

**CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN CAPTAIN
RICHARD SPRYE, AND THE RT. HON.
WILLIAM-EWART GLADSTONE ON THE
COMMERCIAL OPENING OF THE SHAN
STATES, AND WESTERN INLAND CHINA,
BY RAILWAY, DIRECT FROM RANGOON**

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Correspondence Between Captain Richard Sprye, and the Rt. Hon. William-Ewart Gladstone on the Commercial Opening of the Shan States, and Western Inland China, by Railway, Direct from Rangoon by Richard Sprye & William Ewart Gladstone

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HENRY DUCKWORTH, ESQ., OF LIVERPOOL,

F.R.G.S., &c., &c.,

AND

THE MANUFACTURERS, MERCHANTS, SHIPBUILDERS, SHIPOWNERS,
AND BANKERS, OF SOUTH LANCASHIRE, WHOSE SEVERAL COMMERCIAL
CHAMBERS AND ASSOCIATIONS HAVE, SINCE 1859, SENT UP
NUMEROUS MEMORIALS TO HER MAJESTY'S MINISTERS IN FAVOUR
OF THE COMMERCIAL OPENING OF THE SHAN STATES AND INLAND
WEST OF CHINA PROPER, BY RAILWAY DIRECT FROM THE PORT
OF RANGOON, THE FOLLOWING CORRESPONDENCE ON THE SUBJECT
WITH ONE OF THEIR REPRESENTATIVES IN PARLIAMENT, PRINTED
FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY, IS INSCRIBED BY THEIR FAITH-
FUL FRIENDS, THE PROJECTORS OF AND HOPEFUL LABOURERS FOR
THAT EXTENSION OF FOREIGN COMMERCE—THE SUREST BASIS OF
INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND NATIONAL PROSPERITY, AS IT IS THE
BEST PIONEER OF CHRISTIANITY AND CIVILISATION.

RICHARD SPRYE,

REYNELL. H. F. SPRYE.

SOUTH LODGE, CAMPDEN HILL, W.,
30TH NOVEMBER 1865.

TENTANDO SUPERABIS.

INTRODUCTION.

THE following Correspondence with H.M.'s Chancellor of the Exchequer, as one of the representatives in Parliament of the manufacturing, shipping, and mercantile constituency of South Lancashire, not having been written on either side for publication, and Mr. Gladstone's concurrence in its being printed having been asked, as "for private circulation only," it must be so considered by those to whom we may send it, or into whose hands it may otherwise fall.

As introductory to it, and explanatory of its seeming freedom of style towards a leading Member of the Cabinet, and of its condemnatory tone towards H.M.'s Ministers generally, for their persistent disregard of our efforts to draw their official attention to the many great and permanent advantages England and India must derive from the commercial opening of the extensive and populous Shan States and western inland provinces of China Proper, and from the extension of the Indo-European Telegraph from eastern Pegu, *by land*, to Hong-Kong and the Chinese Open Ports; it is right to state, briefly, not only what have been our long individual labours to effect the realization of those projects, but how greatly those labours have been seconded and aided by the manufacturing and commercial interests of the country; and how very negative has been the attention paid by the Government to such continued and well supported appeals to them for that peaceful extension of the country's foreign trade.

It was at the commencement of the year 1852, now fourteen years since, that—having originally, when serving in what is now a part of British Burma, submitted our views to a Governor-General of India—we first addressed H.M.'s Ministers, soliciting their attention to the rich field which existed, generally, in Eastern Asia, for the peaceful and profitable extension of the foreign trade of the United Kingdoms; but more especially as regarded Burma or Ava, Siam, the West of China, and Japan. In reply to two letters we wrote on the subject to H.M.'s

then Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Malmesbury, dated the 24th of March and 6th of April, 1852, his Lordship informed us, under date the 15th of that April,—“that the attention of H.M.’s Government is, “at this moment, much occupied with the advancement of British “commercial interests in Siam and the neighbouring countries.” Yet, and notwithstanding that, as regarded Siam, the subject was also then being urged on ministerial consideration by influential merchant firms and several Chambers of Commerce, no action was taken by Government in the matter, either with Siam, Ava, or the other countries named by us, until the year 1854.

