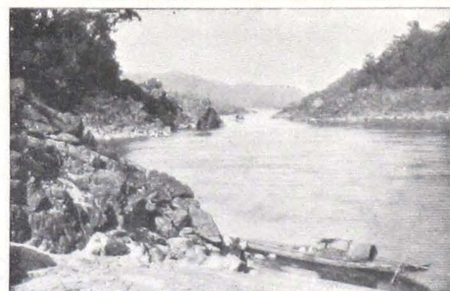
THE DEFILES OF THE IRRAWADDY

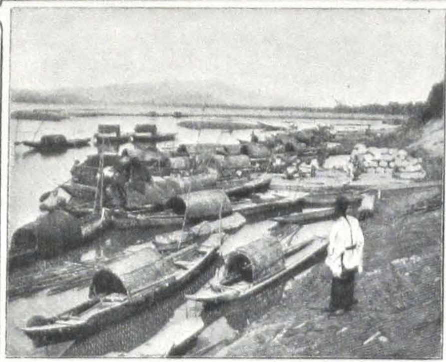
BY V. C. SCOTT O'CONNOR

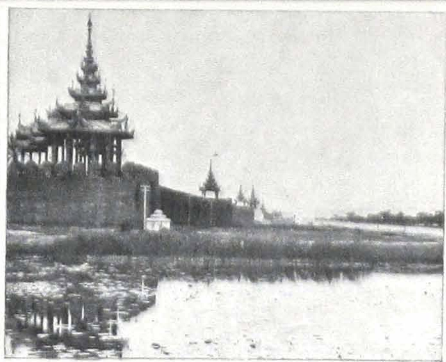
OF all the great rivers of Indo-China, the Irrawaddy is incomparably the greatest. For nearly a thousand miles it flows through Burma in a broad and mighty stream, from the "Confluence," in the far north, where, emerging from its mysterious infancy amid an untraveled wilderness of mountains, it unites with its first great tributary, to the measureless sea, where it hurtles against the cliffs of Cape Negrais. The mountains of its birthplace follow its destiny seaward, and when they sweep down to its water's-edge, or tower mistily on some distant horizon, lend it its incommunicable charm and beauty. Lessening gradually from altitudes of eternal snow, they sink with the river into the ocean, their last bluff crowned by the golden pagoda of Moodain, "gleaming far to seaward, a Burmese Sunium."

It is not easy to write about the great river, for its personality is complex in the extreme. Its length and volume, its importance as an artery of the world, its rise and fall, these are easily recorded and tangible facts. The beauty of its waters, that mirror a sky of surpassing and varied loveliness, of its hills and woods and precipitous heights, and of the sunsets that clothe it in divine mysteries of color, can only be hinted at in words. A great painter might depict them, and yet leave the tale incomplete. For even he could paint only a phase of that which is ever changing. He could tell nothing of the human interest with



LACQUER-WARE MAKERS AT PAGAN—A NATIVE OF BHAMO—IN THE FIRST DEFILE—KACHIN SOLDIER OF THE MILITARY POLICE.





THE RIVER BANK AT BHAMO—PALACE WALL AND MOAT, MANDALAY—KACHIN MAN—KACHIN WOMEN—DAUGHTER OF A SHAN PRINCE—A VIEW IN OLD PAGAN.

which it is fraught; of the long historic procession that fills the mind's eye; of the migrations of prehistoric races, the downward trend of tribes ever moving southward under the impulse of immutable laws; of the advance of invading armies, the flight and agony of the vanquished, the gay processions of exultant victors; of kings and nobles and warriors; of the many-faceted life of the common people, with its passing joys and sorrows, in all of which the great silent highway has played so continuous a part. One cannot entrap the beauty of that which lives and moves, and is yet in its entity and suggestiveness eternal; but of one or two of its aspects something may be said.

The peoples of Burma came from the highlands of Tibet many centuries ago, at a time of which no memory is preserved in local legend or tradition, though each man bears on his face the evidence of his origin. Following the streams which rise in that elevated country, they gradually spread southward, reaching in the fullness of time the sea. In primitive times, when the tribe was the only political unit, and there was no more obvious line of separation than the watershed between the streams that they encountered in their southern migration, it was natural that each tribe should separate itself from the rest. It was a separation, however, which, while it secured to each tribe its immediate liberty, carried in it the germ of ultimate reunion; and read in the light of this physical fact, the racial history of Burma becomes clear in its wide outline. The dominant Burmese represent those tribes which wandered down the many small tributary streams of the Upper Irrawaddy, finally to coalesce in the valley of the great river. Their kindred with a lesser heritage are found in the many tribes on their borders.

Thus, the river flowing oceanward, ever accompanied by its hills, is symbolic in a profound sense of the history of the land. On its banks, peopled by these rude Mongol wanderers, grew up the earliest civilization in Burma, under the teaching of Hindu exiles from India—a civilization to which the ruins of ancient cities bear eloquent testimony to this day. About its northern reaches was fought out the long battle of Burmese supremacy over the kindred Shan race, a struggle of many centuries and varying fortunes, in which the prize was the great river itself. The Shan kingdom of Pong, once powerful in the north, and already in the first century of the Christian era in political relation with China, fell in the struggle, and, save in tattered chronicles of small value, its memory has gone out from among its people. Down the valley of the Irrawaddy, too, swept the tide of the Chinese invasions, in one of which there perished the greatest of all Burmese capitals, the holy city of Pagan. For eight miles the majestic ruins of its thousand temples still line the banks of the river; and palace wall and tapering spire, rising up into heaven from the desolate earth, bear witness to the crushing weight of the blow that was given to civilization in Burma when the miscellaneous hordes of the Tatar descended on it in destruction six hundred years ago. The cactus and the wild plum now grow where once Anawrata the Great ruled in magnificent splendor, and a dusty wheel-track runs through the grand gateway of old Pagan. A slow country cart, creaking along the ruts, toils alone now in the broad sunlight, where once there marched the processions of a king, and the breath of desolation broods over a city of the dead.

