

INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure and a privilege to write a few introductory words to this fascinating and important book. It must have been during one of the many, enjoyable chats which we have had during the past year that Dr. Maung Maung mentioned his hopes of editing a short volume on Aung San. With his customary modesty, he has now implied that it was I who suggested its writing to him. Let me frankly say that I do not deserve the credit. All I may have done is to get infected by his own enthusiasm, and to urge him to go ahead.

Dr. Maung Maung primarily wrote this book for the young generation of Burma (Myanmar), to whom Aung San has become a name in national history, but no longer a living and glowing inspiration. I believe that he has superbly succeeded in this self-appointed task, and that he has done so in a most unusual, not to say unorthodox, way. I am not only referring to the highly original way in which autobiography and biography are intertwined in Aung San of Burma (Myanmar), to add up to a surprisingly alive and three-dimensional portrait of the founder of modern Burma (Myanmar). Even more impressive is the fact that this book is no civics primer about an idolized national hero, no panegyric, but a composite record of a highly complex and fascinating personality. Aung San's indomitable energy, his devotion to duty and hard work, his patriotism, and his charisma - they all are writ large in these pages. But so are his moodiness, his erratic behaviour, his less attractive personal habits. I can think of very few Founding Fathers in any country of the world who have been presented so soberly, so realistically, and so lovingly, by one of their own contemporaries and nationals. If the young people of his country are to find inspiration, dedication, and an example in Aung San, this book will make them patriots in the best sense of the word. They will be spared the senseless adulation of chauvinistic nationalism that so often obscures the true greatness of truly great men.

Aung San of Burma (Myanmar) is at first sight a deceptively modest, almost simple book. It is, in fact, a work of scholarship and a

work of art, and its importance is therefore by no means circumscribed by the author's immediate purpose. As a work of art, it achieves portraiture with apparent effortlessness. Dr. Maung Maung has seemingly limited himself to the writing of brief explanatory prefaces for each selection, and to the compiling of the very useful Appendix. But has he, really? Has he not chosen his pieces with infinite care, with the sure touch of the biographer? Aung San's relations with his family, the young student's aloofness from girls and his later courtship of his wife, his exuberance and his depressions, his early ideological naiveté and his later lightning grasp of reality - they all emerge accidentally, as it were, as so many facets of Aung San's personality. The pieces, in short, are parts of a mosaic, carefully selected, expertly trimmed, and painstakingly assembled.

These same qualities make the book noteworthy as a scholarly achievement. No-one, I believe, was better qualified to attempt a biography of Aung San than Dr. Maung Maung, Burma's (Myanmar's) best known author in the English language. His research for this volume was exhaustive. He brought with him to Yale many of the voluminous sources he needed for his work, and for months he also turned into an academic sleuth, tracking down additional, scarce materials from many parts of the world. He then distilled, from thousands of pages, the essence of Aung San's life and work. Look at the section devoted to 'The Wisdom of Aung San,' and you will admire the skill of the creative scholar, who has managed to extract from the overly long speeches of a man not born a speaker but a doer the gist of a political philosophy. Read the part on 'War and Resistance,' and you will experience the transformation of an idealistic but unsophisticated student into a hardened soldier, a skilful politician, and a mature statesman.

Since Aung San's story is to such a large extent the history of the birth of modern Burma (Myanmar), the book makes a most welcome contribution to the scanty literature on Southeast Asia. It is, in fact, one of the very few significant biographical works in English on any modern non-Western leader. If not as probing and revealing as Nehru's autobiography, it is nonetheless an intensely human and often moving account of one of the key figures who helped to shape the new Southeast Asia. As such, it is virtually without parallel in providing insights into the development of a new ruling group. The ideological uncertainties of Burma's (Myanmar's) fu-

ture leaders, their helplessness in colonial Burma (Myanmar), their 'bourgeois' limitations, their naiveté in seeking and accepting Japanese aid, their disillusionment with Japan - some of them already discernible in U Nu's revealing Burma under the Japanese Occupation - are here brought into stark relief. The Japanese training centres of 'The Thirty Comrades' suddenly spring to life. The place of the Communists in the resistance and after the war, the 'feel' of No. 10, Downing Street, the relationship between Burmans (Myanmar) and Karens - these are a few of the many facets of intimate history in the making that are the historian's delight, which yet are so scanty in the recorded annals of modern Southeast Asia. It will be difficult to bypass Aung San of Burma (Myanmar) in any future work dealing with Southeast Asian history and politics. Indeed, 'area specialists' apart, many a scholar will doubtless find it of generic importance to the study of non-Western intelligentsias as political leaders.

