

THE BOWRING MISSION: THE MELLERSH NARRATIVE

by

Nicholas Tarling*

Sir John Bowring himself recognised the importance of the treaty he made with Siam in April 1855. 'The country will be absolutely revolutionised by the change, — and in a few years I doubt not there will be an enormous trade....'¹ The making of the treaty has been described in a number of works, including Bowring's own book,² an article published by me in 1962,³ and a recent publication by M. L. Manich Jumsai,⁴ which includes some additional material found in the files of the Thai Embassy in London in 1968 and now kept in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok. A recent deposit in the British Museum adds something to the story of the negotiations. This is a narrative, apparently by Captain A. Mellersh, commander of H.M. steam sloop *Rattler*, one of the vessels that accompanied the mission. The purpose of the present paper is to supplement previous publications with extracts from this narrative.

Getting the steamer up to Bangkok was seen as in itself a major diplomatic success.⁵ The *Sphinx*, accompanying Sir James Brooke's mission, had stuck on the bar of the Menam, and the mishap was thought to have contributed to Brooke's failure.⁶ The *Rattler* had difficulty, 'Vexatious!' wrote Sir John in his diary for 2 April: the *Rattler* stuck 'fast in mud and sand'.⁷ Mellersh was more than vexed, as his own diary shows.

* Professor of History, The University of Auckland, New Zealand.

- 1) Bowring to Edgar Bowring, 13 April 1855, English Mss 1228/125, John Rylands Library, Manchester.
- 2) John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam; with a narrative of the mission to that country in 1855*, 2 vols., London, 1857.
- 3) N. Tarling, 'The Mission of Sir John Bowring to Siam', *The Journal of the Siam Society*, L, 2 (December 1962), 91-118.
- 4) M.L. Manich Jumsai, *King Mongkut and Sir John Bowring*, Bangkok, 1970.
- 5) Bowring, II, 250; Jumsai, pp. 44, 57, 59-60.
- 6) Spenser St John, *The Life of Sir James Brooke*, Edinburgh and London, 1879, p. 222.
- 7) Bowring, II, 261.

No English Man of War has ever been here before. A Portuguese Ship of War once came up, but was subjected to the humiliation of taking out her guns, to which of course we would never submit. On the morning of the 2nd inst^t we weighed at 5am, and ran in under steam towards the mouth of the river which was scarcely discernible from our anchorage, in half an hour we stuck fast on the bar in soft mud [:] we had passed over the shoal part, but, from some cause which we could not discern [—] probably it [was] an under current the ship though moving freely thro' the mud and water (in 18 inches less than she drew) refused to steer, and the wind, acting of [?] the starboard quarter, pointed her head towards one side of the channel, and tho' we backed her off several times with the engines and trimmed her with the pins in various ways, nothing seemed to have the slightest effect, and in half an hour from the time of weighing she was immoveable with the tide falling from her rapidly; — she sat upright, however, as in a cradle and did not strain in the least, which relieved me from a great deal of anxiety, as the ship originally weak, has the infirmities of age creeping on, and like her Captain has gone thro' a good deal of hard work in her youth. As soon as the people had breakfasted we began to discharge the coals into some large boats which had been for two days vainly endeavouring to beat out to us against the strong sea breeze. Had they succeeded in getting to us we should most probably have got into the river without lying (as we did) a whole tide on the bar. The sun (nearly vertical) poured his rays down on us with such force that I feared the men would have suffered severely, as the awnings could only be partially spread on account of working of the the coal whips (ropes which hoist out the coal sacks), and even under the awnings the temp^{re} was nearly 90. A Merciful Providence however ordered it otherwise, and sent a cool sea breeze before noon, which though it did not lower the temp^{re} was very refreshing. It is under such circumstances as these that the folly of "under-manning" ships becomes most evident to observers and most oppressive to its victims; the ship had her full complement of men on board, and very few sick, yet such was the wretched weakness of our crew from

mere paucity of numbers, that by 3pm when the ship floated we had only got out 30 tons of coals, though I never saw men work better; we were obliged to lower all the boats down to prevent the ship straining, and the greater part of them were employed with full crews sounding all over the bar for the deepest water, and the men who were left on board were only sufficient to keep one whip going. I thought that if the civil Lords of the Admiralty were only able to see the condition we were in they would have acceded to my *twice sent in* application for twenty more men; I say the "Civil" Lords because I suppose the reason of my application (though strongly backed by the Commander in Chief) being refused, was, that the Naval Lords who must know the wretched way in which the *Rattler* was manned were over-ruled by the Civil ones. However this is a digression. With what anxiety I watched every inch the tide rose, and with what joy did I perceive her head begin to move a little about 3pm!! the fires were immediately poked up, the engines set going, all plain sail set to a strong fair wind, and She began gradually to drag thro' the mud in one foot less water than she drew, until, having passed thro' several miles of "fishing stakes" the anchor was let go in 8 fms off "Pak-nam" a town three miles from the entrance of the river. I forgot to say that the King's Pilot had been sent out to bring us in; he was a very intelligent old man, cool, firm, and decided, as a Pilot should be, and it was thro' no fault of his that the ship struck. I must also here (as I have on many previous occasions) notice the great superiority of the Screw over the paddles in helping a vessel off the ground, as when the vessel is stationary the Screw can be made to revolve with nearly as great rapidity as when she is in motion whilst the paddle cannot be got to more than half speed; I think therefore that in future we must call an old horse "an old paddle" instead of "an old screw".