Lastly, it has been up the Irrawaddy that the British power has advanced. The great conflict of barbarism with civilization, more acute, more universal now than at any previous period in the history of the world, has once more been fought out along its banks. The people of Burma have become a subject people; its kings have passed forever out of the category of sovereign princes. Civilization has triumphed, to the satisfaction of all civilized men. Yet no satisfaction can divest such changes of their tragic character. The most callous heart cannot regard the fall of a nation without some sentiment of sorrow, or the final extinction of a picturesque court and of ancient institutions without inextinguishable regret. "Burma," observes the royal chronicler of China—"Burma, from the Han dynasty until our day, has existed for over seventeen hundred years, and now, alas! by reason of a few years of tyranny and indiscretion on the part of its monarch, the country has been obliterated in the twinkling of an eye."

Not the least of its many fascinations is the mystery which shrouds the great river's birthplace. Soon after entering Burma it presents the appearance of a pellucid stream eight hundred yards in width. That is the furthest knowledge of it possessed by the ordinary traveler. But the men who live up there, the Englishmen who rule and fight in the wild border country, know it farther up, as far as, and beyond, the

Confluence, where its two main sources unite. It has not yet been given to any man to say whence they come. The secret of its birth is still wrapped in the vast *terra incognita* of mountains which spreads away to the north and west. Yet it is being slowly but surely wrested from its keepers. One by one the many erroneous theories that have been hazarded by investigators since the dawn of the nineteenth century are being disposed of; one by one the wild frontier tribes are being reduced to civilization, as the growing peace of Burma frees the government for exploration and extension in the north. Each winter sees a movement of British columns a little farther north. It cannot be long now before its mystery is pierced.

Thirty miles below the Confluence the new settlement of Myitkina is laid out on the high right bank of the river. No change can be more significant than the change which the last few years have wrought in the character of Myitkina. Half a dozen years ago it was the Ultima Thule of Burma, a military outpost in the heart of the enemy's country. For six months each year it was cut off from nearly all communication. The only approach to it lay by the river, and the river, as we shall presently see, is no highway at that season. The outpost of Myitkina had to look out for itself, feed itself, and, if necessary, fight for its life. One winter it was burned down by the caterans of the hills over the heads of its garrison. Myitkina is still the frontier town, it is still liable to have to fight for its life; but it is no longer cut off from succor. It is easily reached by railway at all seasons of the year, and is becoming a popular stopping-place for the tourist hurrying round the globe. It has all the freshness and charm of a new settlement, and though on the borders of savagery, it is full of life and action and hope.

From Myitkina to near its junction with the Mogaung, the river flows in a broad, clear stream over a pebbled bed. Steaming down-stream in the last days of December, we could see the coarse sand churned up from amid the pebbles by the eddying current, and glistening like gold in the sunlit waters. The simile is not altogether fanciful, for the gold-washers may be seen at work on the river slopes below Myitkina. Nearer the shallows which the steamers skirt in their course, distinct glimpses can be had into the life of the river, and great fish may be seen scuttling away in agitation at the near approach of the throbbing paddles. The river, though broad and majestic to the eye, is comparatively shallow in its northern reaches, and the navigable channel is narrow. This is made obvious to the inexperienced eye when a great bank of yellow pebbles tilts its glistening back half-way across the stream, or a reef of gray rocks stretches in saw-like outline across the ship's course, narrowing the channel to a stream of deep water under the shelter of the opposite bank. Behind Myitkina, now fading into the blue distance, there tower up, like "Breasts of Sheba," the twin peaks of Loi Lem and Loi Law, and behind these, again, there fade away into the empyrean the unexplored mountains of the north, upon some of which there is a white gleam of snow. It is one of the most beautiful and most satisfying voyages in the world, this swift descent down the upper waters of the Irrawaddy. The keen ozone of a perfect air, the broad winter sunlight flooding a landscape of romantic beauty, the sense of encompassing infinity, fill the blood with a supreme vitality, and lift the soul into regions of exquisite peace. The great river, free, for the present, to go where it lists, flows on in serene, untroubled beauty, the central chord in a grand harmony of nature. Overhead there is a flawless sky, and on every hand the mountains stretch away to the uttermost horizon in shades of color, from tints so faint that they are scarcely to be known from the ether beyond, to the rich purples of near peaks, and the deep blue-greens of heavenly wooded spurs which reach down to the water's edge, laving their uncovered foundations in the pellucid stream. At points like these in its course, where the dense shadows fall on the seemingly motionless waters, the river presents some of its most characteristic and beautiful aspects, resembling some still mountain lake, and recalling, by strange analogy, far-off Como and Lucerne.

