

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

ANGLO-BURMESE RELATIONS, 1795-1826

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

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April 1977



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ABSTRACT

In this work, the writer has provided a detailed analysis of Anglo-Burmese relations between 1795 and 1826. In Chapter I, Part I, the Burmese incursions of 1787 and 1794 are examined and are shown not to have been hostile. The factors which led the British to despatch an embassy to Burma in 1795 are examined in detail, and the Burmese Court's amenability to contact with foreign powers is high-lighted. In Chapter I, Part II, the state of Anglo-Burmese trade at this time is examined. In Chapter I, Part III, the Symes mission is discussed. His instructions are examined in detail. His threat at Rangoon to leave Burma is shown to have been an error. A number of issues which cropped^{up} at the capital are examined, including the question of the Burmese attitude to the Governor-General's status. The Burmese response to Symes' proposals was friendly, although they refused to abandon their neutrality.

In Chapter II, the Cox mission is discussed. His instructions are examined in detail, as also his violations of these instructions. His diary for the period between November 1797 and April 1798 is also examined. The unsuccessful attempts by the Burmese to secure arms are also discussed.

In Chapter III, Part I, the events at the Chittagong-Arakan frontier between 1799 and 1800 which, together with the Cox mission and the failure to obtain arms, generated considerable ill-feeling for the British in King Bodawpaya's mind, are examined. Lord Wellesley's policy towards Burma is examined also. The mission sent to Burma in 1802, it is shown, did not succeed in its aim of a

subsidiary alliance, but it succeeded in re-establishing cordial relations. The King also promised not to revive the embarrassing demand for the surrender of refugees in Chittagong (made in 1799 and 1802).

In Chapter III, Part II, the reasons for the despatch of Lt. Canning to Rangoon are examined. The reasons for the arrival of a French ship at Rangoon are examined, as also the reasons for Canning's departure in November 1803, and the Yewun's conduct on that occasion (which is shown to have been defensible).

In Chapter IV, the failure (on two occasions) of British sea captains to respect Burmese territorial integrity, and the Canning mission of 1809 to 1810, are discussed. Certain features of this mission - Canning's intrigue with the Ein-gyi Paya, the questions of the Governor-General's status, the Burmese response to the blockade of Mauritius and Bourbon and the King's apparent desire to gain possession of parts of Bengal - are high-lighted.

In Chapter V, the Canning mission of 1811 to 1812, the result of the invasion and temporary conquest of Arakan by Arakanese from Chittagong, is discussed. The Burmese response was initially conciliatory, but subsequently, the King apparently attempted (unsuccessfully) to have Canning sent up to the capital, by force if necessary. A new interpretation of the origins of Chin Pyan's rebellion is suggested in this chapter.

Chapter VI examines the Burmese demand for extradition of refugees (revived, in consequence of Chin Pyan's insurrection, for the first time since 1802), the letters of 1817 and 1818, demanding (respectively) the expulsion of refugees and the surrender of parts of Bengal, Burmese expansion into Northeast India and the emergence of

new refugee problems, British policy towards Assam, the resulting anti-British feeling at the Burmese capital and the Burmese missions to Vietnam and the Sultan of Kedah, which show that despite worsening relations with the British, the Court's preoccupation, at the time of the outbreak of the Shahpuri crisis was the conquest of Siam.

In Chapter VII, VIII and IX, the outbreak of the war from 1824 to 1826, and the political aspect of the war are discussed. The Burmese claim to Shahpuri island, it is shown, was made in good faith, like the British. The Court was prepared to uphold its claim to Shahpuri even at the cost of war, but so were the British. Subsequently, the Court received the wrong impression that the British were willing to give up Shahpuri. It then decided to demand a surrender of refugees and the ruler of Cachar, who would be made tributary ruler of Cachar. There is no satisfactory evidence to show that the Court still intended to fight the British.

Initially, British policy aimed mainly at chastising the Burmese, so as to ensure their future good behaviour, and securing a strategically viable frontier. Subsequently, after the war had dragged on for over a year, new demands were made on the Burmese, for a variety of reasons, and in the last stages of the war, it was decided, solely for strategic reasons, to separate Pegu from Ava. This decision was rendered inapplicable by the conclusion of peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer would like in the first place, to express his gratitude to his supervisor, Dr. D.K. Bassett, of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies of the University of Hull, who provided guidance over a period of seven years. The writer would also like to thank Dr. Clive Christie, of the same Centre, who was his temporary supervisor for a brief period in 1973. The writer is indebted also to his Burmese instructor, Mrs. A.J. Allott, of the School of Oriental and African Studies, of the University of London with whose help a portion of the Burmese chronicle has been translated.

Grateful thanks are due also to the staff of the India Office.

This study was made possible by the award of a scholarship by the Inter-University Council for which the writer is deeply grateful.

The writer wishes to express his gratitude also to Ms Ong Beng Thyne, of the Department of History, University of Malaya, who was responsible for typing the final version, and several other drafts.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BPC	.. Bengal Political Consultations
BSC	.. Bengal Secret Consultations
BSPC	.. Bengal Secret & Political Consultations
BSSC	.. Bengal Secret & Separate Consultations
HMS	.. Home Miscellaneous Series
JBRs	.. Journal of the Burma Research Society
JSEAS	.. Journal of Southeast Asian Studies

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GLOSSARY

Akaukwun .. Customs officer

Akunwun .. Provincial revenue collector

Atwinwun .. Junior Minister

Ein-gyi Paya .. Heir Apparent

Myowun .. Governor of a province

Tical .. uncoined silver used in Burma

Viss .. A weight used in Burma; about 3 lbs.
and 5 1/3 ounces

Wungyi .. Senior Minister

Yewun .. Deputy to Myowun

INTRODUCTION

(1) The Present State of Historical Knowledge

This work attempts to examine the relations between the East India Company's government at Calcutta and Burma in the period from 1795 to 1826. There have been previous studies of this period - either of parts of it, or of the whole of it - while the journals of three of the British envoys of the period have been published. These facts, however, do not rule out research into this period. The published journals do not tell the whole story of the missions concerned; they omit relevant material. The extent of material omitted varies from mission to mission. Symes' published journal includes no relevant original background material. Some material pertaining to the activities of the mission while in Burma is also omitted; these documents give one a fuller picture of the mission's activities, though admittedly, they do not contribute anything essential to an understanding of it. The Governor-General's minute on the mission of 4 January 1796, is, of course, also omitted.

As for the Cox mission, the published journal again does not include background material, including his instructions. It also omits his letters to the Burmese, which, when compared with his instructions show clearly and in detail that his proceedings in Burma were unjustifiable. Further, the journal ends in November 1797, although Cox remained in Burma till the following April. Also omitted from the journal are his economic and other reports on Burma.

The Symes mission of 1802 has been more or less fully documented by D.G.E. Hall in his Michael Symes: Journal of His Second Embassy to the Court of Ava (London, 1955). However, the material relating to the events at the Arakan frontier between 1799 and 1800, and late in 1801, has a bearing on the Symes mission and has not been published.

The documents concerned with Anglo-Burmese relations from 1803-1823 have, of course, not been published (with very occasional exceptions, such as the Burmese letters of 1817 and 1818, demanding the repatriation of the Arakan refugees, and the return of Chittagong and Dacca respectively).

H.H. Wilson, Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War (Calcutta, 1827) is exceptionally thorough on military events, but contains very little on the political issues, such as the formulation of the peace terms, the peace negotiations culminating in the Yandabo treaty, and British policy towards Pegu.

The mere fact that the material relating to a subject has been published does not rule out historical study; for the task of interpretation remains. There have, in fact, been historical studies of this period. Some of these were by contemporaries, such as G.T. Bayfield, Historical Review of the Political Relations between the British Government in India and the Court of Ava, Calcutta 1825; H.H. Wilson, Introductory Sketch of the Burmese War, Calcutta, 1827; W. Whyte, A Political History of the Extraordinary Events which led to the Burmese War, London, 1827.

The works of Bayfield, Wilson and Whyte are sketchy and leave ample scope for another effort. The writings of Bayfield and Wilson suffer also from ethnocentric bias of an old-fashioned type. Whyte's book, however, attempts to present the Burmese point of view, and for this reason has a surprisingly modern flavour. Its defect, however, is its sketchiness.

A further category consists of general histories of Burma by modern historians like Phayre and G.E. Harvey. These general histories do not, of course, preclude a special study of this period. Phayre's work, however, offers some valuable insights for the historian of Anglo-Burmese relations while Harvey's by contrast contains much distorted and fanciful writing.

We come now to studies concerned solely with this period. Of these A.C. Bannerjee's The Eastern Frontier of British India (Calcutta, 1964) is the only one to deal with the period as a whole. Bannerjee also had access to nearly all the documents consulted by the present writer. Bannerjee devoted much space, however, to subjects which fall outside the scope of this work, such as military events from 1824 to 1826, and British relations with Assam and other frontier states before the beginnings of Anglo-Burmese rivalry. The book also contains much introductory material on Burmese history, society and so forth. The result is that the issues discussed in this work are nearly always dealt with very sketchily. These include the six missions of the period 1795 to 1812, and the correspondence of the period from 1812 to 1818. On some issues, the Burmese incursions of 1794, the outbreak of the war of 1824 to 1826,^{and} the political aspect of the war, his discussion is detailed but marred by numerous errors and omissions, many of which are major. This, in fact, is a characteristic of nearly all historical writing on this period. The

writer has also succumbed almost completely to the bias of the documents.

B.R. Pearn's writings on this period of which the most important are A History of Rangoon (Rangoon, 1939), "Felix Carey and the English Baptist Mission" (JBRS, XXXVIII, 1938) and "Kingbering" (JBRS, XXIII, 1933), are of high quality and may rule out a further study of the topics covered. It will be noticed, however, that Pearn's writings dovetail with the present work and do not overlap with it.

S.K. Bhuyan's Anglo-Assamese Relations (Gauhati, 1947), deals in a very detailed way with British policy towards Assam from 1817 to 1823 and the writer has for the most part been content to summarize Bhuyan's findings.

D.G.E. Hall's introduction to his Michael Symes: Journal of His Second Embassy to the Court of Ava offers valuable insights, but like Bannerjee's work, contains a large number of errors, and is very sketchy.

(2) Utilization of Sources

The official records of the East India Company's Government at Calcutta have been the main sources consulted.

The writer has taken, as the terminal points of this study, Governor-General's Shore's minute of 10 November ¹⁷⁹⁴ and the Yandabo Treaty of February 1826. However, some material relating to the Burmese incursion of January to March, 1794, and to the previous one of 1787 has been brought in for background purposes. The writer cannot however claim familiarity with other material on Anglo-Burmese relations in the period between 1762, the year of the *Alves*

mission and 10 November 1794. There certainly is some material on this subject in the series of India Office documents known as the Bengal Public Proceedings, which has been utilized by B.R. Pearn on his History of Rangoon (Rangoon, 1939). It may contain more unutilized material. The Home Miscellaneous Series also contains correspondence between the government of Bengal and the rulers of Arakan in the days before the Burmese conquest. The Bengal Political Consultations and the Bengal Secret Consultations may also contain relevant material.

Nearly all the documents consulted were in the collections known as The Bengal Secret Consultations, the Bengal Political Consultations, the Bengal Secret and Separate Consultations and the Bengal Secret and Political Consultations. Each of these collections is indexed. The material on Burma can be located by consulting the index for a particular year.

extent of

The material on Anglo-Burmese relations in the India Office Records for the period between November 1794 and February 1826, is enormous, and the researcher must be grateful that a part of it (such as the journals of Symes and Cox, and many of the documents connected with the war of 1824 to 1826) has been published.

It was not found possible to examine all the material concerned. Certain material, which seemed from an examination of the indexes to the documents to be unimportant, was omitted. The material relating to Chin Pyan's insurrection and to Anglo-Burmese rivalry over Assam, was not examined fully since they have already been discussed by B.R. Pearn and S.K. Bhuyan in two very thorough studies. The writer had checked Symes' published journal of 1800 against the original. This

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was not necessary in the case of D.G.E. Hall's edition of Symes' journal of 1802, since this is a reproduction of the original journal. Hiram Cox's original journal is presumably lost. The version published by his son in 1821, omits only "minute and ordinary matters, which necessarily enter into all journals kept for the private gratification of the writer."¹ The India Office version consists of extracts of a political nature from the journal made by Cox for his superiors. The writer lacked the time to compare the published version with the one in the India Office records, and has accepted Cox's son's claim that only "minute and ordinary matters" have been omitted.²

The writer has not consulted any unpublished private papers with the exception of the Munro-Amherst correspondence in the India Office Library. Burma was only of peripheral interest to the Company's government until 1823, and it is likely that only occasional references will be found. At any rate this is true of the published papers consulted by the writer. Wellesley's papers contain occasional references to Burma. Shore's letters to Dundas, President of the Board of Control, contain occasional references also. These references are interesting, but add nothing of importance to what is already known. Hastings' private journal contains only one reference, but it provides important information not obtainable elsewhere.³

1. Cox H., Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire, Gregg International Publishers, Farnborough, England, 1971, viii.

2. Ibid.

3. Owen, S.J., Selections from Wellesley's Despatches, Oxford, Furber, H., The Private Records of an Indian Governor-Generalship, Cambridge, 1933; The Marchioness of Bath, The Private Journal of the Marquis of Hastings, London, 1858.

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The voluminous papers of Amherst who was Governor-General from 1823-1828 are certain to contain much material on military and political matters. However, the official records on the first Anglo-Burmese war are enormously detailed and self-explanatory and a further expenditure of time and effort on the Amherst papers seemed ill-advised.

The records of the English Baptist Mission and the London Missionary Society include material relevant for Burma, namely the papers of missionaries stationed at Rangoon. These have already been utilized by B.R. Pearn in his "Felix Carey and the English Baptist Mission in Burma (JBRS, XXVII, 1928) and his "A Burma Diary of 1810 (JBRS, XXVII, Pt.iii, 1927). However, they may contain material relevant for Anglo-Burmese relations, and for Burmese internal history, that has not appeared in Pearn's articles. In particular, they may throw more light on the Canning missions of 1809-1810 and 1811-1812.

After his return to Malaysia, and shortly before the submission of this thesis, the writer discovered the existence of a series of India Office documents known as the Bengal Reports of Private External Trade. These ought to contain information on Anglo-Burmese trade in the period under review, when it was in the hands of private traders. Yet, they have never been consulted by any historian of Burma. The discovery came too late to be acted upon and in any case, the writer was not primarily concerned with commerce.

The writer spent a year at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, studying Burmese, but found the language very difficult to master. Nevertheless, some material from the Burmese chronicle, the Konbaungzet Mahayazawin has been translated with help

from Mrs. A.J. Allott, of the School of Oriental and African Studies. These portions dealt with the Court's response to the Shahpuri crisis, the negotiations which culminated in the Yandabo treaty, the British evacuation of Pegu and the disturbances in Pegu after the British evacuation (only a part of the relevant material on this last subject was consulted), the Crawford mission, as well as the entire index for the parts dealing with Bodawpaya's reign. The portion dealing with the Shahpuri crisis was valuable, but those on the Crawford mission of 1826 on the Yandabo negotiations and the post-Yandabo developments yielded very little. The chronicle refers to the missions of 1795, 1796-1798 and 1802, but, according to D.G.E. Hall, in the briefest possible manner. It contains nothing on the missions of 1803, 1809-1810, and 1811-1812 nor on the Arakan refugee problem nor the Burmese letters of 1817 and 1818. It does contain material on Burmese relations with Assam and on the Burmese war, and this may yield important information on these subjects to anyone with a fluent reading knowledge of Burmese. In particular, they may provide more information concerning the Burmese incursions into Chittagong and Cachar in May and June 1824 and the abortive negotiations at Rangoon in June 1824.

CHAPTER I

THE MISSION OF 1795

Part I

The Political Setting

The land called Arakan - which was destined to figure prominently in Anglo-Burmese relations between 1795 and 1826 - had been part of Burma at the time of the Pagan dynasty. When that dynasty suffered decline, it broke away and continued as an independent kingdom. With the establishment however, of the expansionist Konbaung dynasty in Burma, it was probably only a matter of time before Arakan was brought once again into the fold. Indeed, conditions in Arakan were such that some Arakanese at any rate desired Burmese intervention. The Kings of Arakan had proved unable to maintain law and order, with the result that the country was torn by strife between warring chiefs. An appeal for Burmese intervention was first made during the reign of King Singu of Burma but he rejected it. A second appeal was made to Bodawpaya. It was only in 1784, after some delay, that Bodawpaya embarked on the conquest of Arakan.

The Burmese conquest, once decided upon, proved swift and easy. The King of Arakan was taken to Burma in captivity, the land was divided into the four provinces of Danyawati (constituting the Arakan mainland), Megawati, Yamawati and Dwarawati (the three provinces of Cheduba, Ramri and Sandoway respectively); and a Myowun or governor

was appointed over each of these provinces.¹ As a result of this development Burma acquired a common frontier with the British East India Company, which had gained control of Bengal after the battle of Plassey in 1757. The events which followed need to be examined in detail, because they form the background to the despatch in 1795 of the first British mission to Burma after 1762.

It was not long before the Arakanese chiefs began to fall out with the Burmese. Soon after the Burmese conquest of 1784, cases occurred of Arakanese leaders crossing into the Chittagong district of Bengal with their followers and being allowed to settle there by the Company's officials, partly for humanitarian reasons and partly for the sake of land revenue. These immigrants tended to commit crimes in the vicinity of the Naf river, in both Burmese and British territory - a factor which earned them the dislike of the local British Magistrate, Shearman Bird.

Against this background, certain unusual developments occurred in the middle of the year 1787. Firstly, King Bodawpaya made an offer of a commercial treaty and of friendship to the Governor-General of British India - the only offer of this kind the Burmese were to make in the entire period up to 1826. Some Burmese envoys arrived in the Chittagong district of Bengal with a letter for the Governor-General, and a present of four elephants' teeth.

1. For accounts of the Burmese conquest of Arakan, see Phayre, A History of Burma, London, 1882, pp.212-213; Symes M., An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, London 1800, pp.103-111 and Harvey, G.E., A History of Burma, pp.148-149 and p.267.

The letter is an interesting document, and requires careful examination. After a very long prologue, in which numerous attributes of the King are listed, the following passage occurred:

As the country of Arracan lies contiguous to Chittagong, if a treaty of commerce were established between me and the English perfect amity and alliance would ensue from such an engagement. I therefore have submitted it to you [am submitting to you?] that the merchants of your country should resort hither for the purchase of pearls, ivory and wax, and that in return my people should be permitted to resort to Chittagong for the purpose of trafficking in such commodities as the country may afford, but as the Mugs [Arakanese] residing at Chittagong have deviated from the principles of religion and morality, they ought to be corrected for their errors and irregularities agreeably to the written laws....¹

It will be seen that the letter while proposing a commercial treaty and friendship, also demands a correction of the Arakanese "agreeably to the written laws". Only a month afterwards, a Burmese pursuit force was to enter the Chittagong district with a demand for the surrender of certain Arakanese leaders and their followers. It is possible, that the expression meant the surrender of the immigrant leaders to their old masters for punishment, something that was consonent with Burmese laws. If so, the demand was certainly vaguely worded and the arrival of the pursuit force shortly afterwards was to surprise the British.

Another interesting feature of this letter is its relative freedom with regard to protocol. It will be noticed that the King is writing directly to the Governor-General of Bengal. The pronoun 'I' is used whenever the King's attributes are mentioned and the letter contains no conflicting indication that it is technically from

1. European Manuscripts, India Office Library, E63 "Deputation to Ava", pp.11-12.

the Hlutdaw or the Arakan authorities. Burmese protocol was to change later in this respect. By 1802, possibly even earlier, letters to the Governor-General came always from the Hlutdaw. (By 1823, the King did not correspond even with other kings, to judge from the one case of this kind that appears in the British records, the proposal made by the Hlutdaw in that year to the council of Ministers in Vietnam for an offensive alliance against Siam). Also, as will be seen later, the Burmese messengers were willing to receive a reply to the King's letter from the Magistrate of Chittagong.

The Burmese envoy which had brought the letter in 1787 wished to return quickly before the monsoon began. He also wanted a reply to the King's letter. Since there was not enough time to await a reply from the Governor-General-in-Council, the Magistrate,

Shearman Bird, decided to write one himself. He assured the King in this letter that the English were "very desirous to preserve a firm friendship and good alliance with their neighbours".¹ In his subsequent report to the Governor-General-in-Council, the Magistrate explained why he gave this assurance.

The Burmas (who are by all account a very powerful body of men) are in possession of the Countries so adjacent to the English territories that ... they might prove very troublesome in case of a future rupture with European Powers by joining and assisting them with troops. If the Burmans are sincere in this desire of alliance, it may prove very beneficial to both countries by establishing a general and free trade and extirpating or keeping in subjection the inhuman race of Mugs who have so infested the country for some years past with impunity.²

The objects of forestalling a possible Franco-Burmese alliance and of promoting commerce with Burma were to figure subsequently in British diplomacy with Burma; but that of allying with the Burmese and thus exercising control ^{over} the Arakanese residents in Chittagong, did not recur. The current Magistrate in Chittagong was angry with the Arakanese for having committed depredations in the vicinity of the Naf, including the murder of a British merchant attempting to open a private trading venture to Arakan. Subsequently, the Arakanese seem to have settled down to peaceful pursuits in British territory so that they were an irritant to the Burmese alone.

Governor-General Cornwallis and his Council approved of the reply sent by the Magistrate. They resolved to make an approach

1. Ibid., p.13.

2. Ibid., p.2.

to Ava "when an opportunity offers";¹ the Burmese could send an agent to Calcutta in the meantime if they wished. Shortly afterwards in June 1787, there occurred the unexpected incursion referred to earlier. A Burmese force crossed the Naf river and stockaded itself in uncultivated land regarded by the British as their territory. Its commander, the Myowun of Arakan, wrote to the Magistrate demanding the expulsion of a number of emigrant chiefs and their followers. He accused them of having committed violence in Arakan. "It is not proper [he wrote] that you should give an asylum to these Mugs [Arakanese] who have absconded from Arracan and you will be right to drive them from your country...."² He sought an indication of British intentions in this matter. If they were not surrendered, he would search for them himself wherever they might be.

In 1794, there was to be a similar incursion across the Naf and the Burmese were to claim then that they were not aware they were in territory claimed by the British. They seem to have assumed that British territory commenced further west in the cultivated areas. The British, however, claimed the Naf as the boundary. The reason for this is not clear, but it is probable that they simply assumed it was a boundary, because it was a prominent natural barrier. The region of the Naf was desolate land, over which such differences of opinion could exist, without coming to light. It is probable that the Burmese in 1787 were also not aware that the British claimed the territory they were on. Even if they were aware of this, however, they would probably have seen nothing wrong in an armed border.

1. Ibid., p.15.

2. Ibid., p.37.

crossing (although for the British this was an act of war). This was to become clear during the Hill mission of 1799, which will be discussed later. Even in 1787, the Burmese threatened to look for the Arakanese anywhere, which would include territory which was indubitably British.

It never seems to have occurred to the Burmese commander in 1787 that the British would regard the border crossing as a hostile act. This is suggested by the fact that he wrote a second letter to the Magistrate, announcing a gift to the British of ivory and other articles and asking in return for over 1,000 muskets which he desired to offer to his King.¹ This request appears to have been overlooked in the excitement caused by the border crossing.

The Magistrate of Chittagong regarded the crossing of 1787 from the first as a hostile act (British policy in this regard was consistent throughout the period under review). He informed the Governor-General-in-Council that he would have sent a force to oppose the Burmese if the rains had not made this impossible. He had a suspicion which, as it turned out, was unfounded, that the extradition of the fugitives was not the real object of the Burmese and that they contemplated some wider aggression. He wrote a reply to the Burmese explaining the British attitude towards an armed border crossing "... as they [the British] cannot but regard the entrance of an armed force into their territories with suspicion and as it is what they never admit of they must observe that you will remove the cause of it, by returning into your own country".² "The

1. Ibid., p.32. The Burmese commander was to send more gifts after the monsoon (when large quantities of goods could be transported more easily) so that the British would receive an equivalent.

2. Ibid., p.44.

Magistrate claimed, in his report to Calcutta, to have impressed on the messenger who brought the Burmese letter that the presence of the Burmese force was causing the local peasantry in the cultivated regions to abandon their fields^{thus causing loss of revenue}. Also, in his reply to the Burmese commander, the Magistrate had promised that he would have the Arakanese against whom complaints had been made expelled or detained after the rains. The Magistrate was to report later that some of these persons seemed to have the intention still of contesting Burmese supremacy in Arakan, for they had refused offers of land for cultivation in the interior of the Chittagong district, preferring instead to live in the vicinity of the Naf, whence they could harrass the Burmese occupiers of their country. Another reason for residing in this region was no doubt for the purpose of plundering the traffic of both countries plying on the Naf, an activity that came easily to them as Arakanese, and in which they are known, on both British and Burmese evidence, to have been involved.

The Magistrate was able to announce the withdrawal of the Burmese force in a postscript to the same letter in which he had reported their arrival. He heard a report that the withdrawal was on account of his remonstrances^{concerning loss of revenue}, but the Burmese commander would probably have been influenced also by the Magistrate's promise to have the Arakanese expelled or detained in the dry season and by the wish to avoid a clash.

The Magistrate of Chittagong wrote a second letter to the King of Burma in June 1787, after he had been informed of the decision of the Governor-General-in-Council to enter into a treaty of commerce with Burma. He advised the King of Burma that someone would be sent to the Burmese Court in a few months by the British for this purpose,

and that the Burmese could send an envoy to Calcutta in the meantime if they wished.¹ The letter was sent to the Arakan Myowun for delivery to the King at the time of the border incursion and also contained a severe criticism of the crossing. No envoy was sent to Calcutta by the Burmese, perhaps because this was treated as optional in the Magistrate's letter. But the Governor-General-in-Council decided that on account of the Burmese failure to send an envoy, and of the small value of the Arakanese trade, the British should not send an envoy either. In a letter to the Court of Directors, they wrote:

The Chief of the Burmas has not sent an Agent to Calcutta and the object of commercial intercourse with the country was not sufficiently material to require us to make particular advances.²

The fact, however, was that the Burmese had not been required by the Magistrate to send anyone.

As regards extradition, it would seem that the Calcutta Government's policy was to investigate Arakanese accused by the Burmese; if they were found to be guilty of crimes, they would forfeit British protection. In other words, the Burmese charges would have to be proved.³ There could be no expulsion of refugees without trial, though the Magistrate had been willing to do this.

The Burmese did not take up the matter of extradition after the rains, to judge from the absence of such references in the records of 1787 and 1788. The reasons for this are not known.

1. Ibid., p.38.

2. Ibid., p.48.

3. Index to Bengal Secret Consultations of 1787, Decision of Board regarding Chuckreah, an Arakanese refugee.

Although the Burmese Court did not persist in its efforts to obtain a commercial treaty, and thus promote friendship, the fact that they made the attempt once shows that they were amenable to such a development. This fact should be remembered when considering the friendly reception given to Sorrel and Symes in 1794 and 1795. Another episode demonstrating a willingness to have relations with foreign powers was an overture made by the Burmese to the authorities at the French settlement of Pondicherry in India in 1793:

... in 1793, King Bodawpaya sent a small ship with a cargo of three elephants to Pondicherry with the intention of forming commercial ties. From the conversations which he had with the King's agent, Lescallier the governor of Pondicherry was convinced that the King desired to see the French established in his country. Being persuaded himself that it was in France's interest to have factories comptoirs in Pegu and in Cochin-China, he had asked General Malaritic, Governor of the Isle of France, to place two frigates at his disposal, one of which would take civil commissioners to Bengal, and the other be sent to Pegu and Cochin-China. The French revolutionary war prevented him from carrying out this project.¹

The assertion that the King wanted to see the French established in Burma must be treated with some caution, since it was not an actual proposal but something that Lescallier deduced from the envoy's remarks. However, there is nothing inherently improbable in the idea. Before 1762, the year of the Alves mission, the Burmese kings had wanted the British to maintain a factory in Burma.² Between 1762 .

1. France - Asie, xxi (3), p. 258

2. Hall, D.G.E., Early English Intercourse with Burma, London, 1968, Chs. III, IV, IX, X & XI. There was an English factory in Burma from 1647 to 1657, and (with intermissions) from 1697 to 1744.

and 1793, attempts were made to persuade the British to open a factory in Burma, but without success.¹ That the King wished to promote commerce with French India is certain. Nothing could come out of this project in 1793, for news of the war in Europe reached India in that year and the British occupied all the French settlements there.

To return to the Chittagong-Arakan frontier: in Arakan, there was increasing discontent at the demands made by Bodawpaya for men and money with which to carry on the war against Siam. In 1791, a major rebellion occurred. The Arakanese proclaimed one Weymoo, a descendant of their former king, as King of Arakan and attacked the Burmese troops in the province. The latter took refuge in the fort of Arakan town, which was not captured by the Arakanese. An Arakanese chief, who had been allowed by the British to settle in Chittagong some years previously, is reported to have helped the rebels at this time. Reinforcements sent from Burma were able to relieve the besieged garrison in Arakan town and conquer the country. Weymoo and his adherents then fled to Chittagong and were allowed to settle there. On this occasion, the Burmese attempted no armed border crossing, but complained of the behaviour of the Arakanese in Chittagong.²

In 1794, a development similar to that of 1787 occurred. A Burmese force several thousand strong, commanded by the Myowun of

1. Pearn, B.R., A History of Rangoon, Rangoon, p.74. A French factory was set up at Dalla, opposite Rangoon, at some time after 1768 but was closed during the war of American Independence.

2. Bengal Political Consultations (BPC), 25 April 1794, Erskine to General Abercrombie, No.14.

Ramri, crossed the Naf river and entered territory claimed by the British. The Myowun demanded that a number of specified Arakanese, who had fled a short while ago into the Chittagong district, be surrendered to him. They were alleged to have committed crimes in Arakan and fled to Chittagong. The British attitude was that the Burmese would have to evacuate British territory before this demand could be considered, because as in 1787 an armed border crossing was unacceptable to them. A military force was built up at a place called Ramu, under Lt. Colonel Erskine, with orders to drive out the Burmese if they would not withdraw immediately. The Myowun of Ramri, the commander of the Burmese force, managed to establish contact with Erskine. To a deputy sent by Erskine, the Myowun explained how the incursion had come about. The King, on hearing of the crimes of the fugitives, had suspected the Myowun of complicity. He had told him that nothing would convince him of his innocence except the persons or heads of the fugitives. It appeared that the King had ordered the Myowun not to leave his present location until the fugitives were surrendered. If he returned to Arakan without the fugitives, he would be put to death with his relatives. Yet, in view of the British attitude (an immediate withdrawal) it would be fatal to him and his followers to remain where they were. He insisted that he had no orders to fight the British and would not be able to offer resistance if he was attacked. He also assured Erskine's deputy that the surrender of the other Arakanese in Chittagong was not required. Finally, the Myowun claimed that he had not been aware that he was in British territory. He had believed that he was on neutral ground. The British, however, regarded the Naf as the boundary.

In order to avert a crisis, the Myowun offered to send half of his troops and all his guns back across the Naf, and to follow with the remainder if the King's permission was received. He wanted a respite of twenty days for an answer from the capital before retreating completely.

Erskine sympathised with the plight of the Burmese commander, but felt that he must insist on an immediate withdrawal. The border crossing was an act of war for the British; besides, the Burmese force had been in British territory for a long time. As a conciliatory gesture he assured the Burmese that any well-grounded complaint would be attended to if they withdrew.¹

Meanwhile he had passed the Myowun's proposal on to Calcutta, where it was accepted. The Calcutta Government was now aware that the Burmese action was not meant to be hostile.

Erskine was ordered to wait for twenty days; even after that period, he was not to attack the Burmese if he was convinced that their intentions were peaceful.²

By the time the new instructions from Calcutta reached Erskine, the crisis had already been resolved. Erskine, in obedience to his previous instructions, which called for an immediate withdrawal, advanced to the first Burmese stockade. This was at Ratnapullin, a few miles to the west of the Naf while the other stockades were located on the bank of the Naf. When Erskine's force approached the first stockade, the Myowun of Ramri, who was in the

1. BPC, 27 March 1794, Nos.24-29.

2. BPC, 27 March 1794. Instructions to the Lt. Colonel Erskine, 27 March, No.30.

stockade, sought a personal interview with him. The Myowun repeated what he had said earlier during his meeting with Erskine's messenger; his orders were to stay where he was until the fugitives were surrendered; also, he had no orders to fight and could not resist if attacked.. Erskine said that in that case he could take the entire Burmese force prisoner. The Myowun made no direct answer to this, but said the Burmese wanted to promote friendly relations between the two sides (meaning by this that such a proceeding would cause friction). He stated again that he had not been aware that he was in British territory, "he in a manner considered himself on neutral ground".¹ The Myowun urged Erskine not to advance any further, while the latter insisted he would advance. After this the meeting broke up. Erskine then advanced on the first stockade. As he approached it, the Burmese made the following proposal, which he accepted.

The Burmese commanders agree to pull down their first stockade. The first stockade to be pulled down tomorrow the 25th Instant i.e. 25 March. On the 26th Lt. Colonel Erskine will, if he please, march to the ground of the first stockade. They will then pull down all their stockades and with the whole of their troops recross the Naaf river. They will smooth the ground and place everything in the former situation. The whole of the terms will be completely fulfilled.²

The agreement was fulfilled and the Burmese force had recrossed the Naf by the end of March. Erskine's acceptance of the proposal met with the approval of the Calcutta Government. The Burmese ^{hostilities would} incursion was not meant to be hostile; besides, / lead to an interruption of trade.

After the withdrawal, Erskine confirmed, apparently after making enquiries on the spot, that the area on the Chittagong side

1. BPC, 7 April, Erskine to General Abercrombie, 24 March, No.23.

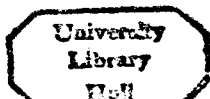
2. Ibid., enclosing Burmese letter.

of the Naf had been regarded (by the population of the Chittagong district presumably) as a sort of neutral ground.¹ This report produced no change of attitude on Calcutta's part; they continued to regard the Naf as the boundary. The Burmese, for their part, seemed quite indifferent to the issue. They raised no objection to the British claim in 1794; and in 1799, during the Hill mission, they agreed that the area immediately across the Naf was British territory. The reasons for this change are not known.

It was decided to surrender the Arakanese fugitives if the Burmese withdrew in 1794 and their complaints against the former (of murder and robbing) were proved. The fugitives were taken into custody and the Burmese were invited to send persons to Chittagong with the evidence against them. The invitation was accepted. However, it was not until January 1795 that the Burmese sent a representative to Chittagong. The British were at first in some doubt as to whether an inquiry would be held at all. In a letter received by Erskine in October 1794, the Myowun of Arakan and other high Arakanese officials explained why the delay had occurred. Several high-ranking Arakanese officials, they disclosed, had attempted to proceed to Chittagong some time previously but had been forced on account of the monsoon to return to Arakan. They promised to send witnesses after the monsoon.

We must now survey briefly the charges brought against the Arakanese fugitives, and their defence. The accounts given by Apolung and the Burmese are at complete variance with one another. Apolung

1. BPC, 25 April 1794, Erskine to Abercrombie, No.14.



maintained, in a letter to Colonel Erskine, that in order to avoid being killed or enslaved, he had made his submission to the Burmese and fulfilled his tributary obligations.¹ In spite of this, the Burmese had made several raids on his little community in the Broken Islands lying off the Arakan coast, in the course of which they had killed his wife and son-in-law, and many of his subordinate chiefs and followers, and carried away many people and much property. His nephew, who was held in Arakan as a hostage, had warned him that a further raid, under the command of an official despatched from the capital, was imminent. On hearing this, he had attempted to escape to the Chittagong district with his followers. On the way, he had fallen in with the Burmese force, and in the ensuing battle, had lost twenty of his boats, with the property on them and about ninety of his men dead. He had, however, seized three empty boats belonging to the Wundauk, or royal official who commanded the Burmese force.

Apolung's account is unsatisfactory in at least one respect. Apolung failed to explain why the Burmese should have made so many murderous attacks on his domains if he made his submission to them and fulfilled all his tributary obligations.

The Burmese account says nothing of raids of extermination. It claimed that Apolung took his oath of allegiance to the King of Ava in 1790 (not at the time of the Burmese conquest, as implied by Apolung), and tendered tribute to his officers in Arakan. In 1793 he was required to make a contribution to the Siamese war and in November 1793 he was asked by a representative of a Burmese junior minister (wundauk) to fulfil this order. Instead he had killed the

1. BPC, 10 November 1794, Apolung to Lt. Colonel Erskine, No.45.

Wundauk's representative, plundered government boats and destroyed many neighbouring villages and then fled to Chittagong.

The Burmese, as stated earlier, did not participate with Erskine in the judicial inquiry until January 1795. In the meantime, Governor-General Shore and his Council had decided to send an embassy to the Burmese Court. After the withdrawal of the Burmese force from Chittagong in March 1794, Shore had written a letter to the King of Burma dated 11 April 1794 in which he explained British policy in the late crisis.

He stated that an inquiry would be held into the conduct of the fugitives, and that the Burmese could produce evidence against them. He promised that further applications would be received.¹ No reply was ever received to this letter. The reasons for this were never discovered; Symes does not appear to have investigated the matter when in Burma. By early November 1794, Shore had received a letter from the Myowun of Pegu, dated 4 September 1794, which contained no reference whatever to Shore's letter of 11 April. Shore concluded that his letter had been suppressed by some official or other.

This assumption might have encouraged the despatch of a British embassy to Burma since the Court would presumably have been without a direct statement from the Calcutta Government of its policy towards such things as an armed border crossing, and an approach by letter seemed unreliable. There is however, no direct statement to this effect in the Governor-General's minute of 10 November 1794,

1. BPC, 14 April 1794, Governor-General to King of Ava, 11 April 1794, No.17.

in which the embassy is discussed.¹ The minute sets forth reasons of a more general kind for a diplomatic approach to Burma. These, together with other reasons not spelled out in the minute, are so cogent as to suggest that a mission would have been sent eventually even if the January 1794 incursion had not occurred, and that the role of the latter was only that of a catalyst. Shore, in fact, admits in his minute to having long considered instituting direct intercourse with Burma. "The advantages arising from a direct intercourse between this Government and the Court of Ava have long appeared to me of great importance both in a commercial and political light" (my emphasis).² This feeling, it is clear, may have antedated the January incursions.

One reason for instituting diplomatic relations was the existence of a very large trade between Burma and the British territories. This trade was of considerable importance to the British.

In the first place, it was the source of teak required for ship-building and other purposes in the Bengal and Madras Presidencies. As Michael Symes, writing in 1800, expressed it:

It is impossible to impress my reader with any stronger proof of the vast importance of the Pegue trade than briefly to state, that a durable vessel of burthen cannot be built in the river of Bengal, except by the aid of teak plank, which is procurable from Pegue alone, and that if the timber trade with that country should by any act of power be wrested from us, if it should be lost by misfortune or forfeited through misconduct, the marine of Calcutta which of late years has proved a source of unexampled prosperity to our principle settlement the Bengal Presidency ... must be reduced nearly to annihilation...."³

1. BPC, 10 November 1794, Minute by Governor-General, 10 November 1794, No.40.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Apart from teak, Burma supplied the British Indian settlements with ships (built at Rangoon harbour), stick-lac, and certain other commodities. In return, Burma imported a very large quantity of British and Indian produce, cloth being the single most important item. More details on this trade will be given later; what should be noted here is that with the existence of so large and in the case of teak, so essential a trade, the total absence of diplomatic contact would have seemed anomalous.

The Bengal Government had the impression also that the Burmese officials at Rangoon were oppressing the British traders. In his minute of 10 November 1794, Sir John Shore quoted from a report by Captain Michael Symes, which listed the various grievances of the British traders.¹ Symes alleged that British traders were made to pay extortionate prices for their timber. The merchants had attempted to complain to the Court, but the complaints, so Symes claimed, were blocked by the Akoukwun (or harbour-master) and Yewun (deputy to the Myowun/^{or viceroy}) at Rangoon. There were other complaints. The purchaser of timber was prevented from selecting "either in person, or by his agents, such timbers as he stands in need of at the forests where they grew".² Supplies of timber tended to be irregular, with the result that ships had to wait long periods for their cargo. The Akoukwun and the Rangoon Council, Symes alleged, fixed high prices for the timber, knowing that the British had no other source of teak. He accused them also of creating artificial scarcities. Then, Symes claimed that the

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

Rangoon Council denied British merchants a free "intercourse" with the country; he probably meant by this that they were denied freedom to trade wherever they liked.¹ The result was that trade was restricted, although there was a big demand for British goods.

In the minute of 10 November, the Governor-General stated that one object of the proposed embassy would be "to negotiate the removal of grievances that merchants have hitherto complained of and the general improvement ... of the commercial system".²

Symes stated also that the Burmese were carrying on trade with the Chinese Empire, and had offered to take Sorrel to China. (The Sorrel episode will be discussed later). This suggested to Symes the possibility that the British might gain access to China via Burma.

Burma had also become strategically important to the British by 1795. In February 1793 war had broken out between Britain and revolutionary France, and news of it had reached India by June 1793. This meant that Burmese ports had become strategically important. The Burmese, if so disposed, could provide French warships and privateers with shelter (necessary during the period from October to December, when the Bay of Bengal became dangerous for shipping), provisions, repairing facilities, and an opportunity to sell their prizes. It was these considerations Shore would have had in mind when writing the following passage:

The political advantage of a constant and amicable intercourse with the Court of Ava is certainly great and in the event of a war with a maritime power, we might avail ourselves of it to induce the King of Ava to refuse the benefit and freedom

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

of his ports to the enemy, a circumstance which it is evident would greatly tend to the security of our eastern trade, as it would deprive the enemy of a valuable resource.¹

When Symes went to Burma, he was instructed to ask for the exclusion from Burmese ports of French vessels.

Curiosity about an important neighbouring country about which almost nothing was known to the British appears also to have been a motive behind the embassy. The Governor-General wrote:

We may hope by this opportunity to obtain information about the products, manufactures, trade, government and nature of a country conveniently situated for trade from all our ports in India hitherto almost wholly unexplored.²

It can be seen that this information was expected to be commercially useful. This was supplemented by a wish to give the Burmese "a just idea of the British Government in India, of its power and resources, of its pacific principles and commercial pursuits." Until this was achieved, the Governor-General wrote "ignorance will perpetually suggest the renewal of distrust."³ In fact, there are no grounds for thinking that actual distrust of the British existed in Burma at this stage.

A factor which greatly encouraged the Bengal Government in the matter of a mission to Burma was the friendly reception given

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., After Michael Symes had been sent to Burma as British envoy, Shore wrote to Dundas stating that he was ashamed that so little was known about Burma before Symes' mission. Furber, H., The Private Record of an Indian Governor-Generalship, Cambridge, 1933, p.79. Dundas was President of the East India Company's Board of Control.

3. BPC, 10 November 1794, Minute by Governor-General, 10 November 1794, No.46. The fact that Burma ^{was} a neighbouring and major power would also have made political contact seem desirable.

to the bearer of a letter to the Burmese Court from Lord Cornwallis, the previous Governor-General, concerning a minor trading matter. Symes discusses the affair in full in his report. The Burmese had impressed some vessels into their service for operations against the rebel city of Tavoy, handed over to Siam by its disaffected Myowun. Such service was supposed to be paid for, but in this case the compensation was not given and several complaints were made by the aggrieved owners to the Bengal Government. An English merchant, George Tyler, who owned one of the ships commandeered, had informed Lord Cornwallis, then Governor-General, that the King had acted under necessity, and had ordered payment, but that local officers had appropriated the sum. He was confident that compensation could be secured if a representation was made to the King on the subject. Cornwallis, fearful that the Burmese might respond with insult, decided to send a semi-official mission only. He arranged, through Tyler, for one George Sorrel to carry a letter from him to the King of Burma. Sorrel was also given some presents for the King.¹ This would have been a friendly gesture.

It should be noted that Tyler had a significant part in initiating this semi-official mission. He was one of those affected by the commandeering of vessels, he had suggested making a representation to the King, and he had arranged for Sorrel to carry the letter. He seems furthermore to have been for some time an enthusiast for official relations between Bengal and Burma. Symes states that in

1. M. Siddique Khan in his "Captain George Sorrel's Mission to the Court of Amarapura, 1792-1793", Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Vol.II, Dacca, 1957, p.131, stated that the Sorrel's mission was a feeler for Symes' mission. Had this been the object, both the Governor-General and Symes (whose report describes Sorrel's mission) would surely have been aware of it. They show no awareness of such an object. The Bengal Political Consultations do not contain any documents relating to Sorrel. The mission is known only through the discussion of it in Shore's minute of 10 November.

September 1793 Tyler wrote a report for the Bengal Government which "not only demonstrates the advantages that must accrue from a free intercourse with Ava, but likewise shows that nothing prevents such intercourse except that mutual distrust that deters either party from being the first to offer terms of conciliation".¹ Symes added that Sorrel, on arriving at Rangoon:

... found obstacles opposed to his progress, and was some time before he could get the nature of his mission announced to the Court of Ava, but as soon as it was made known, every further impediment was removed. Royal boats were sent to meet him, and after a pleasant voyage up a fine river [the Irrawaddy], he arrived at the Burmah capital Chenrut Mingun.²

It will be noticed that Symes is interested to note the existence of a great river in Burma; an indication of the extent of the ignorance which prevailed at Calcutta concerning Burmese geography.

Sorrel handed over his despatches to the Myowun of Pegu, then at the capital, on 31 March 1794. In a letter to Tyler from Rangoon, dated 25 April 1794, he reported that:

... the manner and style in which they were received can be more easily understood than described. I need only inform you that the Government despatches had been expected with great anxiety, and as soon as I delivered them to the Minister, he immediately with a long train of people accompanying the packages went to the place where all the great men were assembled for the purpose, and there the letters were opened and read before His Majesty, and the presents viewed by all the Court, and the Minister having presented to the King, His Majesty accepted of them... the country thereabouts being destitute of all kinds of provisions for Europeans, the Minister was so good as to send a boat every day to the city of Ava to fetch me what provisions the place could afford. His first care after I arrived was to

1. BPC, 10 November 1794, Minute by Governor-General, 10 November 1794, No.46.

2. Ibid.

have a temporary house built for me close to his own building besides which he made an offer of his services and the use of his purse, requesting that if I wanted anything whatsoever I would let him know and not apply to any other person. Indeed, I cannot but acknowledge he treated me with great attention and kindness during the whole time I remained with him.¹

Sorrel was given a letter and some presents for the Governor-General. On Sorrel's return voyage, however, his ship was wrecked, he was the only survivor, and the letter and presents were lost.

Symes states on the strength probably of information supplied by Sorrel after the shipwreck, that the letter was from the King. This assertion, however, must be treated with caution. As will be seen later, it is doubtful whether the King had a hand in the writing of the letter received by Symes in 1795 while he was envoy to Burma. It appears to have been solely the work of the Hludaw. It is possible that a careless mistake was made and that it was actually from the Hludaw in 1794 also.

Sorrel understood that the letter was friendly in tone, and that the King (or Hludaw) had expressed in it an earnest wish to establish "mutual confidence" between the governments of Ava and Bengal.² This report, if correct, shows (like the offer of 1787 and the communication to Pondicherry in 1793) that the Burmese Court, instead of being isolationist, actually welcomed relations with the

1. BPC, 10 November 1794, Sorrel to Tyler, 25 April 1794, No.49.

2. BPC, 10 November 1794, Minute by Governor-General, 10 November 1794, No.46.

outside world. The reasons why "mutual confidence" with the British was desired would have been the same as those which were to cause the British to renew diplomatic intercourse with Burma in 1795; the political and commercial importance of the country in question, and its geographical proximity.

Some months later, a letter from the Myowun of Pegu to the Governor-General dated 4th September 1794 was received at Calcutta in which the Myowun promised that compensation would be brought to the owners at Calcutta by an agent of his after the monsoon. This person, the Myowun revealed, had attempted to go to Calcutta during the rains, but had been forced to put in at Mergui for shelter. According to the Myowun, the King, on hearing of the British complaint, had ordered payment. The Myowun also dwelt in a very friendly way on the commercial relations between Burma and Bengal.

It is well-known [the Myowun wrote] that our different sea-ports are resorted to by all nations, and that strangers are well received, and their trade encouraged be they of what nation soever, but in particular the merchants and shipping of the British, who having for ages past frequented our ports, and never having had any disputes with us have always I trust experienced a preference and will I doubt not ever continue to be the most favoured by my sovereign. It is a happiness for all people trading to, or living at any of the parts and districts under your jurisdiction that you are equally disposed to encourage and protect commerce, and being in this respect of one mind and disposition, the trade to and from both countries ought to unite our interests as firmly as the metallic cement which jewellers use solders gold and silver together.¹

1. BPC, 10 November 1794, Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General, 4 September 1794, No.47.

Some presents, consisting of jewellery (sapphires), peacocks' feathers and other articles, were sent to the Governor-General together with the letter. The letters and presents brought earlier by Captain Sorrel were acknowledged and the Governor-General was assured that "I [the Myowun] will take particular care that all vessels coming from your Ports, shall in future be better treated than heretofore". Although this last promise seems to have been a rhetorical one only, the Myowun was in future to work for improved and closer relations with the British.

The exceptionally friendly tone of the Myowun's letter and of Sorrel's reception produced a favourable impression at Calcutta, and encouraged the Bengal Government in the matter of sending an embassy to Burma, as is evident from the following observations by Shore:

.... from the concurrent circumstances of Captain Sorrel's very favourable reception, and the particular marks of attention shown to him as the Messenger of this Government, the very friendly tenor of the letter from the Pegu Minister to the Governor-General and of the apparently sincere disposition to afford redress to Mr. Tyler, for the grievances communicated to him through the medium of this Government, as manifested in the Minister's letter [it was clear that] the King of Ava would most readily receive a deputation from this Government and treat its delegate with every possible respect and attention, and as he does not appear to be ignorant or regardless of the benefits of a flourishing and unobstructed commerce as well as of a friendly connection between the two states, it may be presumed that he would accede to such proposals as are calculated to promote these objects.¹

It was quite clear that Cornwallis' fears of deliberate insult were baseless.

1. BPC, 10 November 1794, Minute by Governor-General, 10 November 1794, No. 46.

In the minute of 10 November, no definite decision was announced as to whether or not an envoy was to be sent. However, a few days later the Governor-General wrote a letter to the Myowun of Pegu (in reply to the letter from him) informing him that the British would send an envoy to Burma. From this moment, the Calcutta Government was committed to this line of action.

The foregoing then were the factors that made the despatch of the mission desirable in British eyes. In January 1795, before an envoy was actually sent, Colonel Erskine, who had investigated the Arakanese fugitives in Chittagong in collaboration with Burmese representatives, submitted his findings. The Burmese in his view, had failed to substantiate their charges against the three Arakanese. The Governor-General-in-Council decided nevertheless to surrender them to the Burmese authorities. He contended that although the evidence produced by the Burmese was, as Erskine had reported, "insufficient for their conviction and punishment" it did provide "strong presumptive proof" of their guilt: among other things, property was found on them which suggested guilt.¹

Also, the alleged crimes had been committed in Burmese territory when the accused were Burmese subjects. They had in fact fled to the Chittagong district as late in December 1794, only a few weeks before the arrival there of the Burmese pursuit force and were therefore not British subjects. For these reasons, the Governor-General-in-Council decided that the accused should be handed over for trial to their own Government, but with an accompanying request that the charges against them should be fully substantiated.

1. BPC, 6 February 1795, Minute by Governor-General-in-Council, No.22.

The decision is open to criticism on a number of grounds. Since the evidence of their guilt, although strong, was insufficient for / ^{their} punishment, there seems to have been a possibility that they were innocent. Shore, of course, had requested the Burmese to prove the charges against Apolung and the others but he must have known that there was at best some doubt as to whether this would be done. Symes, after his return from Burma, stated that two of the fugitives were executed, while one escaped; he did not mention an inquiry. Then, there seems to have been a possibility that the Burmese were themselves guilty of crimes towards Apolung and his family and adherents. Apolung, in his statement to Erskine, had alleged that the Burmese had killed several of his relatives and subordinate chiefs and many of his followers. If this was true, the Burmese had surely no right to punish Apolung and the others, and the latter ought not to have been surrendered to them. Also important was the related possibility that Burmese crimes might in some measure have provoked Apolung's acts.

There is no discussion of these issues in the Council's minute. This is surprising, since they had shown themselves aware in the previous year of the possibility that Apolung may have been driven to retaliation by Burmese oppression.

Part II

The Commercial Setting

In the previous section, an attempt has been made to set forth the political background to the mission of 1795. In this section, it is proposed to give an account of Anglo-Burmese commercial relations at about the time of the Symes' mission. This account is based on data collected by Captain Hiram Cox, British resident in Burma from 1796 to 1798.

By 1795, an extensive trade, carried on by private traders, had developed between Burma and various British dependencies, especially Bengal. It appears to have grown steadily since the 1760s, at which time Burmese trade with the British had been rather small.

One reason for the growth in trade with Burma was the rise of a ship-building industry in Bengal. This industry needed timber, which Burma could supply. Burmese teak in fact was exceptionally well suited for ship-building though its cost was somewhat high. Teak was to be found in other parts of India. There were extensive teak forests in Malabar, on the western coast of India, and Malabar teak was stronger and more durable than Burmese teak. (This was not an unmixed advantage, for lighter wood was more suitable for some purposes). Transportation costs from the Malabar coast to Bengal were much higher than from Burma to Bengal. Also, in Malabar, there were acute difficulties of internal transportation while in Burma, ^{teak} / grew in places where it could be pushed into a river as soon as felled. This meant that teak could be obtained in much larger quantities and that internal transportation costs would be

lower. Teak forests existed also in the interior of India, but here the problems of procurement were insoluble.

Few details are available concerning the growth of ship building in Bengal. The first ships are believed to have been built in the 1760s. The first known to us is the Arracan or Amazon. The first of her names suggests that she was built of Burmese teak. In the 1760s and 1770s, the industry remained a minor one. In the 1780s however, it began to develop rapidly.¹ By the middle of the next decade, the Calcutta ship-builders were importing most of the timber, worth roughly 140,000 ticals, exported annually by Burma.

Another factor behind the increase in trade was the demand in Burma for various British and Indian products. These could be sold in Burma and the money realized invested in teak or some other export. In fact, money could not be taken out of the country; it had to be invested in some export or other.

At this point, it would be useful to examine Cox's statistics on Burma's seaborne trade.² It will be seen that imports into Burma were worth about 1,200,000 ticals. Of this, 347,225 ticals worth of goods were imported from Bengal and 58,450 ticals from Madras. "Europe" supplied goods worth 333,630 ticals. There is no evidence of direct communication between Europe and Burma, and

1. Furber, H., John Company at Work, Cambridge, 1931, p.188.

2. See Appendix B.

Cox must have been referring to goods manufactured in Europe and re-exported from European territories in the east. It would be safe to assume that the vast majority of these were British goods re-exported from Bengal, and other British territories, for there is no evidence of any significant trade between Burma and the French and Dutch possessions. Finally, goods worth 92,750 ticals were imported from the Malay coast (which would include the British territory of Penang, as well as the neighbouring Malay states and Dutch-held Java).

To turn now to the commodities imported: the most important of these, according to Cox's statistics, was cloth of various kinds. Company broad cloth was the most important single item, 135,000 ticals worth being imported annually. It will be seen by consulting Hobson-Jobson that among the other items mentioned are types of cloth. 200,000 ticals worth of goods were also imported by Burmese boatmen from Bengal. Betel nut and cloth were the most important of these goods.

A few other points should be noted. The coconuts were imported from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; they were in demand because of their fibre, which was used in making ships' ropes.

Also, some of the articles imported from "Europe" were for the ship-building industry at Rangoon: namely, iron, oils, ship's chandlery, carpenter's tools and optical instruments.

To turn now to exports (see Appendix B): ships constructed at Rangoon harbour (and not timber) were the most valuable Burmese export: they were worth 360,000 ticals annually. Second in importance was timber which was exported to Bengal, Madras and even Bombay. The exports of timber were worth about 135,000 ticals annually. Third came sticklac, of which 90,000 ticals were exported.

Also goods estimated by Cox to be worth 60,000 ticals were taken by Burmese boatmen to the Bengal presidency, and to parts of South-east Asia, including Prince of Wales Island.

Cox provides interesting information concerning the trade carried on by Burmese boatmen with Bengal. Every year, some 40 boats would set out from various parts of Pegu for Bengal. They would proceed down the Bassein river, and along the Arakan coast to Lucki-pore, Dacca, Balighat, Patna and Benares. The boats carried cargo worth about 4,000 rupees each, chiefly in silver bullion, but also in sheathing board, sticks, copper from China, sticklac, cutch, ivory and wax.¹ Some 40 to 50 boats also sailed from Arakan for Bengal every year, also with a capital of about 4,000 rupees each. In return, they brought back betel-nut (which constituted about half of the imports) and cloth. The capital for this trade was mostly provided by well-to-do Burmese, wanting to engage in trade.

The Burmese boat owners were able to sell goods in Burma "at least 50 per cent cheaper than the fair trader and by underselling him, gradually depreciate the value of goods in the market, until they no longer yield to him even a living profit and must ultimately compel him to abandon the trade."² The reason why they could undersell British traders was that they paid no duties in the British territories, had no war risk and sea risk, and by means of bribery avoided paying duties in Burma; they stopped at Ramri, where they could bribe local officials to give them a certificate

1. The writer is not clear as to what sheathing board was, nor what sort of sticks these were.

2. Francklin, W., Tracts, Political, Geographical and Commercial, on the Dominions of Ava and the North-Western Parts of Hindustan, London, 1811, p.98.

stating they had paid the King's duties. Cox expressed fears that British traders would ultimately be forced out of the Burmese market. These fears turned out to be unjustified, to judge from statistics collected by John Crawford after the Anglo-Burmese war. What happened probably was that the demand for textiles (despite occasional periods of glut) kept increasing and the Burmese boatmen could meet only a part of it. There is evidence that they kept up their activities until the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26.

Also important to Burma was the overland trade with China. The Burmese exported five or six lakhs of rupees worth of cotton and imported in return "raw silks, wrought silk, velvet, gold and silver thread, gold ingots and plates".¹ British goods did not find their way to China by this route. They would probably have been too expensive, as a result of transportation costs, and the duties levied illegally along the Irrawaddy.

1. Ibid., p.130.

PART III

The Mission

The measure of sending an envoy to Burma was adopted in February 1795. The person selected as envoy was Captain Michael Symes of the British 76th Regiment, the author of the report on Burma that Shore had consulted when writing his minute of 10 November 1794. Symes' instructions were modelled closely on the ideas of this minute. He was told that his primary aim should be to promote friendship with Ava. The Burmese were to be told that the British did not resort to hostilities except to repel aggression. He was asked to "prevail upon the Ava Government to withhold the benefit of their ports to French vessels, either warlike or mercantile; to prevent the subjects of France receiving supplies of timber or provisions and not to suffer any to be exported from Pegu for the use of the French".¹

An important objective was the establishment of regular communication with Ava. Shore had not received a reply to the letter he had written to the King in April 1794, and it was presumed that the letter was lost. Unless some reliable arrangement was made, it might not be possible to discuss problems which arose at the border and this might lead to distrust. Shore suggested that Symes try to establish regular communication by land via Arakan, since communication by sea was liable to interruption.²

1. BPC, 6 February 1795, Instructions to Symes, 6 February 1795, No.39.

2. Perhaps, communication by sea was more liable to interruption during the monsoon than that by land; alternatively, a ship might not always have been available.

With regard to commerce, Symes was "to facilitate the timber trade by all practicable means by exonerating the purchases from vexatious delays and undue imposts."¹ He was to try to secure such relief from legal duties "as circumstances may require."² A commercial connection could be drawn up to promote commerce, but it was to be limited to commerce only. He was to ascertain the nature of the Rangoon duties. He was to stimulate the court's interest in promoting commerce between Burma and British India. There was to be liberal protection for merchants both in Burma and in India.

A consul at Rangoon would be a means of promoting commerce and also of communication with Bengal. However, Shore had stated elsewhere that communication by land via Arakan was preferable, since communication by sea was unreliable⁷. Symes was not to make a proposal to this effect committing the British. If the attitude of the Court seemed favourable, he was to bring up the idea and if the Court seemed to be agreeable, he was to tell them that he would recommend it to the British Government. Shore it seems, wanted to consider the idea afresh in the light of the new information that would be collected by Symes before taking a final decision on the matter. Symes was also "to induce the Ava Government to establish a market town on the banks of the Naf River, to serve as an emporium for the commodities of both nations."³ The idea of promoting the Arakan-Chittagong trade had apparently occurred to Shore only after writing his minute on 10 November 1794.

1. BPC, 6 February 1795, Instructions to Symes, 6 February 1795, No.39.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Symes was to discover what British and Indian products could be sold in Burma and what Burmese products could be sold in India. He was to collect information on Burmese history, geography, economic products, religion, government and military power. He was also to collect information on the trade between Burma and China and to examine the practicability of communication between India and China through Burma. This idea was clearly to discover whether it would be possible to trade with China via Burma, and it had originated, it will be recalled, with Symes. He was not to excite suspicion by his inquiries. He was to give the Burmese an idea of the power of the British, both in Europe and in India.

Symes was also to explain the British point of view as regards extradition and the border crossing. It was "usual with all civilized states to grant an asylum within their territories to the subjects of other jurisdictions seeking it".¹ This usage did not however "extend to the protection of murderers, robbers, public defaulters and criminals of other description whom it is in the interest of all states to bring to condign punishment".² However, Symes was to explain to the Burmese that an armed border crossing was a measure "which by all states is deemed an act of aggression and hostility".³ In future, applications for extradition would always be received provided they were made in a "proper and amicable" manner and with the sanction of the Court.⁴ This meant that there

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

should be no armed border crossings or threats to search for them anywhere in British territory and so forth, and also, that the Arakan authorities could not make applications to Bengal themselves.

There was also the problem of giving general directions regarding the treatment for which Symes was to stipulate. Only general directions were possible at this stage; since nothing was known about Burmese etiquette Symes was empowered to leave the country, if it seemed likely that he would not be received at the capital, or if it seemed very inadvisable to proceed "either from the distracted state of the country and the disposition of the government and the general prejudice of the people, or from any other causes."¹ If, on arrival at the capital, he found himself "exposed to illiberal or insulting treatment", he had the right to leave, "either formally protesting against the indignity... or without ceremony, as the case may require".² It was made clear that this power was to be used with great caution. "This is a case which we trust will not occur... the provision for it may be deemed superfluous. We have stated it however, in the fullest confidence that you will make every allowance for the habits and manners of the Burmese".³ He was not to attach "useless importance" to etiquette.⁴

On 19 March, the mission reached Rangoon harbour. The residence of the Myowun of Pegu was then at the town of Pegu, the capital of the old Pegu kingdom. The officials who had to handle the matter of Symes' reception were the Yewun, or deputy governor

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

of Rangoon, and Baba Sheen, an Armenian merchant, who was acting as Akunwun, or revenue collector for the province. (Joseph Xavier da Cruz, the Portuguese Akunwun, had gone to the capital with the customs-revenue).

The envoy became convinced - despite denials - that his seclusion was due to distrust felt by the Burmese officials. He also found seclusion humiliating. He was also aggrieved over certain points of etiquette.

The Burmese stated emphatically that seclusion was their custom of the country and that no disrespect was intended. They also told Symes (correctly) that his seclusion would probably be temporary, since he would probably receive an invitation to visit the Myowun of Pegu (the invitation was received on 26 March). Symes however, warned them (on 27 March) he would leave unless his seclusion was lifted and certain other points conceded.

Symes believed that the Burmese distrust showed that it was inadvisable to proceed to the capital, and that he was entitled to leave. Symes appears to have had no reliable evidence for his suspicions of distrust. In view of this fact, the Burmese claim that seclusion was their custom, the fact that his seclusion would be temporary, that the Burmese behaviour at the capital might be different and that his government had wanted him to make every allowance for Burmese custom, he ought to have submitted to the regulation. Instead, he stated that he would leave unless his seclusion was ended, and certain other points of etiquette conceded. His mission had very important political and commercial objectives; if he left in protest, no mission could be sent in the immediate future and relations with Burma might also have been damaged. The Burmese officials, however, (when they failed, despite strenuous efforts to make him change his mind) decided to end his seclusion and meet his other demands, rather than have him leave. His departure would expose them to the King's displeasure (as Symes was aware) for

they had reported his arrival to the Court and, it would be regarded as an insult if he left now.¹ Nevertheless, there clearly was a danger that they might refuse to end his seclusion.

The Burmese claim that seclusion was their custom, and that it did not involve disrespect was apparently correct. In fact, it appears that seclusion enhanced an envoy's prestige in the estimation of at least the general public in Burma. When Symes reached the capital, Burmese officials, who had evidently heard of what happened at Rangoon, informed him that although it was the custom of the country for envoys to be secluded, he would be allowed to move about the countryside, though not into the capital, but he was advised not to wander too far, "as it would be considered by the common people in the light of a derogation from my consequence".²

Symes was exceptionally well-received at Pegu by the Myowun. The difficulties that he had created at Rangoon do not seem to have prejudiced the Myowun against him in any way. His account of his gracious reception can be read in the fourth and fifth chapters of his published journal.

In early May, Symes was back in Rangoon from Pegu, awaiting the Court's order to come up to the capital. It arrived in late May. Despite Symes' protests, the Burmese insisted on meeting the cost of the mission's journey to the capital. Symes was told that "it was inconsistent with the usage of their government to admit of a public minister being at any expense for his conveyance.... This, I understand, was an established point of etiquette from which they

1. This episode is discussed in Symes, M., An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, Gregg International Publishers, Westmead, 1969, pp.143-158. Symes' official reports do not contain a full account of it.

2. Ibid., p.235.

could not possibly recede".¹

On 29 May 1795 Symes left Rangoon, accompanied by the Myowun. On 9 July, the mission reached Pagan, where a deputation from the Court consisting of 3 officials, one of them a Wundauk, awaited them. Symes was accommodated at this point in a barge, which was towed by warboats, so that the envoy would not be in the same boat as ordinary boatmen. This was a high honour, which no subsequent British envoy received.

A few days later on 18 July 1795, Symes reached Amarapura and was accommodated just outside the capital, with permission, as has been seen, to travel some distance into the countryside, but not to go into the town itself.

Symes' mission was not the only one at the capital. An embassy had arrived also from the province of Yunnan in China. Symes was determined to secure precedence for his mission at the royal audience on the grounds that the Chinese were "only a provincial mission of very inferior consequence".² It was possible however that the Governor-General was on the same level as the Governor of Yunnan in Burmese eyes, for both were officials whose authority had been delegated to them by their respective sovereigns. Besides, one factor may have entitled the Chinese to greater consideration in Burmese eyes. According to Symes himself: "It was not at all improbable that the mission had been sanctioned by the authority of the Emperor of China, especially as the principal member of it was a native of Peking, and had lately come from thence".³

1. Ibid., p.220.

2. Ibid., p.367.

3. Ibid., p.285.

The exact nature of this sanction is not known; but the fact remained that Symes could claim no kind of sanction whatever from George III. The British envoy, however, was determined that the Governor-General of India should not be treated as inferior to, or even as an equal of the Governor of Yunnan. He demanded of Burmese officials that they give him precedence, and this was agreed to. The Burmese agreed also in response to another demand to give him equality with the nobility of the Court (as distinct from members of the royal family). Symes reported that the ^{respecting the Chinese} concession ~~was~~ given only after an initial reluctance. This reluctance, if it existed, may have been due to the factors mentioned above.

The Burmese sent a deputation to take away the Governor-General's letter, so that it could be opened and read, and its contents could be communicated to the King before the audience. The original was to be returned to Symes and handed over by him at the audience. Symes informed them that it was contrary to the British practice to give an official letter to anyone other than the person to whom it was directed. The Burmese replied that the letter need not leave Symes' sight, but that its contents would have to be revealed to the King before hand: "... the King [They said] would on no account receive a letter, the purport and language of which were not previously disclosed; that as it had been a custom never broken thro' from time immemorial I ought not to imagine that any disrespect was meant to be offered either to the Governor-General or to me his agent and assured me that if letters from all the potentates on earth were to arrive, they must undergo similar inspection before it would be admissible to present them...."¹

1. BPC, 21 October 1795, Symes to Shore, 15 August.

Symes then agreed to the proposed arrangement.

The Governor-General's letter had been written only in general terms "expressive in the words of the Hlutdaw's reply to Shore⁷ of a desire to cement friendship, open a free intercourse and encourage trade".¹ It had referred the King^{fo} Symes for specific proposals. After the Burmese had taken a copy of the Governor-General's letter, Symes wrote a letter himself to the King, dated 12 July 1795, in which he explained the objects of his mission and made specific proposals.

He had been deputed, Symes wrote, to make known to the Court the earnest desire of the Calcutta Government to preserve the existing friendly relations with Ava. He stressed the peaceful and friendly inclinations of the British. He asked for a "confidential intercourse" between the two states.² Otherwise, disputes at the frontier caused by individuals might lead to distrust or war. He did not state specifically that this intercourse should be by way of Arakan. Perhaps, he already felt that communications by way of a representative at Rangoon was preferable. He brought up the border crossing and ^{the} problem of extradition. He criticised the incursion strongly; but he also condemned the three persons surrendered earlier on in the year, calling them, "criminals of the deepest dye" although their guilt had not in fact been fully established at Erskine's inquiry.³ He promised that criminals would continue to be surrendered; however, the application would have to come from the Court. Strictly speaking, Shore had wanted only the sanction of the Court; the application itself could come from the

1. Symes, op.cit., p.489.

2. BPC, 21 October 1795, Symes to King of Burma, 12 July, No.6.

3. Ibid.

Arakan authorities. He stated also that there were certain classes of persons whom it was not customary under the law of nations to surrender. He referred specifically to debtors and petty delinquents. No reference was made to political offenders, or those who were fleeing from oppression; although Symes would have been aware that they were entitled to asylum under western law. It was not made clear either whether it would be necessary for the Burmese to substantiate their charges against criminals in future.

He then raised the matter of commercial concessions. While at Rangoon he had investigated conditions there and decided upon certain proposals which would promote commerce. He now suggested to the King that it was advisable to frame certain regulations on commerce, in order to reassure merchants (and thereby encourage trade). He was prepared to discuss this subject with the King's ministers. If a written agreement was secured, and the King's signature secured to it, he would take it to Calcutta and secure the signature of the Governor-General. Alternatively, the King could send an envoy to Bengal for this purpose. There was no reference to the French in Symes' letter to the King. However, Symes was to bring up the matter when submitting his specific proposals.

Subsequently on 19 July, Symes submitted his detailed commercial proposals, and also a proposal calling for the exclusion of the French from Burma to the Hlutdaw.¹

On 30 August 1795, the royal audience was held. Symes had many complaints about his reception on that day. It is proposed to examine only the more important ones here. He suspected that the Chinese had been given precedence over him (in deliberate violation of the promise that had been made to him), They had been

1. The Burmese were promised certain reciprocal commercial concessions, and a reciprocal political concession: the enemies of the Burmese would not be allowed to purchase munitions of war in British ports. (See Symes, op.cit., pp.490-491).

led into the hall after the British and after the audience, they had been led out before them. Symes connected this with the fact that the Burmese participants had entered the hall in ascending order of importance, and left it in descending order. The Chinese had also been conducted to the places assigned to the British by previous arrangement. It should, however, be noted that the British had had questions put to them, whereas the Chinese had not. It seems reasonable to assume that by doing this, the Burmese had granted the British precedence. With regard to Symes' complaint about the order of entry and departure, and the seating arrangements, it should be noted that the Myowun of Pegu stated (when Symes complained to him about his reception) that "much" of what Symes had found objectionable had originated in error.¹ This could have been a reference to these points.

Symes also suspected that the Burmese had subjected him to derogatory treatment, because the Governor-General, his delegating authority, lacked sovereignty. The King had not been present at the audience, the prayers, prostrations and so forth, had been directed at an empty throne. Symes was informed later that this was because his delegating authority lacked sovereignty. Symes' informant on this and probably on other occasions as well, could have been Don Luigi de Grondona, the Italian bishop at the capital, who was to supply the British envoys of 1796-1798, 1802, 1803, 1809-1810, and 1811-1812, with reports about Burmese attitudes.²

Symes noticed too that the questions put to him were about the British royal family, and not the Governor-General. He believed

1. BPC, 21 December 1795, Symes to Shore, December 1795, No.39A, para.18.

2. Also known as Louis de Grondona.

that this was because the Governor-General, since he was not a King, was not considered entitled to questions at a royal audience. There is not enough evidence to make definite solutions to these questions possible. However, the King's absence could not have been easily due to error, and could very well have been derogatory. It is possible that the Governor-General's lack of sovereignty was the reason.

The royal audience was followed (as prescribed by custom) by visits to other personages at the capital. After these visits, certain events occurred, which led Symes to raise the matter of the Governor-General's status. He received reports to the effect that the Burmese had decided to regard him as the representative of a power inferior to their own government in rank. His informant on these occasions may have been Luigi de Grondona. On one occasion Symes describes his informant as "a private person of rank" a description which fits Grondona.¹

Certain other developments which occurred during an interview between his deputy Lieutenant Wood and the Wungyis on 7 September and between the Wungyis and himself on 19 September also created a conviction in his mind that the Burmese had come to such a decision. He was also convinced that news of British defeats in Europe which had been brought to Rangoon by a French ship and disseminated by persons hostile to the British caused the Burmese to be more arrogant.²

The evidence presented by Symes, however, is far from being conclusive. Perhaps Symes had good reasons for accepting his informant's statements (for example, the latter's sources may have

1. BPC, 21 December 1795, Symes to Shore, 18 December 1795, No.39A, para 44.

2. Symes, op.cit., Chapter XVII.

been the Wungyis themselves). However Symes does not disclose such facts.

Symes had at one stage been officially informed that the Court would send an envoy to Bengal to claim reciprocal concessions and to give assurances of friendship. A person had actually been selected, and all that remained to be decided was whether he would proceed by sea or land.¹ He was now informed by an informant that the Court had changed its attitude on the matter, because of the Governor-General's lack of sovereignty. He was also informed that the Court had taken a firm decision to view him as the representative of a power lacking in sovereignty and for this reason, they had decided not to allow him a personal audience with the King (that is, an audience in which the King would be present, unlike at the first audience) because such a favour could be granted only to representatives of a sovereign state. Symes had asked for such an audience in a short note to the King written after the visits.

Symes wrote a letter to the First Wungyi, asserting that the Governor-General was a sovereign, and demanding that he be given a farewell audience of leave in the character of the Governor-General's agent. The reason for making this demand was that he had been informed (possibly by Grondona) that only representatives of a

1. BPC, 4 January 1796, Minute by Governor-General, No.36. This information was apparently given to the Governor-General verbally by Symes after his return to Calcutta.

sovereign state were granted this privilege. Yet, in their interview with Symes on 19 September, the Wungyis had invited him to an audience. If such a principle really existed, the Wungyis had already conceded it. It is not clear why Symes did not notice this point.

Symes warned the Wungyi that unless his demand was met, the British would not initiate communication with Burma in future. He ended his letter on a note of menace, urging the Wungyi to advise the King "with prudence and moderation".¹

The Hludaw's recommendations are not known, but the King's decision was that Symes would be given "a personal audience in the character to which I laid claim".²

Symes believed he had secured recognition of the Governor-General's sovereignty; he refers to this audience as one in which the British mission would be received "in the character of an imperial delegation".³

What, however, did the expression "the character to which I laid claim" refer to? It could, of course, have referred to Symes' claim made in the earlier part of his letter, that he was the representative of a sovereign power. It could, however, have referred also to Symes' demand made several times in his letter that he be received in audience as the Governor-General's representative. Symes' assumption that only representatives of sovereign power were granted this privilege was never proved. It is not certain therefore, that Symes succeeded in his objective.

1. Symes, op.cit., p.486.

2. Ibid., p.409.

3. Ibid., p.411.

This audience was held on 30 September. Afterwards, Symes received a letter apparently from the Hludaw, which constituted the Burmese response to his proposals.

The Court did not send a mission to Bengal to obtain reciprocal concessions from the Governor-General, although Symes was officially informed that they would. The Burmese were probably not keenly interested in commercial concessions, the right to have a resident at Calcutta, and so forth; if this was the case there would have been no practical motive for sending an envoy. The Governor-General's lack of sovereignty may also have been a factor behind the decision not to send an envoy, unless, of course, the King had conceded his sovereignty, in which case there would not be much point in refusing to do this for this reason.

The British request that French ships be denied the use of Burmese ports was not acceded to by the Hludaw. "With respect to the desire that aid should not be given by this state to the enemies of England, as well as Indian, and that such enemies should not be assisted at our ports with warlike implements, timber or provisions, it is to be observed that to purchase warlike weapons, lead and powder, is forbidden to all nations, but when merchants come to trade, they will be allowed to carry away these commodities, agreeably to the usage of merchants."¹ The restriction therefore applied only to munitions of war.

Symes had also proposed to the Burmese, on instructions from the Governor-General, that they found a market town on their

1. Symes, op.cit., p.492.

side of the Naf. The Hlutdaw's letter represents Symes as having urged the setting-up of a guard-post and village on the bank of the Naf ("banks" in the letter) but does not mention any commercial purpose. It goes on to reject the proposal "As there is strict and confidential friendship with the King of England, there can in future be no difference or distinction between the two countries".¹ They seem to have seen the proposal as an attempt to lay down a boundary in that region.

During Cox's mission (1796-1798) the Burmese were to allege that Symes' proposal was an attempt to trick them into acknowledging the Naf as the boundary between Arakan and Chittagong and thereby forestall an attempt by the Burmese to claim the two Bengal districts of Chittagong and Dacca, over which they believed that they had rights, because these districts had ~~one~~^c paid tribute to Arakan. On this occasion, they referred to Symes as having "strenuously urged the building of a chekoy [customs-post] on the Naaf, to mark that river as the boundary between the two countries".² It is not clear whether this reason was given by Symes himself, or whether it was a Burmese deduction.

The Hlutdaw's letter also took note of the British promise that criminals would be surrendered. The Burmese also seemed to be aware of the British view that applications should be by letter.

We come now to the commercial concessions obtained by Symes. The Rangoon officials had been collecting more duties than

1. Symes, op.cit., p.492.

2. Cox, H., Journal of a Residence in the Burmese Empire, London, 1821, p.203.

they were entitled to. Symes secured a clear definition of the existing duties, and a prohibition of further exactions. There had been a tendency for the Rangoon officials to collect emoluments in bullion of 50% silver content, instead of the Rangoon variety, which had a 25% silver content. This practice was prohibited. Shore had suggested asking for relief from legal duties, if necessary, but Symes refrained from doing this, since the existing duties were not burdensome.

Symes secured the prohibition of duties which were being levied illegally on timber being floated down to Rangoon from various parts of the Irrawaddy delta. He expected the prohibition to be very beneficial, since the price of timber would fall as a result.

The right of British merchants to complain to the Court in case of oppression was now confirmed. This had been one of the complaints mentioned in the report by Symes quoted by Shore.

Symes also secured freedom for British merchants to carry on trade anywhere in the country. They had hitherto been prevented from doing this by the provincial officials (it is not clear what the reason for this was). This complaint had been mentioned in Symes' report quoted by Shore in 1794. Symes also secured a re-affirmation of the law which prohibited the levying of duties on goods taken up the river and defined the duties which could be levied on goods taken down it. Merchants were reluctant at that time to convey goods to the capital, because of duties levied illegally along the Irrawaddy. Symes expected that abolition of the duties would lead to a growth in trade with Upper Burma; it might also render trade with southern China possible. Symes also secured permission for the stationing of a British agent at Rangoon, "to

superintend mercantile concerns, maintain a friendly intercourse, and forward letters to the presence".¹

last
Symes considered that the measure would be "highly advisable in more than a commercial point of view".² To judge from the Hludaw's letter, Symes had suggested to the Burmese that the agent could be a channel of communication with the Court, and could also maintain good relations. Symes may also have been thinking of the need to combat French influence and to exercise supervision over the English traders at Rangoon, of whose conduct he had formed a very bad impression.

Symes secured an order from the Hludaw to the effect that English vessels forced to put in at Burmese ports should be provided with material, labour and so forth at equitable rates.

According to Symes, foreign vessels, when forced to put in at Burmese ports other than Rangoon, were regarded "as a whale left by the retiring tide, a fair prey to most rapacious captors".³

In the 17th Century, foreign vessels forced to put in at Burmese ports because of bad weather, or lack of provisions, were actually regarded as Burmese property and their crew as slaves. (This might be evaded by bribing local officials).⁴ This custom had died out by this time; however, the sailors were charged exorbitant prices for repairs, and were subjected to unkind treatment. Something of the spirit of the old custom seems to have survived

1. Symes, op.cit., p.492.

2. BPC, 21 December 1795, Symes to Shore, 18 December 1795, para.79.

3. Ibid., para.81.

4. Discussed in Hall, D.G.E., Early English Intercourse with Burma, London, 1968.

(except in Rangoon).

The British merchants who traded at Rangoon, Symes discovered, had also been responsible for many disputes. The English traders /settled at Rangoon were of a low type, and therefore liable to get into trouble with the law.

who traded at Rangoon
The other class/were the sea-captains who called at the port. These were "for the most part men of no capital and confined credit".¹ They came to Rangoon hoping to purchase a cargo of timber from the money they made by selling goods at the port. In this, they were often disappointed. Their goods, such as Indian piece-goods, were of small value to begin with. Then, in recent years, their value had declined even further. For one thing, the number of ships calling at Rangoon had increased. Then, Burmese boatmen had begun to trade with Bengal themselves, and to return from there with cargoes of piece goods which resulted in lower prices for these goods. (This was discussed in the previous section). Coconut cultivation too was spreading in Burma, and this depressed the value of coconuts imported from ^{the} Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The result was that the captains of vessels often found themselves without the necessary funds for meeting legal demands, such as the port duties and the cargo they had ordered. To make matters worse, the Burmese would sometimes add unauthorized demands to those they were legally entitled to make. "At length the unfortunate adventurer is obliged either to bribe the officers of justice to let him run away and elude the creditors, or grant bills at an exorbitant exchange on his owners."

1. BPC, 21 October 1795, Symes to Shore, 5 May 1795, No.14.

The sufferer then endeavours to extenuate his folly by uttering invectives against the government thus called him to account".¹

Why were ships not sent to Rangoon from well-established mercantile houses possessing ample funds? The reason was that the profits from the timber trade were much smaller than would be realized elsewhere. "A cargo of timber purchasing a premium of one hundred and fifty percent makes but a moderate return.... A merchant with the command of five or fix lachs of rupees, which may probably be a temporary loan on the confidential deposit of a number of constituents, cannot wait to accumulate a fortune by the secure and tardy trade of a timber carrier. He looks for a quick and splendid return.... He will try his fortune in that quarter in the Malay ports and in China² where the success of a single venture may secure him independence and perhaps give him affluence for the rest of his life".² Only persons who could not afford a more valuable cargo would participate in the timber trade.

A further point should be noticed. Symes noticed that the preamble to the Court's reply to Shore was from the Wungyis, but he thought that the King was the author of the portions where the commercial concessions were specified. This however, seems a rather odd procedure. It is true, that before the concessions are mentioned, the words, "I, the King immortal ... I direct" occur.³ However, subsequently, the passive voice is used again even when the concessions are mentioned. "It is commanded

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Symes, op.cit., p.491.

... it is directed."¹ It seems likely that the words "I ... direct" were wrongly translated and ought to have been put in indirect speech.² This would mean that the letter was wholly the work of the Hlutdaw. After 1795, all letters received from the capital were unambiguously from the Hlutdaw.

Symes noticed that the person who gave him the letter would not say at first that it was from the King to the Governor-General, Symes finally forced him to say this by refusing to receive the letter otherwise. His initial unwillingness may have been on account of the letter being actually from the Hlutdaw.

Symes made a comparison of the treatment accorded to his mission by the Burmese, with that which Louis XIV's envoy, the Chevalier de la Loubere, received in Siam. He concluded that his mission was in one respect less well-received, in that the French did not have to make efforts to establish the sovereignty of their delegating authority. His having had to do this, he ascribed to Burmese ignorance, misinformation and pride. It is not certain, however, that the Governor-General's lack of sovereignty mattered to the Burmese at this stage. If it did, there was no error or ignorance involved, the Governor-General was not in fact a sovereign. However, Symes tended to regard the view of the Governor-General as a person lacking in sovereignty as a mistake. In a personal discussion with Shore after his return to Calcutta, Symes suggested that the former uphold his claims to be a sovereign by corresponding only with the King. Correspondence with Burmese officials should be left to other British officials.

