ART. X.—*Burmese Transliteration.* By H. L. ST. BARBE,
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IN 1872 the Local Government of the province arranged to become purchaser of Dr. Mason's work on "Burma." The author was an American missionary, who had spent nearly all his life in the country, and whose name is well known amongst Oriental scholars as having been the first to discover and bring to light Kaccayāno's Pali Grammar, which is to this day the handbook here in every village school. The last edition of "Burma" had been published in 1860. Since that date the writer had been amassing new collectanea, and it was agreed that he should personally supervise a fresh publication, which was intended, in his hands, to become a kind of encyclopædia of all scientific subjects connected with the province. But Dr. Mason was never destined to see the consummation of the work he had laboured at so long. For some time his missionary duties interfered with all active literary endeavour, and his death in 1874 finally prevented the execution of the original design. His notes and MSS., after remaining for three years in the possession of his widow, have been consigned by Government to one who is fully conscious how incompetent he is single-handed for the task.

Before his decease, Dr. Mason had consulted with the Secretariat on the question of an uniform scheme of Burmese transliteration to be employed in the forthcoming work. He pointed out that no recognized system was at present in force: every Government servant was at liberty to follow his own method; the result being that the English equivalents

for even the commonest vernacular names were very rarely alike in two publications.¹

No definite plan, however, was adopted, either by the Local Government or by Dr. Mason, and the same initial difficulty still remains in the way of his successor.

There have been a variety of systems suggested. Captain Latter, Dr. Judson, Colonel Horace Browne, and Dr. Hunter have all attempted a solution of the problem. Their efforts have been entirely confined to a more or less exact reproduction of the language as it is spoken. This is no doubt a difficult matter, but the difficulty in their case has been intensified by their reluctance to diverge too widely from the *written* Burmese character. There is probably no language in the world where the letters offer so little clue to the pronunciation, where there are so many modifications of vocal sounds, and so much change, confusion, and euphonic variation of consonantal sounds, without any corresponding variation in the writing. If you want to represent the speech, you must altogether neglect the spelling, and *vice versa*. No compromise is possible between the two.

But in a book with any scientific pretensions, due regard must be had to both the spoken and written character. Few languages can be of any real philological value until we know the symbols of which they are composed. Moreover, all the more civilized peoples of the province have borrowed their alphabet, their literature, and a considerable portion of their vocabulary, from the adjacent continent. They have generally altered the use and appearance of their acquisitions, so that, to enable us to trace their origin, these must be re-attired in their original garb. On the other hand, for ordinary every-day purposes, the written or antique form of a language is practically worthless. What is wanted is some arrangement of letters which articulation renders intelligible with more or less completeness.

I have tried to secure both these ends by developing a

¹ I have seen the name of a large district in the Tenasserim Division transliterated in the following ways:—Shwegheen, Shwaygheen, Shwaygyen, Shwayghen, Shwegyen, Showegyen, and Showegyeen.

method which Dr. Hunter has made use of in his "Non-Aryan Languages," *i.e.* by giving two versions of every word, the *one as it is written*, the *other as it is pronounced*. The Burmese alphabet is simply one of the numerous modifications of the old Pali or Nagari type. In representing its individual characters I have accordingly used the English symbols which are now employed in every attempt at Indian transliteration. As a fact, they do not accurately give the present sound of the consonants of the second varga, and one or two other letters. But apart from the advantage of uniformity with the continental system, I am of opinion that this change in pronunciation has occurred within a comparatively recent date. In Father Sangermano's time, ∞ was certainly pronounced as 's' (as it is still by the Shans and Talaings), and $\ominus$ probably as the 'ch' in church. Thus he talks of 'swā' (to go), 'hansa,' 'mahasamata,' and 'Chepang' and 'Chittaun,' for 'Sagain' and 'Sittoung'; while Captain Latter mentions ∞ as the only sibilant in the language approaching to the sound of 's.' I have therefore made no change in the English equivalent so far as the written character is concerned, but in representing this or any other sound, the nearest English letter will always be employed.

