from which they had before derived their subsistence, that is, the flesh of wild animals killed in the chase [sic], and the spontaneous fruits of the earth, were insufficient to maintain them, now that their numbers were increased, and their situation more confined. Hence they were obliged to have recourse to the breeding of tame cattle (the pastoral life) and to the increasing of those productions of the earth which they found best suited for nourishment by Agriculture. But, through necessity made this the first art which employed their attention, yet it has always been among the last in being brought to perfection. For this requires an intimate acquaintance with the operations of nature in the production of vegetables, which cannot be obtained but by long and accurate observation; a multitude of facts must be collected, and the reasoning faculty must have been improved by long exercise, before those facts could be applied to useful purposes. Besides, it has happened, unluckily for this art, that it has been very late in becoming the object of attention with men who are capable of improving it on rational principles. Even among the enlightened nations of Europe, after philosophy had been applied with success in almost every other art, we see it was a long time before men of science turned their enquiries to the improvement of agriculture. Of its state in Pegu very little can be said: It is entirely confined to the culture of rice; but yet, in this single branch of the art, we cannot observe without some degree of surprise, that those people, however ingorant we may esteem them, have long known and practised an operation, to the good effects of which we have, till very lately, been strangers; I mean the transplanting of grain. As soon as the rice is sown, they take care to cover the ground three or four inches deep with water, through which the blade springs up, and it is soon after transplanted into another field, where it is suffered to grow and ripen. The same method is practised in all other parts of India.

The next article that comes to be considered is that of cloathing. The materials employed in Pegu for this purpose are silk and cotton. Though hemp and flax are produced in several parts of India, yet I have never heard of either being employed as article sof cloathing; and as to wool, it is not a product of any of the warmer climates. This covering, so comfortable and so necessary to animals in the frozen regions of the north, would be a burden insupportable in the Torrid Zone; and therefore nature, like an indulgent parent, ever attentive to the exigencies of

her children, has cloathed the sheep in those countries with hair. This is evidently the final cause of the difference we observe in the cloathing of sheep in different climates, ut it is also worth while to enquire for the efficient cause of this appearance, for it is a certain fact that the change under consideration is the natural and necessary effect of removal from one climate to another. The enquiry is curious and may be useful, but as it would lead us too far from our subject at present, I shall resume it in a dissertation by itself.

The natives of Pegu, have not only the art of making cloth, which has a firm texture, of each of these materials separately, but they often combine them both in one piece; and they dye the thread used for weaving, of various colours, so that the cloth made in this manner very much resembles that worn in the highlands of Scotland, usually known by the name of Tartan. And of this kind of cloth those garments are made which are worn by the men over their shoulders. But the only cloth manufacture in Pegu that is valued by foreigners is that of towels, which are esteemed for a roughness, a kind of knap, that is peculiar to them.

After men have provided for their food and cloathing, their next object is to secure a habitation that may defend them from the inclemency of the weather. Hence the next art that calls our attention is Architecture. From what we before said of the houses in Pegu, it may be concluded that this art is yet in its infancy there, and likely so to continue for a long time; for it never makes a rapid progress in a country where wood is the principal material for building. In Pegu there are no buildings of stone except those consecrated to their worship; and these are of that form which appears to me to have been the most ancient of any, that of a pyramid or cone. The simplest idea, and that which would most naturally occur to mankind, just emerging from the savage state, for the construction of their first huts, is that of three or four sticks fixed with one end in the ground at some distance from one another, so as to include a square or triangular area, tied together by the other ends, and covered with straw, leaves, or some other materials of that kind. This would form a pyramid; and the same shape would naturally be given to the first buildings of stone, before the properties of the arch, or the use of pillars in architecture, came to be known. And accordingly, we find that this was the form of the most ancient edifices we know, which were built while the art was yet in its infancy, I mean the pyramids of Egypt. For I cannot agree with a certain learned autho (Goguet),³ in thinking that buildings so incommodius in their construction, can afford a proof that the art had arrived at any great perfection; though their size and solidity are monuments of the power of the monarch by whose orders they were erected. What knowledge of this art the natives of Pegu actually possess may be collected from the description formerly given of the Golden Pagoda, which is the only considerable edifice we meet with in the country.

³ A long footnote was originally included here on a topic superfluous to the account of Pegu and is thus not included here.

