

CHAPTER VII
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ALAUNGPAYA 1752-60 was born in 1714 at Shwebo.¹ It was then a village of 300 houses,² known as Moksobomyo "town of the hunter chief," and many of his followers were hunters. But he himself belonged to a better class, the landed gentry as it were. For generations his ancestors had been *myothugyis* and rulers. In after times he even claimed descent from Nawrahta, Myaukpet Myinhmu or Commandant of the Northern Cavalry Area, and brother to the Ava chief Mohnyinthado 1427-40. The genealogy,³ is unproved, but the old-established villages of Upper Burma are not like the newly cleared Delta areas where society is positively colonial and men do not know their own pedigree.

The omens which fired his ambition are typical of certain limitations beyond which he never developed. But everyone else had those limitations. What they did not have was his tiger heart. When the Talaings came raiding up to Ava, when the cruel Manipuris cantered past his home, he thought of the kings of old whose blood flowed in his veins. What was the king of Ava now? A dummy on a golden throne, bowed beneath the weight of lofty titles

"Calling a crowned man royal who was no more than a king."

He knew all about that king, the sort who would let himself be led away into captivity like a tame lamb. He heard from his uncle the lord *mingyi* the sort of thing that happened at court. Ava was bound to fall sooner or later; well, the Talaings might take Ava, but they should not take him. He felled toddy trees by the hundred and made them into a stockade round his village, dug a moat, cleared the jungle

¹ *JBR* 1915 Enriquez "Capitals of the Alaungpaya Dynasty."

² *Dairymple* I. 163.

³ *Konbaungset* 15, *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* 6.

outside to form a glacis, and rode out destroying ponds and filling in wells. There was no difficulty, for he was aged thirty-six, the hereditary lord for miles around, and there were scores of good men only waiting for a lead. Forty-six villages joined him, and among them they raised a few muskets.

When Ava fell he was ready. The Talaings sent a small detachment to exact the oath of allegiance. His father made ready to pay homage and to give up half his property, saying "We can do nothing. Fate is against us. Ava has fallen. The Talaing army is too strong. We shall simply be overwhelmed. We may as well give in." "No," said Alaungpaya, "When fighting for your country it matters little whether you are few or many. What does matter is that your comrades have true hearts and strong arms." He went out and met those Talaings in the scrub jungle south of Halin in Shwebo district. They got no homage. Only such as were lucky got away with their lives.

They came back in a large detachment with orders to spare not even infants in the cradle. Alaungpaya built a state hut and sent ten horsemen to conduct them respectfully to it. But they were conducted along a hollow road and in the bushes on each side lay his musket men. The Talaings never reached that hut. A bare half dozen reached Ava alive to tell the tale.

Again they came back, several thousand strong this time, to wipe out Shwebo once and for all; but as they came without cannon the assault failed and they had to undertake a siege. One night Alaungpaya burst out at the head of a general sortie. It was not a defeat but a rout. Word passed along the Burmese pursuers that men had seen Myinbyushin Nat, the spirit Rider of the White Horse, fighting on their side. The Talaings jumped into boats and, without stopping to report at Ava, fled straight home down the river. All their camp and equipment fell into Alaungpaya's hands. His men got clothes, horses, and things which they said were of gold and silver; above all they got scores of muskets, worth their weight in gold in these critical days.

The news spread. There was no need to offer bounties or to press men. They were fighting for the existence of their race; also there would be loot, and they looked forward to the clothes and horses and girls they would take from those dogs

of Talaings. Officers and men from the disbanded palace Guard joined him with such arms as they retained. Under the recent kings of Ava the territorial cadres (p. 24) had existed only on paper. But now, from half the villages of Upper Burma lads of spirit came trooping in to take service under the new leader. A dozen legends gathered round his name. Men felt that when he led them they could not fail.

The deficiency of the races of Indo-China in power of combination on a large scale is natural to people whose inherited instincts were formed in a country of great distances and bad communications. But when roused to enthusiasm they have shown considerable capacity for combined action. Among the Burmese the years 1752-7 are a model instance. Alaungpaya was not the only prominent man in Upper Burma. Independent attempts to form centres of resistance had been made at Mogaung in Myitkyina district and Salin in Minbu district. Some of the leaders were men of better birth, who had not to go back nine generations to claim royal blood. There were masterful men with considerable followings, who could have ruined the common cause by insisting on their rights. Not one of them did so, and the hereditary nobles ended by placing the territorial cadres at the disposal of Alaungpaya.¹

A few of the Upper Burma lords with their Burman, Shan and Kadu retainers, were fighting on the Talaing side. Alaungpaya issued orders that they were to be given quarter; but he burned their villages, and deported their families and herds to Shwebo. The rest took warning and wherever he went men now drank the water of allegiance.

It is difficult to conceive what the Talaing government thought they were doing; they had allowed a formidable situation to develop, which now needed every man they had; yet they sent not a single reinforcement. They merely sent the Toungoo Ngwegunhmu to replace Talaban, who employed Burmese servants, omitted to make men bob their hair in the Talaing fashion, and failed to crush Alaungpaya. The Talaings had northern outposts, operating as far as Wuntho and Kawlin, and the Gwes of Madaya-Okpo joined them. Alaungpaya received many a check but his men fought with the greatest

¹ *JRS* 1919 Furnivall "An Incident in Burmese history."

spirit, rushing up to stockades and tearing them down with *dahs* and axes. He massacred the Gwes, capturing large numbers of their men and women and driving the rest to take refuge in Hsipaw or with the Talaings.¹

By October 1752 the Talaings had withdrawn most of their outposts, and in December 1753 he was able to camp under the walls of Ava. The Talaings tried to dislodge him but suffered heavily before his stockade. Deserted by their government, and knowing that as soon as a siege started the Burmese and Shan citizens would rise against them, they evacuated the town silently in the night and retreated to the Delta. Not till next day did the Burmese discover their good fortune. It was such a victory that they did not trouble to pursue. It was enough for them that by January 1754 the whole of Upper Burma was clear of Talaings.

Alaungpaya had been hailed as king from the first and had already built a palace at Shwebo. Ava was a blackened ruin, but he made a formal entry and spent several weeks there in festivities, holding a solemn investiture and worshipping in state at the Shwekyetyet, Yanaungmyin and Shwetaunguchantha pagodas; he worshipped thus wherever he went, strictly enforcing prohibition of intoxicants and cattle slaughter. To secure his rear and subject new areas from which to draw levies, he proceeded in strength up the Irrawaddy, spreading the terror of his name among the wild tribes, and receiving homage or promises of homage from the nearer *sawbwas*. He worshipped at the Thihadaw pagoda on the beautiful island in Shwebo district, and the Zina-Aunggya-Shwebontha pagoda at Tagaung marks the spot where the Momeik *sawbwa* knelt before him. He met the devoted remnant of Toungooyaza's little band (p. 216) and saw that they should not suffer want.

In March 1754 the Talaings did what they should have done two years before, and sent their whole army. It would have been 1751-2 over again; but this time they had to face Alaungpaya instead of an effete dynasty. They drove his sons out of Talokmyo in Myingyan district; the younger son was so overcome with shame that he washed his head in purification (pp. 45, 187). The Talaings besieged Ava; their assaults failed but they carried fire and sword through the

¹ Dalrymple I. 165, *Konbaungset* 73.

villages up to Kyaukmyaung in Shwebo district. Finally, Alaungpaya marched down from Shwebo, his son made a sortie from Ava, and the Talaings, finding the rains near and their losses heavy, beat a general retreat in such haste that at Hsinbyugyun in Minbu district they left behind the golden *hti* they had brought to place on the Shwezigon pagoda at Pagan.

Meanwhile the Burmans of the Delta and those whom the Talaings had captured and scattered among the villages, were watching Alaungpaya's fortunes. Parties of them hung together in suspense and disobeyed the Talaing king's order to disperse. Alaungpaya wrote to their leaders promising them the governorship of any districts they could instigate to revolt.¹ In Pegu some thousand Talaings and Burmans plotted to restore the captive Ava king; the *parabaik* lists of their names were betrayed, wholesale executions followed, and the Ava king was drowned with three of his sons.

At this news Alaungpaya swore high vengeance, and the Delta Burmans broke loose, slit the throats of their Talaing *thugyi*s, and assembled on the Shwehsandaw pagoda at Prome. Shouting "Shwebotha! Shwebotha!" they rushed into the town. Hearing the Shwebo war-cry the Talaing garrison thought an Upper Burma army was upon them and fled in panic. Alaungpaya bade the victors hold out, and when the Talaing army, retreating from Ava in April 1754, besieged them hard, he came down with all his host. The Talaing besiegers, secure in a great earthwork stockade like jackals in their holes, flung off Alaungpaya's attacks. But waverers met death from his own sword, and in February 1755 the troops, dreading his wrath, forced their way in amid heavy slaughter, capturing many muskets and cannon but very few prisoners: they were in no mood for prisoners. The Talaings retreated wholesale. Alaungpaya entered Prome, returned solemn thanks at the Shwehsandaw pagoda, received the homage of central Burma, and held an investiture, honouring especially the lord of Sale in Myingyan district and the *myothugyi* of Pahkannge in Magwe district who had led the Delta rising.

He occupied Lunnhe (Kudut) in Henzada district, naming it Myanaung, "Speedy Victory." Here he built the Shwebontha

¹ Dalrymple I. 135.

and other pagodas and held high festival for thirty days and nights, receiving the homage of Toungoo, Henzada, Myaungmya, Bassein and even Sandoway in Arakan. For weeks the jungle lords came bringing elephants, horses, and daughters to the rising king.

In May 1755 he wrested Dagon from the Talaings, called it Rangoon, "End of Strife," and worshipped in state at the Shwedagon pagoda. Finding three small English ships in the port he detained their officers ashore, and sent his men aboard to seize their cannon, small arms and ammunition. They were neutral and he bore them no ill-will but he was in great need of fire-arms. One of the ships, the snow *Arcot*, belonged to the East India Company.¹ Her captain, Jackson, took precedence of the others, and though helpless protested against this incredible breach of international law. He did not realise that the Burmese were not subject to international law; they had not heard of it, for they had no foreign relations: it is doubtful whether they averaged one embassy a year, and that from tribal states. Yet Alaungpaya allowed the protest and took nothing, because he thought it would pay to conciliate Europeans, not because he was afraid—he believed he could beat the French and English just as he beat everyone else.

* Jackson had put in to caulk his leaking ship, and he came to Rangoon as the English shipwright had moved there, away from the fighting at Syriam. His ship was so bad and the local labour so incompetent that repairs took five months, during most of which he lay half dying of dysentery. The Burmese, attacked in their stockade at Rangoon, distrusted him for not firing on the Talaings, and threatened him; and the Talaing crown prince at Syriam continually wrote asking him to fire on the Burmese. He was heartily sick of both. He was cut off, without orders, and wondered whether he would ever get out of the place without the assistance of Bourno, the French agent at Syriam, who with three bigger ships was openly siding with the Talaings. Utterly distrusting the Burmese after Alaungpaya's high-handed attempt at seizure, regarding him as a mere usurper who was

¹ Snow, a small brig up to 120 tons, with 4 to 12 cannon, probably nine pounders, and 30 to 50 men. In eastern waters her complement would be lascars save for the captain and perhaps the commander and chief gunner who were white. Jackson's diary is at *Dalrymple I.* 177-200.

bound to fail, and receiving kind messages from his enemy Bourno who chivalrously offered him a doctor, Jackson and his two fellow captains co-operated with the Talaings and French when their ships bombarded Rangoon. The bombardment lasted a week, driving the Burmese from the bank and smashing up their boats, but had no real result because nothing would induce the Talaings to land and face cold steel. Finally Jackson took refuge in Syriam and received kind treatment from the Talaing crown prince who, however, reproached him because the English would not enter into an agreement, refused to give the Talaings stores, and removed the guns of their Syriam factory to Negrais just when the Talaings wanted to use them. While ill in bed, Jackson was struck in the face by a Talaing commander, and finally he got leave to sail away only by surrendering five of his cannon to the Talaings. In the same way the Burmese, on their side, had compelled a Dutch brigantine to fight for them.

Some months previously, Alaungpaya had sent envoys with presents of horses, a ring, 100 *viss* (365 lb.) wax and 100 *viss* ivory, to the Bassein timber depot asking the English to enter into relations; he wanted cannon. The Talaings reoccupied Bassein and demanded the surrender of Burmese envoys but the English factors refused and sent them safely to Negrais where they arranged that Brooke, the chief, should send an envoy to Alaungpaya. Brooke was furious with Jackson's conduct at Syriam and recalled the English there. The envoy, Captain Baker, with a mirror, a twelve pounder cannon, three nine pounders, powder and shot, as presents, arrived at Shwebo in September 1755, and was admitted to the royal presence within a day of arrival:—

To the palace steps we were conducted by about twenty musketeers headed by a drum. . . . I entered in the midst of a crowd of officers in their court dress, the King's two eldest sons being seated on carpets, one each side the . . . throne where their father sat in state. Having paid my compliments on the knees, bowing the head three times low down, three separate times, he looked at me for some time and at length said "How does your King do?" I answered he was well when we had the last account from Europe. . . . Having paused some time at length says he "Your ships that were at Dagon with Mr. Whitehill,¹ I treated with kindness . . . and

¹ Jackson's colleague. The firing occurred during Baker's journey to Shwebo.

at my leaving . . . to come here to keep our fast, desired him . . . to assist my people, or at least not to join the Peguers against them ; which though he promised to observe, yet was the first that fired on them." I answered I was heartily grieved at his being guilty of so rash and imprudent an action and that I was sure His Majesty himself could not be more offended at him than Mr. Brooke would be . . . it was either the force of the Peguers, or the fraud and device of our inveterate enemies the French which had compelled or seduced him to it. "But" says he "had not Mr. Brooke any hand in this, was it not by his counsel?" I gave him all the assurances to the contrary . . . averring that I was sure no other human affair could give him so great uneasiness as the news of this would. He then ordered the letter to be read, to which he gave a calm attention till coming to these words "as you will by this means obtain an alliance and friendship with so great a power as the Honourable East India Company, who can send you such assistance as will support Your Majesty's throne against all future rebellions, domestic feuds and foreign enemies." At which he affected a very hearty laugh (and his officers in attendance like true courtiers joined in the chorus) said "Have I asked? Or do I want any assistance to reduce my enemies to subjection? Let none conceive such an opinion. Have I not extended my conquest three months journey on every quarter without the help of cannon or muskets? Nay, I have with bludgeons only, opposed and defeated these Peguers who destroyed the capital of the kingdom . . . and a month hence I intend to go with a great force to Dagon, where I have an army now lying. . . . I will advance to the walls of Pegu, blockade and starve them out of it, which is the last town I have now to take to complete my conquest, and then I will go in quest of Bourno." Then the secretary proceeding . . . "these gentlemen may be witnesses to Your Majesty's placing your signet to the contract on your part" he again affected the same mirth (and was again joined by his courteous attendance) saying "What madman wrote that? Captain, see this sword! It is now three years since it has been constantly exercised in chastising my enemies, it is indeed almost blunt with use, but it shall be continued . . . till they are utterly dispersed. Don't talk of assistance. I require none. The Peguers I can wipe away as thus" drawing the palm of one hand over the other "See these arms and this thigh" drawing the sleeves of his vesture over his shoulder and tucking the lower part up his crutch . . . "Amongst 1,000 you won't see my match. I myself can crush 100 such as the King of Pegu. . . . With what intention do you come to Negrais?" and without staying for the answer went on again with encomiums on himself . . . and ran on with a narrative of all his actions insomuch that I had not the opportunity to say anything. . . . The 26th at night was told . . . that His Majesty's indisposition had so much increased that he could not grant an audience and therefore desired me to come again in the morning. . . . I went accordingly

about ten o'clock in the morning on the 27th to the Inner Yondaw . . . whence a messenger informed His Majesty . . . who returned . . . an answer in writing "Do not take it amiss, Captain, that I cannot grant you an interview. My indisposition will not admit of it. I have therefore sent, by my first minister, the Company's letter, and ordered him to give you a horse. Return again with despatch and meet me at Dagon or in the way thither, then the Company shall not want what they would have. I have elephant's teeth, wax, etc., ready for them." This being read . . . the Minister delivered me the King's letter and ordered the horse to be sent to my house. . . . His indisposition was excessive grief. . . . At this time his favourite lay at the point of death and expired about two hours after; she was daughter to a petty prince . . . whom the King had subdued and taken this princess captive. (Baker's report, *Dalrymple* I. 149.)

Thus interrupted by domestic grief, Alaungpaya sent Baker away without the treaty, which did not go through till July 1757. It ceded absolutely and in perpetuity all Negrais and a site at Bassein with permission to fortify, and granted all trade duty free. In return, the English were to send military assistance when paid for, to refrain from assisting the lord of Tavoy (who was making overtures to them) should he fail to submit to Alaungpaya, and to send annual tribute of one twelve pounder cannon and 200 *vis*s powder. The treaty was fetched by Ensign Lester at Myanaung in Henzada district whither he had for days accompanied the royal barge.¹ Alaungpaya presented Lester with eighteen oranges, two dozen heads of maize, and five cucumbers, and pointed out that he was a very great king, so great, indeed, that a nine pound ball fired out of a cannon could not injure him, for he was invulnerable. He was immeasurably amused at finding Lester could not *shikko* or kneel for long without getting cramp, and graciously permitted him to sit; pointing to Lester's shoulder knot he asked "What do you wear that for? How much pay do you get a month? Let me feel you," and felt his hand and wrist, saying the English were like women because they were soft and white and did not tattoo. But Lester was meanly treated by everyone else; he was made to give up the boat he had come in,

¹ *Dalrymple* I, 220-26 gives Lester's diary and the text of the treaty. Before the siege of Pegu, when he needed guns badly, Alaungpaya thought of ceding Negrais, Bassein, and a site at Rangoon for 20 cannon and 1,000 muskets down, instead of annual tribute, see *Dalrymple* I. 154.

and was given instead a leaking boat for the return journey; he wrote "Of all mankind which I have seen, the Burman promises the most and performs the least"; and he could not get Alaungpaya's seal affixed to the treaty until, with a shocked protest, he paid one of the princes Rs. 2,000 and another Rs. 1,000, vastly greater sums than now, for rice then sold at twenty baskets a rupee.¹

The reason why the English envoy in September 1755 had found Alaungpaya at Shwebo was that he sometimes had to return there to settle affairs in the north country. Thus in 1755 he found the Gwe people stirring up trouble with the Shans, and he had also sent an expedition to instil respect into the Manipuris who significantly call this, the first of his dynasty's inroads, "The First Devastation"; the Manipuris found the Burmese on this occasion using fire-arms for the first time, their weapons, like those of the Manipuris, having previously been only swords, spears, bows and arrows.² He sent his musketeer captain Minhlaminhkaungkyaw with an imposing escort to visit the Shan states and thus secured the homage of most of them and also recognition from the Yünnan viceroy.

Alaungpaya himself returned with a large force, containing Shan and Chin levies, to Syriam which his men had started to besiege soon after the capture of Rangoon. Rangoon was of no importance in comparison with Syriam, *the* port of Burma. There was much fighting in the Delta not only by land but also between the great war-canoes, driven by sixty oars, which, after using their swivel guns, would ram with terrific effect.³ Finally the Burmese, burning the villages

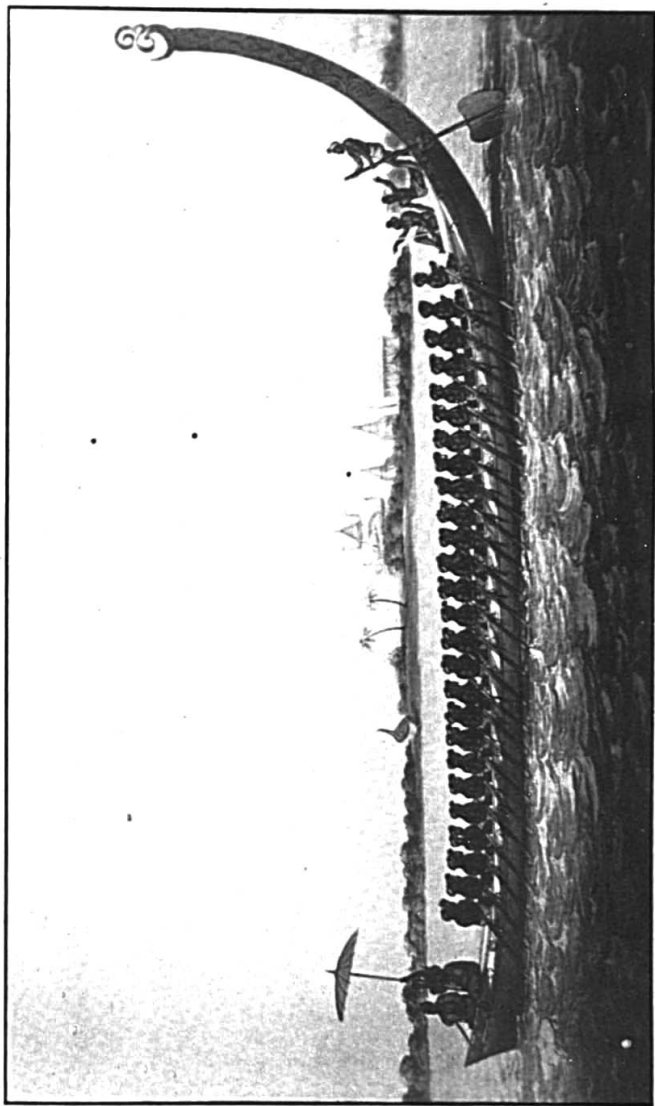
¹ See note "Price of Rice" p. 354.

² See note "Fire-arms" p. 340.

³ The men faced aft and rowed on tholepins. The chief sat in the bows, as the stern was derogatory to rank.