1. Ibid., p.492.

2. It is less likely that a mistake was made in respect of the passive voice, since it is used much more often.

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Symes left the capital on 25 October 1795, and returned to Rangoon, which place he left on 27 November. His treatment in Burma during this last phase of the mission seems to have been exceptionally good. On 22 December, he arrived at Calcutta.

In his minute on Symes' mission, the Governor-General accepted in an uncritical way many of the envoy's allegations concerning his reception. He accepted Symes' interpretation of the events at Rangoon. He accepted Symes' contention that the King's absence at the first audience was connected with the Burmese view of the Governor-General's status. He agreed that the Court had intended originally to send an envoy to Bengal to claim reciprocal concessions (this was apparently correct since Symes was officially informed of it), but had dropped the plan partly because of the news brought by the French ship from Mauritius (which was not demonstrated). This news was one factor which led them to decide not to allow Symes a personal audience (he had in fact been invited to one). He agreed that Symes managed in the end to secure acceptance of his viewpoint as regards the Governor-General's status.

Shore considered that the Burmese had a knowledge of British power and this had helped in the negotiations. (He was probably referring to the negotiations with respect to a second audience).

The Court's knowledge of European affairs, Shore argued, could have repercussions on Anglo-Burmese relations (as shown, presumably, in the supposed refusal to send an envoy to Bengal and to grant Symes a second audience partly because of the receipt of news of European developments from Mauritius).

It was important to combat French influence in Burma. Shore listed the dangers attendant on a French presence in Burma.

They could develop Burmese products for sale in Europe at low prices and in this way make inroads into what was very largely a British preserve. They could exploit the advanced ship-building facilities in Burma, which, as Symes had discovered, could turn out ships of great size. (He had noticed ships of up to 1000 tons burthen under construction). They could also cut off the teak supply of the British "so indispensably necessary to the shipping of this country."¹ Finally, French privateers could use Burmese ports as supply points. However, these fears, with the exception of the last one, proved to be groundless.

Shore noted with satisfaction that the commercial proposals had been accepted although that they might not be immediately realizable, on account of obstruction from local officials.² A further reason for satisfaction was that the mission had given the Burmese a better understanding of the British character and resources. Hitherto the Burmese had depended for their impressions in this regard on the British traders at Rangoon. Yet, another advantage was that the mission had collected a great deal of information about Burma. It was now clear that the Burmese empire was not militarily formidable. Its territorial extent, however, was second only to that of China among eastern nations.

For the future Shore considered, echoing Symes, that the British Indian Government should maintain its status as a sovereign

1. BPC, 4 January 1796, Minute by Governor-General, 4 January 1796, No. 36.

2. Ibid.

power in all dealings with Burma. "The importance annexed by them [Shore wrote] to forms requires an equal attention to them on our part, and the dignity of the company and through it of the nation as represented by the Governor-General-in-Council, must be cautiously maintained in the style of his correspondence with the Court of Ava".¹ He accepted Symes' suggestion that he should write in future only to the King.

The need to curb the unruly British traders at Rangoon, of whom Symes had formed and conveyed a very bad impression, together with other considerations, made it expedient, Shore wrote, to despatch a representative of the company to Rangoon. The other considerations, to judge from the instructions issued to Captain Hiram Cox later on in the year, were the desire to combat French influence, to represent British merchants in disputes, to serve as a reliable channel for communication with Bengal and to promote good relations with Burma.² However, no final decision was taken in this matter as yet.

Although Symes had not been instructed to contend for the Governor-General's sovereignty, Shore was clearly highly pleased that the envoy had done this. The Governor-General explained why it was important for Symes not to have acquiesced in the view of him as "the delegate of a provincial administration below the rank of

1. Ibid

2. "The nomination of a permanent agent or consul will be expedient, not only for promoting the newly established intercourse and harmony but as a check upon the licentiousness of the Europeans who frequent the port of Rangoon, and who may trade to the capital." (Shore to Dundas, President of the Board of Control, 5 November 1795, in Furber, H., The Private Record of an Indian Governor-Generalship, Cambridge, 1933, p.80).

sovereignty".¹ To have done so "would have established a degrading idea of the political importance of the British Government in India, would have introduced a principle of inferiority in our political relations to the Court of Ava and might have given weight to French influence and machinations...."² These were important considerations and the second one in particular. Had the principle of the Governor-General's lack of sovereignty been conceded the Company's Government would have found itself permanently in a position of inferiority to Ava.

Shore was well satisfied with the results of the mission.

"The result of the embassy has equalled the most Sanguine expectations which I could form".³ Certain presents asked for by the

Burmese were to be provided. By doing this, the British would strengthen their connection with the Burmese.

There can be no doubt that the Burmese response to Symes was friendly. They had withheld their assent only to two of his proposals.

1. BPC, 4 January 1796, Minute by Governor-General, 4 January 1796, No.36.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE MISSION OF 1796-1798

There had been provision in the Hludaw's letter to Sir John Shore for the appointment of an agent of the Company to look at Rangoon. After a delay of some months, the Bengal Government decided to take up this offer, and one Hiram Cox, a thirty-six year old captain of the Bengal army, was selected for the post. His primary task, Cox was told, was to cultivate the existing goodwill of the Burmese for the British. Cox was informed that:

The commerce between the two Countries cannot be promoted by any specific efforts on your part. It must be left to its natural course and your occasional interference must be limited to procure redress for injuries sustained by the subjects of this Government trading to Ava and their Agents, and to prevent as far as possible any misconduct on their part.¹

His interference would be unnecessary 'where the officials of the Ava Government are disposed to listen to the complaints of British subjects and their Agents and to grant redress'.² The role prescribed for Cox as commercial agent was thus a minor and unobtrusive one and well within the scope of the Hludaw's provision. The Governor-General's instructions went on, however, to prescribe a function that the Burmese had not envisaged. He was informed that the task of counteracting possible French influence 'will require your particular attention and during the continuance of the present war, it will also

1. Bengal Political Consultations (BPC), 27 June 1796, No.16. It was made clear that a grievance would have to be one under Burmese law to justify action on Cox's part.

2. Ibid.

be extremely desirable to prevent their privateers and ships of war obtaining supplies in the Burmah ports, as well as the admission or sale of their prizes'.¹

Symes had failed in 1795 to secure a ban on the use of Burmese ports by the French. The Calcutta Government were renewing their efforts in this direction. However, perhaps because the Burmese government had rejected the proposal once, a change of strategy was felt to be necessary. 'You are not authorized [Cox was informed] to require any concessions on those points from the Ava government, and your success must depend upon your address alone'.² This would have meant that he was to rely on quiet and unofficial persuasion, instead of making an official proposal, as Symes had done.

One way of influencing the Burmese on this point, Cox was told, was to give them an accurate impression of British power. The presence of ^a Burmese representative at Calcutta, it was believed would be a means of conveying such an impression to the Court, and he was to try to persuade them to adopt this measure.

A very important stipulation was laid down with regard to a journey to the capital. "If you should receive an invitation from his Majesty to proceed to his Court, you are authorized to comply with it, but it is not the wish of the Government that any proposal for this purpose should originate with you".³

He was to continue his work of collecting information about Burma that had been begun by the previous mission; "Any concern directly or indirectly with commerce [would be] incompatible with your office"⁴

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

Before leaving for Burma, Cox submitted eighteen queries regarding the nature of his appointment. Each of these queries was answered unambiguously. It is proposed to examine the more important of these here. Cox asked whether in my public communications with the Viceroy of Pegu, or the Wungyis at Amrahpoorah, I should endeavour to obtain^{to}/meet them on an equal footing, visit them first, or visit them at all, without stipulating for a return visit....¹ He had asked also 'whether in the event of my proceeding to Court, I should endeavour to obtain any relaxation of the homage exacted from the former deputation....'²

The answer to the first of these queries was that the Governor-General had no objection 'to your visiting the four principal Woongees and the Viceroy of Pegu, without any stipulation of a visit in return, but you are not to consider the order applicable to officers of an inferior rank'.³ This implied that Cox's rank in the Calcutta Government's eyes was lower than that of the Wungyis and Myowuns, but not that of lesser officials, such as Atwinwuns and Yewuns. Cox was also instructed 'on all occasions to make it clearly understood that you appear only in the capacity of Resident at Rangoon and not as Ambassador on the part of the Governor-General, as in the latter capacity it would be necessary for you to stipulate an attention to etiquette in cases where it may be dispensed with in the former'.⁴ Cox's status therefore was lower than that of Symes. The previous stipulation with regard to his journey to the capital was now reiterated. As regards his second query he was informed that it would be 'inadvisable to attempt to procure any relaxation in ceremonial

1. BPC, 12 September 1796, Cox to Shore, 10 August 1796, No.11.

2. Ibid.

3. BPC, 12 September 1796, No.12.

4. Ibid.

as practised towards Captain Symes'.¹

Cox had asked if he could accept honorary distinctions from the Court. He was told that he could. It would not be advisable, he was told, in reply to a query, to offer to sit as a judge in Burmese courts when British subjects were on trial, for it might be regarded as an 'attempt to interfere in the internal Government of the country and excite jealousy'.² However, he could agree to do this if the Burmese requested it. Cox had asked if he could give letters and passports to commanders of British ships conveying Burmese envoys to Ceylon. He seems to have expected the Buddhist King of Burma to want to cultivate closer relations with a fellow Buddhist ruler. He was told that he could do this, if it was required of him. Then, Cox had inquired whether he could 'encourage' on the contrary any application of the Birmagh Government for arms and military stores'.³ This query shows Cox to have been a man of some acumen, for he had grasped the fact that arms would be the one item in the British possession that the Court would have a strong desire to acquire. Neither Symes nor the Calcutta Council had thought of this factor. Cox may also have realized that by supplying arms the British could acquire political leverage in Burma. The Calcutta Government's reply was that such applications 'should be discouraged during the war. There will be no objection to your receiving them after the conclusion of peace'.⁴

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. BPC, 12 September 1796, No.11.

4. BPC, 12 September 1796, No.12.

The Bengal Government, to judge by these instructions, wanted Cox to work for the mission's objects in a quiet and unobstrusive way, without embroiling it in disputes that might have hindered their accomplishment. It will be noticed that Cox had been barred even from pressing officially for the closure of Burmese ports to privateers, or seeking whether officially or unofficially, to promote commerce. Cox's conduct of his mission, however, was completely at odds with his instructions; he was continually pressing demands which were not only made without authority, but were so numerous and in many cases, so extravagant, that their acceptance was unlikely. His demands would also have been repudiated by Shore and his Council if they got to know of them. Cox's failure to realize ^{this} proves that he lacked normal judgement. Yet, if his deficiency in judgement is set aside, he emerges as an able man. He had intelligence, industry and powers of expression. He was an exceptionally competent compiler of reports, especially economic reports. He was well read in literature, and had a practical grasp of chemistry, geology, astronomy and mechanics. No other British envoy in the period under review possessed so much technical ability.¹ But his mission was primarily a political one and called for discretion and judgement other than technical ability.

It remains for us to consider the motives which led Cox to violate his instructions. These are deducible from the proposals he

1. See Cox, Journal of a Resident in the Burman Empire, London, 1821 pp.15, 19-21, 35-45, for proof of his scientific skills.

made while in Burma. Some of these were aimed at enhancing his status in Burma, others at promoting his country's interests, while at least one was intended to secure a private fortune for himself. Ambition, patriotism and cupidity therefore would seem to have been the sources of his actions. It is worth emphasizing that many of the proposals betray lack of realism.

An incident occurred, before the selection of Cox as an envoy which the historian Bayfield, writing in the 1830s, cited as an instance of Burmese arrogance. Sir John Shore's political secretary, N.B. Edmonstone, had written to the Myowun of Pegu, informing him that the carriage, coining apparatus and other things that Symes had been requested to obtain were being prepared and would be forwarded as soon as ready. (In point of fact, Cox was to take them to Burma with him). The letter came from Edmonstone because of Shore's decision to correspond only with the King. The British were acting on the principle that Shore was a ruler, who should correspond only with other rulers. It followed that the Myowun should be addressed by a subordinate official. Events were to show that the Burmese had different principles. A polite reply was received to Edmonstone's letter, but it came from Baba Sheen, a English-speaking member of the Rangoon Council, not the Myowun, and it was addressed to the Governor-General. This meant that the Myowun had not concurred in the British estimation of his status in relation to their hierarchy.¹ On a later occasion, the Myowun, when addressed by the Persian Translator, wrote a reply

1. Bayfield, Historical Review of the Political Relations between the British Government in India and the Empire of Ava, London, 1834, p.12.

himself, but addressed it to the Governor-General. He never wrote directly to a government secretary.¹

The letters that Cox took to Burma embodied the same assumptions as the previous letter on the subject of the King's carriage. Sir John Shore wrote to the King of Burma, while the Myowun of Pegu and the First and Second Wungyis were addressed by Edmonstone. The Burmese while continuing to adhere to their style of correspondence, never complained about the British one to Cox; an indication that they were not quite as fussy about matters of protocol as British envoys thought, and were willing that each side should please itself by adhering to its own protocol.

Shore's letter to the King of Burma contained a clear indication that Cox's function would be partly political. Commercial considerations were mentioned, but the King was informed that Cox had been deputed also 'to increase and confirm the harmony and good understanding subsisting with your Majesty'.² This function had in fact been provided for in the Hlutdaw's letter/ to Shore in 1795. The King was requested also to instruct his officers to show to Cox 'the attention and respect that are due to the representative of the Company's Government'.³ 'I have further to request that whatever communication your Majesty may be desirous of making to this Government may be made through that gentleman'.⁴

1. See pg.111

2. BPC, 19 September 1796, Shore to King of Ava, 9 September 1796, No.20.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

Cox arrived at Rangoon harbour on 10 October 1796. He found that the Burmese wanted him to submit to a customs examination as was obligatory for visiting merchants. Joseph Xavier da Cruz, the Akaukwun (or harbour-master), explained to Cox that no insult was intended; that this was merely 'a custom which everyone who frequented the port acquiesced in'.¹ The rule had been recently introduced by da Cruz; this explains why Symes had not been asked to go in the previous year.² Cox was determined not to go there, since this was where visiting sea-captains were taken to be searched. He refused to go unless specific orders to this effect came from the capital. Da Cruz then yielded the point.

Cox's stay at Rangoon seems to have been a pleasant one. Whereas Symes had been initially secluded, he was given liberty to go into the town and countryside. He also received assurances of all possible help from the Akaukwun da Cruz, and the Akunwun Baba Sheen. Since he complains of nothing, it may be assumed that his treatment was completely satisfactory.

1. Cox, op.cit., p.7.

2. BPC, 21 November 1796, Cox to Shore, 19 October 1796, No.106A.

En route to Rangoon, Cox had determined to write to the Hludaw immediately on his arrival at the port, in order to secure clarification of his status and privileges before he assumed office at Rangoon. On arrival there, Cox claimed to have been informed that the Rangoon officials misunderstood the nature of his office. They had supposed from the words of the Hludaw's mandate ('a person come to superintend commercial concerns') that he had come 'to settle amongst them as a merchant'.¹ If this was correct, it would have justified an approach to Ava. Cox was much more than a merchant in the eyes of the Calcutta Council; he had parity with officials below the rank of Myowun and Wungyi. Cox's information however cannot be regarded as certain; it came from not the officials themselves but from an unofficial source, and Cox does not appear to have asked the officials about it. Even if this report was erroneous, there was a case for securing clarification of the Resident's status, since the Calcutta Government intended Cox to enjoy a rather high status in Burma, while the Hludaw's letter had been silent on the matter of his status.

However, the letter he wrote violated his instructions on several points. Cox first asked for permission from the King for him to assume office at Rangoon. He also asked for a decision from the King regarding 'the relative rank he may please to assign me during my residence in his dominions'.² He wanted 'a full defination of his priveleges' also.³ This much was defensible; but Cox had

1. Ibid., see also Symes, op.cit., p.494.

2. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, Appendix A, Cox to Chief Wungyi, 29 October 1796.

3. Ibid.

been instructed to make it clear to the Burmese 'on all occasions' that he did not have the rank of Ambassador; it was surely essential that he ^{do} this when he was raising the question of rank and privileges. He carefully avoided doing it. He stated merely that an Ambassador was someone who dwelt briefly in a country, while a Resident stayed on permanently. No indication was given that a Resident's rank was lower and that he was entitled to fewer privileges. Such a disclosure would have made it impossible for Cox to claim the status and privileges that he was subsequently to claim, and it was for this reason no doubt that it was avoided. A further point should be noted. Cox angled for an invitation to come to the capital, although the Calcutta Council had not wanted this idea to originate from him. '... I should deem myself the more fortunate in being honoured with the royal command to proceed to the Presence, as it will afford me an opportunity of... paying my personal tribute of respect to your wisdom'.¹

The letter appears to contain sufficient evidence for Cox's recall. However, he sent no copy of it to Calcutta at this time; it was submitted only towards the end of 1797, after he had decided to throw up his mission and return to Bengal.

On 18 November, the Rangoon authorities received an order from the Hlutdaw to send up Cox, and on 5 December he left Rangoon.² Things went well until 14 January when he reached the place a few miles north of Pagan where Symes had been received in the previous

1. Ibid.

2. This was the usual Burmese practice to judge from their behaviour in 1794, 1795, 1795, 1809-1810, 1812; Cox's hint cannot have been responsible since his letter had not been translated at the time of his arrival at Court.

year by a deputation from the Court led by a Wundauk. No deputation of this kind awaited Cox. The Hlutdaw probably did not consider Cox's mission to be important enough to entitle him to distinctions of this kind. But Cox's explanation of this was an altogether different and very revealing one:

... the enemies of Great Britain [the French and their supporters] have been busy at Court to inflame the pride of this haughty nation, and to induce them to treat me as the agent of a subordinate and supplicant state, in the hope of preventing an intercourse which they imagine may be fatal to their interests.... I firmly trust, if my health does not fail me, I shall prove more than a match for them; at least, I am prepared for the worst which, if it does not secure victory, may alleviate defeat.¹

There is no evidence whatever in the journal to support such a theory.

On 24 January 1797, Cox reached Amarapura. Cox was told that he could not disembark till a royal order had been issued to this effect. The Myowun of Pegu, who bore responsibility for Cox, could not broach the matter immediately with the King, because the latter was absorbed in religious ceremonies connected with the consecration of the unfinished Mingun Pagoda, but would do so as soon as suitable a/opportunity arose. It is understandable that the Myowun should have been unwilling to introduce alien secular matters when the King was

1. Cox, op.cit., pp.45-46.

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involved in a religious ceremony. However, Cox on hearing on 24 January of the difficulties that existed with regard to disembarking, had placed a wrong interpretation on them:

This is altogether an intended slight, meant to impress the grosser multitudes with ideas of the superiority of their own government over all others; and makes part of a premediated plan to insult, which will require all my address and patience to baffle and overcome. However arduous the task, I trust I shall yet awaken them from their dream, and am fully prepared for the contest.¹

He was annoyed also at the refusal of the Burmese to allow his party freedom of movement. He sent off a strongly-worded letter of complaint to the Myowun on 27 January, demanding that the Burmese officials in his party be deprived of all authority over him and a person of rank be sent to escort him to the capital; if these conditions were not met the Myowun was to secure permission for him to return to Bengal.²

On 28 January the royal order to proceed to Mingun was brought to Cox; but he refused to budge until the Myowun had assented to these proposals. This posed a grave problem for the Burmese: for royal orders could not be obeyed on conditions. 'They employed all their rhetoric to move or intimidate me, saying it was his Majesty's order, and that their heads would be answerable for any demur in obeying it, but I remained inflexible....'³ On the same day, the Myowun, who received the letter of 27 January, sent word to the bearers of the letter to leave Cox alone and to Cox, apologising for all that he complained about, giving him ^{and his servants} permission to go into the city or anywhere else he pleased and placing his warboat at his disposal for this

1. Ibid., p.51.

2. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, No.3, Appendix C.

3. Cox, op.cit., p.58.

purpose. Cox claims that the Myowun promised also to meet him half-way as he proceeded to Mingun. The Burmese, however, were to deny later that such a promise was given.

Cox decided to leave the next day (30 January) for Mingun, and to hold the Myowun to the alleged promise to meet him half-way. The Myowun could not, of course, have known when it was that Cox intended to proceed to Mingun. It is scarcely surprising therefore, that he should have had an engagement at Court on 30 January. (This is on the assumption that he had given such a promise). Typically, Cox saw in this 'a design if possible to evade meeting me'.¹ He refused to go any further, in spite of receiving a written appeal from the Myowun. On 31 January, the Myowun again pleaded, as an excuse for not meeting Cox, an engagement with the Ein-gyi Paya (the Burmese messengers denying on this occasion that a promise to meet Cox half-way had been made) and on 1 February, a meeting with the King. Again Cox could see only 'evasion' in this.² He decided however to go up to Mingun anyway, but to refuse to leave his boat till the Myowun paid him a visit. On 1 February Cox arrived at Mingun. On the same night, the Myowun came up to his boat, but Cox would not go ashore to meet him at so late an hour; so the two men conversed with each other while in their boats. The Myowun promised to visit Cox the following morning. When the time came, he again sent an excuse; but he came later on in the day when Cox refused to go ashore otherwise. The meeting, which was held ashore, went off well, Cox handing over the Calcutta Government's letters to the Myowun on this occasion. On 3 February, Cox finally transferred to land with his retinue.

1. Ibid., p.61.

2. Ibid., p.62.

Cox's reactions after his departure from Rangoon showed clearly that he was a wrong choice as envoy. He was capable of imagining conspiracies against him where there were none (as in the matter of the reception north of Pagan), of suspecting deliberate slights on very inadequate evidence (as on the occasion of disembarking) and of threatening to call off the mission over very trivial issues and of displaying incredible stubbornness.

After disembarking Cox threatened to disobey a second royal order. The Yewun of Rangoon had been asked by the Myowun of Pegu to assume responsibility for Cox. On 6 February, he informed Cox that the King had ordered his reception to be held on 8 February. But Cox refused to attend it unless all details of the audience and of his subsequent meetings with the Wungyis were settled beforehand. Cox wrote on 6 February:

I told him I should be very sorry to disappoint His Majesty's expectations, but that it was absolutely necessary I should be previously acquainted with every form and ceremony required of me as some mistakes had occurred on a previous occasion [Symes' embassy] which were unpleasant and improper....¹

Cox, had, in fact, been warned against attempting to secure any relaxation in ceremonial as practised towards Symes. Cox secured from the Burmese a promise that the King and royal family would be present at the audience. (The King had been absent at the first audience accorded to Symes.) With regard to his interviews with the Wungyis he was told that the King would have to decide the mode of these after the audience.

1. Ibid., p.74.

Cox appears to have been well-received. Cox himself considered that his reception was gracious. The King appeared as promised and addressed friendly personal remarks to Cox through an interpreter - which he had not done at Symes' second audience in 1795. On the other hand, at Cox's audience, the King did not wear the heavy gold ornaments he had worn at the audience of 1795. Also, the courtesy questions put to Symes at his first audience were omitted. It would not be safe, therefore, to conclude that Cox's audience was of a higher grade than those accorded to Symes. Their failure to receive him north of Prome suggests that he had a lower status in their opinion.

After the audience, the King sent for Rowland, Cox's private interpreter, and Moncourtuse, the Armenian interpreter attached to Cox's retinue in Burma, that 'they might hear from himself his sentiments, so that I might not suppose them mere complimentary reports from his courtiers'.¹ He went on to describe Cox as 'a prudent, sensible man', on account apparently of the various stipulations he had made before agreeing to Burmese programmes.² On this occasion, the King took possession of the carriage which he had asked the British, through Symes, to have built for him.

It seems clear that at this stage of the mission, the King was well-disposed to the British. The reason for this seems to be clear also. It was the same as that which had induced the British to

1. Ibid., p.94.

2. Ibid., p.94.

cultivate relations with Burma in the first place: the recognition that the two powers were of political and economic importance to one another.

After the audience, the King gave orders for Cox to be obeyed as Resident at Rangoon. Cox mentions this fact in a very casual manner, although it was of central importance to his mission as originally conceived.¹ On February 21, this news was confirmed by the Yewun but Cox passes over it without comment.² On 15 March the Myowun informed Cox that his credentials were ready for him at the Hlutdaw.

In view of the fact that his real function was that of Resident at Rangoon, Cox should have returned to Rangoon as soon as this information from the Myowun was received. Instead he stayed on at Amarapura till mid-October, in an attempt to push through a host of unauthorised proposals. It is proposed to examine his proposals here and the reasons why the Burmese rejected them. The first memorial he submitted represented an attempt to define his status in relation to the Wungyis.³ Symes in 1795 had agreed to differ with the Wungyis on the question of his status with regard to them; but Cox, whose rank was lower than that of Symes, was determined to secure equality of status. Symes had decided not to visit them at their homes, because they would not return his visit and had sent his deputy, Ensign Wood, to them instead. But Cox insisted - in direct violation of his instructions of 12 September - on an exchange of visits and on his own elaborate conditions, all of which were intended to secure equality.

1. Ibid., p.100.

2. Ibid., p.114.

3. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, No.3, Appendix D.

4. Symes, op. cit., pp. 385 - 386

The first meeting, he stipulated, was to be held not at the Hlutdaw but at a neutral place, and the Wungyis were to come unattended by junior officials. Cox would then visit them at their homes, after which they would return his visits (which they had absolutely refused to do during Symes' mission). Cox would then go to the Hlutdaw, where he would sit next to the Wungyis, and on the same level as them (Symes, in 1795, had sat without any demur at a lower level). All subsequent communications of Cox to the Wungyis would have to be answered by them, not by junior officials.

As might be expected, these proposals were strongly resisted by the Wungyis, because they were unprecedented breaches of custom and involved giving a foreign agent equality with themselves. However, the King, for reasons that will be discussed later, ordered that Cox's demands concerning the preliminary meetings be conceded. However, Cox was to meet the Chief Wungyi and not all four Wungyis.¹ However, after this, the King did not exert his influence any more; and the Wungyis refused to concede Cox's further conditions with regard to his meeting with them at the Hlutdaw itself. On 4 July, a Wungyi remarked that '... I [Cox] claimed a seat in the Lotto, next to the whoongees, which was more than was allowed to the first prince of the blood';² and on 10 September, he was told by the Myowun of Pegu that the Hlutdaw 'was a public court for the great officers of state, and that no respect for persons would be shown

1. Cox, op.cit., p.147 et seq.

2. Ibid., pp.284-285.

there; and that it was absolutely necessary for me [Cox] to go as a private person; he had done so, and every other officer in the Burhman dominions'.¹

Cox forwarded three further memorials to the Hlutdaw after the royal audience had taken place. One of these was concerned with diplomatic privileges.² Cox wanted, among other things, to be exempted from Burmese jurisdiction [all complaints against him were to go to Calcutta]; to be allowed to import articles for his personal use free of duty; to be the sole channel of communication with the Governor-General-in-Council; to be given a place at Court 'suitable to the high rank and power of the Government he represented' and to be allowed free access to the King and the members of the royal family.³ Some of these objectives seem to be defensible. The proposal that Cox should be the sole medium of communication with Bengal was in Shore's letter to the King. However, one at least of these proposals would have been totally unacceptable to the Burmese. No individual could have free access to the semi-divine king of Burma (nor for that matter could an ambassador in an European capital). Cox also wanted permission to build, as he chose, a brick or wooden house for himself at Rangoon. In Burma, it was against the law for an individual to build a house of brick. Houses were built of wood, with the Wungyis, usually Myowuns and some others using teak and the rest of the population/only bamboo.⁴ It is clear living in a brick house would be one means of

1. Ibid., pp.353-354.

2. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Sir John Shore, No.3, Appendix I (i).

3. Ibid.

4. Sangermano, A Description of the Burmese Empire, New York, 1969, p.160.

enhancing the Resident's prestige. Then, Cox wanted to build a house of more than one storey if he chose. This again could have been interpreted as a mark of very high status, for in Burma, all houses were of one storey, it being considered very offensive for an individual to stand above the head of another.¹ Then Cox wanted to decorate ('paint and ornament') his house 'in the European manner.'² This again would have been contrary to local custom if the use of gilt, lacquer or white colour was involved. 'Gilding is forbidden to all subjects of the Birman empire, and liberty even to lacker, and paint the pillars of their houses is granted to very few.'³ Also the use of white colour was reserved to members of the royal family only.⁴

The second memorial concerned commercial matters.⁵ Cox's instructions had envisaged a low profile role for him in his capacity as commercial agent. By pressing for major reforms in Burmese economic arrangements in his memorial, he violated his instructions. However, some of his proposals make the student aware of defects in the economic system of Burma which Symes left unmentioned, either because they were part of custom and did not involve illegality, or because he was not as acute or interested an observer of economic matters as Cox.

1. Ibid., p.160.

2. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, No.3, Appendix I (i).

3. Symes, M., An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, London, 1800, p.186.

4. Sangermano, op.cit., pp.243-244.

5. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, No.3, Appendix I (2), pp.726-752.

6. See p. ...

Firstly, Cox recommended that two mints be set up, one at Rangoon and one at Amarapura, and that a standard currency be issued. (Cox had brought coining machinery with him, so that these mints could have been set up immediately). Cox objected to the use of silver bullion. The percentage of silver tended to vary. 'In the payment of 100 ticals, there shall not be two pieces of silver of the same degree of fineness'.¹ The result was that merchants^{were} often cheated, since it was impossible to ascertain the degree of fineness by inspection.

Secondly, he recommended that duties be collected henceforth in specie, not in kind. This would provide the King with 'a more certain and useful revenue' and would also be more convenient for the merchants.² The payments were to be made in silver bullion until the coins were introduced. He suggested that certain fees levied at Rangoon ('Cannee Casceer'), which were currently the same for vessels of all sizes, should be altered to take into account the size of the vessel. The current practice tended to prevent all small vessels from frequenting His Majesty's ports to the great discouragement of Trade and diminishment of His Majesty's Revenues'.³ Cox devised a table showing different rates for three different sizes of vessels. This seems to have been^a sensible proposal, likely to have been of benefit to both sides.

Thirdly, Cox recommended that the high import duties at Rangoon, amounting to over 12½%, be reduced. Burmese ships, he

1. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, No.3, Appendix I (2).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., See Appendix C for these fees.

pointed out, paid only light duties at Calcutta. He recommended import duties of 7½% in all, with the export duties remaining at 5%.

Cox's fourth suggestion was that English merchants were to have liberty to sell their goods and buy others wherever they wished without molestation. This was in response to the institution of a monopoly of all trade at Rangoon which will be examined later.

The fifth suggestion was that the Rangoon Government should give English merchants assistance in recovering debts: the lawyer who pleaded for them was to receive 5% on the amount recovered, the translator 2% and the Court 10%. The lawyer may well have been destined to be Cox himself. The sixth suggestion was that Burmese law was to apply in suits by Burmese against the British; the seventh that the freight in ships should not be liable for debts contracted by these ships when undergoing repairs; this was no doubt because the freight did not belong to the owners of the vessels. Eighth, Burmese Courts were not to try British commanders or subjects for offences committed on the high seas; they were to be surrendered to the Resident, who would send them to Calcutta for trial. Ninth, the property of British subjects who died intestate was to be delivered to the British Resident, after the claims of Burmese subjects had been deducted. Tenth, disputes between English and Burmese subjects were to be settled with the consent of both parties. Some other proposals of a minor nature followed.

An important commercial issue which cropped up during Cox's mission and formed the subject of a further memorial concerned the monopoly exercised at Rangoon by one Boodhim, a Muslim merchant from Southern India. Details concerning this monopoly were given in a letter of complaint to Cox from the British merchants at Rangoon,

dated 18 March 1797.

Bhoodhim Company compels native merchants to sell goods to him alone, at a reduction of 10% but upon the market price by which means he becomes the monopolizer of all the country productions and as we are prevented from purchasing from anyone but him, he therefore has the power to fix whatever price he chooses upon every kind of goods we want for exportation. The article of sticklac was the first upon which he began to exercise this authority, and which, after the same had been purchased by one of us, and the undersigned, he forcibly compelled the owner to deliver up to him at the rate of 35% viss ticals. He now demands 45% viss from those who have occasion to export the articles which is an advance of nearly 30%. As no shipping has arrived here since the Bhoodhim Company came down, he has not yet had an opportunity to do the same with our goods... but we are credibly informed that his authority extends to the buying up the cargoes of every vessel that arrives at an arbitrary valuation of his own.¹

After Cox had gone to the capital, he received a letter from a merchant named J.B. Reeves, alleging that on his arrival at Rangoon, he had had to pay a 10% fee to Bhoodhim 'on all sales and purchases'.² This measure was being strictly enforced on everyone and, so Reeves alleged, had put a stop to all trade. In fact, the trade appears to have continued, but on a reduced scale. According to a testimonial obtained by Cox early in 1798, only 27 ships put in at Rangoon in 1797, instead of the usual 60 to 80. Also, the decline in trade was/ apparently also due to other causes/ such as competition from Burmese boatmen and the activities of French privateers.

It seems certain that the monopoly involved a repudiation of a concession made to Symes only a few months earlier. The Hlutdaw

1. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, No.3, Appendix V. A viss was a weight used in southern India and Burma, equivalent in southern India to 3 lb. 2 ounces, and in Burma to 3 lb. 5 1/3.

2. Ibid.

had commanded that British merchants should not be '... impeded, or molested, or prevented in their barter, bargain or purchase' anywhere in the country.¹ (This arrangement was subject to prior approval from the Myowun in each individual case). The Court may not have been bound by the concessions in the sense that a western government would be bound by a treaty; nevertheless, its action seems open to criticism on at least two other grounds: the concession had been withdrawn too quickly, and it had been withdrawn without prior notification. Cox, in fact, reported that the King was highly embarrassed at his arrival in Burma late in 1796, soon after the monopoly had been instituted.

According to Cox, in a letter written from Rangoon in November 1797, Bhoodhim loaded a ship with property and fled to Penang. After this, the merchants appear to have been able to trade without unusual restrictions of any kind. The exact date of Bhoodhim's departure is unknown.

Cox discovered also that the concessions negotiated by Symes had been violated in another respect; although it must be said, in fairness to the latter that he had not expected the concession concerned to be immediately enforceable. It seems that Burmese officials in the interior had continued to levy unauthorized dues on goods brought up the Irrawaddy. Certain representatives of a Parsee merchant from Bombay, who had a business at Rangoon, complained to Cox that they had had to pay 'upwards of 400 ticals flowered silver on each boat, exclusive of the delays which have protracted their

1. Symes, An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, p.494.

voyage up to three months'.¹ Cox obtained a detailed description of the violation from one J.B. Reeves, who was another victim.

'Almost at every chokey [customs-post]', Reeves wrote, 'I was compelled to give presents'.² At one place he was detained a whole day and his interpreter confined until he paid the sum demanded.

Cox made a further proposal, also unauthorized, for the institution of a monopoly in the trade of betel-nut, salt and blat-chong, to be managed by the Myowun of Pegu and himself. He promised that the scheme would yield the King and the royal family a revenue of over three million ticals over a period of three years. However, Cox and the Myowun were each to receive^{as} 'an indemnification for our risks and trouble', a reward of 4,000 ticals in the first year, 8,000 in the second and 11,000 in the third.³ The proposal violated the Calcutta Government's ban on commercial activity. He also wrote a private letter to the King (which, like his memorials, had to be given in the first place to the Hlutdaw), requesting him to inform the Bengal Government that it was at his insistence that Cox had undertaken to manage the monopoly. Cox reported later that the proposal was received initially with great interest, as it might well have been, considering that the annual revenue of the Court was very small, but that it was dropped when the King developed a suspicion that his profits would be larger than the modest figure submitted by himself. When a Wungyi observed that the sum promised by Cox was

1. Cox, *op.cit.*, p.378. The Parsee merchant would have been entitled to Cox's assistance, since he was from a British territory.

2. *BPC*, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, No.3, Appendix W, letter by Reeves, 25 July 1797, p.818.

3. *BPC*, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, No.3, Appendix I (4).

immense, the King, Cox was informed, had replied 'but his profits must be immense also'.¹

It turned out that the King's suspicions were justified. In his subsequent letter to the Governor-General-in-Council, Cox reported that the monopoly would have yielded a further two to three hundred thousand ticals, which he had not included in his tables. He maintained - unconvincingly - that he meant to split this sum with the Myowun, and to use his share for such purposes as maintaining the residency, and buying presents for the King. He also spoke vaguely of creating 'a body of interest' favourable to the British by means of this monopoly.²

It was not in Cox's interest, of course, to inform the Calcutta Government of this extra three lakhs, nor of his letter to the King requesting the latter to inform the British Government that Cox had undertaken the management of the monopoly at his request. Cox's failure to see this, like so many of his other actions, raised doubts about his judgement.

Even Bayfield, who is usually unwilling to criticise Cox, concedes that the latter went too far in making this proposal. He called the proposal 'extraordinary', and added that he was informed no doubt when he was deputy to Burney, the British resident in Burma in the 1830s that 'some of the old Burmese Courtiers talk of it as a remarkable circumstance in Cox's mission....'³

1. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, No.5.

2. Ibid.

3. Bayfield, op.cit., p.15.

The third memorial that Cox submitted was of a political nature.¹ He had received instructions to induce the Burmese 'by address' to close their ports to French warships and privateers.² On arriving in Burma, he had found that French warships had used Burmese ports to refit and resupply. A squadron of six frigates together with a prize-ship had put in at Mergui. This was the squadron of Admiral Sercey, which had fought a drawn battle with British ships in the Straits of Malacca. Cox's informants (two Dutchmen and a Muslim from Mergui) reported that two of the frigates had been dismantled and a third had lost its rudder. The French had also suffered very heavy casualties. They left Mergui in October after repairing their vessels and after an unsuccessful cruise in the Bay of Bengal had proceeded to Batavia. Subsequently, a French privateer which had seized a British ship out of the Coringa roads (off the Orissa coast) had put in at Mergui to refit. Then, at Bassein, a privateer captain had handed over his vessel, a former English ship, to two Englishmen resident there and left in another vessel supplied by the latter.³

Another incident, of which Cox appears to have been unaware, took place off Arakan early in 1797. According to an intelligence report received at Calcutta, two French warships (described by the eye-witness as frigates of 26 to 32 guns) were sighted off the coast

1. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, No.3, Appendix I (3).

2. See pp. 69-70.

3. BPC, 21 November 1796, Cox to Shore, 19 October 1796, No.106A and 26 November 1796, Cox to Shore, 1 November 1796, No.23; Cox, op.cit., p.216. Also, Parkinson, C.N., War in the Eastern Seas, London, 1954, pp.101-105.

of the Arakanese coastal island of Cheduba on 2 February 1797.

They sent boats to Cheduba to secure provisions but apparently made no attempt to contact the officials there. The Myowun of Arakan sent out boats to invite the warships to Arakan, but no contact could be made. The ships appeared to have withdrawn after collecting provisions.¹ The reason for such secrecy was, of course, the fear that the British in nearby Bengal would hear of their arrival. It was partly for this reason no doubt that the other vessels had preferred to put in at places such as Mergui and Bassein, rather than Rangoon.²

The French had clearly found Burmese facilities of some value. In particular, Sercey's squadron, a serious threat to the British, had been enabled to make good damage which would otherwise have clearly crippled some of its ships.

The French privateer campaign was taking a heavy toll of British shipping. The commerce of Bengal was one of their favourite targets and it was natural that Anglo-Burmese trade should suffer as a result. Statistics are available for the year 1797; these show that the number of ships calling at Rangoon dropped from between sixty to

1. Bengal Secret Consultations, 6 March 1797, Collector, Chittagong to Barlow, Political Secretary, 14 February 1797, No.8.

2. Cox enumerated the advantages of Mergui to French ships: 'Mergui seems to be a common rendezvous to the French cruizers, the port is commodious, materials for repairs easily procurable, and it is remote from observation'. BPC, 21 November 1796, Cox to Shore, 19 October 1796, No.106A.

eighty annually to only twenty-seven.¹ (This decline in trade was partly due, however, to other factors also, such as competition from Burmese boatmen who traded to the Chittagong district, and the granting of a monopoly in the trade at Rangoon to a Muslim merchant from southern India). However, the privateers would have been partly responsible. If Burmese ports were closed to privateers, the latter's operations would be impeded to some extent, for they would lose the right to refit and resupply at Burmese ports, and sell their prizes there.

While at the capital, Cox attempted to secure the closure of their ports to the French. This had been one of the objects of the mission, but the method he employed involved a violation of his instructions; he petitioned the King on the subject. This was exactly the kind of direct straightforward approach he had been cautioned against adopting. Also, he included in his memorial several proposals he had no authority to make.

In his memorial Cox proposed that the King 'should not permit the enemies of the English nation to take shelter within his dominions, or refresh their crews and repair the damage of their vessels at his ports - much less permit them to sell their prizes as had lately been done by the French privateers.² He proposed that if French vessels came, they should be given forty-eight hours to leave; in the meantime, they were not to be supplied with either provisions

1. BPC, 1 October 1799, Memorial of Rangoon merchants to Governor-General-in-Council, No.8; also BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, No.3, Appendix W.

2. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, No.3, Appendix I (3).

or weapons. Cox pointed out also that the French privateers who had seized two British ships off the Rangoon river had caused alarm and diminution of trade and revenue at Rangoon and that it would be in the King's own interest to exclude the French from his ports. By doing this, he would also give 'a most decisive proof of His desire to unite the interests of the two nations by the firmest ties....'¹ Cox promised - without authority again - that if this was done, the English would respond with further (unspecified) concessions. Cox promised also to issue passports and recommendations to any person the King wished to send to Ceylon or 'to any other part of the British domains'.² He claimed that Shore had given him permission to do this. In fact, Cox had been given authority only to issue such documents to the Captains of the British ships conveying the envoy, not to the envoy himself. Cox even offered to discuss with the Hlutdaw 'the subject of terms of closer alliance between the Burmah and English nations.... I shall with pleasure discuss and arrange the terms and shall exert all my influence to procure the Ratification of them from the Hon'ble the Governor-General-in-Council'.³ This was an attempt to transform the very nature of Anglo-Burmese relations and represents a high point in Cox's disregard of his instructions.

An interesting problem arose when it came to translating Cox's memorials. Cox was annoyed to discover that the memorials had been described in their translations as petitions and he himself

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. See also Cox, op.cit., p.285.

referred to as 'praw kuendo' /paya gyundaw: slave or subject/.¹

The reason for this was that an address to the King had to be presented in a form prescribed by custom. Moncourtuse, the translator, told Cox that there was no other way of translating it without giving offence.²

Cox's memorials were all addressed to the King not the Hlatdaw. In line with Burmese custom, however, they had to be submitted in the first place to the Hlutdaw, which had to decide whether to transmit them to the King and whether it wished to make recommendations of its own.

Cox spent seven months at Amarapura, from March to October 1797, trying to push these proposals through. He was repeatedly advised to go to Rangoon and take up his post there, as sanctioned by the King. But Cox would not leave until all the ^{proposals} were accepted. These, however, were so numerous and in some cases so extravagant that the Burmese very understandably refused to concede

1. Cox, op.cit., p.273.

2. Ibid., p.273. Cox also sought for an interview on his own terms - with the Ein-gyi Paya. In this connection, the incident described on pp.175-177 of his journal must have been extraordinarily offensive to the Burmese. Cox refused to go to an audience given by the Ein-gyi Paya on the day of the audience itself, after all arrangements had been made.

them.¹ Had Cox gone for the time being to Rangoon some of the proposals might have gained acceptance eventually, perhaps by the Myowun influencing the King. The latter, after all, had intervened once on Cox's behalf. Even the Wungyis did not rule out the granting of concessions at a later date.² However, it was not possible for the Burmese to accede to all the proposals at once. That would have been too extravagant a concession.

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1. On 19 March, the Yewun of Rangoon reported that the King had ordered that all Cox's demands with regard to his interviews with the Wungyis be complied with. (These orders applied only to the initial interviews with them, not the meeting at the Hlutdaw itself). He also apologised for the reception of a French ship at Bassein, promised that it would never happen again and stated that he had ordered that Frenchmen should be expelled from the country. At this stage, Cox had submitted his memorial concerning his relations with the Wungyis and had also apparently complained of the reception of the French though no complaint is mentioned in the journal at this time. The King, however, also told the Yewun that he hoped to obtain with the Governor-General's help, a tooth of the Buddha in the possession of the King of Kandy in Ceylon. This would have been a very important matter for a Buddhist monarch, and would have justified the concessions made by the King. The Chief Wungyi raised the matter of the tooth at his subsequent meeting with Cox. After this, however, the King seemed no longer to desire the tooth; no further reference to it was made. Also, he did not order further concessions to Cox. The orders respecting the French (if there really were orders to that effect and Cox was not misinformed) were apparently not carried out; if they were, there would have been evidence of it. The reasons for this were not clear.

The King's initial concessions may simply have been due to a desire to maintain good relations with the British. Had the King continued to desire the Buddha's tooth, some major concessions might have been made to Cox, in order to obtain the tooth. At one stage, the Chief Wungyi told Cox that the concessions would all be granted if the King agreed that there should be a 'friendship and mutual support' between the two countries. (*Ibid.*, p.285). But apparently, this proposal - which Cox put forward without any kind of sanction from Calcutta - was not sufficient. See *ibid.*, p.302.

2. The memorials were rejected by the Hlutdaw on 14 July 1797; but some hope was held out of concessions at a later date.

As week after week passed without any sign of success, Cox lost patience and drew up a petition addressed to the King, in which he complained in strong language of the Hlutdaw's obstruction. Like the other memorials, it had to be submitted in the first place to the Hlutdaw. The latter, however, refused to accept it, let alone transmit it to the King.¹ In the meantime, the Burmese had begun to make demands of their own. It was during Cox's visit that they first advanced their claim to the eastern parts of Bengal, then in the possession of the East India Company. The basis of the claim was that the two districts had once paid tribute to Arakan, whose rights had been inherited by the Burmese conquerors of that country. Cox heard that it was the Arakan Akaukwun, who had brought the yearly tribute from the province, who first interested the King in these districts. He may also have acquainted him with the historical basis of the claim. The Burmese officials were to offer to prove the claim from Arakanese records, with which this official may have been familiar. On 14 July a messenger sent by Cox to press his demands was told by the Burmese that '... Chittagong, Luckipore, Dacca and the whole of the Casim Bazar island, formerly made part of the ancient dominions of Arrakan; that the remains of chokeys [posts] and pagodas were still to be seen near Dacca; and they would further prove it from the Arakan records. [The Burmese] hinted that his Majesty would claim the restitution of those countries....'² On a

1. Ibid., pp.297-299.

2. Ibid., p.300.

later occasion, the Burmese, '... again brought forward his Majesty's claim on the ancient territory of Arrakan, and reduced it to the form of a demand of half of the revenues of Dacca'.¹ Subsequently, the demand was reduced still further to one-tenth of the revenue. However, the issue was not pressed by the Burmese at this stage. The fact that they made a different demand on each of the three occasions suggests they had not even formulated a definite policy on this matter.

The Burmese brought up a further matter. They were finding it difficult to accept the notion of an official who owed allegiance to another government exercising authority in their King's domains, as Cox would have done if he took up the post at Rangoon. This aspect of the matter had not struck them, apparently, when they gave permission to Sir John Shore to send an agent to Rangoon. They insisted now that Cox accept a 'commission' from the King, and take an oath of allegiance to him.² In other words, Cox was to be made a Burmese official also. Cox believed that he had been placed in a quandary by this proposal. '... I knew of no precedent in point or the extent to which they might apply it, or how to reconcile it with my allegiance to my own sovereign, and duty to my employers'.³

Cox remained at Amarapura till mid-October 1797. A number of attempts were made at mediation - by the Ein-gyi Paya Heir

1. Ibid., p.302.

2. Ibid., pp.359-360.

3. Ibid., p.360.

Apparent⁷, the Myowun of Pegu and by the Queen-mother ⁷Alaunpaya's sister⁷, but they were unsuccessful. The advice of the Myowun of Pegu, as of everyone else, was that he should take the oath, receive the commission, and then go to Rangoon. But Cox decided instead to return to Bengal and declared his intention of doing so.¹ On 17 October 1797, he left Mingun on the journey downriver. His conduct had stirred up great ill-feeling and suspicion towards the British. What was especially unfortunate from the British point of view was that the King's earlier goodwill had been impaired and his attitude had become one of suspicion and dislike. It is important to realize that the Burmese could not have known that Cox's proceedings were all unauthorized. There seems to have been a widespread suspicion, which the King shared, that the Calcutta government had had some sinister motive in deputing the embassy. Cox's interpreter learned from the queen-mother that '... the enemies of the English had poisoned his mind with reports to our prejudice, and induced him to believe we wanted to take his country from him....'² In fact, Cox's actions alone would have been sufficient to produce such an attitude.

1. Ibid., p.363.

2. Ibid., pp.401-402. The queen-mother disclosed that she had been informed that Cox sought the retrocession of the island of Negrais, ceded to the British by Alaunpaya. Ibid., pp.399-400. This suggests that unfounded rumours about British intentions were in circulation. Cox heard also that 'alarming reports were coming ⁷to the King⁷ from many quarters about British intentions.' The Muslim Akaukwun from Arakan was one of those responsible for spreading these rumours. Ibid., p.290.

Cox's stay in Burma entered its final phase upon his arrival at Rangoon. On the evening of 6 November, the Myowun of Pegu arrived in Rangoon with his retinue. Cox made a number of attempts to communicate with him, which were all rebuffed. On 9 November, a royal order was brought down to Rangoon and read out at the town hall. It was to the effect that 'when the Mew Whoon went to Amarapurah, I [Cox] was to accompany him and when he returned I was to return with him.'¹ The intention of this order [Cox stated] was to announce that I was forbidden to leave the country."² This appears to have been an error. The correct meaning of the order appears to have been the literal one. The Myowun, while at the capital, had urged Cox to return with him to Rangoon, and not to go there alone. The latter, it seems, would have been given offence, though it is not clear why. Subsequently, Cox was to claim that the Court had issued an explicit order to the Myowun to prevent him leaving the country which the Myowun had thought it best not to announce publicly. If it was not announced publicly one wonders how Cox could have known of it, and how reliable his information was.

1. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, No.2, Cox's entry for 23 December 1797.

2. Ibid.

It is certain, that at Rangoon, there were fears of a British attack and that they persisted until March 1797. (The evidence presented by Cox is detailed and convincing). 'The expectations of the natives', Cox reported, 'are wrought up to such a pitch that I am apprehensive it will betray them into some fatal excesses'.¹ A number of prophecies were in circulation, including one that 'the Country was to be conquered by a nation wearing hats, whose flag was red, white and blue.'² On 29 November, a ship, an Indiaman, arrived from China and came up to the harbour without a pilot. This caused great consternation; soldiers were called up, and war-boats reconnoitred the vessel. In the end, when she was discovered to be only a merchantman, the tension subsided, but the vessel was forbidden to fire salutes.³

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

On 27 November 1797, Cox sent to the Bengal Government extracts from his diary up till that date, together with a long justification of his proceedings and reports on political, social and economic conditions in Burma. The reports are the fruits of much labour, and together with certain other reports submitted in the following year, are an important contribution to present-day knowledge of contemporary Burma.¹ Cox's defence of his actions, by contrast, is a worthless document filled with explanations so wild and unconvincing as to raise doubts about his judgement.

What is remarkable is that Cox's judgement deserted him in one sphere: the assessment of human situations. In his discussions of economic and other matters, he showed quite exceptional competence during his stay.

Cox considered that his position at Rangoon was precarious. It seemed to him that he would not be allowed to leave Burma, and he asked for a warship to be sent to evacuate him. Cox also recommended general hostilities with Burma. The British, he wrote, should deal with the Burmese henceforth 'sword in hand'.² The country should be invaded and conquered, for '... in the hands of an enlightened government [it] would even rival Bengal over which it has already many advantages especially for the purposes of a maritime nation'. Cox seemed to be thinking of Burma's teak supply and her five good ports; and perhaps also of land-revenue, for he had been impressed by the prosperity of the peasantry, especially in Upper Burma.

1. Cox's informants appear to have included Rogers, an Englishman resident in Burma, and Vincentius Sangermano, an Italian missionary in Rangoon.

2. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 27 November 1797, No.5.

Shore was away at this time, and Peter Speke, the Vice-President, was head of government at Calcutta. The response of Speke and his Council was very different from what Cox had recommended. Their main concern, it is clear, was to get him safely out of Rangoon, and at the same time to preserve good relations and trade with Burma. Letters were drawn up, addressed to the King, the First and Second Wungyis, the Myowun of Pegu and Cox. In accordance with Symes' suggestion, the letter to the King came from the Vice-President and the others from junior officials. The contents of the letters to the King and the Wungyis ^{and Myowun} were roughly similar, and we need examine only the one to the King. The British, the King was informed, had learnt 'with concern' that Cox had returned to Rangoon without obtaining an audience of leave with him and that the Rangoon officials had discontinued their former attentions and civilities.¹ They could attribute this changed treatment only 'to some dissatisfaction entertained by Your Majesty at his conduct'.² Cox's actions were not disavowed. They were confident, Speke wrote, that Cox had been 'activated by a zealous desire to promote the objects of his deputation'.³ Nevertheless, he had been recalled. It was hoped that the King would give the necessary orders to facilitate his departure, and that he would be treated well until he left. Another person would be deputed in Cox's place if the King wished it. It should be noted that no apology was offered for Cox's conduct, nor even any clear indication given that he had violated his instructions. In the letter to the Myowun of

1. BPC, 2 March 1798, Speke to King of Ava, 20 February 1798, No.9.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Pegu, it was expressly stated that Cox's treatment must have been due to 'some misunderstanding with regard to his conduct'.¹ A letter was sent to Cox also, making the point that his further residence at Rangoon would be useless and ordering him to return at the earliest opportunity. If he thought that he would not be allowed to leave, he was to let the Calcutta Government know immediately and they would then decide what to do. For the sake of trade and future relations with Burma, he was to leave without affording 'any ground of complaint' thereby provoking the Burmese into insulting him, or exciting suspicion that his departure would be followed by a British attack.²

The Bengal Government continued to receive letters from Cox after it had taken the decision to recall him. The Rangoon authorities, Cox reported in a letter dated 31 December, had made several attempts at accommodation, but these he deemed to be 'totally devoid of sincerity'.³ He still waited for a frigate to be sent to Rangoon to evacuate him; otherwise, he did not think the Burmese would allow him to leave. He claimed that on 12 December a gilt boat had come from the capital, with explicit orders this time to prevent him leaving the country, which the Myowun had thought it best not to announce publicly. The regulation that ships should not come up without pilots was being enforced strictly. On 11 December, a ship called the Peggy under a Captain Bacon, had, like the Indiaman, ignored the regulation - something, according to Cox, which sometimes happened at normal times without exciting alarm. She was boarded by a peon.

1. Ibid., Persian Translator to Myowun of Pegu,

No.11.

2. Ibid., Secretary Barlow to Cox, 13 February, 1798, No.12.

3. BPC, 13 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 31 December 1798, No.91.

at the post at the river mouth, who demanded (in Burmese) that the Captain observe the regulation. The Captain could not understand him and continued sailing; he was then threatened by the peon with a rope's end. However, the latter was secured by the crew. Later, when a translator came on board, and explained the situation, the ship had anchored 'all [sail?] standing'.¹

Cox's next letter was dated 5 January 1798.² A ship had arrived from Bengal with some articles for him. These were searched on the orders of the Rangoon Akaukwun, probably with a view to examining his correspondence. Wishing to safeguard his diplomatic immunity, Cox reshipped the package and called a meeting of the British traders at Rangoon. They agreed to support him by suspending trade till the ordered were rescinded. Cox's translator took a letter of complaint to the Myowun 'attended by the whole of the (English) Gentlemen'.³ The Myowun sent a written reply which Cox deemed to be unsatisfactory. A further exchange of letters followed which failed to satisfy Cox. He then issued a threat. The King was to be informed that unless the demands in his memorials were all met, he would leave the country. He would allow one month for an answer before leaving. Cox seemed to think that it was this threat which induced the Myowun to make the concessions which followed. The latter promised to reprimand the Akaukwun. If Cox wrote a 'short letter' to the King,

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., Cox to Shore, 5 January, No.93.

3. Ibid.

the Myowun would support it. He agreed also to fix a date for exchanging visits with the Resident.¹

The real reason for the Myowun's change of policy was that he had become interested in obtaining arms from the British. (It is not known whether this idea occurred first to him or to the Court). Cox mentions this circumstance, but without connecting it with the official's altered disposition. The Myowun asked Cox for some gunpowder from the British ships in Rangoon harbour. He also told Cox's interpreter that 'if I [Cox] was to make a tender of procuring Arms and Ammunition for his Majesty, it might greatly tend to induce him to grant the Privileges I require'.² Cox had orders to discourage requests for arms during the current war. He informed Shore that he merely made 'general assurance of your readiness to give his Burhman Majesty every proof of your Friendship'.³ This however clearly amounted to encouragement, and as such was a breach of his instructions. Just as Cox was actually leaving Burma in April 1798, he was to receive a message from the Hlutdaw granting him certain concessions and requesting him in return to arrange for imports of arms into Burma. It seems certain that as a result of Cox's assurance, the Myowun gave the Court hopes of obtaining arms from the British. It became known later that the arms were meant for use against Siam.

Cox wrote a further letter to Shore dated 26 January.⁴ He disclosed that in response to the Myowun's earlier request, he had

1. Ibid., This letter was never written.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. BPC, 13 March 1798, Cox to Shore, 26 January 1798, No.94.

sent the Myowun eight barrels of gun-powder as a present from the Governor-General. This might have encouraged the Myowun still more. The letter is interesting also in showing that despite the Myowun's new friendliness, suspicions of the British had not been dispelled. On 7 January, the Rangoon Government, wishing to use existing stocks of timber to strengthen the Rangonn stockade, forbade further exports of the item. Cox took up the matter with the Myowun on the appeal of the British merchants. The latter altered his decision and ordered the delivery of whatever supplies British merchants (but not those of other nationalities) needed. The reasons for this concession, probably, were the hope of securing arms from the British and the wish not to jeopardize existing trade with British India.

There were other indications that suspicions of the British existed. The Rangoon defences continued to be strengthened and men were still being collected in the countryside for the defence of the province. Non-British merchants at Rangoon

were subjected to coercion 'in order to obtain presents and forced loans to defray the expense of the projected fortifications'.¹

In a letter dated 27 March 1798, Cox reported that he had received the Calcutta Government's new despatches and that he had handed over to the Burmese those letters meant for them.² They were received politely, and those for the King and the Wungyis were sent up to the capital without delay. The tension in the town subsided. There is no further mention of defensive preparations against a

1. Ibid.

2. BPC, 10 September 1798, Cox to Speke, 27 March 1798, No.35.

British attack. Also, Cox's relations with the Myowun improved, and they visited and entertained each other. It seems certain that the relaxation of tension was due to the receipt of a reassuring statement of policy from Calcutta.

The Myowun wrote a reply dated 6 April 1798 to the Persian Translator's letter.¹ Significantly, it was addressed to the Governor-General.² He listed the various concessions made by the Burmese to Cox, but without any complaint about Cox's conduct, or indeed, so much as a suggestion that there had been disagreements. The letter was exceptionally friendly. It was clearly intended to show that the Cox mission had left no legacy of bitterness and to promote good relations. However, the Myowun was speaking only for himself, and may have been guarded, because of the prospect of obtaining arms from the British. The Symes' mission of 1802 was to show that Cox's proceedings had engendered ill-feelings for the British at the Court.

A final episode should be noticed. When still at Rangoon, Cox had complained to the Bengal Government, in very bitter terms, of the conduct of one Captain Carey, of the ship Peggy, who had brought his order of recall. He charged Carey with having spread word in Rangoon that he had been recalled for incapacity.³ Cox had of course shown incapacity when at the capital and the Bengal Government would have been aware of this. Word of their feelings towards Cox may have got around in Calcutta, and been picked up by Carey.

1. BPC, 23 November 1797, Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General, received 13 June, No.12.

2. See p. 75

3. BPC, 10 September 1798, Cox to Speke, 27 March 1798, No.36.

At the time of Cox's return to Bengal, a new Governor-General, Wellesley, had assumed office. Wellesley did not think ill of Cox's proceedings, to judge by the absence of any reference of this kind in the records and his appointment of Cox as officer-in-charge of relief activities at the frontier, after the great Arakan exodus of 1798 began.¹ At the same time, Wellesley inflicted an unusual punishment on Carey. He was prohibited from sailing to Rangoon or any other Burmese port, on account of his having circulated at Rangoon 'the most unfounded and indecent reports' respecting Cox.² Such language indicates that Wellesley refused to see any shortcomings in Cox's conduct of his mission. In fact few missions could have been so wantonly mismanaged.

Yet, curiously, Cox might have had one achievement to his credit that surpassed in importance anything accomplished by the missions of the period from 1795 to 1812. He might have averted a Burmese invasion of Assam towards the end of 1797. This was a factor of some importance. Assam was not, as Cox believed, a British protectorate, but it offered easy access to the plains of Bengal and its conquest by Burma in 1817 was partly responsible for the outbreak of war Seven years later. An extension of Burmese authority to Assam in 1797 might have brought on a war between the two powers much sooner, by creating resentment and insecurity at Calcutta.

While at Mingun, Cox came by evidence that the King had received an appeal for help from a claimant to the Assamese throne, and was planning to accept it. On 5 February, the King sent Cox a

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1. Cox, op.cit., vi-viii. Cox's son states that Wellesley 'expressed himself perfectly satisfied' with Cox's conduct. Ibid., vi.
 2. BPC, 10 September, Observations by Governor-General-in-Council, No.50.

gold and silver coin, and a map printed on cloth, with a query as to whether he knew the country concerned.¹ Cox was told by the Yewun of Rangoon that the articles had been brought by the messenger 'from the country they call Vizaddee [Vethali or Assam], who had arrived to supplicate his Majesty's assistance to place a person they call the rightful sovereign on the throne; who, they say, had been dispossessed, by his brother. In consequence of their representation, his Majesty had assembled a large army and had already sent off 20,000 men in advance to clear the roads etc... and meant to follow it up with a much larger force....'² The claimant sent an Assamese 'princess' and some Brahmans as gifts to Bodawpaya.³

The numbers mentioned might have been exaggerated, but intervention in Assam was clearly in the offing. Cox protested repeatedly and vehemently at such a move. He believed that Assam had become a British protectorate as a result of the Welsh expedition of the early 1790s. This seems to have been a genuine mistake on Cox's part. Governor-General Shore had decided for reasons of economy on a policy of non involvement in Assam. But Cox's mistaken impression made him a very forceful advocate of non-intervention. He told the Burmese that Assam 'was tributary to the British and under their protection; that it was not more than three years since our troops had settled the country, and placed the present rajah on the throne; and if my apprehensions were just, I much feared that if the Burhman

1. Cox, op.cit., pp.69-70.

2. Ibid., pp.277-279.

3. Ibid., pp.138-139.

troops invaded there, it would be the cause of a war between the English and Burhman nations....'¹

Towards the end of 1797, these remonstrances may have had an effect. Chiengmai had replaced Assam as the destination of the Burmese forces that were being gathered near the capital and Burmese intervention in Assam did not take place until 1817. As early as February 1797, the King was reported to have asked Moncourtuse and Rowland whether they knew Assam and whether it belonged to England.² On 22 September 1797, a member of Cox's party visited a Burmese camp near the capital and the commander actually 'pointed out the route they were to take to Jamai [Chiengmai] over the eastern range of mountains....'³ On 15 October, Cox heard that a vanguard of 5,000 men had already set off for Chiengmai.⁴ On his journey downstream, he discovered that recruits and arms were being collected for the expedition. Intervention in Assam was evidently intended at one stage but was not undertaken in the end. It is possible that Cox's warnings of a war with the British in the event of an invasion of Assam were the deterrent.

1. Ibid., p.369.

2. Ibid., p.400.

3. Ibid., p.400.

4. Ibid., p.425.

Thanks to Captain Cox, a problem of historiography has been solved also. To quote Klaus Wenk:

The dating of this new Burmese attack on Chiengmai is a matter on which Burmese and Thai records do not agree. The Burmese Chronicle puts this attack in the year 2340, i.e. 1797, but according to Thai statements, it took place two years before 2338, i.e. 1795. It appears that the date given in the Burmese Glass Palace Chronicle is correct, for 2340 is the date given in a certain Thai poem by Sunthon Phitak, who himself took part in this campaign....¹

Cox's journal establishes 1797 as the date beyond any doubt.

Before leaving Rangoon, Cox obtained a statement from the local British merchants giving the reasons why trade had declined since Symes' visit.² One of the signatories to the statement was Robert Dyer, described by Symes in 1795 as a reliable man. The letter stated that the number of ships calling at Rangoon had fallen from sixty to eighty annually to twenty-seven in 1797, of which not one was a three-masted vessel. Burma's export potential was rather small to start with, since timber was the only export item of consequence. In recent years a further problem had arisen: Burmese boatmen had become traders in their own right. They were making their way to Penang with sticklac, cutch and other commodities, and purchasing China goods and beetle-nut in return. Their small boats did not have to pay port charges at the British possessions, while they minimized import duties also by paying these at places like Cheduba, Tavoy and Mergui, where the duties were only four or five per cent as compared

1. Ibid., p.81. Cox heard on 15 October that the first Burmese detachment numbering 5,000 men had already set off for Chiengmai.

2. BPC, 1 October 1799, Memorial of Rangoon merchants to Governor-General-in-Council, No.8.

to the ten per cent levied at Rangoon. Consequently, they were able to under-sell British products. The statement continued:

But an object of much more serious import to the trade of this place than the above is the communication which the Burmhans have lately discovered overland by the way of Arrakan, to which place it is but seven days journey, and by which route a very considerable contraband trade is carried on in the following manner. They reckon three days' journey from the western banks of the river Ayrawadi [Irrawaddy] till their arrival at the foot of the range of mountains nearly opposite the town of Comma [north of Prome] and which [sic] forms the barrier between Pegu and Arrakan. They are crossed in two days and in three more reach Arrakan, from which place they go by boats throughout the river to Chittagong, from then to Cossimbazar, Dacca and all the original manufacturing towns and villages of Bengal navigable for their boats. Here they purchased with silver smuggled out of Pegu the goods produced at these places, in an underhand manner from the workmen employed by the Honourable Company and at the rate of twenty or forty percent cheaper than the same can be purchased by the English at Calcutta to export from there. They return by nearly the same route, employing the coolies of Arrakan to bring their goods to the banks of the Ayrawadi.... Their boats which are built light for the purpose carry only a thousand viss each. These they load in creeks and rivulets about the back of the town of Comma, and with them proceed thro' creeks formed by islands in the great river till within the two last chokies immediately nearest the city of Amarapoorah.¹

In this way, they evaded the duties levied illegally at the other nineteen customs-posts along the Irrawaddy and also the 12½% duties and harbour fees at Rangoon. 'This accounts for the considerable quantity of Bengal goods to be found at Amarapoorah and at a price considerably cheaper than at Rangoon'.² The writers requested the British government to stop the export trade through Arakan and to levy duties on Burmese boats calling at Penang. No notice appears to have been taken of this request.

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

After Cox's mission, no British representative was sent to Burma until 1802. The British had offered to depute some one more acceptable than Cox in their letter to the Court announcing his recall, but no reply was received in this matter. However, political contact between Burma and British India continued into 1799. The issue now was whether the Burmese were to be allowed to make large arms purchases at Calcutta. The muskets, cannon and gunpowder used in both the Burmese and Siamese armies were of very poor quality.¹ With a campaign under way against Siam, the Burmese Court seemed to have believed, perhaps as a result of representations by the Myowun of Pegu, that imports of up-to-date arms from Bengal could give them a great advantage over Siam. The Myowun, it will be recalled had discussed the possibility of arms imports with Cox. Having been encouraged by Cox, he made an appeal to the Bengal Government for arms. The letter was received at Calcutta on 30 April 1798. 'There is use here [the Myowun wrote] for as great quantity of ordnance, musquets, Powder and flints, as can be procured. However great the quantity still more would be wanted.'² The request was ignored.

The next appeal came from the Court. The Myowun would have informed them of Cox's encouraging remarks of January 1798. The Court became anxious that Cox should remain at Rangoon as Resident for the purpose of importing arms from Bengal. It is worth noting however, that it took the Court about four months (until April 1798) to act on this idea. The reasons for this delay are not known.

1. Phayre, A History of Burma, New York, 1969, p.258.

2. BPC, 8 May 1798, Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General. There was a supporting letter from the Yewun, ibid., No.5.

The first communication from the Court on the matter reached Cox when his ship had already left Rangoon harbour but was still in the Rangoon river. A boat sent from Rangoon by the Myowun came up to the ship on 30 April 1798, with a copy of an order to him from the Hlutdaw. It ran as follows:

By order of His Majesty, the Emperor of the Golden Lootehoo [Hlutdaw].... His Majesty's commands are that they do grant to Captain Hiram Cox the Resident appointed by the Honourable the Governor-General to reside in Ranghong [Rangoon], ground for his factory, home and for his garden, wherever he chooses, but directed that the house shall be built of wood and the fence made of Bamboo and mats in a temporary manner, like the first ministers of the Burma Empire; and the Emperor further recommends that Captain Hiram Cox may be desired to import to Ranghong as many muskets as possible for the service of his Kingdom.¹

The Court, despite its desire to secure arms, had not conceded any of the major demands in Cox's memorials. In the matter of accommodation Cox had been restricted to a wooden house although he had wanted permission to build a brick house if he wished. It was however a signal honour to be allowed a wooden house, for Cox would have been accommodated 'like the first ministers of the Burmha Empire'.²

Cox wrote a reply to the Myowun on 29 April, informing him that the answer to the King's request for arms 'will depend on the answers which his Majesty may be graciously pleased to forward to the last letters which I have the honour to deliver to you from the Honourable the Governor-General'.³ He added that he thought it

1. BPC, 10 September 1798, Hlutdaw's order, No.46.

2. Ibid.

3. BPC, 10 September 1798, Cox to Myowun of Pegu, 29 April, No.45.

'very fortunate that I am going to Bengal because when those letters [replies by the Court] arrive, it will enable me to settle everything to His Majesty's satisfaction. That every exertion on my part will be made to please your Excellency is well assured, as you know that I am entirely devoted to His Majesty's service'.¹ Cox was obliged by his instructions to discourage requests for arms. Instead, he had held out hopes that the request would be met if a certain condition - which was a figment of his imagination - was fulfilled. He had also implied quite falsely that he had sufficient influence at Calcutta to secure a compliance with the Burmese request. By this stage, his thinking on this subject was largely fantasy.

Cox had also received a letter from Baba Sheen, complaining that the guns bought by an adherent of the Myowun at Penang for the latter's use had been held up by the officials there. The Myowun, Baba Sheen wrote, wanted a letter from Cox to the Penang authorities, requesting that his followers be allowed to purchase and take away guns and muskets and gunpowder whenever they wished.² Cox promptly obliged the Myowun by sending him a letter written on these lines addressed to Major Macdonald, the British Superintendent at Penang.³ The Court's appeal (like the previous appeal by the Myowun) was not discussed by the Calcutta Government, now under Lord Wellesley.

The Burmese Court persevered with the matter. Further appeals were received via Arakan and Pegu. The Myowun of Arakan wrote to the Governor-General. The appeal was supported by a brief

1. Ibid.

2. BPC, 10 September 1798, Baba Sheen to Cox, 20(?), April, No.46.

3. Ibid., Cox to Macdonald, 30 April 1798 (no number).

note from two Wungyis at the capital and must therefore have had royal sanction. The Burmese wanted to be allowed to export large quantities of arms free of duty. The reply was written on 13 October. The letter acknowledged the receipt of the Burmese letters. It went on to claim that the Arakan Myowun's representative had been well-received by the British Government and to contrast this with the unfriendly attitude of the Burmese officials towards Cox. Cox's treatment justified a refusal of the Burmese request. However, the Thiyidawgyi was being allowed to purchase 1,000 stand of arms. It was hoped that the measure would show the Burmese government "the advantage of cultivating a close political and commercial connection with a state so powerful as the British and acting upon such liberal and disinterested principles".¹ The Burmese request for permission to export large quantities was not rejected; it was stated that the Governor-General needed time to consider the idea. Such permission, however, was never given.

Further appeals were received. The Myowun of Pegu (on his own testimony in his letter) wrote to the Governor-General on the order of the Court. His letter was brought to Calcutta by an emissary in November 1798. After the customary reference to ties of friendship and commerce between the two governments, the Myowun revealed that the King was 'about to be engaged in warlike enterprises' (doubtless a renewed attack on Chiengmai) and that in

1. BPC, 28 November 1798, Political Secretary to Myowun of Arakan.

consequence 'muskets, powder and flints are extremely wanted....'¹

He, the Myowun, had been ordered to write to the Governor-General on the matter. He requested that 'from ten to twenty thousand stand of arms' be sent to Rangoon, where they would be paid for 'by His Majesty's commands'.² The letter ended on a note of urgency 'As his Majesty's want to arms arises from his being about to be engaged in warlike enterprises, they arms are particularly necessary....'³

The Myowun sent a letter to Captain Cox also, through the same messenger, requesting him to expedite the matter. This letter too, the Myowun stated, was written at the King's behest. Perhaps Cox's promise to settle everything to the King's satisfaction had been reported to him. 'I am convinced the Myowun concluded you will exert all your influence with the Governor-General to effect this purpose, in doing which you will gain great favour with His Majesty as he is most distressed'.⁴ Cox was also sent a ring. This present, and the assurance that Cox would gain 'great favour' with the King if he was successful, were probably meant as a spur to action.⁵ The Burmese had clearly been misled by Cox's parting assurance on the subject of arms sales into thinking that he could influence the decisions of the Calcutta Government.

1. BPC, 17 December 1798, Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General (Received 19 November), No.30.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. BPC, 23 November 1798, Myowun of Pegu to Cox (Received 10 November), No.40.

5. Ibid.

Wellesley allowed the envoy to purchase 1,000 stand of arms.¹ This fell far short of the Burmese request, for they had wanted 10,000 to 20,000 muskets, and payment was to be made at Rangoon. Wellesley told the envoy that the situation of the Calcutta Government would not permit a compliance with the Burmese request. This was probably a reference to the war with France.

Two other actions of Bodawpaya's demonstrate his interest in arms in the period 1798-1799. He wrote to Governor Malartic of Mauritius, making the same request. Malartic replied that he could send no muskets at that time because France was at war with Britain, but that they would be supplied the moment he could spare them (his successor, Governor Magallon de la Morliere, was to keep this promise after the Peace of Amiens). This reply may have pleased Bodawpaya, since the French had promised future supplies. The King is alleged also to have demanded 40,000 men and 20,000 muskets from Nga Than De, an important Arakanese leader, and one Arakanese leader who had appealed for Burmese intervention in 1781.² Being unable to comply, Nga Than had fled to Chittagong, sparking off the great Arakanese exodus of 1798. It must be emphasized, however, that these figures seem wildly exaggerated and that the muskets sought could only have been antiquated ones, like those already in service in the Burmese army.

The vessel in which the Burmese agent from Rangoon attempted to return to Burma was compelled to return to Calcutta because of bad weather. The Vice-President-in-Council, Alured

1. BPC, 17 December 1798, No.40, government's comment.

2. Pearn, 'King-Bering', Journal of the Burmha Research Society, XXIII, ii, 1933; Also Cox, op.cit., p.400.

Clarke, decided to provide a home for him and his followers and to meet the expenses of their stay until a vessel could be found for their return. In August 1799, a further letter was received from the Myowun of Pegu, inquiring what had happened to the envoy and asking that he be sent back immediately with the arms. He emphasized that the arms were sought because of military difficulties.¹ In Wellesley's absence in southern India, the reply was written by Alured Clarke, the Vice-President. He attempted to sooth Burmese feelings by dwelling on the 'commodious house' allowed the Burmese envoy by the British, and the fact that the British had met part of the expenses of his stay at Calcutta, and would meet that of his return voyage to Burma. (A vessel had been found by this time). But he refused to change the existing policy on arms sales, on the ground that '... as the same circumstances which precluded a compliance with your earlier application on this subject, still exist, I am under the [same?] necessity.'² The Burmese agent returned taking with him only eight muskets and swords, and some luxury goods, all bought in the shops of Calcutta.³ Unlike Malartic, Clarke had not promised to send arms supplies when he could do so. This fact should be remembered when considering the unfriendly reception that Symes received in 1802.

A final point should be noticed. In 1798, for reasons that will be discussed later, a large-scale immigration of Arakanese

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1. BPC, 16 January 1800. Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General, No.7 (Received 11 August).
 2. BPC, 29 August 1799, Sir Alured Clarke, Vice-President-in-Council, to the Myowun of Pegu, No.4.
 3. Ibid., Paper from Vakeel (agent) of Myowun of Pegu, No.3.

into the Chittagong district occurred. Cox was appointed by Wellesley to carry out relief operations in the area. Symes was to discover, during his second mission to Burma of 1803, that while engaged in these duties, Cox had written a letter to the Myowun of Pegu, informing him 'that the Burma and English nations were at war, assuring him of protection in the event of his being taken prisoner and desiring a similar security for himself.'¹ This move was like many others made during his mission, for the assertion that Britain and Burma were at war was completely visionary. Yet, right up to the end, Cox continued to show ability. His relief work in Chittagong district, until he died from fever towards the end of 1799, had earned him praise.²

1. Hall, Michael Symes: Journal of his Second Embassy to the Court of Ava in 1802, p.156.

2. Hall, D.G.E. (ed.), Hiram Cox: Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire, Gregg International Publishers, 1971, Introduction.

CHAPTER III

THE RENEWAL OF RELATIONS, 1802-1804

Part I

The Symes Mission of 1802

In 1802, the British in India resumed diplomatic relations with Burma but conditions in both countries had changed by this time. In 1795, the East India Company had been stronger than any Indian state, but it had still been only one power among many. By 1802, the Company had embarked on a wave of expansion that was to make it the paramount power in India by the time of Wellesley's departure in 1805. Although many of the Company's successes came between 1802 and 1805, southern India had already passed under their direct or indirect control by 1803, with the acceptance by the Nizam of Hyderabad of a subsidiary alliance and the annexation of Tipu Sultan's Kingdom of Mysore.

In Burma too, conditions had changed. The reports of Symes and Cox in 1795 and 1796-1798 had depicted a prosperous country, a mild government and a population that was not in any way burdened by heavy financial or military demands. Symes' report in 1802 revealed a markedly different state of affairs. The reason for the change appears to have been the war carried on by Burma and Siam between 1797 and 1803 for the control of Chiengmai. On the Burmese side, the war involved two major campaigns, one beginning in 1797 and the other in 1802.¹

1. For details, see Wenk, K., The Restoration of Thailand under Rama I, 1782-1809, Tucson, Arizona, pp.81-94.

The war led to heavy demands in the form of manpower. This drain would account for the depopulation of the countryside along the Irrawaddy river which Symes reported in 1802. He claimed to have observed:

... the rapid decline of the country since my last visit to it, which was too plainly indicated by the decay of farms, neglect of cultivation and the complete desertion of entire villages. The land appeared as if it had been recently the seat of war, and devastated by contending armies.¹

Symes also alleged that there was a large-scale emigration of Burmese and Mons to Siam, but he was almost certainly wrong in this matter. Crawford, writing in 1828 put the number of Mon immigrants in Siam at 25,000, a very small figure, and probably the result of emigration from Martaban and Tennasserim, and made no mention of Burmans at all.² It is more likely that the population simply withdrew into the interior, away from the villages on the banks of the Irrawaddy, which were easily accessible to royal recruitment.

The result of all this military activity was a country that had suffered considerable decline since the prosperous days of 1795-1798. Some Burmese understood the cause of this decline. The Myowun of Pegu, as reported by Symes, 'declared his disapprobation of the ruinous and oppressive measures which the Court pursued; to which he very justly ascribed the depopulated state of the country and the insecurity that all classes of the inhabitants felt both of person and property'.³ The country's condition continued to be depressed

1. Hall, D.G.E., Michael Symes' Journal of his Second Embassy to the Court of Ava in 1802, London, 1955, pp.136-137.

2. Crawford, J., Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China, London, 1828, p.452.

3. Hall, op.cit., p.211.

at least until Captain Canning's mission of 1812. Thereafter, a recovery seems to have been made, judging by the reports of Judson and Gouger. This may have been connected with the fact that from 1812 onwards, the Court's military operations were confined to minor incursions into northeast India, which involved almost no drain on Burmese manpower.¹

The previously good relations of the Burmese with the British had been damaged by the Cox mission, by the Calcutta Government's understandable unwillingness to allow major arms purchases and by the events at the Arakanese frontier (to be discussed later).² But the expansion by the British in India from 1798 onwards may have done something more - it may have given rise to actual apprehensions as to British intentions towards Burma herself. Anti-British foreigners living in Burma appear to have fanned these suspicions. South Indian Muslims might have been especially aggrieved over the annexation of Tipu Sultan's kingdom, since the latter was a Muslim. There is evidence that suspicions of the British existed.³ In this connection, a further report needs to be examined. The Yewun at Rangoon who was appointed after the departure of Cox - was perpetually at odds with the Myowun. Personal rivalries had a part in this, but Symes was to be informed in 1802 that there was another reason for the quarrel. The Yewun suspected his superior of being pro-British, and had, according to Symes, represented the Myowun to the King as '... a dangerous person, much attached to the English and ready to

1. Except for an attack on Junk Ceylon in 1813.

2. Hall, op.cit., pp.149, 153-156, 238, 241, 255-256. The evidence is overwhelming.

3. Ibid., p.169, pp.171-172 and p.162.

concert with them in any plot against the state that might forward his own personal views of ambition'.¹

The result according to Symes was that the Myowun had been detained by the King at the capital for some time. 'About a year ago [Symes reports in 1802] the Viceroy repaired as usual to the capital to do homage at the golden feet, whence, tho' not at all degraded or deprived of his rank and station, he has not since been able to return'.² It is possible, of course, that the Myowun was detained for some other reason.

The friendly feelings of the Burmese for the French appear to have been stronger by 1802 than in 1795-1798 when, in fact, there had been none. One reason for this may have been the deferential reply received from Mauritius to the Burmese request for arms. It will be recalled that the French authorities there had stated they could not spare arms at that moment, but would send them when they could. This promise was to be kept, awkwardly for Symes during his second mission. The British, by contrast, had allowed only minor purchases of arms, and had not guaranteed further supplies. There was also the provocative behaviour of Captain Hiram Cox in 1797-1798, for which the Bengal Government had never sent a clear apology to the Burmese Court, the disputes at the Chittagong-Arakan frontier and British expansion in India. On account of these factors perhaps some Burmese at any rate came to think of the French as being preferable to the British. The King, for example, was reported by

1. Ibid., p.218. Symes confirmed that the Myowun was pro-British. (ibid., p.149).

2. Ibid., p.218.

Don Louis de Grondona to have said: 'The true characteristics of the English nation are pride, violence and rapacity; whereas the French, on the contrary, are gentle, courteous, peaceful and quiet'.¹

The Ein-gyi Paya, who was ultimately persuaded of the greater value of friendship with the British, was also reported by Don Louis de Grondona to prefer the French to the British.² The Prince of Prome, too, was reported to have told Rogers, an Englishman resident in Burma, when the issue of receiving the British was being discussed: '... Why should one give such preference to the English, who, wherever they have once got a footing, in the end have turned the legal possessors out, and kept the country to themselves. The French have always behaved well to us'.³

However, as will be seen later, the pro-French atmosphere, although partly responsible for Symes' initial bad reception was a rather superficial affair. Certainly the contingency which was one reason for the despatch of Symes in 1802 - a French political presence in Burma - was very remote indeed.

It is necessary now to turn to the reasons which led Wellesley to send Symes to Burma again. A serious situation arose at the Chittagong-Arakan frontier. Bodawpaya, needing men and weapons for the war against Siam over Chiengmai made requisitions for

1. Ibid., p.237; see also ibid., p.238. The Myowun of Pegu told Symes that the King had a prejudice in favour of the French. (Ibid., p.167).

2. Ibid., pp.241, 245.

3. Ibid., p.249.

both in Arakan. This led to a massive migration of Arakanese to Chittagong. Thousands had emigrated in the early 1790s; the fresh emigration of 1798-1799 brought the total number of Arakanese in Chittagong to around 50,000. The new arrivals carried out fierce reprisals against the Burmese which caused widespread devastation in Arakan.

It is clear, from their later statements, that the Burmese were aggrieved at the protection given to the refugees. At most times (though not always), the Burmese regarded even ordinary emigration as wrong; the people were the King's property and could not run away to another country.¹ For the local authorities, emigration also meant loss of revenue; for the emigrants, if they had remained in Arakan would have paid a head tax to the provincial government. The emigrants of 1798-1799, had also fled to British territory to avoid military service and royal requisitions. They had thus rebelled against the King. Then, the emigrants had, in many cases, raided Arakan and caused much devastation.

