Dr. Ba Maw of Burma

An Appreciation

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ON MAY 30 LAST YEAR, a long distance call to my North Carolina apartment announced the death in Rangoon, Burma, of Dr. Ba Maw. He was 85 years old. For at least the second half of his unique career, his name had been a household word. With his passing, a notable era in the history of the Burmese nation ended.

Shortly before his death, Mrs. Theda Maw Sturtevant, the only daughter living abroad and therefore beyond the reach of the Burmese secret police, had written to tell him that she had contacted me in the United States and that I seemed agreeable to doing a short piece on his life—not so much on Ba Maw the politician and senior statesman as on Ba Maw the man. Although getting messages in and out of Burma through channels other than the heavily censored mails was a wearisome as well as a risky business, Dr. Ba Maw closed readily with my offer. In saying he was pleased with the project and that there was no one more qualified than myself to carry it out, he was speaking at least partially with tongue in cheek.

Although Dr. Ba Maw and I are products of an educational system that adhered so rigidly to the curriculum and discipline of a British public school as to give rise to student upheavals that ended once and for all the elitism of that system, he was so senior to me in years that I was not always able to overcome the deference with which we treated senior classmen in our schools. This had nothing to do with riches or worldly success; it was the mere fact of one being so much ahead of another as to warrant one's assumption of authority and precedence in a pecking order based on the fag system. It made no difference at all that, bereft of his father in infancy, he had gone to St Paul's on a compassionate scholarship, whereas I, possessed of father and mother, had been charged a staggering sum of money for the privilege of being a "parlour boarder" at St Peter's. Throughout our long acquaintanceship, Dr. Ba Maw never allowed me the luxury of getting the better of him in debate. He would feign consternation at my "ignorance" or lack of cogency in argument, in the manner of a prefect dressing down a junior for truancy.

~~To begin then with facts which are more or less of common knowledge,~~ Dr. Ba Maw was born on February 8, 1893, in the delta town of Maubin amidst an abundance of rice and a super-abundance of mosquitoes, the latter fortunately, of the non-malarial species. His grandmother, Hpwa Khin, was a domineering personality who had appointed herself ombudswoman of the town until the local authorities went in awe of her. There was still a Burmese king on the celestial throne in Mandalay, but Hpwa Khin had little patience with what

she viewed as the aberrant ways of a degenerate Court. Great therefore was her disappointment when one of her seven beautiful daughters gave her heart to an itinerant palace official deeply committed to the monarchy and the sagging fortunes of King Thibaw.

U Kye, or U Shwe Kye, as he came to be styled after the word "Golden" had been prefixed to his name, had early distinguished himself by learning not only English, but French as well. He was thus able to accompany the Kinwun Mingyi on both the missions to Europe, the first time a Burmese plenipotentiary had ventured into the heartlands of the infidel. U Shwe Kye alone could communicate directly with western leaders, and this earned him ambassadorial rank as well as the task of writing the official account of the mission, known today as "Kinwun Mingyi's Diary." Thibaw's chief minister, although speaking no English, was sagacious enough to recognize the ascendency of European power. Accordingly, he counselled patience and constraint when Britain threatened war in 1885. Not so U Shwe Kye, who clung to the monarchy even after King Thibaw had been exiled, and for five years waged a losing battle against the invader. Dr. Ba Maw thus never saw his father. Years later, the British Criminal Investigation Department (a curious device for tracing Burmese genealogy) surmised that, because Dr. Ba Maw was fair of complexion, he must be a Eurasian of some kind. Actually, his complexion was no lighter than that of many another Lower Burman or Mon. I should have thought a more striking feature was his eyes which had the habit of fastening themselves on others with the intensity and fearlessness of one or two of the best known British proconsuls. I once twitted Dr. Ba Maw about his being a faker. "You assumed the title of Dictator," I said (his official designation as head of state was *Anarshin Adipadi*—repository of power and the ultimate in authority), "yet you never once jailed, let alone killed, anybody. You must be a bogus dictator." His immediate response was, "A man's best weapon is his eye. The other kind are not dictators; they're thugs."

The French Brothers of the Christian Schools, then newly established in Rangoon, took in not only Dr. Ba Maw but also his elder brother, Dr. Ba Han. Their mother, in her widowhood, might have been expected to return to the family heart in Maubin, but apparently she was determined to give her sons the best possible education under the new dispensation. Displaying a stiff upper lip, soon to develop as a family characteristic, she invested in a pony cart and eventually ran a fleet of "gharries," or, as the British called them, hackney carriages. As the boys graduated from St Paul's, with scholastic records seldom equalled, friends and relatives helped them pursue further studies in India (in those days the Rangoon College did not yet confer degrees) and the brothers returned with a Master of Arts diploma apiece. Ba Han went into teaching school, saved money and sped to England where, after qualifying rapidly as a barrister, he wrote his theses to win two doctorates simultaneously. Ba Maw followed, had himself admitted at Cambridge, and entered Gray's Inn to follow in his brother's footsteps. Although the brothers were very close, and remained devoted to each other for the rest of their lives, Dr. Ba Maw's a

