

THE  
EASTERN  
FRONTIER  
OF  
BRITISH INDIA



The eastern frontier of British India, 1784-18

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THE  
EASTERN FRONTIER  
OF  
BRITISH INDIA  
1784—1826

BY

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## PREFACE

The declaration of war by Japan against the British Empire and the United States of America in December, 1941, the conquest of Burma, and the threat to India from the east, have painfully demonstrated the great importance which should be attached to the eastern frontier of this country from the politico-military point of view. The North-West can no longer monopolise the attention of the defenders of India, nor can serious students of frontier policy, which constitutes so large and vital a part of our national history, confine their study to the routes taken by Alexander and his followers. It is to be deplored that historians of British India have so far concentrated their attention on northern, western and southern India ; they have been altogether indifferent to the strange events which culminated in the Burmese Wars and resulted in the incorporation of Assam and Burma in the British Empire. Some years ago I realised the importance of this neglected subject, and the composition of this book was finished a few months before the declaration of war by Japan. Circumstances beyond my control delayed its publication for more than two years. I now submit it to the public, strengthened by the conviction that a pioneer's defects deserve more charity and indulgence than are usually accorded to those who follow the lead of veteran scholars and deal with well-known subjects.

I have not tried to narrate the history of Burma and Assam ; my purpose is to describe in some detail the policy pursued by the British Government towards these States. Probably my readers will agree with me in

saying that, throughout the period covered by this volume, that policy was essentially pacific and defensive. Be that as it may, I have dealt with the subject from the British Indian point of view. The internal history of Burma and Assam has been altogether excluded, except in so far as references to internal conditions were found necessary to explain the attitude adopted by British authorities towards particular questions. My standpoint is, therefore, quite different from that adopted by Sir Edward Gait in his *History of Assam* and by Sir Arthur Phayre and Mr. G. E. Harvey in their works entitled *History of Burma*.

A detailed account of the materials utilised in the composition of this volume will be found in the Bibliography. I have relied entirely on original sources, mainly unpublished official documents. No statement made by secondary authorities, contemporary or later, has been accepted unless it is supported by positive documentary evidence. I may, therefore, claim that the entire book is an original contribution to the understanding of British Indian history. Sir Edward Gait gives a more or less complete, though brief, account of British relations with Assam; but he did not examine unpublished documents. He relied on Sir James Johnstone's *Captain Welsh's Expedition to Assam* ("compiled from records in the Foreign Department of the Government of India") and Wilson's *Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War*. Whether Sir Arthur Phayre and Mr. G. E. Harvey examined all relevant documents, I do not know. But their narrative is very brief (covering only a few pages).

In reply to those readers of mine who look upon quotations from documents with disfavour, I would take shelter behind the following observations of

Mr. Churchill (*Marlborough*, Vol. III, p. 10): "I have tried as far as possible to tell the story through the lips of its actors or from the pens of contemporary writers, feeling sure that a phrase struck out at the time is worth many coined afterwards".

In conclusion, it is my pleasant duty to acknowledge my debt to my teacher, Dr. Surendra Nath Sen, M.A., Ph.D., B.Litt., Keeper of the Records of the Government of India, who made it possible for me to secure with astonishing rapidity thousands of pages of transcripts from the unpublished records preserved in the Imperial Record Department, New Delhi, and kindly allowed me to use the manuscript of his *Records in Oriental Languages, Vol. I, Bengali Letters* before its publication. To Rai Sahib B. N. Basu, B.A., formerly Superintendent, Imperial Record Department, and Mr. U. N. Sarkar, M.A., an Assistant in the Imperial Record Department. I am indebted for uniform courtesy and ungrudging assistance. From my teachers, Dr. Indubhusan Banerjee, M.A., Ph.D., and Mr. Tripurari Chakravarti, M.A., and my esteemed friend, Dr. Narendra Krsihna Sinha, M.A., Ph.D., I received constant encouragement and advice.

A. C. BANERJEE

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is a pleasure for me to know that a new edition of this book is called for. It shows that, with all its defects, it has helped to rouse interest in one of the most important aspects of modern Indian history. I have made many alterations in the text ; many passages have been fully or partly re-written, and new matter has been incorporated. Chapter I has been added in response to the request of some readers who wanted more information on the background of the main story. Although my period ends with 1826, I have added a short review of the Residency in order to illustrate the working of the treaty. All the maps, except one, are new ; they owe much to the care and technical skill of Mr. Anil Chandra Mukherjee. Two new plans have been added. I hope this revised and enlarged edition will be found more interesting and useful.

A. C. BANERJEE

To  
My father  
Sj. SURESH CHANDRA BANERJEE, B.A.  
A sincere student and earnest  
teacher of History





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*Note.* A map of Burma prepared in 1826 by Major Jackson (printed in Wilson's *Historical Sketch*) has been utilised in the preparation of Maps No. 2, 3.

Plan No. 2 is based on a sketch prepared by Lieutenant Trant (printed in Wilson's *Historical Sketch*).

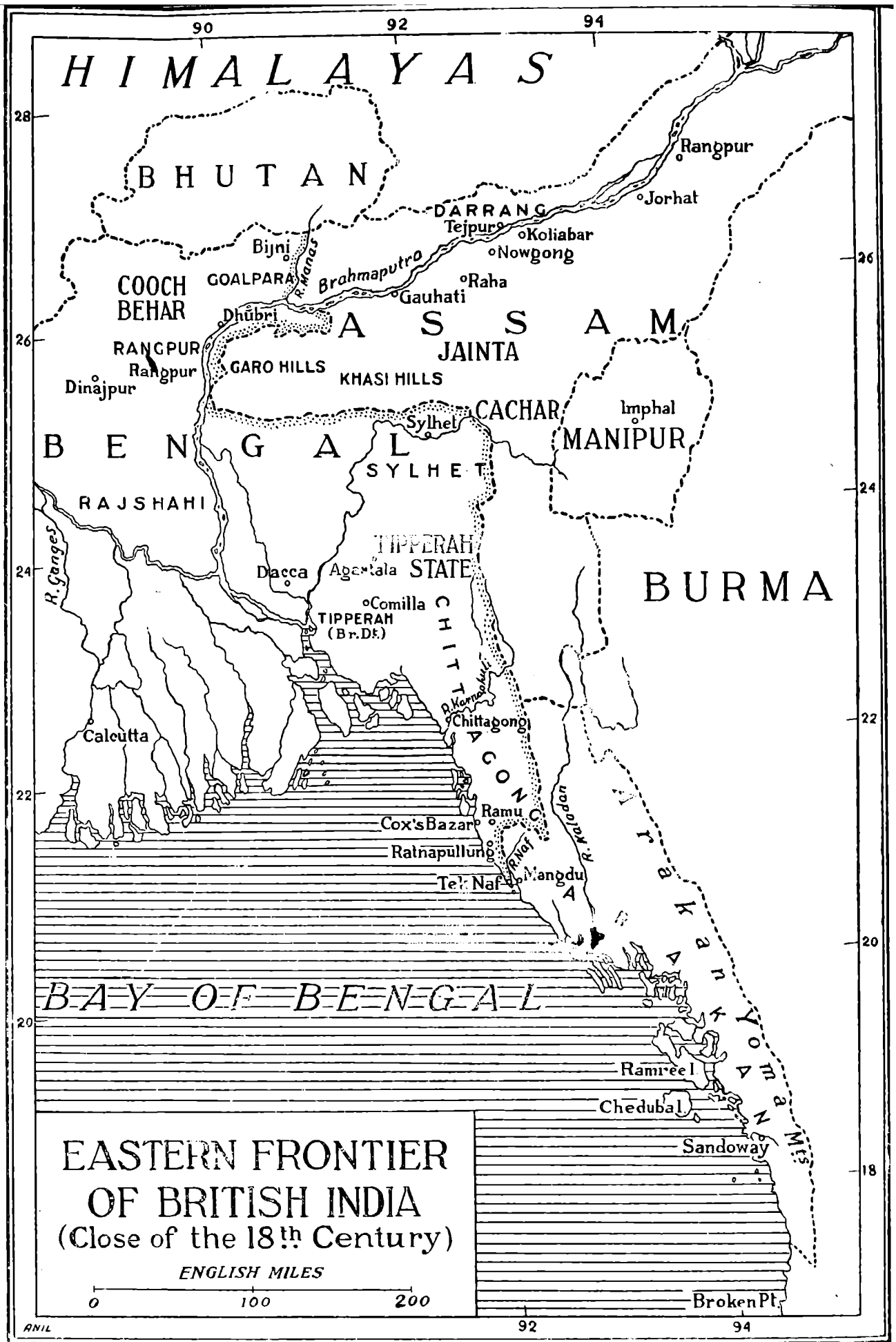
*“Frontiers are the chief anxiety of nearly every Foreign Office in the civilized world, and are the subject of four out of five political treaties or conventions that are now concluded . . . . Frontier policy is of the first practical importance, and has a more profound effect upon the peace or warfare of nations than any other factor, political or economic.”*

—LORD CURZON

## ABBREVIATIONS

- P.C.—Political Consultations of the Government of Bengal, preserved in the Imperial Record Department, New Delhi.
- S.C.—Secret Consultations of the Government of Bengal; preserved in the Imperial Record Department, New Delhi.





## CHAPTER I

### GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On August 12, 1765, the titular Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II granted to the East India Company the *Dewani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This secured to the Company 'the Superintendency of all the Lands, and the Collection of all the Revenues' of these three provinces. The Imperial *farman* also imposed upon the Company the responsibility of maintaining an army for the protection of the *Dewani* territories. Within ten years of this remarkable transfer of responsibility the Nawab of Bengal, who was the nominal representative of the Mughal Emperor in these provinces, lost all his powers; Warren Hastings, Governor-General of Fort William, described him as 'a mere pageant without so much as the pageant of authority'. and Justice Le Maistre of the Supreme Court of Calcutta openly referred to him as 'this phantom, this man of straw'.

The establishment of the *de facto* authority of the Company in the three eastern provinces of the Mughal Empire necessarily brought it into contact with the neighbouring independent or semi-independent States. On the eastern frontier, with which alone we are concerned in this volume, there were five States: Cooch Behar, Assam (*i.e.*, the Ahom Kingdom in the Brahmaputra Valley), Jaintia, Cachar and Arakan.

Cooch Behar is at present a petty State (area: 1,307 square miles) ruled by an Indian Prince, but in



the sixteenth century it was a comparatively powerful Kingdom. It owed its origin to the valour of a Mongoloid race called Koch. At present the Koches living in North Bengal and in the Goalpara district of Assam call themselves Rajbansis; they have for all practical purposes merged themselves into the population of Bengal. The Koch language is now almost extinct.

According to traditions incorporated principally in the *Bansabali* (Dynastic Chronicle) of the Darrang Rajas, composed in Sanskrit by an Assamese writer<sup>1</sup> probably in 1806, the Koch Kings were descended from a petty Mech<sup>2</sup> or Koch chief named Haria Mandal, who lived in a village called Chikangram in the Goalpara district. The founder of the Koch political power was Bisu or Bisva Singh (*circa* 1515-1540), whose authority was obeyed as far as the Karatoya in the west and the Bar Nadi in the east. He established his capital at Cooch Behar, which grew into a beautiful city. He was converted to Hinduism, and under the influence of the Brahmins, he became a zealous patron of this religion. †

It was during the reign of Nar Singh, Bisva Singh's son and successor, that the Koches came into contact with Bhutan, a Himalayan State lying to the north of Bengal and Assam. It is said that after his expulsion from Cooch Behar by his elder brother Nar Narayan, Nar Singh managed to make himself ruler of Bhutan. No definite evidence is available in

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<sup>1</sup> See *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LXII, for an analysis of the contents of this work.

<sup>2</sup> The Koches and the Meches were closely allied tribes.

support of this tradition ; but in his *Report* on his mission to Bhutan Sir Ashley Eden observed, "Apparently the Bhutias have not possessed Bhutan for more than two centuries ; it formerly belonged to a tribe called by the Bhutias Tephu ; they are generally believed to have been people of Koch Bihar"<sup>1</sup>.

Nar Narayan (whose death took place in 1584 after a long reign) was the most successful of the Koch Kings. He is said to have defeated the Ahoms and the Kacharis. He constructed an embanked road from the city of Cooch Behar to a place in the district of North Lakhimpur (Assam), a distance of about 350 miles. Tribute was realised from the Rajas of Manipur, Jaintia, Tippera and Sylhet. Hostilities were carried on against the Muslim rulers of Gaur.<sup>2</sup> We read in Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* that in 1578 Nar Narayan sent 54 elephants and other valuable presents as a token of submission to Akbar. Towards the close of his reign he divided his Kingdom in two parts : the portion west of the river Sankosh (called 'Cooch Behar' by the Muslim writers) was reserved for his descendants, while the portion east of that river (called 'Cooch Hajo' by the Muslim writers) was made over to his nephew Raghu Deb, who formally acknowledged him as his overlord. Nar Narayan was a zealous Hindu and a patron of learning. The military achievements of his reign were primarily due to the energy and leadership of his younger brother Sukladvaj, nicknamed Silarai, Raghu Deb's father. Ralph Fitch, the well-known

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<sup>1</sup> *Political Missions to Bhutan*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Capital of the independent Nawabs of Bengal.

English traveller who visited Cooch Behar during his reign, says that "the King's name is Suckel Counce" (*i.e.*, Sukla Koch or Sukladhvaj).

The two branches of the Koch royal family began to quarrel after Nar Narayan's death. The weakness caused by this internecine strife exposed the Koch Kingdoms to Mughal invasions<sup>1</sup> and Ahom inroads. Towards the middle of the seventeenth century the rulers of Cooch Hajo found their authority confined to the present Mangaldai subdivision in Assam, which they governed as vassals of the Ahom Kings. The western Koch Kingdom (*i.e.*, Cooch Behar) became a tributary State within the Mughal Empire.

Towards the middle of the eighteenth century the Bhutanese took advantage of the decline of the Mughal Empire and the weakness of Cooch Behar and made repeated incursions which gradually consolidated their influence in the western Koch Kingdom. A representative of Bhutan used to reside at Cooch Behar with a detachment of Bhutanese troops and frequently interfered in the internal affairs of the State. In 1770 the Raja of Cooch Behar became a prisoner in the hands of the Bhutanese, who recognised a subservient member of the Koch royal family as the nominal ruler of the State. Two years later this titular ruler died, and a prominent officer of the State placed a minor son of the captive Raja on the *gadi*. Unable to resist the depredations of the Bhutanese,

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of Mughal relations with the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms, see Sir J. N. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, Vol. III, and S. N. Bhattacharyya, *History of Mughal North-Eastern Frontier Policy*.

this officer, *Nazir Deo Khagendra Narayan*, applied for protection to Warren Hastings through Charles Purling, Collector of the adjoining British district of Rangpur. A treaty was concluded on April 5, 1773, by which the East India Company undertook to protect the Raja against his enemies in lieu of an annual tribute amounting to half the total revenues of the State. The Raja naturally acknowledged the suzerainty of the Company and even agreed that his principality might, if necessary, be annexed to the province of Bengal after the expulsion of the Bhutanese and the restoration of peace. A British force under Captain Jones expelled the Bhutanese from Cooch Behar and even penetrated into their hills. In 1774 the Company concluded a treaty with Bhutan. The captive Raja of Cooch Behar was released. Instead of being annexed to Bengal, Cooch Behar remained a tributary State. The annual tribute amounted to Rs. 67,700-14-5 in the Company's currency. There were further troubles in Cooch Behar—internal as well as external; but Cooch Behar did not exercise much influence on British frontier policy after 1774. So we shall exclude this petty State from our survey.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of British relations with Cooch Behar see the following :

*Cooch Behar Select Records*, 1788.

Pemberton, *Report on Bhutan*, 1839.

S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*.

*Cooch Behar Select Records*, 2 vols., 1882.

Government of Bengal—*Selections from Records*, No. 5.

Calica Das Dutt, *Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement*, 1903.

On the east of Cooch Behar lies the district of Goalpara, which is now a part of the province of Assam ; but in the eighteenth century it was included within the Mughal *Suba* of Bengal. So in 1765 it became subject to the *Diwani* jurisdiction of the Company. Afterwards the permanently settled portions of the district were placed under the administrative jurisdiction of the district of Rangpur (in Bengal); these were transferred to Assam in 1826 on the conclusion of the First Anglo-Burmese War.

After 1765 Goalpara town continued to be an important frontier outpost, protecting the boundary between Bengal and the Ahom Kingdom. A considerable trade was carried on from Goalpara, and from Jogighopa on the opposite bank of the Brahmaputra, between some European merchants and the Assamese. Before the battle of Plassey (1757) a French merchant named Jean Baptist Chevalier had established a factory at Goalpara. Of the European merchants who carried on commercial intercourse with Assam during the period following the battle of Plassey, we find frequent references to Baillie<sup>1</sup> and Raush, who went there probably soon after the grant of *Dewani*. Raush was probably a German or a Dane. After his death the *Calcutta Gazette* described him as an ex-officer of Frederick the Great's army. In 1768 he obtained the lease of the salt trade at Goalpara. Gradually he secured something like a monopoly of the trade between North Bengal and Assam. His

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<sup>1</sup> Auber, *Rise and Progress of the British Power in India*, Vol. II, p. 53.

methods were high-handed. Captain Welsh wrote to Lord Cornwallis on February 21, 1793, "Mr. Raush being the principal merchant at Goalpara, entered into an agreement with the Baruas<sup>1</sup> to furnish them with whatever quantity of salt they might require, and in return for it almost the whole trade of Assam came through their hands to him, which was in fact enjoying an exclusive privilege. This monopoly, injurious to the Raja (of Assam), prejudicial to trade and oppressive to the inhabitants, must . . . be abolished"<sup>2</sup>. Raush maintained a detachment of sepoy and even interfered in political troubles within the Ahom Kingdom. His partner was Robert Brydie, an indigo merchant of Rangpur, who obtained a permit to trade in Assam in 1790. In the same year another merchant named Thomas Cotton was favoured with the same concession. The people of Goalpara have probably forgotten all about these powerful merchants whom the political troubles of their age compelled to employ force for commercial purposes; but a "pile of masonry, the size of a small cottage, which covers the remains of Raush's two infant children, stands on the side of a low hill overlooking the river"<sup>3</sup>.

On the east of Goalpara, separated from it by the river Manas, lay the Kingdom of the Ahoms. It roughly covered what is now known as the Brahma-

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<sup>1</sup> Officers of the Ahom King at the Kandar *chokey* (or out-post). That *chokey* lay in village Hadira on the Brahmaputra, opposite Goalpara.

<sup>2</sup> Imperial Record Department, Political Consultations, March 11, 1793, No. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XII, p. 278.

putra<sup>1</sup> Valley, one of the three principal natural divisions of the province of Assam. This Valley is a large alluvial plain, about 450 miles in length and 50 miles in breadth. It is shut in by hills on every side except the west. On the north it is bounded by the eastern section of the great Himalayan Range, the frontier tribes from west to east being the Bhutias<sup>2</sup>, the Akas<sup>3</sup>, the Daflas<sup>4</sup>, the Miris<sup>5</sup>, the Abors<sup>6</sup> and the Mishmis<sup>7</sup>. On the east it is bounded by the mountains inhabited by the Khamtis<sup>8</sup>, the Singphos and the Nagas. On the south-east lies the Manipur State. To the east of the Mishmi Hills, the Patkai Hills, the Naga Hills and the Manipur State lies Burma. On the south the Brahmaputra Valley is bounded by the so-called Assam Range, of which the Garo Hills form the western

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<sup>1</sup> Some interesting facts and speculations about the source and course of the Brahmaputra will be found in Wilson, *Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War*, Appendix No. 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> The Bhutias live not only in Bhutan but also in Towang, a province subject to Lhasa.

<sup>3</sup> The hills inhabited by the Akas lie to the north of the Darrang district in Assam, between the Dhansiri and Dikrai rivers.

<sup>4</sup> The hills inhabited by the Daflas lie to the north of the Darrang and Sibsagar districts in Assam, between the Bharebi and Ranga rivers.

<sup>5</sup> The hills inhabited by the Miris lie to the north of Dibrugarh and are intersected by the river Subansiri.

<sup>6</sup> The hills inhabited by the Abors lie to the north of the Lakhimpur district in Assam, between the Siom river on the west and the Dihang river on the east.

<sup>7</sup> The hills inhabited by the Mishmis lie to the north-east of the Lakhimpur district in Assam. These hills sweep round the head of the Brahmaputra Valley.

<sup>8</sup> They controlled the Sadiya region.

extremity, and the Barail Range, merging into the Burmese mountain system, forms the eastern extremity. The Mikir Hills, projecting northward from the Assam Range, almost reach the southern bank of the Brahmaputra and disturb the uniform breadth of the Valley. The Brahmaputra flows through the centre of the plain and is bounded on either side by stretches of marshy land covered with thick grass jungle.

Over this magnificent valley the Ahoms began to establish their control in the thirteenth century, and remained in possession till the Burmese conquest in the second decade of the nineteenth century. The historical evolution of 'the sleepy hollow of the Brahmaputra Valley' has been described by Sir Edward Gait in the following words: "The soil of the Brahmaputra valley is fertile, but its climate is damp and relaxing, so that while the people enjoy great material prosperity, there is a strong tendency towards physical and moral deterioration. Any race that had been long resident there, though rising in the scale of civilisation and gaining proficiency in the arts of peace, would gradually become soft and luxurious and so, after a time, would no longer be able to defend itself against the incursions of the hardier tribes behind them . . . The history of the Ahoms shows how a brave and vigorous race may decay in the sleepy hollow of the Brahmaputra valley . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The Ahoms were an offshoot of the great Tai or Shan race which occupied a vast tract of South-East Asia, from the border of Assam to the interior of

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Assam*, p. 7.



China. The story of the Ahom conquest of the Brahmaputra Valley is extremely obscure, but there is no doubt that Sukapha (1228-1268) was the founder of the Ahom Kingdom in Assam. We need not summarise the known facts regarding the early Ahom Kings and their long struggle with the Muslim invaders from Bengal. The Kingdom was consolidated and strengthened by Gadadhar Singh (1681—1696), who finally conquered Gauhati from the Mughals, and steady progress continued during the reign of his son and successor, Rudra Singh (1696—1714). Under his successors—Sib Singh (1714—1744), Pramatta Singh (1744—1751) and Rajeswar Singh (1751—1769)—the warlike spirit of the Ahoms gradually evaporated; religion and luxury took the place of military ardour. The vitality of the Ahom Kingdom appreciably declined during the reign of Lakshmi Singh (1769—1780), who ascended the throne at the age of 53 and left the management of affairs in the hands of the *Bar Barua*, one of his principal ministers.

It was during the reign of his son and successor, Gaurinath Singh (1780—1794), that the British Government for the first time interfered in the affairs of the Ahom Kingdom. When political intercourse began between the two neighbouring Governments, the affairs of Assam were a mystery to the British authorities. Lord Cornwallis observed in 1792. "However extraordinary it may appear to people in Europe, we are under the necessity of admitting that, owing to the unremitting jealousy which the chiefs of those countries have hitherto shown of the English, we know

little more of the interior parts of Nepal and Assam than of the interior parts of China". The earliest sketch of the geography of Assam was compiled by John Peter Wade<sup>1</sup>, who went to the Brahmaputra Valley in 1792 as Assistant Surgeon to Captain Welsh's detachment, and Buchanan Hamilton published the results of his survey<sup>2</sup> in 1809. The prospect of trade with Assam was naturally alluring to a mercantile Company which was just becoming a political power, and even the Court of Directors took an active interest in this subject. In a letter written in March, 1787, the Directors invited the attention of the Government of Bengal 'to the trade with Assam in salt, and the advantageous returns that might be made in gold dust and other articles, as originally suggested in a letter from Mr. Baillie in 1773'. The Directors also 'considered that broad-cloth and other European commodities might be disposed of to the natives of Assam,

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<sup>1</sup> Wade, *An Account of Assam*, compiled in 1794-1800. Edited by Benudhar Sarma, 1927.

Wade, *Geographical Sketch of Assam*, compiled in 1796-1802. Edited by S. K. Bhuyan, and published in *The Assam Review*, December, 1928—August, 1929.

Wade says: "The kingdom of Assam is seven hundred miles in length and from sixty to eighty in breadth . . . it will be within a very moderate calculation to consider the surface as containing about sixty thousand square miles . . . . The kingdom is separated by the great stream of the Brahmaputra into three grand divisions called Uttarkol or Uttarpar, Dakhinkol or Dakhinpar and the Majuli or great island. The first denotes the provinces lying on the northside of Brahmaputra, the second those on the south. The Majuli is a large island in the middle."

<sup>2</sup> *Description of Assam*. A semi-contemporary account of Assam is available in Robinson's *Descriptive Account of Assam*, published in 1841.

who were represented as carrying on considerable traffic with the colder countries, situated to the north-east, from whence returns in silk, pepper, and specie, might be obtained<sup>1</sup>.

Although the British authorities in London as well as in Calcutta were anxious to extend their trade to the Brahmaputra Valley, and even to 'the colder countries, situated to the north-east' of Assam, yet it would be a mistake to think that British intervention in the internal affairs of the Ahom Kingdom was inspired solely, or even primarily, by the commercial motive. Just as the treaty of 1773 with Cooch Behar and the expedition against the Bhutanese were the outcome of the natural British desire to keep the peace on the north-eastern frontier of Bengal, so also the expedition of Captain Welsh was, from the British point of view, nothing more nor less than a pressing political necessity. Towards the close of the eighteenth century the Ahom Kingdom revealed many symptoms of disintegration. Lord Cornwallis was anxious to avoid political and military commitments, and he was more than occupied with dangers in Southern India; but he could not remain altogether indifferent to the growing chaos in a neighbouring State, which was separated from British territories by a small river only, and connected with Bengal by commerce, religion and tradition. Thus British intervention in Assam began as an attempted solution of an urgent and difficult frontier problem.

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<sup>1</sup> Anber, *Rise and Progress of the British Power in India*, Vol. II, p. 53.

The vitality of the Ahom Kingdom was sapped by many factors, political, physical and religious. The administrative organisation<sup>1</sup> of the State was quite incompatible with stability and strength. The climate of the 'sleepy hollow of the Brahmaputra Valley' was unfavourable to the growth of a healthy and enterprising race. Religious dissensions absorbed the attention of the people and led to bloodshed which might have been reserved for a better cause.

"The form of government", as Captain Welsh said in a report<sup>2</sup> submitted to the Government of Bengal in 1794, "was monarchical and aristocratical." The monarchy<sup>3</sup> was the monopoly of the descendants of Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom Kingdom. It was 'partly hereditary and partly elective'. Brothers some-

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<sup>1</sup> For a description of the Ahom system of administration see the following :

S. K. Bhuyan, *Ahomar Din*.

S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, Introduction and Glossary of Vernacular Terms.

Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*.

Gait, *History of Assam*, Chapter IX.

*Journal of the Assam Research Society*, Vol. IX, Nos. 1-2, pp. 31-40.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., February 24, 1794, No. 13A.

<sup>3</sup> The Kings were generally known by the title of *Swargadeva* (Lord of Heaven), which Captain Welsh corrupted into 'Surgey-Deo' or 'Surgeo Deo'. It was an abbreviation of *Swarga-Narayana-Deva*, "the progenitor of the Ahom royal family, who was born of Indra, through a mortal mother. The title is also attributed to the fact that the first princes Khunlung and Khunlai, grandsons of Indra, came down from heaven to rule this earth in 568 A.D. This heaven of the Ahoms is probably China . . . Swargadeo, is a title of Brahmanical origin, the Ahom equivalent being Chaopha, *chao*, a god or king and *pha*, heaven." (S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, pp. 244-245)

times took precedence over sons; "the aristocracy exercised a latitude of election among the nearest relations of the late monarch, with some attention to the claims of nearer consanguinity, but more to those of personal merits". As the first executive officer the King presided over every department of State, but his powers were severely restricted by the privileges of the three *Gohains*. In distributing titles and offices he had to act 'without the concurrence, but not without the counsel' of these leaders of the aristocracy. He was not the owner of the soil; he could only alienate those lands for the legal tenure of which the occupier had no documentary evidence. All uncultivated lands, however, were entirely at his disposal. He could not make peace and war without the concurrence of the aristocracy. He treated with foreign Powers through his own ambassadors and in his own name, but with the previous concurrence of the aristocracy. His person was sacred. In passing a sentence of death his order alone could sanction a form by which the criminal's blood might be shed.<sup>1</sup>

The three *Gohains* referred to above were the

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<sup>1</sup> Captain Welsh says that the King 'possessed no power over the lives and property of his subjects'. This statement is not only inconsistent with his peculiar privilege of shedding the criminal's blood, but also improbable in itself.

The shedding of blood seems to have been regarded by the Ahoms as a special symbol of authority. "Before the reign of Rudra Singh, it had been the custom for the new king, before entering the *Singarigarh*, to kill a man with his ancestral sword, but that monarch caused a buffalo to be substituted, and the example thus set was followed by all his successors". (Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 232).

*Bar Gohain*, the *Burha Gohain* and the *Barpatra Gohain*. To them was applied the dignified title of *Dangaria*. These three offices were the monopoly of five clans descended from the associates of Sukapha.<sup>1</sup> The three *Gohains* were 'permanent and hereditary councillors of State, little inferior to the monarch in rank'. In case of delinquency, however, the King could remove a *Gohain* from his office with the concurrence of the other two. The *Gohains* were entitled on all important occasions to offer their counsel to the King, and it is said that they could even depose a King on the ground of incapacity or delinquency. To each of them the King assigned territories, in which they exercised most of the rights of independent sovereignty. In the event of war they supplied soldiers to the King's army. They also contributed labourers for the construction of public works. They paid no revenue to the royal treasury, although they sometimes supplied some 'trifling articles' to the King's stores. Within their territories they could inflict the sentence of death, but they were not authorized to sanction a form of execution which involved the shedding of the criminal's blood.

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<sup>1</sup> "By right of joint conquest the enjoyment of the soil was vested in the leader Sukapha, and his commanders and camp-followers who had shared with him the fatigues of the adventurous march. All subsequent appointments in the Ahom administration were made on this understanding. Sukapha's descendants enjoyed a hereditary title to the throne; those of his commanders and camp-followers to the principal offices of the state; and this principle was followed throughout the entire period of Ahom rule in Assam." (S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, Introduction, p. xviii).

In early times the *Bar Gohain* was concerned principally with military affairs. Traditionally his political jurisdiction extended over the area from the south of the Dikhu river to Koliabar. The authority of the *Burha Gohain*, who was conventionally regarded as the seniormost of the *Dangarias*, extended from the north of the Dikhu river to Sadiya. The office of the *Barpatra Gohain* was created probably in the early part of the sixteenth century. A member of the *Barpatra's* family controlled the relations with the hill tribes, like the Nagas, the Kacharis and the Mikirs. As a matter of fact, the defence of the frontiers, which were always exposed to the raids of the neighbouring hill tribes, was in practice left to various officers (*Sadiya-Khowa Gohain, Marangi-Khowa Gohain, Solal Gohain, Jagiyalia Gohain, Kajalimukhia Gohain*) who were always selected from the families of the three chief *Gohains*.

The extension of Ahom territory necessitated the appointment of new officers with extensive powers. Of these, two important ministers deserve special mention: the *Bar Barua* and the *Bar Phukan*. Their offices were not hereditary; they were chosen from four families<sup>1</sup> descended from the associates of Sukapha. They might be dismissed by the King with the concurrence of the *Gohains*. "The *Bar Barua* received the revenues of, and administered justice in, those portions of the upper provinces from Sadiya to

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<sup>1</sup> Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 233) says that they could be chosen from 'twelve specified families'. We follow the report prepared by Captain Welsh.

Koliabar which lay outside the jurisdiction of the Gohains, and was also, usually, the commander of the forces."<sup>1</sup> He was not competent to pass the sentence of death on any criminal.<sup>2</sup> The office of the *Bar Phukan* was considered of higher importance than that of the *Bar Barua*. The territory under his control extended from Koliabar to Goalpara, and he had his head-quarters at Gauhati. His privileges were similar to those of the *Bar Barua*, but owing to the distance of his province from the capital,<sup>3</sup> he was authorised to inflict the sentence of death by drowning. Appeals from his judicial decisions were scarcely practicable and were only made on very important occasions.

There were six vassal Chiefs—the Rajas of Darrang, Dimarua, Rani, Barduar, Nauduar and Beltola. They enjoyed complete autonomy in their internal administration. They collected the revenues and administered justice in their own territories. The King's control over them was not precisely defined.

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<sup>1</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> "The Barbarua . . . could not act independently of the three Gohains. Any matter placed before the king by the Barbarua would be considered in the presence of the three Gohains. . . ." (S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, Introduction, p. xxviii).

<sup>3</sup> Sukapha built a city at Charaideo. Sudangpha (1397-1407) built a town at Dhola, but afterwards made his capital at Charguya near the Dihing river. Suhungmung (1497-1539) made his capital at Bakata on the Dihing. Suklenmung (1539-1552) transferred his capital to Garhgaon, on the Dikhu river, in the Sibsagar district. For a description of Garhgaon at the time of Mir Jumla's invasion (1662), see Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 141-142. Gadadhar Singh made his capital at Barkola. Rudra Singh built a city of bricks at Rangpur, close to Sibsagar. Jorhat rose to importance during the reigns of Gaurinath Singh and Kamaleswar Singh (1795-1810).



They had to attend personally on the King with their prescribed contingent of men when called upon to do so. All of them, except the Raja of Rani, had to pay an annual tribute to the Royal treasury. The King could dismiss any Raja and appoint his brother or son to fill up the vacancy. It is doubtful whether he had the legal right to put a Raja to death. Some local governors, such as the *Sadiya-Khowa Gohain* (who was in charge of the important frontier post of Sadiya), the *Marangi-Khowa Gohain* (who governed the Naga territories west of the river Dhansiri), the Raja of Saring and the Raja of Tipam (who governed the tract round Jaipur on the right bank of the Buri Dihing) enjoyed powers almost analogous to those of the six vassal Chiefs.

The army of the Ahom Kingdom was a loosely organised militia composed of *paiks* or foot soldiers. Every male between the ages of 15 and 50 was a *paik*, and was under the obligation of rendering service to the State. Three *paiks* formed a *got*. In time of peace every *got* had to send one *paik* to be employed on public works. In time of war two, or even three, *paiks* might be requisitioned from each *got* for military service. Twenty *paiks* were commanded by a *Bora*, one hundred by a *Saikia*, one thousand by a *Hazarika*, three thousand by a *Rajkhowa*<sup>1</sup> and six thousand by a *Phukan*. The *Phukans*, the *Rajkhowas* and the *Hazarikas* were nominated by the King with the advice and concurrence of the principal *Gohains*.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Rajkhowas attend the court of justice, and are employed as umpires to settle disputes, and to superintend any public work for the King." (Martin, *Eastern India*, Vol. III, p. 614).

The *Boras* and the *Saikias* were appointed by the *Phukans* and the *Rajkhowas*. The *paiks* might demand the dismissal of any *Bora* or *Saikia* and the appointment of their own nominees. The Navy consisted of boats concentrated mainly at Rangpur, where the dockyard was called *Barnaosal*. There were smaller *Naosals* at Garhgaon, Majuli, Dergaon and Jaipur. An officer in charge of boatmen was called *Naobaicha Phukan*.

There was no regular, well-defined code of laws; but, except in cases of individual idiosyncracies, the administration of justice was probably 'speedy, efficient and impartial'. The three *Gohains*, the *Bar Barua* and the *Bar Phukan* exercised judicial authority within their respective provinces, sometimes personally, generally through subordinates. Against the decisions of the *Bar Barua* and the *Bar Phukan* appeals could be made to the King. These appeals were generally decided on his behalf by the *Nyayasodha Phukan*, who may be roughly described as the Chief Justice of the Kingdom.

There were numerous officers; some of them were entrusted with curious duties. For instance, we may mention the *Barua* (the head of a department which was not in charge of a *Phukan*, or the second officer of a department controlled by a *Phukan*), the *Barchetia* (the officer in charge of some Chetias or Ahoms of high social standing), the *Bartamuli* (the head of the attendants appointed to supervise the supply of betel-nuts), the *Bartekela* (the head of the emissaries of the King and his officers), the *Baruk* (courtier), the *Bhandari* (store-keeper), the *Bhitarual Phukan* (the commander

of the household troops), the *Bura-pachani* (the head of the superior attendants), the *Choladhara Phukan* (the officer in charge of the Royal cloaks), the *Ghora-Barua* (the officer in charge of the Royal stables), the *Habial Barua* (forest officer), the *Hati-Barua* (the officer in charge of the Royal elephants), the *Jalbhāri Phukan* (the officer in charge of men working with Royal nets for catching fish, deer, birds, etc.), the *Kakati* (clerk), the *Kataki* (Royal envoy), the *Majindar Barua* (King's private secretary), the *Pañi-Phukan* (officer in charge of the northern part of Kamrup), the *Phul-Barua* (officer in charge of the Royal flower gardens), and the *Tamuli Phukan* (officer in charge of the Royal parks or orchards).

Such a constitution—if it deserves that name—based on half-forgotten tribal customs, unaltered by the progress of time and the accumulation of experience (except in the creation of new offices and new privileges), could not stand the strain imposed upon it by the growth of Burmese power in the east and of British power in the west. The inherent weakness of the political and military systems, the illogical division of authority and the total absence of administrative and military efficiency, could be partially counteracted by the personality of strong rulers like Pratap Singh. Gadadhar Singh and Rudra Singh, but neither Lakshmi Singh nor Gaurinath Singh could control their over-mighty subjects.

Sir Edward Gait thinks that the rapid progress of Hinduism was responsible for the deterioration of the physical and mental strength of the Ahom race. When they 'took Hindu priests, and abandoned the free use

of meat and strong drinks', they lost their 'pride of race, and martial spirit', and 'with a less nourishing diet, their physique also underwent a change for the worse'<sup>1</sup>. This view has been echoed in 'the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*<sup>2</sup>: "The change (of religion) was disastrous: it involved the loss of the old martial spirit and pride of race with which the Ahoms had till then been animated; their patriotic feelings thenceforth became more and more subordinated to sectarian animosities and internal dissensions and intrigues, and their power soon began to decay."

The religious history of the Ahoms presents several features of exceptional interest, but unfortunately the subject still awaits proper investigation. Originally the Ahoms were not mere Animists of the type ordinarily found among the aboriginal tribes; they had a regular pantheon, of which the leading members were in course of time identified with Hindu gods and goddesses. The growing influence of Hinduism in Ahom society can be clearly traced in the sixteenth century; in the seventeenth century the old tribal religion seems to have been almost completely submerged beneath the tide of Brahminical influence. But it is the Sakta form of Hinduism which enjoyed the patronage of the Ahom Kings, and the Saktas were not required to 'abandon the free use of meat and strong drinks'. It seems, however, that Vaishnavism was preferred by the masses. If change of religion had any thing to do with physical deterioration, it is

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Assam*, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VI, pp. 30-31.

Vaishnavism rather than Saktatism which must be held responsible for the decline of the martial spirit of the Ahoms<sup>1</sup>. But it is significant to note that, if Muslim testimony is to be believed, the food and temper of the Ahoms showed no Vaishnava influence even in the seventeenth century. The author of *Pādishāhnāma* says that they ate 'every land and water animal'<sup>2</sup>. Even at the time of Mir Jumla's invasion they ate all kinds of flesh, except human, whether of dead or of killed animals. The *Alāmgīrnāma* praises the Ahoms for their courage, strength and power of endurance, and refers to their 'ferocious manners and brutal tempers'<sup>3</sup>.

Vaishnavism was preached in Assam in the sixteenth century by Sankar Deb, a Kayastha of Batadroba in Nowgong. Persecution compelled him to leave the Ahom Kingdom, but he was welcomed by the Koch King Nar Narayan, in whose territory he freely preached his views. After his death the Vaishnavas of Assam formed different sects under different leaders or *Gosains*. Some of these *Gosains* were Brahmins and came to be known as *Bamunia Gosains*. The non-Brahmin Vaishnavas followed the leadership of Sankar Deb's favourite disciple, Madhab Deb, who was a Kayastha like his *guru*. Madhab

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Edward Gait implies this when he explains Gadadhar Singh's persecution of the Vaishnavas in the following words: "Gadadhar Singh . . . feared the physical deterioration that might ensue if the people obeyed the injunction of the Gosains and abstained from eating the flesh of cattle, swine and fowls, and from indulging in strong drinks." (*History of Assam*, p. 162).

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1872, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 139.

Deb's followers were known as *Mahapurushias*. A third sect, known as the *Moamaria* sect, was founded by a Sudra of Upper Assam, Anirodh by name, who had quarrelled with Sankar Deb before his own emergence as an independent religious leader. The Moamarias were 'mainly persons of low social rank, such as Doms, Morans, Kacharis, Haris and Chutiyas, and as they denied the supremacy of the Brahmins, they were naturally the special aversion of the orthodox Hindu hierarchy'.

There is no doubt that 'sectarian animosities' played an important part in weakening the Ahom Kingdom. Persecution of the Vaishnavas began in the days of Sankar Deb and increased in intensity as their tenets gained ground. Pratap Singh (1603-1641) persecuted the *Mahapurushias* and put several of their *Gosains* to death. The same policy was continued by Jayadhvaj Singh (1648-1663). Udayaditya (1670-1673) showed some favour to a descendant of Sankar Deb, but this departure from orthodoxy caused a political revolution in which he lost his life and his new spiritual preceptor was impaled. Gadadhar Singh cruelly persecuted the *Gosains* and their disciples. Sir Edward Gait says, "It is impossible to justify, or palliate, the brutal severity of the measures which he adopted with a view to overthrow the Vaishnava sects, but there can be no doubt that the power of their priesthood was already becoming excessive; and the history of the Moamaria insurrection in later times shows that the inordinate growth of this power is not only prejudicial

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<sup>1</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 58.

to progress, but may easily become a very serious menace to the safety of established institutions”<sup>1</sup>. The persecution of the Vaishnavas was temporarily stopped during the reign of Rudra Singh, but Sib Singh, an orthodox Sakta, revived the old policy. “Hearing that the Sudra Mahants of the Vaishnava persuasion refused to worship Durga”, Rani Phuleswari, to whom Sib Singh had transferred political power, “ordered the Moamaria, and several other, Gosains to be brought to a Sakta shrine where sacrifices were being offered, and caused the distinguishing marks of the Sakta sect to be smeared with the blood of the victims upon their foreheads”<sup>2</sup>.

It is against this background of religious strife, extending over more than two centuries, that the Moamaria insurrections should be analysed. The insult offered to the Moamaria *Gosain* by Rani Phuleswari could not be forgotten or forgiven. The reign of Rajeswar Singh was the lull before the storm, which burst out in the reign of Lakshmi Singh. The arrogance of a powerful official named Kirtichandra Bar Barua<sup>3</sup> provided the necessary excuse and the Moamarias rose in open rebellion. The Royalist troops could not suppress them: Lakshmi Singh himself became a prisoner. A Moamaria leader named Ramakanta ascended the throne and issued coins in his own name in 1769. But a surprise attack by the Royalists overthrew the usurper in April, 1770. The

<sup>1</sup> *History of Assam*, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> See S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, Introduction, pp. xxi-xxii.

Mcamaria *Gosain* as well as Ramakanta and some of his followers were impaled. Most of those who escaped were later on captured and killed.<sup>1</sup> Continued persecution under Gaurinath Singh led to fresh risings in 1782 and 1786. The revolt of 1782 proved abortive, but the rebellion which began in 1786 paved the way for British intervention in Assam.

The weakness of the Ahoms towards the close of the eighteenth century was, therefore, a slow but steady process. The enervating climate of the Brahmaputra Valley must have slowly undermined the health and energy of this martial race. The growing predilection for Vaishnavism, with its inevitable effect on food and common habits, strengthened the influence of the climate. The loosely organised system of administration and the patent weakness of the military system, which had stood the stray assaults of the Muslims, broke down under the stress of internal strife caused by religious dissensions. The process of physical decline was perhaps completed by the introduction of opium in the reign of Lakshmi Singh. From Buchanan Hamilton's memoir it appears that this enervating drug was freely used by the Assamese in 1808.

This rapid geographical and historical survey of the Brahmaputra Valley must be followed by a brief account of the other two natural divisions of Assam.

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<sup>1</sup> For details see S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, Assamese Edition, Paras 108-149. The suppression of the rebellion was due partly to the enterprise of Rajeswar Singh's queen Kuranganayani, daughter of Raja Jai Singh of Manipur. She was known as the *Parvatia Kunari*.



—the Surma Valley, and the Assam Range which separates the two valleys. The Surma Valley is a flat plain, about 125 miles in length and 60 miles in breadth. The river Surma rises on the southern slopes of the mountain ranges on the borders of the Naga Hills district and flows through the Manipur Hills and the Cachar and Sylhet districts. The Valley is bounded by hills on every side except the west. The Sylhet district came under British rule after the grant of *Dewani* in 1765, for, like Goalpara, it had been included within the Mughal *Suba* of Bengal. It was one of the most important revenue districts of the Company.

On the east of Sylhet<sup>1</sup> lies Cachar, now a British district within the province of Assam, with an area of 3,769 square miles.<sup>2</sup> On the north it is separated from the Nowgong district by the Kapili and Doyang rivers. On the east it is bounded by the Naga Hills and the State of Manipur; on the south by the Lushai Hills; and on the west by the Sylhet district and the Jaintia Hills. The plains included within Cachar form the upper portion of the Surma Valley; the hilly portion (area 1,706 square miles) is a section of the Assam Range which divides the Surma Valley from the

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<sup>1</sup> "From the period of the earliest establishment of the British authorities in Bengal, a knowledge of the countries to the eastward of Sylhet has been among our geographical desiderata."—Fisher, *Memoir of the Countries On and Near the Eastern Frontier of Sylhet*.

<sup>2</sup> Fisher says that Cachar "does not include more than 200 square miles of the plain country: of the mountains no estimation can at present be formed." Cf. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 193.

Brahmaputra Valley. The earliest capital of the Kachari Princes was Dimapur, now an important station on the Bengal and Assam Railway: but the repeated invasions of the Ahom Kings compelled them to remove it to Maibang (in the North Cachar Hills) and then to Khaspur in the plains (near Badarpur, now an important station on the Bengal and Assam Railway). At present the town of Silchar is the administrative centre of the district.

The Kacharis are identical with the Meches and closely allied with the Koches. Their early history<sup>1</sup> is still shrouded in obscurity, but in the thirteenth century the Kachari Kingdom probably extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Dikhu in the east to the Kallang in the west. The first contest between the Ahoms and the Kacharis took place on the banks of the Dikhu in 1490. In 1536 the Ahoms sacked Dimapur. The ruins of this town are still in existence: they show that in the sixteenth century and probably even earlier, the Kacharis had developed a civilization considerably superior to that of the Ahoms. In 1706 Rudra Singh, one of the most powerful of the Ahom Kings, occupied Maibang. In 1765 the Kachari Prince had to pay homage in person to Rajeswar Singh. Krishna Chandra, Raja of Cachar (circa 1773-1813), gave shelter to many Moamaria and other Ahom rebels; the result was a war between the Ahoms and the Kacharis (1803-1805), which ended in the decisive defeat of the latter. Krishna Chandra

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher's *Memoir of the Countries On and Near the Eastern Frontier of Syllhet* contains a brief sketch of the history of Cachar.

conciliated the victorious Ahom King by sending the customary tribute of horses and elephants.<sup>1</sup> The Kachari Princes ruled almost independently over their principality, although, as we have seen, they were defeated on various occasions by the Ahom Kings and compelled to recognise their suzerainty.

Krishna Chandra was the first Kachari ruler to be formally converted to Hinduism (1790), although the slow progress of Hinduism among the Kacharis had probably begun before the transfer of the capital to Khaspur. Krishna Chandra was recognised as a Kshatriya and allowed to claim descent from Bhima, one of the heroes of the *Mahabharata*. From a memoir<sup>2</sup> compiled by a British military officer at the time of the First Anglo-Burmese War we learn that Hinduism was the 'prevailing religion' in Cachar during the early years of the nineteenth century. Apart from the three principal castes—the Brahmins, the Vaidyas and the Sudras—there were 'various mixed castes, all of which indiscriminately engaged in agriculture'. Kali, Jagannath and Vasudev were the principal deities worshipped by the people. So it is clear that both the Sakta and Vaishnava forms of Hinduism were prevalent. The Muslims composed about one-quarter of the population, but their social and economic position was not at all satisfactory. "They are in a state of extreme abasement", we are told, "and appear scarcely sensible of any distinction between their own faith, and that

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<sup>1</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, pp. 142-145, 155-158, 170-176.

<sup>2</sup> Fisher, *Memoir of the Countries on and Near the Eastern Frontier of Sylhet*.

of the Hindoos, except that which arises from the permission to eat the flesh of cows, and the restriction upon that of swine. They have no endowed religious establishments, no mosques, and no public places of worship, except the Durgahs, or tombs, of reputed saints." Christianity was unknown in Cachar.

Cachar attracted the notice of the East India Company soon after Plassey. In 1763 Captain Verelst reached Cachar *en route* to Manipur and waited at Khaspur and Jainagar for about a year. Owing to the difficulties of the country he could not continue his journey to Manipur<sup>1</sup>. Captain Pemberton observes, "From this period, until 1809, we have no trace of any further intercourse with this petty State"<sup>2</sup>. But this statement is not true. In 1793 Krishna Chandra sent a *vakil* to Henry Lodge, Justice of the Peace at Sylhet.<sup>3</sup> He was driven to the hills<sup>4</sup> by an Iranian Muslim adventurer named Aga Muhammad Reza, who gave out that he was the 12th *Imām*, destined to deliver India from the yoke of the British merchants. He was captured and sent to Calcutta by some sepoy, who had been sent by the British authorities in response to an

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<sup>1</sup> See below.

<sup>2</sup> *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter No. 65.

<sup>4</sup> The resources of Cachar were very poor. According to Fisher's estimate, the population did not exceed 40,000. He says, "There is little or no difference in the appearance of the huts occupied by the different classes: from the Rajah to the meanest peasant, they are small, inconvenient, and unsubstantial. The Rajah Kissen Chunder, after a visit to Calcutta in 1810, constructed a building of Masonry. . . ."—Fisher, *Memoir of the Countries On and Near the Eastern Frontier of Sylhet*.

appeal from the Raja. Shortly afterwards some of these sepoys were discharged from the service of the Company. They went to Cachar and occupied a part of the country. The Raja appealed to the Magistrate of Sylhet. That officer sent some sepoys, who succeeded in expelling the adventurers.<sup>1</sup> These circumstances naturally made Krishna Chandra somewhat dependent upon British support. He requested the Governor-General 'to protect him whenever an enemy shall invade his territories, on condition of his paying whatever expense may be incurred on account of the force employed for his defence.' The reply was unfavourable: "To issue an order of that nature would be inconsistent with the principles which regulate the conduct of the British Government."<sup>2</sup> Krishna Chandra died in 1813 and was succeeded by his brother Govinda Chandra, in whose reign the menace of Burmese invasion brought Cachar under the protection of the East India Company.

To the east of Cachar lies the State of Manipur<sup>3</sup>, a fertile<sup>4</sup> valley (area 650 square miles) surrounded by

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., April 26, 1811, No. 52. See also Fisher, *Memoir of the Countries On and Near the Eastern Frontier of Sylhet*. For date, compare Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., August 3, 1801, No. 9, 10; November 30, 1807, No. 37; December 2, 1807, No. 49; April 26, 1811, No. 53.

<sup>3</sup> According to Pemberton (*Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 19-20), Manipur was called "Kathe" by the Burmese, "Moglie" by the people of Cachar, "Meklee" by the people of Assam, and "Cassay" by the Shans.

<sup>4</sup> "The richness of the soil of the valley of Manipur, manifested by the luxuriance of the grass with which it is overgrown, and the abundant supply of water derivable from the streams, by which it is traversed, leave no doubt of the productiveness of

hills<sup>1</sup>. At the time of the First Anglo-Burmese War there were three roads between Cachar and Manipur<sup>2</sup>. They were, says an official account written by a military officer with local experience, "more or less difficult, but either of them might be easily defended by 200 men, against any force that could be sent against them. Forts might be constructed on commanding points, and passes in the hills might be occupied, down which stones, or rather rocks, might be rolled on an assailing enemy. The mountains over which the roads pass, are covered with jungle of grass

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this sequestered spot . . ."—*Government Gazette*, February 20, 1826.

For the mineral and agricultural resources, animals, climate, etc., of Manipur, see Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 27-36.

<sup>1</sup> "The amphitheatre in which the town of Manipur is situated, varies from 10 to 12 miles in breadth from E. to W. and 20 to 30 miles in length from N. to S."—*Government Gazette*, February 20, 1826.

<sup>2</sup> "The journey through the hills from Cachar to Manipur is one of great interest. The path crosses five considerable ranges, covered with forest and separated from one another by deep river valleys, and thus possesses all the attractions which are conferred by stately timber, luxuriant undergrowth of bamboos, creepers and giant ferns, bold cliffs and rivers rushing through wild gorges."—*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XVII, p. 184.

Pemberton (*Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 51-53) mentions three routes connecting Cachar with Manipur: (1) The Aquee route, between Banskandi in Cachar and Jainagar in the Manipur Valley, 86½ miles long. (2) The Kala Naga route, between Banskandi and Lumlangtong, 82½ miles long. (3) The Khongjuee route, which commenced at a *ghat* on the western bend of the Barak river. In 1825 General Shuldham's army intended to advance by the Aquee route. The third route was 'wholly useless for military purposes'. For all the routes Banskandi was the only available depot for troops, military stores and supplies.

and bamboos, cleared away in places by the Nagas, who are very poor and miserable; troops, and even travellers passing these mountains, must carry their supplies with them, as nothing can be procured from the mountaineers. The passage has been effected in various periods between eight or fifteen days. When Marjeet invaded Cachar, he crossed in ten days, marching day and night, and making every exertion to arrive before information of his march could reach Govinda Chandra. There was formerly a road from Khaspur to Manipur, by which the distance was only four days' journey, but it is now overgrown with jungle."<sup>1</sup>

The principal routes connecting Manipur with Upper Burma lay through the Kabaw valley. An official account compiled in 1826 informs us that one route lay through a narrow defile, nearly due south of Manipur; the second crossed an extensive range of hills inhabited by Nagas, and united with the former a few miles south-east from Manipur. "The former route was taken by the Burmans, until they made it a desert, and then they were obliged to proceed over the hills."<sup>2</sup>

The early history of Manipur is obscure, but from 1714 onwards our knowledge about this petty principality is more or less satisfactory. That year marked

<sup>1</sup> Fisher, *Memoir of the Countries On and Near the Eastern Frontier of Sylhet*.

<sup>2</sup> *Government Gazette*, February 20, 1826.

Pemberton (*Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 55-58) gives details about the various routes connecting Manipur with Burma and says that Tamu was 'the general rendezvous of parties' proceeding from Manipur into Burmese territory.

the accession to the throne of Manipur of a Naga chief named Pamheiba, who later on embraced Hinduism and took the name of Gharib Nawaz. The people of Manipur accepted the religion of this enterprising ruler. He led several successful expeditions into Burma, captured some Burmese towns, and even threatened Ava itself.<sup>1</sup> His successes were due in a large measure to the weakness of the Burmese Government in this period, which was rendered worse by the revolt of the Talaings in the Irrawaddy Delta in 1740.

Gharib Nawaz was an enterprising and successful ruler, but his fascination for his second wife created serious troubles for Manipur. In or about 1750 he abdicated in favour of her son Ajit Shah or Ugat Shah, *alias* Kakilal Thaba, superseding the legitimate claim of his eldest son Sham Shah, who was born of his first wife. About three years later Gharib Nawaz and Sham Shah went to Burma to settle some political differences with the Burmese Court. While they were away from Manipur Ajit Shah was led by rumours to believe that his father intended to place Sham Shah on the throne after their return from the mission to Burma. Under his secret order some of his men murdered Gharib Nawaz and Sham Shah on their way back to Manipur.<sup>2</sup> But Ajit Shah's secret came out.

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> This account is based on Verelst's letter to Calcutta, September 19, 1762. Pemberton (*Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 38-39) gives us a different story. He says that Gharib Nawaz led an unsuccessful expedition to Burma in 1749, and after his failure he presented a daughter to the King of Ava. On his way back to Manipur he was met and rebuked by Ajit



and he was dethroned by his younger brother Bharat Shah who ruled for about two years. After Bharat Shah's death the principal chiefs of Manipur offered the throne to Gour Shah, the eldest son of Sham Shah. Thus began a series of sordid internal wars 'of the most savage and revolting type, in which sons murdered fathers and brothers murdered brothers, without a single trait of heroism to relieve the dark scene of blood and treachery'.

As a result of these domestic troubles Manipur lost that political importance and military strength which it had acquired during the long and successful reign of Gharib Nawaz. A-laung-pa-ya (1752-1760) established a new dynasty in Burma, and, not satisfied with the consolidation of his authority in Upper and Lower Burma, invaded Manipur and Siam<sup>1</sup>. The Burmese used fire-arms, which the Manipuris tried in vain to resist with their *dāo*, spear, and bow and arrow. A part of Manipur was permanently annexed by the Burmese. Gour Shah broke his leg during his retreat from an expedition against the Burmese and offered the throne to his younger brother Jai Singh. The new ruler continued the resistance against the Burmese, but his position became precarious due to

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Shah for 'having tendered homage to the King of Ava by the presentation of his daughter'. Gharib Nawaz, deserted by his troops, returned to Burma and found shelter there. Sometime later he tried to re-enter Manipur; he was met by Ajit Shah's emissaries and murdered by them, 'together with his eldest son, Shamshae, and all the principal men of the court, who had shared his compulsory exile'.

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 56.

the intrigues of his uncle Ajit Shah, who was actively trying to recover the throne. Ajit Shah appealed for assistance to the British authorities, using the Raja of Tipperah as the intermediary. When Jai Singh heard this he sent one Haridas Gosain to Verelst, Chief of Chittagong. This *vakil* argued his master's case so convincingly that the British authorities not only rejected Ajit Shah's prayer but also decided to support Jai Singh against the Burmese.<sup>1</sup> Commercial as well as political designs lay behind this bold decision. Haridas Gosain persuaded Verelst to believe that the expulsion of the Burmese from Manipur would enable British merchants to come in direct contact with China, for "the China merchants bring their goods down as far as Manipur, in any quantities they find a market for." Secondly, an alliance with Manipur would enable the Company to 'obtain reparation from the Burmese for the repeated ill-treatment of the factory at Negrais'<sup>2</sup>.

When Verelst's proposal for an alliance with Manipur came under the consideration of the authorities in Calcutta<sup>3</sup>, an unexpected difficulty was found in an application for military assistance from Emperor Shah Alam II, who was anxious for occupying Delhi

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<sup>1</sup> Pemberton (*Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 40-41) says that an offensive and defensive alliance was negotiated on September 14, 1762, with Haridas Gosain by Verelst. In return for military assistance Haridas Gosain promised on behalf of his master to grant land for the establishment of a British factory and fort.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 57-60.

<sup>3</sup> Consultations, October 4 and October 11, 1762.

from *Wazir Ghazi-ud-din*<sup>1</sup>. The Calcutta Board, under the presidency of Vansittart, decided that "it would be very imprudent at that juncture to detach any body of European troops to so distant a quarter as Meckley", but it was at the same time held that it was unwise to lose so favourable an opportunity to put pressure on Burma. So six companies of sepoy were ordered to be sent to Manipur and they were directed 'to fix a post at Manipur and make themselves acquainted with the strength and disposition of the Burmese and the situation of their country'.

The detachment reached Chittagong in December, 1762, and left for Manipur under Verelst in January, 1763. It reached Khaspur, the capital of Cachar, in April. The difficulties of the route prevented Verelst from continuing his journey; after waiting for some time at Khaspur and Jainagar he returned to Bengal. Later on Jai Singh<sup>2</sup> again sent an appeal for assistance, adding that, as the Burmese had carried away all his money, he could only offer the produce of his country for defraying the expenses of the British troops. The British authorities discontinued the negotiations, probably because they were not yet strong enough to interfere in the affairs of distant and inhospitable hill States. It must be remembered that the struggle between Mir Qasim, Nawab of Bengal, and the Com-

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<sup>1</sup> See Sir J. N. Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Vol. II, pp. 543-545.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is based on Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 265. Pemberton (*Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 41-42) says that it was Gour Shah who sent this appeal for assistance in October, 1763.

pany's servants in Bengal had already begun: the Patna 'massacre' took place in October, 1763.

During the reign of Hsin-byu-shin (1763-1776) the Burmese repeatedly invaded Manipur and more than once compelled Jai Singh to become a fugitive in Cachar. He received some assistance from the contemporary Ahom King, Rajeswar Singh<sup>1</sup>, but the Ahoms could not make his position secure. At last he made peace with the Burmese, probably during the reign of Bo-daw-pa-ya (1782-1819), and remained on his throne undisturbed till his abdication in 1798. He even found himself strong enough to help Gaurinath Singh in 1792 against the Moamaria rebels.

Jai Singh's reign of nearly forty years was followed by a long period of civil war and anarchy, during which the ambitious Burmese King Bo-daw-pa-ya renewed A-laung-pa-ya's policy of aggression. Jai Singh's eldest son and successor, Harsha Chandra<sup>2</sup>, was murdered after a short reign of two years. His successor was his brother Madhu Chandra, who was murdered in 1806 after a reign of five years. Jai Singh's third son, Chaurjit Singh, then ascended the throne; but his authority was challenged by Jai Singh's fourth son, Marjit Singh, who secured the throne in 1812 with Burmese assistance. He remained in undisturbed possession of the country for about six years.

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<sup>1</sup> It was in return for this assistance that Rajeswar Singh received in marriage Jai Singh's daughter Kuranganayani. See above, p. 25, note.

<sup>2</sup> According to Pemberton (*Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 43-44), Jai Singh's eldest son and successor was Rabinchandra, who was murdered in 1801.

According to Pemberton<sup>1</sup>, Manipur regained 'almost all its former prosperity' during this period. The friendship with Burma tended to encourage trade; "the prosperity of the inhabitants was proved in the numerous herds of buffaloes and bullocks which grazed on the plains, and a considerable accession of people had taken place from the return of those who had accompanied Marjeet in his flight."<sup>2</sup> But Marjit Singh's Burmese manners and 'sanguinary disposition' made him unpopular with his subjects. In 1818 he led an unsuccessful expedition against Cachar. In 1819 he was summoned to the Burmese capital to do homage to the new King, Ba-gyi-daw, to whose friendly exertions he owed his elevation to the throne of Manipur. Marjit had already offended the Burmese by forcibly cutting timber in the Kabaw valley and by erecting a richly gilded palace for himself. He apprehended that he would be put to trouble if he attended the installation of the new King. He pleaded his inability to attend the ceremony on account of the hostile intentions of his brothers—Chaurjit Singh and Gambhir Singh—who had in the mean time established themselves in Cachar. A Burmese army was immediately despatched to seize the rebel. After an unsuccessful encounter with this army Marjit fled to Cachar. At this stage the fortunes of Manipur and Cachar became entangled in the First Anglo-Burmese War.

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<sup>1</sup> *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 45.

We now come to the range of mountains which separates the Brahmaputra Valley from the Surma Valley. It is generally called the Assam Range. It projects at right angles from the mountain system in North Burma, and lies almost due east and west. The Lushai Hills, which separate Burma from Assam, run at right angles to the Assam Range in parallel ridges.

The Garo Hills form the western extremity of the Assam Range. The peak of Nokrek, a little to the east of Tura, rises to a height of more than 4,600 feet. By the end of the eighteenth century the Garos inhabiting the outer ranges had been brought partially under the control of the *Zamindars*, but the villages in the interior were quite independent. In 1790 the British Government tried to put an end to their disturbances by recognising one of their most powerful chiefs as a *Zamindar*, but the turbulence of the *Zamindars* of Goalpara rendered this system ineffective. In 1811 a British officer named David Scott, to whom we shall refer frequently in the following pages, was deputed to the frontier and the tributary Garos were released from the authority of the Bengali landlords. The hills were constituted a separate district in 1869.

To the east of the Garo Hills lies the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Shillong peak reaches a height of 6,450 feet; "but this is only the highest point in a table-land hardly any part of which falls much below 6,000 feet". The inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills belong to the same race and speak the same language.

The territories of the Rajas of Jaintia included two distinct parts—the Jaintia Hills, and the plains

lying between those hills and the Barak river. The plains are known as the Jaintia *parganas* and constitute a part of the Sylhet district; the inhabitants are Bengali Hindus and Muslims. According to Sir Edward Gait, the Jaintia Rajas had established a State in the Jaintia Hills and succumbed to the influence of Hinduism before 1500 A.D.; later on they extended their rule over the plains<sup>1</sup>. Jaintiapur was the capital of this petty State. The system of government was peculiar. A contemporary account runs as follows: "In conducting the affairs of government, the Rajahs of Jyntiah are under the necessity of consulting, on all important occasions, the Queen-mother, and chiefs of districts, and officers of state; and, although the appointment or removal of both of the latter descriptions of persons rests with the Rajah himself, they are nevertheless enabled to exercise a considerable degree of control over him, as he is obliged, in conferring such appointments, to consult the wishes of the chief

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Assam*, pp. 255-256.

"In the case of the Jyntea family, the descendants of the reigning Rajahs appear to gain admission in the course of time into the Kayt and Bayd caste, by intermarriage with individuals of those tribes, and they follow, in every respect, the customs of the Hindoos of the plains. Persons of this origin are settled in considerable numbers about the capital, and usually enjoy offices of state, but without any right to the succession, which, unless under very extraordinary circumstances, goes to the son of the Rajah's sister, called Koonwuree, by a Cossyah husband, chosen from certain noble families in the hills, by a general assembly of the chief people."—*Government Gazette*, June 24, 1824. (Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 12). Cf. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 219.

people in the interior, who seem to be of a very independent and rather turbulent character.”<sup>1</sup>

We need not refer to the hostilities between the Jaintias and the Kacharis ; but it should be recorded that Tamradhvaj, Raja of Cachar, was made a prisoner by Ram Singh I of Jaintia. The Jaintia Rajas paid ceremonial visits and offered presents to the Ahom Kings on different occasions, but they never lost their practical independence. Rudra Singh's attempt to annex the Jaintia country proved unsuccessful.

It was during the reign of Chattra Singh that Jaintia came into contact for the first time with the British Government. In 1774 a British force led by an officer named Major Henniker overran Jaintia and realised a fine from the Raja. According to Pemberton<sup>2</sup>, “it is probable that some aggressions against the inhabitants of the adjacent plains of Sylhet had rendered the chastisement necessary”. Chattra Singh was probably succeeded in 1790 by Ram Singh II, who died in 1832. The First Anglo-Burmese War brought this Prince under the control of the East India Company.

To the east of Shillong lie the Jaintia Hills and the North Cachar Hills ; here the level falls, but the Barail Range, which begins on the south-east corner of the Khasi-Jaintia plateau, sometimes rises even to 6,000 feet. To the north-east of the Barail Range, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Government Gazette*, June 24, 1824. (Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 12).

<sup>2</sup> *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 211.



to the north of the Manipur State, lie the Naga Hills<sup>1</sup>.

We have finished our brief survey of the States lying to the east of Bengal; our attention must now be diverted to the south-east. The south-eastern corner of Bengal is formed by the district of Chittagong, a long strip of land, about 160 miles in length, the breadth varying from 26 miles to 4 miles. More than a third of the total area (851 square miles) is covered by hills and jungles. The district is intersected by three low-ranges of hills running in a south-easterly direction parallel to each other and also to the coast-line. It is separated from Arakan by the river Naf. The East India Company acquired *zamindari* rights in this district by a treaty with Nawab Mir Qasim, dated September 27, 1760.

“Between the plains of Bengal and those of Upper Burma stretches a hilly tract of primaevial forest, bounded on the north by the State of Hill Tippera and by Assam, and on the south by the Burmese province of Arakan. A succession of hill ranges runs from north-west to south-east, determining the geographical and ethnical division of the whole country into three oblong strips of which the most westerly is known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts; the central strip constitutes the Lushai Hills, and the eastern the Chin Hills, which form part of Upper Burma”.<sup>2</sup>

The district now known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts is bounded on the north by Hill Tippera, on the west by the Chittagong district, on the south by

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<sup>1</sup> For a contemporary account of the Nagas see Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. X, p. 318.

Arakan, and on the east by Northern Arakan and the Lushai Hills. "The general aspect of the district is a tangled mass of hill, ravine, and cliffs covered by dense tree, bush, and creeper jungle".

The Lushai Hills consist of ranges running almost due north and south, with an average height of about 3,000 feet on the west, rising to 4,000 feet farther east, and here and there to over 8,000 feet. The sides of the hills are covered with forest and dense bamboo jungle. The hills now constitute a district within the province of Assam, with its headquarters at Aijal.

The Chin Hills constitute a tract of mountainous country (150 miles in length and varying in breadth from 100 miles to 150 miles) inhabited by hill tribes. "The tract consists from end to end of a mass of mountains, much broken and contorted and intersected by deep valleys, and is practically devoid of plains and table-lands. Its main ranges run generally north and south, and vary in height from 5,000 to 9,000 feet . . . The rivers of the tract flow into Upper Burma, Arakan, Assam, and Manipur"<sup>1</sup>. The tribes living in this almost inaccessible region were engaged in frequent hostilities with the Burmese, the Lushais and the Manipuris.

To the south of the Chin Hills lies Arakan, separated from the Chittagong district by the river Naf<sup>2</sup>. The northern part of Arakan is covered with hills, and from this region three low ranges run south-

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<sup>1</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. X, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of the routes connecting Chittagong with Arakan, see Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 95-98.

ward. The western spurs of the Arakan Yoma Range cover the broken country east of the Lemro river. Between the Naf and the Mayu rivers lies the steep Mayu Range, its southern portion running parallel with the coast. Between the Kaladan and the Mayu rivers two ridges run parallel to each other. The rivers generally flow from north to south, spreading out in the plains into a network of tidal channels. The largest and the most important river is the Kaladan<sup>1</sup>, which rises in the Chin Hills and falls into the Bay of Bengal at Akyab, where its estuary is six miles in breadth. The other prominent rivers are the Lemro and the the Mayu.

The Arakan Division consists of four districts: Akyab, Northern Arakan (or Arakan Hill Tracts), Kyaukpyu, and Sandoway. The Akyab district covers the central portion of the Division and embraces the valleys of the three important rivers. The town of Akyab, situated at the mouth of the Kaladan, was a small fishing village until the First Anglo-Burmese War. It was made administrative centre of Arakan in 1826. It is 'really an island, cut off from the mainland by a creek which connects the Kaladan on the east with the estuary of the Mayu on the west, and open on the south and south-west to the sea'.

The Arakan Hill Tracts, situated between the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Chin Hills, constitute the most southerly portion of the Lushai Hills. It

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<sup>1</sup> From *Kula* (foreigner) and *dan* (place or location). It was on this river that the Kings of Arakan located their Bengali slaves. See Fytche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, p. 263, and also *British Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. II, p. 63.

formed part of the Akyab district till 1865 ; it was then separated in order to enable officers to deal effectively with marauders.

To the south of the Akyab district lies the Kyaukpyu district, which includes the islands of Ramree and Cheduba. Within this district lies the An Pass<sup>1</sup>, which runs across the Arakan Yoma Range and connects the township of An<sup>2</sup> (in the Kyaukpyu

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<sup>1</sup> "At first the route lies through a very level and fertile country, but the scenery is soon changed, and it proceeds over a succession of low hills till it reaches the village of Sarowah, situate fifteen miles from Aeng. . . . From Sarowah . . . commences the ascent of the pass. For the first few miles it is gradual, but the last mile or two is excessively steep, and the path is conducted in a zigzag manner to the summit. This part of the road passes through much forest and thick jungle; about half-way there is a stream very conveniently situated, but the deficiency of water in most places is very great. The stockade of Nariengain is situate on the summit of the pass. . . . The distance of the summit from Sarowah is eighteen miles, and the ascent being 4,517 feet, the average rise is 250 feet in the mile. . . . The most difficult portion of the pass is the descent on the eastern side of the mountain, which is much steeper than the other. The distance to Kheng Khyong, the next halting-place, is eight miles, and the descent being 3,777 feet, the average declination is 472 feet in the mile. The second division of the route extends to Maphe Myoo, following generally the course of the Man river, which it crosses many times. . . . From Maphe Myoo the route proceeds over a thickly-wooded country, and passes . . . to Tsedo, a distance of sixteen miles, where it separates, one branch running in a south-easterly direction to the village of Memboo, on the Irawaddy river, a distance of twenty-two miles; and the other forty-six miles, over a fertile and highly cultivated country, to Shembegwen Ghaut."—Thornton's *Gazetteer*, p. 5. This account is mainly based on Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 101-107.

<sup>2</sup> "Aeng now contains but few inhabitants, but formerly it

district) with Ngape in the Minbu district of Upper Burma. In order to facilitate commercial intercourse between Arakan and Burma<sup>1</sup> a 'superb road' was constructed over the An Pass by order of King Bo-daw-pa-ya. The plan was laid out by the engineers of the King, and the construction was begun in 1816. An official report compiled in 1826 contains the following information: "...what contributed more than anything to the completion of the road, was a most sensible rule enforced by the Burma government, by which, in lieu of taxes on their merchandize, they obliged all the travellers to carry with them working tools, and repair those parts of the road which might require it, or facilitate the access to the water. Thus, constant use, instead of spoiling the road, only improved it..."<sup>2</sup>

Another important pass connecting Upper Burma with Arakan was known to European writers<sup>3</sup> as the Talak Pass. Talak lies to the north-west of An. Wilson says, "Above eighty miles of a low jungly tract, crossed by numerous rivulets, intervened between the

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was of considerable size, and was the emporium of all the trade between the two kingdoms (*i.e.*, Arakan and Burma)."—*Government Gazette*, May 22, 1826.

<sup>1</sup> "A great trade was carried on before the war, between Aracan and Ava, in which, it is said, forty thousand people were annually employed: the former country exported Indian and European manufactures, such as velvets, broad cloths, piece goods, silver and muslins, and beetle-nuts, salt, and other articles, the produce of its own soil, receiving, in return, ivory, silver, copper, palmyra sugar, tobacco, oil, and lackered boxes."—*Government Gazette*, May 22, 1826.

<sup>2</sup> *Government Gazette*, May 22, 1826.

<sup>3</sup> See Robertson, *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, pp. 55-57, 125, 245-248.

capital (of Arakan) and Talak, at the foot of the mountainous ridge which separates Arakan from Ava. It thence passed, for ninety miles more, over lofty and rugged precipices, where no supplies could be expected and even water was scarce."<sup>1</sup> In an official report written in 1826 we read: "Chalain Mew"<sup>2</sup> ...is the chief town of the district of Chalain... From Chalain Mew, the road branches off to Talak... A foot-path is said to have existed over the mountains of Talak, occasionally frequented by a few itinerant merchants, and that poneys and bullocks were the only beasts of burden by which the road could be traversed. A great scarcity of water exists for four marches, so much so that those who went that way used always to carry a supply of water in bamboos; the chance of finding crevices in the rocks, or pools of water, being very precarious; and if found, would not prove sufficient for more than twenty or thirty men. The hills are very steep, and although the road was naturally so bad, the Burmahs, at the time they expected an attack from us in that quarter, determined on entirely destroying the medium of communication, and, accordingly, scarped part of the road, in others, felled trees across it, and so completely closed the passage, that for more than two years not a single individual has passed that way. The Talak road was not followed by either of the Burma armies; the Maha Bandoolah having marched by Aeng, both in going to and returning from Arracan, and the Arracan Army, after its defeat, was

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<sup>1</sup> *Historical Sketch of the Burmese War*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> An old town on the route from Sembew Ghewn in Burma to An in Arakan.—*Thornton's Gazetteer*, p. 192.

so totally dispersed, that the men who composed it, striking into the mountains, followed no regular track, but took their chance of going straight over the hills."<sup>1</sup>

The Sandoway district<sup>2</sup> occupies the southernmost corner of the Arakan Division and merges into the Bassein district of Lower Burma. Within this district lies the Taungup Pass<sup>3</sup>, which runs across the Arakan Yoma Range and connects Taungup (in the Sandoway district) with Padaung in the Prome district of Lower Burma. In 1826 this Pass was reported by Lieutenant Browne to be impracticable for troops and also for laden cattle. After the Second Anglo-Burmese War Lord Dalhousie constructed a good military road across this Pass.

The whole of the Arakan Division is separated from Burma proper by the Arakan Yoma Range, which is connected with the Chin Hills and the Lushai Hills. The Range is not very high; the loftiest ridges vary from 4,000 feet to 5,000 feet. The two principal passes<sup>4</sup> over this Range have been mentioned above.

For many centuries Arakan had been an independent Kingdom, and its cultural<sup>5</sup> relations with Bengal

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<sup>1</sup> *Government Gazette*, May 22, 1826.

<sup>2</sup> This district used to grow the best tobacco in Burma. See Fyche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of this pass see Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Thornton's *Gazetteer* (p. 552) mentions the Kyoungtha pass in the Pegu district, on the route over the Arakan Yoma Mountains, connecting the coast of the Bay of Bengal with the interior of Pegu. The crest of the pass is 20 miles N.N.W. of Bassein.

<sup>5</sup> See E. Huq and A. Karim, *Bengali Literature in the Court of Arakan* (in Bengali).

had been very intimate. The 'Chandra' Kings who ruled in Arakan from 788 A.D. to 957 A.D. were probably related to the 'Chandra' Kings of Vikrampur in Eastern Bengal (*circa* 950—1050 A.D.)<sup>1</sup>. The reign of Minhti (1279—?1374) witnessed an unsuccessful naval raid into Arakan from Bengal<sup>2</sup>. Naramekhla, King of Arakan (1404—1434), was expelled from his Kingdom by the Burmese; he found shelter in the court of the Muslim ruler of Gaur, and was reinstated on his throne by an army sent from Bengal. Henceforth the Buddhist rulers of Arakan used Muslim designations in addition to their own names and even issued medallions bearing the *kalima* (the Islamic confession of faith) in Persian script. Naramekhla's successor, Ali Khan (1434—1459), annexed Ramu, now in the Chittagong district. His successor, Kalima Shah (1459—1482), occupied Chittagong in 1459. This important port remained under Arakanese control till its recovery by Shayista Khan<sup>3</sup>, *Subadar* of Bengal in Aurangzib's reign, in 1666.

The Arakanese were known in Bengal as *Mags*. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the *Mags*, frequently aided by *Feringhi* or Portuguese adventurers, plundered and devastated<sup>4</sup> large parts of southern and eastern Bengal, specially the modern districts of Backergunge<sup>5</sup>, Noakhali (including the

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<sup>1</sup> H. C. Ray, *Dynastic History of Northern India*, Vol. I, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> See J. N. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, Vol. III, pp. 220-245.

<sup>4</sup> See *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1907.

<sup>5</sup> In Rennell's map of Bengal, published in 1794, the area



island of Sandwip), Dacca and Khulna. Even the distant district of Murshidabad did not escape the terror created by the *Mags*, whose swift boats easily ran into any river or creek in the Bengal delta. The fury of the raids continued almost unabated during the first half of the eighteenth century. In a single month (February, 1727) the *Mags* carried off 1,800 captives—men, women and children—from the southern parts of Bengal'. During the administration of Warren Hastings the East India Company had to take defensive measures for the protection of the people of Bengal. "Efforts were made to repress them (*i.e.*, the *Mags*) by means of the troops at Dacca and Chittagong, with the assistance of armed boats from Dacca, and a cruizer on the coast of Arakan. The government also proposed a plan for making reprisals on the country of the Muggs, in the hope that, at all events, it would deter them for a time from repeating their invasion"<sup>2</sup>.

With Burma the political relations of Arakan had been spasmodic. Under the Pagan dynasty (1044-1287 A.D.) the Burmese established their suzerainty over the northern portion of Arakan, but the south remained independent. During the period 1374-1430 A.D. the Burmese and the Talaings frequently interfered in the affairs of Arakan. From 1430 to 1784 there was not 'even the pretence of Burmese overlordship'. Then followed the conquest of Arakan by the Burmese King

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south of Backergunge is marked: "Deserted on account of the ravages of the Mugs."

<sup>1</sup> *Twenty-four Parganas Gazetteer*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Auber, *Rise and Progress of the British Power in India*, Vol. I, p. 568.

Bo-daw-pa-ya and its incorporation in the Burmese Empire.

Burma is a vast country, covering a superficial area of about 237,000 square miles. Its extreme length is about 1,200 miles and its extreme width is about 500 miles. Its north-western frontiers march with Assam, Manipur, the Lushai Hills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. With Upper Burma (the Minbu, Meiktila, Sagaing and Mandalay Divisions) we are not concerned in this volume. In this region the preponderating element of the population is Burmese. It has always been the political centre of the Burmese Empire<sup>1</sup>. Most of the old Burmese capitals—Pagan, Sagaing, Ava, Shwebo, Amarapura, and Mandalay<sup>2</sup>—are situated within its limits.

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<sup>1</sup> "The three towns of Ava, Amarapura, and Sakaing, with the districts annexed to them, contain an area of 288 square miles, and constitute by far the best cultivated and most populous portion of the empire. It is nearly exempt from taxation, being favoured, through ancient and established usage, at the expense of the rest of the country. It contains, according to the public registers, 50,600 houses, and each house is estimated to have seven inhabitants, which makes their total population only 3,54,200. Ava itself certainly does not contain 30,000 inhabitants, and in population, wealth, industry, and trade, is greatly below the capital of Siam."—*Government Gazette*, March 1, 1827.

<sup>2</sup> For details about these cities, see V. C. Scott O'Connor, *Mandalay and Other Cities of Burma*.

The city of Ava (Burmese *Inwa*) was built on a triangular island artificially formed by a channel which was dug from the Myitnge river to the Irrawaddy. It was founded by King Thadominpaya in the middle of the fourteenth century. In 1752 it was captured and burnt to the ground by the Talaings. Alaung-pa-ya established his capital at Shwebo. Ava became capital again under Hsin-byu-shin in 1765, but it was deserted

# CAPITALS OF BURMA UNDER THE ALUNGPAYA DYNASTY

ASSAM HILLS

N. Shan States

SHWEBO

SAGAING

Ancient  
Burmese Capital

Irrawaddy River

MANDALAY

Former  
Burmese Capital

Road to  
Rangoon

AMARAPURA

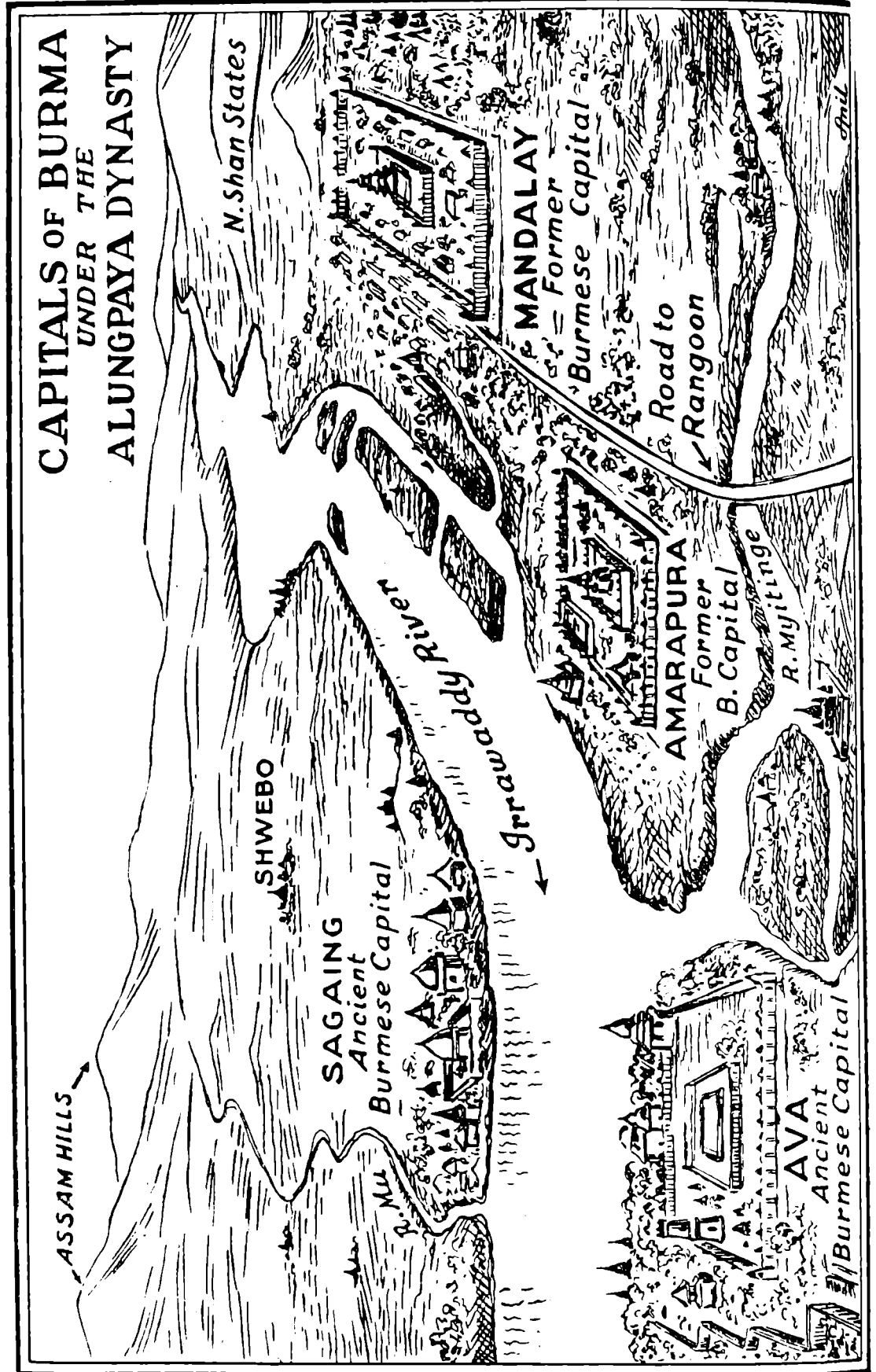
Former  
B. Capital

R. Myittha

AVA

Ancient  
Burmese Capital

April



Lower Burma may be divided into two natural divisions: the Coast (the Arakan Division and the Thaton, Amherst, Tavoy and Mergui districts) and the Delta (the districts of Bassein, Pyapon, Myaungmya, Maubin, Hanthawaddy, and Pegu). The costal region is intersected by numerous hill ranges. The population is predominantly non-Burmese: Arakanese, Bengalis, Chins, Karens, Taungthus, Talaings or Mons, Siamese, Salons and Tavoyans constitute the principal sections. The Delta is a large plain with a dense population. With it are intimately connected the districts of Thayetmyo, Henzada, Tharrawaddy, Prome, and Toungoo, which are generally described as 'sub-deltaic'.

The general course of the hills and rivers of Burma is from north to south. To the east of the Irrawaddy lies the Arakan Yoma Range, which we have already noticed. To the west of the Irrawaddy lies the Pegu Yoma Range, which rises in the Yamethin district in Central Burma, separates the valleys of the Irrawaddy and the Sittang, and branches out in the Delta into several low hills. On the east of the Salween a mass of hills lying to the east of Karenni descends southward along the Amherst, Tavoy and Mergui districts to the extreme southern limit of the Tenasserim

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by Bo-daw-pa-ya in 1783. It became capital again under Ba-gyi-daw (1822-1837). Its ruins may still be seen in Sagaing district, Upper Burma. The city of Amarapura (in Mandalay district, Upper Burma) was founded in 1783 by Bo-daw-pa-ya. It was deserted by Ba-gyi-daw in 1822, but it became capital of Tharrawaddy in 1837. It was finally abandoned by Mindon in 1857 on the foundation of Mandalay.

Division. With other mountains in Northern and Eastern Burma we are not concerned in this volume.

The most important river of Burma is, of course, the Irrawaddy, which rises about 30 miles above the town of Myitkyina, flows southward for 900 miles, and falls through a multiplicity of mouths into the Bay of Bengal between Rangoon and Cape Negrais. Next in importance is the Salween, lying to the east of the Irrawaddy, which empties itself into the Gulf of Martaban near Moulmein. About midway between the valleys of these two great rivers flows the Sittang, which falls into the Gulf of Martaban at a point about equidistant from Rangoon and Moulmein. One of the principal tributaries of the Irrawaddy is the Chindwin, the most prominent river of north-western Burma.

The Burmese, a people of Mongoloid origin, probably began their migration into Burma from the north-east in the ninth century. They absorbed the original inhabitants of the country, the Pyu, whose centre was the town of Hmawza, near Prome. The Burmese established a powerful Kingdom with the city of Pagan as its capital. A-naw-ra-hta (1044-1077), the first great King of Burma, conquered Lower Burma and imposed his suzerainty on the Shan States in the east and Arakan in the west. The Burmese thus came into contact with the sea, and, through it, with the outside world. The Kingdom of Pagan fell in the thirteenth century as a result of Tartar invasions. The invasions of the Shans had already begun. Until the sixteenth century Burma remained parcelled out among a number of minor Shan chieftains, who regularly sent tribute to the Tartar Emperors of China.

Burmese power was revived, and unity of the country restored, in the sixteenth century by Ta-bin-shwe-hti. During the first half of the eighteenth century the Burmese Government became so weak that the Siamese and the Manipuris raided different parts of Burma. In 1740 the Talaings revolted and brought the whole of the Delta and the country as far north as Prome and Toungoo under their control. With the help of Dutch and Portuguese merchants they took the Burmese capital (Ava) and burnt it to the ground in 1752.

At this crisis the Burmese found a saviour in an obscure village headman named A-laung-pa-ya, who claimed descent from the ancient Royal house of Pagan, and lived at Shwebo (north-west from Ava, between the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers). His bold leadership attracted many adventurers. His victories were swift and decisive. He occupied Ava in 1753 and Prome in 1755. In May, 1755, he occupied the village where stood the great Shwe Dagon Pagoda and gave it a new name—Yankon, later corrupted into Rangoon<sup>1</sup>. Syriam

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<sup>1</sup> *Yan* (victory), *Kon* (accomplished). The name indicated A-laung-pa-ya's complete victory over the Crown Prince of Pegu and his famous general, Da-la-ban. The great modern city was then little more than a collection of monasteries and huts near the Shwe Dagon Pagoda. Dala, on the other side of the river, was the commercial part of the town. The place was known as Dagon, and is so referred to by the Portuguese. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the town had ceased to be a collection of bamboo huts on a marshy flat, but it stretched only a little more than 1,000 yards along the river front, and was about 600 yards wide at its broadest part. The population did not probably reach 20,000. (See Fytche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, p. 86, and also Scott, *Burma*, pp. 20-21). The growth of the port was obstructed by the tyranny of the local officers. Thus, in 1812

was captured in July, 1756, and Pegu in May, 1757. He invaded Manipur and in 1759 occupied Imphal for a short time. Attempts were also made for the conquest of Siam<sup>1</sup>; but for his premature death (1760) the resistance of the Siamese might have been less successful.

The reign of A-laung-pa-ya really marks a new era in the history of Burma. He occupied the throne for about seven years, but within this brief period he succeeded in establishing a dynasty which was to last a hundred and thirty years and more. He crushed the Talaings so successfully—the Delta remained in an almost depopulated condition for a century after him—that they never again became a serious political problem to the rulers of Burma. His strong arms imposed unity and almost obliterated the old tradition of anarchy. The Manipuris and the Siamese were taught lessons which they were not likely to forget easily. Under him Burma became strong, self-confident, ambitious. Unfortunately, expansion rather than consolidation became the key-note of Burmese history under his less able successors; they recklessly slipped into a career of conquest which led to disasters.

Although the Italian traveller Nicolo Conti visited

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the Governor of Rangoon realised a large fine from a Muslim merchant for the offence of saying that the ex-Governor might be reinstated in his office.

For the history of Rangoon, see B. R. Pearn, *History of Rangoon*.

<sup>1</sup> In the following pages many references will be found to Burmese relations with Siam. The subject is interesting and deserves to be studied in detail, but it cannot be treated at length in the present volume, which is not concerned with the internal history of Burma.

Pegu as early as 1435 and Portuguese mercenaries took part in Burmese wars in the sixteenth century, yet Burma attracted European merchants in large numbers only in the seventeenth century. The English, French and Dutch merchants established trading posts at Syriam, which was then the major port of Burma. In 1743 the English withdrew their factory from Syriam; ten years later they established a new factory in the island of Negrais. When A-laung-pa-ya captured Syriam, French<sup>1</sup> and English ships at the port gave aid to the Talaings. A-laung-pa-ya sent a mission to the British factory at Bassein, asking for artillery; he received a cannon and some other presents. After the fall of Syriam A-laung-pa-ya recognised the British occupation of Negrais by a formal treaty (1757). The increasing political complications in India led to the evacuation of the island in May, 1759. In October, 1759, a few servants of the Company were sent to Negrais to retain a lien on the island, but they were treacherously murdered by the Burmese, as a result of accusations made by the French that the English were secretly arming the Talaings<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Dupleix treated Syriam as his chief ship-building centre, for it was out of the way of the English, and it provided cheap labour and material. Even after the dissolution of the French ambition of empire-building in India (Treaty of Paris, 1763) the French enjoyed greater shipping and commercial concessions in Burma. For instance, in 1769 they secured the right of flying their flag at Rangoon. See Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 353. For the conquest of Syriam by A-laung-pa-ya, see Harvey, *History of Burma*, pp. 229-232.

<sup>2</sup> For details, see Hall, "Tragedy of Negrais", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol. XXI.



Like the Timurid dynasty of India the A-laung-pa-ya dynasty of Burma had no recognised law of succession. It was a fundamental weakness which not unoften threatened to shatter the Monarchy. Disputed successions became a normal feature of political life, and the successful claimant could only consolidate his authority by killing all actual and potential rivals<sup>1</sup>. A-laung-pa-ya probably wanted each of his sons to reign in turn in preference to succession by primogeniture. But his death was followed by a struggle, in which his eldest son's claim was disputed by his second son and the former's uncle. Victory favoured the eldest son, Naung-daw-gyi, who ascended the throne and mercifully spared the lives of his unsuccessful rivals. He reigned for three years only (1760-1763) and was succeeded by the brother who had challenged his claim to his father's throne.

The massacre of the Company's servants at Negrais could not be allowed to be forgotten without protest: but in India the struggle against the French<sup>2</sup> monopolised the attention and resources of the British merchants, and it was impossible to take effective

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<sup>1</sup> For the horrible custom known as "Massacre of the Kinsmen", which was sometimes a political necessity, see Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 338, and *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. VI, p. 435.

<sup>2</sup> Lally attacked Madras in 1758, was defeated by Eyre Coote at Wandiwash in 1760, and capitulated at Pondicherry in January, 1761. In Bengal, Clive repulsed the invasion of the Shahzada (later Emperor Shah Alam II) and defeated the Dutch at Biderra in 1759. After his departure from India (February, 1760) the Shahzada and the Marathas renewed their invasions, Mir Jafar was deposed and Mir Qasim was made Nawab of Bengal.

measures for restoring lost prestige in Burma. A half-hearted attempt was, however, made to remind His Burman Majesty of his responsibility for the massacre and to re-establish commercial relations with his country. In September, 1760, Naung-daw-gyi was visited by a British envoy named Captain Alves, who brought letters to the King from Holwell, Governor of Bengal, and Pigot, Governor of Madras. Pigot expected that the authors of the massacre would be punished, but his chief request was that the English prisoners should be liberated and that British property should be restored<sup>1</sup>. The King expressed his surprise how "the Governor of Madras"<sup>2</sup> . . . could have the face to demand any satisfaction, which he would not give, for . . . he looked on all that were killed at Negrais, whether guilty or innocent, as born to die there"<sup>3</sup>. Later on he relented, released the half dozen English captives, mostly survivors of the massacre, gave full liberty to trade, and signified his willingness to grant commercial sites anywhere in return for arms and ammunition. It appeared, however, that trade was no longer to be duty free, as under the treaty of 1757, and that the head-quarters of the Company must be transferred from Negrais to Bassein. The King wanted

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<sup>1</sup> Sir J. G. Scott says, "It is impossible to believe that the Honourable Company was not conscious that there were grounds for the assertion that its agents had supplied the Talaings with arms; otherwise the mild terms of the letters were disconcerting enough to be humiliating." (*Burma from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, p. 167).

<sup>2</sup> In those days the Company's factories in Burma lay within the jurisdiction of the Madras Presidency.

<sup>3</sup> Alves' report, quoted in Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 244.

to keep the English at a place where he could easily control them; Negrais was too remote and beyond his effective authority. Bassein, however, was too far from the sea<sup>1</sup> to be a convenient centre for the English merchants. They preferred Rangoon. According to Bayfield<sup>2</sup>, this mission "left us in a worse condition than before, tended to tarnish the respectability of our name, and plainly shewed the utter insecurity of both British persons and property in Burmah."

The reign of the next King, Hsin-byu-shin (1763-1776), was marked by military exploits. He invaded Siam and Manipur, annexed a portion of the Shan States, and successfully repelled a serious Chinese invasion<sup>3</sup>. During his reign the English got an opportunity to establish a factory at Rangoon, but it was not utilised. "Official relations with the Burmese government almost ceased for thirty-five years after the Negrais massacre, and the trade with Burma was left entirely in the hands of private adventurers"<sup>4</sup>.

Hsin-byu-shin was succeeded by his son, Singu Min (1776-1782), who lost his life in a palace revolution. The next King, Bo-daw-pa-ya (1782-1819), was cruel, strong and ambitious. Father Sangermano, an Italian Catholic missionary who lived in Burma during the greater part of his reign (1783-1806), observed<sup>5</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> About 75 miles.

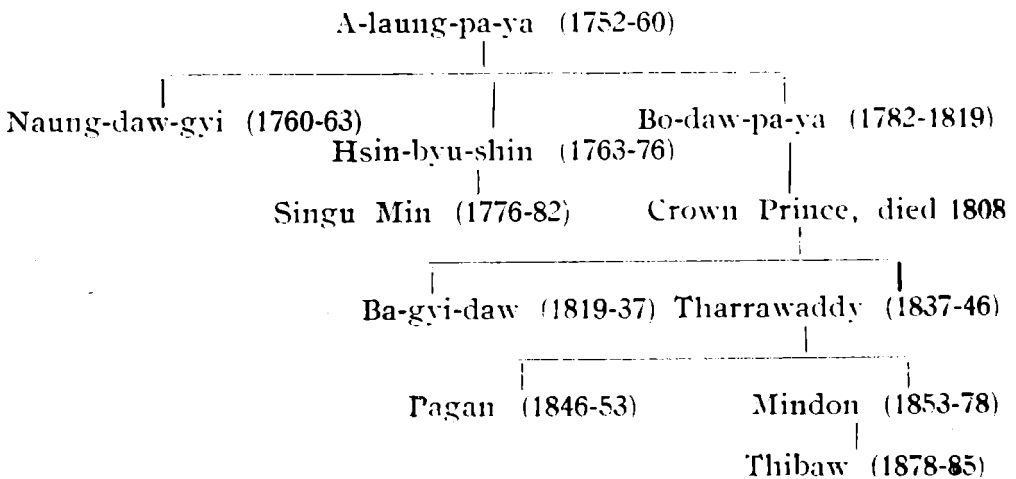
<sup>2</sup> *Historical Review of the Political Relations between India and Ava*, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> See Luce, "Chinese Invasions of Burma," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol. XV.

<sup>4</sup> Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>5</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 61.

“Although despotism in its worst sense constitutes, as it were, the very essence of the Burmese monarchy, so that to be called its King is equivalent to being called its tyrant; still has Badonsachen, the despot who for the last twenty-seven years has governed this kingdom, so far outstripped his predecessors in barbarity and pride, that whoso but hears of it must shudder with horror. His very countenance is the very index of a mind, ferocious and inhuman in the highest degree . . . Immense is the number of those whom he has sacrificed to his ambition, upon the most trivial offences: and it would not be an exaggeration to assert, that, during his reign, more victims have fallen by the hand of the executioner than by the sword of the common enemy. To this atrocious cruelty he has united a pride at once intolerable and impious. The good fortune which has attended him in discovering and defeating the numerous conspiracies which have been formed against him, has inspired him with the idea that he is something more than mortal, and that this privilege has been granted him on account of his



numerous good works<sup>1</sup>. Hence has he, for some years, laid aside the title of King, and assumed that of Pondoghi, which signifies, great and exalted virtue: nor was he content with this, for but a few years since he thought to make himself a God”<sup>2</sup>.

