

TIBET IN ANGLO-CHINESE RELATIONS :

1767-1842

BY ALISTAIR LAMB

PART I

FROM 1764, WHEN the British position in Bengal was established beyond challenge, until 1842, when the Treaty of Nanking gave Britain the island colony of Hong Kong, the shortest route between British and Chinese territory lay across the Himalaya mountains. Until the Gurkha War of 1814-1816, the southern slopes of the Himalayas and the states that lay along them formed a narrow buffer between British territory and Tibet. As a result of the Gurkha War, British influence was brought right up to the Tibetan border, through the annexation of Kumaon in the western Himalayas, and through the establishment of a vague protectorate over the tiny hill state of Sikkim. Tibet had been evolving into a Chinese dependency since the beginning of the eighteenth century. This process, nearly complete by 1750, reached its final stage in 1792, when Tibet became, to all intents and purposes, an integral part of the Chinese Empire. The British in India were well aware of their proximity to this outpost of the power of the Chinese Emperor. In a period when British dealings with China were confined to trade at a single port, Canton, in conditions that were far from ideal, it would have been most surprising if no attempts had been made to develop Anglo-Chinese relations across the far from impassable barrier of the Himalayas.

The British began to appreciate the significance of Tibet in this respect as soon as they had established their rule in Bengal. A trade then flourished across the mountains between Tibet and the Gangetic Plain by way of the hill states of the Vale of Nepal, Katmandu, Batgaon, and Patan, at that time ruled by Rajas with the closest ties of religion, race, and culture to Tibet. This trade, unlike that of the East India Company with China at Canton, gave rise to a balance of payments in favour of India. A flow of specie into British territory resulted from it at a time when the Company was being criticized for exporting gold and silver to China.

No sooner had the British arrived in a position in which they could benefit from the trade across the Himalayas than it came to an abrupt end. The Gurkhas, a tribe from the west of the present

kingdom of Nepal, began to undergo in the 1760s a rapid process of expansion. Their warlike qualities, which seem to have long lain dormant, were suddenly made plain when Gurkha armies conquered, one after the other, the three states of the Vale of Nepal and founded a kingdom which was destined to go on expanding until it was checked during the years 1814 to 1816 by British arms.

In 1767 the Gurkhas had nearly completed their conquest of the Vale. The trade across the mountains to Tibet had come to an abrupt halt. Since this trade was "an advantageous trade . . . by which a considerable quantity of gold, and many other valuable commodities were imported", and since the East India Company had no wish to see its territories "deprived of the benefits arising from the former intercourse, at a period when a decline of trade and a scarcity of specie render it of the greatest importance that every spring of industry should flow freely and without interruption",¹ it tried to prevent the conquests of the Gurkhas.²

The Company, in fact, realized that not only did the trade with Tibet provide a source of specie which might be offset against the expenditure of the Chinese tea trade, but also that across the Himalayas there might be found a route for the introduction of British manufactures, especially British woollen textiles, into the Chinese Empire. The attempts to sell such goods at Canton had been most disappointing. As the Court of Directors had written to Bengal on 16th February, 1768: "We desire you will obtain the best intelligence you can whether trade can be opened with Napaul, and whether cloth and other European commodities may not find their way from thence to Tibet, Lhassa, and the Western Parts of China."³ When it became clear that the Gurkhas had closed the route through Nepal and that there was nothing to be done at that time to reopen it, the Court of Directors instructed the Bengal Government to search for alternative routes through the neighbouring Himalayan state of Bhutan.⁴

¹ Hodgson MSS (in India Office Library). Vol. 1, f. 26. Sketch of the Relations between the British Government and Nepal, quoting Select Committee to Home Government, 25th Sept., 1767.

² In 1767, in response to an appeal from the Raja of Patan, the Bengal Government dispatched Captain Kinloch and a small force to try to arrest the advance of the Gurkhas. J. Talboys Wheeler, *Short History of India*, London, 1889, p. 463.

³ Home Miscellaneous Series in India Office Records. Vol. 219, f. 325.

⁴ S. C. Sarcar. Some notes on the intercourse of Bengal with Northern Countries in the second half of the eighteenth century. *Proc. Indian Historical Records Commission*, vol. xiii, 1930, pp. 104-105.