Before the *Rattler* crossed the bar, the mission had been communicating with the Thais. Bowring's son John and Harry Parkes had discussions in Paknam and in Bangkok itself, and King Mongkut communicated with Sir John by letters and through his 'private ministers'.⁸

8) Jumsai, pp. 43, 45, 67ff.

During the time we were lying outside waiting for the tides to come in, the King had sent out several very friendly letters to Sir John, both public and private, with shiploads of fruit, sugar, coffee, tea dried fish, dried deer's flesh and various other things, so that the ship's company's of the two vessels were overwhelmed with good things. A very amusing incident took place resulting from our ignorance of Siamese customs; — two men dressed in the common costume of the country, i e, with the smallest possible amount of clothing came on board one day without the Interpreter, and delivered an Autograph letter from the First King in which he said "I send my private Ministers Mr Nackham Naibo" (and some one else whose name I have forgotten) [Kham Nai Pnong] with a present of fruit etc etc; no one had the slightest idea that these two men were nobles of the highest class and though they were civilly treated, no particular attention was shewn to them, until about half an hour after the Interpreter came on board and told us who they were, when every attention was shewn them; — they were very intelligent, and examined everything about the ship and engines with great minuteness asking very pertinent questions on every thing they saw; and displaying an amount of knowledge, certainly not inferior to that displayed by the average of English visitors to a ship at Spithead or the Nore etc etc, and which astonished us as possessed by men whose whole costume consisted of one scanty garment, and shewed us that men may be very intelligent tho' they do not wear shirts...

Bowring landed at Paknam on 3 April,⁹ though Mellersh ascribes the event to the following day. The compromise agreed on with the Thais² was that the envoy should go up to Bangkok on state boats, the *Rattler* following the next day.¹⁰

Next morning Ap^l 4th Sir John landed under a salute from the ship, yards manned etc etc, and was received by a Guard of Honor of about 500 men equipped in European style, the word of command being given in English, and a band of European instruments making a very respectable attempt to play our National Anthem when the

9) Bowring, II, 262.

10) *ibid.*, 260; Jumsai, p. 60.

Guard presented arms;—they also managed a tolerable salute of the same number of guns as the ship fired when His Excellency left. A sort of Chamberlain (an old Portuguese gentleman dressed in an old Windsor Uniform given him by Sir Jas. Brooke) conducted Sir John to a new Bungalow built for the occasion, in the centre of which was erected a Dais a considerable height from the ground; the “Phra-Kalahom” or Prime Minister received His Excellency at the top of the stairs, and conducted him to his seat in the centre, which was a handsome gilt chair, with splendid cushions of crimson velvet; pipes and coffee were brought, and after they had once replenished, business was begun, and it was soon arranged that the “Kalahom” should return the visit at 10-30 am, and that the First King’s boats should be ready to take Sir John and his Suite at Noon, and that the ship should follow to Bangkok the following day. During this short interview we had an opportunity of seeing some of the customs of this singular people, one of the most remarkable of which is the “crouching” attitude that each man is obliged to observe to his superior, in fact a complete prostration, and this is so common, indeed universal that the elbows and knees of all the population are quite callous, the two Kings being the only persons in the Kingdom of Siam that are not called on to prostrate themselves (with the exception of the Priests). An immense crowd collected close round the base of the Dais, the Bungalow being quite open, gaping with great interest on the strangers, but perfectly well behaved. We were all seated in chairs, as well as the “Kalahom” and a few other Nobles of equal rank, but all the others were prostrate, and it was painful to see the servants crawling on the floor on their knees and one hand when required to bring any thing to their masters. Each nobleman has a gold box for his tobacco, another for his “beetle-nut”, another for his match, and several more, besides a gold, (or silver inlaid with gold) teapot for water, a servant or “bearer” is attached to each, and always attends with them, and whilst the master is stationary these boxes are all put down on the floor; when the King creates a Nobleman, he also gives him a set of these boxes which constitute his right to the title. About 9 am we returned on board to breakfast, and just after we had finished another breakfast

consisting of very savoury currys, and stews, roasts, haricots, and ragouts, to the number of nearly thirty dishes, amongst which were two good sized pigs roasted whole, with loads of fruit, was sent off as a present; we just tasted some of the dishes which we found excellent, and then served them out to the Ship's Company. At 10.30 am, punctually, the "Phra-Kalahom" came on board (with one or two other Nobles); he is very good looking and highly intelligent in countenance; he understands English, but will not speak it; his manners are as polished as if he had lived in the highest European Society all his life, and he bowed to the Guard when they presented arms to him with a dignity that I have often missed in great men of more civilised countries; after looking round the ship, displaying quietly a great deal of knowledge about everything, he departed, saying that the boats should be ready for us by noon.

