

TRANSLITERATION OF FOREIGN NAMES AND WORDS INTO BURMESE.

Kinwun Mingyi U Gaung's diary, in which he recorded, as he had perforce to record, the names of European towns and many another European word in the Burmese script, and which he had executed most satisfactorily, approximating the European pronunciation and accent in many cases, affords a concrete example of the imperfections of the Burmese script for the purpose. The apparent inaccuracies were due, not to his want of ability to write or to find the correct script, but to the inherent imperfections of the Burmese script itself. The Kinwun Mingyi was an acknowledged Burmese and Pali scholar and a past master of the two languages. His knowledge of them was erudite and profound, yet he was unable to find the equivalents of the characters F and V in the Burmese script. Ever since the publication of his diary, I have often times been thinking whether the time has not arrived when we should add these two characters to our alphabet, thus breaking the traditional convention in the right direction. By adding these two characters to our script the names of foreign towns and the foreign words and phrases written in the Burmese script, be they legal, technical, scientific or colloquial, would be more readily decipherable than now. At present the transliteration, as given in the Burmese daily newspapers and journals, is done so imperfectly that one can hardly recognise the European equivalents of the words thus transliterated in the Burmese script. The transliteration in most cases has given sounds out of all recognition. No guessing of any kind will solve the problem. The following are the examples :—

- (1) Min-chit-sa-tar (မင်းချစ်စာတာ) for Manchester.
- (2) Auk-pho (အောက်ဖို့) for Oxford.
- (3) Came-bree (ကိမ်းဘရီး) for Cambridge.
- (4) E-jip-pa-shin (အီဂျစ်ပရင်း) for Egyptian.
- (5) Sie-yin (ဆိုင်ယင်း) for science.
- (6) Um-ma-sa-tar-din (အမ်းမာစာတာဒင်း) for Amsterdam.
- (7) Wee-to-ri-ya (ဝီတိုရိယ) for Victoria.
- (8) Pha-lin-min (ဖာလင်းမင်း) for Fleming.
- (9) Bar-moo (ဘာမူ) for Vermouth.
- (10) Pha-ran-sit (ဖာရန်စစ်) for Francis.
- (11) Byi-tee-sha (ဗြိတိယ) for British.
- (12) Chee-coat (ချီးကုတ်) for Chief Court.

- (32) It is not a very good stuff.—အပ်(-တ)၊ အပ်(-စ)၊ နေ့(-တ)၊ အေဗျး-ရီး၊
ဂွတ်(-ဗ)၊ စ-တပ် (-ဗ)
- (33) There is no hotel at the railway terminus.—သုံး(-ဂ်)၊ အပ်(-စ)၊
နီး၊ ထို-ထံး (-လ)၊ အက် (တ-)၊ သီ၊ ရေး (-လ) -ဝေး၊ တီး-မင်း-နပ် (-စ)။
- (34) Vermouth and brandy.—ဗျီး၊ မု (-သ)၊ ထံး (-န-ဗ)၊ တ-ရီး (-န) -ဗီး။
- (35) From Rangoon to Henzada.—ဂ-ရေန် (-သ)၊ ရီး (-န) -ဂူး (-န)၊ ဝူး၊ ထံး
(-န) -ဗ-ဂ။
- (36) The fare is very stiff.—သြို၊ ဗျီး (-ဂ်)၊ အပ် (-စ)၊ ဗျီး-ရီး စ-တပ် (-ဗ)။

U THA KIN.

NOTE.

The World of Books, June 1927, Vol. v. No. 5, printed an article by me on the same subject. With the kind permission of the Editor, I reproduce it together with the editorial remarks thereon.

P. M. T

[We make no apology for reverting to the transliteration of foreign words in Burmese. But if any excuse were needed it would be found in a letter from the Professor of Oriental Studies responding to the appeal made by a correspondent in our April number. The major difficulty raised by the lack of final consonants in Burmese he proposes to remove by a simple device indicating that the final letter is to be sounded, while leaving to the preceding consonant its inherent vowel sound. This device alone would make it possible to render in Burmese by the existing letters of the Burmese alphabet a sufficiently close approximation to most of the sounds in foreign languages. But the sounds indicated English by the letters r, v, and f, need special treatment. There is a symbol corresponding to r in the Burmese alphabet although this symbol has not the sound of r in ordinary speech. But, as he points out, it is given the sound of r in Pali words and all we need is a convention that it shall have this sound in foreign words. As regards v and f Burmans have neither the symbols nor the sounds, though they experience no difficulty in pronouncing them. For v he proposes to take over the Talaing symbol for *ba* and by aspirating this letter we get a symbol for f.

Editor, World of Books.

THE TRANSLITERATION OF FOREIGN WORDS.

Sir,—I am pleased to see that in your April number a correspondent has raised the question of transliterating foreign words. As you rightly point out in your leading article, this question is of fundamental importance in relation to the introduction of modern science into Burma, and I would therefore like to ventilate the following suggestions.

Burmese with its *killed* final consonants cannot truly represent English words or syllables ending in consonants. Thus the *l* of 'School' is lost in စူး; and 'Mr.' becomes three syllables in မှူး။ Writers now-a-days are

introducing two devices for reviving the killed consonant, with a view to rendering the phonetic transliteration more accurate. The first device is to put the required consonant within round brackets. Thus on p. 2 of the supplement of the World of Books, May 1927, Aldus Manutius is rendered အ(လ်)ဒ်(စ)မနုတိယ်-(စ)။ Obviously the ω carries the *athat* to show that it is not the final of a word like the \circ which has no *athat*. The second device is to use a hyphen instead of the brackets. As far as my observation goes, the hyphenated consonant always carries the *athat*. Thus one would write အ-လ်ဒ်-စမနုတိယ်-စ။

It is unfortunate that so much space should be taken up by the brackets or the hyphens (which by the way have been put to other uses by other writers.) And one naturally feels reluctant in spite of the new devices, to go against the accepted significance of the *athat*.

I propose that the brackets and hyphens be done away with and that instead of the *athat* a horizontal line be used over the final consonant. Thus we should write အလ်ဒ်-မနုတိယ် (The hyphen may now be used to separate the Christian name from the Surname) The elimination of the δ is a distinct gain. It may perhaps be added that a final consonant so treated should not change the quality of the preceding vowel sound. ခိဝ် is *beat*, not *bait*.

The English *v* and *f* sounds are wanting in Burmese. For *v* I propose to use the Talaing character \bigcirc thus showing its relation to *o*. The Talaings get a sort of *f* sound by combining the spiratin sign with *W*. Thus φ . This in Burmese is sounded like the *wh* in *what*. We might, however, substitute *v* for *w* and write \mathfrak{g} for *f*.

The English *r* sound does not need a new character. Burmans pronounce it in such Pali words as သုဒ္ဓိယံ။ တိဒ္ဓိယံ။ they ought to do the same with the new terms taken from the west.

Thus a new character for *v* and a new diacritical mark for the final consonant are all that we need at present for a sufficiently accurate representation of foreign names and scientific terms.

P. M. T.