life style was vastly different from the other's. Dr. Ba Han was immersed in law books. He was frugal and ascetic throughout his life and, unbelievably to me, never once went to the theatre or cinema. Upon his return to Burma he formed his chapter of the Plymouth Brethren and comported himself thereafter as a model of that brand of Christianity in which the amenities, and indeed the joys, of life are held suspect. I asked him to dinner once or twice; he always accepted but subsequently excused himself uncertain lest what I considered plain fare might border on the orgiastic in his puritanical imagination. The eupeptic healthiness of his morality contrasted strangely with maladies which I suspect were induced by avoidance of pleasures which must be bad because too many people too often indulged in them. To Dr. Ba Maw, on the other hand, the study of the law was far from being the be-all and end-all of life. The education he elected was that of a gentleman. He read Adam Smith and was little influenced by the London School of Economics and, as he was at pains to add, Political Science. At the start of his political career he was to found the *Sinyetha* or Poor Man's party, but his socialism consisted of the slogan "Three acres and a cow" based on the philosophy that the people must own something, and wealth acquired, before it can be spread around. His problem was landlessness in Burma brought about by improvidence on the part of the farmers and foreclosure by Indian chettiars and absentee landlords. Dr. Ba Maw was the least xenophobic of Asians, but he felt impelled to circumscribe the economic power of foreigners. He seemed genuinely distressed that during the time he was in the government riots should have broken out against the Indian Hindus, the Chinese and the Moslems. He thought it was unworthy of the Burman to take it out on communities that owned more, but largely because they were less spendthrift, whereas the real incubus on the Burmese economy was the monopolistic stranglehold of the British commercial interests. British trade, or British enterprise in the market place, was not markedly unfair and, until the Burman learnt recognized procedures, it was not totally objectionable to have mostly Indian and Chinese merchants acting as middlemen and distributors for European manufactures. What was intolerable for Dr. Ba Maw was the excessive political power the British business exercised under the 1935 Government of Burma Act, arising out of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. It was under this Act that Dr. Ba Maw became the first Prime Minister of Burma in 1937. The Act was so framed that the British Chamber of Commerce was virtually able to make and unmake cabinets, and it was Dr. Ba Maw's uncompromising opposition to the chamber's dominance in the Legislature that brought about his downfall.

But first, the young Ba Maw in London and his preparation for the struggles ahead. Not at that stage, nor thereafter, was there in Dr. Ba Maw the frenetic desperation of a revolutionary willing to gamble the future of his country, to win or lose it all. Instead, cast as he was in what today would be considered the truly liberal mould, he set about equipping himself for the role of leader, by studying systems and institutions and widening his vision through travel and personal contracts. Eating a set number of dinners at the Inns of

Court was obligatory. At these and other activities equally tradition-bound, men from the colonies and protectorates were often unsure of themselves, like newly elected members of an exclusive club. Not so Dr. Ba Maw, who moved with perfect ease without, in the words of a contemporary, paying the Englishman the sincerest tribute of imitation. If one was rich and brash, like young U Chit Hlaing, one came back with an inflated ego and the undying admiration of one's tailor; if one was poor and brash, one still had acquired a vocabulary of vogue words and, with a broken accent, a false sense of values. Only Ba Maw seemed acclimated, suffering from no sense of inadequacy and protected from affronts by a caustic tongue and a deliberate manner. Not for him were the lightning thrust and the quick repartee; the irony and cynicism were dished out in a studied way, in measured cadences. He understood the English language to an extent never grasped by any other Burman before or since his time. Although he never cultivated the English accent, he was bemused by the Oxford drawl, looking upon it as mere affectation. Yet in the U and non-U controversy of later times he stood with the gentry against the plebeians. He liked to play with words and the manner of their delivery, savouring every inflexion, every nuance of tone. Most Englishmen talking to Burmans might simplify their language for ready comprehension; Dr. Ba Maw never did. He spoke to everyone exactly alike, and if he thought he was speaking above the other's head, he would stay throughout the conversation with Burmese, knowing full well that he often sounded in that medium as stilted, eschewing as he did the slightly off-colour words, the irreverent puns and spoonerisms with which our language abounds, even the easy conversational gambit of richochet words.

In conformity with the still prevalent custom of young gentlemen in quest of a wider education, Dr. Ba Maw travelled on the Continent. I could never get him to speak French, although his knowledge of that language must have been considerable. He submitted his Ph.D. thesis to the University of Bordeaux, but as he confesses, he was more taken with Josephine Baker than with French culture, notwithstanding which his religious beliefs took on the hue of a Voltaire: in a nutshell, religion was unnecessary to a philosopher, whereas the common people needed and ought to be encouraged to embrace some form of religion, to render them amenable to governance. His artistic talents were such that he designed his own clothes as well as those of his wife and daughters. In place of the traditional *gaungbaung*, which in those days preceded the ready-tied turban, and needed patience and dexterity to fix and unfix, he sported a velvet beret—more correctly a skull cap—worn at a jaunty angle. He was heckled in Parliament as being improperly dressed; his admirers said it was a practical garment because it hid a scar on his forehead; but of course there was no scar. His elegance in dress and deportment equalled that of his speech. The ornateness might tend to bewilder both friends and critics, but he went on his own sweet way, unhampered by snide remarks that he was "togging up" as though for the stage; that in his house the common gourd was so fashioned for his table that it resembled a work of art!

The Burmese drama, the puppet theatre, and Burmese classical music never failed to bring him delight. He was equally at home with Western music, both classical and low-brow. Once going into his residence unannounced, I was pleasantly surprised to find him singing the theme song from a Marilyn Monroe film, the one about life being a traveller on the river of no return. He was then living largely upon the past, and the words seemed to fit his mood. Having many acquaintances, but very few friends with whom he could share his thoughts, he tended to be introspective, but once you got him going he could be the life and soul of a party. Gastronomy rather than epicureanism was his forte. He ate and drank sparingly, preferring a claret to the much touted whisky, and he seemed to set greater store by the manner in which his dinner was laid, rather than the contents thereof, on the theory that a well served meal was a well prepared one. Coversation in Burma he believed to be a lost art, and he was almost saddened by the thought that the politicians, so good now at haranguing crowds and inflaming passion, were so devoid of sense and sensibility in the privacy of their homes as to be incapable of moral suasion, the art of diplomacy and negotiation. Dr. Ba Maw apparently needed very little sleep; he read; he declaimed; he paced the floor and stayed awake most of the night; in the afternoon he might take a catnap under a mosquito net that ran the length of his booklined study. A patron of the arts though he undoubtedly was, I recall seeing only one oil on his wall, a Ngwe Gaing on the battle of Shwedaung, with Dr. Ba Maw's son-in-law, Bo Yan Naing, making history in a paddy field. An aficionado of the Japanese flower arrangement, and a furniture designer (I told him cabinet making was in his blood), he nevertheless used an old fashioned, uncomfortable chair to work in. He never used a typewriter or gadgets of any kind, but wrote everything in longhand, neat, accurate, and always decipherable. He wrote many an article for my paper, for which I paid him nothing. At the same time, he refused to write to order. He would write only when he felt the urge, and if I failed to publish it, it was my loss.