Punctually to the time they came, His Majesty's own boat for Sir John having for "figure head" a Gigantic Image of Budda, with a flag in each hand; the stern of the boat was finished off into a Dragon's tail, and the canopy was richly carved and gilt outside, with silk curtains and crimson velvet cushions; 60 rowers, or I should say paddlers propelled the boat with wonderful swiftness, and though they were dressed in a picturesque uniform of red caps red loose cloth jackets, and trousers of the same, reaching to the knee they did not seem to feel exertion so much as the fact that the temperature was near 90 would have led us to expect.

All the other boats to the number of 20 which took the Suite, the Guard, and the baggage were of the same kind but less ornamented; every now and then the "paddlers" broke out into a wild song keeping remarkably good time during which they pulled with greater energy, and only had one real rest during the voyage to Bangkok (30 miles) in a fearful sun (no awnings) a good lunch was provided for them and a sumptuous repast for us, when about one third of the way up, which was welcome to us all; at 6 pm we arrived at Bangkok, and were glad to find the house appointed for the use of the Embassy a very comfortable one in Indo-European style, and the beds quite luxurious. This house was built by a

Scotch Merchant a Mr. Hunter for a residence and warehouse but somehow it came into the First King's possession and Mr. Hunter's son, was employed by His Majesty to prepare it for the reception of Sir John and his Suite.

An excellent dinner was provided for us, quite in European stule, and as we had good musquito curtains to our beds, and our apartments were very airy, we enjoyed a comfortable night's rest of which we stood in much need after our hot and fatiguing day. We were obliged to keep so completely under the canopy for protection from the sun that we could not make many observations on the appearance of the river; the little however that we did observe of the banks, was that they were thickly covered with jungle to the water's edge, except where the towns and villages stood which however were not very numerous.

Mellersh had gone up to Bangkok with Bowring and lodged the night in the 'English factory', the house built by Robert Hunter, a Scots merchant who had incurred the displeasure of King Rama III.¹¹ One reason was to arrange for the salute which it was hoped the *Rattler* would fire on its arrival. Bowring wanted to make the steamer's presence known, which he believed would assist him in his negotiations. Some of the Thais opposed it, fearing the effect on the populace. The result was another compromise: a salute would be fired, but notice would be given.¹²

April 4th. The ship came up today. I went up with Sir John yesterday as it was not settled when we started how far she should come or about the salute to be fired when she did come; I therefore met her at the place for her to anchor, and the salute was fired (21 guns). The 1st King had objected to the salute being fired so close to the city (the ship was anchored a mile below it) on the ostensible grounds that his subjects would be so frightened that they would suppose we had come to attack them; the news would spread up the country, and that some of the provinces whose allegiance

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- 11) R. Adey Moore, 'An Early British Merchant in Bangkok', *The Journal of the Siam Society*, XI, 2 (1914-15), 25, 33. Neon Snidvongs, 'The Development of Siamese Relations with Britain and France in the Reign of Maha Mongkut', Ph.D. thesis University of London, 1961, p. 136.
- 12) Tarling, 97; Jumsai, pp. 70-71.

was not very firm would take advantage of the supposed diversion in their favor, and rise in insurrection; he yielded however to our arguments and statements that it was the custom to interchange salutes amongst all nations which were on terms of amity, and the salute was fired;—in the morning at daylight I had taken a walk, and lost myself amid temples and Monasteries (Budhist), which are very numerous and some of them on a very grand scale; the people were all extremely friendly and I felt quite as much in security as if I had been walking in London: at daylight the streets and river swarm with Buddhist Priests dressed in their dirty looking yellow uniform; by their vows they are obliged to get their food by begging cooked victuals, and each one goes about with a large iron or metal bowl on one hip under his long yellow garment; at all the crossings, and corners of the streets women and children are stationed with large bowls of smoking rice and plantains; perhaps a troop of five priests may come by they give each one a little and wait for the next troop, and so on until the provision is exhausted; these Priests are all fat and greasy, but have a look of degradation about them and seemed ashamed of their calling, which however can hardly be the case, as the highest Princes, and even the Kings become Priests for a short time, it not being considered respectable not to have been a Priest for some period of life. The First King was a Priest 25 years, indeed the whole time that his illegitimate Brother usurped the Throne, and no doubt he saved his life by it;—during this time he studied the English language which he now reads speaks and writes very well, astronomy in which he has made wonderful progress, and I believe in mathematics and mechanics; the 2nd King who is his Brother was a Priest for three months; he also kept himself in retirement during the usurpation and devoted himself to all sorts of learning; he speaks English perfectly, and writes it correctly; he is a good astronomer, a very scientific Navigator, and his practical knowledge of Mechanics may be judged of by the fact that he built with his own hands a boat, made an engine for her, and worked her in the river;—he is also European in his *mind*; he has about 30 wives, as according to Siamese notions it is not reputable