A modern historian of Burma describes Bo-daw-pa-ya as ‘the most powerful monarch who ever ruled in Burma’, with the possible exception of Bayinnaung (1551—1581), and adds, “He kept his throne for thirty-seven years because he was a masterful man who never hesitated to punish”<sup>3</sup>. During his reign the Burmese conquered Arakan, Manipur and the Brahmaputra Valley, but he was not a great leader of men like his father. The humiliating failure of his great expedition to Siam in 1785-86 and his own cowardly retreat for personal safety<sup>4</sup> revealed the difference between Alaung-pa-ya and his son. The unexampled military triumphs won by the Burmese under the banner of Bo-daw-pa-ya were really the outward expression of that national enthusiasm which the great founder of the dynasty had kindled within his brief reign of seven years. It has been truly said that “the exploits of

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<sup>1</sup> Bo-daw-pa-ya changed his room and his bed daily, for he could not trust any body. On his accession he enforced the “Massacre of the Kinsmen”.

<sup>2</sup> The practice of worshipping rulers as Buddhas was not unknown in Burma. Bo-daw-pa-ya’s claim was not accepted by the clergy. Compare the custom of the deification of rulers in ancient India. See H. C. Ray Chaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, pp. 433-434.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey, *History of Burma*, pp. 271, 293.

<sup>4</sup> See Harvey, *History of Burma*, pp. 270-271.

A-laung-pa-ya were no mere flash in the pan but were broad-based on the energy of the race as a whole".

One of the most interesting features of Bo-daw-pa-ya's character was his curiosity in matters of religion. We have referred to his claim to be worshipped as a Buddha—a claim which the obstinacy of the priests compelled him to give up. Like a true Buddhist he built pagodas (the great Mingun pagoda in Sagaing district was built by him in 1790-97) and adored white elephants. The greatest of all the spoil brought by the victors from Arakan was the celebrated Mahamuni image,<sup>2</sup> which was enshrined in a great pagoda. He received religious missions from Ceylon. He executed Burmese heretics. But metaphysical questions troubled him, and he took occasional interest in Islam as well as in Christianity. He extended his protection to Judson, who went to Burma in July, 1813, and founded the American Baptist Mission.<sup>3</sup> Judson had been preceded by two English Baptists of Serampore (near Calcutta)—James Chater and Felix Carey.<sup>4</sup> The work

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup> See Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 313.

<sup>3</sup> For details about Judson's wonderful work in Burma, see Mrs. Judson's *An Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire* (published in 1823), and Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labour of Judson*. A detailed treatment of his career does not fall within the scope of the present volume.

<sup>4</sup> As the East India Company disapproved of missionary activity in India, the English Baptists of Serampore wanted to create a new field of activity in Burma. After a short visit to Rangoon two of their members brought an encouraging report. So James Chater and Felix Carey, son of William Carey, the great missionary who founded the Serampore College, were sent to found a mission in Burma. They arrived at Rangoon in

of the missionaries was not interfered with because, as Judson observed, they were 'considered in no other light than as ministers to the English' who lived in Burma. Any ostentatious display of proselytising zeal would probably have resulted in disaster. It is also probable that the missionaries would not have been allowed to establish their centres in the heart of the country. Captain Canning thought that they would not be permitted to settle outside Rangoon.

Details of civil administration did not always escape the proud King's notice. General revenue inquests were undertaken twice during his reign—in 1784 and in 1803. Figures regarding population and revenue were collected from village headmen all over the country. A modern British administrator with long experience in Burma says, "There is no reason to doubt that the figures were roughly accurate and gave the central government a much better idea of the country's resources than it had ever had since 1638, when King Thalun had held a similar inquest."<sup>1</sup> Bo-daw-pa-ya tried to secure continuity in administration by issuing a decree in connection with the inquest of 1784 that legal claims should not be affected by dynastic changes. It was a wise measure, for in Burma

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1807. In 1811 Carey alone was left to carry on the work. He entered the service of the Burmese Government and in 1814 abandoned the mission. See Pearn, "Felix Carey and the English Baptist Mission in Burma", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol. XXVIII.

<sup>1</sup> Harvey, *History of Burma*, pp. 269-270. Sir J. G. Scott says that Bo-daw-pa-ya's census 'proved to be very useful' to British officers after 1886. (*Burma from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, p. 188).

'every change of dynasty, nay even a change of king, cancelled existing rights'. Obviously this strange system was unfavourable to administrative continuity and security of private property.

Bo-daw-pa-ya was a natural product of the Burmese system of government. "I suppose", says Father Sangermano,<sup>1</sup> "that there is not in the whole world a monarch so despotic as the Burmese Emperor. He is considered, by himself and others, the absolute lord of the lives, properties and personal services of his subjects<sup>2</sup> ; he exalts and depresses, confers and takes

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<sup>1</sup> For the internal condition of Burma during Bo-daw-pa-ya's reign we may rely on the works of Sangermano, Symes and Cox, and also on the unpublished reports of Canning. Supplementary information may also be collected from the works of those who wrote on the basis of their experience in the First Anglo-Burmese War—for instance, Snodgrass, Doveton, Havelock, Robertson, Trant, Crawford. Sangermano's account is more valuable from the historical point of view than the statements of any of these writers, for during his long residence in Burma the Italian missionary had greater opportunities to come into contact with different aspects of Burmese life.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Alexander Hamilton, who visited Burma in 1709, makes the following observations on King Sane's titles: "His subjects, if they may be so called, treat him with fulsome adulation. When they speak or write to him they call him their god (or in their language Kiack), and in his letters to foreign princes, he assumes the title of king of kings, to whom all other kings ought to be subject, as being near kinsman and friend to all the gods in heaven and on earth, and by their friendship to him all animals are fed and preserved, and the seasons of the year are regularly kept: the sun is his brother, and the moon and stars are his near relations, Lord over the floods and cbbing of the sea; and after all his lofty epithets and hyperboles, he descends to be king of the white elephant, and of twenty-four white somereroes or umbrellas." See Hall, *Early English Intercourse with Burma*, p. 255.



away honour and rank ; and, without any process of law, can put to death, not only criminals guilty of capital offences, but any individual who happens to incur his displeasure. It is here a perilous thing for a person to become distinguished for wealth and possessions ; for the day may easily come when he will be charged with some supposed crime, and so put to death, in order that his property may be confiscated. Every subject is the Emperor's born slave ; and when he calls any one his slave he thinks thereby to do him honour. . . . Hence also he considers himself entitled to employ his subjects in any work or service, without salary or pay, and if he makes them any recompense, it is done, not from a sense of justice, but as an act of bounty. Their goods likewise, and even their persons are reputed his property. . . . To the King it belongs to declare war or to conclude peace ; and he may in any moment call upon the whole population of his empire to enlist themselves in his army, and can impose upon them at pleasure any labour or service”<sup>1</sup>.

Under such circumstances the ruler is naturally corrupted and debased by the absolute power which he exercises almost without any external restraint. Nothing but the King's voluntary respect for Buddhist rules and precepts, and the fear of insurrection, in addition to the difficulty of enforcing the King's will in all parts of the Kingdom, kept excesses within tolerable limits. General Fytche, who retired as Chief Commissioner of British Burma in 1871 after a long and brilliant career in that country, wrote in 1878,

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<sup>1</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, pp. 60-61.

“ . . . whilst the King is an absolute despot, there are popular forms of government which at some remote period may have exercised a wholesome check upon the sovereign’s authority, although they have long since become wholly subservient to his will”<sup>1</sup>. The King of Burma had no prime minister. He had two councils—a public council known as the *Hluttaw*,<sup>2</sup> and a privy council known as the *Byedaik*. The former was composed of four ministers or *Wungyis*. Each of them had an assistant or *Wunduk*, who sat in the *Hluttaw* but did not speak or vote. Sangermano’s description of the *Hluttaw* is as follows: “Its sittings are held in a spacious hall or portico situated within the precincts of the palace itself. All orders or favours emanating from the Emperor, and even all capital sentences must pass through this tribunal ; not because it has power to modify them, but in order to be registered, and speedily put into execution. Its grants and commands are written upon palm-leaves, in a most concise style ; and indeed, the more concise this is, the more forcible and efficacious the sentence is considered. These leaves are cut at the ends, so as to bear the figure of a sabre, probably to symbolize the respect and dread with which the sentence of this tribunal should be received”<sup>3</sup>. In Sangermano’s time the *Wungyis* were ‘chosen by the sovereign from the

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<sup>1</sup> *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> See Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 329. Taw Sein Ko, *Selections from the Records of the Hluttaw*, gives the best available information about the *Hluttaw*, but the records relate mainly to the reign of Thibaw.

<sup>3</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 66.

oldest and most experienced Mandarins.' They had 'no power to counsel or direct'; they were 'considered as the blind executors' of the King's commands. In King Mindon's reign they sometimes acted in their individual capacity, but they exercised supreme power under the King in their collective capacity.<sup>1</sup> We do not know whether that was the system under Bo-daw-pa-ya as well.

The *Byedaik* was also composed of four members or *Atwinwuns*, who were the private advisers of the King. Sangermano says, "They have the superintendence of the royal palace, and are the privy counsellors of the Emperor; and though inferior to the Vunghi in authority, yet by their vicinity to his person they frequently procure advancement to places of great dignity and influence"<sup>2</sup>. Fytche observes, "These two councils appear as relics of a constitution, which has long lost all real power. The members of both are mere nominees of the King; they are the creatures of his will, the instruments by which his orders are carried out. Occasionally he may listen to their advice; but they exercise nothing of the influence which attends a hereditary or elective body; and their authority, excepting in matters of detail, is little better than a

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<sup>1</sup> Fytche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 66. "It would seem that as far as prestige and nominal power were concerned, the Hlutdaw had the higher authority, but probably the *Byedaik*, composed as it was of officials who had important financial functions and special influence in the palace, was a more potent factor in shaping the royal decisions." See Hall, *Early English Intercourse with Burma*, pp. 171-173.

sham"<sup>1</sup>. The position of the councils was probably not different in Bo-daw-pa-ya's reign.

Every Burmese sovereign had many queens and concubines.<sup>2</sup> Sangermano says, "As the reigning sovereign has had more than a hundred children<sup>3</sup> by numerous wives and concubines, they have swallowed up all the riches of the land ; the cities, villages and lakes have been almost all given them for their maintenance ; and the best situations, as of Vunghi of the Lutto (*i.e.*, *Hluttaw*), have been distributed among them." The ever-increasing Royal family not only 'swallowed up all the riches of the land' ; one of the worst results of Royal polygamy was the danger of disputed succession. As we have said, the rule of primogeniture was not recognised ; the King could appoint whom he pleased as successor. Whether a King appointed a successor or not, his death was in many cases followed by dissensions among the different claimants to the throne. Bo-daw-pa-ya himself came to the throne as a result of family dissensions ; but he was strong enough to leave his crown peacefully to his grandson, Ba-gyi-daw, in whose reign the A-laung-pa-ya

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<sup>1</sup> *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> "Among the innumerable wives and concubines whom he keeps, four are raised to the rank of queen, taking their titles from the four cardinal points, according to the quarter of the palace which they occupy."—Sangermano. The King was free to 'select for his concubine any female that may chance to please his eye', but 'no married woman can be seized for the king.' (Sangermano, *Description of the Burmese Empire*, pp. 57, 60).

<sup>3</sup> At the time of his death Bo-daw-pa-ya left 122 children and 208 grandchildren.

dynasty first came into disastrous contact with the British Empire in the west.

The Burmese Empire was divided into provinces,<sup>1</sup> the provinces into districts, the districts into townships, and the townships into hamlets or villages. The Burmese Government paid no fixed salaries. Ministers, queens, concubines, officers and favourites of the King were supported by the grant of a province, or a township, or some villages, and they were known by the name of *Myosa* (or 'eater of the revenue'). The actual administration of the territory was carried on by a local officer, who paid a fixed sum every year either to this absentee assignee or direct to the Royal treasury. "The position of the head of the township was thus in direct antagonism to the interests of the people . . . he was responsible for the fixed yearly revenue, but, as he received no salary, he was compelled to squeeze as much as he could out of the people, for the support of himself and his followers." The fixed sum which he had to pay, either to the *Myosa* or to the Royal treasury, was divided out amongst villages within his jurisdiction. He also realised many other imposts, such as a tax in kind on every plough, transit dues, dues on sale of cattle, fees on law suits, fines for crimes, etc. "Added to all these there were extraordinary contributions to the Crown called for on public emergencies, the amount being fixed by the King's Govern-

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<sup>1</sup> For provincial administration in Burma, see Sangermano, *Description of the Burmese Empire*, pp. 67-68; Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 199-201; Fytche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, pp. 128-130, 241-245; *British Burma Gazetteer*, Vol. I, pp. 446-447.

ment at the capital, as for instance in 1798, when a call of  $33\frac{1}{3}$  *ticals* of silver was made from every house and this took two years to collect and produced about Rs. 6,000,000." Very little effective control was exercised by the Provincial Governors over the heads of townships, who possessed the power of the sword and maintained large bodies of armed retainers.

There was, however, no Feudalism in Burma. Offices were not hereditary. Fytche says, ". . . . any governor whatever, whether of a province or a township, might be appointed or removed at the pleasure of the King. But occasional presents to a queen, minister, or favourite generally sufficed to smooth down any difficulty that might arise." Every local head carried on official correspondence with the *Hluttaw*. There was a supplementary system of espionage which kept a strict surveillance over local administration.

In Burma there was no distinction between civil and military services. "Treasurers and judges", says Fytche, "are expected to take the command of armies." In the days of Bo-daw-pa-ya criminal cases were heard by the local governors, but in civil cases the parties were at liberty to select their own judges. Sangermano says, ". . . . when an individual is at difference with another, or has claims upon him for a debt, or for satisfaction of an injury, he goes to some Mandarin, whom he believes likely to favour him, and procures from him a summons against his adversary. It may be easily conceived to what injustice and inconvenience this practice must necessarily lead"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 68.

Capital punishment was very common in Burma.<sup>1</sup> In the days of Bo-daw-pa-ya it was a capital offence to drink wine<sup>2</sup>, to smoke opium, or to kill any large animal, as an ox or a buffalo. Capital punishment was, however, frequently 'commuted, through interest or bribery, for a term of imprisonment'; but highway robbery, accompanied with murder, was never forgiven. Criminals condemned to death were sometimes pardoned on consideration of their acting as executioners for life<sup>3</sup>. Sangermano says, "Although the crime of treason, and sometimes, in order to inspire terror, ordinary crimes are punished in a cruel manner<sup>4</sup>, the ordinary means of putting to death is by decapitation." Torture was frequently inflicted upon suspected persons to extort confession; for, says Sangermano, "it is the custom not to execute any one unless he acknowledge his crime". He adds, "I have

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<sup>1</sup> See Harvey, *History of Burma*, pp. 353-354, 358.

<sup>2</sup> The cruelty of the law did not succeed in abolishing drinking. In 1797 Cox (*Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire*, p. 250) found the young nobles at Amarapura anxious to produce liquor and intoxicating drugs at any price. In 1825 British officers found drinking fairly prevalent in Burma. Speaking of Burmese commanders Snodgrass observes, ". . . . either from taste, or respect to the orders of the King, which forbid the use of wine and spirituous liquors, they drank sparingly. . . . It may be questioned, whether or not their lordships would have been so abstemious in private, as the lower orders are so excessively fond of liquor of every description, that they never hesitate, when in their power, to disobey an order, the penalty of which is death." (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 223).

<sup>3</sup> For their position see Fytche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, pp. 244-245.

<sup>4</sup> Bo-daw-pa-ya sometimes compelled drinkers to drink boiling lead.

no doubt but many, unable to bear the atrocity of these torments, have, in spite of their innocence, pronounced themselves guilty." When definite evidence was not available, ordeal was resorted to<sup>1</sup>. The punishment of a culprit often involved all the members of his family as well as his relatives and dependants<sup>2</sup>. A British officer wrote in 1794, "The Burmah laws . . . are like the laws of Draco wrote in blood"<sup>3</sup>.

Regarding the system of taxation in the Burmese Empire Sangermano observes, "The fixed revenues of the Burmese Emperor consist of a duty of ten per cent. on all merchandise brought by foreigners into Rangoon, or any others of the ports of Pegu; of the produce of the mines of silver, amber and rubies; of certain contributions in rice, which several places are obliged to furnish for the use of the palace; and of the presents which on stated days are made by the Mandarins to the Emperor. These must not however be confounded with the presents, which are always necessary when any favour is asked for, as in this country nothing is ever obtained without them. But though the Burmese monarch has no fixed revenues besides these, still his means are far from being limited to them alone. For, as he considers the property of his subjects as in reality belonging to himself, he there-

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<sup>1</sup> Sangermano, *Description of the Burmese Empire*, pp. 38-72. Symes (*An Account of an Embassy*, p. 467) and Cox (*Journal of a Residence*, p. 14) refer to ordeals.

<sup>2</sup> Fyche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, pp. 243-244.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., April 7, 1794, No. 37.



fore extracts from them anything he pleases."<sup>1</sup> The priest then gives 'a short account of the oppressions, exactions, and injustices that the people are obliged to suffer at the hands of the King and his ministers.'<sup>2</sup>

Every Burmese subject was bound to render military service whenever he received the King's command. Sangermano says, "When the Emperor orders any military expedition, either into hostile countries, or against rebels, he fixes at the same time the number" of soldiers who are to march, and nominates immediately the general who is to command them. The Lutto (*i.e.*, *Hluttaw*) in the capital, and the Ion or Rōndai (council) of the provincial cities then exact from the heads of the different places under their jurisdiction, not only the number of men ordered by the Emperor, but also a certain quantity more. Those who are not fit for war, or who possess great riches, instead of personal service, furnish a certain contribution, of which the ordinary rate is hundred dollars, and this money, received from the surplus of the men required, serves to pay the expenses of the war, and

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<sup>1</sup> "The golden court was largely tinsel. Its revenue did not exceed a few lakhs, perhaps only two, against the present eight hundred. But the people did not get off so lightly: two lakhs was the amount that reached the king, not the amount collected. In a not untypical instance, out of Rs. 27,000 collected, only Rs. 15,000 reached the treasury, the balance Rs. 12,000 sticking to the hands of the collectors."—Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey concludes that "even under the Maungpaya dynasty, which had greater driving power than any of its predecessors save perhaps Bayinnaung, the country could not put more than 30,000 in the field." See *History of Burma*, pp. 272-273, 333-334.

provide the soldiers with necessaries<sup>1</sup>. For the Emperor does not furnish anything but the arms . . . All from the age of seventeen or eighteen to that of sixty are admitted to the ranks, but those are always preferred who have wives and children to serve as sureties or hostages, and be responsible for the desertion or rebellion of their fathers or husbands.”<sup>2</sup> A British officer observed in 1794, “If any person turns his back in the day of battle, the whole of his relations, male and female, lose their lives”<sup>3</sup>.

The equipments of the Burmese soldiers were very simple: “throwing their weapon over their shoulders like a lever, they hang from one end of it a mat, a blanket to cover them at night, a provision of powder, and a little vessel for cooking, and from the other end a provision of rice, of salt, and of *nape*, a species of half-putrid half-dried fish, pickled with salt. In this guise they travel to their place of destination without transport wagons, without tents, in their ordinary dress, merely carrying on their heads a piece of red cloth, the only distinctive badge of a Burmese soldier<sup>4</sup> . . . At night they bivouac on the bare ground.

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<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 199-200) says that the local officers—he calls them ‘petty despots’—“generally take care to raise double the number of men that may be ordered, allowing one-half to buy their discharge, according to their means; and pocketing at least half the amount of what is collected for the equipment of the other.”

<sup>2</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., April 7, 1794, No. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the march of a Burmese army through Burmese territory resembled that of a hostile army. For an example, see Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 273.

without any protection from the night air, the dew, or even the rain; merely constructing a palisade of branches of trees or thorns."<sup>1</sup>

The following information is available from Chinese records relating to the invasion of Burma by the Chinese in 1765-69: "They (*i.e.*, the Burmese) had no regular army; in times of danger Shan levies were called out. There was however at Ava a standing force<sup>2</sup> of 10,000 men called the 'Invincibles'. In actual fighting the Shan levies were placed in front and the 'Invincibles' occupied the rear. Cavalry were posted on either flank to close in upon the enemy. If victory appeared doubtful the army rapidly entrenched itself under cover of a heavy fire from artillery and small arms. When the smoke cleared away the stockade was complete, and the men inside were ready

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<sup>1</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 79. Caesar Fredericke observed, "I have seene with mine eyes, that those people, and souldiers have eaten of all sorts of wilde beasts that are on the earth, whether it be very filthie or otherwise all serveth for their mouths: yea, I have seene them cate scorpions and serpents, also they feed of all kinde of herbes and grasse. So that if such a great Armie want not Water and Salt, they will maintayne themselves a long time in a bush with rootes, flowers and leaves of trees."

<sup>2</sup> The system of maintaining permanent guards on duty in the palace probably began towards the close of the twelfth century. In 1795 Symes (*An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava*, p. 318) found about 2,000 troops in the capital, of whom 700 only remained on duty at the palace. Havelock (*Memoirs of the Three Campaigns . . . in Ava*, p. 353) found about 4,000-5,000 troops in the capital. They were dressed in war jackets of 'dark glazed cloth'. Gouger (*Personal Narrative of Two Years' Imprisonment in Burmah*, p. 106) speaks of them as 'attired in a comfortable campaigning jacket of black cloth, thickly wadded and quilted with cotton'.

to defend it. These were the invariable tactics of the Burmese."<sup>1</sup>

It is probable that fire-arms came into extensive use in Burma in the sixteenth century, but till the time of A-laung-pa-ya these were used mainly by foreign mercenaries. A-laung-pa-ya used fire-arms against Manipur<sup>2</sup> in 1755. Henceforth fire-arms were frequently served out to a section of the Burmese army mobilised for war. "Early in the nineteenth century the palace arsenal had up to 35,000 muskets, but they were mostly rejects from French and English arsenals, and the powder was so bad that it would not have been passed in the armies of Indian princes."

Stockades played a very important part in Burmese warfare. As early as 1794 a British officer sent to protect the Chittagong frontier reported to the Supreme Government, "It is their custom to fortify every time they move as the ancient Romans did"<sup>3</sup>. The following description of Burmese stockades<sup>4</sup> is based on data collected during the First Anglo-Burmese War: "The unvarying element was a continuous wall, sometimes as high as twenty feet of solid timber—the stem of bamboos or trunks of saplings from the neighbouring forests. At the top ran horizontal beams which held all firmly together. At intervals were loop-

<sup>1</sup> Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> P.C., April 7, 1794, No. 37. Snodgrass (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 21) says that the Burmese 'displayed great skill and judgment' in the 'formation and defence of stockades'.

<sup>4</sup> Ritchie and Evans, *Lord Amherst*, p. 93.

holes for musketry fire. Within the enclosure, which was square or oblong, were raised platforms of earth or wood from which small guns could discharge over the paling. Inside and outside the stockade were trenches, and on the external face were often abattis formed of trunks of trees."

According to Sangermano, the Burmese soldiers were 'destitute of discipline and all knowledge of tactics', but they were kept in control by threat and punishment. He says, "Not merely the general, but even the officer of any corps which is separated from the main body, has the power of punishing with death, and this without any process, whatever soldier he may think deserving of it. The sword is always hanging over the head of the soldier, and the slightest disposition to flight, or reluctance to advance, will infallibly bring it down upon him. But what above all tends to hold the Burmese soldiery to their duty is the dreadful execution that is done on the wives and children of those who desert. The arms and legs of these miserable victims are bound together . . . and in this state they are shut up in cabins made of bamboo, and filled with combustible materials, which are then set on fire by means of a train of gunpowder."<sup>1</sup> The commander who failed to secure victory suffered 'the loss of all his honours and dignities'. If he was

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<sup>1</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 80.

Bo-daw-pa-ya had 'rendered himself detestable by these dreadful barbarities', and in or about 1805 'he put to death in this cruel manner, men, women, and children, to the number of a thousand persons'.

found guilty of 'the slightest negligence', his possessions and life were 'sacrificed to the anger of the Emperor'.

This systematic terrorism, added to the 'continual wars' waged by A-laung-pa-ya and his sons, resulted in the partial depopulation of the Irrawaddy valley. Death took a heavy toll; many of those who managed to survive migrated to Siam or to Bengal. Sangermano says, "When I first arrived in Pegu each bank of the great river Ava (*i.e.*, Irrawaddy) presented a long-continued line of habitations, but on my return, a very few villages were to be seen along the whole course of the stream." When a person of rank ventured to represent to Bo-daw-pa-ya that his wars were greatly diminishing the number of his subjects, the King coldly replied, "It would matter little if all the men were dead, for then we might enroll and arm the women."<sup>2</sup>

Burma has a long coast line, but her people did not feel the call of the sea. The capital was usually situated far away from the sea. In 1635 the capital was transferred from Pegu to Ava. The political importance of this inland city lay in its ancient traditions and in its position in the heart of the purely Burmese area in the country. From the primitive point of view it was also economically important, for the abundant rice of the Kyaukse district was easily procurable for the city. But it was far away from the

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<sup>1</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, pp. 80-81.

Bo-daw-pa-ya once ordered a general to be roasted at a slow fire. Fortunately the condemned general captured a white elephant and then received a free pardon.

<sup>2</sup> *Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 81.

centres of international trade, and European merchants found it very difficult to make the upstream journey from Syriam to Ava in order to secure the King's permission to trade in his country. Burma was almost cut off from the outside world ; her people lived in a world of their own.<sup>1</sup> The atmosphere of the capital was that of the Upper Burma villages among which it lay, and the ideas of the Kings remained in the nineteenth century what they had been in the ninth.<sup>2</sup> The intransigent elements in Burmese character and administrative policy found full play in the isolated capital. No real understanding of the intricacies of Anglo-Burmese relations is possible without a thorough appreciation of this significant geographical fact.

The magnificent Irrawaddy could not but encourage a rudimentary form of naval warfare. The Burmese used large war-boats, driven sometimes by sixty oars, which used their swivel guns with good effect. Every town on the river had to furnish a war-boat, to man it, and to keep it ready for operations. "The famous war-boats", we read in a British Intelligence Report, 1823, "are never seen out of the Irrawaddy or Rangoon river, or employed except on special missions or expeditions ordered by the King, or in carrying a royal order to cut off a head or create a governor." King Sane (1698-1714) of the Toungoo dynasty created the nucleus of a mercantile marine ; he was the first ruler of Burma to possess sea-going vessels.<sup>3</sup> The tradition

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, *Early English Intercourse with Burma*, pp. 11, 75, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 249.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, *Early English Intercourse with Burma*, pp. 201-202.

introduced by him was not extended and developed by the A-laung-pa-ya dynasty.

The following estimate of the character of the Burmese people comes from a British military officer who took part in the war of 1824-26: "It has often been objected to the Burmese, that they are addicted to pilfering, lying, and dissimulation, as well as insolent and overbearing to strangers; but the remark may be, in a great measure, confined to the numerous government functionaries and their followers . . . they are, indeed, a vile race, who exist by fraud and oppression, and who, upon numerous pretences, no matter how frivolous, are always ready to rob and plunder all who come within the influence of their authority: the poor people, on the contrary, . . . are frank and hospitable, and by no means deficient in qualities which would do honour to more civilized nations. They, very generally, can read and write; are acute, intelligent, and observing; and, although frequently impressed with high notions of their own sovereign and country, show no illiberality to strangers or foreigners who reside among them."<sup>1</sup>

Such was Burma in the zenith of her power and prosperity, virile, audacious, proud in her isolation, ignorant of the angry world outside, carelessly gliding into a conflict with mighty *Kalas* from beyond the seas.

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<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 208-209.



## CHAPTER II

### CAPTAIN WELSH IN ASSAM (1792—1794)

Lakshmi Singh died in December, 1780, and was succeeded by his son, *Jubrāj* Gaurinath Singh. He assumed the Ahom name Suhitpangpha. By his order the other princes of the Royal family were mutilated and rendered ineligible for the succession. This was probably a political necessity, but the history of his reign—a disastrous period of Ahom history—shows how cruel and vindictive he was. Captain Welsh refers again and again to his debauchery, imbecility, ignorance, caprice and cruelty<sup>1</sup>. In a contemporary British document<sup>2</sup> we read: “The Assam Raja was a very weak man on whom no dependence could be placed, he being generally intoxicated with opium, and, when sober, totally incapable of all business, which was transacted by his ministers. These men were devoid of honesty, inimical to their master and rapacious to the country”. Sir Edward Gait rightly concludes: “Gaurinath was the most incompetent, blood-thirsty, disreputable and cowardly of all the Ahom Kings.”<sup>3</sup>

Gaurinath was quite young at the time of his

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., February 24, 1794, No. 13A; December 17, 1792, No. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Foreign Department Miscellaneous Records*, No. 8, Memoranda, Vol. I, No. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *History of Assam*, p. 211.

accession<sup>1</sup>. A young King required able and honest ministers, but unfortunately he chose the *Bar Barua* as his 'great favourite' and 'acted as he was advised by that officer'<sup>2</sup>. This unscrupulous officer exploited the young King's inexperience and credulity and secured for his own family a dominant position in the State. A contemporary chronicle says, "There was an animosity between the *Barbarua* and the *Bargohain* since the days of Swargadeo Lakshmi Singh. Having discovered some loopholes the *Barbarua* out of umbrage reported the matter to the King."<sup>3</sup> The result was the execution of the *Bar Gohain* and his three sons as well as the confiscation of their belongings.<sup>4</sup> Several relatives of the *Bar Barua* now occupied the offices vacated by the *Bar Gohain* and his sons. But the *Bar Barua* could not enjoy his victory for any length of time. An Ahom chronicler says, ". . . the *Barbarua* conducted the administration of the country in an independent manner. The King then realised that the *Barbarua* did everything by ignoring the absolute rights of the sovereign." So the *Bar Barua* and his sons were dismissed, and all "articles deposited at the Rangpur residence of the deposed *Barbarua* were seized and removed to the King's household."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson (*Descriptive Account of Assam*, p. 170) says that he was only fourteen years old at the time of his accession.

<sup>2</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, pp. 89-90.

<sup>3</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., February 24, 1794, No. 13A.

<sup>5</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, pp. 90-91.

The Moamarias had suffered terribly as a result of their unsuccessful rebellion during the reign of Lakshmi Singh. Naturally they brooded over those wrongs and spread disaffection amongst the people. Gaurinath followed the old policy of persecution. In April, 1782, the exasperated Moamarias rebelled again and tried to burn the city of Garhgaon, which was, however, saved by the *Burha Gohain*. The rebels then attacked Rangpur, where also they were repulsed by the same energetic minister. Instead of adopting a policy of conciliation, which might have restored order in the country and pacified the Moamarias, Gaurinath proclaimed a general massacre. The Moamarias were killed 'in all the villages with their sons and wives'. Some of them fled into the territories of the Daflas, the Bhutias, the Kacharis and the Jaintias, and thus saved their lives. It was reported that the sons of the deposed *Bar Barua* had joined the rebellion. The King 'ordered their eyes to be plucked'.<sup>1</sup>

The suppression of the first Moamaria rebellion of Gaurinath's reign was followed in 1782 by the death of the able *Burha Gohain*, Ghanashyam, whose energy was primarily responsible for the Royalist victory. He was succeeded by his son Purnananda, who played a decisive part in the affairs of the decadent Ahom Kingdom for many years. In dealing with the Moamarias he displayed the same loyalty and energy which had characterised his father's service to an

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<sup>1</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, pp. 91-95.

unworthy ruler. Captain Welsh observed that "the Burha Gohain may with great justice be suspected of having favoured the (Moamaria) insurrection (of 1786)". Sir Edward Gait points out that this statement does not deserve credence: "There is nothing whatever in the native accounts of this period that in any way supports this accusation, which was probably grounded on secret allegations made by other rival ministers, who had access to Captain Welsh from the beginning, whereas he did not meet the Burha Gohain till towards the end of the expedition. Welsh himself describes these ministers as unscrupulous intriguers. The evidence of such persons, who had themselves abandoned the contest, cannot be accepted as throwing any slur on an officer who, alone, for many years before Welsh came to Assam, had kept the Moamarias in check, and who continued to do so after he had again departed."<sup>1</sup>

The King's policy of indiscriminate revenge produced its natural reaction; early in 1786 a serious revolt of the Moamarias<sup>2</sup> broke out on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. A contingent sent by the King to suppress it was cut up by the rebels. "Having obtained a large quantity of provisions in this war", says our chronicler, Srinath Bar Barua, "the Moamarias continued hostilities with redoubled strength." Another contingent sent by the King was defeated near the Garaimari *Bil*<sup>3</sup>. Fresh troops were sent, but they

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Assam*, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> For details, see S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, pp. 99-130.

<sup>3</sup> Marsh.

could not prevent the Moamarias from capturing the Goramur *Satra*<sup>1</sup>. The defeated Royalist army then joined the troops commanded by Purnananda *Burha Gohain*, who had in the meantime taken shelter in a fort erected on the bank of the Sonai river. But the *Burha Gohain* was not able to stem the swelling tide of rebellion. The Moamarias compelled him to retreat, first to Gaurisagar and then to Rangpur, where he met the King. The Moamarias established their headquarters at Bhatiapur and ravaged the territory evacuated by the Royalist army. Rangpur itself was threatened. The panic-stricken King appealed for assistance to the *Bar Phukan* at Gauhati and also to the rulers of Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia. Before the arrival of the expected succour the situation became very serious, and the King fled to Gauhati with most of his officers (January, 1788). The panic created by the rebellion utterly dislocated the administrative machinery, for the chronicler says, "The other Phukans and Baruas went to whatever place and direction they liked." Fortunately the *Burha Gohain* and the *Bar Barua* remained behind, but they could not prevent the occupation of Rangpur and Garhgaon by the Moamarias.

On his arrival at Gauhati the King sent a large army to reinforce the *Burha Gohain*. When this force arrived the *Burha Gohain* was able to take a strong attitude against the Moamarias, but the demoralised Royalist troops could not stand the strain with determination and perseverance. Desultory warfare con-

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<sup>1</sup> Vaishnava monastery.

tinued for years over a large area, and although Purnanda displayed many qualities of patriotic leadership, he could not dislodge the Moamarias from Rangpur, where they placed one Bharat Singh on the throne<sup>1</sup>. Petty chiefs, officers and adventurers 'assumed independence in various parts of the country'<sup>2</sup>. The natural result was widespread anarchy. The Royalist administration had collapsed, and in the area held by the Moamarias "the burning of villages, the looting of supplies and the wanton destruction of crops led to a terrible famine: rice was not obtainable, and the sufferings of the people were so great that many abandoned their own children. Even persons of the highest castes, it is said, were reduced to eating the flesh of cows, buffaloes, dogs and jackals. Some roamed about in the jungle, devouring wild fruits and roots, while others fled to the Burha Gohain or to the neighbouring hill tribes, and even to Bengal"<sup>3</sup>.

It was clear that the Ahom King would not be able to restore order in his kingdom without external assistance; but external assistance was not easily available. The rulers of Cachar and Jaintia refused to respond to his appeal, and it is not unlikely that in his distress they discovered an excellent opportunity for their own aggrandisement. But Jai Singh of Manipur still remembered the valuable assistance he had received from Rajeswar Singh<sup>4</sup>. He advanced at the head of

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<sup>1</sup> Bharat Singh's coins, dated 1793, are still extant.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., February 24, 1794, No. 13A. For details, see Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 37, *ante*.

500 horse and 4,000 foot to Nowgong, where he was met by Gaurinath. He then established contact with Purnananda, and accepted his proposal that an immediate attack should be made on Rangpur. Accordingly the Manipuri army, strengthened by a detachment of the *Burha Gohain's* force, advanced towards Rangpur. But the Moamarias met the invading army on the way and scored a victory. In the language of the Ahom chronicler, "A large number of Manipuris fell in the engagement ; and the Moamarias seized all the goods of the Raja." Jai Singh now returned to Manipur, leaving a detachment of his troops with the *Burha Gohain*<sup>1</sup>, who continued the struggle under depressing circumstances.

From Nowgong, where the oppression of his officers had caused a rising of the local population<sup>2</sup>, Gaurinath went to Gauhati. There he expected to find a safe refuge, but unfortunately fresh troubles confronted him. We have already referred to the assumption of independence by petty chiefs in different parts of Assam. Of the six principal vassal chiefs, the Rajas of Nauduar and Darrang had revolted. The former 'esteemed the time favourable to his personal independence, which was accordingly asserted, without any apparent provocation'<sup>3</sup>. In the case of Darrang, however, there was a serious provocation. Gaurinath had treacherously seized and put to death Raja Hansa

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<sup>1</sup> See S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, pp. 123-130.

<sup>2</sup> See S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, pp. 124-125.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., February 24, 1794, No. 13A.

Narayan of Darrang on a very doubtful charge of disloyalty<sup>1</sup>, set aside the claims of his son Krishna Narayan, and handed over the state to another member of the ruling family whose name was Bishnu Narayan. Krishna Narayan approached Douglas, the British Commissioner in Cooch Behar, and through that officer requested the Government of Bengal to re-instate him, offering to hold his state as a vassal of the East India Company. The Government of Bengal refused to comply with his request. Krishna Narayan then collected troops, expelled Bishnu Narayan from Darrang, and even occupied Kamrup<sup>2</sup> and North Gauhati<sup>3</sup>. He was assisted by Haradatta Chaudhuri<sup>4</sup>, a *Zamindar* of Darrang, some of whose relations had been killed by the King.

Krishna Narayan's small army was composed mainly of *Barkandazes* or mercenary troops recruited in the district of Rangpur in Bengal. Although the official documents uniformly refer to these mercenaries as *Bengal Barkandazes*, most of them were not *bona fide* inhabitants of Bengal. There were Sikhs from the Punjab, Hindustanis from Bundelkhand, and also fighting *Sannyasis* from different provinces.<sup>5</sup> It seems that the services of these mercenaries were much in

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<sup>1</sup> According to Bishnu Narayan and the ministers of Gaurinath, Hansa Narayan openly waged war against the King. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter nos. 39, 40).

<sup>2</sup> P. C., February 24, 1794, No. 13A.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 16, 1792, No. 11.

<sup>4</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., January 23, 1793, No. 4.



demand in Assam, for we are told by our Ahom chronicler that Gaurinath employed them for his own purposes<sup>1</sup>. The Government of Bengal should have taken steps to prevent the recruitment of these mercenaries *within* British territory by the agents of the rival political parties in Assam; but the seriousness of the problem was realised only when it was too late. Lumsden, Collector of Rangpur, brought the matter to the notice of the Government as soon as Krishna Narayan and Haradatta Chaudhuri began to enlist the *Barkandazes* within his jurisdiction. By an order dated September 9, 1791, the Government instructed Lumsden 'neither to assist nor prevent' Krishna Narayan in raising such force as he might think proper so long as his troops acted peacefully within British territories. Krishna Narayan took so much advantage of Lumsden's neutrality that Gaurinath's ministers came to Rangpur and requested the Collector to recall the *Barkandazes*. Lumsden thought that he was not warranted by his instructions in acceding to this request. Thereupon the Assamese ministers asked him to forward to Calcutta a petition praying for the intervention of the Supreme Government<sup>2</sup>. The Government informed Lumsden that he had misunderstood the implication of their order dated September 9, 1791. He was asked to prevent Krishna Narayan from openly enlisting *Barkandazes within* the Company's territories, although British subjects might be allowed, if they liked, to repair to the Darrang Raja's territories and to

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<sup>1</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English Translation, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 16, 1792, No. 11.

serve him there<sup>1</sup>. Lord Cornwallis was not willing to forget the friendly professions contained in his letter of July 23, 1787, to the King of Assam<sup>2</sup>. A proclamation was issued by the Government of Bengal, asking the *Barkandazes* to return to Bengal, and warning them not to use the name of the Company in support of their plundering activities. They replied that they were serving the cause of Krishna Narayan in return for pay and the Company was in no way implicated in or committed by their work<sup>3</sup>.

Lord Cornwallis came to India after the passing of Pitt's India Act (1784), which had declared that "to pursue Schemes of Conquest and Extension of Dominion in India, are Measures repugnant to the Wish, the Honour, and Policy of the Nation."<sup>4</sup> Although he was 'a capable military commander', he acted loyally in accordance with the spirit of this significant Parliamentary declaration, and did his best to avoid entanglements with the 'country powers'. His war against Tipu Sultan may be regarded as an act of necessity rather than a product of aggressive policy, and his refusal to dethrone Tipu<sup>5</sup> was probably due in a large

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 16, 1792, No. 17.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 16, 1792, No. 16.

A letter was written to the King on June 12, 1792, saying that the *Barkandazes* had been asked to return to Bengal, and re-iterating the Governor-General's friendship and good wishes. (P. C., June 15, 1792, No. 17).

<sup>3</sup> S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter no. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Section 34. See A. C. Banerjee, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, Vol. I, pp. 68-69.

<sup>5</sup> See Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 78.

measure to his desire not to contravene the Act of 1784. Such a Governor-General was not likely to invite unnecessary complications by taking serious interest in the affairs of Assam. Moreover, the war against Tipu Sultan was still going on, and it was hardly possible for the Governor-General to turn his attention towards the Brahmaputra.

But as the crisis in Assam reached its culmination, the Government of Bengal found it difficult to remain a neutral spectator of the terrible civil war across the eastern frontier. Trade suffered, and it was not unlikely that the shadow of anarchy would silently come over the border districts of the Presidency. Purnananda *Burha Gohain* repeatedly asked for British assistance, and his application was supported by Raush, the farmer of the salt revenues at Goalpara<sup>1</sup>. Lord Cornwallis felt that the British Government had some indirect responsibility for the success of Krishna Narayan's rebellion, which was mainly due to the service he was receiving from the *Barkandazes* recruited from British territory. It had become clear that the *Barkandazes* would not obey the notifications calling upon them to leave Assam. So the Governor-General decided to expel them by force from the area of their depredations. The termination of the war against Mysore in

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<sup>1</sup> Krishna Narayan sent a *vakil* to Lumsden to protest against Raush's conduct: "Mr. Raush having come and joined the Assamese has encouraged them to plunder and deplete . . . my country . . ." The *vakil* was asked by Lumsden to see Captain Welsh at Goalpara. (P. C., November 26, 1792, No. 8, 9). Raush was an opportunist; he did not hesitate to commit depredations in Gaurinath's territory. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter nos. 29, 30).

the early part of 1792 left him free to deal with these recalcitrant mercenaries. 'Advised as well from motives of humanity as from a wish to be better informed of the interior state of Assam, its commerce, etc.' he decided to send 'an active and prudent officer' with six companies of sepoy to Goalpara. In September, 1792, 360 sepoy were despatched under the command of Captain Welsh, with Lieutenant MacGregor as Adjutant and Ensign Wood as Surveyor. Lord Cornwallis refused to give him detailed instructions 'until he should transmit every information that he could obtain when near the scene that related to the object of his future operations.'<sup>1</sup>

Captain Welsh arrived at Goalpara on November 8, 1792. Here he received from Raush a detailed account of the internal condition of the Ahom Kingdom, and was met by Bishnu Narayan, who urgently requested him to march at once to the relief of Gaurinath, heavily pressed at that time by Krishna Narayan and the *Barkandazes*. In one of his letters, shown to Captain Welsh by Bishnu Narayan, Gaurinath compared himself to a heavy-laden ship on the point of sinking.<sup>2</sup> Captain Welsh sent a report to Calcutta and decided to proceed at once to Gauhati, where the King of Assam was then besieged<sup>3</sup>. The situation was undoubtedly serious, and if Gaurinath was to be assisted in the recovery of his power, there was no time to be lost. But Captain Welsh assumed a heavy

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<sup>1</sup> *Foreign Department Miscellaneous Records*, No. 8, Memoranda, Vol. I, No. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., November 26, 1792, No. 7.

responsibility when he rushed towards Gauhati without waiting for further instructions from Calcutta. The situation was not free from military danger. The detachment under his command was not large; the geography of the country he was entering was but vaguely known. At any moment his communications and supplies might be cut off by hostile forces. More serious, perhaps, was the political danger. By identifying the Company with the Ahom King's cause Captain Welsh might, knowingly or unknowingly, accept far-reaching political liabilities which his Government might be unwilling to approve and unable to repudiate.

While the gallant Captain was maturing his plan for rescuing a fallen King the Governor-General was meditating upon the new problem. He thought that the detachment should do something instead of waiting at Goalpara, but he was not quite sure what it could do. He was fully conscious that his own 'local knowledge of Assam' was 'no less imperfect than our information on the strength and views of the contending parties in that country'. He sent a letter to Captain Welsh, which the latter received after his departure from Goalpara. Instead of sending detailed instructions the Governor-General confined himself to a general outline of his wishes and left Captain Welsh free to adopt such measures as he considered necessary. He was directed to try to compose the disturbances in Assam by mediation and without bloodshed. The personal safety of Gaurinath was to be regarded as one of his primary objects. If the Darrang Raja refused to accept his mediation or showed a design to gain

time by insincere negotiations, Captain Welsh was authorized 'without too much exposing the detachment . . . to act immediately with the utmost rigour . . . for the Raja of Assam's relief'. He was to occupy some fort or post where he could collect a large stock of provisions and from which he could maintain communication by river with Goalpara. At the same time notice was issued to the *Barkandazes* that, if they did not return home within a limited time, their families would be seized and their properties confiscated by the Government of Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

Captain Welsh started for Gauhati on November 16. Three days later his boats confronted near Nagarbera hill some small canoes carrying Gaurinath and a few attendants. The King had escaped from Gauhati at two o'clock on the previous morning. His flight was due to the capture of the southern side of Gauhati by a *Bairagi*<sup>2</sup> who had put himself at the head of a rabble of low class *Doms*. Gaurinath's house was set on fire by these adventurers; he fled with four atten-

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., November 26, 1792, No. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Welsh refers to him as the 'Burjee Rajah' and reports, "Neither the Raja nor any of his people can tell me who the Burjee Rajah is. They only say that their country is in such a state of anarchy and confusion that any man who can pick up 100 desperate fellows sets himself up for a Raja". (P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 47). Captain Welsh adds that this 'Burjee Rajah' was 'desirous of getting assistance from Gaurinath to drive out Krishna Narain'. In that case Gaurinath's house must have been burnt by mistake. (P. C., November 30, 1792, No. 31).

A letter of the Assam ministers shows that Gaurinath was driven away from Nowgong by the *Bairagi*. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter no. 40).

dants, leaving his family behind. The King assured Captain Welsh that as soon as he appeared at Gauhati his friends would join him and his enemies would be compelled to retire.<sup>1</sup> In this interview 'it appeared very plainly that his views in soliciting aid from the British Government were not confined to getting rid of the Bengal Barkundosses but he wished to be assisted by British troops against all enemies who by his own account were numerous, and in this hope he was encouraged by Captain Welsh.'<sup>2</sup>

The Captain decided to proceed to Gauhati 'with the utmost expedition.'<sup>3</sup> On his way he was joined by the *Bar Barua*<sup>4</sup> and the tributary Chief of Rani.<sup>5</sup> Gauhati was captured without any struggle on November 25; the *Bairagi* made his escape,<sup>6</sup> but about sixty of his followers were taken prisoner. Gaurinath then 'entered into the town in great state.'<sup>7</sup>

On November 26 Captain Welsh had a visit from Gaurinath and the *Bar Barua*. After the usual compliments the latter requested Captain Welsh to assist the King not only against the *Barkandazes* but also against the *Bairagi* and the Moamarias. Captain Welsh promised to do his best. The minister then

<sup>1</sup> P. C., November 30, 1792, No. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Foreign Department Miscellaneous Records*, No. 8, Memoranda, Vol. I, No. 7.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., November 30, 1792, No. 31.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., December 3, 1792, No. 9.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 47.

<sup>6</sup> "The Bairagi was hacked and subsequently transfixed to a spear". (S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji*, English. Translation, p. 131).

<sup>7</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 47.

enquired whether the Captain considered his force sufficient for the purpose. Captain Welsh replied that if after obtaining a thorough knowledge of the country and the strength of the King's enemies he considered his force to be insufficient, he 'should make it known to Government and act agreeable to their instructions'. Gaurinath and the *Bar Barua* were satisfied. They then pointed out that the best way to deal with the *Barkandazes* would be to ask them to come to Gauhati and, if they came, to induce them to return home 'by promising to write to Government in their favour to restore their houses to them.' With this request Captain Welsh agreed to comply; but when he was further asked to invite Krishna Narayan to Gauhati and to deliver him to Gaurinath as soon as he arrived there, he pointed out that the King had not applied to the Governor-General for assistance against the Darrang Raja, nor had the Government authorised the British force to take hostile measures against any one besides the *Barkandazes*.<sup>1</sup>

Krishna Narayan was naturally anxious to conciliate the British authorities. On November 27 his *vakil* saw Captain Welsh and assured him that 'neither his master nor the Burkondosses would fight against the Company'. When Captain Welsh showed him the draft of a *parwana* asking the *Barkandazes* to appear at Gauhati within six days, he said that they would certainly come but 'begged that they might have ten days instead of six to make their appearance.' Captain Welsh satisfied him on this point. The *vakil* told him

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 47.



that Krishna Narayan was prepared to come to Gauhati if he was assured of protection. Captain Welsh replied that he would protect his life. The *vakil* said 'that was all he wanted.'<sup>1</sup>

When the above-mentioned *parwana*<sup>2</sup> was served on the *Barkandazes*, they sent an *arzi*<sup>3</sup> saying that 'in obeying his (*i.e.*, Krishna Narayan's) order we have not done any thing that should bring displeasure on us'. They added that one of their *Jamadars* having died and another having gone elsewhere, they were not in a position to reach Gauhati within ten days. To this *arzi* Captain Welsh replied by another *parwana*<sup>4</sup> demanding their presence at Gauhati. The *Jamadars* again sent an *arzi* professing obedience to him ; but, they went on, "our brethren are separated from us, some of them at the distance of two or three days' journey ; hence we have sent people to call them and when they arrive we will come in a body to the Presence."<sup>5</sup>

Within a few days Captain Welsh realised the difficulty of his position. Krishna Narayan was waiting with his whole force on the bank opposite Gauhati ; in spite of his *vakil's* profession of friendship he was not 'at all inclined to go off or come in' to the British camp. The King and his ministers were incapable of giving any effective assistance. "This poor debilitated man of a Raja," Captain Welsh reported to the

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 47.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 48.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 48.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 48.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 51.

Governor-General, "is not capable of transacting any kind of business himself. He is either praying or washing, and when he is to be seen he is intoxicated with eating opium. His ministers are a set of villains . . ." The detachment was threatened with scarcity of provisions. For the time being Captain Welsh succeeded in inducing the King and his ministers to summon a market, and a large quantity of rice was brought.<sup>1</sup>

Unwilling to begin an open contest with Krishna Narayan,<sup>2</sup> Captain Welsh tried to persuade the Assamese ministers to settle the dispute with him. He pointed out that he was not authorised by his instructions to proceed against the Darrang Raja, that his detachment was 'too small for the purpose,' that it was illegal and unwise to punish Krishna Narayan for his father's offence, and that if the King wanted to go to Garhgaon,<sup>3</sup> 'it would be proper to have friends in the rear.' If the King agreed to re-establish Krishna Narayan in his father's possession upon the customary terms, Captain Welsh was prepared, on behalf of the East India Company, to guarantee his good conduct. To this proposal Gaurinath replied that it was not customary to re-establish rebels in their old possessions. He was, however, prepared to reinstate Krishna

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Although Captain Welsh told Gaurinath and his ministers that he could not fight against Krishna Narayan without specific instructions from the Government, in his letters to the Governor-General he seems to imply that he was restrained merely by the weakness of his detachment. *Vide* his letter to Lord Cornwallis, dated December 4, 1792. (P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 50).

<sup>3</sup> The old capital of Assam.

Narayan if it was proved that he was not 'very culpable.' The unfortunate King then threw himself 'entirely and unequivocally' into 'the arms of the Company,' asked for assistance against Krishna Narayan and all other rebels, and promised to reimburse the Company for military expenses as soon as he would again be the real ruler of the country.<sup>1</sup>

It was clear that the narrow object with which the expedition had originally started—the expulsion of the *Barkandazes*—would not meet the requirements of the situation. At the time of receiving Gaurinath's application for assistance the authorities in Calcutta were not aware of the Moamaria rebellion,<sup>2</sup> and they were under the impression that Krishna Narayan 'was entirely under the control of the Burkundosses whom he had invited to assist him against the Raja of Assam and that these troops constituted his principal strength'.<sup>3</sup> But on his arrival in Assam Captain Welsh found that Krishna Narayan's force, five to seven thousand strong, consisted of *Barkandazes*, Gosains and Assamese mercenaries.<sup>4</sup> He had 'a number of miserable guns' and he was in possession of one of the strongholds on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The most formidable enemy of the King of Assam was, however, the Moamaria force, of the existence of which

<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 50.

<sup>2</sup> See Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> *Foreign Department Miscellaneous Records*, No. 8, Memoranda, Vol. I, No. 7.

<sup>4</sup> "Krishna Narayan's forces were collected from all parts of the country as far as Lahore, and as to the wandering tribe of Sannyasis, they have no home." (Captain Welsh). (P. C., January 23, 1793, No. 4).

the British authorities seem to have been altogether ignorant<sup>1</sup> until the arrival of the expedition at Gauhati. Gaurinath could not maintain his authority in his country even if Captain Welsh compelled the *Barkandazes* to return to Bengal. He sent to the Governor-General a detailed report,<sup>2</sup> with the recommendation that additional troops<sup>3</sup> should be despatched to assist him in restoring the King to his capital.<sup>4</sup>

Lord Cornwallis expressed his satisfaction at 'the prudence and circumspection' shown by Captain Welsh, but hesitated to undertake new commitments in Assam. He remarked, "It is not consistent with the political view of conduct which has been prescribed for the Company to attempt the conquest of a country from which we have received no injury, nor it is even the wish of this Government to acquire an influence in the internal management of the affairs of Assam, and it is therefore particularly necessary that our temporary interference should be confined to the objects which were originally expected to be accomplished by the detachment under your command." These objects were the expulsion of the *Barkandazes* from Assam and 'the re-establishment of the Raja in his lawful authority.' The Governor-General believed that Captain Welsh would be able 'to effect the first object' either 'by conciliatory means or by intimidation.' In dealing with the second object the Captain

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<sup>1</sup> See Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Dated December 4, 1792.

<sup>3</sup> One battalion to be sent to Gauhati and another to be kept as a reserve at Bijni; two six-pounders; transport cattle.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., December 17, 1792, No. 50.

was asked 'to act with the utmost caution . . . in avoiding to give any hope that may commit this Government further in the business of that country than is conformable with our intention and the general scheme of our policy.' Lord Cornwallis requested him to inform the King that the British Government could not 'take any further concern' about the affairs of Assam unless Krishna Narayan was restored to his ancestral possessions, 'on the condition however that he (*i.e.*, Krishna Narayan) shall assist in re-establishing the Raja's authority over the other parts of his dominions.' If Krishna Narayan agreed to submit to the King and the *Barkandazes* returned to Bengal, the Governor-General expected that Captain Welsh would be able to take Gaurinath to his capital without the assistance of an additional force.<sup>1</sup>

Captain Welsh had already made up his mind to punish Krishna Narayan.<sup>2</sup> On December 6 he crossed

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<sup>1</sup> Cornwallis to Welsh, December 18, 1792. (P. C., December 21, 1792, No. 17).

<sup>2</sup> Sir Edward Gait says that "Captain Welsh had become convinced that Krishna Narayan was trifling with him." (*History of Assam*, p. 200). The Captain's letters do not disclose the reasons, if any, which led him to this conclusion. On December 4 he wrote to the Governor-General that Krishna Narayan was 'the first object.' Two days later he attacked him, without waiting for the Governor-General's reply. He says that want of provisions prevented him from making the attack earlier. (P. C., December 21, 1792, No. 19). While Lord Cornwallis was harping on caution, the man on the spot involved the Government in far-reaching commitments by his aggressive activities.

It is not unlikely that Krishna Narayan was unable to control the *Barkandazes*, whom he could not pay regularly, and who took too much interest in plunder to listen to proposals for

the Brahmaputra and defeated the Darrang Raja.<sup>1</sup> Lord Cornwallis congratulated Captain Welsh on his success but at the same time reminded him that "the material objections to our engaging deeply in the affairs of Assam are as strong as ever."<sup>2</sup> The Collector of Rangpur was directed by the Government to seize and confine the families of the *Barkandazes*.<sup>3</sup>

Krishna Narayan did not take this defeat very seriously; he soon collected his troops and began to commit depredations at some distance from Gauhati. Captain Welsh thought it necessary 'to give protection and confidence to the inhabitants and enable them to cut and bring in their crops of grain.' A detachment under Lieutenant Williams was sent against Krishna Narayan. An engagement took place at Khatikuchi. Krishna Narayan's men fled across the Bhutan frontier.<sup>4</sup> He was deserted by most of the *Barkandazes*,<sup>5</sup> although

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peace. See S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, Bengali Introduction, p. 60.

<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 21, 1792, No. 19. Captain Welsh gives a detailed account of the engagement and illustrates it with geographical sketches.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 24, 1792, No. 14.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., December 21, 1792, No. 22. Lumsden could 'only find the residence of three men in all his collectorship.' (P. C., January 23, 1793, No. 4). Later on he seized and confined six *Barkandazes*. (P. C., February 1, 1793, No. 19).

<sup>4</sup> At that time the Bhutan frontier extended into the plains as far as the Gosain Kamala Ali. (Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 201).

<sup>5</sup> The Bhutanese demanded that all *Barkandazes* entering their territory must be disbanded, that they must offer no excuse to the English to enter Bhutan, and that they could remain in Bhutan if they lived peacefully. Thereupon one of the principal *Jamadars* came to Bijni. (P. C., January 14, 1793, No. 22).

the Gosains remained loyal to him.<sup>1</sup> Captain Welsh believed that Krishna Narayan had 'the strongest inclination to put himself under my protection, but was prevented by the *Jamadars*, who had him entirely in their power, and obliged him to act in the manner they conceived would best promote their own interested views.' He was, therefore, prepared to follow the Governor-General's instructions by asking Gaurinath to reinstate him.<sup>2</sup>

The problem of Gaurinath's restoration was more difficult. Lord Cornwallis had expressed his own misgivings in a letter<sup>3</sup> written to Captain Welsh before receiving the news of Krishna Narayan's expulsion from Gauhati. "I do not see," he observed, "how we can reconcile it to any principle of justice or humanity to establish by force the authority of the wretched Raja and his worthless and cruel minister in that country." The whole country was 'so completely convulsed' that it was very doubtful whether an accommodation with Krishna Narayan alone would confirm Gaurinath's authority. So Lord Cornwallis asked Captain Welsh to summon an assembly of 'all the chiefs who have any power or followers' and to find out, by full and frank discussion, 'the best means to prevent the country from being totally ruined.' The Governor-General was careful to add that Gaurinath 'must previously be required to dismiss the ministers whose misconduct and treachery have

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 11, 1793, No. 23.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 14, 1793, No. 21.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., December 31, 1792, No. 13.

brought upon him the misfortune which he at present suffers.'

Thus Captain Welsh was authorised indirectly to interfere in the internal affairs of Assam. So he boldly suggested that Gaurinath's authority could not be re-established 'without interfering with the internal management of the country.' He had already compelled the King to dismiss the *Bar Phukan*.<sup>1</sup> He now pressed for the removal of the *Bar Barua* as an essential preliminary to the restoration of order. The ministers tried to keep the King in a 'state of subjection'. "The most enlightened," Captain Welsh reported to Lord Cornwallis, "of the inhabitants here declare it to be their opinion, that until every man in power about the Raja is dismissed, and he is in some degree under my own management, he will not be enabled to assert his own rights, or exercise his lawful authority. Such a measure I do not think myself authorized to take without being empowered to do it by your Lordship."<sup>2</sup> Lord Cornwallis thereupon authorised him to demand the dismissal of the King's bad counsellors and the appointment of 'men of the best character in the country to supply their places'.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile Gaurinath had agreed to act according to the Captain's advice, and it had been arranged that a *Durbar* should be held twice a week, when the ministers and Captain Welsh 'in concert might enquire into the state of the country and issue the

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<sup>1</sup> S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter no. 40.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 14, 1793, No. 21.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., January 17, 1793, No. 10.



necessary orders to his rebellious ministers and refractory Zamindars'.<sup>1</sup> But Captain Welsh had not yet correctly appraised the character of the man whom he was trying to assist. Gaurinath left the British camp to visit his family for a few days.<sup>2</sup> During his absence the *Bar Barua* carried out the execution of his prisoners according to his order. The matter being reported to Captain Welsh, he sent an officer to release all prisoners in confinement. Seventy persons were released; they had been so much weakened by starvation that 2 expired on the way and the rest were scarcely able to walk to the Captain's tent. Of these prisoners 6 had been sentenced to death, but Captain Welsh could discover 'no fault they have been guilty of.' It was also discovered that 113 persons had been executed since his arrival at Gauhati. He was convinced that 'the Raja's visit to his family was proposed merely to give the *Bar Barua* an opportunity of plundering the country and destroying the inhabitants without fear of discovery'.<sup>3</sup>

These atrocities of the ministers, committed with the connivance, if not the active support, of the King, compelled Captain Welsh to adopt measures which he himself described as 'harsh'. The *Bar Barua* and the *Soladhara Phukhan* were arrested. Gaurinath was informed 'that while he continues to countenance acts of oppression and cruelty, and leaves the management of his country in such worthless and infamous hands,' he could expect no protection from the British Govern-

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 17, 1793, No. 11.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 23, 1793, No. 4.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., January 28, 1793, No. 7.

ment.<sup>1</sup> The King at first tried to keep himself away from the British camp by protracting the length of his visit to his family. Captain Welsh then threatened that if he refused to come, the *Bar Barua* and the *Soladhara Phukan* would be sent 'out of the country.'<sup>2</sup> On February 2 the King arrived at the camp and had a prolonged interview with Captain Welsh. "The Raja," reported the Captain to the Governor-General, "betrayed his own cruel disposition and conducted himself in the most intemperate manner. He owned with a degree of exultation that . . . if he was deprived of his power of killing or mutilating<sup>3</sup> his subjects at pleasure, he would not wish to be a Raja . . . He declared that every act of cruelty and rapacity was committed by his order and not by that of his ministers, and that he positively would not dismiss them."<sup>4</sup> Captain Welsh thereupon deprived the King temporarily of all authority and informed him, "One hundred attendants are allowed you and by them alone your orders will be obeyed." Guards were posted round his compound and no one was allowed to see him without the Captain's permission.<sup>5</sup> The administration of the country was entrusted to the newly appointed *Bar Phukan*. A manifesto was issued to the

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 28, 1793, No. 7.

<sup>2</sup> They were sent at first to Jogighopa, then to Rangpur (in Bengal). (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter no. 40).

<sup>3</sup> On his way to the camp he had ordered one of his servants to be mutilated. The man was quite innocent. He lost his nose and eyes. (P. C., February 15, 1793, No. 16).

<sup>4</sup> Welsh to Cornwallis, February 4, 1793.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., February 15, 1793, No. 17.

people of Assam, asking them not to hold any communication with the King and to obey no order which in his name might be conveyed to them.<sup>1</sup> Another manifesto<sup>2</sup> was addressed to the Chiefs and *Zamindars* of Assam, inviting them to assemble at Gauhati 'in order that we may all conjointly concert measures to prevent your country from being entirely subverted.'

Captain Welsh was conscious that, in suspending and confining the King and in assuming personal responsibility for the internal government of Assam, he was exceeding the authority delegated to him by the Government, but he claimed to be excused on the ground that he had 'done it with a view to promote the cause of humanity'.<sup>3</sup> To this appeal in the name of humanity Lord Cornwallis found it difficult not to respond. He remarked that the measures were 'of a very strong nature,' but they deserved his approbation because they had proceeded from 'motives of humanity.' He also authorised Captain Welsh to give a 'general assurance' to the people of Assam that they would not be abandoned to 'the Raja's savage cruelty'.<sup>4</sup> Thus an expedition sent to restore a King became an

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., February 15, 1793, No. 17. Sir Edward Gait (*History of Assam*, pp. 201-202) says that in this manifesto "the people were informed that, in future, justice would be righteously administered, and certain days were appointed on which complaints would be heard and grievances redressed." This is the substance of a manifesto which Captain Welsh had proposed to circulate before his interview with Gaurinath. (P. C., January 28, 1793, No. 8). We have given the substance of the manifesto actually circulated after that interview.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 28, 1793, No. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Welsh to Cornwallis, February 4, 1793.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., February 22, 1793, No. 13.

arbiter between him and his people. Emboldened by the Governor-General's anxiety for the welfare of the people of Assam Captain Welsh wrote, "A temporary interference with the management of this country will not answer the humane intention of Government. The inhabitants are anxious to retain the Company's protection . . ."<sup>1</sup>

One of the motives which had led the Government of Bengal to give a favourable reception to Gaurinath's appeal for help was the establishment of commercial relations between Assam and British India.<sup>2</sup> That motive was now strengthened by the necessity of collecting money for meeting the expenses of the expeditionary troops. Owing to the anarchical condition of the country the export and import duties were the most fruitful sources of revenue. Accordingly Captain Welsh regarded the commerce of Assam as the subject of his particular care. Before Gaurinath's accession all export and import duties on salt were collected by two *Baruas* at the Kandar<sup>3</sup> *chokey*<sup>4</sup> opposite Goalpara. The duties generally varied between ten and six per cent. During Gaurinath's reign these two *Baruas* succeeded by corruption and violence in monopolising for their own benefit the entire salt trade of Assam. Raush, the English merchant of Goalpara, entered into an agreement to furnish them with whatever quantity of salt they

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 11, 1793, No. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Cornwallis to Welsh, February 21, 1793. P. C., February 22, No. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Village Hadira on the Brahmaputra, opposite Goalpara.

<sup>4</sup> A place for the collection of customs, tolls, etc.

might require ; as a result, 'almost the whole trade of Assam came through their hands to him.' Captain Welsh decided to abolish this monopoly, 'injurious to the Raja, prejudicial to trade and oppressive to the inhabitants'.<sup>1</sup> For that purpose he entered into an agreement with Gaurinath. The duties legally imposed on salt (ten per cent.) were to be regularly collected at Kandar *chokey*. It was expected that the total sum realised would amount to one *lakh* of rupees, from which the cost of collection would be deducted and Rs. 26,000 would be paid to the King. The remaining sum would be appropriated to defray the expenses of the British detachment serving in Assam.<sup>2</sup> With regard to other articles of trade, British subjects were left free to sell their commodities in all parts of Assam, subject to the payment of ten per cent. duties. An exception was to be made in the case of materials used in war, which could be supplied only to the British troops in Assam.<sup>3</sup> All exports from Assam were liable to pay ten per cent. duties. No European merchant or adventurer was entitled to reside permanently in Assam.<sup>4</sup> Lord Cornwallis regarded this agreement as likely to 'prove advantageous to both countries as soon as Assam is in a state of sufficient

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh to Cornwallis, February 21, 1793. P. C. March 11, 1793, No. 15.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 11, 1793, No. 17, 18. For the text of the agreement, see Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> Many merchants later on abused this privilege by passing the Kandar *chokey* without paying the duties under the pretence of bringing supplies for Captain Welsh. (P. C., April 22, 1793, No. 13).

<sup>4</sup> P. C., March 11, 1793, No. 18.

tranquillity to admit of its being carried into complete effect.<sup>1</sup>

It was now necessary to take up the question of administrative re-organisation, but the response of the principal Chiefs to the invitation of Captain Welsh was not very satisfactory.<sup>2</sup> He asked whether the Governor-General wished him to give up the project of holding an assembly of the notables or to punish those who refused to come for consultation and advice.<sup>3</sup> Lord Cornwallis replied that no military expedition was to be undertaken without 'an absolute necessity.' The Captain was directed to persevere 'in endeavouring to procure a meeting of the chiefs and in cordially inviting the return' of Krishna Narayan. The Governor-General once again tried to restrain his agent by reminding him of the policy of non-aggression to which the Government was committed. "However desirable," he observed, "it may be from consideration both of policy and humanity to take such active means as our force enables us to adopt in order to restore tranquillity, order and some degree of regular government in Assam, we must yet be careful not to suffer ourselves to be diverted even by the most benevolent motives from a strict obedience to the spirit of the act of the British legislature,<sup>4</sup> and from a steady perseverance in that system of moderation and peace which alone can convince the native powers that we

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 18, 1793, No. 12.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 11, 1793, No. 15.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 22, 1793, No. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Pitt's India Act (1784). See *ante*, p. 91.

have utterly abandoned all views of ambition and conquest . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Since the confinement of the King the administration had been under the direct management of Captain Welsh, who regularly held public *Durbars* and decided disputes brought to his notice. He found that the old customary taxes were not ‘high or oppressive’ to the people; ‘they only became so from the King’s extreme imbecility and the rapacity of his ministers and collectors’.<sup>2</sup> Gaurinath had surrendered himself to the inevitable. Early in April Captain Welsh reported that he was ‘perfectly tractable’ and offered no opposition to his transactions. This submission was rewarded with the removal of all restraints previously imposed upon him.<sup>3</sup> But the Governor-General was not yet prepared to publish for general information the terms of the commercial agreement with Gaurinath. He was not convinced that anarchy was at an end in Assam and he was not willing to allow British subjects ‘to engage too deeply’ in commercial transactions there.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the close of April five<sup>5</sup> companies of *Sepoys* arrived at Gauhati from Calcutta.<sup>6</sup> The season for campaigns was almost over; so it was decided to

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., April 5, 1793, No. 34.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 22, 1793, No. 33.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., April 22, 1793, No. 13.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., April 22, 1793, No. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Edward Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 203) says that six companies were sent, but our documents do not support him. See P. C., April 22, 1793, No. 13, and May 1, 1793, No. 16.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., May 1, 1793, No. 16.

halt at Gauhati during the rainy season.<sup>1</sup> Captain Welsh had already collected nearly six months' supplies for the whole detachment. The *Sepoys* had erected temporary huts for themselves. A sufficient number of boats had been collected.<sup>2</sup> The troops were in excellent health.<sup>3</sup> In May a Quarter-Master was appointed 'to superintend the public buildings, boats and stores, and to manage the grain department.'<sup>4</sup> Captain Welsh was thus 'perfectly prepared for the wet season'.<sup>5</sup>

Before these arrangements were completed Krishna Narayan had sent a *vakil* to Captain Welsh for conducting negotiations.<sup>6</sup> He was prepared to pay tribute to the Company, and he asserted his claim to a portion of the district of Kamrup on the ground that it was held by his ancestors.<sup>7</sup> He had already descended from Bhutan hills into plains below.<sup>8</sup> Captain Welsh sent Lieutenant MacGregor to meet him on his way, 'give him confidence, and prevent any disturbances which his return might occasion.'<sup>9</sup> On May 20 Krishna Narayan arrived at Gauhati with 400 *Barkandazes*. The *Barkandazes*, it was apprehended, might again create disturbances. So they were sent to Rangpur and paid their arrears from the British

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<sup>1</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., April 22, 1793, No. 13.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., April 22, 1793, No. 14.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., May 31, 1793, No. 11.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., May 1, 1793, No. 16.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., May 1, 1793, No. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Krishna Narayan to Welsh. P. C., May 1, 1793, No. 17.

<sup>8</sup> P. C., May 1, 1793, No. 17.

<sup>9</sup> P. C., May 1, 1793, No. 16.



treasury.<sup>1</sup> On May 24 Krishna Narayan was installed on his ancestral *gadi*. He still pressed his claim on Kamrup;<sup>2</sup> it was, however, disputed by two other members of his family as well as Gaurinath. Captain Welsh placed him temporarily in charge of that district and proceeded to investigate into the validity of his claim.<sup>3</sup> The evidence collected by him from various sources proved unfavourable to Krishna Narayan,<sup>4</sup> but Captain Welsh did not give any final decision.<sup>5</sup>

Many difficulties were gradually cropping up owing to the King's weakness and aversion to business. Captain Welsh did not like to communicate with him through his ministers, but it was very difficult to arrange an interview. As he reported to the Governor-General, ". . . he is so much averse to business, and so wantonly in a state of intoxication which renders him unfit for it, that I am always obliged to request an interview with him many days before I am likely to obtain it, and even then sometimes not without compulsion."<sup>6</sup> He was under the influence of 'crafty priests and worthless dependents . . . who have influence enough to prevail upon him to withhold his acquiescence to any measure . . .'<sup>7</sup> The two dismissed ministers, the *Bar Barua* and the *Soladhara*

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., June 3, 1793, No. 9, 10, 11. The arrears amounted to Rs. 5,782-4 as. 4p. Krishna Narayan agreed to repay this sum within six months with 12 p.c. interest.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., June 14, 1793, No. 11.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., July 15, 1793, No. 26.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., August 12, 1793, No. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., July 15, 1793, No. 26.

<sup>7</sup> P. C., July 15, 1793, No. 26.

*Phukan*,<sup>1</sup> were creating disturbances in Upper Assam. A minor son of the former collected a considerable force and realised contributions from petty Chiefs and *Zamindars*. The *Soladhara Phukan* secretly negotiated with the King himself.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the close of the rainy season Captain Welsh prepared to restore Gaurinath's authority in Upper Assam by crushing the Moamarias. An advance guard under Lieutenant MacGregor was sent up the Brahmaputra to Koliabar. Gaurinath himself refused to accompany the troops who were proceeding to fight for him.<sup>3</sup> On his arrival at Koliabar early in November Lieutenant MacGregor met and secured the adherence of three influential *Gohains*.<sup>4</sup> He recommended that the *Bar Barua* and the *Soladhara Phukan* should be treated with 'some degree of severity.'<sup>5</sup> They were arrested and sent to Rangpur.<sup>6</sup> He also sent a letter<sup>7</sup> to Pitambar, Chief of the Moamarias, asking him to attend the assembly of notables summoned by Captain Welsh. Attempts were made to suppress all refractory Chiefs ravaging the districts between Koliabar and Nowgong,<sup>8</sup> but

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<sup>1</sup> They were then at Jogighopa.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 16, 1793, No. 41.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., November 22, 1793, No. 63.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., December 16, 1793, No. 40, 41.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., December 16, 1793, No. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Welsh to Shore, November 30, 1793.

<sup>7</sup> P. C., December 16, 1793, No. 41.

<sup>8</sup> See the proceedings of the Court Martial regarding Din Dayal Naik's failure to arrest Sinduri Hazarika, a leader of the Moamarias. (P. C., January 6, 1794, No. 14, 15, 17, 18, 19; January 31, 1794, No. 11, 12).

Captain Welsh did not consider it prudent to adopt 'harsh measures' or to send a detachment 'beyond Koliabar' until the country was perfectly settled.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile a very important change had occurred in Calcutta. Lord Cornwallis left India, and Sir John Shore succeeded him on October 28, 1793. We have seen how cautiously the former had tried, in the case of Assam, to obey the declaration<sup>2</sup> of Parliament that "to pursue schemes of conquest, and extension of dominion in India, are measures repugnant to the wish, the honour and policy of the nation." Sir John Shore was even more determined to pursue a policy of peace. "He was," says Lord Curzon, "a typical Bengal Civilian of the best type, a great revenue expert, an upright, dull, respectable, friendly kind of man, hating pomp of any sort, loving peace and economy, very pious, declining to work on Sundays . . ."<sup>3</sup> Such a man was not likely to pursue a policy of adventure. He held strong views about economy, and the effects of the war with Mysore were still troubling the Government. The French were active, the Marathas were aggressive; the Company had neither a strong army nor a full treasury. Naturally Sir John Shore deliberately withdrew from the complications in the east which he had inherited. Within a few weeks of his assumption of office he wrote to Henry Dundas,

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh to Lieutenant Williams, November 29, 1793. (P. C., January 6, 1794, No. 15).

<sup>2</sup> This declaration was repeated in the Charter Act of 1793, Section 42. See A. C. Banerjee, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, Vol. I, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> *British Government in India*, Vol. II, p. 171.

President of the Board of Control, "I sincerely regret this Government ever interfered in it, and my present wish is to extricate ourselves from prosecuting our Interposition, as speedily as possible, without discredit, and if it can be effected with some Commercial Benefit."<sup>1</sup> Here we find the keynote of the policy which resulted in the withdrawal of Captain Welsh from Assam.

On January 6, 1794, Sir John Shore directed that Captain Welsh should 'suspend all offensive military operations without further instruction from the Board excepting in case of urgent necessity which does not admit of a reference,' and formulated certain questions regarding the government and economic conditions of Assam to which the Captain was asked to reply.<sup>2</sup> He replied that Gaurinath would lose whatever authority he had regained as soon as the British troops were withdrawn. It was also pointed out that commercial intercourse between Assam and British India was likely to suffer if the British Government decided not to render military assistance to the King. Captain Welsh was convinced that the inevitable result of the policy of non-intervention would be the renewal of civil strife and the consequent suffering of the people. He recommended that 'the original form of Government in all its parts should be preserved,' that 'the Government of the country should be vested in the aristocracy,' and that 'the British Government should

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<sup>1</sup> Letter dated January 10, 1794. See Furber, *The Private Record of an Indian Governor-Generalship*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 6, 1794, No. 21, 23.

continue its mediating and controlling influence as the only means of preserving order and tranquillity.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Captain Welsh had arrived at Koliabar (January, 1794) and Gaurinath had accompanied him. The King had surrendered himself absolutely to his ally. He did not object to the dismissal and deportation<sup>2</sup> of the *Bar Barua* and the *Soladhara Phukan* and the appointment of new men in their posts.<sup>3</sup> He wrote conciliatory letters to the three *Gohains* who were supporting Lieutenant MacGregor.<sup>4</sup> He agreed to restore the Government of Assam to 'its ancient form' by extending the influence of the aristocracy. He made a suitable arrangement for the regular payment of the expenses of the British detachment<sup>5</sup> and requested the Governor-General to authorise Captain Welsh to employ the troops in Assam in whatever manner his ministers and the Captain might judge expedient.<sup>6</sup>

This friendly disposition of the King did not, however, last long. He wrote a letter to the Governor-General, complaining bitterly against the activities of Captain Welsh. The deportation of the ministers, the restoration of the Raja of Darrang, the confinement of the King and the interference with his religious obser-

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., February 24, 1794, No. 13A.  
To Rangpur (in Bengal).

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 20, 1793, No. 17.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., December 16, 1793, No. 41.

<sup>4</sup> A sum of Rs. 300,000 was to be paid annually. "Of this sum half was to be collected by the Bar Phukan from the districts under his control, and the other half by the Bar Barua from the rest of the Ahom dominions."

<sup>6</sup> P. C., February 24, 1794, No. 15.

vances,<sup>1</sup> the plan to take him to Rangpur, the abolition of the salt monopoly enjoyed by Raush—all these were cited as instances of the Captain's objectionable performances. "This Captain," wrote the King, "will never do anything for my advantage but in every respect will favour my enemy."<sup>2</sup> Some of his ministers wrote a similar letter a few days afterwards, in which they asserted that the consent given by the King to the Captain's proceedings was not voluntary.<sup>3</sup>

Sir John Shore was already inclined to withdraw the detachment from Assam; Gaurinath's letter changed his inclination into resolution.<sup>4</sup> Captain Welsh was 'positively directed to hold himself in readiness for commencing his march from Assam on or before' July 1 next. He was directed to repair to Koliabar 'or any other situation nearest the Company's provinces,' not to proceed to the capital of Assam, and to give up 'all offensive operations whatever'. He was also required 'to withdraw any control that he may have exercised over the internal government of Assam' and to extend his protection only to those Chiefs who attended the assembly summoned by him. Gaurinath

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<sup>1</sup> It is reported in this letter that Captain Welsh wanted to separate the King from his *guru* (spiritual preceptor) and prevented him from washing and saying his prayers.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 19, 1794, No. 13.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 31, 1794, No. 34. The ministers observed, "And whatever the Captain is desirous the Raja should acquiesce in, he threatens the Raja in case of his refusal and stops his provisions and prevents his washing and discharging the duties of his religion and shuts the doors upon him. The Raja in consequence being driven to extremity does as the Captain requires."

<sup>4</sup> Sir Edward Gait (*History of Assam*, pp. 207-208) does not refer to this letter.

was to be left free to conclude an agreement with the Chiefs; if he failed and wanted to accompany the detachment to Bengal, 'the Company's provinces are open to him as an asylum.' The Chiefs were to be informed 'that it is the resolution of Government not to employ the troops of the Company in the establishment of the sovereignty' of Gaurinath.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime Lieutenant MacGregor had defeated the Moamarias near Jorhat<sup>2</sup> and Captain Welsh had arrived at Debargaon (March 8, 1794). He had not yet received the orders of the Government referred to above; so he continued his preparations for crushing the Moamarias.<sup>3</sup> He wrote a letter to the chief Moamaria leader, Pitambar, asking him to submit to Gaurinath and to assist the British Government in restoring peace and order in Upper Assam.<sup>4</sup> The letter, however, could not be delivered to Pitambar. Lieutenant Irwin was thereupon sent towards Rangpur, to pacify the Moamarias by conciliatory measures, if possible, or to capture the city, 'provided his force was equal.' At a distance of about twelve miles from Rangpur he was 'furiously attacked and surrounded' by a large body of the Moamarias. He defeated them and advanced towards a bridge over the Namdang river, about four miles from Rangpur. Here he was

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary to Government to Welsh, March 19, 1794. (P. C., March 19, 1794, No. 20).

<sup>2</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>3</sup> He was aware of the new Governor-General's inclination to the policy of non-intervention. So he assured him that he was anxious to avoid hostilities and to 'settle matters by negotiation'. (Welsh to Shore, March 9, 1794. P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 22).

<sup>4</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 23.

joined by Captain Welsh. Rangpur was occupied on March 18 without any opposition, as the Moamarias had already evacuated the city. They had left large quantities of grain, cattle, furniture and treasure.<sup>1</sup> Gaurinath reached his capital on March 21.<sup>2</sup> Captain Welsh asked him whether he could dispense with the assistance of British troops. The King and his ministers unanimously declared that the departure of these troops would inevitably result in the revival of anarchy.<sup>3</sup>

The restoration of the King to his capital did not mean the establishment of peace and order in Upper Assam. The Moamarias were not yet crushed;<sup>4</sup> some of the Bengal *Barkandazes* were continuing their depredations in Kamrup. Captain Welsh prevailed upon the King to promise full pardon to all rebels if they offered their submission without delay,<sup>5</sup> but the policy of conciliation had no effect. Lieutenant Crosswell was sent against the *Barkandazes*, whom he succeeded in driving into Bhutan.<sup>6</sup> Then a detachment was sent against the Moamarias<sup>7</sup> at the request of Gaurinath and his ministers. It was reported that

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<sup>1</sup> The booty was sold; a sum of Rs. 1,17,334 was received and distributed among the troops as prize money. Sir John Shore severely censured Captain Welsh for this. (P. C., May 12, 1794, No. 3; May 28, 1794, No. 28, 37).

<sup>2</sup> P. C., April 7, 1794, No. 39, 40, 41, 42.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., April 7, 1794, No. 41.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., May 12, 1794, No. 1.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., April 7, 1794, No. 41.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., April 7, 1794, No. 42; April 28, 1794, No. 8; May 19, 1794, No. 26, 28.

<sup>7</sup> They had established their head-quarters at Bagmara near Rangpur.



many of these rebels were anxious to avail themselves of the King's offer of pardon but were prevented by their 'self-created chiefs.' The detachment, however, was recalled as soon as the letter of the Government dated March 19<sup>1</sup> was received.<sup>2</sup>

Captain Welsh decided to wait at Rangpur and forwarded to Calcutta the unanimous request of the King and his ministers that the detachment should not be withdrawn immediately. Nothing was wanting to complete the establishment of the King in his lawful authority but the submission of the Moamarias. Captain Welsh added that it would be very difficult for his troops to leave Assam during the rainy season, for they could not proceed by land owing to the inundated condition of the roads and the Brahmaputra was a dangerous river owing to 'the rapidity of its current and the inclemency of the weather.'<sup>3</sup> But the Government decided that the order of recall was 'founded on principles which are not at all affected by the alteration of circumstances referred to' by Captain Welsh.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile the Moamarias had resumed their aggressive attitude. Early in May they crossed the river Dikhu and plundered some granaries at Rangpur. Captain Welsh chased them twice and dispersed them.<sup>5</sup>

Fully conscious of the difficulties which he would have to face on the withdrawal of the Company's

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., May 12, 1794, No. 1.

Welsh to Secretary to Government, April 25, 1794. (P. C., May 12, 1794, No. 2).

<sup>4</sup> P. C., May 12, 1794, No. 2.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., May 28, 1794, No. 26; June 2, 1794, No. 21.

detachment, Gaurinath repeatedly requested the Governor-General to allow Captain Welsh to continue his work in Assam,<sup>1</sup> but Sir John Shore did not change his policy. So Captain Welsh left Rangpur on May 25 and arrived at Gauhati on May 30. Here a petition was presented to him by some of the local merchants who wanted his protection, but the Government did not authorise him to do anything for them.<sup>2</sup> He left Gauhati on July 1 and proceeded towards Rangpur (in Bengal).<sup>3</sup> The expedition reached British territory on July 3, 1794.

The immediate effect of the Captain's departure was disastrous to the people of Assam. A *vakil* of Gaurinath wrote to the Governor-General, ". . . his country is nothing but a scene of constant alarm and confusion, the Moamarias having immediately renewed their old practices, making incursions into the country in every direction and plundering and laying waste all before them with the most cruel barbarity, to the utter terror and dismay of his subjects who have forsaken their fields and habitation and betaken themselves to strongholds."<sup>4</sup> Gaurinath was compelled

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., June 2, 1794, No. 22, 23, 24; June 13, 1794, No. 7, 12; July 7, 1794, No. 27.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., July 7, 1794, No. 23.

Sir Edward Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 209) says that "he was overwhelmed with petitions imploring him to remain from all sorts and conditions of people," but we have found in the Imperial Record Department only one petition from some merchants who seem to have been British subjects trading in Assam.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., July 14, 1794, No. 24.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., August 22, 1794, No. 44.

to leave Rangpur, which was constantly threatened by the Moamarias ; he established his capital at Jorhat, where the presence of Purnananda *Burha Gohain* was a guarantee of personal safety. Rangpur was there-upon occupied by the rebels.<sup>1</sup> Raja Bishnu Narayan, whom Gaurinath had once placed on the *gadi* of Darrang, asserted his claim to the district of Kamrup and requested to be restored to his possessions as a vassal of the Company. His request was not accepted by the Government of Bengal.<sup>2</sup> British subjects trading in Assam suffered so much that an official protest had to be sent to Gaurinath from Calcutta.<sup>3</sup> The *Bar Barua*, a nominee of Captain Welsh, was dismissed ; the *Bar Phukan*, another nominee of his, was 'barbarously murdered'.<sup>4</sup> The Bengal *Barkandazes* renewed their depredations in Assam.<sup>5</sup> It was considered necessary to check their movements ; so a notice was issued in the *Calcutta Gazette* that no armed man would be allowed to proceed towards Assam without a passport from the Commissioner of

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<sup>1</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., October 3, 1794, No. 19.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., October 3, 1794, No. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Edward Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 209) seems to imply that the murder of the *Bar Phukan* was an unjustifiable act of cruelty. From a letter written by the *Bar Phukan* himself to the Governor-General it appears that the former had tried to depose Gaurinath and to enthrone a puppet prince at Gauhati. The *Bar Barua* was one of his accomplices. Such men surely deserved punishment. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter no. 53).

<sup>5</sup> S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter no. 42.

Cooch Behar.<sup>1</sup> Sadiya was taken by the Khamtis. Gaurinath died on December 19, 1794.

We have seen how, from the very beginning, the Government of Bengal had tried to follow a policy of cautious and limited interference in the affairs of Assam. The true spirit of this policy was, however, not always loyally followed by Captain Welsh, who found himself unable to resist the pressure of events and sought on more than one occasion to proceed further than he was authorised to do. Probably he would have proved a better ruler<sup>2</sup> to the unhappy people of Assam than their cruel and worthless King; it must, however be admitted that the assumption of government by Captain Welsh, directly or indirectly, would have involved the Company so deeply in the turmoils of Assam that sooner or later the story of Oudh would have been repeated on the eastern frontier of British India. No one could imagine in 1794 that Assam would be absorbed by Burma and that, for Bengal, the Burmese would prove to be worse neighbours than the Assamese. Sir Edward Gait says that "but for the intervention of the Burmese, the downfall of the Ahom Dynasty might have been con-

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 19, 1794, No. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Edward Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 207) says that Captain Welsh 'had not only shown himself a good organizer and a bold and determined leader, but had also displayed consummate tact and singular administrative ability'. This high tribute is hardly justified in view of his failure to secure the confidence of the chiefs and his selection for the important post of *Bar Phukan* of a man who intrigued against Gaurinath soon after the departure of the British detachment.

siderably delayed".<sup>1</sup> If Lord Cornwallis and Sir John Shore refused to increase the burden of the Company by hastening that downfall, we must seek for the justification of their policy in the attitude of the authorities in England<sup>2</sup> no less than in the critical situation which they had to face in other parts of India. It should not be forgotten that Captain Welsh was sent to Assam within a few months of the conclusion of peace with Tipu Sultan. During his stay in Assam the Marathas and the Nizam were sharpening their swords in anticipation of a contest which came in March, 1795.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the pro-French parties, supported by powerful contingents under French commanders, were becoming paramount in the courts of Sindhia and the Nizam. These dark clouds steadily gathering on the Indian horizon did not shake Sir John Shore's belief in the so-called policy of non-intervention. A distinguished English writer says, "Certainly in the administration of Sir John Shore the neutral policy laid down by Parliament and the Court of Directors received a fair trial."<sup>4</sup> That policy has been adversely criticised by many writers,<sup>5</sup> but it must be admitted that Lord Cornwallis and Sir John Shore left for Lord

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Assam*, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Section 34, *Pitt's India Act*.

Battle of Kharda, March, 1795.

Roberts, *History of British India*, p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm observed that "a period of six years' peace, instead of having added to the strength or improved the security of the British dominions in India, had placed them in a situation of comparative danger." Smith observes about 'the self-denying ordinance of the Act of 1784', "Instead of securing peace it ensured war". (*Oxford History of India*, p. 580).

Wellesley no legacy of trouble on the east. Assam was, indeed, left a victim to her own political and moral maladies, but the Company had successfully extricated itself from Ahom affairs 'without discredit, and . . . with some Commercial Benefit.'

## CHAPTER III

### DISPUTES ON THE ARAKAN FRONTIER (1784-1795)

In a previous chapter we have referred briefly to the relations between Arakan and Burma, and we have seen that Arakan was usually an independent kingdom. Indeed, its political and cultural relations with Bengal were probably more intimate than its direct contact with the interior of Burma. The decline of Arakan began after the conquest of Chittagong by the Mughals in 1666. The Arakanese continued their raids into the interior of Bengal, but they were never again able to rule over any part of that Mughal province.

Towards the close of the seventeenth century Arakan fell a prey to political turmoil and anarchy, in which adventurers from Bengal—followers of Shuja<sup>1</sup>, the unfortunate Mughal Prince, as well as their descendants and associates—played a decisive part. Order was restored for a few years by a King named Sandawizaya (1710-1731), whose death was followed by the revival of anarchy. Some Arakanese prayed for Burmese intervention when Singu (1776-1782) ruled at Shwebo, but he was not very much interested in military and political adventures. In 1782 a native of Ramree, Thamada, occupied the throne of Arakan. The inhabitants of Ramree and Cheduba are regarded

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<sup>1</sup> For the tragic fate of Shuja in Arakan, see Harvey, *History of Burma*, pp. 146-148.

by the Arakanese as beyond the pale of social intercourse. So Thamada's rule was hated by his subjects. A deputation of Arakanese nobles waited on King Bo-daw-pa-ya at Ava and requested him to dethrone Thamada. "Perhaps," says Harvey, "they were patriots wishing to see their land at rest ; perhaps they wanted the sweets of office."<sup>1</sup> The ambitious Burmese King eagerly accepted their prayer, and Arakan sank into the gloom of Burmese tyranny.

The procedure adopted by the Burmese King was shrewd and cautious. His spies, disguised as monks, worshipped at the famous Mahamuni shrine<sup>2</sup> and thus neutralised the protecting deity of Arakan. Then a large force assembled at Prome under three Royal Princes and invaded Arakan by three different routes.<sup>3</sup> Another force with guns went by boat round Negrais. The conquest began with the capture of Ramree. Thamada was so unpopular that there was hardly any serious resistance to the invaders, who were in some cases even welcomed as friends and deliverers. Mrohaung was easily occupied. Thamada tried to save himself and his family by flight, but he was caught and made a prisoner. The victorious Burmese army returned to Ava in February, 1785, with some members of the Arakanese Royal family, including Thamada himself,<sup>4</sup> and 20,000 Arakanese as prisoners.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Burma*, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> See Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 313.

<sup>3</sup> Pa-aing Pass (Minbu district), Padaung Pass (Prome district) and Kyangin Pass (Henzada district).

<sup>4</sup> He died in Burma a year later.

<sup>5</sup> For the Burmese version of the conquest of Arakan, see



Even before the completion of the conquest the Burmese deliverers had revealed their true nature to their Arakanese hosts. Symes<sup>1</sup> refers to the terrible sufferings inflicted on the population of Arakan by the victors. Harvey quotes an Arakanese family tradition, telling us that the Burmese left the Arakanese 'tied to stakes at low-water marks, or buried them up to the chin in fields which they then proceeded to harrow'.<sup>2</sup> The terror continued even after the complete subjugation of the country. Colonel Erskine wrote in 1794, "That the Burmahs have been guilty of shocking cruelty and oppression to the conquered, I have not . . . the smallest doubt . . . thousands of men, women and children have been slaughtered in cold blood . . ."<sup>3</sup> This testimony of a competent British officer makes it difficult for us to reject the statement of the Arakanese rebel Apolung, who said in 1794 that nearly two *lakhs* of men, women and children had been killed, the same number had been carried off to Burma as slaves, and those who had taken shelter in hills and jungles were either captured by Burmese troops or killed by tigers.<sup>4</sup>

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*Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, pp. 1-17. See also Fytche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, pp. 76-77, and *British Burma Gazetteer*.

<sup>1</sup> *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava*, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Burma*, p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 41. On another occasion Colonel Erskine wrote to the Commander-in-Chief (April 5, 1794) that the subjugation of Arakan by the Burmese was "a happy event, for the Mugs were a set of pirates and had no idea of public or private faith; they committed depredations upon all their neighbours with uncommon cruelty". (P. C., April 25, 1794, No. 14).

<sup>4</sup> P. C., October 10, 1794, No. 45.

Bo-daw-pa-ya obviously took more interest in Arakan than in Manipur. In spite of repeated incursions against Manipur no attempt was made to bring that State under direct Burmese administration; the policy of ruling it through submissive vassals was preferred. In the case of Arakan, however, no submissive vassal was probably available. Thamada had rejected the advice of his ministers to make submission to the conqueror and refused to offer him a daughter. It is possible that Bo-daw-pa-ya wanted to put Arakan on the same footing as Pegu. Whatever the reason or motive might be, Arakan was constituted a province of the Burmese Empire and placed under a Burmese Governor who resided at Mrohaung. Sandoway, Ramree and Cheduba were constituted sub-provinces. This is why we often come across the expression "the four provinces of Arakan" in Burmese works and English documents. Burmese garrisons and outposts were scattered throughout Arakan, and the An Pass was put into repair to facilitate communication between Burma and Arakan<sup>1</sup>. But mere brute force could not maintain order in a country groaning under tyranny. Rebellions and reprisals constituted a vicious circle, and Arakan knew no peace for two generations.

Owing to geographical contiguity Bengal was affected by the troubles in Arakan. The *Mags*, who had for centuries oppressed the people of Bengal, now became victims of Burmese cruelty. Some of them crossed the small river Naf, the boundary between Arakan and the British district of Chittagong, and

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<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, pp. 45-46.

took refuge in the Company's territory. They were accepted as British subjects, and some of them were provided with waste land for cultivation.<sup>1</sup>

The Burmese naturally resented the emigration of their subjects. In 1786 a Burmese army crossed the Naf in pursuit of a *Mag sardar* who had found shelter in British territory. A British officer named Major Ellerker was sent with some troops to protect the frontier. The *Mag sardar* was shot by the Burmese on the northern bank of the Naf (*i.e.*, within British territory), but no hostile step was taken by Major Ellerker. The Burmese army returned to Arakan. In 1787 another *Mag sardar* fled from Arakan, but he was captured by the Burmese at the mouth of the Naf. On this occasion presents were interchanged as a testimony of friendship between the Magistrate of Chittagong and the Burmese.<sup>2</sup>

We have said in a previous chapter that ever since the days of A-laung-pa-ya the Burmese had been trying to conquer Siam. The conquest of Arakan encouraged them. A grand expedition proceeded to the south in 1786, led by the King himself.<sup>3</sup> The Governor of Arakan was ordered to send large supplies of men, money and rice.<sup>4</sup> The measures adopted by him for collecting these supplies were so oppressive that in 1791 the Arakanese determined to resist. They

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., February 10, 1794, No. 16.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., April 25, 1794, No. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey, *History of Burma*, pp. 270-271. The expedition did not succeed. The King left his soldiers to their fate and fled for his life to Rangoon.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., August 11, 1794, No. 11.

took up arms<sup>1</sup> and nominated as their commander a member of their former Royal family. The rebels killed some Burmese troops and compelled others to take refuge in a fort. They were assisted by a *Mag sardar* who had left Arakan before the Burmese conquest and obtained from the Magistrate of Chittagong a plot of rent-free land near the Arakan frontier. The Burmese crushed the rebellion as soon as reinforcements arrived from Ava. The leaders of the rebellion fled to Chittagong and received a village. The Burmese do not appear to have taken any step to pursue them within the British frontier.<sup>2</sup>

In 1792 some Muhammadans of Chittagong crossed the Naf and obtained some plots of land from the Governor of Arakan. They purchased 800 bullocks and 95 buffaloes under the pretence of employing them in cultivation. At the end of the year, however, they returned to Chittagong with the animals. The Governor of Arakan complained to the Magistrate of Chittagong, who realised the sum of one thousand rupees from the offenders and sent the money to the Governor as compensation.<sup>3</sup>

No more trouble took place on the frontier till the beginning of the year 1794. In January<sup>4</sup> a Burmese army crossed the Naf and demanded the surrender of a *Mag sardar* who is called Lohomorang in British records. This *sardar* had emigrated to Chittagong soon after the Burmese conquest of Arakan

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., April 14, 1794, No. 14.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., April 25, 1794, No. 14.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., April 25, 1794, No. 14.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 31.

and received from the Magistrate some plots of waste land for cultivation. Colebrooke, Magistrate of Chittagong, reported to the Governor-General on February 3, 1794, that the object of the Burmese army was 'to seize or enforce the surrender of men whom Government has long considered as its own subjects.'<sup>1</sup>

In his letter to the Magistrate of Chittagong the Governor of Arakan complained that his revenues had suffered owing to the flight of 3,500 men under the leadership of Lohomorang, and requested him to deliver them to his army. The Burmese did not understand the significance of crossing, without permission, the boundary of a friendly State. The Governor of Ramree, who was the leader of the Burmese invading army, wrote to the British officer stationed at Ramu<sup>2</sup> that his followers 'have not plundered the effects of any people in this country nor touched one article.'<sup>3</sup> Sometime later he wrote, ". . . no damage arises to your country from my remaining in the forts which I have erected."<sup>4</sup> Apparently he knew nothing about the offence known to International Law as violation of territory. He demanded the surrender of some fugitives on a new ground; it was asserted that some of them, under the leadership of a

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., February 10, 1794, No. 16.

