

## CHAPTER XI

### Boundary with France

The boundary settlement in 1894 between Britain and Siam did not settle the question of Mongsing, a term which henceforth will be taken to mean the trans-Mekhong Kengcheng. Of all the Shan States frontier problems the settlement of Mongsing was the thorniest for the British as it involved another European power, France, the frontier bogey.

We have mentioned how Mongsing was formally declared Siamese territory in 1893, in exchange for the Siamese acquiescence in withdrawal from the trans-Salween Kantarawadi. This British accommodation lends credence to the Siamese allegation that a promise had been made by the British to recognise their rights over the ground occupied by them in return for their cooperation in the war against Sawlapaw. But the British had to step in again into Mongsing affairs after 1894, to the extent of virtual occupation of the place for one whole year in 1895-96. To understand this fully it is necessary to know the background of Mongsing and what was happening in Siam at the time.

The State of Kengcheng lay astride the Mekhong river between latitude 20° and 21½° N. with an area of about 2400 square miles. The cis-Mekhong feudatory districts of Kengcheng consisted of Mongkhan, Monghe (written -re), Mongloe, Mongyu and Mongwa while its trans-Mekhong territory consisted of Mongsing and its 39 village tracts.

The old city of Kengcheng was situated on the banks of the Mekhong and had been deserted at least a hundred years previously. When the Siamese raided the area in 1893-94 and when the Lagree-Garnier Expedition made its way from Saigon by the Mekhong to Yunnanfu in 1866-68, the capital of the State was at Mongyu. This was subsequently moved to the ancient site of Kengcheng on the left bank of the Mekhong. Owing to the unproductiveness of this place, the capital was again moved by Sao Kawngtai of Kengcheng (Saomom Kengcheng) on the 2nd waning of the 4th month 1239,<sup>1</sup> (or 1887) to Mongsing. Over one thousand families took part in this mass move, leaving only some 10

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1. This date is from Scott's No. 22-B to Salisbury Further Report respecting the Mekhong Commission dated London the 22nd August, 1895. Curiously enough, Scott had identified the date as "about March 1884". At this date 1884, Saomom Joti Kawngtai had already succeeded to Kengtung, but Scott went to say that the migration was ordered by him as Sawbwa of Kengtung. According to the copy

households to carry on in the old capital. This illustrates well the process of migration of a small Tai tribe within one generation.

Kengcheng suffered much in the process of inter-tribal wars between various Tai peoples, as it lay directly on the route from the Lao States to Kenghung and Kengtung. During the reign of Rama I of Siam, Lao armies in 1803-04 invaded Kengtung and Kenghung. Little States en-route such as Mongyawng, Kengcheng, Mongmang, Mongpong, Mongnoon, Mongram, Mongtong, and Phukha were all ravaged and plundered. The Burmese garrison at Kengcheng was put to death. Contingents from Muangnan alone claimed to have conquered eleven or twelve States and deported between forty and fifty thousand souls. Other Siamese contingents claimed to have brought down some sixty to seventy thousand people. All the princes and their families were taken to Bangkok to submit to the King in person. Rama I later released these princes in consideration of the fact that they had not done Siam any harm and that the proximity of their States to Burma and China would render the King's protection ineffective.<sup>1</sup> All the rulers returned to their States except the Kengtung Sawbwa whose State was now in the hands of the Burmese who later recognised his brother, Maha Khanan, as Sawbwa. The original Sawbwa, also Kawngtai by name, was obliged to settle in Chiangmai and later moved to Chiengsaeng.<sup>2</sup>

In 1813, Chao Chang Phoak (Lord of White Elephants), Sawbwa of Nan (a state in northern Siam), again conquered Kengcheng and drove out the Burmese troops. During the unsuccessful Siamese invasions of Kengtung in 1852-54, unhappy Kengcheng, lying in the path of invading Lao hosts, suffered another devastation. In fact, the Sawbwa of Nan who was commanding his contingent, marched up by way of Mongpukha, Mongsing, Mong Loe and fixed his headquarters at Mongyu until the Siamese retreat. This was the same Chief who was still ruling in 1891.

That seems to have been the last big-scale devastation suffered by Kengcheng.

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of Kengtung Chronicle in my possession Sao Kawngtai ordered the move in 1239, which agrees with the Burmese era of Scott's No. 22-B. But in his 1890-91 Report on a visit to Kengtung-Chiangmai Boundary and to Mongsing and Kenghung in Burma Foreign Department Proceedings Nos. 1-3, June, 1891, the move to Mongsing was done in about 1884 by Mom Siri. According to Prachum Phongsawadan, Vol. IX, p. 114, the move was also led by Siri in 1245 about 1883-84.

1. Phrarajphongsawadan Krung Ratanakosindr, Rama I, ppg 240-42g
2. Chronicle of Kengtung.

The Siamese, however, never attempted to establish their authority over Kengcheng which continued to pay its tribute to Ava twice every three years, the last being in the spring of 1885. True, Kengcheng Chiefs occasionally sent presents to Nan, but these were in the nature of friendly gifts from poor relatives to wealthy and powerful cousins, for Kengcheng and Nan were closely related, the mother of the then (1852-91) Nan Sawbwa being a Kengcheng Lady. This question of tribute to Bangkok came up only in 1888 after the fall of Mandalay, when a Siamese Commissioner together with some Nan princes and a force of 1000 levies came to Mongsing and demanded tribute. Gold and silver flowers were then sent to Bangkok. The receipt of these tributes was recorded in the royal annals of Bangkok, having the date of February 1891.<sup>1</sup> When Messrs. Archer and Scott, after their survey of Kengtung--Chiengmai boundary went to Mongsing early in 1891, the Myosa insisted that the submission to Siam was forced upon him, and as his State had always paid tribute to Ava he was anxious to accept the British suzerainty. He had known of the fall of Mandalay but had been ignorant of the British intentions, as the letters sent by Scott and the Sawbwa of Mongnai in May 1887 failed to reach him.

The Siamese took three days to make out their claims which centered around their over running of Kengcheng in 1803-04, 1813 and 1852-54 and on presents sent to Nan which they regarded as tribute. The Myosa offered to present gold and silver flowers to Scott as tribute to his Government. Scott regarded the Siamese case as weak, but as no orders had been passed regarding British commitments beyond the Mekhong, he was obliged to refuse the Myosa's offer to submit. As we shall see, this refusal had seriously undermined British credit in their subsequent dealings with Mongsing, a Mongsing supported by France.