Sixty-five miles below Myitkina the Mogaung, emerging from between low, flat banks clothed in giant grass, pours its tributary waters into the Irrawaddy. It flows through a district fruitful in serpentine and amber and india-rubber, inhabited by a medley of hill tribes of kindred origin, whose truculence and savagery long prevented its being opened up. The town of Mogaung has earned an unenviable notoriety as a penal settlement. Banishment to Mogaung was the greatest misfortune that could overtake a Burman official in disgrace under the old

régime. Near it is the Endaugyi Lake, from which the Mogaung derives a portion of its waters, and a legend of the country tells of an ancient city at its bottom, suddenly engulfed. Soon after the union of the Mogaung and the Irrawaddy a new range comes prominently into view, broadening out into a beautiful amphitheater of blue hills, at the feet of which the united stream must seemingly come to eternal pause. But the river makes a grand southwesterly sweep, and there presently becomes visible, in the vicinity of the Shan-Talok village of Senbo, the great gorge through which it must pass, known in the nomenclature of the river as

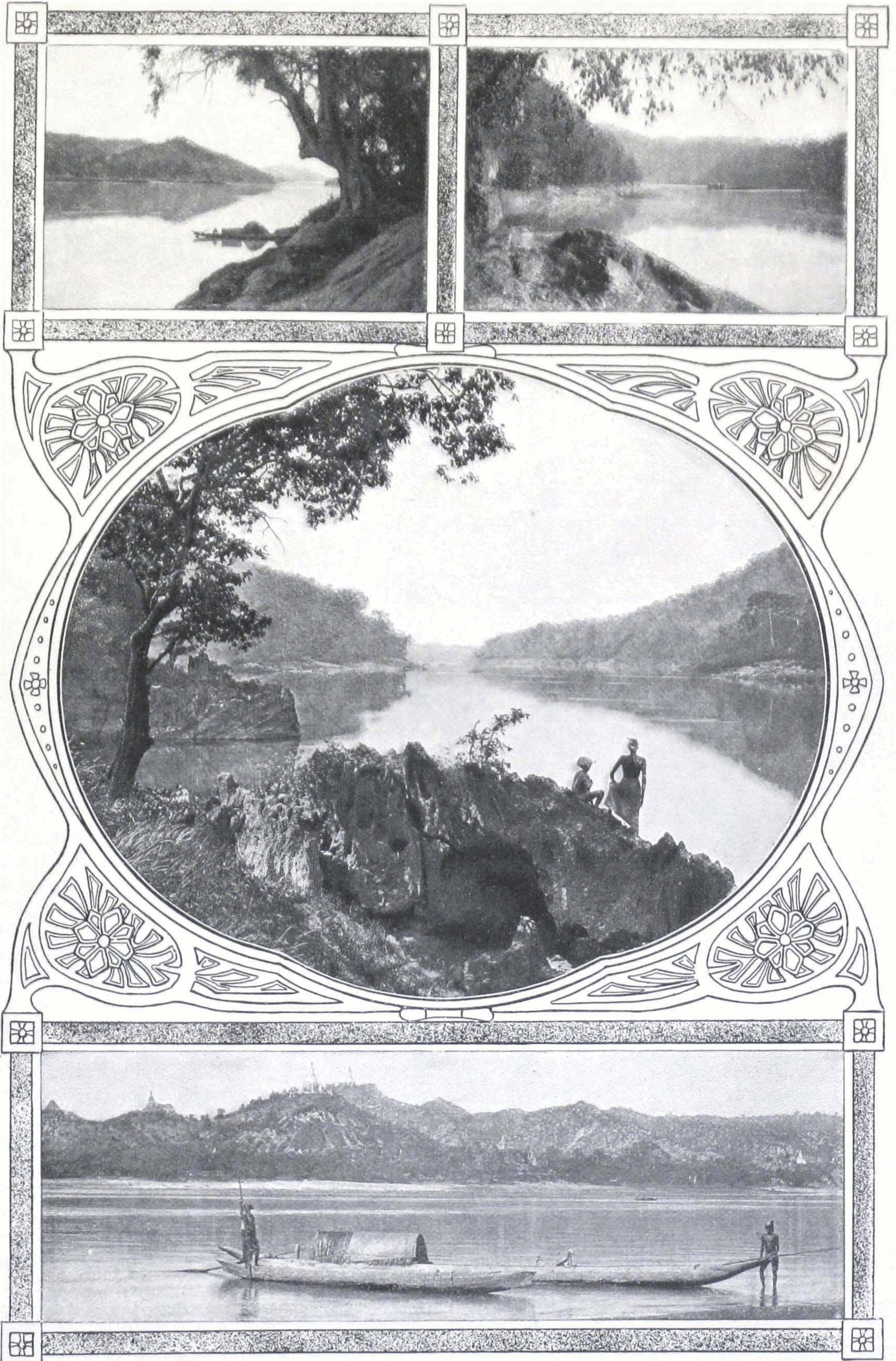
THE FIRST DEFILE.

