

Hopkins in Akyab

Hopkins's portrayal of the situation before his departure from Rangoon for Akyab sounds on the one hand highly plausible, on the other, rather muddled. He claimed much later in *The Messenger* that his modest attempt to run his work for sailors from the Phayre Street flat, with the help of his sister Mary Ann, had the approval of the bishop and the archdeacon. At the same time he accepted that the diocesan committee under which it would properly be placed was not prepared to accept it, perhaps because some of its members were also to be found on the Seamen's Chaplaincy committee. When it is remembered that the bishop and archdeacon were members of both committees his claim to having their approval appears rather odd.

To be sent to Akyab, according to Peter Anson in his *Call of the Cloister*, was a sign of the bishop's displeasure and an attempt to remove Hopkins from the centre of maritime activity¹. Either view needs to be approached with caution. In a sense, he was being given his own church (not a usual sign of episcopal displeasure) and here especially so, as Akyab was an opportunity for Hopkins to prove himself in a situation far from his bishop, and therefore from supervision. The appointment also, far from removing him from sailors, placed him in another port. Later he would write of being sent out to relieve a sick chaplain, which is more plausible if he understood his appointment to be for six months only. However, his subsequent actions suggest that he saw his removal as being more permanent. This may be why, as he said, his first action on being appointed was to cable the All Saints' Sisters at Bombay for a complete set of eucharistic vestments, the first, he later claimed, in the Anglican Church in Burma.

Hopkins went to Akyab in June 1886. The chaplaincy which he was now to serve was a 'parish' of some 250 miles by 105 miles, no

small area but with the population centred on Akyab in the Arakan Division. His base was St Mark's church in Akyab, but he served too an old military church at Kyauk-Pyu (or Khyouk Phu), a small port in the north of Ramree Island. Commercial residents of Akyab may have wondered what sort of man they were getting. Word had gone round that his presence was to be temporary. His first work was not among seamen, but only because of the seasonal nature of this port: Akyab depended heavily on the rice trade. In the absence of ships, Hopkins concentrated on the people ashore, who were, according to *Thacker*, a divisional population of 359,706, a figure predominantly composed of native Burmese, spread over 5,535 square miles.

If Hopkins's appointment was indeed for six months, his period at Akyab outlasted that of all previous chaplains, the regular turnover of whom, usually and correctly ascribed to ill health, encouraged the view that Akyab was a seasonal chaplaincy. Although he had resisted the diseases of Rangoon, here he was not to be so fortunate. Neither port was a healthy place and local diseases were not pleasant. In Akyab 247 Europeans died from cholera alone in 1885, 103 in 1886. Figures for Rangoon are more comprehensive and indicate the unhealthiness of the whole country. Deaths were classified by fever, bowel complaints, smallpox and cholera. Fever claimed 1,419 lives in 1883, bowel complaints, 435, smallpox 152, and cholera 20. One old Burma hand described the Arakan Division as the unhealthiest area in Burma, and within that Division, Kyauk-pyu as its worst, the military sanitorium there abandoned because of the prevalence of malaria.² In Hopkins's day the causes of fever were not well understood. Sir Ronald Ross (1857-1932), in the Indian Medical Service from 1881, was to discover in 1897-8 (well after Hopkins had come 'home') the connection between mosquitos and blood parasites, and thus the cause of malaria. Its incidence in Akyab, a town but recently and rapidly developed, with less than adequate drainage, would have been greater; it was an ever-present threat to which Hopkins would succumb.

Mention has been made of Hopkins's ordering a set of vestments. If his ministry in Rangoon had left them in any doubt, this was an action which would identify him firmly in the eyes of the bishop and others with the Ritualist party which was causing such a stir in the wider Anglican Church. It is another clue to his theological views to add to his discussions with Panter about church ornaments and

his assistance of Marks with a Sung Eucharist. And yet there is an ambiguity about the churchmanship of the church in Akyab, when Hopkins's claims are compared with other sources. Though the 1885 Christmas services under his predecessor, The Rev. Mr Wintour, were fully choral, and the church furnished with flowers, candles and hangings, Hopkins claimed to have been the one who introduced a fully choral service; he claimed too to have made the choral service a weekly event. Nor was the scope of his choral service limited to St Mark's Church. The local paper (14 June 1887) referred to 'Mr Hopkins, who has lately been showing High Church tendencies, and on this occasion introduced what is certainly a novelty in Akyab – a choral funeral service in the cemetery... has not given general satisfaction.'