<sup>2</sup> A frontier post in the Chittagong district, not far from the Arakan border.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., February 10, 1794, No. 17. This claim was true. (P. C., February 17, 1794, No. 12, 13; March 3, 1794, No. 13). The local people fled when they heard of the Burmese advance, but the Burmese 'paid liberally for every article of which they found the owner'. (P. C., March 14, 1794, No. 30).

<sup>4</sup> P. C., March 7, 1794, No. 20.

*Mag sardar* called Apolung in British records, had plundered one of the Burmese King's ships and settled at Mahiskhali within the limits of Chittagong.<sup>1</sup>

The immediate issue before the British authorities was simple. They could not allow the Burmese to violate their territory with impunity. The Burmese must be compelled to leave British territory before the question of surrendering the fugitives could be taken up for discussion. Captain Rayne, Officer Commanding British troops at Chittagong, detached Lieutenant Lyons to expel the Burmese from British territory. He marched a few miles from Ramu, camped at Ratanpullung, and reported<sup>2</sup> that a stronger force would be necessary 'to do anything effectual against them.' Captain Rayne then sent Lieutenants Watherstone and Hunt, with artillery and a company of *sepoys*,<sup>3</sup> to join the force at Ramu. It was reported that the Burmese army, about 5,000 strong and armed with French muskets, had erected four small forts made of wood and bamboos.<sup>4</sup> But the Burmese disclaimed all hostile intentions; the Governor of Ramree was prepared to proceed to Chittagong to carry on negotiations.<sup>5</sup> So the British troops were instructed by Captain Rayne 'on no account to cross the boundary or pursue them beyond it.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.C., February 17, 1794, No. 14.

<sup>2</sup> P.C., February 17, 1794, No. 13.

<sup>3</sup> A private vessel, the *Charlotte*, was chartered to transport the artillery and the *sepoys*, as the land route was covered with hills and jungles. (P.C., February 17, 1794, No. 12, 13).

<sup>4</sup> P. C., February 17, 1794, No. 12.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., February 17, 1794, No. 14.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., February 17, 1794, No. 15.

These measures were adopted by the civil and military officers at Chittagong on their own responsibility. When their proceedings were reported to Calcutta, Sir John Shore and Sir Robert Abercromby<sup>1</sup> took a serious view of the situation<sup>2</sup> and decided to send Lieutenant-Colonel Erskine to take command of the troops at Chittagong.<sup>3</sup> Re-inforcements were sent from Calcutta, and Colebrooke was authorised to summon troops from Dacca in case of necessity. If the Burmese army refused to evacuate British territory within a reasonable time, they were to be expelled by force.<sup>4</sup> The Magistrate of Dacca was ordered to 'lay an embargo on all Arracan trading boats that are now at Dacca or may arrive there during the continuance of the Burmah Troops on the Borders of Chittagong.'<sup>5</sup>

On February 18 Colebrooke sent letters to the Viceroy of Pegu,<sup>6</sup> the Governor of Arakan and the Governor of Ramree, requesting them to evacuate British territory at once.<sup>7</sup> At the same time arrangements were completed for the adoption of hostile measures. The Burmese army was superior in num-

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<sup>1</sup> Commander-in-Chief.

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Shore wrote to Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Control, on March 10, 1794, "... the Pegu Government means to enforce, as far as it can, the Requisition which it has made; you will I hope find our reply just, moderate and firm. . ." (Furber, *The Private Record of an Indian Governor-Generalship*, p. 50).

<sup>3</sup> P. C., February 17, 1794, No. 16.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., February 17, 1794, No. 17.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., February 17, 1794, No. 19.

<sup>6</sup> The usual channel of communications between the British and Burmese Governments.

<sup>7</sup> P. C., March 11, 1794, No. 11.

ber to the British troops sent to the frontier. Their stockades were strong. The territory lying between Ramu and the Naf was covered by hills and jungles. It was extremely difficult to carry provisions and guns through so difficult a tract of land. The difficulty of transport was removed to some extent by the *Charlotte*.<sup>1</sup> Colebrooke was glad to receive authority to summon troops from Dacca.<sup>2</sup> Captain Rayne requested the Magistrate of Tipperah to send to Chittagong all troops stationed at Comilla,<sup>3</sup> but the Magistrate regretted his inability to do so, as the local treasury and jail required a strong guard.<sup>4</sup> Later on, however, he complied with Captain Rayne's request.<sup>5</sup>

Colebrooke received on February 26 a reply to his letter to the Governor of Ramree.<sup>6</sup> A new offence was now attributed to the fugitives. It was alleged that some of them, including Apolung, were 'informers and incendiaries': "They carry to Chittagong the stories of Arracan and to Arracan the stories of Chittagong." The old charge of robbery was repeated, and it was clearly stated that the Burmese army would not retreat beyond the British frontier without arresting Apolung.<sup>7</sup>

Colonel Erskine arrived at Chittagong on March

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 3, 1794, No. 15, 16. See *ante*, p. 135, for the *Charlotte*.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 11, 1794, No. 11.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 3, 1794, No. 19. Comilla is the head-quarter of the Tipperah district.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., March 3, 1794, No. 18.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., March 14, 1794, No. 30.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., March 7, 1794, No. 19.

<sup>7</sup> P. C., March 7, 1794, No. 20.



4.<sup>1</sup> He was instructed 'to repel the invaders and oblige them to re-pass the frontier and retire from the Company's territories as soon as you have collected a force sufficient for the purpose.'<sup>2</sup> He accepted Colebrooke's suggestion<sup>3</sup> that no more time should be spent in fruitless negotiations with the Burmese army. It was, said he, "highly impolitic to permit them to hold with an armed force the smallest spot in the Company's territories, as it must create in their minds the supposition of our not being prepared to resist a sudden attack, and may in future from that circumstance lead them to more offensive acts of hostility." He decided to proceed to Ramu at once and to collect the force under his command, so that he might 'instantly lead it to the first point driving them out of the Company's provinces.'<sup>4</sup> He arrived at Ramu on March 10. He found that the Burmese army was about 8,000 strong. They had erected six stockades. He felt that the force at his command was not strong enough to drive them away across the Naf, a distance of about fifty miles. So he decided to wait, 'although with much reluctance and impatience,' till the arrival of additional troops.<sup>5</sup>

At Ramu Colonel Erskine was requested by the Governor of Ramree to send a reliable person to whom the Burmese point of view might be explained. A man who knew the Arakanese language was accord-

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 14, 1794, No. 29.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 7, 1794, No. 31.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 14, 1794, No. 30.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., March 14, 1794, No. 31.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 24.

ingly despatched to the Burmese camp. The Governor of Ramree declared again and again that he had no intention to provoke hostilities. He said that his letters to the British officers were misinterpreted by the Arakanese, 'who were hereditary enemies to the Burmese.' He gave an assurance that the Burmese Government did not demand the surrender of those *Mags* who had settled in British territory and were regarded as British subjects. Nor, said he, did his King object to the peaceful emigration of the *Mags* from Arakan. But he expected that British authorities would not extend their protection to 'traitors and assassins.' His advance towards Ramu was to be 'entirely attributed to his ignorance of the boundary and of the laws and customs of European Governments.' He humbly described himself as 'a poor man who had a boon to request and who from ignorance had crossed the threshold instead of waiting at the door.'<sup>1</sup>

The conciliatory attitude adopted by the Governor of Ramree satisfied Colonel Erskine ; he regarded him 'as an object of compassion rather than worthy of the chastisement of Government.' He sent Lieutenant Frazer to request him to cross the Naf, with an assurance that "any well-grounded complaint would be attended to by our Government as soon as he had evacuated the Company's province."<sup>2</sup> In his conversation with Lieutenant Frazer the Governor of Ramree said that he was held by his King personally respon-

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 27.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 27.

sible for the capture of Apolung, and that, if he failed in his attempt, "not only my own life but the lives of all my kindred and relations, male and female, will become forfeited to our just though severe laws." Lieutenant Frazer was impressed with his sincerity.<sup>1</sup>

At this stage it is necessary to refer to the incidents which led to the Burmese demand for the surrender of Apolung. This *sardar* and his associates had taken the oath of allegiance to the King of Ava, the oath being administered by the Governor of Ramree. They were given possession of the Broken Islands, for which they paid an annual tribute of bees' wax and elephants. For three years Apolung and his associates remained true to their obligations; but in September, 1793, they plundered some boats belonging to the Burmese Government. A few days later they seized a boat sent by the King of Burma to purchase clothes in Calcutta. The Governor of Ramree sent a man to protest against these depredations. This man was put to death by Apolung. "The conduct of these *sardars*," reported Colonel Erskine, "from the period of their attacking the Government fleet seems to have been uncommonly licentious<sup>2</sup> until they were driven from the islands by the Burmese, when they took refuge in the Hon'ble Company's province . . . ."<sup>3</sup> Some enemies of the Governor of Ramree reported to the King of Burma that he had

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 28.

<sup>2</sup> This statement was supported by reports received by Colebrooke from Arakan merchants. (P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 31).

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 24.

'connived at their villainy and received part of the plunder.' The King declared that nothing could convince him of the Governor's innocence but 'the persons or heads of the traitors.'<sup>1</sup> The unfortunate Governor was thus compelled to advance to the British frontier.

After Lieutenant Frazer's return from the Burmese camp Colonel Erskine received a letter from the Governor of Ramree, asking for 'the space of 20 days for an answer from the King of Ava.' He was very anxious to avoid open war. "We mean no harm," said he, "and to comply with your orders as near as is consistent to the saving of our lives, we will, if required, send all our guns and half of our troops the other side of the Naf and all of us follow in twenty days."<sup>2</sup> Colonel Erskine was authorised by the Government to accept this proposal and to inform the Governor of Ramree that the Magistrate of Chittagong would 'apprehend and secure the persons stated to have committed depredations in Arracan with a view to strict enquiry into any specific charges that may be hereafter brought against them.'<sup>3</sup>

In an elaborate report sent to Calcutta on March 19 Colebrooke submitted that, although the Burmese army had advanced 'not more than 6 or 10 miles' within British territory, yet it was clear that its conduct was not 'intentionally hostile towards the English.' The commercial intercourse between Arakan and Chittagong was not interrupted. The obstinate resolu-

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 28.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 29.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 30.

tion of the Governor of Ramree to get hold of the fugitives was 'merely dictated by the necessity under which he conceives himself of executing his orders where his own head and the heads of all his family will be the penalty of failure.' Colebrooke concluded, "His total inaction in the line of offence compared with his obstinacy in refusing to retreat would further strengthen this opinion by proving that, if possible, he apprehends less the consequences of provoking hostilities with the English Government than of incurring the displeasure of his own monarch."<sup>1</sup>

Sir John Shore was now convinced that the apparently aggressive attitude of the Burmese was 'not owing to designed hostilities and may fairly be imputed to erroneous and mistaken motives.' Under the circumstances he was not prepared to prejudice the commercial interests of the Company by precipitating the outbreak of war. Colonel Erskine was instructed to inform the Governor of Ramree that the Government of Bengal would not demand any 'compensation or satisfaction' for the violation of British territory, and that the Burmese authorities were expected to assist the enquiry about the conduct of the fugitives which would be held by the Magistrate of Chittagong.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the close of March the Burmese army crossed the Naf and evacuated British territory. Colonel Erskine found no reason to take exception to the conduct of the Governor of Ramree. The Burmese

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 31.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., April 7, 1794, No. 33, 34.

had remained peaceful even when two of them had been killed by the party under Lieutenant Lyons before Colonel Erskine's arrival at Ramu. The erection of stockades in British territory was quite in accordance with Burmese custom. As Colonel Erskine reported: "It is their custom to fortify every time they move as the ancient Romans did." The gallant officer fully sympathised with the cruel dilemma in which the Governor of Ramree found himself: "The Burmah laws . . . are like the laws of Draco wrote in blood. If any person turns his back in the day of battle, the whole of his relations, male and female, lose their lives."<sup>1</sup>

The retreat of the Burmese army prepared the ground for the enquiry. The Governor of Ramree at first agreed to co-operate with the British authorities, and even to come to Chittagong with the evidence collected by him. He requested Colonel Erskine to expedite the matter, as the approach of the rainy season would make it difficult for both English and Burmese troops to remain encamped in a jungly and unhealthy country.<sup>2</sup> But by the middle of May it appeared that the Burmese had no intention of taking part in the enquiry. It was reported that the Governors of Ramree and Cheduba had been summoned by the King to Ava, where both of them were likely to lose their heads. The newly appointed Governor of Arakan, who was a near relative of the King and his first counsellor, was unwilling to commit

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., April 7, 1794, No. 37.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., May 2, 1794, No. 18.

himself until he was favoured with instructions from the capital.<sup>1</sup> The result was the complete cessation of intercourse between Colonel Erskine and the Burmese authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Sometime later Colonel Erskine received a letter from the Governor of Arakan, who asserted that the English officers had promised to surrender Apolung, and demanded the fulfilment of that promise. Colonel Erskine replied that no such promise had been made by any English officer. He requested the Governor to assist the enquiry by supplying evidence against the fugitives, as "it is not the custom of the English to deliver up men without a trial."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the non-co-operation of the Burmese authorities Colonel Erskine succeeded in procuring some details about the treacherous conduct of Apolung. It appears that in July, 1793, one of the King's ministers arrived in Arakan to demand paddy to be delivered at Rangoon for the use of the army in Siam. Apolung agreed to furnish some soldiers, instead of paddy, as he 'inhabited in woody country which did not admit of the cultivation of paddy.' In November, 1793, Apolung was asked to fulfil this agreement. He replied by killing the minister's messengers. Then he plundered some Government boats. The Governor of Ramree tried to capture him, but he plundered one of the King's boats and went from one village to another, burning and destroying them. When Arakan

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., June 13, 1794, No. 6.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., July 18, 1794, No. 19.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., August 11, 1794, No. 10.

became too hot for him he fled to Chittagong with his followers.<sup>1</sup>

These details were forwarded to Calcutta. The Governor-General in Council came to the conclusion that, if these allegations were substantiated by reliable evidence, there could be "no hesitation to surrender Apolung to the justice of his own monarch, as it cannot be the interest of any Power to protect a murderer and plunderer." It was felt, however, that there was a 'possibility of either the innocence of Apolung and others or their having been driven by cruelty and tyranny into resistance and retaliation.' Colonel Erskine was, therefore, directed to call on Apolung for an answer to the charges brought against him and to keep him under arrest till the conclusion of the enquiry.<sup>2</sup>

In October Colonel Erskine received a letter<sup>3</sup> from the Governor of Arakan, who now appeared to be 'more interested in the encouragement of commerce than solicitous in what relates to the fugitives'.<sup>4</sup> Apolung denied the truth of the charges brought against him. He said that five followers of his, including his nephew, were murdered in cold blood by the Governor of Arakan. He himself was attacked, but he succeeded in escaping to Chittagong. He agreed that he had taken the oath of allegiance to the

<sup>1</sup> P. C., August 11, 1794, No. 11.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., August 11, 1794, No. 12.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 44. The Governor wrote: "... These two nations are one. Let not, therefore, the gold and silver road of commerce be shut up, but let the merchants pass and re-pass as formerly."

<sup>4</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 41.



King of Ava, but the Burmese Governor killed his wife and son-in-law and some of his followers. He had never plundered Government boats or burnt villages; on the other hand, he had presented to the Government one *maund* of elephants' teeth as contribution for the expenses of the war with Siam.<sup>1</sup> It was obviously difficult to decide whether Apolung was more truthful than his enemies. Colonel Erskine recommended that, if no evidence was forthcoming from Arakan, the fugitives (who had been arrested in the mean time) should be liberated.<sup>2</sup> Sir John Shore also found it impossible to come to any definite decision about the question of Apolung's guilt. He concluded that it would be 'impolitic and unjust' to surrender him until more satisfactory evidence was available. Colonel Erskine was authorised to 'liberate him from personal restraint upon condition of giving good security to appear when required.'<sup>3</sup>

Towards the close of November Colonel Erskine received a letter from the Governor of Arakan, saying that the Governor of Cheduba was proceeding to the Naf with satisfactory evidence about Apolung's guilt.<sup>4</sup> Colonel Erskine encamped on the bank of the Naf on December 1, taking the fugitives along with him. A few days later the Governor of Cheduba informed him that the evidence was not ready and he did not know when he could cross the river. Colonel Erskine naturally concluded that the Burmese were 'trifling'

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., October 10, 1794, No. 45.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 41.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 46.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., December 5, 1794, No. 39.

with him and decided to return to Ramu.<sup>1</sup> But the Burmese soon changed their tactics. In January, 1795, the Governor of Cheduba co-operated with Colonel Erskine in the enquiry. The evidence was not satisfactory, and Colonel Erskine concluded that "the principal parts of the accusation have not been substantiated."<sup>2</sup> The Governor-General in Council decided that, although the evidence was 'insufficient for the conviction and punishment' of the fugitives, there was 'strong presumptive proof of their having been guilty of the crimes imputed to them.'<sup>3</sup> As these crimes were committed within Burmese territory by Burmese subjects, it was decided that the fugitives should be delivered up for trial before the officers of that Government. The Governor-General was desired to request the King of Burma to 'order a full and impartial investigation of their conduct previous to giving any authority for their punishment.'<sup>4</sup>

No objection can be taken to the final decision of the Government of Bengal on political and legal grounds. There is no doubt that there was 'strong presumptive proof' of Apolung's guilt; the testimony of some Arakan merchants, recorded by Colonel Erskine<sup>5</sup> and Colebrooke,<sup>6</sup> was clearly against him. It was also beyond doubt that Apolung had taken

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 22, 1794, No. 10.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., February 6, 1795, No. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Bayfield (*Historical Review*, p. X) is hardly quite correct in saying that "the prisoners, having been tried and found guilty, were surrendered."

<sup>4</sup> P. C., February 6, 1795, No. 21.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 41.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., March 27, 1794, No. 31.

shelter in British territory after committing the crimes imputed to him. He was undoubtedly a subject of the Burmese King. His country had been conquered and permanently annexed to Burma, and he himself had taken an oath of allegiance to the new ruler. He was not a political offender<sup>1</sup>: he was not fighting to make his country free. Under the circumstances it was the duty of the British authorities to surrender him.

Judged from the standpoint of liberalism and expediency, however, Sir John Shore's decision is not quite immune from censure. Speaking of the surrendered fugitives Phayre remarks, "Their real crime was, that they had led their fellow-countrymen in resistance to the Burmese conqueror, and in their wild warfare had probably been as unscrupulous as their oppressors of the lives of their foes. The surrender of these patriots must be condemned as an act unworthy of a civilised power, having an armed force at command."<sup>2</sup> It may be doubted whether the surrendered refugees were patriots rightly struggling to be free, but their tragic fate certainly excites our sympathy. In view of the lack of positive evidence about their guilt and the notorious character of Burmese rule in Arakan Sir John Shore might have refused to surrender them to their cruel masters. Nor was this a question of mere sentiment. "The opinion that prevailed both in Chittagong and at Ava was that the refugees were

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<sup>1</sup> The custom of refusing extradition for political offenders was not generally accepted in Europe before the nineteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Burma*, p. 221.

given up from fear.”<sup>1</sup> Bayfield observes that the arrogance and insolence of the Burmese to Captain Symes in 1795 was ‘in some measure the effect of the conciliatory conduct of General Erskine, and the surrender of the criminal Mug fugitives in the year 1794; which acts were construed by this benighted people as the result of fear of their mighty power.’<sup>2</sup> The Burmese interpretation of Sir John Shore’s scrupulously correct policy revealed its political inexpediency.

Sir John Shore did his best for the unfortunate refugees by requesting the Burmese King to give them a fair trial. It is not difficult to imagine the effect of this request on the Court of Ava. One of Apolung’s associates made his escape on the way to Amarapura; Apolung and the other fugitive suffered a lingering and cruel death.<sup>3</sup> The Governor of Arakan tried, soon after the surrender of Apolung, to get hold of the wives and children of the fugitives, by demanding their surrender. This demand Colonel Erskine refused, with the support of the Government, to comply with.<sup>4</sup> It appears that in preferring this demand the Governor acted on his own initiative, and that it was not authorised by the King or the Ministers.<sup>5</sup> Two guns and three boats belonging to the Burmese King had been carried off by Apolung.

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<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Journal of Science*, October, 1825.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Review*, p. X.

<sup>3</sup> Report of Captain Symes. (P. C., January 23, 1797, No. 26).

<sup>4</sup> P. C., May 22, 1795, No. 99, 101.

<sup>5</sup> Report of Captain Symes. (P. C., January 23, 1797, No. 26).

These were restored by Colonel Erskine on the demand of the Governor of Arakan.<sup>1</sup>

There are certain aspects of Burmese policy which demand a more satisfactory explanation than we are at present able to offer. Why did the Burmese give up their demand for Lahomorang? Why did they not mention the name of Apolung at the beginning? Why did the Governor of Ramree evacuate British territory without securing the fugitives? Why did the Governor of Arakan appear to be more anxious for the prosperity of trade than the capture of the 'traitors'? British records provide no satisfactory answer to these questions. Unfortunately we are quite in the dark about the Burmese view of the whole affair. The *Konbaungset Yazawin* does not refer to it at all.

The protracted negotiations regarding the Burmese demand for the surrender of the fugitives drew the attention of the Government of Bengal to the unsatisfactory condition of the frontier between Chittagong and Arakan. The river Naf was the official boundary, but even a responsible Burmese official like the Governor of Ramree did not know (or pretended not to know) it. The most important post within British jurisdiction beyond the town of Chittagong was Ramu,<sup>2</sup> about 25 miles from the sea. A navigable rivulet passed by this post; it was computed that boats carrying 600 *maunds* of rice could proceed through this stream from Chittagong to Ramu. The land route was difficult; heavy loads and guns could hardly

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., May 22, 1795, No. 99.

<sup>2</sup> About 68 miles S. S. E. of Chittagong.

be sent by land from Chittagong to Ramu.<sup>1</sup> The territory lying between Ramu and the Naf was covered by hills and jungles and intersected by rivulets. The ground was so low and flat that it was completely inundated during the rains. The troops took an hour to march one mile. Only a few *bighās* of land were under cultivation.<sup>2</sup> There were no shops, and no provisions were available. "There was no military post beyond Ramu ; the intermediate tract of land seems to have been considered neutral ground."<sup>3</sup> The whole region was in 'a perfect state of wilderness.'<sup>4</sup>

This wild region was inhabited by about 5,000 *Mags*, exclusive of women and children. They "earned a bare subsistence chiefly by fishing, labouring in the woods, and partial employment amongst the Mussalman Zemindars, few or none of them possessing lands of

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., February 17, 1794, No. 13.

<sup>2</sup> As the hilly tracts were unsuitable for plough cultivation a peculiar method was adopted by the local people. "In the months of January and February a convenient piece of forest land is selected; the bamboos are cleared and the smaller trees felled, but large trees are only denuded of their lower branches; the cut jungle is then allowed to dry in the sun, and in April it is fired. If it has thoroughly dried and no rain has fallen since the *jhum* was cut, this firing reduces all but the largest trees to ashes, and burns the soil to the depth of an inch or two. The ground is then cleared of charred logs and debris, and as soon as heavy rain falls and saturates the ground, the *jhum* is planted with mixed seeds of cotton, rice, melons, cucumber, pumpkins, and maize." (*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. X, p. 321).

<sup>3</sup> Colonel Erskine's report.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., March 3, 1794, No. 15; March 27, 1794, No. 31; April 7, 1794, No. 37, 38; April 25, 1794, No. 14; January 9, 1795, No. 47.

any extent. They carried on an insignificant barter, exchanging dried fish, honey, bees' wax and coarse cloth . . . ." They were active, industrious, mild and docile. Women took part in the manufacture of cloth. It was expected that "if the Mugs were encouraged in agriculture, the emigration from Arracan would be prodigious."<sup>1</sup>

"The state of this frontier," observed a military officer after local inspection, "by being covered with jungle, is peculiarly well adapted to the desultory inroads of our neighbours, and while it remains so, they may lie concealed, make sudden irruptions, and retire with impunity."<sup>2</sup> It was difficult to fathom the real intentions of the Burmese Government. Although the Governors of Arakan and Ramree repudiated hostile designs, a large number of Burmese troops arrived at the frontier in January, 1795, when the enquiry against Apolung was coming to a close.<sup>3</sup> Nobody knew the mind of King Bo-daw-pa-ya, cruel, proud and ambitious. It is said that soon after the conquest of Arakan he decided to invade Bengal. A council was summoned to deliberate upon the project. A native of Bengal, who then resided at Ava, was asked to say whether, in his opinion, the Burmese would be able to defeat the British army. He unwisely replied in the negative and lost his head, but the King gave up the project.<sup>4</sup> Any accident might

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 9, 1795, No. 47.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 9, 1795, No. 47.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., February 6, 1795, No. 21.

<sup>4</sup> "The vagaries and eccentricities of the old King were not allowed, by him, to embroil or imperil his Empire. They were

lead to its revival. Nor was the King of Burma an enemy to be neglected. Colonel Erskine remarked, “. . . although the troops of the King of Ava are at present despicable in point of discipline, yet when we are unprepared or engaged in another quarter, they have it in their power to give us much trouble.”<sup>1</sup>

It was obviously necessary to put the frontier in a defensible position. The battalions at Chittagong and Dacca were too weak and dispersed for *mufussil* duties to be available in any sudden emergency. Colonel Erskine suggested that one ‘effective’ battalion should always be stationed at or near Ramu, ready to act at a moment’s warning.<sup>2</sup> This measure would “not only impress the natives with confidence, preserve peace and order in the interior districts, but compel the Burmahs to relinquish their predatory habits and thereby give stability to the Company’s possessions in that quarter.”<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately effect was not given to these suggestions by the Government. Sir John Shore wrote to the President of the Board of Control,<sup>4</sup> “The Pegu Government is powerful, but it can never send any army of consequence into the Company’s territories . . . .”<sup>5</sup>

controlled by so much of natural shrewdness and penetration, that it continued to flourish during his long reign, and at his death it descended to his grandson in the very height of its prosperity.”  
—Gouger, *A Personal Narrative of Two Years’ Imprisonment in Burmah*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>1</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 41.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 41.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., January 9, 1795, No. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Dundas.

<sup>5</sup> Letter dated March 10, 1794. Furber, *The Private Record of an Indian Governor-Generalship*, p. 50.



## CHAPTER IV

### COMMERCIAL MISSIONS TO BURMA (1795-1798)

Although the East India Company had almost withdrawn its commercial activities from Burma after the Negrais massacre,<sup>1</sup> yet it could not altogether overlook the interests of those private merchants of British nationality who still congregated at Rangoon. The forgotten story of Sorel's mission to Burma during the administration of Lord Cornwallis brings into clear relief the difficulty of obtaining redress for their grievances. It appears that in 1786 the pressing necessity of finding ships to transport troops to Siam had compelled the Burmese King 'to order an indiscriminate embargo to be laid on all vessels in the Rangoon river.' He asked his officers at Rangoon to grant an adequate compensation to those owners of ships who might suffer as a result of this order, but this part of the King's order was not obeyed. Some European ship-owners, whose ships had been seized by the Burmese officers at Rangoon, complained to Lord Cornwallis. He was not prepared to send an official Agent to Ava, for he was afraid that such a representative might be 'exposed to personal insult in his public capacity'; so he decided to send a 'half-official letter' through one Mr. Sorel. After some troubles at Rangoon Sorel arrived at Ava, where he was given a flattering reception. He received the King's reply, which was understood to be conciliatory.

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<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 57.

Unfortunately Sorel suffered a ship-wreck during his return journey. His life was saved, but the letter was lost.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the close of the eighteenth century the port of Rangoon was under the administrative jurisdiction of the *Myowun* of Hanthawaddy, who is usually described in contemporary British records as Viceroy of Pegu. He enjoyed extensive executive as well as judicial powers. He was "vested with authority to adjust every matter that related to" his province. Although he was assisted by a council composed of his chief subordinates, yet his decision was final. Once a year he attended the Royal Court to submit an account of his work. Next in importance to him was the *Yewun*, whose title implied control over war-boats and shipping, but who was primarily a judicial officer. He held charge of Rangoon whenever the *Myowun* was absent from the city. The *Akawkun*<sup>2</sup> was the collector of customs, usually known to the Europeans as the *Shah Bunder*. He was usually a foreigner, for foreigners were expected to be better acquainted than the Burmese with commercial customs.<sup>3</sup> The *Sitke*

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 46.

<sup>2</sup> He is to be distinguished from the *Akunwun*, who collected land revenue from the entire province of Hanthawaddy.

<sup>3</sup> The post of *Akawkun* was held, for instance, by a Portuguese named Joseph Xavier de Cruz, usually called Jaunsi, by an Armenian named Baba Sheen, by an Englishman named Rodgers, and by a Spaniard named Lanciego. For details about Rodgers and Lanciego see Gouger, *A Personal Narrative of Two Years' Imprisonment in Burmah*, pp. 7, 68-70, 182-183, 239. Rodgers was a naval officer in a Company's ship. He fled to Burma in 1782 in order to escape the consequences of a crime.

was primarily a police officer ; he also commanded a small force of troops, probably not exceeding 500 in number, who were armed with rejected British muskets imported by speculators into Burma.<sup>1</sup> These officials did not receive any regular salary from the Burmese Government. They were entitled to charge some fees and to appropriate a share of the taxes. They also engaged in private trade, and their activities were not always confined within the limits of laws and customs. The Central Government could hardly exercise any effective control over them. Moreover, these local tyrants did not always act in harmony. Mutual jealousy led them to undermine the position of their colleagues, and not infrequently their intrigues produced violent reactions on the people committed to their charge.<sup>2</sup>

Such a system of administration was repugnant to European ideas. The difficulties of the European merchants at Rangoon were, however, not solely due to administrative inefficiency and corruption. They found it difficult to adjust their commercial activities with the peculiar laws and customs of Burma. The rate of import duty was probably a fixed charge of ten per cent. *ad valorem*, in addition to an extra fee of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. for the officials. The rate of export duty was probably a fixed charge of five per cent. *ad valorem*, in addition to an extra fee of one per cent. for the officials. Ship's stores, however, paid only half the nominal rate of duty. Apart from customs duties

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<sup>1</sup> Doveton, *Reminiscences of the Burmese War*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> For details see B. R. Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, pp. 55-58, and Hall, *Early English Intercourse with Burma*, p. 170.

certain other fees were payable by shipping. Captain Symes observes, "It is not of the amount of duties that the merchant has reason to complain ; it is the obstacles thrown in his way by the under-members of the Government."<sup>1</sup> But he admits that Burmese laws were in many respects favourable to foreigners: "as a stranger you are exempted from several rules which a native cannot infringe with impunity."<sup>2</sup>

One fruitful source of confusion was the absence of coinage in Burma. Silver was known, but it was not used for monetary purposes.<sup>3</sup> It was not till 1861 that King Mindon introduced a coinage adapted to that of British India. Even after the advent of the Industrial Revolution the Burmese used 'bullion modified to different standards' instead of coins. Captain Symes wrote in 1795, "No man in trade receives or pays his own money, nor indeed could he do it with safety. A banker, who is also an assayer of metals, keeps your accounts, and is your cashier."<sup>4</sup> Foreigners naturally found themselves in difficulty due to the want of current coins.

Another difficulty was that Burmese law did not allow rice, precious stones and precious metals to be exported.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the value received by foreign

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., October 21, 1795, No. 2.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., October 21, 1795, No. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Tical* was the most general piece of silver in circulation ; it weighed 10 penny-weights, 10 grains and three-fourths. (H. G. Bell, *An Account of the Burman Empire*, p. 12).

<sup>4</sup> P. C., October 21, 1795, No. 2.

<sup>5</sup> For the difficulties imposed by this law on the British merchants see Gouger, *A Personal Narrative of Two Years' Imprisonment in Burmah*.

merchants in exchange for goods imported by them had to be invested in ship-building. The Government of Burma, however, provided facilities for ship-building in Rangoon.<sup>1</sup> No duty was imposed on articles which were imported for this purpose. No port duties were levied on newly built ships when they left Rangoon for the first time. The Burmese labourers worked hard and improved rapidly under the direction of European engineers.<sup>2</sup>

According to Captain Symes, British trade in Burma suffered from two causes. In the first place, British merchants in Rangoon were oppressed by the *Shah Bunders*, who abused their position, and in co-operation with their colleagues, compelled the merchants to submit to various illegal impositions.<sup>3</sup> No complaint was allowed to reach the capital. Secondly, the officers of the Burmese Government discouraged the introduction of European and Indian articles into their country. The people wanted to get

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<sup>1</sup> See B. R. Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, pp. 70-72.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., October, 2, 1795, No. 2.

<sup>3</sup> This charge seems to have been somewhat exaggerated. Sir John Shore observed, "We are not aware of any particular grievances sustained by British subjects in the dominions of the King of Ava . . ." (P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 46). In April, 1795, Captain Symes wrote, ". . . 52 ships in the course of last season have been cleared out of Rangoon for English ports." (P. C., June 5, 1795, No. 14). An English merchant named Dyer, who had been living in Rangoon for six or seven years, wrote to Captain Symes, ". . . I have never met with any ill treatment from the Government." (P. C., December 21, 1795, No. 42). In 1822 Gouger noticed the 'absence of all unauthorised exactions' at Rangoon. (*A Personal Narrative of Two Years' Imprisonment in Burmah*, p. 15).

British hardware, cloth and glass, but they were taught to be distrustful of British traders. Captain Symes laments: "If properly encouraged, they would rid us of much of the unsaleable refuse of Calcutta."<sup>1</sup>

Although Captain Symes frequently harps on the oppression of the Rangoon officials, he contradicts himself by saying that he never found any European merchant suffering unjustly in any particular case. He says, "Europeans oftener give than receive cause of individual offence." He himself offers an explanation for this state of things. Those Europeans who went to Burma were usually men of despicable character. They engaged in trade without sufficient capital. Naturally they found themselves involved in troubles and tried to 'extenuate their fault, or cloak their folly, by uttering violent invectives against the Government that called them to account.' He adds, "Nor is this a heightened picture—the reality is within my knowledge."<sup>2</sup> On this point the testimony of Captain Symes is corroborated by that of Captain Canning, who visited Burma some years later. Captain Canning observes, "For the sake of his revenue he (*i.e.*, the King) is willing to admit the common class of traders that frequent Rangoon whom the hope of gain and other allurements will ever attract and render submissive to any indignity." He adds, however, that this was partly due to the fact that conditions were unfavourable to attract the better type of foreigners: "It is difficult to imagine a more disagreeable or even degraded state

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 46.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., October 21, 1795, No. 2.

than the present situation of Europeans at Rangoon, where their public or private letters, invoices and most secret accounts are subject to the inspection of three or more interpreters, some of whom are naturalised in the country and of the lowest class, all traders and of course interested and under no promise (or even injunction) of secrecy."<sup>1</sup>

The grievances of the British merchants in Burma could not attract the serious attention of the founders of the British Empire in India—Clive and Warren Hastings; for them the absorbing task was the consolidation of the political authority of the East India Company. As long as the Marathas confronted the British in Northern and Western India, as long as the rising power of Mysore threatened the Carnatic, no sensible pilot of the Company's affairs in India could exhaust his energy and resources in diversions of doubtful urgency and value. In the days of Lord Cornwallis the political situation was radically, if temporarily, changed: the Marathas co-operated with the British in crushing the power of Mysore. For the moment there was no serious threat to the stability of the British power, and, as Pitt's India Act stood in the way of political aggression, serious attention might be bestowed upon commercial expansion. The real significance of Sorel's semi-official mission to Burma is probably to be explained against this background. That mission was, however, nothing more than a halting leap in the dark. Sir John Shore found it necessary

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., July 5, 1804, No. 125.

to take a really decisive step, for he was confronted with a rapidly changing situation.

Even after their disastrous defeat in the Seven Years' War the French did not give up the hope of re-establishing themselves in India. The second half of the eighteenth century was the age of European military adventurers, to whom the political disturbances in India opened excellent prospects of personal gain and national aggrandisement. As Prof. Dodwell observes, ". . . from the government of Warren Hastings to that of Wellesley the Indian courts were full of Frenchmen, commanding large or small bodies of sepoys, and eager for the most part to serve their country by the exercise of their profession."<sup>1</sup> In 1775 René Madec<sup>2</sup> declared that he would ravage the upper provinces of Bengal as soon as war broke out with the English. St. Lubin<sup>3</sup> and Montigny<sup>4</sup> tried to organise a

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<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup> After serving different masters—the Jats, Emperor Shah Alam, Begam Samru—he returned to France in 1778. He was prepared to co-operate with Chevalier, who was in charge of French affairs in Bengal.

<sup>3</sup> For his activities see Grant Duff, *History of the Mahrattas*. In order to induce Nana Fadnavis to conclude an offensive and defensive alliance with France he offered to bring 2,500 Europeans to support the Peshwa against the English Company, to raise and discipline 10,000 *sepoys*, and to furnish abundance of military and marine stores. Although the First Anglo-Maratha War was then going on, the shrewd Maratha Minister refused to take these proposals seriously.

<sup>4</sup> See *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission*, Peshawar, 1945. Montigny remained in India as a diplomatic agent of the French Government from 1778 to 1787, with only a short break in 1780-81 when he returned to France. In 1788 he became Governor of the French Establishments in Bengal. On



coalition between the French and the Peshwa's Government. Their diplomatic manoeuvres were followed by the expedition of Bussy (1782); but peace was concluded before he had accomplished anything. The conclusion of the American War of Independence in September, 1783, restored peace between the British and the French in India, and in 1786 a supplementary Anglo-French treaty<sup>1</sup> restored regular commerce between the two nations. The position was by no means satisfactory from the French point of view. Bussy wrote to the French Minister de Castries in September, 1783, that "the terms of the peace had produced an unfavourable impression" about France in Indian Courts; the shrewd general "actually advised the recall of the various parties serving with Indian princes, as being nothing but a lot of brigands—*un amas de bandits*." Four years later de Castries resolved to recall Aumont and Montigny from Hyderabad and Poona respectively. The policy of co-operating with Tipu Sultan of Mysore was, however, to be continued. The result was that Tipu's first embassy visited France and met with a cordial reception. But France was on the eve of the Revolution—bankruptcy was imminent; she could not promise material assistance to Mysore in the event of war with the English Company.<sup>2</sup> The Third Anglo-Mysore War (1790-1792) compelled Tipu to

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the outbreak of the French Revolution he was arrested by the revolutionary party at Chandernagore. Released by Lord Cornwallis, he returned to France in 1791.

<sup>1</sup> See Grant Robertson, *England Under the Hanoverians*, pp. 316-317.

<sup>2</sup> See *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, pp. 324-326.

cede half his Kingdom and surrender much of his treasure. Thus the most powerful potential ally of the French in India was weakened and humbled.

During this period the French made some attempts to establish themselves in Burma, probably with a view to compensate themselves for their losses in India. A French envoy named Sefevre saw King Hsin-byu-shin and secured his permission to build a factory at Dala. But this factory had to be abandoned for want of supplies when the British occupied Pondicherry in 1778. In 1783 Bussy thought of concluding a new commercial treaty with Burma, and even entertained a project for leaving India and seeking in Burma an alternative sphere for French enterprise. But the removal of the French head-quarters from Pondicherry, which was too near the British power at Madras, required the maintenance of a large naval force<sup>1</sup>—a condition which France was hardly able to fulfil. Admiral de Suffren might have consolidated French naval power in the Indian Ocean if the conclusion of peace in 1783 had not interrupted his work. Moreover, Bussy thought that Pegu was ‘a country of the most decided anarchy’ and the French were not strong enough to occupy and defend the growing port of Rangoon.<sup>2</sup> The strategic importance of Pegu as a convenient base of operations against British Bengal haunted the imagination of the French: Admiral de Suffren told an Italian priest in Europe that “Pegu was the country through which the English might be attacked in India with

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<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> B. R. Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, p. 76.

most advantage.”<sup>1</sup> It is doubtful, however, whether, with their base in far off Mauritius, the French could have consolidated their power in Pegu. Prof. Dodwell observes, “. . . we may doubt whether the possession of Mauritius was an unmixed blessing to the French. It possessed an excellent harbour where their squadrons could refit ; but it was remote from the decisive area of the (Seven Years’) War, and was a constant temptation to a faltering commander to abandon the coast to the enemy”.<sup>2</sup> Had the French been able to build for their navy a good harbour on or near the coast of India, their prospects in India as well as in Burma would have been considerably improved.

In February, 1793, England joined the First Coalition against Revolutionary France. Pondicherry was easily captured in 1793 ; the other French factories fell almost without any resistance. In 1795 Ceylon, Malacca, Banda and Amboina were occupied. An expedition from England occupied the Cape, but no attempt was made to capture the French islands, ‘which would have made a stouter resistance and required a considerable proportion of the English forces in India for their subjugation’. It was, perhaps, a short-sighted policy to leave these French naval strongholds undisturbed. Had they been brought under British control at an early stage of the Revolutionary War, Lord Wellesley<sup>3</sup> and Lord Minto might have been spared

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished journal of Symes, 1802 (Imperial Record Department, New Delhi), pp. 325-327.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Wellesley did, indeed, project an expedition against Mauritius, but Admiral Rainier refused to co-operate with him without authorization from London.

the trouble of dealing with French intrigues in Burma. The continued occupation of Mauritius and Bourbon by the French, coupled with the growth of French-controlled armies in different Indian States,<sup>1</sup> made it necessary for the Company's Government to keep a vigilant watch on French activities in India as well as in Burma. Thus during the administration of Sir John Shore the establishment of regular political intercourse with the Burmese Court became an imperative necessity.

The situation was still further complicated by the question of the Arakan refugees. The conquest of Arakan by Bo-daw-pa-ya made the Burmese Empire a neighbour of India. The hostile attitude of the *Mags* to their new masters, the tyrannical rule of the Burmese in the conquered province, and the peculiar geography of the Chittagong frontier created frequent occasions for open conflict between British India and Burma. The incidents which took place in 1794 led Sir John Shore to the conclusion that it was necessary to place Anglo-Burmese political relations on a regular footing. With a view to establish direct intercourse between Calcutta and Ava he decided to send a duly authorised

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond, a French General, commanded an army of 15,000 men at Hyderabad. Sindhia had 40,000 trained men under another French General, Perron. Later on Lord Wellesley spoke of 'the French State erected by M. Perron on the banks of the Jumna'. Prof. Dodwell points out that, "although these armies were in the pay of Indian princes, no one could say when they might not be marched against the Company's possessions, with or without the consent of their ostensible masters. The appearance of a French expedition would almost certainly set them in movement". (*Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 326).

envoy to the Burmese Court. His choice fell upon Captain Michael Symes,<sup>1</sup> 'who had directed his researches very particularly to the little known countries and constitution of Arracan and Ava'. The perusal of an official narrative of Sorel's mission convinced the Governor-General that "the King of Ava would most readily receive a deputation from this Government and treat its delegate with every possible respect and attention."<sup>2</sup> The receipt of a friendly letter from 'the minister of Pegu'<sup>3</sup> confirmed this conclusion.

The Governor-General personally drafted the instructions which were to regulate the activities of the Agent. His 'primary object' was to be the promotion of Anglo-Burmese friendship. If, on his arrival at Rangoon, the Agent found that the reception of a British Agent at the Court of Ava would be opposed, he was authorised to return to Calcutta, without even announcing his mission. Although he was to protest if he found himself 'exposed to illiberal or insulting treatment', yet he was asked to 'make every allowance for the habits and manners' of the Burmese. 'Useless importance' was not to be attached to matters of form or ceremony. The Agent was to convince the Burmese Government that "commerce, and not conquest, is the object of the British nation in India." The following specific concessions should be demanded if the attitude

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<sup>1</sup> Entered the Bengal Army in 1780; transferred to the Royal Army in 1788; served in the Third Anglo-Mysore War and the Peninsular War; died in 1809 at sea of fatigue and exposure during retreat to Corunna.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 46.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 47.

of the Burmese Court appeared favourable: (1) the establishment of a regular and free communication through Arakan; (2) the exclusion of French ships from Burmese ports; (3) the expulsion of Frenchmen living in Arakan;<sup>1</sup> (4) the removal of all obstacles to British trade in Burma; (5) the establishment of a market town on the banks of the Naf river. The Agent was also required to collect reliable information about the possibility of exporting British articles into Burma. He might, if possible, reduce to writing the regulations for promoting commerce between the British Empire and Burma, but such a convention was to be strictly limited to commercial objects only. He might also suggest the advisability of receiving a British Consul at Rangoon. Finally, he was asked to submit detailed reports about (1) the constitution and military strength of Burma; (2) the state of the commerce between Burma and China, and the possibility of establishing communications between India and China by the channel of Burma,<sup>2</sup> and (3) the history, geography, religion and natural products of Burma and the intellectual and military progress of the Burmese. Enquiries on these points were not to be pursued at the risk of exciting the suspicions of the Burmese Government.<sup>3</sup>

Captain Symes left Calcutta on February 21, 1795, and arrived at Rangoon on March 20. He was accom-

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<sup>1</sup> They were suspected of complicity in the troubles described in Chapter III.

<sup>2</sup> The Burmese had offered to convey Sorel to China. (P. C., November 10, 1794, No. 46).

<sup>3</sup> P. C., February 6, 1795, No. 39.

panied by a Surveyor (Ensign Wood) and a Surgeon (Peter Cochrane). "The mission", says Bayfield,<sup>1</sup> "was supplied on the most liberal scale, and was of much greater respectability and consequence, than had been any of the previous embassies to the country; in fact, it may be taken as the date of our attempt to treat with Burmah on a footing of equality and in earnest." But the reception accorded by the Burmese to the British envoy was not satisfactory. Symes complains of 'the vigilant suspicion with which I was guarded, and the restriction, little short of imprisonment, imposed on myself and my attendants, aggravated by the humiliating prohibition against holding any intercourse with my countrymen'.<sup>2</sup> But he gradually succeeded in securing the confidence of Burmese officers. He went to Pegu and saw the Viceroy, who did not omit any act of hospitality<sup>3</sup>. He started for Amarapura on May 30; the Burmese officials spared no pains to provide him with the best accommodation which the country boats could supply. He was accompanied by the Viceroy of Pegu.<sup>4</sup>

In his preliminary report Captain Symes gave a tentative account of the economic condition of Burma.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Review*, p. X.

<sup>2</sup> For details, see Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava*, Vol. I, pp 178-187.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., June 5, 1795, No. 14.

Symes and his party took part in Burmese festivals at Pegu. See *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. I, Chap. XI.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., October 21, 1795, No. 4.

<sup>5</sup> This is in substantial agreement with Captain Cox's account. (P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 4).

Rangoon was a flourishing port ; its opulence was daily increasing. Bassein was better adapted than Rangoon for the convenience of shipping.<sup>1</sup> Mergui and Tavoy were also commodious ports. Pegu was a very fertile province. The people were healthy, robust and active, 'resembling the Chinese in their habits and the Malays in features.' The principal product of Pegu was timber: "It is the staple which our trade cannot be supplied from any other quarter, except at a rate so high, as deeply to affect, if not wholly destroy, the internal commerce of India." Stick lac, tin, elephants' teeth, bees' wax, emeralds, rubies, sapphires—these were the other articles of commerce which Pegu could supply. The mines of Ava were very rich: gold, silver and lead might be procured in abundance. But the export of these valuable metals was strictly forbidden. Salt and salt petre were Royal monopolies. Sugar thrived exceedingly in the northern provinces. Indigo was manufactured in a clumsy manner. Rice was abundant, but "they cultivate no more than they can consume. They might supply the want of other countries with advantage to themselves." Burmese silk was coarse but durable. Cotton was remarkably fine ; it was exported to Yunan, the south-western province of China. Pegu, Captain Symes concludes, might have "risen to a higher standard in the scale of mercantile nations, had not destructive war depopulated the empire, insecurity checked the spirit of adventure, and

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<sup>1</sup> "Bassein as a naval port yields to none, and would soon far exceed any one in India. . ."—Captain Cox. (P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 5).



the most arbitrary despotism<sup>1</sup> destroyed in the bud the early shoots of commerce . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Captain Symes reached Amarapura on July 18. He was satisfied with the reception accorded to him.<sup>3</sup> His public reception by the King<sup>4</sup> was delayed by a lunar eclipse, ‘a phenomenon which they (*i.e.*, the Burmese) attributed to the resentment of a malignant demon.’ The Governor-General’s letter to the King was read informally by the Ministers on July 28. The effect of the letter on the conduct of the officials was excellent: “they have now added confidence to the respect which they before observed towards me.”<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> “Informers are publicly and privately employed. The man who amasses wealth is suspected, and he who is suspected, dies, or if levity is shewn him, purchases life at the expense of all his acquisitions.”

<sup>2</sup> P. C., October 21, 1795, No. 2.

<sup>3</sup> “. . . compliments had been paid to me which were never before extended to the Agent of any other nation . . .” But Captain Cox reported later on that Captain Symes had been led about by the Burmese officials ‘like a wild beast for the amusement of the multitude.’ (P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 5). Bayfield (*Historical Review*, p. xi) says that at Amarapura Symes ‘had to undergo a repetition of the same disgraceful neglect which he had suffered at Rangoon’.

<sup>4</sup> Bayfield (*Historical Review*, p. xi) says that Symes was presented to the King on a *kadaw* or ‘beg-pardon day’, thus placing the Governor-General upon an equality with His Burmese Majesty’s *Tsawbáws* and vassals. Moreover, he was obliged to take his seat behind officers of very inferior rank. Symes considered that “he had gained a great point, in being permitted to wear his shoes until he reached the inner enclosure, where’ all the noblemen of the court unslipper.”

<sup>5</sup> P. C., October 21, 1795, No. 5.

King received him on September 30, but did not speak to him.<sup>1</sup>

\* Captain Symes left Amarapura on October 29. He had succeeded in securing the following commercial concessions from the Burmese Government:

“1. English merchants or their agents have free liberty to go to whatever part of the Burman dominions they think fit, for the purpose of selling their own goods or purchasing the produce of the country.

2. No inland customs are to be exacted on goods which have paid the import duties and a certificate granted by the Governor of the town or province where the duties have been paid is to be a passport for all such goods to go free of further duties through the Burman dominions.

3. The customs which heretofore have been levied (though never authorized) between Rangoon and Amarapura, at the several *chokeys*,<sup>2</sup> seventeen in number, are now wholly abolished on imports, and the customs to be paid at each *chokey* on the produce of the country carried down are clearly defined and determined.

4. English traders are authorised to purchase and transport timber . . . subject to no other duty than 5 per cent. payable at Rangoon.

5. English merchants who may think themselves aggrieved are allowed to complain to the throne . . . .

6. One imposition has long prevailed of exacting the port duties at Rangoon in fine silver Amarapura

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<sup>1</sup> *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, pp. 162-166.

<sup>2</sup> Posts or Stations for the collection of customs duties.

currency. This practice is forbidden and Rangoon currency is substituted in its room. Rangoon currency is 25 per cent. inferior to that of Amarapura.<sup>1</sup>

7. English traders are allowed to employ whatever interpreter they please.

8. The customary charges on a ship as well as the duties levied at Rangoon are accurately defined and limited.

9. Any English ship driven into Burma ports by stress of weather and in want of repair, is to receive from the officers of Government all possible aid at the current rates of the country.”<sup>2</sup>

“These regulations,” says Symes, “expressed . . . with clearness and precision, were equally liberal and satisfactory; and, on the part of the Burman Government, were voluntarily granted, from a conviction of the equity on which they were founded, and the reciprocal advantages they were likely to offer.”<sup>3</sup> They were not, however, embodied in a treaty. They were laid down in two documents—a letter from the King to the Governor-General, which Symes describes as ‘a curious specimen of the extravagant phraseology of oriental compositions’, and an order from the chief Minister to the Viceroy of Pegu and to Governors of ‘sea-port towns in general.’<sup>4</sup> In reality, Symes completely misunderstood the meaning of the letters he

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<sup>1</sup> For the Burmese Currency system see Sir R. C. Temple’s article entitled “Currency and Coinage among the Burmese” in *Indian Antiquary*, 1897.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 21, 1795, No. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, pp. 171-172.

<sup>4</sup> *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, p. 170.

had received from the Burmese Ministers. The letter to the Governor-General was not really addressed by the King; it was addressed by the Ministers, and in it the Governor-General was styled '*Gombanee Bangala Myosa*' (i.e., Eater of the Revenues of Company's Territory in Bengal). Thus the Governor-General was officially put in the same status as the Governors of towns in the Burmese Empire.

As regards French vessels in Burmese ports, two ships took shelter in Mergui in August and sailed in October. Another French ship came to Rangoon in November and sailed immediately for the Dutch Settlements or the Isle of France. Another ship came to Rangoon from Mauritius.<sup>1</sup> The Burmese Government 'refused her a cargo of provisions and likewise rejected a requisition made by the Master for Burman colours which he was very desirous of procuring'.<sup>2</sup>

Captain Symes reached Calcutta on December 22, 1795.<sup>3</sup> The detailed report of his proceedings which he submitted to the Governor-General convinced Sir John Shore that his policy of sending an official Agent

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<sup>1</sup> This ship brought 'unfavourable report about Europe.' At Amarapura a Burmese official "promulgated it with an addition, that a powerful fleet was on its voyage from France to India, and that four French ships of war were triumphantly cruising the Indian seas. This intelligence . . . was diligently improved by the Armenian and Mussulman merchants, who insinuated that, if our present overtures sprang not from treachery, they originated in fear; at the same time renewing a report . . . of combination of all the powers of India to deprive Great Britain of her possessions in the East. . . ."—*An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 21, 1795, No. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, pp. 232-233.

to Burma was justified by the results. The difficulties encountered by Captain Symes<sup>1</sup> were attributed by the Governor-General to the traditional pride of the Burmese King, the intrigues of suspicious and selfish officials and the reports of French victories in Europe. Moreover, Captain Symes was treated, not as the envoy of an independent sovereign, but as the Agent of a 'provincial administration below the rank of sovereignty.' Sir John Shore regretted the refusal of the Burmese King to send an Agent to Calcutta. The decision to appoint an Agent had been officially communicated to Captain Symes and an official had been actually selected for the purpose ; but the arrival of a French vessel from the Isle of France led the King to drop the matter altogether. Sir John Shore was naturally anxious about the growth of the French menace in Burma, and in his view one of the most important effects of sending the embassy to Burma was to counteract that threatening prospect. Burma might injure British shipping by cutting up the supply of timber. She might allow French engineers to build ships in Rangoon. She might allow French warships to take shelter in, and to draw provisions from, her ports. 'To frustrate these consequences' it was necessary to cultivate friendly relations with the Court of Ava. Captain Symes had shown the way ; others might follow. The Burmese King had expressed a desire that a Brahmin 'well-versed in Astronomy and Hindu Learning' might be sent to him. Sir John Shore

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<sup>1</sup> *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. I, pp. 178-187, 256 ; Vol. II, pp. 148-159.

wanted to send a man who possessed, in addition to learning, 'talent which may be politically useful, from his situation at the Court of Ava.'<sup>1</sup>

In the commercial concessions secured by Captain Symes the Governor-General found 'a new proof of that circumspection which marked his conduct throughout his deputation.' The channel of commerce was fairly opened, and if it was fairly pursued, it was likely to lead to 'the advantage of individuals and to public benefit.' He concluded by saying that the result of the embassy had 'equalled the most sanguine expectations which I could form.'<sup>2</sup>

In September, 1796, the Viceroy of Pegu was informed that the Governor-General wanted to appoint an Agent who would reside at Rangoon. His purpose would be to confirm the friendship existing between the two States and to promote 'the benefits of commerce.' The person selected for this responsible post was Captain Hiram Cox.<sup>3</sup> According to Bayfield<sup>4</sup> three important duties were assigned to him: to render permanent and effective the so-called treaty of 1795 ;

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 4, 1796, No. 32. A Brahmin was actually sent, but whether his 'talents' proved 'politically useful' we do not know. (P. C., February 29, 1796, No. 25).

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 4, 1796, No. 32. He wrote to Dundas, President of the Board of Control, "The termination of the Embassy to Ava, will not I trust prove disreputable to the Government or the Negotiator. The actual Expense may be one Lac of Rupees, and a further Charge will be incurred of probably thirty thousand more. I think we have gained an Equivalent." (Furber, *The Private Record of an Indian Governor-Generalship*, p. 88).

<sup>3</sup> P. C., September 19, 1796, No. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Historical Review*, p. xii.

to protect British political and commercial interests ; to counteract 'in a private manner' the designs of the French to obtain a footing in Burma. Captain Cox was also expected to prevail on the Burmese King to send envoys to Bengal.

Before Captain Cox could undertake his duties at Rangoon the Governor of Arakan revived the question of the *Mag* refugees. In a letter addressed to the Governor-General he demanded the surrender of three *Mags* specifically named, together with all Burmese subjects 'now at or near Chittagong'<sup>1</sup>. Sir John Shore was surprised 'at the very unexpected and peremptory terms of the requisition.' Captain Symes had reported that the Burmese King was fully satisfied by the surrender of the three fugitives demanded in 1794, and that he was not likely to sanction a renewal of *Mag* troubles.<sup>2</sup> So the Governor of Arakan was informed that his demand could not be complied with, and he was requested to refer his future demands to Captain Cox.<sup>3</sup>

In July, 1797, the Judge of Chittagong reported that one of the three refugees surrendered in January, 1795, who had made his escape on the way to Amara-pura,<sup>4</sup> was living within the Company's territories.<sup>5</sup> He was informed that the King of Burma had sent to Arakan three *sardars* with 300 troops, and that 14,000 men were soon to follow. This army was instructed

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 23, 1797, No. 27.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 23, 1797, No. 26.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., January 23, 1797, No. 29.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., July 28, 1797, No. 15.

to invade Chittagong in case the British Government refused to surrender the prisoner.<sup>1</sup> Sir John Shore did not take these reports seriously, for no formal demand had been made by the Burmese Government for the surrender of the prisoner. The Judge was instructed to prevent the escape of the unfortunate man and to surrender him if a formal claim was made either by the Governor of Arakan or by the Government of Burma.<sup>2</sup>

Captain Cox was appointed in the capacity of "Resident at Rangoon"; he was not, like Captain Symes, an ambassador representing the Governor-General. He was instructed not to proceed to the Court unless invited by the King. He left Calcutta on September 15, 1796, and landed at Rangoon on October 12, 1796. Soon afterwards the Governor of Rangoon was peremptorily ordered to send him to the capital, "for it is a positive law of the Empire that all messengers, envoys or ambassadors shall be forwarded, without communication, to the presence."<sup>3</sup> He left Rangoon on December 5, 1796, and arrived at Mingun, where the King was holding his Court at that time, on February 2, 1797. His reception left much to be desired, and on more than one occasion he had to make strong remonstrances.<sup>4</sup> He was received by the King on February 8, 1797. "His Majesty received him well, was talkative and complimentary, but avoided inquiring

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., August 7, 1797, No. 3.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., September 4, 1797, No. 31.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., January 21, 1799, No. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Cox, *Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire*, pp. 2-15, 51, 83, 114-115, 119, 137, 207, 262-264.



after either the King of England or the Governor-General."

Encouraged by the King's apparent favour Captain Cox submitted to him three documents in which he gave a detailed account of the concessions he wanted. The first document<sup>1</sup> dealt with the question of diplomatic immunities. The British Agent was not to be subject to Burmese jurisdiction ; all complaints against him were to be referred to Calcutta. He was to be at liberty to punish all persons who composed his retinue or received monthly wages from him. Provisions and other articles required for the Agent and his retinue were to be free from duties. He was to be allowed to build a house at Rangoon for the location of his residence and office. He was to be allowed to maintain a guard of *sepoys*, the number of whom would be determined by the Burmese Government. He was "not to be required to take off his shoes on any occasion but at such place where carpets are laid for him to tread upon, as from his habit and constitution the wetting his feet may be fatal to his health." He was to be allowed free access to the King and the members of the Royal family. A proper place, 'suitable to the high rank and power of the Government he represented,' was to be assigned to him at Court. All communications to British authorities were to be sent through him alone: "letters sent through any other channel . . . will not be considered by the Governor-General as authentic."

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 3.

The second document<sup>1</sup> dealt with questions relating to commerce. Captain Cox demanded that (1) coins should be introduced for the better regulation of trade ; (2) duties levied on ships at Rangoon should be reduced ; (3) there should be no vexatious examination of articles at the ports ; (4) import duties should be reduced to 5 per cent ; (5) English merchants were to be at liberty to sell and buy goods in all parts of the Burmese Empire ; (6) English merchants were to be provided with legal and administrative facilities for the recovery of their dues from Burmese subjects ; (7) offences committed by British subjects in ships on the high seas were not to be subject to Burmese jurisdiction ; (8) all property belonging to British subjects dying in Burma intestate was to be delivered over to the British Agent ; (9) all disputes relating to trade between British and Burmese subjects were to be settled by arbitrators nominated by the parties ; (10) English ships were to be allowed to take on board provisions for three months for passengers and crew ; (11) English vessels were not to be detained on any pretence at Burmese ports after the clearance of port dues.

The third document<sup>2</sup> referred to political questions. In return for the surrender of the *Mag* refugees in 1795, Captain Cox demanded that the Burmese King should not in future "permit the enemies of the English nation to take shelter within his dominions or refresh their crews and repair the damages of their

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 3.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 3.

vessels at his ports—much more permit them to sell their prizes as has lately been done by the French privateers.” All French ships arriving at Burmese ports were to be ordered to leave within 48 hours under pain of confiscation. All Burmese officials and subjects were to be ordered not to sell provisions or warlike stores to, and hold communication with, any French vessel.

Before these demands were formally considered by the Burmese Government, Captain Cox received a letter from some British subjects trading at Rangoon. They brought to his notice the fact that the Burmese King had authorised a ‘Moorman’ named Boudin to be ‘the sole purchaser and seller of all the goods and merchandizes imported and exported to and from’ Rangoon.<sup>1</sup> This was a clear violation of the commercial agreement concluded by Captain Symes.

Sir John Shore believed that the military strength of Burma could not be ‘formidable to the Company.’<sup>2</sup> Captain Cox calculated that the total population of Burma amounted approximately to 11,200,000—‘a very scanty population indeed for so extended a territory.’<sup>3</sup> The proportion of women to men did not exceed 3 to 1, the disparity being due largely to ‘the incessant state of warfare in which the Burma nation has been engaged by the restless ambition of its sovereigns, particularly

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 3. See also P. C., October 1, 1799, No. 6.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 4, 1796, No. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Symes says that the approximate total population, excluding Arakan, was 14,400,000. (*An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, p. 52). But King Ba-gyi-daw’s revenue inquest of 1826 gave only 1,831,467.

those of the present dynasty.' These calculations led Captain Cox to believe that the Burmese King 'would find it extremely difficult to raise and maintain for any length of time an army of 60,000 men.' Burma had no standing army.<sup>1</sup> Her army was composed of 'levies raised on the spur of the occasion' by princes and officials who held their lands by military tenure. Naturally the peasants tried to avoid the burden of military service.<sup>2</sup> So the outbreak of war threw the country into commotion: "many of the poorer classes fly to the jungles or totally abandon their country". Those who were compelled to enlist themselves had to furnish their own arms—a short spear and a sword.<sup>3</sup> Muskets were provided from the King's stores, but they had to pay for them. Ammunition was provided gratis. The soldiers had to find their own food or to buy it from the King's stores. The relatives of deserters were burnt alive. No reliance was placed on the loyalty of the troops. "Men for the defence of the eastern frontier were drafted from the West, those for the defence of the southern from the North, and *vice versa*, in order to secure their fidelity." Every town on the rivers had to furnish a war boat. Each boat

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<sup>1</sup> Symes says that the only regular army consisted of the bodyguard and the police of the capital. (*An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, p. 55).

<sup>2</sup> "I saw strings of these miserable recruits, boys under age and decrepit old men, marching from Arakan to Amarapura."—Captain Cox (P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 4). Symes supports this statement. (*An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, p. 55).

<sup>3</sup> Symes says that the infantry was armed with muskets and sabres and the cavalry with spears. (*An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, p. 56).

carried 40 to 50 men. The King could collect 200 or 300 boats at any time. The sailors<sup>1</sup> were more efficient than the soldiers, "as they live chiefly by rapine and are in a constant state of hostility with the rest of the people, which makes them audacious and prompt to execute any orders, however cruel or violent." In general, the Burmese undoubtedly possessed 'brutal courage,' which, according to the British Agent, tended 'rather to debase than exalt them; it is irregular, uncertain and not to be depended on.' Captain Cox heard that the King was constantly in apprehension of a British attack. To deal with that catastrophe he had collected an army consisting of about 30,000 men—10,000 in Arakan, 10,000 on the Assam border and 10,000 in the province of Pegu.<sup>2</sup>

Captain Cox spent two months in Mingun, entirely unnoticed by the King or his Ministers. He returned to Amarapura on March 25, 1797, and waited there for about seven months; but in spite of his exertions he failed to secure any concession from the elusive Burmese Court.<sup>3</sup> In disgust he left Amarapura and arrived at Rangoon on November 1, 1797. There he was treated by Burmese officials as 'a state prisoner;' he did not rule out the possibility of personal violence. A military force was assembled near the mouth of the river to prevent any British ship from coming to the

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<sup>1</sup> They used swords and lances. (Symes, *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. II, p. 59).

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 4.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 10. Cox suspected that the King was "either fearful of the consequences, or desirous of enhancing the value of the favour, by increasing the difficulties of attainment."

rescue of the British Agent.<sup>1</sup> On receipt of this information the Government of Bengal wrote to the chief Minister of Burma, asking him to facilitate Captain Cox's departure from Rangoon.<sup>2</sup> The Agent left Rangoon on March 1, 1798.

Captain Cox's departure from Rangoon took place under circumstances which clearly showed that his conduct had not met with the approval of the Supreme Government. In the absence of the Governor-General the Vice-President<sup>3</sup> in Council came to the conclusion that "as the conduct of the Court of Ava and its officers was accompanied with strong indications of personal dissatisfaction with Captain Cox, the removal of which could hardly be expected, no benefit could result to the public interests from his continuance at Rangoon". So Captain Cox was recalled<sup>4</sup> and the Burmese King was informed that, if he so desired, the Supreme Government would depute to reside at Rangoon another officer in whom the Vice-President had the greatest confidence<sup>5</sup>. Captain Cox violated his instructions by stipulating for ceremonies in his negotiations with the Burmese Ministers. He should have left Mingun as soon as he saw that he was not taken seriously; in that case he would have been spared unnecessary expense and recurrent indignities. Still his difficulties<sup>6</sup> did not

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 5.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Speke.

<sup>4</sup> Secretary Barlow to Captain Cox, February 13, 1798.

<sup>5</sup> Vice-President to King, February 20, 1798.

<sup>6</sup> Captain Cox was deceived by his interpreter, Mr. Moucomtuse. (Bayfield, *Historical Review*, p. xx).

wholly escape the notice of his official superiors. Bayfield says, "There is no official record in this office of the final opinion of the Supreme Government on the conduct of this mission; but from Captain Cox being immediately after sent in civil employ to Chittagong, it is presumed, . . . that his strenuous and long-continued exertions in Burmah were approved of, and that his eighteen months of toil and painful anxiety met at length their due reward."<sup>1</sup>

Captain Cox submitted to the Government an elaborate explanation regarding the causes of his failure. The principal cause he found in the mistaken impression conveyed to the Governor-General by Captain Symes. He says, "The Burma Court and nation are there (*i.e.*, in the reports of Captain Symes) depicted as a most polished, hospitable and sagacious people.<sup>2</sup> His public indignities are glossed over and his personal consolements are ostentatiously displayed. The fallacious and trivial concessions of a treacherous Government are detailed with all the embellishments of diction, while the bleeding interests and honour of his country<sup>3</sup> are unnoticed." This surprising attitude on the part of Captain Symes was due, according to Captain Cox, to his excessive reliance on Baba Sheen<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> *Historical Review*, p. xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Cox himself described the Burmese Court as "an assembly of clowns" and "the followers of the court or camps" as ungrateful, rapacious, cruel, treacherous, avaricious and lazy. (P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 4).

<sup>3</sup> For a specific instance, see P. C., October 1, 1799, No. 6. For general complaints of British subjects trading in Burma, see P. C., October 1, 1799, No. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Bayfield (*Historical Review*, p. xi) says that Baba Sheen was

a member of the Council of the Governor of Rangoon: "in truth Captain Symes was but a mere speaking automaton in the hands of Baba Sheen, implicitly believing and repeating whatever he was told." Captain Symes had recommended Baba Sheen to Captain Cox's confidence, yet he<sup>1</sup> had secretly 'branded' this man as 'infamous' in a letter to his Burmese superior.<sup>2</sup> Captain Cox doubted whether Sir John Shore would have sent him to Burma if Captain Symes had given him an accurate idea about the Burmese Court and the people. The Governor-General was led to expect that the Burmese King was really friendly, and that British interests in Burma might be placed on a secure basis by further negotiations. Captain Cox was, however, convinced that the King 'had ever been averse to a connection with us'. The commercial concessions secured by Captain Symes were altogether illusory<sup>3</sup> as the privileges granted to Boudin<sup>4</sup> showed.

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"a man of great cunning and plausibility and ever ready to reply to Captain Symes's queries, in the manner most likely to impress him with respect and admiration of the power, character, and customs of the Burmese King and nation."

<sup>1</sup> Captain Symes.

<sup>2</sup> In his published journal Symes describes the character of Baba Sheen in the following words: "His learning was universal, being slightly versed in almost every science; but his information, extensive as it was, although it gained him employment, could not procure him confidence. He was said to be deficient in other essential requisites." (*An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. I, p. 191).

<sup>3</sup> Captain Symes himself doubted whether the document which granted those concessions could be called a treaty (*Journal*, p. 149).

<sup>4</sup> See p. 180.



The prohibition regarding French ships, which Captain Symes had made much of, was 'perfectly ridiculous'; after his departure the Burmese 'received, comforted and permitted the sale of a French prize in their ports and granted to Frenchmen the protection of their passes and flag'. That the Burmese were unwilling to allow a British Agent to reside permanently in their country was proved by the insolence with which they treated Captain Cox and also by their refusal to grant his demands concerning diplomatic immunities.<sup>1</sup>

Captain Cox realised his difficulties as soon as he landed in Burma, and in spite of many provocations he pursued a policy of patient but firm conciliation.<sup>2</sup> His failure was generally due, according to his own version, to "the extreme ignorance of the Burman Government of the relative importance and rights of other nations, excessive pride inflated by an uninterrupted victory over the surrounding still more barbarous hordes, and to the general clamour and intrigue of the infamous crew of renegades and refugees of all nations who infest their dominions and poison their councils". An accident that largely inspired Burmese insolence towards Captain Cox was the circulation of the news of the indignities suffered by Lord Macartney at Peking. The concluding sentence of Anderson's book on Lord Macartney's embassy ran as follows: "We entered the country like paupers, remained in it like prisoners and quitted it like

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 5.

<sup>2</sup> The Burmese Court viewed his conduct as an example of 'rusticity and ill humour.' (*Journal* of Symes, p. 543).

vagrants." A Burmese translation of that book was available to the King and the Ministers. Naturally they did not consider it necessary to pay serious attention to the demands of these weak and despised English merchants.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that the statements of Captain Cox were substantially true, and that he had formed a more accurate idea about Burma than his credulous and optimistic predecessor.<sup>2</sup> If Sir John Shore's sanguine expectations were frustrated, this was due to his natural reliance on a man whom he reasonably regarded as an expert on Burmese questions. Burma was a strange land; very few Englishmen had any idea about the character, resources and policy of the Burmese people. But the Government of Bengal must be held responsible for their rejection of Captain Cox's advice. His reports were regarded as incredible,<sup>3</sup> and Captain Symes continued to enjoy his reputation as the greatest authority on Burmese affairs. Yet Captain Cox revealed his political insight when he wrote, "A firm and solid alliance with this nation is absolutely necessary for the security of your Eastern dominions, for if they do not place themselves

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Bayfield (*Historical Review*, p. xii) says about Symes that "his description of the Court of Ava, and of men and manners, differs as much from what they were a year afterwards, as related by Captain Cox, and what they are now, as a polished European differs from an Andamanese."

<sup>3</sup> "Cox brought such an amazing account, so utterly at variance with Symes', that the Government of India thought he must be ill or over-wrought, or perhaps he had made some mistake. . . ."—Harvey, *History of Burma*, pp. 285-286.

under our protection, or we do not acquire a right to protect them, the French will be masters of the country in a very short time. . . .”<sup>1</sup> It was left for Lord Wellesley to appreciate the significance of these words; but unfortunately he relied on Captain Symes, and ‘a firm and solid alliance’ with Burma remained as distant a prospect as ever.

The failure of Cox’s mission and ‘the temporizing policy’ adopted by the Supreme Government at the time of his recall exercised considerable influence on Burmese policy towards British India. Bayfield<sup>2</sup> says that the conciliatory attitude of the Vice-President in Council was ‘little less than a premium on future aggressions and insults, which the result shewed this semi-barbarous Court was not slow of profiting by.’ These are strong expressions; but there is hardly any doubt that the failure of the British Indian Government to support its Agent against open and deliberate insults led the Burmese to think that the white foreigners need not be taken seriously.

Bayfield<sup>3</sup> attributes this ‘temporizing policy’ partly to ‘the then state of Europe, our situation in India and an erroneous idea of Burmese power’. The position of England in Europe was, indeed, very serious. The First Coalition broke up after the Treaty of Campo Formio (1797), and England was left alone in arms

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 2, 1798, No. 5. Towards the close of 1796 a French naval squadron tried to make the island of Cheduba a place of rendezvous. (S. C., January 6, 1797, No. 2; March 6, 1797, No. 8, 9, 10).

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Review*, p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Historical Review*, p. xxi.

against the triumphant French Republic. In India, French influence was strong in the Courts of powerful Princes like Daulat Rao Sindhia, the Nizam of Hyderabad and Tipu Sultan of Mysore. The 'erroneous idea of Burmese power' was, of course, due to the exaggerated reports of Captain Symes. It must also be remembered that the so-called 'Non-intervention Policy' of Sir John Shore still held the field; Lord Wellesley did not assume office till May, 1798.

## CHAPTER V

### LORD WELLESLEY'S POLICY TOWARDS BURMA

Lord Wellesley has been described by Lord Curzon<sup>1</sup> as 'at the same time both great and small, a man of noble conceptions and petty conceits, a prescient builder of Empire and a rather laughable person'. Although the historian cannot altogether overlook those personal idiosyncrasies which hampered the execution of his 'noble conceptions', this great 'Senatorial Pro-consul' is universally acknowledged as one of the principal architects of the British Empire in India. We are told that "his own imperious will, wide and bold political grasp of facts, and gorgeous imagination swept onward to a more ambitious view of British Dominion than had hitherto been entertained".<sup>2</sup> It was during his administration that the Company in its relations with Indian States 'advanced from the position of *primus inter pares* to an assertion of superiority'. He gave a definite shape to the system of subsidiary alliance, which had been in practical operation in the Carnatic and Oudh for many years. He silently, almost contemptuously, set aside the declaration<sup>3</sup> of 1784 and launched upon a career of deliberate

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<sup>1</sup> *British Government in India*, Vol. II, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Roberts, *History of British India*, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> ". . . to pursue schemes of conquest and extension of dominion in India are measures repugnant to the wish, the honour and policy of this nation. . . ."—*Pitt's India Act*.

aggression.<sup>1</sup> Lest any one should think that the policy of annexation and extension of suzerainty was nothing more than a temporary phenomenon, he observed in a Minute dated July 10, 1800, "Duty, policy and honour require, that it (*i.e.*, the British Empire in India) should not be administered as a temporary and precarious acquisition, as an empire conquered by prosperous adventure, and extended by fortunate accident, of which the tenure is as uncertain as the original conquest and successive extensions were extraordinary; it must be considered as a sacred trust, and a permanent possession"<sup>2</sup>. Such a Governor-General naturally took a more comprehensive view of Anglo-Burmese relations than his predecessors.

On his arrival in Calcutta Lord Wellesley received a letter of congratulation from the Viceroy of Pegu. This letter contained a request for permission to buy 'ten to twenty thousand stand of arms' in Calcutta. The Government of Bengal authorised a Burmese agent to buy 1,000 stand of arms.<sup>3</sup> This friendly gesture was, however, followed by a fresh incursion of Burmese troops on the Chittagong frontier.

Even after the troubles of 1794 fugitives from Arakan continued to enter into the district of Chittagong. Between the years 1797 and 1800, it is said, about 30,000 or 40,000 persons emigrated from Arakan into Chittagong. By 1798 so large a body of

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<sup>1</sup> See A. C. Banerjee, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, Vol. I, *Introduction*, pp. xvii-xxi, xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Banerjee, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, Vol. I, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., December 17, 1798, No. 30.

emigrants arrived that the British Government had to adopt comprehensive measures for their settlement. Captain Cox was the first officer appointed to superintend the settlement of the *Mags*; the small town of Cox's Bazar—now the head-quarters of a sub-division in the district of Chittagong—commemorates his name.<sup>1</sup> In January, 1799, a large body of *Mags*, accompanied by their wives and children, made their way into British territory by sea and through the hills and jungles. They resisted all attempts made by British officers to induce them to return to their own country. Considerations of humanity precluded the British authorities from expelling these unfortunate emigrants by force.<sup>2</sup> They were allowed to settle in British territory<sup>3</sup>; the Burmese authorities were at the same time informed that specific demands for the surrender of criminals would be carefully considered. In spite of this a large

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<sup>1</sup> *Chittagong District Gazetteer*, pp. 41-42. The unhealthiness of the climate was responsible for Cox's premature death within a year. He was succeeded by Ker, Registrar of Dacca. The *Mags* were ultimately placed under the supervision of the Collector of Chittagong. They were employed on construction of a road from Ramu to Ukhia *Ghat*.

<sup>2</sup> Within a few years, however, many *Mags* returned to Arakan. Some local officers treated them as 'deserters', and it became necessary for the Secretary to the Government to write that "the emigrants from Arakan are under no restrictions, and if they wish to leave Chittagong they are at liberty to do so." See *Chittagong District Gazetteer*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> In 1806 the Collector of Chittagong submitted to the Government of Bengal 'a statement of lands for which the Magh emigrants had entered into engagements for the payment of revenue'. Regulation XI of 1812 was passed in connection with the settlement of the *Mags* within British territory. See *Chittagong District Gazetteer*, p. 42.

body of Burmese troops crossed the frontier. The policy of the British Government was fully explained to them on the spot by British officers stationed there, but the Burmese began to establish stockades and their number went on increasing. They were then compelled by force to evacuate British territory.<sup>1</sup>

After this incident the Government of Bengal considered it necessary to send an Agent 'to Arakan and eventually to Ava'.<sup>2</sup> The choice fell upon Lieutenant Thomas Hill. He was instructed 'to enter into an explanation with the Burma Government on the subject of the emigrants from Arakan and to endeavour to bring the business to an amicable adjustment'. He was to tell the Burmese clearly and unequivocally that the British Government would not expel the emigrants by force, although no pains would be spared to induce them peacefully to return to Arakan. He was also to make it clear that the policy adopted by Sir John Shore in 1794—the policy of surrendering criminals against whom adequate evidence was available—was still in force.<sup>3</sup>

Before Lieutenant Hill's arrival in Arakan the Viceroy of Pegu again requested the Government of Bengal to supply him with arms from the Government arsenal. This request was refused, although Burmese

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., February 11, 1799, No. 9; February 15, 1799, No. 3; June 24, 1799, No. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant Hill was instructed to wait in Arakan and not to proceed to Amarapura. If the King wanted him to go to the capital, he was to request the King to write to Calcutta to authorise him to proceed there.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., June 24, 1799, No. 3.



agents were permitted to purchase arms in the open market.<sup>1</sup>

Lieutenant Hill arrived in Arakan on September 27, 1799. He had a long interview with the Governor, and a full discussion took place about the question of the refugees. The Governor argued that the Burmese incursion into Chittagong was due solely to the protection given by British officials to rebellious *Mags*. Burmese troops, he said, did not invade British territory; they merely pursued the emigrants and established stockades for their own protection. Lieutenant Hill clearly explained what 'violation of territory' meant in International Law. The Governor then declared that this unhappy incident should be forgotten and the old ties of friendship uniting the two States should be strengthened. Lieutenant Hill expressed his agreement with this view. The Governor then demanded the surrender of all the refugees. When Lieutenant Hill wanted names and evidence of guilt, he was told that all the refugees were guilty of ravaging various districts in the province of Arakan. The Governor refused to allow him to leave Arakan 'till the business was finished'. Lieutenant Hill protested. He was then told that no restraint would be put on his movements, although he was expected to stay till the arrival of final instructions from Amarapura.<sup>2</sup>

Another interview took place a few days later in the presence of the Governors of Cheduba, Ramree and

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., August 22, 1799, No. 7; August 29, 1799; No. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 17, 1799, No. 3.

Sandoway. The Governor of Arakan said that a list of *Mag* rebel leaders would be sent to Calcutta. He expected that the Governor-General would not object 'to a small force being sent to seize them'. Lieutenant Hill observed that although criminals would be surrendered, the despatch of any armed force into British territory on any pretence whatsoever would 'most certainly be the cause of a war'. The Governor then said that he would send, not an army, but an ambassador.<sup>1</sup> When these proceedings were reported to Calcutta, Lieutenant Hill was asked to leave Arakan at once; the original object of his mission was considered to be 'sufficiently answered' by the mutual explanations which had taken place between him and the Governor of Arakan.<sup>2</sup>

In December, 1799, Lieutenant Hill was informed that a letter had been received from the King. The Governor of Arakan was directed 'to demand the surrender of all the emigrants, both new and old, without exception'. Lieutenant Hill said that he could give no new information or assurance. He wanted to leave Arakan, but the Governor of Arakan requested him to stay till the arrival of a fresh letter from the King.<sup>3</sup> He was allowed to leave Arakan in February, 1800.<sup>4</sup>

Lieutenant Hill was followed by a Burmese Agent, who came to Calcutta and demanded the surrender of 'all the emigrants, both men and women',

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 17, 1799, No. 4.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 17, 1799, No. 6.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., February 20, 1800, No. 9, 10.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., February 27, 1800, No. 22.

whose names were specifically mentioned in a list prepared by the Governor of Arakan.<sup>1</sup> The Governor-General wrote to the Governor of Arakan that no refugee would be surrendered unless his guilt was established beyond doubt. He added that in order to satisfy the King of Burma he would issue a proclamation declaring that no Burmese subject would in future be allowed to settle in British territory.<sup>2</sup>

It appeared from the reports of the Magistrate of Chittagong that some *Mag sardars* living near the frontier were creating troubles. They invited people from Arakan to settle within British jurisdiction. They prevented *Mags* living within British jurisdiction from returning to Arakan. The Governor of Arakan was following a comparatively liberal policy to those *Mags* who returned to their own country; although the *sardars* were cruelly punished, ordinary *Mags* were well received. The Magistrate recommended that the troublesome *sardars* should be compelled to leave Chittagong and asked to settle in any other district (Tipperah, for instance) at some distance from the Burmese frontier. This would curb their intrigues and put an end to Burmese demands for their surrender. This would also induce most of the emigrants to return to Arakan.<sup>3</sup> This policy met with the approval of the Government.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., June 26, 1800, No. 148.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., June 26, 1800, No. 149.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., July 23, 1801, No. 11.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., July 23, 1801, No. 14.

There is no evidence showing that the *Mag sardars* creating troubles on the Chittagong frontier were actually transferred to Tipperah or any other district.

The matter was reported to the Governor of Arakan, but he was not satisfied. The old demand for the surrender of the refugees was reiterated.<sup>1</sup> His attitude was so threatening that defensive measures had to be taken. Troops were sent from Dacca to the Chittagong frontier.<sup>2</sup> A strong but conciliatory letter<sup>3</sup> was despatched to the King of Burma. In that letter it was announced that Colonel Symes would be again sent to Amarapura 'to promote the mutual interests and to cement the friendship of the two States'.

The question of the *Mags* was, no doubt, the immediate issue which was responsible for Lord Wellesley's decision to send Symes once again to Burma; but there were other—and graver—problems to be solved. Trade between Rangoon and British Indian ports had been increasing considerably in recent years. It was necessary to obtain protection for British traders against the steadily increasing extortion of Burmese port officials. Teak was badly wanted for ship-building. Attempts were to be made to open overland trade to China through Rangoon. Finally, it was essential to counteract French intrigues in Burma. Rangoon could not be allowed to be converted into a base for attacks on Calcutta and on British shipping. The misuse of the Burmese flag by French privateers had to be prevented.<sup>4</sup>

Vincent Smith points out that "Wellesley's policy of subsidiary alliances and annexations . . . was largely

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 7, 1802, No. 4B.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., February 18, 1802, No. 25, 26.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., April 29, 1802, No. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, p. 93.

determined by his resolve to exclude for ever all possibility of French competition".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Lord Wellesley has been 'accused of exaggerating the French peril'.<sup>2</sup> It is beyond the scope of the present volume to attempt an examination of this accusation. Suffice it to say that, as in the cases of the Indian States, so in the case of Burma, Lord Wellesley's policy was largely shaped by his resolve to prevent the diffusion of French influence.

The assumption of office in India by Lord Wellesley almost synchronised with Napoleon's Egyptian expedition.<sup>3</sup> The French hero's ulterior designs were clearly expressed in his letter of October 7, 1798, to the Directory: "The European Power which is mistress of Egypt is in the long run the mistress of India." In spite of his initial successes Napoleon could not make France mistress of Egypt; once again the naval power of England shattered French ambition in the East. In India Lord Wellesley was trying to attract the potential allies of France to the British camp. Within a month of the battle of the Nile (August, 1798) the Nizam concluded a subsidiary alliance with the Company (September, 1798), and the force organised by Raymond was disarmed and disbanded. Tipu Sultan, who had planted the tree of liberty at Seringapatam and become a member of a Jacobin Club, was defeated and killed in May, 1799. A *sepoy* force under General Baird, who had led the assault on Seringapatam, was landed in Egypt early in

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford History of India*, p. 582.

<sup>2</sup> Roberts, *History of British India*, pp. 250-251.

<sup>3</sup> The Toulon fleet set sail in May, 1798.

1801. Cairo was occupied by the British in August, 1801. The Peace of Amiens was concluded in March, 1802.

The Peace of Amiens stipulated for the restoration of the French and Dutch factories in India, but Ceylon remained permanently in British occupation. Lord Wellesley probably anticipated the renewal of war with France at an early date, for he wrote<sup>1</sup> within a few months of the conclusion of the treaty, "... although the conclusion of peace between Great Britain and France precludes the British Government from requiring the exclusion and expulsion of the subjects of France from the Dominion of Ava, it would not be inconsistent with the amicable relations subsisting between His Majesty and the French Republic to require from the King of Ava an obligation to expel from his Dominion the subjects of any European State with whom we may hereafter be engaged in war..."<sup>2</sup> Towards the close of the year 1802 Lord Wellesley directed the Governor of Madras not to restore the French possessions without specific orders from the Supreme Government.<sup>3</sup> This cautious policy was fully justified by the instructions received from England during the early months of the year 1803, and in September, 1803, Lord Wellesley learnt that war had been declared in May.<sup>4</sup>

This is the background against which the second

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<sup>1</sup> Instructions to Colonel Symes.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., September 2, 1802, No. 4.

<sup>3</sup> The French possessions were not actually handed over to Binot, a French officer who arrived at Pondicherry in June, 1803.

<sup>4</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 329.

embassy of Symes must be interpreted. As early as 1801 Lord Wellesley 'contemplated some further communication with the Burmese Government, on which Major Franklin, of the Bengal Army, was to have been employed'. Major Franklin prepared a memorial<sup>1</sup> on the subject on the basis of Captain Cox's papers. But he was not, after all, sent to Burma as British envoy. Early in 1802 Captain Symes returned from Europe, with the new rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and relying on his old reputation as an officer well-versed in Burmese affairs, Lord Wellesley selected him as his envoy to the Burmese Court.<sup>2</sup>

We have already referred to the objects of the mission.<sup>3</sup> It remains only to notice one interesting point. An important object to which the attention of the envoy was particularly directed by the Governor-General was the probability of a war of succession in Burma. Information had been received in Calcutta to the effect that King Bo-daw-pa-ya intended to abdicate in favour of his eldest son (the *Ein she min*).<sup>4</sup> The claim of the eldest son was likely to be resisted by a younger son. The Siamese would probably assist the latter. "The military character of the *Tongha Tukeen*<sup>5</sup> and the resources which he is enabled to command may be supposed to render his opposition extremely

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<sup>1</sup> This memorial forms the basis of Franklin's *Tracts, Political, Geographical, and Commercial, on the Dominions of Ava*.

<sup>2</sup> Bayfield, *Historical Review*, p. xxii.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> Corrupted into *Engy Tecking* in English documents. It means 'Lord of the Eastern House'.

<sup>5</sup> The younger son.

hazardous to the stability of his brother's power." Both parties might take advantage of the British envoy's presence in Burma to ask for military assistance from the Government of Bengal. Such a contingency Lord Wellesley welcomed as a good opportunity 'for the purpose of establishing British influence and of promoting British interests in the Burmese Empire'. Colonel Symes was explicitly authorised to offer military assistance to the *Ein she min*. The number of troops to be furnished on the occasion was to be regulated by circumstances. Colonel Symes was directed to induce the eldest son 'to subsidize permanently the British force' which might be sent to place him on the throne ; but his consent to this proposition was not to be rendered the indispensable condition of granting the military aid asked for. Even if no direct application for British aid was made by the eldest son, Colonel Symes was authorised to offer it, 'provided that the state of affairs in that country should be such as to induce you to expect that the offer will be accepted, and that the Court is merely withheld from a direct application by considerations of fear or jealousy'.<sup>1</sup> These speculations proved to be quite premature ; Colonel Symes did not notice the symptoms of a civil war in Burma. Although Lord Wellesley clearly contemplated the extension of the system of subsidiary alliance to Burma in order to consolidate British influence in that country, the ground was not at all favourable. King Bo-daw-pa-ya still reigned in full glory.

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., April 29, 1802, No. 23.



Colonel Symes arrived at Rangoon on May 30, 1802.<sup>1</sup> He was received with proper ceremonials and showed the respect due to his position. Some difficulties were indeed raised by Burmese officials, but they were frustrated by the firmness and tact of the envoy. It was clear, however, that they regarded the Governor-General as a man of inferior rank than their King<sup>2</sup>; Colonel Symes could not, therefore, be treated as an ambassador from a sovereign ruler. Though Colonel Symes tried to induce them 'to consider the Governor-General in the light of a sovereign with reference to their own Court',<sup>3</sup> his efforts were not successful. Burmese officials continued to exhibit symptoms of jealousy and distrust.<sup>4</sup> He was compelled to wait at Rangoon till he was summoned to Mingun<sup>5</sup> where the King was still busy with his pagoda.<sup>6</sup> The expected invitation came in August, 1802.<sup>7</sup> Colonel Symes reached Mingun in the following month, accompanied, as before, by Baba Sheen.<sup>8</sup>

During his journey to Mingun Colonel Symes detected an appreciable change of attitude on the part of Burmese officials. The absence of ceremonials was so marked that "even our low Burmese conductors

<sup>1</sup> S. C., September 2, 1802, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Down to the days of Thibaw Burmese Kings refused to regard Governors-General of India as their equals.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., September 2, 1802, No. 2.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., September 2, 1802, No. 3.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., September 2, 1802, No. 9.

<sup>6</sup> See *ante*, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> S. C., October 21, 1802, No. 46.

<sup>8</sup> The following account is taken from the unpublished *Journal* of Colonel Symes (Foreign Department Miscellaneous and Separate Records, Imperial Record Department, No. 109).

perceived it".<sup>1</sup> No improvement was noticeable even after the envoy's arrival at the capital. Of the prominent persons in the Court only the Viceroy of Pegu, who had assisted Colonel Symes in 1795, paid him frequent visits and expressed a favourable disposition. No official residence was provided for the envoy and the other members of the Mission. For more than a month he was compelled to reside on an execution and burial ground. The King issued orders for disarming Colonel Symes and his followers, but the execution of this command was secretly stopped by the Ministers.<sup>2</sup>

A good friend of the Burmese like Colonel Symes was naturally shocked at the conduct of the Court. For a few days it appeared inexplicable; then the reasons became clear. A French ship from Mauritius had arrived at Rangoon a few days before the British envoy's arrival at the capital. That ship had brought a letter from the French Governor of that island. The letter was addressed to the King of Burma. It expressed a strong desire for the establishment of friendly relations with Burma and contained a promise to the effect that the French authorities were prepared to supply arms and ammunition to the Burmese King. The letter was carried by one Bevan, an American of French connections. As soon as this news reached the capital the King changed his mind.<sup>3</sup> He sent orders

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal*, pp. 5-6, 10-11, 24, 57, 63, 69-70, 79, 80, 85, 91, 93-94, 108, 118-119, 132, 136-137.

<sup>3</sup> Colonel Symes heard that three or four years ago a Burmese emissary had been sent to Mergui to invite some French cruisers

that no respect should be shown to the British envoy, but the French envoy—Bevan was taken as such—should be brought to the capital with proper ceremonials. Symes says, “It was to be proclaimed to the world that deputies from the two greatest States of Europe came at the same time to court his alliance and ask his protection.” The King openly referred to the English with contempt and betrayed his pro-French inclination. Those members of the Court who, like the Viceroy of Pegu, were really suspicious of the French and friendly to the English, did not dare to contradict the King. Symes says, “Now that he has avowed his partiality to the French, every voice in the Court re-echoes his sentiments.” There was no alternative for the courtiers. The Viceroy of Pegu told Colonel Symes that “the King resembled a tiger, a beast to be least trusted when he seemed most tame.” The real intentions of the King were difficult to fathom. An Italian priest<sup>1</sup>, who had lived in Burma for more than 20 years, told Colonel Symes that although the King would gladly take some Frenchmen into his service and utilise the French navy to repel British invasion, he would neither grant the French any territorial settlement nor ‘suffer the entrance of such

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which happened to be there to come to Rangoon. When two privateers arrived, the King exempted them from the usual dues and supplied them with free provisions. The King’s view was reported to be as follows : “The true characteristics of the English nation are pride, violence and rapacity, whereas the French, on the contrary, are gentle, courteous, peaceful, and quiet.” See Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, p. 97.

<sup>1</sup> The reference is, obviously, to Sangermano.

a foreign force into his dominions as might endanger his own Government or give weight to any faction'.<sup>1</sup>

At this unexpected crisis Colonel Symes tried to take advantage of the favourable disposition exhibited by the Viceroy of Pegu. He explained to him in detail 'the national character and sinister views of our rivals, their spirit of aggrandisement'. He asked him 'to warn the King of giving encouragement to a people who were looking for a country to conquer'. He narrated how "Tipu had brought down destruction on himself by founding an alliance with the French". The Viceroy admitted the 'justice' of these remarks but said that "it was difficult to combat the King's prejudice". He asked Colonel Symes to tell him clearly what the Governor-General wanted. The envoy took this opportunity to send to the Viceroy the following statement of British demands classified under four articles<sup>2</sup>:

“1. Perpetual peace and friendship to subsist between English and Burman States, and neither is at any time to supply the enemies of the other with materials of war. This is not to be understood to prohibit the relief of any vessels in distress or to impede mercantile intercourse.

2. The British Government is not desirous to extend its territorial possessions, but if hereafter at any time the Burman Government shall deem it expedient to grant a factory or ground for building or lands for any purpose to any European nation, the English are

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, pp. 25-28, 41, 48, 50, 54-56, 100-101, 107, 109, 111-113, 115, 121, 475.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal*, pp. 132-140.

to have the preference, and no immunity of any kind shall be granted to any European nation without a similar and equally advantageous one being granted to the English.

3. The treaty<sup>1</sup> agreed on and ratified in 1795 between Captain Symes and the Burmese Government is to be considered in full force and effect.

4. Whenever cause of discussion shall arise between the English and Burman States, such matter is to be represented through the person residing on the part of the Company at Rangoon and all communications made by the Resident are to be considered authentic".<sup>2</sup>

These concessions were 'all' that Colonel Symes considered 'necessary to accord us complete security against the intrigues of our rivals.'<sup>3</sup> The papers sent by him to the Viceroy were submitted to the King. The heir-apparent invited the King's attention to the fact that the British envoy did not want any territorial concessions. The King said that Colonel Symes meant well, but he must wait. Colonel Symes told the Viceroy that he would leave the capital by the end of November unless the King 'came to some resolution' about his demands. The result of this remonstrance was satisfactory: the King was induced by the heir-apparent and the Queen to agree to see the British envoy. Immediate effect, however, was not given to this resolution. But Colonel Symes was respectfully

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<sup>1</sup> Symes himself says, "if a paper couched in such terms can be called a treaty." (*Journal*, p. 149).

<sup>2</sup> *Journal*, pp. 487-500.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal*, p. 141.

conducted to an official residence, which he describes as 'in every respect unexceptionable.'<sup>1</sup>

The King was really unwilling to arrive at a final decision till he saw the French 'envoy'. In vain did Colonel Symes point out to the Viceroy 'the impolicy of treating the master of a ship as an accredited minister.' Towards the middle of November the French party arrived at Mingun. It was composed of four persons, of whom Bevan was the chief. The official residence provided for their use was 'in every respect inferior' to the house allotted to Colonel Symes. He says, "My private information is that the appearance made by the French has a good deal embarrassed the King by touching his pride, while the populace deride in pointed terms the rivals of the English, whom they have been led to expect in a style of at least equal splendour." The 'humble appearance and manners' of a member of the French 'Mission' provoked sarcastic remarks from the Burmese guards of Colonel Symes. But the King was 'determined not to disappoint his own pride by declining to give them a formal reception, although he knew well they had no claim to such a distinction.' Bevan was sent by the Governor of Mauritius to carry on negotiations secretly. He disclaimed all 'pretensions' to formal honour, but, says Symes, 'the foolish vanity of the King will not let slip this opportunity of recording the public reception of a French ambassador.'<sup>2</sup>

The French 'envoy' was received by the King on

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, pp. 158-160, 163-164, 176, 188, 190.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal*, pp. 186-188, 207-211, 223-224, 226, 229.

November 26 with very little ceremony. Colonel Symes received audience two days later. His reception was far more flattering. The King expressed friendly sentiments and 'desired that a monstrous idol composed of cast iron lately made by his orders should be shown to us.' Formal visits to the Ministers and princes followed. The French were suffered to sink into neglect. "They have been", says Colonel Symes, "the pageant of a day, answered the foolish purpose for which they were called at Amarapura, and have gained nothing." They sent certain proposals to the Viceroy of Pegu, who refused even to submit them to the King.<sup>1</sup>

Colonel Symes now found it possible to discuss specific proposals with the Viceroy. He was assured that no demand would ever again be made for fugitives. With regard to the demands submitted by him, the Viceroy expressed the King's 'determination not to grant lands or settlements to any European Power.' Other matters, he said, would revert exactly to the same state in which Colonel Symes had left them in 1795. The Viceroy informed him that he had been vested by the King with full authority to deal with all matters relating to foreigners. It would be better, he suggested, if in future the British Government sent all communications to the Burmese Court through him alone. He referred significantly to 'the capricious and despotic disposition of the King.' The Viceroy also agreed to secure for the British Government the right of establishing a Resident at Rangoon. He hoped that

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, pp. 246, 253-254, 256-257, 259-262, 267, 270-276, 282-284, 289-294.

if they 'proceeded by degrees,' they would be able to procure a factory at Rangoon.<sup>1</sup>

The Italian priest, already referred to,<sup>2</sup> told Colonel Symes a story which, if true, proves that as early as 1783 the French had thought of occupying the province of Pegu in order to make it a base of operations against British Bengal.<sup>3</sup> The famous French Admiral de Suffrein met the Bishop of Pegu, who was a friend of the Italian priest, in Europe in 1783 and 'was particularly inquisitive about the local and political circumstances of Burma.' The Admiral told the Bishop that "he soon expected to see him in that part of the world, for Pegu was the country through which the English might be attacked in India with most advantage." The plan was frustrated by the outbreak of the Revolution and the death of the Admiral, 'the chief promoter of this scheme.'<sup>4</sup> The materials at our disposal do not allow us to verify the accuracy of this story, but there is nothing inherently improbable in it. Intelligent Burmese officials were quite aware of the seriousness of the French menace to their country. The Viceroy assured Colonel Symes that so long as he and the heir-apparent retained any influence on the King, the French would never obtain 'a settlement or permanent footing of any kind in his country.'<sup>5</sup>

There was nothing more to be done at the capital ; so Colonel Symes started for Rangoon on December 27.