According to the subsequent testimony of the Myowun of Arakan, the King ordered him to 'proceed and demand [in the Myowun's words] the subjects of this Government....'² The result was that an incursion similar to that of 1794 occurred. The British in 1794 to 1795, had insisted that the Naf was the boundary between Arakan

1. The only exception was the commander of the pursuit force in 1794, who stated that the Burmese did not object to ordinary emigration.

2. BPC, 29 August 1799, letter from Myowun of Arakan to Governor-General, No.5, received 25 August 1799.

and Chittagong and that no armed force should cross it. Yet, the Burmese did this in 1799. In 1794, the Burmese commander had claimed not to be aware that the Naf was the boundary but in 1799 the Arakanese local officials made no such claim; instead they acknowledged that they were in British territory. Even the officials at Ava had been aware that the British regarded the Naf as the boundary. Why then was an incursion ordered? It is not clear whether the Burmese remembered Symes' remonstrances in 1795 concerning border crossings. Perhaps, these had been forgotten, Alternatively the Burmese may simply have ignored them.¹ It is clear, however, that they did not see anything objectionable in a border crossing. The Burmese force crossed the Naf and stockaded itself at Rutnapallin. This was the spot, a few miles from the Naf, where the advanced stockade of the force which had crossed into British territory in 1794 had been located. The Burmese received reinforcements from Ava, and their numbers began to increase. The British (as in 1794) made appeals to them to withdraw, and promised that their complaints would receive attention afterwards. They claimed that they had tried to persuade the emigrants to return to Arakan but they

1. The Court had been aware in 1795 that application for extradition would have to be made by letter (See Symes, An Account of an Embassy, Westmead, 1971, p.492). However they may not have realized the importance the British attached to this.

had refused. The Burmese, however, insisted on a compulsory repatriation of recent emigrants. A detachment of provincial Sepoys who were not as well trained as those of the Bengal army, was then sent to attack them. The attack failed, but the Burmese, who had never intended that hostilities should commence, withdrew across the Naf, leaving behind letters claiming that they had no hostile purpose.

Wellesley was at this time in Southern India, because of (recently terminated) the war/against Tipu Sultan. He ordered the Vice-President, Alured Clarke, and his Council to send an envoy to Arakan who was to come to an understanding with the Arakanese on the matter of the refugees. One Lt. Thomas Hill, of the Bengal Army, was selected.

The Burmese were to be told, Hill was informed, that the British would not be entitled to refuse asylum to those seeking it unless they were unworthy of it, or unless such an act would imperil the British themselves. The British would also not abandon the refugees, to the vengeance of the Burmese. However, if the Burmese sent agents to Bengal to identify those responsible for crimes in Arakan, and succeeded in proving their guilt, they would be surrendered. A border crossing was a hostile act, and if one occurred again, it would be regarded as a 'premeditated act of hostility'.¹

Hill was to try to terminate his discussions at Arakan. If the King invited him to Ava, he was to inform him that he had passed the information on to Calcutta, and was awaiting orders.

Although Hill was to try to 'adjust' the matter of the refugees, no real concessions had been offered by the British. Their position was the same as before and Hill was really expected to try

1. Ibid., 9 July 1799, Instructions to Hill, No.18.

to win over the Burmese to the British point of view.

Hill arrived at Arakan town in September and had discussions with the Myowun of Arakan and other officials. The Myowun stated that it was the British who had broken the peace, by giving protection to 'the rebellious' inhabitants of Arakan. Hill took the view that giving protection was not a hostile act, while a border crossing was. The Burmese claimed that it was not hostile; they ^{pointed} / out that they had caused no damage in Chittagong. The Akoukwun of Arakan criticized the British attack, and expressed the view that it could not have been authorized by the Governor-General. Hill made it clear that he had authorized it. The Myowun incidentally even seemed to think that the British ought to have supplied the force with provisions since it was in their territory.

This basic difference of opinion persisted; each side seemed to think that the other had done wrong. Hill also explained the British position on extradition. There could be no general repatriation of emigrants. However, emigrant leaders who had committed crimes in Arakan would be surrendered, if the Burmese sent agents who could point out the guilty ones and prove their guilt. However, it was not customary to surrender ordinary criminals, as opposed to leaders. This does not appear to have been a sound position, since both had committed crimes in Arakan. (The distinction was introduced by Hill, not the Calcutta authorities).

The Burmese did not at first understand what Hill meant by proof. They asked if the devastated countryside Hill had seen on his way to Arakan to war was not sufficient proof. This, of course, showed that the Arakanese had been responsible for crimes, but it did not show which Arakanese were responsible. Hill pointed out that it

was necessary to identify the guilty ones. The Burmese then asked what sort of proof would be considered sufficient. Hill said he did not know, as he had no instructions in the matter.

The Arakan authorities passed Hill's proposals to the Court. The King's reply arrived in December 1799. He asked for a surrender of all emigrants both old and new. Hill's statements on the right of refugees to asylum, and the necessity of proving guilt, had apparently made no impression on the King. Hill repeated his previous statements. These were reported to the King, while Hill, despite his protests, was refused permission to return to Calcutta before the reply arrived, on the grounds that it would be a violation of Burmese custom. In February, a messenger arrived with the King's reply and Hill returned to Calcutta.

The messenger told Hill before his departure that the King would be satisfied by the surrender of leaders who had committed atrocities and whose guilt could be easily proved. If this was correct, it would mean that the King had lowered his demands. The messenger asked what sort of proof would be considered sufficient and Hill said again that he did not know.

Shortly afterwards, the Myowun of Arakan wrote to the Governor-General in the name of the King. His letter was ambiguous: it is not certain whether the surrender of all refugees was required, or only certain leaders who were named in the letter. However, the statement of the messenger to Hill suggested that only the surrender of leaders was correct. The Myowun had also not offered to prove the guilt of the leaders though the messenger had seemed to think that some attempt would be made in this respect.

The Calcutta Government rejected the demand for immediate repatriation but promised once again to surrender chiefs whose guilt the Burmese could prove.¹ Also the British modified previous policy by issuing a proclamation prohibiting further immigration from Arakan to Chittagong. This involved a modification of policy; for the British view till then had been that refugees were entitled to asylum. It is clear, however, that if a situation similar to that of 1797-1798 had recurred, this proclamation could not have been enforced unless the refugees were fired upon or expelled forcibly.

From this moment, however, until December 1801, things quietened down on the Chittagong-Arakan frontier. The Burmese did not come forward with evidence against specific Arakanese. Perhaps it was found to be impossible to provide it.

The events of 1797-1800 would have impressed on Wellesley's mind the need to reach a permanent understanding with Burma. The frontier problem was likely to prove a serious distraction when British forces were involved elsewhere in India, as had happened in 1799-1800 when there were wars against Tipu Sultan in southern India, and operations against the French in the Red Sea. But there would have been a further reason for a diplomatic approach to Burma at this time. This was the war with France, which had figured significantly in the decisions to send envoys to Burma in 1795 and 1796. Since then, the rivalry between the two powers had intensified. The problem of privateers, for one thing, had become more serious year by year.

1. BPC, 26 June 1800. Edmonstone, Political Secretary to Myowun of Arakan, 16 May 1800, No.149 and proclamation, No.150. Note that Wellesley, in keeping with the decision taken after the 1795 mission, had not written directly to the Myowun. However, the Vice-President-in-Council had done this before.

By 1801, some twelve of them were operating in the Indian Ocean and were inflicting heavy losses on British shipping. The possibility existed that they were using Burmese ports as supply-points. Symes in 1802 was to discover only one instance of this kind happening after Cox's departure, but Wellesley would not have known this at the time.¹

From 1798 onwards, French territorial ambitions in India and elsewhere in Asia had also become a matter of concern among British government circles in India. In July 1798, General Napoleon Bonaparte had landed in Egypt with an expeditionary force. It was believed, both in London and Calcutta, that his ultimate objective was an invasion of India, either by sea or overland via Persia. In practice an invasion of this type would have been almost impossible to attempt, given such factors as British command of the sea and the distance overland between India and Egypt. Moreover, had a French force landed in India, its defeat could only have been a matter of time, given the vastly superior resources of the British in India. The British had in any case already retaliated by undertaking operations in the Red Sea and landing an army in Egypt and sending a political mission to Persia. But if an actual French invasion of India was a remote possibility only, the establishment of a French political presence in Asian states, both inside and outside India, was not. A short-lived French connection with Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, had been cut short by the British invasion and annexation of that State; but there still were many states which, in alignment with the French, could threaten the British position in India. One of these states was Burma. It is clear what sort of dangers a Franco-Burmese alliance would have posed for the British. The teak supply of Bengal and Madras would have been cut off and a profitable market for British and Indian products lost; the ship

1. Hall, op.cit., p.237. It appears also that French warships called at Mergui once/Cox's departure from Burma (Ibid., /after p.237).

building facilities of Rangoon would have been made available to the French /Sir John Shore had touched on these possibilities in his assessment of Symes' mission, and Symes himself had discussed the last possibility in his Account of an Embassy, published in 1800.¹ There was the further possibility of a Burmese army trained on European lines and led by Frenchmen threatening British India with an invasion at a time when the Company's forces were involved elsewhere. These dangers were equalled, incidentally, by those attendant on a French presence in Vietnam, where the Emperor Gia Long had come to power with French help and therefore already had a connection with them, and where the French, if given naval facilities, could intercept the trade with China, which was vital to the East India Company and to the financial stability of Britain. This would in fact have been much easier to accomplish than an invasion of India through Burma. The Symes mission of 1802 was followed, as is well known, by the mission of Roberts to Vietnam.²

Another factor which must be borne in mind when examining subsequent events is the attitude of the new Governor-General, Lord Wellesley. The fact that he approved of Cox's proceedings, the reference in the letter to the Myowun of Arakan, to the advisability of instituting closer relations between Burma and British India, show that Wellesley was inclined towards a more ambitious policy towards Burma than had been followed by the previous administration.³

It was probably on account of the factors discussed above that despatch of another embassy to Burma came under consideration

1. BPC, 4 January 1796, No.32 and Symes, Account of an Embassy, London, 1800, pp.459-460.

2. Discussed in Lamb, A., The Mandarin Road to Hue, London, 1970.

3. Wellesley's policy in India was, of course, one of imposing subsidiary alliances.

after the Calcutta Government had rejected the Burmese request for repatriation of the refugees. One Captain William Francklin of the Bengal Army was selected to write a paper on the method of approach that was to be adopted, after first studying all the available documents on Burma. It is possible that he had prior discussions with Wellesley which influenced his suggestions. In July 1801, he submitted his report. Burma, he wrote, was the only gateway into India left to the French. The British objective should be an alliance with Burma that would keep out French influence. This could be achieved in the first place, by impressing on the Burmese an idea of British power by providing the British envoy with a strong military escort. The Burmese treatment of Symes and Cox, Francklin believed, had been due partly to feelings of condescension arising from their having had small escorts. In the case of Cox, at least, Francklin's attitude suggested that he could not have read the relevant documents with any discrimination, since Cox failed, as has been seen, because he made extravagant and unauthorized proposals. Francklin concluded that once the Burmese had been suitably impressed by a military display they could be made amenable to a firm alliance by a lavish distribution of presents, by removing the Arakanese leaders to the interior of India, and by offering the King the support of the Company's troops. In return for such aid, the Burmese should be required to expel all Frenchmen from Burma, and to allow the British to establish factories at Rangoon, Mergui and Bassein.

Professor Hall calls the proposals for a subsidiary alliance 'ludicrous'.¹ Certainly, some of Francklin's ideas make strange reading.

1. Hall, op.cit., lviii.

for example, his suggestion that a strong military escort or a distribution of presents could influence Burmese royal decisions on issues of fundamental importance. There can be little doubt^{also} that as long as Bodawpaya remained on the throne, there was no possibility of a subsidiary alliance being entered into or of territory being conceded by the Burmese. Francklin can perhaps be excused however, for not realising this. A subsidiary alliance would guarantee the incumbent ruler security from internal and external dangers. Also, among Francklin's proposals for influencing the Burmese favourably was a British promise to quieten the Arakan frontier. These were strong inducements, and although they would not have influenced Bodawpaya or any other Konbaung ruler, it was not ludicrous of Francklin to expect that they would.

Francklin's report was submitted in July 1801. He was not, however, appointed immediately as an envoy to Ava. Perhaps this was because the Arakan-Chittagong frontier had become quiet again, and the French threat was not sufficiently serious on its own to warrant an approach to Burma; or perhaps, Wellesley wanted time to study the report. It is possible also that he came to prefer sending Symes rather than Francklin (his original choice) as envoy because of his past experience of Burma and was awaiting^{the} former's return from furlough in England. Then in December 1801, there was a revival of tension at the frontier.

The Calcutta Government's reply of May 1800, would have been taken to the Court of Ava shortly afterwards. For the next year and a half, no reply was received from the Burmese on the matter of refugees. Then, the issue was revived by the Myowun of Arakan in a letter to the Governor-General. This letter deserves close examination, for it was the immediate cause of the despatch of Symes to

Burma for the second time in 1802. It appears that the King ordered the Myowun to make a new demand for the Arakanese refugees. The Myowun did so, but in terms of menace that the Court had not authorized and was subsequently to disavow. The Myowun first stated his conviction that refugees should be handed over to the parent government by friendly states, but without allowing for the fact that other nations could have different principles in the matter.

Your Lordship well knows that [when] any subjects who may conduct themselves with disaffection towards their own lawful sovereign... go to another country it is proper to the sovereign of that country not to think of giving them encouragement to take refuge in it, but to send them back to their princes. This established custom can be proved from the records and histories of governments and princes. In fact, if no assistance be given to emigrants who have taken refuge in a country, it is impossible that they can remain in it. Thus evidently your Lordship had infringed the acknowledged laws of Nations by affording fugitives an asylum and protection and consequently they do not leave your territories and come to this quarter.¹

The Myowun named four men who had emigrated 'with a considerable number of disaffected and rebellious [Arakanese]; and uttered the following threat:

If you should not acquiesce in this [demand for repatriation] but still continue to [harbour them?] then one of the officers of his Majesty will be sent with a powerful and victorious army to make an invasion into your frontiers when, in consequence of the protection afforded to them [the refugees] the whole of your territories will be involved in the flaming fire in which... the wicked shall suffer for their evil deeds and the border of friendship... between us shall be dissolved, and enmity and hatred shall exist.²

1. BPC, 7 January 1802, letter from Myowun of Arakan, Received 26 December 1801, No.4A.

2. Ibid.

When in Burma in 1802, Symes was told by the Myowun of Pegu that the Myowun of Arakan had not been instructed to make the demand for the refugees 'in terms of insolence or disrespect'.¹ (However, this implies that the demand was made on the King's orders, even if the threat of invasion was not authorized). The available evidence is definitely against the supposition that Bodawpaya was contemplating hostilities with the British. There was a war underway at this time between Burma and Siam in the Chiangmai area, which the Burmese were losing. By 1802 Burmese military resources were already severely strained. During his visit to Burma in 1802, Symes was to be informed by the Myowun of Pegu that the King would have been hard-pressed to raise 10,000 conscripts. Under such circumstances an invasion of British India was impossible.

Wellesley was anxious to have the threat disavowed by the King. But his instructions to his envoy, Michael Symes, now a Lieutenant-Colonel, went much further than this: they also incorporate Captain Francklin's suggestions and in consequence offer a remarkable contrast to the restrained instructions issued to Symes and Cox in 1795 and 1798.²

With regard to the Arakan refugees, Symes was authorized / 'to require in the name of the Governor-General his Majesty's acknowledgement or disavowal of the menaces contained in the Myowun's letter'.³ If the King agreed to the latter 'you will state to him the necessity of manifesting some public mark of displeasure at the conduct of a subordinate officer, who has abused the authority vested

1. Ibid., p.201.

2. Ibid., pp.100-109.

3. Ibid., p.102.

in him by his sovereign, and incurred the hazard of involving the two states in the calamities of war."¹ If it transpired that the threatening letter from the Myowun of Arakan was authorized, Symes was 'to require His Majesty to annul the orders which he had issued to the Rajah Myowun of Arracan, and to afford the most satisfactory assurance of his resolution to observe in future a conduct more suited to the amicable relations subsisting between the two Governments.'² Symes was informed also of 'the necessity of finally closing the discussion with the Court of Ava on the question respecting the emigrants, and upon that subject you are already apprized of His Excellency's unalterable determination.'³ In other words, Wellesley would not go beyond the previous promise to surrender individuals whose guilt could be established and his prohibition of further immigration. Curiously, there was no mention in Symes' instructions of any plan to transfer the Arakan chiefs to the interior of India, which Francklin had recommended and which might have satisfied at least the King, who did not stand to gain revenue by the acquisition of subjects. All he drew from Arakan was an annual tribute of about 18,000 rupees.

Symes was then informed of the other objects of his mission. 'It may perhaps be in your power successfully to avail yourself of this state of circumstances to induce His Majesty to enter into formal engagements of alliance with the British Government.... The ultimate object of your mission to Ava is to establish an improved system of

1. Ibid., p.103.

2. Ibid., p.109.

3. Ibid., p.104.

alliance between the British Government and that State, with a view to secure to the Company the political and commercial advantages of which such an alliance is susceptible.... His Excellency will be disposed to enter into subsidiary engagements with the Court of Ava under proper [i.e. customary] modifications and restrictions [i.e. on Burma]. Upon this subject, however, His Excellency considers it premature to furnish you with detailed instructions and wishes merely to point your attention generally to this important question.¹

Professor Hall deduced that 'it is abundantly clear that the phrase ["an improved system of alliance"] implies a subsidiary treaty, though there is no specific mention of the term in the document.....'² In fact it can be seen that the possibility of a subsidiary treaty is referred to explicitly, though Symes is given some leeway in negotiating it.

Symes was informed what advantage was expected from a subsidiary alliance.

His Excellency considers the exclusion of the subjects of France from any establishment within the Dominions of Ava, and the supercession of their influence in the concerns of that state, to be objects of the greatest importance. His Excellency thinks it extremely probable that the Government of France will take advantage of the season of peace to endeavour to establish a connection with the State of Ava, an occurrence which may eventually be productive of material injury to the British interests in India. It is this consideration which principally constitutes the political importance to the company of an improved alliance with the State of Ava, which would necessarily tend to the exclusion of the French interest.³

1. Ibid., pp.103-104.

2. Ibid., lxxv.

3. Ibid., pp.106-107.

(the Peace of Amiens)
 Symes was reminded that although the current peace with France/ruled out the possibility of requiring an undertaking from Burma against allowing the French to establish themselves in the country, a British alliance, if accepted, would necessarily result in the exclusion of the French. Subsequently, after Symes had arrived in Rangoon, he was informed by letter that 'it would not be inconsistent with the amicable relations subsisting between His Majesty [i.e. the King of England] and the French Republic to require from the King of Ava an obligation to expel from his dominions the subjects of any European state, with whom we may hereafter be engaged in war....'¹

Symes was also to press for the renewal of the concessions made in 1795 (they had never in fact been abrogated with the temporary exception of the monopoly granted to Bhoodin), to revive^{the}/claim to Negrais, which had been ceded to the British by Alaungpaya in 1757, or to renounce it in return for other concessions, and to secure the right to appoint a Resident at the capital and a Consul at Rangoon.

Approximately a month later, in April 1802, Symes received a further set of instructions. The Calcutta Government had received a false rumour of the impending abdication of King Bodawpaya in favour of the Ein-gyi Paya. 'The records of this Government,' Symes was informed, 'contain a narrative of facts, which affords reason to believe that in the event of the death of abdication of his present Majesty, His Majesty's younger brother Tongho Tickeen [the Toungoo prince] will endeavour by force or intrigue to supercede the heir apparent in the succession to the throne.'² The 'narrative of facts' referred to appears to have been a report received from Captain Hiram

1. Ibid., p.130.

2. Ibid., p.114.

Cox at Rangoon early in 1798, in which he had passed on a rumour about rivalry between the Ein-gyi Paya and the Toungoo Prince. The latter had been given a present of six guns by the King, which the former had forcibly taken away from him.¹ The Ein-gyi Paya had also told the King that he would not permit the Toungoo prince 'being furnished with the means of rebellion'. Cox had rashly deduced from this report that a civil war was likely in the near future. To the Calcutta Government, this report, taken together with the report of the King's abdication, suggested that a struggle between the Ein-gyi Paya and the Toungoo Prince was likely in the near future. Had the King really intended to abdicate, a succession dispute was in fact likely to occur; such disputes were usual in Burma. However, the Calcutta Government's reason for thinking a succession dispute likely was Cox's report, not a knowledge of Burmese tradition in respect of succession; and as such, their reasoning seems to have been rash. It was thought likely also that the Siamese, whose territories bordered those of the Toungoo prince, would readily support him against his brother if they were assured that their current subjection to Burma would be terminated. This remark showed great ignorance of conditions in mainland Southeast Asia, for Siam was not subject to Burma at this time.

The Calcutta Government believed that if the abdication occurred after Symes' arrival in Burma, the Toungoo Prince would dispute the Ein-gyi Paya's succession and in such an eventuality, either the Ein-gyi Paya or the Toungoo Prince might ask Symes for

1. BPC, 2 March 1798, Cox to Sir John Shore, 23 November 1797, No.2, L. 630-63.

British aid. Symes was authorized to pledge such aid to the Ein-gyi Paya. He was told also that if the Ein-gyi Paya made no overtures to the British, he could offer such aid himself. The actual military force that could be provided, however, was little more than a battalion. Symes was advised that it would be a desirable arrangement if the Burmese agreed to maintain this force or a larger one permanently on a subsidiary basis.

Although the offer to Bodawpaya of a subsidiary alliance probably would have failed, matters might have been different if the offer had been made to a contender for the throne, for the temptation to agree and thereby strengthen his chances of securing the throne would have been strong. The new instructions, therefore, did represent a threat to Burmese sovereignty, although it was one that was not realized, because the rumour of abdication proved to be false. It is possible, however, that Symes discussed this project with the Myowun of Pegu, who was a friend and supporter of the Heir Apparent; but of this, more later.

On 31 May 1802, Symes arrived at Rangoon. Burmese suspicions, it is possible, were aroused by his guard of 100 sepoys under British and Indian officers. Previous British envoys had had escorts, but these had been very small; sixteen men in the case of Symes in 1795 and twelve in Cox's case. The very notion of an envoy being attended by a military guard was alien to the Burmese. But the guard in this case, unlike those which had attended Symes and Cox in 1795 and 1796, was large enough to take temporary possession of Rangoon. The Yewun had only some followers armed with spears to oppose this disciplined and well-equipped force, which was supported by a warship in the harbour. It is also possible that British

expansion in India after 1798 gave rise to fears that the mission had come with some aggressive purpose. At any rate, such fears apparently existed.

On 14 June, Symes wrote to the Calcutta Government that the Rangoon authorities had shown signs of 'mistrust and jealousy' but '... these originated more in fear for their own security than in any intention to affect ours... [the Burmese were] prepossessed with the belief that our designs were sinister, and that we ultimately looked to conquest.'¹ He thought he had removed suspicion by discontinuing parades and other means.

Certain problems of protocol emerged while Symes was at Rangoon. The Yewun, during an interview with Symes, had asked the envoy whether he had been deputed by the King of England, and from whom his letters and presents came. Symes had left Burma in 1795 thinking he had won acceptance of the Governor-General's status as sovereign. Symes deduced from their questions^{that they} still refused to view the Governor-General as a sovereign. Symes' reasoning on this point seems suspect. The Yewun's views need not necessarily have been those of the Court. Besides, the Yewun may have asked these questions merely to elicit information; he may simply have wanted to know from whom the letter came, and who had deputed Symes. At any rate, Symes felt obliged to write to the Hludaw on this matter from Rangoon.

I also request that you apprise his Birman Majesty that I am entrusted with presents and a letter to him from the Marquis Wellesley, who is the representative of the King of Great Britain and of the India Company; who possesses sovereign power over all the British possessions in India, and who in his relations to all potentates of the East is himself a Sovereign....²

1. Hall, op.cit., p.128.

2. Ibid., p.127. Also, ibid., pp.122-124.

Two other problems of protocol arose at Rangoon. On his arrival at Rangoon, Symes had been asked to go to the customs house before entering the town. Symes maintained that this was something from which high dignatories, like the Myowun of Martaban, were exempted. He refused to go and had his way. Captain Cox had also been asked to go to the customs house and he too had successfully refused.¹ Symes believed that the custom was derogatory but it is by no means certain that it had anything to do with status. According to Symes himself, it was a custom to which all strangers were subjected; the Myowun of Martaban may have been exempted because he was not a foreigner.

The other problem concerned the Yewun again. A meeting had been arranged between him and the envoy. At this meeting the Yewun, by coming in last and leaving first, had implied, Symes believed, that he was the most senior person present. Symes, in 1795, had claimed equality of status with the First Wungyi, and found such an implication unacceptable.²

1. Ibid., pp.120-121.

2. Ibid., pp.121-123.

In mid-July, the local authorities received orders from the capital to send up Symes. He left Rangoon in mid-August. Things went smoothly until his arrival at the town of Pagan, where, in 1795, he had been met by a deputation consisting of three wundauks. Although he had the status of Ambassador, as in 1795, no deputation awaited him. On arriving at Mingun, the party was led to an island and made to wait there for some forty days before being allowed to land. Symes attempted to discover the reason for this treatment.

An acute Birmese whom I had brought up with me, went by my desire to the King's island to bring what intelligence he could collect. He came back in the evening and told me it was currently reported that His Birmese Majesty was highly displeased with the English, and that he had sent orders to the Rangoon Government to forward to the capital two French ambassadors, charged with letters and presents from the Governor of Mauritius, also that several persons, particularly Mussulmen, had of late been very active in endeavouring to raise in his Majesty's mind doubts and suspicions of the views of the present mission....¹

A French ship had arrived at Rangoon before Symes' departure from the town. A sister ship had brought arms, some of which were for sale and for presents, but had been wrecked to the east of Rangoon. The new Governor of Mauritius, General Magallon de la Morliere, had carried out his predecessor's promise to send arms when they could be spared. (The Treaty of Amiens had been signed, and Britain and France were temporarily at peace).

The arrival of the French was not the only reason for the turn of events. Although the Court had agreed to the British mission coming up to the capital, it had misgivings about its objects. Symes was informed by the Italian Roman Catholic bishop at the capital,

1. Ibid., pp.145-146.

Don Louis de Grondona, that a Muslim merchant from South India (probably a supporter of Tipu Sultan) had submitted a memorial advising the King to be wary of the British mission who 'have their eyes fixed on his dominions'.¹ Another Muslim merchant, this time from the Malay state of Selangor, but possibly also of South Indian origin, had submitted a similar memorial.

'These remonstrances', Don Louis de Grondona told Symes, 'have occasioned long debates in the interior of the palace, on the expediency of receiving the presents the English Ambassador [sic] has brought. The result is not known, but what is beyond doubt [is that] the counsels of the Moormen have made a strong impression on the mind of the King and his eldest son [the Ein-gyi Paya]. The latter sent to me a confidential person to tell me that being a European, I might have heard from Bengal the true object of the Embassy and he requested me to communicate to him sincerely what I knew on the subject....'² This evidence indicates alarm at the Court as to British purposes.

The King appears to have been provoked also by Symes' large military escort - for him, an unfamiliar and threatening feature. It seems that he gave orders that it should be disarmed but that the Ein-gyi Paya prevented the execution of the order.³

There is evidence also that the King was becoming puzzled at the frequency of British missions to Burma. He told Rogers, an Englishman domiciled in Burma, that 'this being the third ambassador

1. Ibid., pp.235-236; for a related case, see ibid., p.204.

2. Ibid., p.236.

3. Ibid., p.162.

sent by the English, and not being able to comprehend the motive of these embassies, he had ordered the ambassador to be sent back without any discussion with him.'¹ But if such an order was issued by the King, it was obviously not executed by his officials.

There is evidence to show that the King already had a tendency to issue rash orders which had to be held up by his ministers. According to Don Louis de Grondona 'the King, as he advances in years, grows daily more violent and ungovernable; and it is with great difficulty the old ministers prevent his issuing the most destructive orders'.² There were to be more signs of this royal tendency towards rash action in 1812 and 1818. This may account in part for the order to disarm the escort.

The King also had many grievances against the British. Cox's actions had given great offence, and the British had failed to make amends for them.³ They had not, in fact, even disavowed them, and it is possible that the Burmese were afraid that Symes would make similar proposals.⁴ (This would have been a reason for not receiving him). There were also the disagreements at the Arakan-Chittagong frontier and the British refusal to supply arms.

The problem now arose as to what was to be done with the British. Were they to be sent back and their presents refused? Or

1. Ibid., p.246.

2. Ibid., p.240.

3. Ibid., p.241.

4. Ibid., p.154.

were they to be received after all? The King was inclined at first to the first course of action, but he was advised strongly by others to receive the British, and ultimately agreed to do so. The Ein-gyi Paya was the most important person who worked for an accommodation. According to Louis de Grondona, 'Though himself more inclined to the French, he dreads the former [the British] particularly at the present period, when the Siamese give sufficient employment to the Birman arms'.¹ The Myowun of Pegu, then detained at the capital by the King was also in favour of receiving the British.²

Rogers who, as an Englishman domiciled in Burma, was more aware than most Burmese of the military disparity between the two powers, also impressed upon the King the dangers involved in sending away the envoy, and thereby humiliating the British. The British, he said, had 150,000 men in Bengal ready to attack any country. The King could receive the envoy, and accept his presents, while rejecting his proposals if he wished. The King apparently thought Rogers' advice to be good.³ The danger of provoking British retaliation at a time when his armies were involved in Siam would have been one reason which induced the King to agree to receive Symes.

It must be emphasized also that the King's grievances against the British had never been so serious as to make a

1. Ibid., p.241.

2. Ibid., p.149.

3. Ibid., p.247.

reconciliation impossible. It will be remembered that early in 1798, he had already been willing to overlook Captain Cox's conduct in order to obtain arms from the British. Even in 1802, he had initially been willing to receive Symes and had only subsequently changed his mind. The case for friendly relations with a strong neighbouring power and main trading partner was still as strong as ever. It is not surprising therefore that he should in the end have paid heed to the remonstrances which various people made to him, restored Symes to his favour and made a number of concessions to the British. It should be noticed also that there was French influence in Burma only in the sense that there was apparently some liking for them in the minds of some persons, including the King and the Ein-gyi Paya. But the King's goodwill proved to have only a transitory effect on policy, and the Ein-gyi Paya was actually to work for a reconciliation with the British.

Although the King's resentment proved to be temporary it could have had serious consequences while it lasted. Symes maintains that the King had at one stage wanted to disarm the mission's escort, and that he had even issued orders to this effect but that these were blocked by the Ein-gyi Paya.

Since resistance would have been futile, Symes would probably have acquiesced in the measure if he was satisfied that no harm would come to his party afterwards. However, the Calcutta Government would have felt badly humiliated and relations with Burma would have been damaged. If Symes resisted an attempt to disarm him, a clash would have occurred, and this too would have damaged relations with Burma. It is difficult, however, to say what

the British reaction would have been. It could have taken the form of a retaliatory attack on Rangoon.

Symes helped matters also by providing a moderate statement of British objectives when the Ein-gyi Paya and the Myowun wanted one to show to the King. The envoy felt that it was out of the question now to put to the King the original objective of the mission such as a subsidiary alliance, a cession of territory, and an Ambassador at the capital. Symes wished to put forward only such proposals 'as should carry in themselves internal evidence of our good intentions, while being sufficient to afford us complete security against the intrigue of our rivals'.¹ He drew up four articles which were ultimately laid before the King. The first was as follows:

Perpetual peace and friendship to subsist between the English and Birman states, and neither is at any time to supply the enemies of the other with the materials of war. This is not to be understood to prohibit the relief of any vessel in distress, or to impede mercantile intercourse.²

It seems certain that the expression 'materials of war' was intended to cover more than just weapons and gunpowder. For one thing, Burmese weapons and gunpowder were of such poor quality that the French would not have wished to purchase any. Then, the export of these items was in any case forbidden by Burmese law, so that no special prohibition was necessary. Finally, Symes states in his diary that the clause prohibited 'the aiding in any shape [of] enemy vessels'. This must have included the provisioning and repair

1. Ibid., p.168.

2. Ibid., p.245.

of such vessels. The relief of vessels in distress was allowed. This would have meant help in such cases as starvation, loss of masts etc. but would not have included normal provisioning, repairs etc.

The second article was drafted to dispel fears of sinister British intentions, which existed at that time, and to avert all likelihood of a French political presence in Burma.

The British Government is not desirous to extend its territorial possessions [in fact, a cession of territory had been one of Symes' objectives]; but if hereafter at any time the Birman 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 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.¹

The third and fourth articles called for the 1795 concessions to be considered as in full force and effect and for future discussions to be channelled through the "Resident" at Rangoon. These suggestions were moderate; and it was such as these perhaps that Wellesley should have instructed Symes to make in the first place. As a result of Symes' personal clarification of his objectives, the Ein-gyi Paya could inform the King that the British were not seeking territory.²

Was Symes justified in refraining from putting forward his original proposals? There can be no doubt that he was. The offer of a subsidiary alliance would have been rejected and would probably have given offence (particularly, as is possible, the King did not

1. Ibid., p.245.

2. Ibid., pp.171-172. However, Symes also warned the Burmese that the British might exact respect if none was offered by the Burmese. (Ibid., pp.170-171). See also ibid., p.158.

consider the Governor-General as being even his equal). It would also have given credence to the rumours in circulation that the British had expansionist designs in respect of Burma.

The Ein-gyi Paya informed Symes through an intermediary that the Court had been under the impression, until it saw Wellesley's letter, that Symes had been deputed by Sir John Shore to repeat Cox's proposals (presumably those in his memorials). If this was correct, it would go a long way to explaining Symes' cold reception. On this occasion, the Ein-gyi Paya asked Symes also how an envoy would be received if one was sent to Calcutta again to obtain arms. Symes believed probably wrongly, that there would be no difficulty over arms purchases.¹ His assurance may have mollified the King, although he refrained from pursuing the matter. The Heir Apparent was also reported to have drawn the King's attention to the importance of the Rangoon trade to the royal revenue.²

On November 9, Symes was accommodated in comfortable quarters on land. On November 11, the French arrived and were also accommodated. On November 26, the French received an audience, and on November 28, Symes was received. The King, Symes reported

... observed in an audible voice that the records of the Burmese Empire contained no mention of war having ever subsisted between the English and Burmese nations and that much mischief may arise from selecting an improper person to represent a state /a reference to Cox/. He thought fit to pay me by name a compliment and said that having seen my face, he should forget every cause of umbrage.³

1. Ibid., pp.154-155.

2. Ibid., p.186.

3. Ibid., p.190.

No enquiry was made after the Governor-General or even the King of England, but it was clear that the King was once again well-disposed. He seems also to have been fond of Symes. Cox, by contrast, seems to have left a lasting bad impression.

Symes' reception was much superior to the one the French had received. They had to walk two miles to the palace, attended only by Baba Sheen and 'an inferior officer' and had been received by the King 'in his plain dress and without his crown.'¹ This total and abrupt reversal suggests that the King's earlier pro-French attitude was a very superficial affair.²

It should be noted also that the reversal in question did not amount to very much. It was not as if the King had been dissuaded at the last minute from entering into an anti-British alliance with France. There is no satisfactory evidence to show that such an alliance was ever in prospect. All that had happened, if Symes' information was correct, was that he had been inclined to show some favour to the French, and some disfavour to the British. Instead he had decided to give the British a better reception than the French.

On 2 December, Symes received a letter from the Hlutdaw in reply to Wellesley's letter to the King, and was also given some important verbal assurances. The letter together with the assurances represent the King's response to the 1802 mission, and need to be examined carefully. Before this

1. Ibid., pp.187-188.

2. The following report is of some interest in this connection: "As to the French, after the departure of Messrs Bevan and Desbruslais, they were no more talked of than if they were not in existence. Neither letter nor request that I have heard of has since been heard of from them." Canning to Symes, 23 September 1803, No.130, in Bengal Secret Consultations, 5 July 1805, enclosing report by Don Louis de Grondona.

is done, however, it is proposed to examine Wellesley's letter to the King. This letter was very different in tone from those brought by Symes and Cox in 1795 and 1796.¹ Wellesley informed the King that it was only his conviction that the Arakan Myowun's threat had not been authorized by him that had induced him 'to refrain from employing the means within my powers of exacting signal and instantaneous repatriation for the insult thus wantonly offered to the dignity of the British Government in India.....' Wellesley also referred to 'the great augmentation of the power and resources of the British Empire in this quarter of the globe', 'the progressive course of victory, conquest and triumph [of the British]', and 'the irresistible force of our arms'. He called the demand for the expulsion of emigrants from Chittagong 'unwarrantable' and re-affirmed the policy that only proven criminals would be handed over to the Burmese.

Yet, in spite of its minatory tone, the Governor-General's letter was not fundamentally unfriendly. The object of Symes' mission Wellesley declared, was 'an improved system of friendship and alliance between the two states on a secure and permanent foundation'. The King was referred to Symes for the actual proposals 'calculated to promote the mutual interests and to cement the friendship, of the two states'. It has been seen that Symes refrained from putting forward these proposals and submitted his four articles instead. These, therefore, were all the King knew officially about British objectives. It is true that the words 'alliance' was used in Wellesley's letter, but in loose contexts ('an improved system of friendship and alliance', 'existing relations of friendship and

1. Hall, op.cit., pp. 110-112, gives text of the letter.

alliance') where it meant no more than friendship.¹

The King may not have been pleased at the tone of Wellesley's letter. At any rate, the royal reply contains a severe criticism of British policy with regard to the refugees and to arms.² It first refers to Symes' arrival in Burma and goes on:

His Majesty had already been informed that the Governor-General after having, some years ago, paid homage under the golden rules of his royal feet, and requested to be received into his royal protection, had not only welcomed and refused to deliver up his Arracan subjects, who had taken refuge in the province of Bengal, but that he had even opposed an armed force to those sent to compel them to return. His Majesty had further received information that the Agents sent by him to purchase musquets had met with opposition from the Governor-General, for which reason a Royal decision, dreadful as the culminating arms of the spirits above, thundered from his golden mouth that considering the conduct of the Governor-General's, there was just reason to believe him a man of little faith, and that it was therefore not expedient to receive his presents.³

In the next paragraph, there was reference to a further cause of complaint: 'the rusticity and ill humour of Captain Hiram Cox'.⁴

However, the letter ended, like Wellesley's, on a note of friendship, though also of superiority. It stated that Symes, after indicating that his words should be regarded as Wellesley's, had 'entreated' that he should be forgiven, that the British should be allowed to trade in Burma, and that the presents should be received; and that the King had consented to do these things. It was stated that the King 'had taken into his royal protection the English nation

1. Ibid., pp.111 and 112. Note the reference to 'existing' relations of alliance.

2. Ibid., pp.253-257, gives text of the letter.

3. Ibid., p.239.

4. Ibid., p.230.

both of Bengal and Europe....'¹ There were references also to the reception of the party from the Isle de France and to the receipt of letters from the Vietnamese court. Copies of these letters, which proposed an alliance of Burma and Vietnam against Siam, were attached to the royal letters to Wellesley. Symes referred to this as 'an ebullition of foolish vanity', but it seems to have been a practice to let friendly powers know of the King's greatness.² A Burmese letter of 1823 to the Sultan of Kedah accepting his offer of vassalage informed him of another offer of alliance by Vietnam which appears to have been spurious.

The King's letter made no direct comment on Symes' proposals. He preferred perhaps not to enter into a discussion of them in writing. Symes reports:

I had an interesting conversation with him [the Myowun of Pegu] on the objects of the embassy. With respect to Arracan he said he was authorized by the King to assure me that no demands would ever again be made in any shape, and that the Governor of Arracan was not instructed to make a demand of them in terms of insolence or disrespect. With regard to the propositions which I have submitted, His Majesty thought that the only reply necessary was to signify to me his determination not to grant lands or settlement to any European power whatever and that matters should revert exactly to the state in which I had settled and left them in the year 1795....³

The last sentence suggests an alternative reason why no written statement was given; the King wanted matters to revert to the state of affairs created by the Hludaw's letter and other documents of 1795.

1. Ibid., p.256.

2. See Chapter VI.

3. Hall, op.cit., pp.198-199.

Later, Symes was to write with some irritation that:

His Majesty may perhaps be of the opinion that the verbal communication^s made to me in his name by the Viceroy ... were sufficient to authorise silence on those points in his reply to the Governor-General's letter. This is not unlikely, and is perfectly consistent with that vanity which seems to increase as real strength diminishes.¹

In fact, the assurances made to the British were important even if communicated verbally. British apprehensions with regard to the Arakan Myowun's threat had been set at rest; the demand for refugees had been avowedly dropped for good (it was, in fact, revived in 1812, but in circumstances which arguably justified the move), and assurances had been given with regard to foreign factories and settlements. On the other hand, French ships continued to be received at Burmese ports after the resumption of hostilities between France and Britain. In 1802, as in 1795, the King did not wish to abandon his neutrality.

There were those in Burma who feared that the King had already risked too much by his early cold treatment of Symes, and that relations might deteriorate. One of these was the Myowun of Pegu. Symes reports him as saying: 'I hope you will represent things in such a light as may tend to peace and friendly intercourse.' What is the disposition of Marquis Wellesley?² Symes said he reassured him on this point. The Myowun may have thought that the safest policy that could be adopted in the future would be one of satisfying British ambitions, and he believed he could gradually induce the King to do this. Alternatively, he may have wanted British help

1. Ibid., p.229, fn.91.

2. Ibid., p.199.

for the Ein-gyi Paya. 'Proceed by degree [he told Symes] and I can answer that your nation will be able to procure a factory at Rangoon, and whatever else you desire. The Engy Teckien [Heir Apparent] is as well disposed as myself'.¹ In view of the King's attitude, the Myowun probably over-estimated his own influence.

Another Burmese official anxious to avoid a rift with the British was Joseph Xavier da Cruz, the Portuguese Akaukwun, or customs-officer, at Rangoon. Da Cruz assured Symes that he would deter the King from giving the French a foothold in Burma (though it is very doubtful if the King would ever have done this and therefore whether da Cruz's influence was needed).² On 23 December 1802, da Cruz and the Myowun visited Symes and 'earnestly entreated me to represent matters in such a light as would avert from their nation the miseries of war, observing that they knew our power to be irresistible'.³

On 25 December 1802, Symes left the capital, on 11 January he arrived at Rangoon. There he got into a dispute with the anti-British Yewun. The latter tried to prevent Symes' vessel leaving Rangoon, but since he had only 200-300 followers armed with spears, he could not enforce his wishes, and Symes was able to depart on 20 January 1803.⁴ In the course of his dispute with the Yewun, some of the followers of the Myowun, who were resentful of their master's continued detention at the capital, had an interview with Symes, in

1. Ibid., p.199.

2. Ibid., pp.260-261.

3. Ibid., p.216.

4. Ibid., pp.218-228 for details of the dispute.

which '... they were sufficiently explicit', Symes reported, 'to convince me that a change, likely to put the Engy Teckien Heir Apparent in the throne, and of course elevate their patron, would be far from disagreeable to them'.¹ There is no evidence, however, that either the Ein-gyi Paya or the Myowun had such ambitions for themselves.

En route to Calcutta, Symes wrote a brief account of the achievements of the mission, and made some suggestions as to the future policy to be adopted towards Burma. The gist of his argument was as follows:

There are several circumstances relating to the political and the military state of the Birmese country, of which it is proper your Lordship should be apprized, but which I think it most prudent to reserve for personal communication. On a general review of all the transactions of the embassy, from the commencement to the conclusion although the result may fall short of your Lordship's expectations, as it certainly has of mine, yet I trust your Lordship will agree with me in opinion, that important advantages have been derived from it. A positive and to us a very detrimental alliance between the Birmese and the French has been prevented, and French influence, if not eradicated, has been considerably diminished even in his Majesty's mind, whilst a powerful party had been formed in favour of the English, which, let the result be peace or war, cannot fail to give us an advantage, either a preponderating weight in their counsels or (if such aid were necessary to our success) an easy conquest in the field. Our national character is become better known to the people at large, as invaders we should not inspire the defenceless and peaceful with terror.... A knowledge of the principles of our Government is now widely diffused among all classes of Birmese, who cannot avoid contrasting those principles with the wretched system to which they are forced to submit.²

1. Ibid., p.227.

2. Ibid., pp.232-233.

It is not known what it was that Symes communicated personally to Wellesley on returning to Bengal. It could have been details of a project he had discussed with the Myowun of Pegu to instal the Ein-gyi Paya on the throne, in the event of a power-struggle. An earlier quotation suggests that Symes discussed something of this nature with the Myowun's adherents. The Myowun himself was to make a proposal of this nature in 1809 to the current British envoy to Burma, Captain John Canning who had been Symes' deputy in 1802. Also, Symes' words in his report are intriguing: "... a powerful party has been formed in favour of the English, which, let the result be peace or war, cannot fail to give us an advantage...."¹ But this, it must be emphasized, is speculation; also, if something of this nature was discussed with the Myowun, we do not know, firstly, what the British terms for help were (territorial cessions and friendship would probably have been more acceptable to the Burmese than a subsidiary alliance); and secondly, whether the Ein-gyi Paya was privy to the project.

In discussing the advantages gained by his mission, Symes was almost certainly wrong in claiming that an alliance between the French and the Burmese had been forestalled; for no such alliance was ever in prospect. His assertion that 'French influence' had been dininished in the King's mind requires qualification also. 'French influence' in this case was only a superficial liking which could not have had serious consequences. On the other hand, it was true that the British had gained substantial benefits. The King had granted Symes a reception and had 'revived'

1. Ibid., p.232.

the concessions of 1795. The bad feeling created by the Cox mission, the refusal to supply arms and the differences of 1798-1800 had been dissipated; as the King himself had told Symes at the royal audience, 'every cause of umbrage had been forgotten'.¹ The British also had verbal assurances that French factories or French settlements would not be allowed. Further, Symes had enlisted on the British side as against the French, a number of important people including the Ein-gyi Paya, the Myowun of Pegu and Joseph Xavier da Cruz. And possibly, Symes had managed to prepare the ground for British intervention in the event of a power struggle, though of course, in 1819, the Burmese were able to solve their succession problems themselves.

Symes' claim that his embassy had infused all classes of Burmese with a knowledge of British principles of government must of course be dismissed out of hand, as must also his further contention that the influence the British had acquired in Burma would give them an easy victory there (unless perhaps the British happened to be intervening on the side of the Ein-gyi Paya in a power struggle between the rival princes, in which case their support could have tipped the scales).

The mission of 1802 may appear to have been a failure when its results are compared with Wellesley's objectives, but not when these are compared with the real strategic interests of the British. These seem to have been more or less accommodated if the continued use of Burmese ports by French privateers is set aside. Consequently, it is surprising to find Symes arguing that 'a paramount influence

1. Ibid., p.190.

in the Government and administration of Ava, obtain it how we may, is now become indispensably necessary to the interest and security of the British possessions in the East.¹ This was not sound advice and it was not accepted at Calcutta. It is possible that Symes' advice at this point was coloured by resentment arising from the neglect he had suffered in the early phase of his mission.

1. Ibid., p.234.

CHAPTER III

PART II

Lt. Canning's First Mission

Wellesley ignored Symes' suggestion that the British should attempt to secure a paramount interest in the counsels of the Burmese state. For many months, no decisions were taken in Calcutta regarding Burma. Then in May 1803, it was decided to re-establish relations.

To understand Wellesley's reaction, two factors should be borne in mind. Firstly, the initially hostile reception accorded to Symes, and the behaviour of the Yewun upon Symes' return to Rangoon, were greatly resented at Calcutta.¹ Secondly, the news received from Europe indicated that a resumption of hostilities between Britain and France in the near future was likely and it seemed highly desirable that there should be a British agent in Rangoon who could report any new French initiatives there.² The British had the right, under the 1795 treaty, which was still in force, to send a ^{and political} commercial representative to Rangoon, who could have also acted as an undercover agent. However, Wellesley was unwilling to take advantage of this concession until the Court had made amends for their treatment of Symes and for the Yewun's behaviour. He decided

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1. Bengal Secret Consultations (BSC), 19 May 1803, Symes to Canning, 7 May 1803, No.13.
 2. Bengal Political Consultations (BPC), 12 May 1803, Edmonstone to Symes, 6 May 1803, No.27 and BSC, 19 May 1803, Symes to Canning, 7 May 1803, No.13. News of the outbreak of hostilities reached India in September. Wellesley thought it likely that France would try to establish her influence in Burma. ^{at the time} See Owen, S.J., A Selection from the Despatches, Treaties and other Papers of the Marquis Wellesley, Oxford, 1877, p.587.

instead, that Symes should send a private agent to Rangoon, but that the transaction would be 'under the authority of the Governor-General'. Lt. Canning, Symes' deputy in 1802, was selected. Canning was informed that his main task would be to inform Calcutta of any attempt by France to gain a footing in Burma. He was to report any attempt by France towards forming an alliance with Burma, to mark the state and progress of French interests in that quarter, 'and to give the earliest intimation of any attempt on the part of France to obtain a settlement within the Burmese territory either by negotiation or by force of arms'.

The King had assured the British in 1802 that he would not cede territory to any European power. It is possible that Wellesley was not fully re-assured by this promise. In any case, it was clearly advisable to secure information on all French initiatives. Canning was instructed to keep this objective of reporting French activities strictly secret.¹

He was also to convey to the Calcutta authorities any proposal or communication the King might wish to make and he was to encourage such a development by assuring the King of the friendly intentions of the British. He was also to receive any apology which the Court might make for the treatment accorded to Symes in 1802. If the Burmese asked why he had come, Canning was to say that he had come to receive apologies for the Yewun's conduct. This was not a

1. BSC, 19 May 1803, Symes to Canning, 7 May 1803, No.13. An impression existed at Calcutta that the King was hostile to the British (*ibid.*). This was, in fact, no longer the case. This had become evident in the later stages of the Symes mission.

very convincing explanation and it was not believed. Also, in case an apology was offered, Canning would no longer have any reason for staying at Rangoon. If his reception was hostile, and his stay became unavailing Canning could leave. It was not expected however, that this would happen.

The old policy of establishing a subsidiary relationship with Burma and of intervention in her succession disputes appears to have been given up. Nor was there any interest in promoting commerce. Neither of these factors is referred to at all in Canning's instructions. The ^{main} aim now was the limited one of gaining information on French activities in Burma.

Canning arrived at Rangoon on 31 May 1803, and was well-received. He found that both the Myowun and the Yewun were absent. The Myowun had not returned yet from the capital, while the Yewun had been called up by the King, because he had been displeased with his conduct. The Yewun, according to daCruz, had sent a report on his dispute with Symes to the King immediately after Symes' departure. The King had been displeased with the Yewun, and had called him up to the capital. (This information appears to have been reliable, since the King stated his views personally to daCruz).¹

In the absence of the Myowun and Yewun, authority in Rangoon had devolved on da Cruz, the Akaukwun and Baba Sheen, the Akunwun. Neither of them would accept Canning's explanation of his purpose in coming. They made determined efforts to find out the real objects of the mission, but Canning was under very strict instructions on this score, and could not meet their wishes.² To judge from Canning's

1. BSC, 20 June 1805, Canning to Symes, 14 July, No.440, entry for 17 June.

2. Ibid., entry for 7 June.

account, Baba Sheen was well disposed to the British. He was willing to help them, if their aims were not inimical to Burmese interests. 'Mutual confidence was necessary', he told Canning, 'if every desirable end was to be achieved'.¹ (My emphasis). But he would first have to know what British objectives were.

It seemed to Canning from the reports reaching him that the King too was well disposed to the British. (This had, in fact, been obvious towards the end of Symes' mission, although it was apparently not fully realized at Calcutta). There was also the fact that the King had called up the Yewun. Further, Canning was informed by da Cruz that the King, on finding out from da Cruz that Symes had suggested to the Ein-gyi Paya that he sent an envoy to Bengal, had thought it a very good idea, and had been annoyed that neither the Myowun nor the Ein-gyi Paya had mentioned the project to him. He had told da Cruz that he would send an Ambassador to Calcutta, and all issues which arose between the two powers could be communicated to the British through him. This information must be regarded as authentic, unless it is supposed that da Cruz was lying. Da Cruz believed the King would be willing to send an exploratory mission first and to follow it up by a permanent embassy.²

Subsequently, Canning received more information on the Court's attitude. He had sent to the Ein-gyi Paya a letter from Symes, in which the latter suggested that the court sent an Ambassador to Bengal. The Ein-gyi Paya wrote to Baba Sheen and da Cruz at Rangoon, informing them that 'His Majesty having already listened to

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

all the representations made to him by Colonel Symes at Ummerapoora, and granted whatever he asked, no cause nor motive appears now to exist for sending an Ambassador to Calcutta'.¹ If the real reason was the Governor-General's lack of sovereignty, it was not openly stated. It is also not clear whether the decision was the King's or the Ein-gyi Paya's. If it was the King's, it is clear that he had made a volte-face. In this connection, a report sent to Canning by Don Louis de Grondona is interesting. Don Louis wrote that 'the first time that Colonel Symes visited this country [i.e. in 1795], some of the ministers mentioned the subject [of sending an Ambassador to Calcutta] to the King who replied that he was a Sovereign prince whereas the Governor-General had only a delegated authority which rendered him not his equal and the result was that an Ambassador was not sent'.² This report, however, cannot be regarded as completely reliable, since some doubt attaches to certain other reports sent to Canning by Don Louis.

On 12 June, Canning was visited by Ommetha, the adherent of the Myowun who was reported by Symes in 1802 as hinting that the Myowun's followers would like to see a revolution occur, which would raise the Ein-gyi Paya to the throne, and elevate the Myowun. He told Canning that the Ein-gyi Paya had asked him to secure 1,000 muskets. Ommetha asked if Canning could get them from Bengal. Canning replied that the Ein-gyi Paya should make an official request which he would certainly pass on to Calcutta. He could not act on a request from Ommetha.³

1. BSC, 5 July 1804, Canning to Edmonstone, 7 September, No.128, enclosing Ein-gyi Paya's order, received 23 July.

2. Ibid., Canning to Symes, No.130, submitting Grondona's report.

3. Ibid., entry for 12 June.

Canning concluded his despatch of 17 June with observations on economic conditions in Burma. Trade, he reported, had declined, partly because of exactions by the Yewun, partly because of the illicit trade in cloth carried on by Burmese boatmen with Bengal, which resulted in reduced prices for cloth and partly because the market in cloth was glutted. Trade had picked up after the Yewun had been called up to the capital in May. The nature of his exactions is not described, nor whether these involved a violation of the 1795 agreement.

In July, an order was received from the Ein-gyi Paya's ministers (who appear to have been officiating in the Hlutdaw's place at this time) ordering da Cruz and Baba Sheen to give Canning a house if he wished to stay, and not to obstruct him if he wished to leave. The Burmese Government had already heard of Canning's arrival and his presence in Rangoon had secured their approval.

Early in September, a dramatic event occurred. A French ship arrived in Rangoon. According to early reports reaching Canning, the vessel (which was called La Jeune Africaine) had left Bordeaux in France on a trading voyage with a cargo of muskets, cloth and so forth. Canning heard that the commander was one Feuillelaze, who had been Brigade-Major to the French General who had commanded the ships sent to Tipu Sultan's assistance from Mauritius in 1798. Feuillelaze had however left the Isle of France and returned to France, and was now coming directly from there.¹

1. BSC, 5 July 1804, Canning to Symes, 8 September, No.128.

Canning suggested in his initial report to Symes, that reports of the 1802 embassy might have reached France, and the French government might want to take steps to counteract it. On the other hand, he pointed out that Feuillelaze might simply have taken up trade.

Subsequently, Canning passed a new, and more alarming report. The Jeune Africaine had brought a cargo of forty-six chests, each containing 25 muskets, 40 bales of cloth, liquors, specie, and various other small articles for sale. A report was spread by the French that the muskets were meant to be sold to the Marathas, but because of the confusion in their territories, the captain saw "little security of payment."¹ He had then attempted to secure arms at other places in India but had not been able to do so to advantage. He had therefore come to Burma. Da Cruz had bought 1,000 muskets for the King and the remaining had been sold to others in Rangoon.

However, Canning heard from an informant that the Captain had brought a letter to be forwarded to Court, and that also 1,000 muskets were meant as presents for the King. The various members of the Rangoon Government had also received presents. The contents of the letter were not known to Canning.

On receiving this report, Symes informed the Calcutta Government that the French were actively promoting their interests in Burma.

Soon, however, Canning passed on new reports which contradicted the previous ones on several points. The ship's name, it

1. Ibid., Canning to Symes, 16 September, No.128.

appeared, was not La Jeune Africaine but La Pucelle. (The Jeune Africaine was the name of a ship being built by the local French community). The Captain's name was not Feuillélaze. (However, in subsequent reports, Canning uses this name again, and he apparently considered later that it was the correct name).

However, Canning still felt sure as a result of reports supplied "from the channel through which I derive my information" that there was "little doubt" that muskets were a present for the King and that a letter was delivered to Baba Sheen, though it might have been meant for da Cruz and Baba Sheen, and not the Court.¹

Canning's informant could have been Vincentius Sangermano, the Italian missionary, who had promised earlier to supply him with information about French activities.

At the time of his departure (in November) Canning still believed that the French ship (which was still at Rangoon) could have come for a political object. "Pegue he wrote being a country in which both the government of the Isle of France and its mother country have always taken a considerable interest, it is not impossible that Feuvilleélaze without touching at the Mauritius may have come direct from France, either with specific proposals from the French government or merely to discover on which terms the Birmans would be willing to treat, and by what means the French interests may be best promoted."²

1. Ibid., Canning to Symes, 23 September, No.130.

2. BSC, 20 June 1805, Canning to Chief Secretary, 2 December 1803, No.443. In fact, there is no evidence that France took any interest in Burma between 1795 and 1826.

On another occasion in November, he wrote, with reference to Feuillelaze's arrival "I think it probable that the French are endeavouring to feel their ground and carry on some secret negotiations with the Birman Government."¹ The use of "not impossible" on one occasion and "probable" on another shows carelessness.

According to all reports reaching Canning, the ship had come from France and the Frenchmen on board were all from Europe. The metropolitan French government however, had no plans for a political initiative in Burma in the period 1795 to 1826.² The ship must therefore have started out originally with a commercial purpose. This was understandable; because of the Peace of Amiens, the French had an opportunity to trade in the east, and it would not be surprising if it was taken. According to the reports received by Canning again, the ship did not stop at Mauritius. It had stopped at the Seychelles, (a British conquest), and at French colonies in India, which had all been occupied by the British. It is hard to believe that political proposals could have been sent from these places. Admittedly, the possibility that the ship had in fact stopped at Mauritius cannot be ruled out. The fact that Canning heard no reports to this effect does not amount to conclusive evidence.

A further point should be noted, however. Feuillelaze, it appears, was a disreputable character. In fact, according to certain Frenchmen from India who were forced to stop at Rangoon when

1. Ibid.

2. See article by Phillipe Presenez in France-Asie, XXI, 3.

the vessel taking them to Mauritius developed a leak, "a remote situation [was] best suited to his character, and he would not find it quite convenient to shew himself at the Isle of France."¹ Even if he had stopped at Mauritius, the authorities there would not have been likely to entrust a political mission to him. It may be assumed therefore that the ship was on a trading voyage only and that the muskets were really for sale.

The French captain was still at Rangoon when Canning left in November 1803. In September, news of war in Europe reached India and (subsequently) Burma. It was now more essential than ever that Canning should stay in Rangoon. However, in late October, a crisis occurred which resulted in Canning leaving for Bengal.² On 22 October, the Yewun returned to Rangoon with additional powers (undefined by Canning). His treatment of Symes was greatly resented at Calcutta. The King too had been initially displeased and had called him up to the capital. Now he had sent him back to Rangoon with additional honours. Nothing is known as to what passed between the Yewun and the King; but it was clear that the King either accepted his explanation or did not think his offence serious enough to preclude his return to his post. The fact that he had enhanced authority might even mean royal approval of his actions. Canning at any rate interpreted this royal decision as a slight to the British.³

1. BSC, 20 June 1805, Canning to Chief Secretary, 2 December 1803, No.443.

2. BSC, 20 June 1805, Canning to Chief Secretary, 2 December 1803, No.443.

3. Letters of protest regarding the Yewun's behaviour had already been sent to the Court by the British.

Canning was willing to call on the Yewun. Baba Sheen assured Canning he would be well-received by the Yewun. The latter was civil at the meeting with Canning.

He inquired after the health of the Governor-General and of Colonel Symes, and whether the British provinces in India were in state of tranquility. He added that Rangoon being a commercial town it was his intention to do everything in his power to the advantage of trade.¹

It has been seen that Canning's explanation for his presence in Rangoon had failed to satisfy Baba Sheen and da Cruz. It probably failed to satisfy the Yewun also. What Canning's purpose in coming was, he could not know for sure, but it is understandable that he wanted to make sure Canning was not up to anything harmful.

On 31 October, the Yewun ordered that all letters either to or from foreigners at Rangoon should be subject to his inspection.

Canning at first did not believe that "so extraordinary an order" had been given. Then, on 2 November, he received a message from da Cruz requesting him to come to his house. On arrival there, he found there, da Cruz, various members of the Rangoon Council and a Captain Davidson, commander of the Company's armed brig Waller, who wished to hand over two letters to him.

It appeared that two British warships the Waller, and H.M.S. Caroline were outside the bar of the Rangoon river. The captain of the Caroline had received information (as Canning subsequently discovered) sent by Canning to Calcutta of the arrival of the ship from Bordeaux. He had written to Canning, mentioning that this news was one of his reasons for visiting Rangoon, and asking

1. Ibid.

Canning to supply him with any information he possessed about French and Dutch ships. The purser of the Caroline had also written asking for a supply of provisions. Da Cruz stated that the Burmese would have to read the letters first. Canning did not know what was in the letters, but he refused to receive them on such terms.

The members of Government entreated Canning to allow the letters to be opened but Canning refused. The Burmese were anxious to avoid a clash, but were also insistent that the letters should be opened.

The discussion was transferred to the Yewun's house. After much discussion, the Yewun decided that the letters should be delivered unopened to Canning, but that Baba Sheen should "obtain a sight of them."¹ Afterwards Baba Sheen told Canning that the Yewun had agreed to give up the letters for the sake of harmony between the two governments, but that he was expected to inform Baba Sheen in private of their contents. Canning refused to receive them on such terms, but the letters were put into his hands.

Canning returned home, Baba Sheen, da Cruz and a third member of the Rangoon Council arrived immediately afterwards and asked to see the letters. An hour of argument and entreaty (from the Burmese) followed, but Canning refused to give way.

Canning would in fact have been willing to give up these letters, had it not been for Page's request for information concerning French and Dutch vessels (Canning had read the letters on returning home). Canning was under strict instructions to keep

1. Ibid.

this objective secret, and it would be discovered if he showed this letter. He believed also that the Burmese government was partial to the French and would refuse him permission to stay if his purpose was discovered. (There does not seem to be any reliable evidence for this belief). If he agreed, other demands would be made and absolute secrecy might be necessary on future occasions. Also, the Yewun, according to unverified rumours received by Canning, had decided to seize Canning and all other British subjects if he found an expression "capable of a hostile construction."¹ Canning also felt that it was very degrading to have his letters opened. He decided to leave unless the demand was dropped.

He sent a letter to the Yewun through his interpreter stating that he would leave if his letters were opened. On arrival, his umbrella was taken from him, and thrown into the street, a stone was flung at him, and he was pushed out of the Yewun's office.

I cannot suppose Canning wrote this to have been done by order of the Raywoon Yewun yet it is difficult to imagine that his servants would have dared to act in such a manner had they not thought themselves authorised by their master's disposition.²

His interpreter gave the letter to a Burmese official, who gave it to the Yewun. No reply was received for some days.

On 3 November, Captain Davidson returned to his ship, accompanied by a boat laden with provisions. However, a Burmese official was stationed on the boat carrying the provisions, so that the boat should not send a letter to Canning secretly on its

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

return. Davidson could not find the Caroline at the pre-arranged spot, and sent a letter to Canning through the official. The official took it to the Yewun, who had it opened and translated. He then sent it to Canning.

Canning decided to view the opening of Davidson's letter as an answer. Therefore he wrote a letter to the Yewun announcing that he was leaving Rangoon. On 8 November, the Yewun's reply was received.

You ought to remain here [the Yewun wrote] cheerfully showing us clearly and exactly whatever may come to you in writing. If however, you be not content that we should read your letters and are really resolved to return to Bengal, I inform you that such a resolution is neither proper nor becoming.¹

The Yewun therefore did not want Canning to leave (a measure which might damage relations with the British). However, he was insistent that he should submit his letters for inspection.

Canning wrote two more letters to the Yewun, reiterating his earlier position. The Yewun, instead of waiving the regulation, opened another letter from Davidson. This confirmed Canning in his determination to leave.

Baba Sheen and da Cruz told Canning (correctly, as it turned out) that the Myowun had already left the capital and was on his way down river. They requested him to wait till he arrived. The Myowun would not inspect letters and Canning could stay on. Canning suspected that this was a delaying tactic. Only two ships would be going to Bengal for many months and both were leaving immediately.

1. Ibid.

He did not believe the Myowun would come down. The Yewun had received additional powers, and Canning had been informed by Don Louis that the Myowun would not return.

Baba Sheen and the Yewun seemed to feel that his departure would have very serious consequences. Symes, in 1802, had warned that the British would resent any ill-treatment of their representatives and perhaps his warning was responsible for their present fears. Canning told them that his departure would not have serious consequences. If the Viceroy came down and the order was revoked, some one would be sent.

It would perhaps have been better if Canning had stayed on at Rangoon. The discovery of his purpose need not necessarily have caused the Burmese to order him to leave. It might also have been possible to smuggle letters in and out of Rangoon when necessary.¹ Also, da Cruz and Baba Sheen had insisted (correctly) that the Myowun would return.

The reports to the effect that the Myowun would return soon turned out to be correct. He was already on his way down-river when he received a letter from Canning, explaining why he was leaving Rangoon. He wrote immediately to both Symes and Canning, criticizing the Yewun very strongly and asking both men to explain matters to the Governor-General, so that no dispute would ensue. On his arrival at Rangoon Baba Sheen had suggested that he write to the Governor-General himself. He therefore wrote another

1. In fact, Canning had already done this successfully on one occasion.

letter addressed to the Governor-General, assuring him that the Ein-gyi Paya was well disposed to the British and expressing a hope that the friendship between the two countries would be permanent. He did not suggest that the British send a representative to Rangoon. Canning had stated someone would be sent if the Myowun returned and the practice of opening letters was stopped.¹ The Myowun would not have considered a special invitation necessary.

Ommetha, the Myowun's adherent, also wrote a number of letters to Symes at this time. In one letter, he suggested that Canning and Symes persuade the Governor-General to issue the necessary orders for the import of muskets. In another letter, he proposed that the British send 20,000 to 30,000 muskets to Rangoon where they would be paid for. Ommetha had ignored Canning's request that an official request be made by the Ein-gyi Paya. It is not clear also whether he discussed the project with the Myowun. His request appears to have been ignored.

No representative was sent to Rangoon by the British although the Myowun had promised that there would be no examination of letters. Perhaps it was feared that the current state of affairs might not last, and the Yewun would once again be in control of the Pegu government. In any case, the British appear to have made alternative arrangements for gaining information. A brig, the Diana was chartered to carry letters between Burma and Calcutta. One of

1. BSC, 20 June 1805, letters from Rangoon Nos. 444 and 445. (All letters are under No. 444, except the letter from the Myowun to Governor-General which is numbered as 445).

British correspondents was Louis de Grondona, the Italian bishop at the capital; it is possible that Vincentius Sangermano at Rangoon was another. It does not appear that any important information was received and in mid-1804, the arrangement appears to have been suspended. This again suggests that the French ship which arrived in September was not on a political mission.¹

The French ship, which arrived in September, was not on a political mission. It is possible that the ship was on a commercial mission, or that it was a private vessel. The French government was not in a position to send a ship to Rangoon at that time, and the ship's arrival was a surprise. The ship's captain, Vincentius Sangermano, was a French priest who had been in Rangoon for some time. He had been in contact with the British authorities, and had been allowed to travel freely. The ship's arrival was a surprise, and it was not clear what its mission was. The British authorities were not in a position to send a ship to Rangoon at that time, and the ship's arrival was a surprise. The ship's captain, Vincentius Sangermano, was a French priest who had been in Rangoon for some time. He had been in contact with the British authorities, and had been allowed to travel freely. The ship's arrival was a surprise, and it was not clear what its mission was.

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1. BPC, 9 August 1804, No.3.

A final episode needs to be discussed. Between May and July 1804, a French privateer captured two English ships off the mouth of the Rangoon river. The privateer in question was called the Pariel and was commanded by one Captain Quenet. He had left Mauritius in March 1804, and arrived off the Pegu coast in June. His first victim was a sloop, the Trial, which was coming to Rangoon from Madras. Quenet converted the Trial into a privateer, which he had named the Pariel, and sent the former Pariel into Rangoon to be sold. He also collected provisions there. Quenet then attempted unsuccessfully to seize another ship, which was coming to Rangoon from Penang. Then, on 11 July, he seized the Harriot, a ship which had come from Chittagong. He converted the Harriot into a privateer, called the Pariel again, gave the former Pariel (originally the Trial) to the Captain of the Trial and the Harriot as a present, and after plundering a Muslim vessel sailed to Mergui. Canning (who was at Calcutta now) was informed that he was still there in late August.¹

At first, an impression prevailed at Calcutta that the Burmese authorities had been in collusion with Quenet. It seemed clear that the Burmese would have known of the privateer's presence, for it remained almost a month off the Rangoon river, and had secured provisions at Rangoon. Yet, Canning found it difficult to explain the supposed collusion of the Rangoon authorities with the privateer, in view of the fact that the King's duties suffered as a result. He could attribute it only to jealousy of the British.² The Calcutta Government wrote a letter of protest to the Myowun of Pegu.

1. BSC, 20 July 1805, Canning to Edmonstone, 14 September 1804, No. 446.

2. Ibid.

In reply the Myowun wrote a letter to Wellesley which explained Burmese policy in the matter. The Burmese Government had had no quarrel with any European power; its relations with the English, who were its closest neighbours, were particularly good. However, Rangoon was 'a sea port to which ships in distress resort for assistance'.¹ The privateer had asked for assistance and (in view of the fact that the Burmese had no quarrel with France, and that all ships were entitled to assistance at Rangoon), he could not refuse it. He had told the French, however, that they would have to leave the port in three days after securing supplies and had warned them against molesting vessels or entering vessels. Also, he had given supplies sufficient only for their reaching another port. Later, he was 'informed [by an officer of the Harriot, who came up to Rangoon by boat] that an enemy privateer appeared to be lying off the mouth of the river'.² He had immediately sent the officer and two war-boats, to protect the Harriot. This party found that the privateer had already seized the Harriot. The crew of the war-boats had wanted to attack the privateer, but ^{the} Harriot's officer had objected, saying 'it would mean certain destruction'.³

The Myowun wrote a similar letter of explanation to Canning. Baba Sheen also wrote to Canning, informing him that the practice of opening British letters had been stopped, but like the Myowun in the previous year, not suggesting that a representative be sent to Rangoon.³

1. Ibid., Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General, 13 December 1804, No. 448.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. Baba Sheen to Canning, No. 448. Baba Sheen referred also to St. Mathew ('Blessed are the peace-makers').

The British records include an account of the proceedings of the Rangoon Council in respect of the privateer.¹ It appears that a promise was exacted from the French that they would leave once they had secured supplies. This promise was violated. This extract may have been sent by Baba Sheen, who was a member of the Council, and who, in his letter to Canning, promised to send him information whenever necessary.

A further letter, received from one C. James, who described himself as a British subject at Rangoon, gives a fuller account of this episode. It appears that the Yewun sympathized with the French, but the Myowun reproached him, saying the King's duties would suffer if the privateer remained off the river-mouth.²

The Myowun, it seems clear again, wished to preserve good relations with the British. It was true that he had not refused provisions to the privateer, but he had insisted that they leave quickly, which he was not required to do under the 1795 concessions, and had also allowed only a limited sale of supplies. The Mergui authorities according to information received by Canning, allowed the vessel to remain there. It is unlikely, however, that they would have tolerated attempts by the privateer to seize ships coming to trade, any more than the Rangoon authorities had done.

Both the Myowun and Baba Sheen congratulated the British on their recent successes against the Mahrattas, referred to by Wellesley in his letter to the Myowun. Perhaps they wished to show that British successes in India were not resented.

1. Ibid., Extract from Proceedings of Rangoon Council, 10 July 1804, No. 448.

2. Ibid., Memorial by C. James, 24 July 1804, No. 450.

It is curious that the Myowun allowed the privateers to sell a vessel captured off the Rangoon river. Perhaps, he believed it was seized on the high seas.

Canning felt that the Myowun's explanations were satisfactory.¹ In view of this, and the fact that the practice of opening letters had been stopped, he felt that it would be worthwhile to send a representative to Burma. The suggestion was ignored.

1. Ibid., Canning to Edmonstone, 13 December 1804, No. 447.

CHAPTER IV

THE MISSION OF 1809-1810

In 1809, a further British mission was sent to Burma, the first since 1803. The intervening years, were not however without incident. One of these occurred in 1805-1806. A British vessel, the Betsey, had been seized by the French. The ship had put in at Rangoon harbour, and the British, who had heard of this, had stationed a warship, H.M.S. Albatross commanded by Captain J.M. Gordon, at the mouth of the Rangoon river, where it could protect British merchant vessels, and recapture the Betsey.

Two merchants at Rangoon, one an Armenian called Arratoon, and the other, Francisco, an Eurasian (or 'Portuguese', as Eurasians with Portuguese blood were then called) owned a ship called the Regina.¹ The ship had called at Mauritius, where it took on board a number of lascar prisoners (or Indian sailors employed on British ships) whom the French had been willing to set at liberty. It had then returned to Burma, stopping en route at the Nicobar islands to collect coconuts for sale at Rangoon. (Their fibre was used at Rangoon for making ships' ropes). When approaching Rangoon, it fell in with the Albatross, whose captain attempted to search her. The Regina attempted to escape, but was stopped by the firing of warning shots. Gordon found that her papers were irregular and fictitious.

Gordon felt that he had the right to send the ship to Calcutta for an inquiry, which would decide whether she was a legitimate prize. Subsequently, Admiral Troubridge, the British naval commander in the Indian Ocean, was to endorse this view; in

1. The documents relating to this affair are in the Bengal Secret Consultations (BSC), of 24 May 1806.

fact, he considered that the ship could have been declared a prize even if it was proved that she was Burmese property, since she was carrying false papers. However, Gordon, instead of sending her straight away to Calcutta, sent her instead into Rangoon, in order to sell her cargo of coconuts. This seems to have been an irregular act, since the Regina had not been declared to be a prize. Besides, the Burmese reaction was predictable. Their authorities refused to allow the sale of the coconuts. They also refused to allow the ship to be taken to Calcutta, insisting that she was Burmese property. They demanded that the vessel be handed over to them.

Gordon decided to take the ship out forcibly. On the night of 23 October, H.M.S. Albatross came up to Rangoon harbour without a pilot, took the Regina out and anchored some distance down the river.

The Myowun was infuriated by this act. He sent Rogers, the English Akaukwun of Rangoon, and Antony George, a local Eurasian, to Gordon to remonstrate with him. Gordon refused to return the vessel. The Myowun reacted by placing the British residents in Rangoon, and the captains of the seven British ships in Rangoon (though not the junior officers) under arrest. They were warned that they would be executed, and their property confiscated if the Regina was taken away.

These persons sent a representative to Gordon and he tried to persuade Gordon to return the vessel. Gordon offered to return the Regina if the merchants and sea-captains were released. He stated also that the departure of the Betsey would have great effect on his future actions, but did not make this a definite condition for the return of the Regina.

The Myowun agreed to release the English if the Regina were returned. He asked the English prisoners to write a petition to him incorporating Gordon's proposals. This was done and he issued a statement with the King's seal on it, promising to release the British if the Regina was surrendered but not mentioning the Betsey.

Gordon, however, refused to return the Regina. For one thing, the Burmese had not promised to send away the Betsey. He had apparently expected some concession on this point. Gordon was also irritated by certain features of the Myowun's statement, which he considered were insulting to him.

Gordon warned that he would leave Rangoon unless the Betsey was forced to leave in three days. At the end of this period, he left Rangoon with the Regina. He was apparently convinced that the Burmese would not carry out their threat to execute the British prisoners.

The threat of execution was not in fact carried out. However, the merchants and sea-captains remained under arrest. The seven British ships in Rangoon harbour were detained there. Also, trade between Burma and the British dependencies was at a standstill, for no ship dared to go to Rangoon in view of the conditions there.

Sir Thomas Troubridge, the British naval commander in the Indian Ocean, decided that the ship should be returned. He considered that Gordon had done wrong in taking the ship forcibly out of Rangoon. There was also the predicament of the British merchants to be considered, and the necessity to revive the trade with Burma. However, he did not think that Gordon's initial view that the ship ought to be taken to Calcutta for a judicial decision was wrong; the Regina was a lawful prize, because of her irregular papers.

He wrote letters to the King of Burma and the Myowun of Pegu. He defended Gordon's decision that the ship ought to have been examined at Calcutta. In his letter to the Myowun, he stated that 'if vessels were permitted to navigate with false, or illegal papers, it would be impossible to say whether such vessels be in the hands of proper owners, and unlawfully run away with by pirates and bandits.¹ However, Gordon had violated Rangoon's neutrality by taking the ship out forcibly. He would therefore return the Regina; but he hoped that the vessel would be returned to the British if found to have been carrying false papers. He also argued that the irregular acts of British officers should not lead to retaliation against British subjects. All well-grounded complaints would be attended to by the British.

At Penang, there were fears that the cessation of trade with Burma would ruin the plans entertained at that time in India and England for building up Penang as a major shipbuilding centre. This industry would need large supplies of teak from Burma. The Penang authorities, like Troubridge, felt that the Regina was a lawful prize; but for pragmatic reasons, it would be necessary to return her, and compensate Gordon and his crew if necessary. By the time their appeal reached Calcutta, the decision had already been taken to return her.

A British warship, H.M.S. Dedaigneuse was sent to Rangoon with Troubridge's letters to the King and the Myowun. The Myowun immediately released the British, and the ships in the harbour were allowed to leave. The Dedaigneuse returned to Calcutta with this information. She returned to Rangoon with the Regina. There was a feeling that the British would lose face if Regina was handed over to the Burmese authorities in Rangoon harbour. Consequently, the return

1. BSC, 24 May 1806, Troubridge to Myowun of Pegu, 20 November 1805, No.49.

was effected at the mouth of the Rangoon river. It does not appear that the Regina was ever returned to the British, which Troubridge had requested should be done if her papers were false. The fate of the Betsey, the privateer whose presence in Rangoon harbour, had been the reason for Gordon's arrival at the mouth of the river, is unknown.

The second incident occurred in January 1807. A French ship pursued by a British one had tried to pass between the island of Cheduba and the mainland, and had run aground and been wrecked in consequence. The captain of a British ship in the vicinity sent a boat to reconnoitre the ship which was fired at by the French crew. A party was then sent to the vessel, but they found that apart from the Captain and one officer, the crew had gone ashore. According to the Myowun of Arakan, the British ship

...entered the port of Maciawoddy Megawati or Cheduba⁷... and sent a party of armed men on shore who forced open the gate of the Fort and carried them the French on board the English ship. Although because of the friendship and good understanding subsisting between His Burmese Majesty and the British nation, the authorities at that time did not think proper to oppose that proceeding lest they should incur the displeasure of their Sovereign, yet adverting to the serious nature of the transaction they deemed it to be their duty to represent the case to His Majesty the King of Ava, who was accordingly pleased to direct that I the Myowun of Cheduba would, in his name, require the British government to despatch an Embassy (to Arakan) with the officers and crew of the French vessel which sic had been taken from within the limits of His Majesty's authority.¹

Two envoys from the Myowun of Arakan came with this letter dated 7 January 1808, to Calcutta early in March 1808, after Lord Minto had become Governor-General. It is not certain whether the incident of 1805-1806 was reported to the King of Burma; but this

1. Bengal Political Consultations (BPC), 28 March 1808, Myowun of Arakan to Governor-General of India, dated 7 January 1808, and received 1 March 1808, No.55.

one clearly was. The King, it is clear was determined to uphold his authority by securing the release of the crew.

Minto, in his reply, defended the boarding of the French ship within Burmese waters, as well as the subsequent landing on shore (no mention was made of breaking into a fort) on the grounds that it was the French who first started hostilities in Burmese territory. Minto maintained also the French crew on shore had come away with the British voluntarily; '... the English Captain... proceeded with several boats on shore for the purpose of bringing off the crew to the French ships, who voluntarily returned with him to the ship, being extremely unwilling to be left on shore....'¹ He stated also that the captured crew had already been sent to Mauritius by the British (probably as part of an exchange of prisoners), and that the Burmese mission's object of setting the French at liberty had therefore already been accomplished.

It is not known whether this reply satisfied the King. The repatriation of the crew did not vindicate his authority (the real object of the mission) as clearly as their restoration to Burmese hands would have done. Also, one violation of neutrality did not justify another. It should be noted also that although the act of boarding a French ship in neutral waters was a serious matter, that of landing a pursuit force ashore was much more so. The King does not appear however to have pursued the matter further. Probably he did not want to create a crisis in relations with the British on account of only one such incident. No complaints were made on this affair when Captain Canning visited Burma in 1809.

1. Ibid., Governor-General to Myowun of Arakan, 28 March 1808, No. 56. By writing directly to the Myowun, Minto had departed from the decision taken in 1796 that the Governor-General should write only to the King. This latter principle was not revived subsequently.

A friendlier exchange took place in 1809, shortly after the despatch of Canning to Burma. It was shown in the previous chapter that the Burmese attack on Chiengmai in 1798 had led to an appeal to the British for arms. Early in 1809, with the attack on Junk Ceylon imminent, the Myowun of Pegu wrote on behalf of the King to the authorities at Calcutta asking, in consequence of the friendship between the two countries, that 200 muskets and a quantity of saltpetre be sent to Rangoon, where they would be paid for.¹ (No mention was made of imminent hostilities with Siam). If the Governor-General could not supply them, he was asked to permit their purchase from private individuals. He was asked also to apply to the Myowun if he needed anything from Burma. The Burmese had evidently taken the lesson of 1798-1799 to heart, for the quantity of arms and saltpetre asked for this time could be easily met. The Governor-General replied, in a letter dated 2nd April 1809, agreeing to send the articles to Rangoon, and promising to ask the Myowun for whatever articles he needed from that quarter.²

In 1809 Minto's administration sent a new mission to Burma. The previous mission to Burma had been the unofficial one of Lieutenant Canning in 1803; the Government of Calcutta had remained since then without reliable information as to the extent of communications between Burma and the French Isles. In these circumstances, a belief developed that a large trade existed between the two places. As the instructions to Captain Canning expressed:

1. BPC, 29 April 1809, Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General of India, received 1 March 1809, No.162.

2. Ibid., Governor-General to Myowun of Pegu, 2 April 1809, No.163.

It is well-known that an extensive trade is carried on between the country of Pegue and the French Islands and that the former is an entrepot for the supply to the latter of articles both of merchandise and necessity, the produce of this country [India].¹

The belief was mistaken. Captain Canning, the British envoy of 1809-1810, was to discover that there had been only one case of commercial contact between Burma and the French Islands after the affair of the Regina in 1805. However, in 1809, the belief in the existence of a sizeable trade caused anxieties at Calcutta. Britain was retaliating at this time against Napoleon's Continental System by imposing a blockade on all French possessions. By an order in Council issued in Britain in November 1807, 'all trade in articles produced by countries excluding British ships and goods, or by their colonies, and all ships trading to or from the said countries or their colonies, together with all merchandize and produce belonging thereto, were thenceforth to be lawful prize.'² In other words, ships of neutral countries would not only be prevented from entering Mauritius/ ^{and Bourbon,} but would be seized along with their cargo if they attempted to do so.

Minto's administration feared that the measure "would materially... affect the commercial interests and the revenue of the Government of Pegu".³ There was concern also that seizure of neutral Burmese ships bound for Mauritius would be regarded by the latter, who knew nothing of blockades in the western sense, as an act of hostility against them. These factors might lead to retaliation against British interests at Rangoon. The lives and property of

1. Ibid., 20 July 1809, Instructions to Captain Canning, 20 July 1809, No.24.

2. Banerji, A.C., The Eastern Frontier of British India, Calcutta, 1964, p.180.

3. BPC, 20 July 1809, Instructions to Captain Canning, 20 July 1809, No.24.

British subjects would be in danger, and the trade between Bengal and Burma, important to the British as their source of teak, would be jeopardized.