'High Church' leanings were not to everyone's taste. The expression refers to what was originally a high regard for *The Book of Common Prayer*, one of the Church of England's foundational documents, as opposed to a low regard and therefore casual use of the same book. High Church clergy were also known as Tractarians (named from a series of Tracts for the Times). These tracts written earlier in the nineteenth century had introduced a generation to the Catholic treasures, lost for centuries, of the Prayer Book, and the successors of the Tractarians, amongst whom we must now number Hopkins, imported into the worship of their churches many of the practices associated with the Church of Rome, so becoming known as Ritualists, later as Anglo-Catholics. These clergy were controversial and often had to seek, if there was access to no comfortable family benefice, employment in parishes with mean circumstances and small incomes. Such men, therefore, were often to be found in the slum and mission parishes of the Church. Some chose these parishes because Anglo-Catholic theology was strongly incarnational, believing that the God who took flesh was to be found particularly among the poor. Others went knowing that any attempt to introduce elaborate ritual would produce few protests while bringing colour to otherwise drab lives. The vestments, incense and other imports had a strong didactic role for people otherwise ill-educated, revealing the Holy Communion as something more than a memorial meal. Hopkins's probable experience of such ritual in his time at Falmouth has been touched on in an earlier chapter. These parishes often became a seedbed for Christian Socialism, which will find its place in the next chapter. Bishops of the period, as bishops

of any period, preferred not to preside over controversy and many were strongly anti-Ritualist.

Hopkins's first year, then, was not without its difficulties. When compared with his subsequent start in Calcutta, the similarities will confirm that this was largely due to matters of churchmanship. We must also allow, however, for a lack of tact. The *Indian Churchman* (22nd November, 1884), whilst Hopkins was still in Rangoon, had implied as much when referring to the annual report of Hopkins's Rangoon Port Chaplaincy Committee as rather personal (he being at loggerheads with the committee at the time). It noted that Hopkins's own report had 'evoked much adverse and harsh criticism.... It will... teach him to do what he feels right and wise, and to talk of it afterwards, rather than to submit his plans to public criticism'. The editor clearly believed Hopkins to be less than judicious in his words and actions.

Socially, Hopkins was proving an asset in Akyab. He was a single, slim and attractive young man, according to contemporary photographs which survive at Alton Abbey, with the added attraction of being able to play the piano and to sing: highly desirable qualities at a time and in a place where people made their own entertainment. And there was plenty of entertainment in Akyab of the home-grown variety. The season included several 'calico balls', fancy dress balls (on 24th January, 1887 it was reported that he went dressed as 'a R.C. priest', the reporter perhaps confused by Hopkins's cassock), and in 1887, many celebrations of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, which Hopkins had made the subject of his first sermon in 1887. Such events were written up in the *Rangoon Gazette Weekly Budget* (RGWB), of which many copies survive in London's Newspaper Library at Colindale. The same paper reports him away in February on duty at Kyauk-Pyu: it seems that during this tour he was invited, by whom is unsaid, to minister to local Buddhists, processing into the village preceded by a cross and a banner of our Lady and Child; later he appears to have baptised some natives. For part of this tour he was accompanied by the choir which he had formed in Akyab soon after his arrival. The tour appears to be the only instance known to us of his ministry to the native people of Burma. His primary concern was for expatriates and his seamen and it may have been the latter who drew him to Kyauk-Pyu.

Back in Akyab, it is apparent from the local press that Hopkins was again working among seamen.

About a fortnight ago the British steamer *BEDOUIN* arrived in port with a case of smallpox on board... the poor sick man was brought ashore and put into a small hut in the hospital compound. So far as I know, the only European who attended him was the Rev Mr Hopkins, who, I believe has made a report to the Government about the cruel way in which this poor sailor was neglected.

Here is another instance of Hopkins's willingness to complain or 'report' to authority. At this time there was a general campaign in Akyab to improve medical attention. The newspaper reporter filled his report with details of the campaign at the expense of this particular incident, leaving us with little more about the sick man. Elsewhere, and later in *The Messenger*, a very sad account of the sailor's plight is given, Hopkins apparently being the only person concerned for his welfare. The incident gives a strong indication of Hopkins's genuine sense of compassion, as well as of his comprehension of the 1876 Merchant Shipping Act which required sick seamen who had been put ashore to have provision made by the ship's master.