To Warren Hastings fell the opportunity to carry out these instructions. In 1772 a war broke out between a Himalayan hill state, Bhutan, and the small Indian state of Cooch Behar. The latter, hard pressed, requested British help. In the following year, in return for a treaty which placed Cooch Behar under British protection, Hastings sent a small force of British troops against the Bhutanese, who were soon obliged to retire into the hills. The 6th Panchen Lama of Tibet, then the leading figure in Tibetan politics, the Dalai Lama being a minor, wrote to Hastings on behalf of the defeated Bhutanese, who were in some measure Tibetan dependents. When Hastings received this letter in March, 1774, he resolved to treat the vanquished Bhutanese with leniency and to send a friendly mission to the court of the Panchen Lama (or Tashi Lama, as Hastings called him) at Tashilhumpo near Shigatse in Tibet. To this task he deputed George Bogle, a young Scot in the Company's service whose ability and tact had come to Hastings' notice.¹

Hastings was influenced in his decision to send this mission partly by his curiosity as to what went on in Tibet, about which he had already learnt something from the accounts of the Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries who had resided in Lhasa before 1750, when the establishment of the Chinese protectorate brought down that barrier against foreign travel which already existed in other parts of the Chinese Empire. In part he was concerned with the role which the Panchen Lama might assume as mediator on behalf of the British among the warlike states of the Himalayas, Nepal and Bhutan. But there can be little doubt that his main interest was in finding an answer to two of the main problems besetting British trade at Canton, the adverse balance and the difficulty of selling British manufactures to the Chinese. In his instructions to Bogle, Hastings drew particular attention to the Tibetan wealth in gold and silver, and to the considerable trade which existed between Tibet and Western China. Bogle was told to inquire carefully into the relations between China and Tibet and the nature of the roads that linked the two countries together.²

The story of Bogle's mission has been told elsewhere. It suffices

¹ See : C. R. Markham, *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet, and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa*, London, 1876. S. Cammann, *Trade through the Himalayas*, Princeton, 1951.

² Markham, *Narratives*, op. cit., pp. 5-8.

to say that he reached Tashilhumpo in December, 1774, and that he remained in Tibet for five months, during which period he established a firm and mutual friendship with the 6th Panchen Lama. The Lama promised to use his influence in opening a trade route through the territory of the somewhat turbulent rulers of Bhutan and to see that the peace of the Himalayan frontier was maintained. Bogle acquired a great deal of accurate information about the people, religion, government, customs, and trade of Tibet which he presented to Hastings in a number of admirably clear reports. As far as the immediate object of creating a new channel for the trans-Himalayan trade was concerned the Mission was a moderate success. Bogle, however, came to a conclusion about the nature of the relationship between Tibet and China that gave to the establishment of Anglo-Tibetan relations a new significance.

The Panchen Lama, Bogle discovered, was not only the most important man in Tibet, during the minority of the Dalai Lama, but also he exerted an influence far beyond the Tibetan borders. The 6th Panchen was, moreover, a man of exceptional sanctity whose reputation stood higher than that of any of his predecessors. The Chinese Emperors, Bogle noted, "being of Tatar extraction, profess the religion of the Lamas, and reverence them as the head of their faith." This was especially so in the case of the 6th Panchen, whose "character and abilities had secured him the favour of the Emperor" so that "his representations carried great weight at the Court of Peking".¹ Bogle went as far as to describe the relationship of Lama and Chinese Emperor as being comparable to that of Pope and Medieval German Emperor. Here lay the germ of the idea that the Panchen Lama might be used by the British to pave the way for the establishment of a British representative at Peking, whose voice would reach the ears of the Emperor without undergoing the distortions imposed by the Chinese hierarchy that separated the British at Canton from the Chinese capital. While at Tashilhumpo, Bogle sounded the Lama on this question and the Tibetan pontiff promised to do all he could to help. He promised to write to a Lama friend of his in Peking, "who has great interest with the Emperor," in praise of the British and he held out the hope that it might eventually be possible for an envoy of the Company to make his way through Tibet to the Chinese capital.

¹ Markham, *Narratives*, op. cit., pp. 195-6.