Prior to the fall of the Burmese Kingdom in 1885 the relations between Kengtung and Kengcheng were very intimate. Apart from connections by marriages, the latter, junior partner of the two, had always looked to the former for advice and guidance in dealings with other part of the Shan States and with Mandalay. The old Myosa of Kengcheng, Nai Noi Einta, father of Mom Siri, had given his youngest sister, Nang Khan Kham, in marriage to Saomom Maha Khanan of Kengtung, out of which two sons were born, Tippanikham and Joti Kawngtai. Noi Einta also had two younger brothers, Semmong and Famao of whom the former was recognised as his heir but died before his father, and the latter through a family quarrel went to live in Nan and died there. When Noi Einta died, his eldest son, Mom Siri, was too young, and the Taophyas and people of Kengcheng approached Maha Khanan in 1220 (1858) with the request that his eldest son by Nang Khan Kham, namely Saomom Tippanikham, be made their Chief. Tippanikham after ruling Kengcheng for two years went to receive a royal patent from Mandalay but on his return he died at Mongnai. The people of Kengcheng again requested Maha Khanan for Joti Kawngtai to be their ruler. Their request having

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1. Prachum Phonsawadan, Vol. IX, pp. 112-113.

been granted, Saomom Kawngtai became the Myosa of Kengcheng in 1222 (1860) and Mom Siri was made the Kemmong. When Kawngtai succeeded to Kengtung, Siri was recognised by Ava as Myosa with the title of Mahathiri Thabbezinkura Buddhabrahmawuntha, at the age of 19.

The above dates and events were recorded in the royal annals of Bangkok as submitted by Kengcheng officials who took gold and silver flowers to the Siamese King in 1891. From having been the Myosa of Kengcheng before he succeeded in Kengtung Joti Kawngtai was styled Saomom or Sawbwa Kengcheng; this title was applied to him till his death. When Kawngtai died in 1887 he was naturally succeeded by his son the Tiger Sawbwa, a boy of about 13. British reports of the period often quoted Siri as a dissatisfied man because, it was said, he considered that he should have succeeded Kawngtai in Kengtung instead of the Tiger prince. This assumption was wrong! Siri was never in the line of succession in Kengtung which could hardly have been expected to submit to a Myosa from Kengcheng as long as their own Ruling House was not barren of scions.

It was during the rule of this unfortunate Mom Siri that the suzerainty over Kengcheng changed hands several times. When Scott met him for the first time in 1891 he gave the following description:

The Myosa came out to meet us in the usual Shan fashion, riding at the base of a sort of pitch fork formed by two lines of men, carrying guns, spears, green, white and red, and white and brown pennants. The display was rather paltry compared with that of most of the cis-Salween Chiefs, who have not been so completely ruined as to be unable to make any display at all, but it was marked by an array of processional weapons, tridents, half moons, halberds, and buffalo-horn like forks. These properties were very ancient and vastly inferior to the same things which one sees in Tongking or China, the only countries so far as I am aware where they are used. The Myosa had only three golden umbrellas, which showed that he had not the rank of a first-grade Myosa in Burmese times. On one side of him was his son and on the other rode a Chinaman - a Yunnanese - who acts as a species of Maire du palais, and apparently has much greater influence with his Chief than the Nan people, who had asked for but had not received permission from the Myosa to accompany him. The Chief wore a Chinese bamboo hat and one of the sleeveless jerkins, plastered with gold so suggestive of the Middle Kingdom. The whole turn out was in fact much more suggestive of China than of Siam. The Myosa himself conducted us to a large assortment of barracks and shelter huts which he had run up for us, and then after the usual compliments, returned to the Haw, where we paid him a formal visit the following day! He is a stout burly man of five and forty and, after his first nervousness had worn off was very pleasant and frank in his manner. He combines the shrewdness of the Mongpaw Sawbwa with the savoir-fair of

Mongnai, and is altogether as favourable of specimen of the Shan Chief as any I have seen ....<sup>1</sup>

In the last chapter we have already related how the Siamese Government had agreed to take this unproductive Kengcheng in exchange for the teak-rich trans-Salween Karenni, how Mr. A. H. Hildebrand publicly promulgated the British recognition of Siamese suzerainty over Kengcheng, and how a letter was also sent by the Kengcheng delegates to their Myosa informing him that he was now a vassal of the Siamese King. In giving Kengcheng to Siam, the British Government stipulated that the State must not be ceded to any foreign power without their consent. To this Bangkok agreed. The British also informed the French Government in Paris that they reserved the right to reassert their claims over Kengcheng should Siam be forced to surrender that State to any third party. The French raised no objection then! That was in April 1893.

On receipt of Hildebrand's letter, and after two years of British silence over the fate of his State, Mom Siri sent tributes to Nan, and affably received in Mongsing a Siamese Commissioner who was sent to organise the administration in the new territory. The good news scarcely had time to reach Bangkok when France began her aggression in Siam.<sup>2</sup>

We must now turn our attention to what is happening in Siam during the same period.

Here France was fast expanding in the East! In the general European scramble for colonies, France (having been out-manoeuvred from India by the British) was determined not to be outwitted again in Indo-China but to acquire as much territory as possible. By 1863 she had annexed Cochin-China and established protectorate rights over Cambodia. In 1866-68 the Mekong Expedition was undertaken, in which Doudart de Lagr e and Francis Garnier made their name. The Expedition started from Saigon in June 1866 and, following the course of the Mekong by steamboats and country dugouts, reached Kenghung, and proceeded thence overland to Yunnanfu! The leader de Lagr e died at Ting-Chuan in March 1868 on the return journey, but the expedition under Garnier reached Saigon on the 15th June 1868, after 2 years and 10 days, with "a wealth of information". Although the expedition proved that the Mekong could never be a water highway from Saigon to the heart of Yunnan, the French for some sentimental reason insisted on dreaming about opening up commerce with Yunnan and south-western China via "le fleuve" which they affectionately regarded as theirs!

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1. Memorandum by J. G. Scott, Offg. Superintendent, Shan States on a visit to the Kengtung-Chiangmai Boundary and to Mongsing and Kenghung dated Mandalay the 21st May 1891, in Burma Foreign Proceeding No. 1, June 1891.

2. Murti, B. S. N., op. cit., p. 279.

Colonial activities of France stopped for a while in the early seventies when she was recovering from her ignominious defeat by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1. But after the Berlin Congress in 1878 she was encouraged by Germany and Britain to go ahead with her colonial expansion in North Africa and Indo-China, which she did with such resolute determination and methodical thoroughness that she nearly clashed with Britain in a war! By 1883, she had annexed or acquired protectorate rights over Cochin-China, Cambodia, Annam and Tongkin.