"Every town on the river . . . is obliged to furnish a gilt, or common war-boat, and to man and keep it in constant readiness. . . . His Majesty can muster from two to three hundred; they carry from forty to fifty men each, and are, I think, the most respectable part of his force. As they live chiefly by rapine, and are in a state of constant hostility with the rest of the people, they are audacious and prompt to execute any orders, however cruel" (Cox, year 1797, *Snodgrass* 19).

"The famous war-boats are never seen out of the Irrawaddy or Rangoon river, or employed except on special missions or expeditions ordered by the king, or in carrying a royal order to cut off a head or create a governor" (Paper of



A BURMESE WAR CANOE.

Contemporary print, Publ. Thos. Clay, Ludgate Hill, on the walls of the Pegu Club, from the original sketch by Captain Marryat, R.N., the sea novelist, who was senior naval officer at Rangoon in 1824.

and killing or deporting the population, closed around Syriam. They invested it tightly, swept away the great Talaing stockade at Dawbon, and cut off communication with Pegu. The garrison commander was the Talaing king's brother Binnyadala.

To irregular troops, unprovided with siege artillery, Syriam was a fearful place. They had nothing but their bare bodies to oppose to the beams and boiling pitch which were hurled down from the wall; even if they succeeded in planting a ladder, the first man to put his hand on the rampart had it chopped off and the ladder was overthrown. To make things worse, there were Frenchmen inside Syriam. The English had long left, and such as were at Rangoon now had orders from Negrais headquarters to assist none but the Burmese, but the French sided with the Talaings, and two French ships of respectable size lay in the river. The Talaing snow and 200 war-canoes could only have held their own against Alaungpaya's flotilla but the French ships' gunfire smashed it to pieces. Though Alaungpaya harried the French with fire-rafts, he could make no progress on the water side. On the land side, his assaults failed with cruel losses among his best officers and men; even later he never had any cannon over 24 pounds calibre, and he could make no impression on a rampart backed by earthwork.

When the siege had lasted a year, starvation began to do its work, and the garrison were reduced to eating roots. Bournon the French agent had a tentative interview with Alaungpaya, and would have deserted to the Burmese had not the Talaings put him under restraint. Finding the defenders faint with hunger and the omens favourable for a certain day, Alaungpaya called for volunteers and selected ninety-three. Among them were the noblest in the land, Guards officers and princes of the blood, and they were known as the Golden Company of Syriam. They fed in the king's presence for

Intelligence from Cox's Bazaar, 20 October 1823, in *BSPC*). This reassured English naval officers, who had asked for information.

In the Franklin Room at the Royal Naval Museum, Greenwich,² are two model war-canoes from Rangoon, deposited in mid-Victorian times; neither has a gun-mounting; one has a dragon head and tail, the other is plain, with eyes painted on each side of the bow, and thirty oars a side; the ticket says "Burmese war-boats are all on the same plan, 120 feet in length, from 6 to 7 feet in breadth, and from 3 to 4 feet in depth."

several days, and were given leather helmets and lacquer armour. On the appointed night, in July 1756, the Burmese held a festival with drums and music in their camp at Bogyok. The sound floating over to the Talaing city on the hill induced the watchers to relax their vigilance. The Golden Company found their way over the walls, cut down the guards, and opened the gate to their comrades outside; it was the Wetthattaga, the gate where Nga Than Hlyin in olden days had killed the legendary boar.¹ They poured in, shouting their war-cry "Shwebotha," slaying right and left, and the town was theirs. The Talaing prince Binnyadala rode off with his bare life.

To Alaungpaya's simple men from Upper Burma, Syriam was a veritable Eldorado, and they glutted themselves with mirrors, candlesticks, lamps, chairs, clocks, and suchlike wonders. Alaungpaya made a heap of silver and let the survivors of the Golden Company take away as much as they could carry. Mahomedans and Eurasians were forced to serve in the army; any Europeans he got were generally used as officers. He released the few English he found, and spared such Burmans and Shans as had not been killed out of hand, saying they had opposed him only under Talaing compulsion. He occupied the Catholic mission church and buildings, destroying the town which henceforth is of no importance. Angelo, a Catholic brother, had been killed during the siege while he was tending the wounded. Nerini, the Italian bishop elect, was not a political intriguer, but he doubtless stood in with his French co-religionists, and in any case he had to stay by his native flock in Syriam; Alaungpaya sent for his head. But the soldiers heard of the bishop's virtues, and spared him, killing a half-caste Portuguese priest and trying to palm off his head instead. Alaungpaya was not deceived, and sent them back with positive orders, and this time it was really the white bishop's head that they brought.

Bourno had written to Pondicherry asking for assistance. The French in India, though sore beset, could not afford to lose Syriam, their shipbuilding depot, and they sent three more ships with cannon and munitions. One, *Diligent*, met bad

¹ *YBRS* 1915 Furnivall "The History of Syriam (with translation and notes)"; 1914 his "Notes on the History of Hanthawaddy" reproduced in his "Syriam Gazetteer."

weather and came so late that the news of the fall of Syriam had spread and she returned without entering the port. The others, *Fleury* and *Galathée*, arrived two days after the sack. Alaungpaya made Bourno write asking them to come up the river. The Burman pilot stranded them, and fire-rafts sealed their fate. Bourno and the ships' officers, numbering twelve and including gentlemen of quality, were at once beheaded.¹

The French were under no obligations to Alaungpaya and as the Talaing state which they were helping was actually in existence, they were entitled to treatment as prisoners of war. But it was customary among the races of Indo-China to give no quarter save to those they carried off into slavery, and beheading was a not unusual fate for officer prisoners. In this case Alaungpaya enforced the rule, hoping to strike terror and to warn the French not to oppose him again. He did not realise that it was the one way to provoke a terrible vengeance, and the only reason vengeance never came was that the French were shortly afterwards defeated in Europe in a country of which neither he nor his successors knew so much as the name, and under the terms of the peace they had to evacuate India.

In *Fleury* and *Galathée* he found thirty-five ship's guns (24 pounders), five field guns, 1,300 muskets, and a large store of ammunition and accoutrements. These were a godsend to him, and it was largely on their account that he gave the crews, over 200 men, their lives: white gunners were too valuable to execute. They were decently treated and given wives; some of them became Captains of the Guard;² the rest were a corps d'élite who played no small part in major actions, and when too old to follow the armies they were allowed to retire in the Shwebo villages (pp. 345, 349). There, with a white priest, they ended their days, far from the Breton cliffs and the women who waited in vain for their return.

Thus, until the gunners lost their man-of-war smartness, the

¹ *Sonnerat* (1782) II. 40, (1806) III. 37, *Symes* 18-32.

² For instance, the Chevalier Milard, see *Sonnerat* (1782) II. 43, *Bigandet* 21. He was Captain of the Guard and Master of the Ordnance. His Latin and Burmese tombstone at Ngayabya-Ava records that he died in 1778 aged 42 having served His Burman Majesty against Pegu, Ayuthia, Manipur, etc., being Captain of the Feringhis, styled Thiriyazathukyawhtin, lord *myosa* (baron) of Tabe in Sagaing district. Considering their hard life, it is not likely that many of the crews lived to be old.

court had some good artillery. The enemy could tell at once when a gun was laid by one of these Frenchmen. Alaungpaya had indeed already in his possession a number of cannon, mostly taken from the Talaings, but some of them were two hundred years old,¹ and the best of them was the gun used at Prome in 1754. This was a three pounder and it was the pride of the day, because when fired it went off, and when it went off it was the enemy whom it hit, and the enemy whom it hit died; because of these things, it was coated with goldleaf, and men made offerings of spirits to it, reverently perfuming it with scents and wrapping it in fine raiment.² Alaungpaya was Head of the Church, but when he came to possess French gunners, he was not responsible for their souls, as they were unbelievers and it was their own concern if they chose to drink damnation. Besides, theologically speaking, he did not countenance their use of intoxicants: he merely permitted the offering of spirits to the Gun Spirit, according to precedent, and the slaves of the Gun Spirit happened to consume the offering.

Alaungpaya enlarged Rangoon, appointing a senior governor, and henceforth it replaced Syriam as the port of Burma. In the open season 1756-7 he advanced on Pegu by land and water, while a second army, mainly of Shan levies, moved towards it from Toungoo. His advance was slow, with grim losses, for the Talaings still had cannon and they were now fighting literally with their backs to the wall. He left pots of poisoned intoxicants³ where the Talaings would find them, and so killed many until they learnt caution. He piled more than a thousand Talaing heads on a raft and sent it up with the flood tide; the watchers on the city walls saw it float by and read their own doom, while the vultures rose and fell.⁴ The defence made desperate stands in forty stockades south of the city, especially near Mokkainggyi, at Kyaikpadaing and Zenyaungbin (Nyaungbin). At Zenyaungbin the Talaings captured many of his jingals and turned them against him; it was a hornet's nest which he captured only by flinging in the Golden Company of Syriam, increased to three hundred;

¹ *Trant* 26.

² *Konbaungset* 110-12.

³ *Konbaungset* 198. See note "Drink" p. 314.

⁴ *Konbaungset* 212.

undeterred by heavy losses, they pressed on shouting "Shwebotha!" and flung open the gate to their comrades outside.

Finally the Burmese, devastating the country and deporting the population, closed around. The moat turned red in colour; the Talaings watched it with a sinking heart, for this was the fatal sign of 1538 when Tabinshwehti had captured the city. They made sorties. A monastery at Sidi still shows a bell cast by Alaungpaya; he resided there, at the little fort of Zetuwadi, part of which is still in existence though the river bank has eroded; his own camp here was rushed one night by Talaban with a body of picked Talaings who were not driven out till they had inflicted severe losses. But their efforts were vain. The Burmese, aided by their French artillery, and by war-boats which flung off the Talaing fire-rafts, completed their lines round the devoted city.

At length the besieged sent out deputations to intercede with Alaungpaya; prominent in these were their Talaing, Burmese and Shan monks, and Alaungpaya responded in the noblest language. He pointed out that the precedent of Razadarit (p. 88) they quoted was no precedent, for when Razadarit yielded to religious intercession he was fighting on equal terms, whereas he himself was overwhelmingly victorious and could listen to no proposals which did not include complete annexation; but—it is the ambition of every great Buddhist king to be a divine incarnation—he added that he was a divine incarnation, he hoped to become a Buddha, he would promote truth and justice, religion and mercy among all men, and the poor had nothing to fear from him. Finally he gave them two bunches of orchids, saying one was for offering, the other for adornment.

The Talaings breathed more freely. They offered one bunch to the Shwemawdaw pagoda, the other they twined in the tresses of their king's daughter, as for the bride of Alaungpaya. But she was beloved of Talaban, the heart and soul of the defence;¹ he was furious and, finding his advice, to sally forth and die like men, rejected, he collected his family and with some of the best troops broke through the Burmese lines and maintained himself at Sittaung in Thaton district.

¹ Symes 34.

The trembling king sent his daughter to Alaungpaya's camp, borne in a gorgeous palanquin, surrounded by a bevy of handmaidens and princes. After kneeling some time in homage, she was conducted into Alaungpaya's harem. There was universal rejoicing and the Talaing crown prince with many of the leaders came over with their families and took Burmese allegiance.

Now was the time for Alaungpaya to fulfil the hopes he had raised and to grant terms however hard; but he did nothing. Under cover of fraternisation, parties of Burmese troops were introduced into the city. The inevitable fracas occurred and the Talaings in disgust shut the gates, renewed the defence, and put their king under restraint as he wished to desert. For them the delay had produced nothing but the desertion of their best men and leaders. After a few weeks they were reduced to eating reptiles. In May 1757, seeing that they were so weak with hunger that an assault was practicable, Alaungpaya said he would spare them from dying of starvation. He pointed cannon with his own hand. The general advance was fixed for moonrise, by which time the stormers were to be in possession of the wall. When the moon rose, they were still under the wall, and Alaungpaya sent word that he was coming to execute the whole detachment; thereupon they swarmed over, cut down the guards, fired the houses, and opened the gate. The Burmese Fury burst headlong in, sparing neither sex nor age nor even the monks. One long wail of horror rose to the deaf skies. Men, women, and children rushed to the twenty gates, flung them open, and tried to escape. Many were crushed to death, some were caught by the guns, others in despair flung themselves from the battlements, many perished in the flames. The roads and gates were choked with dead.¹

When the sack subsided, Alaungpaya, gleaming aloft on his elephant, with his Guards and Frenchmen, made a state entry in procession through the Mohnyin Gate in the south wall, during a slight drizzle. He returned solemn thanks at the Shwemawdaw pagoda and appointed governors to the newly conquered districts. The captive king, and such of the leaders as had submitted in good time, were reasonably treated. The remnants of

¹ *Konbaungset* 245-6.

the deposed Ava family were sent home, the daughters being taken into Alaungpaya's harem.

Alaungpaya said to the two Talaing envoys "If as he says your king will really mingle his blood with mine, I will return with all my host to Ava." They told their king and he sent his daughter the lady Megon with an hundred handmaidens and with many attendants and with the ministers Mahagayat and Mahathamun. And Alaungpaya cherished her, yet he withdrew not his army nor kept his promise, but again attacked the town. At midnight on Friday the fifth waning of the moon of Kahson in the year 1119 he captured Pegu. The king Binnyadala, his son Thado Upayaza, his queens, sons, daughters, his chambers of gold and his chambers of silver, Alaungpaya seized them all. Saying "The monks helped the town to resist," he threw more than 3,000 monks to the elephants, the elephants trampled on them, the elephants killed them. Their velvet and satin robes, the officers wore; their cotton robes, men used for pillows, rice-bags, and towels to wipe their feet. They were strewn over the face of the earth, the holy robes; their alms bowls were turned into household pots. The monks who still lived fled east of the Sittang river to the towns of Sittaung, Pan, Shwegyin, Martaban, Labun, Zimme, Yodaya and the Shan towns. The Burmese soldiers seized all the people of the Talaing country, men and women, and sold them some for an hundred pieces, some for fifty, some for twenty-five, some for twenty, some for fifteen pieces. We were sold in the market, we were sold like cattle in the market, and the Burmese soldiers made merry with the price. Sons could not find their mothers, nor mothers their sons, and there was weeping throughout the land. (*Sayadaw Athwa* III. 148.)

He burnt the palace and razed the city wall. He made a desert and called it peace. For the Talaings it was the peace of the grave, and this is the end of them in Burma. Such as were not enslaved sometimes found a refuge in Siam, where they rose to high office and furnished some of the best troops. Such as remained in Burma were prone to rebel, and whenever they dared raise a head it was at once chopped off; they grew fewer and subsided, and their lands relapsed into jungle. Burmese armies on their way to Siam would lighten the tedium of the march by devastating the Pegu country. As time went on, the Burmese of the Delta entered into kindly human relations with the survivors, and some of the governors relented and acted with liberality. But if the racial spirit came to be dead until the British victories of 1824 temporarily revived it, this was not because of any statesmanship on the part of the Burmese government, but simply because there were not

sufficient numbers left to keep it alive. Burmese rulers doubtless had their own difficulties, but it is none the less an indelible stain on their administration that the Delta, one of the most fertile areas in Asia, should have been found by the English to be mainly an uncultivated waste, the haunt of the tiger and the elephant.¹

The Burmese owed their civilisation to the Talaings; it was an older and apparently a gentler civilisation. We know too little to say with confidence why they went under. In Alaungpaya's time their literature was largely destroyed and their language fell into discouragement. Hence we read about them through Burmese spectacles. The Burmese chronicles accuse them of perfidy, and perfidy would account for their defeat; but the instances given do not differ in kind or frequency from those of the Burmese themselves. Probably the ultimate cause of their elimination is that they received no reinforcements by immigration, unlike the Burmese who, lying to the north, were open to a constant trickle of racial invigoration. The proximate cause in 1757 was, firstly, the failure of the Talaing government to subjugate the north immediately after entering Ava and before withdrawing the bulk of the army; secondly, they were divided in their councils, while the Burmese were united under a great leader; thirdly, they had only their own corner of Burma to draw on for men, whereas Alaungpaya's numbers were fed by Shan, Kachin, Chin and Kadu levies.

Alaungpaya was lavish in his praise and rewards. To be named at one of his investitures was the ambition of men's lives. When the brave musketeer captain Minhlaminhkaungkyaw, styled the Mahathenapati, lay dying of his wounds at Syriam, Alaungpaya mourned unaffectedly and honoured him with a funeral under the white umbrella before the whole army. But he was merciless to failure. He judged men largely by the number of heads they could show at the end of a day's fighting.² Unsuccessful officers were executed; it was harsh, but every good leader knows the treatment his men require.

He was a guerilla leader of the first quality. His men had

¹ Symes 165. and English authors *passim*, e.g. *Crawford, Laurie, Mrs. Judson.*

² *Alaungpaya Ayedawbon* 64, *Konbaungset passim.* Cf. *Laurie* "Pegu" 461, 467, and *Crawford* II. 40.

not the training or leadership for pitched battles in the open, but excelled in stockade fighting, and in ambushes which showed their individual initiative and cunning to full advantage. They would have made admirable pioneer units, for their woodwork and entrenching were excellent.¹ Outside the Guard not one in twenty had muskets. Men in the levy received rations but no pay, and had to bring their own equipment—*dahs*, bludgeons, and spears which sometimes had an iron head but were more often pointed bamboos. Many came with hammer and nails, for their speciality was stockading, and their best constructions won the respect of English sappers. For greater speed and for ease of provisioning on long marches, their columns broke up into small parties, each finding its own way and reassembling before battle. They were given liberty to maraud and used it impartially on friend and foe alike; and they would carry off women and children and sell them for profit.² Each man slung a cooking pot with a fortnight's rice and dried fish at one end of his musket, some powder, a mat and a blanket at the other end, and marched without baggage train of any kind, living on next to nothing;³ many combined war with trade, carrying a pack of goods as well as their weapons.⁴ After 1824, finding themselves outclassed, they became demoralised and devoted their energies to running away. It was quite the most sensible thing to do under the circumstances, but it led to their being regarded as a comic opera army. Yet the first Englishmen to cross swords with them had a different opinion which, though of a later day, assuredly applies to Alaungpaya's own men and is in any case the earliest professional opinion on record:—

“They fought with a bravery and obstinacy I never witnessed in any troops. . . . They fought desperately, reserving their fire to the last moment and seldom missing their object. . . . Little is known of the march of Mahabandula's force across the mountains of Arakan to the Irrawaddy; a distance, by the shortest route, of upwards of two hundred miles, at a season of the year when none but Burmans could have kept the field for a week, much less have attempted to

¹ *Trant* 125.

² *TP* 1891 Cerdier “Les Français en Birmanie” 30; *BSPC* 25 September 1812 Canning to Edmonstone; *Yule* “Mission” 250.

³ Cæsar Frederick, Ralph Fitch (*Hakluyt* X. 125, 189); *Sangermano* 79.

⁴ *Cox* 393.

pass the insalubrious jungles and pestilential marshes of Arakan, with rivers, arms of the sea and mountain torrents opposing their progress at every step. . . . The Shans earned with their blood the character of brave men. They fired with the steadiness of veteran troops. Two officers and thirty men of the 41st fell in a moment. . . . The Burmese, with spear or musket couched, and their heads lowered to a butting position, blindly charged upon our bayonets; they neither gave nor expected quarter, but continued fighting with the utmost fury long after all hope of success or escape. . . . The gray-headed *sawbwaw* of the Shans, in particular, showed a noble example to their men, sword in hand, singly maintaining the unequal conquest, they only sought the death which too many of them found." (Reports of 22 and 25 February 1824 from Col. Bowen to Brigade Major, Dacca, *Wilson* "Documents" 23-4; Mahabandula's march in August 1824, *Snodgrass* 75; action near Prome 1 December 1825, *Havelock* 269; actions near Rangoon 28 May 1824, near Prome 1 December 1825, *Snodgrass* 30, 234.)

About 1750 the Sonta sayadaw, a monk of Hsinbyugyun, Minbu district, compiled the *Manu Ring dhammathat* law-book,¹ which started the fashion of attributing the decisions of Kaingsa Manu (p. 195) to his namesake the ancient sage Manu; it was in Pali verse, and Tejosara in 1755 translated it into Burmese. At Alaungpaya's instance, his minister the soldier Mahasiri-uttamajaya compiled the *Manu Kye dhammathat*; it is not a code but a compilation of existing laws and customs, and of the rulings preserved in previous *dhammathats*, with little arrangement or attempt to explain contradictory passages; it attained an enormous vogue owing to its encyclopædic nature and to its being written in simple Burmese with little Pali. Alaungpaya had several court poets, such as Yanaungbala; and among the great office-bearers Letwethondara, who served at the siege of Pegu, had literary talent (p. 249).

In the cold weather 1758-9 Alaungpaya sent an expedition against the Gwes who were raiding the northern Shan states. He himself invaded Manipur in support of a pretender there. After the murder of Gharib Newaz 1714-54, the Manipur durbar had relapsed into a series of sanguinary plots, and one of the claimants took refuge with Alaungpaya, to whom he presented some princesses. Alaungpaya now proceeded up the Chindwin, devastating the villages of the Kathe (Manipur) Shans on the west bank; he crossed the hills by the Khumbat route, and entered the Manipur valley. The Manipuris say he

¹ *Forchammer* "Jardine Prize" 92, 96.

was unspeakably cruel ; but he was only doing unto them as they had done unto his people (p. 208). At Pulel in the Imole pass they gave him battle.¹ After a stubborn conflict they fled. He entered Imphal, the capital, only to find it empty, for the inhabitants lay hiding in the woods. He halted there for thirteen days, set up a stone inscription, took what loot there was, threw into the river two cannon of a cubit calibre as they were too heavy to move, and returned home, leaving garrisons in permanent stockades at Tamu and Thaugdut. In his capacity as a divine incarnation he promoted religion among the Kathe Shans on his line of march ; in his capacity as a king he massacred more than four thousand of his Manipuri prisoners because they stubbornly refused to march away into captivity.²

These incursions, lasting down to 1819, ended by depopulating the country and stamping out Manipuri civilisation so completely that we can no longer tell what that civilisation was like.³ The people were famous for their skill in handicraft, and the Burmese valued them highly, settling them in the capital, in the riverine villages of Sagaing district, and at Amarapura. They served as boatmen and silversmiths ; as silkworkers they introduced the *acheik* pattern ;⁴ they gave the Burmese army its best cavalry (the Cassay Horse), and they supplied the bulk of the court astrologers, who at levees stood robed in white, intoning benedictions, as the king took his seat on the throne.