HERE, in the shadow of the hills, spreads a vast receiving-basin, in which its waters must perforce stay their course, since the narrow and circuitous defile is all too small for the broad stream demanding imperious admission. At this, the winter season, the river threads its way far down amid the sands which in flood-time form the bottom of a great seething lake. There can, indeed, be few more magnificent episodes in the life of a river than this. For when, swollen with melting snow and heavy rain, it rushes turbulently seaward in obedience to the first law of its being, it is here suddenly checked in its course by the iron hand of the mountains. Signs of its terrible recoil are evident on every side. The spectator standing under the barbed frieze of the Goorkha outpost near Senbo, and looking down, first on the now quiet river, and then across a yawning interval to the opposite heights, realizes something of its greater life. Far above the present limit of its waters, to a height of eighty feet, marking the woods with an even line in testimony to its domination, the river climbs in its session of wrath. In a single night it rises fifty feet, as though it sought to sweep the mountains before it, and at such times the defile within is a raging inferno of waters in which no boat can live.

For thirty-five miles the river flows through the mountains of the First Defile, the rocky sides of which, torn and lacerated, lie bare in winter, the embodiment of savagery. This is more especially the case at one point, the most dangerous in the entire defile, where the black rocks rise sheer out of the river's bed, threatening destruction. Through them there has been cut a passage, now high above water-level, for the slow country boats which formerly performed the perilous duty of carrying the mails in the flood season. From May to October the defile is entirely closed to steamers, and even for country boats the service is one of some danger. The journey up-stream is then sometimes of three weeks' duration; the descent is a matter of hours, so fierce is the current. A traveler who made both journeys at a comparatively quiet season has left of the journey up-stream the following account: "The scenery throughout this defile is sublimely grand and picturesque, but in places awful to contemplate as one stands watching the trackers encouraging one another by fiendish yells that echo through the woods, and straining every muscle to gain ground as the boat sluggishly quivers through the fierce rapids now running flush with the boat's gunwale. All now depends on the trueness of the towing-line: that gone and we are lost, for the best and strongest swimmer could not live in such places." Returning in March, three months later, the journey was even more fruitful in excitement. "The danger of the defile had in no way been exaggerated. Indeed, as we shot down the impetuous stream, every moment seemed to be our last. It was with difficulty the helmsmen kept the boats from being carried round by the violent eddies and whirlpools, and the boatmen rowed their strongest against stream to reduce the terrific pace at which we were being borne by the fierce rapids. Our position was too critical to admit of accurate observation."

These are fearful joys to which the present-day traveler is not subjected; yet, for the seeker after it, the swift delirium of a race down the river in its turbulent season is a quite attainable joy any time between May and October. The river, restricted in this portion of its course to a narrow rocky channel, assumes again, though in a less transparent degree, the pure green tint which characterizes it at Myitkina. On each hand the nobly wooded hills run down in echelon to the river's edge, and there is at all times that play of color characteristic of hills piled behind one another in receding distances.

At frequent intervals the hills send down their tribute to the river in streamlets that babble over great polished boulders and gleam and sparkle in the sunlight. This is their season of security and charm. In the rains their music swells to a deafening roar as they surge down in cataracts, bringing with them, in helpless chaos, boulders and



VIEW NEAR THIHADAW, THIRD DEFILE—VIEW IN THE SECOND DEFILE—A RIVER VIEW—THE RIVER AT SAGAING, NEAR MANDALAY.

trees and sand. Near the lower end of the defile the river, winding a narrow and sinuous course through the rocks known as the Elephant, Cow, and Granary, enters on one of its most exquisite passages. The rocks, fancifully so named, stretch across in a broken line from shore to shore. For half the year they are covered, but in winter they lie exposed, glistening in the sun, and revealing the true width of the channel, here scarcely more than eighty yards across, but of great depth. Their sheer bare sides, of a polished gray-green hue, afford no footing for life; but on their rugged summits the receding river leaves a thin deposit of rich silt, in which beautiful tussocks of vivid grass find a home, its lively beauty enhanced by the grim setting. In the days soon after the war, when the channel was less known, a small steamer came to a violent end amid these dangerous reefs, which, in the flawless calm of a winter afternoon, present an aspect of placid beauty. Dashing against a rock, she was flung back, and sank almost instantly, and was lost to sight in the deep, resistless understream.

Below the Elephant and Cow the little hamlet of Tamangyi peeps out from the leafy hillside, and the river, freed from its iron fetters, lengthens out into a long, dreamy reach in which the varied hills and woods and the opalescent clouds that trail like the pinions of another world across the blue sunlit·ether attain redoubled beauty. A moment, and the dream sweeps by; the great curtain of the hills folds swiftly back, revealing a distant glimpse of the Shan Mountains; and the waters, sparkling in the broad sunlight, seem visibly to rejoice at the termination of their long and arduous passage through the territories of the First Defile.

Few signs of life greet the traveler between Senbo and Tamangyi. An occasional boat or dugout; a thatched hut high up on the steep declivities; at the lower end some blue-coated Chinese Shans quarrying for stone; a rare pagoda—such are the faint symptoms of man's dominion. For the rest, a startled otter on the glistening rocks; a white-headed fish-eagle with keen gaze intent on his prey; a cormorant poised on a stake, and, with obtrusive philosophy, drying his dripping wings; perhaps a panther swimming hurriedly for life across the fast-flowing river; the short, quick call of barking deer, or the sullen roar of a tiger making off up one of the leafy watercourses. All else is loneliness and solitude.

