



**Notes:**

In the last sections of his account of his mission to Ava in 1827, John Crawfurd included his journal of his visit to Martaban in the previous year, in order to fill a gap in his 1827 narrative. As he explained: "Our return to Bengal having hindered our excursion to the Saluen and Gain rivers, as well as prevented us from visiting other parts of the province, I shall endeavour in some measure to supply the deficiency, by the insertion of the journal of a voyage to Martaban, which, I performed about ten months before the time of which I am now writing. It is as follows..." We reproduce this account on its own here.

M.W.C.

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**An Account of Martaban in March and April  
1826**

**John Crawfurd**

My party consisted of Captain Studdert, the senior officer of his Majesty's navy at Rangoon; Captain Hammond, of the Madras Quartermaster-general's department; the Rev. Mr. Judson, of the American Mission in Ava, and Mr. King, R.N.

**March 31, 1826**

On the 31st of March, at half-past one o'clock in the afternoon, we left Rangoon in the steam-vessel Diana, and at ten in the forenoon of the following day reached the mouth of the Martaban river,

distant from that of Rangoon about seventy miles. Its entrance is not less than seven miles broad. The mouth of this river, and indeed its whole course to the town of Martaban, is a somewhat difficult, and, in some seasons, a dangerous navigation: until our visit, the existence of a tolerable harbour had not been suspected. The position of the cape of Kyaikami, the first high bold land to the south, after quitting the Delta of the Irawadi, as laid down in the chart of Mr. Abbot, led us to imagine it possible that shelter might be found behind it in the south-west monsoon; but we had proceeded in our course a considerable way up the river, and had a good view of the land behind us, before appearances rendered it probable that a harbour actually existed. We fortunately determined to return, and, making for the land, anchored in quarter-less three fathoms, within fifty yards of the shore, in a clayey bottom. It was low-water neap-tide, and the surrounding rocks and sand-banks were exposed to view; the first formed a reef of about two miles and a half in extent, running out in a north-westerly direction from the cape; and both, along with the cape itself, which sheltered us from the south-west wind, nearly land-locked us—forming, to all appearance, a good harbour. About a mile and a half to leeward of us, in reference to the south-west monsoon, was the wide mouth of a river hitherto unexplored.

After dinner our party landed, and began, with avidity, to explore the little peninsula, of which Cape Kyaikami forms the extremity. For three-quarters of a mile from the cape inland, on the north-eastern side, the land was elevated from ten to twenty feet above high-water mark spring-tides; and on the south-western side, the whole country was of similar elevation to the distance of apparently three or four miles, when there commenced a range of hills, between three and four hundred feet in height. We found the country covered every where with a tall forest, intermixed with so little underwood, that we walked into it without difficulty for several hundred yards. Thus far the spot promised many advantages for the site of a commercial town and military cantonment.

### **April 2, 1826**

Early on the morning of the 2d, our party landed again, and explored the little tract of country before us more completely. It

was uninhabited, but the traces of former occupation were discernible. The ruins of four small pagodas were found close to the beach: several wells were seen not far from them; and in the same situation were the remains of a miserable breastwork, recently thrown up by way of opposing the conquest of the province by Colonel Godwin's detachment in 1825.

At ten o'clock we proceeded to explore the river already mentioned, and the mouth of which falls into the harbour. In proceeding towards it from the place where we lay, we had all along three and a half and four fathoms water; and over the bar, which was of soft ooze, quarter-less three. After entering, we carried five and a half and five fathoms for eight miles up, ranging the river from one side to another, until the steam-vessel sometimes touched the trees. For about a mile up, this stream is everywhere from four to five hundred yards wide; and being soon landlocked, it forms a spacious and beautiful harbour, into which at low-water neap-tides most merchant-ships can enter; and at high-water, ships of any burthen. The banks of this river would have formed by far the most convenient spot for a mercantile town; but unfortunately they were, within any convenient distance of its mouth, low, and subject to inundation. We ascended the stream as far as a large branch which leads to the village of Wagru, then distant two miles. This place, once the seat of government of a dynasty of Peguan kings in the thirteenth century, was now nearly without inhabitants, having been deserted in the great emigration of Talains into the Siamese territory. The river which we had now examined is called, in the Talain language, the Kalyen, and sometimes that of Wagru. Many small but navigable streams join the main branch. We ascended one of these, on the left bank of the river near its mouth, in our boats, as it appeared to lead to the neighbourhood of our proposed settlement. It brought us to a small village, the inhabitants of which were fishermen and salt manufacturers. These poor people expressed no apprehension at our appearance, but proceeded without disturbance in their usual occupations, obligingly answering all our questions. This feeling of confidence towards us is, I believe, at present general throughout the whole Talain population, and I trust our conduct may always be such as not to forfeit it.