I have always thought that Dr. Ba Maw would have been happier as an educator or college president. He was the one Burman who would have been a great Master of a citadel of learning in the Oxbridge tradition. He had in fact begun adult life as lecturer in English at Rangoon College (he subsequently became Education Minister, and an extremely good one at that), but of course the moment he returned from Europe in 1924 the law claimed him for its own. At the very outset, a brilliant mind like Dr. Ba Maw's could have reached out to a judgeship; if he waited a while he could expect to be a puisne judge of the High Court and given a knighthood. Dr. Ba Maw was to use the law as a stepping stone, but not in the manner of most of the barristers who liked to play it safe; he unhesitatingly joined the General Council of Buddhist Associations, the only political association which held out promise of being able to reclaim Burma by constitutional means. Among the educated classes there had been stirrings of nationalism, faint and inchoate at first, but gathering momentum as, the vicissitudes of the people under the Konbaung kings forgotten, political

monks of the Buddhist "Church Militant" began to instigate the masses to throw the British out. In Dr. Ba Maw's time there was nothing comparable to the spirit of disaffection which was moving India towards civil disobedience. But the Burmese politicians, subjected to less pressure from the rural areas because their people were less miserable than the Indians, nevertheless could not fail to discern the political advantages to be gained by the non-cooperation tactics of the Indian National Congress. In 1930, as Dr. Ba Maw waited for the constitutional reforms that would bring elections on a universal franchise, an upheaval took place in an unexpected quarter, one result of which was to expedite the process of bringing selfgovernment within reasonable reach. A peasant soothsayer in the Tharrawaddy district had a vision in which he saw himself as the man born to be king, and forthwith raised the flag of rebellion, assuming unto himself the title of Galon Raja, the Galon, like the garuda, being a mythical bird-man with supernatural powers. The depression was setting in, and peasants from miles around flocked to his banner, to have charms tatooed or let into their skins and to hurl themeselves like howling dervishes against British machine-guns. It took two years and a whole division of Indian soldiers before the uprising could be quelled and Saya San, the leader, brought to trial. While it could not have occurred to any of the Western-educated leaders that this was a good way of doing business with the British, they could not but be impressed by the daring, indeed the recklessness, of such an undertaking. The chief political protagonist of the rebels was a briefless lawyer called U Saw. A man of derring-do himself, U Saw was a native of the disaffected area, and he promptly undertook to defend Saya San. However, as a lower grade pleader, he could plead only in a magistrate's court, whereas the trials were conducted before a Special Tribunal, and the appeals before the High Court of Judicature, in which only advocates or barristers could appear. Saya San's followers approached Dr. Ba Maw. They could not come up with fees, and such honoraria as the British government might sanction for the defence of indigent accused would be pitifully small, but Dr. Ba Maw accepted the brief unhesitatingly. In an age of safety matches, Saya San had used a tinderbox with which to ignite the first large scale rebellion ever, and who can say it did not spark into flame the latent fire of his counsel's ardent nationalism?

The British punished the rebels with the utmost severity. In all 350 prisoners were convicted; and Saya San and 77 others hanged. Saya San never uttered a word in his own defence and faced the proceedings with unconcern, but Dr. Ba Maw rose to forensic heights, calling the uprising a series of riots touched off by intolerable economic conditions. He ridiculed the idea of landless peasants armed with knives waging war against the King-Emperor, and accused the British of overreacting. Only two Britishers had lost their lives, whereas 3000 Burmans were dead and 9000 put into jails. Dr. Ba Maw and U Saw lost their cases but won their political laurels. Both were to become Prime Ministers of Burma.

The plunging into politics of Dr. Ba Maw, now at the height of his powers, was most certainly a joint decision taken with his wife, Daw Khin Ma Ma

Maw, whom he had married on April 5, 1926. This woman, destined to found virtually a dynasty, was a slim, dainty person with attributes complementing those of her husband. She was born on December 13, 1905, of middle-class parents who sent her, of all places, to St. John's convent in Rangoon. The family was orthodox Buddhist, and only a clear vision of the shape of things yet to come could have induced it to break with tradition. Khin Ma Ma thus acquired a command of English which enabled her to keep abreast of the procedural intricacies of the fledgling politicos of those times, English being the only language permitted in the Legislature. Oddly enough, in every conversation I have had with her, Mrs. Ba Maw never once spoke English, not even by accident. I do not think she entirely approved of me. Flippancy was not for her, and she never understood why her husband and I raised our voices, argued, and said seemingly rude things to each other. That these stormy sessions should end in peals of laughter was also beyond her. She usually left the two of us to conduct our "free masonry" together, but at least on one occasion she interjected a question. I was, as often, taunting Dr. Ba Maw about his discursive style of speaking and writing. I said he was so adjectival that he reminded me of Nehru. "What's wrong with Nehru's style?" he demanded. He then strode across the room, brought back a small book, "I go West" by F. Karaka, and said, "Read that. It's by an Indian, too." Then, with mock seriousness, he turned to his wife with, "Karaka was president of the Oxford Union. Nehru like us went to Cambridge. My children go to Yale, but this fellow, he only went to Borstal!" Daw Khin Ma Ma could not understand why I was laughing. She asked me how, if I did not know any word of two syllables, I managed to put out a paper.