It was then that she came into contact with the Kingdom of Siam which had been expanding north and east over the countries of the Laos and the Khmers.<sup>1</sup> In Paris the colonial party whipped up "public opinion" through the press which clamoured for outright annexation of Siam. In London, the French Ambassador made several proposals to partition Siam between the two countries, and in 1891 suggested that the Mekong river should mark the extreme limit of the spheres of influence between Great Britain and France.

Like a man well satisfied after a very heavy meal, Britain was slow to move with events in Indo-China and Siam which were rapidly coming to a head by 1893. By "incidents", diplomatic manoeuvres and military pressure, France in Indo-China was extending her territory westward, at the expense of Siam! Suddenly in March 1893, the French representative in Bangkok, M. Auguste Pavie, informed the Siamese Government that France claimed the Mekong as the western limit of Annamite territory and insisted upon the withdrawal of all Siamese posts east of the river. Ignoring Siamese proposals for arbitration or peaceful discussion to settle their differences, the French organised military columns which drove out three major Siamese outposts east of the Mekong. In addition to this aggression against Siam, the French also claimed that all damages caused to them by the Siamese in the defence of their own land must be made good by the latter. To reinforce these claims the French in June 1893 sent three gunboats to Bangkok! The Siamese Government refused to give permission for the French warships to proceed beyond Paknam, mouth of the river Menam Chaopaya. In defiance of orders from Paris to station his boats at Paknam, the French commander forced entry into the river which caused the Siamese Government at Paknam to open fire, grounding one of the gunboats. Two of the gunboats reached Bangkok, and Pavie presented an ultimatum to the Siamese Government on the 20th July 1893.

By the terms of the French ultimatum Siam in effect must

- (1) Cede to France all territory on the left bank of the Mekong (about 100,000 square miles or one third of Siam)".

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1. Hall, D. G. E., A History of South-East Asia, p. 591.

- (2) Evacuate all troops from the area.
- (3) Pay for losses and damages incurred by France during her aggression against Siam.
- (4) Pay two million francs in cash for losses caused to French subjects and ships during French aggression.

Because the Siamese, not unnaturally, were hesitating to accept entirely the French demands, Pavie left Bangkok with his gunboats on the 25th July and blockaded the Gulf of Siam. The Belgian Adviser to the Siamese Government, M. Rolin Jacquemyns, wrote to his English friend in the Siamese Legation in London: "The frog-eaters seem to like to treat Siam as if she had been utterly knocked down in war, when she is nothing of the kind!"

All this time the Siamese turned to the British Government and appealed for help. Lord Rosebury, British Foreign Secretary at the time as he said of the the French action, "They proceed as a man who has unprovokedly knocked down some one else, and exacts compensation from his victim because he has bruised his knuckle in doing so", advised the Siamese Government to accept French terms unconditionally.

To save their precious independence the Siamese did so. The French did not accept at once the total capitulation by Siam, but exacted further humiliating terms before lifting their blockade of the Gulf of Siam on August 3, 1893. Among these were stipulations that the Siamese must not station any security post, be it police or military, within 25 kilometers of the western bank of the Mekhong and that the French must occupy Chantabun, a coastal town near the Cambodian border, until Siam had fulfilled all the other conditions imposed by France.

Commenting on the French behaviour towards Siam after the latter's surrender in August but before the signing of the Treaty and Convention of October 3, 1893, Lord Dufferin British Ambassador to Paris told the French Foreign Minister, Delvèlle: "to use the language of the grammarians the Siamese Government are now in possession of an ultimatum, a penultimatum and an ante-penultimatum. In fact the word 'ultimatum' had completely lost its meaning, for each new one seemed to procreate a successor". The terms of the Treaty and Convention were not unlike those imposed by a victor on the vanquished in a war.

There was little that Britain could do to help the Siamese in spite of the right sentiments her officials expressed. In 12 years between 1884 and 1896 the British Government had added to its Empire in the shape of direct annexation or spheres of influence two million and six hundred thousand square miles of territory! This British achievement excited the envy of other colonising powers to an intolerable degree. As far as the Indian Empire was concerned she was bordered on the west by Russia and on the north and east by China, France and Siam! The French aggression in Siam

hurt the British more than any other Power, as their commerce in that country amounted to tenfold the combined trade of all other nations."<sup>1</sup> British commercial interests in Bangkok were advocating a firmer British stand against France, and the British representative in Bangkok was advising the Siamese Government privately to resist French demands, but they did not receive support or encouragement from London.<sup>2</sup> Britain was not ready for a show-down in a war with France<sup>3</sup> over her commercial interests in Siam. Nevertheless, it was British commercial interests in Siam that prompted the British Government in London to advise the Siamese Government to surrender to France so as not to give the latter any excuse for direct annexation and at the same time to strive by diplomatic pressure on France to respect the independence and integrity of Siam, thereby preserving British commerce there. Not a very heroic way out, perhaps, in the context of the present day, but European powers in those days could do no wrong in Asia and Africa! And it was this policy of limited self-interest in Siam that prompted Lord Rosebury to propose a buffer state between the French Indo-Chinese frontier in the extreme West and that of the extreme Eastern boundary of the Indian Empire, a buffer state touching China (Kenghung) in the North and Siam (Mekhong) in the South and separating the two frontiers by a few dozen miles. A common frontier with France was unthinkable.

This brings us back to the main trend of the story of Mongsing.

In surrendering all the left bank of the Mekong to France in accordance with the Treaty of 1893<sup>1</sup>, Siam reminded Great Britain that Mongsing which she had promised not to surrender to any foreign power was included in the surrendered area! The British Government somewhat coldly replied that it would be for them to take up the matter directly with France! It was then that the British Government proposed the creation of a small buffer state between their territory in Burma and French Indo-China, and Mongsing was suggested as the British contribution with the trans-Mekong territory of Muang Nan, south of Mongsing, as French contribution. This part of Indo-China was very barren and unproductive and difficult of access, and if the idea of a buffer state was that of an unwanted territory where no colonising Power would normally step in, then the area proposed was ideal.

But the French passion for territorial expansion was not normal. It has been said that "Britain annexed areas where she had interests to protect, whereas France annexed areas where she wished to have interests to protect, and so had to shut out competition

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1. Nisbet, John, Burma under British Rule and After, Vol. II, p. 3.
  2. Murti, B. S. N., op. cit., pp. 132-133, 231, 208-210.
  3. (We must not assume that war would have resulted from a firmer stand; that was Rosebury's defence, but I refuse to accept it. D. G. E. H.)

from the start".<sup>1</sup> The ease with which France managed to annex the trans-Mekong territory of Siam was helped by the fact the Laos and the Khmers resented Siamese domination for, as remarked by Professor Hall, Siam "had certainly not shown her best qualities in exercising dominion over other peoples".