to have *less* than that number, but his First Wife is his real one and treated by him as an English Wife is by her husband for some of the American Missionaries told me that She sits in a chair and works by his side, whereas all other Siamese wives are obliged to crouch before their Lords in the abject manner which I have described before as used by men to the superiors; the First King who during his 25 years of Priesthood was vowed to celibacy, has 600 wives;—his Queen died in Child birth two years ago, and now none of his wives are of sufficient rank to be his Queen, so he has no Heir though three of his Wives each presented him with a son nearly at the same hour on the same day a short time before our arrival;—his Brother the 2nd King is therefore heir presumptive to the Throne, and as he is a very good man it is to be hoped that the First King will not find a Lady of sufficient rank to be his Queen.

The ship came up to the place appointed her at noon, and I went to meet her, and to carry out all the formalities that had been agreed upon;—accordingly a salute was fired and returned by a battery on shore;—I found some of the highest Nobles on board who evinced a great deal of knowledge of every thing they saw, and were very much gratified by seeing the engines put in motion expressly for them; as the ship was light they saw the working of the Screw and as I had a little model of it in the cabin they soon understood it perfectly.....

While negotiations proceeded, a number of functions were arranged. These included a public audience on 12 April at a religious ceremony of Totkathin at Wat Arun.¹³ Negotiations and functions in fact clashed. So busy were the nobles with preparations for the ceremony that a meeting of the negotiators was put off. Bowring believed it was a deliberate attempt to obstruct the conclusion of the treaty and threatened not to attend the ceremony. But apparently he was mistaken.¹⁴

Mellersh attended the ceremony with him, though his diary again misdates it.

13) Jumsai, p. 76.

14) Bowring, II, 297-8; Jumsai, p. 86.

April 13th Went in grand procession to see the First King go in great State to worship at the "tombs of Ancestors" a ceremony that is very strictly performed by Budhists;—the First King however merely does it to keep well with his subjects for he told Sir John that his knowledge of astronomy had led him to disbelieve in any Religions; the scientific knowledge of the Second King has on the contrary given him a leaning to Christianity as I gather from the Missionaries and from seeing the Bible and other Religious books in his library. The ceremony took place in one of the most beautiful temples here; we were seated on chairs, whilst all the Nobles, as well as every one else were in the abject state of prostration I have before described; not far from us were three women nursing the King's Infant son, a quick pretty child about 3 or 4 years old, dressed in a very superb "Pau-Noong" and loaded with gold chains and bangles; the moment the Prince, the King's Brother shewed himself the women left the child to the care of two men, by whom he was conducted to his Father, who is dotingly fond of him; soon after we followed the Prince and all the highest Nobles to the shelter of a Canopy that had been erected near the throne;—when the King came, down on their knees and elbows went all the Nobles just in the attitude of frogs about to leap, whilst we stood upright and respectfully took off our hats as the King passed; a sort of band played "God save the Queen" as he came along in his gorgeous chair of state carried by a number of men, whilst a host of others carried silk and gilt umbrellas, fans, and screens; he bowed to Sir John in passing and when he ascended his Throne we sat down on the Persian carpet spread for us in front of him; soon after he was seated his child was brought to him; and then he spoke to Sir John in broken English which he writes much more correctly than he speaks;—it is wonderful however that he should speak so well considering the little practice he has in speaking: He said first, "This is my Royal state dress which I wear when I worship at the Tombs of my Fathers";—amongst other things he said "Some of the officers with you, are civil, and some Military", to which Sir John assented;—some of the Suite were dressed in plain blue coats with

uniform buttons (their proper dress);—he then asked which were the Commanders of the two “men of war”, and bowed to Keane and myself when pointed out to him.

After a short pause he asked us if we should like to see the Interior of the Temple in which he had just been worshipping, to which Sir John assented for us, and his Majesty left the throne for the State Chair in which he was carried to his boat, in which the Chair was put on a raised place made for it, and then the Royal Cortège set out on their return to the Palace, which is on the opposite side of the river, in the same order in which it came. . . .

Negotiations proceeded to a conclusion. Mellersh relaxed.