Leaving the hills, the river spreads out to ambitious dimensions, and flowing past the site of ancient Sampenago, receives, before it reaches Bhamo, the tributary waters of the Taping. The town of Bhamo, like the river on which it rests, lives a double life. In the rains its low grounds and pasture-lands lie flooded by the encroaching river. Its tenements on the river face exist on sufferance, in imminent danger of being flooded and swept away. Its streets are moribund and of squalid appearance. One looks in vain for the famous trading-town on the border, the southern gateway of China, the traditional meeting-place of Chino-Burmese commerce. One looks in vain, because the road to China, on which so many embassies have traveled, is impassable for caravans in the rains, and Bhamo has perforce relapsed into a small and unimportant Burmese town.

But the approach of winter heralds a great change. Over the wild border-land, through which winds the ambassador's road, roughest of international highways, come the long caravans from China—thousands of hardy mules, hundreds of blue-clad laborers, and numerous portly merchants filled out to abnormal size by dint of many satin coats and furs, astride small ponies, which amble hardily along. From the Shan States, north and east, come picturesque crowds of varied nationality, a permutation of Chinese, Burmese, and many-tribed Shans. And from the border highlands descend the cateran Kachins, to whom the British government now pays a fixed toll, in lieu of the income they formerly derived, by robbery, murder, and blackmail, from the traders making their way along this dubious highway. Bhamo now breaks out into life and color, exchanging its moribund isolation for the concourse of many visitors, like any tourist resort in the season. The streets bustle with animation, and the market-place of a morning is a picturesque rendezvous. The country folk come in with supplies of vegetables and greens, and business is brisk in the early hours of the morning. There is a genial hum of voices and laughter in the air, and the play of color and gesture is full of absorbing interest. Along the stony highway the trader from Yun-nan rides by in a fast amble, seated far back on his shaggy steed. An almond-eyed coolie, a man of thews and sinews, struggles slowly behind him, stooping under a heavy load. He might have stepped out from a Chinese vase. Following him, one is presently in China street,

flanked by roomy shops tenanted by groups of Yun-nan Chinese, whose long pigtails, woven at the end into a tassel of red silk, are crowned by a slight dome-shaped cap of black satin. China street is a busy thoroughfare, and there is little leisure to loiter. A loud clatter of hoofs on the stone pavement behind interrupts one's reflections, and a trio of worthy traders amble rapidly past, one of them to dismount a few yards ahead at a more pretentious shop. A small lad leads off his stout nag, with its paraphernalia of tasseled trappings swaying about it, through an impossible-looking passage to a stable hidden away in some presumptive back yard, while the man of trade, stretching his legs, cramped in the short, high stirrups of his people, yields himself up to the attentions of his wife, on whose round Celestial face there is spread an affectionate smile. A small crowd of his friends presently gather round him to hear the news, and there, seated cross-legged on the floor of his counting-house, smoking the long pipe of ease, we may leave him, to observe a group of approaching Shans. Clad in dark, broad, silk trousers and vast red-tasseled hats of straw, they are sufficiently picturesque. The Shans move on, and are presently followed by a Kachin, with an embroidered bag slung under one arm and a broad *dah* across his back, its under side naked, its outer face sheathed in a wooden scabbard. He and his fellows come down from their hills with vegetables and fruits, and such sundries as a tiger-skin, some gold-dust, or a spinel picked up in a watercourse, and barter these in Bhamo for the civilized commodities they desire. On the outskirts of the town, facing the highway, stands the Kachin *waing*, or caravansary. It is not the place of entertainment in which Harun-al-Rashid might have sojourned, for it consists merely of three open sheds inclosed by a bamboo fence. Yet it is possessed of a primitive interest. The Kachin, who carries his few necessaries with him, is content with such shelter as a bare roof may afford, and it is here in the waing that he sleeps and feeds during his visits to the town. If you go out there in the early morning, while the river mists still lie brooding over the low pasture-lands of Bhamo, you will see him making ready his breakfast. A small black earthen pot is perched over a fire of slender twigs, and seated before it, surrounded by the baskets of fruit and vegetables he has brought down to sell, he leisurely peels a pile of onions, dropping them one by one into the simmering pot, in which a handful of small fry are already stewing. Hard by, his fellow pares small fagots, with dexterous dah strokes, for the fire. From the basket of necessaries neat bamboo cylinders are drawn forth in succession, and little clouds of salt or a shower of red chilli-dust is added to the fish now nearly ready. Finally a stouter cylinder of bamboo, which contains drinking-water filled the previous day at a mountain stream, is placed close by, and then, taking off the soot-incrusted pot, the meal is served with a savagely phlegmatic indifference to observation. The same process is going on throughout the waing, and one presently passes out by the small mat cottage at the gate, in which a spruce clerk is seated, compiling trade statistics, with a sense of emerging from a primitive existence.

In another quarter of the town is the Shan waing, so called, even more primitive in its hospitality than the Kachin shelter, for the Shans and Panthays who frequent the spot are all encamped out on the open plain. Yellow masses of straw lying scattered about contrast with the blue clothes of the mule-drivers hard at work packing innumerable sacks with dried fish and with salt taken from snowy heaps of that commodity. You will see them seated out there in the open, chatting and laughing hoarsely, far into the night, in groups collected round blazing fires. Out of the dusk there looms an indefinite suggestion of pack-saddles piled in heaps and pack-animals herding close together from instinct. Overhead the stars gleam brightly in the clear winter sky, and a few paces away the river flows darkly past, with a hurtling murmur against the high mud cliffs.