At all events, the British wanted to show that Mongsing was as much their territory as its cis-Mekhong dependencies, and Mr. G. C. B. Stirling, an Assistant Superintendent in the Shan States, was despatched from Fort Stedman late in December 1893 to ascertain and demarcate the boundary between Kengtung and Kengcheng States. The man who was to do the actual mapping was the experienced Colonel R. G. Woodthorpe. The escort for the party was 150 strong under the command of Lieutenant E. W. Carrick of the 5th Burma Regiment. Maung Nyo, who had just been appointed Assistant Political Officer at Kengtung, also accompanied the Mission.

In the survey of the boundary, the Mission found Kengcheng East and West occupied roughly the same amount of ground. A small sub-State, Kengkhang, was found to be a dependency of Kengtung but surrounded on all sides by Kengcheng, except in the north which was Kenghung. To draw a good boundary line, Mongwa, in the south and adjoining Kengtung, was recommended to be detached from Kengcheng and given to Kengtung as compensation for the loss of Kengkhang, which was to be incorporated in Kengcheng. At Kenglap, the Mission discovered that the Myosa of Kengcheng at Mongsing had been demanding revenue from the people there who had continually paid it to Kengtung. Stirling was also against the idea of having the Kengtung boundary broken by giving Kenglap to Kengcheng. Nor did his Mission make any survey of the area as such a step would be tantamount to acknowledging Kengcheng claim over it. The villagers themselves were anxious to learn about their future and Stirling, like Scott in 1891 and Hildebrand in 1893, was unable to allay their anxiety, through lack of instructions as before, and advised status quo "until further orders".

While at Mongyawng, Stirling received a courtesy call by the Kemmong of Kengtung who had come all the way from Mongsing. The Kemmong, Saomom Ratana Kawn Kiao Intaleng had gone to Mongsing to marry Nang Padumma, eldest daughter of Mom Siri. He refused to return to Kengtung on the ground that his brother, the "Tiger" Sawbwa, had not sent him a suitable escort to welcome home his bride and himself. This was the time when the two brothers were on hostile terms due largely to court intrigues by different factions. Intaleng was also "ill-supplied" with money; the Sawbwa had given him none; his wedding was an expensive affair and he was now heavily in debt; he wanted an appropriate amount of money as well as a suitable escort to enter Kengtung with any face. The

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1. Hall, D. G. E., op. cit., pp. 591, 612.

Assistant Superintendent invited the Kemmong to accompany his party from Mongsing back to Kengtung! He said he would consider the matter but Stirling did not see him again.

While surveying Western Kengcheng on the 15th March 1894, Stirling received orders to proceed to Mongsing to inform the Myosa that Kengcheng was still British after all, the transfer to Siam having been cancelled, and to exact a nominal tribute from him. On arrival at Mongsing, Stirling failed to get any token submission from the Myosa, whom he described as a man of about 45 years of age, well mannered, intelligent and honest. The British Officer thought Mom Siri was a mere figurehead entirely in the hands of his advisers. This statement seems unjustified, to judge from subsequent dealings Stirling had with him!

From the very beginning, the Myosa refused to accede to the British demands and he took his stand as below:

1. Kengcheng had been tributary to Burma and therefore became tributary to the British after November 1885.
2. Fully admitting this, the Myosa was willing and anxious to submit to British suzerainty in 1891, but his offer was refused and nothing had happened for two years.
3. In 1893 the British declared Kengcheng to be a vassal State to Siam and accordingly the Myosa drank the water of allegiance to Siam and sent tributes to King Chulalongkorn.
4. Now he was told that the transfer was cancelled and he was still in British territory.
5. He refused to accept this story as no one had informed him officially of the re-transfer and Siam had accepted his tributary presents, Siamese officials having left Mongsing only a month before.
6. Should there be a mistake again, acceptance of Stirling's demands would be a treasonable act against the King of Siam.

No. He could not bring himself to accommodate Mr. Stirling without orders from Bangkok releasing him from his oath of allegiance to the King there.<sup>1</sup>

In due course, however, the British Government requested the Siamese Government to absolve the Myosa from his allegiance to them. A number of Proclamations written in Western Shan Script were then sent

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1. Report dated Taunggyi the 1st June 1894 by G. C. B. Stirling on the Kengtung-Kengcheng Boundary Commission 1893-94 and on a Visit to Mongsing.

by the Superintendent, Shan States, to the Myosa for distribution to all his domain. As the population of Mongsing was composed largely of Lu who had a script of their own and could not understand or read the Western Shan Script, the Proclamation sheets served no useful purpose. The Myosa, however, acknowledged receipt of the Superintendent's letter and stoically accepted his new status.

At the same time he also wrote a reply to the Government of Siam acknowledging receipt of the intimation that he was no longer a Siamese subject, and sent this letter with an official of Muangnan, Nai Nan Pichawong. The letter carrier was intercepted at Chiengkong by the French who sent their "commercial agent", M. Macey, back with Nai Nan to Mongsing to inform the Myosa that as Mongsing had been ceded to France by Siam he must have no contact with Siamese officials and that Kengcheng East was now a French territory and the Myosa a French subject. The Chief wrote to the Frenchman and said "that he had been told that he was a British subject, and piteously asked what he was to do pending the settlement of the question between the two Great Powers". Reiterating that Mongsing was French territory, Macey replied "that the Myosa was to continue to rule as before, leaving disputes of importance to be settled by French Officers who would be appointed for the purpose". This French reply was accompanied by a Tricolour.

"It is certain", reported Scott, "that from this time on the State of Kengcheng became much more French than British in feeling and tendencies".

This pro-French attitude was created by French propaganda and presents, while the British awaited orders from above. Scott somewhat naively expressed a surprise that the French had an unlimited supply of secret money and said that coins were liberally "distributed with both hands to all comers".

These French activities were unknown in London at the time when preliminaries to the Buffer State Commission were discussed between London and Paris. As stated, this proposed Buffer State was the result of the Siamese intimation to the British Government that Kengcheng East, i.e. Mongsing, had been included in the territory east of the Mekhong forcibly taken from Siam by France! Should their idea of a Buffer State prove unworkable the British said they would retain suzerainty over Mongsing. England and France agreed to have the Commission on the Buffer State in the cold weather of 1894-95.

