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Journey Round Siam: Discussion

Author(s): Hugh Low, F. A. Swettenham, F. Verney, J. G. Scott, R. L. Morant and Mr. Black

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Before the papers were read, the PRESIDENT said: We are honoured this evening by the presence of the Prince of Siam, son of his Majesty the King of Siam. The papers to be read are on kindred subjects. The first by Mr. Clifford,* on some of the Malay States on the eastern side of the peninsula—about which we are almost in complete ignorance, I think, until we shall have heard his paper; and the other will be an account of a very interesting journey round Siam, by Mr. Black, of her Majesty's consular service in Siam. I will now ask Mr. Clifford to read his paper.

After the reading of the papers, the following discussion took place:—

SIR HUGH LOW: I am afraid I can add very little to what Mr. Clifford said in his admirable paper. I don't know that part of the country well, having only visited parts of it. Mr. Clifford has travelled through it, and, I suppose, knows it better than any other person who has ever been in it. He came to the country, where I was at the time, about twelve years ago, when quite a young man, and at once showed his great powers of endurance by going into the jungle in all kinds of weather; and he has told us how he forced himself to live upon the native food, which I don't think any other person could have done, and carried out the expedition he undertook with so little difficulty. He is about to go back to these countries, and, although Pahang has not been under the care of British officers long, I have not the least doubt that, when he has been there for a short time, we shall have great improvements by federation with the most prosperous states on the western side of the Peninsula; and federation will enable Pahang to be developed, a policy which has been successful—as all our policy has been lately—so successful that scarcely anything can be compared with it in recent history. It is not for us to talk about the commercial advantages of the place, but the jungles, and the country through which Mr. Clifford travelled, really contain some of the most glorious scenery, the richest botanical products, and the most beautiful zoological productions in the world. Mr. Black mentioned the peacocks. These are far more handsome than those we have in England; it is a most glorious bird. I don't think I can say anything which would add to our knowledge, but I am sure that this Society will wish Mr. Clifford every possible success in this most important post to which he has been appointed, as Resident at Pahang—that country which is said to contain minerals in abundant quantities, which are already profitably produced, though scarcely prospected at all by Europeans. They are crudely worked by the Chinese and Siamese, but could be produced in greater abundance than in any other part of the world; and I have not the least doubt that many other rich productions will soon be developed now that this federation is under the protection of officers who are going to take charge of it.

THE PRESIDENT: We also, I believe, have to welcome here this evening the presence of Mr. Swettenham, who has been kind enough to bring some interesting curiosities from the Malay Peninsula, and I trust he will address you on some part of the subject Mr. Clifford has brought before us.

MR. F. A. SWETTENHAM: There are one or two things I should like to say, not so much with reference to Mr. Clifford's paper, because he has said all there is to be said. His journey was very remarkable, and I am specially glad to be here this evening, because I think I may claim some credit for having suggested to this Society that they should ask Mr. Clifford to read this paper. I should like to say, with reference to the geographical portion of the question, that Mr. Clifford has been able to fill up a blank space on the map. Twenty years ago the map showed

* Mr. Clifford's paper will be published in a subsequent number.