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, pp. 295, 298-299.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> *Journal*, pp. 325-327.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal*, pp. 363-364.



He reached the vicinity of Rangoon on January 11, 1803. Here he encountered unexpected opposition from the Lieutenant-Governor of the city. This official was a personal rival of the Viceroy of Pegu; he had aroused the King's suspicion by representing the Viceroy 'as a dangerous person, much attached to the English and ready to concur with them in any plot' against the throne. The King had, therefore, detained the Viceroy at the capital, without allowing him to come to Rangoon. This gave the Lieutenant-Governor a free hand. He insulted some members of the British Mission, refused to allow a British ship to salute the envoy's boat, and, finally, tried to detain Colonel Symes 'until answer should arrive from Amara-pura.' The envoy 'judged it expedient to be in readiness to repel, and, if necessary, to anticipate attack.' A British ship was placed in the most advantageous position to attack the stockade, and the British force on shore was prepared to act offensively. The Lieutenant-Governor tried to create an alarm in the city by proclaiming that the English would kill the citizens of Rangoon when they were asleep, but 'the tide of popular opinion was strong' in favour of the foreigners. At last the Lieutenant-Governor apologised to Colonel Symes and allowed him to leave Rangoon peacefully.<sup>1</sup>

Colonel Symes returned to Calcutta with nothing more than an empty letter<sup>2</sup> written by 'four chief Ministers of Burma,' which he had received before his

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, pp. 384-424.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal*, pp. 541-543.

departure from Rangoon. That letter merely conveyed the King's order that "inhabitants of Bengal might come to his ports to sell, purchase and trade according to ancient customs." There was no reference to the question of the refugees, or to the French. There was no explanation of the term 'ancient customs' which were to regulate trade. There was no mention of the proposals submitted by Colonel Symes. The envoy observes, "It seems he (*i.e.*, the King of Burma) will treat with no power on earth as an equal.<sup>1</sup> He will grant a boon but will not make a treaty, and whatever he gives must be in the form of a mandate issued in favour of a suppliant." Symes claims, however, that "a very detrimental alliance between Burma and the French has been prevented, and French influence, if not eradicated, has at least been considerably diminished even in the King's mind." His own *Journal* makes it clear that this desirable result arose, not from his own diplomatic skill or even from the presence of the British Mission at the critical hour, but from the character of the persons composing the French 'Mission'. Even in his concluding observations, of which this claim forms a part, Colonel Symes admits that the King wanted to utilise the French as a counterpoise against the English. True to the exaggerated optimism which spoilt the value of his diplomatic career, Colonel Symes asserts, ". . . a powerful party has been formed in favour of the English which, let the result be peace or war, cannot fail to

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<sup>1</sup> One of the Burmese letters mentions the Governor-General as having 'paid homage at the Golden Feet, and solicited the Royal protection'.

give us an advantage, either a preponderating weight in the council, or, if such aid were necessary to our success, an easy conquest in the field." It was certainly too much to expect that the Viceroy of Pegu and the heir-apparent would assist the British to effect 'an easy conquest in the field,' if the King decided to favour the French. Nor is Colonel Symes more logical when he says, "Our principles of Government are now widely diffused among all classes of Burmese, who cannot avoid contrasting those principles with the wretched system to which they are forced to submit." How could 'all classes of Burmese' acquire an intimate knowledge of the principles of British administration from the accidental appearance in their Court of an envoy who was not allowed by their Government even to talk with non-officials? Indeed, the two Missions of Colonel Symes were not less unsuccessful than the Mission of Captain Cox; but the latter had a sense of reality, while the former lacked that quality. Failure was perhaps inevitable, for the ways of the Burmese Court were tortuous. But there is no reason why Colonel Symes should have twice misled his Government by giving a rosy picture of an unpleasant situation. "I am decidedly of opinion," says he, "that a paramount influence in the Government and administration of Ava, obtain it how we may, is now become indispensably necessary to the interests and security of the British possessions in the East." Unfortunately he failed to point out how that 'paramount influence' could be obtained.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, Bayfield<sup>2</sup> is hardly

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, pp. 429-445.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Review*, p. xxvii.

guilty of exaggeration when he says that the second Mission of Colonel Symes 'may not only be considered as a perfect failure, but as having subjected the British name to further degradation'.

While Colonel Symes was on his way to Calcutta, clouds of war were gathering on the European horizon: the Peace of Amiens was about to be broken.<sup>1</sup> Lord Wellesley kept himself well-informed about events in Europe and regulated his Indian policy accordingly. As soon as he thought that war was likely to break out in Europe<sup>2</sup> he 'deemed it of great importance that we should possess the means of obtaining authentic information of transactions in the Burmese Empire.' He was naturally anxious to prevent the establishment of French influence in that country. Lieutenant John Canning,<sup>3</sup> who had accompanied Colonel Symes to Burma in 1802, was sent to Rangoon in the capacity of an Agent of Colonel Symes under the authority of the Governor-General.<sup>4</sup>

Lieutenant Canning's primary duty was to deal with the French menace. The French were very likely to obtain a footing in Burma 'either by sinister negotiation or by force of arms.' They might even be invited by the King of Burma, who was at that time badly in need of assistance against Siam. In December, 1802,

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<sup>1</sup> War began in May, 1803.

<sup>2</sup> A despatch from England, dated October 17, 1802, received by Lord Wellesley on March 30, 1803, directed him to delay the restoration of the French factories. (*Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 329).

<sup>3</sup> Entered the Bengal Army in 1799; died in Calcutta, September 2, 1824.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., May 12, 1803, No. 27.

the Viceroy of Pegu had indicated to Colonel Symes the necessity of employing a maritime force against the Siamese. The Burmese were more likely to ask for this maritime force from Mauritius than from Calcutta. They were more afraid of the British than of the French. Moreover, their religious feelings had been outraged by the British conquest of Kandy,<sup>1</sup> 'by the pollution of their most holy shrines and by the expulsion of their acknowledged Pontiff.' A competent British officer observes, "I am assured that it has caused a sensation throughout the Burmese Empire similar to what zealous Mussalmans would feel had infidels captured Mecca and profaned the sacred Caba." Under the circumstances, the Burmese King might invite the French and allow his country to be used by them as a base of operations against the English.<sup>2</sup> Such a contingency Lieutenant Canning was expected to prevent.<sup>3</sup>

Lieutenant Canning left Calcutta on May 21, 1803, and arrived at Rangoon on May 31, 1803. He carried two letters from Colonel Symes, addressed to the heir-apparent and the Viceroy of Pegu. His

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<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of 1795 Ceylon was seized by an expedition from Madras; but the mountain Kingdom of Kandy remained independent. In 1803, the English took possession of Kandy, but as soon as the bulk of the force was withdrawn, the remainder was massacred by the Ceylonese. Kandy was finally conquered in 1816.—*Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. IX, pp. 733-734 (Cheap edition).

<sup>2</sup> Soon after Canning's arrival at Rangoon a French brig, *jeune Africaine*, came there with 46 chests, each containing 25 muskets, many bales of cloth, liquor and specie. See Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of Symes*, pp. 359-360, 594-606.

reception was satisfactory. The Lieutenant-Governor who had insulted Colonel Symes had already left Rangoon for the capital in response to Royal orders; the government of the city was temporarily in the hands of the subordinate members of his council. The letters brought by Lieutenant Canning were despatched to the capital.<sup>1</sup> In July, 1803, a reply was received from the Viceroy of Pegu. The Rangoon officers of the Burmese Government were informed that "in consequence of the Governor-General's desire to seek refuge under the Golden Feet, Lieutenant Canning was permitted to reside at Rangoon"; it was added that the King thought it unnecessary to send Burmese envoys to Calcutta.<sup>2</sup>

It was expected that the Lieutenant-Governor would be punished by the King, or at least dismissed from his office, for his discourtesy to Colonel Symes. But in October, 1803, he returned to Rangoon 'with additional powers and honour that put him nearly on an equality with the Royal family.' This was looked upon by every one as 'the sole act of the King,'<sup>3</sup> for it was generally known that the heir-apparent and the Viceroy of Pegu had tried their best to prevent his return to his former office. The Lieutenant-Governor lost no time in showing that the British Agent could not expect any favour from him. He declared that all

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., June 20, 1805, No. 440.

<sup>2</sup> Bayfield, *Historical Review*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant Canning observes, ". . . the object of the King appears to have been to exalt his own power and importance in the eyes of the British Government and thus deter it from ever having recourse to hostile measures."

letters received by foreigners should be subject to his inspection. This was an innovation repugnant to all foreigners, specially to political agents like Lieutenant Canning. He firmly refused to submit to this procedure; yet a letter addressed to him was opened by Burmese officials. Lieutenant Canning thereupon left Rangoon (November 13, 1803), considering it unsafe to stay there any longer.<sup>1</sup>

During his stay in Rangoon Lieutenant Canning was told by a European priest<sup>2</sup> that though the King was willing to give the best terms to the highest bidder, he would never enter into a specific treaty with the French, nor grant them any territorial concession.<sup>3</sup> In the long run this analysis of Burmese policy proved to be true.<sup>4</sup> The war with Siam was going on as before; in addition, the Shans had invaded Burmese territory.<sup>5</sup> Yet the King showed no signs of invoking French assistance. French ships<sup>6</sup> and French officers were, indeed, coming to and leaving Burmese ports; but no definite information was available regarding their intention or the real attitude of the Burmese Court towards them. Lieutenant Canning, however, sus-

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., June 20, 1805, No. 440.

<sup>2</sup> Sangermano.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., June 20, 1805, No. 440.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant Canning agreed with this conclusion. (S. C., July 5, 1804, No. 134).

<sup>5</sup> S. C., July 5, 1804, No. 130.

<sup>6</sup> During Canning's stay at Rangoon a French vessel arrived there with a letter for the King from the Governor of Tranquebar. The Captain supplied to the Burmese authorities 1510 muskets, and Canning suspected that "he had been privately appointed agent." (Bayfield, *Historical Review*, p. xxviii). This French vessel may be identical with the *Jeune Africaine*.

pected that the French were trying 'to feel their ground.'<sup>1</sup> He apprehended a repetition of Dupleix's exploits: "The Burmans," wrote he, "strong and robust, free from all shackles of caste, satisfied with the coarsest fare, and insensible to the hardships of the climate, if disciplined by French adventurers paid by their own Government, and supplied with warlike stores by France, or taught to manufacture them themselves, might, at a future period, prove to us very troublesome neighbours."<sup>2</sup> At the same time he believed that 'the glorious conclusion of the late Maharatta war' would have a due share of influence in the Burma councils in respect to this country.'<sup>3</sup>

The period of Canning's residence at Rangoon (May 31—November 13, 1803) saw important developments in India. The news of the outbreak of war in Europe in May did not officially reach the Governor-General till September, but, as we have already seen,<sup>4</sup> he was prepared for all eventualities. Decaen, who was appointed Captain-General of French India, and his chief of staff, Binot, established contact with some Indian Princes; but Decaen's troops were barely enough to garrison the French islands, and the French squadron under Admiral Linois was not strong enough for offensive action. The only serious trouble to the Company came from the French privateers, which now covered the Indian Ocean in all directions.<sup>5</sup> But the

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., July 5, 1804, No. 124; June 20, 1805, No. 443, 446, 447.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., July 5, 1804, No. 134.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., June 20, 1805, No. 447.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> See Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, pp. 101-102.



privateers could do nothing 'beyond inflicting heavy private losses, and left the Company's position in India untouched'. In 1805 the Cape was re-occupied by the English, and the French islands were cut off from their nearest supplies of foodstuffs.<sup>1</sup> Thus, by the time of Lord Wellesley's retirement from India (August, 1805) the French menace on land and sea had lost much of its effectiveness, and the necessity of securing Burmese co-operation against the French was no longer very urgent.

Meanwhile, the scene on the Indian continent had also become favourable to the Company. The intrigues of Decaen and Binot failed to organise an anti-British coalition, for they were unable to provide Indian Princes with 'anything more serviceable than encouragement in what was to prove a suicidal policy'.<sup>2</sup> On December 31, 1802, Peshwa Baji Rao II concluded the treaty of Bassein, by which he entered into a Subsidiary Alliance with the Company. Sir Alfred Lyall says, "Wellesley's subsidiary troops were encamped at the capitals of the four great Indian powers . . ., at Mysore, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Poona." The treaty was a great triumph for the Governor-General, but Lord Castlereagh, President of the Board of Control, pointed out that it made war inevitable. War, indeed, broke out while Canning was still at Rangoon; but the blows dealt at the Marathas were swift and terrible. Sindhia and Bhonsla were compelled to make peace in December, 1803. The reverses

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<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, pp. 329-330.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 330.

of the British<sup>1</sup> came later—in 1804-5. Lord Wellesley's policy was discredited, and Lord Cornwallis was appointed to supersede him.

In spite of the failures of the British forces in 1804-5 the victories of Arthur Wellesley and Lake in the early stage of the war could not but impress India and Burma. The hurried submission of the Nizam, the dramatic fall of Tipu Sultan, the cowardly surrender of the Peshwa, the crushing defeats of Sindhia and Bhonsla, the establishment of British authority over the puppet Emperor, Shah Alam II—all these momentous events, following each other in quick succession within a brief period of five years (1798-1803), established the Company in a position which could not but influence the policy of its neighbours. It is perhaps not without significance that the Burmese authorities made no anti-British move in 1804 and during the early months of the year 1805. Probably their inactivity was not altogether unconnected with the military triumphs of the Company in the early stage of the Second Anglo-Maratha War. It was just after Lake's failure at Bharatpur and Lord Wellesley's departure from India that Burma again troubled the British Government.

On the whole, Lord Wellesley's policy was successful in keeping Burma free from effective French operations. The credit due to him in this respect is, however, to be modified by several considerations. In the first place, we have seen that the French never

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<sup>1</sup> Monson's retreat (August, 1804); Lake's failure at Bharatpur (April, 1805).

made any systematic attempt to convert Burma into a base of operations against British Bengal. No duly authorised and properly equipped French envoy visited Burma. Something more than casual visits of privateers and adventurers was required to draw Burma to the French side.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, we have no definite information about the real attitude of the Burmese Court towards the Anglo-French conflict in India. The reports of Symes and Canning seem to attach exaggerated importance to casual conversations and bazaar rumours; it is almost certain that they could not fathom the secret feelings of the Burmese King and his Ministers. So far as we can judge from the unsatisfactory material at our disposal, Bo-daw-pa-ya was a really shrewd and competent pilot for his Kingdom. He wisely refused to enter into 'entangling alliances' with either England or France. As yet his chief political object was the conquest of Siam; he was not interested in Bengal or Assam. His control over Rangoon brought him into contact with England and France; he baffled both by pursuing a seemingly shifting and capricious policy.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1804 an English observer noticed the presence of only three permanent French residents in Rangoon, besides four Frenchmen who were temporarily in the port engaged in building a ship. (Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*, pp. 77-78).

## CHAPTER VI

### THE QUESTION OF ARAKAN REFUGEES (1805—1822)

Lord Cornwallis, who took over charge from Lord Wellesley on July 30, 1805, died on October 5, 1805, and was succeeded by the senior member of Council, Sir George Barlow. Like Sir John Shore he was a capable departmental official, but owing to the narrowness of his views he was quite unfit to deal firmly with the political problems left unsolved by Lord Wellesley. Lord Curzon justly observes that he 'had not the strength of character to enable him to ride the Indian or any storm'.<sup>1</sup> The recall of Lord Wellesley meant the reversal of his policy; both Lord Cornwallis and Sir George Barlow zealously carried out the policy of non-intervention prescribed by the authorities in England. The same policy was continued, with some unavoidable modifications, by the next Governor-General, Lord Minto, who assumed charge on July 31, 1807. Malcolm remarks, "The government of Lord Minto had no result more important, than the impression it conveyed to the authorities at home, of the utter impracticability of perseverance in that neutral policy they had desired to pursue. It was a progressive return to a course of action more suited to the extent, the character, and the condition of the British power . . . ."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *British Government in India*, Vol. II, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> *Political History of India*.

Soon after Lord Wellesley's departure from India the Government of Bengal had to protest against a particularly high-handed act on the part of the Burmese officials at Rangoon. It appears that a vessel was proceeding from the Isle of France to Rangoon under Burmese colours. She aroused the suspicion of a British ship of war. On search it was discovered that she did not possess the necessary papers to prove her nationality. The British ship of war seized her and took her to Rangoon. There she was seized by Burmese officials. The commander of the British ship of war was not prepared to give up his lawful prize. He forcibly brought the captured vessel out of the river. The Governor of Rangoon threw all British residents of the city into prison and ordered the rudders of all English ships in the river to be 'unhung'. Sir George Barlow, who had in the meanwhile assumed the Governor-Generalship, requested the Viceroy of Pegu to release the ships and the prisoners, who had been victimised for no offence of theirs, although he did not justify the conduct of the commander of the British ship.<sup>1</sup> In reply the Burmese Government stated that British residents of Rangoon were neither imprisoned nor molested, and that the 'unhanging' of the rudders was the normal procedure.<sup>2</sup> The vessel in question was then restored to the Burmese Government.<sup>3</sup>

After Lord Minto's assumption of office as

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 16, 1806, No. 7. S. C., July 17, 1806, No. 108A.

<sup>2</sup> S. S., July 17, 1806, No. 109.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 28, 1808, No. 55.

Governor-General a Burmese envoy came to Calcutta to protest against the violation of Burmese territorial sovereignty by a British man of war. In January, 1807, a French ship tried to pass between the island of Cheduba and the coast of Arakan and 'got aground'. The Captain of a British ship of war, which was then within sight, sent a boat to the spot. The French ship fired upon the boat. The English Captain then sent his men to take possession of the French ship. They found that the ship was wrecked. The crew had left her and gone to the shore; only the Captain and one officer were found on board. These officers were taken to the British ship. The English Captain then went in search of the crew, who willingly came with him to his ship. All these men were ultimately sent to the Isle of France. The Burmese Government argued that the English Captain had no right to arrest the French officers and men in Burmese territory. Lord Minto replied that Burmese territory was 'violated not by the English, but by the French, who . . . fired upon the English boat.'<sup>1</sup> The matter ended there. Later on Lord Minto conciliated the Viceroy of Pegu by permitting his agents to buy salt petre and muskets in Calcutta.<sup>2</sup>

While these petty disputes were distracting the attention of British authorities in India, England was making a desperate attempt to frustrate the Continental System inaugurated by Napoleon in 1806. By an Order in Council, dated November 11, 1807, it was

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., March 28, 1808, No. 55, 56.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., April 29, 1809, No. 162, 163.

declared that all trade in articles produced by countries excluding British ships and goods, or by their colonies, was to be considered unlawful, and that all ships trading to or from the said countries or their colonies, together with all merchandise and produce belonging thereto, were thenceforth to be lawful prize.<sup>1</sup> If this order was to be rigidly enforced, the 'extensive trade carried on between Pegu and the French islands' was likely to be severely curtailed. The result would, therefore, be unfavourable to 'the commercial interests and the revenue of the Government of Pegu.' Lord Minto apprehended that the King of Burma would not accept this loss as a necessary 'evil eventually inseparable from a maritime war between other States'. "In the East," he observed, "where these laws (*i.e.*, laws of maritime war) are utterly unknown, their observation must naturally tend to excite the complaints and the resentment of the neutral States whose interests are affected by them. The prohibition of the trade to the blockaded ports and the penalty of infringing that prohibition will be deemed on our part acts of hostility." Such an interpretation was to be expected particularly from Burma, which might retaliate by seizing the person and property of British subjects 'within the reach of its power', and by prohibiting British trade altogether.<sup>2</sup>

In July, 1809, Lord Minto decided to send Captain Canning to Burma. He was not authorised to assume 'the style and title of Envoy'; he was to

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<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. IX, p. 366 (Cheap edition).

<sup>2</sup> P. C., July 20, 1809, No. 11.

act as an Agent for the accomplishment of certain specific purposes. He was not to proceed beyond Rangoon, unless it was found absolutely necessary to go to the capital. His principal object was to explain the significance of Blockade and to convince the Burmese Government that the measures adopted against the French were not acts of hostility against Burma. If the Burmese Government refused to be convinced, Captain Canning was to take measures for 'protecting from violence the person and property of British subjects.'<sup>1</sup>

Captain Canning arrived at Rangoon on October 2, 1809. The Lieutenant-Governor who had previously insisted on opening his letters was still in charge of Rangoon. Naturally Captain Canning expected an unfavourable reception, but he soon found that the Lieutenant-Governor had changed his attitude.<sup>2</sup> His first impression was that French influence had declined in, or almost disappeared from, Burma.<sup>3</sup> His explanations satisfied the Lieutenant-Governor and his council, and prompt measures were taken to send his letters to the capital. He noted two favourable circumstances which, he thought, would prevent the King from adopting a hostile attitude. The large income which he derived from Rangoon was drawn almost wholly from the port dues and commercial taxes paid by British

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., July 20, 1809, No. 24.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., November 14, 1809, No. 24.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., December 5, 1809, No. 131. Captain Canning stated that no "official communication between the Government of Ava and the Isle of France has taken place since my departure from Rangoon in November, 1803." (P. C., December 26, 1809, No. 57).



merchants. For him it would be a suicidal measure to bring about a rupture with the British Government. Moreover, the war with Siam was still going on, and the King was mobilising all his resources in men and money in order to send a grand expedition to occupy the capital of that country.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the close of October the Viceroy of Pegu came to Rangoon. He showed special marks of favour to Captain Canning and told him that, so far as his personal opinion was concerned, he was prepared to accept British regulations about the blockade of the French islands. Captain Canning was summoned to Amarapura.<sup>2</sup> He left Rangoon on December 23 and arrived at the capital on February 10, 1810.<sup>3</sup>

Captain Canning gives us a terrible picture of Burma. During his journey from Rangoon to Amarapura he frequently came across deserted villages and decayed towns. Burma, he says, was far more prosperous in 1803. "The misery of the people," says he, "is beyond description; children of various ages were repeatedly brought to me whose fathers had been driven to the war (with Siam), and whom their mothers begged me to accept in the hope of procuring for their offspring that sustenance which they were unable to afford. The wretched inhabitants, dragged from their houses, or publicly sold if unable to pay the exorbitant requisitions of the Government, to avoid famine and disaster in a camp, or the miseries of slavery, have in numerous bands had recourse to open rebellion, and

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 26, 1809, No. 57.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., January 9, 1810, No. 72.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 1.

now infest the great river in such a manner as to render navigation impracticable to any boat not well-protected."<sup>1</sup>

The capital provided an atmosphere of terror and intrigue. "The present King," says Captain Canning, "at all times despotic, superstitious and cruel, has of late years been rendered by age still more gloomy and suspicious, and his temper is now become insupportable to his family and to all whom necessity obliges to approach him. He has half persuaded himself that immortality is attainable by charms and elixirs which he is at all times compounding. No one is now anxious to offer advice to a man who frequently pursues with a sword or spear any person whose countenance chances to displease him, and who in sudden fits of rage has ordered hundreds to execution, and afterwards blamed his ministers for not interfering in their favour, by doing which they would probably have provoked the same fate."<sup>2</sup> The Court was humming with intrigues. The King's eldest son, who had shown so much favour to Colonel Symes, was dead. Although

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 1.

The distress noticed by Captain Canning was the result of the confusion created by the war with Siam in 1809-1810. It was apprehended that Rangoon would be occupied by the Siamese. Much damage was caused at Rangoon by a fire started probably by incendiaries as a protest against heavy taxation and conscription. (See Pearn, "A Burma Diary of 1810", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol. XXVII). At Rangoon the number of inhabited houses fell from 5,000 to 1,500. (In August, 1829, there were 1,570 houses and 8,666 people). In March, 1810, it was noted at Rangoon that "there is now very little trade between this place and Bengal".

<sup>2</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 1.

the King had declared the son<sup>1</sup> of the dead Prince as his successor,<sup>2</sup> Captain Canning apprehended that his (*i.e.*, the King's) four surviving sons were not likely to yield without a struggle. "In fine," says he, "the Court of Amarapura presents at this moment a scene of jealousy, feud and treachery between those connected by the nearest ties of blood that has perhaps seldom been equalled."<sup>3</sup> While Captain Canning was at Rangoon, the Viceroy of Pegu had asked him whether the British Government would be prepared to give military assistance to the young Prince against his uncles. For this help he was prepared to give 'any tract of land' which the British Government might want. Captain Canning said that he was not authorised to discuss the matter officially, but in his private capacity he encouraged the Viceroy to be hopeful. He expressed similar sentiments to the young heir-apparent on his arrival at the capital.<sup>4</sup>

Soon after his arrival at Amarapura Captain Canning heard from reliable persons that "the King claimed Chittagong and Dacca as having anciently formed part of the kingdom of Arakan".<sup>5</sup> His 'private

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<sup>1</sup> Later King Ba-gyi-daw.

<sup>2</sup> *Ein she min*.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 1.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Although Chittagong was for many years a part of the Kingdom of Arakan, Dacca was never permanently annexed by the *Mags*. For them Dacca was nothing more than a flourishing field for plunder. When Captain Cox went to Amarapura, the Burmese Ministers hinted that the King would claim 'Chittagong, Luckipore, Dacca and the whole of the Casembuzar island.' (*Journal of a Residence*, p. 300). 'Luckipore' is probably Lakshmipur, now an important village in the district of Noakhali.

apartment was filled with maps and plans of Dacca and Chittagong, which he was strongly bent on annexing'. Before the British Agent's departure from the capital the King sent some spies to Chittagong and Dacca 'for the purpose of taking plans of these provinces and of the islands of Sandwip and Hatia.'<sup>1</sup> No official claim was, however, addressed to Captain Canning.<sup>2</sup>

A few days later a deputation of Burmese Ministers came to see Captain Canning. They made various enquiries about the principles and justification of Blockade and appeared satisfied with the Agent's replies. They persuaded the King to grant a formal interview to Captain Canning. The Agent received audience on February 28, 1810. He was excused most of the humiliating ceremonies exacted from Symes and Cox<sup>3</sup>, but the King still refused to accept the Governor-General as his equal. He told Captain Canning that he was entitled to an Embassy from the King of England, because the Governor-General held only delegated authority. The letter finally issued by the King's order 'contained nothing satisfactory' respecting the 'business' of Captain Canning's Mission and was written in 'a very objectionable style'.<sup>4</sup> But the heir-

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<sup>1</sup> These islands are at present included in the district of Noakhali. They lie at the mouth of the river Meghna. They were constantly subjected to Arakanese depredations during the Mughal period.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Bayfield, *Historical Review*, p. xxx.

<sup>4</sup> This letter assured the Governor-General of the protection of the Golden Feet and asked him to report the result of Captain

apparent ordered that the Lieutenant-Governor of Rangoon should not in future grant passports or protection of the Burmese flag to ships bound for the French islands.<sup>1</sup>

With this empty concession Captain Canning left Amarapura on March 29 and started from Rangoon for Calcutta on April 19, 1810. His reception at the capital he regarded as 'little short of insult', for no notice was taken of his arrival for a fortnight. He came to the conclusion that "the system of moderation adopted by the British Government towards Ava has failed of having the desired effect". The King, he thought, 'ascribes our forbearance to want of power'. He did not consider Burma strong enough to challenge British power. He says, "In the Upper Provinces we observed no troops nor any appearance of armed force. The only body of men bearing a very distant resemblance of regular troops that we saw in the country were those that accompanied the late Viceroy of Pegu on his entrance into Rangoon . . . ." He considered that the invasion of Chittagong was 'not a certainty but a probability'. If this apprehension proved to be true, Captain Canning recommended that the province of Arakan should be 'the forfeit of such aggression'. Geographically this province is a continuation of the plain that extends from Chittagong as far as Cape Negrais; a high range of mountains separates it from Burma proper. British India might

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Canning's Mission to the King of England. (Bayfield, *Historical Review*, p. xxxi).

<sup>1</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 1; June 16, 1810, No. 64.

reach its 'natural frontier' if Arakan was incorporated within Bengal. 'This extension of the frontier would 'secure Bengal from all future attack from the Burmese by the impenetrable barrier of the Arakan mountains'. Moreover, Arakan was a very fertile granary; it also supplied teak, elephants' teeth and other valuable articles.<sup>1</sup>

On Captain Canning's arrival in Calcutta the Governor-General expressed 'high appreciation of the zeal, discretion and ability' displayed by him. One point, however, was disapproved. It was not proper for him, the Governor-General observed, to encourage the heir-apparent 'to look for the active support of the British Government in securing the succession . . . as it never could be in the contemplation of the Government to interpose its power for that purpose.'<sup>2</sup> The policy of non-intervention was at work: the days of Lord Wellesley were over.

The difficulties arising out of the blockade of the French islands came to an end with the capture of both Mauritius and Bourbon<sup>3</sup> by Admiral Bertie and General Abercromby in 1810. In 1811 a British expedition occupied Java, to which island a French regiment had been sent sometime before by Daccaen. "These captures", says Prof. Dodwell, "brought to an end the activities of the privateers, who thus lost the bases at which they had refitted, revictualled, and sold their prizes; and wiped out the French reputation in

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., May 29, 1810, No. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Called the Isle of France and the Ile Bonaparte respectively.

India.”<sup>1</sup> Writing from Java in 1811 Lord Minto informed the Secretary of State for War that ‘the British nation has neither an enemy nor a rival left from the Cape of Good Hope to Cape Horn’.<sup>2</sup>

Petty disputes, however, arose now and then to disturb the tranquillity of the Burmese Court. About the middle of 1810 a British ship of war seized certain military stores from a Burmese brig, and the crew of a Burmese brig were seized and detained by the Government of Madras. A Burmese envoy came to Calcutta to obtain redress for these grievances. No trace was available of the ship which had seized the military stores. The captured crew of the Burmese brig were sent to Rangoon.<sup>3</sup> It is uncertain whether these measures satisfied the Burmese Government. Within a few months the authorities in Calcutta had to protest against ‘vexatious delays and detention’ suffered by British ships at Rangoon.<sup>4</sup>

In 1811 serious troubles arose in connection with

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 332.

In one of his first letters from India to the Chairman of the East India Company Lord Minto wrote, “The Mauritius affords a secure port for equipping and refitting ships of war and other cruisers against our trade, and a place of refuge and safety for them and their prizes. Every project of the enemy which requires a naval and military force, will find facilities in the possession of the Mauritius. Troops, stores, and shipping may be almost imperceptibly assembled there, separately and in detail, which could not without extreme hazard of failure, be dispatched in a body from France”. (Countess of Minto, *Lord Minto in India*, p. 241).

<sup>2</sup> Smith, *Oxford History of India*, p. 613.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., June 14, 1811, No. 49, 50.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., June 14, 1811, No. 49, 51.

the invasion of Arakan by a *Mag* refugee named Nga Chin Pyan, who is called Kingbering<sup>1</sup> in contemporary British records. Through the negligence of Police *darogas*<sup>2</sup> he was able to collect a considerable body of refugees and establish himself on the eastern side of the Naf river. When these proceedings came to the notice of the Magistrate of Chittagong, he tried, without success, to seize the person of Kingbering and to prevent *Mags* living within his jurisdiction from joining his standard. But Kingbering's army did not consist merely of men recruited from British territory; it was joined by many inhabitants of Arakan as he carried on hostilities against the Burmese officials in that province. He succeeded in bringing nearly the whole of Arakan temporarily under his authority. It seems that the inhabitants, exasperated by 25 years of Burmese tyranny, voluntarily submitted to him. But he knew that he was not strong enough to maintain his authority permanently against the superior strength of Burma. So he posed as a nominee of the British Government and actually requested that Government to accept tribute from him. Lord Minto peremptorily rejected this request.<sup>3</sup>

It was clear that the Court of Ava would accuse British authorities of instigating this rebellion. The Burmese officials in Arakan, whose cruelty and incompetence were primarily responsible for Kingbering's

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<sup>1</sup> See Pearn, "King Bering", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol. XXII.

<sup>2</sup> The *daroga* of Tek Naf was dismissed. (P. C., November 22, 1811, No. 4).

<sup>3</sup> P. C., September 6, 1811, No. 50; November 22, 1811, No. 4.



success, ascribed his successful invasion to 'the designs and assistance of the British Government'. This explanation was very likely to be accepted as true by the King and his Ministers. It was apprehended in Calcutta that reprisals might be taken against British subjects living at Rangoon. It was, therefore, decided that Captain Canning should again be sent to Burma.<sup>1</sup>

The primary object of Captain Canning's Mission was to convince the Court of Ava that the British Government, instead of instigating and assisting Kingbering, had done their best to restrain him.<sup>2</sup> If the Burmese Government demanded British assistance for the re-establishment of their authority over Arakan, Captain Canning was authorised to give a negative reply: "The British Government cannot reasonably be expected to remedy evils arising from the disaffection of the subjects of the King of Ava." If the Burmese Government seized the person and property of British subjects living at Rangoon, Captain Canning was asked to demand their release, and to threaten 'a rupture between the two States' in case his demand was rejected. He was not authorised 'to proceed to measures of force' without reference to Calcutta. Finally, Captain Canning was asked to make it clear that his appearance at the Burmese Court was not a 'deprecatory solicitation'. He was told that his representations must not be 'couched in the language of apology'. His Mission was not 'dictated by any

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., September 6, 1811, No. 50; October 11, 1811, No. 4.

<sup>2</sup> The measures adopted by the Magistrate of Chittagong are detailed in Captain Canning's letter to the Viceroy of Pega. (P. C., November 22, 1811, No. 4).

other motive than a sense of the right of the Government of Ava to receive an explanation of the circumstances under which that Government has been deprived of a valuable portion of its dominions by means originally derived from the Company's provinces'.<sup>1</sup>

Captain Canning arrived at Rangoon on October 18, 1811. He found that all Burmese officials, including the Viceroy of Pegu,<sup>2</sup> entertained 'a strong suspicion' that a large force of refugee *Mags* could not have been collected in a British province, nor the invasion of Arakan by Kingbering have taken place, without the knowledge and participation of the British Government.<sup>3</sup> Captain Canning tried to convince the Viceroy that his impression was wrong,<sup>4</sup> but the latter remained as suspicious as before.<sup>5</sup> He sent an envoy to Calcutta and demanded that if Kingbering or any of his associates again fled to British territory, they should not only be refused asylum but seized and delivered to Burmese officials.<sup>6</sup> Lord Minto was prepared to expel them from British territory, but he refused to agree to surrender them to the Burmese Government.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile Burmese troops had succeeded in defeating Kingbering and dispersing his forces. In December, 1811, river boats were sent against the rebel

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., September 6, 1811, No. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Not that Viceroy who had helped Colonel Symes.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., November 22, 1811, No. 4.

<sup>4</sup> His letter to the Viceroy was considered by the Supreme Council to be too apologetic. (P. C., November 22, 1811, No. 5).

<sup>5</sup> P. C., December 26, 1811, No. 6.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., January 17, 1812, No. 63.

<sup>7</sup> P. C., January 17, 1812, No. 63.

*Mags*. The equipments of these boats left much to be desired: "their guns are of all calibres, . . . and eaten up with rust; their shot lumps of lead pounded into something like a round shape; and their commanders native Portuguese of the lowest description, without either knowledge or experience".<sup>1</sup> But even these boats proved too strong for Kingbering. Many of his followers crossed the Naf and took shelter in British territory. The Magistrate of Chittagong apprehended that Burmese troops might enter into British territory in pursuit of the rebels. So a detachment of troops was sent to the southern frontier. This unforeseen incursion of a large number of refugees compelled Lord Minto to modify his original plan of compelling them to leave British territory. The refugees might be divided into three classes—Kingbering and other leaders, *Mags* who had accompanied Kingbering from Chittagong, and *Mags* who had left Arakan after the defeat of Kingbering. With regard to the leaders, Lord Minto was 'unwilling to deliver up even Kingbering to the sanguinary vengeance of the Burmese Government', although in future circumstances might 'render that measure expedient'. He was, however, prepared to compel them 'to quit the limits of the province of Chittagong'. With regard to the second class of refugees, although they were to be given immediate protection from the pursuit of the Burmese army, they would ultimately be compelled 'to retire from our provinces'. No definite conclusion was formed about the ultimate fate of the third class of

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., December 26, 1811, No. 6.

refugees, although for the time being they were to be allowed to take shelter in Chittagong. These points were communicated to Captain Canning in due course and he was authorised to intimate the Burmese Government accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

In February, 1812, the Governor of Arakan formally demanded the surrender of Kingbering and other leaders of the late rebellion, and declared that, if his demand was rejected, he would pursue them 'to whatever quarter of the Company's territory they may retreat'.<sup>2</sup> The Magistrate of Chittagong informed him that he would arrest Kingbering, but the question of surrendering him could be decided by the Supreme Government alone. Lord Minto approved this reply, although the Magistrate was told that he had 'attributed to Government . . . a greater degree of solicitude for their (*i.e.*, rebel leaders') apprehension than is in reality entertained'.<sup>3</sup> Some members of Kingbering's family were arrested. The Magistrate of Chittagong was asked to treat them 'with every degree of delicacy and kindness'; they were neither to be surrendered to the Burmese nor allowed to escape. Troops were sent from Dacca to the southern frontier in order to deal with 'the menaced invasion of the Burmese forces'.<sup>4</sup> A ship, accompanied by a cruizer of 20 guns, was sent to Rangoon to provide for Captain Canning's safety and eventual retreat'. He was authorised to leave

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., January 25, 1812, No. 53.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., February 21, 1812, No. 34.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., February 21, 1812, No. 22.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., February 21, 1812, No. 33.

Rangoon if he was insulted or threatened with violence.<sup>1</sup>

These apprehensions of the Supreme Government were not baseless. The Magistrate of Chittagong reported that the Burmese *vakils* were trying to mislead him by 'pacific proposals', while about 500 Burmese troops crossed the Naf and fired on British troops.<sup>2</sup> Captain Canning was thereupon asked to remonstrate against the deceitful conduct of the Burmese officers on the frontier'.<sup>3</sup> Colonel Morgan, who commanded British troops in Chittagong, took the 'pacific proposals' of the Burmese *vakils* seriously<sup>4</sup> and invited them to a conference. One of their demands was that the refugees belonging 'to the third class'<sup>5</sup> should be 'encouraged, permitted and ordered' to return to Arakan 'under assurances of good treatment on the part of the Government of Ava'. Colonel Morgan was informed that this demand might be complied with, if 'some authentic and formal security shall be afforded for the safety of the emigrants by written stipulations under the signature of the Raja of Arakan'.<sup>6</sup> It was reported that the Burmese General intended to encamp near the Naf during the rainy season of 1812.<sup>7</sup> He probably expected to occupy that portion of British territory which was inhabited by

<sup>1</sup> S. C., February 21, 1812, No. 34; March 13, 1812, No. 9.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., March 13, 1812, No. 2.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., March 13, 1812, No. 4.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., March 20, 1812, No. 13. His conduct was disapproved by the Government. (S. C., March 20, 1812, No. 15).

<sup>5</sup> See p. 236.

<sup>6</sup> S. C., March 13, 1812, No. 27.

<sup>7</sup> S. C., March 10, 1812, No. 13.

the *Mags* during the heavy rains, when British troops were likely to leave that unhealthy region.<sup>1</sup> But he changed his mind in April, 1812, probably in response to orders received from the Viceroy of Pegu, and adopted a really pacific attitude. In May Lord Minto concluded that the Burmese no longer meditated 'designs of a hostile nature'. British troops were ordered to leave the frontier.<sup>2</sup>

It is necessary at this stage to turn to the activities of Captain Canning at Rangoon. Towards the close of January, 1812, he was asked to proceed towards Amarapura,<sup>3</sup> but his departure was delayed by the tension due to the appearance of Burmese troops on the Chittagong frontier. The ship (*Amboyna*) and the cruizer (*Malabar*) sent by the Supreme Government<sup>4</sup> arrived near Rangoon on March 18, 1812. It was with some difficulty that Captain Canning secured the permission of the Viceroy of Pegu to bring the ships to the shore. The arrival of these ships excited widespread alarm in Rangoon. Many Burmese officials believed that war had already broken out on the Arakan frontier and that the ships intended to capture Rangoon. The Viceroy of Pegu remained friendly, but took the precaution of collecting troops. Captain Canning was requested to proceed to the capital, but he refused on the ground that he had been asked by his Government to remain at Rangoon till further orders. The apprehension of the Burmese officials was

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., March 20, 1812, No. 16.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., April 17, 1812, No. 59; May 8, 1812, No. 20.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., February 21, 1812, No. 30.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 237.

increased by the arrival, on March 29, of a British schooner at Rangoon. Captain Canning observes, "The utmost degree of alarm prevailed. The bazars, at that hour much thronged, were deserted; many of the inhabitants prepared to rise in favour of the English, many to oppose them, and still more for the purpose of general plunder, and many actually left the town and sought refuge in the jungles". The Viceroy took prompt measures to pacify the population and invited Captain Canning to see him. The interview was not pleasant, although nothing untoward happened. Two English officers of the schooner were, however, 'confined under lock and key' for a few hours in the custom house. Some other petty incidents and reliable reports convinced Captain Canning that the Burmese officials intended to put him 'under restraint'. He left the city and established his residence on the *Malabar*—not without a demonstration of hostility from some Burmese troops and war boats stationed at the port. The Viceroy tried to conciliate him by sending the sailors of the war boats to apologise for their conduct. Captain Canning was 'entirely satisfied' and resumed friendly communications with the Viceroy. He did not return to Bengal at once, because such a step was likely to be considered by the Burmese officials as 'nearly tantamount to a declaration of war'.<sup>1</sup>

Early in May, 1812, the Governor-General ordered Captain Canning to return to Calcutta; the purpose of his Mission had already been accomplished by the

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., May 8, 1812, No. 23.

explanation which he had offered about the measures adopted by the British Government in connection with Kingbering's rebellion. Burmese troops had left the frontier, and the departure of the British Agent was no longer likely to be interpreted at Rangoon as a demonstration of hostility.<sup>1</sup> Before receiving this order Captain Canning had to pass through some unpleasant incidents. The Burmese officers seized some tents belonging to the British Mission; these were returned only when Captain Canning positively told the Viceroy of Pegu that he would leave Rangoon immediately if British property was seized in that way. Some tombs and monuments, including those on the graves of some 'respectable Europeans', were destroyed in order to collect bricks for erecting fortifications. There was so much agitation and so many rumours at Rangoon that Captain Canning became very anxious for the safety of British subjects living in the city.<sup>2</sup> The Viceroy of Pegu demanded the surrender of the fugitive *Mag* chiefs. Captain Canning refused to commit himself, on the excuse that he had no positive information about the matter. But he argued that the disturbance in Arakan was solely due to 'the

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., May 8, 1812, No. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Some British subjects fled to Captain Canning's ship. Among them was Felix Carey, who brought with him his wife, mother-in-law and sister-in-law. As these ladies were Burmese subjects it was illegal for them to leave the city. After acrimonious correspondence between Captain Canning and the Burmese officers Carey returned to the city with those ladies. Captain Canning requested the Supreme Government to take up the vexed question of the emigration of the wives and children of the Europeans from Burma, but Lord Minto decided not to interfere with the internal laws of Burma.



oppressive and tyrannical government' of the Burmese Governor of that province—a remark approved by the Burmese *vakil* who had recently visited Colonel Morgan—and claimed that the misconduct of that official should not be used as an excuse for demanding the surrender of the fugitives. He said, “. . . the surrender of persons to certain destruction who seek refuge in the dominions of any great power must always be deemed an act of extreme concession.” Then at the Viceroy's request he moved from the ship to a convenient house on the bank of the river, which ‘in point of security was not inferior to a residence on board ship.’<sup>1</sup> The resumption of friendly intercourse was soon disturbed by the attempt of the Burmese to detain some British ships, to seize Captain Canning's official correspondence and to confine the family of a British subject. These disputes were, however satisfactorily settled.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the close of May, 1812, Captain Canning came to the conclusion that the time had come for him to proceed to Amarapura. He had reasons to believe that a satisfactory solution of the question of the refugees could be found only by direct negotiations with the King. The ungovernable temper of the old King was kept in restraint by the tact of the heir-apparent (his grandson) who took a prominent part in the management of affairs. During Captain Canning's former visit to the capital the heir-apparent had been very friendly to him. There was no reason to believe

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., June 12, 1812, No. 22.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., June 12, 1812, No. 24.

that his attitude had changed. His immediate return to Bengal, Captain Canning thought, would frustrate the object of his Mission by leaving everything in a state of uncertainty and lead the Burmese to believe that hostilities were imminent.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Kingbering had made another attempt to invade Arakan. The Burmese army had already left Arakan. Kingbering utilised this opportunity, crossed the Naf with about 500 followers and occupied a stockade at Maungdaw. Colonel Morgan tried in vain to arrest him and to check his progress.<sup>2</sup> The Government authorised the Magistrate of Chittagong to offer a reward for the capture of Kingbering and his principal associates and to issue a proclamation<sup>3</sup> to the effect that any one who directly assisted Kingbering would be punished 'according to law.'<sup>4</sup>

As a result of this new development Captain Canning was ordered to wait at Rangoon and not to proceed towards Amarapura. "The recent occurrences in Chittagong," he was informed, "would furnish new sources of irritation and new grounds for arrogant demands, which by your presence at the capital the Court would be enabled to urge with all advantage to be derived from the relinquishment of the independent and commanding position which you have the means of maintaining at Rangoon; and, above all, the Government and you would be deprived of the benefit

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., June 12, 1812, No. 24.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., June 12, 1812, No. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Text of the proclamation will be found in S. C., July 4, 1812, No. 34.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., June 12, 1812, No. 20.

of a speedy and regular communication between the Mission and the Presidency." He was instructed to explain the measures adopted by the British authorities to prevent the *Mag* refugees from crossing the Naf and 'to signify that this Government is willing to afford, to the extent that may be practicable, the co-operation of its troops in quelling the insurrection headed by Kingbering.' If this assurance failed to conciliate the Burmese officials at Rangoon and Captain Canning was threatened with insult or injury, he was authorised 'to retire without awaiting the result of a reference to the Presidency.' With regard to the question of surrendering Kingbering, in case he was captured by the British authorities, the Governor-General was not prepared to give up 'a fellow creature, whatever be the magnitude of his offences, to the summary decrees of vindictive cruelty'; yet he would very reluctantly agree to satisfy the Burmese demand if it was the only alternative to war. Lord Minto felt that victory could be easily purchased in a war with Burma: "The coasts and provinces of that country are certainly exposed to our attack without the means of defence, and the only part of our territory accessible to the Burmese forces might with ease be effectually protected." Even then he considered the extension of territories to the eastward and southward to be 'more burdensome than beneficial.' His only purpose was to check 'the arrogance and presumption' of the Burmese Court.<sup>1</sup>

This despatch was soon followed by another, in

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., June 12, 1812, No. 25.

which Captain Canning was informed that Kingbering's expedition into Arakan had totally failed and that Kingbering and his followers had been driven back into Chittagong. The Burmese troops who dispersed them did not cross the Naf, nor did they demand their surrender. Captain Canning was now asked to return to Calcutta; he was directed 'on no account' to proceed to Amarapura.<sup>1</sup>

Although Captain Canning was satisfied with the friendly attitude of the Rangoon officials,<sup>2</sup> the Governor of Arakan created new difficulties by writing an 'insolent' letter to the Magistrate of Chittagong. The Magistrate was directed by the Government to send a firm reply.<sup>3</sup> About the same time Kingbering himself precipitated a crisis by adopting predatory practices.<sup>4</sup> In August, 1812, the Magistrate of Chittagong reported: "The whole of the southern part of the district is in a state of confusion." The officers of the *thana* at Tek Naf were compelled to abandon their post, and the *Mags* 'carried all before them.' The Magistrate had to call for military assistance.<sup>5</sup> He also tried to seize two *Mag* chiefs by treachery, but his plan was condemned by the Government in the strongest terms.<sup>6</sup>

Captain Canning left Rangoon early in August,

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., June 25, 1812, No. 47.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., June 25, 1812, No. 46.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., July 17, 1812, No. 23.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., August 14, 1812, No. 17.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., August 21, 1812, No. 17, 23; September 11, 1812, No.

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<sup>6</sup> S. C., September 11, 1812, No. 25.

1812.<sup>1</sup> His proceedings received the fullest approbation of the Government. He had succeeded, in the opinion of the Governor-General in Council, not only in convincing the Burmese Court that Kingbering had received no encouragement or assistance from the Company's officers, but also in 'inspiring the Burmese authorities with juster notions of the character, principles and powers of the British Government.'<sup>2</sup> The following chapters will reveal how far these 'juster notions' influenced the policy of the Burmese Court.

Meanwhile the depredations of Kingbering remained unchecked.<sup>3</sup> The Magistrate of Chittagong was directed to take strong measures for 'the seizure of Kingbering's person and that of his principal adherents.'<sup>4</sup> In December, 1812, Kingbering made another attempt upon Arakan, but the adventure ended in his 'total defeat.'<sup>5</sup> A Burmese force consisting of about 2,000 armed men entered into British territory 'on the professed purpose of searching for and seizing the insurgent *Mags*.' The Magistrate of Chittagong asked Colonel Dick, officer commanding in that district, to expel the Burmese from British territory 'either by fair means or by compulsion.'<sup>6</sup> Ensign Hall was despatched at the head of some troops to Rutnapullung, but he found no Burmese troops there.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., September 11, 1812, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., September 25, 1812, No. 12.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., October 16, 1812, No. 51; October 23, 1812, No. 53; December 4, 1812, No. 33.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., December 4, 1812, No. 34.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., January 8, 1813, No. 5.

<sup>6</sup> S. C., January 15, 1813, No. 31.

<sup>7</sup> S. C., January 15, 1813, No. 34.

It was reported that they were 'searching in the woods and hills on the boundary for Kingbering and the insurgent *Mags*.'<sup>1</sup> The Governor of Arakan advanced with his troops as far as Maungdaw and sent a friendly letter to the Magistrate of Chittagong,<sup>2</sup> inviting his co-operation against the fugitives. The Magistrate sent a conciliatory reply.<sup>3</sup> He was directed by the Government not to withdraw any part of the force assembled on the southern frontier as long as the army of Arakan remained at Maungdaw. He was also asked to demand from the Governor of Arakan a formal disapproval of the conduct of his men who penetrated into British territory. The Governor was to be informed that British troops would co-operate with him for the apprehension of Kingbering on the distinct understanding that neither British nor Burmese troops would cross the Naf without a 'specific invitation' of the other party. But the Magistrate was directed 'to avoid any expression that can be construed into an intention to deliver Kingbering or his adherents, in the event of their apprehension, into the hands of the Burmese Government.'<sup>4</sup>

To a letter written according to these instructions the Governor of Arakan sent a civil reply: he requested that the rebel leaders should be captured and surrendered, but he offered no apology for the violation of British territory by his troops.<sup>5</sup> A few days later he

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., January 15, 1813, No. 35.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., January 15, 1813, No. 34.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., January 15, 1813, No. 27.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., January 29, 1813, No. 30.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., February 11, 1813, No. 17.

sent another letter, in which he stated that his troops did not violate British territory.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile wild rumours were afloat: it was said that a Burmese army, about 7,000 strong, was advancing to the Naf<sup>2</sup>; that a son of the King was coming from Amarapura to lead an expedition against the British<sup>3</sup>; etc. These rumours were not considered credible by the Magistrate of Chittagong, but he took adequate precautionary measures.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Burmese had no real intention of beginning hostilities, they persisted in pressing their demand for the surrender of the fugitives. Envoys were sent to Calcutta, where they arrived in April, 1813. Captain Canning tried to convince them that their demand was unjust, but his arguments had 'little weight' with them. They were afraid that they—and other members of their families—would lose their heads if they returned to Amarapura 'without having effected the object of their mission.'<sup>5</sup> While the envoys were trying to save their own heads by securing those of the refugees, Kingbering was trying to lead another expedition into Arakan, and his followers were 'plundering the inhabitants of the plains' from their shelter in hills and jungles.<sup>6</sup> With great reluctance Lord Minto authorised the Magistrate of Chittagong to declare that if Kingbering invaded Arakan again

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., February 26, 1813, No. 12.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., February 19, 1813, No. 62.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., March 12, 1813, No. 32.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., March 12, 1813, No. 32.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., August 20, 1813, No. 19.

<sup>6</sup> S. C., September 10, 1813, No. 16.

and fell into the hands of the British Government, he would be surrendered to the Burmese. Even now he expected that such a declaration would restrain Kingbering and make it unnecessary for British authorities to hand him over to his cruel enemies. So he directed the Magistrate of Chittagong not to communicate in official letters to the Governor of Arakan the decision of the Supreme Government to surrender Kingbering.<sup>1</sup> A few weeks later Lord Minto left India, and Kingbering troubled him no more.

Lord Curzon says, "Minto was one of the class of Governors-General who leave no particular mark on history and cease to be remembered either for good or ill".<sup>2</sup> Although a very competent observer like Malcolm<sup>3</sup> and historians like Thornton<sup>4</sup> and Marshman<sup>5</sup> have praised Lord Minto's statesmanship in eloquent words, yet, so far as his policy towards Burma is concerned, Lord Curzon's judgment is probably not without adequate justification. During the period 1811-1813 Lord Minto's policy was neither firm nor consistent. He irritated the Burmese Government by his half-hearted and shifting attitude towards Kingbering. There is no doubt that Kingbering used

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., September 10, 1813, No. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *British Government in India*, Vol. II, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm speaks of Lord Minto's 'clear intellect' and 'acquaintance with the whole science of government'; in him, we are told, 'moderation' was 'combined with firmness and capacity'.

<sup>4</sup> According to Thornton, Lord Minto 'well deserves to be held in remembrance as one of the most eminent statesmen in India'.

<sup>5</sup> Marshman says, "Lord Minto's administration has never been sufficiently appreciated."



British territory as a base of operations against the Burmese Government in Arakan.<sup>1</sup> It is also clear that among his followers there were many *Mags* who had settled within British territory and enjoyed the privileges of British subjects. Under these circumstances Lord Minto should have taken strong and effective measures to prevent Kingbering from invading Arakan.<sup>2</sup> There is little doubt that he did not pursue this clear policy. There were undoubtedly difficulties in his way. A contemporary observer remarks that it was 'wholly beyond the power' of British officers 'to eradicate the insurgents, so long as they remained secluded in the remote and insalubrious hills and jungles, seven days' journey from the sea shore, where, after repeated defeats, they were always sure to find an asylum'.<sup>3</sup> Still the available records make it clear that the Governor-General was not determined to defeat these geographical obstacles.<sup>4</sup> Lord Minto's failure to deal effectively with the complicated frontier problem in the east becomes less justifiable when we remember that during the period 1811-1813 he was not involved in any serious difficulty in or outside

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey holds this view. See *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 558.

<sup>2</sup> Modern International Law requires a neutral state 'to prevent the use of any part of its territory for the naval or military operations of the belligerents, or the fitting out therein or departure therefrom of warlike expeditions organized in the interests of a belligerent'. See Lawrence, *International Law*, p. 634.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Hamilton, *Description of Hindostan*. 1820.

<sup>4</sup> Phayre says, "By the supineness of the British Government, Khenbyan was still allowed to raid on the frontier of Arakan." (*History of Burma*, p. 225).

India. The conquests of 1810-1811 had removed the French menace on the sea. The safety of the north-western frontier had been secured by the Persian Missions of Malcolm and Harford Jones (1808, 1809) and also by the treaty with Ranjit Singh (1809). Within the borders of India there was no immediate danger of war. This was undoubtedly an excellent opportunity for putting Anglo-Burmese relations on a satisfactory basis. Lord Minto missed it and left for his successors a legacy of troubles which led to war almost within a decade of his retirement.

Lord Hastings,<sup>1</sup> who succeeded Lord Minto, reached Calcutta on October 4, 1813, and made over charge on January 1, 1823. The early years of his administration (1814-1818) were spent in wars against the Nepalese, the Pindaris and the Marathas; the remaining years were devoted to the political settlement resulting from 'the universal establishment of the British influence'. These never-ending complications hardly left Lord Hastings any opportunity to devise a clear-cut solution of the Burmese problem.

One of the pending problems which claimed the attention of Lord Hastings soon after his arrival in India was the fate of the *Mag* refugees. From their experience in their own country the Burmese envoys expected that the new Governor-General would reverse his predecessor's proceedings and agree to give up the refugees. It was not long before they were disillu-

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<sup>1</sup> Although Lord Moira was created Lord Hastings in February, 1817, we have, for the sake of convenience, called him Lord Hastings throughout this chapter.

sioned.<sup>1</sup> A new envoy arrived,<sup>2</sup> probably to emphasize the seriousness of the business. All the envoys left Calcutta as soon as they received a definite reply, and it was reported that 'the refusal of the Supreme Government to surrender the refugee *Mags* was not received by the local authorities in Pegu with any apparent degree of irritation.'<sup>3</sup>

The plundering raids of the *Mags* continued to disturb the peaceful inhabitants of the plains. The Magistrate of Chittagong reported that the ordinary police could not control the situation. Some troops were posted at important villages. It was reported that Kingbering had given up his plan of invading Arakan: he could not collect an adequate force.<sup>4</sup> In January, 1814, a small Burmese force assembled at Maungdaw. Although the Magistrate of Chittagong apprehended that they would enter British territory in pursuit of Kingbering and his partisans,<sup>5</sup> the Government did not take so serious a view of the situation.<sup>6</sup> Lord Hastings was determined to capture Kingbering. As British troops could not penetrate 'the remote and insalubrious part of the country which he had lately

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., October 29, 1813, No. 23.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., October 29, 1813, No. 24.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., January 28, 1814, No. 51.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., December 17, 1813, No. 56. The Magistrate of Chittagong wrote, "I cannot imagine that any of the *Mags* can be so absurd as to expect to reconquer their country under such a leader as Kingbering, who, on every occasion when a battle is expected, is the first to make his escape." (S. C., April 25, 1814, No. 30).

<sup>5</sup> S. C., January 14, 1814, No. 12.

<sup>6</sup> S. C., January 14, 1814, No. 19.

occupied,' the Governor-General was prepared 'to permit small bodies of Burmese troops to enter the hills and jungles . . . under a solemn promise that they shall on no account enter the plains and cultivated parts of the country.' The Magistrate of Chittagong was authorised to convey this offer to the Governor of Arakan.<sup>1</sup> Before the proposal could be communicated to the Governor, Kingbering invaded Arakan and captured the stockade at Maungdaw.<sup>2</sup> The Burmese succeeded in dispersing the invaders within a few days.<sup>3</sup>

After these troubles the Magistrate of Chittagong sent an agent to the Governor of Arakan. The latter accepted the proposal suggested by the Governor-General and expressed the desire that the British Government would furnish Burmese troops with ammunition and provisions when they entered British territory.<sup>4</sup> The Government of Bengal refused to accede to this request,<sup>5</sup> but the readiness of the British authorities to allow Burmese troops to enter their territory betrayed a weakness which the Burmese Government naturally tried to exploit. Sir Arthur Phayre rightly observes, "The British Government, with a discreditable disregard of its own character, allowed Burmese troops to enter the hills within British territory to attack the chief (*i.e.*, Kingbering) in his stronghold."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., January 14, 1814, No. 19.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., April 7, 1814, No. 33.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., April 7, 1814, No. 30.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., June 17, 1814, No. 71, 72.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., June 17, 1814, No. 74.

<sup>6</sup> *History of Burma*, p. 226.

Emboldened, perhaps, by the weak and shifting policy pursued by the British Government during the period 1811-1814, the Burmese Court tried to establish political contact with Indian States potentially hostile to the Company. The evidence available to us regarding Burmese political intrigues with Indian States is not very satisfactory ; but isolated incidents referred to in British records and reliable secondary works hardly leave any room for doubt that a half-hearted attempt was made to organise a grand anti-British confederacy during the early years of Lord Hastings' administration.

The Marathas naturally occupied the centre of the stage. The relations between Peshwa Baji Rao II and the British Government were not satisfactory. He was unable to reconcile himself to the restrictions imposed by the treaty of Bassein. He spoke of his claims on the Nizam, Sindhia, Holkar and Gaikwad. Grant Duff says that he was 'flattered by the suggestions' of his unworthy adviser, Trimbakji Danglia, who 'tried to persuade him that he would recover by the force of his wisdom all that his ancestors had gained by their swords'. After the murder of Gangadhar Sastri the Peshwa was compelled to sign a new treaty (June 13, 1817), which deprived him of his headship of the Maratha confederacy and also of the Konkon province. Within five months he attacked the British Resident at Kirkee (November 5, 1817). Daulat Rao Sindhia had secret connections with Nepal. According to Grant Duff, he would have risked a war with the Company in 1815 in order to enforce his claim of suzerainty over Bhopal, but 'the brilliant

termination of the Nepal war<sup>1</sup> restrained him. Confusion prevailed in the dominions of Jaswant Rao Holkar, who had become insane in 1808 and died in 1811. During the years 1815-1817 Peshwa Baji Rao II established his influence over the ruling faction at Indore.<sup>2</sup> Sir Thomas Hislop defeated Holkar's troops in the battle of Mahidpur on December 21, 1817. Apa Sahib Bhonsla, who followed the Peshwa's example after the battle of Kirkee, was defeated in the battles of Sitabaldi and Nagpur (November-December, 1817) and deposed. The defeat of the Peshwa's army in the battle of Ashti (February 20, 1818) practically closed the last Anglo-Maratha War.

It is probable that the concerted movement of the Maratha States against the Company was not altogether unconnected with the Nepal War. Grant Duff says that 'the first impressions throughout India respecting that warfare inspired hopes in all who wished the overthrow of the British power'. The aggressions of the Nepalese had begun immediately after the cession of the Gorakhpur territory by the Nawab of Oudh in 1801, which had brought the British districts into contact with the Gurkha possessions in the *Tarai*. As soon as war broke out in 1814 the famous Gurkha General, Amar Singh Thapa, established contact with

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<sup>1</sup> The early operations against the Gurkhas culminated in the defeat and death of General Gillespie. The turn of the tide came with the occupation of Almora and Amar Singh's surrender of Malaon (May 1815). The war was concluded by the treaty of Sagauli (March, 1816).

<sup>2</sup> See Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, Vol. I, Chap. VII.

Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh ruler of Lahore.<sup>1</sup> The secret relations between the Gurkhas and the Sikhs continued even after Ranjit Singh's death.<sup>2</sup> Ranjit Singh also corresponded secretly with the Peshwa and the rulers of Marwar and Bharatpur.<sup>3</sup>

The isolated references to Burmese intrigues with Indian Powers should be interpreted against this background. In June, 1814, it was discovered that the Burmese were intriguing with the Sikhs. A confidential agent of the King of Burma proceeded to Northern India in the guise of a merchant. His purpose was to collect information about the military resources of the Company and to establish, if possible, friendly relations with Ranjit Singh.<sup>4</sup> Bayfield<sup>5</sup> probably refers to this incident when he says that in 1814 the Magistrate of Chittagong 'discovered, and reported an intrigue of the Burmese to engage the native princes to join them in a scheme to expel the British from India'. Bayfield also says that in 1818 three Burmese agents (who were natives of western India) tried to reach Lahore 'ostensibly in search of religious books'.

It seems that the Burmese Government really succeeded in establishing friendly relations with the Sikhs. In 1823 some Sikhs, who claimed to be agents

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<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission*, Mysore, 1942, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> N. K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh*, pp. 126-130. *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission*, Peshawar, 1945, pp. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission*, Mysore, 1942, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., June 23, 1814, No. 42.

<sup>5</sup> *Historical Review*, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

deputed by Ranjit Singh, came to Amarapura. They said that "they had suffered shipwreck in crossing a river, and lost the letter and presents which they had from their master." The object of their 'mission' was 'a treaty, offensive and defensive', to drive the British out of India. The Burmese received them cordially, but during the war with the British (1824-1826) they became suspected and were even imprisoned for a short time. They were finally sent back with letters, and a sum of money was given to each of them.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1838 Ranjit Singh referred to the courage of the Burmese in conversation with a member of the British Mission then visiting him. He said, "I have heard that they fight well, and beat your Sipahis".<sup>2</sup>

The Burmese also came into contact with the Marathas.<sup>3</sup> Phayre says, "It was discovered that the Burmese Government was scheming to enter the confederacy which the Peshwa was forming against the British power. The hopes of Burma were extinguished by the battles of Kirki, Mahidpur, and Ashti, and the dispersion of the Pindari hordes by the army under Lord Hastings."<sup>4</sup> Although the crude efforts of the Burmese Government to make a common cause with the Sikhs and the Marathas failed to bear fruit, a distinct tone of aggression and an exaggerated consciousness of power are noticeable on their part during the critical years 1814-1818.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174 C.

<sup>2</sup> Osborne, *Court and Camp of Runjeet Singh*, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., January 9, 1818, No. 69, 72.

<sup>4</sup> *History of Burma*, p. 226.



Captain Fago, officer commanding at Ramu, suggested a plan for maintaining peace in the hilly areas infested by the turbulent *Mags* refugees. He advocated the recruitment of *Mags* as soldiers and the formation of 8 or 10 companies, 'partly of *Mags* and partly of the other natives of this part of the district'. He expected that this step would secure the loyalty of the *Mags* and restore the prosperity of the fertile area devastated by them. "The improvement of the country," he remarked, "will very soon repay the expense of the corps."<sup>1</sup> This proposal was not approved by the Magistrate of Chittagong. He suspected that *Mag* soldiers would not agree to serve against their own countrymen, for all *Mags* were 'generally united in the scheme of trying to remain in Arakan by some means or other, *i.e.*, either by their prowess or by engaging the British Government in a war with Burma.' Those *Mags* who agreed to enlist would do so merely 'for the sake of being entrusted with arms with which they would desert on the first opportunity'.<sup>2</sup>

The advent of the rainy season made the southern part of the Chittagong district so unhealthy that the troops stationed at Ramu had to be partially withdrawn. This made it possible for the *Mags* to renew their aggressions in the plains.<sup>3</sup> Their objects were two-fold: 'to threaten the peaceable *Mags* who inhabit the plains in case they do not attend them, and to

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., June 10, 1814, No. 61.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., July 12, 1814, No. 9.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., July 12, 1814, No. 72; August 16, 1814, No. 62.

plunder all boats that pass them, and occasionally on shore.<sup>1</sup>

In September, 1814, the Governor of Arakan wrote a very unsatisfactory letter to the Magistrate of Chittagong, and an agent sent to Arakan by the latter returned with a report that the Burmese were making preparations for war<sup>2</sup>. The agent was forcibly detained for 20 days under a guard. The Government considered it to be 'a gross insult' to the Company. The Magistrate of Chittagong was directed to stop correspondence with the Governor of Arakan.<sup>3</sup>

In November, 1814, some Burmese envoys appeared in Calcutta.<sup>4</sup> They were followed a few months later by Felix Carey.<sup>5</sup> The Government refused to recognize him as an accredited envoy, because he was not mentioned as such in the letters which he had brought from Amarapura. He was merely instructed to purchase 'religious books, sacred writings and ancient histories.'<sup>6</sup> Another deputation arrived in Calcutta in October, 1815.<sup>7</sup>

Early in 1815 Kingbering died.<sup>8</sup> He was making preparations for leading another expedition into Arakan, but his death disorganised his party. It was

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., August 16, 1814, No. 64.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., October 4, 1814, No. 35. This report was confirmed by others. (P. C., November 4, 1814, No. 50, 52).

<sup>3</sup> P. C., October 4, 1814, No. 38.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., November 4, 1814, No. 54.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., April 18, 1815, No. 7. See *ante*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., October 7, 1815, No. 88, 93, 94, 95, 102, 106.

<sup>7</sup> P. C., January 13, 1816, No. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Bayfield, *Historical Review*, p. xxxvi. Harvey says that he died in 1814. (*Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 558).

reported that his adherents 'manifested a disposition to return to their homes and resume their former peaceful occupations.'<sup>1</sup> The Magistrate of Chittagong was directed to allow them to return without molestation to their homes, although he was forbidden to adopt 'any active measures' for settling them in any particular part of the Chittagong district.<sup>2</sup> But peace was not restored in that district. The *Mags* found a new leader whom British records call Ryngjeing, and who had been a rival of Kingbering. This leader was allowed to return and settle in the cultivated parts of the district, but he preferred to create disturbances.<sup>3</sup> His wife and children were captured by the Magistrate of Chittagong and strong measures were adopted to seize him.<sup>4</sup> Charipo, a son-in-law of Kingbering and one of Ryngjeing's principal followers, voluntarily delivered himself to the Magistrate, who placed him in confinement. Within a few days he escaped.<sup>5</sup> Distress and want compelled Ryngjeing to surrender himself at last (May, 1816).<sup>6</sup> Some of his followers were punished; others, against whom no positive evidence was available, were released.<sup>7</sup> Ryngjeing and five of his chief assistants were detained as prisoners of State.<sup>8</sup> Tranquillity was at last restored in the

<sup>1</sup> P. C., November 4, 1814, No. 46; December 13, 1814, No. 24; March 21, 1815, No. 76.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., May 30, 1815, No. 53.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., May 30, 1815, No. 53; October 4, 1815, No. 35; February 10, 1816, No. 69.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., February 10, 1816, No. 69.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., March 2, 1816, No. 133, 134.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., June 1, 1816, No. 48.

<sup>7</sup> P. C., July 27, 1816, No. 19.

<sup>8</sup> P. C., July 27, 1816, No. 21.

southern part of the district of Chittagong. Charipo was captured in August, 1817, with 96 associates. The Magistrate of Chittagong and a Judge of Circuit conducted an enquiry and found them guilty of raids into Arakan and dacoities within British territory.

In April, 1817, a son of the Governor of Ramree<sup>1</sup> arrived at Chittagong with a letter<sup>2</sup> from his father, purporting to be written under the immediate orders of the King, and containing a demand for the surrender of Arakan rebels. He was 'paid every mark of civility' and 'expressed himself as much pleased with his reception.' The Magistrate expressed his surprise that the demand for the *Mags* should be renewed at a time 'when all was quiet on the frontier and there was no probability of any renewal of disturbance there.' The Governor's son replied that, although Kingbering was dead, there were many relations and adherents of his, 'who would doubtless take any opportunity that presented itself of reviving troubles.' He had to return to Arakan with a letter addressed to the Viceroy of Pegu, in which the Governor-General observed, "The British Government cannot, without a violation of the principles of justice on which it invariably acts, deliver up a body of people who have sought its protection and some of whom have resided within its territory for thirty years; but . . . . no restraint is imposed on the voluntary return of these people to their native country, although no

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<sup>1</sup> The Governor of Ramree was at that time officiating as 'the head of the Government of the four provinces', for the Governor of Arakan had gone to Amarapura.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 4.

authority would be exercised for the purpose of effecting their removal from the British territories.”<sup>1</sup>

Lord Hastings felt uneasy at this sudden revival of the question of the refugees. The Magistrate of Chittagong was directed to ascertain the real motive of the Burmese and to find out ‘whether any preparations or arrangements are in progress in Arakan indicative of a design to attempt the seizure of the *Mags* by violence or of any other hostile purpose.’<sup>2</sup> He reported, after enquiries, that some ‘hostile irruption’ would probably take place, but whether it would be directed against the British, or merely the *Mags*, he could not say.<sup>3</sup> He recommended the adoption of precautionary measures and suggested that additional troops and a cruiser should be despatched to Chittagong.<sup>4</sup> Lord Hastings approved this suggestion. Troops were ordered to be sent to Chittagong and a cruiser and two gun-boats were to be stationed on the coast, so as to provide against a sudden descent by sea. Fortunately the alarm proved to be premature. Subsequent reports from the Magistrate<sup>5</sup> led Lord Hastings to the conclusion that ‘the highest authorities of Ava’ did not entertain warlike designs.<sup>6</sup>

Towards the close of 1817 Burmese troops appeared on the frontiers of Cachar and Sylhet, and in January, 1818, the demand for the surrender of the

<sup>1</sup> P. C., May 10, 1817, No. 34, 36. S. C., June 28, 1817, No. 5.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., May 10, 1817, No. 37.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., June 28, 1817, No. 7; July 25, 1817, No. 28.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., June 28, 1817, No. 5.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., August 22, 1817, No. 37. P. C., September 12, 1817, No. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 3.

refugees was renewed. Confused reports began to pour in, indicating hostile designs on the part of the Burmese.<sup>1</sup> In April, 1818, the son of the Governor of Ramree again came to Chittagong. He was the bearer of a letter from his father, in which the Governor-General was asked, in insolent language, to surrender to the Burmese King 'the countries of Chittagong, Dacca, Murshidabad and Cossimbazar.'<sup>2</sup> Lord Hastings treated this 'improper' demand as an unauthorised act of the Governor of Ramree.<sup>3</sup> The matter ended there. Although the Governor's letter was not disavowed by the Burmese Court, no repetition of the demand was made. It is impossible to ascertain from the available documents whether the Burmese really wanted to provoke hostilities. Some writers believe that the outbreak of war was prevented only by the defeat of the Marathas in 1817-1818, the victory of the Siamese, and the death of King Bo-daw-pa-ya in 1819.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., January 9, 1818, No. 69, 70, 71, 72. P. C., January 30, 1818, No. 84, 86.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., May 1, 1818, No. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 7. *Private Journal of the Marquis of Hastings*, Vol. II, p. 341.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch of the Burmese War*. Phayre's view has been quoted above, p. 257. Thornton (*Gazetteer*, p. 417) says, "The projected hostility (of the Burmese) was evidently a measure concerted with the Mahrattas." Major Ross of Bladenburg says in *The Marquess of Hastings* (Rulers of India Series, p. 184) that before the Burmese could move 'their allies (*i.e.*, the Marathas) had been subdued and they themselves had been defeated by the Siamese'.

## CHAPTER VII

### TROUBLES IN ASSAM (1795-1824)

In Chapter II we have traced the course of events in Assam up to the death of Gaurinath Singh (December, 1794). The condition of the country at that time was miserable. As Gait says, "Where the Moamarias held sway, whole villages were destroyed, and the inhabitants, robbed of all their possessions, were forced to flee the country, or to eke out a precarious existence by eating wild fruits and roots and the flesh of unclean animals. In Lower Assam the Bengal mercenaries and gangs of marauding banditti who flocked into the province caused similar, though less widespread, havoc, while where Gaurinath himself had power, all persons belonging to the Moamaria communion were subjected to all manner of persecutions and barbarities."<sup>1</sup> The prophecy of Captain Welsh was thus almost literally fulfilled. "If we leave the country now," he wrote in his report to the Supreme Government in February, 1794, "the contest for influence, power, and independence would revive amongst the first officers of State, dependent Rajas, and chiefs of districts and towns. The same confusion, devastation, and massacre would ensue. Assam would experience a state of desolation greater in proportion to the temporary restraints which British influence has now imposed on the inhumanity of the monarch. on

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Assam*, p. 212.

the ambition and resentment of the chiefs, and on the vengeance of the people. Obnoxious ministers and favourites would immediately be restored to their offices. Every individual who had been observed to cultivate British friendship would flee the country, in well-grounded apprehension of destruction by the ministers or their connections. Commerce would again be suppressed by the confusion that would prevail in the country ; and the monarch, whose person is too sacred for assassination, would probably be compelled to abandon his kingdom." Captain Welsh recommended that "the British Government should continue its mediating and controlling influence as the only means of preserving order and tranquillity." The refusal of the Supreme Government to accept this recommendation was clearly responsible for the revival of anarchy in Assam.

After Gaurinath's death Purnananda, the *Burha Gohain*, treacherously murdered the *Bar Barua*, his most powerful rival, and placed on the throne a mere baby who was an illegitimate descendant of Rudra Singh's<sup>1</sup> brother.<sup>2</sup> The new King, known before his accession by the humble name of Kinaram, assumed the title of Kamaleswar Singh. He remained nominal King till his death in 1811, but Purnananda became the *de facto* ruler of the country. He was an

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<sup>1</sup> King of Assam, 1696-1714.

<sup>2</sup> We follow *Tungkhungia Buranji* (Text edited by S. K. Bhuyan, para 257) and a letter of Gaurinath's wife, Queen Kamaleswari. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter No. 101). Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 211) merely says that Kinaram was a descendant of Gadadhar Singh.



able man. He suppressed many insurrections and to some extent restored the prosperity of the country. But he was a tyrant to his rivals and enemies.<sup>1</sup>

On his accession Kamaleswar Singh wrote a friendly letter to the Governor-General,<sup>2</sup> who sent a conciliatory reply.<sup>3</sup> This was followed by repeated requests for military assistance against the Bengal mercenaries who were still committing depredations in different parts of the country in defiance of Purnananda's attempts to restore peace.<sup>4</sup> Sir John Shore refused to send another expedition to Assam<sup>5</sup>, but he supplied the Assamese envoys with arms. The following contemporary account about the mercenaries is interesting: "These bandits are represented to be a set of vagabonds and dacoits who, having or choosing no means of existence but plunder, rally under the standard of any one who has influence enough to collect them, and forming themselves into parties in the neighbourhood of Assam towards the close of rains, take advantage of the fall of the waters to enter the

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<sup>1</sup> *Tungkhungia Buranji*, text, paras 257-342. For the high offices occupied by Purnananda's relations, see para 336.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., March 2, 1795, No. 28.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 2, 1795, No. 30.

<sup>4</sup> S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter Nos. 81, 82. P. C., July 29, 1796, No. 13; November 4, 1796, No. 55; November 14, 1796, No. 32; February 6, 1797, No. 22, 23; February 20, 1797, No. 32.

In the Bengali documents the mercenaries are called *Dundias*.

<sup>5</sup> An officer named Captain Thomas Darrall was deputed to suppress the mercenaries in the Jogighopa and Goalpara region. The experiment proved successful, and henceforth a force was permanently stationed at Jogighopa. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter Nos. 75, 81).

country where they oblige the Raja or his officers to entertain them as Sepoys upon their own terms, by threatening to overrun the country if refused, and, when entertained, act wholly without subordination and commit every species of outrage upon the defenceless inhabitants. . . . The enormities committed by these people are represented as shocking to humanity. Rápine and murder are practised without control. The country is deserted. Wherever they appear cultivation is impeded and commerce almost wholly at a stand.”<sup>1</sup> Surely it was a duty of the British Government to take adequate measures for preventing these people from crossing the frontier of Bengal. A detachment of Sepoys was stationed at Jogighopa<sup>2</sup> and orders were issued to the Commissioner at Cooch Behar and the Magistrates of Rangpur and Dinajpur to watch and regulate the movements of the mercenaries.<sup>3</sup> These measures proved partly effective.<sup>4</sup>

In 1806 Queen Kamaleswari, wife of Gaurinath Singh, sent an application to the Governor-General against Purnananda. She stated that Kamaleswar Singh had no title to the throne, that he was nothing but a puppet in the *Burha Gohain's* hands, and that peace and prosperity might be restored to Assam if the British Government assisted Brajanath Singh, a descendant of Rajeswar Singh,<sup>5</sup> in securing the throne.

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<sup>1</sup> *Foreign Department Miscellaneous*, No. 8, *Memoranda*, Vol. I, No. 17.

<sup>2</sup> An important military post in the district of Goalpara, 6 miles N. W. of the town of Goalpara.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., May 11, 1798, No. 16.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., April 15, 1799, No. 5; May 3, 1799, No. 8.

<sup>5</sup> King of Assam, 1751-1769.

The Queen was at that time living at Chilmari<sup>1</sup> and enjoying a pension granted by the Company. Brajanath Singh had fled from Assam and joined her there.<sup>2</sup> The Governor-General does not seem to have taken any notice of her request. Lord Wellesley had already left India, and the policy of non-intervention had been revived.

The *Bar Phukan*, whose gallantry in suppressing some insurrections<sup>3</sup> had been rewarded with the title of *Pratāpa-ballava*, realised that it was not possible to restore peace and prosperity in Assam without British assistance. So he suggested that Assam should follow the example of Cooch Behar and become a tributary State under the protection of the Company. Purnananda rejected this proposal.<sup>4</sup> It is almost certain that the proposal would have been rejected by the then Governor-General, Lord Minto, had it been officially submitted to the Supreme Government.

Kamaleswar Singh died at the age of sixteen and was succeeded by his brother, Chandra Kanta Singh.

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<sup>1</sup> In the British district of Rangpur in Bengal, 36 miles S.E. of the town of Rangpur, on the right or west bank of the Brahmaputra.

<sup>2</sup> S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter No. 101. S. C., July 17, 1806, No. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Specially those of the *Dundias*.

<sup>4</sup> Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 220) says that the proposal was rejected "as it was thought that it would be very unpopular with the people." Dr. S. K. Bhuyan (*Tungkhungia Buranji*, Eng. trans., p. 198) says, "Purnananda had firm faith in his own powers, and thought that he would be able to restore his country to peace and orderly government without the intervention of any exterior power. The Barphukan's proposals were shelved as being pessimistic and premature."

At the time of his accession he was a boy of 14 years. Purnananda continued to govern the Kingdom as before. In June, 1814, some conspirators tried to murder him, probably with the connivance of the King.<sup>1</sup> The plot failed. One of the sympathisers of this plot was Badan Chandra,<sup>2</sup> who had recently succeeded *Pratāpa-ballava* as *Bar Phukan*. He was not only a rival of the *Burha Gohain*; his administration at Gauhati was very oppressive.<sup>3</sup> So Purnananda tried to arrest him; but a timely warning<sup>4</sup> enabled him to seek shelter in Bengal. He visited Calcutta and tried to secure British assistance against Purnananda. His request was not complied with<sup>5</sup> by the then Governor-General, Lord Hastings, whose attention was at that time concentrated upon the war with Nepal. The desperate *Bar Phukan* came into contact, in Calcutta,

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<sup>1</sup> In 1815 Chandra Kanta sent a letter to the Governor-General, asking for military assistance against the *Burha Gohain*. He stated that the *Burha Gohain* had murdered Gaurinath and Kamaleswar under the excuse of administering medicine, and was at that time trying to murder him. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter No. 140A).

<sup>2</sup> He was the son of Haranath Senapati, who played a distinguished part in the reigns of Rajeswar Singh, Lakshmi Singh and Gaurinath Singh.

<sup>3</sup> "One of their (*i.e.*, Badan Chandra's sons) favourite pranks was to make an elephant intoxicated with *bhāng*, and let it loose in Gauhati, while they followed at a safe distance, and roared with laughter as the brute demolished houses and killed the people who were unlucky enough to come in its way." (Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 221).

<sup>4</sup> Badan Chandra's daughter was married to Purnananda's son. She warned her father.

<sup>5</sup> *Foreign Department Miscellaneous*, No. 11, *Memoranda*, Vol. IV, No. 31.

with a Burmese agent, who probably advised him<sup>1</sup> to address his prayer to King Bo-daw-pa-ya. He went to Amarapura, and after waiting there for 16 months, succeeded in persuading the Burmese King to send an expedition to Assam.<sup>2</sup>

Bo-daw-pa-ya's decision to invade Assam marked a momentous epoch in Burmese history. Repeated failures to subjugate Siam had probably diverted his attention towards the west, and the establishment of Burmese suzerainty over Manipur in 1812 paved the way for Burmese expansion in that direction. Moreover, as we have already seen, Bo-daw-pa-ya was trying to establish political contact with the enemies of the British in India.<sup>3</sup> He decided to intervene in the affairs of Assam at a time when the Nepal War was just over, and the Pindari War and the Third Anglo-Maratha War were impending.<sup>4</sup> It is probably not quite unreasonable to assume that Bo-daw-pa-ya was conscious of the inability of the British Government to take serious interest in Assam at that critical period. He decided to strike at a moment when success was almost certain. His calculations proved correct and

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<sup>1</sup> According to *Ahom-Buranji* (p. 378) the Governor-General himself asked Badan Chandra to approach the *Mantaras* (Burmese) for assistance.

<sup>2</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji* (Eng. trans.), pp. 201-204.

For the Burmese version of Burmese activities in Assam, see *Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, pp. 343-368.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, pp. 254-257.

<sup>4</sup> The treaty of Sagauli was signed in March, 1816; the campaign against the Pindaris began in September 1817, and the battle of Kirkee took place on November 5, 1817.

Assam failed to survive the blow ; but the conquest of Assam involved Burma in a disastrous conflict with the British and paved the way for the downfall of the A-laung-pa-ya dynasty.

Towards the beginning of the year 1817 a Burmese army, consisting of about sixteen thousand men, invaded Assam. Purnananda *Burha Gohain* sent an Assamese force to oppose the invaders, who were, however, victorious in a battle fought at Ghiladhari. At this crisis Purnananda died<sup>1</sup>, and Assam was left without an able leader who could organise her defence. He was succeeded by his son Ruchinath. Another Assamese force sent to resist the Burmese was defeated near Kathalbari, east of the river Dihing. Unable to raise another army to oppose the triumphant invaders, who were pillaging and burning the defenceless villages along their route, Ruchinath advised Chandra Kanta to take refuge in Lower Assam. The young King refused to take this course and seemed inclined to make terms with Badan Chandra. Ruchinath felt that his own life was in danger. He deserted the treacherous King and fled to Gauhati.

All resistance having thus collapsed, the Burmese occupied Jorhat (which was then the capital of the Ahom Kingdom), placed Badan Chandra in power and retired to their own country (April, 1817). They were provided with a large indemnity and a princess of the Ahom Royal family<sup>2</sup> was offered for the Burmese

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<sup>1</sup> He is said to have committed suicide by swallowing diamonds.

<sup>2</sup> A sister of Jogeswar Singh who later on became King of Assam.

King's harem. Chandra Kanta had to submit to the rule of the triumphant *Bar Phukan*, who took terrible vengeance on all the relations and partisans of his dead rival—Purnananda *Burha Gohain*. Peace might have been restored in the Ahom Kingdom if Badan Chandra had pursued a conciliatory policy. Unfortunately his relentless persecution of his political rivals created widespread resentment and confusion. At last the King's mother secretly joined Badan Chandra's enemies and had him assassinated. Ruchinath was now invited to return to Jorhat and assume the reins of government. Once again party spirit ruined all prospects for unhappy Assam. Ruchinath was not prepared to forgive Chandra Kanta for his submission to Badan Chandra. He invited Brajanath<sup>1</sup> to ascend the throne and occupied Jorhat with a force of Hindustani mercenaries and local levies in February, 1818. Chandra Kanta fled to Rangpur (in Assam), and Brajanath, who had accompanied Ruchinath to Jorhat, caused coins to be struck in his own name. It was discovered that Brajanath was ineligible for the throne, as he had suffered mutilation. So his son Purandar Singh was placed on the throne. Chandra Kanta was seized and his right ear was mutilated in order to disqualify him from again occupying the throne.<sup>2</sup>

Towards these political revolutions in Assam Lord Hastings adopted a policy of neutrality. Ruchinath's prayer for military assistance was rejected, but Braja-

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<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, pp. 267-268.

<sup>2</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji* (Eng. Trans.), pp. 204-206.

nath was allowed to proceed from Chilmari to Assam without taking with him 'a military force of any description.'<sup>1</sup> But the Burmese King was not prepared to tolerate the overthrow of his nominees in Assam. Badan Chandra's friends went to Amarapura and appealed to the King. They were probably assisted by the influence of the Assamese princess<sup>2</sup> in the *harem*. A Burmese army under Ala Mingi (or Kio Mingi) appeared in Assam in February, 1819<sup>3</sup>, and secured a decisive victory at Phulpanichiga near the Janji river. Purandar Singh fled to Gauhati; Ruchinath followed him there. Chandra Kanta joined the Burmese and was reinstated by them. The victors committed terrible atrocities on the helpless Assamese people.<sup>4</sup>

It soon became clear that the Burmese had changed their policy: in 1817 they had retreated from Assam with a large indemnity, but in 1819 they began to establish themselves permanently in Assam. Chandra Kanta was left as nominal King, but real power was concentrated in the hands of the Burmese generals. They decided to crush all the followers of Ruchinath, whom they rightly regarded as the most powerful and determined enemy of the Burmese cause in Assam. Some high officials were put to death and troops were

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., May 31, 1817, No. 91, 92.

<sup>2</sup> Interesting details about her may be read in S. K. Bhuyan's *Barphukanar Git* and *Asamar Padya-Buranji*.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson incorrectly placed Ala Mingi's arrival 'early in 1818'. See Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> For details of these atrocities, see Wilson, *Documents*, No. 149; Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy*, Vol. I, p. 423; *Nowgong Gazetteer*, p. 39; Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 227-228; Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 298.



sent to Gauhati to capture Purandar Singh, who, however, saved himself by escaping to Chilmari. From that safe retreat he addressed numerous appeals for assistance to the Government of Bengal. He was prepared either to pay tribute or to cede a part of his Kingdom if British troops assisted him in regaining his throne.<sup>1</sup> Similar appeals were also sent by Ruchinath, who had fled to Calcutta after an unsuccessful attempt to defend Gauhati against a strong Burmese force.<sup>2</sup> They were informed that the British Government did not interfere in the internal affairs of foreign States. They were, however, permitted to live within British territory as long as they 'conducted themselves in a quiet and peaceable manner and conformed to the orders of Government'.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile Chandra Kanta and the Burmese generals were repeatedly requesting the British authorities to surrender Purandar Singh, Ruchinath and their followers. This request was not complied with on the ground that political refugees could not be surrendered.<sup>4</sup>

Owing to the high-handedness of the Burmese generals<sup>5</sup> Chandra Kanta gradually found his position intolerable. He left Jorhat in April, 1821, and fled, first to Gauhati and then to Bengal. Unable to induce him by professions of friendship to return to Jorhat, the Burmese killed many of his adherents and placed

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., July 29, 1820, No. 79, 80.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., July 29, 1820, No. 81, 82, 83, 84.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., July 29, 1820, No. 85.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., July 29, 1820, No. 88, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95.

<sup>5</sup> For an instance, see Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 224.

on the throne an Ahom prince named Jogeswar Singh<sup>1</sup> (November, 1821). The Burmese now became the *de facto* rulers of the Brahmaputra Valley; only the Moamarias maintained precarious independence in the small tract between the Buri Dihing and the Brahmaputra.

The two exiled Kings of Assam—Chandra Kanta and Purandar—now began to make persistent attempts to oust the Burmese from their former territory. Owing to the difficulty of collecting provisions the Burmese troops were distributed all over the Brahmaputra Valley in numerous small detachments. Chandra Kanta twice invaded Assam and was able temporarily to occupy the western part of the country. His success was undoubtedly due to the fact that he had to face isolated Burmese detachments rather than the entire Burmese army.

Unable to attract the sympathy of the British Government, Purandar Singh collected troops with the assistance of one Robert Bruce<sup>2</sup> and made preparations for invading Assam.<sup>3</sup> He requested the Government to allow him to take possession of the arms and ammunition deposited by him at Chilmari and to purchase arms in Calcutta.<sup>4</sup> These requests were not complied with. The Government insisted on the principle 'of

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<sup>1</sup> A descendant of Gadadhar Singh's (King of Assam, 1681-1696) brother. His selection was due probably to the influence of his sister, who had been sent by Chandra Kanta to the Burmese King's *harem*, as stated *ante*, pp. 271-273. (P. C., January 26, 1822, No. 77).

<sup>2</sup> See Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 226, footnote.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 10, 1821, No. 111, 112.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., May 12, 1821, No. 84, 85, 86, 87, 88.

not permitting armed bodies to be assembled within our territory for the invasion of any neighbouring State;’ but no restriction was placed on Purandar Singh’s activities because he used Bhutan as the base of his operations.<sup>1</sup> David Scott,<sup>2</sup> Joint Magistrate of Rangpur, who played a leading part in the affairs of Assam during the years 1821-1831, recommended that fire arms should be freely supplied to Purandar Singh in order to enable him to expel the Burmese invaders from Assam. Their atrocities had created such strong feelings of resentment in Assam that Purandar Singh might be expected to drive them away without much difficulty. Such a course, argued Scott, was favourable to the interests of the Company, for the consolidation of Burmese authority in Assam would impose on the British Government the necessity of stationing a considerable force on the unhealthy eastern frontier.<sup>3</sup> This advice was not accepted.

In May, 1821, Purandar Singh<sup>4</sup> penetrated into

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., May 12, 1821, No. 88; June 16, 1821, No. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Born, 1768 : served at Gorakhpur : Judge and Magistrate of Purnea, 1812-1813, and of Rangpur : Commissioner, in 1823, of Rangpur : then Agent to the Governor-General on the North-Eastern Frontier and Commissioner of Revenue and Circuit in the districts of Assam : died, 1831. (Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, pp. 378-379).

For an appreciation of his abilities, see Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., June 16, 1821, No. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Ruchinath quarrelled with Purandar and professed friendship with Chandra Kanta, but there is reason to believe that he secretly negotiated with Jogeswar as well. (P. C., January 11, 1822, No. 22). He intercepted a Burmese letter in order to con-

Assam through Bijni; but his troops were 'entirely defeated and dispersed'<sup>1</sup> by the followers of Chandra Kanta, who was at that time in occupation of the territory west of Gauhati. Bruce, Purandar's commander-in-chief, was taken prisoner and sent to Gauhati.<sup>2</sup> He was released on his agreeing to enter Chandra Kanta's service. In September, 1821, Chandra Kanta was again compelled by the Burmese to retreat towards Bengal. Fortunately the British authorities allowed him to transport arms and ammunition from Bengal.<sup>3</sup> He occupied Gauhati in January, 1822;<sup>4</sup> but the appearance of a large Burmese army under Maha Bandula in the spring of that year compelled him to take shelter in British territory.<sup>5</sup>

Scott's prophecy about Burmese aggression on the frontier of Bengal did not take long to be fulfilled. Some Burmese soldiers raided a village in the British *pargana* of Habraghat on November 4, 1821. The terrified inhabitants of the locality left their houses and fled in different directions. Scott requested the Burmese commanding officer to surrender the guilty troops.<sup>6</sup> When the matter was reported to Calcutta,

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ceal his relations with Jogeswar and detained the messengers who carried it. For this offence he was confined by the British authorities. (P. C., January 11, 1822, No. 25; May 17, 1822, No. 79).

<sup>1</sup> After Purandar Singh's defeat (May, 1821), Lord Hastings permitted him 'to procure arms by private means in order to carry them across the frontier and arm his adherents.' (P. C., June 16, 1821, No. 71).

<sup>2</sup> P. C., June 16, 1821, No. 70.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., December 8, 1821, No. 81, 82.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., January 26, 1822, No. 77.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., June 14, 1822, No. 47, 50; July 5, 1822, No. 97.

<sup>6</sup> P. C., November 28, 1821, No. 3.

orders were issued for the despatch of troops for the protection of frontier villages.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Burmese aggressions continued—several villages in the above *pargana* were affected—and the Burmese commanding officer informed Scott that he could not surrender the accused without the permission of his superiors.<sup>2</sup> Later on he stated that “his soldiers had by mistake plundered the village of Habraghat, thinking that they were in Assam . . . and that he would afford satisfaction on the receipt of orders” from his superiors.<sup>3</sup> These ‘orders’ apparently never came, for no ‘satisfaction’ was ever afforded.

The aggressive incidents for which the Burmese were undoubtedly responsible should be judged against the background of the half-hearted, indirect assistance which Purandar and Chandra Kanta received from the British authorities. There is no doubt that they were allowed to make an unjustifiable use of Bengal as a base of operations against the Burmese. The protests of the Burmese commander against the facilities which had been afforded to the Ahom Kings were quietly ignored.<sup>4</sup> As in the case of the Arakan refugees, so also in the case of the Ahom refugees, the British Government pursued an illogical and shifting policy. They might have observed strict neutrality by making it impossible for the refugees to use British territory as their base, or they might have accepted Scott’s advice and offered open assistance to the Ahom Kings on the

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., November 28, 1821, No. 4.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 8, 1821, No. 70.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., December 8, 1821, No. 71.

<sup>4</sup> See Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 226.

ground that the establishment of Burmese authority in Assam was a menace to Bengal. But they did not adopt any clear-cut course of action. They exasperated the Burmese by refusing to surrender the Ahom refugees and also by giving the latter facilities to collect arms and troops in Bengal. At the same time they refused to offer such assistance and protection as might have enabled the Ahom refugees to expel the Burmese from their country. The dangers in Western and Northern India were over; the suzerainty of the Company was well-established. There was no longer any justification for the indifference which even at this critical stage characterised British policy towards Assam and Burma.

In July, 1822, an envoy sent by Maha Bandula arrived at Rangpur (in Bengal).<sup>1</sup> Then he proceeded to Calcutta<sup>2</sup> and formally demanded the surrender of Chandra Kanta. The demand was, of course, refused; but steps were taken to prevent the Assamese refugees from creating troubles on the frontier.<sup>3</sup> Local officers at Rangpur reported that they had been unable to ascertain whether Chandra Kanta had actually taken shelter there or not. This ignorance, says Gait, was 'apparently due to the corruption' of the 'native subordinates' who had been heavily bribed.<sup>4</sup> After this the Burmese invited Purandar Singh 'to proceed to the frontier, ostensibly for the purpose of enabling them to confer with him on the subject of reinstating him in

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., July 26, 1822, No. 49.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., December 7, 1822, No. 63.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., October 11, 1822, No. 54.

<sup>4</sup> *History of Assam*, p. 227.

the Government of Assam as a dependent King of Ava.' Purandar Singh responded to this invitation, but the negotiations failed. The Burmese were not inclined to grant his terms.<sup>1</sup> They then turned to Chandra Kanta, who unfortunately took their professions of friendship at their face value. He was seized as soon as he reached Jorhat and confined at Rangpur (in Assam).<sup>2</sup> Having consolidated their authority in the Brahmaputra valley and crushed their opponents by frightful reprisals,<sup>3</sup> the Burmese adopted a policy of conciliation towards their new subjects. "Rapine and pillage were put a stop to, and no punishment was inflicted without a cause. Officers were again appointed to govern the country; a settled administration was established, and regular taxation took the place of unlimited extortion."<sup>4</sup> There was no longer any room for doubt that the Burmese really meant to incorporate Assam in their Empire.

The problem created by the consolidation of Burmese authority in Assam could no longer be evaded. As Scott observed, "The substitution of a warlike, and comparatively speaking, powerful Government in the place of the feeble administration that has hitherto ruled Assam, in a situation so commanding and with such extensive means of offence, will no doubt render it necessary that some permanent measures should be adopted for the security of the frontier and of the

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., September 6, 1822. No. 12; November 9, 1822, No. 38.

<sup>2</sup> S. K. Bhuyan, *Tungkhungia Buranji* (Eng. trans.), p. 211. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> Butler, *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam*.

<sup>4</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 229.

country in the lower part of the Brahmaputra, Meghna and Ganges.”<sup>1</sup> For the time being the Burmese seemed inclined to maintain friendly relations with the British Government ;<sup>2</sup> but if, in the future, they asserted their claim over Dacca or tried to plunder the rich plains of Northern and Eastern Bengal, it would be difficult to resist them, ‘without some other description of force than troops unwilling or unaccustomed to act both as boatmen and soldiers.’ Scott suggested that some boats might be fitted out for navigation in the Brahmaputra.<sup>3</sup> In a private letter he gave a lurid picture of the Burmese menace: “There is nothing now to prevent them from sacking Dacca and plundering all the adjoining districts, nor have our troops half the chance of being able to meet or overtake them that we had with the Pindaris, and were they provided plentifully with good fire arms, the superior discipline of our troops would avail us very little in that sort of warfare that may be carried on during half the year in this part of the country in boats . . . As for a knowledge of the rivers in Bengal, our boatmen are far behind the Burmese, for there is not a creek or rivulet navigable in the rains between Chittagong and Hardwar that they are not perfectly acquainted with . . .”<sup>4</sup> In September, 1822, the Burmese occupied a small island

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., July 26, 1822, No. 50.