In the same Pagoda, and the smaller ones round it, we find a specimen of the skill which the natives have in Metallurgy, at least in one branch of it, the working in gold. As this is generally found in its metalline state, it must have been the first discovered of any; and we see, in the instance before us, that the natives of Pegu are no strangers to its wonderful ductility, nor to the application of that property to useful purposes: For, from the great extent of those buildings, the roofs of which are covered with this metal, we must naturally conclude that covering to be very superficial; and according to the best information I could obtain, those roofs have only a very thin coat of gold. They also know very well how to work in Silver, and they have the art of covering utensils made of a particular kind of earth, however irregular their form may be, with thin plates of that metal, so as to be taken for solid silver, till their lightness discovers the mistake. They are no acquainted with the method of working in Iron, but as that metal is not obtained from any mines in the country, I must look on this as one of the arts that have only been introduced at Pegu since the arrival of the Europeans there.

They are very well acquainted with the arts of Ship-building, and Navigation; but in what measure they are indebted to strangers for their knowledge in these respects, it is hard to determine. As the wood proper for the construction of ships is found here in greater plenty than anywhere else, Europeans often repair to this place, for that purpose. But, from whatever source the inhabitants have derived their skill, it is certain that they have now among them excellent carpenters; and that their own ships, managed by crews who are natives of the country, visit all the ports in India. The only peculiarity about their vessels, is the substance of which the rigging, of every kind, is made. This is the bark of a tree, and the ropes made of it are very strong, but much less flexible than those made of Coir, or the fibrous substance that incloses the cocoa-nut, which is well known to be used for this purpose in all other parts of India.

The language of the Birmahs abounds with a nasal sound, which has a disagreeable effect on the organs of one who hears it for the first time; but this gradually becomes familiar, and then, you can perceive that the frequent occurrence of liquids and vowels produces a degree of softness, which is by no means unpleasing. They seem to be fond of compounding words, in which, I doubt not, one thoroughly acquainted with the language, would perceive a great deal of regularity: For example, in these words, *Lay-a*, hand; *Lay-maa*, thumb; *Lay-chnew*, fore-finger; *Lay-Lay-a*, middle-finger; *Lay-pfegua*, ring-finger; *Lay-pfan*, little-finger; the radical words seems to be *Lay-a*, and the others to be compounded from it, by the addition of words, which probably relate to the situation or use of the different fingers.

The characters are written from left to right, contrary to the practice of most eastern nations, and have all a circular form, some being confined within the limits of the line, while others project above or below it, or both. This writing was

commonly performed on Cajans, the leaves of the toddy-tree, by means of an iron-pen with a sharp point, and in this way all public orders are written: But, besides this, they have a black paper made from the bamboo, on which they form the characters, with a pencil, made of a stone of that kind called steatites, which has exactly the appearance of white bees-wax; and these characters may be rubbed out with a wet cloth, leaving the paper fit to be used again in the same manner.

They are fond of Music, which makes a great part of their entertainments; and there is a sweetness in their's, that one would hardly expect to meet with among a people who have made so small a progress in civilization. Their instruments are principally the stringed kind; one is like the guitar in form, and is used in the same way; another has four strings, and is played on with a bow, like a violin, which, except that it is narrower, it resembles in shape.

Chapter VII

Of the Product and Commerce of Pegu; Trade of Teak-wood; Tin; Bees-wax; Gold; Nitre; Areca; Cachow; Petroleum; Grain; Animals; Fruit; Money

The principal object of Europeans who frequent this port, is the trade of Teak-wood, which is produced in greater plenty, than in any other part of India. This is a tree which grows to a very considerable size, and in its texture, excepting that it is more flexible and not quite so hard, resembles the Oak. It is of the most universal use, all over India, not only in making of furniture, but, more especially, in the construction of ships; and it has this advantage over every kind of woode employed in Europe for that purpose, that it is much less corruptible in the water. Accordingly we find that vessels built of this wood last much longer than any others. But, altho' this timber abounds more, and is cheaper, here than in other places, yet it is not of the best quality; for, from the moisture and richness of the soil, it grows up faster, and consequently acquires less solidity than in parts which are dry, bleak, and exposed to the force of the wind. And this is the reason why ships built at Bombay, where they are supplied with wood from the Balagate mountains, are less subject to decay than those constructed at Pegu.