Let me end on a more personal note. Dr. Maung Maung wrote this book in an astonishingly short time, and after he had completed A Trial in Burma, a detailed analysis of the trial of Aung San's assassins. How he manages to hide his inexhaustible energy behind an apparently leisurely and unhurried appearance, and how he apparently leisurely and unhurried appearance, and how he preserves an almost proverbial charm and courtesy in the midst of the beehive activities of an American university campus are questions which none of us have so far been able to answer. Perhaps the enigma will be solved during Dr. Maung Maung's second year in our midst, but we cannot be sure. Suffice it to say that we are proud that Aung San of Burma was written at Yale. We hope that it will be the first pillar of the bridge spanning Rangoon and Yale, which Dr. Maung Maung wants us to build with him.

HARRY J. BENDA

New Haven, Connecticut
September, 1961

PREFACE

Aung San, founder of New Burma (Myanmar), fell under assassins' bullets on the 19th July, 1947, when he was 33. His rise had been rapid in the last five years of his brief life, from commander of the Burma (Myanmar) Independence Army and leader of the resistance to national leader, popular hero, and architect of freedom. Burma's (Myanmar's) independence had been established all but in name when he died, and he had found himself a lasting place in history and the hearts of our peoples.

The name Aung San does not merely bring back tender memories in Burma (Myanmar), it awakens the political conscience as well. People remember what he stood for: honesty and hard work, unity and discipline, and such homely virtues; they talk of these as the 'Aung San way' or his lanziin, the way they must, or should try to go. Politicians always claim that they are the faithful followers of the lanziin. Early in 1958, when the party which Aung San led as a united front broke into two factions, both proclaimed themselves to be such followers and promptly marched off in opposite directions. The Aung San park in Rangoon (Yangon) is where the children come to play, and the politicians to pledge. Aung San's pictures on the ballot boxes doubtless won the then-undivided party many seats in the parliamentary elections of 1951-52, and 1956, and it was only in 1958, when the two contending factions could not agree on which of them should enjoy the exclusive use of the vote-winning picture that an election rule was added disallowing candidates and parties the use of it.

But then, the post-war years have been years of change and ferment, of peril and opportunity, the world over, and in Burma (Myanmar) too. We may feel despondent sometimes, after the first flush of independence has worn off, but we can at least console ourselves that we are still there, keeping constant faith in the basic

PREFACE

values of a free society, and the name Aung San still conjures up images and visions, still awakens the conscience. We may not have followed his lanziin faithfully; our major political parties may have parted, but they march in circles and profess the same faith, so that they soon meet again on grinning terms.

I have tried, in this volume, to project a picture of Aung San, the man, his role, and his times in Burma (Myanmar), and also to bring out his message anew specially for the benefit of our younger people. This volume may, in some small way, help to give them a sense of history and a feeling of roots. They may dismiss the message as just a lot of platitudes, but hearing it will not do them any harm.

Several sources have been tapped in gathering this collection. Some extracts are reproduced from published works which are not readily accessible to readers in Burma (Myanmar); some are translations from Burmese (Myanmar) sources which are not easily accessible to western scholars. There are also original contributions from Aung San's contemporaries who will, I hope, one day write and record their memoirs and work together on a full-length biography of Aung San. I attempted to write one myself in 1948, when the world and I were somewhat younger, and The Nation, English-language newspaper in Rangoon (Yangon), making its gallant debut, published my study in serial form. Recently, on a visit to the Library of Congress, I found those early issues of the newspaper - which are getting to be rare now - and my articles. I decided, however, that those articles should rest undisturbed in the archives, and I should try to get for this collection the writings of those who were closer to Aung San. I sent out requests to all of such people I could think of, and many of them responded warmly, giving me suggestions and references or new material.