<sup>2</sup> The officer commanding at Goalpara reported that the Burmese ‘have instantly paid every attention to the various demands’ made by him. (P. C., July 26, 1822, No. 50). In August, 1822, all Burmese troops retired from the frontier, leaving only a small post there. (P. C., August 18, 1822, No. 28).

<sup>3</sup> P. C., July 26, 1822, No. 50.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., July 26, 1822, No. 51.



in the Brahmaputra near Goalpara. Scott reported the matter to Calcutta, stating that the island formed a part of British territory and suggesting that it was 'impolitic' to submit to Burmese aggression. Lord Amherst directed him to take steps for effecting an amicable settlement.<sup>1</sup>

In order to realise the real significance of the Burmese menace on the eastern frontier of Bengal we must turn our attention to the course of events in Cachar and Manipur. These petty States knew no peace in the early years of the nineteenth century. In 1813 the troubled reign of Krishna Chandra of Cachar<sup>2</sup> came to an end. He was succeeded by his brother Govinda Chandra, whom a contemporary observer describes as 'a man of weak character and pacific disposition, but tyrannical and avaricious'.<sup>3</sup> One of his servants named Tularam rebelled and made himself practically independent in the northern part of Cachar. He was assisted by Ram Singh II, the ruler of Jaintia.<sup>4</sup> Govinda Chandra requested Lord Hastings to send him military assistance, but the Governor-General refused to interfere<sup>5</sup> in the affairs of a State in which no direct British interest was involved.

Govinda Chandra was soon confronted with a new danger as a result of the establishment of Burmese

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., September 27, 1822, No. 67, 69.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> Fisher, *Memoir of the Countries On and Near the Eastern Frontier of Sylhet*.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> P. C., May 11, 1816, No. 62, 66.

S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter Nos. 148, 153, 157.

control over Manipur.<sup>1</sup> Pemberton says that Manipur was 'doomed . . . to the devastating visitation of Burmese armies which have nine or ten times swept the country from one extremity to the other, with the apparent determination of extirpating a race whom they found it impossible permanently to subdue'.<sup>2</sup> Whenever the rulers of Manipur were seriously threatened by the Burmese, they fled to Cachar. It is said that Jai Singh had been thrice expelled from his Kingdom and forced to take refuge in Cachar. His son, Madhu Chandra, married the daughter of Krishna Chandra of Cachar and tried to recover his throne with his father-in-law's assistance ; but he was defeated and killed by the troops of his brother, Chaurjit Singh. During Chaurjit's reign his rival brother, Marjit, fled to Cachar and became involved in a bitter dispute with Govinda Chandra regarding a 'hockey pony of quite exceptional excellence'.<sup>3</sup> Marjit went to Burma, induced Bo-daw-pa-ya to take up his cause, and expelled Chaurjit from Manipur in 1812. Chaurjit and his brother Gambhir Singh came to Cachar and applied to Govinda Chandra for assistance with a view to invading Manipur. Govinda Chandra refused to lend his support to Chaurjit as he was 'related to both the brothers in the same degree'. Chaurjit then went to Calcutta, but having failed to secure British assistance there, came to Jaintia, made an alliance with Ram Singh and began to create troubles on the frontier of

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<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> B. C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers*, Vol. I, *Cachar*, pp. 25-26.

Cachar. Govinda Chandra approached the British authorities for 25 sepoy to help him (November, 1815).<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Marjit Singh, having consolidated his authority in Manipur with Burmese support, invaded Cachar in December, 1817, with a view to 'feed fat his ancient grudge' on unfortunate Govinda Chandra. Once more Govinda Chandra invoked the intervention of the British Government, but no notice was taken of his application.<sup>2</sup> Chaurjit and Gambhir Singh, however, came to the assistance of the Cachar Raja. Marjit was defeated and forced to retreat to Manipur.<sup>3</sup> Govinda Chandra's principality was saved for the time being, but he soon found that his friends were his worst enemies. Chaurjit, Gambhir Singh and Tularam took advantage of Govinda Chandra's troubles and plundered Cachar. Towards the middle of the year 1818 the Cachar Raja was ousted from his Kingdom and compelled to take shelter at Sylhet.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter Nos. 141, 163.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Davidson was sent to Badarpur from Sylhet for protecting the Company's frontier. Marjit wrote to the Magistrate of Sylhet that he had no hostile intention against the British and requested that a European officer might be put in charge of Cachar. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter Nos. 162, 163).

<sup>3</sup> Sir Edward Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 266) says that "Marjit, afraid of his brother's influence with his soldiers, promptly retreated to Manipur. . . ."

<sup>4</sup> Sir Edward Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 266) says that "Chaurjit established himself in the south of Cachar, which Govinda Chandra is said to have promised him as a reward for his services." See S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter Nos. 162, 163, 166.

At this stage the intervention of the Burmese created a new situation. Marjit was expelled from Manipur by the Burmese.<sup>1</sup> He came to Cachar and effected a reconciliation with Chaurjit<sup>2</sup> and Gambhir Singh. Cachar remained a prey to their depredations.<sup>3</sup> At the same time they made repeated attempts to expel the Burmese from Manipur. Hira Chandra, son of Rabin Chandra<sup>4</sup>, continued at the head of a small body of horse to annoy the Burmese garrison left in Manipur. In 1822 Pitambar Singh, another nephew of Chaurjit, was sent to Hira Chandra's assistance. Pitambar and Hira Chandra defeated a Burmese force, but they had to retreat to Cachar owing to the difficulty of securing provisions in the Manipur territory ravaged by the Burmese. In 1823 Pitambar again invaded Manipur, deposed a man named Shubol who had been placed on the throne by the Burmese, and assumed Royal dignity himself. Gambhir Singh then entered Manipur with a small force and dispossessed Pitambar, who fled to Burma and found a permanent asylum there. Unable to draw supplies from devastated Manipur, Gambhir Singh returned to Cachar. Unfortunately, a quarrel

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<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Pemberton (*The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 46) says that 'on his flight from Manipur to Cachar Marjit was kindly received by Chorjit, to whom he made a formal resignation of regal authority.'

<sup>3</sup> In 1820 Govinda Chandra proposed that his territory should be amalgamated with the Company's district of Sylhet, for his own efforts to expel the Manipuri brothers had proved unavailing. (S. N. Sen, *Records in Oriental Languages*, Vol. I, *Bengali Letters*, letter No. 168).

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 37.

broke out between the three brothers.<sup>1</sup> Marjit Singh occupied Hailakandi, and Gambhir Singh possessed himself of the rest of south Cachar ;<sup>2</sup> Chaurjit took shelter in Sylhet. In May, 1823, Chaurjit requested the British Government to recognise him as the tributary ruler of Cachar. Gambhir Singh also 'professed himself willing and anxious to be considered' as a protected Prince, but he 'showed a marked disinclination to enter into any new and specific engagements'.<sup>3</sup> In 1823 he made a futile attempt to establish himself in Manipur.

These petty skirmishes in the hills of Cachar and Manipur acquire a new significance if we link them up with the policy of expansion pursued by A-laung-pa-ya and his sons. As early as the reign of Hshin-byu-shin the Raja of Cachar had handed over to a victorious Burmese general a tree with the roots bound in their native clay as a recognition that his person and land were at the disposal of the Burmese King. As Scott observes, "The Burmese incursions were in the nature of burglary, or gang robbery, or old-fashioned border raids, but the tree with the clod of earth at the foot of

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<sup>1</sup> Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> Pemberton (*The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 47) says that Marjit and Gambhir Singh were 'in possession of nearly the whole of that territory of which Govinda Chandra had been unjustly deprived'.

<sup>3</sup> Secret Letter from the Supreme Government to the Court of Directors, January 9, 1824, paras 8, 9, 18. Pemberton (*The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 189) says that Gambhir Singh 'held back, apparently in the vain expectation of being able to defend the usurped territory, without forming an alliance which might ultimately compromise his independence'.

it gave, to the Burmese mind, a claim to suzerainty over the country."<sup>1</sup> This peculiar way of asserting suzerainty might not be quite convincing to the British authorities, but from the Burmese point of view its validity was not to be questioned. With Manipur the contact of the Burmese Court was more intimate. A portion of Manipur had been 'permanently annexed'<sup>2</sup> by the Burmese in A-laung-pa-ya's reign. They had repeatedly expelled Jai Singh from his Kingdom. Not less than thrice did the Burmese raise their nominees to the throne of Manipur.<sup>3</sup> Marjit ruled over Manipur for seven years (1812-1819) as a vassal of the Burmese King. It seems probable that the inclusion of the whole of Assam within the Burmese Empire was the aim of the Burmese Court, and attempts were made to subjugate all the States in Assam during a critical period for the British Government. The pretence of governing through vassal Princes was probably deliberately adopted with a view to conciliate local sentiment. Had the British authorities cared to evolve a comprehensive policy with regard to the eastern frontier, they would not have remained satisfied with a barren attitude of neutrality and half-hearted measures to defend their own frontier districts.

In 1823 the situation had become too critical to be ignored. Manipur was in the hands of the Burmese, and Cachar, from which its legitimate ruler had been expelled, was in the possession of Manipuri adventurers who might either fall a prey to, or reconcile themselves

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<sup>1</sup> *Burma*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>2</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, pp. 43, 47.

with the Burmese.<sup>1</sup> The situation on the Chittagong frontier was no less alarming.<sup>2</sup> So the Governor-General, Lord Amherst, took serious notice of the question of extending British protection to Cachar. Had the British Government listened to the prayers of the Cachar Rajas before Govinda Chandra's expulsion from Cachar, the Burmese menace might have been more easily and effectively dealt with. Now, when the whole political and military situation was so confusing, Lord Amherst discovered 'several inducements for the British Government to establish its direct authority, or at least a preponderating influence, in Cachar'. In a letter written to the Court of Directors on the eve of the First Anglo-Burmese War these 'inducements' were explained as follows: "One of the easiest passes from Ava into the Company's possessions is through Manipur and Cachar and . . . the occupation of the latter is essential to the defence of that pass . . . The recent progress of the Burmese arms, and their permanent occupation of Assam, the force stationed in which country it would also contribute to keep in check, gives the possession of Cachar an importance under present circumstances which did not before belong to it."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Burmese occupation of Cachar would give them 'a position which placed the richest portion of the district of Sylhet and the *suddar* station itself<sup>4</sup> com-

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<sup>1</sup> Even Govinda Chandra invoked the aid of the Burmese. See below.

<sup>2</sup> See below, Chapter VIII.

<sup>3</sup> Secret Letter to Court of Directors, January, 9, 1824, para 12.

<sup>4</sup> Town of Sylhet.

pletely at their mercy.’<sup>1</sup> An additional argument was found in the previous relations between Cachar and the Company: “Cachar has been a prey to internal dissensions . . . the contentions of the parties struggling for superiority and their appeals to our assistance and support have been a frequent source of trouble and embarrassment . . . There seems no other probable mode of appeasing these dissensions than the employment of our influence for the purpose, and that can only be rendered effective by taking the country openly and decidedly under our protection.”<sup>2</sup>

The ‘inducements’ were strong indeed, but there were difficulties. Did the Burmese consider Cachar as one of their protected States, and would they take offence if British protection was extended to that principality? Lord Amherst found no evidence to show that Cachar had ever been ‘subject or tributary to Ava,’ and ‘felt satisfied’ that Cachar might be taken under British protection ‘without any fear of infringing the rights or claims of the Burmese.’ He went further and remarked, “If the measure be expedient on other grounds, we ought not to deprive ourselves of its

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> Secret Letter to Court of Directors, January 9, 1824, para 12. These elaborate arguments were reviewed unfavourably by the Court of Directors (Secret Letter from Court, August 4, 1824, paras 31-41). Although the ‘military advance’ to Cachar was approved, the extension of British suzerainty over that principality was condemned. The Court observed, “The danger must be near and certain which would justify you in the extension of our frontier or of our influence.”



advantages from an apprehension of giving umbrage where it cannot with any colour of justice be taken."<sup>1</sup>

There was one more difficulty: who was to be recognised as vassal ruler of Cachar? Chaurjit Singh had 'lost all footing in Cachar.' Marjit Singh held 'precarious possession of a small tract.'<sup>2</sup> Gambhir Singh 'had obtained a decided ascendancy'<sup>3</sup>; but he intrigued with the Burmese and 'showed a marked disinclination to enter into any new and specific engagements'.<sup>4</sup> So Lord Amherst turned to Govinda Chandra. He had already appealed for assistance to the Burmese,<sup>5</sup> and a Burmese army was advancing from Assam to re-instate him. But he was not unwilling to make terms with the British.<sup>6</sup> So Govinda Chandra was recognised as the protected ruler of Cachar.<sup>7</sup> He agreed to acknowledge allegiance to the

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<sup>1</sup> Secret Letter to Court of Directors, January 9, 1824, paras 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Hailakandi, in the modern district of Cachar.

<sup>3</sup> Gambhir Singh held the whole of South Cachar, except Hailakandi. North Cachar was held by Tularam.

<sup>4</sup> Secret Letter to Court of Directors, January 9, 1824, paras 16-21. S. C., November 14, 1823, No. 22; November 28, 1823, No. 6; December 12, 1823, No. 11.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., January 17, 1824, No. 4, 6.

<sup>6</sup> "The intelligence of Govinda Chandra's repeated negotiations with Burma did not appear to us under all circumstances to demand any alteration of our previous resolution to re-instate him."—Secret Letter to Court of Directors, February 23, 1824, para 39.

<sup>7</sup> S. C., December 12, 1823, No. 11; December 19, 1823, No. 21; January 30, 1824, No. 14. Gait says, ". . . the local authorities were informed that it was not the intention of the Government to accord support to any particular chief, but merely to take the country under its protection, so far as was necessary to prevent the Burmese from occupying it." He adds, ". . . when

Company, to pay a tribute of Rs. 10,000 per annum and to admit British interference in the internal administration of his territory.<sup>1</sup> An alternative plan, less objectionable from the Burmese point of view, was suggested by Scott, who had been appointed (on November 14, 1823) Agent to the Governor-General on the North-East Frontier<sup>2</sup> in addition to his post as Civil Commissioner of Rangpur. In order to give no ostensible cause of offence to the Burmese he proposed that Govinda Chandra should remain independent of both British and Burmese Governments. This proposal was not accepted by the Governor-General.<sup>3</sup> It would have been altogether impossible for Govinda Chandra to preserve his independence against the constant threat of Burmese intervention; so Lord Amherst acted wisely in bringing this defenceless, but strategically important, State under the direct control of the British Government.

The extension of British suzerainty over Cachar was followed by the inclusion of the petty hill State of

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the Burmese had been driven out, the country was restored . . . to the *de jure* ruler Govinda Chandra." (*History of Assam*, p. 252). But in the Secret Letters to the Court of Directors, January 9 and February 23, 1824, we find specific references to 'alliance' with Govinda Chandra and 'resolution to re-instate him.' See also text of the treaty in S. C., April 2, 1824, No. 7.

<sup>1</sup> S. C., April 2, 1824, No. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Amherst wrote, "He should exercise a general control and superintendence over our political relations and intercourse with the petty states in that quarter, including Sikim, Bhutan, Tibet, Cooch Behar, Bijni, Assam, Cachar, Manipur and Jaintia, and other independent states."

<sup>3</sup> Secret Letter to the Court of Directors, February 23, 1824, para 34.

Jaintia in 'our general system of defensive arrangements for the frontier.'<sup>1</sup> The Burmese claimed that as successors of the Ahom Kings they were entitled to regard the ruler of Jaintia as a vassal prince. Ram Singh was asked to make his submission. Scott had already opened negotiations with him. On February 2, 1824, Scott sent a letter<sup>2</sup> to the commander of the Burmese army in Cachar, prohibiting his entry into Jaintia territory, on the grounds that Ram Singh's ancestor had received his principality as a gift after conquest from the Company<sup>3</sup> and that Ram Singh himself had applied for British protection. Still the Burmese commander treated Ram Singh as a vassal of Burma and required his presence in the Burmese camp. A Burmese force appeared near the Jaintia frontier, but it withdrew as soon as a British detachment was sent to reinforce Ram Singh's troops. Although Ram Singh was 'reluctant to compromise his independence by any engagements as long as this could be avoided,' the approach of a Burmese army left him without any alternative. A treaty was concluded in March, 1824. Jaintia followed the example of Cachar.<sup>4</sup> Ram Singh agreed to place his territory under the protection of the Company and to admit British interference in his internal administration, but no tribute

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<sup>1</sup> Secret Letter to the Court of Directors, February 23, 1824, para 38.

<sup>2</sup> Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, p. 41, and also Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 260-261.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., January 17, 1824, No. 4, 6; February 13, 1824, No. 8, 13.

was demanded from him.<sup>1</sup> He was promised a part of the territory conquered from the Burmese if he co-operated in the military operations against them.<sup>2</sup>

Although Cachar and Jaintia were thus brought within the Company's sphere of influence, the Burmese still retained possession of Manipur and the Brahmaputra Valley. The following extract, long as it is, from a letter written to the Court of Directors by the Governor-General-in-Council in September, 1824, clearly explains the advantages derived by the Burmese from their control over Assam:

“. . . . Such is the nature of the country (*i.e.*, Assam), and the facility of bringing down the largest army by means of the river with the utmost celerity, that should the Burmese at any time determine upon invading the British territory by way of the Brahmaputra, previous intelligence of their designs . . . could not be obtained . . . in sufficient time to be of any avail, for, on the supposition of an army being sent into Assam for the above purpose, they might reach Dacca in 15 days from the time of their arrival on the banks of the upper part of the river and in 5 from that of their appearance on our frontier at Goalpara. No previous extraordinary collection of boats . . . would be required nor any extensive preparations near our frontier that might excite suspicion, as the Burmese soldiers carry nothing with them but their arms, subsisting upon what they can find in the country they pass through, and proceeding, after they reach the

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., April 2, 1824, No. 8.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., April 2, 1824, No. 9.

streams flowing into the Brahmaputra, upon rafts made of bamboos, until they may be able to seize a sufficient number of boats for their accommodation ; which is very easily effected in a country where, for four months in the year, the communication from house to house is by water, and where a canoe is as necessary a part of the husbandman's establishment as a plough or a pair of oxen."<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

### LORD AMHERST AND THE FINAL RUPTURE WITH BURMA (1823—1824)

In 1819 King Bo-daw-pa-ya, who was blessed, in the words of a loyal subordinate,<sup>1</sup> with 'a hundred sons, a thousand grandsons, and one great grandson', departed from this world,<sup>2</sup> leaving his exalted throne to his grandson Ba-gyi-daw.<sup>3</sup> Adoniram Judson,<sup>4</sup> an American missionary who had lived for years in Burma, described Ba-gyi-daw in 1826 in the following words: "He is a man of about forty years of age, of rather a dark complexion, and in person small and slender. His manners are graceful,<sup>5</sup> and, in public, dignified. In

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from the Governor of Ramree to the Governor-General of Bengal, June, 1818. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 6).

<sup>2</sup> "At the death of the elephant, as at that of an Emperor, it is publicly forbidden, under heavy penalties, to assert that he is dead; it must only be said that he is departed, or has disappeared."—Sangermano, *A Description of the Burmese Empire*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Judson (*An Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burmese Empire*, pp. 174-175) says that Rangoon sat 'in sullen silence, expecting an explosion' after Bo-daw-pa-ya's death; but nothing happened. Gouger (*Personal Narrative*, p. 100) says that two uncles of Ba-gyi-daw, Princes of Prome and Toungoo, who are frequently mentioned by Symes, were accused of attempts at usurpation, and suffered cruel deaths.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Gouger (*Personal Narrative*, pp. 30, 71) says that the King had 'a pleasant, good-humoured countenance'. He was, however, told by Rodgers, an English naval officer who had been living in Burma since 1782, that the King 'gives way to sudden bursts of

private, he is affable and playful to boyishness. His disposition is obliging and liberal, and he is anxious to see every one around him happy. His mind is indolent, and he is incapable of any continued application. His time is passed in sensual enjoyment, in listening to music, or seeing dancing, or theatrical entertainments; but above all, in the company of the principal Queen to whom he is devoted to infatuation. His personal activity is remarkable for an Eastern Prince, and scarcely a day passes, that he does not go on the river in boats or rides on horseback, or an elephant. He is partial to Europeans. No person of this description comes before him, without receiving some marks of kindness." The principal Queen is characterised by the missionary as haughty, avaricious, vindictive, intriguing and bigoted. The two most influential personalities in the Court were the Queen's brother and the Prince of Tharrawaddy, the King's younger brother. The former, says Judson, was cruel, rapacious and a great intriguer. Through his sister, we are told, he ruled the Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

Henry Gouger, an English merchant who went to Burma in 1822 and suffered imprisonment during the war, gives us interesting details about the Burmese Court.<sup>2</sup> "The chief Queen", he says, "had been raised to the throne from the humble condition of chief gaoler's daughter. Although some years older than the King, and far from possessing any personal charms.

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passion, when for a little while he is like a raging mad man, and no one dares to approach him'.

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174 (C).

<sup>2</sup> *Personal Narrative*, pp. 34, 45-46.

she had, by the judicious use of her influence, and a certain determination of character, obtained complete control over the mind of her easy husband. By corrupt means she had acquired immense wealth—her intrigues had filled most of the important offices in the kingdom with her creatures, and through the instrumentality of her only brother, a fit agent for the purpose, she was enabled to carry on a large traffic in bribery and extortion. As avarice, backed by unlimited power, naturally leads to cruelty, this venal pair were as unscrupulous and vindictive as they were avaricious. They were equally feared and detested by the people". The party organised by 'this venal pair' was opposed by another party led by the Prince of Tharrawaddy, whom Gouger describes as 'a daring, reckless young fellow, about 25 years old'. The King's son by a former marriage—a boy of 15—was 'little regarded by either party, looked on only as an obstacle to be removed when necessary'. The King's brother 'surrounded himself with bands of daring ruffians, bandits, pugilists, and such like, who lived near his palace, formed a kind of body-guard, and were ready at a moment's call for any desperate undertaking'. Yet he was 'a favourite with the people'. The Queen's brother, 'proud, rapacious, oppressive, vindictive, and cruel', was suspected by everybody except Ba-gyi-daw himself: "his designs on the throne formed a topic of general conversation apparent to all except the indolent and misguided King".

The corruption of the Court was naturally reflected in general administration. Gouger says, "The possession of power is ruin to the Burmese character ;



so much so, that the governors and governed seem to possess almost different natures. It is rare to find a man in authority who is not oppressive, corrupt, crafty, and cruel.”<sup>1</sup> He refers to the wide prevalence of bribery: “Nothing can be done without it—few things fail to be accomplished by its aid”.<sup>2</sup> Torture and arbitrary punishment were the most prominent features of the judicial system.

Gouger attributes the outbreak of war ‘primarily to a desire, on the part of the Burman Court, to try its strength with the British’.<sup>3</sup> That Court had ‘no appreciation of the Power it was defying’.<sup>4</sup> The following observations of Gouger probably give us a correct picture of Burma on the eve of the war: “. . . . the constant talk of war, in the ears of a people who had been accustomed to a long course of victory and usurpation, inflamed their ambition, and rendered it popular. The reports they had heard of the unbounded wealth of Calcutta ; the unwarlike character of such of the borderers as they had met on the frontier; the interested reports of those foreigners who hated our rule ; the general forbearance of our Government for a long course of years,—interpreted into timidity,—all conspired to lead them to the idea that Bengal would fall an easy prey,—that, like the great Roman, they had only to go, to inspect, and to conquer”.<sup>5</sup>

According to Gouger, the advice offered to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Personal Narrative*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Personal Narrative*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174 (A).

<sup>4</sup> *Personal Narrative*, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> *Personal Narrative*, pp. 103-104.

King by Maha Bandula after his triumphant return from Assam hastened the war.<sup>1</sup> This statement is supported by the testimony of John Laird<sup>2</sup>, a Scot who went to Burma in 1820. Maha Bandula, we are told, informed the King that he could conquer Bengal with an army composed of *Kulas* (*i.e.*, foreigners) and that not a single Burmese soldier would be required<sup>3</sup>. Judson says that Maha Bandula 'boasted he maintained a secret correspondence with several native Princes of Hindustan who, according to him, would rise against the British, as soon as the Burmese would set them a good example.'<sup>4</sup> Laird also gives us a glimpse into the mind of the King's brother. The Prince of Tharrawaddy is reported to have told him, "You are strong by sea and not by land. We are skilled in making trenches and *abbatis*, which the English do not understand."<sup>5</sup> Less responsible persons held still more unfavourable views about British soldiers. They were considered to be "luxurious and effeminate, incapable of standing the fatigues of war, and therefore unable to contend with a people hardy like themselves, who could carry on war with little food and no shelter."<sup>6</sup> The King was led to believe that his troops would

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174 (A).

<sup>2</sup> For details about him see Gouger, *Personal Narrative*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174B. According to *Konbaungset Yazawin* (Vol. II, p. 371), Maha Bandula compared the Burmese with lions and the English with jackals.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174C.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174B.

<sup>6</sup> Judson's evidence. Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174C.

easily march to England.<sup>1</sup> The chains in which the Governor-General was to be brought to the King were coated with gold.<sup>2</sup> Crawford, who went to Burma after the treaty of Yandabo, says, "From the King to a beggar (the Burmese) were hot for a war."<sup>3</sup> In 1823 the Magistrate of Chittagong reported that the Burmese expected an easy victory over the British.<sup>4</sup> We may easily endorse Mr. Harvey's conclusion: "It was not the King who led the people but the people who led the King into war."<sup>5</sup> The incidents which took place after Ba-gyi-daw's accession and culminated in war must be interpreted against this background.

The accession of the new King was followed by the transfer of the capital from Amarapura to Ava.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 277. Trant, *Two Years in Ava*, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of an Embassy*, Vol. II, Appendix, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., June 27, 1823, No. 62.

<sup>5</sup> *History of Burma*, p. 304.

It seems, however, that Ba-gyi-daw inherited something of his grand father's ambition. Under his orders a map of the Burmese Empire, together with the adjacent territories of India, Siam and Cochin China, was prepared by one Mr. Gibson. On seeing the map the King observed, "You have assigned to the English too much territory." Gibson replied that the map was correct. The King answered, 'with evident feelings of dissatisfaction', "The territory of the strangers is unreasonably large." (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174C).

<sup>6</sup> Gouger, who was present at the time of the transfer of the capital, says that the nobles profited from 'the corrupt distribution of the building sites of the new city, and the frequent litigation it gave rise to'. To the people, however, 'it was the source of ruinous loss and discomfort, to which none but an unfeeling despotism would have dared to subject them'. (*Personal Narrative*, p. 25).

We do not know why Ba-gyi-daw decided to give a new lease to the ancient capital. Since the year 1783 Ava had lain unoccupied. In 1796 Symes noted how rapidly it had fallen into decay. "The walls", he says, "are now mouldering into decay; ivy clings to the sides, and bushes suffered to grow at the bottom undermine the foundation, and have already caused large chasms in the different faces of the fort . . . Numerous temples are dilapidating by time. It is impossible to draw a more striking picture of desolation and ruin". The transfer was welcomed by the nobles who, says a contemporary English writer, 'were glad of the opportunities the migration offered of adding to their fortunes, but it was melancholy to see the poorer classes breaking up their old habitations and seeking new ones at great cost and labour'. When the new palace was nearing completion an unfortunate accident occurred: a thunderstorm broke over the new city and caused some damage to the King's Lion Throne. It was an ominous portent. The King's fury exhausted itself after the execution of the unlucky architect. But the restoration of Ava was really coincident with a fatal decline in the greatness of the Burmese Empire. A large part of the money inherited by Ba-gyi-daw from his avaricious grandfather was spent in the removal of the capital and in the building of magnificent palaces and temples: towards the close of the war with the British the King's exchequer was empty. And within a few years of the new birth of Ava A-laung-pa-ya's descendant found his authority confined to Burma proper.

Before his accession to the throne Ba-gyi-daw had

expressed friendly feelings for the English, but a change seems to have come over him after his grandfather's death. Probably he considered it necessary to pursue the aggressive policy followed by his predecessor with considerable success for more than three décadés. We have also seen how his policy was influenced by the audacity of his Court and the optimism of his subjects. Roused by a series of unprecedented successes, the national spirit was driving hard to the goal of war.

In India the aggressive personality of Lord Hastings exhausted itself in the Third Anglo-Maratha War and the complicated problems arising out of it—the administration of the Bombay Presidency, the pacification of Central India, the settlement of Rajputana. The Governor-General who complacently allowed Assam to fall into Burmese hands could not be expected to take serious notice of petty skirmishes on the eastern frontier or the insolence of a 'barbarous' Court. The Burmese interpreted his indifference as a sign of timidity.<sup>1</sup> He left India in January, 1823, and a few months later Lord Amherst arrived as his successor. "Almost from the moment when Lord Amherst addressed himself to the duties of his high office, the contingency of war with Burma occupied his thoughts."<sup>2</sup>

It was a situation of peculiar difficulty which confronted the new Governor-General on his arrival in

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<sup>1</sup> The King's sister told Judson 'that it was obvious the English were afraid to fight; that their conduct on the frontier was mean and cowardly; that they were always disposed to treat and not to fight'. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174C).

<sup>2</sup> Ritchie and Evans, *Lord Amherst*, p. 66.

India. On the British frontier and in the Council Chamber in Calcutta, dense ignorance prevailed regarding the character and intentions of the Burmese Court. Attention was fixed upon the west; the significance of the cloud gathering in the east was, not quite unnaturally, lost sight of. Lord Amherst was not an experienced and far-sighted statesman<sup>1</sup>, and on the Burmese question he could not get proper advice from his subordinates. So he continued the old policy, which was at once inconsistent and weak, and created an unfavourable impression upon the Burmese Court. The King's sister observed in her conversation with Judson, "The new Governor-General acts foolishly, he is afraid of us, and attempts to coax us, yet continues the usual course of aggression and encroachment."<sup>2</sup> This is not an accurate estimate of Lord Amherst's policy, but it reflects the attitude of the Burmese Court on the eve of the war.

Even before Lord Amherst's arrival in India the Burmese had renewed their aggressive activities on the Chittagong frontier, without any provocation or excuse. The chief objects of Burmese violence in that quarter were the elephant-hunters in the Company's employ, whom the Burmese seized, and sometimes carried off, under the pretext that they were within Burmese territory. In April, 1821, 25 elephant-hunters were carried off and imprisoned at Maungdaw under the

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<sup>1</sup> Lord Curzon says, ". . . it was largely as a consolation for his lack of success at Peking that Lord Amherst received the Indian appointment". (*British Government in India*, Vol. II, p. 56).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174(C).

pretext that they had trespassed in Burmese boundary. A British officer reported the incident to the Magistrate of Chittagong,<sup>1</sup> and observed that this 'wanton attack was made solely with the view of extorting money from us.' A similar outrage was repeated in April, 1822. Such outrages were likely to put an end to the Company's elephant-hunting business at Ramu because hunters were now unwilling to enter jungles. A local military officer remarked, "... the Burmah Government of Arracan has manifested an uniform spirit of encroachment upon our territory in this district, since 1794, advancing progressively to the banks of the Mooressee river, which they themselves then declared to be the boundary of Arracan, until they now claim the jungles of Gurgeneea ... at a distance of nearly forty miles from the Mooressee river—the intermediate tract of jungle is of little moment to either State, further than that, as being our best hunting ground for elephants and where our villagers cut their annual supply of rattans, renders it of some value to us, while to the Burmahs it is of no apparent benefit whatever: their laying claim to it therefore appears to proceed from a mere spirit of arrogance—unless, indeed, that they look forward to the event of future hostilities with our Government, when the possession of these jungles would enable them to come, unperceived, into the rear of such troops as might be stationed at Ramoo."<sup>2</sup> In January, 1823, some British subjects, passing through the Koor Nullah in a boat laden with rice, were asked by the Burmese

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 15.

to pay custom dues, and on their refusal, fired upon. One of the British subjects died.<sup>1</sup> It appears that, as they were passing through British territory, the demand of the Burmese, not to speak of the violence, was altogether illegal.

“This outrage,” says Wilson, “was followed by reports of the assemblage of armed men on the Burmese side of the river, with the purpose of destroying the villages on the British territory, and in order to provide against such contingency, as well as to prevent the repetition of any aggression upon the boats trafficking on the Company’s side of the river, the military guard at Tek Naf was strengthened from twenty to fifty men, of whom a few were posted on the adjoining island of Shahpuri.”<sup>2</sup> It was a mild step, but it showed that the British authorities were determined to protect their frontier. The Burmese at once took serious objection, and the Governor of Arakan requested the Magistrate of Chittagong to remove British troops from Shahpuri. The latter having refused to do so, the Governor wrote a letter to the Governor-General,<sup>3</sup> stating that the island in dispute lay within Burmese territory, and demanding that the troops stationed there should be removed. “The guard now stationed at that place,” he observed, “may be the occasion of disputes among the lower order of the people, and of obstruction to the poor merchants and traders now carrying on commerce in the two great countries, and eventually cause a rupture of the friend-

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Sketch*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Dated August 8, 1823. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 17).



ship and harmony subsisting between the two mighty States." The Governor-General replied<sup>1</sup> that the Burmese Government had 'not a shadow of right' to the possession of the island; but he signified his desire 'to depute an officer of rank, ... in the ensuing cold season, to adjust finally all questions relating to boundary disputes on the S. E. frontier of that district (*i.e.*, Chittagong), in concert with a properly qualified and duly empowered agent from Arracan.'

This was Lord Amherst's first communication to the Burmese Government, and it was eminently conciliatory. But before this reply could reach the Governor of Arakan, he took measures for the forcible occupation of the island. On the night of September 24, 1823, 1,000 Burmese troops attacked the British post at Shahpuri, killed 3 *Sepoys*, wounded 4 *Sepoys*, and drove the rest off the island.<sup>2</sup>

The Burmese claim to the possession of the island of Shahpuri seems to have been altogether unjustifiable. In the absence of Burmese evidence<sup>3</sup> we are forced to base our conclusion on English documents, but these are so detailed and circumstantial that it is probably not unsafe to rely upon them. The island was for the first

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<sup>1</sup> Dated August 15, 1823. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 18).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 19.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter (dated December 23, 1825) to the Court of Directors the Governor-General-in-Council observed, "The Burmese never offered, or pretended to produce, an atom of proof, and it is worthy of remark, that they rested their claim on the island of Shahpuri mainly on the same ground that they asserted a title to Ramoo, Chittagong, Dacca, and the eastern districts of Bengal, *viz.*, that the whole once belonged to the Mug Raja of Arracan."

time surveyed by British officers in 1801 and leased to one Krishna Das Kanungo in 1803. In 1815 it was found by a British officer in the possession of two refugee *Mags*, who asserted their right on the basis of a *sanad* granted to their father in 1790 by the then Collector of Chittagong. Documents issued in 1819 also proved the occupation of the island by British subjects. Its situation also favoured the British claim. It lay on the British side of the main channel of the Naf, which was the admitted boundary between Chittagong and Arakan.<sup>1</sup> It is really 'a continuation of the Tek, or point of the mainland of the district of Chittagong, from which it is separated only by a narrow channel'.<sup>2</sup>

The island of Shahpuri, in itself, was not a prize worth fighting for; it was 'uncultivated and wholly unproductive of public revenue.' But Lord Amherst could not abandon British control over an island which 'had been often the subject of notice on the public proceedings and stood recorded as a portion of British territory'. Moreover, he could not 'patiently endure the insult and wrong' involved in 'the attack and slaughter' of Company's troops.<sup>3</sup> He could not permit 'success to attend any attempts to enforce an unjust demand on British territory by acts of positive violence and aggression'. He was 'reluctant to believe' that the aggression against Shahpuri was authorized by the King

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Governor-General-in-Council to Court of Directors, December 23, 1825, paras 5-10, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Governor-General-in-Council to Court of Directors, December 23, 1825.

of Burma, 'at least with a full knowledge of facts and circumstances', and presumed that, either the Governor of Ramree 'acted in the affair without any authority in prosecution of some unworthy and chimerical purpose of his own', or the judgment of the King had been influenced by some gross misrepresentation and perversion of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

It was obviously necessary to take adequate steps for the prevention of sudden Burmese 'irruptions' into British territory. The number of troops usually stationed at Chittagong was very small; they could not be expected to deal with Burmese forces entering into the district by different passes through the hills. Nor could reliance be placed upon troops sent from Calcutta upon the receipt of definite information about Burmese preparations. Such a process would involve a few days' delay and allow the Burmese to take the initiative.<sup>2</sup> A detachment of European and Indian troops was, therefore, ordered to be sent to Chittagong in October, 1823. Lieutenant-Colonel Mc'Creagh, who commanded this detachment, was instructed 'to recover the possession of the island of Shahpuri and punish the aggressors by attacking and destroying their boats and military posts and equipments on the river Naf and eventually pursuing them along the sea coast as far as the Arakan river and even to the fort of Arakan itself'. Lord Amherst was, indeed, determined 'to teach the Burmese a salutary lesson for the future.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 21.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., June 27, 1823, No. 62.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., October 17, 1823, No. 3.

Before these orders could reach Chittagong, Lord Amherst received reports which led him to doubt whether the Burmese ever 'entertained any serious intentions' of a 'general attack' or 'meditated any aggression beyond the seizure of the island of Shahpuri which they claimed as part of the Burmese territory.' So the orders for the despatch of European troops were cancelled; only a detachment of *Sepoys* was sent to Chittagong under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Thapland, who was instructed only to expel the Burmese from Shahpuri and to maintain a military post there. The Magistrate of Chittagong was censured for sending alarming reports based on 'defective information' supplied by the Daroga of Tek Naf who was afterwards dismissed for incapacity.<sup>1</sup> A letter was despatched to the Burmese Ministers, stating that the Governor-General considered the occupation of Shahpuri as an unauthorised act of the Governor of Ramree, and requesting that 'adequate and exemplary punishment' might be inflicted on 'the authors of the disturbance,' and that such orders might be issued to the local officers in Arakan as would 'effectually prevent the recurrence of disputes and differences on the frontier.'<sup>2</sup> Wilson observes, "The tone of this despatch was that of firmness, though of moderation, but when rendered into the Burman language, it may, probably, have failed to convey the resolved and conciliatory spirit, by which it was dictated, as subsequent information of the most authentic character established the

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., October 17, 1823, No. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 21.

fact of its having been misunderstood, as a pusillanimous attempt to deprecate the resentment of the Burmese, and it was triumphantly appealed to at the Court of Ava, as a proof, that the British Government of India was reluctant to enter upon the contest. . ."<sup>1</sup>

On October 29, 1823, a few days after the despatch of the conciliatory letter to the Burmese Ministers, the Governor-General received a very insolent letter from the Governor of Arakan.<sup>2</sup> Precautionary measures were at once adopted for the protection of the Assam and Chittagong frontiers. Troops were sent to Rangpur and Sylhet, and the officers in those districts were directed to collect reliable information about the movements and intentions of the Burmese. David Scott, Agent of the Governor-General on the North-East Frontier, was asked to report his views about the possibility of 'restoring the native Government in Assam.' The Magistrate of Sylhet was required to enquire about 'the number and nature of the passes leading from the Burmese possessions into Cachar and Jaintia and the expediency, with reference to the climate and other considerations, of sending detachments of British troops to occupy the same.'<sup>3</sup> The Commander-in-Chief was requested to suggest

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<sup>1</sup> *Historical Sketch*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> "If you want tranquillity, be quiet, but if you re-build a stockade at Shein-ma-bu (*i.e.*, Shahpuri) I will cause to be taken, by the force of arms, the cities of Dacca and Moorshedabad, which originally belonged to the great Arracan Rajah, whose chokies and pagodas were there." (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 22).

<sup>3</sup> S. C., October 31, 1823, No. 15, 16.

measures for the defence of British territories as well as for offensive operations. He suggested that, for the defence of the eastern frontier, three brigades should be formed, consisting of 3,000 men each, to be stationed at Chittagong, Jamalpur,<sup>1</sup> and Goalpara, in addition to a strong corps of reserve, to be posted at Dinajpur, under a senior commanding officer, to whom all communications should be made, and by whom all orders should be issued. He also recommended the formation of an efficient flotilla on the Brahmaputra, towards Assam, and in the vicinity of Dacca.<sup>2</sup> He favoured defensive operations alone: "Any military attempt beyond this, upon the internal dominions of the King of Ava, he is inclined to deprecate, as, instead of armies, fortresses and cities, he is led to believe that we should find nothing but jungle, pestilence, and famine."<sup>3</sup>

In a letter written on October 31 Scott reported that 'some important warlike expedition' was on foot,<sup>4</sup> although he thought that no 'hostile attempt' would be made by the Burmese troops in Assam unless they received positive orders from Ava. He recommended that in case of war British troops should invade Assam; he was confident that they would receive every assistance from the people of that unhappy province, who bitterly hated their Burmese conquerors. A great majority of the inhabitants of Assam, he said, 'would

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<sup>1</sup> A sub-division in the district of Mymensingh, commanding the Brahmaputra.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 12; *Documents*, No. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 24.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., November 14, 1823, No. 13.

now view the establishment of the authority of the British Government with the utmost satisfaction.' If the Government decided to place a member of the Ahom Royal family on the throne, it would be necessary to 'avow' the right of interfering in the internal administration of the country. Scott was not prepared to extend British military support to incompetent and oppressive Ahom Princes and leave the people in helpless misery.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the close of November information was received that about 900 Burmese troops were ready to invade Cachar.<sup>2</sup> Scott was directed to inform the Burmese commander that Cachar was under British protection. He was also authorised at his discretion 'to direct the troops in Sylhet to advance into Cachar and to occupy the passes through which the Burmese would attempt to penetrate.' As time went on further reports, showing the advance of a large number of Burmese troops towards Cachar, were available.<sup>3</sup> Lord Amherst thought that they were proceeding to assist Tularam<sup>4</sup> against Marjit Singh and Gambhir Singh; he could not 'ascribe to this inconsiderable body an intention of committing aggressions in the Company's territories.' But Scott was instructed to take measures for the prevention of Burmese 'irruption' into Cachar and to conclude an alliance with Govinda Chandra.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., November 14, 1823, No. 14.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., November 28, 1823, No. 5.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., December 12, 1823, No. 2, 3. Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 282.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., December 12, 1823, No. 11.

When it was reported that three Burmese forces were proceeding towards Cachar from Nowgong in the north, the Jaintia Hills in the north-west and Manipur in the east, Lord Amherst remained true to his conviction that they would retreat as soon as they were informed that Cachar was a protected State under the Company. Scott was, however, authorised to 'expel them by force of arms' if they 'evinced a determination to maintain their ground in Cachar notwithstanding this warning.'<sup>1</sup> The warning proved abortive. On January 17, 1824, a clash took place between British and Burmese forces in the village of Vikrampur (45 miles east of Sylhet), in which the Burmese were defeated.<sup>2</sup> Lord Amherst approved the conduct of Major Newton, who commanded the British troops on that occasion, and authorised Scott to take 'active measures for expelling the Burmese from Cachar whilst the season is yet favourable for military operations.'<sup>3</sup>

It is necessary at this stage to turn our attention to the Chittagong frontier once again. Shahpuri was re-occupied by British troops on November 21, 1823.<sup>4</sup> The officer in charge of these troops reported that the Burmese would not 'dare to shew themselves offensively against us whilst we remain here with our present force.' A proclamation was issued and circulated, representing the desire of the British Government to remain on amicable terms with Burma and to con-

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., January 17, 1824, No. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., January 30, 1824, No. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 26.



tinue the usual friendly intercourse between the two States. For about two months the Burmese made no attempt to dispute the right of the British Government to the island. In January, 1824, British troops were removed from Shahpuri because the climate had proved peculiarly unhealthy. Only three days after the abandonment of the post the Governor of Arakan assembled his troops at Lowadhung, with the declared intention of occupying the island. The Government did not consider it necessary to order the immediate return of the withdrawn troops to the island. It was left to the discretion of the Magistrate of Chittagong and the Commanding Officer, in case of urgent necessity, either to despatch those troops to the island, or to hold such a force in readiness at Tek Naf as would suffice to expel the Burmese from the disputed territory.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Robertson,<sup>2</sup> Magistrate of Chittagong, had invited the Governor of Arakan to send proper persons for the purpose of defining and settling the boundary. Four Burmese agents came and suggested that the island should be considered neutral ground and remain unoccupied by either party. The tone of the agents was menacing. When the matter was

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, Thomas Campbell (1789-1863): joined Civil Service in Benigal, 1805: Magistrate of Chittagong, 1823: Governor-General's Agent on the North-Eastern Frontier and Commissioner of Assam, 1831: Commissioner of Cuttack, 1824: Judge of the *Sadr* Court, 1835: Member of the Governor-General's Council, 1835-1840: Lieutenant-Governor of the N. W. P., 1840-1842: Provisional Governor-General: retired, 1843. (Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, p. 362).

reported to Calcutta, the Magistrate was informed that 'no overtures involving the relinquishment of our absolute and unqualified right to Shahpuri must for a moment be entertained'. Lord Amherst might have agreed to recognise the island as neutral ground if such a proposal had been 'brought forward by the Government of Ava itself, at an earlier stage of the discussion, and previous to the assault on our outpost and the slaughter of our Sipahis'; but the time for compromise was over. Robertson was asked to give up the project of defining the boundary, as it could no longer be carried on with any hope of success or even with safety to himself. He was also authorised 'to inflict instant and signal chastisement on those who might attempt to cross the Naf for the purpose of disturbing' British control over Shahpuri.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime four 'Ministers of rank' had arrived in Arakan from Ava to enquire into the real state of the dispute with the English and, as it afterwards appeared, to supersede the functions of the local authorities. The arrival of these confidential officers of the Court was followed by 'a fresh act of outrage and treacherous violence'. They arrived at Shahpuri 'with four large boats full of armed men, with some pomp and display,' and set fire to a hut, 'the only tangible object on the island.' Their interpreter invited some British military and naval officers to wait on them at Maungdaw. The military officers wisely refused this 'insidious invitation,' but some of the naval officers

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<sup>1</sup> Secret Letter to Court of Directors, February 23, 1824., paras 2-9.

unhappily fell into the snare. On January 21, Commander Chew, who was in charge of the Company's vessel *Sophia*, accompanied by Royce, the Commander of the row boats, and eight *lascars*, went to Maungdaw. Commander Chew 'was fully sensible of the hazard attending the step'; before proceeding to the Burmese shore he left particular instructions that, in the event of his not returning by a certain hour, a gun boat should be sent to demand their release. He and his companions were confined as soon as they reached Maungdaw, and then taken to Lowadhung in the interior. Robertson demanded their release in 'persuasive and conciliatory language'. The Governor of Arakan replied that they had been seized by the orders of the Ministers, 'because their ship had been anchored off the island of Shahpuri.' The prisoners were, however, 'treated with humanity, and even kindness.' The capture of the British officers 'created the greatest terror and alarm in the southern part of the Chittagong district, and the inhabitants were preparing to fly with their cattle and property.' Robertson reported that the designs of the Burmese Ministers were hostile, for they were assembling their forces at Maungdaw, Lowadhung and other places in the interior.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Amherst naturally took a very serious view of the situation. He came to the conclusion that even the release of the prisoners was not enough, and that the Burmese authorities must be required to offer 'ample apology and reparation' and to 'abandon all pretensions' to the island of Shahpuri. They should

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 28.

also be asked to withdraw their troops from Maungdaw and Lowadhung. Roberston knew that these conditions were not likely to be fulfilled by the fire-eating Ministers who had come to Arakan with the special mandate of the Burmese King. He reported that the dispute was 'no longer a mere provincial discussion': it had been taken away from the jurisdiction of the Governor of Arakan by the arrival of the Ministers. He pointed out that, 'considering the state of affairs at Cachar, and the conduct of the Burmese on the Naf, the British Government must be regarded as virtually at war with the empire of Ava.' As the Chittagong frontier was peculiarly exposed to predatory incursions, he suggested the adoption of offensive measures in order to keep the hostile Burmese at a distance<sup>1</sup>.

After the successful clash with the Burmese at Vikrampur (January 17, 1824) all British troops were withdrawn from Cachar and concentrated at Badarpur.<sup>2</sup> The Burmese then advanced to Jatrapur (about five miles east of the frontier and eight miles from Badarpur), where the two armies from Assam and Manipur formed a junction. A bridge was thrown over the Surma river, and stockades were built on both sides. The total number of Burmese troops in and near Cachar was about 8,000. The Burmese commander informed Scott, who was then at Badarpur, that his purpose was to restore Govinda Chandra and to secure the person of the three Manipuri brothers.<sup>3</sup> Scott

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Now an important junction of the Bengal Assam Railway.

<sup>3</sup> Chaurjit, Marjit and Gambhir Singh.

replied that Govinda Chandra would be restored by the British Government, and that the Burmese would not be allowed to seize the Manipuri brothers in British territory. The British Government was prepared, however, to 'engage that they should never be permitted to disturb the peace of Cachar.'<sup>1</sup> The Burmese commander was also warned not to make any attempt upon Jaintia. No reply was received, and it was understood that the object of the Burmese was to strengthen their positions and to postpone hostilities till the beginning of the rainy season.

Although Major Newton's force was very weak in artillery, circumstances compelled the British troops to attack the Burmese on several occasions. On February 13 an engagement was fought at Badarpur on the north bank of the Surma, and the Burmese were compelled to retreat.<sup>2</sup> Within a few days Jatrapur (where the Burmese had already abandoned their stockades) was occupied. A large number of stockades was destroyed.<sup>3</sup> These successes were followed by a reverse. On February 21 a British detachment attacked a Burmese stockade near Dudpatli. The attack failed, and a retreat was made to Jatrapur.<sup>4</sup> The Burmese took no advantage of this success; they retreated towards Manipur.<sup>5</sup> Thus Cachar was freed from the invading Burmese army. "As there seemed little reason to apprehend their speedy return in force, and the nature

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., February 13, 1824, No. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 21\*-22\*.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 25\*.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., March 5, 1824, No. 18.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., March 12, 1824, No. 19.

of the country rendered it difficult to procure supplies for any number of troops for a protracted period, it was thought sufficient to leave a small detachment in Cachar, whilst the main body went into cantonments at Sylhet.”<sup>1</sup>

War was formally declared on March 5, 1824. In the Proclamation<sup>2</sup> the Governor-General in Council observed, “The Governor-General in Council . . . , for the safety of our subjects and the security of our districts, already seriously alarmed and injured by the approach of the Burmese armies, has felt himself imperatively called on to anticipate the threatened invasion. The national honour no less obviously requires that atonement should be had for wrongs so wantonly inflicted and so insolently maintained, and the national interests equally demand that we should seek, by an appeal to arms, that security against future insult and aggression which the arrogance and grasping spirit of the Burmese Government have denied to friendly expostulation and remonstrance.” On March 17 Lord Amherst received from the Viceroy of Pegu a reply<sup>3</sup> to his letter<sup>4</sup> dated October 17, 1823. The reply showed that the proceedings of the Governor of Arakan were approved by the Government of Burma, and the Governor-General was asked to refer his views to Maha Bandula who had been ‘appointed to regulate all state affairs’ in Arakan.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 31.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> According to *Konbaungset Yazawin* (Vol. II, pp. 368-372),

Was Lord Amherst justified in declaring war? He was condemned by the British public and severely taken to task by the Court of Directors. "The treasury they considered was exhausted by the struggle within the limits of India proper<sup>1</sup> and it seemed sheer madness to court further outlay in adventures in the barbarous borderlands."<sup>2</sup> The Court of Directors represented a mercantile Company and were naturally very sensitive about money. They could not be expected to take a comprehensive view of a political problem about which their most experienced servants in India were strangely ill-informed. Even Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras, a statesman with long Indian experience, expressed an opinion which lightly brushed aside the peculiar difficulties of the eastern frontier. In a letter to Lord Amherst, dated February 25, 1824, he observed, "The occasional hostilities on the eastern frontier of Bengal might, perhaps, still be allowed to continue for some months without much serious inconvenience . . ."<sup>3</sup>

But Lord Amherst did not fail to grasp the far-reaching consequences of 'the occasional hostilities on the eastern frontier of Bengal'. Had his predecessors

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the English Chief of Chittagong was prepared to give up the island of Shahpuri, but the King refused to conclude peace. He was very sensitive about the question of the fugitives. Maha Bandula held out the prospect of an easy victory. It was argued that it was necessary to declare war in order to compel the English to show proper respect to the Burmese King. One of the Ministers said that frequent rebellions in Assam were due to the shelter given to Assam refugees by the English.

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the wars in the time of Lord Hastings.

<sup>2</sup> Ritchie and Evans, *Lord Amherst*, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Gleig, *Life of Sir Thomas Munro*, Vol. II, p. 95.

taken a firm and consistent attitude to the problem of Burmese expansion in Arakan and Assam, either the Burmese would have withdrawn themselves from those regions, or a decisive conflict would have come many years before 1824. Unfortunately no Governor-General since the days of Lord Cornwallis took really serious notice of this problem. We are not unaware of the more pressing political and military problems which kept their attention confined to 'the limits of India proper'; but after a critical analysis of the official documents the conclusion becomes irresistible that the nature and implications of the Burmese problem really eluded their grasp. Little accurate information was available about the cross-currents in the Burmese Court, and the journal of Symes shows that even British diplomats with local experience could not be relied on for information regarding the resources of Burma. It is also necessary to remember that no systematic attempt was made by the British authorities to collect information about Burma. It was very difficult, if not impossible, to establish a regular Embassy at Amara-pura or Ava or to station a permanent Consul at Rangoon; but, as a modern writer<sup>1</sup> points out, there were in Burma some persons of British origin or connection—traders, missionaries and servants of the King<sup>2</sup>—'who could have thrown a clear light upon all that was afoot'. The official documents indicate no attempt on the part of the Supreme Government to

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<sup>1</sup> V. Scott O'Connor, *Mandalay and Other Cities of Burma*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> The evidence of some of these persons was recorded *after* the war. See Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 219-239.



establish contact with these sources of information. The only explanation of this strange apathy towards a persistent frontier problem is that it was despised as a local issue of no consequence.

This apathy was, not unnaturally, interpreted by the Burmese as a definite sign of weakness. The easy conquest of Assam strengthened their self-confidence and widened their ambition. Repeated expeditions since the days of A-laung-pa-ya had shown that the conquest of Siam was not easy. So they naturally turned to the west, where black strangers were living uneasily under the rule of a handful of white merchants from a far off island. Could not the invincible Burmese army drive away these white merchants and bring under the banner of Ava all the districts which had once obeyed the King of Arakan?

Thus in the days of Lord Amherst the neglected problem had assumed a different colour. It was no longer a question of resisting or tolerating 'occasional hostilities on the eastern frontier of Bengal'. The safety of the whole of Bengal—the citadel of British power in India—was at stake. The Burmese were about to invade Bengal simultaneously from three directions: the Brahmaputra Valley, Cachar and Arakan. Such a threat could not be 'allowed to continue for some months without much serious inconvenience'. Lord Amherst immediately grasped the real implications of the situation and boldly met it without hesitation or loss of time. In a long letter to the Court of Directors, dated December 23, 1825, the Supreme Government justified its point of view. It was claimed that the appeal to arms could not have

been avoided without exposing 'our honour, our interests, and the lives and properties of our subjects . . . perhaps to irreparable injury.' The occupation of Assam placed the Burmese 'in a situation the most favourable for making a sudden descent' into northern and eastern Bengal. On the Chittagong frontier they were 'acting systematically upon a plan of slow and gradual encroachment.'<sup>1</sup> Under such circumstances 'a temporizing policy' would have resulted in 'serious loss of reputation in the eyes of all India'; the 'insolence and audacity' of the Burmese would have increased, hostilities might have broken out at a time when 'we might have been engaged in other quarters, and the plans and measures of our opponent would have been more matured.'

If the declaration of war was justified, it was hardly advisable to delay the beginning of hostilities. "The period selected for the declaration of war," observed the Governor-General in Council, "has been made the theme of frequent censure, as if in reality any option had been left us in this respect" The concentration of Burmese troops in Arakan and the Burmese invasion of Cachar preceded the declaration of war. The Burmese were 'fully bent on invading the British territory.' If no resistance was offered to them, they would have occupied the forest land near

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<sup>1</sup> On another occasion Lord Amherst wrote that these encroachments were not isolated local occurrences: "they were . . . intended as steps towards the accomplishment of their favourite scheme of enforcing that visionary title to the eastern districts of Bengal, which was gravely and formally asserted by them even as late as 1817." (S. C., July 2, 1824, No. 1).

Ramu, which the Company's elephant-hunters had frequented for years; the island of Shahpuri would have been lost; Cachar and Jaintia would have been over-run by them. These 'immediate and direct sacrifices' Lord Amherst was not prepared to make in order to gain a precarious respite for a few months.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Amherst's moderation becomes clear if we compare his policy in 1823-24 with Lord Dalhousie's policy in 1851-52. In Lord Dalhousie's days there were no 'occasional hostilities on the eastern frontier', and the Burmese did not even dream of expelling the white merchants from Bengal. The only cause of friction was the ill-treatment of some British merchants by Burmese officials at Rangoon. Lord Dalhousie sent a Commodore to make 'an amicable adjustment'. The Commodore's activities were so high-handed that the Governor-General himself admitted in a private letter, "These Commodores are too combustible for negotiations". On both sides the atmosphere was unfavourable to 'an amicable adjustment of the dispute'. War followed. There was no forcible occupation of British territory, no threat of invasion, no capture of British officers, no insulting letter to the Governor-General. Yet Lord Dalhousie took a very broad view of the situation. "The simple question is," he observed, "whether, before all Asia, England will submit to Ava desert its subjects, and be driven out of the Irrawaddy; or whether, protecting its subjects, it will enforce its treaty rights by arms, and, if no less alternative will do, take possession of the Irrawaddy itself." In a carefully

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Court of Directors, December 23, 1825.

prepared Minute he said, "Holding to the wisdom of Lord Wellesley's maxim, that an insult offered to the British flag at the mouth of the Ganges should be resented as promptly and as fully as an insult offered at the mouth of the Thames, I should, under any circumstances, have regarded it as sound policy to exact reparation for wrong done to British subjects from any native state."<sup>1</sup> Such words were certainly more appropriate in 1823-24.

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<sup>1</sup> For details see A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*, Chapter III.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FIRST ANGLO-BURMESE WAR (1824—1826)

A few days before the formal declaration of war Lord Amherst wrote an elaborate minute<sup>1</sup> about the coming campaigns. His primary difficulty was that the information available about Burma was 'extremely defective and insufficient'. Offensive operations were obviously to be directed against Assam (including Cachar), Arakan (including the islands of Cheduba and Ramree), and the sea ports of Pegu and the Tenasserim coast (*i.e.*, Rangoon, Syriam, Martaban, Tavoy and Mergui). From the reports of David Scott<sup>2</sup> the Governor-General came to know that the climate of Assam was 'by no means peculiarly unhealthy even during the rains.'<sup>3</sup> So he recommended that Gauhati

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., February 20, 1824, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., February 13, 1824, No. 15.

<sup>3</sup> "The climate of Assam is characterised by coolness and extreme humidity, the natural result of the great water surface and extensive forests over which evaporation and condensation proceed, and the close proximity of the hill ranges, on which an extensive precipitation takes place. Its most distinguishing feature is the copious rainfall between March and May . . . The year is thus roughly divided into two seasons, the cold season and the rains, the hot season of the rest of India being completely absent. From the beginning of November till the end of February the climate is cool and extremely pleasant, and at no period of the year is the heat excessive . . . The total amount of rain that falls in Assam during the year is always abundant, but is sometimes unfavourably distributed." (*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. VI, pp. 20-21).

should be captured and an adequate force stationed there. This was not likely to be a difficult enterprise, for the number of Burmese troops in Assam did not exceed 4,000, and the local population was reported to be extremely hostile to them. On the Chittagong frontier *Mag* levies were to be raised and employed in defensive operations, so that regular troops might be spared 'exposure to the noxious climate of that quarter during the most unhealthy season.' Naval expeditions were to be sent against Cheduba, Ramree, Negrais, Rangoon, Tavoy and Mergui.

Captain Canning was at that time the recognised official expert on Burma. He was, therefore, asked to prepare a memorandum on the best method for conducting the war. Although the Burmese had no regular army and no artillery worth the name, yet the ex-envoy warned Government not to treat them 'as a foe altogether contemptible.'<sup>1</sup> But he thought that it was 'perfectly practicable' to proceed to Amarapura after occupying Rangoon; 10,000 troops, with a proportionate detail of artillery and gun boats, could easily capture the capital. "For the advance of a force on the capital," Captain Canning wrote, "the commencement of the rains or beginning of June should be selected, when the rise in the river (*i.e.*, the Irrawaddy) would remove all obstacles from sand-banks etc."<sup>2</sup> and a strong southerly wind convey the

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., March 12, 1824, No. 4.

<sup>2</sup> "The river commences to rise in March. It rises and falls several times until June, and then, rising pretty steadily, it attains its maximum height about September, at which time it is about 3½ feet above its dry season level at Prome. The Irrawaddy

troops to their destination in a month or five weeks, the distance from Rangoon being about 500 miles." He also suggested that an army might be sent to Amarapura through Manipur.

Lord Amherst accepted the plan of sending an expedition to Rangoon, with the prospect of advancing upon the capital during the rainy season of 1824. He preferred the Irrawaddy route; the Manipur route, he thought, was likely to be very difficult.<sup>1</sup>

The plan of campaign being settled, troops were despatched to the three theatres of war—Assam, Arakan and Rangoon. In the following pages an attempt has been made to give a brief account of the military and naval operations<sup>2</sup> which culminated in a complete British victory in 1826.

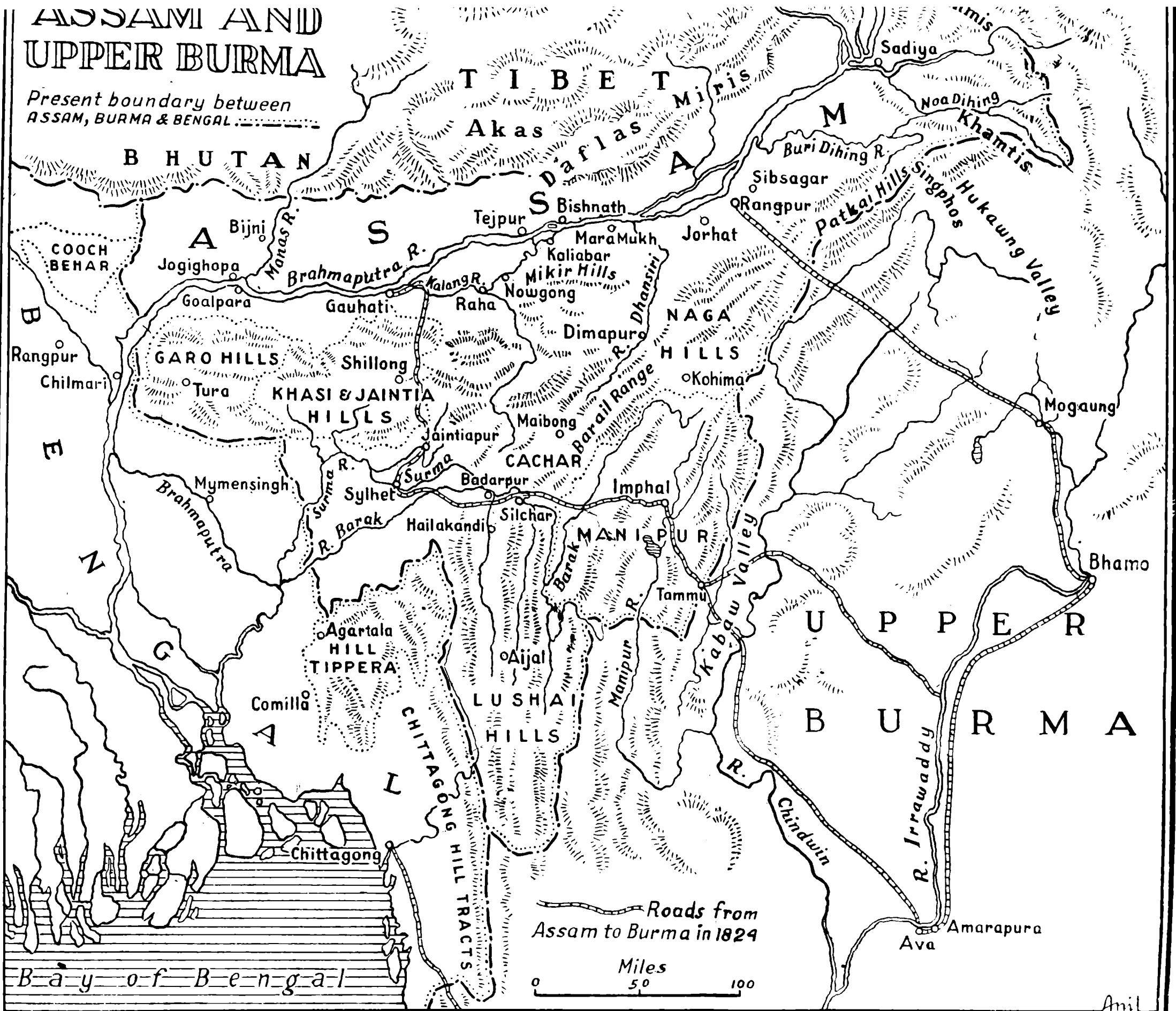
is navigable for large steamers all the year round as far as Bhamo in Upper Burma . . . ."—A. Ireland, *The Province of Burma*, p. 6.

<sup>1</sup> S. C., March 12, 1824, No. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson's *Documents* contains almost all important documents concerning these operations. I have compared his extracts with the unpublished documents in the Imperial Record Department, and I have found no important omission. For the convenience of my readers, most of whom will have no access to the unpublished records, I have referred to Wilson's book in the footnotes. All important documents on military operations are also printed in De Rhe-Phillipe's *A Narrative of the Burmese War*. Wilson's *Historical Sketch* gives a tolerably complete account of the military operations, although it is of no practical value so far as the *political* aspect of the war is concerned. I have collected supplementary information from the works of reliable contemporaries—Snodgrass, Havelock, Trant, Doveton, Robertson—all of whom took part in the war. Unfortunately they do not deal with operations in Assam and Arakan, with the exception of Robertson, who gives interesting information about Arakan. The part played in

# ASSAM AND UPPER BURMA

Present boundary between ASSAM, BURMA & BENGAL



Bay of Bengal

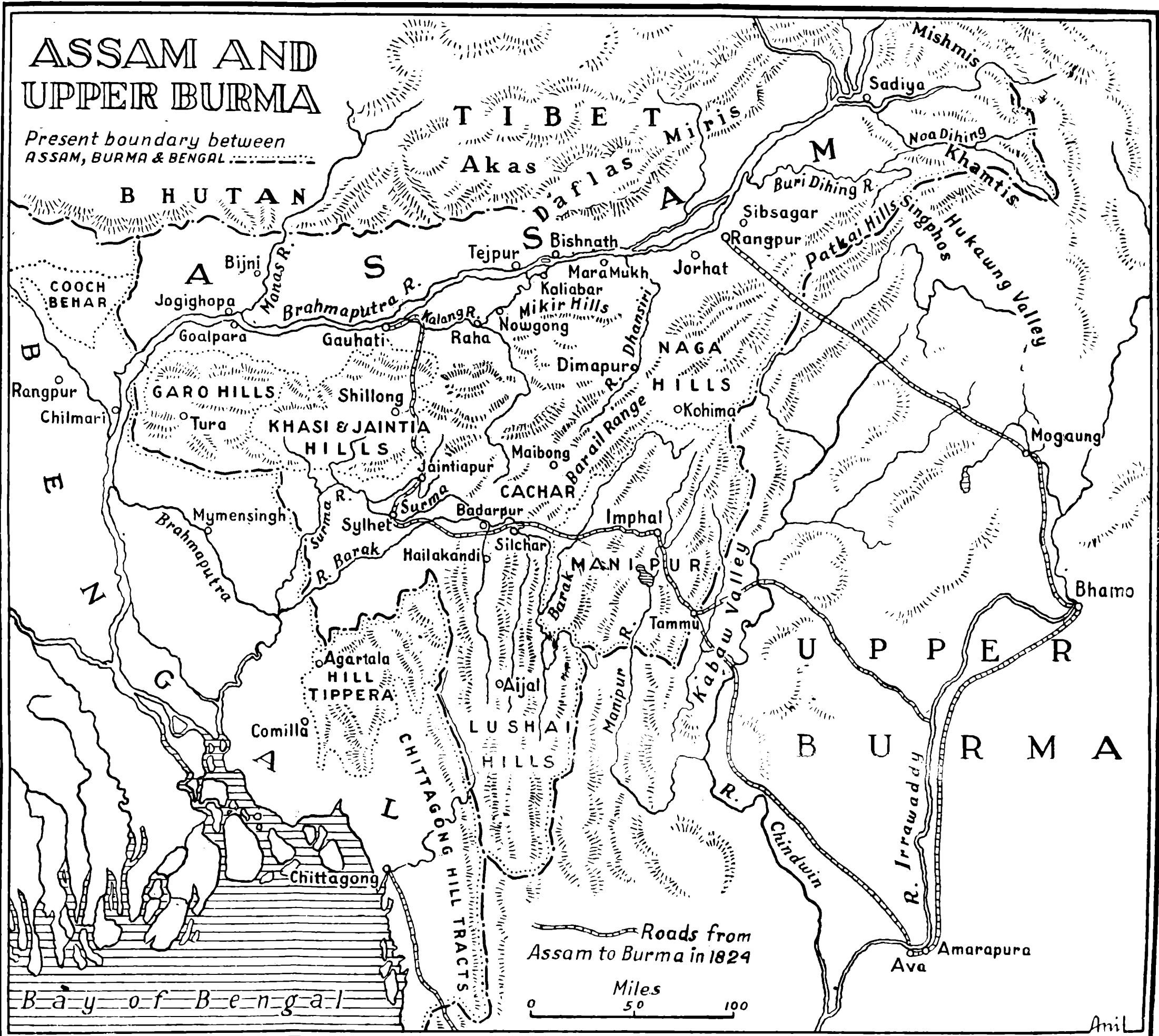
Roads from Assam to Burma in 1824  
Miles  
0 50 100

Anil



# ASSAM AND UPPER BURMA

Present boundary between ASSAM, BURMA & BENGAL



Roads from Assam to Burma in 1824

Miles 0 50 100

Anil

I. MILITARY OPERATIONS IN ASSAM.<sup>1</sup>

On the outbreak of war it was decided to concentrate the military operations in the Brahmaputra Valley, for the Burmese had already been expelled from Cachar; it was also considered advisable to make Manipur too hot for them, and for this purpose the services of the Manipur princes were to be utilised. David Scott was directed by the Government to induce Gambhir Singh and Marjit Singh to remain at Sylhet; it was proposed that some provision should be made for them out of the revenues of Cachar. Gambhir Singh was 'a bold and aspiring soldier;' the course of events might 'render him an useful ally in the Manipur country,' which he might liberate, with British assistance, from the Burmese yoke.<sup>2</sup> Scott thereupon induced Gambhir Singh to lead an expedition for the conquest of Manipur. Chaurjit Singh was at first associated with this enterprise, but the mutual jealousy between these brothers was so strong that the Commissioner of Sylhet refused Chaurjit's co-operation. Gambhir Singh proceeded to Badarpur in April, 1824, and joined the British detachment stationed there.<sup>3</sup> He

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this war by the first Madras European Regiment has been described in *Historical Record of First European Regiment*, by a Staff Officer, 1843. I have also used *Konbaungset Yazawin*, which is of very little practical value.

<sup>1</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin* does not give details about the operations in Assam; only the name of the general sent to Assam (Maha Kyawhtin) is mentioned (Vol. II, p. 372).

<sup>2</sup> S. C., February 20, 1824, No. 15.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., April 20, 1824, No. 6.

was informed that Manipur would be given to him if he could conquer it, and that the British Government would not ask him to 'admit Chaurjit Singh to any share in the Government.'<sup>1</sup> Chaurjit Singh tried 'to excite a spirit of discontent amongst the Manipurian recruits' of a British battalion. He was, therefore, removed to Nadia<sup>2</sup> and granted a pension of Rs. 100 per month.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile operations against the Burmese in Assam had begun. The British force in Assam was placed under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel George MacMoline,<sup>4</sup> who was succeeded, on his death due to cholera on May 5, 1824, by Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred Richards.<sup>5</sup> Towards the close of February, 1824, the troops stationed at Goalpara were ordered to advance into the interior of Assam.<sup>6</sup> They left Goalpara on March 13 and arrived at Gauhati on March 28. "The route lay along both banks of the river Brahmaputra, occasionally, through thick jungle and long grass, in which the troops were completely buried: a number of small rivulets and ravines also intersected the road, and marshy swamps rendered the march one of more than usual toil. Through the greater part of the advance, the signs of cultivation were of rare occurrence, and all the supplies of the

<sup>1</sup> S. C., April 20, 1824, No. 9.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., May 14, 1824, No. 14. 17. Nadia is a district in Bengal.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., March 18, 1825, No. 47; December 23, 1825, No. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Joined the Bengal Army in 1781; served in the Second and Third Anglo-Maratha Wars.

<sup>5</sup> Entered service in 1797.

<sup>6</sup> S. C., February 20, 1824, No. 15.

divisions were carried with them on elephants, or in boats.”<sup>1</sup>

Captain Sneyd captured Gauhati without bloodshed, the Burmese having already evacuated it. The evacuation of Gauhati was probably due to the numerical weakness of the Burmese force stationed there, for troops had been withdrawn from Upper Assam for service in Cachar as well as in Lower Burma. Moreover, Gauhati was too near the British base to be easily defended.

Before their flight the Burmese had killed 14 Assamese Chiefs whom they suspected of an intention to come over to the British side. The local population was hostile to the Burmese. Several Assamese tribes had assembled to cut them up and to prevent their passage back to Ava. The Raja of Darrang and some other petty Chiefs accepted British protection.<sup>2</sup> A proclamation<sup>3</sup> was issued by the British officers, asking the Assamese to co-operate with them, and assuring them that the British Government would re-establish in Assam ‘a government adapted to their wants, and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 18. Pemberton points out that supplies from Bengal ‘could only reach the force requiring them by the navigation of a river more tedious, uncertain, and difficult, than perhaps any other in India’. Captain Wilcox wrote, “When coming down the river at the latter end of October, 1825, I saw a fleet of commissariat boats (at that time very much required with their supplies for the army) which had been twenty-five days between Goalpara and Nughurbera hill, a distance of thirty miles, and there was no remarkable wind to impede their progress.” See *The Eastern Frontier of India*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 35.

calculated to promote the happiness of all classes'. The response was satisfactory, 'but their unwarlike character, scanty numbers, and reduced means rendered their co-operation of no value'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Colonel MacMorine was so much disturbed by the uncertainty about food supply and the want of accurate information about roads that, in spite of this initial success, he decided to halt at Gauhati instead of continuing the march into the eastern section of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Scott's arrival in the zone of operations changed the course of the campaign. From Sylhet he marched across the Jaintia State and reached Nowgong<sup>2</sup> on April 15. It was then 'one of the largest towns in Assam, extending, in a straggling manner, for about twelve miles along both sides of the Kalang river, and containing, it is said, four thousand families'. It was a healthy place, suitable for a cantonment. Scott left his escort to hold Nowgong and went to Gauhati to establish contact with the head-quarters. Meanwhile the Burmese, about 1,000 strong, had established a stockade at Mara Mukh; they were 'worse armed than usual'. They were conscious of their inability to make any effective resistance without reinforcements, which they had repeatedly asked for from Ava. Scott pro-

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 34-35. For an account of his journey see Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 12. On his way he received the most cordial co-operation from Ram Singh, Raja of Jaintia, who, however, permitted a Burmese detachment from Assam to occupy his territory. See Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 212.

posed an attack on Koliabar,<sup>1</sup> one day's march north-east of Nowgong. The forward movement on Koliabar was calculated to consolidate British authority in the western part of Assam, to secure provisions for the future supplies for the troops, and to dispel the well-grounded fears of the inhabitants that, if the country was left unoccupied, the Burmese would recover their courage, and at least deprive the English troops of its resources, if not create a subsequent famine by sending out small parties to devastate and burn the villages. Upon the good will of the local people British officers naturally placed great emphasis. Scott found them well-disposed towards the British troops: "Such of them as had displayed any backwardness in assisting us were either dependents of the Burmese, or afraid of their return, which latter feeling could only be completely dispelled by the advance of a large force."<sup>2</sup> Colonel Richards advanced from Gauhati to Koliabar, which remained for a few months the seat of the main body of the British detachment.

In May the Burmese, who had taken up a stockaded position at Hatbar, on the south bank of the Kalang river, evacuated it on the advance of Lieutenant-Colonel Richards, and retired to Rangaligarh, where they had a strong stockade, about eight hours' march from Koliabar. A small party returned to reoccupy it, but Lieutenant Richardson successfully surprised it. Twenty Burmese soldiers and a *Phukan* (commander)

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<sup>1</sup> On the left bank of the Brahmaputra, near its junction with the Kalang.

<sup>2</sup> Extracts from the *Government Gazette*—Wilson, *Documents*, p. 35.

were killed. The *Phukan* was reported to have been second in command and chief manager of the Burmese camp.<sup>1</sup> The Burmese tried, a few days later,<sup>2</sup> to attack Captain Horsburgh's position at Hatbar. On this occasion, says Wilson,<sup>3</sup> the Burmese 'exhibited the only proof of enterprise, which they had yet displayed in the campaign in Assam.' Captain Horsburgh succeeded in repulsing the attack. A large number of Burmese soldiers was killed on the spot or drowned in the Kalang. Some old muskets, brass drums, and about eighteen jinjals were captured. The Burmese retired from Rangaligarh<sup>4</sup> and fell back once more on Mara Mukh.

On June 4 Captain Wallace destroyed a Burmese stockade on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, near Gauhati.<sup>5</sup> Towards the close of June the following information was received in Calcutta about the strength and disposition of the Burmese troops in Assam: at Mara Mukh, 1,000; at Jorhat, 100; at Rangpur, 1,000. Mara Mukh was strongly fortified,<sup>6</sup> and considered as their 'grand point of resistance to the attack of any

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant Richardson's successful attack took place on May 17, and Captain Horsburgh's defence on May 24. (Wilson, *Documents*, p. 36).

<sup>3</sup> *Historical Sketch*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> "It appears to be upon a perfectly open plain on the bank of the river, and defended with all the art and strength in their power. It is of great extent, and constructed, as usual, of beetal trees and bamboos, forming strong palisades, and surrounded by ditches, everywhere closely staked and spiked." (Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 36-37).

force.<sup>1</sup> It was under the personal command of the Burmese Governor of Assam, who was anxiously waiting for reinforcements from Burma. Probably there were not 500 real Burmese at this time in the whole of the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>2</sup>

The commencement of the rainy season compelled the British troops to leave Koliabar where supplies were scarce, and to retire to Gauhati; military operations were necessarily suspended. The general result of the first campaign in Assam was, says Wilson, "decidedly favourable, and the British authority was established over a considerable tract of country between Goalpara and Gauhati. It is likely, however, that had an advance like that made by Colonel Richards in April, been authorised a few weeks sooner, the Burmese might have been expelled from a still greater portion of Assam; their force in this country never having been formidable, either in numbers or equipment."<sup>3</sup>

Before the setting in of the rainy season the Burmese, emboldened by the withdrawal of British troops from Cachar, renewed their invasion of that province.<sup>4</sup> They advanced from Manipur, and occupied the heights of Talain, Dudpatli and Jatrapur. The force that occupied these positions was estimated at about 8,000 men and it was given out that they formed but a part of an army of 15,000. In consequence of the apprehensions excited for the safety

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., June 11, 1824, No. 9.



of Chittagong and Dacca, after the defeat of Ramu,<sup>1</sup> the force at Sylhet had moved towards the south.<sup>2</sup> The alarm having subsided, Lieut.-Colonel William Innes<sup>3</sup> returned to Sylhet on June 12 with about 1,200 men and proceeded to Cachar to expel the invaders. He arrived at Badarpur on June 20 and then proceeded by water, along the Barak river, to Jatrapur, where he arrived on June 27. His march was rendered extremely difficult by incessant rains and consequent inundation of the country.<sup>4</sup>

On the way he tried to dislodge the Burmese from the heights of Talain, where they were strongly stockaded. For three days (July 6, 7, 8) British guns fired on the stockade; Gambhir Singh, with his 'excellent local knowledge,' assisted the operations. On the second day the position was so desperate that Colonel Innes gave up the hope of carrying the stockade without further re-inforcements. On the third day the attack was given up, and Colonel Innes gave up the hope of carrying the stockade without further re-inforcements. On the third day the attack was given up, and Colonel Innes retreated to Jatrapur, where he took up a strong position.<sup>5</sup> This retreat was partly due to 'the increasing sickness of the men, induced by constant exposure to the rain, in the midst of a country abounding with swamp and jungle'. The Burmese remained in their entrenchments, where they

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<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 351 ff.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., June 4, 1824, No. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Entered the Bengal Army in 1794.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., June 18, 1824, No. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 44, 45, 46.

were confined by the rise of the rivers. No further movements could take place on either side during the continuance of the rains.<sup>1</sup>

The return of the British troops from Koliabar to Gauhati at the beginning of the rainy season was followed by an offensive movement on the part of the Burmese, who occupied Koliabar, Raha *Chokey*<sup>2</sup> and Nowgong. They levied heavy contributions on the people, pillaged the country,<sup>3</sup> probably to punish the Assamese for helping the British troops, and devastated the frontier districts of pro-British Ram Singh, the Raja of Jaintia. Colonel Richards was, therefore, asked to expel the Burmese from those stations. He had at his disposal about 3,000 men, 'a corps more than adequate for the purpose it was directed to effect, being fully equal, if not superior, to the aggregate of the Burman troops in Assam, and infinitely superior in equipment and efficiency'.<sup>4</sup>

As the rainy season was not yet over, and water-carriage for the whole force could not be provided at once, Colonel Richards had to send small detachments for the re-occupation of some important posts. Towards the close of October, 1824, he asked Major Edmund Waters<sup>5</sup> to proceed to Raha *Chokey* and Nowgong and sent Major Cooper to Koliabar.<sup>6</sup> The latter arrived at

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> A small town in the district of Nowgong, 20 miles S.W. by W. of the town of Nowgong.

<sup>3</sup> See Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 277.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Entered the Bengal Army in 1799.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 87(A).

Koliabar on October 31,<sup>1</sup> his progress being unexpectedly slow 'owing to the easterly winds, strong current, and the tracking grounds being covered with strong and high reeds'. He found that the post was unoccupied by the Burmese. On his way he had surprised a small party of the Burmese and killed their leader.<sup>2</sup> Major Waters dislodged a Burmese party from Hatgaon<sup>3</sup> and occupied Raha *Chokey* by a surprise attack on November 2.<sup>4</sup> Hearing that the Burmese Governor of Assam had left Nowgong with his troops and intended to retreat across the hills into Manipur,<sup>5</sup> Major Waters pursued him and occupied the deserted stockade at Nowgong; but the Governor had gone too far to render a pursuit practicable unless by the cavalry. The Governor was totally unprepared for the rapid advance of his enemy, and left behind him all his baggage, plunder, military stores, and heavy property. Major Waters captured twenty iron guns and some boats.<sup>6</sup>

Colonel Richards moved his head-quarters to Koliabar towards the close of December, 1824. From Koliabar the force arrived at Mara Mukh on January 6, 1825.<sup>7</sup> Hearing that two Burmese parties had taken shelter in the neighbouring hills, and apprehending

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson (*Historical Sketch*, p. 44) is wrong in saying that he arrived on October 29.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 87(B).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 87(C).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 87(D).

<sup>5</sup> The retreating force consisted of about 1,300 men, of whom about 500 were Burmans.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 87(E).

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 45.

that they might cut off supplies and command the road between Koliabar and Mara Mukh, Colonel Richards detached several parties against them. They were able to destroy the Burmese stockades at various places and to cut up some small Burmese parties.<sup>1</sup>

These defeats compelled the Burmese to concentrate their forces at Jorhat; the country now lay open for the British advance. A fierce quarrel broke out in the Burmese camp; the *Burha Raja*, or the Burmese Governor of Assam, was killed by the followers of *Shan Phukan*, a rival Burmese general. "Despairing, consequently, of defending the position at Jorhat, the Burman Commanders, after setting fire to the entrenchment, fell back upon the capital, Rangpur, on the banks of the Dikhu, about twenty miles from its junction with the Brahmaputra."<sup>2</sup>

Colonel Richards advanced to Jorhat on January 17, 1825, and within a week established his headquarters at Gauri Sagar, on the Dikhu river, about eight miles from Rangpur.<sup>3</sup> On January 27, the Burmese attacked the British advance post at a bridge over the Namdang *nullah*,<sup>4</sup> but they were repulsed with heavy loss.<sup>5</sup> Colonel Richards naturally wanted to follow up this success by the capture of Rangpur. Strengthened by the requisite reinforcement of guns he started on January 29 and attacked a Burmese stockade on the route. This stockade had

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 88, 89 (A, B, C).

<sup>2</sup> S. C., February 11, 1825, No. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> A very small stream.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 90.

been built across the road, with the obvious intention of obstructing the passage of the invading army. The engagement was severe. Colonel Richards and another officer were wounded; the loss in wounded was very heavy. The result, however, was satisfactory, for the stockade was captured.<sup>1</sup> The Burmese now lost their spirit and self-confidence; faction fights once more broke out in their camp.

On January 30 the Burmese fort at Rangpur was attacked. Soon after the attack had begun a herald came from the fort under a flag of truce. He 'represented himself to be a native of Ceylon, by name Dharmadur Burmacheree,<sup>2</sup> many years resident in Bengal and the Eastern Islands, . . . at present Raj Gooroo, or chief priest, to the Saum and Burmese authorities in Assam'. He said that the Burmese camp was divided into numerous conflicting factions, but the two great chiefs, *Shan* and *Baglee Phukans*, were disposed to come to an understanding with the British Government. Colonel Richards agreed to consider the proposals of these two chiefs if they came over to the British side and abandoned the others to their fate in a continuance of hostilities. The *Guru* declared that it was impossible, for the anti-British party considerably preponderated in strength over the two *Phukans*, so that 'the slightest suspicion of such an inclination would entail bloodshed and destruction, not only on their families here, but in their own country'. Colonel Richards then agreed to allow all

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 91(B).

<sup>2</sup> The name seems to show that he was a native of Bengal.

the Burmese troops at Rangpur to retire out of Assam into their own country, 'provided that they took the directest route, committed no ravages on the road, and carried away none of the inhabitants now in their possession, by compulsion'. This advantage he was willing to grant them because he knew that it was impossible for him to prevent their escape upon the capture of Rangpur; he could not pursue them on their flight, nor could he rescue the captive Assamese inhabitants. Moreover, he was very anxious to complete without delay the expulsion of the Burmese from the Brahmaputra Valley. If the operations had been delayed, 'the want of carriage and supplies would have detained the army some time at Rangpur, and might have delayed its movements till the season was too advanced to admit of its progress far beyond the capital'.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately the *Phukans* accepted his terms. They wrote a letter,<sup>2</sup> saying that they were willing to leave Assam, and hoping that British troops would not molest them on their journey. Some of them came to the British camp to settle the terms of peace. Some agreed to evacuate the fort and leave for their own country; others surrendered, on condition that they would not be delivered to the King of Ava on the restoration of peace.<sup>3</sup> Thus Rangpur was occupied almost without bloodshed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 92(F).

<sup>3</sup> "Most of these eventually settled down at Singimari, in the Goalpara district, where lands were assigned them for cultivation."—Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., March 4, 1825, No. 2.

Rangpur was a really strong place from the standpoint of defence. It was 'of very great extent, and surrounded by deep swamps and jungles, with a ditch; the sorties to the three gates were strongly defended; and on them and the walls were more than 200 pieces of ordnance ready for service'. The fall of Rangpur secured to the British Expeditionary Force 'a key to all points from whence any future irruptions might be attempted from the eastward'.<sup>1</sup> The Brahmaputra Valley now completely fell under British control; the regular campaign in Upper Assam was brought to an end.

The failure of the Burmese to defend Rangpur illustrates some of those defects which were responsible for their final defeat in this war. Disunity within the Burmese camp was the immediate cause of surrender, not only in the case of Rangpur, but also in that of Jorhat. To accuse the Burmese commanders of cowardice and lack of patriotism would be an inadequate explanation of their refusal to face the enemy. The number of Burmese troops at their disposal was never sufficiently large. It must be remembered that the Burmese commanders had to perform two difficult tasks: to resist the British assaults, and to keep the hostile Assamese population under control. They could not rely on those Assamese and Kachari mercenaries who had joined their flag. They asked for reinforcements, but they received no response from Ava. It seems that the Burmese Ministers were too busy with the defence of Arakan and the Delta

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 92(C).

to divert their attention to the Brahmaputra Valley, which was, from their standpoint, a comparatively unimportant zone of war. Probably the Burmese commanders in Assam did their best under the circumstances; they delayed the inevitable retreat by one year, and when it could not be delayed any longer, they secured very favourable terms for themselves. The disunity in their camp was probably due to the divergence of views regarding the necessity of retreat. Those who surrendered might be condemned as traitors by the Burmese Court, but from the purely military point of view they probably made the best of a bad bargain.

The favourable terms granted by Colonel Richards to the Burmese at Rangpur illustrate some of the defects of the British military organisation in this war. The want of carriage and supplies delayed the operations at every step, but the authorities in Calcutta do not seem to have profited by experience. Inadequate information about the roads was another difficulty which persisted up to the last. Scott's hope<sup>1</sup> that the rains would not disturb the operations proved illusory. Finally, the good will of the Assamese population was, indeed, secured by soft promises and orderly conduct, but it did not actively influence the course of the campaign. As Wilson says, 'their unwarlike character, scanty numbers, and reduced means, rendered their co-operation of no value'. So the campaign for the expulsion of the Burmese from the

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<sup>1</sup> Before the outbreak of hostilities Scott had written to the Government that the expulsion of the Burmese 'would be a matter of no difficulty'. (See Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 281).



Brahmaputra Valley covered one full year (February, 1824—January, 1825).<sup>1</sup>

After the occupation of Rangpur Colonel Richards heard that the Singphos, a hill tribe living on the eastern side of the Patkai Hills, were plundering and carrying off the inhabitants of the plains into slavery. He detached some parties to drive them back to their own territory and to rescue their helpless captives.<sup>2</sup> Early in May the Burmese appeared again and built stockades in several Singpho villages along the river Nca Dihing. From these posts they were driven away by the middle of June, and several hundred Assamese captives were rescued.<sup>3</sup>

It is necessary at this stage to turn our attention to the Sylhet frontier. Towards the close of October, 1824, the Burmese army in Cachar retired to Manipur; British troops could not pursue them because the country 'was still under water,'<sup>4</sup> but they occupied Talain and Dudpatli, and destroyed the stockades built by the Burmese. Cachar was entirely evacuated by the Burmese in a hurry, but it is difficult to understand why they did so.<sup>5</sup> Dudpatli was strongly fortified, and

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<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to agree with Sir Edward Gait's remark, "The ease with which the Burmese had been ejected was no surprise to the officers on the spot . . ." (*History of Assam*, p. 281).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 94, 95.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 96.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson says that the Burmese sustained a serious reduction of their force by the climate and want of supplies. (*Historical Sketch*, p. 49). There is nothing in the documents quoted by him to support this hypothesis. *Konbaungset Yazawin* (Vol. II, p. 385) informs us that the Burmese troops in Assam were recalled after the capture of Rangoon by the English.

probably ten thousand Burmese troops were living there on the eve of their departure.<sup>1</sup>

After the final retreat of the Burmese from Cachar and the Brahmaputra Valley, it was decided to give effect to the plan of occupying Manipur. No serious opposition was apprehended, for the Burmese were fully occupied with the operations in Arakan and the Delta. Brigadier-General Shuldham, Commanding Eastern Frontier, decided to march to Manipur, and for that purpose made arrangements for the construction of a road from Dudpatli<sup>2</sup> towards Manipur.<sup>3</sup> On February 24, 1825, he arrived at Banskandi. The geographical features of the country<sup>4</sup> and the incessant rains<sup>5</sup> made it impossible for him to complete the road or to advance towards Manipur. On March 11, he reported that "the state of the road is such that it is quite impossible to send supplies on to the advance, either on camels, bullocks, elephants, or men."<sup>6</sup> Wilson says, "The country from Banskandi towards Manipur was a continual series of ascents and descents, the route being intersected, at right angles, by ridges of mountains running nearly due north and south . . . . for the first thirty miles, also the sides of the mountains were completely covered with a thick forest . . . . The

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 97.

<sup>2</sup> A village in Cachar. Lat. 25° 3', long. 92° 42'.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 98.

<sup>4</sup> See Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Pemberton (*The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 156) says that 'the native troops (of Shuldham's army), suffered from illness to a most melancholy extent, while the Europeans, both officers and men, with but few exceptions, enjoyed uninterrupted health'.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 99-103.

soil was a soft alluvial mould, converted by the slightest rain into a plashy mire . . . .”<sup>1</sup> The difficulties were further increased by the beginning of rains early in February. The attempt to advance to Manipur was, therefore, abandoned,<sup>2</sup> and the main body of the troops was removed to Dacca. Small detachments were left in Cachar and also at Sylhet.

Gambhir Singh, who had so long been living in British camps and training his troops,<sup>3</sup> now decided to take up the task condemned as hopeless by General Shuldham. With the permission of the British authorities he started for Manipur with his own troops, 500 in number.<sup>4</sup> A British officer named Lieutenant Pemberton volunteered to accompany him.<sup>5</sup> They left Sylhet on May 17, arrived at Banskandi on May 23, and, after a march of great difficulty and privation, reached the western limit of the valley of Manipur on June 10. On their approach the Burmese left the town of Manipur<sup>6</sup> and stockaded themselves at a

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> The Government attributed General Shuldham's failure to 'physical difficulties of an insurmountable nature'. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 171).

<sup>3</sup> These troops were paid and supplied with arms by the British Government.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 104(A).

<sup>6</sup> Now better known as Imphal. The following contemporary notice is interesting: "The place called the town of *Manipur*, exhibits few vestiges of having been the capital of a kingdom. Two deep and broad ditches enclose two areas, of which the inner, and smaller was occupied by the Rajas and their families, and the outer space, or that between the ditches, was tenanted by the officers of State and their dependants. Of the dwellings

village called Undra, about ten miles away. Gambhir Singh occupied the capital and proceeded towards Undra, but found it deserted.<sup>1</sup> Thus 'a few hundred undisciplined mountaineers' accomplished what General Shuldham's regular force had not ventured to undertake. Gambhir Singh left 300 men at Manipur and returned to Sylhet towards the end of June. He believed that the Burmese troops stationed on the confines of Manipur would not be able to dispossess the party he had left there.<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant Pemberton, who had accompanied Gambhir Singh to Sylhet, reported that the success of the enterprise was due mainly to 'his energy, perseverance and skill.'<sup>3</sup>

On December 18, 1825, Gambhir Singh returned to Manipur with his troops. He was accompanied by Captain Grant. At that time the Burmese force in the Kabaw Valley (which lies between Kalemya and Tammu, down to the Chindwin river) did not consist of more than 300 or 400 men.<sup>4</sup> A few days later Gambhir Singh came to know that all Burmese troops had been withdrawn from that valley, leaving it solely under the protection of 500 local people. Hoping that the district would submit to him without fighting, he sent his troops there early in January, 1826.<sup>5</sup> The principal

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of the Princes or the people, no fragment remains, and the only ruins are those of some small brick temples of no interest nor extent."—*Government Gazette*, February 20, 1826. (Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 14).

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 104(B).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 104(A).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 164(B).

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 165(B).

chief of the district, the Sumjoo Raja, collected about 700 men in the Tammu<sup>1</sup> stockade and determined to resist the advance of Gambhir Singh's troops. Thereupon Gambhir Singh and Captain Grant arrived at the scene and cut off their enemy's troops. The sudden flight of the Sumjoo Raja was partly due to the impression that a British battalion had entered Manipur. Such an impression, Captain Grant expected, would cause some alarm at the Burmese capital and create a diversion in favour of the British army operating in the Delta.<sup>2</sup> Another stockade on the right bank of the Ningthi river was also captured. Captain Grant reported. ". . . the activity, judgment, and skill, he (*i.e.*, Gambhir Singh) has displayed on this occasion, have proved the justice of the opinion previously entertained of his merits. The steady gallantry which, without the usual aid of cannon, could force a brave enemy to evacuate a strongly fortified position, is a very satisfactory illustration of the character of his followers . . . ."<sup>3</sup>

On February 1, 1826, Gambhir Singh arrived on the western bank of the Ningthi and found the entire district deserted. The inhabitants had made a very hurried retreat, having left their cattle behind and allowed their Manipuri prisoners to escape. Even the district on the opposite side of the river was deserted.<sup>4</sup>

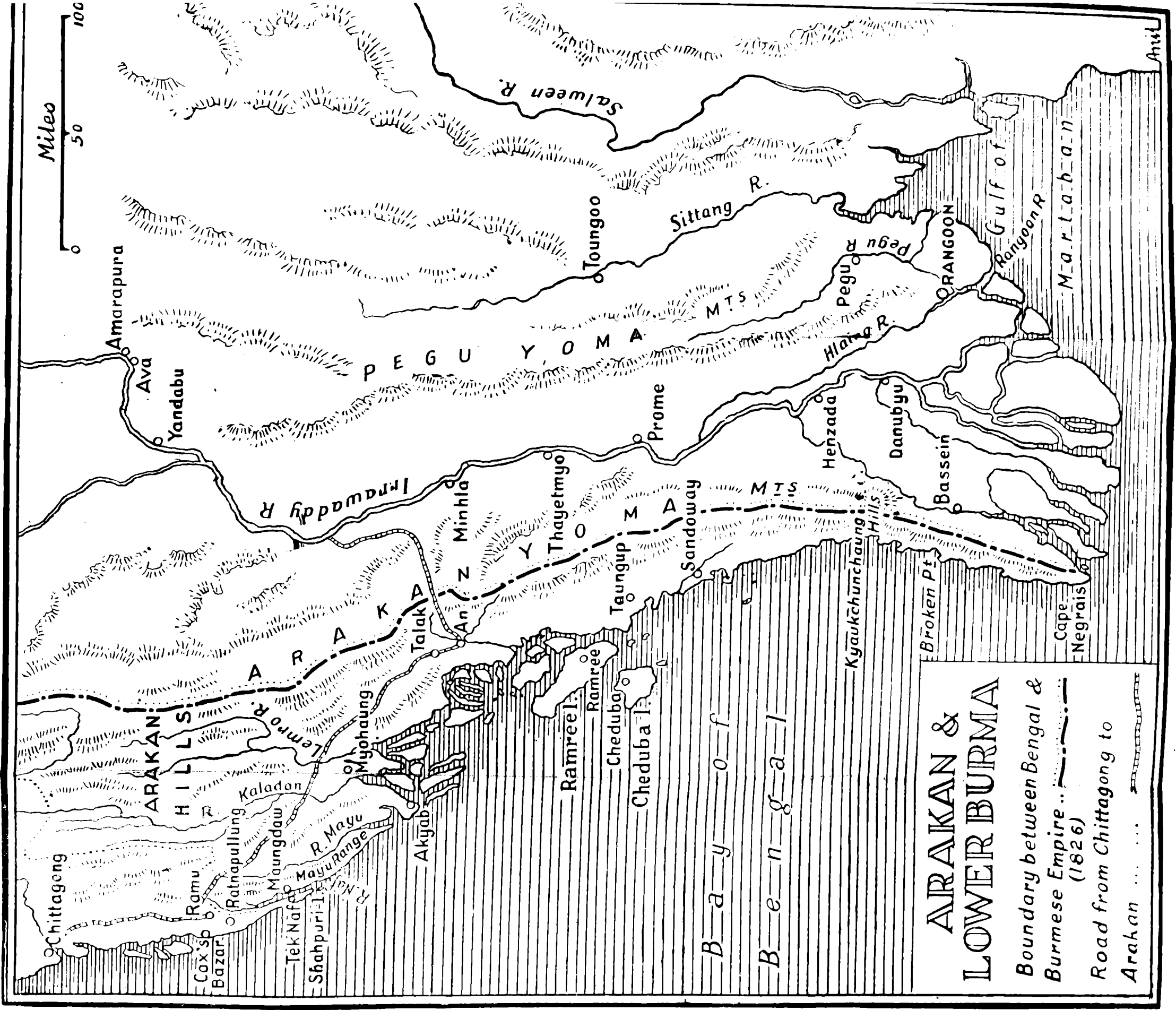
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<sup>1</sup> It stands on the present frontier between Manipur and Burma. The Kabaw Valley lies to the east of Tammu.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 166(C).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 166(B).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 167(B). S. C., February 17, 1826, No. 50, 51; May 5, 1826, No. 22.



