

A baby boy who later on in life was destined to hold a very honoured place in the Christian Church of Burma, was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> Waxing Day of the month of Tabodwe (January), in the year 1219, Burmese Era, of the parents U Moe and Daw Min Thu, residents of a village Kya Bin, just a few miles away from the royal city of Mandalay, the capital of the last two Burmese Kings. According to the Burmese traditional manner the baby boy was with due ceremony given the name of Kya Bin. His family belonged to one whose services were very much esteemed by the reigning King and in recognition His Majesty had bestowed upon his father titles and gifts and appointed him Governor of Mingin.

Since the parents were devout Buddhists, according to the custom then prevailing he was by the tender age of five, put in charge of a *Sayadaw*, 'Reverend Master', in a monastery to lay a firm foundation for good learning. The boy proved himself not only above the average in intelligence but extraordinarily eager to learn, so that for higher study he was sent by the age of eight years to a well known institution of learning, the Khin-ma-gan Monastery in the royal city of Mandalay, under the able guidance and tutelage of the Reverend Sayadaw U Wah. The boy's faculty of memorizing lessons, his zest for more and yet more knowledge, and power to retain what had been once taught and mastered, all put him in good stead; so much so that while he was at a very young age of fourteen years he most successfully managed to pass the Examinations set by His Majesty's Government in all three stages in succession without a hitch anywhere, the Examinations being the *Pata-ma-nge*, *Pata-ma-lat*, and *Pata-me-gyi* respectively. As his scholarship was most extraordinary and outstanding, His Majesty the King regarded it as worthy of recognition and awarded him a *Pade-thabin*, which means a tree or plant of rich gifts or offerings, and he had one made which was said to be worth even in those days between Kyats five hundred and a thousand, an enormous sum indeed. To crown all this unusual feat the boy sat for another and higher Examination called the *Pate-ma-byan* and came out with flying colours again at the end of just one year's tuition. This time His Majesty King Mindon was so overwhelmed with pleasure at the brilliant success of the young man that an announcement was made to this effect: the honoured young man to be carried on the gilded palanquin (used only by the royalty) all over the city as a mark of respect for learning and achievement. Thereby Mg Kya Bin's future was indeed made safe; it looked bright and rosy.

So as soon as Mg Kya Bin left the precincts of the monastery he was assured of an appointment in the service of His Majesty the King in the capacity of a clerk in the King's Treasury (*Byedaik*). When a post fell vacant in a higher office, that of the clerk of the *Hluttaw*, or Privy Council, it was to Mg Kya Bin that the post was offered. However, it was only a temporary post, and at the termination of his service there he became clerk to the *Tan-aung Myosa* (Head of the city of Yan-aung), U Shwe Oh. But he was not destined to remain long in the service of a rural dignitary; since his work and capabilities had been sampled by the royal city he was soon recalled there to become the permanent clerk of the Privy Council.

In the year 1875 His Majesty King Mindon died and was succeeded by his son, Prince Thibaw. Mg Kya Bin's reliable services were then transferred to one of the Queen's households, that of *Hteik-su-lat* (the Middle Queen), and he served in the capacity of the Household Secretary. Within a few months his worth was noted and he was taken away from this responsibility to that of the King's Household in the position of the Royal Tea Room Secretary, an exalted and responsible post which put him close to the



King. As his intense loyalty and sincerity were recognized by the King, soon he was appointed to a more responsible position, that of the Governor of the Royal Barns or Granary.

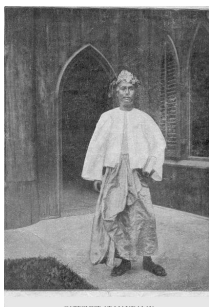
At the very young age of eighteen Mg Kya Bin was now in charge of the King's Officials in the area of Taungoo and Yemethin. During this time in recognition of his energetic service to the King, his position was again raised accordingly with a rich award of velvet robes, a golden sword, a golden helmet, golden betel box and such other paraphernalia which went with such a position.

When the royal barns or granaries were found one day depleted of food grains most unexpectedly, it was to Mg Kya Bin that His Majesty the King turned for help. So once again he assumed the duties of the Governor of the Royal Granaries. When this responsible duty was concluded to the satisfaction of His Majesty the King, Mg Kya Bin's status was once again raised and he became the Governor of Four Districts.

In the memorable year of 1885 which corresponded with the Burmese era of 1247, King Thibaw was dethroned by the British and the entire Kingdom of Burma was annexed to the British Empire. The British authorities saw the worth of U Kya Bin's continued service with them, and promptly offered him the post of Sub-divisional Officer. During this time while he was serving the British Government he fell ill. He therefore took leave of absence from his duties for six months. It was at this time also that he got married to Sarah Ma Ma Gyi, a Christian lady.

It was then that an opportunity occurred to bring him and the Revd Colbeck together. They were fond of discussing theology. Having belonged to a sect of Buddhists called the 'Paramat', whose peculiarity was to recognize fundamentals only of the Buddhist religion, discarding unnecessary and unspiritual elements of the doctrine, this led him to ponder well on the new religion. Soon he was profoundly entangled in the new religion and converted to it, and baptized with the new name of George Kya Bin, a name well-known and respected among the church members.

At that period he gave up his service as an officer of the Government and became a church worker without taking any salary. At the end of two years of his work in the church he suffered a heavy loss in his earthly possessions in the form of his gold, silver and jewels, hard earned through the years of loyal service to his country and king, through no fault of his own but through dacoity (robbery). He then applied for leave of absence from his work in the Church, and went back home to his parents in the town of Mingin.