While Bogle was "not so sanguine" about the prospect of this, he did not quite despair of "one day or other getting a sight of Peking".¹

News that the Panchen Lama was about to go from Tibet to China to visit the Emperor led Bogle, in July, 1778, to return once more to this theme. In a memorandum to Warren Hastings he proposed to take advantage of the Lama's visit to obtain passports for himself to travel to Peking. The Lama, Bogle reported, had said he would try to get such documents; he doubted if Bogle would be allowed to travel overland by way of Tibet, but he saw no reason why the Company Envoy should not go to Peking through Canton. Bogle argued that there was a crying need for a British Envoy to negotiate in Peking for the repayment of the large debts which were then owing to Englishmen in Canton by Chinese merchants. He noted, furthermore, that "the Company's business (at Canton) is often harassed and oppressed, and its conductors are entirely without any channel of communication or representation to the Court of Peking". Even if the Lama did not get him passports, Bogle concluded, there was every chance that he might arrange some other means whereby the British case could be presented in Peking without distortion.²

Hastings welcomed these proposals. In April, 1779, he made it quite clear that the use of Tibet as the diplomatic back door to China had become the goal of his Tibetan policy and had dwarfed considerations of frontier policy and local Indo-Tibetan trade.

"The connection and friendship which have been formed with Teshoo Lama (Panchen Lama)," he wrote on this occasion, "may eventually produce advantages of a far more extensive nature," since "by means of the Teshoo Lama . . . I am inclined to hope that a communication may be opened with the court of Peking, either through his mediation or by an Agent from the Government; it is impossible to point out the precise advantages which either the opening of new Channels of Trade, or in obtaining redress of Grievances, or extending the privileges of the Company, may

¹ Markham, *Narratives*, op. cit., p. 134.

² Markham, *Narratives*, op. cit., pp. 207-210. Cammann, op. cit., p. 67, n. 64, makes out that this memorandum was dated July, 1779. This cannot be so, since it is quite clear the statement of Hastings, of April, 1779, which is quoted below, is an answer to Bogle's proposals. Cammann has only seen this document in a quotation from Sarcar, op. cit. p. 121.

result from such an Intercourse ; like the navigation of unknown seas, which are explored not for the attainment of any certain and prescribed object, but for the discovery of what they may contain. In so new and remote a search we can only propose to adventure for possibilities, the attempt may be crowned with the most splendid and substantial success, or it may terminate in the mere gratification of useless curiosity, but the hazard is small, the design is worthy of the pursuit of a rising state, the Company have both approved and recommended it, and the means are too promising to be neglected, while the influence of the Teshoo Lama joined to the favourable disposition which he has hitherto manifested to our nation, affords so fair a prospect, and that the only one which may ever be presented to us of accomplishing it.”¹

The opportunity that seemed so promising in 1779 came to nothing owing to an unhappy chain of events. The Panchen Lama, when he saw the Emperor in China, was to have sought the passports which Bogle needed to visit Peking. Once these had been secured, word was to have been sent to India and Bogle was to have set out to join his old friend at the Chinese capital, probably travelling by way of Canton. But the Panchen Lama died of smallpox in Peking in 1780, before he had made any progress in the matter of the passports—there was much rumour to the effect that he had been murdered by the Chinese because of the friendship he had shown to the British, but this is now generally discounted.² In the following year Bogle also died and Hastings was deprived of the services of the only Englishman with experience of Tibet. One may well speculate what would have been the outcome had Bogle been able to visit Peking. He would have done so as the envoy of the East India Company and not of the King of England and would, in consequence, not have been so concerned with questions of “face” which brought on the kow-tow crises and rendered abortive the missions of Macartney and Amherst. Bogle possessed the skill and the tact required in the tortuous conduct of oriental diplomacy, as his success with the Panchen Lama stands witness. He had the patience and the intelligence for the kind of negotiation that would produce results only by the establishment of a mutual good will over a long period of time. Acting under the command of

¹ Home Miscellaneous, vol. 219, f. 375. Extract from Bengal General Consultations, 19th April, 1779.

² Cammann, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-80.

Warren Hastings, he would have been allowed a freedom of action that was denied to later envoys, and his discretion was such that he would certainly have made the best use of any opportunity which lay to hand.