It was decided, therefore, to send John Canning (now a Captain) to Burma again to inform Burmese authorities of the existence of a blockade. He was also to explain to them that a blockade was something which affected friends as well as foes, so that the fact that their ships would be siezed if they went to Mauritius did not signify enmity towards them. Since Mauritius had already been blockaded by British ships from the Cape of Good Hope, nothing could be done about Burmese ships that had already sailed from Rangoon to Mauritius. Consequently, the Calcutta Government took the unusual step of asking Canning to inform the Burmese '... of the orders which have been issued in England to the naval authorities in the Eastern Seas and of the entire independence of those authorities of [sic] the British Government in India....'¹ The authorities at Calcutta were hoping apparently that whatever anger was felt in Burma would be directed inconsequentially at the faraway Government in Britain rather than at themselves.

Canning was asked also to collect all the information he could concerning French relations with Burma.

It will be proper that you should endeavour to acquire full information regarding the exact nature and extent of the intercourse which has hitherto subsisted [between] the Government or inhabitants of Rangoon and the Isles of France and the degree and manner in which persons residing in the former place may be the cannels [sic] of trade between this country and the French Islands.²

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

It is surprising, in view of the Calcutta Government's belief in the existence of a flourishing trade between Burma and Mauritius, that no attempt was made before this occasion to collect information on dealings between the two places. It could have been done fairly easily, through a visiting country captain, for example.

Captain Canning arrived at Rangoon on 1 October 1809.¹ He found that the pro-British Myowun had been called up to the capital. The chief authority at Rangoon was now the Yewun, who in 1803 had become suspicious about the motives for Canning's residence at Rangoon and, by insisting on opening his letters, had forced him to leave the town. This time, however, the Rangoon Council and he gave Canning a friendly reception. However, when Canning began discussions with the Rangoon Council on 20 October, certain procedural difficulties arose. The Calcutta Government had wanted Canning to make his explanations about the blockade to the Rangoon authorities and return as quickly as possible to Bengal. Canning had not been given the status of Envoy to the Court of Ava, although he carried a letter from the Governor-General to the King and was at liberty to go to the capital if the King should invite him and if he thought that it was essential to the success of the mission to do this. For the Burmese, however, the important thing was that Canning was the bearer of a letter to the King. To judge from the missions of 1795, 1798, 1802 and 1811-1813 the accepted procedure in such a case was to inform the King that such a person had arrived and had brought presents for him; upon the receipt of this information a royal summons seems to have

1. Ibid., 14 November 1809, Canning to Lushington, Acting Secretary, Secret and Political Department, 2 October 1809, No.24.

been automatic. The Calcutta Government's hope that the mission could be terminated at Rangoon was doomed therefore to be disappointment.

A problem arose as to presents. Canning had not brought presents any/for the King, since he was not on a mission to the Court of Ava. However,

Baba Sheen [The only English-speaking member of the Rangoon Council] in the name of his colleagues informed me that it was contrary to the custom for a letter to be forwarded to the King unless accompanied by some presents, and that they could not even transmit confirmation of such a letter having been delivered to them without sending at the same time a list of the presents that accompanied it.¹

Canning was able to circumvent this difficulty however. He had been provided by his Government with a few presents for his private use. He offered to submit these as presents for the King, and the Council agreed to this manoeuvre. A boat left for the capital shortly afterwards with the news of Canning's arrival and a list of the presents.

Canning provided the Rangoon Council with a written explanation concerning the blockade and also had discussions with them on this subject. His written explanation was as follows: The French had declared the British Isles to be in a state of blockade. The British, in order to avoid harming their allies, had waited three years before retaliating but had at last declared the French possessions of Mauritius and Bourbon to be in a state of blockade. Perhaps with a view to bringing out Britain's naval superiority, Canning explained the difference between the British and French systems of blockading; the British actually had ships at the French Isles, while the French merely forbade their allies to trade with the

1. BPC, 26 December 1809, Canning to Lushington, 22 October 1809, No.57.

British. He continued by observing that neutrals in Europe did not regard the seizure of their vessels on account of a blockade as an act of hostility, but that Asian nations who had not heard of this practice, might do so. Besides, there were persons in Burma (French sympathizers, presumably), 'who ever delighting in mischief will not fail to attribute [the blockade] to motives of hostility'.¹ The Burmese were being informed of the existence of a blockade 'to prevent any vessel sailing under the flag of His Burmah Majesty from exposing itself to the danger attending an attempt to hold communication with those Isles'.² Canning concluded by pointing out that the matter was really out of the hands of the Government of India; they could not modify the decisions of the Government of Britain, which had sent the orders concerning the blockade to the squadron of the Royal Navy at the Cape of Good Hope, without previous communication with India. The Burmese were assured that the blockade would be lifted as soon as the French Isles were occupied, or the war with France concluded. A copy of this letter was sent to the capital, Mingun, together with the letter announcing Canning's arrival.

Canning reported that the Rangoon Council showed surprise at the thought that they should have to suffer on account of war between two powers friendly to them. Nevertheless, they accepted his explanations and there was no resentment, as the Calcutta Government had feared. They took note of the facts that the Governor-General was only obeying the orders of the Government of Great Britain, and that the British had no wish to take advantage of their

1. Ibid., enclosure No.1.

2. Ibid., enclosure No.1.

ignorance by withholding news of the blockade and capturing Burmese vessels going to Mauritius.

Matters might have been different if there had been a large trade between Burma and the French Isles but there had been only one known commercial transaction in four years. Burma's foreign trade was mostly with British dependencies. In fact, Canning reported, without specifying the period of time involved, that every ship which called at Rangoon (as opposed to the small boats of the Burmese traders) had come from a British dependency. Even the Burmese boatmen traded mostly with British territories, as shown by the statistics presented by Cox in 1798.

Canning reported also that there was no French political influence in Burma. He did not believe that there had been official contact between Burma and the French Isles since his departure in 1803. There were French residents in Burma but they were few in number and of a low type. It is clear that Canning did not think they could influence the Burmese Court or even the Rangoon Council.¹

In his report to the Governor-General-in-Council, written at the end of his mission, Canning was to urge them to annex Arakan. One of the advantages to be derived from it, in his view, would be the exclusion of 'French ships of war from ^{their} favourite haunts' of Ramri and Cheduba.² Yet, in his many discussions of the French question, he never referred to visits by warships or privateers (it is doubtful if he meant to distinguish between these). He would surely have done so

1. BPC, 26 December 1809, Canning to Lushington, 22 October 1809, No.57.

2. BPC, 29 May 1810, Canning to Edmonstone, 5 May 1810, No.1, entry for 20 April.

if he had heard of such cases. It must be assumed, therefore, that Canning was referring to what he assumed had happened at a much earlier period (before the Betsey affair of 1805, perhaps).

Canning, it may be noted, appears not to have heard even of the 1808 shipwreck discussed earlier in this chapter. It is possible, of course, that privateers made use of ports other than Rangoon, without Canning getting to know of it but it is unlikely that this could have happened often, for such a development would have been very difficult to keep secret. It may be inferred therefore, that Burmese neutrality was only of slight value to the French and quite possibly, after the Betsey incident, of no value at all.

However, the privateers certainly preyed on the commerce between Bengal and Burma even after 1804. This is shown by the fact that the British merchants in India requested the authorities to arrange for naval protection off Cheduba and Negrais, as well as such places as the Andamans, the Nicobars, Acheh Head and Ceylon, and east of the Straits of Singapore.¹ Some arrangements were instituted but it is not known whether Burma was included. Also, the great privateer captain, Robert Surcouf, is known to have cruised unsuccessfully off the Pegu coast for a fortnight in mid-1807.²

On 22 October 1809, the Myowun of Pegu returned to Rangoon from the capital. His boat carried special decorations and he possessed

1. Parkinson, C.N., War in the Eastern Seas, London, 1955, pp.318-319.

2. Ibid., p.311. Parkinson lists several French studies of the privateer campaign. These may provide more information in respect of Burma, but the writer has not been able to consult them. The privateer campaign in the Indian Ocean was very successful between 1803 and 1809. The East India Company alone lost 15,000 tons of shipping. British country shipping also suffered heavily. See Philips, C.H., The East India Company, Manchester, 1961, p.155.

a gilt umbrella; Canning deduced from these facts that he was now nearly on a level with the royal family. The Myowun showed himself as anxious as ever to conciliate the British. Referring to the case of the Yewun opening Canning's letters in 1803, he called his subordinate an 'ignorant man', and insisted that he had acted 'without authority'.¹ He said that he admired the British Government for its forbearance; and he knew it 'possessed the means to resent an insult but would not suffer a mean fellow of that description to interrupt the harmony subsisting between the two nations'.²

The Myowun went on to discuss the blockade. He seemed to have no difficulty in reconciling himself to the idea. Such a measure, Canning reported him as saying, "might naturally be expected in order to prevent succour being carried by neutrals to a place attacked by our the British forces...."³ The Myowun promised that until the King's decision was known, he would not allow Burmese ships to leave Rangoon for the French Isles. 'But he thought it hard Canning reported that such as might through ignorance proceed there should be subject to capture, and that he deemed it but fair that vessels in that predicament should be released.'⁴ Canning replied that there was little danger of this happening. No vessel had sailed from Rangoon directly for Mauritius, and ships which put in at the ports of British India would be informed of the blockade.

1. BPC, 9 January 1810, Canning to Lushington, Acting Secretary to Government, Secret & Political Department, 23 November 1809, No.72.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

The Myowun then made a proposal which showed that the suspicions of him that the King and Yewun had probably entertained in 1802 were fully justified. It was shown earlier that Wellesley in 1802 had wanted to support the Ein-gyi Paya (heir apparent) against his rivals in a supposedly imminent struggle for the throne. Symes, Wellesley's envoy, had not raised the matter with the Ein-gyi Paya in 1802 but he may have discussed it with the Myowun, whom he knew to be pro-British.¹ At any rate, the Myowun now raised this very idea with Canning.² He proposed that the British give help to the current Ein-gyi Paya (the future Bagyidaw and the son of the Ein-gyi Paya with whom Symes had had dealings in 1802) against his uncles, the princes of Toungoo and Prome (Wellesley had wanted to help his father against the former). He believed that the Ein-gyi Paya lacked the ability to ward off challengers to the throne. Canning who had accompanied Symes in 1802, may have been aware that the British had on that occasion been prepared to offer such help. At any rate, he now took it on himself to discuss the matter with the Myowun, and agreed to continue the discussions of the capital with emissaries of the Ein-gyi Paya, whom the Myowun was to notify in advance. Canning reported that the Myowun understood that the British would expect some benefit and that he was willing to offer them territory in return. In one sense, the plan was in line with the King's intentions, for he wished the Ein-gyi Paya to succeed him and the purpose of the plan was to ensure that this happened. This fact, however, would surely have been outweighed in the King's mind by the consideration that the

1. Discussed in Chapter III.

2. BPC, 29 May 1810, Canning to Edmonstone, Chief Secretary, 8 May 1810, No.1, entry for 18 February. Note that this intrigue is recorded very late. It is not clear why Canning should not have informed the Calcutta authorities of this intrigue in his despatch from Rangoon of 23 November. No explanation is given in his diary.

intrigue would have given the British a foothold in Burma. The proposal was certainly a remarkable one for a subordinate official like the Myowun to make; there is however, no evidence to suggest that he was put up to it by the Court with a view to gauging British intentions towards Burma or for some such purpose. He appears to have advanced it on his own initiative, though deriving some encouragement, perhaps, from the conversations which might have taken place between Symes and himself in 1802 on the same subject. It is clear from his discussions with Symes in 1802 that the Myowun had no objection to a British political presence in Burma.¹ It was very indiscreet of Canning also /to have entered into these discussions without authority.

Although Canning was not on a mission to the Court, he had permission to visit the capital if summoned; and it would have been a serious breach of Burmese protocol if he disobeyed a royal summons. In due course, a summons came from the Hlutdaw for Canning to proceed to the capital. The cost of his journey - which had to be borne by the Rangoon Government - amounted to 15,000 ticals. It was raised in the usual way by imposing a special levy on the town. Each house in Rangoon had to pay 20 ticals. Since there were 6,000 houses, 120,000 ticals would have been collected. Canning stated that what remained after the deduction of the expenses of his journey was divided among the Rangoon officials, including the Myowun. Part of the Myowun's share, he believed, would be used to defray the expense of sending a white elephant he had caught to the capital 'in Royal State'.²

1. See Chapter III.

2. BPC, 29 May 1810, Canning to Edmonstone, Chief Secretary, 8 May 1810, No.1, entry for 7 December.

The envoy also reported a delay of nearly a month before starting, which was caused by Baba Sheen, a member of the Rangoon Council. Baba Sheen knew English and was conversant with European manners; the Myowun had therefore given him the task of accompanying Canning to the capital. He wished to use the opportunity to convey goods to the capital for sale and the delay was caused by the need to collect these goods. Canning reported that Baba Sheen made more money by paying the boatmen twenty to twenty-five ticals, instead of the fifty ticals usually paid by the Rangoon Government. The boatmen were willing to accept this lower wage, because they were men from the capital, who were anxious to rejoin their families there. Baba Sheen would have had to pay the usual wage on the return voyage, but this journey being downstream, required fewer men. Baba Sheen could also leave behind some of the boats when returning. (Canning does not mention whether Baba Sheen put this plan into operation on the way back). Interestingly enough, Canning thought that there was some justification for Baba Sheen acting as he had done. He received no remuneration for his position as a member of the Rangoon Council and was obliged besides to make presents to the King during his visits to the capital.¹

Canning left Rangoon on 21 December 1809, and arrived at the capital on 9 February 1810. The diary he kept during his journey up-stream should prove a useful document for students of Burmese internal history. As at the time of the second Symes mission, Burma was engaged in an unsuccessful war against Siam and the population of the Irawaddy valley had once again abandoned their fields and fled into the interior to avoid conscription.

1. Ibid., entries up to 7 December.

This time, however, their resistance had taken an active form also; in upper Burma, a guerrilla movement had developed under a leader who had proclaimed himself King and had accorded himself two of the appurtenances of royalty - he rode an elephant and carried a white umbrella. The rebels operated with great freedom in the countryside; they even raided a town north of Prome when Canning spent a night there.¹ However, control of the capital and of the palace - which counted far more than anything else in deciding legitimacy - was firmly in Bodawpaya's grasp and the administrative system of the country was still functioning.

On 9 February, Canning reached Mingun, the capital. He discovered that there was still some uneasiness at the capital as to the motives of his mission. He was informed by

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1. Ibid., entries for 21 December 9 January, 24 January, 8 March. There can be no doubt that Canning's picture of Burma was on the whole accurate. His impression of depopulation, disorder and so forth was confirmed by Don Louis de Grondona (Ibid., 8 March).

Symes, it is worth noting, had also noticed extensive depopulation along the river banks in 1802. He, like Canning, ascribes it to the desire to escape conscription for the war against Siam.

By 1809-1810, however, there was more active resistance to the King. A peculiar feature of the period however, was the occurrence of acts of arson. Rangoon was burnt down on 13 January. The town of Amarapura was burnt down completely immediately before Canning's departure. (Ibid., 28 March). On his way downriver, a small town, called Meyaun by Canning, was also burnt down.

For details of the Siamese war see Manich Jumsai, Popular History of Thailand, Bangkok, 1972, pp.369-375; Wood, W.A.R., A History of Siam, Bangkok, no date, p.273 and Gerini, G.E., 'Historical Retrospect of Junk Ceylon Island' in Siam Society Journal, Vol.IV, Bangkok, 1959. The Burmese launched several attacks on Junk Ceylon from their base in Tavoy and also conducted operations in the adjoining Siamese mainland, even reaching the South China coast. But they were unable to hold on to any of their gains and the campaign ended in complete failure.

the Italian bishop at Mingun, Don Louis de Grondona, that when news of his arrival at Rangoon reached the capital along with a letter from the Rangoon Council giving the reasons for the mission, the Hlutdaw had asked the bishop whether he knew what the real objectives of the British were.¹ While at Rangoon, the envoy had been afraid that Armenian and Muslim merchants would spread rumours that the British were seeking territory; to counteract such a development, he wrote to Don Louis from mission's Rangoon, informing him of the/official objectives and asking him to publicise them.

Don Louis assured the Burmese that Canning had indeed come to give the Burmese warning of the blockade. Don Louis was a respected man at the capital and the ministers seem to have accepted his assurance. They made the curious observation that it showed 'candour' on the part of the British to have given such a warning, instead of having used the opportunity to seize unsuspecting Burmese vessels as they proceeded to Mauritius.² (The Rangoon Council had also noticed this point). However, it will be seen later that the Burmese had doubts about the rightness of interdicting Burmese trade with Mauritius. It should be noted also that Don Louis' assurance, based as it was on information supplied by Canning, was not fully justified. The envoy's official objectives were innocuous enough, but while at Rangoon, he had become involved in an intrigue that did represent a threat to Burmese sovereignty.

1. BPC, 29 May 1810, Canning to Edmonstone, Chief Secretary, 8 May 1810, No.7, entry for 9 February.

2. Ibid., 9 February.

While at the capital, Canning dealt with three matters - the blockade, the proposed British help to the Eingyi Paya and the Burmese claim to Chittagong and Dacca. It is proposed to discuss them in the order above. Since there was no Burmese trade with Mauritius, and the Rangoon duties were a valuable part of the royal revenue, there was much to be said for acquiescence in the British measure. On the other hand, the awkward fact remained that the King's freedom of navigation was being impeded. The Burmese officials at Mingun, as opposed to the Rangoon officials, were to find this difficult to accept. A meeting was scheduled for 21 February, at which Canning was to explain the British position to a Burmese delegation. Baba Sheen, who it will be recalled, had accompanied Canning to the capital, was due to meet the King on 20 February, to explain the purpose of the British mission. On 19 February, he visited Canning and proposed that he make his explanations to the King as follows: that Lord Minto like all previous Governors-General, had sent an envoy with presents to the King of Burma; that the previous envoys had returned pleased with their gracious reception and that this was the main reason why Minto had deputed Canning to Burma; but that Canning had also been instructed to inform the King that England and France were at war, in consequence of which the French Islands had been blockaded. The Governor-General therefore 'requested His Majesty as a friend not to permit his subjects to carry assistance to our enemies'.¹ Canning was specifically asked not to say that Burmese ships going to Mauritius would be seized. A request couched in the

1. Ibid., 19 February.

terms Baba Sheen proposed could be met without loss of dignity, for the whole process would be looked upon as the granting of a royal boon.

Canning, however, refused abruptly to recast his explanations in this form. He reported that he burst out laughing, and told Baba Sheen that the account recommended by him was historically false; that the earlier missions had been sent to secure the advantage of both parties, not of the British alone; that Symes had not been satisfied with his reception in 1802; that in 1803, Canning's letters had been opened and the person responsible had not been punished; and finally that he had been sent to Burma not to request the King as a favour not to allow ships to sail to the French Isles, but to inform him that the islands had been blockaded, and that ships trying to enter their harbours would be captured. Canning was being tactless no doubt; he would, however, have been taken to task by the Governor-General-in-Council had he made his explanations in the manner Baba Sheen suggested. Canning was convinced that Baba Sheen would explain the mission's purpose to the King in the terms he had suggested, even though he had not agreed to this.

On 20 February, Baba Sheen visited Canning again, and made suggestions to him as to how he should explain the mission's purpose to the delegation. These, according to Canning, were a modified version of the earlier proposals, and he again refused.

There can be little doubt that Baba Sheen made these proposals after consultations with the Burmese officials. The officials at the Court, it will be remembered, were already acquainted with Canning's explanations, for a copy of his

explanations to the Rangoon Council had been sent to them. These, it seems clear, were not in accord with their ideas of diplomatic propriety.

On 21 February Canning received the Burmese deputation. They had three main objections to the blockade. Firstly, they pointed out that Burma was at peace with the King of England (who had ordered the blockade) as well as the Government of India. Why then should Burmese ships be attacked? Secondly, they wondered whether the British would attack Burmese ships everywhere on the pretext of enforcing the blockade of Mauritius and Bourbon. Thirdly, they pointed out that the King of Burma was an independent ruler. 'What right', had the British to prohibit him from sending his ships anywhere he pleased? ¹

Canning dealt with all three objections. The first, he considered had to be answered with caution; for the 'insufferable pride' of the Court would be offended to hear that the Government in Britain had never heard of 'the great flag (as they term it) or at all events cared very little about it'. ² He stated that the King of England was as desirous as the Governor-General to preserve friendship with Burma. A blockade, however, was something that affected all friends and allies and the King of England could not exempt any nation from it. He, however, had been deputed to Burma 'as a mark of particular regard to His Burmah Majesty'. ³ As to the second

1. Ibid., 21 February.

2. Ibid., 21 February.

3. Ibid., 21 February.

question, Canning pointed out that a ship's papers or an actual attempt to enter Mauritius would give away the intentions of the vessel. Ships which were engaged in other commerce in the Indian Ocean were safe. Coming to the third objection, he argued that there was no actual prohibition of trade with Mauritius, but that ships which did go there would be seized.

It is proposed to examine these answers more closely. With regard to the first question, it will be noticed that the Burmese had asked how the blockade could affect them, who were friends of the King of England, and Canning had simply answered that a blockade was something that did affect friends; but it was precisely this that the Burmese found difficult to accept. It will be noticed also that Canning's assertion that the King of England was as desirous as the Governor-General to preserve friendship with Burma was untrue. The second objection seems to have been answered satisfactorily. In the third case, Canning had not touched on the point at issue: that the King's right to send ships to the French Isles was being impeded.

Nevertheless, Canning thought that the Burmese were satisfied at the end of the discussion. Perhaps what was of more importance than Canning's explanations in securing their compliance was the fact that the blockade would not result in any loss of trade for Burma.

On 24 February, Baba Sheen informed Canning that the King had accepted his explanations.

Canning also undertook secret discussions on the matter of British help to the Ein-gyi Paya in the event of a disputed succession. The Ein-gyi Paya, who had been notified beforehand by the Myowun, sent an emissary to discuss the matter with Canning. This agent expressed his belief that 5,000 British troops would give the Ein-gyi

Paya victory over any force the Prince of Toungoo could muster against him since they would be equal to 15,000 Burmese soldiers (which was more than any force the Toungoo prince could raise) and would be supported by the Ein-gyi Paya's own adherents. In return for such aid, the Ein-gyi Paya was prepared to offer either money or territory to the British. He was not willing however, to enter into a formal agreement for if that came to the ears of the King it might result in his execution. Canning suggested that the Ein-gyi Paya write to the British Government in India via Arakan when he wanted help, giving details of the kind of assistance needed and of what he would give in return. Canning was of course acting completely without authority, and he made it clear to the agent that this was the case. Nevertheless, he had placed himself in an anomalous position. The plans proposed were of a very dangerous and far-reaching character, and he had no right to promote them without authority.¹

Lastly, there was the question of Chittagong and Dacca. The legal and historical basis of the Burmese claim to these districts, and the economic factors that made their recovery seem desirable, will be examined in detail in a later chapter. What should be noted here is that although the claim seemed a preposterous thing to the British, the Burmese position with regard to Chittagong and Dacca was the same as their position with regard to Siam; they were reasserting a suzerainty that the other party had in their eyes cast off unlawfully, though with this difference, that in the case of Chittagong and Dacca the suzerainty had been exercised by the rulers of Arakan, whose rights the Burmese considered that they had inherited. The Burmese

1. Ibid., 18 February.

had raised the matter once before, at the time of Cox's visit, but in a desultory fashion, and no further reference to it had been made in the period up to 1809. By the time of Canning's visit, however, there was a definite hardening of interest. Canning had already been informed of this development by Baba Sheen when coming upriver.

The latter had warned him also that the mission's members might be held as hostages for the return of the desired provinces.¹ On his arrival at the capital, Canning was told by a Wundauk's son of the King's interest in Chittagong and Dacca - he made no mention however of a project to seize the envoy.² Subsequently, Baba Sheen provided more information on the subject; he had paid a visit to the King, during which the latter had insisted 'in very peremptory terms' on his right to the two districts.³ The emissary of the Ein-gyi Paya (who had discussed the question of British aid for his master in the event of a power struggle) also brought information from the prince about the King's attitude. The King's conversation, according to the Ein-gyi Paya, was all about Chittagong and Dacca, even though the Burmese armies were embattled with the Siamese to the southeast. The Ein-gyi Paya had tried to dissuade him from this interest by arguing that 'a claim obliterated by such a length of time' could be enforced only by arms, and if this was done, British vessels would stop coming to Rangoon, to which port 'no other than British vessels resorted'.⁴ The Ein-gyi Paya assured Canning that he would do his

1. Ibid., 12 February.

2. Ibid., 18 February.

3. Ibid., 20 February.

4. Ibid., 18 February.

best 'to prevent the adoption of any intemperate measure on the part of his grand-father.'¹

What had revived the King's interest in eastern Bengal after the lapse of over ten years since the Cox mission? Canning's explanation was that the King had come under the influence of the colony of Brahmins from Northern India at the capital and of the Myowun of Ramri, who was then at the capital.² It is quite possible that these Brahmins were anti-British, and welcomed any diminution in British power in India; and there is evidence that they tended to discuss the claim, Canning's interpreter, Rowland, found them doing this in the Ein-gyi Paya's palace on one occasion. Canning claimed also that they had told the King the claim would be proved from Sanskrit records, and that one of the Brahmins had gone to Chittagong and Dacca at the time of Canning's departure from the capital to make maps of Chittagong, Dacca and the island of Sandwip.³ Canning was also informed that the Myowun of Ramri [an island near the Chittagong district] had admitted that he had on several occasions asked the King his opinion on the subject of the Burmese right to Chittagong and Dacca though he denied having instigated him. But whatever the immediate influence of these parties may have been, the claim itself was something which would have seemed a natural one to the Burmese in view

1. Ibid., 18 February.

2. Ibid., 12 February.

3. Ibid., 20 March and 12 February.

of their notions of suzerainty. It was very likely to have come up for discussions after the conquest of Arakan. Curiously, it never seems to have occurred to them that the British could also have put forward a claim to the districts on the basis of rights inherited from the Moghuls.

To understand subsequent events, a further point should be noticed. Whatever may have been the King's view of the Governor-General's status, he had never openly stated that he was inferior to him in rank, nor had he asked for direct relations with England. There are, in fact, no grounds for thinking that he desired such relations. His attitude changed in the course of the mission of 1809-1810. Perhaps he became exasperated at having to receive four successive envoys from the King of England's representative, the Governor-General, without receiving as much as a hint that the King of England was aware of his existence; perhaps he hoped, by establishing contact with England, to gain possession of Chittagong and Dacca; an issue which he may have believed might receive a more sympathetic hearing at London than at Calcutta. Canning had heard a report that he hoped to discuss it with the British king.

The royal audience was held on 28 February. The King raised the matter of an embassy from England. The King's observations deserve to be quoted in full, for they constitute the only request for direct relations with England made in the period 1795-1826.

The King said he rejoiced at the friendship that had long subsisted between the Burmah and British Governments, which had at various times been strengthened by the missions of Ambassadors, but that the Governor-General, however friendly his intentions, holding only a delegated authority, he thought himself entitled to an Embassy from

the King of England, who was his equal in rank, wishing me at the same time to convey his sentiments to His Majesty in England.¹

To this [Canning reported], I replied that the King of England equally rejoiced with himself at the harmony subsisting between the two nations and that I should make known his wishes to the Governor-General. Baba Sheen wished much to be allowed to say that an Embassy from England would be sent in consequence, and was ill-satisfied when I told him that was really more than I could answer for.²

Canning's statement with regard to the King of England was of course, misleading.

The King also asked Canning whether a road existed connecting India and Europe. Canning suspected that this was connected with an alleged plan of his (of which Canning had heard a rumour) of sending an embassy to England to claim the two districts.

The King also suggested that Canning could return to Bengal overland via Arakan, if a sea-passage was unsafe because of the monsoon.

The royal audience was followed by the customary visits to the princes. Canning asked the Ein-gyi Paya to obtain permission for him to return to Bengal overland via Arakan which the King had suggested he could do. His purpose was to survey the passes in the mountains separating Arakan and the plain of Bengal from Burma proper, which were likely to come into use in the event of a war, and about which very little was known to the British. The request was debated in the Hlutdaw

1. BPC, 29 May 1810, Canning to Edmonstone, 8 May 1810, No.1, entry for 28 February.

2. Ibid., 28 February.

and was rejected. Canning heard that the Toungoo Prince had exclaimed: "Why should we suffer these strangers to observe our country and become acquainted with the passes in the mountains?"¹

Another incident involved the Prince of Pagan. He too inquired of Canning why the King of England did not send an Embassy to Burma; if he did, he added, the Burmese would conquer France for him.² This remark might be thought to prove Burmese ignorance of their military inferiority to western powers and of the problems of geographical distance involved. It certainly shows ignorance; but it was the Pagan prince who made it, not Bodawpaya, who had sole control of policy. Bodawpaya's policy to the British in the period from 1795 to 1819 suggests an awareness of his military weakness. This may have been partly responsible, for example, for his decision to give Symes a proper reception in 1802; and more examples will occur in the following pages.

On 17 March, Canning was given the Hlutdaw's reply to the Governor-General's letter. He was staggered by its contents; he described it in terms such as "an absurd production", "foolish and ridiculous", "surpassing even the usual style of Burmah arrogance".³ The letter first referred to Canning's purpose in coming (viz the blockade), but then declined to discuss it, for the following reasons: 'When the

1. Ibid., 11 March.

2. Ibid., 3-5 March.

3. Ibid., entry for 17 March.

affairs of the two great Kingdoms and two extensive countries are to be discussed, it is proper in the first place to settle the exact limits of both kingdoms....¹

This would have to be done 'by [the Burmese] treating with the King of England in Europe'.² Therefore Canning was being 'sent back';³ and the Governor-General was asked 'to represent which [what?] is above to your Sovereign of Bengal and of Europe, keeping at the same time always fixed in your heart that you must hold yourself under the protection of the golden excellent royal power'.⁴

This call to the Governor-General to hold himself under the King's protection was described by Canning as surpassing 'the usual bounds of even Burmah insolence'.⁵ It would seem, however, that the tone of the letter was not unprecedented: the letter of 1802 after all, had taken the Governor-General into the royal protection, and had forgiven various lapses on his part and had in general had a very condescending tone.⁶ Nevertheless, the letter of 1810 had raised issues and announced decisions which were unprecedented: it had proposed that the frontier between Burma and British India be defined; it had 'sent back' the British agent without giving

1. Ibid., Appendix 8.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., entry for 17 March

6. Chapter III.

a reply on the issue in connection with which he had come; and it had asked for direct relations with England.

It will be noticed that the King had not explicitly claimed Chittagong and Dacca in this letter; he had asked for a definition of the frontier. However, there can be no doubt that the Burmese would have claimed these provinces when the task of frontier demarcation was begun. The evidence that they sought the retrocession of these regions is overwhelming; there is no evidence to suggest that he was merely interested in defining the frontier between Arakan and Chittagong.

Canning felt that he could not allow this letter to pass without a protest. His reply was addressed, however, not to the Hlutdaw, but the Ein-gyi Paya. This was because the latter was much more likely to be accommodating, since he wanted British support in the event of a power struggle.

Canning asked for a statement of policy with regard to the blockade. He also took up the matter of the Governor-General's status. 'The whole tone of His Majesty's [the Hlutdaw's] letter [he wrote] appears rather to imply an order from a superior than a communication between the rulers of two powerful states treating on terms of perfect equality'.¹ The Governor-General had authority over 60,000,000 people and would not treat except on terms of perfect equality. Canning, like Symes before him, informed the Burmese that the Governor-General had been invested by the King of England with supreme authority with

1. BPC, 29 May 1810, Canning to Edmonstone, 8 May, No.1, Appendix 9.

regard to eastern powers and was treated by these powers (he named Persia, the Sikhs, Afghanistan and the Marathas) as a sovereign. There was therefore no indignity in the Burmese having to deal with him. However, this notion of delegated sovereignty would have been alien to the Burmese. Also, supreme authority over India was in the hands of the King and Parliament in Britain, not the Governor-General. Canning's assertion therefore, was misleading.

Canning advanced a further argument which was definitely misleading. 'Were it practicable', he wrote, 'His Majesty [of Great Britain] would willingly treat immediately with the King of Ava, but as distance renders that impossible, by his Majesty's authority the Governor-General of India treats with sovereign power with the several states of the East'.¹ Distance, however, cannot have been a decisive consideration, since Britain had sent the McCartney Embassy to China in 1794. It was true (and Canning did point this out) that every dispute that occurred could not be referred to London (given the two years needed for a reply). The Burmese, however, would surely have been willing to refer disputes to Calcutta (though with the apparent exception of the one over Dacca and Chittagong). The principle of equality with Britain and superiority to British India was established, but it was this that the British Indian Government would not concede.

The Ein-gyi Paya expressed satisfaction with the letter when Canning's messenger, Antony Rowland, gave it to him and explained its contents. Rowland, on Canning's instructions, asked for a written reply from him on the blockade. The Ein-gyi Paya, according

1. Ibid., Appendix 9.

to Rowland, seemed to be willing to give a reply immediately, but the officials about him objected, saying that the matter (giving a reply on an issue which the Hlutdaw had declined to discuss) required consideration. Nevertheless, the prince in Rowland's presence ordered Baba Sheen, as a member of the Rangoon Council, 'to give official intimation to the newly-appointed Viceroy [Myowun] not to grant passports and protection of the Burman flag to ships sailing to the Isle of France'.¹ The Ein-gyi Paya also took the interpreter to one side, and told him that 'a reply would be given' in every way satisfactory' but admitted that he was at a loss to see how such a letter could be made to agree with the King's.² It is not clear whether the prince was referring to the blockade or the issue of sovereignty or both. (The claim to Chittagong and Dacca was not raised by Canning in his letter).

The Ein-gyi Paya did not object to Canning's remonstrances concerning the Governor-General's sovereignty. When he became King, he showed no disposition to view the Governor-General as a sovereign, but at this stage he was hoping for British help in the event of a power struggle.

As a result of this assurance, Canning expected to receive a letter from the Ein-gyi Paya giving a reply on the blockade. However, when the letter came, Canning found that it contained nothing on the blockade, but only a request for certain gifts.³ Canning was much

1. Ibid., 20 March.

2. Ibid. 20 March

3. Ibid., 22 March.

disgusted with this and other requests for presents. "The Burmese King and princes", he wrote, "are always ready to ask for presents ... such a shabby, begging Court I believe nowhere exists".¹ What had happened probably was that the prince, perhaps as a result of advice from his officials, had come to prefer not to give a written reply when the King had clearly not wanted to give one. It was inept of him to have assured Rowland that he would give a written reply.

Although Canning now had an assurance that Burmese ships would not be allowed to sail to Mauritius, he still did not have a written reply to the Calcutta Government to this effect. Also, the King was probably ignorant that such an assurance was given. Canning left the capital in late March and arrived at Rangoon early in April 1810. He found that further instructions had arrived from Calcutta. In 1809, the French (or, more precisely, the pro-French Dutch Government in Java) had finally attempted to form an anti-British alliance with Burma. Marshall Daendels in Java, had sent an agent - a French officer, named Lt. Colonel de la Houssaye, to Burma for the purpose of 'establishing an alliance with the Burmese Government for the subversion of the British Empire in India'.² This envoy, who is described in the British records as a close confidante of Marshall Daendels, had instructions to proceed first to the kingdom of Aceh, for a similar purpose. Before he could reach Aceh, however, he had fallen into British hands and was taken to Penang. De la Houssaye was found to have a letter from Daendels to the King of Burma.

1. Ibid., 22 March.

2. Bengal Secret and Separate Consultations (BSSC), 30 October 1809, Instructions to Canning, 30 October 1809. There is no copy of this letter in the Bengal Secret and Separate Consultations or the Straits Settlements Records. However, the British claim that de la Houssaye's objective was "an alliance for the subversion of the British Empire" was based on Daendels' letter.

In conversation with the British, de la Houssaye had claimed that the Batavian government 'are determined to assist and train to arms, the Burmahs, and all the natives on the adjoining provinces....'¹

Canning already had instructions to investigate French activities in Burma, but it was felt at Calcutta that it was advisable to issue further instructions. (It was decided also to investigate conditions in Acheh, and a British agent, David Campbell, was sent there).

Canning was informed of this new development. He was to keep the de la Houssaye mission a secret; but he was to find out whether any intrigues were already afoot, and to defeat them if there were.

Canning had reassuring news on the subject of French influence; as he had stated in his despatches from Rangoon in the previous year, there was none in Burma. He had also warned the Burmese repeatedly that the British would not allow the admission of foreign troops and officers into the country. (It is not clear whether this was done before he received the news of the French mission). He did not think that the Burmese government would allow a foreign army to enter Burma. They were too proud a nation to allow this, and they were aware it might be difficult to get it to leave. They might, however, employ foreign officers to train their soldiers. With such training, the Burmese would make good soldiers. At present, however, the country was in such a distracted state, that even such a development would not be dangerous for the British. (In fact, Canning

1. Ibid., 26 September, report to Penang government, No.3.

considered that the French had overestimated Burmese strength).

However, if French officers were admitted, a better government came into power, and the population increased there would be cause for anxiety. If this happened, the British could first attempt to persuade the Burmese to change their policy; if this failed, they could use force, which would be successful.

Canning revealed that he had arranged for someone at Rangoon to send to Calcutta copies of all letters received at that place from the French or Dutch. It is impossible to say who this person was. Perhaps, it was Baba Sheen, who knew European languages, and who, as a member of the Rangoon Council was likely to have had access to letters it received; or perhaps, it was the English Baptist missionary, Felix Carey, who was often employed by the Rangoon Council to translate letters. Canning was so sure that copies of such letters would be sent, that one suspects that it was a regular member of the Rangoon Council with access to all letters.

Canning was sure that the French would renew their efforts, but there is no evidence that further efforts were made. Another important development occurred at Rangoon. Canning, having failed to secure a written reply on the blockade at the capital, now sought one from the new Myowun. At first, the Myowun thought of giving a verbal reply. When Canning insisted on a written one, he gave way but imposed a prohibition only of a few months duration in his letter. Canning, however, was able to secure a copy of this letter before it was delivered to him. He interceded once again with the Myowun and this time was able to secure a prohibition of indefinite duration.

The operative part of the Myowun's letter ran as follows:

The French island of Mauritius being situated at a great distance from this country and little or no commerce being carried on between the two Ports ... [and] considering therefore that between friends what is for a time required by one ought to be granted by the other we will accordingly refrain from allowing vessels under Burma colours to proceed to the Isle of France.¹

It will be seen that the new Myowun had issued this written statement with some reluctance. The explanation for his initial reluctance would be that he did not wish to take an initiative of this kind without specific instructions from the Court or the Ein-gyi Paya.

In the same letter, the Myowun brought up the matter of direct relations with England. Probably he had realized when at the capital that this was now official policy. Alternatively, the King may have instructed him to raise this issue alone. The Myowun wrote:

When weighty and important affairs occur to be discussed between two great nations such business is best transacted immediately between the sovereigns of these states. It is thus that friendship is secured (rendered) perpetual and the advantage of both states secured on a firm basis.²

1. BPC, 29 May 1810, Canning to Edmonstone, 8 May 1810, No.1, Appendix 14.

2. Ibid., Appendix 14.

Canning embarked for Calcutta on 19 April and arrived there early in May. He submitted his journal and set down his impressions of the mission and his views as to future policy towards Burma. The purpose of the mission, Canning argued, had been achieved; for no ships would now sail to Mauritius. He had reassuring news also on the subject of French influence in Burma. There was none in Burma.

Canning passed on to consider the tone of Burmese proceedings towards the British. He considered that it had been highly derogatory. 'Every circumstance tended to declare a decided aversion on the part of the King to treat ^{with} the British Government in India on terms of equality'.¹ The King of England was referred to on numerous occasions, 'while all enquiry after the Governor-General was omitted and a wish expressed that immediate intercourse should take place between the King of Ava and his Majesty....'² The Hlutdaw's letter had been particularly insulting. It had referred to the object of Canning's mission, 'but no sooner is the subject mentioned than it is dismissed with contempt as unworthy to occupy His Majesty's consideration until an object of far greater importance shall have been previously adjusted... an exact defination of the two countries'³ Its assumptions on the Governor-General's status had been very objectionable. Canning went on to suggest that the British should simply ignore the Hlutdaw's letter and its implications. However, in doing so, he himself used language which showed that he

1. Ibid., 20 April.

2. Ibid., 20 April.

3. Ibid., 20 April.

had been flustered by it ('a petty effusion of impotent arrogance... unworthy of consideration... certainly most insignificant').¹

Canning then raised the matter of the claim to Chittagong and Dacca. He considered this to be a more serious matter than the Burmese assumption of superiority, or the prospect of French influence in Burma. Although aware of the distracted state of the country, and the involvement of most of the available forces of the Burmese empire to the southeast, he advised the Calcutta Government that it was not 'possible but probable' that 'such a force as that state can bring into the field may be sent to invade the British territories'.² The reason was the following: the King was 'continually revolving in his mind various plans and schemes to effect the reconquest of the districts'.³ But when he found that all these end in nothing and is continually and repeatedly urged by Brahmans and other parasites to make good his claim by the only method worthy of a King of his province, that of arms, I think it not improbable that an invasion may be attempted'.³ If this happened, Canning recommended that Arakan be annexed by the British, to whom it was 'destined by nature' to belong, because it was geographically a part of India, being it was separated from Burma proper by a range of mountains.⁴ Canning made it clear that he thought that a war with Burma would be a desirable thing. The objectionable features of Burmese policy were due to the

1. Ibid., 20 April.

2. Ibid., 20 April.

3. Ibid., 20 April.

4. Ibid., 20 April.

forbearance that had hitherto characterized British policy which the Burmese had ascribed to weakness.¹ He assured the Calcutta Government that a change of government in Burma would be welcomed by the people.

This was ill-considered advice. Canning had offered no evidence whatever to show that the King could be so easily influenced as he suggested. It is worth noting also that although he described the invasion of Chittagong and Dacca as 'not possible but probable', he had described it earlier on in the same despatch as 'not improbable'.² This betrays rashness in composition.

Howwell had Canning acquitted himself in the course of this mission? He could, and did, claim that the object of his mission - reconciling the Burmese to the blockade - had been accomplished. On the other hand, given the absence of a trade between Burma and Mauritius - this was not a very difficult objective to achieve. On the debit side, there was the fact that the envoy had acted in an irregular manner on several occasions. He had entered without authority into an intrigue which might have placed his government in a difficult position if it had been pursued by the Ein-gyi Paya. He had misled the Burmese with regard to the King of England. He had also used his newly-acquired influence with the Ein-gyi Paya in an attempt to obtain an answer on the blockade, when the proper course would have been to petition the Hlutdaw. And when it came to assessing his mission and giving advice as to future policy, all semblance of judgement seemed to desert him.

1. Ibid., 20 April.

2. Ibid., 20 April.

The Calcutta Government took a more balanced view of the situation than Canning had done. In their reply to Canning, they pronounced the King's claim to Chittagong and Dacca to be 'extravagant, but any attempt to realise it by force they felt to be improbable'.¹ They also took Canning to task, on grounds of 'justice' as well as of 'expediency', for encouraging the Ein-gyi Paya to expect British help in the event of a disputed succession.² This manoeuvre apart, they seem to have been satisfied with the results of the mission. Its object - the cessation of trade between Burma and Mauritius - had been attained. French influence had been found to be non-existent. Finally, the King's request for direct dealings with Britain could be ignored, as also the King's insistence on treating the Governor-General as an inferior. It is clear that these issues did not trouble Minto very much. His interest was focussed solely on the war with France. The questions of the Governor-General's status and of relations with England were not even discussed in the Calcutta Government's reply to Canning.

It turned out that the Calcutta Government was right and no invasion was attempted. This indicates that the King was aware that it was not possible to wrest the districts of Chittagong and Dacca from the British by force. He had suggested that the frontier needed defining and had tried to take the matter up with Britain; when these efforts produced no results, he had to let the matter rest. But his belief in the strength of his claim to these districts never weakened, and he was to revive the matter in 1818. Canning's intrigue with the

1. BPC, 29 May 1810, Edmonstone to Canning, 29 May, No.2.

2. Ibid.

Ein-gyi Paya was also without result. The British, as has been seen, had set their faces against it; while, Bagyidaw, in 1819, did not apply to them for aid in eliminating the challenge posed by his two uncles, the princes of Prome and Toungoo. It may be that by 1819 he had forgotten the whole affair.

CHAPTER V

CHIN PYAN'S INVASION AND THE MISSION OF 1811-1812

In 1811, trouble flared up again on the Arakan frontier, in a much more serious form than in 1798-1800. On the former occasion, the activities of the Arakanese emigrants to Chittagong had not gone beyond brigandage in Arakan; and they had resorted to this mainly because they had no other livelihood. The rebellion of Chin Pyan in 1811 by contrast had the political objective of expelling the Burmese from Arakan; and for a while, it was successful in achieving this. This rebellion has been the subject of a study by B. R. Pearn in an article in the Journal of the Burma Research Society.¹ It will be discussed here only to provide a background to the study of the British mission to Burma of 1811-1812, for which it was directly responsible, and to develop a point about its origins that was overlooked by Pearn. According to Chin Pyan, the rebellion originated in a fear he entertained that he would be handed over to the Burmese for punishment for having cultivated early in 1811 a piece of land in Burmese territory at the head of the Naf river. This had led him to embark on the desperate project of invading Arakan, with the intention of wresting it from Burmese hands and then persuading the British to accept him as a tributary ruler. This suggests that he was aware from the beginning of his inability to repel Burmese counter-attacks on his own. Between December 1810

1. Pearn, B.R., "Kingbering", Journal of the Burma Research Society, XXVIII, ii, 1933, pp.443-473.

and May 1811, Chin Pyan made his preparations. Then in May he invaded Arakan, with several thousand followers from Chittagong, taking both British and Burmese by surprise.

Two points must be made however, in qualification of what has been stated above. Although not of royal blood himself, Chin Pyan may have developed political ambitions after his flight to British territory with his parents in 1798. His father, Nga Than De, had been one of the most important and popular leaders of Arakan, and was the person who had invited Bodowpaya to intervene in Arakan in order to end the internal strife in that country. Later, he had emigrated to Chittagong to escape Bodawpaya's requisitions for the war against Siam.¹ Also, Chin Pyan might have found it more difficult to obtain recruits if not for the hatred of the Burmese that existed among the emigrants. However, many of them testified later that they joined him because of the fear that they would be killed by his followers if they did not (an indication, incidentally, of how little control the British officials had over goings-on within the Arakanese community in Chittagong). Hope of plunder in Arakan would also have induced many of them to join Chin Pyan. But to judge from Chin Pyan's testimony, there would have been no rebellion in 1811 if he had not been afraid that he would be surrendered to the Burmese.

Here, firstly, is Chin Pyan's account of why he launched the rebellion, written to the British Magistrate of Chittagong after his successes in Arakan. After describing the difficulties he had had to undergo as a result of the lack of a livelihood, he declared:

1. Ibid., p.447.

I got a Pottah land grant from Sadoodeen for the ground at Mooruseegeere, erected my flag, and intended to till the land; and when... a Burman named Mungdoo Achurung the official in charge of the Burmese checkpoint at Maungdaw, opposite Tek Naf made a complaint to Boodsing, Darogah police officer of Tek Naf, that I have committed a Dacoity, they bribed him to give such a report to you the Magistrate of Chittagong as caused you to believe me guilty; in consequence of which you sent for me, and caused me to attend you at Chittagong. I was detained three months. You took security from me that I would not pass the river near Mooruseegeere and told me I should be fined if I disobeyed the order. I shortly returned home. As I did not get possession of the above land and had been made to give security I was unhappy and feared I should be given up like Pellong Apolung, one of the three Arakanese surrendered in 1795/. Conceiving myself degraded thus, it was the same to me whether I lived or died; the idea came into my head of trying to regain possession of my own country and paying revenue for it to the English government.¹

The plot of land in question was located at the head of the Naf, in an area within Burmese control. Chin Pyan claimed to have been aware of this and to have told Saddudin Chowdhry, the person who secured the grant from the Magistrate (the latter having assumed it to be within British territory) that it was Burmese controlled. But Saddudin had persisted in asking Chin Pyan to cultivate the land for him and he, hard pressed for a livelihood, had done so.² The Magistrate could not of course have punished Chin Pyan for cultivating a tract of land whose grant he had authorized himself; but Chin Pyan who knew nothing of British law, seems to have believed this would be done in order to placate the Burmese. He was aware that Apolung had been surrendered in 1795.

1. Bengal Political Consultations (BPC), 22 November 1911, Canning to Edmonstone, Political Secretary, 25 October 1811, No.4, Appendix 1, 2nd letter.

2. BPC, 6 September 1811, letter from Pechell to Dodeswell, Judicial Secretary, 23 March 1811, enclosing Chin Pyan's deposition.

On hearing of the grant, the Burmese had protested vigorously. The Magistrate then took the steps described by Chin Pyan (of cancelling the grant etc.), but had frightened Chin Pyan in the process.

Why did Saddudin Chowdry want this land to be occupied? The Magistrate had a suspicion that it had to do with the elephant-catching operations conducted by Saddudin in the vicinity for Dr. Macrae, civil surgeon at Chittagong; in what way exactly he does not say. Perhaps it would have helped his elephant-catching operations in some way to have that land occupied. The Magistrate went on to express a suspicion that Saddudin had had a hand in the insurrection and had even hired some 200 discharged sepoys from the former provincial battalion to fight for Chin Pyan.¹ The Burmese were later to accuse both Dr. Macrae and Saddudin Chowdry of helping Chin Pyan. Chin Pyan must have been provided by others with funds for hiring sepoys and buying muskets, in view of the penury in which he and his followers lived; it is difficult, however, to see what motives Saddudin Chowdry and Dr. Macrae could have had for stirring up an insurrection in Arakan. Had the British authorities investigated both men thoroughly, some motive might have been discovered; but Dr. Macrae was investigated only perfunctorily and Saddudin not at all.

The Burmese could not understand how Chin Pyan could have made preparations for an insurrection between February and May without the British finding out about him. Professor Pearn has explained how this was possible. The southern part of Chittagong district in

1. Ibid., Pechell to Dodeswell, 14 June 1811.

which the Arakanese were settled, was a wilderness, over which the company exercised no administrative supervision.¹ However, there was one incident which could have alerted the officials at Chittagong to what was afoot, if it had been investigated.² In April, a group of Arakanese removed 16 or 17 pieces of artillery from a ship-yard at Chittagong belonging to Macrae. This incident was not investigated apparently, by the British authorities. In fact, the cannon need not have been intended for use against the Burmese only. They could equally well have been intended for sale to a privately-owned Indian or Arab vessel for its defence, and it was not unduly negligent of the Chittagong authorities not to have linked them with aggressive designs in respect of Arakan.

The Governor-General, Minto, was absent at this time on the Java expeditions and the head of government at Calcutta was Hewitt, the Vice-President. Hewitt and the Calcutta Council decided it would be advisable to send a representative to Rangoon to disabuse the Burmese of the notion that the British were involved in the rebellion.³ The mere fact that the rebellion had been launched from British territory would give rise to suspicion. Besides, the Arakan authorities had accused the British of involvement, and would make similar accusations in their reports to the capital. Then, it

1. Pearn, op.cit., p.452.

2. Whyte, W., Political History of the Extraordinary Events which led to the Burmese War, London, 1827, pp.16-17.

3. BPC, 6 September 1811, Instructions to Canning, No.250.

was felt that the Court might view the rebellion as an attempt by the British to prevent a Burmese attempt on Chittagong and Dacca. As a result of the Canning mission of 1809 to 1810, it was known in Calcutta that the King wished to gain possession of these districts. A belief in British involvement would damage relations between the two states, and it was necessary to remove it.

Quite apart from these considerations, it was felt that the Burmese were entitled to an explanation from the British, in view of the fact that the invasion had been launched from British territory.

It was feared also that the Burmese might detain British subjects or seize their property. If this happened, the British representative should try to secure their release. If he failed, he should inform the Calcutta Government and they would then consider attempting a rescue operation.

It was extremely desirable that the representative should settle all matters in Rangoon. He could however go to the capital if necessary, and he had letters and presents for the King^{and}/Ein-gyi Paya.

While making his representations, he was to give the Burmese copies of official documents from the Chittagong district, which showed clearly that the Magistrate had not been aware that Chin Pyan was organising a rebellion. He was also to give the Burmese two original letters from Chin Pyan which again showed that the British had not been involved in the rebellion. He was however, to avoid an apologetic tone when making his representations.

On account of his previous experience in Burma, Captain John Canning was selected for this mission. Curiously, Canning received no instructions on the subject of extradition of rebels

who managed to re-enter British territory. When questioned about this, he had to write to Calcutta for further instructions.

When Canning arrived at Rangoon on 20 October, he was to find that he could not convince the Burmese that the British had had nothing to do with the invasion. It is easy to understand why this suspicion should have had such a strong hold on the Burmese. The invading force had numbered several thousands and had included men in red sepoy uniforms whom the Burmese could not know were discharged soldiers from the Company's armies; it had also possessed muskets and cannon. How could such a force have been assembled, the Burmese would have wondered, without the British having come to know of it?

The existence of suspicion at the capital, is indicated by the following excerpt from a letter from an unnamed person at the capital to a friend at Rangoon, who allowed Canning to make a copy of it.

What gives me most cause for concern is that, though it be not said that the English have joined the Arakanese, yet the King has declared that they afford them assistance underhand and supply them with arms... and that if the English government had not given its consent to the invasion of Arakan, it never would have suffered the Arakanese settled in their territory to leave it for the purpose of making war on the Burmese. What may be the result of this affair, I dare not conjecture but I certainly think there is every reason to foresee an open rupture between the two governments.¹

1. BPC, 26 December 1811, Canning to Edmonstone, 26 November 1811, No.6, quoting letter dated 7 July 1811, from a person "of the first trust and responsibility" at the capital, to a friend at Rangoon. It is possible that the writer concerned was the Italian bishop, Louis de Grondona, who supplied British envoys with information both before, during and after the 1812 mission. His correspondent could have been an Italian missionary, Brito, who was living in Rangoon at this time.

The dire consequences predicted by this writer did not come to pass, however. It has already been suggested that the King's awareness of British military strength was one reason which induced him to give Symes a proper reception in 1802, and which, despite his revived interest in Chittagong and Dacca in 1810, deterred him from attempting an invasion of Bengal. The same factor would have operated again to prevent any resort to arms; and the fact that hostilities with Siam were still continuing would have given it added weight. The Court did feel a need for retaliation. This it satisfied by ordering the Myowun of Pegu to detain all British ships at Rangoon. Even here, however, there was a factor recommending restraint; the Rangoon duties were an important source of the King's revenue.¹ It is perhaps significant that the Myowun was also given discretionary authority to release the vessels. In any case, the principle objective of the Court as will be seen later, was not to get into disputes with the British, but to reconquer Arakan, and to apprehend the leaders of the insurrection. On this issue, the Court was not inclined to compromise. Arakan was a large province and the King's only successful conquest to date. Its possession would never be secure as long as potential trouble-makers remained in British territory.

Canning was to find later that the Myowun of Pegu shared the Court's suspicions of British involvement in the rebellion. The Myowun, however, was an important trader, whose business would have suffered if the embargo he had imposed on British trade at the Court's behest had been allowed to continue for long. The royal revenue would have been affected also and relations with the British would have suffered. Consequently, after a token embargo of 20 days, he took advantage of the discretionary authority which the Court itself had given him to lift it. Three British ships were

1. It is unclear whether the King or Ein-gyi Paya was responsible for policy. In mid-1812, the Ein-gyi Paya was responsible but the situation in 1811 may have been different; also, the King (as will be seen) was capable of intervening even if the Ein-gyi Paya had authority.

detained during this period; to reassure their captains and avoid jeopardizing Rangoon's trade by provoking British reprisals, he told them that the ships had been detained to prevent them falling into the hands of the Arakanese rebels as they returned to Calcutta.¹ It is of course unlikely that this explanation was believed.

The Myowun sent an envoy to Bengal by the time Canning arrived at Rangoon in October 1811; he had taken with him a letter which purported to come from the British merchants at Rangoon, but which had, in fact, been written by the Myowun, who had then talked the merchants into signing it. The letter stated that the Myowun had told the British merchants that he had heard that the rebels had obtained arms in British territory (as they had, in fact, but from private sources) but that he was sure that the British government would have done nothing calculated to damage the good relations subsisting between the two States. He hoped the British would take steps to prevent the rebels "finding refuge or procuring assistance in their territories...."²

There was no charge of British complicity in this letter. However, Canning discovered later - presumably from the merchants themselves - that the Myowun had stated to the merchants that he had good grounds for believing that the British had given arms to the rebels. The reason why this charge was not made in the letter to the Governor-General would seem to be this: the Burmese objective at this time was to get British help in securing the rebels; and

1. BPC, 26 December 1811, Canning to Edmonstone, 26 November 1811, No.6.

2. Ibid., The Myowun had just returned from the capital, and was apparently executing court policy.

this would have been jeopardized if they quarrelled with the British.

On arriving at Rangoon in October 1811, Captain Canning presented to the Myowun and the Rangoon Council a detailed official paper concerning the rebellion, which stressed British ignorance of Arakanese preparations. Canning also provided the Burmese with the original letters of Chin Pyan to the British in which he explained why he had revolted and asked to be accepted as a tributary ruler. There was, of course, nothing whatever in these letters to indicate official complicity. Canning also went into such factors as the difficulty of policing the district. The envoy was convinced that he had failed to produce the desired effect in spite of these explanations. The Myowun "assented to everything", he reported, but with a "visible degree of mistrust and suspicion".¹ It is significant, however, that the Burmese accepted the explanations ~~qf~~ their face-value, and went on to ask for an assurance that the rebel chiefs would not be allowed refuge in British territory. This seems to be the same policy as that under-lying the letter to the Governor-General, that is, of maintaining good relations with the British, while ensuring British cooperation in the apprehension of the rebels.

Canning assured the Myowun that the British had stationed troops at the frontier to prevent an attempt by the insurgents to return to Chittagong. It had occurred to Canning however, that this measure might not prove effective. He had written to the Calcutta Government enquiring what he should tell the Burmese if this proved to be the case. He received from the Vice-President-in-Council

1. Ibid.

an undertaking "that Kingbering [Chin Pyan] and his adherents would not be allowed an asylum within the British territories, which, on the contrary they would not if possible be allowed to enter, or having entered would be compelled to quit".¹ However, the British would not themselves actually seize rebels and hand them over to the Burmese. Canning conveyed this undertaking to the Burmese.

The Myowun, Canning thought, shared the suspicion "impressed on the mind of the King and of course prevalent at Court, that so great a number of refugee Mugs [Arakanese] could not have been assembled... nor the invasion of Arrakan have taken place without the knowledge and participation of our Government".² Canning was informed also that an English resident had asked the Myowun with what arms the Arakanese had been fighting. "With what arms should they fight but those which they are supplied from Bengal?" the Myowun had replied.³ Canning discovered that one fact which fostered suspicions of the British in Burmese minds was that some of the insurgents had been dressed in sepoy clothing. The Burmese thought these had been given to them by the British, "not reflecting, or probably being ignorant that such clothing may very frequently be procured in Calcutta by whoever chooses to purchase it".⁴ However, according to a subsequent report from the Magistrate of Chittagong, these persons were sepoys discharged from the Chittagong Provincial Battalion, and not Arakanese dressed in sepoy clothing.

1. BPC, 22 November 1811, Edmonstone to Canning, 22 November 1811, No.5.

2. BPC, 26 December 1811, Canning to Edmonstone, 26 November, No.6.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

Before leaving the subject of the Burmese reaction to Chin Pyan's invasion, a further point should be noticed. In mid-May 1812, an incident occurred which suggests strongly that the belief in British complicity in Chin Pyan's rebellion was shared by the Burmese Commander-in-chief at Tavoy and his subordinate officials. A letter was received at Calcutta from the Myowun of Tavoy and certain of his officials. It stated that the King of Burma had become displeased with them because of complaints made to him about them (the nature of the complaints was not specified), and went on to ask that Tavoy be taken under British protection, and that three ships of war and 500 troops be sent there for its defence against the King. "If your Lordship will relieve us from our present hardship, we readily assent to comply with any requisition which may be proposed and further agree to pay the tribute."¹ This letter was dated 23 December 1811. By that time news of Chin Pyan's invasion of Arakan from British territory would have reached Tavoy. If the Arakanese could defy Burmese authority with British help, why not Tavoy, the officials concerned seem to have thought. Canning, incidentally, was to report later from Rangoon that a large group of Burmese from Tavoy actually crossed the Gulf of Martaban in boats and joined the rebels in Arakan.²

The town of Tavoy seems to have had a tradition of disloyalty towards Ava. In 1793, the Myowun had offered to become a tributary ruler of Siam; and in 1824, it was surrendered to the British without a fight.

1. Bengal Secret Consultations (BSC), 15 May 1812, No.9.

2. BPC, 22 November 1811, Canning to Edmonstone, 25 October 1811, No.4.

As in 1809, so in 1811, Canning had not been accorded the status of envoy to the Burmese Court. His orders were to make his explanations to the Rangoon authorities, and to go to the capital only if it was necessary. But, as in 1809, he had letters for the King and the Ein-gyi Paya and, this time, presents worth 10,000 rupees for them. The Rangoon authorities were obliged therefore to inform the Court of Canning's arrival and await the inevitable summons to the capital. The boat which went to the capital also took a copy of the letter containing his official explanations to the Rangoon Council of Chin Pyan's letters to the British. The Vice-President-in-Council, Hewitt, had written letters to the King and Ein-gyi Paya but Canning did not consider himself entitled to forward it without a special order (from the Court) to that effect.

Meanwhile, the Burmese had been making preparations for the reconquest of Arakan. After Chin Pyan's conquest of the province in May 1811, the monsoon had descended, making military operations impossible. It was only after the end of the monsoon in December 1811, that Burmese forces set sail from Rangoon and Bassein for Arakan to regain control of the province. They fought a major battle with Chin Pyan's forces off the island of Cheduba; the Arakanese were scattered, and the Burmese proceeded to reoccupy the entire province. The emigrants were never again to threaten their control of it seriously.

Canning, it will be remembered, had made a promise to the Burmese that the rebels would not be allowed an asylum in British territory and that they would be forced to leave it if they managed to enter it. It transpired now that because of the length of the border, and the scarcity of troops and police, it was not possible

to prevent the rebels from re-entering the Chittagong district. In the light of their promise, the British were now required to drive the rebels out of their territory. Instead there was a change of policy at Calcutta. It was decided to admit the rebels, however, including the leaders and to keep the latter under detention. The Calcutta Government was prepared to transfer the rebels from the Chittagong district to some other part of India; also it did not rule out the possibility of surrendering the rebel leaders to the Burmese if future circumstances made this advisable. However, if a demand was made by the Burmese at the present moment, Canning was to say that considerations of humanity prevented the British from surrendering them to a cruel death. The Burmese were to be told also that they would have to discuss the issue of the extradition of the refugees with Canning at Rangoon; it was not to be raised by the Burmese commander in Arakan. The reason would seem to be that the Calcutta Government did not want to appear to be negotiating under pressure from the victorious Burmese forces in Arakan nor with a subordinate army commander. A despatch dated 25 January 1812, was sent to Canning informing him of the new policy towards the rebels.¹ The reason for the change of policy as regards asylum may be that Minto, who was a man of humane feeling (as shown, for example, by the support he gave to Raffles' policies in Java) had returned to Bengal from Java and taken over from Hewitt, who had made the original promise to force the rebels out of British territory.

1. BPC, 25 January 1812, Edmonstone to Canning, 25 January, No.53.

The British were retracting a pledge that they had made to the Burmese. It is clear, however, that this was done for humanitarian reasons. There is no suggestion in the records that the rebels were being protected for some anti-Burmese purpose.

This modification of policy was followed by further developments at the frontier. The Burmese commander in Arakan and the Myowun of that province had been ordered by the Court to ask for the surrender of the rebels. Like the Myowun of Arakan in 1801, they proceeded to make the demand in terms which the Court was subsequently to disavow. To a messenger sent by the Magistrate of Chittagong, the Burmese commander declared "that he would invade Chittagong with eighty thousand men if Chin Pyan and other Mug [Arakanese] leaders were not surrendered; he said also that he would have the assistance of a number of French ships which were bringing "ten thousand stand of arms".¹

In their formal letters to the British, both the military commander and the Myowun were more moderate, but they threatened still to look for the rebels in British territory. A number of border crossings by small parties of Burmese occurred. These, however, were subsequently disavowed by the Burmese commander and in some cases at least, may have been due to ignorance. The Burmese, in fact, lacked the means to carry out an invasion of Chittagong. The French ships mentioned by the Burmese army commander in Arakan were imaginary, of course; and the army in Arakan was already in difficult straits for lack of supplies. However, the British were

1. Pearn, op.cit., pp.456-457.

obliged to view the threats with some seriousness, in view of the fact that the Burmese leaders at the frontier had claimed (when making the threat to search for the rebels) to be acting upon orders from Ava and since it was not known at first that the crossings were unauthorized. British reinforcements were sent to Chittagong; and further instructions were sent from Calcutta to Captain Canning. There was concern at Calcutta that the tension at the border posed dangers for Canning. "Adverting to the barbarious character and despotism of the Government of Ava, His Lordship in Council does not feel altogether satisfied of its observance of the sacred rights and priveleges of the Representative of a foreign state".¹ There seemed to be a possibility that Canning might be used as a hostage to secure the surrender of Chin Pyan. Minto had been Governor-General at the time of Canning's mission of 1809-1810, and might have remembered the rumour that the King had considered holding Canning as a hostage for the surrender of Chittagong and Dacca. Again, the Burmese might seize him if war seemed probable. There were fears also for the safety of British residents at Rangoon. The Calcutta Government decided therefore to send two ships - the Amboyna and the Malabar, the latter a 20-gun cruiser - to Rangoon, to give Canning a degree of independence of the authorities there and to evacuate him and the British residents if the need arose. If Canning thought it better to stay at Rangoon, he was at liberty to do so; but he was enjoined not to go to the capital, until the Court had ordered the Burmese commander to respect British territory and agreed to discuss the issue of the fugitives with Canning,

1. BPC, 21 February 1812, Edmonstone to Canning, 21 February 1812.

rather than through the commander at the frontier.

Over the next few days, the tension at the frontier decreased. The Burmese commander recalled the troops who had crossed the frontier and also sent to the British camp envoys who seemed pacifically disposed. However, the Burmese forces were still at the frontier and a threat of invasion had been made earlier by their commander. In a despatch sent on 29 February 1812, Canning was informed of the easing of the tension at the border; but the conditions laid down in the instructions of 21 February with regard to his journey to the capital were re-affirmed.¹

After making his explanations to the Rangoon authorities on his arrival there, Canning had remained in the town, awaiting a likely summons from the Hlutdaw to proceed to the capital. By the time the Malabar and the Amboyna reached Rangoon on 17 March, the summons had already arrived. It has been seen that the Court, like the Myowun of Pegu, had wanted to preserve good relations with the British while securing the persons of the rebel leaders. The Myowun of Pegu would have reported Canning's arrival for the purpose - a basically friendly one - of establishing British innocence and his subsequent promise that the rebel leaders would not be allowed a refuge in British territory.² The Court would have thought that all its objectives had been achieved and that the reception of Canning at Ava would have set the seal on the re-established

1. BPC, 29 February 1812, Edmonstone to Canning, 29 February 1812.

2. BSC, 8 May 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 5 April, entry for 22 March. Baba Sheen told Canning that the King and Ein-gyi Paya were pleased at the British refusal to grant asylum to the refugees.

friendship. Canning was preparing for the journey upriver when the Amboyna and Malabar arrived in mid-March with the new instructions from the Calcutta Council.

On reaching the mouth of the Rangoon river, the Malabar and the Amboyna, in accordance with the port regulations, had sent an officer to the town by boat to ask for pilots.¹ This officer told Canning that he understood the ship had been sent to effect his release from prison. Canning could not be sure what the ship's purpose was till he saw his despatches; but it would now be clear to him that she had probably been sent for his protection. Meanwhile, the guards at the entrance to the river had sent word that a warship had anchored there. British warships had visited Rangoon before without creating any alarm. It was warships, for example, which had brought Symes to Burma in 1795 and 1802. This time, however, the situation at Rangoon was different. The British, in spite of Canning's assurances, were suspected of involvement in the rebellion in Arakan. Now they wished to bring into Rangoon harbour a vessel that could destroy the whole town with ease and with impunity. It is scarcely surprising that rumours should have spread in the town that the British had some aggressive intention in mind. And, in fact, even the actual British purpose - enabling Canning to ward off a Burmese attempt on his person - would probably have been unacceptable to the Burmese even if no attempt was considered at this stage.

In order to quieten the rumours, Canning paid a visit to the Myowun. The latter inquired why the warship had come. The

1. Ibid., entry for 17 March.

least hint that the ship had probably come to protect him from the Burmese, Canning considered, would have resulted in the Myowun refusing her permission to come up to Rangoon. He was probably right here - the Myowun was unlikely to have willingly foregone the privileges of being absolute master in his own house. It would, of course, have been a hostile act for the ships to come up after a refusal of permission. Canning, however, had come to feel that the ship's presence would be useful to him. He would have expected the ship's presence to help him in his negotiations. Also, he felt sure that the Calcutta Government would have had good grounds for sending it. Perhaps recent developments at the Naf made it adviseable. Therefore, Canning said he was not sure why the ship had come but that it was probably because of the presence of French frigates in the Bay of Bengal. (Mauritius, their stronghold, had been captured in 1810). The Myowun seems to have accepted this explanation. "The Viceroy [Myowun] replied that he should always be happy to have it in his power to manifest his regard for the British Nation and gave orders for a pilot to bring up both ships".¹ They arrived on the next day, 18 March.

The Rangoon Council, however, was not so accommodating. In Canning's words, the Council, with the exception of Baba Sheen (who may have been his informant) "expressed the highest dissatisfaction at the conduct of the Viceroy [Myowun]" and maintained that the British "had no other object in view than to endeavour to obtain possession of the town".² It now dawned on the Myowun that he might

1. Ibid., March 17.

2. Ibid.

have been duped; what exactly the ship's objectives were he still could not know; but the fact remained that at a time of tension between the two governments, he had allowed a British warship to come up to Rangoon on what might very well be a false pretext. As a result, the whole town was at the mercy of the vessel. The threat to the town apart, he seems to have been afraid of the King finding out about what he had allowed. Canning wrote of "the dread he [the Myowun] entertains of the King receiving information of the Malabar being bere...."¹ The Myowun now made several determined efforts to be rid of the ship between 19 March and 24 March. At a meeting with Canning and Captain Maxfield of the Malabar on 20 March the Myowun told them that "many strange reports were in circulation and that it was generally understood that the two nations were at war".² At this meeting the Myowun was attended by a guard 400 to 500 strong, of whom two-thirds were equipped with "serviceable" muskets. He warned Canning that if he continued to refuse to send the ship away, he would issue an order to it to leave. It would, of course, have been illegal for the ship to remain thereafter.

Maxfield stated that the ship was searching for enemy vessels and had called at a friendly port; at present, it also needed repairs, which would take some days to complete. The Myowun promised all the materials the vessel needed but insisted that the ship should leave after the completion of the repairs. The envoy was determined however, to keep the ship in the harbour as long as

1. Ibid., 19 March.

2. Ibid., 20 March.

he was at Rangoon and thereby avoid being subjected (along with the Europeans at Rangoon) to "the caprice of the most tyrannical and arbitrary of Governments".¹ He believed also that if the ship left he would be in a weak position in negotiations and would be exposed to unreasonable demands. He now resorted to a tactic used by Symes in 1795; he agreed to send the ship away if the Myowun ordered it, but warned that he would leave with her. "To this", Canning remarked, "I well knew he would never consent, as having once received the King's order to send us up the Country, it was as much as his situation and property, perhaps even head, was worth to be the cause of my quitting Rangoon in disgust".²

It would have been an act of disrespect for Canning to leave after he had received a royal summons; and the Myowun would have been in trouble for having allowed it. Out of consideration for his own safety, the Myowun agreed (on 24 March) to the ship remaining, with the possible risk it entailed to the town. He accepted the excuse of repairs at its face value, and asked to be allowed to send workmen on board in order to convince people that the vessel's presence was innocuous and thereby save him from the Rangoon Council.

Canning disclosed also that he was under orders not to go to the capital till certain conditions, which he now disclosed, were met. He knew, however, that the Court would be expecting him; to give them some sort of satisfaction he thought of sending his Eurasian sub-interpreter, whom he had hired locally, to the capital, with a letter to the Ein-gyi Paya stating the conditions upon which he would

1. Ibid., 19 March.

2. Ibid., 21 March.

go. This procedure could not have been satisfactory to the Myowun who had wanted Canning to go immediately to the capital, but he had to agree once again.

The strategy of employing workmen on board the Malabar failed to dispel the uneasiness in the town, as is shown by the following development. On 28 March, a schooner carrying the Calcutta Government's despatch of 29 February (for reasons that had nothing to do with the current political situation) came up to the harbour without first asking for a pilot. This, however, was a violation of the port regulations. As the Myowun expressed it in a subsequent letter to Canning:

If any vessel should have come up and pass the Royal Chokey [the Burmese post at the entrance to the river] without having complied with this regulation, the commander would be deemed to have transgressed the Royal order and the ancient statutes of the Port, and would be punished accordingly.¹

The Myowun was in fact overstating matters a little. The regulation was sometimes violated at normal times without causing any alarm. But its violation at a time when great unease existed as to British objectives was attributed by the Burmese quite naturally to some aggressive purpose. The report of the schooner coming up river threw Rangoon into complete chaos. The life of the town was disrupted, the markets were deserted, and many people fled into the jungle. "It was generally rumoured", Canning reported, "that the English were now come to take possession of the place...."² It seems that the schooner was believed to be the vanguard of an invasion fleet that

1. BSC, 12 June, Canning to Edmonstone, 6 May, No.22, Enclosure 7, para 5.

2. Ibid., 24 March.

would attempt to seize the town the same night. The Burmese, Canning reported, "notwithstanding many boasts and threats, are pretty well aware of their inability to cope with the force we now have here by open means."¹ Under such circumstances it is scarcely surprising that they should have thought of foiling the British by means which were not open. Canning claimed he received information from several (undisclosed) sources that the officials of the Government were planning to seize him as a hostage for the departure of the warship and the surrender of the refugees.² The reports he received concerning the Myowun's attitude towards this project were contradictory. One report was to the effect that the Myowun had invited Canning to meet him alone for the express purpose of seizing him. The envoy states this information was divulged by the Myowun to an European confidante of Canning's. But later Canning received information that the Myowun had confined several members of the Rangoon Council to prevent them from attempting to seize Canning, a measure, which the Myowun feared "would certainly create a rupture" between the two Governments.³ The Myowun, it appears, did consider seizing him at any one time at least but it is possible he was hesitating between two courses of actions. (He afterwards told Felix Carey he had considered seizing Canning). At any rate, Canning thought it best to withdraw to the Malabar. He was convinced that the Burmese would oppose his transfer to the ship if he told them about it and that this would result in a clash and possibly wider hostilities. Consequently, the preparations for his departure were made in secret,

1. Ibid., 28 March.

2. Subsequently, the Myowun confirmed that the Council had wanted to seize Canning. BSC, 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 6 May, para. 9.

3. Ibid., postscript.

and the withdrawal itself was carried out abruptly on the afternoon of 30 March 1812.

If any reliance at all can be placed on Canning's judgement, the Myowun really believed his first explanation for the Malabar's presence and later under the Council's influence, came to disbelieve it. He does not appear to have feigned either his initial belief or his later suspicion.

An incident occurred in the course of the envoy's removal to the ship, which shows that considerations of face were important to the British as early as 1812. When Canning's party was going to the ship in boats, one became separated from the rest and two Burmese war boats attempted to tow it ashore. The effort was unsuccessful; the tow-line snapped and the boat was able to reach the ship safely. Even so, Canning felt that he had lost face, and that "the insult" had to be made good. He demanded that the head man of the war boats be sent to him for punishment. At first, the Myowun refused, saying - rather unconvincingly - that the warboats had been trying only to assist the boat's crew; but he finally sent the headman when Canning threatened otherwise to return to Bengal. The envoy then personally went through the motions of preparing to flog the headman, but stopped short of inflicting the actual punishment. He also made him strike the deck with his forehead, a Burmese gesture signifying penitence. He then considered himself satisfied, and was convinced that he had succeeded "in impressing them with a due sense of our power...."¹ On receiving a pre-arranged signal from Canning the European

1. Ibid., 30 March. It is by no means certain, however, that this crude incident would have increased feelings of respect.

residents at Rangoon came on board the two ships also.

Once on board the Malabar, Canning made a move which was well - advised - he wrote to the Myowun, offering to take the ships some distance downriver. This would have reduced fears of an immediate attack on the town and also brought home to the Burmese authorities that Canning's transfer to the ship was essentially a defensive move. The Myowun replied that there was no need for such a move; he said also that Canning could stay on board ship if he did not feel safe ashore, but assured him that he had no intention of seizing him. The tension gradually eased and the European residents were able to return ashore.

While the tension had lasted, however, war had seemed likely and Canning in fact had gone so far as to suggest military operations in Burma involving the seizure of Rangoon, Prome and other towns, and the promotion of general rebellion in Burma.

I have every reason to believe that on permanent protection being held out to the natives, they would gladly join the English and throw off the yoke of their own Government.¹

The rains would come down soon, making land operations impossible, but an ascent of the country by river would still be possible. He was to repeat these rather wild suggestions in 1823-1824. The envoy's thoughts were echoed by one Captain Mackenzie, commander of the merchant-vessel Providence. He had witnessed the events at Rangoon, and left the town, in his own words,

...in full hopes that the English Government will chastise those insolent, overbearing scoundrels before they drop their affairs, and ultimately

1. BSC, 15 May 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 19 April 1812.

douse [i.e. defeat and conquer] the Burmese peacock [the national emblem of Burma] in addition to the rest of British India but should government pass over the insult with the many others they and their subjects have received for several years back, those rascals will no doubt be more insolent than ever.... I am much surprized the British Government having the rest of India, they should have neglected to add this beautiful country to their other dominions, as it is I fancy, one of the richest countries in India and produces not only all but many more articles of trade than any other part of India, and above all the quantity of timber of every description for ship-building, which would be a great acquisition to our Commerce and trade, instead of now getting so small a supply, and obliged to pay so high a price for it.¹

The letter may indicate warlike inclinations among British mercantile circles. The same arguments - the desire of the people for a change of rulers - the economic potential of the area etc. - were to be used by the men on the spot in 1824-1826 to persuade the Calcutta Government to annex Pegu. But both at this time and in 1824-1826, the higher authorities showed no enthusiasm for such a move.

It was, of course, highly unorthodox in the Burmese context, or the British for that matter, for an envoy to seek protection from his hosts on board a warship. (In fact, he was supposed to be under strict seclusion ashore and George Sorrel - the semi-official envoy of 1794 - had been so secluded, but Michael Symes had had this regulation waived in 1795). The Myowun and the Rangoon Council accordingly urged Canning "to leave the ship and return to live on shore in accordance with the customs of Ambassadors". Since the Myowun did not use threats, there was no conflict between this policy and his earlier agreement that Canning could remain on board ship as

1. BSC, 15 May 1812, Pechell Magistrate of Chittagong to Edmonstone, 4 May 1812, enclosing Captain Mackenzie's letter.

long as he wished. In the end, Canning, who found his residence on board inconvenient and that it prevented him from gaining information of events in Rangoon, agreed to go ashore provided he was given a house by the wharf. This was in case a quick departure became necessary. The Myowun agreed and on 5 May Canning went ashore. While he was on board ship, however, he had a series of clashes with the Burmese.

First, a dispute arose over the property, including the presents for the King and Ein-gyi Paya, that Canning had left behind on land when he withdrew to the vessel. The envoy wanted these articles to be brought on board the ship. The Myowun and the Rangoon Council, afraid that Canning might sail away with the property, were loathe to agree. From the Burmese point of view, there were two disadvantages to such a development. Firstly, Canning would have been leaving after a royal summons had been received. Secondly, he would be taking the presents away. These, however, were presents for the King and a list of them had already been sent to the Court. The Burmese were consequently reluctant even to lose control over them, let alone allow Canning to take them away. Canning finally secured them by threatening to leave for Bengal if they were not returned.

Canning clashed with the Burmese also over the laws which prohibited taking women and currency out of the country. Both these laws, besides being hallowed by tradition, had some practical justification. The ban on the emigration of women born in Burma must have been intended to conserve the population of a very sparsely populated country; the ban on taking out currency was a variant of mercantilist economics. The violation of the first prohibition arose in the following manner: Felix Carey, a British missionary working in

Rangoon, had wished to bring his wife and children on board the Malabar at the time the European residents sought refuge there. He felt that because of their connection with him, his family would not be safe on shore in the event of hostilities. However, Carey's wife was a Eurasian lady born in Burma and therefore subject to the law. Canning knew of this law, but so far as he was concerned the humanitarian case outweighed whatever violence was done to Burmese custom, and he gave them permission to come aboard.

The clash over the export of specie involved the Elephant, a ship belonging to a British firm at Calcutta which had been commandeered by the Myowun of Pegu to ferry troops and supplies for the expedition against Junk Ceylon. This again was the custom in Burma; the King was considered to have the right to commandeer vessels in cases of emergency, in return for giving them the right to call at his ports. The use of ships in this way was supposed to be paid for. It will be recalled that Cornwallis had sent George Sorrel to Burma in 1794 to ensure that the compensation in a case of this kind was actually paid. The Myowun, on his own account, had chosen the Elephant in order to minimize the inconvenience that would result to the British traders; because she was a large vessel, she sufficed for the task in hand and obviated the need to commandeer several vessels. However, the compensation the Myowun offered was inadequate to cover the loss sustained by the owners of the vessel as a result of her long absence. Canning had been instructed to try to obtain a larger sum. He found the Burmese making difficulties over this sum; so he proposed a sum midway between what the Calcutta Government had proposed and what the Myowun offered. The Myowun had agreed to this. When Canning was still on board the Malabar, the

the Myowun summoned the envoy's interpreter to the town hall, and publicly announced that the revised sum would be paid; but he then added the proviso that the money could not be taken out of the country (i.e. that it had to be invested in teak or some other Burmese export which, in fact, was how Burmese trade was normally carried on). Canning was convinced that the whole affair had been arranged by the Myowun to make the British look foolish. He conceded that there was a regulation to this effect but he felt it could have been set aside. In 1794, the Burmese had certainly agreed to send money to Bengal, as compensation for George Tyler's commandeered vessel.

In their correspondence with Canning, the Burmese responded vigorously. "There exists a most ancient law in this country, which absolutely prohibits the carrying away of silver and women."¹ The taking on board of Carey's family they seem to have regarded as a wrong done on them. It was described by the Myowun, in a letter to Canning, as an act "which will probably render us all guilty of treason in the eyes of His Majesty. How could you [Canning] ever be induced to consent to this act?"² Nevertheless, the Carey affair itself was settled amicably when the tension in the town subsided. Carey and his family were willing to go ashore and were well received by the Burmese authorities. With regard to the compensation for the Elephant, the Myowun decided to waive the regulations in question. It seems, therefore, that the regulation could be waived.

1. BSC, 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 6 May 1812, Enclosure No.7, Myowun and Rangoon Council to Canning, para.9.

2. Ibid., para.9.

A curious affair occurred also when the pilot schooner which had brought Canning his instructions of 29 February returned to Calcutta in mid-April. The departure caused another panic at Rangoon (the only major case of panic that occurred after Canning's transfer to the Malabar). A rumour spread that the schooner had been sent to bring back a powerful force to subdue the town. Canning reported that the Yewun and others in the Council, though not the Myowun himself, considered attacking the ship with warboats and fire-rafts before "additional opponents" arrived.¹ (The latter method was actually employed in 1824 and seems to have been a standard Burmese tactic). It was argued also that honour demanded a resort to arms, "...it being a shame, said they, that two vessels with a few guns should bid defiance to the town of Rangoon and the thirty-two provinces of Pegue...."² Face was therefore a Burmese consideration too. Only the Rangoon Council had these notions - the Myowun was apparently against hostilities. However, caution prevailed and the Burmese confined themselves to strengthening the defences of Rangoon. The population of Rangoon was put to work on this project. Orders were also given for batteries to be erected also at a number of points along the river. In the process of strengthening Rangoon's wooden stockade, stones were taken from the tombs at the European cemetery in Rangoon, some of which were those of Britons. The act horrified Canning who protested vigorously to the Myowun. It is possible however that there was no conflict here between British and Burmese custom. The Myowun replied that the removal of the

1. BSC, 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 6 May 1812, Canning's diary, para. 4.

2. Ibid.

tombstones was unauthorized and that the stones would be replaced.

