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PREFACE

Thibaw was the last king of the Konbaung dynasty. During his brief reign of seven years Myanmar (Burma), against great odds, attempted to maintain her sovereign status. It was a time when political pressure from Britain escalated more than ever. To counter this situation Myanmar tried to cultivate friendship with other European countries such as France, Italy and Germany. This behaviour earned the ire of imperial Britain.

The nineteenth century witnessed a growing rivalry between France and Britain in Europe. It was equally evident in Southeast Asia and this destabilized Myanmar's existence as an independent nation. It sealed the fate of king Thibaw. The nineteenth century may also be labeled as the hey-day of modern imperialism. During this time Holland, Portugal, Italy, Germany, France and Britain threw in their economic and war potential and vied against one another in quest of new territories and fresh soil. Out of these France and Britain appeared to be the two super powers of the day. With sea

2 Myanmar and the Europeans

power as their weapon of expansion, or colonization for that matter, they created 'spheres of influence' in various parts of the globe.

In orchestrating Thibaw's relations with European powers I have utilized many Myanmar original works alongside those of the British. I have also attempted as far as possible to strike a proper balance between the overall view and the particular detail. An ancient adage runs:

For want of a nail, a horse shoe was lost; for want of a horse shoe, a horse was lost; for want of a rider, a message was lost; for want of a message, a battle was lost; for want of a battle, a kingdom was lost; and all for the want of a horse shoe nail.

Bearing in mind the above maxim I have attempted to present as best I could, and to be profound about kingdom, been grandiloquent about battle and still pay attention to the humble nail. Perhaps, I have tried to present Myanmar's past with the life and atmosphere of the times. Nevertheless I am well aware that my portraiture and interpretations will be disputed. This, I have no doubt, because no man's view points are infallible.

The production of the present work has involved a lot of time consuming research into several official Myanmar and English primary sources the latter document being microfilm copies from the India Office library in London. In conclusion, I must express my sincere thanks to U Thaw Kaung, retired Librarian of Yangon (Rangoon) University

and a Member of Myanmar Historical Commission. I thank him for encouraging me to finalize this account of King Thibaw. Another person whom I owe much is U Thet Tun, fellow Alumni of LSE, a retired Ambassador and retired Director of Asia and Pacific region (UNESCO). He is also a very active Member of MHC. He had on many occasions discussed with me on finding ways and means of publishing my manuscript. He had also displayed a keen and stimulating interest in my historical work. For that, if not for any other I owe him a debt of gratitude.

Hla Thein
Member (Retd)
MHC

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