

This district had an area of 7047 square miles (about as large as Massachusetts) and, in 1881, a population of 381,419, of whom nearly 100,000 were Sgau and Pwo Karens. The Karen population has largely increased since 1881. The district is fertile, producing rice and fruits in great abundance and large quantities of fish in the rivers. Bassein, its capital, was a port of entry with a large commerce. The Burmans, who were the ruling class, oppressed the Karens most cruelly and had reduced most of them to a condition of peonage.

Light was brought to this people, then sitting in darkness, in a very singular way. In April, 1835, Rev. Thomas Simons, a Baptist missionary to the Burmans in Rangoon, who had been on a visit to friends in Arakan, then a British province, determined to return to Rangoon overland through Bassein, crossing through a pass in the western Yomas to some of the branches of the Irawadi. His journey by boat and on foot occupied several days. Mr. Simons did not understand the Karen language, but he carried with him many Burmese tracts, some of them written by Dr. Judson. In the villages at which he stopped he distributed these to the Burmans and Karens who came around him, and not knowing that the Burmans had prohibited the Karens from reading or hearing read any foreign books, he told them to ask some of the Burmans to read them to them. Mr. Simons made his way to Rangoon, and the bread which he had cast upon the waters seemed to have been wasted. But it was not.

Two years later Rev. Elisha L. Abbott, designated as a missionary to the Karens in Burmah, after spending a year in Maulmain and Tavoy in acquiring the language, came to Rangoon to commence his labors there. He met with great success and baptized nearly two hundred, mostly in the vicinity of Maubee, thirty miles north of Rangoon. In December, 1837, he left Rangoon to make his first visit to Bassein, in which no missionary had yet preached. He crossed the Irawadi, December 16th, and entered the little village of Sekkau. In the first house he entered he found several Christians, some of whom had visited Rangoon. Very soon an old man came in, and going up to Mr. Abbott said: "Teacher, I want to be baptized." On inquiring, Mr. Abbott found that two years before a Burman had come to the old man and offered to sell him two little books in the Burmese language, which proved to be the "Golden Balance" and "The Ship of Grace," which Mr. Simons had given to him. As the old man could read Burmese, he bought them for two large bunches of plantains. He read them over and over again. They told him of an Eternal God and a Divine Redeemer. He was not satisfied, but wanted to know more, and hearing that the Karens in Maubee had received a new religion, he made his way thither through the dense jungle, infested with robbers and wild beasts, a distance of nearly a hundred miles, obtained light and instruction, embraced the Gospel with all his heart, told the story of the cross to his neighbors, some of whom were converted, and for a year had served God with all his house. Three days later, at a large village on the eastern bank