Canning was convinced that he had given such orders, but did not produce any evidence for this charge.

Yet another incident occurred which involved a breach of tradition. It took place immediately after the Malabar had arrived, and Canning was still on land, but it will be discussed in this section with cases of this type. The Myowun's account of it was as follows:

When a Town Gate is mentioned, it is understood to mean a Royal and Sacred Gate. The officers of your ships having expressed a wish to pass through the Gate after the Hour of 9 p.m. [when the gate was closed, presumably] and near the hour of 12, the Gatekeeper stated that it was beyond the Hour and that therefore they must obtain permission of the superior to open it. But your Officers were impatient, pushed aside the Gatekeeper and having wrenched out the staple that fastened the Gate, thus forcibly made their way out. Having sent to you the Royal Interpreter, Antony George, with the very Padlock that was forced off, you merely said, 'truly they have acted wrong', without giving us any further satisfaction.¹

For the Burmese, the offence had a shocking character, which the envoy, because of his different training, would not have seen in it, since the town gate was in the Myowun's words, a "Royal and Sacred Gate", it was a very disrespectful act to force it open and tear off the padlock.²

1. BSC, 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 6 May 1812, Myowun and Rangoon Council, Enclosure 7, para. 3.

2. Ibid.

After Canning had gone ashore, his stay at Rangoon entered its final phase, during which the question of the surrender of the rebel leaders became of secondary importance, and the main point of issue was whether or not the order to proceed to the capital would be obeyed. It is proposed, however, to touch on the issue of the rebels first. It has been seen that the Calcutta Government had changed its policy regarding them. Although their surrender had not yet been completely ruled out, Canning had been informed of the British government's extreme reluctance to agree to it. On April 22, while the mission was still on board ship, Canning had had a meeting with the Myowun in the course of which the latter asked if the rebel leaders would be handed over to the Burmese. The Myowun argued that the rebel leaders would excite disturbances in Arakan if allowed to remain at liberty. Canning stated that he doubted very much if the Governor-General would agree to surrender the rebel leaders to the Burmese to be executed. The surrender of refugees to certain death must be considered an act of extreme concession. However, the refugees would probably be prevented from creating more trouble in Arakan. The Myowun warned that the King would insist on the surrender of Chin Pyan, though perhaps not of the other leaders. He suggested that the British deny they had captured Chin Pyan even if they had done so. However, he seemed to be hopeful that a solution to this problem would be found; and he was willing to ^{discuss} it with Canning, as required by the British, instead of it being raised at the frontier.¹

1. BSC, 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 6 May 1812, entry for 22 April.

In mid-May, Canning received important news from the Italian bishop Louis de Grondona. Canning's sub-interpreter had already reached the capital. Grondona had been asked by the Hludaw to translate Canning's letter to the Ein-gyi Paya of 28 March (he declined to do this because the translation made at Rangoon was adequate). He had discussions with the Hludaw, and subsequently with the Ein-gyi Paya on relations with the British. In a letter dated 22 April he confirmed that the proceedings of the Burmese commander in Arakan had not been authorized by the Court. The conduct of the commander was in fact "reprobated in the strongest terms" and orders had been sent to him already to withdraw from the frontier.¹ The commander-in-chief at Prome had also been recalled. Grondona found that the King had entrusted affairs of state to the Ein-gyi Paya and had devoted himself to reforming the Buddhist priesthood. The King had nothing to do with the decisions taken at this time. Grondona was absolutely sure that the Ein-gyi Paya and all the Court "are for peace and foresee nothing but disaster from a rupture with the English... in the present state of affairs and situation of the kingdom there is too much to be thought of within for them to dare to seek new enemies without".² (The country, it seems, had not recovered yet from the effects of the war fare with Siam and internal disorder that Canning had observed in 1809-1810). With regard to the King, however, Grondona struck

1. 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 22 May 1812, enclosure 18, Grondona to Canning, 22 April 1812. This information was provided because Canning had written to Grondona also in late March, asking for information on the Court's attitude.

2. Ibid.

an ominous note by adding that he would not "take it upon myself to ensure that he [the King] is not capable of playing some trick, being proud to excess and often of a billious humour incapable of reason...."¹ If he became displeased with the proceedings of the British, there might be trouble. Grondona reported that the Court was becoming puzzled at Canning's remaining at Rangoon, instead of obeying the Hlutdaw's summons. The Court thought that the Myowun had confined Canning because of some quarrel. It now sent instructions to the Myowun of Pegu to release Canning and send him up with all honour, and with an escort to protect him from the robbers still infesting the Irawaddy valley. The Ein-gyi Paya told Grondona that he was anxious to see Canning ^{to} settle all differences. This indicates a strong desire to mend relations with the British. It should be noted, however, that the Court was under the impression that the British would not allow the rebel leaders a refuge in their territory.² Had they been aware of the new policy of the British, their response might not have been so conciliatory.

Canning, it will be recalled, had received orders not to go to the capital unless the Burmese commander received orders to respect British territory and the Burmese agreed to discuss the refugee issue with him. Both these conditions had been met (the Burmese troops had already been recalled from Arakan and the Ein-gyi Paya had wanted to settle all matters with Canning) but he seems now to have felt the need for a specific clearance from the Calcutta Government. The reason for this is not clear.

1/ Ibid.

2. Canning's conversation with the Myowun on refugees took place on 22 April. See also Appendix I

In his report to Calcutta of 23 May, Canning suggested that he ~~go~~ to the capital. By going there, it might be possible for him to arrive at a final settlement of differences (as suggested by the Ein-gyi Paya himself). Also, although he did not state this, the Ein-gyi Paya had clearly been anxious that he should come to the capital, and it might damage relations with Burma if he returned. The King's disposition was "wild and savage".¹ He was confident, however, that the Ein-gyi Paya would be able to restrain the King from any dangerous move which he might be inclined to make (if he became dissatisfied with British refugee policy). As regards the rebel leaders, he considered that they should not be surrendered to a cruel death. He inquired of the Governor-General-in-Council, however, whether he should simply refuse to surrender them, and repeat his statements of 22 April or promise to surrender them, with the British Government "secreting them out of the way" if they fell into their hands.² (This idea had originated with the Myowun). He doubted if war would break out as a result of a refusal to surrender the refugees. If it did, however, the Burmese would be the sufferers, since all the coastal regions of the Empire were vulnerable to British attack. The Burmese could only invade Chittagong, and such an attack could be easily repelled.³

On 8 May, the Calcutta Government, having received Canning's despatch of 9 April, wrote to him recalling him from Burma. They felt he had already carried out his mission, which was to

1. BSC, 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 22 May, No.24.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 6 May, No.22.

explain to the Burmese that the British had not been involved in Chin Pyan's rebellion. The Burmese should send an envoy to Bengal if they wished to discuss the refugee problem. There was no necessity, according to diplomatic usage, for him to remain at Rangoon for the purpose of awaiting Burmese overtures.¹

Subsequently, they received Canning's despatches of 6 May and 23 May. They inferred - correctly - that Canning would stay on at Rangoon even after receiving the recall order of 8 May, until the Calcutta Government's answers to his queries of 23 May were known. After all, the Court had been conciliatory over the Arakan issue. On 12 June 1812, the Calcutta Government sent its reply to Canning's queries of 23 May. They refused to allow Canning to go to the capital. Chin Pyan had invaded Arakan again in mid-1812. This turned out to be only a minor attack on the Burmese post at Maungdaw, which was apparently not even reported to the Court or to the Myowun of Pegu; but the British were at first under the impression that the invasion would be a major one and that it would be bitterly resented by the Burmese. Given this wrong impression and the continued refusal to surrender rebels, Canning's position at the capital was expected to be a difficult one. He would be going there, they wrote, only to face "such demands as the pride and ignorance and insolence of a barbarious Court might suggest on the basis of alleged injuries..... [my emphasis] the British Government [would be placed] in the humiliating character of an accused party before the tribunal of the King of Ava".² Canning might even be in some danger

1. BSC, 8 May 1812, Edmonstone to Canning, 8 May 1812, No.25.

2. BSC, 12 June 1812, Edmonstone to Canning, 12 June 1812, No.25.

at the capital. The friendly disposition of the Ein-gyi Paya afforded little protection against "the intemperate mandates of the King".¹ In any case, there was no need for a British agent to go to the Court. All the British wished to do was to convey certain explanations concerning the second insurrection and this could be done at Rangoon. The British seemed to be unwilling to accept the fact that the injuries sustained by the Burmese were real injuries, and not alleged ones. It is interesting also that the requirements of Burmese protocol - that a summons to Court could not be ignored without giving great offence - were not known to the Calcutta Government; at least, they were not referred to. On the other hand, they were correct in thinking that the Ein-gyi Paya's goodwill was not sufficient protection against the King's mandate.

Canning's statement of 22 April on the refugees was approved of. He was to inform the Burmese of the measures adopted by the British against the insurgents on hearing of the second insurrection. He was also to state to them that further measures were under consideration. Furthermore, the British were willing to provide troops after the rains to suppress the insurrection. He was to continue to refuse to surrender the rebels, because the Governor-General was not willing to surrender them to a cruel death. However, Canning was informed that the surrender of Chin Pyan was not completely ruled out; it might be acceded to if it was the only means of avoiding a war. (This was not to be divulged to the Burmese). If it seemed to Canning that a surrender would be the only means of avoiding war, he was to refer the matter to Calcutta

1. Ibid.

again. The Burmese were to be assured that the rebel leaders, if caught, would never again be allowed to make trouble in Arakan.

On 25 June, new instructions were drafted. Chin Pyan had been easily expelled from Arakan by the Burmese troops. There had been no protests or threats from the Burmese. It was clear now that there was no crisis at the Naf, and therefore it was not considered necessary for Canning to remain in Rangoon. He was instructed to describe the measures adopted by the British against the insurgents when news of the outbreak was received and to state that further measures were in contemplation. The assistance of British troops was promised in case of further insurrections in Arakan. The refugee leaders could not however be surrendered and the Burmese should send an envoy to Bengal if they wished to continue discussions on this problem. The despatches of 12 June and 25 June were sent to Rangoon together and they reached him on 26 July.

The Calcutta Government made interesting observations on Canning's advice that a war with Burma would lead to a quick victory. They agreed with this assessment, but felt that there would be attendant drawbacks.

Great inconvenience and embarrassment will attend with reference to other interests and exigences of the public service and government would consider the extension of its dominions to the eastward and southward to be more burdensome than beneficial, and these considerations outweigh on the whole at least at the present time the object which His Lordship-in-Council admits to be desirable, of checking the arrogance and presumption of that weak and contemptible state.¹⁾

The inclination to teach the Burmese a once-and-for-all lesson that would quieten them for good was to be an important cause of the

1. Ibid.

declaration of war by the British in 1824, at which time the major pre-occupations of Minto's administration, the war with France and the occupation of Java, no longer obtained. In 1812, however, such thinking was inappropriate; for the despatches the Calcutta Government had recently received from Canning had shown the Court's policy to be conciliatory despite the serious injury they had suffered in Arakan at the hands of invaders from British territory.

By the time the Governor-General's instructions of 12 and 25 June reached Rangoon, the King had embarked on a line of policy which, if implemented by the Myowun, might have brought on a serious diplomatic crisis. It is clear, from the repeated statements of the Myowun to Canning, that it was a serious matter in Burmese eyes if an envoy left the country after receiving a summons to Court. It appears that the King decided to ensure a compliance with the summons, if necessary by force. He would have been infuriated at the fact that Canning was still at Rangoon although several orders to come to Court had been sent (four orders had been sent to Rangoon before the summons sent by order of the King arrived). There was apparently a rumour at the capital that Canning had at one stage been forcibly detained at Rangoon by the Myowun, although he had wanted to come to Court. However, by July 1812, the King had apparently realized that it was possible that Canning himself had been unwilling to go. This emerges from the fact that the fifth summons (which was sent by the Ein-gyi Paya to the Myowun on the King's orders) was to the effect that Canning should be sent up, preferably voluntarily but if necessary by force.

The Ein-gyi Paya, it will be noted, implemented the King's orders, although he had hoped for British help in securing his throne in 1810 and had been conciliatory over the Arakan problem.

The King also decided to dismiss the present Myowun and to restore Myedei Mingyi, the previous Myowun, to his old post. The reasons for this are obscure. The deputies who came down from Ava with the fifth summons were to tell Canning that the Myowun had been dismissed for his unfriendly attitude to Canning. It is difficult however, to believe that the King would have acted on such a consideration at a time when he issued orders to have Canning sent up by force if necessary. The real reasons, however, are not clear. Perhaps, the King was angry that the Myowun had not sent up Canning earlier; or, perhaps, he simply wished to restore Myedei Mingyi to his old post.

After sending his despatch of 23 May, Canning received his order of recall of 8 May. However, he decided to stay on in Rangoon until the Governor-General's answer to his queries of 23 May was received instead of returning immediately in the Malabar. He informed the Myowun of this decision. On 12 June, the Myowun, at a meeting with Canning, told him that "if after receiving repeated instructions, I returned to Bengal without visiting the capital, the whole blame of my departure would fall on him".¹ He would be removed from office or suffer worse punishment. The Myowun suggested that Canning write a letter to him, claiming that severe illness prevented him going to

1. BSC, 25 September 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 9 September, No.11, entry for 12 June, para.2.

the capital at the moment but that one of the two Europeans in his party should go in his place with the presents. The Myowun would then clear himself with the Court by writing a letter to Canning "couched perhaps in rather harsh terms", reproaching him for not having gone up sooner; Canning was to pay no attention to its tone. Perhaps, he would subsequently receive permission from Calcutta to go to Court. Canning was prepared to go some distance to ensure that friendly relations with the Court were maintained, that the Myowun, who had shown himself to be friendly to the British, continued in office and that the British merchants in Rangoon came to no harm. Ultimately, a compromise was worked out. Canning agreed to send the presents to the capital, but through his Eurasian sub-interpreter, who had arrived at Rangoon on 14 May, not an European as suggested by the Myowun. He was prepared also to receive a letter from the Myowun provided that it contained nothing to which he could take exception. Finally, he agreed to write a letter to the Myowun stating that the illness of many of his party and the depletion of his supplies and medicines (both these facts did obtain) were reasons preventing him at that time from journeying to the capital. If the health of his party improved and other circumstances permitted it, he would go up to the capital. Thus, Canning had avoided making the false statement that ill-health and lack of supplies were the only reasons preventing him going to the capital. Canning also warned the Myowun that if he attempted to seize him, the town would be destroyed by the Malabar and war would inevitably follow. Also,

the mission would escape anyway (since they were living by the river and had an escort).

The sub-interpreter accordingly left on 16 July for the capital taking with him the valuable presents and a copy of Canning's letter to the Myowun, and another letter from the Myowun to the Eingyi Paya.¹ On 26 July Canning received the Bengal Government's despatches of 12 June and 25 June. The latter despatch ordered him to return to Bengal. He informed the Myowun of this development. The Myowun had an inkling however, that orders would come soon from the Court ordering him to send the envoy up forcibly. On 29 July, he told Canning that he had already received four orders, and was expecting a fifth which might be violent in nature. He suggested that Canning write him a letter stating that the illness of all the members of the mission compelled him to leave Rangoon. If a violent order was received, the Myowun would not enforce it but would go through the motions of trying to stop Canning by firing a few shots at the British, which he should ignore. Canning rejected these suggestions; he warned the Myowun that the British would not distinguish between a mock attack and a real one. He was perhaps worried about the loss of prestige the British would suffer if they made a quick exit to the accompaniment of shots from the Burmese. The Myowun then dropped the plan. He had apparently not expected Canning to find it so objectionable.

¹ *Ibid.*, entries for 12 June to 15 June, paras 2-4. Canning had asked the Calcutta Council to send the supplies of food and medicine. If he were allowed to go to the capital, he would therefore have the necessary supplies.

Canning also carried out the instructions he had received on the Arakan problem. He stated definitely that the Governor-General would not surrender the rebel leaders to a cruel death. Also, the Burmese should send an envoy to Calcutta if they wished to discuss the problem.

On 31 July the fifth order arrived. Two envoys arrived from Ava in a gilt boat (symbolising the importance of their mission) with orders (as Canning was to discover later) to the Myowun to send Canning up to the capital, if necessary in chains. The envoys also gave Canning a message from the Ein-gyi Paya; the envoy was informed (this information was not given to the Viceroy) that the present Myowun was about to be dismissed, for treating Canning like a "stranger" and that he was invited to the capital.¹ The Court seems to have been hoping, by giving only selected or false information to both parties, to secure their full cooperation. Canning revealed that he had already been recalled by his Government; but the envoys still seemed to expect him to go. After all, the Arakan affair had been settled amicably and the Prome Commander-in-Chief recalled. Besides, so Canning supposed, they could not imagine "... who should dare resist the mandate of the King and Prince Royal [Ein-gyi Paya] conveyed in a gilt boat?"² The envoys maintained that there had been an impression at Court that Canning had been under some kind of detention.

1. Ibid., entry for 31 July, para. 15. They stated that the prince had been particularly annoyed that the Myowun had been unwilling to pay the compensation for the "Elephant".

2. Ibid.

Canning reported:

Having for some days past had reasons to suppose that the order brought down from Court by the two deputies contained more than they or the Viceroy had thought proper to communicate to me, I had directed my endeavours towards obtaining an accurate knowledge of them, which were at length crowned with success. The order respecting me was sent by the Ei gy Praw by command of the King and contained nothing less than a positive injunction to the Viceroy to send myself and Mr. Rowland up to Court, if of my own free will and accord so much the better - otherwise to use force - but at all events without the least delay under charge of the two deputies.¹

Once again, Canning does not disclose his sources but the above account was confirmed later by the Myowun in a discussion with him. Canning reported:

In the course of a friendly conversation with the Viceroy, I told him I was perfectly acquainted with the full extent of the orders he had lately received, and that as a mark of his confidence and sincerity I expected to hear an account of them from himself. The Viceroy appeared at first surprized at the knowledge I possessed; he however freely acknowledged the accuracy of my information and that the orders alluded to had been received by him. On being further questioned by me as to particulars he stated, as above mentioned, that the order included only myself and Mr. Rowland whom he was enjoined to deliver over to the charge of the two deputies in case of resistance on my part well secured which expression joining his wrists, he confessed would have no other signification than confinement in irons. He added that he was perfectly aware of the consequences of attempting to enforce that order which he knew must be serious and fatal: that he had besides made a solemn promise to me that no act of violence should be resorted to, which promise, under whatever circumstances, he would religiously abide by. That he knew he risked the King's displeasure and the loss of his situation, but that he was convinced that both the King and Ein-gyi Paya would at some future period feel indebted to him for the present conduct.²

This testimony is convincing because it is very specific.

1. Ibid., entry for 9 August, para.22.

2. Ibid., entry for 11 August, para.23.

Bodawpaya was prone to fits of rage in which he was liable to issue rash commands, as had probably happened in 1802, when he was reported to have issued an order that Symes' escort should be disarmed and this impulsiveness probably happened again in 1818 when he apparently issued an ultimatum to the British. The Myowun, incidentally, and several other persons told Canning that the King often acted in this way and that the Ein-gyi Paya was not always successful in preventing the execution of his orders. It will also be remembered that Canning had been aware in his despatch of 23 May that the King might act rashly.¹ Canning had already heard reports to this effect (from Grondona and perhaps others as well).

It should be noted also that, according to Canning, a sixth order was sent down subsequently, ordering the Rangoon Council to prevent Canning's departure for Rangoon. It is difficult to believe that Canning was misinformed once again. However, the possibility that Canning was somehow misinformed and that the Myowun was lying (for some obscure reason) cannot be ruled out.

The Myowun, on receiving the King's orders, should have attempted to seize Canning; but as has been seen, he decided against doing this. He was aware that such an attempt would probably fail. Canning lived by the river and could escape to the Malabar, also he had a sepoy escort. Furthermore, retaliation from the Malabar and Calcutta might have followed. Canning, in fact, had told him that the Malabar would destroy Rangoon, and that war would definitely follow. The Myowun, to judge from his remarks to Canning, dreaded the possibility of war especially and he was confident,

1. See also ibid., paras. 41-49.

correctly as it turned out, that the King would be grateful to him ^{end} in the /for having averted a possible crisis. He summoned the Yewun and two other members of the Rangoon Council and told them that he would not make the attempt, since it would fail and would have dangerous consequences; and that he would take full responsibility for disobeying the order, thereby shielding the Council from trouble. The others, who were equally anxious to avoid an unnecessary crisis, agreed to this. The Myowun emerges, in this last phase of Canning's mission, as a worthy servant of his King and country.

On 13 August, there were further developments at Rangoon. The followers of Myedai Mingyi, the newly-appointed Myowun, arrived in advance of their master, who was still upstream. They posted two further orders from the Hludaw at the town hall. The first announced the appointment of Myedai Mingyi as the new Myowun, the other (the sixth on this matter) ordered that Canning be given whatever medicines he needed for his sickness (this suggests that the Court was aware of Canning's explanations of mid-July), but he sent up all the same without any delay. He was on no account to be allowed to return to Calcutta. This order was addressed to the Rangoon Government, since the Myowun had been dismissed. The former, however, made no attempt to seize Canning.

On 14 August, Canning embarked for Calcutta. At this point a final problem arose. The Rangoon river was dangerous at this season so that there seemed to be a chance that both ships would run aground if they attempted to leave without a pilot. But the Rangoon Council, despite the ex-Myowun's urgings, refused to supply one; for that would have involved actually helping the envoy to violate the royal command. Canning wrote a letter to them,

warning them a refusal would have very serious consequences. He also decided to use coercion if necessary. Measures (not specified by Canning) were taken for wharfing the Malabar opposite the wharf and customs house "to facilitate further operations" - probably a seizure of this building.¹ The Burmese then sent a pilot. Perhaps they had realized from the shore what Canning was about to do; alternatively, they may have been influenced by his letter.

On returning to Calcutta, Canning reported the latest developments at Rangoon to the Governor-General-in-Council. He also made certain observations on these events and recommendations concerning future policy towards Burma. He conceded that the recall of the Burmese troops from Arakan showed a desire to be friendly. However, the orders concerning him showed a complete disregard for future consequences. The apparent Burmese intention to manhandle an envoy (as expressed in the fifth order) or to prevent his departure forcibly (as in the sixth) was very objectionable in the British eyes. The envoy himself seemed to believe that these orders called for some British reaction. Without actually recommending hostilities, he assured the Governor-General-in-Council that should it "extend its views towards the Dominions of Ava, there is little reason to doubt that the united voice of the People would hail the arrival of a British force as the most wished for and auspicious of events, while at the same time the contiguity of the Burmah country with

1. Ibid., entry for 15 August, para.28. Canning justified his decision to use force if necessary on the grounds that the ship might run aground if they attempted to leave without a pilot. The mission would then be at the mercy of the Rangoon Government and would be sent up forcibly to the capital.

China might offer many points for further reflection".¹ Here, Canning was thinking of an actual annexation of Burma, not simply a punitive expedition. If hostilities were ruled out, the British could reduce the Burmese to "petitioners" by curtailing all trade with Burma - a measure that would deprive Burma of nearly all her trade, and the King of his valuable customs duties, but would affect the British very little, since Java (conquered in 1811) and the west coast of India could provide an alternative supply of teak.² This was ill-considered advice. It was beyond the means of the British Indian government of that time, with its resources stretched to the limit by the need to occupy and administer Java, to annex Burma also. There was also no guarantee that an economic boycott would reduce the Burmese to "petitioners"; it was in fact quite likely that the King would have decided to forego his customs revenue rather than adopt so humiliating a posture.³ There was also a possibility that the British would be forced to ask for a resumption of trade; for there was, in fact, no alternative supply of teak for Bengal, whose ship-building industry would have faced extinction.

It is necessary now to examine the reaction of the Governor-General-in-Council to this situation. It was shown that, in a letter to Canning at Rangoon, they had considered it a desirable object to check the "arrogance and presumption" of the Burmese.⁴ A similar tone prevails in their letters to the Court of Directors. In a

1. Ibid., para.35.

2. Ibid., para.35.

3. Ibid., para.35.

4. BSC, 12 June 1812, Edmonstone to Canning, 12 June 1812, No.25.

letter of 4 March 1812, they wrote: "It might contribute to the future tranquility of our eastern territory ... if that government (of Burma) were led to form a just estimate of the greatness of our power and the weakness of its own".¹ In a letter of 25 May 1812, they wrote: "We cannot ... refuse to entertain the sentiments, that it may become absolutely necessary at some future time, if not at an early period, to check the arrogance and presumption of that weak and contemptible state".²

Yet, they reacted mildly to the news brought by the envoy - news which could be seen by them, given their ideas as to the rights of envoys, as proof of Burmese "arrogance and presumption".³ The plans to seize Canning were referred to as "snares of artifice and treachery", but there was no hint of any wish to retaliate. There seems in fact to have been a wish to continue to have good relations with Burma, for Canning was praised for his efforts "to render practicable a continuance of the intercourse of amity between the two states...."⁴ The matter was not taken up later with the Burmese and when Burmese envoys came to Calcutta soon after to ask for the extradition of the refugees, they were received in the normal way. The long war with France, culminating in the expensive conquest and administration of Java, had strained British resources severely and would have made the prospect of hostilities with Burma very

1. Wilson, H.H., Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, Calcutta, 1822, No.1.

2. Ibid., No.2.

3. BSC, 25 September 1812, Edmonstone to Canning, 25 September 1812, No.12.

4. Ibid.

unpleasant. It would have seemed the better course to overlook the attempted seizure of Canning, and thereby preserve good relations with Burma and ensure a continued teak supply. However, if Canning had actually been manhandled or forcibly detained, there would probably have been some warlike response from the British, such as a naval demonstration or an attack on Rangoon in spite of the British involvement in Java.

CHAPTER VI

THE DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS, 1813-1822

In February 1813, news reached Calcutta of what had transpired in Burma after Canning's departure. It will be recalled that Edward de Cruz, Canning's sub-interpreter had gone up to the capital in July 1812 with the envoy's presents for the King and Eingyi Paya. On 1 February 1813, he returned to Calcutta, bringing with him letters for the envoy from several people in Burma. Canning prepared a summary of these letters for the Governor-General-in-Council.¹

Canning stated that when news of his departure in violation of the royal order reached the King 'he was incensed, as was to be expected, to the highest pitch, and directed the Supreme Council (of the Lootoo [Hlutdaw]) to deliberate on the mode of death to be inflicted on the Viceroy [Myowun] for daring to disobey his positive orders.....'² Some cruel methods were proposed, including 'the crucifixion of the Viceroy on a raft in 7 fathoms water off the mouth of the Rangoon River, that his corpse might be carried by the tide to Bengal and announce his fate to the British Government'.³

1. Bengal Secret Consultations (BSC), 19 February 1813, Canning to J. Adam, Calcutta, 5 February 1813, No.6. Canning does not disclose the names of his correspondents. However, he refers in his report to a conversation between Don Louis, the Italian bishop, and a Wungyi. It is possible that Don Louis was among his correspondents. Edward de Cruz would also have been a source of information.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

According to Canning, Rogers, the English Akaukwun at Rangoon, arrived at the capital at this point with a large sum of money and ten thousand baskets of rice. Rogers, Canning claimed, was sent by the ex-Myowun and the Rangoon Council to plead their case. He implies that the money and the rice were sent to the capital as bribes. Rogers made representations to the effect that war with the British would have followed had the Myowun carried out the King's orders concerning Canning, and the customs-revenue at Rangoon would have been lost in consequence and also, that a very friendly letter had been received from the Governor-General after the receipt of the King's instructions, explaining why Canning had been recalled. More important than these representations, Canning maintains, were the presents sent by the Myowun and the Rangoon Council, and those given by da Cruz and others to be sent up later by the Myowun. It was largely because of the latter that the death sentence on the ex-Myowun was set aside, and the latter received 'even with a certain degree of favour' at the Court.¹ He was later appointed to the Myowunship of Dalla, a province whose capital was the village on the opposite side of the river from Rangoon.

The attitude at the capital with regard to the British seems to have been ambivalent. Canning's sub-interpreter, Edward da Cruz, was exceptionally well-received when he arrived there on 6 October.

He was received in a friendly manner by the Ein-gyi Paya, and was even accorded a royal audience: "... seldom a day passed [Canning reported] without the princes sending for him and keeping him till a late hour at night viewing dancing and other entertainments. The Eingy Praw [Ein-gyi Paya] repeatedly asked Edward why I did not come

1. Ibid.

up assuring him that so long as he was there I could have nothing to fear."¹

Yet the events at the frontier from mid-1811 onwards had definitely excited suspicions as to British intentions towards Burma and created, though possibly only temporarily, a desire for some counter-balancing connection. Canning reported that Don Louis de Grondona was summoned by the First Wungyi,

for the express purpose of making inquiry respecting the practicability of forming an alliance with the French, the distance between the two countries, the time required for the voyage etc. etc. and whether in his opinion the English could resist the united force of the two nations? The Minister seemed much disappointed at receiving from Don Louis such answers as tended wholly to destroy any such hopes.²

No other account of events at the capital at this time is available with which Canning's may be compared. Yet, much of what he says is probably correct. There can be little doubt that the King, in a fit of rage, did issue an order for Canning to be brought to the capital, in chains if necessary. The news that this order had been set aside by the ex-Myowun might well have infuriated him. Yet, once his anger had subsided, the King would have realized, in all probability even without representations from Rogers, that the ex-Myowun had acted in his own interest and had displayed courage and selflessness of a high order. This again might well have led him to bestow some mark of his

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid. This was the only occasion on which the possibility of a French alliance is known to have been discussed in the period between 1795 and 1826. It is not known whether the idea originated with the King and if so, how serious his interest in it was.

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favour on the ex-Myowun; hence his appointment to the Myowunship of Dalla. He was not reappointed Myowun of Pegu, but that was probably because Myedai Mingyi had been Myowun of Pegu with occasional intervals, from at least the year 1794 and the King did not wish to deprive him of this post. The representations ascribed by Canning to Rogers, seem to have been the right ones to make in the circumstances, and he may well have made them, but their effects on the King are difficult to determine. Also, Canning's assertion that it was the distribution of presents that was chiefly responsible for the reversal of the sentence on the Myowun is unsupported by any evidence and must be treated with caution. After all, the Myowun's action did deserve to be rewarded. Again, it is not clearly explained how a distribution of presents at the capital could have induced the King to set aside the death sentence. Were the presents given to the King? Or were they given to the Court officials who interceded on the Myowun's behalf? Canning also does not make it clear that the money and the rice did not consist wholly of presents. It is known from his Journal of 1812 that Rogers had come to the capital in his capacity as Akaukwun of Rangoon. This official was supposed to take the King's customs-revenue to the capital every year. Some of the money therefore must have been the King's customs-revenue, and could not have been used to bribe people. Again, it is doubtful if the 10,000 baskets of rice were meant as a bribe. The amount is so large that it seems more likely that the rice was simply being taken to the capital for sale there, as was customary in old Burma. Yet, it is quite possible that Rogers did take some presents to Ava, and distributed them, perhaps to high court officials who were in a position to advise the King.

The treatment of de Cruz was certainly in sharp contrast to the projected treatment of Canning a little while earlier. The treatment of the Myowun again offers a startling contrast to the previous talk of execution and so forth. These changes became explicable, however, on the theory that the King was quick-tempered but could see a point once his mood had changed.

Canning reported that the King, on remitting the ex-Myowun's punishment, had ordered a letter to be written to the British in the name of the Myowun of Pegu - the Governor-General's equal in rank, according to Burmese notions - asking for the surrender of 'King Bering Lharembou and Nukloo, with all their followers'.¹ The letter was to be taken to Calcutta by an envoy of the Myowun. Canning was able to obtain a copy of this letter. He pronounced it to be insolent, 'in as much as it charges the British Government with deceit in declaring the insurgent Chiefs, King Buring and Lharembou to be not within its power', whereas the Burmese Government had received information to the opposite effect.² However, Canning understood that the letter was to be modified at Rangoon, so that it was premature to form a judgement of it.³

It is remarkable that the envoy should have been able to obtain a copy of an official letter written at the capital. He does

1. BSC, 19 February 1813, Canning to Adams, 5 February, No.6.

2. Ibid.

3. This procedure is a little puzzling. Canning does not explain whether this modification was to be carried out with the knowledge of the King or without. If it was the latter, it was probably because Burmese officials felt the letter would provoke the British.

not explain how this was possible. Edward da Cruz also brought with him a letter to Canning from the ex-Myowun of Pegu (now the Myowun of Dalla). The letter makes no direct reference to any plan to seize Canning, but states that "Captain Canning is fully aware of the service rendered by Min-re-Nan-da-Mik (the ex-Myowun) during his residence at Rangoon".¹ The ex-Myowun claimed that the new Myowun had raised various port duties to the detriment of commerce. The ex-Myowun asserted that trade by contrast had flourished during his term of office, and suggested that 'a letter be addressed to the King stating that he is a person more able and deserving of the situation, and soliciting that he be re-appointed, which letter be committed to the care of the Ackoonwoon [Akaunwun] of Arracan'.² This suggestion, which would have involved interference in a Burmese internal matter, was not acted upon.

Before leaving Rangoon, Canning acting on instructions from the Calcutta Government had asked the Burmese to send representatives to Calcutta if they wished to pursue the matter of extradition, but had also warned that they could not expect a surrender of fugitives. According to the envoys who were eventually deputed to Calcutta by the Myowun of Pegu, this invitation had been reported to the Court, where despite the warning attached to it, it had given rise to the impression that the British were still open to persuasion on the matter. In fact the invitation had been extended only to avoid ending

1. BSC, 19 February 1813, No.64.

2. Ibid.; These duties were subsequently revoked by the new Myowun of Pegu. BSC, 29 October 1813, Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General of Bengal, No.25.

the mission on an abrupt note, and the mind of the Governor-General and Council were made up on this matter.

The Burmese envoys arrived at Calcutta late in July 1813. The demand this time was for a specified leader who was in British hands, not the refugee population as a whole or even all the followers of Chin Pyan. The Governor-General-in-Council entrusted Canning with the responsibility for discussions with these envoys. Canning stated definitely (on orders from the Calcutta Government) that there could be no surrender of British subjects to the Burmese. He had to attend to a further problem. The envoys asked to be provided with the expenses of their stay at Calcutta, Canning recommended that they be allowed 1,000 rupees each.¹ A law existed in Burma which forbade taking money out of the country. Besides, in the Burmese tradition, it was the responsibility of the host country to maintain the envoy. Symes, in 1795, had been offered money for his expenses but in conformity with his own traditions had refused to accept it. The Governor-General-in-Council agreed to the request for expenses.² On the matter of refugees, however, they re-affirmed the principle stated by Canning but gave a solemn assurance that they would make every effort to seize and confine the rebels still at large.³

1. Bengal Political Consultations (BPC), 20 August 1812. Canning to Adam, 7 August, No.20. The demand made at the capital had been modified, as predicted by Canning.

2. Ibid., No.21.

3. Ibid., No.22. Canning in 1812 had told the Burmese that the British would not surrender rebels to be executed. The envoys stated that the Burmese would not execute the rebels but would keep them under detention. The British stated now that they themselves would do the same.

The envoys remained at Calcutta for a few months longer. In September 1813, they made a second appeal, this time pointing out that it was the British themselves who had suggested that a mission be sent and revealing that the suggestion had raised hopes at the capital that the rebels would be surrendered. The request was not acceded to. The envoys decided then to remain at Calcutta until the newly-appointed Governor-General, Lord Hastings, arrived. Canning explained in a letter to John Adams, Secretary in the Political and Secret Department, that in Burma, a change of government was often followed by a change of policy and it was in the hope that Hastings' policy would be more accommodating that the envoys had at first wanted to stay on. As a result of his explanations, the Burmese no longer believed this would happen, but they still wanted 'a communication of the present Governor-General's sentiments [Hastings had just arrived in India when Canning wrote this letter] for 'their exculpation with their own Government,' to whom they might have to answer if they returned without sounding out the new Governor-General.

As if to prove Canning's point, a second Burmese mission arrived at Calcutta in late October 1813, coming once again from the

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1. BSC, 17 September 1813, No.20.
 2. BSC, 29 October 1813, Canning to Adam, Secretary, Political Department, 22 October 1813, No.23.

Myowun of Pegu. They had a letter from the Myowun for the new Governor-General. The Myowun claimed that Canning had promised that the refugees would be surrendered. Canning denied this, but it is possible that he did leave such an impression behind him at Rangoon.¹ The Myowun disclosed a further reason for the mission - the previous mission sent by him on the King's orders had not returned, and he was at a loss as to what to tell the King.

Both missions ultimately returned to Burma, having failed in their objectives. The British heard more news of these missions early in 1814 from Felix Carey, the Baptist missionary who had taken refuge with his family in a British ship during the Canning mission of 1812. Carey was sent by the Burmese Court to Bengal

to obtain a dosage of small-pox vaccine to inoculate the son of the Ein-gyi Paya and to introduce the vaccine generally into Burma.² (This last objective does not seem to have been seriously pursued). Carey arrived at Calcutta in January 1814. He informed Canning that the authorities at Rangoon had shown no great annoyance at the rejection of the demand for the surrender of the fugitives. They may have half-anticipated a refusal throughout. But the members of the Burmese missions had been ordered by the Court to come up to the capital without delay to report in person on what had transpired in Bengsl.³ This indicates that the mission was viewed with great seriousness at the capital.

1. Ibid., 25 October 1813, Nos. 24 & 25.

2. BPC, Carey to Canning, 25 January 1814, No.52.

3. BPC, 28 January 1814, Canning to Adam, 27 January, No.51.

Had the Arakan frontier been quiet, the problem of extradition might have been shelved, as it was shelved after 1802. Unfortunately, Chin Pyan and his adherents continued to create disorders. Their activities after 1812 have been described by B.R. Pearn in his article in the Journal of the Burmese Research Society.¹ These disturbances took place mostly in British and not Burmese territory; however, Chin Pyan did make two brief incursions to Arakan and the possibility of more incursions always existed. The Court of Burma and the Arakan authorities were understandably uneasy. The Calcutta Government, it appears, made no serious effort to stamp out the insurrection; for one thing, the regular units employed in activities against the rebels were still small. It is by no means certain, however, that Chin Pyan and others would have been caught even if the number of troops had been increased. It is possible that the Arakanese tactics of avoiding clashes with regular units, of secreting themselves in various parts of the Chittagong district when they were being pursued, and of carrying out minor raids when the pursuit was called off, could not have been countered merely by increasing the size of the British force. It does seem to be the case, however, that no serious attempt was made in this direction, although the company faced no major problems in India in the period 1812-1815 (the year of Chin Pyan's death).

It was against this background of continuing disturbances in Arakan that a further mission, led by the same Felix Carey, was despatched to Bengal.² The objective this time was to persuade the

1. Pearn, B.R., 'Kingbering', Journal of the Burmese Research Society, XXXIII, ii, 1933.

2. Chin Pyan in fact had died in January 1815, but the Burmese were not aware of it.

British to step up their frontier security and to surrender Chin
 Pyan. A further objective of the mission was to secure religious
 books. Carey arrived at Calcutta in April 1815 bringing with him
 two letters. One letter was from the Hlutdaw to the Governor-
 General. It was written in general terms only and made no
 reference to the mission or its objects. These were discussed
 in the letters from the Myowun of Pegu, also brought by Carey.
 The letter from the Hlutdaw to the British must be looked at briefly.
 "We, Ministers of the most Illustrious Sovereign of the Universe,
 King of great virtue ... are commanded to convey to your Excellency,
 acting by authority of His Majesty, the King of England, the Governor-
 General of India, the assurances of the unaltered disposition of
 our August Monarch...."¹ The Governor-General was reminded that
 in the past the British sent ambassadors on various occasions
 'with offering to the Golden Feet,' and the King 'was pleased
 to permit them the honour of placing their heads under the golden
 soles of his Royal Feet....'² The letter goes on to express a hope
 that the British would meet Burmese wishes but without referring ex-
 plicitly to either the refugees or the religious books "... we trust
 your Lordship will participate in our sentiments that between Friends

1. BPC, 7 October 1815, Hlutdaw to Governor-General, No.87.

2. Ibid.

what is for a time required by one, ought to be granted by the other, thus when both states are so disposed the benefits of connection would increase.¹

The Myowun of Pegu's two letters were more specific. One asked for cooperation in securing 'religious books, sacred writings and ancient histories etc. in Bengal, as that Presidency has been inhabited in former times by Hindoo Bramans'.² The second letter took up the question of disturbances at the frontier. After referring to the commercial benefits allowed the British by the King, the Myowun wrote that

[We] feel much concern in bringing to your Lordship's notice the continued unwarrantable proceedings of King Bering, Lekroombaye [both persons had in fact already died but the Burmese were not aware of this] and their associates in disturbing the tranquility of the dominions of His Majesty... in a time of profound peace and uninterrupted friendship between the two states. His Majesty, considering the conduct of King Berrung and their [his] associates, in having transgressed the most sacred laws by audaciously taking up arms against the powers of a sovereign whose protection they have ever enjoyed, extremely criminal, committed measures to be adopted for their apprehension. These rebels, finding it difficult to oppose the virtues and irresistible arms of His Majesty retired to the British Territories where they are now sheltering. I am consequently impelled to consider the countenance thus given as unjustifiable on the part of the British Government.³

The Myowun then asked the British to step up their efforts to apprehend those refugees who were still at large and to surrender them if they were caught. They were also asked to punish those of their frontier officials who, the Myowun alleged, citing information

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General, No.85.

3. Ibid., Myowun of Pegu to Governor-General, No.86.

obtained in Arakan, had turned a blind eye to the activities of the Arakanese.¹

In January 1815, Chin Pyan died. He had spent his last months evading British patrols and these exertions probably hastened his death. The main threat to Burmese rule in Arakan was now gone. All the same, a large Arakanese community remained in Chittagong, among whom were many who had participated in anti-Burmese activity. There was no certainty that the old problems would not recur. Besides, to the Burmese the mere existence of an emigrant community in Arakan was objectionable, for emigration was considered treasonable. In these circumstances, it was natural that the Burmese Court should revive the issue; and it was revived in mid-1817. Perhaps, there were particular causes for this, but of these nothing is known.

In late April 1817, the Magistrate of Chittagong, in a letter to J. Adam, Secretary in the Political and Secret Department, reported the arrival in his district of the son of the Myowun of Ramri, with a letter from his father for the British. The bearer informed the Magistrate that

... his father and himself had three months ago been ordered to go to Ava, that on their arrival at that place, they had been introduced to the King's presence and that His Majesty had commanded the Rajah [Myowun] on his return to address the letter to me, the terms of which were in a general way dictated by the King, that in compliance with the King's order the letter

of bribery

1. The charge/was first made by the Arakanese authorities in August 1814. Pearn, op.cit., p.471-472. These officers, it was alleged in the Myowun's letter, took bribes from Chin Pyan and agreed in return not to allow the Burmese troops to enter the British territories. This charge was apparently never investigated by the British.

had been written and he had been despatched by his father to deliver it, that his orders were to procure an answer consenting or refusing to deliver up the Mughs Arakanese.¹

The Magistrate reported that he had told the Burmese envoy that Chin Pyan was dead and that the border had been quiet for some time. The envoy conceded this but disclosed that

it had occurred to the Government at Ava that although Kingbering Chin Pyan was dead, there were many relations and adherents of his and others who would undoubtedly take any opportunity that presented itself of renewing the troubles which are for the present extinguished and of over-running and endeavouring to reconquer Arracan and its dependencies... the King was satisfied the tranquility of the frontier could never be reckoned upon for any length of time unless the Mugs were delivered up and that he was to come in conformity with the King's order to deliver the letter and demand an answer from me containing either a compliance or a refusal.²

For various reasons, the letter was of a rather more serious nature than its predecessors on the same subject. Firstly, the King was allegedly responsible for its main point; secondly, its tone, unlike that of most previous letters, was very imperious; and finally, it contained a warning of further trouble if the Burmese demand was not met. 'His Majesty the Myowun wrote has appointed me Governor of Ramree.... You are the Magistrate of Chittagong. The four provinces of Arracan, Chyda Sandoway, Chedhuba and Ramree are under my orders. According to the envoy, this was because the Myowun of Arakan was temporarily absent at the capital. The Mugs Arakanese belonging to your territory have injured and despoiled

1. BPC, 10 May 1817, Magistrate of Chittagong to Adam, Political Secretary, No.34.

2. Ibid.

my country, and have returned and received protection in your territory'.¹

The Myowun revealed that he was acting on the King's orders; 'The King of Ava has ordered me, in his Majesty's name, to demand these Mugs'.² He then argued that the British were obliged by the friendship and trade existing between the two nations to return the men. This, he said, was the universal practice in such cases.

It is the custom to restore them, with their women, children and grand children. It is not advisable to retain them. In the east of the King's territories are five other great countries. It is not customary of the Kings of those countries to detain each other's subjects; in the north of the Burmese territories are Munnypure, China and Wyzalee [Vethali or Assam]. The Kings of these countries are in amity with the King of Ava. If the ungrateful Mugs go into their territories, they are restored on being demanded. This is friendship.³

It is most unlikely that Arakanese would actually have sought asylum in these territories. But the Myowun was right in claiming that this was how the Burmese expected powers friendly to one another to behave.

The Myowun went on to warn of inevitable future discord if the demand was not complied with.

It is not proper to be at enmity; but the English Government does not try to preserve friendship. You seek for a state of affairs like fire and gunpowder. The Mugs of Arracan are slaves [subjects] of the King of Ava. The English Government assisted the Mugs of Arracan and given them a residence. There will be a quarrel between us and you.... Therefore I write to you to restore the Mugs, then our friendship will continue. Understand this.⁴

1. Wilson, Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, Calcutta, 1827, No.4.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

The meaning of this passage appears to be this: the Burmese would like friendship to continue, but this would not be possible unless the British acted as desired. Lord Hastings, the Governor-General, instructed the Magistrate of Chittagong to reject the demand, but also to assure the envoy that the voluntary return of emigrants would not be prevented.¹ He also sent a letter to the Myowun of Pegu dated 1 May 1817, declining to comply with the demand to surrender fugitives on the ground that it would be 'a violation of the principles of justice on which it the British Government invariably acts' and again promising that no one would be prevented from returning of his own volition.² Hastings argued also that 'the troubles which formerly existed on the frontier have been allayed, and the death or captivity of Kingbering and his principle associates and the return of the Mugs in general, to industrious pursuits, have rendered their renewal a matter of great improbability'.³ It is clear, however, from the messenger's testimony that the Burmese Court did not think a renewal of the frontier troubles to be so improbable.

Since the letter from the Myowun had implied that war would result if the Arakanese were not repatriated, and since it

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., No.5. A copy of this letter was sent to the Burmese capital via Arakan.

3. Ibid.

was professedly written on the King's order, there would have been some concern at Calcutta that the Burmese might attempt an invasion on hearing of the British response. Two other reports received at this time certainly created alarm at Calcutta, and led to reinforcements being sent to the frontier.

A letter was received from the Burmese messenger on 9 July, written at the frontier shortly before he re-entered Arakan. In this letter, the messenger repeated what he had said before (that he and his father had been called up to the capital, where the King had ordered them to demand the repatriation of the Arakanese). He now added that the King had also said, in his presence, "If they are not given up, I will collect the troops of the following countries [various regions of the Burmese] by force of arms. In Arracan are four provinces. Collect rice grain and provisions of all kinds and prepare and clear the roads, so that my troops, elephants, carriages, horses and other effects can pass. I myself [the messenger wrote] heard these words uttered by the Golden Lips."¹

He urged the British to send an ambassador to the King before the end of the rains. This gesture might preserve friendly relations. His purpose in revealing all this, he claimed, was that a friendship had developed between the Magistrate and he in Chittagong and he wished to protect the Magistrate's country from an invasion. He also stated that the Myowun of Mergui, who had

1. BSC, 25 July 1817, No.29.

toured the Maratha kingdoms ostensibly to secure classical Indian writings had in reality had a very different object, implying probably that he had been engaging in anti-British intrigues. It would not, however, be safe to conclude from this that this had been the Court's objective in sending the Myowun to western India. The Ramri Myowun's son may have been mistaken, or the Mergui Myowun may have engaged in such activities without Court sanction.

At the same time, a further report was received from a person called Byroonath. He claimed that he had been sent to Burma by a Major Wilford of Benares to collect Burmese "shastras" (classical writings) and to make a map of Burma. There was, in fact, a Major Wilford of Benares, who is described by Hodson as a researcher into Hindu literature and geography.¹ (This would explain his interest in the literature and geography of Burma although the latter was a Buddhist country). He heard frequent discussions, while at the capital, between the King and two persons from India, Devy Dutt, and Shaikh Daood. It is not clear what the topics discussed were. There is conclusive evidence in the British records that there were two such persons and that they were well-known to the Court of Ava. In two months' time, Byroonath informed the Magistrate, the King would attack Bengal. It is not clear whether Byroonath claimed to have heard the order, or to have heard of it. He also claimed that he had seen 3,000 men going to Arakan armed with muskets. Byroonath also claimed that he had brought a letter for the British from a son of the Burmese King, who wanted

1. Hodson, List of Officers of the Bengal Army, London, 1947.

British help in securing the throne. The King had decided (and this was correct) that his grandson should succeed him. This story was greeted with disbelief at Calcutta, but it may have been true. There was nothing remarkable in the prince attempting to secure British help in order to gain the throne and to protect his life. Unfortunately, no copy of this letter exists in the British records though the letter was given to the Magistrate.¹

Parts of Byroonath's story therefore seem plausible enough. It is not clear, however, what his grounds for asserting that the King would invade Bengal were and it would not be safe to accept this part of his story. As regards the force which had gone to Arakan, it was to appear later that this was merely the retinue of the Myowun of Arakan who had been returning at that time to Arakan. This could, however, very well have been an honest error on Byroonath's part.

The Calcutta Government, on receiving these letters, feared that war might break out, and sent military and naval reinforcements to the Chittagong district. The Ramri Myowun's son, after all, had claimed he had heard the King give an order, Byroonath had stated that the King would attack and that a force had gone to Bengal; and the Ramri Myowun's letters had warned of inevitable future discord if the Arakanese were not expelled. The Calcutta Government's concern was understandable.

In August, however, the Magistrate reported that he had received new reports which showed that the likelihood of hostilities

1. BPC, 25 July 1817, testimony of Byroonath, No.30.

was much diminished.¹ Nothing in Arakan suggested war was imminent. There were rumours circulating to the effect that the Myowun's threat had originated in the following manner: the King had sent for the Myowuns of Arakan and Ramri. The Arakan Myowun had presented the King with a large diamond. The King then asked the Myowun of Ramri if he had anything to give. The Myowun replied that he would conquer a part of the British territory as far as Dacca (according to some rumours) or secure the Arakanese inhabitants of Chittagong (according to others). The King had then ordered a force to be collected near the frontiers of Arakan to invade the British territory. However, the King's grandson had persuaded him to give up the project. The Magistrate did not reject this story but it was clearly a mere rumour, and it would not be safe to accept it.

The Myowun of Arakan, after his return to Arakan, according to rumours reaching the Magistrate, disclaimed all idea of going to war with the British and was angry with the Myowun of Ramri for being anxious to excite ill feeling between the British and Burmese. According to rumours reaching the Magistrate, the Myowun of Ramri was anxious for a chance to display his military prowess in order to obtain a higher office.

The Magistrate had sent an agent to Arakan to the Burmese capital and to Bassein to ascertain whether any warlike preparations were afoot. He could not find the slightest evidence of such preparations. The Magistrate was also informed by this agent that

1. BPC, Magistrate to J. Adam, Secretary, Nos. 37 & 38.

the Ramri Myowun's threat had not been authorized by the King in the way he made it. (The agent was apparently relying on rumours in making this second assertion, since he had not talked to any of the principals concerned).¹ According to the Magistrate, there were many rumours in circulation to the same effect. On hearing that no warlike preparations were afoot, the Calcutta Government withdrew its reinforcements from Chittagong.

Although many of the reports of the Magistrate seemed to have been pure rumour, and it would not be safe to accept them, the Ramri Myowun's messenger had claimed he had actually heard the King issue the order in question; such an order must have been issued unless he must have been lying. It was apparently true that no warlike preparations were made. It is known, however, that the King tended to issue rash orders. On this occasion he may have ordered warlike preparations to be made so that he could invade Bengal in case the British rejected his demands. His officials, however, knowing his temperament, might not have embarked on so major a project if they felt he was acting on the whim of a moment; hence the absence of any warlike preparations. In the following year, the King, when he heard of the refusal to surrender the Arakanese, issued an ultimatum to the British (through the Myowun of Ramri) and threatened an invasion of Bengal. This again shows that the King was capable of acting rashly.

Early in 1818, more invasion stories were received by the Calcutta Council. A friend of Byroonath's wrote to him from

1. BPC, 19 September 1817, Magistrate to Adam, 9 September 1817, No.8.

the capital stating that armies were forming for the invasion of Bengal. (An army was raised in 1817 but it invaded Assam).

According to another report, apparently a rumour, "the Burmese government had decided to postpone the invasion of Bengal until all Burmese merchants returned to Bengal. Then two merchants from Cox's bazaar had been to Ava where they had seen a big army set out for the north. (This was apparently the force which conquered Assam in 1817). They had also heard that the Myowun of Mergui who had visited the Maratha leader, the Peshwa and had entered into an agreement to attack the British.

The report about the intrigue with the Peshwa was clearly based on rumour. Even taken together with the Ramri Myowun's son's statement, concerning the Mergui Myowun, they do not amount to satisfactory proof that the King had entered into an anti-British intrigue with the Peshwa. The Calcutta Government itself regarded the report as inconclusive. The reports concerning an invasion of Bengal were also regarded as inconclusive.

The news of the rejection of his demand for the refugees was to infuriate the King, and to cause him, in a fit of rage, to revive the Burmese claim to eastern Bengal, as well as to accompany it with a threat of war much more explicit than the one made in 1817. It is proposed to discuss the historical background to this contention claim here. The Burmese/was that the eastern districts

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1. However, it is significant that no invasion was ever attempted. At the back of his mind, Bodawpaya would have been aware that this was too dangerous.

of Bengal had once been subject to Arakan, whose rights had passed to them after their conquest of Arakan in 1785. It was true that the Chittagong district had been ruled by Arakan for a century and a half. Parts of it were already in Arakanese hands by the beginning of the sixteenth century. During the first years of that century, the power of the Delhi Sultanate, which had nominal authority over all of northern India, had declined so considerably that the Arakanese were able to take over the whole of the district. A Portuguese traveller who visited Chittagong in 1517 found it in Arakanese hands. Until the middle of the following century, when they were expelled by the Moghuls, there was a regular Arakanese Governor at Chittagong, who issued his own coinage. Throughout this period (the beginning of the sixteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth), the Arakanese were constantly making piratical incursions into the rest of Bengal, with assistance from Portuguese adventurers who felt themselves to be contributing thereby to the national struggle against Islam. (The rulers of Bengal, and a large part of its population, were Muslim). For a brief while, however, their relations with Bengal assumed a different character. This was early in the seventeenth century, after the future Moghul Emperor, Shah Jehan, had launched his successful rebellion against his father, the Emperor Jehangir. Having killed Jehangir's Viceroy in Bengal, he marched on Delhi, leaving a power vacuum behind in Bengal. The Arakanese took this opportunity to extend their authority to the rich and populated town of Dacca and compelled it to pay them tribute. This situation could last only as long as there was no strong central authority in northern India capable of challenging the Arakanese. Once Shah Jehan had been installed in Delhi, he appointed a new Viceroy of Bengal, who was

able to recover Dacca. Then, in 1668, another Viceroy, the energetic Shaista Khan, drove the Arakanese out of Chittagong itself, as a final solution to the perennial problem of Arakanese piracy.¹

It will be seen that the Arakanese controlled Dacca (as opposed to Chittagong) for a brief period only and that they had lost control of Chittagong for a century and a half by 1818; and also, that the Burmese claim was based on the concept of rights inherited from others by conquest and excluded completely the factor of actual political control. It should be noted also that the British could claim the districts, using the same argument as the Burmese; that is, that the districts had been subject for long periods to the Moghuls, whose rights the British had inherited. These points, however, would not have troubled the Burmese, even if they had occurred to them. The Toongoo dynasty had been able to exact tribute from Siam only for a short period in the sixteenth century; yet, it was on this fact that the Burmese based their claim to suzerainty over Siam in the nineteenth century. With regard to the question of inherited rights, it will be seen that in 1824, a Burmese force was to demand tribute from the tiny frontier state of Jaintia, on the grounds that it had once paid tribute to Assam, which had recently become a Burmese dependency. Finally, the argument that the British could advance an analogous claim if it had been put to the Burmese, would only have meant a clash of claims for them and not that their own claims were invalid. This argument, it is worth noting, seems never to have occurred to the Burmese.

1. Phayre, A., A History of Burma, New York, 1969, pp.171-180.

But there was more to this issue than a feeling that Burmese rights had been usurped by the East India Company. The Burmese must have known that regions like Dacca and Murshidabad, and to a lesser extent, Chittagong, were rich and densely populated areas, which yielded the British a large revenue. The annual revenue of the Burmese Court was rather small and the prospect of securing an increased revenue through the conquest of these districts must have had great attraction. As early as the Cox mission, the Burmese had shown interest in the revenues of these districts, as distinct from the question of their ownership; for they had proposed to Cox that the two sides share the revenues of these districts.¹

In a despatch dated 18 April 1818, the Magistrate of Chittagong reported the re-arrival in the district of the son of the Myowun of Ramri, who in the previous year had brought the letter demanding the repatriation of the Arakanese emigrants, and taken back the Magistrate's reply. This time, he had a letter which, although addressed from the Myowun of Ramri to the Governor-General of India, was, according to the bearer, dictated by the King himself. 'He informed me' the Magistrate reported 'that on his departure from this [district] last year, he proceeded to Ava with my answer to his father's letter, which was laid before the King in his presence on the day of his arrival, and that on becoming acquainted with the contents of it, the King was much incensed and desired that the letter should be addressed to the British Government of which he is now the bearer'.²

1. See Chapter II.

2. Bengal Secret Consultations, 1 May 1818, Magistrate of Chittagong to Lushington, Secretary, Secret and Political Department, 18 April, No. 104.

The contents of the letter amazed the British. It first praised the King in traditional terms, and then made reference to two incidents, which were supposed to reveal the King's determination to uphold justice. Then, it continued as follows:

Those who do not minutely and scrupulously observe the laws of good government and exercise oppression and injustice, incur the marked displeasure of our Sovereign; who, in similar cases, invariably sends armies, under generals, to capture their provinces, but not to plunder, and subsequently restore them to the monarch entitled to its inheritance.

Then, the key passage followed:

Our Sovereign is an admirer of justice, and a strict observer of the laws and usages, as they existed in ancient times, and strongly disapproves of everything unjust and unreasonable. Ramoo, Chittagong, Moorshidabad and Dacca, are countries which do not belong to the English, they are provinces, distant from the Arracanese capital, but were originally subject to the Government of Arracan, and now belong to our Sovereign.¹

In fact, the Burmese position was by no means as sound as this; for even if their notions of suzerainty (which took no account of the question of current control) were conceded, the British could still make a similar claim. The letter continued as follows:

Neither the English Company nor their nation observe the ancient laws strictly, they ought not have levied revenues, tributes, etc. from these provinces, nor have disposed of such funds at their discretion. The Governor-General, representing the English Company, should surrender these dominions, and pay the collections realized therefore to our sovereign. If this is refused, I shall represent it to His Majesty, Generals with powerful forces will be despatched, both by sea and land, and I shall myself come for the purpose of storming, capturing and destroying the whole of the English possessions, which

1. Wilson, op.cit., No.6.

I shall afterwards offer to my Sovereign; but I send this letter, in the first place, to make the demand from the Governor-General.¹

According to the Magistrate, the bearer himself seemed to be aware that the demand would be refused, and to be convinced that the King's response would be an invasion. He was concerned about his own safety, and wanted the British to remember that he was not responsible for the letter's contents.

The letter was certainly a serious matter. The claim to Chittagong and Dacca had been discussed with Captain Cox in 1797, and it had been officially raised (though in indirect language) in 1810, but this was the first time that it had been backed up with a threat of war. This was, also, the first threat of war which the King had ever sanctioned. A number of threats had been made previously, but by impetuous local commanders acting without authority.

From the testimony of the messenger ('... the King was much incensed...'), it would seem that the King made this threat in a fit of temper at the rejection of his earlier demand for the repatriation of the Arakanese (just as in 1812, in a fit of temper, he had ordered Captain Canning to be brought up in chains to the capital, a measure that he must have known might bring on a war with the British). This interpretation is given support by the fact that nothing happened after the British rejected the demand. It is perhaps an indication of caution that there is no claim that the letter was sent by the King's orders. (The letter of 1817 on the refugees had contained such an assertion).

1. Ibid. Strictly speaking, this was an ultimatum, not a threat; the letter had stated that war would definitely follow.

The communication was received at a time when hostilities were underway in India with the Marathas. For this reason, perhaps, the Governor-General-in-Council preferred to treat the letter as an unauthorized one from the Myowun of Ramri and thus give the King an opportunity to retract. They could take advantage of the fact that there was nothing in the letter to show that it was authorized by the King. Hastings wrote a letter to the Myowun of Pegu, dated 22 June, sending with it a copy of the Myowun of Ramri's letter. He treated the letter as unauthorized. Hastings wrote:

My respect for His Majesty inclines me ... to adopt the belief that the Rajah [Myowun] of Ramree has, for some unworthy purpose of his own, assumed the tone of insolence and menace exhibited in his letter, without authority from the King. If I could suppose that letter to have been dictated by the King of Ava [which Hastings knew, from the envoy's testimony, to have been the case], the British Government would be justified in considering war as already declared and in consequence, destroying the trade of His Majesty's empire.¹

But even in such an eventuality the British 'would forbear (unless forced by actual hostilities) from any procedure which can interrupt those existing relations so beneficial to both countries.'² There was not even a demand that the threat be disavowed. The fact that the King did not carry out an invasion suggests that the demand was made in a fit of anger and not as part of a calculated policy.

A further point needs to be noticed. The Ramri Myowun's son told the Magistrate that when he was at the capital five to six months previously - this would have been in November or December 1817 - the Court had received the Governor-General's letter to the Myowun

1. Wilson, op.cit., No.7.

2. Ibid. Hastings had no doubt that the King was responsible for the letter. See the Marchioness of Bath, The Private Journal of the Marquis of Hastings, London, 1858, entry for 6 September. Hastings believed also that the King was acting in concert with the Mahrattas and was deterred from an invasion only by their defeat, but produced no satisfactory evidence for his charge.

of Pegu of May 1817. A copy had been sent to them overland, and the original letter was sent directly to Pegu. It is not clear which one was received at this time. The Myowun's son heard that the writing of a reply similar to the one he had brought had been ordered then. In fact, a letter was received at Calcutta in January 1818. It was from the Myowun of Arakan.¹ This letter asked for a repatriation of all refugees, a subject which was not discussed in the Ramri Myowun's letter. It did not ask for the surrender of eastern Bengal but it asserted that the district belonged to Arakan, and demanded that the British surrender to the Burmese the revenue they had collected from the territories, so that peace would be maintained. They were also to surrender the revenues collected from the Chittagong Arakanese. This letter was not identical to the Ramri Myowun's, but it had claimed that the districts were Burmese, had asked for a surrender of the revenues. In these respects, it was similar to the other letters.

An alternative explanation of these letters is possible: that the King was not responsible for their contents, but that the Ramri Myowun had instructed the messenger to claim that he had, and that the Arakan Myowun's letter was also an independent initiative. This begs the further question as to what their motives were. Perhaps they intended to scare the British into surrendering the refugees, or Chittagong and Dacca, or the revenues of these areas, as the case might be and thereby gain favour with the King. However, such a proceeding could have been dangerous. If the initiative failed, and a crisis resulted, both Myowuns would have been in trouble with the King. Also, the messenger's testimony was so detailed and specific that it is convincing.

1. BPC, 23 January 1818, Myowun of Arakan to Governor-General, No.88 (Received 19 December 1817).

It was shown that what provoked the King into raising the issue of Chittagong and Dacca was the refusal of the British to modify their refugee policy. In the years between 1818 and 1824, the Arakanese refugee problem remained unsolved. There was no more trouble on the scale of Chin Pyan's invasion, but the Burmese still had grounds for anxiety, for there was a new claimant to the throne of Arakan living in Chittagong. A glance at his background will indicate why the Burmese were uneasy. The person in question - usually called Hynja in the British records - was a nephew of the last King of Arakan, Maha Thamada.¹ Hynja appears to have been taken to Amarapura along with the royal family and most of the Court after the Burmese conquest in 1785, when he was a boy of about nine. After some years' residence there, he was allowed to return to Arakan, apparently because the situation was sufficiently tranquil there. The exact year of his return is not known. In 1811, however, Chin Pyan's raids had begun, placing Burmese rule in jeopardy, and thereby creating dangers for someone with Hynja's close connection with the old royal family of Arakan. He thought it prudent to withdraw into the Chittagong district, where he joined the large expatriate community of Arakanese. After Chin Pyan's death in 1815, Burmese fears shifted to Hynja. It is very doubtful whether Hynja could have grown into a second Chin Pyan. Admittedly, there is evidence that he wished to become ruler of Arakan. Writing in 1823, Lee Warner, the Magistrate of Chittagong, informed the Calcutta Government that '... he [Hynja] had a set of followers who talk of his again getting possession of

1. Robertson, T.C., Political Incidents of the First Burmese War, London, 1853, pp.16 et. seq.

his rights'.¹ After their conquest of Arakan in 1825, the British deported Hynja when he was found to be planning resistance to their rule. But Hynja did not pose a serious threat to the Burmese in the years preceeding the Anglo-Burmese War. For one thing, the extent to which he commanded the loyalty of the expatriate Arakanese was limited. Many of the Arakanese chiefs who had fought with Chin Pyan, and in some cases had married into his family, felt that he, not Hynja, should be regarded as a King of Arakan, and his young child as his successor. Besides, a new leadership pattern had emerged during the thirty to fifty years in which the Arakanese had been settled in Chittagong. Leaders who derived their authority from tradition - like Hynja or Chin Pyan's son - carried less weight with them than their village headmen. To the Arakanese, living in isolated villages scattered all over the Chittagong district, their village headmen were real figures in their lives, while they were only vaguely aware of the national leaders living far away in Cox's Bazaar.

Apart from this, the Arakanese national spirit which could have made Hynja dangerous had ceased to be an important force. The British realized this when, to their surprise, they found it very difficult in 1824 to raise a body of Chittagong Arakanese for service against the Burmese. Robertson, who, as Agent to the Governor-General to the Southeast, was in charge of the operation, offered an explanation. He pointed out that the Arakanese immigration had occurred thirty-five years previously after the fall of the kingdom of Arakan '... it follows there is not a man of the Mug [Arakanese] tribe under

1. BPC, 10 October 1825, Magistrate of Chittagong to George Swinton, Secretary, Secret and Political Department, No.1.

forty years of age who can remember the existence of his country as an independent state or even retain any lively local recollection connected with it'.¹ Feelings of veneration for old Arakan existed only among older Arakanese of a higher rank.

At the time of Kingbering's [Chin Pyan's] expedition in 1811 or 1812, more men must have been in existence [over] whom such feelings might have sway and yet it is evident that even then the leader had to intimidate his countrymen into joining him and that of his spontaneous followers the number was but small.²

In short, the Burmese hold on Arakan was probably secure after 1812. Yet it is easy to understand why they should have been uneasy. Having had no contact with the Chittagong Arakanese, they could not have known of Hynja's political impotence and the subsidence of Arakanese nationalism. It seems also that Burmese disquiet was fanned by the occasional acts of petty brigandage committed by the Chittagong Arakanese in Arakan.

The British records have almost nothing to say about these forays - a state of affairs which become explicable when it is remembered that the British at most times had police-stations at only three places in the whole of the Chittagong district - Chittagong town, Cox's Bazaar and Tek Naf. Consequently, they were very much in the dark as to the activities of the Arakanese. The Burmese, however, made occasional complaints, which are preserved in the records. The following complaint, made in November 1823, gives an idea of the kind of thing that sometimes happened at the frontier.

1. BSC, 12 March 1824, Robertson to Swinton, 28 February, No.25.

2. Ibid.

On the 17th Rubbleool Awoul (about the 21st ultima) thirty men came ... and plundered a village of ours and wounded a headman of it, and carried away a quantity of rice belonging to Ryots. They came a second time and plundered (some place, name not legible) taking off 1200 garees (some measure) of rice and beating and maltreating the Ryots.... They say here that it is one Rikut Nam Tuk who had destroyed our two villages and maltreated the ryots and wounded the headman.¹

Another complaint, made a little earlier, in October 1823 was as follows: 'We purchased 100 muskets. These have been seized by the Company's subjects. You are requested to have them returned.'²

Given the existence of a strong freebooting tradition in Arakanese culture, it is not surprising that events such as the above, which kept tempers high and carried the suggestion of future trouble on the scale of Chin Pyan's invasion, should have occurred. However, it is likely that it was only the provincial officials who were affected by these small incidents. The Court was probably worried by the presence of Hynja in British territory, and the possibilities of future insurrections led either by Hynja or some other Arakanese leader.

The Arakanese refugee problem embittered Anglo-Burmese relations. The years following Chin Pyan's insurrection, however, saw the creation of two further refugee problems, as a result of conflicts between the Burmese on the one hand and their political opponents in principalities of Manipur and Assam on the other. The process of Burmese expansion into northeastern India must be examined

1. BSPC, 12 December 1823, Colonel Shapland to Major Patrickson, Deputy Adjutant-General, 22 November 1823, submitting Burmese letter.

2. BSPC, 31 October 1823, Captail Baker to Lt. Col. Casement, 22 October, No.12, enclosing letter from Myowun to Arakan.

briefly here, though in the case of Assam, it has been treated in a historical study of that country.¹

The country of Manipur had been subjected to Burma in the days of the Toungoo dynasty. To judge from their policy towards Siam, this fact alone would have made it, in Burmese eyes, a tributary province. Under Alaungpaya and Hsinbyushan the Burmese invaded Manipur repeatedly, but do not appear to have established effective overlordship. Bodawpaya, after his accession, does not appear to have shown any great interest in Manipur, and the first step towards bringing about a resumption of effective Burmese suzerainty were taken by the Manipuris themselves. It is proposed to examine this development more closely.

In 1799, the King of Manipur died and his sons fought amongst themselves for the throne. Only three of them seem to have survived the struggle. The eldest among these, Chourjit Singh, became King. Another brother, Marjit Singh, tried in 1806 to get Bodawpaya's support for his own claims by sending him presents, but Chourjit Singh, it is claimed, forestalled him by also sending presents, including one of his daughters. In making this move, he had made himself a Burmese vassal. Marjit Singh, however, came to Amarapura later to make renewed complaints against his brother and Bodawpaya finally summoned Chourjit Singh to Amarapura to settle the dispute. This he was entitled to do, because of his status as suzerain of Manipur. Chourjit Singh refused to go and in 1813, in order to uphold the King's authority, a Burmese army invaded Manipur, and installed Marjit Singh as the new ruler. Chourjit Singh fled to the neighbouring

1. Bhuyan, S.K., Anglo-Assamese Relations, Gauhati, 1949.

state of Cachar, where he was allowed refuge. Some years later, in 1818, he took over the country himself, driving out the ruler, Govind Chandra. He was aided in this by his other brother, Gambhir Singh. Between 1819 and 1822, there were further developments, which will be examined later.¹

In 1819, Bagyidaw became King of Burma. Marjit Singh failed to turn up at his coronation. Tributary rulers of a particular kind were supposed to be present on this occasion and Marjit's failure to appear probably represented a repudiation of Burmese sovereignty.² Bagyidaw determined to depose him. A military force was despatched to Manipur in the same year, after the rainy season. It was in this campaign that Maha Bandula, then a junior commander, first attracted notice. Marjit Singh was defeated and fled to Cachar, where he was reconciled with his two brothers. However, effective authority passed gradually to the ablest of the three brothers, Gambhir Singh.

1. The view that Burmese expansion in Northeast India was due to their failure to subjugate Siam seems to be without foundation. Effective overlordship over Manipur was secured in 1806, before the failure of the last major attack on Siam (in 1812) while the invasion of Assam was the result of an appeal which would probably have been accepted if made in the period before 1812. The King had contemplated intervention in 1797 and had been deterred, possibly by Cox's remonstrances.

2. Phayre, A History of Burma, p.233. Phayre, who consulted the Burmese chronicle when writing his history, states without going into details, that Marjit Singh had shown for some time 'a disposition to evade the promise of fealty which he had made to Bodoahpra Bodawpaya.'

From their base in Cachar, these men launched counter-attacks on the small Burmese garrison in Manipur, left there to maintain a new tributary ruler installed by the Burmese. In November 1820, they actually managed to shut up the Burmese in the capital of Manipur, but a relieving force from Burma arrived in time to save the garrison. There were further minor attacks in 1822 and 1823.¹ Meanwhile, certain developments had taken place in connection with Cachar. Govind Chandra, the dispossessed ruler of that state, appealed to Governor-General Hastings to restore him to his throne as a dependent ruler. This appeal was rejected, and Govind Chandra made a similar appeal to Burma through an adherent of his who actually went to Burma for the purpose. It will be seen that the Court was to accept this invitation, and thereby come into conflict with the British, who subsequently, as a result of tension at the Assam and Arakan frontiers, had decided to extend their authority to Cachar. All that need be noted here is that the Court would have hoped, by extending its authority to Cachar, to wipe out the Manipuri threat for good.

The Burmese occupation of Manipur evoked no response from the British, whose territories did not border Manipur at all. It was a different matter when the Burmese entrenched themselves in Assam, although here again, the response of Hastings' government, which followed an aggressive policy in other directions, was hesitant and indecisive. The strategic significance of Assam was obvious. It bordered the wealthy and densely populated province of Bengal, Unlike Arakan, the key province of the British. /it was not separated from Bengal by sharp natural obstacles, such as mountains or jungle. Instead,

1. Ibid., pp.233-234.

Assam occupied the upper valley of the Brahmaputra river and Bengal the lower. This river offered easy ingress from Assam into Bengal and, as the Burmese were to discover during the war of 1822 to 1826, from Bengal into Assam. Geographically and culturally, Assam's links were with Bengal, not Burma, from which it was cut off by a formidable mountain barrier. It is not surprising therefore that before 1817, all but one of the appeals to outside powers to intervene in the local disputes in Assam should have been addressed to the British rulers of Bengal. The exception was the appeal to the Burmese witnessed and frustrated by Captain Hiram Cox in 1797.

By contrast, there were repeated appeals to the British. During the Governor-Generalship of Cornwallis, the ruling monarch appealed to the British for help in suppressing civil strife in Assam. The result was the Welsh expedition of the 1790s. However, in 1794, Cornwallis' successor, Shore, decided, for financial reasons, to put an end to involvement in Assam. The years following saw further appeals for British intervention. One was from the reigning monarch, to help restore order in the country, and another made in 1806 was from a pretender to the throne. Then in 1814, an attempt was made by an Assamese official named Badanchandra, with the connivance of the young ruler, Chandrakanta, to murder the chief minister, Purnananda, who had been exercising effective authority in the Kingdom ever since Chandrakanta's ascension. The plot failed; Badanchandra fled to Bengal, and appealed unsuccessfully to Governor-General Hastings to intervene on his behalf against Purnananda. After this, he came into contact with a Burmese who was passing through Calcutta, and proceeded with him to Amarapura to seek Bodawpaya's help. According to the subsequent testimony of Chandrakanta, the approach to Hastings

was made with his consent. He was to write to Hastings later as follows: 'I despatched... Badanchandra to your Lordship, but he receiving no orders from your Lordship was helpless and proceeded to the Burmese country'.¹ There is no evidence, however, that the approach to the Burmese had his sanction.

In a letter to the British, Mingyi Maha Tilwa, subsequently commander of the Burmese forces in Assam, described what happened next:

Under the Golden Soles of his [the King's] Royal Feet came the chief of Gwahatty Gauhati, a large town in Assam and represented that Chandraganda Chandrakanta, the lawful sovereign of that place, had by force been divested of his royal power by Pooya Coonhay Buragohain, or chief minister.... Our sovereign, with that compassion which makes his own character, deeming the claim of Chandraganda Sing to be just, in compliance with the spirit of the petition presented by his agent for His Majesty's Protection, ordered that the rebels should be put out of power, and the rightful owner placed on the throne, feeling at all times an aversion to support usurped authority. Chanda Ganda Sing, having on investigation been discovered to possess every title to his pretensions, the Governors of Magoun Mogaung, Bamo Bhamo and Moying Monyin each with 5,000 soldiers were despatched against Pooya Coonhay.²

The Burmese had a concept of their king being the upholder of righteousness everywhere. This notion will be discussed in detail elsewhere

1. Bhuyan, op.cit., p.455.

2. BPC, 11 January 1822, Scott to Swinton, 28 November 1821, submitting Maha Tilwa's letter, No.23. Here is another Burmese account of the episode: 'The Rajah of Guahuty Gauhati having also represented to his Majesty that the Minister of Wezalee Assam had by usurpation assumed the Government of that Kingdom and was acting also unjustly towards his Subjects, Our Sovereign, in consequence of this remonstrance, dispatched an army with Guahaty Rajah to take and confin by force the reigning Minister of Wezalee and replace the real sovereign on the throne'. BPC, 30 January 1818, Hlutdaw to Governor General, No.85. The 'Rajah of Guahuty' was Badanchandra. This letter was written to secure permission for a Burmese envoy to secure religious books in India. It was apparently a practice with the Burmese in their correspondence, to keep other powers informed of alliances proposed to them recently. See Hall, D.G.E., Michael Symes: Journal of His Second Embassy to the Court of Ava, London, 1955, p.209.

It should, however, be noted here that it stimulated imperial expansion: the king upheld righteousness by intervening in other countries, but those whom he had aided were expected to acknowledge him as suzerain. It should be noted also that Mingyi Maha Tilwa's language shows the influence of this concept; for it is emphasised that the King intervened to uphold legitimate authority. Also, Bodawpaya's decision to extend Burmese suzerainty to Assam was an error. Assam adjoined Bengal, and the British could not be indifferent to a Burmese presence in such an area.

The Burmese force entered Assam early in 1817 and occupied the capital, Jorhat, in April. Badanchandra, who accompanied the Burmese force, was welcomed by the King, and made chief minister.¹ The King, with the support of local leaders, sent a princess, 50 elephants and a sum of money (100,000 rupees, allegedly), to Bodawpaya. It is not certain how the Assamese viewed this development, but the Burmese henceforth regarded Assam as a tributary province. 'The rights of Chanda Ganda', Mingyi Maha Tilwa wrote, 'were restored, and he was placed on the throne. Chanda Ganda, being thus under an obligation to our sovereign, declared himself a slave [subject] in common with all other subjects'.²

Soon however, a conspiracy was formed against Badanchandra and he was murdered. Personal animosities were involved but resentment at Badanchandra's introduction of foreign influence into Assam

1. The King was urged by Assamese nobles to continue to offer resistance from Lower Assam, but he preferred to conciliate the Burmese. The chief minister, Purnananda, either died or committed suicide at the height of the crisis.

2. Bhuyan, op.cit., p.468.

was also a factor. The King invited Ruchinath, son of the previous chief minister, Purnananda, to take Badanchandra's place. He took no action against the conspirators - which suggests sympathy for them.¹ Ruchinath, however, was unable to forgive the King for not having resisted Budanchandra and the Burmese. He resolved to invade the country himself, and instal another Ahom prince on the throne. In May 1817, the conspirators asked the British for military help for this purpose, the second such appeal since 1816. If the appeal was refused, they wanted their emissaries to be allowed to buy 700 stand of fire arms at Calcutta. Both requests were rejected. The conspirators, however, were allowed to go into Assam. To refuse to allow this, the Governor-General-in-Council argued, would have constituted a kind of interference in Assamese affairs. It was laid down that they should not take bodies of men with them. However, David Scott, the British Magistrate at Rangpur, added a twist to these instructions. He allowed individuals, carrying arms, to enter Assam. He claimed that his purpose was to rid the district of Rangpur 'of many soldiers of fortune and disorderly persons, who had formerly served in Assam, who now possessed no regular means of livelihood nor had any prospect of finding employment in British territory'.² This order was not countermanded by Hastings. Its effect was the same as that of allowing bodies of armed men to enter Assam, for the conspirators could send their adherents in one at a time. In February 1818, the capital Jorhat, was occupied. The King, Chandrakanta, was

1. Badanchandra, like his predecessor, Purnananda, usurped all power in the country. This would have alienated the King.

2. Bhuyan, op.cit., p.470.

made a prisoner, and Purandar Singh, the nominee of the conspirators, was made King. The news was carried overland to Amarapura by supporters of Chandrakanta.

The British were of course aware that the Burmese had interests in Assam since 1817. In allowing the conspirators to enter Assam, they took a chance that their relations with Ava would be damaged. Perhaps, they really felt they had no right to prevent a particular Assamese faction from trying to gain power in their country; but it is also possible that they preferred to see an anti-Burmese government installed in this strategically important province.

The tributary arrangement between Assam and Burma obliged Bodawpaya to ensure the tributary ruler's survival. What followed was a case of the Burmese discharging an obligation they had assumed, as well as asserting their suzerainty over Assam. In January 1819, a second Burmese army entered Assam, drove out the new King and his supporters (who fled once again into British territory) and reinstated Chandrakanta. Some of the supporters of the expelled pretender were murdered by the Burmese. The Burmese then withdrew, taking with them another princess provided by Chandrakanta. They do not seem to have suspected Chandrakanta of complicity in Badanchandra's murder.

In 1819 and 1820, the British received letters from the unsuccessful conspirators, who solicited help in overthrowing Chandrakanta and promised to enter into tributary relations with the British in return, and from Chandrakanta asking for the extradition of the rebels. A letter was also received from a minister of the Hlutdaw, which argued that because of the flourishing trade which subsisted between British India and Burma, the enemies of the Burmese

should never be sheltered by the British.¹ For the Burmese, the sheltering of political enemies was a hostile act. Since the British enjoyed friendly relations with the Burmese, it made no sense to them that they should shelter their political enemies.

Governor-General Hastings, who rejected the demand for extradition, assured both the Burmese and Chandrakanta that the British wanted to remain on friendly terms with them. Chandrakanta was assured also that in order to qualify for asylum, the refugees would have to behave in a 'quiet and peaceable manner'. The rebels too were informed that their right of asylum was conditional on their not making more trouble.²

The Burmese would have felt very concerned at the creation of an additional refugee menace on British soil. Hitherto, only the Arakan refugees had been given shelter in British territory. The Manipur brothers, it will be recalled, were established in Cachar, which was not subject to the British at that time. It would of course have been perfectly clear to the Burmese that the British had allowed the incursions and the only guarantee they had against a recurrence was a British promise to this effect. Nevertheless, the matter seems to have been dropped.

Subsequent events are known only in broad outline. It seems certain that Chandrakanta had decided to put an end to his tributary relationship with Burma, for he wrote to the conspirators in Bengal

1. Ibid., p.480.

2. Ibid. The Burmese Minister was referred to Chandrakanta for a statement of British policy towards the refugee (and therefore to the decisions that their right of asylum was conditional on peaceable behaviour).

asking them to join him in resisting the Burmese.¹ Also, it appears that a Burmese general called Mingyi Maha Tilwa, with some 500 men, arrived in eastern Assam with some gifts from Bagyidaw for Chandrakanta. The fact that there were only 500 men in the Burmese force suggests that this was, as stated, a friendly mission. The King of Assam refused to accept the presents, or to meet the Burmese. It was a serious insult to the King of Burma for his presents to be rejected, and it infuriated the Burmese commander. He retaliated by killing supporters of the King in the vicinity, while Chandrakanta executed Burmese messengers in the capital. Chandrakanta was now a tributary ruler in rebellion. The Burmese force was too small for offensive operations, but while awaiting reinforcements from Burma, they proclaimed another Assamese King. After receiving reinforcements, the Burmese proceeded to expel Chandrakanta from Assam altogether. This was followed by further appeals to the British for extradition, this time of Chandrakanta.²

While Chandrakanta's dispute with the Burmese was in its early stages, British policy towards Assam had undergone^a significant change. It was known in Bengal by about May 1821 that the Burmese had installed a new king on the throne. It seemed possible that he would be a figure-head, and that real power would be in Burmese hands. This prospective consolidation of Burmese authority in Assam was resented, and this had an effect on policy at Calcutta. The conspirators against Chandrakanta had asked again for permission to buy arms in Bengal. David Scott, the Magistrate of Sylhet, urged that they be

1. Bhuyan, op.cit., p.481. He may have been emboldened by the fact that there were virtually no Burmese troops left in Assam.

