

**HOW WARS ARISE IN INDIA:
OBSERVATIONS ON MR.
COBDEN'S PAMPHLET, ENTITLED,
"THE ORIGIN OF THE BURMESE
WAR"**

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BY

JOHN CLARK MARSHMAN.

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1853.

HOW WARS ARISE IN INDIA.

Mr. COBDEN has recently published a pamphlet entitled "How Wars are got up in India," in which he asserts that "deeds of violence and injustice have marked every step of our progress in India," and that the British authorities in the East have been always actuated by an "insatiable love of territorial aggrandisement." These heavy charges he endeavours to substantiate by a reference to our proceedings in Burmah. In the narrative which he has compiled of the "Origin of the Burmese War," he exonerates the Burmese Court and its officers from all blame, and denounces the conduct of the British Government in every stage of these proceedings as unjust, unscrupulous, and utterly indefensible; and he characterizes Lord Dalhousie's minute, written to explain and justify these transactions, as "an unstatesmanlike, immoral, and illogical production." He adds, these are "strong words, but their truth can, unfortunately, be proved by evidence as strong." The expressions are undoubtedly "strong," but any one who will give the Burmese Blue Book a calm and unbiassed perusal, will perceive that there has seldom been an instance in which strength of language has been so completely in an inverse ratio to the strength of testimony.

Those who have watched the origin and progress of these proceedings will be unable to resist a feeling of surprise, almost bordering on indignation, to find a man of Lord Dalhousie's high principle and unimpeached character, held up to the execration of the civilized world as having got up a war with a weaker power from an insatiable love of territorial aggrandisement, and defended it by an "immoral" publication. When it is borne in mind that the Blue Book affords irrefragable evidence of his extreme reluctance, from first to last, to engage in any war at all, and of his repeated declaration that "annexation would be a calamity second only to war itself," Mr. Cobden's assertion will admit of but one explanation, that all his Lordship's pacific professions were the result of hypocrisy, and that the spirit of forbearance which he manifested throughout these transactions was only assumed to conceal his ambition. From any imputation so utterly at variance with his established character, an appeal may be made with perfect confidence to those who have watched his career during the last twelve years, in the discharge of duties of the highest importance and responsibility.

Mr. Cobden states in his Preface, that he had not been able to meet with any one, in or out of Parliament, who had read the papers relative to hostilities with Burmah; and the narrative which he has drawn up is intended, therefore, as a popular history of the origin of the war, which will doubtless be received with credulity proportioned to the ignorance which prevails on the subject. Without,

in the smallest degree, questioning Mr. Cobden's innate love of truth, there can be no hesitation in stating that whatever impression his pamphlet may create, injurious to the character of the British functionaries in the East, will be attributable to the undue prominence he gives to immaterial circumstances, the omission or depression of some of the most important points in the series of events, and the general colouring diffused over the whole transaction, in accordance with his own peculiar views. It is thus that the public mind, always more ready to believe evil than good of men in eminent station, becomes warped by prejudices, which, in the case more particularly of India, are too often found to survive the generation in which they were propagated. It becomes, therefore, a matter of some importance to the cause of truth to supply an immediate antidote to the fallacious representations and reasonings contained in Mr. Cobden's publication, and to make an honest attempt to remove the odium they are calculated to create.

To go over the indictment, item by item, and to show how each circumstance has been misapprehended—I do not say misrepresented—would be no difficult task; but perhaps it will be less fatiguing and more satisfactory to the reader to be presented at once with a more faithful and accurate version of these transactions, drawn from the same source from which Mr. Cobden's narrative is derived. Such a recapitulation of these events will explain the cause of that unexampled and extraordinary unanimity which was exhibited by the Indian journals

on the Burmese question, and show the grounds on which editors, always opposed to the Government, united with its friends in commending the course which had been pursued on this occasion. After having endeavoured to vindicate the proceedings of Lord Dalhousie from the censures which have been cast on them, I propose briefly to examine how far Mr. Cobden's assertions, relative to the general progress of the British empire in India, are in accordance with historical fact.

It was at the time when Lord Dalhousie was congratulating himself on the permanence of peace, after a century of warfare, and actively engaged in providing for the extension of railways, the establishment of electric telegraphs, and a uniform rate of three-farthing postage throughout India, that an appeal was unexpectedly made to him against the extortions inflicted by the Burmese authorities on British subjects at Rangoon. Twenty-six years had elapsed since the termination of the first Burmese war, and the remembrance of the ten millions of expenditure which it entailed on the Indian treasury, had led Government, during the whole of this period, to regard a second collision with that slippery and arrogant Cabinet as an event to be above all things avoided. Subsequent to the treaty of Yandaboo, signed in 1826, the conduct of Burmese officials towards the subjects and representatives of the British Government, had been marked by that insolence by which the Burmese Court is so preëminently distinguished. The two Residents who had been deputed to Ava, in conformity

with the provisions of the treaty, had been treated with such contumely as to constrain the Government of India to withdraw the embassy altogether; and the British interests which had been established in Burmah under the guarantee of that engagement, were left without any protection. Complaints had been made from time to time of the oppression to which our merchants were subject in that country, but the Governor-General was anxious to avoid any interference which might possibly terminate in hostilities. This indifference on the part of our Government to the wrongs of its subjects naturally served to embolden the Burmese authorities, and these outrages were increased in number and aggravation. At length, the commanders of two British merchantmen, who had been subjected to the greatest oppression by the Governor of Rangoon, made an official representation of their grievances, and claimed the protection of their own Government, and it appeared impossible to refuse the demand of redress consistently with the duty which it owed to its subjects. There is no civilized Government in Europe or America which could, or would, have remained quiescent under such treatment of those whom it was bound to protect. The injury inflicted on the commanders was, after a careful examination, estimated at a sum within £1,000, and it was resolved by the Government of India to demand the payment of this amount from the Burmese authorities. Lord Dalhousie, considering the contempt with which our ambassadors had previously been treated, was unwilling to have

recourse to another political mission. He availed himself, therefore, of the presence of H.M.'s ships *Fox* and *Serpent*, in the Hooghly, under the command of Commodore Lambert, and deputed him to Rangoon to make the demand of reparation for the injuries inflicted on the two merchants. He was also furnished with a communication to the King of Ava, which was to be transmitted to him, in case the demand on the Governor of Rangoon was not complied with.

On the arrival of the Commodore off Rangoon, the Governor immediately interdicted all intercourse with him, and threatened to cut off the heads and to break the legs of all the foreigners, British or others, who should venture to go down to the wharf to welcome the frigate. He likewise issued orders for the ships of war to be unmoored, and take their station in the midst of the mercantile shipping; and fined the commander of a Madras vessel, a British subject, for having lowered his flag to the Commodore. Notwithstanding these discouraging circumstances, an arrangement was made for an interview between him and the Governor on shore, but before it had taken place the merchants of Rangoon contrived to open a communication with the British representative, and to place in his hands a list of thirty-eight grievances, which they had suffered from the Governor of Rangoon. On the receipt of this document, the Commodore conceived it to be his duty to decline any intercourse with one whose conduct towards British subjects had been so flagitious, and to deal at once with his