Hastings did not abandon his Tibetan schemes on the deaths of the Panchen Lama and George Bogle. The installation of the new Panchen Lama, an infant into whose body the soul of the 6th Panchen was thought to have migrated, provided him with the opportunity to send a second mission to Tashilhumpo to bring the good wishes of the Government of India on this happy occasion. The task of bearing this message was entrusted to Samuel Turner, a kinsman of Hastings, who set out for Tashilhumpo in 1783. There was no prospect of Turner repeating Bogle's triumphs since the Panchen Lama was an infant. The second mission to Tibet could do no more than reinforce the good will established by the first mission.

Turner was convinced that with patience the project which had been thwarted by the death of the 6th Panchen might yet come about. It was essential that every effort be made to continue the friendly contacts that had been established in 1774, and the surest means to do this would be by the encouragement of trade between India and Tibet. A mutually profitable trade was the most certain way to mutual friendship. As Turner put it, on his return from Tibet in 1784: "whenever a regular intercourse takes place between the agents of the government of Bengal and the chiefs of Tibet, I shall consider it to be the sure basis of an intercourse with China; and it will probably be, by the medium of the former, that we shall be enabled to arrive at Peking." ¹

Turner's conclusion, in fact, was that the best way to bring about an improvement in Anglo-Chinese relations was for the Company to do all it could to encourage trade across the Himalayas. It is perhaps of significance in this connection, as an indication of the aspect of his Tibetan policy upon which Hastings placed the greatest emphasis, that until Turner's return, despite much correspondence on the subject, Hastings had taken no official action to encourage trade between Bengal and Tibet. In April, 1784,

¹ Samuel Turner, *An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama in Tibet; containing a narrative of a journey through Bootan, and part of Tibet*. London, 1800, p. 373. Turner's report to Hastings on his return, dated 2nd March, 1784.

however, a month after Turner had returned from Tibet and reported to Hastings on the result of his mission, such official action was taken. On 22nd April, 1784, Hastings instructed that an advertisement should be circulated inviting native Indian merchants to join in an "adventure" in trade with Tibet through the recently opened Bhutanese route. The party of merchants was to assemble in February of the following year. A detailed list of goods likely to find a market in Tibet was included. The advertisement stated that this first venture, so that it should have every chance of success, was to be exempted from all duties.¹ In 1785 the "adventure" took place according to plan, and a flourishing and profitable trade seems to have resulted. But by then Hastings had left India for good and his plan to exploit this trade for diplomatic ends seems to have faded into the background.²

If Hastings' scheme to open direct relations with the Chinese Emperor through Tibet seems to have gone into eclipse following the departure of the Governor-General from India, there is still a certain amount of evidence to suggest that the possibility of Tibet playing a part in Anglo-Chinese relations was not completely forgotten by the East India Company. It is probable that the happy outcome of the two missions of Bogle and Turner suggested strongly that some good might derive from a British mission to the Chinese Emperor himself. Shortly after Hastings' return to England the difficulties of the Company's position at Canton in the face of the obduracy of the local Chinese authorities, which had been indicated in Bogle's memorandum of July, 1778, brought the Court of Directors and the Board of Control to the same conclusion that Bogle had earlier arrived at. A British mission must go to Peking. In 1787 Lt.-Col. Cathcart was deputed to this task. A hint to the effect that this mission was not completely unconnected with the earlier Tibetan ventures is provided by the suggestion that Cathcart might proceed to China by way of Tibet. When this was vetoed by the Board of Control on the grounds that such a journey would be "too long and hazardous to be entered upon, as well as very doubtful in the result",³ Cathcart then proposed

¹ Home Miscellaneous, vol. 219, f. 469. Hastings to E. Wheeler, 22nd April, 1784.

² Turner, *Embassy*, op. cit., pp. 419-433. Home Miscellaneous, vol. 608, f. 33.