2. Ibid., pp.483-484.

allowed to do so, and also to invade Assam in order to dislodge the Burmese and their supporters from that state.¹ He argued that Burmese control of Assam would necessitate the maintenance of a large British force in the unhealthy frontier region. Governor-General Hastings and his Council accepted this proposal, but ostensibly for a different reason; authority in Assam, they argued, was still in an unsettled state and it would be unfair to interfere with anybody's chances by not allowing him to challenge the current ruler.² Yet only a year earlier, they had made the continued right of asylum of these men conditional upon their not creating more trouble in Assam and had informed Chandrakanta and the Burmese of this.

The conspirators were accordingly allowed to buy arms and enter Assam in a body if they were natives of Assam, singly if they were not. They were, however, beaten off by Chandrakanta's followers. But Chandrakanta, as has been seen, was himself driven out of Assam by the Burmese. The new policy was extended to him also. In October 1821, he was allowed to buy arms, and to recruit Indian mercenaries, who seem to have been discharged soldiers from the Company's armies, still wearing red uniforms. It will be recalled that in 1811, Chin Pyan had invaded Arakan with discharged sepoys, and in Kedah in 1831, there was to be a similar development. In all three cases, this was to give rise to a suspicion, bordering on a conviction, of British complicity. With regard to Arakan and Kedah, these suspicions were unfounded, but not with regard to Assam.

In December 1821, Chandrakanta invaded Assam, and occupied the lower part of the country, though not the capital Jorhat. In

1. Ibid., pp.486-487.

2. Ibid., pp.487-488.

order to consolidate Chandrakanta's authority, the Governor-General-in-Council issued a decree prohibiting any further incursions by prospective rebels into Assam. This was directed at Chandrakanta's rivals. Previously, the British had allowed these men to invade Assam on the grounds that Chandrakanta's authority was unsettled, now, suddenly, this argument no longer applied. The real reason for the change of policy, of course, was that Chandrakanta was now anti-Burmese.

Bagyidaw took steps to re-establish his suzerainty over the lower part of Assam. An army was despatched to Assam under Mingyi Maha Bandula. In April 1822, his forces appeared in Assam, and reconquered it in fighting between April and June 1822. Chandrakanta and his followers fled once again into Bengal. Maha Bandula was able to take a large number of Chandrakanta's red-coated mercenaries prisoner.

The Burmese now gave up the attempt to rule Assam through a subsidiary ruler. Assam was made a Burmese province, like Arakan or Pegu and Mingyi Maha Tilwa, who had accompanied Maha Bandula, was appointed its Myowun. The Burmese made several attempts now to recover the Assamese fugitives, both Chandrakanta and the conspirators. The British received three letters in all. Two were received in July 1823, one of which was from Maha Tilwa and the other from Maha Bandula.² In September 1823, a further letter was received from Maha Tilwa. The first two letters were firm in demanding the return of

1. Ibid., p.489.

2. Bhuyan, op.cit., pp.498-499.

the fugitives, impressed Hastings by their freedom from the customary hauteur of Burmese communications.¹ The arguments used by the Burmese were the usual ones: that Chandrakanta and the others had done wrong and that the British were obliged, on account of the friendship and flourishing trade between the two countries, to surrender them. The Burmese, although aware of British involvement in the insurrection, made no accusations to this effect.

Hastings' reply was that the British could not violate their principles by surrendering political offenders. However, he recognized Burmese suzerainty over Assam.² He also declared that if the fugitives created more trouble, they would lose their right of asylum. The rebels were then warned that if they made trouble in future, they would be handed over to the Burmese. The British therefore had reverted to a policy of non-interference.

Although British policy towards Assam damaged relations with Burma, it was capable of justification, since Assam was contiguous to Bengal and offered easy access to it, its occupation by a comparatively powerful nation justified British counter-measures.

Nevertheless, British policy as announced by Hastings involved a return to a policy of non-intervention. Hastings at least may have intended to continue the policy of non-intervention, after having burnt his fingers twice by intervention in Assam. The strategic

1. Wilson, Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, No.8, para 117, Calcutta, 1827.

2. Hastings' words were: 'His Burmese Majesty may have just cause of dissatisfaction with the ruler of Assam and is at liberty to pursue his own measures with regard to them and the occupation of their country. In this the British Government asserts no right to interfere.' BPC, 11 October 1822, Hastings to Maha Tilwa, No.53.

argument against a Burmese presence in Assam, although strong, was not overriding. From Assam, the Burmese - a strong and confident nation - possessed the means to make a sudden incursion into Bengal, the key province of the British in India. On the other hand, if Bengal was easily accessible from Assam, the converse was equally true. The British, possessing vastly superior military power, and commanding the enormously greater resources of Bengal, could easily dislodge the Burmese from Assam during the dry season whereas the Burmese could not expect to do more than temporarily inconvenience the British. Besides, a large Burmese force would have to be gathered in Assam even for this purpose, and the British would undoubtedly have heard of this if it happened and could have devised effective counter-measures. Another reason for the British deciding not to sanction future incursions into Assam was that Assam was now a regular Burmese province, not just a tributary kingdom, with which more liberties could be taken. David Scott sent in a number of alarmist reports at this period, but they do not seem to have swayed the Governor-General-in-Council. On one occasion, Scott's warnings bordered on the neurotic. '... a more formidable diversion cannot well be conceived than might now be created by a large Burmese force provided with arms and perhaps officers and artillery men, by the Russians in the not improbable event of war with them to the northward.... As for a knowledge of the rivers and etc. in Bengal, our own boatmen are far behind the Burmese, for there is not a creek or rivulet navigable in the rains between Chittagong and Hardwar a place in the western Himalayas⁷, that they are not perfectly acquainted with, vast numbers of them having been prowling about the country for the last twenty years upon pretense of collecting Kingfishers'

feathers'.¹ Scott believed that a large force should be permanently stationed at the frontier for defensive purposes. The suggestion was rejected.

All the same, British policy up to this point indicates clearly that they regarded the Burmese presence in Assam as something regrettable, and although the curbs placed by Hastings on the refugees suggest that he had decided to acquiesce in Burmese overlordship over Assam, it is by no means certain that his policy would have been continued by his successors. The Burmese certainly could have had no sense of security in this matter. They had had to invade Assam three times in the past in order to secure it from rebels who had operated from bases in British territory; each time, they had asked for the extradition of the rebels and each time they had failed. These events had been preceded by Chin Pyan's invasion of Arakan from British territory, in which the British were wrongly believed to have been involved. When would this process end? It is scarcely surprising that after Maha Bandula's return to Amarapura in January 1823, after his victory in Arakan, war with the British should have been discussed.²

1. BPC, 26 July 1822, Scott to Swinton, Political Secretary, 10 July 1822, No.51. There is no evidence to show that these Burmese were spies.

(BSPC),
2. Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, 5 May 1826, No.10 and Crawford, J., Journal of an Embassy to the Court of Ava, London, 1829, Appendix 10. The document in the BSPC, appears to have been written by an Englishman who had spent many years in Burma and spoke Burmese fluently, according to T.C. Robertson, British civil negotiator during the war, who took down this deposition. The description fits the Englishman, Rogers, who was Akaukwun in 1812-1813.

One factor operating against a resort to war - the caution and wisdom (despite occasional lapses in moments of anger) of the old King Bodawpaya - was gone now. His grandson, the previous Eingyi Paya, who is known to posterity as Bagyidaw, seems to have lacked this quality and apparently none of his advisers were able to make up for this. Added to this fact was a general confidence in Ava of victory in the event of war with the British, which again had not been present in Bodawpaya's time. One reason for this possibly was Maha Bandula's victories over Chandrakanta's Indian mercenaries, who had been drilled along European lines.¹ These victories introduced an element of doubt as to whether western discipline would be as decisive a factor when used against the Burmese as hitherto supposed (there were other reasons which will be discussed later). An added incentive for war was the lure of the rich districts of Eastern Bengal. The American missionary Adoniram Judson, who arrived at the capital in the year of Bagyidaw's ascension, reported after the war of 1824-26 regarding the mood at the capital on this issue as follows: 'The claim to these parts of the British domains was so generally maintained by all classes of public officials that if I had introduced the subject, I might have heard it insisted upon every day of my life'.²

1. BSPC, 5 May, 1826, no. 10.

2. Crawford, op.cit., Appendix 10. Testimony of Judson. The claim, it is worth noting, was now more popular than before to judge from Judson's testimony. Previously all classes of officials had not been passionately interested in it.

The depositions of a number of Europeans and Americans living at the capital (which, early in 1823, was changed from Amarapura to Ava), particularly those which were taken down after the war of 1824-26 by John Crawford, show that war with the British was discussed at the capital by Burmese officials and members of the royal family after Maha Bandula's return there. Even during the Assam campaign, the King had reportedly ordered Burmese forces to cross the Bengal frontier in pursuit of rebel leaders, when he heard that the latter had found refuge in British territory; but these orders were not transmitted by the Atwinwuns to the Hlutdaw. In January 1823, Maha Bandula returned in triumph to Ava. Here is one account of what happened:

When I was in Ava... I was present at an evening levee of the King. [This must have been a royal council held at the Hlutdaw]. The late Bandula, and several of his officers, who had just arrived from the conquest of Assam, were there. [After the King had been given some information about his new domains, and praised in hyperbolic terms Bandula said:] I pursued the fugitives across the Burram-pooter into the British territory; but, as the English are on terms of friendship with your Majesty, and you derive a large revenue from Rangoon, I retired. But if your Majesty desire to have Bengal, I will conquer it for you...."1

The King did not reply on this occasion but he consulted a number of Europeans later on the subject. The following is one account.

The King...spoke to Dr. Price [an American doctor and missionary resident at Ava] privately and asked his opinion as to the... success of it [an attack on Bengal]. Mr. Price said all he could [to] dissuade him from [so] dangerous an undertaking, telling him that although the English force in India was very much scattered, yet in the event of war, they could

1. Crawford, op.cit., Appendix 10.

collect a force numerically superior to his, better equipped for war in every respect, and that discipline would inevitably prevail. As a set-off against this, the bravery, hardihood and other warlike qualities of the Burman soldiers together with the sickness that the English troops would be subject to, were severally urged.¹

Clearly, leading persons at the Court were not persuaded of Burmese military inferiority to the British. The King mentioned some of the reasons for their confidence in the above extract. But there would have been others. The Burmese had developed the art of stockading to a very high degree - in fact, it was found during the war that only the best troops in the company's service were capable of capturing these. Their destruction by artillery fire would have been an easy matter. The Burmese were aware that the British possessed a military technique of their own, and better weapons, but in Assam, Bandula had managed to defeat mercenaries who possessed these advantages. Nor were the logistical problems involved in an attack on Bengal insurmountable for the Burmese. They had successfully overcome similar problems at the time of Hsinbyushin's successful attack on Ayuthia, when two forces had converged on that city, one advancing via Chiengmai, and the other crossing by sea to Tavoy and advancing to Ayuthia.²

Needless to say, this assessment was disastrously wrong. The East India Company could put into the field forces much larger than the few hundred sepoy Chandrakanta had recruited; and they would be commanded by trained officers and would have artillery. The role of officers was of importance for an average sepoy would

1. Ibid.

2. Of course, the force involved was small and had no officers and no artillery.

have only the most elementary grasp of contemporary military tactics (as opposed to methods of drill).

During the war, the Burmese were to be defeated in their own country by a British force only about 10,000 strong. Yet, before the war, the Burmese were considering invading Bengal, which was garrisoned by an army about 70,000 strong. The project was clearly impracticable.

Bandula had returned from Assam early in 1823. If the Court had then decided on war, it would have had time to make preparations for an attack on Bengal at the beginning of the dry season, sometime in October or November 1823, but the opportunity was allowed to pass. It required the news, received in December 1823 of the British having established a fort for a second time on Shahpuri Island (which was regarded at Ava as being Burmese territory), to get the Court to take the plunge. Given the undoubted British provocation in Assam, and the new-found Burmese confidence in their military strength, the question arises as to what the constraints on the Burmese were.

The first was the fact that the King's biggest source of revenue was the Rangoon trade, most of which was with the Company's territories. According to figures collected by John Crawford after the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26, the duties on cotton imports alone in 1822 amounted to 225,600 ticals.¹ The Rangoon trade was a large and growing source of revenue for the King. The political significance of this becomes evident when it is remembered that his other sources of revenue were restricted. There were, of course, in

1. Crawford, op.cit., Ch.XV.

every Burmese province, taxes on households, on agriculturists and participants in judicial cases and the proceeds from these were large, but these went exclusively to the provincial governments. The King's sources, apart from the Rangoon trade, were duties on imports from China (exports to China were large but do not seem to have been taxed); the rent from royal monopolies farmed out to others, like the timber forests and the silver mines; the share in the taxes on certain products such as salt, fish, birds' nests and oil; and a fixed annual tribute from the provinces. The tribute amounted only to an estimated 100,000 ticals. The income from the China trade (about 40,000 ticals) and the timber forests (probably about 240,000 ticals) had been made over to the Queen and the Prince of Tharawaddy (the King's brother) respectively. The other sources were not significant, with the exception of the silver mines, the Chinese who worked these paying an annual rent of 48,000 ticals. It can be seen that very little money went annually into the royal treasury. To counter-balance this, there was the fact that apart from pagoda construction, the King had almost no expenses in times of peace. There were no salaries in Burma, officials being rewarded with fiefs. Nevertheless, the above facts help to explain the Burmese interest in the revenues of Chittagong and Dacca, their reluctance to agree to the indemnity clause during the peace negotiations of 1825-1826 and their hesitations as regards a war with the British.

Maha Bandula has already been shown as explaining his failure to pursue the Assamese into British territory as being due to the fact that the King's earnings from Rangoon would be jeopardized as a result. In their letters to the British concerning the refugees and the Bengal districts, the Burmese invariably cited the flourishing

trade between the two powers as a reason why the two powers should remain on friendly terms. There is one report, however, which suggests that this factor was beginning to lose its efficacy as a deterrent. 'After the conquest of Assam, I heard Bandula say to His Majesty, "I will also make Bengal into your hands". The King asked Lanciago [a Spaniard who was Akaukwun collector of customs duties at Rangoon] his opinion and the latter advised against it. The King replied: "You know nothing about it; are you afraid of losing the duties of the port of Rangoon? Although the English do not come to trade, the French, the Chinese, the Telingas [Southern Indians], the Parsees and others, will come". Besides the revenues of Bengal, whether all of it, or only the parts claimed by the Burmese, would have compensated for any loss in trade at Rangoon.¹

More important perhaps than the Rangoon trade as a curb on the Burmese at this time was the challenge posed by Siamese independence. The Court of Ava viewed Siam as a Kingdom which had entered into tributary relations with Burma in the time of Bayinnanng and Hsinbyushin but had ungratefully cast off its allegiance and remained ever since in a state of successful rebellion. Its existence as a powerful independent kingdom and a second centre of Buddhism in the region was more galling to the pride of the Court than the policies of the British. The year 1823 witnessed two Burmese diplomatic initiatives designed to eliminate the Siamese power. The first was a mission to Vietnam, which left Burma in January 1823, at about the time Maha Bandula returned from Assam. Its object was to effect an alliance with Vietnam to dismember Siam. While they

1. Ibid., Appendix 10, testimony of Jeronimo de-Cruz. The King's remark shows gross ignorance of external economic realities.

awaited the results of so important a mission, the court would have had reservations about an involvement in Bengal which would have hampered effective cooperation with the Vietnamese.

The mission, however, proved to be a failure. On their way back to Burma, the envoys touched at Singapore and were detained, in consequence of war having broken out with the British. In this way, the Calcutta Government came to possess a copy of the letter from the Hlutdaw to its opposite number in Vietnam (which country is referred to in the correspondence as Cochin-China). More information regarding the mission came from another source. The head of the mission was one Gibson, a man of mixed British and Indian parentage and a British subject, but resident in Burma for a long time, and a close friend of the King. Being a man of exceptionally wide knowledge and a polyglot, he had been chosen by the King to head the mission, in preference to the two high-ranking Burmese who accompanied him. He now offered his services to the British, showing them a diary he had kept of the mission and given them much information about Burma, a country about which they then knew very little.¹

The letter to the Vietnamese is valuable for the light it throws on the Burmese attitude to Siam, and to international relations in general. The present King of Burma, the letter explained, had sought to renew the contacts with Vietnam that had existed in Bodawpaya's time, and in response, two 'Cochin-Chinese' (i.e. Vietnamese) envoys had arrived at Ava. They had informed him that their country had difficulties with the Siamese with regard to Cambodia,

1. BSPC, 21 May 1824, John Crawford, Resident at Singapore to George Swinton, Secretary, Political and Secret Department, 22 April 1824. Crawford also submitted an abstract of Gibson's diary and a French translation of the Hlutdaw's letter to Vietnamese Council.

and expressed the view that if the two countries united, they could vanquish the Siamese easily and establish direct relations among themselves. They had also stated that this subject had been discussed in the highest Council in Vietnam.¹

The Hludaw's letter set forth the Burmese case against Siam. It was based on the principle of tributary relations - a meaningful concept in Southeast Asian diplomacy, as shown, to take another example, by Siamese policy towards Kedah. The letter stated that the Siamese having accepted tributary status in Bayinnaung's time, their King was taken to Burma, and treated with great honour, while the government of the country was entrusted to his son upon payment of an annual tribute.² But this person had revolted and refused the tribute, and the Siamese had remained pirates and brigands ever since, forcing even the two 'Cochin-Chinese' to travel as merchants. The dignity and interest of the two nations demanded the removal of this obstacle to their mutual relations. Consequently, envoys were being sent from Burma who were competent to discuss 'all

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1. Vietnam had, in fact, proposed an alliance against Siam in 1802, hence the reference to contact in Bodawpaya's time. (See Hall, Michael Symes: Journal of his Second Embassy to the Court of Ava in 1802, p.209, fn.8). It was not true, however, that the two Vietnamese were sent in response to a Burmese appeal, to judge from the account presented by Crawford. The Vietnamese mission, according to Crawford, in his introduction to the abstract of Gibson's diary which he published as an Appendix to his Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China (reprint, Kuala Lumpur, 1967), were sent to Burma by the Vietnamese Governor-General of Cambodia (whose domains included the region which is now called Cochin-China), solely to collect birds' nests for sale in China. It is possible that the Cochin-Chinese were speaking without official sanction. Alternatively, the proposal could have been attributed to them by the Burmese, so that the letter could avoid appearing as asking for aid. In a subsequent letter from the Hludaw to the Sultan of Kedah, the King of Cochin-China is represented as having solicited aid from Burma.
 2. It is worth noting that the Burmese claim to suzerainty was based on the conquest of Siam by Bayinnaung not by Hsinhyushin in 1767. This indicates a very tenacious concept of suzerainty.

that concerns the destruction of the Siamese, the common enemies of our two countries'.¹ The envoys were authorized to receive the decision of the Emperor and his Ministers and one was asked for without delay.

It can be seen that the proposed joint attack on Siam was something that it was hoped would materialize in the very near future. As such, it must have had a restraining effect on the Burmese as regards the policy to be adopted towards the British.

But Vietnam, ruled at that time by the isolationist Emperor Minh Mang, would have nothing to do with the proposal. Crawford, then British Resident at Singapore, reported as follows on the fate of the mission, '... a total failure has attended the mission. The members of it were not permitted to come up to the Court [at Hue] at all and never proceeded beyond Saigon where they appear to have been detained above nine months'.² The Burmese mission was accompanied on the return journey by some Vietnamese mandarins 'whose sole object was to land the delegation somewhere in Ava territory'. The Vietnamese court 'not only declined to enter into an offensive alliance against the Siamese but showed a strong reluctance to maintaining any close intercourse whatever with the Burmese nation, deeming the connection one which promised no benefit to either party....'³ The jewels

1. BSPC, 21 May 1824, Crawford to Swinton, 22 April 1821, submitting French translation of Hludaw's letter.

2. BSPC, 21 May 1824, Crawford, Resident at Singapore to Swinton, Secretary, Political and Secret Department, 22 April 1824, enclosing letter from Hludaw to Vietnamese Council.

3. Ibid., abstract of Gibson's diary, entry for 28 February 1824.

offered as presents to the Emperor of Vietnam were returned. There is evidence, however, that the idea of an alliance found favour with an adventurous minority at the Court of Hue. The Governor-General of Cambodia was among them.¹

After the departure of the Burmese mission to Cochin-China, the Court embarked on another anti-Siamese initiative. The Sultan of Kedah - in exile in Penang and despairing of getting the Company's help in recovering his state - appealed for aid from the Burmese. It was claimed in the letter written to the Sultan subsequently by the Hlutdaw that the Sultan's messenger had stated that Perlis, Perak, Selangor and Petani had joined with Kedah to send 'complimentary offerings' to Burma and that three of these states were concerting with Kedah to attack the Siamese. It is possible that these states were agreeable to becoming Siamese tributaries; at any rate, the Burmese were later to offer tributary status to all of them.

For the Burmese, the offer had come at an opportune moment for they now had a chance to attack the Siamese from yet another quarter and also to expand their influence into the Malay world. The Court decided to offer help, and the paraphernalia of tributary status - a title, a golden umbrella, and equipment for a horse - were sent to the Sultan of Kedah, one set for each of the five rulers.

1. Although the Governor-General of Cambodia had not made proposals of a political nature to Burma, he seemed to favour the idea of an alliance with Burma. Perhaps, he believed it would facilitate Vietnamese expansion in Cambodia. When the Burmese mission arrived at Saigon, he was initially non-committal (Crawford, op.cit., p.574), but at the capital he spoke in favour of the alliance (ibid., p.586).

In a letter to the Sultan, the Hlutdaw promised military aid but asked first for a full picture of the situation in that quarter. The Sultan's message, according to the Hlutdaw, was not detailed enough to enable intervention. Further, his messages had stated that the attack on the Siamese would be made in five months' time after the departure of the messenger from Penang, irrespective of whether they had returned with promises of Burmese aid; yet, ten months had passed and there had been no Malay attack [the latter criticism is not openly stated, but seems to have been implied]. However, when more details were sent, 'a powerful... armament shall be fully prepared and equipped to attack the Siamese. The five states will then become like ornaments of the Golden Palace'.¹ The Sultan was asked to find out whether the rulers of Rembau, Riau, Dungun, Marang, Pahang, Kelantan, Trengganu and Aceh would be interested in accepting tributary status also.

Judging from the Hlutdaw's letter, it does not appear that the Court of Ava expected the British to object to the proposed arrangement. They seem to have thought of the latter as traders only, confined to two small islands off the Peninsula and apparently could not conceive of them as wanting to take a hand in the political affairs of the peninsula. Their naivety in this respect contrasts strikingly with certain remarks of the Governor of Cochin-China on the subject of British interests in the Peninsula.² However, the

1. BSPC, 11 June 1824, Governor of Prince of Wales Island to Lord Amherst; 20 April 1824, enclosing Hlutdaw's letter to Sultan of Kedah. Also enclosed were letters from the Myowun of Tavoy to Phillips, Governor of Penang and to the Sultan.

2. Ibid., Hlutdaw's letter to Sultan of Kedah.

Myowun of Tavoy, at which place the Sultan's envoys with their Burmese escort stopped on their journey back to Penang, seems to have had his doubts. In a letter to the British Governor of Penang, Phillips, he explained that the Sultan had reported the Siamese attack on Kedah to the King of Ava, who, taking pity on him, had sent him some rice and royal clothing.¹ There was no mention of the tributary arrangement. But the device did not work when the party arrived at Penang early in January 1824. The British obtained a copy of the Hludaw's letter, and, judging the Siamese to be preferable as the neighbouring paramount power, immediately informed the Raja of Ligor of the developments. And it is probable that if war had not broken out already with the Company, a grave crisis would have resulted from this Burmese initiative.

In Calcutta, the correspondence with the Sultan of Kedah was regarded as confirming 'in a remarkable manner the grasping and ambitious spirit which influences the Councils of that state [Burma].'² Undoubtedly, the Burmese, like their British and Siamese neighbours, were an expanding power. But their expansion was not the purely predatory affair that Calcutta seems to have considered it. There were religious and moral factors connected with Burmese expansionism, which bore the same relation to it as, for example, the British plea of wanting to introduce good government bore to their expansion.

1. BSPC, 11 June 1824, Government of Prince of Wales Island to Lord Amherst, 20 April 1824, enclosing letter from Myowun of Tavoy to Phillips, Governor of Penang.

2. BSPC, 11 June 1824, Governor-General-in-Council to Governor of Penang, 11 June 1824, para.3.

The Buddhist concept of the Cakkavati - the universal ruler who maintains righteousness everywhere - influenced successive Burmese kings.¹ From Alaungpaya onwards, the Kings of Burma were known as 'Lords of the Law' (of Righteousness) and they felt themselves entitled to uphold the law when it was flouted. Applying this notion to Siam and the Malay States, the Court could feel that it was seeking to establish righteousness by ending Siam's unrighteous rebellion, and by rescuing the Malay States from the Siamese menace. Parts of the Kedah correspondence were definitely influenced by the Cakkavati concept. '... whoever requires assistance, this mighty king lends his support to, for it is his custom to render aid... it is the peculiar character of the King that when he hears of the distress of anyone, he instantly feels a disposition to relieve [them]... the King of Quedah with a candid heart wishes to become tributary to the Golden Palace, and the great King will protect him and cherish his children and children's children, even his remotest descendants and promote their prosperity and welfare....'² While the driving force behind Burmese expansion was undoubtedly ambition, the 'Cakkavati' ideal influenced the form and timing of this expansion. In Manipur, Assam, Cachar and, as we have seen, in Kedah, the Burmese intervened only after rightful rulers who have been deposed had appealed to them for help. Even in Arakan, they had acted upon an invitation. The Cakkavati ideal cannot be dismissed as a mere pretext for unlimited expansion.

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1. See Sarkisyanz, E., Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution, The Hague, 1965, Ch. XV, for a discussion of this subject.
 2. BSPC, 11 June 1824, Government of Prince of Wales Island to Lord Amherst, 20 April 1824, enclosing Burmese letters to Sultan of Kedah and to Penang Government.

The despatch to Vietnam and Burma of two Burmese missions which, if successful, would have demanded a heavy commitment of resources in the eastern and southern directions, shows that the Court was not looking for a pretext for war with the British when the Shahpuri crisis occurred.

CHAPTER VII

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

The frontier between Arakan and Chittagong had never been officially demarcated. To the north-east, mountains formed a natural barrier; to the south, the Naf, an inlet of the sea about 50 miles long and 3 miles wide, formed another; but, as will be seen later, no agreement had been reached as to the island of Shahpuri lying at its mouth. Between the Naf and the mountains to the northeast lay thickly wooded and unhealthy country through which no boundary had ever been drawn. It was accepted that the Morusi river flowed through Burmese territory, and that somewhere to the west of the river, the Chittagong district commenced, but where exactly no one knew. This situation had already given rise to disputes. On two occasions, in 1821 and again in 1822, the Company's elephant-hunters stationed at Rama had crossed into territory where the Burmese were found to be exercising effective control and had been detained in consequence.¹ The only solution would have been the expensive and difficult one of constructing stone pillars at regular intervals through the jungle. Some arrangement would have been necessary also with regard to any elephants which crossed the boundary while being pursued. But Governor-General Hastings did not consider the matter serious enough for such measures. After the dispute over Shahpuri had developed into serious proportions however the Indian Government under Lord Amherst (who arrived in India in mid-1823) regarded the disputes over

1. Wilson, H.H., Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, Calcutta, 1827, Nos. 14-15.

the elephant-hunters, taken in conjunction with the Shahpuri affair, as evidence that the Burmese were steadily encroaching westwards. There is, in fact, some evidence that the authority of the old Arakan kingdom did not extend beyond the Morusi, and that some westward extension had taken place since then; but this seems to have been due to the spontaneous process of the clearing and settlement of the untenanted jungle to the west by the inhabitants of Arakan rather than to any deliberate design on the part of the Burmese authorities.¹

Similarly, there is evidence that the Burmese claim to Shahpuri was not something hastily concocted to justify expansion. It would seem that both sides believed themselves to be claiming only what was their own territory. The dispute had begun in January 1823, when the Calcutta Government received a report that the crew of a Burmese boat in the vicinity of Shahpuri Island had fired on a boatload of Chittagong Arakanese carrying rice for sale at Cox's Bazaar when the latter had rejected their demand for a toll. One of the Arakanese was killed. Concerned that the Burmese had decided to start demanding duties for the use of the Naf, hitherto regarded as a common thoroughfare, the Calcutta Government decided to station a police contingent at Shahpuri Island to prevent such a development and generally to keep an eye on the Burmese. No demand for duties

1. There was a Burmese post some forty miles to the west of the Morusi river at a place called Gurjenie. (See Wilson, op.cit., No.15). For evidence of the cultivation of the Morusi valley by people from Arakan, see Bengal Secret and Political Consultation, 6 February 1824, Robertson to Swinton, 22 January 1824, No.2. Robertson's journey up the Morusi for surveying purposes alarmed these villagers.

was ever made again and it appears that the incident was only a stray act of violence.¹ But the stationing of a police unit at Shahpuri brought the conflicting claims over the island into the open. The Magistrate of Chittagong promptly received a letter from the Myowun [or Governor] of Arakan asking for the removal of the police on the grounds that the island belonged to Arakan.

The British based their claim on the grounds, which they communicated to the Burmese, that the island was nearer to the Chittagong district than to Arakan and that it had been included in three unilateral surveys of the Chittagong district by themselves in 1801, 1815, and 1819. It had also been specifically included in a lease of the adjoining western bank granted by the British to a local landowner in 1802. These actions were never regarded as in doubt but this fact does not resolve the question of their validity and the Burmese do not seem to have been aware of them at the time. The landowner in question had not attempted to cultivate the island, and the three surveys appear to have involved no actual measurement of the island; they appear to have been estimates made from the mainland. Hence, the Burmese would not have discovered the existence of a British claim.² Once the disputes had begun, the Burmese claimed, repeatedly and emphatically, that the island had belonged to Arakan from the days of the Arakanese kings. They had their own name for

1. Wilson, Documents, No.16. Evidence came to light subsequently which showed that the person killed had emigrated recently to British territory, and "set" the Arakan authorities 'at defiance'. It is not explained how he did this, but it seems clear that the incident was connected with a private feud. See BSPC, 9 June 1826, Paton to Swinton, 26 April 1826.

2. BSPC, 23 December 1825, Collector, Chittagong to R. Hunter, Secretary, Board of Revenue, 12 November 1825, Nos. 23 & 26.

it - Shin-ma-byu Gyun.¹ It is probable that the Arakanese records too referred to Shin-ma-byu Gyun as part of Arakan.

Had there been permanent residents on this island, a clash would have occurred, for both sides would have attempted to realize revenue from it; but there were none. Occasionally, Arakanese from Chittagong had come to the island to graze cattle (the channel between Shahpuri and Chittagong being fordable at low tide), cut wood and fish; but people from Arakan had also come over for fishing and wood-cutting (but not to graze cattle for Shahpuri was not fordable from their side).² This shows that British ownership of the island was not an acknowledged fact with the people of Arakan. The Burmese, on the other hand, revealed, in November 1823, when the dispute was already far advanced, that their official at Maungdaw, a village a few miles further up the Naf, had been issuing permits to those Arakanese who wished to graze cattle on Shahpuri (referring evidently to Chittagong Arakanese, who alone could bring cattle over to Shahpuri).³ It is unlikely that the custom was enforced very strictly, or for a very long time, for in that event, the British would have heard of it. But it does indicate (admittedly on the supposition that the claim was not totally false) that the Burmese had been treating the island as theirs.

The island - an unproductive piece of land some 30 acres in extent - could conceivably have been neutralized. The Burmese made

1. This is the name used in the Konbaungzet Mahayazawin.

2. BSPC, 23 December 1825. Collector, Chittagong to Hunter, 12 November 1825, Nos. 23 & 26.

3. BSPC, 24 December 1823, Lee Warner, Magistrate of Chittagong, to George Swinton, Secretary, Political and Secret Department, 1 December 1823, No. 6, enclosing Burmese letter.

this suggestion towards the end of 1823, and the British view then was that neutralization was not possible after the Burmese attack on the island in September but that it might have been accepted if made before that. The fact remains, however, that the British as well as the Burmese had failed to make such a proposal earlier. On the British side, the inhibiting factor would appear to have been their suspicion - deriving from the dispute over the elephant-hunters and the strength of their belief in their own claims to Shahpuri - that the Burmese were beginning to encroach on the Chittagong district, and that a firm stand had to be taken if further squabbles were to be avoided. As Adam, the acting Governor-General until Amherst's arrival in August 1823, expressed it in a report to the Court of Directors, dated July 20th, 1823: '... I do not anticipate the probability of it [a war with the Burmese] unless we invite hostility by appearing to stand in awe of it....'¹

The Shahpuri dispute had already induced the British to take measures which led to another crisis to the north-east, for it had revived their anxieties about the exposed state of the Bengal frontier. Their possession of Assam already gave the Burmese the means to invade Bengal suddenly. Besides Assam, there were two frontier states, Cachar and Jaintia, which contained passes through which the Burmese in Manipur and Assam could also descend into the plains of Bengal. Cachar was ruled by three Manipuri princes expelled from their own country by the Burmese. They, in turn, had driven Govind Chandra, the legitimate ruler of Cachar, out of that country.

1. Home Miscellaneous Series, Vol.660, acting Governor-General Adam to Court of Directors, 20 July 1823.

The latter had applied to Hastings to recover his kingdom for him, Hastings had ignored this appeal, as he had ignored similar appeals from Assam. But in 1823, after Assam had been acquired by the British, the Burmese more or less by default and the Shahpuri crisis had occurred, the British felt that it was time to take Cachar under their wing, thereby making part of the Bengal frontier secure. Jaintia was ignored at the time, the Government not being aware that it contained a pass also - an indication of the extent of their ignorance of the geography of the frontier. The three Manipuri brothers in Cachar having fallen out among themselves, one of them, Chourjit Singh, had offered to become tributary to the British. This offer came at an opportune moment, and the British decided, on 22 May 1823, to take advantage of it, after first satisfying themselves that the Burmese had no right to Cachar.¹ Negotiations were begun with Chourjit Singh by the British Magistrate of Sylhet, through a messenger.

Unknown to the British, Govind Chandra had offered his submission to the Burmese Court, in return for help in recovering Cachar, after his plea had been rejected by Hastings. This offer was accepted by the Court of Ava. Several considerations would appear to have influenced them. Firstly, the Burmese, contrary to what the British believed, did have claims on Cachar, and on Jaintia as well. Cachar had been conquered together with Manipur in Hsin-byu-Shin's time and the ruler had agreed to pay tribute to the Burmese.²

1. BSPC, 4 November 1823, Extracts from judicial proceedings of May-July 1823.

2. Symes, An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, London, 1800, pp.78-80.

Subsequently, the Burmese could not enforce payment of tribute and it appears to have been discontinued after a while, but (as in the case of Siam), this fact did not change the status of Cachar in their eyes. The Burmese based their claim to suzerainty over Jaintia on the grounds that the state had once paid tribute to Assam, whose rights they had inherited.¹ As regards Cachar, there was also the fact that Govind Chandra was the legitimate ruler of Cachar. Installing him on his throne once again would have been an act befitting the King of Burma as the Lord of the Law of Righteousness. Also important was the fact that the Manipuris were using Cachar as a base for the recovery of Manipur. In 1820, they had almost effected the reconquest of the country, even shutting up the Burmese garrison in Manipur in the capital for a while. With Govind Chandra's offer of vassalage, the Burmese saw a chance to secure their possession of Manipur once and for all; and in the process of restoring Govind Chandra, they could also re-assert their claims to Cachar and neighbouring Jaintia. It was not until January 1824, that the Burmese actually entered Cachar. The Burmese decision was not directed against the British. Nevertheless, a British reaction to this fresh extension of Burmese authority was highly probable, even without the crisis over Shahpuri and their own plans for establishing a protectorate over Cachar. It shows ineptitude on the part of the Court not to have expected a British reaction.

1. Just as the Burmese claimed the Chittagong and Dacca districts, because they had once paid tribute to Arakan, whose rights they had inherited. The fact that they had not secured regular payment of tribute from Cachar and Jaintia did not give the Burmese any qualms about the legitimacy of their case.

Although the Shahpuri dispute had made the British more conscious of the exposed state of their eastern frontier, there is no evidence that they welcomed war as yet as a means of expelling the Burmese from Assam. In his letter to the Court of Directors in July 1823, Adam referred to the Burmese possession of Assam as 'a matter of regret' but insisted: 'Nothing can be more undesirable for us than so unprofitable a war [as one] with the Burmese would be'.¹ The Calcutta government still felt, therefore, that the inconveniences attendant upon a war with Burma outweighed the advantage regarding Assam that could be derived from it.

While the British attributed the Burmese attitude on Shahpuri to a general aggressive spirit, the Burmese attributed British conduct to the malignant influence of the Chittagong Arakanese. They too failed to see that the other party's claim had been made in good faith. Nevertheless, the Myowun of Arakan's first move, after the establishment of the British post at Shahpuri was simply to wait for the British to remove it - an indication that he wanted the matter to blow over without trouble. After waiting six months, he realized that the British detachment would not be withdrawn. He then reported the matter to the King and wrote also to the Governor-General asking again for an evacuation of the island so as to avoid a rupture between the two states.²

The Burmese Chronicle, the Konbaungzet Mahayazawin, describes what followed as seen from the Burmese side:

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1. HMS, Vol.660, Acting Governor-General Adam to Court of Directors, 20 July 1823.
 2. Wilson, Documents, No.17; for the supposed influence of the Chittagong Arakanese, see BSPC, 12 March 1824, Robertson to Swinton, 1 March 1824, No.26, enclosing Arakan Myowun's letter.

The Myowun of Arakan, Maha Mingyi Gyaw-Zwa, and other officials, reported to the king that foreigners from the town of Chittagong had ... planted a flag and set up a fort with a guard, for two to three months [sic], on the island of Shin-ma-byu, in the province of Arakan. On learning of this, the King felt that in spite of the garrison, the fort should not be allowed to stand; and a royal directive was issued, saying 'let the Myowun and other officials of Arracan destroy utterly the fort set up by those bad people' and this was done.¹

The Court's reaction is understandable, considering that they believed the British to be encroaching into Burmese territory. The Calcutta government's reaction on hearing of the expulsion of their garrison was to attribute exactly the same tendency to the Burmese. What is significant is that the Court was willing to let the matter rest after the expulsion of the British. There was no disposition at this stage to treat Shahpuri as a casus belli.

The British had several informants among the traders and ferrymen involved in the commerce between Chittagong and Arakan. From these sources it is possible to build up a picture of what happened in Arakan at this time. In the month of September 1823, Arakan was rife with rumours that an attack on Arakan by Chittagong Arakanese under Hynja's leadership was imminent. It will be recalled that the Burmese had suspected these people of having instigated the British occupation of Shahpuri. The Chittagong Arakanese appear also to have stolen some muskets in Arakan belonging to the Burmese. Against this background of suspicion, the King's orders arrived and were ceremoniously read out in Arakan town before the four Myowuns of Arakan, Ramri, Cheduba and Sandoway. The Myowun of Ramri was chosen to carry out the expulsion. Before this was done, the Burmese

1. Konbaungzet Mahayazawin, Vol.II, p.368.

sent a warning to the police post at Tek Naf (near Shahpuri), the principal British post in the vicinity of the Naf, informing them of the King's orders, and asking them to remove the force at Shahpuri, failing which they would have no alternative but to attack. On the night of September 24th, the Burmese retook Shahpuri, driving out the police detachment, and killing or wounding six of them, after the latter had rejected a demand to vacate the island.¹

Having expelled the British force, the Burmese left the island, which reverted to its previous untenanted position, a fact which the British did not discover till early in November. The Myowun of Ramri, in a subsequent message to the British post at Tek Naf, promised that no fort would be built on the island. This was clearly intended as a concession. The Burmese now hoped that relations with the British would gradually return to normal.² But this was not to be. The Calcutta government, on hearing the news, decided that the British right to Shahpuri must be upheld even at the risk of war.

George Swinton, Secretary in the Secret and Political Department in Calcutta, explained the Government's policy to the Magistrate of Chittagong in a despatch in October, 1823. The latter had uncritically passed on reports about an imminent Burmese invasion of Chittagong. Rightly dismissing these as alarmist, Swinton maintained that it was still necessary

1. BSPC, 10 October 1823, despatches of Lee Warner to Swinton, with enclosures, Nos. 1-11.

2. Just as the British hoped that after their re-occupation of Shahpuri, the situation would gradually return to normal.

to take immediate and decisive measures to check their petty but gradual encroachments on the Chittagong frontier, and ... to teach them a salutary lesson for the future ... that however desirous we are to avoid proceeding to extremities with those insolent and arrogant barbarians, we are prepared when necessary to resist any violation of British territory....¹

Clearly the Calcutta government had failed to grasp the essentially defensive character of the Burmese reaction: that the latter had merely retaken what they regarded as their own territory, just as the British were now proposing to do.

The Government worked out the form the 'salutary lesson' was to take. An expedition would be sent to retake Shahpuri and patrol the Naf, sinking any war-boats the Burmese might attempt to gather there. At first, it was proposed to send a naval force up river to Arakan town, if the rivers were found to be navigable, but this idea was abandoned when it was discovered that the Burmese had evacuated Shahpuri, and perhaps also because it would make a more general war imminent. In the meantime, letters would be sent to the King and Hlutdaw at Ava, explaining the reasons for the measures taken at the Naf, and asking for a removal of the officials responsible for the attack. It was recognized that the attack was almost certainly made upon the authority of the Court (as claimed by the Burmese themselves) but the Court, it was felt, should be given an opportunity to retract. If the 'barbarous and arrogant Burmese monarch' responded with some 'open act of hostility', the British would then seize his sea-ports and islands. Much was expected from this wider display of power. It was described as 'the most effectual measure to humble the overbearing pride of the Burmese monarch, to bring the contest to

1. BSPC, 17 October 1823, Swinton to Lee Warner, 8 October 1823, No. 11.

a speedy termination and to secure ourselves from petty encroachments and aggression in the future'.¹ But this course of action was envisaged only if the occupation of Shahpuri was greeted with fresh acts of hostility; for the moment, the British response was to be limited and defensive.

It was felt also that the time had come to demarcate a boundary in the wild country to the north of the Naf frequented by the elephant-hunters. The Magistrate was asked to request the Burmese to appoint an officer to collaborate in this task. If one was not sent, the Magistrate was to do the work himself, 'assuming the Morusi River as the boundary acknowledged by the Burmese themselves in 1794, and laying down the line from thence to the Eastwards and Northwards, according to the most authentic information procurable on the spot' The measure of taking the Morusi as part of the boundary would have secured most of the elephant-hunting tracts for the British; but the thirty years since 1794 had seen some changes, and Burmese authority now extended some 40 miles to the west of the Morusi.²

The situation in Chittagong was certain sooner or later to have an effect on the situation in the north-east, at the frontier with Assam. The process was hastened however by further news from Arakan. The Governor-General had replied to the Myowun's letter (received on 8 August 1823) demanding the evacuation of Shahpuri, with a letter re-asserting the British right to the island. It was sent through a Burmese-speaking messenger who reached Arakan town

1. BSPC, 10 October 1823, Resolution of Governor-General-in-Council, 8 October (copy to military department), No.12.

2. BSPC, 17 October 1823, Swinton to Lee Warner, 8 October 1823, No.3.

only after the Burmese attack had taken place. His report is worth reproducing in parts:

On arrival, '... he was sent for by the Rajah [Myowun] to whom he delivered the Governor-General's letter. It was read out in his presence by Hussein Ali ... Interpreter to the Rajah; they said in answer at the time: "Tell the Lord and Sahib Loge [the British], that Shahpuree belongs to us and not to them. That it is not proper they should keep a guard there. If they do, it will produce War, for which we are prepared. We do not mean to keep a Guard there, but the English shall not, as it is our right".

Given the Burmese belief that the island was theirs, this message can even be regarded as conciliatory; for the Burmese were not proposing to occupy it themselves. However, a few days later, the Myowun summoned the messenger, who reported him as saying:

If you attempt to take Shapuree, we shall invade Bengal by Assam [and] Goalpara; whither three thousand men have gone - and we shall enter Chittagong by the mountains from Gurjenea.... The Sultan [sic] of Ava has armies ready for the invasion of your country on every point. It was by his order that we drove you from Shapuree, and by his order, it shall be maintained.

The actual royal order requiring the expulsion of the British force was then read out to the messenger as a demonstration of this. The messenger was then given a letter from the Myowun to the Governor-General, which, after re-asserting the Burmese claim to Shahpuri, added: 'If you want tranquility, be quiet; but if you rebuild a stockade at Shein-mabu, I will cause to be taken, by the force of arms, the cities of Dacca and Moorshedabad, which originally belonged to the great Arakan Rajah whose chokies [posts] and pagodas were there'. Complaining of a recent outrage by the Chittagong Arakanese [We purchased one hundred muskets; these have been seized

by the Company's subjects') the Myowun went on to demand the surrender of certain of their leaders, including Hya¹

Time was to show that the Myowun was issuing empty threats; he had neither the resources nor the authority to order an invasion of Bengal; nor had any preparations been made by either himself or the Court for this measure. He was evidently hoping to frighten the British into dropping their claim on Shahpuri island. The actual effect was to cause them to think about improving their strategic position to the north east, whence the Myowun had threatened to invade Bengal. It was decided on 31 October 1823, to send British reinforcements to the districts of Sylhet and Rangpur adjoining the Burmese territories. The Magistrate of Sylhet was asked, on the same day, for information concerning the passes leading from Assam and Manipur into Cachar and Jaintia (the Government had discovered by then that the latter state also offered access into Bengal). With regard to Cachar, an unexpected difficulty had arisen. Chourjit Singh, who had made the initial offer of vassalage to the British, was discovered to have no authority in Cachar. This was in the hands of the youngest of the Manipuri princes, Gambhir Singh, and he refused to accept protectorate status when the offer was made to him instead. This problem was given serious attention after the threat from Arakan was received.²

The Government's preparations were not purely defensive, however. In case war did break out, they determined to take

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1. BSPC, 31 October 1823, Captain Baker to Lt.Col. Casement, Military Secretary, 22 October 1823, No.12, submitting Arakan Myowun's letter.
 2. BSPC, 31 October 1823, Swinton to Scott, Commissioner at Rungpore, No.15 and Moore, Magistrate of Sylhet, 31 October 1823, No.16. The evidence shows that it was the Myowun's threat which was the decisive factor.

advantage of it to seize Assam and Manipur and possibly Arakan also. David Scott, Commissioner at Rangpur, and long an advocate of the annexation of Assam, was asked his opinion on how best the Burmese could be dislodged from that state.¹ At the same time, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Edward Paget, was asked to draw up war-plans. He was informed that if a war became inevitable, the Burmese were to be driven out of Assam, Manipur and perhaps Arakan, thus creating 'A barrier of friendly states between the British and Burmese Dominions along the whole of our Eastern Frontier'. These states were to be restored to their former indigenous rulers, or their descendants. A naval expedition would also be fitted out to seize Burma's sea-ports and islands. This, it was believed, would compel the King to sue for peace quickly, and by demonstrating to him the vulnerability of his coastal possessions to British sea-power, would ensure the future tranquility of the border.²

The British were clearly expecting important gains from any conflict with Burma. Nevertheless, they were, at this stage prepared to forego these opportunities if the Burmese did not contest their re-occupation of Shahpuri. Scott was explicitly warned against holding out any promises of intervention to the Assamese rebels. To the Commander-in-Chief, the Government explained its policy as follows:

Adverting to the peculiar inconvenience of a contest with the State of Ava, and to the injury which must thence result to our commercial interests, and to the utterly worthless and insignificant

1. BSPC, 31 October 1823, Swinton to Scott, 31 October 1823, No.15.

2. BSPC, 31 October 1823, Swinton to J. Nicol (Adjutant-General), 31 October 1823, No.17.

correctly, as it turned out, that the Burmese were planning to invade Cachar to seize the Manipuri rebels. Unfortunately, the Calcutta Government suspected this to be the preparation for the co-ordinated attack on Bengal threatened by the Myowun of Arakan. Scott was made 'Agent of the Governor-General to the North-East' with over-all responsibility for the area. The existing policy vis-a-vis Assam was re-affirmed:

In the event of any hostile moment in Assam or elsewhere consequent upon the reoccupation of Shahpuri the Governor-General-in-Council contemplates the expediency of adopting measures for assisting the Assamese in expelling the Invaders of their country You will therefore be prepared to encourage this disposition on the part of the Assamese should the above contingency arise.¹

When carefully scrutinized even these early reports of Burmese military activity show clearly that the preparations in question were in fact the Court of Ava's response to the appeal of Govind Chandra, the dispossessed ruler of Cachar. The Burmese in Assam while complaining of the protection given by the British to the Assamese refugees, had no plans for an attack on Bengal.

In a private note to George Swinton, Secretary in the Political and Secret Department, Scott suggested that the Burmese should be made to evacuate Assam even if the dispute to the south-east was resolved peacefully.² Although the letter was included in the records, the suggestion was ignored. It would not, in fact, have been approved of by the Court of Directors.

1. BSPC, 14 November 1823, Swinton to Scott, 14 November 1823, No.12.

2. BSPC, 14 November 1823, private letter from Scott to Swinton, 31 October 1823, No.16.

Early in December 1823, more reports reached Calcutta, this time showing conclusively that the Burmese were advancing towards Cachar. Scott had already written to the Myowun of Assam, telling him that he believed the current ruler of Cachar, Gambhir Singh, to be in alliance with the British, though no actual treaty had been concluded as yet. He was instructed by the Governor-General-in-Council to write again to the Myowun, informing him of the "prior titles" of the British to Cachar. He was also asked to conclude a treaty with Govind Chandra, then living in Bengal, because of Gambhir Singh's refusal to accept a treaty. Govind Chandra's Manipuri rivals were to be given pensions as compensations. It was decided that if the Burmese persisted in entering Cachar, force would be used to expel them; but in the first instance, persuasion would be attempted.¹

Persuasion, however, was destined to fail. Had the Calcutta Government informed the Court of Ava, or at least, the Myowun of Assam, of its decision to establish a protectorate over Cachar as soon as this had been taken (in May 1823), a collision might conceivably have been avoided, though this measure might equally well have resulted in a Shahpuri-type situation. By December, however, the Burmese in Assam and (although the British did not know it yet) in Manipur were already about to move, upon the most explicit orders from the Court of Ava and in pursuit of a strategic objective of great importance, the liquidation of the threat posed by the three brothers to Burmese rule in Manipur. In these circumstances, a letter from

1. BSPC, 12 December 1823, Swinton to Scott, 12 December 1823, No.11. Scott was given the discretion to veto the plan to restore Govind Chandra if he chose, but he agreed that it would be the best idea. BSPC, 17 January 1824, Scott to Swinton, 31 December 1823, para. 6.

Scott asserting a 'prior title' to the state could scarcely have been expected to stop them.

In any case, no 'prior title' existed at this stage. Cachar had paid tribute in the past to the Burmese who were now intervening by invitation of its legitimate but dispossessed ruler. The British approaches, on the other hand, had been rejected by the usurper Gambhir Singh. The British position was to improve later when Govind Chandra signed a treaty of alliance with them instead. This, however, was only after fighting had broken out in Cachar between British and Burmese troops, in January 1824, and it did not invalidate the relative superiority of the Burmese legal position as against the British in 1823.

Meanwhile, fresh developments had taken place at the Chittagong frontier. The Burmese authorities in Arakan already had a suspicion apparently that the British were about to make some military move. On 9 November, the Magistrate of Chittagong reported that the Burmese official in charge at Maungdaw had written asking '... with what intention troops are assembling in different parts of the district, and why Mugs [Chittagong Arakanese] are employed....'¹ Evidently, the Burmese were referring to the reinforcement of the Chittagong District, and to employment of the Arakanese for general service purposes. They seem to have suspected however that some Chin Pyan type incursion was afoot. The Magistrate reported: 'It is evident that the Maungdaw people are apprehensive of something as they are strengthening their stockade....'²

1. BSPC, 21 November 1823, Magistrate of Chittagong to Swinton, 9 November.

2. Ibid.

On 21 November, sepoys landed on Shahpuri and found it to be deserted. They began building a stockade, while the six ships of the British expedition, mounting thirty guns in all, entered the Naf to prevent the Burmese assembling war-boats there. The Burmese were thoroughly alarmed. On the day of the Shahpuri landing itself, a messenger arrived with a letter from the official at Maungdaw complaining that Arakanese from Chittagong had recently plundered a village in Arakan, and asked if the British were planning something of the same nature. Colonel Shapland was asked not to take advice from one Rikut Nam Tuk, who was held by the Burmese to be responsible for the raid. This reflects the Burmese belief that the Arakanese had been instigating the British throughout. Colonel Shapland assured the Burmese that no further military operations were intended; the latter, however, noticing the warships and boats, the stockade being built at Shahpuri and Tek Naf, and the Arakanese working with the British, seem to have been afraid, at least at that time, that an invasion of Arakan was imminent.¹ They now reported to the Court that Shahpuri had been retaken, and that 'ships and boats' had assembled in the Naf.² Nor were they totally wrong. Some kind of attack would undoubtedly have been made on Arakan if the Burmese had attempted to retake Shahpuri. The British commander was informed that the local Burmese officials had passed the matter on to Ava, and would make no further move till fresh orders arrived. The Maungdaw official felt obliged however, to issue a fresh warning on the consequences of

1. BSPC, 12 December 1823, Lt. Colonel Shapland to Major Patrickson, Deputy Adjutant-General, 22 November and 26 November 1823, with enclosures.

2. Konbaungzet Mahayazawin, Vol.II, p.368.

the re-occupation. The letter is worth reproducing because it conveys the Burmese view-point at the time very clearly:

The island of Shapure has been held in possession by us from the time of the grandfather of the present Raja and the country on the western side of the Naf belongs to you. Whenever the Mugs or Mussulmans [from British territory] wished to carry over their cattle to feed on the island of Shapure [sic] they received a written order... from the Uchurung [the official]. You now say the island of Shapuree is your possession. If you continue to retain possession and keep ships and boats and a large body of soldiers there it will lead to a great quarrel.¹

Had the Burmese authorities made such details available before attacking the island, it might have served to modify Calcutta's belief that the Burmese were encroaching into previously unclaimed lands rather than asserting traditional limited rights to Shahpuri. There was justice in Amherst's contention, in his letter to the Court of Directors of 23 December 1823, that the Burmese should have attempted to prove their claim by evidence 'more valid and convincing than mere assertion'.² The British on their part had provided evidence to the Myowun of Arakan in support of their claim, although as indicated earlier it was rather unsubstantial and also involved no previous occupation of the island.

Since there had been no retaliation by the Burmese after the British re-occupation of Shahpuri, the plan of seizing Assam,

1. BSPC, 24 December 1823, Magistrate of Chittagong to Swinton, 1 December, enclosing letter from Burmese official.

2. Wilson, Documents, No.149. But another clash was building up over Cachar, which would also have had to be solved if peace was to be maintained, and there were the long term problems of Assam, on the one hand, and the refugees and Chittagong and Dacca on the other.

Manipur and the coastal possessions of the King had to be suspended until such time as Ava's reaction became known. The Court of Directors was informed of this. While assuring the Directors that war would be avoided as far as possible, the Governor-General made the following very significant observation:

We are impressed with a strong persuasion, founded on the experience of the past, that no permanent security from the aggression of the Burmese... can be safely calculated on, until that people shall have been made to feel the consequences of their provoking the British Government to depart from the pacific tone of policy it has hitherto pursued, the motives for which, there is too much reason to believe, have always been misunderstood by the arrogant and barbarous Monarch of Umrapoora.¹

It seems probable that the prospect of war could not have been displeasing to the Calcutta Government, for, judging from the above extract it was felt to be the only source of permanent security. Admittedly the war of 1824-1826 did bring about a marked change in the Burmese demeanour towards the British. One suspects that had it not been for the attitude of the Court of Directors, a more ambitious policy would have been adopted by the Calcutta Government much sooner. As it was, any attempt to challenge the British occupation of Shahpuri was held to constitute grounds for hostilities, and the Court of Directors was informed of this also.

The report from the Arakan authorities of the new developments would have reached Amarapura in December. On the evidence presented by the Myowun to the Court, the British appeared, at the

1. Wilson, Documents, No.23. The Commander-in-Chief was informed that there was no need for military preparations, as things stood, since the Burmese threat of general hostilities had proved to be empty. BSPC, 24 December 1823, Swinton to Nicol, 24 December 1823, No.5.

instigation of Arakanese rebels, to be renewing an aggression (on Shahpuri) that had already been foiled on one occasion, and as likely to launch a more general attack on Arakan (because of the warships in the Naf). This development it should be noted, had been preceded two years earlier by Chadrakanta's invasion of Assam from British territory. The Assam episode had led the Burmese to give serious attention to the matter of war with the British. Now another crisis appeared to be brewing in Arakan. The desire to teach the British a lesson that would ensure their future good behaviour - just as the British saw a 'lesson' as ensuring future Burmese good behaviour - is evident even in the sketchy account given in the Konbaungzet Mahayazawin. This describes the King as telling the Hludaw that the English, in spite of the commercial privileges he had granted them, had seized 'Shin-ma-byu' island in Arakan and that the English 'will not be humbled and quietened for good unless we settle this matter well', to which the Hludaw agreed.¹

According to the chronicle, the King decided to send out a force to occupy the island. In fact, to judge from Arakanese statements preserved in the British records the Court ordered the Arakan authorities to seize the island, and the large army sent from Upper Burma probably had instructions to uphold the Burmese claim by beating off likely British counter-attacks. It is clear from these decisions that the Court ^{was} willing to fight the British to retain Shahpuri.

In an official polity statement sent by the Hludaw to the British at this time through the Myowun of Pegu (in reply to Amherst's letter to the Court) the Burmese made it clear that

1. Konbaungzet Mahayazawin, Vol.II, p.368.

Shahpuri was the only likely cause of war. In this letter, the Burmese stated that Chittagong Rami and Bengal belonged to Arakan, and accused the British of harbouring rebels from frontier areas; but these matters "were not worth notice, on account of the commercial intercourse carried on by sea-faring people."¹ In other words because of the large trade between Burma and British India, these issues could be overlooked. However, the letter goes on to assert that Shahpuri was Burmese territory and makes it clear (in menacing language) that the Burmese intend to uphold their claim. Further, the Burmese had not given up all hope of an accommodation yet, for in the last paragraph, the Governor-General is asked to investigate the situation again and to represent his case via Arakan. Subsequently, the Court received the wrong impression that (for reasons that will be discussed later) that the British were willing to give up Shahpuri. According to the chronicle, the King's reply was "We shall be free from such incidents in the future only if the English are humbled. Therefore, advancing as far as Godawpallin Panwa [Rutnapallin and Ramu], attack and destroy them."²

The Burmese would therefore attack and defeat the British and thereby ensure their future good behaviour. Although the Burmese claimed eastern Bengal, the Burmese objective was not the conquest of these districts, to judge from the chronicle.

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1. Wilson, op.cit., No.31 (Appendix D). This letter appears to have been written after the reception of the news of the British re-occupation of Shahpuri but before news of the subsequent British evacuation of the island and a supposed offer by them to surrender it, and of fighting in Cacha was received; for these developments are not referred to.
 2. Konbaungzet Mahayazawin, Vol.II, p.370.

Subsequent Burmese military movements are fully described in the chronicle. Maha Bandula left Amarapura on the 1st January 1824, with a nucleus of 1,800 or 2,000 men. This force descended by boat to Hsin-byu-gyun, whence a route existed - partly by land and partly by water - to Arakan town. Maha Bandula then set about raising levies from the villages between Pagan and Prome; and sent a small advance party into Arakan under Mingyi Maha Thihathuya. Judging from certain references in the British records, this force arrived at Arakan town early in February.¹

The decision of the Court of Ava to reoccupy Shahpuri had, of course, been communicated long before this to the authorities in Arakan, who were ordered to do this immediately. As on the occasion of their first attack on the island, the four Myowuns assembled at Arakan town to hear the royal mandate, and then moved down to the Naf (the Myowun of Arakan being represented by his son). Their total force amounted to about 1,500 men. Their camp was at the village of Lowadhung. It no longer exists but appears to have been a village a little to the east of Maungdaw which was a post on the bank of the Naf.

Had they carried out their attack, the Calcutta Government would have embarked immediately on general hostilities; but certain factors caused the Burmese to hesitate, and the war was consequently delayed by two months. Thomas Campbell Robertson, who had been sent out to Chittagong to replace the ailing Lee Warner as Magistrate, had written to the Myowun of Arakan, asking for someone to be sent to participate in a proper demarcation of the boundary. This letter reached the Myowuns at Lowadhung. They seem to have thought he wished

1. Konbaungzet Mahayazawin, Vol.II, p.369-70.

to discuss Shahpuri, whereas he had in fact been referring to the unmapped country to the north of the Naf. They immediately sent four deputies to Robertson (then at Tek Naf), with a letter from them which reiterated the Burmese claim to the island. 'The Deep [island] Shapuree belongs to our sovereign and never did belong to the English. Nevertheless, they, listening to the suggestions of the Mug [Chittagong Arakanese], who are miscreants, have built a fort thereon.' Consequently, they indicated to Robertson, the King had ordered the immediate destruction of the fort. Nevertheless Robertson discovered that the envoys were willing to settle for 'a declaration on our part that the Island should remain unoccupied by either [side]'. By another coincidence, Robertson had ordered the removal of the force on Shapuri because its ranks were being thinned by disease at an alarming rate. The Burmese had discovered this and had assumed it to be part of the new policy of conciliation. The deputies then expressed the hope that the evacuation would lead to better relations.

Robertson passed the proposal of neutralization on to Calcutta, warning the government that its rejection would mean war, which it might be better to postpone until after the monsoon. In the meantime, in order to avert an immediate attack on the island, or on the Chittagong district, he gave the Burmese the impression that the proposal would be accepted.¹ On the other hand the Myowun of Arakan (judging from his conduct on this occasion) appears to have been very glad to avert a war with the British. It would seem in fact, that

1. BSPC, 24 January 1824, Robertson (officiating magistrate at Chittagong) to Swinton, 11-16 January 1824, Nos.1-4. Robertson favoured delaying hostilities till the dry season.

he misrepresented Robertson's interim acceptance of the Burmese proposal as involving an actual surrender of the island to the Burmese. This, at least, is how the chronicle describes it.¹ The Court's reaction to the British withdrawal from Shahpuri has already been discussed.

The proposal to neutralize the island was rejected by the Calcutta Government also, not because they suspected that Ava would reject it (they seem to have had no such doubts) but because it was felt that the time for compromise was past. The Burmese attack on the island in September could not be overlooked. Besides '... the uniform experience of many years has satisfied Government that moderation has only served to augment the arrogance, presumption and encroaching spirit of the Court of Ava ... it becomes incumbent on us... to adopt a tone and conduct with regard to the insolent demands and hostile acts of the Burmese Government that will prove better calculated to teach it the respect due to the British power'.²

The British rejection of the neutralization idea is interesting, because it seems to be based on two

1. Konbaungzet Mahayazawin, Vol.II, p.370.

2. BSPC, 24 January 1824, Swinton to Robertson, 24 January 1824, No.5.

misconceptions concerning Burmese policy: first, that the Burmese were encroaching on the island, and second, that the Burmese had been emboldened by the previous passivity of the British, whereas in fact, the former had been pushed in the direction of war by what they regarded as British provocations.

A similar misunderstanding prevailed in the Bengal Government's despatch to Scott of 17 January. The magistrate of Sylhet had reported in a despatch of 9 January 1824, that a Burmese force of 3,000 to 4,000 men was about to enter Cachar from Manipur. It was now clear that the warnings issued by Scott of an impending, or as he claimed, actual British political connection with Cachar had failed to deter the Burmese. The Burmese were reported to be accompanied by an adherent of Govind Chandra, whom the British, as has been seen, had decided to install as ruler of Cachar. This made Scott suspect that the Burmese were acting on an invitation from Govind Chandra, whose overtures the British had previously spurned, and he suggested that Govind Chandra, who was living in British-controlled Bengal, be installed as ruler of Cachar under a joint Anglo-Burmese guarantee. This was rejected by the Calcutta Government: 'It is evident that the Burmese have no object in re-establishing Govind Chandra, but that of acquiring an influence and footing in the country hostile to the interests of the British Government'.¹

Clearly, the Government did not appreciate the seriousness of the threat posed by the Manipuri brothers in Cachar to the Burmese

1. BSPC, 17 January 1824, Swinton to Scott, 17 January 1824, No.6, para.6.

in Manipur - a threat which was the cause of their current intervention.¹ Nor apparently did they question their own right to form an alliance with Govind Chandra, although the Burmese had already established their suzerainty over him and the British had not yet done so and had not, it seems, even begun negotiations with him. In fact, if the British had no understanding with Govind Chandra in existence and their negotiations with the Manipuri brothers had failed they had no solid claim to Cachar at all at this stage. Even so Calcutta rejected Scott's suggestion of a modus vivendi in the shape of a joint Anglo-Burmese guarantee.

The news from the Sylhet magistrate of the impending advance into Cachar had reached Calcutta in mid-December, before that of the new crisis over Shahpuri, and it was to the former object that the British government first addressed itself. On 17 December, instructions went out to Scott to drive the Burmese out of Cachar if they persisted in entering it despite his warnings. Scott had suggested that the British troops should march into Assam and thereby compel a Burmese evacuation of Cachar. Cachar, according to Scott, was difficult country to campaign in, on account of the lack of roads and the hilly terrain. Scott had always been an advocate of intervention in Assam and it is possible that the military factor he cited was secondary as far as he was concerned. The Government would not order the measure at this stage, but made it clear that it would consider it in case of

1. On the other hand, whether or not the British recognized that the Burmese motive in seizing Cachar was connected with Burmese security, the fact remained that a Burmese presence in Cachar was a threat to their security. It was naive of the Court, and of the Burmese commander concerned, not to have expected the British to oppose their plan.

'further insults and provocation', and Scott was authorized to order it 'in case of emergency'. The expression 'further insults and provocation' suggest that the Government was prepared to order the measure even if it was not militarily essential. The test seems to have been the reaction of the Burmese commander in Cachar, and ultimately the invasion of Assam was undertaken even though it was found that the British troops could campaign effectively in Cachar. In the meantime, the British forces were order to advance to the Assam frontier. This threat, it was hoped, would induce the Burmese in Cachar to withdraw. Scott was also asked to bring the state of Jaintia into a tributary relationship with the Company (as urged by himself).¹

Despite its uncompromising policy with regard to current Burmese incursions into Cachar, the Government was prepared to let matters rest as they were if the Burmese withdrew from that state. But, as has been pointed out, this was most improbable in view of the orders from Ava. This was followed towards the end of January by news from the northeast that two Burmese columns had entered Cachar, one from Manipur and one from Assam. The former column had defeated Gambhir Singh, who had fled to British territory, while the other had itself been attacked and defeated by a British force. The two Burmese columns were able to join forces, and thereby force the British to vacate Cachar. Scott again urged an advance into Assam although the initial British victory showed it was possible to fight in Cachar. The Government still would not order the measure, but the reason they gave was significant - the lateness of the season they said, made it

1. BSPC, 17 January 1824, Magistrate of Sylhet to Swinton, with enclosures, 9 January, No.4 and Swinton to Scott, 17 January 1824, No.6.

inconvenient. They may have taken note of Robertson's suggestion that it would be more prudent to postpone hostilities until after the rains. However, Scott was once again reminded that he had the power to order the advance into Assam in case of emergency. In the meantime, Scott was ordered to expel the Burmese by further offensive measures in Cachar itself. The government expressed satisfaction at Scott's report that Gambhir Singh had surrendered himself to the British and that Govind Chandra, with whom the British had now established contact, had denied having invited the Burmese in. Scott suspected that Govind Chandra had in fact made this invitation and in any case, the British themselves had entered Cachar without Govind Chandra's consent.¹

More news reached Calcutta from Robertson in Chittagong towards the end of January - Maha Bandula had sent some officials to investigate the Shahpuri dispute. Upon their arrival at Maungdaw, the local authorities apparently informed them of the supposed surrender of the island. On 20 January, they crossed over to the island, spent some time there and then left after burning some huts left behind by the British. The officials, seemed to have objected also to the presence of a warship near the island, as being inconsistent with the surrender of the island. The officers and some of the crew were invited ashore, arrested and sent

1. BSPC, 30 January 1824, private letter of Scott to Swinton, 20 January, No.13 and Swinton to Scott, 27 January, No.14. However, Govind Chandra proved willing now to enter into a subsidiary alliance with the British, and one was concluded.

off to Arakan town.¹ The Myowun, seeing his hopes for a settlement evaporating, protested vehemently to Maha Bandula, who, on hearing the news immediately ordered the release of the party. They arrived safely at Tek Naf on 17 February. By this time, however, the damage had been done; the authorities at Calcutta had already taken important decisions on the assumption that the crew were unlikely to be returned.

Robertson also reported that the Burmese had protested vigorously at his having sailed up the Morusi river on a survey. This river, as has been pointed out, had marked the limit of Burmese authority in the 1790s, and was desired by the Calcutta Government as the boundary (irrespective of the fact that Burmese authority extended by 1823 to villages which lay some distance to the west of it) because it would have secured for the British the bulk of the elephant-hunting tracts. It appeared that a fresh area of dispute had arisen.²

For the moment, however, the Calcutta Government's attention was concentrated on the development in the vicinity of Shahpuri. Although furious over what had happened, they seem to have been glad at obtaining supposed clarification of the Court of Ava's attitude towards the Shahpuri dispute. The Court had yet to reply to the Governor-General's letters sent in mid-November, and Burmese actions on the Chittagong frontier had till then been the work of local officials, though these had claimed to be acting on Ava's orders. The latest development was allegedly the work of men deputed from the capital (in actual fact, by Maha Bandula, but the reports reaching Tek Naf had described them as "royal viziers"). The kidnapping of

1. BSPC, 6 February 1824, Robertson to Swinton, 22 January 1824, No.2.

2. Ibid.

the ship's crew was described by the Governor-General-in-Council as 'an act of treachery and outrage'. Angrily, the Government demanded to know why the boats carrying the officials to the island to burn the British huts had not been attacked and sunk together with their passengers. The development at Chittagong, taken together with those in Cachar, indicated to the Governor-General-in-Council that '... the Burmese will not abandon their insolence of tone and hostile line of conduct until they shall have been made to feel the inadequacy of their means to contend, by force of arms, with British Power'.¹

Robertson was ordered to make an attempt to secure the release of the naval party and if this seemed unlikely to succeed, to make a retaliatory attack on the forces of the Myowuns assembled near Maungdaw. The Commander-in-Chief was once again asked to prepare for a war, which would be 'inevitable' if the party were not returned.²

This was followed by more news from Cachar. The Government received copies of letters written by Mingyi Maha Gyaw-Zwa, the Myowun of Assam, who was now discovered to be the field commander in Cachar. The first was written when the Myowun was still in Assam, about to start on the expedition, and having just received Scott's letter asserting British rights to Cachar. The Myowun seems to have believed that the British motive in keeping the Burmese out of Cachar was to protect the Manipuris, and to have been at a loss to understand this. He replied to Scott, making a bitter criticism of the

1. BSPC, 6 February 1824, Swinton to Robertson, 31 January 1824, No.4.

2. BSPC, 6 February 1824, Swinton to Adjutant-General, 31 January 1824, No.5.

Manipuris ('unmindful of their oaths of allegiance and the favours conferred on them by His Majesty... occasioning serious disturbances in every country they have been... very turbulent men') and went on: 'We are subjects of His Burmese Majesty and are not to be intimidated at your hindering us. You should not for the sake of ungrateful men and rebels cause a rupture between two Great States'.¹

The Myowun urged Scott to persuade the Manipuris to submit of their own will to their Sovereign. The Assam force then entered Cachar and was attacked and defeated by the British at Bikrampur, while the force from Manipur defeated Gambhir Singh, who fled into British territory. The Myowun wrote again to Scott, complaining that his force, while pursuing the Manipuris, had:

... arrived at Beekrampore, when it had not to contend with the Cassayers (Manipuris) but against numberless sepoys who opposed them with arms, as on the occasion of Kingbering's [Chin Pyan's] escape from Arracan, when he took refuge in the English territories after exciting a rebellion ... [and] when [the Assamese rebels] violating their oaths of allegiance caused an insurrection at Assam and fled to the English dominions.²

Having received Scott's subsequent letter stating that the British planned to restore Govind Chandra, the Myowun argued that there was now no conflict on this point, and that by surrendering the Manipuris the British would only be promoting Govind Chandra's benefit.

1. BSPC, 6 February 1824, Davidson (assistant to Scott), to Swinton, 16 January 1824, submitting Burmese letter.

2. BSPC, 13 February 1824, Scott to Swinton, 31 January 1824, No.6, submitting Burmese letters. Although the Myowun seems to have been willing to content himself with the recovery of the Manipuris, we do not know whether the Court of Ava would have agreed to abandon its projected protectorates over Cachar and Jaintia.

But if this was not done the King's orders were 'that without reference to any country, they must be pursued and apprehended.'¹

It is clear from these exchanges that the Burmese, after 31 years, had not understood the British attitude on the surrender of refugees. The British, on their part, seem to have failed to realize that Burmese policy towards Cachar was an inevitable response to the harassment which the Manipuri brothers had conducted from their sanctuary in that state. Instead, it was described as revealing 'the ambitious designs and insufferable arrogance' of the Court of Ava.

After the skirmishes with Gambhir Singh and the British the Burmese forces from Assam and Manipur had joined forces and stockaded themselves at Jatrapur, five miles from the Sylhet frontier. They consisted of some 6,000 men, of whom only about 2,000 were Burmese. Previous to his defeat at Bikrampur, the Myowun of Assam had also written to the Raja of Jaintia asking him to pay to Ava the tribute once sent to Assam.²

While ordering further efforts to expel the Burmese from Cachar the Government began to consider the question of general hostilities. The arguments against it were the lateness of the season and the possibility that the Court might still meet British wishes respecting Cachar and Shahpuri. This emerges from a despatch dated 10 February to Commodore Grant, the British naval commander in the Indian Ocean, in which he was alerted to the probability of war but also informed;

We shall again have the honour of addressing you at an early period when we shall be better able to

1. Ibid.

2. Wilson, Documents, No.21(C).

judge of the temper and disposition of the Court of Ava on its being informed of the measures of retaliation which we have authorized to the southeast frontier of Chittagong /in case the naval party were not returned/ as well as of the actual attack and defeat of a party of Burmese troops by a British Detachment in the country of Cachar.¹

It was unlikely, however, that Ava's response to these events could have been discovered in time for effective military operations before the monsoon in June. At any rate, three days later, on 13 February, the Government took the plunge and ordered an advance into Assam and seizure of Gowhati. One factor behind this change appears to have been the receipt of a despatch from Robertson of 27 January, reporting that the messenger who had taken his demand for the release of the naval party to Arakan town had heard a report that: 'Twelve thousand men with their surdars have arrived by order of the Court of Ava at Talak and are proceeding with the intention of making war in this direction....'²

This, of course, was Maha Bandula's force at Hsin-byu-gyun, wrongly located in this report at Talak. It was clear now that there was no possibility of the British claim to Shahpuri being conceded explicitly by the Court of Ava while there was every possibility that it had sanctioned actual incursions in that quarter.³ This was Robertson's view, stated in a despatch of 1 February, and on 13 February, the Government replied agreeing 'that all expectation of an amicable adjustment... must now be abandoned'.⁴

1. BSPC, 13 February 1824, Swinton to Commodore Grant, 10 February, No.1.

2. BSPC, 13 February 1824, submitted by Robertson to Swinton, 27 January 1824, No.18.

3. It had, of course, but the British could only guess at this.

4. BSPC, 13 February 1824, Swinton to Robertson, 13 February 1824, No.24.

Although Robertson's report of Burmese military reinforcements reaching Arakan would have been regarded as a sufficient pretext for general hostilities, a letter written by Scott appears to have strengthened the Calcutta Government's resolve to take the offensive in Assam. In this letter, Scott argued that no effective defence or retaliation could be made if the Burmese chose to sail down the Brahmaputra on a piratical incursion during the rainy season. Their war-boats were so fast that the British would have no advance notice. On the other hand, once the monsoon began the occupation of Assam would be impossible. The monsoon hitherto cited as a reason for delaying hostilities till after the rains, was now used by Scott to justify an immediate invasion of Assam.¹ The argument was accepted and on 13 February the advance was ordered to be carried out within a month. Apart from Scott's recommendation and the news from Chittagong the Government may have realized also that the attacks on the royal forces in Cachar were bound to elicit a warlike reaction from the Court.

The Government now considered the demands that were to be made on the Burmese as the price of peace; and the general strategy that was to be followed. These were discussed in minutes by the Governor-General and Fendall, the other member of the Council. On 20 February 1824, a resolution was passed embodying the substance of the two minutes. The actual proclamation of war was delayed until 5 March, so as not to give the Burmese in Assam time to prepare defences by a premature disclosure of British intentions.

1. BSPC, 13 February 1824, letter from Scott to Lt. Colonel McMorine, British commander, Assam frontier, 6 February, No.6.

After the Court heard of the retreat of their force from Cachar, their policy paradoxically became more peaceful. By May 1824, Burmese policy had changed completely. By this time, the Burmese Court no longer desired war - which the King had certainly decided on after the news of the supposed surrender of Shahpuri by the British. The reasons for this change are not clear. Perhaps, the King felt that the object of chastising the British - his original object - was not worth a war, and the interruption of commerce.¹ Instead, court policy now was to demand the surrender of refugee leaders, and the release of Govind Chandra whom the Burmese would then install as tributary ruler of Cachar. Despite David Scott's statements the Burmese were not aware that the British claimed Cachar as a protectorate. British intervention in Cachar was interpreted as an attempt to assist the Manipuri brothers, and they do not appear to have been aware of conflicting claims with regard to Cachar.

Even before May 1824, there were signs that war was no longer the Burmese intention. Early in April 1824, probably, T.C. Robertson received a letter from the Myowun of Arakan. The Myowun states that Maha Bandula had proceeded from Ava to execute the King's orders concerning Shahpuri, when it appeared that the Shahpuri affair had been settled. However, at this point, the British had assisted the Manipuris against the Burmese.

To Pearn the reason for this, the Myowun was sending with the General's consent, an official "to learn what is the case

1. The Burmese chronicle, which the writer has not been able to consult on this point may throw more light on the matter.

and quickly send me a letter about it."¹

Maha Bandula, therefore, was trying to find out why the British supported the Manipuris. Had the Burmese been committed to war, they would surely not have sought such clarification. The Burmese incidentally were clearly not aware that the British had already declared war on them.

Robertson believed that the Burmese were trying to spy on the British by sending an official to Chittagong. He referred the Myowun to Scott for information concerning Cachar.

By May 1824, Maha Bandula's entire force had arrived in Arakan, and an army entered Chittagong, not to seek clarification of British policy towards the Manipuris, or to invade Bengal, but to demand the surrender of Arakanese rebels. Another force entered Cachar to demand a Manipuri rebel and the "release" of Govind Chandra. When, the King late in May, heard of the British occupation of Rangoon, he was surprised and ordered the Myowun of Pegu to settle all matters amicably. This suggests that he was not anticipating hostilities with the British at all by this stage.

1. ESPC, 20 April 1824, Robertson to Swinton, 10 April 1824, enclosing Myowun's letter.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE WAR

It is proposed, in the following two chapters, to concentrate on the political aspect of the war, with military developments being discussed only if necessary for background purposes. The objectives of the Burmese Court have already been discussed in the previous Chapter. British objectives were first discussed in mid-February 1824, by Governor-General Amherst and his colleague and subordinate in the Council, John Fendall. The substance of these discussions was incorporated in a resolution of the Governor-General-in-Council of 20 February 1824. In the following month, instructions were drawn up on the basis of this resolution for General Campbell, commander of the expeditionary force, and Major Canning, who, on account of his previous experience in Burma, was chosen as the expedition's Political Officer.¹ Before the expedition actually sailed, in late April, some minor changes were made in the demands. It is proposed to examine these demands in detail here.

It will be shown in the last chapter that the British objective in going to war was to end the state of tension and uncertainty at the frontier. It was expected that the experience of total defeat (not the slightest doubt was entertained about this being achieved) would deter the Burmese from ever again offering a military challenge to their neighbour.² As a further guarantee of security,

1. The instructions to Campbell and Canning are in Bengal Secret and Political Consultations (BSPC), 26 March 1824, Nos. 16 & 17.

2. This object was achieved; Burma never sought war again with the British.

however, it was decided also to redraw the frontier so as to place natural barriers between British territory and Burma. This meant that the Burmese would have to abandon for good all claims to Assam, Cachar and Jaintia. As regards Assam, the policy was that even in the unlikely event of a reply being received from the Court before the declaration of war, acceding to Amherst's demands in his letter of October 1823, the Burmese would still have to surrender that province as the price of peace.¹ The renunciation of Assam, Cachar and Jaintia by the Burmese constituted a hard-core of demands which were never altered or considered to be negotiable.² At this point, there was no British intention of annexing any of these states; the plan was to install indigenous rulers who would be in subsidiary relationship with the British. 'Our main object', declared Amherst, 'will not be the acquisition of new territory but the security of what we already possess'.³ Hastings' policies of expansion had resulted in a massive increase in costs and administrative responsibilities in India; consequently, the climate of opinion, both in Calcutta and in London, was much against further annexation.

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1. BSPC, 20 February 1824. Resolution of the Governor-General-in-Council, 20 February 1824, No.13. Indeed, in respect of Assam, the war was regarded as opportune, '... no argument can be required to demonstrate the expediency, if not the necessity of our taking advantage of the existing differences to dislodge them from this most commanding position'. BSPC, 20 February, Minute by the Governor-General, 14 February 1824, No.7. (My emphasis).
 2. The Burmese, if they wished to avoid hostilities now, were also to agree to a frontier between Chittagong and Arakan demarcated by the British.
 3. Amherst to Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras, 2 April 1824, quoted by Ritchie and Evans, Lord Amherst and the British Advance Eastwards to Burma, Oxford, 1899, p.82.

Arakan, it was decided, was to be left in Burmese hands. It had been a Burmese possession since the 1780s and, at this stage of the conflict, the Governor-General-in-Council was reluctant to interfere with traditional possessions as contrasted with recent acquisitions.¹ Such a policy would have made the re-establishment of friendly relations with Burma after the conflict more difficult. Moreover, there was less disquiet about the Burmese presence in Arakan than in Assam, Arakan being separated from the Chittagong district by wild and hilly country. On the other hand, the Government was of the view that a prolongation of the war by the Burmese should meet with punishment in the form of further demands. In such circumstances, Arakan could be asked for. Its occupation, in the event of the Burmese prolonging the war, was in any case already decided upon. As a vulnerable and exposed part of the Burmese Empire, and provocatively close to the centre of British power, it was an obvious target.

Although Arakan was not asked for in the terms that Major Canning took to Rangoon as Political Officer attached to the expedition, his letters to the Court contained a threat of further demands if peace was not concluded quickly.

Amherst had not intended originally to ask for Manipur either. The route from Manipur to Bengal was through mountain passes leading into Cachar and Jaintia, which the British expected to seal by occupying these two states. Also, Manipur was believed to have had long connections with Burma, like Arakan and unlike

1. '... the British Government entertains no wish or disposition whatever to annex permanently to its own Dominions, any portion of the ancient established territories of the King of Ava....' BSPC, 26 March 1824, Instructions to Sir Archibald Campbell, 26 March 1824, No.16.