THE SECOND DEFILE.

A FEW miles below Bhamo the Irrawaddy, leaving behind it a great mass of mountains the loftiest peaks of which are the possession of China, glides into the gorge known as the "Second Defile." There are no signs here of a vast accumulation of waters similar to that at the mouth of the defile above. The channel, broader and less obstructed, offers a more adequate highway, and the river is less turbulent in its entry. Yet on all sides there is grim testimony to its power in the pedestals of the surrounding hills, torn, contorted in the most fantastic patterns, and swept bare of every vestige of life to a height of thirty feet. It is this

sense of conflict between vast elemental forces of nature, of eternal battle between mountains and river, which, felt intensely here, makes the Second Defile, briefer than the others, a great spectacle of the world. Near the northern entrance a mighty cliff, which turns its worn, precipitous face to the river, speaks with convincing eloquence of the conflict. It rises sheer into the sky from the water's edge, eight hundred feet from its massive foundations, made smooth by the constant friction of the speeding river, to the delicate clustering bamboos on its summit. Round its base graceful creepers grow and climb, hanging in festoons amid the branches of noble trees. A pagoda in miniature, one of the smallest of the myriads which taper heavenward in this land of religion, crowns the top of a small rock at its feet. Its diminutive size throws into wonderful relief the great rock, seared with the stress of centuries, which towers in colossal majesty behind it. An instinctive hush settles down on the ship as we race under its shadow, and there is deep silence in the gorge, broken only by the steady paddle-throbs, which echo like mysterious heart-beats through the glen. In this battle-chamber of nature, stamped with the records of a long, unceasing strife, the human soul shrinks into itself, finding no vent in the commonplace.

There is a legend attached to the great rock that is not unworthy of its tragic grandeur and beauty. It is a tale of the first king and queen of Sampenago, who were driven in a far-away day from their kingdom by Kuttha, the king's brother. The king, with a truly Buddhist philosophy, when he heard of his brother's advance, forbade any resistance. To take life would be wrong, and the issue must turn on the extent of his accumulated merit through all past existences. If this were great, the threatened evil could not befall him; were it small, it could not be averted. So while the king turned to prayer and good works, his princes and generals stayed their measures for defense until the usurper swept in on the tide of destiny and seized the kingdom. The king fled, but was pursued, overtaken, and cast into prison. The queen escaped to the enchanted mountain Wela, where a son was born to her in her sorrow. When the little Prince Welatha ("son of Wela") was six years old, he saw his mother in tears, and by questioning her learned that he was a prince and his father a captive. When he was seven his mother yielded to his importunity, and sent him with her royal ornaments to visit his father. On approaching Sampenago, he met his father being led out to execution. The brave boy stopped the procession and revealed himself, offering to die instead of his father. The King Kuttha thereupon ordered him to be thrown into the Irrawaddy. But the river rose in tremendous waves, the earth shook, and the executioners could not for terror obey the royal order. This being reported to Kuttha, he ordered that the prince should be trodden to death by wild elephants; but the beasts could not be goaded to attack him. A deep pit was then dug and filled with burning fuel, into which the prince was cast; but the flames came on him like cool water, and the burning fagots became lilies. When Kuttha heard this he grew furious in his rage, and had the young prince taken down to the spirit-haunted mountain and cast from the great precipice into the river; but he was caught up by a Naga and carried away to the Naga country. The earth quaked, many thunderbolts fell, the Irrawaddy rolled up its waves and broke down its banks. Kuttha was seized with terror, and, as he fled forth from the city gate, the earth opened and swallowed him up.

It is not the least interesting feature of many legends in Burma that they enshrine the traditional knowledge of some ancient historical or geological fact, and it may be that in this pretty tale we have a record of some convulsion of nature, an episode in the ceaseless conflict between the great river and its encompassing hills.

This, the place of the Great Cliff, is the finest portion of the Second Defile. Soon after leaving it, the river sweeps round in more than a semicircle, to emerge once more in untrammeled splendor at the foot of a gently rounded hill tinted with reddening heather, like the broad-backed English downs which Tennyson loved, which keep sentinel by the sea near his sheltered home.

> Where, far from noise and smoke of town,
> He watched the twilight falling brown,
> All round a careless-ordered garden
> Close to the ridge of a noble down.

Below the defile lie the island and village of Shwegu, through the tree-tops of which gleam the golden spires of many pagodas, the center of a great annual festival attended by many thousands of pilgrims. An island of green and gold set in the folds of the sunlit river, which fades away to steel-blue mist

at the threshold of the mountains, on the summits of which an army of opalescent clouds is enthroned, Shwegu is thrice lovely.

Henceforth, till it reaches the Third Defile, the river's course is uneventful, save where, encircling many islands, it receives from China the many-mouthed homage of the Shweli, one of its principal tributaries. Yet it never ceases to be beautiful. At evening the sun sinks to rest behind the clear-cut amethyst hills in a blaze of golden light, and the beautiful hues of sunset pervade the still reaches, slowly changing like chords of divine music till they pass imperceptibly away into the gray dusk of twilight. Later the stars shine out in the clear winter sky, and their light, like quivering spear-points, plays on the dark face of the waters, hastening untired to their union with the sea. The beautiful constellation of the Great Bear, climbing the heavens, points coldly northward, where imagination pictures the snows of æons lying on the summits of mountains on which man has left no footprint. Near by, the lights of a small village die out one by one, and the hush of sleep broods over hillside and plain. The silent ship, like a tired bird, sways gently on the bosom of the calm, eternal river. It is midnight on the Irrawaddy.