³ H. B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China*, vol. ii. Oxford, 1926, p. 162. Quoted from Cathcart's instructions, 30th November, 1787.

that after reaching Peking by way of Canton he should send his secretary, Agnew, home through Tibet.¹

The establishment of relations between the British and the centre of Chinese power by means of a channel of communication through Tibet had obvious advantages for the East India Company. Any improvements in the condition of trade with China by sea which an Ambassador from the King of England might secure would have to be open to all the King's subjects. As Dundas told the Court of Directors in 1787, it was unthinkable that "in negotiating with the Emperor of China, the King of Great Britain is obliged to accept a settlement with such a restriction in it, as of necessity obliges him to carry on the trade of China by an exclusive Company".² But improvement in a trade of which one terminus lay within the Company's territory was clearly another matter. Improvement in the trade across the Himalayas carried no threat to the Company's monopoly.

The Cathcart Mission failed owing to the death of its leader while at sea on the way to China. The project was revived with the sending of Lord Macartney on a similar mission in 1792. Here again, while the immediate object was to improve conditions of trade at Canton, there are still hints that some thought had been given to the Tibetan route. In Macartney's instructions, as in those of Cathcart, Dundas at the Board of Control was at pains to state categorically that the British Ambassador should not travel to China by way of Tibet.³ And, as in the case of the Cathcart Mission, Macartney gave serious thought to the possibility of exploring the Tibetan route as a means of communication between Peking and the East India Company. He was musing on this idea on the voyage out to China; while off the coast of Sumatra he wrote to Dundas that he had just suggested to Cornwallis, then Governor-General of India, that Cornwallis should "communicate with me not only by way of Canton, but also by Tibet, and I propose to try that way also from Peking in order to let you know, if possible,

¹ E. H. Pritchard, *The Crucial Years of Early Anglo-Chinese Relations, 1750-1800. Research Studies of the State College of Washington, IV, 1936. Pullman, Washington, 1937, p. 239.*

² Morse, *Chronicles*, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 155.

³ Morse, *Chronicles*, vol. ii, op. cit., p. 235. Instructions to Macartney, 8th Sept., 1792.

the sooner of my arrival at that Capital, and what may be the likelihood of my success there".¹

When Macartney wrote to this effect he was not aware of the radical alteration in the situation in the Himalayas that had ruled out completely the Tibetan route. He knew of the policy of Hastings towards Tibet—he was Governor of Madras at the time of Turner's return from Tashilhumpo—but the slowness of communications had kept him in ignorance of the chain of events that not only upset the work of Hastings but also endangered the success of his own mission to China.

In 1788 the Gurkhas invaded the territory of the Panchen Lama in Tibet and occupied several points across the Tibetan border. The Tibetans had no forces with which to oppose them and only persuaded them to withdraw on the promise of the payment of a substantial indemnity.² Before this had been agreed to, the authorities at Tashilhumpo remembered the promises of friendship which had been made to them by the two envoys of Hastings and appealed to the British for help against the Gurkha invaders. Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General, replied in a somewhat ambiguous manner. It was clear that he did not want to be involved in a Himalayan war or take any action which might be construed as hostile by the Gurkhas; yet he wished to derive some benefit from this development in the Himalayan situation. He promised, in his reply to Tashilhumpo, that he would give no assistance to the

¹ CO. 77 79. (A collection of miscellaneous letters relating to the Macartney Mission, preserved in the PRO.) Macartney to Dundas. Off the coast of Sumatra, 25th March, 1793.

² The somewhat confused history of the two Tibet-Nepalese wars is discussed in : Cammann, *op. cit.*, chapters v and vi.

D. B. Diskalkar, *The Tibeto-Nepalese War of 1788-93, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, vol. xix. Patna, 1933. This prints much of the correspondence between the Company, Tibet, and Nepal that took place during the war.

Home Miscellaneous, vol. 608, f. 33. A summary of correspondence.

Sir G. Staunton, Bart., *An authentic account of an Embassy from Great Britain to the Emperor of China, etc.*, 2 vols. London, 1797. Vol. ii, p. 211 et seq.

W. Kirkpatrick, *An account of the Kingdom of Napaul*. London, 1811, pp. 339-379.

Turner, *Embassy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 437-442.

BM Add. MSS. 39, 871. Warren Hastings Papers. Supp. Vol. I, f. 51. S. Turner to W. Hastings, 25th Nov., 1792.