Assam.¹ This policy was changed in the middle of April 1824. David Scott, the Governor-General's Agent to the northeast, urged that an independent government be established in Manipur. The proposal was prompted by his discovery that Amarapura was only thirteen days' march from the Manipur border. Scott argued:

The establishment of an independent Government in Manipur in alliance with us... would undoubtedly prove the most powerful and effectual check upon the Burma Government that could well be devised by affording us at all times a ready passage into the heart of their dominions and as an ally a military power that could upon occasion prove most useful to us....²

This proposal was accepted readily by the Calcutta Government and Manipur was added to the list of territories to be ceded by the Burmese.³ It had in fact already been decided to make an attempt on the Burmese capital by the Manipur route if hostilities continued into 1825. It seemed vastly more convenient than the advance via Rangoon, but not enough of the dry season was left to attempt it at that moment.⁴

It can be seen from the addition of Manipur to the British demands that the quest for security could lead to the same consequences as an avowed expansionist policy. Later, Sir Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras, was to argue that British security demanded the

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1. BSPC, 20 February 1824, Minute by the Governor-General, 14 February 1824, No.7. Amherst thought that most of Manipur had been subject to Ava for a century and a half. In fact, firm Burmese control was as recent as 1806.
 2. BSPC, 9 April, Scott to Swinton, 28 March 1824, No.5.
 3. BSPC, 9 April, Swinton to Scott, 9 April, No.8.
 4. The idea could not be carried out; the British force failed even to penetrate into Manipur because of the jungles, hills and swamps that lay in the way.

final crippling of Burmese power by the establishment of a Mon kingdom in Pegu.

The provinces of the Tenasserim coast - Tavoy and Mergui - stood in rather the same position as Arakan in British eyes. Their immediate occupation was not considered but in the event of the Rangoon expedition not producing quick results they seemed to offer an attractive field for military operations. As with Arakan, there was something else that made their seizure appear desirable. If Siam could be prevailed upon to accept these provinces - long a bone of contention between her and Burma - in return for allowing the Sultan of Kedah, then in exile in Penang, to return to that state, the British would be able to satisfy, at Burma's expense, their feeling of obligation to the Sultan.¹ The possibility of using these provinces as a bait to get Siam to participate in the war was also envisaged by Amherst, but at this stage without enthusiasm. '... I am not disposed if we can possibly avoid it, to enter so largely into the intrigues and politics of the Indo-Chinese nations'.²

It had become a practice with the British to make defeated Indian princes pay for part of the cost of their subjugation.³ Given this precedent and also the Calcutta Government's view that Burma was solely responsible for the war, it was inevitable that the policy

1. BSPC, 26 March 1824. Instructions to Sir Archibald Campbell, 26 March 1824, No.16, paras. 13 and 14.

2. Letter from Amherst to Munro, quoted by Ritchie and Evans, op.cit., p.82.

3. In India, this was usually effected by requiring the cession of territory, which yielded rich revenues. Canning, in a memorandum, suggested requiring a money payment. In any case, territorial acquisitions were not viewed with favour at this time, either at Calcutta or Longon, because they involved administrative costs and responsibilities.

should be applied to Burma also. The sum to be exacted was fixed at two million rupees, out of an estimated British war expenditure of five to six million rupees. But Canning was instructed to make sure first that the sum could be realised 'without distressing the Government of the country to a degree that is not contemplated'.¹

Although some provision was made for Burmese inability to pay, none was made for the intense repugnance with which the Burmese Court was to react to this proposal. The Government was unprepared by its Indian experience to expect such strong feelings on the matter, while the advice of Canning, in spite of his four visits to Burma, was that an indemnity should 'certainly' be exacted.²

It was decided also to secure better treatment at Rangoon for British vessels and traders. This was proposed by one Captain Mayflower Crisp, himself a trader at Rangoon. Early in November 1823, by which time news of the Shahrupri dispute had begun to get around Calcutta, he had approached the Government with grievances to be redressed in the event of war breaking out.³ One was the Burmese practice of keeping on shore the guns and ammunitions, and sometimes the stores, of visiting vessels until their departure. Besides having

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1. BSPC, 26 March 1824, Instructions to Sir Archibald Campbell, 26 March 1824, No.16.
 2. BSPC, 12 March, Canning's report, 4 March 1824, No.4. Canning proposed that upon the seizure of the capital after an ascent up the river, '... terms might be dictated, a leading feature of which I should certainly recommend to be the payment of the expenses of the war....' If this was refused by the Burmese, the country was to be annexed.
 3. BSPC, 21 November 1823, letters from Crisp to Bayley, Judicial Secretary and to Stirling, Deputy Secretary, Political Department 10 November and 17 November 1823, Nos. 11 & 13.

the force of tradition behind it, the regulation also had a practical justification - the guns of a hostile vessel could work havoc on a town built entirely of wood. This procedure put the vessel at the mercy of the local authorities, instead of the other way round. The British, however, found the practice humiliating, and the moment seemed to have arrived for putting an end to it. It was resolved, therefore, to press for 'the future exemption of all British vessels frequenting Rangoon and other ports of the Burmese Empire, from certain degrading and vexatious regulations to which they are now subject.'¹

Crisp complained also that British traders at Rangoon were constantly subjected to extortion by Burmese officials. It was essential to stop this:

The great and increasing trade to that country and the consumption of British manufactures which may be carried to a vast extent, urgently require that both person and property should be placed on a more secure footing than the unchecked and almost irresponsible power of a barbarian whose cupidity is raised by the sight of accumulated wealth and whose tribunals the most confirmed innocence is not protection against extortion.²

Crisp's solution was for an agent to be installed at Rangoon, with the right to appeal to the capital if cases of oppression occurred. These proposals were included in the demands that Major Canning took to Rangoon. At this stage, the agent's function was thought of as being purely commercial, that is, to reassure and represent British traders and thereby increase trade. Canning was

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1. BSPC, 26 March 1824, Instructions to Captain Canning, 26 March, No.17, para 7.
 2. BSPC, 21 November 1823, Crisp to Stirling, 10 November, No.11; Also, Crisp to Stirling, 17 November, No.13.

informed also that neither the abolition of the port regulations, nor the presence of a Resident was to be insisted upon if the Burmese showed great aversion to them.¹ With regard to extortion, it is doubtful if it happened very often. Corruption was customary with the Rangoon officials including judicial officials, but foreign traders were probably not subjected to it often.² The rapidly increasing foreign trade of Rangoon was a source of great profit to the town and to the royal treasury, and the local officials would have been concerned not to frighten it away. Judging from Crisp's subsequent career, as described by Professor Pearn, his purpose in having a Resident at Rangoon was to

1. BSPC, 26 March 1824, Instructions to Captain Canning, 26 March 1824, No.17.

2. Henry Gouger a British merchant who visited Burma in 1822, does not refer to such things at all in his Personal Narrative of Two Years Imprisonment in Burmah, London, 1860. Admittedly, the possibility of occasional acts of extortion by tribunals cannot be ruled out. However, if it was customary, Gouger would probably have referred to it.

dominate the Rangoon authorities. He was to keep up his efforts to secure one into the 1840s.¹

It is now necessary to review the Calcutta Government's military objectives. Immediately after the first Burmese attack on Shahpuri, in late September 1823, they had decided that in the event of a full-scale war, the most effective way of striking at Burma would be to occupy her coastal regions.² The failure of the Burmese Court to evict the British from these areas in spite of using the whole force at their command, would, so it was supposed, convince them of their military inferiority and secure a quick and lasting peace. Such lasting results could not be expected if operations were confined to the border of Northeast India. Over the next few months, from October 1823 to March 1824, the case for a naval expedition became stronger. The government had detected signs of a Burmese military build-up, which suggested to them that the Burmese planned to invade Bengal. An occupation of Rangoon and other towns would, it was believed, forestall any such attempt and thus spare the British the necessity of having to campaign in the unhealthy Chittagong district. A report submitted by Major Canning lent a further attraction to the idea of a naval expedition. Canning maintained that it would be a simple matter for the British to sail up the Irrawaddy on boats all the way to the capital, taking advantage of the monsoon winds.³ Sir Archibald Campbell, Commander of the

1. Pearn, op.cit., pp.136-137, 139, 142 and 158-159. He had a part to play in the events leading to the 2nd Anglo-Burmese War. See Pearn, op.cit., p.164.

2. BSPC, 10 October 1823, Resolution of Governor-General-in-Council, 8 October, No.12.

3. BSPC, 12 March, Canning's Report, 4 March, No.4. Nobody seems to have foreseen the dangers of an unpacified country along the banks, or of the exposure of the troops to the downpour of the monsoon.

expeditionary force, was asked to find out whether this would be possible. If it was not, his orders were to seize all the towns up as far as Prome. If this did not force the Burmese to negotiate, the British would make an attempt on the capital in the ensuing dry season via Manipur. The plan ultimately adopted, of advancing to the capital along the banks of the Irrawaddy was apparently not envisaged at this stage.¹

It was made clear in the instructions to Campbell that the Government attached great importance to demonstrating British military superiority. Campbell was ordered 'to produce such an impression of the power and resources of the British Empire in India as will deter the Court of Ava from any attempt again to disturb the friendly relations which may be re-established by the result of the present contest'.² It was partly with this psychological objective in view that the Government favoured Canning's idea of sailing straight to the capital and dictating terms there.³

Lastly, there was the question of Pegu. The Governor-General and Council were aware that Pegu also was a conquest of the Court of Ava. They decided, therefore, to use the spectre of an independent Pegu as a means of securing a quick submission from the Court and a reference was made to the possible independence of Pegu in the letters Canning carried for the Burmese court. But the execution of the threat was looked upon as something to be resorted to only if

1. BSPC, 26 March, Instructions to Sir Archibald Campbell, 26 March, No.16, para. 5 and 15.

2. Ibid., para. 4.

3. Ibid., para. 6. This plan would 'enable us to dictate our own terms and terminate the war in the speediest and most satisfactory manner'. Ibid. (My emphasis).

the military situation became extremely grave.¹ Neither at this stage, nor later, was there any British plan to annex Pegu.

It will be realized from the above that the objectives of the British at the outset of the war were limited, and concerned primarily with security. They were, however, capable of extension, and they were to cause increasing damage to Burmese interests as they developed.

It is clear that by this stage, the Court no longer wanted was with the British. The Burmese forces which entered Chittagong in May 1824, offered to withdraw into Arakan if the British handed over a few Arakanese refugee leaders; those which entered Cachar demanded the surrender of Govind Chandra (whom the Burmese would then install as tributary ruler of Cachar) and of a Manipuri rebel prince, but promised to withdraw into Burma if these demands were acceded to. These then, were the Burmese objectives. They cannot be regarded as being unreasonable. The Burmese knew nothing of the principle of political asylum; they believed friendly nations should not harbour political offenders. As for Cachar, they were still acting ^{on} Govind Chandra's invitation; they did not know he had entered into an alliance with the British and seemed in fact ^{to believe} that he was a British prisoner.

In May 1824, a Burmese army entered the Chittagong district from Arakan. In overall command of this force was an official from the capital, described in the British records as a royal "vizier" or official. He may have been Maha Bandula's brother, who was

1. Ibid., para.13, "... an extreme state of things" was the expression used.

said to be in the camp. Also present were the four Myowuns of Arakan. Maha Bandula had overall charge of the operation, but had remained behind at Arakan.

The Burmese made repeated efforts to make it clear that their intentions were peaceful. On approaching the advanced British outpost at Rutnapallin, they sent word that they had come to camp but not to fight. The outpost was abandoned by the sepoys and was occupied by the Burmese. At this point, the Burmese were fired upon by sepoys from Ramu. The former advanced to Ramu where a British force numbering about one thousand was stationed. According to a British witness:

... Captain Noton [the British commander] communicated with two horsemen who approached the opposite bank of the river, who disavowed any hostile intention of the Burmese towards us, but desired only that some rebellious subjects under our protection should be delivered up to them, offering at the same time to explain further the views of the Burmese, provided Captain Noton would allow them to cross the river with a guard of 100 horsemen and guarantee the safety of that party.¹

Captain Noton did not trust the Burmese and rejected the offer. He decided also to defend his outpost against the Burmese, since he expected - mistakenly, as it turned out - to be reinforced very soon. It is certain that the British were the first to fire in this engagement.

On the evening of the 14th, the enemy's whole force being concentrated on the opposite bank of the river apparently with the intention of crossing at a favourable opportunity [some units] were detached for the purpose of annoying the enemy on their encampment, and preventing

1. Wilson, H.H., Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, Calcutta, 1827, No.36.

them crossing the river, should they attempt it. Several rounds of grape and sharpnell were fired from the nine-pounders with effect, and appeared to create much confusion.¹

The Burmese then proceeded to attack the British force (on an order from the royal official). After a three day battle, they routed it completely. The Burmese were later to insist that add also that they had attempted to negotiate despite the firing the attack was a response to British firing. It must be remembered that the entry of an armed force into another country was not in their eyes, anything objectionable (as had become obvious some twenty-five years earlier, during the Hill mission). The Burmese were also not aware that the British were already at war with them.

The British expected an attack on Chittagong (which was not adequately defended at this stage). However, the Burmese remained at Ramu. The Myowun of Arakan wrote to T.C. Robertson, Magistrate of Chittagong, in an attempt to remove the belief that the Burmese incursion was hostile and to explain how the conflict could be settled.

"Our master, the Lord of the white elephants ... wishes that the people of both countries should remain in peace and quiet." In other words the King did not want war. The Myowun continued as follows: "The Bengalees of Chittagong excited a dispute over the deep [island] of Shaporee which belonged to Arracan. [However, the Magistrate had wisely surrendered the island]. After this some mischevious persons misled the English gentlemen and caused a dispute and encounter between the [English] soldiers and our people [a reference to the fighting in Cachar] whereon the general advanced

1. Ibid., No.36.

from Pegu with a large force into Arracan and with a view to the tranquillity of the two great countries came to Rutnapulling and sent a message calculated to benefit ... the parties through Hussein Ullee Doobashee [an interpreter] to the Bengalee captain and

commandant of the stockade."¹ The Burmese were fired upon then by sepoy from Ramu whom they drove off.

The statement that the general (Bandula) came to Rutnapulling is, of course, wrong, and may be due to faulty translation.

Also, the Myowun had insisted that the Burmese had entered Chittagong with peaceful intentions, and not for any hostile purpose.

The next sentence is obscure. "Still no letter came from the Judge of Chittagong and therefore we remained at Ramoo. Our soldiers injure were of the poor inhabitants and committed no oppression and destroyed no habitations yet the English gentlemen with the Bengalee sepoy [at Ramu] began firing from muskets and cannon. At last the Burmese sardars advanced with Doobashee to say what would have contributed to pacify both sides."²

The assertion "we remained at Ramoo" is obscure, since the previous sentence refers to developments at Rutnapallin. Perhaps it ought to read "We proceeded to Ramu." It seems also that the Burmese expected some kind of communication from the British after the events at Rutnapallin, which would give them a chance to make their demand for refugees.

With regard to events at Ramu, both British and Burmese sources agree that the British were the first to fire. British sources do not mention an attempt to negotiate after firing had

1. Ibid., No.38.

2. Ibid., No.38.

begun, which is referred to in the Myowun's letter; probably, they failed to recognise it. However, as has been seen, the British sources do mention an attempt to negotiate before the firing (which the Myowun does not in fact mention).

The Myowun's letter goes on "On this, the Bengalee sepoy's began a fire which the Burmese were obliged to return, a battle ensued many were killed and many wounded and many put to flight."¹

It would seem therefore that the famous battle at Ramu was unnecessary, and was caused by British distrust of Burmese motives and by their firing on the Burmese.

The village at Ramu was burnt down at this time. This, according to the Myowun, was the work of the villagers themselves and not the Burmese. On this occasion, as during previous incursions, the Burmese were careful to avoid damaging property.

The letter concluded with the following very significant observation: "The Judge and Collector of Chittagong are men of wisdom and intelligence. From their keeping and protecting the traitor Hynja all of these calamities arise."² This then was the point at issue, for the Burmese and the Myowun were trying to make this clear to the Magistrate. He must have been hoping for a letter from the Magistrate promising to surrender the rebels.

The many precautions taken by the Burmese, both before and after the Ramu battle, to convince the British that they had no aggressive intentions, were all unsuccessful. T.C. Robertson, the Magistrate of Chittagong, misunderstood Burmese motives. The

1. Ibid., No.38.

2. Ibid., No.38.

failure of the Burmese to advance in Chittagong, and the mild tone of their letter to him, Robertson wrote to Swinton, "might induce me to suppose that they have abandoned their design of prosecuting the invasion of the district but that it is well-known to be their policy to endeavour by similar affectations of moderation to lull apprehension and abate the vigilance of their antagonists."¹ This seems a very far-fetched interpretation. However, the Governor-General-in-Council agreed with this assessment. Robertson was asked to temporize with the Burmese. He was to ask them to prove their sincerity by releasing all prisoners and evacuating the Chittagong district. The idea was to reinforce Chittagong town before the Burmese could reach it. By 4 June 1824, the Calcutta Government had received a despatch from T.C. Robertson, dated 20 May, saying that because of their delay at Ramu, the Burmese would not be able to reach Chittagong before adequate reinforcements arrived. The British, despite the despatch of some 10,000 troops to Burma, still possessed immensely superior military power in Bengal. If it had been the cold season, the Burmese could have been expelled easily. The monsoon, however, had already set in, and it was feared that military operations in the Chittagong district would be fatal to the troops. It was hoped that news of the British attack on Rangoon would cause the Burmese to withdraw. Robertson wrote to the Myowunof Arakan (as instructed by the Governor-General-in-Council) asking him to release prisoners and leave the district. As an inducement, he also released four Burmese taken prisoner by the British. His messenger was taken

1. BSPC, 28 May 1824, Robertson to Swinton, 22 May.

before the four Myowun of Arakan and the representative from the capital, whose authority, according to the messenger, was above that of the others. He may, in fact, have been Maha Bandula's brother, who was reportedly in the Burmese camp at this time. By this time, the Burmese had heard reports of the British attacks on Cheduba and Rangoon, although it is possible that they did not believe that there really had been an attack on Rangoon. They were, however, aware of the attack on Cheduba and were therefore aware that the British had gone over to the offensive. The royal representative spoke as follows to the messenger: "What sort of people are your masters? We came as we thought to conclude an amicable adjustment with them and sent Hussein Ali to Rutnapallin where they refused to converse and began to fire. Again we came to Ramoo and sent the Dabashee Hussein Allee to talk about an adjustment to differences. The gentlemen would not hear what Hussein Allee had to say but fired and wounded him in the side. Therefore, I, the Vizier Minister of the Sultan of Ava gave orders for the battle to commence and many men were subsequently killed on both sides."¹ Like the Myowun's letter, the representative's remarks show that the Burmese had not meant to fight, but were responding to British firing. Their purpose was "amicable".

The representative continued as follows: "Even now we do not wish the contest to continue. Three times have the Mugs Arakanese invaded our Country in 1791, 1799 and 1811 and these men the English have sheltered and protected. Now for this once we

1. BSPC, 2 July 1824, Robertson to Swinton, 21 June, enclosing deposition.

have entered Ramoo. It will be well if the English gentlemen give up Hynja Rangjhang and other Mug traitors to us, when we will remove and return into our own country."¹

This could have been the Burmese answer to Robertson's proposal that they withdrew. At any rate, it was a statement of policy. The Burmese would withdraw if the British would surrender a number of Arakanese rebel leaders.

The question asked by the royal representative ("what sort of people are your masters?") appears to reflect bafflement at British behaviour, i.e. their firing at Rutnapallin and Ramu and their attacks on Cheduba and perhaps Rangoon. Why react in this way rather than negotiate and hand over the refugee leaders? The Burmese were not familiar with the principle of political asylum nor with the British attitude towards an armed border arising. Also, they did not know the British had declared war on them.

The Myowun wrote a reply to Robertson's letter. He stated that the matter of releasing prisoners had been referred to the Court. He continued as follows: "I had hoped that between the two great states there would have been no disputes. But Hynja and other Arracanese who are thieves, robbers and miscreants have, through their nefarity and wickedness caused this war. When the war terminates the insignificant individuals who have been taken will be released."² He added: "The Judge of Chittagong is a sensible man and will doubtless deliberate upon what can prove most beneficial to both countries."³ This seems to have been invitation to the

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., enclosing Myowun's letter.

3. Ibid.

British to reflect on the inadvisability of protecting Hynja and other rebels.

Another important piece of evidence regarding events at Chittagong is the letter sent by Maha Bandula to certain merchants in the British camp in 1825, at the time of the seige of Danubyu.

Maha Bandula wrote that "the chiefs of Munnipore, by name Jwrarajit and Marjit forgetting their allegiance to the Golden King revolted from his authority, and ran away into the country of the English, which the King heard. For many years friendship had subsisted between the two nations, and therefore it was not right the English should have received and protected the rebels. Therefore, the King gave an order that they should be demanded, and I then sent to the British chokies posts at Shapuree and Rutnapallung on the subject, but the people there would not attend to what was necessary to be said and with the men that were there, the said people made fight. How strange it is that for two paltry men, war should break out between our nations. Therefore did I afterwards remain at Arracan, waiting daily in the hope of hearing and understanding the reason of this; but I never could succeed in getting thoroughly to the bottom of it."¹ Maha Bandula went on to ask the merchants to provide him with an explanation of British motives in invading Burma.

The statement contains some inaccuracies. For example, the force which entered Chittagong had asked only for the surrender of Arakanese, and not Manipuri rebels. The demand for the surrender of Manipuri rebels was apparently left to the northern

1. Wilson, op.cit., no.31.

force (though only the surrender of one rebel, Marjit Singh, was actually asked for). Maha Bandula's letter, it must be remembered was written about a year after the events in question, and that year had seen many momentuous developments: the invasion of Pegu by the British, Maha Bandula's crossing of the Arakan Yoma, the battles at Rangoon, and the Burmese retreat to Danubyu and so forth. It would be understandable if Maha Bandula's memory failed him on some issues. In broad outlines, the letter agrees with the statements made by the Burmese in Chittagong i.e. that the latter had wanted only the surrender of refugees (though Arakanese and not Manipuri refugees) and that the British had resorted to hostilities instead of entering into discussions.

Maha Bandula believed that the war had resulted from the refugee issue and was surprized at this. ("How strange that for two paltry men war should break out between our nations.") This suggests that the Burmese had no plans to invade Bengal even if the refugees were not surrendered; such behaviour seemed to Maha Bandula to be inexplicable.

Maha Bandula was not aware that the British had not yielded on the Shahpuri issue, that they believed the Burmese planned to invade Bengal, and above all, that they had decided, for strategic reasons, to drive the Burmese out of Assam, Cachar and Jaintia and by chastizing them to ensure their good behaviour. The refugee issue quite naturally did not seem to him to be important enough to justify an invasion.

It may be noted that Mrs. Judson, wife of the American missionary Adoniram Judson, passed Maha Bandula's camp while he was still at Hsun-byu-gyun.¹ She was informed that he was about to invade Chittagong where Burmese refugees had found refuge. Maha Bandula was not about to invade Chittagong but the recovery of fugitives was the Burmese objective (as implied by Mrs. Judson). This part of Mrs. Judson information was therefore correct.

In June 1824, another Burmese force took possession of Cachar. On this occasion, the commanding Wungyi made an attempt to secure the surrender of a political enemy, this time the Manipuri prince Marjit Singh; he sought also to restore Govind Chandra, whom the Burmese thought was a prisoner of the British. It was made clear that this was all the Burmese wanted. After referring to the traditional ties of friendship and commerce between the British and Burma, the commander went on:

Why do you now league with Mannypooorees and break the bond of amity? ... I am come to invest the King of Cachar with possession of his country... you will release the Rajah. Having reinstated him, I will return to my own country. You will also release Marjeet who has broken his faith with me. I shall carry him back with me.²

1 This appeal, like those made in Chittagong, failed to make an impression on the British. It is perfectly clear, however, that the Court would have been satisfied by a surrender of refugees and the "release" of Govind Chandra who would then be installed as tributary ruler of Cachar.

1. Wayland, F., Memoir of the Life and Labours of the Reverend Adoniram Judson, London, p.268.

2. BSPC, 23 July 1824, G. Tucker, Commissioner, Sylhet to Swinton, 17 June 1824, No.14, submitting letter from Burmese commander in Cachar. It is not clear why the surrender of only one refugee leader was demanded.

The defeats of various Burmese commanders at Rangoon induced the Court to recall Maha Bandula and his army. In August 1825, T.C. Robertson, the Magistrate of Chittagong reported that the Burmese army in Chittagong had recrossed the Naf. The force in Cachar was decimated by disease during the monsoon and was withdrawn in November.

To turn now to developments at Rangoon: a British force occupied Rangoon on 11 May 1824. During subsequent negotiations with the Burmese, the latter were to claim that the King had been greatly surprised by the British invasion because he had believed he was at peace with the British and that he had deputed the new Myowun of Pegu, who was some distance upriver, to settle the matter amicably.

The fact that the Burmese in Chittagong and Cachar made only limited demands and were at pains to make their desire for peace clear, and that the King, on hearing of the British invasion had wanted to settle matters peacefully shows that the Court no longer intended to fight the British. Also significant was the fact that no preparations whatever had been made at Rangoon against a British naval attack, and no warning whatever had been given to local officials by the King. Had he had any intention of fighting the British he would surely have warned the Rangoon officials, since British naval power would have been a well-known fact.

An effort must be made to see matters from the point of view of the King. He had meant to fight the British at one stage, but the idea had been dropped. The Burmese in Chittagong and Cachar had been sent not to fight the British but to demand the

surrender of refugees and Govind Chandra. So far as the King was concerned, the Shahpuri crisis had already been settled and since the fighting in Cachar, the border had been peaceful for months. This would account for the King's surprise.

It would seem, therefore, that the British in May 1824, had invaded a peaceful country. Incredibly this was not understood by Campbell or Canning, or the Calcutta Council. Yet, the actions and statements of the Burmese in Chittagong and Cachar and at Rangoon show that this was the case.

An objection to the above argument is the fact that the British had invaded Assam, a province of the Empire, late in March, 1824. Assam was very distant from Ava and the route between Ava and Assam ran through very rugged country. Yet, two months is a long time, and it does seem likely that the Burmese commanders in Assam would have been able to send word to Ava of the British invasion by 23 May 1824, when news of the British occupation of Rangoon was received. If news of the invasion of Assam was already received, the King could not have believed that he was at peace with the British, as claimed by the Burmese negotiators, at Rangoon. There is very strong evidence, however, that the first indication of war received by the Court was the news of the seizure of Rangoon. An invasion of Assam would have been regarded in the same light as an invasion of Pegu, for Assam was not a part of Burma. Yet it was only on 23 May 1824, after the news of the seizure of Rangoon, that the Europeans at the capital were treated as enemies, (by being interrogated and imprisoned). If news of the invasion of Assam was received earlier, they would have been treated in this way before.

It is not clear why the Assam officials failed to inform the Court in time (assuming that two months was sufficient for a communication to Ava). Perhaps, it was because they had put up a very ineffective resistance, or perhaps, something happened to their messengers.

Myedei Mingyi, the old Myowun, had died before the British invasion, and his successor, a Wungyi, was still upriver when the latter event occurred. Authority in Rangoon was in the hands of the Yewun. He took steps to isolate the invaders, by preventing the population from returning to Rangoon. He also made an effort to find out British intentions. Canning stated that the British had come because of disputes at the frontier and asked for a boat to convey letters to the Court, so that the latter should be acquainted with the British terms.

The Yewun did not provide a boat. On 3 June 1824, certain representatives of the new Myowun came to the British camp. They stated that the Wungyi and the officials with him were angry with the Yewun for firing on the British without communicating with the latter first, and also for failing to defend Rangoon effectively. They also made the very important disclosure that the King had ordered the Wungyi to settle all matters peacefully.¹ In the meantime, orders were given to the Burmese outposts not to fire on the British. They stated they had been sent by the Wungyi to settle matters.

1. By 3 June, royal instructions would have reached local officials. It was possible for news to be sent from Rangoon to Ava in 7 or 8 days. The journey downstream would have been even quicker. (See Phayre, A History of Burma, New York, 1969, footnote, p.242).

The British insisted on an exchange of prisoners before a discussion, and also that the discussion would have to be with the Wungyi himself. They asked again for a boat to convey letters to the Court.

On 7 January, more Burmese came. They had a letter from an official of the Wungyi asking why the British had come. Campbell stated that they had come because the Governor-General had declared war.¹ On 9 June, 2 more persons came. Canning discovered that the senior Burmese envoy on this occasion had been the go-between during his discussions with the Ein-gyi Paya in 1810 on the question of British aid to the latter in the event of a succession dispute. He told Canning that he had come directly from the Court, that the King, "believing his country to be at peace with the English had been greatly surprised at finding himself attacked by them without knowing why or wherefore..... He had sent the Wungyi to inquire into the matter and settle all matters peacefully."² The Burmese claimed that they had been deputed by the Wungyi. To the British suggestion that they be allowed to send a boat with letters to the Court, they responded by saying that "in such cases a conference between principles always effected more than letters or messengers."³ They suggested that the British authorities confer with a representative appointed by the Wungyi for the purpose. The two Burmese would remain behind as hostages.

1. Home Miscellaneous Series (HMS), Vol.663, Canning's diary, entry for 3 and 7 June.

2. Ibid., entry for 9 June.

3. Ibid., entry for 9 June.

The British stated in reply that they had come because the two countries were at war, and that the state of affairs was known to the King. (This was apparently not the case). It was preposterous for a British officer to go upriver to confer not with the Wungyi himself but his agent.¹ Their letters would acquaint the King with the British terms straightaway and he was the best person to decide whether they were acceptable. They asked again for a boat to convey letters to the capital. The Burmese seemed to find this reasonable, and asked whether if the Wungyi agreed to forward a letter to the King, a present would accompany it. (This was presumably because an address to the throne had to be accompanied by some mark of respect). This was agreed to. The Burmese stated that in such circumstances, they had little doubt that the Myowun would agree to forward the letters. The Burmese were informed that hostilities would continue until the King's reply was received.

1. Ibid., entry for 9 June. In the King, the first signature, Sir

The Burmese did not return, however, and no further overtures from the Court were received till 1825. The reasons for this cannot be ascertained from the British records, but the Burmese chronicle may throw more light on the matter. Perhaps, the Court was too confident of its ability to drive the invaders out by force to persevere in the path of negotiations.

It was clearly important that the Court should be made aware of the British objectives; otherwise, they might have the impression that the British aimed at total conquest and that there would be no point in negotiating with them. Late in July, Canning found another method of communicating the peace terms. It was stated earlier that the members of the Burmese mission to Vietnam were detained by the British when they put in at Singapore on their return voyage. They were later sent to Rangoon. The leader of the mission, Gibson, was afraid to return to the capital lest he be put to death for having English blood and for having had dealings with the British at Rangoon and Singapore despite the favours shown to him by the King. He now offered his services to the British. He told Canning (with what accuracy it is impossible to say) that the lesser members of the mission would be allowed to proceed to the capital. Canning decided to send his letters to the King and Hlutdaw through these persons. Some minor changes, made necessary by the capture of Cheduba and other recent events, were made. Gibson also wrote three letters. Two were addressed to the King, the first apprizing him

of the fate of the Cochin-China mission, and the second warning him that the British were seeking Siamese intervention and were planning to supply them with 20,000 muskets. The third letter was addressed to the Hlutdaw.¹ The Burmese seemed shocked at Naunbinzeik by the terms, and in a subsequent letter rejecting the British demands, they claimed that these had been totally unexpected. This suggests that the letters were not received. Perhaps the local authorities were reluctant to allow communication between invaders and the Court. Yet the Burmese officials did not always react in this way. Some British letters written subsequently, which proposed negotiations without communicating the peace terms, were received at the capital.

Although the initial objectives of the Governor-General-in-Council were limited, the expansionist urge was strong at lower levels. Within a fortnight of his arrival at Rangoon, Canning was recommending the annexation of Cheduba, giving as his reasons 'the commanding situation of the island with reference to the whole coast of Arracan, the excellence of the harbour, the salubrity of

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1. Shortly afterwards Canning succumbed to the epidemic that was thinning the ranks of the British at Rangoon. He returned to Calcutta and died on 1 or 2 September 1824, within 24 hours of landing.

the climate, the exclusion of all French and American privateers in the event of future wars... and... the trifling expense at which the post could be maintained'.¹ The same arguments, he wrote, applied to Negrais.

In its reply dated 18 June, the Calcutta Government reminded Canning that its policy was to annex only territories 'immediately connected' with the defence of the frontier.² Before the letter could reach Canning, he was recommending the annexation of Pegu, in a letter dated 19 June. The Burmese, he wrote, were refusing with 'extreme obstinacy' to receive any communication from the British. If this policy of isolating the British was to continue, Campbell and he favoured calling on the Mons to revolt, and annexing the province to the British Empire. 'It would be contrary to every principle of humanity and good faith first to incite the Peguers [Mons] to revolt and then abandon them to the merciless revenge of their oppressors'. They believed that 'the population under a guarantee of British protection would rise and the resources of the country under proper management would probably defray the charge of administration'.³ He warned Amherst that it might not be safe to advance from Rangoon with the country in the rear unpacified. A few days later, Campbell wrote to Calcutta, strongly supporting this suggestion.

1. BSPC, 18 June 1824, Canning to Swinton, 20 May 1824, No.3.

2. BSPC, 18 June 1824, Swinton to Canning, 18 June 1824, No.4. But Swinton stressed that the Governor-General-in-Council would step up their demands if the war was prolonged by the Burmese.

3. BSPC, 16 July 1824, Canning to Swinton, 19 June 1824, No.13.

Both men appear to have been led by a mixture of expansionist, humanitarian and strategic considerations into a serious error of judgement. The Mons would not have responded to such a proclamation unless they desired independence and the British seemed capable of supporting them. It is uncertain whether there was any widespread desire among the Mons for independence or even any knowledge that they had been independent in the past. Also, the British lacked military credibility at this time, since they were still penned up in Rangoon. Further, since Campbell and Canning had no contact with the Mons, they could not have discovered any sign of Mon willingness to cooperate; yet, they had said that this was likely to happen. Canning had also referred to the Burmese as being 'merciless oppressors' of the Mons. There is however no evidence of oppression at this time; although a Mon insurrection, if it had been broken out then, would have been suppressed ruthlessly.

The Calcutta Government's reply to Canning and Campbell of 23 July 1824, showed that they had detected their mistake. What grounds were there, they asked, for thinking that a proclamation would have any effect? Hitherto, the Mons had been as hostile to the invading British as the Burmans. Also, they had been subject to Ava for seventy years. They pointed out that in Assam, a very recent Burmese conquest, David Scott's assurances of a popular revolt immediately upon the issuance of a similar proclamation had not been fulfilled. In any case, a permanent involvement with Pegu was 'fraught

with danger' for the British Empire in India. For the moment, it was best to look to a purely military solution.¹

It might be asked what objection there could be to trying out a proclamation in any case. The fact, however, was that a proclamation was not expected to be successful without a promise to the Mons of future support, and if it succeeded on such a basis, it could mean a long-term British involvement in Pegu; unless, of course, the commitment was given without the intention of keeping it.

In the months that followed, the British force continued to be isolated at Rangoon, its ranks rapidly thinned by disease, and the countryside just as hostile as ever. Under such circumstances, the temptation to try to turn the tables on the Burmese at a stroke by playing the Mon card began to grow - although there was still nothing to show that a call to rebel would be heeded. John Fendall, who had served previously in Java, was Amherst's colleague in the Council, and therefore party to the July decision to avoid incitement of the Mons. In September he reversed his position and suggested that Canning's proposal be accepted. The Burmese, he argued, would never negotiate under current conditions; greater force alone would work; but unless the British had the Mons on their side, they would never get beyond Rangoon. Fendall did not discuss the consequences of their not responding to a proclamation; probably he assumed that the expedition would have to be abandoned.²

1. BSPC, 23 July 1824, Swinton to Campbell and Canning, 23 July 1824, No.7.

2. BSPC, 17 September, Minute by Fendall, 14 September 1824, No.6.

Sir Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras, had been invited by Amherst in February 1824, to advise him on the conduct of the war, a matter which, Amherst admitted, was far outside his own experience. Munro too doubted whether Campbell would be able to advance without the help of the Mons, but he desired a dismembered Burma for long-term strategic reasons also. 'Our first objective,' he wrote, 'should be the safety of our territory and the most likely way to ensure this is by weakening the powers nearest to it.'¹ Munro was to continue to urge this course of action on Amherst until the end of the war.

Amherst, however, felt that the objections to the measure were at the moment far stronger than the possible advantages. 'We should find ourselves,' he wrote, 'entangled in an interminable contest at a distance from our frontier requiring the constant employment of transports for conveyance of stores and demanding reinforcements of troops which the Bengal Army with its prejudices against sea voyages would be unable to supply.'²

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1. Letters from Sir Thomas Munro to Lord Amherst, MSS. E 184, India Office Library, letter of 31 March 1825.
 2. BSPC, 8 October 1824, Minute by the Governor-General, 27 September 1824, No.8.

Amherst also rejected Fendall's view that the Burmese would avoid negotiations indefinitely. Campbell's force was the only threat to them and it had not got beyond Rangoon. Therefore, 'the King of Ava can hardly be considered as showing an undue degree of obstinacy in continuing the war up to the present moment'.¹ He thought it best, for the moment, to await the outcome of developments at Rangoon.

If Amherst had given in to the pressure of his colleagues in September 1824, which he might have been expected to do, in view of their far greater experience, the consequences could have been momentuous. No immediate help would have been obtained from the Mons, but after the British successes in December, some contender for the Pegu throne might have stepped forward, perhaps from the ranks of the emigrant Mons in Siam. An independent Mon kingdom would then have been created, whose consequences for the internal history of Burma might have been serious whatever the eventual fate of the kingdom itself.

Between the British landing at Rangoon on 11 May 1824, and the arrival of the Maha Bandula near the town in November, the Burmese had conducted harrassing warfare against the British occupiers of Rangoon. In July, the Wungyi Thado Mingyi Maha attempted unsuccessfully to recapture the town, with reinforcements sent down from Upper Burma. The British had also made a number of successful counter-attacks, in one of which the Wungyi was killed. Despite these setbacks and the fact that the coastal areas of Bassein, Martaban, Mergui and Tavoy had been lost, the war had not gone too badly for the Burmese. After six months the British force was still

1. Ibid.

in Rangoon and its losses from sickness were heavy. The Burmese policy of isolating the invaders from the population and from food supplies had also proved effective. Had the Burmese continued with this policy, the war might have been abandoned by the Governor-General-in-Council at Calcutta, for the British would have had to bring all their supplies from India. But the Burmese court was not thinking from the very beginning of victories on the battlefield. Maha Bandula was recalled from Arakan with the troops that he had collected from Upper Burma for the invasion of Bengal. The committal of these troops to a pitched battle rather than a guerilla campaign of a more flexible and harassing kind was probably an error. Maha Bandula's strategic ideas were often good.¹ But this could not make up for the gap of centuries that separated the two sides with respect to training and weapons. After what must have been a very difficult march across the Arakan in the rainy season, Maha Bandula arrived with 16,000 men at Rangoon in November. The weeks that followed saw fighting in which the Burmese, under Maha Bandula's leadership, gave the best account of themselves that they could on the basis of their traditional methods of warfare, but they were defeated nevertheless. Even at this stage, it was not too late to revert to the old policy of isolating the invaders and harassing them, which had proved so effective, as opposed to the proven ineffectiveness of pitched battles. Instead, Maha Bandula withdrew to the town of Danubyu, for another battle. In late December, the British were able to march out of Rangoon and towards Danubyu. Here, Maha Bandula was able to

1. Bruce, G., The Burma Wars, 1824-1886, London, 1973, pp.90, 104-106.

take advantage of Campbell's faulty planning and win an initial victory over the British. However, his troops lacked the training in the long run to execute his plans effectively.¹ The battle was already going against the Burmese when Maha Bandula was killed on 1 April 1825. The leaderless Burmese army then simply dispersed. After this, the British advanced and occupation of Prome was almost unopposed. On 11 April 1825, Prome was occupied by the British. By May 1825, when hostilities ceased for the duration of the monsoon, the Burmese Court had no military force south of Prome, with the exception of a small force at Toungoo.

Although the adoption of orthodox tactics led to disastrous results, a harassing war would of course have had its own drawbacks; in particular, a quick Burmese victory could not have been obtained, and the major towns of Burma, including the capital, might have been occupied by the British. The latter possibility/might have been averted by the Burmese had they organized a guerrilla campaign against the extended supply lines of the British. The latter, in fact, had envisaged this happening, and had plans to declare the independence of Pegu, thereby obtaining the support of the Mons. But the independence probably could not have been maintained by the British for long, given the strained state of the Indian finances. Although it is impossible to state the outcome of a guerrilla war for certain, it is conceivable that Burma could have inflicted on the British the kind of check they suffered later in Afghanistan. It must be admitted however, that in all probability such a victory would have caused more suffering than the war of 1824 to 1826 and the Treaty of Yandabo.

1. Ibid., pp.104-106.

In the absence of any considerable Burmese military force in Pegu, and therefore of any effective counterweight to the British, the myothugyis in the area proved unwilling to continue their resistance. Also, Campbell took pains to reassure the population that they would not be molested by the British nor their property taken away. It is proposed to examine the relationship between the British and the Pegu population more closely here.

After Maha Bandula's defeat in December, and his retreat to Danubyu, the British had an opportunity to conciliate the population in the vicinity of Rangoon. Campbell then issued a proclamation to the Mons calling on them to return to their homes, and reassuring them as follows:

Against you, Inhabitants of the Ancient Kingdom of Pegue, and the whole of Talien Mon Race, we do not wish to wage war. We know the oppression and tyranny under which you have been labouring for a length of time, by the cruel and brutal conduct of the Burmese Government towards you.

Compare your condition with the comfort and happiness of the four Maritime Provinces - Mergui, Yeah, Tavoy and Martaban, now under the protection of the English flag. Follow their example and enjoy their blessings by placing yourselves under my protection.¹

A Mon chief is reported to have come in soon afterwards to ask if the proclamation was genuine. On being reassured on this point, he undertook to distribute it. When a copy was introduced into a Burmese camp, its Mon component deserted, and returned to their homes in the Dalla district. However, it was not stated how large this camp was, nor how large the proportion of Mons who deserted. The population of Rangoon began to return gradually. By

1. Wilson, Documents, 121 (A).

12 February 1825, their number was reported to be 3,000. They proved willing to provide labour and supplies at a cost. Reassuring proclamations were also issued by the British to Burmans and Karens.¹

This development was repeated in all the areas that came under British control by May 1825. As long as the Burmese armies were in control, the population obeyed their 'scorched-earth' policy - villages were abandoned, the population retiring into the jungles, taking with them all articles that could be of use to the British. Once the Burmese armies had left, or had broken up and their fears as to their possessions and property were set at rest, the civilian inhabitants were willing to return. After the capture of Danubyu, the myothugyis of the Syrian and Dalla districts 'made their submission to the British', and after Prome had been taken, the rest began doing so. The process of 'submission' involved only surrendering their old warrants of office for new ones issued by the British. The myothugyis exercised all authority in the villages. The British were too few numerically to intervene at that level. The myothugyis' source of income continued to be the old tax on law-suits.² On 9 May, Campbell reported jubilantly:

The governors [myothugyis] of the surrounding districts are coming in to offer their submission and placing themselves under our protection; one has already given me up nine elephants belonging to the state and [I] was promised by the same person two more. Another has brought me in five guns, some jinjals, and a few musquets, and all make fair promise of affording us every aid in their power; I have therefore, little doubt of being able to keep my troops well supplied....³

1. *Ibid.*, 121 (B).

2. Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, London, 1827, pp.138-211, especially 193-211.

3. Wilson, *Documents*, No.139.

Clearly, allegiance to Ava rested very lightly on the myothugyis. They did not owe their positions to Ava; these were hereditary. There would, therefore, have been no feeling of obligation. The behaviour of the Myowuns and Yewuns, who were appointed by the Court, was quite different, except in Bassein, where the independent-minded Myowun made his peace temporarily with the British, before turning against them also, and in Tavoy, where the Yewun delivered the town to the British on account of a personal feud with the Myowun.

The fact that the myothugyis had promised cooperation and one had handed over state elephants indicated

that the British presence was expected to be permanent. The myothugyis would have been unlikely to commit themselves in this way if they had known that the prospect of an independent Pegu was to be used simply as leverage to secure other objectives. Being familiar only with wars of conquest, they would have seen the occupation of Pegu in this light. There was nothing in Campbell's proclamation to indicate that Pegu would be returned, which might have proved a dangerous thing to do. In fact, there was even a suggestion in the last sentence of the proclamation that the British wished to see a separate government established in Pegu: 'Choose from among yourself a Chief, and I will acknowledge him'.¹

In contrast to the traditional Burmese practice of commandeering whatever they needed, the British paid for what they

1. Wilson, Documents, 121 (B); Campbell had acted without authority here. However, he was not reprimanded by the Governor-General-in-Council, who were perhaps curious to see if anyone would in fact be selected by the Mons as their leader. No one was selected.

received in the way of provisions, cattle, carriage and labour (of boatmen and coolies in particular). Given this arrangement, and the fact that the British did not resort to revenue collection, more money must have been in circulation than ever before. This did not mean, however, that the economic condition of the Pegu population was good. The war and in particular, the methods of warfare resorted to by the Burmese, had interfered with cultivation. British records have little to say about this, since they had almost no direct contact with the people in the countryside, as opposed to those in the main towns of the Irrawaddy delta. But it is certain that famine conditions prevailed in the delta till late 1826. Those who had money could buy the rice that was in short supply and was sold at high prices; others had to subsist on roots.¹

There is practically no direct evidence as to what the attitude of the average peasant in Pegu towards the British was; but their religious feelings at least must have been outraged by the looting of the numerous small pagodas in the Rangoon area. The object of plunder was the images of the Buddha which were known to be inside the stupas of the pagodas. Initially, those were supposed to be of gold and silver, in keeping with the notion prevalent among the British that Burma was a land of great wealth. Later, they were discovered to be of imitation metal, but they could still be kept as souvenirs or sold in India. Also, soon after the British landing at Rangoon, a false rumour spread that there was treasure buried under the Shwe

1. For a graphic description, see Gouger, op.cit., pp.313-314.

Dagon Pagoda and General Campbell had 'an attack made on the bowels of the Shwe Dagon, which was continued till every hope of finding the long-expected treasure had vanished'.¹ For part of the British occupation, at least, the Shwe Dagon and other pagodas were used for housing troops. This, Burney was to report later from Siam, had, together with the looting of images, aroused resentment in Siam, and the reaction of the Buddhist population of Pegu is unlikely to have been different.²

It must be emphasized, however, that except on the day of the landing at Rangoon, when some looting occurred, Campbell seems to have been careful to respect private as opposed to monastic property. Everything taken from civilians, whether labour or supplies, was paid for. Any other course was too dangerous, for it carried the risk of disaffection in Pegu.

In Martaban and the Tenasserim provinces, the willingness to accept British protection seems to have been due to a further motive also. The region had for long been the scene of Siamese slave-raids and the British occupation was seen, quite correctly, as affording protection against the Siamese. Tavoy and Mergui were occupied by the British in September and October 1824, and Martaban and Ye in November of that year. The town of Tavoy, it has been stated, was surrendered to the British without a fight by the Yewun and other officials because of a dispute with the Myowun. According to Lt. Colonel Miles, who commanded the British expedition to Tavoy,

1. Pearn, op.cit., p.128, quotation.

2. The Burney Papers, Gregg International Publishers, Farnborough, 1971, Vol.I, para. 15. See also Pearn, op.cit., pp.128-129.

shortly before the British assault on the town:

The Burmese came on board, and brought me a communication from the second in command [the Yewun], stating his readiness to seize or destroy the Mayhoon, governor of the province, or to obey such orders as I might dictate. Immediately on receipt of this, an answer was returned to say, I was on the eve of advancing, and that he was to be taken and confined upon my arrival, which was in about two hours after. All was directed; and at one o'clock, p.m., we were in possession of the fort... without opposition.... The capture of the Mayhoon, his brother and family, with his principal adherents, completely weakens the enemy and places us in a commanding situation to cripple any exertions on this quarter.¹

After the British occupation, the new Myowun (the previous Yewun, who had been promoted by the British to the rank of Myowun) and other officials of the Tavoy government wrote to the British saying that a war had been going on for a long time between the people of Tavoy and the Siamese, but that 'after placing ourselves under your magnificent flag, the whole of our subjects were in hopes of all our Enemies becoming friends and thereby remove [sic] our fears and establish tranquility'.² They went on to complain that Siamese slave-raids had occurred, in spite of their acceptance of British protection. The letter raises the possibility

that effective protection against Siam was one local reason for surrendering Tavoy in the first place.

There is evidence that the people of Martaban too saw British rule as affording protection against the Siamese. Lieutenant-Colonel Godwin, the British commander at Martaban, claimed in a letter to Campbell that the people of the province were '... beyond

1. BSPC, 7 January 1825, enclosure submitted by Sir Archibald Campbell, 11 December 1824.

2. BSPC, 2 January 1824, Campbell to Swinton, 16 December submitting letter.

description happy in their being under British Protection'. He reported that 'the heads of villages all around to the extent in some instance of thirty miles came in and received at their own particular request papers stating that they were under the care of the British Government'.¹ (My emphasis), Godwin stated further that the Siamese had refrained from attacking people when shown British passes.

The expectations of the people of the Tenasserim areas were fulfilled. The British occupation of Tavoy, Mergui and Ye, did bring an end to the decades of lasting warfare carried on by Burma and Siam in this area. Even those inhabitants who were carried off by the Siamese were ultimately released as a result of the exertions of Major Burney, the British representative in Siam from late 1825 onwards.

The facility with which Pegu accepted its supposed change of rulers need not necessarily have been due to the survival of Mon national feeling. In fact, in the vicinity of Prome, Burmans constituted a majority of the population, and in Bassein, Burmans and Karens made up the great majority; yet, the population in these areas were just as willing to sell labour and supplies to the British. The boatmen who played a crucial role in ferrying supplies for the British in their third campaign beginning in November 1825 were nearly all pure Burmans. Towards the southeast, in the vicinity of Rangoon, Dalla, Syriam, Thaton, Pegu and so forth, Mons were predominant, but their cooperation need not have been due to national feeling; it might just have been the most opportune course.

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1. BSPC, 7 January 1825, Lt. Colonel Godwin to Campbell, 21 December, No.12, enclosing deposition.
 2. BSPC, 14 April 1826, Minute by Civil Commissioner in Ava and Pegu (Robertson), 26 March; BSPC, 26 August 1825, Smelt to Swinton, enclosing letter from Fenwick, containing brief report on population of Bassein.

Even so ardent an advocate of Pegu's separation as Major Snodgrass (who was then military secretary to Campbell) could detect no desire among them for a Mon kingdom, nor even any memory that such a Mon kingdom had once existed.¹ It is/ perhaps significant that Campbell's call to the Mons to select a leader among themselves whom he would acknowledge, was not answered, or even inquired about.

Matters might have been different in Martaban. Martaban, in Snodgrass' words, '... is the only province in Pegu where a strong and marked national antipathy was found to exist against the Burmese Government.'² This might have been connected with the fact that Martaban had the highest concentration of Mons of any part of Pegu. It was almost completely a Mon area, unlike even the southeast of Pegu, where miscegenation had progressed far and there were many Burmese settlers. The Mon myothugyis of Martaban proved willing to undertake operations against the able Myowun, Maha Udine, himself a Mon, who was conducting a guerrilla struggle against the British. When word of the initial British failure at Danubyu reached Martaban, there was a suggestion that the British send their garrison to the assistance of the main force, while giving the local myothugyis arms. When the question of establishing an independent Pegu came up again, late in 1825, British officers were confident of raising a force of 3,000 - 4,000 men from Martaban, under their myothugyis. Even in Martaban, however, no one came forward as an acknowledged leader in

1. BSPC, 15 July 1825, Captain Snodgrass' Memorandum, 1 July 1825, No.17.

2. Snodgrass, op.cit., p.87.

response to Campbell's proclamation.¹

The question of a revived Mon kingdom was raised, however, from another quarter. Alaungpaya's conquest of Pegu and the failure of the subsequent Mon rebellions had resulted in a flow of Mons to Siam, where they were welcomed as providing soldiers, artisans, cultivators and officials. From the letters they were to write to the British, it is clear that the emigrant Mon leaders knew of the old Pegu kingdom, and of the historic Burman-Mon enmity. One communication ran,

The Burmans, having, for a series of years, oppressed and tyrannized over us we became the humblest of nations, and at last took flight and found refuge in Siam... whereas in days of yore, we and the Burmans were inveterate enemies, and we fled from our country, in consequence of their conquest, and consequent oppression.²

Nothing similar to this statement was produced by the Mons of Pegu or even Martaban. The Mons of Siam, however, as an emigrant community, were perhaps more inclined to preserve the memory of their flight to a new country, and the historical developments connected with it. It was from this quarter that the question of an independent Pegu was raised.

1. BSPC, 16 December 1825, Fenwick to Smelt, 12 November 1825, submitted by Smelt to Swinton, 23 November, No.18. A curiously similar development to that in Pegu took place in the part of the Chittagong district which the Burmese occupied for a few months in 1824. They treated the local peasantry well, and got cooperation from them. This alarmed the Governor-General-in-Council, who declared martial law in the area. (BSPC, 28 May 1824, Minutes by Fendall, No. 7 and resolution of Governor-General-in-Council, 28 May 1824, No.2). Clearly, the peasantry on both sides wished to avoid trouble with invading armies.

2. Wilson, Documents, 119, letter from Mon commissioners.

The Mon move originated in a decision by the Siamese Court to take advantage of the war to carry away people from Martaban and the Tenasserim provinces. This happened every year but special success was expected this time since the Burmese had their hands full elsewhere, and British occupation of these areas was not anticipated. Participation in the Anglo-Burmese war as such was not contemplated by Siam. This would have seemed too rash to a Court which, at this stage, had no reason to think that the Burmese would lose the war. The Bangkok Court did not receive reliable information about military developments in Burma and continued to believe well into the year 1825 that the British were still held up at Rangoon and Martaban. When news of the British progress up the Irrawaddy was received, the conclusion drawn from it in Bangkok was that the British position was becoming more and more exposed, and that they might at any moment be cut off and annihilated. In any case, the fundamental British assumption that Siam desired a Burmese defeat may have been wrong. Siam was now justifiably confident of her capacity to withstand Burma, while the British, with their presence in the Malay Peninsula, were a new and uncertain factor.¹

The person chosen by the Siamese for the task in view was Ron-na-Ron (General) Choy Pya Maha Ayuthia, the highest military

1. It is impossible to be sure of the intentions of the Siamese court without access to Siamese records. The reports of Major Burney, constitute only indirect evidence. His opinion, however, was 'There is no question Siam never intended to cooperate with us against Ava....' (The Burney Papers, Vol.I, pp.157-158). See also, ibid., pp.37-38, for evidence as to the Siamese conviction that British would win the war. Burney's evidence may be all that exists. According to David Wyatt (Introduction to The Burney Papers, op.cit., vi), the Siamese archives are 'sadly deficient' on this critical period.

officer in Siam. Henry Burney, who was the British envoy at Bangkok from November 1826 onwards, had a conversation with Maha Ayuthia in May 1826, in which the latter revealed interesting details about himself. Burney reported:

Upon my enquiry, he assured me that no branch of the ancient Pegue Royal race now exists, that his father had been a Governor of Martaban under the Pegu Dynasty, and that when the Burmese overthrew it, his father had lived at Martaban for some time as a private individual and had afterwards retired to Siam with his family. Maha Ayuthia was then only 13 years of age, and he is now upwards of 60. He declared that his father was in no manner related to the ancient Pegue royal race, but that from his own large family, numerous connexions and distinguished services against Ava, all the Peguers now looked up to him as the remaining head of their race.¹

This whole conversation, Burney alleged, was overheard by two agents of the Siamese Government who were concealed behind Maha Ayuthia's Hall of Audience. Burney was clearly impressed by Maha Ayuthia. On another occasion, he reported him to be a talented man, and very anti-Burmese, on account of the alleged execution of two of his brothers by the Burmese during Bodawpaya's reign. He was the ablest as well as the highest military official in Siam, and therefore much feared by the Burmese.²

Maha Ayuthia arrived at the Martaban frontier in January 1825, with a force of 3,000 Mons and 2,000 Siamese. Here, apparently on his own initiative and without any Siamese prompting, he began to explore the possibility of making himself ruler of Pegu. He is alleged to have sounded out the views of the myothugyis of Martaban,

1. The Burney Papers, Vol.III, p.187. There is no evidence to support this last assertion.

2. Ibid., Vol.I, pp.236-243.

Pegu, Rangoon and a place called Taik-kall-a first and is said to have received an enthusiastic reply, together with the information that the British seemed indifferent as to who was to rule Pegu.¹ Thus encouraged, Maha Ayuthia sent envoys to the British camp at Rangoon.

We are in the dark as to what exactly passed at Rangoon between Maha Ayuthia's envoys and the local British commander, Brigadier McCreagh. To Campbell's annoyance, McCreagh failed to take transcripts of the conversations. The delegates returned to Maha Ayuthia's camp after the discussions. However, detailed information is available concerning the ensuing correspondence and discussions between Lt. Colonel Smith, British commander at Martaban, and the Mons. Campbell had sent instructions to Smith to refrain from 'the slightest pledge or promise of any kind on the part of the Supreme Government of India. However, encouragement to act and aid allies should [they] spontaneously declare the independence of their country is of course, warranted and authorized by the Law of Nations'.²

After suggesting that the Siamese commanders send representatives to the British camp, Smith continued as follows:

... should any matter come under discussion that may require specific instructions from the Governor-General-in-Council, the Colonel will lose no time in laying them before his government for ultimate decision of the high and august body.... Colonel Smith begs to offer his prayers for the health of his Majesty the

1. Wilson, Documents, No.137 (F). The deponent was an adherent of both Maha Ayuthia and his brother and his information may be reliable.

2. BSPC, 18 March 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 23 February 1825.

King of Siam, and for the prosperity and stability of government, as also for the ultimate restoration of the ancient dynasty of Pegu and the Colonel, in conclusion, assures the king's chiefs, to whom this letter will be presented, that he will avail himself with cordial satisfaction (as far as his authority may extend) of any events in the future operations of the war, which may enable him to afford assistance for the attainment of that desirable object.¹

Smith had mentioned the independence of Pegu, but had not specified the nature of the assistance that would be rendered. Also, Smith had spoken only for himself, and had not committed the Calcutta Government even to this extent. As such, Maha Ayuthia could not have derived much encouragement from his letter.

There were other reasons for not heeding Smith's invitation to participate in the war. By accepting it, Maha Ayuthia would have incurred the enmity of both Burma and Siam without having obtained any compensating pledge of support from the British government. His wife and family were kept in Bangkok at this time as hostages according to a report by Burney early in 1826. He had, moreover, no way of knowing how the war would turn out. Again, habits of loyalty to Siam could not be easily overcome. However, he seems to have steeled himself for the plunge initially, hoping perhaps to present his cooperation with the British to the Siamese court, at least initially, as something designed to advance Siamese instead of Mon interests.

Maha Ayuthia sent envoys to Colonel Smith to make arrangements for military cooperation. His letter to Smith deserves quoting, as revealing his state of mind at the time:

1. Wilson, Documents, No.137 (B).

The commander of the army of Dwarawuddy [Siam] is fully aware of the cordial friendship which has subsisted between the English nation and the Tallyens [Mons] from the earliest period of prosperity of their ancient kingdom of Pegue and which he trusts, please God, if again recovered from their enemies, will under more happy auspices, expand, like the opening bud, into blossoms of future greatness... and afford occasion to remember with thankfulness the friendly concern of Colonel Smith, for the Tullyen nation [Mon], who are never ungrateful for the favours they receive from their ally.¹

This letter, despite its enthusiasm, and its specific reference to the restoration of the Pegu Kingdom, does not specify military collaboration. However, envoys sent by Maha Ayuthia to Smith's camp did raise this matter. The meeting took place on 8 March 1825. Smith noticed that the envoys looked very agitated - an indication that they were aware of the risks they were running. The envoys stressed that Maha Ayuthia's force would be entirely dependent on the British for provisions - none, of course, could be expected from Siam. Smith could agree to this since the Martaban granaries were full.

A final meeting was arranged, at which Maha Ayuthia himself was to be present. This meeting was never held. On 13 March 1825, a letter was received from Maha Ayuthia's camp, stating that cooperation was not possible, and in a few days the whole force had been withdrawn from the frontier. In his letter, Maha Ayuthia stated merely that he had been recalled because the rainy season was coming. (It was two months away). Subsequently, the British heard a report of what had really happened from an adherent of Maha Ayuthia's brother, who returned to his native Martaban, instead of proceeding with his

1. Ibid., No.137 (C).

master to Bangkok. He reported that:

The Siamese Ministers, who were, from prudential motives, associated with the Tullyen Mon Zemindars and Chieftains and moreover, suspected the motive of his negotiation with the English, instantly made known the circumstances, with every exaggeration, to the Court of Siam. Incensed at the presumption of a man whom he had raised to from obscurity to the dignity of the command of the Siam army, his Majesty instantly despatched one of his principal ministers, with peremptory orders for his recall. Ron-na-Ron (Maha Ayuthia), from this unexpected summons, at the critical moment he was strengthening his interest with the local authorities of Rangoon, and Martaban, was thrown into the utmost consternation; he bewailed his fate with tears and returning into his apartment refused to see anyone for several hours....¹

But however greatly Maha Ayuthia regretted the decision, he could not bring himself to disobey a direct order from the Court, especially when he had no promise of British support.

1. Ibid., No.137 (F).

CHAPTER IX

THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE WAR

In October 1825, negotiations between the British and Burmese, last held in June 1824, were resumed. British policy, however, had undergone important changes in the intervening period. In May 1825, the original peace terms were made more severe.¹ The Calcutta Government believed that the original peace terms had been communicated to the Court. It was very likely that stiffer conditions would make peace more difficult, and it might be wondered why the Calcutta Government should have been willing, in this way, to run the risk of prolonging a war which had already proved enormously expensive. One reason for this was a fear that the setbacks and difficulties experienced by the British - such as the defeat at Ramri in Bengal, the stalemate of six months at Rangoon, and the heavy loss of life there, and the continuation of full-scale warfare after more than a year of hostilities, had all damaged the military reputation on which British hegemony in India was based.

The original terms, Amherst wrote, "would scarcely be considered either by European or native spectators of the contest as an equivalent for the sacrifices and efforts we have made during the

1. The following were the main demands made by the British at the beginning of the war: the Burmese were to give up Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia; to pay an indemnity of 2,000,000 rupees; to receive a British consul at Rangoon; and eliminate certain grievances of the traders there. There were certain other minor demands, including the punishment of the four Myowuns of Arakan.

last twelve months".¹ The Commander-in-Chief, who was a member of the Council, made no reference to this factor in the discussions of May 1825. However, in a subsequent minute dated 25 July 1825, he referred to the need to offer to India, "some tangible proofs of our success and [to demonstrate] that our power is not to be attacked with impunity".² If it were not for this necessity, he would be willing to offer very mild terms.

The two other members of the Council, John Fendall and John Harrington, did not refer to this point at all. The latter was, in fact, opposed to making the terms more severe, and it may be presumed that he did not regard the possibility of losing standing with the Indian princes as a serious one. On the other hand, the Court of Directors, who were normally averse to all measures likely to increase expenditure, accepted the argument used by Amherst and Paget. Without the new terms, they wrote, "success would not have been manifest ... and the powers of India might have been tempted to believe that the British Government had at last encountered an enemy whom it had failed to humble".³

It must be remembered that the completion of British paramountcy in India had been achieved as recently as 1818. It is understandable that there should have been concern in some minds

1. BSPC, 20 May 1825, Minute by Governor-General, 16 May, No.6.

2. BSPC, 12 July 1825, Minute by Paget, 2 July 1825, No.2.

3. Board's Copies of Secret Letters to India, Court of Directors to Governor-General-in-Council, 25 April 1827. It is worth noting that Dalhousie, in 1852, also justified his warlike policy towards Burma on the grounds that loss of face jeopardised security.

that restiveness might result among the Indian princes if the British seemed to be unable to gain a victory in Burma.

Amherst also expressed the view that the Burmese might not avoid future contests when they found "so little atonement required for past injury and insult".¹ This seems very doubtful. The Commander-in-Chief was nearer the truth when he suggested, in July 1825, that "... if by magic our troops ... be withdrawn from Ava, and replaced in their Bengal cantonments, we should never more hear of Burmese aggression".² After having lost Assam, Arakan, Pegu and Tenasserim to the British, the Burmese could not have failed to realize their military weakness.

Another factor was a feeling that the Burmese, having prolonged the war and forced the British to make considerable sacrifices, could not expect the same terms as those offered in May 1824. They had to be punished for prolonging the war. The Calcutta Government had assumed also that the Burmese had received the letters sent by Canning and Gibson in August 1824 and had ignored them. This again called for punishment. Further, it was felt that the British, having made so many sacrifices, were entitled to more concessions.³

These general arguments apart, there were special factors underlying some of the new demands that were made. It is proposed to examine these demands now, and the special motives, if any, which lay behind them.

1. BSPC, 20 May 1825, Minute by the Governor-General, 16 May 1825, No.6.

2. BSPC, 22 July 1825, Minute by Paget, 2 July 1825, No.2.

3. BSPC, 20 May 1825, Minute by Governor-General, No.6 and Swinton to Campbell, No.11.

The large province of Arakan, already occupied by the British in the early months of 1825, was now added to the list of territories whose cession was required. One factor which recommended its annexation was that the mountain range separating Arakan from Burma seemed to be a better defensive barrier than the Kaladan river, which separated Arakan from Chittagong. Other factors mentioned in the Council's discussions were the climate of Arakan (wrongly supposed to be safer for a garrison than that of the Chittagong district) and its "robust and warlike population", who Amherst believed would be a better bulwark against the Burmese than the people of Bengal.¹ Finally, John Fendall was convinced that the war had made the Burmese inveterate foes of the British and that they would take the first opportunity to exact vengeance. He proposed that Arakan should be annexed for that reason. The mountainous Arakan-Burma frontier, as stated above, was easier to defend than the Arakan-Bengal one.² Fendall's fears turned out to be unfounded.

The indemnity demanded from Burma was raised tenfold to the enormous sum of 20,000,000 rupees. In the instructions to Campbell, it was stated that having spent unexpectedly heavily on the war, the Calcutta Government wished to secure as much recompense as possible. The purpose of the indemnity was also to punish the Burmese for protracting the war, and to provide convincing proof that the Burmese had been made to atone for their offence.

1. BSPC, 20 May 1825, Minute by the Governor-General, 16 May 1825, No.6.

2. BSPC, 20 May 1825, Minute by John Fendall, 19 May, No.7.

3. BSPC, 20 May 1825, Swinton to Sir Archibald Campbell, 20 May 1825, No.11.

However, the territorial cessions (Arakan, Tavoy and Mergui) would have the same effects. (Land revenue, it was supposed, would also be a means of securing recompense. This need not necessarily have been the case since administration costs could exceed revenue). Consequently, Campbell was informed that if the Court of Ava refused to pay the indemnity, he could reduce the demand, or waive it, or give them an opportunity to redeem the provinces of Martaban and Ye for whatever amount he had meant to demand as an indemnity. It was made clear to him, however, that it would be desirable to collect as large a sum as possible. Campbell, when faced later by Burmese protests that the sum was too large for them, reduced it to 10,000,000 rupees.

Tavoy and Mergui were also to be asked for. The Calcutta Government had received from John Crawfurd, then Resident at Singapore, completely erroneous estimates of the economic potential of those provinces and of the strategic value of their ports.¹ There seemed also to be a possibility of transferring Tavoy and Mergui to Siam as an inducement towards restoring the Sultan of Kedah to his throne. But the records do not show that the Calcutta Government was affected at this juncture by these considerations. The objective in asking for these provinces ^{was} for such purposes as demonstrating British power and punishing the Burmese.

Campbell was instructed to warn the Burmese that Martaban and Ye, and in the last resort, Pegu, would be taken from them also

1. BSPC, 19 November 1824, Crawfurd to Swinton, 31 May 1824.

if they kept up their resistance. As regards Martaban and Ye, occupied by the British in November 1824, he was specifically advised that: "... it will be prudent to reserve the question of the disposal of Martaban and Ye should it appear to you that the Burmese government is practising an evasive conduct in the negotiations for peace".¹ This stipulation was to cost the Burmese the loss of Ye also. Campbell regarded the conduct of the Burmese negotiations at Naunbinzei~~k~~ as being evasive and demanded the cession of Ye also at the subsequent talks at Melloon.

The new territorial demands were to cause great humiliation to the Court. The loss of the Indian provinces, which alone had been prescribed by the earlier terms, was accepted by the Burmese negotiators; at Melloon with comparative equanimity; they were recent acquisitions and were separated from Burma by a difference of religion. Arakan, on the other hand, was, after Pegu, the most valued acquisition of the Konbaung kings. Its size, its long subjection to Burmese rule, and the fact that its conquest was an important achievement of the Konbaung dynasty, were cited by the Burmese negotiators at Melloon as reasons for their reluctance to part with it. The second and third objections would also have applied to the loss of the Tenasserim provinces, which had in fact been even longer in the Burmese possession. The increased indemnity was also to prove a heavy burden. The attempts of the Court to realize it led to misery, and in parts of the country to revolt. The humiliating treaty of Yandabo was, in all likelihood, also partly responsible for Bagyidaw's subsequent insanity.

1. BSPC, 20 May 1825, Swinton to Campbell, 20 May 1825, No.11.

In May 1825, the Calcutta Government also decided to initiate negotiations. Hitherto, they had been of the view that the Burmese should open negotiations since they were the losing side. The Court, however, made no overture. It might not, in fact, have seen any point in doing this; for why should the British voluntarily give up territory they had conquered? The economic burden involved in holding territories in Burma might not have struck them at all.¹ But the Court might have been reluctant to initiate negotiations even if they had known that the British were agreeable, for it might have been inadmissible for the King to show such weakness. This aspect of the matter had dawned on the policy makers in Calcutta by May 1825 and they decided that it would be better to propose negotiations themselves than to face the risk of the Court abandoning the capital, and fleeing north, leaving them with no one to negotiate with.²

It is clear from the instructions of Campbell of May 1825, that the Calcutta Council was aware by now of the reasons which might prevent the Burmese Court from opening negotiations. The King, Campbell was informed,

... may conceive that [while] we are victorious we can have no sufficient motive for desiring to stop in our course or that as long as there is anything to be gained from war, we cannot be sincere in our professions of moderation or readiness to conclude terms of peace.³

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

The professions referred to would have been those in the letters sent by Campbell and Gibson to the Court from Rangoon in August 1824. The Council referred also to "vanity and pride" as reasons which might prevent the Court from negotiating.¹ The Council's language at this point shows bias; but it is clear that they realized that the King might think it to be beneath his dignity to be the first to initiate negotiations, and further, that the British aimed at conquest. Campbell was now instructed to answer any proposal that might reach him, no matter how irregular. (It was recognized that the Court might attempt to initiate negotiations without openly avowing responsibility, in order to avoid losing prestige). If no overture was received, he could initiate negotiations himself.

Finally, an important decision was taken in August 1825, concerning Pegu. Expansionist feeling in respect of Pegu was widespread among British circles below the level of the Governor-General-in-Council.² Only some Englishmen, however, have left their views on record. The most prominent among them were Sir Archibald Campbell, and his military secretary, Captain Snodgrass.³

Campbell's feelings on the subject are revealed by the following extract:

I am most happy at the disposal of the Tenasserim provinces [he had just received information that the British planned to retain Tavoy and Mergui] as they will turn out a most valuable acquisition to the British Government and with the Kingdom of

1. Ibid.

2. Robertson, T.C., Political Incidents of the Burmese War, London, 1855, p.141 et seq.

3. BSPC, 25 July, Snodgrass' minute, Calcutta, 1 July, No.17; 15 July, Snodgrass' memorandum, 28 June, No.12, 26 August 1825, Snodgrass' memorandum, 18 August, No.8, and 23 December 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 3 November No.9, submitting information on Pegu.

Pegu should the fate of war so determine it, the Company will possess a tract of country rich beyond anything they now have.¹

Snodgrass was of the view that "united with the rich province of Tenasserim, Pegu would soon become the most important state of India beyond the Ganges".² There was also some sympathy for the Mons, arising partly from the mistaken impression that they had suffered recent oppression at Burmese hands.

The Mons of Pegu no longer remembered the old Pegu kingdom. However, Snodgrass and Campbell assumed from the fact that the population had acquiesced in British control of Pegu, that they had become enamoured of existing conditions, and would fight to maintain them. "One word," Snodgrass wrote, "would wrest Pegu from the House of Ava forever".³ Campbell even claimed that

a simple requisition to the mudghees [myothugyis] of districts would have obtained for me all the aid money actually procured. Had the standard of independence been displayed, there is not in my opinion a real Tullyen [Mon] who would not have joined it.⁴

No convincing evidence however, was ever offered in support of such assertions.

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1. BSPC, 26 August 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 8 July 1825.
 2. BSPC, 25 July 1825, Snodgrass' minute, 1 July 1825, No.17.
 3. BSPC, 17 July, letter by Snodgrass, 24 May 1825.
 4. BSPC, 27 January 1826, Campbell to Swinton, 30 December. T.C. Robertson (op.cit., pp.141 et seq) stated emphatically that there was no pro-British feeling in Pegu. All he found was that the Pegu population was willing to serve the British for high wages, and the majority of these doing so were Burmans, not Mons.

The Calcutta Council had no enthusiasm for the project of annexing Pegu or even for supporting a Mon state. It was realized that this would make peace with Ava very difficult, even impossible. It would also entail keeping an army there to defend it against Ava. The cost of this would be enormous; it might not even be appreciably less than that of the current war. Yet a major concern of the government was to end the war and the ruinous expense it entailed. It might be objected that Pegu might yield revenue which would defray some part of the expenditure incurred. It was not known, however, whether this would be large enough to defray the cost of a garrison to a significant extent. In any case, there were more fundamental objections to the annexation of Pegu. The British empire had only recently undergone very considerable expansion under Lord Hastings. The Calcutta Council were satisfied with these acquisitions. If the three major acquisitions were made, there would be grave problems of administration; the recent acquisitions were already proving difficult to administer. It was known also that the Court of Directors was firmly opposed to further annexation and their views had already been set aside as regards Arakan and Tenasserim because of the need to make an impression on the Indian princes^{and other reasons}. The point of view of the Council as regards territorial expansion was perhaps best summarized by Paget. "Any increase", he wrote, "in our already extended territorial possessions would be impolitic and unnecessary and contrary to the wishes of His Majesty's Government and the Honourable Court of Directors."¹

1. BSPC, 11 November 1825, Minute by Paget, 8 November 1825, No.10.

Nevertheless, the Calcutta Council was forced, for strategic reasons, to consider setting up a Mon government in Pegu, with the expense it entailed of defending it against the government of Ava. The impending campaign might prove a very difficult one. It had taken Campbell a whole campaign to cover the 150 miles up to Prome. Yet the capital was another 380 miles away. The Burmese would of course continue their scorched earth policy, so all Campbell's supplies would have to be brought up from Pegu. It was essential for the safety of Campbell's army that there should be no disaffection in Pegu. The cooperation of the Pegu population was necessary to ensure a flow of supplies and to thwart Burmese attempts on the British supply line. The Commander-in-Chief, Paget, in a minute dated 7 August, urged the other members of the Council to consider the idea of getting the support of the Pegu population by declaring it independent. However, Fendall and Harrington, the two civilians in the Governor-General's Council, preferred delaying the declaration until it became unavoidable and the Governor-General came down on the side of the civilians. A peace, Amherst wrote, which left Burma unified while giving the British what they wanted was greatly to be preferred to a permanent British involvement with Pegu. Such a treaty would become impossible, because of Burmese resentment, if a declaration was made on the lines suggested by Paget. On the other hand, if a declaration was avoided, a satisfactory treaty might be concluded at any stage of the advance to the capital. (In fact, the Yandabo treaty was to be concluded about fifty-five miles from the capital).

Amherst did not entirely discount Paget's military arguments however. He was prepared to sanction a declaration recognizing Pegu as independent in certain circumstances. Firstly, he conceded that

...if his Campbell's communications with Rangoon should be intercepted or should be in danger of being intercepted by the assemblage of any Burmese force upon his right or in his rear and if it should be his opinion that such danger would be best averted by the close cooperation of the Peguers, and further that a declaration of their separation from Ava would arouse them into activity, he should in such cases feel authorized to invite the Peguers to assert their independence of Ava under a guarantee of our assistance.¹

It will be noticed that Campbell was to make this move only if he felt that "a declaration of their separation would rouse them the Pegu population into activity."² Amherst clearly had his doubts as to whether this would happen, in spite of the assurances given by Campbell and Snodgrass.

Amherst foresaw two other eventualities in which Pegu might have to be separated from Ava; the first would arise if it was found to be impossible to get a treaty at the capital (even with a new dynasty installed there by the British) and the second if Campbell's advance was checked as a result of Burmese resistance. However burdensome a British military commitment to a Mon kingdom was expected to be, Amherst clearly preferred it to the humiliating and, from the Indian point of view, supposedly dangerous expedient of evacuating Burma without a treaty.³ Instructions to this effect were sent to Campbell on 26 August 1825.⁴

1. Ibid.

2. BSPC, 26 August 1825, Minute by Governor-General, 15 August 1825, No.13.

3. Ibid.

4. BSPC, 26 August 1825, Swinton to Campbell, 26 August 1825, No.18.

The Council's records do not contain any discussion of the policy which would have to be adopted if a declaration establishing an independent Pegu was issued but met with no response. Probably, the British would in the end have had to evacuate Pegu also, except for certain coastal areas including Rangoon, which could have been secured by a comparatively small and inexpensive garrison, and then been used as a bargaining counter in future negotiations with the Burmese.¹

The reaction of the Pegu population was obviously of great importance to the British. It was clearly necessary for them to possess detailed information on the attitudes and likely responses of the Pegu population. They possessed no ^{such} information. Campbell and Snodgrass had persuaded themselves that there would be a favourable reaction, but the evidence they offered was extremely weak. The Calcutta Government, for its part, was in the end to issue orders for the separation of Pegu from Ava, without ever having received any real evidence that there would be a reaction.

On receiving the Calcutta Government's instructions to negotiate, Campbell opened communications with the Burmese. He wrote a letter to the Hlutdaw on 6 August 1825. Campbell adopted a carrot and stick policy in his letter. The Burmese were warned of the "more than probable fatal consequences" another campaign would have for the King and royal family.² He also warned that the war might cease to be conducted in a mild and humane way,

1. The British were able to hold Pegu in 1852, but at that time, they did not face financial difficulties.

2. Wilson, H.H., Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, Calcutta, 1827, No. 142. Campbell had in fact ~~written~~ already sent letters to the Burmese suggesting negotiations and the Burmese appear to have received them. Negotiations could have resulted even without the overture of 6 August.

"after the junction of the Siamese army with my force".¹ He meant by this that the Siamese would resort to cruel methods of warfare. This was a piece of bluff. Siamese intervention was by no means an assured fact. Without actually communicating any of the terms proposed, Campbell reminded the Burmese that he was "fully authorized by the Right Honourable the Governor-General of India to treat upon, and conclude a peace with any person or persons duly accredited to me for that purpose by the King of Ava."²

A letter was soon received from the Hlutdaw.³ The Burmese claimed to know that there would be no Siamese intervention: "Now we well know that the Siamese cannot come".⁴ Campbell was informed later that Siam had given Burma assurances in this regard.⁵ Even so, the Burmese asserted that:

....if it should 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 younger brother who has received authority over the Burmese armies, and is fully empowered by the King to treat, and you will receive your answer according to the tenor of your terms.⁶

1. Ibid., No.142.

2. Ibid., No.142. It had been made clear, in the letters sent from Rangoon by Canning that he had such power.

3. Ibid., No.144 (B).

4. Ibid., No.144 (B).

5. BSPC, 7 October 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 7 September 1825, No.18. "... I forgot to mention that on asking the Burmese deputies sent to make arrangements for the conference upon what grounds they found the assertion that the Siamese Army would not join us [the British], they replied at once, upon the best possible assurances from the Court of Siam that it would take no part in the war and that it would be better for both countries to keep the English at a distance."

6. Wilson, op.cit., 144 (B).

The Burmese, at subsequent peace talks, were to refuse to make any concessions whatever to the British. The idea of concessions to an invader was unacceptable to them. The Burmese were to find the idea of paying for a part of the British expenses peculiarly humiliating. Significantly, the delegates were to say that the King might be willing to give the British some money after they had left the country; this would not have carried the degrading implication of submission to coercion and could even be viewed as a charitable gesture befitting a Buddhist monarch. In fact, the Burmese were to represent the indemnity in these terms when they wrote their official history of the war.

Precedent was also an important consideration for the Burmese. (This was to be stated by the Burmese negotiators). There had been no case of a Burmese King having made concessions to an invader, although there were cases of invaders having overthrown Burmese dynasties. There had in fact been only one precedent for even negotiating with an invader - this was with the invading Chinese in 1769. Here is Phayre's account of that episode.

The Chinese generals, discouraged by defeat and straitened for provisions determined to negotiate in order to secure an unmolested retreat. They addressed a letter to Maha Thiha Thura, in which they attributed the war to a misunderstanding caused by the intrigues of the sawbwas of Thinni, Bamoa, Mogaung and Kyaingyun. They proposed that these officials, then in Chinese territory should be exchanged for the Chinese officers who were prisoners and that the relations of the two countries should be established as they were before the war.¹

1. Phayre, A., A History of Burma, New York, 1969, pp.201-202.

Mingyi Maha Thihathuya agreed to the Chinese request because

China was a powerful empire and could send even more men than the vast hosts which had already appeared. If the men now at their mercy were destroyed, the quarrel between the two countries would be perpetuated and great evil would result to future generations.... A document styled 'a written contract of settlement' was drawn up and agreed to by all present. It stated in general terms that peace and friendship were to be established as of old between the two great countries, and the gold and silver road in commerce to be opened as before; presents were exchanged between the commissioners of both nations and in accordance with former custom, it was agreed that letters of friendship were to be sent every ten years from one sovereign to the other. The question of boundary between the two countries which had formed a subject of correspondence, was not mentioned in the document nor was the surrender of the sawbas and prisoners inserted therein.¹

The Burmese (to judge by their statements of the Naunbinzeik talks) intended to sign a treaty of this type with the British, that is, a treaty which would re-establish friendship and not involve concessions by either side. It might be argued, as Campbell did, that the British position in 1825 was very different from that of the Chinese, who had suffered repeated defeats. But the situation did not look quite that way to the Burmese. The Burmese negotiators at Naunbinzeik did not reflect the despair of a beaten side. Despite its successes, the British force was small, and its position in the heart of the Burmese empire looked precarious. The losses of the British from sickness at Rangoon would also have been known to the Court. Besides, the Court could still draw on Upper Burmese and the Shan states for troops. The Court certainly did not want a prolongation of war; yet, it did not dread this sufficiently to be willing to concede anything to the British.

1. Ibid., pp.261-262.

To return to our narrative: Campbell, on receiving the Burmese reply to his letter proposing negotiations, was upset at being asked, for the purpose of negotiations, "to come and solicit at the Burmese camp the King's younger brother", then the Commander of the Burmese forces.¹ He took offence both at being asked to come to the Burmese camp and at the expression "come and solicit".² The language certainly implied inferiority. It must be remembered, however, that a member of the royal family was involved and the Burmese were compelled for that reason to employ a particular kind of language. Campbell replied, suggesting that the negotiations be held midway between the two armies. This proposal was accepted, but the persons sent as negotiators were a Wungyi and an Atwinwun, not the prince himself, whose status, it seems, precluded his coming to meet Campbell halfway.

The conference proper began on 3 October 1825. However, the peace terms were communicated unofficially a few days previously to the Burmese negotiators the Ki Wungyi and an Atwinwun, after they arrived at Naunbinzeik, through an Armenian merchant at Rangoon, Sarkies, who was now employed by the British as an interpreter. The Burmese negotiators urged Sarkies to get the money clause dropped. Sarkies told them that this was impossible, but added that "if they would tell him in confidence what their King could ^{really} pay he was certain I Sir Archibald Campbell might be induced to modify the demands... to meet His Majesty's means...."³ This, of course, had been provided for in Campbell's instructions.

1. BSPC, 2 October 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 7 September 1825, No.18.

2. Ibid.

3. BSPC, 11 November 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 5 October 1825, No.9.

The Burmese negotiators met Sarkies again on 2 October. Instead of taking up Sarkies' proposals, they urged that no concessions whatever be required of them. Campbell reported them as telling Sarkies:

The King of Ava would always prefer it [war] to the humiliating alternative of either giving up one inch of territory or paying money. That if we [the British] chose to act as the Chinese had done in making peace after years of war without either party giving up or exacting anything the business would very soon be settled... but that we mistook their character in supposing they would ever yield to any other terms... they were no Bengalees to submit tamely to their fate and when circumstances rendered it expedient they would get into the woods in bands and ultimately annihilate us.¹

It will be noticed that the Chinese precedent was referred to explicitly on this occasion.