In the evening I went up the river amongst the floating ships, and as I was coming down we heard very sweet music proceeding from some of the floating houses, and stopped the boat to listen, when the owner came out in his Pah-noong and courteously invited us to come in; he was an oldish man and turned out to be a “Phra” i.e. one of the highest Nobles, and head of the Second King’s Police; to our surprise and pleasure we found that no less than ten of his wives (eight of whom were very young (one 14) and for Siamese pretty) were the Musicians we heard; he immediately drew out a sofa for us to sit on, gave us cigars, and *ordered* his wives to play a tune, which they did keeping excellent time, tho’ as they have no written music, it was monotonous; he then desired the youngest, who appeared to be the chief wife, to sing, which she did accompanying herself on an instrument with two strings, using an ivory pin to touch the strings instead of her fingers;—She sang very sweetly, and, we thought improvised a song about us. The old gentleman, who has the reputation of being very jealous of his wives, did not exhibit the least feeling of that kind towards us, but invited us into the inner room where the wives sat, to examine the instruments, and to take them out of the Ladies hands. Four were strong instruments, three others were like canoes with pieces of bamboo (strung together) laid over both edges, those in the middle being the broadest, and producing the deep notes;—sound is made by striking them with a kind of small drumstick;—there was also a kind of

drum in the shape of a bottle, or vase, into which the left hand was inserted, whilst the fingers of the right hand, act as a drumstick: there was also a tambourine played by a very old woman whilst some exceedingly sweet cymbals were played by a young girl of 9 or 10. Whilst we were there one of the other wives came up out of the water dripping like a Mermaid, and retired to an inner apartment, from whence she issued in two minutes in dry clothes, the simple toilet of these Ladies not occupying so much time as that of European Belles; and as they have no hair on their heads except a little on the top, which is cut in shape and length like an inverted blacking brush, no time is consumed by brushing out the "back hair"; both men and women bathe several times a day, going into the water with their clothes on, and putting on dry ones when they come out; in fact they are a very clean people quite the antipodes in this respect to their Chinese Neighbours, who even in the hottest weather are very little given to the use of water, and in the cold weather they never use it, consequently are very much afflicted with skin diseases, wh.^h we never saw in Siam. We stayed an hour and went away very much gratified, and strongly impressed with the notion that if these people had instruction they would be excellent musicians for their voices were very sweet, and both with them and the instruments they kept good time, tho' their singing was rather monotonous.

A public reception followed on 16 April. Bowring describes its 'barbaric grandeur'.¹⁵ One possible issue was the wearing of swords in the royal presence; but no difficulties were in fact made.¹⁶

April 16th We went in full dress this day in the suite of Sir John, with all the State boats in gorgeous array, and I feel that I can give but a very imperfect idea of the pomp and splendor of the scene.

On landing we were met by a number of Siamese sedan chairs which are different from any I have ever seen, as the passenger sits

15) Bowring, II, 306ff.

16) Jumsai, pp. 74, 77; Bowring, II, 307-8.

sideways, we each had four bearers, except Sir John who had eight, and four more carrying an enormous crimson silk umbrella over his head.

When we arrived at the gates of the Palace Garden, we alighted, and formed in order as arranged before starting;—here we were met by a Guard of honor of about 5,000 men, who on our arrival at a certain spot “presented arms” whilst their band played “God save the Queen”;—as soon as that ceased, about 200 Native drums began beating in single taps but all together which had a very singular effect; and some shrill instrument, very like the highland bagpipes, played with increasing strength as we approached the Hall of Audience, in which were the Thrones of the Two Kings; all the Elephants were drawn up in array, dressed in their gorgeous clothing, and “salaamed” as Sir John passed; indeed every thing, was done to shew attention to the English Plenipotentiary that could have been done to a crowned head. All the Nobles were assembled, and the King entering his Throne (which was in a sort of enclosure and very much elevated above that of the Second King who was not present) from behind, as we entered the doors of the Hall, down they all went into the “frog-like” attitude I have before described; we *sat* down on the floor, on a beautiful Persian carpet, and Sir John had a large cushion covered with crimson velvet under him, as had all the Nobles. Sitting with the feet towards a superior is considered in Siam as an insult, which we did not know till afterwards, but they did not even mention the circumstance to us, but I suppose kindly “imputed it to our ignorance”; no one before had been allowed to come into the King’s presence with a sword on, and this had been the subject of some discussion, as when the Officers of the Indian Navy were here with Sir Jas^s Brooke they consented to leave their swords; Keane and I agreed that we as the Queen’s Officers could not do so, neither in my opinion ought the Indian Officers to have submitted to it. The dresses of the Nobles were rich beyond description, and as every one of them (about 500) had had his gold bowls and boxes ranged beside him there was a very magnificent display. The king had on a black velvet or silk cap, with an enormous