Tin and Bees-wax are also articles of commerce. The former, in particular, is a very considerable one. Gold is produced in no contemptible quantity, but the exportation of it is not allowed, nor is it used, among the people, for money. A little is employed for adorning their persons, but the only great consumption of it is in the decoration of their places of worship. The same prohibition is extended to salt-petre, which might be prepared in abundance, if permission could be got to export it. The country produces, in plenty, the Areca Nut, and Cachow, which is prepared from a plant of the Mimosa kind (by a process very minutely described in the

London Medical Observations and Enquiries by Mr. James Kerr, Surgeon in the Company's service) and, as well as the former, is chewed by the natives of India, along with their Betel. There is found here, swimming on the surface of the water in certain wells, a kind of Petroleum, or Naphtha, which is used, like oil, for burning; and also for making unctuous compositions, for paying the sides of vessels.

This country is very plentifully supplied with all the necessaries of life. Rice is produced in abundance. The fruits are much the same with those in Bengal; such as pine-apples, water-melons, plantains, &c. they have great quantities of honey, but of a strong taste, which is not very agreeable; and it is said, if used too freely, to produce intoxication. They have plenty of poultry and game, particularly deer and wild hogs. The forests abound with wild elephants, buffaloes and togers; but, if we may believe the report of the natives, there is not a single jackall to be found in the country, which is a singular circumstance, when we consider in what numbers they are found in all other parts of India. They have a small breed of horses, which are much esteemed for their hardiness and patience of fatigue. Their head is somewhat large and thick, their mane and tail bushy. The natives from habit, manage them with ease, tho' they are naturally hard mouthed, and the bridles they use are but indifferently calculated for the purpose. Their method of riding appears to us ungraceful; they use stirrups, which are so short, that the thigh is nearly horizontal, or rather, the knee a little elevated, and the calf of the leg is applied to the horses side.

The principal money of this country is silver, which is not coined, but paid in weight. The smallest denomination is the Tycal; one hundred Tycals make one Viss; and these are used in weighing goods as well as money. But, another circumstance to be attended to, is the purity of the silver, of which there are three degrees, established by law, or by custom; the 25 per cent. The 50 per cent. And the 75 per cent. The first has one fourth part; the second, one half; the third, three fourths, of alloy: And one Tycal of twenty-five per cent. silver, is esteemed equal, in value, to the Bengal Sicca Rupee. This diversity in the fineness of the current money, renders it impossible for a stranger to receive it in payment, without being subjected to continual imposition; and therefore, all money matters are conducted by a particular set of men, who are answerable for the quality of the silver, which they receive on account of their employer, and are thereby entitled to a certain allowance per cent: For the payment of smaller sums, they use money of lead, which is weighed in the same manner as the former.

Chapter VIII

Of the Treatment of Foreigners who Trade to Pegu; Reasons for the Conduct of the Birmahs in this respect; Proposal for putting the Commerce on a better footing than at present

Ships that frequent this port, on purpose to trade, meet with a treatment, which, in many circumstances, is extremely mortifying. As soon as they come to anchor, the guns and rudder are carried on shore, and not delivered again, 'till the business is concluded, and the ship has obtained permission to depart. It frequently happens that difficulties are thrown in the way, by some individual in power, which detain the trader much longer than would be necessary to finish all his commercial transactions; and besides, he is often obliged to bear, with patience, because without any prospect of redress, the most shocking personal indignities. As this behaviour has rendered the trade of Pegu much less considerable, than it otherwise would have been; and retarded the advancement of the country, both in richness and civilization; it will, doubtless, appear to be very impolitic; and yet, if independence is the greatest good that a nation can enjoy, we must confess their present conduct to be the wisest they could have pursued, as being the best calculated to preserve that invaluable possession. Any man who is acquainted with the means by which the European powers have obtained their establishments in Hindostan; will be convinced of the truth of this assertion. Under the pretence of trade, they obtained permission from the sovereigns of the districts they visited, to build factories and forts, and to keep in pay a body of troops, Both which they strengthened, and augmented by degrees, under various pretexts, 'till they reduced to a state of dependence those very princes, to whose indulgence they were indebted for all their possessions. Is it then at all surprising that the Birmahs should be unwilling to encourage an intercourse, which they have seen to produce such fatal effects, and rather chuse to resign the advantages they might derive from an extensive commerce, than endanger their existence as an independent people? Happy nation! Who are contented to enjoy the wealth which nature has, with liberal hand, bestowed on your foil; and know not the desire of foreign riches, and foreign luxuries, which has tempted others to relinquish the more substantial blessings of liberty and independence. May you long continue to preserve, with jealous care, this your most precious birth-right, and reject, with disdain, the most splendid allurements, if they tend, in the least to put it in danger. Such may be the language of the philosopher, who stiles himself a citizen of the world; but the member of a commercial state, has different sentiments: And juster sentiments his certainly are, in the present instance; for though the Birmahs may boast a national independence, yet personal freedom is a stranger to every individual, except the King, if indeed he can be accounted free, who is in continual apprehension, from