On arriving home Alaungpaya tried to dam the Mu, and built the Mahananda lake to supply Shwebo town with water. The Mu canals were not successful and the work decayed after his death. He suppressed a Talaing rebellion in Pegu, and seized Whitehill (p. 225) who with his ship had put into Rangoon, but released him on payment of a heavy ransom.

The East India Company had occupied Negrais (p. 213) since 1753 and Alaungpaya had ceded it to them in the treaty of 1757. But their resources were being strained to the uttermost with great events in India, and they withdrew 35

¹ Pemberton 40.

² Konbaungset 303.

³ Hodson 4, 29, 58.

⁴ Parlett 4. As late as 1780 the people of Lower Burma had no silk manufacture and contented themselves with cotton, *Sonnerat* (1782) II. 54.

Europeans and 70 Indians, practically the entire staff, in May 1759. In October they sent back a small staff to retain a lien on the island. The governor of Bassein, with Lavine, one of Bourno's men, who was in high favour, and sixty followers, met the new staff on arrival saying they had a letter from the king to show, and the senior Burmese officers messed with the English in the fort. A day later, 6 October 1759, at nine in the morning they were sitting down to breakfast together when the senior guest, the governor of Bassein, gave a sign and some of the 2,000 Burmans concealed in the woods rushed in, killed eight Englishmen and about a hundred Indians, turned the cannon of the fort on the two ships at anchor, and finally withdrew burning the settlement and taking with them all cannon, stores and four English. A midshipman and 64 Indians escaped on board. The ruins are still there.

What had happened was that the Armenians, some of whom held high office at court, were jealous of the English, who outbid them throughout the East. They represented to Alaungpaya that the English were fortifying their stations against him, supplying the Talaings with arms and spoiling his revenue by preventing other traders from coming up the Bassein river. Alaungpaya sent the governor of Rangoon, brother to his queen, to wipe out Negrais. But the governor returned saying there must be some mistake, he had found the English there to be innocuous. Alaungpaya therefore regarded him as a traitor, flogged all his men, sent a second party which actually did the work, and before letting him return to his high office flung him into irons and pegged him out in the sun for some days with three beams across his body so that a year later he was still suffering from the effects. The governor of Bassein subsequently admitted that the English had not intrigued with the Talaings, but had fed a few refugees, just as they fed Burmese refugees, and had made presents of four or five muskets which the Armenians represented to Alaungpaya as 500. The English had not prevented ships coming up the river, because they regarded Alaungpaya as too strong a raja to offend. Under the treaty he had expressly allowed them to erect fortifications.¹

¹ See note "Negrais Massacre" p. 354.

After the fall of Pegu, envoys from Chiengmai visited Alaungpaya. He told them they must make complete submission. They looked at those blackened ruins and went home; and before long Martaban, Tavoy, Chiengmai, Anan and other states in north-west Siam, sent tribute.

Talaings had taken refuge in Siam; now as ever there were endemic slave raids on the border; and the Siamese had detained the captain of a Burma-owned ship which had been driven under stress of weather into their port of Tenasserim. But the real reason why Alaungpaya now invaded Siam was that he had to work off his energy; moreover, seeing that after his conquest of the Delta he reigned over nothing but ruins, he wished to populate his realm with prisoners obtained in Siam.¹ Early in 1760 he advanced through Martaban and Tavoy.² Capturing Tenasserim with the aid of some small ships managed by European captives, he went eastward over the hills to the shore of the Gulf of Siam, turned north, and captured the coast towns, Kuwi, Pran, Nawng Chik, Pechaburi. The Siamese army came out and delayed him still further although he drove them in. Approaching Ayuthia, he burnt some Dutch ships, massacred the defenceless population in crowds regardless of sex or age, and covered the surface of the rivers with their corpses.³

Under the walls of Ayuthia he released prominent prisoners with this letter to the king of Siam:—"His Burman Majesty comes as a divine incarnation to spread true religion in your country. Come forth with respect and present him with elephants and a daughter."⁴ But the Siamese had among them Talaing refugees who knew the story of Pegu, and they relaxed no effort. Their feringhis and Mahomedans manned the war-boats with cannon in the maze of rivers round the city; the glacis and fords were strewn with caltraps; cannon frowned from the battlements, with thousands of resolute men behind.

¹ *Sonnerat* (1782) II. 41.

² Some of his troops must have gone down the Tenasserim river, for tradition says that 500 of his men, with their leader Letyapyanchi, perished in the Shanthon-daung (Krantwowai) rapid a day's journey above the Tavoy-Mergui boundary. The name "Rapid of the Three Thousand Shans" is due to a Shan host having been similarly engulfed at some unknown period.

³ *Samuel Smith* 108.

⁴ *Konbaungset* 315-8.

Alaungpaya had started much too late in the cold weather. The rains were at hand, when the whole country would be under several feet of water. Half his men were down with dysentery and he himself was far from well.¹ It looked as if the ever victorious army was not going to be victorious. He sent another message telling the Siamese king that he had no wish to dethrone him if only he would submit to religious reform. There was no reply, and Alaungpaya saw that the play was over; he did not hesitate, and within a week of arrival the hosts were in full retreat, abandoning forty guns of three-inch calibre.

He selected the friend of his boyhood, Minhkaungnawrahta, for the signal honour of commanding the rearguard. These were the pick of the army—500 Manipur horse and 6,000 foot, every man of whom had a musket. Minhkaungnawrahta spread them out and it was two days time before the Siamese realised that the main body had left; then they swept out upon him; his men watched the ring closing round them and, fearing to be cut off, begged him to let them fight further back; but he said “Friends, the safety of our Lord the King lies in our keeping. Let us not fight further back, lest the sound of the guns should break his sleep.” When they could stand they stood, and when they had to run they ran; they were defeated but never broken, and they withdrew in good order, collecting Alaungpaya’s stragglers on the way.

Meanwhile Alaungpaya had gone ahead by forced marches. Perhaps, as he lay in pain jolting along in his litter, he longed for the sights and sounds of home; but he was destined never to see them, for whether he knew it or not the hand of death was upon him. He reached Kinyua, Bilin township, Thaton district, and there at dawn he died.²

To his son Hsinbyushin and the other watchers by the bed, it was as if the sky had fallen, but they kept their heads. Heaven alone knew what would happen now; there might be civil war and a struggle for the throne; the men might break if they lost heart, for the Siamese were pressing the rearguard. They kept the death a close secret and sent their swiftest horse-

¹ Dalrymple I. 361.

² 1122 Kahson lazok 12 = Sunday, 11 May 1760.

men to Shwebo so that the crown prince might be the first to know and secure his throne. The body, bound in sheets, was hidden in the curtained litter; and thus in death Alaungpaya still rode with his armies and the daily orders issued in his name.

At Rangoon his death was made public and his body, placed on a state barge, was taken up stream. At Kyaukmyaung landing stage in Shwebo district the whole court came out to meet it, and bore it solemnly in through the Hlaingtha Gate of Shwebo. So he was buried with the ritual¹ of the kings in the palace city which once had been his lowly village, amid the mourning of an entire people. They would never see his like again, the village headman who made himself lord of Burma and received the homage not only of the tribes, but also of French and English captains kneeling to receive his orders in respectful silence. His grave, with an inscription in misspelt English, perhaps by some Negrais captive, is near the Shwebo Deputy Commissioner's court-house; from its shortness you might think him a small man, but he was a fine tall man. The English captain² describes him as five feet eleven inches in height, coarse featured, dark complexioned, with a long face and nose, not without an air of majesty. He had reigned only eight years and was under forty-six when he died; but men are remembered by the years they use, not by the years they last.

NAUNGDAWG YI 1760-3. Alaungpaya was succeeded by his eldest son, the crown prince, Naungdawgyi. Kneeling by his father's death-bed, with the eyes of the great commanders upon him, the second son Hsinbyushin could not think unworthy thoughts, and had loyally joined in sending the news to his elder brother. But now that the body had departed, and he rode through the sunshine and fresh air, the Old Adam reasserted itself and he struck for the throne. It was a feeble

¹ Unnecessary stress has been laid on its being the rite for a *setyawade* (universal emperor), as if this had not been used for every nonentity on the throne of Ava for the preceding century.

² Captain Baker in *Dalrymple* I. 166-7.

effort, and he soon submitted and was forgiven at the queen mother's intercession.

But the king sent for two of the generals he disliked, and when they came unsuspectingly, he executed them without allowing them to see him. The army was furious. Minhkaungnawrahta, lingering with the rearguard, thought he also might be among the king's dislikes; and now, in the darkness that clouded his mind in the death of his great master, he revolted. Many of the troops who had not yet returned, joined him, for he was the idol of the army; and as nearly all the musketeers had been given him to form the rearguard, he had no difficulty in occupying Ava. Men said he had sent to a scion of the fallen Ava dynasty who was a refugee in Siam, offering to put him on the throne. He can hardly have dreamed of becoming king himself, with six sons born of Alaungpaya's loins against him. The king repeatedly sent monks and old comrades urging him to desist from his folly and offering a free pardon. But he refused them all, saying "What? Surrender with my dear ones that they may suffer the cruel mercies of the king? No, friends, leave me to my fate. I will die like a soldier, I will make these walls my coffin." So with his 12,000 men, the flower of the army, he was tightly besieged in Ava.

While thus besieging him the king stayed at Sagaing, where he granted audience to Captain Alves, the Company's envoy, in September 1760. The Company, fully occupied with winning an empire in India, had no desire for new commitments in Burma, such as the exaction of due amends for the Negrals massacre would involve. But it had to make at least a protest, and to ascertain whether trade relations were still possible. The king gave Alves audience, and having heard his demand for compensation,

he said he was surprised to think how the Governor of Madras . . . could have the face to demand any satisfaction, which he would not give, for . . . he looked on all that were killed at Negrals, whether guilty or innocent, as born to die there . . . he would never give himself any trouble to enquire farther about the affair. His soldiers were not obliged to know who were guilty or who were not, neither did he expect they would enquire, but in such cases generally killed men, women or child as they pleased. "For instance" says he "As

soon as ever they get into Ava, I have given them orders to spare nothing that has life, and to burn 'kill and destroy everything in it, though I know that . . . the general and the soldiers are to blame. . . ." I then asked him what crimes the governors of Negrais had committed for which the king his father had been so much offended? He said that Captain Hope, while chief at Negrais, had supplied the Peguers . . . with arms, ammunition, and provisions . . . I answered, if that could be brought to proof, the laws of England would punish him with death if his father had left his punishment to the English. I then asked him what crime the new governor, that arrived the day before, or any of his people, had done, for there was no difference in their punishment. He said "He was born to die there" and laughed "For I suppose you have seen that in this country in the wet season there grows so much long useless grass and weeds in the fields that in the dry season we are forced to burn them to clear the ground. Sometimes it so happens there is some useful herbs among these weeds and grass which, as they cannot be distinguished easily, are burned along with them. So it happened to be the new governor's lot." (Alves' report, *Dalrymple I.* 373.)

Perhaps Alves did not remember many a terrible passage in his own Old Testament scriptures, showing that collective execution is the normal rule in the tribal stage; even good and great men could not see its iniquity until they had developed beyond that stage. The king was no harder on the English than on his own people; having executed justice, he was well disposed towards them and asked them to return although he treated the 1757 treaty as if it did not exist. To Alves, this was a shocking breach of faith, signifying a double dose of original sin; but it was really only unbusinesslike, and signified the inevitable clash between a developed civilisation and a backward community. Having had no international transactions, the Burmese were not acquainted with the nature of treaties.

The king released the half dozen English captives, mostly survivors of the massacre, gave full liberty to trade, and was willing to grant sites anywhere in return for arms and ammunition, and he desired a male and female camel, and a horse and mare each four cubits high, as he wished to breed. But trade was no longer to be duty free, as under the 1757 treaty, and he made one proviso: the headquarters must no longer be at Negrais. Alaungpaya himself had said he would rather they were at Bassein, and the reason the king now gave was that he could not protect Negrais against the French; the real reason

was, he had no control over so remote a spot, and wished the English to be on the mainland where he could control them. Although he twitted Alves with being a spy, he was graciously disposed towards him when he came, like every one else, to bring a present and offer congratulations at the Thadingyut festival, and in return he offered him anything he liked for himself; would he like an elephant? There was no love lost between the English and the Dutch, but Alves asked for the release of three Dutch captives, survivors of a station of thirteen whom Alaungpaya had wiped out in Siam; the king said orders to this effect would be drafted at once. When Alves had arrived, the ministers and princes pounced on him, looting his kit and preventing all business until he had paid eight of them a tip of Rs. 300 each; he said he would complain to the king, but was told that the king would laugh, and this was the recognised way in which ministers lived, for they had no salaries. One of the ministers mistranslated the despatches to his own end, and the fraud succeeded until the difference between the two versions slipped out during one of Alves' conversations with the king, who was furious but passed the matter over as he was none too sure of his throne and feared that his officers might desert to Minhkaungnawrahta. The people were sick of perpetual war, and on his way up the river Alves had noticed that the villagers longed for a change, and seemed pleased whenever one of the assaults on Ava failed. Down the river he saw a village in flames, as various high officials were marauding over the country for their own benefit. He was glad to get away from it all to a cleaner atmosphere. He brought back no treaty, but he brought a letter from the king granting the terms promised in the interviews. The English could not return to Negrais, as it was not permitted; they would not go to Bassein, for it was seventy miles from the sea, their base; henceforward they concentrated on Rangoon.

Minhkaungnawrahta had no cannon but the king could not take Ava save by starvation, for light irregulars can do nothing by storm against a fortified town. None the less, as was their wont, they tried to storm it and wasted many lives; among them Lavine the Frenchman who had aided in the Negrais massacre and was now killed leading the stormers. Alves saw some of the poor wretches who had been terribly scalded by

the boiling liquids poured down on them when they tried to scale the walls.

At length, his men starving, Minhkaungnawrahta broke out with a band of devoted followers and fled west. More than once the pursuers surrounded him but fell back in awe when he strode through them. In the Shan woodland above Kyaukse, half starving, he was brought down by a musket shot; even then he overpowered the assailant who grappled with him, and had to be finished off with a second shot. Such was the end of Alaungpaya's brother in arms.¹ When the head was laid at his feet, the king mourned, saying "Should ye have slain so great a man?" Like others of his line, Naungdawgyi was doubtless in the habit of uttering the most sublime platitudes—the chronicles are full of it—and he might have acted accordingly; but, on the other hand, he might not. An experienced officer, Minhkaungnawrahta knew what the word of a king was worth in the Golden Palace.

The king's uncle, governor of Toungoo, revolted, was besieged, made submission, and was forgiven in 1762. During the siege Talaban, the great Talaing refugee (p. 233), raided Martaban. An expedition reduced Chiengmai to submission, capturing fugitive Talaing princes and a scion of the fallen Ava house. Talaban had for years maintained himself in the famous caves at Kawgun, Thaton district, and his family were now captured there. Knowing well what their fate would be, he gave himself up and, when brought before the king, claimed their lives in return for his own; struck by his chivalry, the king released them all and took Talaban into his service.²

Naungdawgyi's principal poet was Seindakyawthu 1736-71, a skilful rimester, nephew to the Twinthintaikwun (p. 268). He was a native of Maungdaung village in Alon, Monywa district, and in his teens had served under Toungooyaza (p. 216). He wrote poems on weddings in the royal family, etc., and on the invasion of Siam describing how all the kings of the earth bow down before Alaungpaya; but his chief works are the Kawiletkanathatpon and Awwadatupyo.³

¹ *Konbaungset* 324-40.

² *Konbaungset* 350, *Symes* 38. For the Kawgun caves, see *IA* 1892 Taw Sein Ko "Notes on an archeological tour through Ramannadesa" and 1893 Temple "Notes on antiquities in Ramannadesa."

³ *JBRS* 1918 Ba Han "Seindakyawthu: man and poet."

The king died while engaged on works of merit. He built two pagodas on the Mahananda lake near Shwebo, and sent offerings to Shwesettaw in Minbu district. He was aged twenty-nine, left seven children, was succeeded by his brother.

HSINBYUSHIN 1763-76 himself raided Manipur in December 1764, carrying away its people into captivity, for he wished to increase the population of the new capital, Ava, into which he moved in April 1765. The gates of restored Ava were named after conquered states, some of them being —on the east side, Chiengmai, Martaban, Mogaung; on the south, Kaingma, Hanthawaddy, Myede, Onbaung (Hsipaw); on the west, Gandalarit, Sandapuri (Viengchang, Linzin), Kenghung; on the north, Tenasserim, Yodaya (Siam). The various wards were, according to precedent, allotted on racial lines; thus the Indian traders lived in one, the Chinese in another, Christians in another, and in others were the Siamese and Manipur captives; such captives were often a source of suspicion, as in 1774 when the leading families of the Manipur colony were extirpated for alleged plotting. The wall, sixteen feet high, backed by earthwork, was of indifferent quality, but adequate to the only style of warfare it would have to meet. As was usual in Burmese capitals, the palace was an inner city, with its own moat, wall, and a massive teak stockade outside.¹

The transfer to Ava was a wise step so far as it went, for it placed the king in direct communication along the Myitnge river with the Kyaukse granary, and it was on the great river, whereas Shwebo was landlocked. But the step did not go far enough. From the day that Vasco da Gama opened the sea route in 1498, the centre of gravity had shifted to the Delta. The kings from Bayinnaung 1551-81 to Anaukpetlun 1605-28 acted as if they realised this, making Pegu their headquarters. But none of their successors realised it, and their failure to do so sealed the fate of the monarchy. Rangoon might have let a little fresh air from the outer world into the court. To

¹ *Konbaungset* 377, *Crawford* II. 1, *JRS* 1915 Enriquez "Capitals of the Alaungpaya dynasty."

the Burmese, the Delta was a foreign country, and they did not feel safe among the Talaings. Hence there was some excuse for the earlier kings. But there was none for the Alaungpaya dynasty, which exterminated the Talaings; the remnant continued to rebel for some time, but these rebellions were crushed with ease, and need not have occurred had the kings, instead of wasting their energy on wars in Siam and Assam, used half of it in giving the Delta a good administration. As they would not move to the Delta, the atmosphere of their palace was that of the Upper Burma villages among which it lay. Their ideas remained in the nineteenth century what they had been in the ninth. To build pagodas, to collect daughters from tributary chiefs, to sally forth on slave raids, to make wars for white elephants—these conceptions had had their day, and a monarchy which failed to get beyond them was doomed. It is probably more than coincidence that Siam, which had its capital in a seaport, developed a more enlightened government than the Burmese kingship, and is independent to-day.

The king sent to Benares for Brahmans. Nine came, and they were frequently consulted on matters of state. With their help the Maungdaung *sayadaw* translated into Burmese numerous Sanskrit works on grammar, medicine, astrology, erotic lore, etc., known as the Vyakarana.¹ In 1771 an official, Manu Wannana Kyawhtin, compiled the Manusarashwemin *dhammathat* based on older law-books; also, with the aid of Taungdwin *sayadaw* and other learned monks he compiled the Manu Vannana law-book in Pali and Burmese stanzas, the monks helping him to polish the Pali. The king had a concubine, Ma Htwe, who was a poetess, and he himself took an interest in letters; Letwethondara (pp. 238, 269), a secretary to the Hluttaw Council, whom he had exiled to Meza hill, Katha district, in 1763, earned his recall two months later by writing the well-known Mezataungche poem bewailing his grief and loneliness. The third verse describes the Nyaung-ye festival he saw, in exile among the wooded hills:—

At the Nyaung-ye festival
Meza people, all devout,
Duly fall in prayer and pour
Water to the banyan-tree.

¹ Forchammer "Jardine Prize" 104.

From the valley, see, the shrine
 Rises even to the sky.
 Meza ! thy pagoda old
 Of the Golden Cave is there,
 Fair to look on evermore.
 Dimly glimmering o'er the mount,
 Dusky floor to shadowy head,
 Steady hang night's vapours yet ;
 Soon, as a billowing net, are stirred,
 Surging fretful as a flood,
 Huddle upward, tower, and crowd ;
 Then in cloudy streamers free
 Stretched across the sea of dawn,
 Darkling wreath the heights around
 Lost and drowned. The ravelled mist,
 Shredded now by twisting winds,
 Patters—listen !—to the ground ;
 Drip—drop—the sound is loud
 Like the rounded clear refrain
 Of the rain, though none there be.
 See ! the chariot of the sun
 Peeps o'er Mount' Yugandhara,
 Stooping under vapours wan.
 Numbed, the noon I fondly wait,
 Counting on my fingers chill
 Hours and minutes, till the rays
 Spreading fill the world with warmth.

The main armies spent 1764-7 against Siam. The Burmese claim rested on Bayinnaung's conquest in 1564. It was a false claim, for they had never administered the country. Bayinnaung had merely held it to tribute for twenty years, and the claim had lapsed ever since. Starting from Kengtung with 20,000 men, mostly Shans, Thihapate slowly fought his way down from Chiengmai through Vicngchang (Linzin), while another army of the same size under Mahanawrahta fought its way south-east from Tavoy to Pechaburi. The Tavoy people had revolted, massacring all Burmans and making overtures to Siam ; they now had bitter cause to repent.