Because she was so prim and proper, it was bruited about that she was an imperious woman, and that Dr. Ba Maw gave himself airs and graces because of her. All I know is that her mother was a gem dealer and she brought to Dr. Ba Maw a dowry which helped defray the cost of party organization as well as the luxury of mothering those incipient political leaders later to emerge as the "Thirty Comrades." Later, when her husband was Head of State, she gave her seal of approval to Bo Let Ya, a dyed-in-the-wool "Comrade," but also to two others: Thakin Than Tun, who, to nobody's surprise, became president of the Communist Party of Burma, and U Kyaw Nyein, who would head the Socialist Party. Than Tun and Kyaw Nyein were ambitious men and early displayed qualities of leadership and intellectual excellence that endeared them to a woman who looked upon politics as a deadly serious business. It was Dr. Ba Maw who was imaginative and inventive; she was a stickler for the conventions. The exoteric sentimentality of the husband found expression in the naming of the children after the avatars in the Jataka tales. His last child he named Neta, after Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the Indian political leader who was his friend and colleague during the Japanese occupation. Mrs. Ba Maw, the conservative, alike in her thinking as in her book-keeping, never permitted the children to deviate from the Buddhist faith. She was unable to do anything about her husband's agnosticism, an attitude which she learnt to live

with, as she learned to live with Bible readings (strictly as literature) and Christmas trees (because it gave the children pleasure). Because of the empirical nature of Dr. Ba Maw's soul-searchings, the man of no religion became known as the man of all religions, and a body of monks who took Dr. Ba Maw's non-profession of faith to be more than adequately covered by Mrs. Ba Maw's devoutness, defended his unorthodoxy and earned for themselves the sobriquet of "Dr. Ba Maw's pongyis."

In the political ferment of the nineteen-twenties, Mrs. Ba Maw had neither the time nor inclination for frivolity. The system of government called Dyarchy had arrived, under which a Legislative Council of 103, of whom 80 were elected, was given a shaky start. The electorate had to meet property and educational qualifications, and only 7 per cent of them in fact voted. But it was sufficient to give impetus to everyone with political pretensions to swing into stride after bigger game of more power and more lucrative offices when a fuller representation under the Montagu-Chelmsford plan materialized. Dr. Ba Maw, initially representing the parliamentary wing of the GCBA, was restive for leadership. From being an amorphous body, the GCBA had first split into two, one faction wishing to advance along with India, and the other, following popular sentiment, preferring to separate. Dr. Ba Maw, intent on forming his own party—the *Sinyetha* or Poor Man's party—straddled the fence. If he had the choice, he would like to remain an anti-separatist, but would reserve the right to opt out later if the arrangement did not work to Burma's advantage. But, in view of widespread feeling that Burma should stand on her own, and the Montagu-Chelmsford dictum "Burma is not India," he allowed himself to be swayed. What troubled Ba Maw was that the intended reforms were still narrow in scope: the Shan states, Karenni, and the Kachin and Chin country, comprising half the land area of Burma, and perhaps a third of the population, would remain under the Governor's control. Furthermore, in a House of Representatives of 132 elected members, there would be only 91 from general constituencies, the remainder to represent Indian, Anglo-Indian, Karen, Chinese and British commercial interests. Since these communal and labour interests would tend to remain subservient to the British firms, and since the fissiparous tendencies of Burmese political parties, ready to intensify as time marched on, were already there, the GCBA led by the veteran U Ba Pe, the *Myochit* (Nationalist) under U Saw, and *Sinyetha* would have their work cut out for them.

After the passage of the 1935 Act, Burma was separated from India (April 1, 1937) and the promised general election held. Males over 18 and females over 21 could vote. Although the three main groups remained as named, there were of course a large number of hopefuls who stood as independents. Another development, not seriously taken at that time, was the emergence of the *Dobama Asiayone*, the organization of the *Thakins* or "lords" as the young Turks of university and high school graduates styled themselves. Originally, the revolt of these young men was aimed at the British education authorities, since student representation at schools and colleges was lacking, and such senior

Burmans as were invited to the university senate and school boards tended to favour the status quo. As the students' union gained strength, its leaders turned to the extremists in the land, those without funds or patience to oppose the British constitutionally, who were ready adepts at using the Indian shock tactics of strikes, boycotts, and open denunciation of British imperialism. At the last possible moment, this group also filed candidates in a spirit of devil-may-care.

When the results came in, the *Nga bwint saing* or "Five Flowers in One," so named because five stalwarts of the United GCBA headed it, won the largest number of seats: 46. The alliance, however, was only for election purpose, the winning candidates seemingly owing no allegiance to the flag once it had served its purpose. Dr. Ba Maw's party came in with only 16 seats, whilst the *Thakins*, who had filed late and only in 28 constituencies, won 3. The GCBA expected to form the government, but they were reckoning without Ba Maw, who promptly fished for the 12 independents who had got in and lured the "loose" votes within the GCBA itself. It then remained open to the British in the Council whether to sanction the coalition or vote with the majority party. They gave the nod to Dr. Ba Maw, who thus became the first Prime Minister of Burma.

Dr. Ba Maw's tactic of attracting adherents from other parties was not lost upon U Saw, who had travelled abroad (to Japan) in preparation for his own debut. His *Myochit* party had only to reach out to the GCBA rump and at the first wobble of the new government he would be able to do a "Ba Maw" on its leader. Or so he thought; but Ba Maw proved to be an adroit parliamentarian. He weathered successive no-confidence motions and kept the British guessing as to whether he intended to push against them or become more malleable. On the subject of the "excluded areas," Ba Maw showed restraint, but he bit hard at what he deemed to be the real bone of contention between him and the British—the so-called discretionary powers of the Governor which enabled him to overrule the cabinet over internal security or law and order matters. This was an extremely sensitive area inasmuch as rioting or labour unrest invariably hurt the foreign commercial interests. Having condemned British overkill in regard to the rebellion he had as a lawyer defended, it was inevitable that as prime minister he should bring amnesty to the rebels still in jail. In extension of the same logic, when university students rioted, or oilfield workers staged a protest march, Ba Maw, rather than turn out the police and have a magistrate read the Riot Act, would treat and parley. The British were not as phlegmatic as they appeared to U Saw. His deputy, U Pu, read the signals more correctly. He took soundings of the minority groups' feelings and, assured of GCBA backing, moved against Ba Maw, one jump ahead of U Saw. Dr. Ba Maw had been in office almost two years. The war clouds were gathering over Europe. He resigned office, his cabinet with him. This was the signal for the young radicals to throw in their lot with him; thus was formed the Freedom Bloc, an amalgam of the *Sinyetha* and *Dobama* parties. In Roman fashion the young Thakins declared the period one of national emergency and elected Dr. Ba Maw "dictator."

