

KO-THAH-BYU, THE KAREN APOSTLE.

In the year 1827 the Karen of Burma were a poor, despised, and scattered people, without a written language, often enslaved and cruelly abused by the Burmans. They were children of the forest, the mountain, and the jungle, hiding at times from their oppressors. Those who dared to live in the cities were seized as slaves for even a trifling debt. They were held together by race traditions and by a religion distinct from any other about them, having no idols nor any Buddhist beliefs. They said that their ancestors came from the north-west "across the running river of sand;" and they claimed to have had religious books which had been lost by their forefathers. They retained traditions of the creation, the fall of man, and the flood, which correspond most wonderfully to the Old Testament history. They handed down from father to son the assurance that there was a God and that he would yet save them. "Hence," wrote the Karen San-qua-la, after he became a Christian teacher - "hence, in their deep affliction, they prayed: 'If God will save us, let him save speedily. We can endure these sufferings no longer. Alas! where is God?'"

The Karen elders also taught their children many excellent moral precepts. So remarkable in their likeness to the divine commandments given to the Jews, that some have thought the Karen race must have descended from the lost tribes of Israel. San-qua-la says: "we were instructed never to forget God; to pray to him every day and every night. A prophet also told us that white foreigners would come, who were our younger brethren, and that they were righteous and had the words of God, and that with them happiness would arrive."

To this wretched and waiting people came at length the promised deliverance. They heard rumors that the white foreigners were coming and prayed diligently for their arrival. It was in April, 1827, that Mr. Judson, of the American Baptist Mis-

sion, notes among hopeful enquirers a Karen, Ko-Thah-byu by name, a man of very ordinary abilities, exceedingly ignorant, passionate, and immoral. He accepted the truth of Christ, but it was a year before he gave such evidence of a change that the little Burman church ventured to receive him. At his baptism in 1828 he was forty years old, had recently married, and had studied enough to read the Burman Bible. Three Karen visitors in Tavoy witnessed his baptism, and they urged him to go back with them and teach their people. He consented, and from that day he ceased not to travel up and down the land, preaching Jesus. The Karens listened eagerly. Was not this the God who could deliver? Ko-Thah-byu often returned to Tavoy, bringing companies of natives for further instruction. One day he found a very interesting young Karen in the niche of a Buddhist temple, where he had been fasting two days. He had heard of Buddha's rules from the Burmans, and thought he would try this austerity in hope of future reward. He listened to the Christian teaching, took a Christian book, and returned to his forest to impart the knowledge he had gained to others. Soon he was back in Tavoy, where Ko-Thah-byu spent nearly a whole night in telling him the way of God more perfectly.

Ko-Thah-byu was now always devising new and judicious plans of doing good. His wife was with him on one long tour, and when he had preached awhile in a certain place he said to his host: "Brother, it is very pleasant staying with thee, but my wife wishes to go to Tshiekku." So he took his wife to tell the good news in Tshiekku, while he went over the mountains to another village. December 16, 1830, he returned to Tavoy with nearly forty in his train, who had all come to receive baptism. In the rainy season, when it was impossible to travel, this diligent Christian would teach school. But preaching was his ruling passion. He was once out in a boat with a missionary when they were in great danger of drowning. He cried out in distress, but not merely