**April 3, 1826**

By dawn of day on the 3d, we landed again on the promontory, and repeated our examination. Passing to the south-west of the cape, we proceeded along a beautiful sandy beach, shaded from the morning sun by a high bank on our left, covered with overhanging trees, many of them in fruit and flower; our Indian servants feasting upon the *Jamun*, which was found in great abundance. After a distance of about a mile and a half, the strand now described was interrupted by a bold rocky promontory, but recommenced beyond it, and continued as far as the eye could reach. This promontory, as well as Cape Kyaikami itself, afforded us an opportunity of examining the rock formation, which is very various; consisting of granite, quartz-rock, clay-slate, mica slate, indurated clay, breccia, and clay-iron ore. The soil, apparently of good quality, and generally from two to three feet deep, as might be seen by the section of it in the wells, commonly rests on the clay-iron ore, which sometimes gives the water, in other respects pure and tasteless, a slight chalybeate flavour. The distance between the farthest rocky promontory and the river Kalyen we computed to be about two miles; the whole a table-land, nearly level, with the exception of a few hundred yards of mangrove on the immediate banks of the Kalyen. The peninsula thus formed contains about four square miles, an ample space of choice ground for a town, gardens, and military cantonments. The whole receives considerable protection from the south-west monsoon by the little woody island of Zebo, above one hundred feet high, and lying about three-quarters of a mile from the shore.

At eleven o'clock in the forenoon we ascended the Saluen river, for Martaban. During nearly our whole course up, we had the large and fertile island of Balú on our left hand. This is the most productive place in rice within the whole province, and afforded a considerable revenue to the Burmese Government. At sunset we reached Martaban, about twenty-seven miles from the mouth of the river. The prospect which opens itself upon the stranger here is probably one of the most beautiful and imposing which Oriental scenery can present. The waters of three large rivers, the Saluen, the Ataran, and the Gain, meet at this spot, and immediately proceed to the sea by two wide channels; so that, in fact, the openings of five distinct rivers are, as it were, seen at one view,

proceeding like *radii* from a centre. This centre itself is a wide expanse of waters interspersed with numerous wooded islands. The surrounding country consists generally of woody hills, frequently crowned with white temples. In the distance are to be seen the high mountains of Zingai, and in favourable weather the more distant and lofty ones which separate Martaban from the countries of Lao and Siam. Captain Fenwick, the Civil Superintendent of Martaban, came on board to compliment us upon our arrival. Shortly after we landed with this gentleman, and passed the evening with him at his house, where we arranged an excursion, for the following day, up the Saluen to the Caves of Kogún.

#### **April 4, 1826**

Early on the morning of the 4th, a party visited the little picturesque island of Taongzê, opposite the town, and which is covered with white temples. From thence we passed over to Maulamyaing, on the left bank of the river; the place first contemplated for the site of a new town, and where part of the ground was already cleared of forest for this purpose. Situated twenty-five miles from the sea; by an intricate navigation, and accessible only to craft drawing ten feet water at the most, in point of convenience for a commercial establishment, it seemed to bear no comparison with the situation which we had already examined at the mouth of the river. Maulamyaing had once been the site of a town and capital under the Hindoo name of Ramapura, or the city of Rama; and the high earthen walls and ditch could still be easily traced. When the tide served at eleven o'clock, we ascended the Saluen in the steam-vessel, the first of her description that had ever entered its waters. When twelve miles above Martaban, the stream, hitherto disturbed and muddy, became as clear as crystal, and we had still three fathoms depth. About this place we passed the Kadachaong creek, which leads to Rangoon through the Setaang and Pegu rivers, and thence again through several cross channels to Bassein, a direct distance of more than two hundred miles. The internal navigation of Pegu appears to me to possess natural facilities far beyond any other Asiatic country, of which this is a fair specimen. At half-past two o'clock, the tide aiding us all the while, we reached Kogún, distant by computation twenty-