Ba Maw of course was still a Member of the Legislature, but that House, divided against itself, could not hope for constitutional advance except through a change in imperial policy. Dr. Ba Maw resigned his seat and announced he would fight for complete independence of Burma. He made anti-British speeches of such vehemence that arrest and imprisonment became inevitable. His wife was ready, just as Pandit Nehru's wife and sisters ever were, to move the Freedom Bloc forward. Within the Legislature, U Pu was not long in; U Saw elbowed him out in another no-confidence resolution, the British supporting him. War had now been declared in the West and U Saw jailed Thakins and dissidents right and left. U Nu was packed off to Mandalay jail and Dr. Ba Maw to Mogok, there to await the Japanese advance. Thakin Aung San, with a price on his head—withal a cheap price—had no intention of languishing in jail. He led, in batches, thirty like-minded young men to Hainan Island whence, having undergone musketry training, they returned in the van of the invading Japanese. When the British withdrawal commenced, U Nu and others were released. Mrs. Ba Maw planned and executed her husband's rescue before anyone remembered the existence of Mogok and smaller jails.

In the flush of victory the "Thirty Comrades" saw one of their number, Thakin Tun Oke, head the Preparatory Committee for forming a new government, but the Japanese had their own plans, which were to offer the premiership to Dr. Ba Maw. The royalist faction, leaders in the *Dobama* organization, had visions of restoring the monarchy in the person of Taw Payagyi, a grandson of King Thibaw (through his mother's side), but Tokyo was firm. Dr. Ba Maw, in splendid isolation on his hilltop, was invited down and ceremoniously installed as Head of State. It was less an induction than a coronation, the same Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, who had wanted a prince, officiating at the *beiktheik* or royal investiture.

On paper, Burma in 1942 was a sovereign state; in actuality, it was fiefdom of the Japanese military command. The Thakins were the first to murmur against the Japanese. Was it for this, this farce, that they had rebelled against the British? Dr. Ba Maw, with his Freedom Bloc partners in his government, with U Nu as foreign minister and General Aung San as defense minister, behaved as though independence were real. In 1942 the Japanese were world beaters; its army of occupation had to be tolerated for as long as necessary for the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere to become reality. Since the Russo-Japanese war, only Japan—not China—was regarded as the Asian people's hope for the containment of European imperialism. In 1942 the Japanese had gone further than containment. They had defeated the combined might of the colonial powers, on land, sea and in the air. It was strong stuff for anyone who believed in the invincibility of the new Asian superpower. Did Ba Maw believe that the Japanese would conquer India and beat America, too? To answer this, one would have to go to the record: Dr. Ba Maw behaved in such a way as to fortify and encourage the Japanese to invade India. He did so mainly by his unstinted support of Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army. To Ba Maw, Bose was no Japanese puppet; he stood head and

shoulders above the others, even above the Congress leadership. Bose was the personification of what Ba Maw in Burma stood as a symbol of: the clarion call of a grown-up, and an equal to a former master, to pack up and go because he was now redundant. Dr. Ba Maw was incapable of hating anybody. As the first elected head of the Burmese nation he had asked for the bare minimum: Dominion Status. Historians have said Burma opted out of the Commonwealth, which is untrue. Burma was never in the Commonwealth. Dr. Ba Maw asked for Dominion Status or self-government under the British Crown. U Saw asked for the *promise* of dominion status *after* the war. Both these requests were denied. As to whether Ba Maw believed the Japanese could beat the Americans, the answer, based on the record, must again be "Yes." It was not until 1944 that the tide turned against the Japanese. Until then Dr. Ba Maw hoped that the British would quit India, and that with the French and the Dutch already gone, there would be no lingering traces of western imperialism to act as the raison d'etre for American presence in the Pacific. Because he was a well informed person, he never at any time believed Japan could invade the United States but—here again the wish was father to the thought—he hoped that America would be prevented from interfering in Asia.

It must not be overlooked that, although the Japanese army entered Burma in 1942, it was only in 1943 that Tojo announced in the Diet that Burma would be given independence within a year. By then Aung San had been made a Major-General, the Burma Defense Army was in situ, and the existence of a national government universally recognized. Japan was flooding Burma with worthless paper money, and the Japanese army was stealing the country blind, but at the highest level Ba Maw, arch, withdrawn, showed the commanding generals and the Japanese ambassador that he was boss and that if he could not prevent Japanese wrongdoing in Burma, he was not going to condone it either. It is curious that even we, who were there on the spot, tend to forget for what a short space of time Dr. Ba Maw was actually Head of State in Burma and how much he managed to accomplish within that period. As early as March of that year, he had been received (along with General Aung San) by the Emperor of Japan in audience. One does not know how deeply impressed the other Heads of State, such as Sukarno of Indonesia, were by the "Imperial Graciousness" in investing them with the Order of the Rising Sun, but I know the Order was stolen from Dr. Ba Maw in Tokyo in the closing stages of the war, and he used to say those who flaunted honours and titles often did not deserve them, whereas deserving Village Hampdens never got any. There were no medals, decorations, or orders of chivalry that Dr. Ba Maw could not have obtained from the British, yet when he went to London to attend the coronation of Edward VIII in 1936 he wore no decorations of any kind. What he did wear were his self-designed clothes which were the most resplendent in that glittering crowd. "Is it true they cheered you as Lady Zafrullah Khan?" I once asked him, and the response was, "Are you sure Zafrullah was even there?" Ba Maw, who had a retentive memory, forgot things by design. He forgot the Imperial Rescript which General Tojo had given him in solemn pledge of

Burma's sovereignty and independence in a hotel drawer in Manila, and only discovered its loss when he reached Saigon.