diamond in front and his finger rings had in them diamonds of large size; the Hall of Audience was supported on large spare pillars painted so as to look like papering; against these were hung European Prints, one of the Queen; on each side of the Throne which was richly carved and gilt, stood two enormous white umbrellas, wh^h here, as in Burmah are the insignia of Royalty; under each of these was a raised seat, that on the right was the highest, and had a gilt chair with rails round it for the Second King when he sits in Council. The Kings Sons and Brothers were on their "all fours" next; then on the left the Nobles in their gradations of Rank. As soon as Sir John was seated he read an address to the King in English thanking him for having made a Treaty which would be beneficial both to England and Siam; it was then translated to him by the Interpreter, and he asked to see the paper which Sir John had read; he read it attentively, and after having read it, said "I did not understand it as you spoke, but by reading it, I understand it perfectly." He then made some other observations both in English and Siamese, some of which latter did not seem to please the Prime Minister, as I saw him "pish" once or twice, and knit his brow several times as the King proceeded. After some more conversation the King took out his opera glass and eyed us all very attentively for some time; he then told Sir John he would send him lithographs of the new White Elephant, and a peice (sic) of the skin of the old one which died; he then bowed and withdrew, and all the Nobles sat up, but they did not stand up until we went out, though I do not know that their movements were at all controlled by ours. We saw some of the 600 wives peeping at us thro' the Jalousies, but we could not discern their faces. I feel that I have failed in giving even a faint idea of the gorgeousness of the scene; in fact it was bewildering, and I felt after I left it and got home as if recovering from a dream of some tale in the Arabian Nights.

It is a wonderful thing to hear the King of a Country so little known and heard of as Siam, speaking and writing English better than nine foreigners out of ten who live within 50 miles of our country. . . .

In the evening there was a private function.

On the evening of the First Kings audience we went to a private party at his palace where we had tea and coffee, and then His Majesty shewed us his Crown which is of Gold studded with diamonds and other precious stones; it weighs four pounds; the King told us it was made by his Father, (but I have forgotten the reception). The King met us at the entrance of the Palace and shook hands with us all in a very friendly way. He was dressed in a Pah-noong with a beautifully (gold) embroidered jacket from India, and gold-embroidered sandals, and wore outside his dress the splendid Gold watch set with diamonds, that Sir John had brought as a present from the Queen; amongst the things we brought was a Planetary System, shewing the motions of the Planets, and the King explained the motions of the Heavenly bodies much better than I, or I believe any one present could have done in very grammatical English and when some Latin words were made use of, he said "that is the Latin for so & so"; he then took us to a table and shewed us some curiosities (to us) amongst which was a most beautiful miniature desk made in China after a model designed by himself, and made by his hands; also a gold pen and pencil case made in his Palace after Mordan's, and exquisitely finished.

Mellersh, like other members of the mission, met the Second King.

Last Sunday the Second King sent to Keane and me an invitation to lunch with him and a request to bring some of the officers of the two ships with us; we accordingly went four from each ship (nearly all the Grecians officers came up the river in the Rattler) in our own boats.

We were met by Captain Knox the Second King's "Factotum", who drills his troops etc. etc. This gentleman was formerly in the English army, once in the 65th Regt. but getting into some scrape found it convenient to sell out;—he does not appear to be very comfortable here, and tho' he does not make quite the same prostration as the Nobles, he is obliged to do a good deal in that line.

Several carriages (one with a pair of horses), of different kinds were sent down to the Jetty for us, but as a one-horse open carriage appeared to be on the best springs, Kean^a and I put ourselves into that, and were soon taken up to the gate of the enclosure, in which the Palace of the Second King is situated; we were then taken by Captain Knox to His Majesty's "European House" over the gate of which was painted in large golden letters "Royal Pleasure Hall". the Second King received me, Standing, in a Saloon fitted up plainly (for a King) but neatly in English style, and having taken us thro' several rooms we sat down to Tiffin in the Saloon, where we had some delightful coffee, of native growth, and a great variety of dishes, very well cooked, many of them quite new to us, as were also many of the fruits;—the 2^d King spoke English with scarcely an accent, though he appeared rather diffident; he was dressed very plainly in a black silk kind of jacket and trowsers, with embroidered velvet shoes;—after tiffin he took us into his study, and shewed us his chronometers of which he has three by the best London Makers; he asked what we made the Lat and Longitude, which he wrote down giving us his also, which I believe was nearer the truth as the weather has not been favourable for making observations since we had been here; he had also some excellent Sextants and a reflecting Circle, and asked us what methods we used in working Lunars and other problems in nautical astronomy; he then took us into his model room where he had a very pretty model (working) of a paddle steamer and we were astonished to learn that he has built a small boat, made the engines for her, and worked her in the river all with his own hands; I believe (indeed there is no doubt of it) that he understands more about a steam engine than I do, for I could not make a steam engine if it was to save my life;—we then were shewed two statues one of Wellington, one of Napoleon; the latter is tolerable, but poor Wellington is almost as great a fright as he is on Southsea common;—considering however that the Second King is entirely a self taught genius and that he had only engravings to model from, these statues may be considered very good, and the likenesses are tolerably preserved.

