

**MEMOIR OF THE EARLY
OPERATIONS OF THE BURMESE
WAR
ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF
THE UNITED SERVICE JOURNAL**

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Memoir of the Early Operations of the Burmese War Addressed to the Editor of the United Service Journal by H. Lister Maw

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H. LISTER MAW

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OF THE
EARLY OPERATIONS
OF
THE BURMESE WAR.

ADDRESSED TO THE
EDITOR OF THE UNITED SERVICE JOURNAL.

BY
H. LISTER MAW, LIEUT. R. N.
FORMERLY
NAVAL AIDE-DE-CAMP TO MAJOR-GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, G.C.B. &c.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., CORNHILL.

1832.

NOTE TO THE READER.

This account of the early Operations of the Burmese War was commenced as a Letter to the Editor of the *United Service Journal*. It has extended into a Memoir. Whether I am correct in publishing it, the Public must determine. Should it appear egotistical—for such is the nature of all memoirs—the reader must subtract accordingly. The only apology I can offer in either case, is, that the statements are true, and the intention not evil.

H. LISTER MAW.

Junior United Service Club,
January, 1832.

CONTENTS.

I.

CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO, AND PREPARATIONS FOR, THE WAR.

II.

EARLY AFFAIRS.

III.

NATURE OF THE COUNTRY; AND CHARACTER AND RESOURCES OF THE BURMANS.

MEMOIR,

&c.

TO THE

EDITOR OF THE UNITED SERVICE JOURNAL.

SIR,

THE number of your Journal for this month, January, 1832, commences after your annual preface, with a paper on the "Naval Operations of the Burmese War." Your account, however, appears to me so far from doing justice to the Navy, whilst it is most unjust to Major, now Lieutenant-Colonel Snodgrass, that I feel it little less than a duty, from the peculiar position in which I was placed—that of a naval officer lent on 'special service' to the army—to endeavour to correct some of the errors into which you have fallen.

I shall premise, by stating my opinion, that Colonel Snodgrass' work is by far the best that has

been published relative to the Burmese war, although, unfortunately for the navy, he has confined it to a journal of the operations of Sir Archibald Campbell's army, speaking of that army as a body, whilst it has been received by the public as a general history of the war.

On its publication, remarks were made by various persons, and angry complaints by the navy; I, for one, spoke to Colonel Snodgrass on the subject; and his answer was, "That his work was a journal of Sir Archibald Campbell's army; that he did not understand 'naval tactics;' and that he thought some naval man had better publish an account of their proceedings;" adding, however, "that the naval force employed was comparatively small;" and, "you know that, at one time, you were the only naval officer doing duty at Rangoon."

This was all well and true, on the part of the Colonel; but, the public having read and approved his work, it was scarcely probable that they would read and approve all, or any, of the nine hundred and ninety-nine accounts that might follow it; and, consequently, the naval man, whoever he might be, that should undertake the task, would have an additional difficulty to overcome — to obtain a hearing.

As, however, the naval force, small as it really was, had never been wanting in exertion, but had, on the contrary, struggled hard to make up by energy, for the want of physical force and numbers,

it appeared but right that some one should make the attempt ; and, in consequence of representations that were made to me—the peculiar position in which I had been placed—and my desire to see the profession to which I had the honour to belong have fair play, I endeavoured, with the approbation of one of the then Lords Commissioners of Admiralty, to arrange some notes I had previously made for publication ; they were, however, prevented from being published by another official personage.

The account since published by Lieutenant Marshall, the naval biographer, is a valuable collection of extracts from Gazettes and other documents relative to the naval operations—through which, however, you have not followed him correctly—but, as it is not merely what the navy *did*, but the difficulties to which both they and the army—they more especially—were exposed, from want of previous information, properly organized resources, and efficient equipments—that requires to be understood, and which a person not upon the spot, and unacquainted with localities, could scarcely be expected to explain ; I will endeavour to set matters right upon some points, which may tend to remove those feelings of jealousy that still appear to exist.

One of the principal difficulties to which the Commodore and his squadron were exposed was the want of timely notice of their services being required, and of the nature of the resources against

which they were to act. The Burmese war, indeed, was one of those cases which have so disastrously proved the want of common geographical and political information, for there can be little doubt, that had the governor-general possessed a correct knowledge of the character and resources of the Burmans and their country, and with which it should have been the business of his council, or other local authorities, to supply him, much of the expence and difficulty of the war might have been avoided. As it was, a power of little more than half a century's growth had been allowed to arise and extend itself to the frontiers of our East Indian possessions, anxiously awaiting a favourable moment to attack, without the local government having obtained that knowledge of their resources, or even of their position, and the nature of their country, without which it is impossible for military operations, whether offensive or defensive, to be carried on so as to ensure success with economy. An individual of low origin—I believe a huntsman—having succeeded, by a concurrence of extraordinary circumstances, in placing himself at the head of two comparatively powerful tribes, or nations; and his successors conquering their neighbours, they arrived on the frontiers of the British possessions.

For a time the known prowess of the British forces checked their proceedings, but those disquiet and ambitious feelings that have at all times marked