Dr. Ba Maw's family have warned me I cannot write any profile on him without inundating myself with details of his career. One daughter has said, "I dearly love my father and he loves us, but he is the complete politician; we breathe politics; we live politics; if there is a side of him that comes alive in a different environment, I've yet to see it." As I attempt to draw out the man from the mass of detail surrounding his career, I find myself falling back on personal anecdote. In 1944, I was deputy governor of Myitkyina under U Kin Maung. Myitkyina was under direct military rule, but of course U Kin Maung, as a senior Frontier Service officer of the old regime, was acceptable to the Japanese. Dr. Ba Maw knew him personally and approved of him. But when Kin Maung, attending a conference in Lower Burma, was unable to get back to his charge because of continuous Allied bombing, the Japanese promoted me governor. I reported the date on which I entered upon my new duties to Rangoon. I did not get confirmation of my promotion, which in any case was temporary, but two letters reached me by name, the first of which said that, henceforth, the word *Payah*! (meaning O my God!) with which the common people addressed high ranking officials was taboo; and the second that if I was ever in Rangoon I should sign the Book at Government House. I had visions of popping a visiting card into a little box marked "Mrs. Ba Maw/Not at home," but these were dispelled when a wireless message came to tell the Japanese my name was not borne on the old (British) civil list and that I was not only not known to Dr. Ba Maw, but also unacceptable. In view of the fact that every government facility was being operated by the military, and particularly in view of Dr. Ba Maw's appointees deserting their posts through dread of incessant bombing, the Japanese wished me to ignore Dr. Ba Maw's order, but I said No. Dr. Ba Maw was my god, my Tenno Heika, and if I was compelled to defy him I should have to commit suicide. It was this fortuitous circumstance that gave me breathing space when almost immediately Merrill's Marauders landed and the Japanese used draconian methods to immobilize all my friends who believed neither in Ba Maw nor the Japanese.

Having escaped to India, it was not until the end of 1945 that I was able to see Dr. Ba Maw and proffer him thanks for having fired me. Ba Maw roared with laughter. He of course had never even heard of me at the time of the firing, but he thought the action of his home secretary, U Paing, was most appropriate. "It was the principle of the thing, my dear chap," he said. "The Japanese had to be put in their place. Besides, you were an interloper. How on earth did you get put in that hot seat in the first place?" Perhaps this little incident will help bring out the fact that in every manner possible, over things little or big, Dr. Ba Maw never let the Japanese forget that his authority over the entire Burmese administration was indisputable. It was because of his archness towards the Japanese that an infantry captain of the Japanese army attempted to assassinate him during an air raid. Because Ba Maw would consent to see only the Japanese ambassador or the commanding general, Iida, from time to time, junior officers felt they might be better off with a subservient Quisling instead of maintaining an oracle whom even their high priests were permitted to consult only infrequently. Because the whole compound was in darkness, and members of the family were in different trenches, the attempt failed. One would have thought the frustrated captain would have disembowelled himself; instead he was packed off in less in than disgrace to Japan. Later, it transpired that General Aung San had been tipped off in advance of the plot, but he failed to warn the intended victim in time.

To understand the relationship between Ba Maw and Aung San, one has to take into consideration the fact that there was a difference of nearly a quarter of a century in their respective ages. Aung San stood head and shoulders above the "Thirty Comrades," but his supremacy was recognized by Ba Maw only in the military field. As upholder of the civilian authority, Ba Maw's choice of a politician who could best implement his policies was Thakin Than Tun, the communist. Than Tun with Aung San and Let Ya had had a hand in founding the Communist Party, but the latter two had become disenchanted with the ideology. Ba Maw himself never believed that ideology could ever take root in Burma. Marxism to him was essentially an analytical system, and if Than Tun devoted his life to mastering it, more power to him. His conviction was that the nations professing to be Communist would take to interpreting Marx in individual fashion and that nationalism must eventually prevail. It is significant that since Ba Maw first set the example, every Burman leader has seen fit to view communist doctrine with equanimity, even when he was quelling violent methods of unseating him with severity. In the nineteen fifties, after the initial communist insurrection had failed and some of the supporters of that movement had left the Thakin Nu government to form a coalition of the Workers and Peasants party, the Trades Union Congress, the People's Volunteer Organization, the People's Unity Party, and other splinter groups, Dr. Ba Maw came out of retirement for one day to confer with them at the Green Hotel. When I heard of this strange meeting, I went to attend it although I was not invited. Taking Dr. Ba Maw aside, I remonstrated with him, pointing out that the convenor, Thein Pe Myint, was a Trojan Horse left behind by the Communist Party to prepare the way for their return. "Can't you see they're making use of you?" I asked. The blood came and went in Ba Maw's face. This was the only time in his life when he was annoyed with me. He rebuked me for attempting to show "King Crocodile" where he might or might not swim. Fortunately, nothing came of that meeting, and Ba Maw never again took umbrage over my continuing proclivity to teach political grandmothers (and grandfathers) how to suck eggs.

General Aung San, for his part, was never one to show deference to someone he did not respect; hence his taking Dr. Ba Maw fully into his confidence in regard to the plot to overthrow the Japanese must be seen as the measure of the trust he had in his leader. Dr. Ba Maw was not expected to join the revolt. It was recognized by the plotters that, had he done so, the conspiracy would have been exposed, with attendant suffering and loss of life.

When, on March 27, 1945, the Burma Defence Army defected, Dr. Ba Maw kept up appearances most effectively. Historians have wondered why Rangoon was not put to the torch in the last days of the Japanese occupation. I believe it was Ba Maw's sang-froid in the tensest moments, when a slip would have turned natural suspicion on the part of the Japanese commander-in-chief into certainty of a doublecross, that saved the situation. Ba Maw maintained his composure even when faced with the ordeal of moving his government with the retreating Japanese to Tenassarim and eventually (discharging his cabinet and leaving his family defenseless) boarding a plane for Japan. Subhas Chandra Bose, equally courageous, was to perish in an air crash, but Ba Maw survived and got thrown into Sugamo jail by the Allied command. When, months later, Dr. Ba Maw upon his return to Burma was interviewed by an American, his response to the question what, now that the war was over, the Burman most desired, was singularly free of bitterness. "Nothing would gladden the average Burman more than the sight of paddle steamers coming up the Irrawaddy laden with cloth and bicycles and English biscuits," he said.