Much of his information Mellersh clearly derived from the American missionaries in Bangkok. One of them accompanied him on another social visit. The identity of the host is not clear. It may have been the Somdet Ong Yai, the Kralahom and Phraklang of Rama III's reign. But Mellersh's description does not tally with the description given in the journal kept by young Bowring and Harry Parkes, which speaks of the Somdet's 'formality and constraint'.¹⁷

One evening I went to sup with a jolly old fellow the Kings half Brother [He gave me the accompanying card with his name in Siamese and English R M] a "Somdech" pronounced "Somdet"; he had a male band who played very sweet music on their native Instruments, but, as before monotonous from want of written music; an American Missionary Mr Mattoon went with me to interpret as the Prince did not speak, though he understood English a little; he displayed a great deal of intelligence and though he was a General his questions were almost entirely about Naval matters;— he had been a good deal on board the "Rattler", and had observed that order and routine which is only to be observed in a ship of war, and asked me if we had written rules to guide us; on my telling him that we had "Printed Instructions", he asked if I could give him a copy, which of course I could not; I told him however that if he had only made known his wish a little sooner I would have had some of the book copied out for him;—he made another remarkable observation, shewing how the character of our Nation is damaged by some of our worthless countrymen he said "You and Captain Keane [of the *Grecian*] have given me a very different idea of an English 'Sea Captain' from what I had before, as all the English Captains who come here drink and fight and make such disturbances". Of course he now understood that we were Servants of the Queen, and he had quite penetration enough to observe that we were a different class of men from the "Ship Captains" who had brought our country into disrepute at Siam; about ten we left after a pleasant evening, and when I got down to my gig I found the]

17) Journal of the Mission, 6 April, Enclosures No. 15 in Bowring to Clarendon, 28 April 1855, No. 144, F. 0.17/229, Public Record Office.

Prince had sent me an "Elephant cushion" and some coolers as a present; these cushions are so called because they are the shape of the inclined planes, against which the Elephants recline when they lie down, and very comfortable cushions they are. The American Missionaries we met here are all of the Baptist persuasion, and appear to be very good men; most if not all, have been educated as medical men, medical knowledge being such a great help to missionary work; Mr. Mattoon told me that the Second King was more European in his mind and tastes than his Royal Brother, and that he had fallen in love with his wife in quite an European, and even romantic way; I say his Wife, for though he has thirty wives, (it not being considered respectable in Siam to have less than that number) he treats his first Wife only, as a Wife in England is treated, the others a la Siam. His First Wife sits in a chair by his side whilst he reads, a thing unknown in Siam elsewhere, as a woman is always obliged to keep her head lower than her Lord's even if he is sitting on the floor; it is supposed too that he has a strong leaning to Christianity, if he is not secretly a Christian; I saw in his library a large edition of the Bible, the life of Our Saviour, lives of the Apostles, and other books of that kind, (besides a great number of Scientific books amongst which I believe every work which has ever been written on Navigation). It is to be hoped that he will come to the Throne after his Brother for there are very few such enlightened Princes as he is to be found in any part of the world. His marriage with his First Wife was a very romantic affair; I have said before that all the Princes and Nobles enter the Priesthood at some period of their [lives], tho' few remain in it long; the shortest period is I believe three months; the Second King was undergoing this short term, when in one of the morning begging expeditions he encountered a pretty, young and modest girl, standing with her bowl of rice for the Priests, and at the end of his Priesthood sought Her out, and married Her, and now treats Her almost if not quite as Wives in England are treated;—he shewed us some very beautiful rifles (minie,) pistols muskets and swords, and conversed on all topics of European interest with great intelligence; he takes in

regularly some English papers and periodicals amongst which is I think the Illustrated London News. We spent a very pleasant afternoon, and regretted much that the Second King had not ventured to come on board the "Rattler" which he was on the point of doing, but on account of some jealousy, (which we could not understand,) on the part of the First King he gave it up for fear it might be misconstrued.

The treaty was signed on 17 April. Bowring had determined to leave by the next spring tide, whether or not he succeeded in concluding it.¹⁸ The *Rattler*, with its apprehensive commander, dropped down the river the same day.

April 17th. This was the day fixed for the signing of the Treaty, and though it was past the New Moon, I waited to celebrate the affair by a Salute, and dressing the ship, so as to give it as much importance as possible. At 10 am Sir John, his Suite Keane and myself, and some of the Officers of both ships went to the Palace of the "Phra-Klang" i.e. (High) "Minister for foreign affairs, [""] (we of course to be witnesses) to see the signing and sealing of the Treaty; five Commissioners affixed their seals; they do not sign, because they have no names;—in Youth they call their Children, "Cat" "Dog" ["] monkey" etc etc, and afterwards individuals are described by some peculiarity such as White, black, etc etc; these in time will I daresay become Patronymics, which they will find necessary when their commerce with other nations increases. As soon as the last signature was put to the First of the four copies of the Treaty, the Siamese Flag was hoisted on the Palace Flag-staff, when the Flags on board the "Rattler" were "broke", and the first of 21 guns was fired, the same number being fired by a battery on shore, and indeed the Treaty is worth the Powder, as it has opened to our trade one of the richest countries of the world. As soon as this was done I took leave of all the Nobles present, who were all very friendly, whilst the Phra-Kalahom, and the Prince "Luang-Wong-Sa", the King's Brother were very warm in

18) Bowring, II, 283.

