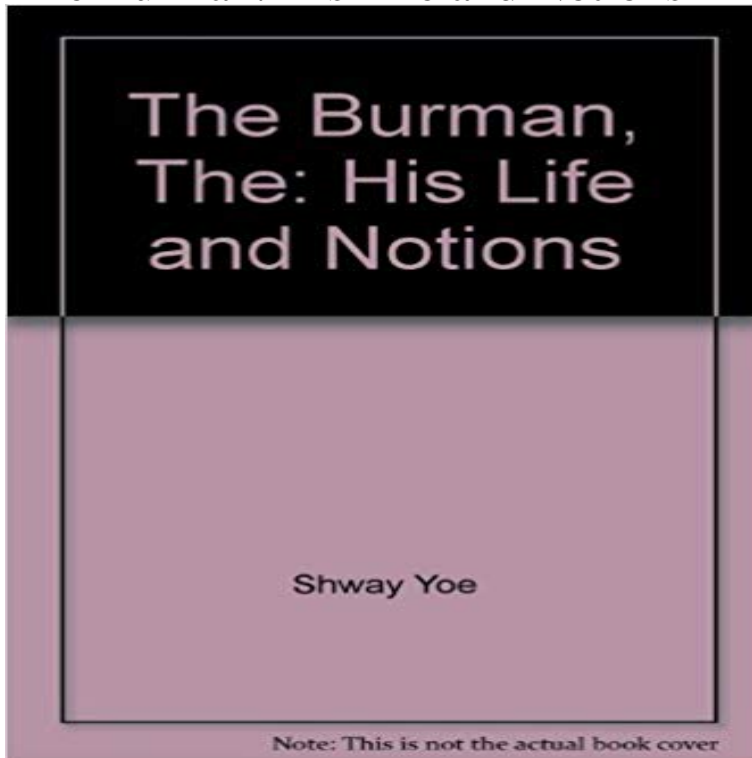


The Burman: His Life and Notions



Excerpt from The Burman: His Life and Notions

Phoneticism is said to be the murderer of history, and there has been a craze of late years to prevent this felony by the adoption of scientific methods of rendering Burmese in English characters. I have no doubt that whatever other faults I may be accused of, I shall be greatly blamed for endeavouring to reproduce the pronunciation rather than the orthography of Burmese words. But I may be allowed to contend that the catch phrase ascribing bloodguiltiness to phoneticism, however just it may be in a country where fonetic nuz puzzle a long-suffering generation, is most misleading and calumnious where it is applied to a foreign language, and especially to such a language as Burmese. No one who is concerned about the etymology of a language is likely to study it except in the national character; if he trusts to transliterations, scientific or otherwise, he will most assuredly be little worth listening to. When an author writes in English about a little-known people he presumably writes for a majority of readers who know nothing whatever of the language, and cannot be reasonably expected to have any very great concern in its etymology as long as they get a more or less correct notion of how the words should be pronounced. This is most especially the case in Burmese, where, in very many cases, the orthography of a word supplies but the remotest possible hint of its pronunciation.

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