At my very first meeting with Dr. Ba Maw, Bo Yan Naing used what influence he had with his father-in-law to get me started as a newspaper publisher. Assuring me the money would be forthcoming, Dr. Ba Maw summoned Bo Set Kya, one of the "Thirty" who had come into a fortune, nobody knew how, and peremptorily ordered him to unload. Bo Set Kya said "Yes," but later said "No." Next I was asked to call on one U Nyunt Maung, who wanted no part of me. I realized then that Ba Maw had no money sense at all and that if Mrs. Ba Maw had not held on to her trinkets and started "Maw Taik," a business enterprise, he would have been financially embarrassed.

Characteristically, he withdrew into himself when the negotiations for Burma's independence were being conducted. It was the members of his erstwhile cabinet who were now talking with the British, and Ba Maw held aloof as though what they were haggling about was already a fait accompli. Like Charles de Gaulle, he adopted an attitude of splendid isolation, waiting for the call, which of course never came. Only when General Aung San was assassinated on July 19, 1947, did he show any sign of animation. I myself was in Mandalay playing golf when the assassination occurred, and I was surprised that Ba Maw had not been considered when the Governor had to find a successor to our slain leader. In 1969 I twice spoke about this with Sir Hubert Rance in Surrey. Sir Hubert told me he had been assailed by doubts whether he did the right thing in choosing U Nu over U Saw. There was no mention of Dr. Ba Maw. So it was his archrival, the very man who had plotted Aung San's death and was hanged for it, that was being serious considered for the premiership!

When the trial of U Saw opened, there was no doubt of his guilt, but the lawyer in Dr. Ba Maw refused to pass judgment until the evidence was in. I had lunch with Derek Curtis-Bennett, KC, who had flown from London to defend U Saw. He had concluded his argument before the Special Tribunal—there was no jury—and wished to know what I thought the outcome would be. When I told him, he nodded, changed the subject, and was gone without waiting for the verdict. I said to Dr. Ba Maw that I did not know what the famous KC was paid, but it seemed odd he should merely have paraphrased Henry II's "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" Ba Maw's remark was, "With one of the assassins turned approver, there was nothing else Curtis-Bennett could have done. He was not trying to win acquittal; he was trying to save his client's neck!"

I never did discover what Ba Maw's views were on capital punishment. When I went to the Insein jail to see U Saw hang, his only comment was "Morbid." From his other remarks it seemed to me he would have preferred U Saw to have lived. That the latter had held his head high and gone bravely to his death won ungrudging respect, posthumously, from a lifelong adversary. Dr. Ba Maw's son-in-law, Bo Yan Naing, was openly, vituperatively critical of the new order. Ba Maw could have joined the majority of the "Comrades", ranged on the side of U Nu, or he could have gone underground with the more militant of his friends. He did neither. He went off to central Burma to contest a seat in Parliament against the majority party. He lost. In the following general election, he stood against the Home Minister in a Rangoon constituency. He collected an impressive number of votes, mine included. I had organized a pipe-and-drum troupe to march to the polling booth. The government took a dim view of my theatricals. When the next election came, my name was not on the electoral roll. I asked Dr. Ba Maw to go to the Supreme Court, but he only laughed. "The Supreme Court is not for the likes of you," he said, "You've only to fork out five rupees (one dollar) and they'd have to put you back on."

The time came when I was on trial for criminal libel. I had repeatedly called U Nu's planning secretary and the economics czar of Burma a crook and a five-percenter, and the government decided to teach me a lesson. It briefed the doyen of the Rangoon Bar and two other barristers to prosecute me. At first, Dr. Ba Maw said he would defend me. But of course the doyen was no other than Dr. Ba Han, his brother, and Dr. Ba Maw backed out. He gave me Ratanlal's Law of Crimes, the thickest book in his library and told me to fend for myself. I was convicted and sentenced to jail, but I won my appeal in the High Court. Dr. Ba Maw treated the whole thing as an amusing interlude. "You just wanted me to make a political speech," he said, "And now you've made it yourself. What are you bellyaching about?" As an afterthought he added, "You were itching to go to jail. Why didn't you? You'd been a hero."

Bo Yan Naing was the first hero. Because of the civil war, the government had enacted POPA (the Peace and Order Protection Act), somewhat on the lines of DORA (the Defence of the Realm Act) in Britain. It was aimed at members of the underground, but those were elusive beings. Bo Yan Naing was taken in the dragnet. I went to see him in jail. This time Dr. Ba Maw appeared in Court and expounded the law on habeas corpus. After a while Yan Naing was released, but almost the first words he uttered were, "Upon what meat doth these vermin feed that they are grown so great?" He was in jail

again, this time in Insein. I had myself admitted there for a day so that we might cook and eat pilau together. Next, Dr. Ba Maw himself was seized under the same POPA he had castigated, but he wanted no show of bravado on anyone's part until he came out.

By now it was obvious that as long as the AFPFL remained in power, Dr. Ba Maw would not be President. It was unthinkable for him to consider taking a lesser post. He was absolutely without rancour and never spoke an unkind word against the government which, after all, was composed of members of his wartime cabinet. On the contrary, he watched with satisfaction the rapid development of U Kyaw Nyein, his former Private Secretary, who by dint of study and industry, had become a power in the land. The students he had sent abroad as state scholars were now ambassadors and leaders in commerce and industry. I realized how completely British he was in his political thinking. Even when he was reviling the Tories, calling on the British to leave peacefully or be flung out, he could think of no substitute for the British parliamentary form of government. When the AFPFL as a popular front broke up, he looked upon it as a natural development and as an augury for the ushering in of a two-party system. When U Kyaw Nyein declared the AFPFL would remain in power for forty years and used that worn phrase "After us, the flood!" Dr. Ba Maw's eyes twinkled with merriment. For the government party to burnish its image and tarnish that of its opponent was de rigueur. There were certain built-in advantages for the party in power, just as there were definite risks in being the opposition; but because he was so steeped in the British tradition he did not envision anything worse befalling an obstreperous critic than a short period of detention, with all the provisions of the Burma Jail Manual observed. During the British regime, political detainees were sometimes referred to as detenus. I think it gives an insight into his character that, himself a detainee, he objected less to arbitrary arrest and detention than to that "terribly un-English" word detenu.

