

Editor's Note

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M.W.C.

General Remarks on the Coast of Arracan

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THE HARBOURS, PRODUCE OF THE COUNTRY, NATIVES, &C.

The province of Arracan extends from the left bank of the Tiknaaf river, in latitude 20° 46' N. and longitude 92° 20' E., to Cape Negrais, in latitude 16° 2' N., and longitude 94° 14' E., and is divided from the Burman territory by the Yeomandong mountains, lying parallel to, and in some places approaching very near, the sea-coast, which is fronted by numerous islands, moderately high and thinly inhabited, the largest of which are Cheduba and Ramree, forming part of a group which were almost unknown to Europeans before the Burmese war of 1824. Amongst them are several good harbours, particularly that of Kyouk Phyoo, which takes its name from the small white pebbles that are washed on the beach during the S. W. monsoon, Kyouk Phyoo meaning 'white stones.' Akyab to the northward and Ramree to the southward are also safe harbours, and both have inland water communications with Kyouk Phyoo, as it has with Mion river, Arracan town (now reduced to a few huts), Jalak, Mai, and Aing, from whence there is a pass over the Yeomandong with a road to Ava, by which one division of the British army returned to Jalak from Melloon after the peace. Sandoway, and even Giva, may also be said to have inland navigation to Kyouk Phyoo, as there is a creek from the latter communicating with Sandoway river.

The comparatively small number of Europeans that has yet resided in the Arracan province, renders it premature to judge of its climate; and though all whom we met spoke favourably of it, it certainly is not free from the diseases common to India. Jalak and Arracan towns have everything in their vicinity to make them unhealthy, being placed in mere swamps, enveloped in thick fogs during the N.E. monsoon, and inundated during the opposite season. Our troops suffered much from dysentery and fever at both during the Burman war; while, on the sea-coast, at Kyouk Phyoo, Sandoway, and Negrais, they were comparatively healthy, those places having a cool sea-breeze with temperate nights nearly throughout the year. But at any distance from the sea, where the land is low, heavy fogs and dews prevail during the nights, with hot days. The S.W. monsoon begins early in May and lasts until the end of October; it usually blows along the coast, except when interrupted (which it frequently is about the full and change of the moon) by strong S. and S. W. winds, accompanied with heavy rain and sea, making it at such time necessary to approach this coast with great caution, as there is no place of shelter between Negrais and Ramree, with numerous dangers between them.

From November to April the weather is fine and the water smooth;—an anchorage may then be found, on a muddy bottom, in from six to twenty fathoms, all the way from the Naaf to Negrais, with with good landing. The rise of tide appears to be nowhere so great as at Kyouk Phyoo (sixteen feet in the springs).

In January and February we experienced little or no current in the offing until to the southward of Cheduba; between it and Negrais it ran south from one to one mile and a half per hour.

The islands on their northern and eastern sides are fertile, producing rice in abundance; also cotton, silk, and indigo; but only sufficient is cultivated for the consumption of the very few in-habitants, who are now reduced to little more than 200,000 in the whole province, almost every Burman, with all that was costly or respectable, having recrossed the Yeomandong when the province was ceded to the East India Company, who, with one regiment of sepoy, now hold the scattered remains of its ancient inhabitants (the Mughs) in perfect subjection. It is divided into three districts, Akyab, Ramree, and Sandoway, each governed by a civil judge or superintendent, under the immediate inspection of a commissioner, who usually resides at Chittagong. These judges (officers in the Indian army) have a number of Bengalee policemen; and the one at Akyab, which is much the largest district, has two companies of natives to assist in preserving peace and collecting the revenue, which amounts annually, in the whole province, to about three lacs and a half of rupees (350,000 *l.*), produced principally by the rental of land, the Company considering themselves the proprietors of the soil. A tax on everything useful or necessary is also imposed to raise this apparently insignificant amount, which barely defrays the expenses, though the garrison only consists of eight companies of sepoy, two of which are stationed at Akyab, two at Sandoway, and the other four with the head-quarters of the regiment at Kyouk Phyoo, where a cantonment has been recently formed, and part of the flotilla employed in the late war, consisting of flats and gunboats, is laid up. The others are at Jergo, or Amherst Island, off the south end of Ramree, where there are temporary storehouses, with a quantity of naval stores, decaying very fast, from want of proper protection from the climate, as also are the boats.