THE THIRD DEFILE.

BELOW the picturesque village of Male, inclosed in a red-thorn stockade, the river, for the third time in its course between the Confluence and the sea, forces a right of way through hilly country. Male was once the resting-place of a fugitive queen, and for a short time served as a royal capital. In later days it was the Burmese customs-station on the upper river, and in the last days of 1885, when the kingdom of Burma was hastening to its dissolution, a fleet of the king's war-boats and steamers lay at anchor at Male, in wild hopes of a French advent across the frontiers of Tonquin. But the French never came, and the last of the house of Alompra was already on his way into exile, followed by his weeping wife and a stricken court, before his Majesty's itinerant ambassadors in Europe had concluded their wanderings in search of an alliance. Leaving Male, the river, confined between low hills, flows in tranquil splendor under the shadow of the Shwe-u-daung, the bare, serrated peak and sharp declivities of which rise majestically into the sky, like the Spanish hills beyond Gibraltar. The Shwe-u-daung, six thousand feet in height, is the outer citadel of that fortress of magnificent mountains in the chambers of which are treasured the finest rubies of the world. Sixty miles inland, in the beautiful Mogok valley, are the famous ruby-mines of Burma. The road is rough and steep, and for five months each year impracticable for wheeled traffic. At best, it is hard going for the long trains of bullock-carts which creak and toil along its ruts, laden with machinery for the mines and all the requirements of a colony of Englishmen planted in a secluded valley sixty miles from a highway of communication. The traveler on horseback, lightly equipped, can make the journey in two days. Preliminary difficulties overcome, the journey through the wild and uncivilized mountains, till quite recently the haunt of numerous banditti, is one that well repays him.

Mogok itself, surrounded by magnificent peaks like the Pinkudaung, seven thousand feet in height, and apt to be transfigured at sunset in a glow of red fire, suggestive of their priceless contents, is unique in its seclusion and its world-known fame.

Below the village of Thabeitkin—the port of Mogok, on the Irrawaddy—there is a charming island pagoda and monastery. Once, and it is not many years ago, the monastery was tenanted by an abbot and his monks and acolytes. Every year, at a great annual festival, the country-side came over in long boats and dugouts, and the pagoda platform was gay with the brilliance of a Burmese festival. Monastery spires and columns, the chapels of the Buddha, and the slopes of the island pagoda were renovated and gilded with the lavish gold of Burmese Buddhism. In the still waters of the river between the island and the near shore dogfish, tame and gentle from years of immunity, came each day to be fed by the monks, and at the year's festival to be decorated with leaves of gold by the followers of a religion the highest attribute of which is its tenderness for all created life. To the traveler the pagoda of Thihadaw, with its singular appanage, was one of the most interesting spectacles to be met with on the upper river. But a few years have wrought a change, which is not without its symbolism. The island pagoda, set in the heart of the Third Defile, is still beautiful; but the fingers of decay are busy with its monastery roofs and spires. Their halls and closets lie empty and deserted. The waters of the river are slowly but certainly eating into the fence of wood and stone built in an

earlier decade to protect the island, and time will bring destruction. The monastery fish, no longer fed by its tenants, no longer protected by their presence from secular attack, have grown wild and timid, and no artifice will now induce them to come when summoned by the familiar call. It is believed that the island, consecrated to religion, can never be flooded, however high the river may rise. The pagoda is still firm on its base, its buildings still habitable; and yet it is silent and untenanted. No one will say why. The old monks at Thabeitkin shake their heads and mutter impossible reasons; the fishermen of Thihadaw village say it is because their village has become small. An evil legend, which broods sadly over the deserted fane, attributes it to another and a harsher cause. But whatsoever the cause, the result is there, and, in a sense, it is symbolic of an inevitable decadence. Fewer monasteries are built now than in years gone by; fewer scholars chant their lessons in the monastic schools; everywhere there is a loosening of the bonds of a great religious organization, equaled only by one other in the world.

At Thihadaw the defile grows to greater beauty. The single line of hills which has confined the river on each bank rises in height and breaks up into a greater variety of groups, through which the river wanders in long reaches and curves, as placid and calm as untroubled slumber. At Kabwet village, where an enterprising German works the coal-mines of the neighborhood, the river emerges in a great curve from the midst of the higher hills, and widens out, though still restrained for many a mile by low, undulating country, beautiful in December with warm autumn hues, till, at Kyaukmyaung, the Third Defile quietly ends. The view, hitherto confined, now broadens out, and far ahead on the river's horizon loom successive spurs of the Shan Mountains, towering in stately beauty above the distant city of Mandalay.

Here the great defiles of the Irrawaddy end. The river, leaving its infancy and hot, strenuous youth behind it, settles down to maturer life, till at the delta, still many hundred miles distant, its power is broken and ultimately lost in the ocean.