W. W. Rockhill, *The Dalai Lamas of Lhasa, etc. T'oung Pao*, vol. xi, 1910, pp. 60-63. Gives extracts from Chinese sources.

M. C. Imbault-Huart, *Histoire de la Conquête du Népal, etc., Journal Asiatique*. Paris, 1878.

Gurkhas ; but he added that neither could he give any active help to the Tibetans. The Company could not afford the expense of a hill war ; it had received no provocation from the Gurkhas ; it did not want to intervene in a matter which concerned a dependant of the Chinese Emperor without first being asked to do so by that ruler. Perhaps, Cornwallis concluded rather disingenuously, his answer would have been different if the Company had possessed a representative in Peking and had been in a closer relationship with the Chinese Government. It was not too late, Cornwallis implied, for Tashilhumpo to use its influence to bring this about ; it was very much in its interest to do so.¹

It is clear from this correspondence that Cornwallis was less interested in the value of the local trans-Himalayan trade, of which he was well aware,² and which was bound to suffer from any increase in the power and extent of Nepal, than in the opportunity which the Tibetan hour of need promised to give for the establishment of a British representative in Peking through Tibetan mediation.³ In one sense, Cornwallis held a high card in his hand. If the British did not help, then it seemed that the Tibetans would have to turn to China. Any active intervention by the Chinese in such a crisis could only lead to an increase of Chinese control over Tibetan affairs and would surely damage the independent position of Tashilhumpo which had been built up in recent years on the foundations of the skill and patience of the 6th Panchen Lama.

But the reply of Cornwallis to the Tibetan appeal was sent too late to have any effect on Tibetan policy. By the time it reached Tashilhumpo the Tibetans had already come to terms with the Gurkhas. The only result of this response to the Tibetan call for assistance was, in all probability, to suggest to the authorities in Tashilhumpo that the friendship of the Company towards Tibet was not as disinterested as the professions of Bogle and Turner might have suggested.

In 1791 the Gurkhas once more invaded Tibet. Only part of the indemnity promised in 1789 had been paid and Lhasa, which was

¹ Home Miscellaneous, vol. 608, f. 33. Bengal Consultations of 6th Jan., 1789, and 9th March, 1789. Staunton, *Embassy*, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 217. Diskalkar, op. cit., pp. 367-369.

² A. Aspinall, *Cornwallis in Bengal*, Manchester, 1931, p. 178.

³ Perhaps because the balance of payments problem was already on the way to being solved, through the sale of Indian produce at Canton. See : M. Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China*, Cambridge, 1951, pp. 9-13.

the financial centre of Tibet, refused to provide the balance. Lhasa had watched with great suspicion the rise in influence and independence of Tashilhumpo, as is quite clear from Bogle's and Turner's narratives.¹ It must have appreciated that failure to pay the Gurkhas in full would inevitably result in a fresh invasion, which would provide an excuse for requesting Chinese intervention and the consequent squashing, once and for all, of the pretensions of Tashilhumpo. If this was the policy of Lhasa, it proved a complete success. The Gurkhas renewed their attack, and this time they advanced far into Tibet, capturing Tashilhumpo and Shigatse and plundering the monastery of the Panchen Lama. In early 1792, while the Gurkhas were withdrawing slowly to their own territory, loaded with their booty, a powerful Chinese army arrived in Tibet. The invading Gurkhas were decisively defeated and obliged to come to terms with the Chinese. They returned their loot and accepted the status of Chinese tributary with the obligation of sending a tribute mission to Peking once every five years. The Chinese took the opportunity afforded by their intervention to strengthen their control over Tibet, even to the extent of devising a method by which they could influence the process of incarnation whereby the Dalai Lamas were chosen. After 1792, until the end of the nineteenth century when the 13th Dalai Lama began his work of freeing Tibet from foreign control, an independent policy of the kind manifested by the 6th Panchen Lama became impossible. Tibet became, to all intents and purposes, an integral part of the Chinese Empire, as the British in Bengal were soon to realize.