Friends in Rangoon (Yangon) sent over to me all the speeches and writings of Aung San that they could lay hands on, many of them in his own English, and helped to translate those that were available only in Burmese (Myanmar). After a few months of correspondence between New Haven and Rangoon (Yangon), the papers were ready for selection and editing. I have done both rather severely, to cut the length, reduce repetition, sharpen the pictures, and generally make the collection smooth and easy reading for my younger friends in Burma (Myanmar). I hope, however, that I have

got the sense and the facts correctly, and preserved the pith and flavour of Aung San. I also hope that our Government will collect the speeches and writings and publish them in full for the permanent record, before they get scattered and lost.

This small volume is written by many hands and made possible by many friends, and it may be presumptuous on my part to thank my co-producers, but I thank them all the same:

Daw Khin Kyi (Madame Aung San), Burma's (Myanmar's) Ambassador in New Delhi; Prime Minister U Nu; Chief Justice of Burma (Myanmar), U Myint Thein; Ambassadors U Hla Maung in London, Brigadier Maung Maung in Israel, U Mya Sein in Malaya, U Thant at the United Nations and U Vum Ko Hau in Djakarta; Brigadiers Aung Gyi and Tin Pe; Brigadiers (retired) Bo Let Ya, Kya Doe; Miss Dorothy Woodman in London, for their interest and encouragement; the contributors to this volume; the Ministry of Information; the Defence Services Historical Research Institute; Miss Barbara Stephen of the Union Bank of Burma (Myanmar); the editors of the Guardian publications, Rangoon; Mr. James Spey of the Central Office of Information, London; Chatham House, London; Mr. John Musgrave, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; Mr. Cecil Hobbs, Library of Congress; Sri Girja Kumar, Librarian, Sapru House, New Delhi; Professor Nyi Nyi, University of Rangoon, U Htin Gyi of Sarpay Beikman Institute; U Nyo Mya, M.P., of the Oway newspaper; U Thein Naing of the Defence Services Historical Research Institute; U Than Htut, director, Institute of Culture, Rangoon (Yangon) for help in the collection of materials;

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and many many friends.

New Haven, Connecticut,
September, 1961.

MAUNG MAUNG

III. THE WINNING OF BURMA'S FREEDOM

1. Our Goal is in Sight 97

2. New Hope for Burma, by Tom Driberg 99

3. A Real Leader of High Ideals, by Rev. G. Appleton 101

4. Steps to the Final Goal 102

5. We Want Complete Independence 104

6. We Want Burma United and Free 106

7. A Strong Character and a Statesman, by C. R. Attlee 107

8. It was a Historic Moment, by U Tin Tut 108

9. Burma's Future in Her Own Hands 110

10. The Road is Open 111

11. The Coming of Freedom, by U Thein Han 113

12. None but the Brave, by U Thein 115

13. Plans for his Family, by Bo Tun Hla 116

14. Aung San's Helpmate, by Dr. Maung Maung 117

IV. THE WISDOM OF AUNG SAN

1. Let Us Unite 123

2. Religion, the Sangha, and Politics 125

3. We Cannot Stand Alone 128

4. Foundations of Burma's Democracy 129

5. A Role for Private Enterprise 131

6. Planning for New Burma 135

7. A Few Painful Truths 139

V. APPRECIATION

1. An Eternal Place in History, by U Nu 145

2. He Made a Dream Come True, by U Kyaw Nyein 146

3. Unifier of Burma, by F. S. V. Donnison 147

4. Enemy Turned Friend, by Saw San Po Thin 149

5. The Spirit of Panglong, by U Vum Ko Hau 150

6. He was One of Us, by Sama Duwa Sinwa Nawng 151

7. The Central Figure was Aung San, by Maurice Collis 152

NOTES AND WHO'S WHO

155

CONTENTS

Introduction by Professor Harry J. Benda v
Preface viii

I. THE MAKING OF AUNG SAN

1. Self-Portrait 3
2. Snapshots of Aung San, by Bo Let Ya 7
3. Aung San's Sterling Qualities, by U Nu 16
4. Into the Mainstream of History, by U Mya Sein 20
5. Editor of the "Oway" Magazine, by Dr. Tha Hla 25
6. Politics was His Sole Existence, by "Dagon" Taya 26