**ARAKAN & LOWER BURMA**  
 Boundary between Bengal & Burmese Empire .. (1826)  
 Road from Chittagong to Arakan ...

The condition of Manipur after the expulsion of the Burmese was miserable. A contemporary official account<sup>1</sup> shows that the whole valley was covered with dense grass jungle and extensive swamps. Many villages were in ruins; their inhabitants had been carried off captives by the Burmese, and those who had escaped had found an asylum in Sylhet.

## II. MILITARY AND NAVAL OPERATIONS IN ARAKAN.<sup>2</sup>

Owing to geographical and climatic difficulties Lord Amherst was at first inclined to follow a defensive policy on the Chittagong frontier;<sup>3</sup> so the defence of that frontier was entrusted to a small detachment of 3,000 men, which included a *Mag* levy. A portion of this detachment was left at Ramu (east of Cox's Bazar) under the command of Captain Noton, 'to check any demonstration on the side of Arakan'. These preliminary arrangements indicated that the British troops were not prepared to penetrate into the interior of Arakan.

Maha Bandula,<sup>4</sup> the greatest Burmese general of his day, proud, audacious and self-confident, com-

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<sup>1</sup> *Government Gazette*, February 20, 1826.

<sup>2</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin* (Vol. II, pp. 372, 377-380, 385-386) gives some details.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., August 6, 1824, No. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Snodgrass (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 175) says, "The character of Maha Bandoola seems to have been a strange mixture of cruelty and generosity, talent with want of judgment, and a strong regard to personal safety, combined with great courage and resolution, which never failed him till death."

manded the Burmese army in Arakan, which probably consisted of ten or twelve thousand men. Early in May, 1824, about 8,000 Burmese troops crossed the Naf and advanced to Ratnapullung, about 14 miles south of Ramu, under the command of the Governors of Arakan, Ramree, Sandoway and Cheduba. These Governors were assisted by four inferior members of the Royal Council.<sup>1</sup> Maha Bandula himself directed this campaign from his head-quarters in 'the city of Arakan'.<sup>2</sup> The campaign was undoubtedly intended to be offensive, for such elaborate preparations were not required for the defence of Arakan. The beginning of the rainy season was chosen for the invasion of Chittagong, probably because Maha Bandula was aware of the inability of the British troops to overcome the climatic difficulty.

Hearing that the Burmese were advancing upon Ratnapullung, Captain Noton moved southwards with his troops to ascertain their strength and object. A

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Myohaung.

Pemberton says that the city stood 'at the head of an inferior branch of the Kaladan, about 50 miles from Akyab'. The population did not exceed 10,000. The city was very unhealthy. (*The Eastern Frontier of India*, pp. 89-90).

"The old capital of Arakan was situated in the interior of the country on a branch of the Kaladan river. But, shortly after our taking possession of the country, from the reputed unhealthiness, inaccessibility, and distance from the sea of the old city, a new site was chosen on a large land-locked estuary at the mouth of the Kaladan river, forming a safe harbour." (Fytche, *Burma, Past and Present*, Vol. I, pp. 87-88). This harbour is now known as Akyab. For its prosperity in 1835, see Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 87.



heavy fire was opened upon this party by the Burmese, and Captain Noton was compelled to return to Ramu because his elephants had thrown away the guns and ammunition placed upon them. The ammunition coolies had deserted, the guns were perfectly useless, no confidence could be placed on the *Mags* (although during the retreat some *Mags* behaved with great coolness in the face of danger, much to Captain Noton's satisfaction),<sup>1</sup> and there was no possibility of procuring supplies. On his return he was re-inforced; the whole force under his command amounted to about 1,000 troops, of whom less than half were regulars.<sup>2</sup> As it was obviously impossible to face the large Burmese army with this small, half-regular detachment, he decided to await at Ramu the approach of the Burmese, till the arrival of reinforcements from Chittagong.

On May 13 the Burmese advanced from Ratnapullung and occupied the hills east of Ramu. Only a small stream separated the British from the Burmese camp. Captain Noton apprehended an attack and prepared for resistance. Next day two Burmese horsemen<sup>3</sup> approached the opposite bank of the river, disavowed any hostile intention, requested Captain Noton to deliver up to them some rebellious Burmese subjects living under British protection,<sup>4</sup> and offered

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 36.

<sup>4</sup> In a letter written after the battle of Ramu the Burmese commanders observed, “. . . from their keeping and protecting the traitor Hynja, all of these calamities arise”. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 38).

to explain their views in detail if Captain Noton allowed them to cross the river with a guard of 100 horsemen and guaranteed their safety. Captain Noton, placing little confidence in these assertions, rejected their proposal.

The Burmese camp occupied an extent of ground upwards of a mile in length. Captain Noton estimated that the Burmese force consisted of not less than 10,000 fighting men, besides, at least, an equal number of *coolies* and camp-followers. His own force consisted of about 1,000 men; of these, little reliance could be placed on 250 Provincials and 400 *Mags*. Yet so confidently did he expect reinforcements from Chittagong, that he determined, with the approval of every officer present, to defend, against such superior numbers, the post which he commanded.

On the night of May 14 it was found that the Burmese force had concentrated on the opposite bank of the river, apparently with the intention of crossing at a favourable opportunity. So some British troops were detached to annoy the Burmese in their encampment and to prevent their fording the river. A skirmish followed. The British camp remained on the alert during the night in expectation of an attack.

On the following morning the Burmese crossed the river 'unobserved' and took possession of a tank upon the left of the British detachment. This tank was, as usual, surrounded by a high embankment, which protected the Burmese from the fire of the British troops. Captain Noton occupied another tank and took up his position behind an embankment about three feet high, which completely surrounded his

camp. On his right and left there were two other tanks, and his right flank was protected by the river. On completing the distribution of his troops he opened fire, but it was not very effective. The Burmese cautiously concealed themselves in the neighbouring huts and behind trees, and exposed themselves as little as possible. Information from Chittagong led Captain Noton to expect that reinforcements would arrive on the evening of May 16. He accordingly persevered in his former determination to defend his post till that time.

On May 16, Captain Noton found in the morning that the Burmese had considerably advanced their trenches, but were still at some distance from his camp. At noon they set fire to the *Mag* barrack in the rear of the British camp. Lieutenant Scott, the officer in command of the guns, was severely wounded and obliged to leave the field at once. In the evening Captain Noton heard that the Provincials were showing signs of deserting him and going over to the Burmese side.<sup>1</sup> He at once went to the spot and found the elephants loaded with baggage. He secured the ringleaders, and took measures to prevent their followers from carrying their intention into effect. Under these circumstances Captain Noton seriously thought of beginning a retreat under the cover of darkness. "Reluctant, however, to quit the post, which he had so long and so successfully defended without allowing the enemy to gain in struggle advantage over him, and anxiously, but confidently expecting to be

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 41.

joined in a few hours by Captain Brandon's detachment,<sup>1</sup> he at length, (depending solely on the courage and good discipline of the regular troops in the event of an attack) once more resolved, with the concurrence of the officers, to hold on till the arrival of the wished for reinforcement which it was considered could not be delayed beyond the following morning."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the night the Burmese were very active in extending their trenches. On the following morning they advanced very near the British camp and invested the tank which sheltered it. "The fire on both sides was now incessant, and at so short a distance proportionately formidable and effectual."<sup>3</sup> The Provincials became so alarmed that they fled with precipitation. The *Mags* followed them. Even the elephants took fright and ran off at full speed. The tank was taken possession of by the Burmese, and the remaining British troops were nearly surrounded by them. Captain Noton had no other alternative but to attempt a retreat instantly. His troops proceeded in tolerable order for about half a mile, keeping up a desultory fire on the Burmese, who poured in on them on every side in large numbers. "On the arrival of the enemy's cavalry," we read in an official despatch, "who fell upon our rear and cut to pieces numbers of sepoy, the detachment quickened its paces, and the utmost combined exertions of the officers to preserve the ranks,

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<sup>1</sup> From Chittagong.

<sup>2</sup> Extract from *Government Gazette*. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 36).

<sup>3</sup> Extract from *Government Gazette*. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 36).

and effect the formation of a square, were unavailing, and each corps and company presently became so intermingled with each other, that all order and discipline became at an end." Captain Noton and Captain Trueman were overtaken by the Burmese and cut to pieces. Captain Pringle and Ensign Bennett were killed in attempting to cross the river (which was not fordable). When the river came in sight every *sepooy* hastily divested himself of his arms and clothes and plunged into water. Two British officers were missing.<sup>1</sup> According to official returns, between six and seven hundred men reached Chittagong by May 23. So the total loss in killed and captured did not probably exceed 250. Some prisoners were sent to Ava, 'where they served to confirm the arrogant belief of the Court in the irresistible powers of their troops, and their anticipations of future triumph'.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that the British disaster at Ramu was due solely to Captain Noton's mistakes. He carelessly allowed the Burmese soldiers to cross the river unobserved without any opposition. It was unwise on his part to face 10,000 Burmese soldiers with only 1,000 men at his disposal. It was an act of incredible rashness, for he knew that no reliance could be placed on the loyalty and military skill of 250 Provincials and 400 *Mags*.<sup>3</sup> He might have saved him-

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 35, 36, 41.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> ". . . the regular troops . . . behaved with the greatest coolness and bravery throughout, and it was not until the enemy's horse had cut to pieces numbers in our rear that any confusion or alarm was betrayed. The Mug Levy also conducted them-

self and his party if he had retired on May 16 under cover of darkness, but even at that stage he risked everything in anticipation of reinforcements.

The disaster created consternation at Chittagong; even Dacca and Calcutta became uneasy. The Magistrate of Chittagong organised large bodies of *Mags* for offensive operations.<sup>1</sup> Considerable reinforcements were sent to Chittagong.<sup>2</sup>

It is rather strange that Maha Bandula did not try to complete the success his troops had won at Ramu.<sup>3</sup> Towards the close of May the Burmese advanced to Chekeria, a village to the north of Cox's Bazar, but here their northward progress stopped.<sup>4</sup> Early in June they occupied the British stockade at Tek Naf and tried unsuccessfully to cut off a British cruiser and some gun-boats in the river.<sup>5</sup> Early in July a messenger, who had conveyed a letter from the Magistrate of Chittagong to the Governor of Arakan at Ramu, returned to Chittagong and gave an alarming report about Burmese preparations for war. He said

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selves equally well till the Provincials set them a disgraceful example, which, considering all circumstances, it is not perhaps surprising that they followed." (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 36).

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Reports received from some refugee *Mags* indicated that about 500 Burmese were slain at Ramu. (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 41).

<sup>4</sup> It is probable, as Snodgrass (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 74) suggests, that Bandula built stockades near Ramu which 'he . . . intended should form the basis of his forward movement on the return of the cold season'.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 41. The success of the Burmese was at least partly due to the mutiny of the Provincials.

that there were 8,000 Burmese troops near the Chittagong frontier, and Maha Bandula would soon join them with 9,000 men. The whole force would then advance to Chittagong. Two blacksmiths' forges were constantly at work, repairing arms of every description. The walls of the stockade built by the Burmese at Ramu were nine cubits thick, which, the Burmese were confident, would be sufficient to resist the British artillery.<sup>1</sup>

Two Arakan *Mags*, who had escaped from Ramu to Chittagong, had a different story to tell. They said that the news of the capture of Rangoon, Bassein and Cheduba had already reached Maha Bandula, and the Governor of Arakan had been asked to send reinforcements to prevent the advance of the British army towards Ava. Probably the story of the *Mags* was true, for the Burmese evacuated Ramu in August, 1824. In an official report we read: "The most probable cause of the evacuation of Ramu by the Burmese is the alarm excited at the Court of Ava by the failure of the grand attempt to drive our army into the sea at Rangoon, on the 1st of July, and the tremendous overthrow which the Burmese troops received on the 8th. On the receipt of those accounts, nothing is more likely than that an immediate order for the recall of the Burmese force from Ramu and Arakan would be issued, for the purpose of their proceeding to the assistance of the armies opposed to us at Rangoon. We know that the Burmese at Rangoon were badly armed, and that the Ramu force was most efficient in

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 41.

that respect.”<sup>1</sup> This explanation is hardly convincing in view of the fact that more than six weeks probably elapsed between the battle of Ramu and the arrival of the news of the fall of Rangoon in Arakan. We are still unable to understand why the Burmese did not advance upon Chittagong immediately upon the defeat of Captain Noton’s detachment. It is doubtful whether hastily recruited *Mag* soldiers could have defended Chittagong in the last week of May or even in June. The mere approach of the Burmese near Chittagong would have created terrible alarm in Eastern Bengal and upset the plans of the British Government. It is not too much to say that prompt action on the part of Maha Bandula might have changed the whole course of the war.

Wilson rightly says, “The disaster at Ramu, although it might have been avoided, perhaps, by a more decided conduct on the part of the officer commanding, and would certainly have been prevented by greater promptitude, than was shown, in the despatch of the expected reinforcements, . . . was wholly destitute of any important consequences, . . . the Burmese had displayed neither personal intrepidity, nor military skill. Their whole system of warfare resolved itself into a series of entrenchments, which they threw up with great readiness and ingenuity. Behind these defences, they sometimes displayed considerable steadiness and courage, but as they studiously avoided individual exposure, they were but little formidable in the field as soldiers. Neither was much to be appre-

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 44-45.



hended from the generalship, that suffered the victory at Ramu to pass away, without making the slightest demonstration of a purpose to improve a crisis of such splendid promise, and which restricted the fruits of a battle gained, to the construction of a stockade."<sup>1</sup>

"But backward as were the Burmese leaders in taking advantage of the success they had achieved, they were not more so than were the British in trying to recover the *prestige* they had lost. No attempt was made to avenge the defeat at Ramu: the defensive policy previously determined on was strictly adhered to, and soon the advent of the rainy season put an end to all operations."<sup>2</sup> Thus one of the most important pitched battles fought during the war remained but an isolated incident without any appreciable effect on subsequent operations.

On May 5, 1824, Sir Archibald Campbell, who was appointed to command the force sent to Rangoon, left Port Cornwallis in the Andaman Islands. Before his departure he despatched two detachments for the capture of Negrais and Cheduba. Towards the middle of May Major James Wahab<sup>3</sup> landed at Negrais and found the island (about six miles in circumference) uninhabited: it was perfectly barren and covered with almost impenetrable jungle and deep inlets of salt water. He found no article of subsistence for his troops. So he crossed over to the mainland with a party of troops and tried to buy provision from the inhabitants. On May 17 he discovered that a stock-

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<sup>1</sup> *Historical Sketch.*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> De Rhe-Phillipe, *A Narrative of the First Burmese War*, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> Entered the Madras Army in 1800.

ade had been erected and troops and boats were being collected near the shore on the mainland. A detachment was at once sent. The stockade was occupied. The Burmese fled in the utmost disorder, leaving everything behind them. They suffered severely, for no less than 800 men had collected within a small enclosure. Ten or twelve guns and many muskets were captured. In spite of this success Major Wahab did not consider it worth while to remain in the island. So he evacuated it and returned to Rangoon;<sup>1</sup> he did not consider himself strong enough for an advance to Bassein.

Cheduba<sup>2</sup> is a small island on the Arakan coast, opposite Sandoway. The town of Cheduba was situated on the north-east corner of the island. A British detachment under Brigadier Michael McCreagh<sup>3</sup> arrived there on May 12 1824. Two days later the troops landed and occupied a small Burmese outpost without opposition. This was followed by a Burmese attack on some British boats in the river, which cost the Burmese 20 killed and many wounded. At last the main stockade<sup>4</sup> in the town was attacked

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 55(A, B, C, D). S. C., July 16, 1824.

<sup>2</sup> In 1831 it had a population of 5,253 souls, and yielded a revenue of Rs. 12,722. (Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 93).

<sup>3</sup> Entered service in 1797; later on promoted Colonel and knighted.

<sup>4</sup> "It was a square of about two hundred yards each face; the outward piles, from sixteen to twenty feet high, and embankment and a parapet within them, salient gateways in each face, and a triple row of railing round the entire exterior, appeared to be in good order, and the fire was from several six-pounders, as well as swivels of various calibre, and musketry."

and captured. The Burmese commander was killed; his men fled, leaving behind a large number killed. The Governor of Cheduba was captured a few days later and sent as a prisoner to Calcutta shortly afterwards. The Burmese crossed over to the mainland in a hurry. A British detachment under Lieutenant-Colonel Hampton was stationed at Cheduba for the protection of the island. 'Having made such arrangements regarding the island as circumstances admitted,' Brigadier McCreagh proceeded to Rangoon, where he arrived on June 11.<sup>1</sup>

During the month of September, 1824, the Company's cruiser *Hastings*, stationed off Cheduba, made several reconnaissances of the neighbouring island of Ramree,<sup>2</sup> and cut off several Burmese war boats. In October some stockades in the island of Ramree were destroyed.<sup>3</sup> No systematic attempt was, however, made to occupy this island.

Maha Bandula's departure from Arakan soon after the battle of Ramu had considerably weakened the effective strength of the Burmese force in Arakan, and it was no longer possible for it to undertake offensive operations. After leaving the stockades at Ramu the Burmese retreated to Maungdaw (opposite Tek Naf) and Lowadhung, and finally concentrated themselves in 'the city of Arakan'<sup>4</sup> (Myohaung), which they carefully fortified.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 57(B). S. C., July 7, 1824, No. 13; July 16, 1824, No. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 72(A), 72(B).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 72(D), 73(A), 73(B).

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 350.

The menace of invasion was thus removed: the follies of the Burmese in Arakan, and the success of British operations in the Delta, not only restored confidence in Chittagong, but also freed the whole area from Cox's Bazar to Maungdaw from Burmese control. The British authorities were now free to revise their timid policy of defence and send their troops boldly into the interior of Arakan. Not more than 500 men defended 'the city of Arakan', but there were climatic as well as geographical difficulties. The rains continued till the end of November and obstructed the preparation of a military road from Chittagong to the river Naf, by which the artillery and the loaded cattle were to proceed.<sup>1</sup> "The country thinly peopled and overrun with jungle, afforded no resources, and the stores and provisions, as well as cattle and carriage, were necessarily brought from a distance, and collected slowly with much labour and expense."

Preparations could not be completed before January, 1825. In the early part of that month General Joseph Morrison,<sup>2</sup> who commanded the British force at Chittagong, decided to start for Arakan. The troops were assembled near Cox's Bazar, and the transports and flotilla proceeded along the coast. General Morrison preferred to follow the direction of the coast, where he could be sure of the steady co-operation of the flotilla, for he was fully aware of the difficulties of a march inland—the wild

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Entered service in 1794; served also in Holland and Canada; health broke down under the effects of the climate of Arakan; died at sea on way to England, February 15, 1826.

nature of the country, intersected by hills and streams; absence of roads; risk of being cut off from the flotilla.

The troops, therefore, followed a road along the coast to the mouth of the Naf and reached Tek Naf on February 1. A detachment went to Maungdaw on the following day and occupied it without opposition. The Burmese retreated to 'the city of Arakan' by the road which connected Maungdaw and Lowadhung with the capital. They took with them their artillery and burnt stores of grain. The local population remained quiet and showed no alarm. A proclamation was issued, asking them to obey the orders of the British commander.<sup>1</sup>

The capture of Maungdaw gave General Morrison an important base of supplies and made it possible for him to proceed directly to 'the city of Arakan' by the Maungdaw-Lowadhung-Arakan road. But he was still afraid of a march inland; so he continued his march from Maungdaw along the shore to the mouth of the Mayu river. The march was as tedious as it was long. The land column took ten days to reach the mouth of the Mayu river; the water column was further delayed by a storm and serious geographical obstacles. Towards the end of March, 1825, General Morrison began to advance towards 'the city of Arakan' along the eastern bank of the Kaladan river. The greatest difficulty he had to encounter was the obstruction of the *nullahs* or small canals which intersected the road every few miles. The Burmese made repeated attempts to oppose him, but in spite of

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 108.

the strength of their stockades, they could not seriously embarrass the British troops. About eight weeks elapsed between the fall of Maungdaw and General Morrison's arrival near 'the city of Arakan'. As we read the details of his slow march along the Mayu and Kaladan rivers<sup>1</sup> we feel tempted to surmise that a march inland along the Maungdaw-Lowadhung-Arakan road might have been less troublesome and much more rapid.<sup>2</sup>

On March 29 the Burmese defences near 'the city of Arakan' were attacked. These consisted of a connected series of stockades, carried along a range of hills which were 350-450 feet in height. One pass alone led through them to the capital, and that was defended by the fire of several pieces of artillery and about 3,000 muskets. On the hills about 9,000 Burmese troops had assembled. In vain did British troops try to capture the pass and assail the right of the Burmese position. The next day was spent in the construction of a battery which was expected to destroy the Burmese works commanding the pass. On March 31 a heavy cannonade was directed against the Burmese, but their artillery could not be silenced. A night attack, however, succeeded in capturing a hill on the Burmese right. This seems to have created a panic among the Burmese, for they surrendered the remaining hills almost without any resistance on April 1, although reinforcements had probably arrived from Ava a few days before the British attack. Thus

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 109(A), 109(B), 110, 111(A), 112(B).

<sup>2</sup> Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 95.

'the city of Arakan' was secured at the cost of 2 killed and 97 wounded.<sup>1</sup>

Wilson says, "Arakan<sup>2</sup> stands upon a plain generally of rocky ground, surrounded by hills and traversed by a narrow tide *nulla* . . . The fort stands at the N. W. corner . . . It consists of three concentric walls . . . These walls are of considerable thickness and extent, constructed with large stones, and with a degree of labour such as a powerful state alone could have commanded."<sup>3</sup>

After the occupation of the city General Morrison tried to prevent the Burmese troops from returning to Burma. In this attempt he was not very successful. Some stragglers were captured; but a large proportion of the survivors merged themselves in the local population, some wandered in the jungles, and others proceeded to Burma by unfrequented mountain routes.<sup>4</sup>

Two of the four provinces of Arakan (Arakan and Cheduba) being cleared of the Burmese, it only remained to dislodge them from the remaining provinces of Sandoway and Ramree. This task General

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 111(A), 112(B).

<sup>2</sup> "It is situated in a valley on the banks of a small branch of the Arracan or Kuladyne river, and is about fifty miles from the sea. This valley is intersected by numerous streams and nullahs, all of which overflow and 'convert it into a noisome swamp'. It is surrounded on all sides by hills varying in height from 200 to 500 feet: the hollows between them consist of swamps and jungles." (Thornton's *Gazetteer*, p. 43).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 114.

Morrison entrusted to General McBean, who left 'the city of Arakan' with a part of the force on April 8.<sup>1</sup>

We have already referred to some British operations against Ramree in September and October, 1824.<sup>2</sup> The task of surveying and reconnoitring the harbour and creek of Ramree was entrusted to Captain Hardy, commanding the Company's frigate *Hastings*. Under the directions of Lieutenant-Colonel Hampton, commanding at Cheduba, Captain Hardy led an unsuccessful attack against Ramree in February, 1825. His failure was due to the treachery of the guides, who took him away from the place which he wanted to attack.<sup>3</sup> This reverse was retrieved some weeks later by General McBean, who occupied the town of Ramree on April 22 without any opposition from the Burmese. It is difficult to understand why they had evacuated it before his arrival, for it was powerfully defended by a strong stockade and several forts upon adjoining hills.<sup>4</sup>

General McBean then proceeded towards Sandoway and occupied it on April 30 without opposition. The banks of the river were covered with breastworks at different commanding points, and the town was strengthened by two stockades, but no attempt was made by the Burmese to utilise these defences.<sup>5</sup>

The occupation of the entire province of Arakan fulfilled one the chief objects of the expedition, but

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 114.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, p. 361.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 115.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 116(B).

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 116(C).



it was not found possible to accomplish the other primary object, *i.e.*, to send a portion of the British force in Arakan across the mountains to assist Sir Archibald Campbell. The chief impediments were geographical and climatic.<sup>1</sup> A reconnaissance was made towards the close of May by Major Bucke under the instructions of General Morrison.<sup>2</sup> He surveyed the Talak route, proceeding to Talak by water and crossing the mountains almost to the frontier of Burma, where he found the Burmese assembled in strength. It was impossible for the British force in Arakan to traverse this difficult route in the rainy season. The information collected by Major Bucke revealed the exact nature of the country between Arakan and Burma, and brought to light the enormous difficulties which had to be confronted if Upper Burma was to be invaded from Arakan across the Arakan Yoma mountains. The An route<sup>3</sup> was much less difficult than the Talak route<sup>4</sup>, but it was not discovered until the end of the war; "it would not have been of much avail for the passage of troops had

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 171.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 118(B). Robertson (*Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, p. 128) says that the journey of Major Bucke was useless (for British troops could not advance through the Talak pass) and describes General Morrison as a man disposed to reject information reaching him through those in whose favour he was not professionally prepossessed. Robertson himself favoured the An Pass. The Commander-in-Chief accepted General Morrison's recommendation in favour of Talak. (S. C., August 26, 1824, No. 78). The whole plan was, however, abandoned later on.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, pp. 46-47.

its existence been known earlier, as none of the carriage cattle of the army had crossed the Mayu river in June, and some were even then to the north of the Naf."<sup>1</sup> Thus the army of Arakan, like the army of Assam, could not take part in the expedition which brought the war to an end a few months later.

During the rainy season of 1825 the climate of Arakan proved very unhealthy. Fever and dysentery broke out among the troops to an alarming extent, and with the most disastrous results.<sup>2</sup> The Government was at last compelled to recall the major portion of the force, leaving some troops in the islands of Cheduba and Ramree, and also in Sandoway, where the climate was less unhealthy.<sup>3</sup> It seems that no precautionary measure adopted by the Government could have minimised the effects of the climate. The severity of the rains,<sup>4</sup> the exposure to the weather, which no precaution could prevent, and the intoxication in which European soldiers habitually indulged,<sup>5</sup> all had

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Between May and September, 1825, the European force, about 1,500 strong, lost 259 men and had, at the end of September, about 400 in hospital. During the same period the native corps, about 8,000 strong, lost 892 men and had 3,648 in hospital. (Burnard, *Sketch of the Medical Topography of Aracan*).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>4</sup> During July, August and September, 1825, the fall of rain in Arakan was 123 inches, of which 103 inches fell in the first two months. (Burnard, *Sketch of the Medical Topography of Aracan*).

<sup>5</sup> Percentage of death among Europeans—17·25. Percentage of death among Indians—11·0. Percentage of illness among Europeans—27·0. Percentage of illness among Indians—45·5. (Based on tables in Burnard, *Sketch of the Medical Topography in Aracan*).

their share in producing disease.<sup>1</sup> The bad quality of the supplies may have been a factor in aggravating the evil to some extent, but "that the great mortality in Aracan owed its origin to this source, is a conclusion of which there is no proof."<sup>2</sup> It is significant that although the detachments sent to Talak and Ramree were supplied from the same stores, the percentage of sickness and death due to fever and dysentery was very much higher in the case of the former than in the case of the latter.<sup>3</sup>

### III. NAVAL AND MILITARY OPERATIONS IN TENASSERIM, PEGU, AND UPPER BURMA<sup>4</sup>

The command of the Rangoon expedition was entrusted to Major-General Sir Archibald Campbell.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Burnard, *Sketch of the Medical Topography of Aracan*.

<sup>2</sup> Stevenson, *On the sickness prevailing in Aracan*.

<sup>3</sup> Stevenson, *On the sickness prevailing in Aracan*. See also S. C., December 9, 1825, No. 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin* (Vol. II, pp. 380-412) gives interesting details, which generally corroborate the English documents on which the following account is mainly based.

<sup>5</sup> Born 1769 : entered the Army, 1787 : went to Bombay 1788, and served in the Third Anglo-Mysore War under Sir Robert Abercromby, 1790-2 : was at Seringapatam, 1792 : at Cochin, 1795, and the defeat of the Dutch in Ceylon, 1796 : served in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War and was at the final siege of Seringapatam, 1799 : served in Portugal under Sir John Moore, 1808 : was Brig.-General with the Portuguese, 1811 : knighted, 1814 : was Portuguese Maj.-General, 1816, in command at Lisbon : commanded in Burma, 1824-6 ; governed the ceded provinces till 1829 ; Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, 1831-7 : Lt.-General, 1838 : was unable through ill-health to accept the appointment of C.-in-C. in Bombay, 1839 : died 1843. (Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, p. 68).

The Bengal army left Calcutta in the beginning of April. As the *sepoys* of the Bengal Army were very reluctant to undertake a voyage across the sea, which, in their view, involved loss of caste,<sup>1</sup> Lord Amherst had to requisition troops from Madras, where caste prejudices were supposed to be less strong. Sir Thomas Munro was at that time Governor of that Presidency. He promptly responded to the Governor-General's request; a considerable force was speedily equipped.<sup>2</sup> With 2,175 troops from Bengal General Campbell reached Port Cornwallis<sup>3</sup> in the Andaman Islands, where he was joined by 9,367 troops from Madras.<sup>4</sup> On May 5 the joint expedition left Port Cornwallis; five days later it reached Rangoon.<sup>5</sup>

There is much to be said in favour of the view that the expedition should not have been sent just

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<sup>1</sup> The immediate cause of the Barrackpore Mutiny of October, 1824, was the unwillingness of the *sepoys* to go to Arakan.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., March 5, 1824, No. 3, 4. Gleig, *Life of Sir Thomas Munro*, Vol. II, pp. 95, 109. Out of the 1,300 men composing the First Madras European Regiment, 863 of the most effective and healthy non-commissioned rank and file were picked for active field service in Burma. (*Historical Record of the First Madras European Regiment*, p. 439).

<sup>3</sup> "The settlement of Port Cornwallis is not situated on the principal island, but on a smaller one within the harbour, named by the English Chatham Island; the utmost length of which does not exceed two miles, and the breadth little more than half a mile."—Symes, *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. I, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> For a slightly different estimate of troops see Pearn, *A History of Rangoon*.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 47, 48, 49, 50, 52.

We find in *Historical Record of the First Madras European Regiment*, p. 440, that the departure from Port Cornwallis took place on May 7.

as the rainy season was about to commence. Rangoon was occupied at a time when the health of the troops could not be expected to remain good. "The result was the most appalling mortality, not from enemy action, but from sickness . . . Of the 3,586 European troops who landed in Rangoon in May, 1824, 3,115 died of wounds and disease, only 150 being actually killed in action; casualties from sickness were also heavy among the Indian troops, and taking the expeditionary force as a whole it is stated that during the first year of the war  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the troops were killed in action while no less than 45 per cent. perished of disease."<sup>1</sup> At the same time it is difficult to overlook Wilson's view: "The period of the year at which this expedition was fitted out, was recommended by various considerations of local or political weight."<sup>2</sup> Nautical experts advised that a more favourable season for navigating the coast of the Bay of Bengal to the eastward could not be selected. Experts on Burma held that "if the expedition, upon arriving at Rangoon, should be able to proceed into the interior without delay, the rising of the river, and the prevalence of a south-easterly wind, rendered June and July the most eligible months for an enterprise which could only be effected . . . by water conveyance."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it was considered unwise to give a few months' time to the Burmese to put their aggressive plans into operation. Finally, to have remained

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<sup>1</sup> Pearn, *Burma Background*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Sketch*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> See Symes, *An Account of an Embassy*, Vol. I, pp. 24, 128.

throughout the rains wholly on the defensive would have compromised British reputation.

Lord Amherst justified himself in the following words: “. . . we had received no information which could lead us to believe the climate of Rangoon at all peculiarly unhealthy during the rains . . . The very extensive and melancholy sickness which prevailed in Sir Archibald Campbell’s army, from July to November, 1824, had its first origin in an epidemic fever, of a casual, not local character, which visited Rangoon in the month of June, as it did Calcutta . . . The effects of the above epidemic, of course, impaired the health of the men generally, and rendered hundreds who would otherwise have escaped, wholly unable to stand the severe service and privations which ensued. The want of fresh meat and other wholesome food, in itself so sufficient to have produced extensive sickness, infinitely aggravated the evil, and this was to be ascribed mainly to the entire desertion of the place by its inhabitants, an event which could not have been anticipated.”<sup>1</sup>

“Rangoon lies at the junction of three minor streams—the Hlaing or Rangoon river, which flows down . . . from the north-west, the Pazundaung creek from the north, and the Pegu river from the north-east.”<sup>2</sup> In 1824 the town extended for about 900 yards along the Hlaing river;<sup>3</sup> the centre was

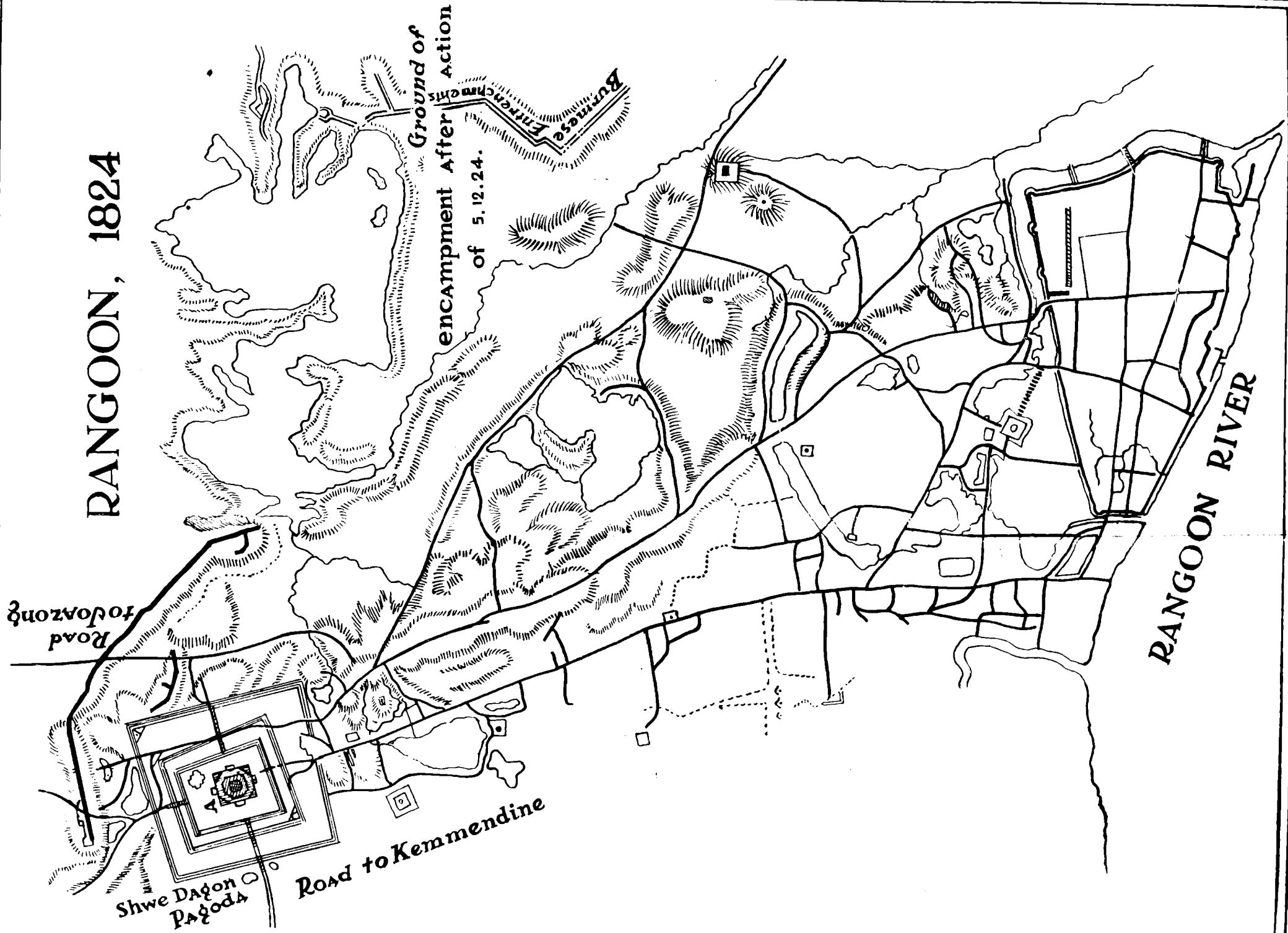
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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Court of Directors, December 23, 1825.

<sup>2</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. IX, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> In 1822 Gouger found Rangoon ‘a miserable, dirty town, containing 8,000 or 10,000 inhabitants, the houses being built of bamboo and teak planks with thatched roofs,—almost without

# RANGOON, 1824



defended by an enclosure of palisades ten or twelve feet high, but the suburbs were unprotected. At the river gate there was a landing place, called the King's wharf, where the main battery was placed. On May 11 the British fleet anchored opposite to the King's wharf; there was no opposition except some insignificant discharges of artillery. This was soon silenced by the first few shots from the British ship. Two brigades landed and occupied the town, 'without having had occasion to discharge a single musket'. The Burmese troops had already fled into the neighbouring jungles. "The members of Government fled at the first shot." Some hours later an American missionary named Hough, who had been imprisoned by the Burmese officers, came as their delegate to entreat that the firing might cease. General Campbell demanded the release of all European prisoners.<sup>1</sup> The missionary

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drainage and intersected by muddy creeks, through which the tide flowed at high water.' (*Personal Narrative*, pp. 6-7).

<sup>1</sup>For details about these prisoners see Gouger, *Personal Narrative*. The following deserve special notice: Gouger (a British merchant who went to Burma in 1822), John Laird (a Scotch, commander of a ship, who went to Burma in 1820), Rodgers (a British naval officer who went to Burma in 1782), Judson (American Baptist Missionary who went to Burma in 1813), Mrs. Judson, Price (American Baptist Missionary), Constantine (a Greek of Constantinople), Cassidy (a private in Madras European Regiment), Arrakeel (a young American), Lanciego (a Spaniard who had married a sister of one of the Queen's favourites and occupied a high official position in Rangoon), Ignatius Brito (a Catholic priest who was 'a native Burman of Portuguese extraction'), Lieutenant Bennett and Dr. Sandford (two British officers who had been captured on their way from the British army near Pagan to Rangoon on sick leave). All these prisoners were not,



went back, but did not come again. Next morning British reconnoitring parties found seven Europeans at different places, strongly fettered, but deserted by their guards. The captured ordnance far exceeded in number anything General Campbell supposed Burma to possess.<sup>1</sup>

“The arrival of a British fleet at Rangoon,” says Snodgrass, “seems to have been wholly unexpected by the Court of Ava; the town was unprepared for its reception, and the civil and military authorities thrown into alarm and consternation.”<sup>2</sup> Snodgrass suggests that the Burmese ‘had been for many months preparing for a rupture with the government of India’, but they were prepared for offensive war; “the invasion of their own frontiers, more especially of the distant coasts of Pegu and Tenasserim, seems to have been wholly overlooked in their warlike preparations”. They had made roads through the jungle in the Arakan-Chittagong frontier; they had sent reinforcements to Assam and Manipur. But they had made no provision for the defence of the maritime provinces which they regarded as ‘naturally secure from any attack of their enemy’.<sup>3</sup> No more conclusive evidence is required to show how ignorant the Burmese were about the character and strength of their enemy. In spite of the conquest of Pegu, Tenasserim and Arakan, Burma under the A-laung-pa-ya dynasty

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of course, arrested or captured at the same time; some of them fell into Burmese hands after the fall of Rangoon.

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 52, 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 4-5

<sup>3</sup> *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 23-25.

remained a land-locked power, and naval warfare remained uncongenial to the Burmese character.

Even after the fall of Rangoon the Burmese could not realise its proper significance. If we may believe the statements of Americans and Englishmen who had been living in Burma for years, the Burmese believed that their enemies 'had fallen at length into a snare, and that they were a sure prey'. They were only afraid that 'the marauders would escape' before the King's troops could reach Rangoon and capture them. "Throughout the town of Ava," we are told, "there was nothing but rejoicing at the event". The King expected that the arms and ammunition captured from the English would be useful in the coming war with Siam.<sup>1</sup>

The miscalculations of the British authorities were hardly less serious. It was 'sanguinely hoped', says Snodgrass, that the Burmese inhabitants of Rangoon 'would, by accepting our protection, at once place at our disposal the resources of the country in cattle, boats, drivers, and boatmen, with which we were wholly unprovided'. But in the neighbourhood of Rangoon nothing beyond some paddy was found: 'the careful policy of the Burmese authorities had removed far beyond our reach everything that was likely to be of use to an invading army'. The 'invitation and promises of protection that were circulated about the country' by British officers in distress failed to persuade the local population to return to deserted Rangoon. Moreover, it was anticipated that the capture of

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174(A). Gouger, *Personal Narrative*, p. 128.

Rangoon would induce the King to make overtures for peace; but there was no trace of conciliatory spirit in the harassing tactics pursued by the Burmese. Snodgrass bitterly remarks, "Every day's experience only increased our disappointment, and proved how little was known of the character of the nation we had to deal with".<sup>1</sup>

The difficulties of the invading army were, indeed, numerous. In the first place, supplies could not be drawn from Rangoon: the Governor of the port had driven the local inhabitants into the inmost recesses of the neighbouring jungles. Secondly, as the invading army was unprovided with the means of moving either by land or by water, it was compelled to remain confined in 'the miserable and dirty hovels of Rangoon'. Thirdly, it was difficult to carry on local operations even in the Rangoon area, for it was generally 'covered by a thick and tenacious jungle, intersected by numerous creeks and rivers'. Snodgrass says, "Roads, or anything deserving that name, are wholly unknown in the lower provinces". As the rain began to fall in torrents, the guns could be dragged no farther. Finally, the Burmese carried on systematic guerilla attacks. Snodgrass says, ". . . a cordon was speedily formed around our cantonments, capable indeed, of being forced at every point, but possessing, in a remarkable degree, all the qualities requisite for harassing and wearing out in fruitless exertions the

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<sup>1</sup> *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 5, 8, 15-17, 44. Wilson (*Historical Sketch*, p. 27) pathetically says that such a state of things was 'little to have been expected, from the known commerce and supposed resources of Rangoon'.

strength and energies of European or Indian troops.”<sup>1</sup> In a despatch dated June 1, 1824, General Campbell observed, “Every act of the enemy evinces a most marked determination of carrying hostility to the very last extremity; approaching our posts day and night under cover of an impervious and uncombustible jungle; constructing stockades and redoubts on every road and path-way, even within musquet shot of our sentries, and from these hidden fastnesses, carrying on a most barbarous and harassing warfare, firing upon our sentries at all hours of the night, and lurking on the outskirts of the jungle for the purpose of carrying off any unlucky wretch whom chance may throw in their way.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the British army became absolutely dependent upon Bengal and Madras ‘for every description of conveyance and food’,<sup>3</sup> General Campbell resolved to carry out the pre-arranged plan. After the fall of Rangoon he occupied, on May 10, a strong Burmese stockade at Kyimyindaing (corrupted by British writers into Kemmendine), a village only four miles distant from the city. Here the Burmese ‘fought with very great spirit’ and tried in vain to

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<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 7, 8, 16, 20, 21, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 55(A).

<sup>3</sup> “Such was by this time (end of May, 1824) the scarcity of provisions, the rations putrid, salt fish and badly-cured meat being the only description of food procurable, that the officers of the regiment were obliged to break up this mess: by dividing into small parties of three and four, and trusting to their own resources, they fared a little better.” (*Historical Record of the First Madras European Regiment*, p. 443).

resist British bayonets with their spears.<sup>1</sup> After these initial successes the troops were posted in the town, in the great Shwe Dagon Pagoda (about two miles and a half from the town), and also on the two main roads which ran from the northern gates of the town to the Pagoda. Numerous pagodas and religious buildings provided cover to the British troops<sup>2</sup> as soon as heavy rainfall began.

General Campbell's difficulties were intensified by another quite unexpected factor—the prevalence of disease in the British army, which considerably weakened its efforts to continue the operations according to the pre-arranged plan. The heavy rains worsened the situation by making land movement very difficult, if not altogether impossible. Under these circumstances it was not possible for General Campbell to march northward to threaten Ava. The rainy season was spent in desultory expeditions against Burmese entrenchments in the neighbourhood of Rangoon.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 53(A, B).

<sup>2</sup> It may be suspected that the hostility of the Burmese was embittered by the disrespect shown to their religion by the British troops. A European writer says, “. . . under an idea that treasure was concealed in the Great Pagodah, it was ransacked and dug up in all directions by order of the Commander-in-Chief, but without success; the example was not, however, lost on the army at large, for whilst the Great Pagodah was being thus ransacked, the lesser ones were dug up and rifled by the soldiery, and in a short time nearly every one had been plundered of all they contained,—a few images made of stone or composition, and covered over with thin sheets of gold or silver, or little value except as curiosities.” (*Historical Record of the First Madras European Regiment*, p. 442).

Towards the close of May, 1824, General Campbell marched out with his troops to the interior. He advanced through thick jungles and rice fields and destroyed three stockades. At last he arrived at the village of Juayhyvaug. It was defended by the Burmese from the stockades, which were 'so well masked as not to be distinguished from a garden fence, even at the short distance of sixty yards'. General Campbell occupied these stockades by a determined and well-conducted attack under heavy rain. Two British officers were seriously wounded, and the Burmese left about 300 dead in the stockades.<sup>1</sup>

Information was soon available that the Burmese had returned to Kemmendine and built a large and strong stockade there.<sup>2</sup> An unsuccessful attack<sup>3</sup> was made on June 3. Two days later two Burmese officers of high rank came to Rangoon and paid a visit to General Campbell. They said that they were envoys from the Viceroy of Pegu, and requested the General or Major Canning to see the Viceroy at Danubyu, offering themselves as hostages for their safety. General Campbell did not accept this offer but requested the envoys to forward his despatches to the capital. The envoys went to the Viceroy to secure his assent, but never returned to the British camp. Probably their real object was to gain time by

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 55(A).

<sup>2</sup> According to Wilson (*Historical Sketch*, p. 29), this stockade lay about two miles above the post called Kemmendine occupied on May 10.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 56(A, B).

suspending the British operations until the force assembling at Danubyu should be ready to strike.<sup>1</sup>

On June 10 General Campbell moved upon the Burmese camp and stockades at Kemmendine with about 3,000 men. "The country, season and roads rendered the undertaking extremely arduous," wrote he. About two miles from the town of Rangoon the head of the column was stopped by a stockade, which, however, was occupied within half an hour. Then the column moved forward nearly a mile and invested the great stockade. The attack began at day-light next morning. After two hours of firing it was found that the Burmese had evacuated the place, carrying off their dead and wounded.<sup>2</sup> In his report to the Supreme Government General Campbell observed, "The chain of posts occupied by the enemy rendered flight at all times easy, and the thickness of the jungle necessarily prevented our observing when it took place."<sup>3</sup> He added, "The stockade . . . is one of great strength, and capable of being obstinately defended."<sup>4</sup> It was

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 30. According to *Konbaungset Yazawin* (Vol. II, p. 382), the English General refused to entertain proposals unless they came from the King. His views were not communicated to the King by the Burmese generals. There is some truth in this version of the incident, for, according to Wilson, General Campbell refused to see the Viceroy of Pegu because the latter 'could no more than forward the result of the conferences'.

<sup>2</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, pp. 382-383.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 57(♣).

<sup>4</sup> "The stockade was at least fifteen feet high, and with neither ladders nor guns, it was impossible to escalate or breach it." (*Historical Record of the First Madras European Regiment*, p. 444).

garrisoned by the most desperate crews of the enemy's war boats, and it cannot be doubted that the dreadful example of the day before, and awful effects of our opening fire, alone could have induced men possessed (as the Burmese unquestionably are) of great personal courage, to give it up. The object I had in view has thus been fully accomplished; a general pause and terror for our arms at present prevail among the troops lately opposed to us, and . . . every stockade in our neighbourhood has been evacuated, and the enemy has retired to some distance from our front."<sup>1</sup> The strategic value of the capture of Kemmendine was not negligible. Wilson says, "The stockade of Kemmendine, commanding the river between it and the town, and connecting the head of the British line, the Shweda-gon-pagoda with the river, secured the latter from being turned, or the town of Rangoon from being threatened in that direction . . . ."<sup>2</sup> It was, therefore, left in charge of a detachment of British troops.

Such successes, however, did not materially improve the position of the British expeditionary force in Pegu. The original plan of advancing towards Ava had to be given up for the time being. "An advance up the river, whilst either bank was commanded by the enemy in such formidable numbers and by strong entrenchments, was wholly out of the question, as, although conveyance for the troops and ordnance had been provided, the impossibility of deriving supplies from the country was undeniable,

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 57(A).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 31.



and it was equally impracticable to maintain a communication with Rangoon.”<sup>1</sup> Nor could General Campbell expel the Burmese forces from the Rangoon area; “the country and season stood them in the stead of discipline and courage.” There was almost daily skirmishing at the outposts.<sup>2</sup> The rains set in, and brought disease along with their coolness. Sickness began to thin the ranks, and impair the energies of the invaders. It was aggravated by the use of spirituous liquor and the want of a sufficient supply of fresh meat<sup>3</sup> and vegetables. Fever, dysentery, scurvy and hospital gangrene raged furiously in the British camp.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the close of June General Campbell received information that the Burmese were collecting troops for the recovery of Rangoon.<sup>5</sup> It was reported that orders had been sent from Ava to collect as large a force as possible to surround and capture the British, and that a chief officer of the State (*Thakia Woongyee*) had been placed in command.<sup>6</sup> On the morning of July 1 all doubts were removed. A British despatch

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Record of the First Madras European Regiment*, p. 449.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 67.

<sup>4</sup> From June to October “the average monthly admissions into hospital from the Artillery were 65 Europeans and 62 Natives, being nearly one-third of the greatest strength of the former, and one-fourth of the latter; and large as was this number . . . it was considerably less, in proportion, than that which was exhibited by one European Regiment, in either division of the army.”—*Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society of Calcutta*, Vol. III.

<sup>5</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, pp. 385-386.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 33.

says, "Three columns of the enemy estimated at one thousand men each, were seen crossing the front of our position, moving towards our right: and the jungle in front of the great Dagon Pagoda, and along the whole extent of our line to the left, was occupied by a large force, but on this side, from the nature of the ground, it was impossible to ascertain either the disposition or strength of the enemy." The Burmese took post on a hill about 400 yards from the British position, and commenced a feeble and harmless fire from some jinjals and swivels. Within a short time British troops occupied the Burmese post, 'the enemy flying in every direction towards their favourite haunt, and only place of safety, the jungle'. "Thus ended", says General Campbell, "the mighty attack that was to have driven us into sea, defeated with the greatest ease by the three weak companies of *sepoys*, and two pieces of artillery". The Burmese, about 12,000 strong, left at least 100 men dead on the field. The British had not one man either killed or wounded.<sup>1</sup>

Petty skirmishes went on for a few days, showing that the Burmese had not altered their plan of giving constant annoyance to the invaders. On July 8 General Campbell 'determined to make as general an attack as the very woody and inundated state of the country would possibly admit of'. A combined military and naval attack was directed against the Burmese stockades at Dala.<sup>2</sup> Ten strong stockades were captured, and more than 800 Burmese troops

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 58.

<sup>2</sup> A suburb of Rangoon on the western bank of the Rangoon river.

were killed.<sup>1</sup> Among the slain was the General himself, *Thamba Woongyee*,<sup>2</sup> who had tried to animate his men to resistance, not only by his exhortations, but by personal example. This conduct, observes Wilson, was contrary to the usual practice of the Burman Chiefs, who were rarely even present in an engagement which they directed.<sup>3</sup> British officers found their dinner on the table—so sudden and unexpected was the attack—and partook of it.<sup>4</sup> Another Burmese leader of rank fell in a personal struggle with a British officer. It was expected that the capture of so many stockades by so inferior a force and without any assistance from artillery would shake the confidence of the Burmese in their 'bamboo ramparts'. Wilson describes this engagement as 'an achievement unsurpassed during the war'.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the middle of July a detachment was sent to capture Kyaikkalo, about 12 or 15 miles from Rangoon. The inundated state of the country made it impossible for the British troops to reach that place; so they returned.<sup>6</sup>

Early in August General Campbell received information that the Burmese Governor of Syriam<sup>7</sup> was making arrangements for finishing and defending a large field work, which was to command the Pegu or

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 58, 59, 60.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 60.

<sup>3</sup> *Historical Sketch*, p. 34.

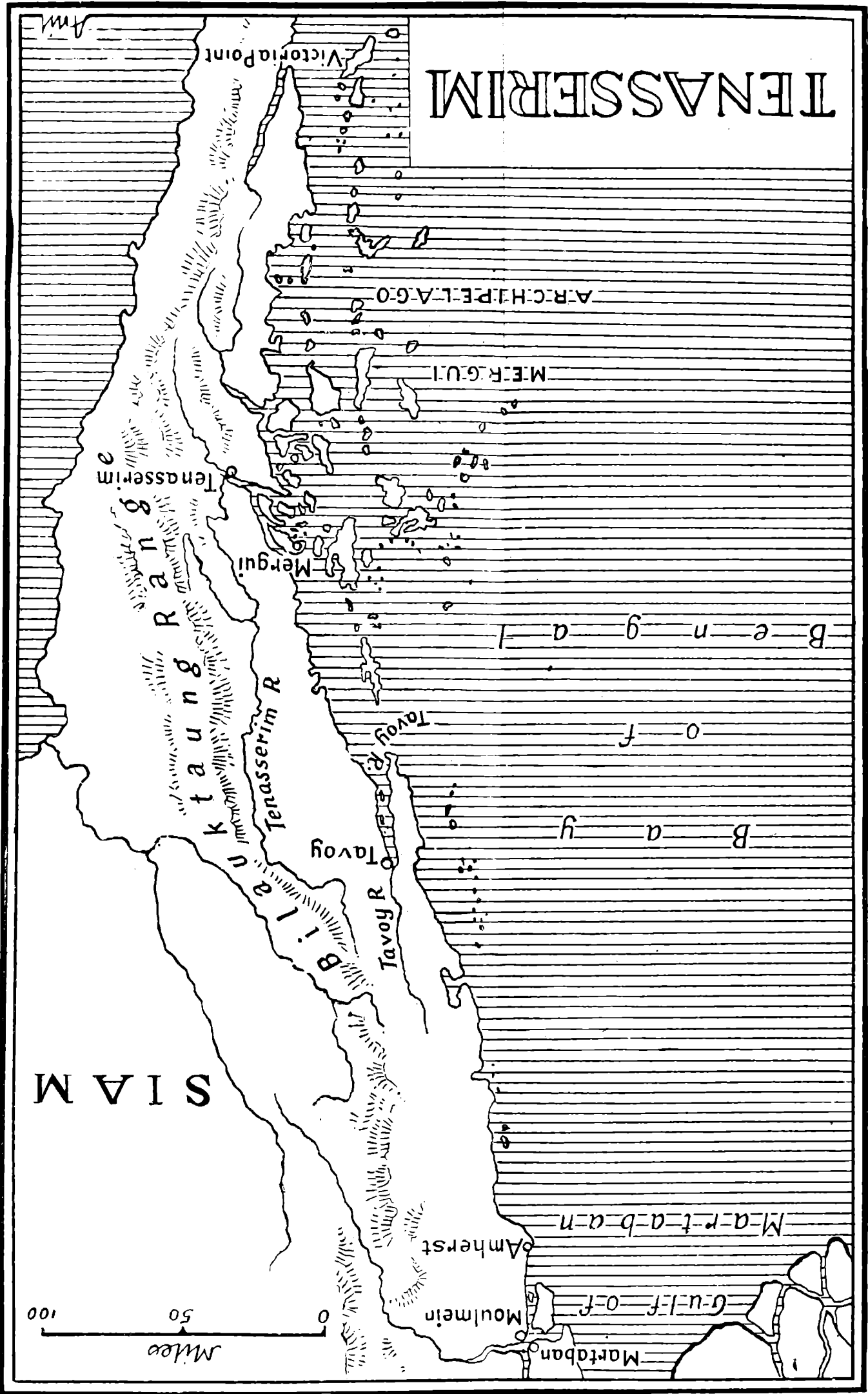
<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 60.

<sup>7</sup> A town on the right bank of one of the branches of the Irrawaddy, 11 miles E.N.E. from Rangoon.

# TENASSERIM



S I A M

Miles  
0 50 100

Martaban

Gulf of

Moulmein

Amherst

Burma

Tavoy

Mergui

Tenasserim

Bilauktaung Range

Tenasserim R.

Tavoy

Tavoy R.

Tavoy

Archipelago

Mergui

Victoria Point

Am

Syriam river and protect the surrounding country. So he proceeded to Syriam with 600 troops. On his arrival there he found that the Burmese had taken their post in an old Portuguese fort repaired for the purpose. They made a feeble attempt to obstruct the advance of the invaders, but 'abandoned the place with the utmost precipitation' as soon as they were attacked.<sup>1</sup>

About the same time General Campbell received information that the inhabitants of Dala were resisting the orders of the King for a general levy of every man capable of bearing arms. A detachment of 400 troops was sent 'to assist the opposition and escape of the discontented'. The stockade at Dala was easily captured.<sup>2</sup>

The advance towards Ava being temporarily postponed, it was decided to employ a part of the Rangoon force in reducing the maritime province of Tenasserim. This province 'contained a valuable tract of sea coast' and was likely to 'afford supplies of cattle and grain'.<sup>3</sup> An expedition under Colonel Edward Miles<sup>4</sup> sailed from the Rangoon river on August 26 and arrived near Tavoy on September 1. Next morning two Burmese brought to Colonel Miles a communication from the second officer of the fort, stating his readiness to seize or kill the Governor of the province. Colonel Miles said that the Governor should be seized and confined.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 61. S. C., September 10, 1824, No. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 62(A, B).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Entered service in 1794; served in Holland, West Indies, Ireland and the Peninsula; later on Knighted; died in 1848.

Within a few hours Colonel Miles was in possession of the fort, without any opposition. He reported, "The population is very great, and from the strength and extent of the works (all being of brick and very high) our loss must have been very great, had any defence been attempted. The capture of the Mayhoon,<sup>1</sup> his brother and family, with his principal adherents, completely weakens the enemy, and places us in a commanding situation to cripple any exertion in this quarter."<sup>2</sup>

Having left some troops and a ship for the protection of Tavoy, Colonel Miles proceeded to Mergui, where he arrived on October 6. Instead of responding to his demand for unconditional surrender the Burmese opened fire, which was 'heavy and well-directed'. Miles succeeded in capturing the stockade. He reported, "More than common attention had been paid in arranging the defence of the place, and the natural strength of the ground gave the greatest advantage to them. Their batteries were placed on the brows of the different hills, commanding the shipping . . . the enemy had 3,500 men in arms."<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile the Burmese were following their harassing tactics in the Dala district. They rushed from the creeks and *nullahs*, with which the country abounds, upon unarmed boats from the British garrison. They also reoccupied and repaired some of the stockades formerly captured by British troops.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mewun*, i.e., Governor.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 63(B). S. C., October 1, 1824, No. 20. *Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, p. 388.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 63(C).

General Campbell thereupon determined to drive them away not only from the stockades, but permanently to a greater distance. On September 2 Major Evans succeeded in capturing their strongholds. The Burmese escaped into the jungle; the swampy state of the country and the thickness of the jungle prevented British troops from cutting off their retreat.<sup>1</sup> A few days later the Burmese tried, unsuccessfully, to occupy a British post at Dala.<sup>2</sup>

On August 29, the Burmese made an unsuccessful attempt to capture the great Pagoda of Rangoon. An extract from the *Government Gazette*,<sup>3</sup> dated September 30, states the position as follows: "It is said, that in the Burmese army there is a corps of about 3,000 men, specially denominated warriors: of these again, some hundreds assume the title of *Invulnerables*<sup>4</sup>; both one and the other enjoying immunities unknown to other subjects, particularly the latter class, who, in general, remain about the person of the King. Lately, a large body from this redoubtable legion made a vow, that if His Majesty would send or allow them to go to Rangoon, they would retrieve the national honour by the immediate expulsion of the British army. Leave was granted, and the *Invulnerables*,<sup>5</sup> headed by the *Attawoon* of the Prince of Tharrawaddy, proposed, in the first instance, to carry by assault the great Pagoda." They appeared before the Pagoda in

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 66(B).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 65.

<sup>4</sup> See Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 70-71, 95.

<sup>5</sup> S. C., October 29, 1824, No. 17.

the darkest part of the night, but fled as soon as they were fired upon. This incident had its full effect upon the Burmese troops, already damped by fear and constant disappointment. The *Invulnerables*, instead of joining the Prince of Tharrawaddy after their defeat, fled and concealed themselves in the hills to the eastward.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the close of September General Fraser proceeded to Paulang in order to prevent the Burmese from constructing combustible rafts and boats for the destruction of British shipping. He occupied several stockades and breast-works without encountering any opposition.<sup>2</sup>

Early in October, British troops suffered a temporary reverse at Kyaikkalo. On October 5 Colonel Smith advanced with 800 men and occupied a stockade at To-da-ga-le (a village in the Rangoon district). Here a prisoner informed him that the Burmese were in considerable force in the neighbourhood, with guns and a party of horse, very strongly stockaded. Colonel Smith secured reinforcements from Rangoon and began to advance. A succession of breast-works on the route was stormed and carried. When he arrived before the stockade at Kyaikkalo, the Burmese observed a sullen silence and did not fire a shot. When British troops were ready with ladders, volleys of grape and musketry were discharged upon the party at the distance of 50 or 60 yards with an effect and regularity hitherto unequalled in Burmese warfare. Colonel

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 68A. S. C., October 29, 1824, No. 18.



Smith's men were seized with panic, and lay down to secure themselves from the 'awful and destructive fire'. He was compelled to retreat. His troops lost their discipline and 'crowded indiscriminately into one general mass'. Finally, however, the party arrived at 'To-da-ga-le without facing any trouble on the route.'

The Burmese were not allowed to exult over their victory. As soon as Colonel Smith's detachment returned to head-quarters, Brigadier McCreagh was sent by General Campbell to dislodge them from Kyaikkalo. On his way he found 'the horrid spectacle of the bodies of *Sepoys* and pioneers . . . fastened to the trunks of trees on the road side, mangled and mutilated in every manner that savage cruelty could devise'. On October 11 he arrived near the Burmese entrenchments and found that they had already evacuated a pagoda which held the key to the position. Later on he learned from a few Burmese stragglers that the *Rayhoon* (with his people, about 3,000) had retreated to a village called Kaghahie, where he had a reserve of 1,000 more people and a strong stockade. He thereupon advanced to that village. The road was 'embarrassed with felled trees' and defended with strong breast-works. But the movements of the British troops were so rapid and unexpected that the Burmese fled in all directions through the neighbouring jungle. The village itself was deserted by the inhabitants, and it was burning. The available information showed

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 69(B). *Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, p. 389. We are told that the Burmese could not follow the British due to the darkness of the night.

that the Burmese were in a state of utter dispersion and panic.<sup>1</sup>

As far back as July, 1824, General Campbell was aware that the Burmese had erected a very strong stockade at Thantabain, upon the Hlaing river. For some months this stockade was used by the Burmese as a post of observation, but in October it became the head-quarters of highly placed ministers, who received daily reinforcements and collected large supplies of military stores for the future operations of their army in that quarter.<sup>2</sup> The troops stationed at Thantabain really formed the advance division of the large army entrusted by the King to the command of his brother, the Prince of Tharrawaddy, who had established his head-quarters at Danubyu.

These preparations demanded a response. So General Campbell sent Major Evans to attack Thantabain. The naval part of the expedition was led by Captain Henry Chadds.<sup>3</sup> They reached the place on October 7. The village was defended by three long breast-works, with a very extensive stockade, constructed of large teak beams; fourteen large war boats, each mounting a gun, were anchored so as to defend the approach to it. On October 8 the principal stockade was carried by assault without a struggle. Major Evans describes it in these words: "It is, without exception, the strongest work of the kind I have ever seen—the length of the front and rear faces is two

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 70(B).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 70(C).

<sup>3</sup> Entered the Royal Navy in 1803; later promoted Rear Admiral; died in 1868.

hundred yards, and that of the side faces one hundred and fifty. It is built of strong timber, fifteen feet high, with a platform inside all round, five feet broad and eight feet from the ground—upon this platform were a number of wooden guns, and piles of single and double-headed wooden shot, and many jinjals, and below we found seven pieces of iron and brass ordnance. In front, the stockade is strengthened by breast-works and regular demi-lanes, and would contain with ease above two thousand men.” It is strange that such a place should be surrendered without a struggle by highly placed ministers. Major Evans rightly claims that this incident ‘sufficiently denoted the terror we inspired’. He returned without the loss of a single man. The Burmese must have suffered severe loss, but only 17 dead bodies were found within the stockade.<sup>1</sup>

On October 11 General Campbell sent an expedition under Colonel Henry Godwin<sup>2</sup> to capture Martaban.<sup>3</sup> The expedition reached Martaban on October 29, being delayed on the way by the ignorance of the pilots. The place was found to be ‘uncommonly strong and commanding’. Colonel Godwin wrote, “The place rests at the bottom of a very high hill,

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 70(D). S. C., November 5, 1824, No. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Entered service in 1799; served in Germany (1805) and Portugal (1808-1809); later on promoted Major-General and knighted. He commanded the British army in the Second Anglo-Burmese War. His health was shattered by exposure and privations in this war, and he died at Simla on October 26, 1853. See A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 74(A).

washed by a very beautiful and extensive sheet of water; on its right a rocky mound, on which was placed a two-gun battery, with a deep *nullah* under it. This battery communicates with the usual stockade of timber, and behind this a work of masonry, varying from twelve to twenty feet thick, with small embrasures for either cannon or musketry. The stockade runs along the margin of the water for more than three-quarters of a mile, where it joins a larger pagoda, which projects into the water in the form of a bastion. The defences then continue a short distance and end at a *nullah*, on the other side of which all is thick jungle. . . . The whole defence is the water-line, with its flanks protected." On the night of October 29 there was a cannonade from both sides. Next morning Colonel Godwin landed his troops and advanced under a heavy fire of musketry. The Governor was bold and active; he warmly defended the place at first, but evacuated the entrenchments before the British troops entered. His force suffered a severe loss.<sup>1</sup> The town was at first deserted, but the panic gradually subsided and the local inhabitants, chiefly Talaings, gradually returned. Martaban was occupied by a British detachment throughout the remainder of the war.

Towards the close of November General Campbell reported the submission of Tenasserim and the town and small province of Ye. "These places," he says, "of their own accord, requested our protection, and the whole Burmese coast, from Rangoon to the eastward, is now subject to the British arms".<sup>2</sup> Those Burmese

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 74(C).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 75(A).

troops who fled from the captured towns later on assembled in the district of Dala. There was no serious engagement in the Rangoon area during the months of October and November. This interval of comparative repose and the gradual approach of the healthy winter prepared the British troops for the renewal of operations in December.

It seems that the Burmese Court failed to grasp the real military value of the Fabian tactics which the Burmese troops had so far followed with considerable skill and success. It is possible that if they had continued the 'harassing tactics of making frequent small scale attacks on outposts and cutting off foraging parties, the Company's force would have been kept immobilised until in disgust the whole operation was abandoned'.<sup>1</sup> But the Burmese authorities were probably not quite aware of the difficulties of the British army; so they failed to measure the potentialities of their harassing tactics. Moreover, the Court was anxious for spectacular success, and there was none to point out that in pitched battles the invaders were sure to make full use of their immense superiority in artillery, training and organisation. So the only chance of liberating Rangoon was lost when the old policy was given up, and Maha Bandula, who had been recalled from Arakan soon after the battle of Ramu,<sup>2</sup> was entrusted with the task of exterminating the invaders or carrying them captives to the capital, 'where the chiefs were already calculating on the number of slaves

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<sup>1</sup> Pearn, *Burma Background*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, pp. 351-359.

who were, from this source of supply, to swell their train.<sup>1</sup> Bandula's arrival at Ava, we are told, 'acted as a spell in drawing forward the lately reluctant peasantry to range themselves under the banner of so popular a leader'.<sup>2</sup>

On October 16 General Campbell reported that Bandula had arrived at Danubyu<sup>3</sup> with 'unlimited powers'. On November 25 he wrote that he anticipated to 'have the whole strength and talent of the empire to contend with'.<sup>4</sup>

Such an attack the British troops were now not unprepared to receive. They were refreshed by two months' rest and the comparatively cold climate of early winter. The mobility of the army was increased by the arrival of 'draft cattle' from Madras.<sup>5</sup> But its numerical strength was far inferior to that of 'the whole united force of the Burma empire.' When the engagement took place the British lines were weakened by the absence of Colonel Godwin (who was then at Martaban) and Colonel Mallett (who had gone with a strong detachment 'to display the British flag in the ancient capital of Pegu'). It was probably due to this numerical weakness that General Campbell offered no

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> On the western bank of the Irrawaddy, 35 miles south of Henzada, 65 miles N.W. from Rangoon.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 71, 75(A),

<sup>5</sup> On October 16 General Campbell reported, "... 180 bullocks have arrived from Madras, and more are daily expected. They are the best caste of draft cattle on that coast, and will be highly useful." (Wilson, *Documents*, No. 71).

opposition to the advance of the Burmese army to the immediate neighbourhood of Rangoon. He wisely decided to fight within his well-protected base.

On December 8, 1824, General Campbell reported<sup>1</sup> as follows: "The long-threatened and, on my part, no less anxiously wished-for event has at length taken place: Maha Bundoola, said to be accompanied by the Princes of Tonghoo and Surrawuddy,<sup>2</sup> appeared in front of my position on the morning of the 1st instant, at the head of the whole united force of the Burma empire, amounting, upon the most moderate calculation, to from fifty to sixty thousand men,<sup>3</sup> apparently well armed, with a numerous artillery and a body of Cassay horse . . . it had pleased God to . . . crown the heroic efforts of my gallant little army with a most complete and signal victory."

Emboldened by the apparent reluctance of the British to confront them, and quite confident of success, the Burmese advanced towards Rangoon and formed a regular investment of the British lines. They extended in a semi-circle from Dala, round by Kemmendine and the Great Pagoda, to the village of Pazundaung on the creek of the same name. On December 1, they issued from the jungle and opened a smart attack upon the British post at Kemmendine. But the attack was repulsed. Then followed serious efforts on the part of the Burmese to drive the British

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 76 (A).

<sup>2</sup> Tharrawaddy.

<sup>3</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin* (Vol. II, p. 390) gives the more probable figure of 16,000.

ships at Rangoon off their station by directing against them 'tremendous fire-rafts<sup>1</sup> and crowds of war boats'. These operations were not very successful. At night the Burmese advanced and fortified a height in front of the north gate of the Pagoda. On the morning of December 2 British troops drove them from one breast-work to another, fighting them in 'the very holes they had dug, finally to prove their graves.' Colonel Mallet returned from 'the ancient capital of Pegu' (which he had found completely deserted)<sup>2</sup> and assisted General Campbell in the operations of the following days.

The Burmese spent December 3 and December 4 mainly in improving their entrenchments and in advancing close to the principal points of the British lines. The attacks upon Kemmendine continued with unabated violence. British ships successfully defended the passage of the river against 'the most furious assaults of the enemy's war-boats, advancing under cover of the most tremendous fire-rafts which the unwearied exertions of British sailors could alone have conquered.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 106) says that the Burmese fire-rafts were 'ingeniously contrived, and formidably constructed, made wholly of bamboos firmly wrought together, between every two or three rows of which a line of earthen jars of considerable size, filled with petroleum, or earth-oil and cotton, were secured; other inflammable ingredients were also distributed in different parts of the rafts, and the almost unextinguishable fierceness of the flames proceeding from them can scarcely be imagined'.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 79.

<sup>3</sup> The operations of the ships are described in detail in Wilson, *Documents*, No. 78(A), 78(B), 78(C), 78(D), 78(E).



On December 5 General Campbell directed a decisive attack against the left wing of the Burmese army. Captain Chadds, the senior naval officer, moved up to the Pazundaung creek during the night and commenced a cannonade on the Burmese rear at day-light. About 1,700 British troops attacked the Burmese and succeeded in completely defeating and dispersing them. "The Cassay<sup>1</sup> horse fled, mixed with the retreating infantry, and all their artillery, stores, and reserve depots, which had cost them so much toil and labour to get up, with a great quantity of small arms, gilt *chattahs*, standards and other trophies, fell into our hands." So wrote General Campbell in his despatch to Calcutta. He continued, "Never was victory more complete or more decided, and never was the triumph of discipline and valour over the disjointed efforts of irregular courage and infinitely superior numbers, more conspicuous."

Maha Bandula brought up the scattered remnant of his defeated left to strengthen his right and centre and carried his trenches in front of the Pagoda. On December 7 General Campbell directed an assault on these trenches. The Burmese were compelled to fly away, abandoning their guns, a great quantity of arms of every description, and the ladders they had brought to escalate the Pagoda. General Campbell wrote, "The total defeat of Bundoola's army was now fully accomplished. His loss in killed and wounded, from the nature of the ground, it is impossible to calculate, but I am confident I do not

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<sup>1</sup> Manipur.

exceed the fairest limit, when I state it at 5,000 men. In every other respect the mighty host, which so lately threatened to overwhelm us, now scarcely exists . . . Humbled, dispersing, and deprived of their arms, they cannot, for a length of time, again meet us in the field, and the lesson they have now received will, I am confident, prove a salutary antidote to the native arrogance and vanity of the Burmese nation . . . those means which the Burmese Government were seven months in organising for our annihilation, have been completely destroyed by us in the course of seven days. Of 300 pieces of ordnance that accompanied the grand army, 240 are now in our camp, and in musquets, their loss is to them irreparable." The loss on the British side was 26 killed and about 250 wounded.<sup>1</sup>

On December 9 a British detachment repulsed the remnant of the Burmese army from Dala. Many Burmese were slain in the short conflict that ensued: they were driven at the point of the bayonet into the jungle in their rear; ten good guns, with a large quantity of small arms, fell into the hands of the victors.<sup>2</sup> On December 12 a Burmese deserter told General Campbell that the Burmese would again attack the British, 'determined to sacrifice their lives at the dearest rate, as they had nothing else to expect than to do so ignominiously, by returning to the presence of their King, disgraced and defeated as they had been'. Subsequent events proved the accuracy of this state-

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 77.

ment. On the morning of December 14 Maha Bandula's emissaries set fire to Rangoon; one-fourth of the town was destroyed. Large bodies of Burmese troops were transported during the course of the day from the Dala to the Rangoon side of the river. Next morning (December 15) British troops began an attack against Burmese troops stockaded in the village of Kokaing about three miles from the Pagoda. General Campbell was 'disappointed to find that Maha Bandula did not command in person, having retired to a distance, leaving his orders with a Chief'. He proudly reported that he had secured another 'great victory'<sup>1</sup> and added, "When it is known, that thirteen hundred British infantry stormed, and carried by assault, the most formidable, entrenched and stockaded works I ever saw, defended by upwards of twenty thousand men, I trust it is unnecessary for me to say more in praise of men performing such a prodigy. The prisoners declared<sup>2</sup> that our appearance before their works, was treated by them all (from their Generals downward) with the utmost derision and contempt, so confident were they in their immense superiority in numbers, and the fancied security of the works they had constructed." There were naval engagements on the river, and Captain Chadds succeeded in securing 30 Burmese war-boats and destroying more than 150.<sup>3</sup> On January 11 and 12, 1825, a British detachment occupied a Burmese post at Syriam.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 81(A).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 81(B).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 82.

“These several actions”, says Wilson, “changed the character of the war. The Burmans no longer dared attempt offensive operations, but restricted themselves to the defence of their positions along the river . . .”<sup>1</sup> The abandonment of the Fabian tactics by the Burmese and their defeat at Kokaing altered the balance in favour of the invaders. By retreating northwards the Burmese unwisely left the Delta to the invaders, who now found it easy to secure the support of the Mons. Indeed, there was a general rising in the Delta as a result of British encouragement. The Mons supplied food and transport to the British army, and many Mons deserted the retreating Burmese army. With the support of the Mons in the rear the British Expeditionary Force could now push its way into the interior of Burma.

Maha Bandula failed to grasp the significance of the abandonment of the Delta. He established his head-quarters at Danubyu and tried to concentrate there as many men as he could attract.<sup>2</sup> Obviously his belief in the possibility of spectacular success in open battle had not been shaken by recent events, for he made no attempt to revert to the harassing tactics which had proved partly successful in the early part of the war.<sup>3</sup> But he made half-hearted attempts to negotiate for peace. In January, 1825, General Camp-

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 82, 83.

<sup>3</sup> Many years later King Tharrawaddy declared: “. . . had Bundoolali followed his advice, which was to take the jungles and carry on a guerilla warfare instead of meeting in force, the result of the war would have been very different”.

bell received a letter written by Maha Bandula to some European residents of Rangoon.<sup>1</sup> The Burmese general expressed his surprise that the British had preferred war to compliance with the Burmese demand for the surrender of the two Manipur Princes, and requested the addressees to afford him all information regarding the wishes or intentions of the invaders. Wilson remarks that this letter, 'although of a vague and indefinite character, evinced a material alteration in the temper of the chieftain, and a disposition, if not to treat for peace, to respect his antagonists. The tenour of the letter, and its address to unofficial persons, precluded its being made the basis of negotiation.'<sup>2</sup> General Campbell asked Maha Bandula to communicate with him direct. No reply was received. Whether Bandula acted under the orders of the Court or on his own initiative, we do not know.

Towards the close of January it was reported that Maha Bandula was maintaining a sullen and suspicious attitude at Danubyu. He was unwilling to hold any communication with any one not living within the pale of his own defence, because he was afraid of the King's resentment. A Burmese Chief who had collected 20,000 men was vainly trying to gain access to him.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to assess the truth of these rumours which reached the British camp at frequent intervals.

As early as March, 1824, Sir Thomas Munro had

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 119.

suggested<sup>1</sup> the desirability of encouraging the Mons to throw off the Burmese yoke. Later on he wrote,<sup>2</sup> "As the southern and most fertile provinces of the Burman empire were formerly under Pegu, it would perhaps be advisable to proclaim the restoration of the ancient family, and to guarantee to it the possession of whatever part of its old territory might be recovered from Ava. Were this done, Sir Archibald Campbell would soon have a friendly instead of a hostile country, along a great part of the line of his operations. If we hold out to the people no hope of their not being placed again under their ancient sovereign, but leave them to suppose, that whenever our troops are withdrawn, they are again to fall under the Burman Government, we must expect no co-operation from them, but to be harassed by their withholding supplies and cutting off stragglers." To these arguments Lord Amherst replied,<sup>3</sup> "We are at present quite in the dark as to the existence of a single individual of their former royal race . . . Nothing like a disposition to revolt has at any time manifested itself, I believe, during the present generation; and as circumstances are at this moment, I imagine it would be hopeless to expect that we could excite a disposition to throw off a yoke which has long ceased, at least, to be a foreign one." Sir Thomas Munro recognised the force of these views, but did not 'despair of such an event (*i.e.*, revolt of Pegu) taking place'. He wrote,<sup>4</sup> "We know that in

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<sup>1</sup> Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, pp. 123-124.

<sup>3</sup> Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, pp. 125-126.

India, when a race of ancient princes has been extirpated, persons claiming descent from them frequently start up to recover their real or pretended rights . . . there can, I think, be no doubt that . . . the same would happen in Pegu. What we want there is some party hostile to the Government; we should derive from it information regarding the roads and the country and aid in procuring provisions. We want no military assistance . . .”

If the testimony of Snodgrass is to be believed, Sir Thomas Munro's view regarding the hostility between the Burmese and the Mons was to a large extent exaggerated. Snodgrass says, “The disappearance of every trace of the royal family of Pegu, the cruel policy of the conquerors in exterminating or driving into perpetual banishment every chief and man of weight, and their subsequent judicious system of amalgamation with the conquered, had well nigh obliterated all remembrance of ancient independence in most parts of the country (*i.e.*, Pegu) . . .” Under the A-laung-pa-ya dynasty the conquerors and the conquered—the Burmese and the Mons—enjoyed equal rights and privileges; both were equally eligible for the highest posts under the Government. Many Mons were, indeed, anxious to exchange ‘the iron sceptre which had so long ruled them’ for ‘the mild and equitable sway’ of their British conquerors; but Snodgrass found no trace of ‘any distinct national feeling or wish to regain independence’.<sup>1</sup> This view is also supported by Robertson's observation that the

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<sup>1</sup> *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 87-89.

assistance received by the British army from the Mons was paid for and was nothing more than a commercial arrangement.<sup>1</sup>

The Mon refugees in Siam, however, fulfilled Sir Thomas Munro's expectations by trying to 'recover their real or pretended rights.' They were prepared to join the British army with the purpose of avenging the slaughter of their fathers and grand-fathers, and their ultimate aim was the restoration of Mon rule in Pegu. They were encouraged by a proclamation<sup>2</sup> issued by General Campbell, asking them to place themselves under British protection and inviting them to choose a chief whom the British authorities were prepared to recognize. Many Mon soldiers in the Burmese army deserted.<sup>3</sup> On April 16, 1826, Sir Thomas Munro wrote to the Duke of Wellington,<sup>4</sup> "I believe that there is no man who is not now convinced, that the Taliens deserted the Burman Government, sought independence, and in the hope of obtaining it, though without any pledge on our part, aided in supplying all our wants with a zeal which could not have been surpassed by our subjects."

The hostility of the Mons to the Burmese Government was encouraged by the King of Siam,<sup>5</sup> who was prepared to adopt a friendly attitude to the enemies of his hereditary foe. Lord Amherst wrote to Sir Thomas Munro on April 2, 1824, "The Siamese. inve-

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<sup>1</sup> *Political Incidents of the Burmese War*, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 121(B).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 121(A).

<sup>4</sup> Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 119, 120.



terate enemies of the Burmese, would cause a most powerful diversion in the south. The aid to be derived from the Siamese, in the event of protracted hostilities, has entered deeply into our calculation. But I am not disposed, if we can possibly avoid it, to engage too largely in the intrigues and politics of the Indo-Chinese nations, or to enter into engagements which we are not prepared at all hazards to fulfil . . . The balance is now tolerably equal between them (*i.e.*, the Burmese and the Siamese), and they help to keep each other in order." Sir Thomas Munro replied on May 8, 1824, ". . . such Kingdoms as these (*i.e.*, Burma and Siam) are in a perpetual state of fluctuation, and can never, for any long period, remain like the old governments of Europe, within the same limits. Our best policy is not to look so much to the preservation of any balance between them, as to the weakening of that power which is most able to disturb our frontier."<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass gives an account of Siamese policy which may not be far from the truth. The King of Siam was alarmed when the British captured Mergui and Tavoy; he knew that the establishment of a British settlement in Tenasserim was 'fraught with danger' to his country. The Burmese negotiated with him and asked him to join them against the British. Courted from both sides, the King of Siam 'thought it proper to pursue a safer course, endeavouring to persuade both parties of his friendly disposition and determination of taking an early part in the war, but cautiously abstaining from any decided hostility on either side.' He did not

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<sup>1</sup> Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, pp. 110-111, 115-116.

entertain favourable opinions about the chances of British success against Burma, and the danger to his capital due to its exposure to naval attack was probably the only factor which prevented him from trying to seize Tenasserim from the British.<sup>1</sup>

It was now possible for the British army to advance northward to the capital of Burma, for Bandula's great army had lost its unity and morale, and the friendly attitude of the Mons could be relied on for the defence of the Rangoon area. There were, however, some great difficulties yet to be solved. "There was no doubt that a similar policy would be pursued in the interior that had been adopted at Rangoon, for which purpose a considerable force must be left there, and at difficult points on the line of march, and, above all, the navigation of the Irawadi was to be commanded by a numerous and well-equipped Flotilla. Whatever carriage was required for the baggage, artillery, and stores, was procurable only by sea from Bengal and Madras, from whence few of the class of bearers or coolies would consent to embark, and the transport of cattle was attended with much delay and loss. The Bengal cattle were also found too small and feeble for effective field service, and the chief dependence was necessarily placed on those sent from Madras, which had been shipped with great promptitude for the use of the army. Still, the whole number of available cattle was far from adequate to the transport of guns, ammunition, and provisions . . ."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 80-82.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 62.

Another difficulty related to the selection of the route from Rangoon to Ava. Sir Archibald Campbell rejected Captain Canning's old scheme<sup>1</sup> and proposed that he should advance by land. Lord Amherst thought that it would be better to remove the army (leaving only a defensive garrison at Rangoon) to Arakan and to proceed to Ava through one of the passes of the Arakan Yoma mountains.<sup>2</sup> Reports were collected about the comparative advantages and disadvantages of three passes, of which the An was the most important.<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Munro naturally joined this discussion and expressed his views as follows:<sup>4</sup> "The original plan of the invasion of Ava was romantic and visionary, and was, I believe, suggested by Captain Canning. It was, that Sir A. Campbell, after occupying Rangoon and collecting a sufficient number of boats, should, with the help of the south-west wind, proceed against the stream to Ummarapoorra at once. This, even if it had been practicable, was too hazardous, as it would have exposed the whole force to destruction, from the intercepting of its supplies . . . even if there had been a sufficient number of boats, Sir A. Campbell would have been justified, by our ignorance of the country and of the enemy, in not making the attempt until he should have received more troops, to leave detachments at different places on the river, to keep open his communication with Rangoon. When

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<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, pp. 327-328.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., August 6, 1824, No. 4.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., August 13, 1824, No. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Sullivan, July 11, 1825. Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, pp. 150-151.

Captain Canning's plan of sailing to the capital was abandoned, two others were thought of, but both were impracticable: one was to proceed in the dry season by land from Pegu; the other was to re-embark the troops, land somewhere on the coast of Aracan, and march from thence through the hills to the Irawaddy. I said that re-embarkation would be attended with the most disgraceful and disastrous consequence; that the measure would be supposed to have proceeded from fear, that it would encourage the enemy, and would deter the people of the country, wherever we might again land, from coming near us, or bringing us provisions for sale; that we knew nothing of the coast of Aracan or the interior; that if the troops landed there, they would be in greater distress than at Rangoon, because they would find less rice, and be as much exposed to the weather; that they could not possibly penetrate into the country without carriage cattle, of which they had none;<sup>1</sup> and that they could be at last compelled to re-embark again, without effecting anything. I said that the nature of the country, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Munro wrote to Lord Amherst on February 2, 1825, "Sir Archibald Campbell had never distinctly stated what number of carriage bullocks would enable him to act efficiently: it does not appear to me that less than four, five, or perhaps six thousand, would answer the purpose . . . He wants bullocks much more than soldiers." (Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, pp. 140-141).

Sir Thomas Munro wrote to Lord Amherst on January 15, 1825, ". . . the inhabitants of all these countries (between Rangoon and Martaban), if well treated, will be ready to sell cattle to our army at cheaper rates, and in greater numbers, than they can possibly be sent from India." (Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 139).

difficulty of sending draught and carriage cattle by sea, pointed out clearly that our main line of operation could only be by the course of the Irawaddy, partly by land and partly by water, and that this would give us the double advantage of passing through the richest part of the enemy's country, and of cutting off his communication with it ... ”

We make no apology for having quoted this long extract, because it gives in a nutshell all relevant arguments for and against the different routes.<sup>1</sup> The route advocated by Sir Thomas Munro was finally adopted.<sup>2</sup> A detachment, about 2,400 strong, advanced by land under General Campbell's own leadership; another, about 1,200 strong, proceeded by water under the command of General Cotton. The flotilla consisted of 62 boats. A third detachment, about 800 strong, was sent to Bassein, where the inhabitants had manifested a friendly disposition. The rest of the force, consisting of nearly 4,000 effective men, was left in Rangoon under the command of Brigadier McCreagh, who was instructed to form a reserve column and to follow the advancing detachment as soon as means of transport could be collected. All arrangements being completed, General Campbell began to march on February 13, 1825.<sup>3</sup>

The land column proceeded along a narrow and difficult path, a short distance from the left bank of the Hlaing river, gradually pushing in a north-westerly direction towards the Irawaddy. During his march

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<sup>1</sup> See also S. C., August 26, 1825, No. 78.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., August 26, 1825, No. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 123(A), 123(B).

General Campbell was 'received with kindness and friendship' by the villagers. He tried to 'confirm the hope of peace they entertained' by issuing a proclamation<sup>1</sup> promising to alleviate the miseries of the Burmese subjects. The proclamation had its effect, for it brought to the British army some assistance in rice, road-making and slaughter-buffaloes.<sup>2</sup>

The water column under General Cotton<sup>3</sup> advanced slowly and took position near Danubyu on March 5. Here Maha Bandula was waiting, with the whole Burmese force at his back.<sup>4</sup> On March 7 General Cotton attacked one of Bandula's outworks and carried it, with a loss to the Burmese of about 500 men.<sup>5</sup> But an attack against the principal stockade<sup>6</sup> failed and he decided not to make any further attack until he was re-inforced. The incident was reported to General Campbell, who had in the meantime advanced a few miles above Tharrawaddy. He at once decided to attack Danubyu and returned to

<sup>1</sup> February 1, 1825. Wilson, *Documents*, No. 124(B).

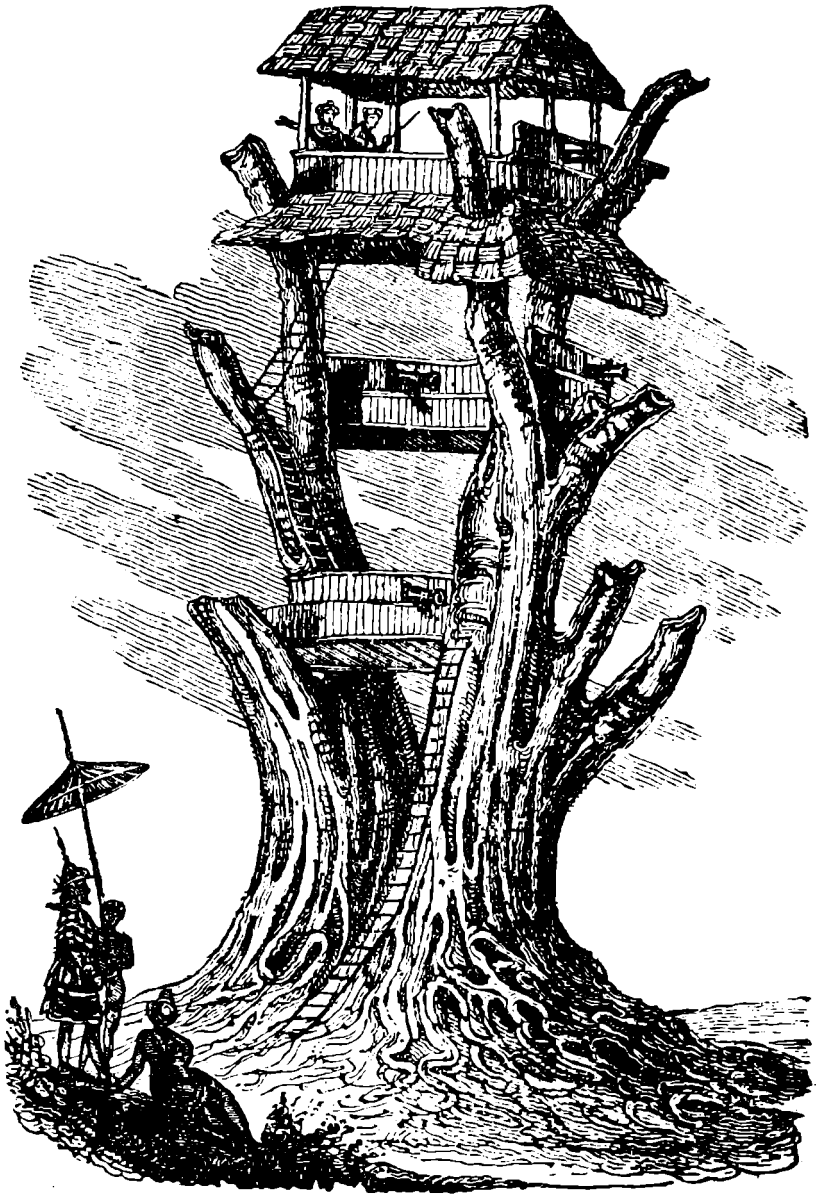
<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 124(A).

<sup>3</sup> Entered service in 1798; became Commander-in-Chief, Bombay; died, 1860.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 124(A). Bandula is said to have sent the following reply to General Cotton's summons for surrender: "We are each fighting for his country, and you will find me as steady in defending mine, as you in maintaining the honour of yours." (Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 66).

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 125(C).

<sup>6</sup> It was 'composed of solid beams of teak, from 15 to 17 feet high; behind which were the thick ramparts, the whole surrounded by a large deep ditch, filled with spikes, nails, and holes, and beyond it several rows of palisading, and an abatis of great breadth'. (*Historical Record of the First Madras European Regiment*, p. 471).



Bandula's observation post—Mounting four guns.

Tharrawaddy, from which place his force crossed the Irrawaddy. The passage occupied about six days (March 13-18), and the General's head-quarters were established at Henzada. The army then resumed its march and reached Danubyu on March 25. Contact was established with the Flotilla, and batteries, strengthened by heavy artillery, were constructed. On March 29 General Campbell reported to the Supreme Government, "We are now, night and day, employed in preparations for the reduction of Donabew. It is commanded by Maha Bundoola in person, and the garrison is rated at fifteen thousand fighting men, of whom ten thousand are musqueteers."<sup>1</sup>

On April 2 General Campbell occupied the fort and different redoubts of Danubyu, with all the ordnance, stores, depots, etc.; the Burmese had evacuated them in a hurry in the course of the previous night.<sup>2</sup> Maha Bandula was killed by a rocket while going his rounds on the morning of April 1. His death caused a panic among the troops, and no entreaty on the part of the other commanders could prevail upon them to remain longer together.<sup>3</sup> Eleven Burmese war-boats and a large number of other boats were captured.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 125(A).

<sup>2</sup> S. C., May 6, 1825, No. 13.

<sup>3</sup> His brother tried at first to conceal the news of his death in order to prevent confusion in the army. (*Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, p. 397). Snodgrass (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 175) says that the retreat after Bandula's death was effected 'with such silence and circumspection as would have been a lesson to the best-disciplined army in Europe'.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 126.



“The death of Bundoola,” says Wilson. “was a severe blow to the Burmese cause. He was the chief instigator of the war, and its strenuous advocate, and, in courage and readiness of resource, displayed great abilities to maintain the contest. He was a low and illiterate man, who had risen to power by his bravery and audacity. When the war broke out he professed himself ready, and no doubt thought himself able, to lead a Burman army to the capital of British India, and wrest from its Government the lower districts of Bengal”.<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass also praises Bandula’s military skill: “The management of a Burmese army, for so long a period contending against every disadvantage to which a general can be subjected, evinced no small degree of talent, while the position and defences at Donoobew, as a field-work, would have done credit to the most scientific engineer . . .” Nor did this resourceful general lack in personal courage. Although he did not expose himself to unnecessary risk, “he did not hesitate, when circumstances required it, to allow himself to be hemmed in at Donoobew, where he boldly declared he would conquer or die, and till he actually fell, set his men the first example of the courage he required in all.”<sup>2</sup>

General Campbell left Danubyu on April 3, crossed the Irrawaddy, and arrived at Tharawaddy a week later. There he was joined by the reserve column from Rangoon under Brigadier McCreagh. Then the General pushed northward to Prome. The Prince

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<sup>1</sup> *Historical Sketch*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 176-177.

of Tharrawaddy, who commanded the Burmese army, had recently received a reinforcement of 6,000 men from Ava; but instead of offering opposition he fell back as the British force advanced. So the British troops continued their march without opposition or annoyance of any kind on the part of the Burmese. As a matter of fact, except the totally deserted state of the country, and the consequent difficulty of obtaining supplies of any kind, the line of march was not marked by any act of systematic hostility after General Campbell's departure from Rangoon. It was reported from Rangoon that the chiefs of Syriam and Dala had voluntarily made their submission and that a Siamese army was marching towards Martaban.<sup>1</sup>

On April 19 General Campbell received a letter from two high officials of the Burmese Court, expressing a desire for the restoration of peace. He replied that he was ready to enter into negotiations if duly authorised envoys were sent to him. In reply the Burmese officials, who were probably acting under the guidance of the Prince of Tharrawaddy, professed satisfaction and requested General Campbell to halt where he had already arrived, instead of marching to Prome.<sup>2</sup> General Campbell suspected that "the retention of Prome was more at heart than any serious wish or direct authority to sue for peace." His suspicion was confirmed by the report that 30 pieces of brass artillery and a considerable reinforcement in troops were on their way down from the capital. So he replied that

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 127(A), 128(A).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 128(A), 128(B), 128(C), 129(B).

he would march to Prome, but halt at a certain distance from the town for the purpose of receiving the Burmese deputies. This letter could not be delivered, for, when his messenger reached Prome, he found the place already deserted by Burmese officials and troops.<sup>1</sup> Thereupon General Campbell marched to Prome and took possession of the city on April 26 without firing a shot.<sup>2</sup> The Burmese had left about 100 pieces of artillery and extensive granaries well-filled with grain. The town was on fire when the British force entered it. General Campbell wrote, "The surrounding hills were generally fortified to their very summits, and commanded our advance, presenting a position of a very formidable appearance, and, in reality, so naturally strong, that 10,000 steady soldiers could have defended it against any attack of ten times that force. The stockade itself is complete, and great labour must have been bestowed upon it; indeed, both in materials, and workmanship, it surpasses anything we have hitherto seen in this country . . . The inhabitants are coming in great numbers, and even chiefs of towns and villages are now suing for passes of protection."<sup>3</sup>

After leaving Prome the Prince of Tharrawaddy retired direct to the capital, with the remnants of his

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 129(A), 131(A).

<sup>2</sup> See *Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, p. 400.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 130, 139. S. C., May 27, 1825, No. 11. Pemberton (*The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 153) says that 'the inhabitants of the district and city of Prome came forward, and assisted in establishing the communications between the advancing army and its then distant magazines at Rangoon, which so materially contributed to the ultimate success of the campaign'.

force.<sup>1</sup> It seems that he was now sincerely desirous of terminating the war. He visited the capital for the express purpose of advocating a treaty of peace, in opposition to the 'infatuated' views of the war party of the *Hluttaw* (Royal Council), at the head of which were the Queen and her brother.

The approach of the rainy season compelled the British force to establish itself in cantonments at Prome.<sup>2</sup> Wilson says, "Previous to the setting in of the rains, the thermometer had risen in the shade to 110°, but the nights remained cool, and the climate was not found unhealthy. The monsoon brought with it its ordinary effects upon the condition of the troops, but by no means to the same extent as in the previous season at Rangoon, the face of the country being mountainous, and free from swamps, and of some considerable elevation above the sea." The people resumed their usual avocations and began to form markets along the river, and especially at Prome and Rangoon, by which the resources of the country now began to be fully available for carriage and support.<sup>3</sup> The troops remained inactive during the months of June, July and August. "The monsoon, however, proved mild: the men were comfortably hutted: there was no want of provisions, and, although extensive

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 131(A).

<sup>2</sup> At Prome General Campbell collected the bells found in the pagodas, in order to prevent the Burmese from utilising the metal for warlike purposes. The Supreme Government warned him not to do anything which might wound the religious susceptibilities of the Burmese. (S. C., November 4, 1825, No. 15, 16)..