Towards the end of U Nu's regime, Dr. Ba Maw seemed to mellow. His articles in my paper had always been restrained in tone, but now his criticisms were so couched they appeared to be written more in sorrow than in anger. When the first military coup d'etat took place in 1958, he held his breath until it became clear Parliament would be retained and elections held. It was during the time of that caretaker government that Dr. Ba Maw came to relax with me. "I'm dying of ennui," he said. "Why don't we act as judges for the Miss Universe competition?" This was an eye-opener for me. I knew Mrs. Ba Maw would not have approved. "Oh, never mind her," he said, and went with me a few doors away to the home of U Tun Tin, another Cambridge alumnus and a barrister. He was also a member of General Ne Win's cabinet, but he was not going to argue the toss with Dr. Ba Maw. The unfortunate thing was that the leading contender, Ma Sein Aye, Miss Burma at the time, had shortly before been abducted by an army officer, and although she had been restored to her family and to spinsterhood, she was no longer virgo intacta. I asked Dr. Ba Maw whether she should be allowed to compete and was brushed aside with,

"Of course. How many beauty queens these days do you think are virgins?" But then he was reckoning without that strange quirk of the Burmese language which equates spinsterhood with virginity. The public hurled abuse at us, calling us the "Three Dirty Old Men" of Burma. "Give me the law," I urged Ba Maw. "I'll put these so-and-so's right." His answer was a chuckle. "The law, my dear fellow," he said, "is an ass."

Came the second coup d'etat in 1962, and this time it was no laughing matter. Everybody who was anybody, from the President down, was arrested and jailed for years without trial. After U Nu's arrest and the tearing up of the Constitution, Bo Let Ya (General Aung San's deputy), Bo Yan Naing and I met to discuss means of thwarting the dictator. Dr. Ba Maw discouraged meetings in his house, so we met in mine. I was arrested in 1963 together with U Kyaw Nyein and nine other Opposition leaders. Let Ya's arrest followed. Yan Naing, who had entered Burma in the wake of the Japanese army, walked out over the same path to flaming rebellion in Thailand. The army held its hand for a year, but eventually took Dr. Ba Maw in. In jail, because I could not carry a single tune in Burmese or English, I sang Latin in plain chant. Dr. Ba Maw did not sing, but he recited Shakespeare and Caesar's Commentaries. His composure amazed everyone as well it might, because this time he really suffered. Bo Yan Naing's wife, with babe in arms, was incarcerated, the family placed under watch. Years later, when a son of Justice Chan Htoon married a Ba Maw daughter, the young man was frogmarched into jail and he is still there at this writing. After five years of mental torture and physical degradation, we ourselves were set free. Dr. Ba Maw and I were kept behind bars 24 hours later than the others. I had to sign a sheaf of ridiculous bonds promising to keep the peace, and so I expect had Dr. Ba Maw. As my car drove up the jail drive, Dr. Ba Maw's car was leaving. From his half-lowered window Dr. Ba Maw smiled at my wife and raised a finger to his brow. As she said to me, he might have been on his way to a cocktail party.

Was parliamentary democracy such an effete system that in the face of naked force we must all lie down and die? Prime Minister U Nu and I decided, after staging public demonstrations, that we would go into exile to continue the struggle, by whatever means available. I went to say goodbye to Dr. Ba Maw. I knew nothing would budge him. At the same time, inasmuch as he had given his blessing to Aung San's revolt against the Japanese, we could expect no less in respect of our own venture in which his eldest son Zali, like himself a product of Cambridge and the Inns of Court, and his intrepid son-in-law had anticipated us. Mrs. Ba Maw, the activist, was moved. I think she accepted me at last as a member of the family. When I said to Tinsa (Mrs. Yan Naing) "This day I shall be with your husband. What do I tell him?" she held up the infant whom Yan Naing had never seen, and said "Tell him this."

After my departure, things got worse for the Ba Maw family. Yan Naing's sons, twins and teenage boys, came to join us on the River Kwai. One boy contracted cerebral malaria and died; the other was shot by an adherent of the Burmese military regime masquerading as one of us. Then the youngest son, a

mere child, braved the worst terrain in Southeast Asia to be with his father. Dr. Ba Maw never smiled again.

In retrospect I cannot contend that what we did was what Dr. Ba Maw would have wanted us to. His was not the way of violence. No one showed greater fortitude in the face of aggression or force, but he was an examplar of strength and courage rather than the blow in first or the pre-emptive strike. Even in his earliest days, when Oswald Mosley first set the pattern, his "pocket army" was armed with blunt choppers, the general utility knife sanctioned by law. He abhorred uniforms and military paraphernalia. If he had to design garments for the security force, I imagine he would have come up with a colourful arrangement like Micheangelo's Swiss guards at the Vatican.

Dr. Ba Maw lived and died an Anglophile, but in essence he was everything admirable in a Burman of sound principles and an artistic flair. The cultural impact of this gentlemanly man upon Burmese society has been great in a variety of ways. To take but one example, a nation of such individuality and diversity of names as to make kinship undecipherable, has slowly begun to adopt the father's last name as a surname. Out of office, he tried to teach us the role of a Loyal Opposition. Throw the rascals out by all means, but be prepared to accept responsibility. His greatest contribution, though not generally recognized, is to me the most patent and incontrovertible fact of history. The independence that Dr. Ba Maw established—granted he took advantage of the fortunes of war—was of such emotional validity that no attempt by any power, however great, could hope to restore the status quo ante in Burma. Let me end with a quotation from the British historian F.S.V. Donnison (1970: 123): "The habit of being governed by the British, and habit is one of the strongest factors making for the acceptance of government, had been broken. It was never to be re-established, although there were still six years to run before the *formal* (italics mine) gaining of independence.

Upon Dr. Ba Maw's death, the nation mourned him. Despite the ban on public gatherings, one thousand of the elite of Burma came to pay their respects. Had I been there I would have wished his soul to rest in peace. But as his peers were soulless Buddhists, I am certain the prayer uppermost in their minds was the fervent one that his great spirit might win final release from that of which he was least deserving: unhappiness.

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