Hopkins's six months in Akyab passed with no sign of the bishop wishing him to move, and indeed he was able to find out through the local commissioner, Colonel Strover, whose friendship he enjoyed, that he was not going to be moved. Colonel Strover and his wife attended St Mark's church. Mrs Strover was to help him with a sick seaman, probably the one mentioned above, while Colonel Strover helped by using his influence generally. For example, the colonel was president of the local Gymkhana Club, a position of great social usefulness. The colonel and his wife seemed happy to meet seamen who conventionally would be considered their social inferiors. Support of this kind was valuable and extended in several directions. Having survived the calico ball of 1887, a Cinderella dance, and various other terpsichorean delights, Hopkins was to be found at the August concert for St Mark's charities playing a Mendelsohn duet, singing with Mrs Strover, and later, singing on his own. It is not hard to picture members of the Gymkhana Club in the audience. One of the beneficiaries of this concert would be the new recreation rooms which Hopkins had obtained for the use of seamen on finding he was to remain in Akyab. No details of the rooms seem to have survived. They are variously referred to as reading and recreation rooms. The difference is of little consequence. With

the rooms went a committee, presumably one of his own choosing, with whom he was soon to be at odds.

Hopkins's work was expanding in a number of directions and he was keen to find paid help, particularly with visiting seamen and to run the reading rooms. The Strovers were prepared to help in raising funds to this end. Several people were considered. One possible helper, found as a result of an advertisement which Hopkins had seen in *The Church Times* (a weekly paper popular with Ritualists), proved inadequate and was found other employment to help him work his passage home. Another recruit embezzled money. Hopkins was forced to consider seriously the problem of how to maintain his work for seamen with inadequate funds and with people uncommitted to the task. Perhaps, too, he wanted a way forward which would make him less dependent upon a local committee.

In May 1887 the local paper carried this interesting paragraph:

There is evidently a screw loose in the appointment of the Port Chaplain. His report is flatly contradicted by his Committee, and washing dirty linen in public is not usually held to be the best way of getting support. With a resident Bishop one would have thought that such differences would have been smoothed over....

It is not clear from the papers that survive what was the nature of this particular trouble between chaplain and committee. The detail is probably unimportant beyond its revelation of Hopkins's willingness to plough a solitary furrow. The reference to the bishop may refer to the days when Rangoon had no bishop of its own but was under the more distant Bishop of Calcutta, the Rangoon Diocese being a relatively recent foundation. The important point of the article is its confirmation of Hopkins's work among sailors.

In August a further paragraph appeared, again with no indication of what was afoot. The subject was probably considered too well-known to local expatriates to give more detail.

From the Rangoon papers we are able to see what charges the local correspondent of the *Rangoon Times* has to make against our padre, also what your correspondent Ramree has to say about Akyab people generally. I have read... Mr Hopkins' contribution in self defense to the *Provincial News*. I do not think that the affair has

brought out the best side of Akyab at all, and therefore think that I had better say nothing about it, and only express the hope that Mr Hopkins will remain with us yet, and that all concerned may be better from this sore when it has healed.

The article's tone suggests that Hopkins had his sympathisers. The reference to the *Provincial News* reveals that his work and troubles would be known in Calcutta, city of the metropolitan bishop. If the Bishop of Calcutta read the *Provincial News*, such news items were not enough to prevent his invitation to Hopkins to accept the Port Chaplaincy of Calcutta little more than a year later.

For Hopkins, close on the heels of this trouble, whatever it was, came fever. He evidently went on sick leave, for the local paper's Akyab correspondent noted his return to Akyab in October (whence is not said) aboard the *COCONADA*, adding, 'he looks much better for the change'. But his return was brief and controversial, and his enemies were not slow to find fault. The fancy dress ball of January 1888 was the cause of this item:

The only sad thing in connection with [the ball] is the action of *The Advertiser*: Our Padre has become the Editor of the Weekly News and in his zeal for the welfare of that paper made notes on the ball and issued a special edition next morning, and thus got ahead of his contemporary. Here is what his esteemed contemporary says:-

We can imagine nothing more unbecoming, improper, unreverential or infra dig than for a clergyman to strut about ballrooms in the sacred garb that ought to be regarded with respect. To see one dressed in that clerical garb, strut about ballrooms, notebook in hand, taking notes of frivolous costumes, cannot but inspire disgust in all right-minded persons. Yet such was the sight we saw last Wednesday night ... a sight we never saw before though ... we have seen dancing dervishes.

... even the veriest child will allow that Mr Hopkins on Wednesday evening did not at all resemble a dancing dervish.

The passage offers an example of Hopkins going into print, which he would do with increasing frequency. It also reminds the reader,

indirectly, that he was a man to inspire strong feelings.

The social round was not to last for long. Hopkins left Akyab again at the end of January 1888 by steamer for Calcutta for a further month's leave. This would be just before Akyab's busy season and the arrival of the rice ships. His own version of events is that he left to consult an eye doctor for a childhood eye condition which had been aggravated by the malaria. The rest of his life would be marked by attacks of blindness and fever. In Calcutta he stayed for a while with the Oxford Mission brotherhood, and here his thoughts began to turn to the religious life as a solution to the twin problems of inadequate funds and uncommitted staff for work among seamen. The Oxford Mission brethren had their own particular charism and it was not one to which Hopkins was in any way drawn, but the idea of a life under vows did seem a way forward.