the cabals of his nobles, and the just resentment of his people. Our citizen, then, will enquire what advantages his nation may derive from an intercourse with this people; what sources of wealth may flow from their trade; and whether, in time of war, his country can strengthen herself by their alliance, or procure from their stores, for the equipment of her fleets and armie. He will next examine the probability there may be of overcoming their repugnance to the commerce of strangers, and endeavour to find the best means for effecting this end.

Let us now consider the subject a little in this view. And here, the circumstance that presents itself first to our attention, is the trade of wood, which is so much the more important on this account, that it is not only a considerable branch of commerce in itself, but is absolutely necessary to the carrying on of all the others. Pegu is the only source, to the eastward of Cape Comorin, from which a regular supply of this commodity can be obtained; and consequently, if the scene of a naval war should be laid in the Bay of Bengal, that nation which could procure wood from Pegu, would have the great advantage of being able to refit her ships much sooner, and more effectually, after an engagement, than the enemy could do. But, to be properly supplied with this valuable article, it is not sufficient to send our ships to purchase it at the port; this method is very uncertain; and, by it, we can never be sure of having stores of the quality that may be wanted; for the wood is not produced within many miles of Rangoon: The great nurseries from which it is brought are among the mountains in the very heart of the country; The wood which is cut there is floated down the river Syriam, and often consumes several months in making the voyage. It is put up, for the sake of a better conveyance, in the form of rafts, and a great number of these generally arrive together. As the time of their arrival is uncertain, it is evident that persons on the spot must be the best supplied; and consequently, we see the propriety there would be in having Agents appointed to reside here constantly, and to choose from among the wood, on its arrival, that which is of the best quality, and of the dimensions that may be wanted. This end would be still more effectually answered, if permission could be obtained, to send to those parts, in the neighbourhood of which the wood is cut, proper persons, who might receive their instructions from those who reside at the port.

If these people could be prevailed on to permit the exportation of their gold, it would, no doubt, become a valuable branch of commerce; as the Malay coast is, at present, the only part of India, from which it is procured, and this is in no considerable quantity. We should thus be able to extend our trade with China; and the balance of that trade would be less against the mother country than it is on its present footing. The exportation of tin, from Pegu, is already great, but it might, undoubtedly, be much increased.

But, to what purpose, it may be said, are we told of the benefit that would result from a connection formed with these people, if their aversion to an intercourse with strangers is so great as has been represented? To this I reply that

their aversion, it is true, is great; but that yet, there is reason to think, it is not insuperable. In the first place, from the fondness that is shewn by the natives for observing and imitating the customs of strangers, we may judge, by analogy, that they might soon be brought to form to themselves new wants, which they would be obliged to supply by a commerce with their neighbours. Next, we know, that Opium, which is already become a staple commodity in the trade to this country, and will, in all probability, be still more in request, if the law against the use of spiritous liquors continues in its present force, is entirely furnished by our territories in Bengal. But, setting aside all theoretical reasoning, let us confine ourselves to real examples; and we shall find that there is, at present, a factory actually established at Rangoon, belonging to the Imperial Company: It is surrounded by wall, on which the colours of that Company is hoisted. Nay, the English Company has also had a settlement in the territories belonging to Pegu; I mean, at Negrais. It is true, we were obliged to relinquish it, but this appears to have been more the fault of those entrusted with the administration of our affairs at that place, than of the inhabitants, who had suffered many instances of oppression, before they resolved to assert their rights by violent means. And although the behaviour of our first settlers may have inspired the natives with prejudices to our disadvantage, yet there is every reason to believe, that such a uniform moderation of conduct as has distinguished the later transactions of the British Government with the natives of India, would soon remove them all. The present Government of Pegu express sentiments of the highest respect for the English East India Company; and they gave an example of it in the treatment of the *Success Galley* which, because she was loaded on account of that Company, enjoyed much greater indulgences than any other foreign vessel that ever entered the port of Rangoon. Here, it is sufficient to hint, that a skilful management between the two nations that now inhabits this country, the original Peguers and the Burmahs, might make the nation that should undertake the office of a mediator highly respected by both parties.