To delay Mahanawrahta, the Siamese pressed an English merchant ship into their service ; her broadsides did great execution in the Burmese stockades near Nontaburi, thirty miles from the mouth of the Menam ; but as soon as she could, she flung off the Siamese and returned to sea. Thihapate had to storm town after town, and found the villages stockaded against

him. When roused, the men fought with spirit, vying among themselves as to who should first mount the wall. They died like flies from preventible disease, and suffered ghastly wounds for which they got no thanks from the king, as the loss of a limb, even in honourable service, disqualified a man from entering the palace: His Majesty's sight must not be sullied by reality.¹ They kept the field all the year round, a rare thing for Burmese levies, spending the rains in the towns they had won. At Chiengmai they had to resort to mining, with movable shelters under the wall; finally they captured part of the wall with its guns and turned them all night down into the terror-stricken population who sent their monks to surrender in the morning. The prettiest girls and choicest loot were sent to the king at Ava.

Gradually they swept over the whole country, burning the towns and making the chiefs drink the water of allegiance. Such of the population as had not stampeded eastwards ran a risk of having to contribute to the heads which the Burmese hacked off and piled up in great heaps under the walls of the towns they besieged, in order to terrify the defenders.² They were sometimes besieged themselves, for the Ayuthia armies came out and pressed them hard, striving to prevent their effecting a junction.

But finally the two commanders joined hands under the walls of Ayuthia. Mahanawrahta fixed his headquarters there at a pagoda built by Bayinnaung. In spite of wastage their hosts were as numerous as ever, as they had exacted contingents from the states which they had conquered, and according to Burmese custom their prisoners were made to fight for them. They were to spend fourteen months before Ayuthia. The rains came and flooded them out: they stood their ground. Their commanders died of hardship: they did not lose heart. Imperial armies from China invaded Upper Burma: they were not recalled. During the first open season they could not get near the walls because of the numerous stockades outside the city. Sometimes the whole plain was alive with swarms of Siamese working under the supervision of grandees who were carried about in sedan chairs. Both sides used bamboo matting

¹ *Crawford* I. 439.

² *Konbaungset* 381.

between two uprights containing earth for temporary defence while they constructed permanent works. The Siamese had foreign adventurers fighting for them, one of their outworks containing four hundred Chinamen. When the rains began to lay the whole country several feet under water, the commanders urged Mahanawrahta to withdraw but he refused and Thihapate supported him. The men stayed on knolls of rising ground or built dykes to keep out the water. The Siamese seeing them scattered in isolated groups attacked them in boats. In one of these attacks a Siamese leader while waving his sword and hurling defiance in the bows of his boat, was brought down by a musket shot and fell into the water, and the whole flotilla fled. Ayuthia prided itself on its great guns, some of them thirty feet long with a 30 *viss* (100 lb.) ball. One of these burst with an overcharge but the shot killed several men on two Burmese boats. The Burmese had war-boats in plenty, constructed by their lieges up the rivers, and so they were able to prevent provisions entering the city. When the dry season returned they reconstructed their earthworks. Some of these were higher than the walls, and the cannon were also mounted aloft on pagodas so as to fire down into the palace. Often the palace guns ceased fire because the king yielded to the entreaties of his harem who were terrified at the noise.¹ The city starved. Shan states tributary to Siam sent an army which came down from the north and tried to raise the siege; they were swept away. The king and princes tried to cut their way out and escape; they were driven back. They asked what they had done to merit these horrors and were curtly told they were rebels and traitors and deserved all they were going to get. The commander-in-chief Mahanawrahta died, and by royal decree was buried with extraordinary honours; he deserved them. Thihapate had to finish the siege alone. The end was now near. In the palace chapels, where women knelt in prayer throughout the night, the holy images were seen to weep. At four in the afternoon, 28 March 1767, the French guns opened for the last time. The wall had been mined; by sunset the breach was practicable and the stormers effected an entry. The slaughter was indiscriminate. The king's body was identified next day near the west gate by his

¹ Siamese palace tradition.

brother whom the Burmese found in chains and released.¹ The houses, the monasteries, the temples, the great palace itself, went up in flame; the walls were razed to the ground; the city was never restored as a capital. The princes, the harem, the clergy, foreigners including a French Catholic bishop,² and thousands of the population were carried away into captivity, so that many a private could boast of four slaves. Such of the guns as were too big to move were burst or thrown into the rivers.³ There was gold, silver and jewels in abundance, for the royal treasure was immense. This is the secret of these continual Burmese attacks on Ayuthia: it was at once a thriving seaport and a king's palace, one of the wealthiest cities in Indo-China, so that its treasures were a standing temptation to the Burmese hordes.

The Lao and Shan levies were allowed to return home, probably because the long absence was rendering them unreliable and many of them were prisoners serving under compulsion. But there was no rest for the weary Burmans. If Ayuthia had not fallen when it did, the siege would have had to be abandoned, as royal despatches now came urgently recalling the armies to take their place in the line against the Chinese whose attacks on Ava looked like breaking through; for the years 1765-9 saw a series of murderous Chinese invasions.⁴

Some of the *sawbwaws* on the Yünnan border now ceased paying tribute to Burma, which therefore marched against them; one fled to Yünnan, and the Kengtung *sawbwa* made a foray there at the instigation of the Gwe (p. 222) in the course of their wanderings. Moreover the Chinese were dissatisfied with the treatment their merchants received in Burma. At Bhamo a Chinese caravaner, angry at delay in getting sanction to build a bridge, insulted the Burmese governor who therefore arrested him; and when released he found that the Burmese officers had looted his caravan. At Kengtung a Chinaman was killed in a dispute

¹ *Konbaungset* 417.

² He was called Brigot and arrived opportunely in Burma as Percoto, the bishop elect there, was looking for a consecrator. Subsequently the Burmese let Brigot return, *Bigandet* 19-21. See also note "List of Captives" p. 321.

³ Four of the light guns taken here are now in the Madras Museum, with Burmese inscriptions recording the date and hour of their capture, *RSASB* 1917. 21.

⁴ See note "Chinese War 1765-9" p. 355.

about payment; the Burmese resident offered blood-money and even talked of executing the slayer, but would not hand him over, and the Chinese would take nothing less. Such instances were trivial and could have been adjusted had the two governments been in communication with each other; but they had no embassy system.

The Chinese invaded Burma in great strength with the active or passive co-operation of Hsenwi, Bhamo, Mogaung and Kengtung. The fighting was in the triangle Mogaung, Kenghung on the Mekong river, and down the Myitnge valley to within three marches of Ava. The Chinese had bases at Bhamo and Lashio and their line of advance was usually down the Shweli and Myitnge valleys. But the principal theatre was in Bhamo district where Balamindin won fame by his great defence of Kaungton, twelve miles to the east of which, at Shwenyaungbin, the Chinese also had a gigantic stockade, "as big as a city."

The Burmese had better war-canoes than the Chinese, they received invaluable help from their captive French gunners, and they won most of the dozen major actions which were spread over four campaigns; but the suspense was terrible; as soon as one Chinese army was driven back, another come on in greater numbers than ever. The earth quaked, rending the national shrines; to placate the unseen powers, the king flung thousands of gold and silver images into the Shwezigon at Pagan and the Shwedagon.

The Chinese proved useless as soldiers, but the Manchu contingents were good troops who with ladders, axes, hooks and ropes, would rush up to the stockades against a withering fire, while boiling lead poured down on them and their bodies were crushed by great beams¹ of which the lashings were cut as soon as the stormers were underneath. The Chinese ought to have won, although their casualties from disease were heavy; but whereas the Burmese commanders worked together hand in hand, the Chinese lacked co-ordination, and threw away the advantage of superior numbers by allowing themselves to be overwhelmed

¹ This was so all over Indo-China. The Assamese prided themselves on their stockades and the Siamese boasted that when their stormers were sufficiently numerous they could receive the falling beams on their spears and toss them off; but the beams were often whole teak trees, see *Samuel Smith* 36, *Snodgrass* 66. Until superseded by the stone keep, the stockade was normal in Europe—the Bayeux tapestry shews the Normans erecting one at Hastings.

in detail. The best of their generals, Mingjui, son-in-law to the Emperor, who had won distinction in Turkestan, fought his way from Lashio, smashing a Burmese army and driving it past the Gokteik gorge to Singaung, three marches from Ava. The court in panic urged the king to flee but he scornfully refused saying he and his brother princes, the sons of Alaungpaya, would face the Chinese single handed if necessary. Mingjui's colleagues failed to support him, Burmese armies in his rear cut off his supplies, his men were starving, and he had to retreat, beset by overwhelming odds. The slaughter was such that the Burmese could hardly grip their swords as the hilts were slippery with enemy blood. Mingjui fought in the rearguard till he saw his men were safe and then, obeying the tradition of the Manchu officer corps, he cut off his plaited hair, sent it as a token to his Emperor, and hanged himself on a tree; his servant hid his body with leaves lest the Burmese should desecrate it according to their wont. The following is from Chinese records:—

The Burmese had a device of pretending to negotiate and then suddenly appearing with a new army. . . . They had no regular army; in times of danger Shan levies were called out. There was however at Ava a standing force of 10,000 men called the "Invincibles." In actual fighting the Shan levies were placed in front and the "Invincibles" occupied the rear. Cavalry were posted on either flank to close in upon the enemy. If victory appeared doubtful the army rapidly entrenched itself under cover of a heavy fire from artillery and small arms. When the smoke cleared away the stockade was complete, and the men inside were ready to defend it. These were the invariable tactics of the Burmese. . . .

When Mingjui began his retreat from Burma the enemy's ranks were continually reinforced from all sides, whereas he had no supports or reserve. They could procure supplies anywhere, whereas we had no system of supply. They had cannon mounted on elephants, while we had only small arms and these decreased from day to day. In action the noise of their cannon and musketry was as ten myriad fireworks exploding at once, rendering speech inaudible. . . . Mingjui each morning rose early and directed the operations in person with the fighting and retreating columns alternately. He often came into camp at nightfall not having drunk a drop of water all day. Grain had long been finished, and sliced beef was the only provision; of this he took his share with men in the ranks. He looked kindly to the wants of his commanders who suffered much from exhaustion, hunger and wounds; and he refused to abandon his sick and wounded men, ordering them to be carried by the local

levies. Thus it was that no man, however much he suffered, had a word of blame for the General.

Mingjui died, not because he could not have saved himself, but because he was returning without having carried out the instructions of his master. It is true that the Emperor had ordered the return of the force, but these orders never reached Mingjui. Encompassed daily with growing difficulties he would say to his officers "The enemy are aware that we are in extremity, but for the sake of our country we must fight on, that they may know that its orders are clear and irrevocable and that its servants fulfil them to the death. No reinforcements are coming but we must do our utmost, that the enemy may be impressed by our determination and that the work may be rendered easier for those who come after us." This was a far-sighted patriotic resolve, not the decision of a desperate man. . . . The people of Yünnan and the troops who had accompanied him never spoke of Mingjui without tears, for his hold upon their affections was not less than that of famous commanders of olden time. His death was unfortunate too for another reason, because the events which immediately followed the battle in which he fell could not be properly reported to the Emperor or made known to the people at large. . . .

Kaungton was on the Irrawaddy and the enemy held both banks of the river. We took up a position close to their eastern camp, which they had built on an eminence, their lines reaching to the river. It was 2 *li* [1 *li* = 631 yards] in circuit, constructed of large trees deeply sunk in the ground; outside were three trenches, and beyond was a stockade of trees laid horizontally, their branches being pointed and directed outwards. This was the usual clever contrivance of the Burmese when defending important positions. Our first step was to raise a mound from which we cannonaded the fort. This was unsuccessful, for the breaches made in the timber were promptly repaired by the Burmese and the stockade remained intact. Next we tried with long thongs of raw hide to pull down the posts of the stockade, but the thongs broke. A similar attempt was then made by night with canes several hundred yards long which we procured in the jungle. Two or three thousand men took part in this attack which however did not succeed, as the enemy cut the canes with their *dahs*. Fuhêng then ordered the stockade to be burnt. A large body of our men with torches advanced under cover of shields specially constructed to ward off fire from the fort. The three trenches were crossed and the leading party reached the stockade, when a river fog rose at 2 a.m. and lasted till 8 a.m. This so damped the wood that it could not be ignited, and the wind also being in the wrong direction the attempt was abandoned. Finally, mines were laid and exploded; part of the stockade was lifted bodily by the shock and the enemy were thrown into the greatest alarm, but the posts still remained upright. This happened three times, and the explanation was that the stockade being built on rising ground our excavations were too level and our mines were exploded at too great a depth below the surface. (*Warry*.)

The Chinese never succeeded in taking the Kaungton stockade, and at length in the fourth year, 1769, after losing, from first to last, 20,000 men and a quantity of arms and ammunition which went to equip fresh Burmese levies, they were themselves driven out of their great stockade at Shwenyaungbin and their generals asked for terms. The Burmese staff were averse to granting terms, saying that the Chinese were surrounded like cattle in a pen, they were starving and in a few days they could be wiped out to a man. Luckily Mahathihathura, the commander-in-chief, saw that the loss of a few armies would merely stiffen the resolution of the Chinese government. He sent back the messenger with a conciliatory reply. At Kaungton, in a seven-roofed hut, fourteen Burmese and thirteen Chinese officers drew up a written agreement whereby the Chinese were allowed to withdraw, trade was to be restored, and, to prevent misunderstanding, decennial missions were to pass between the two sovereigns. The Chinese burnt their boats and melted down their cannon; and then, while the Burmese stood to arms and looked down, their columns marched sullenly away up the Taping valley, to perish by thousands of hunger in the passes.

When he heard that the Chinese had been allowed to depart, the king was angry; he thought they should all have been killed. So the armies, afraid to return home, went off to Manipur in January 1770. Under a good raja, Manipur was recovering from the last devastation, and the commanders scented a fresh harvest of slaves and cattle with which to appease the king.¹ The men of Manipur fought gallantly but were overwhelmed in a three days' battle near Langthabal. The raja fled to Assam. The Burmese raised their own nominee to the throne and returned, taking with them such of the population as were not hiding in the woods. The king's anger had subsided, and as after all they had won victories and preserved his throne, he was merciful; he sent Mahathihathura a woman's dress to wear, and exiled him and the commanders to the Shan states; he would not allow them to see him, and he also exiled the ministers who dared to speak on their behalf. Their wives, including the sister of his queen, were exposed in the sun at the western gate of the palace, with

¹ Pemberton 43.

the Chinese presents of silk on their heads, a public mock for three days.

By granting honourable terms the Burmese gave the Chinese Emperor a loophole to withdraw from a costly adventure; and although pride prevented him from acknowledging the treaty, his silence gave consent, and soon the caravans of 400 oxen or 2,000 ponies started coming down from Yünnan as of old, and the Burmese were once more able to find a market for their cotton.¹ Burma remained in possession of Koshanpye, the nine Shan towns above Bhamo. The Chinese prisoners taken in the war, numbering 2,500, were settled in the capital as gardeners and craftsmen, and were given Burmese wives. But the material was as nothing to the moral gain. Their other victories were over states on their own level such as Siam; this was won over an empire. Alaungpaya's crusade against the Talaings was stained with treachery: the great siege of Ayuthia 1766-7 was a magnificent dacoity; but in the Chinese war the Burmese were waging a righteous war of defence against the invader.

The victory, coming as it did on top of a generation of continuous warfare which might well have exhausted the race, shows that the exploits of Alaungpaya were no mere flash in the pan but were broad-based on the energy of the race as a whole. His tradition was not only maintained, it was eclipsed. The chronicles for the period are verbose and pompous, but it is impossible to read them without being struck with their fierce pride. The Burmese knew that to the north lay a big country called China; to the east, Shans of various sorts, some of whom had a kingdom called Siam; to the west, a place called India and, further west still, a country of white people, which some people said was an island. All these countries, except China, were uncivilised and not worth studying. The white people called themselves various

¹ For Koshanpye, see note "Pong and Koshanpye" p. 322.

The imports from China were silks and raw silk, velvet for state robes, Chinese-Shan tea, gold, hams, copper, steel, liquor, mercury for vermilion lacquer, and large quantities of needles and thread. The exports to China were cotton above all, edible birds' nests, salt, ivory, horn, amber and a little lacquer ware and precious stones (the mines, so far as they were worked, were worked by Chinese lessees). The total trade was, see p. 359, inconsiderable. See *Wayland* I. 132, *Crawford* II. appendix, *Parker* "Précis."

names such as Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English, but they were all much the same just as the various Shans were much the same; and in any case they were not a numerous race and were usually crushed with ease. The Indians were more important but even they could not count for much, judging by the way the Manipuris had been wiped out. The Siamese and Chinese, on the other hand, were really great powers, but they had been defeated. Thus the whole world was accounted for; and the Burmese felt equal to anything. They had some justification for their pride. They had no commissariat, and on the march they perished of under-feeding and disease. They were the ordinary little people you can see in any village to-day, led by their *myothugyis*, who ranked as lords. Yet their spirit carried their bare feet from Bhamo to Bangkok, they fought and died by hundreds and thousands, leaving their bones to bleach from Junkceylon to the banks of the Brahmaputra. They had bought those lands with their blood. Doubtless it was a small world, but it was the only world they knew, and the Burmese minister could say with truth to his English suitor "You do not realise. We have never yet met the race that can withstand us."¹

In 1773 the Talaing levies who had been mustered against Siam mutinied. The Burmese commanders and guards had to run for their lives, first to Martaban and then to Rangoon. The mutineers failed to take the Rangoon stockade but fired the town and burnt several foreign ships which were building on the stocks. They treated foreigners decently, but some French shipmasters who were in port would have nothing to do with them and lay in hiding with their wives; one of the wives was granddaughter to Phaulkon (p. 203), another was a bride fresh from Pondicherry. A week later the Burmese brought up reinforcements, used a Dutch ship and retook the town with the aid of her gunfire; they then robbed her of all guns and munitions and sent her to sea where she foundered a few days later. The mutineers made off, collected their families, and migrated to Siam, three thousand in number. But the general population could not flee, and from them the Burmese exacted vengeance, massacring both sexes. They dragged the French from hiding, distributed the wives among

¹ Gouger 104.

the officers, selling one of them for Rs. 400,¹ and made them look on while their husbands were bound hand and foot and thrown into the river. One, a man of great strength, burst his bonds and swam ashore. When he reappeared as if from the dead, the Burmese regarded him as supernatural and did him no more harm.²

In 1774 the king made a royal progress down the river to Rangoon in splendid barges with the queens, the court, and the captive Talaing princes in his train, holding high festival at every halt and worshipping at the pagodas on the way, especially the Shwezigon at Pagan and the Shwehsandaw at Prome. His camp at Prome was on a sandbank by the mouth of the Nawin stream, and when returning he placed a new spire on the pagoda which crowns the Po-u-daung hill near Prome.³ He came to Rangoon to impress the Talaings in two ways. Firstly, he raised the Shwedagon pagoda to its present height, 327 feet (p. 117), gilding it with his own weight⁴ in gold and erecting a golden spire studded with gems to replace the one thrown down during the 1769 earthquake (p. 254); secondly he executed the captive king of Pegu with his brother the crown prince, and son. They had been prisoners seventeen years without opportunity of doing harm, but considerations such as the recent mutiny sealed their fate.

The king's prayers were for victory on his arms. The situation in Siam was serious. His supremacy there began to collapse almost before the ruins of Ayuthia had ceased to smoulder. When the Burmese hosts were sweeping down upon Ayuthia in 1765, there was a governor of a northern province who would not drink the water of allegiance. He was the son of a Chinese father and a Siamese mother and his name was Paya Tak.⁵ He collected a few hundred determined men like himself and withdrew to the hills. The Burmese tried to dislodge him but he flung them back each time. He went east and gained Cambodia, vastly increasing his resources. The men of Siam,

¹ An enormous price, as a Siamese girl slave cost only Rs. 5, *Crawford* I. 424.

² *Sonnerat* (1806) III. 64-5, *TP* 1891 Cordier "Les Français en Birmanie" 31-2, *Konbaungset* 504.

³ *IA* 1893 Taw Sein Ko "Preliminary study of the Po-u-daung inscription."

⁴ Twelve stone three. See note "Tuladana" p. 328.

⁵ *Pallegoix* II. 94-8.

sick of oppression, rose and called on him to lead them, for their lawful princes were in captivity. In 1768 he wiped out several Burmese garrisons, reoccupied Ayuthia, and founded the present capital, Bangkok. He was now king but his palace never saw him, as he lived in the field. The Burmese sent expeditions. He harried them in ambushes, cut them off, starved them out. He and his people were united in a just cause. Whether the Burmese could in any case have held Siam for long is doubtful, but whatever chances they had were ruined by the disunion which now became the curse of their armies in the field: the spoilers fell out over their prey. Captains like Mahathihathura, the hero of the Chinese war, and Thihapate, the conqueror of Ayuthia, continued to win occasional victories, but they could achieve nothing permanent in the face of rampant insubordination. If a commander disapproved the plan of campaign, he showed his disapproval by simply withdrawing his levies and marching off elsewhere. Some of them were executed; but the harm had been done. By 1775 the Burmese had been driven across the frontier, and even in Chiangmai they were ill at ease, when the king died; he was aged thirty-nine, left forty-one children, and was succeeded by his twenty-year-old son.

SINGU 1776-82 at once finished the Siamese escapade by withdrawing the armies. His only wars were in Manipur. The rightful raja who fled from the Burmese in 1770 made four attempts to oust their nominee between 1775 and 1782; his base was in Cachar and they drove him back each time but after 1782 left him in possession, perhaps because the country was now so thoroughly devastated that nothing more could be wrung out of it.¹ In the first two years, for which Singu was not responsible, the army was absent continuously, losing 20,000 men, partly by fever, and gaining barren victories in Cachar and Jaintia. These states had to present daughters and pay tribute of a tree with the earth still clinging to its roots in token that the king had seizin of the land, and

¹ Pemberton 43.

henceforth he claimed these countries.¹ His suzerainty was only nominal.