only the outline; since that time we have done something to fill up all the western part of it; but until the other day—I speak of last year—the part that is now filled up was quite blank, and this Mr. Clifford and his friends have done. I hope this Society will put it in the way of being seen by the public. If the Royal Geographical Society would aid the efforts that are being made in the East by a sister society, a branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, we might in a short time get a really good map of the Malay Peninsula. As I said, twenty years ago nobody thought it worth while to try and fill in any part of the Malay Peninsula. Sir Hugh Low reminded us that we must not discuss commercial topics here, but I trust that, as we are a nation of shopkeepers, you will forgive me if I allude to matters which are, in a way, commercial. Our interest in the Peninsula has been forced upon us. The British Government for many years absolutely refused to have anything whatever to do with the Malay Peninsula. We were established in a few small places marked in bright red on the map. The British had a colony, and outside that they declined to go, until the state of things in what I may call the Hinterland became so bad that we were compelled to go in against the wishes of the British Government. The result of our going there has been that we have done a great deal of good. The places which yielded a very small revenue indeed ten years ago, \$400,000, now yield \$8,000,000, the colony itself only yielding \$4,000,000. The colony is more than a hundred years old, and we have been in the Malay Peninsula only twenty years. There is not a railway in the colony, and we have 200 miles inside the Malay States. I ask your pardon for mentioning these commercial matters, but they are of some importance. I hope that, by means of the scheme for federation which has lately been sanctioned by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, we shall be able to so extend these railways that by-and-by the Malay Peninsula will become quite an important place, and that Malacca will become the port for the valuable mineral and agricultural products of the Peninsula. All that is due to one great fact which I think we are far too apt to forget, which is, that our presence in the Straits of Malacca is due to the foresight of one man, Sir Stamford Raffles. Everybody who knows anything about his life must recognize that he is one of the greatest Englishmen that ever lived, probably the greatest who ever got as far as he did, and I fear one whose history, character, and career have been the least recognized and least known, although whatever we are and whatever we shall be in the Straits of Malacca is really due to his great foresight and desire to advance the interests of this country.

Mr. F. VERNEY: I have really nothing to add to the very excellent remarks which have been made by those who have had the opportunity of serving in that distant and most interesting country. Perhaps I may be allowed to say a word with regard to the relations which have recently been established between England and France in the country of Siam. I must not trench on the question of politics, but would say this, that we must fervently hope that the arrangement may tend to the advancement and progress of the country, which we have so much at heart. I hope that no one here will think for a moment that commercial rivalry need be co-existent with a kind of commercial hostility. I think there is plenty of room for healthy commercial rivalry in this great country, and we should not in the least deny to France the rights we claim. We hope, by advancing in healthy rivalry, we may, without doing any harm to the king and country of Siam, go ahead in a way advantageous to Siam itself, and not disadvantageous, but of great gain, to the two commercial countries which have their interests so largely developed in Indo-China. We must have been immensely interested by the excellent papers we have heard. It requires splendid health, first-rate temper, a knowledge of the language of the country, and great experience, to produce such

good explorers as we have listened to to-night, and Englishmen, going into these countries, and making nothing of the toil and hardships they go through, giving such excellent representations of the journeys they have made and the countries they have visited, offer us the main chance we have of learning something of, and adding to our interest in, those distant lands. We feel heartily obliged to these two gentlemen who have been exploring these countries, and who have brought back such interesting accounts of them to us.

Mr. J. G. SCOTT: After the two papers which have been read to us, it seems rather invidious to call upon a person like myself, with a superficial acquaintance of the country, to make any remarks at all; but I think I shall be only representing the feeling of this meeting when I say that the little we have heard will make us look forward to the proceedings of the Society with the greatest interest. I should like to make some remarks with regard to Siam. A little earlier than Mr. Black, I travelled in Siam, and crossed his route. A few remarks which Mr. Clifford made about his hardships in Trengganu and Kelantan suggest to me that it would be as well, seeing that Siamese listeners are here to-night, that I should thank the Siamese Government for the facilities they placed at the disposal of myself and Mr. Black in travelling about the country. So far as I am concerned, I can safely say that I never had to test my capacity for putting away the rice which Mr. Clifford spoke of as the diet of which one has to take a great deal before being satisfied. There are a great many British subjects in the north of Siam, a great many Burmans and Shans. It is a curious fact that both Burmans and Shans are agriculturists in their own country. Agriculturists in this country are not in so good a position as they, for in Siam you only have to tickle the ground. Considering the number of British subjects in Siam, it is a matter of great pleasure to us that that country, which was in a dubious position owing to its two neighbours calling each other bad names, is now guaranteed on both sides. In travelling through the country, one sees an extraordinary number of ancient ruined cities, the city walls grown with trees, which shows they must have existed more than a hundred years ago, and from the ruins it would appear that the population must have been very great. We may hope, now that Siam is settled and at ease, that the population will grow to be as great as ever, and it is in this central part of the country that the population will settle. The country to the east, which some people seem to think belongs to France, is much less interesting. Mr. Black's paper, when it is published, will give you an idea of the country, but I think it is waterless, and that the population from there will most probably go to the centre of Siam, and will help to swell the amount of British trade, which is already 97 per cent. of the whole trade of Siam. The Mekong, of which I saw the upper part, and Mr. Black the middle, is a very fine river to look at, but it is not such a fine river as the British river, the Salwen. It never can become a commercial river at all. Lieutenant Simon has taken a gunboat up above the rapids to Luang Prabang, which shows it is feasible for pluck to conduct steamers up the river; but what a brave man will do a commercial man will not do, because it won't pay. Mr. Verney said that we might look upon the French rivalry with friendship. I think that if they intend to use the Mekong river, we may look upon their efforts to take the trade down with indifference.