The Burmese alphabet consists of 11 vowels and 32 consonants. They are as follows :

CONSONANTS.					VOWELS.	
k	kh	g	gh	ṇ	a	ā
c	ch	j	jh	ṇi	i	ī
ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh	ṇ	u	ū
t	th	d	dh	n	e	ai
p	ph	b	bh	m	o	au
y	r	l	w	s	ui	
h	ḷ					

I may remark that the vowel 'ui' (or 'o' as it has hitherto been written) is generally described as a diphthong. It is no more of a diphthong, of course, than 'ai' or 'au.'

I have transliterated it 'ui' to represent its apparent components. It must be clearly understood that the above letters are no guide whatever to the pronunciation. They are simply intended to indicate the corresponding characters in our Indian alphabet, while, at the same time, they will enable any Burmese scholar to reproduce the exact vernacular combination they express. They represent in short the written language.

The spoken language may be roughly analyzed as follows :

First, the vowel sounds as above, a, â, i, î, u, û, e, ai, o, au, which are all to be pronounced according to the Hunterian method. Here again it is necessary to note that these symbols (especially the last three) afford no clue to the written character. The Burmese, in adopting the letters 'ai' and 'o' and 'au,' changed the first from the sound of the 'ai' in 'aisle' to nearly the sound of the 'ai' in 'hair,' and both the second and third from the vowel sounds in 'toll' and 'haus' to the vowel sound in 'aught,' pronounced more or less broadly. These new vocables will require fresh English symbols. I propose expressing the first by 'è' and the second by 'oa' (as in 'oar'). The appropriate English combination is manifestly 'au,' and it is a pity that, ordinarily, this is used to indicate a sound which 'au' more clearly represents. There is another vowel which I shall have to denote. It is a short 'e,' like the 'e' in 'met,' and will be, I think, best designated by the letter 'ě' with a diacritical mark. It may be objected that I have now got the letter 'e' to represent three different vowel sounds. But as a fact these sounds are not very divergent in Burmese. Most English students find it hard to discriminate between 'è' and 'ě,' and the latter vowel with an acute accent can scarcely be distinguished from 'ě.' 'Ai' is the prevalent method of expressing 'è,' but these characters, as I have just shown, are already employed in the Hunterian system. There is one more vocable in the Burmese which may be thought to require a distinguishing symbol. The letter 'w' before certain final consonants modifies the inherent vowel into a sound about midway between 'o' and 'u.' It is

usually transliterated 'oo' and 'u,' but both these forms are clearly exceptionable. The modification differs in no appreciable degree from 'u,' and this letter may be used accordingly.

Turning to the consonants we find the following sounds :

k	hk	g	ng
s	hs	z	ny
t	ht	d	n
p	hp	b	m
y	l	w	th, h and the com-

compound ch and sh. When the reader compares this with the foregoing table of the written characters, he will gather correctly enough that the Burmese make no distinction (1) between an aspirated and an unaspirated soft consonant, (2) between cerebrals and dentals, and (3) between 'y' and 'r.' He will notice also that I have had to prefix instead of affix the aspirate, to avoid confusion between 'hs' and 'sh,' 'ht' and 'th.'

I can now give a full alphabetical table of the spoken language.

VOWELS.

a as in woman	ê as in rate
â „ father	è „ hair
i „ pin	o „ note
î „ pique	oa „ soar
u „ full	ai „ aisle
û „ mute	au „ sound
e „ met	

The consonants require but little explanation. 'ng' is a sound that cannot be exemplified; 's' and 'hs' are generally pronounced as if they were 'ts' and 'hts'; 'w' is occasionally slurred altogether, when its sequent vowel is modified into 'u'; 'ch' and 'sh' approximate to the sound in the English words 'church' and 'shame.'

I have made this paper as brief and clear as possible, in the hopes of provoking some criticism and discussion. The chief advantage of the method I suggest is its entire con-

formity with the Hunterian system, on the ground which the latter covers. To obtain this result some sacrifices have to be made when we pass beyond these limits; but the changes are few and not especially uncouth, and very little practice would make them natural and familiar.

The whole design differs in a very slight degree from that which has been adopted and uniformly practised by Sir Arthur Phayre, than whom no better authority could be cited on any subject connected with Indo-Chinese philology.