The people liked Singu because he stopped these everlasting wars, which made everyone miserable and led to migrations. Thus, the Yaw folk fled from their original home to the remote Mu valley in Katha district in order to get out of the king's reach.² If a town was depopulated by rebellion or by the wastage of its levy during foreign service, a few hundred households would be transferred to it from another charge, sometimes a week's journey distant, whether they wanted to go or not.³

The people did not know that Singu was seldom sober; all they knew was that he left them alone, and they were deeply grateful. He built many pagodas, for he spent much of his time in prayer; he was an angler too, and had an eye for scenery, to judge from some of his favourite haunts, where the gleam of a golden spire is reflected in the green depths of the stream below. His chief queen had a talent for verse, and the tutor of his youth was the poet Nga Hpyaw, author of *Paleiksa-egyin*, who now received the title Minyeyaza. Sleep, prayer, fishing, the laughter of the palace ladies in some sequestered woodland—it was all very pleasant, far pleasanter than the hard life of the soldier in foreign fields.

Of course there were the occasional cares of office. He executed his younger brother, his uncle the Amyin prince, fourth son of Alaungpaya, and with them several ministers with their dependants in the usual way, for alleged treason. Some princesses, his sisters, died in like manner, especially when he was angry as well as drunk. He deposed his queen, and sent her back to her father Mahathihathura who, on arriving from Siam, was deprived of all his offices; later he drowned her too.

Had he been a man of ordinary character, such acts would doubtless have been accepted as being in accordance with custom. But the court could not respect a man who was often unconscious for hours and was surrounded by ministers and swordbearers most of whom followed his example.⁴ His habit of making pilgrimages with only a small court, leaving the

¹ Symes 80.

² Clayton 9.

³ Dalrymple I. 390.

⁴ Konbaungset 530. See note "Drink" p. 314.

palace vacant for weeks at a time, and returning in slipshod fashion at any hour of night, gave conspirators their opportunity. While he was absent at Thihadaw pagoda on the Irrawaddy island in Shwebo district, a party came to the palace at midnight. With them was a puppet of eighteen, Maung Maung, lord of Paungga in Sagaing district, dressed up so as to resemble the king his cousin. The Guard passed them in, thinking it was the king; some, who realised their mistake and resisted, were cut down. When day broke, part of the Guard continued to resist and having cannon held their own until their Armenian captain was speared, whereupon they fled. Mahathihathura returned from retirement and took command of the Guard in Maung Maung's behalf.

When the news reached king Singu, his followers fled and he thought of taking refuge in Manipur but his mother, the queen dowager, indignantly insisted on his playing the man. He went alone at dawn to the palace gate, and when challenged by the Guard answered "It is I, Singu, lawful lord of the palace." They fell back respectfully, and he entered the courtyard. There he saw a minister, father to one of the queens he had murdered. He made for him exclaiming "Traitor, I am come to take possession of my right." The minister seized a sword and cut him down.¹ At least he died royally.

Maung Maung was miserable. He had spent most of his life in a monastery, and now that he was put in possession of the palace, he tried to induce his seniors to take the crown, recalling them from the villages in which they had been made to live for the sake of his predecessor's safety.² He gave them precedence and pressed them each in turn to relieve him of the kingship. They all suspected some deep device, and refused. But soon they saw there was no need to fear him, and after seven days on his unhappy throne he was executed by one who had many faults but was not a puppet.

This was Bodawpaya, the senior of Alaungpaya's surviving sons. Alaungpaya had expressed the wish that he should be succeeded by his sons in turn, and Hsinbyushin had disregarded

¹ *Symes* 95.

² *Sangermano* 53. They were the three surviving sons of Alaungpaya, see *IA* 1892 Temple "The Order of Succession in the Alompra Dynasty."

that wish by nominating his own son Singu. Half the palace plots which were the bane of Burma proceeded from the lack of any clear law of succession. The king nominated whom he liked, sometimes a son, sometimes a brother, his choice being subject to only one restriction—that the nominee be born of a queen, not of a concubine.

BODAWPAYA 1782-1819 at once enforced the Massacre of the Kinsmen (p. 338), making a clean sweep of his rivals, with their followers, servants, and children. Singu's queens and his lesser ladies had laughed their little day in forest glades; they now laughed no more, for they were burnt alive, every one, holding their babes in their arms.

He rewarded his followers generously, especially Mahathihathura. But a few months later he found his brother plotting against him, and among the faction was none other than Mahathihathura himself. The shock to the king's faith was such that never again, to the end of his life, did he put his trust in mortal man, no not even his nearest kin; and from that time onward he changed his room and his bed daily.¹ All the faction, with their families and attendants, were exterminated; and thus the old general, who had so often led his countrymen to victory and had won the greatest of their wars, died the death of a traitor.

At the end of the year a *minlaung* pretender, Nga Myat Pon, with two hundred wretchedly armed followers scaled the palace wall by night, seized the cannon and turned them on the palace, firing blank as they could find no ball.² When day dawned and it was seen how few they were, they were overpowered and cruelly executed. Nga Myat Pon claimed to be a prince of the deposed Ava dynasty who to avoid captivity among the Talaings had fled to the Shans and Red Karens. He was really a native of Mōng Kūng in the Southern Shan States, and many of his followers were from Mōng Pai

¹ *Sangermano* 53. Bodawpaya's changing his room does not appear to have been a palace custom, as it was at Pataliputra (Strabo xv 55).

² *Konbaungzet* 551-5, *Sangermano* 54, *Parlett* 44.

and Yawnghwe. They had plighted their troth with the *thwethauk* blood bond at Aungzigon pagoda south of Pinya; their plans were matured and their ladders made at Paungga, Sagaing district, some of whose people hated the king, as was natural in the fief of the slain seven-days king. They were now dealt with according to precedent—the whole population, down to infants and monks, was burnt alive, the fruit-trees cut down, the crops ploughed up, the village burnt and left to relapse into jungle. Many officers and men who had failed to detect the conspiracy, or to prevent the escalade, or had helped under compulsion to fire the blank rounds, were executed. Bodawpaya built, on the site of the humble house he had occupied as a junior prince at Sagaing, the Aungmyelawka (Eindawya) pagoda, dedicating as slaves such people from the Paungga locality as had escaped burning, for he was a most religious king.¹ After the English annexation they returned to their villages.

A year after coming to the throne, Bodawpaya moved the capital, causing hardship not only to the citizens but also to the country at large which had to pay heavy contributions in money and labour. Such hardship was justifiable in 1765 when the move had been from Shwebo, a bad site, to Ava, a good site; but now the move was to Amarapura, an indifferent site six miles away, and it was undertaken for astrological reasons.²

One evening in September 1783 three hundred Talaings from the Bassein province, armed with swords and bamboo spears, suddenly rowed up to Rangoon at sunset, rushed into the town, killed everyone they met, cut the governor's throat, burnt his offices, and seized the armoury containing 200 muskets with ammunition.³ The townsfolk ran up to see what the fire was, and fifty were at once cut down. Many of the rest, with all the officials, ran off into the woods, thinking the Talaings more numerous than they really were. The Talaings shut the gates, patrolled the streets, killed all who would not drink the water

¹ *Konbaungset* 784.

² *Sangermano* 56, *Gouger* 25, *Crawford* I. 147. Sangermano put the city population at 200,000; *Crawford* II. 9 put Ava at 50,000 in 1826; Mandalay was 65,000 under Mindon, *Fytche* I. 252, 218,000 in 1886 (old office files), and 138,000 in 1922. See p. 139, note "Shifting Capitals" p. 356.

³ Rangoon was a stockade until 1841 (illustrated at p. 304). See *JBR* 1912, *Saya Thein* "Rangoon in 1852" and 1920 Fraser "Old Rangoon."

of allegiance, and made everyone stay indoors. They maintained good order and prevented theft; they presented the Portuguese and Armenians to their *minlaung* pretender, a young man dressed in shining raiment, and compelled them to assist; they got no help from the European ships and were too few to compel it. Two days later the Burmese in the woods assembled a levy and sent three hundred men who pretended to side with the Talaings and stood under the gates asking to be admitted and promising to drink the water of allegiance. The Talaings let them in and administered the great oath. The Burmese then stormed the north gate, leaving four hundred casualties on the ground, drove the Talaings to the centre of the town, and were there checked, for they had no muskets. But one hundred and fifty of their men, led by a Siamese, breaking down the west gate with axes, ran up with some muskets, the three hundred men who had sworn allegiance suddenly threw off the mask, and the Talaings were overpowered, hunted out from the houses, and killed. The Burmese seized the ammunition of some European ships lying in the port, and compelled one hundred and fifty Europeans and Eurasians to serve; they put them in charge of armed parties and left the most important points, such as the city gates, in their keeping. Next day Talaing reinforcements arrived. The first canoe, arriving singly, was sunk by a cannon shot and as her crew, numbering sixty, swam ashore, they were cut down. One hundred and twenty men, coming up in two more canoes, were quietly allowed to land and were then suddenly set upon and killed. The leading prisoners were cross-examined, and after confessing the full extent of their plans they were beheaded.¹ The shore was littered with Talaing corpses, a feast for dogs and vultures, and the river was bloodstained for a whole day. In the next few days scores of Talaing canoes appeared but guessed there had been a miscarriage and returned without landing. Subsequently twenty-two canoes flying red flags brought a great governor, Master of the Royal She-elephants, who levied a heavy fine on the townfolk for their failure to prevent the Talaing entry. But before he had left, an even greater governor, Lord of the East Gate of the Palace, arrived

¹ A readiness to confess is still noticeable in the less sophisticated parts of the country. Beheading with the *dah* was invariably an instantaneous death, and Burmese rulers did not grant it to those who failed to confess.

with orders to hold an inquiry ; he put the Master of the Royal She-elephants into irons, saying he had no authority to levy fines for his own benefit, and returned to the capital taking with him all officials ; some at least cannot have been responsible for the initial surprise, and had subsequently shown great courage and determination, but they also were led away in fetters.¹

An Arakanese, lord Hari, came asking Bodawpaya to take over his distracted country (p. 149), alleging that everyone would welcome so noble a ruler. Bodawpaya feared the Mahamuni image which overshadowed Arakan with its protecting power. He sent spies to report. Two of them were qualified in witchcraft ; disguised as monks, they worshipped at the Mahamuni shrine and performed magical rites to neutralise the power of the image. At the end of 1784 upwards of 30,000 men under the crown prince invaded Arakan in four divisions. The first went by the pass from Pa-aing, Minbu district, the second by the pass from Padaung, Prome district, the third by the pass from Kyangin, Henzada district, the fourth with the guns went by boat round Negrais. They united on the west coast, swept the Arakanese royal army out of Ramree Island, and camped along the Dalet river north-west of An, receiving the homage of the surrounding country. Subsequent fighting took place through the creeks and islands, and the Arakanese came out to offer resistance both on land and sea ; but they were outnumbered three to one and never succeeded in seriously checking the Burmese who occupied the capital Mrohaung without difficulty, inflicting wanton cruelties on the population,² leaving them tied to stakes at low-water mark, or burying them up to the chin in fields which they then proceeded to harrow.³ The king of Arakan had been advised by his council to make submission and present a daughter, but he refused to go down to history as having disgraced his country and he himself led the army. After his defeat he fled by boat with his harem but was overtaken and brought back a prisoner to his own capital. The Burmese constituted Arakan a province under a governor at Mrohaung with a garrison of several thousand men, having Sandoway, Ramree and Cheduba

¹ See note " Administrative Conditions " p. 357.

² *Symes* 110.

³ Arakanese family tradition.

as sub-provinces. They then returned in February 1785 with the royal family and 20,000 inhabitants; it was these prisoners who introduced¹ inoculation against small-pox, already practised in Arakan, into Burma. The captive king was given reasonable treatment in the capital till his death a year later, after which his kinsmen were suffered to sink into obscurity and want.

Among the spoil was a cannon thirty feet long, and the thirty bronze images of Ayuthia (p. 183); six survive at the Arakan pagoda, Mandalay. This pagoda was built to enshrine the Mahamuni image which was now brought from near Mrohaung, being the greatest of all the spoil; Bodawpaya himself went forth to meet and greet it on its way. Through the long colonnades leading to the pagoda,² there used to come daily from the Burmese palace, so long as a king reigned there, sumptuous offerings borne in stately procession, marshalled by a minister and shaded by the white umbrella. Nowhere, even at the Shwedagon or Shwesettaw, is the devotional atmosphere more intense. On its first arrival 125 captive Arakanese families were dedicated as slaves to the image, and the number was subsequently increased.

In the long gallery are 600 inscriptions, collected by Bodawpaya, not for archæological reasons but because he thought the clergy were getting more rent than was their due. He therefore instituted a close scrutiny of the inscriptions in which pious dedications were recorded, causing copies to be made and to be deposited here.³ Unfortunately the copies are frequently inaccurate, and many original inscriptions were broken or thrown away on the road by cartmen groaning under forced labour, especially when they were pagoda slaves wishing to destroy the evidence of their bondage. None the less, the collection is a veritable mine for the archæologist, and luckily it was from the first entrusted to the care of the Twinthintaikwun 1726-92, a monk who turned layman before the fall of Ava in 1752. He was respected for sane speech and integrity, and Alaungpaya made him tutor to Bodawpaya. On becoming king, Bodawpaya appointed him *Kyiwun*, "Commissioner of the Granaries," and gave him many titles with a jewelled staff.

¹ *Sangermano* 136.

² See note "Mahamuni" p. 313.

³ Talaing plaques of circ. 1059 at the Shwehsandaw, Prome, are in round character, but it was usually reserved for palm leaf until this reign, when the use of marble for inscriptions became fashionable and led to the disuse of square character.

He wrote prose and verse—for instance, Wethandaypyo, Zanekapyo, 66 *jatakas*, and the great Yazawinthis history, a task for which he was especially qualified by his knowledge of the inscriptions in his care. He died full of years and honours at Mingun while the king was building the pagoda (p. 275), on which the old man had written some courtly stanzas.

Quite a number of other courtiers dabbled in literature, and the king encouraged it. Nga Aung Hpyo wrote verse on Kyanzitha and on the China tooth (p. 279) and compiled a *thamaing* history of Halin, the ancient Pyu site in Shwebo district. Nawadenge, *thugyi* of Yuawe in Sadaung, Sagaing district, wrote court verse on the royal family and a *mawgun* on the Meiktila lake when the king was superintending repairs there in 1796; he received high offices and titles together with a jewelled staff and the privilege of driving up to the very gates of the palace. In 1785 U Awbatha, a monk, wrote a fine prose version of the Mahajanaka *jataka* story of Buddha; he wrote it at Minbu in his monastery, the pond of which still survives under the east side of the Deputy Commissioner's court. One of the judges in Bodawpaya's court was Letwethondara who, born in 1727, lived until just before the First Anglo-Burmese War; he had been one of the secretaries to the Hluttaw Council before the fall of Ava, and the Alaungpaya dynasty continued to employ him, just as the English government continued to employ his descendants; his best-known work was the poem written in exile (p. 249) but he wrote several other works, such as court verse on the 1767 conquest of Siam, the coronation of Bodawpaya, the conquest of Arakan in 1785, the Mingun pagoda, and a rimed law-book, the Winisayapakathani *dhammathat*.¹

The king's scrutiny of inscriptions was only part of a general revenue inquest undertaken in 1784 and again in 1803. It was based on the depositions of village headmen all over the country, detailing the boundaries of their jurisdiction, the type of produce, the kind and amount of revenue, and the population in each—the total population was barely two million (p. 333). There is no reason to doubt that the figures were roughly accurate and gave the central government a much better idea

¹ *JBR* 1916 Saya Thein "Letwethondara: judge and poet," 1917 Po Byu "A study of Letwethondara's poem written during his exile."

of the country's resources than it had ever had since 1638, when king Thalun had held a similar inquest (p. 194). But, like the English Domesday Book of 1086, it was popularly regarded as the instrument of fresh exactions.¹ At the 1784 inquest His Majesty decreed that legal claims should not lapse with a change of king or dynasty. The kings often issued such decrees and they were as often disregarded. Burma possessed the germ of many an institution, crude no doubt but scarcely cruder than those in feudal lands; yet whereas feudal lands retained and developed them, Burma could not develop, because every change of dynasty, nay even a change of king, cancelled existing rights, rendering continuity impossible.²

The conquest of Arakan, a thinly populated strip of country which had been still further weakened by civil war, convinced Bodawpaya that he was destined to be a world conqueror. He talked of annexing China and India.³ As a preliminary he set forth to annex Siam in 1785-6. He took the field in person, thus giving his armies the immense advantage of unity of command, which was seldom attainable by an ordinary commander; Shan chiefs, being royalty, took orders from the crown alone.⁴ The plan of campaign was excellent, overwhelming the country from four points simultaneously. One army with Shan levies was to sweep down from Chiengmai, another would advance up the Ataran river and through Three Pagodas Pass in Moulmein district, the third from Tavoy would prevent the provinces in the Malay Peninsula from sending assistance to the Siamese king, the fourth was to occupy the important trading island of Junkceylon south of Mergui district and so prevent fire-arms reaching Siam.

Unfortunately things did not go according to plan. Paya Tak was dead but his spirit lived on in his comrade-in-arms, the founder of the present Siamese dynasty. The Chiengmai army indeed met with some success but everywhere else the Burmese

¹ Masses of the record for both 1784 and 1803 survive on palmleaf and *parabaiik* in the Bernard Free Library, Rangoon. For specimens, see *J.BRS* 1912 Furnivall "Matriarchy in Burma" and 1916, 1918, 1919 "Some historical documents." These specimens mention the regulation whereby foreign ships arriving at Rangoon had to land their cannon and rudder; a similar regulation existed in Japan.

² *Forchammer* "Jardine Prize" 91.

³ *Sangermano* 58.

⁴ *Gouger* 269.

were checkmated. The fourth army in war-boats with eleven ships,¹ managed by half-caste Portuguese who were seamen of a sort, coasted down to Junkceylon, landed and built stockades round its northern city Chalang; the governor had just died, so his widow the lady Chan,² and her young sister, took command, themselves leading their men in the field with such effect that the Burmese withdrew in a month. The third army from Tavoy occupied Ligor and was then wiped out. The leading divisions of Bodawpaya's own army met with much the same fate before they had advanced far beyond Three Pagodas Pass. The men were hampered by their absurd cannon, old ship guns mounted on cumbrous carriages; they might have been some use if the men behind them had known their work, but the generation of French gunners had now passed away. Abandoning these, his elephants and stores, and leaving his men to their fate, Bodawpaya ran for his life to Rangoon where he said prayers at the Shwedagon pagoda and was comforted by his queens.³ The invasion collapsed and he reconsidered his decision to annex China and India.

He kept his throne for thirty-seven years because he was a masterful man who never hesitated to punish. But this campaign discloses the extent of his ability. He persisted in taking the field with a huge army which had no transport, as he issued orders without allowing time for arrangements to be made. Of course he blamed others, threatening to burn the whole staff, and actually carrying out the threat to a certain extent. The staff thought he could have won even yet had he persevered, for his numbers were overwhelming; instead, he himself set the example of a shameful flight.

For the next decade he continued to send armies against Siam, partly in self-defence, partly in the hope of recovering the southernmost Shans who of course went over to the conqueror. Indeed, fighting continued intermittently throughout most of the reign. In 1803 the Siamese ravaged as far as Kenghung and carried away the Kengtung population wholesale to Chiengmai; many of these went by collusion, hoping

¹ Symes II., 123.

² JSS 1905 Gerini "Historical retrospect of Junkceylon island" 60.

³ He also built the Letkattaung pagoda at Launglon, in Tavoy district, during this campaign.

for better treatment from the Siamese than they received from the Burmese.¹ In 1814 the Talaings of Martaban rebelled and fled in large numbers to Siam; Siamese princes of the blood were sent to greet them and make arrangements along their route. In 1809-11 Bodawpaya's forces four times raided the Siamese coast villages south of the Isthmus of Kra and landed on Junkceylon; here they sometimes captured a town and carried off the population but sometimes were themselves captured and carried off into Siam in numbers, the officers being executed. But there were no big operations, he never regained Chiengmai, and it was probably well for him that the Siamese government was comparatively unaggressive.

The ravages of his dynasty had reduced parts of Siam to a desert² which seventy years later had not yet recovered its population.³ There was many an old score for the Siamese to repay, and they made extensive slave raids into Tenasserim, which continued for some months after the English occupation in 1824. The Burmese retained Tavoy and Mergui; after the 1760 conquest (p. 241), when the Siamese had either been killed or had run away, these areas had been repopulated by batches of people sent down from Burma; but they were too few to keep out Siamese raiders, and when they failed, they paid homage to Siam, fearing Bodawpaya's vengeance. Some of his garrison commanders were devoted men, and on those who were not he would pass orders "Execute them in such fashion that all who even hear of it will shudder."⁴

The drain on Upper as well as Lower Burma was such that the framework of society cracked, and bands of brigands infested the entire realm; to crown all, the rains failed for several seasons in succession; probably 1812 saw the climax of the years 1807-16 which are still remembered in many a northern village as a time of terror and starvation. When the condition of the people was reported to Bodawpaya, he said "We must hold the people down by oppression so that they may not dare to think of rebellion."⁵

The largest number of men in any one of these 1809-11 campaigns was on paper 80,000 and in reality 36,000, of whom

¹ GUB II. i. 407.

² *Aymonier* III. 790.

³ *Anderson* "English intercourse with Siam" 8, 395-6.

⁴ *Konbaungset* 648.

⁵ *Sangermano* 81.