five miles from Martaban. The scenery in this neighbourhood was grand and beautiful, the banks of the river high, and the country to all appearance peculiarly fertile. Close to the left bank of the river was to be seen a range of mountains, steep, bare, and craggy, rising to the apparent height of fifteen hundred feet. Almost immediately on the right bank, and where the river makes an acute angle, a number of detached conical hills rose almost perpendicularly from the plain. All these last are of a grey compact limestone. We visited the largest, which contains a spacious cave, dedicated to the worship of Gautama, and which, besides having its roof rudely but curiously carved, contains several hundred images of that deity, a good number of them of pure white marble from the quarries of Ava. Around the hill is a garden belonging to a neighbouring monastery, in no very good order. The only plant in it which struck us as remarkable, was a tree about twenty feet high, abounding in long and pendulous pannicles of rich geranium-coloured blossoms, and long and elegant lance-shaped leaves; it is of the class and order *Diadelphia Decandria*, and too beautiful an object to be passed unobserved, even by the uninitiated in botany. Handfuls of the flowers were found as offerings in the cave before the images of Gautama.<sup>1</sup> At four o'clock, we began to descend the river, and at seven, with the assistance of the ebb-tide, the current of the river, and the full power of the steam, reached Martaban.

The cultivation of the fertile tract of country which we had passed in the course of the day is meagre, and proportionate to the oppressed and scanty population of a country, which hardly contains three inhabitants to a square mile, and these, of course, neither industrious nor intelligent. The objects of culture which we observed,—all in small patches, but growing with much luxuriance, notwithstanding the too obvious unskilfulness of the husbandry by which they were reared,—were indigo, cotton, and tobacco. Besides these, the upper part of the country, which is not subject to inundation, appears to be peculiarly fitted for the growth of the sugar-cane and coffee plant. Martaban, indeed, is a province of very various useful produce; for, besides the articles already

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<sup>1</sup> Crawford's note to the original: I showed the dry specimens of this plant to my friend Dr. Wallitch, on his arrival at Rangoon, about four months afterwards, and he soon ascertained that it constituted a new genus. He afterwards examined it in person on the spot, transferred it to the Botanical Garden at Calcutta, and described it under the name of *Amherstia nobilis*, in compliment to the Countess of Amherst.

mentioned, it yields pepper, cardamums, areca-nut, and teak wood, not to mention rice, which seldom exceeds in price twenty annas the maund. This is a list of valuable indigenous productions which can scarcely be matched in any other part of India.

### **April 5, 1826**

On the morning of the 5th, we went through the town of Martaban, a long, straggling, and mean, place, consisting of miserable huts, according to the custom of the country. It is situated at the foot of a conical hill, and is said to have contained a population of nine thousand souls, chiefly Talains. The Chinese are very few in number, a fact which, in a country understocked with inhabitants, calculated by nature for agricultural and commercial pursuits, and removed from their own at no very inconvenient distance, must be considered the certain sign of a bad government. We found the inhabitants preparing to move across to the British side of the Saluen. Such is the poverty, and such are the unsettled habits produced by oppression, that these emigrations are no very arduous undertaking to the Peguans. Yesterday we heard that one thousand two hundred families from the district of Zingai, with three thousand head of cattle, had arrived on the banks of the Saluen, with the intention of crossing over into the British territory, there to establish themselves: But these are trifling emigrations in comparison with the great one which took place from the same quarter, in 1816, into the Siamese territory, and which, at the lowest computation, is said to have amounted to forty thousand souls. The fugitives, on this occasion, conducted the plot with so much concert and secrecy, that, from one extremity of the province to another, they put themselves in motion towards the Siamese frontier on the same day; and took such advantage of a temporary quarrel between the officers of the Burman Government among themselves, that the latter were neither in a condition to oppose their flight, nor to pursue them. By direction of the leaders of the emigration, cannon and musketry were simultaneously fired throughout the country, the concerted signal for the march. The lower orders, in their ignorance, ascribed the distant sounds which they heard to their tutelary gods.

At eleven o'clock in the forenoon, we left Martaban for Kyaikami, accompanied by Captain Fenwick. Close to

Maulamyaing, on the left bank of the river, is the termination of a range of hills of no very great height, which extends all the way to Zea, a district which commences with the right bank of the Kalyen river. In various parts of this range is found a rich and abundant ore of antimony, of which specimens were shown to us. The great range dividing Martaban from Lao and Siam, is said to afford ores of lead and copper. At five o'clock in the evening, we reached the newly discovered harbour.

