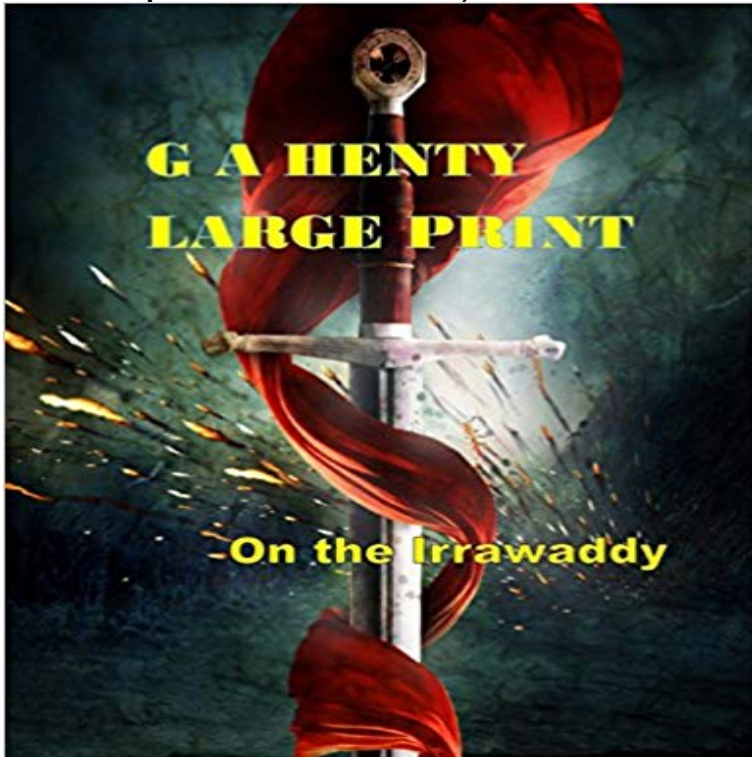


On of the Irrawaddy: The First Burmese War Large Print: (G A Henty Masterpiece Collection)



With the exception of the terrible retreat from Afghanistan, none of England's many little wars have been so fatal--in proportion to the number of those engaged--as our first expedition to Burma. It was undertaken without any due comprehension of the difficulties to be encountered, from the effects of climate and the deficiency of transport; the power, and still more the obstinacy and arrogance of the court of Ava were altogether underrated; and it was considered that our possession of her ports would assuredly bring the enemy, who had wantonly forced the struggle upon us, to submission. Events, however, proved the completeness of the error. The Burman policy of carrying off every boat on the river, laying waste the whole country, and driving away the inhabitants and the herds, maintained our army as prisoners in Rangoon through the first wet season; and caused the loss of half the white officers and men first sent there. The subsequent campaign was no less fatal and, although large reinforcements had been sent, fifty percent of the whole died; so that less than two thousand fighting men remained in the ranks, when the expedition arrived within a short distance of Ava. Not until the last Burmese army had been scattered did the court of Ava submit to the by no means onerous terms we imposed. Great, indeed, was the contrast presented by this first invasion of the country with the last war in 1885, which brought about the final annexation of Burma. Then a fleet of steamers conveyed the troops up the noble river; while in 1824 a solitary steamer was all that India could furnish, to aid the flotilla of rowboats. No worse government has ever existed than that of Burma when, with the boast that she intended to drive the British out of India, she began the war. No people were ever kept down by a more grinding tyranny, and the occupation of the country by the British has been an even greater blessing to the population than has

that of India. Several works, some by eyewitnesses, others compiled from official documents, appeared after the war. They differ remarkably in the relation of details, and still more in the spelling of the names both of persons and places. I have chiefly followed those given in the narratives of Mr. H. H. Wilson, and of Major Snodgrass, the military secretary to the commander of the expedition.

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