It seems that the British Government had been anticipating the creation of the Buffer State even while the French were blockading the Gulf of Siam, for in August 1893, J. G. Scott was ordered to proceed from Lashio to Bangkok to advise the British Legation there "on Siamese affairs". He arrived in Bangkok on the 15th September and on the 2nd November, Captain Jones, the then British Resident Minister, at a private dinner party read out a telegram from Lord

Rosebury instructing him to hand over the charge to Scott. His appointment was acclaimed by Siam Free Press "as a very satisfactory one" "in view of the delicate negotiations now proceeding between France and England on Siamese Affairs". But it was only in August 1894 that Scott received the appointment order to be the British Commissioner in the Buffer State Commission.

The British Commission then composed of the following, besides Commissioner Scott:

Mr. W. Warry, Chinese Political Adviser to the Government of  
Burma  
Mr. G. C. B. Stirling, Political Officer in charge of Mongnai  
Colonel R. G. Woodthorpe, C. B. R. E.) Survey officers  
Lieutenant C. H. D. Ryder, R. E. )  
Captain H. S. Walker, D. S. O., D. C. L. I., Intelligence  
Officer  
Surgeon-Major O. E. P. Lloyd, V. C., A. M. D., Medical Officer  
Sub-Surveyor Abdul Rahim )  
" " Ramsabad ) Indian Survey Department  
Jamadar Ranjit Garung, Escort Commander  
Escort of 30 rifles of the 1st Burma Regiment

Captain G. Caulfield, D. S. O., stood by in Kengtung with 100 men of the same battalion, with Subadar-Major Imam Singh Garung and Jemadar Jasabab Thappa.

Phya Raw (or Law, as erroneously recorded), representative of Kengtung State, who had won high praise for himself from Mr. Hildebrand in the 1892-93 Anglo-Siam Boundary Commission, was also on hand to advise! Apparently this Phya Raw was one and the same person as Phya Sim, who had accompanied Scott on his 1890-91 Kengtung-Chiangmai Boundary survey mission! He seemed to have been promoted by his Sawbwa to the rank of Raw as a reward for good work done with the British. The previous holder of the title, Raw, had been done to death in 1890 by the order of the Tiger Sawbwa who accused the officer of plotting against his life. This person, the new Phya Raw, seems to have been a man of initiative and high intelligence. For a native to win a word of praise and esteem from Europeans, especially in those days, he must have worked unusually hard to conform or come up to their standard. In all his three missions with British Officers, Raw had won their unstinted praise! While these British Officers received suitable awards and acclaims from their imperial Governments, he was rewarded with the upgrading in rank by his tempestuous and youthful overlord the Tiger Sawbwa. In the present Buffer State Commission, Phya Raw had already ordered repairs of roads and bridges to Mongsing before the arrival of Commissioner Scott.

Scott left Bangkok on the 23rd October, and travelling through Korat, Paknampho, Utaradit, Pre, Nan and Chiangrai, reached Hawngluk on the 13th December to find the rest of the British Commission waiting for him there! The Commissioner had high praise for the Siamese

Government's help in his journey all the way from Bangkok. The commander of his Siamese escort was a "Major Count Ranron" who together with his men had earned a gallant praise from Scott. "As far as mere marching was concerned, they were the superiors of the slow-footed Gurkhas, and, therefore, better light infantry". This, from a Scotsman, to Siamese troops of those days was no mean tribute. Was this Ranron one and the same person as that who "welcomed Mr. Ney Elias into Siamese territory" on the bank of the Salween on the road to Mongmau in 1890?<sup>1</sup>

Scott arrived in Mongsing on the 24th December, 1894, after 63 days journey from Bangkok ahead of his opposite number, the idea being that Scott should be there, "to welcome the French into British territory", a la Ranron.

The French Commission was no less impressive than the British. It consisted of:

M. Auguste Pavie, Commissaire-General au Laos  
 M. Lefevre-Pontalis, Secrétaire d'Ambassade, Commissaire-Adjoint  
 Capitaine A. Rivière. )  
 Lieutenant Thomassin. ) Survey Officers  
 " Seauve )  
 Dr. Lefèvre, Surgeon to the Mission  
 M. Caillat, Private Secretary to M. Pavie  
 Two interpreters from the Cambodian College in Paris, one of whom a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.  
 Escort of 30 Tongkinese Miliciens.  
 12 Shan-Chinese Body guards of M. Pavie from Lai Chao.

When the British Contingent arrived at Mongsing, the Tricolour was flying over the Haw, but the Myosa and his son, thinking that armies were converging on his capital, had fled.

The hoisting of the French flag had no sort of significance to him. He considered it a mere concession to the eccentricities of foreigners, and attached not the slightest importance to it. The same explanation may be offered for his more recent flight in May of this year, on the occupation by Mr. Stirling of Mong Hsing. It is unfortunately true that the Chief has completely lost his nerve, and is entirely in the hands of one or two of his officials who exercise anything but a good influence over him. He is not by any means an old man, and he does not appear to have any particular vices. It is very possible that his undeniably harassing position during the last five years is responsible for his entire lack of backbone.

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1. See Chapter IX.

At any rate we were eight days in Mong Hsing before he could be persuaded to return. None of his people would betray his hiding-place, and during the whole week I had constant interviews with the officials of the State, and even went the length of writing a formal letter guaranteeing to the Chief his personal safety and immunity from any kind of punishment for his failure to obey the orders of Mr. Stirling.

The officials were extremely eager to learn whether the British Government intended to establish a military post in Keng Tung. I could give them no direct answer. Had I been able to answer in the affirmative I am confident that I should have obtained the tributary offerings. That question had to be dropped entirely after the arrival of M. Pavie.

This sizing up of the situation seems unwarranted. The flying of the French flag undoubtedly conveyed its full meaning to the Myosa who knew he was closer to the French fort opposite Chiengkong, and it did hurt Scott. Subsequent events showed up the Myosa as by no means back-boneless and his own people obeyed and supported him loyally until superior forces were used! And Scott's evasive answer at once lowered British prestige on the spot.

Scott, of course, hauled down the French flag, but, instead of keeping it as the French would probably have done to a Union Jack, courteously returned it to Pavie who secretly gave it back to the Myosa.

Of the French Commissioners, Scott said that Pavie was "a very crafty man" but weak, and that he (Scott) would have had no trouble in dealing with him, alone! In fact, Pavie was very courteous and accommodating before the arrival of his Deputy, Pontalis. He even admitted privately to Scott that Kengcheng was undoubtedly tributary to Burma, but said that "it would have been 'more generous' if Great Britain had recognised the sentimental feeling of the French for 'le fleuve' and had agreed to "the Mekhong forming the boundary line of French Indo-China as far North as the Chinese frontier"!