### **April 6, 1826**

Early on the morning of the 6th, we renewed our examination of the promontory. The day before, a party of natives had cut a path quite across the highest part of it—a labour of no great difficulty, for the ground was firm and level, and it was only necessary to clear away a little underwood. The distance measured by the perambulator was found to be only one thousand yards. After seeing and examining the banks of the Martaban river to the extent of fifty miles, we found no difficulty now in fixing upon this spot, as by far the most eligible for a commercial town. Accordingly, at twelve o'clock, the ceremony of hoisting the British flag, and fixing the site of the town, in the name of his Majesty and the East India Company, took place. Major Macqueen, of the 36th Madras regiment, and his staff, with a detachment of Sepoys, who had arrived in the Lady Blackwood transport, joined our party. The Lady Blackwood fired a royal salute, and a party of Sepoys three volleys of musketry. The Reverend Mr. Judson pronounced his benediction in a feeling prayer. The following appropriate scriptural quotations introduced by Mr. Judson, may be considered as specimens of the good taste and judgment of my amiable friend;—

The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto, thee.

For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron; I will also make thy officers peace, and thy exactors righteousness.

Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders.



The new town and harbour were called Amherst, in compliment to the Governor-General.

**April 7, 1826**

A party of workmen commenced yesterday to clear the ground for a small military cantonment, and a road having been opened all round the spot intended for it, we had an opportunity of deciding upon its eligibility. The whole country indeed up to the hills, and to within a few hundred yards of the Kalyen, was a dry, level, table-land, rising gently in the centre, than which nothing can be conceived more commodious or suitable to the purposes of an European settlement. I ought here to mention that the peninsula, from the south-west and north-east winds blowing without interruption over it, is well ventilated; that the climate, and we experienced it in one of the hottest months in the year, was consequently cool and agreeable; while the soil was so dry, that during our whole stay we did not see; or feel a single musquito, or other troublesome insect. The testimony of the natives, let it farther be added, is decided in favour of the salubrity both of this spot and of the neighbouring country, including the town of Martaban itself. In passing along the sandy beach on the western shore yesterday and to-day, we saw the fresh tracks of three leopards, many fresh tracks of wild cats, large deer, and buffaloes. The latter, we were told, were the cattle left behind by the emigrated Talains already mentioned, which they had not time to take along with them, and which therefore had taken to the forests and become wild. In the mountains close at hand, however, there exist real wild buffaloes and many elephants. In the forest, when examining the ground for cantonments, we saw one large deer and several monkeys, and the woods abound with the common wild-fowl and peacock.

In walking along the sandy beach this morning, we unexpectedly met two priests, who readily entered into conversation with us, and were very communicative. They had heard of our projected settlement, and took advantage of the circumstance to cheer us in our undertaking, by paying us a compliment, I fear, at the expense of their veracity. They said, that the place was fortunate; that the Temple of Kyaikami was dedicated to the God of Fortune, which the term imported in their

language. They added, that they had that morning perused their sacred books, and in these found it written that a colony of white men would one day settle in the neighbouring country.

Captain Hammond having measured the ground with the perambulator, a matter which was easily effected along the smooth sandy beach, drew out a plan of the whole ground, and in the course of the day we were busy in allotting the ground for the various wants and necessities of a new town. The north-western promontory was reserved for the Government, the high ground immediately fronting the harbour was set apart for the European and Chinese, or, in other words, the commercial establishment, and the lower grounds towards the Kalyen river, for the native town. A ground plan of the European town was sketched, composed of ten streets, with four hundred houses; the great front street, consisting of one row, and containing nineteen lots, each of sixty feet front, and one hundred feet deep, being especially appropriated for principal mercantile establishments. Immediately behind the town was ground for an esplanade, beyond which, arid on the western shore, were the military cantonments, and to the south-west of the whole, towards the hills, ample room remained for gardens and garden-houses, ground for a church, a botanical garden, and an European and Chinese burying-ground. Regulations for the construction of the town were adopted; and in appropriating and granting lands, the liberal and comprehensive rules laid down for the flourishing settlement of Singapore were assumed for this meditated new one.