The present-day traveler in Burma is borne along the great highway under conditions that favorably compare with those of Europe. For nine hundred miles the Irrawaddy is navigated by the steamers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, most of which are handsomely equipped with all the resources of civilization. For purposes of rapid travel the fast mail-steamers are the more suitable; but for interest and local color, and for the unique insight they offer into the life of the people, the great cargo-boats of the Irrawaddy are much to be preferred. To the gay, light-hearted Burman, whose philosophy is perfect indolence, and to whom time is infinite in its opportunities for doing nothing, the speed of the express-steamer is no attraction. A Burmese village, which treats the arrival of the mail-packet with calm indifference, is plunged into sudden excitement when the hoarse whistle of its slower fellow is borne up the river. On such occasions, Sleepy Hollows, where no one appears to have anything to do but doze in a comfortable corner or bathe in the cool river, attain to quite ridiculous energy. For to every little village secluded from the great world beyond it, save in so far as it rests on the shores of the noblest of highways, the cargo-boats, with huge flats in tow, mean the advent of news, of gossip, and of trade, things especially dear to the Burman woman's heart. Each week they leave Mandalay, the center of all things to the upper Burman mind, for the long voyage up the river to Bhamo, and they bring with them all that a Burman heart can desire, all that a Burman village cannot furnish, from tinned Swiss milk and potted salmon to silk and pearls. The process is eminently simple. The cargo-boat and at least one of her flats are partitioned out into stalls which are let for the entire voyage, a matter of nearly a fortnight, from Mandalay to Bhamo and back. But the stall-holders are wisely conservative, and frequently retain their stalls for years. In this way they build up a business connection, and are well known in all the towns and villages along the river. Thus, if the head man Moung Bah of Moda village wishes for a new silk *putsoe* of the fashionable zigzag pattern, or his wife a *tamein* of the new apple-green and pink tartan, or Mahla, the village belle, a necklace of Birmingham pearls, they go down to the steamer landing, and with much detail describe their requirements to Ah Tun, the Chinaman, or Sheik Ibrahim, the Mohammedan trader, whose long gray beard contrasts strikingly with the hairless faces about him, and, in the fullness of time, the "fire-boat," trumpeting its advent, brings to each of them his heart's desire. The transaction, gratifying in itself, is made more so by time. Moung Bah's wish

for a fashionable garment was probably inspired by an eloquent hint from the silk-dealer, or a glimpse of a Mandalay dandy, when the last boat passed through. A week's deep reflection, eked out by clouds of green tobacco and the enthusiastic advice of his neighbors; a calculation of ways and means, based on the length and breadth of his credit with the dealer, have brought him to a pleasant decision before the boat's return down-stream; and then, the order given, there follows a period of blissful anticipation. If you are traveling up in the boat next voyage, you will see Moung Bah sitting on his haunches on the high foreshore of Moda village, chewing betel-nut with apparent calm; and when the boat is run alongside, and the lascars plunge overboard into the river with a rope to make her fast, and the gangway-planks are laid, Moung Bah will walk up gravely to the upper deck and enter into possession of his long-expected purchase. A period of further excitement will follow on his return home, when the fashionable garment will run the fire of domestic criticism and the loud praise of the village cronies. Business transacted under such conditions, however unsatisfactory it may appear to a feverish Western observer, is laden with subtle charms for the more placid Oriental. Time, the mere element of hours and minutes, is a thing of no account in a bountiful land where there are no paupers and no poor law, in a smiling land where it is always afternoon.

The deck of a cargo-boat is itself a delightful microcosm of Burmese life. Down the center there is the long double line of stalls, back to back, each stall separated from its neighbor by a row of bales or boxes; and in the small square spaces between, the stall-holders have their habitation. Here, at all hours, you will see them seated on gay carpets, reclining on soft quilts, slumbering under silk tartans of beautiful composition, flirting, gossiping, smoking contentedly, or playing animated chess. A Burmese game of chess is a unique entertainment, and one which can generally be seen played to perfection on a big cargo-steamer. Everything appertaining to it is of massive proportions. The chess-board is of solid wood nearly two feet square; the squares look gigantic; the pieces, rudely carved, are made to stand hard usage, for the Burman throws a curious vigor into his play, each piece being brought down on the board with a sounding whack. In addition to the players, there is always a group of friends and self-constituted advisers round the chess-board. Each of these takes a keen interest in the game, and pours forth advice with great eagerness. The player, with an amiable, superior smile, plays his own game, and when this is at variance with proffered advice, each move is followed by long-drawn sounds of pessimistic regret and much resolute head-shaking. One or two spectators, who do not fully understand the game, look on in silence, smoking their long green cheroots in a manner suggestive of deep and concentrated thought. The game, in short, is interesting, because there is so much human interest in it.

The flats in tow of a cargo-steamer are occupied, as a rule, by a poorer class of stall-holders than those in the steamer itself. Silks, cotton goods, fur coats, socks, linen, china, pottery, ironware, and the gewgaws of vanity here give way to the necessities of life—to salt and onions, piles of imported flour, molasses in little rhomboids like taffy, sugar in great crystalline heaps, baskets of potatoes, red and yellow chillies, and raw produce of the most bewildering variety. Most of the stall-holders here are women. The atmosphere is wholly different from that on the adjoining steamer. The curtains are let down, and a soft half-light pervades the flat. In the dim vista, broken here and there by bars of light in which the myriad motes riot, women lie asleep, resting against soft flour-bags, or sit chatting in undertones in small groups. In this way the hours and weeks pass by, till they grow to years, and in some cases a lifetime.