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 67.

sickness occurred, it was not more than was fairly attributable to the nature of the service and the season of the year, and was by no means so severe as that of the previous rains at Rangoon, nor, indeed, more so than it would have been in any of the lower Gangetic provinces. The casualties were comparatively few.”<sup>1</sup>

After the occupation of Prome General Campbell sent a detachment under Colonel Godwin towards Toungoo, in order to ascertain the state of the country and the strength of the Burmese army in that district. Colonel Godwin left Prome on May 5 and marched in a north-easterly course till May 11. “The troops having got into a mountainous country, with heavy roads, want of water, the probability of the monsoon, and the total absence of all supplies in this almost uninhabited country, determined me to change my route,” said he in his report to General Campbell. He turned to the left and came to Mye-de, 60 miles above Prome, which he found totally deserted. Then he turned directly south and reached Prome on May 23, making a circuit of 139 miles. Nowhere did he find any Burmese soldier. Everywhere the inhabitants seemed to be friendly.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile events had been moving rapidly in Lower Burma. On the south-east, a British detachment occupied Bassein without any opposition on March 3.<sup>3</sup> The place continued to be occupied by British troops throughout the war. On the south-east the Siamese had already begun troublesome harassing

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 125(D).

incursions into Tenasserim.<sup>1</sup> On January 29 some Siamese boats appeared near Mergui. A party of *sepoys* being sent to meet them, the Siamese Chief promised to release all the prisoners he had taken. All the prisoners, however, were not released. The Siamese Chief suddenly left Mergui. Early in February the British Commander at Mergui received information that the town of Tenasserim and some small villages had been plundered by the same Siamese Chief, who had also carried off a large number of the inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Towards the end of March about 1,600 Siamese landed near Tenasserim.<sup>3</sup> It was ascertained that a highly placed Siamese Chief did not believe that Tenasserim was under British protection and ordered his men to carry off every one they could lay hold on. There was a brisk exchange of fire between a Siamese party and British *sepoys*.<sup>4</sup> This determined opposition had the desired effect; the Siamese never again ventured to molest the territories under British occupation. "The negotiations also that presently ensued with the Court of Bangkok, not only contributed to

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<sup>1</sup> "Although no declared war existed between the powers of Ava and Siam, active hostilities had been only suspended for some years past, by the mutual fears and weakness of the parties, and a system of border-inroads had been maintained, by which the countries on the confines of the two states had been almost depopulated. The Siamese . . . annually made incursions, especially into the districts of Ye, Tavoi, and Mergui, and carried off the inhabitants, whom they detained in slavery."—Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 68. See Wilson, *Documents*, No. 136(B).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 135(A), 135(B).

prevent the repetition of the predatory incursions, but eventually obtained the liberation of almost all the Burman inhabitants who had thus been carried into bondage."<sup>1</sup>

Before leaving Rangoon in February, General Campbell had directed Colonel Smith, British Commander at Martaban, 'to cultivate a good understanding with the Siamese; and to encourage the disaffected Peguers, without entering into the slightest pledge or promise, beyond mere countenance and support . . .'<sup>2</sup> Towards the end of February some deputies from the Siamese army came to see Colonel Smith at Rangoon, where he was waiting to receive them. On their arrival there he started with them for Martaban, where he reached on March 5. The deputies were then furnished with a letter addressed to the Siamese Commander,<sup>3</sup> Ron na Ron,<sup>4</sup> who was a Talaing refugee in Siam. On March 7 another deputation from the Siamese camp came to see Colonel Smith at Martaban, and signified their readiness to assist the British force against the Burmese. Ron na Ron promised through this deputation to see Colonel Smith; but on March 14 a letter<sup>5</sup> was received from him, stating that he had been asked to return to Siam by the King, because the rainy season was at hand and the services of the troops were required for the cultivation of the country. It seems that throughout these negotiations Ron na Ron was

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 123(A).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 137(B).

<sup>4</sup> That is the name found in the English documents.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 137(D).

acting in violation of the instructions which he had received from the Siamese King and was planning to establish himself as a ruling Chief in the province of Pegu with the assistance of the British army and some Talaing Chiefs. The Siamese ministers submitted to the King an exaggerated account of his activities, and thus procured his recall.<sup>1</sup> A few days later Colonel Smith received a friendly letter from the Prime Minister of Siam,<sup>2</sup> who stated that he had allowed the Burmese living in Siam to return to their own country, and intimated that after the rainy season a Siamese army would be sent to assist the British. The British authorities were not at all eager to secure the co-operation of the Siamese army. Wilson says, "The aid of a Siamese army could be but nominal, and the presence of an undisciplined rabble would only be formidable to the provinces now subjected to the British authority".<sup>3</sup>

In June the Talaing inhabitants of 'old Pegu' rose in rebellion and expelled *Thekia Woongyee*,<sup>4</sup> who commanded the Burmese troops there. At the request of the Talaings 200 *sepoys* were sent for their protection. It was expected that the fertile province of Pegu would supply British troops with provisions, elephants and boats.<sup>5</sup>

The news of Maha Bandula's death and the capture of Danubyu and Prome created a temporary panic

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 137(F).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> That is the name found in the English documents.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 141(B).



in the Burmese Court,<sup>1</sup> but a few enterprising Ministers, especially the *Pagham Woongyee*,<sup>2</sup> promised to drive the invaders from the country. Elaborate measures were taken to prepare the ground for the resumption of offensive operations on the expiry of the rainy season. High bounties, as much as Rs. 170 per man, were paid to induce men to enlist in the army. By the end of June a considerable force assembled at Ava. Early in July a British reconnoissance party found about 4,000 men cantoned near a village 84 miles from Prome.<sup>3</sup>

The uncompromising attitude of the Burmese made it clear that the war was going to be indefinitely prolonged. In spite of the definite improvement in his position General Campbell was reluctant to face another rainy season in the Irrawaddy valley. Moreover, the expenses of the war were exceeding all previous calculations, and it was not the desire of the Supreme Government to urge the Burmese to extremities. So General Campbell decided to open informal negotiations for peace, hoping, perhaps, that the consciousness of weakness had partly changed the atmosphere at Ava. He sent a private letter to the Prince of Tharrawaddy through one of the latter's confidential servants, whom he found at Prome, stating that the British Government was prepared to terminate the war 'whenever the Court of Ava should be inclined to offer reparation for the injuries which had provoked it, and

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<sup>1</sup> Gouger (*Personal Narrative*, p. 238) says that Bandula's brother, who came to the Court with the despatches, was executed.

<sup>2</sup> That is the name found in the English documents.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 71.

to indemnify the British Government for the expense'. No answer was received.<sup>1</sup> Reports about popular discontent and the peaceful deposition of the King, which later on proved incorrect, led Sir Archibald Campbell to renew his overtures in August.<sup>2</sup> He requested the Burmese Ministers to consider the awful responsibility they owed to both their King and country, and warned them against 'a further perseverance in the war'. He expressed his desire to conclude peace with any person or persons duly accredited to meet him for that purpose.<sup>3</sup> No response, however, came immediately. The Queen and her brother maintained their ascendancy over the King and the policy of peace found no favour in the Court.<sup>4</sup>

Early in August General Campbell came to know that about 20,000 men, apparently well armed, and with a large proportion of artillery, had come to Mye-de<sup>5</sup> and entrenched their position. The whole force in motion, under the command of the King's half brother, was estimated at not far short of 40,000. Besides collecting this army, the Court was making other preparations of considerable magnitude. It was reported that 20,000 baskets of paddy had been sent to Mye-de from the capital, that the King had melted down a number of silver bars in the treasury, that Burmese officers were waiting at Mye-de to take charge of Lower Burma as soon as the British were expelled, and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> A small town in the Thayetmyo district.

that the King had liberally given money to the army from his private treasury.<sup>1</sup>

As the Burmese army advanced southward and collected information about the preparations of the British General, its 'menacing aspect' was 'suddenly changed to pacific demonstrations'. On September 6 a Burmese deputation came to General Campbell at Prome<sup>2</sup> and delivered a letter from officers of the advance army. They wrote, "Now we well know that the Siamese cannot come. But if it be your wish that our two countries should be on the same terms of amity and friendship as formerly, come and solicit the King's youngest brother, who has received authority over the large Burmese armies, and is fully empowered by the King to treat, and you will receive your answer according to the tenor of your terms".<sup>3</sup> Wilson writes, "This style was not very conciliatory, but being the court language, it was not thought proper to object to it, beyond pointing out its impropriety to the deputies, and explaining to them, that although the English General was willing to meet Burman commanders half-way, he could not condescend to seek them in their entrenchments."<sup>4</sup> General Campbell sent a formal reply<sup>5</sup> to the letter through a complimentary mission of two British officers.<sup>6</sup> They were treated with great respect and kindness; but they had to wait for a few

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 144(A).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 144(B).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 144(C).

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 144(A).

days in the Burmese camp, because the commander could not accept any terms without receiving beforehand the instructions of the King's brother who was at Me-lown. Their free intercourse with the Burmese convinced them that there was no reason to doubt their sincerity.<sup>1</sup> On September 17 they signed an armistice,<sup>2</sup> and returned to Prome on September 19.<sup>3</sup> The armistice provided for the cessation of hostilities for one month, drew a line of demarcation between the two armies, commencing at Kama<sup>4</sup> on the western bank of the Irrawaddy to Thongo, and arranged that British and Burmese plenipotentiaries would meet at the village of Nyaungbinzeik,<sup>5</sup> half-way between the two armies, on October 2 and settle the terms of peace. General Campbell reported that he was not very hopeful about the successful conclusion of these negotiations: "such is the consummate pride and presumption of the people I have to deal with."<sup>6</sup>

On October 2 General Campbell, accompanied by six British officers, including Sir James Brisbane, Commander of the Royal Naval Forces in the Indian Seas, met the Burmese envoys at Nyaungbinzeik. The Burmese envoys made every effort to be 'civil and obliging'. At their request the armistice was extended for two weeks more (*i.e.*, to November 2 next). This concession General Campbell could easily make, because

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 145(B), 145(C).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 145(D).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 145(A).

<sup>4</sup> In the Thayetmyo district, about 25 miles above Prome.

<sup>5</sup> Thayetmyo district, east of the Irrawaddy.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 145(A).

owing to the continued wetness of the ground he could not move with comfort to his troops before the middle of November.<sup>1</sup> The envoys required this extension of the period of armistice because they could not accept General Campbell's demands without reference to the capital. They were asked to renounce their claims upon Assam, Manipur and Cachar, to cede the province of Arakan to the East India Company, to pay two *crores* of rupees as war indemnity,<sup>2</sup> to receive a British Resident at Ava, and to conclude a commercial treaty. In vain did they refer to the serious losses already inflicted by the war upon Burma and appeal to the generosity of the English. General Campbell refused to yield. The Burmese envoys anxiously waited for news from the capital. There the demands of the British General were considered extremely humiliating, and it was decided to resume military operations.<sup>3</sup> On October 29 General Campbell received a letter<sup>4</sup> from the Burmese envoys, who complained that the English General had not acted sincerely<sup>5</sup> and said, "However, after the

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 146(A), 146(B).

<sup>2</sup> One *crore* was to be paid immediately, and the Tenasserim province was to be retained by the British until the full payment of the remaining sum.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 149(C).

Wilson remarks, "The Court of Ava, indignant at the idea of conceding an inch of territory, or submitting to what, in oriental politics, is held a mark of excessive humiliation, payment of any pecuniary indemnification, breathed nothing but defiance, and determined instantly to prosecute the war." (*Historical Sketch*, p. 76). But how could Bo-daw-pa-ya's grandson give up his conquests?

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 149(B).

<sup>5</sup> "By command of a Burrasahib, armed sepoy, ships, and boats, passed to Rangoon by way of Modeen (Cape Negrais) and

termination of the armistice between us, if you shew any inclination to renew your demands for money for your expenses, or any territory from us, you are to consider our friendship at an end.”<sup>1</sup>

Information collected from various sources by General Campbell showed that about 49,000 Burmese troops had assembled at various places between Ava and Mye-de.<sup>2</sup> The whole force was slowly advancing towards the British position at Prome. General Campbell protected the right flank by stationing a detachment under Colonel Pepper at ‘old Pegu’<sup>3</sup>; the detachment stationed at Bassein was considered strong enough to protect the left. Owing to the continued wetness of the ground and ‘the yet incomplete concentration of resources’ it was not possible for the main British army to march northward at once. So General Campbell tried to allure the Burmese to begin a direct attack on Prome.<sup>4</sup>

In November, 1825, a difference of opinion arose between the Commander-in-Chief<sup>5</sup> and the Governor-

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officers with troops, from Megawaddy (Cheduba) crossed over to Sandway, and are in motion. This shews no wish or desire for peace . . . .”

<sup>1</sup> An amusing account of these negotiations is given in *Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, pp. 403-406. General Campbell is represented as anxious for peace due to his fear of Burmese strength. Snodgrass (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp. 214-224) gives full details. He accompanied General Campbell to Nyaungbinzeik.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 149(C).

<sup>3</sup> Colonel Pepper occupied several Burmese outposts in January, 1826. See Wilson, *Documents*, No. 162(B), 162(C), 163(D).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>5</sup> Lord Combermere had already succeeded Sir Edward Paget.

General about the expediency of advancing upon Ava. Lord Combermere argued that it would require more than one campaign to complete a march of 300 miles (from Prome to the capital), for the march from Rangoon to Prome (a distance of 150 miles) had taken more than a year. General Morrison could not advance upon Ava through the passes of the Arakan Yoma, for he had reported that it would require the labour of 4,000 men for six weeks 'to open a practicable road into Ava from Arakan'. No co-operation could be expected from the people of Pegu.<sup>1</sup> The Burmese might allow General Campbell to advance without opposition and desert the capital; would not the British army then find itself 'in a situation from which the utmost bravery and determination may hardly release it'? So Lord Combermere suggested that General Campbell 'should be instructed to make Prome the base of his future operations, endeavouring to bring the enemy to action whenever he can ascertain that a considerable force is within reach of him'.<sup>2</sup> Lord Amherst thought that General Campbell had sufficient troops to protect his flank and rear, that his march to the capital would not occupy so much time as Lord Combermere considered necessary, and that the desertion of the capital by the Burmese would not compel the

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<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, pp. 402-404. Robertson remarks on the relations of the Peguers with the Burmese, ". . . the lapse of seventy years, and a greatly improved administration on their part, had, by removing invidious distinctions, and placing conquerors and conquered on a footing of equality, done much towards reconciling the latter to their lot."—*Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., November 11, 1825, No. 17.

British army to beat a disastrous retreat. On the other hand, he observed, "the fact of reaching the enemy's capital and compelling the royal family to save themselves by flight must have a most advantageous effect both in the history of the present war and in lessening the probability of wars with Ava in future".<sup>1</sup> Owing to this fundamental disagreement between the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, the Supreme Government left the question of marching upon Ava to the discretion of General Campbell, the man on the spot.

Towards the middle of November General Campbell sent a detachment to dislodge the Burmese from Wethtikan,<sup>2</sup> about 20 miles from Prome. The attempt proved disastrous.<sup>3</sup> Colonel McDowall attacked the left flank of the Burmese, but, finding that the strength of the Burmese position and their numerical superiority were too formidable for assault, he retreated. Major Evans attacked the front of the Burmese, but he failed to effect a junction with Colonel McDowall. A 'heavy, well-directed and destructive fire' from the Burmese compelled him to retreat. The troops were exhausted, and, no guide being available, took a wrong road. Colonel Smith, at the head of another regiment, appeared before the Burmese force, but, being unable to join Colonel McDowall, retreated. He reported that he had 'no option left but to retreat or permit himself to be surrounded by an overwhelming force, without hopes of succour or sub-

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., November 11, 1825, No. 19.

<sup>2</sup> A village in the Prome district.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 150, 151(A), 151(B), 151(C), 151(D).



sistence of any kind'. On the whole, 2 officers (including Colonel McDowall) were killed and 11 officers were wounded.<sup>1</sup>

Encouraged by this success, the Burmese advanced southward, spread over a considerable area, sending detachments past both flanks of the British position, and thus almost encircled it. The British communications between Prome and Rangoon were threatened, and the Delta on both sides of the Irrawaddy was exposed to the depredations of irregular Burmese bands. General Campbell took prompt measures, for the question of securing the safety of the large and valuable convoys of stores and treasure running in the Irrawaddy naturally caused him much anxiety. Colonel Godwin cleared the left bank of the river for 15 miles below Prome. A detachment was stationed at Podoun-myo<sup>2</sup> with a view to command the western bank of the river.<sup>3</sup> Although repeatedly attacked by the Burmese, it succeeded in maintaining its position.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of their numerical superiority the Burmese were apparently unwilling to leave the cover of the jungle and to offer a direct challenge to their enemy. They preferred harassing tactics. Their army, about 60,000 strong, was divided into three corps, two of which occupied the east bank of the Irrawaddy. The left corps, about 15,000 strong, commanded by *Maha Nemio*,<sup>5</sup> an old and experienced general deputed from

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<sup>1</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin*, Vol. II, pp. 407-408.

<sup>2</sup> Town in Prome district.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 152(A).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 152(B), 152(C), 152(D).

<sup>5</sup> That is the name found in the English documents.

the capital to introduce a new system of conducting the war, was stockaded in the jungles at Simbigon and Hyalay, upon the Na-weng<sup>1</sup> river. The centre, under the command of the *Kee-Woon-ghee*,<sup>2</sup> consisting of 30,000 men, was strongly entrenched in an almost inaccessible position on the hills of Napadee, a commanding ridge on the Irrawaddy. The right, under the orders of *Suddoowoon*,<sup>3</sup> occupied the west bank of the Irrawaddy, strongly stockaded, and defended by artillery.<sup>4</sup>

Unwilling any longer to tolerate the annoyance and inconvenience caused by Burmese marauding parties, General Campbell decided to make a general attack upon every accessible part of the Burmese line. On December 1 a combined naval and military attack was made upon Simbigon. The attack was led by Colonel Godwin. The Burmese left 300 dead upon the ground (including General *Maha Nemiow*), with the whole commissariat, and other stores, guns, about 500 muskets and more than 100 Cassay horses. On December 2 a combined naval and military attack was made upon the Burmese centre. Within a short time the Burmese were driven from all their defences in the valley and took shelter in the hills. The hills, covered with strong stockades, could only be ascended by a

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<sup>1</sup> A river in the Prome district, rising in the Pegu Yoma Mountains.

<sup>2</sup> That is the name found in the English documents. He had conducted the negotiations in September and October.

<sup>3</sup> That is the name found in the English documents.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 153(A).

difficult road. Yet the British troops advanced, and occupied the whole of the formidable position, nearly three miles in extent. The defeat of the Burmese army on the east bank of the Irrawaddy was complete.<sup>1</sup> On December 5 Brigadier-General Cotton attacked the Burmese right wing and scored 'a most complete success'. The Burmese left their stockades, which were later on found by British troops to be completely manned and occupied by guns. In this attack also the Flotilla co-operated with the army.<sup>2</sup>

After these defeats the Burmese commanders withdrew their flanking parties, and General Campbell easily re-established free communication along the Irrawaddy. Instead of waiting for the inevitable renewal of Burmese attack he decided to advance northward in pursuit of the retreating army. He reached Wethtikan on December 9 and pushed forward to Mye-de as rapidly as possible. On their way the troops suffered from a heavy fall of rain, which continued for 30 hours, interfered with the transport and damaged the provisions. An outbreak of cholera followed. On his arrival at Mye-de General Campbell found it deserted. He reported, "The country over which the army has marched, bears ample testimony to the panic and dismay in which the enemy has retired; while the numerous dead and dying, lying about the country, afford a melancholy proof of the misery and privations which his troops are suffering. His loss in killed and wounded all the prisoners affirm

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 153(A).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 154(B).

to have been very great, and desertions to a great extent are daily taking place."<sup>1</sup>

Commodore Sir James Brisbane<sup>2</sup> led the Flotilla up the river and arrived off Mye-de on December 17. All along the banks Burmese stockades were found deserted. The Commodore wrote to General Campbell, ". . . it is impossible not to be struck with a degree of admiration at the happy choice of situation of the enemy's positions, aided as they are by the decided natural advantages which the face of the country presents. The extensive and formidable works . . . could have been erected only by the manual labour of the masses of men at the command of a barbarous government . . . I cannot imagine why the enemy should have so hastily relinquished them, unless the recent successes of your force, and the knowledge of your advance, had . . . operated on their fears."<sup>3</sup> Weakened by losses in the field, by desertion, and by disease, disheartened by the rapid advance of the British army, the Burmese completely lost their morale, and made a precipitate retreat to Me-lown on the right bank of the Irrawaddy.

While General Campbell was proceeding up from

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 155(A).

<sup>2</sup> Entered the Royal Navy in 1787; Naval Commander, East Indies; Baronet; died in New South Wales, 1826.

<sup>3</sup> Letter dated December 18, 1825: Wilson, *Documents*, No. 155(C). Another officer wrote, "As both sides of the river (which in this part is narrow) were thus strongly defended, it would have been impossible for the Flotilla to proceed up until either side had been reduced, had not the enemy, by his flight, thus rendered nugatory one of the very best positions and chain of field defences I have ever seen."—Wilson, *Documents*, No. 155(D).

Mye-de, the Burmese approached him with an offer to conclude peace. The negotiations, however, were fruitless,<sup>1</sup> and hostilities were resumed, after a short truce, on January 18, 1826. After midnight the British troops hurriedly constructed batteries and brought heavy ordnance from the Flotilla. The Burmese also constructed extensive and well-planned works. The cannonade began on January 19. British troops crossed the river and carried Me-lown<sup>2</sup> by assault. The Burmese suffered a severe loss. Specie, to the amount of about 30,000 rupees, a large quantity of grain, about 70 horses, together with ordnance, ordnance stores, arms and ammunition, were captured.<sup>3</sup>

After this General Campbell marched northwards, 'over very bad roads, but without having occasion to fire a shot'.<sup>4</sup> Early in February he arrived at the ancient city of Pagan,<sup>5</sup> where the Burmese force, amounting to 16,000 men, had concentrated. The command had been entrusted by the King to a daring chief, *Ta-Yea-Soo-gean*<sup>6</sup>, who was known as 'King of the Lower Regions'. He seems to have been a good general, for General Campbell reported that his plans and disposition of troops exhibited marks of 'consider-

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapter X.

<sup>2</sup> A village on the left bank of the Irrawaddy, S.W. from Ava 105 miles, N. from Prome 148 miles.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 157(B), 157(C). S. C., February 10, 1826, No. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 159(A).

<sup>5</sup> A town on the left bank of the Irrawaddy, 99 miles S.W. by W. from Ava.

<sup>6</sup> This is the name found in the English documents.

able judgment'. On February 9 British troops captured Pagan,<sup>1</sup> but the Burmese displayed unwonted courage and resolution in opposing them. The operations lasted for twelve hours and continued over four miles of ground. General Campbell attributed the immunity of his troops to the fact that the Burmese lacked 'their usual security behind works, whereby they were not only protected, but afforded a rest for their arms, which has often been the cause of considerable loss to us whilst advancing to the attack'.<sup>2</sup> The Burmese general fled to the jungles, but was soon arrested and executed.<sup>3</sup>

Many interesting details about the aims and methods of the Burmese were collected from intercepted documents and the depositions of prisoners. The Burmese generals seem to have kept up a tolerably active system of espionage. It was said that they had sanctioned an attempt to assassinate some officers of the British army. The King had tried to obtain assistance from the Emperor of China, who, however, merely offered to mediate between him and the English and promised an asylum if he were compelled to leave his kingdom. It was also reported that the King had abdicated in favour of his son and fled from the capital.<sup>4</sup> It is impossible for us to assess the truth of these reports.

From Pagan General Campbell resumed his

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., March 28, 1826, No. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 161.

march towards the capital. On his way he received further overtures for peace. The negotiations culminated in the conclusion of a treaty at Yandabo, a village within four day's march from the capital,<sup>1</sup> where the British army had arrived about the middle of February. The victorious army commenced its return by water on March 5 and came to Rangoon,<sup>2</sup> where no time was lost in embarking such portion of it as was no longer required. A small force continued to occupy Rangoon for some months after the conclusion of peace in accordance with the terms of the treaty. General Campbell paid a brief visit to Calcutta in April and returned to Rangoon.<sup>3</sup>

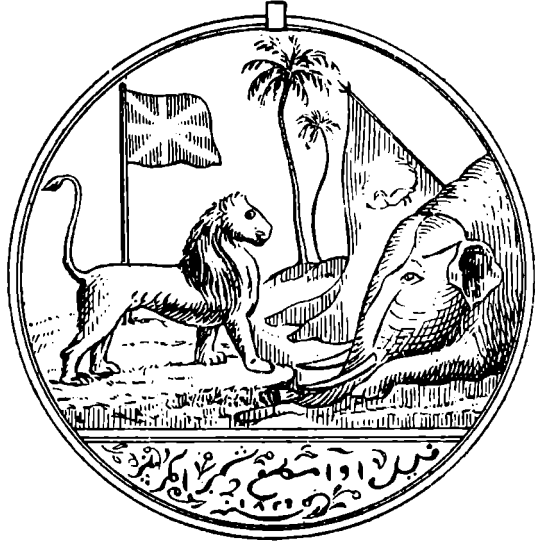
We have tried to reconstruct a brief account of the military and naval operations of the British forces in Assam and Burma from the official reports submitted by military and naval officers to their superiors. These reports are in no case contradicted by the statements of competent contemporary observers like Snod-

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<sup>1</sup> If the capital had been subdued, says Snodgrass, 'the Court would have fled, for a season, to some distant part of their extensive empire, and have left the Indian Government the mere honour of having conquered a country which they could not retain; and from which necessity would soon compel them to retire, without gain or profit, and with the ruinous burthen of the expenses of the war upon their own shoulders.' (*Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 284).

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 93.



### THE AVA MEDAL

*Presented to the troops engaged  
in the First Anglo-Burmese War*



grass<sup>1</sup> and Havelock.<sup>2</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin* enables us to draw an incomplete and unsatisfactory picture (only 40 pages being devoted to the war) of the state of things behind the Burmese lines. Some information on this point may also be extracted from the deposition of four residents in Burma—Henry Gouger, John Laird, Adoniram Judson and Aga Mahomed—which was recorded by John Crawfurd after the war.<sup>3</sup> It may be claimed, therefore, that, on the whole, our sources are fairly exhaustive and accurate, although it must be recognised that we do not know much about the Burmese point of view.

The collapse of Burma cannot be attributed to the cowardice of her soldiers. Sir Thomas Munro wrote to the Duke of Wellington, "The armies . . . . of Ava, are . . . . a most miserable half-armed rabble, greatly inferior to the peons of any Indian Zemindar. They are the best ditchers and stockaders since the time of the Romans, but as a military body they are little better than an assemblage of badly armed tank-diggers."<sup>4</sup> But Robertson, who knew Burma better, observes: "Contemptible warriors as the Burmese may be, experience has proved that it is only by the

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<sup>1</sup> Author of *Narrative of the Burmese War*; entered service in 1812; married Sir Archibald Campbell's daughter; later promoted Lieutenant-Colonel.

<sup>2</sup> Author of *Memoir of the three Campaigns of Sir Archibald Campbell's Army in Ava*; entered service in 1815; Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General at head-quarters of the Expeditionary Force in the First Anglo-Burmese War; afterwards Major-General Sir Henry Havelock of Mutiny fame.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 174(A, B, C, D).

<sup>4</sup> Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 156.

very best troops in our service, that they can be promptly driven from such stockaded entrenchments as they can in the course of a day construct; and then not without a loss of life." This experienced civilian makes it clear that much of the trouble suffered by Sir Archibald Campbell was due to the prevalent tendency to despise the Burmese as a contemptible enemy.<sup>1</sup> Wilson, who had many opportunities to know the truth, says, ". . . unaccustomed to civilised warfare, they (*i.e.*, the Burmese) neither gave nor expected to receive quarter; and wherever, therefore, unable to escape, they rushed desperately upon the bayonets of their assailants, and often provoked their death by treacherously attempting to effect that of the soldiers by whom they had been overcome and spared."<sup>2</sup>

If we cannot disparage the Burmese soldier, we cannot minimise the strength and military value of the stockades constructed by him. Sir Thomas Munro was quite correct in describing the Burmese as 'the best ditchers and stockaders since the time of the Romans'. In the course of our narrative we have on more than one occasion referred to the excellent use which the Burmese might have made of their stockades.

The responsibility for the Burmese debacle should be attributed in a large measure to the commanders, all of whom lacked the supreme gift of leadership, and most of whom displayed unquestionable signs of cowardice. On many occasions they made a precipitate

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<sup>1</sup> *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, pp. 221-222, 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Sketch*, p. 31. Compare Harvey's view : *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 560.

retreat instead of defending strong positions. Even Maha Bandula, the greatest Burmese general of the day, failed to make good use of the victory at Ramu and hastened the destruction of his army by his anxiety to secure spectacular success. Burmese generals were not trained in the difficult art of war. They depended on traditional methods and acquired experience in desultory warfare against Siam and Assam. Moreover, a Burmese aristocrat might secure the command of an army as a reward for his success in political intrigues. Such amateur generals could not be expected to confront on equal terms *bonafide* military officers with good training, thorough acquaintance with Western methods, and wide experience in many fields. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Burmese generals failed to make good use of the geographical and climatic features of their country.

Sir Thomas Munro was not quite correct in describing the Burmese army as 'a most miserable half-armed rabble', but its organisation and equipment certainly left much to be desired. There was a small standing army, but the conduct of the *Invulnerables* during the war betrayed its weakness. Snodgrass says that in Burma "every man was by profession a soldier, liable at all times to be called upon for military service at the pleasure of the sovereign". But these peasants received no military training worth the name, and, generally speaking, they were neither fed nor armed by the State. The artillery was bad,<sup>1</sup> and the

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<sup>1</sup> "With field artillery which dated from the time of Queen Elizabeth, and muskets which were tied together with rattan, the conditions were hopeless for victory against European troops."

soldiers were not properly trained to use it effectively. How could the average Burmese soldier, dragged by the threat of torture from his plough, ill-equipped, under-fed, deserted by his commander in the hour of crisis, save his country from the folly of his rulers and the determined and organised pressure of a powerful enemy?<sup>1</sup>

It seems that the Burmese Government failed to utilise to the fullest extent the man-power at its command.<sup>2</sup> On his way from Rangoon to Ava in 1824 Judson observed no preparation for war until reaching Prome, where he heard that troops were being raised 'in all the provinces above that place'. As he advanced towards the capital he saw the conscripts leaving their villages.<sup>3</sup> There is no reason to question the authenticity of this statement. It shows that the Burmese Government did not raise troops in the Delta, presumably because no reliance could be placed on the

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(Scott, *Burma*, p. 195). Yet the musketry and jingal fire of the Burmese was good. (*Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 560).

<sup>1</sup> Judson's deposition contains the following Burmese estimate of the fighting qualities of the British soldiers: "They (*i.e.*, the Burmese) consider them (*i.e.*, the British) nearly invincible, fierce and blood-thirsty, and possessing almost supernatural powers. I have heard them compare them, in action, to a particular class of demons called Baiu, that according to Burman notions, feed on human flesh. They have compared the rapidity of their movements to a whirlwind. The skill of Europeans in the use of artillery . . . astonishes them, and is incomprehensible to them."

<sup>2</sup> "The Burmese host was the greatest in their history—600 guns, 35,000 muskets, and a cadre of 70,000. Except 4,000 household troops they were a mass levy . . . ."—*Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 559.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 229.

loyalty of the Talaings. As the war proceeded the Burmese Government experienced increasing difficulty in raising new recruits even in the non-Talaing area. Aga Mahomed said, "It was almost impossible to assemble 500 or 1,000 men, and when they were got together, they were rogues and vagabonds, picked up about the streets of Ava. The King heard that the English paid their troops monthly, and considered that this was the reason why they fought so well. Latterly, a bounty of 100 and 150 ticals were given, but few troops obtained. The soldiers purchased fine cloths, ate opium and gunja, but at the first sight of the European troops, ran off."<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the isolation of Burma from the rest of the world, except China and Siam, the Court of Ava failed to grasp the character of the war. All attempts of the British Government to avoid war were interpreted as signs of timidity.<sup>2</sup> The King's sister told Judson "that it was obvious the English were afraid to fight; that their conduct on the frontier was mean and cowardly; that they were always disposed to treat and not to fight; and upon some occasions, when the Burman and British troops met, the British officers held up their hands to entreat the Burmans not to advance."<sup>3</sup> The British were considered as 'merchants who had hired a few mercenary soldiers to fight for them'.<sup>4</sup> The Prince of Tharrawaddy told Judson, "They

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 230.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 224.

continue to conquer and govern the black strangers with caste (Hindus), who have puny frames and no courage. They have never yet fought with so strong and brave a people as the Burmans, skilled in the use of sword and spear. If they once fight with us, and we have an opportunity of manifesting our bravery, it will be an example to the black nations, who are now slaves to the English, and encourage them to throw off their yoke".<sup>1</sup> Bandula assured the King that for the conquest of Bengal he would require only '*kulas*, or strangers, and not a single Burman'.<sup>2</sup> Even after the landing of the British army at Rangoon "it was the general belief that the English had come to burn and plunder the country, and carry off the inhabitants, in the manner practised by the Burmans and Siamese towards each other on the frontier". When the King 'issued orders for raising an army to drive the strangers out of the country', he 'expressed a hope that the *kulas* would not run away before the arrival of his army, as their fire-arms would be of great service towards the conquest of Siam'.<sup>3</sup> Such astounding misconceptions about the strength of the enemy and the character of the war could not but end in disaster.

In spite of these serious defects the Burmese were not easily vanquished. The loss to the British in men and money was enormous. The total expenditure was about five millions sterling.<sup>4</sup> The number of lives

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 224-225.

<sup>4</sup> According to Wilson (continuation of Mill's *History of British India*, Vol. III, Chapter IV) a large portion of the

sacrificed was, considering the number actually killed in action, almost incredible. A report by Major Alexander Tulloch, presented to Parliament in 1841, contains the following figures: "The whole number of British troops that landed in Rangoon in the first instance was, exclusive of officers, 3,586. The number of reinforcements does not appear, but that of the deaths was 3,115, of which not more than 150 occurred in action or from wounds. Of about 150 officers, 16 were killed in action or died in consequence of their wounds, and 45 died from disease.<sup>1</sup> In Arakan the loss in action was none, but of the average strength of the two regiments, amounting to 1,004 men, 595 died in the country in the course of eight months, and of those who quitted it not more than half were alive at the end of twelve months".<sup>2</sup>

The prolongation of the war and the unnecessarily large sacrifice of blood were to a large extent due to the complete lack of co-ordination between the military and the political authorities in India. Lord Amherst was severely criticised by the Directors as well as the British public for his failure to supply the Expeditionary Force with provisions and transport.<sup>3</sup> Snodgrass

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military expenditure was unnecessarily incurred: ". . . a most exaggerated opinion seems to have been entertained of the strength of the Burmans; and large and heavily armed bodies were consequently sent to perform what two or three regiments, lightly equipped, would have easily accomplished."

<sup>1</sup> According to Havelock (*Memoirs*, Appendix) the total loss in Burma (excluding Arakan and Assam) amounted to 3,222 Europeans and 1,766 Indians.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Ireland, *The Province of Burma*, Vol. I, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> In their Secret Letter dated August 3, 1824, the Directors observed that the want of bullocks in General Campbell's army

says, "The army came unprovided with the necessary equipment for advancing either by land or water". Want of fresh food resulted in much suffering and illness. As the war advanced and the sufferings of the troops came to public notice in England, the unpopularity of Lord Amherst's Government naturally increased. At the conclusion of the war the Court of Directors offered its unanimous thanks to Sir Thomas Munro, Sir Archibald Campbell, Commodore Brisbane and the military and naval officers who had taken part in the operations, but it could not reach unanimity when the proposal of thanking the Governor-General was accepted.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, at one stage of the war the authorities in London seriously entertained thoughts of recalling Lord Amherst. After the costly wars of Lord Hastings the Court of Directors wanted peace and retrenchment; Lord Amherst gave them a long and mismanaged war. Lord Curzon says, "From the end of 1825 the ship of Amherst was labouring in very heavy waters, and he was only saved for a time by the robust common sense of the

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was a 'matter of censure either on the Supreme Government or on the Commander of the expedition, if not on both of them'.

A European soldier who took part in the war charges Lord Amherst's Government of neglect '. . . to the spiritual wants of the British troops, while on service in the field'. During the war, he says, "there was no such person as a chaplain attached to the troops", nor was there any provision for the performance of divine service. In his own corps the Sabbath was observed by officers commanding companies reading Articles of War to their men. (*Historical Record of the First European Regiment*, pp. 511-512).

<sup>1</sup> Political Department Notification, May 14, 1827.



Duke of Wellington . . . .”<sup>1</sup> The Duke wrote to the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, on October 10, 1825, “I am aware of the power of the Court of Directors to remove the Governor-General.<sup>2</sup> But in my opinion it would be better, both for the public interest and for the honour of the individuals concerned, that they should remove him against the will of the Government than that we should be guilty of injustice”.<sup>3</sup> After reading the Governor-General’s defence the Cabinet refused to be a party to his dismissal. Lord Curzon says, “For months the unhappy Governor-General, separated by nearly six months from English news, was left in almost daily expectation of being recalled. . . . In August 1826 he made up his mind to resign. But in May 1827 there arrived a Resolution of Thanks and compliments from the Court, as a belated solatium for his previous sufferings. Nevertheless his resignation, proffered on the score of ill health, was accepted . . . .”<sup>4</sup> Lord Amherst left Calcutta in March, 1828.

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<sup>1</sup> *British Government in India*, Vol. II, pp. 191-192.

<sup>2</sup> Section 22 of Pitt’s India Act, 1784, provided that “it shall and may be lawful to and for the King’s Majesty, his Heirs and Successors, by any Writing or Instrument under his or their Sign Manual, countersigned by the Secretary of State, or for the Court of Directors of the said United Company for the Time being, by Writing under their Hands, to remove or recall the present or any future Governor-General of Fort William in Bengal. . . .” The Directors could, legally, recall the Governor-General even without the approval of the King (*i.e.*, the Cabinet). Lord Ellenborough was recalled by the Court of Directors without the approval of the Board of Control. See A. C. Banerjee, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, Vol. I, pp. 63, 235.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Curzon, *British Government in India*, Vol. II, p. 192.

<sup>4</sup> *British Government in India*, Vol. II, p. 192.

There is no doubt that the Supreme Government committed mistakes and protracted the duration of the war by their failure to send regular shipments of provisions<sup>1</sup> and carriage cattle. Sir Thomas Munro stated the position very fairly when he wrote to the Duke of Wellington, "There has been no want of energy or decision at any time in attacking the enemy; but there has certainly been a great want of many of the arrangements and combinations by which the movements of an army are facilitated, and its success rendered more certain. There were no doubt great difficulties; everything was new; the country was difficult, and the climate was destructive; but still, more enterprise in exploring the routes and passes on some occasions, and more foresight on others in ascertaining in time the means of conveyance and subsistence, and what was practicable, and what was not, would have saved much time."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion he wrote, ". . . great injustice is done to him (*i.e.*, Lord Amherst) in the idle clamour which has been raised against him. His situation was a very arduous one. He was new to India;<sup>3</sup> the Burmese were an enemy entirely unknown

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Munro wrote that "one of the most serious obstacles to the prosecution of military operations from Rangoon, is the want of both salt and fresh provisions for Europeans." (Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 384).

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated April 16, 1826. (Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 160).

<sup>3</sup> At the very beginning of the war Lord Amherst frankly wrote to Sir Thomas Munro, "Arrangements like these are far beyond the reach of my experience." (Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 100). In a letter to the Court of Directors (December 23, 1825) the Supreme Government observed that the want of

to us; we were ignorant of their military force—of their mode of warfare—of their resources, and of the face of their country.”<sup>1</sup> These views of a competent observer, frankly expressed in the privacy of non-official correspondence, constitute the most plausible justification of Lord Amherst's management of the war.

While censuring the civil authorities for the mismanagement of the war, we must not forget to hold the military authorities responsible for serious technical mistakes. Havelock's narrative shows that stormers were sent to take strong Burmese stockades without scaling ladders; 'sepoys, sent into action without a stiffening of British infantry, were so often routed that their *moral* declined and they were obsessed with a belief that Burmese warriors had magical powers'. Owing to the prevalence of epidemics and the absence of proper medical arrangements Sir Archibald Campbell 'sometimes had only 1500 effectives'.<sup>2</sup> This was probably partly responsible for the technical mistakes noticed by Havelock, but something was perhaps due to that curious military obstinacy which occasionally refuses to admit and rectify errors of judgment. It is interesting to note that Colonel Godwin, who played a prominent part in this war, deliberately continued

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fresh meat, which aggravated the sickness of European troops originally caused by an unforeseen outbreak of epidemic fever, was due entirely to the desertion of Rangoon by local inhabitants, 'an event which could not have been anticipated.'

<sup>1</sup> Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 175. Wilson, *Documents*, No. 242-243. See also Secret Letter to Court, March 18, 1826, Para 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. V, p. 560.

the same policy when he commanded the British army in the Second Anglo-Burmese War. On October 2, 1852, Lord Dalhousie wrote about him: "The war of 1824-25-26 was a perfect war, and nothing that was not done then can be done now—everything that was done then must be done over again now." On December 4, 1852, the Governor-General wrote again: ". . . he will hear no one, see no one, trust no one, believe no one—believe nothing except what he thinks himself, founded on what it was in 1825."<sup>1</sup> While Havelock, a junior officer, detected mistakes which he publicly criticised within two years of the conclusion of the war,<sup>2</sup> Godwin, a senior officer, continued to hold till his death that 'the war of 1824-25-26 was a perfect war'!

## CHAPTER X

### THE ANGLO-BURMESE TREATIES OF 1826

A few days before the declaration of war Lord Amherst defined his war aims in an elaborate minute.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental principle to be observed in determining 'the terms which should be imposed on the Burman monarch' was defined in the following words: ". . . . as any active and successful hostilities in which we may engage with that proud, arrogant and irascible people, will necessarily make them for ever our fixed and deadly enemies, every maxim of sound policy suggests that, when once this Government has embarked in measures for coercing them, it should require such concessions as must materially circumscribe their means of doing future injury to the British power." In pursuance of this principle the Governor-General decided that 'the entire evacuation and the formal renunciation of all right and dominion in the conquered countries'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., February 20, 1824, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Apparently Lord Amherst was not prepared to force Burma to give up territories which were her integral portions. He wrote to Sir Thomas Munro on April 2, 1824, "I am not at all sure that the dismemberment of the Burmese empire, even if we had the means of effecting it, is an event to be desired. The balance is now tolerably equal between them and the Siamese, and they help to keep each other in check." Sir Thomas Munro replied, ". . . such kingdoms as these (*i.e.*, Burma and Siam) are in a perpetual state of fluctuation, and can never, for any long period, remain, like the old governments of Europe, within the same limits. Our best policy is not to look so much to the preservation of any balance between them, as to the weakening of

of Assam, Cassay (including Manipur) and perhaps Arakan, with their dependencies' should be 'insisted on as indispensable conditions' of peace. But these countries were not to be annexed to the British Empire; they were to be 'placed in the situation of dependent and protected states, subject to the payment of such tribute only as might suffice to cover the expense incurred by their protection.' Such a policy, Lord Amherst believed, would 'afford security to our Eastern frontier.' It would at the same time prove the generosity of the Company; the liberation of the peoples of Assam and Arakan from 'the tyranny of Burman despotism' was 'not unworthy of the attention of a great and generous Government'. With regard to Manipur, Lord Amherst suspected that, owing to the long and intimate relations of the Burmese Kings with that principality, the extension of British influence there would be viewed with 'jealousy and alarm' by the Court of Ava. So he decided to settle the question of extending British protection to that hill State after receiving a detailed report from the man 'on the spot, David Scott. With regard to Arakan, the Governor-General refused to accept the recommendation of Captain Canning in favour of the annexation of that province to the British Empire. He believed that the *Mags* 'cherished the deepest resentment against their oppressors, as well as the most ardent desire to recover their long lost patrimony.'

These preliminary observations of the Governor-

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that power which is most able to disturb our frontier." (Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, pp. 110, 115-116).

General naturally lost their force under the pressure of the war, and we shall be sadly disappointed if we look for the germs of the treaty of Yandabo in the minute of February 20, 1824. Scott had already suggested the necessity of retaining possession of Assam after the expulsion of the Burmese.<sup>1</sup> On March 4, 1824, Captain Canning suggested that one of the principal conditions of peace should be the payment of the expenses of the war.<sup>2</sup> When he was sent to Rangoon as the Governor-General's Political Agent and 'Joint Commissioner for executing on the part of the British Government any treaty that may be negotiated with the Burmese', he was instructed to ascertain whether the King of Burma would be able to pay a large war indemnity, to demand 'the removal and public disgrace of the four Rajas of Arakan whose language and conduct have invariably been so disrespectful and violent towards the British Government', to ask for 'the restoration of all property of British subjects plundered or confiscated during the war', to require 'the exemption of all British vessels frequenting Rangoon and other ports of the Burman Empire from certain degrading and vexatious port regulations to which they are now subject', and, lastly, to secure 'permission for the permanent residence of a Political Agent and Consul at Rangoon with a fortified dwelling house and a guard for personal security'.<sup>3</sup> He was informed, however, that the last two conditions should not be insisted on 'if received with any particular display of jealousy and

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., February 13, 1824, No. 15.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., March 12, 1824, No. 4.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., March 26, 1824, No. 17.

alarm'.<sup>1</sup> To these new demands was soon added a claim for 'the safety and indemnity of the Manipurians'. Scott's report had convinced the Governor-General of 'the importance to British interests of establishing the independence' of Manipur. At the same time Gambhir Singh was informed that his only chance of regaining his ancestral throne lay in 'the degree of active assistance and co-operation' offered by him to the British Government.<sup>2</sup>

In April, 1824, Robertson, Magistrate of Chittagong, reported to the Government that, in his opinion, 'the separation of Aracan from the Burmese dominions' was 'a most desirable event'. "The retention of that province by the Burmese," he observed, "will leave them the means of gratifying at some future period their desire of injuring us by all those petty modes of annoyance which, though not serious enough to be publicly resented by again having recourse to arms, may still, as heretofore, be more than the ordinary police can prevent". The restoration of the province to the *Mags* he considered as unwise, for they were likely to prove 'troublesome' neighbours. Moreover, they could not be expected to form 'a Government of sufficient strength and stability to stand unsupported'. There were two parties led by two claimants to the throne of Arakan—a minor son of Kingbering and a man named Hynja, a descendant of a former usurper. Under the circumstances, Arakan could flourish best under British rule. Arakan was likely to attract many

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., March 26, 1824, No. 17.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., April 20, 1824, No. 9, 14.



Bengali settlers: "the soil is so favourable to the growth of rice that, were the Bengalees relieved from their dread of the Burmese, half the land now covered with jungles would in a few years be rendered productive."<sup>1</sup>

Soon after the capture of Rangoon Captain Canning wrote a letter to the Burmese Ministers, stating distinctly the terms on which the Governor-General was prepared to conclude peace.<sup>2</sup> He demanded the evacuation of Assam, Cachar and Jaintia, the relinquishment of all claims to the island of Shahpuri and the principality of Manipur, the acceptance of such a boundary between Chittagong and Arakan as the British Government might determine, the payment of the cost of war, the dismissal and public disgrace of the four Rajas of Arakan whose language and conduct towards the British Government were disrespectful, the release of all British subjects confined during the war, the restoration of all British property plundered or confiscated during the war, exemption of all British ships from degrading and vexatious regulations at Burmese ports, and the establishment of a permanent British Political Agent and Consul at Rangoon with a fortified dwelling and guard for personal security.<sup>3</sup> No reply seems to have been received at the British camp. Probably the victory of Ramu and the interpretation put by the Burmese upon the British successes in Rangoon encouraged them to reject this offer. But the successive defeats suffered by the Burmese during the first few months of the war led them to make an abor-

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., April 30, 1824, No. 30.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., June 18, 1824, No. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Foreign Miscellaneous, No. 179.

tive attempt for opening negotiations in January, 1825.<sup>1</sup>

In July, 1825, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Edward Paget, observed, “. . . . as we have sufficient grounds to come to the conclusion that no disasters, however severe, will influence this infatuated court to commence a negotiation for peace, however much they may be anxious to obtain it, it becomes necessary to consider whether we can, consistently with our own honour, be the first to make pacific overtures.”<sup>2</sup> Lord Amherst, tired of successful skirmishes which seemed only to prolong the war, approved this policy.<sup>3</sup> Robertson, who had so long been managing civil affairs in Arakan,<sup>4</sup> was sent to Rangoon as Civil Commissioner for Pegu.<sup>5</sup> He was also ‘joined with

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<sup>1</sup>See *ante*, pp. 400-401.

<sup>2</sup>S. C., July 22, 1825, No. 2.

The Commander-in-Chief observed, “When I consider the enormous expenditure of treasure . . . and . . . the great sacrifice of British blood, when I contemplate the obstacles and difficulties which . . . still present themselves to our views . . . ; when I bear in mind the extraordinary hardships and deprivations to which our troops have been already subjected and which they must still be prepared to encounter ; when, above all, I recollect the insalubrity of the climate . . . . , I cannot disguise my anxiety that, consistently with our honour, this contest may be brought to the speediest conclusion.” (S. C., July 22, 1825, No. 2).

<sup>3</sup>S. C., July 22, 1825, No. 3.

<sup>4</sup>For a description of his work there, see his *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*.

<sup>5</sup>Lord Amherst observed, “The chief thing to guard against in his administration of the judicial and revenue concerns of the country is the giving an impression to the inhabitants that they are about to form permanently a part of our Empire. The laws at present in existence should continue to be administered save

Sir Archibald Campbell in a Commission for conducting any future negotiation.' This step was not to be interpreted as an indication of the Governor-General's loss of confidence in Sir Archibald Campbell.<sup>1</sup> The General remained the Senior Member of the Commission. He was to have decisive voice in all cases of a political nature. If Robertson differed on any point he was merely entitled to record the grounds of his dissent. All matters of a purely civil nature were left to Robertson, but General Campbell was authorised to record his opinion on any case. Thus, as Robertson says, Sir Archibald Campbell had 'nothing but a moral restraint imposed upon him'.<sup>2</sup> These arrangements, however, did not bring the war to an end. Even after Maha Bandula's death the Burmese did not betray any sign of psychological weakness. The negotiations of October, 1825, proved abortive.<sup>3</sup>

Towards the close of the year 1825 two factors turned the scale in favour of peace in the Court of Ava. The *Rājaguru* (spiritual preceptor of the King), who had been travelling in India 'ostensibly for purposes of devotion', had been confined by the British authorities after the outbreak of war. He was released after the arrival of General Campbell's army at Mye-de-

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when they violate the first principles of justice and humanity and the revenue should be collected as nearly as possible in the mode in which the people have been accustomed to pay it." (S. C., July 22, 1825, No. 3).

<sup>1</sup> S. C., July 22, 1825, No. 3, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, pp. 143-144. Later on John Crawford was sent to join the Commission as third Member.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, pp. 323-325.

and 'furnished with a private note, expressive of the undiminished readiness of the British officers to grant peace . . . upon liberal conditions, which it was expected he would communicate to his master'.<sup>1</sup> This communication was received in a favourable atmosphere, for the advance of the British army towards the capital seems to have weakened the Queen's party.<sup>2</sup>

While General Campbell was proceeding up from Mye-de, a Burmese messenger came to him under a flag of truce and said that *Kolcin Menghie*<sup>3</sup> had arrived at Me-lown, deputed by the King, to conclude a treaty of peace. Two British officers were sent to the Burmese camp. The Burmese envoys wanted a truce for 25 days, but nothing beyond 24 hours was agreed to. General Campbell reached Me-lown on December 29. The place was strongly occupied and the river covered with boats. The Burmese unsuccessfully tried to escape with the boats. They allowed Commodore Brisbane to pass their stockades unmolested. This forbearance to the flotilla was accepted by General Campbell as a proof of their sincerity and desire for peace. Negotiations, therefore, began.<sup>4</sup> The British point of view was represented by General Campbell, Robertson and Commodore Brisbane.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> That is the name found in English documents.

<sup>4</sup> The details of the negotiations are collected from S. C., January 6, 1826, No. 43.

Rev. Judson was taken out from prison and carried to Me-lown as interpreter. When the negotiations failed he was again sent to prison. (Gouger, *Personal Narrative*, pp. 272-273).

*Kolein Menghie*, the senior Burmese Commissioner, declared that he was authorised by the King 'to settle the business' by doing what he thought best for the interests of the country. "Whatever I do," he said, "my acts are as the acts of the King." He was then told that the British Government insisted on the acceptance of the terms proposed in October last (*i.e.*, the cession of Arakan, Assam and Manipur, and the payment of two *crores* of rupees as indemnity) with one addition—the cession of Ye, Tavoy and Mergui.

Robertson says that the Burmese envoys 'prayed, in almost abject terms'<sup>1</sup> for the withdrawal of the demand for indemnity.<sup>2</sup> They said, "In war the expenses are not all upon one side. We also have expended a great quantity of money. It has never been our custom in war to ask for the reimbursement of expenses, nor to pay them to others." Robertson coldly replied, "In cases like the present, where customs differ, the custom of the conquerors is acted upon." They were also told that if they refused to conclude peace at once, the war would be prolonged and the amount of expenses (and therefore, of the indemnity) would be heavier. The Burmese envoys said that they were ashamed to confess that their treasury was quite empty. *Kolein Menghie* said, "You are mistaken in supposing us to be wealthy. If there were money in

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<sup>1</sup> *Kolein Menghie* said, "The English are very generous, the Burmese extremely poor. The Burmese beg, as a national boon, that the demand may be lessened, and they will account such a favour as an act of charity done to them."

<sup>2</sup> See *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, pp. 167-184.

the treasury at present, the King would not consent to make peace. The country is ruined. The people have all fled from their homes, and there is no cultivation." Sir Archibald Campbell thereupon reduced his demand to one *crore*. After further entreaties for mercy *Kolein Menghie* agreed to pay this amount in instalments, but added, "The payment of the money falls very heavy upon us."

With regard to the question of territories, *Kolein Menghie* made no objection to give up Assam and Manipur, although he declared that Gambhir Singh should not be recognised as the ruler of the latter Kingdom. Ye, Tavoy and Margui he agreed to surrender with mild protests, but he put up a stubborn fight for Arakan. Robertson said, "We must keep Arakan. If it be returned to you, no care that our judges or your Governors can take will prevent eternal quarrels upon the frontier. We must have the mountains as a barrier between us and you to prevent the possibility of the recurrence of war." He added, "The question is not how much you will cede to us, but how much we shall return to you." Even a soldier could not be more blunt. *Kolein Menghie* had no alternative but to agree. The points of contention being thus settled, there was no difficulty about minor points—the grant of amnesty to those inhabitants of Pegu who had helped the British during the war, the interchange of Residents, and the inclusion of Siam as a party to the treaty.<sup>1</sup> A draft treaty was signed on

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Siamese had taken no part in the war, they had continued their military demonstrations and from time to time announced their desire to help the British force. An envoy,

January 3, 1826, and an armistice was agreed upon till January 18, by which date it was expected that the ratification of the King would be available.

Sir Archibald Campbell and his colleagues thought it necessary to explain to the Supreme Government the reasons for reducing the amount of the indemnity. The Burmese had accepted all the terms—including the cession of valuable provinces—imposed upon them. They had pleaded their inability to pay. Under these circumstances it was neither politic nor generous to insist upon the payment of two *crores*. Moreover, if the Burmese decided to prefer the continuation of the war to the payment of so large a sum, the British Government would once more find itself exposed to ruinous expenses.<sup>1</sup>

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Captain Burney, was sent from Calcutta to congratulate the King of Siam on his accession. He was instructed to 'cultivate a good understanding with Siam,' to 'afford the fullest information on every point connected with the Burma war,' to 'hold out no distinct expectation of our ceding to the Siamese any portion of our acquisitions on the coast of Tenasserim,' to express no eagerness for Siamese co-operation against Burma, and 'to effect the desired improvement in our commercial relations with Siam.' (S. C., May 13, 1825, No. 24). He reached Bangkok on December 4, 1825, and concluded a treaty of friendly and commercial intercourse. "The Court of Siam would have been well pleased to have recovered the Tenasserim provinces, which had been wrested from them by the Burman arms, but they hesitated to render the services (*i.e.*, military assistance) that might have entitled them to some compensation, not only in the uncertainty of the return they might expect, but in mistrust of their own army, composed as that was, in a great degree, of Peguers and commanded by a General of Pegu extraction." (Wilson, *Historical Sketch*, p. 84. See also Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 30, 32, 33, 34).

<sup>1</sup> S. C., January 6, 1826, No. 43.

Lord Amherst had decided that the King of Burma should be asked to agree not to allow any American or any subject of any European Power except England to settle or to trade in his dominions. Sir Archibald Campbell and his colleagues did not propose this condition to *Kolein Menghie*. Such a condition, they thought, would betray unnecessary anxiety on the part of the British Government and encourage the Burmese King to expect support and assistance from other Powers. Moreover, "such a clause might possibly give umbrage to the Governments of many nations now at peace with Great Britain." There were some European merchants in Burma; they—and their Governments—would certainly resent their exclusion from 'a fair participation in all the commercial advantages which a free and unrestricted intercourse would afford'.<sup>1</sup>

Indications were, however, soon available to show that the King would not ratify the treaty. On January 6 General Campbell received letters from two Englishmen who had been living at Ava as prisoners. They wrote that the King would never consent to the dismemberment of his territory. These letters were obviously written under dictation. On January 17 some Burmese envoys appeared at the British camp, apologised for the non-arrival of the ratification, and requested the British force to retreat to Prome or at least to extend the truce. On January 18, the day originally fixed for the return of the ratified treaty, the Burmese envoys solicited a further delay of six or seven

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., January 6, 1826, No. 43.



days. General Campbell declared that their request could not be complied with and asked them to evacuate the fortified and entrenched city of Me-lown by sun-rise on January 20. On their positive rejection of this demand, they were told that hostilities would be resumed after twelve o'clock that very night (January 18).<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to say why the Burmese Government refused to ratify the treaty. Snodgrass<sup>2</sup> suggests two alternatives: either the envoys exceeded their power, or the fickle King changed his mind. At one of his interviews with Sir Archibald Campbell *Kolein Menghie* had betrayed his fear of provoking the King's wrath. With regard to the clause concerning the indemnity, he said, "That term of the treaty we must ourselves execute, for we dare not communicate it to the King. We must pay the money ourselves, for should the King hear of such a stipulation, he would probably put us to death. Of that we must take our chance."<sup>3</sup>

A few days after the resumption of hostilities the Burmese Government released two white prisoners—an American missionary named Price and an English surgeon named Sandford<sup>4</sup>—and sent them as envoys to the British camp. They were told that the terms previously offered were still open to the Burmese King, that the British army would retire to Rangoon<sup>5</sup> upon

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 157(B).

<sup>2</sup> *Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., February 10, 1826, No. 14.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 373.

<sup>5</sup> *Konbaungset Yazawin* (Vol. II, pp. 412-413) informs us that the British officers were afraid because the country was un-

the payment of 25 *lakhs* of rupees, that Burmese territory would be completely evacuated upon the payment of another instalment of similar amount, and that the remaining amount of 50 *lakhs* should be paid in equal instalments in two years.<sup>1</sup> The King and his ministers heard with 'as much satisfaction as astonishment' that the terms were not more severe than those offered before. Price and Sandford returned to the British camp on February 13. The only objection raised by the Burmese Court related to money payment,<sup>2</sup> but General Campbell refused to reduce the amount. Price once more went to Ava. The army advanced to Yandabo, within four days' march from the capital. There Price came, with Burmese envoys authorised by the King to conclude a treaty embodying all British demands. The treaty<sup>3</sup> was signed on February 24. A sum of 25 *lakhs* of rupees was paid at once in gold and silver bullion. Three British officers (Captain Lumsden, Lieutenant Havelock and Dr. Knox) paid a ceremonial visit to the King<sup>4</sup> on March 1.

For various reasons Lord Amherst had decided not to demand the cession of Pegu. He did not like

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known to them ; they thought that further advance would be unsafe, and proposed peace.

<sup>1</sup> S. C., March 10, 1826, No. 6.

<sup>2</sup> This seems to have been due to financial difficulties. At the concluding stages of the war the Burmese Government had to hire soldiers at the rate of Rs. 170 per man ; Rs. 60 or 70 was the standard rate at the beginning of the war. An eye-witness speaks of 'the impoverished state of both public and private funds' in the capital.—Wilson, *Documents*, No. 173(A).

<sup>3</sup> Text in Appendix B.

<sup>4</sup> Havelock, *Memoirs*, pp. 338-366, Appendix.

to undertake the responsibility of defending the province against Burmese aggression.<sup>1</sup> Direct annexation was, therefore, out of the question. Nor was it possible to leave the Mons independent. As Wilson observes, "The people were very much mixed with the Burman race, and their characters indicated neither personal intrepidity, nor national spirit, which could have been relied upon as available in undertaking their defence; neither did it appear that any individual of rank or influence existed, round whom the population would have rallied, as the common object of their reverence or attachment."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, although the King had reluctantly agreed to the cession of Arakan, 'no

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<sup>1</sup> Robertson says, "Pegu once incorporated into our possessions, a trespass upon its integrity must be resented as promptly as that infringement of our Bengal frontier out of which the war in progress had arisen. The possession of Pegu was likely to lead to a speedy renewal of war with Ava, and an eventual rupture with Siam, a state little likely to prefer us as neighbours to its co-religionists, the Burmese." (*Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, p. 141). Sir Thomas Munro favoured the restoration of Talaing rule in Pegu, with Tenasserim attached to it. He wrote, "I would have left a corps of about six thousand men in the country until their government and military force were properly organised; five or six years would have been fully sufficient...and we could then have gradually withdrawn the whole of our force...Pegu is so fertile, and has so many natural advantages, that it would in a few years have been a more powerful state than Ava." (Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 160).

Crawford suggested the annexation of Rangoon, and the Commander-in-Chief preferred Rangoon to Tenasserim 'as more easily defended and probably of greater commercial value'. (S. C., May 12, 1826, No. 1).

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Sketch*, pp. 84-85. Ron na Ron, the Siamese general who hoped to place himself at the head of an independent Pegu, was the descendant of a former headman of Martaban.

coercion' could have induced him to give up Pegu; "therefore that province was to be taken without treaty, and to be held by sheer force."<sup>1</sup> It must be admitted that there was some truth in this apprehension. When Lord Dalhousie annexed Pegu after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, King Mindon could not be induced to sign a treaty; the annexation was effected by Proclamation.<sup>2</sup>

It is probable that casual British observers sometimes over-emphasized the past and exaggerated the hatred of the Mons against their Burmese rulers. In 1773 the Mons had rebelled unsuccessfully and suffered cruel punishments. Of the three principal leaders of this rebellion one—Dalla Khin—was captured and executed at Rangoon in 1774; the others—Dalla Hsin and Minasi—fled to Siam. The ex-King of the Mons, Binnya Dalla, who had been captured by A-laung-pa-ya about two decades ago, was executed at Rangoon by a common executioner in 1774. Many Mons of high rank were executed. The next Mon rebellion took place in 1783; troubles at Rangoon were followed by a general rising in the Delta. Bo-daw-pa-ya suppressed the rebellion with characteristic cruelty. After the restoration of peace, however, he adopted a conciliatory policy which gradually removed the bitterness of the Mons. The government of the Delta became less severe than before, and the policy of discriminating between the Mons and the Burmans was abandoned. Moreover, Bo-daw-pa-ya flattered the Mons by restor-

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<sup>1</sup> Robertson, *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> See A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*, Chapter V.

ing the prestige of their old capital—Pegu. In 1790 the *Myowun* of the Delta was ordered to take up his residence there. This plan was not very successful, for the growing importance of Rangoon as a commercial centre made it impossible for the *Myowun* to transfer the political centre of gravity to Pegu. Still the King's policy compelled him to divide his time between the two cities.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, Bo-daw-pa-ya's policy was so successful that in 1813 Felix Carey found the Mons of the Delta completely Burmanised. So far as language was concerned, he observed, "the Peguans no longer exist as a nation"; the language and national characteristics of the Mons survived only in Tenasserim. Robertson, an experienced and competent officer who came into close contact with the Mons as Civil Commissioner of the Delta during the war, observed that "the lapse of seventy years, and a greatly improved administration on their (*i.e.*, the Burmese) part, had, by removing invidious distinctions, and placing conquerors and conquered on a footing of equality, done much towards reconciling the latter to their lot."<sup>2</sup>

So there was no substantial argument in favour of establishing a Mon national State in the Delta. It was, however, argued by the annexationists that the Mons, who had liberally helped the British Expeditionary Force, should not be left to the mercy of their Burmese rulers. This point deserved serious consideration, for one of General Campbell's proclamations<sup>3</sup> had expli-

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<sup>1</sup> Symes, *An Account of an Embassy*, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, p. 404.

citly promised protection to those Mons who might put themselves under the British flag. "This proclamation," says Pearn, "had quite properly been construed as a guarantee of the restoration of Mon independence under the Company's protection, and the assistance which the Mons rendered to the invading force must have been evoked largely by that consideration".<sup>1</sup> Robertson, on the other hand, remarks that no obligation had been incurred towards the Mons; their assistance had been well paid for, and it was nothing more than a commercial arrangement convenient to both parties.<sup>2</sup> This is probably an unduly narrow and technical view regarding the direct and indirect commitments of the British authorities towards the Mons. In June, 1824, General Campbell issued a proclamation establishing a customs system at Rangoon. Although it was later on disallowed by the Supreme Government, it probably indicates his desire to bring the Delta permanently under British rule. Indeed, Gouger says that General Campbell 'had earnestly and repeatedly solicited permission to declare the independence' of the Delta.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the refusal of the Supreme Government to accept his suggestion, it is probably not quite wrong to assume that the General and the officers subordinate to him consciously or unconsciously gave the Mons to understand that they would not be re-placed under Burmese control. At any rate, the Mons must have received that impression from

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<sup>1</sup> *A History of Rangoon*, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> *Personal Narrative*, p. 296.

the elaborate arrangements made by the British authorities to govern the Delta during the war. Under the authority of the Commission<sup>1</sup> made up of General Campbell and Mr. Robertson military officers were posted as Magistrates at Rangoon, Tharrawa, Bassein, Pegu, Martaban and Ye. The Mons knew nothing about what International Law calls 'Military Occupation'; they concluded that the British had come to stay.

Some British officers were anxious to retain the Delta in the possession of the Company for military reasons. With the Delta in Burmese hands, Tenasserim remained separated from Arakan. It was certainly 'a highly inconvenient state of affairs';<sup>2</sup> but it was not dangerous from the military point of view, for Tenasserim was open to the sea. There was another difficulty which the supporters of annexation overlooked. The Delta had no definite and easily defensible frontier. Lord Dalhousie observed in 1852 that the northern frontier of Pegu 'presents no natural features in the formation of the country which would facilitate its defence, or save us from the worry of predatory attacks, even if invasion were not attempted by the Burmese'.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, the decision of the Supreme Government remained unaltered, and the Delta was restored to the Burmese King. Article 6 of the treaty of Yandabo provided for a general amnesty for all who had taken part in the war; but such a provision was not

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<sup>1</sup> See *anlc*, p. 455.

<sup>2</sup> Pearn, *Burma Background*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*, p. 142.

likely to restrain the Burmese after the withdrawal of the British garrison. Indeed, the conclusion of peace was followed by a Mon rebellion, which the Burmese easily suppressed. The leader of the rebellion, Maung Sat,<sup>1</sup> fled to Tenasserim in 1827. He was followed there by about 10,000 Mons. More than a generation later Lord Dalhousie observed after the annexation of the Delta that the Mons 'heartily rejoiced in their liberation' from 'the cruel tyranny of the Burmese rule'.<sup>2</sup>

"The cession of Arakan," says Snodgrass, "amply provides for the freedom from Burmese interference with our Indian territories on that side".<sup>3</sup> The Arakan Yoma Mountains were recognised as the boundary between British India and Burma, and it was provided that any doubt regarding the boundary was to be settled by Commissioners appointed by the British and Burmese Governments for that purpose.<sup>4</sup>

We have already referred to Lord Amherst's unwillingness to annex Arakan. Even in January, 1825, Robertson was informed that the independence of Arakan was to be regarded as one of the most important conditions of peace. "Indeed," observed the Secretary to the Government, "so desirable does the Governor-General in Council consider any arrangement with the Burmese which would secure to us the intervention of a friendly nation on the Chittagong

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<sup>1</sup> He received from the British Government a monthly pension of Rs. 250 till his death in October, 1830.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> *Narrative of the Burmese War*, p. 297.

<sup>4</sup> Treaty of Yandabo, Article 3.



side and thereby complete the removal of the Burmese from the whole line of our eastern frontier, that to ensure a more ready acquiescence on the part of Ava, His Lordship in Council would be willing to waive the demand for the reimbursement of our expenses . . . .”<sup>1</sup> After the capture of the city of Arakan Robertson was appointed to control ‘the entire civil government of the province’. He was instructed ‘to undertake the most effectual measures for organizing a Police, calling forth the local resources, and establishing such a degree of order, tranquillity and confidence, as will give to the force in advance the advantage of a peaceable and well-disposed population and country in its rear’.<sup>2</sup> A few months later, in May, 1825, Lord Amherst suggested that the annexation of Arakan<sup>3</sup> was necessary ‘as inflicting a severe but well-merited loss on our enemy, and as materially contributing to our own future security’. He thought that the mere cession of Assam would not be regarded by ‘European or native spectators’ as ‘an equivalent for the sacrifices and efforts’ of the British Government, and the Burmese would not be ‘deterred from future aggression when they found so little atonement required for past injury and insult’. Finally, he observed that “a country possessing a comparatively robust and hardy population will be much more desirable as a frontier territory than the fertile and unwarlike province of Bengal”.<sup>4</sup> The annexation of

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., January 14, 1825, No. 14.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., February 18, 1825, No. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Even at this stage he did not preclude the possibility of establishing an independent *Mag* Government.

<sup>4</sup> S. C., May 20, 1825, No. 6.

Arakan was, therefore, decided upon, and arrangements were made for the administration of the province.<sup>1</sup>

After Robertson's appointment as Civil Commissioner for Pegu, Paton succeeded him as the controller of civil affairs in Arakan. A few months after the conclusion of the treaty of Yandabo he submitted to the Government a detailed report<sup>2</sup> about 'the character of the country, its extent, history, population, productions, and the manners and customs of the inhabitants'. Of the four provinces of Arakan,<sup>3</sup> Arakan proper (excluding the capital) consisted of 55 districts, each of which contained 'according to its size from 2 to 60 *paras* or small villages'. The 'city of Arakan' was divided into eight wards. The province of Ramree was divided into 25 districts, and the province of Sandoway into 17 districts. The island of Cheduba formed a single district and consisted of 10 *paras*. The Governor of Arakan (who

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<sup>1</sup> The Commander-in-Chief suggested that the British boundary should be extended to the river Kaladan, but he was opposed to annexation of the mainland of Arakan. He observed that "the unhealthiness of Arakan itself has been so fully proved, and the real value of it so doubtful, that I do not think it can be considered as a beneficial acquisition." He favoured the establishment of *Mag* rule in Arakan under British protection. "This", he said, "would remove from our own territory in Chittagong a race of people not very quiet or well-satisfied with their present state." He was in favour of annexing Ramree, Cheduba and Sandoway, for they 'formed to a certain degree a protection to our south-eastern frontier'. (S. C., May 12, 1826, No. 1).

<sup>2</sup> S. C., June 9, 1826, No. 10. Some of the details given in this report are also found in Robertson's report dated July 21, 1825. (S. C., August 26, 1825, No. 41).

<sup>3</sup> Arakan, Ramree, Cheduba, Sandoway.

controlled these four provinces) used to send to the King an annual tribute of Rs. 18,663; the remainder of the revenue became his 'sole perquisite'. The population of the four provinces did not exceed 100,000 (*Mags*—60,000; Muslims—30,000; Burmese—10,000). Limestone was available in abundance in the islands. Gold and silver dust were found in the *nullahs* (small canals) near Bassein. The soil of Cheduba was well-adapted for the cultivation of cotton. The only land assessed for revenue was that on which sugar cane, hemp, indigo, onions, garlic and turmeric were grown. "The annual tax upon a piece of land 150 feet square sown with sugar cane or indigo was two rupees, and one rupee for hemp on the same measurement. Onions, garlic and turmeric on a slip of ground 150 feet long and 3 feet wide paid eight annas." Every plough drawn by buffaloes was assessed at a uniform rate throughout the province. Fees of varying rates were levied on fishing. The total annual revenue derived from fishing amounted to Rs. 2,000. Timber was found in the hills, but the cost of bringing it down to the plains was prohibitive. "The cultivation of rice," Paton observed, "may be carried on to any extent, and, as the population increases, will be extended and tend not only to render the climate and country more healthy, but by becoming an article of great trade, will increase the revenue considerably". This prophecy has been fulfilled. Akyab is now one of the most important rice-exporting ports in the world.

In 1826, however, Arakan was not regarded as a

profitable acquisition from the financial point of view.<sup>1</sup> Robertson (who became the Governor-General's Agent for the South-Eastern Frontier after the treaty of Yandabo) observed, "As a source of revenue Arakan has never been contemplated as a useful possession, all the advantages anticipated from its annexation to our empire being comprised in the exclusion of the Burmese from a province where the local peculiarities enabled them to disturb the tranquillity of the contiguous country . . . ."<sup>2</sup> Arakan was governed by a Commissioner who was under the direct control of the Governor-General. The system of administration was gradually assimilated to that of Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

The national aspirations of the Arakanese people had, however, survived four decades of Burmese rule. After the treaty of Yandabo they fondly believed that the British Government would retire and accept a yearly tribute in lieu of full occupation. The discontent of the people was undoubtedly aggravated by 'very heavy taxation'.<sup>4</sup> So within two years of the expulsion of the Burmese the establishment of an Arakanese

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<sup>1</sup> In 1832 the total revenues of Arakan amounted to Rs. 2.5 lakhs. After the establishment of British rule the cultivation of rice steadily increased. In 1830 the area under rice-cultivation in Arakan was only 66,000 acres, but in 1855 it was 350,000 acres. (Pearn, *Burma Background*, p. 25). In a report submitted by Richard Temple and Colonel H. Bruce to the Government of India in 1860 we find that the annual income from Arakan was Rs. 14,50,000, and the annual expenditure Rs. 5,00,500. (A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*, p. 171).

<sup>2</sup> S. C., June 9, 1826, No. 12.

<sup>3</sup> See Furnivall, "Fashioning of the Leviathan", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol. XXIX.

<sup>4</sup> *Sandoway District Gazetteer*, Vol. A, p. 11.

Monarchy became the programme of an active party led by Oung Gyaw-rhee, a brother-in-law of Chin Byan, and Oung-Gyaw-tsan, his nephew, both of whom had helped the British army and received appointments under the British Government. They were assisted by Shwe-pan, a British official. The plot was easily suppressed. Oung-Gyaw-tsan was sentenced to long imprisonment; Shwe-pan fled to Ava. In 1836 an open rebellion broke out, and gradually resolved itself into a series of dacoities.<sup>1</sup>

The annexation of Tenasserim ultimately proved to be an unprofitable speculation.<sup>2</sup> It was at first subordinate to the Civil Government of Penang; after two years it was brought under the direct control of the Governor-General, and gradually the Bengal system of administration was introduced. Every year the Supreme Government had to bear an expense of over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lakhs of rupees for this province, and this charge was expected to increase since buildings, barracks,

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<sup>1</sup> *British Burma Gazetteer*.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Amherst was conscious of the political importance of this province. He wrote to Sir Thomas Munro on September 4, 1824: Mergui and Tavoy 'are remote acquisitions, but they would be powerful cards to play in any dealings which we may eventually have with the Siamese'. (Gleig, *Life of Munro*, Vol. II, p. 135).

In a Minute dated May 12, 1826, the Commander-in-Chief argued against the annexation of Tenasserim on the following grounds: (1) The loss of this province must always be regarded with jealousy by the Burmese. (2) Its situation at a long distance from other British territories must render its defence difficult and expensive. (3) Its revenues would not suffice for defence. (4) Bengal *sepoy*s would be prevented by caste prejudices from serving there.

fortifications, etc., were required. In 1826 the Court of Directors suggested the retrocession of the province to Burma, but the measure was not insisted upon, on the expectation<sup>1</sup> that a large number of Burmese subjects would migrate to Tenasserim. This migration was considerable at first, amounting to about 12,000 persons, but later no more arrived, and some of the original emigrants returned to Burmese territory. In 1828 the Court of Directors repeated that suggestion and Lord Ellenborough, President of the Board of Control, drew up an elaborate memorandum (November 25, 1828) in which he observed "that the Tenasserim provinces are an undesirable possession and regret may be expressed that we insisted upon their cession". Early in 1830 Major Henry Burney was sent to Ava as Resident (under Article 7 of the Treaty of Yandabo) by Lord William Bentinck. He was instructed to find out whether the King was willing to give 'some equivalent . . . . in exchange for a portion or whole of the Tensasserim provinces'. After protracted negotiations Burney found that the Burmese Ministers were not prepared to give any 'equivalent'—neither money nor territory. He reported, "The circumstance, which is well-known here, of our annually sending *lakhs* of rupees to defray the ordinary expenses of places from which under the Burmese the King was accustomed to realise some surplus revenue, leads all parties here to rest perfectly satisfied that, sooner or

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<sup>1</sup> This expectation was due to the belief of the British authorities in the superiority of their own administration to 'Burman tyranny'.

later, we must restore these provinces to Ava, and that the exercise of a little patience is all that is required on the part of the Ministers of this country to promote the attainment of their wishes". Under these circumstances Lord William Bentinck had no other alternative but to tolerate the recurring losses. In March, 1833, orders arrived from the Court of Directors authorising the Government of India to retain the Tenasserim province permanently.

Soon after the commencement of military operations in the Brahmaputra Valley it was decided that the districts in Upper Assam conquered from the Burmese should be treated as enemy territory under British occupation and administered under Martial Law. Scott and Colonel Richards were jointly vested with the management of these districts. The former controlled political transactions (including negotiations with the Burmese as also with the friendly chiefs and tribes in Assam) and collected the revenues. To the latter was entrusted full control over military affairs as well as the charge of the Police. This arrangement was systematised and confirmed in April, 1826, when Scott and Colonel Richards were appointed "Commissioners for the provisional administration of the affairs of Assam".<sup>1</sup> As Senior Commissioner Scott became entitled to make the final decision in all matters which fell under the joint jurisdiction of the two Commissioners, but in some matters Colonel Richards exercised independent authority. Elaborate arrangements were made for the better distribution of justice and the collec-

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., April 5, 1825, No. 26.

tion of revenue.<sup>1</sup> The work of organising civil administration in Assam suffered considerably due to the dearth of officers, but with the limited resources at his disposal Scott did much to restore order and justice in a province devastated for half a century by anarchy, civil war and foreign invasion.<sup>2</sup> He died in August, 1831. Sir Alexander Mackenzie does not exaggerate when he says, "The name and fame of David Scott are still green on the North-East Frontier. He was one of those remarkable men who have from time to time been the ornament of our Indian services. Had the scene of his labours been in North-West or Central India, where the great problem of Empire was then being worked out, he would occupy a place in history by the side of Malcolm, Elphinstone and Metcalfe".

By Article 2 of the treaty of Yandabo the King of Burma renounced all claims upon Assam and promised to abstain from all future interference with that country 'and its dependencies'. Was Assam to be annexed to the British Empire, or was it to be restored to a member of the Ahom ruling family? This important question engaged the serious attention of the Supreme Government for a long time. Before the conclusion of the war Scott had expressed the opinion that if Ahom rule was to be restored, the British

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief account of Scott's revenue system, see Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 288-290. For his general administration, see S. C., July 7, 1826, No. 31.

<sup>2</sup> See Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 284. Anandiram Dhekial Phukan, an Assamese writer, observes that the Barmese 'had destroyed more than one-half of the population, which had already been thinned by intestine commotions and repeated civil wars'.



Government should reserve to itself the right of interference in the internal administration of the Brahmaputra Valley. He felt that, in view of the peculiar conditions prevailing in the Ahom Kingdom, this departure from the general principle followed by the Company in its relations with friendly States was not only justified but essential for the maintenance of order. In a letter dated February 20, 1824, Scott was informed that the Supreme Government favoured the plan of restoring Ahom rule. In a proclamation addressed to the people of Assam and issued by the British military authorities on entering the Brahmaputra Valley in 1824 it was observed: "We are not led into your country by the thirst of conquest; but are forced, in our own defence, to deprive our enemy of the means of annoying us. You may, therefore, rest assured, that we will . . . re-establish . . . a government adapted to your wants, and calculated to promote the happiness of all classes."<sup>1</sup>

After the expulsion of the Burmese Scott made two alternative suggestions: either, the Brahmaputra Valley should be restored to an Ahom Prince, who should be required to pay an annual subsidy of two *lakhs* of rupees; or the area as far as Bishnath should be annexed to Bengal, the upper portion of the Valley (excluding the territory inhabited by the Moamarias, the Khamtis and the Singphos) should be restored to an Ahom Prince, and proper arrangements should be made for the defence of the Assam-Burma frontier. The powers of the restored Monarchy were to be restrained by the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, No. 32.

privileges of the aristocracy. Scott favoured the claim of Raja Chandra Kanta who, he suggested, might be succeeded by Purandar Singh. About Purandar Singh he wrote, "Purandar Singh has more ability and general information than Chandra Kanta, but he is of a rather untractable disposition and supposed to be much swayed by the advice of low favourites. Having been brought up in our territories, he has no doubt been inspired with some degree of respect for, and gratitude to, the British Government for the favours conferred upon his family. He has also been better educated than is usual with an Assamese Prince, and being possessed of considerable wealth, he would be more able to support his dignity and give his people breathing time than a starving King".<sup>1</sup>

The Supreme Government took a half-hearted decision on Scott's suggestions. He was informed that the Government did not consider itself pledged by any engagement or declaration to restore an Ahom Prince to the throne of Assam. The problem of restoration was, indeed, very complicated. "Not only had the Burmese been in possession for several years, in the course of which they had overthrown most of the old administrative landmarks, but the people were split up into many conflicting parties, and the elevation of any particular pretender to the throne would have resulted, as soon as the British troops were withdrawn, in a renewal of the fatal dissensions and civil wars which had prevailed for so many years before the Burmese occupation."<sup>2</sup> Scott's suggestion regarding

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<sup>1</sup> S. C., July 14, 1826, No. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 285.

the annexation of the territory as far as Bishnath was accepted, on the ground that the local population preferred British rule to the restoration of the Ahom Monarchy. With regard to the upper portion of the Brahmaputra Valley, the Supreme Government rejected Scott's suggestion and decided that it should remain under British administration, for a time at least. The acquisition was financially profitable, and it was expected that the local co-operation of the Assamese nobles could be secured by offering them responsible posts in the judicial and revenue departments. Scott warned the higher authorities in the following words: "Unaccustomed as the Assamese have been to the payment of taxes, the lower order would probably look upon any considerable increase to the revenue as the greatest of all evils, and the members of the royal family, the nobility, the public functionaries and the religious orders would view with dislike the introduction of our authority, founded, as it seems to me, it must ultimately be upon the destruction of their own."

The frontier tract, inhabited by the Moamarias, the Khamtis and the Singphos, was excluded from the direct administrative control of the British Government. The area known as Matak (modern Lakhimpur district), lying between the Brahmaputra and the Buri Dihing rivers,<sup>1</sup> was chiefly inhabited by the Moamarias,

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<sup>1</sup> According to Pemberton (*The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 68), the Moamaria territory lay on the south bank of the Brahmaputra; it was bounded on the south by the Buri Dihing, on the west and the north by the Brahmaputra, and on the east by a line extending from the Dihing to a point nearly opposite to the mouth of the Kundil *nulla*.

who were governed by a chief known as the *Bar Senapati*.<sup>1</sup> The *Bar Senapati's* capital was at Rangagora on the Dibru river. Matak had not suffered from Burmese aggression, probably because the district was poor and almost inaccessible, and the *Bar Senapati* had carefully avoided giving the invaders any offence. He had, however, helped the British army with labour and provisions. On Scott's recommendation the Supreme Government agreed to leave him in semi-independent possession of his territory. By an agreement<sup>2</sup> dated May 13, 1826, he acknowledged the supremacy of the British Government and promised to furnish 300 *paiks* as well as provisions in time of war. No revenue was to be paid to the British treasury, but his jurisdiction in serious criminal cases was placed under the supervision of the Agent to the Governor-General. Later on the obligation to supply *paiks* and provisions was commuted to a money payment of Rs. 1,800 a year. In January, 1835, a new agreement was concluded, by which the *Bar Senapati* undertook to pay Rs. 1,800 a year as tribute, and to supply a contingent of *paiks* when required. He died in November, 1839, and as his successor refused the terms offered to him, the district was annexed by the Company.<sup>3</sup>

The Khamtis, 'the first race in Assam in spirit, intelligence and moral character', had liberated themselves from Ahom control in 1794. Their territory,

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<sup>1</sup> This title was conferred upon the chief of the Moamarias by Purnananda *Burha Gohain*.

<sup>2</sup> Aitchison, *Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 137-138.

<sup>3</sup> Aitchison, *Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 131, 138-139.

lying to the south of the Noa Dihing river, merged into the Hukawng Valley of Upper Burma. Their chief was known as the *Sadiya Khowa Gohain*. He co-operated with the British force in resisting the raids of the Singphos after the expulsion of the Burmese. Scott recommended that his position should be made analogous to that of the Bar Senapati. By an agreement<sup>1</sup> concluded in May, 1826, the *Sadiya Khowa Gohain* acknowledged British supremacy. No tribute was demanded from him, but he was required to maintain a contingent of 200 men who were to be provided with arms and ammunition by the British Government. His judicial authority was curtailed. Four companies of the Assam Light Infantry were stationed at Sadiya to protect the frontier against the hill tribes. This arrangement was disturbed by the revolt of the Khamtis in 1839. The suppression of the revolt was completed by December, 1843. Sadiya was annexed by proclamation in 1842.

We have already referred to the raids of the Singphos.<sup>2</sup> Captain Neufville, who served as Intelligence Officer during the war, commanded the Assam Light Infantry, and later on became Scott's assistant for the administration of the Brahmaputra Valley, struck terror into the heart of the Singphos by leading carefully planned raids into the interior of their territory. Sixteen Singpho chiefs submitted to the British Government and an agreement was concluded

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<sup>1</sup> Aitchison, *Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 131-132.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, p. 344.

with them in May, 1826. No tribute was demanded from them, but it was stipulated that they would loyally co-operate with the British authorities in case of war or disturbances by supplying men and provisions, clearing roads, and collecting information. They were required to surrender all slaves in their custody and to submit their mutual disputes, if any, to British arbitration. Every chief was required to deliver a hostage for good conduct—a son, a nephew, or a brother, who was to be educated by the British Government according to Scott's suggestion. The *Gam* (or Chief) of Bisa was accorded a pre-eminent position.

Seven years elapsed between the conclusion of the war and the restoration of Ahom rule in the Brahmaputra Valley. This was a period of attempted consolidation by the British Government, acting through Scott and his successor Robertson, and of rebellion on the part of discontented Ahom elements who were probably in touch with the Court of Ava. As Scott had apprehended, the Ahom nobility could not reconcile itself to the loss of political power. The first attempt to revive the *ancien regime* was made by Gadadhar Singh, who claimed to be a nephew of Raja Chandra Kanta. The rebellion was suppressed and the would-be usurper was imprisoned. Major Burney, Resident at Ava, informed the Burmese Ministers that the rebels had used the name of the Burmese King; the Burmese Court naturally disowned any connection with Gadadhar Singh. This incident was followed by another rising under the professed leadership of *Kumar Rupchand*, a man of uncertain antecedents. A rebellion of the Khasis under a very energetic leader

named Teerut Singh was far more serious. The Singphos also rebelled in 1830.

It is beyond the scope of the present volume to go into the details of these rebellions, but it is necessary to point out their effect on the settlement of the Brahmaputra Valley.<sup>1</sup> They revealed the existence of serious discontent in Upper Assam. A policy of blood and iron might be successful, but the peculiar geographical and climatic conditions in Assam rendered military operations very troublesome and expensive. A far more serious factor was the suspected desire on the part of the Burmese Court to foment disturbances in Assam. The possibility of a fresh Burmese invasion, supported by the Singphos, the Khasis and the discontented Ahom nobility, had to be taken into consideration. So the question of the restoration of the Ahom Monarchy again came to the forefront.

Under the directions of the Supreme Government Scott submitted a fresh report in June, 1831, only a few weeks before his death. He pointed out that the sincere loyalty and co-operation of the nobility could not be purchased by offices and pensions. "It would be futile to suppose," he remarked, "that members of the ruling classes, whose ancestors had reigned in the valley for more than five hundred years, would at once give up all their hopes of future greatness upon the appearance amongst them of a handful of strangers".

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<sup>1</sup> It is somewhat strange that Sir Edward Gait does not even refer to these rebellions (except the Khasi rebellion). His narrative seems to indicate that the restoration of the Ahom Monarchy in 1833 was merely the normal solution of a political problem postponed in 1826.

He suggested that the Ahom Monarchy should be restored in the so-called 'Jorhat Division', *i.e.*, the territory east of the Dhansiri river. He no longer considered Raja Chandra Kanta as a person fit to be enthroned; he was described as an 'imbecile' incapable of transacting public business.

Scott's plan involved the retention of full British control over the Sadiya region and the consequent responsibility for the defence of the north-east frontier. The financial liability involved in this arrangement alarmed the Supreme Government (Lord William Bentinck was pursuing a policy of retrenchment), and some absurd alternatives (reliance on the Singphos for the defence of the frontier, cession of the frontier tract to Gambhir Singh, etc.) were seriously considered. Finally, Lord William Bentinck decided in favour of restoration. Scott's death in August, 1831, and the survey of the eastern frontier by Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton delayed the consummation of the plan of restoration. Meanwhile Robertson succeeded Scott and reported in favour of Purandar Singh. The Supreme Government endorsed Robertson's view. Robertson interviewed Purander Singh at Gauhati and was favourably impressed by his pleasant manners and mild disposition.<sup>1</sup> Raja Chandra Kanta sent a pathetic appeal to the Supreme Government, which unceremoniously rejected his prayer for restoration.

By a treaty<sup>2</sup> concluded on March 2, 1833.

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., February 4, 1833, No. 123, 124.

<sup>2</sup> Aitchison, *Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 139-141.



Purandar Singh was recognised as the vassal ruler of the territory 'lying on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra to the eastward of the Dhansiri river, and on the northern bank to the eastward of a *nulla* immediately east of Bishnath'. Sadiya and Matak remained outside his authority; the British Government continued to maintain direct political relations with the *Sadiya Khowa Gohain* and the *Bar Senapati*. The districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang (including Bishnath) and Nowgong remained under direct British rule<sup>1</sup>. Purandar Singh was required to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 50,000 out of an estimated revenue of Rs. 1,20,000. He bound himself 'to abstain from the practices of the former Rajas of Assam as to cutting off ears and noses, extracting eyes, or otherwise mutilating or torturing', to 'assimilate the administration of justice in his territory to that which prevails in the dominions of the Honourable Company', to 'abolish the immolation of women by Suttees', to 'assist' the passage of British troops through his territory by 'furnishing supplies and carriage and receiving payment for the same', to claim no jurisdiction over British military cantonments in his territory, 'to listen with attention to the advice' of British Political Agents, and to abstain from carrying on correspondence 'by letter or otherwise', and also from entering into any compact or agreement, with any foreign ruler. Faithful adherence to these articles would involve British protection of his territory 'from the aggressions of any

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of the administration of these districts, see Gait, *History of Assam*, pp. 272-294.

foreign foe'; but if he in any way departed from loyalty or oppressed the people, 'the right was reserved to the Government of the Honourable Company either to transfer the said country to another ruler or take it into its own immediate occupation'.

Purandar Singh was formally installed as Raja of Upper Assam in April, 1833. By an agreement concluded a few months later his status was practically degraded to that of a big *jagirdar*. Thus from the very beginning of his administration Purandar Singh found himself in a very difficult situation. He did not enjoy the status and prestige of his predecessors. His rival, Raja Chandra Kanta, who sent a fresh appeal to the Governor-General after his installation, was more popular with the nobles and the people. The rulers of Sadiya and Matak preferred Raja Chandra Kanta to the nominee of the Company. Moreover, Purandar Singh found it very difficult to discharge his financial liability to the Company. It was hard to spare Rs. 50,000 out of Rs. 1,20,000. As time went on he failed to raise the estimated revenue; the people complained of maladministration and extortion.<sup>1</sup> He applied to the British Government for a considerable reduction in his tribute. The result was his deposition in October, 1838. His territories were brought under direct British administration and formed into two districts—Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. The following passage from the pen of a contemporary observer gives us a pathetic description of Purandar Singh just before his fall: "The present representative of this once

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<sup>1</sup> Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 220.

powerful dynasty (*Svargadeo* or Lord of Heaven, as he is pleased to call himself) now resides at Jorhat in noisy pomp and tawdry splendour; his resources limited to that of a zamindar; his numerous nobility reduced to beggary or to exist upon bribery and corruption; and his kingly court (for he still maintains his regal dignity) more resembling the parade of a company of strolling players than anything imposing or sovereign."<sup>1</sup>

The annexation of Sadiya and Matak<sup>2</sup> in 1842 completed the establishment of direct British rule over the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley, and the north-eastern frontier of British India touched the mountains of Upper Burma. The district officer of Dibrugarh generally performed the duties of Political Agent in this area. In 1882 an Assistant Political Officer was stationed at Sadiya.

By a treaty executed at Badarpur on March 6, 1824, Govinda Chandra had been recognised as the protected ruler of Cachar.<sup>3</sup> After the conclusion of the war his ancestral territory was formally handed over to him, but the Governor-General was not sure whether he could regularly discharge his financial liability to the Company. Govinda Chandra was too weak to suppress his rebel servant Tularam;<sup>4</sup> he repeatedly appealed to the British Government for help against this persistent enemy. In 1829 Scott induced

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, p. 481. They were incorporated in the Lakhimpur district, and the head-quarters of the district were transferred to Dibrugarh in the Matak country.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>4</sup> See *ante*, p. 282.

him to assign to Tularam a tract of land in the hilly regions of North Cachar; but this compromise satisfied neither party. Tularam challenged Govinda Chandra's claim to the *Raj* on two grounds: he was not crowned with the approval of the council of forty chiefs who alone were entitled to select a King, and he had forfeited his right by his oppressive conduct.<sup>1</sup> Tularam's intrigues certainly intensified the anarchy in Cachar. The oppressed cultivators fled to Jaintia, Sylhet and Tippera; the plains of Cachar became jungles for want of cultivation. Govinda Chandra's tyrannical measures destroyed trade and commerce.<sup>2</sup> His relations with Gambhir Singh were unfriendly. The whole situation was further complicated by the fact that he had no natural heir. He wanted to adopt a child as his successor, but the Supreme Government did not sanction adoption.<sup>3</sup> In 1829 the Commissioner of Sylhet wrote to the Supreme Government, ". . . for the peace and happiness of the inhabitants of the country now suffering under every change something should definitely be settled, a successor to the Raja should be selected, or it should be declared that the British Government should assume the sovereignty of the country on the death of the present Raja as the paramount lord and the natural successor of the State having no heir to the Raja".<sup>4</sup>

In April, 1830, Govinda Chandra was assassinated at the secret instigation of Gambhir Singh. Several

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<sup>1</sup> P. C., May 14, 1832, No. 81.

<sup>2</sup> P. C., May 14, 1832, No. 81.

<sup>3</sup> P. C., May 14, 1832, No. 81.

<sup>4</sup> P. C., May 14, 1832, No. 81.

claimants at once put forward their pretensions to the principality—Chandraprabha (widow of Govinda Chandra), Tularam, Govindaram (Tularam's cousin). But the most serious claim was that of Gambhir Singh, who applied for a lease of Cachar for 20 years on an annual tribute of Rs. 15,000. This claim was supported by Captain Grant, Commissioner of Manipur, but seriously opposed by Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton, who pointed out that it would be dangerous to entrust the defence of Cachar to the weak ruler of Manipur.<sup>1</sup> Lord William Bentinck decided in favour of annexation. A hilly tract in the eastern part of Cachar was ceded to Gambhir Singh; the plains were annexed on August 14, 1832, and formed into a district with head-quarters at Silchar.

At the time of the annexation of the plains of Cachar Tularam was confirmed in the possession of the hilly tract assigned to him in 1829. This tract was bounded on the south by the Mahur river and the Naga Hills, on the west by the Doyang, on the east by the Dhansiri, and on the north by the Jamuna and the Doyang. His tribute consisted of four elephants' tusks; later on a money payment of Rs. 490 was substituted. He enjoyed a life pension of Rs. 50 per month. His authority in criminal cases was limited. In 1834 Tularam surrendered to the British Government the western portion of his territory. His sons, Nakulram and Brijnath, failed to protect their

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see B. P. Chakravarti, "Annexation of Cachar, 1832", *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission*, 1942.

people from the raids of the Nagas. So their territory was annexed by the British Government<sup>1</sup> in 1854.

By a treaty concluded in March, 1824, Ram Singh had been recognised as the protected ruler of Jaintia.<sup>2</sup> When Scott marched from Sylhet to Nowgong (April, 1824) through Jaintiapur,<sup>3</sup> Ram Singh gave him considerable assistance. Later on, however, that crafty chief made no exertions to help the British authorities and even connived at Burmese aggressions. Still he was confirmed in the possession of his territory at the end of the war. He took advantage of the unsettled conditions which prevailed for sometime before the consolidation of British authority in Assam, encroached on the Nowgong district, and established an outpost at Chappar Mukh, at the junction of the Kopili and Doyang rivers. In 1832 he induced one of his subordinate chiefs to seize four British subjects, three of whom were subsequently sacrificed in a temple. Ram Singh died before the British Government could take him to task for these outrages.<sup>4</sup> His nephew and successor,<sup>5</sup> Rajendra Singh, failed to give satisfaction to the British authorities. In 1835 he was compelled

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<sup>1</sup> Aitchison, *Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 164-165.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, pp. 292-293.

<sup>3</sup> See *ante*, p. 332.

<sup>4</sup> "He was a wise and active prince, and seems to be universally beloved by his subjects."—*Government Gazette*, June 24, 1824. (Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 12).

<sup>5</sup> The rulers of Jaintia were succeeded by their nephews, *i.e.*, sister's sons. (See *ante*, p. 40). 'In consequence, ostensibly, of a sense of the degradation his descendants would undergo, agreeable to the rules of succession', Ram Singh never married. His heir-apparent was about twelve years of age in 1824. (Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 12).

to surrender his territory in the plains; the hills, which were quite unprofitable, he voluntarily gave up.<sup>1</sup> He retired to Sylhet with a pension of Rs. 500 per month.

By Article 2 of the treaty of Yandabo the King of Burma agreed to recognise Gambhir Singh as the ruler of Manipur. The words used in the treaty<sup>2</sup> were not very clear. Was Gambhir Singh to remain, like his immediate predecessors, a vassal of Burma, or did the treaty recognise him as an independent Prince? From the British standpoint it was unsafe to allow Manipur to remain a dependency of Burma. It was obvious that the consolidation of Burmese influence in Manipur would expose the Sylhet frontier to the danger which had precipitated the war in 1824. The question was discussed by the Supreme Government and even referred to the Court of Directors. Major Burney, Resident at Ava, was directed to report to Calcutta the sentiments of the Burmese Ministers on this delicate subject. But fortunately they did not demand suzerainty over Manipur. On one point, however, they persistently refused to make any concession. During the military operations Gambhir Singh had succeeded in occupying not only Manipur proper but also the Kabaw valley,<sup>3</sup> lying to the east of the former boundary of the Manipur State, and inhabited by Shans. The Burmese Government refused to agree to the inclusion of the Kabaw valley in Gambhir Singh's dominions, claiming that it was an integral part of the Burmese

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<sup>1</sup> Aitchison, *Treaties*, Vol. II, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> See Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, pp. 116-119.