the expressions of Friendship saying they hoped to see me here again, the latter begging me to write to him. As soon as I got on board we weighed and as the ship was lying with her head up the river to the strong ebb tide, and the river was much too narrow to turn opposite the Embassy, we were obliged to go up as high as the Second King's landing place, to the great dismay of the Pilot, and of several Nobles who had come on board to see the Engines working. Our old Musical friend came out with a spyglass and all his Wives to look at us, and as he was the Head of the Second Kings Palace our Pilot (who having been educated in England spoke English perfectly) went about with his head bent bown as if he was doing some great piece of roguery. I believe that he, knowing how suspicious his Rulers were, was afraid that it might be supposed he was piloting us with a view to our learning the depth of water; the river was about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile broad, but owing to the effect of a strong wind acting on the Flags and awnings, and provoking eddies, the ship would not turn round, and after putting several respectable families in a great fright, first with the flying jib boom, and then the spanker boom poking into their parlour windows, we were obliged to anchor, (like S^t Paul) "by the stern ["] and let her swing round.

As we went rapidly down the river with the ebb tide, crowds of people were on the tops of all the houses both on shore and afloat to gaze on a spectacle they had never witnessed before; as a tier of ships was anchored right in the middle of the stream we were obliged to go so close to the floating houses that our yards were right over them, and as the wind took our smoke in the direction of the wooden houses, they threw water over the wooden roofs with great energy; this was not without need, as we were burning wood and the sparks came thick from the funnel. We however passed all the habitations in safety and arrived off Paknam (where we anchored the night we entered the river) soon after dark; here we changed our Pilot for one who was to take us over the bar on the morrow.

April 19th. Before daylight we weighed and having dragged the ship thro' the mud in one foot less water than She drew, never going less than 5 knots, we anchored just outside the bar at 6.30 am to my great relief; for had we stuck on the bar we should have remained there for another fortnight, and besides the delay, might have injured the ship;—my anxiety now was to get the coals which we had taken out to enable the ship to recross the bar, as we had scarcely any on board, and it is 800 miles from Siam to Singapore. April 22^d Sunday. Sir John and his Suite reembarked and it was arranged that the First King's letter to our Most Gracious Queen should be received on the morrow with great solemnity according to Siamese Customs, and that we should start immediately afterwards if all the coals were off;—

Monday April 23rd There was still some 30 tons of coals to get on board which were still some miles distance to leeward; about 10 am they came alongside, and at the same time the First King's Schooner anchored close to us with the Interpreter and the High Nobles who were to present the Letter written by His Majesty to Our Most Gracious Queen; I will first describe the letter; it was encased in a large official envelope, covered with gilt nearly the thickness of a man's thumb nail; it was addressed as well as written in English;—the translation of it into Siamese was engraved on a solid gold plate, the metal being nearly pure; I believe the engraving was by the King's own hand as well as the writing of the letter; now for the ceremony of presenting it;—had the ship been *in* the river, all the State boats would have come in procession with the letter, but it would not have been safe to have had them in the open roadstead;—so the letter was sent out in the Schooner in which came also the Nobles who were to present it, and the Band. When every thing was ready Sir John came on deck in his robes, and Captain Keane, myself, and the Officers of the two ships in swords epaulettes etc etc, the whole Ship's Company aft, and the Marines under arms; two Siamese boats were close to the ship with a Siamese band of about thirty instruments; the letter in a rich solid gold casket, of handsome workmanship was then conveyed from the

gangway by the two nobles appointed for the purpose who walked in stately pace to where Sir John stood, and making a short speech delivered at Sir John who briefly replied; at his last word the Marines presented arms, the drum beat a March, and the First of 21 guns was fired, and thus the ceremony was concluded; but I have forgotten to mention that whilst the Casket was in process of conveyance from the gangway to Sir John the Siamese band struck up, and continued until the salute began;—the music however, was not of the pleasant kind we heard from the Ladies in the river, the chief sounds being apparently produced by a kind of “bag pipes”;—it may have arisen from the Musicians being unaccustomed to play on a boat kicking about in a good deal of sea.

Vast quantities of fruit sugar, tea, dried fish, and dried venison were sent out by the King as presents, and when we had cleared the Schooner of all, our friends took their leave, and we set to work to get in the remainder of our coals, which however we did not quite accomplish until 8 am on Tuesday the 24th (next day) when we took the Grecian in tow and steered for Singapore; in consequence of which towing our coals were consumed (nearly) when we were yet 100 miles from that place, (tho we only towed Grecian 36 hours), and on Sunday 29th we were obliged to put into an island to cut wood, enough of which we did not get until 8 am on the 1st May when we started for Singapore; but the wood burned so badly that even with the help of the sails we could not go more than 5^{kts}, fortunately we had a full moon and clear weather so that we went into Singapore as well as if it had been day, and anchored at 3 am, well outside, when I went to bed quite exhausted, and was in a heavy sleep at 6 am when Wrey the 1st Lieutenant rushed down and shouted in my ears “the Emperor of Russia is dead and You are Posted”. . . .