There is a regular *dâk* established between Calcutta and Arracan province, as far as Sandoway, *via* Chittagong, Akyab, Kyouk Phyoo, and Ramree: it is from nine to ten days reaching Akyab, and is thence conveyed in boats by the inland communications to the southward, usually reaching Sandoway in four days.

The inhabitants are a hardy, inoffensive race; and, having had little intercourse with strangers, supply all their wants from the immediate vicinity of their houses, which are universally bamboo huts, raised upon piles about four feet from the ground, and generally in some thick jungle near the water, with small patches rice, indigo, cotton, tobacco, and fruit-trees at no very great distance. Fish are abundant, constituting, with rice, their principal food; and this year, for the first time, a cargo of both has been purchased for the Mauritius—the rice at the rate of 1 *l.* 8s. per ton, and the fish equally low. Poultry is also very numerous at Arracan—eighteen for a rupee, nor is there any scarcity of bullocks or buffaloes. The latter they esteem most, from their being docile and useful in cultivating and treading out rice; and it is difficult to say what other use they make of either, as they neither kill them for food, nor do they use milk or any thing made from it, and were much amused at the Europeans and Hindostanees wishing to get it, asking whether they were not afraid of becoming calves. Their religion, that of Buddha, enjoins them not to take away life; but they do not appear very bigoted so this part of their creed, as they had no objection to part with their oxen or buffaloes, and ate any part when dead, even to

the offal usually given to dogs. We procured excellent ox-beef, with an abundance of vegetables, at Cheduba and Ramree, at the rate of three halfpence the pound: at Kyook Phyou, it was the same price; but the cantonment having been so recently formed, it was by no means so good, nor were vegetables easily to be procured, though we got a few of the best oranges I have tasted in India, and I was told they were abundant at the latter part of the year.

Though, in many respects, the people are far from being civilized, in others they surpass the most polished nations. There is rarely a person to be met with who cannot read and write; and records are kept on the palm-leaf, beautifully lacquered in japan or red, generally on a gilt ground, with dark letters. Their common accounts are written with a chalk pencil, resembling talc, on folds of paper made from the bark of a tree, and then covered with lamp-black, or a smooth board, besmeared with the same substance. They have thirty-six characters in their alphabet, written from left to right; and they hold their pen or pencil as we do, the lines being as fine, and the characters as beautifully formed, as if made with a pen and ink.

Their priests appear entirely occupied in the education of the children, and in every village there are two or three. Their schools are equally open to all; and the only remuneration appears to be a sufficient quantity of food, and the erection of a house, which answers as a residence, temple, and school-room; with generally a small pagoda, having a number of poles and pendants hanging from it, much after the manner represented on the common china-ware. Indeed, all their habits, as well as their persons and dress, resemble those of the western part of China. Celibacy is observed by the priests, who universally shave their heads, and wear a dirty yellow cotton dress; and before any boy can be prepared for admission as a priest, he must publicly declare his own and his parents' free consent. Should he afterwards, however, at any time of his life, repent of his resolution, it is not thought disgraceful for him to say so, and he may return to the common walks of life, and take a wife as soon as he pleases. The only foreigners now in Arracan are the servants of the East India Company, who, both civil and military, spoke of the priests (or pondis, as they are termed) as being an unpresuming, well-disposed set of men, never interfering with the concerns of others, unless applied to as arbitrators, when they exercise their judgment with impartiality. The 'Mughs,' in their manners, are perfectly free from the servile hypocrisy of their western neighbours, and equally unlike them as to probity—their words being generally to be taken; and, in dealing with you, they ask the price which they consider the article worth, and no more; though it is to be feared the intercourse which they are likely to have with the natives of Bengal will soon remove these honest traits in their characters. The women dress much after the Chinese fashion, but are by no means secluded, having a full share in all the common intercourse or transactions in life.

At present, except rice, there seem to be no surplus articles for export, though there is no doubt the country would afford abundance, were its resources brought out, which can only be done by a much larger population than it is likely to have for many years, even under the most favourable government. Their imports are very trifling—a few boats coasting along shore to Chittagong, and from thence, by the Sunderbunds, to Calcutta, are sufficient for all their trade to the northward; and a not much larger number to Basseen, and from thence through the Sunderbunds of the Irrawaddy to Ava or Rangoon, are required to bring back silk and other articles manufactured in that country, which are much superior to those made by themselves, and more esteemed than any yet brought by Europeans.