8,000 died of hunger and disease before striking a blow, since no arrangements had been made for supply. When embarked, hundreds of them were tied hand and leg, like so many cattle, lest they should desert.¹ Their line of march from Upper Burma resembled that of a hostile army, leaving devastated villages in its trail. As a Myede levy of 1,500 men was slow in coming up, the commander-in-chief sent a detachment to punish them; the detachment met the unsuspecting levy on the road, cut down a hundred, seized four to five hundred before they could run, bound them hand and foot and left them lying at low water in a creek where the tide came in and drowned them. Men deserted wholesale and, unable to return to their villages where they would have been punished, roamed in bodies over the country, living by dacoity. What the army did at Tavoy is not on record, but for months after, the town was one long silence, for years the fields around were white with human bones, and, prominent among the five lakhs of gold and silver loot, was a quantity of bangles, chains, and other ornaments of the kind worn by women and children. The king was delighted at such prowess on the part of his favourite commander until he requested permission to delay his return and spend the rains in Tavoy as he was tired with his exertions and overcome with grief at the death of a concubine there. The request aroused the king's suspicions, for he prided himself on his penetrating intellect. Indeed, the courtiers said His Majesty possessed *deippa sekku nyan*, the supernatural faculty of perceiving what is going on at the other side of the world. This faculty now enabled him to perceive the real reason why the commander was delaying to return: he was plotting rebellion. Therefore he sent orders "Roast him at a slow fire, taking particular care that none of his bones should be broken or dislocated, which might tend to shorten his sufferings." Even the commander's service rivals, who were to carry out this order, hesitated, for they admitted that he was entirely innocent; and meanwhile he succeeded in capturing a small, white elephant in the jungle. Amid the universal rejoicings which followed, he received a free pardon.²

Indeed there was no sin so scarlet but the finding of a white elephant would purge it whiter than snow. The chronicles

¹ *Crawford* II. 159.

² BSPC despatch 25 September 1812 Canning to Edmonstone.

scarcely deign to mention English missions or the causes leading up to the catastrophic war of 1824, but they are full of this sacred quadruped. Like the king, he was a living sacrament and together they shared some mysterious divinity. It had ever been thus, and when the Buddha became incarnate of the lady Maya, the annunciation took the form of a white elephant. Red, black, and spotted elephants were all valued, but the white elephant was in a class by himself. Of course he was only technically white, and it needed a trained eye to diagnose him; whoever did so and captured him, was ennobled. Bringing him from the jungles to the palace was a triumphal procession. It might be an arduous task, for he sometimes resisted his worshippers and destroyed the crops; but the royal aesthete, with a commendable disregard of earthly dross, would exclaim "What signifies the destruction of ten thousand baskets of rice compared with the possession of a white elephant?" At every halt on his way, a gorgeous pavilion would be erected, and crowds flocked to kneel and adore. Arrived at the capital, he was given a separate court of his own, with minister and secretary, and fiefs for his support. If the revenue from these fiefs was diminished, the king would write him an apologetic letter in his own royal hand, explaining the circumstances. A Guards detachment was on duty at his palace, the king himself made offerings and paid him reverence, he was bathed every day in scented water, all his vessels were of pure gold, dancers danced to him, and palace singers sang him to sleep. No milk save human milk was good enough for him, and every morning twenty nursing mothers waited on him in a row. His trappings were of finest silk, bosses of solid gold studded with rubies and emeralds hung all over his body, his tusks and his feet were ringed with gold, and his forehead bore a gold plate recording his voluminous Pali titles. He alone, with the king, was entitled to the white umbrella. If he sickened, the king might sicken; if he died, the king might die—nay, the whole country might come to ruin; therefore his death caused universal consternation and plunged the land into mourning; if a male, he was buried with the ritual of a king, if a female, with the ritual of a queen. He might live sixty years in his palace, unless he died prematurely of eating too many sweets from the hands of his adorers.¹

¹ See note "White elephant" p. 361.

Bodawpaya repaired the embankments of the Nanda, Aungbinle and Maungmagan lakes in Mandalay district, and of the Meiktila lake. The last involved forced labour by levies dragged from the Shan states, Arakan, and the Talaing country. He first came to Meiktila in 1785, staying at the Nandawgon hillock near the present courthouse. During his stay he cast his eye on the daughter of the *myothugyi* Nga Kyu who, unwilling to give her up, said she was a leper. The king built a three storied monastery, Nga Kyu a two storied one. The king scented the falsehood and perceived that the building of the rival monastery was high treason; with that punning allusiveness which struck the courtiers as so exquisite, he murmured the adage ကျွဲငှက်တို့ကို ငှက်ပျံတို့ကို ငှက်ပျံတို့ကို ငှက်ပျံတို့ကို “Cut down the *kyu* [reed], let not the stump remain.” Thereupon Nga Kyu, his daughter, and the whole family were exterminated in the most correct manner. Their broad acres, requiring 1,000 baskets of seed, with their 51 serfs, escheated to the crown, according to the law whereby the king seized the property of people he condemned in person—wealth was not always an enviable possession.¹

Occasionally he executed Burmese heretics,² and he built pagodas by the dozen, the largest being the Mingun pagoda in Sagaing district. This was to stagger humanity by its vastness. He himself frequently superintended the work 1790-7, camping on an island in the river and taking great pride in the leaden image-vaults which were his own idea. Thagyamin, the King of the Spirits, aided in the construction of these, sending angels to forward the work during the night; doubtless the miracle was as genuine as those which occur previously in the chronicles, but an observer³ who was not gifted with the eye of faith noted that the angels must have used artificial light, for melted wax, such as mortals use for candles, lay all over the slabs. The king enshrined many treasures beyond price, also bits of coloured glass, and a genuine soda-water machine. The *chinthe* gryphon images were 95 feet high, their eyeballs were 13 feet in circumference, and the

¹ Gibson 51. Cf. Cox 342.

² Sangermano 89.

³ Cox 108.

height of the pagoda was to be 500 feet. But when it reached a third of this height, a prophecy arose, "The pagoda is finished and the great country ruined!" Now there had been precisely the same prophecy in 1274 when Narathihapate built the Mingalazedi pagoda (p. 63) and, lo! the Chinese overthrew the kingdom. Bodawpaya therefore abandoned the construction. The great bell, weighing 80 tons, is the second largest in the world, and the pagoda enjoys the distinction of being the biggest heap of shoddy in existence.

During his stay at Mingun he was struck with a revelation that he was god; he opened his golden mouth and announced amid impressive silence that he was Arimittiya, the coming Buddha. But there are limits to the power of the most portentous potentate: the clergy were adamant in their opposition. The royal hermit pined for the luxury of his palace and the society of his ladies; before long the beatific vision faded and he came down to earth again.¹

Indeed scepticism seized him for a time. It is human to doubt, and still more human to be jealous of the clergy, who received more homage than befitted subjects. He directed that their title Pongyi, "The Great Glory," should cease, for he alone was glorious. He thought them too numerous, caused inquiry to be made, found them lazy and ignorant, and issued orders that stricter examination should be made into the attainments of heads of monasteries. His orders were carried out in so far as the confiscation of certain church lands was concerned, but for the rest, the crown prince saw that nothing so alarming as a real change was made. His Majesty had been shocked at the primate's inability to solve his metaphysical conundrums, and began to think there must be something wrong with Buddhism. He heard that Mahomedans would die rather than eat pork; if that were true, there must be some reality in their faith and it might be worth adopting. He summoned the *maulvis* of Amarapura to the palace where pork was laid before them and they were commanded to eat. They looked at the pork, they looked at the king, they thought

¹ *Sangermano* 61, cf. pp. 182, 241 above. Paya Tak (p. 260) was being worshipped as a Buddha when he was assassinated, and "Buddha that is to be" sometimes occurs in the style of the Siamese royal house. There are living Buddhas in Tibet.

of the executioner's sword outside, and—they ate the pork. So evidently there was nothing in Mahomedanism and His Majesty continued to build pagodas. Sometimes he would break out into eccentricities and queer superstitions, but they were checked by his natural shrewdness.¹

In 1785 he had two new golden heads of the Mahagiri Nat spirits made for the shrine at Popa Hill (p. 16), and in 1812 he replaced them with larger heads, weighing 2½ lb.²

Cingalese religious missions had for some time past gone to Siam, thinking that religion was purest there; but in 1802 and 1812 they came to Burma. The 1802 mission was of some importance. Kirti Siri Raja Singha, king of Ceylon 1748-78, had introduced a system whereby ordination was restricted to the agricultural caste; the lower castes were indignant and some of their novices came to Burma where Bodawpaya gave them audience and, amid a scene of great magnificence, himself presented them to the primate for ordination; they returned to Ceylon taking with them some Burmese monks and a letter from the Burmese primate to the Cingalese primate. The Burmese monks were five in number, a full chapter, and on their arrival they proceeded to make further ordinations so that in Ceylon to-day their successors are known as the Amarapura school, which protests against caste distinctions in the order and is separate from the older body, known as the Siam school.³

In 1810 the king sent lords and Brahmans to Buddhagaya in Bengal.⁴ They went by the An Pass to Arakan and thence through Chittagong, bearing rich offerings with which they worshipped the Holy Tree after sprinkling it with scented water. They brought back detailed drawings and plans of the tree, together with little models of the pagoda, images, some of the sacred earth, and two shoots from off the Tree. The images were kept in a chapel in the palace, and the shoots, planted in the sacred earth, were kept in two jewelled pots on the north-west of the Pahtodawgyi pagoda which the king was building at Amarapura.

¹ *Sangermano* 92, *Cox* 230, *Gouger* 96-100, *Crawford* I. 399.

² *GUB* I. ii 21.

³ *Hardy* 327; *Tennent* 224, 246; despatch of 4 March 1812 from Governor-General to Court of Directors, para 29 (*PP* 17).

⁴ *Konbaungset* 749-54.

In 1813 Judson, with the saintly and heroic lady who was his wife, arrived in Burma where, with small beginnings, they founded the great American Baptist Mission. They came by accident, for they had left America intending to work in India, but they were at once ejected from India by the British Government which then discouraged missionaries on the ground that they would stir up religious strife and expose government to the charge of favouring its own creed. Although the king when granting the Judsons audience contemptuously flung their tracts to the ground, he passed no order against them; although they met with petty opposition from the monks, they met with nothing but protection from successive governors of Rangoon and with the most charming courtesy from the governors' wives; and when, some years later, they underwent what may fairly be called martyrdom, it was for political not for religious motives.¹

Bodawpaya punished with death the drinking of intoxicants, the smoking of opium, and the killing of any large animal, as an ox, or buffalo; and when he was in a really devout mood he would make drinkers drink boiling lead.² In the provinces governors contented themselves with decapitation, but it was inflicted even for selling liquor, and sex was no exemption. The clergy would sometimes intervene, and their robes, flung over a criminal when he was kneeling under the executioner's uplifted sword, were so absolute a reprieve that government usually took steps to prevent their attendance; a person thus pardoned, for this or worse offences, became the monk's slave and had to dress in white, take vows, and serve the monastery.³

Diplomatic intercourse with China resulted from the peace terms of 1769. It was the first time the Burmese made a serious effort to maintain regular foreign relations, and the results were wholly to the good, smoothing out the friction that was always arising on the disorderly frontier. China sent missions

¹ *Wayland*. The king who granted them audience was Bagyidaw, *Mrs. Judson* 231.

² *Sangermano* 68, *Gouger* 278. See note "Drink" p. 314.

³ *TP* 1891 Cordier "Les Français en Birmanie" 13. The monks would even attack the ministers of justice with sticks, *Sangermano* 97. In 1837 their threats so enraged a judge that he forthwith executed, for petty theft, two boys whom he had all along intended to reprieve, *McLeod and Richardson* 129.

to Burma in 1787, 1790, 1795, 1796, 1822; and Burma to China in 1782, 1787, 1792, 1823. As a result of the 1787 embassies the Chinese extradited a fugitive Bhamo *sawbwa*, and the two countries began to release some of the surviving prisoners of the war. In 1790 the Burmese restored some Chinamen they had captured in Siam. In his 1796 embassy the Emperor announced his abdication, asking Burma to recognise his son. In their 1792 embassy the Burmese sent patents of nobility with the usual gold phylacteries to various Chinese dignitaries, and an enormously long Pali title for the Emperor; their envoys came back with a great seal bearing Chinese characters and shaped like a camel; the king hesitated to accept it lest he should thereby admit investiture from China, but its value—three *vis* (10 lb.) of solid gold—decided him to retain it, while carefully omitting the fact from his chronicles. Some of his letters were studiously curt, but the Emperor none the less persisted in regarding him as a vassal. In many cases the Chinese embassies were provincial not imperial, but sometimes they were magnificent cavalcades of 400 horsemen, headed by Guards officers. Three of the Burmese embassies actually reached Peking after a five months' journey and came home with a detailed itinerary and a glowing account of how gracious the Emperor had been, how he had insisted on hearing a Burmese band, how he had feasted them day and night with theatres, what a wonderful city it was, how they had been carried round in sedan chairs to see the sights, what dresses the mandarins wore, etc., etc. The monarchs exchanged devotional images before which they had themselves worshipped. The king would send the Emperor elephants, ivory by the hundredweight, English piecegoods and carpets, ivory helmets studded with rubies and sapphires, Pagan lacquer boxes, jewelled rings and peacock tails. The Emperor would send the king fans, dwarf gardens, horses, tea sets, fur jackets lined with yellow silk, and 10 mules which the Burmese believed to be prolific. But the best of all was the 1790 Chinese mission which brought a Buddha tooth and three ladies for the royal harem. The acquisition of the tooth showed Bodawpaya that he was a greater king than Anawrahta 1044-77 who had failed to obtain the tooth from China. And as for the ladies, were they not princesses of the Imperial House of China? Was not the Emperor his vassal and did he not

admit it by sending tribute of his own granddaughters? He failed to realise that they were ordinary Yünnanese girls.¹

Before returning with his army from Arakan, the crown prince had made all headmen take out appointment orders under the Burmese seal, and had scattered outposts throughout the land; thus there were 300 men in Sandoway, 500 at Ramree and a few thousand at Mrohaung.² But from the very first year, 1785, there had been continual disorder; it was no unusual thing for a Burman outpost to have to run for their lives; terrible reprisals were exacted but the trouble continued.

The Arakanese had every excuse; they were rebelling not against government but against tyranny.³ They would be called in to the various garrison headquarters on the pretext of disarming them, and when they arrived the Burmese would round them up and massacre them. Quite apart from revenue exactions—even infants were not exempt from poll-tax—there were continual exactions of human cattle. Sometimes three hundred youths would be packed off to wait in the palace at Amarapura, having tattooed on their arms the fact that they were sent in lieu of revenue. Sometimes men would be called up in crowds across the passes to pay homage to the Lord White Elephant. 3,000 were requisitioned to work on the Meiktila lake reconstruction, and none returned. 6,000 were dragged away in 1790 to serve against Chiangmai, where they died of disease in numbers.

When, in 1797, the Burmese came demanding 2,000 more to make bricks and work on the Mingun pagoda, village after village beat the war-drum and the people rose wholesale; their principal leader was Nga Chin Pyan (Kingberring), lord *myosa* of Sindin in Akyab district, who up to this time had served the Burmese. Year in, year out, the fighting never ceased, while thousands fled to Chittagong in British territory where taxation

¹ See note "Chinese embassies" p. 362. The tooth, enclosed in five little metal pagodas, fitting one inside the other, was enshrined in the Mingun pagoda (p. 275).

² The occupation led to the An Pass from Minbu district being put into repair. In 1816 seven hundred men were employed upon it and every traveller was required, in lieu of toll, to carry tools and do some repairs during his journey. (GUB II. i. s.v. "Aeng").

³ *Nga Me; Dinnyawadi Yazawinthit* 253, 260; *San Shwe Bu*.

was reasonable and a man could go to bed at night without wondering whether his throat would be cut in the morning by order of some official. Arakan had never been populous, and now it became a desert; the towns were deserted and overgrown with jungle, and there was nothing to be seen but "utter desolation . . . morass, pestilence and death."¹

Among the refugees were fierce spirits who used British territory as a base for fresh attacks on the Burmese. The handful of British officers at Chittagong and their native subordinates, unacquainted with the Magh language, could not keep in touch with their plans or movements, and the Bengali police were not equal to the control of men so much more energetic than themselves.² The frontier was wild jungle with little population; in such places even modern government finds difficulty in exercising control, and under eighteenth-century conditions half a dozen raids could be hatched before the Chittagong magistrate knew anything about it.

But the Burmese never gave him a chance to know anything about it. In 1794 one of their governors marched 5,000 men across the frontier, the Naaf river, and stockaded himself well inside British territory, neither knowing nor caring that this in itself was a *casus belli*; the king's orders were that he was not to return without three fugitive Arakanese lords. A battalion of white troops, with sepoy and artillery, was once despatched from Calcutta and camped against the Burmese stockade. The Burman governor at first bluffed, but finally called on the English major-general explaining that he must have the three fugitives as they were dacoits with a long record of crime and he would never evacuate British territory until he had them. However, he consented to withdraw on receiving assurances that full inquiry would be made; soon after his withdrawal, the three fugitives were classed as dacoits and handed over to him, and the incident closed.³ The three men were as much patriots as dacoits; on the way to Amarapura one of them slipped his leg-irons and escaped at Hsinbyugyun, Minbu district; the other two, brought before the king's minister,

¹ Paper of intelligence from Cox's Bazaar dated 20 October 1823, in *BSPC*.

² *Robertson* 19.

³ *Symes* 120.

defied him to his face and dared him to do his worst; he did it, and one of them, Nga Po Lon, the lord of Ramree, spent sixty hours in dying.¹

In 1798 a horde of terrified Arakanese poured into Chittagong as a result of Nga Chin Pyan's unsuccessful revolt; Cox's Bazaar, a sub-divisional headquarters, is populated mainly by their descendants, and takes its name from Lieutenant Cox who was sent to supervise them and prevent a food shortage. A Burmese force failed to recover them but stockaded itself miles inside the English frontier, and drove off a police battalion with considerable loss. The king sent an envoy to Calcutta telling the Viceroy to deliver up his ungrateful "slaves" (i.e. subjects) who had dared to run away from his beneficent rule. The Viceroy replied that this could not be done but they would be prevented from making raids. The king thereupon threatened immediate war but nothing happened; to him the refusal to surrender rebels was an act of plain hostility. But for centuries it has been the boast of Anglo-Saxon governments that, while they will surrender criminal refugees, they will never surrender political refugees even to their best ally. In the present case it was increasingly evident that most of the fugitives were not even political refugees but simply harmless people fleeing from death; as the years went by there came to be some 50,000 of them—it was little short of a racial migration.²

In 1811, however, the Burmese had just cause of complaint. as Nga Chin Pyan, after taking refuge in Chittagong, again broke out in Burmese territory. He made several raids, each time returning into difficult hill country inside British territory; once he overran the whole of Arakan, wiping out the Burmese garrisons save at Mrohaung. After this the English washed their hands of him; he had abused their hospitality and they now captured his principal officers, deported them to Dacca, set on his head a price of Rs. 5,000 (equivalent to half a lakh nowadays), harried him with their troops, and invited Burmese

¹ *Dinnyawadi Yazawinthit* 259.

² *Passim*, e.g. para. 3 of despatch dated 9 March 1812 from Governor-General to Court of Directors (*PP* 26); incidentally para. 11 attributes an infraction of territory to the Burmese troops having no pay or food and being driven to forage across the frontier; but they were also burning villages.

armies to cross the frontier and hunt him down ; but although he was thus prevented from doing more harm, he was still at large when, to everybody's relief, he died in 1815. For seventeen years he had led his people gallantly, the most famous of all the insurgents ; but he never had a chance, because he could rely on the other leaders for nothing save to fail him, out of jealousy, at the critical moment. The facilities given by the English should have sufficed to show their good faith, and possibly some of the Burmese officers who met them understood this ; but the court did not, and merely saw in these facilities proof that the English were trembling in their shoes before the dazzling glory and power of the Golden Throne.

Manipur relapsed into civil war and Marjit Singh, one of the princes, brought in the Burmese who invaded the country in 1812-13 and, after heavy fighting in which some of the commanders were killed, set him on the throne and were rewarded with the cession of the Kabaw valley.

The Ahom Shan kingdom of Assam, with capital at Rangpur in Sibsagar district, extended along the Brahmaputra river from Goalpara in the west to Sadiya in the east. It was in a state of dissolution and in 1805, at the request of some rebels, the Burmese twice marched into the country but were bribed and withdrew. Later a governor, who had plotted against one of the best ministers who ever ruled Assam, fled to Calcutta ; there he failed to get English assistance but fell in with a Burmese envoy who listened to his tale and took him to Amarapura. Bodawpaya gave him audience and in 1816 sent 8,000 men to Jorhat in Sibsagar district ; on the way they picked up Manipur and Hukong levies so that they were 16,000 strong when they entered Assam, overcame resistance, and reinstated the governor ; they then withdrew taking a large subsidy, fifty elephants, sacred things such as Ganges water, and also a girl whom they accepted as a daughter of the Ahom raja for Bodawpaya's harem.¹

In 1795 the English began to send embassies to Burma.

¹ *Gait* 218-23, *Konbaungset* 781. She had, allotted for her support, some of the 500 Assamese who settled near Bhamo under the brother of a Burmese nominee to the throne of Assam ; this colony still exists, its numbers having been fed by compatriots bought in Bhamo market from Chin slave raiders. There are Burmese villages in Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts, Assam, founded by prisoners taken in the 1824 evacuation ; their people are great brewers and smugglers of country spirit, wear Burmese dress, and are visited by monks who come from Burma via the Hukong valley.