Pontalis was less compromising, and asserted "that the British had no right to anything east of the Salween, if so far as that; that our progress to the Salween-Mekhong watershed was due to French supineness; that our claim up to the Mekhong is unblushing effrontery, and to anything beyond a blatant insult". Much time was spent by Pavie in restraining the violence of his deputy who claimed he was in an ante-room when the Buffer State Commissioners, British and French, met in Paris in 1893

Pavie was the man who dictated the humiliating treaty terms of 1893 to Siam, and the 25-Km zone was Pontalis' idea, "devised with no other object than the keeping open a raw spot for future operation on Siam" - Siamese authority in the zone was being sabotaged methodically.

In a survey of the territories involved, trans-Mekhong Kengcheng, i.e. Mongsing, had an area of 1250 square miles; cis-Mekhong Kengcheng 1150 square miles; trans-Mekhong Nan, 2700 square miles. Kengtung had an area of about 736 square miles east of the Mekhong with villages founded by the orders of its Sawbwa and paying revenue to him! The largeness of this area surprised both the British and the French, and because of the prospect of revenue the latter bitterly contested British or Kengtung rights in it. Pavie said he regarded this enclave as French territory and threatened to arrest any Kengtung officials from Monglin or Paleao. Scott hotly replied that he would regard that as a French unfriendly act and "would take measures for the protection of British subjects".

The British proposed that as the trans-Mekhong Kengtung enclave and Mongsing were part of their Indian Empire, they would contribute this piece of territory, amounting to some 2050 square miles,<sup>1</sup> as their share of the Buffer State, and that the French were to contribute trans-Mekhong Nan (consisting of trans-Mekhong Chiengkong, Phkha and Muang Luang) with its area of 2700 square miles as their share! The British share was smaller but richer and had a population of about 6000 while the French area was barren with about a tenth of the British population.

The French, refusing to admit any British rights east of the Mekhong, said that Mongsing and the Kengtung enclave, having been "ceded" to them by the Siamese in 1893, would form their share of the Buffer State, while the British share would have to be cis-Mekhong Kengcheng to which must be added Mongko, Hopong, Monglin and Paleao in order that Siam might have access to it.

Scott, of course, could never have agreed to the French stand, and he reported:

If to Keng Cheng East and trans-Mekong Keng Tung is added Keng Cheng West, the value of the British contribution is out of all proportion beyond that of the French in area, population, prosperity, and orderliness. At the same time, it must be remembered that the whole tract is worth very little. From a European point of view it is worth little more than nothing. From a Shan States point of view Keng Cheng is a comfortable little possession, which grows so much more than it wants that the people are able to cover themselves with finery, to own pack cattle, hold periodical feasts, and build occasional pagodas, while the Chief has a revenue sufficient to enable him to keep up elephants, maintain a private band, and to buy Dutch clocks, fearsome glass ware, and Chinese eccentricities such as the Shan delights in.

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1. It is not understood how this figure was arrived at as Mongsing and the Kengtung enclave together make 1986 square miles. All the figures are from Scott's report of the 25th July and the 22nd August, 1895.

Trans-Mekong Keng Tung is peaceful and well in hand. It pays for the officials told off to look after it, and if a sale is found for the Mong Hi timber it might even be a profitable possession. It is, moreover, a convenient settling-place for migratory La Hu and other hill tribes. The Keng Tung Sawbwa would undoubtedly resent being deprived of it without compensation elsewhere.

In all their formal meetings and to the very last the two parties would not depart from the above stand each had taken. A tour of some of the areas along existing routes was undertaken by the Commissions. This tour revealed the unproductiveness of the area, especially the French portion. This worthlessness of the whole area was about the only thing of which the two parties were in complete agreement.

At their last meeting at Chiengkong at the end of March the British and the French Commissioners realised that agreement was impossible, argument waste of time and joint recommendations out of the question. They therefore on the 2nd April signed a procés-verbal whereby the question of ownership of the portions of territory which were to form the Buffer State was left to the two Metropolitan Powers and in the meanwhile no orders were to be issued to the Myosa of Mongsing by either side.

The Commissions broke up at Chiengkong on the 3rd April. Pavie and Pontalis returned to Hanoi via Luang Prabang, Dien Bien Phu, and Lai Chao. Scott returned to Burma via Kengtung, reaching Mandalay on the 4th June 1895, 225 days after leaving Bangkok and some 1880 miles wearier in the legs! He then left Burma on the 22nd and submitted his first report on the 25th July, 1895.<sup>1</sup>

It will have been seen that Scott was no match for the crafty Pavie! He did not succeed in convincing the French of the British suzerainty over Mongsing and the trans-Mekhong Kengtung enclave, although it was indisputable that the ground belonged to the British as successors to the Kingdom of Ava. London, Calcutta and Rangoon never had a clear-cut policy in the Buffer State which was the creation of Lord Rosebury who dreaded a joint frontier with France.

Scott was criticised by the Foreign Office in London for his agreement of the 2nd April 1895 with Pavie! It was difficult to see how he could have done otherwise. Officials of Mongsing were pro-French (through British fickleness, in their eyes) and he was so far away from London which had no firm policy. Scott himself must have been too apprehensive of involving his Government to have taken any other course, though as far as the military situation in Mongsing was concerned he boasted that with the force at his command he could

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1. Scott to Salisbury, No. 21-B dated the 25th July and No. 22-B dated the 22nd August 1895; Report, and Further Report, on the Mekhong Commission!

have swept all French opposition up to the Black river and the hills above Hue.

Again when Scott tried to maintain his Government's rights in the Kengtung enclave east of the Mekhong, he was criticised by the India Office in London for "having taken too high ground in regard to Kengtung villages, east of the Mekhong", which, London "felt it would be a useful card to throw away", as the Government of India abhorred any commitment beyond the Mekhong. In the same letter to the Foreign Office, and referring to Mongsing where the British Government had decided to exercise authority should the Buffer State fail, the India Office in London declared, "We should not pose as grasping at any disputable territory beyond the Mekong". To which the Foreign Office added a note: "We don't want that beastly place, but we can't let Pavie go on flourishing about treading on our toes with hot headed boots". The Chief Commissioner of Burma was of the opinion that to surrender Mongsing to France "would damage prestige, stultify recent action, render useless work of past season and give us river frontier with France, the military objections to which have been pointed out". The Viceroy on the other hand expressed "his unpreparedness to advise definitely until he knew what general arrangement of Siamese affairs was considered". But the India Office was pressing the Foreign Office to relieve the Indian Government of the burden of maintaining troops in the trans-Mekong Shan States.