British diplomacy during the second Tibeto-Nepalese war was no more successful than it had been during the first crisis of 1788-89. The British received letters from both the Gurkhas and the Tibetans and Chinese. The former sought British assistance and the latter, in an admonishing tone, requested British neutrality. British policy seems to have been to try to play off one side against the other. The mediation of the Company was offered to both sides while in secret the British seem to have hinted that they might give the Gurkhas armed assistance in return for a commercial treaty opening Nepal to British trade. The commercial treaty was duly signed in the spring of 1792; the Gurkhas, when they found that no help beyond Company mediation would be forthcoming, felt, naturally

¹ For example: Markham, *Narratives*, op. cit., p. 132. Turner, *Embassy*, op. cit., p. 364.

enough, that they had been tricked. In Tibet, on the other hand, there seems to have been a definite impression that the British had sent troops to help the Gurkhas against the Chinese and Tibetans. The Company gained the good will of neither side.

Cornwallis, in fact, was serious in his offer of the Company's mediation. In September, 1792, Colonel Kirkpatrick was sent up to Nepal for this purpose, but by the time he got there the war had long been over and the Gurkhas had come to terms with the Chinese. Kirkpatrick saw clearly that a change had taken place in the Himalayas which was adverse to British interests. In the first place, the trade between Bengal and Tibet was now dead, and the only hope for its revival lay through Nepal: British goods could perhaps be carried to Katmandu for onward transmission to Tibet in the hands of Nepalese traders.¹ That this hope was a forlorn one was soon apparent; after a decade of futile and frustrating attempts to open trade through Nepal by means of commercial treaties little liked and less honoured by the Gurkhas, and through the employment of native agents with access to the Nepalese capital, the British in 1804 decided to give up the attempt and dissolved all their treaties with Nepal.² In the second place, the Chinese intervention seemed to have changed Tibet from a possible help towards the improvement of Anglo-Chinese relations to a positive danger to the position of the British traders at Canton. As Kirkpatrick perceived in 1792, when the extent of the new Chinese control over Tibet was not yet clear, if "the Chinese were to establish themselves permanently in our neighbourhood, the border incidents always incident to such a situation, would be but too liable to disturb, more or less, the commercial relations subsisting between them and the East India Company in another part of Asia".³ Kirkpatrick argued that this was a matter of sufficient gravity to be included in the agenda of subjects which

¹ Kirkpatrick, *Nepaul*, op. cit., pp. 371-9.

² D. Wright, *History of Nepal*, Cambridge, 1877, p. 52.

C. U. Aitchison, *Treaties, Engagements and Sanads*, 24 vols. Calcutta, 1931. Vol. xiv, p. 45.

Home Miscellaneous. Vol. 608, f. 38. Consultations of 10th Nov., 1793, and 10th March, 1796.

The best known of the native agents was Abdul Kadir Khan. See: C. H. Philips (Ed.), *Correspondence of David Scott, etc.* Royal Hist. Soc. Camden, 3rd Series. Vol. lxxv. London, 1951, p. 57.

Despatches to Bengal, vol. 31. Bengal Political Despatch, 4th Oct., 1797.

³ Kirkpatrick, *Nepaul*, op. cit., p. 372.

Lord Macartney, in his impending embassy to Peking, should discuss with the Chinese Emperor.¹

Macartney's Embassy coincided with these events in Tibet, but no information about them from a British source reached the Ambassador until he arrived at Canton in December, 1793, on his way home, his mission completed. Thus Macartney was most surprised to hear from the Chinese, when he was on his way to meet the Emperor at Jehol, that they were very angry at the way in which the British had fought against them in the recent war in Nepal. As he noted in his diary, on 16th August, 1793, "I was very much startled with this intelligence, but instantly told them that the thing was impossible and that I could take it upon me to contradict it in the most decisive manner." He then thought that the story that the British had helped the Nepalese might have been "a mere feint or artifice to sift me, and to try to discover our force, or our vicinity to their frontiers", and he was reinforced in this conclusion a few days later, when the Chinese asked him whether "the English at Bengal would assist the Emperor against the rebels in those parts". Since Macartney had denied the first charge on the grounds, quite untrue, that the distance between British territory and the scene of the recent war in the Himalayas made British intervention on either side quite impossible, he could only consider this second question as a trick to test his sincerity, and he was forced to say that the British could give no assistance to the Chinese.² Macartney, however was soon obliged to admit that the Chinese at Peking genuinely believed that the British had opposed China in the recent war, perhaps because of the deliberate misrepresentations of Fu K'ang-an, the Chinese commander in Tibet, who, Macartney suggested, might have been insulted by some Englishman during his recent tenure of office as Viceroy at Canton, and was now getting his revenge. He had met the Chinese commander, just back from the wars, and found him to be most unfriendly despite every exertion of the Ambassador's charm.³

¹ Kirkpatrick, *Nepaul*, op. cit., p. 377.