Previously they had sent none, for envoys such as Baker (p. 225) were mere concession seekers. The immediate cause of these embassies was the expansion of Burma in Arakan, but the ultimate cause was the world situation. England was at death grips with France. Two generations of naval warfare so depleted her oak forests that access to teak forests became increasingly important. Rangoon was one of the shipbuilding centres of the East, and many of the merchant ships which provisioned England during the struggle, though built in Calcutta, were built of Burma teak.¹ Suffren, the greatest of French admirals, after holding the eastern seas from 1781 to 1784, told his government that Burma was the country through which the English might be attacked with most advantage.² His government never occupied Burma because they were too fully occupied elsewhere, and not having command of the seas they could not regain their lost empire in the East; but they wished to do so, and might succeed in doing so; they had wrested the command of the seas from England in 1779, for a short time only it is true, but that short time had sufficed for America to win her independence; what had happened before might happen again, and the English took steps to counteract even the feeblest French efforts in the East. Thus, they hunted down the French privateers which occasionally used the Burmese ports and sold muskets to the king;³ and they intercepted the correspondence which passed between Indian kings and the French Republic.

Burma knew nothing of international affairs save through bazaar rumour and through the tales, usually anti-English propaganda, of Armenian and Mahomedan merchants who knew little of the French but thought that anything was preferable to the East India Company's monopoly. Burma never succeeded in getting into real communication with the French, but she sent embassies to Indian kings with a view to making a combined attack on the English. Thus in 1813 the king talked of making a pilgrimage to Buddhagaya and Benares attended by 40,000 men; and in 1807, '08, '13, '17, '20, '23 he sent to northern India missions consisting of lords and

¹ See note "French and shipbuilding" p. 353. ² *Bayfield* x.

³ *Bayfield* xxiii, xxviii; *Cox* 145; *Crawford* I. 162.

Brahmans who went as far as Delhi and Lahore if not even to Peshawar and elsewhere; they collected sacred books, relics, and Hindustani girls whom they presented to the king as daughters presented in homage by Indian rajas. When the English, who had at first given them facilities for pilgrimage, found that the pilgrims were communicating with kings such as the Mahratta Confederacy, they stopped them and sent them back.¹ In any case they usually came a year or so late, after their intended allies had been crushed.

The English missions from 1795 onwards, being political and no longer commercial, were on a superior scale, with imperial officers, sepoy escorts, and rich presents. The first was that of Captain Symes in 1795; he was sent to secure the release of British subjects from exactions other than legal port dues, to ask that ships suffering from stress of weather be given the treatment usual among civilised nations instead of being confiscated (p. 205), to open up diplomatic relations, and to secure the establishment of an English political agent at Rangoon. He secured all these by a paper which he imagined to be a treaty, but the king regarded it as a mere grant and failed to observe its terms. Symes was permitted to look at the king on his throne but was not granted audience; and he gained permission to go to Amaraपुरa only by threatening to withdraw with the presents which the king was desirous of receiving. The shortness of his stay rendered his impressions superficial. A pachyderm, he saw everything *couleur de rose*, overestimating the population by 400 per cent. and the sanity of the court by considerably more. If his account had been only a travel book, this would not have mattered; but it was an official report, and seriously misled his government.

His successor, the Rangoon political agent Captain Cox, was sent in 1797 to ask that a Burmese embassy might go to Calcutta. The king kept him waiting nine months, partly on a sandbank at the Mingun pagoda construction camp, but granted audience and actually spoke to him with his own golden lips. The mission was a complete failure, none of its objects being achieved, and Cox brought back such an amazing account, so utterly at variance with Symes', that the Government of India thought he must be ill and overwrought, or perhaps he had

¹ Bayfield xxxvi-vii; PP 87, 106.

made some mistake; they wrote to the king saying they regretted that the envoy had failed to give satisfaction, and that they proposed sending another officer who would prove more satisfactory.

The next envoy, in 1802, was the redoubtable Symes himself; but he was treated in exactly the same way as Cox, being put off from day to day for three months, half of which he was made to live on an island where corpses were burnt and criminals were executed; he did not write a book this time.

The last missions were those of Captain Canning in 1803, '09 and '11. At royal audiences, the king pointedly talked about His Britannic Majesty only, avoiding reference to the Viceroy; it was beneath his dignity to mention a viceroy. A prince-minister said¹ to Canning "You see how difficult you make it for us by coming from a viceroy only. His Majesty is longing to enter into the closest alliance, but how can he do so unless proposals come from your king himself? Look at all the years you have wasted by failing to realise this little technicality. I hear you are at war with the French. Now just think, if only you had come from your king himself, the whole business could have gone through at once and we would have done everything to help you. Indeed I would probably have led the army myself, and I would have conquered France for you by now"—this was a few months after Wagram.

It was natural that Bodawpaya should disregard the Viceroy and insist on dealing only with His Britannic Majesty as king to king, for had he been told that His Britannic Majesty heard of him, if at all, only as one among other rajas in the Farther East, he would not have believed it. And as the years went by, and still the English sent no ambassador from their king, there grew up at court a mass of silent resentment. The only kind of viceroy the king of Burma knew was his own provincial governors; indeed, he usually referred to the Viceroy of India as *Bengalamyosa*. No doubt the viceregal governor of Rangoon was one viceroy and the Viceroy of India was another; but quite apart from the fact that the Rangoon viceroy was officially styled *ngá kyun*, "my slave," and was sometimes treated as such, being sent to the palace in chains and pegged out in the

¹ Year 1810, *Bayfield xxx*.

sun, he ruled over little more than a district, and he possessed no sovereign powers such as the power of making peace and war. The Viceroy of India possessed these powers and was treated as an equal by mightier monarchs with longer pedigrees than the king of Burma.

On his third deputation, Canning refused to leave Rangoon and attend court unless reasonable conditions were assured. The king therefore ordered the governor of Rangoon to send him up in fetters; but the governor's staff could not keep a secret and Canning escaped out of the governor's reach on to his ship, the Company's light cruiser *Malabar* (54 guns). The very officers who had tried to catch him now came alongside and, nothing ashamed, asked to be shown over her; so the gangway sentries passed them and they swarmed over her white decks chattering with delight at the compact power of the first warship they had ever seen.

Living in a seaport, the governor was less afflicted with parochialism than the court, and apologised to Canning for the way he had to behave under orders, adding "Our king is absolute. His commands must be unreservedly obeyed and he disregards the forms and usages of all nations. Indeed, Captain, between ourselves, I sometimes wonder whether His Majesty is quite right in the head, for they say in the Palace he does things which entirely indicate a disordered mind."¹

In despair at Canning's escape, the governor said "I wish you would let my men fire a few shots at you—no offence intended, of course, but you see I really must be able to convince His Majesty that I made a desperate effort to capture you!" When the news that Canning had sailed away reached the king, he ordered the governor to be sent up in chains, and the collective wisdom of the Hluttaw Council was exercised in selecting an appropriate method of execution. On the whole, they inclined to the view that the best method was to crucify him on a raft in seven fathoms of water at the mouth of the Rangoon river so that his body might float to Bengal and show the Viceroy the result of disobedience to royal orders. But while the Hluttaw was debating the question, a courtier distracted the king's attention with some fine new presents and at last so

¹ BSPC despatch 25 September 1812 Canning to Edmonstone.

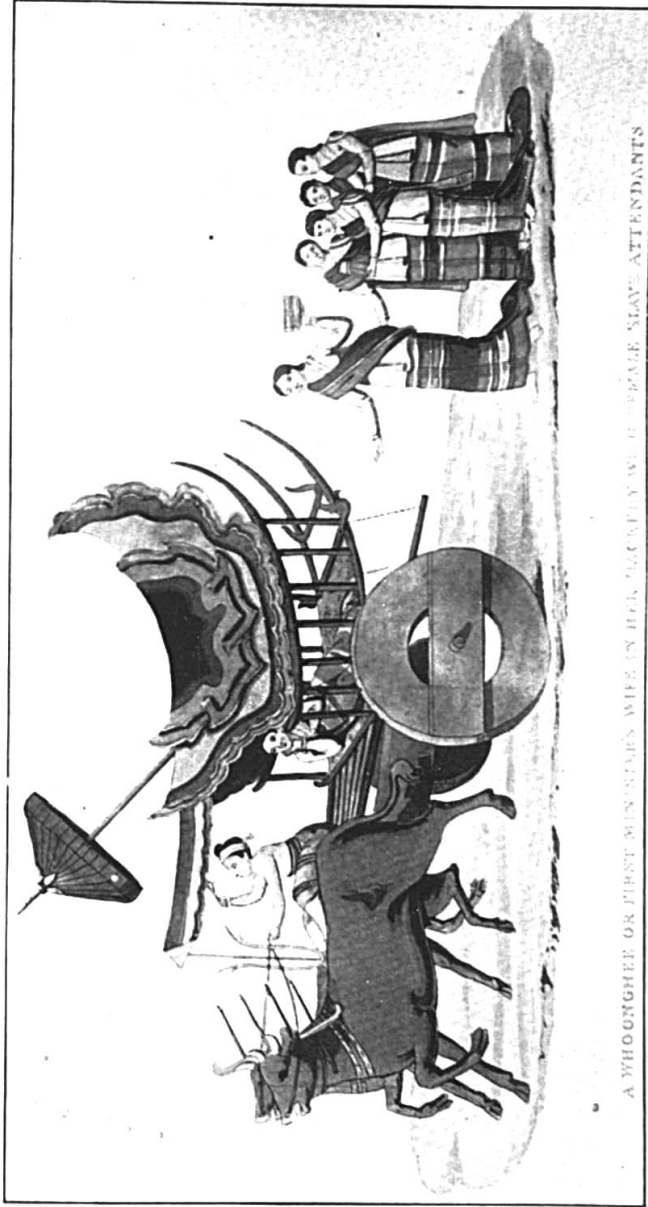
pacified him that instead of executing the governor he transferred him to Dalla.¹

After this the Viceroy sent no more embassies and, whenever he wished to address the king, wrote a letter to the viceregal governor of Rangoon. To be appreciated, these embassies 1795-1811 must be studied in detail. A great bone of contention was the shoe question. English officers never made any difficulty about taking off their shoes in the palace and kneeling in the king's presence; even in 1826 when the court was beaten to the dust, Havelock and his officers from the victorious army bowed thrice of their own accord when the opening gates revealed the palace, took off their shoes at the foot of the great stairs, and of course addressed the king on their knees though they neither took off their shoes nor knelt to their own king.² But before 1826 the court was not content; it wished envoys to run barefoot and bareheaded in the sun along the roads, grovelling at every corner of the walls, at every spire. They would keep an envoy waiting two months and then ostentatiously admit within a few days of arrival what they called a French embassy, consisting of an American who had escaped from Calcutta jail, and two half-castes, all three dragged off a French merchant ship by some minister and compelled to dress up and appear at court as if they were French ambassadors, while all the time they were astonished out of their minds and were trying to avoid the farce which they feared might have serious consequences.³ A minister would invite an envoy on to his house, swearing he loved him as a brother, begging him on no account to remove his shoes, but when he came that night, dressed in full regimentals, he would be kept waiting two hours in the hall amid a crowd of village petitioners and would have to return without seeing his host; or a minister would pass him several times and deliberately look away so as not to see him. The king would ask for some rupees and a coining machine from Calcutta, as he was thinking of introducing a coinage into his dominions; when the rupees arrived, containing 17 per cent. alloy for hardness' sake as is usual, the king returned the gift saying he could allow only pure silver to circulate in his dominions; and then he proceeded

¹ BSPC despatch 5 February 1813 Canning to Adam.

² *Havelock* 350. See p. 336 below.

³ Year 1802, *Bayfield* xxiv.



A WHOONGHEE OR FIRST MINISTER'S WIFE IN HER HOWDAH WITH HER FEMALE SLAVE ATTENDANTS

FROM CAPT. COX'S JOURNAL, 1797.

to pay English claims in silver which was 25 per cent. or 40 per cent. alloy. One day they would tell the envoy that they were going to present him with two elephants, the next that he must buy his own boats for departure. He would learn that the king was himself about to accompany him to Rangoon and instal him as resident; the next moment, he was near being arrested as a hostage for the surrender of the Arakanese refugees, or was asked to drink the water of allegiance as he might be plotting against His Majesty. The king would go into raptures over the presents such as an English coach, or beg for the envoy's own hat, and put it on saying delightedly "See! This is a high proof of the envoy's regard for me. He could not do more for his own king!" and when his son the prince asked for it he would say "No, no! The hat is not for you, it is for me alone." The envoy would be invited, as a great delicacy, to see an exhibition of fireworks in which scores of deserters were to be burnt in the wheels. Sometimes he would be ignored for weeks; then suddenly half a dozen great personages would call on him with the utmost affability asking him to get the Viceroy to obtain a Buddha tooth from Ceylon; or perhaps they had discovered that he had some more presents to give them. One day they would tell him that he must pay large bribes to get an audience, the next that the king was longing to see him, the third that they wondered he was still here, why had he not left long ago? One day it would be announced that an army was about to march against England; another, the whole population of Rangoon, headed by the governor, would stampede into the woods because a pilot schooner with despatches for the envoy had appeared in the river, carrying two tiny cannon without ammunition. In the morning men would set about arresting the envoy; in the evening, the governor of Rangoon would send an urgent message asking him to come and stand beside him and show his face to calm the town which was on the verge of revolt—this, from a viceregal governor in his own headquarters surrounded by his guards. A governor would ask the envoy to come and receive the bullion paid by the king in settlement of some shipping dispute; and when he came, the governor would say "There it is, you may have it, but you must not take it away." An envoy wrote:—

Surely, never had poor diplomatic wight such a strange crew to deal with as has fallen to my lot, ignorant of the first principles of government, policy, or politeness, and their words, actions, and sentiments, continually at variance; detesting, backbiting, and undermining each other, yet occasionally combining to perplex me. . . . A man had great need of patience in dealing with these people, who are the most ignorant, presuming, and rapacious set of beings that I ever met with. (*Cox* 182, 236.)

The English envoys had no special cause for complaint, as, although it is doubtful whether the whole of this etiquette was prescribed for Burmans at court, there is evidence to show that it was commonly prescribed for foreign envoys in order to impress them with a due sense of the king's unique majesty (pp. 57, 64, 98, 190, 191, 209, 214).

The letters addressed at this period by Burmese governors to the English magistracy are filled with an unconcealed fury. The Burmese lived in a land which was geographically isolated. Nobody from other lands came to them, except a few shipmen and some tribal immigrants; nor did they themselves visit other lands, for their population was so small that it could not fill even their own country. They lived in a world of their own.

With such governments as they knew, Yünnan and Siam, there had been mutual extradition of fugitive rebels. The land on the frontiers was largely uninhabited. If a rebel ran away the Burmese chased him to the hills. It mattered little whether those hills were in Burma or not, and if the pursuers occasionally met some chief he either grovelled before them or they burnt his village and cut off his head. It had been ever thus. But now, when the pursuers went to Chittagong, they found an unprecedented phenomenon: a regular administration with outposts, *dak* runners, offices, records, and white men at the back of it all. There were never more than two or three white men actually to be seen, but with them were hundreds of disciplined sepoy, every one of whom had a musket and knew how to use it. It was very difficult to understand these people. If a rebel ran away into their territory and the Burmese chased him there, a white man would appear and say there was no thoroughfare; if they pointed out that they were after a rebel, he would say he was sorry, but they must not catch the rebel here; if they asked him to catch the rebel for them, he would

say no, it was not the custom of his government to deliver up a fugitive; if they said it was the king's order, he would say that was nothing to him, the king was not his king. It was insufferable: who were these English to pay no attention to the King of Kings, the Arbiter of Existence, the Master of the Earth and Water and all that therein is? Besides, if one did not produce the rebel's head, what would happen to one's own head? Save that the Burman's letter is less furious than some, the following is typical of the correspondence which passed between Burma and the Government of India for a generation:—

Translation of a letter from the Raja of Ramree to the Governor-General. Received 8 June 1818.—I, Nameo Sura, Governor of (Yamawoody) Ramree, placing my head under the royal feet, resembling the golden lily, and bowing to the commands of the most illustrious sovereign of the universe, king of great and exalted virtue, lord of white elephants, called Saddan, strict observer of the divine laws, who fulfils the ten precepts, and performs all the good works commanded by former virtuous kings, who assists and protects all living beings, whether near or remote, and possesses miraculous and invincible arms, etc. etc. address and inform the Governor-General of Bengal, that our mighty monarch is distinguished throughout the vast world, for his unexampled piety and justice. He has a hundred sons, a thousand grandsons, and one great grand son, whom he nourishes in his arms, and who is inexpressibly esteemed and beloved, as a rarity of as great a magnitude as the white elephant is superior to ten other various species of rare elephants; the acquisition of this roval infant, is considered as an offering made to the king, by the angel of heaven himself. The power, good luck, and inestimable reputation of our great sovereign is universally known, and he is duly recognised by all foreign kings. Those who come to him for the purpose of paying due homage and respect, are invariably taught the principles of religion, and the system of good government. Our master, in fact, protects all living beings.

From Keopugan Lengen Peyagee, and the nine cities of Shyan, situated to the eastward, king Woody [Utibwa of China pp. 30, 280], sent three of his esteemed daughters, as offerings to the golden soles of the royal feet of our gracious sovereign, and thereby established a happy friendship between the two kingdoms, which intercourse has been attended with incalculable advantages. . . .

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 them, and subsequently restore them to the monarch entitled to its inheritance.

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 everything unjust and unreasonable. Ramoo, Chittagong, Moorshedabad, 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. Neither the English Company nor their nation observe the ancient laws strictly, they ought not to 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 collection realised therefrom to our sovereign. If this is refused, I shall represent it to His Majesty. Generals with powerful forces will be dispatched, 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 I shall afterwards offer to my sovereign; but I send this letter, in the first place, to make the demand from the Governor-General.

Letter from the Governor-General of India to His Excellency the Viceroy of Pegu etc. dated 22 June 1818.—A letter having been addressed to me by the Raja of Ramree containing a demand for the cession of certain provinces belonging to the British Government, I deem it incumbent on me, in consideration of the friendship subsisting between His Burmese Majesty and the British Government, to transmit to you a copy of that extraordinary document.

If that letter be written by order of the King of Ava, I must lament that persons utterly incompetent to form a just notion of the state of the British power in India, have ventured to practise on the judgment of so dignified a sovereign. Any hopes those individuals may have held out to His Majesty that the British Government would be embarrassed by contests in other quarters are altogether vain, and this Government must be indifferent to attack, further than as it would regard with concern the waste of lives in an unmeaning quarrel.

My respect for His Majesty, however, induces me rather to adopt the belief, that the Raja 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, and that a procedure so calculated to produce dissension between two friendly states will experience His Majesty's just displeasure.

If I could suppose that letter to have been dictated by the King of Ava, the British Government would be justified in considering war as already declared, and in, consequently, destroying the trade of His Majesty's empire. Even in this supposition, however, the British Government would have no disposition to take up the matter

captiously, but, trusting that the wisdom of the King of Ava would enable him to see the folly of the counsellors who would plunge him into a calamitous war and that His Majesty would thence refrain from entailing ruin on the commerce of his dominions, the British Government would forbear (unless forced by actual hostilities) from any procedure which can interrupt those existing relations so beneficial to both countries. (*Wilson* "Documents" 5.)

The king never disavowed the governor of Ramree's letter; indeed he never condescended to answer the Viceroy at all. The only reason why he did not at once carry out the threat in the letter, and invade Bengal, was that he now heard of the defeat of the Mahratta Confederacy with whom he had hoped to co-operate against the English.¹

He claimed Bengal far beyond Calcutta because he was successor to the rajahs of Arakan who at various times in the middle ages had ruled Ramu and Chittagong and sometimes raided Dacca and Murshidabad. He failed to note that long since then the Moghuls had included those places in their empire, and that the English as legatees of the Great Moghul had been in charge of their daily administration since 1760. He had no claim, and was estopped from raising one because during his occupation of Arakan, now thirty-three years old, he had frequently acknowledged possession by applying to the English for extradition of the Arakanese fugitives. The Burmese thought that to have raided a country centuries ago, gives a claim to it now; raiding was their conception of conquest. But, as the Chinese had pointed out to them in 1769, such reasoning would justify the Chinese in claiming Burma down to Tarokmaw below Prome because they had marched there in 1287.²

Bodawpaya died in the thirty-eighth year of his reign and the seventy-fifth of his age, leaving 122 children and 208 grandchildren. With the possible exception of Bayinnaung 1551-81 he was the most powerful monarch who ever ruled Burma, and the chronicles regard him as one of the best. With characteristic shrewdness he decided the succession long in advance, appointing his eldest son crown prince.

¹ Despatch dated 17 March 1820 from Governor-General to Court of Directors (PP 120).

² *Konbaungset* 467.

One of his brothers had thereupon remarked that this was not in accordance with their father Alaungpaya's behest whereby the brothers were to succeed in order of seniority, and Bodawpaya himself owed his succession to this behest; this remark helped to bring its maker to the executioners. But the crown prince, although he lived to do service such as the conquest of Arakan, died in 1808 leaving a son. Bodawpaya lost no time in nominating that son; consequently the court had a decade in which to regard the matter as settled, and the heir succeeded without difficulty.

BAGYIDAW 1819-37 was thirty-five years of age at his succession. He was graceful and dignified in public; in private he had charming manners and was most approachable. He took exercise daily, riding an elephant or pick-a-back on a favourite whom he bridled with a kerchief in the mouth; and he delighted in the magnificent regattas which were such a feature under the kings. His queen was of low origin and had sold fish in the bazaar; of her brother, the power behind the throne, the less said the better. The chief counsellors in foreign affairs were men such as a half-caste Portuguese who nowadays would not be accepted for a clerkship but was regarded as an authority because he had actually travelled as far as Calcutta. The king's exceptional kindness made him so revered and beloved that there was no rebellion throughout all the disasters of his reign, which would have overthrown any other king. He had the receding forehead of his family and could not fix his attention on a subject for more than ten minutes. When annoyed he had a way of stepping off his throne into an inner chamber; everyone knew what to expect and prepared for flight; in a moment he would return with a spear—princes, ministers, generals, courtiers would go tumbling over one another down the palace stairs, while he came after them hurling the spear into their midst. If he returned from an excursion by land and not, as expected, by the waterside where they were awaiting him, three *wungyis*, all the *wundauks*, and all the

atwinwuns would be clapped into three pair fetters and spend the night in the common jail. The spire of his new palace at Ava was overthrown by a thunderstorm; he could not punish the thunder so he punished the architect, who was immediately led away to execution, the king impatiently exclaiming "Is he dead?" "Is he dead?" every few minutes; in the evening his merciful heart made him send a reprieve, but when it arrived the architect's head was no longer on its shoulders. He was most unfortunate to reign at a period when publicity was increasing.¹

At his coronation he announced his benevolent intentions, remitted central taxation for three years, and held a great investiture. Two of his uncles fell from power and one of them, the prince of Toungoo, was executed with all his family and followers according to the correct procedure; the king ordered that the other, the prince of Prome, should be spared, but the queen thought otherwise, and he died of a sudden complaint.² What they had done is uncertain, but under the kings, especially at times of succession, suspicion and guilt were synonymous—at least they met the same fate—and quite possibly the two uncles had contemplated rebelling as their only chance of safety.