The only newspaper (the RGWB) which it has been possible to trace now became sympathetic to Hopkins, either because he was a sick man, or because his work spoke for itself:

11 May 1888. AKYAB – While neglect, and indolence in management, effectually closed our Seamen's Institute at Rangoon, undaunted energy and practical enthusiasm opened another at Akyab, and we are pleased to learn that it is much appreciated, and paying its way. Opened at 7 a.m. daily, it is, says a circular lying before us, to be closed at the discretion of the manager (Mr Cecil W Forder). Refreshments minus alcoholic liquors are always to be had, and a breakfast, tiffin or dinner, at 12, 8 or 16 annas respectively. We learn from an outside source, that at the close of one of the entertainments, recently given at the Institute, a shipmaster, in order to testify his approval of the good work being done, stepped forward and presented the Chaplain with a cheque for Rs 50. We devoutly wish that every seaport in the East, had a Chaplain of the stamp of our esteemed friend who ministers at Akyab.

Internal evidence suggests that some of the information, especially the reference to the shipmaster, must have derived from Hopkins, who never missed a chance to draw the attention of an audience to this sort of recognition, especially when he was becoming a figure of controversy to many of the visiting captains. Other authorities to

be cited in later articles would include the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and the Chief of the Calcutta Police. Almost incidentally, a picture emerges of the daily pattern of the Seamen's Institute and Reading Rooms, which were to be open on demand, closing when the port was quiet.

The same issue of the paper carried the information that Hopkins had swooned after Evensong in church on Easter Day. He was taken to the house of a parishioner nearby. The local doctor had ordered his departure from Akyab at once, either on furlough or at least for a change. The paper lamented this interruption to Hopkins's excellent work. His departure, however, was not immediate. A week later (17th May, 1888) the RGWB's Akyab correspondent was again writing that Hopkins's health was being seriously undermined by repeated attacks of 'Arakan fever'.

To make Hopkins's leave possible some parishioners got up a fancy fair to raise funds. This was necessary because the Additional Clergy Society was not retaining his services and he was therefore without pay. Worse: because he had been recruited in Burma, the Society would not be paying his passage home to England. The *Provincial News* noted that,

a Clergy Society ought to be more considerate and we hope it will reconsider its present decision and grant a free passage home well earned by being a victim of Arakan fever.... However willing the Society may be to grant Mr Hopkins ... we are very much afraid that sheer inability on account of want of funds will prevent it

This illustrates all too well the state of the finances of the diocese.

The RGWB reported again on 31st July – some twelve weeks later – that Hopkins was expected to leave Akyab very shortly, being sufficiently ill for his church services to be conducted by laymen (who could read the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer). A week later a Mrs Duffing handed Hopkins Rs261, the proceeds of the fancy fair. Akyab people were very sympathetic and appealed to the bishop: '... it is very strange that the ACS should wish to get rid of a priest who is the only man to have done well in Akyab – filling the Church and Schools – and is well-liked by the people'. The bishop was memorialised on 4th September, but without effect. In spite of controversy, during his two years in Akyab Hopkins had managed, if the press is not mistaken, to endear himself to his

people. Through their generosity his passage to, and stay in, London became possible. Donations seem to have come not just from his own denomination. A total of Rs300, equivalent to a month's salary, assisted him on his way, the delay in his departure allowing more time for late donations.

The local paper reported the wedding of his second sister, Maggie 'daughter of Captain and Mrs Hopkins of Bassein and Falmouth', on 9th October, 1888, giving an additional reason for delay. The bridegroom was John Shaw Brown, municipal engineer and secretary. The ceremony took place in St Mark's Church, Akyab, which was described as crowded with people 'and tastefully adorned with moss and evergreens'. The brother of the bride – CPH – officiated. 'After an impressive choral service, Mr Cecil Forder [manager of the Seamen's Institute] presiding at the harmonium, the party adjourned to the hospitable roof of Mr & Mrs George Brown for cake and wine...'. In the evening Captain Hopkins gave the couple a grand ball at the Municipal High School.

Two days later, Hopkins sailed for the United Kingdom. London, scene of his student days, was his destination. Medical attention, and perhaps an overdue holiday, would be his purpose. As the centre of the Empire, London offered specialised treatment for tropical diseases, both at the School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and at the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital. But London was also an excellent centre for the making of wider Church contacts, and for furthering his plans for a religious community to work among seamen.