While at home with his parents he was tempted to re-apply for his work in the Government. But he seemed to be quite incapable of making up his mind at this juncture. His eyes began to give trouble and soon he lost the use of both eyes. Then only he was reminded to approach the Throne of Grace instead of men's favour. So along with his wife by his side, literally and figuratively, he knelt before the Almighty Father to help him make up his mind. He made up his mind to remain God's faithful worker. Almost immediately after this sincere prayer, most heartfelt and confident, his eyesight was miraculously restored, and so this man of God with his wife returned to Mandalay to resume his duties in the Lord's field with more zest, better understanding and energy. His parents and



relatives attempted to their utmost to stop him from working in the Mission, but all their attempts miserably failed. They had now no other alternative but to resort to disinheriting him and disowning him and to declare so publicly. But all these actions failed to turn him back to them, or dampen his spirit. He and his wife were now very much alive to their task and forged ahead with more eagerness.

At that time Mandalay was the central station for the S.P.G. Mission in Upper Burma. The Revd George U Kya Bin, working with the foreign missionaries, was permanently stationed at Mandalay. During this period, as the Mandalay Church was just beginning to be established, Sayagyi George was not needed to be a full-time worker, so he went around the town and nearby villages to preach to the people. He, being an experienced teacher, told stories of broader outlooks. He knew so well the history of Burma,



Buddhism and Christianity, that he did not find any difficulty in meeting people of different societies in religious discussions. He was a very good speaker; so wherever he was he never lacked of a good audience. It was not easy to preach to people in the town. Not only in the ancient days but also at present Mandalay is the town where the greatest number of the Buddhist priests are residents and Buddhism is much taught. Even so, Sayagyi was never afraid of spreading the Gospel among the people of Mandalay, and because of his good teaching and discussion many educated Buddhists were converted. When Sayagyi went out preaching in the villages he never found a hard time, as he was very sociable, even in villages where there were no Christians, and although the most influential individuals in every village were Buddhist priests. He was able to overcome

obstacles in his preaching. Travelling in those days was not so easy and speedy as now. Going in bullock-cart was slow and risky, but he never felt reluctant to go by cart or by boat or by foot. Because of his courageous spirit he won many souls from those far out villages. He went up as far as to the hill people among the Palaungs of the Shan Plateau. He preached and sowed the seeds of Christianity. Up to Meza in the Northern Hills Region of Burma where Kadoos (a tribe akin to Kachins) lived, he reached and preached. The descendants of those of his old believers are still living as Christians.

He went many miles around preaching to the people with perseverance and without a word of complaint. He served God in his purpose with full heart and selflessness. Like many other missionaries, at times Sayagyi had to suffer railings, stoning, asking unreasonable questions and being called a heathen, but he faced these people with calm, courage, patience, love and clear explanation. Thus the opposers turned to be good listeners. The mission field was too big a job for him in his youthful days, yet he was able to do very well. When he grew older he was given full time work to do in Mandalay. Besides there grew up some more Burmese priests to do the mission work. It was the time that the mission could send out young preachers to the districts. Only at times Sayagyi went with them to help the people to be more spiritual. Sayagyi was thorough in his work, very influential and the most respected. Moreover he was not only one of the translators of the Bible from English to Burmese, but also a teacher of Burmese and Buddhism to the foreign missionaries. He composed a hymn in Burmese

Saya George (The Revd George Kya Bin) by Peter Ba Maw. Extract from 'Elect from every Nation', ISPCK, 1962.



tune and it is still in the Burmese hymn book. He was the most respected among the Burmese Christians and the foreign missionaries as well. He was a learned man with a faithful heart and a good voice. Throughout his life as a priest the most remarkable characteristic was that he consecrated himself in prayer before every bit of his work in his service. That distinguished life of his he left to those who remembered and loved him, especially the Winchester Brothers.

His Buddhist training which he had undergone in childhood and youth, his profound learning of the Sutras, his intense desire to search for Truth, all went to make him a unique preacher, who dared to compare Christianity and Buddhism, and did so most boldly and authoritatively. There are some Christians still alive who had heard U Kya Bin preach, and they testify that his was a most profound and soul-stirring sermon every time they heard

him. He labored together with the Revd C.E.Garrard in the translation of the Bible into Burmese, taking the entire responsibility for putting the translation into good authentic Burmese. His most worthy service continued in the church till he got to the ripe old age of seventy-seven. On the 8<sup>th</sup> day of December, 1933, God indeed was great to call his worthy son to rest and peace after a long period of labour in his field. We cannot forget this man of God, generation after generation of Christians in Burma, who have so happily inherited from him the Bible in our own language.



The translators of the Bible into Burmese c.1926 - front row Saya George, Rev. William Sherratt, Rev. Charles Edward Garrard

We Christians have lovingly dubbed him 'Saya George-gyi', meaning 'Teacher Big George', and he remains so in our memories and in annals written about him.

He left behind a son and daughter. The son, U Peter Khin Mg, was educated in the University of Rangoon and passed the Intermediate of Arts before he proceeded to Calcutta to study in the Bishop's College, from where he obtained the B.D. After his ordination he served the church faithfully until his death, which occurred in April 1935. Saya George Gyi's daughter, Daw Khin May, is still living and serving as a school-mistress in a mission school.

We thank God for this his faithful servant.