Mr. R. L. MORANT: I don't wish to keep the meeting; but, if I may, I should like for a moment to add my humble testimony to what has been said about the work done round the Peninsula. I had the honour of going to each centre of government there with H.M. the King of Siam in 1889, on which occasion I was able to look at it, not only as a Britisher, but also, of course, through Siamese spectacles—that is, looking at the methods of the British Government from the point of

view of an Eastern monarch. We went down the west and up the east coast. The contrast was striking as one came up to the more northern ports of the Peninsula, where the suzerainty is not British. I well remember the remarks his Majesty made at the time, that it was quite visible what could be done by good administration. I only wish to ask a question upon two points of some importance. On most maps there is marked a river flowing through Korat down to the Mekong; when I went to Korat in 1894 I did not see anything in the nature of a river which would be of any use. The question is of some importance politically as well as geographically. Perhaps Mr. Black, who was there at a different season, saw something of the kind. As far as I can make out, everything in the nature of commerce must come westwards, that is to say, westwards from Korat. I would also like to know whether it is yet finally decided for the railway to go as far as Korat, or to stop at the point it has now reached. In its present condition it will not largely assist trade, though it has its uses. I shall never forget with what delight we walked along the top of the embankment after toiling over heavy jungle tracks. At the same time, if rails were laid it would be probably somewhat more useful to Siam generally. One would like to know if Mr. Black has any opinion on these points.

MR. BLACK: As regards Mr. Morant's first question about the river flowing eastwards from Korat to the Mekong, there is such a river called Nam Mun. It flows past Korat, about 13 miles distant. It is a very small stream there, and in the dry season it contains only a few inches of water. Where it enters the Mekong its course is obstructed by rapids, and even the native boats, which at present go down that river, are obliged to have their goods taken out and carried overland; so that in its present condition, for the purposes of commerce it is not what might be called a practicable river. In the rainy season, of course, there is a great deal of water, and launches could, and, in fact, I believe a couple of launches were run for a short time from a place near Korat called Ta Chang down to Ubon, below which the rapids begin. Trade on this river could be fostered and developed, but this would take some time. As regards the railway, I am sorry to say that I have no information to give. If it were continued to Korat, it would develop an entirely new country, and pass over a tract which is now very difficult to traverse. At present this railway has been constructed for a distance of 75 miles, or half way. There still remains a distance of from 80 to 85 miles to Korat to be constructed.

THE PRESIDENT: It now only remains for us to thank the authors of these two papers. Mr. Clifford has opened to us countries which, I may say, were almost entirely unexplored. It is true that the coasts of these countries have been known for centuries. I remember well that the great Arctic navigator, John Davis, was becalmed for many days off that coast of Trengganu and Pahang, and in sight of these lands he lost his life through the treachery of some Japanese pirates. But with regard to the interior of these states, we know next to nothing. We must all admire the hardihood and pluck with which Mr. Clifford explored them, and I think we must also applaud the gallantry of those youngsters who, in a dark night, risked their lives down the rapids; for, although it was only to bring their master his dinner, still it was an act of heroism. His account of the country is instructive, and his narrative of the journey most interesting. I am very sorry that Mr. Black was obliged to skip a large portion of a very valuable part of his paper, because he was afraid of boring you, which I am sure he would not have done. What he has told us is certainly most instructive and interesting, and I know you will desire me to return your cordial thanks to Mr. Black and to Mr. Clifford for the papers we have listened to this evening.