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# BURMESE WONDERLAND

*A Tale of Travel in  
Lower and Upper Burma*

BY

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*"A Burmese Enchantment": "A Burmese Loneliness,"  
etc.*

Oh Nat! Observe the serenity of mind that good men possess.

Oh Nat! Imprint upon thy heart the thirty-eight precepts.

—Discourse of Baddha.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### FORGOTTEN YESTERDAYS.

IN these crowded days the past recedes rapidly. The Alaungpra Dynasty which came to an end at Thibaw's abdication in 1885 has almost reached the legendary stage, though Thibaw himself is but lately dead, and Queen Supayalat still survives. Numbers of Ministers and Maids-of-Honour are yet alive, and crowds of royal personages, including at least two Queens of Mindon Min. The dynasty, however, is a thing of the long-ago past. Its true history is told in the Upper Burma Gazetteer, but in men's minds it is seen as a Golden Age it was very far from being. The timber palace in Mandalay is held together now, with difficulty. The buildings and stockades that surrounded it are vanished, and the Royal City has a depressing and moribund appearance. The previous capitals, crowded close together in Sagaing, Ava and Amarapura, and abandoned in quick succession, are overgrown with jungle, and their splendid but rotten monuments are crumbling to bits. Yet Mandalay, the last of them, was only finished in 1859! Ava and Amarapura with their ruins and avenues of magnificent tamarinds are now the quietest corner of Burma. In Mandalay the trees have not yet had time to grow. Burmese Kings attached much importance to trees. When Mindon:

when cemeteries were at their worst. There are winged cherubs over the door of the Paya Ni, and the wooden gate itself is carved with stags and eagles straight from an heraldic plate. Needless to say these things, however fine, are utterly inappropriate.

The most curious experiment of all at Amarapura is a true lion at the base of one of the pagodas in place of the usual stylized *chinté*. It is the only one I have ever seen in Burma. One cannot but connect it with the caged lion, that was sent to the capital in 1824 by the Imam of Muscat, and which no doubt served as a model. That lion, whose extraordinary story is told on page 262 of *A Burmese Enchantment*, is not the only beast to take its place in the history of this period. A little earlier, in 1795, the Emperor of China expressed extreme curiosity to see a rhinoceros and an alligator. A request for a consignment thereof created considerable excitement in Burma. The exhortations of Bodaw Paya and his whole Government could not charm a rhinoceros to board a vessel, but a boat-load of alligators was duly shipped.<sup>1</sup>

Amarapura with its splendid trees, quiet pagodas and enchanting views across the Taungthaman Lake, is one of those fascinating nooks unspoiled as yet by the disturbing influence of our age. Mail trains roar past to Rangoon and Mandalay, but eternal repose pervades the court of the Patho-daw-gyi, where I spend quiet Sundays picnicing beneath the tamarinds.

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<sup>1</sup> Symes. *Embassy to Ava*. Page 221.