Then, Sir John Bowring, who held the important and very busy offices of Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Hong-Kong, and Chief Supervisor of our trade with China; who had the consequent control of our large naval and military forces then in that part of the East, and was, in addition, England’s representative to Cochin China and Japan; was also nominated H.M.’s Envoy to the King of Siam, for the negotiation of a commercial treaty more suited than the then existing one to the enterprising spirit of the age. The importance and urgency of his duties in China delayed Sir John’s making his first and only visit to Siam and presenting himself at the court of Bangkok until April 1855, and then compelled him to limit his stay to about twenty days. Thus hurried, as it might have been foreseen he must be, and being also very imperfectly informed and instructed by our Foreign office, the treaty he negotiated was, in several respects, by no means such as he, doubtless, would have proposed and obtained, had he been more fully and correctly prepared by the Foreign Secretary; and had not the more important and pressing duties of his many other high offices in the East, prevented his giving that time and consideration to the Siamese Court and negotiation, which the object of his mission made desirable.

Up to the year 1850, when the Foreign office first sent an envoy—Rajah Sir James Brooke—to Siam, all political and commercial negotiations with that country, had been conducted by the Governors-General of India; who, as occasions arose, deputed their envoys to the Siamese Court, fully instructed respecting the interests, political and commercial, of both England and India, with that country and its neighbour states. H.M.’s Government having, however, when it took Siam under its diplomatic charge, omitted to obtain from the Government of India, and to furnish to Sir James Brooke and Sir John Bowring, copies of the instructions to, and journals, reports, and correspondence of, those previous envoys to Bangkok from Calcutta; the

two Foreign office envoys were, of course, without knowledge of our past diplomatic negotiations and relations with Siam, and ignorant of what the interests of her two conterminous neighbours, British Burma and Ava, required; knowledge which could alone enable them to negotiate with proper advantage for England and India, in reference to the proximity to Siam of British Burma along its whole western, and of Ava along its entire northern frontier.

Those Foreign office missions to Siam, and their results, having been reviewed in our letter of the 29th of April, 1865, to the Secretary of State for India in Council, which we may hereafter print, we will here only observe of them, that their entire failure in the very important points wherein they failed, must not be ascribed to the envoys, but to the department of state which selected and instructed them. Because, had the Foreign Secretary, in reference to the papers we had sent in to him on the subject, even sought it from us, it was in our power to have furnished, as those papers should have shown him, the fullest and latest information of the political and official relations between India and Siam, in reference to territorial and commercial questions alike, and as affecting the territory of the King of Ava, as well as that of British Burma: for we possessed copies, *in extenso*, not only of the instructions, journals, reports, and correspondence of the different envoys sent from the Government of India to that of Siam; but of the instructions, journals, reports, and correspondence, also, of the officers sent, at different times, by our authorities in the Tenasserim provinces to the Siamese Government, and the different Shan States of Siam.

Before 1858, the Indian Government had annexed the two remaining seacoast provinces of Burma—those of Pegu and Martaban; which gave to England the entire coast of the east side of the Bay of Bengal, from Calcutta to the river Pakchan, on the south of the province of Mergui. And events in China then appearing to us likely to open an opportunity for our Government to negotiate favorably with that of China, for the opening of trade, overland, from that our new province of Pegu, with the West of China, we resumed addressing the Foreign Secretary of State, on the subject; and during the months of March, April, and May, 1858, sent him six, if not more, explanatory papers. The one dated the 10th of April, 1858, written by the senior of us, thus commenced:—

“I had the honour to receive in the country your Lordship’s acknowledgment, dated the 9th of March, of the paper which I addressed to you on the 1st of that month, relating to the further extension of our commerce with China; and for effecting which I offered to your consideration suggestions for

the negotiations likely to be entered into with the Chinese Emperor, for the restitution to him of Canton. I trust that my later letter to your Lordship, of the 21st ultimo, with its enclosure—the return of which I shall feel obliged for—was also received by you.