It was all very confusing and not easy for honest Scott to please London, thousands of miles from "that beastly place". The situation was further confounded when (in spite of London's abhorrence of the place) Lord Kimberly, Foreign Secretary in Rosebury's Government, ordered Mr. Stirling and 100 rifles of the 1st Burma Regiment at Kengtung under Captain G. Caulfield to proceed to Mongsing to reassert British suzerainty there. Stirling reached his destination on May 2, 1895. The French had already established a fortified post garrisoned by militiamen at Fort Carnot, opposite Chiengkong on the left bank and in the territory which the British proposed to be their (French) contribution to the Buffer State.<sup>1</sup>

Confused British policy on Mongsing also resulted in the propaganda victory for the French. It was not surprising therefore that an honest man like Scott could not get the upper hand of Pavie in what may be called the Buffer State cold war! Nor could the Mongsing populace be blamed for feeling more favourably disposed towards the French, who, besides their presents, also showed firm intentions of "staying put" in all places acquired by them. The local populace certainly thought that the French were the more powerful of the two. These were also the feelings of the British Commissioners as they came away from the fruitless mission.

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1. Murti, B. S. N., op. cit., pp. 304, 307, 308, 316, 320."

Such was Scott's disgust that in his report to Salisbury of the 25th July 1895, he wrote: "Except as a means of mapping and gathering miscellaneous information about a little known country, the Commission over which I had the honour to preside has not been very productive of results".

The map which Scott submitted was "entirely the work of Colonel Woodthorpe and Lieutenant Ryder. The French mapping work consisted of mere route traverses-pacing, combined with compass work, frequently done from pony-back. Latitudes were fixed occasionally by astronomical observation, but apparently the observations were always taken from the inconsistent moon, and not from a more trustworthy star. The French work, could not therefore, claim to be more than an indication of the general line of the roads, and this was admitted by the French Officers themselves".

The occupation of Mongsing itself was frustrating for the British. The Myosa, whom both Messrs. Stirling and Scott described as clay in his ministers' hands, refused to meet the British representative, and took refuge with the French at Phukha! Persuasion, cajolery and threat by Stirling produced no result. He forbade his ministers to obey the British, on pain of death. The British, on stupid principle rather than expediency, decided to raise revenue to assert their suzerainty! They received no cooperation from the people until all the ministers were arrested and threatened with deportation to Taunggyi. Even after this, a mere Rs.3000 was collected. It is surprising that Rangoon authorised this unnecessary blunder. The following letter from the Myosa more or less sums up Stirling's activities during the year:

I have heard that you have been out to examine the limits and boundaries of my State, and that you have told the Ministers you will, on your return, order house-posts five spans in circumference and will build a large and substantial house. I do not at all relish this news. The State of Kengcheng is not your State. Do you think you will stay in it for-ever? The arrangement between the two great powers and the letter given to me are facts which cannot be controverted. Your coming to my State (as you did) is equivalent to having attacked and seized it forcibly. You acted with violence and drove me out. I was obliged to leave my State and fly on account of your violence. I took refuge in French territory because the French have observed the arrangement made by the two great powers and have done no harm to, nor seized upon, my State, nor have any cause of complaint against it. At the time I fled from my State and came (here) you received and intimidated the Ministers, saying I had abandoned both them and my State and that I should never return to it. You told them not to imagine that I would ever come back and recover my State. When the Ministers heard this deceitful and threatening language of yours, they still refused to obey you. Then you seized eight of the chief Ministers and placed them in confinement. You declared you would send them to

Taunggyi and would bring troops and rule the State. Then the Ministers and people were afraid, because they were but feeble people, and they collected the revenue and drew up a document declaring themselves British subjects. It is the same therefore as if they had never collected the revenue and had never signed such a document. As to the Ministers collecting the revenue and drawing up a document declaring themselves British subjects, what could they say, or what could they write? If you had not used violence to them, the Ministers would neither have collected the revenue nor have written such a document and this you well know.

The State is mine and I rule it. When the French and English Governments have decided to which it shall belong, they will inform me. Your coming to Monghsing was an offence against the two powers, and contrary to the written agreement made, notwithstanding which you came and seized upon my possessions. Now I never gave you leave to live in my State, and I protest against your conduct under five heads -

- (1) I protest against your living at Monghsing at present.
- (2) I protest against the evil (violence) you are now doing.
- (3) I protest against everything you may do in the future.
- (4) I do not authorize or approve what the State Ministers have done in the past, or what they may do in the future, or their obedience to your orders.
- (5) I now call upon you to observe the agreement between the two powers. I wish to return and govern my State, and I demand from you the same recognitions of that agreement as the French have accorded. When I know to which power the two Governments have decided to allot the State I shall not disobey their orders.

Written the 15th waxing of the 3rd month 1267 (31st December 1895).<sup>1</sup>

If the Myosa had been a European he probably would have been exalted for his steadfastness and courage to the last. True, he had the French behind him, and later years were to prove that British colonial policy was more liberal than that of the French. But in 1895-96, May to May in Monghsing, it definitely looked as if the French were the champions of the under dog, if one had not remembered what

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1. Burma Political Dept. Proceedings, June, 1896, pp. 94-95.

they had just done to Siam and the rest of Indo-China. Even now, many Europeans behave in a most unaccountable manner outside their own country. The excuse is always that the other people are not as civilised as they are.

However that may be, the British occupation of Mongsing in 1895-96 would have won the support of the local inhabitants if they could have proved in a gentler way that their ruling methods were superior to those of the French.

In his report to London Scott stated that it would be impracticable - even dangerous - to have the Buffer State under its own independent Chief. Nor was it politic to hand over Mongsing to China whose existence in the area the French refused to recognise, especially after she had been defeated in the war against Japan in March 1895. Scott's third alternative was to hand over Mongsing back to Siam if only that meant a revision of the unjust France-Siamese Treaty of 1893 and if it was also followed by an Anglo-French guarantee of Siam as a buffer and independent country. His final recommendation was that there was really no valid objection in having the Mekhong as the boundary line.

A Siamese special envoy, Prince Swasti, and his Belgian Adviser, M. Rolin Jacquemyns, who came to London during their tour of the European capitals at this time, were told by Lord Salisbury who succeeded Lord Kimberly, at the Foreign Office that while he would do everything to maintain the integrity of Siam he did not think that the interests of Siam were important enough for Britain to defend them in a war.

That being the case Scott's last recommendation was the only acceptable one. In fact, it pleased London to find a way out of the impasse created by British policy makers.

The French, of course, were loud in their protests against Stirling's occupation of what they had considered their territory. At the same time they proposed also that the Mekhong boundary would be the most favourable solution to both the Powers. Yet the French delayed coming to any agreement with Great Britain about their proposal, in an effort, it would appear, to find a pretext for annexing the whole of Siam.