² J. Barrow, *Some Account of the Public Life and a Selection of the Unpublished Writings of the Earl of Macartney*, 2 vols. London, 1807. Vol. ii, pp. 203-204.

³ Barrow, *Macartney*, op. cit., pp. 228, 267.

E. H. Pritchard. The Instructions of the East India Company to Lord Macartney on his Embassy to China and his reports to the Company, 1792-94. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London, 1938, p. 499.

Macartney to Sir John Shore, 3rd Feb., 1794.

Macartney was convinced that this misunderstanding on the part of the Chinese as to the nature of the British role in the recent Himalayan crisis was a major factor behind the failure of his mission. Staunton, who accompanied Macartney and later wrote the standard account of the Embassy, thought it was a tragedy that the Cathcart Mission had not reached its destination, for then there would have been a British representative in Peking at the time of the opening of the Gurkha attack on Tibet. The Emperor, he argued, would in such a case have surely asked for British assistance in defending his Tibetan dependants, rather than have relied on his own forces who had not been too successful on the field of battle in recent years. From the giving of such help the British would have reaped valuable diplomatic benefits.¹ The misunderstanding, moreover, in conjunction with the great increase in Chinese power so close to the borders of British India might have serious consequences for the future unless it was explained away. As Staunton put it: "should an interference take place in future, on the part of His Imperial Majesty (of China), in the dissensions which frequently arise between the princes possessing the countries lying along the eastern limits of Hindostan, . . . there may be occasion for much mutual discussion between the British and Chinese Governments; and no slight precaution may be necessary on their parts to avoid being involved in the quarrels of their respective dependents or allies." This danger was present on the Assam frontier as well as in the Himalayas.²

Macartney felt that the need to clear up this misunderstanding justified another mission to Peking, not only because no improvement of Anglo-Chinese relations could result until the Chinese had been disabused of their suspicions of the nature of British policy in the Himalayas, but also because the existence of such suspicions created a dangerous situation on the very borders of the Company's possessions in India. Once Chinese doubts had been removed, moreover, the British might begin to derive some positive benefit from the recent chain of events in the Himalayas. The Chinese had learnt, Macartney was clearly implying in his letter to Sir John Shore of 3rd February, 1794, that the British possessed great strength in an area which lay virtually on the Chinese frontier.

¹ Staunton, *Macartney*, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 229-230.

² Staunton, *Macartney*, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 227-8.

“ Our political situation in Bengal,” he wrote, “ may even contribute, with other motives, to procure for us the full extension, we desire, of our commerce throughout the Empire of China.”¹

While a second Embassy was not immediately sent, as Macartney advised, the misunderstanding about the Tibeto-Nepalese war was considered of sufficient importance in London to lead, in 1795, to a correspondence with Peking, in which the British case was stated. In the following year, in a letter to King George III, the Emperor, Ch'ien Lung, indicated in a most patronizing manner that perhaps the British had not helped the Gurkhas after all. British mediation had been offered, but it came too late to have any effect on the course of the war, and no debt of gratitude was owed to the British on this account.²

¹ Pritchard, *Crucial Years*, op. cit., p. 360. Pritchard, Macartney, *JRAS*, 1938, op. cit., p. 499.

² E. H. Parker, *China Past and Present*, London, 1903, pp. 149-150. See also E. H. Parker, Letter from the Emperor of China to King George the Third. *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xv, July-Dec., 1896. E. H. Parker, Nepal and China, *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, vol. vii, 1899, p. 77. E. H. Parker, *China's Intercourse with Europe*, pp. 44-45. Morso, *Chronicles*, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 273-276. J. B. Eames, *The English in China*, London, 1909, pp. 129-130.