Like every other king, Bagyidaw performed the sacramental ploughing of the fields in June each year, wearing his crown, riding the Lord White Elephant from the palace to the field, and using a gilded harrow drawn by milk-white oxen which were harnessed in gold trappings studded with rubies and diamonds.³

The capital (p. 265) was moved back to Ava and in 1823 the king took possession of his new palace with a ceremonial procession of great beauty, in which all the great office-bearers and vassal chiefs wore their robes of state, and only the king and queen, walking hand in hand, were clad in the simple dress of householders.⁴ These changes of capital had become a habit with the dynasty. The ancient transfers between Prome, Pagan, Ava, Toungoo, and Pegu were justified on the ground of some

¹ *Crawford passim, Gouger 34, 71, 73.*

² *Trant 80, Gouger 100.*

³ See note "Lehtunmingala" p. 362.

⁴ *Wayland I. 336, Gouger 25, Crawford I. 147.*

pressing need; but after 1765, in the Age of Prose and Reason, the transfers took place on purely astrological grounds.

Nga Min, the royal bard, wrote a eulogy for the state entry into the palace and received as a reward Rs. 400 with a barge; he enjoyed the salt revenue of Hainggyi island (Negrais). Nga Chein, the author of *Woharalinatta-dipani*, was a senior herald in this reign. Nga Sa, son of a cavalry commandant of Mauktet, Monyua district, was private secretary to Bagyidaw both as crown prince and as king; in 1819 he commanded the Manipur expedition and in 1824 he was Mahabandula's second in command against the English in Arakan; later he was made a minister of the Hluttaw Council and administrator of crown lands; he wrote the *Shwebonnidan* and in youth he translated the *Enaungzat* from Siamese into Burmese and wrote a drama on it with songs.

When in 1813 the Burmese had set Marjit Singh on the throne of Manipur (p. 283), his rival brothers fled to Cachar.¹ He and his lords, having lived at the Burmese court, introduced luxurious habits and affected a degree of splendour in their dress and cavalcades which contrasted greatly with the natural simplicity of Manipur; but they were bloodthirsty tyrants, tolerated by the people only from fear of the Burmese. They had to be rebuked for cutting timber in the Kabaw valley and for building a gilded palace which the Burmese allowed to no king but their own; and Marjit Singh, in spite of all he owed to Bagyidaw who when a prince had always spoken in his favour, disloyally failed to appear at Bagyidaw's coronation. The Burmese therefore again overran Manipur in 1819 and stayed in the country but were seldom safe outside their stockades; they suffered ghastly ambushes, and could get nothing to eat because their own devastations had made the land a desert. Marjit Singh with thousands of his people fled to his brothers in Cachar, became reconciled to them, and proceeded to persecute that country also. They then re-entered Manipur in overwhelming strength and nearly took the Burmese stockade at Imphal, but the garrison made a magnificent defence until reinforcements arrived, whereupon the Manipuris made off

¹ *Konbaungset* 850-71, *Pemberton* 45, *Gait* 252, *Naga Hills and Manipur Gazetteer* 17.

to Cachar. There the rival Manipuri princes again fell out, this time over a polo pony; one of them applied to the English for help, and so did the rightful raja of Cachar. In 1762, angry at the Negrals massacre, the English had made a treaty with the Manipuris against the Burmese but had done nothing in fulfilment; even now they refused both applications, saying they could not interfere in internal affairs. The rightful raja of Cachar thereupon brought in the Burmese but this was in 1824 when the English, seeing that it was no longer possible to stand aloof, had already declared Cachar to be a protected state and sent a force which neutralised the Burmese advance beyond Manipur.

The rebel governor whom the Burmese in 1816 had helped to return to Assam (p. 283) was soon murdered as he deserved and the raja, Chandrakant, was deposed. So the Burmese in 1819 again overran the hapless land and reinstated the raja; but as they killed people and passed orders without even the pretence of consulting him, he and many lords fled in terror across the English frontier; the English refused the Burmese demands for their extradition. These demands were in studiously provocative terms, for the Burmese felt they had taken the measure of the English, having defeated not only the dismal detachments recruited in Chittagong (p. 282), but also the Assamese, whom the raja dressed and drilled after the Company's model. In 1821 they entered English territory (which extended up the Brahmaputra river to Goalpara), because Chandrakant was using it as a base for his counter attacks with considerable success; he had in his service Bruce, a country-born adventurer with 300 muskets procured in Calcutta, and he raised 2,000 men, mostly Sikhs and Hindustanis, in British territory. He evaded English magistrates by bribing their native subordinates not to report his actions, and in any case the English soon ceased to care, for the Burmese atrocities in Assam gave them moral justification and they were beginning to see that peaceful methods were wasted; they were but acceding to the self-determination of a people begging to be rescued from hell on earth.

Hitherto it has been difficult to say what the wars which had been depopulating Indo-China from time immemorial meant to the non-combatant population; but at this time it is

easy, for the country comes under observation by a trained staff. Consider this deposition :—

I am a native of the village of Udarbund, in the country of Cachar. I have been a prisoner of war in Ava. I was seized at my native village, about twenty months ago, by a party of Burmese, belonging to the army. . . . About six thousand persons, including men, women, and children, were seized about the same time. We were all taken away from Cachar. We were treated with great rigour; we were chained two and two, got very little food, were made to carry heavy loads on the march. Women, with infants at the breast, and who on this account, could not carry loads, had the infants snatched from them, their heads chopped off before them, and their bodies thrown into the rivers. I have witnessed murders of this description twelve or thirteen times myself. Old and sick persons, who could not carry burdens, were often killed by the Burman soldiers; and their loads, which consisted of plunder, were divided among the other prisoners. (Deposition of Mahomed Ruffy, recorded in June 1826, *Crawford* I. 423.)

Thirty thousand souls were carried away from Assam alone.¹ To cow the people they were flayed alive, burnt in oil, or driven in crowds into the village prayer-houses which were set on fire;² women, old as well as young, were outraged with every circumstance of barbarity;³ sometimes bamboo cages would be constructed to burn men, women and infants two hundred or so at a time; and the more imaginative among the Burmese braves would add variations, such as cutting pieces off the bodies of their lingering victims under whose eyes they would eat the raw flesh.⁴ Such being their energy, it is hardly surprising that the Burmese should, during the seven years of their intervention in Assam, have reduced the population by more than half, that some valleys are still suffering from this depopulation, and that in many a village to-day men speak with a shudder of *Mānar Upadrab*, "the oppressions of the Burmese."

These oppressions were committed out of set policy, and the Burmese prided themselves on it, saying that though at

¹ *Gait* 284.

² *Gait* 277.

³ *Gait* 227, *Nougong Gazetteer* 39.

⁴ *Butler* 248. Cf. pp. 37, 94, 174 above. This practice of eating prisoners alive was continued in 1887 by Ya Nyun, the Burmese king's trusty and well-beloved Myingaug (Cavalry Commandant) of Welaung, Myingyan district, as men still living remember.

home they were a mild people, when invading foreign countries they deliberately gave way to all their passions, plundering and murdering without control so that foreigners should learn not to provoke them.¹

Naturally atrocities diminished after the Burmese had been some time in a country and conditions became more settled; but there was no knowing when they might not recur. Thus, for sixty years the Burmese would march into Manipur whenever the mood seized them, round up several thousand hapless people, and re-enact the same terrible scenes as before. Two generations after Alaungpaya had swept away the Talaing kingdom, seven Talaing villagers were fishing in a canoe on the Panhlaing river thirty miles above Rangoon when a Burmese war-canoe came by, bearing royal despatches; she swept along under sixty oars, and her commander's gold umbrella flashed in the sun; his eye fell on the seven men in the canoe and he ordered them aboard; they had done no harm, but the Burmese were out to break the spirit of the Talaings; therefore those seven men were made to kneel at the head of the boat, stretching their necks over the water, and without more ado, in cold blood, the heads of six of them were struck off.² Such things were so liable to happen that Talaing housewives habitually kept a store of rice which had been boiled and then dried in the sun, so as to have a supply of portable cooked food in case they had to flee at a moment's notice.³

The most favoured tributaries were the Shans. All that the Burmese did was to keep them down with a garrison and leave them well alone, provided they paid tribute. Yet even the Shans, who spoke with liking and respect of their Chinese overlords, had not a good word to say for their Burmese overlords.⁴ Travellers noted that the Burmese Shans were shabbier and had poorer houses than the Siamese Shans, and seemed to have all the heart taken out of them by the crushing revenue which the Burmese exacted; yet they got nothing in return, and the Burmese did not protect them from the cruel Karen slave raids which were the terror of their lives. Even well-intentioned chiefs would be driven to practise extortion in

¹ *Crawford* I. 422.

² *Gouger* 310.

³ Talaing family tradition.

⁴ *ASBengal* 1837 MacLeod "Journal of an Expedition to Kiang Hung" 998; *McLeod and Richardson* 71, 82, 118-9.

order to recoup the bribes they had to pay at court to secure investiture. They were sometimes sent flying at each other's throats, for the Burmese fostered feuds and would promise a pretender the succession if he could oust the reigning *sawbwa*. The chroniclers regard such methods as statesmanship, and delight to relate the wise minister's parable of the man who sets two wild animals fighting until they are exhausted, and then captures both.

The Assamese campaigns, waged amid strange races and magnificent scenery, powerfully affected the imagination of the Burmese as they swarmed through the passes or floated for hundred of miles down the Brahmaputra river on rafts. They marched with the tread of conquerors, and the earth seemed to tremble under their feet. The succession of victories confirmed the opinion they had of themselves, and whetted their appetite for further conquest. Among the commanders who thus won fame was Mahabandula,¹ a handsome man of fine presence, born about 1780 at Ngapayin in Monywa district, where he subsequently became governor of Alon. As a youth he had waited long at court until in despair he committed a violent assault on a minister; thereupon king Bodawpaya, perceiving that he had a valiant soul, had employed him as a soldier. It was sometimes impossible to get a word out of him, for he would remain lost in silent contemplation of his own glory. His reputation puzzled the only trained soldiers he ever met, for although they respected him as a resolute man they found his judgment to be nothing out of the ordinary. Like Alaungpaya, he owed his fame largely to the fact that his opponents were obscure tribes. He obtained his results by using methods known to every energetic Burmese commander. Thus, a fault in even a senior officer would be visited with the penalty of being sawn in two; some commanders did not always inflict such punishment very intelligently, as when a scout reported that the enemy were advancing, and was at once

¹ Gouger 107, *Crawford* I. 14 and II. app. 100. *Snodgrass* 176, *Trant* 140, *Wilson* "Documents" 102 and "Introductory sketch" 66, *Robertson* 24, *FBRS* 715 *Stewart* "Ex Libris Bandulac."

BURMA IN 1824



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executed for bringing sad news, and the execution was hardly over before the enemy made hand-to-hand contact. But his followers adored Mahabandula; he was pre-eminent in stratagems of a type which was devastating against enemies of his own class, and in the management of Burmese levies, no light task, he evinced real talent. He was just, self-sacrificing, honest to an unusual degree, and, unlike the court, he was willing to learn by experience. He learnt to disregard the astrologers whose humbug guided armies in the field. When he found an enemy who treated his wounded well instead of mutilating them in the way which he had believed to be universal he promptly ordered his men to do likewise. And when, all too late, he realised that there were more things on earth than he had dreamed of, he evinced a grave courtesy and an unflinching resolution, in contrast to his colleagues who vented their panic-stricken fury on all around and ran for their lives. He was an imperialist of the most aggressive type, yet it is unjust to regard him as responsible for the war of 1824; he did indeed force it on, but in advocating it he was merely the mouthpiece of the entire people.

Burmese frontier guards sometimes fired on British subjects proceeding in their canoes down the Naaf estuary, the frontier between Arakan and English territory. The villagers were frightened and could not go about their business. After February 1823 therefore the English stationed an outpost on Shahpuri Island (Shinmapyugyun) at the southern extremity of Tek Naaf police station in Chittagong district.¹ The people's fears were allayed and things went on in the ordinary quiet way for months, till suddenly at midnight 23-4 September 1823 a thousand Burmese soldiers swarmed onto the island in boats with flaming torches. The outpost consisted of a dozen nameless sepoy's under a jemadar; there was nobody to whom they could apply for orders, but they knew their duty and did it quickly. After finishing them off, the Burmese (no longer a full thousand, for there were now gaps in their ranks) burnt the outpost stockade to the ground and garrisoned the island.

When the papers, including a survivor's statement, were laid before the Viceroy, he repressed his first impulse and wrote personally to the king of Burma asking him to reflect

¹ *Wilson "Documents" 14-18; Crawfurd II. app. 122.*

on what the consequences of this sort of thing must inevitably be, and offering him the loophole of disavowal. The king did not deign to reply. Shahpuri Island had been under the Collector of Chittagong for generations, it was in his old files and had regularly been included in the revenue settlements. Yet even now the Government of India, with all their experience of human weakness and folly, hesitated to believe that the king really meant war; as late as 24 November 1823 the Adjutant General, discussing troop movements, wrote that it would be necessary to strengthen the frontier guards, but that there was no need actually to anticipate a campaign.¹

For twenty-nine years the Burmese had habitually crossed the frontier at will, occasionally murdering and enslaving British subjects, destroying lakhs' worth of property, holding the Company's elephant hunters to ransom, claiming the surrender of crowds of panic-stricken refugees, and seeking to drive their slave-gangs² home through British territory. Letter after letter from the Viceroy remained deliberately unanswered, and his envoys had been subjected to vulgarities of a type associated with the scullery. Every few years some extraordinary person, smiling all over with satisfaction at himself, would prance up to British officers and hand them a letter full of white elephants, golden feet, etc., commanding the Viceroy of India to make haste and *shihko* (prostrate himself) before the throne of Amarapura and beg pardon for his sins or it would be worse for him. Successive Viceroys had gone out of their way to make allowances for the mentality of the Burmese court, but every act of consideration had been interpreted as cringing. These things had ceased to be comic and even the Government of India now began to see that, as the unfortunate Cox had told them twenty-six years previously, there was only one way to bring this people to its senses. But it mattered little whether the Government of India saw it or not, for the decision was taken out of their hands: the king of Burma had slipped the leash, and his exultant armies were now speeding across the frontier with orders to finish the English once and for all.

¹ *Wilson "Documents" 21.*

² Para. 31 of despatch dated 10 September 1824 from Governor-General to Court of Directors (*PP 129*).

The king had not taken this drastic step without profound consideration. In the year of grace 1823, midway between the French Revolution and the electric telegraph, his considered judgment was as follows.¹ He was partial to Europeans, but they had repaid him ill: these English had the impertinence to possess a larger territory than his and to refuse him homage; his dignified silences, the exquisitely delicate hints of his ministers, the stern warnings of his generals, had all failed; he had spared them too often and it was now time to teach them a lesson. War was expensive but the loot of Calcutta would compensate him for that; the muskets and cannon captured from the English would come in very useful for his projected conquest of Siam; and as for the wastage in manpower, this would be made good by the myriads of prisoners his great generals would bring home. No doubt the English were quite good soldiers in their way, but they had won their reputation at the expense of black Hindus: they would find things very different when they met real Burmans. The Chins, the Singphos, the Manipuris, the Assamese, etc., etc., all the nations of the earth, had gone down before his men. Who were the English to fare any better? Everyone knew that one Burman was worth four Englishmen; the English knew it themselves, for they were evidently afraid to fight—had they not given way on every occasion since he first had dealings with them twenty-nine years ago? Mahabandula had pointed out that the English were mere merchants and such indifferent soldiers that it was unnecessary to send proper Burmese troops, and Assamese levies would suffice to conquer Bengal. Mahabandula was a man of his word; the English might have some good commanders, but it was not likely that any of them could equal the genius of Mahabandula; for in war bravery is not enough, high strategy also is necessary; there are many, many stratagems, and Mahabandula was master of them all. The English evidently knew nothing about high strategy, for they did not understand entrenching and used to march about in red coats, exposing their whole bodies and giving notice of their onset by beating drums; doubtless that was their way of doing things, and they had some reason of their own for it; it might do well enough against mere Hindus, but Burma was

¹ *Crawford* II. app. *passim*.

different from India, and if they tried that sort of thing in Burma they would all be ambushed¹ and blown to pieces and their heads would be taken in thousands. Some fool said that the English had 200,000 trained sepoy² and would bring an army by sea from Calcutta to Rangoon; had anyone ever heard such nonsense? There could not be 200,000 troops in the whole world put together, and as for transporting an army from Calcutta, why, the place was at the other end of the world. If the English ever did land a few men in Rangoon, they would certainly never get out again, and he would take such steps that even old women would not be disturbed in cooking their rice.³ The main theatre would be in the north-west, where his armies would take Calcutta, march to England,⁴ and establish his son as viceroy of all the English countries. But even at this dread hour the royal heart was merciful, for the hosts were enjoined to spare the life of the English Viceroy; and the royal taste was exquisite, for the chains in which he was to be brought back were coated with gold.⁵

It was not the king who led the people but the people who led the king into war. For long he had been a moderating influence, hesitating to accept the advice of his commanders, who thirsted for fresh victories. The war was popular not only with the princes and the army but also with all classes: the Burmese people willed the war.⁶ Their armies crossed the frontier in January 1824; when challenged, they announced that hostilities had begun, and they followed up the announcement by drawing English blood.⁷ The Viceroy of India merely recognised existing conditions when, 5 March 1824, he notified a state of war. A few weeks later, English transports drew alongside the Rangoon stockade.

¹ *Gowger* 104.

² *Crawford* II. app. 97. It did not take a tenth of this number of effectives to dispose of Burma.

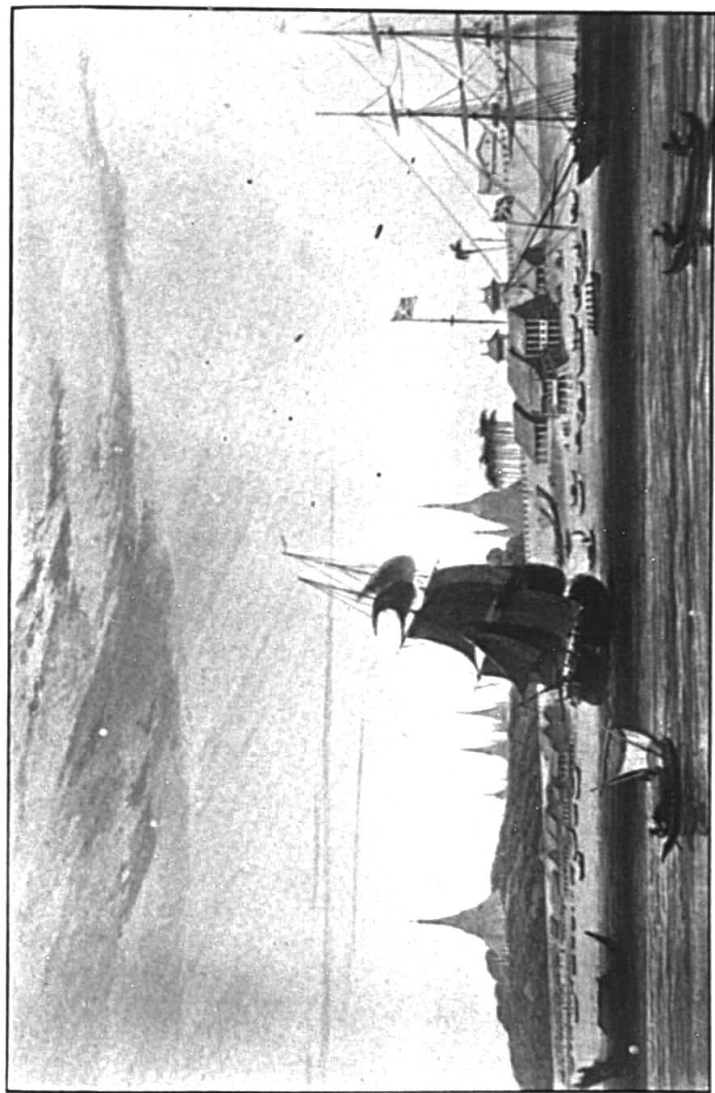
³ *Snodgrass* 25.

⁴ *Wilson* "Documents" 19.

⁵ *Snodgrass* 277, *Trant* 75.

⁶ See note "Popular feeling" p. 363.

⁷ Four English officers and 155 sepoy^s killed and wounded at Dudpatli—Col. Bowen's report dated 22 February 1824 to Brigade Major, Dacca. The Burmese had fired the first shot on 18 January, at Bikrampur inside our Cachar frontier (*Wilson* "Documents" 23).



KANGOO IN 1824.

*From an engraving by William Daniell, 1824, on the walls of the Maymoo Club. The only letterpress on it is
"Kangoo from the Anchorage, | Drawn on the spot by Capt. Keohare, 13th Light Infantry," one of H.M.'s
regiments at Kangoo in 1824.*