Shortly after determining on the site of the town, a proclamation in the Burmese language was addressed to the inhabitants, of which the following is a literal translation. The object of it was to encourage the resort to, and conciliate the prejudices of the people; but at the same time to hold out no assurances which might have the effect of embarrassing our future administration of the province, or our political relations with the Burman Government:

The Commissioner of the Governor-General of British India to the Talains, Burmans, and other tribes of people. In conformity with the treaty of peace, between the Governor-General and the King of Ava, the English Government takes possession of the places beyond the

Saluen river, and at the entrance of the sea, in the district of Kyaikami, founds a new town. The inhabitants of the towns and villages who wish to come to the new place, may come and settle; those who come shall be free from molestation, extortion, and oppression. They shall be free to worship as usual temples, monasteries, priests, and holy men. There shall be no interruption of free trade, but people shall go and come, buy and sell, do and live as they please, conforming to the laws. In regard to employing the labouring people, they shall be employed on the payment of customary wages, and whoever compels their labour without reward shall be punished. In regard to slavery, since all men, whether common people or Chiefs, are by nature equal, there shall be under the English Government no slaves. Let all debts and engagements contracted under the Burmese Government previous to the war, be discharged and fulfilled according to the written documents. Touching the appointment of officers and chiefs, they are appointed to promote the prosperity of the towns and villages and the welfare of the inhabitants. If, therefore, they take property by violence, or govern unjustly, they shall be degraded and punished. In regard to government assessments, when the country is settled and prosperous, consultation will be held with the leaders of the people, and what is suitable and moderate will be taken to defray the necessary expenses of government. Whoever desires to come to the new town, or to the towns and villages beyond the Saluen river under the English Government, may come and live happily, and those who do not wish to remain may go where they please, without hinderance. Given at Martaban, the 6<sup>th</sup> April [1826], and the 14<sup>th</sup> of the wane of the moon Tagoo, 1187.

Anxious to make a farther examination of the Kalyen river, we ascended it again at eleven o'clock, and proceeded up to the distance of fourteen miles, having every where from four to five fathoms water. At the farthest point which we ascended, the river did not exceed seventy yards in breadth, and in one or two situations the hills were within a mile and a half. of us. No elevated ground was, however, any where to be found on its banks. The

highest spring-tides took place this morning, and this afforded us an opportunity of determining the greatest rise and fall of the tides, and other important points connected with the navigation of the harbour and the entrance into it. The greatest rise and fall in the springs appears to be between eighteen and nineteen feet; at neaps, it is five or six feet less. On the oozy bar of the Kalyen, there were this morning, at the lowest ebb, ten feet water, and at the highest flood, quarter-less five fathoms. Every morning since our arrival, Captain Studdert was employed from three to four hours in examining and sounding the harbour and its approaches. Between the reef of rocks already mentioned, and at no great distance from the cape, there is a channel which has been long used by Chinese junks and native vessels; but for European shipping, the proper entrance into the harbour is close round the extremity of the reef, and between it and a shoal lying north of it.

[From the description now given of the harbour,—the entrance into it, and the neighbouring localities, it is obvious that the place is capable, at a very trifling expense, of being fortified in such a manner as to render it quite impregnable. A battery on the promontory completely commands the town, and protects the shipping, which may lie in good anchorage within fifty yards of the shore. An enemy entering the harbour might be sunk from a martello tower on the high rock of Kyaikami, a few hundred yards from the promontory. A battery at either side of the entrance of the Kalyen would render the harbour formed by this river equally secure.]<sup>2</sup>

Upon the commercial advantages of the place it is scarcely necessary to insist. Ships, as already said, may lie within fifty yards of the shore, and within seventy-five of the merchants' warehouses. Sheltered by the cape, by the long reef of rocks to the north-west of the harbour, and by the innumerable sand-banks to the north of it, dry at low water, as well as by the great island of Balú, and the continent on the east bank of the Martaban river, ships will lie in smooth water, except perhaps for a moment in the westerly monsoon during high flood, and when the wind, as is not often the case, shifts to the west or north-west. In such an event, vessels with indifferent tackle, or in a disabled state, may slip with perfect facility into the Kalyen river, a short mile to the lee of the

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<sup>2</sup> This paragraph was apparently inserted by Crawford in the 1829 publication.

harbour, then accessible to merchant-vessels of the largest burthen.

**April 8, 1826**

At half-past two o'clock on the afternoon of the 8th, we quitted the new harbour on our return to Rangoon, taking, in going out, the channel commonly frequented by native vessels. It was not above fifty yards broad. We went through it with the commencement of the ebb-tide, and had a depth throughout of nothing less than five fathoms and a half.

**April 9-10, 1826**

On the evening of the 9th, we made the entrance of the Rangoon river, and early on the morning of the 10th reached the town.