Empire.<sup>1</sup> Within a few weeks of the conclusion of the treaty of Yandabo some Burmese troops crossed the river Ningthi and entered the disputed valley, but they soon retired into Burmese territory of their own accord. Instead of renewing hostilities Gambhir Singh submitted the matter to the decision of the British Government.<sup>2</sup> For eight years the matter formed a subject of controversy between the Governments of India and Burma. The authorities in Calcutta supported the claim of Gambhir Singh until, in 1832, Major Burney submitted a confidential report in favour of the Burmese claim. In his letter dated July 5, 1832, he pointed out that the disputed valley had been in possession of the Burmese Kings since 1370 A.D.,<sup>3</sup> and that for 12 years prior to the outbreak of the late war the Burmese had enjoyed uninterrupted possession. Lord William Bentinck thereupon decided to return the valley to Burma. The Supreme Government wrote to the Resident at Ava on March 16, 1833, “. . . the Supreme Government still adheres to the opinion that the Ningthee formed the proper boundary between Ava and Manipur; but that in consideration for His Majesty’s (*i.e.*, Burmese King’s) feelings and wishes, and in the spirit of amity and good will subsisting between the two countries, the Supreme Government consents to the restoration of the Kubo valley to Ava, and to the establishment of the boundary line at the

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<sup>1</sup> Both the routes connecting Burma with Manipur ran through this valley.

<sup>2</sup> S. C., May 5, 1826, Nos. 19, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Gait (*History of Assam*, p. 263) says that the valley was annexed to Manipur in 1475 A.D.



foot of the Yoomadoung hills". The transfer took place on January 9, 1834. Gambhir Singh accepted the decision of the British Government, 'but neither he nor his descendants ever willingly acquiesced in the cession' of what they considered to be their ancestral territory. In order to compensate Manipur for this loss the Governor-General agreed to give the Raja a monthly stipend of Rs. 500. This stipend is still enjoyed by the Raja of Manipur.<sup>1</sup> Gambhir Singh died in 1834.

Three articles of the treaty of Yandabo remain to be discussed. There is no doubt that the article concerning money payment<sup>2</sup> fell very heavily on the Burmese. Probably the King was rich enough to pay the money from his own funds, but no Minister had the 'hardihood' to suggest that 'the sum should be taken from the Royal coffers'. As a result, the Ministers had to raise it 'by voluntary or compulsory contributions'. This process required time; so they repeatedly demanded 'an extension of the term of payment'.<sup>3</sup> The last instalment was paid in February, 1833. Robertson observes, "Any one who had seen our paymaster standing like Brennus before a rude pair of scales, and receiving, by weight alone, costly trinkets of really beautiful workmanship, would have felt that the vanquished were humbled to the uttermost that a civilised and Christian power could desire . . . ."<sup>4</sup>

The Burmese Government agreed by Article 11 of

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<sup>1</sup> Aitchison, *Treaties*, etc., Vol. II, pp. 268-269.

<sup>2</sup> Article 5.

<sup>3</sup> S. C., April 14, 1826, No. 27.

<sup>4</sup> *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, p. 236.

the treaty of Yandabo to return to British authorities 'all British, whether European or Native, American, and other prisoners'. Several thousands of Manipuri and Assamese captives were kept as slaves in different parts of Burma. When Crawford demanded their release, the Burmese Ministers argued that the treaty referred merely to prisoners of war—not to those former subjects of their King who might have been brought to Burma before the war. The argument was probably technically correct. Crawford failed to secure the release of these unfortunate slaves, and for this he was censured by the Supreme Government.<sup>1</sup>

Article 7 of the treaty of Yandabo provided that "a Commercial Treaty, upon principles of reciprocal advantage, will be entered into" by the British and Burmese Governments. Accordingly, in September, 1826, John Crawford<sup>2</sup> was deputed as envoy to the Court of Ava.<sup>3</sup> He arrived at the capital on September 30 and had an audience of the King on October 20. He says, "The appearance of a British Mission at Ava, although specifically provided for by the Treaty of Peace, had excited a good deal of uneasiness on the

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<sup>1</sup> Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy*, pp. 283-284.

<sup>2</sup> Crawford, John (1783-1868) : joined Army Medical Service, 1803, and served for five years, chiefly in Upper India : transferred to Penang : was with Lord Minto in the expedition to Java, 1811 : employed in diplomatic offices in Java, 1811-1817 : sent as Envoy to Siam and Cochin China, 1821 : administered the government of Singapore, 1823-1826 : Commissioner of Pegu, 1826 : Envoy to Ava, 1826 : retired to England, 1827. (Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, p. 99).

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the journey see Wilson, *Documents*, Appendix, No. 20.

part of the court, and much alarm among the people. Our little party of less than thirty Europeans had been magnified by rumour into some hundreds, and from such a force the capital itself was scarcely thought to be safe—so deep an impression had the superiority of European arms produced upon the nation at large!”<sup>1</sup>

The Ministers of the Burmese King were, however, shrewd enough to reject all drafts prepared by the British envoy and to impose upon him a treaty prepared by themselves. The treaty<sup>2</sup> was signed on November 24, 1826. Crawford explains the advantages secured by the treaty to the British Government in the following words<sup>3</sup>:

“The first article of the convention stipulates generally for a free commercial intercourse between the subjects of the two Governments, and for protection to the persons and property of those engaged in trade. It in fact, however, makes no alteration in the circumstances under which that trade has been long conducted; but it may be said to secure, by the formalities of a public instrument, a branch of British commerce which had hitherto existed only by sufferance.

By the second article of the Treaty, all British vessels, not exceeding fifty tons burthen, or thereabouts, are exempted from the payment of tonnage duties and port charges. This places our trade, in the ports of the Burman Empire nearly on a footing with

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<sup>1</sup> Crawford, *Journal*, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal*, Appendix, pp. 8-9.

that of its own subjects and of the Chinese, whose boats and junks seldom exceed the tonnage now mentioned, and who have always been exempt from the payment of such charges. The stipulation makes no change in the state of the Burman trade at British ports. The privilege thus secured to us may, it is hoped, give rise to a coasting trade of some value and extent between the Burmese ports and our various settlements in the Bay of Bengal.

The third article secures some advantages to British merchants resident in the Burman dominions, although far short of those required by the justice and necessity of the case.

According to the Burman laws, all vessels shipwrecked upon the coast are forfeited, and become the property of the King. This arbitrary and unjust law is cancelled by the fourth and last article of the convention, which stipulates for British property shipwrecked the same immunity and protection as under civilized Governments."

Crawfurd's estimate of the benefits likely to be derived from the commercial treaty concluded by him was coloured by the same optimism which had spoiled the value of the work done by Symes in Burma. Within less than three decades of the conclusion of Crawfurd's treaty the British Government had to declare war against Burma primarily for the protection of British commercial interests in that country. Indeed, the Court of Ava never considered Crawfurd's treaty as a *treaty*; it was treated as a 'Royal license' (*Akhwen dau*), which was not binding on the Burmese Government. As early as 1835 Bayfield observed, "It is much to be

regretted, that Mr. Crawford should have accepted the commercial treaty offered to him by the Burmese . . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Article 7 of the treaty of Yandabo also provided that “accredited ministers, retaining an escort or safeguard of fifty men, from each shall reside at the *Darbar* of the other, who shall be permitted to purchase or to build a suitable place of residence, of permanent materials”. Robertson describes this clause as the ‘real blot’ in the treaty. The reception of envoys, says he, was ‘a measure repulsive to all Indo-Chinese nations’.<sup>2</sup> In April, 1836, the King of Burma received a letter from the Emperor of China, which contained the following remarks: “It is not proper to allow the English . . . . to remain in the City. They are accustomed to act like the Pipal tree<sup>3</sup> . . . . Let not Younger Brother<sup>4</sup> therefore allow the English to remain in his country. . . .”

John Crawford was the first British Resident in the Court of Ava in accordance with Article 7 of the treaty of Yandabo. When he arrived at Henzada (September 8, 1826) he found that the Burmese were very reluctant ‘to admit the residence of a permanent diplomatic agent, and especially to the military guard of fifty men’. The Chief Officer of the town contended

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<sup>1</sup> *Historical Review*, p. xlviin.

<sup>2</sup> *Political Incidents of the First Burmese War*, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> “Whenever this plant takes root and particularly in old temples and buildings it spreads and takes such firm hold that it is scarcely possible to be removed or eradicated. . . .”—Note by Major Burney.

<sup>4</sup> King of Burma, the Emperor of China being the Elder Brother.

that the British Resident should live at Rangoon, not at Ava. The English version of the treaty provided that the 'accredited minister' should reside 'at the *Darbar*', but the Burmese version of the treaty<sup>1</sup> provided that the British Agent was to live 'in the royal city of Burma' (*Myanma Myodaw*). The Chief Officer of Henzada argued that Rangoon was a Royal city (*Myodaw*). Crawford refused to accept this 'singular and unexpected' construction of the treaty and proceeded to the capital. He remained there for a little more than two months (September 30—December 12, 1826). He left Ava without communicating with the Government; for this he was censured by the Vice-President<sup>2</sup>-in-Council<sup>3</sup> in a resolution dated April 6, 1827.

For the next three years no Resident<sup>4</sup> was sent to the Court of Ava. In a minute dated December 30, 1829, Lord William Bentinck expressed the view that it was necessary to continue diplomatic relations with Burma. A Resident living at Ava, he thought, could 'gradually remove from the minds of our opponents the sore and angry feelings left there by defeat, assure them of the sincerity of our desire of cultivating friendly relations and keep our Government well informed of the real view and state of parties at the

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Combermere.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Amherst was then in Simla.

<sup>4</sup> A detailed review of the work of the Residents in Burma, based on an exhaustive study of the original sources, is available in W. S. Desai's *History of British Residency in Burma*.

capital of Ava'. Accordingly Major Henry Burney<sup>1</sup> was sent to Ava as Resident in 1830. With regard to his general duties he received the following instructions from the Government: ". . . . you should make no proposition but encourage the Burmese to disclose their views and make first overtures on all occasions, and . . . . you should quietly make it your study to ascertain and report for the information of Government the state of parties at Ava and the real views of the King and courtiers, and endeavour to obtain some influence over the Court, and above all to establish a free intercourse between yourself and our possessions both in Arakan and Tenasserim."

Burney arrived at Ava on April 24, 1830. He was welcomed, and on the whole treated with respect. When the time came for his formal reception by the King, the 'Shoe Question'<sup>2</sup> created trouble. He was required to remove his shoes when he came near the Royal Council building. He objected, and submitted a memorial to the King. He says, "My objection to removing my shoes is founded on the fact that the Burmese require it not as the fulfilment of a mere custom, but as a means of exalting their King and gratifying their own pride and vanity by humiliating

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<sup>1</sup> Burney, Henry: Captain, on duty at Prince of Wales Island: learnt Malay: acquired knowledge of the Archipelago and Malacca: appointed Military Secretary of the Penang Government: employed to negotiate with Malay and Siamese Chiefs: Political Agent to Siamese States, 1825: Envoy to Siam: Deputy Commissioner of Tenasserim, 1827-1829: Resident at the Court of Ava, 1830-1838: returned to India, 1842: died there in 1845-1846. (Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, p. 63).

<sup>2</sup> See A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*, pp. 232-234.

and degrading the British character." After a regular tug-of-war between the Resident and the Burmese Ministers, it was decided that Burney should appear before the King without shoes on an ordinary day.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the presentation to the King took place on June 17, 1830. Burney then visited the heir-apparent, the Prince of Tharrawaddy, the only full brother of the King, and some other influential persons.

Burney acted as British Resident in Burma for eight years (April, 1830—March, 1838). During this fairly long period he had to deal with numerous diplomatic questions, some of which were settled satisfactorily from the British point of view.

The question of the payment of the indemnity came for discussion soon after Burney's arrival at Ava. At that time a balance of about 12 *lakhs* of rupees was still outstanding. Burney began to press the Burmese Ministers for immediate payment, but they evaded the issue on various excuses. In August, 1830, Burney demanded a definite agreement, and declared that he would leave Ava if the agreement was not forthcoming by a certain date. The Ministers did not take this warning seriously. So Burney left the city on the appointed date. Within two hours of his departure some Burmese officers overtook him and a satisfactory arrangement was made. The Resident returned to

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<sup>1</sup> "It was custom with the Burmese to present foreign agents to the King on a Kadaw day, so as to impress the people with superiority of His Burmanic Majesty over all monarchs. Even the envoys of the Emperor of China were subjected to this indignity. The British envoys, Symes (in 1795) and Crawford (in 1826), had also submitted to this treatment."



Ava. The Governor-General censured him for 'proceeding further than could be considered proper without specific orders': "His Lordship thinks it would have been prudent to have limited your representations to a refusal to hold further communication until the point at issue could be referred for the orders of superior authority, instead of committing yourself to a measure so difficult to retrieve if once carried into effect, as actual retirement from the capital." However, Burney's strenuous efforts succeeded in securing the last instalment in February, 1833.

Soon after the conclusion of the treaty of Yandabo the Burmese began to commit outrages in British territory on the Moulmein frontier. There were reasons to believe that the Burmese Chief of Martaban was secretly in touch with the bandits. In 1829 British troops advanced into the interior from Moulmein, and burnt down Martaban and some Burmese villages. On his arrival at Ava Burney found that the Ministers had taken offence at the drastic reprisals taken by the British authorities. After frank conversations on the subject with the Ministers Burney was able to secure the removal of the Martaban Chief. Similar complaints came also from Arakan. After protracted negotiations Burney succeeded in persuading the Ministers to take proper steps for the prevention of outrages committed by Burmese subjects in British territory.

We have already referred to the question of the retrocession of Tenasserim. In October, 1831, the Burmese Ministers raised an important question in connection with the boundary of the province of Tenasserim. Article 4 of the treaty of Yandabo

recognised the river Salween as the boundary between British and Burmese territory. But the same Article appeared to modify this provision by permitting the British to take only the districts of Tenasserim, Tavoy, Mergui, and Ye. The British had, however, taken possession of Moulmein and some other places *east* of the Salween. The Burmese Ministers demanded that, as the British had no right to the Martaban district, they should return those places. When Burney refused to admit this claim, the Ministers argued that the matter should be decided by a joint boundary commission in accordance with Articles 3 and 4 of the treaty of Yandabo. Burney replied that he was prohibited by his instructions from discussing this point. When the Burmese Ministers began to press their claim, he sent them a written reply, in which he clearly stated that during the negotiations culminating in the treaty of Yandabo the Salween had definitely been fixed as the boundary irrespective of the limits of the Martaban district. The Ministers made a vigorous protest, saying, "The Treaty says one thing, Major Burney another."

Burney was instructed by the Supreme Government to look after the interests of the British subjects in Burma. One paragraph of his letter of instructions ran as follows: "And I hereby authorise you to receive complaints from all British subjects residing in the dominions of the King of Ava, in the subject of injuries received by them from the Government or subjects of Ava and to make such representations thereon to the King and Ministers as you judge advisable". But it was added that "it is not the desire of the Govern-

General-in-Council that you should interfere in any such matter whenever the established laws of the country are adequate to afford the parties redress." The Resident was also expected to foster Indo-Burmese trade: "The Governor-General also desires, that your attention should be given to the trade of Ava with a view to reporting to his Lordship-in-Council the practicability of extending and facilitating British commerce and the consumption of British manufactures." There are numerous cases on record in which Burney intervened successfully for the protection of Indian and Armenian merchants in Burma. His presence gave them such security as they had never known before. The result was that the number of Indian and Armenian merchants in Burma increased considerably, and British goods found an expanding market in that country. Burney says, "The importation of British goods into this country and particularly into the capital has been vastly increased since the residence of a British officer here."

Soon after Burney's arrival at Ava the Burmese Government decided to send an embassy to Calcutta. Two envoys were selected in August, 1830, and they were entrusted with the following duties: (1) To demand the restoration of the Kabaw valley. (2) To demand the restoration of those parts of the Martaban district which lay east of the Salween. (3) To demand the abrogation of Article 7 of the treaty of Yandabo providing for the appointment of Residents. "The two countries," so ran the letter of instructions, "have no cause for distrusting each other, and therefore it would be better for the English and Burmese Chiefs to

withdraw the men stationed by each, and to send Royal and friendly letters to each other once in five years, and in this manner keep open the communication and intercourse between the two countries and cultivate friendship." The envoys were verbally instructed to demand the retrocession of Tenasserim and Arakan. They reached Calcutta on December 6, 1830. As the Governor-General (Lord William Bentinck) was then on tour in Upper India, they could not meet him before November, 1832. Their demand with regard to the Kabaw valley was satisfied,<sup>1</sup> but in all other respects they were disappointed. They left Calcutta in June, 1833.

Burney's relations with King Ba-gyi-daw were, on the whole, friendly, but the Resident was convinced that the King would soon take recourse to hostilities for the recovery of the lost provinces. He wrote to the Supreme Government in December, 1830, "Having in some of my former reports expressed an opinion that the present King of Ava will take the first favourable opportunity of engaging in another contest with us, I beg to take the present occasion of submitting a more detailed statement of the grounds upon which I have formed that opinion. The King and those about him are manifestly dissatisfied with the present state of things. Nothing shows this more decidedly than the eagerness with which they listen to any tales brought here of disasters suffered by us in India or of hostilities projected against us by Runjeet Singh or any other chief, and their ignorance of the real superiority of our

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<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, pp. 491—493.

power and resources is very great. . . . All here are certain that Ava will rise again from her present reduced condition . . . . and not only the King's Court but the lower ranks of the people and even many of the inhabitants of the Tenasserim provinces firmly believe that in the last war it was our turn to conquer, but that in the next contest it will be the turn of Ava." The Ministers were paying great attention to the re-organisation of the military forces. The Governors of Prome, Bassein, and other cities in the Delta were appointed as military chiefs (*Bo*) who had 'the power to call out the inhabitants of their districts to meet armed at any point they pleased'. The civil administration was also improved. Burney says, "This Government now shows some deference to the feelings and opinions of the governed. An apprehension that its subjects may remove into our territories is secretly influencing it to treat the people with extraordinary mildness and indulgence; and this is the principal cause why so few Burmese have emigrated to Arakan or to the Tenasserim provinces since the conclusion of the war."

Such reports from the Resident naturally attracted the serious notice of the Supreme Government. In a Minute dated June 24, 1831, Lord William Bentinck observed, "In the meantime, to intimidate the Burmese from manifesting the hostile feeling towards us, which they are reputed to foster, and to convince them of their error in supposing us so exhausted and embarrassed as to submit to concessions, rather than venture a fresh conflict, we must seek the best military position on the Ava frontiers and show that we are prepared, and as

determined as prepared, not only to repel but chastise aggression."

In April, 1832, Burney left Ava for Rangoon for the purpose of recouping his health. His place was temporarily taken by Blundell, Deputy Commissioner of Tenasserim. The Governor-General expressed his appreciation of Burney's work in a letter dated September 8, 1831, "The acknowledgment of His Lordship and of the British Government are due to this officer for the uncommon zeal with which he has discharged the arduous and responsible duties with which he was entrusted at the sacrifice of his health and personal comforts."

While at Rangoon, Burney continued to hold the office of Resident; at Ava three officers—Blundell (April—September, 1832), Captain Macfarquhar (September, 1832—August, 1833), and Captain McLeod (August—November, 1833)—successively worked as his deputy. It was during this period that the bitter dispute about the Kabaw valley was brought to a close.

Burney returned to Ava in November, 1833. But his own ill-health, and the difficulty of transacting business with the King who had been ill for some time past, made it necessary for him to leave the capital once again. He left Ava in April, 1834, and returned there in July, 1835, spending the interval at Rangoon and in Calcutta. During this period the Residency was in charge of Assistant Surgeon Bayfield. On his return to Ava Burney wanted to post Bayfield at Rangoon to take charge of the British interests there, but the Government of India did not sanction this arrangement. Complaints of injustice, extortion and

molestation began to pour into the Residency from the British, Armenian, and Indian merchants at Rangoon. In March, 1836, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce sent a petition to the Government of India, suggesting 'the propriety of appointing a Consul or Assistant Resident to protect the British commercial interests at Rangoon and its maritime dependencies'. When the matter was referred to Burney for his opinion, he submitted that a regular covenanted servant of the Company should be appointed to take charge of affairs at Rangoon. Such a step, he argued, would remove the impression which generally prevailed in Burma that the British Government cared little about the interests of British subjects trading in that country. The Government of India appointed Bayfield to take charge of Consular duties at Rangoon, but he was not able to go to Rangoon before October, 1837. By that time Burney had left Burma for good.

In July, 1835, a Singpho Chief living within Burmese territory (in Northern Burma) attacked another Singpho Chief living within British territory (in Assam). Burney at once asked the Burmese Ministers to control the wild frontier tribes under their jurisdiction. A British officer named Captain Hannay was allowed to go to the disturbed area. The offending Singpho Chief surrendered; he was brought to Ava and reprimanded by the Ministers. Hannay collected valuable geographical and commercial information regarding Upper Burma, and returned to Ava in May, 1836. A few months later Bayfield was sent to Upper Burma for the purpose of collecting 'statistical and useful information on all subjects, but particularly on

. . . . the extent and nature of the trade now carried on between China and the Burmese Dominions and between them and our territories in Assam, and the best mode of protecting, facilitating, and extending the last mentioned'. He returned to Ava in May, 1837. The activities of Hannay and Bayfield created suspicions in the Burmese Court and alarmed the Burmese population. It was believed that the British Government intended to take forcible possession of the tribal territory in Upper Burma.

In 1837 Ava witnessed a political revolution of far-reaching importance; King Ba-gyi-daw was overthrown by his brother, the Prince of Tharrawaddy. The details of this revolution<sup>1</sup> need not be discussed here, but it is necessary to add that throughout this crisis Burney maintained an attitude of correct neutrality. He tried in vain to bring about a reconciliation between the King and his rebel brother, but his efforts to mitigate the sufferings of the victims of the new King's wrath were not altogether unsuccessful.

Burney soon found that it was very difficult to transact business with Tharrawaddy, "because he is so extremely uncertain and fickle: one hour, good humoured, affable, and attentive, the next harsh, peremptory and inconsiderate. . . . He indulged in spiritous liquors and gambling, and his house was much resorted to by the dissolute and disreputable. . . . He is further subject to fits of ungovernable passion,

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<sup>1</sup> See Desai, *History of the British Residency in Burma*, Chapter IX.



particularly when heated with liquor at which times also he is cruel and sanguinary."

It was clear to Burney that the new King was anxious to get rid of the treaties of 1826. In a conversation with Burney he "desired no reference should ever be made to them, that they are a matter of reproach and shame to the Burmese, that the English frightened the Burmese officers into signing them, and now always referred to them when they desired to shame the Burmese into granting anything which they desired."<sup>1</sup> He added "that as there are several articles in the treaty of Yandabo which, if referred to, would create a difference of opinion and quarrel, he thought the best plan is to throw aside these treaties and have no written engagements." On another occasion he clearly said that "the English had not conquered him or made the treaty with him and that he was determined to have nothing to say to it." Burney suggested that "if the King desired a modification in some of the articles of the treaty, the proper and established course would be to send an embassy to Bengal." Tharrawaddy replied, "I will not send an embassy to Bengal; if I send one it shall be to the King of England. I know nothing of the Goombhanee<sup>2</sup> and will not acknowledge him. He is an officer who receives pay and is not a King. Let him correspond with his equal, the Governor of Rangoon. I will receive no communication from

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<sup>1</sup> Burney's letter to the Supreme Government, May 24, 1837, para 65.

<sup>2</sup> A corruption for 'Company'. Here it refers to the Governor-General.

him or in his name.”<sup>1</sup> Burney observed that if the rejected the treaty of Yandabo, it might imply that he was also disputing the cession of the territories embodied in it. Tharrawaddy said, with a laugh that he had no intention of seizing those territories from the Company.

In view of the definitely unfriendly attitude of the King, Burney decided that no useful purpose would be served by his residence at the capital. He thought it would be better to retire to Rangoon, leaving Bayfield to keep touch with the King and his Ministers. The King had no objection to Bayfield's residence at his capital, but he made it clear that he would not recognise him as a public officer under the treaty of Yandabo. He explained his policy in the following words: “I will have nothing to say to the treaties, I will not acknowledge or grant anything to which you may found your right upon them, but in everything else you shall be treated much better than you ever were before.” Burney was censured by the Supreme Government for discussing the question of the treaties with the King who was at that time too much in-

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<sup>1</sup> King Mindon considered it beneath his dignity to enter into diplomatic relations with the Governor-General, whom he regarded as a mere officer of the Queen of England, and it was one of his fondest desires to conclude a treaty on terms of equality with the Queen herself. With this end in view he sent an envoy to London in 1872. In 1882 Thibaw's Ministers refused to conclude a treaty with the Governor-General and demanded that it should be concluded in the name of the Queen. In an official report we read: “The question was treated by the Burmese as one affecting their national dignity, and there is some evidence to show that this feeling had long existed among them . . . .” See A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*, pp. 241-242, 279-280.

toxicated with his newly won power to take a serious view of political problems. Moreover, Burney's decision to remove the Residency to Rangoon was disapproved: "It is at the present juncture of the highest consequence that accurate information should reach the Governor-General-in-Council of everything that occurs at Ava . . . . if the protection of the Residency should be removed during times of so much trouble there is every reason to fear that the interests of the English and others settled in Ava will materially suffer." But Burney left the capital before this letter reached him, and arrived at Rangoon in July, 1837.

After his arrival at Rangoon Burney wrote to the Supreme Government, "One universal impression exists not only at Ava, but throughout the country, that the present King has determined to declare war against us for the purpose of recovering the territories ceded by the treaty of Yandabo and restoring the Empire of Ava to its former extent of power and dominion." Tharrawaddy was collecting arms and ammunition, recruiting new troops, and strengthening his frontier garrisons. So Burney proposed decisive action without further delay: "We should proceed, if forced by the King's obstinacy, even as far as to threaten to invade his country, and we should not neglect the present opportunity of establishing a more extensive influence and control over the Court of Ava, and of placing our relations with this country on a more solid and secure footing." But the Governor-General, Lord Auckland, was 'directly and unequivocally opposed' to war with Burma. One member of his Council observed, "No event is more to be deprecated than a war with the

Burmese; neither honour nor advantage would be gained by it, while the disasters of the late war, the loss of troops by the unhealthiness of the climate, and the ruinous expenses attending it, from which we are only now beginning to recover, are still fresh in our recollection." The Governor-General was apprehending troubles on the North-West<sup>1</sup>; why should he precipitate hostilities on the East, when the Burmese King 'was not anxious at least immediately to provoke a rupture'?

In October, 1837, Burney left Burma for Calcutta, withdrawing the Residency without orders from the Government of India. Bayfield was left at Rangoon to look after British interests in Burma, under the general superintendence of the Commissioner of Tenasserim. But the Government of India cancelled this arrangement. Bayfield was to remain at Rangoon as Acting Resident, holding communications directly with the Supreme Government. The Governor-General officially declared that Burney had mismanaged the affairs of the Residency, and the Court of Directors condemned him for removing the Residency from the capital to Rangoon. It was decided that, in view of Burney's warlike attitude, he should not be re-employed as Resident in Burma. He resigned the Residency in March, 1838.

Tharrawaddy transferred his capital from Ava to Kyauk-Myaung in June, 1837, but he remained there for only six months. In December, 1837, Amarapura

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<sup>1</sup> The Tripartite Treaty between Ranjit Singh, Shah Shuja and the Company was signed on June 26, 1838.

became his capital. His attitude towards the British Government remained unchanged. Lord Auckland observed in a Minute dated August 29, 1837, "I am of opinion that the King of Ava is not anxious to provoke an immediate rupture with the British Government. He will not admit himself bound by the treaty, but he will break none of its conditions. He speaks offensively and insolently. His head is turned with success and with personal vanity, yet he seems to have sufficient acuteness to take in some respects a just measure of his position and so knows that this at least is not the moment at which he could prudently provoke a quarrel with us." Still the Governor-General felt that "there is undoubtedly hazard of our being at no distant period involved in war with Ava, and it is at least incumbent upon us to apply ourselves to the consideration of the measures by which either an event so much to be deprecated may be averted, or by which, if it should be forced upon us, we may be found in the best state of preparation". The garrisons on the Assam, Arakan, and Tenasserim frontiers were strengthened.

The Commander-in-Chief, Sir William Casement, wrote an elaborate minute, explaining the measures he recommended for the defence of the Company's territories in case of a sudden invasion. He deprecated the idea of relying on the voluntary assistance of Burmese subjects who, many British officers believed, would eagerly welcome the advance of the British army in order to escape the tyranny of their ruler. Nor did he expect to draw from the invaded districts an adequate supply of provisions and carriage. He observed, "A

force disembarking at Rangoon, or crossing to Martaban or descending from the Arakan mountains would . . . . be an instant signal to the rural population, under the eye of Government officers, to conceal or remove their grain, cattle, carts and boats, according to an invariable custom of the country under such circumstances." The Commander-in-Chief was aware of the severe financial strain imposed upon the Government by the First Anglo-Burmese War, but he was convinced that "liberality in all necessary equipment in the beginning will prove the best economy in the end."

If offensive operations were to be carried on against the Burmese, their territories might be assailed from five points—Assam, Manipur, Arakan, Rangoon, Moulmein. For the passage of an organised army the Assam and Manipur routes were 'quite impracticable'. But 'some stir and show of activity' in Manipur 'at the commencement of hostilities' might 'answer the purpose of distracting the enemy's attention and of forcing him to hold a portion of his troops in reserve to watch or subvert our supposed designs'. A large British army could advance into the heart of Burma from Arakan through the An Pass, although there were geographical difficulties of a formidable character. In 1829 Sir Archibald Campbell had reported that the arrival of a large British army on the Irrawaddy would throw the Court of Ava into such a degree of consternation as to make it submit to any dictated terms of peace. Sir William Casement shrewdly observed that "since 1829 great changes have occurred in Ava." He wrote, "Ever since the Kabaw valley discussions an appeal to arms has more or less occupied the thoughts of Burmese

politicians and they have not omitted to canvass the modes by which invasion is to be met. The probability of an attack from Arakan . . . is far from being unfamiliar to the King or to his courtiers. There is little prospect indeed that the present sovereign will succumb even on the fall of his capital, if his armies remain in any quarter of his dominions unsubdued . . . he contemplates on the approach to Amarapura of a hostile army a retreat to Bhamo. . . ." Hence no decisive success or final conclusion of hostilities could be expected unless the armies of the King were 'entirely broken'. The Commander-in-Chief apprehended that this was 'not likely to be effected by the An column alone in one season'. The position might be somewhat improved if another column occupied Rangoon and proceeded up the Irrawaddy, and a third column advanced from Moulmein. These two columns might unite at or near Prome or remain separate as the General in charge of the campaign at the time deemed expedient. The Commander-in-Chief concluded the minute with a strong recommendation for the annexation of Pegu.

Bayfield remained at Rangoon as Acting Resident for more than seven months (December, 1837—July, 1838). During this period neither the King nor the Ministers held direct intercourse with him, but the Governor of Rangoon transacted business on friendly terms. Murders and gang robberies on the Martaban frontier continued to strain the relations between Blundell, Commissioner of Tenasserim, and the Burmese officers in the neighbouring districts. Lord Auckland decided to appoint a permanent

Resident, and selected for this responsible post a military officer named Benson, who had no local knowledge of Burma. He was to be assisted by Captain McLeod, who had intimate acquaintance with Burma. Bayfield was to remain at Rangoon as Agent to the Resident.

The Burmese Government had expected that the Residency would not be re-established. So the new appointment was not welcomed at Amarapura. Colonel Benson arrived at Rangoon in July, 1838. The Burmese Government expected that he would stay there and transact business with the Governor of Rangoon; but the Supreme Government made it clear that the Resident would live at the capital and hold direct intercourse with the King and the Ministers.<sup>1</sup> Then the Burmese Government objected to the appointment of Bayfield at Rangoon, on the ground that in the treaty of Yandabo there was provision for only one

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<sup>1</sup> The necessity of holding direct intercourse with the King was thus explained by the Government of India in a despatch to the Secretary of State, dated March 7, 1879: "With Governments in which, as in Upper Burma, the power of the monarch is absolute, the authority and consideration which a foreign Resident can command, and the effect of all diplomatic representations, depend almost entirely upon the influence and arguments which he can bring to bear upon the King in person; and this renders the right of access to the King at Mandalay a point of cardinal importance. When the Resident is compelled to deal with the head of such a Government through the medium of subordinate agents, who are generally interested and untrustworthy, he finds that his endeavours to come to any real understanding are distorted and frustrated; while upon critical occasions he has no power of prompt and energetic interference."



British Resident. The Government of India yielded on this point.

Benson reached Amarapura in October, 1838, and remained there till March, 1839. The arrival of the Resident was "a bitter pill to Tharrawaddy, but he was not prepared to go to war; hence he and his Government decided to humiliate the Resident and place all manner of obstructions, difficulties, and inconveniences in his way, professing most vociferously at the same time firm friendship, so that in mere disgust the Residency might be withdrawn." The Residency was located about a mile from the town, 'on an island or tongue of land'. The place was subject to annual inundations for some months, and therefore, it was particularly unhealthy for Europeans. The accommodation provided was not sufficient. There was no market in the neighbourhood. No Burmese boatman was willing to take over any of the Residency people across the swamp surrounding the Residency. Benson's complaints merely brought evasive answers. As a matter of fact, the Burmese Government did not actually recognise him as a foreign envoy. He was never invited to meet the Ministers, nor was he favoured with audience by the King. The Governor of Rangoon put Bayfield in many troubles and even threatened to 'punish' him. Benson brought the matter to the notice of the Ministers, but no redress was available. The Government of India authorised Benson to retire from Amarapura if the attitude of the Burmese Government did not change; no stronger step could be taken in view of the war with the Afghans. Benson himself was not in favour of 'war with Burma, but he

was convinced that 'the most eligible course would be to withdraw the Residency'. In March, 1839, he left Amarapura, handing over charge to McLeod. Bayfield was withdrawn from Rangoon, and an English merchant was placed in charge of all British property there. Benson's work was appreciated by the Government of India, and he was officially recognised as Resident in Burma till May, 1840.

McLeod officiated as Resident for about ten months (March, 1839—January, 1840). For about four months he remained at Amarapura and transacted some business with the Ministers. He even succeeded in securing an audience of the King. Some Muslim residents in Burma spread the rumour that the British army had met with disasters in Afghanistan. The King was thereby encouraged to put fresh humiliations upon the Resident, and some of his sons, specially the Prince of Pagan, the eldest legitimate son, advocated immediate war for the recovery of the territories lost in 1826. The Ministers, who were more in touch with the realities, tried their best to maintain peace, and succeeded. But McLeod found that his position was becoming more and more humiliating day by day. In May, 1839, he wrote to Benson, "Not only is my situation most embarrassing with matters of importance, but I am even at a loss how to conduct myself towards the Ministers and Court." Moreover, the rising river flooded the Residency grounds; all the outhouses and kitchens were submerged. No relief was available from the Ministers. McLeod at last requested them to supply boats to take him to Rangoon. To his utter amazement they replied that he could not leave Amara-

pura unless he was formally recalled by the Government of India. A few days later the King changed his mind, and McLeod was allowed to leave the capital. In his letter to the Government of India, dated July 22, 1839, he observed that the King had at one stage of the crisis meditated laying violent hands upon the Residency.

McLeod arrived at Rangoon on July 31, 1839, and his action was approved by the Government of India. Lord Auckland decided that he should not leave Burma immediately. The Governor-General observed, "A short time will in all probability suffice to show whether Captain McLeod's communications to the Court, since his arrival at Rangoon, will excite merely the transient displeasure of the King, or will lead to any more decisive exhibition of hostility against us, and it will be well that the British Government should have authentic means of ascertaining the effects of those communications. . . . It will be no doubt of advantage that Captain McLeod should remain at hand to watch and report the effect that may be produced by the late news<sup>1</sup> on the minds of the Court and the people of Ava." So McLeod awaited developments at Rangoon. One of the questions discussed by him with the Governor of Rangoon related to the depredations on the Martaban frontier.

Meanwhile Tharrawaddy was making feverish preparations for war. Arms and ammunition were collected, and troops were posted at strategic positions. Orders were issued to all officers in charge of towns to

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<sup>1</sup> News of British victories in Afghanistan.

have the militia fully equipped and ready for service at a moment's notice. Tharrawaddy also tried to establish contact with the French at Chandernagore and Pondicherry. Three Frenchmen visited him at Amarapura in July, 1839. Although they were private individuals, it was widely rumoured that the French Government had sent them as envoys to the Burmese King. In December, 1839, McLeod considered it unsafe to continue his residence in Rangoon. The Governor of Rangoon treated him with marked disrespect and even asked him to vacate the house occupied by him. This was the last straw on the camel's back. On January 7, 1840, McLeod left Rangoon with all his followers. Thus closed the first chapter in the history of the British Residency in Burma.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing important seems to have happened immediately after McLeod's departure from Burma. British officers in Burma found a new cause for excitement when Tharrawaddy decided to visit Rangoon. No one could explain his real motive; hence there were many surmises. The Commissioner of Tenasserim reported, "Many persons suppose that the object of the visit is that of anticipating some old prophecies of which there are said to be several. The dynasty of Alompra will, it is said, not extend beyond seven, and the present King is the seventh. By being crowned King of Pegu he may imagine he is fulfilling the prophecy. . . . Another prediction is that a prince will make his appearance in Pegu in the present Burmese Year 1203.

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<sup>1</sup> The Residency was re-established in the reign of Mindon. See A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*.

By coming down himself he may anticipate any impostors who might avail themselves of the prophecy. A third is that the year 1203 will see much fighting in Burma and as we are the only probable enemies he may desire to be prepared for an invasion from us . . . . Among the various reports in circulation . . . . is one to the effect that an attack on this place<sup>1</sup> is contemplated. I am far, however, from placing confidence in this report. . . ." But the Commissioner added, "It is well-known that the King views this rising settlement<sup>2</sup> with much jealousy. It is a refuge for the oppressed and discontented of his subjects and has tended greatly to reduce the importance of Rangoon. It may, therefore, be one object of his visit to endeavour to restore the prosperity of Rangoon by making it the Royal residence for some time and to effect such injury to Moulmein as may result from posting in its neighbourhood a body of licensed plunderers<sup>3</sup> whose acts he may at any time disavow."

The Government of India instructed the Commissioner not to show suspicion of the King's intention as long as the Burmese army remained cantoned at Rangoon or in its neighbourhood. Some measures for self-defence were, however, to be adopted if a large detachment of Burmese troops was stationed 'so near to the British frontier as to lead to the probability of collision'. Even if the British frontier was threatened by the collection of a large force on the opposite side of the river, the Commissioner was not authorised to

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<sup>1</sup> Moulmein.

<sup>2</sup> Moulmein.

<sup>3</sup> A detachment of the Burmese army.

take 'any military measures but such as are of a purely defensive nature'. He was instructed 'to establish at Rangoon and in other parts of the Burmese territory some system of accurate intelligence' on which the Government could rely for the formulation of their policy. Arrangements were made for sending reinforcements to Moulmein.

Towards the close of September, 1841, the Commissioner of Tenasserim reported, ". . . the idea of an attack on us being meditated by the King is becoming much more generally entertained; indeed, it is now difficult to ascribe any other motive for his making the immense preparations in men and material which he appears to have done." Under the circumstances the Commissioner submitted that it would be risky to postpone military measures till hostilities were actually begun by the Burmese. The King was bringing about 50,000 men with him. "Supposing," remarked the Commissioner, "him to retain half that number as his personal escort, and to direct the assembly of the remainder on the banks of the Salween, are we to allow such a movement to take place at his perfect convenience merely because no direct overt act of hostility may be committed till he is fully prepared for invasion?" He suggested that if 'undoubted evidence' was available to show that preparations were being made for invasion, 'the Burmese should be driven from the banks of the Salween and possession be taken of everything in the shape of boats wherewith a crossing of the river might be effected'.

The King arrived at Rangoon on October 2, 1841. He was accompanied by about 30,000 troops. Blundell,

Commissioner of Tenasserim, reported to the Government, “. . . . the King has come down with this powerful army to try its effect on us. If he found us wavering and discouraged . . . . he would attack us at once, but finding us prepared for him, he may keep up the force some months longer and then return to his capital, rejoicing at the expense and annoyance he has caused us.” A letter received a few days later from the Burmese Ministers convinced Blundell that the King entertained ‘a decided unfriendly feeling’ towards the British Government. He wrote, “There is in it no attempt at conciliation and no word expressive of a desire to cultivate friendly understanding with us, or to take cognizance of the complaints<sup>1</sup> made against the Martaban authorities. On the contrary it appears a sulky dictatorial production seeking for grounds of cessation of all correspondence.” No authentic information was, however, available about the King’s real intention. It was reported that he wanted to found a new town near Rangoon.

The Government of India now felt convinced that no serious invasion was contemplated by the Burmese King. Some effective measures had, however, to be taken for the prevention of robberies committed by Burmese subjects within British territory. It was useless to bring these cases to the notice of Burmese authorities at Martaban or even to appeal to the Ministers. So the Commissioner was authorised to send troops into Burmese territory ‘for the purpose of

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<sup>1</sup> About robberies committed by Burmese subjects within British territory.

punishing specific parties, distinctly chargeable with offences of serious magnitude'. A notice might be sent to the Burmese Court, stating that "the Government of India will no longer resort to amicable representations for redress, but will employ its power in such place and manner as it may deem fit, for the protection of its rights and interests."

It became clear from reports emanating from different sources that, whatever the King's original plan might have been, after his arrival at Rangoon he devoted himself entirely to the foundation of a new town and the renovation of a temple. Blundell sent a friendly letter to the Burmese Ministers in November, but the Commander of the ship which carried this letter to Rangoon received a 'very uncourteous and inimical reception' there, and no reply to the letter was received by the Commissioner. Moreover, the provisions of the Commercial Treaty of 1826 were 'about to be violated by a monopoly of timber to be granted, if not already granted, to a British subject, Mr. Staig, as payment of the King's debt to him'. Finding that Blundell was growing somewhat restless, the Government ordered him to maintain a conciliatory attitude even under provocation. He was informed that the Government was then 'decidedly averse to any measures which may be calculated to lead to an open rupture with the Burmese'. The Commissioner replied, "I look on the present state of our relations with the Court of Ava as designed and brought about by the King in order to cancel existing treaties, to evince to the world generally and his own people in particular, his indifference and superiority to our power, and to cause the Government



of India the greatest possible expense in the defence of the provinces wrested from his Kingdom . . . . no conciliation on our part can win him, and no demonstration we may make can terrify hostile designs on his part . . . . it appears quite hopeless now to expect that our relations with the Court of Ava can revert to any amicable footing." Even after this the Government took measures for the withdrawal of reinforcements sent to Moulmein and refused to take notice of 'the injury sustained by merchants from the establishment of a timber monopoly at Rangoon'.

Blundell still continued to send alarming reports. Stockades were being built in and around Rangoon. Fresh troops were arriving there. The officer in charge of Martaban, against whom the Commissioner of Tenasserim had repeatedly complained, was 'awarded tokens of increased favour'. Blundell suspected that the King might 'commit some act of aggression that will render a war with him inevitable'. The Government of India could no longer brush aside the warnings of the man on the spot. The Commissioner was authorised, if he thought necessary, to detain those ships and troops for whose recall orders had already been issued from Calcutta.

It was not only the British officers and merchants in Tenasserim and Rangoon who eagerly looked forward to the departure of the King from Rangoon. The Burmese residents of Rangoon were being terrorised by the King's troops; 'robberies and murders were daily occurrences'. Moreover, the householders were being asked to remove themselves to the new town. This

transfer was likely to ruin them economically and injure their sentiments.

At last the King left Rangoon; no untoward incident took place. In August, 1842, it was reported that he was again coming to Rangoon with a considerable force. About the same time the Commissioner of Tenasserim received from the Government of Siam an offer of assistance against the Burmese. He suspected, however, that Siam really intended to join Burma against the English. He was informed from many sources that China was instigating both these Kingdoms against the English. His suspicion was confirmed by two facts. Siam recalled the troops she had sent sometime ago against Cochin China, but no obvious explanation for this sudden reversal of policy was available. Secondly, some Burmese officials had gone to Siam some time ago in the guise of monks. Moreover, it was reported from Rangoon that King Tharrawaddy was collecting troops for invading China. The invasion of China was so absurd a project that even the headstrong King of Burma could hardly be expected to entertain it. Blundell thought that his real purpose was to invade Tenasserim. The Government of India took serious notice of these reports and became 'prepared when necessary to add to the military force in the Tenasserim province'.

Early in 1843 a Chinese Mission arrived at Amarapura, but no definite information was available about its 'true object'. The Burmese said that it was merely a ceremonial embassy "usual between the two countries on the accession of a new King to the throne, and it would seem that none such has yet been received

by the present King." About the same time a French ship of war came to Rangoon. Its aim seems to have been 'the protection and extension of French commerce and the acquisition of political and commercial information'. Blundell informed the Government that the Governor of Bourbon was very anxious to establish 'a connexion with this country'. King Tharrawaddy's officers at Rangoon received the officer deputed by the Governor of Bourbon with so much honour that Blundell felt uneasy. However, the Burmese Governor of Rangoon was very disappointed when the French officer talked merely about commercial intercourse and purchased nothing more than 'a small quantity of timber'.

Meanwhile petty disputes had been going on all along the Burma-Assam frontier. Towards the close of 1843 'some English officers in Assam' demanded from the Burmese Government the surrender of certain people who had fled from Assam to Burmese territory. The Burmese Government replied that "the treaty of Yandabo contained nothing regarding the surrender of runaways, but that if it pleased the Company, the Burman Government would have no objections to a new treaty being made in which might be inserted that people who fled from either country should be mutually given up on being demanded." Lord Ellenborough (Governor-General) was, however, not at all inclined to conclude a new treaty with a King who refused to honour a treaty concluded by his predecessor.

King Tharrawaddy's stormy rule came to an abrupt conclusion in 1845, and he was succeeded by

his eldest son Pagan, who lost his throne as a result of another war with the East India Company.

There is no doubt that the treaty of Yandabo was very unpopular in Burma. With reference to Crawford's Mission Lord William Bentinck observed,<sup>1</sup> "The very sound of the word treaty appears to have excited all the fears and suspicions of the Court of Ava, and the King himself, when told the object of Mr. Crawford's Mission, is said to have cried out, What! is he come to make another Yandabo Treaty with us?" On July 12, 1837, Burney wrote, "It is well-known that nothing but dire necessity forced the late Government of Ava to agree to the Treaty of Yandabo, and that it always intended to take the first opportunity of releasing itself from the engagements it had so unwillingly entered into. On one occasion Burney told a Burmese Minister that the British and the Burmese, being better acquainted with each other, were less likely to engage in hostilities again. The Minister laughingly answered, "Yes, we only want one more trial for the sake of *letza-kya*" ('revenge or taking satisfaction').<sup>2</sup> The feelings of the common people Burney found to be 'very rancorous and sore' against the English.<sup>3</sup> This feeling of hostility reached its culmination after the accession of Tharrawaddy. An open rupture was probably prevented by the cautious attitude of the Government of India, although it is uncertain whether Tharrawaddy ever seriously thought of declaring war against the English. The

<sup>1</sup> Minute, December 30, 1829.

<sup>2</sup> Burney's *Journal*, (Ms.), para 848.

<sup>3</sup> Burney's *Journal*, para 758.

A-laung-pa-ya dynasty reconciled itself to the loss of territory, but it steadily refused to accept the establishment of a British Residency in Burmese territory and to grant ungrudgingly the commercial concessions claimed by the British merchants. The East India Company did not fight in 1840 for the maintenance of the Residency: Article 7 of the treaty of Yandabo was given a quiet burial. But in 1851-52 the commercial interests of the British merchants provided a *casus belli* which an aggressive imperialist like Lord Dalhousie could not easily set aside: Article 9 of the treaty of Yandabo and Article 1 of the Commercial Treaty of 1826 involved material interests as well as the all-important question of prestige.<sup>1</sup> So King Pagan fell, the rich Delta came under the British flag, and Upper Burma waited uneasily for the final jump of the British Lion.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*, pp. 83-85.

<sup>2</sup> For the history of Anglo-Burmese relations during the period 1851-1886, see A. C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma*.

## APPENDIX A

### COMMERCIAL TREATY CONCLUDED BY CAPTAIN WELSH WITH GAURINATH SINGH. (FEBRUARY 28, 1793).

Article 1st. That there shall henceforth be a reciprocal and entire liberty of commerce between the subjects of Bengal and those of Assam for all and singular goods and merchandizes on the conditions and in such manner as is settled in the following rules.

Article 2nd. That to facilitate this full intercourse the subjects of both nations, those of Bengal and Assam, fulfilling the conditions hereafter prescribed, be permitted to proceed with their boats loaded with merchandizes into Assam and to expose their goods for sale at any place or in any manner that may best suit their purposes without being subject to any other duties than are established by these articles.

Article 3rd. That a regular impost be levied on all goods or merchandizes whether of export or import, and that their duties be fixed as follows :

#### *Imports*

1. That the salt of Bengal be subject to an impost of 10 per cent. on the supposed prime cost, reckoning that invariably at 400 rupees per 100 maunds of 84 tolas weight to the seer.

2. That the broad cloths of Europe, the cotton cloths of Bengal, carpets, copper, Lead, Tin, Pearls, Hardware, Jewellery, Spices and the various other goods imported into Assam pay an equal impost of 10 per cent. on the invoice price.

3. That warlike implements and military stores be

considered contraband and liable to confiscation excepting the supplies of those articles which may be required for the Company's troops stationed in Assam, which and every other matter of convenience for the said troops whether of clothing or provisions are in all cases to be exempt from duties.

### *Exports*

1. That the duties to be levied on all articles of export (except in such cases as are hereafter mentioned) be invariable 10 per cent. reckoning agreeable to the rates hereby annexed to each.

<i>Mooga Dhoteis</i> per maund of 84 tolas to the seer		Rs. 95 0 0
<i>Mooga</i> thread ...	„	70 0 0
Pepper ...	„	
Elephants' Teeth ...	„	50 0 0
Cutern Lac ...	„	4 0 0
Chuprah and quryzai ...	„	3 8 0
Monjut ...	„	4 0 0
Cotton ...	„	

2. That all articles of export not herein specified (with the exception of the following) and for which no certain calculation can be made be subject to an equal impost in such instances always to be paid in kind and with respect to those articles which have been particularised that the duties be received either in money or kind, as may be most convenient to the merchant; but as it may happen that a temporary scarcity of grain may secure within Bengal and Assam, to provide against which rise every description of grain to be exempt from duties.

Article 4th. That any person or persons detected in attempting to defraud the Surgeo Deo of the duties hereby established shall be liable to confiscation of his/their

property and for ever after debarred the privilege of the trade.

Article 5th. That for the purpose of collecting the said duties agents be appointed and custom houses established, for the present one at the Candahar *Chokey* and one at Gwahatty.

Article 6th. That it be the business of the agents to be stationed at the Candahar *Chokey* to collect the duties on all imports, and on all exports, that the produce of the country to the westward of Gwahatty for which they are to be held responsible (?) they are to examine all boats passing up and down the river and after having settled with the proprietor for the amount of the duties they are to grant him a passport specifying the number and quantity of each article, copy of which they are to forward without delay to the agent at Gwahatty whether or further if it be necessary the merchant may proceed under sanction of the said pay.

Article 7th. That it be the business of the agents stationed at Gwahatty to collect the duties on all exports the produce of the country parallel to it North and South, and also on all exports the produce of the country to the eastwards as far as Now Gong, for which in like manner they are to be held responsible. They are to examine all boats passing down the River and to grant passport to the proprietor, copy of which to be forwarded to the agents at the Candahar *Chokey* who are to re-examine the cargo lest on the way between Gwahatty and this station the merchant may have taken goods on board which could not be specified in the pass granted at that place.

Article 8th. That as an incitement to the agents to be industrious in the discharge of this duty, a recompence be made to them bearing a proportion to the amount of the collections and that for the present it be fixed at



12 per cent. on the said collections which is calculated to defray all incidental Expenses.

Article 9th. That the said agents be required to be securities for each other and that the whole be bound by engagement to the Surgeo Deo not only for the purity of their conduct in the collection but also that they abstain from having any concern either directly or indirectly, in trade.

Article 10th. That a copy of their accounts be produced on or before the 10th of every month and that the payment of the collections be made into the funds of any person the Surgeo Deo may appoint to receive it at the expiration of every quarter.

Article 11th. That the standard weight hereafter for exports and imports be 40 *seers* to the *maund* and 84 *sicca* weight to the *seer*.

Article 12th. That as much political inconvenience might arise to both Governments from granting a general license to the Subjects of Bengal to settle in Assam no European merchant, or adventurers of any description be allowed to fix their residence in Assam without having previously obtained the permission of the English Government and that of the Surgeo Deo.

Article 13th. That as Captain Welsh, the representative of the said English Government, in consideration of the Surgeo Deo having removed the prohibitory restrictions which have hitherto existed to the detriment of a free intercourse, has signified his intention of bringing to punishment all persons from Bengal offending against the established laws of Assam or infringing these articles, so the Surgeo Deo on his part declares he will punish all abuses in his subjects tending to obstruct or discourage the reciprocal intercourse this system is designed to promote.

Article 14th. That copies of these articles be affixed at every public place throughout Assam that none may plead ignorance and that Captain Welsh be requested to send one officially to his government.

*Note.* On February 6, 1794, Captain Welsh reported to the Government of Bengal as follows:—

“The commercial regulations rather between the Rajah and myself are in full force, but the principal benefit which has arisen from them is the demolition of an iniquitous monopoly, which ultimately must be productive of great pecuniary advantage, and in the mean time removes the distress of the people. From the collections at the Candahar *Chokcy* the sum of Arcot Rupees 12,012-2-6 has been received, during the space of nine months, after defraying incidental expenses, and from this source the Rajah is to receive annually rupees 12,000 . . . the overplus is destined to defray part of the expense of the detachment.

I am of opinion that this commercial compact will admit of considerable alteration with a view to the improvement of trade between the two states but the efficacy of such alteration depends in the first instance on the restoration of order, and in the second, on the degree of influence the Hon'ble Board may be desirous of obtaining in the affairs . . . .”

## APPENDIX B

### TREATY OF PEACE CONCLUDED AT YANDABO

#### *English Version*

The treaty of Peace, between the Honourable the East India Company on the one part, and His Majesty the King of Ava on the other, settled by Major-General Sir Archibald Campbell, K.C.B. and K.C.T.S., commanding the expedition, and Senior Commissioner in Pegu and Ava, Thomas Campbell Robertson, Esq., Civil Commissioner in Pegu and Ava, and Henry Dacie Chads, Esq., Captain Commanding his Britannic Majesty's and the Honourable Company's naval force on the Irrawadi river, on the part of the Honourable Company, and Mengyee Maha-men-hlah-kyan-tan, Woongyee Lord of Laykaing and Mengyee-maha-men-hlah-thee-ha-thoo Atwen-Woon, Lord of the Revenue on the part of the King of Ava, who have each communicated to the other their full powers agreed to, and executed at Yandabo in the Kingdom of Ava, on this twenty-fourth day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty six, corresponding with the fourth day of the decrease of the moon Taboung, in the year one thousand one hundred and eighty-seven, Guadama era.

Article 1st. There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the Honourable Company on the one part, and His Majesty the King of Ava on the other.

Article 2nd. His Majesty the King of Ava renounces all claims upon, and will abstain from all future interference with, the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty states of

Cachar and Jyntea. With regard to Munnipore, it is stipulated that, should Gumbheer Singh desire to return to that country, he shall be recognized by the King of Ava as Rajah thereof.

Article 3rd. To prevent all dispute respecting the boundary line between the two great nations, the British Government will retain the conquered provinces of Aracan, Ramree, Cheduba, and Sandway ; and His Majesty the King of Ava cedes all right thereto. The Amoupectoumieu or Aracan mountains, (known in Aracan by the name of Yeoamatoung or Phokingtoun range), will henceforth form the boundary between the two great nations on that side. Any doubts regarding the said line of demarcation, will be settled by Commissioners appointed by the respective Governments for that purpose, such Commissioners from both Powers to be of suitable and corresponding rank.

Article 4th. His Majesty the King of Ava cedes to the British Government the conquered provinces of Yeh, Tavoy, Mergui, and Tennasserim, with the lands and dependencies thereunto appertaining, having the Saluen river for the line of demarcation of the frontier. Any doubts regarding their boundaries will be settled as specified in the concluding part of Article Third.

Article 5th. In proof of the sincere disposition of the Burmese Government to retain the relations of peace and amity between the two nations, and as part indemnification to the British Government, for the expenses of the war, His Majesty the King of Ava agrees to pay the sum of one crore of rupees.

Article 6th. No person whatever, whether native or foreign, is hereafter to be molested, by either party, on account of the part which he may have taken, or have been compelled to take, in the present war.

Article 7th. In order to cultivate and improve the relations of amity and peace hereby established between the two Governments, it is agreed that accredited Ministers, retaining an escort or safe-guard, will reside at the Durbar of the other, who shall be permitted to purchase or to build a suitable place of residence of permanent materials, and a Commercial Treaty upon principles of reciprocal advantage will be entered into by the two high contracting powers.

Article 8th. All public and private debts contracted by either Government or by the subjects of either Government, with the others, previous to the war, to be recognized and liquidated, upon the same principles of honour and good faith, as if hostilities had not taken place between the two nations ; and no advantage shall be taken by either party of the period that may have elapsed since the debts were incurred, or in consequence of the war ; and according to the universal laws of nations, it is further stipulated, that the property of all British subjects who may die in the dominions of His Majesty the King of Ava, shall, in the absence of legal heirs, be placed in the hands of the British Resident or Consul, in the said dominions, who will dispose of the same according to the tenour of the British law. In like manner the property of Burmese subjects dying, under the same circumstances, in any part of the British dominions, shall be made over to the Minister or other Authority delegated by his Burmese Majesty to the Supreme Government of India.

Art. 9th. The King of Ava will abolish all exactions upon British ships or vessels in Burman ports, that are not required from Burman ships or vessels in British ports ; nor shall ships or vessels, the property of British subjects, whether European or Indian, entering the

Rangoon river, or other Burman ports, be required to land their guns, or unship their rudders, or to do any other act not required of Burmese ships or vessels in British ports.

Article 10th. The good and faithful ally of the British Government, His Majesty the King of Siam, having taken a part in the present war, will, to the fullest extent, as far as regards His Majesty and his subjects, be included in the above Treaty.

Article 11th. This treaty to be ratified by the Burmese Authorities competent in like cases, and the ratification to be accompanied by all British, whether European or Native, American, and other prisoners, who will be delivered over to the British Commissioners; the British Commissioners, on their part, engaging that the said Treaty shall be ratified by the Right Honourable the Governor-General in Council; and the ratification shall be delivered to His Majesty the King of Ava, in four months, or sooner if possible, and all the Burmese prisoners shall, in like manner, be delivered over to their own Government, as soon as they arrive from Bengal.

#### ADDITIONAL ARTICLE

The British Commissioners being most anxiously desirous to manifest the sincerity of their wish for peace, and to make the immediate execution of the fifth Article of this Treaty as little irksome or inconvenient as possible to His Majesty the King of Ava, consent to the following arrangement with respect to the division of the sum total, as specified in the Article above referred to, into instalments; *viz.*, upon the payment of twenty-five lacs of rupees, or one quarter of the sum total, (the other Articles of the Treaty being executed), the army will retire to Rangoon. Upon the further payment of a similar sum

at that place within one hundred days from this date, with the proviso, as above, the army will evacuate the dominions of His Majesty the King of Ava with the least possible delay, leaving the remaining moiety of the sum total to be paid by equal annual instalments, in two years, from this twenty-fourth day of February, 1826 A.D., through the Consul or Resident in Ava or Pegu, on the part of the Honourable the East India Company.

*Burmese Version*<sup>1</sup>

Treaty of Peace and Friendship, between the English Company's Governor-General of India and the King of Burma, made by the Chief General, the Noble Archibald Campbell, Commissioner, Robertson, Esq., Commissioner, and Chads, Esq., Commander of the English war vessels on the Irrawadi river, appointed by the Governor-General, and Mengyee Maha-men-hla-kyan-ten, Woon-gyee, Lord of Lakaing and Mengyee Maha-men-hla-thee-ha-thu, Atwen Woon, Lord of the Revenue, appointed by the King of Burma, at Yan-da-bo, on the fourth of the decrease of Ta-boung, in the year 1187 (Feb. 24th, 1826).

Article 1st. Let there be perpetual peace and friendship between the Governor-General and the King of Burma.

Article 2nd. The King of Burma shall no more have dominion over, or the direction of, the towns and country of Assam, the country of Ak-ka-bat (Cachar) and the country of Wa-tha-li (Jyntea). With regard to Munnipore, if Gan-bee-ra-shing desire to return to his country and remain ruler, the King of Burma shall not prevent or molest him, but let him remain.

Article 3rd. That there may be no cause of future dispute about the boundary between the two great

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<sup>1</sup> Desai, *History of the British Residency in Burma*, pp. 463-467.

countries, the English Government will retain the country of Aracan, that is, Aracan, Ramree, Man-oung (Cheduba) and Than-dwa, which they have conquered ; and the King of Burma shall not have dominion. Let the Yo-ma and Bo-koung range of mountains, unto the Great Pagoda, on the Man-ten promontory (Cape Negrais) be the boundary. If hereafter there should be a dispute about the boundary, let men be appointed by the English and the Burmese Governments, to decide correctly, according to ancient limits. The men appointed, shall be respectable officers of Government.

Article 4th. The King of Burma cedes to the British Government the towns of Ye, Tavoy, Myik (Mergui) and Tenasserim, with their territories, mountains, shores, and islands. The Salwen river shall be the boundary. If hereafter there should be a dispute about the boundary, let it be settled as specified above.

Article 5th. The King of Burma, in order to make manifest his desire to preserve perpetual friendship between the two great countries, and to defray part of the expenses incurred by the British Government in the war, shall pay one crore of rupees.

Article 6th. No person who has gone from one side to the other during the war, whether a Burmese subject who has joined the English, or an English subject who has joined the Burmese, whether voluntarily or by compulsion, shall be punished or molested on that account.

Article 7th. That the friendship now settled between the two great countries may be permanent, let one Government person be appointed by the British Government, with fifty attendants and arms complete, to reside in the royal city of Burma ; and let one Government person, appointed by the Burman Government, with fifty attendants and arms complete, reside in the royal city of the



Governor-General. And let the Burmese Governor, residing in the Ku-la country, and the Ku-la Governor, residing in the Burmese country, purchase or build anew, as they may choose, a suitable house of wood or brick for their residence. And in order to promote the prosperity of the two nations, an additional Treaty shall be made, relative to opening the gold and silver (A Burman phrase) road and trading one with another.

Article 8th. All debts contracted previous to the war, by the Government people or common people, shall be completely liquidated, according to good faith. No one shall be suffered to excuse himself saying, the war took place after the debt was contracted ; nor shall either party confiscate the property of the other in consequence of the war. Moreover, when British subjects die in the Kingdom of Burma, and there be no heir, all the property left shall, according to the usages of white Ku-las, be delivered to the English Government person residing in Burma ; and in like manner, when Burmese subjects die in the British Kingdom, and there be no heir, all the property left shall be delivered to the Burmese Government person residing there.

Article 9th. When British vessels come to Burmese ports, they shall remain without unshipping their rudders, or landing their guns, and be free from trouble and molestation, as Burmese vessels in British ports.

Article 10th. The King of Siam, the ally of the British Government, having taken part with the British in the war, shall be considered as included in the present Treaty.

Article 11th. This Treaty shall be ratified by Commissioners appointed by the King of Burma ; and all English, American, and other black and white Ku-la prisoners shall be delivered to the British Commissioners.

Also the Treaty, assented to and ratified by the Governor-General of India, shall be transmitted to the King of Burma within four months ; and all Burmese prisoners shall be immediately called from Bengal, and delivered to the Burmese Government.

#### ADDITIONAL ARTICLE

The British Commissioners, in order to manifest their desire for peace, and that the King of Burma may pay with ease the crore of rupees mentioned in the fifth Article, agree that when he has paid eighteen and three quarters lacs of ticals, or one fourth part of the whole sum of seventy-five lacs of gold silver, which is one crore of rupees, the English army will retire to Rangoon. Upon further paying eighteen and three-quarters lacs of ticals, within one hundred days from this date, the English army shall speedily depart out of the Kingdom of Burma. In regard to the remaining two parts of the money, one part shall be paid within one year from this date, and the other within two years, to the English Government person residing to Burma.

## APPENDIX C

### ANGLO-BURMESE COMMERCIAL TREATY OF 1826

A Commercial Treaty, signed and sealed at the Golden City of Rata-na-pura, on the 23rd of November, 1826, according to the English, and the 9th of the decrease of the Moon Tan-soung-mong 1188, according to the Burmans, by the Envoy Crawford, appointed by the English Ruler the Company's Buren, who governs India, and the Commissioners, the Atwenwun Mengyi-thi-ri-maha-men-thi-ha-thu, Lord of the Revenue, appointed by His Majesty the Burmese rising Sun Buren, who reigns over Thu-na-pa-ran-ta-Tam-pa-di-pa, and many other great countries.

According to the Treaty of Peace between the two great Nations made at Yandabo, in order to promote the prosperity of both countries, and with a desire to assist and protect the trade of both, the Commissioner and Envoy Crawford, appointed by the English Company's Buren, who rules India ; and the Commissioners, the Atwenwun Mengyi-thi-ra-maha-nunda-then Kyan, Lord of Sau, and the Atwenwun Maha-men-tha-thi-ha-thu, Lord of the Revenue, appointed by His Majesty the Burmese rising Sun Buren, who rules over Thu-na-pa-ra-Tam-pa-di-pa, and many other great countries : these three in the conference tent, at the landing-place of Ze-ya-pu-ra, north of the Golden City of Rata-na-pura, with mutual consent completed this Engagement.

Article 1. Peace being made between the great country governed by the English Prince the India

Company Buren, and the great country of Rata-na-pura, which rules over Thu-na-pa-ra-Tam-pa-di-pa, and many other great countries, when merchants with an English stamped pass from the country of the English Prince and merchants from the Kingdom of Burma pass from one country to the other selling and buying merchandize, the sentinels at the passes and entrances, the established gate-keepers of the country, shall make inquiry as usual, but without demanding any money, and all merchants coming truly for the purpose of trade, with merchandize, shall be suffered to pass without hindrance or molestation. The governments of both countries also shall permit ships with cargoes to enter ports and carry on trade, giving them the utmost protection and security ; and in regard to duties, there shall none be taken beside the customary Duties at the landing places of trade.

Article 2. Ships whose breadth of beam on the inside (opening of the hold) is eight Royal Burman cubits or  $19\frac{1}{10}$  English inches each, and all ships of smaller size, whether merchants from the Burmese country entering an English port under the Burmese flag, or merchants from the English country with an English stamped pass entering a Burmese port under the English flag, shall be subject to no other demands beside the payment of duties, and ten takals 25 per cent. (10 sicca Rupees) for a chokey pass on leaving. Nor shall pilotage be demanded, unless the Captain voluntarily requires a pilot. However, when ships arrive, information shall be given to the officer stationed at the entrance of the sea, in regard to vessels whose breadth of beam exceeds eight Royal Burman cubits, and remain, according to the 9th Article of the Treaty of Yandabo, without unshipping their rudders, or landing their guns, and be free from trouble and molestation as Burmese vessels in British ports. Besides the Royal Duties,

no more duties shall be given or taken than such as are customary.

Article 3. Merchants belonging to one, who go to the other country and remain there, shall, when they desire to return, go to whatever place and by whatever vessel they may desire, without hindrance. Property owned by merchants, they shall be allowed to sell, and property not sold and household furniture, they shall be allowed to take away without hindrance or incurring any expense.

Article 4. English and Burmese vessels meeting with contrary winds or sustaining damage in masts, rigging, etc., or suffering shipwreck on the shore, shall, according to the laws of charity, receive assistance from the inhabitants of the towns and villages that may be near, the master of the wrecked ship paying to those that assist suitable salvage, according to the circumstances of the case ; and whatever property may remain, in case of shipwreck, shall be restored to the owner.

## APPENDIX D

### SOME CONTEMPORARY NOTICES ON THE ECONOMIC RESOURCES OF BURMA

#### I. *'Natural Productions of the Burmese Empire'*<sup>1</sup>

If we except a few medicinal drugs, sulphur, brass, and some other semi-metals, which are imported from foreign parts, the Burmese receive from their own soil everything necessary for the necessities, the comforts and the luxuries of life, so that were they but as industrious as the Chinese, they might soon rival them in manufactures and riches.

Rice, in this country, as in every other part of India, holds the same place as bread with us. There are several species of it, differing in taste, colour, and form. Thus there is one kind of a red colour ; and of the white rice some kinds are of a more excellent quality than others, particularly one of which the grains are very small, and which has a strong but pleasant scent of musk. An intoxicating liquor is also prepared from rice steeped in water, and this is esteemed by the Burmese as the greatest luxury, when the Emperor allows its use ; it is also much drunk by the Carians, a nation we have before described as inhabiting the forests of Pegu. The flour of rice is employed by the Burmese, though perhaps not so commonly as by the Siamese and Chinese, in making several kinds of pastry.

The wheat of the kingdom of Ava is most excellent,

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<sup>1</sup> Sangermano, *A Description of the Burmese Empire* (written between 1808 and 1819), pp. 152-156.

and it gives good returns in the grounds that lie along the river, and are subject to its floods, by which they are generally covered during three months every year. It is usually sown immediately the waters have retired, and is harvested in February. Its produce is usually forty-fold. Besides wheat, this empire is very fertile in maize, *panicum*, and a species of grain called *piaun*, which is similar to the Indian millet, being round and of the size of our chickpease. In some parts it is cooked like rice, which it excels in substance, but not in flavour. All kinds of beans and pulse grow with great luxuriance here, and there are even some species unknown in Europe.

The citron, the pomegranate, and the orange are the only fruits that the Burmese have in common with us. But it must not thereby be supposed that there is any scarcity of good fruits, for besides all those that are found in the other parts of India, the Burmese have some peculiar to their own country. A Frenchman once endeavoured to introduce the vine, and did in fact succeed in bringing some tolerably good grapes to maturity so as to show that the climate would admit its cultivation, if the natives took the pains to attend to it. The olive is here quite unknown ; but its place is supplied by the sesame or gingili, the grains of which, though not larger than those of mustard, furnish an excellent oil, useful, not only for burning, but also in cookery, though it is said to be rather heating. Under the city of Pagan there is a large well of petroleum, very thick in consistence, and of a strong and disgusting smell. It is also used for varnishing the houses made of teak-wood, to which it gives a lustre ; and if regularly renewed every year, has the effect of preserving them from decay. But the greatest consumption of this article is at Rangoon, where, united with pitch, it is employed for smearing the vessels.

Its colour is somewhat black, and hence it seems to be of the same nature as what is called by naturalists, Scotch fossil-oil. From Rangoon it is carried to all the places along the coasts of Coromandel and Bengal.

In Europe there are no fresh fruits during six months of the year, but here every month produces some one ; and the celebrated banana-tree furnishes the inhabitants of the torrid zone with its fruits all the year round. The cocoa-tree and the palm are two inexhaustible sources, unknown in Europe, which furnish to the Burmese an immense number both of the luxuries and necessaries of life. The fruit of the former even whilst yet tender is filled with a nectarious juice, and a substance of the consistence of butter, both extremely delightful to the taste ; when the nut is grown harder this paste acquires the taste of the almond, and being pressed yields an oil which is an excellent seasoning in cookery. The coarse exterior rind, which is very stringy, furnishes an excellent material, after it has been washed and pulled to pieces, for making ropes and ship-cables, and it is also used in calking. The inner rind, which is as hard as horn, serves for drinking cups, ladles, etc. By making incisions in the trunk, a juice of a pleasant flavour is extracted, which, after fermentation, becomes a generous wine, and by further fermentation a strong vinegar. The palm-tree is scarcely less useful than the cocoa ; for besides its fruit, it also produces a sweet liquor, which is drawn from its trunk, and which, like that of the cocoa, may be successively changed into cocoa, wine and vinegar. It has also this further property, that by means of fire it is condensed, and forms a kind of sugar called jagra, quite hard and compact ; and this, dissolved in water, and left twelve or fifteen days to ferment, gives a spirit equal in strength to our alcohol. The leaves of the palm are used not only



to thatch the houses, but also for every day letters ; and the bark of the branches furnishes good ties for connecting the canes of which the houses are built. Even the trunks of these trees, which, on account of the quantity of pith they contain, are useless for planks or beams, are not thrown away, as they make very good water-conduits. Hence we may see that what some travellers have asserted is an exaggeration, that the cocoa-tree furnishes materials for spinning, as well as wood for all kinds of carpentry.

The sugar of the palm just mentioned is not the only one the Burmese possess ; for the sugar-cane is cultivated to the north of Ava, in the country of the Sciam, and a very coarse article extracted from it, and made into flat-cakes. The Chinese established in Amrapura have also begun to refine it, and they have been imitated by the natives ; so that at present a sugar is made here, as white and as refined as that of Bengal.

Besides these two kinds of sugar, the Burmese have also many drugs which are useful for conserves ; and some which are medicinal ; of these we may mention pepper, and the cardamomum, which is found very plentifully in the district of Martaban. Great use is made of cayenne pepper in seasonings ; and the common pepper is frequently an ingredient in medicine. A species of nutmeg is also common, of an oval shape, and larger, but less aromatic than those of the Moluccas ; as well as a large species of cinnamon, called by the druggists *cassia*. The woods of Tavai and Merghi are full of the sassafras-tree, which is remarkable not only for the sudorific virtues it possesses in all its parts, but also because its leaves when dried are useful both in medicine and cookery. In Pegu there is abundance of wax and honey, which is deposited by the bees in the highest trees. Some of the little islands near Negraglia, and off the coast of Tenasserim are famous

for being the resort of the birds, whose nests, formed of a curious gum, are so much esteemed throughout India, and still more in China, for their pectoral, anodyne and cordial qualities. For use, they are boiled in water or in chicken-broth. As to their formation, the most probable opinion seems to be, that a marine bird, collecting in its beak the sea-foam and uniting with it a glutinous substance which it draws from its own stomach, builds these nests with the material so prepared. They are always fixed upon high rocks, and they are gathered by means of ladders, by men trained to the occupation, not without considerable danger. Finally, salt, which seems so necessary a commodity all over the world, far from being rare, as in Bengal, Azen and Junan, is here most plentiful. In Pegu the very best species is extracted from the sea water ; but more is drawn from the brine pits in the plains of Mozzobo, and in other places.

Tamarinds, aloes, lac, catechu, indigo, cotton and tobacco, must also be mentioned among the productions of the Burmese Empire. Catechu is a juice obtained by boiling a certain wood, and hence it is quite wrong to call it Japan-earth or catechu-earth ; the Burmese use it principally in preparing their betel ; but it is also exported to other places, where it is refined. The labours of the insects that make the lac are worthy of the study of a naturalist. The indigo would probably be better than that of Bengal, if industry were brought in to assist nature ; but as less attention is here paid to it than in other places, its lustre and fineness are rather inferior. There are two species of cotton ; that of a reddish colour, which is rare and most esteemed, and the white or common cotton ; and of this more is collected than the natives can make use of. The tree called *leppan* also produces a kind of down or cotton, which, though it cannot be spun, is good for

mattresses and pillows. The tobacco of the kingdom of Ava is not inferior to that of America. The cane, called by the Portuguese bamboo, grows everywhere, and particularly in Pegu, where it increases to a height and thickness truly astonishing. Some will measure a foot and a half in diameter, and are large enough to form the principal pillars of a house. Great use is made of the tender roots of the bamboo, which after having been steeped in water for some time, are used in making curry ; they are also preserved in vinegar.

The flowering shrubs and plants of this country are not less numerous or various than the fruit trees, and it would require a volume to describe them all. We must therefore content ourselves with speaking of some of the most remarkable. There is one shrub which grows to a great height, and has a flower like a large spike of maize, the scent of which is very pungent, and is not lost even when the flower is dried. Many species of the jessamine are common, one in particular, the flowers of which are as large as small roses. Lilies are also common ; and indeed there are so many kinds of flowers that it would take too much room to enumerate them. The young people of both sexes gather them to make garlands for their heads, and are very proud of this ornament.

But besides the trees producing fruit, the Burmese have many which are extremely useful to them, for their leaves are the chief ingredient of their curries. In the villages, where there are no markets, the inhabitants are furnished with their kitchen herbs entirely from these trees. But they do not restrict themselves to the trees, which have no fruit, in preparing the curry, for the leaf of the tamarind and of the mango-trees, are very much sought after for this purpose. The former are rather acid,

and the latter have an aromatic flavour, and when dressed as a salad after the European fashion, are really excellent.

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The pine-apple is here very common, as also the *santor*, the *guava*, the *jambos*, the *jaceas*, the mango, the *durcione*, and all the other fruits that are found in India and the adjacent islands. There are also some peculiar to the Burmese, as the *marione*. Before ripening, this fruit very much resembles our olive, but it afterwards attains the size and appearance of the plum. Whilst in its first state it is excellent for preserves, on account of its acidity, and it is likewise pickled in salt and vinegar ; but when ripe it is eaten both in its natural state, and preserved in salt. The tree that bears it is exclusively a native of Pegu, so that it will not even grow in the kingdom of Ava.

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## II. *'The Currency and Commerce of the Burmese Empire'*<sup>1</sup>

The Burmese have no coined money, but in their commercial transactions they make use of gold and silver bullion. Hence they are obliged to employ scales in all payments. The principal weight that they have, and to which all others are referred, is the ticalé ; it is equal to about half an ounce. The gold and silver used is sometimes quite pure, but ordinarily it is mixed with some alloy ; and of course its value depends on its degree of purity. But the inferior money of Amrapura and Rangoon is lead ; its value is not by any means fixed, but

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<sup>1</sup> Sangermano, *A Description of the Burmese Empire*, pp. 172-176.

varies according to its abundance or scarcity. Sometimes a tical of silver with a portion of alloy, is equal to 200 ticali of lead, sometimes to a thousand, and even to more. In Tavai and Merghi pieces of tin with the impression of a cock, which is the Burmese arms, are used for money.

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The Burmese have both an internal and external commerce. In the kingdom of Ava, and indeed throughout the whole Empire, except in the great cities, the commerce for the necessaries of life, as food and clothing, is rather a barter than buying or selling. The inhabitants of the places abounding in rice or cotton, go to exchange their commodities with those, the produce of whose fields is gingili, tobacco, indigo, etc. In all the villages of Ava rice is the ordinary commodity bartered for fish, vegetables, and other things necessary for food. But the Sciam are those who carry on the most extended internal commerce ; as it is they who sell throughout all the provinces of the Empire, that coarse tea of which we have spoken, under the name of lapech, as being used at funerals, in lawsuits, and in making contracts.

The external commerce of the Burmese is with various nations. The Chinese of Junan, coming down by Canton and along the great river Ava, bring to the Burmese capital, in great boats, several of the commodities of their country, as wrought silks, paper, tea, various kinds of fruit, and other trifles, and they return laden with cotton, raw silk, salt, birds' feathers, and that black varnish, which as we have said, is distilled from a tree ; this, prepared and purified, is the celebrated commodity known by the name of Chinese varnish.

The excellence of the ports of Pegu, and the richness

of the productions of this Empire, attract merchants with their vessels, not only from all parts of India, but also from China and Arabia. The river of Rangoon, the mouth of which is the same as that of the river Siriam, affords a station for ships, at once easy of access, and defended from the wind. The river of Bassino forms a harbour which is still more secure, and from which ships may sail at all seasons ; which is not the case at Rangoon, by reason of the south-west wind, which often prevails. The dangerous shallows and formidable calms of Martaban hinder any but small barks from entering its port. Tavai has a commodious port ; and vessels may ride at anchor in the mouth of its river, under the shelter of two or three small islands. The sea in the vicinity of Merghi, is full of little islands, among which, as in secure roads, vessels may winter, sheltered from every wind, or be repaired in the greatest security.

But of all the ports of Pegu that of Rangoon is the principal, in fact it is the only one of importance ; for this is one of the most populous cities of the kingdom, the residence of a Governor and Viceroy, and it has an easy and continual communication with the capital and other principal places of the Empire, by means of the river, along which all their various productions are brought to it, to be again disposed of to the merchants, both native and foreign, with whom the city is crowded. Until the year 1790, Bassino enjoyed the same privileges, but when it was given as an apanage to one of the children of the Emperor, the Mandarins, who were sent to govern it, committed so many and such cruel injustices and vexations, that no merchant dared to approach the place. It may therefore be said that the commerce is entirely concentrated in Rangoon, where it is exercised by the inhabitants, as well as by a number of Mahommedan

Moors, some Armenians, and a few English, French, and Portuguese, who have taken up their residence there. The ships that come from China, and the Malay coast, which latter are for the most English, bring in cargoes of arecca, and other merchandise, as silks, nankeen, porcelain, tea, etc. The commodities however, which have the best sale at Rangoon, and return the highest profit, are the sugar and muslins of Bengal, the linen of Madras, and particularly the white and coloured handkerchiefs, which are here universally used for covering the head. Sometimes also vessels arrive, from the Isle of France, laden with merchandise that yields an exorbitant profit ; such as pottery, muskets, looking-glasses, and articles of iron and brass, with woollen cloths of various colours, which are eagerly sought after in this country, particularly when they are of two colours. For although they are not used for clothing, still they are in great request as coverlets at night, as also for wearing on the shoulders in the day-time like a mantle. The English ships also bring in quantities of these stuffs. Such are the principal commodities brought by sea ; though there are some others of minor importance, consisting chiefly of various drugs, and spices, raisins, almonds, coffee, and other natural productions of Persia and Arabia, which are brought by the ships of the Burmese themselves.

No ship is allowed to enter Rangoon, without being provided with a pilot acquainted with the navigation of the river ; for the city is fifteen leagues from the mouth. After having cast anchor, the captain of the ship, or some one of its officers, must present himself at the Rondai, which . . . is a large hall where the Mandarins assemble to administer justice, to declare the nation to which the ship belongs, the place it has come from, and the merchandise it carries. If afterwards, any thing is found not men-

tioned in this declaration, it is considered as contraband. The ship is then disarmed ; all the cannons, muskets, and ammunition, and indeed even the rudder is carried to land. All merchandise upon entering pays a duty of twelve and a half per cent ; of which ten per cent goes to the Emperor ; the rest is divided among all the Mandarins in Rangoon.

The commodities which the Burmese export in return for those just mentioned, are lac, catechu, and isinglass, when the ships are destined to China or the Malay coast. The lac and catechu are used by the Chinese in their colours, the isinglass for glue. But if the vessels are bound for the west, that is for Bengal, the coast of Coromandel, the Isle of France, etc., the cargo generally consists of vegetable oil, petroleum, and above all teak-wood, either as masts for ships, or cut into planks of different sizes. Indeed it is for this wood more than for anything else that vessels of every nation come to Pegu from all parts of India. It is found also in Bombay, but in small quantities, and is excessively dear ; whereas in Pegu and Ava there are such immense forests of it, that it can be sold to as many ships as arrive, at a moderate price.

This wood, while it does not quickly decay, is very easily wrought, and very light. Cases have occurred of ships made of it and laden with it, which have been filled with water, but yet did not sink. Hence all the ships that come to Pegu, return with cargoes of this wood, which is employed in common houses, but particularly in ship-building.

Most of the ships that arrive in these ports are here careened and refitted ; and there are besides two or three English and French ship-builders established at Rangoon. One reason of this is the prohibition that exists of carrying the specie out of the Empire. For, as merchants after



selling their cargo, and taking in another of teak-wood, generally have some money remaining in their hands, they are obliged to employ it in building a new ship. Though perhaps this is not the only motive for building vessels in Rangoon ; but the quantity of teak and other kinds of wood with which the neighbouring forests abound, may also have a great influence in this way.

If the port of Rangoon entices strangers to build ships there, it also obliges them to sail as soon as possible. For there is a species of worm, bred in the waters of the river, which penetrates into the interior of the wood, and eats it away in such a manner that the vessel is exposed to the greatest danger, since the holes formed by these worms being hidden, cannot easily be stopped up. They attack every species of wood except ebony and tamarind, which are so hard that they are used to make the mallets, with which carpenters drive their chisels.

III. *Deposition of Henry Gouger, taken at Rangoon before John Crawford, Civil Commissioner in Ava and Pegu.*<sup>1</sup>

Q. Do you conceive that the presence of a British Agent at the Court of Ava will be useful towards the protection of our commerce?

A. Yes, most certainly—heretofore, British merchants residing at Rangoon, have possessed no means of getting their grievances redressed, except by personally repairing to the Court, at an enormous loss of time, and money. Over the Viceroys of Rangoon, there was no control whatever, and they could proceed to acts of oppression, which they would not dare to

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 221-222.

venture upon, were a British Agent residing at the Court, who could make known to the government, any acts of injustice committed on the persons or properties of British subjects.

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- Q. Have you had extensive means of gaining information, respecting the trade of the Burman dominions?
- A. Yes, I have.
- Q. In what branch of the trade were you chiefly engaged?
- A. I imported British cotton goods, and made returns to Calcutta, chiefly in timber.
- Q. What quantity of British piece goods did you sell, from your first arrival in the Burman dominions, in June, 1822, until the breaking out of the war?
- A. I sold . . . to the value of about 220,000 ticals of flowered silver, equal to about 275,000 sicca rupees.
- Q. What quantity of teak timber did you export during the same period?
- A. I exported teak timber, in all, to the extent of about 5,400 tons ; of this, one or two cargoes were sent to Bombay, one to Java, and all the rest to Calcutta.
- Q. What other articles did you export besides teak?
- A. Chinese hurtal or orpiment, Chinese raw silk, stick lac, terra japonica and horses.
- Q. Are you of opinion, that the trade of piece goods, in the Burman dominions, is capable of much extension?
- A. Yes, very great extension.
- Q. Do you know anything regarding the inland trade, carried on between the Burman dominions and China?
- A. Yes, I made enquiry into the nature of it, and several times visited the Chinese camp, or fair, at Maday,

which is distant about twelve miles from Ava, in a north-easterly direction.

*Q.* What articles do the Chinese import, and what do they export?

*A.* Their importations consist of silk, hurtal, vermillion, gold, copper, quick-silver, Chinese spirits, tea, hams, dry and a few fresh fruits, fans, umbrellas, shoes and sundry wearing articles. They export little else than cotton.

*Q.* Is the importation of silk considerable?

*A.* Yes, it forms by far the largest article of import, and is very considerable. Upon enquiry at the custom house at Maday, I learnt there were 2,700 bundles of silk, which, at the rate of a tythe, had been collected as duties. This, supposing it, as I believe it was, one year's collection, would give the imports 27,000 bundles. Each bundle worth, at an average, about 30 ticals of flowered silver.

*Q.* Is the price reasonable and the quality good?

*A.* The quality is generally coarse, but the thread is round and even. It is dirty, from long land carriage, and not well crossed on the reel. It is likewise generally cased. I sent some of it to England, but have not yet received account sales.

*Q.* What description of tea is generally imported by the Chinese?

*A.* It is made up in cakes, and is of various qualities. I used to drink some of the best, and found it very palatable. It is all black tea, and bears no resemblance to the varieties exported from Canton. The result of my enquiries is, that this tea is not the produce of China, but of the Shan country, or Lao. The Burmans always informed me this was the case.

Q. Can you state the prices of the tea?

A. I cannot exactly recollect, but it is very cheap.

Q. Do you think it would answer for the European market?

A. The taste is peculiar, and I think would not, at first, at least, suit the European market. Its cheapness, however, would be a great recommendation to it.

Q. What is the quality and quantity of the cotton exported by the Chinese?

A. In quality, the cotton is short in the staple, but fine silky. This was the character given in the Bengal market to some musters which I carried round to Calcutta. Considerable quantities are taken to our province of Dacca, yearly, by Burman boats, where I understand it fetches a higher price than ordinary Bengal cottons. Respecting the quantity, my enquiries lead me to think that it does not exceed 20,000 bales yearly; each bale of 100 viss, or 365 pounds. The cotton is always cleaned from the seed.

Q. Do you know what is the usual price of this cotton?

A. Between 50 and 60 ticals of flowered silver per 100 viss, or from 17 to 18 sicca rupees per maund.

Q. Have you any idea of the general amount in value of the whole Chinese trade?

A. Nothing beyond what can be collected from the amount of the silk and cotton, which are the principal articles of importation and exportation.

Q. What number of Chinese do you suppose composed the yearly caravan?

A. In my opinion, the number of Chinese is very small. I should think some hundreds; as far as I can recollect, one man to about 30 horses, or mules, both of which are numerous.

IV. *Deposition of John Laird, taken at Rangoon before  
John Crawford.*<sup>1</sup>

Q. Were you agent for the Prince of Sarrawaddi<sup>2</sup>?

A. Yes, and also for the late Prince of Tongo, brother to the king.

Q. Did you enjoy any privileges under the Prince?

A. Yes, I had a monopoly of the teak timber and other produce of the province of Sarrawaddi, which is the domain or estate of His Highness. The people could sell their produce to me only, so long as I gave the market price of Sarrawaddi for it.

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Q. Do you consider that the British trade, in the Burman dominions, is likely to receive any protection or benefit from the presence of a British agent at the Court of Ava?

A. Yes, undoubtedly. I would return to Ava myself, as a merchant, were a British Resident appointed there.

Q. Have you had extensive means of gaining information respecting the trade of the Burman dominions?

A. Yes, very considerable means.

Q. What do you consider to be the production of the country, either at present suited for foreign exportation, or likely to become so when the country is settled, and trade put on a fair footing?

A. The following enumeration occurs to me: rice, gram, cotton, indigo, cardamoms, black-pepper, aloes, sugar,

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents*, pp. 223, 225-227. It seems that the short notice on 'Trade of Ava' published in the *Government Gazette* on July 3, 1826, was based on Laird's statement.

<sup>2</sup> Tharrawaddy.

salt-petre, salt, teak timber, stick-lac, kutch, or terra japonica, areca, damar, fustic, sapan wood, wood and earth oil, honey, bees' wax, ivory, with rubies and sapphires. I may add, that the following metals and minerals are found in the Burman dominions: iron, copper, lead, gold, silver, antimony, white statuary marble, limestone, and coals.

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Q. What do you suppose may be the annual produce of Sarrawaddi?

A. I got about 7,500 pairs of Shinbins, but, notwithstanding the monopoly, others got large quantities also.

Q. Do you know anything of the produce of the teak forests of Lain, Prome and Tongo?

A. No, I cannot afford any precise information respecting them.

Q. Have you ever visited the teak forests of Sarrawaddi, and what do you think of them?

A. I have. The timber is very fine, and in great quantity. It is all natural wood, the Burmans never planting.

Q. Are they capable of affording a larger annual produce than they yield at present?

A. Yes, any quantity that the market may demand.

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Q. Have you ever seen any cane sugar in Ava?

A. Yes, I have seen some very fine white clayed sugar, manufactured by the Chinese of Ava. I thought the best description of it superior to Siam sugar.

Q. What was the price of sugar in the market of Ava?

A. From 30 to 36 sicca rupees..... 365 pounds avoirdupoise.

- Q. Are you of opinion that the culture of the sugar cane, and manufacture of sugar might be extended?
- A. I was told by the Chinese that nothing was wanting but a market, to enable them to produce sugar in large quantity. The Burmans prohibited the exportation.
- Q. Are you of opinion that any part of the Burman territory is suited to the production of indigo?
- A. Yes, the lower parts of the country. . . .

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- Q. What are the principal articles of import by sea into the Burman dominions?
- A. Bengal, Madras, and British piece goods, British woollens, iron, wrought and unwrought, copper for ship-building, lead, quicksilver, borax, sulphur, gunpowder, fire arms, salt-petre, sugar, arrack and rum, a little opium, earthen ware, Chinese and English, glass ware, cocoanuts, and betelnut.
- Q. Has the trade in piece goods increased of late years?
- A. Very much, especially in British piece goods, which were not known at all to the Burmans a few years ago. The trade in Madras piece goods has declined.
- Q. Do you know anything of the trade carried on between the northern parts of the Burman dominions and China?
- A. Yes, I have made enquiry into it.
- Q. Will you mention what you know respecting it?
- A. The trade is carried on at Banmo<sup>1</sup>, on the Chinese frontiers, and a fair held at a place called Midai, four or five miles to the northward of Amarapura. . .
- Q. What goods did the Chinese import?
- A. Copper, orpiment, quick-silver, vermilion, iron pans,

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<sup>1</sup> Bhamo.

silver, gold, rhubarb, tea, fine honey, raw silk, spirits, hams, musk, verdegriis, dry fruits, and a few fresh fruits, with some dogs and pheasants.

Q. What description of tea is it the Chinese bring?

A. It is black tea of different qualities. . . .

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Q. Do you consider this tea fit for the European market?

A. Yes, I think the best quality is. . .

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Q. Are you aware that the tea plant is the production of some parts of the Burman empire?

A. Yes, but I do not know of what part. Tea, under the name of Lepak, is consumed by all classes of Burmans, and is a great article of native trade. . . .

Q. Do you know how and where salt-petre is obtained in the Burman country?

Q. Yes, I have seen it manufactured at a place called Aong-ben-le, about ten or twelve miles from Ava. . .

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Q. What returns do the Chinese chiefly carry back with them?

A. The principal article is cotton, and then ivory and bees' wax, with a small quantity of British woollens, chiefly broad-cloth and carpet.

Q. Have you heard what quantity of cotton is exported from Ava to China annually?

A. . . . . I consider the quantity cannot be less than 70,000 Bengal bales, of 300 pounds each.

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Q. Did you ever hear that the cotton of Pegu is sent to Chittagong and Dacca?

A. I have understood that it is, and that from it is manufactured the fine Dacca muslin.



V. *Trade of Bassein (Government Gazette, May 3, 1827)*<sup>1</sup>.

The internal trade of the country was formerly considerable—the articles, sent from Bassein were rice, salt, balachong, and salted and dried fish; the returns for which were silk clothes, lackered-ware, tobacco, onions, tamarinds, cotton, lac, lacker, petroleum oil, dammer, iron, saltpetre and sulphur—the conveyance of these articles was by boats of large size . . . . The productions of the district, or those of internal import, were exported for areca nuts and piece goods, chiefly to Rangoon, but boats of a large dimension were annually sent to Chittagong, and even to Dacca, before the late war.

VI. *Commercial Potentialities of the Tenasserim Province (Government Gazette, March 2, 1826)*<sup>2</sup>.

. . . The soil and climate of the district (of Ye) are evidently favourable for cultivation. Boat timber is abundant, and of good quality, but no teak grows in the forests: the other products of Ye are much the same as those of Tavai.

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Although, perhaps, inferior to that of Martaban, the soil of Tavai is superior to that of Mergui, and only requires cultivation to be rendered eminently productive. . . .

Rice has always been a staple of this country, and is mentioned by the early travellers, as forming the chief article of export from all the northern ports on this coast,

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents, Appendix, No. 21.*

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Documents, Appendix, No. 26.*

to the more southern points, as Malacca, and to the opposite side of the bay, or Coromandel coast . . . even calculating upon a very considerable augmentation of the inhabitants, there is little doubt, that, under a settled government, and with improved methods, rice may be grown in Tavai, so as once more to form a valuable article of exportation.

Tobacco, of a tolerable good quality, is grown in Tavai, but scarcely in sufficient quantities for the consumption of the province. . . . Indigo is cultivated, but not to any extent, although the soil and climate are considered as particularly well adapted to it. . . . The application of this and other dying drugs, is familiar to the Tavayers, and most of the cloths worn by them, are dyed as well as manufactured in the province. Sugarcane grows, but not of the best sort. . . . Of timber-trees, there is an endless variety, and many of them are employed in the construction of vessels. Sapan-wood has always been an article of export. Salt is manufactured in this province, and may be made to almost any extent, and wax, and honey, and elephant's teeth, are procurable from the *Karians*. . . .

The chief mineral produce of Tavai is tin. . .

\* \* \* \*

Most of the finest fruits of India, and the eastern islands, grow in Tavai. . . .

\* \* \* \*

The trade of Tavai has not been very extensive for some time. Chinese from Penang, Burmans from Rangoon, Martaban, and Mergui, and sometimes a country ship, have chiefly conducted it. . . .

\* \* \* \*

The imports to Tavai are cotton and tobacco, from Martaban and Rangoon. Earth oil from the latter place. Piece goods, iron and cutlery, china-ware and Europe goods from Penang. Gun-powder and fire-arms. Muslins. Betel-nut, prepared in a peculiar manner. Raw sugar, spices.

The exports are rice, birds' nests, tin, bees' wax, cardamoms, ivory, bich-de-mer, earthen cooking pots and goglets ; together with other kinds of produce already enumerated.

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*

The productions of Mergui are very much the same as those of Tavai. . . .

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*

(The neighbouring islands produced) pearls, edible birds' nests, bich-de-mar, etc.

#### VII. *Economic Resources of Martaban* . (*Government Gazette, March 23, 1826*)<sup>1</sup>.

The chief staple of Martaban is rice, which has been always cultivated in quantities much beyond the consumption of the province. A considerable part of the surplus went to Ava, and the upper portions of the Burman empire. Some was also exported in China junks to Pinang, and elsewhere. . . .

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*

Cotton is another article of export from Martaban to Rangoon, Tavai and Mergui. . . .

*Me*, or Indigo, is seldom cultivated separately, but

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *Documents, Appendix*, No. 27.

may be seen growing promiscuously with cotton and other plants. . . .

The black pepper plant may be considered indigenous. . .

Sugar cane, of a tolerably good quality, is reared, though sparingly. Tobacco is cultivated to a small extent, and hemp grows abundantly in some of the islands in the river. The areca nut tree is abundant, and the nuts form an article of export.

The forests of Martaban are not less the source of a supply of valuable products than those more to the southward. The Kareans bring ivory, cardamoms, wax, and honey to market—and sapan and other valuable woods are procurable, with the important addition of teak. The Martaban teak is said to be rather inferior to the Rangoon, but there is reason to think this may be prejudice, and it is unquestionably very good, if not of the best quality. . . .

Salt is made in large quantities along the Martaban coast, and finds a ready market. The whole of the upper provinces of Ava, are dependant on the maritime districts for this essential ingredient in their food. Balachong and dried fish, although not to a similar extent, are almost equally necessaries of life amongst the Burmans. The Martaban fisheries are very productive. Martaban is less rich in mineral products than its neighbours. Gold, in small quantities, is found in some of the rivers, but no other metal has been yet met within the boundaries of the district. It was once celebrated for its rubies, but these are brought from the interior, or the borders of the Laos' country.

The manufactures of this province are, of course, of a character and extent little more than adapted to domestic consumption. . .

Martaban is open to a much more extensive trade than the southern provinces, as it not only communicates, like them, with Siam, but with the Burman kingdom, with Laos, and even China. . . From these two latter countries come lac, rubies, medicinal drugs, swords, knives, manufactured cotton and silk, sugar, candied yanseng, or earth nuts, blank 'books composed of blackened paper, ivory, rhinoceros' horns, etc.—They take, in return, raw cotton, salt, spices, quicksilver, red lead, assafoetida, borax, alum, chintzes, piece goods, needles, and various European articles. There can be little doubt that when affairs are settled, an extensive vent will offer itself in this direction for our broad cloths and cottons.

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These documents constitute the principal source of information on which this volume is based.

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that these documents give *the most detailed and authentic account* of the events narrated in this book.

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<sup>1</sup> Of these the most important is *Rangoon and Ava : Intelligence Reports by Major Jackson, 1824-1827*. It is a volume of more than 500 pages, without pagination, containing miscellaneous correspondence full of information about military operations. Major Jackson seems to have been inclined to send reports coloured by his own prejudices. On one occasion he was severely censured by the Supreme Government. (Secret Consultations, November 4, 1825, No. 16):

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