II. WAR AND THE RESISTANCE

1. A First-hand Report 31
2. Our Lonely Mission, by Bo Yan Aung 41
3. The March to National Leadership, by Bo Let Ya 43
4. Aung San and the Burma Independence Army, by Keji Suzuki (Bo Mogyoe) 53
5. On the March with Aung San, by Brigadier Maung Maung 59
6. The Bogyoke, by Brigadier Kya Doe 71
7. Meeting in Meiktila, by Bo Tun Hla 82
8. I Could Do Business with Aung San, by Field-Marshal Sir William Slim 83
9. A Note from My Diary, by U Thein Pe Myint 85
10. The Patriot Burmese Forces, by Lord Louis Mountbatten of Burma 87
11. A Churchill or a Wellington, by U Tin Tut 89
12. Farewell to the Army 90
13. Bogyoke, the National Hero, by U Nu 92

III. THE WINNING OF BURMA'S FREEDOM

1. Our Goal is in Sight 97

2. New Hope for Burma, by Tom Driberg 99

3. A Real Leader of High Ideals, by Rev. G. Appleton 101

4. Steps to the Final Goal 102

5. We Want Complete Independence 104

6. We Want Burma United and Free 106

7. A Strong Character and a Statesman, by C. R. Attlee 107

8. It was a Historic Moment, by U Tin Tut 108

9. Burma's Future in Her Own Hands 110

10. The Road is Open 111

11. The Coming of Freedom, by U Thein Han 113

12. None but the Brave, by U Thein 115

13. Plans for his Family, by Bo Tun Hla 116

14. Aung San's Helpmate, by Dr. Maung Maung 117

IV. THE WISDOM OF AUNG SAN

1. Let Us Unite 123

2. Religion, the Sangha, and Politics 125

3. We Cannot Stand Alone 128

4. Foundations of Burma's Democracy 129

5. A Role for Private Enterprise 131

6. Planning for New Burma 135

7. A Few Painful Truths 139

V. APPRECIATION

1. An Eternal Place in History, by U Nu 145

2. He Made a Dream Come True, by U Kyaw Nyein 146

3. Unifier of Burma, by F. S. V. Donnison 147

4. Enemy Turned Friend, by Saw San Po Thin 149

5. The Spirit of Panglong, by U Vum Ko Hau 150

6. He was One of Us, by Sama Duwa Sinwa Nawng 151

7. The Central Figure was Aung San, by Maurice Collis 152

NOTES AND WHO'S WHO

155

Aung San was absolutely honest. He was a good military leader too, brave and skilful. He was a patriot, and his patriotism and honesty won respect from all of us in Japan as well as on our march.

Keji Suzuki (Bo Mogyoe)

The greatest impression he made on me was one of honesty. He was not free with glib assurances and he hesitated to commit himself, but I had the idea that if he agreed to do something he would keep his word. I could do business with Aung San.

Field Marshal Sir William Slim

He is a young man, only about 30 or 31, of great intelligence, political intelligence as well as military intelligence, and he is undoubtedly - because I have been about in Burma in the last month or two and have seen him in various parts of it and have seen the way the people regard him - the hero of the younger generation in Burma today.

Tom Driberg

In my view Aung San was a statesman of considerable capacity and wisdom, as was shown by his proposals for dealing with the minority communities on generous lines. Had he lived, Burma might well have stayed in the Commonwealth, but, as it was, the Burmese decided on complete independence.

C. R. Attlee

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