On 3 October, the Burmese began discussions directly with Campbell and they urged him to withdraw both the territorial and financial demands. Campbell reported that they gave as the reason that "it would be an eternal shame and degradation to so great and mighty a sovereign to concede the slightest point [to] any nation while he remained at war with them."² The British demands, both territorial and financial, were very considerable; but at this stage, this aspect of the matter was not raised by the Burmese negotiators at all. It was the very notion of concessions that was rejected, as being immeasurably humiliating.

The British were reminded also that peace would bring about a resumption of trade, which would mean financial gain for

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

both sides. When Campbell accused them of starting the war, they did not deny this but responded with what Campbell described as "an insidious attempt to prove that we had also after all been the aggressors in affording countenance and protection to Burmese who had fled to us for refuge."¹ Campbell warned the Burmese that Pegu might be taken from them if they kept up their resistance.

The delegates promised to submit the terms to the Court but correctly predicted their rejection. An armistice of 20 days was agreed to in the meantime, to give the Court time to consider the demands; since this was the period of the monsoon, military operations were not affected as a result. The King rejected the proposals although he was thereby running the risk of losing Pegu. It would have been difficult for him to accept the idea of concessions; besides, the military situation would not have looked hopeless to the Court, for they could still draw on the whole of Upper Burma for troops.

After the King had rejected the proposals, the two Burmese commissioners wrote as follows to Campbell:

For the purpose of terminating the war which existed between the two great nations we met at Neonbenzick. On our part, we spoke the truth plainly from our hearts. But not so the English general [sic] they brought forth too many subjects totally unexpected by us.

If you sincerely want peace and our former friendship re-established according to Burmah custom empty your hand of what you have and then if you wish it we will be on friendly terms with you... after the termination of the armistice between us, if you show any inclination to renew your demands

1. Ibid.

for money for your expenses, or our territory from us, you are to consider our friendship at an end. This is Burma custom.¹

There was not even an indication that the Burmese would cede the three Indian provinces of Assam, Cachar and Jaintia. In his report to the Governor-General-in-Council, Campbell denounced the Burmese in violent terms ("the still unhumbled pride and arrogance of that Court, the proverbial cunning and treachery of the Government").² He did not despair "of yet bringing the infatuated dispot [sic] to reason and to a just sense of his own interests".³ In the last resort, he had no doubt that he would succeed "in wresting the sceptre of Alompra from the feeble grasp of his degenerated descendant".⁴ In other words, the British advance would continue until further Burmese overtures were received. Campbell wrote to the Burmese also, denying that the British were greedy for territory or money and claiming (rather oddly for a representative of the East India Company) that the Burmese empire was "already overgrown".⁵ But he made it clear that negotiations could be resumed whenever the Burmese wanted it. Prior to the resumption of the British advance, Campbell issued two further proclamations. One was addressed to the population of Pegu. It urged them to continue to sell supplies and labour to the British; there was a suggestion

1. BSPC, 9 December, letter from Burmese Commissioners, 28 October 1825.

2. BSPC, 9 December 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 2 October 1825.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. BSPC, 23 December 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 3 November, No.2, enclosing letter to Burmese.

(stronger than in the proclamation issued earlier in the year) that the British would countenance political changes in Pegu if the population wanted it: "by your determination to maintain the rights of a free people... you are worthy of becoming so...."¹ The other was addressed to the population of Upper Burma. It informed them that the King preferred "his treasure to the happiness of his unfortunate subjects". It urged them not to oppose the British and promised payment for anything sold to them.²

The Court for its part had realized how serious the situation had become. The new conscripts were paid 150 ticals each - something that was done very rarely in Burma, though it was not entirely without precedent.³ This new force was defeated in front of Prome in fighting during the first two weeks of December 1825. This defeat meant the loss to the Court of all the territory between Prome and Melloon, a town halfway between Prome and Ava, to the outskirts of which place the British were able to advance unopposed. Melloon, however, still remained in Burmese hands. The Court could now look for troops only in the area around the capital. Also, its treasury was now almost empty, as a result of the payments made to the 50,000 - 60,000 troops raised previously. Accepting the unacceptable, the idea of concessions, they now tried to whittle these down to a minimum. In fact, the British demands seemed so

1. BSPC, 23 December 1825, Proclamation by Sir Archibald Campbell, addressed to population of Pegu.

2. BSPC, 23 December 1825, Proclamation by Sir Archibald Campbell, addressed to population of Pegu.

3. Hall, D.G.E., Michael Symes: Journal of his Second Embassy to the Court of Ava in 1802, p.211.

large to them that it was assumed that they must be bargaining points, rather than what they would actually settle for. (This was stated by the Burmese at the Melloon conference). In late December the Court once again agreed to negotiations.

On the British side, Campbell was now joined as fellow negotiator by T.C. Robertson, till then in charge of the administration of Arakan. Perhaps, the habitually violent language Campbell used when referring to the Burmese Court in his letters and his obvious desire to see Pegu separated from Ava, raised doubts in the mind of the Calcutta Council as to whether he possessed the right attitude for negotiations. By contrast, T.C. Robertson, the administrator of Arakan, had called for moderation and a negotiated settlement, and he might have been expected to be a moderating influence. It was known also at Calcutta that British control of Pegu would create administrative problems, which Campbell would not be able to attend to because of his military duties. T.C. Robertson was now appointed Civil Commissioner in Ava and Pegu. He was given administrative powers over Pegu and he was made co-negotiator with Campbell. Campbell, however, was made Senior Commissioner, with a final voice in negotiations. Perhaps, Calcutta did not want Campbell to feel they had lost faith in his capacity to negotiate.

On the Burmese side, the Ki Wungyi, the negotiator at Naunbinzeik, was joined by Kaulien Mingyi, who had a special commission from the King to negotiate. Before the conference could begin, problems of procedure had to be resolved, so that neither side would appear the inferior party. Since the British and Burmese armies were controlling opposite banks of the Irawati (with the Burmese controlling Melloon), it was decided to hold the conference

in a boat in the middle of the river. Then a dispute arose as to whether the boat was to be British or Burmese. Campbell wanted it to be a British warship (the steamer "Diana"), but the Burmese were vehemently opposed to this, for nothing could have exposed their weakness more than having to negotiate on an enemy warship in the heart of their country. They offered to provide a boat specially built for the occasion, and therefore, strictly speaking, not their property. Robertson persuaded a reluctant Campbell to agree to this.¹

At the conference itself, the Burmese first conceded the principle of concessions and then sought to bring down the British demands to an acceptable minimum.² The concessions they were prepared to make reveal their order of priorities. They agreed to give up the Indian provinces, but were extremely anxious to know whether these states would be annexed by the British, or returned to local rulers. The concession involved in the latter case was regarded as being smaller than in the former. British policy towards these states was still undetermined, but the Burmese were told that it was likely that they would be restored to local rulers, since the British had no interest in them beyond that of security.

Arakan was brought up next. The Burmese explained why the province was important to them. When their pleas were ignored, they conceded the point, but urged that the indemnity and the demand

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1. However, Campbell appears to have been by far the dominant partner during all the ensuing discussions with the Burmese.
 2. The reports on the Melloon negotiations, BSPC, 27 January 1825, Commissioners in Ava and Pegu to Swinton, 3 January enclosing reports of 26 December, 29 December, 30 December, 1 January and 2 January.

for Tenasserim be dropped. They were shocked to discover that there was to be no compromise here either. Ki Wungyi, who had negotiated at Naunbinzeik said:

I formerly thought that if the English insisted upon a money payment, they would retain it [Arakan] in hostage and allow us to redeem it by a specified sum of money but now you have taken Arakan, Mergui and Tavoy, as well as other provinces, and demand the money in addition.¹

The Burmese negotiators "pressed the relinquishment of the money demand at great length and with peculiar urgency".² They insisted that they could not pay 20,000,000 rupees, as it was a vast sum, their treasury was now empty and the country was ruined.³ They offered to pay a few hundred thousand rupees immediately, and 4,000,000 rupees after the British had left Burma and the country had recovered from the war. Campbell halved the demand to 10,000,000 rupees, half of which was to be paid before the British evacuated the country; but he would not reduce further. It is interesting to

1. Ibid., 2 January.

2. Ibid., 1 January.

3. It must be remembered that Burma was on a different level of economic development from Britain, or even Bengal. The country was potentially wealthy, but produced little wealth at that time. The following figures will illustrate this: the King's annual revenue was well below one million rupees. The total taxes (both royal and provincial) paid by the province of Pegu was only 428,000 ticals (about 500,000 rupees). For the Burmese, therefore, 20,000,000 rupees was an impossibly large sum and even 10,000,000 was to strain their resources to the utmost. They were able to pay it only by making payments in jewellery also, and by imposing special taxes on the people. A lot of the money spent by the British in Pegu would have been recovered by them in this way.

note that when the Burmese delegates admitted the inability of their king to pay the indemnity (as opposed to his unwillingness to do so) all the Burmese present except the two principal negotiators left the boat. Perhaps, the poverty of a divine king was regarded as something very shameful.

Faced with the alternative of accepting what seemed to them to be extravagant demands or having the British advance resumed, the negotiators gave in and acceded to the British terms, but without any clear idea of how to persuade the king to accept them, or how to raise the money. Initially, fearing execution for having agreed to such terms, they stated to the British that they would keep the King in ignorance of the treaty, and carry out its provisions themselves, including the money clause, but they seem to have realized that this was not possible; at any rate, they passed the terms on to Ava eventually.

It is scarcely surprising that the Court, faced as it was with such terms, should have decided upon a final military effort. A new force was raised, and paid for from loans raised from the propertied citizens of Ava - a measure which, according to one eye-witness, made them anxious for an end to hostilities. When this force was defeated also, the Court sent one Dr. Price, an American missionary, to the British camp in February 1825, hoping that he, as a westerner, might succeed in softening the terms of the treaty. Price asked first that the demands be withdrawn on the grounds that they were contrary to Burmese custom. When this was rejected, he conveyed a Burmese offer to pay the indemnity in lieu of ceding territory. He was particularly anxious that the demand for Arakan should be dropped. To the British, who expressed surprise that the

Court was now willing to assume the burden of an indemnity, Price explained that an indemnity had come to be preferred because financial losses could be recovered from the population by special taxation over a period of time, whereas territorial losses would be permanent. His offer of an indemnity as an exclusive alternative was refused by Campbell. The King then gave his consent to the treaty. It was ratified at Yandabo, only forty-five miles from the capital, bringing the British advance, resumed after the failure of the Melloon negotiations, to a halt.¹

Campbell had been instructed by the Calcutta Government to secure the King's signature to the treaty. This brought the British up against another Burmese custom. The Burmese king did not sign letters, at any rate not by 1823. Even the letter to Vietnam of 1823 had been from the Hlutdaw to its counter-part in that country, not from Bagyidaw to Minh Mang. This custom was explained to the British negotiators, and they had to content themselves with the Hlutdaw's seal.

Since the Court had expended most of its financial resources in its final military efforts, the first instalment of the indemnity had to be paid partly in jewellery. This amounted to 2,500,000 rupees. On receiving this sum, the British withdrew to Rangoon. In December 1826, the second instalment of 2,500,000 rupees was paid, and the British left Rangoon also, leaving the third and fourth instalments to be paid at one yearly intervals.

1. BSPC, 10 March, 28 March 1824 and 14 April 1824, letters from Commissioners in Ava and Pegu to Swinton.

During the last two months of the war, the Calcutta Government's policy concerning Pegu underwent important changes which, however, were not implemented because it took a month for the amended instructions to reach Campbell's army. On 10 February 1826, orders actually went out from Calcutta to General Campbell to declare Pegu independent, unless a treaty had been signed or was in the process of being signed. This despatch reached the general only after the Yandabo treaty had been signed and he was coming down the Irrawaddy. According to Henry Gouger, a British merchant who was in the same boat, Campbell said that if he had received the despatch earlier, the Burmese "would not have got off so easily."¹ It is interesting to speculate on what would have happened if the Burmese had not signed the Yandabo treaty - if, for example, the King had given in to the urgings of the queen to abandon the capital and carry on a guerrilla war. But before doing this, it is necessary to examine the evolution of policy at Calcutta between August 1825 and February 1826.

It has been shown that Amherst, in August 1825, gave Campbell authority to declare Pegu independent if there was any danger of his supply line being cut. Early in December 1825, the Calcutta Government received Campbell's report on the failure of the Naunbinzeit negotiations. They noted that the Burmese negotiators had rejected the British terms, not because of the extent of the concessions demanded, but because the very principle of concessions

1. Gouger, H., A Prisoner in Burmah, London, 1860, p.303. But this book was published some 35 years after the war, and may not be reliable on details. Gouger, incidentally, states (p.296) that Campbell had repeatedly asked the Calcutta Government for permission to declare Pegu independent. He had not in fact done this, only on one occasion, in 1824. Subsequently, he had written in support of the idea, but had not actually asked for permission to declare Pegu independent.

was unacceptable to them. But the British attitude at this stage was that they needed some concessions if they were to emerge from the war without loss of face. There now seemed to be no course of action left except, in Amherst's words to aim at "the entire subjugation and prostration of the enemy".¹ But would it not be dangerous to advance without the assurance of Mon cooperation? A piece of information received at Calcutta early in November suggested that it would be dangerous. Campbell reported that certain myothugyis in the vicinity of Prome had shown signs of hostility to the British at the time of the negotiations, and that a patrol which had gone in search of a group of dacoits had been fired upon at one village. The myothugyi of Prome was also behaving suspiciously. Campbell reported that he was not passing on reports of pro-Burmese activities. His explanation, probably a correct one, was that word had got around that the British had offered to restore Pegu to Burma at the conference.² This would probably have come as a surprise to the myothugyis, and made them want to demonstrate their pro-Ava zeal before it was too late. There were also unconfirmed reports to the effect that the Burmese were trying to create disaffection in Pegu. These reports awakened the Calcutta Government's fear of disaffection in Pegu and the consequent destruction of Campbell's army.³

Campbell already had the power to declare Pegu independent but it was felt in Calcutta that it was necessary now to issue more

1. BSPC, 9 December 1825, Minute by the Governor-General, 22 November, No.41.

2. BSPC, 10 November 1825, Campbell to Swinton, 11 October 1825, No.23, with enclosures.

3. BSPC, 23 December 1825, Swinton to Campbell, 22 December 1825, No.17.

specific instructions. He was ordered to get whatever support he thought he needed from the Mons, including the formation of a Mon military force commanded by British officers, and if he felt that it was necessary to declare Pegu independent in order to get such help, he was authorized to do that, and also to promise British support for the kingdom. He was not, however, to go into details about the kind of support that would be given. At this stage, the Calcutta Government still wanted some room for manoeuvre. These instructions were despatched on 23 December 1825.¹ In a subsequent despatch dated 29 December 1823, the Calcutta Government made detailed suggestions for Campbell to consider, such as investigating candidates for the Pegu throne (including Maha Ayuthia, who had appeared once again at the head of a Siamese force at the Martaban frontier) and raising a Mon force of 10,000 men, which would defend Pegu along with 4,000 British troops, with the latter being withdrawn in stages.²

Campbell was warned that the Indian Government had no intention of taking over Pegu itself. All the British would ask from the new Mon kingdom would be reciprocal trading advantages (such as those accorded by Bodawpaya in 1795). It is clear that even the existing policy, with all its constraints, was repugnant to them, because it would involve maintaining a temporary garrison in Pegu at enormous expense at a time when the Indian budget was already seriously strained. It was only the fear of the imminent destruction of Campbell's expeditionary force which made them adopt it.

1. Ibid.

2. BSPC, 30 December 1825, Swinton to Campbell, 29 December, No.7.

In fact, the danger facing Campbell in May 1825 was very great. The British force was numerically very small, and it would not have been possible for them to guard their entire supply-line successfully. By carrying on harassing warfare against their long and vulnerable supply-line the Court might have been able to force them to retreat and perhaps even compel surrender. It is not certain if the British could have prevented this by declaring the dependence of Pegu. If, as seems quite likely there was no desire in Pegu for such independence, the population would not have tried to prevent attempts to interfere with the British supply line. Besides, these attempts could have been confined to Upper Burma. The Burmese failed however, to exploit their opportunity. They continued to resort to pitched battles and were consequently defeated. Conventional warfare posed no threat to the British.

The British decision to ask only for trading advantages meant foregoing completely whatever revenue could be raised from the Rangoon trade and from taxes on agriculture, timber and people, although such revenue would defray in part the cost of defending Pegu against Ava. This shows clearly and was perhaps meant to show clearly, to the Court of Directors, that the Calcutta Council was acting solely for strategic reasons.

Early in February 1826, news reached Calcutta of the failure of the Melloon negotiations. This was the second time a peace conference had failed. The news produced a deep impression in Calcutta and had an effect on the instructions sent to Campbell in February. The Melloon negotiations, Campbell was told, appeared to have failed either because of the "duplicity" of the Burmese negotiators, or the "barbarous ignorance, pride and fluctuation of councils

which has hitherto characterized the Court of Ummarapoor", but whatever the reason, "... our dependence on the favourable result of any renewed conference and of the security and stability of any peace which may now be formed with the Court of Ava is necessarily shaken to the foundations".¹

Therefore, an advance to the capital was necessary, and Campbell was "enjoined" to safeguard his rear by proclaiming the independence of Pegu, with a "full promise of future support".² This promise was to be made as explicit as possible, that is to say, the population were to be assured that "under no circumstances shall their country ever return under the Dominion of Ava".³ This was to be done in case a treaty had not been ratified, or was not in the process of being ratified by the time the instructions reached him, and the Burmese did not seem likely to accept one. There was still no liking for this measure in Calcutta. It was described by Swinton, as political secretary to the Bengal Government as being fraught "... with the most serious and positively embarrassing consequences, which nothing short of the existing emergency would warrant our encountering".⁴

If a treaty had not yet been obtained, but the Burmese seemed likely to accept one, Campbell was not to declare Pegu independent but to press instead for the cession of Martaban in return for an appropriate reduction in the money demand. The reason

1. BSPC, 10 February 1826, Swinton to Commissioners in Ava and Pegu, 10 February 1826, No.19.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

for this decision was that British officers returning from Burma (presumably those who brought despatches to Calcutta) had urged that the Martaban myothugyis who had supported the British ought not to be abandoned to Ava, and also that those Mons who wished to leave Pegu for British territory would find Martaban a more congenial refuge than Tenasserim or Arakan.

An examination of the three sets of instructions, of August 1825, December 1825 and February 1826, shows that Campbell had all along had the power to declare the independence of Pegu. What had changed and become more inflexible and specific were the circumstances under which the declaration was to be made. In August, Campbell merely had the discretion to take the step if his army was in danger. In December 1825, he was instructed to declare Pegu independent if it was necessary to do so in order to secure Mon support and to raise a Mon force to assist the British; and in February 1826 there was a further advance still: there was an order to adopt the measure unless a treaty had been signed or was imminent. The factors behind the changes in December and February were the indications that the Court would carry on the war to the last extremity, the evidence of the change in attitude of some people in Pegu and doubts about the value of an agreement with Ava.

Neither the instructions of late December 1825 nor those of early February 1826 had any effect on developments in Burma. The first set reached Campbell only after the capture of Pagan, after which the British advance northwards was almost unopposed, and Mon help unnecessary. The second reached him, as has been seen, only after the Yandabo treaty had been signed.

What would have happened if the Burmese had continued the war - if, for example, the King had accepted the queen's advice to carry on a guerrilla resistance which might include attacks on the British supply-line. Tharawaddy, in the 1830s, felt this course should have been adopted. One can understand why the king preferred to stay in Ava. If he abandoned the palace, any of the royal princes, or even any commoner, could, by occupying the palace (which was regarded as the centre of the universe, and as one source of the King's authority) have proclaimed himself king. There were precedents for this in Burmese history. In 1781, King Singu had been deposed by a pretender who managed to seize the palace when the King had gone upriver to worship at a pagoda there. In March 1782, the Badon prince seized the palace from the pretender himself and became the ruler known to later reigns as Bodawpaya. In December 1781, another pretender attempted to seize the palace from Bodawpaya but failed, and was executed. As recently as mid-1825, the Pakhan Wun had been executed, soon after he had been appointed commander-in-chief of the Burmese forces, for plotting to seize the palace. The suspicions of the Court had been aroused by his suggestion that the King should leave the palace to offer prayers for the success of the Burmese troops. This was seen as a ruse to get the King to vacate the palace; and a subsequent search of the Wun's house, it claimed, uncovered royal insignia.

However, had the King followed the queen's advice in 1826 and resorted to a harrassing war, Campbell, who was very much in

favour of separating Pegu, might have carried out the instructions of 10 February to declare Pegu independent.

It is by no means certain however, that the mass upheaval the Calcutta Government hoped for would have come about. Admittedly the myothugyis of Pegu, because of their collaboration with the British, feared a resumption of Burmese rule. Their behaviour in the vicinity of Prome has already been noticed. The following excerpt from a statement submitted by 21 Mon and Karen headmen in the Rangoon area is another piece of evidence:

"... the Burmese invaded the territory of the English, upon which the latter coming well-provided with war-like weapons and firearms took possession of the Country from the Burmese. Since that time we have enjoyed tranquility and many, who had fled through fear of war, hearing the equity and mildness of the English reported, have returned to their habitations, obeyed orders and cheerfully complied with the requirements of the English. Now, it has come to our ears that it is intended to restore our country to the dominion of the Burmese Rajah. Should this be done, many of us will be put to death, and many of our wives and children will be committed to the flames, and there will be no place for us to remain in. Therefore, we pray that our country may never be restored to the Burmese and we will exert ourselves night and day to execute whatever orders we may receive."

(21 signatures)¹

But would this fear have sufficed to make the myothugyis fight for the British or for a Mon kingdom, instead of merely continuing to provide labour and supplies at market price? The myothugyis might have preferred to try to conciliate Ava, as those in the Prome area seem to have done. In any case, the population of Pegu, as opposed to the myothugyis, had much less to fear from

1. BSPC, 20 January 1825, Smelt to Swinton, 12 January, private, enclosing petition.

the charge of collaboration. Any mass opposition for this reason was by no means certain.

There is no satisfactory evidence to show that there was any widespread popular desire in Pegu for independence from the Burmese. The assertions of Snodgrass and Campbell to the effect that the Pegu population would respond to a proclamation declaring Pegu independent were contradicted as has been seen by T.C. Robertson. It must be remembered that a good part of the Pegu population was Burmese, and they clearly could not have been animated by Mon nationalism.

In Martaban, the local British commander was confident of getting military help from the myothugyis and their followers. Captain Fenwick, who commanded the British garrison there, reported that these myothugyis, who were already engaged in minor operations against Burmese units in the province, could furnish a force of 3,000-4,000 men. But although Martaban was almost entirely Mon, the motive of these myothugyis seems to have been mercenary. According to Fenwick, the reason for their willingness to give armed support was that "... the wealth they have accumulated during their connexion with us renders them much averse to the idea of returning under the Burmese Government".¹

Even if a major upheaval occurred among the Mons, however, the presence of British troops and administrators would have been necessary to bolster up the fledgling Mon kingdom. In view of the strained state of the Indian finances, this could not have been kept

1. BSPC, 30 December, Fenwick to Smelt, Commander, Rangoon, 12 November 1825.

up. The British would have had to withdraw and the Court of Ava would probably have been able (after a period of warfare and chaos) to re-establish its authority in the South.

CONCLUSION

After 1762, the year of the Alves Mission, a period ensued in which there was no political contact between Burma and the British. This state of affairs could not last, several factors came into being which would have led to diplomatic contact sooner or later. Anglo-Burmese trade expanded greatly in this period, and this fact alone would have resulted in diplomatic contact before long. Then, the British merchants involved in this trade had many grievances, and the British Government was bound sooner or later to intervene on their behalf. The Anglo-French war began in the east in 1793 and this made the exclusion of the French from Burma very desirable. Then, in 1784, after the Burmese conquest of Arakan, the Burmese and the British had acquired a common frontier. Disagreements emerged over such issues as border crossings and extradition. This again, made official relations likely. Finally, there was the fact that the Burmese and the British were neighbouring powers. This alone would have led to contact before long.

As a result of these factors, Michael Symes was sent to Burma in 1795. The Symes mission failed to secure the exclusion of the French. On the other hand, the king clearly wished to promote good relations with the British and was willing to be liberal to British merchants, though one of the commercial concessions that he made was temporarily withdrawn shortly afterwards.

In 1796, Captain Hiram Cox was sent to Burma to develop further the existing good relations, to assist British merchants, and to secure by discreet methods, the exclusion of the French.

He turned out to be an unsuitable choice. He made innumerable demands, which not only greatly exceeded his authority, but also violated specific instructions. The failure of this mission was due to the agent himself. The King cannot be held responsible for it. As early as February 1797, the King agreed to Cox becoming resident at Rangoon, and this was the only concession that it was necessary for him to make.)

The result of Cox's actions was that the British withdrew him from Rangoon and had no agent residing in Burma till 1803. Cox's actions had aroused great resentment at the capital, and in the king's mind. The friendly atmosphere so evident in 1794 and 1795 disappeared and in its place, there was rancour. This ill-feeling was aggravated by other developments: the failure of repeated Burmese efforts (made on the Court's orders) to secure arms, the attack on the pursuit force of 1797 and the protection given to refugees from Arakan. A more sympathetic attitude on arms might have been sufficient to regain the Court's goodwill.

Meanwhile, in 1798, Wellesley had become Governor-General of Bengal. Under Wellesley, British policy towards Burma became much more ambitious than it had been before, and was to be afterwards, at any rate until 1823. (In fact, British objectives, during the Anglo-Burmese war, were argueably more restrained than Wellesley's policy in 1802). A certain amount of rashness in policy formulation is also evident.

There is evidence that Wellesley approved of Cox's conduct. This fact alone suggests that Wellesley considered a high-handed policy towards Burma appropriate. It also betrays poor judgement, since Cox had violated his instructions and made unrealistic demands.

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In 1798, the Calcutta Government had written a letter, in reply to a request from the Myowun of Arakan for arms, suggesting a "closer political and commercial connection" between Burma and Bengal.¹ The alliance involved would in all likelihood have been a subsidiary alliance. The subsidiary alliance was not the only kind of association Wellesley could envisage. The Roberts mission to Vietnam did not aim at securing a subsidiary alliance. However, a subsidiary alliance was always Wellesley's objective in India; also, in 1801, he was to offer a subsidiary alliance to Nepal, and in 1802, to Burma. It seems more likely, therefore that in 1798, he was thinking of imposing a subsidiary alliance on Burma. At any rate, an alliance of some kind was envisaged. Yet, he had failed to lay down a clear policy to this effect, and in subsequent letters to the Burmese, the matter was not revived.

However, after the differences at Arakan frontier in 1799 to 1800, the issue was taken up again, but in a more systematic manner than before. Captain William Franklin was instructed by the Governor-General to write a report on the mode of approach to be adopted towards Burma. Franklin, who was apparently influenced by his knowledge of Wellesley's outlook, had suggested (among other things) attempts to impose a subsidiary alliance. In 1802, Symes was sent to Burma to secure such an alliance, as well as for other reasons. Symes had instructions also to offer British help to the Ein-gyi Paya in the event of a power struggle.

It was argued earlier that the object of a subsidiary alliance was not necessarily unrealistic. However, it was shown

1. Bengal Political Consultations (BPC), 28 November 1798, Secretary to Governor-General to Myowun of Arakan, 13 October 1798, No.34.

that Calcutta Government's assumption that a power struggle was likely was rash.

Symes met with an initially cold reception at the capital. The King had first meant to receive him, but when the news of the arrival of the French ships came, his animosity towards the British came to the surface. However, his own judgement, and the advice he received from various quarters apparently led him to receive Symes as well. The King's resentment towards the British was not so deep as to prevent a reconciliation. The case for good relations with the British, who were powerful neighbours and important trading partners, was much stronger than that for the policy of hostility.

In 1803, Wellesley sent Canning to Burma to report French initiatives and to pass on communications from the King. He was sent as Symes' agent not (as has been wrongly stated) to avoid involving the British Government in case of disputes,¹ but because the King's initial treatment of Symes, and the Yewun's behaviour to the envoy after his return to Rangoon had offended Wellesley, who was not willing to send an envoy himself till the Burmese apologized. The ambitious aim of a subsidiary alliance was now dropped.

There was an impression that the Yewun had behaved unreasonably to Canning in 1803. In fact, his behaviour was defensible; he was a loyal servant of the King and probably wished to make sure that Canning was not engaging in intrigues harmful to the King. Also he did not want Canning to leave; he merely wished to read his letters.

1. Hall, D.G.E., Michael Symes, Journal of his Second Embassy to the Court of Ava, London, 1955, p.lxxxviii.

After Canning's departure in November 1803, no British representative was sent to Burma for six years. In 1809, however, a new mission was sent to warn the Burmese of the blockade, and to explain its purpose to them, so that there would be no enmity. On this occasion the King drew attention to the fact that the Governor-General was not a sovereign and asked for direct relations with England. He also asked for a definition of the frontier, with a view apparently to claiming the districts of Chittagong and Dacca. He had also snubbed the British by refusing to give a reply on the issue on which Canning had come. On the other hand, the Ein-gyi Paya (perhaps partly because he desired British help in a war of succession) curtailed trade with Mauritius, and the Myowun of Pegu gave a written assurance on the matter. The King had not been conciliatory during this mission yet Burmese policy on the blockade was accommodating, thanks to the cooperation of the Ein-gyi Paya and the Myowun of Pegu.

In 1811-1812, Burmese policy was initially conciliatory. Although one of the major provinces of the empire had been conquered by rebels from Chittagong, the Court (it was not clear whether the King or the Ein-gyi Paya was responsible for this policy) had authorized no retaliatory measures beyond a detention of British shipping at Rangoon, which the Myowun had discretionary power to lift. They desired only that the rebels be denied asylum in Chittagong and an assurance was given by Canning to this effect. Subsequently, the Ein-gyi Paya had acceded to British demands that the threats of the authorities at the frontier be disavowed and that the Burmese troops be recalled from the frontier. In fact, the Burmese army which reconquered Arakan was apparently disbanded.

However, subsequently, the King apparently attempted to have Canning brought up to the capital by force if necessary. This was a rash act, and if the Myowun had attempted to seize Canning, a serious crisis might have resulted.

The writer has sketched out above the principal developments in the period between 1795 and 1812. It is proposed now to touch on certain important aspects of this period.

The belief that the Burmese Court was isolationist appears to be without foundation. B.R. Pearn has shown how on two occasions before 1795 the Burmese Court ^{attempted to} persuade the British to open a factory in Burma. They had also agreed to the setting up of a French factory at Dalla. In 1787, Bodawpaya proposed a treaty of commerce to the British, whose object was also to promote friendship. In 1794, he had expressed a desire for "mutual confidence" with the Bengal Government.¹ The Burmese in fact, appeared till 1794 to have shown a greater interest in cultivating closer relations than the British. The latter had failed to pursue the 1787 offer, while the Sorrel mission was aimed at securing compensation for Tyler's commandeered ship. The British had sent presents, and this was certainly a friendly gesture, but the King by asking for "mutual confidence" had gone much further. The letter sent by the Myowun of Pegu to the Governor-General had also been extraordinarily cordial. Then in 1795, the Burmese had agreed to the stationing of a British resident in Burma.

How important in this period was the question of the access to Southern China markets via Burma? It was of very little importance. Shore had instructed Symes to collect information on

1. BPC, 10 November 1794, Minute by Governor-General, No.46.

Sino-Burmese trade and on the practicability of communicating with China via Burma. However, the provision was not given any particular emphasis, and was clearly not among the more important objectives of the mission.

Symes and Dr. Buchanan did collect some information which can be found in Dr. Buchanan's journal.¹ There was however no specific reference to this issue in the instructions to Cox, nor any actual attempt to institute such communications. In fact, it was never referred to again by the Calcutta Government in the period up to 1826. Several lower-ranking officials were to bring up the question when urging a policy of expansion. Canning in 1812 referred to the "contiguity of the Burmah country with China" as one factor recommending an annexation of Burma, while Snodgrass in 1825 referred to the possibility of British access to Southern China (via Upper Burma) as ~~the~~ factor recommending an expansionist policy towards Pegu.² These suggestions aroused no interest at Calcutta.

The incursions of 1787, 1794 and 1799 were not aggressive. In 1794, and probably in 1787 as well, the Burmese commanders had not been aware that they were in the territory claimed by the British. In both cases, they had withdrawn, in the first case, ^{partly at least} to avoid causing the British loss of revenue (because the peasants were abandoning their fields further west in British territory) and in the second, to avoid a clash.

1. European Manuscripts, India Office Library, E.C.2 Buchanan-Hamilton Collection.

2. Bengal Secret Consultations (BSC), 25 September 1811, Canning to Edmonstone, 9 September 1811, No.11, para. 35.

In 1799, they had refused to withdraw. When the British attacked, they repelled the attack and then withdrew, apparently to avoid aggravating matters. Hill's discussions with the Arakan Myowun showed clearly that the Burmese now viewed the territory as British, but could see nothing objectionable in entering British territory to demand refugees.

It was the protection of the refugees and the attack on the Burmese force that was objectionable in their eyes. For the British, by contrast, such an incursion was tantamount to a declaration of war.

It is often assumed again, that the question of the Governor-General's lack of sovereignty mattered a great deal to the Burmese. Yet in 1787, Badowpaya wrote directly to the Governor-General, suggesting a commercial treaty, and his envoy had been willing to receive a reply to this letter from the magistrate. The Burmese attitude on the Governor-General's status in 1795 is not certain. However, they were clearly willing to have friendly relations with the Governor-General; it is even possible that they recognised the Governor-General as a sovereign. Also, his lack of sovereignty was not made an issue of contention, nor was explicit reference ever made to it.

In 1810, the King told Canning at a royal audience that the Governor-General was not his equal in rank, and that he would like the King of England to send an embassy. The matter is raised in the letter from the Hlutdaw to the Governor-General, and by the

Myowun of Pegu in his letter to the Governor-General and seems to have become official policy. Yet, the Burmese never revived this matter in the period up to 1826, and it does not appear to have ever been an impediment to normal relations.

Arms were one commodity that the Burmese might be expected to desire, since modern weapons, once their use was mastered, would give their armies a decisive advantage over their neighbours such as China or Siam. The British, on the other hand, might^{be}/expected to refuse such a request, for fear of strengthening Burma militarily, or incurring the hostility of countries against whom these arms might be used.

On balance, the Burmese showed less interest in arms than might have been expected. The commander of the 1787 pursuit force, apparently on his own initiative, had asked for 1,000 stand of arms which he wished to present to the King. Between 1798 and 1799 King Bodaw Paya made repeated efforts to secure very large quantities of weapons. These efforts failed. In 1802, Symes had stated that arms purchases would not be opposed by the British, but the King did not make new attempts to obtain arms, although he was at war with Siam at this time. In 1809, the Myowun of Pegu made a request for a small quantity of muskets. There is, however, no evidence that the King was involved.

What was the British attitude to arms purchases? Sir John Shore in 1796 had been willing to supply arms after the conclusion of peace with France (when they could be easily spared). The dangers

of strengthening the Burmese armies, and of incurring Siamese or Chinese enmity might not have occurred to him. Alternatively, he may have been thinking of minor purchases, which would not have been dangerous.

Wellesley was apparently ^{UN}willing to allow major arms purchases. No arms were offered in 1802, although this might have given the British some leverage in their negotiations.

The Anglo-French war in the east gave Burma strategic significance. Burmese ports could be used by the enemy in a maritime war for, such purposes as provisioning, refitting, and selling prizes. There were other, more alarming possibilities, such as a Franco-Burmese alliance against the British.

Shore's instructions to Symes (1795) and to Cox (1796) show a concern with the maritime aspect. Symes, on his return from Burma in 1795, had warned of another danger - the possibility of the French gaining control over Burmese ship-building facilities, and building warships there.¹ In 1801, William Franklin had warned that Burma was a gateway into British India, the only one that was left to the French.

In 1802, Wellesley had sent Symes to Burma to secure subsidiary alliance, which would result in the exclusion of the French. No subsidiary alliance was secured, however, and Wellesley

1. Symes, M., An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, Gregg International Reprint, Farnborough, England, 1969, pp. 459-46.

sent Canning to Burma in the following year to report on French initiatives. He expected the French to make overtures to Burma at this time.¹

One purpose of the 1809 mission was to secure information on French activities.

How serious, however, was the French threat? To answer this question, it would be necessary, firstly, to ascertain how useful the Burmese ports were to the French. It does not appear that they were of much importance. For the period from 1793 (when news of the war reached the east) to 1810 (when the French Isles were captured), there were only 14 verifiable cases of visits by French warships, privateers and merchant vessels. (On several of these occasions several vessels were involved). This is not a large number for a period of 17 years. One visit is recorded in 1793, three in 1795, three from 1796 to 1797 and two between 1798 and 1802. On some of these occasions several French vessels were involved and on one occasion, some warships belonging to Sercey's Squadron underwent essential repairs. Only one visit is recorded for 1802. Four are recorded for the period 1803 to 1810 (counting the shipwreck of 1808 as a visit). There would in all likelihood have been two other visits (in around 1805 and 1808) but the records do not enable us to be sure. There may, of course have been others, which the British never discovered. Such visits would probably not have occurred very often, for in that event they would have become known and been reported by the British

1. See the reference to "the probable designs of France upon the coast of Ava", in his letter to Castlereagh, dated 25 July 1803, and therefore written shortly after the despatch of Lt. Canning to Burma. Owen, S.J., A Selection from the Despatches Treaties and other Papers of the Marquis Wellesley, Oxford, 1877, p.587.

envoys of the period 1795 to 1810, one of whose obvious task was to report such things. British merchants and sea-captains visiting Burma are also likely to have passed on information.

There appear to have been fewer visits after 1803 - in the second phase of the Anglo-French struggle. Visits appear to have been most frequent between 1795 to 1797. The reason for this is not clear, but may be ascertainable from Mauritius records, and French studies of the privateer campaign listed by C.N. Parkinson in his War in the Eastern Seas (London, 1954).

It is clear that French vessels operating in the Bay of Bengal did not find it necessary to put in at Burmese ports for food and water. They appear generally to have started out from Mauritius with adequate supplies.¹ Burma, was, of course, rather close to Bengal and word of the arrival of French ships would be likely to reach the British through their merchants and others; this would be one reason for avoiding Burma. Also, the French appear to have been able to dispose of their prizes in Mauritius itself.

Yet, Burmese facilities were occasionally utilized, while Sercey's squadron had certainly gained great benefits from it. With regard to a French-Burmese alliance, the French made no efforts to secure Burmese cooperation against British until 1809.

There is no evidence that the metropolitan French Government ever considered such a plan. In 1798 and 1799, Governor

1. See the account of privateer activities in Malleson, G.B., Final French Struggles in India and the Indian Seas, London, 1884, pp.79-114. Malleson describes the activities of several of the better-known privateer captains. Only in one case did a captain stop to take on water. This was the famous Surcouf who stopped at Java late in 1799. Malleson's account is not, of course, a full history of the privateer campaign.

Malartic of Mauritius, had promised to supply arms to Bodawpaya, and in 1802, Governor Magallon de la Morliere had actually sent muskets. However, these developments had been initiated by Bodawpaya, not the French. The later clearly wished to be conciliatory, possibly with a view to retaining Burmese port facilities (which had certainly benefitted Sercey). Yet, there is no evidence that they had wider anti-British schemes in mind.

In 1803, a French ship visited Rangoon, but apparently for commercial purposes only. In 1809, Marshall Daendals in Java hit upon the idea of forming an anti-British alliance with Burma. To judge from the statements of his envoy, Daendals intended to train an army of Burmese to invade Bengal. The training of a Burmese army along western lines would have taken many years, and the British would have had ample time to take counter-measures. In any case, it is extremely unlikely that Bodawpaya would have involved himself in projects which would inevitably have led to a war with the British.

The subject of French attitudes to Burma needs further investigation. The archives at Mauritius, the Batavian Government's archives and French studies of the privateer campaign (listed by C.N. Parkinson in his War in the Eastern Seas, London, 1954), may all yield information. The Batavian archives may contain a copy of Daendels' letter to the King of Burma. No copy exists in the India Office or Straits Settlements Records.

The King, as suggested earlier, was unlikely to have entered into an alliance with France. He had refused of course to close his ports to the French in 1795 and 1802. It may have been a matter of prestige for him to keep his ports open to the French. Also, he might have wanted to preserve his neutrality. Yet, this issue was probably not a desperately important one to him. What great advantages were derived from occasional visits by privateers? The profits derived from supplying provisions and labour or from port duties, would have been rather small. On the other hand, the French could have been an alternative source of arms. Also, if a war broke out with the British, the French might have been of some help.

It will be remembered that at an early stage of Cox's mission, the King had been willing to exclude the French. This may have been to a concession meant to secure British help in acquiring the Buddha's tooth; on the other hand, it would have been due to a desire to please the British. The King no longer desired to make this concession afterwards. Yet, with good sense and tact, Cox might have prevailed on him to exclude the French ultimately. However, the concession would not have been of very great consequence to the British.

How important was commerce in this period? The trade with Burma was important to the British because it was their source of teak, and because it absorbed a large quantity of British and Indian manufacture. A curtailment of Burma trade would have ruined the Bengal ship-building industry. There were several British

subjects in Rangoon in this period, and the Calcutta Government wished to protect their interests.

The British were naturally anxious to protect the Burma trade and British trades, but there were limits to the importance of this factor. In 1794, Sir John Shore, who had believed that the despatch of a force into Chittagong was a hostile act, had been prepared to expel them forcibly, though there was a danger that British trade with Pegu might suffer. Yet Shore was relieved when there was no fighting, for it meant that British commercial interests were safe.

Commercial considerations were a factor behind the missions of 1796, 1809 and 1812. In the last two cases, the British hoped to prevent the Burmese punishing local British traders, and to protect their trade. Yet, the British were not willing to modify their policies on the blockade (by trying to secure exemptions for the Burmese for example), and by surrendering fugitives. In 1824, the desire to protect trade, along with other factors, led the British to view the prospect of war with regret, but it did not prevent their resorting to war.

Between 1812 and 1813, relations deteriorated. The Burmese made repeated efforts to secure the extradition of the Arakan refugees, whom the British had decided, early in 1812, to allow asylum. These efforts failed. Late in 1817 or early in 1818, the King, incensed at one such refusal, demanded the surrender of several districts in eastern Bengal. British policy towards Assam between 1819 and 1822 damaged relations further. They sanctioned repeated invasions of Assam from their territory. Conflicting claims emerged also over the island of Shahpuri and over the border

states of Cachar and Jaintia. Also important was the personality of the new King, Baggidaw. He was willing to resort to war, which Bodawpaya had avoided during his reign.

We come now to the war of 1824 to 1826. The first Anglo-Burmese war is regarded by those who desire to present the Burmese point of view as primarily due to Burmese expansionism (in contrast to the second and third wars, in which the Burmese were victims of British imperialism). This view is erroneous. The Burmese claim to the island of Shahpuri was made in good faith, like the British. The Burmese were willing to back up their claim, even at the cost of war, but so were the British. Burmese policy over Shahpuri, it seems, was similar to British policy.

Subsequently, the Court received the wrong impression that the British had decided to surrender Shahpuri. It later decided, however, to ask for a surrender of refugees, and for the release of Govind Chandra who would be made tributary ruler of Cachar. There is no satisfactory evidence that the Burmese planned to fight the British by May 1824, when the British attacked Pegu.

APPENDIX A

Biographical Data

ADAM, JOHN (1799-1825)

Entered East India Company service, 1794 - secretary to Marquis of Hastings - private secretary to Marquis of Hastings - 1817, became member of Calcutta Council - acting Governor-General on Lord Hastings' departure, January 1823 - attempted to place curbs on freedom of the English press in India. Buckingham incident - Adam cancelled Buckingham's license, without which no European could remain in India.

/From Dictionary of National Biography/.

CAMPBELL, ARCHIBALD (1769-1843)

Joined 77 Regiment, 1787 - went to Bombay - fought in war of 1790-1792 - and in 1799 fought in the (Iberian) peninsula - Knighted 1814 K.C.B. in 1815 - served with Portuguese army. "In 1820, during the absence of Lord Berisford, he offered to put down the rising of Oporto, but his services were declined; he at once threw up his Portuguese career and returned to England. Went to India as Lt. Colonel, 38th Regiment in 1821 - nominated to command forces against Burmese - governor of ceded provinces after the war - 1829, returned to England - Lt. Governor of New Brunswick, 1831-1837, 1843 died.

/From Dictionary of National Biography/.

CANNING, JOHN (1775-1824)

Major, 53. Bengal Native Infantry; baptised, Ilmington, Worcestershire, 11 December 1775. Cadet, 1799. Arrived in India, 7 January 1801. Ensign 12 August 1800. Lieutenant, 8 October, 1800. Captain, 16 December 1814. Major, 1 March 1824, died Calcutta, 2 September 1824.

3rd and youngest son of Francis Canning of Foxcote, Co. and Warwick, and Catherine, his wife; married, Calcutta, 11 September 1807, Mary Anne, daughter of Sir John Randall Meredyth, Baronet, Newton co. Meath and widow of John Fitzgerald Anster.

Services: Commander, Murshidabad Provincial Battalion, 30 October 1807, till 1819. On embassy to Ava, 1812-1813. Supernumerary A.D.C. to Governor-General, 1814-1815. Political Agent, Aurangabad, 1820-1824. A.D.C. to Governor-General 1821-1823 and 1824. First Burma War 1824 - accompanied Brigadier General Sir Archibald Campbell to Rangoon in May 1824, in a political capacity. Retired to Calcutta owing to ill-health, 1 September 1824 and died within eighteen hours of landing.

/From Hodson, List of the Officers of the Bengal Army, London, 1947/.

COX, HIRAM (1759/60-1779).

Batta Captain, Infantry, born 1759/60.

Cadet, 1779. Arrived in India, 14 September 1779. Ensign 18 September 1780. Lieutenant, 29 May 1781. Batta Captain 7 January 1796. Died Chittagong, 2 August 1799 of fever, aged 39.

Married Mary, daughter of Alexander Fraser of Fairfield, Inverness and great grand daughter of eighth Lord Lovat. Father of Henry Chambers Murray Cox.

Services: Resigned 11 April 1785. Readmitted 29 October 1790. Lt. 3rd Bengal European Regiment in 1796.

From Hodson, List of the Officers of the Bengal Army, 1758-1834, London, 1947/.

FRANCKLIN, WILLIAM (1763-1839)

Ensign, 14 Bengal Native Infantry, 31 January 1783;

Captain, 7 June, 1796; Major, 25 April 1808;

Wrote many articles on scholarly subjects.

From Dictionary of National Biography/.

HARRINGTON, JOHN, H. (died 1828)

An orientalist; entered East India Company service 1780; became a chief judge on 17 December 1811-1822; a provisional member of the Supreme Council and President of the Board of Trade, 22 April 1825.

From Buckland, Dictionary of Indian Biography, London, 1906/.

SYMES, MICHAEL (1761-1799)

Lt. Infantry. Subsequently Lt. Colonel, 76th Foot.

Born, co. Wicklow, 1761. Cadet, 1780. Ensign 1780. Lt. 24 June 1781. Resigned, 2 November 1788, died at sea, 22 June 1809 on board the Mary transport on his passage from Corunna in consequence of fatigue and exertion.

5th and youngest son of Richard Symes, of Ballyarthur and Eleanor, his wife; married Rochester, 8 February 1801, Jemina, daughter of Paul Pilcher, of Rochester. Trinity College, Dublin. Pensioner, 2 November 1778, aged 16.

Services: sailed to India, 1780, aged 18. Furlough, 24 January 1786; returned to India with H.M. newly-raised 76th Regiment, 1788; appointed A.D.C. to Colonel Musgrave, 76th Regiment, 2 September 1788. Resigned his commission in Bengal Army, 2 November 1788; and was appointed Lt. 76th Regt. Ft. the samedday. Captain (18th March 1793), 5 June 1793; Lt. Colonel - do - 15 February 1800. Embassy to Ava 1795. In England, c.1800-1801. Ambassador to Ava, 1802. Published book 1800.

From Hodson, List of the Officers of the Bengal Army, 1758-1834, London, 1947/.

APPENDIX C

A Table of Port Fees and Charges, with King's
Duties on Imports and Exports at Rangoon

SALAMEY, or KING'S PRESENT

	Tecals	A		
1 Piece of Currum Cullas	30	0		
1 ditto of Madraparks	20	0		
1 ditto of Moa Sannas	4	0		
2 Masulipatam Handkerchiefs	1	50	Tecals	A.
Flowered Silver 2½ Tecals, or 25 per Cent	3	77	59	27

VISITS

132 to 148 China Plates	40	0		
7 Viss of Coarse Sugar	7	0		
			47	0

CANECAUSES

To the Mew Whoon	65	0		
To the Yie Whoon	65	0		
To the 2 Auk-hoons .. 60 ea.	120	0		
To the 2 Chokeys 50 ea.	100	0		
To the 2 Nah-hoons... 50 ea.	100	0		
To the 2 Shuny Dhogus 40 ea.	80	0		
To the 2 Linguists... 20 ea.	40	0		
To the Sed haighran, or dispatches to Court to give notice of the vessels' arrival.....	70	0		
To the Keepers of the Town Gate	5	0		
To the Chokey coming up the River	5	0		
To the Do. at the Landing-place	25	0		
To the Godown Peons	7	0	682	0

PILOTAGE AND ANCHORAGE

Pilotage flowered Silver 200 Tecals, or 47 percent	294	0		
Anchorage do.do. 42, or do.do.	61	74	355	74
			1,144	1

LEAVING THE PORTS

The Chokey Orders	5	0		
7 Viss of Sugar	7	0		
Pilotage	100	0	112	0
TOTAL			1,256	1

If the articles for his majesty's presents are not to be procured, the officers of government generally demand from 90 to 120 Tecals as an equivalent.

The port charges for a snow are the same as for a ship, except a deduction of 100 Tecals, 25 per cent. silver from the pilotage and anchorage; and the charges for a sloop or cutter is 100 Tecals less than a snow.

All Duties on Imports are taken in kind, as follows:

Hia Majesty	10 per Cent.
Godown.....	1 5/10 per cent
Writer	2/10 Do.
Chop Man	2/10 Do.
Salamey	2/10 Do.
Weigh Man a Counter	2/10 Do. 2 1/10

Total Imports Duties 12 1/10

=====

Besides the above duties, a piece is taken from each of the first five bales opened belonging to the ship; but if the goods are on freight, 40 Tecals 25 per cent. silver is demanded from the ship, and one piece of cloth only taken from the freighters.

His majesty allows all commanders of ships trading to Rangoon to import 2,200 Tecals worth of goods, free from duty, as an encouragement; but the officers of government have lately withheld one-third of this privilege, and applied it to their own use.

Upon all exports a duty is paid to his Majesty of 5 per cent. in bullion, except timber, of which the duties are taken in kind.

Carpenters' wages, upon an average, is 18 Tecals per month.

[Source: Francklin, W., Tracts, Political, Geographical and Commercial, on the Dominions of Ava and the North-Western Parts of Hindustan, London, 1811/.

APPENDIX D

LETTER FROM MYOWUN OF PEGU TO GOVERNOR-
GENERAL, RECEIVED 17 March 1822

"The letters brought by Webster's ship were delivered, and on the petition being submitted to the Ministers of the most fortunate King of the White Elephants, Lord of the Seas and Earth etc., they observed that the English protect the Arracanese rebels, who have violated their oaths of allegiance, as well as Jorajeit Chourjit Singh, Mora-jeit Marjit Singh, the Cassayers Manipuris and natives of Eckaba Cachar, also Boora Counhay an Assamese minister, Chundee Gunda Singh Chandrakanta and the Assamese people; and that Chittagong, Ramoo, and Bengal, form part of the four great cities provinces of Arracan, but that as they were worldly matters, they were not worth notice, on account of the commercial intercourse carried on by seafaring people.

Shein-mabu is annexed to the four great cities provinces and because sepoy were stationed there, the governor of Arracan requested in the first instance that they might be withdrawn, and afterwards caused them to be expelled by royal authority.

The governor of Arracan has represented, that three ships and three boats are stationed on the opposite side of the Naf, and that a stockade has been erected on the island, also that his messenger, on arriving at Chittagong, was confined there. If this be true, know that the governors on the Burman frontier have full authority to act, and that until everything is settled a communication need not be made to the golden feet.

The Rajahs and generals of Arracan, Ramree, Cheduba, ... Bassein and the western sea-coast would, on hearing these occurrences, rise like giants; for this and for many other considerations, Mungee Maha Bandoola has been appointed to regulate all the state affairs. He is vested with full military powers and on all important occasions, he must be referred to ... via Arracan. This appointment has been communicated to all the authorities.

The letter sent by the Governor-General states, that he has been newly appointed; he can therefore know nothing of the guilt of the Arracanese rebels, and he believes what they represent. Much rests upon those in charge of chokies [posts] and such places. Let him ascertain the truth, consider duly everything, investigate and judge properly, and by petition represent his case to the general, via Arracan."

In the original letter, the Governor-General states that he has been newly appointed, and that he can therefore know nothing of the guilt of the Arracanese rebels. He believes what they represent, and much rests upon those in charge of chokies [posts] and such places. He asks that they should ascertain the truth, consider everything duly, investigate, and judge properly, and then by petition represent their case to the general via Arracan.

The following is a translation of the original letter, as given by the Governor-General. It is a letter from the Governor-General to the General, via Arracan. The letter is dated 1827. The Governor-General states that he has been newly appointed, and that he can therefore know nothing of the guilt of the Arracanese rebels. He believes what they represent, and much rests upon those in charge of chokies [posts] and such places. He asks that they should ascertain the truth, consider everything duly, investigate, and judge properly, and then by petition represent their case to the general via Arracan.

Source: From H.H. Wilson, Documents Illustrative of the First Burmese War, Calcutta, 1827, No.31.

The following is a translation of the original letter, as given by the Governor-General. It is a letter from the Governor-General to the General, via Arracan. The letter is dated 1827. The Governor-General states that he has been newly appointed, and that he can therefore know nothing of the guilt of the Arracanese rebels. He believes what they represent, and much rests upon those in charge of chokies [posts] and such places. He asks that they should ascertain the truth, consider everything duly, investigate, and judge properly, and then by petition represent their case to the general via Arracan.

APPENDIX E

Bodawpaya and the Daiwoon

Canning reported in the concluding despatch of his 1811-1812 mission that several years previously the King appointed his minister of war (or "Daiwoon") to the supreme command of the army going to Tavoy to fight Siam. He was also to raise an army of 80,000 men on his way downriver. It is proposed to quote Canning's account of subsequent developments.

"His [the Daiwoon's] progress down the country was marked by fire and sword and bore every appearance of the march of a hostile army. In every town and village, thro' which he passed he seized the greater part of the inhabitants capable of bearing arms or at least as many as had not fled at his approach, and as hostages for their fidelity carried with him their families whom he without mercy put to death on the desertion of any of their relatives. When I proceeded to the capital of Ava in 1809-1810, the traces of this barbarian were everywhere visible in deserted villages and the general devastating of the country. All the Daiwoon's violence was, however, ineffectual towards collecting half the number of men prescribed by the King, as a very large proportion of those whom he dragged from their habitations in spite of all his vigilance found means to desert with their families and being no longer able to with safety to return to their homes formed themselves into large bodies of dacoits which still continued to overrun the country and nearly put a stop to the navigation of the river.

The Daiwoon having succeeded by every means of savage violence in assembling about thirty-six thousand men, arrived with them at Tavoy but having neglected to make any provision for their support. Famine and pestilence soon became prevalent in his camp, which in a short time swept away 8,000. With the remainder he made diverse attempts with various success on the Island of Junk Ceylon, which having been twice occupied by the Burmahs and the Siamese reverted to its former masters.

After the arrival of the Daiwoon at Tavoy his sanguinary disposition continued to show itself without check or restraint, and his inclination for blood and plunder to be gratified; both on the unoffending inhabitants and the people he had brought with him. Indeed, the numerous well-authenticated acts of barbarity committed by this tyrant justly place his name on a level with the most celebrated bloody characters of ancient and modern times. One instance will serve to give an idea of the man. A detachment of 1,500 men with the usual train of women and children from Meeaday was proceeding to join the army and received orders from the Daiwoon to be at Tavoy on a certain day, their services being required for particular purpose. Not arriving at the time appointed, the Daiwoon in a fit of rage ordered his own immediate dependents in the number of 3,000 in whom he could confide to proceed to intercept the party from Meeaday and made an indiscriminate slaughter of the whole. The unsuspecting detachment was accordingly fallen upon and about a hundred killed at the first onset and between four and five hundred taken prisoners before they had time to recover from their surprize and flight. The latter were bound hand and foot and cast into a nullah dry at low water into which the tide flowing soon put an end to their existence.

The Daiwoon continued without interruption his career of blood till the month of June of the present year. I have been assured by many persons deserving of credit come from that quarter that the fields in the neighbourhood of Tavoy are whitened with the bones of the victims, and the town emptied of inhabitants and their property transferred into the coffers of the dispot. An order at length came from the Court for his return to the capital, the Siamese war being declared no longer to require his presence on the frontier. Another order was at the same time received by the viceroy of Pegue directing him to despatch a vessel to Tavoy for the conveyance of the Daiwoon to Rangoon on his way to Ummarapoor. A vessel was accordingly sent which returned shortly after with the Daiwoon's son he himself declined leaving Tavoy on account of the illness of a favourite concubine, petitioning at the same time the King to be allowed to remain there till the end of the rains. This act of temporary disobedience was immediately construed at Court into an

intention of rebelling and orders were in consequence dispatched to the Viceroy to collect without delay a force in the provinces of Pegue, Syrian, and Dalla for the purpose of reducing him. In consequence of these orders, as a preliminary step, a vessel was sent to Tavoy with 200 men under the orders of the Raywoon and Deputy Governor of Rangoon and other principle members with orders, if practicable to seize the Daiwoon others to land at a place higher up the coast and collect such an additional force as might be deemed adequate to that service. A short time after the vessel had sailed, a second order came from the King, respecting the Daiwoon by the son of the Governor of Merghui, whom he had put to death and this order contained nothing less than an injunction to the Viceroy to have him roasted at a slow fire, taking particular care that none of his bones should be broken or distreated which might tend to shorten his sufferings. The body to be afterwards delivered to the Governor of Merghui's son to be by him conveyed to the royal presence. The Viceroy on receiving this savage order repugnant to his disposition more mild than that of the generality of his countrymen felt in some measure at a loss how to act. On the other hand, he had no inclination to expose himself to any risks by saving a man whom he knew to be of all others more obnoxious to the Engyi Praw. He therefore determined on steering a middle course and sending for an Armenian well-known in Rangoon by a series of crimes and adventures proposed (which the others acceded to) that he should immediately proceed to Tavoy with a letter from himself to the Daiwoon, which being well-known to the latter he would without delay be called into his presence to deliver and while the Daiwoon should be employed in reading it, that the Armenian should shoot him with a pistol delivered to his hands by the Viceroy for the purpose, and if requisite, also dispatch him with a dagger also given to him with the same intention. Pistols and daggers were also distributed to four Manilla [?] who were to attend and lend assistance necessary. A solemn oath of compliance having been exacted from those concerned and 500 ticals promised to the principal and 200 to each of the subordinate assassins. They were despatched in a small schooner for this purpose.

The following day a third order came down respecting the Daiwoon cancelling the one directing his being roasted, and enjoining his being merely sent up to the capital with a certain degree of restraint. This order the Viceroy, with a view to ingratiating himself with the Ein-gyi Praw by the sacrifice of his enemy thought proper to keep back five days, thereby leaving, as he imagined, time to his emissaries to complete their work. The third order was then despatched on a small vessel to Tavoy.

In the meantime, the party that had first proceeded to Tavoy on the 20th of June had been successful in obtaining possession of the Daiwoon's person without the least resistance which he does not indeed appear to have even had an idea of making. On his arrival at Rangoon, the first compliment paid him by the Viceroy was to direct the order for his being roasted to be publicly read to him on his knees in landing at the King's wharf, and he was suffered to remain some time under the influence of sensations almost too shocking even for such a character. He was then made acquainted with the third order respecting him; and conducted under a guard to the House allotted for his temporary residence, deprived of all his attendants and even of his beetle box, the greatest mark of degradation among the Burmahs. He, however, appeared to keep up his spirits, declaring his perfect reliance on being speedily restored to all his honours and greater power than even, and exulting in the idea of making his enemies before long pay dearly for their temporary triumph over him, which I think very probable, as, with the exception of his supposed rebellion now proved to be merely imaginary his conduct has been such as to merit the King's warmest approbation. He confided also in the plunder of Tavoy, comprising about five lacks of gold and silver conveyed to Rangoon in a small China junk that arrived in company with the Daiwoon which junk with the double view of conciliating the King's favour and saving it from the pillage of the Rangoon Government, he declared on landing to be all the King's property. It is a curious circumstance that very considerable proportion of this amount consisted of bangles, chains and to that female and children's ornaments. But another great object of his confidence in regaining the King's favour is what he terms a small white elephant which accompanied him from Tavoy."

The above account may be of some value to students of Burmese mores in the early 19th century, though some difficulty will arise distinguishing between fact and rumour. The King's order to have the Daiwoon roasted (if one really was issued) suggests that he would not shrink from having an envoy man-handled. (Admittedly, in the latter case, the danger of provoking the British also existed, and the King's order respecting Canning showed rashness as well as savagery).

It will be noticed also that the order in question was changed. This suggests that the King was capable of coming back to his senses. Similarly, he was willing to forgive the Myowun of Pegu for having allowed Canning to leave and to give da Cruz a good reception, though he had initially been displeased with the British mission and with the Myowun.

It should be noted also that the Myowun in 1812, had expected to be forgiven for having allowed Canning to leave. He asked Canning (successfully) for a tent belonging to the British mission before Canning's departure. This was not the behaviour of a person who expected to be punished very severely in the near future.

The Daiwoon and his subordinate officials had certainly been engaged in treasonable activity. They were the authors of the letter to the British quoted on page 242 asking that Tavoy be accepted as a British tributary state. This move was apparently made (to judge from their letter) for fear of punishment by the King. The Court, therefore, was apparently right in thinking he was planning rebellion and Canning wrong in thinking he was not.

Source: BSC, 25 September 1812; Canning to Edmonstone, 9 September 1812, No. 11.

APPENDIX F

A Problem Concerning the Sultan of Kedah's Envoys

A.P. Rubin, in his "International Personality of the Malay Peninsula",¹ states that the Sultan of Kedah's envoy visited Ava in December 1823. If true, this would mean that the Court decided to expand its influence into the Malay world at the time when it planned to uphold its claim to Shahpuri, by war if necessary. (News of the occupation of Shahpuri reached the Burmese capital early in November 1823). It is hard to believe that the two would have embarked on two such major projects at the same time.

In any case, the date given by Rubin is demonstrably wrong. The letter from the Governor of Tavoy to the Governor of Penang was dated, as 15 Noto, in the year 1185, which, according to Anderson, Malay translator to the Penang Government, was the same as 18 December 1823. Also, the Kedah envoys are said to have returned to Tavoy on 12 Noto, 1185.

By consulting the Burmese calendar printed by Symes in his book of 1800,² it can be seen that the Kedah envoy must have returned to Tavoy several months before December 1823. In any case, Rubin's suggestion that the envoys would have gone to Ava in December (the same month in which they arrived at Tavoy on their return voyage) is very improbable, in view of the geographical distance between Ava and Tavoy and the fact that negotiations with the Burmese would take some time.

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1. Rubin, A.P., The International Personality of the Malay Peninsula, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, pp.202-203.
 2. Symes, M., An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, Gregg Reprint, Westmead, 1964, p.332.

APPENDIX G

Bodawpaya and the Question of an Anglo-Burmese Alliance

In his first memorial (concerning his interview with the Wungyis), Cox had proposed (without any hint of authority from Calcutta) that the enemies of the English should be the enemies of the Burmese and vice-versa. When Cox was trying to secure acceptance of all his memorials, a Wungyi had suggested that he repeat the proposal, saying in the preamble to his remarks, if it was acceded to by the King, his memorials would be accepted. The King's reply was that it was not a fair bargain, because the Burmese had only one enemy, the Siamese, whereas the British had three - the French, Dutch and Spaniards.¹ This remark raised the interesting possibility that the King could have been made amenable to an alliance. The truth was that the Burmese would be the real beneficiaries, if such an alliance was concluded. British help would have enabled Burma to defeat Siam; while Burmese help against France, Spain and Holland could not have resulted in anything comparable in importance. It ought to have been possible for Cox to make the King realise this. However, the proposal would doubtless have been rejected by Calcutta. It is certain that the Company would ^{not} have been willing to fight Siam for the sake of Burmese help, since the latter would not have been of very great insignificance; also Siam was a tributary of China, and an attack on Siam might have led to reprisals against the Canton trade, which was of immense significance both to the government of Britain and to the East India Company.

1. Cox, H., Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire, Gregg International Publishers, 1971, p.302.

APPENDIX H

The Alleged Burmese Intrigues with the Indian Princes

A belief exists that the Bodawpaya attempted to engage in anti-British intrigues with the Indian princes. The Burmese chronicle does not mention such attempts, but it omits a great deal: there is no mention in it, for example, of Chin Pyan's invasions of Arakan. Two factors would seem to make for such contact: Firstly, there was the fact that in 1811, Arakanese emigrants in Chittagong had attacked, devastated and temporarily conquered a province of the Burmese empire. Although the Court's policy was conciliatory there would inevitably have been some misgivings as to British intentions towards Burma. In 1813, Canning had reported that a Wungyi had summoned Luigi de Grondona and had enquired about the practicability of a Franco-Burmese alliance. This report was in all probability provided by Grondona himself and appears to be reliable. If the Burmese would consider such a proposal why should they not have considered cultivating closer relations with the Indian princes, who were also threatened by the British?

Yet the evidence in the British records is inconclusive. One case occurred in 1814. A vessel arrived at Chittagong from Arakan with some Burmese and Arakanese on board and a Hindu from Benaras, Churn Das, who was well-known to Burmese officials at the Court. One Munnoo, a merchant, put them up. The latter told the Magistrate that their real objective was to go to the Punjab, on a mission to Ranjit Singh, ruler of the Punjab. Subsequently, the Magistrate was told by Munnoo that Churn Das had orders also to secure for the Burmese King a full account of British defences in Northern India.

The Calcutta Council believed that the party had attempted to form an anti-British alliance with Ranjit Singh. The messengers were to be allowed to proceed to Dacca (so that they would not realize the British understood their purpose), but they were not

APPENDIX I

The Myowun of Pegu's Letters

At about the time of his sub-interpreter's return, from his first visit to the capital in 1813, Canning came across evidence which suggested that the Myowun was genuinely concerned to promote good relations with the British. During his mission of 1809-1810, Canning had found someone, possibly Baba Sheen, who understood to supply the British with copies of all letters sent to the Burmese Government by the French. It was presumably from this person that Canning now obtained copies of letters written recently by the Myowun to the commander-in-chief at Prome, and the Ein-gyi Paya. The letters urged caution on both men. The commander-in-chief was asked to withdraw his troops from Arakan and the Ein-gyi Paya "not to allow anything to reach the Golden Ears of His Majesty but what you may think proper." The Myowun, in his letter to the Ein-gyi Paya also revealed for the first time, that Canning was not going to the capital at that time because of orders from Calcutta, but that he would go if he received new order to this effect. With regard to the rebel leaders, he informed the Ein-gyi Paya that Canning had promised that they would be surrendered when caught. This was untrue, for Canning had told him of the British government's "extreme aversion" to the measure. The envoy had a curious explanation for the Myowun's action: The Myowun "would be deemed disrespectful if even guilty of hinting that any object the attainment of which he (the Ein-gyi Paya) may be supposed to desire is beyond his reach." The Court, on receiving this letter, would have believed that British policy was to hand over the rebels. It is not clear when they discovered the truth. Perhaps, it was only after the return of the envoys sent by the Myowun of Pegu to Calcutta in 1813.

Source: BSC, 12 June 1812, Canning to Edmonstone, 22 May 1812, Appendices 20, 21 and 23.

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10 November 1794	14 June 1811
6 February 1795	6 September 1811
8 May 1795	25 October 1811
21 October 1795	22 November 1811
21 December 1795	26 December 1811
4 January 1796	25 January 1812
27 June 1796	21 February 1812
12 September 1796	29 February 1812
19 September 1796	13 March 1812
21 November 1796	20 March 1812
26 November 1796	25 March 1812
23 January 1797	19 February 1813
2 March 1798	18 April 1813
13 March 1798	20 August 1813
20 March 1798	17 September 1813
8 May 1798	5 November 1813
26 June 1798	25 January 1814
10 September 1798	28 January 1814
23 November 1798	23 June 1814
28 November 1798	21 November 1814
17 December 1798	7 October 1815
9 July 1799	10 May 1817
29 August 1799	22 August 1817
1 October 1799	19 September 1817
16 January 1800	23 January 1818
26 June 1800	31 July 1818
7 January 1802	11 January 1822
12 May 1803	26 July 1822
17 May 1804	16 August 1822
9 August 1804	20 September 1822
16 January 1806	27 September 1822
28 March 1808	11 October 1822
29 April 1809	9 November 1822
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14 November 1809	
26 December 1809	

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3 October 1809

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6 March 1797	19 February 1813
12 May 1803	17 September 1813
19 May 1803	29 October 1813
5 July 1804	28 June 1817
20 June 1805	25 July 1817
17 July 1806	1 May 1818
8 May 1812	
15 May 1812	
12 June 1812	
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17 October 1823	7 January 1825	28 March 1826
31 October 1823	21 January 1825	14 April 1826
4 November 1823	27 January 1825	12 May 1826
14 November 1823	28 January 1825	9 June 1826
21 November 1823	11 February 1825	
12 December 1823	18 March 1825	
24 December 1823	5 April 1825	
17 January 1824	15 April 1825	
24 January 1824	22 April 1825	
30 January 1824	29 April 1825	
6 February 1824	20 May 1825	
13 February 1824	8 July 1825	
15 February 1824	12 July 1825	
20 February 1824	15 July 1825	
5 March 1824	22 July 1825	
12 March 1824	25 July 1825	
26 March 1824	17 July 1825	
2 April 1824	29 July 1825	
9 April 1824	26 August 1825	
27 April 1824	9 September 1825	
21 May 1824	23 September 1825	
28 May 1824	2 October 1825	
18 June 1824	7 October 1825	
28 June 1824	4 November 1825	
2 July 1824	10 November 1825	
9 July 1824	11 November 1825	
16 July 1824	18 November 1825	
23 July 1824	9 December 1825	
30 July 1824	16 December 1825	
10 September 1824	23 December 1825	
17 September 1824	30 December 1825	
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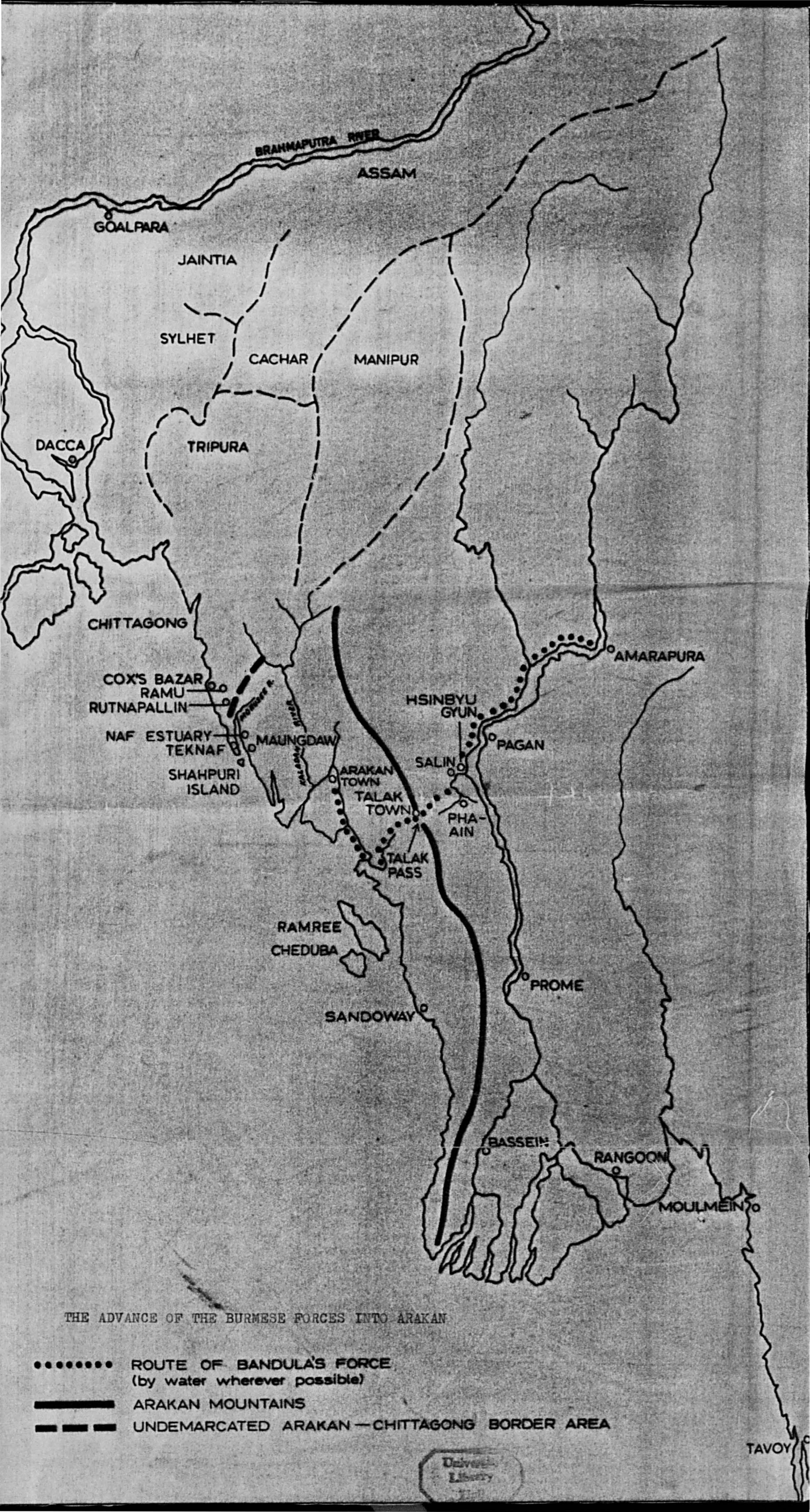
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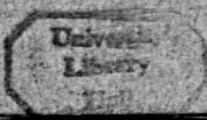
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THE ADVANCE OF THE BURMESE FORCES INTO ARAKAN

- ROUTE OF BANDULA'S FORCE
(by water wherever possible)
- ARAKAN MOUNTAINS
- - - - - UNDEMARCATED ARAKAN — CHITTAGONG BORDER AREA



REFERENCES ACCORDING TO CAPTAIN COX

GOODS IMPORTED AT RANGOON FROM CALCUTTA

ARTICLES	Quantity Annually	Price of Purchase	Price of Sales	Amount of Separate Sales		Gross Amount	
				Tecals	N.	Tecals	N.
Behar Tanjels	4,000 Pieces	60 to 70 Rupees per Cord	6 1/4 Tecals per Piece	26,000			
Mulmuls (3 sorts)	1,000 Do.	4, 5 and 6 Do. per piece	12 to 15 Tecals per Piece	13,500			
Corseid as	1,000 Do.	4 to 8 Rs. each	8 to 16 Do. do.	12,000			
Moa Somas	2,000 Do.	40 Rupees per Cord	80 to 90 do. per Cord	8,500			
Balasore do.	500 Do.	8 to 10 Rs. per Piece ..	16 to 20 Tecals per Piece	9,000			
Patua Chints	20,000 Do.	10 Rupees per Cord	18 to 20 do. per Cord	19,000			
Striped Dimity	500 Do.	4 do. per Piece	8 to 10 do. per Piece	4,500			
Corseid Roomals	10,000 Handkerchiefs	10 do. per Cord	20 do. per Cord	10,000			
Carpets	10,000	30 to 40 Rs. per Cord ..	70 to 80 do. per do.	37,500			
Choppah Roomals	10,000 Pieces	80 to 120 do. do.	3 to 12 do. per Piece	100,000			
Taffeties	1,000 Do.	4 to 6 do. per Piece ...	3 to 12 do. do.	10,000			
Sister Soys Roomals	500 Do.	4 to 6 do. do.	3 to 12 do. do.	5,000			
Gold Flowered Muslims	200 Do.	20 to 30 do. do.	40 to 50 do. do.	9,000			
Long Cloth	250 Do.	15 to 20 do. do.	30 to 40 do. do.	8,750			
Rose Water	100 Carboys	8 to 10 per each	16 Tecals each	1,600			
Soft Sugar	1,000 Mds. first sort ...	8 Rupees per Md.	60 Tecals per 100 Vis	13,530			
Ghee	100 Do.	12 to 15 do. do.	120 to 150 per 100 Vis	3,375			
Rum	3,000 Gallons	12 Annas per Gallon	2 Tecals per Gallon	6,000			
Silver Plate .....	.....	.....	.....	1,000			
Diamonds .....	.....	.....	.....	30,000			
Gold Mohurs	100	16 Rupees	18 to 20 Tecals	19,000			
						347,255	
MADRAS							
Nadrapacks, 2 1/2 & 3 Cubits wide	1,000 Pieces	40 to 60 St.Pag. Per Cord	15 to 20 Tecals per Piece	17,500			
Mouses, 2 Cubits by 32 do.	600 Do.	70 to 80 do. do.	15 to 20 do. do.	10,500			
Long Cloth	100 Do.	6 to 8 do. per Piece	30 to 50 do. do.	4,000			
Imaurs	100 Do.	3 to 4 do. do.	15 to 20 do. do.	1,750			
Prolicat Handkerchiefs	500 Do.	45 do. per Cord	15 do. do.	7,500			
Coarse Chints	100 Do.	10 do. do.	3 do. do.	3,000			
Purdas (Drapery)	500 Do.	14 do. do.	5 do. do.	2,500			
Cumum Cullas (Drapery)	100 Do.	3 to 4 St.Pag. each	25 to 30 Tecals each	2,700			
Masulipatam Handkerchiefs	1,000 Do.	25 Pag. Per Cord	9 Tecals do. piece	9,000			
						58,450	
CHINA							
Coarse China Ware .....	.....	20,000 Dollars Annually..	From 50 to 70 Per Cent advance ...	64,000			
Tea	10 to 20 Chests .....	.....	120 Tecals per Chest	1,800			
Sugar Candy	100 Tubs .....	.....	15 to 20 Tecals per Tub	1,750			
Velvet	100 Pieces	20 to 30 Dollars per Pc..	80 to 90 do. per Piece	8,500			
Silk	100 Do.	16 Dollars do. do.	50 Tecals Per Piece	5,000			
						81,050	
Carried Over						486,755	

ARTICLES	Quantity Annually	Price of Purchase	Price of Sale	Amount of Separate Sales		Gross Amount	
				Tecals	M.	Tecals	M.
BOMBAY AND COAST							
			Brought forward	..		486,755	
Pearls .....	.....	.....	.....	4,000		
Sandals	1,000 Viss .....	.....	1½ Tecals per Viss	1,500		
Dates	1,000 Do. ....	.....	30 to 40 Tecals per 100 Viss	350		5,850
MALAY COAST							
Red Betel Nut	120,000 Viss	8 Luxurs for 24 Dollars	40 to 50 Tecals per 100 Viss.....	54,000			
White do. do.	40,000 Do. Do.	8 do. do.	20 to 30 do. do.	10,000			
Nutmegs	100 Do. ....	.....	40 to 60 do. do.	5,000		
Mace	50 Do. ....	.....	50 to 100 do. do.	3,750		
Coves	1,000 Do. ....	.....	10 to 30 do. do.	20,000		92,750
NICOBAR ISLANDS							
Cocoa Nut	5 to 10 Lacks	500 to 1,000 Rs. per Lack	5 to 10 Tecals per 100	56,250		56,250	
EUROPE							
Companies Broad Cloths	1,000 Pieces .....	.....	120 to 150 Tecals per Piece	135,000		
Superfine do.	50 Do. ....	.....	190 to 200 do. do.	9,750		
Carpets	500 Do. ....	.....	40 to 45 do. do.	21,250		
Long Ells, or Embossed Cloth ...	200 Do. ....	.....	70 to 80 do. do.	15,000		
Velvet, Red and Blue	60 Do. 18 yds. each ..	.....	8 to 10 Tecals per Yard	9,720		
Gold Lace, 3 inches wide	300 yds. ....	.....	10 Tecals do.	3,000		
Cutlery	5 boxes .....	.....	160 do. per Box	2,300		
Iron	50,000 Viss .....	.....	40 to 50 Tecals per 100 Viss	22,500		
Nails	5,000 Do. ....	.....	60 to 100 do. do.	4,500		
Steel	1,000 Do. ....	.....	4 to 5 Tecals per Viss	4,500		
Fire Arms	1,000 Stand .....	.....	.....	15,000		
Glass Ware .....	.....	.....	.....	10,000		
Beads .....	.....	.....	.....	2,500		
Ship Chandlery of all descriptions	.....	.....	.....	60,000		
Carpenters' Tools .....	.....	.....	.....	1,000		
Hats .....	.....	.....	.....	1,000		
Drugs .....	.....	.....	.....	10,000		
Gold Thread .....	.....	.....	.....	3,500		
Optical & other Instruments ....	.....	.....	.....	4,000		334,520
Various Articles from Bengal and other places not enumerated .....	.....	.....	.....	24,775		23,875
						1,000,000	
N.B. The above Table is formed principally from the Duties received at the King's Godown... of which, it is supposed) there are Goods smuggled to the amount of						200,000	
						TOTAL ... 1,300,000	

REFERENCES ACCORDING TO CAPTAIN COX

EXPORTS ANNUALLY FROM RANGOON

ARTICLES	Quantity	Rate of Sales	Gross Amount of Sales exported	
			Tecals	M.
Mast and Heel Pieces	150 to 200.....	at 60 to 200 Tecals each	22,750	
Duggies	1,000 to 2,000	at 10 to 20 do. each	22,500	
Shin bin	5 to 700 per	6 to 10 do. per pair	48,000	
Sawn Plank	1,000 do.	4 do. do.	4,000	
Comer do.	500 to 1,000 do.	3 to 5 do. do.	3,000	
Artus	4 to 500 do.	6 to 8 do. do.	3,150	
Joists	2,500 do.	3 1/4 do. do.	8,750	
Sheathing Board	20 to 30,000 do.	45 Tecals per hundred	11,250	
Staves	100,000	14 do. do.	14,000	
Shipping	3,000 Tons in the following proportion:			
		Iron	60,000	
		Timbers	60,000	
		Labour	120,000	
		Out fit	120,000	
			360,000	
Cordage of all sizes .....	.....	15 to 17 Tecals per 100 Viss		
Iron Country-wrought Nails &c. ....	.....	50 Tecals per 100 Viss		
Do. in Pegs .....	.....	25 to 30 do. do.		
Dungaree, 2 1/2 Cubits by 14 .....	.....	2 1/4 Tecals per piece		
Wood Oil	3 to 4,000 Viss	10 to 15 Tecals per 100 Viss	437	
Earth Oil	1,000 do.	3 to 4 do. do.	35	
Cotton Clean .....	.....	45 to 50 do. do.		
Indigo .....	.....	20 do. do.		
Stick Lack	200,000 Viss	40 to 50 do. do.	90,000	
Cutch	100,000 do.	12 to 15 do. do.	13,500	
Ivory, 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th) sorts	100,000 do.	at 3, 2, 1 1/4 Tecals per Viss	30,000	
Sapan wood .....	.....	.....
Arsenic	6 to 7,000 Viss	70 to 80 Tecals per 100 Viss	4,875	
Lead .....	.....	12 do. do.		
Copper .....	.....	1 1/4 do. do.		
Wax	5,000 Viss	175 do. do.	8,750	
Tin	8 to 10,000 Viss	100 to 120 do. do.	9,900	
Birds' Nests	100 Viss	40 to 50 Tecals per Viss	4,500	
Cardamums	4,000 Viss	90 to 120 Tecals per 100 Viss	4,200	
Fish Maws & Sharks' Fins ...	5,000 do.	50 to 60 Tecals per 100 Viss	2,750	
Dammer .....	.....	10 to 15 do. do.		
Chunam .....	.....	16 to 20 do. per 100 Baskets		
Charong .....	.....	75 to 100 do. per 100 Viss		
Tobacco .....	.....	30 to 40 do. dc.	2,000	
Precious Stones .....	.....	.....	26,652	
Pepper, Martalan & Tongs ...	.....	1 Tecal per Viss		50
Towels & other Country Cloths .....	.....	.....	5,000	
TECALS ...			700,000	