“To draw your Lordship’s attention more effectually to the important object of the first of those letters, I alluded in it to the *overland* trade which has been long carried on, during the short dry season of each year, between Northern Burma and the most western province of China—Yunan; and I stated that I and my son had, for many years, given our attention to the consideration of the best route by which English merchandize, in large quantities, might be expeditiously and cheaply introduced, overland, into Western China,—be brought to meet in the central and northern provinces of that Empire the advances of both Russia and America towards that portion of Asia,—and be made successfully to compete, hereafter, with their improved and still improving geographical facilities for the Chinese trade. And I will now endeavour to explain to your Lordship, as briefly as the important subject permits, *why* and *how* we consider this superior facility for British and British-Indian commerce with the most remote interior of China proper may be secured, if, in pending negotiations with the Chinese Government, your Lordship will open the commercial gate we respectfully point out to you.

“The mode by which we propose to create and *perpetuate* that beneficial increase of our national foreign trade, is both simple and easy, should it be honored with the approval and assistance of H.M.’s Government; viz.—as I have stated in a previous paper to your Lordship, by the construction of a *cheap single line of railway for commerce*, from H.M.’s new port of Rangoon on the east of the Bay of Bengal, to the northeast of the *now British-Indian* provinces of Pegu and Martaban; and thence, across the two southeastern Shan States of Ava or Burma, on to the most eligible point of the Meikong or upper Kamboja river, near to where it issues from the Chinese Yunan province, navigable, even in the dry season, for deeply laden junks. The King of Ava’s consent to this railway, and the cordial co-operation of his Government in its construction and maintenance, we will hereafter show your Lordship to be readily attainable, if sought in the manner we shall take the liberty to suggest that it should be.”

That letter and a succeeding one to him, dated the 13th of April, 1858, was thus acknowledged by the then Foreign Secretary:—

“FOREIGN OFFICE, 19th April, 1858.

“SIR,

“I am directed by the Earl of Malmesbury to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 13th instant, on the subject of overland trade with China; and in conveying to you his Lordship’s thanks for your com-

munication, I am to state to you that copies of that letter, and of your former letter of the 10th instant, will be transmitted to the Earl of Elgin, in China.

"I am, &c.

"CAPTAIN SPRYE.

"E. HAMMOND."

On the 8th of the following May, 1858, we transmitted to the Foreign Secretary another letter, setting forth further reasons why measures should be, without delay, taken by H.M.'s Government, to open the proposed overland trade with China from Rangoon; which letter his Lordship acknowledged as follows:—

"FOREIGN OFFICE, 12th May, 1858.

"SIR,

"I am directed by the Earl of Malmesbury to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 8th instant, setting forth the grounds on which you recommend that measures should be taken for constructing a cheap railway from Rangoon, across Pegu and Burma or Ava, to Western China.

"The Earl of Malmesbury will communicate your letter to the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade: and in the meanwhile he desires me to return you his thanks for having placed in his hands so interesting a document, the compilation of which does so much credit to your ability and industry.

"I am, &c.

"CAPTAIN SPRYE.

"E. HAMMOND."

Nothing further, however, resulted to the cause from that correspondence. And strange to say, in reference to the statement in the Foreign Secretary's above letter of the 19th of April, 1858,—“that copies of our letters to him of the 10th and 13th of that month, would be transmitted to the Earl of Elgin, in China;” the Parliamentary Paper of last session, “China, No. 2, 1865,” states, in its page 3,—“that there was *no* correspondence between the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the late Earl of Elgin when on either of his missions to China, on the subject of opening up a direct commerce with the West of China from the Port of Rangoon.” And certain it is, that no allusion was made in the long Treaty of Tientsin to either the opening of trade with the West of China, or the extension of the Telegraph from Pegu to Hong-Kong, &c. We continued, therefore, still to recommend those matters to the consideration of the Foreign Secretary, by letters dated the 10th of August, 2nd of September, 4th of October, 26th, 29th, and 30th of November, and 3rd of December, 1858; the last of which was thus replied to:—