Months passed without anything happening until one day, November 12, 1895, Salisbury bluntly told the French Ambassador in London, Baron de Courcel, that it was in Britain's interest to maintain the independence and integrity of Siam, and that unless France could agree on some reciprocal arrangement he would be forced to make a unilateral formal declaration that "the maintenance of Siam within her present limits as an independent Kingdom was a matter of serious interest to Great Britain". Salisbury added quietly that perhaps such a British action would serve the interest of France better than a joint guarantee.

For the first time over these years of negotiation on the question of Siam, Britain was able to put France on the defensive. France had to accept the cession of Mongsing by Britain to her, thereby acknowledging British rights in that State, in exchange for a joint Declaration signed in London between Salisbury and de Courcel on January 15, 1896. By the Declaration, the safety of the "Menam Valley" was guaranteed jointly by the two Powers, which further engaged not to acquire special privileges or advantages in the region not commonly enjoyed. It is true the Valley of the Menam was by far the richest part of Siam, but the fact that the "safety zone" was bounded on the west by the British Burma frontier and on the east not by the Mekong, but by the watershed of that river and of the Menam, shows up two features of the then cold war; namely, the adroitness of the French in securing as their sphere of influence the whole of the western watershed of the Mekong within Siam, and the unwillingness of the British to guarantee anything outside their commercial interests which were mainly in the Menam Valley. This latter feature, however, was somewhat mitigated by a letter dated January 15, 1896 from Salisbury to Lord Dufferin, British Ambassador in Paris, in which the former declared: "We fully recognise the rights of Siam to the full and undisturbed enjoyment, in accordance with long usage or with existing treaties, of the entire territory comprised within her dominions; and nothing in our present action would detract in any degree from the validity of the rights of the King of Siam to those portions of his territory which are not affected by the Treaty". This virtually ruled out any French annexation of the area in Siam which France claimed as her sphere of influence.

To come back to Mongsing, Mr. Stirling the British Administrator there reported:

On the 15th January 1896 the declaration fixing the Mekhong as the boundary between British and French possessions in Indo-China was signed. Intimation of the settlement was received on the 31st January, and from this date till our evacuation of the district nothing of importance occurred. By the terms of the Convention Mong Hsing was ceded to France. It only remained to hand over the territory to the officer appointed to receive it. M. Vacle, Commandant Supérieur of the Upper Laos, was nominated for this duty, and (after considerable delay) reached Mong Hsing on the 9th May.<sup>1</sup>

M. Vacle was accompanied by two other French Officers and escorted by 10 Europeans of the Infanterie de Marine and 22 Annamese tirailleurs. The handing over ceremony took place on the 10th. The British asked for a French assurance that none of the Mongsing officials who had obeyed British orders would be punished.

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1. Stirling, G. C. B., Report on the British occupation of Mong Hsing (May 5th 1895 to May 10th 1896), with some account of events in the Upper Lao country adjoining British territory dated Kengtung the 26th June 1896. Burma Political Dept. Proceedings, June 1896.

Stirling received the assurance and reported further:

In view of the feeling which our occupation of Mong Hsing excited in French Indo-China, it is pleasing to record the courtesy shown by M. Vacle and his companions to Major Caulfield and myself on the occasion of its handing over". The party marched in without the usual tricolour, and none was hoisted while we remained there. The visit which we paid to the French officers on their arrival was returned within two hours.

Our private relations were of the most cordial kind, and we parted with many expressions of mutual regard. It is impossible that the most ignorant villagers could have failed to see that the cession of the territory was made without reluctance on our part, and received without triumph by the French officers. On the 11th May we left Mong Hsing, and four days later recrossed the Mekhong into British territory."<sup>1</sup>

This show of good will over the cession was part of "playing the game" but it only confirmed the belief of the Myosa and his ministers that they had acted in the right direction from the beginning by passive and active resistance to Mr. Stirling.

Thus it was that the frontier between the Shan States of Burma and the French Indo-China was formed by the Mekhong river all the way from the mouth of the Mehok until the former river entered the territory of Kenghung at the sub-State of Mongla". All the cis-Mekhong Kengcheng became part of Kengtung State.

As far as our study is concerned it ends with the handing over ceremony of Mongsing by Mr. Stirling to M. Vacle on the 10th May 1896, but it will not be improper to relate briefly how Siam fared from this cold war.

The French reaction to the treaty of the 15th January 1896 was violent and uncompromising; the colonial party blatantly claimed that the opportunity for annexation of the whole of Siam had been allowed to slip; the Indo-Chinese and Paris press called the treaty "a betrayal of the rights of France over Siam". The Government of India greeted the treaty with great relief as they had always considered "this small excrescence on the other side of the Mekong could be of no advantage or profit to us". In Siam it was felt that the joint guarantee should have been extended to the whole Kingdom; but then the British concern was with her commercial interests in the Menam Valley and not in Siam's difficulties with France. In England the press was very critical and Lord Rosebury who was now in the opposition called the treaty "the surrender of Siam".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Murti, B. S. N., op. cit., pp. 338-3458

Scott, who himself suggested the Mekong as the boundary after several impracticable alternatives, wrote years later:

Lord Rosebury, who was Foreign Secretary at the time, had the extraordinary idea of forming a buffer state. Lord Kimberly, who followed him, courted a snub by ordering the immediate occupation of Mongsing, and then came Lord Salisbury, who was, without exception, the worst Foreign Secretary we ever had for matters east of Suez, and he gave the whole question up.<sup>1</sup>

Truly, states in South East Asia, big or small, were but pawns in the imperial chess board of the 19th century.

The treaty was by no means a satisfactory one even in those colonial days, but it gave Siam that very much needed respite to recover from the state of despair and despondency into which she had fallen as a result of the 1893 treaty dictated to her by France, and to put her house in order. Thanks to her enlightened king and other leaders, she was able to modernise rapidly, and opened up her country to other European Powers thereby obtaining a balance of their vying interests. For example, previous to 1900, about 80% of shipping in Siam was British. In 1900, the German Norddeutscher Lloyd bought up two of the chief steamship lines from the British firms. The Danish and other shipping firms came into the field later. When there was only Britain as the chief commercial power in Siam, France did not hesitate to twist the Lion's tail to her advantage, but now that there were other European powers in the Menam Valley she would have to ponder long and deep before she could act rashly. Germany, with her vast army ever ready for war in Europe, was now in Siam, and a combined protest of this Power and Britain would be more than sufficient to stop any French aggressive action.<sup>2</sup>

From the very beginning, Britain need not have feared having a common frontier with France on the Mekhong.

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1. Mitten, G. E., op. cit., p. 166.

2. Nisbet, J., Burma under British Rule & Before, volume II, pp. 6-8.

